

BILLY BUNTER in Brazil

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ALL EYES IN THE CANOE WERE UPON HIM, AND FROM THE
INDIAN PADDLERS CAME AN OUTBREAK OF STARTLED
EXCLAMATIONS

CHAPTER I

WHO WANTS BUNTER

“ABOUT the hols —,” began Billy Bunter.

Bunter got no further than that.

He had intended to go further — much further. In fact he had quite a lot to say on the subject. It was an important matter: for Greyfriars School was about to break up for the long summer holidays, and Bunter’s plans for the “ hols “ were as yet unsettled. And the fat Owl of the Remove had to decide what — or rather whom — he was going to do.

So, coming on Harry Wharton and Co. in a cheery group on the Remove landing, Billy Bunter rolled up to that cheery group and started. He had tried them on that topic once or twice already, without result. But hope springs eternal in the human breast.

But the word “ hols ” seemed to have the effect of an electric shock on the Famous Five of the Remove. A moment ago, they had been standing at ease, cheerily discussing the very subject that interested Bunter. But as Bunter said “ hols “ they woke to sudden activity. Five fellows shot away as if moved by the same spring, leaving Billy Bunter blinking after them through his big spectacles in surprise and annoyance.

“I say, you fellows,” roared Bunter, “ don’t walk away while a chap’s talking to you! I say!”

The Famous Five did not walk away. They ran! Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh scudded for the stairs, as if Billy Bunter had been a packet of dangerous explosive, instead of an old pal who wanted a friendly chat about the hols. They scampered down the stairs, laughing as they scampered, and Billy Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

“Beasts! “ roared Bunter.

There was a chuckle at his fat elbow, and he blinked round at Herbert Vernon-Smith. Smithy was grinning.

Bunter gave him a morose blink. He could see nothing in that irritating incident to evoke a grin.

But the next moment the frown faded from his plump brow. Frowns were out of place, just on

break-up, when a fellow’s plans for the hols were still unsettled. Harry Wharton was Bunter’s first choice as a host in holiday time, but Smithy — if amenable — was a good second-best.

“I say, Smithy, fixed up for the hols? “ he asked, affably.

“Quite.”

“Where are you going, old chap?”

“Switzerland.”

Oh, good.” Bunter’s little round eyes glistened behind his big round spectacles.

“Plenty of grub there! Tons! I’ll bet that’s why you’re going! He, he, he! I say, you’d like a pal with you who can talk ripping French, what? Makes everything so much easier. I’ll jolly well see you through, if you like, Smithy.”

“That’s a jolly kind offer, Bunter,” said the Bounder, gravely.

“Not at all, old chap! I’ll come with pleasure,” assured Bunter.

“There’s only one difficulty in the way — I mean, there’s just one thing I couldn’t possibly stand, in the hols ——.”

“What’s that, old fellow?”

“You!” said Smithy.

And the Bouncer walked away to the stairs, laughing. Billy Bunter glared after him with a glare that might almost have cracked his spectacles.

“Beast!” he roared.

The frown returned to Bunter’s fat brow. But once more it disappeared, at the sight of a slim and elegant figure emerging from No. 12 Study. Billy Bunter rolled up the passage, with his very best smile turned on for Lord Mauleverer.

“I say, Mauly!” he squeaked.

Lord Mauleverer gave him one look. Mauly had come out of his study, apparently to go down. He seemed to change his mind at the sight of Billy Bunter, for he backed quickly into his study and closed the door.

Billy Bunter arrived at the door of that study. He turned the handle. But the door did not open.

Bunter breathed hard, and he breathed deep, as he realised that Mauleverer had turned the key.

He rapped on the door with fat knuckles.

“I say, Mauly, old chap!” squeaked Bunter. “Wharrer you locked your door for? I want to speak to you, Mauly.”

“That’s why!”

“Beast!”

Billy Bunter was anxious to discuss the hols with Mauly. But hols couldn’t be discussed through a locked door. He rolled disconsolately away.

Again the frown settled on his fat brow. This time it stayed there. Bunter was peeved. A fellow had to fix up his holidays before the school broke up. The glories of Bunter Court, of which Billy Bunter talked a great deal during the term, never seemed to attract him much in holiday time. Somehow he did not yearn for home, sweet home, and the fascinating society of his brother Sammy and his sister Bessie.

Wharton Lodge, or Mauleverer Towers, or one of Smithy’s expensive trips abroad, would have suited Bunter admirably. It was strange enough, and indeed inexplicable to Bunter, that fellows who had a chance of securing so charming a guest for the hols should let their chances like the sunbeams pass them by. But there it was — they did! Billy Bunter, who knew that his mere presence was enough to make any party a success, had that knowledge all to himself. Among all the crowds of fellows who were asking one another for the hols, not one seemed to want William George Bunter. Still frowning, Bunter rolled into his own study, No. 7 in the Remove. Peter Todd, who had the pleasure — or otherwise — of sharing that study with Bunter, was there. He was searching through the study cupboard, apparently for something he could not find.

Bunter gave him a somewhat disparaging blink. Peter was not really the fellow he would have selected as a host for the hols. But a fellow had to get fixed up somehow, and it looked as if his own study was his last resource. So, once more banishing the frown from his fat brow, he replaced it with a friendly grin.

“Looking for something, Toddy?” he asked, affably. “Can I help you, old chap?”

Toddy gave a grunt.

“I’m looking for my chocs!” he answered.

“Oh!” said Bunter.

Peter looked round from the cupboard, with a suspicious glare at his fat study-mate.

“Have you scoffed them, you fat villain?” he asked.

“Oh, really, Peter—.”

“Well, they seem to be gone,” growled Peter. “If you’ve snooped them, Bunter—.”
“I hope I’m not the fellow to snoop another fellow’s chocs,” said Bunter, with dignity. “But never mind that now, Peter. I came in to speak to you about the hols —.”

“I do mind!” said Peter. “I want my chocs.”

“About the hols, Peter—.”

“Never mind the hols,” said Peter. “I’m talking about chocs. They’re gone. If you’ve snooped them—.”

“I wouldn’t make a fuss about a few chocs, Toddy. There were only half-a-dozen, and they were jolly small ones—.”

“So you had them!” roared Peter/

“Eh! No! I never found them in the cupboard, and certainly never ate them. I hope you can take a pal’s word about a few miserable chocs that lasted a chap hardly a minute,” said Bunter, warmly.

“Never mind the chocs now — I came in to speak to you about the hols. I was going to say —Yaroooh! Leggo my neck! Oh, crikey!”

Bump!

Peter Todd walked out of No. 7 Study, leaving Billy Bunter sitting on the floor, spluttering for breath—his plans for the hols still unsettled!

CHAPTER II

SIX OR SEVEN?

LORD MAULEVERER came along the Remove passage, stopped at the door of No. 1 Study, and looked in at that celebrated apartment.

Five fellows, seated round the study table, glanced at him; and there were five smiles of cheery welcome. His amiable lordship was persona grata, indeed gratissima, in that study, as in most other studies in the Remove. Quite a chorus greeted him.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

“Trickle in, Mauly!”

“Here’s a chair!”

“Just in time for tea—and there’s lots.”

“The lotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Mauly.”

Harry Wharton and Co. had sat down to an unusually well-spread board. Wharton and Nugent, to whom the study belonged, had provided a loaf, a moderate quantity of butter, and a cake. Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had brought along a bundle of sausages, a tin of sardines, and a jam-roll, from No. 13. From No. 14 Johnny Bull had arrived with a pot of jam under one arm, and a bag of biscuits under the other. So plenty reigned.

Billy Bunter, whose fat little nose seldom failed him in scenting out a feed, had looked in; but Johnny Bull had promptly picked up a cushion and taken aim, and Bunter, with equal promptness, had looked out again.

So near the end of the term, with the happy prospect of not seeing Bunter again for weeks and weeks, the Famous Five would no doubt have allowed the fat Owl to roll in, like a lion seeking what he might devour. But nobody wanted to hear Bunter’s conversation on the subject of hols.

Quite a different sort of welcome was extended to Mauly. They made room for him at the table, and Bob Cherry dragged up a box for himself, insisting upon giving his chair to the honoured guest. The plate that was not cracked, and the tea-cup that had a

handle, were both assigned to him.

“Looked in to speak to you fellows,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Fixed up for the hols?”
“All cut and dried,” answered Harry Wharton. “We’ve been planning a boating trip. Wish you’d come, Mauly.”

Bob Cherry chuckled.

“Not much good asking Mauly to change the gilt-edged, diamond-studded family yacht for an old tub on the river,” he remarked.

“Do you good to rough it a bit, old chap,” said Johnny Bull. “Camping out—cooking your own meals — washing up — no end of fun.”

“Oh! Yaas! Fine!” said Lord Mauleverer. “But—.”

“The butfulness is probably terrific,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

“Oh! I’d like it all right! At least, I — I think so,” said Lord Mauleverer, cautiously. “But—.”

“But you’d miss your butler!” said Frank Nugent, laughing.

“Yaas! I mean, no! Not at all. But — the fact is, I’m fixed up for the hols,” explained Lord Mauleverer. “I’m goin’ to see my cousin Brian! You fellows remember him?”

“Yes, rather,” answered Harry Wharton, and the other fellows nodded. They all remembered Brian Mauleverer, the “rolling stone” of his lordship’s family, who had gathered no moss.

They had heard that Brian had settled down, and hoped that it was so. Lord Mauleverer did not doubt it. But then, old Manly never doubted anybody.

“Like to see him again?” asked Mauleverer.

“Oh, yes, rather. Where is he now — at your place?” asked Harry.

“No! You see, old Brian was rather at a loose end, after wanderin’ in the Pacific, and all that, and Nunky fixed him up with a job, managin’ an estate, a bit off the beaten track. He’s turned out a toppin’ manager. He manages a what-d’you-call-it—.”

“Does he!” ejaculated Bob.

“Yaas, on the banks of the River Thingummy—.”

“We haven’t had that river in geography with Quelch,” remarked Frank Nugent, gravely; and his comrades chuckled.

“Well, we don’t do a lot of South American geography in the Remove,” said Lord Mauleverer, innocently.

South America!” repeated Harry.

“Yaas. Brazil, you know — where the nuts come from.”

“You’re going out to Brazil for the hols?”

“That’s it.”

“Bit of a step for the vac, isn’t it?” asked Bob, with a grin.

“Yaas. I believe it takes a couple of days to get there — forty hours, I think, to be exact!” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Forty hours to Brazil!” repeated Harry. “Oh! You mean by air?”

“That’s it — South American Airways — four hops to Rio,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Rio de What’s-its-name — I forget the other bit.”

“Rio de Janeiro, perhaps!” suggested Nugent.

“Yaas — I knew it was Rio de Somethin’. You go upcountry from Rio — rather a long trip, the River What’s-its-name, where old Brian manages the what-do-you-call-it. But old Brian will come to Rio to take the party upcountry.”

“Oh, you’re going with a party?”

Well, I hoped so,” said Lord Mauleverer. “That’s why I came in to speak to you chaps. I thought you might like to come, as you know old Brian.”

“Oh!” said the Famous Five, all together.

“Old Brian would be jolly glad to see you again — he said so in his letter. You see, he’s made good, after bein’ a bit of a rollin’ stone. Nunky says that he’s made the plantation in Brazil pay twice as much as it did before he took charge. I was rather bankin’ on you fellows comin’,” went on Lord Mauleverer. “If you’re not frightfully keen on that boatin’ trip, what about washin’ it out and comin’ to Brazil with me?” There was a chuckle round the table in No. 1 Study. The chums of the Remove were keen enough on a boating trip, or anything else to which they set their strenuous hands, but there was no doubt that a trip by air to South America was distinctly more attractive.

“My uncle’s standin’ the trip,” continued Mauleverer.

“I’ve got to let him know how many seats to book on the plane. Old Brian says he can give us a good time out there — lots of things goin’ on in Brazil. Wild Indians, alligators, canoein’ on the river, jaguars in the forests — all sorts of things. Like the idea?”

“Like it!” repeated Bob, his eyes dancing.

“Sort of!” grinned Johnny Bull.

“The likefulness is terrific.”

“What-ho!”

“Topping!”

“Oh, good! You can tell your people that Nunky will see us off at the drome, and old Brian will meet us when we drop down at Rio, and on the way we shall be under the charge of South American Airways. So that will be O.K., if they fancy we couldn’t look after ourselves.”

Which, of course, we could.” said Bob. “But nothing like being tactful with tha old folks at home.”

Then it’s settled,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Jolly good of you fellows.”

At which the Famous Five chuckled again. The mere idea of speeding over the rolling Atlantic in a fast plane, of landing in the fabulous city of Rio, of a run up-country in the strange wild land of Brazil, of canoeing on a South American river, roaming in the vast primeval forests, riding on the boundless plains, was not only attractive — it was just gorgeous!

For the next half-hour there was a buzz of cheery voices in No. 1 Study, as six fellows discussed that gorgeous prospect in all its bearings.. It transpired, as Lord Mauleverer made efforts to remember, that the name of the estate was the Quinta Branca, and that the river upon which it lay was the Araguaya. There was an assistant-manager, a Brazilian named Martinho Funcho, who would be left in charge of the quinta while Brian Mauleverer came to Rio to meet the Greyfriars party. The journey up-country would be at first by railroad, then by river-steamer, and finally by canoe. Which was an added attraction in the eyes of the juniors.

“I’ll ask Quelch to let me use his phone, and tell Nunky that it’s fixed up,” said Lord Mauleverer, when he rose from the table. “Seats on the plane have to be booked some time ahead — I believe there’s a rush for them.” Mauleverer paused. “Let’s see — you fellows and me — that’s six, isn’t it?”

“So far as I remember my arithmetic, about that,” said Bob Cherry, gravely. “But let’s count heads, to make sure.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I was wonderin’ if you chaps would mind if I made it seven,” explained Lord Mauleverer.

“Of course not, ass! It’s your party, isn’t it?” said Harry.

“Well, yaas, but—.” Lord Mauleverer hesitated. “If you fellows think you could stand Bunter—.”

“Bunter!” repeated the Famous Five. They stared at Lord Mauleverer for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

“You—you see—I” stammered Mauly. “Bunter seems to be at a bit of a loose end, and — and — if you fellows wouldn’t mind — you — you see —.”

“Yes, we see,” chuckled Bob. “Nobody wants Bunter, you least of all, Mauly. That’s why! Get on with it, you old ass.”

“Well, if you fellows wouldn’t mind—.”

“Charmed!” said Frank Nugent, solemnly. The charmfulness is terrific,” grinned Hurree Jamset

Ram Singh.

“O.K. then?” asked Mauleverer.

“The okayfulness is preposterous!” said Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Then I’ll push along and phone Nunky,” said Lord Mauleverer; and he ambled gracefully out of No. 1 Study leaving the chums of the Remove laughing.

CHAPTER III

BUNTER ALL OVER!

SORRY, Smithy!”

“Eh?”

Herbert Vernon-Smith glanced round, as the fattest head in the Greyfriars Remove was put in at his study doorway. Tom Redwing looked up. The two were in their study discussing hols when Bunter happened.

Billy Bunter fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, on the Bounder, with a disdainful blink. His fat lip curled, and he turned up his fat little nose — an easy matter, as Nature had started it well on the way.

Smithy stared at him in surprise. This was quite a change in Bunter. For days and days, the fat Owl had bestowed his friendliest grin, and his most ingratiating manners and customs on Smithy, in the faint hope of wedging into the holiday party for Switzerland. Now his fat visage was a picture of lofty disdain. Bunter said that he was “sorry,” but he said it in a very off-hand contemptuous way.

“What are you sorry about, you fat burbler?” asked the Bounder.

“Sorry I shan’t be able to join you for the hols, I mean,” explained Bunter. “I’ve thought it over, but it wouldn’t do. A bit too much like a Bank Holiday crowd, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

“What?” roared Smithy, while Redwing stared. They were unaware that Bunter was fresh from a happy chat with Lord Mauleverer about the hols, and that his amiable lordship’s constitutional inability to keep on saying “no” had solved, at last, the fat Owl’s problem.

“I mean to say, I don’t mind knowing you at school, Smithy, but in the hols a fellow has to be a bit more particular,” further elucidated Bunter. “I couldn’t stand it, Smithy. I don’t want to rub it in, but you’re too jolly loud, old chap. Sorry — but it wouldn’t do at all.”

Smithy gazed at him, speechless.

“So you can keep your week in Lovely Lucerne, or whatever it is,” added Bunter.

“Sorry, and all that, but it just wouldn’t do for me.”

If Billy Bunter had more to say, he did not linger to say it. No doubt the expression on Smithy's face warned him that he had said enough. He backed hastily into the passage and shut the door — only just in time, for an inkpot banged on the door as it shut. In the passage, the fat Owl grinned with satisfaction. Now that he was safely booked for the hols, Bunter had no further use for Smithy, and he quite enjoyed telling the Bouncer what he thought of him.

Peter Todd came out of No. 7 Study. Billy Bunter was quite glad to see him. He had something to say to Toddy, too.

“Hold on a minute, Toddy!” squeaked Bunter.

“Not if you're going to talk about the hols,” said Toddy.

“I'm booked for the hols,” said Bunter, with dignity.

“Oh! Who's the jolly old victim?”

“Oh, really, Toddy—.”

Hope you'll have a jolly good time,” said Peter, cordially. “No good hoping that the other chap will—but who is it?”

“I'm going with my old pal Mauly. We've just been talking it over. He made such a point of it, that a fellow could hardly say 'no,'” explained Bunter. “I'd half-promised half-a-dozen fellows, but I shall have to wash them out now. I shan't be able to come home with you, Toddy.”

“You won't!” agreed Toddy.

“I'm afraid I shan't even be able to give you a week-end.”

“That's all right — I've got no use for your napper.”

“Eh? Who's talking about my napper?”

“Didn't you mention a weak end —.”

“You silly ass!” roared Bunter. “Look here, Toddy, the fact is, you couldn't expect it. We're pals at school, and all that, being in the same study — but hols are a different matter — quite different. I can't come.”

“You fat, frabjous, frumptious Owl—.”

“You needn't call a fellow names, Toddy, because he has to think of what's due to his own position. I'd like to give you a leg-up with your people, showing me off, and making out that you're in the best set here, and all that, but it can't be done, Toddy. Sorry—but it just can't!”

Billy Bunter rolled away down the passage, as Peter Todd's right foot made a sort of convulsive movement.

He escaped Peter's boot as narrowly as he had escaped Smithy's inkpot.

His fat face was quite merry and bright as he arrived at No. 1 Study. He had something to say to the Famous Five also, now that he was safely booked for the hols. There was a cheery buzz of voices in that study. Harry Wharton and Co. were discussing the trip to Brazil in a mood of happy anticipation. They were going to enjoy every minute of that gorgeous trip, wild Indians and alligators and all, and all the more because they would be in the amiable company of old Mauly. Bunter, doubtless, would not add to the enjoyment, but they were prepared to tolerate Bunter with fortitude and equanimity; and as his fat face appeared in the doorway, Bob Cherry gave him a cheery roar.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man! Fixed up for the hols, what?”

“That's what I've come here to speak about,” said Bunter. “Mauly's asked me for the hols. He was so jolly pressing about it that a fellow could hardly refuse.”

The pressfulness must have been terrific,” remarked. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, gravely.

“Well, I've been rather rushed into it,” said Bunter. “I'd half-promised that chap

D'Arcy, at St. Jim's; still, I suppose I can put him off. ”

“I've no doubt you can, ” said Harry Wharton, laughing.

“Easier to put him off than to put him on, perhaps! ” suggested Bob.

“Well, I've fixed it up with Mauly, and I'm a man of my word — I certainly shan't let him down, ” said Bunter. “But it seems from what he said that you fellows will be coming, too. I don't mind —.”

“You don't mind? ” ejaculated Nugent.

“Well, no. It's Mauly's party, and he can take whom he likes, of course, ” said Bunter, generously. ” Still, I think Mauly might have consulted me first — he's a bit Thoughtless. He'll be asking half the Remove, at this rate — and I don't want a Bank Holiday crowd. ”

The Famous Five gazed at William George Bunter. Apparently, in Bunter's estimation, he, William George, was the important member of the party. Other fellows were merely also-rans.

“But that's Mauly all over, ” went on Bunter. “ Still, as he's asked you fellows, I suppose you'll be coming. As I've said, I don't mind — but I want you to remember that you'll be travelling with Mauly and me, and behave yourselves — and remember that when you're travelling you're not in the Remove passage. A fellow likes to keep up appearances on a holiday. Keep that in mind, see? ”

The Famous Five continued to gaze at Bunter. Johnny Bull's hand closed on a cushion.

“Keep that in mind, and don't let me down, ” said Bunter, blinking at the juniors through his big spectacles. “I'd rather have had a more select party, and I dare say Mauly would, too, if you come to that. Still, as you seem to have hooked on to him, I shall have to make the best of it—.”

“What? ” roared Bob Cherry.

“Only, don't let me down, ” said Bunter, firmly. “You can come, as you seem to have got round Mauly, but I simply won't travel with a Bank Holiday crowd. That's all! ”

And Billy Bunter revolved on his axis, to roll out of the study. Johnny Bull's hand came up with the cushion in it. Bunter had intended to walk out with disdainful dignity, but that dignified exit was somewhat disconcerted as the cushion whizzed. Bunter had escaped Smithy's inkpot and Toddy's boot, but he did not escape Johnny Bull's cushion.

It landed on the back of a fat neck, and Bunter nose-dived into the passage with a roar.

“Oh! Ooooooh! Ow! Wow! ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Wow! Beasts! Ow! ”

“Now all jump on him together, ” said Bob Cherry. “Come on, you men! Wait a minute, Bunter! ”

Billy Bunter did not wait a minute. He did not wait a second. He vanished like a fat ghost.

CHAPTER IV

OFF TO RIO!

“LOOKS a jolly old bus! ”said Bob Cherry.

“She do — she does! ” agreed Johnny Bull.

“The jolliffulness of the esteemed old bus is terrific, ” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram

Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"I say you fellows——!"

"Forty hours to Rio!" said Frank Nugent. "The jolly old world is growing small these days.

London — Portugal — West Africa — South America — all in under two days —!"

"I say, you fellows —!"

"First stop Lisbon," said Harry Wharton. "Only four or five hours to Lisbon—."

"I say, you fellows," howled Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wondering whether she'll lift your weight, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton and Co. in a cheery group on the edge of the runway, were looking at, and admiring, the airliner that was to carry them, in the marvellously brief space of forty hours, from London to Rio de Janeiro.

Some of the twenty-one passengers were already ascending the steps and going aboard. Lord Mauleverer was exchanging a last few words with his uncle, Sir Reginald Brooke, who was there to see the party off. Everyone was in high spirits — only Billy Bunter seemed to have some doubt in his fat mind — though probably he was not wondering, as Bob playfully suggested, whether the giant aircraft would be able to lift his weight.

Each of the juniors carried a bag, hand-luggage being allowed up to eleven pounds — excepting Bunter, who had set his bag down on the ground; eleven pounds being exactly one hundred and seventy-six ounces more than Bunter wanted to carry a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

"I say, you fellows, I wish you'd leave off jawing a minute, and listen to a fellow," said Bunter, peevishly. "You're like a sheep's head, you know—all jaw! I say, what about the grub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Perhaps you fellows hadn't thought about that!" said Bunter, sarcastically.

"You won't want any grub, old fat man," said Bob. "You packed in enough at lunch to last you forty hours."

"It won't last Bunter so long as that, if she rolls a bit!" chuckled Nugent. "I think you'll find that that fifteenth helping was a mistake, Bunter."

"Yah!" retorted Bunter, elegantly.

"The grub's all right, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "They serve meals on the plane, and they're tip-top. You leave rations behind when you get into the air."

"Oh!" said Bunter. His fat brow cleared. "That sounds good. If the grub's all right, everything's all right, of course."

"Of course!" chuckled Bob.

"Well, what are we hanging about for?" asked Bunter. "I get tired standing about — and they're going aboard—."

"Can't you see Mauly's speaking to his uncle, fathead?"

"Is he? Mauly's all jaw, just like you fellows. Well, I'm not standing here while Mauly jaws — I'm going on."

And Billy Bunter heaved his weight up the steps and went on, forgetful of his bag, which still lay where he had deposited it. Apparently the fat Owl did not consider it necessary to say good-bye to Mauly's uncle. It was a fact that Bunter had done remarkably well at lunch, laying in provisions for the voyage as it were, and he had more weight to carry than the other fellows. He grunted as he rolled into the

passengers' cabin, blinked up and down the gangway between the seats, and landed himself in a deep comfortable armchair. That, in Billy Bunter's opinion, was ever so much better than standing on his fat little legs, supporting the weight of a gargantuan lunch, while Mauly talked to his uncle. Bob Cherry glanced at the bag the fat Owl had left behind, and picked it up.

"What I like about Bunter," remarked Bob, "is his beautiful manners. How they must love him at home — and what a pity they haven't got him there!"

"The esteemed and execrable Bunter seems to have forgotten that politeness is the procrastination of princes, as the English proverb remarks," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Good old English proverb!" chuckled Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Mauly. All ready, Mauly, old man."

"Where's Bunter?" asked Mauleverer, glancing round.

"Gone on the bus! The poor chap got tired of carrying that lunch about. He hasn't got lost — no such luck."

Well, it's time we got on," said Mauleverer "Good-bye, Nunky."

"Good-bye, Herbert. Good-bye, my lads." Mauly's uncle shook hands with the Famous Five, all round, and they said their good-byes, and mounted the stairway to the airliner. Billy Bunter turned his big spectacles on them as they came into the passengers' cabin, and the sight of the bags in their hands reminded him of his own.

"I say, you fellows, I left my bag where we were standing," said Bunter. "One of you fellows cut out and fetch it, will you?"

"You couldn't cut out and fetch it yourself?" inquired Johnny Bull.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I'm sitting down!" he said, with dignity.

"So am I!" said Johnny, and he sat down.

"I say, Bob, will you cut out and get my bag?"

"No fear," answered Bob Cherry. He was not likely to step off the plane to fetch Bunter's bag, as he had carried it into the aircraft with him, and now had it in one hand, his own in the other. But the hand that held Bunter's bag was behind Bob, and Bunter could not see through Bob Cherry, even with the aid of his big spectacles. So he did not see his bag.

"I say, Nugent, will you fetch my bag? You're not such a slacker as Cherry, old chap! I am!" contradicted Nugent. "Quite! Worse, if anything!" And he sat down in his armchair.

"Beast! I say, Wharton—."

"Say anything you like," assented Harry Wharton, as he sat down in his turn.

"Inky! I say, Inky! Cut down and get my bag, will you?"

"The cutfulness will not be terrific, my esteemed lazy Bunter," answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

"Beast! Look here, I can't go without my bag! All my other luggage is in the baggage-room. Like to get my bag, Mauly?"

"Not at all," answered Mauly.

Billy Bunter blinked at six smiling faces one after another. He did not smile himself — he frowned. Certainly, it would not have been a tremendous exertion to step off the plane, pick up a bag, and step on again. But Billy Bunter objected to exertion on principle.

"Slackers!" he grunted. "Where's the steward? The steward can get my bag, I suppose. What's he paid for? Steward!"

"You fat ass—!" began Bob.

“You can shut up, Bob Cherry! I’m not going to clamber about when there’s a steward paid to wait on the passengers. Look here, where’s the steward? Where’s that silly idiot of a steward?” hooted Bunter. “He ought to be here when he’s wanted! Where’s that fool of a steward?”

“Is anything wanted, sir?” asked a dulcet voice at Bunter’s fat elbow.

Bunter’s fat head spun round, and his eyes popped at a neat and natty figure in a neat and natty blue uniform.

“Oh!” gasped Bunter.

Bunter had not been aware that stewards on the liners to Rio were of the feminine gender. It was not a steward but a stewardess! He blinked at a pretty, smiling face, in confusion.

“Oh! Ah! No! Er — nunno!” stammered Bunter, red to his fat ears.

The stewardess passed on down the gangway, leaving the problem of Bunter’s bag — which Bob Cherry was still holding behind him — unsolved. Bunter gave his fellow-voyagers an inimical blink, and put his fat hands on the arms of his seat to heave himself up.

“Sit down, you fat chump,” said Bob. “I—.”

“Are you going for my bag?”

“No, ass! But—.”

“Then you can shut up!” grunted Bunter. I tell you —.”

“I said ‘shut up’!” snapped Bunter.

“Oh! All right!” said Bob. He had been about to tell Bunter that his bag was safe aboard, but as Bunter requested him to shut up, he did so.

The fat Owl heaved himself up, rolled to the stairway, and disappeared. Bob, with a cheery grin, deposited Bunter’s bag in Bunter’s vacant seat, amid chuckles from the Greyfriars party. They waited with cheery smiles for the fat Owl to return.

Billy Bunter reappeared in about three minutes, breathless and excited.

“I say, you fellows!” he gasped.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anything up?” asked Bob.

“My bag’s gone!” gasped Bunter. “I say, you fellows, it’s gone — somebody’s pinched my bag! I can’t find it anywhere.”

“O where and O where can it be?” sang Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You cackling idiots,” howled Bunter. “I can’t go without my bag! I say, they’re just going to take up the steps. I say—.”

“Go and have another look for it!” suggested Bob.

“I tell you I’ve looked everywhere,” howled Bunter.

“It ain’t there! Besides, if I get down again, the plane might go off without me.”

“No might about it — it would!” said Bob, cheerily. “That’s the big idea.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Beast!” roared Bunter. “Look here, you fellows, I’ve got to have my bag! I tell you I’m jolly well not going without my bag! If you fellows think I’m jolly well going without my bag, I can jolly well say — Oh!” Billy Bunter broke off, suddenly, as his eyes, and spectacles, fell on the bag reposing in his seat. He stared at it blankly.

“Oh! Why, there it is!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“How did it get there?” gasped Bunter.

“I wonder!” said Bob. “You fellows got any idea how Bunter’s bag got there?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You — you — you beast!” gasped Bunter. “You jolly well brought it on with you

all the time! ”

“He’s guessed it!” said Bob. “What a brain!”

“The brainfulness is terrific.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose, removed the bag, and sat down. The doors were closing now, the plane about to take off.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! We’re moving.” Smoothly, softly, the giant plane taxied on the tarmac.

So smooth was the motion, that the juniors would hardly have realised that they had started, but for looking from the windows. But the buildings of the aerodrome were gliding away. Then —!

“We’re off!”

“We’re up!”

“And rolling down to Rio!”

“I say, you fellows, this is all right.” Billy Bunter groped in his pockets for stray chocolates. “I say, I’ve heard of people being air-sick — like being sea-sick, you know! You fellows had better ask the stewardess for a basin! He, he, he. I say, feeling queer already, Nugent?”

“Ass!”

“You’re looking a bit green, Wharton.”

“Fathead!”

“You’d better look after that fifteenth helping at lunch, Bunter,” chuckled Bob.

“Yah!”

And Billy Bunter, recklessly regardless of what might happen to his fifteenth helping at lunch, proceeded to add sticky chocolates thereunto.

CHAPTER V

FIRST HOP!

“Is that the Thames?” asked Billy Bunter.

Whereat there was a chuckle from his fellow-passengers.

Having finished his chocolates, Billy Bunter bestowed a blink upon the world that was rolling away below. Far under the soaring plane, water shone in the summer sun. They had had a glimpse of Father Thames at the start, but that was minutes ago, and minutes counted for much an airliner. It was the Channel that rolled below, gleaming back the sunshine. Billy Bunter was a quick worker with chocolates, but the airliner put in several miles to every choc that disappeared inside the Owl of the Remove.

“Well, ain’t it the Thames?” demanded Bunter.

“Not quite!” grinned Bob Cherry.

“I didn’t mean the Thames,” said Bunter, hastily. “I meant the Medway. I knew all the while that it was the Medway, of course.”

“It’s the sea, fathead,” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Rot!” said Bunter. However, after another blink or two, Bunter realised that that stretch of water was a little too extensive for any river in the British Isles. “I — I mean, I knew it was the Atlantic. Think I don’t know the Atlantic Ocean when I see it?”

“It must be his specs,” said Bob Cherry, thoughtfully. “Bunter can see the Atlantic Ocean, and all we can see is the jolly old English Channel. Can you see the Pacific, too, Bunter?”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Yah! ” retorted Bunter. “I say, how high up are we? ”

Bob Cherry looked round at the altimeter. “Five thousand two hundred and eighty feet, ” he said.

“Just a mile. ”

“A mile? ” said Bunter. “ It would be two miles if the feet were as big as yours, old chap! He, he, he!

After which affable remark Billy Bunter gave his attention to another search of his pockets for edibles, disinterred a packet of toffee, and proceeded to dispose of the same.

The other fellows chatted as the plane soared. The four engines purred as one, and the sound had settled down to a steady drone, to which the ears soon became accustomed. The Channel disappeared, a glimpse of France following it, and they soared high over the Bay of Biscay. That often stormy section of the Atlantic rolled bright and blue and sunny.

Fleecy clouds drifted below the plane, now at a height of seven thousand feet.

Between the masses of snow-white cloud came the azure gleam of the sea. Far below, seeming to crawl on the waters, a great steamer looked like a cockleshell. The juniors were watching it, when Billy Bunter yawned, stirred in his seat, and favoured the distant earth with another blink. Then he grunted.

I say, you fellows, we ain’t putting on much speed, ” he remarked. “How the thump long are we going to be getting across the Channel? ”

“Oh, my hat! That’s the Atlantic, fathead — the jolly old Bay of Biscay, ” said Bob.

“I said it was the Atlantic, all the time — you fellows made out that it was the Channel, ” grunted Bunter. “ I jolly well knew it wasn’t! I say, when do we get to Lisbon, Wharton? ”

“About five o’clock, I think, ” answered Harry.

“Then I think I’ll have a bit of a nap, ” said Bunter. “Lots of time. Don’t you fellows jaw and wake me.”

Billy Bunter leaned a fat head back on a comfortable cushion, closed his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles, and slid into slumber. Bunter liked a nap after lunch — especially after such a lunch ! — and as he had no further supply of chocolates or toffees, there was nothing to keep awake for. Fleecy clouds, like ranges of snowy mountains under the plane, gleaming, rolling, blue waters, glimpses of ships tiny in the distance; glimpses of the dark mountains of Spain, failed to interest Bunter. Bunter slept — and, as usual, when Bunter slept, he snored. Another sound was added to the drone of the engines, a sound familiar in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars — a deep, rumbling sound, that made some of the other passengers glance round, wondering whether there was thunder in the air. But it was only Bunter. With his eyes shut, and his mouth open, the fat Owl slept and snored.

“There’s a jolly old song about the Bay of Biscay, ” remarked Bob Cherry. “ Let’s see — how does it go? Loud snored the dreadful Bunter—.”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

Neither “jaw” nor laughter from his fellow-voyagers was likely to awaken Billy Bunter, once he was asleep. Sleeping was one of the few things that Bunter could do really well. Probably he would have slept, and snored, till the plane touched down at Lisbon, had the airliner continued to run as smoothly as it had run so far. But a mass of heavy cloud rolled from the Spanish mountains, and the pilot climbed to clear them. There was a sharp dip, and Billy Bunter, awakening suddenly, clutched the arms of his chair.

“Ow! I say, you fellows, what’s that? I say — are we falling? I say—.”

“O.K., fathead,” said Bob. “Only gaining height to get out of cloud.”

“What is the beastly thing wobbling about for?” demanded Bunter. “Ooogh! There it goes again! I say, can’t they keep it still? Look here, I’m jolly well not going to be shook — I mean shaken — up like this. I — ooogh!”

“Shall I go along to the pilot, and tell him you don’t like it?” asked Bob.

“Ow! Yes, old chap! Do! Go at once.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Tell him he’s a silly fool, and I’ll ask them to sack him, if he shoo — shoo — shakes me about like this!” gasped Bunter. “I won’t be shoo — shoo — shuck — shaken up like this. I — oooooooooogh!”

It’s all right, old fat tulip,” said Bob. “She’s only bucketing a bit. Don’t you feel all right inside?”

“Ooogh! Yes! I don’t feel sick, if that’s what you mean,” groaned Bunter. “I’m a good sis — sis — sailor, and I’ve never been sus — sus — sea-sick in my life, and I’m not likely to — woooooogh!”

“Poor old Bunter,” said Frank Nugent. “I told him that that fifteenth helping was a mistake. And with chocs and toffees on top of it—.”

“Oooooooooogh!”

“Feel bad, old chap?” asked Bob, sympathetically. “Urrgh! No! You’d like to make out that I’m airsick,” gasped Bunter, “and I jolly well ain’t! You look rather green, Cherry! You’re looking awfully yellow, Bull! Urrrrgh!” added Bunter, as the plane dipped again.

“Woooch! Ooo-er!”

“Better call the steward,” said Harry.

“Beast! I don’t want the steward! I’m not feeling sus — sus — sick at all — never better in my — ooogh! — life! I — I’m enjoying this!” groaned Bunter.

The fat Owl did not look like enjoying it. His accustomed ruddy complexion was changing to an art shade in pale green. He clutched the arms of his chair, with an awful feeling that something dreadful would happen if he did not succeed in keeping quite still. There was no doubt that Bunter had over-done it at lunch, loading considerably beyond the Plimsoll line, and that the lunch was now on the worst of terms with the chocolates he had added to it, and that the chocolates were far from friendly with the toffees that had joined them. There were so many edibles packed inside Bunter, that even a slight shake-up was enough to set them at loggerheads, and that wretched plane persisted in wallowing, as if it took a fiendish delight in shaking up Bunter’s cargo of foodstuffs.

“I say, you fellows — ooogh!”

“Poor old Bunter!”

Brace up, old chap! It won’t last a minute or two.” Ooooooooooooo — er!” moaned Bunter. “I — I ain’t sick! I — I didn’t have enough at lunch really — I could have done with — urrgh! — another helping of pie. I ain’t sus — sus — sick at all. If you fellows make out that I’m air-sick, I can jolly well say — oooooogh! Oooooer! Wooooogh!”

Bunter collapsed.

A sympathetic stewardess brought a glass of water. Six sympathetic fellows did all they could. But there was little that could be done. The unhappy Owl moaned, and mumbled, and gurgled, and longed for death to end his woes. Not till the plane, emerging from cloud, resumed her smooth and silky glide, did Bunter feel that he might, after all, live to finish that journey. But it was a pale and hollow — very,

hollow — Bunter, that rolled out of the passengers' cabin when the airliner touched down at Lisbon.

CHAPTER VI

SECOND HOP!

"I SAY, you fellows, what time's dinner? "

"half-past eight. "

"What's the time now? "

"Eight. "

"Well, I'm hungry! " grunted Bunter, "What a pity you lost all that lunch, old fat man, "

remarked Bob Cherry.

"Yah! "

"Look at the sunset, " said Harry Wharton. "It's magnificent. "

Sniff, from Bunter. He had no use for sunsets.

Most of the passengers were looking at the western sky, ablaze with crimson and purple and gold. Billy Bunter did not favour it with a single blink.

He was, as he had said, hungry. When Bunter was hungry, sunset and sunrise, and indeed the whole solar system, were of little account in comparison.

Lisbon, and Europe, were far behind now. At Lisbon, the plane's larder had been re-stocked in a land of plenty. But Billy Bunter had been feeling too uncertain in his quaking inside, to re-stock the inner Bunter. He had sat with a pallid visage and a glassy eye, and the plane had taken off again with Bunter still unreplenished.

But he was feeling better now. Portugal, Europe, had vanished astern, and the airliner was soaring over the sun-reddened Atlantic, with dim African mountains looming far away to port. On and on, with an easy gliding motion, heading for Dakar in West Africa, the second hop. As Bunter was feeling better, he was naturally thinking of his next meal. He was not likely to think about sunsets when he was wondering what there was going to be for dinner.

"It's toppin', Bunter," remarked Lord Mauleverer, sitting down again after a long look at the blazing colours in the western sky.

"Is it? " asked Bunter, interested for once in a remark from Mauly. "How do you know, Mauly? " It did not occur to him that Mauleverer was not referring to the matter uppermost in his own fat mind.

"Eh! I've been lookin' at it, " answered Lord Mauleverer.

Bunter blinked at him. This was the very first time he had known Lord Mauleverer to be sufficiently interested in food to look at a meal before it was served!

"Oh! " said Bunter. "You ain't such a silly ass, after all, Mauly. I say, what's it like, old chap? "

"Gorgeous, " said Mauly. "We don't get it like that at home. "

"Well, no, we shouldn't, " agreed Bunter. "But what is it exactly, if you've been looking at it — chicken? "

"Chicken? " repeated Lord Mauleverer, blankly. He could see no connection between a gorgeous semi-tropical sunset and chicken.

"Isn't it chicken? " asked Bunter.

"Eh! No! What the dooce! Wanderin' in your mind, old man? " asked Mauleverer.

"Well, if it isn't chicken, what is it? " asked Bunter.

"I suppose you know what it is, if you've been looking at what they've got for dinner.

”

“Oh, gad!” gasped Lord Mauleverer. He realised that there was a misunderstanding. “Ha, ha, ha!”

“What are you fellows cackling at?” snapped Bunter. “Look here, Mauly, talk sense. I want to know what we’re going to have for dinner, and if you’ve been looking at what they’ve got—.”

“I — I — I haven’t!” gasped Mauly. “Not at all! I wasn’t talking about dinner. I was talking about the sunset.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The sunset!” repeated Bunter. “Why, you silly ass — you footling fathead — you dithering dummy — Yah!”

Lord Mauleverer smiled, and the Famous Five chuckled, while Billy Bunter sat and frowned. But the frown cleared off his fat brow when the natty figure in the blue uniform appeared and the stewardess adjusted the folding table and laid the same for dinner. There was, after all, chicken, and with the chicken there were lovely peas and delightful potatoes, and there was a pie, and a raspberry tart, to follow, and other attractive things, grateful and comforting to a fellow who had large spaces to fill. It was just as well, after Billy Bunter had finished doing justice, and a little over, to the ample fare provided by South American Airways, that the aircraft continued to glide smoothly and sweetly down the West African coast. Otherwise, there might have been a second edition of his performance over the Bay of Biscay in the afternoon. As it was, the fat Owl leaned back in his comfortable seat, in a happy and comfortable state, and drowsed, as the sunset disappeared in darkness, and the other fellows switched on the electric reading lamps.

The darkness deepened. It seemed to the juniors, looking out, that the plane was gliding through a world of black velvet. Looking down, they could see nothing but darkness, but they knew that Africa was below — old Moorish cities, sandy deserts, stony ranges of mountains, shadowy jungles where the lion stalked and leopard crept, were buried in the night more than a mile below.

Some of the passengers were asleep now. Billy Bunter nodded off, and once more a rumbling snore accompanied the drone of the engines. Lord Mauleverer had taken a letter from his pocket — the last he had received from his cousin Brian, at the Quinta Branca in the far-off valley of the Araguaya, and was reading it once more. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh produced his set of pocket chess, and Harry Wharton strove to keep his end up at that game with the dusky nabob of Bhanipur. Frank Nugent read the morning’s paper, and Johnny Bull, always a practical youth, gave his attention to a guide-book to Brazil. Bob Cherry, least of all the party disposed to keep still at any time, walked up and down the gangway between the seats.

But as the hour grew later and later, one by one the schoolboys gave up their various occupations, and slumber reigned.

On and on swept the giant plane, through the velvety darkness over the Dark Continent, the Remove fellows sleeping as peacefully as in the old dormitory at Greyfriars School.

Harry Wharton awakened at a light tap on his shoulder. He opened his eyes and glanced at a blue uniform and a smiling face.

Dakar, in a few minutes,” said the stewardess.

“Oh! Thanks!” said Harry. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. Outside the windows was impenetrable darkness. He looked at his watch. It was three o’clock — three in the morning.

“Wake up, you fellows! We’re going to land.”

Six fellows were soon wide awake.- But it was not so easy to wake the seventh. Billy Bunter was fast asleep, and Billy Bunter never came willingly out of the land of dreams. Wharton shook a fat shoulder, eliciting a sleepy grunt from the Owl of the Remove.

“Wake up, Bunter. ”

“Urrrrggh! ”

“We’ve got to Dakar. We get out here for an hour.”

“Wurrrrgh! ”

Shake! shake! shake!

“Wurrrgh! Beast! ” Bunter’s eyes half-opened behind his spectacles. “ Lemme alone, you rotter! Tain’t rising-bell! ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

Evidently, in the mists and shadows of sleep, Billy Bunter fancied that he was in bed in the Remove dormitory and that some beast was trying to wake him up before the bell rang.

Shake! shake!

“Will you leave off shook — shook — shaking me, you beast? I jolly well know that it ain’t rising-bell. I don’t care if it is! I ain’t getting up yet! Tell Quelch I’m ill. Now lemme alone! ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“You fat chump, ” gasped Wharton. “You’re not in the dorm now — we’re just going to land at Dakar! You’re in Africa, fathead. ”

“Oh! ” Bunter awakened a little more. “Well, blow Dakar! Bless Dakar! Bother Dakar! Let a fellow sleep, can’t you, you silly ass? ”

“We get out here, fathead, ” said Bob Cherry. “It’s an hour’s stop. ”

“I’m not going to get out. ”

“There’s a buffet, ” said Bob, temptingly. “ All sorts of grub. ”

“Oh! ” Billy Bunter sat up and took notice at that. “Why couldn’t you say that first, you silly ass? I say, you fellows, let’s get out. ” Bunter heaved himself out of his seat, and rolled into the

gangway. “ Come on! What are you hanging about for? ”

“Well, I wouldn’t get out just yet, ” said Bob. “Why not? ” demanded Bunter.

“ Because we’re still about a mile up! What would happen to Africa if you landed on it from that height? Might push it right through the globe. ”

“You silly idiot! ” hissed Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

Billy Bunter blinked from the window into the African night. The plane was descending, but the earth was still far below. Strange ruddy gleams of light danced through the darkness. As they came nearer and clearer, Bunter blinked at them in some alarm.

I say, you fellows, what’s that? “ he squeaked. “I say, I don’t like the look of that! I say, is the forest on fire? ”

“That’s the landing-ground, ” said Bob.

“I say, it’s on fire! Look! ” gasped Bunter. “That ain’t lamps — it’s flames — can’t you see the flames? Blind as bats, or what? I say, call the steward — go and speak to the pilot —. ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

The other fellows, whose vision was a little keener than Bunter’s, could see what it was. Great torches of oil and tar were burning, beside the red lamps on the runway, huge dancing flames casting fantastic lights and shadows. It was a little startling at

first sight, in the deep darkness of the African night, but not alarming — to anyone but William George Bunter.

“That’s to help the pilot to land, old fat man,” said Bob Cherry.

“Oh, don’t be an idiot,” howled Bunter. “Think they’d set the place alight for that? The drome’s on fire. Look at those flames! Look at that blaze! Oh, crikey! I say, you fellows, cut along and tell the pilot to stop.”

“I can see him stopping — if we did!” chuckled Bob.

“The stopfulness would not be terrific,” chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Can’t you see the whole place is alight?” yelled Bunter.

“That’s all right,” said Bob. “In ten minutes or so, we shall see you alight, Bunter, and you’ll see us alight.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“What?” howled Bunter.

“You see, we have to alight when we get out of the plane—.”

“You — you — you silly idiot!” hissed Bunter. “Think this a time for rotten jokes?”

“That isn’t a rotten one, old fat man—it’s quite a good one.”

“Beast! I’m jolly well not going down into a place that’s all on fire! Look at those awful flames—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter glared at the hilarious juniors, and then blinked round at the other passengers. He expected to see signs of alarm, if not of panic. But there was no sign of either alarm or panic. Nobody but Bunter supposed that those huge flames indicated that the landing-place was on fire. Some of the passengers were glancing at the fat junior and grinning. It was borne in upon Billy Bunter’s hit mind that his alarm was, after all, unfounded. He gave an angry snort, and plumped into his seat again.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, here we are!” ejaculated Bob Cherry.

There was the lightest of bumps. The plane taxied lightly on the runway, and even Bunter could see that those tossing flames came from nothing more alarming than torches on the ground. The cabin door opened. Billy Bunter heaved himself out of his seat once more.

“Let’s get out,” he grunted.

“Wait for the M.O. to come on board first,” said Harry.

“Shan’t!” Billy Bunter had no more use for Medical Officers than he had for sunsets.

“I’m going.” And Bunter rolled away.

They won’t let you off, fathead.”

“Yah!” retorted Bunter, over a fat shoulder.

However, the fat Owl, much to his annoyance, had to wait: the Medical Officer had to inspect certificates at Dakar. A lot of rot, Bunter called it, and perhaps the other fellows were disposed to agree with Bunter for once; but rules were rules, and nobody was allowed off the plane till the M.O. had done his job. Then, at long last, Billy Bunter was able to roll down the aluminium stairway, and land in Africa, which he did with a frowning brow and an irritated snort. But there was food at Dakar — and in food there was consolation and comfort.

CHAPTER VII

THIRD HOP!

“OFF!” said Bob Cherry.

In midnight darkness, save for the dancing glare of the torches, the airliner rose from the landing-ground at Dakar.

Billy Bunter was already asleep again in his armchair, his rumbling snore going on and on like an unending melody. But Harry Wharton and Co., unaccustomed as they were to wakefulness at such an hour, were too interested in everything about them, to close their eyes, sleepy as they were. It was an exciting thought to the schoolboys, that little more than half a day since losing sight of the Thames, they had set foot in Equatorial Africa, and that the next hop would land them on the South American continent.

But the stop at Dakar was brief. The steps were taken in again, the cabin door closed, the engines roared. The giant aircraft took off as lightly as a bird, the glare of the flaming torches faded into blackness.

High over the Atlantic, unseen in the darkness, the airliner soared, on the third lap of the journey to South America. Looking from the windows, nothing was to be seen but the velvety gloom of night, spangled here and there with glittering stars.

“ ‘Once more upon the waters, yet once more,’ as some jolly old poet said,” remarked Bob Cherry. “Was it Tennyson or Browning, Franky? ”

“Byron, ass! ”

“Can’t see the jolly old waters, though,” said Bob.

It’s as black as a hat. But the Atlantic must be down there somewhere — about a mile and a half, I suppose. No good trying to spot the ships that pass in the night!

Bob yawned. “How long before we whizz over the jolly old Equator, Harry? ”

“Some hours, I think. ”

Well, a fellow doesn’t cross the Line every day, ” said Bob. “ But I don’t think I’ll sit up for it! What about following Bunter’s example? ”

“Let’s! ” agreed Harry.

And the juniors, reposing comfortably in their well-cushioned seats, followed Bunter’s example, though a little less melodiously. They closed their eyes, and slid into balmy slumber, lulled by the purr of the engines, and perhaps by the rumbling snore of the Owl of the Remove. They slept undisturbed, while the airliner soared on through the night, uncounted miles of tossing ocean rolling far beneath them.

There was sunshine on the windows when they opened their eyes again. A sea of boundless blue was visible through fleecy clouds. They looked down at the rolling Atlantic, and at a great steamer that looked like a dot in the distance. But there was no sign of land — they floated in a world of air and water. Sky and sea — sea and sky — a vast solitude of space, through which the airliner throbbed and raced.

Billy Bunter snored on, while the other fellows turned out, and walked in the gangway to stretch their limbs. The stewardess — a new one since Dakar, but as neat and natty as the first in her trim blue uniform — came to lay the tables for breakfast.

Then Bob gave the sleeping Owl a shake.

“Wake up, Bunter! ” he roared.

“Urrrh! Beast! ” Billy Bunter came, with a jump, out of a happy dream of a feed in Smithy’s study at Greyfriars. “ Can’t you let a fellow sleep? ”

“Brekker! ” said Bob.

Oh! “ Bunter sat up. ” All right! It’s jolly early for brekker, but a chap can go to sleep again afterwards. I say, you fellows, what have they got for brekker? ”

That was a very interesting question to Billy Bunter, and the answer to it was quite satisfactory to the fat Owl, The short commons of home, sweet home, were evidently left far behind. Bunter blinked, with a happy grin, at delightful rolls and ample butter,

at beautiful bacon and tempting marmalade, at a bunch of ripe bananas; and he sniffed appreciatively the scent of delicious coffee. But he wasted time on only one blink and one sniff, and the next moment his mouth was full to capacity, and he was a busy Bunter.

“I say, you fellows.” The fat Owl’s voice came muffled through bacon. “I say, this is all right! It’s prime! I say, they do you jolly well on these airliners. This was a jolly good idea of yours, Mauly! Did you know about the food?”

At which question, Lord Mauleverer grinned, and the Famous Five chuckled. Still, they all enjoyed that excellent breakfast in the clouds, a mile and a half above the shining waters of the Atlantic.

Breakfast over, Billy Bunter closed his eyes again behind his spectacles, and resumed his slumber, with its musical effects. The other fellows chatted, and looked at sea and sky, and occasional ships tiny in the distance, while the sun climbed higher in blue heavens, and blazed down with tropical warmth. Long before it was possible for South America to appear in sight, they were watching for the first sign of that continent. And there was a general thrill, when at length a dim blur showed up on the far horizon.

“Hallo, hallo, there it is!” exclaimed Bob Cherry.

“Look, you fellows.”

They watched the distant blur, as it drew nearer and clearer. Billy Bunter, by that time, had had enough sleep, and he was sitting up, his fat thoughts running on his next meal. He blinked round at the Co.

I say, you fellows, what is it?” he asked.

“South America in sight,” answered Harry Wharton

“Oh!” Bunter did not seem interested in the distant prospect of land. “I say, when do we get lunch? What’s the time, Mauly?”

“Ten past nine,” answered Mauleverer, glancing at his wrist-watch.

“Rot!” grunted Bunter. “It’s later than that! I’m hungry, see?” He blinked at his own watch. “Why, you silly ass, it’s ten past twelve! Look here, you fellows, jolly well call the steward — I want my lunch.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I tell you it’s past twelve, and I want my lunch,” hooted Bunter, indignantly.

“It’s ten past nine, fathead!” roared Bob. “We had to put our watches three hours back at Dakar. Different time in the southern hemisphere, ass.”

“Then why didn’t you tell me to put my watch back?” demanded Bunter.

“Because you were sleeping like Rip van Winkle, and snoring like a grampus.”

“Yah! Well, I don’t care what time it is — I want my lunch! Putting your watch back doesn’t put your tummy back, does it?” hooted Bunter.

“Next feed, next stop,” said Bob.

“Where’s the next stop, then?”

“Natal!”

“Natal!” repeated Bunter. “You silly ass, a lot you know about geography! We’re going to South America, ain’t we? Well, Natal’s in South Africa!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, you fellows don’t know much, but I should have thought you’d know that,” snorted Bunter. “I’d like Quelch to hear you say that Natal’s in South America.”

“Oh, my hat!” gasped Bob. “This is quite another Natal, fatty — not Natal in South Africa — Natal in Brazil.”

We finish the third hop at Natal — and it’s in South America. It’s another place of the

same name.” “Well, I’ve never heard of it,” grunted Bunter. “I expect you’ve got it wrong. You don’t know much geography, Bob Cherry. Anyway, I’m hungry, and —.”

“Here comes the steward,” said Bob. “Just in time to save your life, Bunter. You must be famished after that brekker.”

The stewardess appeared with a tray of light refreshments. It was not lunch — but chocolate biscuits and lemon squash comforted Billy Bunter, and there was still lunch in prospect. While Bunter munched chocolate biscuits, gurgled lemon squash, and wondered what there was going to be for lunch, Harry Wharton and Co. watched the sea and the distant land with eager eyes.

On rushed the airliner, eating up the miles while Bunter ate up the biscuits. Over the coastline — over wide stretches of marsh, patches of dense tropical forest, streams glimmering in the glare of the southern sunshine. Then a glimpse of red roofs, and a town sprawling over flat country.

“That’s Natal!” said Bob.

The airliner circled for a landing. It came down to rest like a bird. Down went the steps; the cabin door opened, and Billy Bunter, having finished the biscuits to the last crumb, prepared to roll out and ascertain what there was for lunch. But to his disgust it was just Dakar over again — another M.O. fussing about and wasting time when a fellow was hungry, with the addition of swarthy officials interested in passports. But all these formalities devised by wise Governments to worry travellers having been got through, Billy Bunter was able to roll into a buffet and feed on the fat of the land — and it was a heavy, happy, and sticky Bunter that rolled back to the plane for the final hop to Rio.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST HOP!

MAULY, old chap —.”

Billy Bunter came out of a brown study with that remark. For a long time the fat Owl had been sitting silent, with a shade of deep thought on his fat brow.

Bunter was thinking — rather an unaccustomed exercise for him. But there was a problem on his fat mind that had to be solved. South American Airways were so generous in the item of meals, that Bunter did not need to concentrate on food: and there were other matters, lesser, of course, but still important, to which it was necessary to give attention. Chief among them was a financial problem. Bunter, as was not uncommon with him, was short of money.

There were legal restrictions upon the amount of currency that a traveller to foreign parts might take with him. This did not worry Bunter unduly, as his financial resources were limited to sixpence, which was still in his possession because it was a bad one. The most rigid and particular Treasury official would never have raised objections to Bunter taking that very moderate sum out of the country. That was all very well, but it was fairly clear that a fellow, especially a fellow who liked spending money, could never carry on for weeks in a foreign country on sixpence — even if it had been a good sixpence and legal tender.

Now that the Greyfriars party were on the last hop, and really rolling down to Rio, it was high time to solve this problem. So the fat Owl pondered over it, while the other fellows looked from the plane, watching the endless stretch of the coast of Brazil as the airliner soared swiftly onward. Every town, village, forest, swamp, or stream, was

of interest to them, if not to Billy Bunter, and they were looking forward eagerly to the first sight of Rio and the Sugar-Loaf Mountain.

“Mauly —!” repeated Bunter, as his lordship did not look round. At the second summons, Manly turned his head.

“Yaas,” he said. “What?”

“I’m in a bit of a fix,” said Bunter, eyeing his amiable lordship cautiously through his big spectacles.

“Poor old chap!” said Mauly. “Too much tuck? I rather thought you were over-doin’ it, old bean, with that fruit-salad. Like me to call the stewardess?”

“You silly ass!”

“Eh?”

“Tain’t that!” hooted Bunter. “I’ve never been sea-sick or air-sick either — I may have been a little queer over the Bay of Biscay yesterday, but not really sick, and if you want to make out that I was sick—.”

“Not at all, old bean! But if it isn’t that, what’s the trouble?”

“It’s about money,” said Bunter. “I mean, English money won’t be any good in Brazil, will it?”

“That’s all right. You can change your money in Rio,” said Mauleverer. “Easy as fallin’ off a form.” And Lord Mauleverer’s noble head turned back to the window and the Brazilian landscape.

Bunter breathed hard. The average traveller, no doubt, found it as easy as falling off a form, to change his money at Rio, into Brazilian currency. But there were a lot of difficulties in the way of changing sixpence into Brazilian currency — especially a bad sixpence.

“Look here, Mauly,” yapped Bunter.

“Yaas?” sighed his patient lordship, looking round again.

“Tain’t so jolly easy as all that,” snapped Bunter.

“Oh, gad! You haven’t brought more than the legal limit, have you?” asked Lord Mauleverer, in alarm.

“That’s breakin’ the law! You’ll have to hand it over before we leave the plane, if you have.”

There was a sudden burst of chuckles from five fellows. Harry Wharton and Co. did not share Mauly’s alarm on that subject. They had no doubt that Billy Bunter’s financial resources were well within the legal maximum.

“Oh, really, Mauly! You see, it’s like this,” explained Bunter. “I was expecting a postal order before we broke up at Greyfriars —.”

“Oh, gad!”

“I believe I’ve heard that one before,” said Bob. Cherry, thoughtfully.

“Sounds sort of familiar!” remarked Johnny Bull.

“The familiar soundfulness is terrific,” grinned the nabob of Bhanipur.

“I say, you fellows, do shut up while I’m talking to Mauly. You see how it is, Mauly, old chap! I shan’t get that postal order now till we get home.”

“And perhaps not even then!” remarked Nugent.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Do shut up, you fellows. It’s a bit absurd, Mauly but at the present moment I’ve very little ready cash,” explained Bunter. “I don’t know exactly how much — I’m not always counting my money like Fishy — but it’s more than sixpence, of course, and it isn’t a bad one —.”

“Oh, gad!” gasped Lord Mauleverer.

“But I suppose you’ve brought plenty, Mauly, as. you’ve got lots. You can lend me

some, at Rio, and I'll settle when we get home. That will be all right, won't it? Did you bring lots, Mauly?"

"How could I, when there's a legal limit?"

"Eh! You could have hidden it in your socks, I suppose?"

"You fat villain!"

"Oh, really, Mauly —."

"I don't want to smack your silly head, Bunter, old man! But keep it shut, or else I shall have to smack it."

"Beast! I — I mean, look here, dear old chap! Mean to say you've brought only a few quid?" exclaimed Bunter. "Oh, lor'!" The fat Owl blinked at Lord Mauleverer in dismay. Evidently he had destined Mauly for the role of banker during the holiday in Brazil. Why Mauly, who had lots of money, couldn't have hidden some about him for the trip in the plane, was quite a mystery to Bunter. He had never thought much of Mauly's intellect. Now it sank to the lowest possible point in his estimation.

"Did you bring only a few pounds, Mauly?"

"No!"

"How much, then?"

"A few shillin's."

"Wha-a-t?" stuttered Bunter. "Why, you ass! You fathead! You chump! A few shillings — oh, crikey! Didn't you even bring the amount you're allowed to take?"

"Why should I?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "It's considered rather unpatriotic to take money out of the country in these days, if a fellow can help it. We don't need any money on the plane — everythin's found by the Airways people."

"But you'll need money in Brazil!" howled Bunter. "I know I shall! And — and you haven't brought any!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five. The expression on Billy Bunter's speaking countenance was too much for them.

Lord Mauleverer chuckled.

"Oh, we shall be all right in Brazil," he said cheerfully. "You see, the estate at Quinta Branca belongs to me, and old Brian makes no end of money, and banks it at Rio. Tons of milreis waitin' in Rio — they call their money milreis there — I don't know why —."

"I can tell you," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "The original unit is the real, and reis is the plural of real. But it's such a jolly small spot, that they calculate by the milreis — that is, the thousand-reis ———."

"Oh, good! I'll try to remember that," said Lord Mauleverer. "Astonishin' how much you learn by travellin', isn't it? It's all right, Bunter, once we're landed in Rio — if I need any money before that, I'll borrow some of that sixpence of yours."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

But the fat Owl was comforted. If Lord Mauleverer had unlimited supplies of milreis in the bank at Rio, there was nothing for Billy Bunter to worry about financially.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Jolly old Rio!"

Rio de Janeiro was in sight! With eager eyes the Greyfriars fellows looked down at the great city, with its vast harbour dotted with innumerable islands, uncounted craft of all sizes and every rig, backed by the Sugar-Loaf Mountain, that keeps watch and ward like a sentinel over the city. In the deep red of the sunset the airliner circled for a landing.

“Some city!” said Johnny Bull.

The somefulness is terrific.”

“And jolly old Brian’s there waitin’ for us,” said Lord Mauleverer. “We’re goin’ to stay with him a few days at the Plantain, and have a look at Rio, before we go upcountry. May find old Brian lookin’ out for us on the drome.”

But Mauly’s cousin was not at the landing-place when the airliner landed. The Greyfriars party passed into the charge of a genial official of South American Airways, and in the dusk of the tropic evening they rolled off in a car to the Hotel Plantain, happy and excited, with the fairy-like city of Rio throbbing and teeming round them.

CHAPTER IX

RIO

“ANYTHING up?” asked Bob Cherry, his cheery voice a little subdued.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

“Looks like it,” said Johnny Bull. “But what?”

“Mauly’s cousin hasn’t turned up,” said Frank Nugent. “But he must be around somewhere. Late, perhaps.”

“The latefulness is superior to the neverfulness, as the English proverb remarks,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But—”

The chums of Greyfriars were feeling a little unquiet. Seated on the verandah of the Hotel Plantain, they glanced every now and then at Lord Mauleverer, who was leaning on the rail, looking out over the bay, now twinkling with a thousand lights. Except that Brian Mauleverer had not turned up as expected, everything at the Hotel Plantain had been found to everybody’s satisfaction. Long ago Brian had booked their rooms, and made all arrangements for them. The dusky courteous Brazilian manager had welcomed them with impressive politeness, and with so many bows that the juniors had rather wondered whether he had a spring in his back. Lord Mauleverer was evidently a person whom the Senhor Director delighted to honour, and his friends came in for a share of reflected glory.

Dinner at the Plantain had been excellent: even Billy Bunter was satisfied. Now the Greyfriars fellows were seated on the spacious verandah, overlooking the bay. Before them stretched the vast esplanade that followed the curve of the bay, backed by white-walled villas, adorned by soaring palm trees, thronged with loungers black and white, and all shades of colour between, and buzzing with innumerable cars that whizzed almost like arrows. The tropic moon hung over the bay, amid fleecy white clouds, against a sky of deepest darkest blue. Lights twinkled everywhere: on the endless esplanade, on the islands in the bay, on the countless craft in the harbour. It was to the eyes of the schoolboys a scene from fairy-land, and they breathed in the cool air of the evening, sipped fragrant coffee, and watched the ever-changing scene, while Billy Bunter, with an enormous box of chocolates on his fat knees, travelled steadily and methodically through the contents of the box, his whole attention concentrated on that important occupation, “the world forgetting, by the world forgot,” as it were.

Harry Wharton and Co. would not have been particularly perturbed by the non-arrival of Brian. True, it had been definitely arranged that Mauly’s cousin would meet the party at Rio, and conduct them to the quinta in the valley of the Araguaya. But all sorts of delays might occur in a country like Brazil. It was hundreds of miles from the quinta to Rio. All sorts of things might happen to delay Brian on his journey.

But it was fairly clear that Mauleverer was a little troubled. The hotel manager had only been able to explain that the Senhor Inglez at the Quinta Branca, having made all necessary arrangements by letter, had not after all arrived, and was not there to meet his relative from Inglaterra. He had no doubt that the Senhor Inglez would “go to arrive,” but as yet he had not arrived, and that, so to speak, was that!

But for Mauly’s evident preoccupation, the juniors would have given it little thought. Now they wondered uneasily whether something was “up,” as they glanced from time to time at the silent Mauly, staring out over the dusky moonlit sea.

“I say, you fellows.” Billy Bunter, having finished the chocolates, came back to the world. He blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. “I say, what are you looking like a lot of moulting owls about?”

“Are we?” said Harry, mildly.

“You are!” said Bunter. “Nothing wrong, is there? The grub here is jolly good.”

“And that’s the chief thing, of course,” remarked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

“Yes, old chap, of course.” Sarcasm was a sheer waste on Billy Bunter. “It mayn’t be so good up-country at Mauly’s estate, though. Is that what you’re worrying about?”

“Fathead!”

“I shouldn’t worry,” said Bunter, encouragingly. “It’s been all right so far. I expect they’ll do us all right at the quinta. You fellows think too much about grub.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“Wasn’t that chap Brian going to meet us here?” asked Bunter. “Mauly’s cousin, you know. He doesn’t seem to have turned up.”

“He hasn’t,” said Bob.

“I didn’t think much of that chap Brian when we met him that time with Mauly,” said Bunter, shaking his head.

“Bit unreliable, if you ask me.”

“Nobody asked you, sir, she said!” sang Bob Cherry. “Oh, really, Cherry! Bit of a rolling stone, from what I heard about him,” said Bunter. “I don’t see that it matters if he doesn’t turn up.”

“You don’t?” asked Harry.

“No! We’re in jolly good quarters here, and the grub’s good. We get lots of things here that we don’t get at home. It won’t hurt us to wait a few days for Brian to blow in. In fact, I should be quite satisfied to stay on here in Rio, without going up to the quinta at all. What’s the good of roughing it up-country, when we’re in clover here?”

“Ass!”

“Well, that’s what I think,” said Bunter. “I say where’s Mauly?” Bunter blinked along the verandah, at the junior leaning on the rail, staring out to sea. “Oh! There you are! I say, Mauly!”

Lord Mauleverer detached himself from the rail, and came along to the group in the chairs. There was a slight pucker in his brow, and his look was not quite as placid as usual. Mauly was not the fellow to show his feelings very much, whatever they might be, but the Co. could discern that he was a little perturbed about the non-arrival of his expected relative.

“Queer that old Brian hasn’t turned up, you fellows,” he remarked. “I’m rather wonderin’ what’s keepin’ him.”

“Lots of delays in a country like Brazil, Mauly,” said Bob. “Everything here goes to slow time — except the cars.”

“Yaas! But —.” Lord Mauleverer wrinkled his brows. “It can’t have been delay on the journey, long as it is — he was to have been in Rio some days ahead of us, gettin’ through business matters, and all that. The Director here says that Martinho Funcho,

the assistant-manager at the quinta, is in Rio, and has called here once or twice. Brian was going to leave him in charge of the plantation when he came to meet us. It's queer. "

"Might have forgotten, " suggested Bunter, brightly. "Eh? "

"You hadn't thought of that, had you, Mauly? "

"No! " said Lord Mauleverer, quietly. " I certainly hadn't thought of that, Bunter."

"Likely enough, " said Bunter. " Something else may have turned up, see? "

Lord Mauleverer gazed at the fat Owl without speaking.

"Shut up, Bunter! " grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! Likely enough to happen, ain't It? " demanded Bunter. "Why, only last term I arranged to meet my sister Bessie at Cliff House, to go to the circus, and then Smithy asked me to a feed in his study, and I forgot all about it — forgot the whole thing. "

"You blithering ass—. "

!Oh, really, Cherry —. "

"Well, I don't think Brian would forget to meet us here, if somebody asked him to a feed in the Araguaya valley," said Lord Mauleverer. "I suppose you can't help bein' a rather howlin' ass, Bunter. "

"Oh, really, Mauly —. "

"That chap Funcho will be coming in, when he hears that we've arrived, " said Nugent. " You'll get news of Brian from him, Mauly. "

"Yaas! I wish he'd blow in. "

"Nothing to worry about, that I can see, " said Bunter. We're all right here, Mauly. I'm quite satisfied, for one. The grub's splendid. Brian will come along some time, and if he doesn't, it doesn't matter —. "

"Jolly here, isn't it? " said Lord Mauleverer to the Co. " We'll get a run on the bay, among those jolly old islands, in the mornin', what? "

"I was speaking to you, Mauly, " said Bunter with dignity.

"We can get a motor-boat out from this hotel, " went on Lord Mauleverer, apparently deaf. "Toppin' run round the bay in a jolly old motor-boat. "

"Topping! " agreed Bob.

The topfulness will be terrific. "

"I say, Mauly —. "

"And a run up the Sugar-Loaf," said Mauleverer. There's an aerial railway, or somethin', for goin' up to the top. "

"Look here, Mauly, if you're not going to listen to a chap —. "

"They call that mountain the Pão de Assucar here, " went on Mauleverer. "I shouldn't wonder if assucar means sugar."

"Seems probable, " grinned Nugent, "and the other word probably means loaf. "

"Yaas, very likely. It's a bit of a puzzle — it's spelt P-A-O, but they seem to pronounce it Pong, or Ping, or Pang, or somethin'. "

"There's a little wiggly thing over the ' A ' which makes it nasal, " said Nugent. "A good deal like the French word 'pain' which means the same thing. "

I'll jolly well remember that, " said Lord Mauleverer. There's somethin' I was goin' to remember this afternoon — what was it? A real is a thousand milreis, is that it? " Put it in reverse," chuckled Bob. " A milreis is a thousand reals — or rather, reis — that's their jolly old plural."

"Oh, yaas! That's it! And—. "

"Look here, Mauly —. " howled Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, who's this johnny? " asked Bob Cherry. " Somebody to see us. "

The Senhor Director came on to the verandah, accompanied by another Brazilian — a dark, dapper man, with a rather handsome olive face, and jet black curly hair under a spotless Panama hat.

Lord Mauleverer looked round quickly, evidently with the thought that Brian had arrived. But it was not Brian Mauleverer. Who it was the juniors did not know, but they could guess.

The dark, dapper man was being conducted to them, his jet black eyes keenly on the group of schoolboys as he came. He raised his Panama with a polite bow.

“O Senhor Funcho,” announced the portly hotel manager, and then in English, “The Senhor Inglez of the Quinta Branca he do not come, but O Senhor Dom Martinho Funcho he come in a place. Yes, my lord. ”

He bowed himself away, leaving O Senhor Dom Martinho Funcho with the Greyfriars party. The assistant- manager of the Quinta Branca bowed to all the party, and bestowed a particularly deep and respectful bow upon Lord Mauleverer, his Panama lifted from his thick black hair.

“I greet you, senhor, my lord, ” he said. “I am your good servant. ”

“You’ve come from Brian — from the Senhor Brian Mauleverer? ” asked Mauly.

“Sim, senhor! Yes, my lord! I come from the Quinta Branca,” answered Martinho Funcho, with another deep bow. “O Senhor Intendente is unable to come to Rio to greet your lordship. ”

“He’s not ill? “ exclaimed Mauleverer.

“Não! Não! ” answered Funcho, reassuringly. “The last time I have seen the senhor he is in very good health. It is not that, senhor. ”

“Why has he not come? ”

“The Senhor Intendente has gone on a journey,” explained Funcho. “Since he cannot return in time, he send me to greet your lordship, and to conduct your lordship’s party to the quinta. It is a great pleasure and honour to be of service to so noble a young senhor.”

And Martinho Funcho bowed again, more deeply than ever, as if he, too, had a spring in his back.

There was, for a moment, a cloud on Lord Mauleverer’s brow. His friends guessed that he had feared that Brian might be ill at the quinta. That misgiving was now relieved, but the news that Brian had “gone on a journey” when he was expected to meet his relative at Rio, was a surprise, and could not be a pleasant one. But Mauly’s brow cleared in a moment, and he politely asked Martinho to be seated — and the dapper Brazilian, with yet another deep bow, sat down in one of the long cane chairs. And Harry Wharton and Co., after a few polite words, left Mauly to talk with the assistant-manager of his estate on the Araguaya, and strolled out to mingle with the throng of all nations on the brilliantly-lighted esplanade.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ARAGUAYA!

“I SAY, you fellows! ”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, Bunter! ” roared Bob Cherry.

Grunt, from Billy Bunter. Apparently he was not, at the moment, enjoying life!

“It’s hot! ” he said.

“And we came to the tropics to keep cool!” sighed Bob.

At which there was a chuckle from the other fellows in the big dug-out floating on the waters of the Araguaya. Bunter did not chuckle. Like the old Queen, Bunter was not amused.

“Look at the mosquitoes!” he snapped.

“Plenty to look at!” agreed Bob.

The plentifulness is terrific,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, “and the bitefulness is not a boonful blessing. But what cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.”

Billy Bunter snorted, and smacked at mosquitoes.

Billy Bunter seemed to be perpetually smacking at these, and other, small winged inhabitants of South America. Indeed, since arriving in the interior of Brazil, Bunter could almost have said that, like Samson, he had slain his thousands and his tens of thousands.

It was, in fact, hot, and there were many insects. Nobody really expected it to be cool, in Brazil. The Equator passed through the northern regions of that vast country, and though the Greyfriars travellers were a good thousand miles south of the Equator, they expected it to be warm — and found it so. Even Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, whose native land was far from chilly, admitted that it was warm in Brazil. Billy Bunter seemed almost to think that the heat had been specially turned on to annoy him. Perhaps he felt it more than the other fellows. There was more of him to absorb the torrid rays of the sun. Certainly he felt the insects more than they did. There was always a considerable amount of stickiness about Bunter, which caused those small creatures to take a fancy to him.

In the dug-out on the Araguaya, Bunter had been enjoying a large chunk of sugar-cane. He was rather more sticky than usual. Unluckily the insects seemed to want their share.

Harry Wharton and Co. were merry and bright — flies and mosquitoes and torrid heat and all! To the chums of the Greyfriars Remove, it was exhilarating to find themselves packed in a big canoe, with a crew of coppery Indian paddlers, afloat on the wide sluggish waters of that almost unknown river, the Araguaya, many hundreds of miles from Rio, some hundreds from the nearest railroad point.

They were fairly in the “sertão” now; the almost untrodden wilderness of the back-country of Brazil. Traffic in that country of few roads and fewer railways was very largely carried on by the interior water-ways, but they were now beyond the limit of the river steamers.

They had spent a few days in Rio, seeing the sights: ascending the Sugar-Loaf, bathing at the Copacabana beach, shopping in the palatial Rua Ouvidor, mingling with the throng of all nations and colours in the tremendous Avenida Rio Branco: the dark and dapper Martinho Funcho acting as their guide. And Martinho Funcho was so attentive and obliging, so overflowing with Portuguese politeness, that the juniors had taken rather a liking to him.

From Rio, the Greyfriars party had travelled by railroad at first, and then by river steamer, far in the interior to Porto Lucar — a little river port on the Araguaya. Now the last lap of the long journey was being made, in a huge dug-out canoe, still scented with the produce with which it was usually packed, and paddled by half-a-dozen native Indians.

There was a canvas awning over the juniors where they sat, which kept off the direct glare of the tropical sun, though not its heat.

In the stern, on a stack of baggage, sat Martinho Funcho, smoking one cigarette after

another, in a little cloud of tobacco-smoke, which doubtless helped to keep away mosquitoes. He had a rifle across his knees, at which the schoolboys had glanced with a little thrill. They were in regions now where a rifle might be wanted. The innumerable Indians they had seen were quite tame and peaceful, but there were jaguars in the forests, alligators in the swamps, anacondas coiling in the thickets — and they had heard, during their journey, of bandits — wild and desperate outcasts of the sertão who lurked on the almost untrodden banks of the Araguaya.

Martinho Funcho rolled incessant cigarettes and smoked them. They were of black Brazilian tobacco, rolled in thin rice-paper, and had a scent like a Havana cigar — had not the Greyfriars fellows seen the cigarettes, they would have supposed from the aroma that Martinho was smoking cigars. It was a pleasant enough scent, but decidedly strong, and how the dapper Dom Martinho could smoke such potent stuff so incessantly, was rather a wonder to the Greyfriars fellows. But he was hardly for a minute without a “cigarrilha” in his mouth, and a cigar-like haze hanging round him. “I say, Mauly,” squeaked Billy Bunter, having wearily smacked his umpteenth mosquito.

Lord Mauleverer was watching the gliding banks where alternately forest gave place to campo, and campo to jungle or swamp, with a thoughtful brow. Probably he was thinking of his cousin Brian, and wondering whether the “Intendente” of the Quinta Branca would be there to greet him when he arrived.

He did not seem to hear Bunter. Occasional deafness was Mauly’s only defence against Billy Bunter’s conversation. He was at a little distance from the fat Owl — as far, in fact, as the dimensions of the sun-awning permitted.

As he did not answer, the irritated fat Owl essayed to draw his attention by whizzing at him the remnant of the chunk of sugar-cane he had been devouring. He had almost finished the chunk, but a sticky lump remained in his fat hand, which he aimed to land on Mauly’s ear.

Whiz!

But Billy Bunter was what the other fellows called cack-handed, and even at short range his aim was not good. The whizzing sticky lump missed Lord Mauleverer by a foot or more.

But the next moment there was a loud, startled, angry exclamation in Portuguese. Every bullet has its billet, and the same law applied to a sticky lump of sugar-cane. Missing Mauly, it shot on, and landed fair and square on the olive countenance of Martinho Funcho, who naturally was not expecting anything of the kind, and was taken by surprise.

It caused him to jump so suddenly, that he almost fell off the stack of baggage. As he floundered, his half-smoked cigarette slipped into his mouth, and Martinho Funcho’s yell woke all the echoes on the banks of the Araguaya.

“O que! Corpo de Deos! O que!” spluttered Funcho, frantically spitting out the cigarette

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

“You blithering chump!” exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The juniors all looked at Funcho, startled by the change in the dapper Brazilian’s look. Up to that moment, Martinho’s Portuguese politeness had never failed him for a moment. He had seemed to the schoolboys amiable; patient, and perpetually good-tempered. Now they suddenly realised that there was a fierce southern temper under that Outward aspect. Taken suddenly off his guard, his mouth burnt by the cigarette, the assistant-manager of the Quinta Branca was quite a different man — his black eyes blazed, his dark brows came together in a savage scowl, and a stream of

Portuguese poured from him — which the juniors did not understand, and which, perhaps, it was just as well that they did not understand. Billy Bunter blinked at him almost in terror — for it looked, for the moment, that Funcho would spring on him. Lord Mauleverer jumped up hastily to interpose.

But it was not needed. That blaze of rage was visible only for a moment in Martinho's face: the next, he had recovered himself. He rubbed a smear of stickiness on his olive cheek, and rubbed a lip that had been burnt by the hot end of the cigarette, the spate of angry words ceasing quite suddenly.

"I — I — I say, it was an accident," gasped Bunter. "I — I was chucking it at Mauly, only — only it missed."

"Bunter's a cack-handed ass, Mr. Funcho," explained Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"Ê nada," said Mr. Funcho. "Nada! Nada!"

But though he had recovered his temper, there was still a glint in his black eyes that hinted that he would gladly have smacked Bunter's fat head. "Nada — nada — nothing!"

And Mr. Funcho, once more amiable and smiling, sat down again, and rolled himself a fresh cigarette.

"All your fault, Mauly," grunted Billy Bunter. "Can't you answer a fellow? I was speaking —."

"You generally are!" sighed Lord Mauleverer.

"What is it now, old fat man?"

"How long before we get to the keen — keen — what do you call the beastly place?" grunted Bunter.

"Quinta!" said Nugent. "It's pronounced keenta, if you want to know."

I don't want to know," retorted Bunter. "What I want to know is, how long before we get there, out of this beastly sun?"

"Haven't the foggiest," yawned Lord Mauleverer.

"Well, you can ask Funcho, can't you? I suppose Funcho knows."

"Yaas! How long before we reach the quinta, M. Funcho?"

"Two hours more, senhor," answered the assistant manager, taking the cigarette from his mouth to reply. "Perhaps three, senhor! It may be, four!"

The Greyfriars fellows smiled at that reply. Time counted for little in Brazil. Arrival anywhere was a matter of happy chance.

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Bunter. "I say, Mauly, can't you tell those paddlers to buck up! Lazy lot."

The Indian paddlers were not hurrying themselves. Nobody in Brazil ever hurried. It was not a climate for hurry. But they had been paddling for hours, steadily driving the large, heavy dug-out against the sluggish current. They were in the sun-blaze, protected only by big grass-hats, while the passengers sat under the shade of the awning. Nobody but Bunter was disposed to tell them to drive harder at the paddles.

"Never saw such a lazy lot," went on Bunter. "Look here, Mauly, tell Funcho to tell them to get a move on."

"I daresay Mr. Funcho knows best, Bunter," said Lord Mauleverer, mildly.

"Rot!" snorted Bunter. "You're his boss, ain't you? You can give orders here, can't you, when you're boss?"

"Do shut up, old chap."

"I'd jolly well give orders fast enough, if I were boss!" snorted Bunter.

"Yaas, I expect you would, old thing. But as matters stand, would you mind shuttin' up?" suggested Lord Mauleverer.

“Beast! ”

“Shall we roll him over the gunwale, Mauly? ” asked Bob Cherry. “There’s a nice big alligator over there, who looks as if he’s ready for supper. ”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, cackle,” said Bunter, morosely. “ Fat lot you care if a fellow’s scorched, and baked, and boiled, and stung by flies, and eaten up by mosquitoes. A fellow could doze off, if you’d keep the flies off a fellow. ”

“You men feel like sitting round and keeping the flies off Bunter? ” inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically. “ Don’t all speak at once. ”

“Oh, really, Bull! I wish you fellows wouldn’t be so jolly selfish, ” said Bunter. “ If there’s one thing I never could stand, it’s selfishness. ”

“Oh, crumbs! ”

“I say, Bob, you might smack those rotten mosquitoes, if they settle on a fellow when a fellow nods off. ”

“Oh, all right! ” said Bob Cherry. “ Go to sleep, for goodness sake. You’re ever so much nicer when you’re asleep. Leave them to me. ”

Bunter gave a grunt, doubtless by way of thanks, leaned back against the gunwale, and closed his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles. It was drowsy enough, in the simmering heat of the tropic day. The other fellows were interested in their strange surroundings, but Billy Bunter was equally indifferent to tropical forest, undulating campo, steaming swamp, floating alligators, and green islands from which innumerable parrots screamed. He had consumed as much sticky sugar-cane as even his extensive capacity could deal with, and after eating, sleeping came next in Bunter’s list of earthly joys. Sleep with stinging mosquitoes settling on a fellow was hardly feasible, unless some other fellow undertook to deal with the insects. Bob Cherry having kindly undertaken that important task, the fat Owl settled down comfortable for a happy nap.

In about a minute, a buzzing mosquito landed on his fat little nose. Bob, as per programme, was on the look-out.

Smack!

“Yarooooh! ”

Bunter bounded.

That mosquito went west so suddenly, that it could never have known what happened. From the fearful yell that followed, it might have been supposed that Billy Bunter’s nose had gone west also.

“Ow! wow! wow! Ow! ” Bunter sat up, clasping his nose with both fat hands. “Wow! You silly idiot, wharrer you punching my nose for? Yow-ow-ow! ”

“There was a mosquito on it, ” explained Bob. “Didn’t you ask me to smack any mosquitoes that settled on you? ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“You dithering dummy! ” yelled Bunter. “I didn’t ask you to knock my nose through the back of my head! Ow! wow! Beast! ”

“Well, some fellows are never satisfied, ” said Bob. “You ask a fellow to smack mosquitoes for you, and call him names because he does it! Look here, do you want me to smack your mosquitoes or not? ”

“Beast! ” roared Bunter.

Apparently Billy Bunter did not want Bob to smack any more mosquitoes for him. He seemed to find the remedy worse than the disease. After that, the fat Owl sat up and smacked mosquitoes for himself.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN ON THE ISLAND

BANG!

The sudden rifle-shot rang far and wide, echoing across the wide river, rolling back from the dense forests on the banks in a thousand echoes. In the drowsy quiet of the hot tropical afternoon, it had an effect of thunder.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

“What—!”

“Oh, crikey! I say, you fellows —.”

Everyone on the dug-out, passengers and crew, started at the sudden sound, and stared at the little island in the Araguaya whence it had come. Billy Bunter jumped so suddenly that his spectacles almost slid off his fat little nose.

The Greyfriars voyagers had passed a good many islands since they had embarked on the canoe at Lucar — some of them wooded, others sandy and swampy. Now they were approaching another, at which the Famous Five were looking, as they drew nearer to it — an island so densely wooded that it looked like a solid wall of tropical growths. Great trees grew to the water’s edge, with vast branches spreading out over the river, the huge trunks laced with thick lianas and Spaniard’s-beard.

Looked at from the river, the island appeared to be an impenetrable mass, with no space for a foot to tread. But that someone was on the island, was clear from the shot that had suddenly rung out. No one was to be seen — the thick greenery shut off all view of the interior.

“Corpo de Deos!”

Martinho Funcho grabbed the cigarette from his mouth, stood up, and stared at the island, with glinting black eyes. He seemed to be more startled than anyone else on the dug-out by the sudden shot. Then he turned to the staring Indian paddlers, and rapped out sharply:

“Da pressa!”

What that phrase meant the Greyfriars fellows were able to guess, for the paddles instantly began to flash more swiftly, and the heavy dug-out surged into more rapid motion. It had seemed to the passengers to be almost crawling before; now it almost rushed. Evidently that shot on the island made Martinho Funcho desire to get past as quickly as possible, for what reason the juniors had no idea. Certainly the bullet from the rifle had come nowhere near the canoe.

“Somebody’s on that jolly old island,” remarked Bob Cherry. “Looks as if there’s hardly room for a fly to land. But—hallo, hallo hallo! There he goes again!”

Bang!

A second rifle-shot rang, or rather roared, out, reawakening endless echoes. It was followed by a loud screaming sound as of a stricken animal.

“I say, you fellows!” squeaked Bunter. “Are they firing this way? I say—.”

“No, ass! It’s some hunter on the island,” answered Bob. “Sounds as if he’s shot a jaguar or something.”

“Oh!” gasped Frank Nugent. “Look!”

The swifter strokes of the paddles had brought the canoe abreast of the island. Now the juniors could see that there was an opening in the solid mass of greenery in one spot, clear of trees, though thickly shaded by immense branches overhead. It looked like a landing-place, which perhaps it was. Into that open space, from the thick wood, a sinuous spotted figure leaped, uttering discordant screaming yells as it came.

“A jaguar!” exclaimed Harry Wharton.

“Nossa senhora!” breathed Martinho Funcho.

It was a magnificent jaguar, and evidently hard hit, for the juniors were now near enough to see the blood streaming over the sleek skin. As it landed in the open on the edge of the island, it rolled over, screaming and tearing up the earth with its terrible claws. The Greyfriars fellows gazed spell-bound at the startling scene — their first sight of the wild and savage life of the sertão.

Oh, crikey!” gasped Billy Bunter, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles at the writhing, screaming jaguar. I say, make them sheer off — suppose it jumped this way — oh, lor’!”

Nobody heeded the alarmed fat Owl. The canoe was passing within reach of a jaguar’s leap, but the death-stricken animal was plainly past leaping. It was tearing up the earth in its death-throes.

“There’s the hunter!” exclaimed Johnny Bull.

From the thick wood on the island another figure burst into view — this time a human figure. It was a man in a poncho and a grass hat, under which showed a dark, bearded face, with a livid scar from a knife-cut on one swarthy cheek. In his left hand was a still smoking rifle — in his right, a long knife, which flashed as it caught the rays of the sun. He did not glance towards the canoe, and evidently did not know that it was there: his face was fixed, intent, his eyes on the writhing jaguar as it rolled and screamed. He leaped at the screaming animal, with a leap as lithe and fierce as the jaguar’s own, and drove the long knife to the very hilt into the struggling body. The screaming, the writhing, suddenly ceased — the jaguar lay dead at the hunter’s feet. All eyes in the canoe were upon him, and from the Indian paddlers came an outbreak of startled exclamations.

“O Corvo! O Corvo!”

The paddles fairly flashed — the canoe almost flew. It was not necessary for Martinho to rap

out “Da pressa! — the sight of that dark, bearded, scarred face on the river island had scared the Indians, and they slaved at the paddles, with frightened faces.

“O Corvo!” repeated Bob. “Is that his name? They seem to know him.”

“He’s put the wind up our crew, and no mistake,” said Johnny Bull.

“The wind-upfulness is terrific.”

The man on the island, as he heard the startled cries from the canoe, stared round, aware for the first time that he was under observation.

He gave the canoe one stare and then, with the swiftness of a wild animal, plunged into the trees and disappeared from sight.

“O Corvo! O Corvo!” the Indians were babbling.

Lord Mauleverer fixed his eyes curiously on Martinho Funcho’s dark face. The Brazilian was plainly disturbed, though he was not scared like the Indians. He had replaced the cigarette in his mouth, but instead of smoking it, bit it savagely, and spat out the fragments, with a muttered word in Portuguese which the juniors did not understand, but which sounded very expressive.

“Who is that man, Mr. Funcho?” asked Lord Mauleverer, quietly.

The Brazilian did not reply for a moment. He was staring back at the island, with a black brow. But the canoe, almost racing now, was leaving the island swiftly astern, and Martinho turned to Mauleverer, the scowl on his dark face replaced by his usual suave smile.

“That man — a bandit!” he said. “O Corvo — that is his name among his associates — or as you say in English, the Crow.”

The juniors knew that in Portuguese the “ O “ signified the definite article, “the ”; and from the Latin they had absorbed at Greyfriars, under the gimlet-eye of Mr. Quelch, they could guess that “corvo” meant “crow,” from its similarity to “corvus.” But such a name as “The Crow” for a white man was singular enough.

“The Crow!” repeated Bob Cherry. “ Oh! Sort of bird of prey, what?

Martinho nodded and smiled.

“Certo! A bird of prey—a bandit! Much dreaded by the Indian moços. He is not a safe man to meet.” Martinho shrugged his slim shoulders. “ He carry a knife — and often he use it. It is good to keep clear of O Corvo.”

“ The Indians seem to want to keep clear of him,” said Bob, with a grin. The paddlers were still sweating at the paddles, though the island in the Araguaya had now dropped almost out of sight.

“Sim! Sim! He is a dangerous man,” said Martinho. If he is a bandit, couldn’t the authorities be warned where to find him, now that we’ve seen him on that island? “ asked Harry Wharton.

Martinho shrugged his shoulders again.

“To-day he is here,” he said. “To-morrow, perhaps, far away on the campo, or deep in the forest, or perhaps in hiding among the Chavantes or the Carayas. To catch him, it is like to catch one mosquito. Não, Não, senhor! it is not good to seek trouble with O Corvo. He has friends, of his own kind, in the sertão, and a knife in the back is not good for the health. Não! It is wise, on the Araguaya, to mind one’s own affairs, little senhor.”

And Martinho sat down on the baggage again, rolled a fresh cigarette, and smoked.

He seemed relieved that the island was sinking from sight astern. Very plainly the Indians were relieved: and they ceased, at last, their unaccustomed exertion, and the dug-out slowed down, and rolled onward at its former leisurely pace.

Forest gave place to campo on the banks of the Araguaya; vast undulating plains that seemed to stretch to infinity. Here and there the juniors sighted herds of cattle, with a herdsman in poncho and grass hat, but for the most part, the banks of the Araguaya seemed a solitary waste of forest and swamp and campo. Suddenly, through an open woodland, there was a glimmer of white walls and green verandahs. Martinho Funcho waved his hand with his cigarette in it, leaving a trail of smoke in the air.

“A Quinta Branca! ” he said.

Harry Wharton and Co. were still thinking of the dark, bearded, scarred face that had looked at them from the island. But they forgot O Corvo as Martinho spoke, and stood up in the dug-out to look at the Quinta Branca as they drew nearer. A spacious white-walled villa, with green-painted verandahs round three sides of it, stood on a rising ground facing the river, surrounded by cultivated land, in which numbers of dark-skinned “moços” could be seen at patient labour under the setting sun.

At a landing-place, with a stone quay, more than a dozen boats and canoes were tied up. A crowd of moços were loading bags of coffee into a huge “batalão,” a clinker-built river boat more than thirty feet long, no doubt for transit down the Araguaya — the only practicable road for the produce of the Quinta Branca.

“So that’s the Quinta Branca, ” said Bob.

“Sim, senhor! ” smiled Martinho.

“Here’s your jolly old estate, Mauly.”

“Yaas.” Lord Mauleverer was gazing towards the desembarcadouro — the landing-place — perhaps in expectation of seeing a familiar face there. But though there were white, and half-white, faces among the many brown and black, there was not the face he hoped to see. “Looks jolly, what?

The jolliffulness is terrific, my esteemed Mauly. ”

“Tophole, and then some! ” said Bob Cherry. “Mauly, old man, you’re a lucky bargee, to have bits of property like this lying round loose in the world. ”

“Yaas! ” assented Mauly.

The dug-out rolled up to the desembarcadouro, and the Indians made it fast. The passengers scrambled out, Billy Bunter with a grunt of relief. They walked up a path shaded by trees to the white-walled house, through gardens scented with orange-trees, followed by a stream of brown-skinned moços carrying baggage.

In the open doorway stood a quite imposing figure: a portly black man, black as the ace of spades, with an expansive smile that revealed flashing white teeth, who bowed almost to the ground. Evidently he was the major-domo. Portuguese came from him with a rush, apparently a speech in welcome of “ Senhor o Proprietario,” of which the juniors understood hardly a word. Like other inhabitants of Brazil whom they had encountered, the dark gentleman seemed to have a spring in his back. Portly as he was, he bowed, and bowed, and bowed, as if wound up.

“Ask him if my cousin Brian is back yet, Mr. Funcho, ” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Sim, senhor. ”

Martinho spoke to the plump black man in Portuguese, and then turned to Lord Mauleverer, with a glimmer in his dark eyes.

“Não, senhor! The Senhor Intendente has not yet returned, ” he said.

Lord Mauleverer nodded, and walked into the house with his friends.

CHAPTER XII

BUNTER ASKS FOR IT!

“O ALMOÇO esta prompto, Senhor o Proprietario!”

Tio Jose bowed till his plump chin almost touched his plump waist, his jet black countenance wreathed in respectful smiles, as Lord Mauleverer and his friends came out on to the verandah in the fresh, sunny morning.

Breakfast was laid on the verandah. Tio Jose, steward, butler, and major-domo, was there to greet the young senhores from far-off Inglaterra, and to wait upon them with his own dutiful sable hands.

The Greyfriars juniors had already made the acquaintance of Tio Jose, head of the numerous household staff at the quinta. They liked the plump, obliging, smiling black gentleman, and they liked, too, the total absence of anything like a “colour bar” in Brazil. Most of the servants at the quinta were coloured, but some of them were white or half-white; all, however, treated Tio Jose with the greatest respect, and evidently did not even know that in other countries the colour of his skin would have made a difference.

Tio Jose had a little English, which he had doubtless picked up from Brian Mauleverer, but it was very little, hardly more than the juniors had picked up of Portuguese. So conversation was not easy, but bows and smiles went a long way.

“You fellows catch on? ” asked Lord Mauleverer. “Is he sayin’ good-mornin’? ”

Harry Wharton laughed.

“I think ‘almoço’ means breakfast, ” he said.

“Sim! Sim! Almoço — brickfuss! Yes! Yes! beamed Tio Jose. “Esta prompto, senhores.”

“That means ready, I should guess, ” remarked Nugent.

“Retty, retty! ” repeated Tio Jose, delighted. “Sim! sim! Prompto —retty. Certo. O

almoço esta retty! Brickfuss — retty! Yes! ”

“I say, you fellows. ” Billy Bunter rolled out after the juniors. “I say, where do we have breakfast, and when? I’m jolly hungry. ”

“O almoço esta prompto, senhor! ” said Bob Cherry, solemnly.

Bunter blinked at him.

“Eh! Wharrer you mean, fathead? Is that Portuguese? You silly ass, how long have you been able to talk in Portuguese? ”

“Nearly a minute, ” answered Bob.

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Oh, don’t be an ass, ” said Bunter. “I say, Mauly, I’m hungry! Tell that chunk of ebony I want my breakfast, will you? ” Then Billy Bunter’s eyes, and spectacles, fell on a well-spread table, and his fat face brightened.

“Oh! Are you having it out here? All right. ”

Billy Bunter blinked at the breakfast table, and was pleased with the view. It was well-spread — very well- spread. Short commons, it was clear, were unknown at the quinta in the valley of the Araguaya. The fat Owl did not take the trouble to glance at the wide gardens, brilliant with tropical flowers, at the gorgeous fluttering butterflies with wings nine or ten inches in span, at the tall shady trees, or the river beyond, rolling like gold in the morning sunlight, as the other fellows did. The view of the breakfast table was enough for Bunter.

He rolled to the nearest chair, and plumped down in it, the stout cane creaking loudly as if in protest.

Harry Wharton and Co. sat down cheerily to breakfast. Tio Jose — a name which they had already learned meant “Uncle Joseph ” — waited upon them assiduously. Over breakfast there was a buzz of cheery chat, in which Billy Bunter was, for the time, too busy to take part. First things came first, with Bunter, and much as he loved wagging his fat chin, he had no leisure for it until he had taken the keen edge off his appetite.

“It’s jolly here, Mauly, ” said Bob, for the umpteenth time. Bob Cherry was seldom in any place that he did not find more or less jolly. ” But really the Quinta Branca and its surroundings were delightful, and any fellow who had not found them pleasant would have been hard to please.

“Yaas, ” assented Mauleverer.

“We’re going to have a tremendous time, old man, ” said Johnny Bull. “We’re going to enjoy every minute of it. ”

“The enjoyfulness will be — ! ”

“Terrific! ” chuckled Bob. “Not to say preposterous. Best idea you ever had, to come out here for the hols, Mauly. ”

“Yaas. I wish — ! ” Mauly broke off.

“Not much left to wish for, in a show like this, ” said Frank Nugent. “What is it you wish, you discontented millionaire? ”

“Oh! Nothin’. I mean, I wish old Brian were here, ” said Mauleverer. “Queer that he hasn’t turned up. ”

“Oh, I don’t know, ” said Harry Wharton. “Lots of delays in a country like Brazil, Mauly. ”

“Lots and lots, ” said Bob. “Nobody seems to care much when he starts for anywhere, or what time he gets there. Nobody’s in a hurry in this country. ”

“Yaas — I know! But it’s queer his goin’ off on a long journey at all, just when we were expected, and without a word. ”

“Mr. Funcho brought you a message from him at Rio, ” said Nugent.

But why didn’t Brian write at least a line for Funcho to bring? “ said Mauleverer. “

Just a line, at least, instead of a message by word of mouth? ”

The chums of the Remove could make no reply to that. It had not occurred to them to wonder about it; but now that Mauleverer mentioned it, they had to admit that it was odd, at least. Funcho had told the proprietor of the Quinta Branca that his cousin and manager had gone on a journey; but surely it would have been natural for Brian to send a letter, containing a fuller explanation. Now that they thought of it, the juniors could only wonder that he had not done so.

“It’s a bit ‘puzzlin’, ” said Mauleverer, slowly.

“The puzzlement is somewhat preposterous, my esteemed Mauly, ” agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. “ But no news is the good news that is better than a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks. ”

Lord Mauleverer’s thoughtful face melted into a grin at the English proverb.

“ Yaas, no news is good news, ” he assented. “But I’d like a spot of news of old Brian, all the same.”

“Might come trotting in any minute, ” said Johnny Bull.

Lord Mauleverer glanced out of the shady verandah, across the brilliant gardens, to the desembarcadouro on the bank of the Araguaya. A crowd of brown-skinned moços were loading a batalão there, as the juniors had seen them on the previous day, under the direction of Martinho Funcho, a natty figure in his white ducks and Panama hat among the half-clad moços. Every now and then a canoe appeared on the river, paddling to the landing- place. That, probably, was the way Brian Mauleverer would come, when he came. But there was no white face to be seen in the canoes on the Araguaya.

“I say, you fellows. ” Billy Bunter, having consumed by this time sufficient foodstuffs for three or four fellows, had leisure to add a fat squeak to the conversation. “ I say, it’s rather thick, ain’t it? ”

“Talking about your head, or what? ” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Oh, really, Bull! I call it a bit thick, chap clearing off like this when his boss is coming along,” said Bunter. “Cheeky, what? ”

Lord Mauleverer continued to gaze at the desembarcadouro, apparently deaf to the fat squeak. Five concentrated glares were turned on Bunter from the other fellows.

Impervious to glares, the fat Owl went on:

“I wouldn’t stand it, if I were Mauly! I’d jolly well sack him. I —. ”

Bob Cherry picked up a jar of honey. He was strongly tempted to up-end it over the fattest head at the Quinta Branca. However, he refrained from that drastic measure.

“Try the honey, Bunter, ” he said, instead. “ It’s good. ”

“Is it? ” said Bunter, interested at once. “Those jellies are jolly good, but I haven’t tried the honey yet. Shove it this way. ”

Bunter had no time for talk while he was sampling the honey. Finding it good, the fat Owl selected a large spoon, and commenced operations on the jar itself. That was Bunter’s favourite way of disposing of sticky things. He liked them in bulk.

The other fellows chatted, while Bunter gurgled honey, but Lord Mauleverer did not mention Brian again. Billy Bunter did not interrupt the conversation till he had finished the jar of honey.

“I say, you fellows, what’s the Portuguese for honey? ” asked Bunter, blinking round over an empty jar and a sticky spoon.

“Goodness knows, ” answered Harry.

“ Well, I want some more, ” explained Bunter. “It’s good! In fact, jolly good. Jolly nearly as good as the honey we get from our own — our own honeries at Bunter Court.”

“Oh, my hat! ”

“I can do with another jar, ” said Bunter. Having finished one jar, Bunter, it seemed, like Alexander of old, sighed for fresh worlds to conquer. “Tell the nigger to bring some more honey, Mauly. ”

Lord Mauleverer fixed his eyes on a sticky fat face.

“I wouldn’t use that word here, Bunter, ” he said, quietly. “ It’s offensive to coloured people. ”

Bunter blinked at him.

“ Oh, really, Mauly! Niggers are niggers, I suppose. ”

“Will you shut up, Bunter? ” asked Bob.

“No, I won’t! Look here, Mauly, you jolly well tell that nigger to bring some more honey, ” said Bunter, irritably.

The juniors glanced rather uneasily at Tio Jose, who was hovering with a beaming black face behind Lord Mauleverer’s chair. He could not have failed to hear Bunter’s impatient squeak, and they hoped that the disagreeable word “nigger” was a new one to him. But it was clear, from Tio Jose’s face, that he was well acquainted with it. The beaming smile was wiped from his black face as if by a duster. Otherwise, he gave no sign of having heard.

Lord Mauleverer drew a deep breath.

“A fellow’s in a difficult position, ” he remarked. “Bunter’s my guest here, and I can’t kick him. ”

“Oh, really, Mauly —.”

“But he isn’t your guest, Bob, ” went on Mauleverer.

“I don’t see any reason why you shouldn’t kick him, if you feel like takin’ the trouble. ”

“Pleased! ” said Bob, heartily. He jumped up.

Billy Bunter forgot all about honey, and bounded from his chair, as Bob charged round the table. He jumped to escape, yelling over a fat shoulder.

“Keep off, you beast. I say, Mauly — I say, you fellows — Oh, crikey! Yaroooh! Will you keep off, you beast! Oh, crumbs!”

Bunter fled for his fat life, dodging among the long cane chairs dotted about the spacious verandah, with an avenging foot in close pursuit.



Bunter did not even see him till he crashed

“Keep off!” yelled Bunter. “I say, you fellows, stoppim!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Harry Wharton and Co. watched the chase up and down the verandah, laughing: Tio Jose with

wide-open eyes. Billy Bunter, in desperation, headed for the steps down to the garden. He flew frantically down the steps, barely escaping a lunging boot astern.

It was sheer ill-luck for Martinho Funcho that, having finished his inspection at the desembarcadouro, he was coming up the steps of the verandah as Billy Bunter hurtled down. Bunter did not even see him till he crashed.

It was a terrific crash.

A charge with Billy Bunter’s weight behind it would not have been a light matter on a football field. The slim Brazilian was simply swept away by it. He went, spinning backwards, landing on his back on the hard, unsympathetic earth, Bunter landing on him and sprawling over him. Two wild yells blended into one:

“Corpo de Deos!”

“Yaroooh!”

The Greyfriars fellows jumped up from the breakfast table, and rushed to the verandah rail, to stare down blankly at the mix-up at the foot of the steps.

CHAPTER XIII

BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!

“BUNTER, you ass — !”

“Oh, scissors!”

“Bunter’s done it this time!”

“The donefulness is terrific.”

“Yow-ow-ow-ow-oooh!” roared Bunter. He sat up, groping for his spectacles, which were aslant on his fat little nose. He was not aware, for the moment, of what he was sitting upon. Martinho Funcho was aware of it, only too painfully. Already winded by the shock, Martinho gasped and gurgled horribly, as Bunter’s weight drove almost the last vestige of breath out of him.

Bunter sat and roared.

“Ow! Oh, crikey! I say, I fell over something —.” He jammed his spectacles straight and blinked at Bob Cherry, bounding down the steps from the verandah.

“Keep off, you beast — I’ve fallen over something —.”

“Gurrrrrgh!” came an anguished gurgle from under Bunter.

“You mad chump!” roared Bob. “Get off Mr. Funcho! You’ve pancaked him, you blithering bloater.”

He grasped a fat neck and dragged.

Bunter, spluttering wildly, rolled off Mr. Funcho, and rolled into a flower-bed.

Martinho, relieved of his weight, still lay gasping and wriggling, making spasmodic efforts to get his breath.

Bob Cherry bent to give him a helping hand, and the other fellows, anxious to be of assistance, crowded down the steps.

The Brazilian sat up, gasping and gasping. The expression on his swarthy face startled the Greyfriars fellows. Once already, on the dug-out coming to the quinta, Martinho had lost the smiling suavety that had seemed to be second nature to him. Now he had lost it again, and this time with a vengeance. The fierce and savage temper that was

usually so carefully hidden, was in an uncontrollable blaze. He staggered up, rudely knocking aside Bob's helping hand, panting with rage, spitting out savage words in Portuguese. He stood unsteadily, his eyes on Bunter with a deadly glare.

"I hope you're not hurt, Mr. Funcho," said Bob: a remark that showed that Bob had a hopeful nature! It was only too clear that Mr. Funcho was hurt.

He did not heed Bob. He turned on Bunter, with so fierce and savage a look that Bob caught him by the arm, in alarm.

"Hold on," he exclaimed.

Bunter had scrambled up in the flower-bed. He did not even blink at Mr. Funcho.

Bunter was not concerned about the man into whom he had crashed: his concern was wholly for his fat and fatuous self. He would have passed Martinho by like the idle wind which he regarded not, but the next moment he had to heed him, as the assistant-manager, savagely shaking off Bob's detaining hand, leaped at him.

"Oh!" roared Bunter, as he whirled in the grasp of dusky hands. "Ow! I say, you fellows — yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter's frantic roar echoed across the gardens and the coffee-fields, as he staggered and crumpled under a shower of heavy smacks.

"Ow! Help!" shrieked Bunter. "Stoppim! Draggimoff! Oh, crikey! Help! Whoop!"

For a second, the Greyfriars fellows stood spellbound, utterly taken aback. But it was only for a moment.

"Stop him!" shouted Bob.

And the whole crowd of schoolboys rushed at Martinho Funcho, grasping him on all sides, and dragging him away from Bunter. The man had been hurt, and a spot of temper was perhaps to be expected, but that outbreak of fury was altogether too much. Billy Bunter would certainly have been damaged, had not the Co. rushed to the rescue. But they rushed promptly, and Martinho, in the grasp of half-a-dozen pairs of hands, was whirled away from the yelling fat Owl. Still spitting with rage, he struggled in the hands of the juniors, and tore himself loose.

"Stop that, Mr. Funcho!" rapped Lord Mauleverer, sharply.

The voice of the "proprietario" of the quinta seemed to recall Martinho to himself. He made an effort at self-control.

"Ow! wow! wow!" roared Bunter. He backed, behind the Co., glad to have that sturdy rampart between him and the infuriated Brazilian. He rubbed places where angry blows had fallen. "I say, you fellows, keep that wild beast off! Wow!"

Martinho panted and panted. It seemed, for a moment or two, that he would seek to break through the group of juniors, to get at Bunter again. Their faces grew grim, as they stood ready to stop him. Billy Bunter no doubt deserved to have his fat head smacked, but he had had enough, and too much; and the chums of Greyfriars. were ready to handle Mr. Funcho without ceremony, if he persisted.

But the Brazilian was recovering himself now. He stood panting for breath, his dark face flushed, but the rage dying out of it. His eyes turned on Lord Mauleverer with an almost stealthy look. No doubt he realised that, in those moments of ungoverned fury, he must have made, a very bad impression upon the proprietor of the Quinta Branca.

"I say, you fellows —."

"Oh, shut up, Bunter," growled Johnny Bull.

"It's all your fault."

"Beast!"

"Minha culpa!" stammered Mr. Funcho. "My fault—desculpe-me, Senhor o Proprietario. I lose the temper — but I am hurt, and it is so sudden — I ask you ten thousand pardons, senhor my lord."

Then, as if he could trust himself to say no more, Martinho Funcho hurried up the steps of the verandah, and disappeared into the house.

The Greyfriars juniors were left looking at one another in silence, whilst Bunter, far from silent, spluttered and snorted and rubbed damaged spots. Bob Cherry gave a long whistle.

“Bit of a tartar, that Johnny!” he remarked.

“More than a bit, I think,” said Harry Wharton, drily.

“He came a cropper,” said Johnny Bull. “But—.”

“But —!” said Nugent.

“The butfulness is terrific!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“They have hot tempers in these hot countries,” said Lord Mauleverer, tolerantly. “But Funcho’s seems a spot over the limit. Still, he did come a terrific cropper, with that fat ass sprawling over him —.”

“Look here, Mauly,” roared Bunter. “You’ll have to sack that man, see? You’re boss here, and you can jolly well sack him.”

“Shut up, Bunter!” growled Johnny Bull.

“Shan’t!” roared Bunter. “Think I’m going to be knocked right and left by a dashed Dago? Give him the sack, Mauly!”

“What about some more coffee, you chaps?” asked Lord Mauleverer. “We hadn’t finished when Bunter started this circus.”

“Look here, Mauly —!” yelled Bunter.

“Like some more honey, Bunter?” asked Lord Mauleverer, soothingly. “I’ll ask Tio Jose to fetch the biggest jar they can find on the quinta.”

“Blow the honey! I’m not going to stand this, Mauly! Are you going to sack that Dago, or are you not going to sack that Dago?”

“Do shut up, Bunter,” urged Bob.

“Beast!”

“Speech is silvery, my esteemed and ridiculous. Bunter,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well.”

“I tell you I’m not standing it!” yelled Bunter.

“I’ve had my head smacked —.”

“Nothing in it to damage!” said Bob.

“Yah! I can tell you this, Mauly, that if that Dago stays on here, I don’t!” hooted Bunter. “Mind, I mean that.”

“Hang on to the Dago, Mauly!” said Johnny Bull. “Don’t part with him at any price, if Bunter means that.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You can cackle!” roared the indignant fat Owl. “But I jolly well mean it, Mauly, every word, see? You sack that Dago, or I go!”

“Let’s have it clear, old fat man!” Lord Mauleverer looked thoughtful. “If you really mean all that, Bunter —.”

“I jolly well do!” declared Bunter, emphatically.

“If Funcho isn’t sacked, you’re going?” asked Mauly.

“I jolly well am!”

“Back to Rio, to take the next plane home?”

“Just that!” said Bunter.

“Well, that settles it!” said Lord Mauleverer.

“I should jolly well think it does!” snorted Bunter. “You’re going to sack that Dago at once?”

Not exactly. ”

“When are you going to sack him, then? ” demanded Bunter. “Look here, no good wasting time —sack him at once, see? ”

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

“Not for love or money, old fat man! Wouldn’t sack him for worlds, after what you’ve said. Come and have some more coffee, you fellows. ”

Lord Mauleverer went up the steps on to the verandah, the Famous Five following him, laughing. Billy Bunter was left glaring after his lordship, with a glare that might almost have cracked his spectacles.

It was some minutes before Bunter rejoined the breakfast party, as they sat sipping fragrant coffee, grown on the fazenda of the Quinta Branca. His fat face was pink with indignation, and he frowned at five smiling faces, and blinked a little uneasily at Lord Mauleverer’s placid countenance.

“I say, Mauly, old chap! ” said Bunter, as he sat down.

“Yaas? ”

“Of course, I wouldn’t turn you down, old fellow.”

“Don’t mind me, old fat man. ”

“But I do mind you, Mauly, ” said Bunter, affectionately. “ Don’t you worry — I’m sticking to you, old chap. Haven’t we always been pals? If you can stand that dago, I can. After all, I don’t expect a show like this to be like Bunter Court.”

“Oh, gad! ”

“It’s all right, old chap — don’t you worry! I say, you fellows, do you know what they call honey in the idiotic language of this fatheaded country?

“O mel, ” said Frank Nugent, laughing.

“Well, tell that nig —. ” Bunter stopped, just in time. “Tell your butler I want some o mel, Mauly!

Why they can’t talk plain English beats me — I never could understand why foreigners jabber as they do, instead of talking plain English. But if they call it o mel, tell him I want another jar of o mel, see? ”

And Billy Bunter said no more of shaking the dust of the Quinta Branca from his feet. He was still indignant; but he found comfort in honey.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE FOREST

“I’M tired.”

William George Bunter made that announcement. He came to a halt as he made it, apparently regarding it as an insuperable bar to further progress.

Six other fellows were rather tired. That was a trifle light as air. They did not stop when Bunter made his announcement. They tramped on through the thick tangled forest, Bunter blinking after them, as they went, in almost speechless indignation.

“I say, you fellows! ” he squeaked.

“Oh, come on! ” growled Johnny Bull.

“I’ m tired.”

“Think nobody else is tired? ” snorted Johnny, stopping to turn a backward glare on the fat

Owl. “ Get a move on.”

“Beast! ”

“You fat ass, ” said Bob Cherry. “You would take a short cut through the forest, and

we were asses enough to let you. Well, now get on with it. ”

“The short cut is sometimes the longest lane that has no turning!” sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Come on, Bunter!” urged Lord Mauleverer.

“Shan’t!” retorted Bunter.

“Do you want to be left there on your own, you fat image?” asked Nugent.

“Oh, go on and leave me,” said Bunter, sarcastically. “It would be like you — after all I’ve done for you fellows. ”

Six juniors came to an exasperated halt. They were all tired, and they wanted to get back to the quinta. But, clearly, Bunter could not be left on his own in the tangled forest. He was more likely than not to get lost, and any fellow lost in a South American forest was only too likely never to be found again.

The Greyfriars party had been several days now at the Quinta Branca. On this particular day they had walked out to see an Indian village at a little distance from the river. The path through the forest was well-marked, and fairly easy going, but on the way back Bunter had proposed taking a short cut. He pointed out that it would save a good mile, to cut direct through the forest to the plantation, instead of following the winding trail. Which was true, so far as distance went. But deep in the forest, the juniors found the going very hard and heavy. A fellow could generally pick his way easily enough through an English wood, but a South American forest was a very different proposition. Progress was slow through trees that grew thickly, with interlaced branches, covered with heavy lianas that trailed like thick ropes, with great masses of Spaniard’s-beard hanging from the branches, and almost every inch between the trunks filled up with luxuriant tropical vegetation. By the time they would have reached the quinta by the trail, the schoolboys were still struggling through the forest, hot and tired, dragging aside massive creepers, brushing off buzzing insects, stumbling over tangled roots, bumping into low boughs, and feeling disposed to kick themselves — and still more, to kick Bunter — for having tried that short cut at all. A short cut is often the longest way round — and in the Brazilian forest it seemed interminable.

There was nothing for it but to push on, and make the best of it. Six fellows were prepared to do so. One wasn’t. When Bunter was tired, it was almost as serious as if Bunter was hungry. He halted, and stayed halted.

“It can’t be more than another half-mile, Bunter,” said Lord Mauleverer, encouragingly. “Then we shall be out in the open.”

“It will be getting dark soon,” said Harry. “Oh, get on, Bunter!” growled Johnny Bull. Bunter did not waste breath in replying to those remarks. He blinked round for a seat, and sat down on projecting root.

“We’ve got to get in before dark, Bunter!” urged Mauleverer. “We must go on.”

“Oh, go on and leave me here,” said Bunter. “That’s not how we treat guests at Bunter Court. But don’t mind me.”

“I’m going on!” said Johnny Bull: and he went on. The other fellows exchanged glances. Bunter, certainly, couldn’t be left in the forest. But it was probable that if the rest of the party went on, the fat Owl would decide to follow.

“Push on,” said Harry Wharton, and they pushed on. Lord Mauleverer hesitated, but he followed the others. There was a yell from behind.

“I say, you fellows! I ain’t going to stay here alone! Beasts! I say, wait for me! I’m c-c-coming.”

And Bunter came. He was prepared to tell the other fellows, scornfully, to get on and leave him — so long as they stayed. But when they got on, the case was altered. The

fat Owl almost bounded after them.

Puffing and blowing, perspiring and grunting, the fat junior rolled in the wake of Lord Mauleverer and the Famous Five.

About a hundred yards had been covered, when there was a sudden howl from Billy Bunter.

“Ow!”

Six impatient fellows looked back. Bunter had stumbled over a root, and was sprawling on the earth. He yelled as he sprawled.

“Oh, my hat!” said Bob Cherry. “We shall get home with the milk in the morning at this rate. Buck up, Bunter.”

Ow! ow! wow!

“Hurt, old fat man?” asked Lord Mauleverer, turning back.

“Ow! wow! yow-ow! Wooh! My ankle! Ooooh!” yelled Bunter.

“Well, that tears it!” said Bob. “If that fat chump has sprained his ankle —.”

“Ow! wow! I say, you fellows, help! The — the pain’s awful!” howled Bunter. “I — I think I’ve broken the spinal column of my ankle! Ow!”

“The which?” gasped Bob.

“Ow! The agony’s fearful!” groaned Bunter. “It feels as if the jugular vein is severed! Wow!

Ha, ha, ha”

The chums of the Remove were not unsympathetic. But trouble with spinal columns and jugular veins in the ankle was rather too much for their gravity.

“Oh, cackle!” howled Bunter. “And me lying here —.”

“You’re always lying somewhere,” pointed out Johnny Bull. “You simply can’t help lying, you fat Ananias.”

“Easy does it, old man,” murmured Mauly. “If Bunter’s hurt —.”

“If!” snorted Johnny. “Gammon, more likely.” The juniors gathered round the suffering Owl.

Wharton and Bob Cherry grasped him by fat arms and heaved him to his feet — or rather, to his foot. Bunter stood on his left leg, his right off the ground. He hung his whole weight on Wharton and Bob, and they almost crumpled under it.

“Ow! ow! wow!” said Bunter.

“How long is Bunter going to stand there like a stork on one leg?” asked Johnny.

“Beast!” roared Bunter. “The other leg’s broken — I mean, the other ankle! It’s got pains like a burning dagger. I can’t put my foot to the ground. I — I say, you fellows will have to carry me.” “Oh, holy smoke!”

The Famous Five exchanged glances of dismay. If Bunter was crocked, evidently he had to be carried — and Bunter was not a light-weight. Johnny Bull gave a snort expressive of unbelief.

“He’s gammoning!” growled Johnny.

“Ow! Wow! If you could feel the awful agony in my left ankle —.”

“Your left?” yelled Johnny.

“I — I mean my right! It’s like boiling oil — it — it — it’s exquisicating,” groaned Bunter, perhaps meaning excruciating. “I say, you fellows, do help a chap! I say, Mauly, old fellow — wow! ow!”

“We’ve got to carry him,” said Lord Mauleverer. “If he’s sprained his ankle, the sooner we get him to the quinta the better. Tb Jose will be able to do some-thin’ for it. I’ll take one side —.”

“You won’t!” growled Johnny Bull. “You’d fold up like a penknife, you ass. You and me, Bob — we’re the toughest.”

“I can manage all right —!” said Harry.

“Oh, rot! Give him to me.”

It was true that Johnny and Bob were the toughest and most muscular members of the party, especially Johnny, who was a chunk of solid Yorkshire bone and muscle. So Bob kept hold of Bunter on one side, and Wharton yielded the other to Johnny, and they made a “cradle” of their arms, and the fat and weighty Owl was lifted from the ground. He sat on joined hands, securing himself by gripping Johnny and Bob round the neck, much to their discomfort.

“Now get on, for goodness sake,” said Johnny Bull. “We shall conk out under this if it lasts long.”

Harry Wharton pushed ahead, clearing the way of creepers, with the help of Nugent and Mauleverer and the nabob. After them laboured Bob and Johnny, supporting between them the uncommon weight of William George Bunter. They stumbled over roots and tangled vines, and a fat voice was heard in expostulation.

“I say, you fellows, don’t keep on jolting a chap! I say, keep steady, can’t you? Haven’t you any sense? Look here, don’t be such clumsy asses! I say —.”

“Oh, dry up, Bunter,” gasped Bob.

“Oh, really, Cherry! Shaking a fellow about like a sack of coke,” spluttered Bunter.

“I won’t be shook — I mean shuck — shaken about like a cack of soak — I mean a sack of coke — I —.”

“If you say another word, Bunter, I’m going to drop you!” said Johnny Bull, in concentrated tones.

Billy Bunter opened his mouth to say “Beast!” but closed it again without saying “Beast!”. It was clear that Johnny meant what he said, and Bunter did not want to be dropped. Indignant, but silent, he hung on to two aching necks, and was borne onward by his panting and perspiring bearers.

A few minutes later Harry Wharton, in the lead, came to a halt, where the vast trunk of a ceiba tree, ten or twelve feet in thickness, barred the way. It was necessary to work a way round it, through tangled lianas that hung in festoons from the mighty branches, and he scanned the bewildering mass of greenery in search of the easiest way round. The rest of the party stopped, too, and Billy Bunter was about to squeak impatiently “Hurry up!” when he caught Johnny Bull’s eye, and decided not to squeak.

Wharton pushed on, but suddenly stopped again. From beyond the masses of thick green lianas, the sound of a voice came to his ears: a low harsh voice speaking in Portuguese; and to his nose, the scent of a fragrant tobacco. It might have been the scent of a cigar, or of a cigarette of the potent kind smoked by Martinho Funcho.

“Somebody’s here,” said Harry. “Must be somebody from the quinta — we must be quite near now. If they’re moços, we’ll get them to carry Bunter.”

“They’re welcome!” gasped Bob. “I’d tip any moço a fistful of milreis to carry my half.”

“What-ho!” said Johnny Bull.

Wharton pushed on through the lianas, and as he did so, the voice ceased, and there was a sound of rustling, as if someone had plunged into the wood hurriedly.

Obviously there had been two persons under the ceiba, as one could scarcely have been talking to himself, but only one was visible as the captain of the Remove forced the lianas aside, and came through into a little open space beyond, closely followed by his comrades. A figure in a poncho and a big grass-hat stood under the shadowy branches of the great ceiba, and a pair of fierce black eyes flashed at the juniors as they came, and a dusky hand whipped to the haft of a knife.

“Oh!” gasped Harry.

Not for a moment had the juniors doubted that it was someone belonging to the quinta who could be “tipped” to carry Bunter home. But as they stared, blankly, at the fierce, dark, bearded face, with a scarred cheek, under the grass-hat, they knew who it was. Who his unseen companion had been they did not know, but they knew that dark, scarred, fierce face — the face of the bandit they had seen on the island in the Araguaya. It was O Corvo, the outcast of the sertão, at whom they stared under the ceiba, and whose hand was grasping at the knife in his belt.

CHAPTER XV

BUCK UP, BUNTER!

“YAROOOH!

It was a yell of terror from Billy Bunter.

For one second, while the other fellows stared blankly, Bunter gazed at that fierce, dark face spellbound, paralysed as if by the glare of a gorgon. Then he yelled and jumped to escape.

Bob Cherry staggered in one direction, Johnny Bull in the other, as their fat burden jumped away and bolted into the forest. Bunter seemed to have forgotten that he had a sprained ankle. He bolted like a shaft from a crossbow, and vanished among hanging lianas and swaying tree-ferns, yelling.

“Os rapazes!” muttered the bandit, as he stared back at the juniors, seemingly as surprised by the meeting as they were. He relinquished the knife he had grasped with the alertness of a wild animal.

For a long moment the group of schoolboys, and the scarred outcast of the sertão, stood facing one another staring — then O Corvo, with a sudden movement, disappeared into the underwoods.

They were glad enough to see him go. Not for a moment had they dreamed of the possibility of encountering such a desperado so near the quinta. It was amazing that he should have ventured there.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

“O Corvo!” he said. “That bandit we saw on the island the day we came up the Araguaya — the man who killed the jaguar. What was he doing here?”

“No good, anyhow!” said Johnny Bull.

He was talking to somebody who cleared off,” said Bob. “Can’t have been anybody from the quinta.”

“Not likely! We’d better get in as soon as we can and tell Mr. Funcho this,” said Harry. “O Corvo must have some reason for hanging about near the quinta — robbery, most likely. I don’t see how it could be anything else.”

“The sooner the better,” said Nugent.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh opened his lips, but closed them again without speaking. Some thought had come into the nabob’s mind which he decided not to utter.

“That idiot Bunter —!” exclaimed Bob.

“Oh, bother the fat ass! Cut after him,” said Harry. It was clear that the sooner the bandit’s presence was reported at the quinta, the better. But the juniors could not push on at once, as the terrified fat Owl had vanished into the forest. It was necessary to round up Bunter first, and they started after him to round him up.

It was easy enough to follow Bunter’s trail. Torn lianas and trampled tree-ferns and trumpet-flowers showed the way he had gone. In hardly more than a minute they

sighted him ahead, plunging through the tropical growths in frantic spluttering haste. Johnny Bull gave an angry snort.

Where's his sprained ankle?" he demanded. "The spoofing porpoise!" exclaimed Bob.

There was no trace of a sprained ankle or any other damage about Bunter now. He was travelling as fast as the tangled forest permitted, and putting on quite a good speed.

Oh, gad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "He was pullin' our leg! There's nothin' the matter with his ankle."

"I told you so!" grunted Johnny.

Evidently that sprain had been one of the fat Owl's many inventions: a dodge to get carried home because he was tired. All the party understood it now, and they rushed after Bunter in a rather excited state.

"Stop!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Hold on, you potty owl!" yelled Nugent.

But silly Bunter did not stop or hold on. In his terror of the bandit, he did not even recognise the voices shouting behind. He plunged on frantically. Bob Cherry put on a spurt, reached him, and grabbed a fat neck.

There was a fearful yell from Bunter.

"Ow! Leggo! Mercy! It wasn't me! Oh, crumbs! Help! Rescue! Leggo, you awful villain! Help!

You blithering bloater, do you think O Corvo's got hold of you?" gasped Bob.

Evidently Bunter did! He made a frantic effort to tear himself loose, yelling with terror. Bob spun him round, and then, as his eyes and spectacles fell on the crowd of juniors, Bunter realised that he was not in the grasp of the bandit of Brazil.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You! I — I — I thought —."

"You thought!" hooted Bob. "What did you do that with, you potty porpoise? And where's your sprained ankle?"

"I — I — I say, where is he?" spluttered Bunter. "Is — Is — is he gone?"

"The gonefulness is terrific, my esteemed funky Bunter."

"Oh!" Bunter gasped for breath and wiped a torrent of perspiration from his fat face.

"I — I say, you fellows, it was that awful bandit! He ought to be run in. I say, let's get back — it ain't safe here —."

"The man's gone, you fat ass," said Harry. "I daresay he's a mile away by this time."

"Oh!" Bunter seemed relieved. "All right! Of course, I'm not afraid of the fellow."

"You didn't look it!" said Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"Oh, really, Bull! I'm not likely to be scared by a Dago!" said Bunter, disdainfully.

"You fellows might be —."

"Oh, kick him!" said Johnny.

"Beast! Look here, you fellows, you needn't be scared if the man's gone; but we'd better get in, all the same," said Bunter. "I'm ready, when you are! For goodness sake don't hang about. Who's carrying me?"

"What?" yelled the Famous Five, all at once.

"You know I can't walk, with this sprained ankle —."

"That sprained ankle!" repeated Bob, almost dazedly. ~

"The pain's awful! I can't put my foot to the ground — it's like boiling oil and burning daggers," said Bunter, pathetically. "I can bear it — I'm not the fellow to make a fuss about a spot of pain, like some fellows I could name. But I can't walk —."

“Well,” said Bob, with a deep breath. “That tears it. Bunter takes the cake! He mops up the biscuit! He prances off with the whole Peek Frean factory! So you’ve still got a sprained ankle, Bunter?”

“Yes, old chap It’s awful —.”

“You can’t walk?”

“Not a step!”

“Well, if you can’t walk, you can’t,” said Bob. “But we’ll see whether you can run. I fancy you can if I help you.”

Bob Cherry grasped a fat neck and slewed Bunter round. There was a yell of horrid anticipation from Bunter. The next moment his horrid anticipations were realised, as the largest foot in the Greyfriars Remove was planted upon his fat person.

“Yaroooh!”

“Now hop it!” roared Bob. “I’m going to boot you all the way back to the quinta. You won’t be able to sit down when we get there, if you don’t keep out of reach of my boot! Hop it.”

“Give a fellow room,” said Johnny Bull. “I haven’t kicked him yet.”

Billy Bunter did not wait for Johnny to take his turn. He bounded. He had to realise, sadly, that after his frantic dash to escape from the bandit, his sprained ankle was a chicken that would no longer fight.

“Beast!” roared Bunter. “Keep off! I — I think I can walk now. I — I — I’ll try.”

“Come on,” said Harry Wharton, laughing.

The captain of the Remove led the way again, and Bunter rolled after him. Next came Bob Cherry, and as soon as Bunter lagged — which he did in about a minute — a foot shot out behind him, and Bunter yelled and bucked up again. Twice again did Bunter lag — and twice again a ready foot thudded — after which, William George Bunter put his best foot foremost, and did not lag any more.

“Here we are!” said Harry, at last.

The party emerged from the forest into the cleared land of the plantation, with the white walls and green verandahs of the quinta in the distance, and beyond, the rolling waters of the Araguaya. So sharp was the division between the cleared land and the primeval forest, that the latter stood like a wall of green. Along that green wall, several moços were at work, hoeing and weeding, keeping back the tropical forest in its endless struggle to regain what it had lost. Billy Bunter blinked round at the brown faces.

“I say, you fellows—.”

“Waiting for my boot?” asked Bob.

“Beast If you fellows are too jolly lazy to carry a fellow when he’s got a sprained ankle, those Indians can do it. I’ll tip them,” hooted Bunter.

“Still got that sixpence?” asked Bob.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You lend me a hundred milreis, Mauly, will you? I want to give them a good tip. I never was mean with servants,” said Bunter.

“Oh, gad!”

“Well, Mauly’s a jolly old millionaire, and perhaps he can afford Bunter’s generosity,” said Bob. “But it will come cheaper to boot him. Now, then, all together.”

“Yaroooh!”

Billy Bunter started for the quinta again, as if he were on the cinder-path. After him came the Famous Five, at a run, followed by Lord Mauleverer at a walk. There was no more carrying for Bunter. He had to get back to port under his own steam, as it were; and it was a breathless, gasping, spluttering, perspiring fat Owl that rolled, at

last, on to the verandah, and collapsed into the nearest chair — where Harry Wharton and Co. left him to splutter, while they went to look for Senhor Dom Martinho Funcho to report that the bandit was in the vicinity.

CHAPTER XVI

A STRANGE SUSPICION!

PLEASE to walk in.”

Martinho Funcho rose from a rocking-chair, removed the cigarette from his mouth with a twirl of fragrant smoke, and bowed politely to the juniors at the open french window on the verandah.

Mr. Funcho was in his office, formerly occupied by Brian Mauleverer, now occupied by the assistant-manager who was carrying on in the absence of his chief. There was a great desk with innumerable pigeon-holes, where a big ledger lay open; a typing desk with an American typewriter on it, not by any means the latest model; filing cabinets; shelves of ponderous business books; everything in fact but a telephone, the Quinta Branca being far beyond the range of telephonic communication.

There was a week-old copy of “O Globo” of Rio de Janeiro in Mr. Funcho’s hand, open at a page with a column of coffee prices, which apparently he had been studying when the schoolboys arrived. With the newspaper in his left hand, the cigarette in his right, Mr. Funcho bowed with Portuguese politeness, as he invited them to enter.

“Sorry to interrupt if you’re busy, Mr. Funcho,” said Lord Mauleverer, as he stepped in. The other fellows followed, with the exception of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who remained in the doorway, his dusky face impassive; but his quiet eyes very keenly upon Mr. Funcho.

“Não importa, senhor my lord! It does not matter,” said Mr. Funcho. I am always at the service of Senhor o Proprietario. Please to be seated, senhores.”

“It’s about that man we saw on the island,” explained Lord Mauleverer. “We’ve just seen him again.”

“É possível?” exclaimed Mr. Funcho, his dark eyebrows rising in astonishment. “You have seen O Corvo — the bandit? Corpo de Deos! But where have you seen him — he would not have the audacity to come near the quinta.

“Nearly a mile from the quinta, I think, in the forest.” Lord Mauleverer proceeded to describe the encounter with O Corvo, Mr. Funcho listening with keen attention.

“Nossa senhora!” said the assistant-manager, when Mauleverer concluded. “It is hard to believe that he would dare. Is it possible that a mistake has been made — these tough men of the forest are much alike — a poncho, a grass-hat, a bearded face — one might be mistaken for another — ”

“It was O Corvo, Mr. Funcho,” said Harry Wharton. “We all saw him quite plainly that day on the island, when he killed the jaguar, and we saw him quite plainly in the forest here less than an hour ago — there is no mistake.”

“We jolly well knew him all right,” said Johnny Bull. And Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent nodded. There was no doubt on that point.

“He was alone?” asked Mr. Funcho.

“He was alone when we saw him — but he had been speaking to someone, who was gone before we came up,” answered Harry. “We did not see the other man.”

Mr. Funcho gave him a rather curious look.

“I cannot guess what he may be doing here,” he said. But if you heard him speak, perhaps you may have understood — ”

“We don’t understand Portuguese,” answered Harry, with a smile. “I haven’t the least idea what he was saying. In fact I’m not sure that it was O Corvo who was speaking — it might have been the other man, who cut off when he heard us coming.”

This is very serious, senhores,” said Mr. Funcho. “That dangerous man cannot have ventured so near the quinta without a reason — if you are sure that it was he. It may be some purpose of robbery.”

“That’s what we thought,” said Nugent.

“I must look into this at once.” Mr. Funcho threw the newspaper on the desk, and crossed to a corner of the room where a rifle stood. “I will call a dozen men, and make a search for him. Corpo de Deus — if we lay O Corvo by the heels, it will be a great service to the State: he shall be taken bound hand and foot in a canoe to Lucar, and handed over to the soldados. If he keep his distance he is nothing to me — but if he come near the quinta, that is another matter — he shall find out that we know how to deal with a bandit. Excuse me, senhores — I fly!”

Mr. Funcho stayed only to bow, and then, rifle in hand, hurried out on the verandah — not even stopping for a cigarette. The juniors were left in his office. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, leaning on the french window, followed Mr. Funcho with his eyes, watching him as he ran down the verandah steps, and hurried away. Mr. Funcho had made it clear that he doubted whether it actually was O Corvo whom the juniors had seen in the forest, but at all events he was losing no time in taking up the search.

“Well,” said Bob Cherry, as the juniors came out on to the verandah. “Brazil’s a lazy country, and they usually take it easy, but Mr. Funcho can put on steam when it’s needed. He doesn’t look like letting the grass grow under his feet.”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was still leaning on the french window, silent. Bob Cherry and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Mauly, passed him, going across to the verandah rail. But Harry Wharton, glancing at the nabob, paused, struck by the strange expression on his dusky face. Hurree Singh’s eyes were fixed on Martinho Funcho, as the Brazilian hurried across the garden, with a strange, doubting, questioning look—a look so fixed, so intent, so penetrating, that he did not notice Wharton’s glance, or heed him at all.

Wharton stared at him, startled and puzzled; but the nabob did not heed him, and the captain of the Remove followed the others, perplexed and a little disturbed.

“Look at him now!” Bob Cherry was speaking. “Making the fur fly, what?”

Martinho Funcho was undoubtedly moving swiftly. He crossed the gardens, heading for the line of huts occupied by the labour force of the fazenda — the plantation. The huts were at some distance from the house, nearer the river, but in sight from the verandah. Men were coming in from the fields in the sunset — negroes, Indians, and Italians — all of them to slow motion, as the Greyfriars fellows were accustomed to see things move in Brazil. But there was no slow motion about Martinho Funcho. He was going at a run, regardless of the heat, and many of the moços stared at him in surprise.

“Jolly keen on it,” said Johnny Bull. “They don’t often sprint in Brazil. Not likely to catch O Corvo, all the same. It must be nearly an hour since we saw the brute, and he wouldn’t be likely to hang about after being seen.”

“Not likely,” agreed Harry. “He ought to be searched for, of course, but I don’t see much chance of catching him.”

“But he will know that he’s hunted for, and that will be a tip to him to give the quinta a wide berth,” said Frank Nugent.

“Not a nice neighbour to have around,” remarked Bob. “Hallo, hallo, hallo! There

they go!

Mr. Funcho had reached the huts. At the distance, his voice could not be heard, but the juniors could see that he was calling some of the plantation hands, with many excited gestures. A dozen men, some of them Indians, but most brawny negroes, armed with machetes, followed Martinho Funcho in the direction of the forest, and soon disappeared from sight.

“Plenty of them to bag him if they find him,” remarked Lord Mauleverer. “But it’s too late, I’m afraid. Still, if he’s scared out of this neighbourhood, that will put paid to whatever it was he had in mind here.”

“I say, you fellows!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Still alive, Bunter?”

“Beast! I say, I’m hungry,” said Bunter, from the depths of a deep chair. “I say, Mauly, can’t you tell that fig —.”

“What?”

“I — I mean your butler — can’t you tell him to hurry up a bit with dinner? It’s hours since we had lunch, and I’ve had nothing since except a cake and some toffee and a bag of Brazil nuts and some bananas and oranges. I’m famished.”

“You must be!” said Bob. “Well, I’m going in for a wash before dinner. Don’t you feel that you need one too, Bunter?”

All the Greyfriars fellows felt the need of a wash, after an afternoon in the hot sun, tramping by a dusty road, and then scrambling through a tangled forest hot as an oven — excepting Bunter. Bunter, in addition to dust and damp, was sticky with toffee and smeary with orange-juice. If Mr. Quelch’s gimlet-eye had fallen on him, at Greyfriars, in that state, an immediate wash would certainly have been ordered. But the fat Owl was safe from Mr. Quelch at a distance of some thousands of miles. He answered Bob’s suggestion with a snort.

“I don’t need so much washing as you fellows do!” said Bunter, disdainfully. “We’re not at school now, anyhow.”

“Oh, my hat!” said Bob. “Bunter had a wash the day we broke up at Greyfriars, and he’s made it last till now. Are you going to make it last till the end of the hols old fat man?”

“Yah!” was Bunter’s reply to that; and the juniors went in, leaving the fat Owl still taking his ease in the deep chair, quite unimpressed and unattracted by the idea of an extra wash.

Harry Wharton was about to follow his friends in, but he glanced back along the verandah at Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. The nabob had not stirred, and his dusky face was set in an expression of deep thought — dark, frowning, almost grim. The captain of the Remove went back to join him.

“Look here, Inky,” he said, quietly. “What have you got in your mind? I can see there’s something. Give it a name.”

The dusky junior smiled.

“A still tongue is the politeness of princes, as the English proverb remarks,” he said, slowly.

“But —.”

“Cough it up, fathead,” said Harry. “You’ve got something in your head about Mr. Funcho — I could see that. What the dickens —?”

“There was another man in the forest with the esteemed and execrable O Corvo,” said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. “He was terrifically anxious not to be seen, opining by the way he boltfully cleared off as soon as he heard us coming.”

“What about it?”

“Does it not occur to your debilitated brain, my esteemed chum, that the ludicrous bandit may have come so nearfully to the quinta to communicate with some person here belongfully?”

“Oh!” ejaculated Wharton, with a start. The thought had not occurred to him, but now that the

keen-witted nabob mentioned it, he could see how likely it was. “Oh!” he repeated.

“You think the bandit might be in touch with someone employed here — a sort of spy for him — giving him information. Why, if that’s the case, we might have recognised the man, if he hadn’t bolted so suddenly.”

“Exactly so!” murmured the nabob.

“Mr. Funcho hasn’t thought of that,” said Harry.

“We’d better pass the idea on to him, now you’ve thought of it, Inky. What are you grinning at?” he added, staring blankly at the nabob.

Please excuse the grinfulness,” said the nabob.

But the esteemed Funcho is the last person to speak to on that absurd subject.”

“Why?” asked Wharton, puzzled.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh waved a dusky hand in at the open french window of the manager’s office.

“Do you smellfully detect a scentfulness here?” he asked.

“Only the scent of those jolly strong cigarettes that Funcho smokes,” answered Harry. “What on earth about that?”

“Do you remember the scentfulness of smoking when we came on the bandit in the wood, and was it the sameful scent?”

Harry Wharton jumped almost clear of the verandah. His eyes fairly popped at the nabob.

“Inky!” he gasped.

“It was the sameful scent,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, quietly. “The man who was talking in the forest with O Corvo smokes the same kind of cigarettes as the esteemed Funcho — and rolls them with the same fingers, I think.”

“But — but no end of people in Brazil must smoke that kind of cigarette — O Corvo himself, very likely. Inky, you’re mad, old man.”

“Perhapsfully,” assented the nabob.

“Funcho was here when we got back — we found him in the office here, deep in the Rio newspaper —.”

“The man who bolted had a long start, my esteemed chum. Do you recall,” said Hurree Singh, very quietly, “that the esteemed Funcho was very disturbed when the bandit was seen on the island, and made the canoe crew hurry — neither did he think it worth while to send word to Lucar where the bandit was to be found. It is possible to put two and two togetherfully.”

“And make five or six of it, if you’re not careful,” said Harry. “How could the manager of a plantation be on friendly terms with a bandit of the sertão? Why should he be?”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his dusky head. It was clear that deep doubt and suspicion were in his mind, but he had no answer to that one.

“It’s rot,” said Harry.

“You think so, my esteemed chum?”

“I jolly well do! For goodness sake, don’t say a word about it to the other fellows, and get it out of your own head, Inky. I know you’re jolly keen — twice as keen as any of

us — but this is just impossible. Chuck it, old man. ”

“The chuckfulness shall be terrific, my idiotic chum. But —. ”

“But what? ”

“ But if I were a betting man like the esteemed and disreputable Smithy, I would bet you ten to one that the execrable O Corvo will not be caught.”

“Well, nobody thinks there’s much chance of catching him — though I wouldn’t put it at ten to one against, ” said Harry. He laughed. “What will you say, Inky, if they march O Corvo in a prisoner? ”

“I shall say that the surprisefulness is terrific! ” answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“But they will not march O Corvo in a prisoner. ”

Nothing more was said on the subject, and the two juniors went into the house after the other fellows. That there could be anything in the nabob’s strange suspicion, Harry Wharton could not, and did not, believe for one moment. But on one point, at least, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was right — for when, later in the starry evening, Martinho Funcho returned to the quinta, it was with the news that no trace had been found of the bandit.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TELEGRAM FROM RIO

“O CARTEIRO!” announced Tio Jose.

It was a fresh and sunny morning, and the Greyfriers party at the Quinta Branca had finished breakfast on the verandah. Lord Mauleverer, leaning on the rail, was looking out on the rolling Araguaya: Billy Bunter was reposing his plump form in a hammock: and the Famous Five were discussing strenuous plans for the day.

Maully was gazing at the river, probably with the missing manager in his mind, for Brian’s continued absence was adding anxiety to his perplexity. He had spoken several times to Martinho Funcho on the subject, but the assistant-manager could only reply that the Senhor Intendente had told him nothing of his intentions, and, knowing nothing, he was unable to explain. All that Mr. Funcho could say, with many shrugs and waves of his cigarette, was that Dom Brian had gone on a journey, leaving him to meet the party at Rio in his stead and conduct them to the quinta. No doubt the Senhor Inglez had his reasons, and in the meantime the fazenda did not suffer from his absence — everything was going, smoothly under the care of the assistant-manager. Mauleverer, perplexed, puzzled, and growing anxious, often had his eyes on the river, the way Brian was most likely to come. Now, as he looked over the wide Araguaya, he noticed a canoe shoot up to the desembarcadouro, paddled by a half-clad Indian, who jumped ashore and tied up, and then disappeared among the trees coming towards the house. But he did not heed him particularly, and continued watching the river, till the fruity voice of Tio Jose announced “ O carteiro.”

The plump black gentleman came out on to the verandah, bowing and smiling as usual, followed by the Indian Maully had seen in the canoe.

All the juniors looked round at him, but not one of the party guessed that the postman had arrived. “Carteiro” was a new one on them, and an Indian clad in grass-hat and striped calico shirt and shorts did not look much like a postman to English eyes.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, who’s this merchant? ” asked Bob Cherry.

“O carteiro! ” beamed Tio Jose.

“Well, we’ve got on to the O, ” said Bob, affably. “We know that it means ‘the,’ old bean. But what’s a carteiro? Anybody know ”

“Uma telegrapha!” said Tio Jose.

“A telegram!” said Bob. He could guess that one. “Oh! Gentlemen, chaps, and fatheads, this must be the jolly old postman.”

Lord Mauleverer made a quick movement. Tio Jose conducted the Indian to him, and the carteiro, with a low bow, handed him the telegram. Evidently it was for Senor O Proprietario at the Quinta Branca, and the Indian had paddled twenty miles from Lucar to deliver it at the quinta.

Maully’s usually impassive face showed a spot of excitement. A telegram arriving for him could hardly mean anything but a word from Brian. The same thought occurred to all the Co., and they all looked at Mauleverer, interested at once.

“News at last, old man,” said Harry.

Lord Mauleverer nodded, and unfolded the telegram. He read it at a glance, and then stood with it in his hand, staring at it. His face was blankly astonished. He did not speak, and the Co. could only wonder.

“I say, you fellows.” A fat voice came from the hammock. “Did you say that was the postman? I expect he’s got something for me. I told them to send on my letters, you know, and I was expecting a postal order —.”

Bob Cherry chuckled.

“Well, considering how long you’ve been expecting that postal order, old fat man, it’s about time it came,” he remarked. “Anything else, postman?”

The carteiro looked at him, not understanding.

“Carta?” said Bob, remembering the Portuguese word for a letter. The Indian made a negative sign. There was nothing but the telegram.

“I say, ask him if he’s got a letter for me.” Bunter sat up in the hammock. “I tell you I’m expecting a postal order —.”

“I’ve asked him, fathead,” answered Bob. “There’s no letters.”

“You haven’t asked him!” hooted Bunter. “You said something to him about a carter. I don’t suppose a carter would bring the letters. They get about in canoes here, not carts. Ask him for my letter —.”

“You howling ass!” roared Bob. “A letter is a carta in Brazil.”

“Oh! Is it?” said Bunter. “What a rotten language! Why they can’t talk plain English —! Bunter ended with a snort, reclined in the hammock again, and resumed chewing Brazilian toffee. Having packed away several breakfasts, one after another, Bunter was adding toffee to the last of them. He had a large stick of it in a fat hand, and considerable smears of it round a capacious mouth. Billy Bunter did not think much of South America generally, but if there was one of the products of Brazil that had his full and whole-hearted approval, it was the sweet and sticky toffee of that country. Lord Mauleverer was still staring at the “telegrapha” in his hand. There was a step at the further end of the verandah, and the scent of a potent cigarette, as Martinho Funcho came out of his office. He gave the juniors his usual effusive bow, and glanced curiously at Lord Mauleverer. Perhaps he was interested in the telegram from Rio.

“Uma resposta, senhor?” asked Tio Jose.

“That means, is there a reply, Maully,” said Harry.

“The postman’s waiting.”

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

“No reply,” he said. He detached a note for fifty milreis from his wallet, and handed it to the carteiro, who bowed almost to the verandah floor in acknowledgement of that handsome tip, and departed. Then Mauleverer, with a clouded brow, held out the telegram for the Co. to read.

“What do you fellows make of that?” he asked. He did not, for the moment, notice Mr. Funcho, who was leaning on the verandah rail, smoking his cigarette. Harry Wharton and Co. read the telegram. They noted that it came from the head office at Rio, and was signed “ Brian.” But what Brian Mauleverer could possibly be doing at Rio, was as much a mystery to them as to Mauly. Reading the telegram did not let in much light on the matter.

“Sorry cannot return to the quinta. Will write and explain. Brian. ”

That was all. No address was given for a reply. Bob Cherry whistled.

“That beats the band, ” he said. “Brian was to have met us at Rio, and didn’t turn up — now it seems that he’s at Rio while we’re here on the Araguaya. ”

“What on earth can it mean? ” asked Lord Mauleverer.

“Well, it means that he’s all right, at least, ” said Harry. “Nothing’s happened to him, Mauly — he’s all right, as he’s able to telegraph from Rio. ”

Lord Mauleverer nodded.

“Yaas, ” he agreed. “That’s so — and that’s somethin ’. But — he says that he can’t return to the quinta. It can’t mean that he’s throwin’ up his job here. He wouldn’t let me down like that. But what does it mean?

The Co. could make no reply to that.

“Desculpe-me, senhor. ” Martinho Funcho removed the cigarette from his mouth. “ If it is news from my good friend and master, the Senhor Brian —. ”

Lord Mauleverer glanced round at him.

“It’s from Brian, Mr. Funcho, ” he said. “Look at it, please — and tell me what you think about it.”

Mr. Funcho looked at the telegram. His olive face became very serious, and he gave one of his shrugs, and shook his head.

“I am desolated, ” he said. “The Senhor Brian will not return. He said no word to me of his intentions, as I have told you, senhor my lord. But —! ” He paused, shaking his dark head again.

“But what? ” asked Lord Mauleverer. “If you’ve got any idea what it means, Mr. Funcho, I’d be glad to hear. ”

The Brazilian paused before replying. All the juniors looked at him. They could see that Mr. Funcho had something to say — but he seemed to hesitate to utter it. But he spoke at last.

“Senhor, I think I understand, ” he said. “Many times, here on this verandah, after the work of the plantation was done, I have talked with the Senhor Brian, and he has told me of his wanderings and adventures in many seas and lands. Often it seemed to me that he was restless here — that the desire to wander was coming on again, and that he was a little tired of so long a time in the same place. ”

Lord Mauleverer compressed his lips, and the other fellows exchanged rather uncomfortable glances. They were not surprised by what Mr. Funcho said: the same idea was vaguely in their own minds.

“The Senhor Brian was what you call, in your language, a stone that rolls, ” said Mr. Funcho, shaking his head again. “ Sometimes I have thought that he was tired of my country, and that his thoughts were far away — in the South Seas — and especially after a letter came one day, he talked of the Pacific Islands, and of old friends he knew there. I think, senhor, that that must be the reason why he does not return to the quinta — I can think of no other. ”

He handed the telegram back to Lord Mauleverer, who stood silent, with a darkly clouded brow.

“I shall be sorry, ” said Mr. Funcho. “The Senhor Brian was a good friend to me — I

shall be sad not to see him again. ”

Mr. Funcho raised his hat, and went down the steps into the garden. He left a silent and uncomfortable group behind him. Lord Mauleverer knitted his brows.

“Mr. Funcho seems to think that Brian has cleared off for good, ” he said, at last.

“It — it looks a bit like it, old chap, ” mumbled Bob, hesitatingly.

“His letter will explain, when it comes, ” said Nugent.

“Yaas, there’s that. ”

“He, he, he! ” came from the hammock, and the juniors looked round at Billy Bunter.

“I say, you fellows, Funcho knows jolly well that Brian ain’t coming back, and I’ll bet he’s jolly glad. ”

“What? ” exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.

“Catch him being sad not to see him again! ” said the fat Owl, derisively. “ Who gets the job if Brian don’t come back? ”

“Shut up, you fat ass! ” said Bob, hastily.

“Shan’t! ” retorted Bunter. “ I know jolly well that Funcho’s banking on it — that’s why he gives Mauly so much soft sawder. ”

Lord Mauleverer put the telegram into his pocket. “Time we got out, ” he remarked. “ I’ll wait for

you fellows on the desembarca — what-do-you-call-it. ” And Mauleverer walked away to the steps.

“I say, Mauly, don’t walk away while a fellow’s talking to you! ” squeaked Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer went down the steps and disappeared. Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five.

“I say, you fellows, is Mauly shirty about anything? ” he asked.

“You blithering owl! ”

“Oh, really, Cherry —. ”

“You frabjous fathead —. ”

“Oh, really, Wharton —! ”

“Oh, let’s get out, ” said Bob. “Are you coming, you fat ass?”

Billy Bunter grunted. He had had too many breakfasts to be eager to move.

“Where are you going? ” he asked.

“Trip on the river, and picnic on that jolly old island where we saw the bandit the day we came, ” answered Bob.

“Why, you silly ass! ” howled Bunter. “There might be another jaguar there! ”

“That’s all right, ” said Bob, reassuringly. “ If we meet a jaguar, old fat man, we shall want you. You can stare him in the face —. ”

“What good would that do, fathead? ”

“Don’t you think he would die of shock? ” asked Bob.

“You silly idiot! ” yelled Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“I ain’t coming to that island, ” snorted Bunter. “And I ain’t ready to move yet, either. If you fellows want my company, you’ll have to wait — an hour at least! ”

“Anybody feel like waiting an hour at least for Bunter’s company? ” asked Bob. “Or could we possibly carry on without it? ”

It seemed that the Famous Five could carry on without it, for they went down off the verandah in a cheery bunch, leaving Billy Bunter in the hammock chewing toffee.

CHAPTER XVIII

UNEXPECTED!

“HOT!” remarked Bob Cherry, dashing a stream of perspiration from his brow.

“Warmish!” agreed Harry Wharton.

“But what’s the odds so long as you’re ‘appy!” added Bob.

“The oddfulness is not terrific, so long as the happiness is preposterous,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Brazil’s a fine country,” said Johnny Bull. “But I’d give something for a spot of the north wind over the moors at home.”

“The sooner we’re in the shade, the better,” said Frank Nugent. “Everybody goes to sleep in Brazil at this time of day. There’s the island, anyhow.”

It was a cheerful, if decidedly warm, party in the canoe. Lord Mauleverer and the Famous Five did not miss Billy Bunter’s company unduly. It was fearfully hot, and mosquitoes were many, and had the fat Owl been there, they would have paddled to an unending accompaniment of grousing; which would not have added to the pleasure of exploring the Araguaya.

Lord Mauleverer, perhaps, was a little troubled inwardly over that strange telegram from Rio. But he was not the fellow to be a wet blanket, and his face was as cheerful as the rest.

But it was hot, and all the crew of the canoe realised that the sooner they landed in the shade, the better. It was an Indian bark canoe, and all the juniors had picked up the use of the paddle, and they handled it almost as efficiently as Indians. There was a large wicker basket containing provisions packed by Tio Jose, for lunch on the island, when they reached it. They had not been in a hurry — in fact, they had rather loitered on the sunny river in the morning hours, and now, when the island was in sight, it was noon. And noontide in Brazil was a serious proposition. At that hour, every native of the country, whether biped or quadruped, retired to the shade to rest, and the siesta was the order of the day — or to be exact, in Brazil, the “sesta.” The noontide nap was one of the customs of the tropics that appealed strongly to Billy Bunter; and more strenuous fellows, if they did not want to go to sleep, did want to rest in the shade, out of the blazing sun.

The paddles flashed, and the canoe glided on down the current to the wooded island, which the juniors had not seen since the day they came up the Araguaya in the dugout. It was a good ten miles from the quinta. Camping on an island was an attractive idea to the schoolboys, and they were rather curious, too, to see the spot where the bandit O Corvo had lurked, a couple of weeks ago. That there might, as Bunter had suggested, be another jaguar on the island was a possibility, but nobody thought of staying within the fences of the fazenda because there were wild animals in Brazil. There was a loaded rifle in the canoe, which Harry Wharton could handle as well as Martinho Funcho could have done, and each of the other fellows had a keen-edged machete, used chiefly for hacking a way through tropical undergrowths, but a very useful weapon in case of need. They were not thinking of possible jaguars, but of getting into the shade, as they paddled on to the island in the scorching sun-blaze.

“Oh, good!” gasped Bob, as the canoe glided under vast overhanging branches that shut off the blaze, if not the heat. “That’s better.”

“Here we are!” said Frank.

‘The canoe bumped on the margin of the island, at the little clearing where they had seen O Corvo kill the jaguar. The juniors scrambled ashore, and Bob tied up the canoe to a projecting root.

Overhead, branches were interlaced, shutting out the sun and the sky, save for a glimpse here and there of azure. The shade was grateful and comforting after the glare on the open river. They mopped perspiration, and fanned burning faces, and looked

about them. All was quiet: even the parrots in the trees were silent in the heat of noontide. If a jaguar inhabited the island, he was certain to be sleeping in his lair. But Harry Wharton picked the rifle out of the canoe. It was necessary to be wary in the sertão.

"I wonder where that bandit camped, when he was here," said Bob, looking round at the shadowy openings among the trees.

"Slung a hammock to a tree, most likely," said Nugent. "That's the way they camp out in Brazil."

Bob chuckled.

"I suppose he isn't likely to be still here?" he remarked. "Bit of a surprise if we ran into him."

"Not likely! You remember what Funcho said — here today and gone tomorrow. Besides, we've seen him since, ten miles from here."

"He wouldn't be likely to stick on this island," said Harry. "Not much of a hiding-place, after everybody in the dug-out had seen him here. He couldn't know that Funcho wouldn't take the trouble to set the soldiers at Lucar after him."

"Well, come on," said Bob. "We'll explore the jolly old island, and pick out a spot for lunch. By gum, this looks like a path."

Bob led the way, between great trees hung with lianas and Spanish moss. To their surprise, the juniors discerned signs of a path. Here and there, were unmistakable traces where a keen machete had lopped the clinging creepers.

"Somebody's been here before us," said Bob. He pointed to a mass of fig-vine that had been cut through.

"That bandit was here a couple of weeks ago," said Nugent. "He would have to clear a way for himself."

"That sign's too fresh for that, old bean. Things grow at a terrific rate in this climate. Somebody's been here later than O Corvo."

"Listen to the Chief Scout!" grinned Nugent. "Well, some Indian's been on the island, I expect."

The juniors pushed on, finding the way unexpectedly easy, owing to some unknown hand having "blazed" a path. Only a dozen yards into the wood, and the landing-place and the river were lost to sight when they looked round, shut off by trees and vines. A dim light, almost twilight, reigned under the mighty branches, in startling contrast to the glare on the river. But the heat was as stifling as on the open Araguaya.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob, suddenly.

"What —?"

Bob held up his hand, coming to a halt.

"Listen!"

The other fellows stopped, in surprise, and listened. Bob had caught a sound in the breathless silence of the tropic noon, and now they caught it also — the sound of deep, heavy breathing, evidently that of a sleeper, from beyond a hanging mass of rope-like lianas.

"Somebody's here!" said Bob. His voice was subdued.

"And taking a nap!" said Johnny Bull. "I'll bet everybody but us is asleep at this time of day in this country."

"Listen!" said Bob again.

The sound of breathing deepened to a snore. Then it went on again as before, deep and regular. Obviously, the unknown person whose machete had cleared a way under the trees, was taking his sesta in the heat of the day; no doubt in a hammock slung to a branch, as was the custom in the Brazilian forests. And he was sleeping very soundly.

“Oh, gad!” murmured Lord Mauleverer. “Couldn’t be O Corvo, what?”

The juniors looked at one another. It was a startling thought that the desperate outcast of the sertão might be within a few feet of them, hidden only by the pendant mass of creepers.

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

We know he left the island — we saw him, ten miles away,” he said. “Why should he come back, when he’s been seen here, and for all he knows word may have been sent to the soldiers at Lucar?”

“Some Indian,” said Nugent.

“Better be wary, all the same,” said Bob. “All the Indians aren’t so jolly chummy as the moços at the quinta. Keep that pop-gun handy, old bean. If it’s one of the wild and woolly Chavantes from across the river, he won’t argue with a gun looking him in the eye.”

Harry Wharton nodded, and took a grip on the rifle. The steady breathing still came to their ears: the subdued voices had not awakened the sleeper. Bob Cherry took hold of the thick lianas, and pulled them aside, and every eye was turned on the dusky space beyond. In the dim light they made out the shape of a hammock, slung to a branch. It bulged with the form of a sleeper within, but all they could see of him was an immense grass-hat, laid over his face, no doubt to keep off the insects.

But even as they looked, the figure in the hammock stirred. The hammock swayed as he moved, the deep regular breathing ceased, and they heard a hiss of quick-drawn breath. Harry Wharton half-lifted the rifle. If the man in the hammock was one of the “wild” Indians from the untrodden regions beyond the Araguaya, it was necessary to be wary.

The man was awake now — and once awake, he was as alert and swift as a wild animal of the forest. The grass-hat was tossed aside, and a fierce dark face stared at the juniors from the hammock; and at the same moment there was a gleam of steel as a swarthy hand grasped a knife. And then, as they saw the dark, bearded, scarred face that they had seen twice before, the juniors knew that it was not some wandering Indian who had camped there.

“O Corvo!” stuttered Bob. “Great pip! Look out!”

It was O Corvo, and the ferocity that blazed into his dark face was almost unnerving. He made a motion to spring from the hammock, knife in hand, but in the twinkling of an eye, the muzzle of the rifle was jammed to his chest. Harry Wharton had not expected to see O Corvo, but he was ready — and the bandit had no chance to use his knife, if that was his intention.

“Lift a hand, and I’ll shoot!” rapped Wharton.

Whether the Brazilian bandit understood the words or not, he understood the action. Harry Wharton’s eye gleamed along the barrel of the rifle, and his face was set and determined. O Corvo, crouched in the hammock, glared at him like a jaguar, and his hand closed convulsively on the handle of the long keen “faca” he had drawn. But he did not lift the weapon. The slightest pressure on the trigger, and the bullet would have crashed through flesh and bone, and the bandit, fierce as he was, was daunted.

“Knock that knife out of his hand, Bob.”

Bob Cherry reached out with his machete, and knocked the knife from O Corvo’s hand. It clattered away and fell to the ground. O Corvo glared round, like a cornered wild beast, at face after face, as the juniors gathered round the hammock. He had no chance, desperate as he was: he had been caught napping, sleeping in the heat of the tropic day, when he could not have dreamed that danger would be stirring, and he could neither resist nor escape.

“We’ve got him!” breathed Bob.

“The gotfulness is terrific!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“We’ve got him,” said Harry, quietly, “and now we’ve got him, we’re not letting him go. We’re going to take him back in the canoe to the quinta for Mr. Funcho to hand over to the authorities. “Collar him, you fellows.” It seemed, for a moment, that the bandit would break into a fierce struggle, as hands were laid on him. But the rifle in Harry Wharton’s hands was as steady as a rock, and he did not make the venture. A few minutes more, and O Corvo, with his hands tied behind his back, was marched down to the landing-place in the midst of the Greyfriars juniors, and tumbled into the canoe.

CHAPTER XIX

BUNTER MAKES A DISCOVERY

“MOCHO estúpido!”

Billy Bunter, sprawling half-asleep in a long deep chair on the verandah at the Quinta Branca, heard the muttered words as Martinho Funcho passed him.

“Beast!” breathed Bunter.

He sat up and blinked after the slim lithe figure of the assistant-manager, as Martinho went along to the steps to descend into the garden. And it was a very inimical blink that he bestowed on Martinho’s back.

Bunter did not like Mr. Funcho. Smacking a fellow’s head did not inspire friendly feelings, and Mr. Funcho had smacked it very hard indeed, the first morning at the quinta. Neither, he knew, did Mr. Funcho like him! True, Martinho had not lost his temper with Bunter again, but more than once the fat Owl had caught quite an unpleasant glance from him.

Now, passing the fat junior on the verandah, Martinho muttered, “Mochó estúpido,” as he passed, which was far from complimentary. Bunter was aware that an owl was called “mochó” in the language of the country, and even Bunter could guess the meaning of “estúpido.” In the Greyfriars Remove, Bunter had been nicknamed the “Owl,” from the resemblance his big spectacles gave him to that bird; so it appeared that that resemblance had struck Mr. Funcho also. Which was cheeky enough on the part of a dashed Dago, without “estúpido” being added. It was neither grateful nor comforting to be referred to as a stupid owl!

“Beast!” repeated Bunter.

But he was careful to express his opinion sotto voce. He had not forgotten Martinho’s outbreak of savage temper, and the rain of blows that had fallen before the other fellows could intervene. The other fellows were far away now, in the canoe on the Araguaya, and there was no one to stop Mr. Funcho if he administered the mixture as before, so to speak. So Billy Bunter was very careful not to let the assistant-manager hear what he thought of him.

It was a hot afternoon. Harry Wharton and Co. were finding it hot on the river, and Billy Bunter found it hot at the quinta. He had lunched, as usual, not wisely but too well. Among other good things, there had been iguana steaks. Bunter did not know what they were or what they were called, but he knew that he found them palatable, and he had disposed of a quantity that made Tio Jose’s eyes roll in his black face in wonder. After which, Bunter had gone to sleep on the shady verandah: the midday sesta being one of the customs of the country which was after Bunter’s own heart. No doubt Martinho Funcho had also been reposing in the heat of the day, in his office

farther along the verandah, for it was from that apartment that he came when he passed Bunter, leaving the french windows wide open.

Bunter had been half-asleep — but he was wide awake now, as he sat up and blinked after Mr. Funcho. He would have been very glad to tell Mr. Funcho that he was a dashed Dago, or to whiz an orange at the back of his head. But it was not judicious to do either, so he sat and blinked inimically as Martinho disappeared down the steps.

“Beast!” said Bunter, for the third time.

There was a deep frown on his fat brow. More than once, Bunter had turned over in his fat mind various little schemes for getting even with that dashed Dago who had smacked his head, and whom Mauleverer had refused to sack for that fell deed. Now the cheeky beast had referred to him as a stupid owl, not caring whether Bunter heard him or not. Bunter blinked along the verandah, and noted that Martinho had left his office wide open. A gleam came into his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles.

He heaved his weight out of the chair, rolled to the verandah rail, and looked down into the garden. Martinho was already out of sight.

For a long moment Bunter stood in thought. Then he rolled along the verandah to the open french windows of the manager’s office.

This was Bunter’s chance. Martinho had gone out — and Lord Mauleverer and the Co. were far away: Bunter had a free hand. At Greyfriars, if you had a down on a fellow, you “shipped” his study. Billy Bunter’s idea was to “ship” Mr. Funcho’s office! Perhaps, when he found his ledgers, and papers, and account-books, and pens and ink, all over the shop, the dashed Dago might be sorry that he had smacked a fellow’s head!

Bunter gave a last cautious blink up and down the verandah, and then rolled into the manager’s office. There was a vengeful gleam behind his spectacles. Bunter was on the war-path!

The big desk, he was sorry to see, was locked. He would have liked to root out the pigeon-holes, and scatter the contents over the room. The cabinets were locked also. Mr. Funcho seemed a careful man with locks and keys. Having ascertained these facts, Bunter blinked at the typewriter. It had only a dust-cover over it, and was at his mercy. The cheery thought of twisting the keys out of shape came into his mind. It was the only typewriter at the quinta, and probably a new one was not to be had nearer than Rio, so damage to that machine meant an awful lot of trouble for Mr. Funcho in his business correspondence. That, of course, would serve him right, for having smacked Bunter’s head. It was, indeed, a very mild punishment. Something lingering, with boiling oil in it, would really have been more suitable.

Grinning, the fat Owl stretched out fat hands to remove the dust cover, and begin operations on the typewriter. But he paused suddenly.

There was a step on the verandah: not the soft step of a barefooted moço, but the tramp of a white man’s boots.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

Funcho was coming back!

He had not been gone ten minutes. Not for a moment had it occurred to Bunter’s fat brain that the assistant-manager had merely stepped out of his office for ten minutes or so, and was coming back. He had taken it for granted that Martinho had gone about his business on the plantation. Evidently he had taken too much for granted.

The fat Owl spun round towards the open french windows, in sheer terror.

He had done no damage so far, but if Martinho caught him there, he could scarcely fail to guess that he was there with hostile intent. Only too well he remembered that

outbreak of furious temper on the first morning at the quinta. He was alone, with nobody at hand. to lift a finger in his defence — and Funcho was coming. He could almost feel the angry hands smacking at his fat head, as they had smacked before. In utter dismay and terror, the hapless fat Owl stared round the office for something behind which he could dodge out of sight.

Seldom was Billy Bunter quick on the uptake, or swift in his movements, but terror of Martinho Funcho spurred him.

The striding footsteps on the verandah were not yet half-way from the steps to the office door, when Billy Bunter backed out of sight behind a tall cabinet which stood in a corner, almost opposite the big desk.

There he was invisible to anyone entering, unless Mr. Funcho came and looked round the cabinet, which Bunter fervently hoped he wouldn't do.

The footsteps reached the french windows.

Bunter hardly breathed.

They came in: and then, Bunter, to his surprise, heard the newcomer close the volets—the slatted wooden doors, at the french windows. He heard a click which told him that the shutters had been locked.

Why Mr. Funcho locked himself in the office was a mystery to Billy Bunter — and a rather alarming one. There was no escape for him now if he was discovered.

Next came a scent of potent tobacco: Mr. Funcho had lighted a cigarette. With the shutters closed, the interior of the room was dim. Bunter heard the scratch of another match, and was aware that Mr. Funcho had lighted a lamp that stood on his desk.

The fat Owl, palpitating in his corner, was lost in wonder. Why a man should shut out the daylight, and then light a lamp, was beyond him. Unless, indeed, Mr. Funcho had something to do in his office, which he had to be very careful to guard from all possible observation. But what — and why?

From the bottom of his fat heart, Billy Bunter repented him that he had ever thought of “ shipping ” Mr. Funcho's office. There was something stealthy and secretive about the man's actions that added to his terror. But repentance came too late, and the unhappy fat Owl could only suppress his breathing, and keep as still as a mouse with the cat at hand, and hope for the best. He had only one comfort — it was quite clear that Martinho Funcho had not the remotest suspicion that anyone was in the room with him.

The assistant-manager unlocked the desk, and sat down in the swivel chair before it. Bunter could see nothing of him, but he could follow his movements by the sounds. A rustle of papers, and the scratch of a pen, followed. For long, long minutes, Bunter listened to the scratching pen, and an occasional creak from the swivel chair.

Martinho Funcho was writing, and evidently deeply engrossed in his. task.

“ Bom! ”

It was a sudden ejaculation in satisfied tones. Bunter knew that “ bom,” which was pronounced nasally very much like the French “ bon,” meant “ good. ” It seemed that Mr. Funcho was pleased with the work he was doing, whatever it was.

“ Bom! Estou certo! Bom!! ”

Evidently Mr. Funcho was very satisfied.

After those ejaculations, the scratching of the pen was resumed. Martinho's task, whatever it was, was progressing favourably, but was not finished yet.

Curiosity began to mingle with Billy Bunter's astonishment and uneasiness. From the position of the desk, he knew that Mr. Funcho's back must be towards him, as he sat writing. And at length he ventured to put a fat head out of his hiding-place, like a tortoise putting its head out of a shell, and blink at Mr. Funcho's back.

His eyes, and spectacles, fixed on the back of a dark, bent head. But that dark head did not remain bent over the writing all the time. Just in front of Mr. Funcho, close by the lamp, a paper was pinned up. Every few minutes, Martinho raised his head, to glance at it, and then bent it again to write. Bunter did not need telling that he was copying from the pinned-up paper. That was rather perplexing. Each time that Martinho's head was lifted, it hid the pinned-up paper from Bunter's sight — then, as it was bent again, he saw the paper over the top of the glossy dark head. With his limited vision, the fat Owl could not see what was written upon it; but he could see that it was a sheet of notepaper, evidently a letter of some sort — plainly, too, the last page of a letter, for there were only a few lines, followed by a signature. Martinho was not copying out the whole letter — it was pinned up, showing only the last page, and he did not move it. Only that last page interested Mr. Funcho. Bunter had a faint hope of discerning some sign that the assistant-manager was going, but there was no sign of that. Martinho was concentrated on his task, which seemed to have no end.



At length he ventured to put a fat head out of his hiding-place

Billy Bunter almost forgot to be terrified in his growing astonishment. He drew his fat head back into cover, but curiosity impelled him to put it out again. The assistant-manager was still at the same task.

Apparently he was copying out those few lines over and over again, making innumerable copies. It was utterly inexplicable, for if Mr. Funcho wanted copies of a letter, he had the typewriter and carbons at hand. His action, in fact, was more like that of one copying a picture than copying a letter. Yet it was a written letter that was pinned up in front of him, at which he continually glanced.

Slowly, it dawned upon the fat Owl's astonished mind, what the assistant-manager was really doing. He was not copying the last few lines of a letter over and over again. That was meaningless. He was copying the signature!

That, being the only possible explanation of Mr. Funcho's mysterious proceedings, penetrated at last into Bunter's fat intellect.

And, as he realised it, Bunter popped back into cover, and did not venture to put his

fat head out again. It made him feel cold all over.

Obviously, Mr. Funcho was not copying his own signature. That was unthinkable. He was copying somebody else's. What signature it was, Bunter did not know — he had made out the lines of writing, but not the words. But he knew now what it meant. A man who shuttered his windows, lighted a lamp in the daytime, and sat down to copy a signature over and over again, could have but one intention — to acquire skill and facility in imitating that signature.

If he discovered Bunter now —!

Bunter's fat knees knocked together in terror. He had feared the man's savage temper if he found him there — but now —. What would he do, if he found Bunter, and guessed that the fat junior had seen him practising the imitation of another man's signature? Bunter perspired at the thought.

Would he never go, and give the unhappy Owl a chance to escape? He had been at his strange task more than half an hour, in the hot and stuffy room. Yet there was no sign that he intended to go.

"Bom!" Bunter heard him mutter again. He knew now why Martinho Funcho said "Good!" He was satisfied with his success in reproducing another man's signature. Then, suddenly, there was the scrape of a chair, as it was pushed back, and Martinho Funcho jumped to his feet. For a dreadful moment, Bunter feared that he had somehow divined that someone else was in the room. Then he realised that there was a sound of loud shouting from the direction of the river. Something unusual was happening at the desembarcadouro. Martinho, startled, stood listening — and Bunter could only hope that the disturbance, whatever it was, would draw him out of doors. The roar of voices increased in volume, so that, in spite of the distance, words emerged audibly from the hubbub.

"O Corvo! O Corvo!"

A loud, sharp exclamation, almost a cry, came from Martinho Funcho. In a moment, after that name reached his ears, he slammed his desk shut, locked it, and blew out the lamp. One leap carried him to the french windows: he tore open the shutters, and ran out on to the verandah. It seemed to Billy Bunter almost too good to be true, as the assistant-manager's running footsteps died away.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

This was his chance. Breathless, perspiring, quaking, he emerged from behind the cabinet, and hurried to the french window. He knew that Martinho Funcho was gone — but he peered out very cautiously. No one was there, and the fat Owl rolled out at last, gasping with relief.

Startled voices were still shouting at the desembarca-douro. Bunter did not heed them. Something was going on, but he did not care what it might be. He rolled away the whole length of the verandah, before he sank down into a deep cane chair, palpitating, trembling in every fat limb.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter.

CHAPTER XX

THE PRISONER

"O CORVO! O Corvo!"

"O bandido!"

"O Corvo preso!"

A roar of voices greeted the canoe, as the Greyfriars juniors paddled up to the

desembarcadouro in the hot afternoon.

Five or six moços at the landing-place saw the canoe coming in, and stared in amazement at the dark, bearded, scarred ruffian who sat in it, with his hands tied behind his back, while the schoolboys paddled. Their startled shouts drew others from all directions, and there was quickly a crowd, swarming on the quay and the bank, shouting and gesticulating with South American fervour. Indians, negroes, Italian labourers came running, from the huts, from the coffee-fields, from the

“terreiro,” the great coffee barn where the beans were dried and husked. Tio Jose came rolling down from the house, with a crowd of black servants at his heels. The name of “O Corvo,” the news that O Corvo was taken, spread like wildfire, and it seemed that almost every inhabitant of the Quinta Branca was on the spot, by the time the canoe bumped on the desembarcadouro.

“By gum! This is a jolly old reception!” grinned Bob Cherry. “We’ve started a spot of excitement.”

“The spotfulness is terrific.”

“They don’t seem quite able to believe that we’ve got him!” said Frank Nugent, laughing. “This is rather a score for us, you fellows.”

“We’re the jolly old goods!” grinned Johnny Bull.

“We are — we is!” chuckled Bob.

“O Corvo! O Corvo preso! Os rapazes bravos!” came in a roar from the swarming desembarcadouro. A dozen hands grasped the canoe as it glided in, and made it fast. O Corvo sat with a black and bitter scowl on his bearded face, the scar on his cheek showing livid. His fierce eyes glinted at the shouting crowd, but he said no word.

“O bandido preso!” Tio Jose spluttered with excitement. “É possível?”

“Quite possible, old bean!” said Bob Cherry, affably.

Greyfriars men take these things in their stride!

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“By gad, we seem to have woke up the quinta!” remarked Lord Mauleverer. “Everybody seems to have turned up, excepting Bunter and Funcho!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” Here comes Funcho!”

A lithe figure in white ducks came running from the direction of the house — running as if in a race. Bob Cherry waved his hand.

“This way, Mr. Funcho!” he roared. “We’ve got O Corvo! Here he is, as large as life, and twice as natural.”

The buzzing swarm on the desembarcadouro parted, to make way for the assistant-manager. Martinho Funcho came up panting. The expression on his olive face was extraordinary. A couple of brawny negroes had lifted the prisoner from the canoe, and he stood between them on the quay, held on either side in strong black hands. His eyes were on Martinho Funcho as he came. Martinho Funcho’s were on him — staring, as if Martinho could not quite believe what he saw.

“O Corvo!” Martinho almost babbled.

“That very identical article, Mr. Funcho,” said Bob, cheerily. “We went out for a picnic, and picked up a jolly old bandit.”

“Corpo de Deos!” breathed Martinho.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, standing a little back, was watching the assistant-manager’s face: quietly, curiously. He did not read in that face that Martinho Funcho shared the general jubilation at the bandit’s capture. It seemed to him that he read something very different.

Martinho did not heed the nabob, or glance at him. His almost starting eyes were on the sullen bearded face of the prisoner.

“Não entendo!” gasped Mr. Funcho. “I do not understand! You have taken him — you who are schoolboys have taken a bandit who has always escaped the soldados. Não entendo.”

Harry Wharton laughed.

“We caught him napping, Mr. Funcho,” he explained. He was asleep in his hammock on the island — taking his sesta — and we came on him suddenly. He hadn’t a chance.”

“Not an earthly!” said Bob. “He was quick enough with his sticker, but he hadn’t a chance to use it.”

“A ilha! The island!” Martinho’s eyes, already seeming to start from his head, fairly bulged. He caught his breath. “The island! You have been on the island?”

“Yes, we landed there to picnic — you remember the island where we saw him kill the jaguar, the day we came —.”

“You have gone to that island!” exclaimed Martinho. “Corpo de Deos! But it is far from the quinta — I had not thought —. Senhor, it is very dangerous to go to that island — there are jaguars, poisonous serpents —.”

“We didn’t see any of them — but we found O Corvo,” answered Harry. “It was our good luck that we found him asleep in his hammock.”

“Nossa senhora! You may say so, little senhor! Your life would not have been worth that of an iguana. And when you had taken him, you came away at once, is it not so?”

“Yes, at once,” said Harry. “We tumbled him into our canoe and came back, to hand him over to you, Mr. Funcho. Now that he is a prisoner, you can send word to Lucar, and they can send for him.”

“Sim, sim! I shall lose no time,” said Martinho.

But first of all, he shall be put in a safe place — a very safe place! I will see to it myself that is placed in a very strong hut, with lock and bar. Tomorrow, the soldados will be here to take him away — but for tonight, he shall be guarded in a hut.

Senhores, you have done well — you have done a great service to the law. It is amazing — it is admirable! Now I shall take care of this bandit.”

Martinho Funcho turned to the two blacks who were holding O Corvo by the arms, and spoke to them in Portuguese. Then he strode away from the desembarcadouro, the two negroes following him, marching the captured bandit between them. Many of the excited crowd followed, to see the bandit bestowed in the safe place the assistant-manager selected for him.

“Well, that’s that!” said Bob Cherry. “Bit of a surprise for Mr. Funcho, what?”

“I don’t think he could quite believe his eyes,” said Harry, laughing. “But we’ve got O Corvo safe and sound.”

The juniors walked up the path to the house, leaving a buzzing crowd behind them. They were all tired out, but feeling considerably pleased with themselves, and the result of the day’s excursion down the Araguaya. A dangerous bandit, whose robberies were numberless, and who was suspected of darker crimes, was safe under lock and key: and they had reason to feel satisfied.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh touched Wharton’s arm, and the captain of the Remove, glancing at him, stopped, while the other fellows went on.

“What’s up, Inky?” he asked.

“The esteemed and execrable O Corvo is now safe, lock-and-keyfully, in the hands of the respectable Funcho,” murmured the nabob.

“Yes, what about it?”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not immediately reply, but the expression on his dusky face made Wharton start, as he remembered what the nabob had said a few days ago.

He frowned a little.

“Look here, Inky, don’t be an ass,” he said. “What have you got in your noddie flow? You don’t trust Funcho?”

“Not terrifically,” murmured the nabob.

“But it’s rot,” said Harry, impatiently. He stared at his dusky chum. “Have you got it into your head now that O Corvo isn’t safe in Funcho’s hands?”

“Some such idea has penetrated my debilitated brain,” admitted the nabob. “You are sure that the esteemed bandit is, quite safe?”

“Quite!” said Harry. “Why not?”

“The why-notfulness is preposterous! But stone walls do not make a bird in the bush go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks. It is possible that the hut in which O Corvo is imprisoned lock-and-keyfully, may be found empty in the morning, my absurd chum.”

“Rot!” said Harry, tersely.

“You do not think so?”

“No! Forget it, old man.”

Hurree Janset Ram Singh smiled faintly, but he said no more, as he followed his chum to the house. His own suspicion of the assistant-manager was strong, but Wharton did not share it, and he was content to remain silent and watch events.

On the verandah, as they went in, the juniors found Billy Bunter, sprawling in a deep chair, looking far from his usual fat and satisfied state. He blinked at them with a lack-lustre blink.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob Cherry. “Enjoying life, old fat tulip? Heard the news, Bunt? We’ve caught O Corvo.”

“Have you?” said Bunter, apparently not much interested.

“And we’ve come in jolly hungry. Left anything to eat in the quinta?”

“Oh, really, Cherry—.”

“Is anything the matter, Bunter?” asked Harry Wharton, with a curious look at the fat Owl’s worried visage.

“Oh! Yes! I — I say, you fellows —!”

“Well?”

“Oh! Nothing.”

“Has something happened while we’ve been out?” asked Harry, in astonishment.

“Oh! Yes!”

“Well, what?”

Instead of answering, Billy Bunter blinked uneasily towards the steps from the garden, and then along the doorways that opened from the verandah into the house. Perhaps he dreaded to see the dark face of Martinho Funcho in the offing.

“Oh! Nothing!” he said, at last.

“Something-and-nothing!” remarked Bob Cherry. “Lucid, at any rate! Wandering in your mind, old fat man? Or have you been having too much Brazilian toffee, and has it got into your head?”

“Look here, Bunter, if anything’s the matter —!” said Harry Wharton, impatiently.

“Oh! Yes! I — I mean, no,” mumbled Bunter.

“Fathead!” said Harry, and the juniors passed on into the house, leaving Billy Bunter with a worried fat brow.

CHAPTER XXI

BUNTER IS NOT BELIEVED

“I SAY, you fellows! ”

“Say on! ” said Bob Cherry, cheerfully.

“Like to come for a walk? ”

“Fan me! ” gasped Bob.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

It was after supper. In the sala de jantar, Tio Jose had been waiting on Senhor O Proprietario and his friends, with his accustomed assiduity and his accustomed beaming smile. Billy Bunter, though obviously in a worried state, had done remarkably well: his worries, whatever they were, had not affected his appetite. Martinho Funcho had joined the juniors at the meal, as pleasantly polite and suave as ever, and with many effusive compliments for their exploit in capturing the dangerous bandit, O Corvo. While the assistant-manager was present, Bunter did not utter a single word, he concentrated on the foodstuffs, his eyes on his plate, not turning even a single blink in the direction of Martinho. When Mr. Funcho went out on the verandah to smoke cigarettes, the fat Owl gave a gasp, as if of relief, which made some of the other fellows glance at him.

That something was amiss with Bunter, they were all aware. Their first and natural impression was that he had been eating too much and was feeling the consequences of loading over the Plimsoll line. But they realised that it was not that — he had something on his mind. What it was, they did not know, and perhaps did not very much want to know. They were willing to hear, if he told them what it was — but the usually loquacious Owl was very unusually silent.

But when, after supper was over, Bunter asked them if they would like to come for a walk, they had to sit up and take notice. It was such a very unusual suggestion from Bunter.

After a meal, Bunter was accustomed to take a walk — as far as the nearest comfortable armchair, and no farther. A walk abroad after any meal, and especially after supper, was not in Bunter’s line at all.

Bob Cherry affected to faint, and requested his friends, in feeble tones, to fan him. Bunter blinked indignantly at grinning faces.

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, ” he snapped. “It’s a lovely evening — topping for a walk ! Look here, don’t be slackers. ”

“It’s a jolly evening, and we’re ready for a walk, old fat man, ” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “But this is a bit sudden, isn’t it? ”

“The suddenfulness is —. ”

“Terrific and preposterous! ” chuckled Bob.

“How far do you want to walk, Bunter?, ” inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically. “About a mile minus one thousand seven hundred and fifty-nine yards? ”

“Or a mile minus five thousand two hundred and seventy-nine feet? ” asked Frank Nugent.

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Look here, are you coming? ” hooted Bunter. “We’ll walk as far as the thungummydouro — nobody will hear us there. ”

“Hear us? ” repeated Bob, “ Is it a jolly old secret? ”

“Yes! No! I — I mean, yes! That is, no! ” said Bunter. “I — I mean, look here, let’s go for a walk this lovely evening, and if there’s anybody hanging about the quay, we can go somewhere else, see? ”

“Well, my only hat! ” said Bob. “This is getting mysterious! What’s the dark and deadly secret? ”

“We’re on tenterhooks,” grinned Nugent.

“Nothing can have happened while we were out today,” said Harry Wharton, puzzled. “What on earth is the fat ass driving at?”

“Cough it up, Bunter.”

“I can’t tell you here! I — I mean, there ain’t anything to tell,” stammered Bunter, with an uneasy blink at the open doorway. “Nothing’s happened — nothing at all — and it’s jolly serious, I can tell you.”

“Nothing’s happened — and it’s jolly serious!” said Bob. “It’s getting mysteriouser and mysteriouser. Come on, you men — let’s get out, and if he’s pulling our leg, we’ll tip him into the Araguaya.”

It was clear that Bunter had, or fancied he had, something serious to communicate, and was afraid of listening ears in the house. Lord Mauleverer yawned, and four members of the Co. smiled, not one of them attaching any seriousness whatever to Bunter’s mysterious secret. But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh’s dark eyes fixed on the fat junior with a very penetrating look. Bunter’s fear of eavesdropping could only apply to Martinho Funcho: nobody else at the quinta had more than a few words of English, and Tio Jose and his staff certainly could not have made head or tail of anything Bunter might have related in their hearing. It was the assistant-manager of whom Bunter was afraid, and the assistant-manager was very much in Hurree Singh’s thoughts just then.

The juniors went out through the verandah. Martinho Funcho was there, smoking potent Brazilian cigarettes one after another, as usual, and he gave them a bow as they passed. They went down the steps, and sauntered across the gardens towards the river. It was, as Bunter had said, a lovely evening for a walk. The sun was setting in a blaze of purple and gold beyond the mountains, on the far side of the Araguaya, and there was a cool breath of air on the river. There was a sound of banjos and singing voices from the huts of the plantation workers, happy and cheerful after their day’s labour. Except for a couple of moços on a tied-up batalão, there was no one to be seen at the desembarcadouro, but Billy Bunter blinked round him with great caution, evidently uneasy.

“I say, you fellows, sure there’s nobody about?” asked Bunter.

“Only ourselves, fathead,” said Bob. “Now, if you’re not gammoning, cough it up.” Bunter cast a final searching blink round and about. Lord Mauleverer yawned once more, and four fellows grinned. But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh’s dusky face was quite intent.

“It’s about that beast!” began Bunter, sinking his voice.

“Which?” asked Bob.

“That beast Funcho.”

“Oh, gad! Has he been smackin’ your silly head again?” asked Lord Mauleverer.

“No! I — I don’t know what he might have done, if he’d spotted me,” mumbled Bunter. “I’m not afraid of him, of course. I — I’d knock him down as soon as look at him, if you come to that. But — but ———.”

“I can see you doing it!” agreed Bob, and there was a chuckle.

“You wouldn’t snigger, if you’d seen what I saw,” hissed Bunter. “If you’d been in his office, when he stuck a letter up on his desk, and practised imitating the signature — somebody else’s signature —.”

“What!” six fellows ejaculated together.

“Well, that’s what I saw,” said Bunter. “That’s what he was doing. That’s the sort of thing people go to chokey for, ain’t it? Think he was practising imitating another

man's fist for nothing? ”

Lord Mauleverer's brow grew stern.

“Have you been spyin' on Mr. Funcho in his office, Bunter? ” he asked, quietly.

“Oh, really, Mauly —.”

“Good old Bunter! ” said Bob. “There isn't a keyhole at Greyfriars that he hasn't had his ear at. You ought to keep that for the home market, Bunter, not for export. ”

“I wasn't, ” hissed Bunter. “ I mean, I didn't! I was going to ship his office, just to pay him out for smacking my head, and then he came in, and I dodged behind the cabinet in the corner, and that's how I saw him. And I can tell you —.”

“That will do! ” said Lord Mauleverer. “It's a lovely evenin', you fellows — comin'? ”

“I say, Mauly, I haven't told you yet —.”

“You've told me enough, thanks! Comin', you men? ” Lord Mauleverer walked away, without waiting for an answer.

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged glances. Lord Mauleverer, obviously did not intend to listen to Bunter's account of what he had discovered surreptitiously while in hiding in Mr. Funcho's office. Neither were the Co. inclined to listen. Bunter's statement that he had seen Funcho practising the imitation of somebody else's hand had startled them, as well it might, but after the first moment, they were by no means impressed as Bunter had expected.

“Oh, come on, ” grunted Johnny Bull. “That fat chump would fancy anything, when he was in a blue funk. ”

And Johnny Bull marched off after Mauleverer.

“I say, you fellows —.”

Chuck it, Bunter, ” said Bob Cherry. “ It's all rot! I dare say Funcho was copying out accounts, or coffee prices, or something, and you fancied the rest. ”

“It was a letter, ” hissed Bunter. “ He stuck it up, and kept on copying it — I couldn't make it out at first, and then I jolly well knew, and —.”

“Bosh! ” said Nugent.

“Rubbish! ” said Harry Wharton.

And three fellows followed Johnny and Lord Mauleverer, Billy Bunter blinking after them through his big spectacles in angry dismay. His mysterious communication had fallen flat. Five fellows disappeared beyond the trees on the river bank —they were going for a walk, and had had enough of Bunter's mysterious whisperings. But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh lingered, his keen dark eyes on Bunter's fat face.

“I say, Inky, you believe me, don't you! ” gasped Bunter. “I say, I thought Mauly would sack him at once, when I told him. I say, ain't it jolly serious Inky? ”

“The seriousness is terrific, if the truthfulness is also great, ” answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, slowly. “But you are such a terrific fathead, my esteemed idiotic Bunter —.”

“Oh, really, Inky —.”

“And such a preposterous fibber —.”

“Look here, you beast —.”

“Nevertheless, run on, and tell me what you think you saw, ” added the nabob.

Billy Bunter was glad to find at least one listener to his strange tale. He proceeded to relate, in detail, all that had occurred in the manager's office that afternoon.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh listened quietly, his dusky face growing more and more thoughtful as he listened.

The other fellows had simply disregarded Bunter's story — what they had heard of it. But the nabob's deep distrust of Martinho Funcho made a difference. And Bunter's

evident fear of the Brazilian showed that the fat Owl himself believed all that he was saying. But whether he had it right or not, was another matter. Bunter was the fellow to make mistakes, wherever there was room for a mistake to be made.

“I — I say, Inky, what do you think?” breathed Bunter, when he came, at last, to an end. “I — I never

made out what name it was — but it was a name — a signature at the end of a letter. I jolly well know that — and he was practising it, Inky! I — I say, what do you think, old chap?”

“The knowfulness what to think is not terrific,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

“I — I say, if — if he found out that I’d spotted him —!” mumbled Bunter.

The nabob smiled faintly.

“Better not let him,” he said. “A still tongue is a stitch in time, my esteemed Bunter, and silence, is the bird in hand that goes longest to the well. And if you take my idiotic advice, you will steer clear of the estimable Funcho’s office — the shipfulness is not the proper caper.”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a thoughtful clouded brow, followed his friends. And Billy Bunter rolled after him. Bunter was not keen on exertion, or much disposed to take his supper for a walk; but for the present, at least, he preferred to keep at a safe distance from the assistant-manager of the Quinta Branca.

CHAPTER XXII

GONE!

MARTINHO FUNCHO stood on the desembarcadouro, in the morning, directing the loading of a long batalão with bags of coffee, when Harry Wharton and Co. came out after breakfast. The assistant-manager greeted them with a sweep of his Panama hat, and a deep bow over it.

“Bons dias, senhores!”

“Good morning, Mr. Funcho. O Corvo still safe and sound?” asked Harry Wharton, with a smile.

“He could not be safer, senhor,” smiled Martinho.

“He lies in a hut bound hand and foot, under lock and key. Corpo de Deos! I have taken plenty of care of that dangerous bandit.”

Harry’s eyes turned for a moment, on Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. He had not the slightest doubt that the bandit was safe, but he knew that the nabob doubted. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh’s dusky face was expressionless.

“Oh, gad,” murmured Lord Mauleverer. “He must have been rather uncomfortable, Mr. Funcho, tied up hand and foot all night.”

Mr. Funcho shrugged slim shoulders.

“Certo!” he agreed. “But one must take care, senhor, my lord. We cannot take chances with a bandit who is a peril to all who live in the valley of the Araguaya. O Corvo has been captured, before, but he has escaped! This time I say to myself that he shall not escape! Não!”

“You’ve sent word to the officer at Porto Lucar?” asked Bob.

“Não, senhor! I think of a better way than that.” Mr. Funcho pointed to the batalão, which was now almost completely loaded. “I have a cargo to take down the river, and I shall take O Corvo on the boat, and deliver him with my own hands to the capitão at

Lucar. It will save much time, senhor.” Martinho smiled. “Things do not move swiftly in Brazil, as sometimes I have heard you remark, senhores, and it is very true. It might be a day, perhaps longer, before the soldados arrived to take away the bandit. It is swifter, and it is safer, to take him on the batalão to the porto, and deliver him over to the capitão.”

That’s a jolly good idea,” said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton caught a glimmer in the nabob’s eyes. As plainly as if his dusky chum had spoken, he knew the thought that flashed into his mind. It was over twenty miles to Porto Lucar by an almost solitary river route, and the bandit would be on the batalão with Funcho and the Indian crew, out of sight of all eyes at the quinta. He would not reach the river-port unless Martinho Funcho so desired.

The captain of the Remove frowned a little. But the next moment he laughed — he could not help it — as Martinho went on: It is you, senhores, who have captured this bandit, and it is you who should see him safely handed over to the capitão at Lucar. Perhaps you will like to come on the batalão, and keep guard over him while he remains in our hands.”

“We’ll jolly well come,” said Bob Cherry, at once. “Yes, rather,” agreed Nugent.

“Yaas,” Lord Mauleverer nodded. “And if we’re watchin’ him, no need to keep him tied up like a turkey — it must be dashed uncomfortable.”

“As you wish, senhor my lord,” said Martinho. “I have little pity for a desperate bandido, but it is you who are master here. Also I shall have my rifle, and if he should attempt to escape —!” Mr. Funcho gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

He glanced at the moços who were loading the batalão. The last bags of coffee were now being piled on board.

“All will soon be ready to cast off, senhores! It is time to put O Corvo on board the batalão. Will you please to come?”

He led the way, and the Greyfriars juniors followed him. Harry Wharton gave the nabob’s elbow a nudge.

“Well, what do you think now, Inky?” he asked.

“O Corvo won’t jump into the water and swim ashore with half-a-dozen of us watching him, what?”

“The esteemed bandit is not yet on the boat, my absurd chum,” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“We’re going to fetch him now, fathead, aren’t we?”

“Perhapsfully!”

“Oh, rot!” said Wharton, rather gruffly. Evidently, since it was clear that O Corvo would be well-guarded, once on the batalão, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had reverted to his original doubt — that the prison-hut would be found empty in the morning. Whether or not that was to be the case, would be revealed in the next few minutes. Harry Wharton, at all events, had no doubt, and he was rather anxious to convince his doubting chum.

Dom Martinho led the way, past the huts of the plantation workers, to another hut at a little distance from the rest. It was a store hut, used for stacking sacks and bags — turned temporarily into a prison for the captured bandit. There was a large strong lock on the door, of which Mr. Funcho produced the key as he came to a halt. At the side of the hut was a small window, covered by a closed wooden shutter.

The key scraped into the lock, and Martinho turned it. He threw the door wide open. The juniors looked into the hut. The interior was dim, and seemed dimmer after the bright sunshine without. There were stacks of bags, and a number of them could be seen spread upon the floor, apparently placed there to make a rough bed for the

prisoner. But of the prisoner there was no sign.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” ejaculated Bob Cherry.

“Where is he?”

“Where’s O Corvo?” exclaimed Nugent, blankly.

“Oh, gad!”

“Gone!” roared Johnny Bull.

“Oh!” gasped Harry Wharton.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not speak — he smiled. Martinho Funcho, with a startled face, rushed into the hut, staring about him.

“Nossa senhora! But he is not gone — he cannot be gone!” exclaimed Martinho.

“Have I not said that he was left bound hand and foot? Do I not tell you that he could not stir a limb! Não — no — he is not gone — he cannot be gone. I have him safe — very safe — with my own eyes I see him bound with very strong rope — he cannot be gone.”

“Look here,” said Bob. He pointed to a rope that lay on the coffee bags on the floor — evidently the rope with which O Corvo had been bound, by the negroes, under Mr. Funcho’s eyes. “He got loose somehow, Mr. Funcho.”

“Corpo de Deos!”

Martinho stared at the loose rope. He picked it up, and examined it more closely, in the sunlight at the door.

“Look! There are marks of teeth!” he breathed. It is with his teeth that O Corvo has loosened the rope!”

He flung the rope to the floor, and crossed to the little shuttered window. The shutter was closed, but the fastening was broken. It was plain that O Corvo, released from the rope, had forced the window-shutter, and escaped from the hut. No doubt a good many hours had elapsed since he had made his escape.

“Minha culpa — minha culpa!” exclaimed Martinho Funcho. “It is my fault! I should have watched him through the night, with a rifle in my hands! But who would dream that with his teeth he would unloosen so many knots?”

“It’s not your fault, Mr. Funcho,” said Lord Mauleverer. “That’s rot! You couldn’t help it.”

“I blame myself, senhor my lord! I should have taken more care of that dangerous man! Yet he was bound with a very strong rope, and with my own eyes I watched the knots tied. What more could I do?”

“Nothin’,” said Lord Mauleverer, consolingly. “Nobody’s to blame. But — he’s got away — miles off by this time. Can’t be helped.”

“Well, we shan’t be handing him over to the officer at Lucar to-day, that’s a cert,” said Bob Cherry. “What rotten luck.”

“He gnaw himself loose — he break the shutter and escape — and I — I am sleeping like a fool, and thinking he is safe!” exclaimed Mr. Funcho. “If I had only dreamed that he escape, I would have come with my rifle Now he is gone — by this time, I think, far beyond the Araguaya, in the Indian country, where he is safe. I blame myself very much, senhor my lord.”

“Not at all,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Nobody’s fault — but he’s gone,” said Nugent.

Mr. Funcho, with many gesticulations, stamped out of the hut. Still gesticulating, he tramped back to the desembarcadouro.

“Well,” said Johnny Bull, as the juniors came out of the hut. “Mr. Funcho seems to be taking it a lot to heart — but I don’t see that he could have done more than he did.”

“Couldn’t do more than tie the brute up,” said Lord Mauleverer. “I thought that was rather over-doin’ it, really.”

“It doesn’t seem to have been enough, after all. though,” said Bob. “O Corvo’s a jolly slippery customer. Still, if he’s cleared off across the Araguaya, as Mr. Funcho thinks, we shan’t see anything more of him — and I don’t want to, for one! We shan’t miss his company going down to Lucar.”

Harry Wharton looked at the nabob. Four of the juniors had not the remotest suspicion that matters were not as they seemed. But there was doubt in Harry Wharton’s mind now. Hurree Janset Ram Singh had warned him that the hut would be found empty in the morning. It had been found empty! True, there was every sign that the bandit had escaped unaided: no indication whatever that Mr. Funcho had not, as he said, been sleeping at the quinta while O Corvo was making his escape. Nevertheless, the hut had been found empty, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh had said that it would be found empty. If that was a coincidence, it was a rather startling one.

Hurree Singh, as he caught Wharton’s glance, smiled, and closed one eye at the captain of the Remove. There was no doubt, at all events, what the nabob of Bhanipur thought on the subject. And Harry Wharton, reluctantly, had to admit to himself that it looked as if Hurree Janset Ram Singh was right — though what could be the mysterious connection between the assistant-manager of the Quinta Branca, and a lawless outcast of the sertão, he could not begin to guess.

CHAPTER XXIII

BUNTER’S BIG IDEA

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter jumped.

Bunter had been left at breakfast, when Harry Wharton and Co. went down to the desembarcadouro. Bunter had eaten only enough for two fellows by that time, so he was still busy.

Now, however, he had finished, and was leaning back in a long chair on the verandah, his little round eyes closed behind his big round spectacles, taking a rest after his exertions, when Bob came tramping in. Bob, with a cheery grinning face, bent over him, and roared in a fat ear, in a voice that might have made Stentor retire from business, feeling that he was beaten by the younger generation. Bunter came out of his doze with a jump and a splutter.

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “You silly idiot —.”

“Coming?” asked Bob. “You were saying the other day that you wanted to go to Porto Lucar, fatty! Now’s your chance — we’re going down the river in a batalão.”

“Beast! Yelling in a fellow’s ear —!”

“Coming or not?” asked Bob. “The batalão’s just going to push off. We were going to take the jolly old bandit, this side up with care, but he’s got away, so we’re going without him. If you’re coming, get a move on.”

“Oh!” Bunter sat up, and blinked at him. “Porto Lucar — that’s the place where we got on the

dug-out, the day we came, ain’t it? Where Funcho pointed out some of the buildings —.”

“That’s it,” said Bob. “A river-port — Porto, they call it here. We’re all going, and it would break our hearts to leave you behind — more or less, probably less rather than more.”

“Beast! I’m coming,” said Bunter. “I’ll be ready in half-an-hour. Tell them to keep the battalong waiting till then.”

“Think it will take you all that time to get ready?” asked Bob.

“Quite!” said Bunter, positively.

“O.K. The batalão pushes off in ten minutes. Good-bye.”

Bob Cherry tramped down the steps again, and scudded away to the desembarcadouro. He had cut back to tell Bunter, so that the fat junior could come if he liked. Nobody, perhaps, was frightfully keen on Bunter’s fascinating company, but nobody wanted to leave him behind if he cared to come. But if the fat Owl required thirty minutes to get ready, he was not likely to see the Co. again before the evening. The other fellows were already on board the batalão. Mr. Funcho, ever polite and obliging, had ordered the Indians to rig up an awning for them, to keep off the blaze of the sun. It was not yet hot, but it was going to be very hot, as the sun rose higher in the cloudless sky of Brazil.

“Bunter coming?” asked Harry Wharton, as Bob jumped aboard.

“Well, he says he wants to go to Porto Lucar,” answered Bob. “Goodness knows why — he’s generally too lazy to go anywhere. Anything special at Lucar to attract his nibs that you know of?”

“Warehouses, and a few shops, a military post, and one or two public buildings — and the Casino, where they have dancing. There’s an inn where we shall get lunch — but it won’t be so good as Tio Jose gives us at the quinta.”

“Perhaps Bunter’s got some shopping to do!” said Bob. “Know whether he’s still got that sixpence?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Mr. Funcho was giving some directions to an Italian foreman, before stepping on the batalão. The load was all on board now, and the Indian crew in their places. Mr. Funcho seemed to have recovered from the shock the bandit’s escape had given him — if indeed he had had a shock, as two members of the Greyfriars party now doubted. He seemed in very good spirits, as if he, like the schoolboys, looked forward to a day’s trip on the Araguaya. Perhaps Porto Lucar had some attraction for him, as it seemed to have for Billy Bunter.

Evidently it had for Bunter, for the ten minutes had not elapsed, when a fat figure came rolling down to the boat, a big pair of spectacles gleaming in the sun.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! We’re not losing Bunter,” said Bob, as he gave the fat junior a hand over the gunwale. “Got that tanner, Bunter? No time to cut back for it now if you haven’t.”

Billy Bunter landed spluttering in the batalão. He bestowed an inimical blink on a dapper figure in white ducks on the desembarcadouro. Bunter’s dislike of the assistant-manager was mingled with uneasy dread, since his strange experience in the manager’s office. He gave a squeak, as Mr. Funcho, having finished his instructions to the foreman, came towards the batalão.

“I say, you fellows! That beast ain’t coming, is he?”

“Better not let him hear you calling him names, fathead,” said Bob. “We can’t always be holding him back from smacking your silly head.”

“Look here, you never told me he was coming!” hooted Bunter. “I say, Mauly, tell him we don’t want him. You’re boss here, ain’t you?”

“Do shut up, old fat man,” said Mauly.

“Beast!”

Mr. Funcho stepped on, and the crew cast off. With long sweeps of the oars, the heavily-laden thirty-foot boat glided down the sluggish current of the Araguaya.

The Greyfriars fellows sat in deck-chairs, under the awning. Martinho Funcho sat on the gunwale, at a little distance smoking one potent cigarette after another, tossing the stumps into the water. Billy Bunter blinked at him several times, with mingled dislike and uneasiness, but Mr. Funcho gave no heed whatever to the “mocho estúpido.” Bunter, however, ceased at length to take heed of the assistant-manager. Other matters were in his fat mind. He even forgot to grouse about the increasing heat, and the visitations of flies and mosquitoes. Every now and then a grin, as of happy anticipation, appeared on his fat face. It was plain that Bunter was looking forward to arriving at the river-port, though why, was far from clear. Porto Lucar was simply one of the innumerable river-ports of the interior of Brazil, where produce from the plantations was stored in warehouses and trans-shipped. There were two or three shops on the praça — the square — chiefly dealing in trade with the Indians and plantation hands. Bunter could hardly be thinking of buying himself a poncho, or a pair of spurs, or a hammock, or a roll of tobacco, or a saddle and bridle: neither was the sixpence he had brought from home likely to go far if that was the idea. What else could attract him was known only to himself. But plainly something did.

“I say, you fellows. ”

“Give it a name, ” grinned Bob Cherry. Apparently the chums of the Remove were now going to hear what was working in Bunter’s powerful intellect.

“ I suppose you chaps have got some Brazilian money? ” said Bunter.

The supposefulness is correct, my esteemed fat Bunter. ”

“Well, I shall want you to lend it to me, ” said Bunter.

“Eh? ”

“All you’ve got! ” said Bunter.

“All we’ve got! ” repeated Harry Wharton.

“Yes! I shall need all the capital I can raise. Only for to-day, ” added Bunter, reassuringly. “ I’ll settle up this evening, all round. Twice as much as you lend me, if you like. I shall have lots, and I never was mean. ”

The chums of the Remove gazed at Billy Bunter.

“Well, my only hat and sunshade, ” said Bob Cherry. “Who’s going to lend Bunter all the money he’s got ? Don’t all speak at once. ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Nothing to cackle at, ” said Bunter. “ I mean it! ”

“This is a chance we don’t get at home. I suppose you fellows would like to have thousands of milreis? All that’s needed is capital — and my brains! See? ”

“Well, we might be able to raise the capital, ” said Bob. “But where on earth are you going to raise the brains? ”

“Oh, really, Cherry —. ”

“What’s the big idea? ” asked Harry Wharton, laughing. “What terrific stroke of business are you going to do at Lucar, Bunter? It must be something a bit out of the common, if you’re going to land huge profits in one day. ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“That’s why I’m going, ” said Bunter. “Think I’d stick on this beastly boat, smelling of coffee and things, for nothing? Don’t you remember, when we passed through Lucar the day we came, we saw a big white building on the square, which Funcho told us was the Casino? ”

“I remember, ” answered Harry, staring. “ A sort of dance-hall, I believe —.”

Bunter chuckled.

“Something else, too, ” he said. “They have a roulette-room there, same as Monte Carlo, you know. They do these things in Brazil. Well, I’m going to break the bank. ”

“You’re going to which the whatter?” gasped Bob.

“Oh, gad!” murmured Lord Mauleverer, gazing blankly at the fat Owl.

“It wouldn’t be any use you fellows trying it on,” continued Bunter. “You wouldn’t be any good. What you need for it is a cool, clear head, an awfully keen intellect, and lots of pluck and determination. Well, that’s me all over.”

“Ye gods!” murmured Nugent.

“I fancy I can pull it off all right,” said Bunter, confidently. “But I shall need Brazilian money, of course. I haven’t changed my English money into milreis —.”

“You wouldn’t get an awful lot for sixpence, if you did!” remarked Johnny Bull.

“Oh, really, Bull —.”

“You want us to hand you our Brazilian money, so that you can break the bank at the Casino at Lucar!” said Harry Wharton, almost like a fellow in a dream.

“That’s the big idea,” assented Bunter, complacently. “Of course, I mightn’t actually break the bank!” he added, moderating his transports, as it were.

“I think you mightn’t!” gasped Frank Nugent.

“The might-notfulness is terrific.”

“But so long as I bag, say, thirty or forty thousand milreis, I shall be satisfied,” said Bunter. “I never was greedy.”

“So long as he bags thirty or forty thousand milreis, he will be satisfied!” said Bob Cherry, faintly. “He’s going among a lot of crooks to bag thirty or forty thousand milreis — and they’re going to let him do it!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Isn’t there one thing you’ve forgotten, Bunter?” asked Lord Mauleverer.

“Eh! What’s that, Mauly?”

“We’re trusted to behave ourselves while we’re in this country. That washes out casinos, old fat man.”

“Oh, don’t be an ass, Mauly,” said Bunter, peevishly. “We don’t do this at home, of course. But when you’re in Rome you do as the Medes and Persians do!”

“Oh, gad!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, what about it?” asked Bunter, blinking round with owlish seriousness at grinning faces. “I’m willing to go halves in the winnings, if you like. That’s fair, as you put the capital, and I put the brains. But mind — I shall need all you’ve got. The whole thing might be spoiled by being mean about it. I’ve thought this out, I can tell you — and now’s the chance. What the thump are you cackling at?” added Bunter, angrily, as six fellows went off into a yell of laughter that woke the echoes of the forests on the banks of the Araguaya.

“Oh, dear,” gasped Bob Cherry, almost weeping, “Shovel it out, you fellows — now’s your chance to make a fortune. We mustn’t miss this!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the juniors.

“Look here — I” roared Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter’s eyes, and almost his spectacles, gleamed with wrath. He did not seem to have expected this reception of his big idea. Really, he might have — but he hadn’t.

“You cackling chumps —!” roared Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Look here, are you going to lend me your Brazilian money, or not?”

“We’re not!” gasped Harry Wharton.

“With the accent on the ‘not’,” chuckled Nugent.

“The notfulness is terrific. ”

“But I’ll tell you what we’ll do, old potty porpoise, ” said Bob Cherry. “If we spot you nosing anywhere near the Casino, we’ll boot you all the way back to the batalão,. You’re not going to lose that sixpence! ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Beast! ” roared Bunter.

The batalão rolled on down the Araguaya; Billy Bunter in a state of simmering indignation as it rolled. Fortune beckoned him — at least he had no doubt that it did! Vast sums of milreis were waiting for his fat fingers to pick them up — at least he did not doubt that they were! But even Bunter realised that a sixpence — especially a bad one — would not see him through. That gorgeous prospect faded out. After all his happy anticipations, he was not going to break the bank at O Casino de Lucar.

CHAPTER XXIV

DOWN AND OUT!

O PORTO de Lucar shimmered in tropical heat.

It had been a hot day, and it was still hot, as the sun dipped to the mountains in the west beyond the Araguaya.

The batalão from the Quinta Branca lay moored, among a score of other river boats, and innumerable dugouts, and bark canoes. Slow patient moços had unloaded the cargo, and transferred it to the warehouses. Various goods to be taken back to the quinta had been brought on board. The Indian crew loitered on the quay, or sat about in the shade, heedless of the passage of time, like most other inhabitants of Brazil. But Harry Wharton and Co., who belonged to a distant country where time did not pass quite unheeded, wondered when they were going to start up the river for home. They had had quite a pleasant day at the porto, watching loading and unloading, mingling with the crowd in the praça, lunching at the estalagem, and generally seeing what was to be seen in a port on a South American river. Billy Bunter had not shared their walks abroad — only as far as the estalagem, where there was food. Bunter’s interest in Porto Lucar was limited to one building, which was barred to a fellow whose financial resources amounted to one bad sixpence.

As the batalão was booked to pull out at six o’clock, Harry Wharton and Co. were careful to return on board in good time. But they soon found that they need not have been so particular. Two or three hours had elapsed since then, and the batalão was still moored in the porto.

Martinho Funcho, after seeing to the cargo, had gone off into the town, on business matters, as the juniors supposed. No doubt the assistant-manager of the quinta — head of affairs there during Brian Mauleverer’s absence — had many business matters to which he had to attend. The juniors had seen nothing of him during their rambles about the port, and if they thought of him at all, supposed that he was in some officio, talking produce or freightage or coffee prices with some swarthy merchant, in a cloud of tobacco smoke.

But, accustomed as they had grown to Brazilian disregard of time, they could not help wondering why Martinho did not return to the batalão. The long, hot day was near its close, and it was a long trip up the Araguaya to the quinta.

While the Famous Five loitered about the batalão, getting more than a little bored and impatient, Billy Bunter, in a deck-chair, under the awning, was disposing of a bag of Brazil nuts, as heedless of time as if he had been a native of the country. Lord

Mauleverer, in another deck-chair, was placidly content to wait. But more active fellows were tired of hanging about doing nothing, as one long hour followed another, and there was still no sign of the assistant-manager returning.

They stepped off the boat at last, and strolled about the quay, every now and then glancing up the hot dusty street that led to the praça.

“Looks as if we shall get home with the milk in the morning!” yawned Bob Cherry.

“Anybody getting fed up?”

“The fedupfulness is terrific.”

“Dash it all, Funcho might have told us we were going back late,” grunted Johnny Bull. “He said six, and we came back in time — and now —.”

“Something must have kept him unexpectedly,” remarked Nugent. “He told us six o’clock, so he must have meant to pull out then.”

“They don’t worry about time in Brazil,” said Harry.

“But this is getting too thick. Funcho can’t be doing business now — all the business places must be closed long ago. May have met some friends in the place, perhaps —.”

“And started to jaw, and forgotten everything else,” grunted Johnny. “I’ve noticed that when Brazilians begin to talk they never stop. Bet you he’s sitting at that cafe in the praça, smoking, and wagging his chin. I’m tired of hanging about here.”

“Same here,” said Bob.

“The samefulness is terrific,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But we must wait for the esteemed and idiotic Funcho.”

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. If Martinho Funcho was sitting at one of the little tables, at the café in the praça, smoking, drinking red wine, and chatting with some acquaintance, with the unending volubility of his country, forgetful or careless of the fellows kicking their heels on the quay, he did not feel inclined to hang about much longer doing nothing.

“Look here, what about going to look for him?” he asked. “If he’s forgotten us, it’s about time we reminded him.”

“Let’s!” said Bob, with a nod. “If he’s coming, we shall meet him — there’s only that one street he can come by, so we couldn’t miss him. And if he’s sitting it out at the café, we’ll jolly well tell him that we jolly well don’t want to be out all night.”

Harry Wharton stepped back to the batalão, and glanced over the gunwale to the dusky deck.

“Mauly, old man! We’re going up to the praça, to see if we can see anything of Mr. Funcho. Coming along?”

His lazy lordship turned a lazy head.

“We’ve done a lot of walkin’ to-day,” he remarked.

Harry Wharton laughed.

“Sit it out, then, old fellow, and if Funcho blows in, tell him we’ve gone up to the praça.”

“Yaas.”

Leaving Lord Mauleverer placidly reclining in his deck-chair, and Billy Bunter busy with Brazil nuts, the Famous Five walked up the dusty street to the praça. The sun was dipping behind the mountains now, and the brief tropical twilight coming on. Lights were going up in the praça as the juniors arrived there, and the square was crowded with the usual evening loungers: and the café, which adjoined the Casino building, was crowded. Innumerable little tables were set outside, and every one of them had two or three or four people sitting round it, sipping wine, or coffee, smoking cigars or cigarettes, and talking — especially talking.

But they saw nothing of Martinho Funcho — either in the lounging swarm of strollers, or in the crowd at the café. Close by the café, men were going up, or coming down, the steps of the Casino, and Bob Cherry glanced at them.

“He wouldn’t be there, I suppose,” he remarked.

Harry Wharton frowned.

I suppose he might be — but that show’s open in the afternoon — no reason why he should be there now.”

“He wouldn’t be there,” said Nugent. “He’s not a blithering idiot like Bunter.”

“Plenty of blithering idiots here, to judge by the number of people going in and out,” said Johnny Bull, with a grunt.

The juniors looked at one another. It was no business of theirs what Martinho Funcho chose to do, but if the fascination of the roulette-wheel was keeping him, while they were hanging about hour after hour, it was exasperating enough.

“Let’s have another walk round the praça,” said Bob.

“If he’s anywhere about, we shall see him.”

The juniors mingled in the crowd again, strolling round the praça, with their eyes open for Martinho. But they did not see him, and they came back, at last, to the crowded café beside the Casino. Once more they scanned the almost innumerable tables with their chattering occupants, but Martinho Funcho was not among them.

“May as well get back to the boat,” grunted Johnny Bull. “Wherever the fathead is, he’s not out of doors, or we should have seen him.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” ejaculated Bob Cherry, suddenly.

“What —?”

“Look!”

“Oh!”

Five pairs of eyes fixed on a figure that had emerged from the Casino entrance, and was coming down the steps.

It was Martinho Funcho.

But he looked very different from the Martinho Funcho they knew. His olive face was almost deathly white, his eyes staring straight before him. He moved with an uncertain step, almost like a drunken man. Several people glanced at him, and nodded and grinned to one another. Martinho Funcho did not heed them, or even see them. He looked neither to the right nor the left. The group of juniors were hardly a dozen feet from him, but he did not see them — he passed on, unseeing, unheeding, like a man in a dream, and disappeared into the crowd in the praça.

“Oh!” breathed Harry Wharton.

The juniors were there to seek Mr. Funcho — but they did not think of speaking to him then. They knew what the look on his face meant — what it could only mean. It was a desperate gambler who had lost all, who passed them unseeing — a man stunned by ill-fortune. It made them feel sick at heart, and they were glad when he passed out of their sight; a man stricken, utterly down and out.

“So that —!” muttered Bob.

“By gum, he looked hard hit,” said Nugent, uneasily.

“Better not let him know we’ve seen him — it’s no business of ours.”



He moved with an uncertain step, almost like
a drunken man

“No need to say anything,” said Harry Wharton. “Let’s get back to the boat. I suppose he’s going back now.”

They walked slowly to the quay, with clouded, thoughtful faces. What they had seen, had been a startling shock to them, and they wished that they had not seen it. They wondered, too, what Martinho would be like when they saw him at the boat. A man so utterly stricken was not likely to recover soon.

But Martinho was not at the batalão when they arrived there. A lantern was burning on the boat now, and Harry Wharton glanced over the gunwale in its dim glimmer. A snore greeted him — Billy Bunter had gone to sleep. He called to Mauleverer.

“Funcho back yet, Mauly?”

“No!” yawned Mauly.

The Famous Five remained on the quay.

They could guess that Martinho was taking time to pull himself together, before he showed up at the batalão. They waited, loitering on the quay, under the stars, and it was a good half-hour before a figure came hurrying through the shadows, and the assistant-manager of the Quinta Branca appeared at last.

Desculpa-me! I am late! A thousand regrets!

Martinho Funcho was trying to speak with his usual suavity, but without success. His olive face, under the Panama hat, was almost haggard, and his eyes looked sunken. “I ask a thousand pardons, senhores — a matter of business that was very troublesome kept me longer, than I had intended — much longer! In the service of Senhor O Proprietario I do not count the hours — but you have had to wait — a thousand pardons!”

Without waiting for a reply, the assistant-manager stepped on board the batalão, and the juniors followed him in silence.

Evidently, Martinho had not the remotest idea that they had seen anything of the “troublesome matter of business” that had kept him so late. They knew that he had forgotten them, forgotten the batalão, forgotten Senhor O Proprietario, forgotten everything in his absorption in the gaming-room, a slave to the wheel of chance, and that he would still have been at the green table, late in the night, if he had had any

money left. They were glad, when the batalão pushed off, that Martinho disappeared in the shadows, and did not come near them — though every now and then they caught the potent scent of his cigarette from the gloom.

Under the glittering stars, the batalão rolled on its homeward way: the Indian crew labouring patiently at the oars, the Greyfriars fellows half-asleep in the deck-chairs, Billy Bunter snoring, and Martinho Funcho, somewhere in the shadows, rolling and smoking incessant cigarettes. Dawn was in the sky when at last the Quinta Branca came in sight.

CHAPTER XXV

BUNTER HANDLES THE BOLA

“EASY enough!” said Billy Bunter, with a sniff.

“Listen to the man who knows!” remarked Bob Cherry

“I could do it on my head!” said Bunter.

It looked easy enough — to Bunter. Billy Bunter often had a persuasion that he could do things — until he came actually to do them. Then, more often than not, he woke up, as it were.

The South American “bola” was not, in point of fact, easy to handle. It required a lot of practice and a lot of skill. The Indian moço who was showing its use to the Famous Five in the garden of the Quinta Branca, in the sunny morning, was an expert. Harry Wharton and Co., trying it one after another, found themselves anything but expert. Bunter, sitting in a hammock under a tree watching them, curled a fat lip in derision. Bunter had no doubt that he could do it, and that the Famous Five were clumsy asses, and that being his opinion, he did not hesitate to make it known.

In the middle of a wide lawn, a bench had been set. On the bench stood a cane chair. The Indian stood at a distance with the bola — a long rope with an iron ball at each end. He whirled an iron ball, suddenly let it fly, and it curled round the cane chair, plucked it from the bench, and landed it at the moço’s feet, much like the lasso of North America. The Greyfriars fellows tried it in turn, and in turn missed the object — it certainly was not so easy as it looked. Bob Cherry succeeded in banging his own leg with the iron ball, which caused him to utter a startled howl — and Bunter a fat chuckle.

Lord Mauleverer, seated on the verandah, was looking on, disinclined to join his more strenuous friends. Billy Bunter was even less inclined for exertion, as a rule, than his lazy lordship. But Billy Bunter had an urge to show the Famous Five how easily it could be done, and what clumsy asses they were. So he rolled out of the hammock.

“Look here, hand it to me, and I’ll show you!” said Bunter.

“Oh, let Bunter show us!” said Johnny Bull, sarcastically. “Better get out of range, though, he might brain one of us.”

“The brainfulness might be terrific,” chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Well, he won’t be able to brain himself, anyhow,” said Bob. “The stuff isn’t there! Here you are, Bunter.”

Billy Bunter took the bola.

“Watch me,” he said, disdainfully.

The Famous Five backed away under the orange-trees, out of danger, as Bunter whirled the iron ball. Where that ball would go, when Bunter let fly, nobody knew — Bunter least of all, probably. But nobody wanted to stop it in its career.

“Like this” said Bunter, confidently. He whirled the ball, very nearly getting the

moço, who jumped away like a kangaroo. What happened next, and how it happened, Bunter did not quite know. He knew that something hard tapped him on the back of the head, but it was quite a surprise to him.

“Yaroooh!” roared Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, crikey! What was that?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the juniors under the orange-trees, echoed by Lord Mauleverer on the verandah. The iron ball had, apparently, a will of its own, and it had attacked Bunter in the rear quite viciously. It dropped to the ground as Bunter rubbed the back of his head, blinking round him with a bewildered blink that made the other fellows yell.

“I say, you fellows, what was that? If you’re chucking things at a fellow —!” yelled Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You howling ass, it was the bola!” gasped Bob Cherry. “You banged your own silly head with it.”

“Yah!”

“Do it again, Bunter,” called out Nugent, encouragingly.

“Look out, Mr. Funcho,” called out Bob, as the assistant-manager appeared on the steps of the verandah. “Bunter’s showing us how to use the bola. He wants plenty of sea-room.”

Billy Bunter was gathering in the rope, preparatory to another whirl. Martinho Funcho stared at him, laughed, and stopped on the verandah steps. Crossing the garden within the rope’s length was not a safe proposition, while the fat Owl was exhibiting his skill with the bola.

Mr. Funcho had gone into his office after breakfast, when the juniors went into the garden. But he did not stay there. He came out, to go down to the desembarcadouro, where a loaded batalão was about to start for Porto Lucar. It was several days since the trip to Porto Lucar, and Mr. Funcho had recovered all his old suavity and aplomb. Looking at him, the juniors could hardly have believed that he was the same man whom they had seen emerging from O Casino a few days ago, with a white stricken face and unseeing eyes. On this particular morning Mr. Funcho was making another trip down the river to the porto, and no doubt he had gone into his office for something he required, as he had stayed there only a few minutes. Now he stood on the verandah steps, watching the clumsy fat Owl with a sarcastic smile, but this time Bunter was too far off to hear him murmur “mocho estúpido!”

“Go it, Bunter!”

“Show us how it’s done!”

“On the ball, Bunter!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter was going it. But it was dawning on Bunter that it was not quite so easy as it had looked to him, seated in the hammock. The Indian moço had done it quite easily, and it was really absurd to suppose that William George Bunter couldn’t do things better than an untutored South American Indian. Yet somehow he seemed in a tangle.

Whiz!

Billy Bunter was standing with his back to the verandah. He was aiming at the cane chair on the bench in the middle of the garden, directly in front of him. So how it happened that the whirling iron ball caught an object directly behind Bunter was really one of those things that no fellow could understand.

But it did!

There was a sudden startled shriek from Martinho Funcho. At a safe distance behind Bunter, he could not have supposed himself in danger from the bola — but he was!

“Oh, holy smoke!” gasped Bob Cherry. “Look out!”

That warning came much too late. The iron ball was whizzing round Mr. Funcho with dizzy speed, winding the rope round his neck. He came rolling and sprawling down the verandah steps, headlong, clutching frantically with both hands at the choking rope, his duck jacket curling up about his ears, and half-a-dozen articles scattering from the pockets.

Bunter tugged at the rope.

“I say, you fellows,” he squeaked. “It’s caught in something —.”

“You mad ass!” roared Harry Wharton. “Let go!” He tore the bola from the fat hands, Bunter squeaking in indignant expostulation.

“You’ve caught Mr. Funcho, you potty chump!” gasped Bob Cherry.

“Oh, crikey!”

The juniors rushed to Mr. Funcho’s aid. Lord Mauleverer jumped down from the verandah. Billy Bunter gave one horrified blink at the assistant-manager, rolling on the earth, tangled in the rope, spluttering with fury — but he stayed for only one blink! He remembered what Mr. Funcho’s temper had been like on a previous occasion, and he could guess what he had to expect when Mr. Funcho got out of the bola. He revolved rapidly on his axis, and fled; and vanished among the orange-trees as the anxious juniors surrounded Martinho and gave him help.

Johnny Bull was first to get hold of the iron ball, and unwind the rope from the assistant-manager’s neck. Bob Cherry and Nugent helped him to his feet. Hurree Janset Ram Singh picked up his hat. Harry Wharton fielded a wallet that had fallen from his pocket — a very well-filled wallet. Lord Mauleverer retrieved a fountain-pen from a bed of flowers. Everyone was helpful and apologetic, hoping to pacify the hapless victim of Billy Bunter’s skill with the bola, and to avoid an outbreak of furious temper. Martinho, gasping for breath, leaned on Bob’s sturdy shoulder — gasping and gasping. His face was crimson with rage, but as he saw the fountain-pen and the wallet in the hands of the juniors who had picked them up, his mood seemed to change, suddenly, from fury to anxiety, and he ran his hands hastily through his pockets, as if to assure himself that something was there. Evidently it was not, for his hands came out empty, and heedless of the schoolboys, he stared about him on the ground in search.

“Here’s your wallet, Mr. Funcho,” said Harry.

“And here’s your fountain-pen,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Dropped somethin’ else, Mr. Funcho?”

“We’ll find it for you,” said Bob. “Look round, you men. What was it, Mr. Funcho?”

The assistant-manager did not answer. He moved away, scanning the ground and the flower-beds. Something, it was clear, had fallen, and Mr. Funcho was very anxious about it. Bob Cherry caught a glimmer in the grass, and jumped to it.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here it is, Mr. Funcho!” he exclaimed, as he picked up a gold cigarette case.

Martinho turned towards him sharply, but as he saw the cigarette case, he did not even trouble to take it from Bob’s hands.

“Tolo!” he snapped, and turned away.

Bob coloured. “Tolo,” he was aware, meant “fool” in Mr. Funcho’s language.

It was not the gold cigarette case of which Mr. Funcho was in search, but something about which he was much more anxious and concerned.

“Here’s a letter!” called out Harry Wharton.

He picked up a rather bulky envelope that had slipped under a cluster of flowers when it fell.

It was a large envelope, so fat that it evidently contained an enclosure as well as a letter. The address on it was typed. No doubt Mr. Funcho had been taking it to the post at Porto Lucar, where all letters from the quinta had to be taken by boat for the post office.

Nobody, certainly, was interested in Mr. Funcho’s correspondence, but the juniors could not help seeing the typed address on the envelope as Wharton, without even thinking about it, held it up.

Senhor Priego,
Rua Aruaja 15,
Rio de Janeiro.

That Mr. Funcho was anxious about the letter that had fallen from his pocket, the juniors could not fail to have noticed. But none of them could have guessed that he did not want them to see it or handle it. That, however, became very plain the next moment, as the assistant-manager spun round towards Wharton, at his call. Seeing the letter in his hand, Martinho made a spring like the jaguar of his native country, and in a split second snatched it away, and jammed it into his pocket. The action was so sudden, so rough and rude, that Harry gave him a stare of indignant surprise, which seemed to recall the assistant manager to himself.

“Desculpa-me — Uma carta importante!” he muttered. “A very important letter, little senhor — I thank you for finding it — a thousand thanks.”

The loss, and recovery, of the “carta importante” seemed to have caused Dom Martinho to forget, or at least disregard, Bunter’s exploit with the bola. He did not glance round for the fat junior, as the others rather expected him to do, but hurried away towards the desembarcadouro. The Greyfriars fellows were left looking at one another, rather expressively.

CHAPTER XXVI

TO GO OR NOT TO GO!

“ROT!” said Billy Bunter.

“Fathead!” replied Bob Cherry.

“I don’t want to go to that rotten island,” said Bunter, and if you jolly well go there, I jolly well won’t come, so yah!”

“You won’t?” asked Bob.

“No, I jolly well won’t!” said Bunter, firmly. “That,” remarked Bob Cherry, “makes it the most

attractive spot in South America. We’re bound to go now.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The Greyfriars party were at breakfast on the verandah. It was a sunny morning — all mornings were sunny at the Quinta Branca. Over breakfast the Famous Five were discussing plans for the day. Martinho Funcho, who had finished breakfast, was seated in a deep cane chair at a little distance, smoking his incessant cigarettes, over a week-old copy of the “Jornal do Commercio.” The voices of the juniors reached him, and he glanced towards them once or twice over his newspaper.

Lord Mauleverer did not take part in the discussion. His lazy lordship was prepared to go wherever the other fellows went, which saved the trouble of thinking. It was not so with Billy Bunter. Bunter was the fellow to make his voice heard, in season and out of season. And a visit to the island down the Araguaya where the bandit had been captured, two or three weeks ago, was a proposition that did not appeal to Bunter in the least.

Bunter was not particularly keen on long-distance excursions at all. A walk of a hundred yards was generally enough for Bunter. Still, he did not want to be left behind. Bunter was a gregarious animal, and liked company, and his own, fascinating as it was, palled on him when he was left to himself. Moreover, he never felt easy in his fat mind with Martinho Funcho about, on his own. His deep dislike of Mr. Funcho was tinctured with dread. So if the Co. went, Bunter was going. It was irritating, indeed exasperating, to the fat Owl, to hear that the Famous Five proposed to visit that rotten island again. A trip in a canoe — so long as he was not required to lend a hand with the paddles — suited Bunter; and a picnic under shady trees suited him still more. But an island where both a jaguar and a bandit had been seen, did not suit Bunter.

“I say, you fellows, have a little sense!” hooted Bunter. “You jolly well know that there was a jaguar on that island —.”

“We saw O Corvo finish him off, old fat man,” said Frank Nugent. “You’re not afraid of his ghost, are you?”

“How do you know O Corvo isn’t there?” demanded Bunter. “Might have gone back there, for all you know.”

“Bosh! O Corvo’s a hundred miles away across the Araguaya,” answered Nugent.

“He cleared right off after he escaped. Mr. Funcho thinks he will never be seen in this district again.”

“Fat lot he knows about it,” snorted Bunter.

“Shut up, you fat ass,” said Harry Wharton, hastily. He remembered that Mr. Funcho was within hearing, if Bunter did not.

“Shan’t!” retorted Bunter. “Besides, there’s snakes and things on that island. Funcho says so, and I suppose he knows.”

“There’s snakes all over the shop in Brazil,” said Johnny Bull. “Plenty of them about the quinta, if you look for them.”

“Might run into some great big pythoconda!” said Bunter.

“Into a whatter?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You wouldn’t cackle if you stepped on a pythoconda!” roared Bunter.

“Well, we might run into a python, or into an anaconda,” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “But hardly into a mixture of the two.”

“And there’s wild pigs, too,” said Bunter. “They call them piccaninnies, or something —.”

“Make it peccaries!” chuckled Bob.

I don’t care whether it’s piccaninnies or peccaries, they’re awfully dangerous,” declared

Bunter. “Wild pigs are fearfully fierce.”

“Dash it all, you’re not afraid of your relations, are you?” asked Johnny Bull.

“Beast!” roared Bunter.

“Well, if Bunter’s finished saying his piece, we may as well get a move on,” remarked Bob Cherry, rising from his chair. “Don’t you worry, Bunter. We’re taking

lots of grub, and pythocondas are quite extinct —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Senhores!” It was the polite voice of Senhor Funcho. He rose, and threw down the “Jornal do Commercio,” and came towards the group of juniors, his cigarette between two tobacco-stained fingers. “If I am permitted to give a word of advice —.”

“Carry on, Mr. Funcho,” said Bob, as the assistant-manager paused.

“What the Senhor Bunter says is very true,” said Mr. Funcho. “There are many dangers on that island in the Araguaya.”

“You don’t think O Corvo went back there, Mr. Funcho?” asked Bob, with a grin.

“Não! Não! Isso é impossível — that is impossible!

He would not go where he has been seen — I think that he has fled into the Indian country,” answered Mr. Funcho, “But there are snakes — many snakes! I myself have seen anacondas, when passing the island in a boat. I give you very serious advice not to revisit that perilous island.”

“We’re not afraid of snakes,” said Johnny Bull.

“Certo! certo!” agreed Mr. Funcho. “But snake-bite is very dangerous — many of the Indians die of snake-bite.”

“We shall keep our eyes open, of course,” said Harry.

“But we’ve not come to Brazil to be afraid of snakes.”

“No fear,” said Bob.

Mr. Funcho smiled, with a shrug of his slim shoulders. I waste my advice, it seems,” he said. “It is my duty to warn you, as strangers in my country. But if you do not heed, I am silent.”

“Thank you for warning us — but I think we shall go all the same.”

“You will please yourselves, senhores.”

Mr. Funcho raised his Panama hat, bowed over it, and left the verandah. He walked away across the garden to the desembarcadouro, leaving a trail of fragrant smoke behind him. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh’s dark eyes followed him curiously as he went. The juniors looked at one another, a little dubiously. They did not want to appear to disregard Mr. Funcho’s advice, which they did not doubt was founded on his knowledge of the country round about the quinta. But they did not want to change their plans because of a possible spot of peril.

“Look here, we’re going,” grunted Johnny Bull. “We never saw any snakes that day we were on the island; and anyhow, we’re not funky, I suppose. Might as well stick in the house and never go out at all, if it comes to that. Does Funcho think we’re a lot of Bunters?”

“Why, you cheeky beast!” roared Bunter, indignantly

“If Bunter’s afraid of snakes, let him stick here — and I dare say he will tread on one in the garden,” grunted Johnny. “I’ll bet there’s as many round about here as there are on that island.”

“You heard what he said about the Indians,” howled Bunter.

“That’s because the Indians go barefoot,” answered Johnny. “The best cure for snake-bite is to wear boots. Look here, we’re going.”

“We are — we is!” said Bob Cherry. “Come on, you men!”

“I shan’t come!” roared Bunter.

“Muito obrigado, senhor!” grinned Bob.

“Eh? Wharrer you mean by muito obrigado, you fathead?”

“That means ‘much obliged,’ in the language of the country, old fat man.”

“Beast!”

“Come on, Mauly,” roared Bob. “You look too jolly lazy to get out of that chair. Like

me to tip you out? ”

“Yaas — I mean, no, ” said Lord Mauleverer, hastily, and he jumped up before the exuberant Bob could give him the proffered assistance.

“I say, you fellows, ” yelled Bunter, as the Famous Five departed with Lord Mauleverer. “ I tell you I won’t come! Will you hold on, you beasts? I say — I tell you I jolly well won’t go to that mouldy island —. ”

“Muito obrigado, senhor! ” called back Bob Cherry.

“ Ha, ha, ha! ”

Billy Bunter breathed wrath. But he heaved his weight out of his chair. It was clear that the chums of the Remove were going, and that Bunter either had to do likewise or be left behind. He rolled after the juniors to the desembarcadouro, in a state of wrath and indignation.

Mr. Funcho was there, suave and smiling as ever, apparently not in the least offended by the circumstance that the Greyfriars party were not taking his advice. He selected a canoe for them — a light Indian bark canoe easy for the schoolboys to handle — gave a nod of approval as he noted that Harry Wharton had brought a *rifle*, saw to Tio Jose placing a large basket of provisions on board, and generally made himself politely useful. As the canoe pushed off, he raised his hat and bowed, and bowed again, as if he still had a spring in his back, and called out a cheery good-bye.

Then he stood on the desembarcadouro watching the canoe as it glided down the Araguaya, with a rather curious expression on his face. For several minutes he watched it, and then turned and walked away in the direction of the house. But he did not go into the house; he walked round it to the stables at the back. While the moços worked in the coffee fields or the terreiro that morning and the Greyfriars fellows were canoeing on the Araguaya, it seemed that Senhor Doin Martinho Funcho was going for a ride on the campo.

CHAPTER XXVII

SUNK ON THE ARAGUAYA

“BEASTLY hot!” grunted Bunter.

“I’ve heard that one! ” said Bob Cherry.

“And look at those beastly mosquitoes! ” Bunter smacked. “Ow! I believe there’s another one on my ear! ”

“Sit still, and I’ll get him with my paddle! Beast! ” roared Bunter.

He did not like a mosquito settling on his fat ear, but he did not, apparently, want Bob to get that troublesome insect with his paddle.

Bunter, as usual, was attracting the small winged inhabitants of Brazil. The canoe had done three or four miles on the rolling Araguaya, and the sun, rising higher, and higher in a cloudless sky, poured down heat. All the while, Bunter had been disposing of a large chunk of Brazilian toffee with which he had thoughtfully provided himself. Bunter chewed toffee while the other fellows paddled. That suited Bunter. Bunter liked toffee, and he did not like work. The dignity of labour, about which so many people who have never done any often wax enthusiastic, did not impress Billy Bunter at all. But lazing and chewing toffee had drawbacks — crowds of insects seemed to like the toffee as much as Bunter did, and every now and then his sticky fat face looked almost like a human fly-paper.

“Blow these beastly flies! ” groaned Bunter. “ They don’t seem to worry you fellows so much as they do me. ”

“The stickiness of our unworthy selves is not so terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter, ” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Yah! ” was Bunter’s elegant rejoinder to that.

“You want a wash, old *fat* man, ” said Bob. “It’s weeks since you had that last one at Greyfriars. ”

“Beast! ”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, look out for driftwood! ” exclaimed Bob, as something suddenly struck the side of the canoe.

Crack!

Sharp and clear, the report of a rifle rolled from the distant bank, the next moment. Every fellow in the canoe jumped, and stared round. It was not a floating fragment of driftwood that had struck the canoe. It was a bullet, as they realised when they heard the echoing report roll across the river.

“What the dickens —! ” exclaimed Harry Wharton.

“That was a shot! ” exclaimed Nugent. “What howling ass is loosing off a rifle at random over there?”

The juniors stared towards the bank. Thick forest, many of the trees growing in shallow swampy water on the river’s margin, covered the banks of the Araguaya at that point. Trees a hundred feet high, with vast trunks, laced with lianas and fig-vine, formed a wall of green, solid to the view from a distance of a hundred yards. From somewhere in that wall of green had come the bullet that had struck the canoe and glanced off the bark.

Crack!

Bob Cherry gave a gasp, as his hat spun on his head. He clutched at it.

“Oh, scissors! ” gasped Bob.

The juniors looked at one another in consternation. The first shot might have been accidental: the second could not have been. Someone with a rifle, hidden in that wall of forest, was firing on the canoe.

“He’s firing on us, whoever he is! ” breathed Frank Nugent. “Who can it be — O Corvo? ”

Harry Wharton set his lips.

“Who else? ” he said. “Nobody else would be likely to do it. ”

“Then he hasn’t cleared off as Mr. Funcho thought. ” Another bullet struck the canoe, and the report rolled from the forest across the river. But of the hidden marksman, the canoe’s crew could see nothing — not even a wisp of smoke from the rifle. The dense forest hid him completely.

There was a yell from Billy Bunter.

“I say, you fellows, it’s that bandit — I say, he’s shooting at us — I say — oh, crikey! Oh, lor’! ”

Billy Bunter’s startled eyes almost popped through his spectacles.

“Get out of this! ” muttered Johnny Bull. “Make for the other bank. ”

The paddles flashed, and the canoe shot away towards the opposite bank. There was nothing else that the juniors could do. There was a rifle in the canoe, but it was useless against an enemy that could not be seen. On the open wide river, they were exposed to the fire, wholly at the mercy of their hidden assailant.

Crack! crack! crack! Three shots, in swift succession, struck the canoe as the juniors paddled hard and fast. From Billy Bunter came a series of startled, terrified squeaks. Harry Wharton and Co., silent, with set lips, paddled with all their strength and activity, and the little craft fairly flew. Once in the shelter of the trees on the further bank, they would be safe — there was plenty of cover there.

Crack! crack! crack! crack!

The hidden marksman was firing fast now. It seemed strange, almost miraculous, that no one in the canoe was hit, as the bullets pitched round them.

“Oh, gad!” ejaculated Lord Mauleverer, suddenly.

“Mauly!” exclaimed Wharton. For a moment he feared that Mauleverer was hit. But it was not that.

“Look!” said Mauleverer.

It was a wash of water over his feet that had caused Mauly to ejaculate. The canoe was shipping water. It trickled in through a hole in the bark.

“Oh!” Wharton understood. “He’s trying to sink us.”

Crack! crack crack!

There had been a brief pause in the firing, evidently while the hidden marksman refilled his magazine. Now the bullets came buzzing like mosquitoes, as fast as he could fire. Once or twice the juniors felt the wind of them, as they whizzed over the canoe. But almost all struck the canoe itself, holing it again and again. The water trickled in at five or six places, and spread over the bottom of the canoe.

“Faster!” breathed Wharton.

They drove swiftly at the paddles. The bank was near now — great drooping branches of overhanging trees offered cover and shelter. But the water oozed in fast, and the canoe was becoming waterlogged. The object of the hidden enemy was plain enough now — to sink the canoe, and leave them struggling in the river. They all knew that he could have pitched the bullets among them, had he chosen.

“Ow!” There was a howl from Bunter. “We’re sinking! I say, you fellows — oh, crikey! Help!”

The juniors did not heed Bunter. The canoe, holed in a dozen places now, and fast filling, was sinking under their feet, and dragging slowly in spite of their efforts with the paddles. Water washed round them as they paddled, and the gunwale was almost level with the Araguaya. But they were in the shallows at last, under vast branches, and the canoe jammed into soft clinging mud. There it settled down, and the Araguaya flowed over it.

“Yaroooooh! Help!” yelled Bunter. “I’m drowning — yaroooooh!”

The water washed round Bunter’s fat neck as he sat, and as he struggled up, he stumbled and fell with a mighty splash. Bob Cherry’s strong grasp dragged him up the next moment, spluttering frantically.

“Urrrrrrrggh!”

The hidden rifleman on the other bank had ceased to fire now. If it was O Corvo — as they could hardly doubt — attacking them in revenge for seizing him on the island, he seemed satisfied with having sunk their craft, and wrecked them in the swampy mud. A dozen yards of mud, and shallow water, separated them from terra firma. They scrambled and splashed through it, half-dragging and half-carrying the fat Owl among them, and reached the shore. Breathless, drenched, mud-spattered from head to foot, they scrambled into the forest, plunging through clinging fig-vine, startling a myriad parrots into cackling and squawking.

“Ooogh! Oooogh! Grooogh!” gurgled Billy Bunter, sinking at the foot of a tree.

“Woogh! I’m all wet — I’m all muddy! Oh, crikey! Grooogh!”

“Nobody else is wet or muddy!” snorted Johnny Bull.

“Urrggh! Beast! It’s all your fault — I didn’t want to come! Wrrrggh!”

“By gum!” Bob Cherry wiped mud from his heated face. “We’re having a day out, and no mistake!”

“Lucky the canoe sank close in-shore,” said Nugent. “I shouldn’t like to be swimming among the alligators.”

“The luckfulness was terrific,” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, scraping off mud. “But the wetfulness and the muckfulness are also great.”

“This washes out our jolly old trip to the island,” said Bob, ruefully. “I suppose it must have been O

Corvo potting at us.”

“Must have been,” said Harry.

“The potfulness was not at our esteemed selves, but at our canoe,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “I do not thoughtfully opine that the esteemed and execrable bandit would have been so particular.”

“Who else could it have been?” asked Bob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not answer that question. He shook his head, and scraped off cakes of mud.

Harry Wharton looked back at the canoe. It was sinking deeper into the mud a dozen yards out, the river flowing over it. There was no hope of salvaging either the canoe or its contents. The Greyfriars fellows were stranded, on the wild untrodden bank of the Araguaya, three or four miles from the quinta.

Wharton scanned the wide, rolling waters: There was no sign from the enemy on the other bank. No doubt he was gone, now that he had effected his purpose. Wharton hoped to see some craft on the river — an Indian canoe, or perhaps a laden batalão from the Quinta Branca. But there was no craft to be seen on the wide waters that rolled gleaming in the sun.

“We’re up against it,” said Harry, quietly. “We’ve got to get back to the quinta — and we’ve got to walk.”

“Shanks’ pony!” said Bob, with a whistle.

“It will be tough going for the pony of esteemed Shanks,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. But what cannot be cured must be stitched in time.”

“The sooner we start, the better,” said Johnny Bull. “It’s going to be some walk — through this forest.”

Yell, from Bunter.

“Walk! How far is it?”

“Not less than three miles,” said Harry.

“Think I can walk three miles through this beastly forest?” roared Bunter.

“I think you’ll have to, unless you want to camp here.”

“Beast!” groaned Bunter.

“Come on,” said Lord Mauleverer. “No good waitin’ till it gets hotter! It’s rather warm now.”

“The warmfulness is terrific! Come onfully, Bunter.”

“I — I say, you fellows —.”

“Get a move on, fathead.”

“I — I can’t! I — I’ve sprained my ankle! You fellows will have to carry me!” gasped Bunter.

“What?” roared the Famous Five.

Perhaps Billy Bunter hoped that they had forgotten his sprained ankle story, and that it would serve a second time. If so, it showed that Bunter was an optimist. That his optimism was unfounded, he was apprised the next moment, as Johnny Bull stepped over to him, and kicked.

Thud!

“Yaroooh!”

Thud!

“Wow! Keep off, you beast! Keep your hoofs away will you! I’m coming, ain’t I?” roared Bunter.

And he came.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MUDDY!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!”

“What —— !”

“Tio Jose!”

“Oh, good!”

Seven bedraggled schoolboys, six of them panting, and one groaning, came to a halt, and stared out on the shining Araguaya at a canoe in which sat a plump black man, fishing.

Never had Harry Wharton and Co. been so glad to see Tio Jose. They liked the plump black man, whose jetty Countenance always beamed with good humour. At the present moment they could almost have hugged him.

They had covered a mile since starting back. A mile in an English lane would not have bothered even Billy Bunter unduly. But a mile in a tangled South American forest was a very different proposition. They dragged at clinging creepers, stumbled over jutting roots, tore their clothes on thorny thickets, streaming with perspiration in the tropical heat. Six of them took turns in giving Billy Bunter a helping hand. Only an occasional glimpse of the river was their guide. It was a relief to get out of the pathless forest, when at last it gave place to a stretch of swamp — though the latter, in itself, was far from attractive. Their feet sank deep in mud and slime, stirring up scents that were far from reminding them of attar of roses, and a blazing sun burned down on them. But it was easier going than the forest, and they tramped and stumbled on, to an accompaniment of incessant squeaks and groans from Bunter — wishing from the bottom of their hearts that they had taken Mr. Funcho’s advice, and had not started on that ill-fated expedition to the island in the Araguaya

It was sheer joy to sight Tio Jose in his fishing canoe. At least two miles more lay ahead of them, and then somehow they had to get across the river to the quinta. Had Tio Jose’s black face been a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, they could not have beheld it with more satisfaction.

Well, this is luck!” gasped Bob Cherry, dashing a torrent of perspiration from a face that was as red as a freshly-boiled beetroot.

“The luckfulness is terrific!”

“Give him a shout!” said Nugent.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob.

Tio Jose was intent on his fishing, and had not noticed the draggled figures that trailed along the swampy shore. But Bob’s stentorian roar reached his ears, and he jumped, and stared round. His startled eyes rolled in his black face as he saw the schoolboys. He had seen them start from the desembarcadouro three or four hours ago, a cheery party; and certainly had not expected to see them returning like this — on foot, dragging wearily through the swamp, mud-spattered from top to toe. He sat and stared blankly.

They waved to him, and Bob, luckily remembering the Portuguese word for “help,” roared:

Socorro! Socorro! ”

Evidently Tio Jose understood, for he seized his paddle, and the canoe, which was some distance out on the river, shot shoreward.

“I say, you fellows, who’s that?” asked Billy Bunter, blinking at the canoe through muddy spectacles.

“Tio Jose, ” answered Harry. “Come on, Bunter! He will give us a lift in his canoe back to the quinta! ”

“Oh, lor’! This filthy mud —!” groaned Bunter.

“Poor old Bunter!” said Bob. “This is tougher on Bunter than it is on us, you fellows. ”

“Is it?” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Yes! He will have to wash when he gets in! Even Bunter will have to wash, after this! ”

“Beast!” groaned Bunter.

Closer to the river, the muddy ground was softer and slimier. The juniors sank to their knees as they tramped down to the water, dragging one weary leg after the other. There was a yelp from Bunter, as he plunged in a soft spot, and the reeking mud surrounded the widest waist in South America.

“Ow! Ooooh! Help! Oh, crikey! ”

Six weary fellows dragged him out. Billy Bunter gurgled for breath, and came to a halt. Fifty yards of swamp remained to be crossed, to reach the canoe where Tio Jose awaited them. It seemed too much for Bunter.

Come on, old fat man,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Shan’t!” hooted Bunter. “I’m going to sit on that log and rest a bit, and you can jolly well wait for me, so yah! ”

What looked like a huge log half-embedded in the mud lay close at hand, and it was the first solid object Bunter had seen, since entering the swamp, on which a fellow could sit. So he was going to sit on it.

Heedless of expostulations, he rolled towards the sunken log.

“Oh, come on!” growled Johnny Bull. “It’s only a step now, fathead, and we’re all ready to drop. ”

“Shan’t! ”

“Look here, Bunter —!” exclaimed Nugent.

“Beast! I’m going to sit down! I’m going to have a rest! I’m going to sit down for ten minutes at least! I’m going to — yarooooooh!”

Billy Bunter uttered a yell of alarm. How a log that had floated ashore, and become embedded in the mud, could suddenly heave up of its own volition, was a mystery to Bunter. He had, naturally, not expected it to do anything of the kind. But it did!

“Look out!” shrieked Bob.

“Oh, crikey! ”

As the log heaved up, it was revealed that it had a head at one end, and a tail at the other. Billy Bunter’s eyes almost popped through his spectacles, as he realised that he had very nearly sat down on an alligator sleeping in the mud.

He gave the lifting head and opening jaws one blink. Then he bounded. He forgot that he was tired. The speed that Billy Bunter put on, at that moment, looked as if he would have had a chance in the 100 yards at Greyfriars. He fairly whizzed! ”

The other fellows were not slow to move. But Billy Bunter was an easy first, as they raced down to the river, splashing frantically through the mud, sending up showers of

spraying slime. Whether the startled alligator waddled after them, they did not know. They reached the water, and plunged through mud and shallows to the canoe. Tio Jose helped them in. The fishing canoe was crowded from end to end, with seven fellows in addition to his Own plump self.

“Que pena! que pena!” said Tio Jose, as he paddled out into the Araguaya, and turned the crowded canoe against the sluggish current. “You lose canoe? Sim! sim! Que pena!”

“I say, you fellows —!”

“Jolly glad of this lift home,” said Bob. “Anybody tired?”

“Just a few!” murmured Nugent.

“The fewfulness is terrific!”

“I say, you fellows, do give a fellow room! A fellow can hardly breathe, crammed like this!” yelled Billy Bunter, indignantly.

“Like to get out and walk?” asked Bob. “You might find an alligator handy, to sit down and rest every now and then.”

“Beast!” hooted Bunter. “Will you give a fellow room or not?”

“Not!” answered Johnny Bull. “But I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Bunter. If you don’t shut up, I’ll dip your silly head into the river.”

Billy Bunter decided to shut up.

It was slow work for Tio Jose, paddling up the river with the overloaded canoe. But the quinta came in sight at last, white walls and green verandahs glimmering in the sunshine. Three or four moços on the desembarcadouro stared as the canoe arrived, and a dapper figure in white ducks and Panama hat came hurrying down to the landing-place to meet the juniors as they scrambled ashore.

“Corpo de Deos! What has happened?” exclaimed Martinho Funcho, staring. “Some accident to your canoe, senhores?”

“O Corvo happened, Mr. Funcho,” answered Bob Cherry.

Martinho raised his black eyebrows.

“O Corvo!” he repeated. “But what —?”

Billy Bunter rolled off towards the house. But the other fellows stayed, to explain to the assistant-manager what had happened that morning on the Araguaya. Mr. Funcho listened, with many exclamations and sympathetic gestures.

“But I do not think that it was O Corvo,” he said, shaking his head. “He is far away — sim! sim! Some friend of his — he has many friends among the velhacos of the sertão. Some bravo of his friends — sim! sim!”

“Very likely,” said Harry. “We never saw the man, whoever he was.”

“The esteemed Senhor Funcho is right,” said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. “It was some friend of the absurd bandit, in my ridiculous opinion.”

Mr. Funcho nodded and smiled. Then his olive face became very grave.

“I will send word to the capitão at Porto Lucar,” he said. “But I beg you, senhores, not to take such risks again — you are not safe on the Araguaya at a distance from the quinta, since you have made such enemies.”

The juniors tramped up to the house, leaving Dom Martinho shaking his head. As they went in through the verandah, Harry Wharton caught Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh by the arm and stopped him.

“Look here, Inky, what did you mean?” he asked in a low voice. “What makes you so sure that the man who fired on us was not O Corvo, but a friend of his? Look here, what have you got into your head now?”

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh shrugged his shoulders.

“It was a friend of his, who did not want us to go to the island,” he answered, quietly.

“As we did not take his advice to keep away from the island, I thinkfully opine that he took other measures.”

Harry Wharton caught his breath.

“Inky! You don’t think — that Funcho —!” he stammered.

“The esteemed Funcho does not wish us to visit that island,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“But — old chap —.”

“And he must have a reason. The ridiculous O Corvo has not fled across the Araguaya into the Indian country.”

“But why should he stick on that island?” exclaimed Harry. “Why on earth should he stick there — if he is there? I suppose that’s what you mean.”

Quitefully, ” assented the nabob.

“But why —?”

“The whyfulness is not clear, my esteemed chum. There is some secret about that island in the Araguaya — some reason why O Corvo chooses it for his camp — and the esteemed Funcho does not want us to fall in with him again there. That is why our canoe was sunk — and I am terrifically sure that the esteemed Funcho will keep an eye very wide open for another trip in the same direction,” said the nabob of Bhanipur.

“But — but what secret — what can possibly be going on, on an uninhabited island in the Araguaya, ten miles or more from everywhere —?”

“Esteemed goodness knows that,” answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But the execrable O Corvo is there, my absurd chum, and the ridiculous Funcho does not want him to receive any more visitors.”

“I can’t quite get it down,” said Harry.

But his face was very thoughtful as he went into the house. He had great faith in the keenness of his dusky chum; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had no doubt at all on the subject. Yet what secret could be hidden in that wooded island in the Araguaya — what mysterious reason could the outcast O Corvo have for fixing his camp there — and what connection could exist between the dingy, disreputable outcast of the sertão, and the assistant-manager of the Quinta Branca? Even the keen-witted nabob could not think of an answer to that.

CHAPTER XXIX

DEEP!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

His fat face had been frowning. Now the frown was replaced by an expansive grin, which extended almost from one fat ear to the other.

Something, it was clear, was working in the fat Owl’s fat mind. Or rather, it would have been clear had anyone been observing Bunter.

But nobody was! Important fellow as Billy Bunter was, the only fellow indeed in the holiday party at the Quinta Branca who really mattered, nobody at the moment seemed even to remember his fat existence.

It was a hot afternoon. The Greyfriars party were gathered on the deep shady verandah.

Lord Mauleverer, reclining in a long cane chair, had a thoughtful expression on his face: thinking, doubtless, of his cousin Brian, and the strange and inexplicable

absence of the manager of the quinta. The Famous Five were debating whether it was still too hot to start on a ride on the campo. Bunter, sprawling, sucked a chunk of sugar-cane.

From the manager's office, at the end of the verandah, came a distant click-click of a typewriter, showing that Mr. Funcho was busy there. Billy Bunter frowned as that sound reached his ears. It reminded him of his terrifying experience in that office a couple of weeks ago.

But the clicking ceased, and Mr. Funcho came out of the office. He glanced at the juniors, perhaps unconscious of an inimical blink from behind a big pair of spectacles. With his usual effusive politeness, he swept off his Panama hat and bowed, as he passed the group of schoolboys, and went down the steps into the garden.

Whether he murmured "Mocho estúpido" as he passed Bunter, Bunter didn't know. If he did, it was inaudible. But Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, followed him, as he crossed the garden, and disappeared by the gate into the coffee fields. And it was then that the fat Owl's frown was replaced by an expansive grin.

He blinked round at the other juniors.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Coming for a ride, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Eh! Oh! No! I've got something else to do," answered Bunter. "I mean, I haven't anything else to do — but it's too jolly hot! That is, I — I mean, I — I can't ride today — I've got a touch of plumbago from being soaked in the river the other day."

"A touch of whatter?" ejaculated Bob.

"I was soaked to the skin," said Bunter. "I shouldn't wonder if it turns to pneumonia — my leg feels like it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" said Bunter, sardonically. "Funny, ain't it, for a fellow to be laid up with plumbago and pneumonia in his legs! That's the sort of sympathy I expect from you fellows, after all I've done for you. Look here, why don't you fellows go out? What are you slacking about for?"

"Who's slacking?" inquired Johnny Bull, in a voice rather like that of the Great Huge Bear.

"You are!" retorted Bunter. "That Dago's gone out — why don't you go? Makes a fellow tired to see you slacking about. Take Mauly with you — it will do him good, instead of lolling in that chair."

Harry Wharton and Co. looked at the fat Owl. A grin dawned on the dusky visage of Hurree Janset Ram Singh. Bob Cherry chuckled. Johnny Bull grunted. Why Billy Bunter, all of a sudden, wanted to get rid of the other fellows, was a puzzle for a moment — but it was clear that Bunter did. But a moment's thought elucidated the puzzle.

"You blithering owl," said Frank Nugent. "Are you thinking of playing another idiotic trick in Mr. Funcho's office now he's gone out?"

"Eh! Oh! No," said Bunter, hastily. "Nothing of the kind. I never noticed him go out, and I wasn't watching him go through the gate, either. Still, now he's gone, a fellow could get at his typewriter. Not that I'm thinking of doing anything of the kind, of course. Why should I?"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bob.

"The fellow's beneath my notice," said Bunter, loftily.

"He smacked my head and called me names. I'd knock him down as soon as look at him — but I'm not going to soil my hands on him."

“You’ve soiled them on a good many other things,” remarked Johnny Bull. “Sugar-cane, and toffee, and —.”

“Yah! I say, you fellows, ain’t you going for a ride?” asked Bunter, anxiously.

“Mind, I’m not trying to get shot of you while I go into Funcho’s office —. Don’t get that idea into your heads.”

“Oh, scissors!” gasped Bob.

“You dithering dummy,” said Harry Wharton. “You can’t rag Mr. Funcho’s office like a study in the Remove passage. Now, look here, fathead, if you upset anything in that office, we’ll burst you all over the quinta.”

“I ain’t going to upset anything — I ain’t going to ship the room,” explained Bunter. “But the cheeky beast called me names, and I can jolly well call him a cheeky Dago if I jolly well like.”

“Better guard with your left when you do!” grinned Bob.

“You howlin’ ass,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Do you want Mr. Funcho to smack your silly head again?”

“How’s he going to know it was me?” grinned Bunter.

“What?”

“I might leave a message for him to see when he comes in, and I might not,” said Bunter, astutely. “That’s telling!”

“Oh, fan me!” said Bob Cherry. “If you leave a message for Funcho, you benighted bandersnatch, he will only have to inquire which fellow here writes like a fly crawling out of the inkpot.”

“He, he, he! That’s all you know” chuckled Bunter. “Not that I’m going into Funcho’s office when you fellows are gone, you know. As for using his typewriter, so that he won’t know, I never thought of it. In fact, I never noticed the typewriter when I was in the room that time — never noticed it at all. I — I’m going to have a nap when you fellows are gone! I say, I wish you’d get off — what are you hanging about for?”

“Ain’t he deep?” said Bob Cherry. “Ain’t he the deepest jolly old plotter that ever Was?”

“No deception, gentlemen!” grinned Nugent.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Funcho won’t cackle, when I call him a cheeky Dago and tell him that he wants kicking,” said Bunter. “I say, you fellows, do stop slacking about here — it’s a lovely day for a ride.”

“Let us departfully relieve Bunter of our esteemed and obnoxious presence, my worthy chums,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

We can’t let that fat idiot play tricks on Funcho,” said Harry. “We can’t always be stopping him smacking the fat chump’s head.”

“Oh, really, Wharton —.”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh closed one eye at his chums, unseen by the fat Owl. And realising that the nabob had something to say that Bunter was not to hear, the juniors said no more, but moved off towards the steps, Lord Mauleverer ambling placidly after the Famous Five.

Billy Bunter watched them go, his little round eyes gleaming behind his big round spectacles. His grin grew wider and wider, as he watched them descend the steps, and cross the sunny garden. They disappeared behind a clump of trees, and Bunter chuckled. The coast was clear now — so far as the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove could see.

But that was not very far!

Six fellows stopped in the clump of trees, out of the range of Billy Bunter's spectacles, and looked back. They beheld Billy Bunter sit up, grinning from ear to ear. They beheld him heave to his feet.

Then he rolled along towards the manager's office at the end of the verandah.

"The footling fathead!" said Bob. "He's going to type something on Funcho's machine, and leave it for Funcho to see when he comes in. That's the big idea! Did anybody guess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But it will be terrifically easy to slip into the office and removefully abstract the esteemed Bunter's idiotic message to Funcho," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Then he will think that he has left the message, and the estimable Funcho will not find it, and everybody will be preposterously satisfied."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors, grinning, continued to watch. Faintly, from afar, came the click of the typewriter. Bunter was at work!

But he was not long in the manager's office. No doubt his previous experience had warned him not to linger there. He emerged again, blinked round him cautiously, and rolled back along the verandah. But he did not return to his seat. Billy Bunter was not very bright — but he was too bright to let Mr. Funcho catch him alone on the spot when he came in and found the message that had been left for him in his office. He rolled into the house, and a fat chuckle floated back as he disappeared.

And half-a-dozen juniors, grinning, strolled back to the verandah, and walked along to the manager's office, to ascertain exactly what complimentary message the egregious Owl had left for Martinho Funcho.

There was nothing, when they stepped into the manager's office, to indicate that an intruder had been there. But when Hurree Jamset Ram Singh lifted the dust-cover from the typewriter, they saw.

A sheet of paper was left on the roller. Bunter had not taken it out after typing it, but left it to meet Mr. Funcho's eyes the next time he sat down at the machine. The juniors gazed at it.

"The ass!" breathed Lord Mauleverer.

"The fathead!"

The blithering bloater "

"The howling idiot!"

"The terrific chump!"

The dithering owl!"

Six fellows made remarks, all at once, as they looked

The message left on the typewriter ran:

Marteenyo Foonshow is a beestly cheaky Dago,
and ort to be jolly well kikked.

Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at that cheery message. They hardly dared contemplate what would have happened had it remained there to meet Mr. Funcho's eyes.

Martinho Funcho was well acquainted with the English language, which he could speak, read, and write, with ease.



Six fellows made remarks, all at once,
as they looked

But he was likely to experience a little difficulty with that message, if he found it. Indeed, it was doubtful whether he would recognise his own name at the first glance, Bunter having spelt it by ear, as it were, which would have appeared strange enough to eyes accustomed to the Portuguese spelling.

Still, there was no doubt that Mr. Funcho, if he read that message, would “tumble” sooner or later to its meaning; and equally no doubt that, having “tumbled,” he would go off at the deep end most emphatically. The word “Dago” would have pleased him about as much as the word “nigger” pleased Tio Jose.

Certainly, there was no clue to the writer of the message. Billy Bunter had been awfully deep about that. Anyone might have stepped into the office and tapped out that message on the typewriter!

But no clue, really, was needed. Martinho Funcho could hardly have doubted that it was the fellow whose head he had smacked who had done it.

“The unspeakable blitherer!” breathed Bob Cherry. “If Funcho saw that —.”

“He would see red!” remarked Nugent.

“The redfulness would be terrific,” said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. “And the smackfulness of Bunter’s idiotic head would be preposterous. But a stitch in time saves the cracked pitcher from going longest to a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks.”

And Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh extracted the typed sheet from the roller, and slipped it into his pocket.

Then the dust-cover was replaced on the machine, and the juniors left the manager’s office. A quarter of an hour later they were riding cheerily over the campo: what time Billy Bunter snored through the hot drowsy hours under a mosquito net in his room.

And if the fat Owl dreamed, he certainly did not dream that his complimentary message to Martinho Funcho was miles away in the pocket of the nabob of Bhanipur.

CHAPTER XXX

BUNTER WISHES HE HADN’T!

“HE, he, he!”

Thus William George Bunter.

Bunter seemed amused that starry evening.

It was night in the valley of the Araguaya: a lovely southern night. Overhead, in a sky of the deepest blue, sailed the full round moon, streaming down light that made the garden of the quinta almost as bright as by day. Myriads of stars glistened and glittered, reflected in the wide river that rolled by the quinta. A cool breeze from the mountains in the west was delightful after the blazing heat of the tropical day.

Harry Wharton and Co., pleasantly tired after a long gallop on the campo, sat in deck-chairs in the moonlit garden, and sipped coffee placed on little tables by the beaming and indefatigable Tio Jose. Billy Bunter, also pleasantly tired after his exertions at supper, was blinking at a glowing spot in the deep shade of the verandah at a little distance, where Dom Martinho Funcho was smoking a cigarette. And when that glowing spot moved along in the direction of the manager's office, Bunter chuckled. Mr. Funcho was going to his office, and Bunter expected him to make a discovery there.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, Funcho's going to his office. He, he, he!"

Six juniors exchanged smiling glances.

"Well, what's the jolly old joke, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry. "Anything funny in Mr Funcho going to his office?"

"Oh! No! Of — of course not," said Bunter, hastily. "If he finds anything there, I don't know anything about it, of Course."

"What is he going to find there?" grinned Nugent.

"Nothing, that I know of! Still, he might," answered Bunter, cautiously. "Might be something on his typewriter, for all I know! He, he, he!"

"Anybody been messin' about with Mr. Funcho's typewriter?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"I — I shouldn't think so, Mauly! Who would?" asked Bunter. "I certainly never went into the office after you fellows had gone out this afternoon. Besides, I never touched the typewriter while I was there. Never even noticed it."

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"If there's anything, say a message, sticking on that typewriter, I know nothing at all about it," said Bunter.

"Mind, I wouldn't mind telling you fellows, but a chap can't be too careful, with a wildcat like Funcho — springing at a fellow like a tiger and smacking his head! You might let it out if I told you. Besides, there's nothing to tell you, that I know of."

"Bunter's the man to keep secrets!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Ain't he deep? Wasn't jolly old Machiavelli a fool to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, least said soonest mended, you know," said Bunter, sagely. "I'll bet Funcho will go off at the deep end when he finds that message on his machine, ana I don't want him jumping on me."

"What message?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Eh! Oh! Nothing! If there's any message on his typewriter, I don't know anything about it. How could I, when I never went into his office this afternoon and typed it, or anything. Still, calling him a Dago will make him sit up, what? He, he, he."

"The sit-upfulness will probably be terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But perhapsfully the esteemed Funcho will not find the absurd message."

"Well, he can't miss it, if he sits down to write a letter," said Bunter. "Staring him in the face, see? I say, you fellows, think he's gone to his office to write letters? He does a lot of business correspondence in the evening."

“Shouldn’t wonder,” said Bob.

“He, he, he!” chortled Bunter.

A light gleamed from the window of the manager’s office. Mr. Funcho had lighted the lamp there. Billy Bunter watched, grinning. It was very probable that Mr. Funcho had gone there to deal with business correspondence, as he often did in the cool of the evening, after the day’s work on the plantation was over. If so, he could not miss that complimentary message left on the typewriter — so far as Billy Bunter could see, at all events.

Click! click! click!

The sound of the typewriter keys came through the still evening air. Mr. Funcho, evidently, was at his business correspondence.

The grin faded off Bunter’s fat countenance. He was puzzled.

“I say, you fellows, he must have seen it!” squeaked Bunter. “He couldn’t miss it, staring him in the face like that, could he?”

“Couldn’t miss what?” asked Bob.

“Oh! Nothing.”

The fat Owl blinked at the lighted window of the office, more and more perplexed. Martinho Funcho couldn’t have missed that message on the roller — he just couldn’t. It would stare him in the face the moment he sat down to the machine. Yet he seemed to be getting on with his business correspondence just as if nothing had happened!

“I say, you fellows, it’s queer!” said Bunter.

“What is the ridiculous queerfulness?” asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Well, he must have seen it,” said Bunter. “Must have seen what?” asked Bob.

“Oh! Nothing! But I say, you fellows, wouldn’t you think Funcho would go off at the deep end if a fellow called him a cheeky Dago?”

“Yes, rather.”

“The ratherfulness is terrific.”

“Have you been calling him a Dago, Bunter?” asked Harry Wharton. “If you have, you’d better look out for squalls.”

“Well, he won’t know it was me,” said Bunter. “I took jolly good care to keep clear after I’d done it — I wasn’t seen anywhere near the place. Not that I did anything, you know.”

“We know!” chuckled Bob.

“Besides, how could he guess it was me?” argued Bunter. “Anybody could tap out a message on a typewriter. I thought that out, you know — I’m pretty wide. I’ve got brains.”

“You have?” asked Bob, in surprise. “First I’ve heard of it.”

“Oh, really, Cherry —.”

“Where do you keep them?” asked Nugent.

“And why don’t you use them sometimes?” inquired Johnny Bull.

“Yah!” retorted Bunter. “If you fellows had as much brains in your heads as I’ve got in my little finger, you’d be twice as clever as you jolly well ain’t. Look here, Funcho won’t be able to spot who did it. But why ain’t he kicking up a row about it? That’s jolly queer. I thought he’d come out in a fearful temper.”

There was a chuckle in the moonlit garden. Harry Wharton and Co. did not doubt that, had Martinho Funcho’s eyes fallen on that cheery message, he would have come out in a fearful temper. Fortunately, his eyes hadn’t!

The click of the machine ceased in the office. The light was turned out. A figure in white ducks glimmered on the dark verandah.

“I — I say, you fellows, he’s coming out,” mumbled Bunter. “I — I — I say, if he’s

after somebody, it — it wasn't me, you know. ”

The fat Owl was feeling a tremor. He was sure that he had covered his tracks — Funcho couldn't know! Still, he felt a tremor.

“If it wasn't you, you're all right, ” said Bob. “But if it was you, and he guesses it was you, look out for tornadoes and earthquakes. ”

“He — he couldn't! ” gasped Bunter. “ I — I say, how could he jolly well guess that it was me, you beast? Bunter blinked anxiously at half-a-dozen faces grinning in the moonlight. “I — I say, think he might think I did it because he smacked my head that time? ” That rather obvious consideration occurred to Billy Bunter's powerful brain a little late! “ I — I say, you fellows, if — if he guesses —oh, lor'! ”

Bunter blinked at the dim figure on the verandah.

“I say, you fellows, d-d-does he look waxy? ” breathed Bunter.

“Can't make out his face in that shadow, ” answered Bob. “But he's got something in his hand. Is it a big stick, you fellows? ”

“Oh, crikey! ”

“He's certainly got something in his hand, ” said Harry Wharton. “Look here, Bunter, if you've really been calling him names —. ”

“I — I haven't! I — I say, what has he got in his hand? Is — is — is it a b-b-big stick? ” gasped Bunter. “I — I say, if — if he thinks it was me, you fellows keep him off. I — I never did it,

and I — I won't do it again! ”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, he's coming down, ” exclaimed Bob.

“Look out, Bunter. ”

“Better hook it! ”

Martinho Funcho was at the top of the verandah steps. Certainly he had something in his hand — he was rolling a cigarette! The fat Owl, unaware of that little circumstance, blinked at him in great alarm, as he came down the steps.

“Hook it, Bunter. ”

“Here he comes! ”

Bunter gave the assistant-manager of the Quinta Branca a last alarmed blink, and bolted. Six fellows chuckled, and Martinho Funcho stared, as a fat figure streaked across the garden in the light of the moon, and vanished into the orange trees. Mr. Funcho nodded to the juniors, and strolled on down the garden, smoking his cigarette. Ten minutes after the assistant-manager had disappeared, a fat figure crept out of the orange trees. Billy Bunter blinked round him cautiously, and rolled over to the group in the deck chairs.

“I — I — I say, you fellows, w-w-was he after me? ” breathed Bunter.

“He wasn't after anybody else, ” answered Bob.

“Oh, lor'! ”

“You shouldn't do these things, old fat man, ” said Frank Nugent, shaking his head.

“If you call Funcho fancy names, better steer clear of him. ”

“I can't keep on dodging the beast, ” groaned Bunter. “ I — I never thought he would guess it was me! I — I say, you fellows, suppose you collar him, and — and sit on him, if he cuts up rusty —. ”

“Ha, ha, ha! ”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! If you think I'm going to be pitched into by a Dago with a big stick — ”.

“Ha, ha, ha! ” yelled the juniors.

“I — I say, you fellows, I — I never did it, and — and I wish I hadn't. I — I say, I — I won't have that bad-tempered beast after me —. ”

“He’s going down to Porto Lucar in the morning,” grinned Bob. “Keep out of sight till he’s gone.”

“I — I can’t! I should be late for brekker.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I say, you fellows, be pals, and stand by a chap,” urged Bunter. “We’re pals, ain’t we? Don’t let a fellow down! You know what Browning says — kind hearts are more than coroners —.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Wasn’t it Tennyson?” gasped Bob. “And wasn’t it coronets?”

“No, it wasn’t! I — I mean, yes, it was, if you like, old chap! Look here, you stand by a fellow. I never did it, and I wouldn’t have, if I’d known he would guess and I wish I hadn’t —.”

“Sure you wish you hadn’t?” asked Bob.

“Yes, old fellow — honour bright!”

“Well, if you wish you hadn’t, we may as well tell you that you didn’t,” said Bob, cheerily. “You see, you fat ass, we hooked that paper off the typewriter a few minutes after you left it there —.”

“So Funcho never saw it at all —.”

“Wha-a-at?”

“And he’s not after you —.”

“Oh!”

“And he’s not got a big stick —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Why, you — you — you beasts!” gasped Bunter “Pulling a fellow’s leg all the time.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the Co.

“Beasts!” roared Bunter.

“Inky’s got the paper in his pocket,” said Bob.

“Like to show it to Funcho after all, Bunter? Here he comes — Inky will give you the paper if you ask him nicely.”

Martinho Funcho, having strolled as far as the river, was strolling back up the garden, still smoking cigarettes. Billy Bunter blinked at him as he came, with an inimical blink — but he did not ask Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to produce the paper. He seemed quite satisfied to leave it where it was.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LETTER FROM RIO!

“Is that the carter?” asked Billy Bunter.

“The whatter?”

“The carter,” repeated Bunter, peevishly. “Haven’t you been here long enough to learn that a postman’s called a carter here?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

It’s the carteiro, fathead, if that’s what you mean,” said Bob Cherry.

After breakfast in the sunny morning, six fellows, on the verandah of the Quinta Branca, were discussing a ride on the campo. Billy Bunter was not joining in that discussion. Galloping on the undulating campo did not appeal very much to Bunter. Bunter had an eye on a hammock under a shady tree by the garden path. But the sight

of a dusky Indian in calico shorts coming up from the desembarcadouro interested Bunter. Perhaps he had a lingering hope that his long-expected postal order might have followed him out to Brazil.

“The carteiro!” Lord Mauleverer looked round. “Is that the jolly old postman? Good!”

The carteiro came up the Araguaya in his canoe once a week to the Quinta Branca. Mr. Funcho had mentioned that he was due that morning, and the Greyfriars fellows waited for his arrival before starting on their ride. Little or nothing as Lord Mauleverer said on the subject, his friends knew how anxious he was for the expected letter from his cousin Brian.

“I say, you fellows, I hope he’s got something for me this time,” said the fat Owl. “I told them to send everything on, you know — and I’m expecting a postal order —.”

“The one you were expecting last term at Greyfriars?” asked Bob.

“Or the one you were expecting the term before?” inquired Nugent.

“Yah!” retorted Bunter.

There was a step on the verandah. Mr. Funcho came out of his office, and came along to the group of juniors, sweeping off his Panama hat and bowing, with his usual exuberant politeness. Moços on the desembarcadouro were loading the batalão on which Mr. Funcho was going down to Porto Lucar that morning. It was time for Mr. Funcho to go: but no doubt he, like the Greyfriars fellows, had waited for the post to come in.

“A fine morning, senhores,” said Mr. Funcho. “But are not all the mornings fine here? A fine day for a trip on the river. Perhaps you would like to come on the batalão to the porto? Your company would be a pleasure and an honour to me.”

Harry Wharton caught the glimmer in the dark eyes of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as the assistant-manager made that remark.

He was aware of what was in the nabob’s mind — that as he was to be away from the quinta, Mr. Funcho would have preferred to keep the Greyfriars party under his eyes — in case they should think of another visit to the mysterious island during his absence. But if that thought was in the assistant-manager’s mind, certainly his smiling face gave no sign of it.

“Thank you, Mr. Funcho,” answered Harry. “But we’re going for a ride on the campo. Tio Jose’s packing our lunch now.”

Mr. Funcho nodded and smiled. If, as Wharton knew the nabob suspected, he was not quite easy about what the juniors might do in his absence, no doubt he was relieved to hear that they were going riding on the campo.

In any case, none of the juniors would have cared to accompany Mr. Funcho on another trip to Porto Lucar.

What they had seen on the last occasion had been more than enough for them. No doubt Mr. Funcho had business at the river-port, but it was probable that his visit there was not wholly unconnected with the big white building in the praca — O Casino de Porto Lucar. They had already learned more than they wanted to know of Mr. Funcho’s manners and customs.

“Ah! Here is the carteiro!” Mr. Funcho glanced at the man coming up the garden. He leaned over the verandah rail and waved a hand. “Venha!”

The carteiro came up the steps. Billy Bunter half rose from his long chair, blinking at him through his big spectacles.

But there was nothing for Bunter. Once more the fat Owl was disappointed about a postal order! The carteiro took only one letter from his bag, and it was addressed to Lord Mauleverer.

“For you, senhor my lord!” said Martinho Funcho, and he took the letter from the carteiro, and passed it, with a bow, to Lord Mauleverer. Mauly glanced at it with a faint surprise. The address on the envelope was typewritten. He had expected to see his cousin’s hand. But the post mark was Rio de Janeiro, and there could be no doubt that it was the long-expected letter from Brian. Martinho’s eyes lingered, for a second, with a curious expression on Lord Mauleverer, as he slit the envelope. Then he went down the steps, and Harry Wharton glanced at his companions. What might be in that letter from the missing manager of the Quinta Branca, they did not know, but it was tactful to leave Mauleverer alone to read it.

“We’ll come and see you off, Mr. Funcho,” said Bob.

“I am honoured, senhor!” said Mr. Funcho.

The Famous Five followed him down the steps into the garden.

“Come on, Bunter,” called out Bob.

“Rot!” answered Bunter.

And he remained where he was. Bunter, as soon as he felt disposed to move, was going to roll as far as the hammock under the shady tree. He certainly was not disposed to roll down to the desembarcadouro to see Mr. Funcho off in the batalão. Mr. Funcho chatted pleasantly as they walked down to the landing-place. He seemed to be in great spirits that morning. Harry Wharton and Co. were in a rather thoughtful mood. They could not help feeling a little worried about the letter from Rio, and what effect it might have on Mauly. Even after the telegram, they knew that Mauleverer still hoped to see his cousin arrive at the quinta, and it was likely enough that Brian’s letter meant a disappointment for him.

Martinho Funcho stepped on the batalão, and the Indian crew pushed off.

“Adeus, senhores!” called out Martinho, as the long laden craft slid out on the current of the Araguaya. “A pleasant ride on the campo, senhores!”

And Mr. Funcho raised his Panama hat, and bowed, before he sat down, and rolled himself a cigarette.

The juniors watched the batalão as it rolled away down the river, and the dapper figure in white ducks, in a little cloud of tobacco smoke. They little dreamed, at that moment, what was to happen, before they set eyes upon Martinho Funcho again. In fact, they forgot Martinho’s existence, as the batalão disappeared down the winding Araguaya.

“Bother that fellow Brian!” said Bob Cherry, as they left the desembarcadouro to walk back to the house. “Ten to one there’s a spot of bother in that letter for poor old Mauly.”

Harry Wharton nodded.

“He can’t be coming back,” he said.

“He would have come before this, if he was coming,” grunted Johnny Bull. “That letter’s to tell Mauly he’s cleared off.”

“It’s rotten,” said Nugent. “Mauly came out here to see him, more than anything else — and now —.”

“Good riddance to bad rubbish, if Mauly could see it!” said Johnny.

“Mauly won’t look at it like that!”

“Bother him!” said Bob.

They walked up the path to the house. A fat voice called to them from a hammock under a tree, beside the path near the verandah steps.

“I say, you fellows!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Coming for a ride this morning, Bunter?” asked Bob Cherry.

“We’ll pick you up every time you fall off.”

“Oh, really, Cherry!” Billy Bunter sat up in the hammock, and blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. “I say, know what’s upset Mauly?”

“Is he upset?” asked Harry.

“Well, he looked pretty sick, when I left him,” said Bunter. “Bad tempered too — snapped at a fellow, when I asked him what was the matter. I suppose it was something he had for brekker.”

“Something he had for brekker!” repeated Harry.

“Well, I don’t see what else can have upset him. It can’t have been the fish,” said Bunter. “I had some of that — quite a lot of it — and I’m all right. It can’t have been the honey — that was good. Think it was the pineapple?”

“The pineapple?”

“Well, I had something of everything else, and I feel all right,” explained Bunter. “I hadn’t any room for the pineapple — I mean, I’m not always stuffing like some fellows I could name. The pineapples we get here are good — not quite like those we grow in the pineries at Bunter Court — but pretty good. Still, you never can tell, in this climate.” Bunter shook his head. “Did you fellows notice whether Mauly had any of the pineapple?”

“You howling ass —!”

“You needn’t call a fellow names, Bob Cherry, because he’s worried about poor old Mauly,” said Bunter. “He’s a pal of mine. I can tell you that something’s upset him. You wouldn’t notice, I dare say — fat lot you care if he shoots the cat all over the shop! I think of others. You don’t! That’s the difference.”

“You blithering owl——!”

“Selfishness all round,” said Bunter, shaking his fat head again. “Here’s Mauly, standing us a splendid holiday in Brazil — it’s a rotten country, I know, full of flies, and mosquitoes, and snakes, and bandits, and things — but you fellows can’t deny that the grub’s good. Why, we get more butter here in a week than we get in a year at home. And look at the bananas — bags of ’em! And the oranges — cart-loads! And the beef — ripping! And that stuff they call igglewana, or something. And the toffee — a bit hard, but jolly good, and as much as you want of it, and more! Mauly’s standing it all, and you fellows don’t even notice when he’s upset by something he’s had for brekker — I say, you fellows, don’t walk away while a fellow’s talking to you!” hooted Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk away, apparently having had enough of Billy Bunter’s entertaining conversation. They had no doubt that Mauly was “upset,” though they did not suppose, like the fat and fatuous Owl, that it was due to something at breakfast. Bunter’s was a one-track mind, and ran wholly on food, but Harry Wharton and Co. could guess easily enough that it was the letter from Rio that had disturbed Mauly. They went up the steps to the verandah, leaving Billy Bunter snorting in his hammock.

CHAPTER XXXII

STARTLING!

“MAULY!” exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Lord Mauleverer was standing by the rail, as the Famous Five came on to the verandah, with a letter in his hand. His face was quite pale. Evidently something in

that letter from Rio had given Mauleverer a shock.

He did not answer, as Harry Wharton spoke. The captain of the Remove tapped him on the shoulder.

“Mauly, old man! What’s the trouble? Bad news, old chap?”

“Yaas,” muttered Mauleverer. “Not too good.”

“It’s from Brian?”

“Oh! Yaas.”

“Is he coming back?”

“No!”

The juniors looked at him. Generally, whatever Mauly’s feelings might be, they were invisible under an aspect of cheery equability. He was the last fellow in the world to wear his heart upon his sleeve, but the letter from Rio had ruffled his accustomed calm.

“We won’t ask you the news, Mauly, if you’d rather not say,” said Harry, quietly. “But we’re all friends, here, old chap. Perhaps we can help.”

Mauleverer’s slim fingers closed on the letter in his hand. The chums of the Remove hardly needed telling that there was something in the letter, from the distant city on the Atlantic sea-board, that he hesitated to tell them.

“Two heads are thicker than one, my esteemed Mauly,” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “And in the multitude of counsels there is a stitch in time, as the English proverb remarks.”

“Eh? Oh! Yaas! Quite! But —.” Lord Mauleverer paused. “Look here, you fellows, perhaps you can help. Goodness knows what a fellow can do — we’re hundreds of miles from Rio, worse luck. But — I can’t let old Brian go off like that — I just can’t!”

“But what —?” asked Bob.

“Perhaps you can advise a fellow what’s best to be done,” muttered Lord Mauleverer. “I’ve got to do somethin’.”

“We’ll try, old chap!” said Nugent.

“I — I don’t want you to think too badly of old Brian.” Lord Mauleverer coloured. “He was always a bit of a rollin’ stone, gatherin’ precious little moss — but nobody’s enemy but his own. Nunky and I thought that he had settled down here — from his letters home we thought he liked the place and the life — even after that telegram, I — I hoped — well, look at the letter, and tell me what you think.”

Lord Mauleverer handed the letter to Harry Wharton. It was typewritten, save for the signature,

“Brian Mauleverer,” at the end. The only address on it was “Rio” at the top of the page.

The Famous Five read it together. Some of their faces were very expressive, as they read. The contents were not, perhaps, wholly surprising, in view of what they remembered of Brian Mauleverer and his old ways. But they could understand easily enough, as they read the typed lines, what a shock that letter had given Mauly.

My dear Cousin Herbert,

I suppose you had my telegram, and will be expecting this letter.

There is not much to explain.

Not long ago, I heard from an old friend of my South Sea days, who wanted me to join him in a new venture in the

Pacific Islands. I wanted to go, but could not make up my mind to tell you, after all your kindness. But it is all settled now. I am leaving Rio today, and going back to the South Seas. I have left the plantation in good condition, and Martinho Funcho is an able man, well fitted to carry on in my place. You can trust him. I did mean to keep on at the quinta. But I think I am a born wanderer. That is all I can say. You may as well forget all about me.
Brian Mauleverer.

Harry Wharton and Co. read the letter to the end.

Four faces were troubled and dismayed. What was written in that letter was not wholly unexpected. It had seen vaguely in their minds already, due to Brian's unaccountable absence from the quinta; and they had not forgotten Martinho Funcho's words, on the morning the telegram came. Vague surmises were now confirmed.

But there was a dusky face that had a very different expression on it.

A quick, alert look had come over Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's dusky visage. His dark eyes glinted.

He did not speak, but when the juniors had finished reading the letter, he took it from Wharton's hand, and examined it with a curious concentration.

The other fellows looked at Lord Mauleverer, hardly knowing what to say. Johnny Bull opened his lips, and closed them again. Johnny was not famous for tact, but he realised that Mauly couldn't want to know what he thought of the writer of that letter from Rio.

"That — that's pretty rotten, Mauly," said Harry, at last, haltingly.

"I — I suppose he got fed up, old chap," said Bob, uncomfortably. "A — a bit of a rolling stone, you know."

"He's left you a good man to carry on in his place," said Nugent.

"Yaas!" Lord Mauleverer nodded. "Old Brian never could stick in one place for long. It's as Funcho said, I suppose — you remember? He told us how Brian used to talk to him about the Pacific, and the islands — and that he'd had a letter from some old pal there. I suppose Funcho knew how the matter stood, but I couldn't get it down. I — I suppose Brian was gettin' fed up — but — but I wish I'd seen him before he went." The chums of the Remove said nothing to that. They did not wonder that the "rolling stone" had avoided meeting Mauly face to face, to tell him what he had now written from a distant city.

"But," went on Mauleverer, "the point is, what are we goin' to do?"

"Do!" repeated Harry. He could not see that there was anything to be done, if Brian Mauleverer had "chucked" his job and cleared off.

"I mean, I can't let him go like that! He says he's leavin' Rio to-day — and the letter's several days old. I — I suppose that means that he's gone."

"Can't mean anything else," said Nugent.

"If he's sailed from Rio already, it won't be easy to get on his track." Lord Mauleverer wrinkled his brows. "Might get somebody at Rio to find out what steamer he sailed in, or somethin'. Think so?"

"I — I suppose so," said Harry. "But what —?"

“I don’t want him gettin’ out of touch. If he has bad luck, I wouldn’t like to think of him combin’ the beach. ”

“Oh! ”

“I’m dashed if I know what to do. He’s finished here — but that don’t matter. Funcho can carry on here — Brian seems to think he’s a good man for the job. Nunky can find somethin’ else for Brian, when he needs it. ”

Mauleverer looked deeply perplexed. “You see, I’ve got to keep in touch with old Brian somehow. ”

It seemed that the man who had cleared off was still old Brian ” to Mauly. His kind-hearted tolerance was equal to even such a strain as this.

“What can a fellow do? ” asked Mauleverer. “ If you fellows can think of anythin’ to help —. ”

“I think you’re one of the best fellows breathing, Mauly, ” said Bob. “Can’t think of anything else just at the moment. ”

“Eh? Well, that doesn’t help much, does it? ” said Mauly. “Put our heads together and think it out, what? ”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had not said a word. He had been scanning the letter from Rio with keen, penetrating eyes. But now he looked up, with so strange an expression on his face, that the other fellows glanced at him in surprise.

“My esteemed Mauly —! ” murmured the nabob. “Go it, Inky! What do you think? ” asked Mauleverer.

“I thoughtfully opine that there is more in this absurd letter than meets the eye. And the morefulness is terrific, ” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Eh? How’s that? ” asked Bob. “It’s plain enough, isn’t it! Much what Mauly might have expected, after what Funcho said about the telegram. ”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled.

“Quitefully so, ” he said. “ But — . ”

“We’ve all read the letter, ” said Frank Nugent, in surprise. “ Nothing in it that we’ve missed, is there? ”

“I think so, my esteemed Franky. ”

“Mind makin’ it a bit clearer, Inky? ” asked Lord Mauleverer. “I’m no good at riddles, old man. ”

The juniors looked at Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in increasing surprise. What he could have seen in that letter from Rio, that they had missed, was quite a mystery to them.

The nabob tapped the letter with a dusky forefinger.

From this letter, my esteemed Mauly, you believe that Cousin Brian has thrown up his job here, and gone back to the South Seas? ”

“Yaas — that’s what he says, isn’t it?”

“So you will no longerfully expect him to return to the quinta? ”

“Eh? Of course not. ”

“And the estimable Funcho will be appointed manager in his place? ”

“That’s so. He’s been assistant-manager for a long time, and Brian thinks him a good man for the job. He says so in that letter. ”

“It would be quite a rise in the world for the worthy Funcho, ” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “A large salary would be useful to a person accustomed to losing money at O Casino at Porto Lucar. ”

“Wha-a-at? ” Lord Mauleverer stared blankly. “Inky! ” murmured Bob.

“What are you getting at, Inky? ” asked Harry Wharton, catching his breath. He knew the nabob’s deep distrust and suspicion of Martinho Funcho, which he more or less shared. Now it seemed to him that he had a vague, startling glimpse of what was in

the dusky junior's mind.

"This is what I am getting at," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, quietly. "This letter from Rio is not genuine. It was not written by Brian Mauleverer at all, and is signed with his name by another hand."

"What?"

"Inky!"

"Great pip!"

"Not genuine!" repeated Lord Mauleverer. "Good gad! What's put that into your head, Inky?"

"Good heavens!" breathed Harry. "Inky! You think —!"

"I do not think, my esteemed chum — I know!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "

This letter is like the last piece in the jig-saw puzzle that makes the picture completeful. I know now why Brian has not returned to the quinta — it is because he is kept away —."

"Kept away!" stuttered Lord Mauleverer.

"He is not at Rio, but, in my debilitated opinion, very much nearer," said the nabob. "The person who wrote this letter does not intend him to return, and that is why he has not come. It is not because he has thrown up his job and cleared out of Brazil, my esteemed Mauly. It is because he has disappeared, and this letter is written to account for his disappearance."

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT THE NABOB KNEW!

"DISAPPEARED!"

"Brian —?"

"What?"

"Inky!"

Lord Mauleverer gazed at the nabob, almost dazedly. Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Johnny Bull just gasped. But Harry Wharton's eyes were intent on Hurree Singh's dusky face. He had a glimmering of the truth now.

"Disappeared!" repeated Lord Mauleverer. "Are you dreaming, Inky? Funcho brought us his message in Rio —."

"And you wondered why he did not write even a line," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yaas! But — but the telegram — it's mentioned in that letter —."

"A proof that the telegram was a fake, my esteemed Mauly — for this letter is a fake, and the fakefulness is terrific."

"Good gad! You — you — you mean to say that that letter was not written by my cousin Brian at all?" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

"Exactfully."

But it's signed with his name!" exclaimed Nugent. "You — you — you don't mean —." He broke off, aghast.

"Good heavens!" breathed Bob. "I — I say, Inky —."

"Look here," said Johnny Bull. "I suppose you're not talking out of your hat, Inky. But what makes you think that letter a fake?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh held up the letter from Rio.

"You observe, my worthy chums, that the letter is written typefully," he said.

“Of course,” said Bob.

“Brian often typed his letters home,” said Lord Mauleverer. “What about that?”

“But then he had his typewriter here at the quinta, my esteemed Mauly. In Rio he must have borrowed a machine, to write a short note. Why should he?”

“Well, he did! There it is.”

“Here it certainly is,” agreed the nabob. But in my debilitated opinion it was typed for one particular reason.”

“Give it a name,” said Bob.

“The rascally person who wrote this letter could not rely upon his skill to the extent of writing a whole letter in Brian’s hand. That is why it is written typefully. By typing it, it was necessary to imitate only the signature.”

“Oh!”

Lord Mauleverer took the letter from the dusky hand. He scanned the signature. He had, naturally, taken it for granted, when reading the letter. Now he examined it with close attention. But he shook his head.

“It’s Brian’s fist,” he said. “Anyhow it looks like it.” He drew a deep, deep breath. “Inky! If you’re right, you’ve done me, and old Brian, no end of a good turn. I just hated to think of old Brian chuckin’ up like that. But —.”

“But — but who’d play such a trick?” exclaimed Bob. “Who could get hold of Brian’s signature to copy it? Who could write that letter in English, if you come to that, in a Portuguese country.

Who —?”

“I thinkfully opine that the esteemed Wharton can guess,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“You mean — Funcho?” muttered Harry.

“The estimable and execrable Funcho!” assented the nabob.

“Funcho,” repeated Lord Mauleverer, blankly. He seemed hardly able to believe his ears. “Did — did you say Funcho, Inky? My dear man —.”

“You’re dreaming,” said Bob. “That letter came from Rio, and for the last month Funcho’s been here, under our eyes —.”

“Draw it mild, old man,” said Johnny Bull. “Inky, old chap —!” murmured Nugent. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled. There was incredulity in every face — excepting Harry Wharton’s.

“I have longfully known that the execrable Funcho was a bad egg, my esteemed Mauly,” he said. “I have mentioned it only to Wharton, who could not quite believe it. But I think he believes it now.”

“But what —?” stammered Mauleverer. “What has he done, except smackin’ Bunter’s silly head? He has a bit of a temper. What else?”

Inky suspected that he was in league with that bandit O Corvo,” said Harry. “He believed that O Corvo never escaped, but was let loose by Funcho.”

“Good gad!”

“And that it was Funcho who sank our canoe on the Araguaya, to keep us from going to the island — he thinks that O Corvo has gone back to that island, and that Funcho was afraid that we might find him there.”

“I — I suppose I’m not dreamin’ all this!” said Lord Mauleverer, almost dizzily. “Look here, Inky, you’ll have to make it a bit clearer to my feeble intellect. If that letter’s a fake, how do you know?”

“The knowfulness is terrific. That letter was written, not in Rio, but in the manager’s office in the quinta here,” answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Then how the thump could it be posted in Rio?” exclaimed Bob.

“It was sent to Rio to be posted, for the post mark. And I have a preposterous idea that the man in Rio who despatches telegrams and letters for the execrable Funcho, is named Priego, and lives in the Rua Aruaja.”

“Eh! How — why — ”

“Perhapsfully you remember the day the idiotic Bunter handled the bola. Funcho dropped a letter, and his excitement was terrific.”

“I remember,” said Bob. “He didn’t seem to want us to see it — as if it mattered. A rather big letter —.”

“Big enough to contain another letter, to be put into the post at Rio,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Oh!”

“Look here,” said Johnny Bull. “Are you telling us that that letter that Mauly’s got in his fist was written here at the quinta?”

“Quitefully so! It was typed, because the execrable Funcho had not had enough practice to write it all by hand. He concentrated on the signature — copying an old letter left in the office by Brian —.”

“And how the thump do you know he did?”

“He was seen, my esteemed Johnny. The absurd Bunter, on the day we went to the island, saw him at it.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Johnny. “I remember! But that was all gammon.”

“I never believed a word of it,” said Nugent.

“Nor I,” said Bob.

“Did you, Inky?” asked Harry Wharton.

I did not quitefully know what to believe. But I know now that what the idiotic Bunter saw was Funcho practising Brian’s signature.”

“Good gad!” breathed Lord Mauleverer.

“If Bunter’s yarn is all you’ve got to go upon — !” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Not at all-fully: though the esteemed Bunter is the stitch in time that has saved ninepence,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “And I will make it clear even to the excellent and fatheaded Johnny that this letter was typed here at the quinta.”

“Oh, do!” said Johnny.

“How the dickens are you going to do that, Inky?” asked Bob. “Mind, I know you know what you’re talking about, old man. I expect you’ve got it right. But how you’re going to prove it —.”

“It is as easy as falling off an absurd form. The typefulness is the clue.”

“The whatter?”

“If the typefulness of the letter from Rio is the same as the typefulness on the machine in the manager’s office here —.”

“Eh! All typing is much alike, isn’t it?” asked Bob. “Perhapsfully on machines of brandnewfulness. But old machines differ terrifically.”

“Oh! Do they?” said Bob.

The nabob smiled.

“Give me the letter, my esteemed Mauly,” he said. Lord Mauleverer, in silence, handed back the letter from Rio to the nabob. All the juniors looked at it, as Hurree Singh ran a dusky finger along the typed lines.

“This was written on an old machine,” he said. “You will remarkably observe that the tail of the ‘g’ is slightly chipped — look at it in ‘telegram’ and in ‘expecting’ and in ‘go’ and in ‘going.’”

“That’s so,” said Bob, with a nod.

“Look at the ‘k,’ ” went on Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “It is a little out of the straight.”

”

“Right on the wicket. ”

“Such things happen in old machines that have had the wearfulness and the tearfulness. Look at the capital ‘ M ’ — the middle strokes are fractionally shorter than the others. Look at the capital ‘ F ’ — the top stroke is chipped, like the tail of the ‘ g.’

There was a general nodding of heads. It had occurred only to the keen-witted nabob, but there was no doubt about it. There was hardly a letter that did not show some sign of wear and tear, and every such sign was a clue to the machine that had been used. Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

!That settles it, ” he said.

“I don’t see that it does, ” said Johnny Bull, staring.

“We don’t know that Funcho’s typer in the office here shows the same signs. ”

“Inky does, ” said Harry.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled, and drew a crumpled paper from his pocket. It was the message that Billy Bunter had typed on the machine in the manager’s office the previous afternoon.

“Oh! ” ejaculated Johnny. “You noticed —. ”

“ The noticefulness was preposterous. ”

“So that’s how you know! ” exclaimed Nugent. He understood now.

“That is the howfulness, my esteemed Franky. Look! ” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “ This paper was typed yesterday by the idiotic Bunter in the manager’s office. Look at the tail of the ‘g’ in the word ‘Dago’ — is it not chipped in exactly the same way as in the letter from Rio?

“By gum! ” said Bob.

“Look at the ‘k’ in ‘cheeky’ and in ‘kicked.’ ”

The juniors looked. The ‘k’ in Bunter’s typing was out of alignment, in exactly the same way as in the letter from Rio.

“Look at the capital ‘M,’ my esteemed chums. ”

“That does it,” said Bob. “The tip’s chipped off in the middle, in exactly the same way. ”

“And the top stroke of the ‘F,’ too, ” said Nugent.

“Exactly the same. ”

“It’s the same machine, ” said Harry Wharton. “Look at the other letters — they’re all worn, and exactly the same in both letters — every letter worn in exactly the same way. Bunter’s paper and that letter from Rio were typed on the same machine — an old machine that was well worn. Why, every single letter is a clue, now that we’re looking for clues. ”

Johnny Bull nodded. Johnny was slow and cautious, and hard to convince. But he had to be convinced now.

There was no doubt. The letter from Rio had been typed on the machine in the manager’s office at the Quinta Branca. It could have been typed only by Martinho Funcho, for no one else at the quinta, outside the Greyfriars party, could read and write in English. It followed, as a matter of course, that the signature was a counterfeit — by Funcho’s hand. All the juniors knew now that Billy Bunter’s strange story, of what he had seen in the manager’s office, was not a figment of the fat Owl’s imagination. He had seen Martinho Funcho at work, practising the copying of a signature — the signature of Brian Mauleverer,

“The awful rascal! ” breathed Lord Mauleverer.

“He made me think that old Brian had let me down, and chucked up here —. ”

“To account for his not coming back to the quinta!” said Bob, in a subdued voice. “That means that he knows why Brian stays away — and that he won’t come back! It wouldn’t be any use playing this game, if Brian might walk in any day. It can only mean —.”

“That old Brian’s kept away — that he’s disappeared, as Inky says.” Lord Mauleverer clenched his hands. “What has that villain done with Brian?”

“I think Inky can tell us that, too,” said Harry Wharton. “I’ve a pretty clear idea, now that I know Funcho’s at the bottom of it. Brian Mauleverer is a prisoner, and I can guess where to look for him.”

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded.

“Exactly!” he said. “That is the secret of the island.”

“The island?” repeated Lord Mauleverer.

“The execrable Funcho was not in this alone, Mauly. He had a confederate. He would need help in kidnapping Brian — and is guarding him where he is hidden —.”

“O Corvo!” said Harry, quietly.

“That is Funcho’s connection with the bandit, which was a terrific puzzle. It is preposterously clear now.”

That’s why O Corvo sticks on that island in the Araguaya,” said Harry. “That’s why Funcho wanted to keep us clear of that island.”

Lord Mauleverer caught his breath.

“That island! Why, we’ve been on it, and never dreamed — good gad! You mean to say you think that old Brian’s parked on that island, hardly ten miles away, all the while we’ve been here at the quinta —?”

“That’s what it looks like, at least,” said Harry. “The whole thing’s clear, now we’ve got the clue.”

“The clearfulness is terrific,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head. “We have got to find the esteemed Brian, my idiotic chums, and I thinkfully opine that we shall find him on that island in the Araguaya!”

CHAPTER XXXIV

MINUS BUNTER!

“I SAY, you fellows!”

“No reply.”

“Deaf?” roared Bunter.

Still no reply.

Really, the group of fellows on the verandah might have been deaf, for all the heed they paid to the voice of the charmer, squeaking from the hammock a dozen yards away. Perhaps, following the example of the ancient gladiator, they heard but heeded not.

Billy Bunter was peeved. He was curious; and when Bunter was curious, he wanted to know.

Bunter had done uncommonly well at breakfast that morning. In a country where foodstuffs were unlimited, Bunter was the man to do well at meal times. Since then, he had exerted himself to the extent of rolling a dozen yards to the hammock under the shady tree. For the last hour or so he had been reposing in that hammock in lazy ease. But gradually Bunter became aware that something was “on.”

The Famous Five were not heading for the open air in their usual strenuous manner. They were gathered round Lord Mauleverer on the verandah, talking in tones that did

not reach Bunter's fat ears.

They were, in point of fact, holding a council of war, following the startling discovery to which the letter from Rio had led. So far from missing Billy Bunter's fascinating society, they had forgotten that there was such a person as William George Bunter in the wide world; and if the irritated squeak from the hammock reminded them, they nevertheless passed him by like the idle wind which they regarded not.

Which was very annoying to Bunter. Something was "on". Every face was grave — especially Lord Mauleverer's, which was set hard, with an expression that was almost grim. Mauly's usual placid nonchalance had dropped from him like a cloak. Had they been still discussing a ride on the campo, Bunter would not have been interested.

Bunter preferred a hammock to a saddle any day, and had no desire whatever to go bucketing across the plains on a shaggy Brazilian pony. But it was not that. He had seen the Indian grooms bring the horses round, but evidently the juniors had changed their minds about that ride, for the horses were led away again. Now, clearly, they were discussing something else, which could only be other plans for the day. Bunter wanted to know. But clearly he wasn't going to learn by squeaking from the hammock — the beasts not only did not answer, but not a single head was turned. Bunter sat up in the hammock at last, his eyes and spectacles fixed on the group on the verandah with a devastating blink.

"I say, you fellows," he bawled.

"Hallo, halo, hallo!" Bob Cherry looked round, at last. "Is that you, Bunter? Shut up, old man, will you?"

The mysterious conference on the verandah was breaking up. The juniors moved off to go into the house, to make preparations, Bunter did not doubt, for whatever it was they had fixed up for the morning. Bunter, apparently, was to be left out — the mere idea of which made the fat Owl pink with indignation. Only Bob Cherry took the trouble to answer him as the juniors moved off.

"What are, you fellows confabbing about?" roared Bunter.

"Oh! About an hour!" answered Bob.

"You silly idiot!" yelled Bunter. "I can jolly well see that you've got something on. What have you got on?"

"My clobber!"

"You — you — you fathead!" gasped Bunter. The answer he had received was veracious, but it did not seem to satisfy him. "Look here, what are you up to?"

"Snuff!" answered Bob, cheerily.

Billy Bunter breathed wrath.

"Beast! If you're jolly well fixing something up, and leaving me out —."

"Right on the wicket, old fat frump."

"Well, you — you — you —!" gasped Bunter, "Catch me being left out! What is it — a picnic?"

"Sort of," agreed Bob. "But you wouldn't care for it, fatty. Go to sleep, and don't bother, like a good porpoise. And Bob Cherry followed the other fellows into the house, leaving Billy Bunter sitting in the hammock in a state of almost breathless wrath and indignation.

In a very short time, the Greyfriars fellows came out again. Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had rifles under their arms. Johnny Bull carried a bola slung over his shoulder. The whole party came down the steps, and Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles gleamed at them as they came along the path.

"I say, you fellows, hold on!" howled Bunter.

"Don't bother now, Bunter," grunted Johnny Bull, and he marched on.

“Beast! I’m coming!” hooted Bunter. “You jolly well ain’t going riding. I jolly well know! Think you’re leaving me out of a picnic?”

“Oh, gad,” said Lord Mauleverer. “You wouldn’t like it much, Bunter — not in your line at all.”

“I’m jolly well coming!” snorted Bunter, indignantly. Leaving a fellow on his own! That isn’t the way we treat guests at Bunter Court, I can jolly well tell you!” And Bunter scrambled out of the hammock. Bunter was not going to be left out of that picnic — not if Bunter knew it.

“Look here, Bunter —!” began Harry Wharton. “Yah!” interrupted Bunter.

“I tell you —!” exclaimed Harry, impatiently.

“You can jolly well talk till you’re jolly well black in the face,” retorted Bunter. “But I’m coming all the same, so yah!”

“My esteemed and idiotic Bunter ———.”

“Yah!”

“Perhaps Bunter had better come, you fellows,” said Bob Cherry. “We can’t leave him out of this picnic, if he wants to join up.”

“I should jolly well think not!” hooted the indignant Owl.

“You see, if there’s any shooting, ‘we can all stand behind Bunter,’ ” added Bob.

“Lots of cover for the lot of us.”

“The lotfulness will be terrific,” grinned Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter jumped.

“Shush-shush-shooting!” he stuttered. “D-d-did you s-s-say shush-shush-shooting? I — I say, you fellows, where are you going?”

“We’re going to that jolly old island, old fat man, to look for O Corvo.”

“What?” yelled Bunter.

“That’s the sort of picnic it is,” explained Bob, cheerily. “After all, it wouldn’t be cricket to leave Bunter out, you men. Come on, Bunter.”

“Oh, crikey!”

“Yaas, come on, old fat man, if you make a point of it,” said Lord Mauleverer. “I hardly think you’ll enjoy it, really — but come on, if you like.”

“I — I say, you fellows, wharrer you gig-gig-going to look for that bib-bub-bandit for?” gasped Bunter.

“That’s an easy one — to find him,” explained Bob. “Come on — you’ll be left behind if you miss the boat!”

“Can’t wait for you, Bunter,” grinned Nugent. “Come on!”

“Buck up, Bunter.”

The Greyfriars party marched on, heading for the desembarcadouro. Billy Bunter did not come on. He did not buck up. He did not stir. He remained where he was, blinking after the party through his big spectacles. His objection to being left out of that “picnic” seemed to have evaporated all of a sudden!

Bob Cherry looked back from the end of the garden, and waved an encouraging hand.

“Come on, Bunter!” he roared.

Billy Bunter did not answer. He rolled back to the hammock. A hammock under a shady tree seemed to appeal to William George Bunter more — much more — than a visit to the island in the Araguaya, and a morning call upon O Corvo the bandit! That picnic on the Araguaya was to take place, after all, minus Bunter.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SECRET OF THE ISLAND

“HERE we are again! ” murmured Bob Cherry.

Under the blaze of the tropic sun, the tall trees of the mysterious island rose into view, over the yellow flood of the Araguaya.

Little had been said, as the Greyfriars fellows paddled down the river in a swift canoe. Their plans were made, and all that remained was to carry them out. That there was danger in rousing out the bandit in his lair, if indeed O Corvo was on the island, they were well aware; but they were ready to take the risk.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh relinquished their paddles, as the island came in sight, and picked up their rifles. Their eyes were keen and alert as they watched the wall of greenery for a sign of the bandit.

That O Corvo was on the island, that he was there to guard a prisoner hidden away in its deep shadowy recesses, they were almost sure. Whether the desperado might attempt to prevent a landing by force, if he saw the canoe approaching the island, they did not know; they had to take the chance.

But there was no sign of the bandit, as the canoe glided swiftly to the little landing-place under the overhanging trees. Frank Nugent jumped out, and made the painter fast to a projecting root.

Innumerable parrots, red and green and golden, cackled from the branches, and black-faced monkeys peered out of the foliage. But of other life there seemed no sign.

Whatever secret the island held, was hidden in the interior, beyond the thick trees, the tangled lianas, and pendant masses of Spaniard’s-beard.

The juniors landed, alert and watchful. Every face was tense — every moment they half-expected to see a dark, fierce, bearded face staring from some opening in the trees.

“This way! ” said Harry.

The juniors picked out the track they had followed into the forest on the island, on their previous visit. On that occasion they had not followed it far, only to the spot where they had surprised O Corvo, taking his “sesta ” in his hammock in the heat of the day. Now they were going to follow it to the end — little doubting that it would lead to what they sought.

Harry Wharton led the way, rifle in hand. The others followed in single file through the tangled wood.

Slowly, through clinging vines and giant tree-ferns, they wound among the massive trunks, eyes and ears on the alert. Here and there, they picked up unmistakable traces that the path had been trodden before them — here a slashed fig-vine, there a trampled fern. It was dim and dusky under the branches that formed an almost solid roof overhead, shutting out the sun.

In a few minutes they reached the scene of their encounter with the bandit, when they had surprised him in his hammock. But there was no sign of O Corvo, and they pushed on.

Deeper and deeper, into the thick forest that covered the island from shore to shore: far out of sight and sound of the river. If O Corvo had his lair on the island, it was evidently deep in the interior. But the signs on the track were unmistakable to alert eyes.

Suddenly Harry Wharton halted, and made a sign to his comrades.

“Look! ” he breathed.

Silent, almost breathless, they peered through openings in the tangled fig-vines.

Beyond, was a little clearing. where saplings, and tree-ferns, and thickets, had been cut away by a keen-edged “facaon.” Only the hanging fig-vines separated the Greyfriars juniors from the open space.

“Journey’s end!” whispered Bob.

“By gad!” Lord Mauleverer breathed hard. “That ruffian — and — and look!” Across the clearing, facing them, stood a hut. It was not the accustomed “choupana,” consisting only of four poles and a slanting roof, such as they had often seen in the Brazilian forests. It was a strongly-built hut, of poles planted close together, with a door of the same material, hung on thick leather hinges. The outside of the door was barred across with wooden bars. That could hardly mean anything but that it held a prisoner.

On a log outside the hut sat a wild and dingy figure. One glance was enough — they knew that dark, bearded face — the face of the bandit O Corvo, with the livid scar on the swarthy cheek.

The bandit did not glance up. If he heard a rustle in the thickets, it meant nothing to his ears but the scampering and clambering of the innumerable monkeys. He was sitting astride the log, which served as a table as well as a seat. A flask of wine, a loaf of mandioca bread, and a great lump of “carne seca,” were before him. There was a “faca” in his hand, and, as the juniors watched him, he hacked a slice from the chunk of dried beef, and transferred it to his mouth on the point of his knife. He was not ten yards from the juniors, as they watched — evidently quite at his ease, and never dreaming of danger. They could guess that he relied on Martinho Funcho to prevent another visit to the island by the party at the quinta.

“O Corvo!” breathed Harry.

Lord Mauleverer’s eyes gleamed.

“And who’s in the hut?” he breathed. “Look — the door’s barred — we can guess who’s there!”

Harry Wharton nodded. There could be no doubt now. There was a prisoner in the hut with the barred door, and O Corvo was there to guard him. That was the secret of the island in the Araguaya.

The bandit laid down his knife, and reached to the flask. As he tilted it to his lips, Harry Wharton signed to his comrades.

“Come on!” he breathed.

He dashed the fig-vine aside, and leaped out into the open, followed fast by his comrades. His rifle was half raised.

The flask dropped from O Corvo’s hand, and crashed on the earth, the wine running out into the grass. O Corvo leaped up from the log, and for a second he stared blankly at the juniors, his eyes almost starting from his swarthy face. Then he made a spring at a rifle that stood leaning against the hut.

“Stop!” shouted Harry. His rifle was at his shoulder, his eye gleaming along the barrel. He repeated the warning instantly in Portuguese, “Para! Para!”

He would not fire if he could help it, and he gave the bravo a chance. But O Corvo, unheeding, grasped at the rifle leaning on the hut.

Bang!

Harry Wharton fired, at the bandit’s legs. A loud and terrible cry awoke the echoes of the wooded island.

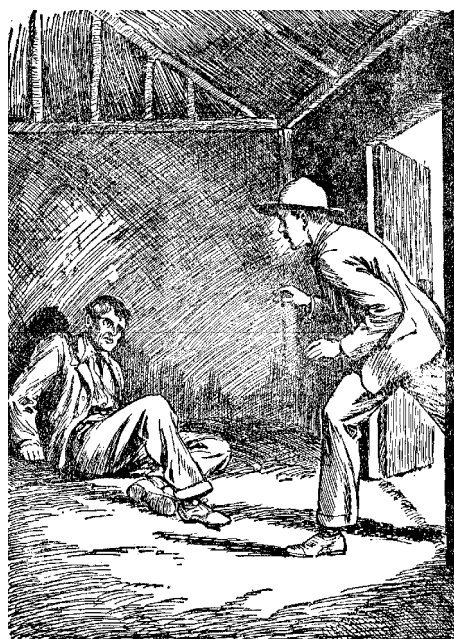
O Corvo was already swinging round, rifle in hand, when he pitched over, his right leg crumpling under him.

The rifle flew from his hands, and O Corvo rolled shrieking on the earth, a bullet in his leg.

The next moment, the Famous Five had surrounded him. Bob Cherry picked up the fallen rifle — Johnny Bull jerked the long knife from the bandit’s belt. O Corvo made a frantic effort to rise, but fell back again, his swarthy face whitening. There

was no danger from the bandit now.

Lord Mauleverer, unheeding him, ran to the barred door of the hut. He dragged at the bars with both hands.



It was the missing manager of the Quinta Branca

“Brian!” he shouted.

There was a sharp, startled cry within the hut.

Mauleverer flung aside the bars, and dragged open the door. The interior was dim: there was no window in the hut. But from the dimness a white face glimmered — a face with sunken eyes, shaggy with several weeks’ growth of beard — but a face Mauleverer knew.

“Brian!” he panted.

It was the missing manager of the Quinta Branca — found at last!

CHAPTER XXXVI

AT LAST!

BRIAN MAULEVERER sat in the canoe, while the paddles flashed, driving the light craft swiftly up the sluggish current of the Araguaya.

In the bottom of the canoe lay O Corvo, his leg bandaged, his hands tied, his eyes gleaming and glinting like those of a captured wild animal. He scowled blackly at the Greyfriars juniors, and the manager of the Quinta Branca. But no one heeded the scowling bandit. The faces of the Greyfriars fellows were merry and bright.

There was an almost dazed expression on Brian’s face. Even yet he seemed hardly able to believe in the sudden change in his fortunes.

His long imprisonment in the hut on the island had told on him. His eyes were sunken, his unshaven face pallid and worn. But a tinge of colour was creeping back now into the pale cheeks.

Under the blazing sun, the canoe moved swiftly, on its way back to the quinta. Brian Mauleverer looked round at the wide waters of the Araguaya, at the green forests on

the banks, at the alligators floating like logs on the yellow flood. He breathed hard and deep.

“It seems like a dream!” he muttered. “I’d given up hope — day after day — week after week — no possibility of escape — no hope of being found — and now — it’s hard to believe that I’m free again, and in an hour or two shall be at the Quinta Branca —.”

His glance turned on the scowling bandit.

“That velhaco has watched and guarded me, on the island,” he said. “But it was not he — it was another — it was Martinho Funcho —.”

“We know, old chap,” said Lord Mauleverer. “We’ve been weeks at the quinta, and never dreamed of the game that Funcho was playing — it was not till this mornin’ that we knew —.”

“And there will be a jolly old surprise for Mr. Funcho, when he comes back from Porto Lucar this evening!” chuckled Bob Cherry.

“The surprisefulness will be terrific,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin. “It will be a lesson to the execrable Funcho that honesty is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb remarkably observes.”

“Good old English proverb!” chuckled Bob.

Brian Mauleverer smiled. But his worn face became sombre again.

“It was Funcho,” he said. “That villain — he had desperate losses at the Casino at Porto Lucar — that was the cause. He helped himself from the safe at the quinta, and I discovered it —.”

“So that’s how it was,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“That is how it was. I found him out, and sacked him on the spot. It was the day before I should have started for Rio to meet you there. But — the same evening — they got me, in the garden at the quinta — O Corvo with his bola — Funcho had no chance of handling me alone, but with the help of that ruffian and his bola, he had me. They brought me to the island in a canoe under cover of night, and ever since —!” He broke off, with a shiver.

“The awful villain!” breathed Lord Mauleverer. “He met us in Rio, with a tale that you had left the quinta on a journey that you had told him nothing about — we couldn’t suspect —.”

“And all the while, I was a prisoner in that hut, wondering — wondering what you would be thinking — what you would be thinking, of my absence —,” muttered Brian. “I knew that you could not suspect — could not dream of what had happened to me. I knew that Funcho was carrying on at the quinta in my place — that he would be gambling away the milreis that should have gone to the bank at Rio — that he might even take my place as manager if he played his cards well —.”

“That was his game,” said Lord Mauleverer. “And goodness knows he came near to pulling it off.”

“The nearfulness was terrific,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But the missfulness is as good as the milefulness.”

“I never dreamed that you could find me — that you could even suspect that I was a prisoner. I cannot understand how you discovered —.”

“You owe that to Hurree Singh,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Look at this, old man.”

He drew a letter from his pocket — the letter from Rio — and passed it to his cousin. Brian stared at it blankly. He listened, almost like a man in a dream, as Lord Mauleverer explained how the discovery had been made.

“Then I owe my liberty to you, Hurree Singh,” he said.

“Inky first and last and all the time,” said Bob. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook a

dusky head.

“Not at all-fully,” he said. “It was the esteemed Mauly —.”

“Eh! How do you make that out?” asked Lord Mauleverer, staring.

The nabob smiled.

“You owe it all to your own ludicrous and admirable kindness of heart, my esteemed Mauly,” he said.

“Eh?”

“It was you who made it seven, instead of six, and let the idiotic Bunter hook on for the hols —.”

“Oh!”

But for the preposterous antics of the ridiculous Bunter, I should never have got wise to the game of the execrable Funcho —.”

“Oh, gad!” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Mauly all the time!” chuckled Bob.

“Oh, gad!” repeated Lord Mauleverer. “If Bunter hadn’t come with us to Brazil —.”

Harry Wharton laughed.

“It’s so,” he said. “If you hadn’t landed yourself with that fat chump, Mauly, old man —.”

“Fancy Bunter coming in useful!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Well, his best pal wouldn’t call him ornamental,” remarked Bob. “But he has come in jolly useful, no doubt about that.”

“The esteemed and idiotic Bunter’s usefulness was —.”

“Terrific and preposterous!” said Bob. “You never guessed that Bunter would turn up trumps, when you let him barge in, Mauly. Kind hearts are more than coroners, as Bunter told us last night —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

It was a merry party in the canoe — with the exception of O Corvo, whose scowling visage was quite a contrast to the rest.

Brian Mauleverer’s worn face grew brighter, as the active paddles flashed, and the canoe drew nearer and nearer home. It lighted up, when at last the Quinta Branca came in sight. He half-rose, to stare with eager eyes at the desembarcadouro, where brown-skinned moços were loading coffee bags on a boat; at the garden bright with orange trees and brilliant tropical flowers, and the white walls and green verandahs beyond.

“Home again!” he breathed.

There was a buzz on the desembarcadouro, as the canoe ran in. Brown faces turned in astonishment on the haggard unshaven man who stepped out with the Greyfriars fellows.

“Senhor O Intendente!”

“O Senhor Inglez!”

Brian Mauleverer smiled. He called to the moços to lift the wounded bandit from the canoe; and O Corvo was taken away to be locked in a hut, “left till called for,” as Bob Cherry expressed it; with no chance this time of being released by his confederate — soon to be a prisoner like himself. Brian Mauleverer walked up the path to the house, in the midst of the cheery crowd of juniors.

From a well-filled hammock, near the verandah steps, a sound greeted the party as they came; a sound that had been familiar to their ears in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School.

Snore!

Brian glanced round. He grinned at the sight of a fat face adorned by a big pair of

spectacles and several smears of toffee. Billy Bunter's eyes were closed behind his spectacles. In the drowsy heat of the tropic day, he slept — and he snored!

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” ejaculated Bob Cherry. “Hasn't Bunter moved since we left this morning?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Must have,” said Harry. “It's long past lunch time. Could Bunter have missed a meal?”

“Isso é impossível!” chuckled Frank Nugent.

Snore!

“Wake up, Bunter!” bawled Bob. “We've got back.”

Snore!

Billy Bunter had lunched, as usual, not wisely but too well. He had returned to the hammock to rest after his exertions. Insects buzzed over him unheeded. With his eyes shut, and his mouth open, he slumbered and snored.

Bob Cherry gave the hammock a shake. Then the little round eyes opened behind the big round spectacles, and Bunter blinked sleepily at the juniors.

Here we are again, Bunter!” grinned Bob. “We've got back, old fat man.”

“Eh! You needn't have woke me up to tell me that,” said Bunter, peevishly. He blinked at Brian Mauleverer. I say, you fellows, who's that?”

“My cousin Brian, Bunter,” said Lord Mauleverer, smiling.

“Oh!” Billy Bunter gave the manager of the Quinta Branca another blink. “Has he turned up at last?”

“Yes, I've turned up at last, Bunter,” said Brian, with a smile.

“You've taken your time about it,” said Bunter.

Brian laughed.

“Yes, quite a long time,” he agreed.

Billy Bunter sat up in the hammock.

Well, now you're back, I'll tell you something,” he said. “If you take my advice —.”

“Shut up, you fat ass,” said Harry.

“Shan't! If you take my advice,” repeated Bunter, blinking with owlish seriousness at Brian Mauleverer, “you'll sack that man Funcho!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! That man Funcho is a bad egg, as I jolly well know,” said Bunter.

“And if you take my advice, you'll sack him!”

Brian chuckled.

“Good advice is never wasted,” he said. “Funcho's sacked!”

“Oh, good!” said Bunter.

And as the party walked on, laughing, Billy Bunter settled down in the hammock again, and closed his eyes behind his spectacles — and a rumbling snore followed them as they went in.

BUT it was not only the “sack” that awaited Martinho Funcho, when the batalão rolled in from Porto Lucar in the starry evening. As he stepped on the desembarcadouro, his arms were grasped, and pinned, by half-a-dozen hands; and he stared, with bulging eyes, at a face that startled him like a ghost — the face of the manager of the Quinta Branca. Martinho spent that night under lock and key with his confederate, and in the early morning the batalão pulled out again for Porto Lucar — with two prisoners on board to be handed over to the guardas civiles. Martinho

Funcho was finished at the Quinta Branca; and in the sertão, O Corvo was seen no more.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HOMeward BOUND!

“I SAY, you fellows —.”

“Hop on, Bunter,” said Bob Cherry.

“But I say —.”

“Roll on,” said Frank Nugent.

“Beast! I say —.”

“The boat’s waiting, Bunter,” said Brian Mauleverer.

“I know that! I say, you fellows—.”

“Want to miss the boat, fathead?” asked Harry Wharton.

“Yes!”

Which reply caused the Famous Five, and Lord Mauleverer, and the manager of the Quinta Branca, to stare at William George Bunter.

It was the last day at the quinta.

It had been a wonderful holiday in the wonderful land of Brazil. The Famous Five had had the time of their lives. Lord Mauleverer had the satisfaction of seeing his cousin Brian settled down, happy and content, no longer a rolling stone. Billy Bunter had lived on the fat of the land, enjoying every meal, and every meal between meals; with Only one cloud on the horizon; the circumstance that Brazil and unlimited food couldn’t last for ever. But everything comes to an end — and it was time to depart for home, and the new term at Greyfriars School.

Billy Bunter had been very thoughtful that morning. He was still more thoughtful as the party walked down to the desembarcadouro, where the boat was waiting to take them to Porto Lucar, on the first stage of the journey back to Rio, and the plane for home. The baggage was on the boat, and Brian, who was to accompany them to Rio and see them off by South American Airways, was already on board. But Billy Bunter came to a halt on the desembarcadouro. Bunter had been thinking. He had been thinking deeply. Now the other fellows were to learn the outcome of that unusual exercise on Bunter’s part.

“Come, come,” said Brian, from the boat. “We must not be late for the steamer at Porto Lucar, Bunter.”

“Yaas, get a move on, old man,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“I say, you fellows, if you’ll listen to a chap —!” hooted Bunter.

“Forgotten something?” asked Bob Cherry. “Don’t say you’ve forgotten to pack all your English money! Perhaps it’s in your waistcoat pocket.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, you fellows, do give a fellow a chance to speak,” roared

Bunter. “I’ve been thinking this over —.”

“You’ve been thinking?” ejaculated Bob.

“Yes, I jolly well have!”

“And what did you do it with?”

“Beast! I’ve thought it out,” said Bunter, “and I don’t see the fun of going home.

“What?”

“Well, look at it!” argued Bunter. “We’re here, ain’t we, and we can jolly well stop

if we choose. If you fellows want to see Quelch again, I don't. If the Head's waxy, well, let him be waxy! Look at the grub here! Think you'll get grub like that at home?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You fellows hadn't thought of that, had you?" said Bunter, sarcastically. "Well, I've thought of it! I've got brains."

"The brainfulness of the idiotic Bunter is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You fat ass —!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yah! The beef alone is worth stopping for," said Bunter. "Then — the butter! And the honey! And the bananas! And the oranges! And the chickens! And the toffee! And that igglewana stuff! All the eggs you want, and more! Cakes — chocolates — sugar cane — why, you fellows must be potty to think of chucking it all, for nothing," said Bunter, warmly. "Plain potty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! We can fix it all right at home," said Bunter. "We can get a wire off from Porto Lucar, see?"

"We're to send off a wire to say that we don't want to go away from the grub!" ejaculated Bob.

"Well, no, I wouldn't put it like that," said Bunter, peevishly. "We can say that Mauly's cousin is ill, and we're staying to look after him —."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Or that Mauly's broken his leg — and we can't leave him —."

"Oh, gad!"

"Or you can say I'm ill, if you like," said Bunter. "I've had a touch of pneumonia in my leg, as I've told you —."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It doesn't matter much what we say, so long as we don't go!" explained Bunter. "That's the point — we stay! What do you fellows think?"

"I think we'd better get on the boat," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Come on, you fat chump!"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "If you fellows are asses enough to go, go and be blown — I'm staying! I'll think of you scrounging your half-ounces of butter, while I'm rolling in it!" added Bunter, sarcastically. "And when you're making a quarter of a pound of corned beef last a week, you can think of me scoffing juicy steaks every day! Good-bye!"

Billy Bunter waved a fat hand, and turned to walk off the desembarcadouro.

Evidently, he had made up his fat mind. Like the Israelites of old, he had looked back at the fleshpots of Egypt — and found them irresistible! Billy Bunter was not leaving a land of plenty for a land of short commons — not if Billy Bunter could help it!

But, as it happened, he couldn't!

He had taken only three steps, when five pairs of hands fell upon him. Billy Bunter had always had plenty of weight, and the excellent provender at the Quinta Branca had added to it. But five pairs of hands were enough for even Billy Bunter's weight — and he was swept off his feet — and he gave a breathless squeak as he whirled.

"Oooogh! I say, you fellows — oooooogh!"

Bump!

Bunter landed in the boat. He sat there and roared. The juniors followed him in, and Brian, laughing, pushed off. The boat shot away from the desembarcadouro, the

Indian crew pulling at the oars.

“Urrrh! Beasts!” Billy Bunter scrambled breathlessly to his feet. “If you jolly well think I’m coming when I don’t jolly well like, you’re jolly well mistaken, see? I’m jolly well going to jump off this boat, and —.”

Billy Bunter paused. Twenty yards of rolling water separated him from the desembarcadouro.

“Jump away,” said Bob, cheerily. “There’s an alligator waiting.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Bunter decided not to jump.

* * *

BUT there was a spot of balm in Gilead. On the first day of term at Greyfriars, there was a spread in Lord Mauleverer’s study, which was crowded with the Famous Five, and Smithy, and Toddy, and Squiff, and half-a-dozen other fellows, and — of course — Billy Bunter. Plenty reigned; and for once, at least, Billy Bunter at Greyfriars was able to load over the Plimsoll line as recklessly as Billy Bunter in Brazil.

THE END.