



BILLY BUNTER'S
BARGAIN

By
FRANK RICHARDS

Illustrated by
C.H. CHAPMAN

CASSELL AND COMPANY LTD
LONDON



HE SAT THROUGH IT!

CHAPTER 1

BILLY BUNTER OBLIGES

'HARRY, old chap—.'

'Scat!'

'But I say—.'

'Buzz off!'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'GET OUT!'

Harry Wharton fairly shouted.

Generally, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove was quite equable and good-tempered. He could be patient, even with Billy Bunter.

But circumstances alter cases. Now he was pressed for time. He was, in fact, in a terrific hurry. The fat junior who blinked into No. 1 Study through his big spectacles was often superfluous. At the moment, he was more superfluous than ever.

Harry Wharton sat at the study table, his pen racing over impot paper. His handwriting, which was usually very good, suffered considerably from his haste, indeed in places it almost resembled a scrawl like Bunter's own. It was probable that Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, would raise his eyebrows when he looked at that impot.

But it could not be helped.

Harry Wharton had a hundred lines to do for Quelch.

Those lines had to be handed in before he could go out. On any other occasion that would not have mattered very much. But now it was a special occasion: the Famous Five were due for tea at Cliff House after class that day. Those lines could not have happened at a more awkward time. His friends were waiting for him: all ready to start. But those lines had to be turned out first: and Wharton was turning them out, at express speed. Interruptions were not wanted.

But Billy Bunter did not get out as adjured to do. He blinked indignantly at the busy junior at the study table.

'I say, do listen to a chap!' he squeaked. 'I say, you know Quelch gave me fifty lines yesterday—.'

'Shut up!'

'I forgot to do them—.'

'Get out!'

'And now he's doubled them!' went on Bunter. 'I've got to take in a hundred lines before tea, old chap.'

Harry Wharton paused for a moment in his task, to look up, and fix a glare of concentrated exasperation on the fat face in the doorway.

'You fat, frabjous, footling frump, roll away and don't bother! I've got to get through this impot for Quelch before I can get out, and we shall be late at Cliff House anyway. Now shut up.'

He dropped his eyes to his impot again, and his pen raced on. Having started at '*Contieure omnes*' he had to arrive at '*donee Calehante ministro*' before he could lay down his pen. So far he was only at '*Timeo Danaos*'. More than fifty lines remained to be done. Certainly he had no time to waste on Billy Bunter.

Bunter gave an irritated grunt. Wharton's lines really were a trifle: light as air. His own lines worried Bunter. 'I say, old fellow, you'll jolly soon be through, at that rate—.'

'Not if you interrupt !Get out!'

'You'll have lots of time to lend me a hand with my lines—.'

'I'll lend you a foot, if you don't get out.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter stood blinking morosely at the active pen as it raced. Never, or seldom, had the deathless verse of Virgil been transcribed at such a rate. There was really no reason why Bunter should not have been doing likewise, in his own study. But Bunter did not like lines. Neither did Wharton, if it came to that: but as it had to be done, he was getting it done. Bunter's idea was to get some other fellow to do it, or as much of it as possible.

'Look here, Harry, old fellow—,' recommenced Bunter.

'Pack it up!'

'I just can't get through a hundred before tea—.'

'Quiet!'

'If you'd do half—.'

Billy Bunter was interrupted. A voice, that might have belonged to Stentor of olden time, pealed from the direction of the Remove landing.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Coming, Wharton?' It was Bob Cherry's voice. Apparently Bob had come up the stairs to inquire.

'Only half through,' called back Wharton. 'Oh, my hat! How long are you going to be?'

'Ten minutes yet.'

'Well, we're late—.'

'Get out the bikes ready.'

'We've got them out—.'

'Well, if you want something to do, come up here and slaughter Bunter.'

There was a chuckle, followed by footsteps on the stairs.

Bob was going down again, without slaughtering Bunter! He went down to rejoin Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, waiting patiently in the quad, with the bikes all ready to run out as soon as Wharton was through.

Harry Wharton's pen, already racing, put on a spurt.

His 'fist' more and more resembled Bunter's, as it raced. He even dropped a blot or two in his haste. It was a little risky: for Quelch, accustomed to slovenly lines from Bunter, expected better things of Wharton: and it was quite possible that he might not merely raise his eyebrows over that hurried impot, but might order it to be written over again. Which would have been a crowning disaster in the circumstances.

'I say, old chap—.' Bunter was irrepressible. 'I say, if you'd do fifty for me—.'

'Shut up!' shrieked Wharton.

'Well, what about twenty?' asked Bunter. 'I might get Toddy to do twenty, too. He's lazy, but he might do twenty for a chap. If you do twenty—.'

Again the captain of the Remove paused, to bestow a concentrated glare on the fat Owl.

'Do you want me to buzz this inkpot at your head?' he roared.

'Eh! No—.'

'I'm going to, if you burble another word before I'm through.'

Billy Bunter very nearly rejoined "Beast!" But he checked in time. He did not want an inkpot buzzed at his fat head. So he did not burble another word. He plumped his fat person down in

the study armchair, and sat blinking at Wharton, as the pen raced on. Harry Wharton gave him no further heed. His rapid pen flashed over the paper.

Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea, as a poet has already remarked. At long last, Harry Wharton arrived at '*donee Calehante ministro . . .*' Another line would' have completed a sentence. But Wharton was not bothering about completing sentences. He had done exactly a hundred lines: and that was that. With a sigh of relief, he dropped his pen, and gave further expression to his feelings by hurling Virgil into a corner of the study. Then he jumped up.

'I say, old chap—!' Billy Bunter recommenced once more.

'Thank goodness that's done!' gasped Wharton. He was feeling quite breathless after that rush through Virgil. 'But, I say, what about my lines?' howled Bunter. 'It won't take you long to do twenty, the rate you go at—.'

'Fathead!' Wharton gathered up his lines. Then he paused, 'Look here, Bunter—.'

'Yes, old chap,' said Bunter, eagerly. 'You'll do twenty for me—I say, make it thirty—.'

'I've got to get out, ass! Look here, you can take my lines down to Quelch for me—.'

'What?' howled Bunter.

'He might keep me chin-wagging. The fellows are waiting for me. Will you take that impot down to Quelch or not?' hooted Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. His blink was so expressive that it might almost have cracked his spectacles. Not only had the captain of the Remove declined to do his lines for him, but he was asking him to negotiate a staircase, and Bunter hated stairs. Really, it was the limit: and Billy Bunter's indignation could hardly have been expressed in words.

'Will you or not?' snapped Wharton.

Considering the haste with which that impot had been written, it was only too probable that Quelch might keep him 'chin-wagging', even if nothing worse accrued. But Quelch, obviously, couldn't, if the impot was delivered by another hand! It was quite a happy idea: if Bunter obliged! Bunter did not, at the moment, look very obliging!

'Cheek!' gasped Bunter.

'Oh, go and eat coke, you lazy fat ass!' snapped the captain of the Remove, and, impot in hand, he turned to the door.

Then, suddenly, Billy Bunter's expression changed. A bright, indeed a brilliant, idea had flashed into his fat brain. The indignant frown vanished, replaced by a fat grin.

'I say, hold on, old chap,' he squeaked. 'I say, I'll take that impot down to Quelch, with pleasure, old chap! I'd do more than that, for a fellow I really like! Just hand it over, and leave it to me.'

'Oh!' Harry Wharton turned back. He was anxious to save time, and equally anxious not to be standing under Quelch's gimlet eye when that hurriedly scrawled impot was delivered. 'You'll take it in at once—.'

'I won't lose a minute, old fellow,' assured Bunter.

'Here you are, then.'

The impot changed hands. Leaving it in a plump and grubby paw, Harry Wharton shot out of the study. Billy Bunter was left grinning all over his fat face. Dismissing him, and the impot, from mind, Harry Wharton did the stairs in record time, cut out into the quad, and joined his waiting friends at the bike-shed.

'Through already?' asked Frank Nugent. 'Yes—let's get out.'

'You must have rushed it,' said Johnny Bull.

'The rushfulness must have been terrific!' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton laughed.

'I did—a bit!' he said. 'If Quelch doesn't like it, he can tell Bunter so. I got Bunter to take it in for me. Come on.'

'Much better have taken it in before you came out!' said Johnny Bull, sententiously. 'Quelch expects a fellow to take in his own lines.'

'Let him expect! Come on.'

Five bikes were run out, and five juniors mounted and pedalled away for Cliff House School, and tea with Marjorie and Co. From the window of No. 1 Study in the Remove, two little round eyes, behind a pair of big round spectacles, watched them depart. And Billy Bunter's fat grin expanded, till

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

Billy Bunter was due to take a hundred lines of Virgil to Quelch. A hundred lines of Virgil meant work, to which Billy Bunter objected strongly. But now he had a hundred lines of Virgil in his fat hand!

The haste with which they had been scrawled, and the blots that had been dropped, favoured the bright idea that had occurred to him. There was only one snag: Wharton's name was written, as was the rule, in the top left-hand corner. But a fat finger, dipped in the inkpot, drew a thick smear over that snag obliterating it. Even Quelch's gimlet eyes could never have penetrated to the name under that smear. And an extra smear made the impot look much more like Bunter's own handiwork.

Grinning, Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 1 Study with Wharton's lines. He descended the stairs, at the leisurely pace of a very old slug, headed for Masters' Studies, and tapped at Mr. Quelch's door.

'Come in!'

Bunter came in. Mr. Quelch, seated at his table, deep in a pile of Form papers, looked up sharply.

'Well?' he rapped.

'My lines, sir.'

'Oh!' Quelch's somewhat crusty countenance relaxed.

Bunter was seldom prompt in delivering lines. On this occasion, it seemed, he had lost no time. 'Very good! I am glad to see that for once, Bunter, you have not been negligent and dilatory.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I couldn't help that smear, sir—I—I had some-some ink on my finger—.'

'You should be more careful, Bunter. I cannot even read your name, under that smear! You are a slovenly boy, Bunter. However, you may go.'

Billy Bunter went. He rolled away contentedly. It was probable that a spot of trouble was in store for Harry Wharton, on account of undelivered lines. Fortunately—from Billy Bunter's point of view, at least, that did not matter!

CHAPTER 2

A SPOT OF TROUBLE

'LOOKS like rain!' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Fathead!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'The rainfulness is terrific!' sighed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. 'It never rains but the poorfulness is preposterous, as the English proverb remarks.'

It not only 'looked' like rain, as Bob playfully remarked.

The rain was coming down. It was only a shower so far, but it was coming down, and the dark clouds that rolled in from the sea indicated that it would soon be coming down harder and faster. Which was neither grateful nor comforting to five fellows pedalling bikes in a rutty lane through Friardale Wood.

It had been quite fine when the Famous Five started from Greyfriars. If the weather had had a doubtful aspect, they had not noticed it. But they had to notice it now. They were quite hardy fellows, and a spot or two of rain would not have bothered them unduly. But there was clearly going to be more than a spot or two: and they did not want to arrive at Cliff House School wet and limp from a drenching.

'Blow!' said Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton glanced up at the sky, through the branches that almost met over the little lane. Those branches kept off a good deal of the rain.

'Not too bad here,' he said. 'But when we get out on the Pegg road, we shall be drenched. Better take cover till it's over. It doesn't look like lasting long.'

'We don't want to be late,' remarked Bob.

'But we don't want to push in at Cliff House looking like a lot of drowned rats, either,' said Johnny Bull.

'Um! No!' agreed Bob. Bob Cherry, for reasons best known to himself, always liked to look his best when he came under the eyes of Marjorie Hazeldene. 'Look here, old Joyce will let us stick in his cottage till it's over. Push on to his dump—it's just along here somewhere.'

Which was agreed upon *nem. con.* Five cyclists pushed on fast, the rain-drops pattering on their caps. The cottage of old Joyce, the wood-cutter, was in that lane, about halfway from the village of Friardale to the Pegg road. And old Joyce was a kindly and hospitable old gentleman, absolutely certain to open his door at once to schoolboys anxious to get out of the rain. The delay was a little exasperating, as Harry Wharton's lines for Quelch had already lost time. But it could not be helped: and delay was better than a drenching. Five bikes almost flew, till they reached the garden-gate of a little cottage lying back from the lane in a long garden.

There the chums of the Remove dismounted, and pushed the bikes up the garden-path to a roomy old wooden porch, where there was room enough to park them under shelter.

Mr. Joyce's front door boasted neither bell nor knocker.

Bob Cherry rapped on it with his knuckles.

There was no response from within, however. Bob rapped again, and yet again, and still there was no response. 'Out!' he remarked.

Evidently, old Joyce was out of doors, probably busy somewhere in Friardale Wood. Bob turned the door-handle. The door, like most doors in that rural region, was left on the latch.

'Old Joyce won't mind us stepping inside,' he said. 'Come on.'

The five bicycles rather crowded the old porch, roomy as it was, and as there was no reason for not stepping inside the cottage, the juniors proceeded so to do. The door opened direct on a low-ceiled living-room, where the embers of a log-fire smouldered on an ancient brick

hearth. There was a clatter of heavy rain on the roof, as they entered: it was coming down hard and fast, and they were glad enough to be out of it.

Bob stirred the embers into a cheery blaze, and the juniors gathered round the fire to wait. Rain dashed and splashed on the little diamond-paned window. Bob glanced out at the downpour, and made a grimace.

'We're better out of that!' he remarked. 'Much!' agreed Nugent.

'The muchfulness is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'And the hopefulness is great that the esteemed Mr. Joyce will not mind, if he comes and finds us here.'

'That's all right,' said Bob. 'Old Joyce is one of the best. Hallo, hallo, hallo, that sounds like him coming.'

There was a sound of running feet outside. It sounded like someone in haste to get out of the rain. Hurried footsteps splashed in puddles on the garden path. The schoolboys all looked round towards the door, expecting to see the old wood-cutter appear there. Then there was a sudden crash in the porch, and the clanging of a falling bicycle. It was followed by a loud and angry voice, uttering a string of extremely emphatic ejaculations. Evidently the new arrival, not expecting the porch to be crowded with bicycles, had run into them before he saw them, in his haste to get out of the rain.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob. 'Old Joyce—.'

'That's not old Joyce,' said Harry. 'It's not his voice. Somebody dodging in out of the rain like ourselves.'

'Sounds as if he isn't pleased!' murmured Nugent, as the angry voice in the porch continued to ejaculate.

'Should have looked where he was going!' grunted Johnny Bull.

There was another crash from the porch. This time it sounded as if an angry foot had kicked at a machine. Then a figure appeared in the doorway, and angry eyes stared into the room. Certainly it was not old Joyce, the sedate and good-tempered old wood-cutter. The newcomer was a young man, not a stranger to the eyes of the Greyfriars juniors. They had seen him about Friardale and Courtfield several times, generally lounging with a cigarette in his mouth. He wore a rather long jacket, and rather tight trousers, and his hair rather long, and he was hatless. Mr. Freddy Dexter was, in fact, a rural edition of a 'Teddy Boy'. What he did for a livelihood was his own secret: for he was seldom or never seen in so prosaic an occupation as work, yet he seemed to be able to afford endless cigarettes, and visits to the cinema at Courtfield, the dance-hall at Lantham, and the billiard-room at the Cross Keys in Friardale. At the present moment, he was evidently in the worst temper ever. He was limping a little from contact with the bicycles. His glare at the bunch of schoolboys was almost ferocious.

'Who the dickens are you?' he bawled. 'What the deuce do you mean by sticking bicycles in the porch for a man to fall over?'

'Sorry—!' began Harry Wharton.

'What are you doing here? Get out.'

'We've stepped in out of the rain--,' said Harry, mildly.

'Well, now you can step out into it again!'

Mr. Dexter stooped, and rubbed his knee, which had contacted a pedal, and was no doubt painful. Then he straightened up, still glaring. 'Get out! Do you hear?'

'We're not deaf,' answered Bob Cherry. 'Sorry you butted into our jiggers, Mr. Dexter: but it's a good rule to look where you're going, even when you're dodging the rain. And we're not getting out till the rain stops.'

'No fear!' said Johnny Bull, emphatically.

'I tell you—!'

'You can tell us till you're black in the face, if you like,' said Bob. 'Who the dickens are you to order us out of Mr. Joyce's cottage? Get out yourself if you don't like our company.'

'I live here!' hooted Dexter. 'I'm a lodger here, and I order you out, and you'd better go, if you know what's good for you.'

'Oh!' said Bob, rather taken aback. The juniors were not aware that Mr. Joyce had a lodger in his little cottage. Really, there did not seem much space for letting lodgings, as the building had only two rooms and a kitchen on the ground floor, and two attics at the top of a little crooked staircase. Still, even if Freddy was Mr. Joyce's lodger, his rights could extend only over his own quarters, and the Greyfriars juniors were not in the least disposed to obey his lordly behest to 'get out'.

'Going?' snapped Dexter, with a threatening glare. Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Not till the rain stops,' he answered. 'Mr. Joyce would give us leave, if he were here—.'

'I'm not giving you leave. Get out.'

'We don't need leave from you, Mr. Dexter. If the other room belongs to you, as you say, that's the only room you have a right to keep anyone out of. We're staying here.'

'We are, rather!' growled Johnny Bull.

'If you'd rather be kicked out—!' bawled Dexter.

'Get on with it!' grinned Bob.

'The kickfulness might be a boot on the other leg, esteemed and execrable Dexter!' remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Freddy Dexter gave his painful knee another rub. The twinges in it evidently did not improve his temper. He came towards the group by the fire with clenched hands. Apparently he anticipated no trouble in dealing with a bunch of schoolboys. Only too clearly, Freddy had a bad and bullying temper, and he was giving it free rein.

'Get out, or—!'

'Rats!' said Bob, cheerfully. He followed up that remark with a roar of wrath, as Dexter grasped him, and spun him towards the door. 'Hands off!'

He went spinning, flung headlong towards the door.

Freddy turned next on Harry Wharton, whose fists went up to meet him, his eyes flashing over them. But Freddy's grasp did not reach him, nor were his fists needed: for Bob Cherry, having spun a couple of yards, came back with a rush, hitting out. Something like the kick of a mule landed on Freddy Dexter's chin, and he spun in his turn, collided with a chair, and went to the floor with a headlong crash.

CHAPTER 3

SOMETHING LIKE A SHINDY

'MAN down!' grinned Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry robbed his knuckles. They had suffered a little from that tremendous jolt on Dexter's chin: though not, probably, so much as the chin! His blue eyes gleamed down at Dexter.

'Now get up and have another, you cheeky rotter!' he roared.

Freddy Dexter sat up.

He felt his chin with both hands, as if to ascertain that it was still there. His pasty face was aflame, his eyes gleaming like a rat's. Freddy had started in to throw out the schoolboys, one after another: never doubting that he could handle them. Now he discovered that he could not handle even one of them, not, at all events, the one named Robert Cherry!

Slowly, he picked himself up.

Bob Cherry looked, and felt, a good deal inclined to give him 'another'. But Harry Wharton hastily interposed. 'Keep cool, Bob, old chap—,' he pushed Bob back. 'Think I'm going to be chucked about like a sack of coke?' roared Bob.

'No, old chap: but we don't want old Joyce to find a scrap going on in his cottage if he come in—.'

'Oh! All right! We don't want that, certainly,' agreed Bob. 'But that cheeky rat had better keep his paws to himself.'

Wharton turned to Dexter. The man had acted from sheer evil temper, and from a belief that he could bully schoolboys as he liked. But the captain of the Remove was very anxious to keep the peace in the old wood-cutter's cottage, and to have no more trouble, if it could be helped, with old Joyce's Teddy-Boy lodger.

'Look here, Mr. Dexter,' he said, 'we've just got to stay under shelter till the worst of the rain is over. It won't be ten minutes, very likely. If you don't like our company, there's your own room. What's the good of kicking up a shindy about nothing?'

Johnny Bull gave an expressive grunt. He by no means concurred in taking so pacific a line with a bully. However, he contented himself with a grunt, and left it at that.

But Wharton's pacific words had no effect on Freddy Dexter. If he had been evil-tempered before, he was more so now, after that jolt on his chin. He slid his hand into a long pocket of his long jacket.

'You ain't going, ain't you?' he said, thickly. 'You'll get your heads cracked if you don't! Now, then!'

His hand came out of his pocket, with something in it that looked like a stuffed sock. The juniors stared at it. They could see that there was something of a very solid nature inside that sock. It was, in fact, a 'cosh': a length of leaden pipe wrapped in a sock.

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Nugent.

The schoolboys backed away, as Dexter came towards them, swinging the 'cosh'. They could hardly believe that the young ruffian intended to use such a weapon. But evidently he did. Having failed to throw them out, he was going to drive them out with the cosh! He grinned savagely as they jumped away from it.

'Out you go!' he snarled.

Bob Cherry stooped, and grasped the overturned chair, over which Dexter had stumbled. With a sudden swing of his arm, he hurled it at the young rascal's legs, taking Freddy quite by

surprise. Freddy Dexter gave a howl, as his legs were knocked from under him, and he sat down on the floor with a bump that almost shook old Joyce's cottage.

'Collar him!' panted Bob. 'Get that cosh away.' Harry Wharton was already springing at Dexter as he sat and spluttered. He tore the cosh from the young ruffian's hand, and, with the same movement of his arm, tossed it into the fire.

'That's the best place for that!' he said.

'Now chuck him into his own room!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'He doesn't like our company, and we don't want his.'

'Good egg!' chuckled Bob. He threw open the door of the adjoining room. 'Chuck him in!'

Freddy Dexter scrambled to his feet. He scrambled into five pairs of hands, that grasped him all at once. His attempt to handle the 'cosh' had put the lid on, so to speak: the Greyfriars fellows were fed up with Mr. Dexter, and had had more than enough of him. He was whirled off his feet, and rushed across the room, with his arms and legs flying wildly. He yelled and spluttered as he was rushed through the doorway into his own apartment in Joyce's cottage.

It was a sparsely furnished apartment, with a back window that looked into the dusky shades of Friardale Wood. The most prominent article of furniture was a large leather armchair, of solid Victorian construction. Into that armchair the Famous Five pitched Freddy Dexter, and he sprawled there panting.

'Now stick there, you hooligan, till we're gone,' said Harry. 'If you come back, we'll chuck you out into the rain.'

Leaving Freddy sprawling in the old armchair, almost spitting like a cat in his rage, the juniors returned to the living-room, shutting the door on him.

'That's that!' growled Johnny Bull.

'Bother the rain!' said Nugent. 'It's pretty rotten, a shindy like this in old Joyce's cottage—.'

'We couldn't help it,' said Bob.

'No: but it's rotten all the same.'

'The rottenfulness is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. 'But what cannot be cured, must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

'Good old English proverb!' said Bob. 'That old moon-shee who taught you English at Bhanipur, Inky, must have been some lad! Blow the rain! Is it ever going to stop?'

He stared from the rain-splashed window. The rain was still coming down hard, and evidently they had to wait. Tea in the school-room at Cliff House had to wait, too. It was a relief, at least, to see no more of Freddy Dexter. His door did not open: Freddy, apparently, had had enough of the Greyfriars party at close quarters.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes old Joyce!' exclaimed Bob, a few minutes later, as there were tramping footsteps in the puddles on the garden path. He ran to the door. Freddy had run into the bicycles stacked in the porch, and he did not want old Joyce to do the same. 'Look out, Mr. Joyce—.'

But old Joyce, unlike Freddy, was looking where he was going. He stared at the bicycles, as he came into the porch, and then at Bob. Then he came into the living-room, shaking off rain-drops. He blinked at the Famous Five, evidently surprised to find his little cottage so thickly populated.

'We thought you wouldn't mind us stepping in out of the rain, Mr. Joyce,' said Harry.

'More'n welcome, sir,' said the old wood-cutter. 'Stop as long as you like. It's coming down 'ard, but it won't last long.'

The door of Dexter's room flew open. Evidently that unpleasant young man had heard his landlord's voice. Old Joyce looked blankly at his enraged face as he glared out through the doorway.

'Turn those young ruffians out, Joyce!' he bawled. 'They've refused to go at my order. Turn them out.'

'And who are you to order them out?' inquired Mr. Joyce, stolidly. 'The young gentlemen will stay just as long as they like, Freddy Dexter, and you can mind your own business.'

'Do you want to lose your lodger?' bawled Dexter. 'Nor I wouldn't mind very much if I did, Freddy Dexter.'

A lodger that ain't paid his rent for six weeks ain't everybody's money,' said the old wood-cutter. 'Please yourself. And if you don't want your 'ead smacked, you'd better speak more civilly, young man.'

Slam! Dexter's door closed again. Old Joyce turned to the schoolboys. 'Don't you mind 'im,' he said. 'You stop where you are till the rain's over, and welcome.' And with a nod, the old wood-cutter tramped through into the kitchen.

It was ten minutes more before the rain stopped. A few more drops were coming down, but a few drops did not bother the Famous Five. Having thanked Mr. Joyce politely for his hospitality, they pushed the bicycles out of the porch, and splashed down the garden path to the lane. Then speed was put on, to make up for lost time, and five bikes whizzed almost supersonically till they arrived at the gates of Cliff House School. By which time, Harry Wharton and Co. had forgotten the existence of Freddy Dexter, little guessing how much they were to have to do with that objectionable young man in the near future.

CHAPTER 4

BOOT FOR BUNTER

'WHARTON!'

'Yes, sir!'

'So you have returned!'

Mr. Quelch rapped out those words almost like pistol-shots. His look was very severe.

Evidently, Quelch was extremely displeased with his Head Boy.

Five juniors were looking quite merry and bright when they came in. They had had a pleasant tea with Marjorie and Co. at Cliff House, and, as luckily there had been no more rain, an agreeable spin back to Greyfriars. So they were all looking, and feeling, quite cheery, till Quelch's sharp voice rapped. Then five faces became very serious all at once. Quelch's look indicated that it was a time to be serious.

Quelch met them as they came in. Apparently he had been keeping a gimlet eye open for them. Why, they did not yet know. They could not remember, at the moment, any particular sins of omission or commission: unless perhaps Quelch was dissatisfied with Wharton's lines, which Bunter had taken in for him. Certainly that impot had been rather rushed! It was upon the captain of the Remove that the gimlet eyes fixed, with a glint in them.

'Yes, sir!' answered Harry, wondering what was the matter with Quelch. A hurriedly scrawled impot, even a few blots, hardly accounted for the thunder in his brow, 'And what do you mean by this, Wharton?'

'By what, sir?'

'By what?' repeated Mr. Quelch, with a deep rumble in his voice. 'You were instructed to bring your lines to my study before you left the House after class, Wharton. You did not do so. You went out with your friends, in total disregard of my instructions. I have not received your imposition. I repeat, what do you mean by this?'

Harry Wharton stared at him blankly.

'But, sir—!' he stammered.

It was not, apparently, the scrawly and blotty state of the lines that had incensed Quelch. It seemed that he had not received them at all! Which, if it was so, certainly accounted for the rolling of the thunder! Quelch was not a master to be disregarded. Quelch was accustomed to speak as one having authority, saying 'Do this!' and he doeth it! He was the very last member of Dr. Locke's staff to tolerate disregard.

'Your lines are doubled, Wharton—.' The thunder rolled on!

'But, sir—!'

'To-morrow,' said Mr. Quelch, unheeding, 'is a half-holiday. You will write out two hundred lines, Wharton, and bring them to my study, before you leave the House. If you disregard my instructions a second time, I warn you that the consequences will be very serious.'

'But, sir—!' stammered Harry, again.

'That will do!'

With that, Mr. Quelch rustled away, still frowning: his frown, indeed, almost as frightful and fearful as that of the Lord High Executioner. Only too clearly, Quelch was in a 'bait'. He left the Famous Five in a rather dismayed group.

'That fat villain!' breathed Harry Wharton. 'He can't have taken in the lines—.'

'Just like Bunter to forget,' said Nugent.

'Too jolly lazy, more likely,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Much better have taken them in yourself, old man, before you came out. I told you so—.'

'Fathead!'

'Well, I did tell you so—.'

'True, O King!' said Bob Cherry. 'But not much use now. Dry up, Johnny, old chap! Look here, Wharton, that fat ass must have left your lines in your study. Cut up and get them and take them to Quelch, and explain. The old boy will turn off the heat, if he knows that you did them before you went out, only another fellow forgot to take them in for you.'

'I'll boot that fat villain all over Greyfriars—.'

'Lots of time for that later—get the lines to Quelch at once, so that he will know they were done on time!' urged Bob. 'We don't want the half to-morrow to be mucked up.'

Harry Wharton nodded, and cut away to the stairs.

Bob's advice was too good not to be followed. Quelch was wrathful: but he was a just man, and would be placated when he knew the facts. It was only necessary to get that impot to him without delay, to make it clear that the lines had been written, as per instructions, before Wharton went out. That need be only a matter of minutes, so far as the Famous Five knew, at all events: having no suspicion of the nefarious use to which William George Bunter had put that impot.

Wharton ran into No. 1 Study. He naturally expected to find the undelivered lines on the table there. But there was no sign of them. The impot was not on the table, and a hurried stare round the study failed to reveal them. The fat Owl had not, after all, left them there.

Breathing hard, the captain of the Remove came out of No. 1 again. He had to find that impot, and to find it he had first to find Bunter. He called to Lord Mauleverer, who was coming down the Remove passage.

'Seen Bunter, Mauly?'

'Yaas,' answered Mauly.

'Where is he?'

'Haven't the foggiest.'

'You silly ass!' hooted Wharton. 'If you saw him, you know where he is, I suppose. Where did you see him?'

'In the tuck-shop.'

'The tuck-shop's closed now—it's just on lock-ups.'

'Yaas,' agreed Lord Mauleverer. 'He won't be there now. It's half an hour since I saw him there.'

With an effort, Wharton refrained from telling Lord Mauleverer what he thought of his aristocratic intellect. Herbert Vernon-Smith came out of study, and he called to him.

'Know where Bunter is, Smithy?'

'No: but I can guess,' answered the Bounder.

'Well, where?'

'Somewhere where there's somebody else's tuck.'

'Fathead!' hooted the captain of the Remove. It was no time for Smithy's little jokes.

He tramped up the Remove passage to No. 7. That was Bunter's study, and a likely covert to draw. Quite impatient by that time, he banged on the door, hurled it open, and hurtled in. There were three juniors in No. 7: the three to whom the study belonged: Peter Todd, Tom Dutton, and William George Bunter. The last-named was seated, or rather sprawled, in the study armchair. That armchair belonged to Toddy, but it was generally occupied by Billy

Bunter, who occupied it now. The fat junior gave Wharton a startled blink through his big spectacles. The other two juniors stared at him.

'Do you always come into a study as politely at that?' inquired Peter.

'Sorry, old man—I'm looking for that fat villain! Bunter, you benighted bloater—.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—!'

'Where's my impot?' roared Wharton. 'You never took it in to Quelch, and he's just told me it's doubled because he never had it. I've got to take it to him at once. Where is it?'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Why didn't you take it to him?'

'I—I—I jolly well did!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I said I would, and I—I did, old chap. I'm a fellow of my word, I hope. I—I took it in to him a few minutes after you went out this afternoon. He—he had it all right.'

Wharton stared blankly at the stammering fat Owl. 'You took that impot to Quelch?' he exclaimed.

'Yes, old chap!'

'But he's just said that he never had it!'

'You—you see, there—there was a—a mistake " stammered Bunter. 'I—I don't know why, but—but Quelch thought it was my impot—as—as—as I took it in, you know. I told you I had a hundred lines to do for Quelch, and you wouldn't lend a fellow a hand—.'

'My name was written on it.'

'Oh! Yes! But—but it got smeared somehow, and—and Quelch didn't notice it. Not my fault, you know—I—I can't help Quelch making mistakes, can I?'

'You fat villain ' gasped Harry Wharton. 'You smeared out my name, and took my lines to Quelch as your own. Why, if Quelch knew, he would send you up to the Head.'

Yell, from Bunter.

'I say, don't you go telling Quelch I pulled his leg over those lines. He would be as mad as a hatter. Besides, I—I didn't! I—I never dipped my finger in the inkpot, and never smeared it over your name—never thought of it. It was just an-an accident! Besides, it was all your own fault—. If you'd helped with my lines I wouldn't have done it. And—and I never did it! Never even thought of it. It was just Quelch's mistake—.'

Harry Wharton breathed very hard. Evidently, he could not take that impot to Quelch: that impot had already been taken to Quelch—as Bunter's. He was left with a doubled impot, to write out on a half-holiday.

'You fat, frabjous, footling octopus!' he said. 'I won't give you away to Quelch: but I'll jolly well boot you all over the Remove. Get out of that armchair!'

'I—I say, old chap—!'

'Get out of it,' roared Wharton.

Billy Bunter did not get out of the armchair. Probably he felt safer in it than out of it. But the incensed captain of the Remove was not to be denied. He grasped the high back of the armchair, and tilted it, to roll the fat junior out. Billy Bunter clutched desperately at the arms of the chair. There was an ominous cracking and creaking, as Wharton heaved, and Bunter clung.

'Go easy, old man!' called out Peter Todd. 'That's my property, and it's not in its first youth.' Peter's armchair was, in fact, a somewhat venerable one.

It had had hard wear and tear, and was not in a state to stand much more. Its springs were unreliable, and its joints uncertain. Often and often had it protested, with loud creaks, when

Billy Bunter's extensive weight was plumped into it. Now it really sounded as if it was in the process of final disintegration.

But as it tilted over, Bunter had to roll out. He rolled on the floor of No. 7 Study, and roared. There was a crash of castors as the armchair righted again on its legs. Wharton came round it with a rush.

'Now, you fat villain—!'

Billy Bunter bounded to his feet.

Not often did Bunter bound. He had too much weight to lift. But a foot within a yard of his tight trousers spurred him to unusual activity. He bounded up: and plumped back into the armchair: the safest spot for those tight trousers!

Plump! Crash!

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Harry Wharton.

'My armchair!' yelled Peter.

Bunter had done it, at last! Often and often he had nearly done it, and the old armchair had stood the strain. Now it failed to stand up to it. There was a sudden collapse. Billy Bunter did not sit on the seat of that armchair. He sat through it! The seat disappeared under him, and a fat Owl, yelling frantically, wedged in among split leather and coiling springs, with two little fat legs sticking up in the air.

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

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Harry Wharton.

'My armchair!' gasped Peter. 'Bunter, you blithering bloater—.'

'Yaroooh! Help!' shrieked Bunter. 'Owl Get me out— I'm stuck! I can't get out— Yaroooh! I say you fellows, —whoooooop!'

'Ha, ha. ha!'

Harry Wharton, his wrath turned to merriment, quitted No. 7 Study, laughing, and left him to it. Wild howls followed him, as Billy Bunter struggled and wriggled frantically in the ruins of Toddy's armchair.

CHAPTER 5

HARD LINES

'BLOW!' said Harry Wharton.

He made that monosyllabic remark emphatically. Four fellows looked, as they felt, sympathetic.

It was the following day. And it was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars. And the Famous Five had an excursion planned for that afternoon. And that excursion, for one member of the Co. at least, was 'mucked up' by the circumstance that Harry Wharton had two hundred lines of Virgil to write before he could get out. And he realised, too, that he could not venture to splash them off as he had done the previous day. Quelch, already incensed by his supposed disregard of orders, was likely to go over that impot with a glinting eye: and certainly unlikely to be satisfied with a hurried scrawl, and a single blot might spell detention.

It would not have been so bad, had the weather been rainy again. But it was not rainy. It was a golden autumn afternoon. Bright sunshine streamed in at the window of the Remove landing, where the juniors were standing, and they looked out at a blue sky with hardly a cloud to be seen. It was a day when the open spaces called.

'Blow!' repeated Harry Wharton. 'That fat, footling frump—. Blow!'

'Rotten luck!' said Bob Cherry.

'Rotten!' said Frank Nugent.

'The rottenfulness is terrific!' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'It's rotten!' said Johnny Bull. 'But if you'd taken your lines in to Quelch yesterday—!'

'I didn't!' said Wharton, curtly.

'I know you didn't! But if you had—.'

'If "ifs" and "ans" were pots and pans, the tinkers would all have to go to the Labour Exchange!' said Bob.

'Dry up, Johnny.'

'Well, I told Wharton so, at the time—!'

'Fathead!' said Wharton, politely.

'My esteemed Johnny,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Speech is silvery, but silence is the bird in the bush that makes Jack a dull boy.'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'Well, I did tell him so, and—.'

'You fellows had better get out,' said Harry, interrupting. 'I'll get along to the study and get on with that impot.'

'What about all of us lending a hand?' suggested Nugent.

'No fear! Quelch will go over it like a hawk. He thinks I walked out on him yesterday, and I can't tell him about Bunter, and he's shirty,' said Harry. 'I've got to write every line, and jolly carefully, too. Blow!'

'Can't be helped,' said Bob. 'All in a day's work, old boy. But that cuts out the spin to Redclyffe.'

'Not for you fellows,' answered Harry. 'We were going to wind up for tea at the bun-shop in Courtfield, about five. I'll come along to the bun-shop when I'm through, and meet you there. Now cut off.'

'Okay,' said Bob. 'Come on, you chaps. It's a topping day for a spin, and jolly rotten that you can't come.'

Four juniors turned to the stairs: one towards the Remove passage. But one of the four stopped and looked round again.

'Wharton, old man—!' called out Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton glanced back.

'Well?' he asked.

'Better take that impot in yourself this time,' said Johnny. 'Don't leave it to another chap to take in. I told you—Oh! ow! Leggo! Gone mad?' yelled Johnny, as he was suddenly interrupted by Bob Cherry grasping him, and rushing him headlong down the stairs. 'You mad ass, leggo! Oh, crumbs! Leggo, I say.'

But Bob did not let go. Johnny had said 'I told you so' once too often. Johnny did the stairs in a breathless rush, yelling: followed by Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh laughing. Harry Wharton laughed too, as he watched them from the landing. They disappeared, Johnny's voice floating back on its top note.

But Wharton's face clouded as he went up the passage to his study. It was, as Bob had said, a topping day for a spin, and never had Latin lines seemed so very unattractive. A bike spin by leafy lanes, under a sunny sky, round by Redclyffe Hill, winding up for tea at the Courtfield bun-shop, was ever so much more attractive than the deathless verse of Virgil. That impot had to be done and it had to be done with care: but the captain of the 'Remove was feeling very much inclined to postpone it while he looked for Billy Bunter and kicked him!

But, as it happened, Billy Bunter did not need looking for! It is said that fools rush in where angels fear to tread: and William George Bunter was the fellow to ask for what he did not want.

Harry Wharton sat down at his study table, propped Virgil open, dipped his pen in the ink, and applied himself to his task. Once more he started at '*Contieure omnes*', but this time '*donec Calchante ministro*' was only a half-way mark: he had to push on to '*improvida pectora turbat*'. While his friends were spinning along under a sunny sky on the Redclyffe road, line after line of Latin ran from his pen, but not rapidly. There was to be no hasty scrawling this time: further trouble with Quelch had to be avoided, if he was to get out and join his comrades at the bun-shop at Courtfield. The bare idea of being bidden to write that impot over again was too awful to contemplate.

He was through about fifty lines, when a fat face and a pair of big spectacles looked in at the door.

'Oh, here you are!' said Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton glanced up, with a knitted brow. It was due to Bunter's fatuous trickery that he had to stick in that study, grinding out lines, instead of pushing a bike over Redclyffe Hill with the Co. He had been tempted to look for Bunter and kick him: now the fat Owl had arrived, as if to ask for it!

He half-rose from his chair. But he sat down again.

Bunter, after all, was hardly worth kicking: and anyhow the lines had to be done: kicking Bunter would not have reduced their quantity.

'Get out, you fat ass!' he said, curtly, and resumed Virgil.

'Lines?' asked Bunter, blinking at him.

'Yes, you fat villain—the lines you've landed on me.'

Buzz off before I come across and boot you.'

Billy Bunter had been about to roll into the study. Now he decided to remain in the doorway. But he did not buzz off. Bunter had, in fact, almost forgotten the episode of the lines the

previous day. Such a trifle was not likely to linger in his fat memory. And a much more important matter was on the fat Owl's mind at the moment.

'Well, look here. Wharton, about that armchair—!' he recommenced.

'Eh! What armchair?'

'Toddy's,' said Bunter. 'It's simply smashed up. It was rather an old crock—not the sort of thing I liked having in my study. I expect Toddy's pater picked it up second-hand for about ten-bob—it looked like it! He, he, he! Still, it was an armchair of sorts. Now there isn't one in the study. Toddy has carted it off to the box-room. He says he's going to mend it somehow. Fat lot of good that will be. Anyhow, it will take a jolly long time.'

'Are you going to buzz off?'

'Eh? I haven't finished yet. Look here, a fellow wants an armchair in his study,' said Bunter. 'It was your fault it was smashed up— you know that ! You've got an armchair in this study. I'd go down to Courtfield and get a new one, only I've been disappointed about a postal order. Will you lend me that armchair for my study, till Toddy gets the old one mended?'

'No! Get out.'

'Now look here,' said Bunter, 'I'm jolly well not going to squat on a Windsor chair to please you, Harry Wharton. You rush into my study like a Red Indian and smash up the armchair, and it's up to you to lend me yours. I'll wheel it along to my study now, if you don't mind.'

Harry Wharton glanced round— for a missile. A cushion lay on a chair near at hand. He dropped his hand on it. 'Are you going?' he asked.

'Not till we've settled about the armchair,' said Bunter, firmly. 'I don't mind wheeling it along to my study— I'm not lazy, I hope! I'm expecting a postal order shortly, and then I can cut down to old Lazarus's in Court field and buy one. I'm sick of that old crock of Toddy's, even if he does get it mended. Will you lend me that armchair till my postal order comes?'

'Last time of asking!' said Harry, picking up the cushion.

'If you jolly well chuck that cushion at me, I'll jolly well— yaroooooh!' roared Billy Bunter, as the cushion flew, and landed on the widest circumference at Greyfriars. 'Ow! Oh! Beast! Wow!'

Billy Bunter fairly flew out of the doorway, under the impact of the whizzing cushion. There was a loud bump in the passage, as he sat down there, and a louder yell, which woke most of the echoes of the Remove studies.

'Yaroo! Whoop! Oh, crikey! wow!'

Having thus disposed of Bunter, Harry Wharton turned his attention to his lines again.

But, as it happened, Billy Bunter was not quite disposed of. Even the worm will turn: and in many respects, William George Bunter bore a distinct resemblance to a worm! A breathless and enraged fat Owl scrambled up in the passage, and grabbed up the cushion. Two little round eyes glared wrath into the study through a pair of big round spectacles.

'Beast!' roared Bunter. 'There's your cushion-yah!' And with all the force of a fat arm, Bunter hurled the cushion back, at Harry Wharton's head.

But Billy Bunter's aim, even at short range, was not good! The cushion did not land, as intended, in the middle of Harry Wharton's features. It crashed on the table, knocked over the inkpot, and rolled to the floor. It left the inkpot on its side, streaming ink over Wharton's impot.

'Oh!' gasped Harry Wharton. He gazed at his imposition. Fifty lines had been written out of the two hundred. They had almost disappeared under a sea of ink! Certainly they were in no state to be handed in to Mr. Quelch! He jumped up from the table.

The expression on his speaking countenance was enough for Billy Bunter. The fat Owl bolted, fleeing for his fat life. The matter of the armchair, important as it was, evidently had to be postponed. Billy Bunter did the passage to the stairs at something like 60 m.p.h., and vanished into space.

And Harry Wharton, with feelings that really could not have been expressed in words, sat down again in No. 1 Study, to begin once more at '*Conticuere omnes*'.

CHAPTER 6

SMASH-AND-GRAB!

'HOLD on,' said Bob Cherry.

He slowed down.

Three fellows followed his example, giving him enquiring looks. Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, could see no special reason for 'holding on': and, in fact, it was an awkward spot for holding on: they did not want to lose pace, going up a steep rise.

'Want to walk it?' inquired Johnny Bull, with a slight inflection of sarcasm.

Plenty of cyclists 'walked it' at that particular spot on the road from Redclyffe to Courtfield. It was a steep pull up. But Bob, whose rather long legs seemed to be made of iron, was the last fellow to want to 'walk' it. He was good for that hill, and half-a-dozen more. Nevertheless, he slowed up, and jumped down, and the other three rather reluctantly did the same.

'Tired?' asked Johnny, a little more sarcastically.

'Not a lot,' answered Bob. 'But—.'

'Well, we've done a good many miles,' said Nugent. 'Might as well walk this hill, if you like.'

'The mightfulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'We don't want to keep Wharton waiting for us at the bun-shop!' Johnny Bull pointed out.

'Oh, we can put on a spurt, on the other side,' said Bob. 'I'm going to lend that old chap a hand with his jigger, see?' He made a gesture towards a cyclist a little ahead on the road. That cyclist had dismounted, and was wheeling his machine. He looked a rather unusual figure on a warm, sunny, autumn afternoon, for he wore a long raincoat, buttoned up round his neck. A hat, slouched over his face, half-hid it, but a grey beard and moustache could be seen, which indicated age. In fact on his looks he might have been on the shady side of seventy. Bob's eyes had been on him for some minutes, and it went to Bob's kind heart to see an old fellow who looked old enough to be his grandfather, toiling up a steep hill pushing a bike. Really, the old fellow looked as if his cycling days were over, even on the level.

'Oh!' said Johnny Bull. Frank Nugent laughed.

'Bob, all over!' he said. 'Go it, fathead! We'll walk the jiggers.'

'Go it,' assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Kind hearts are more than crooners, as the English poet has remarkably observed.'

'Well, he looks about a hundred years old,' said Bob. 'Might as well help him over the hill with that jigger.'

Bob Cherry ran his bike on, and in a couple of minutes overtook the grey-bearded man in the raincoat.

'Excuse me, sir,' he began, politely.

There was a glimmer of grey bushy eyebrows under the slouched hat, as the man stared at him. But the eyes under those grey brows were very sharp, and they stared very sharply at the Greyfriars junior.

'What do you want?' The question came with a snap. 'Nothing, sir. But—.'

'Then keep your distance.'

Bob coloured.

'Will you let me wheel your bike over the hill, sir?' he said. 'I can manage the two quite easily.'

'No!'

'I'd be glad to lend a hand, sir.'

'Mind your own business.'

'Oh!' gasped Bob.

The man in the raincoat pushed on, leaving him standing and staring, his cheeks crimson. It was quite an unlooked-for rebuff. Evidently that old gentleman's manners had not improved with age!

Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Hurree Singh came up. They were grinning. Bob Cherry drew a deep, deep breath.

'By gum!' he said. 'If that old boy wasn't as old as Methuselah, I'd jolly well punch his cheeky head.' He put a leg over his machine. 'Nothing to snigger at, you asses— come on!'

The four juniors remounted and rode on. A minute or two later they passed the man in the raincoat. He did not glance at them as they passed: his head was bent, and the slouched hat hid his face, except for the grey beard. They gave him no further heed. Four bikes whizzed on up the hill, and the grey-bearded man was left far behind, pushing at his machine.

Once over the hill, there was an easy run down into Courtfield, the old market-town a couple of miles from Greyfriars School. The four juniors rode into the old High Street, and stopped at the bun-shop: their rendezvous with Harry Wharton. Outside that place of refreshment, there were little tables, under a bright red-striped awning, with several people sitting at some of them, but among them the captain of the Greyfriars Remove was not to be seen.

'Not here yet,' remarked Bob. 'We're first, — we'll leave tea till Wharton blows along.'

Four bikes were stacked round a corner of the building, and the juniors sat down at one of the tables under the awning. There they refreshed themselves with ginger-pop while watching the street in the direction of the school for the arrival of their chum.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' ejaculated Bob, suddenly. 'There's Bunter.'

A fat figure had emerged from a shop doorway across the street.

That shop was the establishment of Mr. Lazarus, who dealt in all kinds of second-hand goods, from watches and clocks, radio sets and fishing-rods, to furniture and frying-pans. His chief line was jewellery: and there was quite an attractive display— and no doubt a very expensive one— of watches and rings behind the plate-glass of the window. Customers at Mr. Lazarus's shop generally came away satisfied, for he was a punctiliously fair-dealing old gentleman, but the plump customer who was now emerging into the sunshine did not look satisfied. It was William George Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove: and his plump brow was wrinkled in a deep frown. Apparently his commercial transactions with Mr. Lazarus, whatever they were, had not gone according to Billy Bunter's wishes.

The four juniors grinned as they watched him.

Bunter had stopped on the pavement outside Mr. Lazarus's shop, and his eyes and spectacles turned on the bun-shop across the street. It was natural, indeed inevitable, for Bunter's glance to turn in the direction of any spot where there were foodstuffs. At the same time, he ran his hands through his pockets, as if in search of coin of the realm. That search was unsuccessful: for the fat hands came out empty. Then, as the fat Owl was about to turn away, his fat face suddenly brightened.

'He's seen us!' grinned Bob.

Evidently that was the case. Billy Bunter came across the High Street almost with a rush.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Squat down, and have a ginger-pop, old fat man,' said Bob.

'Eh? Oh! Yes! But I say, I—I suppose you fellows couldn't lend me a couple of pounds?' asked Bunter, blinking at them.

'Right on the wicket,' agreed Bob. 'We couldn't.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'd settle the minute my postal order comes,' said Bunter, 'I told you fellows I was expecting a postal order—.'

'You did— lots of times! But what the dickens do you want two pounds for?' asked Bob. 'Even you couldn't park two pounds' worth of tuck.'

'Tain't that! It's that armchair,' said Bunter. 'Old Lazarus has got one at two pounds— cheap, too, if you come to that. Better than that old crock of Toddy's ever was. Only— only— well, you know what these shopkeepers are! Sordid! He won't let me have it without the money.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' said Bunter, peevishly. 'A chap wants an armchair in his study. It was Wharton's fault that Toddy's was smashed up yesterday, but he's refused to lend me his till Toddy gets it mended. Selfishness all round!' said Bunter, shaking his head sadly. 'I say, Bob, old chap, you might let me have the armchair from your study. You're not selfish like Wharton.'

'I am!' contradicted Bob. 'Worse, in fact!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, I've seen one at Lazarus's, and it would be all right, if he would let me have it on tick,' said Bunter. 'I told him I wasn't particular about the price— all I wanted was to have it on tick—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' snorted Bunter. He plumped down into a chair, and stretched out a fat hand to the glass of ginger-pop that Bob hospitably poured for him. 'I say, aren't you fellows going to have anything to eat?'

'Yes, when Wharton blows along.'

Billy Bunter grunted, and imbibed ginger-pop. It was a discontented fat Owl that sunny afternoon. An armchair in his study was, in fact, a necessity to Bunter— how, without one, was a fellow to stretch fat limbs in luxurious laziness? Toddy's armchair had gone west: nobody was going to lend him one, and shopkeepers were too sordid to part with their goods unless the same were paid for! It looked as if Bunter was going to remain in an armchairless state, unless he could find some trusting tradesman to supply him on 'tick', or until his celebrated postal order came— both unlikely events! He could have found temporary consolation, at least, in food: but though he had added himself to the tea-party at the bun-shop, even that consolation was denied him, till the missing member of the party came along. He sat and frowned.

'There's that old bean again!' remarked Johnny Bull. The juniors were looking for a cyclist from the direction of Greyfriars. But it was from the other direction that a cyclist came into view. Bob Cherry frowned at the sight of the man in the raincoat. Frowns did not come easily to Bob's cheery face: but really that man in the raincoat had been unnecessarily uncivil.

'Grumpy, old ass!' muttered Bob.

The man did not glance at them as he pedalled by, probably not noticing them at all, under the awning. He was riding slowly, as was natural in a cyclist of such apparently venerable years. He jogged on past the bun-shop, and they watched him idly as he went. But he did not proceed very far. On the opposite side of the street, he stopped, dismounted, and hooked a pedal on the edge of the pavement. Then, with slow steps, he crossed the pavement to Mr. Lazarus's shop-window, and stood looking into it, at the display of jewellery there, with one hand in the pocket of his raincoat.

What happened next was as startling as a crash of thunder.

Smash!

The man's hand had whipped out of his pocket, with something in it. That 'something' crashed in the window, and splinters of broken glass flew in all directions. Almost at the same instant, the man was grabbing at the jewellery in the window, and watches, rings, and other articles were disappearing into the pockets of the raincoat.

'What the thump—!'

'What the dickens—!'

'Smash-and-grab!' gasped Bob Cherry.

The juniors stared blankly across the street, almost spell-bound by the suddenness of it. A score of other people from various directions, stared and exclaimed. But it was only for seconds that the smash-and-grab man was at the smashed window. He came back across the pavement to his bicycle, at a speed that contrasted strangely with his slow movements earlier. He leaped on the machine, drove at the pedals, and shot away down the High Street. Clearly, the man in the raincoat was not so old as he looked! Under his outward aspect, he was a young man, and a vigorous one at that. The bicycle flew at almost lightning speed, and he was gone, as Mr. Lazarus came rushing out of his shop with a wildly-excited face. The High Street was in a buzz as he vanished.



HE LEAPED ON THE MACHINE AND SHOT AWAY

'Smash-and-grab!' repeated Bob, breathlessly. 'And he's robbed old Lazarus-by gum! Smash-and-grab-!' An excited crowd gathered outside Mr. Lazarus's shop, staring at the smashed window. A constable pushed his way through the crowd. A few minutes more, and a car whizzed down the High Street, and the juniors had a glimpse of Inspector Grimes in it: in hot pursuit of the fleeing raider. The old High Street of Courtfield was left in an unwonted buzz of excitement.

CHAPTER 7

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

'*Improvida pectora turbat!*' sighed Harry Wharton.

He wrote the last line, and dropped his pen.

He was through, at last. That almost interminable imposition, further lengthened by Billy Bunter's antics, was finished.

Two hundred lines, without a single blot or a suspicion of a smudge, were completed. It only remained to take them down to Mr. Quelch: and then he would be free to wheel out his machine, and ride across the common to Courtfield, and join his friends at the bun-shop. He was likely to be a little late at the rendezvous, for five was already striking from the clock-tower. But this time he did not think of saving a few minutes by entrusting delivery to other hands.

He gathered up the lines and left his study. A minute later he was tapping at Mr. Quelch's door.

'Come in!'

Mr. Quelch was seated at his sunny window, with a ponderous volume in his hands. Quelch was reading Lucretius.

That was Quelch's idea of a pleasant hour of leisure, when he was free of his form. It was a pleasure that few fellows at Greyfriars would have cared to share with him!

He frowned slightly as Wharton entered.

Quelch was not pleased with his Head Boy, who, as he supposed, had 'walked out' on him the previous day. Neither did he want interruptions when he was deep in the majestic verse of Lucretius, and pondering on that ancient author's interesting anticipations of modern atomic theories. 'My lines, sir!' said Harry, meekly.

'Oh!' said Mr. Quelch.

He very nearly added 'You may place them on my table', which would have enabled him to get back to Lucretius without delay. But he did not. He felt it his duty to be stern: and Quelch was a whale on duty. Tearing himself away, as it were, from the entrancing Lucretian hexameters, he laid the ponderous volume on his knee, and said, 'Hand them to me.'

Wharton handed them to him, and waited.

With a grim eye, Mr. Quelch scanned that impot. A single blot, a single smear, a single hasty orthographical error, a single hasty scrawl, would probably have caused him to direct that impot to be written over again. But the captain of the Remove had been extremely careful, and he was glad of it now, as the grim eye scanned the lines from '*conticuere omnes*' to '*pectora turbat*'. But he waited anxiously.

However, Quelch's grim brow relaxed as he scanned. There was no blot: no smear: no error: no scrawl: it was, in fact, a perfect specimen of an impot, in Harry Wharton's very best 'fist', bearing little or no resemblance to that of the previous day, of which Billy Bunter had made such artful and unscrupulous use.

Quelch's brow relaxed more and more. He almost smiled.

'Very good!' he said, at last.

Harry Wharton was glad to hear it.

'You may go, my boy,' added Mr. Quelch, quite kindly.

Gladly, Harry Wharton departed, leaving Quelch, with quite a pleased expression on his face, to the undisturbed enjoyment of Lucretius.

He lost no time in getting to the bike-shed and wheeling out his machine: and on the Courtfield road, he made that machine fly. Half-way to the town, he turned from the road to follow a track across the common. It was a short cut that saved a considerable distance, and as he had no doubt that the Co. were already at the bun-shop, he did not want to keep them waiting for him. It was a rather bumpy track, but he pushed on vigorously, regardless of jolts. At a short distance from the road, the footpath passed through a tract of woodland. It was not an extensive tract, but it was thickly grown, with bushes among the trees, and visibility was not good for more than a few yards ahead, as the path wound and turned.

In haste as he was, he slowed down as he rode under the branches. Any pedestrian might have been coming along from the opposite direction, or another cyclist, and a collision would not have saved time. And the path was narrow, bushes encroaching on it from either side. He rode on at a moderate pace, ready to put on speed again as soon as he was clear of the wood. But if Harry Wharton was a careful rider, there was another cyclist coming from the direction of Courtfield, who was anything but careful.

Wharton became aware of him all of a sudden: as a bicycle flashed into view under the shady branches at a turn of the path.

He had a glimpse of a raincoat, a slouched hat, and a grey beard. The rider came on at breakneck speed, utterly regardless of anything that might be ahead of him.

It was amazing to see a man who looked elderly, or more than elderly, riding at so wild a speed, and with such utter recklessness. But Harry Wharton had no time even to be amazed.

The rushing rider was upon him, almost as soon as he saw him.

He wrenched his bike aside, to push into the bushes beside the path, as the only hope of avoiding a collision.

But there was no time.

Probably the man in the raincoat did not even see him, before he crashed. It happened in seconds.

A front wheel struck a rear wheel, and both machines were hurled over, and both riders flung to the earth.

Harry Wharton found himself sprawling on his back, with head and shoulders in a hawthorn bush, his bike curled up at his feet. He sprawled there for some moments. dizzy and panting. Then he scrambled breathlessly up.

The man in the raincoat was already on his feet.

His hat had fallen off, revealing a thick mop of rather long hair. He clutched it up and jammed it on his head, and then grasped his fallen bicycle and dragged it up. He did not even glance at the panting schoolboy. Evidently he was in hot haste, and had not a moment to spare.

Harry Wharton stared at him blankly.

He had aches all over him, from his fall: and the grey-bearded man could scarcely have escaped damage: but if he was hurt, it seemed that he had no time to heed it: he was only in frantic haste to get on his way.

But it was the grey beard that fixed Wharton's eyes, and almost made them bulge. That beard no longer covered the man's chin. It was hanging side-ways from a single wire.

Evidently, it was a false beard. The man, whoever he was, was in disguise: and his sudden sprawl on the earth had dislodged his disguise.

In his haste and excitement, he seemed unaware of it.

He was hurriedly examining his bicycle: and a loud and savage exclamation pealed from him as he did so. The front wheel was badly buckled, and refused to revolve.

He flung the machine to the ground, with a crash, and ran to Wharton's bicycle. His intention was plain. His own machine was crocked, and he was going to take the schoolboy's machine in its place.

Knowing nothing of what happened at Courtfield, or that a smash-and-grab man was in desperate flight from pursuit that could not long be delayed, Harry Wharton could hardly believe his eyes, as he saw that action.

He started forward angrily.

'Let that bike alone!' he shouted.

The man did not heed him. He was groping over the machine to ascertain whether it was crocked like his own. But except for a twisted rear mudguard. Wharton's bike had escaped damage. With an angry wrench or two, the man straightened the mudguard, and grasped the handlebars to mount. He heeded the astonished and angry Greyfriars fellow no more than if he had not been there at all.

But Harry Wharton was not likely to allow himself to be passed unheeded, while his bicycle was stolen under his eyes.

He rushed at the man in the raincoat, and grasped him as he threw a leg over the bicycle. Half- astride the machine, the man had to stop. His eyes blazed under bushy brows at the schoolboy.

'Stand back!' His voice came husky and panting.

'Do you think I'm going to let you steal my bike?' shouted Wharton. 'Let go it, you rogue.'

'Keep clear, I tell you, or—.' The man's hand shot to the pocket of his raincoat. It came out with a 'cosh' in it: the same implement that had smashed Mr. Lazarus's window hardly ten minutes ago. Without another word, he lashed at the schoolboy's head.

Harry Wharton jumped back, just in time. The blow would probably have stunned him, had it reached him: and he knew then that he had to do with some desperate breaker of the law, who cared little or nothing what damage he did. But his backward jump saved him: A moment more and the raincoated man was on the bicycle, driving madly at the pedals. He shot away like an arrow, and vanished down the winding path almost in the twinkling of an eye, leaving Harry Wharton standing by the wrecked machine, panting for breath, staring blankly, and, almost wondering whether he was on his head or his heels.

CHAPTER 8

NOTHING FOR BUNTER

'I SAY, you fellows.'

'Oh, dry up, Bunter.'

'But what about tea?' hooted Billy Bunter.

Nobody answered that question: urgent and important as it was, to Billy Bunter at least.

Four juniors were getting a little worried.

They had kept that table quite a long time, and Harry Wharton had not appeared. Every moment they expected to see him whiz into sight on his bike. But he did not come: and it was now half-past five. Not too much time remained for tea at the bun-shop, and to get back to school in time for calling-over.

There was still a crowd outside Mr. Lazarus's shop, across the way, staring at the yawning gap in the window. Exciting episodes did not often occur in that quiet country town: and the old High Street was still in a buzz over the smash-and-grab raid.

No news had been heard of the raider. Inspector Grimes had been seen to return in his car, obviously without a capture. No doubt an active search was going on. But it was probable that the raider, once clear of the town, had taken to one of the many paths over the wide expanse of Courtfield Common, and likely enough that he had made his escape. The whole affair had been so sudden and swift, that the chances were in his favour.

But the group of Greyfriars fellows at the bun-shop were thinking less about the recent exciting occurrence, than about the non-arrival of their chum.

'Can't hang on here much longer,' said Bob, restively. 'May not be coming at all. If he rushed those lines, Quelch would jump on him, after that row yesterday.'

'I say, you fellows, it's no good waiting for Wharton, when very likely Quelch gave him that impot to write over again!' urged Bunter. 'Let's have tea—.'

'Pack it up, you fat owl.'

'I'm hungry!' hooted Bunter.

'We've heard that one.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter breathed indignation. He had added himself to the party for a feed, not to sit waiting for a fellow who was apparently not coming. Had the fat Owl possessed financial resources of his own, he would not have had to wait. But Bunter, as so often happened, had been disappointed about a postal order he was expecting: and his finances were down to nil. So he had to wait! It was more than enough to make a fat Owl indignant.

But a few minutes later, there was an exclamation from Bob.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! There he is!'

Harry Wharton came in sight at last: coming up the High Street, on foot. Why he was walking instead of cycling, was rather a puzzle. His friends had expected him to jump on his machine as soon as that troublesome impot was handed in to Quelch.

'What the dickens has he walked it for?' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Keeping us waiting, hours and hours and hours—!' breathed Billy Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, call the waiter now.'

Harry Wharton stopped, and looked across the street at Mr. Lazarus's shop and the crowd at the broken window. Bob gave him a yell.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! This way, Wharton.'

Wharton glanced round, and came on to the bun-shop.

His friends eyed him as he came up. They had waited quite a long time: and Johnny Bull expressed his feelings with a grunt.

'You're jolly late,' said Bob.

'Sorry, old fellow: couldn't be helped. Has anything happened here?' asked Harry, with a nod towards Mr. Lazarus's establishment.

'Sort of,' answered Bob. 'Smash-and-grab raid.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Harry. He could guess at once a connection between a smash-and-grab raid at Courtfield, and the hurrying man who had crashed into him on the common outside the town.

'The man got away—?'

'Yes, with a whole heap of jewellery stuff from the window—watches and rings and things—.'

'Did you see him?'

'Yes, rather— it happened right under our eyes here.'

'Was he a man in a long raincoat, with a slouched hat, and a beard?' asked Harry.

'You've seen him!' exclaimed Bob. Wharton compressed his lips.

'Yes, the rascal! I fancied he had been up to something, from the hurry he was in—.'

'Why didn't you come on your bike?' asked Johnny Bull.

'I did.'

'Eh? Then where is it?'

'Wherever that smash-and-grab man is,' answered Harry. 'It must be the same man. He crashed into me on the common, and we both went over. His bike was cracked in the crash, and he collared mine, and got away on it.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'What rotten luck!'

'The rottenfulness is terrific.'

Sniff, from Billy Bunter!

'Did you let him?' he inquired.

'What?'

'I'd have knocked him down.'

'You fat ass—.'

'Well, I jolly well wouldn't have let him take my jigger,' said Bunter, shaking a fat head. 'Why didn't you stop him?'

Harry Wharton breathed rather hard.

'Shut up, you fat chump,' said Bob.

'Well, I'd have stopped him,' declared Bunter. 'Pity I wasn't with you, old chap, I'd have stopped him fast enough.'

Billy Bunter never knew what a narrow escape he had, at that moment, of having his fat little nose tweaked. However, Wharton contented himself with turning his back on the plump Owl. '

'The brute had a cosh, like that Teddy Boy at old Joyce's yesterday,' he said. 'I just missed getting my nut cracked. Then he was gone in a flash. I had to walk the rest— that's why I'm so late. But I can't stop for tea— I've got to get to the police-station, and let them know about my bike, and give them a description of that rascal—.'

'They've got that,' said Johnny Bull. 'A whole crowd saw him—.'

'I think I can tell them a little more, if it's the same man, and it must be,' said Harry. 'He was in disguise, with a false beard—.'

'How do you know?'

'Because his beard nearly came off in the crash, and he had a clean-shaven chin,' answered Harry.

Bob Cherry gave a whistle.

'That accounts!' he said. 'I wondered how an old Johnny who looked about seventy could whiz as he did on a bike. Not so jolly ancient as he looked.'

'Nothing like it,' said Harry. 'If they're looking for an old man in a beard, they won't have much luck: they've got to look for a young man without one. I've no doubt his eyebrows were a fake, too. His hair certainly wasn't grey, or anything like it— his hat fell off, and he had a mop of long hair. That ought to be useful to Mr. Grimes.'

'I say, you fellows—.'

Bob whistled again.

'And to think that I offered him help with his bike up the hill, thinking that he was a tottering old codger!' he said.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'I'd better get on,' said Harry. 'The sooner I tell Mr. Grimes what I saw of that rascal, the better. You fellows get on with your tea.'

'Never mind tea,' said Nugent. 'We can get a snack when we get in,— we shall have to walk the bikes home, as you're without one.'

'No need—.'

'Rot!' said Bob. 'Shanks's pony for the lot of us. Cut on, old chap— we'll follow with the jiggers, and hoof it home when you're through.'

'All right, then.'

Yell, from Billy Bunter. 'I say, you fellows—.'

'Good-bye, Bunter.'

'What about tea?' shrieked Bunter.

'Nothing about tea, old fat man. Cheerio!'

Five fellows walked away, four of them wheeling bicycles: leaving Billy Bunter glaring after them with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles. Billy Bunter had waited for tea at the bun-shop. He had waited impatiently: every passing minute adding a keener edge to his appetite. And there was going to be no tea at the bun-shop, after all! Five fellows walked off, just as if William George Bunter did not matter in the very least! There was nothing for Bunter: and no known language could have expressed his feelings as he glared at five departing backs!

CHAPTER 9

BUNTER'S BUNDLE

'BOB, old chap—.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'I'll carry that for you, if you like.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Five fellows seemed amused. Billy Bunter, not at all amused, gave them an irritated blink through his big spectacles.

It was the following day, after class— a bright, sunny, golden autumn afternoon. The Famous Five had come out of the House, Bob swinging a bundle in his hand by the string.

Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles were on that bundle.

He knew what it contained. And when fellows walked out after class, with a bundle of foodstuffs, Bunter knew what it indicated. It indicated a picnic. Naturally Bunter was interested. Foodstuffs had a perpetual and irresistible appeal for Billy Bunter.

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!' snapped the fat Owl. 'I mean it, old chap— I'll carry it.'

'And you wouldn't dodge round the first corner with it?' asked Bob.

'Yes— I mean, no— certainly not, old fellow. I hope I can be trusted with a bundle of tuck!' said Bunter, with dignity.

'Hopeful chap, Bunter!' remarked Frank Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Come on!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Hold on, though,' said Bob. 'If you mean it, Bunter—.'

'Yes, rather, old chap,' said Bunter, eagerly.

'Well, then—!' said Bob, thoughtfully.

'You silly ass!' said Johnny Bull. 'If Bunter gets his paws on that bundle, we shan't see it again.'

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'We're going to picnic in Friardale Wood,' said Bob. 'It's a mile to walk, Bunter.'

'I—I don't mind, old fellow. I'd walk miles and miles to oblige a fellow I really like.' Billy Bunter almost gasped, in his eagerness. Certainly, Bunter had no idea of walking a mile with that bundle, or even a furlong. If that bundle of tuck was entrusted to Billy Bunter's fat hands, it was going to disappear, with Bunter, at the very first and earliest opportunity. His little round eyes glistened behind his big round spectacles at the prospect.

'Well, look here, you chaps, as Bunter's so jolly obliging, he may as well carry the other bundle,' said Bob.

Four fellows stared at him. There was, so far as they knew, no other bundle. All the foodstuffs for the picnic in Friardale Wood were packed in the bundle Bob was swinging in his hand.

'What other bundle?' asked Harry Wharton.

'I'll cut in and get it,' said Bob. 'You take this, Johnny — Bunter's going to carry the other one.'

'I'll carry both, if you like!' gasped Bunter. 'You can hand that to me, Bull.'

'I'll watch it,' grunted Johnny. 'Look here, Bob, you fathead—.'

But Bob Cherry did not stay to listen: he cut back into the House, leaving his chums to wait for him. Apparently there was a further supply, of which they had not been aware. But why Bob proposed to entrust it to the greedy and unscrupulous fat Owl, was rather a mystery. Johnny Bull held on to the bundle Bob had handed to him. Bunter was not getting his fat paws on that, at any rate!

Bob did not keep them waiting long. In five minutes he came out again, with another bundle. It was quite a large bundle, carefully wrapped, and tied with string, with plenty of knots. Billy Bunter stretched out both fat hands to take it, scarcely able to believe in his good luck.

'Here you are, Bunter,' said Bob, affably. Billy Bunter clutched the bundle.

'Look here—!' hooted Johnny Bull.

'My esteemed Bob—!' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Oh, come on,' said Bob, cheerfully, and he started. Billy Bunter rolled after the Famous Five with the second bundle. It was rather heavy: much heavier than Bunter liked to carry: but its weight, in the circumstances, was an additional attraction: it looked as if the second bundle contained more than the first. Bunter, indeed, would willingly have carried both. But Johnny Bull was taking care of that!

Six juniors walked out at the gates, and followed the lane towards the village of Friardale. Half-way to the village was the stile that gave access to Friardale Wood, which was their destination. But there was one member of the party who had no idea whatever of proceeding as far as that stile. Billy Bunter lagged behind. He lagged more and more.

Johnny Bull glanced back, and snorted. Bunter was already about twenty yards in the rear.

'You silly ass, Bob,' he said.

'Eh! What's the row?' asked Bob.

'Think Bunter's coming on with that bundle?' hooted Johnny.

'Think he isn't?' asked Bob.

'Don't you know he isn't?' yapped Johnny. 'Look here, I'll jolly well go back and hurry him up.'

'Oh, let him rip!' said Bob. 'Look here, if Bunter turns up with that bundle, he's going to have a whack in the picnic. If not, not! If he dodges off with that bundle, he won't scoff what I've packed in it.'

'And why won't he?' demanded Johnny.

'That's an easy one! Even Bunter can't eat an old football boot, a chunk of coal, and six or seven empty ginger-beer bottles.'

'Wha-a-at?' gasped Johnny Bull.

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the other three. Bob Cherry chuckled.

'That's what I've packed in it,' he said. 'I sort of fancied that Bunter might have an idea of walking it off. He's welcome to it, if he does.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Five fellows, laughing, pursued their way— without looking back any more for Bunter. That Billy Bunter intended to 'walk off' that bundle, they had no doubt: and it was entertaining to think of his fat face when he opened it. They walked on, without a glance back, and a turn of the winding lane hid them from the eyes and spectacles behind.

Billy Bunter came to a halt. He grinned.

Luck, evidently, was going his way. He had lagged behind, in the hope of losing sight of the juniors ahead. But he had hardly hoped that it was going to be so easy as this! Once safe from a backward glance, he was ready to dodge through a hedge and disappear with that bundle. Not the faintest, slightest, remotest scruple worried Bunter on that subject. In matters of tuck, '*meum*' and '*tuum*' meant precisely the same thing to William George Bunter. All that worried him was, a doubt whether he could get away with that bundle. Now that doubt was gone. He could!

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

They had walked on out of sight. Trees and hedges at the corner of the winding lane hid them from view. Not a single eye in ten was on Bunter!

'He, he, he!'

There were gaps in the hedges along Friardale Lane.

Bunter, after his momentary halt, headed for the nearest. One last blink he cast up the lane: in dread that one of the five might be turning back for him. But there was no sign of any of the five turning back. A figure appeared in view: but it was not that of a schoolboy: it was a plump and portly figure in uniform: no other than that of Mr. Tozer, the village policeman. But P.C. Tozer did not matter. Bunter wasted hardly a blink on that arm of the law. Then he plunged through the gap in the hedge, into the meadow beyond.

He did not stop there. Quite unaware of the contents of the bundle he carried, and how heartily welcome he was to those contents so far as Harry Wharton and Co. were concerned, he dreaded pursuit. He cut across the meadow as fast as his fat little legs would go.

On the further side was a clump of trees. The fat Owl arrived breathless at that clump. He rolled into the shade of the trees. They afforded not only shade, but cover, if inquiring eyes should be looking for him.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter, again.

He sat down in the grass, with his back to a trunk, the bundle on his knees. Then he began operations on the string with which the bundle was tied. Bob Cherry had expended quite a lot of string on that bundle, and had multiplied knots to an extent that seemed to Billy Bunter quite unnecessary. Fat impatient fingers fumbled with those knots. Bunter was eager to get that bundle open. His extensive mouth was watering for its contents. But it had to be untied before it could be opened: and the knots were many and frightfully tight—really as if Bob had done it on purpose!

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

It was quite a long and tiresome task. But the many knots yielded, at last, to the eager fat fingers. Length after length of string was dragged off, and then Bunter, at long last, was able to open that bundle.

He unrolled a large sheet of brown wrapping-paper. To his surprise, there was more wrapping within. Half-a-dozen old newspapers had to be unrolled before the contents of the bundle were revealed.

And then—!

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

The bundle was open at last! What it contained was at his mercy! But eager fat hands did not grab at what it contained. Billy Bunter blinked into that bundle with popping eyes, as if he could hardly believe either his eyes or his spectacles. He blinked at a disused football boot, a chunk of coal, and half-a-dozen empty ginger-beer bottles!

Bunter was, as usual, hungry. He was eager for a feed.

But there was a limit even for Bunter: even Bunter jibbed at an old football boot, a chunk of coal, and a collection of ginger-beer bottles! There was no feast for Bunter.

'Beast!' hissed Bunter.

It dawned on his fat brain at last! He knew now why Bob Cherry had gone back into the House for 'another' bundle! That awful, unspeakable, indescribable beast had deliberately packed this for Bunter to carry— knowing what Bunter was likely to do with a bundle which he believed to contain tuck!

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

The Famous Five, with the bundle of tuck for their picnic, were a mile away by this time! Billy Bunter had succeeded in his surreptitious design: he had walked off with the bundle entrusted

to him: and he was left behind with it, to draw what consolation he could from an old football boot, a chunk of coal, and half-a-dozen empty ginger-beer bottles!
Judging by the expression on his fat face, he drew very little!

CHAPTER 10

FREDDY ASKS FOR IT!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'What—?'

'Teddy Boy!' grinned Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five had arrived in sight of the stile in Friardale Lane. They had to cross that stile, to follow the footpath into the wood. At the moment it was occupied: a young man was seated on it, smoking a cigarette. They all knew that young man at a glance. It was Mr. Freddy Dexter, old Joyce's lodger, whom, a couple of days ago, they had sprawled into the armchair in his apartment at the old wood-cutter's cottage.

Four members of the Co. were smiling, as they sauntered along the leafy lane, thinking of the discovery that William George Bunter was making in the precious bundle he had lawlessly annexed. But Harry Wharton's face was rather serious and thoughtful. He was thinking of his lost bicycle, which he had little hope of ever seeing again. So far, there had been no news of it, or of the smash-and-grab man who had escaped on it.

Mr. Lazarus's loss had been much heavier: it was rumoured that the jewellery snatched from his window was valued at several hundred pounds. Probably he was even keener than Harry Wharton to hear that the man in the raincoat had been laid by the heels.

But there seemed now little prospect of that. The man had vanished as completely as if, like Mercury in the *Aeneid*, he had dissolved into thin air.

Owing to the encounter on Courtfield Common, Harry had been able to supply Inspector Grimes with a useful spot of information. It was known that the smash-and-grab man had been in disguise: and Mr. Grimes was no longer looking for a grey-bearded man of sixty or seventy. But what he looked like, without his disguise, was anybody's guess— except that he had a clean-shaven chin and a thick mop of hair. It was fairly certain that, at a safe distance, he had discarded the beard and the bushy eyebrows, and washed make-up from his face, and packed up the long raincoat that had concealed his clothes. After which, he might have walked past Mr. Lazarus's shop in the High Street without attracting a suspicious glance.

The wrecked bike he had abandoned had afforded no clue. It had been identified as a machine 'pinched' several days before at Friardale, no doubt in readiness for the raid at Courtfield.

Likely enough, he had abandoned Harry Wharton's bike in its turn, once he had made good his escape. If so, it had not yet been found. It was not a light matter for a schoolboy to lose his bicycle: and Harry could not help it weighing somewhat on his mind.

'That smudge!' grunted Johnny Bull, with a frown in the direction of the 'Teddy Boy' sitting on the stile.

Freddy Dexter was sitting on the top bar, one foot resting on the step, one leg crossed over the other. He was, as usual, hatless, his thick fuzzy hair glistening in the sunshine.

He was smoking a cigarette, and seemed to have been so engaged for quite some time, for the ground near the stile was littered with stubs. Apparently Mr. Dexter was a chain-smoker: which perhaps accounted for his pasty complexion and his irritable temper. He was, as usual, idle, with nothing to do but to sit on the stile and smoke.

If Freddy ever did any work, this was not one of his working-days.

He eyed the Greyfriars juniors very unpleasantly, as they appeared. It was easy to see that he had not forgotten the 'shindy' at Mr. Joyce's cottage, and had a resentful recollection of the unceremonious way he had been handled there.

Harry Wharton glanced at him, carelessly, as Bob Cherry drew attention to him. Then he gave a little start, and his look became fixed on Freddy's mop of rather long hair that glistened in the sunshine. The smash-and-grab man was in his mind, and Freddy's mop reminded him strangely of what he had seen, when that unknown man's hat had fallen off in the collision on Courtfield Common. Freddy's mop was a twin to that of the fleeing raider. He could not help being struck by that resemblance, though it did not occur to him, at the moment, to think anything further of it.

Freddy, as the juniors halted at the stile, could not have failed to be aware that they wanted to cross over it. But he did not shift his position, though he was very much in the way. They stopped, and looked at him: and he gave them a hostile stare back, without moving.

'Mind shifting, Mr. Dexter?' asked Bob Cherry, quite politely.

Apparently Mr. Dexter did mind: for he did not shift.

'We want to get over that stile,' said Frank Nugent, mildly.

Freddy gave a wave of his cigarette, indicating the top bar.

'Climb over, if you like,' he answered. And he sat tight. Johnny Bull gave him a glare, reminiscent of the 'tyke' of his native county of Yorkshire.

'Can't you shift and let us step over?' he demanded.

'You haven't bought this stile, by any chance, Mr. Dexter?' inquired Bob.

'Please have the beneficence to move, and permit our ridiculous selves to step over, esteemed Mr. Dexter!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with elaborate politeness.

Freddy did not reply. Neither did he stir. Evidently he was bent on making himself as unpleasant as possible. 'Look here, are you shifting?' Johnny Bull's voice resembled that of the Great Huge Bear.

Freddy did not take the trouble to answer. He proceeded to light a fresh cigarette from the stump of the old one, regardless of Johnny.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips hard. He did not want another 'shindy' with Mr. Joyce's lodger: but Freddy, on his side, was evidently ready for trouble. As likely as not, he had a 'cosh' in his pocket, on which he relied if it came to the 'rough stuff'. At all events, he did not move, and plainly did not intend to move.

'Will you let us pass, Mr. Dexter?' said Harry, very quietly.

Freddy blew out a puff of smoke.

The juniors stood looking at him: Johnny Bull's expression approximating more and more to that of a 'tyke' in a warlike mood.

'Shift!' roared Johnny, quite losing patience.

Freddy blew out another whiff of smoke. He contrived to direct it to Johnny Bull's face, and as Johnny's mouth was open, he caught it there. Johnny gasped and gurgled with his mouth full of smoke.

'Urrrgh! Urrg! Urrrg!' Freddy grinned.

Johnny Bull coughed and spluttered. Then, with gleaming eyes, he doubled his fists, with the very evident intention of shifting Freddy Dexter by main force. Freddy slipped his hand into his pocket. He was as ready to handle his 'cosh' as he had been in the wood-cutter's cottage. But he had no time to handle it. Harry Wharton was watching him quite keenly, and as his hand came out with the cosh in it, he made a spring forward, and his clenched fist crashed on Freddy's arm. There was a howl from Freddy, and the cosh flew through the air, landing several yards away on the inner side of the stile.

'Now shift him!' said Harry.

'All hands on deck!' grinned Bob.

Freddy Dexter was off that stile in the twinkling of an eye. Five pairs of hands fastened on him, and he came down into the dust of Friardale Lane, with a bump and a roar.

Leaving him sprawling there, the Greyfriars juniors stepped over the stile and pursued their way: Bob pausing for a moment to kick the 'cosh' away among the thickets.

Freddy Dexter, covered with dust, tottered to his feet.

He leaned on the stile, panting for breath. The glare he cast after the Famous Five, as they went up the footpath into the wood, was extremely expressive. But he seemed to have had enough of them, and was not thinking of further hostilities. For several minutes, he leaned on the stile, panting. They were out of sight when he clambered over, to hunt for his 'cosh' in the thickets. Then he resumed his seat on the stile, a sadder if not a wiser Freddy, and lighted a fresh cigarette. Five cheery juniors, picnicking in a shady glade in Friardale Wood, dismissed him from mind: while Freddy sat and smoked cigarette after cigarette, in the worst temper ever. And he was still smoking and scowling, when a fat figure came in sight in Friardale Lane.

THE ARM OF THE LAW

'BEASTS!' mumbled Billy Bunter.

It was a disgruntled Owl.

Bunter had found no comfort whatever in the bundle Bob Cherry had packed for his special behoof. He had absolutely no use for an old football boot, a chunk of coal, or a collection of ginger-beer bottles. He had left that assortment where he had unpacked it. But hope springs eternal in the human breast. He still nourished a hope of being 'on' in the picnic, if he could rejoin the party before the feast was over. So there was Billy Bunter, rolling up Friardale Lane, with an unusually rapid roll, his eyes and spectacles alert for five fellows ahead: but with a sad foreboding that by this time they were probably somewhere in the wood, and getting busy on the contents of Bob Cherry's bundle.

He did not sight the Famous Five. But as he came within view of the stile, it was a relief to Bunter to see that Somebody was sitting on it. Whether those beasts had crossed the stile into the wood, or whether they had gone further on, the fat Owl did not know: but that young man sitting on the stile would doubtless be able to tell him. If so, there was still a chance of tracking down the foodstuffs. Bunter rolled up hopefully to inquire of Mr. Freddy Dexter.

Freddy eyed him, as he rolled up, almost wolfishly. Freddy had collected a considerable number of aches and pains from his bump in the lane. His encounter with the Greyfriars fellows had left him sore in body as well as in mind. At that moment, Freddy was fairly yearning for some object on which to wreak his temper. The sight of a Greyfriars cap, just then, had an effect on Freddy, rather like that of a red rag on a bull. That fat Greyfriars junior could not have come along more opportunely, from Freddy's point of view.

Had it been some hefty Greyfriars man like Wingate of the Sixth, or Coker of the Fifth, Freddy would have contented himself with a scowl. But that fat junior blinking at him through a pair of big spectacles was easy game. Freddy threw away his umpteenth cigarette, and prepared for action.

Billy Bunter, all unconscious of what awaited him, rolled up.

'I say, have you seen some fellows pass here?' he squeaked. 'Five fellows, with caps like mine?' Freddy grinned: a ferocious grin.

'Friends of yours?' he asked.

'Oh! Yes!' answered Bunter, at once. 'My pals, you know. We're going on a picnic, but I— I missed them. Did you see them?'

'Yes, I've seen them,' assented Freddy.

'Oh, good,' said Bunter. 'Did you notice if one was carrying a bundle?'

'Yes, I noticed that,' agreed Freddy. 'Did they go over that stile?'

'Yes: they went over this stile.'

Billy Bunter beamed. He was on the track! He was very glad that he had met this fuzzy-haired young man, who was giving him this much-needed information.

'Oh! Thanks!' he said. 'I say, let me get over the stile, will you?'

Freddy slipped from his seat on the stile. Bunter put a foot on the step.

What happened next seemed a good deal like an earthquake to Billy Bunter. He did not get over the stile. He supposed that Freddy had stepped off, to give him room to pass. But Freddy hadn't. Freddy had stepped off, to deal with the fat Owl, and hand him what he would gladly have handed to Harry Wharton and Co., had it been practicable.

Bunter gave a startled yell, as he was suddenly grasped by the back of a fat neck. A swing of Freddy's arm, and he went stumbling and sprawling in the lane. He yelled again as he landed there.

'Yaroooh!'

Billy Bunter sprawled and spluttered.

Freddy followed him up. He proceeded to kick him.

And Freddy's kicks were nothing at all like the more or less playful kicks that Bunter sometimes received, for his sins, in the Remove. They landed hard. The amazed fat Owl, almost wondering whether this was some awful nightmare, squirmed and yelled and wriggled and roared.

'Yaroooh! Keep off! Gone mad?' yelled Bunter. 'Wharrer you kicking me for, you beast? Oh, crikey! Help! Yaroooop! Wow! Ow!'

Freddy Dexter did not take the trouble to explain why.

He went on kicking. Freddy was finding solace in this. The unfortunate Owl was not the first fellow that the young ruffian had kicked when he was down. His only regret was, that it was not Harry Wharton who was receiving the kicks. But it was a Greyfriars fellow, at any rate, and that was satisfactory to Freddy— if not to Bunter.

'Yaroooh!' roared Bunter. 'Owl Oh! Help! Whooop! Help!'

Freddy paused, to cast a glance over his shoulder down the lane. He remembered that P.C. Tozer had passed, a while ago: and it was possible that Mr. Tozer might be coming back, on his beat. But there was no one to be seen, as far as the corner where the lane turned: and he was relieved on that score, and he turned to Bunter again.

But the fat Owl had taken advantage of that momentary pause, to scramble to his feet. He jumped away and dodged, as Freddy came at him.

'You keep off!' yelled Bunter. 'I say— oh, crikey!' He dodged again as Freddy rushed. But he had no chance of dodging Freddy. What felt like a pair of pincers closed on a fat ear.

'Now then—!' grinned Freddy.

Bunter, in sheer desperation, hit out. Why that fuzzy-haired young man had pitched into him in that ferocious way. Bunter had not the faintest idea. But he knew that there was more to come: and as Freddy gripped his ear, he hit out frantically.

He was in luck. Freddy had not expected anything like resistance from the fat and terrified Owl. A fat fist, with all Bunter's extensive weight behind it, caught him unexpectedly in the eye. That sudden jolt bowled him over. He released the fat ear, staggered back, stumbled over, and fell.

Bunter gave him one wild blink.

Unexpectedly, amazingly, he had knocked the young ruffian down. But what Freddy would do, when he got up again, was too awful to contemplate. Billy Bunter did not stop to ascertain. He ran!

Bunter was not thinking of picnics now. No bundle of foodstuffs, though as deep as a well and as wide as a church door, would have tempted him to remain a split second on the spot. He raced back the way he had come: and the speed he put on looked as if the fattest fellow at Greyfriars might have a good chance in the School mile! His fat little legs fairly flashed as he flew.

Freddy staggered up with a hand to his eye, and fury in his face. He lost no time. The moment he was on his feet, he was racing after Bunter. Bunter was disappearing round the bend of the winding lane ahead.

Billy Bunter went round that bend at frantic speed. He had no time to look where he was going: his fat mind was wholly occupied by what was coming on behind.

Crash!

'Oh!

'Ooooooooooh!'

Billy Bunter hardly knew what it was into when he crashed. He had a vague impression of a plump figure in uniform and a helmet, as he reeled from the shock. Then he was running again: leaving Police-Constable Tozer of Friardale staring after him, and gasping for breath. 'My eye!' gasped Mr. Tozer. 'That young idjit— my eye! Bashing into an officer of the law— my eye! I—.'

Mr. Tozer was interrupted. As he stood staring after Bunter another running figure came speeding round the corner behind him. Freddy did not see him before he crashed— his haste was too hot for that. He crashed into Police-Constable Tozer's plump back, sending him spinning forward on his hands and knees.

'Ooooh!' gasped the astonished constable, as he landed, with Freddy Dexter sprawling over his feet. Mr. Tozer stared round at Freddy. Then he grasped him. Mr. Tozer was not to be bowled over with impunity.

"Ere, wot's all this?" gasped Mr. Tozer. 'You 'old on, young feller-me-lad— wot you chasing that kid for— what— OH!'

In a calmer moment, Freddy would probably not have thought of hitting an officer of the law. He was quite a handy man in a row at a dance-hall, or a shindy at the races: but police-officers were not usually his game. But at this moment he was too wildly excited and enraged to care what he did. P.C. Tozer was grasping him, and he landed a heavy thump on Mr. Tozer's chest to release that grasp. Mr. Tozer staggered.

But he did not release his grasp. He tightened it, his plump fingers closing on Freddy's shoulder like a vice. Freddy wrenched savagely, but in vain. P.C. Tozer had him, and he was keeping him. His plump face was grim. P.C. Tozer, an officer of the law, had been struck, in the execution of his duty: and no 'Teddy Boy' could deal with Mr. Tozer in that manner, without getting what he asked for, in full measure. Mr. Tozer added his other plump hand, also in a vice-like grip: and it was much too much for Freddy. Mr. Tozer was plump, but he was muscular, and worth two or three Fredgies in a tussle. For a minute they rocked, and then Freddy crumpled, and Mr. Tozer had him. The arm of the law was too strong for Freddy.

'Now you come alonger me!' said Mr. Tozer, grimly.

Unwillingly, but inexorably, Freddy came along with him: panting, and still seething with evil temper: but probably repenting, as he was marched along, that lawless thump on the official chest.

CHAPTER 12

AN UNEXPECTED FIND

'RACE you fellows!' said Bob Cherry.

Bob, as usual, was full of beans.

The picnic was over, in the glade in Friardale Wood. The good things had been disposed of, without the assistance of Billy Bunter. The juniors had rather expected him to follow on, after discovering the unsatisfactory contents of his bundle: but he had not put in an appearance. They were quite unaware of his hectic counter with Freddy at the stile, and of what had followed.

They were going back through the wood, to emerge at a gap in the fence near the school. It seemed likely enough that the 'Teddy Boy' was still loafing where they had last seen him: and while quite prepared to give him all that he might ask for, nobody wanted another 'shindy' if it could be avoided. It was like Bob to suggest a 'race' home. Racing, in a wood where bushes grew thickly among the trees, was not an easy proposition: but Bob always had a superabundance of energy to dispose of.

'Lots of time to walk it,' remarked Frank Nugent.

'Slacker!' said Bob.

'Fathead!' said Nugent.

'Oh, come on,' urged Bob. 'It's only a quarter of a mile, to the gap where we get out— I'll race you fellows off your legs.'

And Bob started, at a run.

The other fellows followed, at a trot. Bob led the way, crashing through bushes, leaving quite a well-marked trail for his comrades. Bob was in exuberant spirits, which was his happy custom: and he seemed to be enjoying himself. But all of a sudden, there was a change.

'Ow!' came a sudden roar. 'Wow!'

A dozen yards ahead of his comrades, Bob was plunging through a thicket, when he was seen to stumble and crash. The roar he uttered as he crashed woke most of the echoes of Friardale Wood.

'Ow! wow! Oh! Ow! Ooooooh!' roared Bob. 'What on earth—!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'What the dickens—!' exclaimed Nugent.

'More haste, less speed!' remarked Johnny Bull, sententiously.

'Ow! ow! My leg! Wow! Ow!' came back from Bob, sprawling in the thicket over some object on which, apparently, he had stumbled. 'Ow! Oooog! I've cracked my shin on something!

Wow! What silly idiot has been parking a bike here?'

'A bike!' exclaimed Harry, blankly.

They ran up—more cautiously than Bob had done.

Bob Cherry picked himself up. He stood on one leg, rather like a stork, caressing the shin of the other, where evidently he had a pain.

'Oh! ow! wow! My shin! Oh, crumbs! What silly idiot— what blithering chump— what howling ass—what dithering dummy— has been sticking his bike here, in the middle of a bush!' he howled.

'A bike— here!' said Nugent, in wonder.

'Ow! wow! There it is— look at it! Ow! wow!' Bob rubbed his shin tenderly. It had contacted a pedal, hard. 'Oh, crumbs! Ow!'



BOB WAS PLUNGING THROUGH A THICKET, WHEN HE
STUMBLED AND CRASHED

'It's a bike,' said Johnny Bull, staring at it. 'But how the thump did a bike get here?'

It was a bicycle: there was no doubt about that. It had been wholly hidden in thick herbage, amid a mass of straggling bushes: but Bob, crashing on it, had partly uncovered it. A pedal was sticking up, full in view now, the pedal Bob's shin had contacted so painfully.

'Well, this beats it!' said Frank Nugent. 'Who on earth can have left his bike here—. Must have wheeled it a good way to get it here— it couldn't be ridden, in this wood—. Beats me!'

'The beatfulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

The juniors stared blankly at the half-hidden machine.

It was a quite astonishing discovery. Obviously it had not been carelessly left there by the owner. It lay on its side, hidden out of sight, carefully hidden, for not a trace of it would have been visible, but for Bob's rather reckless plunge through the bushes. But for that, it might have remained there unseen and undiscovered for any length of time.

Bob, hopping on one leg, rubbed the other.

'I'd like to know who it was,' he gasped. 'I'd jolly well like to punch his silly head — sticking a bike there,— what the jolly old thump could any silly ass want to stick a bike there for?'

'It was hidden there,' said Harry, quietly. He stood looking down at the half-concealed bicycle, a suspicion already in his mind.

'Well, what mad ass would want to hide a bike, in the middle of a wood?' hooted Bob. 'Ow! My shin! Wouldn't I like to punch his head, whoever it was.'

Harry Wharton stooped, and grasped the machine, and dragged it bodily clear of the bushes. There was a sound of clinking and rattling as he moved it. The bicycle was in a dilapidated condition. His brows knitted, and his eyes gleamed with anger, as he stood it up, sagging. It had once been quite a handsome 'jigger': now it was a ruin— twisted, bent, and broken, in every place where it could possibly be bent, broken, or twisted. It looked as if it had been stamped out of shape with deliberate intent. But dilapidated as it was, Harry Wharton knew that machine. It was his own!

He had surmised that the smash-and-grab man might abandon the stolen bicycle, after he had escaped on it. Evidently, that surmise had been well-founded. This was the machine. It was not necessary for Inspector Grimes to make any further search for the stolen bicycle. Quite unexpectedly, the Famous Five had found it.

'By gum! Somebody's handled that bike pretty roughly,' said Nugent. 'Looks as if it's been smashed up on purpose.'

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

'I've no doubt it has,' he answered. 'It's mine.'

'Yours!' exclaimed Bob, ceasing to hop and rub his leg, for a moment, in his surprise.

'Mine!' repeated Harry. 'My bike, that that rascal collared on Courtfield Common yesterday. He didn't mean it to be found— and he didn't mean it to be of much use if it was found. Look at it.'

They looked at it. It was hardly recognisable as the handsome bike belonging to the captain of the Remove, after its rough and malicious usage. But there was no doubt about its identity.

Wharton knew his own machine: and the number on it placed the matter beyond doubt.

'He must have come this way, then, when he got clear!' said Johnny Bull. 'It's a good step from the common.'

Harry Wharton nodded. He had no doubt that the raider had hunted cover in the wood, to remove his disguise, and to conceal the stolen bicycle. But why he had handled it so savagely, before hiding it in the thicket, was more perplexing. It could only mean, as Wharton had said, that he intended it to be of no use to the owner if found. But why, was a mystery: unless by some inexplicable possibility he had some personal grudge against the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. Whatever his motive might have been, the bicycle was a hopeless and irredeemable wreck.

'Looks as if it will want some repairing!' said Johnny Bull.

Wharton compressed his lips.

'Not much use thinking of that,' he said. 'That bike's a goner. It would cost as much as a new one, to stick it together again. The brute!'

'The terrific rascal!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Better push it home, now we've found it,' said Nugent. 'Couldn't even wheel it, in that state,' said Harry. 'And I think we'd better leave it till Mr. Grimes has seen it. He might pick up some clue to the man here— I hope so! He must have been on this very spot yesterday, and he may have left some sign that a police-inspector might spot.'

'There's a chance, anyway,' agreed Nugent.

The wrecked bicycle was left where it had lain, and the juniors resumed their homeward way, not in quite so cheery a mood. Harry Wharton had had a faint hope of recovering his lost bicycle. Now he had recovered it, and it was useless to him: a wreck that was not worth the cost of repair. His feelings towards that smash-and-grab man were very deep. Neither was Bob Cherry quite so sunny as usual. There was no more 'racing' for the luckless Bob. He limped painfully on his way, chiefly anxious to get in and get some Elliman's to rub on his damaged leg. Painful twinges in that leg accompanied him all the way back to Greyfriars.

ORTHOGRAPHICAL

'I SAY, Toddy—!'

'Prep!'

'Oh, blow prep!' yapped Billy Bunter.

'Fathead!'

'Beast!'

After that exchange of compliments, Peter Todd went on with his prep, and Billy Bunter sat frowning. Bunter was not thinking of prep. He really had no time for it. Often and often Bunter had no time for preparation, which sometimes resulted in a spot of bother with Quelch in form.

Only too often, while Peter Todd and Tom Dutton sat at prep in No. 7 Study, Billy Bunter sprawled his plump limbs in the armchair, 'chancing it' with Quelch. On this occasion, however, Bunter was not sprawling in an armchair, for the excellent reason that there was no armchair in which to sprawl. Ever since the collapse of Peter's armchair, Bunter had been armchairless.

That armchair had been conveyed to the Remove box-room, where Peter, in leisure moments, put in a little repair work. Frequently the sound of a tapping hammer was heard from the box-room. Peter hoped, in the long run, to make that armchair a going concern again. So far, he had not had much luck. In the meantime, there was no sprawling in the study for Billy Bunter. He could still sprawl in an armchair in the Rag: but in his own study there was not a single sprawl for him. Naturally that was very annoying to a fat Owl in whose list of the joys of existence laziness came next to devouring tuck.

Bunter, at the moment, was sitting at the table, with Toddy and Dutton. He had a pen in his fat fingers, and a sheet of paper before him. But prep was not in the schedule. Bunter was writing home, on a matter so important: that prep simply had to slide.

'I say, Peter—!' he recommenced.

'Do shut up, old man,' urged Peter. 'Can't you let a fellow work, even if you're too jolly lazy to do any yourself?'

'Can't you let a fellow speak?' hooted Bunter. 'I'd ask Dutton, only a fellow has to yell to make him hear.'

'Sometimes,' sighed Peter, 'I wish I were deaf like old Dutton. Not a bad thing, with a chap like you in the study.'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap, I want to get this right, when I'm writing home. Quelch put in my last report that my spelling was bad, as well as a lot of other things that made the pater waxy—.'

'I wonder why!' said Toddy, with deep sarcasm.

'Oh! You know Quelch,' yapped Bunter. 'Always down on a fellow for something. Only this morning he jumped on me, making out that there wasn't a "k" in "particular". But I don't care about Quelch,— it's the pater I'm thinking about. A fellow can't be too careful when he's asking his pater for two pounds.'

'Right on the wicket,' agreed Peter, with a grin. 'I wouldn't put any "k's" in "particular", old fat man.'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' said Bunter, peevishly. 'Quelch doesn't know so much as he makes out— school-masters don't, if you ask me. I've got that all right. But I'm not sure about "construe". Is it a W or a double-O?'

'Oh, crumbs! A which or a what?' gasped Toddy.

'I think it's c-o-n-s-t-r-e-w,' said Bunter, thoughtfully. 'But if it's c-o-n-s-t-r-o-o, I don't want to make a mistake—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Peter.

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' hooted Bunter. 'Can't you tell me which you think it is, without going off like a cracker?'

'I'd make it c-o-n-s-t-r-u-e!' gurgled Peter. Billy Bunter's fat lip curled contemptuously.

'That's pretty mean, Toddy,' he said. 'I want to get this letter right, if I'm going to get the pater in a good temper, and get that two pounds to buy that armchair at old Lazarus's. I don't want a single mistake in the spelling for the pater to spot. If you won't help, you won't: but it's pretty mean to try to pull a fellow's leg like that—.'

'You fat, foozling, frumptious fathead,' howled Peter. 'It's c-o-n-s-t-r-u-e—.'

'Oh, chuck it!' said Bunter. 'I tell you--.'

'Rats! You can't stuff me,' snapped Bunter. 'You can get on with your prep, and be blowed: I can spell better than you, anyway.'

Peter Todd went on with his prep. Billy Bunter went on with his letter home. He wrinkled his fat brows over it.

It was rather an urgent matter. Mr. Bunter never seemed pleased or gratified by his school reports— Quelch, of course, never did him justice. In that very matter of orthography, there had been some quite sharp parental remarks. And as Billy Bunter hoped to extract the considerable sum of two whole pounds from his honoured parent, to be expended at Mr. Lazarus's on an armchair for the study, he realised that he could not be too careful. He did not want a single orthographical error in that letter to draw a frown to the parental brow. However, Bunter had considerable confidence in himself: and he certainly wasn't going to allow Peter to pull his leg. He pondered deeply over that word construe, undecided whether to make it 'constrew' or 'constroo', nothing doubting that it was one or the other. He decided finally on the former, and his pen ran on again.

He had finished that letter, by the time his study-mates had finished prep. He read it over, and gave a nod of satisfaction. He had been careful, and he felt that his care had been rewarded. Mr. Bunter, reading that letter, would at least see that his hopeful son at Greyfriars could spell, whatever Quelch chose to say in his reports. That could not fail to make a good impression, Bunter thought, and might very likely produce the required pounds. After which, there would again be an armchair in the study for a fat and lazy Owl to sprawl in. The letter ran:

Dear Father,

I hoap that all are well at home as this leeves me at pressent. You will be pleezed to hear that I am getting on verry well indede in class, and Mr. Quelch toled me this morning that my constrew was the best in the Remove. He is verry pleezed too with my speling, wich he said was an eksample to the uther fellows, as he is verry partikular about speling. There was an axident in the studdy the uther day, and the armchare broke down owing to a fellow larking about, but I have seen one at Courtfield for two pownds, wich is very chepe konsidering, and if you wood send me two pownds I wood get it for the studdy.

Yore affeckshunate Sun,
William.

Getting all those words spelt without a single error had been rather a labour to Billy Bunter. But he felt that it was worth while. It was done at last, and he was satisfied with the result, and glad that he had not allowed Toddy to pull his leg over that word 'construe'. He folded the letter, and slipped it into an envelope, which he addressed to Mr. Bunter at Bunter Villa. But there was one more item.

'Got a stamp, Toddy?' he inquired.

'No! You can get one from the dame.'

Snort, from Bunter. It was always possible to get a stamp from the House-dame. There was no trouble about that, except that the sum of threepence had to be handed over in exchange.

Billy Bunter preferred to get his stamps on easier terms. He turned to Tom Dutton.

'Got a stamp?' he asked.

'Eh?' Tom Dutton was deaf, which, as Peter had remarked, was not wholly a bad thing for a fellow who was Billy Bunter's study-mate.

'Did you speak, Bunter?'

'Oh, you deaf ass!' breathed Bunter.

'Eh?'

'Got a stamp?' howled Bunter. Dutton stared at him.

'Who's a scamp?' he asked.

'Not scamp— stamp!' howled Bunter.

'Did you say scamp or tramp?'

'Stamp!' yelled Bunter.

'Stamp!' repeated Tom Dutton. He heard it, this time. 'Stamp! Did you say stamp?'

'Yes, stamp!' yelled Bunter.

'What do you want me to stamp for?' demanded Dutton. 'I'm not going to stamp on anything. You can stamp, if you like.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from Peter Todd.

'Oh, shut up, Toddy,' hooted Bunter. 'Look here, I said stamp, not stamp. I don't mean stamp, I mean stamp! Stamp, see?'

'I tell you I'm not going to stamp. Why should I?'

'I want a stamp!' shrieked Bunter.

'Well, if you want to stamp, stamp away, if you like,' answered Dutton. 'You can stamp as much as you like, I suppose. I'm not going to. I'm going down.'

And Tom Dutton went down, Peter following him grinning. An angry snort from Billy Bunter followed both of them. Then the fat Owl went through his pockets and disinterred three pennies, with which he rolled away to see the House-dame.

After which, that letter was dropped into the post-box.

After which, again, Billy Bunter felt fairly satisfied. Quelch had referred to his spelling, in his school report: and Mr. Bunter had made some sharp remarks on the subject: so surely his pater was bound to be pleased when he read that letter! And if he was pleased by such a specimen of orthographical exactitude, it was quite probable that the two 'pounds' might be forthcoming. Once more there would be an armchair in No. 7 Study for a fat and lazy Owl to sprawl in. Billy Bunter sprawled in an armchair in the Rag, and hoped for the best!

A STRANGE SUSPICION

'PENNY for 'em!' said Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton gave a little start.

He was sitting by the window, deep in thought, when Nugent came into No. 1 Study. A copy of the local paper, the 'Courtfield and Friardale Gazette', lay on his knees. But he was not reading: he sat with a wrinkle on his brow, and hardly noticed his chum coming in. But he glanced up at Nugent's voice.

'Eh, what?' he said. Nugent laughed.

'Penny for your thoughts, old chap! They must be worth it, judging by that scowl! Anything about our matches in the local rag?'

'I haven't looked— something else caught my eye,' answered Harry. 'It's about that Teddy Boy at old Joyce's. Look at it.'

He indicated a news paragraph, and Nugent picked up the paper and looked at it. Then he whistled.

A week had elapsed since the 'shindy' with Freddy Dexter at the stile in Friardale Lane. Four members of the Co. had almost forgotten his existence. But somehow Freddy lingered in Harry Wharton's mind, with a strange, vague, uneasy suspicion. He had said nothing on the subject: but the more he thought of it, which he often did, the more that vague suspicion deepened.

'Seven days!' said Nugent, whistling again. 'Seven days for punching old Tozer. Serve him right.'

It was quite a brief paragraph. It stated that Frederick Dexter, 25, of no occupation, had been awarded seven days for an assault upon a police-constable. For that space of time, the dance-hall at Lantham, and the billiard-room at the Cross Keys, were to know Freddy no more.

'Must have been the day we had that row with him, from the date,' said Nugent. 'The day he pitched into Bunter. He seems to have pitched into Mr. Tozer too. Nice character!'

He threw down the paper, and gave his chum a rather puzzled look.

'But what about it?' he asked. 'Nothing to do with us. is it?'

'No!' said Harry, slowly. 'But—.' He paused. 'Shut that door. Frank— I think I'd better tell you what's in my mind: and you can tell me what you think. But I don't want everybody to hear.'

Quite mystified. Nugent closed the study door. He stood looking inquiringly at his chum, but it was some moments before Harry spoke again.

'You remember that smash-and-grab raid at Courtfield?' he said, at last.

'Eh? Oh! Yes,' said Nugent, still more puzzled by the change of subject. 'They haven't got the man. Old Grimes didn't seem to spot any clue to him from finding out where he parked your bike.'

'And old Mr. Lazarus doesn't look like getting his property back,' said Harry. 'He stands to lose over two hundred pounds, from what I've heard.'

'Rough luck,' said Nugent. 'He's a good old boy, even if he won't let Bunter diddle him for an armchair! But he's offering a reward of twenty pounds for recovery of the stuff that was pinched. That may help.'

Harry Wharton nodded. He had heard of the reward of £20 offered by old Mr. Lazarus for the recovery of his property: but if that was going to help, it had certainly not helped so far.

'The man seems to have vanished,' said Harry. 'He got clear away that day— and vanished.'

'Just as if he'd got into a hole, and pulled it in after him,' agreed Nugent. 'Not likely to get him, I suppose, after all this while, even with a reward for laying him by the heels. May be a hundred miles away, for all we know.'

'I don't think so,' said Harry, quietly.

'Why not?'

'Well, look at it,' said the captain of the Remove, in the same quiet tone. 'I'm pretty certain that Grimes is after a local man, because that looks jolly clear to me.'

'Local talent?' said Nugent, with a grin. 'But why?' 'The bike the man was riding was pinched in Friardale, that looks as if he knew where to lay his hand on one when he wanted it.'

'Yes, that's so,' assented Nugent. 'But—'

'And he knew that short cut across Courtfield Common, through that patch of woodland, where he ran into me,' said Harry.

'So he did— must have,' said Nugent, with a nod. 'And he knew his way about Friardale Wood, where he hid my bike when he was done with it. All that looks local.'

'You've been thinking it out, I see,' said Nugent, laughing. 'It looks like it, from what you say. Any more, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?'

'I was able to tell Mr. Grimes a few things,' said Harry. 'He would have guessed, from the rogue's speed in getting away, that he was a young man got up to look like an old one. But only I saw him with his hat off— and Grimes knows, from me, that he had a mop of longish hair—.'

'Lots about!' said Nugent.

'Oh, quite! But— the day we saw that Teddy Boy sitting on the stile—,' said Harry, slowly.

'I'd seen him before, more than once: but that day, I had the smash-and-grab man in my mind, and it struck me suddenly that his mop of hair was just like the man's on Courtfield Common—.'

Frank Nugent jumped. 'Harry!' he exclaimed.

'It stuck in my mind, somehow,' said Wharton. 'I didn't exactly think it out, but it stuck in my mind, and since then, some other things—.'

Nugent gave a long whistle.

'You know how we found my bike,' went on Harry. 'The man hid it pretty thoroughly, but he knew, of course, that it might be found, and he meant that if it was, it shouldn't be of any use to the owner. Well, why?'

'It looked as if he had a grudge— we all thought that at the time, but there seemed no reason why a stranger—':

Nugent whistled again.

'Exactly,' said Harry. 'A stranger would just have hidden the bike. He had a motive for smashing it up. Was it because of that row at old Joyce's?'

'Oh, gum,' said Nugent. 'You've got it into your head that Dexter was the smash-and-grab man! Phew! I suppose it could be! But—.' He shook his head. 'It's all too jolly vague, old chap. It does look suspicious, the way you put it— but— that loafing, lounging good-for-nothing a smash-and-grab man-um!'

'We know that Dexter's very handy with a cosh,' said Harry.

'Yes, I know. And very likely he's none too good for it! But—but—.'

Harry Wharton's thoughtful face broke into a smile. 'You think I'd better keep it under my hat?' he said. 'Yes, for goodness sake,' said Nugent, at once. 'Great pip! Suppose you said anything, and it turned out that Dexter was at the Cross Keys, or some dive in Lantham, when

the raid happened! There isn't a spot of proof! Keep it under your hat, old chap, for goodness sake.'

Harry Wharton nodded. His suspicion of Freddy Dexter was strong, yet he had to admit that the grounds for it were somewhat nebulous. Many little circumstances seemed to confirm it,— yet—! Nugent, plainly, was unconvinced, and Harry himself could not feel sure. And the other members of the Co., when he consulted them, were quite emphatically of Nugent's opinion that that suspicion should be kept 'under his hat'. And it was kept there.

CHAPTER 15

NO LUCK!

'ONE for you. Bunter,' said Bob Cherry.

'Oh, good!' said Billy Bunter, eagerly.

It was morning break. A good many fellows had gathered round the rack for letters. Among them was William George Bunter: even more anxious for a letter than usual.

Not only was Billy Bunter expecting a postal order: which was his usual state. But he was also expecting a reply to his letter home.

Mr. Bunter, at Bunter Villa, did not seem to be hurrying himself to reply. Days had passed.

Possibly he was not aware how very urgent it was for his hopeful son at Greyfriars to have an armchair in his study to sprawl in. At all events no reply had arrived, so far: and Billy Bunter was still in lack of the necessary two 'pounds' for a purchase at Mr. Lazarus's.

It was very irritating to Bunter. There were armchairs in the Rag, in which he could extend his lazy fat limbs. But a fellow wanted one in his study. Peter Todd was still carrying on repair work, at odd moments, in the box-room: but his exploits as a carpenter did not seem to have led to much in the way of results. Indeed, fellows who saw that armchair rather thought that its last state was worse than its first, as the outcome of Peter's carpentry. In the meantime, Bunter, when he was in his study, had to sit up on a hard chair, which was undoubtedly very severe on a fellow who was almost too lazy to live.

'Chuck it over, old chap,' said Bunter.

'Catch!' said Bob.

He reached down the letter, and 'chucked' it over as requested. Bunter caught it with his fat little nose. 'Beast!' ejaculated Bunter: no doubt by way of thanks for service rendered.

He clutched the letter. It was addressed in the parental hand: evidently a reply, at last, to that letter home, of which orthographical exactitude must surely have pleased Mr. Bunter.

The fat Owl grabbed the envelope open. There was a folded letter inside: which Bunter's fat fingers quickly unfolded. Then there was another ejaculation from the fat Owl.

'Oh,lor!'

There was no enclosure in that letter. Mr. Bunter had, at last, replied: but evidently he had omitted the most important detail: the enclosure of two 'pounds'. The fattest face at Greyfriars lengthened. After all the trouble Bunter had taken with that letter home: after all his labour to get the spelling exactly right: it had failed to produce the desired effect!

Bunter blinked dismally at the letter: with a faint, faint hope that it might state that a remittance would arrive later. That very faint hope died away as he read:

Dear William,

I have now time to reply to your letter, and I must say that I am surprised, and indeed shocked, by your mistakes in so simple a matter as spelling. Your form-master has remarked on this, and I have spoken to you on the subject: yet you show no sign whatever of improvement. I can attribute this only to idleness, inattention, and carelessness. I advise you very seriously to make a sustained effort to overcome these very grave faults. Unless you do so, I shall have to consider whether it is worth while to continue to pay very onerous fees to keep you at school at all. I shall expect to hear of some improvement, in your next report.

Your affectionate Father,
W. S. Bunter.

Billy Bunter blinked at that letter. Not a word in it about his request for two 'pownds' for an armchair! Clearly, only too clearly, his pater had not been pleased by the letter home. It had been far, very far, from influencing him into a mood to remit the sum of two 'pownds' to his son at Greyfriars School. All that the letter home had effected was to put the paternal back up, and make Mr. Bunter wonder whether it was worth while keeping William at school at all! 'Oh, crikey!' mumbled Bunter.

The plumpest face at Greyfriars School was also the most lugubrious, as the fat Owl blinked at the letter from home. Bob Cherry glanced at him.

'Not bad news, old fat man?' he asked, sympathetically.

'Yes-rotten!' mumbled Bunter.

'Somebody ill—?'

'Worse than that,' mumbled the fat Owl. 'I say, you fellows, look at this letter, will you, and tell me what you think.'

'Certainly, old chap,' said Bob.

He took the letter from a fat hand, and the Famous Five looked at it. Their faces were serious and sympathetic. If Bunter had had bad news from home, if there was trouble in the Bunter household, causing the fat Owl to look so dolorous, it was a time for sympathy.

But their expressions changed as they read. Sympathetic seriousness vanished, and they grinned.

Bunter blinked at them anxiously.

'I say, you fellows, think that means that the pater ain't going to send me the two pounds I asked him for?' he inquired.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!' howled Bunter, indignantly. 'I asked the pater to send me two pounds, to get that armchair at old Lazarus's, and he doesn't even mention it—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' snorted Bunter. 'Look at what he says!

I can tell you I took a lot of trouble over that letter, and got it all right, and now he says there were mistakes in the spelling—just like Quelch! I'm pretty good at orthology, as you fellows know—.'

'At whatter?' gasped Bob.

'Orthology—that means spelling,' explained Bunter. 'Oh! Orthography!' gurgled Bob.

'No— orthology.' Bunter knew best! 'Fat lot of good a fellow taking a lot of trouble over his orthology, if that's the answer he gets! I suppose Quelch has put it into the pater's head that I can't spell—. He actually put it in my report—.'

'I wonder why!' grinned Bob.

'Oh! You know Quelch!' said Bunter, bitterly. 'Still, I wouldn't mind the pater blowing off steam, if he sent the two pounds. Think that letter means that he ain't going to send it?'

'Sort of!' chuckled Bob.

'Looks like it,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'The lookfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter crumpled the letter into a sticky pocket.

There was good advice in it: but the fat Owl had no use for advice. William George Bunter was quite satisfied with himself and his orthography— or orthology, as he seemed to prefer to call it. It was not what was in the letter that worried Bunter: it was what wasn't in it! No two 'pounds' seemed likely to be forthcoming: and it was still an armchairless Owl.

'I say, you fellows, if you could lend me two pounds— till my postal order comes—!' he began.

'That's a large size in "ifs",' remarked Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, you lend me two pounds, and I'll settle up the minute my postal order comes—.'

'Time we got out!' said Bob. 'Come on, you fellows.'

And the Famous Five got out.

BARGAIN FOR BUNTER

'BARGAIN, and no mistake!'

Billy Bunter made that remark. His fat face was very thoughtful.

The Owl of the Remove was sitting in an armchair in the Rag. His little round eyes and big round spectacles were fixed on the columns of the 'Courtfield and Friardale Gazette', which he had borrowed from Harry Wharton's study.

There were a good many Remove fellows in the Rag after class. Harry Wharton and Co. in a group, were talking Soccer. Herbert Vernon-Smith and Skinner— in lower tones— were talking 'geegees'. Snoop was relating to several fellows how Coker of the Fifth had shoved him aside on the staircase, and how he had had a 'jolly good mind' to tip Coker down the stairs: though, apparently, a jollier good mind, so to speak, not to do so. Billy Bunter, like Gallio of old, cared for none of these things: the buzz of voices passed him by unheeded. Bunter was concentrated on the local paper.

He was not reading the local news. Even the paragraph referring to Mr. Freddy Dexter's retirement from active life for the space of seven days did not interest him. Neither did he waste a blink on a report of a Greyfriars football match. His attention was fixed on the advertisement columns.

The section that particularly interested him was headed 'Articles for Sale'.

Many and various were the articles enumerated therein: from agricultural implements and armchairs to zinc and zithers. But of all these innumerable articles, Bunter was interested in only one— armchairs! And it looked as if he had spotted a bargain in that line.

FOR SALE. Bedstead, £2 10 0. Wash-stand, 15/-. Picture in Gilt Frame, 7/6. Stuffed parrot, 5/-. Armchair, £1. Joyce, Wood Cottage, Wood Lane, Friardale.

From which it appeared that Mr. Joyce, the old woodcutter of Friardale, was disposing of some of his household effects: perhaps because he had lost his lodger: perhaps too because Freddy had neglected to pay his rent, and Mr. Joyce had to pay his own!

Bunter was not in the least interested in a bedstead at £2 10 0, a wash-stand at 15/-, a picture in a gilt frame at 7/6, a stuffed parrot at 5/- — but he was deeply interested in an armchair at £1.

Certainly it looked rather a bargain. Bunter had been blinking down that advertisement column for a bargain. Now he seemed to have found one. It only remained to find the £1 with which to secure that bargain!

'I say, you fellows—!' squeaked Bunter.

'They've got a jolly good forward in that man Vane-Carter,' Bob Cherry was saying. The Famous Five were discussing a coming match with Carcroft.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'He won't find it easy to get past Johnny in goal!' said Harry Wharton.

'I say, you fellows—!' howled Bunter.

Bob Cherry glanced round at the fat figure in the arm-chair.

'Did you speak, Bunter?' he inquired.

'Yes, I jolly well did!' hooted the fat Owl, indignantly.

'Well, don't!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'They beat us last time,' said Johnny Bull. 'But that last goal was a bit of a fluke. If my foot hadn't slipped—.'

'Will you let a chap speak?' yelled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, you were in old Joyce's cottage one day last week, weren't you?— the day it rained.'

'Eh! what? yes.'

'Did you notice an armchair there?'

That quite unexpected question caused the Famous Five to dismiss football for the moment, and stare at the Owl of the Remove.

'An armchair!' repeated Frank Nugent, blankly. 'Yes, there was an armchair in his lodger's room— what about it?'

'I suppose that's the one, then,' said Bunter. 'It's in this paper for sale, see? It looks like a bargain at a quid, if it's any good. Did you notice what it was like?'

He indicated Mr. Joyce's advertisement with a fat finger, and the juniors glanced at it. They remembered that they had seen the articles enumerated, in Freddy's room at the cottage, particularly the armchair, in which they had dumped the objectionable Teddy Boy. This looked as if Mr. Joyce did not intend to accommodate his rather disagreeable lodger after his sojourn for seven days in the 'stone jug'. Freddy's room was going to be empty when he came out of his present abode.

'If it's any good, it's cheap at a pound,' said Bunter. 'But is it? If you fellows saw it, what was it like?'

'Bit of a bargain, I should think,' said Bob. 'Old and heavy, but as solid as anything— a few splits in the leather, I believe, but good old Victorian stuff. Worth more than a quid, anyway.'

'That's all right, then,' said Bunter. 'You fellows know that I want an armchair for my study—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I'll jolly well trot over and look at that armchair, anyway. But—.' Bunter paused.

'Is the butfulness terrific?' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I've been disappointed about a postal order I was expecting—.'

'Too bad!' said Bob, sympathetically. 'Was it the one you were expecting last term?'

'Or the term before?' asked Nugent.

'I don't quite know why it hasn't come,' said Bunter, unheeding those inquiries. 'It's from one of my titled relations, you know, and I've been expecting it every day. But— it hasn't come! I'm actually stony.'

'Horrid!' said Bob. 'What does it feel like to be stony for the first time in your life?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, you can cackle,' yapped Bunter. 'But if I don't bag that bargain quick, somebody else may bag it. You jolly well smashed up the armchair in my study, Wharton, —at least it was all your fault, as you jolly well know, and it's jolly well up to you. Will you lend me a pound?'

'Yes, if—.'

'If what?'

'If you can take it out of half-a-crown, and give me the change.'

'You silly ass!' roared Bunter. 'I say, Bob, old chap, will you lend me a pound to bag that bargain?'

'Yes,' grinned Bob. 'If—.'

'If what?' howled Bunter.

'If you can take it out of a threepenny bit—.'

'Beast—!'

'—and give me the change,' added Bob.

'Yah! I say, Franky, old fellow, if you'll lend me a pound to bag that armchair, I'll settle up the minute my postal order comes—.'

'Okay,' said Frank Nugent. 'I'll lend you a pound with pleasure, old fat man, if—.'

'If what?' shrieked Bunter.

'If you'll take it out of a tanner, and don't forget to give me the change.'

Billy Bunter bestowed a glare upon five grinning faces, that might almost have cracked his spectacles.

Nobody, it seemed, was going to lend Bunter a pound to secure that bargain in armchairs.

Pounds, in fact, were rather rare, in the Lower Fourth: and any fellow in possession of one was really quite unlikely to lend it to William George Bunter. Only Bunter realised how urgent it was for him to possess an armchair in which to sprawl his lazy fat person. Bunter was once more up against the selfishness to which he was sadly accustomed.

The fat Owl heaved himself up.

'Beasts!' he remarked, by way of valediction: and rolled out of the Rag. Whereupon the Famous Five resumed 'Soccer jaw', and forgot his fat existence.

If they had remembered it, they might have supposed that Billy Bunter had resigned himself to losing that bargain. But that was not Billy Bunter's idea at all. Billy Bunter rolled out of the House, and out of gates. Out of gates, he headed for Wood Lane at Friardale.

That armchair at Mr. Joyce's was priced at £1, and Billy Bunter's financial resources were limited to one penny, which was still in his possession because it was a bad one. But hope springs eternal in the human breast. Mr. Lazarus, at Courtfield, had declined to supply goods on 'tick'. It was possible that a fat Owl might have better luck with old Mr. Joyce. Billy Bunter hoped so, at least: and if that hope proved well-founded, Billy Bunter was going to 'bag' that bargain.

CHAPTER 17

QUELCH IS PLEASED

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'Is that Bunter's bargain?'

'Looks like it!'

Harry Wharton and Co. were sauntering down Friardale Lane to the village, when a somewhat unexpected sight met their view.

They had forgotten Billy Bunter and his 'bargain'. Now they were reminded of both.

Between the village and the stile, there was a dip in the lane. It was rather a steep pull up out of that dip. Up the acclivity came a hand-cart, with a well-known figure pushing it from behind: that of Mr. Joyce, the old woodcutter of Friardale.

In the cart was a single article: but solitary as it was, it made a good load for an old gentleman of Mr. Joyce's years to push up a steep incline. It was a large, solid, leather-covered armchair: of considerable age, but still solid and strong: —in fact, the old Victorian armchair into which the juniors had dumped Freddy Dexter at the woodcutter's cottage. Old Joyce was panting a little as he pushed.

Near at hand rolled Billy Bunter.

Every now and then, the fat Owl blinked at that armchair, with a blink of satisfaction. Bunter, evidently, had 'bagged' that bargain: and was getting it delivered without delay, under his own eyes and spectacles. That very evening there would once more be a fat Owl sprawling in No. 7 Study.

It did not seem to occur to Bunter to lend a hand with the push up the slope. Bunter rolled at his ease, with his hands in his sticky pockets. Perhaps he was too aristocratic to demean himself by pushing at a hand-cart. Undoubtedly he was too lazy. Old Joyce pushed and panted unaided.

Harry Wharton and Co., as they looked down the slope, could guess that that armchair was on its way to Greyfriars and No. 7 Study.

'So he's bagged it!' said Bob Cherry. 'I wonder who was ass enough to lend Bunter a quid!'

'Looks as if the old bean can hardly shove it up the hill,' remarked Frank Nugent. 'Bunter might give it a shove.'

'Catch Bunter!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Look here,' said Bob. 'Old Joyce did us a good turn the other day, and one good turn deserves another. Cut on, and let's give him a hand with it up the hill.'

'Let's!' said Harry Wharton, at once.

'Good egg,' assented Johnny Bull.

'The goodfulness of the egg is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Cut on, then,' said Nugent.

And the Famous Five broke into a trot down the slope.

Old Joyce was making very slow progress uphill. He stopped for a brief rest, and mopped his brow with a red-spotted handkerchief. It was a warm autumn afternoon, and no doubt pushing that cart was warm work. Billy Bunter was squeaking to him as the Famous Five arrived on the scene.

'I say, what are you stopping for?'

'It's 'ot, sir,' said Mr. Joyce, 'and that cart's a bit 'eavy.' Grunt, from Bunter.

'Well, I want to get it in my study,' he said.

Bunter was undoubtedly anxious to see his bargain safely landed in No. 7 Study. An article purchased on 'tick', date of payment uncertain, could not be delivered too promptly! Bunter could not quite feel that that armchair was really his own, till it was safe in his study.

Mr. Joyce gave him a look, and, without replying, took up the handles again. But by that time Harry Wharton and Co. were on the spot, and he released the handles again to touch his hat. 'Hold on, Mr. Joyce,' said Harry Wharton. 'Leave it to us to push up the hill.' He took one of the handles of the cart, and Bob Cherry took the other. Nugent and Johnny Bull and the nabob of Bhanipur gathered round to help with shoves.

'You're very kind, sir!' said old Joyce, gratefully. 'It's a bit of a push up the 'ill! If you wouldn't mind—.'

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Lend a hand, lazybones,' growled Johnny Bull.

'Oh, really, Bull!' Billy Bunter gave him an indignant blink. 'If you think I'm going to push a cart along—.'

'Kick him, somebody,' said Bob.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter backed out of reach of a foot, and sniffed.

William George Bunter, assuredly, was not going to be seen pushing a hand-cart along a dusty lane. The Famous Five, fortunately untroubled by Billy Bunter's aristocratic prejudices on the subject, shoved away actively. Like Mr. Joyce they found it hard work and became very hot, but they worked together with a will. At which Billy Bunter's fat lip curled even more superciliously.

'I say, you fellows!' he squeaked.

'Are you going to lend a hand?' demanded Johnny Bull. 'No jolly fear!' answered Bunter, emphatically.

'Then shut up.'

'Beast! There's such a thing as appearances,' said Bunter, loftily. 'Nice lot you'd look now, if Quelch came along. He would be in a wax.'

Old Mr. Joyce looked anxious, as he heard that. 'P'r'aps you'd better leave it to me, young gentlemen,' he said. 'I wouldn't like you to have trouble with your schoolmaster.'

'Rot!' said Bob, cheerily.

'The rotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Mr. Joyce,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Shove away! Many hands make the cracked pitcher go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

Headless of Billy Bunter's warning, the Famous Five shoved the hand-cart uphill. Precisely what Mr. Quelch would have thought, if he had chanced on the scene, they did not know: neither did they think about it. They were going to help old Mr. Joyce up the hill, and that was that. Appearances, about which William George Bunter was so particular, did not worry them unduly. They pushed on.

Mr. Joyce, much relieved, trudged after them. Billy Bunter rolled, with his fat little nose turned up even more than Nature had intended. Then all of a sudden there was an ejaculation from Bob Cherry.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'What—.'

'Quelch!'

'Oh, my hat!'

From the bend in the lane ahead, an angular figure appeared, coming down the lane. Bunter had warned them that Quelch might come along! Now he had come along! And his gimlet eyes fixed in a surprised stare on the party round the hand-cart as he came.

'He, he, he!' came from Billy Bunter. 'You're jolly well copped!' It was quite amusing to Bunter. He was glad that he had been more careful of appearances than the Famous Five, as Mr. Quelch bore down on them. 'What is this, Wharton?' rapped Mr. Quelch.

The hand-cart came to a stop, the juniors colouring uncomfortably, under the stare of the gimlet eyes. They realised that their occupation was a little unusual for Greyfriars fellows. But the captain of the Remove answered quietly: 'We're lending Mr. Joyce a hand up the hill with his cart, sir.'

'I ain't, sir!' interjected Billy Bunter, without losing time. Bunter was anxious to make that clear.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him.

'I can see that, Bunter,' he rapped. 'And why are you not helping?'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. He hadn't expected such a question.

'I—I—.'

Old Mr. Joyce broke in.

'The young gentlemen was kind enough to 'elp, sir—.'

'Quite!' said Mr. Quelch. 'I am very glad, Mr. Joyce, to see that my boys are ready and willing to give assistance where it is needed. This is what I should have expected of you and your friends, Wharton.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir!' gasped Harry. Evidently, the thunder was not going to roll! Billy Bunter could hardly believe his fat ears. Quelch was not in a 'wax'. He seemed actually pleased!

Mr. Quelch turned to him. 'Bunter!' he rapped.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'You should be helping your schoolfellows to perform a kind and useful action, Bunter! You are not doing so. This is one more example of your incorrigible idleness and slackness, Bunter. You should be ashamed, Bunter.'



'AND WHY ARE YOU NOT HELPING?'

With that, and a nod to Mr. Joyce, Mr. Quelch walked on: leaving five fellows grinning, and one blinking. 'Good old Quelch!' said Bob Cherry. 'Heave ahead, my hearties! Like to lend a hand now, Bunter, you incorrigibly idle and slack old porpoise?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast!' breathed Bunter. 'I thought he'd give you fellows lines, and instead of that, he jaws me! Beast!'

'Kick him!' said Johnny Bull.

'Yaroooooh!'

The hand-cart rolled on up the hill, Billy Bunter rolling indignantly behind.

CHAPTER 18

PETER SHOWS THEM!

BANG!

'I say, Peter—.'

Bang!

'Look here, Toddy—.'

Bang!

'Will you let a chap speak?' roared Billy Bunter.

Bang!

Peter Todd, hammer in hand in the Remove box-room, was busy. Apparently he had no use for conversation from his fat study-mate. He banged on regardless.

It was raining that afternoon. Harry Wharton and Co., in the Remove passage, were exchanging remarks about the weather: to an accompaniment of bangs echoing down the box-room stair. Peter was not bothering about the weather. That old armchair, which had collapsed under the fat Owl's weight, was going to be a going concern again, if Peter knew anything about carpentry. It was possible that he did not know very much!

Peter's idea of the carpenter's art seemed to be to accumulate innumerable nails, and drive them in with hefty swipes of the hammer. If countless nails, banged well home, could set that old armchair on its legs again, it was going to be a success. Criticism of his carpentry from fellows who saw the work in progress only made Peter all the keener.

Bang! bang! bang!

'For goodness sake, stop that row a minute!' yapped Bunter.

'I say, Toddy, what about tea?'

Peter, pausing for a moment to select another nail, gave him a glare. No workman likes to be interrupted when hard at work.

'Don't bother, you fat ass!' he snapped. 'It's nearly tea time—.'

'Blow tea!'

'There's nothing in the study—.'

'Cut down to the tuck-shop and get something, then.'

'So I jolly well would, only my postal order hasn't come—.'

Bang! bang! bang!

'Look here, Toddy—.'

Bang! bang!

'Stop that row,' howled Bunter. 'What's the good of sticking nails in that old crock, anyway?'

Tain't any good: and we've got an armchair in the study now—and there ain't room for two. Look here, what about tea, Toddy?'

It was an irritated Owl. There was, so far as Bunter could see, no need for Peter to repair that old crock at all -even if he could. It was several days since Billy Bunter had bagged that bargain, since when No. 7 Study had been adorned by the massive old armchair that had once accommodated Mr. Joyce's lodger in the old wood-cutter's cottage. Now that there was once more an armchair in No. 7 for a lazy fat Owl to sprawl in, Peter's labours were superfluous. Naturally only Bunter mattered. And at the moment Bunter wanted his tea— a function of which the importance could hardly be exaggerated, but which Peter seemed to be passing by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

'Look here, Peter, are we teeing in the study or not?' howled Bunter. 'If we're not, I don't want to be late in hall. Look here, Peter—.'

Peter did not 'look there'. He hammered on regardless.

Billy Bunter grabbed his arm with a fat paw to draw his attention. Peter, hammering at the same moment, missed the nail.

There was a sudden yell in the Remove box-room.

Peter Todd jumped almost clear of the floor. The hammer dropped from Peter's right hand. The thumb of his left was jammed into his mouth, and Peter sucked at it frantically, almost dancing with anguish.

'Ooooooooooooooh!'

Billy Bunter blinked at him. 'What's the matter?' he asked.

The glare that Peter gave him would, by comparison, have made the deadly glare of the fabled basilisk seem like a sweet smile.

'Urrggh! Oooogh! You've made me hammer my thumb! Ooooooooooooo! Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! Ooooooooooggh!' Peter sucked his thumb and danced. 'You fat idiot! Ooogh! You blithering bloater! Woooooogh.'

'I wouldn't make all that fuss about a little pain, old chap—.'

'What?' yelled Peter.

'Well. I wouldn't,' said Bunter, shaking his head. 'Bear it, old chap! Now, what about tea?'

'You wouldn't make a fuss about a little pain, wouldn't you?' gasped Peter. 'Wait till I get hold of that hammer.' Peter made a dive for the hammer.

Billy Bunter made a dive for the doorway.

He did not wait to ascertain what Peter was going to do with that hammer. He flew. A fat figure vanished down the box-room stair, almost like a ghost at cock-crow.

Peter Todd, breathing hard, returned to his repair work, pausing every now and then to suck his thumb. Bang! bang! bang! resounded once more, echoing down to the Remove studies.

But the task was nearing its end. Peter drove in his last nail. Having driven in all the considerable supply of nails that he had been able to accumulate, Toddy ceased to bang.

Giving his painful thumb another suck, he stood regarding the old armchair with some complacency. It looked all right, to Peter. It had collapsed under Bunter once, but Peter was confident that it would never collapse again. If nails, driven into almost every spot where a nail could be driven at all, would hold that armchair together, that armchair was O.K.

'Good!' said Peter.

He stepped out of the box-room, and called down the stair to a group of juniors in the Remove passage. 'Here, you chaps!'

Harry Wharton and Co. looked round.

'Hallo! hallo! hallo!' called back Bob Cherry.

'Come up, and lend me a hand to get my armchair back to my study, will you?'

'Stuck it together again?' asked Nugent, laughing.

'I've nailed it together,' answered Peter, with dignity. 'I fancy I know something about carpentry. Come up and help me shift it.'

'All hands on deck,' grinned Bob. 'And mind you don't drop it, you fellows. It might scatter all over the shop.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' said Peter, crossly. 'That armchair's as sound as a bell now— sounder than it ever was before. I've put no end of nails in it, and every one of them driven right home, I can tell you. Come up and help, and don't be a funny ass.'

The Famous Five, smiling, came up the box-room stair.

They were quite willing to help: but they doubted very much whether Toddy had made a success of that repair work. So far as they had been able to observe, Peter's knowledge of carpentry was limited to hammer and nails: and really and truly there was a little more than that in the carpenter's art.

However, they followed Peter into the box-room, prepared to help him carry the armchair home, if it held together during the transit back to No. 7 Study.

'Look at it!' said Peter, waving his hand to the armchair. 'Looks all right now, what?' He was feeling a just pride in his industrious handiwork.

They looked at it, and their smiles widened.

'You haven't been stingy with the nails, old bean,' remarked Johnny Bull.

'No fear!' said Peter. 'When a job's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well. I've used lots.'

'It looks it!' agreed Johnny.

'The nailfulness is truly terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Only too evidently, Peter had used lots. Nails studded that armchair, spotted it all over: it really looked as if it had broken out into a rash of nails. In several places, the business-ends of nails protruded. That article of furniture needed handling with care!

'Think it will stand Bunter?' asked Bob, eyeing the armchair very doubtfully.

'Well, Bunter's got his own armchair now,' said Toddy. 'But it would stand him all right, now I've repaired it. It would stand anything. I can jolly well tell you that that armchair would stand up to it, solid as a rock, if a fellow plumped into it full weight, as hard as he could.'

'I don't think!' murmured Nugent. 'Try it and see!' hooted Peter. Nugent chuckled.

'Too many nails for my taste,' he said. 'You try it, Bob.'

'Leave it to you, partner,' answered Bob.

Peter Todd gave a snort. It was rather exasperating for an industrious carpenter, who had just completed a long and arduous job, to have his masterly handiwork doubted in this way. Peter at least had confidence in that armchair.

'Well, watch!' he snapped. 'I'll jolly well show you! Just watch!'

And Peter proceeded to show them! He backed to the armchair, and sat down in it with a heavy plump, putting all his weight and all his force into that plump— to show them!

Crash!

Peter hardly knew what happened next. The juniors watching him did, and there was a roar in the box-room. 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh!' gasped Peter. He sprawled on his back, amid wreckage, in a dazed and dizzy state.

'What—oh-oooh—what—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the Famous Five.

'Oh, crikey—what—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Peter sat up dizzily. That old armchair had once collapsed under Billy Bunter. It had collapsed under Peter still more thoroughly and utterly. Nails had failed to hold it together: though it was an undoubted fact that Peter had used lots! After all Peter's carpentry, — perhaps because of it! —that old armchair was a more hopeless wreck than when he had started on it. It looked as if all the King's horses and all the King's men would never be able to put that armchair together again! Peter sat up in the ruins of the armchair, like Marius in the ruins of Carthage.

'Oh!' he gasped. 'Oh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Is that what you were going to show us?' asked Johnny Bull.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Jolly good!' said Bob Cherry. 'Do it again, Toddy!' 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Like us to carry it back to your study, Toddy?' asked Nugent. 'We'll take a bit each, if you like.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You—you—you silly chumps!' gasped Peter. 'What are you cackling at? There's nothing to cackle at!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you don't stop cackling—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Peter Todd scrambled up from the wreck. He grabbed up a loose leg of the dismantled chair. Like Bunter before them, the Famous Five did not stop to ascertain what he was going to do with it. They beat a prompt retreat from the box-room—still cackling!

CHAPTER 19

THE ONLY WAY

'WHERE'S Bunter?'

'What—?'

'Where's that fat villain?'

'But what—?'

'Where's that bloated brigand?' Bob Cherry seemed a little excited.

Why, his friends could not guess. A rainy day had been followed by a sunny one, and Bob had been out on his bike after class. Generally Bob came in from the fresh air in the best of tempers. The other members of the Co. were quite surprised to see him come up to the Remove passage with a red and wrathful countenance.

'Want Bunter?' asked Nugent, puzzled. 'Yes—where is the fat frog?' roared Bob.

'What on earth do you want Bunter for?' asked Harry Wharton.

'I'm going to burst him all over the Remove, that's what! Know where he is? Is he in his study?'

'I think so, but—what—?'

Bob did not stay for more. He tramped up the Remove passage to No. 7 Study, his expression indicating stormy weather ahead for the fat Owl.

'What the dickens—!' exclaimed Johnny Bull, staring after him.

'The esteemed Bob seems to be terrifically infuriated,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Perhapsfully we had better follow onfully, and see that he does not completely slaughter the execrable Bunter.'

'Come on,' said Harry.

The Co. hurried up the passage after Bob. There was a crash ahead, as Bob Cherry hurled open the door of No. 7 Study. He tramped in, his friends gathering in the doorway behind him.

There was a startled squeak in the study.

Billy Bunter was there. He was alone in the study, his fat figure extended in luxurious laziness in the 'bargain' armchair. And he was busy. A box of chocolates was open on a fat knee, and fat fingers were transferring its contents to the most capacious mouth in the Greyfriars Remove.

'Oh! There you are, you podgy pirate!' roared Bob.

'Beast!' gasped Bunter. 'Tain't your chocs! I found them in Smithy's study— I mean I've just got them from the tuck-shop—.'

'You fat, fozzling, dithering, diddling octopus—.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'What on earth's the matter, Bob?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'That fat, footling, frumptious freak—.'

'I tell you they're my chocs,' howled Bunter. 'If Smithy's missed a box of chocs, I don't know anything about it. How could I? Nothing to do with you, anyway. You mind your own business, Bob Cherry.'

'By gum! I'll jolly well—.'

'Hold on.' Harry Wharton caught his excited chum by the arm. 'What the dickens does it matter to you about Smithy's chocs—?'

'Fathead!' roared Bob. 'It's old Joyce.'

'Old Joyce!' repeated the captain of the Remove, blankly.

'That fat villain's diddled him—.'

'What?'

'Old Lazarus at Courtfield was too wise to be diddled, but poor old Joyce wasn't,' howled Bob. 'Bunter hasn't paid him for that armchair.'

'Oh!' exclaimed all the Co. together.

'Oh!' gasped Billy Bunter.

He realised that the chocs were not in the picture. It was not that. It was the trifling circumstance that he had omitted to pay for that bargain in armchairs— a very trifling circumstance that Billy Bunter had almost forgotten by this time.

'You see, I met old Joyce in Friardale Lane,' explained Bob, calming down a little. 'He asked me to remind Master Bunter that he hadn't sent the pound yet. He got that bargain on tick, and hasn't paid for it. Old Joyce thought that Master Bunter had forgotten. He doesn't know Master Bunter as we do. He wouldn't guess that Master Bunter was going on forgetting it.'

'You fat villain!' exclaimed Harry. 'Haven't you paid old Joyce?'

'How could I, when you wouldn't lend me a pound when I asked you?' demanded Bunter, warmly. 'You jolly well know that I asked you fellows to lend me a pound, and you wouldn't! But of course I'm going to pay. I hope I'm honest.'

'Oh, my hat!' said Johnny Bull. 'He hopes he's honest! Some hope!'

'The hopefulness is terrific.'

'He's only got to wait till my postal order comes,' explained Bunter. 'Think I'd diddle him? Why, I'll cut off and pay him now, if you like—.'

'You'd better, you fat fozler.'

'If one of you fellows will lend me a pound—.'

'You dithering diddler,' said Bob. 'Old Joyce has got to be paid. He doesn't even begin to suspect that you were diddling him.'

'Oh, really, Cherry! I tell you I'm expecting a postal order—.'

'I'm going to burst him—.'

'You keep off, you beast! Making out that a fellow would diddle a man!' exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. 'You fellows might, but it's not the sort of thing I would do. The minute my postal order comes—.'

'And when will that be?' roared Bob.

'Well, there's been some delay in the post,' admitted Bunter. 'But it's all right,—I'm expecting a postal order from one of my titled relations—.'

'Oh, slaughter him!' said Johnny Bull.

'Beast! Pretty thick I call it, rushing into a fellow's study, and calling him names!' said the indignant Owl. 'As if I'd diddle the man! I hope I'm above it— whatever you fellows might do! Old Joyce will be paid all right, when—when my postal order comes! Now you jolly well get out of my study.'

Bob Cherry breathed hard, and he breathed deep. 'That old bean has got to be paid,' he said.

'We can't let him be diddled by a Greyfriars man.'

'We can't,' agreed Harry Wharton. 'But—.'

The Famous Five exchanged glances. Obviously, if the payment depended on the arrival of Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order, old Joyce's prospect of seeing his pound was somewhat dim and distant.

'We can scrounge it, among us,' said Bob, at last. 'We can't leave it where it is. If you fellows agree—.'

'It's a must!' assented Nugent.

'The mustfulness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head. And Johnny Bull gave a grunt, and a nod along with it.

Billy Bunter blinked at them.

'I say, you fellows, that's all right,' he said. 'You lend me the pound, and I'll cut off, and—.'

'You wouldn't wander into the tuck-shop by mistake?' snorted Johnny.

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'That's that,' said Harry Wharton. 'We'll scrounge it up among us, and cut off and see old Joyce at once. Mauly will lend me his bike. The sooner it's settled, the better—.'

'No need for you fellows to butt in,' said Billy Bunter. 'You just hand me the pound—!'

'We're going to hand you something else, you dithering diddler!' said Bob. 'Bag him!'

'I say, you fellows-yaroooooh!' roared Billy Bunter. The next few moments were wild and whirling. Five fellows grasped the bargain armchair and tilted it over. The box flew from Bunter's fat knee, and Smithy's chocolates scattered over the study. Billy Bunter rolled out in a yelling heap. Then the massive armchair was up-ended over him, pinning him to the floor. Frantic yells came from under the armchair.

'Yarooooh! Oh, crikey! I say, you fellows, lemme out! Oh, crumbs! Beasts! I say— yaroooooh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! wow! I can't get out! I say— whoooooop!'

Five fellows crowded out of No. 7 Study: leaving William George Bunter struggling wildly to escape from underneath his bargain.

NO ROOM FOR FREDDY!

'TEDDY Boy!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Steer clear!' said Harry, quickly. 'We don't want a row.'

Five cyclists, turning out of Friardale Lane into Wood Lane, on their way to old Mr. Joyce's cottage, had a back view of a figure ahead, going in the same direction. They knew that figure. It was Mr. Freddy Dexter who was walking ahead, his gait something between a strut and a slouch: evidently out again after his seven days 'inside'. Judging by his bearing, he was quite at ease: not in the least ashamed to meet the public eye after serving seven days for punching a policeman.

Harry Wharton glanced at him curiously. His suspicion of Freddy was still strong in his mind, though he had said nothing about it. Yet it was, as he had to acknowledge, little more than suspicion: he could not feel sure that Freddy was the disguised raider who had struck at him with a 'cosh' on Courtfield Common, and escaped on his bicycle. In any case, he did not want further trouble with the 'Teddy Boy' if it could be avoided: and he gave a vigorous push at the pedals of Mauly's bike.

'Put it on!' he said. 'Keep clear of him.'

'Okay!' said Bob.

And they accelerated, overtaking and passing the Teddy Boy at a rush. If they had looked back, they would have seen Freddy staring after them and scowling: but they did not look back.

Freddy was left far behind, as they pedalled on to Mr. Joyce's cottage.

Leaving their bicycles at the fence, they walked up the garden path to the porch. The front door stood wide open, and a sound of crockery came from within. The old wood-cutter was about to sit down to his tea, when his visitors arrived. He glanced round at five cheery boyish faces in the doorway, and gave them a nod and a smile.

'Come in, young gentlemen,' he said. 'Not raining this time, hay? Anything I can do for you?'

The juniors came in. A log-fire burned in the grate and a kettle was singing on the hob. Old Joyce was a widower, living alone in his cottage, except when he had a lodger. But everything was spick and span, as clean as a new pin: and the living-room looked very cosy and comfortable. The old wood-cutter was all hospitality: though probably he was puzzled to know why a bunch of Greyfriars fellows had called on him.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Joyce,' said Harry. 'We've dropped in to settle a little account for a fellow in our form at school.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Joyce. 'I 'ope Master Bunter didn't mind me asking Master Cherry to remind him, as he'd forgot about it—. I dessay it's just a trifle to him, but it's more'n that to me, sir.'

'Here it is,' said Harry.

He laid a ten-shilling note, two half-crowns, a two-shilling piece, and three shillings, on the table. There had been some considerable 'scrounging' among the chums of the Remove, to raise that sum: but they had managed it, and there it was. Mr. Joyce was evidently very pleased to gather it up. A pound was a pound, to an old gentleman who eked out his pension with patient labour, and letting a lodging.

'Thank you kindly, sir,' said Mr. Joyce. 'P'r'aps now you're 'ere, sir, you'd sit down and have a cup of tea, and a slice of cake with it.'

'Jolly glad to, Mr. Joyce,' said Bob.

'The gladfulness is terrific, esteemed Mr. Joyce,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Thanks very much,' said Harry. 'Just what we'd like, but don't let us give you a lot of trouble.'
'No trouble at all, sir,' said old Joyce, beaming. 'Pleasure, sir! You jest find something to sit on, and I won't keep you waiting.'

Old Joyce, evidently pleased, went to the cupboard to sort out more crockery, and a rather solid-looking cake. The juniors pulled up chairs and a bench, and sat down at the table. No one was disposed to decline the old gentleman's hospitality. They liked old Joyce, and he liked them: and it was quite a cheery party sitting round the table, when the old gentleman had made the tea and sliced the cake.

But that cheery tea-party was interrupted. There were footsteps on the garden path, and a shadow fell across the open doorway.

Old Joyce looked up, and a frown darkened his kindly old face. The juniors exchanged rather disconcerted glances. It was Freddy Dexter who was looking in at the door. They had forgotten him: but they could guess now that he had been on his way to the cottage, when they had passed him on their bicycles. Very much indeed they did not want any more trouble with Freddy under Mr. Joyce's hospitable roof.

Freddy tramped in. He gave the Greyfriars juniors a scowl, but, to their relief, left it at that. Freddy was welcome to scowl as much as he liked. Having scowled at them, Freddy crossed to the door of the adjoining room. Then Mr. Joyce, who had been staring at him in silence, spoke. 'Keep out of that, Dexter.'

Freddy transferred his scowl to the old wood-cutter. 'Eh! What?' he snapped. 'I can go into my own room, I suppose?'

'Tain't your room now,' answered Mr. Joyce, quietly. 'You ain't my lodger now, Freddy Dexter. I put up with you long enough: but I ain't putting up with you no longer. If you can't keep out of prison, you can keep out of my cottage.'

'You old fool—!'

'That's enough,' said Mr. Joyce. 'You can walk out of this cottage, but if you don't keep a civil tongue, I ain't too old to throw you out.'

Freddy burst into an angry laugh.

'Do you think I care two pins whether I keep your room or not?' he snarled. 'I can get a room at the Cross Keys as soon as I like.'

'Mebbe you'll be welcome there, but you ain't welcome here,' said Mr. Joyce, and he added sarcastically, 'Mebbe they'll want you to pay your rent regular, which you ain't done here. You owe me six weeks' rent, Freddy Dexter.'

'You can whistle for it, if I'm not keeping the room,' retorted Freddy. 'But if that's the trouble, you needn't worry— I've been short of money, but I've got it coming, and quite a lot, too, as I told you that day I was copped for hitting the peeler. But for that, I'd have settled up before this: and if I go on lodging here, I'll square on Saturday. Is that good enough?'

'No,' said Mr. Joyce. 'It ain't! A young man what amuses himself by hitting policemen has got to lodge somewhere else.'

Freddy stood looking at him, with a black look. The juniors carefully kept their eyes on their tea-cups, apparently hearing nothing. But Freddy's words caused a glint to come into Harry Wharton's eyes, as he heard them.

Had Freddy's arrest for punching Mr. Tozer prevented the smash-and-grab man from disposing of his loot— and was that the intended source of the 'lot of money' to which Freddy referred? It was one more little circumstance that strengthened his suspicion.

'Well, if you mean that—!' snapped Freddy, at last.

'I mean jest what I say,' answered old Joyce.

'Then I'll pack my things—.'

Old Joyce pointed to a trunk, standing in the corner of the living-room.

'There's your trunk, and there's your things.' he said. 'I had to clear them out of the room, as I'm letting it again and letting it unfurnished to Jim Horrocks, who's got his own sticks to move in—.'

Freddy gave a jump.

'Isn't the furniture in the room now?' he exclaimed.

'Course it ain't, when I'm letting unfurnished.' answered Mr. Joyce.

'Where is it, then?'

'Sold, of course, I got no room for it, and I had to raise the money for my own rent, as you never paid yours—.'

'Sold!' yelled Freddy.

Old Joyce stared at him. Why his statement of a perfectly normal and ordinary transaction should so startle and excite Freddy Dexter, was a mystery to him: and to the Greyfriars juniors also. They had avoided looking at Freddy, in order not to attract his hostile attention. But they could not help looking at him now. If ever surprise, dismay, and rage, were depicted in a face, all together, they were depicted in Freddy Dexter's now.

'Sold!' He almost stuttered.

'Sold! Did-did you say sold?'

'Course I did.' answered old Joyce, blinking at him in astonishment. 'Whoy not?'

'You mean gone—?'

'Course I mean gone, when I say sold. Gone days ago, after I advertised them in the paper—.'

'Gone!' breathed Dexter.

'And whoy not?' repeated old Joyce.

Freddy did not answer that. He turned to the door of his late apartment, and hurled it open, tramped in, and stared about him. It seemed as if he wanted the evidence of his own eyes. Why the sale of those few old articles of household furniture concerned him, nobody could surmise: but it was plain that he was deeply, indeed savagely, concerned. He stared round at an empty room, and then came back into the living-room, his face almost white, his eyes burning.

'You old fool!' he breathed, thickly. 'You've done this while I was—was away—.'

'While you was in chokey, for 'sault and battery!' said Mr. Joyce. 'And what do it matter to you. I'd like to know. Can't a man sell his own property if he likes?'

'Where are the things now?'

'Along of the folks that bought them, of course.'

'Will you answer me?' hissed Dexter. 'Who's got them?'

'I don't see that that need worrit you,' said old Joyce. 'But if you want to know. Mrs. Atkins. down at Pond End, had the bedstead—.'

'Hang the bedstead! Who has the armchair?'

'Young gentleman named Bunter, up at the school.'

'Has he got it there now?'

'I s'pose so, as I trundled it up in my cart, and these young gentlemen was kind enough to lend me a 'and up the 'ill.'

Freddy Dexter gave those young gentlemen a black look. That he was simmering with fury was plain, though the cause of it was far from apparent. It was simply inexplicable why he should care a straw what had become of the furniture of the room he had formerly occupied, but

which he was to occupy no longer. His interest, apparently, centred in the old Victorian armchair, Billy Bunter's bargain. It was just mystifying.

He stood in silence, biting his lip, clenching his hands.

Old Joyce went on: 'I'll run your trunk up to the Cross Keys on my cart, if you like, young Dexter. I'll be glad to see the last of it, and of you, too.'

Dexter made a stride towards him, with clenched fists, his savage temper breaking out.

Up to that moment, the Greyfriars juniors had sat tight, only wishing to avoid trouble with him. But at that movement, they all jumped up, as if moved by the same spring, and bunched in a group between Dexter and the old woodcutter.

'None of that, please!' said Harry Wharton, curtly. Freddy looked, for a moment or two, as if he would rush on the whole party, hitting out right and left. The Famous Five were quite ready for him, and no doubt Freddy realised that, if he did, his last state would be worse than his first. With the blackest of scowls, he turned away, and tramped out of the cottage. It was a relief to all to see him disappear.

'My eye!' said old Joyce. 'I'm glad to see the last of that young man! They're more'n welcome to him at the Cross Keys. Can't make him out. What would he care whether a man sold a few old sticks of furniture or not? Jest bad temper! But you ain't finished your tea, young gentlemen—sit down.'

And the Famous Five sat down, and finished their tea, uninterrupted further by Mr. Joyce's late lodger.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR!

'TODDY, old chap!' exclaimed Billy Bunter.

He sat up, in his armchair, in No. 7 Study, his little round eyes popping behind his big round spectacles.

Peter Todd, at the study table, had opened a letter.

Billy Bunter was not interested in Toddy's letter from home. But he was deeply interested in something that came to light as Peter unfolded it. It was not often that Peter received a one pound note as a tip from the old folks at home. Now he seemed to have received two!

'I say, Toddy—.'

'Shut up, while a fellow reads his letter.'

'But I say, Toddy, are they pound notes?'

'They are! Dry up.'

'I say, if you'd lend me one of them, Toddy—.'

'Biggest size in "ifs" I've ever heard of!' said Peter.

'Pack it up.'

Toddy proceeded to read his letter, the two pound notes lying on the table at his elbow. Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles fastened on them. Two pounds, in No. 7 Study, was rather a windfall.

Having perused the letter, Peter put it in his pocket, and rose from the table, with a very satisfied look.

'That's good,' he remarked. He picked up the two pound notes, Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles following them longingly as they went into his wallet. Peter crossed to the door.

'I say, don't go for a minute, old fellow!' bleated Bunter. 'I say, I told you I was expecting a postal order—.'

'You did!' agreed Peter. 'Don't tell me again.'

'I say, I'm in rather a jam, old chap, till my postal order comes: pleaded Bunter. 'I owe Wharton and his gang a pound they paid old Joyce—.'

'Lot that would worry you, you dithering diddler,' snorted Toddy.

'Well, they're making a fuss about it,' said Bunter. 'That beast Bull kicked me—.'

'Hard, I hope ' said Peter, heartlessly.

'Beast! I mean, look here, dear old fellow, do help a chap out of a jam! I never asked them to pay old Joyce,' said Bunter, indignantly. 'I was quite willing to let him wait till my postal order came. But they went and paid him, and now they make out that I owe them a pound, and Bull says he's going to kick me every day till I settle up.'

'Good!' said Peter.

He seemed amused. Billy Bunter, on the other hand, was not in the least amused.

It was a couple of days since the Famous Five had called at old Joyce's cottage to settle that account. By that time, Billy Bunter would naturally have forgotten all about it, had he been allowed so to do. Certainly, the most optimistic member of the Co. did not anticipate that that pound would ever be seen again. Even if Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order had arrived, undoubtedly it would have gone, by the shortest possible route, in the shortest possible time, to the tuck-shop. Johnny Bull, who had rather strict ideas on the subject of '*meum*' and '*tuum*',

had promised to kick Bunter every day till the account was squared. Johnny was a fellow of his word: and it was quite a painful prospect for the fat Owl.

One of Peter's pound notes would have settled the matter. But once more Bunter was up against the sad selfishness of human nature! Peter actually didn't seem to care whether he was kicked or not: indeed, he rather seemed to think that the oftener he was kicked, the better! 'Hold on a minute, old chap!' exclaimed Bunter, as Peter opened the door. 'I say, where are you going?'

'I'm going down to Courtfield. Cheerio.'

'Hold on a tick, old chap! I say, I can't go on owing those fellows money, with Bull kicking up such a fuss. Lend me one of those pound notes, old fellow— you don't want to blow two pounds at Courtfield—.'

'Exactly that!' answered Peter. 'I couldn't mend that old armchair after all—.'

'He, he, he!'

'You cackling fat ass—.' Peter glared at his fat study-mate. Peter was a little sore on the subject of the disastrous outcome of his carpentry. 'Nothing to cackle at, is there?'

'Oh! No! Of course not, old chap! But I say—.'

'I'm going to bag that armchair that's going at old Lazarus's,' said Peter. 'My pater's stood me the two pounds for it. I'm going to Courtfield now to see about it.'

'We don't want two armchairs in the study,' objected Bunter. 'There ain't room for two. This ain't a big study like Wharton's or Mauly's. We can't be crowded out with two armchairs, Peter. Lend me a pound instead—.'

'Bow-wow!' said Peter: apparently a reply in the negative.

'Besides, you can use this armchair, when— when I don't want it,' said Bunter. 'I used to use yours sometimes, Peter.'

'Oftener than sometimes,' agreed Peter.

'Well, I'm willing to whack it out, if you'll lend me that pound, old chap! You can have the armchair when I don't want it. That's fair.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' exclaimed Bunter, irritably. 'Look here, Peter, you don't want that armchair from old Lazarus's. Chap oughtn't to be always sprawling in an armchair. It's lazy.'

'You know all about laziness,' grinned Peter. 'Quite an authority on the subject, old fat man.'

'Well, I don't like to see a fellow slack,' said Bunter, stretching his fat limbs in the armchair.

'I'm really surprised at you, Toddy. Brace up and be active, old fellow, like me.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Toddy.

'Look here, you cackling fathead, will you lend me that pound or not?' yapped Bunter.

'Not!' answered Peter, tersely. 'I'm going down to Courtfield to bag that armchair, and if you think there isn't room for two in the study—.'

'There jolly well isn't.'

'Then you can shift yours out.'

'What?' howled Bunter.

'I'll lend you a hand to shift it up to the box-room, if you like.'

'You silly ass!' hooted Bunter. 'Look here, Peter, you don't want an armchair. It's pretty sickening, seeing fellows lolling about in armchairs, I can tell you. Lend me that pound instead, and— I say, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!' yelled Bunter.

But Peter Todd did walk away. The door of No. 7 banged after him, leaving the fat Owl frowning with indignation. Peter's exploits as a carpenter having resulted in disastrous failure,

Peter was going to replace the wrecked article, with the one Mr. Lazarus had for sale at Courtfield, on which Billy Bunter had earlier had an eye— absolutely indifferent, apparently, to the 'jam' his fat study-mate was in.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

It was a disgruntled Owl! He had bagged that bargain on 'tick', and was prepared to let old Mr. Joyce wait indefinitely for payment. As Harry Wharton and Co. had chosen to butt in, he now owed them the pound instead. That in itself would not have worried Bunter. He was prepared to owe anybody anything, for any length of time. The snag was, that he was going to be kicked, for his sins, unless and until that pound materialised. And the postal order he had long expected seemed as far away as ever. The way of the transgressor was hard!

The study door opened, and Tom Dutton looked in. 'Isn't Toddy here?' he said.

'Gone out!' grunted Bunter.

'Eh! Who's a lout?'

'Oh, you deaf ass! Not lout— out!' howled Bunter. 'Toddy's gone out, see?'

'Oh, don't be a goat,' said Dutton, testily. 'Toddy may have gone out, but he hasn't gone to sea—how could he? Don't talk rot, Bunter. Well, if we're not teeing in the study, I'll cut down to hall.'

And Dutton departed. Billy Bunter heaved himself out of the bargain armchair. Evidently, there was going to be no tea in No. 7, and it was judicious not to be late for the scramble in hall.

The fat Owl rolled out of No. 7 Study, and rolled down the passage. A junior coming out of No. 14 glanced after him, and accelerated. Johnny Bull did not speak. He let out a foot.

'Yaroooh!' roared Bunter. He flew.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, on the Remove landing, as the fat Owl came charging out of the passage. 'What's up, Bunter?'

'Ow!' gasped Bunter. 'That beast Bull— he's just kicked me— wow!'

'Good!' said Bob. 'I'll do the same.'

And he did.

'Yow-ow-ow-ow!'

Billy Bunter bolted for the stairs.

'Hold on,' exclaimed Bob. 'There's another coming—!'

'Yow-ow-ow!'

Billy Bunter did not hold on. He did not want another.

He did the stairs in record time, and arrived gasping in hall.

Life was becoming quite exciting for Billy Bunter!

CHAPTER 22

SOLD

'HARRY, old fellow—!'

'Scat!'

'But I say—.'

'Hook it! Or have you come here to be kicked?'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap, I owe you a pound—.'

'What about it?'

'I want to settle up!' said Billy Bunter, with dignity.

'Eh?'

'I can't go on owing fellows money,' said Bunter, shaking a fat head. 'Not my style, you know.'

'What?'

Harry Wharton gazed at the fat ornament of the Greyfriars Remove.

He was sitting at the table in No. 1 Study, busy with a Latin exercise, when a fat figure rolled in, eyeing him warily as he rolled.

Another day had elapsed: and during that period of time, Billy Bunter had collected no fewer than half-a-dozen kickings— two from Johnny Bull, two from Bob Cherry, and one each from Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Harry Wharton had not so far joined in the game: but it might be his turn next, so it behoved a fat Owl to be wary. Bunter was getting extremely tired of lunging feet impinging upon his tight trousers.

Wharton was deep in Latin for Quelch. But he forgot Latin, at that unusual and quite unexpected statement from William George Bunter.

Bunter undoubtedly owed a pound to the Co. collectively.

They had scrounged that sum among them to pay for Bunter's bargain: and, equally undoubtedly, it was up to Bunter to settle up. But that Bunter ever would settle up was wildly improbable.

'Is that a joke, you fat ass?' said Harry, at last.

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'I mean what I say, of course,' yapped Bunter. 'I owe you a pound, don't I? Well, I'm going to square.'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Harry Wharton, and he burst into a laugh, as it dawned on him. Those kickings had been bestowed on Bunter, rather in the way of justice for his sins, than in the hope that they would encourage him to 'square'. Apparently, however, they had produced that effect!

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' snapped Bunter. 'Mind, I ain't going to square because those beasts have been kicking me—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'That's got nothing to do with it, of course—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm going to square because I'm not the sort of chap to owe a fellow money. I'm honourable, I hope!' said Bunter, loftily. 'Not like some fellows I could name! Look here, do you want me to pay up or not?'

'Oh, certainly,' said Harry, laughing. 'Hand it over, you fat diddler.'

'I haven't exactly got it at the moment—!' said Bunter, cautiously. 'But I know how to get it, see? I'm going to sell my armchair.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Harry.

'I don't really need it, now that Toddy's got that one from old Lazarus's,' explained Bunter. 'And there ain't really room for two in the study, either. I told Toddy so, but he didn't care—you know how selfish fellows are! Fat lot he cared whether I was crowded in my own study! He actually told me that if I didn't like two in the study, I could shift mine out! Selfishness all round, as usual.'

'You fat chump—.'

'Well, I'm going to shift it out, and sell it,' said Bunter. 'It's a jolly good armchair, hardly a crack in the leather, only a bit of the stuffing poking out at one corner—you could get that mended all right—.'

'I could!' ejaculated Harry Wharton.

'Yes, old chap,' said Bunter, affectionately. 'As soon as I thought of selling that armchair, I thought of you at once, as we're such old pals—.'

'Thanks!' said Harry, laughing. 'But we've got one in this study.'

'Plenty of room here for two,' explained Bunter. 'Your study is the biggest in the passage, except Mauly's. You'd be ever so much more comfortable here with a couple of armchairs, one on each side of the fireplace, see? That's why I thought of you, old fellow.'

Harry Wharton chuckled.

Bunter, evidently, felt no further need of an armchair of his own, now that Toddy once more had one in No. 7. He was prepared to appropriate Toddy's armchair as he had been accustomed to do of old. So he was going to 'raise the wind' by the sale of his bargain. But such a sale was not easy work in the Remove.

Fellows who wanted armchairs in their studies, had them. Few, if any, were likely to want an extra one. For which reason Bunter had affectionately thought of Wharton, in the hope of landing it on him.

'Many thanks, old fat man,' said Harry. 'But nothing doing! Now cut—I've got this putrid Latin to do for Quelch.'

'Never mind that now—.'

'Quelch would mind, if I didn't! Roll away.'

Billy Bunter did not roll away. He had come there to sell an armchair, and apparently he was going to remain until he had sold it.

'I say, Harry, old chap—.'

'Buzz!'

'But I say, old fellow—.'

'Scram!'

'Oh, really, Wharton! My postal order hasn't come—.'

'Travel!'

'It's a jolly good armchair—.'

'Hook it!'

'And I want to pay you that pound!' urged Bunter. 'I've been disappointed about a postal order, and I want to sell that armchair. You've got lots of room for two in this study. Nobody else wants it—I mean, a lot of fellows would like to have it, only I thought of you, as an old pal. Look here, I'll wheel it along to this study for you! There!'

'Oh, bother!' said Harry. 'I don't want it—.'

'Nugent would like another armchair in the study! Think of him, old chap! A fellow should always think of others, like I always do.'

'Oh, crumbs!'

'It's a bargain, you know,' urged Bunter. 'Bob Cherry 'said it was worth a lot more than I paid for it, and so it is. Is it a go?'

Harry Wharton paused.

'Bunter, it seemed, wanted to 'raise the wind' to settle a debt. No doubt that was due to the kickings awarded him: still, it was a new development in Bunter, and really, one to be encouraged. And as the 'pound' was already gone beyond recall, it looked as if Bunter was offering that armchair practically for nothing. For once, to all appearance, Bunter was not 'on the make'.

'Oh, all right,' said Harry, at last. 'I'll take it off your hands, you fat fraud. But mind, the pound goes to settle what we paid old Joyce among the lot of us.'

'That's what I want, of course.'

'Okay, then: it's a go.'

'Only—,' added Bunter.

'Only what?'

'Well, that armchair's worth a good thirty bob,' explained Bunter. 'I got it at a bargain, you know. I'm selling it for thirty bob, see?'

'Oh!'

'Cheap at the price, too,' said Bunter, warmly, 'and you had a ten-shilling note from your uncle this morning— I happened to see you take it out of the letter. Make it thirty bob, old chap. Be a sport.'

Harry Wharton gave the fat Owl a fixed look. Billy Bunter was, after all, 'on the make'. The sale of that armchair was to settle the pound that was owing, with ten shillings over for William George Bunter to expend on tuck! Billy Bunter was, in fact, killing two birds with one stone! He was going to escape further kickings, and revel in tuck to the extent of ten shillings, if Harry Wharton fell for it!

'You fat villain,' said Harry.

'Oh, really, Wharton! I say, it's a go, ain't it?' urged Bunter.

For some moments, Wharton was undecided, whether to reply in the affirmative, or to rise from the table and boot William George Bunter out of the study. Fortunately for Bunter, he decided on the former.

'Yes, it's a go, you fat fraud,' he said. 'Wheel the dashed thing along, and I'll let you land it on me.'

'Well, I think you might wheel it along, as it's yours—,' said Bunter.

'It's not mine yet,' said Harry, laughing. 'C.O.D. Now get out, and let me get on with this for Quelch.'

Billy Bunter, at long last, got out. Wheeling an armchair on its castors from one study to another was not really an arduous task: but Billy Bunter objected to exertion in any shape or form. However, he was prepared to face even that, in the circumstances: and there was a fat grin of satisfaction on his face as he rolled along to No. 7 Study. And a few minutes later, Billy Bunter's bargain rolled into No. 1 Study and changed ownership.

SOLD AGAIN

'MASTER Bunter—.'

'Oh, crikey! You keep off!' gasped Billy Bunter. Bunter backed away in alarm.

The hatless young man who addressed him, in Friardale Lane, was quite civil. Not often a civil fellow, Freddy Dexter was civility itself at the moment.

But the fat Owl had not forgotten his wild adventure at the stile, a couple of weeks ago. The mere sight of the 'Teddy Boy' was terrifying to him. Bunter would not have been rolling down Friardale Lane, had he been aware that Freddy was about.

He came on him quite suddenly, Freddy stepping from the hedge. Bunter's little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles, at Freddy. Of all the inhabitants of the county of Kent, Freddy was the one whom Bunter least desired to meet.

He backed rapidly away. Why Freddy had 'pitched' into him on the previous occasion, Bunter did not know: but he dreaded that Freddy was going to pitch into him again, in the same unaccountable manner.

Freddy did not follow him up as he backed. He did not want the fat Owl to take to his heels. He made soothing gestures. For some reason, known only to himself, Freddy was amicable.

'I'd like to speak to you a minute, sir, if you don't mind!' said Mr. Dexter, in quite honeyed tones, and in the most respectful manner.

'You jolly well keep off—.'

'Certainly, sir! I'm very sorry for what happened the last time we met,' said Freddy. 'I just wanted to say so, sir.'

'Oh!' said Bunter.

So many 'sirs' rather pleased the fat Owl. Freddy was extremely respectful. Bunter realised that there was, on this occasion, no cause for alarm. Freddy, it seemed, only wanted to express his regret for that unfortunate episode at the stile. If that was all, Bunter did not mind.

'You are Master Bunter, sir, I think?' went on Freddy.

He seemed to want to make sure of the fat Owl's identity.

'Yes, I'm Bunter.'

'The young gentleman who bought an old armchair from Mr. Joyce, in Wood Lane?' asked Freddy.

Bunter blinked at him, quite astonished by the question.

He could not imagine how Freddy could be interested in his bargain at Mr. Joyce's.

'Yes,' he answered. 'What about it?'

'Well, it's like this,' said Freddy, 'I was a lodger at Mr. Joyce's, and that armchair was in my room there. It's a very comfortable old chair, and I was rather attached to it. Mr. Joyce sold it while I was— was away—.'

Bunter grinned.

'I know where,' he said. 'He, he, he!'

Freddy Dexter's eyes gleamed. At that moment, Billy Bunter was quite near repeating his experiences at the stile! But the Teddy Boy, little accustomed as he was to controlling his temper, controlled it now.

'I'm lodging at the Cross Keys now,' he went on, quite amicably. 'There's no armchair in my room there, and I should be glad to have the old one back again. I liked it, you know, and it would be sort of— of home-like, to have it in my room. If you'd care to part with it—.'

'Oh!' said Bunter.

It dawned on him that Freddy had not stopped him in the lane merely to express regret for that spot of bother at the stile. Freddy wanted something. He wanted that old armchair!

'I believe it was sold for a pound—,' went on Freddy.

'That's right,' agreed Bunter. 'But—.'

'I'd willingly give twice as much, if you'd care to part with it, sir.'

'Oh, crikey!' said Bunter in dismay. He had sold that armchair for thirty shillings, out of which a pound had been subtracted to 'square' his debt: a sheer waste, from Bunter's point of view, but unavoidable in the circumstances. Now he was offered two pounds— too late! Bunter, certainly, would have parted with that armchair for two pounds, but he had, alas, already parted with it. That armchair was in No. 1 Study in the Remove, the property of Harry Wharton. Bunter felt like kicking himself. He had been very glad indeed to land that old armchair on Harry Wharton, since it was no longer needed in No. 7. But now—!

'I'd be very much obliged if you'd consent, sir,' went on Freddy, smoothly. He was watching Bunter's fat face, rather puzzled by its expression. 'If you'd let me have that old armchair, sir, I'd be grateful. I'll get the carrier to call at the school for it— no trouble to you at all, sir—.'

Billy Bunter shook his head. Gladly he would have nodded assent, had it not been too late. But he had to shake a fat head.'

'Can't be done,' he said.

Freddy's eyes glittered. But he controlled his temper.

For some mysterious reason of his own, Freddy wanted that old armchair, and smacking Bunter's head was not the way to get it. For that reason alone, the fattest head at Greyfriars School remained unsmacked.

'If you don't think two pounds enough, sir, I could go to two ten!' said Freddy, still in smooth tones.

'Oh, crikey!' said Bunter. 'Why couldn't you ask me before, if you wanted it?'

'I've been looking for a chance to speak to you, sir,' said Freddy. 'I couldn't very well come up to the school.'

Billy Bunter grinned again. He could picture the look on Gosling's face, if a Teddy Boy, fresh from seven days in the 'stone jug', had called to see a Greyfriars fellow. If Freddy had got past the porter, he certainly would not have got past Mr. Quelch. Certainly he would never have been allowed to contact any Greyfriars fellow within the precincts of the school. Freddy's only resource was to hang about the vicinity in the hope of contacting Bunter out of gates.

It had taken some time to learn which, of the many inhabitants of Greyfriars, was the young gentleman named Bunter who had secured that bargain from Mr. Joyce. Having, at length, learned that the name of Bunter appertained to a fat fellow in spectacles— the same, evidently, on whom he had wreaked his temper at the stile— Freddy had been looking out for him since. Now his chance had come— too late.

Freddy's manner continued civil: but his eyes had an ugly glint. He was feeling much more like lifting that fat schoolboy across the lane with his foot, than speaking civilly. Still, if smooth words could effect his purpose, Freddy was prepared to hand them out.

'If you'd let me have it, sir—!' said Freddy. 'I'll pay for it now, sir, if you'll let me tell the carrier to call for it.'

'So I jolly well would!' said Bunter. 'But—.'

'But what, sir?'

'You see, I can't,' said Bunter. 'I've sold it. Tain't mine now.'

'Sold it!' breathed Freddy.

As Harry Wharton and Co. had witnessed, it had given Freddy Dexter a jolt, when he learned that Mr. Joyce had sold that armchair. Now that jolt was repeated. He had succeeded in contacting the purchaser of that armchair, only to learn that it was sold again! Only by a great effort did Freddy restrain his intense desire to repeat his performance at the stile. He wanted to know more.

'If you've sold it—!' he muttered.

'I sold it for thirty bob—.'

'Where— to whom? If it's not still at your school, where is it?' breathed Freddy.

'It's still at the school,' explained Bunter. 'I sold it to a fellow in my form.'

'His name?'

'Wharton!' answered Bunter. 'It's his now, and it's in his study. If you'd asked me before I sold it—.'

'You fat fool!' hissed Freddy.

Billy Bunter backed away, in renewed alarm. Freddy's manner, up to that point, had been so civil, that the fat Owl had been quite reassured. But Freddy's look was not reassuring now. Freddy had no further use for Bunter, no longer the possessor of that mysterious armchair, and in his angry disappointment, he saw no reason for checking his savage temper. Billy Bunter backed away too late.

Smack!

'Yaroooh!' roared Bunter.

Smack!

'Yoo-hooooo!'

Smack! smack! smack!

Freddy, apparently, found some solace in smacking Billy Bunter's fat head. It seemed to afford him satisfaction. It afforded Billy Bunter none whatever. Billy Bunter roared and ran.

A foot, landing on his tight trousers, accelerated his flight. Then Freddy, with the blackest of brows, slouched away. Bunter, in terror of pursuit, careered onward. Five fellows, sauntering down the lane from the school, stared at him, as he came charging up the lane towards them. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'What's the matter with Bunter? A bull got out of a field, or what?' Really, Bunter looked as if a bull might have been behind him. He puffed and he blew, he blew and he puffed, and his fat little legs fairly twinkled as he flew.

The Famous Five stared at him in astonishment. Looking past Bunter, they could see no sign of pursuit. Why Billy Bunter, who generally understudied the tortoise, was now putting up a good imitation of the hare, was quite a mystery.

He came charging up, spluttering for wind, and would have charged past unheeding. But Bob Cherry grabbed a fat arm as he flew by.

'What the thump—!' exclaimed Bob.

'Urrrrrggh!'

Bunter was going too fast to stop. He spun round Bob Cherry in a circle, as Bob gripped his arm. Then he came to a breathless halt, spluttering.

'Ooogh! Leggo! Don't stop me— leggo—.'

'But what's up?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'That beast—he's after me—,' gasped Bunter. 'That Teddy Boy— leggo! Will you leggo, Bob Cherry?'

'That fellow Dexter?'

'Ow! Yes! Leggo!'

'What the dickens is he after you for— if he is?' asked Frank Nugent.

'He wants that armchair—.'

'What?'

'That armchair! He pitched into me when I said I'd sold it to Wharton! Will you leggo?' yelled Bunter. 'Leggo, will you?'

Bunter wrenched his fat arm free, and careered on, leaving Harry Wharton and Co. staring after him in blank astonishment as he went.



CHAPTER 24

SHORT AND SHARP!

'YOU'RE for it!'

Herbert Vernon-Smith addressed that remark to Harry Wharton, looking in at the door of No. 1 Study. Five juniors were gathered round the study table at tea, when Smithy looked in. They all looked round inquiringly at Smithy.

'Anything

'Sort of!' grinned the Bounder.

'What have you been doing to Quelch?'

'Nothing, that I know of.'

'Walked out on him again, leaving him to whistle for his lines?' asked Smithy.

'I haven't had any lines: and I didn't walk out on Quelch that time, either,' said Wharton, curtly. 'That fat villain Bunter bagged my lines. Is anything up with Quelch?'

The Bounder seemed amused. Smithy was very frequently in spots of trouble with his form-master: Harry Wharton very seldom was. Apparently the thunder rolling in Wharton's direction entertained Smithy.

'Is Quelch shirty?' he chuckled. 'If you haven't been kicking over the traces, old bean--.'

'I haven't, fathead.'

'Then Quelch jolly well thinks you have,' said Smithy. 'He's told me to send you down to his study.'

'What for?'

'He didn't tell me, but to judge by his looks, you're for it! Six of the very best, I should say! If you have tears, prepare to shed them now!' grinned Smithy. 'I never saw the old boy looking so much like Rhadamanthus at his best. Won't you tell a fellow what you've been up to?'

'Nothing, I tell you.'

'Well, I hope you'll be able to make Quelch believe that!' chuckled the Bounder. 'Better cut down, the old scout's temper won't improve if you keep him waiting. If you want to pack, I'll lend you a sweater.'

'Oh, don't be a goat!'

Vernon-Smith, grinning, walked on up the passage.

Five fellows in No. 1 Study were not grinning. They all looked very serious. Harry Wharton was frowning. So far as he knew, there was nothing for Quelch to be 'shirty' about, since the affair of the lines, and that was quite in the past. But if Quelch had sent for him, in a Rhadamanthine mood, it certainly boded trouble.

'What the dickens can be up?' asked Frank Nugent, anxiously.

Wharton shook his head.

'I haven't the foggiest,' he said. 'I'd better go down and see, I suppose.'

He left the study, and went down the stairs. Not in the cheeriest of moods, or in the best of tempers, he tapped at his form-master's door, and entered.

'You sent for me, sir!'

His first glance at Mr. Quelch told him that the Bounder had not exaggerated. The Remove master's face was set in a deep frown, and never had his eyes looked more like gimlets, as they fixed on Harry Wharton. Only too plainly, Quelch was in a grim mood.

'I sent for you, Wharton.' Quelch's voice was very deep. 'I require an explanation from you.'

'Indeed. sir!'

'It appears, Wharton, that you have been forming undesirable and questionable acquaintances outside the school.' Harry Wharton could only stare at him. Such a charge would not have surprised Smithy, or Skinner, or Snoop: but it came very unexpectedly to the captain of the Remove. 'Is that the case, Wharton?' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'Certainly not, sir.'

'Are you, or are you not, acquainted with a person named Frederick Dexter—a quite notorious and disreputable young man of this neighbourhood?'

'Freddy Dexter!' said Harry. 'I've seen him about, sir!

Most of the fellows have, I suppose— he's what they call a Teddy Boy, and he seems to be always loafing about. I've nothing to do with him, of course.'

'Have you met him, and spoken to him?'

Harry Wharton paused for a moment. Undoubtedly he had both met and spoken to that notorious and disreputable young man.

'Well?' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'I could hardly help that, sir,' said Harry, quietly. 'It's hardly a fellow's fault if a man he doesn't know kicks up a shindy.'

'No doubt, no doubt! Your words imply that you are on hostile, not friendly, terms with that person.'

'Certainly, sir.'

'You understand, Wharton, that no Greyfriars boy could be permitted to have any voluntary communication with such a person, an idle and disreputable young man who has actually served a prison sentence for assaulting a police-constable.'

'Of course, sir.'

'You do not expect, or wish, to hear from him?'

'Of course not.'

'Very well, Wharton. I accept your statement: but it is very singular that Dexter should have telephoned to the school and asked to speak to you.'

Harry Wharton jumped.

'But he can't have, sir!' he exclaimed. 'Why should he?'

'He has not only done so, Wharton, but he is holding the line at this moment,' said Mr. Quelch, with a gesture towards his telephone. Wharton, in astonishment, glanced at it, and noticed that the receiver was off.

'He has asked to speak to me!' said Harry, blankly. 'He has.'

'I can't imagine why, sir: and I certainly don't want to take the call.'

'I am glad to hear you say so, Wharton. The young man explained to me, quite civilly, I must say, that he wished to speak on the subject of some article of furniture lately belonging to Mr. Joyce at Friardale, but which it seems was bought by a Greyfriars boy, and is now in your possession. Is anything of the kind the case?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Harry, more and more astonished. 'Bunter bought an old armchair for his study from Mr. Joyce. You may remember, sir, that you saw us helping old Joyce up the hill with it—.'

'Oh! Yes! I recall it,' assented Mr. Quelch.

'Bunter sold it to me the other day, as he didn't want it any longer. It's in my study now. Is that what Dexter has 'phoned about?' asked Harry, in wonder.

'So he stated: but it seemed to me a very odd story,' said Mr. Quelch. 'However, as you tell me that such is actually the case—.' The gimlet eyes were very keenly on Wharton's face.

Obviously, Mr. Quelch had suspected that Freddy Dexter's professed interest in an old armchair, was simply 'cover' for getting through to a Greyfriars boy on the telephone. It certainly was, as he had said, a very odd story!

'If that is all,' went on Mr. Quelch, after a pause, 'there can be no harm in your hearing what Dexter has to say on the subject of an article of furniture, Wharton. Take the call.'

'Very well, sir.'

'You will take the call in my presence, and you will understand, Wharton, that whatever that person may have to say, you will make it clear to him that you desire to have nothing whatever to do with him.'

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

'I'll certainly make that clear enough, sir!' he answered. He picked up the receiver.

'Hallo!' he rapped. 'Harry Wharton speaking. What do you want?'

If Mr. Quelch desired to be assured that Wharton's feelings towards the 'Teddy Boy' were the reverse of cordial, he had that assurance now. Certainly the junior could hardly have spoken to an 'acquaintance' in that tone. Quelch's expression relaxed: but he sat watching and giving ear, perhaps to make assurance doubly sure!

The voice of Freddy Dexter came back over the wire, audible to the Remove master as well as to Harry Wharton. That voice was very civil in tone. Freddy could be civil when it served his turn, though it cost him an effort.

'Please excuse me for ringing you up, Master Wharton—.'

'What do you want?'

'It's about that old armchair of Mr. Joyce's. A young gentleman named Bunter bought it from him—.'

'I know all that! Come to the point.'

'I understand that Master Bunter has since sold it to you: that is why I want to speak to you, sir,' said Freddy, smoothly.

'I don't see why, and I don't want you to speak to me about anything at all. It was a cheek to ring me up on my form-master's telephone. Don't talk rot about wanting to speak to me about an old armchair.'

Mr. Quelch smiled faintly.

Freddy's voice came in reply: still smooth.

'Please listen to me, sir! I was fond of that old armchair—.'

'Rubbish!'

'I assure you, sir, that I was very much attached to it, it having been in my room so long at Mr. Joyce's. I should very much like to have it in the room I now live in. If you would not object to parting with it, I would gladly pay whatever you may have paid Master Bunter for it, or a higher price, if you wish.'

Harry Wharton stood silent for a moment. He, and his friends, had been astonished by what Bunter had told them on that subject, in fact, unable to make head or tail of it. That a tough character like Freddy Dexter had any sentimental attachment to an old armchair, or to anything else, was simply incredible. He was puzzled: and Mr. Quelch, listening-in, was puzzled too. But neither of them believed for one moment in that sentimental attachment professed by Freddy.

'I should take it as an act of kindness, sir, if you'd let me have it,' went on Freddy. 'My present room is somewhat bare, and it would make it seem more home-like—.'

'Rubbish!' said Harry. 'Talk sense, Mr. Dexter, if you want to talk to me at all. You don't care two straws about that old armchair, or anything else that was in your room at Mr. Joyce's.'

What have you really rung me up for? If it's a trick to get me into trouble here, because you got the worst of the shindy you started, you won't get away with it— my form-master can hear all that I'm saying to you, and knows that I've nothing to do with you.'

Mr. Quelch smiled again. Undoubtedly, the captain of the Remove was making it quite clear! 'Please believe me, sir—!' Freddy's voice was still smooth.

'I don't believe a single word of it,' answered Harry. 'I don't know what your game is, and don't want to know but you can't make a fool of me. If that's all you've got to say—.'

'Please listen! I will pay five pounds for the old armchair, if you like.'

'I wouldn't touch your money with a barge-pole!' retorted Harry Wharton, contemptuously. 'I don't believe you: but even if you mean what you say, I will have nothing to do with you.'

With that, the captain of the Remove slammed the receiver back on the hooks, and Freddy, at the other end, was suddenly cut off. He turned to Mr. Quelch with a flushed face.

'I hope, sir, that I've made it clear that I've nothing to do with that hooligan,' he said. 'I just can't imagine why he rang me up to talk nonsense about wanting an old armchair. I wouldn't have any sort of dealing with him, in any case.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I am quite satisfied, Wharton, though it is very singular that that disorderly young man should have telephoned at all. But I am quite satisfied, my boy. You may go.'

And Harry Wharton went. He hurried back to No. 1 in the Remove, where his friends were rather anxiously awaiting him.

'What's the row?' asked Bob Cherry, as he came in. 'Not a row, after all! That Teddy Boy on the telephone, making out that he wants that old armchair that Johnny's sitting in,' answered Harry. 'Goodness knows what his game is, I can't make it out. Bother him, anyway.'

A few minutes after Harry Wharton had left Mr. Quelch's study, there was another ring on the telephone. Mr. Quelch picked up the receiver again, with a very grim expression on his face. If this was Freddy Dexter again, Quelch was prepared to be exceedingly short and sharp.

'Well?' he barked.

'I seem to have been cut off.' It was Freddy again. 'If you'd kindly allow me another word with Master Wharton—.'

'Certainly not.'

'Just a word—.'

Slam! The receiver went back on the hooks, and Freddy was cut off even more suddenly than before. If Freddy, for some mysterious and inexplicable reason of his own, really wanted to secure Billy Bunter's bargain, he did not look like getting possession of it!

BREAKER OF BOUNDS

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH caught his breath.

He was startled: so startled that he scarcely suppressed an exclamation.

The hour was late.

Midnight had sounded from the clock-tower.

At that hour, all Greyfriars slept: the last light had been extinguished, the last door closed. But the Bounder of Greyfriars was not in bed like the rest of the Remove. Smithy had been out of bounds after lights out: an exploit which, as he knew very well, would have earned him the 'sack' had it come to his head-master's knowledge.

Now he was returning: he had climbed in at the window of the Remove box-room, which he had left unfastened for his return, and was stealing along the Remove passage, to the study landing, to reach the dormitory staircase. All was dark, with hardly a glimmer of stars at the windows from a cloudy sky. Suddenly, from the darkness of the great landing, a light struck his eyes, and he came to a startled stop, catching his breath.

The Bounder's heart seemed to miss a beat, at that moment. It rushed into his mind that he was caught.

More than once, more than twice or thrice, the scapegrace of Greyfriars had taken such risks, and impunity had encouraged him to trust to his luck. Now it looked as if his luck had failed him.

The light on the landing was the gleam of an electric torch, in the hand of someone unseen in the darkness behind it. But it could only be a master who was up at that hour: and he could be up for only one reason: that it was known or suspected that some Greyfriars fellow was 'breaking out' that night.

Smithy, standing in the Remove passage, staring at the light on the landing, wondered whether it was Quelch who held it. He was well aware that his form-master had long had a doubtful eye on him. But it was in vain that he strove to penetrate the darkness behind the light: he could make out nothing but the dimmest of shadows in the dark.

He clenched his hands, hard.

To reach the upper staircase, and the dormitory above, he had to cross the study landing. To do so, would bring him within range of the light, and he would be seen at once. He had to stay where he was: he was not seen yet, at all events.

The light was moving. It moved in a circle, sweeping the landing, but did not reach the spot where the Bounder stood breathless. But in dread of a glimmer falling on his face, he backed up the passage, and lost sight of it.

He listened: but he heard no footstep. Whoever was on the landing, was moving softly, stealthily, without a sound.

The Bounder waited, tensely. All was dark, and all was silent: and he began to wonder whether Quelch— if it was Quelch— was gone. If the landing was left clear for only a minute, it would give him time to dodge up to the dormitory and plunge into bed.

The anxious minutes dragged by, as he waited and listened. If he was caught— there was a picture in his mind of his head-master's study, of Dr. Locke's stern face: of the train home in the morning! He had chanced it once too often: and never had a reckless young rascal repented so sincerely of his recklessness. If he was caught—!

But he was not caught yet! And at length, he moved forward on tiptoe, to look across the landing again. If there was a chance of escape, Smithy was the fellow to make the most of it. He tiptoed to the corner of the passage, and looked round. Only darkness met his view. The light was gone.

He breathed hard.

Half-a-dozen passages opened from the study landing. The man with the light might have gone into anyone of them—and might emerge again at any moment. But he had to cut across to the dormitory staircase, if he was to reach safety at all. He made up his mind to take the venture: but even as he made a step forward, the light suddenly reappeared.

It came from the direction of the Fourth-form studies.

It gleamed across the dark landing, and the Bounder backed hurriedly again into the cover of the Remove passage.

If it was Quelch, Smithy wondered, savagely, what he was up to, wandering to the Fourth-form studies and back again. From his actions, and the movements of the light, he might have supposed that it was some stranger in the place seeking to get his bearings. That thought crossed his mind for a moment, only to be dismissed. A thief in the night might have designs on the Head's safe or the masters' desks, but could hardly be interested in schoolboys' studies. But was it Quelch, and if so, what was he up to? The Bounder was perplexed, as well as alarmed: but he could not doubt that the man behind the gleaming light was a Greyfriars 'beak': and that he had to keep undiscovered, if he was to escape the train home on the morrow.

A glimmer came across the opening of the passage.

With a sudden start, Vernon-Smith realised that the light was coming in his direction: the man who carried it, whoever he was, was coming to the Remove studies.

For a moment it seemed to Smithy that all was lost.

But he was quick on the uptake. He backed swiftly, and pushed open the first door in the passage, that of No. 1 Study, and backed in. If he had remained in the passage, the light would have revealed him in a few seconds more.

But he was in time.

He was inside Harry Wharton's study, when the unseen man turned the corner. With a thumping heart, he closed the door, without venturing to latch it, lest a sound should be heard.

He stood in darkness, in Wharton's study, listening.

No sound came to his ears: but, with the door ajar, a glimmer of light came to his eyes. If it passed on up the passage, that was his chance at last.

But it did not pass on.

It stopped, and the door moved under a touch from outside. Quelch— it must be Quelch— knew that he was there, and was coming in for him! The hapless breaker of bounds felt like an entrapped rat.

But Smithy was quite desperate now. Even in that extremity, he was not going to be caught, if he could help it. He backed swiftly behind the door, to be concealed by it when it opened— with the desperate intention of crashing it against the man with the light as he entered, and a faint, faint, hope of then escaping unrecognised.

The door opened: the light shone full in, swept round the study, and fixed in a steady beam on an armchair, none other than Billy Bunter's bargain, now the possession of Harry Wharton.

The door was between Smithy and the man who held the light: neither could see the other:

but in one moment more, the man would have been inside the study. In that moment the Bounder, with all his force, crashed the door against him.

He heard a startled gasp, and stumbling feet: and the flash-lamp went to the floor, and was instantly extinguished.

Black darkness covered the scene. From the darkness came the gasping of the man who was stumbling from the crash of the door, which had taken him utterly by surprise. Herbert Vernon-Smith whipped round the door and leaped out into the passage. Panting breath and stumbling footsteps followed him: the man, whoever he was, was hurrying out of the study. It was amazing, if it was Quelch, that his voice was not heard. Quelch or not, he was close behind the Bounder, and Smithy did not waste a split second. His feet hardly touched the old oak planks, as he raced out of the passage, and across the landing. He went up the dormitory staircase in the dark two at a time, and panted into the passage above.

There for a moment, he paused, to get his breath, and to listen. It seemed to him that he heard a sound of running feet below, for a moment. If so, the sound faded out at once: it was not coming in his direction. Quelch or not, the unseen man was not following him up.

He hurried on, and in a few moments more was in the Remove dormitory, the door shut after him. He whipped off his clothes almost in a twinkling, and plunged into his bed. The whole dormitory was fast asleep: Billy Bunter's snore rumbling through the shadows.

Once in bed, the Bounder breathed freely. If Quelch came up, he was in his place, and he was sure that he had not been seen. But Quelch did not come up. All remained silent and still: and before long the Bounder, quite reassured, was sleeping as soundly as any other fellow in the Remove dormitory.

MYSTERIOUS

'BIKE it!' said Bob Cherry.

'You'll have to leave me out,' said Harry Wharton.

'Oh! I forgot! But Mauly will lend you his jigger.' Harry Wharton shook his head.

'I can't keep on borrowing Mauly's jigger,' he answered.

'Um!' Bob rubbed his nose thoughtfully. 'I suppose not! It's rather rotten for you, old chap.'

'The rottenfulness is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But what cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb observes.'

The Famous Five had gathered in No. 1 Study, after prep. They were discussing what they were going to do with the following afternoon, which was a half-holiday. Bob Cherry's idea was to cut across to Lantham and watch the Ramblers playing a Second League team. It was a long way to Lantham: and bicycles were a cheap and easy mode of transport. But there was, so to speak, a lion in the path. One member of the Co. was now minus a bicycle.

'Your uncle would stand you a new machine, if he knew,' said Nugent.

'I know! But—.' Harry shook his head again. 'I had to tell him about the affair with the smash-and-grab man, of course, and that my bike was found afterwards. But— I didn't mention that it was past repair. Bikes cost money: and we're not rolling in it like Smithy's people. I don't like the idea of stinging the old boy for a new one. I've asked old Lazarus to let me know when he has a second-hand one cheap, and I'm leaving it at that. But that won't help to-morrow— you fellows will have to leave me out.'

There was a step at the doorway, and Herbert Vernon-Smith looked into the study. The chums of the Remove glanced round at him: and stared, as they saw his next action. Smithy stepped into the study and closed the door after him, carefully latching it. Apparently the Bounder had something to say, which was not for other ears. Five pairs of eyes fixed on him inquiringly.

'Anything up?' asked Bob.

'Something I can't quite make out,' answered Smithy. 'I hear that one of you fellows picked up a flash-lamp in this study this morning.'

'I did,' answered Harry. 'Some fellow must have dropped it here, I suppose— I saw it when I came up for my books for first lesson. What about it?'

'You don't know who's it is?'

'Haven't the foggiest. I've left it on the table in the Rag, and the chap it belongs to will take it, I suppose. If it's yours—.'

'It's not mine. I don't think it belongs to any Remove man, either— nobody seems to have claimed it.'

'Well, what about it?' asked Harry again, puzzled. He had given no thought at all to so trifling an incident, and he could not understand why the Bounder was interested in it.

'I say, though, that's jolly odd,' said Johnny Bull. 'I don't see what any chap, not in the Remove, would be doing in this study at all. If it doesn't belong to a Remove man—.'

'It doesn't,' said Vernon-Smith, 'and that's what I can't make out. It belongs to some sportsman who dropped it in this study at midnight last night.'

Five fellows jumped, at that surprising statement.

'What rot!' said Bob Cherry.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

'Rot or not, that's what happened,' he said. 'And I'm jolly curious to know who that sportsman was, and what he was up to. It can't have been Quelch, as I fancied at the time. There would be a song and dance going on, all over the school, if it had been Quelch, and there hasn't been a word. Nobody knows a thing about what happened last night.'

'Did anything?'

'Sort of,' said Vernon-Smith. 'And it happened here— in this study.'

'You mean that you were up last night— at midnight?' asked Harry, his lip curling. The captain of the Remove had his own opinion of Smithy's manners and customs, which he did not take much trouble to conceal.

'Exactly,' said Smithy. 'Just a harmless little ramble by starlight to see a man about a horse—.'

'Oh, chuck it!' said Bob, in disgust.

'Pity Quelch wasn't up, and that he didn't cop you!' growled Johnny Bull.

'I fancied he had, for some rather painful minutes,' grinned Vernon-Smith. 'But it couldn't have been Quelch, or a beak at all, though who he was, and what he was up to, beats me hollow. Who the dickens was rooting about the studies at midnight with a flash-lamp, and why?'

'Nobody,' said Johnny Bull.

'I tell you—.'

'Suppose you tell us just what happened,' said Harry.

'I'm going to, but I don't want it jawed up and down the form. I wouldn't exactly like it to get to Quelch's jolly old ears. It's rather against the rules, you know, for a fellow to drop out late to see a man about a horse—.' The Bounder chuckled.

'Oh, cut that out!' exclaimed Wharton, impatiently. 'If anything happened, what was it?'

'I'll tell you.'

And Smithy, in a few words, told of his strange adventure the previous night. The chums of the Remove listened in blank astonishment.

'Sure you didn't dream it?' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Oh, don't be an ass.'

'It sounds jolly queer,' said Nugent.

'The queerfulness is terrific.'

'Of course, I thought it was a beak on the prowl, most likely Quelch,' said Vernon-Smith. 'But it can't have been—.'

'Hardly!' grinned Bob. 'If anybody banged Quelch over with a door, there would be something like an earthquake to follow.'

'No doubt about that,' said Harry. 'It can't have been a beak, or a pre., or it would be all over the school now, and they would be hunting for the fellow who did it. It would be the biggest row of the term.'

'I was rather expecting something of the sort,' drawled the Bounder. 'But nothing's happened. Nobody's said a word. Nobody knows, except the johnny, whoever he was, that I banged over in this study.'

'But who—?' said Bob.

'And why—?' said Nugent.

'That's what I'd like to know. The queerest thing is that that merchant, whoever he was, was more scared than I was. I didn't know that at the time, of course, but it's clear enough now, since I heard that his flash-lamp had been picked up in this study. He must have bolted without stopping to look for it, just bolted like a rabbit.'

'Beats me!' said Bob.

'The beatfulness is preposterous.'

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Can't make head or tail of it,' he said. 'What would any Greyfriars man want to be rooting about the studies for in the middle of the night? It wasn't Bunter after tuck, I suppose?'

The Bounder laughed.

'No, it wasn't Bunter after tuck, he was snoring in bed when I got back to the dorm. But who was it, and what was his game?'

'I give that one up,' said Bob.

'Well, there it is!' said Vernon-Smith. 'Some fellow was rooting about the studies last night, and he must have had some reason, though goodness knows what it was. But whatever it was, he was up to no good, you can bank on that. I haven't heard of anything missed from any study—.'

'Oh, rot!' exclaimed Harry Wharton, sharply. 'You don't fancy there's a pilferer about, do you?' 'Not quite,' admitted Smithy. 'But I can't see what else it could mean. That fellow, whoever he was, was scared, he was more anxious than I was, to keep himself dark. Well, what was his game?'

Five heads were shaken at that question. The chums of the Remove were completely puzzled: but whatever might be the explanation of the mysterious affair, they certainly did not suspect, as Smithy evidently half-suspected, that pilfering was the motive of the midnight prowler.

'Some sort of a silly ass larking, I suppose,' said Bob Cherry, at last. 'But—.'

Bob was suddenly interrupted. Crash!

Smash!

'Oh! What—!'

'What the dickens—!'

Six juniors spun round towards the window in utter amazement. Outside, the autumn darkness was deep. A pane in the window had been smashed out: and a large stone, evidently hurled from the darkness outside at the lighted window, dropped to the floor of the study, amid fragments of broken glass.

'Good gad!' ejaculated the Bounder. 'What mad ass—!'

Harry Wharton ran to the window.

He threw it open, and stared out. Only darkness, with glimmering lights here and there from a window, met his eyes. He fancied, for a moment, that he saw a fleeting shadow, as of a dark figure running in the dark. But if so, it vanished in an instant.

Bob Cherry picked up the stone, staring at it blankly.

Six or seven fellows looked in at the doorway from the passage. The crash of breaking glass had been heard far and wide. There was a buzz of startled voices.

'What the dickens—!'

'Somebody chucking stones—.'

'That window's gone west—.'

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Some potty ass in the quad—.'

'Who's out after lock-ups?'

'Here comes Quelch!'

The crowd at the doorway parted, as the Remove master arrived on the scene. Apparently the crash had reached his ears. He frowned into the study.

'Wharton! What is this? What—?'

Quelch stared at the broken window, and fairly barked. 'Who has done this? Who—?'

'I haven't the least idea, sir,' answered Harry. 'Somebody's pitched a stone through the window from the quad, that's all I know, sir.'

'Upon my word!' Quelch's brow was thunderous. 'Some boy must be out of the House—!' He broke off, and hurried away, evidently to institute an inquiry on the spot. The crowd of Remove fellows were left in a buzz of amazement and excitement.

BAD LUCK FOR BUNTER!

'OH, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter.

Bunter was alarmed. He had cause for alarm.

Billy Bunter, as not infrequently happened, was in a spot where he had no business to be. He was standing at the table in No. 1 Study. On that table was a large tin of toffees, the property of the captain of the Remove.

Rights of property had no strong appeal for Billy Bunter. Toffees, on the other hand, had! So there was Bunter, at the toffee-tin.

Having, provisionally as it were, packed two or three toffees into the most capacious mouth in the Remove, Billy Bunter was busily engaged in transferring the remainder of the contents of the tin to his various pockets.

The tin itself was rather too bulky to be carried off unnoticed: moreover, Bunter had no use for the tin. His idea was to cram his pockets, and then to retire to some secluded spot to devour his prey at leisure. That was one of Billy Bunter's little ways, which had caused his fat career at Greyfriars to be punctuated with many kickings.

On a half-holiday, a sunny autumn afternoon, almost everybody was out of doors. Bunter had no doubt that he was the only fellow up in the studies. He was feeling quite secure as he chewed and crammed. The last toffee disappeared into a sticky pocket, and the fat Owl was replacing the lid on an empty tin, when footsteps and voices in the Remove passage apprised him that he was not quite so secure as he had fancied.

'Look here, old chap, better borrow a bike and come along.' It was Bob Cherry's voice.

'That's all right,' came Harry Wharton's reply. 'I've got my essay to do for Quelch, and I'm going to get on with it. It's about time I got it finished, anyway.'

'But—,' came Frank Nugent's voice. 'Mauly would—.'

'My dear chap, I've borrowed Mauly's bike three times, and Ogilvy's twice, and Smithy's once. Can't go on borrowing things right and left like Bunter.'

'Beast!' breathed a fat Owl in No. 1 Study.

'Besides, I really want to get that essay through. It's all right.'

'Okay, then,' said Bob Cherry. 'I'd rather watch the Ramblers than do an essay, but I never was a brainy bloke like you, old chap. We'll push off.'

'I'll come down and see you started: but come into the study before you go, and sample the toffees. I've got a whole tin. Might shove some in your pockets to chew at Lantham.'

'Oh, crikey!' repeated Billy Bunter, inaudibly.

The juniors in the passage had arrived at a most unpropitious moment for a fat tuck-raider: but he had hoped that they were not coming into the study. Only too clearly, now, they were: to sample the toffees already crammed into Billy Bunter's sticky pockets. It was an alarming moment for Bunter.

William George Bunter was not, as a rule, quick on the uptake. But imminent peril sharpened his fat wits. He jumped away from the table, and ducked behind the old Victorian armchair, once the property of Mr. Joyce. That old armchair had been pushed into a corner. Almost in a twinkling, the fat Owl had ducked into the corner behind its high back. He huddled there, hardly daring to breathe, as the study door was pushed open.

But he was in time: the fat person of Billy Bunter was completely screened by Billy Bunter's bargain, as five fellows came tramping in.

The toffee-tin, on the table, met all eyes as they came in. There was nothing to indicate that its contents had been transferred to sticky pockets. And there was no sound from Bunter's corner. The fat Owl was as silent as a mouse with cats at hand.

Bob Cherry, as he came in, glanced at the study window.

Jagged edges of glass showed where a pane had been smashed out.

'Not mended yet,' he remarked.

'It will be mended to-day,' answered Harry. 'Quelch told me that a man's coming from Courtfield this afternoon to put in a new pane. He telephoned to Smithson's this morning to ask them. Not till four or five o'clock, they told him.' The captain of the Remove knitted his brows, as he glanced at the jagged gap in the window. 'I'd like to know what mad ass it was chucked that stone. I'd jolly well punch his head.'

'Can't make it out,' said Nugent. 'Maddest trick I've ever heard of. I don't envy the fellow if Quelch spots him.' 'They haven't spotted him yet,' said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. 'And I don't think they will, either. I'm pretty sure they won't.'

'Why so jolly sure about it?' asked Bob.

'Breaking windows isn't a lark,' said Johnny. 'It's a rotten hooligan trick, and I don't believe any Greyfriars man did it.'

'Who the dickens else?' asked Bob.

'Some hooligan,' answered Johnny. 'Easy enough for some outsider to sneak in after dark, if he wanted to.'

'Why should he?'

'Oh, ask me another! I don't know why anybody should, but I'm pretty sure that somebody did!' said Johnny. 'Some village kid's idea of a lark, perhaps! No good looking for the sportsman in the school, anyhow— it won't come out that it was any Greyfriars man played such a potty trick.'

'It's possible, I suppose,' said Harry.

'It's so!' said Johnny, quite positively. 'I tell you it wasn't a Greyfriars man, and if it ever comes out who did it, you can remember that I told you so.'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'Okay,' he said. 'There's the toffee-tin, you chaps: help yourselves.'

Bob Cherry stepped to the table, and jerked off the lid of the toffee-tin. About to insert his hand into the tin, he paused, and stared at it instead. Then he stared at the captain of the Remove.

'Did you say help ourselves?' he asked. 'Yes: go it.'

'Thank you for nothing!' said Bob, drily.

'Eh?'

'Awfully kind of you, hospitable and all that,' said Bob, sarcastically. 'Here, you fellows, help yourselves to nothing! Is this where we laugh, Wharton?'

'What the dickens are you talking about?'

'If it's a joke, it doesn't seem frightfully funny, to me,' retorted Bob. 'Come on, you chaps: it's time we pushed off.'

'Well, of all the silly asses!' said Johnny Bull, staring into the empty tin. 'If you think it's funny to pull a fellow's leg, Wharton—.'

'Who's pulling your leg?'

'The pullfulness of our esteemed legs is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'and the jokefulness is preposterously idiotic.'

'Will you fellows tell me what you're talking about?' exclaimed Harry Wharton, quite bewildered. 'Nothing the matter with the toffees, is there?'

'Couldn't be much the matter with what isn't there, I suppose,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'And if your idea of a joke is to ask fellows to help themselves from an empty tin, you've got the joke all to yourself.'

'The tin's nearly full—.'

'Is it?' said Bob. 'Look!' He up-ended the tin. 'Thank you for nothing, as I've said before.' Harry Wharton jumped to the table, picked up the tin, and stared into it. He had left it nearly full of toffees. But he had to admit that it was quite empty now. What had become of those toffees was a mystery. But it was a mystery that did not require a Sherlock Holmes to elucidate! When tuck mysteriously vanished from a Remove study, one name came naturally to mind.

'Bunter!' roared the captain of the Remove.

A fat Owl behind an armchair, quaked. But he quaked in silence. Not for a dozen tins of toffee would Billy Bunter have revealed his presence, at that moment. 'Bunter!' repeated Bob. 'What about Bunter?'

'Fathead! I tell you I left that tin nearly full—three or four dozen toffees, at least. Think I'd ask you to help yourselves from an empty tin?'

'Oh!' said Bob. 'I—I thought—.'

'Did you? First time in your life, then!' snapped the captain of the Remove.

Bob Cherry laughed.

'Keep your wool on, old bean,' he said, soothingly. 'What was a fellow to think, when the tin was empty? If you left it full of toffees—.'

'I did! That fat villain has been here,' exclaimed Harry. 'He hasn't left one— not one! By gum, I'll boot him all over the school.'

'Give him an extra one for me,' said Bob. 'Come on, you men— Bunter's had the toffees, and we'd better go for the bikes.'

And, to Billy Bunter's infinite relief, the Famous Five crowded out of the study. Huddled in his corner, the fat Owl gasped for breath.

'Beasts!' he breathed.

Footsteps faded away down the Remove passage to the stairs. But Billy Bunter was not in a hurry to emerge from his hide-out: he was taking no risks of being booted all over the school! Not till he was quite, quite sure that they were safely off the scene, was Bunter going to emerge. In the meantime, he wedged more toffees into a capacious mouth, and chewed.

A few minutes later, he was glad of his caution, as there were footsteps in the passage again. No doubt one of the beasts was coming back for something. Billy Bunter ceased to chew, and sat tight, with bated breath, as the footsteps stopped at the study door.

The door was thrown open.

'This 'ere is the room!' said a voice, recognisable as that of Trotter, the House page.

Evidently, it was not one of the Famous Five returning.

It was Trotter, and Bunter wondered what had brought the page up to the studies. His words indicated that someone was with him. Footsteps came tramping in.

'That's the winder!' went on Trotter's voice.

Then Bunter guessed who was with Trotter: the man from the glazier's at Courtfield, who had come to repair the broken window.

'You wasn't expected so early,' went on Trotter: 'Between four and five was what they told Mr. Quelch on the 'phone. It ain't half-past two.'

'I got a job finished early,' answered a husky voice, 'and Mr. Smithson sent me here when I got back from my lunch.' Bunter heard a sound of something dumped on the floor: no doubt a case of glass. Then there was a sound of rummaging in a tool-bag.

'That winder was knocked out by a stone last night, somebody larking,' went on Trotter, chattily.

'Was it?' grunted the husky voice.

'Yes, and they ain't found who did it, yet. Won't he cop it, if they do!' chuckled Trotter.

'Well, that ain't my business: I got to get on with my job.'

'If you want any help, I'll lend you a hand—.'

'I don't! You just leave me alone to get my job done,' came the testy reply.

Sniff, from Trotter.

'I'll do that fast enough!' he snapped, and Trotter marched out of the study, closing the door after him with a slam.

Billy Bunter grinned behind the armchair. Only the man from Courtfield remained in the study: and while the fat Owl would have preferred to emerge from his hide-out unseen by any eye, the man from Court field did not matter very much, and Bunter had to get out before Harry Wharton returned after seeing his friends off for Lantham. So up rose Bunter in the corner behind the armchair.

Then he blinked across the chair-back in astonishment. The man from Courtfield was full in his view: a man clad in shabby blue overalls, with a patch over one eye, and several pieces of sticking-plaster criss-crossed on his face: which, added to a thick, shaggy moustache, and bushy, shaggy eyebrows, did not make him prepossessing to look at. But it was his occupation that astonished Bunter. He was standing at the door that had closed on Trotter, his head bent to listen. Had he glanced towards Bunter's corner, he must have seen the fat Owl staring at him, over the back of the armchair, his eyes popping with surprise behind his big spectacles. But the man was deeply intent on listening, and he did not look in Bunter's direction.

Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles glued on him. He was too astonished to move or speak. The man's attitude of eager, intent listening told its own tale: he was making sure that Trotter was gone, and that no one else was at hand. But why, when he had come there merely to repair a broken window, was quite amazing. The silence was broken, not by Bunter, but by a muttering voice from the man at the door.

'Safe for a few minutes, at least, and a few minutes will be enough. Now for it! '

He turned from the door, and came straight across the study towards the old armchair in the corner, as if that was his special object. His movement was so swift, that he reached the armchair, even as his eyes fell on the fat amazed face of the Owl of the Remove staring at him across the back of it. The look that came over his face, surprise mingled with rage and alarm, as he stared at the fat junior, caused Bunter to utter a startled squeak. It dawned even on Billy Bunter's obtuse brain that this man was not, and could not be, what he was supposed to be, a man sent from the glazier's at Courtfield to repair a window. Who he was, what he was, what his intentions might be, Bunter had no time to think: for after that moment's stare of enraged surprise at the unexpected sight of him, the man's grasp was on the fat Owl.

He was hooked out of the corner squeaking.

'Silence!' It was a hiss, in a fat ear. 'Silence, or—!'

He did not need to finish the sentence. His savage threatening look was enough for Bunter. The fat Owl sagged like a jelly in his grasp, not venturing to utter even another breathless squeak.

For a few moments, the man seemed at a loss.

Obviously, Bunter's unexpected presence in the study had taken him utterly aback. Whatever his intentions were, he did not want a witness to them. But he was quick to recover. Grasping the fat Owl with one hand, he picked up the tool-bag with the other, and there was a clinking as tools were turned out on the floor. Then the bag was jammed over Bunter's head, blindfolding him.

'Keep quiet! One sound from you, and you'll get the cosh! Quiet! '

Billy Bunter was quiet enough. Bewildered, breathless, he tottered with his head in the bag, too terrified to utter a sound. The grasp on him was released, and the man turned from him— with what object, he could not see. And at that moment, the door opened, and Harry Wharton walked into the study.

CHAPTER 28

WHY AND WHY?

HARRY WHARTON jumped almost clear of the floor, in his astonishment.

For a moment, he could hardly believe his eyes.

Having seen his friends off, he had returned to his study, naturally expecting to find it vacant. Instead of which it had two occupants: and the scene that met his eyes seemed almost too amazing to be real. The fattest figure in the Remove was tottering, its fat head hidden in a tool-bag: and various tools were scattered on the floor. A man in shabby blue overalls spun round, his face ablaze with fury, as Harry Wharton came in, panting. Wharton's eyes popped, at the savage face with its patched eye and sticking-plaster. Never had he been so utterly astonished.

'Who are you—what—?' He broke off, as the man came at him with a rush, and jumped back into the Remove passage.

The man in overalls followed him out. Amazed, indeed bewildered, the junior backed away, his hands up for defence. What it all meant, he could not begin to imagine: but the man, whoever he was, was about to attack him, as he had evidently already attacked Bunter, and Harry Wharton, as he backed, shouted at the top of his voice: 'Help!'

A door opened up the passage, and Lord Mauleverer looked out.

'What the dooce—?' began Mauly.

The man in overalls checked his rush. For a moment, he had evidently intended to hurl himself at Harry Wharton.

But no doubt he realised that his game, whatever it was, was up, now that the alarm was given. Checking his rush at the captain of the Remove, he turned, and raced away down the passage to the stairs.

Harry Wharton was left staring. The figure in overalls vanished, and a rapid pattering on the stairs died away. Lord Mauleverer came out of his study.

'What the jolly old dooce—!' he exclaimed. 'What's happening?'

'Goodness knows!' gasped Harry Wharton.

A muffled squeak came from No. 1 Study, as the voices in the passage reached Billy Bunter's fat ears.

'I say, you fellows—oh, crikey! I say—!'

'That sounds like Bunter,' said Mauly.

'He's in my study— that man seems to have collared him— goodness knows what it all means—.'

'Grooogh! I say, you fellows—!'

Harry Wharton ran into the study. Billy Bunter was clawing at the tool-bag that enveloped his head. Wharton jerked it off, and a crimson breathless fat face came into view.

'Urrrggh!' gurgled Billy Bunter. 'I say, is he gone?'

Oh, crikey!'

'He's gone,' said Harry. 'Who was he— what was he doing here?'

'Urrrggh! He's the man who came to mend the window,' gasped Bunter. 'Must be crackers, I think— urrrggh! Jumping on a fellow and sticking a bag over his head— urrrggh! He said he'd cosh me if I called out! Grooogh! He was up to something— urrrrggh!'

'The man who came to mend the window!' repeated Harry.

'Yes, Trotter brought him up. And he jolly well jumped at me when he saw me behind the armchair—.'

'What were you doing behind the armchair, you fat ass?'

'Eh! Oh! Nothing! I—I wasn't keeping doggo while you fellows were in the study— I never had the toffees— never touched them, and I haven't got them in my pockets now!' gasped Bunter.

'Then you were in the study all the time—.'

'Yes—I mean, no—I mean—.'

'But what the dooce did the man bag Bunter for?' asked Mauly, staring in at the door. 'What did it matter to him if that fat chump was around?'

'He was up to something,' gasped Bunter. 'If you've got a lot of money in the study, Wharton, he was after it.'

'I haven't, you fat duffer. I've got half-a-crown, and it's in my trousers pocket.'

'Well, he was up to something—.'

'Not much doubt about that, I suppose,' said Harry. 'But I can't imagine what. He's cleared off, and left his glass and his tools here—he can't have come here to mend that window. Got any idea what it all means, Mauly?'

'Not the foggiest,' answered Lord Mauleverer. 'But you'd better report this to Quelch, old bean. It wants looking into.'

'I'll do that at once,' answered Harry.

And he lost no time, hurrying down to the Remove master's study. Whatever might be the meaning of the strange affair, obviously it needed, as Mauly said, looking into. At the foot of the staircase he came on Trotter, with a bewildered expression on his chubby face.

'What's 'appened, Master Wharton?' gasped Trotter. 'That man from Smithson's, that came to mend the winder—.'

'Did you see him?'

'He jest rushed past me, nearly knocking me over, and bolted out at the back door. What's the matter, sir?'

'I don't know any more than you do,' answered Harry, and he went on his way, leaving Trotter as bewildered as himself.

He tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered. Quelch was seated at his study table, deep in a pile of typescript. A half-holiday for the Remove was a half-holiday for the Remove master also: and Mr. Quelch was taking a plunge into his celebrated 'History of Greyfriars', which had occupied his leisure hours for many years, and seemed likely to occupy them for many more. He did not seem pleased by an interruption.

'What is it, Wharton?' barked Quelch.

However, Mr. Quelch forgot even the 'History of Greyfriars', as Harry Wharton told him of the extraordinary happening in No. 1 Study. He listened in great astonishment, a deep frown gathering on his brow.

'Extraordinary!' he exclaimed. 'I will speak to Smithson's at once.'

The Remove master picked up the receiver and dialled.

A voice came through from Courtfield, and Mr. Quelch barked in reply to it.

'Mr. Smithson! A disturbance has been made by the man you sent here to repair a study window—.'

'The man has not been sent yet, sir.'

'What? what?'

'He will be coming at four o'clock, sir.'

'I fail to understand you, Mr. Smithson. The man came, and was taken up to the study where the window was broken, and—.'

'Not a man from here, sir. He won't be coming till four o'clock, as I told you, sir, each time you telephoned.'

'What do you mean by each time? I telephoned only once.'

'Twice, sir—.'

'I repeat,' said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, 'that I telephoned only once.'

'Then someone else did, sir, asking what time the man would come, and was told between four and five, like I had told you before.'

'Bless my soul!'

'I'm sending a man at four, sir! Couldn't make it earlier—.'

'Am I to understand, Mr. Smithson, that the man who came here, representing himself as from your establishment, was not from your establishment?'

'Nobody's been sent from here, sir, so far.'

'Bless my soul!'

Mr. Quelch put up the receiver, with quite a bewildered expression on his face. It was reflected in Harry Wharton's.

'This is most extraordinary,' said the Remove master, at last. 'The man who came here was clearly an imposter of some kind, though what his object can have been, I cannot imagine. Is there any article in your study, Wharton, of such value as to tempt a dishonest person?'

'Nothing at all, sir, that I know of.'

'It is quite inexplicable, but the man must have had some motive, and it can only have been a dishonest one. I shall acquaint Inspector Grimes with the matter. You may go, my boy.' Harry Wharton left his form-master's study, wondering almost dizzily what it might all mean. He left Mr. Quelch wondering too: and no doubt Inspector Grimes also wondered when he was acquainted with the strange affair. There was, so far as anyone knew, absolutely nothing in a junior schoolboy's study to tempt any dishonest person to play such a trick: yet it had happened. Who and why were questions to which it was difficult to find an answer.

JOHNNY THINKS IT OUT

'I TOLD you so!'

Johnny Bull made that remark.

It was a remark not uncommonly made by Johnny.

Johnny was a fellow of sound, solid Yorkshire common sense, who did little talking and a good deal of thinking. It was an undoubted fact that often, when Johnny had 'told them so', Johnny had proved to be right: though the circumstance that he had 'told them so' seldom had a pleasing or gratifying effect on his friends.

On the present occasion, Johnny made that remark after a long reflective silence, during which four other fellows had been talking. It was rather like Johnny to retire into his shell, so to speak, and think while others talked. But why he now remarked that he had 'told them so' was somewhat of a puzzle to the Co. They had no recollection of anything in particular that Johnny had told them.

The Famous Five were in No. 1 Study, at tea after the return of four members of the Co. from Lantham. Harry Wharton had related the strange and mysterious occurrence during their absence. Naturally they were discussing the matter in all its bearings, trying to make head or tail of it as it were.

Nobody, it seemed, was able to make either head or tail of it. Bob Cherry declared that it beat him hollow: Frank Nugent admitted that it beat him equally hollow, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh agreed that the hollowfulness was terrific. Johnny Bull sat thinking, without contributing to the discussion: till, at length, he made the remark with which this chapter opens.

Four fellows looked at him.

'You told us so?' repeated Bob.

'Yes, I did,' answered Johnny.

'And what did you tell us, fathead?' further inquired Bob. 'I don't remember you telling us anything special.'

Johnny Bull made a gesture towards the study window.

That window had now been repaired: the genuine man from Smithson's had come along at four o'clock and done the job.

'That window was smashed, after dark yesterday, with a stone, chucked up from the quad,' said Johnny.

'Tell us something we don't know!' suggested Bob.

'I did tell you something you didn't know,' answered Johnny, stolidly. 'I told you that a hooligan thing like that wasn't done by a Greyfriars man. It jolly well wasn't: and I told you so.'

'And how do you know?'

'Plain enough now,' said Johnny. 'What happened this afternoon proves it.'

'Blessed if I see how,' said Bob.

'The seefulness is not terrific, my esteemed Johnny,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'How do you make that out, Johnny?' asked Nugent.

'It doesn't need making out— it sticks out a mile,' answered Johnny. 'A man comes here, pretending to be a glazier come to mend that window, and turns out to be a spoofer, not a glazier at all—.'

'We know that, from what Wharton's just told us,' remarked Bob.

'And,' continued Johnny, 'he telephoned Smithson's to find out just when the genuine man was coming, so that he could cut in first, with the coast clear. Isn't that plain?' Harry Wharton nodded, thoughtfully.

'Looks like it,' he said. 'Mr. Smithson said there was a second call, and Quelch 'phoned only once.'

'Well, how did he, whoever he was, know that a window was broken here at all?' said Johnny. 'There's only one answer to that: he knew, because he had busted the window over-night, so that he could play this game to-day.'

'Oh!' said Bob Cherry.

'By gum,' said Frank Nugent. 'It does look like it. He couldn't have played that game, without a broken window here to start with.'

'Just that,' said Johnny, 'and that's why the window went west. He knew that a glazier would be called in to mend it, as a matter of course: and Smithson's is the only glazier's at Courtfield, so he knew the man would come from Smithson's. He had some reason for wanting to butt in here, and he had the whole thing cut and dried. I jolly well knew that it wasn't a Greyfriars man busted that window, chucking stones: and I jolly well told you so! Didn't I?'

'The told-us-so was terrific, my esteemed Johnny,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'And now perhapsfully you will tell us the whofulness and the whyfulness.' Bob Cherry chuckled.

'Yes, tell us some more, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,' he said. 'Who was he, and why did he butt in at all, and what the dickens does it all mean?'

There was a grin round the tea-table in No. 1 Study.

Johnny's chums had no doubt that he was right, so far. But they did not expect his powers as a Sherlock Holmes to extend further.

Johnny Bull's face remained quite serious, however.

'I can't tell you that, of course,' he said. 'But I can tell you a bit more than you've thought of. That man must be after something, I don't know what, but he's after it: and he's been here before—.'

'Oh, my hat! That's news,' said Bob, staring. 'When was he here, Mr. Holmes?'

'Night before last,' said Johnny, calmly.

'You were fast asleep in bed the night before last.'

'I know I was: but Smithy wasn't.'

'Smithy!' repeated all the Co., blankly.

'Perhaps you've forgotten what Smithy told us,' said Johnny. 'He was up at midnight, and found some sportsman rooting about the studies with a flash-lamp. He dropped it when Smithy banged him over with that door, and left it— one of you fellows found it here. He was scared, and bolted like a rabbit, finding that somebody was up. We know it wasn't a beak or a pre., as Smithy thought at the time, or there'd have been a row. Who was it?'

'Some ass larking—!' said Bob. Johnny shook his head.

'Same man!' he said. 'What's happened this afternoon makes that clear, to me. It was somebody from outside. Smithy gave him a fright, and he bolted. Then he thought up this trick of breaking a window, and getting in here got up as a glazier. It all fits in.'

The juniors stared at Johnny. In his slow, methodical way, he seemed to have thought it all out. It had not occurred to the Co. that there might be any connection between Smithy's strange adventure, and the happenings of that afternoon. It had occurred to Johnny, as he pondered over the problem.

'Blessed if it doesn't look likely,' said Nugent, with a whistle. 'Nobody seems to know who it was Smithy saw rooting about that night: but if it was somebody from outside—.'

'It was!' said Johnny, calmly.

'How would he get in?' asked Bob.

'Might have found the window Smithy left unfastened, if he was looking for a way in,' said Johnny.

'By gum!' said Bob Cherry. 'I suppose it could be,' he chuckled. 'But tell us some more, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Tell us his name, age, form, and starting-price: the colour of his hair, and the kind of cigarettes he smokes.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I've told you what I've thought out,' said Johnny Bull, stolidly. 'It's plain enough, if you think of it. We could have guessed it; when Smithy told us, if we'd known that some outsider was after something here. Well, we do know that now: and it sticks out a mile that it's the same man. And if it ever comes out who he was, you can remember that I told you so.'

'If we don't, you'll mention it, old chap!' chuckled Bob.

His chuckle was echoed round the table. It was indeed fairly certain that, if Johnny proved to be right, he would not omit to mention that he had told them so!

'Well, whether Johnny's got it right or not—!' began Harry Wharton.

'I've got it right!' interrupted Johnny.

'Well, whether or no, what was the man after?' said Harry. 'If he got in the other night, as you think, as well as butting in to-day, that only makes it more mysterious than ever. He must want something badly, if he came after it twice. What the dickens was it?'

'Tell us that one, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!' grinned Bob. But Johnny Bull could not tell them that one! He cast a puzzled glance round the study. Something must have induced the unknown man to act as he had done— his motive must have been a strong one. But what was it? Nothing in No. 1 Study seemed to account for it.

'You fellows haven't got a buried treasure in this study, by any chance?' asked Bob, grinning at Wharton and Nugent.

'Not that we know of,' answered Harry, laughing.

'I suppose he wasn't after your football, or Nugent's Latin dick! Nothing here specially valuable, unless it's Bunter's bargain! Think he was after that old armchair, Johnny! I can sort of see him carrying it off on his back!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Johnny Bull wrinkled his brows.

'Can't make it out,' he said. 'He was after something in this study, that's a cert: and whatever it was, he would have had it, too, but for Smithy the other night, and Bunter this afternoon. But what it was—!' Johnny shook his head.

'Echo answers what?' said Nugent.

'Esteemed echo answers that the whatfulness is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. It was a puzzle to the Famous Five. The discussion went on, round the tea-table in No. 1 Study: Johnny Bull, silent as before, thinking while the other fellows discussed. But no amount of discussion could throw light on the mysterious affair: and Johnny's thinking produced no further results. It was a mystery, and had to remain one.

ALL READY FOR BUNTER!

'WHAT'S that?'

'What the dickens—?'

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent asked those questions simultaneously. They had finished prep that evening, and were putting away their books, when Bob Cherry came into No. 1 Study, with a wicker basket in his hand, and a grin on his face. Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed him in, also grinning.

Bob slammed the basket on the study table. It was rather large, and flat, and of light weight. And it was empty. Why Bob had brought it along to No. 1 Study neither of the proprietors of that study could guess.

'It's for Bunter,' explained Bob.

'Bunter?' repeated Harry Wharton. 'What the dickens does Bunter want an empty basket for?'

'He doesn't! But he's going to get it all the same.'

And it won't be empty when he gets it!' further explained Bob. 'Shut the door, Inky— we don't want Bunter to hear, if he's around.'

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh closed the study door. 'But what—?' asked Frank Nugent.

'You remember those toffees this afternoon,' said Bob, 'We thought Wharton was pulling our leg, asking us to help ourselves from an empty tin—.'

'Fathead!' interjected Harry Wharton.

'But it was Bunter who snooped the toffees,' went on Bob, 'and my idea is that it's high time Bunter had a lesson about snooping tuck in the studies.'

'Hear, hear,' agreed Nugent. 'But what—?'

'Suppose Bunter happened to hear us talking about Wharton's cake in the cupboard here—.'

'I haven't got a cake in the cupboard here,' said Harry, staring.

'No reason why we shouldn't talk about an imaginary cake, if we feel that way,' answered Bob.

'If Bunter heard us, what do you think he would do?'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'That's an easy one! He would prowl into this study, after we've gone down, to nose after the cake.'

'Exactly!' assented Bob. 'He wouldn't find any cake: but he would find something else: this basket, full of soot! He wouldn't find it, till it dropped on his napper from the top of the door, see?'

'Oh! A booby-trap—.'

'Just that, and a tip to Bunter about snooping in the studies,' grinned Bob.

There was a chuckle in No. 1 Study. The picture of Billy Bunter, nosing into the study after an imaginary cake, and getting a basket of soot on his fat head, was quite entertaining. All the Famous Five agreed that it was time the fat Owl had a lesson on the subject of snooping tuck in other fellows' studies.

'Bunter will want a bath afterwards,' said Frank Nugent, laughing.

'Do him good!' said Bob. 'I don't believe he's had one for whole terms.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'We'll fix it up, and then—.' Bob Cherry broke off, suddenly, as the door-handle turned. He whipped the basket off the table, and held it behind him, as the door opened, hidden from view.

A fat face and a pair of big spectacles looked in.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Roll in, Hunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'I haven't kicked you yet, for snooping my toffees this afternoon.'

'Oh, really, Wharton!' Bunter did not roll in. 'I say, I noticed you fellows hadn't gone down. If it's a study supper—.'

'It isn't! We're going down to supper. Travel!'

'Well, what have you got there?' asked Bunter, blinking at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles. 'What are you hiding behind you?'

'Think it's a cake, you fat cormorant?' asked Bob. Billy Bunter's eyes glistened.

The mere word 'cake' was music to Bunter's fat ears.

Bunter had a deep and abiding interest in all foodstuffs: but for cake he had a special affection. Bunter loved cake. But the course of true love never did run smooth: Bunter never saw enough of the object of his deep affection!

'I say, you fellows, if you've got a cake, I think you might whack it out with a pal,' urged Bunter.

'If that's a cake, Cherry—.'

'Never mind what it is,' said Bob. 'Fade out, fathead.'

'Well, why can't you let a fellow see what it is?' demanded Bunter. 'I jolly well know it's a cake, and if you're going to scoff it—.'

'We're not going to scoff a cake just before supper,' said Nugent. 'We're not all Bunters, old fat man.'

'Well, what's the good of keeping it till to-morrow?' argued Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, I jolly well know you've got a cake, and if you ain't going to whack it out, I can jolly well say— Yaroooooh!'

Billy Bunter made that final remark inadvertently, as a Latin grammar, whizzing from Johnny Bull's hand, caught him under a fat chin. He made it on his top note, as he tottered in the doorway of No. 1 Study.

'Good shot!' chuckled Bob. 'Now let him have the dick!'

'Ow! Beast! Wow!'

Billy Bunter did not wait for the 'dick'. He was convinced that there was a cake in No. 1 Study, and he wanted the cake. But he did not want the Latin dictionary. He disappeared promptly from the doorway.

Bob Cherry glanced into the passage. He was in time to see the door of No. 7 close after Bunter. Billy Bunter, evidently, was waiting for the Famous Five to go down. If there was a cake in No. 1, it was not going to survive till the morrow, if Billy Bunter could help it. Bunter was prepared to 'scoff' a cake just before supper, or during supper, or after supper, or at any other time in any twenty-four hours. Bunter had no doubt that there was a cake: neither had he any doubt about what was going to become of it, when its owners were off the scene.

Bob turned back into No. 1 Study with a cheery grin on his face.

'No need for us to pull his leg,' he remarked. 'He's pulling it himself. The jolly old gudgeon's taken the bait. He's waiting in his study.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Now let's get going!' chuckled Bob.

It did not take long. There was plenty of soot in the study chimney, and in a few minutes Bob had raked a basket-full down with the poker. The Famous Five gathered outside the doorway: and Bob, the tallest member of the Co., reached up and lodged the basket on the top of the door, leaving it about six inches ajar, lodging the other edge of the basket on the lintel over

the doorway. It was quite safely lodged there: until the door should be pushed open! Then, deprived of support, it would undoubtedly obey the well-known Law of Gravitation, and descend— suddenly! — upon whomsoever pushed open the door! If Billy Bunter prowled into No. 1 Study after that imaginary cake, there was no doubt that Billy Bunter would have cause to repent of his unscrupulous manners and customs in matters of tuck! All was ready for Bunter!

'Come on, you fellows,' said Bob Cherry, quite loudly. 'Time we got down to the Rag!' Five grinning fellows strolled out of the Remove passage. But they did not go very far. Having turned the corner, they stopped, and waited in cheery anticipation for what was to happen next.

AWFUL FOR BUNTER!

'HE, he, he!'

Billy Bunter chuckled.

He opened the door of No. 7 Study, to peer into the passage. His fat head projected rather like that of a tortoise from its shell. He blinked along the passage towards No. 1. He had heard Bob Cherry's voice, followed by the sound of receding footsteps. He had no doubt that the coast was clear. But he blinked out very cautiously to make sure.

It was all clear! All the Remove had now gone down after prep— the Famous Five the last to go. Only Bunter remained up in the studies. Nothing was to be seen of Harry Wharton and Co.: they were certainly not in the passage. That they had stopped just round the corner of the landing Bunter was not aware. Even with the aid of his big spectacles, he couldn't see round corners!

'He, he, he!'

The fat Owl emerged from No. 7 Study. Bunter was, of course, hungry. That was his usual state. In a short time the supper-bell was due to ring: but there was ample time to 'scoff' a cake before going down to supper. Bunter had no doubt about having room for supper afterwards.

He rolled cheerfully down the passage to No. 1 Study. There was a cake in that study— at all events, Bunter had no doubt that there was. Billy Bunter's extensive mouth watered for that cake. If fellows who had a cake were fatheads enough to leave it over till the morrow, Billy Bunter certainly was not. Not a crumb or a plum of that cake was going to live to tell the tale, so to speak.

At the door of No. 1 Study, the fat Owl stopped, to give a last cautious blink round. But the coast was quite clear, not a fellow was about. Billy Bunter indulged in another fat chuckle.

'He, he, he!'

Five fellows, bunched round the corner on the landing, heard that fat chuckle, and exchanged glances of blissful anticipation.

Their anticipations were soon realised.

Billy Bunter blinked this way and that, emitted a chuckle, and then got going. As the door stood ajar, he did not reach to the door-handle. He gave the door a push with a fat paw, and followed it in as it opened.

What happened next was quite startling to Billy Bunter.

It came like a bolt from the blue. He hardly knew what was happening. He knew that something fell on his fat head, lodging there like a very large hat, and that something black and smelly enveloped him in a cloud.

'Urrrrrrgh!' gurgled Bunter.

He tottered in the doorway, gasping and gurgling, and hardly aware whether he was on his head or his heels. 'Gurrrrrrrggh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' came a yell from the landing. Billy Bunter's frantic gurgles reached five pairs of ears there. 'Gurrrgh!' Bunter, tottering, clawed at soot. 'Ooooogh!'

What—how—oh, crikey—groooooooch!'

'He's got it!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'The gotfulness is terrific,' chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Urrrrggh! Gurrrrgh! Woooooof! Ooooooch!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Famous Five emerged round the corner into the passage. Quite an extraordinary object met their view. Billy Bunter was hardly to be recognised: indeed, only by his circumference could he have been identified at that moment.

He was a pillar of soot. Soot clothed him like a garment. It smothered him. The basket, up-ended on his head, looked like an enormous hat. Soot streamed from it, over Bunter.

'Grooogh! Oooogh! I say— ooooch! Help! Ooooooch!' gurgled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Where did you get that hat?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Uuuurrrggh!' Bunter clutched at the object on his head, and dragged it off. A face blacker than that of a Hottentot was revealed. Two little round eyes blinked wildly through soot-blackened spectacles. 'Oooooogh! I say, you fellows-wooooch! Something fell on my head—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, crikey! It's soot!' gasped Bunter. 'I say, I'm all sooty—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Urrrrgh!' Bunter clawed and clawed at soot. 'Oh, crikey! Oh, crumbs! Look at the state I'm in—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' howled Bunter. 'I'm all smothered with soot— smothered an over— look at me!'



QUITE AN EXTRAORDINARY OBJECT MET THEIR VIEW

The Famous Five were looking at him! They yelled as they looked! Bunter gave them a sooty glare in return.

'Beasts!' he roared. 'You jolly well fixed up a booby-trap—.'

'He's guessed it!' said Bob. 'What a brain!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, lor!' Look at me! I shall have to change— I shall have to wash all over— oh, crikey! I suppose you thought I was after that cake—.'

'Weren't you?' chuckled Bob.

'Beast!'

'What did you want in my study?' asked Harry, laughing. 'Not a cake?'

'Yah!

'Tip to you not to snoop in the studies, Bunter,' grinned Johnny Bull.

'Yah! Beast!'

Billy Bunter shook a fat and sooty fist at five laughing faces. Gladly he would have planted that fat fist in all the five faces, one after another: indeed, at that moment, Bunter's view of what the Famous Five really deserved was something lingering, with boiling oil in it!

'We shall have to tip Trotter to clean up that soot,' said Bob. 'Like us to tip him to clean you up too, Bunter?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the Famous Five chortling. Even Bunter realised that what he most needed, just then, was a wash— and a much more thorough wash than he was accustomed to. He forgot even the cake! For once, even foodstuffs lost their appeal for Billy Bunter. The soot was sufficient to occupy his full attention for some time to come. He left a trail of dripping soot behind him as he rolled, heading for a bath-room.

For a long, long time, after that, Billy Bunter was busy with hot water and soap— lots of hot water and lots of soap. He splashed and spluttered, and spluttered and splashed: he rubbed and scrubbed, and he scrubbed and rubbed. He did not even hear the supper-bell.

Another bell was ringing, when at long, long last, Billy Bunter had succeeded in cleaning soot from his fat person, and emerged newly swept and garnished, as it were. It was the bell for dormitory.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoyed your wash, old fat man?' roared Bob Cherry, as the fat Owl joined a crowd of juniors on the landing.

'Beast!' roared back Bunter. 'I—I say, you fellows, is it dorm? I—I say, I—I—I—I haven't had any supper.'

'Awful!' said Bob. 'Cut down and ask Quelch to have it sent up to the dorm!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, lor'!' groaned Bunter.

It was truly awful for Bunter! Supper had been scheduled to follow the cake. There had been no cake! Now there was no supper! Missing a meal was a thing that many fellows could have endured with fortitude. To William George Bunter it was quite overwhelming. But there was no help for it. Billy Bunter, supperless, had to roll up to the dormitory with the rest of the Remove: and he felt, as he rolled, like the Raven's unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster!

TWO IN THE DARK

'OH, lor'!' mumbled Billy Bunter.

He sat up in bed.

All was dark and silent, in the Remove dormitory. The last stroke of midnight had died away in the autumn night. A pale glimmer of stars came in at the high windows. Slumber reigned in the long row of beds, with one exception. For once, slumber's chain had not bound William George Bunter.

It was seldom— very seldom indeed— that Billy Bunter's eyes were open at such an hour. As a rule, Bunter slept almost as soon as his fat head was laid on his pillow, and did not wake till the rising-bell clanged in the dewy mom, and not always then! Normally, Billy Bunter would have been fast asleep, and his deep snore would have been rousing out the echoes.

But matters were not normal now. Bunter had missed his supper! Except for some meringues he had found in Lord Mauleverer's study, and some biscuits he had unearthed in Smithy's, Bunter had had nothing since tea. And even tea had been frugal. There had been three eggs for tea in No. 7 Study: and Toddy and Dutton, with the selfishness Bunter knew only too well, had had one each, leaving only one for Bunter! A cake in Harry Wharton's study, followed by supper in hall, would have filled the aching void. But neither had accrued: and the void still ached! Like Macbeth, it murdered sleep!

The fat Owl had slept by fits and starts—merely catnaps! Now, at midnight, he was wide awake. He was hungry. He was, in fact, fearfully hungry. He knew now what it must be like to drift in an open boat at sea, or to be wrecked on a desert island. Sleep would not come! He sat up and moaned.

'I say, you fellows!' squeaked Bunter, at last.

No reply! All the Remove, with that one fat exception, slept soundly.

'I say, you fellows!' repeated Bunter, more loudly. Then there was a mumble from a bed.

'Ummmmm! Who's that— what's that?' It was Bob Cherry's voice.

'I say, Cherry, old chap—.'

'Is that Bunter?'

'Yes, old fellow! I say, got any toffee or anything in your pockets? I say, I'm awfully hungry, old fellow.'

'You fat, frabjous, footling fathead! Have you woke a fellow up to tell him that?' hissed Bob.

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Who's that chattering?' It was Johnny Bull's voice this time. 'Is that Bunter kicking up a row?'

'I say, Bull, old chap, I'm awfully hungry! If you've got any stickers in your pockets— even a bullseye—!' pleaded Bunter. 'I'll get out and get it, old fellow, if you have—you needn't get up!'

'I'll get up, and wallop you with my pillow, if you don't shut up, you gormandizing gollywog!' came a growl from Johnny's bed.

'Beast! '

Bob and Johnny settled down to sleep again. Billy Bunter would have been glad to do the same. But he couldn't! He sat up, his thoughts concentrated on food. The cake in No. 1 Study haunted his fat mind. Quite unaware that the cake had no real existence, Billy Bunter thought of it with deep yearning. And at last he made up his fat mind. He was going down for that cake!

Bunter did not like turning out of bed. He did not like venturing out in dark passages and staircases in the middle of the night, when all the rest of Greyfriars slept. In fact he hated the idea. But he was hungry, he was sleepless, and the thought of that cake drew him like a magnet.

After all, it was easy enough. He had only to slip out of the dormitory, creep down the staircase to the study landing, and grope his way to No. 1 Study. Why not?

For long, long minutes he hesitated. His bed was warm, and the autumn night was chilly. Lonely dark passages were unattractive. But—!

He put a fat leg out of bed at last. He was going down for that cake, and that was that!

He bundled on his dressing-gown and slippers in the dark. It was like Bunter to drop a slipper, grope for it, and bump a fat head against his bedstead. It was also like him to follow up the bump with a loud, startled howl.

'Ow! wow! Yow-ow-ow!' There were voices at once. 'What's that?'

'That Bunter again?'

'You fat ass— what—.'

'What are you up for Bunter, you potty porpoise?' Harry Wharton sat up in bed, peering at a shadowy fat Owl in the gloom.

'Ow! wow!' Bunter rubbed his head. 'Oh! Nothing! I ain't going down to your study—.'

'You blithering bloater, what are you going down to my study for, at this time of night?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'Find out!' retorted Bunter. And he rolled away to the door.

'You fat ass—!'

'Yah!'

That was Bunter's final remark. The door was heard to close after the departing fat Owl. Billy Bunter was gone.

'What the dickens—!' exclaimed Nugent.

There was a chuckle from Bob Cherry's bed.

'He's after that cake!'

'There isn't any cake—.'

'I know there isn't, but Bunter doesn't! Bet you he's after it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

There was a sound of merriment in the Remove dormitory. The idea of the fat Owl groping down in the dark, and hunting in No. 1 Study for a cake that did not exist, struck the juniors as funny. A ripple of laughter ran from bed to bed.

But if the other fellows were amused, Billy Bunter was not, as he crept down the dark passage to a shadowy staircase. It was dark, it was chilly, it was awfully silent and still. The dormitory staircase, when Bunter reached it, looked like a well of darkness. Billy Bunter blinked down into deep gloom, and was tempted to turn back.

But the aching void within, and the lure of cake in No. 1 Study, drew him on. He peered uneasily into dark shadows, he jumped at the faint sound of a crack from ancient wainscot: but he screwed up his fat courage to the sticking point, and groped his way down.

There was a glimmer of starlight at the big window on the study landing. But Bunter did not need a light: he knew every inch of the way. He tiptoed across the landing, heading for the Remove studies.

Suddenly, he stopped, his fat heart jumping. Some sound in the silent night came to his fat ears. The thought of Quelch rushed into his mind. If Quelch was up—!

'Oh, crikey!' breathed the fat Owl.

He listened intently. If Quelch was up— if Quelch caught him out of his dormitory at that hour of the night—! He was almost certain that he had heard a light footfall.

But the silence reassured him: and the darkness, unpleasant as it was, was reassuring also. Quelch wouldn't be up in the dark!

For a long minute the Owl of the Remove stood, palpitating and listening. But nothing came to his ears, and he moved on again: tiptoeing with the greatest caution, lest there should be wakeful ears to hear.

He reached the Remove passage: and then, suddenly, he stopped again, his fat heart giving another wild jump. From the darkness of that passage came a sound, a faint sound, which seemed to Bunter like the sound of a door closing softly and stealthily.

He stood blinking into the dark passage. All was silent, save for the faint murmur of the night-wind in the old ivy outside. Was it the wind he heard? He decided that it was: for who could imaginably be closing the door of a Remove study in the middle of the night? Once more he pushed on, tiptoeing up the passage to the door of No. 1 Study.

The door was shut and latched. He grasped the door-handle and turned it, and pushed open the door.

Then he jumped, or rather, bounded.

Naturally he had expected the interior of the study to be dark. It was dark: but in the darkness, there was a gleam of light: the gleam of a flash-lamp. It was set on a corner of the study table, its gleam directed towards the old armchair in the corner—and over that armchair, a dark figure was bending. There was someone in the study!

'Oooooogh!' gasped the startled Owl.

Another startled gasp came like an echo, as the figure in the corner turned. The flash-lamp shone full on it as it turned, and the terrified fat Owl had a glimpse of a face over which a muffler was tied, two sharp startled eyes glittering over it.

In sheer terror, the hapless Owl stood transfixed, staring with bulging eyes. As he stood, the man came at him. He was upon Bunter almost in a moment. A second more, and the fat junior would have been in his grasp. Hardly knowing what he did, in his terror, Billy Bunter ducked his head and butted, as the man reached him.

A fist swept over his ducking head. That head crashed almost like a battering-ram into a waistcoat.

'Urrrrrrgggh!'

It was a suffocated gurgle from the recipient of Bunter's bullet head. The man went over backwards as if a cannon-ball had struck him.

He crashed on the floor of No. 1 Study. He writhed there, clasping his waistcoat with both hands, struggling frantically for breath: unable to rise, unable to do anything but gurgle horribly, every ounce of wind knocked out of his body. Billy Bunter did not linger! Frantic with terror, he bolted, yelling at the top of his voice.

'Help! Burglars! Keep him off! I say, you fellows— help— burglars— help— oh, crikey— help!'

That the man in the study was hors de combat: that he could not have hurt a fly, Bunter did not know. Bunter yelled and yelled and yelled, and his frantic yells woke every echo of the silent House.

THE MAN IN THE STUDY

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!' 'What the dickens—.'

'That's Bunter!'

'The mad ass— kicking up a row—.'

'What on earth's happened?'

There were startled voices in the Remove dormitory.

Frantic yelling from below echoed and re-echoed there. Hardly a sleeper in the House could have failed to awake. But the Famous Five were already awake, as well as several other fellows in the Remove dormitory: waiting with grinning faces for the fat Owl to return after his quest of a non-existent cake. That sudden outburst of terrified yells in the silence of midnight was startling.

'Help! Burglars! Help!'

'By gum, he'll wake the House!' said Bob Cherry.

'Quelch will be after him. Scared in the dark—.'

Harry Wharton jumped out of bed. Billy Bunter was the fellow to be scared in the dark, and imagine burglars. But Wharton remembered the Bounder's strange nocturnal adventure.

'Better cut down,' he said. 'Something's happened.' He ran from the dormitory. Bob was only a few seconds after him, and Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed Bob—and then five or six other fellows, Smithy, Redwing, Peter Todd, Lord Mauleverer, and one or two others. The wild yelling below was going on without a moment's pause: and there was already a sound of doors opening, and lights were flashing on.

Harry Wharton raced down the dormitory staircase, to the study landing below. At the foot of the staircase was a lighting switch, and he paused for a second to switch on the light. Sudden illumination flashed over the wide landing. It revealed Billy Bunter, his little round eyes almost starting through his big round spectacles, his mouth wide open, emitting yell after yell.

'Bunter—!' exclaimed Wharton.

'Yaroooh! Keep him off!' yelled Bunter.

'There's nobody here—.'

'Help! Burglars! Keep him off.'

'You fat ass!' roared Bob Cherry, as he arrived with half-a-dozen other fellows. 'Nobody's here—.'

'You've woke up the House, you fat chump!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'Here comes Quelch!'

'Ow! Help! Burglars! Keep him off!'

'What is all this?' Mr. Quelch, in dressing-gown and slippers, arrived on the scene, with a brow of thunder. 'What are you boys doing out of your dormitory? What is this disturbance? What—?'

'Ow! Help! Burglars—!'

'Silence, Bunter!' Quelch grasped a fat shoulder, and shook. 'Silence!'

'Ow! Oooogh!' gasped Bunter. 'He rushed at me—.'

'Nonsense.'

'In Wharton's study—.' Billy Bunter blinked round him with popping eyes. 'I say, he was in Wharton's study— he rushed at me, and I butted him in the tummy—.'

'In the what?'

'I—I—I mean, in the bread-basket,' gasped Bunter. 'I—I thought he was after me— oh, crikey! He was grabbing at me—.'

'And what were you doing, in Wharton's study, at this hour of the night. Bunter?' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'Oh' N—n—nothing, sir,' gasped Bunter. 'I—I wasn't after a cake, sir— nothing of the kind—I—I—I—.'

'You foolish, greedy boy, you came down for food at this hour, and have disturbed the whole House—,' hooted Mr. Quelch.

Bunter, undoubtedly, had disturbed the whole House.

Wingate and Gwynne and Loder and several other Sixth-form prefects had come up: Coker and Potter and Greene had turned out of the Fifth-form dormitory: Mr. Prout and Mr. Capper had emerged from their rooms: there was a hubbub of startled voices. The study landing was becoming quite thickly populated.

'Shall I look in my study, sir?' asked Harry Wharton.

'I will do so" snapped Mr. Quelch. 'It is absurd— that foolish boy has been frightened in the dark, that is all: but I will make sure.'

'He—he—he—he—he rushed at me—!' babbled Bunter.

'Silence!'

Mr. Quelch strode into the Remove passage. A crowd followed him. From the open doorway of No. 1 Study came a gleam of light. And as Mr. Quelch neared the doorway, strange sounds impinged upon his ears.

'Wooooooogh Oooooogh! Ooooooo-er! '

Quelch gave a start. Someone, evidently, was in that study. Someone there was making strange unaccountable noises. It dawned on Quelch that Bunter had not, after all, raised a groundless alarm.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'What—who—?' He hurried on. He stared into No. 1 Study. The light gleamed from a flash-lamp on the table. It half-revealed a dim figure. Mr. Quelch reached in and switched on the study light.

'Bless my soul!' repeated Mr. Quelch.

He stared blankly, and a crowd behind him packed the passage, staring too. A figure in the study, with a muffler tied over its face, was painfully dragging itself to its feet, sagging and gurgling, clutching at the table for support as it dragged itself up.

Evidently, Bunter had not raised a false alarm! There was a midnight intruder in No. 1 Study. Equally evidently, the fat Owl had stated the fact, in stating that he had butted that intruder in the region which he described variously as the tummy and the bread-basket! The wretched man was winded to the wide: and so far from being able to make any attempt at escape, he could scarcely drag himself to his feet with the assistance of the table. Having done so, he leaned on the table, gurgling.

'A—a—a burglar!' stuttered Mr. Quelch. 'Upon my word' Wingate— Gwynne— Loder— seize that man— see that he does not escape.'

There was no chance of that. The muffled man sagged helplessly in the grasp of the Sixth-form prefects as they collared him. He could attempt no resistance. He could only press his hands to the spot where Bunter's bullet head had butted, and gurgle.

Mr. Quelch stepped into the study, and jerked away the muffler that hid the nocturnal visitor's face. Then there was a roar in the crowded passage. The face that was revealed was well known to many eyes there.

'Dexter! '

'Freddy Dexter!'

'That Teddy Boy'

'Oh, my hat! Freddy Dexter!'

'Dexter!' said Mr. Quelch, blankly. 'Upon my word' The person who telephoned— Dexter' Take care that he does not escape, Wingate' He must be kept in security while I telephone for a constable to take him in charge.'

'We've got him safe, sir.'

'Freddy Dexter!' said Harry Wharton, his startled eyes on the prisoner's sullen face. 'What did you want in my study, you rogue?'

Freddy made no reply to that, perhaps because he had not yet recovered sufficient wind for speech. Mr. Quelch turned a gimlet eye on the excited crowd in the passage. 'Go back to your dormitory at once! Bunter, I shall deal with you to-morrow. Go! All of you— at once!' The crowd faded out of the Remove passage.

In the Remove dormitory, the juniors did not soon settle down to their interrupted slumber. There was an excited buzz of voices from bed to bed, the name of Freddy Dexter on every tongue. And when, at length, slumber supervened, there was one fellow still awake. The discovery of Freddy Dexter in No. I Study had brought strange and startling thoughts into Harry Wharton's mind, and it was long before he slept.

HARRY WHARTON'S DISCOVERY

'COME up to the study.'

'Anything on?'

'Yes.'

That was all Harry Wharton said. Four fellows, rather puzzled, followed him up to No. 1 Study in the Remove.

Most Greyfriars fellows, that morning, were talking of the startling happening of the previous night. All the school knew that Freddy Dexter, so unexpectedly caught in Harry Wharton's study, had been marched off in custody by a constable from Courtfield. Billy Bunter, for once a fellow to whom other fellows were willing to listen, had related his thrilling adventure a dozen times, and was likely to go on relating it till the bell rang for class.

'Well, what's on?' asked Bob Cherry, as Harry Wharton followed his friends into No. 1 Study, and then closed the door.

'I've been thinking—!' began Harry.

'Didn't it hurt?'

'It's serious, old chap,' said Wharton, quietly. 'I've been thinking over what happened here last night, and I think I've got my finger on what it all means. Now we're going to see.'

'How— which— and what?' inquired Bob.

'Can you guess what Dexter wanted in this study?'

'Haven't the foggiest,' answered Bob.

'Can't begin to guess,' said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. 'But I can tell you one thing: now that that Teddy Boy's been copped here, we jolly well know who it was came here got up as a glazier to mend that window, and who it was that Smithy ran into the other night.'

'I'm sure of that,' said Harry, with a nod.

'The surefulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Same man,' said Johnny, 'and I told you so—.'

'I knew he'd mention that!' chuckled Bob.

'Well, I did tell you so—.'

'Now tell us what he was after,' grinned Bob.

'I think I can do that,' said Harry Wharton.

'Oh, my hat! Is that what you've brought us up here to tell us?'

'Yes— if I've got it right.'

'If you can do that, you'll beat Johnny in the Sherlock Holmes line,' said Bob. 'Freddy must have been after something, but goodness knows what.'

'That!' said Harry Wharton, and, to the blank amazement of his chums, he pointed to the old Victorian armchair in the corner of the study. They stared at Billy Bunter's bargain, and then stared at him.

'Old Joyce's armchair!' exclaimed Nugent.

'Bunter's bargain!' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

'My esteemed and idiotic Wharton—!' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'That armchair!' said Johnny Bull. 'Why, he couldn't even carry it—.'

Harry Wharton smiled.

'Not the armchair itself, but something parked in it,' he said. 'Just listen a minute. You fellows know that I suspected that that Teddy Boy was the smash-and-grab man. I've told no one else, but you fellows know.'

'Oh! Yes,' said Bob.

'But what—?'

'That smash-and-grab man got away with two hundred pounds worth of stuff from old Lazarus's. It's never been found. I think it may be found now.'

'But how— what—?'

'We knew that somebody was after something in this study— we couldn't guess who, and we couldn't guess what. At the same time, we knew that Freddy Dexter wanted that old armchair, he tried to get it from Bunter, and then he 'phoned Quelch and tried to get it from me. But— we never thought of putting two and two together!'

Bob Cherry gave a long whistle.

'I didn't take it seriously that he really wanted that old armchair,' went on Harry. 'But if we'd known that the man Smithy ran into that night, and the man who came to mend that window, boiled down to that Toddy Boy, we should have guessed, I think. When I saw him in the study last night, I did guess.'

'But—!'

'You remember that Dexter was run in, the day after the smash-and-grab, for punching old Tozer. If he was the smash-and-grab man, as I suspected—.'

'If—!' murmured Bob.

'Yes, if,' said Harry, quietly. 'If he was, he had hidden his loot somewhere— and had to leave it where it was hidden, when he was run in. That old armchair was in his room at Joyce's. You remember the temper he was in when old Joyce told him that he'd sold it—.'

'I remember! But—.'

'By gum,' said Frank Nugent. 'It looks—.'

'The lookfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Dexter did want that old armchair, and he wanted it badly,' said Harry. 'He couldn't get it from Bunter, and he couldn't get it from me, so he tried other ways. He was after it that night Smithy was up— he fixed up that trick of the broken window to get into this study— and he came after it last night. My belief is that Dexter was the smash-and-grab man, that he parked his loot for safety in that old armchair in his room at Joyce's: and that that explains the whole thing from start to finish.'

'Oh suffering cats and crocodiles!' gasped Bob. 'The loot from Lazarus's parked inside that old armchair—!'

'Why else did Dexter want it?' said Harry.

'But— but— oh, my hat! If you've got it right, old Lazarus's things are in that armchair this very minute—!'

'That's what I think!'

'Great pip!'

'They wouldn't still be there, if Smithy hadn't scared him off that night and if Bunter hadn't been doggo in this study yesterday afternoon— and if the fat ass hadn't come down for a cake last night! Dexter didn't need more than a few minutes to get what he wanted, each time.'

But—.'

'Oh, holy smoke! Let's look!'

'That's what we've come up for,' said Harry. 'I believe that I've got it right— but we shall soon see, at any rate.'

Bob Cherry whirled out the old armchair. Five excited juniors surrounded it. Bob grasped at the back corner of the seat where the old leather was loose, and a trace of the stuffing exuded.

'We shall damage it a bit,' he said.

'Never mind that— get on!'

'Here goes!' said Bob.

Bob inserted a powerful hand into the split in the leather, and wrenched. There was a loud sound of tearing and rending.

If that old armchair had been used as a hide-out for loot no doubt the pilfered articles had been thrust in, one by one for concealment in the stuffing inside, by a careful hand. Bob's methods were much less ceremonious. He tugged and pulled and wrenched, and the old leather covering of the seat came off cracking and rending in his energetic grasp. Billy Bunter's bargain looked rather a wreck after a few powerful wrenches.

'Now—!' said Harry, a little breathlessly, as he thrust his hand into the thick mass of stuffing, and groped. 'Oh! Look!'

His hand came out with something in it—something that glistened in the sunlight from the study window. It was a gold watch!

'Eureka!' gasped Bob.

For the next few minutes, five pairs of hands were busy.

That old armchair was fairly gutted, and the floor of No. 1 Study littered with fragments of stuffing. Billy Bunter would hardly have known his bargain, if he had blinked at it now through his big spectacles. Eager exclamations followed one another, as article after article was rooted out: watches, gold and silver, and rings with a sparkle of precious stones.

There was no doubt about the matter now!

That old armchair, once in the Teddy Boy's room at old Joyce's, was the hiding-place of the smash-and-grab man's loot: and Harry Wharton had found it.

CHAPTER 35

HAPPY ENDING

'I SAY, you fellows.'

'No room for porpoises!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Travel!'

'Beast! I mean, look here, dear old chap—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

It was several days later. There was quite a crowd in No. 1 Study in the Remove. The Famous Five were there, and Smithy, and Mauly, and Peter Todd, and Tom Dutton, and some more fellows. No. 1 Study was fairly large: but it was rather crowded with so numerous a party. Certainly there did not seem to be extra space for the fattest figure in the Remove, when it presented itself at the doorway.

But Billy Bunter did not 'travel'. Billy Bunter was not likely to travel, when a feast was toward— especially such a feast! It was, in fact, a celebration!

Harry Wharton, when he made the discovery in that study of the secret of the old armchair, had not even remembered that a reward was offered for the recovery of Mr. Lazarus's property. But he was reminded of that fact, when Inspector Grimes, telephoned by Mr. Quelch, came over to Greyfriars as fast as a car could carry him, to hear an astonishing story and to take charge of the smash-and-grab man's loot. And old Mr. Lazarus, when apprised by the inspector that his property had been recovered, had paid up: with the result that the captain of the Greyfriars

Remove found himself in possession of the handsome sum of twenty pounds— the greater part of which he had expended, without delay, on a new bicycle, replacing the old one that the vindictive Freddy had wrecked. After which, there remained a sufficient amount in hand, for a record spread in No. 1 Study, to which as many fellows were asked as the study would hold. To whom William George Bunter now added one who hadn't been asked and whom the study wouldn't hold!

'I say, Harry, old fellow—!'

'Scat!'

'But I say, dear old chap—.'

'Buzz!'

Billy Bunter neither scatted nor buzzed. He just couldn't! His eyes and spectacles glued on the festive board. There were cakes. There were dough-nuts. There were éclairs. There were meringues. Bunter feasted his eyes. But it was not really his eyes that he wanted to feast. It was his capacious inside!

'But I say, it was all through me, you know,' bleated Bunter, reproachfully. 'If I hadn't bagged that bargain from old Joyce, and if I hadn't sold it to you, and if I hadn't come down the other night, and if—.'

'What a lot of "ifs"!'

remarked Bob Cherry.

'The if-fulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'You've got a new bike, and now you're standing a spread, and it was me all the time. I say, you fellows, make room for a chap!' pleaded the fat Owl. 'I say, that cake looks topping! I say, do make room for a chap!'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'Squeeze up a bit, you men,' he said. 'Roll in, porpoise.'

The 'men' squeezed up a bit, and Billy Bunter, if he did not roll in, at least wedged in. After which, it was a happy and sticky Bunter. The fat Owl could not have imagined a happier ending to the strange story of Billy

Bunter's Bargain!