

BUNTER THE CARAVANNER



FRANK RICHARDS

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By
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A FIGURE SUDDENLY BURST FROM THE TREES

CHAPTER 1

BUNTER KNOWS HOW

WHIZ!

Thud! Bump!

'Yaroooh!'

It was a Latin dictionary that whizzed. It was the plumpest person at Greyfriars School on which it thudded. It was Billy Bunter's fat form that bumped, in the doorway of No. 1 Study. And it was Bunter's unmelodious roar that woke the echoes of the Remove passage, on its top note.

Really, it was not a cordial reception, for a fat Owl looking into a study at tea-time. It seemed to indicate that William George Bunter was not persona grata in that study.

But really, Bunter had asked for it. Bunter often asked for what he did not want, and was quite pained when he received the same. Five fellows were seated round the table in No. 1 Study at tea. A large and handsome cake, which Harry Wharton had brought in from the school shop, graced the table: but in other respects it was a somewhat frugal meal. There had been - but no longer was - quite a good supply in the study cupboard. That supply was missing when the Famous Five came in to tea, with healthy youthful appetites after a ramble in the keen spring air. And when tuck was missing in a Remove study, it was not necessary to call in Sherlock Holmes, or to send for Paul Temple, to elucidate what had become of it. Every member of the Co. knew

that that tuck was parked within the extensive circumference of Billy Bunter, just as if they had witnessed the parking thereof. So, when a fat face adorned by a pair of big spectacles looked in at the door. Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, gave it expressive looks, and Johnny Bull, not content with expressive looks, reached for the dictionary, and hurled it with accurate aim.

'Yaroooh!' roared Bunter, as he bumped.

'Good shot!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'Right on the wicket!' grinned Nugent.

'Get up. Bunter, and have another with me: I've got a Virgil here.'

'Ow! wow! Beast!' gasped Bunter.

'Hand me the inkpot. Franky,' said Harry Wharton.

'Here you are.'

'Sit there another tick, Bunter.' The captain of the Remove took aim with the inkpot.

Billy Bunter did not sit there another tick. Whatever it was that Bunter wanted in No. I Study, it was not an inkpot. He bounded up, with a celerity really remarkable considering the weight he had to lift, and dodged out of the doorway.

'Beasts!' came back round the corner.

'You fat villain! Where's our doughnuts? Where's the jam? Come in and be booted, you podgy pirate.'

'Blow your doughnuts! Blow your jam! I never had your jam. It was only a measly pound pot, too - fat lot to make a fuss about—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' A fat face peered cautiously round the doorway. 'I say, you fellows, that looks a jolly good cake—'

'Come a bit further in, Bunter - inkpot all ready—'

'Beast! Look here. I haven't come to tea—'

'You haven't!' agreed Harry Wharton.

'Chuckling things at a fellow, when he's come up to tell you the news,' hooted Bunter. 'I've a jolly good mind not to tell you now.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is there any news?' asked Bob Cherry. 'Has your postal order come?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Or have you glued on to somebody for the Easter hols—?'

'Yah!' retorted Bunter. 'I've a jolly good mind not to tell you now about that plane crashing—'

'What?'

Five fellows jumped up from the table, as if moved by the same spring. A crashed plane was quite exciting news. Tea was forgotten.

'Plane crash!' exclaimed Bob. 'Where?'

'Near the school?' exclaimed Harry.

'Didn't you hear it?' sniffed Bunter. 'You must be jolly deaf, not to have heard that awful crash.'

'Well, we didn't! Where is it?' demanded Johnny Bull.

'In the School Field - frightful crash - smashed up - I came up to tell you because you might like to help - everybody's rushing off to help-'

'Come on, you fellows!' gasped Bob.

If there was a plane crash and help was needed. Harry Wharton and Co. were not likely to remain sitting round a tea-table. Bob Cherry headed a rush for the door.

'Wow! Don't shove a fellow over!' roared Bunter.

He tottered from the rush. Leaving him to totter, Harry Wharton and Co. tore away down the passage to the stairs, which they descended two or three at a time. They vanished: while the fat Owl leaned on the door-post and spluttered for breath.

'Beasts!' gasped Bunter.

Then he rolled into the study.

Harry Wharton and Co. in the excitement of the moment, had forgotten tea. Billy Bunter had not forgotten it. That handsome cake on the table was still uncut. A pair of little round eyes gloated over it through a pair of big round spectacles.

But Billy Bunter did not immediately deal with the cake. He had no time to lose.

Harry Wharton and Co. so far had no suspicion that the artful fat Owl had invented that plane crash, with a felonious eye on that cake. But it was not likely to take them long to make the discovery.

At the rate they were going, it was only two or three minutes to the School Field, where they were scheduled to discover that no plane had crashed, and that nothing at all had happened. Their return was likely to be prompt - and wrathful. Minutes, even moments, were precious: Billy Bunter did not lose one of them. Having crammed a chunk from the cake into a capacious mouth, provisionally as it were, Bunter grabbed up a newspaper that lay in the armchair, hurriedly wrapped it round the cake, and rolled out of the study with his booty under a fat arm.

In the Remove passage, he hesitated a moment. Bunter was hungry. He had had nothing to eat since dinner, excepting some apples he had found in Smithy's study, some toffee that some fellow had left on the table in the Rag, and half a dozen doughnuts and a pot of jam from a study cupboard. So naturally he wanted to get going on that cake without delay.

But prudence prevailed. Billy Bunter was not a very bright youth, but even he was bright enough to realise that the further away he was, when Harry Wharton and Co. came back, the more comfortable it would be for him. Often as Bunter had been kicked, he had never grown to like it.

So he did not head for his own study. He headed for the stairs, and his fat little legs almost twinkled with the speed he put on. He emerged from the House at a trot, and kept up the trot till he was out of gates and rolling down Friardale Lane. And not till a quarter of a mile of that leafy lane lay behind him

did he slacken to his accustomed pace: that of a very old and very tired snail.

Only a few minutes after his departure, five breathless fellows came running up the stairs. For a quarter of an hour after that, they were looking for Billy Bunter. After which, with considerably deep feelings, they finished what was left of a cake-less tea.

CHAPTER 2

STRANGE ENCOUNTER

'A CARAVAN!' ejaculated Billy Bunter.

His fat face brightened. It had been overcast.

A quarter of a mile from the school, safe from reprisals, with a large and luscious cake wrapped in a newspaper under his fat arm, Billy Bunter might have been enjoying life - at least so long as the cake lasted. But in this imperfect universe, there is always a fly in the ointment. Rain had come on. Patter, patter, patter!

It was quite a pleasant and sunny spring. Greyfriars fellows were looking forward to the Easter holidays: Harry Wharton and Co. in particular, hoping for a continuance of the fine weather, for a camping trip. But the British climate has its little uncertainties.

The sun had been shining when Billy Bunter rolled out with the cake. Now that he had come to a halt, looking for a comfortable spot to sit down and devour his prey, that shower started.

It was only a spring shower. It did not look like lasting long. But it was wet, and keen as Bunter was to begin on the cake, he did not feel like sitting down in wet grass, with falling drops pattering on his fat head - even to devour cake. So he blinked round anxiously for some kind of shelter from that shower.

Then he spotted the caravan.

It looked rather a roomy van, painted red, and quite a handsome vehicle. It was of the horse-drawn variety: but no horse was visible. Neither was the caravanner. Possibly he had led the horse away to feed in an adjacent meadow. Anyhow he was not to be seen.

Billy Bunter rolled over to that caravan immediately. The owner, if he was inside, could hardly refuse a fellow shelter from a downpour of rain. Anyhow it cost nothing to ask. If nobody was inside, a fat Owl could step in - the door was open.

Bunter rapped on the door with fat knuckles.

'I say, can I come in?' he squeaked. 'I'm caught in the rain.' There was no answer from the red caravan. It was, as it looked, deserted. Billy Bunter lost no more time. He clambered in.

Inside, he blinked about him curiously.

The caravan was extremely well fitted up, and looked very comfortable. A folding-chair, set up as if in readiness for the fat Owl, looked very inviting. Bunter plumped into it.

All was well now.

Sitting at ease, blinking through the open doorway at spattering raindrops, the fat Owl unwrapped the newspaper, and started on the cake.

Whether the caravanner, when he returned, would be gratified to find a fat schoolboy sitting in his van, devouring cake and scattering crumbs on all sides, he did not reflect. He was out of that spring shower; he was eating cake: all was well.

That cake was a good size. It had been intended to furnish the most solid part of a tea for five fellows. But it did not last Billy Bunter very long. In such matters, Bunter was a quick worker.

The cake came to an end. The shower, at the same time, came almost to an end. Billy Bunter blinked out at the last falling drops, and considered making a move. It might, perhaps, be judicious to be out of that caravan before its owner materialised. He was still considering that point, when there was a sound of running feet.

'Oh-crikey! That's him!' mumbled Bunter, with his accustomed disdain for grammar. 'That's him, I suppose.' Apparently it was 'him', for the running feet stopped at the van, and a man jumped in at the doorway.

Billy Bunter had a glimpse of a smooth, clean-shaven face, and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. But it was only a glimpse, for the man's back was immediately turned, and to Bunter's surprise, he slammed the door shut and locked it. Then he stood panting for breath.

He had not even observed Bunter in the van. That was surprising, for Bunter was certainly big enough to be seen - at least sideways. Unaware of a fat Owl blinking at him only a few feet away, the man panted for breath, and, removing his hat, dabbed at a spot or two of perspiration on his forehead. It looked as if he had been running hard. Hatless, he revealed a head with the hair so closely cropped, that it had an almost bald look. Then, turning, he beheld Bunter.

He jumped at the sight of him. No doubt that sudden and unexpected apparition of a fat schoolboy in his van was enough to make him jump.

He stood staring at Bunter. Bunter sat blinking at him. There was a flash of anger in the smooth, sleek face, that alarmed the fat Owl.

'I-I-I say-!' stammered Bunter. 'I-I-'

Who are you?' The man rapped out the words.

'I-I-I'm Bunter-I-I-I belong to Greyfriars-I--I just dodged in here out of the rain-I-I hope you don't mind!' gasped Bunter.

'You are a schoolboy?'

'Yes - Greyfriars-I-I say, I-I'll go now, if you like.' The fat Owl heaved his weight out of the chair. 'I-I only dodged in out of the rain, you know-'

'Stay where you are.'

'But I-I say, I-I've got to get back for calling-over-'

'Be silent.'

'Oh, crikey!'

The man turned to the little window, drawing the curtain aside, and peering out. Billy Bunter watched him in uneasy wonder. He was alarmed: but it was easy for even the obtuse fat Owl to see that the caravanner was more alarmed than he was. Why, was quite a mystery: unless perhaps a bull had got loose from a field, into the lane.

The man drew back suddenly from the window. Even Bunter could discern that he was in fear of being seen from without. His keen sharp eyes glinted through the horn-rimmed glasses at the fat Owl.

'Open that window and lean out, and look along the lane!' he rapped. 'I-I-I say—'

'Do as I tell you.' The man clenched his hand.

'Oh, all right,' agreed Bunter, in quite a hurry. He leaned a fat head from 'the little window, and blinked up and down the lane.

'Can you see anyone?'

'Yes, there's a man coming—'

'Is he a thin man, in a raincoat, and a bowler hat?' Bunter blinked at the approaching figure. Undoubtedly, it was that of a thin man in a raincoat, with a bowler hat.

'Yes!' he gasped.

'Is he looking at this van?'

'Yes: staring at it! '

'If he stops to speak, tell him what I tell you to say. Do you understand?'

'But I-I say - what—?'

'You will tell him what I say. This is your van—'

'But-but it ain't my van!' stuttered the bewildered Owl.

'It is a holiday caravan, and you and your friends are caravanning in it. Do you understand? A party of schoolboys caravanning—'

'But it isn't - we ain't - ow! Oh, crikey! Leggo!' squeaked Bunter, as the man grasped a fat arm, compressing the grip till the bone almost creaked. 'Wow!'

'Will you do as I tell you?'

'Ow! Yes! Leggo!'

The caravanner let go. But that iron grip had been enough for Billy Bunter. He leaned a fat head from the little window. Why he was to spin such a story to the man in the raincoat, he had no idea. But he was prepared now to do as he was told. Spinning fibs was not, after all, a new experience for Bunter. He had no rooted objection to departing from the frozen truth. Indeed, he departed from it very much more often than he adhered to it. The man in the raincoat, spotting the fat face at the window, came up. He gave Bunter a careless glance. If he was looking for anyone in particular, it was certainly not a fat schoolboy. But he stopped to speak.

'Good afternoon, sir!' he said, politely.

'Oh! Gig-gig-good afternoon,' stammered Bunter.

'Caravanning?' asked the man.

'Oh, yes! A party of us - Greyfriars fellows - caravanning for the hols,' answered Bunter. He had it quite pat.

'Must be jolly,' said the thin man. And with a nod, he walked on and disappeared in the direction of Friardale.

Billy Bunter drew in a fat head. He blinked uneasily at the smooth-faced caravanner. That iron-grip on his fat arm had made

Bunter anxious to get out of that van, and get away as fast as he could. But the door was locked: there was no exit until the caravanner unlocked it.

'I-I-I say, c-c-can I go now?' stammered Bunter.

Unheeding him, the caravanner peered from the window. For a long minute he stood there, peering. Then, apparently satisfied that the man in the raincoat was quite gone, he turned to the door and unlocked it, throwing it open.

'Get out!' he snapped.

The fat Owl rolled to the door. The caravanner stepped behind him.

Thud!

'Yaroooh!'

Billy Bunter yelled, and did the caravan step in one, as the caravanner's boot landed on his tight trousers. He rolled in the grass and roared.

'Ow! wow! Beast! Wow!'

But he did not linger. One hefty kick was as much as Bunter wanted, and a little over. He scrambled up and ran.

CHAPTER 3

NO BOOT FOR BUNTER

'THAT fat villain!'

'That terrific toad!'

'Spinning us a yam about a plane crash—'

'And bagging the cake—'

'By gum, we'll boot him all over Greyfriars.'

These remarks, audible outside the half open doorway of No. 1 Study in the Remove, reached two fat ears. Billy Bunter was passing that study on tiptoe. He was rather anxious to get to his own study without meeting up with any member of the Famous Five, if he could. A meeting, sooner or later, was inevitable: the longer it was postponed the better. Certainly it was no use meeting troubles half way.

'Beasts!' breathed Bunter.

He tiptoed on. Bob Cherry's voice floated out of No. 1 as he went.

'I expect he's come in, by this time. I'm just yearning to boot him up the passage and back again.'

Bunter accelerated.

That episode of the cake was, from Billy Bunter's point of view, over and done with. That cake was gone, and that was that. It had become, as the poet has expressed it, portion and parcel of the past. Bunter would willingly have dismissed the whole affair from his fat mind. But it was evident that the proprietors of the vanished cake were not dismissing it so easily. It seemed that they were not going to be satisfied until they had booted Bunter. It was said of old that to him that hath, more shall be given: but the fat Owl certainly did not want a multiplicity of kicks added to the hefty one he had received at the caravan in Friardale Lane. He bolted into No. 7 Study and shut the door. Peter Todd, who was sitting at the table busy with a translation, looked up, as his fat studymate materialized so suddenly.

'What's up?' he asked. He stared across the table, at a fat Owl listening uneasily at the door.

Bunter blinked round at him.

'I—I—I say, Toddy, if—if they come here for me—'

'Who's they?' asked Toddy.

'Those beasts - Wharton and his lot. I—I think they've lost a—a cake, or something, and—and they make out I had it—'

'Not much making-out about it, I expect,' said Peter. 'Oh, really, Toddy! I—I say, I—I can hear them coming out of the study now—'

'You're for it!' said Peter. 'Why can't you learn to leave other fellows' tuck alone, you fat snooper?'

'If—if they look in here—'

'Sure to,' said Peter. 'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. Shakespeare.'

'Beast! I say, don't you tell them I'm here,' gasped Bunter. He backed from the door, and dived under the table.

'Oh, my hat!' said Peter Todd. He grinned down at an anxious fat face peering up from under the table. 'Better face it, old fat man.'

'Keep it dark, old chap!' gasped Bunter. 'If-if they ask you, tell them I had to go to the Head. Tell them I had to go to Quelch, and I'm in his study now.'

'Anything else?' asked Peter. 'Shall I tell them you've gone to the Geneva Conference, and won't be back till after the hols?'

'Beast! I-I mean, look here, old chap, tell them I've caught a cold, and Quelch sent me into sanny at once - an awful bad cold - I-I say, you'll tell them, won't you, Peter?'

'Certainly,' answered Peter. 'I'll tell them anything you like. I won't guarantee that they'll believe it.'

'Oh, crikey! Here they come.'

A fat head popped back, out of sight, under the table, as the door-handle rattled. The door was hurled open, and five fellows appeared, in a bunch. Under the table, a fat Owl palpitated, invisible. Peter Todd carried on with his translation. That 'trans' had to be finished, and handed in to Mr. Quelch before calling-over.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' roared Bob Cherry. 'Bunter here?'

'Want him?' asked Toddy, looking up from Latin.

'Yes, rather! Never wanted anybody so much. Where is he?'

'That fat villain wolfed our cake, and left us with next to nothing for tea!' explained Harry Wharton. 'We're going to boot him.'

'The bootfulness will be terrific!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But where is the esteemed and idiotic Bunter?'

'Hasn't he been here, Toddy?' demanded Johnny Bull.

'Oh, yes, he's been here, and left messages for you,' answered Toddy. 'If you want to know where he is-'

'We jolly well do!' said Nugent, emphatically.

'Well, he's gone to the Head.'

'What the dickens has he gone to the Head for?'

'I wouldn't know, especially as he's gone to Quelch, and is in his study now,' answered Peter, affably.

'He can't be gone to both of them at once!' hooted Johnny Bull.

'No: I don't quite see how he could,' agreed Peter. 'Especially as he's caught an awful cold and gone into sanny.'

'You silly ass!' exclaimed Bob. 'What the dickens do you mean?'

'Only giving you his messages,' explained Peter. 'You pays your money and you takes your choice.'

'Fathead!' said Bob.

'Ass!' said Johnny Bull.

'Thanks! Same to you, and many of them,' said Peter. 'Now let a chap get on with his trans. Quelch wants it before roll.'

'Bother your trans, and bother you!' was Bob Cherry's reply to that. Five fellows turned from the study doorway. Peter Todd

grinned, and resumed his translation. He had still a dozen lines to translate and no time to waste.

Outside the doorway, the Famous Five paused. It was settled, *nem. con.*, that the fat grub-raider was to be booted for his sins. As he was not in his study - apparently, at least - it seemed that he must be somewhere else, and they paused to consider where that somewhere else might be.

Those considerations were suddenly interrupted by a fat squeak from under the table in No. 7 Study. 'I say, Peter, are those beasts gone?'

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Peter. 'Shurrup, you fat ass.'

'But I say—'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' bawled Bob Cherry. 'That's Bunter.'

'He's in the study—'

'Bag him!'

Back into No. 7 Study came the Famous Five, with a rush. Billy Bunter was still invisible. But it was obvious that he was there. His fat squeak, certainly, was there, and it could hardly have been there without Bunter.

'Toddy, you spoofer, he's here all the time!' exclaimed Bob.

'But where the dickens is he? Are you under the table, Bunter?'

'Oh! No!' came a gasp from under the table. 'I—I ain't here—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Come out of it, you fat villain.'

'Roll out, Bunter. We're waiting to boot you.'

'I say, you fellows. I—I never had that cake. It—it was all a—a—a mistake! I—I say - Yaroooh!'

There was a roar under the table, as Bob Cherry reached under it with a long leg. His lunging foot evidently contacted something there, and seemed to contact it hard. That something roared, and rolled out on the other side, bumping on a table-leg, and setting the table dancing. Then there was another roar, from Peter Todd, as the inkpot rocked over, and spread its contents over the pages he had laboriously translated from Virgil.

'Look out!' shrieked Peter.

But it was too late! That translation was a sea of ink. Peter Todd gazed at it. Only too clearly, that trans would not do now. Peter had spent an hour on that trans. Now, it seemed, he had to spend another. His face, as he gazed at it, was expressive - fearfully expressive. Having gazed at it, thus expressively, he turned and grabbed up a ruler.

'You fat chump!' he roared. 'Look what you've done!'

Billy Bunter scrambled up. He did not even blink at Peter Todd's translation. That was a matter of very little moment - to Bunter. All Bunter was worried about was the booting that was coming.

But the Co. had no time to get on with the booting.

Peter got in first with the ruler. He grabbed the back of a fat neck with his left hand and wielded the ruler with his right. Swipe! swipe! swipe!

'Wow! Owl Stoppit!' yelled Bunter, frantically, as the ruler swiped on tight trousers. 'I say- Yaroop! Stoppit! Wow! wow!'

'Look at my trans!' howled Peter.

'Wow! Blow your trans! Wow! Stoppit! I say, you fellows, stoppin!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

'I think that will do for Bunter,' remarked Harry Wharton. 'Go it, Toddy - more power to your elbow.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Famous Five crowded out of No. 7 Study, laughing. Wild roars from an anguished fat Owl followed them. There was no boot for Bunter, after all: but to judge by the sounds of woe from No. 7 Study, he liked the swipes of Peter's ruler even less.

CHAPTER 4

BUNTER ASKS FOR IT

'RASCAL!'

Billy Bunter jumped.

'Rogue!'

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter.

He blinked round through his big spectacles in astonishment. For a moment he fancied that those emphatic epithets, uttered in quite a loud tone by Mr. Quelch, were addressed to himself. It was morning break at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter was leaning on one of the old elms in the quad. If there was anything at hand on which to lean, Bunter naturally leaned. He had not even noticed his form-master in the offing. His fat thoughts were, as was usual, wholly occupied with one important person - William George Bunter. Break-up for the Easter holidays was at hand, and Billy Bunter was still unattached for the 'hols'. It was necessary, as the song says, for a victim to be found; the alternative being home, sweet home. But the fat Owl's meditations on that urgent matter were interrupted by those sharp and unexpected exclamations from the master of the Remove. Up to that moment, he had not noticed Quelch. Quelch did not notice Bunter at all. His eyes were fixed on a letter, open in his hand. He was not addressing Bunter: indeed, it was quite unimaginable that he could ever have directed such epithets at a member of his form.

Apparently it was something in that letter which caused Quelch to ejaculate so suddenly and emphatically.

Obviously he was angry. His brows were knitted, and his gimlet-eyes glinted. Bunter blinked at him in surprise, wondering what on earth was the matter with Quelch. Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth, rolling majestically on the path under the elms, also glanced round, in surprise, as Quelch's exclamations reached his ears. It was unusual, most unusual, for the calm, self-contained master of the Remove to break out like this.

'Iniquitous rogue!' Quelch was going on, apparently addressing space. 'The impudence - the effrontery - the hardened effrontery - upon my word!' He crumpled the letter in his hand.

'My dear Quelch.' Prout rolled up. 'Is anything the matter?' Mr. Quelch started a little. No doubt he realised that he had been expressing himself with undue emphasis. He calmed down.

'Yes, Prout- this letter-'

'From a parent?' asked Prout. Letters from parents occasionally caused frowns to corrugate the brows of schoolmasters!

'Oh! No! No! From a rogue - a rascal - an impudent knave.' Quelch seemed to bite off the words. 'Probably you remember a man who was science master here many years ago, Prout- A man named Krinko.'

'I remember him,' assented Prout. 'If I did not, I should have been reminded of him lately - his name has been in the papers.' 'Exactly!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Till recently, he held a high position at the research station at Barnwell. He has disappeared, and the authorities are anxious to get in touch with him. In plain terms, he has betrayed his trust, and taken to flight, and it is known that he is in hiding somewhere while watching for an opportunity to escape from the country. And that man, Prout, has had the impudence, the audacity, to write me this letter, claiming me as an old acquaintance who might be willing to give him help to escape justice.'

'Bless my soul!' said Prout.

'Oh, crikey!' murmured Billy Bunter. He was getting interested. For the moment, he forgot the problem of the Easter hols. As the matter discussed by the two masters did not concern him in the least, the fat Owl naturally wanted to hear all about it. That was one of Bunter's little ways. So he listened in with his fat ears on the stretch.

'Read the letter, Prout!' said Mr. Quelch. He held it out to the Fifth-form master.

'Bless my soul! I have left my glasses in my study-'

'I will read it to you.'

Billy Bunter grinned. He was rather glad that Prout had left his glasses in his study. He was going to hear what was in that letter that had so disturbed and exasperated his form-master. Quite unaware that two fat ears were drinking it all in, Mr. Quelch proceeded to read out the letter from that former science master at Greyfriars, who was now, apparently, a rogue on the run.

Dear Quelch,

No doubt you will remember me as an old friend of former days. You must have heard, from the newspapers and the radio, of my present unfortunate circumstances. Will you help me? If you are willing to do so, as I hope, write to me, under the name of Thomas Johnston, Poste Restante, General Post Office, Glasgow.

Sincerely,

Marcus Krinko.

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Prout, for the third time.

'Can you imagine such effrontery!' said Mr. Quelch. 'The man was never a friend of mine - I neither liked nor trusted him. He was clever in his profession: but no one here liked him. And he ventures to ask me to help in his present circumstances, brought about by his own rascality! Why, I should be amenable to the law

if I did so. Not, of course, that I should dream of doing anything of the kind.'

'I imagine not!' said Mr. Prout. 'Such impertinence—'

'Such effrontery—!' said Mr. Quelch.

'Such audacity—!' said Mr. Prout.

'Such impudence—!' said Mr. Quelch.

It was quite a chorus. Both masters, evidently, were at one, in their opinion of Mr. Krinko.

'What will you do about that letter, Quelch?'

Mr. Quelch's lips set hard.

'What shall I do?' he repeated. 'I shall place it immediately in the hands of the authorities. This rogue has, unintentionally, given a clue to his present whereabouts. The envelope is post-marked Glasgow, and from what he says, he will be calling for letters at the General Post Office in that city. That may enable the police to lay him by the heels. I certainly hope so. I shall lose no time. In the meantime, nothing had better be said about this letter. We will keep it between ourselves, Prout.'

'Certainly,' assented Prout. 'Most judicious! Not a word.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Mr. Quelch, suddenly. He glanced round - rather late in the day - to ascertain whether anyone was within hearing. Then he became aware of a staring fat face under an adjacent tree, with two little round eyes glued on him through a pair of big round spectacles. 'BUNTER!'

Bunter jumped. Inquisitiveness - Bunter's besetting sin - had led him to listen. Now he rather wished he hadn't, as Quelch strode towards him with glinting eyes.

'Bunter! How dare you - how dare you listen—!'

'I-I-I didn't!' gasped Bunter, in alarm. 'I-I wasn't listening, sir-I-I never heard a word you said, sir-I-I never heard you mention Krinko, sir - I've never heard the name at all—'

Smack!

'Yaroooh!'

Seldom, if ever, did Quelch's temper fail him to such an extent. Never before had he been known to smack the head of a member of his form. It was quite unprecedented. Had he had his cane with him, no doubt he would have told the fat junior to bend over. But he hadn't his cane with him. So he smacked. And, apparently not thinking one smack sufficient to meet the case, he added another.

Smack!

'Whoo-hoop!' roared Bunter.

Whether Quelch would have added a third smack never transpired. Billy Bunter did not wait to ascertain. He bolted.

CHAPTER 5

BUNTER ON A BIKE

'I SAY, you fellows!'

Five fellows turned a deaf ear: or, to be more precise, ten deaf ears. They walked on, heedless of a fat squeak in the rear. That afternoon was the last half-holiday of the term at Greyfriars. It was a glorious spring afternoon with fleece white clouds drifting in a sky of azure, and naturally it called Harry Wharton and Co. out into the open spaces. They were going down to the bike shed when a fat owl squeaked behind them. A spin round the old familiar spots for the last time before break-up: tea at the Arcade at Lantham, and a run home just in time for calling-over: that was the programme. Pushing a bike over miles and miles, up hill and down dale, was not the kind of thing that appealed to Billy Bunter, as a rule: so why he came squeaking on their trail, the Famous Five did not know. However, they were not interested, and did not stop to inquire: they just walked on.

'I say, you fellows!' howled Bunter. They disappeared into the bike shed.

But before they could run out the machines, a fat and breathless figure appeared in the doorway. Billy Bunter blinked in, with a reproachful blink, through his big spectacles.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo. Where did that barrage balloon blow in from?' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Oh! Is that Bunter? Roll off, old barrel—you're in the way.'

'You hold on while I get my bike! I'm coming.'

'Are you?' grunted Johnny Bull - as if he doubted it.

'Yes, old chap—'

'Forget it, old fat man,' said Harry Wharton. 'We're going over Redclyffe Hill, and round by Lantham; you'd have to be carried home on a shutter before you'd done half the distance.'

Sniff, from Bunter.

'I fancy I could beat any of you lot on a bike!' was his retort.

'Fanciful chap, Bunter,' remarked Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Hold on a minute while I get my jigger.'

'What the dickens do you want to join up for, Bunter?' asked Bob. 'You can roll along if you like, but what's the idea? You just hate pushing a bike.'

'I like your company, old fellow,' answered the fat Owl, affably.

'Oh, my hat!'

'Mind, I never heard you saying that you were going to stop for tea at the Arcade, if that's what you think—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, do stop cackling,' yapped Bunter. 'A fellow can't open his mouth without you fellows cackling. Wait while I get my bike.'

'Rot!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Come on, you chaps.'

'Beast!' said Bunter, over a fat shoulder.

'Oh, give the old fat man a chance,' said Bob Cherry.

Bob was always all good nature. 'Mind, if you fall down dead on Redclyffe Hill, Bunter, we're not going to waste the last half-holiday of the term carrying the body home.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Yah!' snorted Bunter. There was a sound of clinking and clanking as he handled his bike. Billy Bunter was not a careful youth with his machine. Generally it was in need of a few repairs. Now it sounded as if it was in need of more than a few.

'O, listen to the band!' chuckled Bob.

'I say, Bob, you might fix that mudguard for me,' squeaked Bunter, 'and while you're about it, you might see that the chain's all right - I think it's a bit loose somewhere.'

'Anything else?' inquired Bob, with mild sarcasm.

'Well, you might pump it up for me,' answered Bunter.

'Look here, are we going to start?' hooted Johnny Bull. 'I'm going, anyhow.'

Johnny pushed out his bike.

'Come on, Bob,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Bunter can get busy mending that musical-box of his.'

Bob Cherry hesitated. There really was no reason why Billy Bunter should not have kept his machine in good order, unless laziness was the reason. But good nature prevailed, as it generally did with Bob.

'Oh, hold on a tick or two,' he said. 'Let's give the fat chump a hand. It won't take long.'

'Oh, all right.'

Bob Cherry was a handy man with a bike. But Billy Bunter's machine required more than a 'tick' or two. Bunter sat down and watched Bob get busy. Sitting down and watching another fellow at work suited Bunter. But he was prepared to give instructions.

'I say, don't yank that mudguard right off!' he said. 'Don't be so jolly clumsy, old chap.'

'You fat ass!' was Bob's reply.

'And mind that tyre. It's dicky in places.'

'It looks it!' grunted Bob.

'Well, don't puncture it, jabbing about like that-'

'Shut up!' hooted Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

Mudguard and chain were adjusted satisfactorily at last. Bob eyed the rear tyre rather dubiously. It did, as Bunter had remarked, look 'dicky' in places! However, that could not be helped.

'Here you are, Bunter.'

'I think you might pump up that tyre, old chap.'

'I'm going!' growled Johnny Bull: and he went. Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed. Harry Wharton paused in the doorway.

'Look here, Bob, come on! If Bunter's too jolly lazy to pump his machine, he can ride it flat.'

'Oh, just a tick!' said Bob, good nature still prevailing. 'It won't take me half as long as it would that fat ditherer.'

Bob wielded the pump with a vigorous hand.

'Now, you fat ass, it's ready,' he said, 'or do you want me to lift you on it, and hold you there?'

'Yah!' retorted Bunter: no doubt by way of thanks for services rendered. And all being ready now, he wheeled out his machine after the Famous Five, and they started.

For a couple of miles, all went well. Even the plumpest and laziest member of the Greyfriars community did not find it too much exertion to keep going on a level road.

But on the slope of Redclyffe Hill, it was another story.

Then the fat Owl began to puff and blow.

It was Billy Bunter's fixed belief that he could do anything that any other fellow could do, and probably a little better. It was when he came to do it that he woke up, as it were. After the first hundred yards or so of that rise, only the prospect of joining in the spread at the Arcade in Lantham could keep Bunter's little fat legs pedalling. After another hundred yards or so, even that prospect failed.

'I say, you fellows!' came a howl behind the Famous Five.

Bob Cherry looked round.

'What's the trouble?' he called back.

'Look here, let's walk the bikes up this hill.'

'Oh, my hat! We haven't come out for a walk, old fat man - we're riding. Put your beef into it. You've got lots.'

'Beast! I'm jolly well going to walk it!' howled Bunter.

'Oh, come on, fatty, if you're coming!' called out Harry Wharton.

'Shan't!'

'Cheerio, then.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter dismounted. He was not going to pedal up Redclyffe Hill. It really was not a tremendous hill, and the other fellows took it in their stride, as it were. They pushed on. With the selfishness to which Bunter was sadly accustomed, they did not want to turn a ride into a walk: somehow or other, walking the bikes for two or three miles did not seem to appeal to them. They whizzed on and disappeared over the brow of the hill in the distance.

A disgruntled fat Owl pushed on, on his own, shoving at his bike. It seemed to Billy Bunter hours and hours, if not days and days, before he reached the top of that hill. By that time, the Famous Five had long vanished from sight. But from that point, it was easier going, and the fat Owl prepared to remount.

It was still miles to Redclyffe, but the geography was more favourable to a cyclist like Bunter: there were no more hills in the way. The fat Owl was aware that the Famous Five, after a run round the country, were to gather at the Arcade for that spread, before riding home. Billy Bunter did not mind cutting out the run round the country, so long as he gathered at the Arcade for the spread! So he remounted his jigger and pushed on.

But alas for Bunter!

Pop!

It was that tyre.

Bunter had stated, quite correctly, that it was 'dicky' in places. It had, in fact, needed some attention which a lazy fat Owl had not given it. Now its dickiness supervened, all of a sudden.

'Oh, crikey!' grunted Bunter.

He rolled off a machine sagging with a flat tyre. He blinked at that tyre. He concentrated his little round eyes and his big round spectacles on it.

'Oh, crikey!' he repeated.

It was a bad burst - quite a bad burst. That tyre was a ruin. So, far from being rideable, Bunter's machine was not even easy to walk! Mending that burst tyre would have been a dubious proposition for Bunter, if he had wanted a troublesome task. But he didn't!

'Oh, crikey!' said Bunter, once more.

Shoving that bike, on foot, as far as Redclyffe, was hardly to be thought of. Shoving it home to Greyfriars was almost equally unattractive. Billy Bunter blinked at that bike with inexpressible feelings. Finally he leaned it against a wayside tree, and sat down on a knoll. Some passing vehicle might give him a lift with that bike: if not, the fat Owl really did not know what he was going to do with it. Anyhow, there was comfort in sitting down - Bunter liked sitting down. So there he sat. He was still sitting there, blinking at the sunny road, when the red caravan rolled by.

CHAPTER 6

UNEXPECTED!

'BEAST!'

Billy Bunter made that remark, as he blinked at the red caravan, rolling slowly over the hill. He knew that van again at a blink: and he knew the smooth-faced, sleek man who was walking with the horse. He was a good many miles from Friardale Lane, where he had last seen the van and the driver, and he had almost forgotten the existence of both: but now that he was reminded of them he fixed an inimical blink on the caravanner through his big spectacles, and murmured 'Beast!' mindful of the hefty kick he had received at parting. However, he murmured that epithet under his breath, not desiring to draw the man's attention, and a possible repetition of the kick.

The man glanced at him, and started a little. Evidently he recognized the fat schoolboy of the day before.

He drew the horse to a halt by the roadside, his eyes still on Bunter. The horn-rimmed glasses had slid low on his nose, really as if he did not need them to aid his vision. Over them, his eyes were very keen. Having scanned the fat junior, he left the horse standing, and came across the grass verge towards Bunter. The fat Owl gave him an alarmed blink.

'Here, you keep off!' he ejaculated.

Unless the man was coming across to administer the mixture as before, so to speak, Bunter could not imagine why he was coming. But that did not seem to be his intention. His sleek face was quite friendly in expression, and his manner was respectful.

'Good afternoon, sir!' he said, politely.

Bunter could only blink. This was very unexpected.

Evidently it was not another hefty kick that he had to look for. A polite greeting, with 'sir' added thereunto, was reassuring.

'Oh! G-g-good afternoon!' stammered the surprised Owl.

'Master Bunter, I think?' The man remembered the name.

'Eh! Oh! Yes.'

'My name is Jervis - James Jervis, sir.' The man's voice was as smooth and sleek as his face. 'You remember me, sir? I had the pleasure of seeing you yesterday, sir.'

So many 'sirs' were not only reassuring, but gratifying.

The fat Owl began to feel more at his ease. Only yesterday, the man had kicked him out of his van. Today, he was as respectful as a well-trained man-servant to his master. That was a change very much for the better: though why he was wasting all this civility on a fat schoolboy was rather a puzzle. Perhaps it was because he now recognized Bunter as a very superior person! That seemed possible - to Bunter.

'I am very glad to see you again, sir: went on Mr. Jervis. 'I had thought of communicating with you at your school, sir. I am very anxious to apologize for my inhospitable conduct yesterday,

sir. It was inexcusable - but may I hope that you will pardon me, sir?'

Apparently Mr. Jervis had an inexhaustible supply of 'sirs'. Probably he could see that they had a pleasing effect on a fat and fatuous Owl.

'You jolly well kicked me.' said Bunter.

'I regret that action very much, sir— May I apologize? I was - was somewhat upset at the time - I was a little alarmed by that bad character in the lane - indeed I was very much alarmed, as I had no doubt that he was a footpad.'

'He didn't look like one,' said Bunter, staring.

'Did he not, sir? Perhaps I was mistaken, and alarmed about nothing.'

'I fancy you were,' said Bunter. He was quite at his ease now.

'Nothing alarming about him that I could see.'

'No doubt you are right, sir. May I take it, sir, that you will pardon my hasty and thoughtless action, and dismiss it from mind?'

'Oh, all right,' said Bunter.

'Thank you, sir - thank you very much indeed,' said Mr. Jervis.

'That is extremely kind of you, sir. I shall not forget your kindness. I notice, sir, that your bicycle appears to be in a somewhat sad condition. Perhaps you would like me to give you a lift with it.'

Billy Bunter brightened up at once.

He had hoped that some obliging person in a vehicle might give him a lift with that crock. And here was the obliging person! Certainly, he would not have expected it from the man who had kicked him out of the caravan the day before. That was very unexpected indeed. But it was very welcome all the same. In fact, the sleek man was now so suave, almost fawning, that it was really difficult to believe that he was the same man who had delivered that hefty kick.

'I say, I'll be jolly glad,' said Bunter. He heaved himself to his feet. 'If you're going on to Redclyffe, I can get it mended at the cycle shop there.' The fat Owl had visions of that spread at the Arcade after all!

But Mr. Jervis shook his head.

'I shall be camping some distance this side of Redclyffe, sir,' he answered, 'but if you care to rest at my camp while I repair the damage, I shall be very happy to put the machine right for you.'

Billy Bunter blinked at him, more and more astonished. Only twenty-four hours ago, he had rolled out of Mr. Jervis's caravan under the impact of Mr. Jervis's foot. Now, it seemed, he was a man whom Mr. Jervis delighted to honour! The change was startling, and it was no wonder that it astonished the fat Owl. Indeed he might have supposed that Mr. Jervis had some secret purpose to serve by all this obliging suavity, if it had been possible to imagine any such purpose.

'That's jolly good of you,' said Bunter.

'Not at all, sir! An honour and a pleasure!' said Mr. Jervis.

'I'll shove it in the van, then,' said Bunter.

'Pray leave it to me, sir.'

Billy Bunter was quite satisfied to leave it to him. Mr. Jervis lifted the bike into the van, and Bunter followed it in. He sat down again in the same folding-chair that he had sat in to devour Harry Wharton's cake the day before. The sleek man returned to the horse's head, and the caravan rolled on up the Redclyffe road.

'Oh, crumbs!' murmured Billy Bunter. Astonished as he was by this unexpected turn of events, he was feeling very braced. His luck had been out - now, clearly, it was in again!

The red caravan rolled on at a leisurely pace for about a mile. Then Mr. Jervis led it through a gateway into a pleasant little meadow. Perhaps he had already booked that meadow as a camping-ground: at all events, he was evidently going to camp there. The van came to a halt: the horse was let loose to graze: then Mr. Jervis lifted the bike out, and the fat Owl followed it out.

'I say, think it will take you long to mend that puncture?' asked Bunter. His fat thoughts were still on the feed at the Arcade.

Mr. Jervis surveyed the ruined tyre.

'Hem! Probably some little time, sir,' he answered. 'Perhaps you might care for a little light refreshment while I deal with it.' There was no 'perhaps' about that! Billy Bunter always cared for a little refreshment, light or otherwise.

'Yes, rather,' said Bunter, promptly.

'Pray sit down, sir, and I will lose no time,' said Mr. Jervis. Billy Bunter, very willingly, sat down in a camp chair.

Mr. Jervis was busy in the van for a few minutes. Then he set up a folding-table in the grass before Bunter's chair, and placed a tray on it. Apparently the food-locker in the van was well supplied, for it was quite an attractive spot of light refreshment that was spread under Bunter's eyes and spectacles. The fat Owl beamed on it. There was, unluckily, no cake: perhaps Mr. Jervis did not personally care for cake. But there was ham, there were hard-boiled eggs, tomatoes, jam, varieties of biscuits, and quite a number of other good things. Billy Bunter ceased to care very much whether he joined up for that spread at the Arcade or not. Wedging in at a schoolboy spread was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with the lavish hospitality of the caravanner.

Billy Bunter grinned happily over the well-spread table: while Mr. Jervis up-ended the bicycle and set to work on it. From time to time Bunter blinked at him, wondering.

The day before, he had had the very worst impression of Mr. Jervis: but that was gone now. Mr. Jervis now seemed to him an extremely pleasant person. But it was all very surprising - very surprising indeed, and the fat Owl could not help wondering. However, it was all very pleasant, and, surprising as it was, Billy Bunter was not the fellow to reflect very deeply on

anything. He tucked into the foodstuffs, while the obliging Mr. Jervis repaired the burst tyre, and if Harry Wharton and Co. had forgotten Bunter's existence, when they sat down to the spread at the Arcade, Bunter, a couple of miles away, had also forgotten theirs.

CHAPTER 7

AMAZING

BILLY BUNTER leaned back in his chair, stretched out his fat little legs, and grinned contentedly. He was feeling fine.

The last half-holiday of the term, which had started so inauspiciously, had turned out topping. Nothing could have been more fortunate than that meeting with the somewhat mysterious caravanner. The fat junior had done justice - and rather more than justice - to the excellent foodstuffs, and was loaded up to the Plimsoll line. Those beasts, Harry Wharton and Co., could keep their measly spread at the Arcade at Redclyffe, and be blowed! Bunter had done a good deal better without them! Now he was feeling rather too fat and lazy to stir: but the obliging Mr. Jervis had finished the repairs, and his bike stood ready for the run home to Greyfriars, as soon as the spirit moved him to get going. In the meantime, he lazed contentedly.

The sleek man sat on the step of the van, looking at him. There was something curiously searching in his gaze, though the fat Owl did not observe it. He seemed to be 'sizing up' Bunter in his mind - perhaps calculating whether this fat schoolboy was as obtuse as he looked!

'I believe your school breaks up for the Easter holidays shortly, Master Bunter, sir,' he remarked.

'Yes, in a few days,' answered Bunter.

'No doubt you have already made arrangements for the holidays?'

'Well, I'm not fixed up yet,' answered Bunter. 'Fellows keep on asking me for the hols, but there's such a lot to choose from, you see. I think most likely I shall go to Mauleverer Towers. Lord Mauleverer is rather a pal of mine, you know. I might give Wharton a look-in at his little place, perhaps. But it's not settled yet.'

It was, if Bunter had chosen to confide it to the caravanner, quite unsettled - very unsettled indeed. In fact, the number of fellows who didn't want to see Billy Bunter in the hols included the whole of the Greyfriars Remove. Lord Mauleverer, indeed, had promised to kick him if he saw him before the new term. But details like these the fat Owl did not think of mentioning to Mr. Jervis.

'You might care for a caravanning holiday, sir,' said Mr. Jervis.

'Caravans cost money!' said Bunter, shaking his head. 'Those beasts - I mean my old pals - Wharton and his lot, are talking about a camping holiday, because it won't run to a caravan. Of course,' added Bunter, hastily, 'I could afford it if they couldn't! No difficulty about that.'

'Quite so, sir! I was just wondering whether you and your schoolboy friends might care for a holiday in my caravan.' Billy Bunter sat up. 'Eh?' he ejaculated.

Mr. Jervis had already surprised him considerably. Now he was surprising him still more. He really seemed bent on giving the fat Owl surprises.

'It was what happened yesterday, sir, that put the idea into my head,' explained Mr. Jervis, smoothly. 'It occurred to me how very pleasant it would be to have young and cheerful company on a caravan trip - especially, if I may say so, yours, sir.'

'Oh!' said Bunter.

'You remind me very much, sir, of a young gentleman I once served in the capacity of valet,' said Mr. Jervis. 'That was before I came into a legacy that made me independent. It would remind me very happily of old times, sir, if I could serve you in any way.'

'Oh!' repeated Bunter.

'If you cared for the idea, sir,' went on Mr. Jervis, watching the fat face keenly over his horn-rimmed glasses, 'my caravan, and my services, would be wholly at your disposal, of course without any charge to you.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

'You and a few of your friends from your school would be guests in the van. There would be no expense for anyone.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter, again.

He almost wondered whether he was dreaming this!

If the sleek man was in earnest, that handsome, expensive-looking caravan was at his service for the Easter holidays, costing nothing. It seemed a little too improbable to be true. Yet the man seemed quite in earnest.

'A party of half a dozen or so would be very pleasant,' continued Mr. Jervis. 'You could ask who you liked among your many friends at school. Perhaps you will think it over, sir.' Bunter blinked at him.

'I say, you're not pulling my leg?' he asked.

'Oh, sir!' said Mr. Jervis, with a gesture disclaiming any such idea. 'I should not be so impertinent, sir. I know my place, sir. I was trained as a man-servant, sir, and know my place.'

'Well, if you mean it-!' said Bunter. 'Certainly, sir.'

'I might think about it,' said Bunter. 'I suppose it must be a bit lonely, caravanning on your own.'

'Very much so, sir.'

Billy Bunter blinked at the van, and blinked at the driver. Certainly it was a very attractive idea - a caravan for the hols at somebody else's expense. He could picture himself asking astonished fellows in the Remove to join up for such a holiday. For once in his fat career, Bunter would not be a fisher for invitations: he would be handing them out, quite royally. That was a very pleasant prospect. Remove fellows had a way of dodging Bunter on the subject of the hols. They wouldn't want to dodge a fellow who could stand a caravan holiday to anyone he chose: free, gratis, and for nothing!

'Well, I might come along and bring a few friends,' said Bunter, in quite a patronizing manner. If Mr. Jervis, or anyone else,

was willing to be patronized, Billy Bunter was the fellow to patronize him.

'I should be very gratified, sir!' said Mr. Jervis. 'You would honour me, sir, by regarding the van as your own, and myself as a humble friend. I know my place, sir, and I should keep it.' Billy Bunter nodded. That, in Bunter's opinion, was very right and proper. A spot of snobbery was included in the list of Billy Bunter's charming characteristics. Certainly he would expect a man-servant to know his place, and keep it, in dealing with so aristocratic a personage as William George Bunter!

'That's all right,' he said. 'Look here, I rather like the idea. I—I suppose it wouldn't make any difference to you if—if the fellows thought it was my van. It—it would sound better, you know, when I asked them to come on the trip.'

Mr. Jervis smiled pleasantly. That suggestion from Bunter no doubt assured him that he had read the fat junior's character aright! Bunter was already thinking of spreading himself as the proprietor of an expensive caravan!

'Anything you think best, sir, would suit me perfectly,' said Mr. Jervis. 'The caravan will, in fact, be your own, so long as you care to travel in it, sir. I should much prefer you to regard it in that light.'

Billy Bunter nodded again. The prospect was appearing to him more and more attractive. 'I'll jolly well come,' he said.

'Thank you, sir,' said Mr. Jervis.

'Not at all,' said Bunter, airily. Then, as a sudden doubt struck him, he added. 'If you really mean it—'

'Most certainly, sir.'

'Well, I'll ask some of the fellows,' said Bunter.

'I'll bring them along to see you about it tomorrow, what?'

'Very good, sir. I am camping here, and shall remain over tomorrow. You and your friends can decide just when you will be prepared to join up, and what place will be most convenient to you when you leave school for the holidays. I shall act according to your instructions.'

'Good!' said Bunter.

He heaved himself, reluctantly, out of the chair.

'I've got to get back to Greyfriars for calling-over. See you again tomorrow, Jervis.' Bunter did not consider it necessary to make it 'Mr. Jervis'. 'Jervis' was quite good enough for a man-servant who knew how to keep his place! But Mr. Jervis did not seem to mind.

He rose from the step of the van, and took the bicycle to wheel it into the road. That action met with Billy Bunter's full approval. Bunter liked to be waited on.

'Cheerio,' said Bunter, cheerily. 'I'll be along tomorrow, Jervis.'

'I shall expect you, sir,' said Jervis.

Billy Bunter pedalled away. Mr. Jervis stood looking after him, till he disappeared down the hill. There was a somewhat peculiar

smile on his sleek face, as he watched. He was still smiling as he walked back to his van.

Billy Bunter pedalled happily home. His bike ran quite well after Mr. Jervis's ministrations. He grinned as he pedalled. He was going to astonish some of the fellows. He was going to ask the Famous Five for the hols in his expensive caravan, and if that did not make them sit up and stare, nothing would! Only one little doubt lingered at the back of his fat mind. It seemed much too good to be true: such a spot of luck really did seem too amazing to be real. A handsome caravan, all expenses paid, with a man-servant thrown in to wait on him - actually, it did require some believing! However, Billy Bunter was the fellow to believe what he wanted to believe: he dismissed that lingering doubt, and it was a very cheery Owl who rolled into hall at Greyfriars for calling-over.

A SURPRISE FOR THE STUDY

'I SAY, you fellows.'

'Scat!'

'About the hols—'

'Help!'

Prep was over in the Remove studies. Harry Wharton and Co. had gathered in No. 1 Study to discuss a rather urgent topic before going down to the Rag. What they were going to do for the Easter holidays was not yet decided: except that, whatever they did, they were going to do it together. A camping trip was an attractive idea, and a caravan had been mooted. Whether the available cash would run to it was doubtful - or more than doubtful. Being, at the moment, a committee of ways and means, they did not seem to want their deliberations interrupted by a fat Owl. And the word 'hols' from Billy Bunter was never music to anyone's ears.

'But I say—' persisted Bunter. 'About the hols—'

'We didn't kick Bunter yesterday for pulling our leg about that plane crash that never happened,' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Let's do it now.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Come in and be booted, old fat man.'

'Will you let a chap speak?' hooted Bunter. 'I've come here to talk about the hols—'

'Nothing doing!' said Harry Wharton. 'You wouldn't like a camping trip, old porpoise. We couldn't take an armchair along for you.'

'What about a caravan?' asked Bunter.

'It won't run to it,' said Bob, shaking his head. 'We couldn't ask the old folks at home to shell out so much, even for the pleasure of your company. Of course that's worth any amount of money - if we had it.'

'Priceless!' said Frank Nugent. 'But beyond our means, you see.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' said Bunter, disdainfully. 'I've a jolly good mind not to ask you now. I can tell you there's lots of fellows would jump at it.'

'What is there to jump at?' inquired Johnny Bull. 'My caravan for the hols,' retorted Bunter.

'Eh?'

'What?'

'Which?'

The Famous Five stared at the fat Owl. Bunter, as he had foreseen, had surprised them. That the fat junior had come to the study to ask himself for the hols was not surprising at all: but that he had come to ask them, with a caravan of his own thrown in, was very surprising indeed. It was, in fact, a little too surprising!

'Your caravan!' said Bob Cherry, blankly.

'Mine!' assented Bunter.

'You've got a caravan for the hols!' exclaimed Johnny Bull.

'Haven't I just said so?' sniffed Bunter.

'Got it in your trousers' pocket?' inquired Johnny, sarcastically.

'I've jolly well got it, anyhow.' retorted Bunter, 'and I can tell you it's a jolly good caravan - none of your cheap do's - jolly good roomy van, and a jolly good horse, and a man-servant to look after us - what more do you want?'

'One of the crowd of men-servants from Bunter Court, I suppose?' inquired Johnny Bull, still sarcastic.

'An old servant of the family,' answered Bunter, calmly. 'Man named Jervis - very useful handy man, and knows his place. He will make himself jolly useful.'

The chums of the Remove gazed at him.

They had decided, after deep discussion, that their own combined resources would not run to a caravan for the hols. That Billy Bunter, the most impecunious fellow in the Remove, the borrower of shillings and sixpences, the fellow who was always expecting a postal-order that never came, had at his disposal the article that was beyond their means, with a man-servant thrown in, was a little too steep. In fact it was very much too steep for belief.

'Is that a joke?' asked Harry Wharton, at last.

'Oh, really, Wharton-'

'Tell us another funny story!' suggested Nugent.

'The funnifulness of the story is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Is this where we laugh, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter?'

'Oh, really, Inky-'

'Roll away, you fat chump, and shut the door after you!' said Johnny Bull.

'Well, if that's what you call civil; when a chap's asking you for an expensive caravan holiday, all expenses paid-'

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Bob. 'All expenses paid, too!'

'Well, of course, there would be incidental expenses, which you fellows would have to stand,' admitted Bunter. 'But the van wouldn't cost you anything, or the horse, and they're the chief items. And you'd get my man Jervis's services for nothing, too! It was like the fat Owl of the Remove to 'spread' himself. Mr. Jervis had already become 'my man Jervis' in his fat mind.

'Don't you like the idea?' asked Bunter.

'Oh, no end,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'If there is a caravan-'

'If!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Well, if there is a caravan, are you coming?' asked Bunter.

'I'm asking you for the hols in my caravan. I'd like you to come. I've had the hols sometimes at your little place, Wharton. Well now I'm asking you. Coming?'

'Hem!'

'You can look over the caravan tomorrow,' added Bunter. 'I fancy you'll like it when you see it.'

'Oh, my only summer bonnet!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'At this rate I shall almost begin to believe that there really is a caravan!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Seeing is believing!' snapped Bunter. 'We'll run out tomorrow and look at it!'

'Where is it, then?' asked Harry.

'Camped in a meadow on the Redclyffe road, with my man Jervis in charge,' explained Bunter. 'Only a few miles on the bikes. Easy to run across after class!'

They gazed at him.

'Doesn't he spin it out just as if it was true!' said Johnny Bull.

'Just as if he believed it himself!' said Nugent, with a nod.

'The seefulness is the believfulness,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'but the probablefulness is not terrific.'

'Well, if you fellows don't believe me—!' hooted Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The idea of believing Bunter seemed to impress the Famous Five as comic. No. 1 Study echoed with merriment.

'You see, this is so sudden, old fat man,' said Bob. 'Only this morning you wanted to borrow a bob in break. Now you cough up a caravan, a horse, and a jolly old man-servant. Did they drop from the sky like manna?'

'I suppose that's what you call gratitude for a generous invitation,' said Bunter, scornfully. 'Talk about a thankless serpent being sharper than a child's tooth—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here, you cackling beasts, if you don't want to join up, I'll go and ask some other fellows!' hooted the indignant fat Owl. 'Yes or no?'

'Oh, we'll come, if there's a caravan,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Just what we'd like, if—!'

'If!' chuckled Bob.

'The if-fulness is terrific.'

'Well, leave it at that,' said Bunter. 'I'd really like you fellows to come. Not because I think you'll have plenty of pocket-money, or anything of that kind - just because I like your company, you know.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It's a go, then?' asked Bunter.

'Yes, if we see that caravan tomorrow, it's a go!' said Harry.

'We'll run out the bikes, anyhow, and see. If there's a caravan, it's a go - and if there isn't, we'll jolly well bump you for trying to pull our leg.'

'Yah!' was Bunter's reply to that.

He rolled away from the doorway of No. 1 Study, leaving the chums of the Remove laughing. Why the fat Owl had come to the

study with that funny story, they really did not know: but the idea of believing in Bunter's caravan and Bunter's man Jervis hardly occurred to them. The fat Owl having departed, they resumed their discussion of ways and means for a camping trip in the hols - which certainly did not look as if they expected to see that caravan on the morrow.

THE VANISHED VAN

'WHERE'S that van?'

'The wherefulness is terrific.'

'O where and O where can it be?' sang Bob Cherry.

'You fat spoofer!'

'Bump him!'

'Oh, crikey!' said Billy Bunter. He stood blinking over a gate into a little meadow by the Redclyffe road. In that meadow, he had fully expected to behold a red caravan. He did not behold a caravan, red or otherwise. He beheld a stretch of green grass, hedges and trees. There was not even the ghost of a caravan. Harry Wharton and Co. gave him quite expressive looks.

They had run out their bikes, after class, as arranged.

To their surprise, Bunter, during the day, had adhered to his

'funny story'. He persisted that there really was a caravan, that it was camped in the meadow on the Redclyffe road and that his 'man Jervis' was there, waiting with it for the Greyfriars fellows to come along. As he kept it up till the very last moment, when it was time to push out the bikes, the chums of the Remove began to wonder whether it was, after all, not one of Bunter's romances, and whether there really was a caravan after all.

But that doubt was settled when they arrived at the gate of the little meadow. There was no caravan. If there ever had been a caravan, it had vanished, like the Arab who folded his tent and crept softly and silently away! Bunter knew that there had been a caravan: it had been there, under his own eyes and spectacles. But it was gone! Undoubtedly it was gone. But the Famous Five, who had not expected to see it there, were naturally not surprised not to see it! They could only conclude that the fat Owl had been leg-pulling.

'Beast!' mumbled Bunter, referring to the vanished Mr. Jervis.

'Letting a fellow down like this.'

'Where's that caravan?' roared Johnny Bull.

'It's gone!' mumbled Bunter.

'Was it ever here?' grinned Bob.

'It was here yesterday,' yapped Bunter. 'And Jervis said he would be here today, waiting for us to come along. I-I-I suppose he must have been pulling my leg.'

'I jolly well know you were pulling ours!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'The knowfulness is terrific.'

'Well, it's all rot, and we jolly well knew it was,' said Harry Wharton. 'That fat chump's brought us here for nothing.'

'I-I-I say, you fellows, it really was here—'

'Gammon!'

'I-I say, perhaps he had to shift into another field!' That bright idea occurred to Billy Bunter. 'He—he might have camped

here without leave, and had to shift. I say, just look along the road and see whether there's a red caravan about.'

'Rubbish!' said Johnny Bull. 'Bump him! We told him we'd bump him if he was pulling our leg, and he was.'

'Oh, give him a chance,' said Bob. 'It won't take us long to run up and down the road and see.'

'Bosh!' said Johnny.

'Oh, let's!' said Nugent.

And they remounted the bicycles, to explore the vicinity for the vanished van. Billy Bunter sat on the gate while they were so occupied. His fat face was glum.

He had been astonished, indeed amazed, by the generous offer Mr. Jervis had made of his van and his services. But he had swallowed it whole. It had seemed too good to be true. And apparently that was the case - it had been too good to be true! For where was Jervis, and where was the van? Both had vanished into space, and unless Jervis had been entertaining himself by pulling a fat leg, there was no accounting for the disappearance.

Unless - another idea came into Bunter's fat mind as he pondered dismally over this mystery. He remembered the thin man in the raincoat, of whom Jervis had seemed so scared. Perhaps that bad character - if he was a bad character - was still hanging about the neighbourhood, and Jervis had been scared again and had taken to the road. It was possible.

Whether or no, one thing was certain: Jervis and the red caravan had vanished, and there was no caravan for the hols! Whatever the man's motive, whether he had been leg-pulling or not, he had let William George Bunter down, with a bump: and that was that! Five cyclists gathered at the gate again and jumped down. Billy Bunter gave them a hopeful blink - not very hopeful!

'Seen it?' he asked.

'No, you fat ass-'

'No, you spoofing octopus-'

'No, you diddling porpoise-'

'What the dickens did you spin us that yarn for, you fat chump?'

'I-I-I say, you fellows, there really was a van - I say-'

'Bump him!'

'Wow! Leggo!' roared Bunter, as he was hooked off the gate.

Bump! 'Yaroooh!'

Harry Wharton and Co. remounted their bikes for the run back to the school. Billy Bunter sat in the grass and spluttered. They disappeared down the hill, leaving the fat Owl still spluttering.

It was a sad and sorrowful Bunter that clambered on a bike to pedal home. That happy prospect for the Easter hols was washed out - that caravan holiday, all expenses paid, was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. Once more, Billy Bunter's plans for the hols were unsettled. He would have given much, very much, to land a fat fist full in the smooth sleek face of Mr. Jervis, for pulling his leg like this. If that thin man in the raincoat was

after him, Bunter hoped that he would get him, and jolly well knock him into a cocked hat! Words could hardly have expressed his feelings towards that plausible, deceptive man Jervis! It was a dolorous Owl. The Easter hols, so happily settled, were unsettled again, and when Greyfriars broke up for the holidays, Bunter was still in that unsettled state - and had to settle for home, sweet home. Home, sweet home, and the company of Sister Bessie and Brother Sammy, had few attractions for William George Bunter: when he found himself there, he longed more than ever to plant a fat fist in the very middle of the sleek features of Mr. Jervis.

CHAPTER 10

HOME, SWEET HOME

'WILLIAM!'

Billy Bunter barely suppressed an irritated grunt. He had settled down comfortably after lunch in an armchair. He did not want to move. The voice of his respected parent, Mr. Samuel Bunter, was not music to his ears. He could guess that Mr. Bunter wanted him to move for some reason or other. Home, sweet home had some advantages. There was no rising-bell. There were no classes with Quelch. There was no Latin. There was no prep. All these were so much to the good. But there were drawbacks, too. Somebody always seemed to be wanting Billy to do something - and Billy never wanted to do anything. Mr. Bunter seemed to think that a schoolboy home for the holidays should make himself useful. His hopeful son had a rooted objection to making himself useful in any way whatsoever.

Leaning back in the armchair, with his little fat legs stretched out, Billy Bunter's fat thoughts were lingering on lunch, and on the iniquity of Sammy Bunter in wolfing the last helping of jam pudding before Billy could get at it. Such greediness shocked Bunter. However, he had done fairly well, and was feeling quite fat and comfortable when the parental voice broke in upon his meditations on lunch, and his anticipations of a cake for tea. It followed a buzz on the telephone.

'William! Do you hear me, William?' came a testy voice from another armchair, where Mr. Bunter was also taking his ease after lunch.

'Oh! Yes,' mumbled Bunter.

'Cannot you hear the telephone-bell?'

Bunter, as a matter of fact, had heard the telephone ring, in the little hall of Bunter Villa. But he had not heeded it.

'Go and take the call, William.'

Evidently, Bunter had to move! But he was not going to move if he could help it. Certainly, stepping out into the hall to take a telephone call was not a heavy or laborious task. But Billy Bunter objected to any task at all.

'I say, couldn't Sammy?' he asked.

'You go, Sammy.'

Sammy, sitting by the window deep in a horror comic, buried himself deeper in that comic. Bunter minor was no more disposed to move than Bunter major.

'William!' said Mr. Bunter, in a deep voice.

'I-I say, Bessie, you go!' murmured Bunter: a last hope.

'Don't be so lazy, Billy,' was Bessie's answer.

'Go at once, William!' snapped Mr. Bunter.

'I-I say, I daresay it's a wrong number!' ventured Billy. 'They keep on ringing up wrong numbers.'

'Take the call at once and come to me if it is anything that requires my attention!' snapped Mr. Bunter. 'I trust, William,

that you do not wish to give me the trouble of boxing your ears.'

Billy Bunter did not want to give his honoured parent that trouble! He heaved himself reluctantly out of the armchair, and rolled out into the hall. The bell was still buzzing. Bunter grabbed off the receiver.



'DON'T BE SO LAZY, BILLY,' SAID BESSIE

'Hallo!' he squeaked, his fat ear to the receiver. 'Who's speaking?'

'Is that Bunter Villa?' came a smooth voice that rang a bell, as it were, in Billy Bunter's memory. He had heard that voice before.

'Yes! Who is it?'

'Is that Master Bunter speaking?'

'Yes, it is,' grunted Bunter. 'Who are you?'

'Jervis speaking, sir.'

Billy Bunter almost dropped the receiver in his surprise. In the last days of the term at Greyfriars, he had nourished a faint hope of hearing from Jervis again. But that hope had vanished when he came home for the holidays, and whenever he thought of Jervis now, it was with a strong desire to punch his sleek face. Jervis had pulled his leg and made a monkey of him; he had no doubt about that now. He would have been glad to tell Jervis what he thought of him, but he did not expect ever to have the opportunity of doing so. And here was Jervis on the telephone!

'Jervis!' gasped Bunter.

'Yes, sir, at your service—'

'Beast!'

'Eh?'

'Rotter!'

'My dear sir—'

'Oh, shut up!' hissed Bunter. 'Pulling a fellow's leg! Precious fool you made of me, didn't you? Those fellows bumped me when I brought them along and there wasn't any caravan—'

'I very much regret—'

'Yah!'

'I apologize—'

'Rats!'

'Pray allow me to explain, Master Bunter.' The sleek voice was as smooth as ever. 'I was called away that day, on a very urgent matter—'

'That chap in the raincoat after you?' jeered Bunter. 'I know you were jolly scared of him.'

'Please be patient, sir. I regret very much that I had to let you down, owing to - to unavoidable circumstances, and it has taken me some time to learn your address, to telephone to you—'

'Like your cheek!'

'Do please be patient, sir! The offer I made that day still holds good, sir, if you would do me the honour and pleasure of accepting it.'

'Oh!' said Bunter.

'My caravan and my services are wholly at your disposal, sir. I am now camped at Woolley, about ten miles from your home. If you care to come over with your friends and take possession of the van, I shall be delighted.'

'Oh!' said Bunter, again.

'You can take an afternoon train, sir - it is only a short run,' came the smooth, sleek voice. 'Would that suit you, sir?'

Billy Bunter stood blinking at the telephone.

The wrath faded out of his fat face. If that caravan, and a trip with all expenses paid, proved to be available after all, it certainly suited Bunter admirably. If, on the other hand, Jervis had been leg-pulling before and was now leg-pulling again, he might arrive at Woolley and find that there was still no caravan!

It was rather a doubtful proposition.

'Look here,' said Bunter, at last. 'You let me down—'

'It was really unavoidable, sir—'

'That's all very well, but I don't feel like chucking money away on railway fares for nothing—'

'My dear sir, I should be very happy to reimburse you for any expense incurred. It is understood that the holiday is to be with all expenses paid.'

It sounded more and more attractive. The fat Owl debated it in his fat mind. It was taking a chance, but after all, it might be worth it - especially as the alternative was home, sweet home, and making himself useful! He made up his mind.

'All right - I'll come,' he said. 'I'll chance it.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Just where's the caravan?' asked Bunter.

'Not far from the station at Woolley, sir. You will see it from the train.'

'You can expect me, then!' said Bunter. 'If it's all right, I'll get my friends along tomorrow.'

'Very good, sir.'

The fat Owl put up the receiver. Half an hour later he was in the train for Woolley in Kent. And as that train approached the village of Woolley, a pair of little round eyes blinked anxiously through a pair of big round spectacles in search of a red caravan. After his previous experience of Mr. Jervis, Billy Bunter naturally had some doubts about that caravan. But as the train ran into the station, an object in an adjacent field caught his eyes and his spectacles; he grinned with relief. Jervis, if he had been leg-pulling before, was not leg-pulling now.

It was a red caravan!

CHAPTER 11

BUNTER AGAIN

'MASTER Harry—'

'Yes, Wells.'

'The telephone, sir - for you.'

'Oh, all right.'

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove Were chatting in the hall of Wharton Lodge. That camping trip for the hols had been decided upon, and the chums of the Remove had gathered at Harry Wharton's home for a day or two before starting. It was a sunny spring afternoon, and they were thinking of a ramble on the Surrey downs till tea-time, when the telephone-bell rang, and Wells announced that the call was for Master Harry.

'From Master Bunter, sir,' added Wells.

'Bunter!' repeated Harry.

'Yes, sir,' he is holding the line.'

'Bother him!'

'That fat ass!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'What the dickens does Bunter want?' said Frank Nugent. 'Not another funny story about a caravan, I suppose?'

'Well, I'd better see,' said Harry, and he went into the telephone-cabinet and picked up the receiver.

'I say, are you there?' came a fat squeak. 'Keeping a fellow hanging on. Can't that silly ass come to the phone? I say, are you there?'

'Here,' answered Harry, laughing.

'Oh! There you are, old chap! Bunter speaking—'

'Yes, I knew that gurgle you call a voice. Want anything?'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'Cut it short. We're going out.'

'Are you all there? I want the lot of you.'

'Yes, we're all here. What the dickens do you want?'

'About the caravan—'

'What?'

'My caravan—'

'You fat chump! Are you going to spin that yarn over again?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'I've got it here now—' squeaked Bunter. 'It's all right, old chap. I'm speaking from a call-box at Woolley. I want you all to come over and join up, as we arranged.'

'Oh, my hat! You want us all to trot over to Woolley and bump you again for pulling our leg. Is that it?'

'Beast!'

'Thanks! Goodbye.'

'I say, old chap—' squeaked the fat voice. But it got no further than that, as Harry Wharton put up the receiver and went back to rejoin his friends in the hall.

'What did the old fat man want?' asked Bob Cherry.

'That caravan yarn again,' answered Harry. 'This time we're to trot over to Woolley - that's two or three miles from here - and have our leg pulled again. Bother the fat chump!'

Buzzzzzzzzzz!

It was the telephone-bell again.

This time Harry Wharton took the call. He could guess who was at the other end.

'I say, Harry, old chap-' came the fat squeak.

'You fat ditherer! Chuck it!' hooted Harry Wharton into the transmitter. 'Do you think you can spoof us a second time with the same funny story?'

'I tell you I've got my caravan here-'

'Rats!'

'My man Jervis has got it all ready-'

'Bosh! '

'Everything all fixed up, and lots of grub. I can tell you I've just had a jolly good feed. Come over and join up, old chap. Can't you get it into your head that I'm inviting you for a splendid caravan trip, all expenses paid-'

'Bosh!'

'Jervis wants to make a party of it-I-I mean, I want to make a party of it - of course I give orders to Jervis-'

'Oh, of course! Is there really anybody named Jervis?'

'You'll see him when you come over. Jolly good well-trained man-servant, I can tell you, who knows his place, and jumps to my orders.'

'Fathead!'

'I'd really like you to come, old chap. Don't forget your pocket-money - I suppose you're pretty well fixed for pocket-money for the hols.'

'Yes - and it's staying in my pocket.'

'I hope you're not going to be mean, old chap. Of course, there may be little incidental expenses now and then, and I couldn't always be asking Jervis to pay-'

'Oh, my hat! Is that jolly old man-servant paying for the trip, then?'

'Oh! No! Nothing of the kind. I-I mean-'

'Well, what do you mean?'

'I-I-I mean, it - it's all right, old fellow. You could walk over in an hour, and I'll tell Jervis to have tea ready - jolly good spread, too, better than your measly spreads in your study at school. Jervis has got plenty of money-'

'Jervis has?'

'I-I-I mean - I don't mean - I mean - look here, old chap, just trot over, see? I'll go back to the van now and tell Jervis you're coming, what?'

Harry Wharton gazed blankly at the telephone, hardly knowing what to say in reply. If Billy Bunter was spinning a yarn, it was certainly the most extraordinary yarn that even Bunter had ever spun. He wondered almost dizzily whether there really was,

after all, a caravan and a man Jervis, improbable as both seemed.

No doubt it was possible that some wealthy and generous relative might have provided Billy Bunter with a caravan for the hols, assigned a man-servant to wait on the party, and provided cash for the expenses. It was possible - all things are possible! But it was extremely improbable, in fact the improbability was, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh would have said, terrific.

Yet the fat Owl seemed to be quite serious about it - and if there was nothing in it why was he taking the trouble to phone at all?

Harry Wharton really did not know what to think. He stood silent, and the fat voice ran on:

'It's all right, old chap! I keep on telling you it's all right. You see, Jervis was called away that day you never saw the van - that's how it was. It's right here now - only a minute's walk from this call-box. Look here, you fellows fixed it up to come on the trip, if there was a caravan - and I tell you it's here now -'

'Yes! But -'

'Well, just trot over, see?'

'Oh, all right!' said Harry, at last. 'We were going for a long walk, anyway, and we may as well come Woolley way. We'll come over.'

'Right-ho, old boy.' And the fat voice was silent at last.

Harry Wharton returned to the group in the hall. His face revealed the puzzled state of his mind, and they all looked at him inquiringly.

'What was it this time?' asked Nugent.

'Bunter says he's waiting with the van at Woolley, and I've said that we'll walk over and see!' answered Harry. 'May as well go.'

'May as well,' assented Nugent. 'It's all gammon, I expect.'

'The gammonfulness is probably terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh with a shake of his dusky head.

'Rot!' said Johnny Bull, decidedly. 'Either Bunter's pulling our leg, or somebody else is pulling his.'

'Blessed if I make the fat chump out!' confessed Harry Wharton.

'It all sounds too jolly steep, but we may as well walk over and see. We've agreed to go caravanning with Bunter if there's really a caravan.'

'If!' snorted Johnny.

'Well, a walk won't hurt us!' said Bob Cherry. 'Let's go!'

And, that having been decided, they went!

BILLY BUNTER'S CARAVAN

'THAT is the end of the news. But here is a police message.' The radio was on in the caravan-camp.

Billy Bunter's plump person was stretched at ease in a wicker chair. He was slowly, but surely, masticating a chunk of toffee. The portable radio stood on the step of the van. Jervis was in attendance. Bunter had told him to turn it on for the news, and Jervis had turned it on. Bunter, naturally, was sitting down - Jervis was standing. Apparently he was too respectful to sit, in the fat Owl's lofty presence. Nothing, indeed, could have exceeded the smooth, suave respect with which Mr. Jervis treated the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

That suited Bunter.

The swarm of menials at Bunter Court existed only in Billy Bunter's fat imagination. Bunter, in point of fact, had never been waited upon by menials. But he would have liked it! Nothing would have pleased him better than to be in a position to say 'Do this!' and be obeyed! Now he was, most unexpectedly and amazingly, in that very position. It was so unexpected and so amazing, that, every now and then, the fat and fatuous Owl almost doubted whether it was so. But it was!

What Mr. Jervis's motive might be in playing such a part, Bunter had not the vaguest idea. That he must have had some motive, and a fairly strong one, the fat Owl was dimly aware. But he did not bother his fat head about it. For the first time in his fat life, Billy Bunter, lord and master of a respectful man-servant, was waited on hand and foot; that was good enough for Bunter. And there was no doubt that he was lord and master.

He had only to squeak out an order, and it was promptly obeyed. If Jervis had been a well-paid butler, footman, and valet, all rolled into one, he could not have been more respectful and more obedient. The mere fact that Bunter condescended to use his services seemed enough for him.

It was like Billy Bunter, in such circumstances, to spread himself considerably. And he did spread himself. Anyone beholding him at the present moment, sprawling in the wicker chair chewing toffee, with the sleek smooth-faced man in deferential attendance, could never have guessed that it was Jervis to whom that caravan belonged, and that it was Jervis who was footing the bill. Such an idea could have occurred to nobody. Judging by appearance, they were a fat consequential master and a deferential servant. If that was what Mr. Jervis wanted, he had it - though a much more powerful brain than Billy Bunter's would have found it difficult to elucidate why.

At the moment, Billy Bunter was awaiting the arrival of the Famous Five, who were walking over to Woolley. He was looking forward to their arrival with considerable anticipation. They were going to find him in possession of 'his' caravan, and 'his'

man Jervis, and were going to be properly impressed. They were going to hear him squeaking orders and see his man-servant jumping to obey the same. But certainly they were not going to know exactly how the matter stood. They were going to know just as much as Bunter thought good for them - and no more!

In the meantime, Bunter chewed toffee and listened to the news on the radio. The news having come to an end, Jervis stretched out a hand to switch off. There was an immediate squeak from Bunter.

'Leave it alone, Jervis: 'It is only a police message next, sir!'

'Well, may as well hear it,' said Bunter. 'Might be a murder or something.'

Billy Bunter's taste in news was somewhat lurid. He had little interest in the ninety-ninth conference at Geneva, and about as much in the problem of raising the standard of living at Borrioboola-Gha. But a nice juicy murder was quite to his taste.

'Very good, sir,' said Jervis, after just a moment's hesitation. The announcer's voice ran on:

'Marcus Krinko, the scientist who disappeared more than a week ago from the research station at Barnwell is still missing, and a warrant has been issued for his arrest. He is known to have in his possession certain official documents of the highest importance in the research work now going on at Barnwell, and to be seeking an opportunity to escape abroad with them.

Description: medium size, age about forty, dark pointed beard, hair worn rather long, very keen eyes of uncertain colour. Of foreign extraction but speaks English like a native. Anyone meeting or hearing of a person answering to this description is requested to report immediately to the nearest police station, or to telephone Whitehall 1212. That is the end of the police message:

Mr. Jervis switched off. Billy Bunter grinned.

'They haven't got that rotter yet,' he remarked. 'Apparently not, sir,' assented Mr. Jervis.

'I could jolly well tell them where to look for him,' chuckled Bunter. 'Here, I say, what's the matter with you, Jervis, jumping like that? You jolly well nearly knocked the radio over.'

'Pray excuse me, sir - a sudden spot of - of rheumatism, sir-'
'Well, don't jump about like a rabbit, and make a fellow jump,' snapped Bunter.

'Certainly not, sir!' Mr. Jervis's keen eyes, over his horn-rimmed glasses, were fixed quite strangely on the fat Owl. 'You were saying, sir-'

'Oh, yes! I jolly well know where they ought to be looking for that rogue Krinko,' said Bunter. 'He's in Scotland.'

'In Scotland, sir?'

'You see, I happen to know!' explained Bunter, loftily. 'My form-master at Greyfriars had a letter from him from there.'

'Indeed, sir.'

'You see, he was a science master once at my school, and he had the nerve to write to Quelch and ask him to help, now he's on the run. I heard Quelch read out the letter to old Prout - quite by chance, of course - I wasn't listening, and Quelch didn't smack my head! Nothing of the kind. Quelch was waxy, I can tell you, at the man's cheek in writing to him.'

'No doubt, sir.'

'Of course, he wasn't going to do what the rogue asked,' said Bunter. 'He jolly well handed over that letter to the police, so I shouldn't wonder if they're looking for him in Glasgow - the letter was post-marked Glasgow, you see. That's where he is, all right.'

'It seems very probable, sir, from what you say,' assented Jervis. 'We must hope, sir, that so bad a character will soon be secured.'

'Oh, they'll get him all right,' said Bunter. 'He was as good as giving himself away, writing that letter to Quelch. Must be a fool. I say, is that those fellows coming?'

Five figures had appeared in the distance, at the gate of the field in which Mr. Jervis's caravan was camped. The fat Owl turned his spectacles on them and grinned. They had stopped at the gate and were looking over it at the caravan in the field. They were not merely looking at it - they were staring. The sight of the red caravan, and of the fat Owl in the wicker chair, seemed to have surprised them.

'Are these your friends, sir?' asked Jervis.

'They jolly well are!' grinned Bunter. 'Go and open the gate for them, Jervis, and tell them to come along.'

'Certainly, sir.'

'You needn't mention that it's your van, Jervis.'

'Certainly not, sir.'

'I don't see any need to mention it, you know,' said Bunter, blinking a little doubtfully at the sleek man. He was not quite sure that Jervis would play up to this extent.

But he need have had no doubts. Jervis, no doubt, had his own reasons, whatever they were, for playing up! At all events, he was prepared to take his instructions from Bunter.

'Not at all, sir,' answered Jervis. 'Actually, sir, it is your van, as you have done me the honour and pleasure of accepting it for the Easter holidays, with my services, sir.'

'That's all right, then,' said Bunter. 'And if they think my people are footing the bill, Jervis, there's no need to say anything about that either.'

'Quite so, sir.'

'The fact is, it's a bit odd, you know,' said Bunter. Even the obtuse fat Owl realized that it was a bit odd! 'I'd rather they thought that my people were standing the whole thing. It would look better, I think.'

'You are perfectly right, sir! You may rely upon me to be tactful, sir, and to carry out your wishes in every way.'

'O.K., then,' said Bunter. 'Trot across and open the gate, Jervis, and bring those fellows in.'

'Very good, sir.'

Jervis obediently crossed towards the gate on the Woolley road. Billy Bunter grinned complacently. Undoubtedly it was a bit odd - more than a bit, perhaps - but it was very pleasant and satisfactory. Billy Bunter was going to swank: Harry Wharton and Co. were going to be duly impressed, and the mystery of why Mr. Jervis was doing all this did not, so far as Bunter could see, matter very much, if it mattered at all. So all was calm and bright, and the fat Owl of the Remove chewed toffee and was content.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

'THAT'S it!'

'Looks like it!'

'It's a caravan, at any rate—'

'And there's Bunter—'

'And that man must be Jervis.'

'So there really is a caravan—!'

'And there really is a Jervis—!'

'Wonders will never cease!'

'The wonderfulness is terrific, but the seefulness is the believefulness.'

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged those remarks as they stood at the gate, looking across the field on the Woolley road. They had walked over from Wharton Lodge, hardly knowing what to expect when they arrived at Woolley - but scarcely expecting to behold a caravan and a Jervis! Beholding both came as a surprise.

Still, seeing was believing!

There was the caravan, there was Billy Bunter, sprawling in a wicker chair, and there, evidently, was Jervis! For once, it seemed, the unveracious fat Owl had not been pulling the long-bow!

It was perplexing! It was puzzling! But there it was!

That roomy, handsome, well-appointed caravan, and the excellent horse that was grazing in a corner of the field, undoubtedly looked expensive. Often and often as Billy Bunter had talked airily of the wealth of the Bunter clan, very little of that wealth had ever found its way as far as Greyfriars. But clearly, there was plenty of cash about to account for this. Well-appointed caravans and sleek man-servants were not to be had for nothing.

Certainly, the chums of the Remove were not likely to guess the extraordinary circumstances in which Billy Bunter had become lord and master of that caravan and that sleek man-servant.

Neither was Bunter likely to enlighten them.

'Beats me!' said Nugent.

'Hollow!' agreed Bob.

'The beatfulness hollow is preposterous!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head. 'But there is the caravan, and there is the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!'

'There they are, as large as life!' said Harry Wharton. 'That fat ass wasn't pulling our leg after all.'

'Wasn't he?' grunted Johnny Bull. Johnny seemed still to have some lingering doubts.

'My dear chap, there's the van, there's Bunter, and there's Jervis,' said Bob. 'What more do you want?'

'I don't get it,' said Johnny, shaking his head. 'Right up to the end of the term, or nearly, we heard nothing about it.'

Bunter was still trying to stick on to Mauly for the hols - why, old Mauly had to dodge round corners to keep clear of him. Now all of a sudden he coughs up an expensive caravan and a man-servant to wait on the party - all expenses paid. It's a bit too sudden, and a bit too surprising. I don't get it.'

'Oh, rot,' said Bob, cheerily. 'There's the whole jolly outfit, and that's that. Bunter's people are doing him well these hols, that's all. And as he's asked us to go caravanning with him, we're going.'

'That's settled,' said Harry. 'We said we'd join up, if there was a van - and there's no "if" about that now. There's the van.'

'There it is, and no mistake,' said Nugent, 'and there's the old fat man waving a fat paw to us.'

'And here comes Jervis - I suppose it's Jervis!' remarked Bob Cherry, as the sleek man came up to the gate.

They eyed him rather curiously as he came: the smooth, clean-shaven face, the horn-rimmed glasses low on the nose, the close-cropped hair glimmering in the sunshine, the dark quiet clothes. Jervis looked the part of a very respectable man-servant, and if he was only playing the part for reasons of his own, he played it well. As he was hatless, he could not touch his hat, but he bowed his close-cropped head very respectfully to the juniors looking over the gate.

'Master Bunter's friends, I think?' said Jervis, in his sleek, almost oily voice.

'Right in one!' answered Bob Cherry. 'You're Jervis, I suppose, that Bunter's told us about.'

'Yes, sir,' Master Bunter's servant, sir,' answered Jervis.

'Will you please come in. My master is expecting you.'

Jervis opened the gate.

'Is that Bunter's van?' asked Johnny Bull, bluntly.

'Yes, sir.'

'Booked for the hols?' asked Johnny.

'Yes, sir. I understand that Master Bunter's caravan is booked for the period of the Easter holidays, sir.' Johnny looked at the caravan, looked at Jervis, and looked puzzled! However, hearing, as well as seeing, was believing! Johnny said no more, but he was still puzzled.

'Come on, you fellows,' said Harry Wharton. And, with Jervis holding the gate open, they walked in. Jervis closed the gate after them. They walked across to the caravan, a fat Owl grinning at them as they came and Jervis following respectfully in the rear.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man!' roared Bob Cherry. 'Here we are again. So that's the jolly old caravan you told us about.'

'That's it!' grinned Bunter. 'Perhaps you believe me now.'

'Hem! Looks a jolly good turn-out,' said Bob.

'I told you it wasn't one of those cheap do's,' said Bunter, loftily. 'Of course I should have the very best.'

'Oh, of course,' grinned Bob.

'I was jolly particular about it, you know,' said Bunter. 'Only the best would do for me, I can tell you. I'll bet you fellows wouldn't have had a van like that if you'd gone caravanning on your own!'

'Right on the wicket!' said Harry. 'It wouldn't have run to it. Must be jolly expensive.'

'Oh, that's nothing,' said Bunter, airily. 'I simply had to tell the pater what I wanted, and that was-that.'

'So your pater's standing it?' asked Johnny Bull.

'The pater's rolling in money,' said Bunter, without answering that question directly. 'It's nothing to him. Like the look of it?'

'Topping,' said Nugent.

'The topfulness is terrific.'

'There's two bunks in the van,' went on Bunter. 'I shall want one of them - I prefer to sleep in the van. You fellows can toss up for the other, and the rest of you can have the tent. There's a jolly good tent, and Jervis to set it up for you.'

'Oh, we'll all pack into the tent, I think,' said Bob. 'But we can set it up ourselves, old fat man.'

'Just as you like,' said Bunter, with a fat shrug of fat shoulders. 'I prefer to be waited on, myself. I'm accustomed to it. Of course you wouldn't be, in your humble homes.'

'You fat ass-!'

'Oh, really, Cherry-'

'I-I mean-' stammered Bob, remembering that he was now Billy Bunter's guest, and that in the best circles guests did not address their hosts as fat asses! 'I mean - I didn't mean-'

'Oh, that's all right,' said Bunter. 'I don't expect a lot from you fellows in the way of manners. Still, you might remember that you're not in the Remove passage now, and that I'm standing you a jolly topping holiday. I don't want people to think we're a Bank Holiday crowd, if you don't mind, Cherry.'

'You-!' Bob very nearly repeated his remark.

However, he checked it in time. 'Hem!'

'I say, you fellows, squat down, and I'll tell Jervis to get tea,' went on Bunter. 'You'll find it a bit better than you're used to, I expect.'

'Oh!'

'Here Jervis!' squeaked Bunter.

'Sir!'

'Trot out tea for these fellows, Jervis.'

'Immediately, sir.'

Harry Wharton and Co. sat down in camp chairs, handed out of the van by Jervis. That well trained man-servant set up a folding-table in the grass and proceeded to set it out. Harry Wharton and Co., if they were going caravanning, were quite prepared to wait on themselves and had no use whatever for the services of a man-servant. However, it was for Bunter to give orders in his own camp, and they were quite ready to sit down to tea after a long walk.



'TROT OUT TEA FOR THESE FELLOWS, JERVIS'

So they sat down, and Jervis ministered to them. They found the provender ample and good. Billy Bunter was the fellow to spread himself on foodstuffs, with some other person to foot the bill. Being now in that very unusual but extremely pleasing state, the fat Owl had spread himself to the fullest extent. So long as that pleasing state of affairs lasted, there was not likely to be any shortage of foodstuffs in the caravan party. Harry Wharton and Co. could not fail to see that somebody had been spending money freely on the supplies. They could only suppose that the source of supply was Bunter Villa.

Billy Bunter grinned happily over the festive board. Bunter had already had one tea, followed up by toffee.

But he was ready for another. There were few occasions when William George Bunter was not prepared to deal with an extra meal or two.

It was a jammy, sticky, crumby Bunter that leaned back in the wicker chair, after tea, breathing rather stertorously, while Jervis cleared away and washed up.

'Jolly good spread, you fellows, what?' squeaked the fat Owl.

'The jolly-goodfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'You'll find the grub good on this trip!' said Bunter. 'Nothing mean about me, I hope! Everything of the best, and lots of it. I can tell you fellows that you're going to have the time of your lives.'

'Oh! Thanks!' gasped Bob.

'Rely on me to do you well!' said Bunter. 'I always was a generous chap, as you fellows know.'

'Oh!'

'Kindest friend and noblest foe, as Shakespeare puts it.'

'Not Tennyson?' asked Nugent.

'No. Shakespeare!' said Bunter, positively. 'You see, I know these things, and you don't! Shakespeare!'

'Any old thing,' agreed Nugent.

Harry Wharton rose, and the others followed his example.

'We shall have to get back and let them know at home that we're going caravanning, and bring our things along,' said Harry. 'See you again in the morning, Bunter. What time are you thinking of starting?'

'Oh, fairly early,' answered Bunter. 'I'm not going to encourage you fellows to slack about, simply because we're on holiday.'

Johnny Bull opened his lips, but closed them again. 'Say about ten o'clock,' said Bunter, after due reflection. 'That will suit me. Be on time.'

'Oh, we'll be on time all right, even if you're starting so fearfully early as ten in the morning,' said Bob, with a mild sarcasm that was quite wasted on Bunter.

'Well, don't keep me hanging about,' said Bunter. He heaved himself out of the wicker chair. 'I'll walk as far as the call-box with you - I've got to let the pater know that I'm going caravanning with you fellows.'

'You mean that we're going caravanning with you,' said Nugent, with a stare.

'Eh? Oh! Yes! Exactly! That's what I mean.'

The fat Owl rolled out of the field with the Famous Five. At the phone-box he ran his hands through his pockets. 'Got any coppers about you?' he asked. 'I find I've nothing smaller than a five pound note.'

A five pound note - if Bunter had one - was evidently of no use in the call-box. However, the necessary coppers were forthcoming, and the Famous Five walked on and left Bunter to phone. And from that phone-call Mr. Bunter, at Bunter Villa, undoubtedly had the impression that his hopeful son had, as usual, affixed himself to a party of Greyfriars fellows for the hols. The circumstances, which seemed even to the fat and fatuous Owl a bit odd, would certainly have seemed very odd indeed to his honoured parent, had Bunter gone into details. So the artful fat Owl did not fill in any details. Having apprised Mr. Bunter that he would not, after all, be home for the holidays, Billy Bunter rolled back to his camp in a state of complete satisfaction and cheery anticipation.

Harry Wharton and Co. walked back to Wharton Lodge in a somewhat puzzled frame of mind. However, the matter was settled now, and bright and early in the sunny spring morning they turned out - to go caravanning with Billy Bunter.

CHAPTER 12

BULL!

'Is it jolly?' said Bob Cherry.

'It is!' agreed Harry Wharton.

'It are!' assented Nugent.

'The jolliffulness is terrific,' concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

And Johnny Bull nodded.

It was, in fact, quite jolly. There were blue skies overhead, dotted with fleecy white clouds. The spring sunshine was warm and cheery. The red caravan rolled along a leafy lane between green hedges, with fertile meadows stretching on either side. The 'Garden of England' seemed to be looking its best that sunny spring morning.

The Famous Five were walking with the horse. Billy Bunter, naturally, was not walking. Exertion did not appeal to Billy Bunter, and he preferred progress on wheels. That did not detract from the Co.'s enjoyment of the morning march. They preferred a fairly brisk pace, and the pace certainly would not have been brisk had Bunter walked. Also, his fat company, fascinating as it doubtless was, was a pleasure they could do without, if it came to that.

In fact, there was just one fly in the ointment, so to speak. It was a fat fly. It was William George Bunter.

As the fat Owl's guests, the chums of the Remove did not feel that they could express themselves, to Bunter, with the easy freedom of the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Obviously they could not, in the circumstances, kick Bunter! And Bunter's manner was patronizing, and was growing more so. By that time, the fat Owl almost believed that it really was his caravan, as the other fellows supposed it to be, and that Jervis really was his man-servant. He had ceased to wonder why Jervis was doing all this. The present state of affairs was good enough for Bunter and he did not trouble his fat head to think further. Bunter was, as he would have expressed it, boss of the show. And when Billy Bunter was boss of the show, he was the fellow to make it absolutely clear to all whom it might concern that he, William George Bunter, was unmistakably and indubitably boss! However, with Bunter sitting in the van chewing toffee, Jervis walking sedately behind, and a bright sun shining from a blue sky, the Famous Five agreed that it was jolly. As they strolled with the horse, they kept their eyes open for a suitable camping-place. It was getting towards lunch-time, and the Co., though far from being as keen as Bunter on the foodstuffs, were ready for lunch.

Bunter, strange to relate, was not particularly keen on his next meal. In the van, he was in touch with the foodstuffs, and the food-locker was very well supplied. Since breakfast, the fat Owl

had, in fact, had several meals one after another; for once, he couldn't have cared less if lunch had been actually late!

'Stop!'

It was a squeak from the caravan.

Harry Wharton drew the horse to a halt and the juniors all looked round at a fat face looking from the van. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are we stopping for, Bunter?' called out Bob.

'Just stop, that's all!' was the reply.

Five fellows gave Billy Bunter somewhat expressive looks. This was a sample of Bunter's new manners and customs, which he had never ventured to indulge in in the Remove passage. Being in a position to issue commands, the fat and fatuous Owl naturally issued the same.

He clambered slowly down from the van. The Famous Five eyed him inquiringly.

'Well?' said Harry Wharton.

'I'm rather tired of sitting down,' Bunter condescended to explain. 'I'm going to stretch my legs a bit, see?'

'Do you good!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Get on.'

The caravan got into motion again. Billy Bunter rolled on in company with the walkers. No doubt he felt the need of stretching his fat little legs, after sitting in the van for a good many hours. But it soon transpired that he did not intend to stretch them unduly.

'Pull that gee in a bit, Wharton,' came a fat squeak. 'What for?' asked Harry.

'I'm not racing, if you fellows are. Slow down.'

'Oh, all right.'

The horse had been going at a brisk walking pace. It slowed down to a pace that was far from brisk. The Famous Five had to slow down accordingly. Johnny Bull gave an expressive grunt. But even that moderate pace did not satisfy a fat Owl who had a great deal of weight to carry, and who had been adding considerably to that weight on and off during the morning.

'Not so fast, please,' said Bunter, after a few minutes.

'Call this fast?' grunted Johnny.

'I'm not walking my legs off to please you, Bull! You'd better leave the horse alone. Wharton - I'll call Jervis to lead him.'

'Just as you like,' assented Harry.

'Of course it's just as I like! It's my caravan and my horse, isn't it? Here, Jervis.'

'Sir!' came a sleek voice.

'You lead that horse, Jervis, and don't hurry.'

'Certainly, sir.'

Jervis went to the horse's head. The van slowed down to a pace that suited William George Bunter. It was a pace that would also have suited an old tired tortoise. Five active juniors had to pack up their activity, as it were, and slow down to a crawl. Johnny Bull grunted several times, each time more expressively than before. Finally he gave voice: 'How long are we going to crawl like this?'

'What's the hurry?' demanded Bunter.

Snort, from Johnny.

It was true that there was no hurry. Caravanning was a leisurely business. The party were heading westward for Sussex, but they were in no haste to cross the county border. It really did not matter a great deal whether it took them a day or a week to arrive in Sussex. Nevertheless, crawling at a snail's pace was irksome to fellows who were full of beans. However, in the hope that Billy Bunter's fat little legs would tire, and that he would clamber back into the van, they plodded on like a party of tortoises.

'Aren't you getting tired, old fat man?' asked Bob, presently, quite solicitously.

Perhaps Billy Bunter guessed the unspoken hope!

'Not at all,' he answered, calmly. 'I keep fit, you know. A bit of a walk doesn't fag me out like it does you chaps.'

Another snort, from Johnny Bull.

'There's a gate,' he remarked. 'Hadn't we better sit it out?'

This was sarcasm: a sheer waste on Bunter.

'You can sit on that gate if you like, Bull,' he answered, 'but we're not stopping for you. You'll have to catch up somehow. But for goodness sake, don't slack.'

'What?' roared Johnny.

'Dash it all, we haven't come caravanning to slack about,' said Bunter, reprovingly. 'Brace up, old chap! Step out, you know.'

Johnny breathed very hard. At that moment, he came near forgetting that the fat Owl, in the circumstances, was immune from kicking! The caravan rolled on past the gate in the hedge to which Johnny had sarcastically alluded. A large shaggy head was looking over that gate into the lane, and Billy Bunter, as he blinked at it, grinned.

'He, he, he! Relation of yours, Bull!' he remarked. Johnny looked round in surprise. He was far from his native county of Yorkshire, and certainly did not expect to see any relations of his in a Kentish lane. He did not immediately connect Billy Bunter's remark with the shaggy horned head that was looking over the gate.

'Relation of mine!' he repeated. 'What the dickens do you mean? Where?'

'He, he, he! There!' grinned Bunter, indicating the bull in the field with a fat finger. 'Rather like you, old chap, isn't he? Much the same sort of features, what? 'He, he, he!'

Johnny Bull had been breathing hard. Now he breathed harder. He realized that this was a joke - Billy Bunter's idea of a joke! Few people like jokes about their names.

Johnny was not one of the few.

'You silly fat ass-!' he began.

'He, he, he! Don't you fellows see the likeness?' chirruped Bunter, quite pleased with himself as a humorist.

Johnny Bull dropped back a pace behind Bunter. At that moment, the fat Owl had his narrowest escape. But Bob Cherry gave his

chum a playful barge in time. Johnny gave him a glare, in return. However, he trudged on without kicking Bunter. Onward rolled the caravan, and the gate and the bull looking over it were left behind. But they were not far behind, when Bob Cherry suddenly stared back, and gave a dramatic start.

'Oh, my hat!' he exclaimed.

'Eh! What's up?' asked Bunter.

'That bull! They ought to fasten those gates!' exclaimed Bob.

'Bulls are jolly dangerous when they get loose. If that bull comes after us, you fellows, dodge through the hedge. Look out!' Yell, from Bunter!

'Oh! Oh, crikey! Is that bull loose? Ooooh!'

Four fellows, for a moment, stared at Bob Cherry blankly. There was no sign, as far as they could see, that that bull had emerged from the gateway and started after them. The next moment, as Bob gave them a wink, they grinned, while Billy Bunter's yell of alarm woke the echoes of that Kentish lane and the adjacent meadows.

'Oh, crikey! I say, you fellows, keep that bull off! Woohh!'

Billy Bunter made a frantic dive for the van.

He did not even blink back along the lane through his spectacles. The alarm of a bull loose in the lane was enough for him.

Bob certainly had not said that the bull was loose - only that gates ought to be kept fastened, and that loose bulls were dangerous - both perfectly veracious statements.

But the bare possibility of a charging bull sufficed to change Billy Bunter's tortoise-like crawl into a frantic bound.

He did not wait for the van to stop! At the pace at which it was going, any fellow but William George Bunter could have clambered on quite easily. But it was like Bunter to stumble on the step, and roll in a dusty road; a case of more haste and less speed. He roared as he rolled.

'Yaroooh! I say, you fellows! Help! Is that bull coming? Keep it off! I say! Help! Lend a chap a hand, you beasts! Wow!'

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent and Harry Wharton lent the required hand. Billy Bunter was heaved up and hurled into the van.

He sprawled there, spluttering. 'Oooh! Shut that door! Oooh!'

'Bulls can't climb into caravans, old fat man-!' said Bob.

'Beast! Shut that door!' yelled Bunter.

'Oh, all right.'

The door slammed.

Inside the van, a fat Owl sat up gasping for breath.

Outside the van, five juniors grinned at one another, and even Jervis's usually impassive face wrinkled into a grin. It was possible that Jervis, for all his sleek and deferential manners, did not greatly admire his temporary lord and master. At any rate he seemed amused.

Far in the rear, that bull was still gazing sedately over the gate. Billy Bunter, undoubtedly, was quite safe from that bull.

But he did not seem to feel quite safe. From the interior of the van came a yell.

'Jervis!'

Jervis ceased to grin. He was the attentive man-servant again at once.

'Sir!' he answered.

'Get on with it, Jervis! Don't crawl like that, with a bull after us!' yelled Bunter. 'Get up and drive! Do you hear, Jervis?'

'Very good, sir.'

Jervis mounted to the driver's seat, took up the reins and drove. The horse broke into a trot. Harry Wharton and Co., grinning, were quite pleased to break into a trot also. They had had quite enough of tortoise-crawling. Caravanners and caravan rolled cheerily on. Then there came another fat squeak from the van.

'I say, you fellows!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Is that bull behind us?'

'Yes, he's still behind us,' answered Bob, glancing back.

The bull was, in fact, quite a good distance behind and now out of sight.

'Oh, crikey! I say, don't open that door - if he gets close, you can dodge through the hedge! Keep that door shut.'

'Oh, my hat! I mean, all right, old fat man - we won't open that door!'

And they did not. They were, in fact, quite willing, indeed more than willing, to keep it shut on William George Bunter. They trotted on cheerfully, during which time Billy Bunter, still not feeling too safe from bulls, remained in the van and comforted himself with cake.

CHAPTER 15

DITCHED!

'LEAVE it to me!' said Billy Bunter.

'But—'

'Don't argue about it, Cherry.'

'Look here—!' growled Johnny Bull.

'That will do, Bull.'

'But—!' said Harry Wharton.

'Didn't you hear me say that will do, Wharton?' Bunter spoke with a tone of finality. That tone of finality was growing on Bunter. It made the other fellows restive. It was said of old that one should suffer fools gladly. The Famous Five, if they did not suffer Billy Bunter gladly, at least suffered him patiently. But patience wore a little thin at times. It seemed to be wearing very thin at this particular moment.

The Greyfriars caravanners had been several days on the road now. The red van had crossed the county border into Sussex. If the chums of the Remove felt, occasionally, that it had been a mistake to join up with Bunter the caravanner for the Easter hols, they felt also that being landed in it, it was up to them to make the best of it. And the best of it was really very good. Glorious weather and glorious scenery, fresh air and sunshine, compensated for even that fat fly in the ointment, William George Bunter.

Billy Bunter, at the moment, was driving. Not often did Bunter drive, for it was a mild form of exertion, and no form of exertion had much appeal for the fat Owl.

Still, Bunter fancied that he could handle horses, and every now and then he chose to drive, and as it was - or was supposed to be - Bunter's van and Bunter's horse, there was no one to say him nay! Bunter's idea of driving a horse consisted chiefly of jerking at the reins and cracking the whip, and when Bunter was driving, the other fellows had rather uneasy eyes on passing cars. Now the caravan was about to turn a corner from a dusty highroad into a shady lane, and for several reasons, there were objections to turning that corner - reasons to which Bunter, being boss of the show, was prepared to turn a deaf fat ear. In the first place, there was a deep, wide ditch in the lane, and that corner needed turning carefully. With Billy Bunter as charioteer, the other fellows did not feel at all sure that the van might not tip into that ditch. In the second place, the caravanners were heading for the village of Hedgeley, and that shady lane did not lead to Hedgeley, as Bunter supposed that it did. Harry Wharton had consulted a road map of Sussex and was aware that the right turning was some distance on. Bunter, apparently, was superior to maps!

'It's the wrong turning, Bunter,' said Harry, 'if you look at the map.'

'I think it's the right turning,' said Bunter, calmly.

'Anyhow, it's the turning we're going to take.'

'It won't get us to Hedgeley,' said Bob.

'I said leave it to me, Cherry.'

'Oh, all right,' said Bob, resignedly. 'I daresay it will land us somewhere or other. I'll lead the horse round the corner.'

'Leave that horse alone, Cherry.'

'What?'

'I'm driving,' said Bunter, with dignity. 'Don't mess about with my horse while I'm driving it. I don't like it.'

'Do you want to land the van in the ditch?' inquired Johnny Bull.

'Don't be cheeky, Bull.'

Johnny Bull gave the fat driver a fixed look. His expression indicated that he was debating in his mind whether or not to yank Billy Bunter out of his seat and bump him in the road. With an effort, he decided not.

Bunter cracked the whip.

'Get out of the way, you fellows,' he said. 'I don't want to run over any of you. Gee up.'

'Perhaps, sir, you will permit me to lead the horse round the corner, sir,' said Jervis, in his sleek tones.

Billy Bunter gave him a disdainful blink. If Bunter did not want 'cheek' from the Remove fellows, he certainly did not want any from his man-servant!

'Think I can't handle this van, Jervis?' he snapped.

'Oh, yes, sir, certainly, sir, but—'

'Well, shut up.'

'Very good, sir.'

Jervis shut up as bidden.

'Look here,' growled Johnny Bull. 'Somebody had better lead the horse round, or that fat ass will have the van in the ditch.'

'Shut up, Bull.'

'You cheeky fat chump—!' roared Johnny.

'That will do! Keep out of the way! Want me to touch you up with this whip?' Bunter cracked the whip.

'By gum!' gasped Johnny. 'I—I'll—!' He made a stride forward. Bob Cherry gave him a push back.

'Chuck it, old man,' murmured Bob. 'It's Bunter's van, and he can tip it into the ditch if he likes.'

Johnny Bull suppressed his feelings. Billy Bunter gave him a disdainful blink, cracked the whip again, and dragged at the reins. The caravan lumbered into motion, swerving round the corner into the shady lane. The Famous Five backed out of the way, watching anxiously. No doubt it was, as Bob had said, Bunter's van, and he could tip it into the ditch if he liked. Still, nobody wanted to see it tipped in. That seemed quite a probability, however, for the fat charioteer was cutting that corner very fine. It was a left turn, and the caravan swung leftward on the very verge of the ditch.

'Look out, Bunter!' exclaimed Nugent.

'Don't cut it too fine, Bunter,' called out Bob. 'For goodness sake steer clear of that ditch.'

'You'll be over, you fat chump!' shouted Johnny Bull. The van gave a lurch. There was a verge of crumbling mud to that ditch, and the left wheels ploughed into it. Billy Bunter's vision, even with the aid of his big spectacles, was not very penetrating. Perhaps he did not discern the distinction between the muddy verge and the solid lane. Or perhaps, being boss of the show, he was not going to be given instructions! Anyhow he drove on regardless and even gave the horse a flick of the whip to spur him on.

'Look out!' yelled Bob.

He made a bound to the horse's head, to drag him clear of the ditch, regardless of Bunter. But it was too late. The wheels were already slipping down the slant into the ditch, and the caravan lurched sideways.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

He dragged frantically on the reins. The horse plunged and struggled, and Bob had to jump back from plunging hoofs. There was a clattering and a crashing inside the van as all sorts of articles were pitched about. Billy Bunter rocked in his seat and yelled.

'Oh, crikey! I say, you fellows! Oh, crumbs! I say - Yaroooh!' Billy Bunter dropped both reins and whip, and clutched hold to save himself, as the van toppled.

'She's over!' gasped Nugent.

'The overfulness is terrific!' gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'You fat chump!'

'You clumsy fat ass!'

'There she goes!'

'And there goes Bunter!'

'Yaroooh!'

Crash!

Billy Bunter hardly knew what was happening. He had a vague idea that half a dozen earthquakes were occurring all at once. As the caravan toppled down on its side, the fat driver shot off into the ditch. Fortunately for Bunter, there had been no rain of late, and there was little water in the ditch; but there was plenty of wet soft mud. Billy Bunter sat in it, with a mighty squash. He sat in it up to his fat equator, his fat little legs completely buried, and yelled, quite unable to extricate himself.

'Yaroooh! I say, you fellows! Help! Help! Wharton - Nugent - Jervis - Yaroooh - Beasts! Oh, crikey!'

Nobody heeded Bunter. Even Jervis gave no heed to his lord and master. All hands gave attention to the horse, kicking and plunging and squealing in clattering harness. Billy Bunter had asked for it, and the unfortunate horse hadn't, and Bunter was left to splash and splutter. It was no easy task to release the horse and get it clear, and while that process continued, Billy Bunter continued to splash and splutter and yell. He was still

splashing and spluttering and yelling when the animal, at last, was led clear and tethered in the lane. Then the caravanners took heed of the fat junior spluttering and yelling in a sea of mud.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you sticking there for, Bunter?' called out Bob Cherry.

'Beast!' howled Bunter.

'Why don't you crawl out?' inquired Johnny Bull.

'I can't!' yelled Bunter. 'I'm stuck!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beasts!' yelled Bunter. 'What are you cackling at, I'd like to know! I tell you I'm stuck in this mud and can't get out—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The glare that Billy Bunter gave the juniors on the bank might almost have cracked his spectacles.

'Think it's funny to be stuck in the mud?' shrieked the fat Owl.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Apparently the caravanners did think it rather funny!

They yelled with laughter. Bunter yelled too, though not with laughter.

'Beasts! Will you help me out? I tell you I'm stuck, and can't get my legs out! Do you hear? Wharton, you beast - Cherry, you rotter - Nugent, you swob - Inky, you silly nigger - will you help me out of this?'

'What I like about Bunter,' remarked Bob Cherry, 'is his nice, polite, polished way of asking a fellow to lend him a hand.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Jervis!' yelled Bunter. 'Jervis, you beast, come and help me out! Why, you cheeky beast, what are you grinning at?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir!' gasped Jervis. 'I will try to reach you, sir, if you will stretch your arm this way—'

'Beast!'

Bunter stretched out a fat arm. Jervis, leaning over the verge, contrived to reach a fat paw. He grasped it and tugged. Yell, from Bunter!

'Ow! wow! Don't drag my arm off, you silly idiot! Wow! You're dragging my arm off! Wow! Wow! Ow! Wow!'

The fat Owl came slithering through the mud, yelling as he slithered. But the mud was thick and clinging, and progress was slow. However, Bob Cherry leaned over and reached the other fat paw, and added his efforts to Jervis's. Shriek from Bunter!

'Beast! You're squish-squish-squashing my fingers!

Wow! ow! wow! Can't you pull me out without squish-squish-squashing my fingers, you clumsy fathead? Ow! wow!'

'Go it, Jervis,' gasped Bob. 'A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together - He's coming!'

'Here he comes!' chuckled Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

And Bunter came, at last, rather like a cork drawn from a bottle. Slithering through mud and nettles, he was landed on the bank like a fat fish. He sprawled there and spluttered.

'Urrrrgh! Beasts! Grooogh! I'm all muddy! Urrrrgh! Look at me! Grooogh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bunter, undoubtedly, was all muddy. He was clothed in mud as in a garment. He tottered to his feet, glaring at the hilarious caravanners through muddy spectacles.

'Poor old Bunter!' said Bob Cherry. 'He will want a wash, after that! And it's holiday time, too!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beasts!' gasped Bunter. 'Will you stop cackling, and get that van out of the ditch?'

'How?' asked Bob.

'The howfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'That van's a fixture,' said Johnny Bull. 'We shall have to get help from somewhere.'

'If you fellows are going to slack about, and leave my van sticking in that ditch—'

'Fathead!' said Harry Wharton. 'We can't shift it.'

Goodness knows how we're going to get it out, now you've landed it there.'

'Beast!'

The caravan lay across the ditch, on its side, from bank to bank, slanting, with its left-hand wheels deep in mud, the wheels on the other side high in the air. How that caravan was going to be persuaded back into the perpendicular, was rather a problem. It was a problem to which no immediate solution could be found. Billy Bunter's exploits as a charioteer had landed it there - and there, for the present, it had to remain.

CHAPTER 16

MR. FIXER

'JERVIS!'

No reply.

'Jervis!'

Still no reply.

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose.

Why Jervis, for once, paid no heed to his master's voice. Bunter did not know. But he did not like it. He was annoyed. His little round eyes glinted through his big round spectacles at that inattentive man-servant.

Bunter was not in a good temper. His mud-bath had been neither grateful nor comforting. He had scraped off cakes and cakes of mud, but quite a lot still adhered to his fat person. He was of the mud-muddy.

Even Bunter realized that he needed a wash, and he certainly needed a change of garments. Neither was available at the moment. Everything was in the caravan, and the caravan was slanting across the ditch, where Billy Bunter's skill as a driver had landed it.

Something, evidently, had to be done, but nobody seemed to know exactly what. At such a time, it was exasperating for Jervis to disregard his master's fat squeak. But he did disregard it. Harry Wharton and Co. were standing looking at the van, considering what could be done about it. Jervis was standing near them, but he was not looking at the van. His eyes were fixed on the highroad from which that shady lane turned off. Several times, cars had passed, the occupants glancing at the wreck at the corner of the lane. Now another car was coming along, and it was upon that car that Jervis's eyes had fastened. Billy Bunter's man-servant seemed strangely interested in that car.

It was a small car, with a single occupant driving - a thin man in a raincoat and a bowler hat.

Had Billy Bunter blinked at him, he might have recognized the man he had seen in Friardale Lane, on the day he had first made Mr. Jervis's acquaintance. But Bunter's blink was fixed on Jervis.

'Jervis!' he squeaked again. 'Do you hear?'

If Jervis heard, he followed the well-known example of the ancient gladiator, and heeded not. He watched the approaching car and its driver with intent eyes over his horn-rimmed glasses. It really seemed as if Bunter had ceased to exist for Jervis, in his deep interest in the man in the raincoat and the bowler hat.

He caught his breath, suddenly, as the little car drew to a halt.

Other cars had passed without stopping. But as the keen eyes under the bowler hat spotted the group at the corner of the

lane, the car slowed and stopped, the driver staring across the road at the scene. Then he stepped out of the car and came across.

'Jervis!' howled Bunter, angrily. 'We've got to get that van out of the ditch! Do you hear? Gone deaf, or what?'

Jervis seemed to become aware of the fat Owl's existence at last. He turned to him, his back to the man coming across the road.

As he turned, he slipped.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter. 'Look out!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look out, Jervis!' shouted Bob Cherry. He made a jump to catch at Jervis as he fell.

But he was too late.

Splash!

Down went Jervis, over the verge, and his face splashed in soft wet mud.

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Bob.

'Clumsy ass!' hooted Bunter.

Really, that slip on the bank did look very clumsy.

Clumsy or not, it had landed Jervis face down in mud. Bob's grasp was on him the next moment and the other fellows ran to his aid. Jervis was dragged bodily back up the bank where he scrambled to his feet, his face streaming mud.

'Oh!' gasped Jervis, dabbing at mud.

'What did you want to fall in for?' snapped Bunter.

'My foot caught in a bramble, I think, sir—' murmured Jervis.

'Well, you shouldn't be so jolly clumsy. Look here, we've got to get that van out of the ditch. Think it's going to be left sticking there all day?' hooted Bunter.

Snort, from Johnny Bull.

'Hadn't you better get it out, as you put it in?' he demanded.

'Beast!'

'Trouble with your caravan, young gentleman?' asked an unexpected voice.

The Greyfriars juniors all looked round. They had not noticed the car on the road, or the man who came across from it into the lane, until he spoke.

Looking at him, they saw a man with a thin face and sharp features, a face as sharp and keen as a hawk's, with penetrating eyes that looked like pinpoints of steel. Those keen eyes were scanning the caravanning party.

Jervis did not look at him. Jervis seemed too busy with mud to heed the sharp-featured stranger. Billy Bunter's man-servant continued to dab with the muddy handkerchief, half turned from the newcomer.

But Billy Bunter gave him a blink of recognition. He knew the thin man of Friardale Lane again. To Harry Wharton and Co. he was a complete stranger, but Bob Cherry answered cheerily:

'Looks like it, doesn't it?'

'It does!' said the thin man, glancing at the overturned caravan. 'Nobody hurt. I hope?'

'Only some of us a bit muddy,' answered Bob. 'But we're in rather a jam.'

'We had such a jolly good driver, that he landed the van in that ditch, turning the corner,' explained Johnny Bull.

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'I've seen your van before.' The thin man gave it a second glance, and then glanced at Billy Bunter. 'Perhaps you remember, sir - near your school, a week or two ago.'

'Eh! Oh! Yes! It's my van, you know,' said Bunter. 'I'm standing these fellows a caravanning holiday.' It was like Billy Bunter to make it clear to all whom it might concern, and to all it mightn't, that he, William George Bunter, was boss of the show!

'Caravanning long in these parts?' asked the thin man, casually.

'Only a few days, so far,' answered Bob.

'I expect you've seen lots of people on the roads and up and down the lanes, going about in that caravan?'

'Lots,' answered Bob. 'Plenty of people about in the Easter hols.'

'Seen anyone like this?'

The thin man asked that question quite suddenly, at the same moment jerking a photograph from his pocket and holding it up for inspection.

The Greyfriars juniors, in surprise, stared at it, and at him. It was the photograph of a man of about forty, with rather long hair and a dark pointed beard. It was quite a strange face to the juniors, who had never, so far as they knew, seen it before. And why the thin man was displaying it for their inspection was quite a mystery to them.

'Have you seen anyone like that?' The question came like a sharp snap, in a tone of authority.

Six heads were shaken. Jervis, in his deferential way, had backed away a little, still dabbing with the muddy handkerchief. But the Famous Five and Billy Bunter all looked at the photograph and shook their heads.

'Take a good look at it,' said the thin man, in the same sharp tone. 'It's important.'

'Is it?' said Bob, staring.

'It is! You don't know whose photograph that is?'

'Haven't the foggiest.'

'It is the photograph of Marcus Krinko, the scientist who disappeared from Barnwell Research Station, and for whose arrest a warrant has been issued.'

'Oh!' exclaimed all the caravanners, together.

'You must have seen something about it in the newspapers,' said the thin man, 'and no doubt heard it on the radio.'

'Yes, we've heard of it,' said Harry Wharton. 'Everybody has, I suppose. Is the man still on the run? Are you after him, or what?'

It dawned upon the caravanners that the thin man was not merely a casual stranger who had stopped at the sight of the overturned van. He had an object in view. In his rather shabby raincoat and

bowler hat, he looked about as commonplace a person as any among the hundreds they had seen about the roads and the lanes. But it seemed that there was more in him than met the eye!

He smiled at Wharton's question. Somewhat hawkish as his features were, he had a pleasant smile.

'Precisely!' he answered. 'I am very much "after" him, as you express it. And if you have seen anything of a man resembling this photograph, it is your duty to report it to me - Detective-Inspector Fixer.'

'Oh! A jolly old detective!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'A detective, certainly, if not jolly old, my young friend,' said Mr. Fixer.

'You are quite sure that you have seen nobody like this, in your wanderings in your caravan?'

'Quite sure!' answered Harry.

'Quite!' said Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull together, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh added that the quitefulness was terrific - which caused Mr. Fixer to stare at him for a moment!

The thin man's hawkish eyes turned on Jervis. 'One of your party?' he asked.

'My man-servant,' said Billy Bunter, loftily.

'Oh! Here, my man, come and look at this photograph,' called out Mr. Fixer.

Jervis approached, still with the muddy handkerchief to his face. He did not seem to have rubbed off much of the mud, so far. He gave the photograph a glance through his horn-rimmed glasses.

'Seen anyone about like that?' asked Mr. Fixer. Jervis shook his head.

'No, sir! The face is quite strange to me,' he answered.

'No luck!' said Bob.

Mr. Fixer gave a slight grunt and slipped the photograph back into his pocket. Jervis moved away again, still busy with the handkerchief.

'Sorry we can't help, Mr. Fixer,' said Harry Wharton. 'I suppose you're questioning no end of people about that man Krinko?'

'Quite a large number,' said Mr. Fixer. 'Remember, if you should see anyone like that photograph, you must report it at the nearest police station, or telephone Whitehall 1212.'

'We'll remember,' said Harry. 'Glad to help, if we could.'

'Yes, rather.'

'The ratherfulness is terrific.'

'What-ho!' said Bob. 'We'll jolly well keep an eye open for that merchant while we're pottering about the country. Might run across him some time, pottering about in a caravan.'

'Quite possibly,' said Mr. Fixer. He glanced at the caravan again. 'You'll need some help, to get that out.'

'Looks like it,' said Bob.

'There's a farm down the road, where you might get help!' said Mr. Fixer. 'I could give one of you a lift in my car there, if you like.'

'Jolly good,' said Bob. 'You go, Bunter, as it's your jolly old van.'

'I'll send my servant,' said Bunter, loftily. 'Here, Jervis—'
'Sir!'

'Get along to that farm, and get help to get that beastly van out of the ditch,' said Bunter. 'Get a move on, Jervis.'

'Pray excuse me, sir - in this muddy state—' Jervis was still dabbling with the handkerchief.

'Oh, rot!' said Bunter. 'Do as I tell you, Jervis.'

'Bosh!' said Bob Cherry. 'Jervis wants a wash almost as much as you do, old fat man. I'll go.'

'Look here, Bob Cherry, don't you jolly well barge in when I'm giving orders to my servant,' hooted the fat Owl, indignantly.

'Fathead!' answered Bob.

'Look here, you cheeky beast—'

'Rats!'

Bob Cherry settled the matter by walking across the road with Mr. Fixer. He stepped into the little car and the thin man in the raincoat drove off: both of them oblivious of a fat indignant Owl.

'Jervis!' squeaked Bunter.

'Sir!'

'Don't let this occur again, Jervis. I don't want arguments from a man-servant when I give him orders.'

'Oh, certainly, sir. But in the muddy state I am in, sir—'

'That will do!' snapped Bunter.

'Very good, sir.'

'Just don't argue. Just jump to orders, see?'

'Certainly, sir.'

Johnny Bull looked from one to the other. 'Why don't you kick him, Jervis?' he inquired.

'Oh, sir,' murmured Jervis.

'Look here, Bull, if you're going to be cheeky—!' hooted Bunter.

'Oh, shut up!' said Johnny. 'Shut up, you fat chump, or I'll jolly well boot you myself.'

And Johnny looked so like suiting the action to the word, that Harry Wharton hastily caught his arm, and twirled him away from the indignant fat Owl.

'Cheese it, Johnny,' he murmured.

'That footling fat ass—!'

'May as well stroll round while we wait for Bob to get back.

Come on!' said Harry. 'May find out where this lane leads, if it leads anywhere.'

'Let's!' agreed Nugent. 'Come on, Inky!'

'I say, you fellows, you jolly well look here—!' bowled Billy Bunter.

But the chums of the Remove did not 'look there'.

They had to kill time till Bob returned with reinforcements, and perhaps they had had enough of William George Bunter's fascinating society to go on with. Anyhow, the four of them

strolled away up the shady lane, and disappeared, leaving the indignant Owl to waste his indignation on the deserted air.

CHAPTER 17

WRATHY!

'VAGABOND!'

'Ere, you keep orf!'

'Trespassing rascal!'

'You keep that there stick away.'

'Take that!'

'Oooooooh!'

'Sounds like trouble for somebody!' remarked Frank Nugent.
It certainly did!

Harry Wharton and Co. had come to a halt about a quarter of a mile up that shady lane. That that lane did not lead to Hedgeley, they knew, if there was anything in maps. Where it did lead, they did not know, till, coming round a winding turn, they suddenly found themselves at journey's end.

Across the lane, ahead of them, flowed a stream. Across the stream lay an ancient-looking plank. On the further side was a wood. That lane ended on the bank of the stream. Pedestrians could push on, crossing the plank bridge, but obviously nothing in the nature of a wheeled vehicle could do so. Even a perambulator could not have negotiated that narrow plank.

Certainly it was an insuperable barrier to a large roomy caravan. Even if Billy Bunter had not ditched the van a quarter of a mile back, it would have reached a full stop at this point. 'That ass Bunter-' Johnny Bull was remarking, when those excited voices evidently indicating trouble for somebody floated across the stream from the wood on the other side.

They stared across.

Nobody was to be seen. Beyond the grassy bank, the wood was thick, and whatever was going on, was hidden so far by the trees. But it was clear that something exciting was going on. Two voices could be heard - one a sharp barking angry voice; the other a shrill yell. From what they heard, they could gather that somebody was getting busy with a stick - to the considerable discomfort of somebody else.

'What the dickens-!' said Harry Wharton.

'Vagabond!' came the angry bark. 'Trespassing vagrant! Poacher! After my young birds- Take that!'

'Oh! Ow! Oh, crimes!'

'And that!'

'Oooooooh!'

'Here comes somebody!' murmured Nugent.

A figure suddenly burst from the trees on the opposite bank, running breathlessly. It was a somewhat tattered figure in an old patched coat, with a battered hat on a tousled head.

'Tramp!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'And somebody after him!' said Nugent.

The running man stopped on the margin of the stream.

Then he turned and panted along the bank towards the plank bridge. At the same moment, another figure emerged from the wood, evidently in pursuit of the fleeing tramp.

It was that of a small, stout gentleman, with a bristling white moustache and a red face. The juniors could guess that this was the proprietor of the estate on the other side of the stream, whose ire had been roused by the discovery of a poaching tramp in his domain. There was no doubt about the ire! His red face was a picture of wrath. Stout as he was, he charged after the tramp like an excited war-horse, brandishing the stick.

'Cheeky old ass!' remarked Johnny Bull. 'He's no right to pitch into the man like that, even if he is trespassing.'

'Right on the wicket,' agreed Harry Wharton. 'But that chap doesn't look like stopping to argue the point.'

The tramp, or poacher, or whatever he was, certainly did not look like stopping to argue! He was concentrated on dodging the brandished stick in the rear. He jumped on the plank bridge to cross. But the charging stout gentleman was close behind.

'Take that!'

Whop!

'And that!'

Whop!

Frantic yells from the tattered man woke the echoes as he took them. He tottered on the plank and the watching schoolboys caught their breath, half expecting to see him pitch off into the water. But he righted himself, and ran on across the plank. After him charged the stout man, with the stick still in active operation.

Whop! whop!

'That old ass will take a tumble, if he's not careful,' remarked Johnny Bull.

'Serve him right if he did! Man can't take the law into his own hands like that!'

Whether the stout gentleman could, or could not, take the law into his own hands in that dramatic manner, clearly he was bent on doing so. He charged after the tramp with whacking stick. Twice it landed on tattered shoulders, Then, as the tramp made a desperate bound out of reach, it missed in another swipe and swept down through the empty air. The force of that swipe, meeting with no resistance, caused the stout man to pitch forward, stumbling.

'Look out!' shouted Harry Wharton.

'Oh, crumbs! He's going!' gasped Nugent.

The tramp bounded off the plank bridge, to the bank where the juniors stood. He shot past the group, and vanished up the lane. He disappeared like a ghost at cock crow. The juniors did not heed him. Their eyes were fixed on the little stout gentleman on the plank. He was swaying and plunging wildly, in a frantic effort to recover his balance.

'He's going-!'

'He's gone!'

'The gonefulness is terrific.'

Splash!

'Ha, ha. ha!'

Headlong into the stream went the stout gentleman, with a mighty splash, sending up almost a waterspout. Splashes reached the group of juniors on the bank. That sudden collapse of the incensed landowner struck them as comic and they burst into a laugh.

'Do him good!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'May cool his temper!' grinned Nugent.

There was a wild splashing in the middle of the stream. Ripples spread in wide circles round the stout man as he wallowed and thrashed like a grampus. Two plump hands clutched at the plank, and held on. Under the plank, two plump legs went with the current.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Better lend him a hand,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'He looks as if he wants one!'

The juniors moved along towards the plank bridge.

The stout man in the water was making frantic efforts to get his arms over the plank, to clamber on it. But the tug of the current at his plump legs was too strong for him. The stream was deep and swift, rushing on its way to the Ouse, and only his hold on the plank saved the stout man from being swept away with it. Most of him was under the plank, but his plump hands held on, and a red face was turned towards the juniors on the bank.

'Help! Come and help me!' came a bellow. 'You young fools, what are you standing there for? Come and help me.'

It was not a polite form of address. Perhaps the irate gentleman's temper had not been cooled by that plunge into cold water! But the Greyfriars fellows were quite willing to render first aid. Indeed, as his efforts to drag himself from the water were wholly unavailing, it looked as if the stout man would soon have been in real danger had no help been at hand.

'Coming, sir!' called out Harry Wharton.

'Help! Be quick! Hurry!' bawled the stout man. 'Do you want to leave me here to drown? Hurry!'

Harry Wharton ran out on the plank, his comrades in single file after him. Wharton dropped on his knees, grasped a plump arm and tugged.

'Take the other fin, Franky,' he panted, as he tugged.

'I've got him!' said Nugent, grabbing the other plump arm.

The plank was too narrow for Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to lend aid. But Wharton and Nugent, between them, succeeded in dragging the stout gentleman up.

It required a strong, combined effort, for he was a very considerable weight. But a combined effort did it, and he came sprawling over the plank. They helped him to a sitting position, and he sat, streaming with water and gurgling for breath.

'Urrggh! Gurrgh! Wurrgh!'

'All right now, sir,' said Harry.

'What? What? I am drenched - soaked - I must get a change at once, or I shall - gurrroggh! - catch cold! Wurrroggh! All the fault of that poaching vagabond!'

The stout gentleman glared round. 'Where is he?'

'Gone!' said Nugent, with a grin.

'Couldn't see his heels for dust!' said Johnny Bull. Snort, from the stout man! Only too clearly, that plunge had not had a very cooling effect on his temper! He was in a mood to give the poaching vagabond a few more! Luckily for the poaching vagabond, he was at a safe distance by that time.

'Give me a hand up!'

They gave him a hand up. Water ran down him in streams and trickled down his neck from a drenched mop of white hair. He tramped off the bridge to the bank on his own side of the stream, squelching water, four smiling faces looking after him as he went. That he was in the worst temper ever, was evident. It was equally evident that he was quite unaccustomed to controlling that fiery temper. Apparently he was about to stalk away without a word of thanks for services rendered.

However, on the bank, he turned and looked back at the schoolboys on the bridge.

'Here, you!' he snapped.

'Anything more we can do, sir?' asked Harry Wharton, politely.

'What? What? No! But I am very much obliged to you. I might have been drowned, by gad, if I had lost my hold. I am very much obliged.'

'Not at all, sir!'

'What? What? Don't contradict me! I shall reward you for the services you have performed.'

'Oh! No, sir - it was nothing, sir-'

'What? What? Do you call it nothing, when I might have been drowned! What is your name?'

'Wharton, sir.'

'You are a stupid boy, Wharton.'

'Oh!

'I shall reward you. I shall certainly reward you. I am not accustomed to contradiction! Come up to the house later in the day and ask for Captain Pooter-Jones. I shall expect to see you.'

'But - sir - we really don't want-'

'What? You will do as you are told! Pah!'

With that, the stout gentleman turned, tramped into the wood and disappeared. No doubt his mansion was somewhere on the other side of that wood and he was in haste to reach it and get into dry clothes. He left four juniors grinning at one another on the plank bridge.

'Are we going to do as we are told?' grinned Nugent.

'Not a whole lot,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Cheeky old ass!' said Johnny Bull. 'Who the dickens is he to give us orders?'

'The cheekfulness is terrific.'

'May as well get back, and see whether Bob's turned up yet,' said Harry.

And leaving the scene of that rather exciting episode behind, they strolled away down the lane. Certainly without the least intention of calling on Captain Pooter-Jones to collect a reward for their services, and, in fact, quite pleased to have seen the last of Captain Pooter-Jones.

BUNTER KNOWS BEST

'I SAY, you fellows.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'What's on that board?'

'Trespassers will be prosecuted!'

Grunt, from Bunter.

The shades of night, as a poet has already expressed it, were falling fast. A sunny spring day was drawing to its close.

The red caravan, once more a going concern, was in motion.

Kindly help from the farm had extricated caravan and caravanners from their predicament. They were able, at long last, to roll on their way.

But so much time had been lost that it was clear that they would see nothing of Hedgeley that day. Not that that mattered very much if a suitable spot could be found for camping en route.

Harry Wharton and Co., as they walked with the van, were looking out for such a suitable spot.

So was Bunter. And it seemed to Bunter that he had found one.

Half a mile had been covered since the caravanners had restarted after the interval. Billy Bunter sat with the reins and the whip, but Jervis was leading the horse. Bunter, from his eyrie in the driving-seat, blinked over a roadside gate. What he beheld beyond that gate impressed the fat Owl favourably.

Harry Wharton and Co. also looked over the gate and were equally favourably impressed. A little green meadow, with shady trees and a rippling stream on the further side, looked an ideal spot for a camp. But on the gate was a board-and on that board was a legend familiar to caravanners, hikers, tramps, and other rambblers of the roads: 'TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED'. So, attractive as that green little meadow looked, the Famous Five were prepared to march on and leave its attraction astern.

Not so Bunter!

'Just the place!' said Bunter. 'That looks a jolly good spot for a camp, you fellows.'

'Just!' agreed Bob Cherry. 'But it's barred, old fat man. Trespassers will be prosecuted - there it is, plain enough.'

'Rot!' said Bunter.

'We can't trespass in that meadow,' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Rubbish!'

'You fat ass!'

'That will, do, Bull. Stop, Jervis! We're camping here.'

Jervis glanced up at his lord and master.

'Perhaps, sir, it would be advisable to look a little further,' he suggested, meekly.

'I said stop!' snapped Bunter.

'Very good, sir.' Jervis stopped.

'Open that gate, Wharton, and let Jervis lead the van in,' rapped Bunter.

'We can't camp here, Bunter.'

'I've said that we're going to camp here. It's all gammon about trespassers being prosecuted,' said Bunter. 'If you're funky about notice-boards, you shouldn't have come caravanning.'

'Who's funky?' bawled Johnny Bull.

'Looks as if you fellows are!' jeered Bunter. 'I'm jolly well not. Are you going to open that gate, Wharton?' Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Open that gate, Nugent.'

'Rats!' answered Nugent.

'Inky! Open that gate.'

'The ratfulness is terrific,' answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Billy Bunter breathed hard through his little fat nose.

His little round eyes gleamed wrath through his big round spectacles. Bunter was not in a good temper. Misadventures that day had an irritating effect on the fat Owl. If these fellows were forgetting that he was boss of the show, he was more than ready to make it plain unto them.

'I don't want any lip from you fellows!' he snapped. 'If you fancy you're in the Remove passage now, you can forget it. I'm running this show. Just bear that in mind. We're camping in that meadow. Jervis, open that gate and lead the van in.'

Jervis hesitated for one moment. No doubt he had more respect for notice-boards than for the fat and fatuous Owl. But it was only for a moment. Then he opened the gate and led the horse off the road. The caravan rolled into that attractive little meadow. Harry Wharton and Co. remained at the gateway. They exchanged dubious glances. Undoubtedly it was an attractive meadow: a delightful spot for a camp. It was just the spot they would have chosen, but for that forbidding notice on the gate. But - there was the notice in the plainest of plain English. The proprietor of that attractive meadow, whoever he was, did not desire to share its amenities with the general public. He wanted to keep it to himself. He warned the public off. No doubt it was rather inconsiderate of him - but there it was.

The Famous Five were rather at a loss. They did not want to camp in that meadow without leave from the owner. But Billy Bunter had already decided that point. Bunter and the caravan were going to camp there, at any rate. And if the chums of the Remove did not care to follow Bunter's lead and remember that he was boss of the show, the fat Owl seemed quite prepared to leave them to their own devices.

'Cheeky fat ass!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'The cheekfulness of the esteemed fat ass is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'But—'

'Chance it!' suggested Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull pointed to the board nailed on the gate. 'Can't you read?' he inquired.

'May be only gammon, as that fat chump said,' answered Bob.
'These dashed boards are stuck up all over the place. Ten to one it's only meant to keep off tramps, not a nice party like us.'
'Rot!' said Johnny. 'The fact is, we were silly asses to come caravanning with Bunter at all. Might have known it wouldn't work.'

'Well, we're landed now,' said Bob. 'Look here, ten to one it will be all right. Bunter's going to camp here, anyway, and it's his caravan.'

'Bother him,' said Harry.

'Bother and blow him!' agreed Nugent.

'What he wants is a jolly good kicking,' grunted Johnny.

'Hear, hear!' said Bob. 'But the question is, what are we going to do now? Bunter's camping here. Are we going to camp or not?'

'Not!' said Johnny Bull, decidedly.

Johnny seemed quite firm on that point. But Bob Cherry, perhaps a little less thoughtful than his chum, was more disposed to 'chance it'. They lingered at the gateway, undecided.

Meanwhile, the caravan rolled on and halted near the bank of the stream on the further side of the meadow. Jervis unharnessed the horse and set the animal loose to graze. Billy Bunter descended from the van and blinked back at the party at the gate.

'I say, you fellows, are you coming?' squeaked Bunter. 'What are you sticking there for?'

'Come out of that, you fat chump!' hooted Johnny Bull. 'We can find a camp further up the road.'

'Better push on, Bunter,' urged Harry Wharton.

'You can push on, if you like!' jeered Bunter. 'I'm camping here! What are you afraid of?'

'The owner might come along and want to know what we're doing, camping in his meadow,' said Nugent.

'Rot! There's nobody about,' answered Billy Bunter. 'Besides, we can pay him, if he makes a fuss. Don't be so jolly funky.'

'Who's funky?' roared Johnny Bull.

'Well, if you ain't funky, come on!' sniffed Bunter. 'We're jolly well going to camp here, and that's that. If you want to sit on that gate all night, you can please yourrselves - He, he, he. But I wouldn't be so jolly funky, if I were you. Not Greyfriars style.'

Johnny Bull breathed hard and he breathed deep. He made no answer, but he marched in at the gateway. To be considered 'funky' by so very unheroic a person as Billy Bunter was a little too much for Johnny. He marched into the meadow, and the other fellows followed on. The fat Owl gave them a fat grin as they joined him at the van.

'That's right,' he said. 'Don't you fellows get your ears up! I'm running this show, see, and when I say we're going to camp, we're going to camp, and that settles it. I don't want any argument about it. Jervis! '

'Sir! '

'Buck up with the supper.'

'Very good, sir.'

Under the last glimmer of a setting sun, the Famous Five unpacked the tent from the van, and set to work erecting it and preparing it for the night. Billy Bunter, for whom no form of exertion had any appeal, sat in a camp chair and started on a preliminary supper. A full round moon came up over the woods and meadows, and the camp was almost as light as by day, when the Famous Five joined Bunter at the festive board. Billy Bunter, restored to good humour by the foodstuffs, beamed on them through his big spectacles.

'Tuck in, you chaps,' he said. 'Jolly good prog, ain't it?'

'Quite!' agreed Harry Wharton.

'And lots of it,' added Bunter.

'The lotfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter.'

'Nothing mean about me,' said the fat Owl.

'I've asked you fellows for these hols, and I'm going to do you well. You wouldn't get spreads like this if you'd gone off on your own these hols.'

'Um!'

'Nothing like it, I fancy,' said Bunter. 'Money's no object, with me. Everything of the best, and lots of it. All you fellows have got to do is to remember that I'm running the show, and what I say goes. Then we'll get on all right. Jervis!'

'Sir!'

'Is my bed ready in the van?'

'Quite, sir.'

Billy Bunter heaved himself out of the camp chair.

'I fancy I'll turn in now,' he remarked. 'You fellows had better do the same. Don't kick up any row after I've turned in.'

'To hear is to obey!' said Bob Cherry, solemnly.

Billy Bunter rolled off to the caravan. Jervis respectfully retired to a distance with his sleeping bag.

Bob Cherry yawned. 'Turning in?' he asked.

'Hasn't Bunter told us to?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'Bunter can't help being a blithering idiot,' said Bob, tolerantly. 'Oh, listen to the band!' he added, a few moments later.

Snore!

Anyone unacquainted with Billy Bunter's manners and customs might have supposed that a storm was brewing. Certainly that deep rumble sounded remarkably like the growl of distant thunder. But that deep and resonant snore was quite a familiar sound in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars. It did not indicate that a storm was brewing - only that William George Bunter was bound by slumber's chain.

Snore!

'Anybody like the other bunk in the van?' asked Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Nobody was keen on the other bunk in the caravan, at close quarters with Billy Bunter's stentorian snore.

Five in the tent was rather close packing, but the tent had the advantage of having been set up at a distance from the van. The Famous Five retired contentedly to the tent. Slumber descended on the caravan camp, and all was still save for the snore that continued to rumble from the van.

THE SLEEPER AWAKES

'GOOD gad!'

Captain Pooter-Jones gasped out that exclamation. Bright as the moonlight was, showing up clearly the green meadow, the rippling stream, and the red caravan, Captain Pooter-Jones could hardly believe his eyes, as he stared at the Greyfriars camp.

'Good gad!' he repeated. 'Gipsies! Tramps! Caravans! On my land! Good gad!'

The hour was late.

In the tent, five caravanners were sleeping the sleep of the just. If Harry Wharton and Co. were dreaming, they were certainly not dreaming of the little stout gentleman they had rescued that afternoon; still less dreaming that they were scheduled to see anything more of him. The caravan-camp was a good half-mile from the spot, and it had not occurred to them that that little green meadow was a part of the same estate, or that the stream that flowed past the camp was the very same identical stream from which they had fished out Captain Pooter-Jones, half a mile further down its course. They had, in fact, forgotten all about Captain Pooter-Jones: they slept peacefully in their tent, happily ignorant that the fierce little gentleman was anywhere in the vicinity.

Billy Bunter was sleeping peacefully too; though not quite so silently. The deep rumble from the caravan was almost incessant. It impinged upon the ears of Captain Pooter-Jones as he came into the meadow by a path through the trees. It caused him to start, and stare round, and then his eyes fell upon the red caravan. They bulged at that caravan. The little stout gentleman seemed hardly able to believe their evidence. That afternoon, a tattered vagrant trespassing on his property had roused the captain's deepest ire. But that incident was a mere nothing in comparison with this. Here was a caravan-camp on his land: some gang of trespassing gipsies who had passed by the warning notice-board on the gate like the idle wind which they regarded not.

'Good gad!' ejaculated the little captain, for the fourth time. He had a stick under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand, took a firm grip on it, and strode towards the caravan, his eyes glinting under knitted brows. According to the notice-board on the gate, trespassers in that meadow would be prosecuted, but Captain Pooter-Jones had little use for the slow processes of the law. He preferred methods more prompt and vigorous. He was, in fact, a very autocratic little gentleman, given to taking the law into his own hands in the matter of vagrants and trespassers. As he strode towards the red caravan, he certainly looked as if his methods were going to be very prompt and very vigorous indeed.

Snore!

Billy Bunter slept peacefully on, in the bunk in the caravan. He did not awaken as the door was wrenched open. Bright moonlight streamed into the van, revealing a fat face with the eyes shut and the mouth open. Unaware of an intruder, the fat Owl slept and snored on - for one moment longer. Then he was suddenly awakened.

Billy Bunter was not easy to wake. At Greyfriars the rising-bell sometimes passed him unheeded. Often he did not turn out till some kindly hand jerked off his bedclothes, or squeezed a wet sponge over his fat features.

But on this occasion Billy Bunter woke promptly, as a hand grasped a fat neck, and hooked him out of the bunk like a fat wrinkle from a shell.

Bump!

'Whoooooooooooooh!' spluttered Bunter.

Sound sleeper as he was, Billy Bunter was awake in a moment. Captain Pooter-Jones's methods would have awakened Rip Van Winkle or the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in a bunch. Quite wide awake, the fat Owl sprawled on the floor of the van and roared.

'Ow! Whoooooh! Who's that? Stoppit! If that's you, Bob Cherry, you beast - Oooooooooooooh!'

'Vagabond—'

'Ow! wow! what—wow—'

'Gipsy vagabond! Get out! Get off my land!'

Whop!

'Yaroooh!'

Whop!

Billy Bunter bounded up. His first vague impression had been that the other caravanners were larking. But as he glimpsed a fierce frowning face and a bristling white moustache, he realized that this was some stranger who had invaded his caravan. He realized, too, that the invader had a stick in his hand and was whopping him with it - he realized that quite clearly and painfully. Who the man was, and what he fancied he was up to, Bunter did not know - but he knew that he had to get away from that whopping stick. He made a frantic bound for the doorway and plunged out headlong, rolling in the grass.

A fierce face glared after him.

'Get off my land, you gipsy vagrant!' bawled Captain Pooter-Jones. 'I'll have your van trundled after you. Get out of it.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter sat up in the grass, gurgling for breath.

He blinked up in terror at the red face glaring down. It dawned upon his fat brain who the man was - the proprietor of that meadow! Bunter had told the other caravanners that the notice on the gate was 'gammon', and he had pitched his camp regardless of it. Now he rather wished that he hadn't!

The fierce little man in the van doorway brandished his stick.

'Get out!' he roared.

'I-I-I say—' spluttered the hapless Owl.

'Get off my land!'

'I-I-I say, you gimme my clobber,' gasped Bunter.

The fat Owl was more than willing to get out of reach of that stick, but mild as the spring night was, a suit of pyjamas was much too light raiment for taking walks abroad. 'I-I say, I-I can't go like this - you gimme my trousers—'

'Pah!'

Captain Pooter-Jones looked more like stepping down from the van and recommencing operations with the stick. However, he stared round the interior, clutched up clothes, and hurled them out at the fat figure in pyjamas.

'I give you ten seconds!' he bawled, as Bunter's garments descended in a shower over 'Bunter.

'Oh, crikey!'

Never had Billy Bunter donned his garments so rapidly. He shoved them on anyhow over his pyjamas. He found his spectacles and jammed them on a fat little nose. He jammed bare feet into his shoes. But rapid as he was, he was not rapid enough for the impatient captain. Captain Pooter-Jones jumped from the van brandishing his stick.

'Are you going?' he bawled.

Whop!

'Yaroooh! Keep that stick away!' yelled Bunter, dodging frantically.

'You gipsy vagabond—'

'I ain't a gipsy!' gasped Bunter. 'I'm caravanning - I say, look here, I'll pay for camping here, if you like - I'll pay you five bob - and I say - Yaroooh!'

Whop!

'Ow! Beast! Keep off!' shrieked Bunter.

Whop! whop!

Billy Bunter bolted. In what direction he headed, he did not know - his fat mind was concentrated on only one idea - getting out of reach of that swiping stick. He bumped into a tree, yelled, scrambled round it and charged on. Whether he was pursued he did not know. As a matter of fact, he wasn't. Perhaps the stout gentleman, irate as he was, considered that that particular trespasser had had enough, or perhaps he was keen to deal with the rest of the party. Anyhow, Billy Bunter vanished into Captain Pooter-Jones's woods unpursued, and the captain, with the stick gripped in his hand, and his grizzled brows corrugated in a frown that might have excited the envy of the Lord High Executioner, started towards the tent by the stream - to deal with the rest of the party in the same dramatic way.

CHAPTER 20

SPOT OF LUCK

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'What the dickens-?'

'What's that rumpus-?'

'Sounds like Bunter-'

'That fat ass!'

'That terrific fathead!'

Five fellows had been sleeping soundly in the tent.

But they were awakening now. The tent was at some little distance from the caravan, out of range of Billy Bunter's snore - but not out of range of the wild yells that woke the echoes of the meadow and the surrounding woods. Someone was yelling on his top note, and that someone could only be William George Bunter, though why William George was putting up that vocal performance at a late hour of the night was quite a mystery.

Harry Wharton scrambled up and turned on a flash-lamp. Bob Cherry jumped out of his blankets and put his head out of the tent. In the bright light of a full round moon, sailing high in a sky of deep blue, he had a clear view of the meadow. He stared blankly at what he saw. A fat figure was streaking across the meadow towards the wood: another figure was brandishing a stick after it as it streaked. Bob was just in time to glimpse Billy Bunter as he vanished into the trees. In another moment, the fat Owl had disappeared.

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Bob. 'What, who-?'

'What's up, Bob?'

'Bunter's bolted. There's a johnny there with a stick - looks as if he's been pitching into Bunter.'

'It sounded like it!' said Nugent.

'But who - what-?' exclaimed Johnny Bull.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's coming this way!' exclaimed Bob.

'Stout little codger - looks in a jolly bad temper. Oh, suffering cats! I-I wonder if it's the owner of this place!

Looks like it.'

'That fathead Bunter-'

'That terrific ass Bunter-'

'That blithering owl-'

Harry Wharton and Co. had had doubts, very uneasy doubts, about camping in that meadow. Billy Bunter had had his way, and they had taken the chance. Now they could have kicked themselves for chancing it. Still more willingly could they have kicked Bunter. It was only too probable that trouble might accrue; now, evidently, it was accruing!

Four fellows scrambled for their clothes in the glimmer of the flash-lamp. Bob had a wary eye on the stout stumpy figure striding up with brandished stick. The little captain was a stranger to Bob's eyes, but he could easily guess that this was

the proprietor of the meadow, and that he was in a state of towering wrath was only too clear.

'Trespassing rascal!' barked Captain Pooter-Jones. 'I—I say, does this field belong to you?' stammered Bob.

'What? What? Does it belong to me? Did you fancy it was common land when you camped here? Did you not see the board on the gate? Can't you read? Take that!'

'Oh!' roared Bob, as he took it.

'Here, keep off, will you - we'll get out of your dashed field as soon as you like— Keep that stick to yourself, you old ass!' Keeping that stick to himself was, apparently, the last thing of which the little stout gentleman was thinking! So far from keeping it to himself, he grabbed Bob with his left hand, hooked him out, and laid on the stick with his right.

Whop! whop! whop!

'Oh, crumbs! Oh, scissors! Stoppit!' yelled Bob. 'Rescue you fellows! Oh, my hat! Oh, suffering cats! Come on, you fellows! Help!'

'Coming!' gasped Harry Wharton.

He was first out of the tent. But Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were after him in a moment. Bob Cherry was struggling frantically in the captain's grasp. Pyjamas were a poor defence against a swiping stick, and the captain was laying it on as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet. It was no time to stand on ceremony. No doubt the caravanners were trespassing, and perhaps the proprietor, like the prophet of old, did well to be angry! But there was a limit! The irate gentleman's activities with that stick had to be stopped, and they were stopped by the rush from the tent. That rush bowled the captain over like a ninepin and Bob dragged himself free as he sprawled.

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Bob. He rubbed places where the stick had landed. 'Oh, gum! Won't I jolly well kick Bunter for this! Wow! wow!'

Captain Pooter-Jones sprawled on his back in his own meadow. His stick flew in one direction, his hat in another. He spluttered wildly as he sprawled.

'Trespassing rascals! Poachers! Vagrants! Tramps! By gad, I'll have you all given into custody for this! Groooogh!'

He sat up dizzily. Then he dawned, as it were, on the caravanners.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Frank Nugent. 'It's that old bean.'

'Oh! Him!' ejaculated Johnny Bull.

'The himfulness is terrific!' exclaimed the nabob of Bhanipur.

'That old boy!' gasped Harry Wharton.

In the rush that had overwhelmed Captain Pooter-Jones, the Greyfriars fellows had not recognized him. But now, as he sat up in the grass, with the bright moonlight streaming on his red plump face, they knew him again - the little stout man they had dragged from the stream that afternoon. They stared at him

blankly. They had not expected to see Captain Pooter-Jones again. Now, unexpectedly, they saw him.

'Eh! Know that old Tartar?' asked Bob Cherry.

'It's the old boy we got out of the water up that lane, while you were gone to the farm—'

'Rascals! Rogues! Tramps! Vagabonds!' gurgled Captain Pooter-Jones. 'Trespassing—poaching—assault and battery—I'll give you all in charge—I'll— I'll— I'll—' He broke off suddenly, staring at the faces that were staring at him, apparently recognizing the Greyfriars juniors in his turn. 'You! '

'Us!' said Harry Wharton.

'Oh!'

Four of the five faces were familiar to the captain. He sat in the grass and stared at them.

'You!' he repeated.

'Just us!' said Nugent, with a grin. 'I hope you didn't catch a cold this afternoon, sir.'

'What? What? You young rascals, camping with your caravan on my land without so much as "By your leave"!'

'Oh! Sorry, sir! We—we—'

'Can't you read notice-boards?' barked the captain.

'Oh! Yes! But—'

'Trespassing young rascals—!'

'Sorry we camped here, sir,' said Harry. 'We'll clear off as soon as you like.'

'The sorrowfulness is terrific, esteemed sahib!' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'and the apologize is preposterous.'

Captain Pooter-Jones sat and glared at them. But there were signs that his excitement was simmering down. He seemed to be making an effort to suppress his wrath. Evidently, his recognition of the schoolboys who had pulled him out of the stream made a difference and had an ameliorating effect on his ire.

The juniors eyed him warily, as he tottered to his feet.

They hoped that recollection of services rendered might see them through, but they were prepared to dodge.

However, the little stout gentleman was calming down. 'Young scamps!' he snapped. But the snap was not quite so ferocious as before.

'We're really sorry, sir,' said Harry Wharton. 'We know jolly well that we oughtn't to have camped here. We'll get out this minute, if you like.'

Snort, from Captain Pooter-Jones!

'You did me a service this afternoon!' he barked. 'I might have been drowned, by gad! I must overlook this!' The Famous Five were very glad to hear it.

'Thank you, sir,' said Harry, with great meekness.

'Pah! Trespassing young rascals! Can't you read notice-boards? But I must overlook this, considering what you did! I ought to lay my stick about the lot of you! But—but—well, never mind. Get off my land!'

'Certainly, sir.'

'Where's my stick?'

'Here, sir!'

Johnny Bull picked up the stick.

'Where's my hat?'

'Here you are, sir!'

Frank Nugent restored the hat.

Captain Pooter-Jones jammed the hat on his head and the stick under his arm. He gave the caravanners a final glare and stalked away. Harry Wharton and Co. gazed after him, never having been so glad in all their young lives to see anybody's back.

'What a spot of luck!' murmured Nugent. 'The luckfulness is terrific.'

'We're well out of that!' said Johnny Bull.

There was no doubt about that. How the affair might have ended, but for the fortunate episode at the plank bridge that afternoon, the caravanners could not guess. Luckily, it had ended well for the Famous Five, if not for Billy Bunter. It was an immense relief to see the back of the irate stout gentleman as he stalked away. But he did not stalk very far. He stopped and turned.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, he's coming back!' breathed Bob. 'Ware that stick!'

For a moment, the juniors wondered whether the stout gentleman had changed his mind and decided after all to get busy with that stick!

But it was not that! The stick remained under the captain's arm. He was still frowning, but not so thunderously.

'You can stay till morning!' he barked.

'Oh! Thank you, sir!'

The little captain stalked away again. This time he stalked away for good, disappearing by a path through the trees. He left the Famous Five grinning at one another - Bob rubbing painful spots as he grinned.

'Not a bad old codger, after all!' remarked Nugent.

'Too jolly handy with that stick of his,' said Bob. 'All serene now, though.'

'The all-serenefulness is preposterous,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But where is the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter?'

'Goodness knows.'

'Perhaps Bunter will take a little more notice of notice-boards after this,' remarked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'Perhaps,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'Goodness knows where the fat ass has got to. I suppose he will wander back sooner or later. Can't see anything of him, at any rate.'

'I saw the last of him,' said Bob. 'He seemed to be in rather a hurry. Looked as if he had a chance for the school hundred yards, the rate he was going at.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The juniors looked round them in the bright moonlight. The fleeing fat Owl had vanished into the wood that bordered the meadow; Bob had had the last glimpse of him as he vanished. Where he was now, nobody could guess. There was no sign or sound of William George Bunter. Neither was there of Jervis. Possibly Jervis was sleeping too soundly to have been disturbed by the sudden uproar in the night. More probably he preferred to keep at a safe distance from the fierce little captain. Anyhow, neither Jervis nor his lord and master was to be seen in the moonlit meadow, and the Famous Five looked round in vain for a fat figure and a glimmer of spectacles in the light of the moon. 'He'll turn up,' said Nugent.

'Sure to,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Bad pennies always turn up.' 'I'll give him a yell,' said Bob. 'If he's anywhere around, he will hear it and roll in.'

And Bob roared at the top of a powerful voice. 'Bunter! Bunty! Bunt!'

'Bunt!' came back an echo from the woods. But there was no other response to Bob's stentorian roar.

'Bunter!' roared Bob again. 'Bunter! Bunty! Bunt!' Again only echo responded.

'Must have heard that if he's around,' said Bob. 'Must have heard it if he's in Sussex at all,' said Johnny Bull. 'I fancy they must have heard that in Wiltshire.'

'If not in Cornwall!' remarked Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Shall I give him another?' asked Bob.

'For goodness sake, don't!' said Harry. 'We don't want to wake up all the South of England at this time of night. Let's turn in.'

And as Billy Bunter, wherever he was, was obviously out of hearing, and had to be left to his own devices, the Famous Five returned to their blankets in the tent, and once more slumber settled down on the caravan-camp.

AN AWFUL NIGHT FOR BUNTER

'OH, crikey!' moaned Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton and Co. at the camp did not know where Billy Bunter was. Neither did Billy Bunter.

He was somewhere in Sussex. He knew that much.

But that was all he knew. He might have been wandering in a South American forest, for all he knew of his precise location.

He was surrounded by bewildering trees, with here and there a gleam of moonlight that came through thick branches overhead. Trees and trees and trees, and nothing but trees. And finding his way out of those innumerable and bewildering trees, was a proposition far beyond Billy Bunter's powers. He was, in fact, hopelessly lost - like a very plump Babe in the Wood.

Only one thought had been in Billy Bunter's fat mind when he fled out of the meadow in which he had insisted upon camping in defiance of a landowner's notice-board. That one fixed idea had been to get out of reach of a swiping stick, and to put the greatest possible distance in the shortest possible time, between his fat person and that stick. He did not cast one blink back and did not even know that he was unpursued. The guilty flee when no man pursueth, and Billy Bunter charged on as fast as his little fat legs could carry him - dreading every moment to feel a swipe across his plump back. He bumped into trees; he stumbled into thickets; he tripped over trailing roots. How many times he tumbled over and scrambled up again, he could hardly have computed. He panted, he puffed, and he blew, with streams of perspiration running down a fat face, till at length he came to a halt, leaned on a gnarled tree-trunk, and gasped and gurgled for breath - his fat ears cocked like a fat rabbit's to listen for sounds of pursuit.

But there were no such sounds. The wood, when Billy Bunter ceased to plunge and scramble, was silent and still. The fat Owl was alone in the midst of a green and shadowy solitude.

That was a relief to a terrified Owl. At any rate he was safe from the swiping stick. For a long, long time, he leaned on the trunk, pumping in breath. Having, at long last, renewed that much-needed supply, he detached himself from the trunk and blinked round about him through his big spectacles, wondering dismally where he was, and how he was to get out of it, wherever it was.

'Oh, crikey!' moaned Bunter. 'Oh, lor'! That beast - blow him! I-I wonder if he's pitching into the other fellows! Serve them jolly well right if he is! Oh, lor'! Oh, crumbs!'

'Who's that?'

It was a sudden sharp voice in the silence. Billy Bunter jumped like a startled rabbit.

His eyes and spectacles shot round, in the direction of the voice. In a glimmer of moonlight through the foliage overhead,

he glimpsed a tall man in gaiters - and a hand that was outstretched to grasp a fat shoulder. He jumped back in alarm. 'Stop!' rapped the sharp voice.

Bunter was not likely to stop! Who the tall man was or what he was, the fat Owl had no idea, and he did not think of stopping to inquire. He bolted like a frightened hare.

'Stop!'

Billy Bunter tore on. There was a sound of tramping feet behind him. The man in gaiters was following.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter suddenly, as something unseen in the gloom stopped him in his flight. For the moment he did not realize what it was, as he staggered back from the contact. Then it dawned upon him that it was a wire fence.

He groped over it in terror of a clutching hand behind.

It barred further progress. The wire fence extended through the wood, evidently separating some private preserve from the open woodland. To continue his flight, he had to turn at right angles, and follow its length.

Tramp! tramp! came the heavy footsteps in the rear.

'Oh, crikey!'

Tramp! Tramp!

'Stop! Where are you? Stop!' came the sharp rapping voice.

Billy Bunter stood quite still, in the blackness under thick branches. He realized that he could not be seen in the enveloping darkness, and that his best guess was not to make a sound. Clamped close to a trunk, scarcely daring to breathe, he listened. The tramping feet passed within a couple of yards of him.

Then they halted, a few yards away. A calling voice came through the trees from a little distance. 'That you, Mr. Churt?'

'Yes! Seen anyone, Barber?'

'Not a soul!'

'There's one of them about. I nearly had him! Keep your eyes open, Barber. We've got to catch them with the wire-cutters.' To Billy Bunter's immense relief, the tramping footsteps moved away. Mr. Churt - whoever Mr. Churt was - had joined Barber, whoever Barber was, and they moved off together. Footsteps and snapping twigs died away into silence.

'Oh, lor'!' breathed Bunter.

He waited till all was quiet and still. Then, groping his way, he crept along the wire fence. Who Mr. Churt and Barber might be, and why they were in the wood at almost midnight, he had not the vaguest idea, but whoever and whatever they were, he wanted to get to a safe distance from the pair of them. Taking care to make as little sound as possible, the scared Owl crept along the fence.

All was densely dark under the thick branches. But suddenly, in a more open spot, there was a patch of moonlight. And in that patch of moonlight, close to the wire fence, the startled Owl glimpsed a shadowy figure.

Snap!

It was a faint sound, but it rang sharply in the silence - the parting of a strand of wire. Billy Bunter came to a dead stop, blinking at the crouching figure at the fence. The man was wielding a pair of wire-cutters, evidently to make his way into the preserve on the inner side. Billy Bunter's little round eyes almost bulged through his big round spectacles as he stared at him. Bunter's fat brain was not quick on the uptake, but even Bunter could guess that this man was a poacher, and it dawned upon him, further, that Mr. Churt and Barber were keepers, patrolling the fence on the watch for midnight poachers with wire-cutters.

He stood rooted, his eyes bulging at the poacher. The latter seemed to have heard some sound, for he stared round suddenly from the fence, dropping the wire-cutters in his alarm. The next moment he was running, vanishing in an instant into the darkness of the wood.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

There was a loud shout, close at hand.

'Look out! Stop him!'

Evidently, Mr. Churt and Barber were not far away.

A tall figure came dashing into the patch of moonlight. Billy Bunter made a jump to bolt. But he jumped too late.

A brawny hand clutched at a fat shoulder. The man in gaiters had him!

'Ow! Leggo!' yelled Bunter, frantically.

The keeper did not heed that yell. His grasp closed on the fat shoulder like a vice. At the same moment he shouted.

'After him, Barber! I've got one of them! Get after - the other.'

A shout came back, and sounds of tramping feet, dying away in the wood. Barber, apparently, was in hot pursuit of the escaping poacher. Billy Bunter remained a prisoner in the hands of Mr. Churt, wriggling in his sinewy grasp like a fat eel.

'Now, then, take it quiet!' snapped Mr. Churt. Hold-the fat Owl in that vice-like grip, he peered at him in the moonlight.

'You're young for this game, you young rascal - you've started poaching early, you 'ave.'

'I ain't a poacher!' howled Bunter.

'You ain't!' jeered Mr. Churt. He stooped, and picked up the wire-cutters with his left hand. 'What are you doing with these 'ere, then?'

'That's not mine - there was a man here-!' gasped Bunter.

'Don't I know there was? And he's got away, but you ain't getting away, you young rogue. The guv'nor will deal with you in the morning. You're coming along of me now.'

The grip on the fat shoulder propelled Billy Bunter into motion.

'I-I say - Oh, crikey-I-I say, where are you taking me?' gasped Bunter, as the keeper led him away.

'I'm taking you up to the house,' snapped Mr. Churt. 'You'll be

locked in a shed till morning - can't disturb the guvnor at this time of night.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter's fat brain fairly swam. Visions of a police-station, and a charge of poaching, floated before him.

'I tell you I ain't a poacher!' he gasped. 'I-I-I got lost in this beastly wood—'

'Lost, was you? Well, you're found now, and I've found you!' said Mr. Churt, with grim sarcasm. 'And a copper will find you in the morning, in the shed I'm going to lock you in, you poaching young rogue.'

'I ain't a poacher—'

'That will do.'

Mr. Churt, clearly, was satisfied on that point. Bunter on the spot, the wire-cutters lying where they had been dropped, the fence cut, were evidence enough for Mr. Churt. Whether they would be evidence enough for the 'copper' in the morning, Billy Bunter didn't know and couldn't guess, but the possibility was awful. He was not going to be locked in that shed, if he could help it! Force was on the side of the keeper, but there was a vein of artfulness in Billy Bunter, as there often is in obtuse persons. He stumbled suddenly and fell.

The fat shoulder slipped, for a moment, from Mr. Churt's grasp, as Bunter plumped down. The next moment, he was bending over the fat junior, grasping at him again. In that moment, a fat fist jabbed up, catching Mr. Churt fairly in the eye.

'Oh!' roared Mr. Churt. His hand, instead of grasping Bunter, went to his eye! It was quite a painful jab.

Billy Bunter, for the moment, was free. That moment was enough for him. Generally, it was quite a leisurely process for Billy Bunter to get on his feet. But circumstances alter cases. On the present occasion, a flash of lightning had little on Bunter. He was on his feet in a split second and bounding away into the darkness.

There was a roar behind him.

'Ow! My eye! You young villain! Ooooh!'

Apparently Mr. Churt had a pain in that eye. Billy Bunter's fat fist had jabbed hard. In terror of pursuit, the fat Owl charged away in the darkness at almost supersonic speed. But Mr. Churt was not pursuing. He was busily engaged in caressing his eye. Billy Bunter ran and ran and ran, till there was not a run left in his little fat legs. Then he collapsed. If Mr. Churt had trailed him then, Billy Bunter would certainly have been booked to face the 'copper' in the morning. Fortunately for Bunter, Mr. Churt had gone home to his cottage to bathe a black eye!

CHAPTER 22

QUICK MARCH!

'WHERE'S Bunter?'

'The wherefulness is terrific.'

'O where and O where can he be?' sang Bob Cherry.

'Jervis!'

'Sir!'

'Seen anything of Bunter?'

'No, sir! Master Bunter does not seem to have returned, sir.'

That Master Bunter had not returned, was clear, for there was no sign of him in the caravan-camp in the meadow.

Harry Wharton and Co. turned out bright and early in the sunny spring morning. They did not expect to see Bunter up too early, but if he had wandered back to camp, they expected to hear a familiar snore rumbling from the caravan. But no snore rumbled from the van. Billy Bunter was still absent.

What had become of him was a mystery. There was no clue to him, since he had bolted, in the middle of the night, into the surrounding woods. Billy Bunter had disappeared then, and he was staying disappeared.

'Lost himself, most likely,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Bunter's the fellow to lose himself if he had half a chance.'

'He wouldn't know that we made it pax with that sportsman with the stick!' said Bob Cherry. 'May be keeping away from that stick, all this while.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Anyhow, he's not here,' said Harry. 'The sooner we're out of this, the better - but I suppose we can't get on the road without Bunter, as it's his caravan.'

'Hardly!' grinned Bob.

'We shall have to find him, somehow,' said Nugent. 'Look for him after brekker, what?'

That seemed to the caravanners the only thing to be done. They were all keen to start, and leave Captain Pooter-Jones and his property behind the rolling wheels. But obviously they couldn't roll off in Bunter's caravan minus Bunter. Wherever the fat Owl was, he had to be found and collected before they could start. So they sat down to a cheery breakfast in the sunshine, hoping to see a fat figure roll in before the meal was over.

But no fat figure rolled in.

Whether Billy Bunter was lost in the wood, whether he was keeping away in terror of the fierce little captain and his stick, or whatever else might have happened to him, nobody could guess, but he had to be found, and breakfast over, the Famous Five set out to find him, leaving Jervis in charge of the camp. Bob Cherry remembered the direction in which the fat Owl had vanished, and the search-party started in that direction. They found themselves in a wide green woodland, where the trees and

bushes grew too thickly for visibility to extend very far.

'Puzzle - find Bunter!' remarked Bob Cherry.

'The puzzefulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. It was quite a pleasant ramble in the green wood in the fresh spring morning. But finding Bunter in the wood was another matter. It was in fact rather like hunting for a needle in a haystack. Bunter was somewhere about; they could have no doubt of that. But where, was anybody's guess. He might have been within a few yards unseen.

All that the juniors could do was to explore, keeping their eyes on the alert for the fat Owl.

But, as it happened, it was not their eyes, but their ears, that at length gave them a clue.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' ejaculated Bob Cherry, suddenly.

He halted.

'What-?' asked Harry.

'Listen.'

They listened. Snore!

That unmelodious sound rumbled from the thickets, at a little distance. It was a sound familiar in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, and in the caravan-camp. Somebody, evidently, was asleep in that thicket, unseen but not unheard.

But for that echoing snore, the searchers might have passed on their way, unaware that they had passed what they sought. Now they came to a halt.

'Bunter!' grinned Nugent.

'Somebody, at any rate,' said Bob. 'Let's look! This way to the Sleeping Beauty.'

Bob pushed the branches aside and his comrades followed him.

Then the Sleeping Beauty burst upon their view.

It was Billy Bunter: fast asleep and snoring.

The fat Owl was sprawled in the grass, a fat head resting on a fat arm, his eyes closed and his mouth open.

No doubt his nocturnal wanderings had tired him. Slumber's chain had bound him after his escape from Mr. Churt, and he slept and he snored.

Five faces grinned down at him.

'Well, here he is!' said Bob. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wake up, Bunter.'

Snore!

'Wake up!' roared Bob.

Snore!

Sunrise and the song of birds in the wood had not awakened Billy Bunter. Neither did Bob Cherry's roar. He slept on and snored on.

Bob Cherry stooped, grasped a fat shoulder, and shook.

Then a pair of little round eyes half opened behind a pair of big round spectacles. There was a sleepy grunt from Bunter.

'Beast! Lemme alone! Tain't rising-bell.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You fat ass, you're not in the dorm now! Wake up!' roared Bob.

'Is that you, Bob Cherry, you beast? I tell you tain't rising-bell! I'm not getting up yet.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Shake! shake! shake!

A series of vigorous shakes roused even Billy Bunter.

He sat up in the grass, jammed his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at the Famous Five. Then he remembered.

'Oh, crikey!' he gasped. 'Is that you fellows? I-I say. I-I think I fell asleep—'

'I think you must have!' grinned Bob.

'Sounded like it!' remarked Nugent.

'The soundfulness was terrific.'

'I-I say, you fellows, is he here?' gasped Bunter, blinking round in alarm through his spectacles.

'Is who here?' asked Harry.

'That beast!' gasped Bunter.

'What beast?'

'That beast Churt—'

'Who on earth's Churt?'

'That keeper! I hit him in the eye, and got away - he was after me!'

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet. He was wide awake now! 'I-I say, you fellows, you keep him off - I ain't going to be run in for poaching—'

'Oh, my hat!'

'You've been poaching!' exclaimed Johnny Bull.

'No!' yelled Bunter. 'But that idiot of a keeper thought I had, and he was going to lock me in a shed and send for a copper—'

'Oh, crumbs!'

The Famous Five stared at the alarmed fat Owl. Evidently Billy Bunter had had some wild adventures during his absence from the camp.

'A keeper—!' exclaimed Nugent.

'A copper—!' gasped Bob.

'I say, you fellows, you keep him off—'

'There's nobody here but us, fathead,' said Bob, soothingly.

'But if you've been hitting keepers in the eye, you fat chump, the sooner you get out of this the better. We've been hunting for you, to roll you back to camp. It's all right now - that old sportsman with the stick isn't there - come on.'

Billy Bunter blinked round at bewildering trees. 'Know the way back?' he gasped.

'We're not blind blithering owls!' said Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

'Come on,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'We know the way back, Bunter. And if you've got a keeper looking for you, you'd better get a move on.'

Billy Bunter, for once, was more than ready to get a prompt move on. He did not lag on the way back to the caravan-camp. His eyes

and spectacles shot round continually in dread of spotting a tall man in gaiters. Luckily, no tall man in gaiters appeared in the offing, and the caravanners emerged from the wood into the meadow without alarm. The fat Owl gave a gasp of relief at the sight of the red caravan in the distance. But he paused.

'Sure he's gone?' he gasped. 'That beast with the stick—'

'Quite sure!' grinned Bob.

'Well, come on, then!'

The fat Owl broke into a trot. Twice or thrice he cast an anxious blink over a fat shoulder at the dusky wood behind. Bunter was in haste to get to a safe distance from dusky woods and tall men in gaiters. In slumber he had forgotten Mr. Churt, but he remembered him now, and his iron grip, and the awful possibility of a 'copper'. His fat little legs twinkled with speed, and for once, Harry Wharton and Co. had to trot, to keep pace with the fattest and laziest member of the caravanning party. It was quite a race across the meadow, and Bunter, gurgling for breath, was first man in.

'Jervis!' he gasped.

'Sir!'

'Get the horse! Get the van out! Quick.'

Jervis blinked at him.

'Your breakfast, sir—'

'Never mind that! Get the van out, I tell you! We've got to start! Go and get that horse! Do you hear?'

Billy Bunter gave another anxious blink back at the wood.

'Quick! Never mind brekker! Quick.'

'Very good, sir.'

'Did you hear that, you fellows?' murmured Bob Cherry. 'Bunter said "never mind brekker". Never mind a meal! Never mind grub! Do I sleep? Do I dream? Do I wonder and doubt? - Are things what they seem, or are visions about?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows—'

'Aren't you hungry, Bunter?' asked Harry, laughing. 'Eh! Oh! Yes! But never mind that—'

'Hear him!' gasped Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm not always thinking' of grub, like you fellows!' yapped Bunter.

'Oh, suffering cats!'

'Lend Jervis a hand getting the van out! What are you slacking about for, when that beast of a keeper may come along with a copper any minute!' hooted Bunter. 'Think I want to be run in?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I tell you he was going to lock me in a shed and send for a copper.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You silly cackling fatheads—!'

'Come on,' chuckled Bob. 'All hands on deck! Can't let the old fat man go to chokey for poaching and bashing keepers in the eye!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Whether Billy Bunter's alarm was well founded or not, it was certainly very real. He almost danced with impatience, while the Famous Five packed the tent and other paraphernalia into the van, and Jervis collected the horse and harnessed it. It was quick work - in fact only a matter of minutes - but those minutes seemed very long to the alarmed and anxious Owl. He gasped with relief when the van got into motion at last, the fat Owl sitting inside and Jervis leading the horse.

'Buck up, Jervis!' came an angry squeak from the caravan.

'Very good, sir.'

The horse trotted and Jervis had to trot. The Famous Five, grinning, trotted after the van. It rolled out of the meadow into the road. There Jervis slowed down to a more moderate pace. Another angry squeak came from the van.

'Get on, Jervis!'

'Really, sir-'

'What are you hanging about for? Get on, I tell you!' hooted Bunter. 'I don't want any back-chat, my man! Get on faster.'

'Very good, sir.'

Jervis trotted with the horse.

'Is this going to be a race, Bunter?' called out Bob Cherry.

'Yah! If you're too jolly lazy to keep up, you can stay behind, and be blowed to you!' snorted Bunter.



THEY ALL TROTTED

Harry Wharton and Co., fortunately, were not too lazy to keep up; in fact, they quite enjoyed a vigorous trot in the fresh spring morning. They trotted cheerfully, and Jervis trotted, and the horse trotted, and Captain Pooter-Jones's property was left

rapidly behind. If a tall man in gaiters, with a black eye, was looking for Billy Bunter, he was not likely to find him now. But not till the last tree-top had disappeared in the distance, did Bunter cease to cast anxious glances astern - and remember that he had not yet breakfasted. Then the fat Owl proceeded to make up for lost time: the trot-trot-trot on the road went on to an accompaniment of munching and champing from the caravan.

BUNTER AND A BOBBY

'WHO'S that?'

'Only a bobby.'

'What?' yelled Billy Bunter.

'I think he wants us to stop.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Miles had been covered. The pace had slowed down, at last, to a leisurely amble. With long miles of dusty road between the caravan and Captain Pooter-Jones's property, and incessant backward blinks having discerned no sign of pursuit, William George Bunter was at ease. Having disposed of several breakfasts one after another, he was feeling better. Sitting in the van, while the other fellows walked, and Jervis led the horse, the fat Owl was winding up the last of his breakfasts with a cake.irate landowners, tall men in gaiters, and 'coppers', were fading from his fat mind.

But they were suddenly recalled by the sight of a uniformed figure in the road ahead. A police constable was standing in the road, his eyes on the caravan as it lumbered towards him.

Billy Bunter ceased to munch cake. His eyes and his spectacles fixed on that uniformed figure in alarm.

To Harry Wharton and Co. there was nothing alarming in an officer of the law. In reply to Bunter's howl from the van, Bob Cherry replied that it was 'only a bobby'. It looked as if that 'bobby' was going to stop the caravan, when it came nearer. They could not guess why: but they had no objection. Billy Bunter, however, had! A 'bobby' naturally reminded Bunter of a 'copper'. The fat Owl suddenly disappeared into the interior of the van.

'I say, you fellows!' came a squeak from the interior. 'I say, don't you tell him I'm here. I say, if he asks you, tell him there's nobody in the van. He's after me.'

'You silly fat ass—!' hooted Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

'It's all right, Bunter,' said Harry.

'Tain't!' came a howl from the van. 'What's he going to stop us for, if he ain't after me? Think I'm going to be run in, to please you? I say, I'll hide in the bunk, and you tell him that there's nobody here.'

'But we can't—'

'Beast! You'd like me to be run in!' yelled Bunter. 'Jervis!'

'Sir!'

'If that copper stops us, you tell him there's nobody in the van! Mind you don't let him know I'm here.'

There was a sound of scrambling and scuffling inside the van. Billy Bunter, apparently, was seeking a hiding place in the bunk, in case that 'copper' looked in.

'Oh, my hat!' said Bob Cherry. 'That bobby looks as if he's going to stop us, but it can't be Bunter he wants.'

'Rot!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'The rotfulness is terrific.'

The Famous Five grinned as they walked on. It was, perhaps, barely possible that a 'copper' was looking for Billy Bunter in connection with the episode of the previous night. But it was highly improbable. The chums of the Remove did not suppose so for a moment. But the bare possibility was enough for Bunter. A terrified fat Owl buried himself under bedclothes in the bunk as the caravan rolled on.

'He's stopping us!' said Nugent.

The constable held up a hand as the van drew near him. Jervis halted the horse. Keen eyes ran over the party.

'Anything up, officer?' asked Harry Wharton, politely. 'Only a matter of routine, sir,' answered the constable, civilly.

'Orders to examine all vehicles on this road.' He smiled. 'I can see you're a party of schoolboys caravanning. It's all right. But have you given anyone a lift?'

'Nobody,' answered Harry.

'Anyone asked you for a lift?'

'No.'

'Seen anyone about like this?'

'Oh!' ejaculated the Famous Five, all together, as the constable produced a photograph. They knew now why the van had been stopped, and why the constable was stopping passing vehicles as a 'matter of routine'. It was a replica of the photograph Inspector Fixer had shown them the day before. It was the missing scientist who was being looked for - certainly not William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove!

'You know that face?' The constable's voice became suddenly sharp.

'We were shown that photograph yesterday,' explained Harry. 'It was shown us by Inspector Fixer. It's Marcus Krinko, isn't it?' The constable nodded.

'That's it,' he said. 'You've not seen anybody like it?'

'Oh, no.'

'O.K! I'll give your van the once-over - matter of routine.'

'Go ahead.'

The constable stepped on to the van. He was evidently satisfied: there was nothing suspicious in a party of schoolboys on a caravanning holiday, with a man in charge of their horse. But he was on duty there to check all passing vehicles, and he looked into the caravan.

Then the juniors heard a sharp exclamation from him.

'What's that? Who's there?'

'That fat ass!' breathed Bob.

'That dithering chump!' murmured Nugent.

The caravanners grinned at one another. Billy Bunter, buried under bedclothes in the bunk, had heard nothing of the colloquy on the road. Under the blankets, the fat Owl was completely hidden from sight, and he palpitated there in dread of the

clutching hand of a 'copper'. But though he was invisible, the bulge of the bedclothes revealed that someone was in the bunk. The constable stared into the van, and then back at the schoolboys in the road. His face was no longer genial. It was sharp with suspicion.

'Who's in this van?' he rapped.

'Only one of our party,' answered Harry, hastily.

'Gone to bed in the middle of the morning?'

'Oh! Yes! No! You see—'

'I'm going to see!' said the policeman, grimly. He tramped into the van. 'Now, then, show yourself, whoever you! Out of that!'

'Ow! I—I—I ain't here!' came a gasp from under the blankets.

'Wha's at?'

'I—I—I—oh, crikey!' spluttered Billy Bunter, as a vigorous hand wrenched off the bedclothes. 'I—I say—yaroooh! Keep off, you beast! Wow! I say, you fellows! Help!'

The constable stared at him blankly. The fact that some invisible person was hidden under the blankets in the bunk had undoubtedly roused his suspicions. Possibly he expected to see Marcus Krinko, the missing scientist, when he dragged off the blankets!

Whatever he expected, he did not expect to see a fat Owl goggling at him in terror through a pair of big round spectacles.

'What the holy poker—!' gasped the constable.

'Yaroooh! You keep off!' yelled Bunter. 'It wasn't me! I ain't a poacher.'

'A—a—a pip—pip—poacher!' stuttered the constable.

'It wasn't me!' howled Bunter. 'I wasn't there at all, and I only got lost in the wood, and I never hit him in the eye! I ain't going to be run in when it wasn't me.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from the road.

'I say, you fellows, keep him off!' yelled Bunter. 'Tell him I never hit him in the eye, and I only did it because he was going to lock me in a shed—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'What the dickens—?'

'Jervis!' yelled Bunter. 'You tell him it wasn't me! Tell him I was fast asleep in this van last night when I got lost in the wood.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You young donkey!' said the constable. He was not looking suspicious now. He was grinning. 'Nobody's going to run you in! There's nothing to be frightened about.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. 'Ain't you after me?'

'Ha, ha! No.'

To Billy Bunter's tremendous relief, the constable stepped down from the van. He grinned as he waved to Jervis to lead the horse onward. The caravan rolled on again. A fat face stared back at the uniformed figure in the road, and then blinked at five laughing faces.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, stop cackling,' howled Bunter. 'What was that copper after, if he wasn't after me?'

'He was after the same chap as that inspector yesterday, fathead,' answered Bob Cherry. 'He wouldn't take you as a gift, old fat man.'

'Yah!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The caravanners walked on, laughing. Billy Bunter, apparently not yet quite easy in his fat mind, continued to blink back till the man in uniform was lost in the dusty distance. Not till then did he resume munching cake. Then, once more, William George Bunter was himself again. There was always comfort in cake.

ANTS IN HANTS

'KNOW that johnny?'

Bob Cherry asked the question, with a grin, as he indicated a tall, lean figure in tweeds ahead on the road, in the county of Hampshire.

The caravan was crawling. Billy Bunter chose, that sunny afternoon, to stretch his fat legs. He was walking. But he did not stretch those plump limbs unduly. The caravan had to crawl because Bunter was crawling, and the other caravanners had, necessarily, to crawl also - unless, indeed, they were to march on and leave Bunter and his caravan behind them - as perhaps at times they were tempted to do.

Several days had passed and the caravanners had crossed the county border into Hants. Billy Bunter had forgotten his terror of 'bobbies' and 'coppers'. Twice or thrice, during those days, the van had been stopped and looked into by police officers on the roads. Evidently that nefarious scientific gentleman, Marcus Krinko, was still at large, and a widespread watch was being kept for him. Since their encounter with Inspector Fixer, Harry Wharton and Co. had also kept their eyes on the alert for a man with a dark pointed beard and longish hair, which was Mr. Krinko's description, but no such person had materialized. They would have been quite pleased to lend a hand in laying the rogue by the heels, had they, by some fortunate chance, fallen in with him. But no such chance seemed likely to accrue.

But as Bob Cherry drew attention to the pedestrian on the road ahead, his comrades all looked in that direction. Pedestrians on Hampshire highways and bye-ways had no particular interest for them - unless one turned out to be the original of the photograph Mr. Fixer had shown them. In which case they were prepared to notify the nearest police station, or to dial Whitehall 1212, as requested on the radio.

They gazed at a lean back in a tweed jacket. There was something familiar in that rather tall and angular figure, but only its back could be seen.

'Know him?' repeated Bob, with a grin.

'Seems something sort of familiar,' said Frank Nugent.

'Who-?'

'More familiar in a cap and gown, than in a tweed jacket and a Homburg hat!' said Bob. 'Don't you know Quelch from a back view?'

'Quelch!' exclaimed all the caravanners, together.

'Bet you!' said Bob. 'Quelch does walking stunts in the vac. I'll bet he's on one of his hundred mile grinds now. Might push on and offer him a lift, what? He looks as if he could do with one.'

'Good egg!' said Harry.

Having scanned the angular figure in advance, the Famous Five had no doubt that it was Mr. Quelch, their respected form-master at Greyfriars. Quelch was well known for his 'walking stunts'. At Greyfriars, he often walked Mr. Prout, or Mr. Capper, or Mr. Wiggins, off their legs. But now, as the schoolboy caravanners sighted him from the rear, he was walking slowly. Probably Quelch was on his twentieth mile - perhaps his twenty-fifth! Anyhow he had considerably slowed down from his usual vigorous pace. That Hampshire road was a little uphill, and no doubt Mr. Quelch was a little tired. It was quite a happy thought to overtake him and offer him a lift in the red caravan. To Harry Wharton and Co. at least, it seemed a happy thought. But that did not seem to be Billy Bunter's impression. The fat Owl was chewing toffee, as he rolled on at a snail-like pace. He ceased to chew toffee, as he heard the remarks of the other caravanners, and fixed his eyes and spectacles on the angular figure ahead. The blink that he gave the back in the tweed jacket was inimical.

'I say, you fellows, did you say that that's that beast Quelch?' exclaimed the fat Owl.

'No, we didn't!' said Bob, 'and you'd better not let him hear you say so, either. He hasn't got his cane with him, but he's got a stick under his arm.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Hurry up a bit, Jervis!' called out Bob. Jervis was leading the caravan horse. His eyes also were fixed on the angular figure in tweeds. He did not seem to hear Bob's call. The caravan crawled on. And Bob's request was immediately countermanded by a fat squeak from Billy Bunter.

'Jervis!'

'Sir!'

'Stop!'

'Very good, sir.'

Jervis had not seemed to hear Bob's call. But he heard Bunter's squeak, and the van stopped immediately.

Five expressive looks were cast at Billy Bunter. Often and often during that caravan trip he had tried the patience of the rest of the party. Billy Bunter liked throwing his weight about, and he had quite a lot to throw. Johnny Bull had, in fact, suggested 'chucking' it, and leaving the fat Owl to his own devices, but the Co. hesitated to take that step. Now, however, patience was rather near the limit.

'Look here, you fat chump-!' began Johnny Bull.

Bunter blinked at him.

'That will do, Bull!' he snapped.

'My esteemed idiotic Bunter-'

'You can pack that up, Inky.'

'What are we stopping for, Bunter?' asked Bob Cherry, mildly.

'If that's Quelch, we're not going to catch him up!' answered Bunter, coolly. 'We have quite enough of Quelch at school, and we don't want any of him in the hols. At least, I don't.'

'He looks as if he could do with a lift, Bunter,' said Harry.
'Let him!' retorted Bunter. 'He smacked my head! You fellows know he smacked my head, just because I heard him reading out that letter to Prout by sheer accident.'

'You hear too many things by accident!' grunted Johnny Bull.
'Yah!'

'Look here, Bunter, let's push on and ask Quelch if he'd like a lift,' said Nugent.

'Shan't!'

'You fat ass-!'

'He smacked my head-'

'Nothing in it to damage, if he did,' said Bob.

'Beast! Stop where you are, Jervis. I'm going to sit down and rest for a bit.'

'Very good, sir.'

'You must need a rest, after crawling half a mile in half an hour,' remarked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'I'm going to do as I jolly well like, and chance it,' retorted Bunter.

'You can sit in the van and rest if you're tired,' suggested Harry.

'I'm going to sit down here.'

There was a wide green verge by the roadside. A little knoll, thick with grass, looked attractive in Bunter's eyes. He sat down on it. Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at him, as he sat. Jervis stood holding the horse, his eyes on the lean figure ahead, as it moved further and further into the distance. Billy Bunter blinked back at five pairs of gazing eyes, with a defiant blink.

Possibly the fat Owl was tired after doing half a mile in half an hour! But he did not choose to take a rest in the van. That van was not going to overtake Mr. Quelch. Quelch, probably, had long ago forgotten smacking the fattest head in his form. Bunter remembered it. Quelch was not going to get a lift in Bunter's caravan, and, Bunter being boss of the show, that was a matter for Bunter to decide. Bunter was boss, and if the other caravanners did not like it, they could lump it!

'How long do you want us to hang about here. Bunter?' asked Johnny Bull, breathing hard.

'Only till I'm ready to go on,' answered Bunter.

'How long are you going to squat there?' roared Johnny.

'Just as long as I like.'

Bob Cherry gave a sudden chuckle. His eyes, much keener than Billy Bunter's, even aided by the big spectacles, detected something about that grassy knoll which the fat Owl had not observed. Tiny forms were crawling in the grass all around Bunter.

'You'd better get up, Bunter,' chuckled Bob.

'Shan't!'

'You've sat down on an ant's nest.' Billy Bunter's fat lip curled in a sneer.

'You can't pull my leg, Cherry,' he answered. 'I'm sitting here till I'm ready to go on, and you can jolly well wait, see? It's my caravan, ain't it?'

'I tell you—'

'Yah!'

Billy Bunter settled down comfortably in the thick grass.

Evidently he did not believe in those ants!

The Famous Five were smiling now. They did not think that the fat Owl would remain comfortable for very long, with a host of disturbed ants swarming round him. Neither did he!

'Ow!' ejaculated Bunter, suddenly. He gave a jump.

'Wow! What's that? Something stung me—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Wow! Oh, crikey! Wow!' He bounded to his feet.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! Beasts!' gasped Bunter. 'What are you cackling at? Ow! Why, they're all over me—. Oooh! They're biting me—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! wow! I'm smothered with ants!' yelled Bunter. 'They're crawling all over me! 'Think it's funny, you beasts?'

Apparently the chums of the Remove did think it funny. They yelled, as the fat Owl wriggled and squirmed frantically.

'Ants in the pants in Hants!' chuckled Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Wow! They're tickling me all over—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm smothered with 'em—!' shrieked Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Wooogh! I shall have to get my clobber off—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beasts! '

Billy Bunter made a frantic dive for the van, and disappeared into it. He took with him quite an army of ants. For quite a considerable time, the fat Owl was busy with those ants; consoled, perhaps, though more probably not, by peals of laughter outside the van.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

'JOLLY!' said Bob Cherry.

'Um!' murmured Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were silent. They did not seem to be quite so merry and bright as was their wont. And in fact, even the cheery Bob's remark was not made with his accustomed cheeriness. Bob was the fellow to find anything and everything 'jolly': probably he would have found it quite jolly on Robinson Crusoe's island, or in the middle of the Sahara desert. But a damper seemed to have fallen on the spirits of the Greyfriars caravanners.

The caravan was camped on a wide green common, and the surroundings were jolly enough, if it came to that. Red sunset glowed on stretches of waving grass. Almost all the colours of the rainbow glowed in the sky. Tall trees nodded in the distance, a balmy breeze stirring their foliage. Far away was a glimmer of red roofs of a village. The caravanners were finishing supper: in fact five of them had finished, while one, the fattest member of the party, was still going on. Jervis was busy in the van, preparing the bunk for his lord and master.

Billy Bunter was busy with a meat pie.

Bunter was frowning over that pie.

It was rather early for camping and suppering. But Billy Bunter had given the word - and in Bunter's caravan, Bunter's word was law. He had chosen a quite pleasant spot, on common land where caravanners were free to camp if they liked. Since his misadventures in Sussex, the fat Owl had acquired a much greater respect for notice-boards: indeed nothing would have induced him to camp again on any section of the earth's surface prohibited by the legend 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted'. Bunter had selected that spot partly because there was no peril of keepers or 'bobbies' or 'coppers' and partly because the other caravanners would have preferred to push on a few more miles. It was a disgruntled Owl that fine spring evening: more than ever disposed to throw his extensive weight about.

Ants in the pants had left Bunter disgruntled. But that was not all. The Famous Five sometimes felt their patience wearing thin. Perhaps it did not occur to them that Bunter's might be wearing thin also. But it was!

Bunter was not satisfied.

In the Remove passage at Greyfriars, Bunter was nobody - or a little less than nobody - a quite inconsiderable person at whom a Latin dictionary might be buzzed or who might be booted for his sins. Here, lord and master of a caravan and a man-servant, he was somebody - and in his own esteem, a very important somebody. And if these fellows couldn't understand the difference, Bunter was going to make it clear to them.

Bunter, in fact, was indignant. His indignation was indicated by the frown on his plump brow over the meat pie.

However, his attention was concentrated, for the time, on the pie. First things came first, with Bunter. He had something to say to the other caravanners, but not till he had travelled through that pie to the final morsel.

Jervis came out of the van, with his sleeping-bag and groundsheet. It was Jervis's custom to retire to a respectful distance for his sleeping-quarters, while the Famous Five crowded in the tent, and Billy Bunter snored in the van. He drew his master's attention with a deferential cough, and the fat Owl blinked round at him.

'Is there anything more, sir?' asked Jervis.

'My bed ready?' asked Bunter.

'Quite, sir.'

'You've shoved in the hot-water-bottle?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'All right! You can go to bed.'

'Thank you, sir! Good night, sir.'

Jervis walked away, disappearing towards a shady copse at a distance. Billy Bunter's attention reverted to the meat pie. The Famous Five glanced rather curiously after Jervis as he went. That sleek, smooth, deferential man-servant was something of a puzzle to them. Bunter's caravan had been unexpected: his man-servant had been more unexpected still. During a couple of weeks of caravanning, they had become used to him, but he still puzzled them a little.

The sun sank lower, and a crescent moon glimmered in the sky. Johnny Bull gave a yawn. 'What about turning in?' he asked. Bunter blinked up from the meat pie. 'Don't turn in yet,' he said.

'Eh? Why not?'

'I've got something to say first. Wait till I've finished my supper.'

Johnny Bull breathed rather hard. He seemed about to make a reply more suitable to the Remove passage at Greyfriars, than to a caravan-camp where William George Bunter was boss of the show. Bob Cherry hastily interrupted.

'What about shoving the radio on?' he asked.

Bunter blinked up again.

'Don't!' he said. 'I don't want it on.'

'Might be some news of that man Krinko!' said Bob.

'Blow that man Krinko.'

As Bunter did not want the radio on, and it was Bunter's radio in Bunter's van, that was that! But there were visible signs of restiveness among the other caravanners. However, the Famous Five sat it out till Bunter had finished his extensive travels through that meat pie.

Then, at length, he fixed his spectacles and his attention on the five. The frown on his plump brow deepened. 'I say, you fellows, we'd better have this out!' said Bunter.

'Have what out?' asked Harry Wharton, mildly.

'I don't like the way you fellows carry on!' said Bunter, severely. 'Laughing at a fellow when he gets ants in his pants—' 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'There you go again!' hooted Bunter. 'A fellow can't open his mouth without some of you cackling. And when we run into old Quelch, you want to give him a lift in my van. Whose van is it, I'd like to know, yours or mine?'

'Yours, old fat man,' said Bob.

'Well, you just remember that!' said Bunter. 'You fellows may be top dogs in the Remove when we're at school, but we ain't at school now, and I'm top dog here—See? I'm running this show! I'm standing you fellows an expensive caravanning holiday, everything of the best and lots of it, and are you grateful?' 'Eh!'

'Are you grateful?' demanded Billy Bunter, scornfully. 'You're not! If I hadn't asked you for the hols, where would you be? I'm treating you generously. I always was a generous chap, as you know. But if you want me to go on treating you generously, you've got to mind your p's and q's. If I have any more cheek from you, I may chuck you. How would you like that?'

They gazed at him.

'That's that!' said Bunter, loftily. 'You can go to bed now if you like. But you'd better think over what I've said. I mean it! If you want to hang on to me for the hols, no more cheek, and no more back-chat! Just toe the line, and remember that I'm running this show. That's all.

Bunter waved a fat hand in dismissal.

They still gazed at him. They had wondered whether, and how long, patience would hold out. Now they knew.

'Sure that's all?' asked Harry Wharton, very mildly.

'That's the lot! Better chew on it! You can cut off to the tent now.'

'Thanks.'

The Famous Five cut off to the tent. Johnny Bull was frowning, Bob Cherry grinning, the other three smiling. They disappeared into the tent, leaving Billy Bunter following up the meat pie with a few jam tarts. Billy Bunter was looking, and feeling, satisfied. He had told those fellows off. He had put them properly in their place. He had made it absolutely clear that he, William George Bunter, was boss of the show, monarch of all he surveyed, and that he spoke as one having authority, saying 'Do this! and he doeth it!' And if they did not like it, they could lump it!

But, to Bunter's surprise, the Famous Five did not remain long in the tent. They emerged again, carrying bags. Apparently they had been packing.

The fat Owl blinked at them.

'I say, you fellows, what are you up to?' he asked.

'Taking a little walk,' said Bob Cherry, affably. He made a gesture towards the red roofs that glimmered in the distance across the green common. 'Trotting over to Tatham.'

'What are you taking your bags for?'

'Because we're staying there.'

'Eh?'

'Goodbye, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'Thanks for your generosity,' said Nugent.

'The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter.'

'Goodbye, old fat man.'

Billy Bunter sat blinking at five departing backs. He was taken by surprise. That heart-to-heart talk had been intended to put those cheeky fellows in their place, not to cause them to 'chuck' the caravan trip. That, however, was the effect it had produced. It seemed that their patience had run out at the same time as Bunter's!

'Yah!' snorted Bunter. 'Think I care?'

Bob Cherry looked back, and waved a parting hand.

'Cheerio!' he called out.

'Yah! Good riddance!' hooted Bunter. 'Same to you!' chuckled Bob.

They walked on and disappeared from the view of Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles. Billy Bunter, left on his own, finished the jam tarts, and rolled into the van. If those fellows chose to walk off, they could walk off and be blown to them: that parting of the ways did not worry William George Bunter. He turned into the bunk in the caravan, closed his eyes and opened his mouth, slept, and snored.

CHAPTER 26

WHO'S BOSS?

'MASTER Bunter—'

'Urrrrrgh!'

'Wake up, sir.'

'Gurrrrgh!'

Shake!

Billy Bunter was quite unwilling to wake. It was an early hour of the morning - much too early for Bunter. The spring morning was bright and sunny; the sky was blue, and the sun was shining. Had the Famous Five been in the camp, they would have been astir. But, in the changed circumstances, no one was astir but Jervis: and Bunter, if left undisturbed, would not have been astir for quite a long time yet. But he was not left undisturbed. Shake! shake!

Two little round eyes opened reluctantly.

'Wharrer marrer?' mumbled Bunter. He blinked at his man-servant.

'Is that you, Jervis? Wharrer you waking me up for, blow you!

Get out!'

'But, sir—'

'Get out of my van,' hooted Bunter, angrily. 'I didn't tell you to wake me in the morning, did I?'

'No, sir! But—'

'Well, then, what the thump do you mean by it? I'm not getting up yet. Get out of the van, and leave me alone.'

'The other young gentlemen, sir—'

'I said get out!' hooted Bunter.

'They are not here, sir.'

'I know that.'

'The tent does not appear to have been slept in.'

'I know that too! They're gone! Now get out and let a fellow have his sleep out, will you!' Bunter closed his eyes for resumed slumber.

Shake! shake! shake!

The little round eyes opened again with a glare of exasperation. Jervis, hitherto the most deferential of menservants, was deaf to his master's voice. He was shaking his lord and master into wide wakefulness.

Neither was his aspect so respectful as usual. His lips were compressed, and there was a glint in his eyes. It was quite a change in him.

Why Jervis, on whom the whole expense of that caravanning trip fell, chose to play the part of man-servant to a party of holiday-making schoolboys, was a mystery to which the fat and fatuous Owl had given little thought. It might be, of course, that Jervis saw in Bunter a superior person whom it was a pleasure and an honour to serve. That seemed possible - to Bunter! If he had any other motive, Bunter did not know what it was, and did not particularly want to know. He had fallen into

the way of regarding the caravan as 'his' caravan, and Jervis as 'his' man-servant: that was good enough for Bunter. The more deferential Jervis was, the more Bunter ordered him about: a very satisfactory state of affairs - to Bunter. And so accustomed had the fat Owl become, by this time, to the man's unvarying deference, that Jervis's present proceedings excited his deep wrath and indignation. Back-chat from his man-servant was really the limit!

'Wake up!' snapped Jervis.

Billy Bunter sat up. He groped for his spectacles, jammed them on a fat little nose, and glared at Jervis with a glare that might almost have cracked them.

'Shut up!' he roared. 'Get out of my van.'

'Did you say that they were gone?'

'Yes, I did! Get out.'

'Why are they gone?'

'Mind your own business.'

'Do you mean that they are gone for good?'

'Yes, I do! Now get out, blow you. What the dickens do you mean by waking me up without orders, and sticking in this van when I tell you to get out? I don't want any cheek from you, Jervis. Who's the boss here, I'd like to know!'

'Get out of that bunk.'

'Wha-a-at?'

'Get up, you lazy fat fool.'

Billy Bunter could hardly believe his plump ears. This was so complete and startling a change in Jervis! He sat and blinked at him, speechless. The sleek face had entirely lost its deferential expression. It was set and angry, the brows knitted, the eyes glinting. It brought back to Bunter's memory the Jervis of his first meeting in Friardale Lane. Never, since then, had Jervis revealed the savage temper that was hidden under his sleek manners. But it was coming out now.

'Get up, I tell you!' snapped Jervis.

And as the amazed and indignant Owl only stared at him, speechless, he twisted him bodily out of the bunk, with a bump on the floor of the van.

'Wow!' spluttered Bunter, as he bumped. He sat up on the floor, blinking up at his man-servant. Jervis's eyes glinted down at him.

'Now tell me what's happened while I was asleep last night. Have your friends turned you down and thrown the trip over?'

'We—we had a bit of a row,' stuttered Bunter. 'I've had enough of their cheek, and I told them so, and they walked off. What the dickens does it matter to you. I'd like to know?'

'I've wondered a good many times how they put up with you, you fat fool. You will have to mend your manners. Do you hear! You must ask them to come back, and keep on with the caravanning.'

'Shan't!' yapped Bunter. 'It's no business of yours.'

'Otherwise, the caravan trip ends here and now,' said Jervis.

'Either Wharton and his friends travel with us, or I shall kick

you out of this van, as I did the first time I saw you. Take your choice.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter tottered to his feet, in a state of bemused bewilderment. The change in Jervis was quite amazing. The meek man-servant had suddenly turned into the angry master - the iron hand was showing through the velvet glove! For some reason, it suited Jervis to carry on his caravanning with a party of schoolboys, and he had been both disturbed and angry to find them gone when he turned out in the morning.

Bewildered as he was by that startling and unnerving change in Jervis, Billy Bunter's fat mind assimilated the fact that he had to toe the line. 'His' caravan was Jervis's, and his happy belief that he was boss of the show had had a rude shock.

Jervis, if he chose, was 'boss of the show' - and evidently he chose now. It was Bunter who had to jump to orders, if he wanted that caravanning tour to go on at all, and he assuredly did not want to cut it short and wander back to Bunter Villa for the remainder of the Easter hols. Still less did he want to repeat the experience of his first meeting with Mr. Jervis. He could still remember the weight of Jervis's foot!

'Do you understand?' rapped Jervis.

'Eh! Oh! Yes!' stuttered Bunter. 'I-I-I'll ask them to join up again, if-if-if you make a point of it. I don't see why-'

'Never mind that! They must have put up somewhere for the night - most likely that village across the common, as it is the nearest place. Do you know?' Jervis almost snarled.

'Yes, Cherry said so.'

'They may leave early - but there will be time to catch them, if no time is lost. You would be too slow, you fat, lazy, crawling slug. I will go, and you shall write a note for me to take. Mind you word it in such a way that they will return. If they fail to do so, you know what to expect.'

'Look here-'

'Hold your foolish tongue, and do as I tell you.'

It was quite the Jervis of Friardale Lane again. Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose. But he held his tongue as commanded. Only too clearly, that beast Jervis was in a mood to repeat his performance on their first day of acquaintance.

'Sit down and write.'

Jervis produced pencil and paper. 'Say you are sorry - say anything you like, so long as they come back.'

'Wait till I get my clobber on.'

'Do you want your silly head smacked?'

'Ow! You keep off, you beast.'

'Lose no time, you fat dunderhead. They may go on their way early.'

Billy Bunter lost no time. He did not want his silly head smacked! He sat down and scrawled. Jervis glanced at the note when he had written it, and then stared at it, perhaps surprised

by its orthography. However, he folded it into an envelope, put it in his pocket, and, without another word to Bunter, jumped out of the van.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

He blinked after his departing man-servant with a devastating blink. Jervis was striding off in the direction of Tatham, across the common, with rapid strides. Evidently he was anxious to catch the Greyfriars juniors before they went on their way, wherever that might lead them.

'Beast!' repeated Bunter. 'Cheeky beast!'

And he rolled back to the bunk.

CALLED BACK

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'What-?'

'Jolly old Quelch!'

'Oh!'

It was a glorious spring morning. Harry Wharton and Co. were looking as bright as the morning: none the less so because they were no longer enjoying the fascinating company of William George Bunter.

Tatham was a pleasant little village, and it had a very pleasant inn at which the juniors had put up, after walking over from the caravan-camp the previous night. There was a very pleasant garden to the Coach and Horses Inn, bright with daffodils and shaded by trees, under one of which a table was set for breakfast in the open air. No snore from a caravan greeted their ears when they turned out that morning. They strolled out cheerfully into the inn garden. What other guests might be putting up at the Coach and Horses they did not know, till Bob Cherry spotted a familiar face looking from an open window, near the shady beech under which they were about to sit down to breakfast.

That their Greyfriars form-master, Henry Samuel Quelch, was somewhere in the neighbourhood, they were aware from the back view they had had of him the previous day. They had rather forgotten him since. Now they could guess that Mr. Quelch had been heading for this village, for here he was. He was sitting at the open window of his room, with a newspaper in his hands, but he was not reading at the moment. He was looking out into the sunny garden, no doubt enjoying the sunshine and the balmy air of spring.

He caught sight of the juniors at the same moment that Bob murmured to his friends. His somewhat severe countenance melted into a pleasant smile, as the Famous Five capped him respectfully.

'Good morning, my boys!' said Mr. Quelch, quite graciously.

'Good morning, sir!'

'Top of a beautiful morning, esteemed sir!' added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Quite an unexpected meeting,' said Mr. Quelch. 'Are you spending your holidays in Hampshire?'

'We've been caravanning, sir,' answered Harry Wharton.

'Caravanning?' repeated Mr. Quelch. He glanced round, as if expecting to see some sign of a caravan.

'Not our van,' added Harry. 'Bunter had a caravan for the hols, and we joined up, but-but-but we decided to go on from here on our own.'

Probably Mr. Quelch could surmise, from that reply, that there had been a spot of bother in the caravanning party. But Quelch

had tact: he did not pursue the subject. 'Well. I hope you will have a very pleasant holiday,' he said. 'I am on a walking tour myself and I find it very enjoyable. We are having a delightful spring.'

With that, Mr. Quelch nodded genially and disappeared behind his newspaper, which indicated that the interview was over. The juniors moved on to their table under the tree and sat down round it. A ruddy cheeked waiter served breakfast. Over breakfast, the chums of the Remove had some planning to do, and once more they rather forgot that their Greyfriars form-master was in the offing. The sudden end of the caravanning trip had left them at a loose end; what they were going to do with the remainder of the Easter hols was at present a moot question. As it happened, however, the answer to that question was at hand. They were busy with coffee and eggs, when Nugent suddenly ejaculated: 'Jervis!'

'Jervis!' repeated Harry, looking round. 'Oh!'

It was Jervis! He was coming across the garden towards them, the sunshine glimmering on his smooth, sleek face and horn-rimmed glasses. They all looked at him, as he came, in surprise. Having done with Bunter, they had not expected to see anything more of Bunter's man-servant. But here was Jervis: smooth and sleek and deferential as ever.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' said Jervis, touching his hat as he stopped at the table. 'I am very glad that I have found you here. Master Bunter would have been very much distressed otherwise.'

'How come?' asked Bob.

'Master Bunter regrets very much that there was anything in the nature of disagreement,' explained Jervis. 'He is extremely anxious that you should not abandon the caravan trip. I trust, sir, that you have not already made other plans.'

'Well, we hadn't yet decided where we go on from here,' said Harry. 'But—'

'Master Bunter has sent you this note, sir. He very earnestly desires you to rejoin the caravan,' said Jervis.

'Oh!'

Five faces registered surprise. As Billy Bunter's last remark, at the caravan-camp, had been 'Good riddance', the chums of the Remove could scarcely have expected an urgent recall. Neither were they much disposed to comply with it. However, Harry Wharton took the note from Jervis, and opened it, and the juniors read it together, Jervis waiting deferentially while they did so. None of the party thought of looking up at an upper window, or surmised for a moment that a pair of gimlet-eyes were fixed on them over the top of a newspaper. Those gimlet-eyes were in fact fixed chiefly on Jervis's sleek face.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came a sudden chortle round the breakfast table, as Harry Wharton and Co. read the note from Bunter. It ran:

Deer Wharton,

I hoap this finds you in time before you go off. Do cum back. I was only joaking last nite, just one of my little joaks. I was orfully sorrey when you kleered off like that. If I sedd anything you diddent like, I appolojise. A phellow can't say fairer than that. I take it awl back. Do joyn up agane, and phorget awl about it. If you don't come back I shall chukk up the tripp. You don't want to spoyle my hollyday like that, old chapp. Awl of you come back and be pals. Send your anser back by Jervis, and let me know that you ain't gowing to let me down.

Yore old pal,

W. G. Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

There was no doubt that that note from Billy Bunter was written in deep earnest. Evidently, he no longer regarded the departure of the Famous Five as a 'good riddance'. His views had plainly changed overnight! What had caused that unexpected change, the juniors naturally had not the remotest idea. Not for a moment could it occur to them that Billy Bunter's man-servant had pulled the strings. Billy Bunter's remarkable orthography caused a ripple of merriment, but his appeal did not fall on stony ground.

'The fat ass!' said Bob. 'He really wants us back—'

'Looks like it,' said Nugent, laughing.

'The lookfulness is terrific.'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'Bother him!' he said.

'Well, Bunter can't help being a howling ass and a blithering idiot,' said Bob Cherry, 'and we did say we'd caravan with him—'

'We did,' said Harry Wharton. 'If the fat chump is really keen on it, and it looks as if he is from this, we might try another go.'

'Let's!' said Bob.

'I trust, sir, that I may take back a favourable answer!' said Jervis, smoothly. 'Master Bunter is very much distressed, sir, by the breaking-up of the party.'

'O.K.?' asked Harry, looking round.

'O.K.!' answered the other four.

'All right then,' said Harry. 'Tell Bunter we're coming back, Jervis. We'll trot over after brekker.'

'Very good, sir! Thank you, sir.'

With that, Jervis departed, and the Famous Five resumed operations on coffee and eggs. It was no longer necessary to discuss new plans: that matter was now settled, quite

unexpectedly. They were going to rejoin Bunter, and carry on with the caravan, since the fat Owl seemed so deeply in earnest about it! But they did not hurry over breakfast, being in no particular haste to behold his fat visage again. And breakfast was not quite finished, when there came an interruption.

QUELCH WANTS TO KNOW

'WHARTON!'

'Yes, sir.'

Five fellows rose respectfully to their feet, as Mr. Quelch joined them at the table. They had rather forgotten that he was sitting at his window with his newspaper, within sound of their voices, while Jervis was there. Now he had come out of the inn into the garden, evidently to speak to them before they left, and the expression on his face surprised them a little. That expressive countenance wore a thoughtful, puzzled frown. And there was quite a sharp note in his voice. Something, apparently, had disturbed Quelch's equanimity, since he had greeted them so genially that morning, though they could not begin to guess what it was.

'Who is that man, Wharton?'

'Eh! What man, sir?' asked Harry, puzzled for the moment. Jervis had been gone ten minutes or more.

'The man who brought you a note from Bunter.'

'Oh! Jervis!'

'At my window, Wharton, I heard what was said here,' said Mr. Quelch. 'It seems that Bunter sent that man with a note to you. Who is he?'

'Bunter's man-servant, sir,' answered Harry, in wonder.

He could not imagine how or why the Remove master of Greyfriars could possibly be interested in Bunter's man Jervis.

'Bunter's man-servant!' repeated Mr. Quelch, raising his eyebrows a little. 'What do you mean, Wharton?'

'Only what I say, sir. The man's name is Jervis, and Bunter brought him along to wait on the party, and look after the horse, and so on.'

'Do you know anything of the man personally?'

'Only what Bunter's told us, sir.'

'When did you first see him?'

'When we joined up at the start of the hols, sir. Bunter was camped with his caravan at Woolley in Kent, and Jervis was with him there,' answered Harry, more and more surprised, while his comrades, equally surprised, stood silent.

There was a pause.

Mr. Quelch seemed plunged in deep and puzzled thought. But what was working in his mind was beyond the juniors' guessing. His interest in Bunter's man Jervis was quite inexplicable to them.

'It is very odd,' said Mr. Quelch, at last. 'I saw the man, very clearly, from my window, and was immediately struck by something very familiar about him. I am sure that I have seen him before somewhere, in different circumstances. But I cannot recall the name of Jervis.'

'That's his name, sir.'

'Bunter is a very foolish, thoughtless, and obtuse boy,' said

Mr. Quelch. 'He may have engaged some person without due inquiry into his character. Have you had any doubts of this man Jervis?'
'None at all, sir.'

'He seemed all right to us, sir,' said Bob.

'Only a spot too civil,' said Johnny Bull. 'But he must be O.K., sir, or he wouldn't be trusted with the cash for the trip.'

'Oh! Is that the case?' asked Mr. Quelch.

'That certainly is so, sir,' said Harry. 'Jervis sees to the supplies, and other expenses, and pays for them. Bunter leaves all that to him. Mr. Bunter must have trusted him with the funds.'

'In that case, he must be a quite trustworthy man,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I am glad to hear it. I certainly had an impression—' He broke off. 'As you are in my form at school, my boys, I felt bound to speak to you on the subject. But no doubt what I noted is only a chance resemblance. The man's features seemed familiar, that is all.'

With that, Mr. Quelch gave the juniors a nod and walked back into the inn. But his face was very puzzled and thoughtful as he went. That familiarity in the features of Billy Bunter's sleek man-servant seemed to trouble him somehow.

The juniors sat down to finish their breakfast somewhat mystified by that questioning from their form-master. But they concluded, as Quelch apparently did, that it could only be a case of some chance resemblance: it was highly improbable that the Greyfriars form-master had ever contacted Bunter's man-servant.

Breakfast over, the bill was paid, the bags packed, and the Famous Five left the Coach and Horses to walk back to the caravan-camp on the common. Bunter, they concluded, must have been up at an unusually early hour, as he had despatched Jervis after them so early, so they expected to see him when they arrived at the camp. Somewhat to their surprise, only Jervis was visible. He was busy preparing breakfast for his lord and master.

'Where's Bunter, Jervis?' asked Bob.

There was no need for Jervis to answer that question.

From the caravan came a familiar sound. It revealed where Bunter was.

Snore!

'Fat slacker!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Oh, suffering cats!' said Bob. 'Did he go back to bed after sending you after us, Jervis? I'll wake him up.' Bob put his head into the van. He grinned at a view of a fat face with the eyes shut and the mouth open.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' roared Bob.

Snore!

'Here we are again, old fat man.' Snore!

Bob stepped into the van, and jerked off the bedclothes. Then Billy Bunter's eyes opened, and he blinked drowsily.

'Is that you again, Jervis, you beast?' he mumbled.

'Ha, ha! No - another beast!' chuckled Bob. 'Jervis brought us your note, old porpoise, and here we are. We've come back.'

'No need to wake me up, if you have,' yapped Bunter. 'Can't you let a fellow have his sleep out?'

'Aren't we going on the road this morning?'

'Not till I'm ready! You can jolly well wait! I'm running this show!' snapped Bunter.

In the mists and shadows of sleep, Billy Bunter had rather forgotten how he had been called to order. But he was promptly reminded of it. Jervis put a sleek face into the van before Bob could reply.

'Breakfast is ready, sir!' he said. His manner was as deferential as of old, but there was a glint behind the horn-rimmed glasses.

'Well, I'm not!' yapped Bunter. 'You can call me again in an hour.'

'Your friends have returned, sir—'

'I know that.'

'They would like to get on the road, sir - it is already somewhat late in the morning.'

'I don't care—!' began Bunter. Then he caught the glint in Jervis's eyes, and stopped short. He remembered!

'Oh! I—I—I mean—I—I mean, all right, Jervis! I'll turn out now.'

'Very good, sir.'

'It—it's all right, Bob, old fellow,' added Bunter, hastily. 'I—I'm jolly glad you've come back—jig—jug—jolly glad! It wouldn't be like a holiday without you, old chap! We'll get on the road the minute I've had brekker. I—I'm turning out now.'

And Billy Bunter, reluctantly but inevitably, turned out!

MOONLIGHT MARCH

'How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.'

Bob Cherry was not often poetical. But the caravanners' surroundings, at the moment, were extremely picturesque and moved even Bob to poetical quotation.

They had halted at sunset in a Hampshire lane, on a wide green verge. On one side were dusky woods. On the other, green meadows where cattle grazed. Overhead the sky was a deep blue. The sun was setting in the west and a crescent moon glimmering up in the east. Sitting at ease in thick grass on the sloping bank by the lane, Harry Wharton and Co. were feeling very cheerful and comfortable. Billy Bunter was following up supper with an extensive plum pudding. Jervis was busy in the van. Bunter gobbled, and the other fellows rested pleasantly after the day's march. Bob Cherry stretched long legs in the grass, and under the influence of the attractive scenery, quoted Shakespeare. Billy Bunter blinked up from a well-filled plate, cast a blink round upon the picturesque scenery, and then blinked at Bob with a puzzled blink.

'Blessed if I can see it,' he said. 'Where is it?'

'Where's what?' asked Bob.

'That bank.'

'Eh?'

Billy Bunter cast another blink round, at dusky woods and dusty lane and glimmering meadows, and sniffed. 'What rot!' he said. 'I can't see any bank. There ain't a building in sight, so far as I can see. We're miles from everywhere. Where's that bank, if you can see one?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, either,' snapped Bunter. 'If you fellows are going to cackle every time a fellow opens his mouth, I can jolly well tell you-' Bunter paused. Since the episode on Tatham Common, when Jervis had so unexpectedly shown the cloven hoof, so to speak, Billy Bunter's man-servant had fallen back into his accustomed sleek and respectful deference. Bunter was once more, in appearance at least, 'boss of the show'. No one could have guessed, from Jervis's manner, that he had addressed his lord and master disrespectfully, and even bumped him bodily out of his bunk! The Famous Five, certainly, had no suspicion how matters stood. Billy Bunter was as disposed as ever to throw his extensive weight about, but after that glimpse of the iron hand in the velvet glove, he had taken warning. He did not want the Famous Five to 'walk out' on him again. So he paused in time.

'Well?' Johnny Bull gave the fat Owl a fixed look. 'What are you jolly well going to tell us, Bunter?' Johnny, undoubtedly, was prepared to 'walk out' again, at a moment's notice.

'Oh! Nothing!' said Bunter, hastily. 'I—I'm jolly glad you fellows joined up again. I—I don't think you're a cheeky ungrateful lot. I—I like your company, you know. I—I ain't fed up with you.'

'Thanks,' said Bob Cherry, gravely.

'The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter.'

'But you're talking rot,' added Bunter. 'There ain't any banks about here. Think they'd build a bank in the middle of these fields?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'There are banks and banks, old fat man,' chuckled Bob. 'I was quoting from Shakespeare.'

'Rot!' said Bunter. 'They hadn't any banks in Shakespeare's time.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can cackle, but I jolly well know they hadn't!' declared Bunter. 'Fat lot you know about the fourteenth century.'

'Oh, my hat!' said Nugent. 'Wasn't Shakespeare in the seventeenth, Bunter?'

'No, he wasn't!' retorted Bunter, positively. 'You don't know much about history, Nugent.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' snorted Bunter, and he resumed operations on the plum pudding, which really interested him much more than any variety of banks.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that somebody coming?' said Bob. Jarvis had put his head out of the van, and was staring down the lane, with a fixed stare, in the glimmer of the moon. The juniors all glanced in the same direction, but Jarvis's head disappeared into the van again. At a distance, a bowler hat bobbed into view.

'Somebody!' said Bob. 'Give him the once-over as he passes, you men.'

'Eh! Why?' asked Harry.

'Might be that sportsman that Mr. Fixer is after.'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'Might be!' he said.

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

'Well, Mr. Fixer asked us to keep our eyes peeled,' said Bob.

'And according to the radio, they haven't bagged that man Krinko yet. We know they're keeping watch on the roads, so they must think he's somewhere around these parts.'

Sniff, from Bunter, as he blinked up again from his plum pudding.

'They would!' he said. 'Bobbies haven't much gumption. Fat lot of good looking for him in Sussex and Hampshire, when he's up in Scotland all the time. That's where they'd be looking for him, if they had my brains.'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'They might if they had your brains,' he said. 'Spot of luck for that rogue Krinko if they had.'

'I tell you I jolly well know!' yapped Bunter. 'That letter Quelch had from him, just before we broke up at Greyfriars, had the Glasgow postmark, and Quelch handed it over to them.'

'And I'll bet Krinko banked that he would!' said Johnny. 'Ten to one he got some pal to post it, to put them on a false scent.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Bob. 'I suppose he might.'

'Quite likely,' said Harry, with a nod.

'Bosh!' said Bunter.

'Fathead!' said Johnny.

'Look here, you cheeky beast—I—I—I mean, I—I shouldn't wonder if you're right, old chap,' amended Bunter, hastily, as he remembered Jervis's warning to mend his manners. 'I—I say, you fellows, have some of this plum pudding. I can tell you it's good.'

But the Famous Five did not heed the plum pudding.

They were looking towards the bowler hat that had bobbed into view, and was approaching. If that elusive scientist, Marcus Krinko, was skulking somewhere in the southern counties, as the authorities seemed to suppose, it was within the bounds of possibility that wandering caravanners in unfrequented bye-ways might by happy chance clap eyes on him. It did not seem very probable, but in the cause of law and order, it was worth while to keep their eyes 'peeled'. So they all glanced at the face under the bowler hat as it came nearer.

Then they grinned as they recognized it. It bore no resemblance whatever to the photograph they had seen of the missing scientist. But it was a face they knew: no other, in fact, than Detective-Inspector Fixer's.

'No luck!' chuckled Bob.

'Jolly old Fixer!' said Nugent.

Mr. Fixer paused in his walk, for a moment, glancing at the caravan, which he evidently recognized. Then he came on towards the group of schoolboys on the grassy bank.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' called out Bob.

Mr. Fixer stopped, and gave them a nod and a smile. 'Still on the road,' he said, pleasantly.

'Yes, and we've been keeping our peepers open as you told us,' said Bob. 'We had them on you, Mr. Fixer, as you came along.'

Mr. Fixer laughed.

'We've given lots of people the once-over,' added Bob. 'But no luck.'

'Any suspicious character should be reported to the police,' said Mr. Fixer. 'It is quite probable that Krinko may have made some changes in his appearance, such as shaving off his beard. Luckily, his features are well known to me, as I met him several times when he was at Barnwell Research Station, and I should know him with or without his beard, but you boys might not. Keep your eyes open for any kind of suspicious character—you never know your luck.'

'We'll keep them wide open, sir,' said Harry. Mr. Fixer nodded, and walked on up the lane.

Billy Bunter blinked after him as he went, and sniffed. 'Fat lot of good mooching about Hampshire!' he said.

'If that chap had my brains, I know where he'd be looking.' At which the Famous Five chuckled. They had an impression that Detective-Inspector Fixer, of Scotland Yard, had at least as extensive an allowance of brains as William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

'We're going to keep our eyes peeled,' said Bob. 'But if that rogue Krinko has made himself look different from his photograph and from his description on the radio, he might walk by under our noses and we shouldn't know him, as we haven't had a close-up of him like that inspector chap. A beaver would look a different man without his beard - just as Bunter would be if he had a wash-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Yah!' from Bunter.

'Might as well get the tent up,' said Bob. 'Unless you feel like a few more miles this lovely evening, Bunter.'

'I don't!' yapped Bunter.

Jervis came out of the van. He stood for some moments, looking in the direction in which Detective-Inspector Fixer had disappeared up the lane. Harry Wharton and Co. went across to the caravan to get out the tent and other paraphernalia for camping. Then Jervis came over to the fat Owl, still busy with plum pudding, and spoke in a low voice: 'Master Bunter.'

Billy Bunter blinked up.

'Well?' he snapped.

'It is a lovely evening, sir, as Master Cherry remarked,' said Jervis, smoothly, 'and it is still quite early. You might like to push on, sir, before camping.'

'Rot!' said Bunter.

'I prefer it, sir, if you have no objection.'

'Well, I don't,' yapped Bunter.

Jervis bent his head, and spoke in a very low tone. 'You will do as you are told, you fat fool! Otherwise I shall go on with my van, and leave you here to explain matters to your friends. Is that what you want?'

Billy Bunter blinked at him. It was the cloven foot again! For some reason, utterly unknown and mysterious to Bunter, Jervis wanted to resume the march by moonlight. And Jervis was going to have his way. Most assuredly Billy Bunter did not want to be left where he was - to explain matters to the other caravanners! Very much indeed Bunter did not want anything of the kind. He breathed hard, and he breathed deep. His little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. But that sleek man-servant was master of the situation, and if Jervis said jump, William George Bunter had to jump!

'Look here, Jervis-!' mumbled Bunter. 'That will do! Are we going on?'

'Yes, if you like,' gasped Bunter.

'Very good, sir,' said Jervis, dropping back at once into his

accustomed deference. 'Perhaps you will kindly tell your friends so, sir.'

Billy Bunter gave him one devastating blink, and rolled off to the caravan.

'I say, you fellows,' he squeaked, 'don't get the tent out. J-j-jolly good idea of yours, Bob! We—we're going on.'

'Good man!' said Bob.

The Famous Five were more than willing to push on under the glimmering crescent of moon. Billy Bunter, willing or unwilling, had to push on. The caravan rolled off in a direction opposite from that taken by Detective-Inspector Fixer. And it was not likely to occur to any of the Greyfriars caravanners that that moonlight march had anything whatever to do with Detective-Inspector Fixer's presence in the locality.

CHAPTER 30

A PUZZLE

'Is that Quelch?'

'Looks like him.'

'Our jolly old beak again.'

'The esteemed Quelch!'

Billy Bunter blinked up morosely from a chocolate cake. If the other caravanners found anything pleasing in an unexpected view of their Greyfriars form-master, Billy Bunter found none whatever.

'Quelch!' he grunted. 'Where?'

'Just got off that bus.'

'Blow him!' said Bunter.

It was a golden afternoon. The sunshine was more like summer than spring. It was very pleasant, picnicking under shady branches. The Greyfriars caravanners were finding life a very cheerful proposition that afternoon.

They had stopped for tea on a grassy green verge between the highroad and a park wall. Trees over-topping the wall gave a grateful shade. They sat on camp stools round a folding-table that Jervis had set up. On that table was a jug of lemonade, and a dish piled with the sweet and sticky comestibles that gladdened the plump heart of William George Bunter.

Jervis, having supplied the wants of his lord and master, and of the less important members of the party, had gone into the van: Harry Wharton and Co. idly watched the traffic on the road, as they sat at lemonade and cakes. Cars whizzed every few minutes: cycles and motor-cycles buzzed by: pedestrians passed and re-passed. A bus rolled noisily up, and stopped at a little distance. When it rolled on its way again, the juniors noticed that a passenger had alighted on the other side of the road, and was standing there looking across. The lean figure and slightly crusty countenance were familiar to them. It was Mr. Quelch. And the gimlet-eyes under the brim of the Homburg hat were fixed on the picnicking caravanners.

'It's Quelch!' said Bob. 'Spotted us from that bus, and hopped off to speak to us.'

'Nice of him,' said Nugent, with a grin. 'The nicefulness is terrific.'

'Shove on your best manners and customs, if he comes across,' said Bob. 'Must be polite to a beak.'

'Politefulness is the procrastination of princes, as the English proverb remarks,' agreed the nabob of Bhanipur.

His comrades chuckled at that English proverb. But Billy Bunter did not chuckle. He frowned with an inimical blink at the lean figure across the road.

It was rather a surprise to the Co. to see Quelch again.

They were more than twenty miles from Tatham, where they had met him at the Coach and Horses a couple of days ago. Neither would

they have expected to see him travelling by bus. Quelch, on his walking tours, was a tireless foot-slogger and disdained wheels. Nevertheless, there he was: just off that bus.

'He's coming over,' said Harry.

'Blow him!' repeated Bunter. 'Don't ask him to stop.'

'Must be civil to a beak,' said Bob. 'Only civil to ask him to join up for tea.'

'Look here-!' hooted Bunter. Then he remembered, and paused.

'Oh! All right!' Bunter was learning manners! 'All right, old chap: just as you like.'



IT WAS MR. QUELCH

'Call Jervis to bring out another camp stool and tumbler,' said Harry.

'Jervis!' squeaked Bunter.

'Sir!'

Jervis put his head out of the van. 'Bring out a camp stool for Mr. Quelch.'

Jervis gave quite a jump, as if that name startled him.

His sharp eyes shot round over his horn-rimmed glasses, and fixed on the lean figure that had started to cross the road.

'And another tumbler,' added Bunter. 'Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly, sir.'

Jervis disappeared into the van again.

Harry Wharton and Co. gave him no heed. Their attention was on Mr. Quelch as he came across the road. They were not, perhaps, particularly exhilarated by an unexpected meeting with their Greyfriars form-master, but they were prepared, like well-

behaved youths, to 'shove on' their best manners, as Bob had suggested.

But a sudden startling sound from the caravan drew their attention in that direction.

Crash!

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob. 'What's that?'

'That' was a crash of breaking glass, a sudden fall, and a sharp cry. The juniors all stared round towards the caravan. Even Billy Bunter ceased for a moment to masticate chocolate cake and blinked round through his big spectacles.

'Jervis taken a tumble, sounds like,' said Nugent.

'Clumsy ass!' grunted Bunter.

'I'll look!' said Bob. And he ran across to the van.

It certainly sounded as if Jervis had taken a tumble and sustained some damage.

Bob looked in at the doorway.

Jervis was sitting on the floor, a handkerchief in his hand pressed to his face, surrounded by fragments of a broken tumbler. Apparently he had slipped and fallen with the glass in his hand and unluckily contacted the fragments with his face.

'Hurt, Jervis?' called out Bob. 'Cut yourself?'

Jervis tottered to his feet, his face almost hidden by the handkerchief.

'I have cut my face a little, sir,' he answered. 'My foot slipped when I dropped the tumbler, and I fell on the glass.'

'Can I help?' asked Bob.

'It is nothing, sir - only a few little cuts, and I have some sticking-plaster in my locker. But perhaps you would be kind enough to take the camp stool and tumbler that Master Bunter requires, while I attend to the cuts.'

'Certainly,' said Bob. 'But if there's anything I can do—'

'Nothing, sir, thank you very much. A little sticking-plaster will set the matter right.'

'O.K.,' said Bob. He stepped into the van and picked up a camp stool and a tumbler.' Jervis did not sort out the sticking-plaster till he had left the van.

'Any damage?' asked Harry Wharton, as Bob rejoined his friends at the tea-table.

'Jervis has cut his chivvy,' answered Bob. 'Dropped a tumbler and tumbled over on it. He's going to shove on some sticking-plaster. Here comes Quelch.'

The Famous Five capped Mr. Quelch respectfully as he came across the grass from the road. Billy Bunter followed their example, though there was an inimical gleam in the little round eyes behind the big round spectacles. A smack on a fat head is one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive: it lingered in the memory of the recipient.

'Jolly glad to see you again, sir!' said Bob.

'The gladfulness is terrific, esteemed sir,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Please sit down, sir.'

'Here's a chair, sir.'

'You'll join us at tea, won't you, sir?'

Billy Bunter added a grunt to the chorus of welcome.

Mr. Quelch, smiling genially, sat down. The crustiness that was often visible in his countenance in the Remove form-room at Greyfriars was quite absent now. He seemed quite pleased to meet the cheery Co. again.

Yet the Famous Five had an impression that it was not wholly for the sake of a chat with boys of his form on holiday that Quelch had alighted from the bus. They could not help noticing that the gimlet-eyes glanced to and fro, as if in expectation of seeing some person other than themselves. It reminded them of the strange interest Quelch seemed to have taken in Jervis, after his view of Bunter's man-servant at the Coach and Horses at Tatham. And that Jervis was, in fact, in Mr. Quelch's mind, soon transpired.

'Is Bunter's man-servant still travelling with you?' he asked.

'Oh, yes, he's still with us,' answered Harry.

'Couldn't manage without a man-servant,' chirruped Bunter.

Mr. Quelch did not seem to hear that. The gimlet-eyes glanced round again.

'I do not see him,' he said. 'Is he absent now?'

'No. He's in the van,' said Bob. 'I believe he's busy with sticking-plaster now.'

'Sticking-plaster!' repeated Mr. Quelch, raising his eye-brows.

'Yes, he's had a bit of an accident, and cut his face on a broken glass.'

'Dear me! When did this happen?'

'Just as you came up, sir, only a few minutes ago. Will you try one of these cakes, sir?'

'Thank you. Cherry.'

Mr. Quelch accepted the smallest of the cakes on the dish.

Quelch was somewhat past that stage in human existence when sweet and sticky cakes afford delight. However, he graciously accepted a very small one, and even went so far as to munch a small section of it. Harry Wharton poured out lemonade. Billy Bunter travelled steadily through his chocolate cake, finished it, and started on cream puffs. It was quite a pleasant party round the tea-table, till, after ten minutes or so, Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

'I must be going on,' he said, 'but I should be interested to look at your caravan.'

'Certainly, sir!'

The Famous Five walked across to the van with their form-master. Billy Bunter blinked after them, but sat tight with his cream puffs. Mr. Quelch did not enter the van: he stood and looked into it through the open doorway. The juniors stared, as they looked in with him. Jervis did not present his accustomed sleek and smooth aspect. His face was criss-crossed with sticking-plaster. It looked as if he must have sustained a good many

cuts, for he had used the sticking-plaster very liberally. In fact, he was hardly recognizable.

Mr. Quelch gave him a glance, glanced round the interior of the caravan, and turned away. The juniors walked with him to the roadside, where he signalled an approaching bus. When that bus rolled on, with Mr. Quelch a passenger in it, the Famous Five stood and exchanged puzzled looks.

'What the dickens has Quelch got in his noddle?' asked Bob Cherry. 'He jolly well never dropped on us by chance. He jolly well wanted to give Bunter's man-servant the once-over again.' Harry Wharton nodded.

'Looks like it,' he said. 'He could easily get news of a caravan - and he hopped on a bus to catch us up. Keeping an eye on us.'

'But why?' asked Nugent.

'The whyfulness is terrific.'

'Blessed if I make it out,' said Bob. 'He fancied that he had seen the man before, and seemed to have some doubts about him, and I'll bet he trailed us to get a good look at him. Not much use, as it turns out - with all that sticking-plaster over Jervis's chivvy. But what the dickens has he got into his head about the man?'

'Goodness knows.'

It was quite a puzzle to the chums of the Remove.

However, Quelch was gone, and tea was over, and it was time to push on on the road. Billy Bunter rolled into the van, and the van rolled on its way. Puzzled as they were, the juniors soon dismissed the matter from mind.

They would not have dismissed it so easily, however, could they have followed Mr. Quelch's further movements. While the Greyfriars caravanners were pushing cheerily on their way under the sunset, the Remove master was standing at a telephone in a post office-and he was calling Whitehall 1212.

THE WANTED MAN

'OH what a beautiful morning! Oh what a beautiful day!'

Bob Cherry had burst into song. It was undoubtedly a beautiful morning, and his spirits were exuberant. Bright sunshine streamed from a blue sky on the Greyfriars caravanners, and every face was cheerful. Harry Wharton and Co. were enjoying fresh air, exercise, and spring sunshine, as they walked with the caravan. Billy Bunter was enjoying a packet of toffee as he sat on the van. Jervis was leading the horse: whether his face was cheerful or not, could hardly be discerned under the criss-cross of sticking-plaster. Certainly it was a very cheery party of schoolboys on holiday, their faces as bright as the spring sunshine.

A man in a bowler hat, sitting on a stile by the roadside, watched the caravan, and the caravanners, as they came towards him. His eyes, keen as a hawk's, glanced over Billy Bunter's fat visage, sticky with toffee, over the cheery faces of the Famous Five, and rested on Jervis with so intent a gaze that it seemed as if it would penetrate the criss-cross of sticking-plaster. As the van came nearer, he slipped from the stile and stepped out into the road. Then Bob Cherry suddenly broke off his musical effects, and ejaculated:

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Jolly old Fixer.' All eyes turned on Mr. Fixer.

'Good morning,' said Mr. Fixer, pleasantly.

'Good morning, sir!'

'Want us to stop, and give our van the once-over?' asked Bob, with a grin. 'No suspicious characters on board. Mr. Fixer.'

'We've had the van looked into, more than once,' said Nugent.

'Like to have another look, Mr. Fixer.'

Mr. Fixer shook his head with a smile.

'No, don't stop,' he said. 'Nothing to stop for! I'll walk a little way with you.' He glanced at Jervis: quite a casual glance.

'Your man had an accident?' he asked.

'Tumbled on some broken glass, and cut his face,' answered Bob.

'How does it feel now, Jervis?'

'A little painful, sir. But not too bad,' answered Jervis.

'He, he, he!' from Bunter on the van. 'You look jolly funny with all that sticking-plaster stuck on your face, Jervis.'

'Indeed, sir.'

'You shouldn't be so jolly clumsy, you know,' said Bunter.

'Quite so, sir.'

Jervis moved on with the horse. Mr. Fixer fell into step with the Famous Five. They regarded him a little curiously. They rather liked the man from Scotland Yard and were quite pleased to meet him again, but it looked as if he had been sitting on

that stile waiting for them to pass, and they could not imagine why.

'Have you been keeping your eyes open for suspicious characters, since I saw you last?' smiled Mr. Fixer.

'Wide open,' said Bob, 'but we haven't spotted any.'

'Hasn't anybody spotted that man Krinko yet?' asked Nugent.

'Nothing about it on the radio this morning.'

'There may be something about it soon,' said Mr. Fixer. 'We have received what may prove to be very valuable information. It is quite interesting, if you would care to hear it.'

'Oh!' ejaculated all the juniors together.

They fairly blinked at Mr. Fixer. Certainly they were interested: there was no doubt about that. But that a detective-inspector, on the trail of a guilty man on the run, should dream of taking a party of holiday-making schoolboys into his confidence, was too amazing. Really, they could hardly believe their ears. They noticed that Jervis gave Mr. Fixer a quick look - no doubt he was equally surprised. Even Billy Bunter ceased operations on the toffee for a moment to blink at Mr. Fixer. The detective's manner, however, was quite casual. He did not seem to be aware that he had said anything out of the common.

'It was actually a very lucky chance,' continued Mr. Fixer. apparently unaware of astonished looks. 'A school-master on holiday was reading his paper at the window of his room at the inn where he had put up, when a man came to the inn with a message. He had a very full view of him, without the man being aware of it, and was struck by his resemblance to someone he had known years before.'

The Famous Five exchanged looks. This from Mr. Fixer sounded, to them, remarkably like the episode of Mr. Quelch at the Coach and Horses at Tatham.

Mr. Fixer went casually on: 'Our friend the schoolmaster was very much puzzled and perplexed, for although he was assured that he knew the man, he could not place him. Thinking over the matter during the day, however, it occurred to him that the man had made changes in his appearance since their former acquaintance. He had been at one time a science master at the same school, but at that time he had worn a beard and longish hair. This person, however, was clean shaven with close-cropped hair: also he wore horn-rimmed glasses, and our schoolmaster's former acquaintance had never needed glasses. The change in his looks was very great if he was the same man.'

Mr. Fixer paused for a moment. Nobody spoke.

'So what do you think our schoolmaster did?' resumed Mr. Fixer, still in the same casual tone. 'He decided, the next day, to follow the person about whom he had these suspicions, and make absolutely sure of his identity.'

'And - and did he?' gasped Bob.

'He did,' said Mr. Fixer, with a nod. 'The person, as he was aware, was attached to a caravanning party—'

'A—a—a caravanning party.'

'Yes, in the capacity of a man-servant—'

'Oh!'

'It was easy to pick up news of a caravan, and follow,' continued Mr. Fixer. 'But when he saw the man again, there was another change in his appearance. He appeared to have had an accident.'

'An—an accident?'

'Yes! A fall, it seems, on some broken glass.'

'Oh!'

'So that when our schoolmaster saw him, his face was scarcely to be recognized; it was so screened by sticking-plaster.'

'Oh!'

'Had it been a chance meeting, no doubt this accident - or trick, whichever it was, would have passed muster. But as our schoolmaster had joined the caravan party especially to observe the man, he concluded that so timely an accident was nothing but a trick to escape recognition: that the pretended man-servant was, in fact, the man he remembered from years before as a science master at his school.'

'Oh!'

'And so,' continued Mr. Fixer, smiling, 'he lost no time in telephoning Whitehall 1212, and stating his suspicions in the proper quarter, leaving the rest to the police.' There was a dead silence in the caravan party, as Mr. Fixer ceased to speak. It was a stunned silence.

Harry Wharton and Co. looked at Jervis. Billy Bunter blinked at him. Amazing as it was; bewildering as it was; it was obvious that what Mr. Fixer had related, referred to Mr. Quelch and Jervis. Obviously it could mean nothing else. But Jervis gave no sign. He walked on at the horse's head as if he had heard nothing.

Harry Wharton broke the silence.

'You are speaking of Mr. Quelch!' he said.

'Yes: that is the schoolmaster's name,' assented Mr. Fixer.

'And we are the caravanners—?'

'Exactly.'

'Then what—?'

Harry Wharton did not finish asking that question. Up to that moment, Jervis had given no sign. But at that moment came a sudden change. With a sudden bound, he left the horse and reached the hedge at the side of the road. With a crash, he went through the hedge, and a moment later was seen running across the field beyond, with the fleetness of a deer.

'Oh!' gasped Harry.

'Jervis!' squeaked Bunter.

The juniors stared after the running man. Mr. Fixer gazed after him. He made no move to pursue. He smiled.

Bob Cherry, in his excitement, caught the detective by the arm.

'Look here, Mr. Fixer!' he exclaimed. 'Is that man—that man Jervis - Bunter's man-servant—is he—is he that man you're after? It doesn't seem possible, but—is he?'

'Krinko!' exclaimed Nugent.

'Precisely!' said Mr. Fixer. 'He has as good as told us so, now. One could not be sure, of course, that your schoolmaster's suspicions were well-founded—but it was easy to put it to the test.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Harry. 'That's why you told us - for Jervis to hear—'

Mr. Fixer laughed.

'I do not, as a rule, take schoolboys into my confidence,' he said. 'I had a special reason on this occasion.'

'To make the man give himself away?' said Johnny Bull. 'But you've let him get away, too, if he's the man. He's cleared.'

'I hardly think that he will get very far,' said Mr. Fixer, cheerfully. 'Other eyes have been on the watch while I have been enjoying this walk and talk with you young fellows. However, I will leave you now. I shall be seeing you again - I shall require statements from you, and especially from Master Bunter, upon whom that rascal seems to have palmed himself off as a man-servant.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Mr. Fixer gave the juniors a cheery nod and walked away at a brisk pace. He left the caravan at a halt and the caravanners gazing at one another blankly.

'Oh, crikey!' repeated Billy Bunter, quite faintly.

'Well,' said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. 'That's what Quelch was after yesterday! And we've been keeping our eyes open for that man Krinko—and he's been under our noses all the while! Bobbies and coppers and peelers hunting for him all over the shop - and him caravanning with us - Bunter's jolly old man-servant! This beats the band!'

And his comrades agreed that it did.

NOT SO GOOD FOR BUNTER

'THIS is the BBRC. Home Service. Here is the news.'

'Listen in, you chaps.'

'Yes, rather!'

'The ratherfulness is terrific.'

'I say, you fellows—'

'Shut up, Bunter.'

'But what about dinner?'

'Blow dinner! Shut up.'

'But I say—'

'Kick him, somebody.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter's fat voice was music to his own ears: seldom to others. On the present occasion it was more than usually superfluous. For it was one o'clock, time for news on the radio, and the Famous Five were very eager for news. Never, indeed, had they been such eager listeners-in.

In fact, they had been waiting impatiently for one o'clock without giving a single thought to dinner, which to Billy Bunter was, naturally, a far more important matter than anything that could emanate from Broadcasting House.

The Greyfriars caravanners were in camp and Bob Cherry had turned on the portable radio. They had already had an official visit from the police, and statements had been taken of all they knew of the man who had called himself James Jervis. The Famous Five knew little or nothing - they had taken the man on trust as Bunter's man-servant, and that was all. Billy Bunter knew little more, and he was extremely reluctant to state what he knew, but it had to come out and the Famous Five had listened in amazement to the true story of Bunter and his man-servant - and his caravan. Now they were very eager to know what had become of that extraordinary man-servant, whom they had last seen making a desperate bolt across the fields. They expected to hear something on the one o'clock news.

'Oh, blow!' said Bob, as the announcer began with an account of a conference in Paris. They were not, at the moment, interested in Paris conferences.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Shut up, Bunter. Krinko may come next.'

'Blow Krinko!' yapped Bunter. 'Look here, we haven't got a man-servant now, and who's going to cook the dinner? You haven't even got the cooking-stove out of the van.'

'You couldn't get it out, if you tried very hard?' inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'Oh, really, Bull--'

'You cook the sosses and spuds, Bunter, while we listen in to the news,' suggested Bob.

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Get to it, you fat slacker,' said Nugent. 'Dry up, anyway.'
'If you fellows think I'm going to do the chores now that we haven't got a man-servant—'

'Shut UP!' roared Bob. 'Listen you fellows. Here it comes,'
The announcer's voice ran on:

'The missing scientist, Marcus Krinko, who absconded from Barnwell Research Station several weeks ago, and for whom a very extensive search has been going on, is now under arrest.'

'They've got him!' murmured Bob.

'It appears that Krinko, while awaiting an opportunity to escape from the country, evaded detection so long by playing the part of a man-servant in attendance on a party of caravanners, who are stated to be a number of schoolboys on their Easter holidays.'

'Us!' murmured Bob.

'These boys had no suspicion of his real identity, and there is no doubt that it was by travelling in such innocent company that the man succeeded in remaining at large for so long a period. This morning, however, Detective-Inspector Fixer, acting on information received from a schoolmaster who had known Krinko before his appointment at Barnwell, traced the man, and he was arrested after a last desperate attempt at flight. We understand that the official documents he had taken with him when he disappeared were found on his person.'

'So that's that,' said Harry.

'Our special correspondent reports from Nyasaland—' continued the announcer.

Bob Cherry shut off the radio. The Famous Five were not, at the moment, any more interested in Nyasaland than in Paris conferences.

'Well, we're through with Mr. Jervis-Krinko,' said Bob. 'What an artful dodger - caravanning with a bunch of schoolboys on an Easter holiday! No wonder the bobbies never spotted him, right under their noses. He took us all in.'

Snort, from Johnny Bull.

'He couldn't have taken us in if he hadn't taken in that fat ass to start with,' he said. 'He must have thought himself in luck when he fell in with a dithering nitwit like Bunter.'

'Yah!' from Bunter.

'Bunter's caravan!' snorted Johnny. 'I jolly well knew there was a catch in it somewhere. I told you so.'

'And but for Quelch, the rogue might have got by with it,' said Harry. 'A spot of luck, Quelch turning up.'

'That's all very well,' snapped Bunter. 'But Jervis was a jolly good man-servant, and now he's gone. Of course I'm glad they've got him, if he's really Krinko - but we haven't a man-servant now. I don't see how we're going to manage without a man-servant.'

'Lots at Bunter Court, aren't there?' inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically. 'You can wire for one.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'I fancy we can manage without a man-servant, if the trip goes on,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'But does it go on to the end of the hols? As it turns out, this van wasn't Bunter's at all. Jervis must have paid the hire on it. His game must have been to skulk about as a caravanner, and then, when he fell in with Bunter and found what a nitwit he was, he thought up the idea of having a party of schoolboys with him as a smoke-screen. But it was his van, not Bunter's - and not ours.'

'True, O King,' assented Bob.

'That's all right,' said Bunter. 'Nothing to worry about in that. We've got the van, and all we need do is to go on paying the hire. I'll pay it.'

'Good!' grinned Bob. 'Leave that to Bunter.'

'You can leave it to me, of course, as I asked you fellows on this trip,' said Bunter. 'Some of you would have to lend me the money, that's all.'

'A mere trifling detail!' remarked Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, I don't see chucking the trip, because Bunter's lost his man-servant,' said Bob. 'Let's keep it up for the hols. The old folks at home will see us through with the van, if we put it to them, and we can manage for the rest. That is, of course, if Bunter could possibly manage to carry on without a man-servant, after what he's been accustomed to at Bunter Court.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' grunted Billy Bunter. 'I shall miss Jervis a lot - I'm accustomed to being waited on hand and foot, as you fellows know. Still, I can rough it. You fellows will have to play up, of course. You can't slack about now Jervis is gone. You can take it in turns looking after the horse, and cooking, and peeling potatoes, and washing up, and all that. There's not such a lot to do, if you get down to it. Now what about dinner? I'm jolly hungry, I can tell you.'

'O.K.!' said Bob. 'Bunter's settled it all.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, do stop cackling,' hooted Bunter. 'I tell you I want my dinner. Who's peeling those spuds?'

'You are!' said Johnny Bull.

'If you think I'm going to peel spuds, Bull—'

'I think I'm going to kick you if you don't.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Pile in, old fat man,' chuckled Bob. 'We're going to carry on without a man-servant somehow - and that means every man doing his whack. Your whack is peeling spuds and washing up.'

'Washing up!' gasped Bunter.

'Just that! Now get going with those spuds, while I set up the stove.'

'Shan't!' roared Bunter.

Thud!

'Yaroooh!'

'Getting going?'

'Ow! wow! Beast! I-I-I'll peel the spuds if you like.' And Bunter did.

Billy Bunter was, in fact, the only member of the Greyfriars caravanning party who missed the services of that excellent manservant, James Jervis. The Famous Five liked caravanning on their own - and Billy Bunter seemed to like it better than Bunter Villa, even with peeling potatoes and washing up thrown in. Harry Wharton and Co. enjoyed every day of those sunny Easter holidays - and so, even if he did not find it quite so good as before with the addition of peeling potatoes and washing up, did Bunter the Caravanner.

The next book in

THE BILLY BUNTE SERIES

Will be BILLY BUNTER'S BODYGUARD