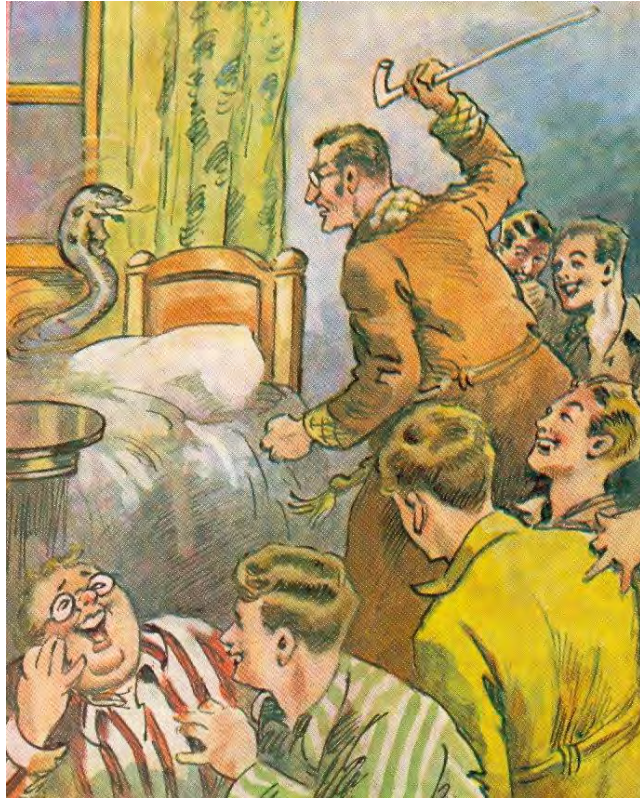


**BUNTER THE
STOWAWAY**



FRANK RICHARDS



MR. QUELCH STRODE INTO THE BEDROOM, CLUTCHING THE STICK

BUNTER THE
STOWAWAY

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CHAPTER 1

A DEAD SECRET

'NOT a word to Bunter!'

Billy Bunter grinned.

Really, Billy Bunter could not help grinning. Every word uttered in No. 12 study in the Remove came to a fat ear, glued to the keyhole of that study door.

Inquisitiveness was Billy Bunter's besetting sin. He always wanted to know, and he had his own methods of doing so, which were not at all popular in the Greyfriars Remove.

After classes that day, Bunter had been surprised to see Harry Wharton & Co. come up to the studies. Generally, these strenuous youths were keen on the open spaces, after Mr. Quelch had finished with them, but now, instead of streaming out with the rest, when Quelch dismissed his form, they had gone to Lord Mauleverer's study, No. 12. That had caused Bunter's present inquisitiveness. He wanted to know why.

The matter did not, of course, concern him. What did concern him, such as his form-master's tuition in class, Bunter never wanted to know. This, however, was someone else's business, and quite different! So he put his ear to the keyhole-and heard his own name.

'Not a syllable!' It was Johnny Bull's voice, 'but about what?'

'What I'm goin' to tell you fellows now,' answered Lord Mauleverer. 'I simply could not put up with him all that time! It's enough to have to put up with Quelchy!'

'What?'

'Still, he won't be too much of the schoolmaster on a holiday, I hope.'

'You're taking Quelch with you on a holiday?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'The holidayfulness with the esteemed Quelch would not have the terrific joyfulness,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Is that the news you've brought us up here to tell us?' demanded Johnny Bull, 'that you're going away on a holiday with Quelch? Of all the silly asses-!'

'I'm not goin' away with him.'

'Good!' exclaimed Frank Nugent.

'He's comin' with me. My uncle suggested it,' continued Mauly, 'after he found he couldn't come himself. I told him we'd be all right, everything bein' fixed up, but he said that goin' all that way, there must be an elder in charge of the party. So he asked Quelch. Jolly good of Quelchy to agree, I suppose. Might have had other plans. You fellows don't mind?'

'Mind you having a holiday under Quelchy's gimlet eyes? Oh, suffering crocodiles!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Rather you than me, Mauly! Doesn't your uncle think you're learning enough in term time? Is Quelch giving you extra toot?'

'My dear chap, of course not! And I don't think you'll find him in the way!'

'We shan't find him in our way, if he is going with you,' said Harry Wharton. 'Nothing to do with us.'

'But you'll be there too.'

'Where?'

It was a chorus of voices.

'On my uncle's yacht,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'You aren't goin' to turn it down, are you? I was relyin' on you chaps-I mean goin' all that way with Quelch alone-not so bad if we share him out, so to speak!'

'What are we supposed to be turning down?' demanded Johnny Bull.

'This trip on my uncle's yacht. Don't say you've thought better of it?'
'Fathead!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'You haven't asked us to come on any trip yet!'

'Haven't I?' said Lord Mauleverer. 'I believe you're right. I meant to, but what with worryin' about Bunter gettin' on to it—'

Bunter, at the keyhole, grinned again.

'I couldn't stand him for whole weeks on holiday, and if he got to know beforehand, I'd have him pesterin' me for an invitation all the rest of term! I'd have to lock my study door to keep him out, and dodge round corners,' continued Lord Mauleverer, plaintively. 'So not a word to him! I suppose you fellows have all got passports? Better get 'em, if not. And any visas wanted? There's almost bound to be some of those things needed!'

'Passports?' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Visas? Are you inviting us to a cruise on your uncle's yacht? If so, the invitation's accepted! Even if we do have to put up with Quelch.'

'Mauly, you're a brick!' said Harry Wharton. 'Isn't he, you chaps?' The rest of the Famous Five agreed heartily. A voyage on the steam-yacht of Mauleverer's uncle, Sir Reginald Brooke—even in the company of Henry Samuel Quelch—was something which they would certainly not turn down!

'You're comin' after all then?' asked Lord Mauleverer, cheerfully.

'After not any kind of an all at all, fathead—but we most decidedly are!' said Bob Cherry.

'And thanks a lot!' added Nugent.

'Good!' observed Lord Mauleverer. 'And if there isn't time to return by sea for next term, my uncle will send you home by air. Better still, might be able to get a bit of an extension of the holidays in the circs.,' added his lordship, thoughtfully. 'Quelch, our form-master bein' with us, you know! May find him comin' in useful after all! Lookin' after us while we broaden our minds by seein' the world.'

'Back by air—or an extension of the hols?' exclaimed Wharton. 'Where on earth are we going then? How far?'

'Oh, not more than about seven or eight thousand miles away. I think,' replied Mauly, cheerfully. 'Takes about five weeks, more or less by a liner. More for us, perhaps, if we put in here and there, as we're minded. Yes, I expect we'll have to come back by air, or get permission to turn up late next term—'

'But where are we going?' roared Johnny Bull.

'Oh, Malta, first. That's an island in the Mediterranean.'

'Yes, so we've heard,' said Bob Cherry, gravely, 'but that's not so very far away! What's the next port of call, then?'

'Cairo!'

'Cairo isn't a port,' said Harry Wharton.

'Isn't it? Are you sure?'

'Yes, chump!'

'Old Nasser's going to dam the Nile, and cause floods all over the place,' observed Johnny Bull. 'He may yet turn Cairo into some sort of a port—whether he means to or not—but it hasn't happened so far. Big ships can't call at Cairo.'

'I'm sure I heard my uncle mention Cairo,' said Mauleverer, thoughtfully.

'Perhaps he hasn't looked at an atlas recently!'

'Ass! I daresay he did mention it,' said Nugent. 'You have to land at Alexandria or Port Said and go to Cairo by rail or road—but I say! This is something of a summer holiday, Mauly, old man!'

'You like the idea?' Mauleverer looked pleased as there was a chorus of approval. There was no doubt that the Famous Five did like the idea! 'We can go and have a look at the Pyramids. They're in Egypt, if you don't know.'

'As it happens, we do,' observed Johnny Bull, with heavy sarcasm.

'Then there's Bombay!'

'Bombay? Are we going on to Bombay?'

'Yes. That's in India.'

'You're an informative chap, Mauly,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'It will be a real treat, having you as a guide. He's right, isn't he, Inky?' The Nabob of Bhanipur smiled. 'He is, indeed, my esteemed chum. I have been throughfully there, on my way to my home. Bombay has not been removed Pakistan-fully, and remains in India.'

'You're right again, Mauly. And then-?'

'Then we wind up at Hong Kong.'

'Hong Kong?' It was a chorus of voices.

'Yes. I believe that's on the coast of China.'

'Your belief's well-founded, Mauly,' said Bull. 'You're coming on in your geography.'

'What a tour!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Mauly, old boy, you may not know all the geography there is to know, but you are a trump! Gentlemen, chaps and fellows, I propose that we put up with Quelchy's company on this trip, on condition that Malta, Cairo, Bombay and Hong Kong are thrown in!'

'Carried unanimously,' agreed Nugent, 'but not Bunter.'

'If he gets wind of it, and tries to join us,' said Bull, 'he must be thrown out.'

The Owl of the Remove frowned on the other side of the keyhole.

'He mustn't get wind of it on any account,' said Lord Mauleverer, earnestly. 'You know how he fastens on to a man, when he thinks there's somethin' to be got by doin' so. So don't talk about this where he can overhear you.'

Bunter ceased to frown and smiled again.

'Not a word!' promised Wharton. Bunter smiled even more broadly, in ignorance of the fact that, at that moment, Vernon-Smith had come into the Remove passage to go to his study, and stopped short on seeing the fat Owl with his ear to the keyhole of No. 12!

'Fine!' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Now, you fellows will look after your passport business, won't you? Can't order those for you; chaps have to get their own. We'll go on my uncle's yacht after breaking up here; she'll probably come round to Pegg Bay. I hope so. Much more convenient than goin' to Southampton where she is now. Especially as I've ordered a lot of light clothes and things for tropical climates to be packed in a big trunk and sent here, ready to take with us. Lots to go round, so you won't need to buy much. Plenty of room on the yacht for anythin' you do bring.'

'Not so packed as the usual Remove study, eh?' Harry Wharton laughed.

'Are we your only guests, Mauly?'

'Yes. 'I've made a few cautious inquiries-so that nothin' should get to Bunter's ears, of course-and most of the chaps are fixed up already-those I'd like to invite anyway.'

'You haven't invited Skinner or Snoop?' asked Bob Cherry, laughing, 'Or Fishy?'

'No!' Lord Mauleverer looked quite startled. 'Pulling my leg, I suppose?' He relaxed into a smile. 'Why, I'd prefer Bunter-' The 'almost' his lordship was about to add was at that moment stopped by a loud yell at the study door, followed by a heavy bump.

'Ow! Wow! Beast! Whoop!'

The Famous Five and Mauly turned round as the study door was pushed open, and they saw the grinning face of Herbert Vernon-Smith looking at them, over the reclining form of Billy Bunter.

'You fellows discussing anything specially confidential?'

'We were-but what?' Harry looked at the fat Owl on the passage floor.

'Well, it isn't confidential any longer,' the Bounder laughed. 'I found Bunter with his ear to your keyhole. Don't know how long he's been there. He stopped when I kicked. You heard him?'

'Beast!' Bunter scrambled to his feet, eyeing the Bounder warily. 'I just stopped to-to-to-sie up my toolace-I-I mean, tie up my shoelace. I-I wasn't listening. I didn't hear a word you were saying. Mauly. I don't know anything about your uncle's yacht. I didn't even know he had one-and-and as for going to Hong Kong, I'd be very pleased to join you.'

'Oh, gad!' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer. 'He knows all about it now!'

'Boot him!' Johnny Bull made a move forward. "You fat tick! Thanks. Smithy, for what you've done, but we'll do it again. Me first—'

'Keep off--Yaroooh!'

'Come on you chaps!'

'Ow! Keep off!'

The Famous Five seemed determined to give Billy Bunter a lesson, but the fat Owl had no desire to wait to receive it. Like the guests in Macbeth he stood not upon the order of his going but went at once-but not quick enough to escape a boot from Bob Cherry, which felt as though its owner was scoring a goal.

'Ow, wow! Stop it!'

The hapless Owl put on speed, the juniors following, with the exception of Lord Mauleverer, who stopped where he was, grinning ruefully. Despite all the precautions he had taken to prevent a word getting to Bunter, it seemed that the fat Removite had now all the words he wanted! It was some consolation that he had also collected a number of kicks which he had not wanted. Lord Mauleverer could not help feeling, as he visualized having to dodge Bunter for the rest of the term, that it would have been as well if he had collected a few more.

CHAPTER 2

AN IMPORTANT LETTER

'How many 'z's are there in 'visa', Toddy?'

Peter Todd looked up from his prep in Study No. 7. He had been surprised, on coming into the study with Tom Dutton, to find Bunter busy writing at the table, instead of reclining in Peter's armchair, as he usually did. Bunter always began prep in that armchair. Only the fear of what his form-master might say-and do-if he called on Bunter next day to construe, and found that he had prepared nothing, ever brought him out of that armchair to do anything.

Yet this evening he had, apparently, begun work promptly!

Peter stared at the industrious Bunter.

'Never heard of the word! What does it mean?'

'You're ignorant, Toddy,' said Bunter, loftily. 'Of course, you haven't travelled much, and don't know about these things. Travel broadens the mind, but it requires a lot of money to travel these days. Only people of standing can afford it, and you're hardly-' He broke off, as Peter reached out for the inkpot. 'Stoppit! It's the thing they have on passports!'

Peter stared, then chuckled and put down the inkpot. 'Oh, you mean a visa?'

'That's what I said, Peter.'

'Well, there isn't any 'z' at all in it. Visa is the way to spell it.'

Bunter regarded the paper on which he was writing.

'I don't think that's the proper spelling, Toddy-and I can't do all this letter again. Much too much trouble.'

'You'll get some more trouble if a prefect comes in and finds you writing a letter in prep-especially if you spell 'visa' with a 'z'-but what-?'

'You're inquisitive, Toddy,' said Bunter, shaking his head, sadly. 'I don't like people who pry into other people's business. It's low.'

'You should know,' observed Peter.

'I do, Peter. However, I won't tell you mine. I may have been invited by Mauly to take a summer cruise in his uncle's yacht, and-'

'You may not,' concluded Peter. 'Is that what Mauly's doing these holidays? He asked me the other day if I had made any plans, and I told him I was going to Norway with my Uncle Benjamin. You won't be found on any yacht with Mauly, Bunter-unless you go as a stowaway! He wouldn't have you with him at any price. Better stop wasting your time on that letter, and get on with your prep.'

'You're jealous, Peter,' said Bunter, sorrowfully. 'I actually heard Mauly say, this very afternoon, that he'd prefer me to come with him rather than-some other fellows. His very words. I won't mention names-I don't want to hurt your feelings-but he has to draw the line somewhere-' Peter Todd's hand hovered over the inkpot again, and then, reluctantly, withdrew.

'Shut up, Bunter! I want to get on with my prep. Any more from you, and you'll get this ink!'

The Owl of the Remove snorted. However, he kept silent. That beast, Toddy, might empty the inkpot over him, and as Bunter wanted to use the contents for his letter, instead of on himself, discretion was indicated. Time was getting on, but Bunter decided to finish his letter instead of tackling anything so sordid as prep. There might be trouble with Mr. Quelch in the morning, but Bunter rarely worried about trouble until it was almost upon him! He knew little of the works of Quintus Horatius Flaccus, despite his form-master's painstaking efforts, but the worthy

Horace's injunction to reap today's harvest and trust tomorrow as little as may be, was whole-heartedly followed by the Owl of the Remove. Bunter completed his letter and regarded it with satisfaction. There might be one or two blots-or even more - but he felt that its literary value outweighed them. He read it through again.

Dear Father,

You will be pleased to hear that I have been invited by Lord Mauleverer to take a cruise with him on his uncle's yacht, during the summer holidays. I heard him say this very afternoon, that he would prefer my company to that of several other chaps here, whose names I won't mention!

I shall have to have a passport as we are going to Malacca and Ceylon and Bombay and HongKong. Would you mind getting one for me, with all the necessary fees? And perhaps you will let me have some extra pocket-money for the cruise as I shall not be any expense to you during these holidays?

Your affectionate son,

William

This seemed to William George Bunter to be a very satisfactory, beautifully written and business-like letter, which could hardly fail to appeal to his father. Naturally, as he would not be put to the expense of keeping his son during the holidays, he would be only too willing to give him a generous amount of extra pocket-money, especially when he received a well-written epistle of this sort.

Billy Bunter's hopes rose. Hope was one commodity of which he never ran short. It cost nothing. Of course, his father was always complaining about the income tax and the rising cost of living, instancing those modern plagues of Britain as reasons why he should not be expected to supply his son with any increase in pocket-money! However, in this instance, Bunter trusted that his father might approve the melting of some of the pay freeze!

It was not every man whose son was chosen by a peer of the realm to be his guest on his yacht on a long sea voyage in preference to several others. By this time, Billy Bunter had almost convinced himself that he had been invited by Lord Mauleverer to join him on that splendid cruise-almost, but, not quite! There were still lingering doubts.

'I suppose, Peter,' Bunter broke a long silence in which he had done nothing, 'Maully could hardly let a fellow down? I mean, if a fellow thought he had been invited on a steam-yacht in preference to several other chaps, as being a bit above them-and made all arrangements for his summer holidays-'

'Maully hasn't invited you to spend the summer holidays with him on his uncle's yacht,' interrupted Peter Todd. 'So if you're trying any spoof, forget it! You won't get away with it. And now shut up! How can I do any prep with your yapping?'

'Blow prep!' snorted Bunter.

'Quelch may blow you, in the morning, if you do.'

'I have more important things to think about than old Quelch and his prep, Toddy!'

'Don't blame me, then, if he gives you something else to think about that'll engage all your attention,' said Toddy, 'and now-shut up, or I'll give you a bit on account.'

Billy Bunter snorted in what he hoped was a dignified manner-but he shut

up! A man of affairs, planning his activities for a long sea voyage, really did not want a brawl with a fellow like Toddy. Nor-Bunter, rather uneasily, remembered Mr. Quelch and his cane-did he want a brawl with Mr. Quelch. Reluctantly, and with the greatest distaste, Bunter decided to remain shut up, and reached out his hand for a book. Anyway, prep would be over soon, and he could then post that important letter.

CHAPTER 3

JUST LIKE BUNTER

'BUNTER!'

Mr. Quelch's stentorian tones brought Bunter to a halt as he entered the form-room. He was the last to enter, but not late, and he really could not see what was disturbing Quelch.

That morning Bunter had had important business to attend to before class. Coker of the Fifth had received a hamper, no doubt from his loving Aunt Judy. Those hampers were always well-filled; so well-filled that cynics had been heard to declare that it was only because of them that his study-mates, Potter and Greene, could manage to put up with Horace Coker. Bunter would have been willing to put up with a great deal for a share in the contents of that hamper, and he had hovered round the Fifth Form passage in the hope that Coker might be in a benevolent mood. Coker wasn't. It was his boast that he had a short way with fags, and he proceeded to demonstrate that with his boot when he saw Bunter peering through the doorway.

Bunter had yelped and fled round the corner. The bell had then gone for classes and Coker, accompanied by Potter and Greene, had left for the Fifth form-room, and the ministrations of Mr. Prout. The fat Owl had then just time to pop into Coker's study and collect a large box of chocolates, which he felt served Coker right for kicking him. There was no time to take that box to his own study and leave it there. Besides that might not be safe. There were some fellows who thought nothing—simply nothing—of taking other fellows' tuck. So he had to take that box with him to the Remove form-room, buttoned under his jacket, and now Quelch was calling him to order for something.

The Owl halted.

'Yes, sir?'

'What is that you have under your jacket, Bunter?'

'Noth-nothing, sir.'

'Bunter! I can see a considerable bulge.'

'Yes, sir—I-I'm afraid I must be getting fat. I-I shall have to do something about it. I-I've always been slim before.' Bunter edged towards his desk, as his remarks were drowned in a roar of laughter from the Remove. Even Mr. Quelch's lips curved in a quick smile. Bunter thought that he had managed the matter rather well. It required a man of quick intelligence to carry off such a situation. It was a pity he had had to plead fatness, which was a slur on a well-developed figure. However, if he put that box of chocolates inside his desk until break—

'Silence!' Quelch's glance swept round his form. 'Bunter—bring me that box immediately.' He took it from a reluctant Owl. 'Why are you bringing a box of chocolates into the form-room? You did not, I trust, intend to eat them, surreptitiously here?'

'Oh, nunno sir. The fact is—the fact is—it's a—a present, sir. I-I had just before class—and I-I hadn't time to take it to my study.'

'There is plenty of time. Bunter, to take anything received by the post, to your study before classes.'

'It-it didn't come by post, sir. The fact is—it was given me by Coker, sir—Coker of the Fifth.'

'You were given this box of chocolates by Coker of the Fifth?'

'Yes, sir. He had a hamper from his Aunt Judy this morning. I heard him telling Potter and Greene. And he said to me, "Take this box of chocolates, Bunter. You are the—the best fellow in the Remove. I-I wouldn't give them to anyone else"'

Mr. Quelch stared at the fat Owl. Had it not been for Bunter's concluding remarks, he might have accepted the story. It was just possible that a Fifth-former with a well-filled hamper could have made a present of a box of chocolates to a Remove boy. What was not possible, however, was that Horace Coker, unintelligent as Quelch knew him to be, could have been quite so unintelligent as to have addressed those remarks to Bunter!

'May I—may I have my box of chocolates, sir?' mumbled the fat Owl.

'For the time being—no, Bunter. I shall make inquiries into this matter. I cannot forget that you have before now been punished for purloining comestibles from other boys. If what you have said is correct the box will be returned to you.' The glance which Mr. Quelch gave Bunter implied that if it were not correct, other and much more unpleasant things would happen. 'The class will now commence.'

Bunter subsided at his desk, uneasily. For the time being he was safe, but what would happen when old Quelch began those inquiries? About that time, probably in break, that beast Coker might be beginning his inquiries, too, as to what had happened to his chocolates.

Of course, Coker couldn't sneak about another fellow to a beak! If he could get hold of Coker in break first and appeal to him as a sportsman—fortunately it was quite easy to pull Coker's leg.

At morning break Bunter raced into the quad. Breathing hard with this exertion he looked round to see if he could find Coker. It was not difficult to do so. Coker had a loud voice and he was talking with Potter and Greene — at least Coker was doing the talking, and Potter and Greene listening, or pretending to. Probably nothing but the remembrance of Aunt Judy's hamper kept them there. Coker was speaking of his summer holiday arrangements.

'We're going on the river,' Coker was saying. 'I'll tell you fellows when to turn up and where. You'll just stand by for instructions. It's not the Thames, this time; it's the Wye. I've been reading a book about it, *Coming Down the Wye*, by a man called Gibbons—'

'Gibbons?' Potter regarded Coker. 'That's the chap who wrote the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* — but—'

'I know that, George Potter. He also wrote *Coming Down the Wye*—'

'That was Gibbins', said Greene, 'not Gibbons. There's more than a century between those two men and their books.'

'When I want you to teach me English literature, Greene, I'll let you know,' said Coker, calmly. 'Now—' He noticed Bunter for the first time.

'Clear off, you fag. I don't want any cheeky fags hovering round—'

'But—but I say old chap—'

'If you call me "old chap" again—'

'But I want to appeal to you as a—as a sportsman, Coker. All Greyfriars knows that you're a sportsman. There isn't any other chap in the school like you.'

'Thank goodness,' murmured Potter.

'What did you say, Potter?'

'Nothing, Coker. Clear off, Bunter—'

'That will do, Potter,' interrupted Coker. 'If this fag has something to say to me, it is right that I should listen to him. It is only natural that he should come to a man in a responsible though unofficial position in the school. What do you want, Bunter?'

'Well, it's like this, Coker. I know you'd never sneak on another man.'

'I should think not, indeed,' said Coker, loftily.

'Well, I went into class this morning with your—with a box of chocolates, Coker,' said Bunter, keeping at a cautious distance, 'and Quelch noticed them, and—and asked me why I had brought them in—and I told him that you had given them to me. And—and—he's going to ask you if you did, you won't give me away and—and say you didn't, will you, Coker? Being a sportsman?'

'But I didn't give you any box of chocolates!' Coker stared at Bunter and a grim look came over his face as he remembered the contents of Aunt Judy's hamper, the unpacking of which had been interrupted by first bell. 'You were nosing round my study this morning, you fat tick - Did you-?' Potter and Greene burst into laughter.

'He's snaffled your chocolates,' said Greene, 'and now comes here to stuff you with a yarn. Ha, ha, ha! '

'Pulling your leg properly,' said Potter.

Coker gave Potter a freezing glance and turned to Bunter.

'I-I didn't pull your leg, Coker,' howled the Owl. 'I-I wouldn't dare to. A man like you. You're-you're too much respected in this school,' continued Bunter, laying it on with a trowel, so to speak, and delighted to notice that Coker's countenance was softening under the treatment. 'I came to you as a sportsman. There may have been a mistake about those chocolates-but if you give them to me now-and tell Quelch so when he asks you-I could give them back-if you really want them. And-there's no one else in Greyfriars who's-who's *majestic* enough to do such a thing,' concluded Bunter, applying it still more thickly.

'Clear off, you spoofing fat humbug,' said Greene.

'I'm dealing with this, Greene,' said Coker. 'I'd like to see the fag or anyone else who'd spoof me-don't interrupt, George Potter, Very well, Bunter. I have given you those chocolates-and if your form-master asks me if I have done so, I will advise him, accordingly.' Coker, who had never been termed 'majestic' before, had almost tried to act up to it. He now came down from the heights. 'I don't want them back again after your grubby fag's fingers have handled them. And I've a good mind to give you something more now-'

'Oh, thank you, Coker,' Bunter retreated hastily out of any reach of the something more. 'You-you really are a sportsman. There's no one else like you at Greyfriars-no one at all.' Bunter turned and fled into more secluded parts of the quad.

CHAPTER 4

JUST LIKE BUNTER AGAIN!

'WAS that not Sir Reginald Brooke I saw leaving you last night, my dear Quelch?'

The voice of Mr. Prout, the Fifth form-master, came to Billy Bunter's ears. Bunter, on leaving Coker, had dodged out of sight behind one of the old elms in the quad. It seemed expedient for the moment not to see Coker any more. The elm was an old tree, and had become sufficiently wide in the course of the years to hide even Bunter.

Billy Bunter snorted as he heard Prout's voice.

Inquisitive old beast-always wanting to know other people's business. However, if anything was said about Mauly's uncle and guardian, and that voyage on the yacht, Bunter felt he ought to listen. Mauly himself seemed very badly informed about that trip-quite vague when a fellow tried to get him to talk about it-even to the extent of forgetting that he had asked Bunter to join the party! Old Brooke must have come to see Quelch about it. A week had passed since Bunter had been invited. It might be as well to know more.

'My dear Prout-' From the initial tone of Mr. Quelch's opening observation, one might almost have thought that his opinion of the Fifth form-master's inquisitiveness was the same as Bunter's. Then he thawed-perhaps the fine summer morning had something to do with that-and Prout was always Prout! 'Ah, yes-that was Sir Reginald. He came to consult me about the yachting party of the boys, which I am to supervise as far as Hong Kong.'

'You are indeed to be envied, Quelch,' said Prout. 'The Far East I do not know. Now, had it been the Far West, I could have given you much valuable information. When I was in the "Rockies"-'

'Yes, indeed, Prout,' interrupted Mr. Quelch, hastily.

Many a time and oft had Paul Pontifex Prout given to all and sundry in Greyfriars, who could not get out of his way, valuable information about his journeys through the 'Rockies' long ago, and even on such a fine summer morning-or, perhaps, particularly on such a fine summer morning-Mr. Quelch had no wish to be given more.

'Those were the days, Quelch. But "*consule Planco*"-'

'The yacht will anchor in Pegg Bay on the day we break up,' said Quelch, taking hold of the conversation again in order to prevent Prout doing so. He had also no wish to hear from Prout any more about the days when Plancus was Consul! 'You will probably be able to see her. Sir Reginald, however, came to me this morning to entrust a vase-no doubt a rather valuable one-to my personal care-for transit to a friend of his in Hong Kong. He prefers not to risk the hazards of the ordinary mail to the Far East.'

'Very wise! Very wise! The handling of mail overseas can sometimes be devastating-positively devastating. I remember when I was in the "Rockies"-'

'Indeed, Prout. It is in my study now. If you will excuse me, I will go and ask the Headmaster if I may put it in his safe.'

'Is that wise, Quelch? The concussion of a safe door when closing-a valuable vase-it might shatter it.'

'H'm!' It almost seemed as if at last there might be something in Prout's remarks which was worth heeding. 'Perhaps you are right, Prout? Sir Reginald's friend in this country-a Chinese gentleman, now resident here-spoke of it as possibly Ming. Sir Reginald himself, however, expressed some doubt-and he had much experience of China in the old days. He

believes that it is late Manchu. Nevertheless—'

'Undoubtedly valuable, Quelch. You must not hazard it'

almost snorted. Anyone would think these old donkeys were talking about a hamper, the fuss they made of it! You could buy all sorts of vases in old Lazarus's shop in Courtfield, for about a shilling! Not that Bunter, if he ever had a shilling, would spend it on a vase!

'I remember once the report of my Winchester repeater completely shattered a window in an hotel. I forget what I was aiming at at the time—'

Bunter grinned. It was very likely that, whatever old Prout had been aiming at, he had hit that window! Mr. Quelch's mind was moving on the same lines.

'There may be something in what you say, Prout. However, it must be packed for the voyage and I shall cover it carefully with cotton-wool, so that—ah—no concussion of any door could possibly hurt it. In the meantime, it will be quite safe in my study and, indeed, until I hand it to—let me see—what was the name?—a Chinese one in Hong Kong.'

Mr. Quelch, who remembered—as Bunter had often unfortunately found out—every word in the Latin tongue, was not, apparently, so much at home in that of the Chinese! Bunter, though he had no wish to be fluent in either, strained his attention. Anything which had to do with Hong Kong—to which he hoped to go in Mauly's yacht—attracted him. If a fellow made himself useful by knowing a lot about the place in advance it might be easier to get on board—and Bunter could not help feeling that there might still be difficulties.

As he leaned forward Bunter heard a slight stir in the shrubbery behind him and turned round. To his great surprise he saw a face of a man amongst the laurels, as though the owner of that face, too, had leaned forward to hear what Mr. Quelch was about to say! It was not a face which Bunter knew or liked—it was in fact, a Chinese face—and the owner of it must, obviously, have come into Greyfriars territory from over the wall. It scowled at Bunter as he turned to look at it, and withdrew. Bunter let out a yell.

'Owl Help!'

'Upon my word, Quelch! What on earth—' It was the booming voice of Mr. Prout.

'BUNTER!' Mr. Quelch caught hold of the fat Owl as he came from behind the tree. 'You have been listening to my conversation with Mr. Prout.'

'Oh, no sir. No I never—I didn't hear a thing. I don't know anything about your mink vase—That man—'

'Ming, you foolish boy! You have had the effrontery to listen and then to—suddenly to yell—Go to my study, instantly!'



**'YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO MY CONVERSATION WITH
MR. PROUT.'**

'Oh! It was that shrinaman in the chubbery-I mean that Chinaman in the shrubbery-I wasn't listening-It was that Chinaman!'

'You will come with me to my study instantly, Bunter. I will listen to no more of your absurd prevarications. There is just time to deal with you before the end of break. Excuse me, Prout.' There was, in Mr. Quelch's view, a silver lining in this ridiculous matter, in so far as he was able to use it to cut off Prout's conversation. The unfortunate Owl could see no silver lining whatever.

'But I tell you there was a Chinaman!' howled Bunter. 'He was hiding in the shrubbery, I saw him. I saw him!'

'That is enough!' Mr. Quelch's hand dropped on Bunter's shoulder. 'Come with me, Bunter.' Bunter was marched off to Mr. Quelch's study where that gentleman selected his stoutest cane. Bunter's eyes caught sight of a blue-patterned vase on the mantelpiece.

'I-I say, sir, is that the Mink vase? I'm-awfully interested in Mink vases. If you could explain to me—'

'Bend over that chair.' There was, apparently, only one thing Mr. Quelch was prepared to explain to Bunter at that moment, and he proposed to do so adequately with the aid of his cane. Bunter gave a yell as the first stroke made contact with the tightest trousers in Greyfriars. He felt that he was doing it more than adequately.

CHAPTER 5

BUNTER BUYS A 'MINK' VASE

BUNTER groaned slightly as he sat down in Peter Todd's armchair. He was still feeling the effects of Mr. Quelch's cane. However, there was now a slight silver lining to his troubles, too, in that he had found in the rack, a letter of which he had high hopes.

It was in his father's writing. Generally speaking, Bunter was in no hurry to open the paternal letters. They usually contained many admonitions, and-if the school report had arrived at the Bunter household-a number of complaints. Rarely did they enclose anything in the nature of a remittance. However, Bunter hoped that after his own recent, well-written and business-like letter, this time it would be different. He opened the letter and looked at it:

My Dear William,

I can congratulate you on your friends, but not on your orthography-

Bunter blinked in surprise. He had said nothing about orth-what-was-it? in his letter to his father. In fact, he had never heard of the stuff! The pater must be mixing him up with someone else. However, the really important thing-much more important than reading the rest of the letter-was-was there a remittance in it? Bunter's fat fingers felt inside the letter and opened it out. A thin slip of paper fluttered to the floor. 'A postal order!' The Owl's face brightened. Then as he picked it up and looked at it his smile faded.

'Only five bob! Oh, dear!'

Bunter groaned. The beasts must have sent in his report already! It seemed hardly worthwhile reading the rest of the letter. There could only be complaints about the report and the income tax and the state of business. Still, he supposed he ought to read it. Bunter turned his attention again to the letter.

I am glad, nevertheless, that you have made such a satisfactory arrangement for your summer holiday. It fits in with my own.

From a business friend of mine I have been offered the use of a cottage in Cornwall, only large enough to accommodate your mother and myself. I have made plans for your brother and sister to stay with your Aunt Eliza as paying guests. She refused to take you as well.

That left me with a problem as to your disposal. I had considered finding you some employment at a holiday camp or boarding-house, where you would be given your keep in exchange for your work. I believe that they are in constant need of waiters and porters and others and the experience would have been good for you.

'Oh, lor',' Bunter shuddered

However, now that you have arranged your own holiday in this manner, all is well. We are now shutting up this house until mid-September.

You have asked me for some money. Owing to the present

iniquitous taxation, I cannot afford much, but I wish to be as generous as possible. I am sending you ten pounds

'Ten pounds!' Bunter beamed, 'but he's forgotten to put it in! Where-?' He turned to the letter again.

in the form of a traveller's cheque, which I am forwarding to you, care of the Purser of Lord Mauleverer's uncle's yacht, the *Sunflower* now lying, I have ascertained, at Southampton. My instructions are that this is to be handed to you, personally, on your arrival on board for the voyage-and not before! It is not to be despatched to you, earlier, should you make any such request.

I fear, my dear William, that should you have this sum in your possession, it would be frittered away before you sailed. So I have taken this necessary precaution.

Once on board, as Lord Mauleverer's uncle's guest, you will, naturally, have no expenses, and my gift should cover any you have to incur at ports of call. In the meantime, I am enclosing five shillings, to serve your needs until the end of term.

I will deal with anything necessary, concerning your passport and visas.

Your mother and I wish you a pleasant voyage.

Bunter gazed at his father's signature ending the letter. 'Oh, crumbs!' he murmured. 'Ten pounds-but I-I say-'

Bunter's feelings were mixed. It was good to have ten pounds ahead of him-but they would not be his until he arrived on board the yacht-and old Mauly was such a forgetful ass! He seemed to have forgotten, already, that he had invited Bunter to join the party. In fact, he had declared that he hadn't and wouldn't! Supposing there were difficulties about getting on board? Bunter, on previous occasions, had found difficulties with hosts who had forgotten that they had asked him to be their guest. If he did not succeed in getting on the *Sunflower*, it would not be possible to go home-Bunter Villa would be shut up, and even if he managed to break in there would be no food inside to keep him going! Nor could he telephone his father in Cornwall, even if he wanted to-and Bunter most certainly did not want to-and felt that his father would want him to even less! No address had been given of that cottage. He could, of course, communicate with his Aunt Eliza, but he would not be welcome there! Far from it! Bunter remembered some very unjust remarks on a previous visit about his laziness and greed, and particularly the basest of suspicions uttered about a pie missing from the larder. He was used to being misjudged, and realized that good men often were, but he really did not want to spend his summer holidays with Aunt Eliza and still less with Bessie and Sammy.

There was no help for it; somehow, he must get on board that yacht! Suppose he were to try and ingratiate himself with Quelch? After all, if Quelch were in charge of the party, Bunter would have to meet him on board the *Sunflower*, and there might be difficulties if Mauleverer's memory still failed him about having invited Bunter. It was a difficult thing for any man to ingratiate himself with Quelch-the Owl of the Remove gave a reminiscent wriggle. However, the old ass seemed to be interested in Chinese vases just now. Supposing a fellow bought one of them from old Lazarus's shop in Courtfield, and took it round to Quelch to ask his opinion about it?

Chinese vases, of course, cost money, even from Lazarus's shop. Still-Bunter looked at that five-shilling postal order-there had been one in the shop-front for half-a-crown. He had seen the ticket attached. Bunter looked at the five-shilling postal order again, and made a rapid calculation of what he could buy with the proceeds in Mrs. Mimble's tuck-shop. Then he gave a groan-a far-sighted man had to be a hero sometimes. He would buy that vase!

It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and he could bike over to Courtfield and get it. If he took it to Quelch that evening, and softened up the old ass, he might get back too, those chocolates which Coker had given him. With a brighter face the Owl of the Remove got up and went on his way to Courtfield.

Half an hour later Bunter was standing on the pavement in front of Mr. Lazarus's shop, his bike propped up behind him on the kerbstone. Inside his pocket two half-crowns from the cashing of the postal-order jingled together. Bunter fingered them lovingly. A little further up the High Street was the Bun Shop. Surely a chap ought to have tea first to enable him to clarify his mind to choose the right sort of vase?

But-the inner Bunter was only too well aware that if he had tea first there might not be enough left afterwards to buy any sort of a vase! The term would end in a week's time, and Bunter thought of the ten pounds waiting for him on Sir Reginald Brooke's yacht-if he could get on board her! There was a nice Chinese-looking vase with blue markings on it in that shop window-with the half-crown label he had seen before. 'Might be valuable,' thought the Owl of the Remove. 'Perhaps, I could get Quelchy to offer it to Mauly's uncle? He seems interested in the things.' Resolutely Bunter marched into the shop. Mr. Lazarus came forward to meet him. 'I want a Mink vase,' said Bunter. 'That one with blue drawings on it in the window-the half-crown one.'

'My cootness!' Mr. Lazarus chuckled. 'Mink, eh? I will sell you the vase, but I do not say it is Ming. Oh, no! It may be, but I can give no guarantee!'

'H'm!' Bunter looked at Mr. Lazarus, and his thoughts turned to the Bun Shop. A fellow could buy half-a-dozen tarts for half-a-crown, and to spend it on a china vase! Still-the Owl realized again that it was going to be difficult getting on board Mauly's uncle's yacht, and equally difficult to stay on board if he did! Anything such as a common interest with old Quelchy in Mink vases would help. And then there were those chocolates waiting-

Bunter put on the air of a connoisseur who has been temporarily deceived by a chance resemblance. 'Not guaranteed Mink, Mr. Lazarus? In that case, I can only offer you one-and-sixpence for it.'

'One-and-six for a Chinese vase which may be Ming-I should be ruined,' declared Mr. Lazarus. 'I do not say that it is Ming, but I do not say that it is not. There is just no guarantee-but one-and-sixpence-no.'



BILLY BUNTER RECEIVED THE VASE AND NINEPENCE CHANGE

'In that case-' Bunter made a half-turn towards the door. In his mind was still the lure of those tarts, but-

It is possible that Mr. Lazarus followed the trend of Bunter's thoughts. In any case, he had had that vase in his window for more than six months, and no one else had made him any sort of an offer for it. Indeed, people looking into Mr. Lazarus's front window often wondered what sort of other people ever tried to buy anything there. 'My cootness!' exclaimed Mr. Lazarus. 'Yes, I shall be ruined.

Two bob!'

Bunter turned round and shook his head. 'One-and-ninepence,' he said firmly.

Mr. Lazarus again stated that he would be ruined, but he reached out to the window front and collected the 'Mink' vase. Billy Bunter took half-a-crown from his pocket and received the vase and ninepence change. His business acumen, he reflected, had saved him the value of two tarts, if he bought the fourpence-halfpenny ones. He had three-and-ninepence left. Feeling that he had acted like a successful financier in a 'take-over' bid, Bunter walked up the High Street to the Bun Shop with his 'Mink' vase under his arm.

CHAPTER 6

EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY

BILLY BUNTER hovered outside the door of Mr. Quelch's study, with that one-and-ninepenny Chinese vase in his hand. There was just time to see Quelch, and ask his opinion on the vase and, more important, after he had been properly ingratiated-get hold of that box of chocolates, which had once been Coker's.

After that visit to the Bun Shop in Courtfield, Bunter had exactly one penny left, which was not much to keep a man for a week until he sailed on a yacht. So those chocolates would come in useful; they would keep the hungry, fat Owl supplied during prep, which was approaching. Bunter felt that whatever work he might do in that period would be better done to the accompaniment of chocolates.

He tapped, with some trepidation, on the study-door.

Mr. Quelch's study was a forbidding apartment and Bunter had some unpleasant recollections of former visits to it. If he went in now, without knocking, he might have some more. There was no reply. Stirred by the thought of the chocolates, the Owl opened the door and peeped in. There was no one there. On the desk was that box of chocolates which Bunter thought looked a good deal better than anything else in the room! Bunter put his vase down on Quelch's desk and took hold of the box of chocolates. 'I don't suppose old Quelch has even taken the lid off,' he murmured, 'and he won't miss one.' He pulled off the lid and took out an attractive one. Coker's Aunt Judy always bought the best for her beloved nephew, a fact which Bunter appreciated. The chocolate disappeared and another followed it, and then another.

Bunter reflected that old Quelch would not miss two or three, especially if he replaced the lid. If he takes it off again he'll think Coker took them before giving me the box, he thought. A fourth chocolate disappeared. Then a fifth. Bunter wondered what was delaying Quelch. He would have to go back to Study No. 7 for prep soon, if Quelch did not come. It might be as well to take some chocolates to see him through prep. The Owl put a handful into each pocket and ate some more. Presently his fat, groping fingers touched an empty box!

'Oh, lor!'' The fat Owl's little round eyes stared at the place where those chocolates had been and were now no longer. Quelch might be waxy about this! Bunter picked up the lid. He'd better replace that, but suppose old Quelch picked it up and felt its lightness?

Wildly the hapless Owl looked round for something to stuff in the empty box, and then halted in alarm at the sound of a voice outside.

It was that of Henry Samuel Quelch!

'Come in, sir,' Mr. Quelch's voice was saying. Bunter, quavering, slid behind the back of the form-master's big armchair. Fortunately, it was a *big* armchair! If he kept quiet, Quelch might see this visitor out again, and then Bunter could escape.

'I must, of course, Mr. Hing Wah, take you to see the Headmaster, Dr. Locke, about your son's entry, but-'

'Oh, quite, Mr. Quelch, but you must excuse me for first getting in touch with you. You were mentioned specially by Sir Reginald Brooke, whom I knew in Hong Kong.' Bunter peeped cautiously round the edge of the chair. The visitor spoke like an Englishman, but Bunter saw that he was Chinese. To the Owl's uneasy eyes, he looked very like the man he had seen peering from the shrubbery in the quad. Billy Bunter's eyes wandered to Mr. Quelch who was staring, with a surprised and angry expression, at the open and empty chocolate-box on his desk and Bunter's vase alongside it.

'Upon my word-'

'You were saying, Mr. Quelch-?'

'Oh-I am sorry, Mr. Hing Wah. My attention was momentarily distracted. I must apologize. We already have a Chinese boy here in the Remove, my own form!-dear me, sir, is anything the matter?'

The armchair, behind which the Owl was crouching, had shaken as though someone had dropped heavily into it. 'I-a slight faintness, Mr. Quelch-this climate-and an old weakness of mine-if you would be good enough to get me a glass of water?'

'My dear Mr. Hing Wah, of course. Pray rest in that chair and I shall fetch one immediately.' The door closed behind Quelch as he hurried out. What followed amazed the fat Owl. With no sign of faintness, the visitor sprang up as soon as the form-master disappeared, and walked to the desk. Then the door opened and shut again with hardly a sound. Bunter, peering in surprise, saw that the study was empty-and that the one-and-ninepenny vase he had left on the desk had vanished!

Bunter rose to his feet, bewildered. The door opened and Mr. Quelch hurried in carrying a tumbler of water.

'Here you are, Mr. Hing Wah! I hope you will feel better-' Mr. Quelch stopped, and looked around him. Within the space of about half a minute Mr. Hing Wah had, apparently, metamorphosed into Bunter. It was no wonder that the Remove master looked surprised. 'What does this mean? What are you doing here, Bunter? Where is my visitor-Mr. Hing Wah?'

'I-I don't know, sir,' stammered Billy Bunter. 'He-he dashed out, sir, as soon as you had gone-and-he's taken my Mink vase with him.'

'Do not be absurd, Bunter! Are you attempting to describe a Ming vase, and-' Quelch's eyes fell upon the empty chocolate-box.

'Yes, sir-that's it; a Mink vase. One of mine-I-I brought it to show you, knowing that you're interested in Mink vases-'

'I presume, Bunter, that you mean "Ming". A mink is a fur-bearing animal. Are you referring to that ornament I found on my desk, alongside the box of chocolates? The box is now empty, Bunter-' added Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice.

'I-I think that Chinaman must have stolen them as well, sir,' stammered Bunter.

'That box was already empty when I brought Mr. Hing Wah in here,' said Quelch, grimly, 'but-' The Remove master paused. Bunter had appeared and a box of chocolates had disappeared. It was a reasonable supposition that they had disappeared into Bunter. Mr. Quelch had no doubt on that point. On all other points, however, there seemed to be a great deal of doubt. Mr. Hing Wah had disappeared as well and, it would seem, that blue-painted china vase, which he had seen for a brief time on his desk.

'When did you first arrive in my study, Bunter?'

'I-just before you came in, sir. I brought my Mink vase to show you. I bought it in Courtfield for-for one-and-ninepence-'

'And you imagine that, at that price, you had purchased a Ming vase? Incredible! I did not observe you when I entered the room. Yet, you say you were here!'

'I-I was behind your chair, sir' stammered the fat Owl-'I had taken one of my chocolates-just to-keep my strength up, sir-and I heard you talking to that-that Chinaman-and thought you wouldn't like to find me eating a chocolate-So-' His voice tailed off, as Mr. Quelch regarded the empty box, grimly.

'I think you ate more than one chocolate, Bunter. I intended to return them to you, as Coker, indeed, stated that he had made a present of them to you. Now, however-' Mr. Quelch paused again. There was no doubt that Bunter had eaten all the chocolates, but he could not be supposed also to have eaten a Chinese gentleman and that blue-painted china vase. Yet both had vanished!

'I desire to have the truth of this matter from you, Bunter, and I warn you that, if you deviate from it in any particular way, I shall deal with you severely for your impertinence in daring to take those chocolates before I had handed them back to you, and to eat them in my study. What happened after I left here to fetch my visitor a glass of water?'

'He jumped up from the chair, sir, and-took my vase, and went out.'

Mr. Quelch almost grunted. Something of the kind must have happened-or where was Mr. Hing Wah and where was the vase? But why had anything so ridiculous happened?

'That ornament which was on my desk, Bunter-you say that you bought that in Courtfield?'

'Yes, sir. I'd heard that you were interested in Mink vases.'

Mr. Quelch frowned. He was annoyed by the Owl's persistent references to the vases as 'Mink', and also by the fact that whatever Bunter had heard about the matter must have been when he was listening behind the elm-tree in the quad that morning.

'I got mine from Lazarus's shop, sir,' continued Bunter, 'and brought it here for your opinion on it, as I'm interested in them too. And now that man's stolen it. And I believe he's the same man who was hiding behind me this morning, sir-'

'Ridiculous!' snapped Mr. Quelch. Rising suddenly, he went over to a cupboard and opened its door. Rather to Bunter's relief-he had feared the appearance of a cane -Quelch turned, holding a vase-somewhat similar in design to Bunter's late possession, but which, in the Owl's opinion was a much inferior article! It had occurred to the Remove master that, incredible as it sounded, there must be some element of truth in Bunter's story, and he had had a momentary fear that Sir Reginald Brooke's vase might have been stolen as well. Mr. Quelch replaced the vase in the cupboard and locked the door.

'I *hardly* know how to deal with you, Bunter. For the present-'

Mr. Quelch stopped as his telephone began to ring.

'Wait!' The Remove master waved to Bunter as he picked up the receiver.

CHAPTER 7

BUNTER THE ASTUTE

'QUELCH speaking. Is that Sir Reginald Brooke? Good evening. Sir Reginald-What? You feel that there might be an attempt to steal that vase?' Mr. Quelch stopped speaking, and the voice of Sir Reginald Brooke came clearly over the line as Bunter listened.

'Yes. Mr. Quelch. My friend who had the vase, and by whose request I am sending it to Hong Kong, tells me that he had a telephone call from someone who wished to purchase it on behalf of the present Chinese Government. He told the man that he no longer had it, and refused to state the name of its present holder. He has also informed me that on the subsequent night his house was broken into and that there were obvious signs of a thorough search.'

'Good gracious. Sir Reginald! I must tell you-' Sir Reginald's voice continued. 'I cannot understand the matter at all. The vase has been stated to be Ming, but I know something of these things and I do not think it is. In my opinion it is of no great value-it is merely being sent to Hong Kong for some family reason or other-but I felt I should warn you in case those in search of it find out where it is now.'

'An attempt to obtain it has already been made here,' said Mr. Quelch. 'A man, giving the name of Hing Wah, called upon me, stating that he wished to send his son to this school, and was a friend of yours.'

'I am acquainted with no such person. Mr. Quelch. Preposterous! Did he try to get you to give him the vase?'

'No, sir. By a pretext of illness he induced me to leave him in my study-apparently alone-while I obtained a tumbler of water for him,' observed Mr. Quelch, grimly. 'Fortunately-unknown to him-and, indeed, to me-a boy of my form was in the study when we entered. He was concealed by a large armchair and was unobserved.' Bunter grinned. Not only was his story being proved true, but Quelch was going easy about the hiding behind the armchair! 'This boy had heard, somehow, that I was interested in Chinese vases, and brought me one to see, which he had purchased locally. This he had placed on my desk, and when I returned, informed me that the man had taken the vase immediately I had left the room, and gone away with it. The boy saw him do so without being seen himself.'

'The scoundrel!' exclaimed Sir Reginald. 'Then the man has the wrong vase-but the boy, who lost his own-?'

'He is a boy of my form, Sir Reginald, called William Bunter. I must say that he has stated to me that he has previously seen this Mr. Hing Wah lurking in some shrubbery in our grounds. I did not at first credit this, but it would now seem possible.'

Bunter grinned again.

'Extraordinary!' exclaimed Sir Reginald. 'Mr. Quelch I am indeed sorry that asking you to take this vase to Hong Kong should have involved you in this! As you know, I intended to take it myself, but urgent business here prevented my journey. If you care to return it, I will now make other arrangements.'

'By no means, Sir Reginald. You have entrusted it to me, and I will deliver it. Fortunately, owing to the presence in this room of this boy, Bunter, I am still able to do so.'

Bunter put on a virtuous expression. Old Quelch could hardly say any more about those chocolates after this!

'Most fortunate, Mr. Quelch! And he recognised this fellow, as he came in, and concealed himself behind your armchair before the man saw him? How very astute!' Bunter beamed. Mr. Quelch did not comment upon Sir Reginald's impression, and Bunter felt that such a tribute ought to show

Quelch how wrong his judgements had always been. Quelch had never called him astute! 'Please compensate the boy for his loss.' It was Sir Reginald's voice, still clear along the line, 'and I will indemnify you.' 'Certainly, Sir Reginald. It was, however, quite a cheap article, I must tell you, almost certainly made in this country, in a Chinese fashion. Even from my momentary glance at it, I could tell that. I cannot understand how this man-this imposter-can have considered it of sufficient value to abstract.'

'Neither can I, Mr. Quelch. Especially as it would appear that this person did not know the vase he endeavoured to steal. He saw one, thought that it was that which had been in my possession-and took it.'

'Apart from any question of the value of your own vase, Sir Reginald,' observed Mr. Quelch, 'this man may have been no authority on them. I assume that most people in China would no more know genuine Ming porcelain at sight than the average Englishmen that of Wedgwood?'

'Very true, Mr. Quelch. That makes it almost certain that this fellow was commissioned to steal the vase by others, who knew its present whereabouts. Why I cannot imagine-but they will know when he returns that he had the wrong one.'

'I will take every care of the right one,' said Mr. Quelch, determinedly. 'I shall put it into the Headmaster's safe tonight, to stay until the term ends.' Quelch thought, with some irritation, that if he had not taken Prout's advice, it would be there now! That advice, too, had given Bunter's listener-who now seemed to be a fact-his opportunity! 'Not until then will it be taken out to be with me on your yacht. Do you wish me to inform the police of this occurrence in the meantime, Sir Reginald?'

'Useless, Mr. Quelch! If the source of this attempt at robbery is as I suspect, the fellow will, almost certainly, have diplomatic immunity. Every Tom, Dick and Harry attached to an embassy has it in these days. Better keep the matter quiet. The fellow may not have reported to his principals yet-and the longer they don't know that he has not obtained the right one, the better. Say nothing, I advise, Mr. Quelch-and tell that boy the same thing.'

'Very well, Sir Reginald.' The glance that Mr. Quelch gave Bunter seemed to indicate that he had grave doubts as to the possibility of Bunter keeping any secret. He replaced the receiver and looked at the Owl.

'How much did you pay for that china ornament you brought here, Bunter?'

'Old Lazarus was asking two-and-six for them, sir. He wouldn't say it was a Mink vase-'

'I should think not, you absurd boy. "Ming" is the word; not "mink". Were it not nearly the end of the term, Bunter, I should give you an imposition of a hundred lines to impress that elementary fact upon your mind. However-' Mr. Quelch put his hand into his pocket and extracted half-a-crown.

Bunter's eyes glistened. No need to mention that, like an astute business-man, he had beaten old Lazarus down to one-and-ninepence. He felt kindly disposed to Mr. Hing Wah, despite the fright the man had given him. Ninepence was two fourpence-halfpenny jam-tarts!

Mr. Quelch paused with the half-crown in his hand. 'You informed me first of all, Bunter, that you had paid one shilling and ninepence for that article you purchased.'

'Oh-oh, yes, sir!' Bunter had forgotten that earlier admission. The vision of the two jam-tarts began to fade. 'I-I said that half-a-crown was what old Lazarus was asking for them, sir-but I beat him down to-to one-and-ninepence. Being astute, sir.'

'Indeed, Bunter! I had not observed your astuteness. However, you may take this half-crown, as your compensation for the loss. And-' Mr. Quelch pulled out his notecase, 'you have-although inadvertently-rendered me a

personal service, by saving from theft that vase for which I was responsible.' He took out a ten-shilling note and handed it to the surprised Owl. 'Take that also, Bunter. I trust you will have a pleasant holiday when you leave for home next week.'

'Oh, thank you, sir! I-I wasn't going home. I'd rather not. I thought you'd want me to come on the yacht and look after that vase-as I showed you how good I am at it, sir-and astute, sir.'

'The guests on that yacht, Bunter,' observed Mr. Quelch, 'are invited by Sir Reginald Brooke, through Mauleverer, and your name is not amongst them. You may go!'

'Oh, thank you, sir. Then I'll join the party when they sail.'

'You absurd boy! I did not say, Bunter, that you could go on the yacht, but from this study.'

'But, sir-now that I've saved the vase, and proved myself so-indisputable-' stammered Bunter.

'So what, Bunter?'

'Indisputensible, sir-'

'Can it be possible, Bunter, that you are endeavouring to say that you are indispensable? That you most certainly are not. Now, leave this study, and when you do, you will say nothing of what has happened here tonight, concerning this attempt at theft. That person does not know that you were a witness to his actions, and it is better that he should remain in ignorance of the fact.'

'Ow! Then I shall only be safe if I get on Mauly's yacht, sir.'

'Nonsense, Bunter! Go! If you do not-' Mr. Quelch rose majestically to his feet. For the time being, he looked much more alarming than Mr. Hing Wah, and with a squeal, the fat Owl shot out into the passage.

CHAPTER 8

BIG ENOUGH FOR BUNTER

'I say, you fellows-!'

Study No. 12 was full when Bunter pushed open the door. It contained not only Lord Mauleverer, but also the Famous Five. It was a happy and rather noisy party; on the last night of term there was no prep to get in anyone's way, and the prefects, themselves going home on the morrow, were not disposed to keep too much order. So Bunter's entrance was not, at first, heard or noticed.

Bunter frowned. He had wanted to have a private word with Mauleverer about that yachting party. Several times during the last week he had endeavoured to approach him, but on each occasion Mauly seemed to have urgent business with someone else in some other place.

It was really annoying. A chap invited on a long voyage wanted to know where he was—transport arrangements and so on. Time was getting short—Bunter quaked inwardly as he realized how short it already was! If he did not succeed in getting on board the *Sunflower* tomorrow, the ten pounds waiting for him there would leave him for Hong Kong! He would be given his ticket for his journey home, where he would find Bunter Villa empty and foodless. The only other alternative, it appeared to Billy Bunter, was to throw himself on Quelch's mercy—the quality of which he doubted very much indeed! Quelch *might* take him on board the yacht but was much more likely to leave him to board at the school!

Somehow, he must get on that yacht!

As no one seemed to have noticed him, Bunter listened.

A fellow might pick up some useful information.

'The yacht will be off Pegg tomorrow mornin',' his lordship was saying.

'There'll be a car to take you fellows to the pier.'

'It'll have to be a big car to take all six of us and our luggage,' observed Bob Cherry. 'Seven with Quelch and his luggage. Lucky Bunter isn't one of us, or he'd burst your car, Mauly!'

'That's all right,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Luggage goes separately by a van. I've ordered one from Chunkley's.'

He looked at his watch. 'It ought to be here now, but I suppose they've been busy.'

'Here now?' interposed Johnny Bull. 'Tonight?'

'Yaas! I arranged that specially. Didn't want the thing hangin' about the study too long. It would take up such a lot of room. And havin' it tomorrow mornin' would be runnin' it fine.'

'You're going to put up Chunkley's van in the study for the night?' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'Cracked?'

'My dear chap, of course not! I'm talkin' about the box.'

'What box?'

'The one with tropical clothes in it for you fellows. I ordered it from Chunkley's. Supportin' home industries in Courtfield, you know. Thought I'd told you about it.'

'So you did,' exclaimed Bob Cherry, 'but that's too generous, old chap. We were going to manage.'

'That's all right,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'These things will help you to manage better. Have to have eighteen suits a day in some parts of the Tropics, I believe.'

'What?'

'Or perhaps it's eighteen a week. Two a day and four spares. You keep on washin' em, you know. And hats—pith helmets—one for each of you. And a spare or two in case anyone's blows overboard.'

'You have a box coming here with eighteen tropical suits for us each and a dozen or so pith helmets?' exclaimed Nugent. 'Well-' Lord Mauleverer was well known to be generous and kind, but this was a real surprise.

'You ass, Mauly!' said Johnny Bull. 'I remember now you said something about this when you invited us-but you shouldn't have done it. Anyway-many thanks!'

'The thankfulness is terrific,' observed Hurree Singh, 'and the bigfulness of the box will be great. Are there things for the esteemed Quelch in it too?'

Lord Mauleverer smiled and shook his head. 'No. Have to be tactful with beaks on holiday,' he replied. 'My uncle bought a lot of stuff, and handed it over to Quelch as he isn't usin' it himself. What I've got ought to fit you fellows all right. You're all average size.'

'Lucky you didn't have to buy for Bunter,' said Bob Cherry.

'Or Chunkleys might not have had enough tropical cloth to go round,' added Nugent.

Bunter snorted. It was time, he thought, to draw the attention of these chaps to himself. He pushed open the door abruptly and hit Frank Nugent on the head. He squeezed himself in.

'All right you chaps. I'm sorry I'm late.'

'Pity you weren't later.' Nugent rubbed his head. 'Better the neverfulness than the latefulness, as the English proverb says,' observed Hurree Singh.

'I say, Mauly-'

'No!'

'No to what, old chap?'

'No to anything you were goin' to ask me,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'I haven't any cake for one thing.'

'Better apply to Coker,' observed Bob Cherry. 'He has one. His Aunt Judy sent him a specially good one for his journey to Wales tomorrow. It's riding pillion on his motor-bike so neither Potter nor Greene can. They're pleased. I've heard 'em say so. Go and please Coker, too, by taking his cake. Then he won't have to carry so much on his bike.'

'Good-bye, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'Hope you have a nice holiday.'

'I'm sure we shall, Harry old chap.'

'The wefulness is a forlorn hopelessness, my esteemed Bunter.'

'Nothin' doing, Bunter,' said Lord Mauleverer, quietly.

'You aren't comin' on the yacht. I couldn't stand you.'

'If that's what you call gratitude, Mauly-'

'Gratitude?' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, blankly. 'When I've just saved your uncle's property from being stolen from Quelchy's study-'

'What?'

'It isn't everyone who'd face a ferocious Chinaman-armed with a knife,' continued Bunter, embroidering a little. He had kept quiet about Mr. Hing Wah for almost a week-a record for Bunter with such a story. Mr. Quelch's command had had some effect upon him; and the fact that the Chinese thief did not know of his existence and might, if he talked, had more! However, he would be safe on board the yacht, and on it he was determined to get. Bunter had burnt all his other boats!

'What are you talking about you fat Owl?' demanded Harry Wharton.

'Mauly's uncle's vase,' said Bunter. 'The Chinese one he gave to Quelch to take care of. No good trusting old Quelchy with valuable things! If it hadn't been for me the man would have got it.'

'Bunter's talking rot as usual,' said Johnny Bull. 'Sling him out!'

'Ow! Keep off!' yelled Bunter. 'I tell you this chap came to Quelch with a story about a new Chinese boy coming here-all lies, of course.'

'And now, you're coming to us with another story-also all lies, of course,' observed Bob Cherry.

'I'm not!' shrieked Bunter. '1-1 intervened. I substituted-

'You what?' demanded Bull.

'Fan me, somebody,' said Bob Cherry. 'Does he mean substituted?'

'I substituted my vase for Mauly's uncle's one,' said Bunter. 'Just like that. It was astute of me-that's what Mauly's uncle said when he heard.'

'We've listened to enough of your nonsense,' said Johnny Bull. 'Harry, old man, help me push this fat rotter out.'

'Hold on,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'There may be somethin' in this-not much, bein' Bunter, but something. My uncle did have a Chinese vase he was goin' to take out to someone there, a Chinese chap he knows here, havin' asked him to do so. As he couldn't go at the last moment, he asked Quelch to take it for him instead.'

'And if it hadn't been for me, Quelch would have lost it,' said Bunter.

'I bought a Mink vase specially from old Lazarus-and substituted it. I mean substituted it for your uncle's and when your uncle phoned Quelch he said it was very astute of me. And he told Quelch that he'd jolly well better take care of that vase, and hold his tongue about someone trying to pinch it.'

'Yes; I can just hear Sir Reginald Brooke talking to Quelch in those very words,' chuckled Bob.

'He said there was someone after it, anyway, and it wouldn't be here now, if it hadn't been for me, and if you don't take me with you to look after it, you'll lose it again, I expect,' said Bunter. 'Quelch told me not to say a word about it-'

'And you've just said all the words you can find,' observed Johnny Bull.

'I had to, hadn't I, to tell Mauly why he can't do without me on that yacht?'

'I can-and I'm goin' to,' observed Lord Mauleverer. 'I don't know anythin' about this yarn of yours, Bunter. Quelch hasn't told me anythin' about someone being after that vase. If you have been of any use-though I can't think how-I'll stand you a feed next term. Anyway, you aren't comin' on board the yacht, unless you can do so as a stowaway-and I don't think you'll be that!'

'And if he is, we'll make him walk the plank!' said Bob Cherry.

'If we can find a plank strong enough for him to walk on,' added Nugent.

'Good night, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton.

'Look here!' yelled the Owl. 'I've got to go-'

'That's what we're saying,' said Johnny Bull. 'So hop it!'

'I mean on the yacht. I've made all arrangements!'

'Un-make them!'

There was a knock on the door as Bunter started to speak. The study door opened and a face looked round the edge of it.

'Why, it's Gosling!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, 'looking in to see if there's any luggage and tips to carry off! You've done well at that game, every end of term since you first came here in King Stephen's time, haven't you, Gosling?'

'You young rip-' The gate-porter ceased to growl and tried to smile!

After all it was the end of term, and there would be tips! 'A large box for 'is lordship just come from Chunkley's, so me and Mible brought it hup! Come hon, Mible!'

Followed by the gardener, Gosling pushed open the door further, carrying in a large box. It was a large box! Bob Cherry whistled.

'Well, one thing is there's no room for Bunter and that box in this study at the same time-unless we pack him inside it. It's big enough to contain him! Pop off, Bunter! Have a happy holiday!'

'But, I say, you fellows-Stop it, you beasts!' There was a howl as Bunter went through the doorway into the open passage. The Famous Five gathered

round the box. With it and them, Lord Mauleverer, Gosling and Mible, Study No. 12 was still crowded, even without Bunter.

'Thanks very much.' Lord Mauleverer felt in his pockets, and some paper money passed. Gosling and Mible, who had been mopping their brows, ceased to mop and seemed revived.

'The van will be comin' for this box tomorrow and some other luggage, Goslin'. If you and Mible would see to it-

'Only too pleased to oblige your lordship.' With the happy prospect of more tips to come, they left the study. Johnny Bull grunted.

'Why didn't you have this box brought up by the van which is coming tomorrow morning, Mauly? Then it could have stayed there, instead of being brought up here now and down again tomorrow. That doesn't make sense.'

'It does to Gosling and Mible,' said Nugent. 'They get two lots of tips.'

'That's so,' agreed Lord Mauleverer, 'but I thought you fellows would like to see the stuff. It ought to be open with the key inside. New boxes are sent like that.'

'Not when they're filled with things,' said Harry Wharton. He bent down and pulled at the lid. 'This is shut. I expect the man had the keys and he doesn't seem to have handed them to Gosling.'

'That's awkward.' Lord Mauleverer shook his head. 'I wanted to show you fellows the things-and put some more in.'

'Perhaps it has a catch I can work loose.' Bob Cherry bent down. 'If I push this a bit-there you are!'

'You've broken the lock ' observed Johnny Bull. 'Of all the fatheads-

'Doesn't matter,' said Mauleverer. 'Saves me telephonin' for the key in the mornin'. The lid will close. Have to keep it the right way up. I'll put a label on to tell people.' He opened the lid just as Bunter opened the door again.

'I say, you fellows-

Johnny Bull grabbed a cushion, and hurled it.

'Wow-ow-ow!' Bunter sat down in the passage with a bump. 'Beast!'

'Call again and you'll get the ink,' said Johnny Bull. 'Nothing more till next term from you-and that's quite near enough.'

CHAPTER 9

COKER LOSES A CAKE

'Speak sharply to your motor-bike,
And beat him when he wheezes,
He only does it to annoy,
Because he knows it teases.'

HORACE Coker looked up from his motor-bike with a grim expression. He was not amused by Frank Nugent's little song, after the manner of the one in *Alice in Wonderland*. For some time that motor-bike had been behaving with an obstinacy which had removed all smiles from Coker's face. It had uttered many sounds, but none which showed any signs of activity in its engine.

The Famous Five were amused and laughed. Coker grasped a spanner, convulsively.

'If you fags want me to thrash the lot of you-'

'Come on, Coker!' invited Johnny Bull. 'Take us on as well as the bike. We're ready-if that isn't!'

Coker breathed hard. With the aid of that bike, he had told Potter and Greene that he expected to 'hit' Ross-on-Wye that night. If and when that motor-bike started, they expected him to hit something much nearer and sooner than that, and there had been some keen competition in declining the offer of a pillion-seat, which he had offered to one of them. Potter had said that he would be delighted, but would stand down in favour of Greene. Greene had said that it would not be fair to take it and leave Potter.

Coker had, at first, been inclined to insist on one of his friends accompanying him. That motor-bike sometimes required assistance in being pushed up hills. Then Potter had, tactfully, reminded Coker of his Aunt Judy's cake, which she had sent her beloved Horace to sustain him on the journey. He could not, said Potter, leave his aunt's cake behind. It must travel with him and could only be fastened to the pillion, which meant that, naturally, neither he nor Greene could sit there.

So it had been arranged that whatever hit Ross-on-Wye -or any earlier objective *en route*-might either be Coker or the cake, or both, but not Potter or Greene. They would join Coker later, provided-though not expressed in those words-that he had remained in one piece to receive them. That they did not mind. Coker's Aunt Judy would, undoubtedly, have hired an excellent and well-provisioned boat for Horace Coker and they were prepared for that reason to put up with Coker as well, although that might occasionally be quite an effort. In the meantime, Potter and Greene had left for their homes, feeling safer out of Coker's way.

So, when the Famous Five rolled up to watch Coker and kill time, pending the arrival of Mauly's car, they saw Aunt Judy's cake on top of a haversack, full of sundries, which Coker had intended his pillion-passenger-either Potter or Greene-to carry on his shoulders all the way to Wales.

Coker looked as if he were about to accept Johnny Bull's invitation but, just then, the motor-bike gave a sound which seemed as though it was considering starting.

Coker took hold of the handlebars and the sound died away.

At that moment it looked as if the motor-bike would never see Wales, but would remain in the quad throughout the summer holidays. Now, occasionally, under Coker's handling, it uttered gasps or grunts, but nothing which sounded like an engine about to work.

It was a lovely summer morning, calm and warm.

Coker was also warm-in fact very warm-but far from calm. In fact, as the Removites watched him, he seemed to become even more heated.

'I know how to start that motor-bike, Coker,' said Bob Cherry, suddenly. 'Leave it to me!' Coker looked up hopefully. The obstinacy of that motor-bike had brought him to a mood in which he would almost lower himself to take help from a fag. Bob Cherry sped away.

'He, he, he!'

The Owl of the Remove had just turned up and was watching the show. He had been looking for the Famous Five. Only by hanging on to them, and being around when their car came, could he make them understand that they must include him in the yachting party, it being too late now for him to do anything else. In his pocket was the railway ticket which had been handed to him for his journey home-but that was no good to Bunter.

Billy Bunter was getting rather worried. He had added his suitcase to the pile of luggage in the hall, waiting collection by Chunkley's van. That would, he hoped, pass unnoticed and be collected with the rest. It would not be so easy for him to add himself to anything or anyone and pass unnoticed. However, it had to be done. He had found the Famous Five watching Coker and his motor-bike and, worried as he was, could not help being amused by Coker.

Coker looked up as he heard Bunter.

'Clear off, you fat fag! If you try to lay hands on this cake I'll squash you!' Coker had not forgotten his lost chocolates.

Bunter remembered Bob Cherry's words of the previous evening-anything eatable always interested Bunter. His eyes fastened on the pillion of that obstinate motor-bike. So there was a cake in the box on top! In between it and Bunter, however, was Coker.

'I came to speak to these fellows, Coker,' said Bunter loftily. 'I am not interested in your cake. I am not one of those chaps who are always thinking of eating-'

'Here you are, Coker!' It was Bob Cherry's voice which interrupted. He had returned and was holding out a large carrot. 'I got this from the kitchen-garden. You hold it in front of the bike's nose, and when it tries to bite it, you run away and the bike runs after you-see?'

Coker ran-but it was after Bob Cherry! Bob vanished, rapidly, round a corner and the Fifth-former then turned on the rest of the Famous Five, who rushed into the quad with Coker in pursuit. Evidently neither Coker nor his motor-bike had any use for a carrot.

'He, he, he! I-I say-' Bunter realized that he was alone, and he looked again at the cake-box on top of the motor-bike. Urgent as was his need to stay in the company of the other Removites until their car came, they had left him-and so had Coker-but the cake remained! And a cake was a cake! Bunter stepped forward and pulled at the string round that box. An extra tug loosened it and the box was in the Owl's hands!

A loud roar caused him to swing round. Coker, having been unable to catch and call to account any of the Removites, was returning, and had caught sight of Bunter with his cake!

'You fat villain! Put down that cake!'

'Ow! Oh, crikey!' Bunter turned and ran, still grasping the cake. Quite near was the open main door of the school. Instinctively he made for it. If he could only get in and hide somewhere! Bunter shot through the door, and sped to the staircase leading to the Remove passage-only to find the way blocked by Gosling, carrying down a trunk!

'Oh,lor!'

Bunter turned and ran along the Masters' Passage. He might hide there. Coker would hardly chase him along the Masters' Passage, even though most of the masters had now left for home. He tried a study-door-Prout's.

Bunter knew old Prout had gone! The door was locked.

'Owl 'Ere! You young rip-!'

There was a thunderous crash at the main entrance.

Coker had arrived, apparently, just in time to encounter Gosling carrying that box. Gosling collected a lot of tips for carrying luggage on breaking-up day. This time, he had also collected something else!

'Oh, lor'! That'll be bust- You silly young fool-'

'You silly old fool-' It was Coker's stentorian voice. The collision had given Bunter a respite. He retreated to the end of the passage. There was a door in the next one on the right leading into the quad. Bunter got there and tried it. It was also locked!

'Oh, dear!' Of course, with the school emptying for the summer holidays, many of the doors would already be closed and locked. Bunter could not help feeling that there were too many difficulties in the way of a fellow who only wanted to join a yachting party. First his host had forgotten having invited him, in preference to several other people, and then this! A ruffianly Fifth-former was actually seeking to take away a small cake, which no one ought to have missed.

Bunter quivered. The voices of Coker and Gosling were still loud and querulous, but the dispute could not go on indefinitely-and he was in a cul-de-sac. If only he could hide that cake somewhere before Coker arrived. A door opened along the passage and Bunter crept back still further.

CHAPTER 10

BUNTER EMBARKS

'WHAT is this uproar?' Mr. Quelch's annoyed voice sounded along Masters' Passage, as he opened his door and looked out. 'Coker? Gosling? What are you doing?'

'What I sez is this 'ere, sir,' observed Gosling, who was sitting on the floor and rubbing his head. 'A man don't hexpect to be rushed into like bein' charged by a bull-not w'en 'e's carrying a 'eavy box. 'e don't!' 'Coker! What is the meaning of this? What has happened?'

'I-I-' Coker's voice tailed off into silence, a state of affairs which, had they known of it, Potter and Greene would have described as unprecedented. 'I was-just coming in, sir, and-' Coker's voice ceased again. Bunter, listening, realized with some relief that Coker was not going to tell Quelch that he had been in pursuit of a Remove boy who had taken his cake. That would have been sneaking and, infuriated though he might be, Coker would not sneak to a master.

'I-I-' It was really difficult for Coker who was not one of the world's swiftest thinkers. He brushed himself down with his hand, and thought. Gosling, still on the floor, sat there and groaned. A few groans might be worth a tip. Coker was a good tipper. 'I was just coming in the doorway. sir-and ran into Gosling-'

'Absurd. You should be more careful, Coker.'

Mr. Quelch strode along the passage to the scene of the collision.

'I cannot believe, Gosling, that it is necessary for you to continue to sit on the floor!' Bunter's heart beat fast. It was more than ever desirable to get rid of the evidence-Bunter hoped only temporarily-now if Quelch was on the scene. Old Quelchy would be on board Mauly's yacht, and any chance the Owl had of staying on board, when he got there-as he still expected to do-would be prejudiced if he were found now with that cake. He might even think it was Coker's and that Coker had been in pursuit of it when he collided with Gosling. Bunter was used to unjust suspicions. Quelchy was now, though, at the other end of Masters' Passage and his open door was between him and Bunter, partially screening the view. All the other doors were probably locked like old Prout's, but Quelchy's was open. Bunter crept along quietly and entered the study!

If old Quelch came back and found him with the cake.

Bunter could say that he had brought it to him as a mark of esteem. A fellow could hardly be walloped for bringing a master a mark of esteem. especially on the last day of term! If Quelch gave him time, Bunter proposed to hide it in a cupboard and say to Quelch, when he did come, that there had been a terrible misunderstanding. He really thought that he had been invited to be one of the party on that yacht and had made all arrangements, and now it was too late to do anything else, and he could not go home because Bunter Villa was closed and empty until September. That might touch Quelchy's heart and get him on the yacht. Bunter realized, however, that he must first hide Coker's cake. A really pitiful story like that would not be believed if he told it clasping that cake! He tip-toed to the cupboard. It was locked. Bunter, now rather desperate, saw Quelch's suitcase on the floor. He had evidently just finished packing it when the collision between Coker and Gosling had disturbed him. Quelch's voice was still to be heard at the foot of the staircase, giving his views of the disturbance. Bunter slipped the latch of the suitcase, finding it unlocked, and opened it quickly.

Inside was clothing and, packed safely at the top of it, that Chinese vase which had been in the form-master's cupboard. Bunter took out the

vase and swiftly hid the cake-box under the clothing. Then he replaced the vase, but the suitcase would not shut! It was now too full.

'Oh, crikey!' Bunter looked at the suitcase, wrathfully.

Then, to his horror, he heard Quelch coming along the passage, accompanied by Gosling, who still seemed to be talking about his injuries. Bunter snatched out the vase, closed the suitcase, and slipped behind the big armchair which had concealed him before. The Owl could move rapidly when occasion called for it, and this seemed to be just such an occasion.

'I cannot think that you have been seriously hurt or, indeed, hurt at all, Gosling,' Quelch was saying as he entered his study.

'Wot I sez is this, sir, a man don't hexpect to get a 'eavy bump, w'en 'e's carrying a 'eavy box.'

'Quite, Gosling. And you have been compensated.'

'Yes sir. Not that Master Coker ain't been generous, but wot I sez-'

'You need say no more, Gosling-' Quelch broke off and listened. 'I hear a vehicle approaching. I think this must be my taxi. It does not sound like a car.'

'Them young rips-I mean, them young gentlemen 'ave gone in their car, sir,' said Gosling. 'I saw it come and them get in w'en I was a-sitting on the floor a-'olding of me pore 'ead. This'll be yer taxi.'

'Yes, indeed. You do not,' added Mr. Quelch, satirically, 'feel too injured, I trust, Gosling, to carry this suitcase of mine to the taxi-for a suitable recompense?'

'Me? No, sir.'

'I thought not. I will just lock it.' There was the sound of a click.

'Come!' Mr. Quelch, followed by Gosling, left the study and the door was shut and locked.

'Oh, lor'!' Bunter came out from behind the armchair.

Being locked in did not matter much. He could get out of the window and into the quad, Masters' Passage being on the ground floor. But the other fellows had got into their car and gone, according to Gosling-and he had not been with them!

Bunter looked at the Chinese vase he was holding. Suppose he could spin some yarn to Quelch about finding it lying about? He could take it to Quelch on the yacht, and Quelch would be grateful-or ought to be. But how was he to get on the yacht?

Chunkley's van had not yet come for the heavy luggage to take to Pegg pier. Supposing he told the driver that he'd just found a valuable vase his form-master had forgotten and must take it to him? They'd give him a lift to the pier and a boat would be waiting to take the luggage to the yacht. He could go with that!

Bunter's face brightened. There was always a way if a man of intelligence gave any problem some thought. And on board that yacht, he ought to be able to get hold of that cake again.

Thinking of food made Bunter feel hungry. The tuckshop was closed for the holidays. He wondered if there were anything eatable left in anyone's study cupboard. Mauly now-he was almost certain to have left something, which he would have told Gosling to take for himself. And Bunter could wait there with safety, anyway. Chunkley's would have to come and take that big box which had come last night. He'd wait there and explain the need for his journey in the van.

Clasping the Chinese vase, Bunter climbed through the window. Once in the quad he turned and made again for the front entrance and the Remove stairs. There was now no obstruction. The box Gosling had brought down, and which Coker had brought down with Gosling, was stacked on a pile in the hall, waiting collection. As Bunter started towards the Remove

staircase there was another loud roar outside; this time, however, not from Coker, but from his motor-bike.

That obstreperous vehicle had come to life. Quite what Coker had done to start its engine he did not know, but he had sprung on to the saddle and taken the quad in a wide swerve. Missing the fountain in the centre by about six inches and the right-hand gate-post at the porter's lodge by even less, Coker turned a wild left into the road and shot off to hit Ross-on-Wye.

'He, he, he!' Bunter cackled, and then went up to Study No. 12. There was no one there and-which was much more disappointing-nothing eatable in the cupboard. Bunter frowned at this negligence.

On the floor was the big box which had come the previous evening, and of which Bob Cherry had promptly broken the lock.

Bunter frowned at it. This was the box which that ass, Bob Cherry, had said was big enough to contain him-

The fat Owl caught his breath, and his little round eyes gleamed behind the big spectacles-Why not?

Chunkley's van would arrive soon to take it to Pegg pier, from which a boat would take it to Mauly's yacht-and it wouldn't be opened until it was on the yacht!

'He, he, he!'

Bunter cachinnated.

It was true that it could not be locked, but the removal men wouldn't know that. They would not try the lock.

All he had to do was to get into it, and lie 'doggo'.

The fat Removite pulled the box open. On the top was a layer of pith helmets. He gathered a couple and, going over to the fireplace, stuffed them up the chimney. The Greyfriars chimneys were old, and had been made large enough to give access to the sweepers' boys who once had to climb them. They were quite big enough to accommodate those dozen pith helmets which had been a beautiful white, a state of affairs which would not last in their present circumstances!

Bunter followed the disposal of the pith helmets, by taking an armful of drill clothing and stuffing it into the cupboard. The rest would make a nice, comfortable cushion. Taking the Chinese vase with him, the fat Owl got inside and pulled down the lid. There was plenty of air, and he felt quite comfortable.



THE FAT OWL GOT INSIDE AND PULLED DOWN THE LID

Mauly had said that he wasn't coming on board the yacht unless he came as a stowaway. Well, he was coming as a stowaway in Mauly's own box. The Owl chuckled again, and then became quiet as he heard a tramp of feet outside in the Remove passage.

'We'll get this 'ere box down now as that there Chunkley's van's houtside, Mimble,' said Gosling's voice. "'Eavy it was last night and they've put a little more in it, so you'll 'ave to 'elp, specially as 'ow's it to be kep' right side up 'e sez, particular. But there, 'is lordship's a generous bloke. So 'ere's to it Mimble.'

'O.K. Gosling.' The two men moved and there were simultaneous gasps. 'Blow me tight, Mimble! What 'ave they bloomin' well loaded it with? Suits of harmour? Or bricks?'

'Bust me, if it doesn't feel like it,' grunted Mimble, 'Per'aps we can shift that there lock and take somethin' hout and load up again downstairs?'

Bunter quaked. If Mimble's advice were followed—

'No, Mimble. We can't do that without them Chunkley's blokes seein' us, and it would look hodd to be a-packin' it before 'em. We got it hup last night, and we can get it down this mornin' is what I sez. And hif we ask those Chunkley's blokes for 'elp they'll hexpect to come in on hour tips, which they'll know we must 'ave 'ad!'

'O.K. then, Gosling. 'Eave ho.'

To the accompaniment of a number of gasps and grunts, the Owl of the Remove felt the box being lifted. Bunter had embarked on the first stage of his journey!

CHAPTER 11

A SCARE FOR MR. QUELCH

MR. QUELCH leaned back in the seat of the taxi-cab as it sped out of the gates of Greyfriars, and relaxed. He was feeling pleasantly interested in the long journey before him. The Remove master had a good knowledge of many European countries, derived from his wanderings during various holidays, but never before had he gone so far afield as he was to do on this one.

It was nice, he felt, to be free of his responsibilities for a while. It was not that he was tired of Greyfriars. Quelch liked and was always interested in the school. His monumental work *The History of Greyfriars*, over which he had spent some years, would prove that, when it was published. Hacker and Prout and Twigg and a few others had, perhaps, hinted that it never would be published and, indeed, that it might never even be finished! Mr. Quelch ignored such innuendoes. It was not for an historian, sifting the facts of the past, to heed the carpings of the present.

Of course, there were drawbacks to his life at the school.

No career was without them. For instance, there was Prout! Much as he respected Mr. Prout, Quelch now told himself, there were times when a period completely devoid of Prout's reminiscences, advice and general *obiter dicta* was a welcome change! There were, too, other annoyances - that absurd boy, Coker of Prout's form, was one of them—a boy who, for apparently no reason whatever, had only recently disturbed Quelch by rushing about the passages and colliding with Gosling! Quelch could not help thinking that the general absurdity of Coker reflected upon Prout's tuition as his form-master.

Then there was Bunter. Mr. Quelch, as his thoughts turned upon William George Bunter, had a qualm of conscience. If Prout, as Coker's form-master, could be blamed for the state of Coker, could not he, Henry Samuel Quelch, as Bunter's form-master be blamed for the state of Bunter? It was a disturbing thought! Mr. Quelch frowned, his feeling of relaxation momentarily fading. Could anyone be held responsible for Bunter's mental equipment, a boy who had recently actually translated *arma virum que cano* as 'the armed man and the dog'? That effort of Bunter's had almost sent the rest of the Remove into hysterics, but it had not amused Mr. Quelch. However—Quelch relaxed again—he would not be seeing Bunter again for several weeks, until the start of the new term. Then—Mr. Quelch relaxed still more—the boy had, indeed, been useful, if not particularly intelligent, in the matter of that Chinese vase.

That, reflected Quelch, had been a mysterious affair.

The man who had attempted to purloin it, had, evidently ascertained that it had passed from its first custodian, Mr. Ching Kong Sen, that Chinese friend of Sir Reginald Brooke, and then from Sir Reginald to himself. The accumulation of such knowledge showed that a certain amount of trouble had been taken in the matter, and Mr. Quelch could not understand why. 'Incomprehensible!' he murmured.

The vase appeared to be of no value. Sir Reginald had told him that in Mr. Ching Kong Sen's opinion it was definitely not of the Ming period and, probably, late Ch'ing or Manchu. Mr. Quelch himself felt sure that it was of no more intrinsic value than the trumpery one which that absurd boy, Bunter, had bought at Lazarus's shop in Courtfield.

Yet, first Sir Reginald and now he himself had been requested to convey this worthless piece of porcelain to Hong Kong, where it was to be handed over to the Head Office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and left there

until claimed by a Mr. Lim Tek. Mr. Quelch could not help thinking that this did not look as if the article were so worthless.

However, its worth was not his affair. He had been asked to take charge of the vase and hand it in to the bank in Hong Kong, and that was what he would do. Quelch was conscientious, and intended to keep it under his personal supervision until he passed it over to whoever was authorised to receive it on behalf of Mr. Urn Tek.

In the meantime, he would dismiss the matter from his mind. It was a pleasant summer's day, and they would soon be in Courtfield, and then make for the old wooden pier of Pegg, where a boat from the yacht would be waiting for him. Mr. Quelch sat, resting with a tranquil mind-and was suddenly brought to alertness, as the taxi braked quickly and slowed down to a stop.

'What?' He leaned forward to interrogate the driver.

The man turned and spoke to him.

'Road's closed, sir. We gotter make a deetour-'

Quelch stared. They were at the junction of the road With Oak Lane, but across the right-hand turn, which they must take to get to the Courtfield Road, there was a large sign: NO THOROUGHFARE.

'But this is preposterous!' Mr. Quelch's tranquil mood had departed. The taxi could turn left, but that would take it down to the Sark, and there was no bridge over that river, nearer than Courtfield. Certainly there was a towpath, but no taxi could negotiate it. It was forbidden, by a by-law, to cyclists-though Greyfriars cyclists, who had been in that neighbourhood, and late for such things as 'call-over' had been known to break that injunction!

Mr. Quelch suddenly saw a man who looked like a road-mender on the other side of the sign. Catching Mr. Quelch's gaze, he came over to him.

'Sorry, sir. There's been a breakdown further up.

Lorry swung across the road and jammed it. If you will turn left-'

'If you, as I suppose, are in the employ of the local rural district council,' observed Mr. Quelch tartly, 'you should know that I cannot turn left. The road there leads to the river, and there is no bridge over it nearer than Courtfield, and it would be impossible for this vehicle to proceed along the tow-path, even were it not against the law-which it is!'

'Sorry, sir,' said the man. 'Perhaps, you'd try it? Being an emergency.'

'No!' Quelch almost snapped the word. It would be necessary to return past Greyfriars, take another road leading to the Cliff Road and, eventually, to Pegg. The *Sunflower* would not, of course, sail without Mr. Quelch if he happened to be late. Nevertheless, the delay was annoying, and the road-mender's manner even more so! 'Turn round, driver, and go back past the school-'

'No!' The road-man suddenly interrupted. 'Turn left up there-sharp!' To Mr. Quelch's surprise and dismay, he produced a pistol from his pocket!

'What is the meaning of this-?'

'You'll find out quick, if you don't do as I tell you.' The man pointed the pistol at the taxi-driver, who had been gazing at the development of the scene with startled eyes and a widely opened mouth. It became plain that however much his passenger might want to argue the matter he, certainly, did not! In a frantic hurry he started his engine and swung his cab round and up Oak Lane towards the Sark.

'Round that corner-and then, stop!' barked the man with the pistol. The Remove master noted, grimly, that he was now speaking with a much more cultured though much more peremptory accent. The taxi turned the corner, which put the main road out of sight and then stopped. Mr. Quelch observed that the man who was holding them up had taken the 'No

Thoroughfare' sign and placed it across the top of the road they had entered.

Another man now came out from a clump of trees at the side of the lane. As he advanced, Quelch stared at him and recognized him.

It was the Chinese gentleman who had called at the school some days previously-Mr. Hing Wah!

CHAPTER 12

COKER TO THE RESCUE!

'ARE you responsible for this outrage, sir?' demanded Mr. Quelch, as Hing Wah approached.

'Yes, Mr. Quelch.' The man bowed, suavely. 'You must pardon the liberty of my employing an English friend to stop you and direct you to turn down this lane. You realize, of course, that I could in no circumstances have passed as a European-and you might have become suspicious after the unfortunate end of our last meeting-and told your driver to drive on. I shall not detain you long.'

'I have yet to learn,' said Mr. Quelch sternly, 'why you have presumed to detain me at all!'

'I shall enlighten you, Mr. Quelch. I wish, merely to look into your suitcase, and see that you are taking nothing out of this country which you should not. I will disturb the contents as little as possible by opening it on the floor of the cab. Allow me!' Opening the door of the cab, he put a hand on Mr. Quelch's suitcase.

'Leave my suitcase alone, sir!'

'No, Mr. Quelch. You must be satisfied if I leave you alone. Do not provoke me. My friend still has his weapon-and is also armed by what is known in your language, as a cosh. I do not think anyone may pass us-but if they do, it is a silent weapon which could be quickly effective. If there should be a passer-by, I shall merely be chatting to you as a friend. It would be well to bear that in mind!

Quelch was a brave man, but he realized that the position was hopeless. There was very little chance of anyone passing along that road as it ended on the tow-path. And as the man was leaving the suitcase in the cab, there would be no curiosity aroused as there might have been had it been taken out to be searched on the road!

'If you are prepared to risk further difficulties, Mr. Quelch, I think your driver is not.'

Mr. Quelch looked at the taxi-driver. It was only too evident that he was not prepared to risk anything!

'I do not wish to steal your suitcase, Mr. Quelch-merely to look inside it. Your key, please!'

Mr. Quelch hesitated.

'Your key, I said. I can easily break the lock if you do not hand it to me. Why incur that damage?'

The Remove master felt in his pocket. There was no sense or use in resisting.

'You are, I suppose, sir, attempting to steal that valueless Chinese vase, which you endeavoured to obtain previously?' he observed, handing over the key.

'As you say, Mr. Quelch,' agreed Hing Wah, suavely. 'I am proposing to steal that valueless Chinese vase.' He fitted the key into the lock of the case and opened it, displaying the contents. Both Hing Wah and the Remove master stared at them.

'What--?'

Mr. Quelch looked at the contents with amazement.

There was no vase within-but instead of that, there was a cardboard box of which he had no knowledge. It was that kind of box which looked as if it might contain a cake. Hing Wah, who seemed equally surprised, tore off the cardboard lid.

The box did contain a cake!

Hing Wah looked at the Remove master. His bantering manner had departed.

'Where is that vase, Mr. Quelch? I am not to be trifled with.'

'Where is it?' thundered Quelch. 'It was, sir, in that case, and should be there now! Somehow, your nimble-fingered accomplices have already stolen it!'

'Nonsense, Mr. Quelch. You had taken that vase under your own particular care. I am convinced you know where it is now, and I warn you-'
Quite what Hing Wah would have warned Mr. Quelch was not to be known for, at that moment, there came an interruption.

Horace Coker's motor-bike suddenly dashed at the little group!

When Mr. Hing Wah and his friends had made their plans, they did not reckon with people like Coker.

Coker had been meaning to 'hit' Ross-on-Wye that night. With this end in view, he should have gone straight ahead to the main road and turned left for Courtfield. Why he should have turned left before then, and on to a road which had no exit save to a tow-path, and which was now, moreover, labelled 'No Thoroughfare', no one but Horace Coker could understand.

Coker was annoyed when he saw that notice of 'No Thoroughfare'. He considered it 'cheek' on someone's part to put it there-which, although he did not know it, it actually was! He had not intended to go to Courtfield by the Sark tow-path, but seeing that notice decided him.

Swinging round it at the last moment, he turned into the lane.

Avoiding, rather skilfully in his opinion, some people who were obstructing the traffic, Coker passed them too quickly to see who they were or what they were doing, and disappeared in the direction of the Sark. The skilful avoidance had first caused the motor-bike to head directly for the man with the pistol. With a yell and a leap he jumped aside and fell into a ditch, loosing hold of the pistol which vanished into some neighbouring undergrowth. Simultaneously Mr. Ring Wah stepped back.

The taxi-driver might not have been inclined to argue with an armed man, but now he saw his chance and took it. Swinging the taxi round as only taxis can be swung, he sped for the main road, knocking down the 'No Thoroughfare' board in transit. Mr. Quelch pulled the cab door to and shut it, and then fastened his suit-case, the key of which Mr. Hing Wah had, thoughtfully or otherwise, left in the lock.

'Good gracious me!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

It had been Coker of the Fifth on that motor-bicycle, Mr. Quelch had observed. He felt grateful to Coker. It was the first time in history that anyone had felt grateful to Coker for his performance on his motor-bike.

CHAPTER 13

MR. QUELCH IS MISUNDERSTOOD

THE taxi-cab was now proceeding at about fifty miles an hour in the direction of Courtfield Road. Mr. Quelch, who had thought his present situation was preferable to the one he had not enjoyed a few minutes ago, was beginning to feel not so sure. In any case, he must attract the driver's attention. The Remove master decided that he had better tell the man to return to Greyfriars. It did not seem possible that he could have left that vase in his room. Nevertheless it was not in his suitcase, and no one had been given any opportunity of taking it that he could see, since he had put it there! So where else, but somewhere at Greyfriars could it be, incomprehensible as the whole situation appeared in every aspect?

Mr. Quelch tapped on the window, causing the driver to start, jam his foot on the accelerator and touch sixty! Then the re-assuring sight of a Courtfield-Redcliffe bus, crossing the road junction fifty yards ahead could be seen, and the man slowed down.

'I think, driver,' said Mr. Quelch, 'that you had better turn round before going further, and take me back to the school.'

The man shook his head, vigorously. 'Not along that there road back, sir, if you don't mind,' he replied, in a tone of voice which almost suggested that it would be the same if Mr. Quelch did mind! 'We'd run into that bloke with the gun again, as like as not-'e's probably picked it outer that there ditch by now-I can take yer the long way round by the Redcliffe Road if yer want-and the same blooming way back to 'ere afterwards!'

Mr. Quelch recognized that there was some reason, if no valour, in the driver's point of view.

'Very well then,' he said. 'You had better stop at the Courtfield Police Station. I must report this incident.'

Incident?' said the driver. 'Bust me! Yessir.'

Quelch leaned back and reflected. Sir Reginald Brooke had said, previously, that it was no good going to the police in this matter, but the Remove master felt that he now had a public duty to perform. He would see what Inspector Grimes had to say, though it was difficult to imagine what he or anyone else could say. Thieves had attempted to steal the vase and had not done so. The vase had been stolen, but not by those who tried to do so. A cake had appeared from nowhere into Mr. Quelch's suit-case.

In the police station, he was soon telling his story to a puzzled Inspector Grimes. The Inspector pursed his lips. 'So this man, Mr. Quelch, whom you recognized this morning, attempted to steal the vase last week, and you did not report the matter to us?'

'Nothing was stolen, Mr. Grimes,' said Quelch, 'except an utterly valueless article purchased in this High Street by a boy called Bunter, for one-and-ninepence.'

'In mistake for another vase, sir, which you tell me you consider equally valueless. It would appear that other people do not share your opinion.'

'It would, indeed. Mr. Grimes,' replied Mr. Quelch, tartly, 'as it has now been stolen.'

'But not by the man who tried to steal it before, and who, again, made an attempt today,' commented Mr. Grimes. 'You tell me that you undoubtedly put it in your suit-case this morning, and yet found it had gone when you were held up in Oak Lane. You did not leave the case unattended except when you walked to the end of the passage, on hearing a noise caused by

the collision of a boy with the porter. It must have been then that this vase was taken, if at all.'

'If at all, sir?' snapped Mr. Quelch. 'There is no other entrance to the Masters' Passage, save for one round the corner and that door was locked—as were all the other study doors, I, being the only master then remaining on the premises. Yet it has most certainly disappeared.'

'In that case, Mr. Quelch,' said the Inspector, imperturbably. 'I must suggest that you must, inadvertently, have removed it from your suit-case and left it in your room at Greyfriars!'

Mr. Quelch breathed hard. 'Replacing it with a cake, which I had never previously seen, Mr. Grimes? I could hardly have taken a porcelain vase from my suit-case, and replaced it with a cake, without being conscious of the circumstance.'

'Nevertheless, someone has done so, it would seem,' said Mr. Grimes. 'I have never before heard of a thief who, on taking his objective, replaced it with a cake or any such gift! Moreover, you say that Sir Reginald Brooke thinks that Chinese in London are in a conspiracy to steal this vase. In that case would they be likely to employ two separate agents on the same day, in competition with and unknown to each other?'

'If there is only one person engaged in this business, sir-' said Mr. Quelch, 'this man, Hing Wah—and he thinks, as you appear to do, that I may have left the vase in my study, replacing it with a cake—may I use your telephone and speak to the porter at the school, and warn him to be on the look-out in case the fellow attempts to get into the school for it?'

'Get Greyfriars School on the telephone!' The Inspector waved a hand at a constable. 'Ask for the gate-porter. Tell him Mr. Quelch would like to speak to him.' The Inspector waited in an official calm, which Mr. Quelch was finding increasingly exasperating. 'There you are, sir.'

The Remove master grabbed the telephone receiver.

His stock of patience had now worn very thin. 'Is that you, Gosling? Has anyone sought to obtain admission to the school since I left—any Chinese?'

'Wot, sir?' Gosling's voice sounded astonished. 'Any Chinese?'

'E wants to know hif we've seen any Chinese.' Gosling had turned away and was speaking to someone else in his lodge—but his voice came clearly over the line.

'Blow me!' It was Mibble's voice, equally clear. ''E must 'ave 'ad one or two—the start of 'is 'olidays—but 'oo'd 'ave thought it?'

'Gosling!' Mr. Quelch was only too conscious of a suppressed smile on the face of Inspector Grimes who had also, apparently, overheard! 'Answer me! Has any person—particularly any Chinese person—come to the school since I left this morning? Has anyone sought access to my room? Yes or no?'

'Yes, sir—I mean, no.'

'What do you mean, Gosling?'

'Yes, sir—I mean, no. We've 'ad the butcher—and the postman. I don't think anyone's bin to yer room. Yes, sir.'

Mr. Quelch slammed down the receiver and turned to the Inspector.

'Mr. Grimes, as you appear to cast some doubts on my statements, I propose immediately to take that taxi-cab to the school, and see if I have, by any possible chance, left that vase in my study. If you wish one of your men to accompany me as a witness—?'

'That will be unnecessary, Mr. Quelch,' said the Inspector, soothingly.

'A statement has already been taken from the taxi-driver as to the hold-up. I suggest you pay him off and let me take you to the school in a police car—and then you, and your suit-case, to Pegg pier. I must tell you that earlier this morning I received a complaint from the Urban

District Council, that one of their 'No Thoroughfare' signs was missing from the Roads Department yard.'

'Oh!' Mr. Quelch brightened. 'Then you give some credence to my complaint?'

'Why, of course, Mr. Quelch-but you will admit that this matter has some peculiar aspects. Let us now go to the school.'

Gosling saw Mr. Quelch drive up in the company of a police inspector, and shook his head sadly as though wondering what the world, and Greyfriars in particular, was coming to. Mr. Quelch, who saw the shake, again felt that he was being misunderstood.

A search of his study revealed no signs of the Chinese vase. He turned to Inspector Grimes. 'You see, it is not here, Inspector.'

'No, sir. The matter remains for investigation.'

'I must advise Sir Reginald Brooke of his loss.' The Remove master picked up his telephone. This was a distasteful task, and he was somewhat relieved when, on getting through to Mauleverer Towers, he was told by Porson, the butler, that Sir Reginald was out and would be for some hours.

Mr. Grimes spoke soothingly. If Mr. Quelch did not wish the police to advise Sir Reginald of his loss, which they were quite prepared to do, Mr. Quelch could telephone from the yacht when she was at sea. The Inspector understood that the *Sunflower* was fitted with this latest device of science.

'Thank you, Mr. Grimes,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I will communicate with Sir Reginald-it is a painful task, and I feel that I cannot leave it to anyone else. And now I must get to the yacht!'

Another run in the police car-with a parting sad shake of the head by Gosling, observed by the Remove master-and they came soon to the old wooden pier of Pegg, at the end of which lay a boat which had doubtless been waiting for Mr. Quelch for some time. A small knot of holiday-makers gathered round the police car as Mr. Quelch descended. There had been the taking-in of boarders in Pegg within the last few years as the tourists began to 'discover' it.

Mr. Quelch caught a murmur of voices.

'Bein' seen outer the country by the police. I wonder what he's done? He looks a fairly respectable bloke.'

'They always do.'

Inspector Grimes caught the much-harassed Mr. Quelch's hand and gave it a hearty friendly shake.

'Well, good-bye, sir,' he said in a loud voice for the benefit of the bystanders. 'I hope you enjoy your tour. It looks fine weather to start. I will let you know if we have any news for you.'

CHAPTER 14

LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE

'WHAT'S the matter with Quelchy?' said Bob Cherry.

'Ask him,' suggested Johnny Bull.

The others laughed. It was a fine summer afternoon, and the Sunflower was just leaving the shelter of Pegg Bay for the English Channel. Bob Cherry's remark had directed the attention of his friends to Henry Samuel Quelch, who was standing by the companion-way.

'May be feeling seasick,' said Nugent.

'Rats!' retorted Bob. 'The ship's moving a bit more than when she was in Pegg Bay, of course, but nothing to disturb anyone!'

'Some people can be disturbed by a voyage on a duck-pond,' said Harry Wharton. 'Not Quelchy, though, I fancy. If he weren't well, he'd go and lie down-but he does look glum, all the same!'

'We've seen him look so before,' said Johnny Bull.

'In class, yes! That's official glumness to overawe us,' replied Bob Cherry, 'but this is the start of a holiday. He was very late coming on board. That boat had to wait a long time at the pier for him. I wonder if anything happened to worry him before he left?'

'Bunter, perhaps?' suggested Wharton. 'He was still hanging about when we had that disturbance with Coker.' Bob laughed. 'Bunter will be nearing Bunter Villa now-not Bunter Court-He wouldn't get in Quelchy's way on breaking-up day, when he doesn't have to!'

'That car, which brought Quelchy down to the pier was a police car,' said Johnny. 'I was looking through field-glasses at the time, and it was Inspector Grimes seeing him off. He and Quelch know each other, of course, but they aren't bosom pals! There might have been something happening at the school after we left, and before he did. He went to see Mauly and had a long talk with him, as soon as he came on board, too!'

'Well, Mauly's the owner of this ship, or as good as,' said Harry Wharton. 'He's resting in his cabin now.'

'He would be!' observed Johnny Bull.

'Let's go and stir him up, and see if he has any news,' suggested Bob Cherry.

'It may look a bit inquisitive-'

'It is!' Johnny prided himself on his downrightness.

Bob Cherry smiled. 'You're right, Johnny-you always are-but I was thinking-'

Bob became serious-'That ass, Coker-you know what he's like on that bike of his when he does get it to go! He should have left about the time Quelch did. And-'

'We'll ask Mauly!' said Wharton, resolutely. They had had many differences with Horace Coker, but no one wanted any harm to come to him. The proper person of whom information should have been sought was, of course, Quelch, but they were wary of putting questions to him even in the holiday time. Quelch remained Quelch. And if he had had a long talk with Mauleverer, it must have been about something!

They found Mauleverer still resting in his cabin. His lordship, though energetic enough when occasion called for it, was disposed to relax when it didn't. He looked up as the Famous Five entered.

'Just being inquisitive, Mauly,' said Bob Cherry, seating himself on the large trunk which had come to Mauly's study the night before, and was now in his cabin. 'We saw Quelchy looking glum, and as we know he was late getting on board, we wondered if there had been any trouble?'

'Oh, poor old Quelchy! Yaas! He's lost the vase,' said Lord Mauleverer.

'What vase?' asked Nugent.

'You remember the one that fat ass Bunter was talking about-the one my uncle gave Quelch to take to Hong Kong-well, it's been pinched. Quelchy's taxi was held up on the way by a man with a pistol-'

'What?' There was a chorus of exclamations. 'And the fellow took the vase?' asked Johnny Bull.

'No!'

'The man held him up and didn't take it? What did he want then?' demanded Nugent.

'That Chinese vase,' said Lord Mauleverer.

'But you've just told us that he didn't take it!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'The confusionfulness is rather terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'It had been taken already,' explained Mauleverer. 'When the man opened Quelch's suit-case, it wasn't there as Quelch expected. He'd put it in, and it had gone. There was just a cake he didn't know anything about!'

'A cake in Quelch's suit-case he didn't know anything about!' exclaimed Frank Nugent. 'He hadn't taken Bunter's suit-case by mistake, I suppose?'

'Bunter's suit-case?' Johnny Bull looked thoughtful.

'There is a suit-case with the initials W. G. B., which has been dumped into my cabin. The steward said he thought it must be mine, borrowed from a relative. I suppose-?'

'Oh, dear!' Lord Mauleverer looked concerned. 'If you've brought Bunter's suit-case instead of your own-?'

'I haven't fathead!' said Bull. 'It must have been-if it's Bunter's-amongst the heavy luggage which came along with that!' He pointed to the box on which Bob Cherry was sitting.

Lord Mauleverer still looked concerned. 'I suppose we'll have to send it back from Nice-but that'll mean all sorts of Customs forms to fill in. Oh, dear, what a nuisance!'

'Nice?' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'I thought we were heading first of all, for Malta!'

'Oh, so we are!' said Lord Mauleverer, 'but I thought we might pop into Nice as we pass.'

'Popping into Nice as we pass is about a five-mile pop off the course,' observed Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton laughed. 'We won't mind,' he said, 'but we were talking about this lost vase-I say! Quelchy held up by a gunman on the way to Pegg! No wonder he was a bit put out!'

'The putoutfulness was probably great,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'An odd kind of happening,' said Johnny Bull. 'A man holding him up-and he hasn't got it, because someone has taken it already-and left a cake in exchange. Sounds to me like some sort of a jape!'

'Quelch can't have thought it a jape, or he wouldn't have gone to the police about it,' observed Frank Nugent. 'Was it valuable, Mauly?'

'No. Not by all accounts,' said Mauly. 'Most puzzlin' matter. My uncle's friend, who asked him to take it to Hong Kong-now, what was his name? Full of "ings" and "ongs"-Ching Kong Sen-that's it-he got it from another chap who came from Shanghai and was just to take care of it until it was wanted-which it was about a couple of months ago. You remember Bunter's gas about someone tryin' to pinch it from Quelch? Well, they did and failed-and now it's gone!'

'There is more than meets the eyefulness here,' said Hurree Singh. 'It must have a value not known, my esteemed Mauly.'

'Stands to reason,' said Johnny Bull. 'There isn't that great care to protect and attempts to steal it for nothing. Must be a reason, and the reason appears to have leaked out.'

'I suppose, even in China, there are people who listen at keyholes, like Bunter?' suggested Bob Cherry.

'Poor old Quelch, he's got to break the news to your uncle, if he hasn't done so already,' said Harry Wharton.'

'Nunky was out when Quelch tried to telephone him from the school,' replied Lord Mauleverer. 'He's goin' to try and get him presently-Ships' Telephone Service, you know.'

'Well-it's rough, but we can't do anything,' said Wharton. 'There's a breeze getting up; you can feel it. Come and have a blow on deck, Mauly?' His lordship shuddered. 'No, my dear chap!' he said, 'I'll just lie here and meditate a bit.'

'If you're not feeling well-' began Bob Cherry.

'I'm perfectly fit!' declared Lord Mauleverer. 'Never better! You chaps go and have a blow on the deck and tell me all about it afterwards-Help you to get your sea-legs, you know.'

The Removites smiled, and left him. In the Remove passage at Greyfriars they would probably, in similar circumstances, have collected his lordship by force, and taken him for a healthy trot in the fresh air-but, as his guests on his uncle's yacht, they felt they had better leave him to meditate-or, more likely, to go to sleep!

Bob Cherry closed the cabin-door, and as he did so, there was heard a sound from inside.

'Woo-ooo-ooo-oooh!'

'Gosh!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'He is ill. He showed no signs of it, but-' Bob Cherry opened the cabin-door again and went in.

CHAPTER 15

AND BUNTER, TOO!

BOB CHERRY stared. Lord Mauleverer was reclining on his berth in the cabin, and looking as though he were already sleeping peacefully-or very nearly so! As Bob gazed, Mauly opened his eyes.

'What's up old chap?' he asked, lazily. 'Anythin' wrong?'

'It sounded like it!' said Bob. 'Mauly, old boy, if you are feeling ill, let us know, and we'll do all we can to help you.'

'But I'm not feelin' ill!' Lord Mauleverer declared.

'What makes you think I am?'

'Well-groaning like that-'

'I wasn't groan in' -Imagination, old chap!'

'Imagination be sugared!' exclaimed Bob. 'We all heard it from outside!'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'Must have been a dolphin or somethin' just outside the porthole. Intelligent beasts they tell me!' He closed his eyes again, and Bob, after staring at him for a moment or two, again closed the cabin-door, and surveyed the other Removites.

'He's all right,' said Bob.

'He didn't sound like it,' observed Johnny Bull. 'Well, he is!' retorted Bob. 'Just dozing and looking serene-'

Bob Cherry stopped, as another agonizing sound came from within the cabin, hardly muffled by its closed door.

'Ooooooh--ah!'

'There-listen to that!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'No one who's all right makes a row like that. We'll go in-' He broke off abruptly, as the cabin-door opened and Lord Mauleverer looked out, inquiringly.

'Oh! Is it Cherry?'

'Is what Cherry?' demanded Bob. 'Look here. Mauly-'

'Man who's groanin',' said Mauleverer. 'Thought it must be Cherry. Didn't know you other fellows were outside. Woke me up. Sorry and all that for whoever it is. What about a bit of fresh air on deck for him?'

'Look here, Mauly,' said Harry Wharton. 'We heard you groaning, as though you were taken fearfully bad, and-'

'Not me!' Mauleverer shook his head. 'I heard it near the door, and thought it was Cherry after he'd gone out. Asking me if I'm ill, when he feels ill himself! There's some sort of psychology about that sort of thing.'

'Blow your psychology!' said Bob. 'We heard you making a row as though you were feeling very ill-we all did. Didn't we, you chaps?'

There was a chorus of agreement. Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

'Sorry to disappoint you,' he observed. 'but I'm quite well. Don't I look it?'

'Well, you do!' admitted Harry Wharton. 'but-'

'If you're quite well, why did you make that awful row?' demanded Bull.

'Not guilty!' said Mauly. 'Didn't make any awful row.'

Must have been one of you fellows-'

'It wasn't. It was inside your cabin,' declared Johnny Bull. 'You must have been groaning in your sleep.'

Lord Mauleverer looked rather worried. 'Well, I suppose it could be,' he admitted. 'Never heard of it happenin' to anyone. I don't see how I could have done it, without wakin' myself up! Tell you what! I'll try and doze off again, and if you hear me makin' any sort of a noise, come in and look at me!' With that, Lord Mauleverer smiled and closed the cabin-door.

Bob Cherry shook his head. 'Beats me!' he said, 'Well-we'll wait around-Hallo, there's Quelchy!'

'Coming this way, I think,' said Johnny Bull. 'Still looking serious, isn't he?'

Mr. Quelch always looked serious from the view-point of the boys in his form, but he certainly now looked much more so than usual. The juniors were sympathetic. Quelch, as they well knew, prided himself on his reliability, and to have to confess that he had lost an article, which had been entrusted to him, must have disturbed him quite a lot.

He looked up as he came near them, and managed to smile.

'Ah, good afternoon, my boys!'

'Good afternoon, sir!' The Removites spoke in chorus. 'Is Mauleverer not with you?'

'He's in his cabin, sir,' answered Harry Wharton. 'He is resting. We thought he wasn't quite well-with sea-sickness-and came to inquire-but he seems all right now.'

'I trust so, Wharton. I came to see him before I put a telephone call through to his uncle.'

This, the juniors immediately understood, was a courtesy visit. Quelch was punctilious about such matters. He might be in charge of the party, but he was a guest on Mauleverer's uncle's yacht, and as such would not make free with the radio telephone, without first seeing his host about it.

'I shall go in-' At that moment the ship rolled rather more than she had been doing, and there came a sound from within the cabin.

'Woooooooh!'

'Upon my word!' Mr. Quelch opened the cabin-door to see Mauleverer reclining on his berth, and looking towards him.

'You seem unwell, Mauleverer-'

'Me, sir?' Mauleverer swung his feet to the floor, and stood up, looking blank. 'I didn't make that noise. It woke me up. I thought it must be Cherry!'

'Me? I told you, Mauly-' Bob Cherry broke off, as a noise came from behind him.

'Ooooooooh!'

Bob swung round.

'It's in that box!' he shouted. 'It's someone in the box! My hat! Who on earth-?' He pulled up the lid to disclose a face-a fat, pale face-with both hands clasped to it.

'BUNTER.!!'

It was a shout in which they all joined. Mr. Quelch came forward, as if he could hardly believe his eyes. 'Bunter?' he exclaimed. 'Is that actually Bunter? What does this mean?'

'Ooooh-Ooooh!' The fat Owl clasped his head. 'Stop it! Stop this ship rolling. Ow! Oh, dear!'

'It was Bunter all the time,' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'He must have stowed himself away in that box! Of all the cheek-!'

'Bunter!' Mr. Quelch thundered. 'What is the meaning of your being here? How dare you come on board this vessel? You will be sent back at the very first port of call-from Malta. Of all the outrageous occurrences-'

'Ooooh ... Ow!'

'I don't think he's well enough to answer you, sir,' said Harry Wharton, taking compassion on the Owl. 'The motion of the ship seems to have upset him. Help me to heave him up, Bob, and we'll take him somewhere to lie down!'

'Good Gad!' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer. 'Who'd have thought this? There's a spare cabin two or three doors along. You can put him in the bunk there.' Lord Mauleverer looked at the space in the box lately occupied by Bunter. 'I wonder what he did with all those topees?'

Bunter was in no condition to reply to that or any other question. Willing hands clasped him, and led him out of the cabin. Quelch stood by silently. It was obvious that the Owl could not answer for his sins at that moment, and equally obvious that Quelch would call upon him to do so as soon as he could.

The form-master waited until Billy Bunter had disappeared, still groaning, and then turned to Lord Mauleverer.

'Mauleverer, I was about to communicate with your uncle, and first wished to ask you-' Quelch stopped. He was looking into the big open box now emptied of Bunter. He stared, catching sight of something which Mauleverer had not observed. Then stooping, he took it from the contents. 'Good gracious!' he exclaimed. 'Incredible! This is the vase, which was lost! How can it have come here?' The appearance of the Chinese vase seemed to surprise Mr. Quelch even more than had that of Bunter!

CHAPTER 16

REPRIEVE FOR BUNTER

MR. QUELCH sat in a deck-chair on the after-deck of the *Sunflower*. The vessel was now crossing the Bay of Biscay which, on this occasion, was contradicting its reputation for roughness. The high wind, which had caused such havoc to Bunter's interior two days before in the English Channel, had died down. Bunter had had a whole calm day in which to recover, and that morning, on looking into the cabin which had been allocated to the Owl, Mr. Quelch had found him consuming a large breakfast-equal to two ordinary breakfasts-which had been brought to him by a steward. It was quite evident to the Remove master that Bunter had recovered.

Soon after the discovery of the Chinese vase in the big box which had contained Bunter, Mr. Quelch had despatched a telegram to Inspector Grimes, informing him that it had now been found. It was gratifying to Quelch that he had been able to send that message, instead of one to Sir Reginald Brooke, announcing its loss. Nevertheless, he had an uneasy feeling that the Inspector would think he had made a great muddle of the whole business.

However, Mr. Quelch had to admit to himself that it would have been much worse if the vase had been lost, even if he did owe its recovery to Bunter and his absurd activities. Mr. Quelch frowned as he thought of those absurd activities.

He now looked up and saw Bunter approaching. The Famous Five, who were close at hand with Lord Mauleverer, grinned at each other. They were aware of Quelch's mixed feelings on the subject of Bunter.

'Now we shall hear something of what happened,' murmured Johnny Bull.

'There was a cake in that suit-case which Quelch received in exchange for the vase. When there's something eatable in an affair, it nearly always means Bunter's in it, too!'

'Not like Bunter to exchange a cake for a vase,' observed Nugent. 'If it had been a vase for a cake now-'

'The unlikeliness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Good morning, sir!' It was Bunter, who opened the conversation as he approached Quelch. A number of crumbs about his fat person indicated that he had, indeed, recovered from his sea-sickness. He eyed Quelch, warily. Quelch ought to be brimming over with gratitude for the recovery of that vase, but he did not look as if he were. Bunter was, however, used to people who were not grateful for things he had done for them.

'Sit down, Bunter!' Quelch indicated another deck-chair. 'Now you appear to be well again, there are questions I wish to put to you, and to them, you must give truthful answers.'

'Yes, sir,' Bunter seated himself in a deck-chair, which creaked ominously under the strain. 'Certainly, sir. I am always truthful, I hope!'

'What a hope!' murmured Wharton.

'First of all, Bunter, why did you come on this vessel, uninvited, and as a stowaway?'

'But I was invited, sir,' protested Bunter. 'Mauly-I-I mean Mauleverer invited me. He said that I could only come if I came as a stowaway! Didn't you Mauly?'

'Oh, Gad!' Mauleverer remembered his remark to Bunter on the last night of term. 'Yes-but I didn't mean-'

'Really, Mauly, you said so. You can't deny it. All the fellows heard you. I thought that you meant what you said.' Bunter's voice was reproachful. 'I can't help it if you said something amphibious, Mauly.'

'Do you mean "ambiguous" Bunter?' Mr. Quelch had been listening to this conversation, with a frown. 'I cannot think that you so misunderstood Mauleverer's meaning. However, you are now on board. You will be landed at our first port of call which, I believe, is Valletta in Malta, and from there sent home. There is now another matter, Bunter. You were in possession of a Chinese vase, which I put into my suit-case. How did that happen?'

'Well, I was saving it, sir,' said Bunter, cautiously. 'I knew it was Mink-'

'Ming!' snapped Quelch.

'Yessir,' said Bunter. 'That's why I took it into the big case with me-I knew there were people trying to steal it-and I thought you wouldn't like it left lying about in the school-I thought you'd be grateful to me for bringing it out safely to you, sir.'

'Grateful?' Quelch almost barked the word. 'Really, Bunter-' The form-master paused. It was a most annoying circumstance, but should he not, after all, be grateful to Bunter? Had that Chinese vase been left in his suit-case, as it should have been, it would undoubtedly have been stolen by the men who had held up his cab in Oak Lane.

Yet gratitude to Bunter, however much deserved, was an emotion which Mr. Quelch felt some difficulty in arousing within himself.

'That vase, Bunter,' he observed, 'was placed by me in my suit-case in my study. When the suit-case was opened I discovered that a cake had been substituted for the vase. Was that substitution effected by you?'

'Yes, sir. I thought you'd like a cake on your journey.

I always get hungry on journeys myself.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Removites laughed. Mr. Quelch did not look round with a glance calculated to quell unseemly hilarity, as he would have done at Greyfriars, but he did not laugh. He frowned.

'If you are speaking truthfully, Bunter-which I very much doubt,' he said, 'your action, however well-meant, was a most improper one. You should be aware that I could not accept any such gift from a boy in my form. Moreover, if you did put that cake into my case, why did you take out the vase?'

'They wouldn't both go in, sir-and Coker was coming.'

'Coker?' Quelch remembered that collision with Gosling in the passage.

'Coker of the Fifth? What has he to do with this matter?'

'It was the esteemed Coker's cake,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'That is now clearly apparent!'

'Bunter pinched it when Coker rushed after Bob, and his carrot-and then chased the lot of us!' whispered Wharton.

'It wasn't Coker's cake, sir, and I didn't take it from his bike when he rushed after Cherry and the carrot,' said Bunter.

'Cherry and the carrot? What do you mean, Bunter?' The form-master turned an inquiring eye on Bob Cherry.

'Only a little joke on Coker, sir,' explained Bob. 'He was having some trouble in starting that motor-bike of his-and I brought him a carrot, and told him to hold it before its nose.'

'Absurd!' Mr. Quelch suppressed a smile. 'Really, Cherry, you should not play such tricks on a senior boy.' He turned again to the Owl of the Remove. 'It would appear, Bunter, that when Coker's attention was distracted, you purloined his cake. That was why he rushed into the House after you and collided with Gosling. You had taken Coker's property, Bunter. Upon my word-'

'Only-only for safety, sir,' said Bunter. 'I thought it would be dangerous to leave it all alone with-with thieves about. You remember

they tried to steal your Mink vase-but I stopped them-so I thought I'd better take care of Coker's cake.'

The Famous Five chuckled. Mr. Quelch frowned.

'It is apparent to me, Bunter,' he said, 'that you took Coker's cake without his permission, and then rushed into Masters' Passage to avoid him and hide yourself. And when I went to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, which was caused by his colliding with Gosling, did you then enter my study?'

'You-sir-I thought you might arbitrate about that cake as Coker had forgotten he'd given it to me. You know what a-a chump he is, sir, and-then you came in and didn't notice me!'

The Removites grinned-but were careful not to let Mr. Quelch see them doing so. The Owl had given two different versions of how he had obtained that cake, and probably expected Mr. Quelch to believe both. Judging by the Remove master's expression, it looked as if he believed neither.

'If we were at Greyfriars, Bunter, I should cane you severely for your untruthfulness. You took that cake from Coker, and brought it to my room. I did not see you there. Were you hiding somewhere?'

'No, sir. I was-was just behind the armchair. And then you went off without the vase-and I thought I-I had better catch you up-and bring it to you, as you valued it-and Mauleverer had said that I could come if I came as a stowaway, and-'

Bunter's voice tailed off. The Remove master's expression was a formidable one. He was thinking deeply. From Bunter's tortuous description of his ways, two things were, at any rate, perfectly clear. One was that Bunter had behaved disgracefully in every way. The other was that, if he had not so behaved, Sir Reginald Brooke's vase would have been stolen!

The Remove master at length rose to his feet.

'Your conduct in every way has been reprehensible, Bunter,' he observed. 'Nevertheless-though without intending to and by means I cannot approve-you have rendered me a service by once more saving that vase from theft. You will be sent home at the first port of call, of course-but the matter otherwise ends here.'

'Oh, thank you, sir!' The fat Owl beamed. 'May I-may I have my cake back, sir?'

Mr. Quelch turned round with an expression which made Bunter recoil.

'No, Bunter, you may not! It is not your cake, and never was-and it is at the present moment in Courtfield Police Station.' Mr. Quelch almost choked. The police had taken possession of that cake, in case it might be possible to discover where it came from and thus trace the abstractor of the vase. Now if any clues led Inspector Grimes anywhere they would lead him to Coker! And through him to Bunter! And sometime, Mr. Quelch must, as a dutiful man, tell the truth to Inspector Grimes himself! It was a ridiculous situation-so much so that, not trusting himself to say any more, Mr. Quelch turned and strode along the deck.

The Famous Five were very, very careful to show no signs of mirth until he was out of sight.

CHAPTER 17

BUNTER THE PLUNGER

THE Removites were watching Bunter with interest. The Owl of the Remove did not usually interest his form-fellows; in fact, when he tried to get them to be interested in him, they usually found pressing business elsewhere.

Bunter, however, was now doing something unusual.

He was not, for once, devoting his energies to anything eatable; he was studying a book. Quelch, much stirred as he had recently been by Bunter's activities, had passed by Bunter's chair, when strolling along the deck, observed the book and seemed pleased.

The *Sunflower* was approaching Nice, and was already near enough for its passengers to see the cars speeding along the Promenade des Anglais. Presently, she would drop anchor. For the colourful shore of the Riviera, with the Alpes Maritimes in the background, Bunter had no eyes. He kept on studying his book.

'It is, perhaps, a book of the cookfulness?' suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Must be something to do with eating,' said Johnny Bull, 'or it wouldn't interest Bunter. But he doesn't usually want to read about eating; he wants to do it.'

'Can't be Virgil or anything of that kind,' observed Bob Cherry, 'yet, Quelch saw what it was and looked approving. Let's be inquisitive and ask Bunter what he's reading.'

The fat Owl looked up, as his form-fellows neared him.

'Bong Jour!'

'What?' The Removites stopped short, in surprise. 'That's French for "good morning", if you fellows don't know,' observed Billy Bunter.

'It isn't! "*Bon jour*" is the French for "good day"', said Harry Wharton.

'You can't teach me French,' said Bunter, loftily.

'That's what old Charpentier found at Greyfriars,' added Johnny Bull.

Bunter put on an even loftier look, and the juniors laughed.

'You're jealous of me, and my talent,' he said. 'You won't laugh when you find out how useful I am to you-'

'Help!' said Bob Cherry.

'That's Nice-' Bunter waved an arm.

'What's nice?'

'Over there! Can't you look?'

'Oh, crumbs!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, 'he means Nice. It's spelled "n.i.c.e." but pronounced "neece", Bunter. If you talk French to them like that, they'll arrest you for murdering the language.'

'That's Nice,' repeated Bunter, adhering to his pronunciation, 'across the Bay of-the Bay of-'

'The Baie des Anges,' completed Harry Wharton. 'There's no need to interrupt, Wharton, I was just about to tell you that. It means the Bay of Monkeys.'

The juniors roared. Bunter as an expert in French was more than amusing, though Quelch, had he been within earshot, would not have found him so.

'It's all very well for you fellows to laugh,' protested Bunter. 'I heard Quelch saying something to the Second Officer about the Baie des Anges, and then I asked Mauly if he knew what a "sange" was-there are some French words I don't know yet-and he said it was the French for "monkey".'

'What you heard Quelch say was the "Baie des Anges" -the Bay of Angels,' said Harry Wharton 'and what Mauly told you was "sing"-spelled "s.i.n.g.e."- for monkey.' He caught sight of the book which had

attracted Bunter's attention-*French Self-Taught*. 'No wonder Quelchy looked pleased when he saw you studying that! It must be the first time on record that you have ever studied anything you didn't have to.'

'Not much good his studying it that I can see!' observed Johnny Bull.

'Even if it improved his French-which it hasn't-he can't land here. He hasn't any passport!'

'They may not worry about that with people off a ship for the day,' suggested Nugent.

'And they may!' retorted Johnny Bull. 'I expect Quelchy is sending Bunter home from Malta instead of from here, because he thinks getting a passport would be easier in a British colony.'

'Quelchy told Bunter he could go as far as Malta, before he knew we were calling here first,' said Bob Cherry. 'I don't suppose he'd go back on that-especially as Bunter, in his own fat-headed way, did save that vase from being pinched, passport or no passport!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! As a matter of fact,' said the Owl, cautiously, 'I have a passport-but don't you go telling Quelchy. I don't want to have any trouble with him before I've made my pile.'

'Your what?'

'Never mind!' said Bunter, mysteriously. 'I may have a system, and I may not. That's why I need to polish up my knowledge of French. You fellows wouldn't understand. But don't you tell Quelchy about that-or the passport. The fact is I should not like to say so to him, but I hardly trust him now.'

'My hat!' exclaimed Nugent. 'I should think you would hardly like to say that to him!'

'I don't want to hurt his feelings.'

'He'd hurt yours, if you said anything like that to him,' remarked Harry Wharton. 'Why don't you trust Quelchy?'

'If he knew I had a passport, he'd be quite capable, I believe, of sending me home from here by rail or by air.'

'Not by air!' Bob Cherry shook his head. 'No 'plane could take off with your weight on it.'

The Removites laughed. Billy Bunter didn't.

'Quelchy will be pleased when you tell him in Malta that you have a passport-if you have,' commented Johnny Bull.

'Of course I have. No intelligent person travels without one. I mean I haven't!'

'Not being intelligent.'

'You've a suspicious mind, Bull. It's low. Of course I haven't a passport. If my father did send one, with all the visas to the purser-'

'Oh, crikey!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'You were as sure as all that, that you'd get on board were you? Even before Mauly's big box came? I wonder what he would say if he knew that?'

'Gentlemen understand each other,' said Bunter.

'Mauly and me, of course. You fellows wouldn't. Like to like, you know! Mauly is grateful to me for saving his uncle's Mink vase.'

'I suppose you did-but you didn't mean to,' observed Harry Wharton.

'Mauly's too soft,' said Johnny Bull.

'Mauly's only too pleased to have me with him-and so's Quelch,' said Bunter. 'They wouldn't have any vase, if it hadn't been for me. And in return for that, Quelchy steals my cake, and gives it to a policeman. That's why I don't trust him-a fellow who takes another fellow's cake-'

'What did you do to Coker's?' howled Johnny Bull.

'I was taking care of it for him,' replied the Owl.

'And now old Grimes is taking care of it for Quelchy.' added Nugent. 'You won't see that cake again, Bunter. It will go as an exhibit to the Black Museum in Scotland Yard.'

'With what Quelchy must tell them he now knows, they'll trace it to Bunter,' said Bob Cherry. 'Probably have already. They may get out an extradition warrant. Hope you don't get arrested when you go ashore, Bunter.'

'Ow!'

'Chuck it, Bob,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'Hallo, we're anchoring. I wonder if we're going ashore in one of the ship's boats?'

'Now, mind, you fellows, not a word to Quelch about my having a passport,' said the Owl. 'Not that I have one, of course. He might think I was being deceptive.'

'How right he'd be,' observed Bob Cherry.

'It's important that I get ashore,' continued Bunter, 'I have to make some financial arrangements.'

'Going to see if you can cash a postal order you haven't had yet?' asked Johnny Bull.

'The cashfulness of an esteemed non-existent British postal order in France would also have the non-existentfulness,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Inky's put it in a nutshell,' said Nugent.

'I'm going to Cook's. They've a place in Nice,' said Bunter. 'My father sent me traveller's cheques for ten pounds-to be going on with. I could have had a couple of thousand if I'd wanted to, but I told him not to bother. I shall have some shopping to do here,' continued Bunter. 'You'd hardly believe it, but there isn't one of those tropical suits in Mauuly's box which fits me-I had a look at 'em. Rather careless of him, but-'

'He didn't buy captive balloon size,' interrupted Harry Wharton. 'And you're not coming as far as the Tropics anyway. You're being put off at Malta.'

'And you turned most of those suits out of the box to get your own fat self in,' added Bob Cherry. 'You left them in Mauuly's study, I suppose, you fat spoofer?'

'Yes, I put them safely in the cupboard,' answered the Owl. 'I know how to take care of other people's property. Not like some people. Not like Quelchy. And the hats in the chimney.'

'You put brand new white solar topees in the chimney?' roared Johnny Bull. 'Does Mauuly know that?'

'I told him they were safe in his study. There wasn't room for them anywhere else. I may not have mentioned the exact place,' said Bunter, thoughtfully. 'No need to tell him, you chaps. It was a case of force major.'

'He means force majeure,' said Bob Cherry. 'You'll knock 'em in Nice with your French, old man-if you get ashore.'

'There's Mauuly waving to us,' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'We're going in that boat. Come on!'

CHAPTER 18

A FRIEND IN NEED

'OH, my hat, look at Bunter!'

The Removites stared, as the fattest figure at Greyfriars rolled out of Cook's office on the Promenade des Anglais, clutching a handful of French notes. The fat Owl blinked at them.

'Sorry I can't stand you fellows a treat,' he said, 'but this is my capital. When I have made it a lot more-'

'How are you going to make it a lot more?' demanded Bob Cherry.

'He, he, he! That would be telling. You chaps wouldn't understand. You require a brain on this sort of thing.'

'That'll have to be your first purchase then,' commented Johnny Bull.

'You'll need one, of course.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'What's the game, old man?' Harry Wharton asked the fat Owl.

'*La boule*,' replied Bunter. 'You put some money on a number and get seven times as much.'

'Or lose the lot! You utter ass, are you intending to go into the Casino? Quelch will be along presently, and if he hears that you have any such idea, he'll skin you.'

'Before the croupiers do,' added Johnny Bull. 'But we needn't worry. They won't let you in. Juniors aren't admitted.'

'So all your French studies will be wasted,' said Nugent. 'Never mind! Better those than your cash.'

'Put it away, Bunter,' advised Harry Wharton. 'Tisn't safe to display money like that.' One or two people passing had turned to smile at Bunter flourishing his money. It was not often that the fat Owl had so much at one time-and he seemed to like to make the fact public, which was unwise. Nice, no doubt like other places, had its quota of people who were not all they should be!

The fat Removite snorted, but he took Wharton's advice and then blinked along the promenade.

'I think I'll just take a stroll,' he said. 'You fellows need not come with me-in fact, I'd rather you didn't! This is a select place, and a fellow has to be careful of the people he's seen with-Ow! Wow!'

Johnny Bull's foot had landed on the seat of the tightest trousers on the Promenade des Anglais.

'Woooooh! Beast!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! After that, Bull, I shall refuse to have anything more to do with you!'

The fat Owl strode away. Harry Wharton looked anxiously after him.

'That fat ass is heading for the casino,' he said.

'The admitfulness will not be terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'They won't let him in, Harry,' agreed Bob Cherry. 'He'll be pushed out to find his way to the nearest tuckshop. He'll come to no harm!'

'With all that money on him?'

'It's his own money,' remarked Johnny Bull. 'His father seems to have sent it for expenses. And even Bunter can't blue ten quid in tuck in one morning. Come on!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He'll do his best,' said Nugent. 'Let's leave him to it, and move on.'

The Removites strolled along the Promenade. Lord Mauleverer was not with them, at the moment, having announced his intention of sitting in a deck-

chair, and looking at the sea. At Greyfriars, the Famous Five might have seized him, and compelled him to take some exercise-but such a proceeding was not practicable on the sea-front at Nice! Mr. Quelch was also absent, having gone shopping, at which they were not displeased.

They liked Quelch and had found that his company on a holiday was much better than they had dared to hope, but it was possible that, if Quelch accompanied them, he would try to improve their knowledge of the history of Nice. They preferred to stroll in the sunshine without any such improvement. They also preferred to stroll without Bunter.

Bunter's own stroll did not last long. Within a very short time, he was sitting on a seat in the Jardin Albert 1, looking wrathful. The authorities of the Casino had made it only too plain that they did not want his company! Visions of untold wealth floated away. Even the solace which he had found at a café in the Avenue de Verdun-where, fortunately, the waitress spoke much better English than Bunter spoke French-did not placate him. There was quite a lot still left of that ten pounds in French currency-and no chance, as Bunter could see, to make it any more! It was hard, he felt, that a chap with a keen brain and a head for business should be so frustrated. All the French he had learned would be wasted-

'M'sieur?'

Bunter swung round at the sound of a voice on the seat beside him. It came from an elegant-looking gentleman-perhaps, a rather too-elegant-looking gentleman-but Bunter was not discerning. He, nevertheless, remembered Wharton's remarks about his money, and rose to go, but the stranger smiled reassuringly.

'Do not be disturbed, M'sieur. I was present when you tried to obtain admission to the Casino, and horrified when they would not let you in!' 'Beasts!' commented Bunter.

'Exactly! I am ashamed of Nice. Your age insufficient-bah! They will let in this man and that man, when they think he is what you call a mug, but if they think he is of the type to whom they might lose-Non!'

The rather too-well-dressed young man was, evidently, a judge of character. The fat Owl almost purred.

'They're afraid. They've seen the sort of fellow I am and they're afraid!' declared Bunter, with the air of a man of the world. 'I'll show them! I'll get on a bus and go to Monte.'

'There is no need for that.' The young man took a quick glance round him. 'There are private establishments here in Nice. There is one run by a friend of mine. He has given me a ticket of admission for this day-but alas! I cannot go! I have sudden business to do. The ticket is yours, m'sieur, if you will accept it?' He pulled out a small packet from his pocket.

Bunter's eyes glistened. 'Oh-thanks.' He took the packet and felt it. It seemed rather thick only to hold a ticket of admission.

'There is more than a ticket there,' continued the young man. 'There is a *brochure d' établissement*-a menu-there are free refreshments, unlimited!' He had apparently, 'sized-up' Bunter very well! 'No-do not open now! Put it in your pocket. It must be handed to my friend just like that-intact-that is the signal for admission. Otherwise, you cannot enter. Say it is from Lerouge. The address -it is No. 19, the Rue Charbon-that is near the harbour. And now I must go!'

Abruptly, the young man rose to his feet and, walking rapidly, disappeared behind a bandstand.

Bunter blinked in surprise. He could not understand why this most generous young man had disappeared so suddenly. He looked round him. There was no one else near, except a gendarme, who also seemed to be walking quickly towards the bandstand. The sight of the official uniform

gave Bunter an uneasy feeling. Suppose it wasn't legal in Nice to have a ticket for a private casino? If the gendarme had seen it passed to him-- Bunter rose and ambled off quickly in the direction of the café in the Rue de Verdun. That English-speaking waitress there seemed to understand all his requirements. He had nearly ten pounds in French currency still left. Of course, if he called at that café, he would have even less-- Bunter halted. Why not go at once to No. 19, the Rue Charbon where there were free and unlimited refreshments? On the other hand there was that very good cafe on the other side of the street, and the Rue Charbon might be some way away; he would have to ask his way and that would take time. Wrestling with his problem, on the kerb of the Rue de Verdun, he looked up and saw Lord Mauleverer approaching. Mauly stopped as he also saw Bunter, but it was too late for him to retreat!

Mauleverer, after dozing awhile in the sunshine, had wakened, and remembered that he wanted to buy a present for one of his cousins. He also remembered that Grasse, famous for its scents and perfumes, was quite near Nice. So exerting himself sufficiently to walk into a large shop in the Place Massena, he came out with a small but expensive packet, containing a bottle of the best perfume, which Grasse sent Nice. It was now getting near lunch-time, and he thought that if he wandered on a little, he might encounter the Famous Five, and take them somewhere to eat. Unfortunately, he didn't. He encountered Bunter.

'I say, Mauly--'

'No!' Mauleverer shook his head.

'No what, you ass?'

'No to any thin' you were goin' to ask me, old bean,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'It can't be done.'

'Well, I wanted the Rue Charbon.'

Lord Mauleverer looked surprised and shook his head. 'Sorry--I haven't got it about me.'

'You silly ass, it's a street,' exclaimed Bunter. 'I'm invited to a party there--a special party--with all sorts of games--and tuck--and you don't know where it is! You chump! I've got to get there, or I may lose a fortune. I tell you what. Come over to that café there and have a snack with me, and we'll ask the waitress. She speaks English, so I won't have to use my French.'

'Narrow escape for her,' observed Lord I Mauleverer.

He fixed Bunter with an inquiring eye. 'Don't think me inquisitive, old bean--but you've only been ashore about two hours, and you have an invitation to a private party already? Didn't know you knew anyone in Nice, or were in danger of losin' a fortune by not meetin' them. What?' Lord Mauleverer was not naturally inquisitive, but Bunter's odd remarks seemed to need some explanation. Bunter eyed him warily.

'Some people have charm, Mauly,' he said. 'I'm not praising myself. I was born with it. Yes, I have old friends in Nice. They gave me an invitation to a party and here it is!' He produced the packet given him by Monsieur Lerouge, and handed it to Mauly who took hold of it. 'It's one of those surprise parties. That's a ticket of admission--and a brusher--'

'A what?'

'A brusher of the establishment!'

'Oh! ' Mauly grinned. 'A brochure.'

'That's what I said, Mauly. I have to hand over this packet unopened and they let me in.'

'Odd sort of procedure for old friends, what? And you don't know where they live?' Mauly looked at the packet again.

'You take me into that café and stand me a snack, Mauly, and we'll ask the waitress where the Rue Charbon is. My friend, Lerouge, forgot to say.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. He did not mind paying for Bunter's 'snack', but he did mind listening to the Owl's conversation, while it went down! Better send him to his friends. Bunter's seemed a mysterious business, but there was no apparent reason why he should delay it. He hailed a passing taxi.

'Here you are, Bunter. Hop in! That's the best way to find where you want to go. I'll pay the fare. What number is the house?'

'No. 19-but I say, Mauly, come with me. They'll let you in too. You might make tons of money. I know you don't need to, but-'

Lord Mauleverer shook his head. It was a gesture of which most people found a frequent need when conversing with Bunter. He thrust a note in the taxi-driver's hand. '*Numero dix-neut, Rue Charbon.*'

The driver shrugged his shoulders and smiled. '*Le Rue Charbon?*

N'importe!' He pocketed his note and let in the clutch. It also looked as if he found something peculiar in being asked to go to the Rue Charbon. There was a yell from Bunter.

'Hi! Mauly, you ass! You've got my ticket!

'Sorry!' Mauleverer realized that he was holding Bunter's packet with his own. He ran alongside the taxi, and pushed it through the window. It was only when the vehicle had disappeared in the direction of the harbour that he discovered that he had given Bunter the bottle of perfume from Grasse!

CHAPTER 19

MR. QUELCH IS NEARLY ARRESTED

'OH, gad!'

Lord Mauleverer's first thought was that he must take another taxi, and catch up Bunter with that ticket. Unfortunately, there were no others to be seen. In sight, there was, indeed, only one vehicle plying for hire—one of those pleasant horse-drawn landaus to be found in Nice. Normally, his lordship would have wished for no pleasanter vehicle, but just now, if anything were to be done at all, it must be at speed. Obviously, he could not catch Bunter in that landau. He looked round again, unavailingly, for another cab.

'Is anything the matter, my boy?'

It was Mr. Quelch's voice. Mauleverer swung round. 'Oh, nothin' much, sir. Just lookin' for a taxi. There doesn't seem to be one. It doesn't matter.'

'A stroll in the sunshine will do you more good,' said Quelch. 'You have been buying something?' His gaze went to the packet in Mauleverer's hand.

'Oh, yes, sir. For a cousin of mine—girl in England.

Scent from Grasse. Best in the world, they say.' This was giving the impression that the packet he held contained that scent. Mauleverer disliked subterfuge. He felt he must explain a little more.

'It's not in this packet, sir. Matter of fact this belongs to Bunter. I saw him into a taxi just now, and gave him the wrong packet. I was just goin' after him to put it right.'

'You can do that this evening, Mauleverer, when we are all on board.'

'Yes, sir,' Mauleverer felt that he must explain more, 'but this is a ticket of admission to a party. Friends of Bunter's in Nice. I understand he can't get in without it.'

'That, Mauleverer, sounds a very odd circumstance at a party given by friends.' Evidently Quelch's thoughts about this matter ran as had Mauly's own. 'I had no idea Bunter had friends here. He took a taxi, you say? I trust that it is not too far away, and that he will not be late returning. Bunter is sometimes very negligent. Do you know where he has gone, Mauleverer?'

'I don't know where the place is, sir, but it's in the Rue Charbon.'

'The Rue Charbon!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'Good gracious me! That is not far away, but in a most disreputable quarter. I cannot imagine any friends of a Greyfriars boy residing there. Is that the alleged ticket of admission you have in your hand. Mauleverer?'

'Yes, sir!' Mr. Quelch held out his own hand, and the packet was passed over.

'A substantial packet to contain a card of invitation,' commented Mr. Quelch.

'I understand it also contains a brochure of some sort, sir.'

'H'm! Very odd!' With a dubious look Quelch handled the packet, evidently wondering if he should open it. A voice suddenly spoke at his side.

'M'sieur?'

Mr. Quelch swung round. A man in a gendarme's uniform, was standing beside him.

'You, sir, are in charge of a party of English schoolboys, visiting Nice, are you not?'

'I am, sir. My name is Quelch. Have you some business with me?'

'I must inform you, sir, that a robbery took place last night, in Cannes, when an English lady lost a valuable diamond necklace. A suspect has been seen and followed in Nice today, but has, temporarily, eluded our men. He

was, however, seen in conversation with one of your schoolboys—a rather stout individual.'

'Good gracious!' Mr. Quelch was aware that there was one of his schoolboys to whom such a description might be applied.

'There is a suspicion that a packet might have been handed over. While our man went in pursuit of the suspect, the boy disappeared.'

'I am quite certain, sir,' exclaimed Mr. Quelch, indignantly, 'that no boy in the party of which I am in charge is capable of any such conduct. Last night—when you state this theft took place—we were at sea in that yacht.' He indicated the *Sunflower* anchored in the bay.

'Most admirable!' observed the gendarme. 'Might I ask, sir, what is in that packet you have in your possession?' 'That contains, I am informed, a ticket of admission to a party—which has been given to one of my boys—and some sort of a *brochure*. I have not seen the contents.'

'You must allow me to do so!' With a quick gesture, and despite an incipient protest by Quelch, the man took the packet. Though unfamiliar with the indications of French police ranks, Quelch realized that this was rather a high-grade kind of gendarme. The packet was torn open and the wrapping removed.

Something sparkled in the sunshine.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Quelch. 'What is that?'

'That, sir,' replied the gendarme, grimly, 'is the stolen diamond necklace. Handed over by the thief to one of your pupils, and then to you. Have you anything to say?'

'Oh, gad!' murmured Lord Mauleverer. 'They'll try and run in Quelch and Bunter as accessories.' He edged forward.

'I've something to say,' he began. 'My name's Mauleverer—Lord Mauleverer—I handed over that packet to Mr. Quelch just now. Didn't know what was in it any more than he did. I took it, by mistake, from a chap called Bunter—the rather stout fellow your man saw. He thought it was a ticket of admission to a party—a chap called Lerouge told him so—'

'Lerouge? That's the man we're after. He stole it from Miss Brooke in the Hotel Continentale in Cannes—'

'Miss Brooke?' Mauleverer blinked. 'Wonder if it's my cousin? Knew she was goin' abroad sometime, but didn't know she was on the Riviera now. Just bought a bottle of scent to send home to her. That's the packet Bunter took in mistake instead of that! He indicated the necklace.'

'Thought I recognized it. Seen her wearin' it.'

Mr. Quelch found his voice. 'I hope, sir, that you are now convinced that I am an innocent party in this matter, as is also this boy, Bunter, although, I must admit, a most foolish one. I wish to find him. He went to a house in a low quarter of this city—in the Rue Charbon. I do not know the number.'

'No. 19, sir,' said Mauleverer, 'if you don't mind my interruptin'.'

Whether Mr. Quelch minded or not, Lord Mauleverer had no time to discover. The officer of gendarmes blew a loud whistle, and before he could consider what was happening, he found himself with Mr. Quelch, in a police-car, tearing through the streets, and disregarding the traffic lights, as only police-cars can tear and disregard! Within a very short space of time, they drew up at a desolate-looking house, on the lintel of which Mauleverer noticed the number '19'.

'Good,' murmured Mauleverer. 'Thought they might be puttin' us in clink, first. Fellow never knows. Held for questionin'—that sort of thing.' He turned to Quelch 'Feelin' all right, sir?'

'I think so, Mauleverer. Upon my word, this is the second time, within a very short period, that Bunter has involved me with the police. It is almost incredible!'

'He's recovered that necklace, though, sir. My cousin will be pleased. Mightn't have had it, if Bunter hadn't butted in.'

'True, Mauleverer, but-it seems that it is necessary again, to show gratitude to Bunter!'

'They're breakin' in the door, now, sir,' observed Mauleverer, tactfully changing the subject. 'Expect he'll be inside.' He smothered the anxiety which he knew Mr. Quelch must also be feeling. It was not a nice place to which the Owl's activities had brought him. Presently two men came out, firmly held by police, one of them being Bunter's amiable sponsor, who did not look amiable now!

Then, escorted by a gendarme, who seemed to find some difficulty in keeping serious, came Bunter.

'Bunter! Where have you been?'

'Oh, dear! Is that Mr. Quelch? They shut me in the coal-cellar, sir. It's all your fault Mauly. They said I had the wrong packet-a rotten bottle of scent-I don't believe there is any la boule here-or anything to eat. I'm famished. Oh, dear!'

'Bunter!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'You referred to la boule! Am I to understand that you came to this place, believing it to be a gaming-house?'

'That rotter told me it was, sir. I mean he didn't tell me, sir. I wouldn't think of playing la boule-the Casino wouldn't let me in, anyway-and this fellow offered-'

'I shall speak to you later on this matter, Bunter. You are in a disgusting state!' Bunter certainly looked as if he had been rolling in the commodity after which the street was named! 'As soon as the police have taken a statement from you, which they will certainly do, you must get yourself clean. There must be some public wash-place of which you can avail yourself.'

'I'm hungry, sir. There wasn't any food after all-and the beast said it was unlimited.'

'Be silent, Bunter ! You cannot walk through Nice, looking like you do now.'

'I'll look after him, sir,' said Mauleverer. 'I'll take him to the Negresco-stand him a bath and a feed.'

'I fear that they will not admit Bunter in such a state to a place like the Negresco, Mauleverer.'

'I'll manage it, sir,' declared Lord Mauleverer. 'Stayed there before. They know me. Taxi-man might object though.' He eyed Bunter. 'However-' He walked over to the gendarme who had originally spoken to them, and murmured a few words. The man nodded. He seemed pleased with Mauleverer. The final clue as to the address, supplied by his lordship, had enabled them to get their man. Mauleverer came back.

'It's all right, sir. We're goin' in the police-car. They'll want to know where we are, anyway; statements and so on. You comin' too, sir?'

'It is really very kind of you, Mauleverer. I have not had lunch-but the Negresco?' Mr. Quelch paused. The Negresco was a very fine hotel, but its charges were not cheap!

'Oh, that's all right, sir!' said Mauleverer, understanding Quelch's situation. 'My cousin will want to stand the whole thing, I expect, having got back her jewels, owin' to Bunter. Bit grateful to him, myself.'

CHAPTER 20

BUNTER IN MALTA

'ROT!' said Johnny Bull. 'Quelchy is quite right!' Johnny Bull prided himself on his Yorkshire 'down-rightness'. There were times when his fellow Removites found this rather trying. In fact, Bob Cherry had observed that when Johnny Bull formed an opinion, nothing but a charge of dynamite could get him to change it! That drastic remedy had not, of course, been tried.

'Quelch is quite right!' declared Johnny Bull, again. 'Bunter has done nothing to deserve consideration. He smuggled himself on board, didn't he? It was purely incidental that he happened to have that vase with him-and only as a result of his fooling about. Quelch told him that he would be sent home from Malta, which we then thought was our first port of call. The fact that we went to Nice, and Bunter made a fool of himself again there, doesn't entitle him to anything more. Quelch still proposes to send him back from Malta, and, in my opinion, that's what he should do!'

'The esteemed Shakespeare has observed that if we all had the esteemed justice, who should escape the terrific whopping,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The juniors smiled at the quotation from the esteemed Shakespeare. Even Johnny smiled. 'The absurd Bunter's foolishness has caused the recovery of a necklace, and the pinchfulness of the thief.'

'No credit to Bunter for it!' stated Johnny Bull. 'He tried to get into a gambling den, and found himself in a den of thieves instead. Quelch knows that. That's why he insists on Bunter going home from Malta.'

'That's all very well, Johnny,' said Harry Wharton, rather testily. 'It was Mauly's cousin's necklace which was recovered-through Bunter-and she was grateful. She sent her thanks to him.'

'He doesn't deserve a word of it.'

'Lots of things we get we don't deserve,' said Bob Cherry, 'and that's one of them. Mauly's fond of his cousin, and grateful to Bunter, however it came about. He wants to show it by taking Bunter on the rest of the voyage.'

'And it's his yacht,' added Nugent.

'No, it isn't. It's his uncle's, Sir Reginald Brooke's,' retorted Johnny. 'That's as good as, in the circs,' said Bob Cherry, 'and Miss Beryl Brooke is Sir Reginald's daughter. Naturally Mauly doesn't want to turn off the yacht any man who did her a good turn-even Bunter.'

'Mauly's soft,' declared Johnny Bull. 'Quelch isn't-and he's in charge of the party-placed in charge of it by Sir Reginald Brooke-and anything he says, goes-and one of them's Bunter-from Malta.'

'H'm!' observed Bob. 'If Bunter had done what he ought to have done, that Chinese vase would be anywhere but where it is now-in the safe on this ship! And if he hadn't met Mauly in Nice, and made that mess-up with the two packets he might be still in that coal-cellar in the Rue Charbon-and looking like those topees he stuffed up Mauly's chimney, I dare say-and the diamond necklace-well, it wouldn't be round Miss Brooke's neck.'

'Mauly made the mess-up with the two packets,' said Frank Nugent.

'It was caused by Bunter wanting to go to a casino,' declared Johnny Bull. 'Anyone defending that?'

'No-but if he hadn't done it-' began Harry Wharton.

'If?' Johnny Bull snorted.

'There is your English proverb,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh 'which says that if the ifs-and-butfulness were the pots-and-pan-fulness, there would be no use for esteemed tinkers. What the reprehensible Bunter has done

has saved a necklace from theftfulness. Would the excellent and right-thinking Johnny have preferred it to be lost?'

'No, of course not, you ass! Forget Bunter. If you want to argue with anyone, do it with Quelch-and I still think he's right!'

Johnny Bull went forward to the bows of the yacht and the others, grinning rather uneasily at each other, followed him. They looked over the blue Mediterranean to where, coming more distinctly into view every moment, was Malta, the island of the George Cross. They were making for Valletta.

'Nice place,' murmured the voice of Lord Mauleverer at Bob Cherry's elbow. 'Pleasantly warm, I hear. Place where they take things easy.'

'Is there any place where you don't take things easy, Mauly?'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'Always a lot to do, even at sea,' he observed.

'Just been on the telephone to my uncle-said we owed Bunter a lot.

Beryl's necklace-that vase-what about takin' him the whole voyage as a sort of reward? Still he says we must leave it to Quelch, bein' in charge of the party. Musn't undermine his authority-that sort of thing.'

'And strict justice for Bunter,' said Bob Cherry.

'Yes, Silly ass, of course, bein' a stowaway and then tryin' to get into a private gamin' house-doesn't deserve any reward. Yet he's done things without meanin' to, for which Quelch must be grateful. Most annoyin' for Quelch. Discipline must be preserved. He said Bunter could go to Malta, and no further. Sufficient reward-and so far, that's that. Here's Quelchy.'

Mr. Quelch came up to them with a smile.

'Well, my boys, we must get ready to land. A day in Malta, and then we resume our voyage. You will be able to see something of the island's historical treasures. Are you all here?' He looked round. 'Hem! Where is Bunter?'

'He does not seem to be on deck, sir,' said Frank Nugent.

'Go below and find him. Nugent, and tell him to be ready to land!'

'Yes, sir.' Nugent disappeared below. Mr. Quelch frowned, and the frown intensified when Nugent returned-without Bunter!

'Please, sir, he's lying down, and says he doesn't want to go ashore. He feels sea-sick.'

Mr. Quelch stared. The sea was as calm as a millpond.

It would seem almost impossible for even Bunter to be seasick in such conditions.

'Absurd!' Quelch strode to the companion-way, went below, and presently re-appeared, holding Bunter by the arm. Bunter's other hand was clutching a jam-tart.

'I don't feel well enough to go ashore, sir. I've got rheumatism in my neck, sir, and, I think, bronchitis coming on.'

'Indeed, Bunter? The symptoms of your various illnesses, including the sea-sickness, of which you complained, are not borne out, by the fact that when I came upon you just now, you were eating a jam-tart-soon after a very considerable breakfast,' said Quelch, with heavy sarcasm. 'You are not returning to the ship, Bunter. You should bring all your effects with you. Where are they?'

'I-I haven't any, sir. I-I hadn't time to pack, when I had to come on board to save that vase for you, and-'

'That will do, Bunter! You still have nearly ten pounds in French currency, which you were unable to lose on the gambling-tables in Nice. A few necessary effects for your journey home will be bought for you from that money, and I shall then leave you, in proper care, to be taken back to England. I warn you to give no more trouble. You have already given enough.'

'I-I say, sir,' the Owl stammered, 'my home's shut up for my holidays, and my-my people are in Cornwall-and I don't know where-and Mauly's quite willing for me to stay on board. He said so, and-'

'Mauleverer is unduly generous, Bunter. The matter, however, rests with me. For the services you have rendered-inadvertently, and arising entirely from your deplorable conduct-you have already been sufficiently recompensed by being allowed to come as far as Malta. Now, Bunter,' Mr. Quelch's voice took on a kinder note 'as you are here. I will let you accompany us on a walk through Valletta to see its sights. And when you get to England you can, of course, inquire at your father's place of business as to his present whereabouts.'

Mr. Quelch turned away. The yacht was now entering the Grand Harbour. In near view were the bastions, erected by the Knights of Malta. In another direction could be seen the great new bulk of the Hotel Phoenicia. Bunter had eyes for none of them. He groaned, and murmured 'Beast!'

CHAPTER 21

BUNTER TO THE RESCUE!

'BUNTER!' thundered Mr. Quelch.

Bunter looked up and groaned. He was sitting on a step at the bottom of a short, steep street in Valletta. It was unlike those in England, one of stairs, such streets being a common feature of the capital of Malta. The other Removites had taken the ascent slowly, looking with interest at the tall houses on each side, and listening to Quelch, expounding the local history. One of them, however, had ascended much more slowly than any of the others, taking no interest in his surroundings, and not listening to Mr. Quelch at all.

That one was Billy Bunter.

At the top of the street, the party had halted and Mr. Quelch, noticing that a member of the party was missing, had looked back. He had discovered the fat Owl a long way behind, and sitting on one of the steps.

'BUNTER!'

Bunter looked up again and groaned. He and Mr. Quelch were within earshot of each other. but he showed no inclination to diminish the distance.

'Oh,lor'!!'

'Do you hear me, Bunter?'

'No sir-I mean yes, sorry sir-I-I-think I've twisted my ankle. I can't walk. I'll wait here until you come back, sir.'

'Bless my soul! My boys, take seats in that café while I return for Bunter. I cannot believe that he is incapable of movement.'

The Removites were quite glad to take seats in the cafe Quelch had indicated. Quelch, with a resolute expression, made for Bunter. The fat Owl gazed at him and then, as Quelch came nearer, suddenly jumped up and ran down a side-street.

Quelch's belief was justified. It was obvious that Bunter was not incapable of movement. Nevertheless, he was not pleased! Bunter had disappeared in what Disraeli had once described as 'the city of palaces built by gentlemen for gentlemen', but he had not done so in a gentlemanly quarter!

Bunter found himself in a disreputable-looking alley, which had, somehow, escaped the ravages of the Second World War. Quite what he proposed to do, and how anything he, did could benefit him, he did not know. For the moment his only objective was to dodge Quelch.

The fat Owl looked round for cover. There were blank walls of houses on each side, although one of them had a porch-but immediately in front of him was a cart filled with cobblestones, resting on its shafts. Bunter made for it and crouched, breathlessly behind it.

'Oh, lor'! That beast, Quelchy. Oh, lor'!!'

Quelch ought not to see him where he was. He'd dodge the beast all day and get back to the yacht. Once on board and hidden there, it might be that Quelch would think no more time should be wasted in sending him home.

'Bunter! Come here!'

Quelch's invitation was not made in an encouraging tone of voice. Just then he felt no sense of gratitude whatever to Bunter. Quite the contrary! He had forgotten any services the fat Removite had rendered him in the matter of Mr. Hing Wah! Then suddenly a reminder came.

A door opened behind the porch and someone stepped out. It was the Chinese whom Quelch had last seen in Oak Lane near Greyfriars.

'My dear Mr. Quelch, how considerate of you to come and meet me!' The man advanced smiling, but balanced on the palm of his hand was a wicked-

looking knife. 'No! Do not call out, or something regrettable will happen to you or this boy!' Hing Wah threw a cursory glance at the quivering Owl.

'You villain-!'

'Hard words will not help you, Mr. Quelch. I realized that you would take your boys to see the sights of Valletta, and had made arrangements to get in touch with you-but you have fortunately got in touch with me. Let me now get to business!'

'Business, sir- Upon my word!' Mr. Quelch almost choked with wrath.

'I desire the possession of that Chinese vase.'

'I have not got it, you scoundrel,' snapped Quelch. 'Do you imagine that I carry such a thing on my person?'

'Of course not,' answered the Chinese, 'but I have possession of you, personally, and of this boy, until that vase is handed over to me at a place I shall name.' Quelch stirred, indignantly. The Chinese came a step closer.

'I advise you not to be reckless, Mr. Quelch. In one second-with this knife-I could make you speechless-for always. Should anyone come here-which is unlikely-that person would find me kneeling beside you, you having -apparently-fainted as I was passing. As for the boy-' He turned a contemptuous glance on Bunter, 'if he uttered a sound, it would be his last-but I think he would not.'

The Chinese took a slight step towards Bunter. The Owl was almost scared stiff-but not quite. He dared not run, but he leaned forward and, grabbing one of the cobble-stones before him, hurled it at Mr. Hing Wah. It hit the man on the jaw, and he staggered and fell.

'Good gracious, Bunter!'

'Oh, lor!' Oh, dear!' Bunter scrambled out from behind the cart. 'Ow! Let's run, sir-Run!'

'There is no need for haste, Bunter.' Mr. Quelch stooped, took Hing Wah's knife, and dropped it down an adjacent drain. 'This man won't move for some time. He is quite unconscious, Bunter!' Quelch put on some haste himself, after the speeding Owl. He caught him by the shoulder. 'Calm yourself, Bunter!'

'Ow! Lemme get back to the yacht, sir-I-I don't want to go home by myself.'

'You may stay on the yacht, Bunter. I will tell Mauleverer. He is quite willing for you to remain with us for the rest of the voyage. And, now-so am I.' Mr. Quelch smiled kindly at the fat Owl, as they turned into the street where the other Greyfriars boys were waiting, little dreaming of what had happened since Quelch left them. 'You certainly most irresponsibly drew us both into danger-but your action just now was commendable. You delivered me from a most dangerous position. We will now resume our walk.'

'Oh, lor', sir, but that man is still around.'

'I shall make it my first duty. Bunter, to advise the police of what has happened, and if we now keep together there is no need for your apprehension.' Mr. Quelch had now come in sight of the rest of the Greyfriars party. He joined them, and sat down.

'You may have a lemonade, Bunter. After your recent exertions you should enjoy it.'

'Oh, thank you, sir.'

The Removites looked at each other. Quelch seemed in a much more benevolent mood than they would have expected after his recent pursuit of a straying Bunter. 'Mauleverer, you must know that just now I encountered that Chinese person, Hing Wah, who made an attempt to obtain your uncle's vase on a previous occasion.'

'Oh, gad! Then he's still on the trail of it, sir?'

'Yes, Mauleverer. He apparently wished to obtain me,, personally, as a hostage for it. However, owing to an action-a thoroughly praiseworthy action-by Bunter, he did not succeed.'

The Removites looked at each other and at Bunter.

'In the circumstances, Mauleverer, although Bunter has acted in a most irresponsible manner in other ways, I should take it as a favour if you would allow him to remain with us for the rest of the voyage.'

CHAPTER 22

BUNTER IN EGYPT

'IT'S hot!'

Bunter made the statement. Statements, made by the Owl of the Remove, were usually received with scepticism. In this instance, however, there was no doubt that Bunter was speaking truthfully. It was the month of August, and the *Sunflower* was nearing the Suez Canal. It was most certainly, if naturally, hot.

Bunter spoke in a complaining voice, as though he expected someone to do something about it.

'Fat lot you fellows care if I get heat stroke.'

'Go and ask the captain to turn round and steer for the North Pole,' suggested Bob Cherry.

'It might help,' observed Harry Wharton, 'if you only ate enough for two, instead of three or four, as you usually do.'

'If the esteemed Bunter wishes for a climate of the coldfulness,' added Hurree Singh, 'no doubt the esteemed Quelch would send him back from Port Said to England.' Bunter snorted. Apparently he did not want to be sent back.

'I'm not asking Quelch anything. I'm fed up with him. Talking rot about Pharaohs and dinner-sties!

'Help!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Do you mean dynasties? '

'How your mind runs on food!' said Frank Nugent. 'If they'd had you in Egypt at the time of a famine, they'd never have got over the lean years. You wouldn't have left enough for them to recover!'

'Din-ass-whatever you call them!' said Bunter, 'I'm fed up with Quelch-'
'Shut up, you fat ass!' interrupted Harry Wharton, who had caught sight of Quelch approaching them. Bunter, who had been facing the other way, did not!

'Shan't,' replied Bunter. 'Blow Quelch! He's a boring old ass!'

'Bunter!'

'Oh, crikey!' Bunter swung round. He gazed at Quelch in horror. 'I-I wasn't saying anything, sir. I-I didn't call you a boring old ass. I-I was thinking of another boring old ass.'

'I have a very good mind, Bunter, to box your ears for your impertinence!' Quelch glared and walked on. 'Lucky for you Quelch didn't bring his cane with him on this trip,' observed Bob Cherry.

'He can pick up one in Egypt,' said Johnny Bull. 'They rope's-end 'em on board ship,' put in Harry Wharton. 'Perhaps Quelch hasn't thought of that? Let's remind him!'

'Beasts!' exclaimed Bunter. 'Sitting round and cackling at a chap. I say, I'd like a deck chair.'

'There's half-a-dozen over there by the cabin-skylight,' said Nugent.

'Take two-you'll need them.'

'Look here, you chuck me over one!'

'Too jolly lazy to fetch one yourself?' asked Johnny.

'I'm hot,' declared Bunter. 'That's you fellows all over.'

You don't care if a man's hot. I think you might chuck me over a chair.'
'Oh, all right. Anything to oblige.' Bob Cherry went over to the pile of chairs by the skylight, and took hold of one.

'You silly ass, Bob!' exclaimed Johnny. 'Are you going to fag for that lazy fat porpoise?'

'Ready and willing! And I want you to help me. This is a job for two!'
Unseen by Bunter, Bob winked at Johnny Bull, just in time to stay a heated refusal. Bob Cherry went to the pile of deck chairs and set up

one. The fat Owl made preparations to sit down.

'Wait a moment! '

With a sudden dash, Bob caught hold of Bunter's shoulders.

'Ow! Leggo!'

'Catch hold of his feet Johnny!'

'Yaroooh! Keep off! What are you doing?'

'What you asked me to do,' replied Bob. 'Chucking you over a deck chair-one, two, three-'

'Wow!'

With Johnny Bull's assistance, Bunter was swung over the deck chair and let down with a bump on the deck on the other side.

'Ow! Yaroooh!'

'There you are, Bunter. You wanted someone to chuck you over a deck chair, and we've done it. Like to have it done again?'

'Ow, Wow! Keep off! Beasts!'

It was obvious that Bunter would not like to have it done again.

'Or perhaps, you'd prefer to be chucked over the rail? Lend a hand, Inky?'

'The lendfulness of the hand will be a terrific pleasure,' declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, advancing. With another howl, the fat Removite sprang to his feet and vanished down the companion-way.

Lord Mauleverer grinned.

'He'll only go to sleep in his cabin, instead of in a deck chair.

Sensible, really, even for Bunter. Cooler! I was just considerin'-'

'No!' said Bob Cherry, firmly.

'We shall have to wake up the ridiculous Bunter at Port Said,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'There is no wishfulness to have to wake up the esteemed Mauleverer as well. There is no time for the sleepfulness!'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'Perhaps you're right,' he said. 'That's Port Said over there, you know. The Suez Canal starts here. Quite a pleasant run through. We have to take it slowly, so as not to erode the banks. Nothin' much to see, except sand-and camels. You can see 'em sometimes. Not wild ones, of course. And porpoises. They come right up the Canal, I'm told. If you fellows would like to sit on deck chairs and just watch, instead of goin' across the desert to Cairo, and rejoinin' at Suez-?'

'That's what you'd like, isn't it Mauly?' interrupted Harry Wharton, with a smile.

'Yaas ! More peaceful than dashin' across a desert, and havin' to dash back again. If you fellows care to stay with me-?'

'No!' declared Johnny Bull, emphatically. 'No?'

'Definitely, No!' added Bob Cherry. 'We're taking the train to Cairo-and you're coming with us!'

'I've got a book about Egypt,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'I thought I'd stick here and read it.'

'You can read it in the train,' stated Johnny Bull. 'It will do you much more good to come with us, and climb the pyramids.'

'Climb them?' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, in alarm. 'Well, perhaps we can let him off with climbing only one,' said Harry Wharton.

'He can take one side, and Bunter the other,' suggested Nugent. 'They can race each other and meet at the top.'

'And the last to get there has to climb another pyramid,' said Bob Cherry. 'Come on-we'd better get ready. The yacht will be tying up soon, and Quelch will be collecting us.'

'I say, you fellows-'

The Removites turned round to see Bunter.

'So you're awake again,' observed Johnny Bull. 'I may have had forty winks-'

'About four thousand-'

'He, he! You will have your joke.' Bunter looked at the shore. 'So we've arrived in Cairo.'

'No, fathead,' said Nugent. 'We're coming into Port Said. We have to take a train to Cairo.'

'Oh!' Bunter blinked. 'Are there railways in Egypt? I thought the Egyptians went about on donkeys.'

'So they do, lots of them,' said Wharton. 'Plenty of your relations here for you to meet, Bunter.'

Bunter ignored that thrust. 'I shall have to do some shopping in Cairo,' he remarked. 'I shall want a few tropical suits-'

'Small elephant size,' observed Bob Cherry.

'Beast! I say, Mauly-'

'All right, Bunter,' said Mauleverer, placidly. 'I'll see you through. Doin' a bit of shoppin' myself.'

'You're an ass, Mauly,' declared Johnny Bull. 'This fat nuisance stuffed half the tropical suits you bought for us, up your study chimney-and now you're buying him some more! '

'I didn't stuff them up the chimney,' yelled Bunter. 'Those were the hats! The suits are safe in Mauly's cupboard. I know how to take care of other people's property, I hope. I had to take out the things to make room in that box-'

'For yourself,' added Harry Wharton.

'For the Chinese vase. There were all those Chinamen round me trying to steal it. I knocked out I think it was three of them-'

'And ran away from the other dozen,' added Bob Cherry.

'And are now holding up Mauly for more suits,' said Nugent. 'You don't really need them, Bunter. If you feel hot here, when we get in the Red Sea, you'll melt down like a tallow candle before a fire. No need for you to waste Mauly's money.'

'I suppose I can borrow a few pesetas from a friend-?'

'Going to Spain?' asked Johnny Bull. 'They use pesetas there. Not in Egypt.'

'You're ignorant, Bull. I may have the pronunciation a little wrong. I'm not fluent in Egyptian, as I am in French. It was something like pesetas-pie-eaters, I think-'

The juniors roared.

'You fat ass, you mean piastres,' said Harry Wharton. 'I think we'd better put you on a chain. You shouldn't be at large. Here comes Quelchy to collect us!'

CHAPTER 23

THE REMOVITES IN CAIRO

'I WONDER, Mauly,' said Bull, 'if there will be another attempt here to get that Chinese vase?'

The juniors were in the train nearing Cairo. It had been a peaceful journey-Bunter being in another compartment-but Johnny Bull's remark immediately attracted his friends' attention from their surroundings.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'They didn't get much change out of the last try. Must be fed-up, I should think.'

Bull shook his head. 'They tried to get hold of Quelch in Malta, and hold him to ransom for it,' he observed. 'I don't know why anyone wants it, but these people do, and don't seem prepared to stick at much to get it. They must have been watching the shipping lists to see when the *Sunflower* was due in Valletta. They had everything ready. We'd better keep watch here.'

'Can't make it out,' said Mauleverer. 'Neither can my uncle, or Mr. Ching Kong Sen, who gave him the vase. There was a letter from my uncle, waitin' for me at Port Said, with some more details-but they don't explain anythin'.'

Lord Mauleverer sighed and looked out of the window. 'Palm-trees,' he said. 'Must be gettin' near the Nile.'

'Never mind the palm-trees, ass!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'What were the more details?'

'Nothin' explaining anythin',' said his lordship. 'This Chinese friend of uncle's-he was given the vase by a man who'd lived in Shanghai and came to Hong Kong with all his possessions in 1947. Before that this fellow had been in Pekin, since the old Manchu days. As a boy, he was attached to the Imperial Court there. His father was, too. They left Pekin in 1911-and, as you know, there's been no peace in China since the dynasty fell then. That's about all my uncle knows.'

'Someone would seem to know rather more,' said Wharton.

'Perhaps that chap, or his father, brought something valuable from Pekin to Shanghai?' suggested Frank Nugent.

'Might be,' agreed Mauleverer,' but it can't be the vase.

That's not valuable. When my uncle's friend was asked to take care of it, until it was called for, he looked at it and asked if it was valuable. He said the chap who handed it over said he could put its value down to its being Ming, if he liked-but it wasn't. My uncle thinks it's Ch'ing-that's Manchu work. Pretty late and not worth much.'

'It's obviously worth something to someone,' declared Bull.

'There would not have been the attempts at much thieffulness otherwisely,' said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. 'There have been great plans to take it which must have been terrifically expensive to organize? Why is the excellent vase on the way to Hong Kong now? Has there been this call for it?'

'Oh, yaas! Didn't I say so?'

'You did not, Mauly,' said Bob. 'Getting information from you, old chap, is like getting a broken cork from a bottle. It comes in bits. Give us a few more bits-in fact, all you have!'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'Well, my uncle's friend, who had the things, was asked to wait until he got a message that "The dragon calls" and then send it to Hong Kong. It's to be handed in to a bank there to await bein' claimed by a fellow with a name like Tooting Bec.'

'What?'

'That's a place in London, you know.'

'Yes, chump!' agreed Bob Cherry, 'but I'll bet that it's no Chinese name!'

'Lim Tek-that's it. That's the fellow who's goin' to call for it when Quelch has put it in the bank.'

'H'm!' said Johnny Bull. 'It's not being trusted to the post, or sent in any ordinary way, but in personal charge of someone, who'd have been your uncle, Mauly, if he hadn't decided at the last minute, not to come with us.'

'Had to stay behind,' replied Mauly. 'Politics, you know. They're in a bit of a mess just now.'

'They always are!' observed Johnny Bull. The other juniors laughed.

'So the custodian's Quelch, and whoever's after the thing got to know that pretty quick. Better keep an eye on him,' said Bull. 'We're slowing down now. Must be getting into the station.'

The train came to a stop and the juniors descended.

Mr. Quelch hurried along to them from another carriage.

'You will want to see Cairo, and do some shopping? You, Mauleverer, I know you wish to buy some things. As you are taking Bunter with you, keep an eye on him, and do not let him get lost.'

'Oh, really, sir-'

'That will do, Bunter! We shall meet outside this station at four o'clock, when two cars from Cook's will be waiting to take us to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx. It is well that you should see some of the historical remains in this country, while you are here.' Mr. Quelch turned swiftly, in time to see Bunter yawning. 'I am aware Bunter that you are not interested in them.'

'Oh, but I am, sir. There's one special place in Cairo I want to see-a most historical place. My cousin, George, was here in the war, and said it shouldn't be missed.'

'Indeed, Bunter?' Mr. Quelch visibly thawed. 'That shows a commendable interest on your part. There are many interesting relics of antiquity in Cairo. Which is this one you wish to see?'

'It's Groppi's, sir. My cousin, George, said it was the best cafe in Cairo. All the troops loved it.'

The juniors roared. Mr. Quelch frowned.

'Really, Bunter! Take charge of Bunter, Mauleverer, and if it is possible, see that he does not overfeed himself. Groppi's indeed!'

'That's all right, sir,' said Mauleverer. 'I'll take care of him.' He hauled Bunter outside the station and, seeing a taxi, hailed it, and told the driver to take them to the Sharia Kasr-el-Nil, the Old Bond Street of Cairo.

Though neither he nor the others knew it, he had been watched, for some minutes past, by a black-bearded gentleman who seemed particularly interested in him.

CHAPTER 24

BUNTER TRIES TO CLIMB A PYRAMID

'THEY must have made that suit out of an old balloon,' said Johnny Bull. The juniors were looking at Bunter who was dressed in a khaki tussore suit. In that suit, the Owl of the Remove, accompanied by Lord Mauleverer, had come to the rendezvous at the railway station.

'Couldn't have been ready-made,' observed Nugent. 'No shop would stock that size!'

'Must be straight off the balloon,' said Bob Cherry. 'Change for it to be full of Bunter, instead of gas.'

'The changefulness is not terrific,' commented Hurree Singh. The juniors laughed. Bunter frowned.

'You're jealous,' he said. 'I lend an air of distinction to your party, and I won't hurt your feelings by saying that it needed it. This is one of the best suits from the Kasr-el-Nil, and I shouldn't like to tell you how many potatoes it cost me!'

'Do you mean piastres, you fat Owl?' demanded Bob Cherry.

'I don't think you've got the proper pronunciation, Cherry.'

'I can tell you how many of whatever you call them it cost you,' said Johnny Bull, 'and that's none!' He looked at Mauleverer, who grinned.

'All right,' said his lordship. 'No harm done.'

'Except to you,' continued Bull, 'having to put up with Bunter all the afternoon.'

'Not quite,' replied Lord Mauleverer. 'After shoppin' he wanted to see Groppi's. Took him there, and called back in a couple of hours. Spent a most peaceful afternoon, myself, drivin' round, while he spent 'em havin' tea. I say, here's Quelch with the cars.'

'And now you're going to spend a peaceful evening driving round,' declared Bob Cherry, 'until we get you climbing a pyramid.'

'I say,' Mauleverer began to protest in alarm. He was interrupted by Mr. Quelch.

'Good afternoon, my boys. I trust you have all spent an instructive one, seeing Cairo and its historical remains?'

'Oh, yes, sir!' Bunter was the first to speak. 'I'm keen on history. Mauleverer took me to the Kasr-el-Nil-and I say, sir-they bring you coffee, while you shop. I asked them for cakes too-'

'Bunter!'

'They were a mean lot. They said they didn't have any cakes, although I'd spent an awful lot there-'

'He means Mauleverer spent an awful lot,' murmured Nugent.

'And then we went to Groppi's, sir, a most historical place.'

'So that is the way you have spent your afternoon?' Mr. Quelch looked at Mauleverer who coloured.

'I drove round Cairo, sir, while Bunter was studyin' Groppi's.'

'Indeed? You appear then, Mauleverer, to have spent a more instructive afternoon than Bunter. What did you see?'

'Oh-er-just Cairo, sir. This and that place. I didn't make any note of their names,' answered Mauleverer, in some confusion. 'I think I saw the Nile once, when we went over a bridge.'

'And you woke up!' murmured Wharton to Cherry. 'One of them spent the afternoon eating, and the other, sleeping!'

'Wait till we get 'em climbing up a pyramid!' said Bob Cherry.

The juniors smiled as they packed into the waiting cars.

Bunter might be interested in Egypt, within the limits of Groppi's, or any other cafe, and Mauleverer, to the extent of taking a taxi-ride, during which he had, probably dozed most of the time, but the others

could not see either of them keen about climbing a pyramid! Within a very short time, they were again on the edge of the desert, which did not seem far away from Cairo in any direction-and were gazing at the Great Pyramid of Cheops.

'May we go up it, sir?' asked Bob Cherry of the Remove master.

'Certainly, if you wish-but-'

Quelch looked at Bunter.

'The merciful man is merciful to his Bunter,' murmured Nugent.

'What did you say, Nugent?'

'Oh-I-I thought Bunter might find it difficult, sir.'

'Not me!' declared Bunter. 'You fellows may, but not me. Race you to the top Mauly!'

Lord Mauleverer shuddered. 'I don't think so, Isn't there any other way of gettin' to the top than climbin', sir?'

'No-but you can hire some of these Bedouin to assist you.' Quelch looked round. Some Bedouin, who had been standing near, surged forward.

'Me take you to the top, sir.' One of them reached out to Lord Mauleverer, who recoiled.

'I think I'll wait until they put in a lift,' he said.

'I trust, Mauleverer, that no one will ever commit any such vandalism,' observed Quelch warmly. 'Quite enough is already in store for Egyptian antiquities, if this new Aswan Dam scheme eventuates, without adding more. A lift, indeed! You may remain, below, Mauleverer, until the others return, if you wish. You will, doubtless, find some way of occupying your time?'

'I thought of goin' and havin' a swim in the pool at the Mena House Hotel, sir.'

'Or you might, if you wish for something more instructive,' said Mr. Quelch sarcastically, 'go and look at the Sphinx, which is quite close. The choice is yours. As for you, Bunter, I am far from dissuading you. You already take insufficient exercise. Nevertheless, I am inclined to think you will need assistance. In fact, I am sure of it.' Quelch beckoned to a couple of the Bedouin who came forward, and then pointed at Bunter.

One of them spread his arms wide. 'Much wide, much fat gentleman!' he observed. 'Much heavy. Much baksheesh!'

The other Removites roared. Even Mr. Quelch smiled.

Bunter did not seem amused.

'Cheek! I'm not fat, sir. These fellows are just lazy!'

'We shall see, Bunter.' Quelch produced some notes.

The Bedouin eyed them, took them, came to Bunter, and each taking an arm began to haul him up the pyramid's great steps.

'Ow, you beasts! You're pinching my arm. Don't grab my neck!'

Quelch gazed at the scene with some concern.

'Upon my word, Bunter, if you struggle like that further up, you may be in serious danger.'

'The coming-downfulness will be quicker than the going upfulness,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I should jolly well think so,' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'Quelch shouldn't have allowed him to try.'

'The esteemed Quelch is now of the same thankfulness,' observed the Nabob of Bhanipur, glancing at the form-master's countenance, which was showing increasing concern as he watched Bunter's efforts, 'but the lockfulness of the stable door, after the cracked pitcher has gone to the well is a stitch in time that saves no ninepence, as your English proverb says.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Good old English proverb,' said Bob Cherry. 'Go and tell it to Quelchy, Inky. It may amuse him. He looks as if he needs amusing-Oh, lor!'

The fat Owl had slipped on the edge of a step. It was, fortunately, only the second up.

'Ow. Wow!'

Falling, he clutched at the two Bedouin, dragging them down with him.

'Ow. Yaroooh! '

The yelling Bedouin disengaged themselves from the fat Owl, and gathered round Quelch.

'Much baksheesh!' They thrust out extended palms. 'Too fat! Too wide! Much tumble! Much hurt! Much baksheesh!'

'Good gracious!' Quelch handed out more money and waved the men away.

'Go! Imshi!- Bunter, that is enough! I cannot allow you to jeopardize yourself and other people. You will remain here, while the others make the ascent.'

CHAPTER 25

LORD MAULEVERER IS LOST

LORD Mauleverer looked at the Sphinx. He was far from uninterested, as Bunter would have been, but all the same, in the hot sand which surrounded it his thoughts wandered to the cool swimming pool quite near at Mena House. Mr. Quelch had not insisted that he should go to the Sphinx instead of the pool, and now he had seen the Sphinx.

'They'll be some time climbin' up that pyramid and down again,' he thought. 'Just time for a swim.' He turned, and was presently sauntering down the road leading to Mena House. There were not many people about, and in front of him, by the side of the road, he saw two Bedouin standing by a taxi. As he neared them, one of them came up to him.

'Gentleman take taxi?'

Mauleverer shook his head. 'No thanks!' He had not far to go, and although no particular lover of unnecessary exercise, as the Remove well knew, the distance to the hotel was not really far enough to justify taking a taxi.

'Gentleman take taxi.' The Bedouin closed on either side of him as he was passing the vehicle, and took hold of his arms.

'Here, clear off!' Mauleverer tried to shake himself free. 'What's the word Quelchy uses when he wants them to push off?-Imshi!-By gad!' He was being pushed into the taxi.

'Good afternoon, Lord Mauleverer. Kindly step inside quietly. It will be wiser if you do.' Mauleverer found himself looking down the barrel of a pistol, held by a sallow-faced, black-bearded man. 'No harm is intended-unless you make a noise.'

Lord Mauleverer looked at the pistol, and then at the man. It was, evidently, useless and dangerous to make a noise.

'You were hangin' about the platform when we arrived in Cairo this mornin',' he said. 'What's the idea?'

'We are going for a little trip into the desert,' answered the man. 'That is all for the moment. The rest depends upon your Mr. Quelch. I really advise you, Lord Mauleverer to make no reckless move. The slight noise, made by this pistol-if fired-would merely be taken for a back-fire. Cairo taxis rarely, if ever, receive any maintenance, and are addicted to back-fires and many strange noises. No one would notice-except yourself.'

'So you're going gunnin' for Mr. Quelch, too, are you?'

'I shall merely be seeing him on a matter of business.'

'Business? Similar to this?'

'Part of it,' added the man, placidly. 'I am a business man. My name is Kalizelos, and I am a Greek. I do not mind telling you as, after today, we shall not meet again-through one cause or another.' He touched the pistol gently. 'Ah!' He looked out of the window. 'I shall be taking you over some rough ground, as we must now leave the road.'

Lord Mauleverer looked out. The taxi was now bumping over a sandy plain towards a low range of barren hills. Presently it stopped before a cleft in the hills.

'Will your lordship be pleased to descend?' said Kalizelos, in an unctuous voice. Mauleverer got out. There was no one else in sight. They might have been in the heart of the Western Desert, instead of so near Cairo. The Greek spoke to the Bedouins in a tongue Mauleverer did not know, and he felt himself seized.

'I say-what's all this?'

'It is necessary to bind your lordship-and I regret to say, also to gag you.' Mauleverer's arms were tied behind his back, and a cloth forced between his lips and tied at the back of his head. He was then pushed

towards the cleft which he perceived was the mouth of a cave. Inside he was forced to the sandy floor, and his feet tied together.

'I shall now leave your lordship,' said the mocking voice of Kalizelos.

'You will remain undisturbed. Although this place is so near the City it has nothing to offer anyone, either tourists or Arabs, so no one ever comes here. How long you remain here depends on Mr. Quelch! Good evening, Lord Mauleverer!'

CHAPTER 26

BUNTER'S DONKEY

'WHERE'S Quelch?'

Wharton asked Bunter that question, as he and the others arrived on the ground after climbing down the pyramid.

'He told me he was going to see the pinks.'

'The what? You, utter ass, you must mean the Sphinx!' Harry Wharton laughed. 'Well, we'd better wait here for him!'

'Catch me doing so!' Bunter sniffed, disdainfully. 'Blow Quelch! He can't come the schoolmaster like this on a holiday. Not with me, anyway. You fellows, perhaps. He said wait here-but I want some tea.'

'Tea?' growled Johnny Bull. 'You were eating all the afternoon in Groppi's. You can't want anything more to eat, yet!'

'I'm hungry,' declared Bunter. 'You fellows don't care -but I must keep up my strength.'

'We're going to have supper in Mena House,' said Bob Cherry. 'Wait till then, like the rest of us are going to do.'

'No. I'll go there now. Blow waiting here for Quelch. One of you call a taxi-'

Nugent laughed. 'There aren't any taxis here, you ass. You might get a donkey, instead There's a man over there with some.'

'He lets them out to tourists,' said Bob Cherry. 'Let's all ride them. It would be fun-and we won't go too far away because of Quelch. If Bunter wants to ride on to Mena House for a tea, he can.'

The juniors trooped over to the Arab donkey boy, who looked eagerly as they approached.

'You like donkey rides, sah? Very good donkeys. Here is strong donkey for you, sah!' He grabbed Bunter's arm. It was evident to the boy that the fat Removite required a strong donkey. 'You get on, sah. His name Sir Churchill.'

Sir Churchill looked round at the sound of his name.

He certainly looked a good strong donkey.

'He's considering you, Bunter,' said Johnny Bull. 'I don't blame him. He'll probably refuse to let you get on him.'

'I have a way with animals,' observed Bunter, with an air of dignity.

'Don't cackle; help me up-Ow. Don't shove me, Cherry. You beast, Nugent. You nearly upset me.' The fat Owl settled on the back of Sir Churchill.

'Now, you go!' Bunter gave the donkey a sudden smack on its side, with an utterly unexpected result. The animal put its head down and bolted.

'Oh, help! Oh, I say, you fellows-' Wildly clasping its neck, Bunter was borne by the donkey into the desert beyond the pyramids.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'He's bolting with him.'

'Probably throw him off, presently,' said Johnny Bull. 'We'd better go after him. Come on!' He gave a handful of piastres to the donkey boy and, followed by the others, who also took donkeys, they raced in pursuit. Despite the weight he was carrying, however, Bunter's donkey kept its distance and lost no speed. The wild yells of the Owl echoed back.

'Where on earth are we going?' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'This is a pretty desolate spot.'

'We musn't lose Bunter in it,' said Harry Wharton.

In front of them were some low hills. The Famous Five, riding as fast as their donkeys would go, were relieved to see Bunter's mount stop, jib and unseat his rider. Bunter's yell came across the intervening distance. He was, evidently, not relieved.

'He won't be hurt,' said Nugent. 'Not on that sand. I expect the donkey's had enough of him.'

'Like most people,' put in Johnny Bull. 'No hurry now. Let's ease up!'
'Sir Churchill's probably fed up with the weight. I don't blame him,'
commented Bob. 'I say-where's he going?' 'Oh, crumbs!' exclaimed Nugent.
'It's disappeared. If we have to walk Bunter all that way back-'



**THE FAMOUS FIVE WERE RELIEVED TO SEE BUNTER'S MOUNT
STOP, JIB AND UNSEAT HIS RIDER**

'We'll have to find it,' said Wharton. 'Its owner will want it back with
the rest. It can't have gone far!'

The juniors halted their steeds round Bunter, who looked up and gasped.
'Beasts!'

'Where's yours?' asked Johnny Bull. 'That's more to the point.'

'I don't care. It threw me off. I'm hot, and all over sand,' exclaimed
the Owl.

'You'll care, if you have to walk back-and pay for the donkey when you
get there,' said Bull. 'They might put you in prison if you can't brass
up-'

'Ow!'

'Don't scare the fat ass!' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'What was his
name-? Sir Churchill-can't be far away. He went between those hillocks, I
think.'

'My esteemed chums,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'There is a trail in
the sandfulness.'

'In which case we do the boy-scoutfulness. Good for you, Inky,' said
Cherry. 'Come on-why, there he is.'

The face of Sir Churchill appeared at the entrance of a small cave quite
near them.

'He went in there to get out of the heat, I suppose,' said Nugent.

'Not a bad idea,' agreed Wharton. 'I wish we could-but we must catch him
and go back now. Mustn't keep Quelchy waiting.'

'Let Bunter catch him,' suggested Johnny Bull. 'It was his mount and it's
his business.'

Harry Wharton shook his head. 'He couldn't do it. There's no time to
waste, and he'd probably scare it.'

'I wouldn't!' Bunter rose indignantly. 'I refuse to let anyone touch my
donkey. I have a way with animals. They always know their master. If you
saw me with our hunters at Bunter Court-Wow!'

Whether Bunter had a way with animals or not, it would appear that Sir

Churchill had a way with Bunters! He suddenly rushed at Bunter with his head down. The Owl turned and fled, but not quite quickly enough.

Bump!

No goat could have butted Bunter better than Sir Churchill.

'Ow, wow! Beast!' Bunter rolled over on the sand.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Come on, Bunter. Let's see more of your way with animals.' Johnny Bull put out a hand and caught Sir Churchill's bridle. 'Catch hold.'

'Ow. Keep him off. I'll have one of the others. Ow! I'm all sandy and hot-I'm going into that cave to rest.'

'Come on, Bunter,' exclaimed Wharton. 'Take one of the other donkeys. We can't keep Quelch waiting.'

'Blow Quelch! I'll tell him so when I see him.' Bunter turned and entered the cave. The next moment he emerged with a yell.

'Ow! Help!'

'What on earth's the matter?' asked Harry.

'Ow! There's something live in there-on the ground, Keep away! It moved when I touched it with my foot. It may be a tiger.'

'There aren't any tigers in Egypt, ass,' said Bob Cherry. 'Nor any other animals which live in caves. What can it be-if anything? Why didn't it rush out when you touched it? I say-'

The tender-hearted Cherry changed his tone. 'Perhaps it's some poor beast injured and needing help. I'll have a look.' He took out a torchlight from his pocket.

The juniors followed Bob Cherry into the darkness of the cave. As they paused they could hear a faint movement, and their pulses quickened. Then Bob's torch illuminated the scene.

'Mauly? What on earth?'

The bound and gagged figure of Lord Mauleverer was lying on the floor of the cave before their astonished eyes.

CHAPTER 27

MR. KALIZELOS IS BUMPED

MR. QUELCH was standing near the pyramids, and frowning. The frown was not caused by the pyramids. These, as the only one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, still to exist in the modern one, interested him very much. He frowned because none of the Greyfriars boys was present. Mauleverer had gone to the swimming-pool at Mena House, but the others-! A donkey-boy had come along, having seen Quelch before with his charges, and told him that they had hired donkeys for a ride, and gone out of sight. 'Race after fat one,' said the boy. 'Cost much baksheesh. You pay me baksheesh? Yes?'

Quelch's answer was 'No' and a frown. Of course, rather more freedom of action was allowed on a holiday, but really-

'Mr. Quelch?'

Quelch turned at the sound of his name. He saw, standing by him, a man with a black beard. The Remove master stared in surprise. He had never seen the man before, and did not like his looks now.

'You seem to know me, sir. I do not think we have met before.' The Remove master's tone was polite but not conciliatory.

'No, Mr. Quelch we have not met before. My name is Kalizelos, and I am a Greek of Alexandria. I have come to do business with you.'

Quelch looked at him in surprise.

'You are making a mistake, sir. I am not in this country on business. I am in charge of a party of English schoolboys.'

'That I know,' answered the man. 'Nevertheless I have come to do business with you. You are in charge of the schoolboys. You are also in charge of a Chinese vase, which I have been commissioned to buy.'

Quelch stared at him, icily.

'You presume, sir. How do you come by this knowledge, I do not know, but the vase is not mine to sell, even were I disposed to do so.' Mr. Quelch turned away.

'A great price is being offered for it, Mr. Quelch.'

'It is not for sale at any price.'

'The price is the Earl of Mauleverer.' Quelch swung round.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean,' answered the Greek, 'that I will trade his lordship for the vase. If you deliver it to me, he will be returned safely to you-if not-but do not let us talk of unpleasant matters.'

The Greek spread his hands out and smiled.

'I fail to understand you. Lord Mauleverer is waiting for me at the Mena House Hotel.'

'No, Mr. Quelch. On his way there, he was met by myself and two assistants, who induced him to go elsewhere-to a small cave in the desert, which you will never find.'

'You scoundrel! You have kidnapped him? I shall at once inform the police.'

'That would be useless. I should deny such a preposterous tale-about myself, a well-known merchant of Alexandria! You have no evidence-neither you nor they could find it-and while inquiries are made-he gets hungrier and thirstier, in his bonds-'

'You villain!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'You do this to a boy in my charge-to obtain a valueless vase? Why-?'

'I am a business man,' interrupted the Greek. 'I have no idea why-shall I say-my principals wish to have this vase. Yet, they do, and have given me

sufficient details to identify you and your party. You give it to me. I have my commission, the matter ends. Otherwise-

Mr. Quelch was silent in wrath and dismay.

'I have not brought the vase to Cairo.' he said at last. 'So I surmised.' observed the Greek, 'but you could send a message to the captain of the *Sunflower* at Port Said, and it could be brought to you, and thus to me, in a fast car.'

'How do I know that you would release Lord Mauleverer, if I did give you the vase?' demanded Quelch, hoarsely.

'You would have to take my word for that. There is no alternative.'

Mr. Quelch thought rapidly. Distasteful as it was to hand over the vase entrusted to him, he could not let Mauleverer stay a prisoner in a cave in the Egyptian desert, to perish miserably of hunger and thirst. As the man had said, there was no alternative.

At that moment, to the surprise of Mr. Quelch, and the still greater surprise of Mr. Kalizelos, one presented itself! 'Sorry, we're late, sir.' said the cheerful voice of Bob Cherry. 'We had to collect another donkey as well as Bunter.'

'Oh, really, Cherry-!'

The juniors dismounted from their donkeys. The short Egyptian twilight was gathering. They did not, at first, observe that Mr. Quelch was in the company of the Greek. 'Oh my boys! My dear boys-

'Is anything the matter, sir?' asked Wharton, noticing the distress in Quelch's voice. 'If it's about Mauleverer-?'

'Yes, Wharton. Mauleverer has been kidnapped, and is being held to ransom.'

'He's here, sir!'

'What?' There was a startled exclamation from Mr. Quelch, and a still more startled one from Mr. Kalizelos!

'Here I am, sir. They found me in a cave. A fellow got hold of me, and took me there, and-' Lord Mauleverer's eyes fell on Kalizelos, who was trying to back out of sight. 'That's the man!'

Kalizelos turned to run, but found himself in the middle of a detaining crowd. Wharton and Nugent grabbed one arm, Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull the other, while Bob Cherry stood by to lend a hand if it were needed-but it was not.

'Scoundrel!' roared Mr. Quelch. 'So your plot has come to nothing. This man, my boys, was trying to get hold of the vase in exchange for Mauleverer's safety!'

'Oh, lor', exclaimed Bunter. 'If I hadn't found Mauly-Oh, crikey! Let me kick the beast!' As the Greek was firmly held, Bunter was in no danger of reprisal, and the other Removites, remembering how they had found Mauleverer, were not disposed to interfere. A fat foot shot out, and the Greek gave a howl. A kick, with Bunter's weight behind it, could be felt-and evidently was!

'Let me give him another-'

'That will do. Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch. 'Keep that man secure while I telephone the police.'

'You can prove nothing,' snarled Kalizelos. 'I will complain that these boys assaulted me. Your word against mine.'

'Might be so,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Take a lot of time, anyway, sir, givin' evidence, and waitin' for his trial. Let's do as he's suggested and assault him here and now!'

'Good egg!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Scrag him!'

'Boot him!' cried Johnny Bull.

'Bump him!' said Frank Nugent.

'All together,' said Bob Cherry. 'We'll give him a Greyfriars bumping!'

Kalizelos yelled as the juniors seized him. Mr. Quelch made as if to protest, and then stopped. It appeared to him as if, in this case, justice-or at least some of it-would be done! Kalizelos was swung over and smote the desert hard, and then again. He howled and struggled.

'There,' said Mauleverer, at last. 'that's about enough.

Let him go now. Don't think the fellow will make any complaint. If he does, we can. Has somethin' to hide. I expect. Police might be interested.'

They released Kalizelos, who vanished into the desert.

Quelch found his voice.

'Let us go to the hotel now, my boys, and have our meal. The cars will be coming for us soon. Pay for the hire of these animals, and send them away with their owner.'

'Ought to be something extra for Sir Churchill,' suggested Bob Cherry.

'I'd like to stand him a carrot for finding Mauly. He'd appreciate it better than Coker's motor-bike did.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I found Mauleverer,' exclaimed Bunter. 'If it hadn't been for me leading you to him-'

'Is that how you describe it?' asked Johnny Bull. 'Well-we'll buy you a carrot too. That'll be one for each donkey. He thrust some money into the hand of the donkey-boy who had been an interested spectator of the proceedings with Mr. Kalizelos. Mauleverer stroked Sir Churchill.

Mr. Quelch, waving to the boys to follow him turned and walked on towards Mena House.

'A carrot?' It was Billy Bunter's indignant voice. 'Blow your carrots! After all I've done-'

'You don't even deserve that,' said Johnny Bull. 'Now, come on and shut up! The last is important!'

CHAPTER 28

BUNTER IN INDIA

'HOMESICK?' asked Bob Cherry.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh turned, with a smile. 'Perhaps, my esteemed Bob,' he answered, 'and perhaps not. I do not know. Yet I shall be pleased to be in Bhanipur again, though I have some way to go.'

'Some way to go?' exclaimed Bob. 'We're here.' The *Sunflower* was slowing down to enter Bombay Harbour.

'It is yet a long way from Bhanipur,' said the nabob. 'I could wish that all your esteemed selves were coming with me, but the excellent and adamant Quelch says "No."'

'I expect that the excellent and adamant Quelch,' put in Wharton, 'thinks that if we did we'd keep the yacht waiting, as you'd entertain us so lavishly, Inky. He wants us to see Colombo and Penang and Singapore before we go to Hong Kong.'

'I think I'd rather go with you, Inky,' said Bob Cherry, 'and then fly straight from Delhi to Hong Kong, as you will-if it could be done!'

'Can't be done!' observed Johnny Bull. 'Plane fares all that way are expensive. Quelch wouldn't let us stick Mauly for so much extra.'

'I say, you fellows.' The Removites turned at the sound of Billy Bunter's voice. 'I'll go. I can look after Inky better than you fellows could.'

I've saved you from all sorts of dangers on this voyage. You chaps can look after yourselves in future. You're not so important.'

'You fat ass!' said Frank Nugent. 'I'll ask Mauly about the air fares-'

'You won't,' put in Johnny Bull, 'unless you want your fat nose rubbed on the deck! You're getting this voyage at Mauly's expense-and you want to stick him for more. No, you'll stay with the rest of us.'

'I saved Mauly's life in Egypt by finding him in that cave-'

'No you didn't. That was the other donkey.'

'That's the one we should have brought with us,' said Harry Wharton, 'it's more intelligent. If you try to sponge on old Mauly for any more, your own life won't be worth saving.'

'Oh, really, Wharton-I don't think-'

'You don't and never have,' observed Bull. 'Your brain wasn't built for it. Now shut up and look at Bombay!'

'It's a fine city-and it'll have to put up with you for a while,' added Bob Cherry. 'Try and appreciate it a bit in return.'

Bunter grunted and turned to look at Bombay, which the yacht was approaching. After all, it looked as if it might have some very good cafes! The great arch of the Gateway of India, and the stately bulk of the Taj Mahal Hotel dominated the view, but a vision of possible and pleasant cafes dominated Bunter!

'We land at the wharf by the Customs House,' said the voice of Mr. Quelch behind them. 'After we have passed through the Customs, we shall take a sight-seeing tour of the city.'

The Removites looked interested. It was possible, of course, that they might have preferred to do their sightseeing without the company of Henry Samuel Quelch. 'After which we shall have some refreshments.' The Remove master paused. 'Hurree Singh?'

'Esteemed sahib?'

'You will not be starting your journey to Bhanipur until the afternoon. Perhaps you will, in the meantime, act as our guide? You must know Bombay better than any of us.'

'The pleasure will be terrific,' said the Nabob. There was no doubt that the dusky junior meant it. He was sorry to be leaving his friends, even for a short while. The juniors also looked pleased. Even though the

verbal guidance would be in the nabob's wonderful English, it would be preferable to Quelch's well-meant instruction. After all, even on holiday, a master was still a master!

'I-I say, sir, couldn't we have the refreshments first?'

'We could and will not, Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch, firmly. 'It is not long since you had breakfast-eating much more, in my opinion, than you should have done. You will have no more, until about eleven o'clock, when you may have coffee and a cake.'

Bunter grunted. There was no arguing with Quelch.

He never seemed to realize that sea air made a fellow hungry. It was also very well for a bony old sketch, like Quelch, to talk, but an athletic fellow like himself, thought Bunter, had to keep up his strength by a series of constant snacks.

However, there was no help for it. Quelch was determined to keep all his flock under his gimlet-eye that morning, and the fat Owl, hungry or not, had to go with the rest.

In the back of the car, listening to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's melodious English, as he explained the passing sights, Bunter dozed, only occasionally awakening as they passed some place where refreshments were sold. He only wakened completely when they stopped outside one of Bombay's smaller hotels.

'We stop here for coffee and cakes in the garden,' said Mr. Quelch.

Despite Quelch's frown, Bunter was first into that garden. The other boys sat back, in easy chairs, and relaxed, but Bunter's concentration was on more important things. A plate of cakes set before him vanished rapidly, and he was only jerked from his attention to them by the arrival of a man who wore, round his arms and body, the unusual addition of a number of snakes. He was a snake-charmer, a customary entertainer of tourists in India, but Bunter looked at his stock-in-trade with alarm and distrust.

'I say you fellows, I don't like the look of those snakes.'

'They may not like the look of you,' said Johnny Bull.

'Calm yourself, Bunter,' observed Mr. Quelch. 'The snakes are perfectly harmless, and the man has them under complete control. You need have no fear.'

'Oh, I haven't sir. I only thought these fellows might be scared.'

'Fathead!' said Bob Cherry.

'I have heard that people sometimes find snakes in their beds in India,' said Bunter. 'I wouldn't mind, of course, but it might frighten you chaps.'

'We'll come to you for protection, when we stay at that hotel on the Malabar Hill tonight,' said Harry Wharton. 'If we find any snakes in our beds we'll call on you to come and deal with them. Of course, if you find one in yours-'

'Ow!'

'Bunter you must not howl like that in an hotel garden,' said Mr. Quelch, severely. 'Wharton, you should not try to startle this foolish boy! Now, if you are all finished, we will resume our tour of Bombay.'

'I-I haven't quite finished yet, sir. I could do with another cake too-to prevent me fainting with the heat.' Mr. Quelch fixed the Owl of the Remove with a stern glance.

'I observed, Bunter, that you sat down in front of a dish on which there were at least a dozen cakes. That dish is now empty. What has happened to those cakes?'

'I-I think the birds must have flown off with them, sir.'

'Bunter!'

'Or, perhaps, the snakes took them when I wasn't looking, sir.'

'If they did, they'll probably follow you up for more,' said Johnny Bull. 'Isn't that one slithering towards you now, looking hungry?' added Cherry.

"Wow! Ow! Keep it off." Bunter sprang to his feet, and ran towards the entrance.

'Cherry, you heard me admonish Wharton just now for startling Bunter. However-' Quelch looked grim, but Bunter did seem to have forgotten-temporarily-that he needed another cake. 'Let us now go.'

CHAPTER 29

A DEAL IN THE BAZAAR

'I say, Mauly, look at that!'

The juniors were in the Nal Bazaar. Lord Mauleverer and Bunter-perhaps, because they were the most lethargic of the party-had fallen a little behind, when Bunter attracted Mauleverer's attention.

Lord Mauleverer looked where Bunter indicated. They were outside a little dusky shop, which appeared to be a taxidermist's.

'They don't sell anythin' to eat there, Bunter.'

'Dash it, anyone would think I was one of those chaps who's always eating!' exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. 'I say, Mauly, there's a stuffed snake in that shop. I want it.'

'It'll only be stuffed with sawdust-or whatever they do stuff snakes with,' said Mauleverer. 'Why on earth do you want it?'

'I have reasons,' declared the fat Owl, loftily. 'I may want to show some fellows something-and I may not. Come in with me, Mauly-and-help me buy it. I think I have enough money.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. Owing to Mr. Quelch's strict supervision, Bunter still had a fair amount left from the proceeds of the two traveller's cheques his father had sent him. Mauleverer had no idea of the value of a stuffed snake, never previously having bought one, but if it were a little more than Bunter could manage he did not mind 'forking out'. A kindly youth, he still felt grateful to Bunter for having, inadvertently, recovered Beryl Brooke's necklace in Nice.

Inside, Lord Mauleverer consulted a small Hindustani phrase book and pointed to the snake.

'*Kitne rupaiya hain?*'

'That's not what it's called, Mauly. I want a snake.'

'Just askin' how much it is in Hindustani.' He looked at the proprietor, only just visible in the recesses of the dusky shop.

'Ten rupees, sahib,' said the man who could, Mauleverer reflected, probably speak better English than either he or Bunter could speak Hindustani.

'Cheap,' said Bunter. 'Grab it, Mauly!'

'You don't know whether it's cheap or not, any more than I do,' said Mauly. 'Not havin' bought any such thing before. If you want it I'll make you a present of it.' He gave ten rupees to the shopkeeper who bowed, wrapped up the snake and handed it to Bunter.

'Thanks awfully, Mauly. I say-don't you tell the other fellows I bought this.'

'No. Goin' to take it home, and tell your people you shot it, what?'

'No. I'm not deceitful, I hope,' said Bunter, with dignity. 'I don't boast about things I can't do. Of course, I could have walked into the nearest jungle, and shot this snake, if I'd wanted to-but this is more convenient.'

'Much!' agreed Mauleverer, grinning, as they emerged from the shop.

'There's Quelch wavin' to us. Come on!'

'Be careful not to get separated from the rest of us,' said Quelch when they came up, eyeing both Mauleverer and Bunter with some severity.

'There was an attempt in Egypt to kidnap you, Mauleverer.'

'They would have done so, if it hadn't been for me, sir.'

'Be quiet, Bunter! Your activities certainly led to the rescue of Mauleverer, but they were quite inadvertent,' said Quelch. 'There is no reason to fear any further attempt-these people who have made such a nuisance of themselves to us, must, by now have learned that we are on

the watch. Nevertheless, Mauleverer, be on your guard, and keep with the rest of the party! '

'He was all right, sir. I was looking after him,' said Bunter.

'Look after yourself, Bunter, and don't stray,' snapped Quelch. 'Come on!' He turned and led the way, accompanied by Hurree Singh. The others followed closely.

'We shouldn't swap you for that vase, Bunter, if they kidnapped you,' said Johnny Bull. 'We'd keep the vase and let them keep you. The vase is less expensive to feed, and doesn't talk.'

'Oh, really, Bull-'

'And easier to wash,' added Nugent 'And may like it.'

'If you fellows are going to be so ungrateful to me for looking after you,' declared Bunter, bitterly, 'I'll treat you all with-with despision-and contempt. I wish I'd agreed to go with Inky. He pressed me to go to Bhanipur with him, and both join you fellows in Hong Kong-but I thought I'd better not desert you. Now you can look after yourselves. Next time you want protection from bandits, or snakes-don't ask me!'

'Thanks,' said Bob Cherry. 'We won't ask you-any more than Inky did to go to Bhanipur. Now, come on, you fat spoofer-unless you don't happen to want any lunch.'

'Lunch? Where?'

The juniors laughed at Bunter's sudden alertness. 'Oh, we've some miles to go yet,' observed Harry Wharton. 'We have to climb the Malabar Hill first.'

'Oh,lor'!!'

There was another laugh at the Owl's dismayed countenance.

'It's all right, ass; we're going by car,' explained Bob Cherry, 'to the Palm Trees Hotel, where we're staying the night. Still part of Bombay, really.'

'Oh! Hardly the kind of thing I'm accustomed to,' declared Bunter. 'I make allowance, of, course, for Quelchy's ignorance. A travelled man has judgement. The Taj Mahal would have been better.'

'I daresay,' observed Johnny Bull. 'You push off to the Taj Mahal and we'll tell Quelchy you're standing your own lunch there, because you don't trust his judgement. I hope they'll take that postal order of yours which hasn't arrived yet to settle the bill-but in case they don't-I suppose the gaols here are fairly comfortable, Inky?' he asked the Nabob, who had rejoined the party after talking to Quelch, who was still a little ahead.

The Nabob of Bhanipur smiled.

'I do not know, my esteemed chum. I have not stayed at one. But the excellent and fat-headed Bunter will be able to give you all the information as to the gaolfulness, if he is unable to pay the hotel bill-'

'Ow!'

'Come on Bunter,' said Lord Mauleverer, 'there's Quelchy lookin' round. Thinks we're hangin' too far behind again.'

'Hurry up, and within twenty minutes you'll be in the middle of your third lunch,' stated Wharton. 'You usually have four, don't you?'

Bunter snorted and came on. He gave a long and wistful look at the stately façade of the Taj Mahal Hotel. It was certainly nearer, and a very good hotel, but it might be one of those establishments which refused to take a gentleman's word that it would be all right, when he'd collected a postal order he was expecting.

CHAPTER 30

A SNAKE JOINS THE PARTY

THE Removites looked into one of the big rooms which Quelch had engaged at the Palm Trees Hotel. There were two beds in it, and it was to accommodate Bob Cherry and Billy Bunter. None of the rooms for the Greyfriars boys was single-bedded. It was evident that Quelch was, as far as possible, minimizing any possibility of another attempt at kidnapping. There might be no reason to fear any further attempt, but it was well to be on the safe side.

'Pleasant dreams, Bob!' said Harry Wharton. 'You have to put up with the company of Bunter-and his snores.'

'Bob may be thankful that he's with me,' said Bunter. 'He has someone really reliable to look after him. Haven't you, old chap?'

'No!' stated Bob. 'I suppose the bed you've taken was the best one? That's why you slipped up early-to bag it?' Bunter was sitting up in bed, eating a cake. It was two hours since he had had an extensive supper-so, naturally, he was hungry again.

'I went up to see that our quarters were properly situated,' observed Bunter. 'We're on the top floor. I don't think kidnapers can get in-but snakes might.'

Wharton laughed.

'You won't find any snakes here, you ass! There's no need to be frightened!'

'I'm not frightened,' said the Owl, 'but one has to be prepared to deal with snakes in India. Bob might be frightened. He, he, he!'

'What are you cackling at?' demanded Bob.

'Goodnight. Harry!' Harry Wharton returned a 'good night' and left the room, Bob Cherry went to the unoccupied bed, and threw back the bedclothes.

'Oh, my hat!' Bob recoiled, and jumped back. On the bedclothes, under the counterpane, was a small snake, its eyes glittering in the electric light.

'A snake? Bunter! Get out of the room-quick! There's a snake in my bed!' The fat Owl looked over unperturbed and laughed. 'He, he, he! You can't fool me like that, old fellow.'

There aren't any snakes here. Don't panic! He, he, he! '

'Get out. I tell you!' Bob's voice rose to a shout, and he seized Bunter by the shoulders, and dragged him out of bed, and on to the floor with a bump.

'Yaroooh ! Ow! Beast!'

Bunter howled and sprang up. Bob Cherry rushed him to the door, and pushed him into the passage.

'Ow! Leggo! Stoppit! '

The fat Removite's voice rang through the hotel. 'What the dickens is up?' Johnny Bull came out of his room followed by Wharton, Nugent and Mauleverer. Mr. Quelch, in pyjamas and dressing-gown was hurrying up from a room at the end of the passage. Startled hotel servants began to congregate at the top of a staircase.

'What the thump-'

'What's the row?'

'What is this uproar?' Quelch's voice was angry. 'Cherry what is the matter?'

'There's a snake, sir, in my room. In my bed.'

'Nonsense!'

'I saw it, sir, I'm not a funky ass like Bunter.'

'Yes, you are!' retorted the Owl. 'I mean-not like me at all. Dragging a chap from his bed because you thought you saw a snake in yours! Beast!'

'I got Bunter out of the room as quickly as I could, sir.

It may be poisonous!'

'He, he, he!'

'You cackling fat chump-!'

'Don't be frightened,' said Bunter. 'I'm not frightened of a snake.'

'Let's look at it,' suggested Mauleverer.

'Be careful!' admonished Mr. Quelch. 'I can hardly believe this, but I shall investigate. Wait here!' He sped back quickly to his room, and reappeared with a stout stick. 'Let me have that stick, sir, and I'll go and knock it on the head!'

'I shall do no such thing Cherry. If there is a snake in your bed,' said Quelch, in a voice which indicated that he had considerable doubt, 'I shall deal with it. You boys keep out of danger.'

Mr. Quelch strode into the bedroom, clutching the stick, the boys following. He recoiled at the sight of the snake on Cherry's bed.

'Good gracious. Cherry; you are right! It is almost unbelievable, but-' Quelch halted and regarded that snake with a steady stare. Wharton, just behind him, peered, and burst into a laugh.

'That's not a live snake, sir. It's a dummy!'

Mr. Quelch, very gingerly, pushed the snake with the end of his stick. It fell over, its glass eyes flashing in the light.

'It's a stuffed one!' exclaimed Mauleverer, suddenly recognizing the one he had bought for Bunter that morning.

'He, he, he!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The hotel servants were now all laughing.

Mr. Quelch turned a very pink face to Bob Cherry. 'Cherry, how dare you play such a practical joke! This is certainly a stuffed snake!'

'I-I didn't know, sir.' Everyone in the room was now laughing with the exception of Cherry and Mr. Quelch. 'I-I thought it was a real snake, sir.' He turned upon the cachinnating fat Owl.

'You knew it was a stuffed snake, you fat villain.'

'I hope I know a stuffed snake when I see one, Cherry.'

'Absurd!' Mr. Quelch tried to conceal that heavy stick, which now seemed rather ridiculous. He eyed Bunter as though he would like to use it on him. Courage and discernment, such as Bunter appeared to have shown, were so totally unlike him, that Quelch's suspicions were rising. However, the hour was late, and he wished to get away from the now hilarious spectators.

'Let there be no more of this nonsense!'

Quelch stalked from the room. The juniors were still laughing-with the exception of Bob Cherry!

'You fellows would have thought it a live one, if you'd seen it as I did!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The juniors roared again.

'There's a stuffed tiger's head on the sitting-room wall,' observed Johnny Bull. 'Don't get the wind up over that, old man, will you?'

Bob Cherry made a rush and the laughing juniors scattered to their rooms. He turned to Bunter, but the fat Owl, was, apparently, fast asleep in his bed.

Bob Cherry breathed hard. It would not do to disturb Quelch again that night-to say nothing of everyone else in the hotel-and a disturbance would certainly occur if he dealt with Bunter as he should be dealt with! Ignoring a fat chuckle, Bob began to undress.

CHAPTER 31

TIGER IN THE NIGHT

BOB CHERRY looked at Bunter with a grim expression. At the present moment, Bob was not his usual, sunny self. The joke with the stuffed snake, which had amused his friends, the hotel staff, and particularly Bunter, had not amused Bob at all. It had not amused Mr. Quelch either, of course, but he had probably gone to sleep again, and thus temporarily forgotten the occurrence. Bob had not.

Bunter had roused, chuckled, and then gone to sleep again, also, with a last admonition to Cherry to have no fear of snakes or tigers, as he-Bunter-would keep them all away!

'Tigers?' murmured Bob Cherry.

It was very unlikely, Bob now realized, that there were any live snakes in the hotel bedrooms, and-still less likely-any tigers, but Bunter's remark had called to memory what Bull had said about the stuffed tiger's head on the sitting-room wall. Bob remembered it, and looked at Bunter. In his normal, placid state of mind Bob Cherry would have been unlikely to attempt to scare Bunter, even with a stuffed tiger's head-especially after Quelch's annoyance about the stuffed snake. Bob, however, was not his placid self. He slipped out of his bed, put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and went downstairs. He was on the warpath, and that tiger's head was to be his weapon.

'When that fat Owl wakes up and sees a tiger looking at him from the end of the bed, he'll sing a different tune,' thought Bob Cherry.

It was not a difficult thing to detach that tiger's head from the wall-but some of the wall came with it! Bob Cherry whistled softly, and paused. He had burned his boats! He might put back the head and call off the whole silly business, which he was for one moment very sensibly inclined to do-but he could not repair the gash on the wall.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. There would, very probably, be a row in the morning with the hotel proprietors and, almost certainly, one with Quelch-but nothing could be done about that now. He crept quietly upstairs, carrying the tiger's head in front of him.

As he opened the door, he heard Bunter's snore and the whirr of the electric fan in the ceiling-and something else! He stopped, looking into the room which was flooded with bright moonlight. Next moment there came a piercing shriek, a loud exclamation and then a crash-

'What?'

Bob felt a terrific bump on the tiger's head, as he was thrust through the doorway with such force as to collapse on the passage floor. Someone fell over him, crashed and shouted.

The other Removites had wakened up, and were again coming out of their rooms. Someone switched on a light. At the end of the passage could be seen Quelch emerging from his room and staring at two flying figures racing down the stairs. He gave a shout.

'Stop thief!'

'I say you fellows-Oh, dear, what's happened?' It was Bunter, at the door of his room.

'Upon my word! That was that scoundrel, Hing Wah. I recognized him,' exclaimed Quelch. 'Has he been stopped?'

The night-porter came upon the scene. Judging by his sleepy look he had not only stopped no one, but had been unaware of anyone to stop!

'I see a thief, sahib-but he goes quick. I cannot catch him.'

'Whatever's the matter?' demanded Johnny Bull. 'What's happened?' He looked at Bob Cherry, still sitting on the passage floor, and clutching the tiger's head.

'I dunno!' Bob staggered to his feet. 'I was just going into my room again, when someone shrieked and crashed into something.' He switched on his bedroom light. 'The dressing-table's upset.'

'There were two of them here,' said Mr. Quelch. 'One was that rascal, Hing Wah, who stopped my taxi on the way to Pegg-and menaced me again in Malta. They were in your bedroom, Cherry? Do I understand that you were absent from it at the time? And what is this?' Quelch stared at the tiger's head.

'Yes, sir. I-I'd gone to get this to play a little joke on Bunter-in return for the one about the snake he played on me. I thought he'd take it for a real tiger.'

'I shouldn't,' exclaimed Bunter. 'I'd have chased it away, if it had been. I know how to deal with tigers.'

'An outrageous trick!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Were we at Greyfriars, Cherry, I should cane you most severely for this. As it is-' He paused in wrath.

'Lucky he did play it, sir.' Frank Nugent came to the rescue. 'I mean, those chaps who were in his room-and who must have slipped in when he went downstairs-seem to have taken it for a real tiger, and panicked.'

'That is certainly true,' admitted Quelch. 'Nevertheless-'

'I say, sir.' Johnny Bull made a dart at something he had just seen on the floor. It was a rag which he picked up and sniffed. 'Smell this, sir?'

Quelch took it, and sniffed.

'Good Heavens-chloroform! Evidently another attempt to kidnap one of you, and hold to ransom. Cherry. I cannot easily excuse your prank. For the second time a disturbance from this room has wakened the whole hotel-'

'Including the night-porter and watchman,' murmured Wharton.

'Nevertheless, it is certain that you have prevented a deplorable occurrence. I thought these people would not try again. I was wrong. It is, however, exceedingly unlikely that, the alarm having been given, they will try again tonight. Now, go to bed, all of you. Shut your doors, and lock them!' Quelch turned to the staring crowd of other guests and the hotel staff. 'Intruders have obtained entry but have been scared away. We had better advise the police in the morning. I am sorry for the disturbance but it was inevitable.'

Quelch went into his bedroom and closed the door. The Greyfriars boys grinned at each other, and followed his example.

CHAPTER 32

PROBLEM FOR MR. QUELCH

'OLD Quelch looks glum!'

It was on the deck of the *Sunflower* that Bunter made that remark. The yacht was steaming slowly along the beautiful south coast of Hong Kong Island, to gain entrance to the harbour on the east, as she must. The other Removites were enjoying the view. Quelch, according to Bunter, was apparently not enjoying it, and Bunter seemed to be enjoying the view of Quelch.

'He's certainly looking a bit thoughtful,' observed Wharton.

'He, he, he!' Bunter seemed to find it amusing.

'I don't wonder he's glum-having had to put up with you during the summer holidays,' observed Johnny Bull. 'Oh, really, Bull. I should like to know what he would have done without me!'

'It's being responsible for that rotten vase, which is bothering him, I expect,' said Bob Cherry. 'It's caused him a lot of trouble.'

'Soon be over,' added Frank Nugent. 'He deposits it in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank here-and it's his bother no longer.'

'H'm! It's still with him in his cabin in this yacht, and it has to be taken to the bank,' said Johnny Bull. 'That crowd seemed pretty keen to get at it, and not inclined to stick at much in doing so. May have another try, though I'm blessed if I know how or when or why.'

'I heard Quelch tell the captain he wanted a police escort,' put in Bunter. 'I was stooping down to tie up my shoe-lace just outside his cabin. He said he'd just taken the vase from the ship's safe-'

'You hear too much,' said Johnny Bull.

'I didn't hear a thing. I wouldn't listen to anyone else's conversation-'

'Wouldn't you?' observed Wharton.

'But the captain said he couldn't think why anyone wanted that vase. It wasn't valuable, and there were dozens like it on sale in a place here called Upper Lascar Row-'

'Someone thinks it's valuable enough to go to a lot of trouble and expense to get it,' commented Johnny.

'I'd sell it if it were mine,' said Bunter. 'I've a good mind to find that place and buy one like it. Might make a large profit.'

The juniors laughed.

'Try and find some way to that place, wherever and whatever it is,' advised Frank Nugent, 'where you don't have to pass anything to eat on the way. Then you'll have enough money left to buy your vase.'

The Removites laughed again.

'Good morning, my boys!' They swung round as Quelch's voice spoke near them. 'We shall be in the harbour soon, and anchoring in the Strait. I shall be unable to leave this vessel until the afternoon. I am taking some property to deposit in the bank here-and as it seems to be valuable, will wait for an escort, which has been promised me. You boys, however, can go ashore immediately. No doubt, you wish to see the sights?'

'Oh, yes, sir. My cousin George was telling me about a floating restaurant here,' exclaimed Bunter, 'on some sort of a boat-a sandpaper something-'

'Do you mean a sampan? Really, Bunter-'

'That's it, sir. On a sampan. With other sampans, bringing up tea and coffee and cakes. It's in a shelter where they keep the typhoons-'

'What, Bunter?'

'My cousin, George, said it was in the typhoon shelter, sir. I suppose a typhoon is some sort of a fish-in a floating zoo, there, but-'

The juniors roared with laughter, and Mr. Quelch smiled.

'A typhoon, Bunter, is not a fish, but a tropical hurricane, and the shelter is to shelter from them, and not to give shelter to any animal. Upon my word!' Mr. Quelch smiled again. 'It may be possible, later, to allow you to visit this floating restaurant, but not this morning.

Wharton, I give you charge of the party, and rely upon you to see that no one strays away when you are ashore. I think that the cause for my anxiety is not so near being removed that there can be no further apprehension of any sort. However, keep together.'

'I'll look after them, sir,' said Bunter. 'Look how I looked after Bob Cherry with that snake-and the tiger.'

'You fat ass!' said Bob Cherry.

'Don't blame me then, if you get bitten by a typhoon.'

'Wharton is in charge of the party, Bunter,' interrupted Mr. Quelch.

'Your valuable assistance is not needed. You will be able, my boys, to pick up a water-taxi to take you ashore.'

'When does Hurree Singh arrive, sir?' asked Wharton. 'Later in the day,' answered Quelch. 'His aeroplane has been delayed slightly. I had a telephone call just now from the Kai Tak airport here, to tell me so. He has apparently instructed someone to keep me posted as to the time of his arrival. A most thoughtful boy.'

Mr. Quelch turned away. The *Sunflower* was now passing the end of the island, steering north to enter the harbour. The tall new buildings, and the improvised dwellings of the refugees from China, be-sprinkling the hillsides above Victoria and Kowloon, came into sight. Bunter's interests were more concentrated. He craned over the side to see if he could see any signs of the famous floating restaurant which had so much attracted his cousin George.

CHAPTER 33

BUNTER BUYS ANOTHER 'MINK' VASE

'I SAY, you fellows-'

The Greyfriars boys were strolling through Hong Kong, after landing from their water-taxi. They were in that part of it known as Victoria, in Queen's Road, West. After passing many new towering office blocks and department stores, very like those in London, they had now come to an older part. They could see narrow streets bordered with small shops.

'I say, you fellows,' piped Bunter again, waving a fat hand.

The others turned to look at him. 'This is the place I want.'

'Well, go and take it then-unless someone stops you,' said Bob Cherry.

'Oh, don't be an ass! This is the sort of place which looks as if I could buy a "Mink" vase, here, like Quelchy's.'

'Quelch will be only too glad to get rid of his after all the trouble it's brought him,' said Harry Wharton. 'He'll heave a sigh of relief when it's gone. I expect he'd heave an even bigger one if he could get rid of you.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast!'

'Come on, you fat ass!' said Cherry. 'They only deal in rubbish here, by the look of the place.'

'Might sell them Bunter,' suggested Johnny Bull. 'Beast! I want to buy a "Mink" vase, like Quelchy's. If they're worth money, I don't see why I shouldn't invest in one, too.'

Wharton looked up to where he could read the street's name. It said Upper Lascar Row. 'That's the place the captain was telling Quelch and me-'

'Telling Quelch with you listening at the keyhole,' said Harry Wharton.

'I've heard of it. The first officer told me about it. It's also called the Thieves' Alley-being full of stolen goods. Come on, Bunter!'

'Picturesque enough,' observed Bob Cherry, 'in a way.'

They were now in a paved alley-way between two lots of steeply descending stairs. Little dark shops on either side were crowded with all manner of goods.

'Let's get out,' suggested Johnny Bull. 'It's like the Portobello Road in London-'

'There's one,' exclaimed Bunter, suddenly. 'Look!' He pointed a fat finger, indicating a blue-patterned vase on a shelf at the back of an old shop. 'That's exactly like Quelchy's which he showed to me-'

'Which you saw by butting into his study,' retorted Johnny.

'I think I'll go in and buy it, and make my fortune by selling it to someone.'

'The juniors chuckled. 'Made in Birmingham, probably,' suggested Johnny.

'Obviously isn't stolen property,' added Bob Cherry. 'No one would ever bother to steal that.'

'You'd think that could be said about Quelchy's,' said Nugent. 'Yet people have been bothering to steal that.'

'I won't let them steal mine,' said Bunter. 'I'm going into this shop. You chaps needn't bother to come in. You're not connoisseurs!'

Harry Wharton laughed. 'Do you mean *connoisseurs*', chump?'

'That's what I said,' replied Bunter. 'It isn't everyone who has the correct Parisian accent.' He went through the doorway of the shop.

'Leave him,' suggested Johnny Bull 'Don't let's waste time. Plenty more of Hong Kong to see. There's a tram which goes up the Peak-'

'Wait until Hurree Singh joins us for that' urged Harry Wharton. 'Let the fat chump buy that vase if he's set his mind on it and we mustn't leave

him. Quelch wouldn't like us to. He turned and followed Bunter into the shop. After some hesitation, so did the others.

It was too dark inside to see much but they soon became aware that it was presided over by an ancient Chinese gentleman, who they had at first taken to be part of his own stock-in-trade. He came forward and bowed low.

'What's the Chinese for "I want that Mink vase",' demanded Bunter.

'Haven't the faintest,' said Harry Wharton. 'That's you fellows all over. You go to another country without taking the trouble to learn the language! If you don't know anything more, you might at least tell me the Chinese for "How much?" Then I can point at it!'

'How about you?' asked Nugent. 'What *is* the Chinese for "How much?"'

'It was just on the tip of my tongue--'

'And just slipped off it again,' Bob Cherry chuckled.

'If the gentleman will say what he wishes to buy I shall be honoured to tell him the price,' said the old Chinese.

The juniors laughed.

'Oh! It's that!' Bunter pointed at the vase.

'It is ten dollars, please.'

'Ten dollars? Oh, lor!'

'That's pounds and pounds. Let me see--'

'A Hong Kong dollar is worth about one-and-three-pence,' stated Johnny Bull.

'H'm! Ten one-and-threes is--'

'Twelve and sixpence,' said Nugent.

'You always have to bargain in these places,' said Bunter. 'One dollar!'

The old Chinese shook his head and smiled.

'That's not much for what you call a Mink vase,' said Cherry.

'Leave this to me, Cherry. Bargaining in these shops sometimes takes hours.'

'I'm going then,' exclaimed Johnny. 'Come on, you chaps!'

'Hi! Wait for me!' yelled Bunter. 'Don't be cads. Quelch told us to keep together.'

'He didn't tell us to keep together in this shop all the morning,' said Wharton. 'If you do we'll be late for lunch on board.'

'Oh!'

'I thought that would stir you.'

'Offer him somethin' nearer, Bunter,' said Lord Mauleverer, with a smile.

'I will take eight,' said the shopkeeper. 'It is a good vase.'

'Don't know if it's worth that,' observed Mauleverer, 'but if you're lookin' for one like my uncle's, Bunter, that's the nearest I have seen.'

Bunter made up his mind. His fat fingers sorted out the sum in Hong Kong currency. Outside, the Owl clasped his purchase tightly. He had not asked and the shopkeeper had not offered to have it wrapped up.

A swarm of Chinese children bumped against them in the narrow alleyway. Bunter squealed.

'I say--push 'em away! I shall drop this.'

'Better take it back to the yacht,' suggested Mauleverer. 'Nearin' lunch-time anyway. Mustn't be late! Plenty of time to stroll round Hong Kong. End of journey and we stay here a week before flyin' home. I'll get a taxi and go with you, Bunter. And we can get one of those walla-wallas--the taxi boats, from the wharf!'

'Oh, thanks Mauly, you're a sport! Better than this selfish lot.' Bunter looked disdainfully at the other Removites.

'Should I be very wrong, Mauly?' asked Bob Cherry, gravely, 'if I thought you'd find that much easier than walking round, doing a little more sight-seeing with us?'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'No good overdoin' it at the start,' he said.

They were in Queen's Road, West, again now, and he hailed a passing taxi before anything more could be said on the matter. 'Bein' a host of sorts, I ought to see if Hurree Singh's arrived on the yacht yet. Should have done.' Leaving the other fellows laughing, he entered the taxi after Bunter, and they sped off.

Lord Mauleverer was not naturally lazy, like Bunter, but was by no means inclined so much as the others to put in a lot of strenuous sight-seeing. Being of a kindly nature, he also remembered that it was owing to Bunter's activities that his uncle's vase had not been lost. If Bunter wanted another vase, for however absurd a reason, he was willing to indulge him.

'I say, Mauly, this is exactly like your uncle's vase, isn't it?'

'Oh, yes. Pretty much so.'

'I might take it to Quelch, and ask him to compare it, don't you think so?'

'Yes. Why not? Might please the old bean! Might not. You take your chance!'

Bunter climbed quickly to the deck, when the walla-walla drew up alongside the *Sunflower*, leaving Mauleverer to pay the fare. He rushed along to Quelch's stateroom, and tapped at the door.

'I say, sir-' There was no answer. Bunter tapped louder and, still receiving no answer, entered the cabin. Quelch was not in. The Owl saw a large cardboard box on the table which, apparently, contained Sir Reginald Brooke's vase. It had now been taken from the safe, and since the yacht was in the harbour, and seamen were on deck who would guard against intruders from any quarter, Quelch had, obviously, felt that the great precautions for its security, which he had hitherto observed, were no longer needed. Within a very short time his responsibility would cease.

Bunter stepped forward and opened the lid of the box.

He took out Sir Reginald's vase, looked at it, and then at his own. They were certainly very much alike, although they were not identical. The Owl turned them from side to side, examining them, with what he considered was the eye of a connoisseur.

'H'm! Better put Quelch's back now, as he may come along. Mine's just as valuable-Oh, lor!'

He looked at the two vases, 'Oh, crikey!' He had changed them from one hand to another, and looked at them all round-and suddenly discovered that he could not remember which was which! The differences between the two were no guide to him; the Owl was not of an observant nature, as Quelch had frequently found in the form-room at Greyfriars.

'Oh, dear!' Bunter realized that there was no time to be lost. Quelch might come in at any moment. Though he might not be so much of the 'schoolmaster' on a holiday, he was still too much so for Bunter's liking. The Owl did not dare to wait and ask him to sort out the vases-and suppose he couldn't?

Quickly, Bunter put one of the vases back into the box. Perhaps Quelch wouldn't notice any difference anyway! Taking the other vase, Bunter made for his own cabin.

CHAPTER 34

IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN!

QUELCH sat in his cabin in the *Sunflower*, unaware that it had recently had a visitor in the form of Bunter. The Remove master looked at the box on the table, containing the vase. It had been a much greater responsibility and worry than either he or Sir Reginald Brooke had contemplated. Very soon, however, it would be in the safe possession of the Head Office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and his responsibility would be ended.

Though he could not see why anyone should want to steal it, that would, presently, be a matter to which he need give no more thought. It was in no danger on the yacht, anchored in Hong Kong harbour, and the police would soon be calling to escort him with it to the bank.

There was a tap at the door and the purser looked in.

'I have telephoned to the airport, sir, at your request.

The plane from Delhi has arrived.'

'Good!' Mr. Quelch had been expecting Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to return to the yacht before this time, and wondered why he had not done so. 'It has not then been much delayed?'

'I am informed, sir,' answered the purser, 'that it was not delayed at all, but arrived at the usual time. They cannot understand how it was that you received a message telling you otherwise. It did not come from the airport authorities.'

Mr. Quelch started. 'How extraordinary!'

'Yes, sir.' The purser retired. Quelch felt a vague sense of uneasiness. The message he had received had been given as an official one. Yet it was not an official one-and not true! Moreover, if the aeroplane had arrived on time at Kai Tak airport, where was Hurree Singh?

There was a tap, once again, at the cabin door. The face of the purser peered in.

'A gentleman to see you, sir.'

'Oh, show him in, please!' Mr. Quelch expected to see Hurree Singh, but the door closed behind the visitor, and as it did, he beheld the very different features of Mr. Hing Wah, whom he had last seen in the Palm Trees Hotel on Malabar Hill.

'Sir?' Quelch rose in wrath. 'This visit is an outrageous impertinence. I shall give you in charge.'

'On what account, Mr. Quelch?' asked Hing Wah, smiling.

'For the attempted robbery of property of which I am in charge. You do not, I suppose, imagine that you can take that vase from me now, and get away with it from this yacht?'

'Why no, Mr. Quelch. I am come to make an offer for it.'

'No offer will be considered for one moment.'

'Not even that of the Nabob of Bhanipur?'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, Mr. Quelch, that His Highness, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, is now in my charge instead of yours- somewhere in Kowloon. In quarters, comfortable enough-for the present. He was met on arrival by a car which he thought was to take him to a wharf, from which he could come to this ship. It did not!'

'You villain! I received a message that his plane had been delayed.'

'Yes. It emanated from me.'

Mr. Quelch looked at the Chinese without speaking.

This was the same kind of plan which the Greek, Kalizelos, had attempted in Egypt-but now it appeared to have succeeded!

'This is a big city, Mr. Quelch. Its population now numbers millions,' observed Mr. Hing Wah. 'It would be difficult for you-or the police on your instructions-to find the nabob. It would be still more difficult if there is undue delay, and it became necessary for him to cross the frontier into China. There are many more millions in China, and a much greater area of land. Moreover-between ourselves-the present administration there is not an easy one with which to deal.'

Mr. Quelch looked up. 'There is nothing whatever between ourselves,' he said.

'Save one valueless blue vase? '

'Valueless? Then why have you and yours made such ruthless efforts to obtain it?'

'Intrinsically, it is certainly valueless,' said the Chinese. 'All reports have it that that is so. Nevertheless, certain quarters, for reasons not disclosed fully even to me, wish to have it. To you, however, it is valueless. Why then bother to retain it?'

'Because it has been placed in my charge,' said Quelch.

'So was the Nabob of Bhanipur.'

Mr. Quelch fell silent again.

'You must decide, sir, which you prefer to possess.'

Quelch looked at the cardboard box on the cabin table.

Hing Wah followed his gaze.

'The vase is there, is it not?'

'Yes.' There seemed to Quelch no sense in denying that fact.

'Ready to take elsewhere?'

'Yes, Mr. Hing Wah.' Quelch's tone was sharp. 'To a bank-under an escort of the Hong Kong police, from whom you would not be able to obtain it.'

'No?' The voice of the Chinese was casual. 'Possibly not. An admirable body of men, the Hong Kong Police. You are probably right. I could not prevent that happening. You could also tell them of my proposition. They might believe you and detain me for inquiries. In the meantime, the Nabob of Bhanipur waits-in discomfort.'

'How do I know that you will release the boy if I give you the vase?' demanded Quelch.

'You will have to take my word. Indeed, you have no option in the matter. You must. If, however, you wish to relieve your anxiety, consider that I am not anxious for complications, such as the possession of the nabob, alive or dead. If I leave here, with the vase, unmolested, and unquestioned, rest assured that within an hour you will meet the Nabob of Bhanipur, if you wish, in the lounge of the Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon.'

'Take the vase!' said Mr. Quelch, bitterly. 'You leave me no option! The boy's life-for that is what I suppose it amounts to-must be saved. But if you play me false-'

'You can do nothing.' Hing Wah completed Quelch's sentence and, going to the card-board box, pulled out the vase and divested it of its covering.

'Yes, this appears to be the thing I saw in your study in Greyfriars. I am sorry you have had so much trouble, my dear sir. "Malta."'

He rubbed his chin. 'Let us forget Malta. Our Greek emissary in Egypt made a sad bungle, and my assistant at that hotel on the Malabar Hill, taking fright and giving the alarm! He thought he saw a tiger entering! I cannot understand how you contrived such an ingenious device! You will not enlighten me? No matter. The Nabob of Bhanipur has come to no harm, and will shortly rejoin you.'

Mr. Quelch made no reply. He watched Hing Wah repacking the vase.

'I understand your feelings, Mr. Quelch, and therefore your lack of reply-but, all the same, I wish you "Good morning".'

With a parting smile Hing Wah, carrying the vase, disappeared through the cabin doorway. Quelch roused himself and looked through the port-hole. A

walla-walla was standing by. Without a backward glance, Hing Wah got into the boat, which then sped in the direction of Kowloon and disappeared. Quelch sighed. He felt that he had failed his trust-but could have done no more. He went to the ship's telephone and got through to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.

'My name is Quelch,' he was saying, shortly. 'I was to bring a parcel to you this morning, to be held until claimed by a Mr. Lim Tek. I do not know Mr. Lim Tek's address in Hong Kong, and you cannot, of course, give it to me. Will you please, though, at the earliest possible moment, get in touch with Mr. Lim Tek and ask him to call upon me on Lord Mauleverer's yacht, the *Sunflower*, now moored in the harbour?'

The bank gave assurances as is customary with banks.

They would certainly get in touch with Mr. Lim Tek. Far from being assured or reassured by anything, Quelch returned to his cabin. On the way, he encountered Bunter.

'I-I say, sir-'

'What is it, Bunter?'

For all his troubles, Henry Samuel Quelch still realized that he was in charge of the Greyfriars boys. He was prepared to be patient even with Bunter-within limits. 'I-I say, sir, the Mink vase-'

Quelch's eyes flashed. Bunter's reference to a 'mink' vase had always annoyed him-and, in view of recent happenings now annoyed him still more. However, he was a just man-the Removites sometimes said he was much too just on occasions. He calmed his wrath.

'You refer, I presume, Bunter, to the vase of which I have had custody.' It hurt Quelch to have to use that tense, but he felt he must. The vase was now somewhere in Kowloon, and he would never see it again. 'What is your concern with it, Bunter?'

'Is-is it all right, sir?'

'No!' Quelch snapped. 'It is not. Do not trouble me, further!' He strode on.

'Oh, lor!'' Bunter murmured. 'Quelch must have looked at it. I say. It's not his I left-and-he's going to have some police to help him take it to the bank. Oh, dear!'

Hardly less troubled than Bunter, Quelch returned to his cabin. He had not been there long before there came another tap at the door.

'Wanted on the telephone, sir, by a gentleman at the Peninsula Hotel sir,' said a steward.

Quelch almost leaped to his feet. He was not accustomed to leaping, or indeed, undue haste of any sort, which he considered indecorous, but he hastened now. 'Honoured, sahib?'

'Hurree Singh? So you are safe-and free?'

'The safe and freefulness is terrific,' answered the voice of the Nabob of Bhanipur. 'I have been detained by some persons, but have now been brought back to this hotel. The sorrowfulness at the latefulness is great.'

'Never mind, Hurree Singh. Take a taxi to the waterfront, and come out to the *Sunflower*. I am only too glad that you are safe.'

'The hastefulness will be terrific, sir.'

In his relief at Hurree Singh's safety, Quelch temporarily forgot his other troubles, but as he replaced the receiver, they returned. What was he to say to the police? He should, he supposed, telephone to tell them that the escort was no longer required. And what was he to say to Mr. Lim Tek when he came?

CHAPTER 35

BUNTER TO THE RESCUE ONCE MORE!

'MR. Lim Tek?'

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet as a grave, elderly Chinese gentleman was shown into his cabin on the Sunflower. The visitor was a much more welcome one than the last of that nationality-but not so much, though, as he should have been-for Quelch had a confession to make. He had failed in his trust!

The visitor bowed. 'I had a message from the bank. Is it about the vase?'

'It is, indeed!' Mr. Quelch ushered his visitor to a seat. 'Mr. Lim Tek I have failed you. The vase is no longer in my possession. Only this day I have lost it. A boy in my charge was kidnapped, and I had to ransom him with the vase!'

Mr. Lim Tek appeared, outwardly, unmoved.

'It is a pity-a great pity. Much may hang upon the matter-but these things occur.'

'It is good of you to take this news so philosophically, Mr. Lim Tek,' said Quelch, who was feeling far from philosophical about it himself.

'Several attempts have been made to steal it upon the journey-and, now at the last stage, one succeeds! I cannot understand why it is wanted by anyone. It appears to be of no value.'

'It is, intrinsically, of no value,' agreed Lim Tek. 'It is of late Manchu-late nineteenth century-no more, and of a pattern often since copied. You will find many such articles in the shops here on sale now. Yet its potential value is great.'

Mr. Quelch looked at him, inquiringly.

'Since the Manchu dynasty fell in 1911 there has been no peace in China,' said Mr. Lim Tek.

Mr. Quelch stared. The statement, true as it certainly was, appeared to have nothing to do with the lost vase. He could not understand why the Chinese gentleman had suddenly wandered from the point of the conversation. Quelch was used to wanderings from conversational points at Greyfriars-Mr. Prout and Bunter came at once to his mind-but he had expected no such defect from Mr. Lim Tek.

However, it was not possible to deal with Mr. Lim Tek as he might have done with Prout or Bunter, so he remained silent to listen.

'There was a great treasure in Peking then,' continued Mr. Lim Tek. 'A faithful servant of the Manchus contrived, somehow, to secure it and bring it to the International Settlement at Shanghai where it was safe.'

'Indeed?' commented Quelch.

'Then some years passed when there was no more International Settlement and no more safety and he brought it to Hong Kong.'

Quelch listened with quickening interest.

'People knew that there had been a treasure and that it had vanished. The man who had taken it for safety had a trusted friend in Hong Kong, called Ching Kong Sen.'

'He was also Sir Reginald Brooke's friend,' observed Quelch.

'Yes. In Hong Kong the treasure was hidden and safe under British rule. Ching Kong Sen came to England knowing that this had been done, but not where the treasure was hidden. He was given a blue vase and told to value it as though it were the choicest Ming.'

Quelch felt that he had misjudged his Chinese visitor.

The conversation had not wandered from the matter of the blue vase-now, most unfortunately, lost!

'When Ching Kong Sen received a message that "The Dragon Calls" he was to send it to me, who would find out its secret and set great events in

motion. There had always been hopes of a day when the Chinese people would tire of the war-lords and liberators and call for an emperor to rule with law and order as in the old days. To bring about such matters needs money.'

'And now I have lost the vase-and its secret,' exclaimed Mr. Quelch, bitterly.

'The story had, doubtless, gone round, until it came to unworthy ears,' observed Lim Tek. 'Perhaps, now, we may wonder if a better way could not have been found. A letter in cipher? Letters can be stolen, and ciphers deciphered-'

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. The cabin door opened, and a face looked in.

It was that of Billy Bunter.

'Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know you had a visitor- At least I knew, but I knew you wouldn't mind-Oh, lor'!-I-I say, sir, you aren't going to have me arrested are you? I didn't mean any harm.'

'Upon my word, Bunter! Excuse me, Mr. Lim Tek.

This is one of my charges-a rather foolish boy!' Quelch turned to the fat Owl.

'What do you mean by interrupting me, Bunter, and suggesting that I am going to have you arrested? What nonsense is this?'

'Well I knew you'd sent for the police, sir, and that they'd be coming at any time, and you said you'd found that it wasn't all right about the Mink vase-'

Quelch gave an exclamation of annoyance. With all the worry on his mind, he had forgotten to communicate with the police, and tell them that, unfortunately, their escort to the bank would not now be required.

'That was an escort I had arranged for the vase from here to the bank.

Mr. Lim Tek. I suppose I must now ring the police and tell them I do not need it.' Mr. Quelch sighed. 'Bunter, my sending for the police has nothing to do with you. Why should you think it has, you foolish boy?'

'Oh, thank you, sir. If you've got the right vase, after all-but you said it wasn't all right. I didn't mean to mix them up!'

Mr. Lim Tek had turned at the word 'vase' and was looking at Bunter, with interest.

'Mix them up? What do you mean, Bunter?'

'With mine, sir. If it was all that valuable that people were trying to pinch it, I thought I ought to have one, too. I only brought it along to compare with yours, and if I haven't mixed them-'

'I fail to understand you, Bunter.' Had Bunter not mentioned the word 'vase' it is likely enough that Quelch would have told him, peremptorily, to go, and not continue to interrupt a private conversation.

Bunter brought into view a large paper-bag which he had been concealing behind his fat person. 'I only brought it along to compare, sir.' His hand withdrew a blue vase, at the sight of which Quelch uttered a startled exclamation, and even the placid Chinese gentleman seemed stirred.

'The vase? It cannot be! Bunter, what does this mean?'

'I bought it this morning, sir, and I brought it along to show you, but you were out-'

'Allow me?' Mr. Lim Tek's hand slipped out, and he took the vase and examined it closely. He then returned it to Bunter.

'Mr. Quelch this is the vase of which you had custody, and were bringing to me. There was a mark upon it, by which I was told I could identify it, and I do so. It is, therefore, not lost.'

'But-' Mr. Quelch felt as if his head were turning round. 'I gave it, under duress, to that person calling himself Hing Wah, and this boy now

tells me that he bought it in Hong Kong this morning. Bunter, you cannot have done so.'

'But I did, sir, in a shop in Upper Lascar Road.'

'But-' Quelch strove to clarify the situation. 'You bought it-and then did what?'

'I came to see if it was like yours, sir-because if yours is valuable so must mine be, although Bull says that's all rot. And as you weren't here, sir, I had a look at yours-'

'You compared the two vases side by side?' asked Mr. Lim Tek.

'Yes, sir, and then I put back Quelch's-I mean, Mr. Quelch's-and came away-'

'With this.' Mr. Lim Tek indicated Bunter's vase. 'It would appear then, Mr. Quelch, that your subsequent visitor went away with the wrong vase, through the most fortunate intervention of this youth, of whom you must be proud.'

It was the first time that Mr. Quelch had ever been told by anyone that he should be proud of Bunter. He did not look or feel particularly proud now, but a great sense of relief was coming over him.

'Mr. Lim Tek-are you sure?'

'Yes, Mr. Quelch. I have not yet fathomed the vase's secret, but it is the right one, and I shall do so.'

'Thank goodness! Bunter, you may hand over that vase to Mr. Lim Tek and go. You have again behaved most foolishly-but most fortunately-'

'It-it cost me ten dollars, sir-'

'That-and more-shall be given you,' said Mr. Lim Tek, 'if you will hand me the vase.'

'Oh, yes, sir.' Bunter took a step forward and stumbled against the foot of a chair.

'Bunter!' yelled Mr. Quelch.

The vase fell on a table and rolled. Mr. Quelch and Mr. Lim Tek both made a grab at it, but missed.

Crash!

'Oh, crikey!' Bunter gazed at the pieces of the vase on the cabin floor!

'Bunter, you-' Mr. Quelch sat down heavily, at a loss for words. To lose the vase after all-and through Bunter's carelessness! 'Bunter-'

'One moment, Mr. Quelch.' Lim Tek bent forward and picked up a large piece of the broken vase. It was from the lower half, and appeared to hold some kind of an inscription on the inner side. He looked at it eagerly, picked up some more pieces and put them together.

'So that is where its secret was! On the inner side below.'

Mr. Quelch looked at Mr. Lim Tek. 'I do not understand, sir.'

'This inscription-in Chinese-giving the location of where I must look-was on the inside of the lower half of the vase, Mr. Quelch-unseen until it was broken. The vase must have been severed and rejoined. I should have made an exhaustive search, and come to the solution in the end, doubtless, but now, owing to this excellent boy-'

Bunter beamed.

'Owing to the activities of this youth, I am in possession of all the secret. I wonder how long the abstractor of the other vase will persist in his fruitless endeavour?' Mr. Lim Tek smiled. 'Mr. Quelch, I am most indebted to you, and also to this boy. You must let me reward him, and his companions-but first with a feast of thanksgiving-the noblest in Honk Kong.'

Bunter's beam became expansive. Mr. Lim Tek rose to his feet.

'And now Mr. Quelch I must go and attend to my garden.'

'Your garden?' Mr. Quelch looked surprised.

'Yes, indeed, Mr. Quelch. I intend to gather some valuable flowers. It is a good garden, with more things in it than other gardens on the Peak. It belonged to the man who came from Shanghai before I bought his house.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Quelch, 'I see.'

'Yes, Mr. Quelch. Please leave it to me to telephone the police and ask that that escort may be-not cancelled-but postponed-and then supplied to me from my house to the bank. I might even have them to entertain tonight-if I explain somewhat. I think it is improbable that Mr. Hing Wah will discover, very soon, what has really occurred, but all precautions will be taken.'

He smiled and patted the beaming Bunter on the head, as he passed through the cabin doorway.

'You will be the guest of honour at my feast, Mr. Bunter.'

CHAPTER 36

BUNTER THE HONOURED GUEST

'I SAY, you fellows, can't these Chinese cook?' exclaimed Billy Bunter. 'They certainly can,' agreed Harry Wharton. They were in the middle of a banquet being given to them by Mr. Lim Tek, at his house on the Peak. 'I'm told they never give fewer courses than there are guests,' continued Bunter. 'There's you five-and Mauly-and me-' 'Counting three more,' put in Johnny Bull. 'Don't interrupt, Bull. You'll make me lose count. That makes--' 'Eight,' said Nugent. 'And then there's the captain, and the first and second officers and Quelchy-that's-' 'Twelve,' added Nugent again. 'For goodness' sake, go carefully,' exclaimed Wharton. 'You've stuffed up on that thing they call deem sum-hors d' oeuvres of sorts-enough for two courses already.' 'And have wolfed about a flock of chickens and ducks,' said Johnny Bull. 'If there are twelve courses-and you go at that rate through 'em-there'll be a sharp report presently, when you burst.' 'Beast! You have to eat everything on the table. That's only Eastern politeness,' said Bunter. 'I say, I liked that sort of soft toffee, with lemon and orange slices. I must get Mrs. Mible to stock some in the tuckshop, when we get back to school.' 'You won't get back. You'll burst before we finish this dinner.' 'That's not the way to talk to the guest of the evening, Nugent,' said Bunter. 'You seem to forget I'm distinguished now-shedding lustre on you all. Aren't you glad that you invited me to come on the *Sunflower* Mauly?' 'Mauly didn't invite you,' declared Bull. 'You came as a stowaway.' 'Which you still remain,' said Nugent again, as he watched Bunter take another helping. Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'I'm glad you came, Bunter,' he said. 'Stowaway or not. Takin' it all in all, you've been quite useful-but go steady. You won't be able to accept my uncle's invitation and mine to spend Christmas at the Towers, if you don't slow down, and crock up here.' Bunter stared and then beamed. Christmas at Mauleverer Towers! - The invitation was, evidently, Sir Reginald Brooke's token of gratitude for the recovery of his daughter's necklace, and the safety of the vase. And old Mauly seemed to be making it conditional on slowing down now! -but he was only joking, of course-and Christmas was a long way off! 'Thanks awfully, Mauly,' said Bunter, and helped himself again.

The next book in THE BILLY BUNTER SERIES Will be THANKS TO BUNTER!
