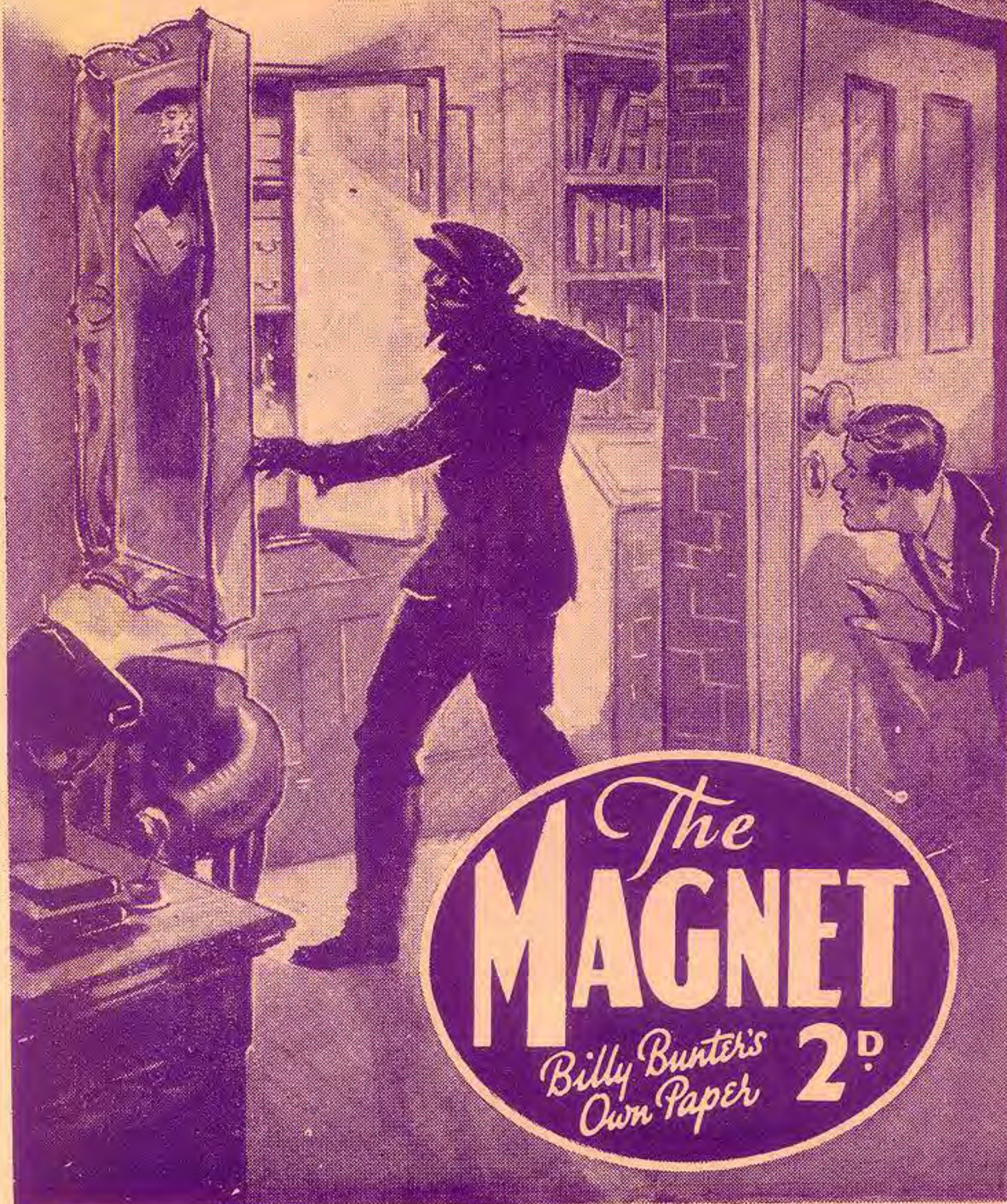


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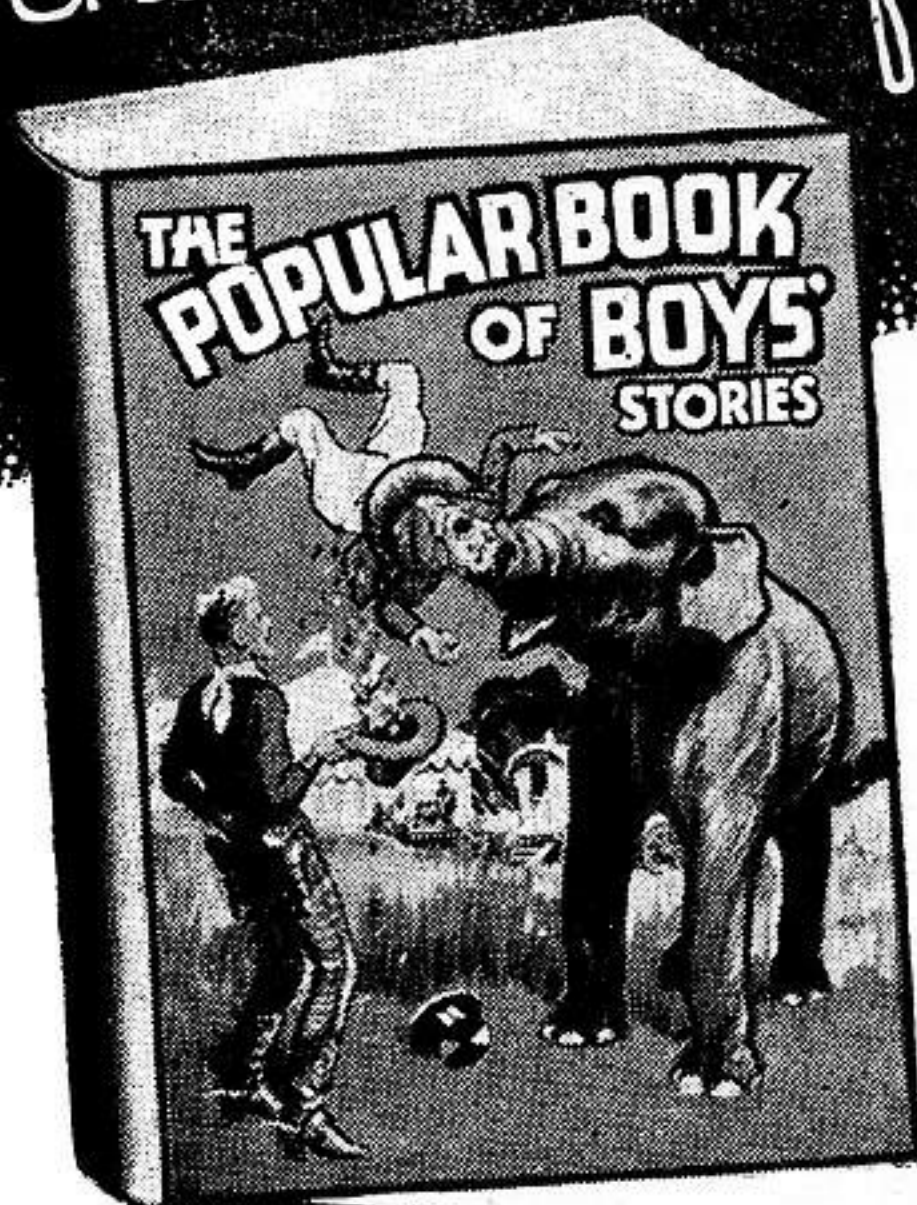
The **MAN IN THE MASK!**

By FRANK RICHARDS



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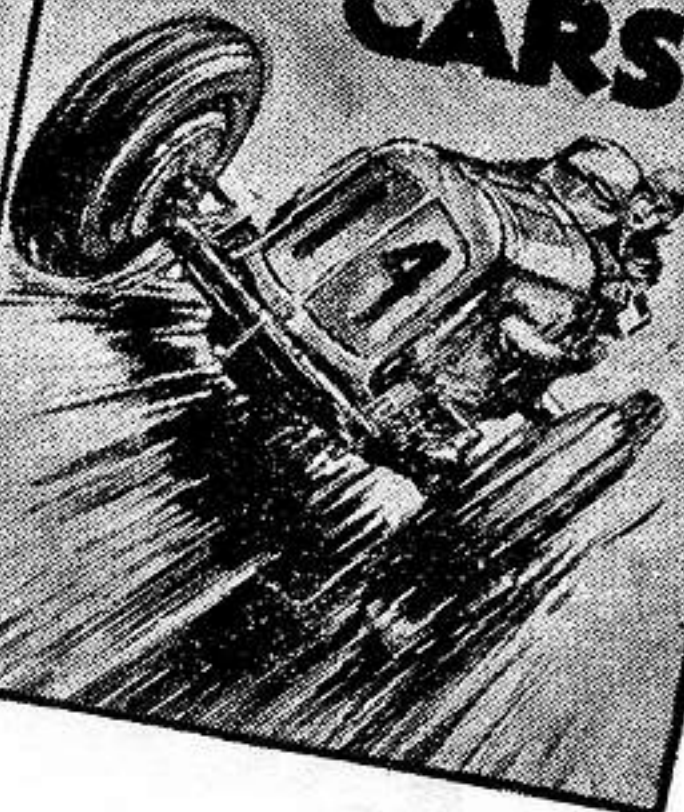
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The MAN IN THE MASK!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

NOT GUILTY!

"**R**ESCUE!" yelled Billy Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

The door of Study No. 1 in the Greyfriars Remove flew open with a bang. A fat figure shot into the study, like a plump rabbit into a burrow.

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped to their feet.

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove were sitting down to tea in that study when Billy Bunter suddenly hurtled in.

He came in rather like a cannonball. He crashed into Bob Cherry, who was nearest the door, and Bob went over like a ninepin. Staggering from the shock, the fat Owl of the Remove bumped into the study table, which rocked wildly under his weighty impact.

There was a crash as tea-things—and tea—slid off a slanting table. Five egg-cups and five eggs landed on the study floor together, with a tea-pot, cups and saucers, and plates.

Billy Bunter clung to the table and spluttered.

"You fat ass!" roared Harry Wharton.

"You potty porpoise!" bawled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—rescue!" yelled Bunter. "I say, keep him off!"

Evidently, Bunter was pursued.

A masked head suddenly appeared above the wall—watching, listening. From narrow slits, two keen eyes watched the dim road. Mr. Quelch, in cover, made no movement!

"Look at our tea!" howled Frank Nugent.

"I'll burst that blithering chump!" gasped Bob Cherry, scrambling to his feet. "I'll—"

Bob was interrupted. There was a patter of rapid footsteps in the Remove passage, coming from the direction of the landing. Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, appeared in the study doorway.

Smithy's face was furious.

He did not speak—he rushed into the study.

Billy Bunter skipped round the table with the activity of a kangaroo.

"I say, you fellows!" he bellowed. "Rescue!"

"Hold on, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Will you let me get at that fat rotter?" roared Vernon-Smith.

**HARRY WHARTON & CO.,
of GREYFRIARS, in Another
Thrilling School Adventure.**

"No!" answered Harry Wharton coolly. "First of all, let's know what the row's about."

"Find out!"

"I say, you fellows, it wasn't me, you know!" gasped Billy Bunter from the safe side of the table. "I haven't got it!"

"You haven't got what?"

"I haven't got his cake!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"You fat villain!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Have you been grub-raiding in Smithy's study?"

"No!" howled Bunter. "I haven't been near his study! I was sitting on the settee on the landing when that beast suddenly rushed at me like a madman. I was just sitting there, thinking over some verbs I've got to do for Quelch. I wasn't even thinking about a cake—"

"Where is it, you fat pilferer?" roared Smithy.

"I haven't got it!" roared back Bunter. "I've never even seen it. I never knew you had a cake! How should I know whether you had a cake or not?"

"He hasn't got it about him, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry pacifically. "You can see that."

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"Unless he's got it inside!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Oh, have you got it inside, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! As if I could have scoffed a cake that size—"

"That size!" repeated Bob. "How do you know what size it was, if you've never seen it?"

"Oh! I mean—"

"You mean that you've got it?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"No!" howled Bunter. "I may have seen Smithy taking it to his study, now I come to think of it! It may have been one of Mrs. Mimble's ten-bob cakes. Just like Smithy to swank, giving ten bob for a cake. Smithy all over! I never had it! I haven't been anywhere near his study. I was sitting on that settee, looking at the view from the window—" Billy Bunter broke off suddenly as the angry Bounder made a sudden rush. "I say, you fellows, keep him off—"

Five pairs of hands stopped the Bounder in transit! He was grasped on all sides and sent whirling back to the door.

He sat in the doorway with a heavy bump.

"You—you—you rotters!" panted Vernon-Smith as he scrambled to his feet. "Has that fat pilferer brought it here, to whack out with you?"

"That's enough! Get out!"

"Yes, you get out, Smithy!" said Bunter, safe behind his rampart of a study table and five sturdy juniors. "Who are you, I'd like to know? Throwing your weight about and showing off your rotten temper! As if I'd touch your mouldy cake! I can get all the cakes I want from Bunter Court! Yah!"

And Billy Bunter turned up a fat little nose at the enraged Bounder—an easy task, Nature having started it well on the way.

Vernon-Smith made another rush.

"That does it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Chuck him back into his study!"

"Go it!"

The Bounder, swept off his feet, was carried bodily out of Study No. 1, his arms and legs flying wildly in the air. He struggled and panted and yelled—but he had to go!

The Famous Five carried him along the Remove passage to Study No. 4, kicking and yelling. A dozen fellows looked out of other studies, staring and grinning at the sight.

Bob Cherry kicked open the door of Study No. 4.

With a swing the Bounder was tossed into his study, where he sprawled breathless on his expensive carpet.

Bob slammed the door, and the Famous Five walked back to Study No. 1—leaving the Bounder to his own devices.

WHOSE CAKE?

"LOOKS like tea!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"The lookfulness is terrific!" sighed Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

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Really, it did not look much like tea in Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter's collision with the table had cleared it—tea and tea-things were mingled and mixed on the floor. Most of the crockery had gone West, and amid the wreckage lay five smashed eggs in a very squashy state.

"Blow!" said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"Bother you!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Couldn't you bolt into some other study? Look at our tea!"

Billy Bunter looked at it through his big spectacles, and grinned. He seemed rather amused.

"That all you had for tea?" he asked.

"Yes, ass!"

"It's all that fathead Smithy's fault!" growled the captain of the Remove. "A fellow ought to keep his silly temper!"

"Tea in Hall now, anyhow!" said Johnny Bull. "Bother Bunter, and blow Smithy! Bother and blow the pair of 'em! I shouldn't wonder if that fat cormorant had Smithy's cake all the time!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Well, Smithy and Bunter between them have done in our tea!" said Nugent. "Better go down to Hall before it's too late!"

"I say, you fellows, don't you worry!" said the fat Owl of the Remove encouragingly. "You've stood by me, and I'm jolly well going to stand by you. Leave it to me! I suppose you fellows like cake?"

Five fellows jumped, as if moved by the same spring.

"Cake!" they repeated, all together.

"Yes; I've got lots," said Bunter cheerily.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at William George Bunter. They gazed at him almost speechlessly.

They had handled Herbert Vernon-Smith rather severely. They had carried him home and pitched him into his study. Bunter had asseverated that he hadn't had Smithy's cake; and they had felt that even Bunter was entitled to be found not guilty in the absence of evidence. They had left Smithy a gasping wreck on his study floor. And now they heard that Bunter had cake—lots of cake!

They did not speak.

They just gazed at Bunter.

"You fellows make some more tea!" said Bunter briskly. "I'll go and fetch the cake. Lots to go round! I say, though, you had better come with me—that beast Smithy may be hanging about!"

"You fat villain!" roared Johnny Bull. "You've got Smithy's cake! We've made a wreck of Smithy for getting after you, and you've got his cake!"

"Oh, no! 'Tain't Smithy's cake!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "Nothing of the kind! It's my cake! I had it in a parcel from Bunter Court this morning!"

"You never had any parcel of any sort this morning!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"I—I—I mean—"

"You mean that you've got Smithy's cake, you guzzling gargoyles!"

"I haven't!" roared Bunter. "I happen to have a cake like Smithy's—that's all! It's just one of those coincidences!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"You know how coincidences happen!" said Bunter warmly. "Well, this is one of them! I don't know anything about Smithy's cake. I never went anywhere near his study. And if his cake's gone, I dare say Redwing had it! He never saw me—you heard him admit it. He was in Skinner's study."

"You snaffled the cake while he was in Skinner's study?"

"Oh, no! I keep on telling you I never snaffled his cake!" howled Bunter. "He just fancied I did—suspicious sort of cad, you know! It's pretty sickening, I think, the way fellows pounce on me if there's any tuck missing! I was just sitting on the settee on the landing—"

"Where's Smithy's cake?"

"I don't know anything about Smithy's cake! I dare say he never had one—only his swank, you know, making out that he has ten-bob cakes! I know it wasn't on his study table when I went in; besides, I left it absolutely untouched when I went out again!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Not that I went to his study, you know," added Bunter cautiously. "I never watched him go along to Study No. 11, and certainly never nipped into his study while he was speaking to Skinner! Not the sort of thing I would do!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "That chap ought to be doing German propaganda in Berlin—he was born for it!"

"I think this is pretty thick!" said Billy Bunter hotly. "You fellows have nothing for tea, and I offer to whack out my cake, and this is the thanks I get! Talk about ingratitude being a sharper tooth than a serpent's child! I must say I'm surprised at you!"

"You fat, foozling, footling frog, what—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You blithering bloater, what have you done with Smithy's cake?" roared Bob. "He's got to have it back! Where is it?"

"How should I know? About Smithy's cake, my mind's a perfect blank. Very likely it's in his study all the time; if he had one, which I don't believe. I know where my cake is!" said Bunter. "But if you think you're going to give Smithy my cake because he's lost his, you're jolly well mistaken! And if that's how you're going to talk to a fellow who offers to whack out his cake, I jolly well shan't whack it out now, so yah!"

And Billy Bunter, with a snort of indignation, rolled to the door.

He blinked cautiously out of the doorway, his eyes and his spectacles on the alert for Herbert Vernon-Smith.

But the Bounder was still in Study No. 4, probably busy getting his second wind!

Billy Bunter rolled out into the passage and headed for the landing. Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged a glance and walked after him.

That cake, obviously, was Smithy's missing cake. That cake was going back to its owner. That, really, was the least they could do after the handling they had bestowed on Smithy.

They walked after Bunter to the landing.

The fat Owl rolled across to the old oak settee that stood by the balustrade. He dragged a large object out from under the settee.

It was a cake—a huge cake—still

study with it!" said Johnny Bull. "Smithy may know whether it's his cake or not!"

"Good egg!" grinned Bob. "Come on, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter backed away in alarm towards the Remove staircase.

"I say, you fellows, I ain't going to let Smithy see this cake!" he exclaimed. "He might make out that it was his—he's unscrupulous, you know! I say——"

"Collar him!" said Harry Wharton. The Famous Five cut across the landing.

Billy Bunter made one bound down the two or three steps from the Remove landing to the study landing. But he did not stop there. With

master, standing in conversation with Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. Chasing down the staircase at top speed was not judicious under the eyes of beaks.

But Billy Bunter did not stop. Bunter was wildly excited, as well as short-sighted, and he did not spot the two beaks in the offing.

Bunter tore on down the lower staircase.

Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout glanced round and up the staircase at the sound of clattering feet and panting breath.

They saw Bunter! But they had time for only a glimpse! The next moment Bunter, charging off the stairs like a runaway rhinoceros, crashed! He did not even know that



Billy Bunter came into the study rather like a cannon-ball. There was a crash, as tea-things—and tea—slid off a slanting table. "Rescue!" yelled the fat Removite. "I say, keep him off!"

partly in its wrappings—just as Bunter had snaffled it from Smithy's study.

The fat grub-raider of the Remove had got it as far as the landing, when Vernon-Smith got on his track. Evidently, he had popped it out of sight under the settee when he heard Smithy coming. Now that Smithy was safely off the scene, the fat Owl brought his plunder to light again.

Bunter rose to his feet with the cake under his arm and blinked round through his big spectacles.

He gave a jump at the sight of five grinning faces looking at him from the end of the Remove passage.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows——"

"Hand it over, you fat brigand!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Let's walk him along to Smithy's

that enormous cake under a fat arm, he cut on to the stairs.

Bunter was not going to lose that cake, if Bunter could help it!

"Stop!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Hold on, you fat ass!" howled Bob Cherry.

"After him!"

The Famous Five rushed across the study landing.

Billy Bunter flew down the staircase.

"Stop, you potty porpoise!" yelled Bob.

Bunter did not stop. He did not think of stopping! Stopping meant losing that cake! Bunter fairly flew, and the Famous Five rushed after him.

But on the middle landing they suddenly halted.

At the foot of the staircase they spotted Mr. Quelch, their Form-

Quelch and Prout were in the way till he crashed into them.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Prout.

"Ooooh!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

Prout staggered to the left! Quelch tottered to the right! Prout came to rest against the newel-post of the banisters; Quelch against the wall! Between them Billy Bunter sat down, with a loud bump, and a louder yell:

"Yaroooh!"

BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!

"BUNTER!"

Mr. Quelch almost shrieked. "Wow!" roared Bunter.

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

"What do you mean by this, Bunter? What——"

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"Yoo-hooo-hooop!"

Bunter sat and roared. The cake was still under his fat arm—Bunter clung to that cake by instinct, like a drowning man to a straw.

Mr. Prout, leaning on the banister, gasped for breath. But Mr. Quelch was himself again in a moment or two. He pounced on Bunter.

An iron grip on the back of the fat Owl's collar jerked him to his feet.

Bunter swayed unsteadily—still clinging to the cake!

"Bunter—"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You utterly stupid boy! How dare you rush down the stairs in that manner? Go to my study at once! I shall cane you severely!"

"Oh crikey! I say, sir—"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh lor'!"

Spluttering for breath, the fat Owl tottered away—his Form-master following him.

Prout was left gasping, with a very expressive expression on his face. The Fifth Form beak had been very nearly up-ended by that Remove boy—racing about the House in such a disorderly way. Prout gasped for breath, and snorted with indignation. But the look on Mr. Quelch's speaking countenance indicated plainly that the hapless fat Owl was going to suffer for his sins.

Bunter rolled dismally into his Form-master's study. He knew what to expect when he got there. Even the cake under his arm did not quite comfort him.

Mr. Quelch picked up a cane from the study table. He swished it in the air, fixing his gimlet eyes on Bunter.

"What is that you have there, Bunter? A cake? Place it on the table!"

"Oh! I—I—I say, sir—"

"Do you hear me, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Bunter placed Smithy's cake on the table. His eyes, and his spectacles, lingered on it. He was going to have a whopping for charging into two beaks like a runaway rhinoceros. But was that the worst? Was he going to lose that cake also? Was it going to be a case of, as Shakespeare puts it: "thus bad begins, but worse remains behind?"

"That cake," said Mr. Quelch sternly, "will be confiscated, Bunter!"

Those words of doom struck like a knell on the fat ears of the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, sir! I—I—I say—"

groaned Bunter.

"You need say nothing, Bunter! I shall confiscate that cake—that enormous cake—and I shall cane you severely. Now bend over that chair!"

"I—I—I—"

"Bend over that chair!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh lor'!"

The fat Owl bent over the chair. Quelch's cane rose and fell six times in succession, swipe after swipe! Six successive yells followed six swipes—a yell for every swipe!

Then Mr. Quelch pointed to the door with the cane.

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"You may go, Bunter!" he rapped. The fat Owl rolled to the door. He wriggled with anguish as he rolled. But even six of the best could not quite drive the cake from Billy Bunter's fat mind.

At the door he turned and blinked at the cake on the table.

"I—I—I say, sir—" gasped Bunter.

"You may go, Bunter!"

"M-m-m-may I take my kik-kik-cake?" stammered Bunter.

"You may not!"

"But—but I—I say, sir—"

"Go!"

Bunter rolled out of the study. His unhappy thoughts were equally divided between the six from Quelch's cane and the scrumptious cake left reposing on Quelch's study table.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! Ow!" moaned Bunter. "Oh crikey! Ow! Wow!"

"You fat scoundrel!"

Billy Bunter jumped, and, at the Bounder's voice, forgot for a moment both the cake and the whopping. He blinked round in alarm at Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Ow! Beast! You keep off, you rotter!" gasped Bunter. "I never had your cake—ow! Wow! Oh crikey! Ow!"

Vernon-Smith stared at the wriggling fat Owl. His temper, already bad, had not been improved by the handling in Study No. 1. But he could see that the fat junior had been through it.

"What's the matter with you, you gurgling gargoyle?" he snapped. "Whopped?"

"Ow! Six from Quelch!" moaned Bunter. "Wow! The beast seemed to think he was beating a carpet! Wow!"

"Where's that cake?"

"I—I don't know!" gasped Bunter in alarm. "Quelch hasn't got it—" "Quelch!"

"Oh! No! He never confiscated it, and it ain't in his study now! Don't you get butting in and saying it was your cake! I should get 'nto a fearful row!" gasped Bunter. "Quelch might believe that it was your cake, you know, and he would think—Ow! Ow! Wow!"

The Bounder gave him a stare and then burst into a laugh.

Smithy, with all his faults of temper, had his good points. Certainly he could have regained possession of that scrumptious cake by going to Quelch's study and explaining that it belonged to him. But the results to Billy Bunter would have been dire.

Bunter's view was that anything in the nature of tuck belonged to him if he could get his fat paws on it. A Form-master's view was quite different from that!

"Well, I won't go to Quelch and tell him you pinched my cake, you fat, pilfering porpoise," said Smithy, "but I'll jolly well boot you all round the landing for pinching it! Stand steady!"

Billy Bunter did not stand steady! He flew up the Remove passage like an arrow from a bow and the door of Study No. 7 banged after him.

A NARROW ESCAPE!

MR. QUELCH came out of his study, walked along the passage, and turned the corner to go along to Common-room to the masters' tea.

Quelch, naturally, looked in the direction in which he was going.

Had he glanced in the other direction, he might have seen a fat face and a big pair of spectacles blinking round the corner from the staircase end of the passage.

As it was, Quelch walked on, regardless and quite unaware that a fat Owl watched him as he went.

He disappeared.

Bunter rolled into the passage. Breathless with haste and trepidation, the Owl of the Remove arrived at Quelch's study door.

Less than a minute after Quelch had gone, his study had a new occupant—William George Bunter, of his Form.

Bunter cut in, shut the door, and switched on the light again.

A blink at the table revealed that the cake was still safe!

The fat junior groped in his pocket for his pocket-knife.

Tap!

That tap at the door made Bunter bound. He suppressed a gasp of terror.

Quelch was gone—Quelch was not likely to return yet—but some other unspeakable beast had come to the study.

Bunter made one bound—behind the door, so that it would hide him when it opened.

It was his only chance.

Palpitating, the fat Owl backed against the wall. But the door did not immediately open. There was another tap.

Bunter suppressed his breathing. The beast, whoever he was, had evidently come to speak to Quelch before he went to tea—not knowing that he had just gone. No doubt he would look in and, seeing that Quelch was not there, go—and the open door would hide the fat Owl from his sight.

Bunter hoped so, at least.

After the second tap, the door opened.

"My dear Quelch—" came a squeaky voice.

Bunter knew that voice. It was the voice of little Mr. Woosey, the art master.

"I have looked in to say good-bye, Quelch. My train goes at six."

Billy Bunter wished from the bottom of his heart that Mr. Woosey's train had been scheduled to leave at five!

Woosey was leaving Greyfriars School. He was going on war work in London, and his successor was blowing into Greyfriars the following week.

Billy Bunter was not interested in art or in art masters; he did not care a boiled bean whether Mr. Woosey went or whether his successor came! He only wished that Woosey had gone earlier! He had dropped in to say good-bye to Quelch at a most awkward moment for one member of Quelch's Form.

It did not seem to dawn on little Mr. Woosey that Quelch was not in the study. As the light was on, and could be seen from under the door, no doubt he had taken it for granted that Quelch had not yet gone to tea.

He pushed the door farther open and walked into the study.

Once the door was wide open, of course, Mr. Woosey could see that the study was vacant.

Woosey was dressed for travelling, with his overcoat on and a hat under his arm.

Bunter blinked at his back with a deadly blink.

Had Woosey simply opened the door and looked in it would have been all right for Bunter! But the little idiot had to walk in, of course, before he noticed that Quelch was not there!

His back was towards Bunter. He had not seen the fat junior yet. But there was no doubt that he would see him when he turned round to walk out.

Woosey had walked nearly as far as the study table before he stopped.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Woosey. "Mr. Quelch is not here! He has left his light burning! Dear me!"

A moment more and the art master would have revolved on his axis, and his eyes would have fallen on Billy Bunter.

In sheer desperation, Bunter charged.

He simply dared not be found in that study. He was still feeling the six from Quelch's cane! He did not want another six added thereunto! If he was copped in Quelch's study, Quelch would know why he was there. Bunter fairly cringed at the thought.

Excess of funk took the place of courage. Billy Bunter jumped forward and butted Mr. Woosey in the middle of the back of his overcoat.

Bump!

That utterly unexpected attack took Mr. Woosey completely by surprise. He gave a startled yelp and toppled over on his hands and knees.

He had barely touched the floor when Billy Bunter whipped out of the study and flew!

Fortunately for Bunter, all the other beaks were at tea in Common-room. No eye fell on him as he flew down the passage.

Seldom did Billy Bunter put on speed! But a lightning-flash had little on the fat Owl on this occasion as he did Masters' Passage! His feet hardly touched the floor! He skimmed! He whizzed!

"Ooooooogh!" came startled tones from the study he had left. "Upon my word! Goodness gracious! Woooooogh!"

An astounded art master, on his hands and knees, blinked at the carpet in Quelch's study.

Never in his life had Mr. Woosey been so utterly amazed and bewildered.

Something—he did not know what—had hit him suddenly in the middle of the back and toppled him over. He gazed at the carpet with a dizzy, amazed gaze.

Then he heaved himself to his feet again and stared round the study. Nobody was there.

"Goodness gracious me!" ejaculated Mr. Woosey.

He stepped to the study door and stared up and down the passage. Nobody was in sight. About a second earlier, a fat figure had vanished round a corner. But it had vanished in time. Mr. Woosey's amazed eyes only beheld empty space.

Mr. Woosey looked this way and that way. Then, in great bewilderment, he turned back into the study and picked up his hat.

"Extraordinary!" he said.

Really, it was most extraordinary! Still astonished and bewildered, Mr. Woosey left the study to seek Quelch and say his good-byes in Common-room—what time Billy Bunter, plumping into an armchair in the Rag, gurgled for breath and wiped perspiration from a podgy brow.

BUNTER'S BRIGHT IDEA!

"SHOVE it on, Browney!"

Squeak! Squeak!

Most of the Remove were gathered in the Rag after tea. Tom Brown had brought down his portable wireless. Outside, the black-out reigned and all was dark as pitch.

Browney's radio was a great resource of the Remove fellows in these days of war's alarms. Everybody wanted to hear the news—hoping to hear that the unspeakable enemy at last was getting it in the neck.

One fellow in the Rag, however, was giving no ear to the radio. That one was William George Bunter.

Bunter had no time to think about such trifles as European wars. He was oblivious of the unpleasant existence of Adolf Hitler. Bunter was thinking of the cake in Quelch's study.

But for that little idiot Woosey, Bunter would have had that cake. Now it was as far off as ever! Bunter had had a narrow escape. So had the cake. Not for a dozen such cakes would the fat Owl have ventured into Quelch's study again! But his fat thoughts lingered on it. Though lost to sight, it was to memory dear!

The announcer's drone from the radio, repeating with weary iteration the endless repetitions of radio news, passed Billy Bunter by like the idle wind which he regarded not. Other fellows listened to it, hoping for some fresh item to follow what they had heard before.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "Listen, you chaps—here's some jolly old local news!"

The announcer had got through the war news and the political news, and was handing out a spot of police news. The word "Courtfield" caught all ears.

Courtfield was only a few miles from Greyfriars School. Local news, naturally, had a special interest for the listeners. Even Billy Bunter sat up and took notice at what followed.

"No arrest has yet been made in connection with the burglary at Courtfield Hall, in Kent. It is now ascertained that two thousand pounds in bonds were taken. It is stated

that, from certain indications, the robbery is believed to be the work of a well-known crackman known to the police as 'Slim Jim,' from the apparent ease with which he gains access to buildings by small windows. But there is as yet no official statement."

That was all!

But it rather interested the Greyfriars fellows. Most of them knew Courtfield Hall, a big place between the town and Highelife.

"So they haven't got that jolly old crackman yet!" said Bob Cherry, as Browney shut off the radio. "They ought to set the Head's jolly old relation after him. Bet you Ferrers Locke would snaffle him!"

"The betfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Might come this way!" remarked the Bounder. "I dare say Dr. Locke's safe would be worth his while!"

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.

"All serene, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "Slim Jim won't come here after your postal order!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, though!" Billy Bunter sat up in his armchair and blinked at the juniors. "I say, though, I've got an idea. With burglars in the neighbourhood, you know, Quelch mightn't guess that it was a Remove chap, if something was missing from his study in the morning—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Thinking of burgling Quelch's study and putting it down to Slim Jim?" asked Skinner.

"No, you fathead!" howled Bunter. "I mean my cake—"

"Whose cake?" asked Smithy.

"Well, that cake!" said Bunter. "I don't want to argue about whose cake it is, so long as we get hold of it! That's the important point!"

"The importance of the point is truly preposterous!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I mean to say, we could whack out that cake in the dormitory if we got it away from Quelch's study!" said Bunter eagerly. "It don't matter whose cake it is, if we whack it out! And when Quelch finds it gone, instead of getting after us he may think that burglar has been here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

They didn't know anything about the personal tastes of Slim Jim, the mysterious crackman who had been so long wanted by the officials at Scotland Yard. But they doubted whether the slim gentleman was likely to bother about cake on his nocturnal excursions.

They could not help thinking that, if Quelch missed that cake from his study, the very last person he would think of as the culprit would be Slim Jim, the crackman.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter. "I think it's a jolly good idea! I mean, suppose a burglar came and saw that cake, well, it stands to reason he would scoff it, doesn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course he would!" declared THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,550.

Bunter. "Well, then, when Quelch misses the cake in the morning, he thinks the burglar had it, see? He won't get after you, Bob, if you go down from the dorm after it—"

"He won't get after me," agreed Bob Cherry with a chuckle, "because I'm not getting after the cake!"

"What about you, Wharton? It's up to you, really, as head boy of the Form, and captain of the Remove, and all that."

"Oh, my hat! I think I'll ask Quelch whether a head boy's duties include stealing cake from a beak's study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, look here, it's pretty rotten to waste that cake!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "Quelch himself has told us not to waste anything in war-time! There's absolutely no risk! Quelch will think it was a burglar—with burglars about, you know—and we get a dorm feed! I say, Smithy—"

"No risk?" asked Smithy.

"None at all!" answered Bunter eagerly. "Quelch won't dream it was a Remove man pinched that cake, with burglars about—"

"Then I'll tell you what," said the Bounder, "I'll make you a present of that cake—"

"Eh?"

"If you'll go down from the dorm to-night and get it!"

"Oh!"

"No risk, you know!" chuckled the Bounder. "Quelch won't dream that a Remove man pinched it, with burglars about—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Bounder. Considering that there was, according to himself, no risk in the enterprise, with Slim Jim in the neighbourhood to take the blame, this was a good offer, and Bunter ought to have jumped at it!

But he didn't!

The expression on his fat face indicated clearly that, much as Billy Bunter wanted that cake, deeply as his fat heart yearned after it, he was not going to undertake an expedition from the Remove dormitory after lights out, in quest of it. Dark passages and shadowy staircases, in the middle of the night, did not appeal to Bunter—and perhaps he was not quite, quite sure, after all, that Quelch wouldn't guess that it was a Remove man.

"Is it a go?" grinned the Bounder.

"Yah!" was Bunter's reply.

From which it was to be deduced that it was not a go.

IN THE NIGHT!

HARRY WHARTON opened his eyes and peered into the darkness of the Remove dormitory.

With the high windows blacked out, not a glimmer of starlight came in, and the long, lofty room was as dark as the inside of a hat.

Some slight sound had awakened the captain of the Remove. But he could see nothing as he lifted his head from the pillow. Faint sounds,

however, came to his ears from the gloom.

"Who's that up?" he asked drowsily.

He thought for a moment of Bunter—and the cake. But Billy Bunter's snore could be heard uninterrupted.

The fat Owl was asleep, dreaming, perhaps, of that cake, but certainly not dreaming of going down to Quelch's study after it.

"Don't shout!" came a voice from the darkness, in answer to Wharton's question.

"Smithy!" exclaimed Harry.

"Don't wake the House!" said Smithy sarcastically.

Wharton peered in the direction of the voice.

"You're a fool to get out after lights out, Smithy!" he said quietly. "You might have a little sense! If there was an air-raid alarm while you're out you'd be spotted for a cert—"

A chuckle interrupted him.

"Thanks for the tip! I'm not going out on the tiles at a quarter to twelve, old bean!"

"Oh!" Wharton started. "Is it as late as that? Then what the dickens are you turning out for?"

"Just to drop into Henry's quarters."

"Oh!" said Harry.

He understood now. Smithy's cake was in Henry Samuel Quelch's study. Smithy was not going to leave it there.

"You're an ass, Smithy!" said the captain of the Remove. "It's tough losing it through that fat chump stealing it and getting it confiscated, but Quelch will raise Cain if it's gone!"

"Let him!" said the Bounder indifferently. "Perhaps he will think it was Slim Jim, as Bunter suggested."

"Fathead! More likely to think it was Bunter, as he fancies that it's Bunter's cake."

"Let him!" said the Bounder again. "I don't care who he fancies it was, so long as he doesn't fancy it was little me!"

"He will have Bunter up on the carpet, you can bet—"

"That will be a tip to Bunter not to steal cakes from fellows' studies!" answered Smithy. "I'm not worrying a whole lot about Bunter. I jolly well know I'm not losing a ten-bob cake, if I can help it!"

"Rot!" grunted Wharton. "You don't care a straw about the cake! You want fellows to know you had the nerve to get it back from Quelch's study."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, look here—"

"Sorry to have to miss the rest of the wisdom—it's rather cold hanging about in December! Ta, ta!"

"Fathead!" grunted Wharton.

The junior captain of Greyfriars laid his head on the pillow and closed his eyes again.

There was a faint sound of the dormitory door opening and closing.

Herbert Vernon-Smith trod silently away down the passage to the landing. It was black as a hat, but he groped his way across the dormitory

landing and down the stairs to the study landing below.

There, leaning over the banisters, he paused to listen.

Had the bad hat of the Remove been going out of bounds, as Wharton had at first supposed, he would have gone a good deal earlier. Even the reckless Bounder did not break out to the accompaniment of the chimes at midnight.

But a visit to Quelch's study had to be left late. It would hardly have done to venture near Masters' Studies till all the masters had gone to bed. Some of them were sometimes late. But close on the hour of twelve it was certain that the coast would be clear.

The Head would be gone to his own house, the staff gone to their rooms, the studies deserted. No light burned in Greyfriars at midnight.

The Bounder, looking down in the deep, dark well of the staircase, listened to make sure, though he had no doubt.

He gave a slight start as a faint sound came in the stillness. What that sound was, he hardly knew, but in the deep silence of midnight it floated faintly to his ears.

His heart, for a moment, gave an unpleasant beat.

Then, shrugging his shoulders, he moved on to the lower stairs. He was not a fellow like Billy Bunter, to be scared by darkness and silence and the cracking of an ancient wainscot in the silence.

Probably what Wharton had said to him was correct. Though Smithy certainly wanted to recapture that whacking cake, his chief motive was—as usual—his desire to let the Remove fellows admire his nerve.

Really, it needed some nerve to steal about the great, dark building in the lonely silence of midnight.

The Bounder reached the ground floor. It was pitch dark, but he knew his way like a book and had only to grope cautiously. In a few minutes more he was in the long, wide passage on which Masters' Studies opened.

From that passage ran the corridor that led to the door of the Head's study—Dr. Locke's study being at some distance from those of the members of his staff.

At the opening of that corridor, as he was passing it, Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a sudden jump at his heart, came to a halt.

That corridor was black as a hat, but in the blackness a single tiny spot of light gleamed.

Transfixed, the Bounder stared at it.

He forgot about Quelch's study and the confiscated cake, and his reason for having come down. His eyes fixed on that spot of light. Somebody was in the Head's corridor, at midnight, with a flash-lamp. Smithy remembered the sound he had heard from the stairs.

He was not the only fellow up—if that was another Greyfriars fellow. But was it?

Startlingly, unpleasantly, came into his mind what he had heard on



Billy Bunter, charging off the stairs like a runaway rhinoceros, crashed into the two masters. "Oh!" gasped Prout, staggering to the left. "Oooooh!" gasped Quelch, tottering to the right.

the radio, and seen in the newspapers—and his own remarks in the Rag!

Slim Jim, who had cracked the crib at Courtfield Hall, was said always to make a sort of general collection in any district he favoured with his attentions. Smithy himself had suggested that he might pay a visit to Greyfriars School!

And, as he watched that spot of light, with beating heart, the Bouncer knew in his very bones that it was not some Greyfriars fellow who was up, like himself—but that he was staring, in the darkness, at a thief in the night.

THE MAN IN THE MASK!

HERBERT VERNON - SMITH stood quite still.

In spite of the rapid beating of his heart, his head was quite cool. Indeed, after the first moment of shock, he was glad he was there.

The Bouncer was insensible to fear. He knew that if this was the unknown cracksman whose face had never been seen, he was in danger. But the Bouncer did not fear danger—or, rather, he enjoyed its thrill. If this was Slim Jim, the Bouncer had spotted him—and the cracksman was not going to carry on if Smithy could prevent him.

But he had to be sure.

Other fellows, as well as himself, might be up. For all he knew, some other Remove man might have crept down after that cake. Or some black sheep, of his own kidney, might be getting in after breaking bounds. Loder of the Sixth, Price of the Fifth, Angel of the Fourth—it was possible!

Smithy did not want to raise an alarm, make a fool of himself, and give some bad hat away to the beaks!

He watched intently, and listened, making no sound.

The spot of light did not move along the corridor. The unseen one could scarcely be some late roysterer making his way in, or he would have been moving.

Smithy could see nothing but that spot of light, but he could judge that it was in the vicinity of the door of the Head's study.

Click!

That faint sound came along the dark corridor.

Smithy's eyes gleamed in the dark.

He knew what that meant. The Head's study was locked at night. The lock on the door had been picked!

There could be no doubt now! He could hardly suppose that it was some Greyfriars fellow who had opened a locked door.

The light disappeared.

Faintly, barely audible even in the deep silence, he heard the sound of a closing door.

Whoever it was, he'd gone into Dr. Locke's study and shut the door after him.

Smithy stood still.

He was certain now—as good as certain. Yet there was the bare possibility that the Head might have come to his study at that late hour—that he had carried a flash-lamp—that he had unlocked the door! It was not at all likely, but it was possible; and Smithy was not the man to take chances! He was out of his dormitory at midnight; which meant six of the best in the morning

if it was the headmaster in that study and Smithy revealed himself.

For a few brief moments he thought it over; then, on tiptoe, he crept along the corridor to the Head's door.

The faintest glimmer exuded from the keyhole of that door. The light had not been switched on in the study, which surely would have been the case if it was Dr. Locke there. It was still the flash-lamp.

Vernon-Smith bent outside the door and applied his eye to that faintly glimmering keyhole. He had a view of a considerable part of the study.

Most of the room was in darkness. But he spotted the spot of light. The flash-lamp was moving to and fro, stabbing the dark with its moving beam.

Of the man who held it he could see nothing. But it was clear that that man was searching for something.

Most of the Greyfriars fellows knew that there was a safe in that study. Many of them, however, did not know where it was; it was not in sight. If the man with the flash-lamp knew, or suspected, that it was there, he had to find it.

Or was it—it was still possible, barely possible—the Head looking for a book or something of the sort?

Smithy watched breathlessly.

The moving beam came to a stop suddenly, in front of a picture on the wall—a full-length portrait of the Head in cap and gown. That massive picture was hinged to the wall. Smithy knew, as some other fellows did, that the iron door of the safe was behind it.

He saw the picture frame move out from the wall on its hinges. It stood at right angles from the wall, revealing an iron door let into the old solid stone. The spot of light gleamed on the metal.

Then the flash-lamp was placed on a chair, in such a position as to concentrate the light on the iron door of the safe.

And then, at last, the man who had been holding the lamp moved into the beam of light from it.

Smithy saw him clearly.

He was a man of slim figure—looking all the slimmer, perhaps, because he was clad in black from head to foot. His slimness struck Smithy at once—remembering the peculiar nickname of the cracksman.

Shoes, socks, clothes were of dead black, a black muffler was round the neck, over the chin, a black cap pulled low over the forehead—and the space between muffler and cap was completely covered by a close-fitting black silk mask.

It was a cold December night, with a drizzle of rain, but the man wore no overcoat, and his neat-fitting clothes showed no sign of the weather. Neither was there mud on his neat black shoes.

The Bounder, watching him, guessed that he had left an overcoat, and probably boots, parked somewhere outside the building before he effected his entrance—by some small, unguarded window, in the style of Slim Jim.

For that this was Slim Jim, who had cracked the crib at Courtfield Hall, Smithy, of course, no longer had the slightest doubt.

In the light from the flash-lamp, a hand—in a closely fitting black glove—was moving over the iron door of the safe.

Smithy knew enough now. He was looking at the mysterious cracksman who, over a period of years, had defied the keenest wits at Scotland Yard; who had been glimpsed, but never recognised; whose cunning hand on a safe was known, but whose features were utterly unknown.

There was time to steal silently away, to raise the alarm, to call a crowd to the spot, and corner the crook in the Head's study!

Smithy grinned at the idea of the mysterious cracksman who had baffled Scotland Yard for years being laid by the heels by schoolmasters and schoolboys!

But suddenly the man in black moved from the safe.

He crossed, with a swift and silent step, to the study window, and unfastened one wing of the casement, and set it ajar.

Smithy wondered for a moment whether he was going. It seemed impossible that he was going empty-handed.

He was not! Having set the window ready for instant escape if needed, the man in black stepped back to the safe.

His hand was on the knob of the combination-lock.

Smithy understood.

After cracking the safe, the cracks-

man was not going back the way he had come, probably by some little window in some remote corner of the House. He was going the nearest and quickest way, by the window of the room in which he had pouched his loot. And he had placed that window in instant readiness for use before cracking the safe. Possibly there would be some faint noise, and Slim Jim was not the man to take chances!

Smithy heard a faint whirring sound.

A moment more and the Bounder would have backed from the door, to steal quietly away for help! But, even as he would have moved, he suddenly saw that the safe door was swinging open.

He blinked.

Slim Jim, from what he had read in the newspapers, was said to have a magic hand with a safe! This looked like it, for he had not been at work more than a few moments, and already he had, in some mysterious way incomprehensible to the Bounder, elucidated the combination and opened the door of the safe.

Vernon-Smith caught his breath.

There was no time to call help now. There was not a minute—there was hardly a matter of seconds.

The thief in the night was flashing the light into the open safe! A grasp at his booty, a leap from the window, and he would be gone, long before Smithy could call help to deal with him—long before his shouts, if he shouted where he was, could rouse the House.

The Bounder's eyes gleamed. There was no time—but there was one way; a desperate chance of stopping what was taking place under his own eyes. It meant risk—deadly risk—but the Bounder cared nothing for the risk. He was not going to let that thief rob the headmaster and escape!

He rose swiftly to his feet, grasped the door-handle, turned it, and hurled the door open with a terrific crash that rang almost like thunder through the House. And as the door crashed he shouted, with all the force of his lungs:

"Here he is! We've got him now! Come on!"

The light in the study vanished. An unseen figure made one swift leap to the window. The casement crashed open, a black figure leaped into the darkness of the quad—a spot of black vanishing in blackness. Slim Jim was gone before the Bounder had time for a second shout.

AN ALARM IN THE NIGHT!

"COME on!" roared the Bounder. He reached into the Head's study and pressed the switch beside the doorway.

Bright light flashed on at once.

The study was empty!

One casement stood wide open, showing the way the thief in the night had gone! Light streamed out into the black-out.

The Bounder panted.

He had taken a chance—a desperate chance! His sudden shout had alarmed the burglar and given him

the impression that force was at hand to secure him. Had he known, had he guessed, had he stopped to discover that it was a single junior schoolboy that was all he had to fear, it was fairly certain that Slim Jim would not have fled so promptly without his plunder. One savage blow would have been enough for the Bounder, and the cracksman would have had time to grasp his loot and make his escape before the others came.

But Smithy's ruse had been successful!

At that shout Slim Jim had made one bound to escape, before his thievish hand had had time to grope inside the safe he had opened—and he was gone!

"By gum!" gasped the Bounder.

He slammed the casement to and jammed fast the catch.

There was already a sound of voices and footsteps in the House. Doors were opening, voices calling, lights flashed on staircases and in passages. The crash of the heavy oaken door as the Bounder hurled it open with all his strength had fairly rung through the House. And the Bounder's shout had followed it as loud as he could roar.

The Bounder moved to the doorway and stepped out of the study.

Already there were footsteps in the corridor. Mr. Quelch, in a flowing dressing-gown, appeared at the end of the passage.

A portly figure—Prout's—followed him.

"This way, sir!" shouted the Bounder. He waved his hand to the two masters.

Mr. Quelch hurried up the corridor.

"Vernon-Smith!" he ejaculated, almost in stupefaction, coming to a sudden stop.

He stared at the member of his Form, standing in the doorway of the headmaster's lighted study at midnight! His eyes almost popped out at the sight of the Bounder of Greyfriars. He did not see into the study, but the light from the open doorway streamed out on Vernon-Smith.

Three or four Sixth Form prefects appeared in view—Wingate, Gwynne, Loder, Walker. From a distance, the voice of Coker of the Fifth was heard:

"What's the row? Burglars, or fire, or what?"

Wingate arrived, breathless. His eyes, like Quelch's, popped at Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"What—" gasped the Greyfriars captain.

"Vernon-Smith!" Mr. Quelch almost howled. "What does this mean? What are you doing here? How dare you enter the headmaster's study at this hour—"

"How dare you wake the House with such a disturbance!" boomed Prout. "Upon my word, these Remove boys—"

"That door was locked!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "You have—"

"May I speak, sir?" asked the Bounder calmly.

"You may explain yourself this instant!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"That young sweep Smith!" Coker

of the Fifth was coming up the corridor. "One of those Remove fags—"

"Silence! Vernon-Smith, explain yourself! What—"

"Certainly, sir!" said Vernon-Smith cheerfully. "There was a burglar here—"

"Wha-at!"

"Nonsense!" boomed Prout.

"You young ass—" said Loder of the Sixth.

"Let the boy speak! Vernon-Smith, you say that there was a—a—a burglar—"

"Yes, sir! I spotted his light, and—"

"And what were you doing out of your dormitory at this hour?" asked Mr. Quelch, eyeing that member of his Form with deep suspicion. Evidently Mr. Quelch was not going to believe in that burglar!

"I heard a noise, and came down, sir!" said the Bounder coolly.

He did not add that he had already come down as far as the study landing when he heard that noise. That detail the Bounder considered it judicious to keep to himself.

"You should have done nothing of the sort!" boomed Prout. "A junior boy— Upon my word!"

"Certainly you should not!" barked Mr. Quelch.

"I hope you will excuse me, sir, as I have prevented a burglary from taking place!" said the Bounder meekly.

"In that case, Vernon-Smith, you certainly would be excused," said Mr. Quelch. "But—"

From where the new arrivals stood in the corridor they did not see into the study, and so they could not see the swung-back picture and the open safe. And there was strong doubt in all faces.

"He picked the lock of this door, sir," said Smithy.

"Did he?" said Loder, with a wink at Walker. "More likely the Head left it unlocked for once!"

"You say you saw the man?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir—in the study—"

"What was he like?"

"A slim man, dressed entirely in black, with a black mask on his face, sir," answered the Bounder.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. He had read in the newspapers that that was the description, so far as it was known, of Slim Jim.

Another snort from Prout.

"Nonsense! This boy has been reading the newspapers. Nonsense!"

"Where is the man now, if you saw him?" asked Loder.

"He bolted by the window."

"You frightened him off?" asked Loder, with a grin.

"Yes," said the Bounder coolly. "I frightened him off by shouting out and making him think that a crowd of us had cornered him in the study. He went just as fast as he could."

"This is—is extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "If the matter is as you state, Vernon-Smith—"

"If!" murmured Loder; and Walker grinned.

"Nonsense!" boomed Prout.

"Either the boy has been dreaming, or—"

The Bounder's lip curled. He had run a good deal of risk, for had not the cracksman fled instantly at the alarm, Smithy might very likely have been knocked out by a crack from a jemmy. There was no doubt that his ruse had saved the Head's valuables from the thievish clutch of Slim Jim. But there was doubt in all the faces before him. Smithy's reckless manners and customs were well known, and Loder, at least, suspected that this was one of the Bounder's wildest rags.

"I should have come away and awakened some of you quietly, sir," said the Bounder, "and the man might have been caught; but—"

"Well?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"If I had, sir, he would have got away with the loot."

"Would he?" murmured Loder.

"He would!" said the Bounder coolly. "You see, he had the safe door open—"

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"And the window unlatched ready to bunk."

"The safe door open?" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Do you mean to say, Vernon-Smith, that the headmaster's safe is open now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh!"

Quelch almost bounded into the study, pushing the Bounder aside from the doorway.

Prout rolled in after him. Wingate and the other prefects crammed in. Coker of the Fifth, and five or six other seniors who had come down at the sound of alarm, blocked the doorway, staring in.

"Oh!" repeated Mr. Quelch, with a gasp.

The picture stood out from the wall; the iron door of the safe was wide open.

Quelch gazed at it! The others gazed at it.

Even Loder had nothing to say now. It was hardly possible to suppose that Vernon-Smith was able to deal with a combination lock on a safe for the sake of a rag. A skilful and cunning hand had been at work there!

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch, for the third time.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Prout.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Wingate.

"There's been a burglar here, sir!"

"By gum!" said Coker. "A burglar—and that kid—"

"Dr. Locke must be called at once!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "It must be ascertained whether anything is missing—"

"I think not, sir!" drawled the Bounder. "That blighter fancied that a crowd was rushing in to collar him, and he went like lightning. I'm sure that nothing has been taken, sir!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Vernon-Smith, you certainly should not have come down from your dormitory—but you appear to have acted very sensibly, and very bravely, too!"

"Thank you, sir!" said the Bounder demurely.

"Return to your dormitory now, Vernon-Smith! Mr. Prout, perhaps you will ring up Courtfield police station! Wingate, Loder, Gwynne, remain here while I call Dr. Locke!"

"Yes, sir!"

The Bounder left the study. There was a cheery grin on his face as he made his way up to the Remove dormitory. Smithy was going to be in the limelight now—which was much more gratifying to Smithy than the cake in Quelch's study could possibly have been.

QUELCH ON THE SPOT!

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL was buzzing with it the next morning.

Smithy, that morning, was the goods.

Smithy had prevented a burglary. He was called into the Head's study and complimented by the Head himself!

Nothing had been taken from the safe, owing to the Bounder's presence of mind and his prompt action. Slim Jim, for once, had gone empty-handed.

As a fellow who actually had seen that mysterious and notorious cracksman, Smithy was an object of general interest.

Fellows of all Forms wanted to talk to Smithy and hear every detail of his startling nocturnal adventure. Even Sixth Form prefects stopped Smithy in the quad to hear the details. There was a run on Smithy—everybody wanted to talk to him at once.

And during class that morning Smithy was called out of the Remove Form-room to be interviewed by Inspector Grimes, from Courtfield, who made careful notes of all he had to tell.

The cracksman, certainly, had got away, though empty-handed. But Smithy's information was of value, for it proved what had hitherto only been surmised—that Slim Jim had selected that vicinity as the scene of his operations. What the Bounder had seen proved that, for the man in black was undoubtedly the well-known crook; that description of him, so far as it went, was known to the police.

There was quite a lot of excitement at Greyfriars, and that day it reigned as almost the only topic. Smithy's name was on every tongue—which was what the Bounder undoubtedly liked.

"Jolly plucky of Smithy!" said Bob Cherry, when the Famous Five were discussing it in the quad, after third school. "If that blighter had known that Smithy was all on his own he might have given him a bad jolt!"

"The pluckfulness was terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter rolled up to the group of juniors with a serious and thoughtful expression on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows!" said the fat Owl. "Quelch has been jolly busy this morning, with the police here, and all that. I don't suppose he's

bothered about that cake. What do you think?"

"That cake!" repeated Harry Wharton.

Nobody was thinking about the cake—except Bunter!

Bunter was not likely to forget what was, after all, the most important thing in the whole affair.

"I mean to say, I expect he was going to hand it over to the House-dame this morning!" said Bunter, blinking seriously at the juniors through his big spectacles. "But with all this excitement going on, you know, don't you think that very likely he's forgotten all about it?"

Harry Wharton looked at Bunter, while his comrades grinned. Then he suddenly annexed a fat ear and slewed Bunter round.

Bunter gave a roar as he revolved—and another roar as a boot landed on his tight trousers.

"Beast!" bellowed Bunter.

And he departed!

It was very exasperating to Billy Bunter. He wanted that cake. It was quite probable that Quelch had forgotten all about it—though Billy Bunter certainly hadn't. If that cake was still on the table in Quelch's study, the opportunity was too good to be missed—it was likely to be the last chance.

Billy Bunter rolled into the House. He was not keen on making the venture personally; still, Quelch was with the Head, and really it looked safe.

The fat Owl found the coast clear in Masters' Passage. He paused a moment, at Mr. Quelch's study door; then, turning the door-handle quickly, he whipped into the study and shut the door after him.

His eyes, and his spectacles, shot straight to the study table. There was the cake.

Bunter's surmise had been correct. Quelch, in the stress of other matters, had overlooked the—to him—trivial matter of the cake. There it lay—just where Bunter had seen it last.

One bound and Bunter was at the study table.

He jerked out his pocket-knife, whipped open the biggest blade, and cut at the cake.

The first section was crammed into the largest mouth in the Remove. Then the pocket-knife slashed the cake into other sections, to be parked in Bunter's pocket for safe transit. Bunter had no time to waste—he had to get clear before Quelch came back from the Head's study.

That Quelch had already come back did not occur to the fat Owl.

Standing at the study table, gorging cake, and hacking the remainder into sections for transit, Bunter did not see a head rise over the high back of an armchair by the fire—did not see that head turn round and fix a pair of gimlet eyes on him.

Those gimlet eyes popped at Bunter.

Quelch had, as a matter of fact, come back to his study some minutes ago. He had sat down in that armchair to toast his toes at the study fire—it being a cold and sharp December day.

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Now he was looking over the top of the high chair-back at Bunter.

He gazed at him speechlessly. He seemed dumbfounded at what he saw.

Guzzle, guzzle, guzzle!

Bunter's jaws were busy. It was a scrumptious cake. Bunter guzzled happily; with happy anticipations of guzzling the remainder, when he got it safely away from the study—blissfully unconscious of the Gorgon-like gaze fixed on him over the top of the armchair.

Quelch found his voice.

"Bunter!"

That sudden roar took Bunter quite by surprise. He fairly bounded. A segment of cake slipped down the wrong way.

Bunter gurgled.

"Boy!" roared Quelch, rising to his feet.

"Gurrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

"What are you doing, Bunter?" roared Quelch.

"Yurrgh!"

"You have actually come to my study to take away that cake which I confiscated yesterday, Bunter—under my very eyes—"

"Oooooooooogh!" Bunter choked and gurgled.

"Yooogh! Wurrgh!"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "This passes all bounds! Bunter, I shall cane you with the utmost severity!"

"Wooooooooogh!"

Mr. Quelch stepped to the table and picked up his cane.

Billy Bunter blinked at him in horror and dismay. Quelch's ghost could hardly have startled and dismayed him more.

"I say, sir—Grooogh! I say—I wasn't going to—Oooogh!" gurgled Bunter. "I—I never meant to—Groooooogh!"

"Bend over that table, Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

Whop, whop, whop!

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter. "I say—yarooooop!"

Whop, whop, whop!

"Oh crikey!"

"Leave my study, Bunter!"

Bunter was glad to leave the study. He left it bent almost double, wriggling. Sounds of anguish died away down the passage.

What Quelch did with that cake—whether, as Bunter suspected, he scoffed it, whether he remembered it or forgot it again, Bunter never knew. Bunter, at least, ceased to be interested in that cake! Wild horses would not have dragged him to Quelch's study again in search of that cake!

THE FACE UNDER THE MASK!

"HOW excessively annoying!"

Mr. Quelch made that remark.

He made it as he looked out of Courtfield Railway Station a few

days later, at a quarter past eleven at night, and gazed into dripping rain.

"Excessively annoying" was a mild expression in the circumstances. Had not Mr. Quelch been a schoolmaster, he might have expressed himself more forcibly.

Mr. Quelch had made a trip to London that day. He had gone to see Mr. Woosey, who was now installed in his new occupation as an official in one of the innumerable new Ministries germinated by the War. Perhaps Mr. Quelch was interested to know what Mr. Woosey was going to do—or whether he was going to do anything!

Anyhow, he had visited Mr. Woosey in his new quarters in a requisitioned hotel, now turned into a sort of



Mr. Quelch lashed out hard and swiftly. A startled gasp from Slim Jim, as the u

rabbit-warren of officials. And he had caught a rather late train back. But he had hoped to land safely at Greyfriars by ten. Possibly he had not calculated adequately on war-time train services.

There he was, landed at Courtfield Station, at a quarter past eleven on a rainy night, with no taxi in the offing and no chance whatever of getting a lift of any kind to the school.

No wonder Mr. Quelch declared that it was excessively annoying. He had to walk—and it was not a nice night for walking!

However, Quelch was a good walker. He turned up his coat-collar, pulled his hat down tight over his scholarly brows, put up his umbrella, and started.

He plugged through the rain, out

of the town, and entered on the road over the windy, rainy common.

When he started, he hoped that the rain would ease off. Instead of doing so, it came down harder and faster. Had Quelch described the situation at this point he would probably have said that it was something much more emphatic than excessively annoying. However, Quelch shut his lips hard and said nothing.

It was two miles to the school by the road. It was a good deal less taking short cuts across Courtfield Common, which Quelch knew like the back of his hand. Naturally, he decided on short cuts.

He plugged on by a footpath in wet grass, rain descending round him, his umbrella waterlogged and little protection.



trailing branch, however, stopped the blow. There
umbrella cracked under the force of the blow!

But there are occasions when a short cut proves the longest way round. Quelch knew the paths on that extensive common as well as he knew the pages of Virgil or Homer. But he knew them chiefly by daylight. In the middle of a dark night they were not so easy to follow, even by a man accustomed to the locality.

After walking for a steady hour in the rain—which should have brought him out quite near the school—Mr. Quelch sincerely wished that he had kept to the road and left the short cuts to take care of themselves.

Past midnight, he was still treading wet footpaths, and realising, only too clearly, that he had missed his way in the rainy darkness.

A black, rainy sky overhead, dim, dripping bushes and thickets on all sides, offered little guidance. Quelch

would never have dreamed that he could possibly be lost on Courtfield Common. But he had to admit that he was.

A gleam of light from a road lamp would have saved him. But there were no gleams from road lamps in the black-out. Not a glimmer of light was visible anywhere on the horizon.

Only every now and then a watery moon glimmered from rainy clouds and showed him wet grass and thickets. Every minute he hoped that the moon would come out more clearly. But it only glimmered now and then, as if to tantalise him.

Quelch was a good walker; but he was tired and his pace slackened as he plugged on in the wet gloom.

Had there been any kind of a shelter he would have been glad of a rest. But dripping thickets offered no shelter.

He could have gasped with relief when, at long last, he emerged from wet grass into a muddy lane.

What lane it was, of the many lanes round Courtfield Common, he did not know; but he was, at all events, on a road of some kind.

With tired legs, but great determination, he marched along that lane, peering to and fro in the darkness.

Now that he did not need it so much, the moon came out a little more clearly. The rain showed signs, at last, of easing.

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Quelch suddenly.

Dim, but recognisable, he spotted a great pair of bronze gates by the roadside. He knew those gates: the gates of Popper Court, that opened on Oak Lane.

He knew where he was now—in Oak Lane, a mile or so from the school, and the dim wall on his right, where the gates stood, was the wall of Sir Hilton Popper's estate. Great trees, in the park within, overlapped the wall, extending thick branches over the lane.

Mr. Quelch plugged on hopefully. It was a great

relief to know where he was, but his legs were bending with fatigue under him, and the rain, which had eased off a little, now renewed its violence, coming down apparently by the bucketful. It was past one o'clock in the morning, a very unusually late hour for the Remove master to be out of bed.

A gust of wind, thick with rain, almost made him stagger. Mr. Quelch came to a weary halt and moved off the lane into the shelter of the thick branches over the wall of Popper Court.

The rain was coming down in torrents—the last burst of violence, perhaps, before it eased off.

Quelch hoped so!

Anyhow, he was now out of the worst of it, and able to take the spell of rest he so sorely needed for

his weary legs. He put down his soaked and dripping umbrella and backed close to the wall, leaning, half-sitting, on a bulging buttress. Wet and cold as it was, the rest was very welcome. He had still another mile to cover when that burst of rain was over.

For a quarter of an hour it poured down. A good deal came through the leafless branches overhead; but the branches were thick and Quelch was thankful for what shelter they afforded.

Then the rain slackened, falling thinner and thinner; and the moon emerged from the clouds once more and a silvery irradiation fell over the dripping landscape.

The rain, at length, was coming to an end; and Mr. Quelch waited for it to stop before he stepped out to resume his way. He needed a rest, and he remained lodged on the buttress while the rain thinned and thinned and the moon grew clearer and clearer.

A sound at the top of the park wall, at a little distance along it, caused him to glance round.

It was not the sound of a swishing branch, and he wondered what it was for a moment.

The next moment he caught his breath.

Not more than three yards from him, at a point where the wall was clear of branches, a head had risen into view from the inner side of the wall.

Mr. Quelch stared at that head, transfixed.

Since he had left Courtfield, he had not seen a soul; it was not the sort of night to tempt people abroad. He had not expected to see a soul before he reached the school. Least of all had he expected to see any person climbing out of Popper Court park over that wall!

In that clear space, beyond the trees, the gleam of the moon fell on the wall and on the head that had risen over it.

Quelch, close to the wall and in deep, dark shadow, was invisible. But that head was clear to his eyes—and he gazed at it, thunderstruck.

It was covered by a black cap, pulled low, and the face was hidden under a black mask that met a dark muffler swathed round the neck.

That was all that Quelch could see of the man on the other side of the wall. But it was enough.

He knew who that man was!

It was the man that Herbert Vernon-Smith had seen in Dr. Locke's study, three or four nights ago; it was the man whose strange description was known to the police; it was, beyond the shadow of a doubt, Slim Jim—and his present stealthy movements indicated that the cracksman had been at work in Popper Court and was now cautiously leaving the scene of a robbery.

Quelch made no movement. He made no sound. But his grip closed on the handle of his umbrella.

For a long, long minute that head remained motionless—watching, listening. From narrow slits in the black mask, two keen eyes watched

the dim road before the man ventured farther. He did not even glance towards Mr. Quelch—though he could not have seen him, in the gloom under the branches, had he looked.

Obviously, it did not occur to the masked man for a moment that anyone could be there, clamped close to the park wall under the dark branches, at such an hour of the night. He was making sure that the road was clear before he ventured out.

Satisfied on that point, he stirred at last.

A slim figure, clad in dead black, whipped over the wall. It dropped to the ground and, to Mr. Quelch's surprise, bent under a clump of bush that grew close to the bricks.

But that action was explained the next moment as a bundle was pulled into view. Under the Remove master's staring eyes, the man in black unrolled a large, thick, heavy coat.

From the unrolled coat he jerked a soft grey hat, which he jammed on his head, covering the black cap from sight. He slipped on the heavy overcoat and rapidly buttoned it. Then, swiftly, he jammed his feet, shoes and all, into a pair of roomy gum-boots that reached almost to the knee.

Quelch watched, spellbound.

Except for the mask on his face, the man in black now presented quite a normal and ordinary aspect—a rather bulky-looking man, far from slim, in the big thick overcoat, with a grey hat and gum-boots.

Mr. Quelch could guess what was coming next. He remained motionless, silent. The man glanced once more up and down the lane in the gleam of the moonlight, and removed the mask from his face, stuffing it into a pocket.

Quelch's eyes, from his cover, fixed on that face—clearly seen in the gleam of the moon.

The Remove master of Greyfriars was the first, and the only man, to see the face of Slim Jim the cracksman!

His eyes almost devoured that face.

It was a clear-cut, clean-shaven face, that of a man in the thirties, of a somewhat pale complexion and dark eyes.

That face was clearly imprinted on Quelch's retentive memory. He knew that he would know that man again if he saw him anywhere, at any time!

If Slim Jim remained at large, there was one man at least who could identify him without a moment's hesitation the moment his eyes fell on him.

But Mr. Quelch had no idea of letting the man get away, if he could help it.

Quelch was a rather elderly gentleman, but he was tough and wiry and he feared no foe. He was gripping his umbrella—the only thing he had that could be used as a weapon. He was going to make an attempt at least to secure that scoundrel, evidently fresh from a robbery at Popper Court, doubtless with his plunder in his pocket.

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath and stepped swiftly forward, his umbrella going up for a swipe.

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He lashed out hard and swiftly.

Had that swipe landed on the cracksman, Slim Jim would have been knocked over headlong and Quelch would have pounced on him the next moment.

But Quelch had rather overlooked the branches overhead. That crashing swipe landed the umbrella on a trailing branch that was in the way, stopping the blow, and bringing down a heavy shower on Quelch.

Crash!

The umbrella cracked under the force of the blow. But it was stopped a yard from the cracksman.

There was a sudden startled gasp from Slim Jim.

His watchful eyes shot round for a split second at Mr. Quelch, then he was running!

Before Mr. Quelch could recover the umbrella for another blow, the running figure was across the lane, vanishing into the shadows of the common.

It was swallowed from sight in a moment.

Mr. Quelch gave a snort of annoyance.

Only for a moment or two, the patter of boots on wet grass came back to him.

The man was gone!

Quelch gave another angry snort.

Then he tramped down the lane towards the high road.

When he reached the road he did not turn in the direction of Greyfriars. He turned in the other direction—towards Courtfield.

Tired as he was, damp as he was, and anxious as he was to get to bed, Quelch had his duty to do—and he headed for Courtfield and the police station, to hand over to the police the most valuable information they had ever received on the subject of Slim Jim.

BUNTER IS WANTED!

“WHERE'S Bunter?”

Coker of the Fifth asked that question—or rather, he shot it out like a bullet. He glared at Harry Wharton & Co. as he shot it.

“Bunter?” repeated Harry.

It was the following day—a half-holiday at Greyfriars. After dinner, the Famous Five were looking at the notices on the board in Hall when Coker happened.

Two members of the Co. were in the art class, and they were rather interested by a notice to the effect that Mr. Lamb, the successor of Mr. Woosey, was to take up his duties at the school on the morrow.

Whether Mr. Lamb had yet arrived at Greyfriars they did not know; they had seen nothing of him so far. But a taxi had been heard during third school, and it was possible that it had brought the new drawing master to Greyfriars.

But they forgot all about art classes and art masters as Coker barged in and bellowed.

Coker looked cross.

Coker of the Fifth often looked cross. Anything coming between the wind and his nobility, so to speak,

was enough to make Horace Coker cross. From his question, it seemed that Billy Bunter was the culprit.

“Do you hear me?” hooted Coker. “I want that fat scoundrel! Where is he?”

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

“He came this way, I believe!” said Coker. “Have you seen him? Don't stand there gaping—have you seen him?”

“What the thump do you want Bunter for?” demanded Harry Wharton.

“Potter saw him on the stairs with a pineapple under his arm,” hissed Coker. “Mine's gone from my study! Where's Bunter? It won't take him long to get through a pineapple. Where is he?”

“Echo answers where!” said Bob Cherry.

“Look here——”

“Esteemed echo answers that the wherefulness is terrific!” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“You jolly well know where he is,” hooted Coker, “and I'll jolly well smack your heads all round, if you don't tell me this minute, see?”

Now, as a matter of fact, the chums of the Remove could guess where Bunter was. Only a few minutes ago, they had seen a fat figure scud up the Form-room corridor, moving with unusual speed, with something hidden under a fat arm.

Nevertheless, they had no idea of imparting information, under threat of having their heads smacked all round! If Coker contemplated smacking their heads all round, their chief idea was that Coker had better get on with it and take what would come to him. If Coker of the Fifth fancied that he could smack Remove heads, the important thing was to make it clear unto Coker that he couldn't!

“You've seen him?” roared Coker. “Where did he go? Are you going to tell me this minute, or do you want your heads smacked? Sharp!”

“I think we'll have our heads smacked, Coker, if it's all the same to you!” said the captain of the Remove politely. “That is, if you can do it, of course.”

“Which is rather a big ‘if’!” grinned Johnny Bull.

Coker did not seem to think that it was a big “if.” Coker was already fearfully shirty! Wharton's answer gave the finishing touch to his wrath! He went into action on the spot!

But he did not get so far as the smacking of heads! He had no time for that. For the Famous Five went promptly into action at the same moment; and Coker, to his surprise and rage, found himself up-ended on the old oak floor.

He hit that floor quite hard! He roared as he hit it! And, to his further surprise and further rage, he found himself pinned to the floor—with two juniors standing on his legs, two holding his wriggling arms, and one grabbing his shock of hair and tapping his head on the old oak!

Tap!

“Yarooop!” roared Coker.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Tap!

“Oh, my hat! Ow, my head!”

Stop it!" spluttered Coker. "Why, I'll pulverize the lot of you—I—I—I'll—"

Tap!

"Yurroop!"

"Bless my soul!" came an unexpected voice. "What—what—what is all this?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The Head!"

The Famous Five jumped away from Coker of the Fifth as if he had suddenly become red-hot! They stared round in dismay.

Dr. Locke had walked in. He was not alone; a man the juniors had never seen before was with him—a young man in gold-rimmed glasses, who stared curiously at that strange scene, and smiled slightly; while the headmaster gazed in great astonishment.

The headmaster, it appeared, was showing the stranger over the school. They had arrived on this particular spot at a rather unfortunate moment. That stranger, whoever he was, must have received a rather surprising impression of Greyfriars manners and customs.

"Hook it!" breathed Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five did not stay to explain. After all, Coker was there, and he could explain, if he liked. They gave the headmaster one blink, and flew!

Before Dr. Locke could make a second remark—before he could bid them stay, if that was his idea—they vanished out of Hall with the promptness of five spectres at cockcrow.

Coker sat up, spluttering.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head. "Is—is that Coker? Is that a Fifth Form boy? Coker! Get up at once, Coker!"

Coker got up at once, crimson and breathless.

"This is ridiculous, Coker!" said the Head with severity. "You are a senior boy—in Mr. Prout's Form—really. Coker, you are surely old enough to know better than this—such absurd horseplay, with a party of junior boys, in Hall—really, Coker, I am surprised!"

Coker gurgled.

"I—I—I—" he spluttered.

Dr. Locke waved his hand in dismissal.

"Go away at once!" he said. "Let there be no more such nonsense, Coker. A certain dignity, a certain self-restraint, is expected of senior boys! Remember that, Coker! Now go away at once!"

And Coker went, boiling—very nearly boiling over!

NO ADMITTANCE!

"UP here!" said Bob Cherry.

He stopped at the staircase in the Form-room passage and pointed.

That, he had no doubt, was the way the fat Owl of the Remove had gone, with Coker's pineapple under his arm.

"In Woosey's class-room, ten to one!" said Nugent, with a nod. "Nobody there, till the new man comes."

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five tramped up that staircase. They had little doubt that Bunter would be discovered there. They had seen him heading in that direction; and the drawing master's class-room was a safe refuge for a fat Owl seeking cover; that room had not been used since Mr. Woosey had left, and was not going to be used till the new drawing master came. So nobody was likely to butt in there while Bunter was disposing of that pineapple which Coker of the Fifth had received from his Aunt Judy.

But the Famous Five intended to butt in! They had dealt faithfully with Horace Coker, simply to impress upon him that he could not smack Remove heads. But they were quite prepared to rescue his pineapple from the grub-raider of the Remove, restore it—or what was left of it—to the proprietor, and bump Billy Bunter into the bargain, as a lesson on the subject of grub-raiding.

There were several class-rooms on the upper floor. Mr. Woosey's class-room—which was going to be Mr. Lamb's, when Mr. Lamb came—extended over some of the masters' studies below, the big window looking out on the quad over Mr. Quelch's study window.

The door was closed.

When Bob Cherry turned the door-handle he made the further discovery that it was also locked on the inside.

"He's there!" said Bob. "The fat villain's turned the key!"

He thumped on the door.

There was a startled gasp within. Evidently somebody was there!

"I—I say, is—is that Coker?" came a startled squeak. "I say, if—if—if that's Coker, I ain't here!"

"You fat burglar!" roared Bob. "Open this door!"

"Oh! Is that you, Cherry? I say, I can't let you in—the door's locked, and—and I've lost the key!"

"Have you scoffed that pineapple, you fat frog?"

"I haven't got a pineapple! I'm not eating anything here! I'm not always eating, like you fellows."

"Oh, my hat!"

Thump, thump!

"Shut up, you beasts!" howled Bunter. "What's the good of kicking up that shindy? I ain't coming out till I've finished this pineapple, and I've hardly started. I'd let you in, if there was enough to go round—nothing mean about me, I hope! But half a dozen fellows—"

Thump!

"Beast!"

The Famous Five had to give it up. There was no getting at the fat Owl through a locked door; and it was clear that Bunter was not going to unlock that door while a remnant of Coker's pineapple remained.

"Oh, come on!" said Bob and they crossed the passage towards the stairs—just in time to see two heads rise into view on the staircase.

They stopped!

"The Head!" breathed Bob. "The jolly old beak's haunting us to-day. Cut off the other way. I don't want to meet the Head!"

The majestic figure of the headmaster was ascending that staircase with slow and stately motion. By his

side was the young man in gold-rimmed glasses, whom the juniors had seen with him in Hall.

After the little scene in Hall, the Famous Five were not fearfully anxious to meet their headmaster. They backed away from the stairs.

"By gum!" whispered Bob. "I expect that chap is the new man—the Head's bringing him up to see his class-room—"

"Oh, my hat!"

It dawned on the Famous Five, all at once, who that stranger was. It was ten to one that it was Mr. Lamb, the new art master, who was coming in Mr. Woosey's place.

That was why the Head was bringing him up that staircase. He was going to show him his class-room—and Bunter was there, devouring Coker's pineapple, in happy ignorance of the fact that the Head was coming, or that the new art master was anywhere near Greyfriars.

"Tip him off—quick!" whispered Nugent.

Bob Cherry raced back to the door of Mr. Woosey's class-room. He bent to the keyhole.

"Bunter, you ass! Get out of it!" he hissed through the keyhole. "The Head's coming!"

"He, he, he!" came from within.

"I tell you the Head's coming!" breathed Bob.

"Go it!" chuckled Bunter. "You can tell me Quelch is coming, too, if you like! You won't get the door open so easy as all that! He, he, he!"

Bob delayed no longer. He cut off and rejoined his chums, and they scudded along the passage and turned a corner—as the Head and the young man in gold-rimmed glasses emerged from the staircase.

BAD LUCK FOR BUNTER!

DR. LOCKE halted at the door of the class-room at which, a few minutes ago, the Famous Five had been gathered—and at which, less than a minute ago, Bob Cherry had been breathing warning words through the keyhole.

"This is your class-room, Mr. Lamb!" he said.

And he turned the doorhandle.

"Dear me!" he said. "The door does not appear to be open! Dear me!"

"Perhaps I can open it, sir!" suggested Mr. Lamb.

The Head relinquished the door-handle. The young man in gold-rimmed glasses turned it, and pushed. But the door did not open.

"It is locked, sir!" said Mr. Lamb.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "It should not be locked—it certainly should not be locked! The key—"

"The key appears to be in the lock, sir! The door is locked on the inside!" said Mr. Lamb.

"Bless my soul! That is very extraordinary!" said the Head. "This class-room is not at present in use—it has not been used since Mr. Woosey went away last week! Really, this is very extraordinary! Who can be locked in this room?"

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He knocked on the door.

"Go away, you silly idiot!" came from within.

Dr. Locke gave a convulsive start. Probably, in all his long career as a schoolmaster, Dr. Locke had never been addressed as a silly idiot before! It was quite a surprise to him.

No doubt it was a surprise to Mr. Lamb also. He blinked through his gold-rimmed glasses at the oaken door.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head faintly. "Who—what—"

"Don't make a row at that door, you silly goat!" came a fat voice from Mr. Woosey's class-room. "Can't you chuck it, you fathead?"

"Open this door at once!" gasped the Head.

"Shan't!"

Billy Bunter, evidently, did not recognise his headmaster's voice through the thick oak. It was fixed in his fat mind that the Famous Five were there—worrying a fellow about that pineapple. Bunter was fed-up with them. Really, it spoiled a fellow's enjoyment of a pineapple to be constantly interrupted and bothered like this.

"Who is there?" the Head almost bawled.

"Oh, don't be a goat!" yapped Bunter. "Just shut up and clear off! Can't you give a chap a minute's peace? If you think you're going to have any of this pineapple, you're jolly well mistaken, so you may as well chuck it, see?"

"Boy!" roared the Head. "Open this door at once! It is your headmaster speaking!"

There was a gasp from the class-room. It dawned on the fat Owl within that this was not the voice of any member of the Famous Five. It penetrated his fat head that it was his headmaster's voice.

"Oh crikey!" was what came to the Head's majestic ears.

Rap, rap!

"I—I—I say, is—is—is that the Head?" gasped the terrified fat Owl! He forgot even the pineapple as he realised that it was, indeed, his headmaster—that Bob's warning was genuine, and that Dr. Locke was there.

"Yes! What boy is that?" thundered the Head.

"Oh! I—I—I don't know—"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean, I—I ain't Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Oh lor'! I—I ain't Bunter, sir! I ain't a Remove chap at all! Oh crikey!"

"Bunter, open this door instantly! I can see that the key is in the lock, Bunter! If you do not immediately open this door, I shall administer a flogging, Bunter, instead of sending you to your Form-master to be caned!"

"Oh lor'!"

The key turned in the lock at last. The door opened!

Billy Bunter backed away, his fat knees knocking together, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles at the Head.

On a chair by the window lay the

remnant of a pineapple—forgotten now!

The Head fixed his stern eyes on the quaking Owl.

Mr. Lamb glanced at him with a faint, amused smile and crossed the room to the window.

"Bunter! What are you doing here?" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh! Nothing, sir!" moaned Bunter. "I—I didn't know it was you at the door, sir! I—I wouldn't have called you a goat, sir, if I'd known it was you! I—I don't really think you're a goat, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Or—or a silly idiot, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Not at all, sir! I thought it was another beast at the door, sir—"

"Is it possible, Bunter, that you locked yourself in this class-room to—devour that—that comestible?" exclaimed the Head, pointing to the remnant of the pineapple on the chair.

"Oh! No, sir! I—I've never seen it before!" gasped Bunter. "I certainly never brought it here, and it isn't Coker's, and—"

"Bunter! You will go to your Form-master and request Mr. Quelch to give you six strokes of the cane!" said the Head sternly.

"Oh crikey!"

"Go!" rapped the Head.

Billy Bunter almost crawled from the class-room—with that message for Quelch.

The Head's stern eye watched him as he disappeared.

When the fat Owl was gone, Dr. Locke glanced round at Mr. Lamb, who, standing at the class-room window, was looking down into the quadrangle below.

"Now, my dear Mr. Lamb," said the Head—"now that that absurd boy is gone—"

Mr. Lamb, looking down from the window, did not reply or turn his head.

He seemed, for the moment, oblivious of Dr. Locke's presence, and deaf to the sound of his voice.

His eyes, from the high window, had fallen on two figures pacing in the quadrangle—the portly figure of Prout, master of the Fifth, and the angular figure of Quelch, master of the Remove.

It was upon the latter that the new master's gaze had fixed.

It was a strange, startled, intent gaze that he fastened upon the unconscious face of the Remove master below.

Anyone who had noted Mr. Lamb's face at the moment might have surmised that he had seen Mr. Quelch before, and that he was startled and disturbed to see him again, where he saw him.

So intent was his interest in the Remove master that it was not until the Head spoke a second time that he realised that he was being addressed. Then he turned abruptly.

VERY STRANGE!

MR. LAMB stepped back. Quelch, walking and talking with Prout below, had not looked up.

Had he done so, probably he would have seen the face at the high window. Now, however, Mr. Lamb was out of view, if he raised his eyes.

The young man in the gold-rimmed glasses was breathing rather quickly. His face, naturally rather pale, was a little paler since he had looked from the window.

But it was not likely to occur to the Head that the sight of a face in the Greyfriars quadrangle had given his new art master a shock.

"This, Mr. Lamb, will be your class-room," the Head was saying, as the young man turned towards him.

"An excellent light!" remarked Mr. Lamb, with a gesture towards the wide windows which, naturally, was a detail that an art master would think of and remark upon. "And a very agreeable view also."

"Quite!" agreed the Head.

He looked from the window, and Mr. Lamb turned to it again, keeping, however, a little behind the Head.

It was quite a pleasant view from that high window, on a clear December day; the old quadrangle, the grey old buildings, the leafless elms, and the grey, wintry sea rolling in the distance.

Innumerable heads moved below; and on one head Mr. Lamb's eyes fixed—that of Mr. Quelch.

"Some members of your staff, sir?" he remarked, with a nod towards the two masters in the quad.

"Yes—Mr. Prout and Mr. Quelch, the masters of the Fifth Form and the Remove," said Dr. Locke. "You will have boys from both Forms in your sets, Mr. Lamb. You have not yet met any of the staff, I think?"

"I have not yet had that pleasure," answered Mr. Lamb. "Lessons were going on, I think, when I arrived here."

He drew a deep breath.

It was quite by chance that he had not, so far, encountered Mr. Quelch.

Quelch had been in his Form-room, with the Remove, when Mr. Lamb's taxi drove in; and Mr. Lamb had lunched with the Head, while Quelch was in Hall with his Form at the school dinner.

Dr. Locke glanced at the new master.

He was quite unaware of what thoughts might be passing in the new master's mind; and that the sight of Mr. Quelch had given the new man a shock, he had not the faintest suspicion. But he could hardly help noticing the intentness of the new master's gaze at the face below.

"Perhaps you have seen Mr. Quelch before?" he remarked.

Mr. Lamb started a little.

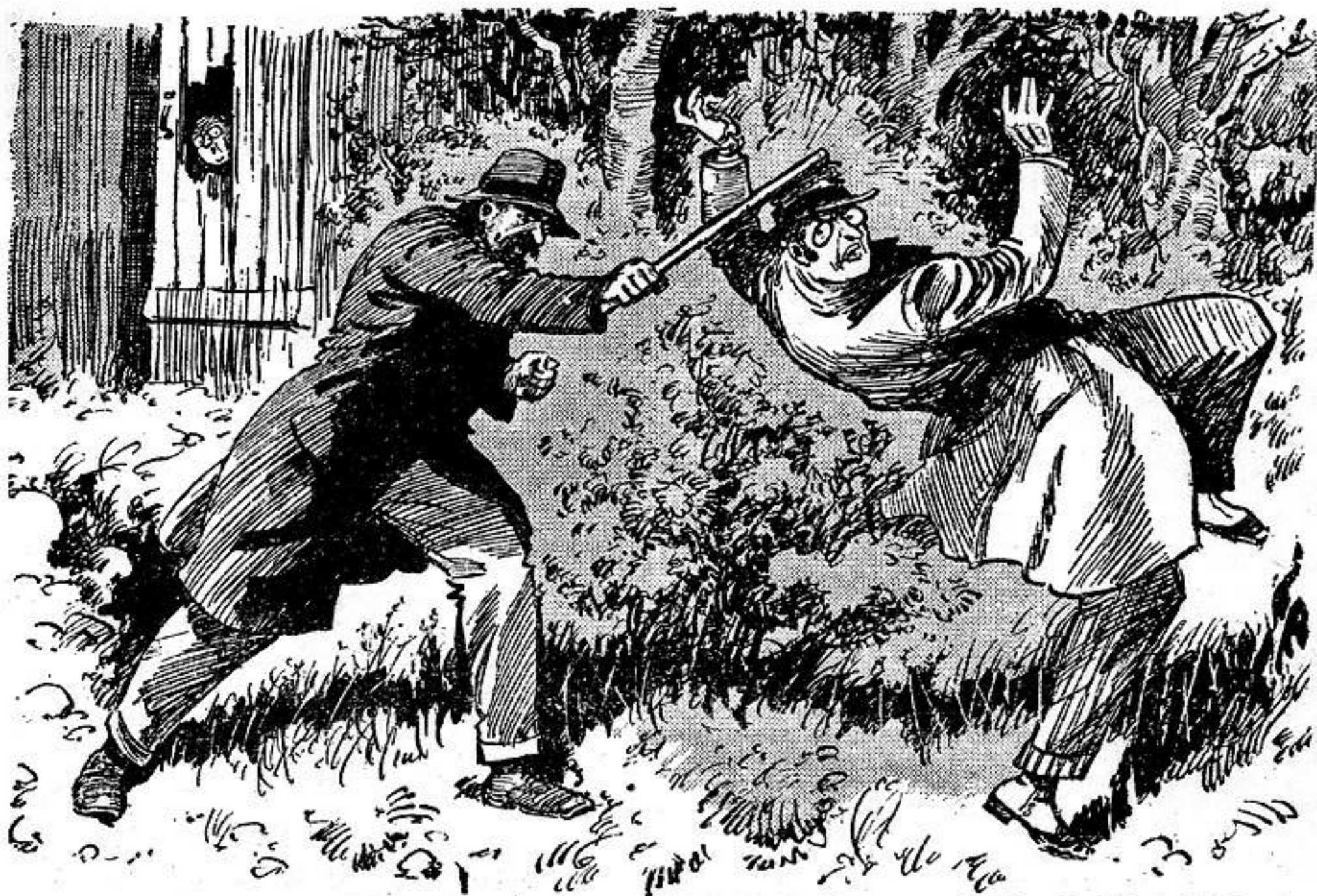
"Mr. Quelch!" he repeated. "The portly gentleman?"

"No, the other!" said Dr. Locke.

So that angular-looking man's name was Quelch, and he was master of the Remove at Greyfriars!

"No; he is quite a stranger to me, sir!" said Mr. Lamb, and he stepped back from the window.

"Mr. Quelch is, to some extent, my right-hand man here," said Dr. Locke. "He is an old friend—a very old and valued friend." He glanced



The amazed and startled Billy Bunter heard the dull thud of a blow, as something in the man's hand crashed on the back of the Remove master's head. Transfixed, the fat junior stared from the hole in the door!

at his watch. "If you will come with me to Common-room, Mr. Lamb, you will meet some members of the staff—"

"Certainly, sir!"

The Head progressed majestically across to the door.

Mr. Lamb followed him rather slowly.

That the new member of his staff could possibly have any reason for desiring not to meet Mr. Quelch, naturally did not occur to the Head of Greyfriars. He was far from dreaming that it cost Mr. Lamb an effort to follow him from the classroom, and down the staircase to the Form-room corridor.

Mr. Lamb's brain was busy as he followed the unsuspecting Head.

For some mysterious reason, he did not desire to meet Mr. Quelch! For whatever unknown cause, the sight of the Remove master's face had struck a chill to his very heart, and caused his cheeks to pale.

Little as the Head dreamed it, the new art master, at that moment, would have left him, had it been possible, and gone to his room and remained there. Had he been able to think of a pretext, he would have done so.

Indeed, had Quelch appeared on the scene, he would have done so, pretext or no pretext.

But Mr. Quelch was walking in the quad, deep in conversation with the Fifth Form master. Common-room, for the moment, was safe enough for the man who did not want to meet Mr. Quelch.

But his heart was beating fast, though his rather sleepy-looking, spectacled face was calm, as he walked with the headmaster to Common-room.

In that apartment, Mr. Capper, the master of the Fourth, was indulging in war jaw with Mr. Wiggins, the master of the Third.

They cut war jaw, and rose, as the Head sailed majestically in.

Dr. Locke duly presented the new master to the two old masters, and left him with them. Having courteously bestowed half an hour of his valuable time on the new man, Dr. Locke handed him over, as it were, and certainly he never guessed how glad Mr. Lamb was to see his majestic back.

Capper and Wiggins politely welcomed the new man into the fold; but, though quite willing to be civil and obliging to a new man on the staff, they were not sorry that Mr. Lamb left them after a few minutes.

He had, he explained, to see that his luggage had arrived from the station; and Capper and Wiggins willingly let him go to see about his luggage, and resumed war jaw when he was gone.

But, once out of Common-room, Mr. Lamb did not seem much concerned about his luggage.

Mr. Woosey had had a study in Masters' Passage, not far from Quelch's. That study now belonged to Mr. Lamb.

Mr. Lamb went quickly to that study, stepped into it, shut the door, and turned the key in the lock—

which was a very singular proceeding on the part of Mr. Lamb, had anyone been aware of it.

There were suitcases in the study, and several other articles of luggage, but Mr. Lamb, in spite of what he had said to Capper and Wiggins in Common-room, did not even glance at them.

Having locked the door, he crossed to the study window, and, keeping carefully in cover of the curtain, looked out into the quad.

Quelch and Prout, at a distance, were still walking and talking.

Unseen, the new master watched Quelch.

He was breathing hard and fast, and there was a strange glitter in his eyes as he watched, and—another singular thing—he had taken off the gold-rimmed glasses, as if he was able to watch more intently without their aid.

"That is the man!" Mr. Lamb breathed the words half aloud. "There is no doubt—that is the man! A master at Greyfriars—who would have thought it? Who would have dreamed it?"

He set his lips and watched, the expression on his face growing hard, grim.

Not till Mr. Quelch, at length, went into the House did Mr. Lamb turn from the study window. Then he stepped to the study door, unlocked it, and opened it a few inches.

From that narrow aperture he glimpsed the Remove master going to his study.

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He heard Quelch's door close.

Then Mr. Lamb emerged from his own study. He turned in the direction of Common-room—evidently not desiring to pass Quelch's door.

Hardly a minute later Mr. Lamb, in coat and hat, left the House by the Common-room and walked quickly to the gates.

The man who did not want to meet Mr. Quelch was taking prompt and careful measures not to meet Mr. Quelch.

DOGGO!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Look out for Coker!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, blow Coker!" said Billy Bunter peevishly. "He can't prove that I had his pineapple—besides, I never had it. But, I say, you fellows, do you think the Head's got a good memory?"

"Wha-a-t?"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at Billy Bunter, surprised by that unexpected and peculiar question.

That afternoon, cold and clear and fine after the rain of the previous night, the Famous Five were thinking chiefly of football. But William George Bunter, if he knew there was a Soccer match on between the Remove and the Shell, was not bothering about such trifles as that.

He blinked anxiously at the Famous Five.

"You see——" squeaked the anxious fat Owl.

"I don't!" said Bob. "What the dickens does the Big Beak's memory matter to you, you fat duffer?"

"Well, it does, you know!" mumbled Bunter. "It's rather important! You see, he told me to go to Quelch and ask for six!"

"Well, why not go to Quelch, and get it over?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, don't be a silly idiot if you can help it!" yapped Bunter. "My idea is to get out of that six! Very likely the Head will forget all about it—after all, schoolmasters are rather old donkeys, you know! If he doesn't see me about this afternoon, he mayn't remember me at all. All I've got to do is to keep doggo."

"I wouldn't bank on it!" said Frank Nugent.

"Well, look here, you fellows," said Bunter, "I'm going to chance it—a fellow can keep out of sight on a half-holiday. I say, think it's going to rain again?"

"I hope not, as we're going to play football!"

"Oh, blow your football!" grunted Bunter peevishly. "You fellows are always jawing football! Bless your silly football! Look here, if it's going to rain, a fellow doesn't want to get soaked! If it ain't I can keep out of gates all the afternoon, and the Head may forget all about me. Look here, if I go to Courtfield I can get tea at the bunshop, and not come in till bell. Only I shall want some money——"

"Time we got to the changing-room!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, don't walk off

while a chap's talking to you!" roared Bunter.

But answer there came none. The Famous Five walked off to the changing-room, apparently more interested in Soccer than in Billy Bunter's dodges to escape six from Quelch.

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter. "I jolly well hope it will rain, so yah!"

Bunter was left disconsolate.

Tea at the bunshop in Courtfield would really have seen the fat Owl through nicely. But that resource was unavailable, owing to the non-arrival of a long-expected postal order.

Still, Bunter had other resources.

An afternoon out of gates with nothing to eat was, of course, impossible. It was as bad as getting six, or nearly so.

But when the Remove fellows had gone down to Little Side to play Soccer, they would not, of course, be in their studies.

Billy Bunter rolled into the House while the Remove men gathered in the changing-room.

By the time Harry Wharton & Co. were getting busy with footer, Bunter was getting busy in deserted studies in the Remove passage.

Smithy's cake, and Coker's pineapple had both turned out rather unlucky for the grub-raider of Greyfriars. Bunter seemed like having better luck this time.

He found a bag of doughnuts in the Bounder's study. Ogilvy's study rewarded him with half a cake. Hazel's study provided bullseyes—and in Squiff's he found jam tarts in the cupboard. Several other studies yielded up their quota, and when the fat Owl rolled at last down the Remove staircase, all his pockets were bulging!

So it was quite a cheerful Owl that emerged into the quad and rolled down to the gates.

Billy Bunter started in the direction of Courtfield. But he had no intention of carrying his extensive weight anything like so far as that town. He left the road at a path on Courtfield Common.

Under the trees by the pond on the common was an old hut. It was used by Courtfield boys who bathed in the pond in summer. In winter it was deserted, and hardly a soul ever went anywhere near it.

Bunter cut across to the trees that fringed the pond and rolled into that hut.

It was a shelter from the rain, if it rained. It was a safe refuge from Greyfriars eyes. Bunter had plenty in his pockets to occupy his time—and he was going to sit in that hut and scoff his plunder till it was time to walk back to the school for roll-call—and, in the meantime, he hoped that the Head would forget his fat existence.

The old creaking door of the bather's hut was on the latch.

Bunter shut it, to keep off the wind, though there were plenty of cracks and crannies through which the wind penetrated; also, near the latch the woodwork was broken, leaving a hole large enough to look through.

Little discomforts like that, however, could not be helped.

Billy Bunter sat down on a bench,

leaned on the wall, and unstuffed his pockets.

After which there was a sound of steady champing in the solitary hut on the common, and William George Bunter grew shiny and sticky, and felt that life was, after all, worth living, in spite of schoolmasters and all their works.

LAYING THE SNARE!

B UZZZZZ!

Mr. Quelch, in his study, turned to the telephone.

The Remove master was taking his case that afternoon in an armchair by the fire, and perhaps nodding a little.

He had been up unusually late the previous night; but, like the slave to duty that he was, he had turned out at the usual time in the morning and taken his Form as usual.

But he was very glad that it was a half-holiday that afternoon, which gave him leisure for the rest he really needed.

He had a volume of Sophocles on his knees as he sat; but he was nodding over that great Greek when the buzz of the telephone-bell startled him into wakefulness.

He picked up the receiver.

"Is that Mr. Quelch?" came a voice—a voice that Mr. Quelch did not remember ever to have heard before.

"Speaking!" answered Mr. Quelch.

"Very good! I am speaking from the police station, sir."

Mr. Quelch sat up and took notice at once.

This, no doubt, was a call in reference to the valuable information he had been able to hand over the previous night. He had seen Inspector Grimes and had a long talk with him on that occasion. But it was not Mr. Grimes' voice that he now heard.

"Please proceed!" said Mr. Quelch, very wide awake now.

"Would it be possible for you, sir, to identify a certain person?" came the voice over the wires. "You know, of course, to whom I allude?"

Mr. Quelch smiled faintly. This, he supposed, was the caution of a police officer in speaking over the telephone; but he really saw no reason why the man at the police station should not put it plainly.

"Quite!" answered Mr. Quelch. "You mean the man whose description I gave Inspector Grimes last night?"

He heard a quick catch of the breath over the telephone. But the next moment the voice went on calmly:

"Precisely! I presume, Mr. Quelch, that you have not spoken freely on this matter—that you have been circumspect——"

Mr. Quelch grunted! He was the most circumspect of gentlemen; certainly not the man to talk too freely on any subject.

"I have said nothing, sir, except to Inspector Grimes and to Dr. Locke—the headmaster here!" he answered. "Naturally, I acquainted Dr. Locke with the whole matter."

"Oh, quite!"

"Mr. Grimes cautioned me—though really it was hardly necessary—to keep my own counsel!" said the Remove master. "I am, as it happens, the only man who can identify that scoundrel—the only man who has seen his face unmasked. I am quite aware that it would be injudicious to allow him to discover my name, my identity, or my residence. He would, in that case, be able to avoid any further encounter with me—while, so long as he remains in ignorance on this subject, I may quite possibly come into contact with him."

"Exactly, sir!"

"Such contact," said Mr. Quelch, "is more than a possibility if the rascal remains in the vicinity, or revisits this neighbourhood. And from what is known of his usual methods, that appears highly probable."

"You are absolutely certain that you could identify him?"

"Absolutely, sir; beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt!" said Mr. Quelch emphatically. "His description, such as I was able to give, may be useful to the authorities, but could not, of course, lead to identification. But if my eyes once fell on him, I should know him instantly."

"You have no doubt on that subject?"

"None whatever!"

"Very good, sir! I am glad you can be so very definite. May I ask whether you are at liberty this afternoon?"

"Certainly, if I can be of any use to the authorities," said Mr. Quelch. "It is a half-holiday at this school to-day; but, in any case, I should be at the disposal of the officers of the law."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Quelch. You are speaking to Superintendent Sharp—possibly you have heard the name?"

"I do not, at the moment, recall—"

"Possibly not—possibly not. I may say that I am a special officer from Scotland Yard, dispatched to take up this matter, immediately information was received there."

"I understand."

"Now, sir, as you say that you are at leisure—"

"Quite!"

"There is a certain person in this town whom I should like you to see—a stranger staying in the town. In the circumstances, one glance from you would be sufficient to tell us whether he deserves our attention."

"Most decidedly!" said Mr. Quelch. "If it is the man I saw last night, a single glance at him will settle the matter quite definitely."

"Very good—very good indeed!"

"One moment, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "At the same moment that I saw the man's face he undoubtedly saw mine—he will know me, I think, as surely as I know him. If he sees me, therefore, he may easily take the alarm."

"You think he would know you by sight?"

"I am quite assured of that."

"We shall take care, sir! If you

will walk to Courtfield I will meet you on the road, and we can enter the town together. I will then take you to the boarding-house where the man is to be seen."

"I am quite at your disposal, Mr. Sharp. But as you are a stranger to me, how—"

"I have thought of that, sir! I will wait for you at a certain spot off the road—you are, I suppose, well acquainted with this neighbourhood?"

"Perfectly!"

"You know a hut that stands by the pond on the common—"

"Quite well!"

"It is only a short distance off the road. You will find me waiting for you outside the hut, sir. Shall we say, in an hour's time?"

"As you wish!"

"Then I shall be awaiting you, sir! I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Quelch!"

"Not at all, sir!"

Mr. Quelch put up the receiver. He was not feeling at all sleepy now! His face was very keen.

From what was known of the manners and customs of Slim Jim, that mysterious crook was in the habit of sticking to one district till he had made a clean sweep of the cribs worth cracking. Now that there was a witness who could identify him, it was worth the while of the police to make an investigation of all strangers staying in the town.

Mr. Quelch had no doubt that they had done so, and that Superintendent Sharp had seen some man who corresponded more or less to his description of the man he had seen at the wall of Popper Court. All that was needed was for Mr. Quelch to see that man!

The Remove master was, naturally, keen to help the authorities to lay by the heels a crook who had defied the law for years, who had robbed two places in the vicinity already—Courtfield Hall and Popper Court—and had very nearly brought off a robbery at Greyfriars School. In the circumstances, he did not regret leaving his cosy study and facing the keen December wind on the common.

Very soon afterwards, Mr. Quelch, in coat and hat, walked out of the House and the gates, and took the Courtfield road.

Gosling, touching his ancient hat to the Remove master as he passed, little guessed how long it would be before he touched that ancient hat to Mr. Quelch again—as little as Mr. Quelch dreamed that the man who called himself Superintendent Sharp was laying a snare for his unwary feet.

WHAT BUNTER SAW!

"**B**EAST!" murmured Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl was alarmed. In selecting that solitary hut by the half-frozen pond on the common Billy Bunter had felt absolutely certain that he would have that spot all to himself on a winter's afternoon.

How Quelch could possibly know that he was there was a mystery to the alarmed fat Owl.

But, really, it looked as if Quelch did.

Bunter was not half-through his surreptitious feast when he heard the sounds of someone approaching the hut by the pond.

He blinked through the hole in the old door, and his eyes popped at the sight of his Form-master.

The fat Owl would not have been surprised if one of the fellows whose studies he had raided had trailed him. But he certainly had not expected to see Mr. Quelch.

But there was Quelch—coming directly towards the hut.

He came through the fringe of trees and thickets that screened the hut and the pond from the high road at a little distance away; and it certainly looked as if that hut was his destination.

Bunter quaked.

Evidently—to Bunter—the Head had mentioned that little matter to Quelch!

Quelch was after him. How on earth he had spotted Bunter's refuge was beyond Bunter's understanding, but he could have no other imaginable motive for coming to such a place—so far as Bunter could see, at least.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter bitterly.

He crammed eatables back into his pockets. He did not want to have to abandon his plunder when Quelch marched him back to the school.

Quelch's footsteps were audible outside the hut.

But, to Bunter's surprise, he did not open the door.

The fat Owl took another squint through the hole in the door.

Mr. Quelch had come to a halt.

He was standing with his back to the door, and Bunter had only a back view of his overcoat.

Mr. Quelch was looking at his watch.

Bunter, in astonishment, blinked at him.

Slowly it dawned on his fat brain that his Form-master's visit to that lonely spot had nothing to do with him.

Quelch was not there to root a fat Owl out of the hut. Evidently, he did not know that anybody was in the hut at all.

He was there for some quite different purpose, quite unconnected with Bunter; apparently an appointment of some sort, as he was standing there waiting and looking at his watch.

It was quite a relief to the fat Owl to realise that Quelch was not after him and did not even know that he was there.

But if Quelch was keeping an appointment with somebody in that lonely spot at a distance from the school, it was very unusual and surprising—and the inquisitive Owl was very curious.

Obviously, Quelch was not going to put his head inside the old hut. The fat Owl was quite safe from observation.

All Bunter had to do was to wait for him to go. And he slid a fat hand into his pocket for a bunch of

bullseyes to keep him company while he waited.

But before the bullseyes reached his capacious mouth there was a sound of footsteps again and a brushing of someone moving through the thickets near the hut.

Bunter blinked again through the hole in the door.

Quelch had been hardly a minute on the spot when another overcoated figure emerged from the thickets and joined him.

Whether the other man had come from a different direction, or whether he had been waiting for Quelch out of sight, Bunter did not know. In the latter case, Bunter had seen and heard nothing of him.

The man wore a long, heavy overcoat, which was turned up about his ears, and a soft dark hat pulled low over his brows.

Of his face, Billy Bunter could see only a thick reddish beard, a walrus moustache, and a pair of thick, heavy eyebrows. The man's face, so far as it could be seen, seemed to be nearly all hair.

As he stepped towards the hut, Mr. Quelch turned towards him.

Bunter heard the newcomer speak.

Mr. Quelch stood silent, watching him as he came.

"I am glad to see that you are on time, Mr. Quelch! I hope that I have not kept you waiting."

"Hardly more than a minute!" answered Mr. Quelch. He was scanning the hairy face curiously. "It was you who telephoned to me?"

"Precisely! I am very glad to see you, Mr. Quelch! Please come with me and I will explain further as we walk."

"Very good, sir."

Both of them turned away, and the fat junior in the hut had a view of the backs of two overcoats.

What happened next made Billy Bunter wonder whether he was dreaming.

The hairy man dropped a pace behind Mr. Quelch, as they walked, and his right hand shot suddenly up.

Thud!

The amazed and startled Owl heard the dull thud of the blow as something in the man's hand crashed on the back of the Remove master's head.

Transfixed, Bunter stared from the hole in the door.

It seemed like some awful dream, or some horrible scene from a film, to the frightened Owl.

Mr. Quelch gave one low, faint cry, and then dropped to the ground. The blow had crushed in his hat, crashed on his head, and stunned him instantly.

He lay like a log.

The thick-bearded man half-bent over him, his eyes burning from his hairy face, the loaded stick gripped in his hand, evidently ready for another blow, if it had been needed.

But it was not needed. The Remove master of Greyfriars lay senseless in the damp grass.

Billy Bunter, too frightened to move, too frightened almost to breathe, stood motionless, watching.

dumbfounded, through the chink in the door, his eyes dilated behind his spectacles.

The bearded man slipped his weapon back into his pocket. Then he bent over the unconscious Form-master and swiftly knotted cords round his wrists and ankles. Then he fastened a gag in the Form-master's mouth.

Evidently, that was a precaution against Mr. Quelch recovering consciousness.

Then he darted back into the thickets from which he had emerged, and disappeared from Bunter's sight.

A few moments later he reappeared, wheeling a large hand-barrow piled with sacks.

Bunter, petrified, watched.

The man lifted out the sacks. He stooped over Mr. Quelch and swung him bodily into the hand-barrow. Bunter caught a movement of the hapless Form-master's limbs—consciousness was already beginning to return.

A few moments more and the sacks were piled over Mr. Quelch, in the hand-barrow, completely screening him from sight.

Immediately, the man picked up the handles of the barrow and wheeled it away across the common—not towards the road, but in the opposite direction.

He disappeared from Bunter's vision.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter. He trembled from head to foot.

Mr. Quelch, his Form-master, had been kidnapped under his very eyes. He heard the sound of the barrow trundling away till it died into silence.

What was that fearful man going to do with Quelch? Nobody who saw him was likely to interfere with him. Who was to guess that a man, bound and gagged, lay under the sacks in the barrow?

Bunter put a trembling fat hand to the door. But he withdrew it. He dared not venture out of the hut till he was assured that that dreadful man was gone.

How long he waited there in terror, he never knew. But suddenly, from the distance, he heard the sound of a car. It came from a lane that crossed the common on the farther side of the pond.

The sound reassured the fat Owl. He could guess that the kidnapper had had a car in waiting in that lonely lane; he had used the barrow only to convey the kidnapped Form-master as far as the car.

The sound of the car died away into silence.

Then Billy Bunter at last stirred.

Shaking from head to foot, white as chalk, the frightened fat Owl crept from the hut, and, after one terrified blink round him, started for the road

fast as his trembling fat legs could carry him.

VERY SUDDEN!

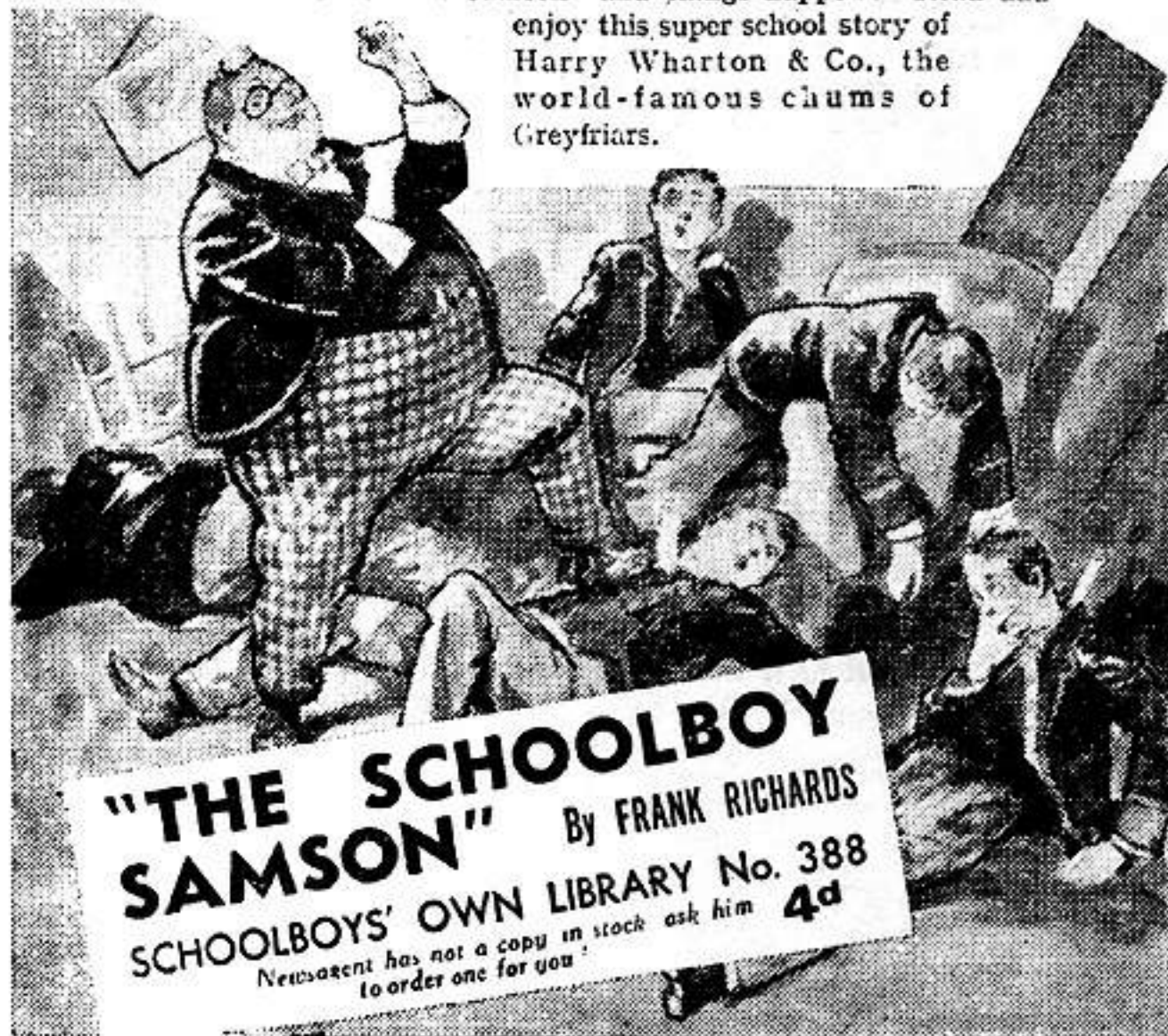
"TELEGRAM, sir!" said Trotter. "Thank you, Trotter!"

The House-page laid the buff envelope on the Head's writing-table, and left the study.

Bunny-Rabbit becomes Lion!

In the ordinary course of events, Billy Bunter, the fat and tattooed Owl of the Greyfriars Remove, hasn't the strength of a bunny-rabbit. Suddenly he blossoms out as **STRONG BUNTER**, with the muscles of a Samson—and things happen! Read and

enjoy this super school story of Harry Wharton & Co., the world-famous chums of Greyfriars.



"THE SCHOOLBOY SAMSON" By FRANK RICHARDS
SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY No. 388
Newspaper has not a copy in stock ask him 4d
to order one for you!

Dr. Locke picked it up and slit the envelope with a paper-knife.

Dr. Locke had been having a happy hour with Sophocles, being at leisure on a half-holiday. He had rather expected Mr. Quelch to drop in for a chat over that abstruse author—the knotty points of Sophocles being a

favourite topic with the Head and his old friend Quelch.

But Quelch had not come in. Probably, the Head thought, he was resting in his study after his very late hours the night before.

The last thing in the world the Head would have expected was a tele-

gram from Mr. Quelch—whom he supposed, at that moment, to be not more than twenty yards distant—not having noticed the Remove master go out that afternoon.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the

(Continued on next page.)

Another **SHEERLUCK JONES** Story

JONES — THE MASTER SPY!

By **PETER TODD**

SHEERLUCK JONES put down the letter he had been reading and ate two sardines and a sausage with a thoughtful air. It would have been better to use a fork; but the great detective never worried about trifles like that.

"In war-time, Spotson," he said gravely, "spies are always as thick as What's-a-Name."

"Thieves, Jones," nodded Dr. Spotson gravely.

"My dear Spotson, I was not talking about thieves. I said spies, not thieves. They are as thick as What's-a-Name."

"Blackberries in autumn, no doubt, Jones."

"Is the man demented?" cried Jones, exasperated. "If you will use your ears, Spotson, I was talking of spies, not blackberries. I said they were as thick as What's-a-Name."

"Leaves in Vallombrosa, Jones."

Seeing that it was perfectly useless to pursue the subject, Jones shrugged wearily.

"They are as thick as your head, Spotson. Leave it at that. I have to-day received an urgent letter from Sir Herbert Hornswoggle himself on the subject of the spy menace. Our services are needed, Spotson. The country needs us." He passed the letter across the breakfast table.

Dr. Spotson took it reverently. A letter from the Chief of the Secret Service—a man who was so secret that no one had ever seen him.

The doctor read it with trembling eyes.

"Sir,—Now that this here war has broken out, you will doubtless start looking for spies. Keep off the grass, for pity's sake. The problem is quite ticklish enough, without you poking your oar in.

"With love,

"H. HORNSWOGGLE (Sir)."

"We must act at once, Jones!" cried Spotson, starting up from his chair. "Let us away to the local gasworks. Spies always prowl round the gasworks, I believe."

"I am aware of that, Spotson," replied the great detective coldly, "but I object to the odour. Spies also prowl round reservoirs. Let us visit a reservoir, Spotson."

At the local reservoir, however, they saw only one man. He had a false beard and blue spectacles, and was prowling for all he was worth.

Jones spoke to the fellow. "Excuse me, sir, have you noticed any spies round here?"

"Ach, no, mein vriend," replied the man, in a false voice. "I no spies haf seen. I a special gonstable am."

"Are you searching for spies, too?"

"Himmel! No! I for somezing I have dropped am looking."

"In that case, perhaps I can help you. I am Sheerluck Jones, the great detective."

"Sheerluck Jones! Donnerwetter!"

The man was startled. He gave Jones a sharp shove and Spotson another. They went backwards into the country's drinking-water with two loud splashes. The man removed himself across the horizon at a fast speed.

Jones and Spotson rose to the surface, blowing bubbles.

"Dear me, Jones!" said the latter. "I am extremely moist. I really do wish, in the circumstances, that we had visited the gasworks instead."

"Tut-tut, Spotson. You have gasworks on the brain. The man was extremely careless, no doubt, but, in a way, it was fortunate. I have found the object for which he was searching." And he climbed out of the damp and showed a small gold badge, with its pin sticking upwards.

"Marvellous, Jones! How did you detect that?"

"Elementary, my dear Spotson! I fell on the sharp end!" He stuck the badge into the lapel of his jacket. "If we encounter the man again, I will return it. Meanwhile, we must resume our search for spies. Onward, Spotson!"

"To the gasworks, Jones?"

"No!" howled the detective. "There are no spies whatever at the gasworks. We must comb London, Spotson. I will comb the fashionable hotels of the West End. You can comb the park benches and the embankments, and so on."

"Very good, Jones."

"And since you will not need to spend any money in those places, you can hand me your spare cash to assist me in my search."

Armed with Spotson's bank balance, the great detective marched into the Hotel Terrifique and ordered a seven-course dinner. He was just starting on the poisson (fish) with pommes de terre (chips), when a large and bulky envelope was tucked into his shirt-front. He looked round quickly, but the tucker-in had vanished.

The envelope was marked "British Secret Plans. Handle With Care." Jones gazed at it in stupefaction.



While he gazed, another envelope was dropped down the back of his neck. It was marked "More Secret Plans. This Side Up." At the same time, he felt someone sliding a roll of secret plans up his trousers-leg.

He knew at once that all the fashionable throng in the hotel were spies—but why were they giving the plans to him? Before he could answer that question, the door was flung open and a herd of police marched in.

"All spies—reach for the sky!" commanded the police inspector.

Everyone raised their hands. The inspector strode across and seized Jones by the jugular vein.

"Gotcha!" he hissed. "You are the Master Spy—you are wearing the secret badge. And—Ha, ha, your pockets are full of plans! Cummer-longer me, you dastardly cur!"

Jones was hurled into a Black Maria and driven away to the dungeons. His head was spinning. He understood now why the plans had been passed to him. The badge in his lapel was that of a Master Spy.

Jones was jerked into the dock to stand his trial.

"He looks desperate," said the judge, peering at the amazed detective keenly. "One can see in his face that he is up to no good. I find him guilty. Gimme the black cap!"

"Look here!" bawled Jones angrily. "You've got it all wrong. I'm not a spy. I'm Sheerluck Jones, the great detective!"

A gasp ran through the court. The judge scratched his head feebly.

"Sorry, old bean!" he stuttered. "Didn't know it was you! But if you're not him, where are you—I mean, where is he?"

"Here!" cried a loud voice, and the faithful Spotson appeared, hauling in the Master Spy on the end of a rope.

He was quickly relieved of his burden by the police, who threw the spy into the dock in place of Jones.

The great detective grasped his humble follower by the hand.

"Spotson," he said, choking, "you have saved me from a terrible fate. But for you, I might have got seven days, or even forty shillings." He shuddered. "Where did you catch him?" he asked.

Spotson beamed happily. "At the gasworks, Jones!"

"Ah! I knew he was there," nodded the great detective. "I deduced it. I was sure of it all along."

And they wandered, hand in hand, back to Shaker Street.

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Head, staring at the telegram he had taken from the envelope.

He gazed at it blankly.

It had been handed in at Folkestone Post Office, and read:

"Please excuse haste. Phone call. Nephew wounded. Crossing to France.—H. S. QUELCH."

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head blankly. He fairly blinked at that telegram.

He was not aware that Mr. Quelch had a nephew with the British Forces in France. Familiar friends as they were, Quelch had never mentioned it to him.

Still, there was nothing surprising in the circumstance, though Quelch had not referred to it. There were few middle-aged gentlemen who had not a son or a nephew in the armed forces.

But this sudden departure of the Remove master, without a word of farewell, without leave asked or given, was astonishing.

Serious as the news was, concerned as he naturally was for Quelch in the circumstances, the Head could not help a feeling of annoyance.

Leave of absence, of course, he would instantly have given in such a state of affairs. But, hurried as Quelch had doubtless been, surely he could have given a few minutes to his headmaster—at least, a word before he hurried away.

But the Head had not even seen him—had not even been aware that he was not in the school.

Dr. Locke frowned a little. This was not only very irregular, but really it savoured of negligence, indeed of want of respect—very unusual in a man like Mr. Quelch.

But the momentary annoyance quickly passed. If Quelch had acted like this, it must mean that that phone call, telling him that his nephew was wounded, had thrown him off his balance—it must mean that the matter was deadly serious—that one more young life was passing in the price paid for the downfall of Nazi tyranny.

Anyhow, Quelch was gone.

While the Head had been sitting there, half-expecting him to drop into the study for one of those pleasant discussions of knotty Sophoclean points, he had been speeding away as fast as the railway could carry him, heading for Folkestone, to cross the Channel to France.

He had given no hint when he would be likely to return. That, no doubt, depended on circumstances, and doubtless a letter would follow—in any case, his return could hardly be soon.

The Remove were left suddenly without a master.

That was a matter to which the Head had to give attention.

For nearly a week Greyfriars had been without an art master—between the departure of Mr. Woosey and the arrival of Mr. Lamb. But that was a matter of small moment—drawing sets could be put off. A Form-master's absence was a more disturbing matter.

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A temporary master would have to be engaged, to carry on till Quelch came back. Arrangements had to be made to deal with the Remove, until somebody came to take charge of them.

Dr. Locke had to consult various masters and arrange an entirely new time-table for the Lower Fourth, and with that duty on hand, he relinquished Sophocles and gave his attention to that task.

Thus it happened that a little later the Head was busy with pen and paper when there was a tap at his study door and Mr. Lamb entered.

Dr. Locke had seen nothing of Mr. Lamb since he had left him in Common-room early that afternoon. He had expected to see him, and had been surprised that he had not appeared.

Now that he did appear, the Head gave him an inquiring look.

"I must ask you to excuse me, sir," said Mr. Lamb diffidently. "It unfortunately happened that some of my luggage went astray on the railway, and I have been to the station making inquiries."

"I hope your inquiries have had a satisfactory result, Mr. Lamb," said the Head politely.

"Not quite, sir—a suitcase appears to have gone astray—but one must expect these little difficulties in war-time," said Mr. Lamb. "No doubt it will turn up in a day or two. I believe, sir, that you desired to discuss with me certain matters in connection with the drawing sets, when you were at leisure. If you are busy now—"

He glanced at the paper over which the Head's pen lingered.

"A very unexpected event has occurred, Mr. Lamb," said the Head. "Mr. Quelch has been suddenly called away—"

"Mr. Quelch?" repeated the new art master.

"Yes—the master of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form. I am very glad you are here, Mr. Lamb—you will help to fill up the gap, until a temporary master can be engaged for the Remove."

"I shall be very happy, sir," said the new master. "Is Mr. Quelch likely to be long absent?"

"That I can hardly say," answered Dr. Locke. "Certainly not less than a week, I think, as he is under the necessity of crossing into France, and will probably be delayed in that country."

"Then I may be able to make myself unexpectedly useful, sir," said Mr. Lamb, with a respectful smile. "Apart from the drawing sets, I am quite capable, if you so desire, of taking a junior Form in several subjects—such as English literature, history, or geography."

Dr. Locke looked relieved and pleased.

"If that is so, Mr. Lamb, it will be a very great help," he said, adding courteously, "if you have no objection to doing so."

"It will be a pleasure to me, sir, to make myself useful in any way."

"Then I shall gladly accept your offer, Mr. Lamb!" said the Head.

And, a little later, the news spread in the Remove that there was a new paper on the board, referring to that Form; and the Removites learned therefrom that their Form-master had been called away from the school, and that his place would be taken as a temporary measure by the new drawing master, Mr. Lamb.

BUNTER KNOWS!

"I SAY, you fellows!" It was a feeble squeak. Every fellow in the Rag looked round at Billy Bunter.

Really, Bunter looked rather like his own ghost. His fat face, usually ruddier than the cherry, was white as a sheet.

He tottered rather than walked into the Rag.

What was the matter with Bunter nobody could guess; but it was very clear that something was.

How Bunter had got back to the school after that fearful experience at the hut on the common he hardly knew. He had dragged himself along like a fellow in a nightmare—perpetually blinking over a fat shoulder, in terror of seeing a bearded face.

But here he was, at last—and he tottered into the Rag. He leaned on the table, gasped, and almost groaned.

"What the thump is up?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Bunter's look was really alarming.

"Quelch!" moaned Bunter.

"Quelch! What about Quelch?" asked the captain of the Remove, in amazement. "Not worrying about Quelch, are you?"

"Oh dear! Yes!"

"Haven't you had that six yet?" asked Johnny Bull. "Is that what you've got on your mind, you fat chump?"

"Oh dear! Oh, no! Oh crikey!"

"Well, what about Quelch?" asked Nugent. "He's gone, if you're worrying about that six—"

Bunter started.

"How do you know he's gone?" he gasped. "I haven't told anybody yet."

"No need for you to tell anybody, that I can see!" answered Nugent. "It's up on the board, in the Head's fist!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! This ain't a joking matter!"

"Who's joking, fathead?"

"Is the fat ass potty?" asked Bob Cherry, in wonder. "Everybody knows that Quelch is gone, Bunter. He was called away suddenly this afternoon—"

"Oh crikey!"

"We're going to have a lamb instead of a wolf in our Form-room from now on!" grinned Skinner.

"I say, you fellows, did you really know he was gone?"

"You fat chump, it's up on the board!" said Harry Wharton. "Mr. Lamb, the new man—the chap the Head brought up to Woosey's classroom to-day—is going to take the Remove while Quelch is away."

"But the Head can't know!" gasped Bunter. "Has he set the police after Quelch?"

"The what?" yelled all the juniors.
 "Mean to say the Head knows he's gone and hasn't told the police?" asked Bunter. "I can't make that out! Does he know Quelch is kidnapped?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Kidnapped!"

"Tell us another funny story!"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "Let Bunter get it out! He may have seen Quelch since he left—he must have gone while we were playing footer. Have you seen Quelch since he left the school, Bunter?"

"Haven't I!" groaned Bunter. "Oh dear!"

"Where did you see him, then?"

"On Courtfield Common!"

"On the road, do you mean, going to the station?"

"No; by the pond!"

"What the thump would Quelch be doing, wandering round the pond on the common?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I think he came to meet that man!" groaned Bunter. "It looked like it, to me! Oh dear!"

"What man?" yelled the juniors.

"I don't know! How should I know? An awful villain with a hairy face—all over beard and whiskers!" said Bunter. "He got Quelch—cosh!—right on the nut! Quelch went down like a skittle."

"Is this Bunter's latest?" asked Skinner.

"He was stunned!" moaned Bunter. "He never moved after that awful villain coshed him on the nut. Oh crikey! If that brute had known that I was in the hut, watching him—"

The hapless fat Owl shuddered from head to foot at the bare thought.

"Buck up, old bean!" said Bob. "You're all right here! For goodness' sake, get the rest out. You say a man with a hairy face knocked Quelch down and stunned him—phew!"

"And then he tied him up, and shifted him into a barrow, with sacks over him," said Bunter, his fat voice quavering. "Then he—he wheeled him away! Oh crikey! I heard a motor-car afterwards—I don't know how long afterwards—I suppose he stuck Quelch in the car! Oh dear!"

"This can't be true!" said Johnny Bull, staring at the fat Owl. "Why should anybody in the wide world cosh Quelch on the nut and hike him away?"

"Well, it sounds jolly steep!" said the captain of the Remove. "The Head knows Quelch is gone—he's put a notice on the board about it. He must think that Quelch is all right!"

"It's true!" howled Bunter. "That man's got Quelch—goodness knows why. I tell you he coshed him on the nut—"

Harry Wharton dropped a hand on a fat shoulder.

"If it's true, come to the Head," he said. "I'll come with you, if it's true."

"Oh! All right!" said Bunter.

Harry Wharton led the tottering fat Owl out of the Rag.

Bunter was going to the Head,

with the captain of the Remove, to tell that strange story—that meant that it was true!

THANKS TO BUNTER!

DR. LOCKE put up the receiver and turned from the telephone.

His eyes fixed on Billy Bunter—sitting on the edge of a chair in his study, blinking at him, his fat face pasty—still under the influence of the terror of his experience that afternoon.

The Head eyed him dubiously.

He had listened, in amazement and

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doubt, to Bunter's strange tale, mumbled and stuttered out by the terrified fat Owl. It was so strange a tale that he could hardly help doubting it, yet Bunter's looks seemed to testify to its truth.

"Bunter!" said the Head quietly.

"Oh dear! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"I have asked Inspector Grimes to call and hear what you have told me. He has promised to come immediately."

"Yes, sir!"

"You will repeat what you have told me to Mr. Grimes, Bunter."

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well. You may wait here," said Dr. Locke.

Bunter, it was clear, was prepared to repeat his tale to a police inspector. It was borne in on the headmaster's mind that it must be true, yet he glanced at the telegram that lay on his writing-table, in hopeless puzzlement.

There was nothing to be done but to wait until Inspector Grimes arrived, and leave the matter to his judgment. If this actually had happened, it was a bewildering puzzle to the Head. He could not begin to guess why any man could possibly have any motive for causing Mr. Quelch to disappear from the school. And there was the telegram—apparently handed in by the Remove master at Folkestone.

Dr. Locke endeavoured—not very successfully—to fix his attention upon a Greek paper for the Sixth, while Bunter sat on the edge of the chair, every now and then shivering at his recollection of the strange and tragic scene at the hut on the common.

But there was not long to wait. Within a quarter of an hour a car was heard outside.

Inspector Grimes, portly and ruddy, was shown into the Head's study. He lost no time; and the keen expression on his face indicated that he had been impressed by what the headmaster had told him over the telephone.

"This is the boy, Mr. Grimes—" said Dr. Locke.

Inspector Grimes gave Billy Bunter a scrutinising look.

The fat Owl blinked at him.

"I am glad, sir, that you lost no time in informing me of this," said the inspector. "I shall be very glad to question this boy."

"It is a very extraordinary story, Mr. Grimes—it seems almost impossible—but—" Dr. Locke shook his head helplessly. "Please question Bunter."

"Now, Master Bunter," said the Courtfield inspector, "please tell me exactly what has happened."

Billy Bunter mumbled out his story again.

Dr. Locke listened in silence, the inspector interrupting Bunter every now and then with a question, keeping the rambling Owl to the point.

The inspector's ruddy face was grave, and his keen eyes seemed to grow keener and keener as he listened.

"Thank you, Master Bunter!" said Mr. Grimes at last, when every possible detail had been extracted.

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from the mumbling Owl, and he had made voluminous notes. "I am much obliged to you, Master Bunter! I think you may leave us for the present."

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

And he rolled out of the Head's study.

"I gather, sir, that you regard this boy's extraordinary story as a statement of fact?" said Dr. Locke, when the door had closed on the Owl of the Remove.

"Perfectly so, sir!" said Mr. Grimes, shutting his notebook with a snap. "It was an extraordinary chance, but a very fortunate one, that the boy happened to be on the spot."

"You believe, then, that Mr. Quelch has been kidnapped, and is now a prisoner in lawless hands?" exclaimed the Head.

"That does not admit of doubt, sir!" said Mr. Grimes. "And, in the circumstances, it is not a wholly surprising occurrence."

Dr. Locke looked at him.

"To me," he said, "it is so extraordinary, so utterly amazing, that it is difficult for me to believe, even after hearing your opinion, Mr. Grimes. That my old friend Quelch can have had an enemy so ruthless, so dastardly, so unscrupulous, is almost inconceivable—"

"He had no such enemy, sir, before yesterday!" said Mr. Grimes.

The Head started.

"Yesterday," he repeated. "I fail to see—"

"To be more precise, last night, sir!" said Mr. Grimes. "Immediately you told me on the telephone what that boy had stated, I had little doubt that the story was correct, and little or rather, no doubt of the hand that struck the blow."

"I must confess that I am quite in the dark," said the bewildered headmaster. "Why any man—"

"Mr. Quelch, sir, is the only man who has ever seen Slim Jim, the cracksman, with his mask off!" said Inspector Grimes.

"Oh!" ejaculated the Head.

He discerned now what was in the police inspector's mind.

"One man, and one man only, has an interest in removing Mr. Quelch from the scene," said Mr. Grimes. "That man is the crook he saw late

last night at the park wall of Popper Court."

"Oh!" repeated the Head.

"That man, sir," said the inspector, "has somehow discovered the name of the man who saw him; and who was able to identify him. By what device he tricked Mr. Quelch into meeting him at that lonely place, we do not at present know—but the fact is clear."

"But Bunter's description of the man who struck down Mr. Quelch does not in the least resemble Mr. Quelch's description of the man he saw at Popper Court, Mr. Grimes—" exclaimed the Head. "Bunter describes a man with a heavy beard and moustache—while the other man—"

"Had the man met Mr. Quelch in his own proper person, sir, Mr. Quelch would have recognised him at a glance, and would have been immediately placed on his guard," said the inspector. "Obviously, he was disguised, and a false beard was the easiest method—"

"Oh!" Dr. Locke nodded slowly. "I understand. Then—you believe that—"

"I believe, sir, that Mr. Quelch is now in the hands of Slim Jim, the cracksman!" said Inspector Grimes. "But for this boy Bunter, nothing would have been known of it or even suspected. But now, sir—the inspector gave his notebook another tap—"now, sir, owing to this boy Bunter, we know the facts—and no stone will be left unturned to discover Mr. Quelch!"

The Greyfriars Remove the next day was taken by Mr. Lamb, in the place of their absent Form-master. That would have been quite a normal occurrence, but for Billy Bunter's startling tale. Now, however, the absence of the Remove master was far from being taken as a normal occurrence. The Remove, and all Greyfriars, fairly buzzed with excitement over the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Quelch.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss "THE PHANTOM OF THE MOAT HOUSE" in next Saturday's GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the MAGNET.)

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Just when Harry Wharton & Co. are happily looking forward to breaking up for the Christmas vac., Greyfriars hears the startling news that Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, has vanished as if into thin air, and not the remotest clue exists to his present whereabouts. Alarmed for the safety of his valued friend and trusty colleague, Dr. Locke enlists the services of his relative—Ferrers Locke, the celebrated Baker Street detective—to assist in solving the mystery. It is, indeed, the strangest case that has ever come Ferrers Locke's way.

Space will not allow me to give details of the other Christmas features in this grand number, but you can all rest assured that they will both amuse and please you. If you've not already ordered your copy, do so NOW!

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Till we meet again, then, in next week's Grand Christmas Number, I wish you one and all happy reading.

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