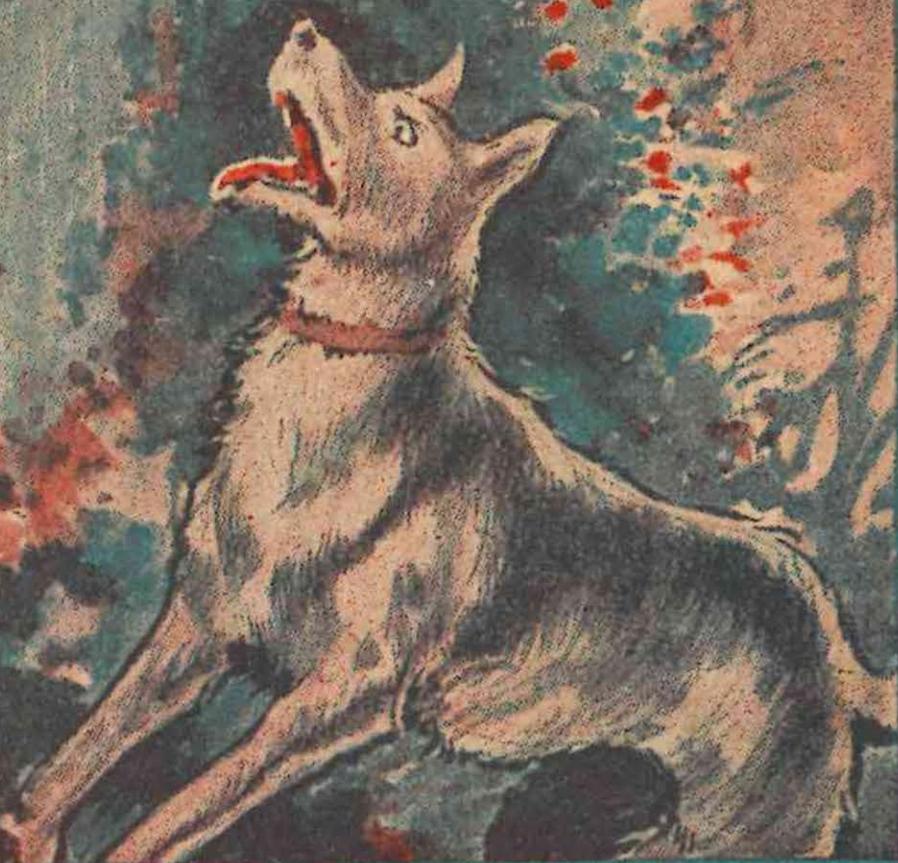
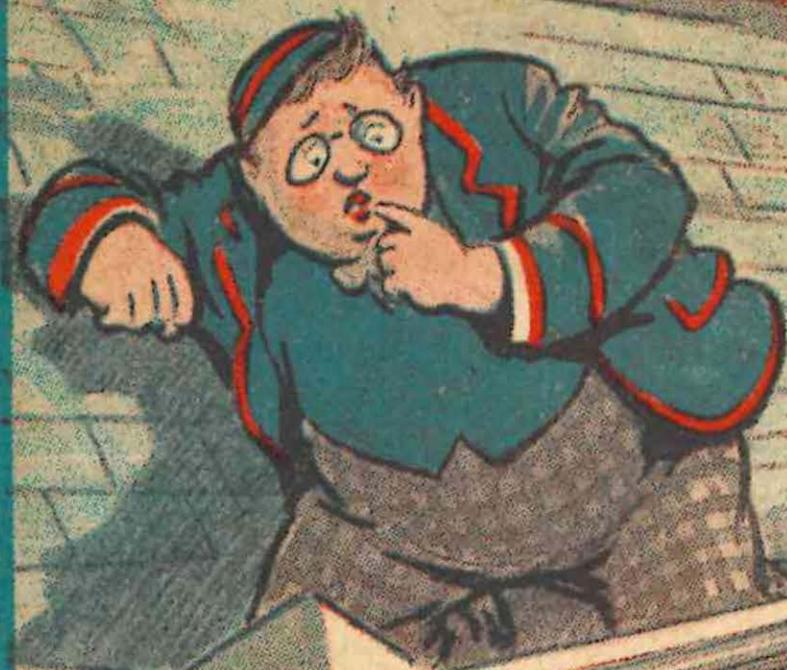


# DETECTIVE BUNTER!

BY  
FRANK  
RICHARDS



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# == MODERN BOY ==

THE 1938 PAPER FOR THE 1938 BOY!

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# DETECTIVE BUNTER!

(by)  
FRANK RICHARDS

Where is Flip, the waif of the Greyfriars Second who has been kidnapped? Both the police and a detective are baffled. But the kidnapper doesn't reckon on "detective" BILLY BUNTER and his blind luck!

## CHAPTER 1.

### Help for Bunter!

"WILL you fellows stop?"  
"No!"

"Beasts!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"I'm tired!"

"Twenty-seven!" said Bob Cherry gravely.

"Wha-a-at?" Billy Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles, in the thickening shadows of Redclyffe Wood. "What? What do you mean, you silly ass?"

"What I say," answered Bob. "Twenty-seven."

"What do you mean—twenty-seven?" howled Bunter.

"You've said you're tired twenty-seven times! That's the twenty-seventh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove chortled.

Billy Bunter did not chortle.

He glared at the chums of the Remove with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"You—you silly chump!" he gasped. "Think I want your silly jokes, when I'm tired and hungry—famished, in fact? My legs are dropping off!"

"Buck up, old fat bean!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Only another three miles!"

Groan!

Billy Bunter stopped and leaned on the trunk of a tree. Wharton had said it was three miles home to Greyfriars. To judge by the effect of his statement on Billy Bunter, he might have said that it was three thousand miles.

"Come on, old fat man!" said Frank Nugent.

Groan!

"Look here, Bunter, we shall be late for call-over at this rate!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Get a move on!"

Groan!

The Famous Five came to a halt.

Billy Bunter, leaning on the tree, seemed a fixture there. Bunter was tired. He had walked a mile. A mile contains 1,760 yards. Every mile, therefore, contained 1,759 yards too many for Billy Bunter to negotiate with comfort.

The early winter dusk was falling on the woods. A sharp walk was needed for the juniors to arrive at the school in time for call-over. So far from putting up a sharp walk, Bunter did not seem disposed to walk at all. He leaned on the tree and groaned.

"You howling ass!" said Bob Cherry. "Are you thinking of making a night of it here?"

"Beast!"

"Let's get on!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. "Don't you go and leave me alone here! I'm not going to be robbed and murdered by footpads and tramps to please you!"

"Get a move on, idiot!"

"Beast! I'm tired!"

"Let's up-end him and roll him along like a barrel!" suggested Bob Cherry. "It's downhill most of the way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" groaned Bunter. "I'm worn out! I've got a stitch in my side—it feels like plumbago, or—or pneumonia! I've walked miles and miles and miles and miles——"

"We're only a mile from Redclyffe, fathead!"

"Then you've lost the way!" said Bunter. "Just like you to lose the way! I know we've covered miles and miles. Oh dear!"

"What did you come over to Red-

clyffe for, you fat chump?" growled Johnny Bull. "Lot you cared about a football match!"

"How was I to know you silly fat-heads were going to walk back?" gasped Bunter. "We came over by train. Why couldn't we go back by train—if you were too jolly mean to stand a taxi?"

"The farefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Snort from Bunter.

"That's you fellows all over! Mean and stingy! Always thinking about money! I call it sordid!"

"Why, you—you—you——" gasped Johnny Bull.

"You frabjous owl!" roared Bob Cherry. "We came over by train to be in time to see the match. We're walking back because we haven't a lot of money to chuck away on railway fares. You stuck Wharton for your fare over to Redclyffe, anyhow, you fat villain!"

"I'm going to settle that as soon as we get back to the school," answered Bunter. "I told Wharton so! I'm expecting a postal order——"

"Shut up and come on!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter continued to lean on the tree. The Famous Five stood and stared at him, in the falling gloom, in considerable exasperation. Even the good-natured, dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh showed signs of exasperation. Bunter, as a matter of fact, was rather trying to any fellow's temper.

"It's our own fault," grunted Johnny Bull. "We shouldn't have let the fat boulder hook on to us!"

"Beast!"

"And I'm jolly well not going to get lines for missing call-over because he's too fat and lazy to shift! I'm going on."

"I say, you fellows——"

Johnny Bull made a movement to go. But as the other fellows did not follow, he stopped again, with a snort.

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "We can't leave the fat idiot here—he doesn't even know the way! He hasn't sense enough to get out of the wood if we leave him!"

"Beast!"

"Well, are we going to carry him?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"I say, you fellows, that's a good idea!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "Two of you can join hands, you know, and make a chair for me——"

"Oh, crikey!"

"You can take it in turns," said Bunter. "There's five of you, and if you take it in turns, you'll manage all right. We'll stop and rest every now and then. I'll risk being late for call-over! I hope I'm considerate!"

"You—you—you hope you're considerate!"

"Yes. I never was selfish, I hope."

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

"Well, what do you fellows think?" asked Bunter, blinking anxiously at the five dim faces under the shadowy trees.

"We'd better not tell you what we think, old bean," answered Wharton. "It couldn't be put in polite language."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Look here, you fat frump!" said Frank Nugent. "We've got to get on. It's another three miles——"

Groan!

"Might get a lift when we get out into the road. It's only a mile to the road, and——"

Groan!

"Oh, let's camp out here for the night!" said Johnny Bull, savagely sarcastic. "It's a nice, warm, cosy March night for camping out."

"My esteemed chums," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "I have a wheezy good idea! The absurd Bunter is too tired to walk——"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. "I—I can't take another step till I've had a rest—a long rest!"

"He is too terrifically tired even to start——"

"Much too tired!" said Bunter.

"It is therefore up to our ridiculous selves to give the esteemed Bunter assistance, my worthy chums."

"Thinking of carrying him?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! You shut up! Inky's not such a selfish beast as you are! Go on, Inky, and don't mind that beast!"

"Certainly, my esteemed Bunter! In the absurd circumstances," said the dusky junior from India's coral strand, "we are bound to help the ludicrous Bunter——"

"Well, how?" asked Wharton.

"The esteemed Bunter is too tired—or lazy—to take another step," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But it has occurred to my debilitated brain that if we all gathered round him and kicked him with terrific energy, he might be able to take many steps——"

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Why, you—you beast!" howled Bunter. "You're a worse beast than Bull."

"Let us, at all events, try this wheezy idea," suggested the Nabob of Bhanipur, "and perhapsfully it will be successful."

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Turn round, Bunter!"

"Lug him away from that tree!"

"Now then, all together!"

"I say, you fellows—yaroooh! I say, I'm going—Yoop! Stop kicking me, you beasts! I say, I'm not so tired after all. Yarooooop! I say, you fellows—Whoooooop! Beasts! Old chaps—Rotters—Dear old fellows—Yarooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter found that he could walk. He made the further discovery that he could run. With five chuckling juniors dribbling him like a very fat football, he put on a good speed. And even if his fat limbs were tired, it was

obvious that there was nothing the matter with his lungs. His yells awoke every echo in Redclyffe Woods.

"I say, you fellows— Yaroooh! I'm going—I—I can walk— Stoppit— Oh, crikey! Oh, lor'! Leave off! Ow! Wow!"

"Think you can walk now?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ow! Yes! Beast! Yes! Ow!"

"Well, if you want any further help, say the word!"

"The helpfulness will be terrific."

"Ow! Beast! Ow!"

Bunter plugged on. Tired as he was, he did not want any more help. Very much indeed he did not want any more.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Crooked!

"OOOOOOOH!" yelled Bunter suddenly.

Another quarter of a mile had been covered. Harry Wharton & Co. were tramping cheerily by the dusky footpath that wound through Redclyffe Woods. A walk of three or four miles, in keen frosty air, was rather a pleasure than a task to the sturdy chums of the Remove, awful as it was to Billy Bunter. And there was still a chance of getting in at Greyfriars before call-over if no more time was lost.

For a quarter of a mile Bunter had plugged on, grunting, but without a halt. He did not want to be helped on his way again, and it was obvious that the Famous Five were not going to carry him, though the fat Owl had so considerately offered to let them take it in turns. Hurree Singh's wheeze had proved successful—so far. The juniors were more than half-way through the woods, when Bunter uttered that sudden fearful yell, stumbled, and sat down.

"Ooooooooooooh!" roared Bunter.

"Oh, my own hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What is it now?"

"The kickfulness——" began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ow! I say, you fellows—— I've sprained my ankle!" groaned Bunter.

"You clumsy ass!"

"If that's what you call sympathetic, Bull——"

"Well, sit there as long as you like!" growled Johnny Bull. "I'm going on!"

"Ow! Help!"

Harry Wharton & Co. halted, and once more Johnny Bull followed the example of his comrades. That the fat Owl was malingering was the suspicion in every mind. Still, Bunter was just the ass to sprain his ankle. They stared at him as he sat and groaned.

"Look here——" said Harry.

"Ow! I think my ankle's broken!" groaned Bunter. "The pain is awful! Fearful! Excruciating!"

"Let us try the esteemed kickfulness——"

"Beast!"

"Hold on!" said Bob, laughing. "If the fat chump really has sprained his ankle, kicking won't do him any good."

"Kicking always does him good!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Look here, Bunter——"

"Oh dear! Go on and leave me!" said Bunter bitterly. "Leave me to perish of cold and hunger and awful agony! It would be like you fellows—after all I've done for-you! Ow!"

"Are you really hurt?" demanded Wharton.

"I'm suffering fearful agonies!" yelled Bunter. "I can't get up! I can't walk! If you fellows can carry me as far as the road, and get a lift——"

"Fathead!"

"Then leave me! Leave me to die!" moaned Bunter. "It's all your fault I'm landed like this! If you'd let me stand a taxi back, we should be in by this time. You know jolly well that my idea was to have tea at the Redclyff Tea-rooms, and a taxi back——"

"Shut up, fathead! Let's look at his beastly ankle!" said Bob. "If th

fat duffer can't walk, something will have to be done."

"Ow! Don't touch my ankle! The pain——"

"Look here——"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Wharton. "What a go!"

The Famous Five stared down at Bunter, exasperated and perplexed. No doubt a fellow who had sprained his ankle was deserving of deep sympathy. But they could not feel at all sure that it was not spoof. They knew their Bunter only too well.

Billy Bunter blinked up at them through his big spectacles. He was quite assured that the Famous Five would not go on and leave him alone in the dusky woods. He was not going to walk any farther—at least, without a good long rest. It was a difficult situation, and it was up to the Famous Five to solve the difficulty—after landing Bunter in this. They had landed him in it—by refusing to let him stand a taxi home from Redclyffe. A taxi home from Redclyffe would only have been fifteen shillings—which would have been three shillings each from the five—all of which Bunter was prepared to settle out of a postal order that he was expecting. They had not seemed to see, somehow.

What was going to be done now was rather a mystery. Bunter saw no reason why two fellows should not make a "chair" for him, and carry him onward. The other fellows saw a lot of reasons why they shouldn't.

"If he really can't walk——" said Nugent, at last.

"Ow! My ankle's broken, I think——"

"Bother the fat idiot!" growled Johnny Bull. "I jolly well believe he's gammoning all the time."

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter.

"You ass, what's that fearful row about?"

"The pain—the awful pain—the excruciating agony——" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here, something's got to be done!" said Wharton. "We can't get any sort of a lift till we get to the road, and it's more than half a mile, unless——"

He paused.

"Well, what?" asked Bob. "We can't stay here."

"I believe we're not very far from old Joyce, the woodcutter's cottage," said Harry. "It's right in the middle of Redclyffe Wood. He has a pony and cart that he carries the faggots in. Might get him to give Bunter a lift in his cart. Five bob would do it——"

"I say, you fellows, I'll stand the five bob!" said Bunter. "You can leave that to me. I'm not asking you fellows to pay my expenses."

"Got it about you?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I suppose one of you fellows can lend me the five bob, if I settle out of my postal order to-morrow——"

"I'm going to kick him!" hissed Johnny Bull. "I'm jolly well going to kick him——"

"Hold on, old chap! If the fat chump's really damaged——"

"I don't believe he is. It's all gammon."

"Well, he says he is. Look here, there's a track somewhere that runs straight to Joyce's cottage; we can't be far from it," said Harry. "Old Joyce would jump at five bob to drive the fat chump to the school—and it's worth that to get rid of him."

"Oh, really, Wharton! If you don't like my company——"

"Great pip!"

"This is what comes of being mean. We could have got a taxi all the way for fifteen bob. Now I've got to jolt along in a beastly cart—to save a miserable ten bob! And with this awful pain in my back——"

"Where?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"I mean, in my ankle."

"It's gammon!" snorted Johnny Bull. "Just gammon!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

Harry Wharton was staring about him in the thickening dusk. Somewhere in the depths of Redclyffe Woods was the woodcutter's cottage; but it was a lonely and remote spot, and not easy to place. The captain of the Remove remembered that he had seen it during a summer ramble two terms ago, but Redclyffe Woods were not so familiar to the Greyfriars fellows as the locality nearer the school. While he looked about him and thought it out, his comrades waited, and Bunter contributed a series of groans in order that his sufferings should not be overlooked.

"I think I can find it all right," said Harry, at last. "I know it's not far from here. The track turns off this path on the left, I know. It's not far away. We shall see a light, too, I expect. Come on, Bunter! We shall have to help you along to the cottage."

Wharton and Bob Cherry grasped the fat junior and lifted him. Billy Bunter hung on them heavily. He gave them all his weight to bear, and his weight was rather uncommon.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob. "Ease off a bit, old bean! You're folding me up like a pocket-knife!"

"Hold on, you silly idiot!"

"Brace up!" gasped Wharton.

"I—I say, you fellows, hold me! I can't walk if it's far. I'm suffering frightful agonies."

"Shall I help from behind?" asked Johnny Bull. "A jolly good kick would set him going."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Oh, let's get on!" groaned Bob. "The sooner the better, with this hippopotamus to lug about."

The juniors re-started after the interval, as it were. Wharton and Bob staggered along, with Bunter's fat arms grasping their shoulders, and the fat Owl's terrific weight thrown on them. Fortunately, the distance proved

not to be great. Quite soon they came on the spot where the track to Joyce's cottage branched off from the main path.

"Here's the place!" gasped Wharton. "We ought to see the lights of the cottage from here."

"Can't see any lights," grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, I'm sure it's this way."

"Hark!"

From the distant darkness came the deep bay of a dog. Evidently that sound came from some human habitation, and the only habitation within three miles was the woodcutter's lonely cottage. It assured the juniors that they were on the right route, and they turned into the dim track and tramped on towards the cottage. The baying of the dog, which sounded like that of a large and powerful animal, was heard again, and yet again, as they advanced, but not a glimmer of light was to be seen.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here we are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he stumbled against a gate in the darkness.

And the juniors came to a halt. And Wharton and Bob, gasping, let Bunter slide to the earth, where he sat and spluttered.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A Narrow Escape!

"THANK goodness!" gasped Harry Wharton.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove was no weakling, but Billy Bunter's terrific weight had told severely upon him. He stood gasping for breath. Bob Cherry, breathing hard and deep, leaned on the gate.

"I say, you fellows, buck up!" said Bunter. "It's jolly cold, you know. Don't hang about wasting time."

"Shut up!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Open the gate, one of you chaps!" said Harry.

"It seems to be locked," said Frank

Nugent, who was fumbling at the gate. "What the thump does Joyce lock his gate for? Nobody about here to pinch his faggots, I suppose?"

"Sure it's locked?" asked Harry, in surprise.

"Well, it won't open."

Wharton tried the gate. It was a solid gate, built strongly of wood, and securely locked. The woodcutter's cottage stood in a large garden, which was surrounded by a fence. Fence and gate were both of solid construction, and could not be seen through; and they were six feet high. Harry Wharton made a jump, caught the top of the gate with his hands, drew himself up, and looked over.

He could see the cottage in the thick dusk, a dozen yards away. There was no glimmer of light from any of the front windows, but he could discern that the wooden shutters were closed, so it was possible that there was a light within—unseen.

He dropped back from the gate.

"Looks as if there's nobody there," he said. "But Joyce has a wife and two sons, and they can't all be out. If the men are cutting wood at a distance, they mayn't have got in from work yet."

"Oh, what rotten luck!"

Another groan from Bunter.

"Bang on the blessed gate!" said Johnny Bull. "If there's anybody at home, they'll hear that."

Wharton shook his head.

"If Mrs. Joyce is alone there, she wouldn't be likely to come out and open the gate. This is a jolly lonely place, and she might think it was a tramp. There was a man robbed by a tramp in this wood not long ago."

"Well, what's going to be done?"

"I think I'll nip over the gate and knock at the door," said Harry. "If Joyce is out, Mrs. Joyce knows me, and she might trust me with the pony and cart."

"That's a good idea."

"Look out for the dog," said Bob.

"We heard a dog as we came along."

"That's all right. I know Joyce's dog. I've often seen him around with Joyce and the cart when he's selling faggots."

"Go it, then!"

"I say, you fellows, you might buck up!" said Billy Bunter plaintively. "I'm cold."

"Shut up, you fat fraud!"

"When I'm suffering fearful agonies I——"

"Give us a rest."

"Beast!"

Harry Wharton clambered over the gate and dropped inside. He had no doubt that, if her men folk were absent, Mrs. Joyce would be keeping gate and door carefully locked in that solitary spot; but it would be easy to speak through the door and reassure her. It was likely enough that she would agree to lend him the pony and cart, knowing that he belonged to Greyfriars. Otherwise, it was difficult to know what was to be done with Bunter.

He crossed the yard quickly towards the cottage, and reached the porch at the door. As he did so there was a sound of pattering feet in the yard.

It was the dog which had apparently been on the other side of the house, and whose keen ears had caught his footsteps.

Wharton turned round towards the approaching animal. He knew the woodcutter's dog, and was not alarmed. But the next moment he gave a convulsive start, and his heart almost leaped into his mouth.

It was not Joyce's half-bred collie that was coming round the house. It was a huge Alsatian—a brute that Wharton had never seen before, and that certainly could not have belonged to the woodcutter. And the briefest glance was enough to show that it was a fierce and savage animal.

A deep-throated growl came from the great beast as it sighted Wharton,

and there was a glimmer of bared teeth in the dusk.

The schoolboy's heart throbbed.

It was not the woodcutter's dog. It was a strange animal that did not know him, and it was going to attack him—there was not the slightest doubt on that point. The brute's eyes almost flamed at him as it approached.

"Oh!" panted Wharton.

He was taken utterly by surprise, but, fortunately, he did not for a second lose his presence of mind. With his bare hands he had no chance whatever in a struggle with the huge, powerful brute. And his blood ran almost cold at the sight of the fearful teeth, and the sound of ferocity from the deep, muscular throat. But he did not lose his courage. There was no time to bang at the door and obtain admittance. The brute would have been upon him before the door could have been opened, even if there was anyone within to open it, of which he was not sure. Startled as he was, his heart almost in his mouth, Wharton acted promptly, and did not lose a moment. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as he raced back to the gate.

If he had needed anything to spur him on, the savage growl behind him would have done so. It sounded horribly like the growl of a tiger. The great brute was rushing after him, and Wharton could almost feel the sharp fangs burying themselves in his flesh.

How he reached the gate he hardly knew. Never in his life had he covered the ground so quickly; the swiftest rush on the football field was a crawl to it. But he reached the gate and made a wild leap, and his arms came over the top, his legs were drawn up convulsively behind him, and he heard the snap of savage teeth that barely missed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What——"

"Harry——"

"What the thump——"

Harry Wharton bundled over the

gate, and dropped in a breathless heap, panting and gasping. From the other side of the gate came the fierce baying of the disappointed Alsatian.

Nugent caught his chum, and helped him up. Wharton stood unsteadily, white as chalk, panting.

"Harry! What——"

"The—the dog——"

Wharton's voice was almost inarticulate.

"But you know Joyce's dog——"

"It's not Joyce's dog! Oh, crumbs!" Wharton shuddered. "He nearly had me! Oh, scissors!"

"I say, you fellows, if Wharton's afraid of a dog——"

"It's a big Alsatian!" gasped Wharton. "It's not Joyce's dog; it can't belong to him. It's a fearful beast, but it's worth a lot of money. It can't belong to Joyce. Goodness knows how it got there. It's nearly as big as a pony, and its teeth—— Oh, crikey!"

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Listen to the brute! Sounds like a jolly old bloodhound!"

Bob pulled himself up to the top of the gate and glanced over. One glimpse of the Alsatian was enough for him. The great brute eyed him with eyes of flame, and made a leap at the gate. Bob tumbled back in a great hurry, his face quite pale.

"Harry, old man—— Great pip! You've had a frightfully narrow escape—— Oh, crumbs!"

"I—I can't make it out!" gasped Wharton. "Joyce may not be living here now—he may have let or sold the place. That dog can't be his, anyhow. Oh, my hat!" He shuddered. "I—I suppose the brute was right to go for me, coming in as I did. He seems to be left to guard the place! But—but if he'd got me!"

"They oughtn't to leave a dog like that loose in the yard!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, I suppose one oughtn't to get over the gate, if you come to that,"

said Harry. "Of course, I never dreamed that——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"That's all very well," said Bunter. "But if Wharton's afraid to go to the cottage because of a silly dog, what are we going to do? I can tell you I'm jolly cold, and hungry, too!"

"I suppose this fence is safe!" said Nugent, rather uneasily. "That brute sounds as if he would tear us to pieces if he can get at us. If he got through the fence——"

"Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter bounded to his feet! His sprained ankle was quite forgotten at the bare suggestion that the savage Alsatian might get loose.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter. "Come on!"

Bunter started! He fairly raced away along the track towards the main path. The Famous Five stared after him, almost in stupefaction.

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton. "Your ankle——"

"Come on!" shrieked Bunter.

He vanished into the shadows.

"Why, the—the—the fat villain!" gasped Bob. "His ankle's not sprained—he was spoofing all the time!"

"I told you he was spoofing!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Why, I—I—I'll——"

"After him!" gasped Wharton. "Kick him all the way to Greyfriars! Pulling our leg all the time! After him!"

The Famous Five rushed in pursuit! It was evident, from the rate at which Bunter was going, that there was nothing wrong with his ankle! The difficult question of transport was solved, after all—the hint that the Alsatian might get through the fence had solved it!

With feelings that could not be expressed in words—which could only be expressed, in fact, by kicking Bunter—the Famous Five rushed after the fat Owl.

But they did not overtake him soon. Bunter, no doubt, was tired, and undoubtedly he was slack and lazy. But he forgot that he was tired, and forgot that he was lazy, at the bare idea of a ferocious Alsatian on his track. He fairly flew.

The juniors were far from the lonely cottage, far from the sound of the Alsatian's deep bay, when they overtook Bunter at last. He was in the main path, going strong, when they reached him.

After they reached him he was going stronger still!

Thud, thud, thud, thud!

"Yaroooooh! Whooooop!"

Thud, thud, thud!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

How many kicks landed on Bunter he never knew! He felt as if they numbered thousands. He yelled and roared, and roared and yelled, and his fat little legs fairly twinkled as he flew. Behind him came the Famous Five, letting out a kick every now and then to keep Bunter on the go.

It really looked as if they might reach Greyfriars in time for call-over, after all!

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Smithy Tries It On!

"WHARTON!"

"Adsum!"

Some of the Removites, in Big Hall, glanced round at Herbert Vernon-Smith as he answered.

Some of them grinned.

It was good-natured of Smithy; but it was taking rather a risk. But the Bouncer of Greyfriars was the man to take risks; and he rather liked to get the eyes of the Form on him by doing so.

The school were gathered in Big Hall for roll-call. There were, as a matter of fact, six vacant places in the ranks of the Remove.

Plenty of fellows had been over to Redclyffe that afternoon to see Wingate

and his merry men play Soccer at Redclyffe School; but most of them had got back in good time for call-over. A few had squeezed in at the last minute. Six were absent—the Famous Five and Billy Bunter; and they were still absent when the big oak doors closed, and it was too late for late-comers to enter Hall.

Had the Head been taking the roll nobody would have ventured to play tricks, not even the reckless Bounder. Had Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, been taking it, the Bounder would have thought twice, if not thrice. He might have chanced it with Prout, or Wiggins, or Capper, or Twigg, or even Hacker—hardly with Henry Samuel Quelch.

But Mr. Quelch was in sanny with a bad cold, and his gimlet-eyes were not on his Form. And it was Mr. Lagden, the new and temporary master of the Remove, who was taking the roll, and with the new man Smithy chanced it.

Mr. Lagden had been little more than a week at the school. He was a young man, handsome and athletic; popular among the seniors because he played football, and rather liked by his own Form.

It was suspected that he had a hard and even violent temper under his smiling and good-humoured aspect; but there was no doubt that the smiling good-humour predominated; the fierce temper had only peeped out once or twice in moments of irritation.

He had been long enough at Greyfriars now to know his Form pretty well; still, he could hardly be acquainted with all their voices, and Big Hall was rather dusky, and he was calling the roll from a distance; and Smithy thought the chance worth taking.

He seemed to get away with it successfully, too, for Mr. Lagden did not pause; he went on with the Remove names, in Form order.

And the Bounder winked cheerfully

at Tom Redwing, who was looking rather anxious, and Redwing smiled.

"Saved our jolly old Panjandrum a hundred lines, Reddy!" whispered the Bounder.

"I hope so!" murmured Redwing. "But——"

"But what?"

"Lagden's pretty keen!" said Tom doubtfully.

"Oh, it's all right! My hat! He's calling. Cherry now—— Adsum!" called out the Bounder, without stopping to think.

There was a suppressed chuckle in the Remove. Most of the fellows knew that the Famous Five were not there.

Mr. Lagden seemed to suspect nothing. He went on with the roll, without even glancing at the Remove.

A fellow who cut call-over was liable to a hundred lines. It was not unknown for one fellow to answer for another when it seemed safe so to do. Answering for two absent fellows, one after another, was certainly unusual, and very risky. But the Bounder was the man to take chances. He liked making the fellows stare.

"Nugent!"

"Adsum!" called back the Bounder, changing his voice a little, pitching it in a higher key.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Skinner. "Smithy's goin' the whole giddy unicorn! Lagden will spot this!"

"Bull!"

The Remove were almost breathless now. In deeper tones, as like Johnny Bull's as he could manage, the Bounder called:

"Adsum!"

The Remove fellows almost gasped. Heads were craned round at Smithy. He grinned cheerily. Every fellow there was wondering at his nerve. It was meat and drink to the Bounder.

"Smithy, old man!" whispered Redwing uneasily. He was getting anxious for his chum.

"My dear man, I'm goin' the whole hog——"

"Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh!"

"Adsum!"

"Great pip!" breathed Peter Todd. "If you get away with that, Smithy, you're a jelly old wonder!"

Fellows fixed their eyes on the handsome face of Mr. Lagden, standing on the dais at a distance.

It was true that he was a new master and perhaps not "up" to the wiles of the Remove. But answering for five fellows in a bunch was really piling it on thick.

New as he was at Greyfriars, he was not an inexperienced master. It was known that he had filled many temporary posts in many schools. It was his regular business, in fact, to take such temporary posts. And though he was the youngest member of Dr. Locke's staff, he was well over thirty. Not a green young man by any means. Nevertheless, he seemed to suspect nothing. He gave his attention to the roll, not to the Remove, and seemed satisfied with receiving an answer to every name he called. Fellows did not have to step forward to answer to their names; they answered from where they stood; and the juniors, of course, were in large numbers.

Had it been a summer call-over in the open air, the Bounder would have had no chance; but in the dusky old Hall on a dusky winter evening there was a chance of getting away with the whole bag of tricks, as it were.

A prefect quite near the Remove glanced round. Had it been Loder, or Carne Smithy's game would have been up. But it was Gwynne, who was good-natured to a fault. If Gwynne detected a similarity of tone in all these answers to different names he took no notice being unwilling to get a thoughtless young rascal into a row.

"Bunter!"

"Adsum!"

The Remove almost gasped.

For the sixth time Herbert Vernon-Smith answered for a fellow who was not there. He was going the whole hog,

as he had expressed it; the whole giddy unicorn, as Skinner put it.

But even Smithy watched Mr. Lagden a little anxiously now. Really, the Bounder was rather asking for it.

But the new master of the Remove seemed satisfied. Having finished with the Remove, he proceeded to call the Third. As he ran off the names of the fags, Smithy grinned complacently. Certainly he seemed to have "got away" with the most reckless attempt to pull a master's leg that had ever happened in Big Hall at Greyfriars School.

"Six hundred lines saved!" murmured the Bounder. "I shall stick those men for a study supper for this!"

Redwing nodded, but he was still uneasy. At Greyfriars, Forms were not dismissed as they were called. The whole school had to remain till the roll was finished. The Bounder was not yet out of the wood, but he smiled cheerily as he waited. Smithy was full of confidence.

Mr. Lagden finished calling the Third, and started on the Second. Dicky Nugent and Gatty and Myers and the rest answered "Adsum" in turn, till Mr. Lagden called "Flip."

That name—a rather remarkable name for a Greyfriars fellow—was unanswered. It was the name, or nickname, of the Greyfriars waif, who had come to the school a new boy that term, and who, as all the school knew, had disappeared and had not been found.

"Absent-minded beggar!" murmured Toddy. "He's forgotten that poor old Flip is missing!"

"Silly ass!" murmured Bolsover major. "Must be a silly ass if he lets Smithy get away with his game!"

"Flip!" repeated Mr. Lagden.

Mr. Twigg, the master of the Second Form, stepped to the master who was calling the roll, and spoke to him. Mr. Lagden glanced up and seemed to remember, and nodded.

"Oh, quite so!" he said in his

pleasant voice. "It had quite slipped my mind. Thank you!"

And the roll went on. Evidently the Second Form master had reminded Mr. Lagden that Flip was no longer in the school.

It was time now for the school to be dismissed, all names but Flip's having been answered. It was for Mr. Lagden to give the word, as he had called the roll. The Bounder winked at Redwing.

"All serene!" he murmured. "What?"

"Looks like it. But——"

"Rats! Blow your 'buts.' It's all serene! The man's an ass!"

"Dismiss," said Mr. Lagden's clear, pleasant voice, "with the exception of the Remove. My Form will remain."

"Oh, my hat!" breathed the Bounder.

The Remove remained. Some of them wondered why, and some wondered whether it had anything to do with the Bounder's little game. The confident grin faded from Smithy's face.

Many curious glances were cast at the Remove by the other fellows as they went out. Mr. Lagden remained chatting with Prout, the master of the Fifth, till they were gone. Then he came down the Hall. The Bounder felt his heart beating rather faster.

Mr. Lagden glanced over his waiting Form. The Remove were almost breathless.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir!"

"When Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, Hurree Singh, and Bunter come in, please tell them to report themselves in my study!"

The Bounder gasped.

The Removites gasped, too. They looked at Smithy and they looked at Mr. Lagden. The new Form-master was grave, but a faint smile flickered over his handsome face. There was a sudden chortle in the Remove. The juniors really could not help it. The Bounder's face, as Skinner said after-

wards, was worth a guinea a box at that moment.

"You hear me, Vernon-Smith?"

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder. "Yes! Yes, sir! Certainly!"

"On another occasion," remarked Mr. Lagden in a pleasant, casual sort of way, "I shall be obliged, Vernon-Smith, if you will have the kindness to answer only to your own name."

"Oh! Yes! Yes, sir!" gurgled Smithy.

"I quite appreciate your motives, Vernon-Smith. I have been a schoolboy myself," said Mr. Lagden pleasantly. "But it won't do, you know. Give my message to the boys I have named. Dismiss!"

The Remove streamed out of Hall.

## CHAPTER 5.

For III

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

There was a laughing crowd in the Rag. The episode in Hall had tickled the Remove immensely. Even the Bounder could not help grinning over it. Certainly nobody in the Remove was thinking any longer that the new man was an "ass." Mr. Lagden had been rather liked already in his new Form. Now he had jumped into popularity at a bound. Evidently the new beak had a sense of humour; equally, evidently, in the opinion of the juniors, he was a sportsman.

Quelch undoubtedly would have given Smithy six, at least, for such a trick—had Smithy ventured to play it on Quelch. The new master had only warned him off, with a good-humoured smile. The warning was quite efficacious. Smithy was not likely to try it on again with Lagden, and he realised very clearly that he had escaped cheaply.

"That man's a sportsman!" said Smithy, in the Rag. "He's shown a bit of a nasty temper once or twice, but

he's a sportsman. I'm jolly well backing up Lagden from now on."

"Keen as mustard, too!" said Skinner. "Never let on, but he knew all the time. He's got eyes like a hawk—or like Quelch."

"Jolly decent of him to take it as he did!" said Squiff. "Most beaks would have been frightfully ratty!"

"Smithy thought he was pulling his leg—and Lagden was pulling Smithy's leg, all the while!" chuckled Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co., looking in at the doorway of the Rag, beheld a hilarious crowd of fellows. They were not feeling very hilarious themselves, as they had arrived a quarter of an hour late for call-over—which meant lines all round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the jolly old joke?" asked Bob Cherry.

The Bounder chuckled.

"It's one on me," he answered. "I say, that man Lagden is a sportsman! I wish we could swap Quelch for him permanently!"

"What-ho!" said Skinner.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Harry Wharton. "But what's Lagden's latest?"

A dozen voices explained and the Famous Five chuckled.

"Decent sort," exclaimed Bob. "I like a beak with a sense of humour! A sense of humour is rare among beaks, my beloved 'earers. Jolly glad he's in a good temper, too, as we're late!"

"You're to report in his study," said the Bounder. "But you'll find him all right! Better than Quelch, anyhow!"

"What's made you men late?" asked Hazeldene. "You had lots of time to get back from Redclyffe!"

"We had to roll a fat porpoise along!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, let's go to see Lagden," said Harry. "The sooner the better. Glad he's so merry and bright!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"I say, I think you'd better see Lagden without me," said Bunter. "You can explain to him that it was all your fault!"

"You fat chump——" roared Johnny Bull. "It was all your fault! We should have been back early if you hadn't pretended to have a sprain——"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Come on, you men," said Harry, "let's catch Lagden while he's good-tempered. We may get off the lines!"

"I say, you fellows, you tell Lagden——"

"Rats!"

The Famous Five walked away to report themselves to their Form-master, and Billy Bunter, with a dissatisfied grunt, rolled after them. With the selfishness to which Bunter was so sadly accustomed, they evidently weren't going to explain how wholly blameless Bunter was in the matter.

Wharton tapped at the door of the study that had been Mr. Quelch's, and that was now occupied by the new master of the Remove. A pleasant voice bade them enter and the six delinquents filed in.

Mr. Lagden rose from his table. His handsome, clean-shaved, healthy face looked very good-humoured, and the juniors could not help thinking how much better-tempered he looked than the respected Quelch. They sympathised, of course, with their old Form-master, who was laid up in sanny, but at the moment they were rather glad that he was in sanny, and that they had to deal with this pleasant young man instead.

"Well," said Mr. Lagden. "You are late for call-over! You are aware, Wharton, as head boy of my Form, that that is a serious matter!"

"We're sorry, sir!" said the captain of the Remove meekly. "But we've been over to Redclyffe to see the football match——"

"I believe a great many boys went

over to Redclyffe to see the football match, Wharton! Come, come!"

"Bunter got rather tired walking back, sir, and—and that rather delayed us!"

"Ow!" groaned Bunter. He felt that a sound of woe might touch the Form-master's heart.

Mr. Lagden stared at him.

"Bunter! What is the matter with you?"

"I—I'm awfully tired, sir! Dropping!" said Bunter pathetically. "I—I think I—I over-exerted myself, sir, trying to get in for call-over!"

"No doubt Bunter is tired," said Mr. Lagden. "It must be five or six miles from Redclyffe, walking by the road!"

"We took the short cut through the woods, sir!"

Mr. Lagden's face changed. The good-humoured smile was wiped off it, as it were, and it became very stern.

"What? I am new here, Wharton, but I understand that Redclyffe Woods are out of school bounds!"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"But what?" rapped Mr. Lagden.

Harry Wharton's face set a little. He did not like the tone in which the new master spoke, neither did he like his sudden change of humour. It was not the first time that the juniors had noted that Mr. Lagden's temper was uncertain. That was not like Quelch. Mr. Quelch might be, as some of the juniors said, a grim old gargoyle compared to Lagden, but, at least, a fellow knew where he was with him, and how to take him. Consistent severity was really easier to deal with than unexpected alterations of good-humour and sharp sternness.

"Redclyffe Woods are out of school bounds, of course, sir," said Harry, "but when a man has leave to go over to Redclyffe he has leave to come back any way he pleases!"

"That does not follow at all," said Mr. Lagden sharply. "I have heard that there was a case of a robbery by

a footpad in Redclyffe Woods not very long ago!"

"Yes, that is so, sir!"

"Such very solitary places, especially at this time of the year, are quite unsuitable for schoolboys to ramble in, indeed, dangerous!" said Mr. Lagden. "No doubt you would have realised this, had you met with some dangerous tramp!"

"We're not afraid of tramps, sir!" said Johnny Bull.

"I—I was with them, sir!" ventured Billy Bunter. "I don't think a tramp would be likely to tackle me, sir!"

"Shut up, you blithering ass!" whispered Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"I am bound to take serious notice of this," said Mr. Lagden. "You will understand, Wharton, quite clearly, that even when you have leave to go as far as Redclyffe, or Lantham, the woods there are out of bounds!"

"Very well, sir!"

Mr. Lagden paused. The juniors waited, wondering whether it was to be lines or a licking. They had come to the study in quite a cheery and hopeful mood, but the angry expression on the new master's face sobered them considerably.

They looked rather grim, as they noticed that Lagden's hand strayed to a cane on his table. It was not really a matter for "licking"; certainly, Quelch would have deemed lines sufficient, if he had not excused them entirely, after hearing a reasonable explanation. But the new master relieved them a little by leaving the cane where it was.

"I—I say, sir——" began Bunter, breaking the silence.

"What? What?"

"C-c-can I go now, sir?"

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir; but I haven't had my tea——"

"Silence!" repeated Mr. Lagden, in a voice that made Billy Bunter jump.

The fat Owl closed his capacious mouth.

Mr. Lagden fixed his eyes on Wharton again.

"You say that you took a short cut through the woods at Redclyffe?" he said. "Yet you are later than boys who returned by road. This requires some explanation, Wharton!"

Wharton's eyes glinted. The implied distrust of his word was more than sufficient to rouse his ire. The thought came into his mind that Rupert Lagden, Master of Arts, was no gentleman. There was a streak of the "bounder" in the handsome Form-master.

"I've already explained that, sir!" said the captain of the Remove, very quietly. "Bunter was tired, and very slow!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Silence, Bunter! Wharton, this matter is serious. But if you assure me that your delay was due only to Bunter's slowness, and that you kept to the main path through Redclyffe Woods, without wandering or rambling——"

He paused for a reply.

"We did not wander or ramble, sir," answered Harry. "We did our best to be back in time for call-over!"

"You have not answered my question!" rapped Mr. Lagden.

"We kept to the main path most of the time, sir," answered Harry. "But Bunter had a fall, and—and fancied that he had hurt his ankle, and we tried to get him a lift home——"

"Indeed! And where could you possibly have tried to get him a lift, in solitary woodlands like those at Redclyffe?"

"We went to the woodcutter's cottage, sir——"

"Where?"

Mr. Lagden rapped out the word like a bullet. His eye gleamed at the captain of the Remove.

"There is a woodcutter's cottage in Redclyffe Woods, sir," answered Harry.

"It belongs—or did belong—to a man named Joyce. He has a pony and cart, and we went along to see if we could hire it."

Why Mr. Lagden was so angry was a puzzle to the juniors. It could hardly be considered an offence to seek to hire a lift from a woodcutter to get back to the school. But there was no doubt that he was angry—intensely angry. His hand strayed to the cane again.

"So you went to this woodcutter's cottage, Wharton?" Mr. Lagden's voice was sharp.

"Yes, sir. But nobody was there, so we were unable to hire the cart. Bunter found that he could walk, after all, and we came on."

"I had a fearful pain, sir——"

"Silence! You say that you found nobody at the woodcutter's cottage, Wharton? I have never heard of the place; but I accept your statement that there is such a place——"

"Any fellow can tell you there is such a place, sir, if you do not care to take my word!" said Wharton icily. "Joyce is well known around here—he can be seen any day on the roads with his faggots. He has a brother who is head-keeper to Sir Hilton Popper, at Popper Court."

"All this is immaterial. It appears that you have been rambling at large in woods that are out of school bounds, with the result that you are late for call-over. Taking a short cut by the main path is one thing; rambling in the woods is quite another. You did not consider, I presume, that leave to go to Redclyffe for the football match included leave to ramble in woods which are out of school bounds?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Yet you have done so."

"We have not done so!" said Harry quietly. "We went direct from the path, by the track up to Joyce's cottage, for the reason I have told you. Bunter fancied he couldn't walk, and we wanted to get him a lift."

"I was in terrible agony, sir!" squeaked Bunter.

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"You did not succeed in getting this lift for Bunter?" said Mr. Lagden sharply.

"I've said that there was nobody at the cottage, sir. At least, we saw nobody—only a dog. Owing to the dog, we were unable to knock at the door. I was going to knock, when the dog came for me, and I had to run. It was a big Alsatian."

The glint in Mr. Lagden's eyes quite startled the juniors.

"You say you were going to knock at the door, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir, to ask——"

"I am unacquainted with the place," said Lagden. "Am I to understand that the door is accessible from the path, and that a big Alsatian dog was loose? Is that what you mean?"

"No, sir. If you'd ever seen the place, you'd know——"

"As I have been here only a short while, Wharton, I am naturally unacquainted with such outlying places. Answer my question."

"There's a fence and a gate, sir," said Harry. "The dog was in the yard inside the fence, running loose."

"Then you opened the gate?"

"No, sir; it was locked."

"Indeed! And how did you reach the door of the cottage if the gate was locked?"

"I climbed over the gate."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Lagden. "We appear to be getting to the facts at last. You committed a trespass?"

Wharton coloured with anger.

"Nothing of the kind, sir! Knowing Joyce, and knowing that he would be willing to hire us the cart, we saw no harm——"

"When a gate is locked, Wharton, does it not usually imply that no one is desired to enter without permission?"

"I—I suppose, so, sir; but in the circumstances——"

"No circumstances can excuse a trespass, Wharton! By your reckless disregard of the school rules, and, indeed, of the law of the land, you placed yourself in danger. You say the dog came for you, as you express it. Does that mean that the dog attacked you?"

"I got over the gate in time."

"Otherwise you might—and indeed would—have been mauled, perhaps seriously injured by a big Alsatian dog?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"And you regard this as a light matter?" exclaimed Mr. Lagden.

The juniors were silent.

Certainly the matter had a serious aspect, and if Mr. Lagden was concerned about Wharton's narrow escape from the Alsatian, there was something to be said for his anger. But it was an undoubted fact that he had been angry before the Alsatian was mentioned. But for his remark that he knew nothing of the woodcutter's cottage, the juniors might have supposed that he knew all about the Alsatian and the danger that had been incurred. But, so far as they could see, he could not have known that until Wharton mentioned it.

"It comes to this, then," said Mr. Lagden. "You were given leave to go to Redclyffe for a football match; you took advantage of this to ramble in woods that are out of school bounds for very good reasons; you committed a trespass, and one of you, at least, placed himself in danger from a savage dog. I am compelled to deal with you severely."

"I have said——"

"You need say no more, Wharton! For your own sakes, I must impress upon you that the rules of this school cannot be defied with impunity. As you are head boy of my Form, Wharton, I hold you chiefly responsible. I shall cane you, and the others will take five hundred lines each." Mr. Lagden

picked up the cane. "Bend over that chair, Wharton."

Harry Wharton looked at him, his eyes gleaming. Resistance to a Form-master's authority was a thing that had hardly entered the head of any Greyfriars man, a thing unthinkable. But it entered the head of the captain of the Remove now. It was not the caning that he cared much about—canings often came the way of juniors.

"Will you let me speak, sir?" said Harry quietly, but with a tremble of anger in his voice. "I have said that we came directly through the woods—we did not ramble—and getting over the gate at Joyce's cottage was not a trespass—"

"That is enough, Wharton! Bend over that chair at once, or I shall take you to your headmaster and request him to flog you for disobedience."

Harry Wharton breathed hard and deep.

His chums eyed him anxiously. They understood his feelings and shared them. But a beak had to be given his head.

Fortunately the captain of the Remove realised that. Only for a moment he stood looking at Lagden. Then, with a scorn in his face that he did not take the trouble to conceal, he turned to the chair.

Six strokes of the cane fell, hard, one after another. Every one was a hefty lash; but no sound came from the captain of the Remove.

He rose from the chair, his face pale, and his eyes glinting. Mr. Lagden pointed to the door.

"You may go!" he said harshly.

And the juniors, in silence, went.

#### CHAPTER 6.

Down on Lagden!

"THE man's a sportsman!" remarked the Bounder.

"The man's a rotten cur!" said Harry Wharton.

"Eh, what?"

It was in the Rag, after prep. Some of the juniors were still talking about the incident at calling-over, hence the Bounder's remark. Smithy, at least, had a very good opinion of the new master of the Remove, which was shared by most of the fellows. And there was quite a jump when the captain of the Remove contributed his opinion.

"What's bitin' you, old bean?" asked Vernon-Smith. "I tell you the man's a sportsman—never heard of a beak who would have played up as he did in Hall."

Wharton's lip curled.

"I dare say the fellow would like to make himself popular," he answered. "He knows the way, too—if he could keep his rotten temper in check. But we saw the kind of man he really was when he pitched into Bunter for next to nothing, his first day here. I've had a sample now myself."

"Ragged for being late?" grinned the Bounder. "Too many lines, old bean?"

"Doesn't Lagden know what a very important chap Wharton is?" asked Skinner. "After all, he's new here. It will dawn on him later."

Some of the fellows laughed.

"Shut up, Skinner!" said Bob Cherry, frowning.

"My dear chap," said Skinner airily. "Let's make allowances for the man. He's only been here a short while. Give him another week to learn that his High Mightiness mustn't be treated like a common mortal."

"He, he, he!" from Billy Bunter.

"The shut-upfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Skinner," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "Otherwise, the punchfulness of your ridiculous napper will be the next item on the programme."

"Oh, let him run on!" said Wharton contemptuously. "Skinner's head isn't worth punching!"

"Glad to hear it!" said Skinner blandly. "But what has the man done?"

Has he had the cheek to give Wharton lines? Has he had the unparalleled nerve to lick him? What is it jolly old Shakespeare says—'On the horror's head, horrors accumulate——'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The man's a cur!" said Harry Wharton, his voice distinct, and audible to every fellow in the Rag. "I hope Quelch will soon be well, and come back. Quelch is rather a Tartar, but he's a gentleman, anyhow."

"And the new man isn't?" asked Smithy, with a stare.

"He isn't!"

"Better tell him so!" suggested Skinner.

"That's not so unlikely as you suppose, Skinner," answered Wharton. "It's quite possible that I may tell him so if he stays here long."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Tell him in Form, so that we can all be there when you do it!" sniggered Snoop. "I should like to see his face when you tell him—and yours, soon afterwards."

"I say, you fellows, he's an awful beast, really," said Billy Bunter. "You know how he licked me his first day—and now he's given me five hundred lines! Of course, I shan't do them, and I shall jolly well tell him so."

"I can hear you telling him so!" agreed Skinner. "About the same time that Wharton tells him that he's no gentleman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton coloured with vexation. He had spoken in anger; but it was rather unpleasant to be bracketed like this with the gaseous Owl of the Remove. Skinner smiled cheerily. Getting Wharton's rag out was a happy amusement for the amiable Skinner.

"Five hundred lines is rather thick for cutting call-over," said the Bounder, with a curious look at Wharton. "He was so jolly good-tempered in Hall, too——"

"I've had six!" said Wharton curtly.

"Oh, my hat! Then you must have cheeked him a lot."

"You can think so if you like."

The Bounder laughed.

"Dear man!" he said. "No need to rag me—I haven't given you six, you know. But, look here, I don't get this. What did he give you six for?"

"Because he's a rank outsider."

"Any other reason?" grinned Skinner.

"Tell us about it, old bean," said Peter Todd. "I've been thinking that the new man was rather decent."

"I don't mind telling you. As I've said that the man's a cur, I may as well give you the reason."

And the captain of the Remove, in a very few words, told of what had passed in the Form-master's study.

The Remove men listened in astonishment. The Bounder whistled.

"That's rather thick!" he said. "But—I suppose he was a bit alarmed when you told him about that jolly old Alsatian. If you'd got mauled, the matter would have been jolly serious."

"That's not the point! He ought to have taken a fellow's word. He was dealing with me, not with Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"He's new here," murmured Skinner. "He doesn't know that our Form captain is a jolly old model of truthfulness. Besides, as a matter of fact, old bean, you were trespassing, just as Lagden said you were. I've heard about that old cottage in the wood—it doesn't belong to the Joyces now. Old Joyce has let the place and moved into Wood-end with his family."

"I never knew that!" snapped Wharton.

"The knowfulness was not terrific."

"Facts are facts, you know, whether you happen to know them or not!" grinned Skinner. "You were butting into some stranger's place; and if you'd found him at home, he might have wanted to know what the thump you meant by climbing over his gate—"

might have come up complaining to the Head."

"I don't understand all this," said Harry. "Who the dickens would want to hire that cottage, in the heart of the woods, two miles from a house——"

"Well, somebody has, because the jolly old woodcutter has let it," said Skinner. "I spoke to him in Woodend only yesterday, and he told me so."

"So you jolly well were trespassing!" said Smithy.

"Lagden didn't know that," said Wharton. "He said quite plainly that he had never heard of the place; so he couldn't have heard that it was let."

"Better keep clear of Redclyffe Woods after this!" said Squiff. "No short cuts for me if I go over to Redclyffe."

"Catch me within a mile of the place!" grinned Skinner. "If Lagden's so jolly particular about bounds in that direction, I'm going to give him his head. I don't want six."

"Same here!" chuckled Toddy.

"The man seems a bit of a Tartar at times," said Smithy thoughtfully. "Still, he's rather a sportsman."

"You mean, he knows how to make himself popular—and he wants to be popular!" said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "But his rotten temper gives him away all the time. He looks decent enough; but he's got a yellow streak in him. Quelch is a bit of a coughdrop; but that man isn't fit to black Quelch's boots!"

"And all because of six!" sighed Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not because of six, Skinner!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "But because he handed out six for nothing—because he was unjust, suspicious, and a rotter! I shall be jolly thankful when we get Quelch back again, for one. That man's not the kind we want here!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific!"

"My dear chap!" said Skinner. It was an opportunity to be unpleasant.

"My dear chap, I shouldn't make such a fuss about a licking. We all get licked at times—even nice, innocent chaps like myself——"

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed at Skinner for a moment. But he disdained to bandy words with the cad of the Remove, and he left the group, and moved away. Skinner winked at his friends.

"The dear man's getting his rag out!" sighed Skinner. "He's cross with Lagden—and cross with poor little me! Nevertheless, friends and sportsmen, a licking isn't a thing to make such a tremendous fuss about——"

"Think not?" asked Johnny Bull, with a glare at Skinner, and speaking in a voice that was rather like the growl of a bulldog.

"Well, that's my opinion!" yawned Skinner. "I can take a licking myself, without doing a song and dance afterwards!"

"Wharton's told you it wasn't the licking—it was the injustice!" growled Johnny Bull. "The man's a cruel brute, when he lets his temper go, and he's got a rotten temper, with all his dashed nice manners. And if I were Wharton I'd punch your head for your cheek!"

Johnny Bull paused and seemed to reflect.

"Come to think of it, I'll punch it, anyhow!" he added.

"Here, you silly ass, keep off! Yaroooh!" roared Skinner, as Johnny suited the action to the word. "You dashed fathead—— Whoooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, come on, you sniggering sweep, and show us how you can take a licking!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Go it, Skinner!" chuckled the Bounder.

But Skinner did not "go" it; he rubbed his head and glared at Johnny Bull and stamped away, scowling. He seemed to have no desire to show the Remove how a licking should be taken!

## CHAPTER 7.

## A Visitor for Bunter!

MR. LAGDEN, in the Form-room the following morning, was his customary good-tempered and agreeable self. He seemed to have dismissed the incident of the previous evening from his mind; and when he had to speak to his head boy on matters connected with the Form, he spoke in his usual pleasant manner.

Wharton, of course, answered respectfully, but with a very evident reserve. He did not trust a man who had a cat-like temper that might break out at any moment, and he could neither forget nor forgive the incident that Mr. Lagden seemed to have forgotten.

The fact was that Wharton had, to some extent, read the man's character. Lagden desired to be liked in his Form, and he knew how to make himself popular. Only on rare occasions the man's real nature showed; but Wharton had seen enough of it to form a very decided opinion; and his opinion was that Rupert Lagden, Master of Arts, was a good deal of a "bounder." Under his excellent manners and his pleasant smile, there was a yellow streak in the man; and Wharton did not like him, and had no intention of pretending to like him.

"Excellent!" said Mr. Lagden, when Wharton had finished his "con."  
"Bunter, you will go on."

"Oh, dear!" said Bunter.

Bunter had nourished a hope that Lagden's eye would not fall on him that morning. After that walk home from Redclyffe, Bunter had been too tired for prep; or, at all events, too lazy. His fat mind was a beautiful blank on the subject of the *Æneid*, which the Removites were supposed to have "prepared" in their studies. Every fellow was not called on to construe; there was always a chance of escape, and Bunter often took such chances and hoped for the best.

"What did you say, Bunter?" asked Mr. Lagden.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" stammered Bunter. "I mean, I'm ready to go on, sir. I—I was very careful with my prep last night, sir."

"Let us hear the result of this unusual application, Bunter," said Mr. Lagden. "No doubt the whole Form will benefit."

This was a jest, and the Remove dutifully smiled.

"Yes, sir. I—I can't find the place——"

"Show Bunter the place, Skinner."

"Here you are, fathead!" whispered Skinner. "Go on from 'jamque rubescebat radiis mare——'"

"What does it mean, old chap?" breathed Bunter.

Skinner was not a fellow to ask for help in a difficulty; but he was leaning over to point out the place to Bunter, and so he was the only fellow to whom Bunter could whisper without detection.

Bunter really ought to have known that it meant that the sea was reddening in the rays of dawn. As he evidently did not know, Skinner was the man to pull the fat Owl's leg, careless whether it landed him in a row or not. He whispered information that would have made any other Remove man jump; but which was good enough for the fatuous Owl.

"I am waiting, Bunter," said Mr. Lagden.

"Yes, sir. I've found the place, sir," said Bunter cheerfully. "Jamque rubescebat radiis mare—and jam reddened the radiant mare——"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Jam reddened the radiant mare——"

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

Bunter's "con" was often of a kind calculated to set any Form-room in a roar. But this was a record, even for Bunter.

Mr. Lagden stared at the fat Owl.

"What—what did you say, Bunter?" he gasped.

"Jam reddened the radiant mare  
—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter! You utterly ridiculous boy—are you totally ignorant of Latin?" exclaimed Mr. Lagden.

"Oh, you beast, Skinner!" groaned Bunter. He realised that Skinner must have taken him in. "Yes, sir! I mean, no, sir. Have—have—have I got it wrong, sir?"

"You have not prepared this lesson, Bunter!"

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I was working very hard in my study last night, sir," said Bunter. "I wasn't taking it easy in the armchair, sir. You can ask Toddy, sir. He saw me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, sir, with all those lines to do, I hadn't time for prep," said Bunter anxiously. "You gave me five hundred lines, sir."

"If you have written out your imposition, Bunter, I shall take that as an excuse. But you have not handed it in to me."

"I—I haven't exactly written it, sir. I mean, I haven't finished it, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—I was going to—"

"How much have you written of it, Bunter?"

"One—one line, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Lagden, to Bunter's relief, joined in the laugh. Either he was in a very good temper that morning, or he was, as Wharton reflected scornfully, on the "popularity" tack again.

"You may go on, Cherry," he said; and Bunter, with a relieved grunt, sat down, feeling that Lagden wasn't such a beast after all.

Bob Cherry was struggling with his "con," when there came a tap at the Form-room door. It opened, and Trotter, the page, looked in. Mr. Lagden gave him a glance of inquiry.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Please, sir, Master Bunter's to go to the 'Ead, sir," said Trotter.

"Oh, crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

A summons to the Head's study boded trouble. A fellow whose conscience was perfectly clear, of course, would have received such a summons with perfect equanimity. But consciences in the Lower School were seldom absolutely clear. Billy Bunter's least of all. The fat Owl wondered what, and which, of his many delinquencies had reached the august ears of his headmaster.

"Very well," said Mr. Lagden. "Bunter, you will leave the class, and go to Dr. Locke's study."

"I—I—I say, if—if you please, sir, it—it wasn't me!" gasped Bunter.

"What? What was not you?"

"Anything, sir—I mean, nothing!" stammered Bunter. "I—I wasn't there at all, sir."

"You were not where?"

"Anywhere, sir! I mean, I didn't do it!" groaned Bunter. "I—I think perhaps it's some other fellow the Head wants, sir. If it's about a pie, sir, I give you my word that I know nothing about it—absolutely nothing."

Mr. Lagden stared at the fat Owl for a moment, and smiled. Then he glanced at Trotter again, who was grinning.

"It's a gentleman to see Master Bunter, sir," said Trotter, kindly taking compassion on the scared Owl.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He realised that it was not trouble with the Head, and his fat brow cleared. "Oh, good!" Instead of trouble, it was a visitor, and escape from Latin. "Is it my father, Trotter?"

"No, sir," said Trotter. "The gentleman gave the name of Brent, sir, when I let him in, sir—Inspector Brent, sir."

Nobody in the Remove had ever heard of Inspector Brent. The local police inspector, who had the case of the missing Second-Form fag in hand, was Mr. Grimes, of Courtfield. What a police inspector could want with Billy Bunter was rather a mystery. Billy Bunter's sins were many and manifold; but certainly not of the sort that would

call for attention from the police. But if the Removites were rather surprised, Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Remove, seemed more than surprised. He took a quick step towards Trotter, and stopped again.

"What name did you say, Trotter?" he asked.

"Brent, sir—Inspector Brent."

There was an instant's pause. Some of the Removites looked at Mr. Lagden, wondering whether he knew Inspector Brent—whoever Inspector Brent was.

"You may go, Bunter!" said Mr. Lagden.

Billy Bunter followed Trotter, and the Form-room door closed.

Mr. Lagden went to his desk—the high desk belonging to Mr. Quelch. He opened it, and peered into the interior for several minutes, and during those minutes the Remove fellows did not see his face. They waited patiently for his attention to return to them—quite patiently. Not a man in the Form was eager to get back to Virgil.

Mr. Lagden lifted his head at last.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I find that I have forgotten a letter—a rather important letter. I am compelled to leave the Form-room for a time—I leave the Form in your hands, and trust you to keep order here."

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Lagden left the Form-room. There was a general relaxation. The head boy of the Remove was quite capable of keeping order in his Form-master's absence; but it was improbable that the Remove would improve their knowledge of the Latin language to any great extent during that absence. A cheery buzz of talk in the Form-room followed Mr. Lagden's departure.

Rupert Lagden went directly to his study. He closed the door carefully, and then, as if he had thrown aside a disguise, the expression of his face changed. The black look that came over it would have startled his Form,

could they have seen it. Under his knitted brows his eyes glittered with a savage light. He had told the Remove that he had to attend to an important letter; but no letter occupied his attention after he was in his study. He moved restlessly about the room, his hands clenched, his brows knitted.

"What does he want here? He knows nothing—can know nothing. Only the boy could have told—and the boy has not spoken. Yet he is here."

Had the Remove fellows overheard those strange mutterings, they would have guessed that the name of "Inspector Brent" was not unknown to Mr. Lagden—that it meant much to him. But there were no ears to hear the mutterings of the Remove master as he restlessly paced his study.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Man from Scotland Yard!

"HERE is Bunter!" said the Head.

Billy Bunter entered the headmaster's study, with an inquisitive blink at the gentleman who was seated there in conversation with Dr. Locke.

What he was at Greyfriars School for, what he could possibly want with Bunter, the fat Owl could not guess. Still, he was glad that Mr. Brent had called; it got him away from class, at least.

The visitor rose to his feet as Dr. Locke spoke, and fixed his eyes on Bunter. Bunter did not much like his looks.

If he was an inspector, he was not in uniform; he was dressed in ordinary lounge clothes of a dark grey, well cut. He was a man of rather stocky figure, evidently strong and muscular. His face was, to Bunter's eyes, forbidding; the features were handsome in themselves, but cold, hard, grim in expression. The eyes were very keen and penetrating—rather reminding Bunter of Quelch's "gimlet-eyes." They

looked out from under knitted, heavy brows.

Mr. Brent's age might have been anything between thirty and forty; but, though he was evidently still a young man, there was nothing of youth in his expression. He looked a hard man; and keener's eyes than Bunter's might have read in that hard face the signs of some old grief sternly suppressed. Anyone but Bunter might have read that Mr. Brent was a man who had seen trouble, and had borne it with courage and fortitude.

No such idea occurred to the Owl of the Remove as he blinked at the man through his big spectacles. He thought that Mr. Brent looked rather a hard nut to crack, and shifted a little uneasily under the penetrating stare of the keen eyes under the frowning brows.

"Bunter," said Dr. Locke, "this is Inspector Brent, a detective officer from Scotland Yard. He desires to speak to you."

"Y-yes, sir!" stammered Bunter, in great wonder.

Bunter had feared that the Head might want to see him about a certain pie that had been missing from where it belonged. But even Bunter could not suppose that a Scotland Yard detective had come to Greyfriars to inquire after a missing pie. He could not begin to imagine what the detective was there for.

"So this is Bunter," said Mr. Brent in a deep voice that seemed to Bunter rather like the growl of a bear. Neither his voice nor his look expressed any favourable impression of Bunter.

"Yes, Mr. Brent," said the Head, rising from his chair. "No doubt you will desire to question Bunter alone; and as I am required in the Sixth Form Room——"

"Certainly, sir."

Dr. Locke quitted the study. Mr. Brent's call had interrupted the Head, who was taking the Sixth Form in Greek that morning. The Head was

rather anxious to get back to the Sixth and Sophocles—though it was not improbable that the Sixth would have been quite willing to give Sophocles a long rest.

Mr. Brent reseated himself when the headmaster was gone. He was still scanning Bunter, who stood uneasily, shifting from one leg to the other, under that steady, unwinking gaze.

"Sit down, Bunter!" said Mr. Brent suddenly. He barked the words out so suddenly that Bunter jumped.

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter.

He sat down.

"You are aware, I suppose, that I am a detective officer," said Mr. Brent. "No doubt you guess that I am here in connection with the boy in the Second Form who disappeared from the school a few days ago."

Bunter had not guessed it—though really he might have done so.

"Oh, Flip?" he said.

"The boy called Flip," said Mr. Brent. "I am given to understand that you know more of this boy than anyone else at the school."

Bunter began to understand why he was wanted.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he said, recovering confidence. "I fancy I know all about the kid. The fact is——"

"I have seen Inspector Grimes at Courtfield," said Mr. Brent, ruthlessly interrupting Bunter, "and I have heard all that your headmaster can tell me. It appears clear that this boy called Flip has been kidnapped, and is now being kept away from the school. So much, I conclude, is well known here."

"Oh, yes," said Bunter, "everybody knows the kid was kidnapped! I can tell you all about that——"

"I have already heard all about that. I am informed that an earlier attempt was made to kidnap the boy, and that he stated that some rough, called the 'Buster,' had seized him, instigated by a man called 'Jimmy the One.' It is fairly obvious now that he has disappeared, that a second attempt was

made by the same persons, and succeeded. It appears that you are the boy who was most in Flip's confidence——"

"Yes, rather! I did a lot for that kid—a tremendous lot——"

"You will tell me everything that Flip may have told you on the subject of the crook called Jimmy the One, and please keep to the point," said Inspector Brent.

Billy Bunter breathed rather hard. This man appeared to have no scruple about interrupting Bunter and cutting him short in the most ruthless manner. Bunter disliked his manners very much indeed. Bunter would have preferred to expatiate on his own uncommon generosity to Flip; in fact, he would have preferred to talk about himself, as usual. Moreover, though poor Flip had regarded Bunter as his patron and his best friend, Bunter had never troubled his head much about the fag, and if Flip had ever felt disposed to confide in him, it had never occurred to Bunter to give him the chance. On that subject he had nothing to tell Mr. Brent that a dozen other Remove fellows could not have told him.

"Well?" rapped Mr. Brent; and Bunter jumped again. The man had a way of barking at a fellow that was quite startling.

"Well, Flip told us that he'd known a man—a crook or something—called Jimmy the One when he lived at Puggins' Alley, in a slum in London," said Bunter. "He said he'd seen this man since he came to Greyfriars, and warned him to clear off; and that it was Jimmy the One who put up that hooligan to kidnap him."

"I have already heard this, and more," barked Mr. Brent. "Has Flip ever told you any particulars about this crook?"

"Only that the man thrashed him once——"

"Never mind that! His description?"

"Never thought of asking him," said

Bunter. "You see, I never thought of——"

"I can see that you never thought," said Mr. Brent grimly. "Try to call to mind anything that Flip may have said about this crook."

Bunter cudgelled his fat brains.

"He's said that the man looked like a gentleman, and nobody would ever suspect him of being a crook," he said. "He said he was what he called a swell."

"And the name he was called by?"

"Jimmy the One!" said Bunter.

"I mean any other name—surname?"

"He never said anything about that. In fact, I fancy he was rather keen on not giving the man away," said Bunter. "Some sort of silly idea that it wasn't the game."

"He never mentioned any name to you?"

"No."

"Or gave any description of the man's looks?"

"Only that he was a swell."

Mr. Brent gave a grunt. Even Bunter could see that the detective had hoped that Flip might have talked freely to another schoolboy and mentioned details that would be useful to the man from Scotland Yard.

There was a brief pause.

"The boy stated that he had seen this crook since he became a Greyfriars boy?" rapped Mr. Brent in his sudden way.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"He never said where. Somewhere near Greyfriars, of course."

"Why near Greyfriars?"

"Well, Flip never went far from the school. If he saw him at all, it must have been somewhere near."

"When did he see him?"

"He never told us."

"Did he tell you what he supposed the man's object to be in attempting to kidnap him?"

"Oh, everybody knew that!" said

Bunter. "It was to keep his mouth shut."

"Did Flip say so?"

"Yes, more than once. He could have given the man away, and the man wanted to shut him up."

"Did Flip have any acquaintances outside the school that you know of?"

"Never heard of any."

"Do you know if he ever went out to meet anyone outside the school?"

"Never heard of it, if he did," said Bunter. "But, of course, I don't see much of the Second Form."

"I am given to understand that you were the boy's friend—that it was you who caused him to be sent to this school in the first place?"

"That's so," said Bunter. "You see, I came on him in the Christmas holidays and befriended him—took him up, and all that. In fact, treated him very generously indeed."

"Did you see much of him here?"

"Well, of course, I was kind to the kid," said the fatuous Owl. "But I Remove man doesn't see a lot of the Second. I was going to help him with his Latin, but somehow I never got time. I stood him a spread sometimes in Wharton's study. I——"

"You saw very little of the boy at this school?" barked Mr. Brent.

"You see, I'm rather popular in my Form, and the fellows run after a fellow a lot," explained Bunter. "I always have so many engagements on hand that——"

"How often did you see the boy here?"

"Oh, lots of times—every day—at least two or three times a week!"

Mr. Brent snorted.

"You see, a Remove man hasn't time——"

Another snort from Mr. Brent, so emphatic that Bunter jumped, and was silent.

The fat Owl blinked rather indignantly at the detective. He wondered whether the man supposed that a Remove man—especially so popular a

fellow as Bunter—had time to be always running after a fag in the Second Form. Bunter had been kind to Flip—in his own fat and fatuous way. But there was no doubt that he had forgotten Flip's existence for days at a time, and that when the grateful little fellow had sought him out, Bunter had never had much time to waste on him.

To Bunter's surprise and annoyance, Mr. Brent was actually glaring at him. He seemed annoyed about something.

"It seems that you were the original cause of Lord Mauleverer's uncle placing the boy at this school!" barked Mr. Brent suddenly. "But that after he was here, although a boy with such an upbringing must have felt very strange in such surroundings, you took very little notice of him."

"Oh, really, sir——"

"In fact, you neglected a lad who had considerable claims on you, as you had caused him to be placed in new and very strange surroundings."

Bunter gasped.

"Well, I like that!" he ejaculated.

"After all I've done for that kid——"

"From what I have learned, it appears that the boy was grateful to you, and looked on you as his only friend."

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Bunter complacently.

"Had you given him more notice, and encouraged him to confide in you, he might very probably have told you things that would be very useful now in the search for him."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Of—of course, I talked to him sometimes."

"What about?" asked Mr. Brent, with a gleam of hope.

A less obtuse fellow than Bunter would have discerned that the man from Scotland Yard was almost desperately anxious to hear even the slightest detail in connection with "Jimmy the One."

"Well, I used to tell him about Bunter Court sometimes," said the

fatuous Owl, "and about my splendid holidays, and——"

Mr. Brent gave a snort that made Bunter almost jump from the chair he was sitting on. It was really, as Bunter told the Remove fellows afterwards, like a bull in the room.

"If you talked to the boy, you talked about yourself, apparently!" barked Mr. Brent.

Bunter blinked. What the dickens did the man suppose he would talk about? he wondered.

"You may go back to your lessons, Bunter!" barked Mr. Brent.

"Oh!" said Bunter.

This was cutting the interview rather short. Unpleasant as Mr. Brent was, barking at a fellow like a dog, Bunter preferred him to Latin in the Form-room. But it seemed that the man from Scotland Yard had done with him.

He rose from the chair.

"You are a fool!" added Mr. Brent, in the same barking voice.

"Eh?"

"A fool! You may go!"

Billy Bunter went, with feelings that were really too deep for words.

## CHAPTER 9.

### The Hunter and the Hunted!

**R**UPERT LAGDEN, Master of Arts, looked from his study window.

It was a cold March morning, but there was a bright gleam of wintry sunshine in the quadrangle of Greyfriars.

Mr. Lagden, apparently, had forgotten that his Form were still waiting for him in the Remove-room, which was rather singular, for since Rupert Lagden had been at Greyfriars, he had been a very careful and dutiful Form-master.

Other matters than Form work, however, filled his mind now.

Standing at the study window, half-concealed by the curtain, he looked out,

his eyes glued on a stocky form that had emerged from the House.

Inspector Brent's interview with Bunter evidently was over, for here was the inspector walking in the deserted quad.

Mr. Lagden, having been in the Form-room at the time, had not, of course, seen Mr. Brent arrive, and had known nothing of his arrival until Trotter came to call the fat Owl. But his look, as he gazed from the study window, showed that he knew who the stocky gentleman with the bulldog jaw was. And the glitter in his eyes told that that stocky gentleman was no friend of his. The burning glitter in Mr. Lagden's eyes might well have startled Mr. Brent, had he discerned it.

The stocky man, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, was tramping down the path by Masters' Studies, his brow knitted in reflection. His lips were set, and his jaw jutted a little. Mr. Brent looked like a man who had the characteristics of a bulldog, who, having got his teeth into a problem, was not likely to let go. And Mr. Lagden, who had the best of reasons to know John Brent's record, knew that his looks did not belie him.

Inspector Brent, as he tramped with heavy, solid footsteps, was looking at the ground. But as if some sixth sense warned him of the burning eyes that were fixed on him, he glanced up as he was passing the Remove master's window.

Instantly Mr. Lagden's gaze shifted, and he seemed to be looking past the inspector, at the distant windows of the library. A moment, and Mr. Brent's glance dropped again, and he went solidly on. And Lagden drew a deep, deep breath. He knew that the man, without appearing to do so, had noted that searching look from the study window.

He bit his lip, then shrugged his shoulders. After all, what did it matter? The keenest detective ever turned out by Scotland Yard was not

likely to dream that a Form-master at a Public school like Greyfriars had any fear of his penetrating eyes.

Mr. Lagden watched the stocky form tramping out of sight. John Brent tramped on—John Brent, the only officer of the law whose hand had ever dropped on the shoulder of Jimmy the One.

The master of the Remove remembered his Form. He left his study, and went back to the Form-room.

A cheery buzz of voices greeted him as he opened the door of the Remove-room. The juniors were all in their places, but a general conversation was going on. It ceased the moment Mr. Lagden entered.

For a second he glanced at Billy Bunter. But if he had any personal interest in Bunter's interview with the man from Scotland Yard, he was careful not to betray it. Lessons were resumed in the Form-room, and went on till break. Only the Removites noticed that the good humour Mr. Lagden had displayed that morning was now conspicuous by its absence. He was in a sharp temper—sharp and irritable. Indeed, the juniors might have fancied that he was nervy had there been anything for a Greyfriars Form-master to be nervy about.

Lord Mauleverer bungled his "con," as usual, and received a hundred lines. Vernon-Smith made the slightest of mistakes, and was quite startled by an angry reprimand. The Bounder's eyes gleamed as he sat down. He had pronounced Lagden a "sportsman" after the incident at calling-over the previous evening. Now he began to veer round to Harry Wharton's opinion of the man. Mr. Lagden, apparently, wanted to be liked at Greyfriars; but his temper was not under control as it should have been. Like a dashed cat, the Bounder said afterwards; purring one minute, and scratching the next. Not a man a fellow could trust.

Billy Bunter was glad that he had got through his "con" earlier. With

Lagden in this mood, "Jam reddened the radiant mare," would have been likely to earn him a licking instead of a laugh.

The Remove were glad when they were dismissed for break. No doubt Mr. Lagden was glad, too, with his thoughts following the stocky man he had watched walking in the quad.

"Bunter!"

Billy Bunter blinked in dismay at the Form-master. Mr. Lagden called to him as the juniors were going out.

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

With Lagden in this unpleasant temper Bunter did not want to draw his attention.

"Your construe was very bad, Bunter," said Mr. Lagden. "You may remain, and I will go through the passage with you."

"Oh, lor'!"

The Remove left the Form-room, leaving the unhappy Owl behind. He sat down again dismally at his desk.

Mr. Lagden strolled over to him. To Bunter's great relief he looked good-tempered again. He smiled at the fat junior; and Bunter grinned with relief.

"You have lost time this morning, Bunter," remarked Mr. Lagden. "Of course, it was not your fault that you were called away from the Form-room. I do not blame you."

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"No doubt Mr.—what was his name—"

"Brent, sir—Inspector Brent."

"Ah, yes—no doubt Mr. Brent had something of importance to say to you, or you would not have been called away from class to see him."

"Oh, yes, rather, sir!" said Bunter importantly. "He wanted to ask me all about Flip, sir."

Bunter was very pleased to show off his importance. Likewise, he was very pleased to keep off Latin. Not for a moment did it occur to the fat Owl that Mr. Lagden had kept him in to learn

what had passed in his interview with the man from Scotland Yard.

"Flip!" repeated Mr. Lagden. "Who is Flip?"

"That kid in the Second Form, sir, who disappeared last week," said Bunter.

"Ah! I remember hearing him spoken of. I do not think I have seen him," remarked Mr. Lagden carelessly.

"Oh, yes, sir! I dare say you've forgotten him," said Bunter. "But you've seen him. It's the kid who was with me, and some Remove fellows, the day you came, and he jumped like anything when he saw you——"

"Eh?"

"Some of the fellows asked him if he'd ever seen you before, sir, he seemed so startled when you came in," prattled on Bunter. "I dare say you remember him now, sir."

For a second Mr. Lagden's eyes glinted at the fatuous Owl. Then he laughed.

"I seem to remember—a rather grubby little fellow——"

"That's him, sir!" said Bunter. "He always looked a bit grubby, though I did my best with him. He never washed much in Puggins' Alley, I suppose, and it came rather new to him."

"I hope you were able to give Inspector Brent any information he desired to obtain from you, Bunter."

"Well, I told him all I knew, of course, sir," said Bunter. "All about Jimmy the One. I—I say, sir, what's the matter?" ejaculated Bunter, startled by a sudden movement on Mr. Lagden's part.

"Nothing, Bunter! What name did you say?"

"Jimmy the One, sir—that's the name of some awful villain Flip knew when he was a vagrant," said Bunter, blinking rather uneasily at his Form-master.

Mr. Lagden was smiling with his lips, but his eyes were strangely unsmiling, and Bunter felt oddly uneasy.

"I see," said Mr. Lagden, "and no

doubt you were able to tell Mr. Brent quite a great deal about this—this person, Jimmy the One?"

"Well, I told him what Flip told us—that it was Jimmy the One who put up that beast Buster to kidnap him," said Bunter. "I couldn't tell him any more than that, because Flip never told us anything else."

"That is rather unfortunate," remarked Mr. Lagden. His eyes were smiling now, as well as his lips.

"Yes, I wish I'd asked him about it now," said Bunter. "Of course, he would have told me anything if I'd asked him. I was his benefactor, you see; he was grateful to me, as he ought to have been. But, of course, I never knew he was going to be kidnapped, or anything. All I know is that the man he called Jimmy the One was an awful villain——"

"Indeed?" said Mr. Lagden.

"An absolute scoundrel," said Bunter. "He's been wanted by the police for ten years and more, I hear—a cracksman and a thief and a villain in every way—a frightful beast altogether——"

"You may go, Bunter."

"Thank you, sir," said Bunter, and he went promptly.

Mr. Lagden seemed to have forgotten that he had kept Bunter in to go through a Latin passage with him; and Bunter was not the fellow to remind him. He scuttled out of the Form-room in a hurry before Mr. Lagden had time to call it to mind.

It was probable, however, that Rupert Lagden, Master of Arts, was not thinking of Latin, or likely to think of it. With that stocky man with the jutting jaw at Greyfriars, the man with a double life had more important things to occupy his thoughts. John Brent had hunted Jimmy the One for ten years and more, but only once had he been so near his quarry as he was now—now that he was near Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Greyfriars Remove.

## CHAPTER 10.

## The Prisoner!

"Oh, swipes!" mumbled Flip. Flip, of the Greyfriars Second Form, was in a dismal mood.

It was only a few days since he had been rapt away from all who knew him, but it seemed like weeks, if not years, to the Greyfriars waif.

He rose from a table, at which he had been working with school books, and moved restlessly about the room.

The room had no windows. Light came from a skylight, far above the fag's head. In what building that room was situated Flip did not know, nor whether he was a hundred or five hundred miles from Greyfriars.

All he knew was that he was in the hands of Jimmy the One, and that only Jimmy the One knew where he was.

Bound and gagged, rolled in a motor-rug, Flip had been carried in a car, whither he knew not. He knew that, after a lapse of time, the car had halted—that he had been lifted out and carried, wrapped in the rug so that he could not get a glimpse of his surroundings. He had been carried some distance, so he knew that the car must have stopped at some distance from the building, and guessed that it was a lonely building far from a road. Beyond that he could form no conjecture.

His first impression had been that he had been taken a great distance from Greyfriars School. But on reflection the kidnapped boy realised that that could not be the case, for twice Jimmy the One had visited him in his imprisonment, and Jimmy the One was playing that part in safety. It seemed, therefore, that wherever Flip was he must be within such a distance of Greyfriars as would enable the crook to come to him without such a prolonged absence as would excite remark at the school.

Even the Buster, who had helped to kidnap him, had not been allowed to know where he was imprisoned—the

Buster had been dismissed as soon as his help was no longer needed. That was like Jimmy the One—he was not a man to take chances. Probably the Buster did not know that Jimmy the One was at the school—did not know that he was named Lagden at all. Jimmy was the man to keep secrets closely.

"Oh, swipes!" mumbled Flip, as he moved restlessly about the room. "This 'ere's enough to make a bloke go off his blooming onion, this 'ere is! Swipes! I'd be glad to see even the Buster now."

The solitude was oppressive to the waif—the solitude and the silence.

No guard was left over him, but no guard was needed. His prison had been carefully prepared by the crook's own active hands.

Where windows had been, thick, strong boards were nailed fast. Outside, shutters were fastened. Flip was in an upstairs room, the door of which was locked and bolted on the outside. Many times he had tried his hand on the door, and on the boards that were nailed over the windows. But there was nothing doing. He was a helpless and solitary prisoner, and the only sound that ever reached him was the savage howl of a dog that ran loose in the yard below, and that came faint and muffled.

But if he had been able to work a way out of the prison-room, the fag might have hesitated to venture forth, for he had seen the terrible animal that ran loose in the yard, and Jimmy the One had told him, quietly and coolly, that if he got out of the house he would be torn in pieces before he reached the gate.

The room was furnished roughly but comfortably. Everything that Flip needed was there so far as that went. Indeed, the quarters might have been considered luxurious in comparison with his old garret in Puggins' Alley.

He had ample food, and a tap in the corner of the room over a sink pro-

vided him with water. From an impulse of humanity, perhaps, the crook had provided him with books—including school books. Flip found a resource in study. He was making progress in Latin that was calculated to please Mr. Twigg, his Form-master, if he ever returned to Greyfriars. Work helped the weary hours to pass.

But often and often the fag's eyes turned to the little window in the roof, watching the steely winter sky in the daytime and the stars at night.

Often and often he roved round the room, restless as a caged animal, as he was doing now.

Yet, irksome as his imprisonment was, it was not of himself chiefly that the Greyfriars waif thought.

He was shut up in this dreary prison, while Jimmy the One carried on his game at Greyfriars, unsuspected. Bitterly now did Flip repent that he had not denounced the crook at once, when "Mr. Lagden" had arrived at Greyfriars as a temporary master of the Remove.

He had shrunk from betraying an associate of former days; he had warned the crook off, and he had believed that Jimmy the One would heed the warning and clear. This was the result. And the school that had sheltered Flip—seemed to him like Paradise after Puggins' Alley—would be robbed, and he could not prevent it. The field was clear for Jimmy the One, and Flip knew only too well what his game was—the game the man with a double life had played successfully many times before.

The Greyfriars waif ceased his weary pacing, started, and listened at the sound of a footstep in the silent building.

Jimmy the One was coming!

There was a scraping of the bolt, a click of the lock, and the door opened.

A man in an overcoat and a soft hat stepped in, and Flip's eyes fixed inimically on the face under the slouch of the hat—a face that the Remove

fellows would hardly have recognised as that of Mr. Lagden. A thick black moustache and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles changed its aspect very considerably.

"You!" grunted Flip.

He clenched his hand.

"Come to see that I'm safe!" he jeered. "You think I might 'ave got out through the blooming keyhole?"

"I'm not letting you starve, Flip," said Jimmy the One quietly. He laid a heavy bag on the table. "Unpack that!"

"You'd let me starve if you dared!" snapped Flip. "Lot you'd care if I never got out of 'ere alive!"

"You can get out of here alive and well as soon as you choose, Flip!" said Jimmy the One. "You know the conditions."

"Aw, stow it!" grunted Flip. "I was a pincher in Puggins' Alley; but I've told you more'n once I'll never pinch agin. If them blokes at Greyfriars see me agin, they ain't going to see me a pincher, s'elp me!"

The crook's lip curved sarcastically.

"They will never see you again, in that case, Flip!" he said. "You young fool! Cannot you see that I must keep you a prisoner for my own safety, unless you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire?"

"I'll 'old my tongue about you if you clear out of Greyfriars!" muttered Flip. "I ain't letting you rob the old cove in the gownd what was so kind to me. Not 'arf! But I'll 'old my tongue if you go, like I said I would!"

Jimmy the One shook his head.

"I've never trusted anyone yet," he said—"not unless I had a strong hold! You know too much, Flip! I never dreamed that you were at Greyfriars when I came here. I'd have kept clear enough if I'd even dreamed it. How could I have foreseen anything of the kind? A beggarly waif from a slum—I was not likely to foresee that! But you know me, Flip; you know now my real name. My liberty is in your hands

if you are free." He gave a hard laugh. "Do you think I am the man to take such chances?"

Flip was silent.

"Think it over!" drawled Jimmy the One. "A few months ago, when you were a vagrant in a slum, you'd have been overjoyed if I had taken you up and offered to make a comrade of you."

"That's true enough," admitted Flip. "I was a pincher then, and knowed no better. But I've learned a lot since then. Since I've knowed Master Bunter and his friends—and the Ead, too—I got to understand things better. And that ain't all! You done it yourself, Jimmy."

"What do you mean, you young fool?"

"You told me you knowed where my father is, and who he is, and that he's an honest man, and an officer of the law!" said Flip. "You offered to tell me all you knowed about it if I'd kept mum and let you carry on. And 'cause I wouldn't fall for it, you kidnapped me and put me 'ere. But you told me enough, Jimmy the One, to make me scared of pinching again. Mebbe I'll never know who my father is, and never see him; but I'll never do nothing what would disgrace him! I'll be cut in pieces first!"

"Take time to think it over, Flip—you've got bags of time before you," said Jimmy the One lightly. "My engagement at Greyfriars will last some time yet."

"You ain't cracked the safe yet?" jeered Flip.

Jimmy the One laughed.

"Plenty of time for that," he said. "I have to choose a time when there is something in it worth lifting, Flip. And, in any case, I should stay out my engagement. If I left before that, people might want to know why. You will remain here till I go. After that we shall see! At present I have to keep you under my eye——"

"Then we can't be fur from the school!" said Flip, eyeing the man keenly.

"You need not build on that, Flip—nobody will find you here. Neither, I think, will you get out—though I see the marks of your grubby fingers on the boards at the window. If you do get out, I pity you! The Alsatian is loose in the yard, and you would not live long enough to reach the gate. Unpack that bag—I have no more time to waste on you!"

Flip obeyed in silence.

"Jimmy!" He spoke in a low voice as the crook was about to go. "Jimmy, if you'd give up the job at Greyfriars you could trust me to 'old my tongue! You know I did 'old it, Jimmy."

"I'm not giving up the job at Greyfriars," said Jimmy the One coolly, "and I can't trust you, Flip! If you'd stood in with me, I'd have trusted you then! But now——"

He paused.

"What's the difference now?" asked Flip.

"It's too late now, Flip! Your disappearance has brought the police on the scene—you've mentioned the name of Jimmy the One."

"What about it?" asked Flip uneasily.

The crook laughed.

"That name, Flip, has been enough to bring a man from Scotland Yard down to the school. A man who's been after Jimmy the One for years, and who nearly had him once! Even if I could trust you, Flip, I should not dare to let you return to Greyfriars. That man would have the truth out of you, whether you liked it or not. You'll never see Greyfriars again, Flip! You'll never see freedom again, unless as the companion and confederate of Jimmy the One—up to the neck in breaking the law, Flip! That's all that's left for you now; circumstances have changed, and that's all that's left."

"It'll never come to that!" said Flip.

"Never's a long word!" said Jimmy the One.

The Greyfriars waif paced the room again after the crook was gone. Escape was impossible; rescue equally out of

the question. Flip had given up hope of either.

How was it to end—unless in his yielding to the terms offered by the crook? End how it might, it should never end in that—on that point, at least, the Greyfriars waif was resolute.

CHAPTER 11.  
Bunter's Latest!

"NECK!"  
"The neckfulness is terrific!"

"Of all the thumping cheek——"

"This takes the jolly old cake!"

It was quite a chorus of surprise and indignation.

Harry Wharton & Co. were standing before the notice-board, looking at the latest notice stuck thereon.

There were several papers on the board; one a games notice signed by Wingate, others posted by masters; one in the majestic hand of the headmaster himself. But upon none of these did the Famous Five cast their eyes.

Their attention was fixed upon a grubby paper, written in the well-known sprawling "fist" of Billy Bunter of the Remove, and in Billy Bunter's own original and striking style of spelling.

It was a cheek for Billy Bunter, who was nobody in particular, to stick a notice on the board at all. But the announcement in that notice was not merely cheek; it was sublime impudence. It ran:

"NOTIS.

"A Meating of the Remove is speshally corled this afternoon.

"Felows are rekwested to role up in the Rag at three o'clock, to be adressed on a verry important subjct.

"(Sined)

"W. G. BUNTER."

"That fat ass—calling a Form meeting!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Of all the blessed cheek——"

"I wonder what the important 'subject' is?" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

"Bunter wants kicking!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Let's look for him and kick him!"

"Good egg!" agreed Bob Cherry. "It's days since I've kicked Bunter—and he really needs kicking every day."

"The kickfulness is the proper caper!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!"

Quite a number of Remove men had gathered round to look at the new and surprising "notis" on the board. Most of them were grinning. Billy Bunter pushed his way through the crowd, apparently gratified by the attention his "notis" was receiving.

"You fat duffer!" said Harry Wharton. "What do you mean by sticking a notice on the board and calling a meeting of the Form?"

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I suppose I can call a meeting if I like! It's jolly important, too!"

"It's for the Form captain to call Form meetings, fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"Don't you know that Wharton's the only pebble on the beach, Bunter?" asked Skinner of the Remove gravely.

"Well, I should be Form captain, you know, if the fellows had any sense," said Bunter. "It's not my fault that they choose to elect a dud, and you can't say it is, Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Still, you can countersign the notice, if you like," said Bunter. "In fact, I'll let you take the chair at the meeting, old chap. I want the whole Form to turn up—it's awfully important. I'm not going to tell you what it's about till the meeting takes place."

"Keeping us on tenterhooks, what?" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently William George Bunter expected general interest and curiosity to know what that "meating" was about. Apparently he expected an eager crowd to surge into the Rag at three o'clock, with eager ears for the "adress." Billy Bunter often expected things that did not come to pass.

"That's it, Smithy," assented Bunter fatuously. "If the fellows knew in advance, they mightn't come, you know."

"I fancy they might not, in any case!" remarked Nugent.

"The mightfulness is terrific!"

"Bunter's got a surprise in store for us," said Skinner. "He's going to tell us that his postal order's come! It's worth calling a Form meeting to behold it, if it has."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Skinner! As a matter of fact, my postal order hasn't come," said Bunter. "I've been expecting a postal order for some time from one of my titled relations, you know. But there's been some delay in the post. Not that that has anything to do with this Form meeting," added Bunter hastily. "I'm not doing this because I'm stony. Don't you fellows run away with that idea."

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'm doing this because I feel that it's up to me, as it was really through me that Quelch got ill, you know."

"Quelch!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

The juniors stared at Bunter blankly.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was still laid up with a severe cold in the school sanatorium.

Certainly, it was through Bunter that Mr. Quelch was laid up; the fat and fatuous Owl having "mopped" a pail of water over him by an unhappy blunder in the dark. But what Mr. Quelch and his cold could possibly have to do with a Form meeting in the Rag was a deep mystery to the Removites.

"What on earth's Quelch got to do with it?" asked Peter Todd.

"That's telling," said Bunter. "I'm not going to say a word till the meeting takes place. Lots of fellows wouldn't come, you see, if they knew there was going to be a collection."

"A collection!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"A—a—a collection!" stuttered Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, you needn't ask me questions; I'm not going to say a word," said Bunter. "You'll hear all about it at the meeting. Still, I hope you'll play up! Think of poor old Quelch, in sanny, sneezing his head off, you know. Of course, he's a beast—but a Form-master can't help being a beast, can he? I'm not denying that it's jolly lucky for us that he's ill——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That new man, Lagden, is ever so much better-tempered—he only laughed when I did my construe this morning, instead of jawing a chap, like Quelch. Still, Quelch isn't a bad sort in his way, though I'm jolly glad he's in sanny. Taking him bunches of grapes and things will please him."

"Taking him bunches of grapes!" gasped the Bounder. "Who's going to take Quelch bunches of grapes?"

"That's telling!" said Bunter, shaking his head. "I'm not going to explain till we hold the meeting. Plenty of fellows wouldn't turn up if they knew I was going to take a collection to buy bunches of grapes to take to Quelch in sanny."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Removites.

"You'll hear all about it at the meeting," said Bunter. "I'm keeping the whole thing dark till then. Blessed if I see what you fellows are cackling at. You can take the chair at the meeting, Wharton, if you like; but bear in mind, of course, that the whole thing is in my hands. I take entire charge of the money."

"If any!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Well, my only hat!" gasped the Bounder. "We're to roll up in the Rag and put up a collection for bunches of grapes for poor old Quelch—and Bunter is to take charge of the money and blow it on tarts at the tuckshop——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The blowfulness will be terrific!"

"Poor old Quelch! I wonder how long he would have to wait for those bunches of grapes—with the cash in Bunter's hands?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, this isn't a laughing matter! Think of poor old Quelch sneezing his head off in sanny! It would buck him up no end to think that the fellows are thinking of him, you know. That's why I thought of this stunt. Not because I'm stony, you know—nothing of the sort! I suppose you fellows know that I'm to be trusted with money——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So that's what the jolly old Form meeting is about, is it?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"You'll know what it's about at three o'clock, Cherry. No good asking me questions; I'm not going to say anything till then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to take the chair, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton wiped his eyes.

"No," he gasped, "I'm not going to take the chair! I hardly think there will be a crowd in the Rag at three o'clock. But I'm going to take down this jolly old notice——"

"Look here——"

"And stuff it down your back——"

"I—I say—— Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! I say, you fellows, rescue! Make him leggo! Ow, wow! I say, old chap—— Leggo, you beast! Look here, old fellow—— Oh, you rotter! I say—— Yaroooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You, ow, ow! Beast! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hilarious crowd of Removites streamed out into the quad, leaving Billy Bunter gasping and gurgling as he made his frantic efforts to extract his "notis" from the back of his fat neck.

## CHAPTER 12.

### A Meeting of One!

"BUCK up, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton's voice was urgent as he glanced at his watch. "Buck up, or we'll be late!"

The remaining members of the Remove team for whom Wharton had been waiting, scrambled into the coach. That afternoon the Greyfriars junior eleven was due to meet Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe, in a "friendly." But even a friendly demanded punctuality—and the captain of the Remove was a stickler for punctuality.

"All ready!" sang out Bob Cherry, "Step on it, driver!"

"I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter rolled up to the coach. "I say, hold on! I say——"

"No room for porpoises," said Squiff. "Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Hold on!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, what about the Form meeting?"

"The what?" gasped Wharton.

"The Form meeting!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "You jolly well read my notice on the board this morning——"

"Ha, ha, ha——"

"It's for three——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the footballers in the coach.

They seemed immensely tickled at the idea of letting a football match slide, to attend Billy Bunter's "meeting" in the Rag.

"I say, you fellows——"

"You can hold that jolly old meet-

ing by yourself, old fat man!" chuckled Peter Todd. "You can do all the talking, with nobody to interrupt you."

"Oh, really, Toddy! I say, you fellows——"

"Like us to cut the football match at Highcliffe, and roll up to the meeting, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Yes, old chap! After all, a football match doesn't matter much, does it? And this meeting is rather important, you know! Think of poor old Quelch in sanny and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" bellowed Bob Cherry. "Who's for cutting the footer to hear Bunter wagging his jolly old chin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Roll away, barrel!"

And the coach rolled off with the hilarious footballers, leaving Billy Bunter blinking after it through his big spectacles, in great wrath.

In fixing his Form meeting for that afternoon Bunter had forgotten that there was a football match on. Trifles like that were not likely to stick in Bunter's memory.

But in view of the great importance of the "meeting," Bill Bunter felt that the fellows might have cut so very unimportant a trifle as a football match! Nobody seemed to share Bunter's opinion on that point, however. Not only had the footballers gone off to Highcliffe, regardless of Bunter and all his works; but a good many fellows had gone with them, and other fellows were wheeling out their bikes to follow, while still others were walking it. It looked as if very few of the Remove would be left to attend Bunter's Form meeting—even if inclined to do so, which was perhaps doubtful!

"Beasts!" grunted Billy Bunter.

Still, all the fellows were not gone, and Billy Bunter hoped for the best. He proceeded to look for stray members of the Remove.

Hazeldene was the first he found. Hazel, having stared after the departing coach with a frowning brow, was coming back towards the House when Bunter bore down on him. The scowl on Hazel's face did not look encouraging; but Billy Bunter was one of those persons mentioned in the proverb, who rush in where angels fear to tread.

"Oh, you're not gone, old chap!" said Bunter affably.

"Looks as if I haven't, doesn't it?" grunted Hazel.

"They don't want you to keep goal to-day?" grinned Bunter.

Hazel gave him a black look, and tramped on. Billy Bunter rolled on with him.

"Cut off!" snapped Hazel.

"Don't be huffy, old chap!" said Bunter. "Cheer up, you know! After all, you can't keep goal like Squiff, can you?"

Hazel did not answer that.

"I offered to keep goal myself," added Bunter. "Wharton turned me down—laughed, in fact."

"You fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Hazel——"

"Shut up, for goodness' sake!"

"The fact is, Wharton's too cheeky!" said Bunter, touching the right chord at last. "He isn't really the only pebble on the beach."

"He thinks he is!" growled Hazel.

Hazel was sore. He did not agree with the rest of the Remove that Squiff was worth ten times as much in goal.

"Time he was taken down a peg, what?" said Bunter.

"High time!" grunted Hazel.

"Making out that he's the only fellow to call a Form meeting!" said Bunter. "You come to the meeting, Hazel, old chap, just to show him, what?"

Hazel stared at him.

"You silly idiot!" was his answer, and he stalked away. Apparently, Hazel was not disposed to come to the meeting, even to "show" Wharton that he was not the only pebble on the beach.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

The fat junior continued to look for stray Removites.

It really was important for that meeting to be held and a collection to be taken for providing comforts for the invalid.

Bunter—not for the first time—had been disappointed about a postal order. It was essential to raise the wind. Every man in the Remove sympathised with Mr. Quelch, more or less—and with so much sympathy going, surely some of it would take a practical form! So many fellows had said "Poor old Quelch!" that really one might have expected a rush to attend the meeting, now that the fellows knew that it was on Quelch's account. But apparently the fellows were satisfied with saying "Poor old Quelch!" and did not intend to extend their sympathy beyond that remark.

Or perhaps they suspected that a collection taken to provide bunches of grapes for the invalid might stick to Bunter's own fat hands! It was barely possible!

Anyhow, the Form meeting did not seem to be prospering. Bunter found Bolsover major in the quad; but all the bully of the Remove did was to knock off his cap, without even waiting to hear his remarks. Having fielded his cap, Bunter decided to leave Bolsover major alone. He went into the House, and found Skinner & Co. loafing in the Remove passage. They were not going over to Highcliffe. They were not interested in football; but it transpired that they were still less interested in Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, are you coming to the meeting?" asked Bunter.

"Eh? What meeting?" asked Skinner.

"The Form meeting—you saw my notice on the board this morning——"

"Kick him!" said Skinner.

"I say, you fellows——Yaroooooooh!"

Skinner and Snoop and Stott were idle and unoccupied, as usual, that half-

holiday. They found occupation for a few minutes in kicking Bunter along the Remove passage.

From this occupation they seemed to derive amusement. Billy Bunter found it far from amusing.

He yelled and fled for the stairs. Skinner & Co. followed him as far as the landing, and Bunter descended in a great hurry.

"Beasts!" he yelled back from the next landing.

"Come up and have some more!" grinned Skinner.

"Yah!"

Bunter did not come up for more. On many occasions Bunter did not know when he had had enough. This time he knew! He departed in wrath, leaving Skinner & Co. chortling.

Really, the outlook for that important Form meeting was not encouraging. But hope springs eternal in the human breast. Towards three o'clock Bunter rolled into the Rag, hoping to see some of the fellows arriving. He found the Rag quite vacant.

"Beasts!" said Bunter, addressing space.

Three o'clock, at last, boomed from the clock tower. Billy Bunter turned his eyes hopefully on the door.

It did not open.

The quarter chimed. Still the door did not open. William George Bunter had the Rag to himself! It was a meeting of one—utterly useless to Bunter, for he obviously could not take a collection from himself! With feelings that were really too deep for words, the Owl of the Remove rolled out of the Rag—and the meeting was over!

But the wily Owl of the Remove wasn't beaten yet. While the majority of the Remove cheered the footballers at Highcliffe William George Bunter devoted the afternoon to thinking out ways and means of "touching" the hearts—and pockets of his school-fellows. And at last a great idea dawned!

## CHAPTER 13.

## Getting Down to Business!

**C**LINK, clink, clink!  
That peculiar metallic sound heralded the arrival of Billy Bunter in the Rag.

It was after tea, but not yet time for prep. Winter darkness lay on the quadrangle, a cold wind whistled over the ancient roofs of Greyfriars; but in the Rag all was merry and bright. A big fire roared and glowed, and near the fire stood the Famous Five, in a cheery group, with some more of the footballers, fighting the Highcliffe match over again.

Smithy's winning goal—that goal which had been rather risky, like so many of the Bounder's goals—was the topic. Quite an interesting topic to the Remove footballers—much more interesting than Billy Bunter and all his works. Still, they gave attention to Bunter as he rolled into the Rag. They could hardly help observing him, as his arrival was announced by a clattering and clinking like a jazz band on a small scale.

"I say, you fellows——"

The juniors stared at Bunter.

He was carrying a large tin box, of which the tin lid was closed and locked. In the flat lid was cut a narrow slit—evidently jabbed there by a chisel in the fat Owl's clumsy hand. It was from the tin box that the clinking sound came. It sounded as if it contained coin of the realm in rather large quantities.

With a cheery grin on his fat face Bunter rattled the tin box and its contents, and drew the attention of the crowd of fellows in the Rag.

"What on earth's that game?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows! I've started the collection myself," said Bunter.

"The which?"

"Collection! The collection for Quelch, you know!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Bunter rattled the box again. The jazz band effects drew the general attention on the fat junior

"Now you're all here, or nearly all," announced Bunter, while the juniors stared at him, "I've got a few words to say—what I was going to say at the Form meeting, you know! Only you fellows never came——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was rather rotten of you," said Bunter. "I came in here and waited, and nobody turned up—nobody at all——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Think of poor old Quelch sneezing his old head off in sanny—coughing and snorting, and all that!" said Bunter reproachfully. "Very likely worrying about how his Form's getting on, and thinking we're missing him. You know what Form-masters are—they'd never guess how glad a chap is to get shut of them——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still, old Quelch isn't a bad sort," said Bunter. "He's a beast; but I'd like to know the fellow who's met a beak who isn't a beast——"

"Hear, hear!"

"And he's better than that new man, Lagden—heaps better! Since that brute whopped me this morning I've been hoping that Quelch will get well quick. Honest Injun! I'd really like him to get well!"

The juniors chuckled.

"And I think it's up to us to show him that we haven't forgotten him, and—and that we're thinking of him constantly, you know——"

"But we're not!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"We're all sorry for poor old Quelch!" said Bob. "But I can't say I'm thinking of him all the time. Not quite."

"The not-quitefulness is terrific!"

"Well, of course, you haven't such a sympathetic nature as I have, Cherry. You know my kind heart. Some poet says that kind hearts are more than coroners——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob. "Do you mean coronets?"

"Well, it's something of the kind," said Bunter. "Anyhow, I'm frightfully sorry for Quelch—practically mourning for him—and that's why I've thought of this wheeze. I'd have told you all about it this afternoon if you'd come to the Form meeting. You preferred football!" added Bunter, with withering sarcasm.

"We did!" chuckled Bob.

"Well, now you're all here, shut up and listen to a chap!" said Bunter. "Quelch is lying frightfully seedy in sanny, coughing and sneezing, and so on, and the idea is to take him a few comforts—not so much for the things themselves, you know, as to show him how deeply we feel for him——"

"But we don't!" remarked Skinner.

"Keep to the point!" said Bunter. "Now, bunches of grapes are always welcome to an invalid. They're frightfully expensive; but that will only add to the thoughtful generosity of the gift, you know. I shall go down to Chunkley's, at Courtfield, and select something really nice. I'm not asking you fellows to take any trouble. You can leave the whole matter in my hands with perfect confidence. Rely on me to spend the money——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To the best advantage. Now I've started the collection"—Bunter rattled the tin box again, with a terrific clinking and clanking—"I want you men to follow my example. I want you to put your usual selfishness aside for this once—see?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm going to place this box on the table here," said Bunter. There was a clang as he slammed it down. "Every fellow will be expected to contribute something. Even coppers will not be despised; but silver is preferred——"

"Not really?" ejaculated Nugent.

"Yes, old chap; but a few currency notes, of course, will be welcome. Smithy might put in a currency note, I think."

"Think again!" suggested the Bounder.

"Well, you're always swanking about your money, ain't you, old chap? I think you might put in a pound note. You, too, Mauly. Anyhow, every man here is expected to contribute something!" said Bunter. "Remember that I'm taking all the trouble. All you fellows have got to do is to contribute the cash."

"Go hon!"

"Follow my generous example!" said Bunter. "I've started the collection——" Bunter picked up the box and rattled it again. "I've started it——"

"What with?" grinned Skinner.

"Well, I won't mention the sum," said Bunter. "I don't want to brag about my generosity. I'm not the fellow to brag, as you know."

"Great pip!"

"Follow your leader, you know!" said Bunter, blinking at the grinning Removites. "Be generous, you know—like me! Think of old Quelch——"

"Let's see how much Bunter has started the collection with," suggested Skinner. "I don't fancy there's a fearful lot of money in the box yet."

"Oh, really, Skinner! If you think I've put three or four old keys in this box just to rattle——"

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

"I'm not going to unlock the box till after the collection," said Bunter firmly. "In fact, I've left the key in my study. Now, look here, you fellows, I've got to go and see old Wingate. He gave me an impot and—and—I haven't done it. I shall have to tell him a yarn about burning it, see! When I come back I shall expect to find that you fellows have played up. Think of old Quelch——"

"Sort out your wealth, Smithy!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

The Bounder chuckled.

"I say, you fellows, think of old Quelch lying in the sanny——"

"While Bunter's lying here!" said Skinner.

"Look here, you fellows——"

"Gentlemen, chaps and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry. "It's up to us! Roll off, Bunter, and leave it to us! I'm jolly well going to put something in the box, and I fancy every other man will. We can't do better than follow your example."

Billy Bunter beamed.

"That's right, old chap! I'll leave the box here, and all of you roll up and do your best!"

"Rely on us, old fat bean!"

And Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag in a state of happy satisfaction. The Form meeting had been a frost, but the collection, it seemed, was coming off all right; and the collection, after all, was really the important item in the programme.

So long as the collection came off, Bunter was satisfied, and with the support of a popular fellow like Bob Cherry it seemed likely to be a success.

Bob grinned cheerfully as the fat Owl rolled out of the Rag. The other fellows stared at him.

"You silly ass!" said Johnny Bull. "Mean to say you're going to put anything in Bunter's box?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Do you think any of it will get to Quelch, and that he will see those bunches of grapes, you howling ass?" snorted Johnny. "If there's anything put in the box Bunter will blow the lot on tuck!"

"The blowfulness will be terrific!"

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"My dear chap," he said, "Bunter may have some idea like that in his fat head, but I feel certain that he won't blow the collection on tuck."

"Fathead!"

"I'm going to put something in, and I call on every man in the Remove to follow Bunter's example in the same way!" declared Bob.

"Well, fools and their money are soon parted!" remarked Skinner.

"Who's talking about money?" asked Bob.

"Eh?"

"I said I was going to follow Bunter's example. Well, Bunter has started the collection with two or three old keys——"

"Oh!"

"I've got an old key in my pocket. It's not very valuable, but every little helps."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites, as Bob Cherry groped in his pockets, extracted therefrom an old key which certainly did not look like an article of value, and dropped it into the slit in the lid of the collecting-box.

"Roll up, you men!" said Bob cheerily. "Every man ought to contribute something—following Bunter's example."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, you men!" chortled Johnny Bull. "I've got a bad halfpenny——"

"Mine's a trouser-button!" chortled Skinner.

"I've got a penknife with both blades broken!" remarked Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clink, clink, clink, clink!

It would have been a pleasing sound to Bunter's ears had those fat ears heard it.

Contributions fairly poured into the tin box.

There were no currency notes, and coin of the realm was conspicuous by its absence. But the contributions were many and various. Some fellows took the trouble to go to their studies to fetch odds and ends for contribution. Buttons, perhaps, predominated; but pebbles, disused pen-nibs, broken fragments of pencils, bits of crockery, all sorts and conditions of odds and ends, were liberally contributed. The box had not weighed much when Bunter placed it on the table in the Rag. It was quite heavy when the juniors had finished.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Bunter!"

And a swarm of grinning faces were turned on William George Bunter as he rolled into the Rag.

## CHAPTER 14.

## Treasure Trove!

**B**ILLY BUNTER blinked round the Rag. He had heard the sound of a clink as he came in, and it was an encouraging sound. There was happy anticipation in the fat face of the Owl of the Remove.

"I hope you fellows are going to play up!" said Bunter anxiously.

"My dear man, we've played up!" said Bob Cherry.

"Followed your example!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Your generous example!" said the Bounder.

"I fancy there's hardly a man here that hasn't put in something, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "And now the question is about opening the box."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Bunter grabbed at the tin box on the table. He gave a gasp as he felt its weight.

"Oh, crumbs!" he gasped. "Oh, my hat! Good!"

The box was quite heavy. The contents rattled merrily. If it contained only coppers the sum must have been a large one. Bunter could tell that from the weight, and he hoped that it didn't contain merely coppers.

That hope, as a matter of fact, was well founded. It didn't!

"About opening the box," repeated Wharton, with a cheery wink at the grinning Removites. "After such a collection—such a large collection—with practically every fellow in the Form contributing, Bunter will agree that the box had better be opened in the presence of all the fellows."

"Nothing of the kind!" hooted Bunter hotly. "This matter is in my hands—entirely in my hands!"

"But the collection being so very large——" urged the captain of the Remove.

"I shall account for every penny in this box!" said Bunter loftily.

"After all, that won't be difficult!" murmured Skinner.

"The matter is entirely in my hands. If you fellows think you're going to chip in you're jolly well mistaken. I shall go down to Courtfield to-morrow for Quelch. Or—or perhaps the next day. After all, there's no hurry."

"Let's make him get the key and open the box," said Bolsover. "With all that enormous collection inside——"

"We'd really like to see it!" declared Squiff.

There was a general move towards Bunter. The fat Owl clutched the tin box in alarm.

"I say, you fellows——" he gasped.

"Open the box and let's all feast our eyes on it," said Nugent.

"The feastfulness will be terrific."

"I—I say, you fellows—keep off!" howled Bunter. "I'm jolly well not going to open the box here! Besides, I've left the key in my study. It isn't in my waistcoat pocket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Bunter! Let's feast our eyes."

"Collar him!"

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter.

With the tin box grasped in his fat arms the Owl of the Remove bolted for the door.

A yell of laughter followed him.

"After him!" roared Bob Cherry, without, however, making any movement in pursuit. "After him!"

Bunter flew.

With the tin box and its valuable contents safely clasped to his pogdy breast, Billy Bunter dodged out of the Rag and scuttled for the stairs. He feared pursuit, but only laughter followed. The contributors to that collection did not really mind where Bunter opened the box, though undoubtedly his face would have been worth seeing at the moment.

Bunter scuttled up the stairs and escaped into the Remove passage. He bolted into Study No. 7 in the Remove, slammed the door behind him, and locked it.

Then he breathed more freely.

He slammed the box on the study table. The contents clanged and clinked, and Bunter grinned a beatific grin. The box was a good size, but it seemed to be nearly full. Even if it was only coppers—

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter. "Making out that a fellow ain't to be trusted with money! Beasts!"

The fat Owl groped in his waistcoat pocket for the key.

There was a happy grin of anticipation on his face.

His fat fingers almost trembled with eagerness as he inserted the key into the lock of the tin box. His fat face beamed.

Bunter, of course, was not a dishonest fellow; he would have scorned the imputation. Far, indeed, was it from Bunter's fat mind to raise a collection in the Remove to buy bunches of grapes for his Form-master in sanny and blow the proceeds on tuck for his fat self. Bunter was incapable of such misdoings. All Bunter was going to do was to borrow the collection temporarily. Merely that, and nothing more.

Bunter was stony. He had been disappointed about one postal order after another. It could make no difference, so far as Bunter could see, if he drew on this source of wealth and made it good when his postal order came. Quelch only had to wait for his bunches of grapes till Bunter's postal order came.

These proceedings, to Billy Bunter's fat mind, were perfectly satisfactory. But he was aware that they might not have been so perfectly satisfactory to other fellows. Bunter had had a lot of carping criticism in his time. Obviously, it was better to keep the whole matter in his own fat hands.

In his own study, with the door locked, he was safe from interference by captious fellows who did not understand the ways of a really high-minded chap like Billy Bunter.

He unlocked the box.

He threw back the lid and turned the box over, to pour out the contents on the study table—a stream of wealth on which to feast his eyes.

The contents streamed out.

Bunter gazed at them.

For a fraction of a second his gaze was one of anticipated joy. Then it changed.

His fat jaw dropped.

He gazed, and gazed, hardly able to believe his eyes or his spectacles.

"Wha-a-a-at——" stuttered Bunter.

His voice failed him.

The collection in the box was undoubtedly large! All sorts of things had streamed out over the table.

Trouser-buttons and waistcoat-buttons, pen-nibs and fragments of cups and saucers that had gone west, all sorts of things, and a single coin among the lot. And that coin was a bad halfpenny—so bad that a blind man would not have taken it as a gift!

Bunter gazed and gazed.

He had the collection in his own fat hands, to deal with as he liked. And that was the collection!

Bunter found his voice at last.

"Oh, lor'! Beasts! Oh, lor'!"

. . . . .

Billy Bunter's fat face was morose for the rest of the evening.

It was quite a contrast to the other faces in the Remove.

All the other faces were smiling, but William George Bunter seemed to be following the example of that ancient king who never smiled again.

## CHAPTER 15.

### The Clue!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"That man's a fool!" said Billy Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove jerked a fat thumb in the direction of a stocky,

thick-set man who was crossing the quad.

It was Saturday afternoon, and, as there was no football match on, the Famous Five were discussing, after dinner, what they were going to do with the half-holiday.

Billy Bunter interrupted them as he drew their attention to the stocky gentleman.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced at Inspector Brent. They had seen the detective about the school several times during the past few days, and their impression of him was that he was anything but a fool. That, however, was evidently the valuable opinion of William George Bunter, the fat ornament of the Remove.

"You want to be careful what you say, Bunter," said Bob Cherry.

"What's he doing here?" asked Bunter.

"Eh! I suppose he came along to look for poor Flip!" said Bob. "It seems to be a job over Grimey's weight, and they've called in a man from Scotland Yard. What about it, ass?"

Sniff from Bunter.

"Well, the man's a fool!" he said. "The fact is, he called me a fool the first time I saw him and talked to him."

"Doesn't that rather show that he's a man of some judgment?" asked Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Well, what's the man done, fat-head?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Nothing!" answered Bunter. "That's the point—nothing! Flip's been missing more than a week. Nobody knows where he is, but everybody knows that he's not here. Well, then, what is that ass mooching about the school for?"

"Asking questions, chiefly!" grinned Bob.

Harry Wharton's face dwelt thoughtfully on the stocky fellow that was approaching from the gates.

Mr. Brent seemed to have taken up

his quarters at Courtfield, but nearly every day he was seen at the school.

He had questioned all, or almost all, the fellows, including the Famous Five, on the subject of Flip.

That the waif had seen Jimmy the One since he had been at the school was certain, and Mr. Brent seemed keen to find any fellow who might have seen Flip in talk with a stranger, evidently with a view to getting a description of the man.

But he had had no luck so far. Nobody remembered having seen the fag in the company of anyone outside the school.

"Let's ask him if there's any news," said Bob Cherry. "He's asked us questions enough. I suppose we can ask him one."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

And, as Inspector Brent drew nearer, the Famous Five capped him respectfully, and Wharton addressed him.

"Excuse me, sir. Is there any news of Flip yet?"

The stocky gentleman stopped and looked at the juniors. There was a derisive expression on Bunter's fat face which Mr. Brent did not seem to observe, though he was undoubtedly a very observant man.

"We're all very anxious about Flip, sir!" said Bob as the detective did not immediately reply.

"The anxiety is terrific!" added the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Our likefulness of the excellent and execrable Flip was preposterously tremendous!"

Mr. Brent glanced at the dusky junior, and his hard, cold face broke into a faint smile for a second. The nabob's beautiful English had the effect of disturbing his grim gravity for a passing moment.

"A clue has been found!" he barked.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed all the Famous Five. And the nabob added that the goodfulness was terrific.

Mr. Brent looked thoughtfully at the junior's under his wrinkled brows. He

was a man of few words, and slow to utter even those few.

"Is it a secret, sir?" asked Nugent.

"If it were a secret I should not mention it," barked Mr. Brent. "It is common knowledge, or soon will be. The boy's cap has been found."

"Flip's cap?" exclaimed Wharton. "Oh, good! Every fellow here has to have his name in his hat——"

"Exactly! That is how it was identified."

"Will you tell us where it was found, sir?"

"Why not, when it will probably be in the evening newspapers?" barked Mr. Brent. "It was picked up some days ago in a street at Ashford."

"That's a good thirty miles from here," said Nugent. "But it's a jolly good clue. It shows the way the villain went with Flip."

Mr. Brent stared at Nugent for a moment.

"But how was it found, sir?" asked Harry, with keen interest.

"It seems to have been picked up by a farmer's man," said Mr. Brent. "He found it lying in the road, as if, as he supposed, it had been blown from someone passing in a car. Instead of taking it to the police station, as he should have done, he attached no particular importance to it until he learned from his paper that a boy named Flip had disappeared and was being searched for. Then he remembered the name in the cap, and took it to the police at Ashford."

"And it's certain that it is Flip's cap?" asked Bob.

"It has been identified as a Greyfriars cap, and the name of Flip was in it. Flip is not, I think, a common name!" barked Mr. Brent.

"Oh, quite!" said Bob, a little abashed. "Then it shows that the brute who took Flip away passed through Ashford. I suppose that's where he would head for on the way to his jolly old native heath."

"If Jimray the One let Flip's cap

blow off the car—if he had him in a car—he must be a howling ass!" said Johnny Bull. "More likely Flip got a chance to chuck it out, with the idea of somebody picking it up and finding the way he went. He was a clever kid. Just the kid to think of such a thing."

"That's it, of course," said Harry.

"That is the conclusion generally drawn," grunted Mr. Brent. "It seems a natural conclusion."

"Pretty certain, I should think," said Frank Nugent.

"Looks as if that brute got poor old Flip back to London," said Harry Wharton.

Mr. Brent gave the captain of the Remove one of his disconcerting stares, nodded, and walked on to the House.

"I say, you fellows, I told you that man was a fool!" said Billy Bunter, with a sniff. "A regular idiot, you know. We all knew that Flip must have been taken a long way off, and now it's a certainty; and that fathead of a detective is still hanging about here instead of looking for him. I've a jolly good mind to tell him what I think of him!"

And Bunter rolled away.

"Blessed if I don't half think Bunter's right," said Bob. "Now it's certain that Flip's been taken such a distance I can't quite see what Brent is hanging on here for."

His chums nodded assent, with the exception of Hurree Janset Ram Singh. The nabob was staring after Mr. Brent, with a very thoughtful expression on his dusky face. There was a glimmer of intelligence in his dark eyes.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"What have you got in your jolly old black noddle, Inky?" he asked. "I can see it's a brain-wave. Cough it up!"

"My esteemed and idiotic chums," said Hurree Singh, "it appears terrifically certain that the absurd Flip was taken away through Ashford, as his ridiculous cap has been picked up there."

"Not much doubt about it," said Nugent. "Of course, that brute would naturally head for London. He's safer there."

"Perhapsfully it is too terrifically certain," suggested the nabob, with a grin.

"Eh? What on earth are you driving at, Inky?" exclaimed Bob. "It's as clear as daylight that the poor kid got a chance of chucking his cap out of the car to leave a clue behind him."

"The clearfulness is preposterous!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Unless, my esteemed chums, that is what the execrable Jimmy the One desired the police to think, in whichful case he may have dropped the cap there himself."

"Oh!" ejaculated the juniors.

They stared at the dusky nabob.

"My hat!" said Bob. "Why, the blighter may have chucked poor old Flip's cap there after landing poor old Flip a hundred miles away in another direction!"

"Or——" murmured the nabob.

"Or what, fathead?"

"Or the absurd kidnapper may have wished the search to concentrate at a distance from this ridiculous school, in whichful case it may turn out that the esteemed Flip is not, after all, far away."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"But the kidnapper wouldn't be ass enough to stack him away anywhere near Greyfriars!" exclaimed Nugent.

The nabob made a gesture towards the stocky figure disappearing into the House.

"The esteemed and absurd detective is still here," he remarked. "Possibly he is lingerfully hanging on because he does not want to follow the trail of a ridiculous red herring."

It was a rather startling thought to the chums of the Remove. If the discovery at Ashford was in the nature of a false scent laid for the searchers, it was possible that the nabob's astute conjecture was right, and that Mr.

Brent suspected that the kidnapped fag was still somewhere in the vicinity of the school. Harry Wharton & Co. would have given a great deal to read the thoughts of the man from Scotland Yard.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Startling!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He jumped.

Harry Wharton & Co. jumped, too, as they discerned how the fat Owl of the Remove was occupied.

The Famous Five had decided to take their bikes out for the afternoon, and they had come along to the bicycle-shed to wheel them out.

Billy Bunter was there!

He was alone there, and very busy. He was stopping beside a rather handsome machine on a stand—a man's machine, which belonged to Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Remove.

Mr. Lagden was the only master at Greyfriars who rode a push-bike. But nearly every day he found time for a run on that push-bike; and, dark and wintry as the evenings were, it was not uncommon for Mr. Lagden to go for a spin after he had done with his Form.

His machine stood next to Wingate's, which was a big, handsome Sunbeam, kept in beautiful order by Wingate's fag. The juniors' machines were at the other end of the shed, and Bunter had no business where he was, and still less business to be occupied as he was.

He jumped up with a startled squeak and blinked round at the Famous Five through his big spectacles in sheer alarm.

"Oh, I say, you fellows! It's only you!" gasped Bunter. "I say, don't you mention you saw me here, you know."

"You unspeakable idiot!" gasped Harry Wharton.

He stared at Mr. Lagden's machine—

a big black Raleigh. It was a good machine, but not much use to Mr. Lagden if he wanted it for one of his solitary spins that afternoon. The tyres were cut and slashed almost to shreds, and Billy Bunter slipped a pocket-knife into his pocket rather too late to hide it from the eyes of the juniors.

"I—I say, I—I never did that, you know!" gasped Bunter. "I—I've only been here a—a minute, and—and I saw it——"

"You fat villain, you were doing it as we came in!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, the beast gave me five hundred lines!" gasped Bunter. "And he's licked me because I haven't done them, although I told him I wrote them out yesterday and Toddy used them to light the study fire by mistake. He refused to take my word, just like he did yours the other day, Wharton——"

"You awful idiot!" said Nugent. "You'd get flogged for this! Lagden will be as mad as a hatter when he sees it."

"I—I never did it, you know! I—I saw it when I—I came in. I—I was just stooping down to—to look——"

"Let's hope Lagden will believe that!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, don't you tell Lagden you saw me here!" squeaked Bunter in alarm. "I say, it serves him right to give him a puncture or two after he's licked a chap for nothing——"

"A—a puncture or two!" ejaculated Bob. "You frabjous owl, you're ripped the tyres to ribbons!"

"Well, serve him right!" said Bunter. "I heard him tell Twigg he was going out at three, so he won't be here yet. It's not half-past two! Safe as houses, you chaps! He won't find it out till he's going to start. Serve him jolly well right, the beast! You fellows keep it dark, you know. Not that I did, of course."

And Billy Bunter rolled out of the

bikeshed, leaving the Famous Five staring blankly at Mr. Lagden's crooked jigger.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob, with a deep breath. "Lagden's rather a sweep, but that's a dirty trick to play on any man. Bunter ought to be boiled in oil. Look here, let's get off. We don't want to be caught on the spot, or we may be asked questions; can't give that benighted bandersnatch away."

"What-ho!" agreed Wharton.

And the Famous Five wheeled out their machines very quickly. As they mounted in the road, they spotted William George Bunter strolling away with a satisfied grin on his fat face. He gave the chums of the Remove a podgy wink as they started.

Bunter evidently was satisfied with his peculiar form of vengeance on the new Form-master. Certainly it was, as Bob had said, a dirty trick; but it had to be admitted that Bunter had just cause for resentment against the new master. He had been licked for not doing his lines, and the lines had been given unjustly in the first place. Bunter, no doubt, would have preferred to tell Rupert Lagden what he thought of him; but that was rather impracticable, so he had taken it out on Lagden's bike. Certainly he had knocked Lagden's spin that afternoon on the head.

Harry Wharton & Co. rode away at a good speed. They were going by Courtfield and along to Redclyffe, where they intended to stop for tea. After which there would be a run home to Greyfriars—but not by way of the path through Redclyffe Woods! After the trouble with Lagden they had sagely resolved to give Redclyffe Woods a miss. And the few extra miles were nothing to them on the bikes. They were out for a long spin.

Billy Bunter's antics were no business of theirs, of course, and they dismissed the matter from their minds. Certainly they thought that the fat Owl ought to be kicked, but it was not their business

to kick him. And it was certain that he would get something much more severe than a kicking if Mr. Lagden discovered who had ripped his tyres.

It was a cold but clear and fine day, with a keen wind from the sea, and the chums of the Remove enjoyed that spin. They rode by Courtfield and round by Highcliffe, and then by the towpath along the Sark, where biking was really not allowed; but as there was nobody on the towpath in the winter they allowed themselves that privilege. Then they got into the Redclyffe road, and shot along in a merry bunch for the distant town.

It was tea-time when they rode into the old-fashioned High Street of Redclyffe, and after two or three hours in the keen air they were quite ready for tea.

The teashop at Redclyffe was an adjunct to the grocery stores. Adjoining the grocery was a railed space where cyclists could park their machines while they had tea within. In the summer there were often two or three dozen machines stacked there, but in the winter there were few. Only one machine stood there when the chums of the Remove wheeled in. Bob Cherry, glancing at it, grinned.

"We're going to have old Wingate's company at tea!" he remarked.

"Wingate!" repeated Wharton. "Wingate's playing football this afternoon. There's a Form match—Fifth and Sixth."

"Old Wingate's jolly well cut it, then. That's his jigger," answered Bob.

Wharton looked at the machine.

He had noticed that it was a big Sunbeam. A second glance showed that it was Wingate's Sunbeam. He knew the machine well enough now that he gave it attention.

"Wingate hasn't cut the footer," said Johnny Bull. "He was going down to play before we came out. He's lent somebody his jigger—some other Sixth Form man."

"Oh, very likely," agreed Bob. "I

suppose he wouldn't be likely to cut the footer."

The juniors wheeled their machines on and stacked them against the farther wall. While they were thus occupied a man came out of the grocery door with a large parcel under his arm. He stepped to the Sunbeam and proceeded with rapid fingers to tie the parcel on the handlebars. The juniors, turning away from their own machines, all looked at him at once. In fact, they stared almost in stupefaction.

The man was a stranger to them. He had a dark face, with a thick, black moustache, and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, and looked about forty. What he was doing with Wingate's jigger was a mystery, unless he was "pinching" it. Certainly it was clear that he intended to ride it, for he fastened the parcel on and then took hold of the machine to wheel it out of the yard.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

He made a sudden rush forward and caught hold of the bike. So far as Bob could see, it was the most barefaced case of "bike-pinching" he had ever come across. Whether Wingate, or another senior of Greyfriars, had left the machine there, obviously a perfect stranger could have no right to take possession of it.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Bob warmly.

The man in the horn-rimmed glasses gave a start and stared at him. It seemed to Bob that there was recognition in the look the man gave him through the big spectacles. But if the horn-rimmed man knew the Greyfriars junior, Bob did not know him.

"What do you mean?" he rapped out, in a harsh, husky voice. "Let go my bicycle!"

"Your bike?" gasped Bob.

"Certainly! Let go at once!"

With a powerful wrench the dark-faced man almost tore the machine

from Bob's grasp. But Bob held on manfully, and shouted to his comrades:

"Here, you men, lend a hand!"

A moment more and the bike was grasped by five pairs of vigorous hands, and the horn-rimmed man wrenched at it in vain, his eyes gleaming savage anger through the big glasses.

#### CHAPTER 17.

##### Whose Bike?

"LET go, you young rascals!"

The harsh, husky voice was shaking with rage.

But the anger of a bike-thief had no terrors for the Famous Five of Greyfriars. They held on grimly.

"You're not taking this machine!" said Harry Wharton. "You see, we know the owner, and we know you're jolly well not the owner!"

"It is my machine!" snarled the dark-faced man savagely.

"This jigger belongs to a fellow at our school," answered the captain of the Remove. "We know it as well as we know our own jiggers!"

"You young fool! Bicycles are much alike. Do you think there is only one Sunbeam bicycle in Kent?"

"Hundreds, very likely," answered Harry. "But this one belongs to Wingate, a chap at our school, and I tell you we know it."

"That's the patch on the front tyre that I put on for old Wingate only two or three days ago!" said Bob.

"Nugent, old chap, cut into the tea-shop," said Harry. "Either Wingate's there, or the chap he lent the bike to. Tell him what's up and bring him out!"

"You bet!" said Frank.

And he scudded off. The man in the horn-rimmed glasses gave up wrenching at the bike. He seemed to control his anger with a great effort, and burst into a harsh laugh.

"You young fool!" he repeated. "If

there is a schoolboy in the place who claims the machine, I will say nothing more."

"Well, there jolly well is, and must be," said Harry. "Hold on and see."

Frank Nugent came back in a few minutes. But he came alone, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"No Greyfriars man about," he said. "I've asked in the grocery, too. Nobody belonging to Greyfriars here."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"Are you satisfied now that you have made a mistake?" snapped the horn-rimmed man. "Let go my machine at once, or I will call a constable."

"You can call a constable as soon as you like," said Harry Wharton determinedly, "and we'll jolly well give you in charge for stealing this bike. It belongs to the captain of our school."

"I—I say, if we've made a mistake —" said Nugent slowly.

"Nothing of the kind! Bob knows the patch he put on for Wingate—and I jolly well know the machine!" said Wharton. "If there's no Greyfriars man here, it only shows that the bike was stolen somewhere else and ridden here by the thief. Look!"

The captain of the Remove opened the saddlebag. He knew where the name of the bike's owner was to be found, and as he opened the flap it stared the juniors in the face.

"G. Wingate, Greyfriars School."

"Oh, my hat! That's proof positive!" ejaculated Nugent.

"The positiveness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "This esteemed person is a delectable and preposterous bike-thief!"

The man in the horn-rimmed glasses gave the juniors a deadly look. Under his thick black moustache his teeth were gritting.

Wharton's eyes flashed at him.

"You cheeky rotter! Are you making out now that the bike's yours, with

Wingate's name written on it?" he exclaimed.

"Somebody's had it out, and this sportsman has pinched it, that's jolly clear!" said Johnny Bull. "And we're jolly well going to give him in charge, too! Old Wingate will pat us on the back for this! One of you chaps cut off and call a bobby."

"An esteemed and ludicrous bobby is the proper caper!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "This excellent and execrable rascal can give an account of himself at the 'bobby' station."

"Hold him!" yelled Bob.

But it was too late to hold the horn-rimmed man. Suddenly letting go the disputed bicycle, he made a leap back, turned, and took to his heels. It was evident that the prospect of interviewing a "bobby" had deeply alarmed him.

"After him!"

The Famous Five rushed, whooping, in pursuit. But the man in the horn-rimmed glasses ran almost like a deer. The juniors stopped.

"Well, we've got the bike back for old Wingate," said Harry. "We don't want to chase that rotter all over Redclyffe. Let him rip—we've got the jigger!"

"Hear, hear!"

The chums of the Remove returned to the machine. The parcel belonging to the horn-rimmed man was still on the handlebars. Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That jolly old bike-bief has lost his parcel!" he remarked. "I wonder what's in it?"

"He brought it out of the shop," said Harry. "Better take it back there and speak to the grocer."

The parcel was untied, and the juniors carried it into the grocery. They handed it over to an astonished grocer, and were equally astonished to hear that the parcel contained food supplies, which had been bought and paid for by the man in the horn-rimmed glasses. Apparently the man had come by the parcel honestly, what-

ever might be his method of acquiring a bike. There was nothing to be done but to leave the parcel with the grocer, in case the man came back for it—which he was not, however, likely to do, considering the circumstances which had caused him to abandon it.

The juniors went into the adjoining teashop, feeling extremely pleased with themselves. Wingate's bike had cost his father ten pounds, and it was certain that the captain of Greyfriars would be greatly relieved to see it safe again when he learned that it had been stolen. How it had been pinched was rather a mystery as yet, but the juniors could only conclude that Wingate had lent it to some friend in the Sixth, who had been careless with it.

After tea the Famous Five remounted their machines to ride back to Greyfriars, and Bob rode with one hand on Wingate's machine, wheeling it by his side.

It was rather a troublesome task, but the chums of the Remove were glad that they had it to perform. They were, in fact, in rather high feather, and looking forward to Wingate's relief and satisfaction when the Sunbeam was trundled safely home.

It was a cheery bunch of cyclists that arrived at Greyfriars in the falling dusk, put up the machines in the shed, and raced across to the House just in time for calling-over.

## CHAPTER 18.

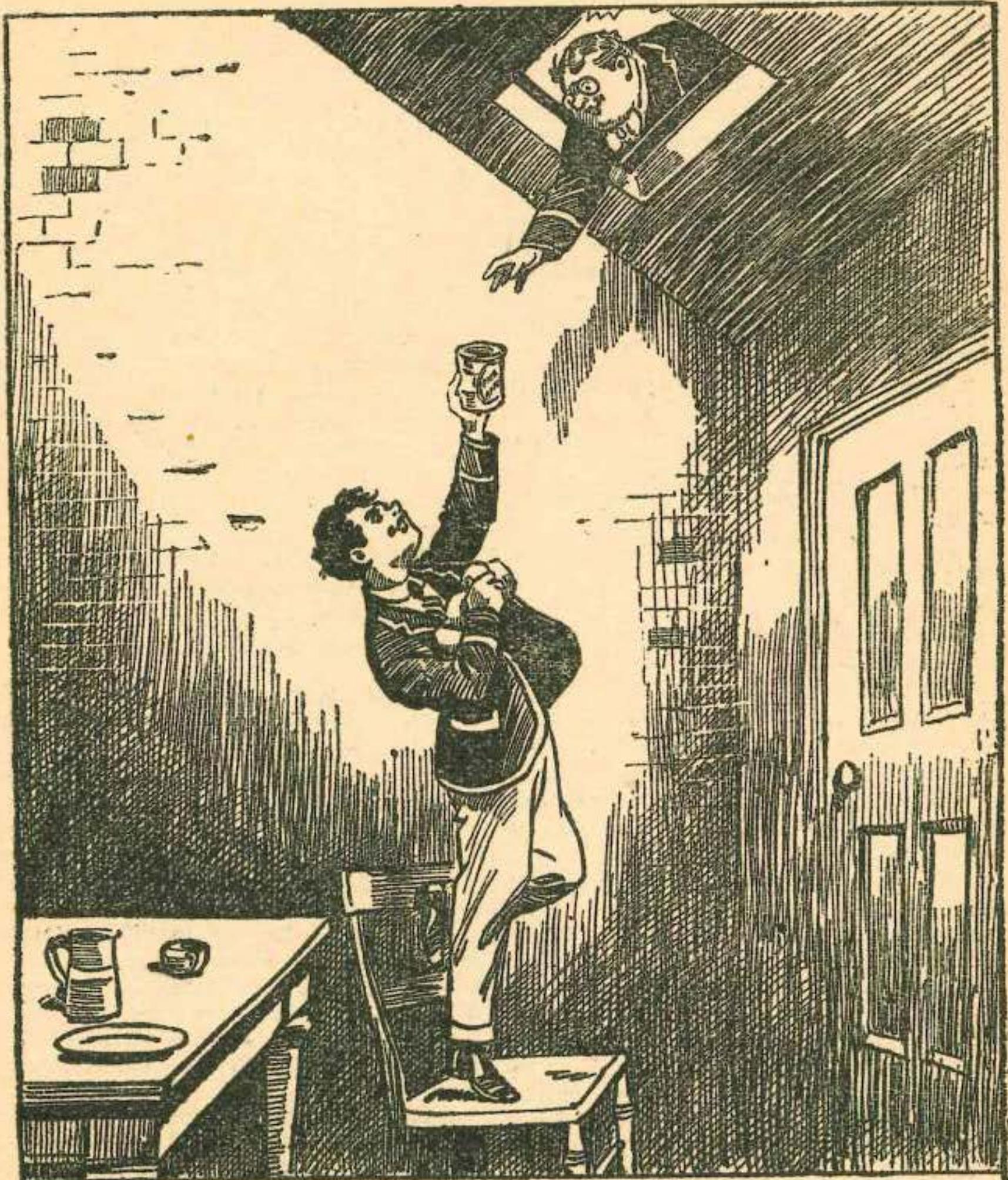
### Inky's Wild Theory.

"VENERABLE and esteemed Wingate—" began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wingate of the Sixth grinned.

The captain of Greyfriars had gone to his study after calling-over, and he was a little surprised when five juniors of the Remove followed him there, and presented themselves with smiling faces in the doorway.

"Well, what's up?" asked Wingate.



Standing on a chair, Flip passed up the eatables. Billy Bunter eagerly reached down through the broken glass of the skylight and took the "grub" from Flip's extended hand. Though Bunter had found the kidnapped fag, a "tuok-in" was his first consideration!

"We've brought your bike back, Wingate!" said Bob Cherry.

Wingate stared.

"My bike?" he repeated.

"Yes, it's safefulness is terrific, after the narrow and preposterous escape from the estimable hands of an esteemed pincher."

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked the captain of Greyfriars. "Did Lagden ask you to bring the bike home, or what?"

"Lagden?" repeated Wharton blankly.

"What the dickens have you been up to?" demanded Wingate. "Mr. Lagden isn't in yet—he wasn't present a call-over, I noticed. Have you been playing tricks on your Form-master, or what?"

"What on earth has Lagden to do with it?" asked Nugent. "We found your bike at Redclyffe——"

"Parked at the teashop——" said Johnny Bull.

"And trundled it home," said Bob Cherry warmly. "And a jolly long way it was to trundle a jigger, I can tell you!"

"As we knew it had been pinched, and——" said Wharton, taking up the tale again.

"We had terrific expectations of seeing the gladfulness in your venerable and absurd countenance, esteemed Wingate."

"You utter young asses!" said the Greyfriars captain. "You found my bike parked at the teashop in Redclyffe and trundled it home? You benighted little idiots! Then you've left Lagden to walk? He must have stopped there for tea or something——"

"Lagden? What the thump has Lagden——"

"I lent the bike to Lagden. Some young rascal has been playing tricks with his bike, ripping the tyres, and he couldn't use it. He had to go somewhere, and I lent him my jigger."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But—but Lagden wasn't there!" exclaimed Nugent. "We thought you might have lent it to some Sixth Form man, and I looked in the teashop—there wasn't any Greyfriars man there, and certainly Lagden wasn't there, or I should have seen him."

"Must have been there, if the bike was there!" grunted Wingate. "He went out on it, anyhow. What on earth made you think the jigger was pinched, you young asses?"

The chums of the Remove exchanged rather dismayed looks. This was not what they had expected at all.

"Look here! That bike jolly well was pinched!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Lagden must have left it somewhere, and that fellow pinched it——"

"What fellow?" hooted Wingate.

The juniors explained all together.

Wingate listened with some impatience at first, but his expression changed when the Removites had got their story out. He whistled.

"My hat!" he said. "The man you've described must have been a bike-pincher from the way he acted. I fancy Lagden must have left the jigger there, but it certainly would have been pinched before he got back if you kids hadn't been so sharp. Dash it all, a man's supposed to take care of a jigger when he borrows it——" Wingate broke off abruptly, remembering that it was the Removites' Form-master of whom he was speaking. "Thank you very much! There's no doubt that you've saved my machine for me. Much obliged."

And the Famous Five left the captain's study, glad to feel that old Wingate realised, after all, that they had done him a considerable service.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Lagden!" said Bob Cherry.

The Remove master had just come in.

"Better tell him, I think," said

Harry. "He must be feeling rather worried. It's no joke to lose a borrowed bike."

"Yes, rather!"

Mr. Lagden did not seem to observe the juniors, but they intercepted him on his way to his study, and he stopped. He did not seem in a good humour.

"What is it?" he snapped.

"About Wingate's bike, sir!" said Harry. "I thought we'd better tell you that we found it at Redclyffe and brought it home."

"Indeed!"

The juniors looked curiously at Mr. Lagden. He was making a visible effort to control his ill-humour and to speak genially.

"That's all, sir," said Harry. "We thought you'd like to know."

"Oh, quite! I was very much perturbed about it," said Mr. Lagden. "I left the machine in Woodend Lane for a few minutes, and it was gone when I returned for it. The thief must have taken it a long way if you found it at Redclyffe. Please tell me how you found it."

The story was told once more.

Mr. Lagden listened attentively.

"You have acted very well, my boys," he said. "It is a great relief to me to know that the machine is safe, as Wingate so kindly lent it to me. Was the man you described a stranger to you?"

"Quite a stranger, sir."

"You had never seen him before?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Lagden smiled—his old, pleasant smile. His good-humour seemed to be restored now.

"You would know the man if you saw him again?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm quite sure of that," said Harry. "We had a good look at him."

"The knowfulness would be terrific!" declared the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"The rascal ought to be under lock and key," said Mr. Lagden. "But if he is a stranger in the district, no

doubt he has lost no time in getting to a safe distance. You are sure you had never see him before?"

"Yes, we're quite sure of that, sir."

"Very well. I am much obliged to you for what you have done."

Mr. Lagden passed on, and the Famous Five went along to the Rag. Billy Bunter was there, and he greeted them with a fat chuckle.

"I say, you fellows—he, he, he!—Lagden wasn't able to go out on his bike this afternoon—he, he, he!—somebody had punctured his tyres—he, he, he!"

"You fat Owl!" said Bob Cherry. "He borrowed Wingate's machine, and very nearly lost it for him."

"The lossfulness was terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I saw you fellows wheeling it in," said Vernon-Smith. "Where on earth did you pick up Wingate's jigger?"

For the third time the story was told.

"Jolly lucky for Wingate!" remarked Peter Todd. "Lagden must have been a careless ass!"

"The carelessness of the esteemed ass was terrific!"

"Any news of Flip?" asked Whar-ton.

"We've heard that his cap was picked up at Ashford——" said Toddy.

"Oh, we've had that! Nothing since?"

"Not that I know of. That merchant Brent is mooching about the school still. Goodness knows what for."

"I say, you fellows. I told you that man was an ass!" said Billy Bunter.

"He's still hanging about—as if there's anything to be found out about poor old Flip here. I've a jolly good mind to tell him it's time he got off to Ashford."

"Fathead!"

"Well, what's the good of the man mooching about the school asking fellows questions?" grunted Billy Bunter. "Just wasting time, you know."

As a matter of fact, a good many fellows, as well as Billy Bunter, were rather puzzled as to Mr. Brent's object in mooching about the school. So far as any fellow could see, there was no chance of picking up a clue to the missing fag at Greyfriars. But he was still there, and when the Remove went up to their studies for prep they passed him standing by the staircase in conversation with Mr. Twigg.

The Famous Five gathered in Study No. 1 to dispose of baked chestnuts before prep. There was a tap at the door, which they had no doubt indicated that Billy Bunter was on the trail of the chestnuts.

"Roll away, fathead!" called out Nugent, as the door opened.

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Nugent.

It was not Billy Bunter. It was Inspector Brent, of Scotland Yard, who entered the study. He gave the juniors a glare.

"Sorry, sir—thought it was Bunter. Please come in!" stammered Frank.

Mr. Brent came in, with his heavy tread.

The Famous Five waited for him to speak, wondering what could have brought the detective to their study.

"I want a few words with you boys," barked Mr. Brent. "I have heard some talk about something this afternoon at Redclyffe. Please give me a full account of it."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Bob involuntarily.

To say that the juniors were surprised would be putting it mildly. They fairly blinked at Mr. Brent in their astonishment. Evidently the most trifling matter did not escape the detective's attention, and no doubt that was as it should be. But what interest he could possibly take in a trifling incident like this was a mystery.

"I am waiting!" barked Mr. Brent.

"Oh! Certainly!" gasped Wharton. "We'll tell you with pleasure, sir!"

For the fourth time the story was told.

Mr. Brent kept his steady stare fixed on the juniors, in the disconcerting way he had, while they told the tale. He did not interrupt them once. But when they had finished, he barked:

"Tell me again what was in the parcel the man fastened on the machine."

"Food, sir."

"What sort of food?"

"All sorts—bread and ham and tongue and cold beef and so on. Solid sort of stuff," said Harry. "Looked as if he was laying in a good supply for some reason."

"Very good! Thank you!" barked Mr. Brent.

He left the study, leaving the chums of the Remove staring at one another blankly.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "He can't be thinking of going after the bike thief, surely! That isn't a job for Scotland Yard!"

"He seemed more interested in the parcel than in the bike or the bike-thief," said Nugent. "Blessed if I know why!"

"I suppose it's rather odd, a man carting about a supply of food on a bike!" said Wharton. "But——"

"Oh, my esteemed hat!" ejaculated Hurree Janset Ram Singh suddenly.

Four pairs of eyes turned on the nabob at once.

"Give it a name, Inky!" said Bob, with a grin. "What have you got in your old inky noddle now?"

The nabob's eyes were gleaming.

"My ridiculous chums," he said, "I have already remarkably observed that probably the absurd Brent believes that Flip is concealfully hidden at no great distance——"

"Flip?" repeated the juniors.

"And whereverfully the absurd Flip may be, it is terrifically necessary to provide him with grubfulness——"

"Inky!" gasped Wharton.

"And it may have occurred to the detective's powerful and idiotic brain that the excellent bike-thief was taking the absurd grub to a kidnapped and imprisoned person."

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared blankly at the Nabob of Bhanipur. It was rather a startling idea.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Is that what the jolly old detective has got in his nut?"

Johnny Bull whistled.

"If that's it, and if there's anything in it," he said, "it was the kidnapper himself that we handled at Redclyffe!"

"I—I wonder——" said Nugent slowly.

"Inky, old man, you think——" exclaimed Wharton.

Hurree Singh nodded.

"The thinkfulness is terrific, my esteemed chums! That is what the ludicrous and absurd detective has in his excellent mind, and my own preposterous idea is that it is a ridiculous clue!"

The chums of the Remove looked at one another. It seemed rather a wild theory—rather as if Inspector Brent was catching at straws, if that, indeed, was what he had in his mind. But if that was not it, it was difficult to guess what he had there.

"Well," said Harry Wharton, at last, "if that's it, and if—if there's anything in it, Brent may have got hold of a clue. One thing's jolly certain—that Johnny from Scotland Yard knows what he's about, and if anybody is going to find poor old Flip, Brent will find him."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

The Famous Five were all agreed on that. And—had they only known it—the same thought was passing through the mind of Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Remove—alias "Jimmy the One."

## CHAPTER 19.

Beastly for Bunter!

"POOR old Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

"The poorfulness of the esteemed old Bunter is terrific!" said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"He asked for it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"A fellow doesn't always want what he asks for," remarked Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton & Co. were sympathetic.

They were standing in the quad, below the windows of the Remove Form-room. One of those windows was open, and framed in it was the fat face of Billy Bunter.

The expression on that fat face was deeply woebegone. Seldom had Billy Bunter been seen to look so lugubrious.

Any fellow who could have beheld his fat face, at that moment, without feeling sympathetic must have had a heart of stone.

The Famous Five were anything but stony-hearted. So they felt sympathetic. So far as sympathy was any use to Billy Bunter, they were prepared to hand it out. Unfortunately, sympathy, though grateful and comforting in itself, did not improve matters very much for the Owl of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, I'm jolly well not going to stand it," said Bunter, blinking down dismally through his big spectacles at the sympathetic five. "It's awful, you know! I thought we were in for a good time when Quelch fell ill and was laid up in sanny. But Lagden's a worst beast than Quelch. It almost makes a fellow wish that Quelch had never got ill, you know."

"Quelch is on the mend," said Harry Wharton. "I hear that Lagden's only at Greyfriars for another week."

"But I've got detentions every day!" groaned Bunter. "How's a fellow to stand it for a week—even if Quelch lets me off when he comes back. And he may not. He may take Lagden's word

for it that I've done something to deserve it, you know."

"And haven't you?" ejaculated Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You asked for it, you know," said Johnny Bull. "In fact, you sat up on your hind legs and begged for it."

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"The begfulness was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the sympathise is enormous and preposterous."

"Detained an hour every day, and every half-holiday for the rest of the term," groaned Bunter. "That's what they call justice. I'd appeal to the Head, you know, but a headmaster always backs up a Form-master. I—I believe Dr. Locke would take Lagden's word before mine. He's doubted my word before," said Billy Bunter sorrowfully. "Otherwise, I'd go to him at once and explain that I never did it."

"But you did do it!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

The Famous Five grinned. The fact that he had "done it" seemed to Bunter a trifle light as air. But really the other fellows could not blame Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Remove, for having come down rather heavy over the matter of his punctured bike tyres.

Bunter felt that it was most unjust that suspicion should fall upon him. It was true that Mr. Lagden had caned him for not handing in lines that were long overdue, and that Bunter had confided to all the Remove his intention of making the beast sit up somehow. It was true that Gosling had seen him going into the bike shed on Saturday afternoon, and that Bunter denied having been anywhere near the bike-shed, explaining—variously—that he had been in his study writing lines, that he had been down to Courtfield to the pictures, and that he had been watching the football on Big Side.

Perhaps it was not surprising that Mr. Lagden declined to believe him.

At all events, Bunter was found guilty, "whopped," and sentenced to detentions for the rest of the term.

And as Bunter was especially weak in the classics, Mr. Lagden kindly set him Latin exercises to fill in the long hours of detention—which was really like adding insult to injury.

"Picking on a fellow, you know," said the fat Owl, blinking dismally at the juniors under the window. "What a fellow wants is justice!"

"Well, we've got to get over to Lantham," said Johnny Bull. "We've listened to the tale of woe; now let's get off!"

"I say, you fellows, hold on!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say, I'm not going to stand it! I'm going to cut detention!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Better not," he said. "It's only asking for more!"

"I'm jolly well not going to stick in the Form-room on a half-holiday," hooted Bunter. "Besides, the beast is giving me an exercise in deponent verbs. He may be here any minute with it!"

"Then you'd better get back to your desk," said Harry. "If he catches you talking to fellows from the window you'll get six!"

"Let's get off!" said Johnny Bull.

"Hold on, you fellows! I say, Lagden will be going out this afternoon—he goes out every half-holiday on his push-bike. You fellows stay in and keep an eye on him——"

"What?"

"And come round and tell me when he's gone out, and I'll chance it," said Bunter.

"You fat ass! He mayn't go out for hours—if he goes out at all."

"That's all right! Keep on the watch till he goes——"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Anybody keen on spending a half-holiday, hanging around and watching Lagden?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The answer is in the esteemed negative!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows——"

"You fat duffer, we're biking over to Lantham to see a League match," said Harry Wharton, "and we couldn't help you break detention, anyhow. Look here, get back to your desk before Lagden comes to the Form-room. You're asking for more trouble."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Bunter!" came a deep voice, from someone within, invisible to the juniors in the quad.

It was the voice of Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Remove. Evidently he had arrived in the Form-room with that exercise in deponent verbs.

"Oh, lor'!"

Billy Bunter disappeared from the window. But the Famous Five heard his fat squeak.

"I—I say, sir, I—I wasn't looking out of the window. I wasn't speaking to anybody in the quad, sir. There isn't anybody under the window, sir."

"Time there wasn't, anyhow," murmured Bob Cherry. "Hook it, before we get spotted."

And the Famous Five faded out of the picture on their highest gear. Speaking to a fellow under detention was against the rules, and, deeply as they sympathised with the unfortunate Owl, they did not want to share his fate. By the time Mr. Lagden reached the window and looked out the Famous Five had vanished into space.

## CHAPTER 20.

### No Luck!

**B**ILLY BUNTER blinked dismally at the new master of the Remove as he slumped down at his desk. The man did not look a beast, by any means. But he was a beast, all the same. He was, so to speak, of the beasts beastly, for he was interfering seriously with the fat comfort of William George Bunter, the most im-

portant person within the wide limits of the universe.

It was a bright afternoon, with quite a touch of spring in the air, and though Billy Bunter did not feel very keenly the call of the open spaces, he loathed spending the afternoon in the dusky old Form-room all on his lonely own.

All he had to keep him company was an exercise in deponent verbs; those irritating verbs which are passive in form but active in meaning; the kind of verbs that Bunter detested more than any other verbs.

Really, it was awful, and it was no wonder that Billy Bunter grumbled and grouched. When Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was taken ill it had not seemed possible to Bunter that the time would come when he would yearn for Quelchy to return to his old duties. Now he longed for Quelch to come back. On his looks, Mr. Lagden seemed a much nicer man than Quelch; but the fat Owl had learned by sad experience that Lagden could not be taken at face value.

"I have prepared an exercise for you, Bunter!" said Mr. Lagden, with a severe look at the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, lor'!"

"What? What did you say, Bunter?"

"I—I said thank you, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It—it's very kind of you, sir. I—I'm rather fond of—of deponent verbs."

"This task will keep you occupied till five o'clock. At that hour you may leave the Form-room."

Bunter blinked at the exercise and suppressed a groan. Then he blinked at Mr. Lagden again. The young master looked quite good-tempered, though there was a steely gleam in his eyes that Bunter did not quite like. He resolved to try his luck with a pathetic appeal.

"I—I say, sir——"

"You need say nothing, Bunter."

"Yes, sir; but I say, sir, I—I'm awfully sorry somebody cut up your tyres the other day, sir, but it wasn't me, sir——"

"That will do, Bunter."

"Yes, sir; but it really wasn't! I never went anywhere near the bike-shed on Saturday afternoon!" groaned Bunter. "I—I can prove it, sir."

"Indeed!"

"You—you can ask Wharton, sir—Wharton and his friends!" groaned Bunter. "They're witnesses, sir; they saw me there——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, they didn't see me there; that is, they saw me when I wasn't there!" stammered the fat Owl. "I never knew anything about it till long afterwards, sir. I—I was quite surprised. I—I never thought of puncturing your bike because you licked me, sir. Wharton said it was a dirty trick, and—and I quite agree with him, sir."

Mr. Lagden, heedless of the voice of the charmer, turned towards the door. Bunter blinked after him dolorously.

"I say, sir, just a minute—it's important!" he gasped. "I—I wanted to get out this afternoon very particularly, sir."

Mr. Lagden had reached the door, and had his hand on it. He seemed quite deaf to Bunter.

"About poor old Flip, sir——" gasped Bunter.

Mr. Lagden turned back suddenly.

"What! Who? What do you mean?"

"Flip, sir. He hasn't been found, sir, and—and I'd like to put in the afternoon looking for him, sir, if you'd let me off detention."

Mr. Lagden came back towards

Bunter's desk and fixed his eyes on the fat Owl—eyes that looked more steely than ever.

"I fail to see why you should concern yourself about a boy in the Second Form, Bunter, who is not related to you."

"Well, sir, I was his benefactor," said the fatuous Owl. "I picked him up, a regular ragged robin, when I was staying with Mauleverer over the Christmas holidays. I got Mauly to ask his uncle to send him here and pay his fees and all that, and make a Greyfriars chap of him. So—so he's rather under my care, sir."

"If that is true, Bunter, this boy Flip would never have been at Greyfriars at all but for you," said Mr. Lagden, with a very strange look at the fat Owl.

"Exactly sir. In my generous way I——"

"Even if you had intended to devote your half-holiday to looking for this boy, Bunter—which I very much doubt—you must be aware that he must have been taken to a great distance from the school. I have heard that his cap was found at Ashford, thirty miles from here."

"Some of the fellows think he mayn't be very far away, sir——"

"Nonsense! Who thinks so?" exclaimed Mr. Lagden sharply.

"I've heard Wharton and his friends talking about it, sir! They think poor old Flip isn't far away, all the same, because the detective chap Brent is still hanging about here——"

"Nonsense!" repeated Mr. Lagden.

"I—I should like to go and—and look

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for him, sir. I'm a dab hand at detective work," said Bunter hopefully. "Think how nice it would be, sir, if— if I found him——"

Mr. Lagden laughed.

"Very nice indeed," he agreed. "I am sure everyone would rejoice, and I should be particularly pleased. But as the matter is in the hands of a detective from Scotland Yard, Bunter, I hardly think that your assistance is needed—valuable as it would doubtless be."

Bunter realised that this was "sarc"; this beast Lagden could be as sarcastic as old Quelch.

"I think," continued Mr. Lagden, "that your time would be better spent, Bunter, in improving your knowledge of Latin verbs, which is seriously deficient. I shall expect that task to be completed when I return."

With that Mr. Lagden left the Form-room.

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

Evidently there was nothing to be hoped from Lagden. Certainly, had Bunter been released from detention he would not have been likely to spend the afternoon searching for the kidnapped fag. Frowsting over a study fire, or tucking into tarts and ginger-pop at the school shop, was more in Bunter's line. It was true that Bunter had been the original cause of the little waif from Puggins' Alley coming to Greyfriars School; but it was equally true that Flip's disappearance had not caused him any undue perturbation. Billy Bunter's own troubles loomed large in his eyes; but the troubles of others he could bear with considerable fortitude.

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter, blinking at his deponent verbs. "I wish Quelch was back. Oh, crumbs!"

He sat at his desk till Mr. Lagden's footsteps had died away. Then he went back to the window.

Harry Wharton & Co. were gone, but Skinner of the Remove was to be seen

strolling along with his hands in his pockets. The fat Owl hailed him.

"Skinner! I say, Skinner, old chap!"

Harold Skinner looked round. He grinned at the sight of the dolorous, fat face in the Form-room window. Skinner was not of a sympathetic nature.

"Hallo, old fat bean!" he said cheerily. "Going to your own funeral this afternoon? You look it."

"I'm jolly well going to cut!" said Bunter. "I say, old chap, take your bike out of the shed, will you, and leave it in the road for me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I shall have to clear off quick when I cut, you know."

"Not on my bike, I fancy!" chuckled Skinner. "What about your own jigger?"

"Well, it's punctured, and the crank's bent, and the mudguard's off, and the chain's broken, and——"

"And you'd like to serve mine the same! No takers!"

"Oh, really, Skinner——"

"Feel any better if you had a packet of toffee?" asked Skinner, groping in his pockets.

The fat face at the window brightened wonderfully.

"Yes, rather! You're a good chap, Skinner."

"One of the best!" agreed Skinner. "You think you'd feel better if you had some toffee?"

"What-ho!" said Bunter fervently.

Skinner withdrew his hands from his pockets—empty.

"Then I'm sorry I haven't any!" he said cheerfully, and walked away.

Bunter glared after him with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"Beast!" he roared.

Skinner chuckled and disappeared. But Bunter did not return to his deponent verbs. Detention couldn't be helped, but looking out of window was more agreeable than Latin exercises. So Billy Bunter left his detention task

untouched on his desk, and continued to adorn the Form-room window with his fat face, blinking out dismally into the sunny quad.

#### CHAPTER 21.

##### A Surprise for the Detective!

"I'M chucking it!"

Billy Bunter had made up his mind.

Breaking detention meant a licking; but leaving his detention task undone meant a licking, too. So—as far as Bunter could see—it was as broad as it was long. He had not touched his task—and had no intention of touching it. Even a licking was better than two or three solid hours at deponent verbs.

The fat junior crossed to the door and blinked out into the corridor. His fat brows knitted over his spectacles at the sight of Mr. Prout, at the end of the passage, in conversation with Mr. Twigg. There was no escape that way—at present.

He grunted, and rolled back to the window.

The window was high, and Bunter was no acrobat; still, it was possible for even the fat Owl to drop from the sill to the ground. It depended on whether the coast was clear. If a master or a prefect was in sight, Bunter had to wait.

There was a heavy tread on the path that ran under the Form-room windows. Bunter blinked down at a stocky, thick-set figure, and frowned.

It was Inspector Brent, the man from Scotland Yard, who was walking below.

"The silly ass!" breathed Bunter.

Nobody else was near at hand, and Bunter waited for Mr. Brent to pass on and vanish. He passed on; but, instead of vanishing, he turned, and came pacing back.

Bunter gave an almost homicidal blink at the top of his head.

Instead of clearing off, the man was pacing to and fro, having apparently selected that quiet spot for a quiet stroll.

"Blow him!" hissed Bunter.

He debated in his fat mind whether to chance it. John Brent was at the school to search for Flip, the missing fag of the Second Form, and the kidnapper who had spirited him away. He had nothing to do with the boys. It was not his business to intervene if a fellow under detention dropped from a Form-room window. Most likely he would take no notice—he looked like a man who could mind his own affairs.

Still, there was a doubt. Bunter watched his passing and repassing head, and longed to see him go.

Quite unconscious of the fat Owl, Mr. Brent continued to pace to and fro, perhaps thinking out the problem that had brought him from Scotland Yard, certainly not thinking how very much he was in the way of a fat junior detained in the Remove-room.

A quarter of an hour passed, and Mr. Brent was still there. Bunter shook a fat fist at the crown of his hat, and retired from the window to take another blink along the passage.

The plump figure of Prout was still in view, still in conversation, at a distance. Mr. Twigg was shifting from one leg to the other, and from the other to the one, like so many of Mr. Prout's victims when he stopped them for a chat. But Prout's booming voice was still going strong, and Twigg had no chance of getting away—and so neither had Bunter.

Once more he rolled to the window.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

The stocky form of the Scotland Yard man was no longer pacing to and fro. Bunter blinked to the right, and blinked to the left. Mr. Brent was not to be seen.

It did not occur to him to blink directly below, under the broad sill of the window. Had he done so, he might

have observed that Mr. Brent was not gone; he had only stopped his pacing, and was leaning on the wall, gazing meditatively across the quadrangle. But as his bowler-hat was below the level of the sill, and as Bunter never thought of looking there for him, he remained unobserved. A fellow couldn't think of everything.

So far as the fat Owl could see, the coast was clear.

But there was no time to waste. Some other beast might appear in the offing at any moment. A fellow who was cutting detention could not be too rapid in his movements.

Bunter crawled out cautiously on the wide, old, stone sill, shoved his fat legs over, and dropped.

John Brent, detective-inspector of Scotland Yard Criminal Investigation Department, had probably had a good many surprises in his life. But he had never been so surprised as he was now.

With his square jaw jutting, and his bushy brows knitted, he was thinking of anything but a sudden attack from above. Two fat legs dawned on him all of a sudden, sprawling and scrambling, as Bunter heaved his podgy form over the sill. He jumped. The toe of a boot caught him in the eye, another boot clumped on his waistcoat, and John Brent gave a gurgle. He started away from the wall in utter amazement, as Bunter plumped down, and there was a startled howl from the fat junior. Bunter had expected empty space below, and he became aware that there was something alive there!

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter.

Bump!

Inspector Brent hardly knew what was happening.

But he knew that he sat down, suddenly and violently, on hard earth, and that something fat and flabby sprawled over him, spluttering.

"Good gad!" gasped Mr. Brent.

"Yaroooh!"

"What—what——"

"Oh, crikey!"

Bunter scrambled wildly up. He planted a knee on Mr. Brent's waistcoat as he rose, and the man from Scotland Yard gurgled horribly. The fat Owl was on his feet the next moment, and in a moment more he would have taken to his heels. But Mr. Brent, though almost winded, was quick to move. A hand that seemed of iron dropped on Bunter's shoulder and spun him back.

"You young rascal!" gasped Mr. Brent.

"Oooooogh! Leggo!"

"What do you mean by this?" barked Mr. Brent. "Is this a schoolboy prank, eh?"

Shake, shake, shake!

Mr. Brent had been startled and shaken and winded. He seemed annoyed. He shook the fat Owl till Bunter gasped and gurgled.

"Oooh! Leggo! It wasn't me!" gasped Bunter. "I say—— Yow-ow-ow! Leggo! Oh, crikey! Yowp!"

"Now, what do you mean by this?" snapped Mr. Brent. "I've a good mind to take you to your headmaster for playing such a trick!"

"Oh, dear! Ow! Leggo! I wasn't!" gasped Bunter. "I never saw you! Oh, crikey! Leggo my neck! How was I to know you were sticking under the window like a stuffed dummy? Ow!"

Mr. Brent gave him one of his disconcerting, penetrating glares. He ceased to shake the fat Owl, but kept a grip on his shoulder.

"Why did you drop on me from the window?" he demanded.

"Ow! I keep on telling you I never saw you!" gasped Bunter. "Besides, you ain't a Form-master! Look here! You let me alone! I'm not breaking detention!"

"What?"

"I'm not detained!" gasped Bunter. "Nothing of the sort! I—I get out of the window sometimes for—for exercise, you know."

"Good gad!" said Mr. Brent.

"Besides, I never did it!" said

Bunter. "It was all frightfully unjust! They made out that I did it, you know."

"What on earth do you mean? You never did what?" John Brent had met all sorts and conditions of people in his career as a detective in the Criminal Investigation Department, but William George Bunter of Greyfriars was a new experience for the experienced detective.

"I never touched Lagden's jigger last Saturday!" gasped Bunter. "Somebody cut up his tyres, you know, and he had to borrow Wingate's bike to go out on. They made out that I did it, and I've got detention. A lot of fellows can prove that I never did it! They came in and saw me at the very time——"

"At the time you did it?" asked Mr. Brent, with the ghost of a smile on his grim face.

"Nunno! At—at the time I didn't do it, I mean. Besides, Lagden borrowed Wingate's jigger, so it was all right. He got it pinched, too, only some of the Remove fellows got it back," said Bunter. "I never knew anything——"

"You are breaking detention?"

"Oh! No! I'm not detained!" gasped Bunter.

"You have just said that you were detained for damaging your Form-master's bicycle."

"I—I mean——"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"That—that was only a figure of speech!" gasped Bunter. "I—I meant to say that I haven't got detention. Being perfectly innocent, you know——"

"You young ass!" said Mr. Brent, releasing the fat Owl.

Bunter gave him one blink and cut off.

Apparently the man from Scotland Yard had decided that Bunter's antics were no business of his. Which was a great relief to William George.

He rolled away in haste, and vanished, the man from Scotland Yard staring after him with a peculiar expression on his face.

## CHAPTER 22.

## Trouble!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

Five cyclists were at a halt on the Redclyffe road—on the way to Lantham.

Frank Nugent's bike was up-ended by the roadside, and Frank, with a set expression on his face, was giving his best attention to an old puncture which had broken out again at an unfortunate moment.

His expression was not only set, it was dogged, in fact, almost deadly. Harry Wharton held the bike, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh held a tube of solution, Bob Cherry looked on with cheery patience, while Johnny Bull remarked, not once, but several times, that that tyre had needed earlier attention, and that he had told Nugent so.

This was perfectly correct, but not grateful or comforting to a fellow who was struggling with a particularly troublesome and obstinate puncture. The puncture was irritating, as it was keeping the chums of the Remove away from the League match they were going to see at Lantham, and they were already late for the kick-off. But Johnny Bull's sage remarks were probably quite as irritating as the puncture.

From a woodland path near at hand, a fat and breathless figure emerged into the road, and the juniors stared at it—excepting Nugent, who had eyes only for his troublesome tyre.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that Bunter, or his ghost?" roared Bob.

"I say, you fellows——" gasped Bunter.

He rolled up to the group.

"Lagden let you off detention?" asked Wharton.

"Likely!" snorted Bunter. "I've cut!"

"You fat duffer! That means a licking!"

"Well, it was a licking anyhow, as I wasn't going to do those filthy verbs!

I say, you fellows, fancy meeting you here! What a happy surprise all round!" said Bunter.

"The happiffulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh solemnly.

"Hold the bike steady!" said Nugent.

"Yes, old chap!"

"Puncture?" asked Bunter. "He, he, he!" Bunter seemed to find something amusing in the up-ended bike, and the expression on its owner's face.

Nugent looked up.

"You fat tick! You punctured this tyre the day I was idiot enough to lend you the bike. Kick him, somebody!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Don't be shirty about a puncture," said Bunter cheerily. "Besides, it's rather lucky you had that puncture. Otherwise you wouldn't have met me here—you'd be at Lantham by this time!"

"Which would have been awful!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, it's rather jolly to meet like this, isn't it?" said Bunter. "I came this way, thinking I might pick up a lift to Lantham in a car or something. I knew you fellows would be glad if I turned up there! I suppose you'll be having tea at the Pagoda after the match?"

"Where's that solution?"

"It is here, my esteemed Franky!"

"For goodness' sake let a fellow have it!"

"Certainly, my ridiculous friend!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Harry Wharton smiled, but did not speak. He understood the feelings of a fellow handling a troublesome puncture; at such moments allowances had to be made, and silence was golden.

"If you'd looked at that tyre before we started——" remarked Johnny Bull.

"I didn't!" said Nugent curtly.

"I know you didn't, old chap! But if you had——"

"You fellows had better get on," said Nugent, breathing hard. "I'll follow when my bike's ready. You're missing the match!"

"Oh, rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Sink or swim together! But if you hadn't

been ass enough to lend Bunter your bike the other day——"

"If 'ifs' and 'ands' were pots and pans, remarked Bob Cherry gravely, "the tinkers would be on the dole!"

"Quitefully so," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "If the if-fulness and the and-fulness, my esteemed Johnny, was the potfulness and the panfulness——"

"Well, I told Frank about that tyre before we started——"

"Don't tell me again!" said Nugent.

"If you're getting huffy, old man, I'll shut up!" said Johnny.

"Time you did, at any rate!" said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, which of you is going to give me a lift to Lantham on the back of his bike?" asked Bunter.

"The whichfulness is terrific!"

"Got any more solution?" asked Nugent.

"I shouldn't swamp it, old chap!" said Johnny Bull. "I shouldn't put on too much if I were you!"

"You're not me," remarked Nugent. "If you were, you'd be a more sensible chap!"

"Here's the solution!" said Bob hastily.

"Well, I think——" said Johnny.

"Rot!" said Nugent, over his shoulder. "You never have so far—don't make out that you're beginning to-day!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"One of you might kick that fat idiot, and keep him quiet while a fellow's busy!"

"Oh, really, Franky! Look here, you're not making much of a job of that puncture," said Bunter. "What about sticking the bike somewhere, and getting a lift. I'll be glad of your company, old chap!"

"More than I should be of yours," said Nugent.

"That's what you call civil, I suppose, when a fellow's offering to stand you a lift to Lantham. I passed old Joyce's woodcart in the wood ten minutes ago—he would give us a lift for

a few bob! I'll pay, of course. At least, one of you fellows could lend me the money, and I'll settle to-morrow. I'm expecting a postal order to-morrow —"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Look out, Bunter——"

"What?"

"Ware beaks!"

Bob pointed along the road, and Bunter blinked in alarm in the indicated direction.

A cyclist had appeared in sight, from the direction of the distant school, coming on at a good rate.

Distant as he was, Bob Cherry had recognised Mr. Lagden, the new master of the Remove.

"I say, who is it?" asked Bunter. His range of vision was limited.

"Jolly old Lagden!" chuckled Bob. "If he catches you here, he may guess that you've cut detention, old fat bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He gave a blink at the approaching cyclist, and vanished again into the woodland path from which he had emerged.

Billy Bunter did not want to meet Mr. Lagden out of gates that afternoon. Very much indeed he did not want to meet him. The fat Owl vanished like a spectre at cock-crow.

Four of the juniors watched Mr. Lagden come up, while Frank gave the finishing touches to his repaired puncture.

They wondered whether he had seen the fat Owl in the group. They were aware that Mr. Lagden's eyes were very keen. And although he was only a temporary master at Greyfriars, taking the Remove while Mr. Quelch was laid up, he had already shown that he was not a master to be trifled with.

He slowed down and jumped off his machine, a big black Raleigh, as he reached the group by the roadside. There was a frown on his face.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir," said Harry. He knew by Lagden's tone that the master had seen Bunter.

"I think that was Bunter I saw with you," said Mr. Lagden.

Wharton was silent.

"Bunter is under detention," said Mr. Lagden. "Apparently he has broken bounds. Am I to understand, Wharton, that you, the head boy of my Form, have encouraged him in this?"

"I never knew Bunter was out of the Form-room, till he suddenly showed up here, ten minutes ago," answered Wharton coldly.

"He is not only out of detention, but he must have reached this spot by coming through Redclyffe Woods, which are out of school bounds," said Mr. Lagden severely. "Had he come by road, I should have seen him. You have not forgotten, Wharton, that last week I had occasion to punish you for rambling in these woods?"

"I have not forgotten that you punished me unjustly, after I had explained that I did not ramble in the woods!" answered the captain of the Remove in a tone of ice.

"What! How dare you answer me like that, Wharton? You are impertinent!"

Harry Wharton was silent, his face setting doggedly. His comrades looked a little anxious. The puncture was forgotten now, and the League match at Lantham, too. Trouble between the captain of the Remove and the new Form-master had impended more than once, and it looked as if it was coming now.

Mr. Lagden raised his hand.

"Wharton, go back to the school at once! You are detained for the half-holiday!"

Wharton's eyes gleamed, but he did not speak.

"When I return," said Mr. Lagden, "I shall inquire of Gosling what time you reached the school. If you have not obeyed my instructions to the very letter I shall report you to your head-master for a flogging. You will go

into the Form-room and write out Latin conjugations till six o'clock."

Wharton was still silent.

"You hear me?" snapped Mr. Lagden.

"I hear you, sir," answered Harry quietly.

"Take care that you obey me, then."

With that the new master of the Remove remounted his bicycle. Harry Wharton stood breathing hard and deep as Mr. Lagden shot away along the road and vanished.

"What rotten luck!" said Nugent dismally. "Blow that blessed puncture! But for that we'd have been at Lantham now——"

"Lagden's a bit of a Tartar," said Bob. "Look here, we've missed a good bit of the match already; let's cut it and get back."

Wharton set his lips.

"I'm not going back!" he said.

"Better, old man!" said Bob anxiously. "Lagden's rather an outsider, but he's a beak, you know. No good kicking. We'll all go back."

"I'm going on to Lantham."

"My dear chap——"

"I've had enough of Lagden's airs and graces. I've done nothing to get a detention, and I'm not going back. I'm going on to Lantham!"

The Co. exchanged uneasy glances. Their sympathies were with their chum—but a beak was a beak.

"Your jigger ready, Frank?"

"Yes, but——"

"Let's get on, then."

Wharton went to his own machine and put a leg across.

"Look here, old chap——" said Johnny Bull.

"My esteemed and ridiculous chum——" murmured the Nabob of Bhanpur.

"Oh, come on!"

Harry Wharton started—in the direction of Lantham. And his chums, in a rather troubled mood, mounted and followed him.

## CHAPTER 23.

## Bunter the Driver!

**B**ILLY BUNTER halted, gasping. The fat junior had covered a hundred yards at top speed; and nearly another quarter of a mile at a trot, after bolting at the sight of his Form-master.

He halted on the woodland path where Joyce's cart was tied up, and leaned on the woodcutter's cart and panted for breath.

The pony, who was nibbling at the grass, lifted its head and looked at Bunter and then went on nibbling. For ten minutes at least the fat Owl leaned on the cart and pumped in breath. Almost he wished that he had remained in the Form-room. Exertion did not appeal to Billy Bunter. Still, he realised that even exertion was preferable to deponent verbs. Anyhow, he had shaken off that beast Rupert Lagden, M.A., and the hour of reckoning was postponed.

Bunter had headed for the Redclyffe road through the wood after getting out of the school, with the idea of getting a lift on some vehicle going to Lantham. Other Remove fellows as well as the Famous Five were going over to see the League match that afternoon—he knew that Vernon-Smith and Redwing, Peter Todd and Tom Brown, and several other fellows would be there—and some of them, at least, would be having tea at the Pagoda afterwards. The fat Owl had hopes of scrounging a tea at the Pagoda, once he could get there. But the sight of Rupert Lagden had scared him back into the woods like a fat rabbit.

Now, as he leaned on the woodcutter's cart and gasped and gurgled, Bunter considered the question of a lift.

Joyce, the woodcutter, and his sons were not to be seen; no doubt they were somewhere deep in the woods, hard at work, leaving the pony to feed till they wanted him. The cart was empty now, but it was evidently there to carry away the cut faggots later; and even for a

"tip" Mr. Joyce was not likely to leave his faggots in the wood and drive Bunter to Lantham.

And there were difficulties in the way of tipping Joyce—Bunter was in his usual hard-up state—and even Bunter realised that it would be no use telling Joyce that he was expecting a postal order.

Moreover, Joyce and his sons were not on the spot. They were out of sight and hearing.

If Bunter wanted a lift in the woodcutter's cart there was only one way of getting it.

There were many things that Bunter fancied that he could do. Driving was one of them.

It was easy enough to clamber into the cart and drive off, borrowing the vehicle for a few hours.

The only question that troubled Bunter was whether there would be a row afterwards.

Joyce might be annoyed when Bunter brought the cart back. Bunter realised that. He might complain to Dr. Locke at Greyfriars.

That, obviously, would not do. But Bunter's fat thoughts worked further. Joyce was only too likely to be disrespectful and ungrateful when Bunter returned his cart safe and sound after going to Lantham in it. But why return it? Joyce's pony could be trusted to wander home when done with—horses could always be relied on to find their own quarters. Joyce would get his horse and cart back, and would not know who had borrowed them. That evidently was the simplest way.

Having come to this sage decision, Billy Bunter untied the pony and clambered into the cart and gathered up the reins and the whip.

The pony looked round at him as he jerked on the reins.

Bunter cracked the whip.

"Gee-up!" he exclaimed.

The pony got into motion.

He ambled along the grassy woodland path at an easy pace, and Bunter smiled with satisfaction.

Driving was jolly easy—besides, Bunter was a jolly good driver!

But it was a good many miles to Lantham, and this easy amble, though agreeable in itself, was not covering the ground fast enough. Moreover, Bunter was rather anxious to get clear of the spot where Joyce had tied up the cart, in case the woodcutter should appear in the offing. So he cracked the whip and whacked the pony and got the animal into a gallop.

The cart rocked along merrily.

All was going well. Bunter rather wished that some of the Remove fellows could see him now, driving at this rate and handling the ribbons in such a masterly style.

Bunter's idea of driving a horse was to jerk at the reins and whack with the whip. This seemed to be a successful method so far as getting the gee-gee to go was concerned. Joyce's pony put on more and more speed till the cart fairly rocked.

Then Bunter decided to pull him in a little.

He did not want to come out on the Redclyffe road among the motor-cars at full tilt.

Pulling in presented unexpected difficulties.

Jerking and whacking had got the gee-gee to go; there was no doubt about that he was going strong! But neither jerking nor whacking would induce him to moderate his transports, as it were.

Instead of slowing down, the pony galloped on faster than before.

Slowly it dawned on Bunter's fat mind that the pony had taken the bit between its teeth and was running away with him.

Bunter fancied that he could drive. Now he made the alarming discovery that it was only fancy. He couldn't!

A toss of the pony's head tore the reins from his grasp, and they dangled and tangled over the heaving back. Even Bunter realised that whacking the horse would not make him stop. And he had to drop the whip now; he needed both hands to hold on with

the cart rocking and bumping and oscillating like a boat on a stormy sea.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked to either side, with the wild idea of jumping out. But the pace was too hot for that.

Bunter was not thinking of driving to Lantham now. He shuddered at the thought of getting out on the main road, where motor-cars whizzed by every few minutes, with the pony following his own guidance and his own sweet will. He would have given all the jam tarts in the tuckshop at Greyfriars to get safely out of the cart. He squeaked with alarm as he rocked on.

Fortunately, the pony did not emerge from the wood into the high road. Bunter was spared that. He turned from one track into another, and galloped on, still in the wood. Perhaps he did not like motor-cars any more than Bunter did.

Redclyffe Woods were many miles in extent, crossed by bridle-paths and cart-tracks in many directions. Where the pony was taking him Bunter had not the faintest idea. Neither did he care much, so long as he got there alive. That was the dubious point.

Bump, bump! Crash!

The cart rocked over a trailing root and almost capsized. Bunter rolled over and landed in the bottom of the cart with a terrific concussion.

"Oooooogh!"

He sprawled in the cart, spluttering. The pony raced on, the cart rocking after him, fortunately still on both wheels.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He crawled to his fat knees, and another jolt of the cart sent him rolling over again.

"Oh lor'! Oh crumbs! Stop that beastly horse!" roared Bunter. "I say— Help! Rescue! Yarooooh!"

But there were no ears to hear Bunter. Only the woods replied with echoes as he roared.

The cart rocked on, Bunter decided

to remain where he was, in the bottom of the vehicle.

As he could neither stop nor control the runaway horse, it was really not of much use to see where he was going. He lay and blinked up at the steely March sky, and the branches that stretched across the track. How many miles he had gone Bunter did not know; but he knew that he must have covered a good distance.

To his immense relief, the pony dropped into a slower gait at last—having, no doubt, recovered from the effects of Bunter's driving.

The cart still rocked, but the fat Owl was able to clamber up, and peer out at his surroundings. The pony, at a trot now, was following a wide track through the woodlands, marked by the ruts of wheels. Bunter blinked round for a sight of any familiar landmark. He could see nothing but trees and sky, and a ruddy track over which the wood-cutter's cart rolled.

But he was still alive—which was something to be thankful for, after his driving methods.

At the present pace of the cart Bunter could have jumped out; but it was not much use jumping out, and landing himself in a wood miles from everywhere. The pony was trotting on contentedly, as if with an understood destination, and it dawned on Bunter's fat intellect at last that the animal was going home.

Bunter, blinking dismally round him, had an impression that he had followed this route before. Where a track turned from the main path, the pony turned, pulling the cart round, following the new track towards a building that could be glimpsed through the trees.

The fat Owl blinked round him, in perplexity.

He knew all about Joyce, the wood-cutter, who was a familiar figure on the roads, with faggots to sell. The wood-cutter, with his wife and two sons, had always lived in the lonely cottage in

the heart of Redclyffe Woods, miles from any other building. And Bunter knew that the cottage had been let to some stranger in the locality, who kept a big, fierce Alsatian dog running loose in the garden.

It was only a week since Harry Wharton & Co. had gone to the cottage, unaware that Joyce was no longer there, and Harry had had his narrow escape from the Alsatian. Joyce now lived at Woodend, a village several miles away on the other side of Greyfriars, and Bunter, when he guessed that the pony was going home, had expected to arrive at Woodend. But to reach Woodend, the pony would have had to cross the Courtfield road, and he had crossed no roads at all. Now he had arrived at the solitary building in deep woods, surrounded by a high fence. And he stopped at the gate, as if accustomed to stop there.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

Joyce's pony was an intelligent pony. He knew how to find his way home when he was left unguided. But evidently he was not yet used to his new quarters in a distant village.

He had gone home; but to his old home.

Bunter sat in the cart and blinked.

He was landed at the woodcutter's old cottage, two miles at least from any other building, in the heart of Redclyffe Woods.

The pony, halting, began to browse round the gate. He was quite calm and peaceful now; but he had looked quite calm and peaceful when Billy Bunter had first undertaken to drive him. Bunter was not going to be deceived by appearances a second time. He had no intention whatever of gathering up the reins and driving Joyce's pony to Lantham or anywhere else. One narrow escape was enough for Billy Bunter. Often and often Billy Bunter never knew when he had had enough. Now he knew!

He gave the pony's back a ferocious glare.

"Beast!" he grunted.

Had that intelligent pony landed him at his new home at Woodend, Bunter could have picked up the motor-bus for Lantham. But there was nothing to pick up at this lonely cottage in the heart of the wintry woodland. What the dickens he was going to do was a mystery to Bunter. His only resource appeared to be to alight from the cart, and take to Shanks' pony—a slower but more reliable pony. As he was several miles from everywhere, that was not attractive. For the present he sat in the cart and grunted and groaned.

This process did not get him any "forrarder," so to speak; but it relieved his feelings a little.

The cart moved again.

"Oh lor'!" ejaculated Bunter.

The pony was only moving on in quest of fresh herbage. But the bare possibility that he was about to bolt again was enough for Bunter. He rolled hastily over the back of the cart, held on a moment, and dropped.

Bump!

Bunter sat down.

The pony looked round at him, as if in surprise. Bunter, indeed, was a driver that might have surprised the most intelligent pony. Then the animal trotted a little distance, the cart rumbling after him, and stopped once more to browse. Bunter blinked after him, and ejaculated:

"Beast!"

The pony did not seem to mind. He nibbled contentedly, and Bunter sat and blinked.

#### CHAPTER 24.

##### Neck or Nothing!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.  
 He picked himself up at last.

It was cold, sitting on the ground, and more serious than that, Bunter was getting hungry. It was getting near

tea-time, and Bunter was always ready for a meal long before it was due.

He stood and blinked at the gate before him.

Who it was that had taken that lonely cottage as a tenant, Bunter had not the faintest idea.

Evidently it must have been somebody with a taste for solitude. For miles on every hand the woods swept, and the paths and tracks were little frequented in the winter. All Bunter knew of the place was that when the juniors had stopped there, a week ago or more, a big Alsatian had been loose in the yard, and the brute had chased Harry Wharton when he clambered over the locked gate to knock at the cottage door.

The thought of that Alsatian was quite unpleasant. Nevertheless, Bunter was debating in his mind whether to get over the gate and knock at the cottage. It all depended on whether the brute was chained up now. If the people at the cottage were nice, hospitable people, they might ask a fellow to stop to tea—a nice, pleasant, well-mannered, fascinating sort of fellow like Bunter! Or alternatively, as the lawyers say, he might find somebody who would be willing to drive him to Lantham in Joyce's cart, for a promised tip.

The tip itself would not be forthcoming; but Bunter felt that the cottager could hardly be so distrustful as not to take the word of a gentleman and a Public school man. Anyhow, it was worth while trying his luck—if only that beastly Alsatian was on the chain. Bunter was not afraid of a dog on a chain, if he was out of reach and the chain was strong.

Whether that alarming brute was loose, could only be discovered by scouting. With a terrific effort, the fat junior heaved himself to the top of the gate, rested his podgy chest thereon, and blinked into the yard.

The cottage, more than a dozen yards away, had a silent, deserted look. The door in the wooden porch was shut, and

the windows were shuttered. Still, it was fairly certain that somebody must be living there; nobody would be paying Joyce rent to keep the building empty. Bunter was not so much concerned about that, as about the Alsatian.

He blinked anxiously over the gate.

Like Moses of old, he looked this way, and he looked that way.

There was no sign of the dog.

No doubt he was safe in his kennel at the back of the house. All was silent, and Bunter resolved, at last, to take the chance.

He heaved himself over the gate and dropped.

Swiftly he trotted up the path to the house. He had no doubt now that the dog, if at home, was chained up in his kennel; but the thought of the brute was still unpleasant, and he did not linger.

In a few moments he was at the wooden porch. There was a large, old-fashioned iron knocker on the door, and Bunter lifted it and knocked.

Knock, knock!

The sound rang loudly through the silence of the woods.

Knock, knock, knock!

There was no sound of movement within. There seemed no sign of life about the lonely cottage at all.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter.

He lifted the knocker again and delivered a terrific crash. If anyone was within the lonely building he could not have failed to hear that.

But still only the echoes replied.

Billy Bunter gave an angry snort.

Whoever was the queer tenant of Joyce's cottage, he seemed to spend a good deal of time from home. Evidently he was not there now.

Bunter gave one more crash on the knocker and then desisted, with a grunt of disgust. He had had all his trouble for nothing. There was nobody at home.

But as he turned from the door he heard a sound—a sound that almost

froze the blood in his veins. It was a deep growl.

Bunter started, his fat heart thumping.

There was a sound of pattering in the yard.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

The Alsatian was loose, after all!

The pattering feet were coming round the house! In utter horror Bunter realised that the knocking on the door had disturbed the animal—probably asleep in his kennel when Bunter had arrived.

That swift pattering of feet told that he was not, as Bunter had taken for granted, chained up.

The fat Owl peered in terror out of the porch.

His eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at the sight of a huge, fierce brute coming round the corner of the building.

"Urrrggh!" gurgled Bunter.

He made a step towards the distant gate. But his fat legs refused to run. He knew that he could never reach the gate before the Alsatian reached him. Before he could cover half the distance the swift brute would be upon him.

White as chalk, frozen with terror, Bunter blinked at the Alsatian for one fearful instant. The huge dog, with flaming eyes and bared teeth, was coming towards him at a pattering run. Only for that second the fat Owl stood transfixed; then his terrible danger woke him into action. He clutched frantically at the trellis-work of the porch, and clambered up. The old wooden porch creaked under his weight, but, fortunately, it supported him. With a rapidity that was amazing, considering the weight he had to lift, Billy Bunter clambered on the slanting roof of the porch and clutched hold there.

He was only just in time. A few seconds and the Alsatian was baying below, his fierce eyes glaring up at the fat junior out of his reach.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter through his chattering teeth.

With eyes almost popping through

his glasses, he blinked down at the terrible animal.

A deep-throated bay came from the Alsatian. It told Bunter what he had to expect if he fell.

He held on for his life.

The great dog pattered round the porch and rose on his powerful hind legs, as if seeking to reach the school-boy above. Then he dropped back, and Bunter longed to see him disappear round the house again. Instead of which the Alsatian lay down a few yards away, his eyes fixed with a steady, unwinking stare at Bunter.

The fat junior trembled in every limb.

The dog had settled down to watch him.

Obviously that Alsatian was left on guard while his master was away, and he was doing his duty. Tramps who wandered by the paths of Redclyffe Woods were kept from entering and looting the lonely cottage. One look at the Alsatian would have been enough for the boldest tramp. Nobody was likely to trespass in the yard while the Alsatian was there—unless, like Bunter, he took too much for granted. And Bunter was fairly "treed." So long as he remained on the top of the porch he was safe from the savage teeth below; but the great brute was watching him and waiting for him to come down. There was no escape for Bunter till the dog's master should return and release him from his awful predicament.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

He blinked over the yard, and over the gate, at the track beyond. Joyce's pony was moving farther and farther away, browsing as he went. But there was no other living thing in sight. The dog's master must surely come back sooner or later; but, if so, there was no sign of him as yet.

Bunter waited, and the Alsatian waited. A long hour passed, and the winter dusk began to fall on the wood. The awful thought was in Bunter's

mind that perhaps the dog's master was away for the night; in which case the fat Owl's position was really terrifying. Not for worlds would he have ventured to descend from his perch while the Alsatian was there, and the dog hardly stirred while the long minutes passed.

Bunter groaned dismally.

The cold wind from the sea chilled his fat limbs. He was cramped, he was cold, he was hungry. He thought of the Form-room at Greyfriars, and even of deponent verbs, with longing. Anything—detentions, lickings, floggings, would have been better than this. No sound came to him, but the sough of the wind in the trees. No sound of a voice or a footstep. Only, when once he slipped and almost slid off his perch, there came a low, deep growl from the Alsatian—a sound to curdle the blood.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

He stirred at last. He was chilled to the bone, tired and famished. It came into his mind that there might be some upper window, a garret window or a skylight, by which he could enter the cottage. What the tenant would say if he came back and found him there was not the pressing question. The question was to get away from his precarious perch, and the keen wind that searched him through and through, and the watching, fierce eyes of the Alsatian.

There was another growl from the dog as Bunter moved. He half rose, ready for Bunter to descend. But Bunter was not thinking of descending. He rose cautiously on the wooden top of the porch and blinked at the slanting, slated roof of the cottage. It was an irregular and rambling building, additional rooms having been added at different dates, mostly of wood. With great caution Bunter extended his fat form on the sloping slates and proceeded to crawl up to the ridge.

The Alsatian growled again as Bunter disappeared from his sight. The fat junior heard a pattering of feet. Possibly the dog suspected him of in-

tending to escape on the other side of the house. Bunter could hear him pattering to and fro and baying.

An old wooden framework jutted from the slope of the slates. Bunter guessed that it was a window of an upper room. He crawled on cautiously till his fat hands grasped the wood. He pulled himself higher, and blinked over the top.

It was, as he had guessed, a roof window, with the same slant as the slates round it. It was closed and fastened, the square pane thick with grime. It was impossible to open the window. But this was no time for half measures. Bunter had to get into the cottage somehow, out of the bitter wind and the danger of slipping and falling into the jaws of the Alsatian. He made up his fat mind to it, and jammed a fat elbow at the glass.

Crash! Clatter! Jingle!

Fragments of broken glass clattered and jingled and tinkled into the room below. From within a startled cry reached Bunter's ears, and in amazement he peered down at an amazed, upturned face. The lonely cottage in Redclyffe Woods was tenanted, after all!

## CHAPTER 25.

### The Detective Makes a Move!

INSPECTOR BRENT, of Scotland Yard, pacing under the old elms at Greyfriars, paused in his walk and fixed his keen eyes, under the bushy, dark brows, on a handsome figure that came from the direction of the bikeshed. Mr. Lagden had returned from his spin and put up his machine, and was strolling in a leisurely way towards the House.

He did not glance in the direction of the detective's stocky figure. But Brent had an impression that Rupert Lagden observed him, all the same.

Three or four times on his way to the House Mr. Lagden stopped to exchange a few pleasant words with someone—Prout or Capper, Wingate

of the Sixth, Blundell of the Fifth. The new master of the Remove had very agreeable manners, and there was no doubt that he was popular in the school. He treated the older masters with a respect that was grateful and comforting to those elderly gentlemen; he played football, which made him liked by the games men in the Upper Forms; he had a pleasant smile and a cordial word for everybody.

Only in his own Form the fellows had had to observe that under the smiling exterior was hidden a hard and savage temper which was liable to break out at any moment. Handsome and agreeable as he was, generally very genial and easy-going, many of the Remove fellows were wishing that Mr. Quelch would get well and come back to his Form. And Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, made no secret of the fact that he was fed-up with Lagden and his uncertain temper.

Brent's eyes, strangely watchful, followed the handsome, athletic figure as it disappeared into the House at last.

Then the man from Scotland Yard resumed his pacing, with a darker shade of thought on his brow than before.

A good many fellows who observed Mr. Brent stared at him, and some of them smiled. They could not help wondering what the detective was up to.

He had come down to Greyfriars to look for the kidnapped fag, Flip of the Second Form. Wherever Flip was, it was certain that he was not at the school. Yet Mr. Brent spent hours every day at Greyfriars, and, so far as could be seen, he did nothing but "mooch" about the place, and ask questions of fellows and masters.

If he was looking for a clue, it was rather a mystery why he was looking for it at Greyfriars. He seemed to be at the wrong end of the trail. Yet there he was, and the general opinion was that Mr. Brent was a puzzled man, beaten by the case he was trying to take hold of. He had done nothing, so

far, apparently, because he could find nothing to do.

Yet he looked a capable man, and a determined man. His keen, penetrating eyes seemed to bore through a fellow. His strong, square jaw gave him a bulldog look. If he was baffled by this strange and mysterious case, at least he looked like a man to hold on to it till he had worried something out of it.

Dr. Locke came down from the House, crossing the quad towards the library. He glanced at the man from Scotland Yard, lifting his eyebrows ever so little. The Head, like almost everyone else at Greyfriars, could not make out what the detective was "up to" there. He was not the man to say so, or to give a hint of what he thought. But undoubtedly he was perplexed, and wondered what Mr. Brent fancied would come of his habit of haunting the school.

Inspector Brent stopped in the Head's path, and Dr. Locke paused politely. The detective had something to say; but the headmaster of Greyfriars had almost given up the hope that he would hear news of the missing fag.

"No news, Mr. Brent?" he asked mildly.

"None, sir!" said Mr. Brent, in his gruff, barking voice. "So far, none! But I have not been so idle as you suppose."

The Head coloured faintly. If Mr. Brent was unable to find the kidnapped Flip, at least he seemed able to read a man's thoughts.

"My dear sir——" murmured Dr. Locke.

"This is a strange case, sir—a very odd case," said Mr. Brent. "Am I delaying you?"

"Not at all, sir. I am quite at your service."

"I shall not detain you more than a few minutes. The case is a very odd one!" barked Mr. Brent. "In the first place, it is odd that the boy Flip should have been here at all. It seems that

the boy Bunter befriended a nameless, penniless vagrant, and somehow induced a rich boy's uncle to take him up and send him here. Such kind actions as this are not common. It is a very odd case."

"No doubt," assented the Head.

"Still more strange," continued Mr. Brent, "is the circumstance that this waif, at a school like Greyfriars, should have seen anything of his old associates of his slum in London. That is amazing! Yet there appears to be no doubt that here, or hereabouts, he saw the crook called Jimmy the One, and, according to the statements of a number of boys whom I have questioned, he told them that the first attempt to kidnap him, which failed, was made by this crook, Jimmy the One. The crook's object was to get him away from the school to keep his mouth shut. At the second attempt he succeeded."

"Quite!" said the Head.

He was aware of all this. Mr. Brent was going over old ground. But the Head was patient and courteous.

"Well, why?" barked Mr. Brent.

"According to the boy's statement to me, and to Inspector Grimes," said the Head, "the criminal had some design on the school—robbery, of course—and he feared that the boy would betray him."

Mr. Brent stared at the Head in his disconcerting way.

"So you have told me before, sir. That design has not been carried out, however."

"No." The Head smiled. "Possibly your presence here, Mr. Brent, has deterred the criminal."

"Possibly," assented Mr. Brent. "But——"

He broke off, gnawing his lip. For a full minute he was silent, apparently thinking. And the Head waited politely. He was getting used to Mr. Brent's rather weird manners and customs.

"The boy's cap was picked up at Ashford, thirty miles away!" barked Mr.

Brent, suddenly breaking his long silence. "The idea is that Flip found an opportunity of throwing it out of the car—if he was taken away in a car—to leave a clue to the way he went."

"It would seem so," said Dr. Locke. "He was certainly a very intelligent and quick-witted lad."

Mr. Brent grunted.

"You have wondered why I am still here, sir? I will tell you. It is largely because the boy's cap was picked up thirty miles away."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the Head.

"You know why I took up this case? I should not have taken it up on account of a missing schoolboy. Such a matter is not in my line at all. It was the mention of Jimmy the One that brought me into the case. I have hunted that crook, sir, for ten years or more. I may hunt him for ten years or twenty still, but I shall get him!" Mr. Brent's square jaw closed like a vice for a moment. "The remotest clue to Jimmy the One would draw me a thousand miles. And this boy Flip could tell me all I need to know—if I could find him. When I find him, I shall find Jimmy the One."

Mr. Brent paused again.

"Can you give me a room here to-night?" he barked suddenly.

The Head almost blinked. Mr. Brent's sudden barks were quite disconcerting to the calm, scholastic old gentleman.

"A—a room? Oh, yes, certainly! With pleasure!" answered Dr. Locke. "I will give orders for a room to be prepared in my own house without delay."

He wondered almost dizzily what Mr. Brent wanted to put up at Greyfriars School for. The ways of the man from Scotland Yard were past finding out, so far as Dr. Locke was concerned.

"I believe a room is available that belonged to a Form-master now in the sanatorium!" barked Mr. Brent. "That will do, with your permission."

"Mr. Quelch's rooms are now occu-

pied by the new master who has taken his place temporarily—a Mr. Lagden," explained the Head.

"Oh, quite! A Mr. Lagden!" grunted Inspector Brent. "Quite so! Give me the nearest vacant room, then."

Dr. Locke raised his eyebrows.

"The rooms in that quarter, sir, are assigned to members of my staff," he explained. "Guests are accommodated in my own house."

"Is there any objection to my occupying a room in the quarters assigned to your staff, sir?" barked Mr. Brent.

"N-n-no, certainly not!" stammered the Head, quite taken aback, and completely puzzled and perplexed. "But—but——"

"If there is no objection, I will take the room, which is now vacant, on the same corridor as Mr. Quelch's old room," said Mr. Brent.

Evidently the detective had acquainted himself with the interior of Greyfriars, and knew which rooms were occupied and which not.

"But, really, my dear sir——"

"Can I have the room I have referred to?" asked Mr. Brent, with ruthless directness.

"Oh, yes, certainly! But I hardly see——"

"Very well, I will send for my things from Courtfield, and take the room. Thank you!"

Mr. Brent stepped back; and the Head proceeded majestically on his way, a very puzzled and bewildered headmaster.

#### CHAPTER 26.

##### Face to Face!

**R**UPERT LAGDEN, Master of Arts, stared from his study window across the quad at the stocky figure that stood in conversation with the Head of Greyfriars. The expression that grew on the handsome face of the young Form-master made it much less handsome. His brow was black, and his eyes gleamed with

distrust and suspicion, and something like fear, as he watched the man from Scotland Yard.

Greyfriars fellows and Greyfriars masters looked on Mr. Brent's lingering at the school as a waste of time, and wondered at it. But Mr. Lagden was an exception. Rupert Lagden, Master of Arts—alias Jimmy the One, crook and cracksman—had eyed that stocky form day by day, with growing uneasiness and suspicion.

Why was the detective still there, unless it was that he believed that the clue to the kidnapped fag, kidnapped by Jimmy the One, was to be picked up at the school? And if he believed that, in what direction had his keen eyes turned—upon what object of suspicion had they rested? That was a pressing question to the man who led a double life.

Rupert Lagden, M.A., was above suspicion. His record was clear, known from the day he had left Oxford. No one knew, no one dreamed, that the man who had filled many posts at Public schools, led in secret another life—that in the underworld he was the man who was called Jimmy the One—the elusive crook of whom the police had picked up hardly a trace in the ten or twelve years during which he had followed a successful career of crime.

Few knew him—old Isaacs, the "fence" in Puggins' Alley, who had received loot from him to be disposed of, little Flip, the walf who had "dossed" in a garret in Isaacs' old dingy den—two or three others, perhaps. He had never had reason to fear betrayal, till he came to Greyfriars as a temporary master—as he had done to a dozen places before—and found Flip, the nameless walf of Puggins' Alley, a boy in the school.

And he had found Flip reformed, determined to keep to straight ways—not only useless to him, but a danger to him. And he had taken drastic measures to keep the boy's tongue

quiet. But there was danger still—he could feel it in the air. So long as that man with the stocky figure and the bulldog jaw was at the school there was danger.

In a week, or less, his engagement at the school, as a temporary master, expired. His planned coup had not been carried out yet. Jimmy the One had a nerve of iron, but he hesitated to crack the Head's safe while a man from Scotland Yard was at the school. But the time was running short, and if Brent hung about much longer, Mr. Lagden would have to go without carrying out the purpose for which he had come.

For that, perhaps, he would have cared little; one coup more or less was not a matter of great moment to a crook whose career had been one of unbroken success. He had even thought of making some pretext for cancelling his engagement and leaving at once—merely to elude the keen eyes of the C.I.D. man. But he felt that that would hardly do—it might draw upon him the attention he desired to avoid, and if Brent suspected him he would follow and watch. And when Rupert Lagden left Greyfriars Jimmy the One had to remove the kidnapped fag from the lonely cottage in Redclyffe Woods, where he was kept a prisoner—and such a move might be disastrous with the keen eyes of John Brent on his trail.

Did the man suspect him?

Or was it only a vague intuition that the clue was to be found at Greyfriars that kept the detective there?

Lagden could not tell.

But he feared the stocky man, and his fear grew. And with it grew a savage fierceness, like that of the hunted tiger in the jungle, debating whether to turn on the hunter.

Rupert Lagden, M.A., had a record open to inspection. Nothing of any kind was known against him. But once the eye of suspicion fell upon him—what then? A series of mysterious

robberies might be traced out, every one of which had taken place at some large school, or public institution, or the home of some eminent man, where Rupert Lagden had held a mastership or a secretaryship.

Such a series of remarkable coincidences, once brought to the attention of Scotland Yard, would be enough for the hard-headed, keen-eyed men of the C.I.D. Concentrated investigation would elicit more, once it was set to work. Sooner or later they would track out his associations in the underworld—the various banking accounts, under assumed names, that concealed his loot—a thousand-and-one hidden clues to his real identity and occupation. It was only needed for suspicion to be awakened.

Was it awakened yet?

He wondered, as he watched the stocky man in talk with the Head. Yet what could have awakened it—what unlooked for chance? The crook's hand slid to his hip-pocket, and for a moment his fingers closed hard on the butt of a revolver. If Jimmy the One was hunted down he would be a dangerous man in a corner.

He saw the two figures in the quad separate, and the stocky man came slowly towards the House. From his window, Mr. Lagden watched the detective pass in at the door.

Brent disappeared from his sight.

The new master of the Remove left the window and threw himself into a chair. He lighted a cigarette, with a hand that trembled slightly. John Brent, the hard-faced man from Scotland Yard, was in the House now. What was his game?

Heavy, solid footsteps came along by Masters' Studies. Rupert Lagden started, with a thrill at his heart.

He knew those footsteps—slow, solid, steady, bodeful to his ears. John Brent was coming to a master's study—and Lagden knew by instinct that it was to his study that Brent was coming. Why?

Tap!

For a second the crook's face was that of a hunted tiger. But Jimmy the One had himself well in hand. His voice was as pleasant as usual as he called out "Come in!" and there was a smile on his face as the door opened and John Brent entered the study. His glance at the detective expressed a faint surprise, mingled with polite welcome.

"I hope I am not interrupting you, Mr. Lagden," said the inspector.

"I have some papers to correct for my Form," said Mr. Lagden, with a smile. "But they can wait, Mr. Brent. Pray sit down."

He pushed out a chair, and the solid, thick-set form of the detective settled in it. Lagden made a gesture to the box of cigarettes, but Mr. Brent shook his head. The Form-master sat down again, slightly shifting his chair so that his back was to the window. He looked at Mr. Brent with polite inquiry, as if wondering, as any other Greyfriars master might have wondered, why the man from the Criminal Investigation Department had called on him.

"I shall not detain you long," jerked out Mr. Brent. "But you may be able to help me by replying to a few questions, sir."

"I should be very glad, of course," said Mr. Lagden. "If you will make it a little clearer——"

"I am here to search for the boy Flip! You are aware of that, no doubt. But I am less interested in the boy than in his kidnapper. Have you ever heard of a crook called Jimmy the One?"

Mr. Lagden laughed.

"Crooks have not come much in the way of a hard-working schoolmaster, Mr. Brent. I do not think I had ever heard the name till I heard it here. I have been told that the missing boy had some connection with some criminal of that name."

"That is so. That is why I took up the case. Eleven years ago I had my hand on the shoulder of Jimmy the

One," said Mr. Brent. "I have not seen him since—to my knowledge. I should not know him if I saw him."

"I conclude that he got away on the occasion you mention?"

"Exactly. He had carried out a daring robbery, and he was escaping with a fortune in jewels. It was, I believe, among the first crimes of his career—before he had grown so wary and cunning as he became later. I had him by the shoulder, I struggled with him, but he escaped, leaving his plunder behind—worth many thousands of pounds."

Mr. Brent's eyes for a moment lingered on the athletic figure before him.

"An athlete," he said—"a slim, young man, but a powerful athlete. Unluckily, I never saw his face. Few, if any seem to know what he looks like. The boy Flip knows—when I find him."

"No doubt you will find him soon," remarked Mr. Lagden. "I gather that he is supposed to have been taken back to London—a cap or something was picked up at Ashford, which, it seems, he must have thrown from the car——"

"A trick!" barked Mr. Brent.

Mr. Lagden's eyes narrowed for a moment.

"A trick?" he repeated.

"Yes—to throw the police on a false scent. The boy is not far from here."

"You think so?" asked Mr. Lagden, smiling.

"I am sure of it."

"I have no doubt you are right, if you think so," assented Mr. Lagden, "though I should imagine that this person, Jimmy the One, would take him as far from the place as he could. But in what way can I help you, Mr. Brent?"

"A few days ago some foolish boy—Bunter, I think—played a trick on your bicycle, Mr. Lagden. You borrowed a machine from a Sixth Form boy named Wingate, to go out on Saturday afternoon."

"That is correct."

"It came to my knowledge," said Mr. Brent, "that some boys in the Lower School—Wharton and his friends—found Wingate's bicycle outside a shop at Redclyffe. They guessed that it had been stolen, and took it away from a man there, who ran away and left it in their hands. The man had fastened a bundle on the machine, which was abandoned when he fled. This bundle was found to contain a large quantity of various foodstuffs."

"Is that so?"

"That is so. They described the man as middle-aged, dark-complexioned, with a moustache and horn-rimmed glasses. It did not occur to them that he was disguised. It occurred to me."

"This grows very interesting," said Mr. Lagden. "From what the boys reported to me the man they dealt with undoubtedly seems to have been a bicycle thief. But I can hardly imagine Inspector Brent, of Scotland Yard, following such small game."

Mr. Brent stared at him.

"That man was Jimmy the One!" he barked.

Mr. Lagden started violently.

"Jimmy the One!" he repeated.

"Yes, sir! I have little doubt—or no doubt—that he was taking the supply of food to a prisoner kept within reach of a bicycle ride—in a word, the boy Flip."

"You astonish me," said Mr. Lagden blankly. "In that case it would seem that the scoundrel is still in the neighbourhood."

"I have never doubted that, from the first hour I came here," said Mr. Brent. "The boy Flip saw him in this vicinity. It is known that he was unwilling to betray the man—that he gave him the choice of clearing out, or being denounced. Had the man gone, Flip would obviously have said nothing. I should never have heard of Jimmy the One from this quarter. It was when the local police applied to Scotland Yard for assistance that I received the news, and the case was

handed to me as a matter of course. The kidnapping of the boy proves that Jimmy the One did not intend to go."

"Now that you point it out, it certainly looks like it," agreed Mr. Lagden, with a nod.

"If the man is still in this vicinity the boy is still in this vicinity!" barked Mr. Brent. "Jimmy the One has gone scot-free so long because he does not work with confederates. Occasionally he makes use of the services of some thug, but he tells them nothing. I have no doubt that he is keeping his prisoner under his own eye."

"This is certainly very interesting," said Mr. Lagden, passing his hand across his mouth as if to conceal a rising yawn. His manner was polite, but it indicated that he was wondering why Mr. Brent had come to his study to tell him these details.

"I am afraid I am taking up your time," grunted the inspector. "But, as I have said, you may be able to help me. When I heard of the incident of the stolen bicycle, I was not told that it had been in your hands—I concluded, as a matter of course, that Wingate had left it somewhere, and had it stolen. That was a natural conclusion. I have learned to-day that the bicycle was lent to you by the Sixth Form boy; it must have been from you that the man in the horn-rimmed glasses obtained it. I have told you so much of my theories, to make it clear to you that I desire very strongly to get on the track of that man in the horn-rimmed glasses. Any information you can give me——"

"I understand!" said Mr. Lagden.

"What can you tell me of the man?"

"Nothing. I am afraid," said Mr. Lagden. "I never saw him, or heard of him, till the boys reported the matter to me."

"How did you lose the bicycle?"

"I had taken a ride to the village of Woodend, and near the village I left the machine leaning on a fence while

I ascended the hill, for the view. When I came back, it was gone. As you may imagine, I was very much relieved when, after walking back to the school, I found that some boys in my Form had found it."

"You saw nothing of the thief?"

"Nothing, I am sorry to say. Had I seen him he would hardly have escaped with it."

"Woodend is the opposite direction from Redclyffe, I think?"

"I think so."

"Others may have seen the thief. Did you make any inquiries after you had missed the bicycle?"

"The spot was a rather solitary one," explained Mr. Lagden. "I did not suppose that anyone had seen the thief take the machine."

"So you made no inquiries locally on the subject?"

"None."

Mr. Brent grunted.

"That's very unfortunate. You can tell me nothing, then?"

"I fear not."

"Then I am sorry that I have wasted your time, Mr. Lagden!" barked the detective, and he rose and left the study abruptly.

The door closed on him.

Like a mask thrown aside, the smile dropped from the face of Rupert Lagden when the door was closed. That handsome face was almost haggard.

So that was it? The merest chance. He had punished that fat fool Bunter of the Remove for having wandered near the lonely cottage in Redclyffe Woods—on the pretext that the woods were out of school bounds. In fatuous retaliation, Bunter had "crooked" his bike. He had borrowed Wingate's machine—surely an act from which he could never have expected danger to accrue? Yet it had spelled danger.

Harry Wharton & Co. had found the machine in the possession of a man who was a stranger to them—and whom they certainly never dreamed

was their Form-master in disguise. They had collared it and brought it back to the school. There was nothing in the incident—if it had not reached John Brent. Mr. Lagden had had to give an explanation—and he had explained that the borrowed machine had been stolen at Woodend by some unknown person. It was a natural explanation; no one gave it a further thought. But what satisfied schoolboys, did not satisfy the man from the C.I.D. Evidently Mr. Brent was giving it further thought.

Had he come to the study simply to inquire what Mr. Lagden could tell him of the supposed bike-thief? Or did he suspect that Mr. Lagden and the man in the horn-rimmed glasses were one and the same?

It was a tormenting doubt to Jimmy the One.

If Brent suspected that, he suspected everything! From suspicion to action would be only a step!

There was a feeling like ice at the crook's heart.

He had always feared the hard-faced man with the bulldog jaw. In all his career of crime, only once had he been near capture—and it was John Brent's hand that had fallen on his shoulder, John Brent who had taken a fortune from his hands. His revenge on the detective had been a ruthless one. Brent was a widower with one small son; and the crook had stolen the child and abandoned him in a slum, to grow up a vagrant and a thief. But that revenge had turned Brent into a human bloodhound, with whom the hunting down of Jimmy the One had become an obsession. He had never found his boy again, and he knew that he owed the loss to Jimmy the One; and for ten long years his thoughts by day, his dreams by night, had been concentrated on his one object—the capture of Jimmy the One. And now they were face to face, and the crook knew—he felt in his bones—that he was suspected.

Rupert Lagden paced his study.

There was suspicion—if only a vague suspicion as yet—in the mind of the C.I.D. man. It would grow. The game was up!

To throw up everything, to flee beyond seas under an assumed name while there was yet time—that was one resource. But there was another resource, a darker one; and the crook was thinking of it as he paced the study with a blacker and blacker brow.

#### CHAPTER 27.

##### Billy Bunter Makes a Discovery!

"FLIP!"  
Billy Bunter gasped the name.

The Owl of the Remove could scarcely believe his eyes or his spectacles.

Sprawling on the slate roof of the lonely cottage, blinking down into the room below the window he had shattered, Billy Bunter's eyes fixed on the upturned face that looked up at him—the face of Flip of the Second Form!

He fairly goggled at Flip.

It had surprised the fat junior to discover that the cottage was occupied at all. There had been no answer to his loud knocking; no sign of life during the long time that he had crouched on the porch, watched by the Alsatian in the yard. Now he understood why. The lonely cottage in Redclyffe Wood had one occupant—a prisoner! And the prisoner was the waif of Greyfriars—Flip of the Second Form.

"Oh, crikey!" gurgled Bunter.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles! The local police had hunted for the kidnapped fag in vain—a special detective from Scotland Yard was at Greyfriars, seeking him; and Billy Bunter had found him!

"Flip!" gasped Bunter.

The little fag stared up at him blankly.

"Master Bunter!" It was a whoop of

joy from Flip. "Oh, Master Bunter! It's you, and you've found me!"

"It—it—it's really you!" gasped Bunter.

"Wot to!" chuckled Flip. "Oh, sir, fancy you finding me! Arter all you've done for me, sir, to find me 'ere!"

Bunter grinned.

He almost purred.

He forgot, for the moment, that he had found Flip by the sheerest, purest accident! He forgot that he was, so long as the Alsatian watched, as much a prisoner as Flip was. The fag's face was full of eager gratitude, and that, in Bunter's opinion, was very right and proper. He was not the fellow to disclaim it.

"You've found me, sir!" repeated Flip joyfully.

"What-ho!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I've found you, kid! I dare say you knew I should be keeping an eye open for you!"

"Well, I 'oped I'd be found, sir!" answered Flip. "But I own up I never thought you'd be able to do it, sir! 'Ow you found me, I can't think!"

"Well, you see, you had to be found," said Bunter calmly, blinking down at the delighted face of the fag. "I asked that beast Lagden for leave from detention to look for you, and he refused. I cut detention, and—and here I am!"

Flip looked startled.

"I say, sir, that bloke Lagden don't know you're here?" he exclaimed.

"No fear! I dodged him all right!"

"Oh, good!" said Flip, with a deep breath. "But, I say, sir! 'Ow did you get past the dorg? There's a big Alsatian dorg——"

"I'm not afraid of a dog!" answered Bunter cheerfully. "The beast nearly had me, but I climbed on the porch in time. Dogs can't scare me, Flip!"

"You're jest as brave as they make 'em, sir!" said Flip admiringly. "There ain't many as would try to pass that there dorg!"

"Precious few, I think!" said Bunter,

hardly remembering, as he spoke, that he certainly was not one of the few. "I say, kid, have you got any grub there?"

"Lots!" answered Flip. "Jimmy the One don't starve a bloke!"

Bunter felt a sudden qualm.

"I—I say, that villain isn't in the house, is he?"

"No fear, sir! He'd have been on to you in a tick if he was here!"

"Is—is he likely to come back?"

"Might come any time, sir!" said Flip. "I reckon he comes along when he can get away without being noticed. Sometimes at night, and a few times by day. He has to feed and look arter the dorg—and bring me grub, too. Nobody else don't know I'm 'ere. Jimmy the One is the bloke to keep secrets!"

"Oh, lor'!" murmured Bunter.

The fat junior's object in breaking the roof window had been to get into the cottage. But he changed his fat mind about that now. He did not want to be in the building if that mysterious crook, Jimmy the One, arrived to see his prisoner.

It was cold and windy on the roof, and it was growing dark, but anything was better than a meeting with Jimmy the One, whoever Jimmy the One was!

But Jimmy the One was not there at the moment, and Bunter was hungry. His fat thoughts returned to food—a subject that was never very far from the thoughts of William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Look here, Flip, I—I'd better stay up here," he said. "See if you can pass up some grub. I haven't had my tea, and I'm frightfully hungry—famished, in fact!"

Flip grinned. He knew the weakness of his podgy patron for anything in the way of eatables.

"Right you are, sir!" he answered.

He placed a chair in position, and mounted on it, with his hands full of edibles.

He could not reach as high as the window, but Bunter, reaching down

through the broken glass, easily reached his extended hands, and lifted the "grub" from them. Several times Flip mounted the chair and handed up supplies—corned-beef and ham and bread-and-butter and cake and other things. There was a steady sound of champing on the roof of the lonely cottage. Not a word came from Billy Bunter now; his jaws were too busy for that.

The March darkness deepened over the wide, sweeping woods. Lamplight from Flip's prison-room glimmered up into the night. Occasionally a howl came from the Alsatian roaming in the yard. Billy Bunter ate and ate, forgetful of less important things.

Flip, standing on the chair, watched him, with a happy grin on his face. Flip, no doubt, was the only Greyfriars fellow who found anything to admire in Billy Bunter, but the little waif's gratitude and admiration were deep. And after long days and nights of loneliness, broken only by rare visits from the ruthless crook who held him a prisoner, the waif was overjoyed to see a human face again—and of all faces, Billy Bunter's fat visage was the one he was gladdest to see!

Even Billy Bunter had to slack down at last; he ate more slowly, and then, at long last, stopped eating. He blinked down benevolently at Flip.

"That was good!" he said, with deep feeling. "I was frightfully hungry. I hoped I might get tea here, but I'm blessed if I thought I'd get it like this! He, he, he!"

Flip's eyes widened.

"You 'oped you'd get tea 'ere?" he repeated.

"Yes, rather! What do you fancy I knocked at the door for?" Billy Bunter was of the class of persons who, proverbially, ought to have good memories, but he, unfortunately, had a bad one.

Flip's eyes widened still more.

"But you came 'ere to find me, sir!" he said, perplexed.

Bunter started.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Of course! I—I sort of suspected this was the sort of place you might be parked in," he stammered. "So—so I—I just butted in, you know, and chanced the dog! Don't you fancy that I came along here by accident, because the beastly pony ran away and landed me here. Nothing of the sort!"

"Eh?"

Flip blinked at him.

"As for knocking at the cottage to see if I could get some tea here, or a man to drive the cart, I never thought of anything of the kind!" added Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped Flip.

Had not the Greyfriars waif's faith in Bunter been so very strong, he might have suspected that his fat patron was a champion fabricator. Even Flip's sturdy faith was a little staggered.

"The fact is," added Bunter, "I never came here in a cart at all, and I haven't left it outside the gate!"

"Oh!" gasped Flip.

"As I told Lagden only this afternoon, I fancied I could root you out!" said Bunter, blinking at Flip. "And I've done it, haven't I? I shall get into a row for cutting detention, but I don't care! I've got you, anyhow!"

"You 'ave, sir!" said Flip loyally. "Look 'ere, sir, if you reach down and 'old my 'ands, I could climb out of that winder! I don't weigh a lot. We'll get away together, sir!"

"What about the dog, though?" asked Bunter, as a whine from the disappointed Alsatian came floating to his fat ears.

"Well, sir, you chanced 'im, and I'll chance 'im along with you, sir!"

Billy Bunter shuddered at the thought.

He had "chanced" the Alsatian quite unintentionally and involuntarily, and he assuredly had no idea of chancing him again.

It began to dawn on Bunter's fat brain—now that the important ques-

tion of food was disposed of, and he was free to consider smaller matters—that he was in a bad box. He dared not, for his fat life, descend and face the Alsatian's teeth, and the only alternative was to remain where he was—till Jimmy the One arrived.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bunter blankly. "We—we can't get away. That awful beast nearly had me, like he nearly had Wharton last week. Oh, crikey! He'd tear us to pieces!"

"But you chanced him, sir——"

"Oh, don't be a young ass!" said Bunter irritably.

"No, sir!" said Flip obediently.

From the darkness came a deep baying from the Alsatian. Bunter started and listened. Someone was approaching the cottage, and the thought that it might be the crook almost made Bunter's fat heart die in his podgy breast. Through the broken window, the sound floated to Flip's ears, and his little, grubby face grew grave and alarmed.

"I know that row he makes when Jimmy the One's coming, sir!" muttered Flip. "It's Jimmy——"

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Bunter.

"Get back from the winder, sir!" panted Flip. "Keep out of sight, for mercy's sake. If he sees you, you'll be lagged 'ere along of me!"

"Oh, crikey! But—but he'll see the window broken——" gasped Bunter.

"I'll tell him I heaved something at it, sir," said Flip. "He ain't likely to guess there's a covey on the roof, with that awful dog loose in the yard. You keep quiet and out of sight, sir! I'll stuff him all right about the winder!"

"Oh, good! I mean, that's telling lies, Flip, a thing I'm down on," said Bunter. "It's not a thing I could do myself. Still, in the circumstances——"

"You keep mum, sir, and out of sight!"

Bunter really did not need urging. He was not likely to make a sound, or to show so much as an eyelash, so long

as Jimmy the One was on the premises. He flattened himself on the slates out of sight of the window, his fat heart palpitating as he heard the sound of a key in the gate, and footsteps in the yard, and the murmur of a voice speaking soothingly to the Alsatian. It was impossible for him to be seen from the yard, and Bunter could only hope that Jimmy the One would swallow Flip's explanation of the broken window. If the crook found him— But Bunter dared not think of that. He lay flat on the slates and palpitated with funk.

Footsteps crossed the yard to the door of the lonely cottage. A key grated in a lock, a door opened and closed again. Then Bunter could hear the sound of steps on the stair, within. He heard the bolts withdrawn on the door of the prison-room. He heard the footsteps enter the room, and the door close behind the newcomer. Terrified as he was, the fat Owl longed to peep in at the broken window and obtain a glimpse of Jimmy the One. But he dared not; and he lay where he was, as if glued to the slates.

Through the gap in the window a voice floated up.

"So you've been trying to escape, Flip! The chair under the window—and the window smashed! You young fool! Do you think you could reach the window and climb out? Do you think I should have left you here with your hands free if you could? Lucky for you you could not, Flip. I've warned you that the Alsatian is on the watch, and I pity you if you get within reach of his jaws!"

It was all that Billy Bunter could do to suppress a yell of amazement as he listened.

He could not see the speaker. But he knew the voice—a voice that was very familiar to his ears—a voice that he had heard, very many times, in the Remove Form Room at Greyfriars. It was Jimmy the One who was speaking to Flip, and he was speaking with the voice of Rupert Lagden, M.A., tem-

porary master of the Greyfriars Remove. Billy Bunter lay glued to the slates, his eyes distended behind his spectacles, wondering whether he was dreaming.

#### CHAPTER 28.

##### Jimmy the One's Last Word!

**F**LIP of the Second Form stood staring at the crook, breathing hard and quick. His heart beat fast.

Jimmy the One looked at him curiously.

But there was no suspicion in the crook's mind of how matters really stood. Well he knew that the imprisoned fag thought and dreamed constantly of escape, and Flip had left the chair immediately underneath the window deliberately to give the impression that he had himself broken the glass, intending to make a desperate attempt to climb out.

Jimmy the One was not likely to suspect that an intruder had escaped the Alsatian, climbed up from outside, broken the window, and was still crouching on the roof. He seemed faintly amused as he looked at the Greyfriars waif.

"You've had no luck, Flip!" His tone was mocking. "It must be some time since you smashed the glass—or I should have heard it as I came. But you're still here."

"I'm still 'ere, Jimmy!" muttered Flip.

"Did you fancy you could climb out?"

"I 'oped I could!"

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast!" grinned Jimmy the One. "You may try as often as you like—but look out for the Alsatian! Break all the panes if you choose—you must take your chance from the rain, Flip! In the circumstances, I cannot call in a glazier to repair the window." He laughed.

The fag watched him keenly.

"You come 'ere to let me out, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Hardly."

"You ain't the same as usual," said the keen-witted waif. "Something's 'appened, Jimmy! 'Ave they found out that Mister Lagden is Jimmy the One?"

Jimmy the One did not answer that. He stood in silence, his brow growing darker.

"Last time you came, you was got up in moustache and 'orn-rimmed specs," said Flip. "You've chucked that, Jimmy?"

"I've chucked that, Flip! I've been seen in that rig—by a set of meddling young rascals! It's unlucky, for it was in that rig that I hired this cottage from Joyce, the woodcutter. The merest chance—due to a fool's trick played by that young idiot Bunter. He cut the tyres of my bicycle, and I borrowed Wingate's, and Wharton and his friends found it in possession of a man in horn-rimmed glasses who was a stranger to them. You see how the blindest chance can disconcert the most carefully laid plans, Flip."

"You can't watch every point, Jimmy," said Flip. "A crook is a fool, arter all. It's a mug's game!"

"You're a keen little scoundrel, Flip!" went on the crook, after a pause. "You've spotted at once that something has happened. Well, something has. I'm in danger!"

"Glad to 'ear it!" said Flip coolly.

He watched the crook closely. Jimmy the One bore no more resemblance, now, to the man in horn-rimmed glasses, than to Rupert Lagden, M.A. His face was half-hidden by a thick, reddish beard, and there was a black patch over one eye. He was dressed in rough clothes, worn over his own attire, giving him a bulky look quite unlike the slim elegance of Rupert Lagden. Even Flip, who knew him so well, would not have known him on his looks. Had Bunter ventured to peer in at the roof-window he would have been amazed to see the man who spoke with the voice of his Form-master.

But the crook's disguise could not conceal his state of nervous tension. There was a suppressed, fierce excitement in him that was new to Jimmy the One, and Flip had guessed at once that matters were not going to his liking at the school.

"Danger!" repeated Jimmy the One. "Danger at last, Flip—after twelve years of snapping my fingers at the police! Did you ever suppose that I should be afraid of a man?"

"Not you, Jimmy!" said Flip. In spite of all, the waif of Puggins' Alley had not quite lost his old admiration of the handsome crook—once something like a hero in his untutored eyes.

"There's a man at Greyfriars now that I'm afraid of, Flip," said Jimmy the One quietly. "Chance—blindest chance—has given him the clue that he has sought for in vain for years and years. I believe that he suspects me—and if he does I have no time to lose. I shall make sure—as sure as I can—and then—then——" He broke off, but the glitter of his eyes startled the fag, and made him draw a quick breath.

"You'd be a fool to do it, Jimmy," said Flip earnestly. "Chokey's better than that. They'd get you sooner or later."

"I'm not here to ask your advice, Flip! I'm here for the last time—so long as John Brent stays at Greyfriars. I've brought you food. If my next visit is delayed, you must make it last. If I strike, and fail, I shall never come again."

"And me?" muttered Flip.

Jimmy the One shrugged his shoulders.

"You've got your chance," he said. "Take the offer I've made. I'll make you my companion and partner. There was a time when you would have jumped at such an offer, and not so very long ago. The offer's still open—but this may be the last time that I shall make it."

Flip shook his head.

"I done with pinching, Jimmy!" he

answered. "If you leave me 'ere to starve, it's all the answer I got for you. I'd die sooner!"

"You may have to make your words good!" said the crook. "I've come here at risk to-day. I had to make sure that John Brent did not follow me from the school—I suspected that he might. Luckily, I had obtained the food earlier in the afternoon, at a distant place, and hidden it in a tree to pick up later, after dark. But for that, I should have brought you nothing.

"But I am not taking more chances. If I find that Brent's eye is not on me, I shall play a careful game and never set foot outside the school walls again so long as he is there. I shall leave when my engagement terminates—without cracking the safe. But if——" He broke off again, gnawing his lip.

The fag watched him in silence. Jimmy the One in this mood was almost a stranger to him.

"If he suspects, I shall soon know—and then—— Well, the future is on the knees of the gods!" said Jimmy the One. "If he gets me, Flip, you will perish here, long before you can possibly be found."

"You'd say the word, Jimmy, if the game was up with you," said Flip, in a low voice. "You wouldn't want to 'urt a bloke that's never 'urt you."

The crook gave him a strange look.

"If he gets me, that's all the revenge I have left!" he said.

"I don't see 'ow! This man Brent what you speak of, what's it to 'im whether I'm found or not?"

"Never mind that! Take it from me, Flip, that if I go down, you go down with me. This may be your last chance of life!"

"You ain't going to make a thief and a crook of me, Jimmy!" said the waif stubbornly. "Not since you told me that you knowed who my father is, and that he's an honest man and an officer of the law. I keep on thinking of him, and I'll let you cut me into little pieces

afore I'll do anything to make him ashamed of me."

"That's that, then!" said Jimmy the One lightly. "I've given you your chance. I may see you again, Flip—but don't bank on it. When the hunted stag turns on the hounds, he has to take chances. This may be the last time you will ever see me—or any human face. As you make your bed, you must lie on it."

The door closed on the crook.

The bolts outside grated into the sockets.

Flip heard the footsteps of the crook descending the rickety stairs and the closing of the door below.

He stood with a pale, troubled face. Faintly through the silence came the sound of the Alsatian's whine in the yard, the shutting of the gate, the click of the key in the lock.

Then all was still. Jimmy the One was gone—gone to strip off his disguise in some remote shadowed nook, and to return to Greyfriars as Rupert Lagden; gone with murder in his heart, as the waif well knew. The man who suspected him was at Greyfriars, and that man was under the shadow of death. Flip, a prisoner in the lonely cottage, could give no word of warning; the desperate crook was free to carry out whatever desperate scheme was hatched in his cunning brain. If he succeeded—— Flip shuddered at the thought. If he failed—— If he failed, if he was taken, he would not speak, and the kidnapped waif would perish miserably in his hidden prison.

"Oh, swipes!" murmured Flip.

There was a sound on the roof. He had forgotten Bunter; now he was reminded of him. He stared up at a fat, scared face blinking in at the gap in the roof-window through a pair of big spectacles.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Flip's clouded face brightened.

The crook had left him, as he believed, as safe a prisoner as he had been through the long days of his im-

prisonment. But there was a chance for Flip of which Jimmy the One never dreamed.

Jimmy the One, like Ishmael of old, had his hand against every man, and every man's hand was against him. Danger dogged his footsteps like his own shadow. But from whatever quarter Jimmy the One feared defeat, certainly it was not from the quarter from which it was, after all, likely to come. In all his cunning and desperate calculations he gave not a jot or tittle of thought to so utterly negligible a person as Billy Bunter of the Remove. Yet it was in the shape of a fat and fatuous Owl that Nemesis was on his track!

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CHAPTER 29.

Surprising!

**H**ARRY WHARTON & CO. rode back from Lantham in the falling dusk, a cheery bunch of cyclists, but not quite so cheery as usual. They had arrived at Lantham football ground in time to see the finish of the League match; quite an exciting finish, and well worth the ride to keen footballers like the heroes of the Remove. But when they mounted to ride back to the school they could not help thinking of the wrath to come.

Wharton's face was grave and a little dogged in expression. His chums were anxious.

The head boy of the Remove, whose duty it was to set an example of cheerful discipline to the Form, had deliberately disobeyed his Form-master. The injustice with which he had been treated rankled deeply; but on reflection Wharton could not help realising that he had done wrong. Had he been dealing with his old Form-master, Mr. Quelch, he would have gone straight to him and expressed his contrition and apologised, and taken without complaint any punishment that was meted out. But with Mr. Lagden he did not think of doing so.

The fact was, that with Mr. Quelch the circumstances would not have arisen; for Henry Samuel Quelch, though severe, was neither distrustful nor unjust. There was, as Wharton had long since discerned, a "yellow" streak in Lagden not wholly hidden by his elegant manners and agreeable smile. He was not a man who could be trusted, or with whom a fellow could be frank and confident.

All the Co. knew that there was trouble to come for the captain of the Remove. And the grim look on Wharton's face hinted that he was only too likely to meet it with stubborn defiance.

The Famous Five reached the school in time for call-over, and put up their machines in the bikeshed.

"Lagden's out!" remarked Bob Cherry, with a gesture towards the stand where the Remove master's machine was kept—now empty.

"That puts it off, anyhow!" said Nugent, rather relieved.

Wharton gave a shrug.

"Not much good putting it off," he said. "I'm booked for a row with Lagden."

"Keep your temper when you see him, old bean," said Johnny Bull. "No good making matters worse."

"The soft answer turns away the wrath of a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks," observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can stand it, anyhow," said Harry Wharton. "Come on!"

The juniors joined the stream of fellows going in to call-over. The roll was called by Mr. Prout, and when the Fifth Form master came to the name of Bunter there was no answering "adsum" from the Remove. Several juniors glanced round, and it was noted that Billy Bunter was not present.

Prout glanced up, repeated the name, and then marked Bunter absent. The Owl of the Remove was the only absentee; excepting, of course, Flip of the Second, whose name was not called.

After roll-call the Remove fellows went to their studies to tea, many of them discussing what was going to happen to Bunter when he turned up. All the Form knew that Bunter had cut detention, which was asking for it; and as if to ask for it still more emphatically, he was cutting call-over, too. And it looked as if he was going to cut prep also, for when the hour came for prep the Owl of the Remove was still conspicuous only by his absence.

"Begging for it!" said Skinner, with a grin. "If he's staying out because he's afraid to come in, the poor old podgy bean won't make things any better. Lagden will make his hair curl."

"Let's hope he'll roll in before Lagden does!" said Bob Cherry.

Bunter did not roll in before prep, at all events. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, in Study No. 1, got through prep rather wondering that the captain of the Remove was not sent for. They concluded that Mr. Lagden had not yet returned. Not for a moment did Wharton expect the Remove master to overlook what he had done; it was scarcely possible for any master to ignore such direct defiance. Even the most good-tempered master could hardly have done so; and the juniors knew well enough by this time that Mr. Lagden's good temper was mostly on the surface. Prep over, the Famous Five went down to the Rag. They met Peter Todd on the stairs, and Toddy called to them:

"You fellows know what's become of Bunter?"

"Not the foggiest!" answered Harry.

"The fat ass!" growled Peter. "He's still out of gates! He can't be staying out because he's booked for a licking, can he? Even Bunter isn't such an idiot as that."

"Is not the esteemed Bunter idiot enough for anything, my absurd Toddy?" asked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But perhapsfully he has lost himself in the ridiculous woods."

"We saw him on the Redclyffe road this afternoon," said Wharton. "Lagden came along on his jigger, and Bunter dodged back into the woods. That's all we saw of him."

"It's jolly queer he doesn't come in," said Toddy. "But I suppose he will turn up like a bad penny before dorm."

The Famous Five went down. At the foot of the staircase Bob Cherry uttered a suppressed ejaculation.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Lagden's in!"

At a little distance the slim, athletic figure of the Remove master could be seen. He was talking with Mr. Twigg, the master of the Second. Harry Wharton fixed his eyes on the man, with a gleam in them. He had no doubt now that the trouble was coming as soon as Lagden's glance fell on him.

"Give him a miss, Harry!" murmured Frank Nugent uneasily.

"Why?" answered Wharton. "It's got to come, and it's no good dodging it and putting it off. I'm not funk-ing that outsider."

And Wharton walked on, passing within a few feet of the Remove master. His chums followed him in an uneasy mood.

They expected Mr. Lagden to call to Wharton. He could hardly have failed to be aware that Wharton had disregarded his command that afternoon and gone on to Lantham instead of returning to the school. He had said that he would inquire as soon as he was back at Greyfriars, and it seemed impossible that he had forgotten to do so.

But he gave the captain of the Remove no attention. Certainly he saw him, but he gave him no heed whatever.

The juniors, passing near the two masters, heard Mr. Twigg's words as he was speaking to Lagden.

"Yes, the room next to yours, Lagden," he was saying. "You have Quelch's room, you know, while he is absent. It is the next room to yours that has been given to Mr. Brent."

"Then he is staying here?" said Mr. Lagden carelessly. "Of course, I am new here, Mr. Twigg, but is it not rather unusual for a guest of the head-master to be accommodated in Masters' quarters?"

"Very unusual indeed!" answered Twigg. "I should naturally have supposed that Inspector Brent would be accommodated in the Head's own house. I have indeed referred to the matter in speaking to Dr. Locke, and I gather that Mr. Brent selected that room himself for reasons which I confess are quite inexplicable to me."

"Very odd!" said Mr. Lagden.

"Very odd indeed!" agreed Twigg.

Lagden, with a nod to the Second Form master, walked on. His eyes fell on the Famous Five as he passed them, but if he had not forgotten Wharton, at all events he gave him no heed.

It was a puzzle to the chums of the Remove, and a considerable relief to Wharton. If Lagden was going to let the matter drop, it was all to the good. But he certainly did not understand it.

They went into the Rag, where the chief topic was the absence of Billy Bunter. It was getting towards bedtime, and the fat Owl had not put in an appearance.

Wingate of the Sixth came in to inquire if anyone knew anything of Bunter, and the Famous Five told him what they knew. They had been the last to see Bunter alive, as Skinner expressed it. Wingate grunted and went away to report to Bunter's Form-master that the fat junior was still out of gates.

"Lost in the jolly old woods!" said Skinner. "Let's hope that he will enjoy his night out. It will be rather parky."

"Even that ass wouldn't stay lost all this time!" said the Bounder.

But certainly it looked as if Bunter was lost, for he was not back when Wingate shepherded the Remove off to their dormitory.

As the juniors went to the stairs Harry Wharton & Co. saw Mr. Lagden

again. He passed within a few feet of the master of the Remove, and Lagden's eyes fell on him, but the master of the Remove seemed to have forgotten, not only his offence, but his existence.

It was surprising enough in a Form-master. But it was hardly surprising in Jimmy the One, who had matters on his mind that quite banished from his thoughts such things as school discipline.

Wingate stopped to speak to Mr. Lagden.

"Bunter has not come in yet, sir," he said.

"Bunter?" repeated Mr. Lagden. He seemed to come out of deep thought with a jerk. "Indeed! Bunter is still absent?"

"Yes, sir. Wharton says he saw him run into Redclyffe Woods this afternoon, and nobody seems to have seen him since."

"Dear me! The foolish boy may be lost in the woods," said Mr. Lagden. "No doubt he will find his way back later."

The juniors went on, some of them wondering that the Form-master took the matter lightly. They little dreamed of what was in the mind of that Form-master. Certainly Mr. Lagden was not likely to trouble himself that night—of all nights—about the absence of a dozen Bunters.

There was a vacant bed in the Remove dormitory that night. The snore that generally rumbled through the dormitory was not heard.

The Removites wondered where Billy Bunter was, and what he was up to. But no conjecture came anywhere near the truth.

## CHAPTER 30.

### In the Night!

MIDNIGHT had long passed. Greyfriars School lay dark and silent under a black and starry winter sky.

Two deep strokes had boomed out from the clock-tower. The echoes died away into deep silence.

The silence was not broken when a door opened softly on a gloomy corridor. Jimmy the One was accustomed to making no sound when he stirred in the dark hours of the night.

Mr. Lagden's door opened and closed without a sound. The figure that stepped out, silent in rubber shoes, was almost invisible in the gloom. It was clad in black from head to foot, and the face was hidden by a black mask.

For several long minutes it stood there motionless, the head bent slightly to listen.

Then, with soundless footsteps it moved along the corridor and stopped at a door at a little distance.

A black-gloved hand glided over the door. It was locked on the inside. The black mask hid a grim, sneering smile on the face of the crook. John Brent was not likely to sleep with his door unlocked if he suspected that Jimmy the One was at hand.

But a lock was nothing to Jimmy the One. There was no sound, but the nimble fingers were busy for a few minutes; then the door was pushed back softly on its hinges.

Within all was dark.

The curtains at the window were partly drawn; where they parted, the dimmest glimmer of the winter stars came through.

Jimmy the One was as accustomed to moving in the dark as a cat. The merest glimmer was enough for him. But he stood for a long minute in the open doorway, listening, his eyes burning through the holes of the mask.

Through the silence the sound of quiet, steady breathing came to his straining ears. It was the regular breathing of a sleeper, and it came from the direction of the bed on the opposite side of the room.

Harder and grimmer grew the face under the mask, a handsome face, not

handsome now. Rupert Lagden, Master of Arts, had disappeared from existence; in his place was Jimmy the One—and Jimmy the One was in the mood of the tiger in the jungle when he turns on the hunters to tear and rend.

He stepped into the room. The door closed again without a sound. Again he stopped, and his hand slid into a pocket of the black coat, and came out with something in it. It was a thick lead pipe wrapped in an old stocking—the weapon of the city thug. One blow from that deadly weapon in a sinewy hand, and the skull upon which it fell would crack like an egg-shell. The crook's fingers closed on it savagely in a tense grip.

A few more steps, and he was staring at the bed.

Dark as it was, he could make out the form of a sleeper. Quiet and steady and regular came the sound of breathing.

The crook's eyes blazed.

John Brent had long hunted him—hunted him as a dangerous crook; hunted him as the thief of his child, kidnapped in revenge. That long, long hunt had come to an end at last—and this was the way it ended!

The right arm of the crook rose, and he made a swift stride towards the bed.

The blow came down with crashing force, fairly on the dim shape of the head on the pillow, and the desperate crook panted with fierce malevolence as he struck.

There was not a twinge of remorse in his heart, not a pang of compunction. The hunter had hunted him down. He knew that the man from Scotland Yard suspected him; that he had taken up his quarters at the school to watch him; that only the death of this human bloodhound could save him. And without compunction, without ruth, the crook struck that deadly blow with all the strength of his strong arm.

Thud!

For a split second Jimmy the One stood still, bewildered. Then a faint cry of amazement and rage and terror left his lips.

It was not a skull that had cracked under the murderous blow. The crashing lead pipe sank deep into a soft pillow. There was no sleeper in the bed; the dim form that lay under the coverings was a dummy.

In that moment of terror the crook knew that he had been tricked; expected, waited for—tricked and taken!

From the opposite side of the bed a figure rose. It was not from the bed, but from the figure crouched beside the bed, that that sound of regular breathing had come which had deceived the crook; he knew that now—if the knowledge was of any use to him.

Sudden illumination flooded the room as the electric light was switched on.

Face to face across the bed stood John Brent and the masked crook, the thick-set, stocky detective standing solidly, fully dressed, an automatic in his hand, aimed directly at Jimmy the One.

"Drop that!"

The lead pipe dropped from the crook's hand. The eyes that glinted over the levelled automatic told him what to expect if he attempted to use the weapon.

His eyes burned at the man from Scotland Yard.

"You knew!" he almost whispered through the mask.

"I was fairly sure," said Inspector Brent quietly. "I had to make sure, and I gave you this chance—and you have taken it, Jimmy the One. It makes little difference, having had the clues in my hands it was only a matter of time. That is why you are here."

A quiver ran through the crook. He backed a pace; and the stocky man's deep-set eyes glinted over the revolver.

"Stand where you are, Jimmy the One!" said Brent. "And keep your

hand away from your hip! If you touch a weapon I shall pull trigger!"

Still covering the crook with the revolver, Brent came round the bed.

His cold, hard face was almost expressionless; only a glimmer of grim satisfaction showed in his eyes.

The masked man burst into a low, bitter laugh.

"Your game, at long last, Brent!" he said, and he held out the black-gloved hands. "Put them on!"

Brent's left hand slid into his pocket for the handcuffs. His right held the automatic steady, and his eyes never left the crook. Jimmy the One, hunted for more than a decade, was holding out his hands for the "irons," taken at last. But even as the man from Scotland Yard drew out the steel handcuffs, the desperate crook made a spring like a tiger, desperately taking the risk of the automatic.

Crack!

The bullet grazed the masked cheek as Jimmy the One struck the firearm aside. A second more, and his grip was on the detective, and they were rolling on the floor in a fierce struggle.

## CHAPTER 31.

### The Last Chance!

"NOT yet!" hissed Jimmy the One. Brent did not speak.

The automatic had fallen from his grasp, as he went down in the crook's desperate clutch; he gave his enemy grasp for grasp, and struggled silently, fiercely, grimly, like the human bulldog that he was.

The crook was a powerful man, athletic, with muscles of steel. But he had no advantage over Brent. There was the strength of a bull in the stocky thick-set frame of the man from Scotland Yard. The crook struggled with almost mad intensity. It was the last throw of the dice for Jimmy the One, and everything was staked on it.

No sound of alarm came from with-

out. The crack of the automatic had not been heard by distant sleepers. The adjoining room, Mr. Quelch's old room—was vacant—now that Jimmy the One was in the detective's room. It was doubtful whether a call from Brent would have roused sleeping ears. But he did not call. The grim, silent detective seemed to count upon himself with certainty to overcome the crook he had so long hunted—perhaps he was unwilling that any other should share in the capture of the Jimmy the One. The man was not only a breaker of the law, but his enemy, the enemy whose revenge had shadowed his life, and the grim, hard-faced man desired to take him with his own hands.

And fiercely as the crook struggled, it was borne in upon his mind at last, that Brent was having his way.

They rolled over, twice, thrice, and yet again, and then Brent was uppermost, and remained uppermost.

Savagely, with tigerish ferocity, the crook struggled, exerting every ounce of his strength, straining every muscle; but the iron grasp on him never relaxed for a second, and slowly but surely his strength flagged under the terrible strain.

Panting, gasping, still resisting, the crook lay in the detective's grip, with the bitter knowledge that he was beaten; that the last throw of the dice had failed him.

One last fierce effort he made to get at the revolver in his hip pocket, and the weapon was half-drawn, when Brent's fist struck it from his hand, and it slid away.

It was the finish! A minute more of desperate wrestling and then the crook's black-gloved hands were drawn together, and there was a click as the handcuffs locked on his wrists.

John Brent rose to his feet, breathing hard and deep. Man of iron as he was the fierce struggle had told on him.

The crook lay panting.

The game was up at last. With the handcuffs on his wrists Jimmy the One

had no hope. He staggered to his feet and sat on the edge of the bed, his handcuffed hands before him, his eyes burning through the mask at the man from Scotland Yard.

"You've got me, Brent!"

Brent nodded, and stretched out a hand to remove the mask from the face of the man he had taken. The crook's head drew back.

"One moment!" he said.

Brent paused.

"Make it a trade," said Jimmy the One, in a low voice. "You've got me—you've got Jimmy the One! Have you got your son?"

The grim face of the detective grew harder and grimmer.

"No," he said quietly.

"You know who took him from you. I left word when he was taken—a written message to put you wise. You knew to whom you owed it."

"I knew!"

"That was all you knew. You never found the boy—you never knew that he was abandoned in a slum, to grow up a vagrant and a thief like those around him. But you know now that I tell you, that the son of John Brent, detective-inspector of Scotland Yard, may end his days in prison—may even fall as a captured thief into his own father's hands. You know that now that I tell you, Brent. Make it a trade. Give me my freedom—and silence—and I will give you back your son."

The detective did not answer.

"Save him, from what is coming to him," said Jimmy the One. "I have kept him under my eyes—I know where he is to be found; I will give him back to you, to save from a life of crime—if you make it a trade. Answer before you take the mask from my face."

"I have my duty to do," said John Brent.

With a steady hand he dragged the mask from the face of the man who sat on the edge of the bed.

The light gleamed on the face of Rupert Lagden.

Brent gave him one look, and nodded.

"I knew!" he said.

The handsome face was distorted with rage.

"You've got me. Not even to save your son, you bloodhound! Listen to me, then!" said Jimmy the One, between his teeth. "Shall I tell you where the boy is? He is a prisoner—hidden safe and sound. Search for him if you like, but you will never find him. If I do not return to take him food, he will die of hunger, alone, helpless, unaided. Think of that, Brent, while you put me behind the bars."

A spasm crossed the detective's iron face.

"Is that true?"

Jimmy the One gave a scoffing laugh.

"You know it is true! I see in your face that you know it is true. You have already guessed, now I have told you so much, who the boy is—there is only one boy likely to be held a hidden prisoner by Jimmy the One—and that——"

"The boy Flip!"

"The boy Flip!" assented Jimmy the One. "You son, John Brent, a waif and a vagrant in the slums, whom an almost miraculous chance brought to this school to bring about my ruin. A vagrant and a thief—now a prisoner, depending on me to save him from death by hunger!"

"You lie!" said Brent, his voice calm, though his hard face worked. "I have heard all about this boy—he was a vagrant and a thief, but he reformed. He was given a chance by kind friends, and he made the most of it. At this school he won friendship and respect. I have talked with many of the boys—the best boys in the school, who were friends to him here—Wharton, Cherry, others, who would not have touched a thief with a pair of tongs. Whatever you made of my son, you dog, he cast it off at the first chance."

He broke off.

"Where is the boy?"

"Safe and sound behind locked doors—and my prisoner."

"But where——"

"Where you will never find him, if I go behind the bars," answered Jimmy the One. "Take me to the stone jug, Brent, and condemn your boy to a lingering death. His life for my liberty."

"If he is the son of his father, he will place duty before life itself," answered Brent coldly. "I have my duty to do, and my duty is to relieve the country of a human wolf who has preyed on it for more than ten years. The handcuffs will remain on your wrists, Jimmy the One, until you are inside a cell."

His hand dropped on the crook's shoulder, as it had dropped more than ten long years ago.

"Come!" he said curtly.

. . . . .

Greyfriars still slept.

But in the Head's study, Dr. Locke, in his dressing-gown, sat and stared in dazed amazement at the handcuffed man, who waited, with a black and bitter face, while Inspector Brent stood at the telephone, speaking to Inspector Grimes at Courtfield Police Station. Only the Head had been called, to be told the facts before the new master of the Remove was taken away. It was likely to be a long time before Dr. Locke recovered from his astonishment.

"Bless my soul!" he said faintly, for the twentieth time. "Bless my soul! Lagden—Mr. Lagden—I really had the best recommendations! Mr. Lagden! Bless my soul!"

The crook did not speak.

John Brent put up the receiver and turned from the telephone.

"A car will soon be here with the constables to take the man away, sir," he said.

"Bless my soul!" was all the Head could say.

Some Greyfriars fellows awakened at the sound of a car on the drive, and wondered what was up, and went to sleep again. If the Remove fellows were dreaming, they little dreamed that Rupert Lagden, M.A., was leaving Greyfriars in that car with the handcuffs on his wrists and a watchful constable seated on either side of him. The Remove were to awake in the morning to find themselves a Form without a master, while stone walls and iron bars closed round the crook who had been known at Greyfriars as Rupert Lagden, and in the underworld as Jimmy the One.

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CHAPTER 32.

At Last!

"ERE we are, sir!" murmured Flip.  
Billy Bunter grunted.

"There," undoubtedly, they were, but they did not seem much "forrader."

Bunter, fortunately, was not hungry. He had made several onslaughts on the provisions Jimmy the One had left for the kidnapped waif. But he was cold; he was tired; he was sleepy. The March night was dark and windy, and Bunter thought of a warm bed in the Remove dormitory with deep yearning. He had to face the music for cutting detention, but he was almost eager to face it, if only he could get to bed.

But there was no bed for Bunter. He was worse off than the gentleman in the song, whose lodging was on the cold, cold ground. Bunter's lodging was on a cold, cold roof.

Flip had joined him there. The keen-witted waif had not been long in thinking of a way out, now that he had help from above. He tore up the sheets of his bed, plaited them into a rope, and tossed the end up to Bunter to catch. Bunter, of course, missed it three or four times; but he caught it at last, and made it fast to the framework of the roof window. Then the active fag

swarmed up the improvised rope, and clambered out through the broken window.

But it seemed a case of "thus far, and no farther." Jimmy the One counted on the Alsatian running loose in the yard to guard the lonely cottage. And the brute was a far more efficient guardian than a human would have been. The pair on the roof hoped that he might go back to his kennel to sleep, and give them a chance of getting away across the yard. But nothing was less likely. Flip tossed down a missile from the roof, to ascertain whether the dog was still wakeful, and a deep growl and a pattering of feet replied. The Alsatian was on the watch.

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Bunter. "It's c-c-cold!"

"Blooming cold, sir!" agreed Flip, with a shiver.

He had a coat on, but the cold wind was searching. Bunter had no coat; he was just as he had dodged out of the Form-room. But Flip had tossed up a couple of blankets, and the fat Owl had wrapped himself in them. Still, it was cold.

"How are we going to get out of this?" grunted Bunter. "Look here, we can't stay here all night."

Flip made no reply to that. It looked as if they had to stay where they were, or take their chance of the Alsatian. And Bunter, most decidedly, had no idea of taking that chance.

"It's jolly nearly freezing!" grumbled Bunter.

"Ain't it, just!" agreed Flip.

"Oh dear!"

"We got to stick it out, sir," said Flip encouragingly. "We shall be all right, sir. You 'eard what Jimmy the One said—he ain't comin' back 'ere. We're safe from that villain, sir. Well, when daylight comes somebody may come along, and we can shout to them. We can be seen on this roof from a dozen parts in the wood. 'Tain't as if we was down in the room, you see, sir."

We're in sight on the roof once it's daylight."

"You silly young ass!" howled Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Think I can stick on here in this freezing wind till daylight?" roared Bunter. "Don't be a fathead!"

"I—I don't see what else we're going to do, sir," mumbled Flip. "We can't get past that dorg."

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter.

"Look 'ere, sir," said Flip, "s'pose you drop into the room and go to bed there, sir? Me, I'll stay on the roof and watch. Jimmy the One ain't coming back, and you'll be safe in the 'ouse, sir."

"He might come back," said Bunter, with a shiver.

"He won't come to-night, sir, that's a cert, arter being 'ere. Soon as it's daylight I'll see somebody in the woods, and we'll get 'elp."

Billy Bunter nodded slowly.

The prospect of bed was attractive. It was necessary for one to remain on the roof to keep watch for help. But it was not necessary for that one to be Bunter, so far as Bunter could see. What was necessary was that Bunter should be made comfortable. That was a matter of the first importance.

"Well, if that beast comes back, you can call me, and I'll come up the rope, same as you did," he said.

Flip loyally suppressed a grin. The rope of sheets had easily taken his weight. Under Bunter's it was likely to snap like a pack-thread.

"It isn't as if I weighed a lot," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Mind you keep watch, Flip."

"Leave it to me, sir."

"Mind you keep awake."

"I ain't likely to sleep 'ere, and in this wind, sir," grinned Flip.

"No, perhaps not; just as well it's so cold, in the circumstances," agreed Bunter. "It wouldn't do for you to go to sleep. Mind you call me in time to get up the rope if that villain comes."

"He won't show up, sir," said Flip.

"And when we get 'elp, you can be let out at the door."

"Well, I think I'll drop inside," said Bunter, blinking into the orifice in the window. "I'll slide down the rope."

"If you 'old on with your 'ands, sir, you can drop on the chair easy," suggested Flip. "I can't move the table, 'cause it's clamped to the floor."

"I'll go down the rope."

Bunter carefully knocked out the last fragments of broken glass from the window, and then heaved his bulk into the opening. He grasped the rope of sheets and hung on, to slide down. He had not far to go to reach the rickety old chair below. It was an easy drop, if he had chosen to drop. As a matter of fact, he dropped without choosing.

The moment Billy Bunter's avoirdupois hung on the rope of sheets it snapped.

Bump!

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"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

"Oh, swipes!" gasped Flip.

Billy Bunter landed on the chair and slipped off, roaring.

Bump!

"Whooooop!"

He sprawled on the floor and belatedly. Flip stared down at him anxiously.

"'Urt yourself, sir?" he asked.

"You silly fathead! Of course I have!" roared Bunter. "Oh! Ow! Wow, wow! Yow! Why didn't you make the rope stronger, you young ass? Wow!"

The patient Flip made no answer to that. Billy Bunter picked himself up and rubbed his injuries, which were not really very serious. But it was clear, even to Bunter that, in case of alarm, he would never be able to climb up that rope of sheets.

"Chuck those blankets down!" he grunted.

Flip tossed down the blankets. The fat Owl rolled into Flip's bed, tucked himself in warmly, and gave a grunt of satisfaction. This was better than a windy roof—so much better, and so much more comfortable that Bunter quite forgot that Flip was still on the windy roof.

"Mind you keep your eyes open, Flip!" he called out.

"You trust me, sir!"

Bunter's eyes closed, and his mouth opened.

Snore!

Bunter was asleep.

There was no sleep for Flip; but he was in no mood for sleep. Escape was possible at last. Indeed certain, unless the crook returned to prevent it, and that was little likely. Anxiously Flip watched through the long hours of the winter night for the first glimmer of dawn.

It was cold, it was windy, it was dark and dreary, but Flip cared little. With wakeful eyes he watched, while from below came the deep, unceasing snore of William George Bunter. At intervals

a whine from the wakeful Alsatian mingled with the sound of Bunter's snoring. The brute was still sleepless and watching.

At last—after ages, as it seemed to the waif of Greyfriars—the darkness of the sky was broken by a glimmer. Dawn was coming.

It came at last—a grey winter's dawn. The shapes of the trees loomed out grimly from the shadows, and grew clearer and clearer. Light and a faint warmth came to the shivering fag on the roof of the lonely cottage.

More eagerly now Flip watched, standing up on the roof, his eyes sweeping the woodland paths that were in sight. Once or twice he had a glimpse of the Alsatian roaming in the yard. How long he had to wait for help in so lonely a spot he could not guess. Perhaps the whole day, perhaps another day. But sooner or later someone was sure to come within sight of the lonely cottage. That was certain. And, as it happened, it was sooner, and not later.

A figure came tramping up the path to the cottage in the rising sunlight. Flip's heart bounded. At a distance he recognised Joyce, the woodcutter.

Before the man was in hearing he began to shout. But Joyce was coming directly towards the cottage, and in a few minutes he heard the shouting voice and stared blankly at the figure standing on the roof, wildly waving. The old woodcutter's eyes almost popped from his head at the startling sight.

He stopped at the gate, a dozen yards from the cottage, and stared blankly at Flip.

"'Elp!" yelled Flip.

"You young rogue, what be you doing there?" exclaimed the woodcutter.

"'Elp!"

"Who be you?" demanded Joyce suspiciously.

"I'm Flip. I belong to Greyfriars. 'Elp me out of this 'ere!"

The woodcutter jumped. The kidnapping of Flip was known far and wide round Greyfriars, and it dawned on Joyce that this was the kidnapped schoolboy whose name was on every tongue in the locality.

"Look out for the dorg!" yelled Flip, as Joyce, having tried the gate and found it locked, began to clamber over it.

The woodcutter, unheeding, dropped over the gate. He had a thick black-thorn under his arm, and even the fierce Alsatian had no terrors for him. There was a deep, savage growl and a pattering of running feet as the old woodcutter dropped within the gate, and the Alsatian fairly flew across the yard at him.

Flip, from the roof, watched, with his heart in his mouth. Even for the stout old woodcutter, with the thick cudgel in his hand, the great dog was a dangerous assailant. It came at the man like a tiger. But Joyce faced it coolly, and a terrific crash from the cudgel drove it howling back.

Twice again it flew at the woodcutter, and each time the crashing cudgel drove it, yelling, off. Then Joyce grasped the collar, and the dog was caught. Flip panted with relief as he saw the old man force it away to the kennel at the back of the house, and he heard the clink of the chain as it was secured there.

The woodcutter came back and looked up at Flip's eager face.

"You can come down now, sir," he called.

"Wot to!" chuckled Flip.

He put his head in at the roof window.

"Master Bunter!" he shouted.

Bunter's melodious snore still floated up. He had not awakened, and Flip's shout did not awaken him. The fag shouted again and again, but only the deep snore replied.

"Oh, swipes!" gasped Flip.

The fag called down to the woodcutter:

"You bust in the door, Mr. Joyce. There's another bloke 'ere—Master Bunter, what came and found me last night. He can't get on the roof agin. You bust in the door!"

The old woodcutter pondered for a moment or two, then he nodded and went to a corner of the yard where logs were stacked. He came back with a heavy log in his grasp, and Flip heard the crash as it was driven against the door below.

With a cheery grin, the fag dropped in at the window, landed on the chair, and jumped on the floor. He shook Bunter by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Master Bunter!"

"Groooooogh!"

"Wake up, sir!"

"Lemme alone, you beast! 'Tain't rising-bell!" mumbled Bunter.

Flip chuckled.

"You wake up, sir! It's 'elp! Can't you 'ear 'im a-busting in the door?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He rubbed his eyes, jammed on his spectacles, and rolled off the bed.

Crash, crash, crash! came from below.

In a few minutes the cottage door was driven in. They heard the footsteps of Joyce in the cottage.

"Where be you?" came the old woodcutter's voice.

"This way!" yelled Flip, thumping on the door of the room.

Joyce came tramping up the stairs. The bolts were shot back, and Flip dragged the door open, his eyes dancing.

Joyce stared into the room.

"Jolly glad to see you, my man!" said Billy Bunter affably. "Jolly lucky you came along!"

"Yes, sir," said Joyce. "I'm glad now that some idjit turned my horse and cart loose yesterday, sir. That's how I came here."

Billy Bunter started.

"Your—your horse and cart!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir," said Joyce. "I left it tied

in the wood, three or four miles from here yesterday afternoon. And somebody must have set the pony loose, for it was gone when I came back for it. I'd like to know who it was. I'd give him something! I hope I'll find the raskil!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He did not share Mr. Joyce's hope that the old woodcutter would find that rascal.

"That pony's still wandering with the cart," said Joyce. "I thought he might have wandered back here, as he never came home to Woodend, so I came along first thing in the morning to see."

"I—I think you'll find him not far away," said Bunter. "In fact, I—I saw him last night quite close to here. I—I fancy it was some gipsy who let him loose. In fact, I saw a gipsy—saw him quite plainly. A rather big chap with a—a black beard."

"Come on, sir," said Flip. "I'll race you to Greyfriars, sir. You'd better go to the police station, Mr. Joyce, and tell 'em about the bloke you let this 'ouse to. Come on, Master Bunter!"

And even Billy Bunter put on speed as he started with Flip for the school.

### CHAPTER 33.

#### Father and Son!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry fairly yelled.

Greyfriars was in a buzz of excitement that morning. After brekker the news had spread through the school of what had happened in the night, and all the fellows knew that Rupert Lagden, alias Jimmy the One, was in a cell at Courtfield Police Station.

In the excitement of that amazing revelation the fellows almost forgot that Bunter was still missing, and that Mr. Brent, though he had captured Jimmy the One, was as far as ever from having found the kidnapped Flip.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the

quad, discussing the latest news, while they waited for the bell for first school. Inspector Brent was with the Head in his study—he was still at Greyfriars. The chums of the Remove ceased their discussion suddenly, and stared in blank astonishment at two figures that came trotting in at the gates. If they had forgotten Bunter and Flip, they were reminded of them now.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Flip!" yelled Bob.

"And Bunter!" gasped Nugent.

"The Bunterfulness is terrific!" ejaculated Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "My only esteemed hat! The absurd Bunter has found the ridiculous Flip!"

"Bunter!" roared Johnny Bull. "Oh, my hat!"

"Back ag'in, you blokes!" grinned Flip. "Oh, swipes! I can tell you I'm jolly glad to see your blooming chivvies ag'in!"

"Well, my hat!" gasped Wharton. "How——"

"Master Bunter found me——"

"Bunter did? Oh, Jerusalem!"

"I say, you fellows, where's Lagden?" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I say, he's the man who kidnapped Flip—I've found him out——"

"Jolly old Brent's found him out, too," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Lagden's in chokey——"

"They got Jimmy the One!" gasped Flip.

"The gotfulness is terrific, my esteemed and ridiculous Flip!"

"Oh, swipes! Jimmy the One—taken at last!" said the waif, with a whistle.

"But how——" began Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, I can't stop here talking to you—I've got to tell the Head that I've rescued Flip!" said Billy Bunter. "Can't waste time on you chaps! Come on, Flip!"

And Billy Bunter marched importantly on. Crowds of staring fellows gathered round and followed to the House. Billy Bunter held his fat little nose high, and fairly strutted. Billy Bunter was the "goods"

now—there was no doubt of that—and Billy Bunter was the man to make the most of it.

"Flip——"

"Bunter——"

"Bunter's found Flip——"

It was a roar of voices that followed them to the Head's study. Bunter tapped on the door of that study. The deep voice of the Head bade him enter, and he marched in, with Flip at his heels.

Dr. Locke, grave and stately gentleman as he was, jumped from his chair. The hard, grim-faced man who sat talking with him turned his head and fixed his eyes on Flip.

Bunter did not heed Inspector Brent. He blinked at the Head through his big spectacles.

"Please, sir, I've found Flip and rescued him," said Bunter cheerfully.

"Bless my soul!" stuttered the Head.

"I hope, sir, that I shall be excused for cutting detention yesterday, as I was going to find Flip and rescue him——"

"Goodness gracious me!" gasped the Head. "This is—is amazing! Mr. Brent, this is the boy—this is Flip! By some amazing chance, Bunter seems to have found him——"

Inspector Brent rose to his feet.

He did not heed Bunter, important as Bunter was. He stepped nearer to Flip and fixed his eyes on the waif, with a steady, intense stare that almost scared the fag.

"I—I ain't done nothing, sir!" faltered Flip. "I—I ain't a pincher now, sir—not since I come to Greyfriars, sir—Master Bunter'll tell you so, sir, and any of the blokes——"

"You have nothing to fear from this gentleman, Inspector Brent, of Scotland Yard, Flip," said the Head gently. "But I think you have much to hope. You told me once, my dear boy, that the wretch you called Jimmy the One had said that your father was an officer of the law——"

"Yes, sir," said Flip.

"Heaven is merciful," said John Brent, in a low, tense voice. "The boy's face is enough for me, even if I did not believe what Jimmy the One told me in revenge. I have found my son!"

Flip stared at the grim-faced man. He saw the grim face working, and he understood.

"You—my father?" he breathed.

"I am your father, my boy!" said John Brent.

Billy Bunter backed out of the room. Even Billy Bunter realised that his presence was superfluous at that moment. Besides, Bunter had something to tell the fellows to make them jump.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter, as he emerged into the quad. "I say, he's Flip's father!"

"Eh? What? Who is?" gasped Cherry.

"He is—that chap with a face like a gargoyle—old Brent! He's Flip's father!" gasped Bunter. "I—I found it out, you know! Old Brent is Flip's father!"

"Great pip!"

Flip had found his father.

It was a nine days' wonder at Greyfriars.

When John Brent left the school his son went with him, and though Flip was sorry to leave his friends—and especially Master Bunter—his little face was bright with joy when he trotted away by his father's side.

Mr. Quelch, released from "sanny" at last, came back to take his Form. The Remove was not, perhaps, overjoyed, but they agreed that "old Quelch" was vastly preferable to Jimmy the One; and certainly nobody regretted that the temporary master of the Remove was safe in the place where he had been put by Flip's father.

## DON'T BELIEVE IT!

**P**EOPLE get all sorts of queer ideas in their heads. Often, a chance remark will go all round the world, picking up more and more half-truths, till in the end practically everybody believes in it.

That one about lightning never striking in the same place twice, for instance. Who started the theory, nobody knows, yet you'll find folk everywhere who believe in it. It's quite untrue, as a matter of fact—it's been proved wrong by the fact that the biggest skyscrapers in New York are struck by lightning during every thunderstorm over that city. The skyscrapers, with lightning conductors at their summits, attract the lightning by affording an easy passage for the electricity from the sky to pass to earth.

### Cats Can't See in Darkness.

You'll hear many people, too, who talk about cats being able to see in the dark. That's rubbish, also, though it's easy to find how the idea came into existence. A cat's eyes, as you may have noticed, are large for the animal's size, and the pupils—those coloured centres—can contract to pinpoints or expand till they almost fill the eye-socket, according to the amount of light falling on them. When in semi-darkness, the pupils expand to their fullest extent, letting in the maximum amount of light-rays, so that a cat does see better in semi-darkness than human beings do. But in pitch-darkness a cat is as blind as we are.

The Great War produced all kinds of weird rumours which gullible people swallowed wholesale. The strangest was a story that thousands of Russian soldiers had been seen passing through

England in trains, on their way to France. Some swore they had actually seen these troops, with snow still clinging to their boots from their march through frozen Russia!

Just think of it—a journey all the way from Russia to England, and the snow on their boots still unmelted! The story was all bunkum, of course; there had been no Russian troops such as people swore they had seen. But, all the same, there was scarcely anyone in England at that time who didn't believe the yarn.

### Here's a Test For You.

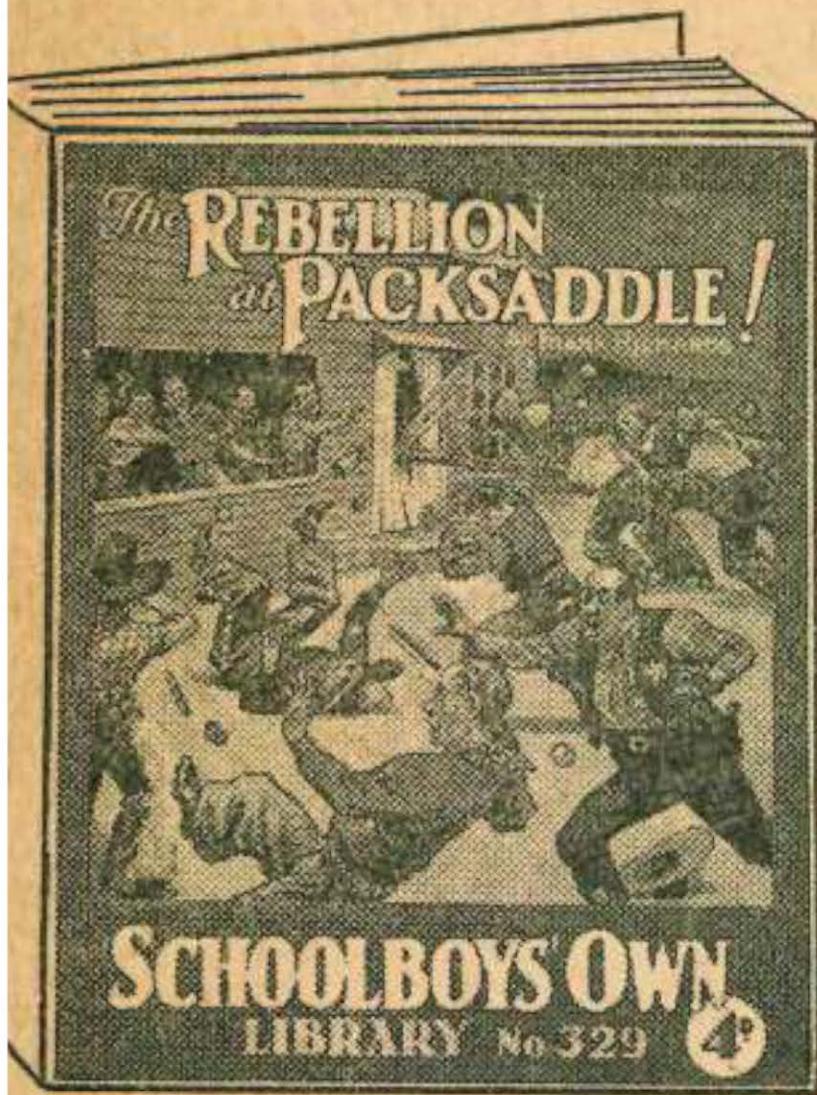
Perhaps you think you wouldn't be hoaxed by such false theories. All right, here's a test for you personally: Which side is your heart on?

Think carefully now. Probably you'll say the left side. Ninety-nine people out of a hundred think that's where their heart is. Actually, it's not on either side—it's in the middle of your chest!

Now another popular fallacy. When your nose is bleeding, would you put a cold key down the back of your neck to stop the flow of blood? It's a proper "old wives' cure," that one—actually, the key can have no effect whatsoever. Why the treatment appears to work sometimes is that a bleeding nose normally dries up of its own accord in a few minutes, anyway!

A curious error that even airmen have been known to make is believing that the reason a 'plane is supported in the air is because the wind-pressure under its wings buoys it up. Actually, it is the top of the wings which give most lift; the slipstream forms a vacuum there, and sucks the 'plane upwards.

TWO MORE TIP-TOP SCHOOL TALES TO READ!

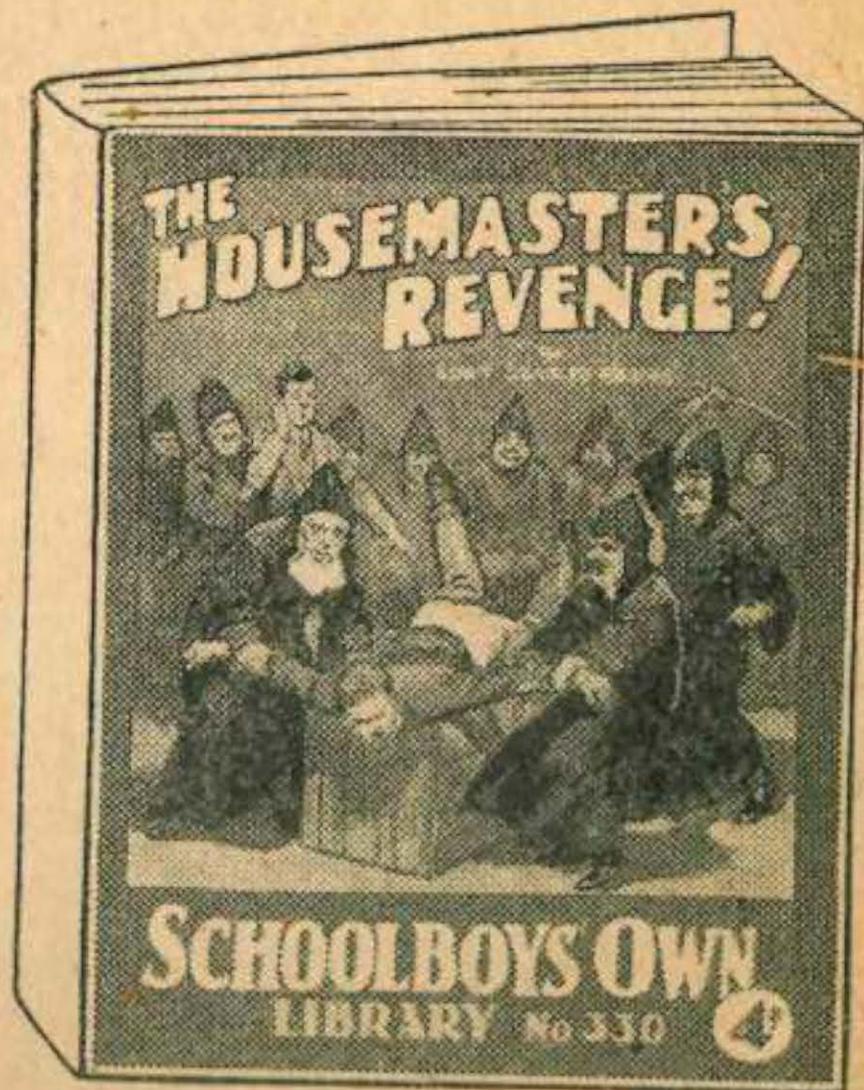


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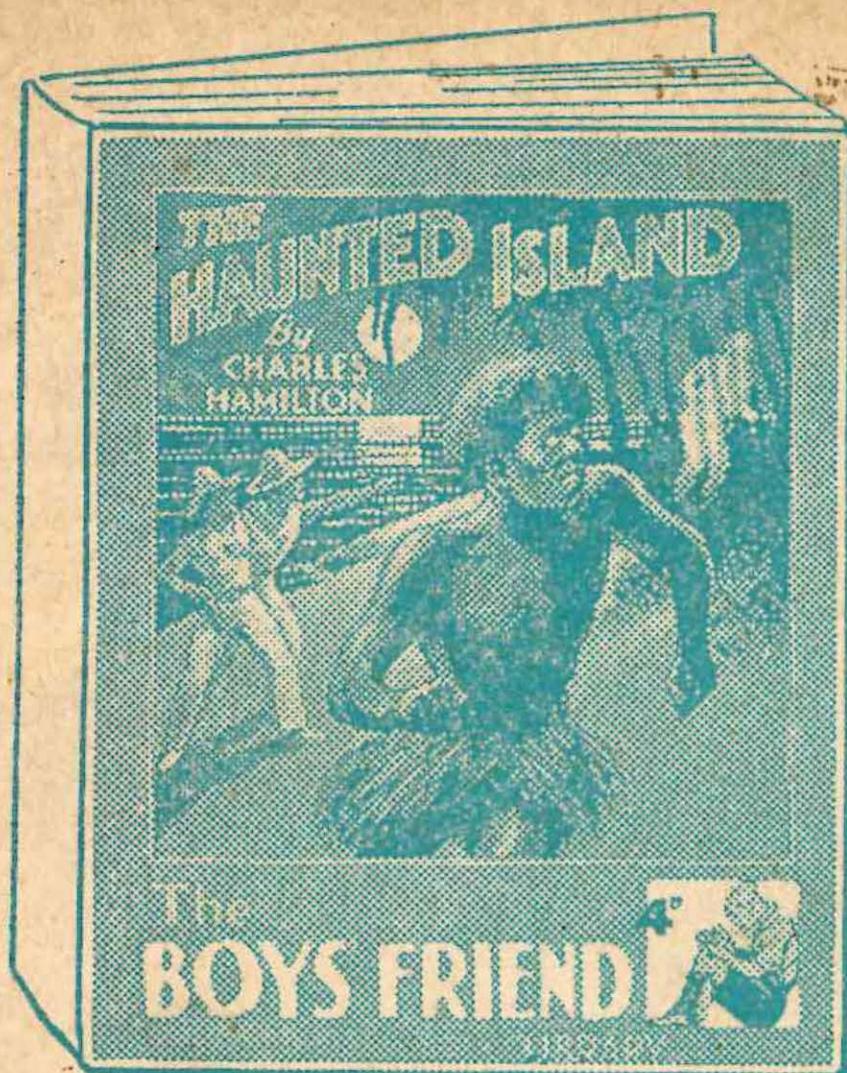
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