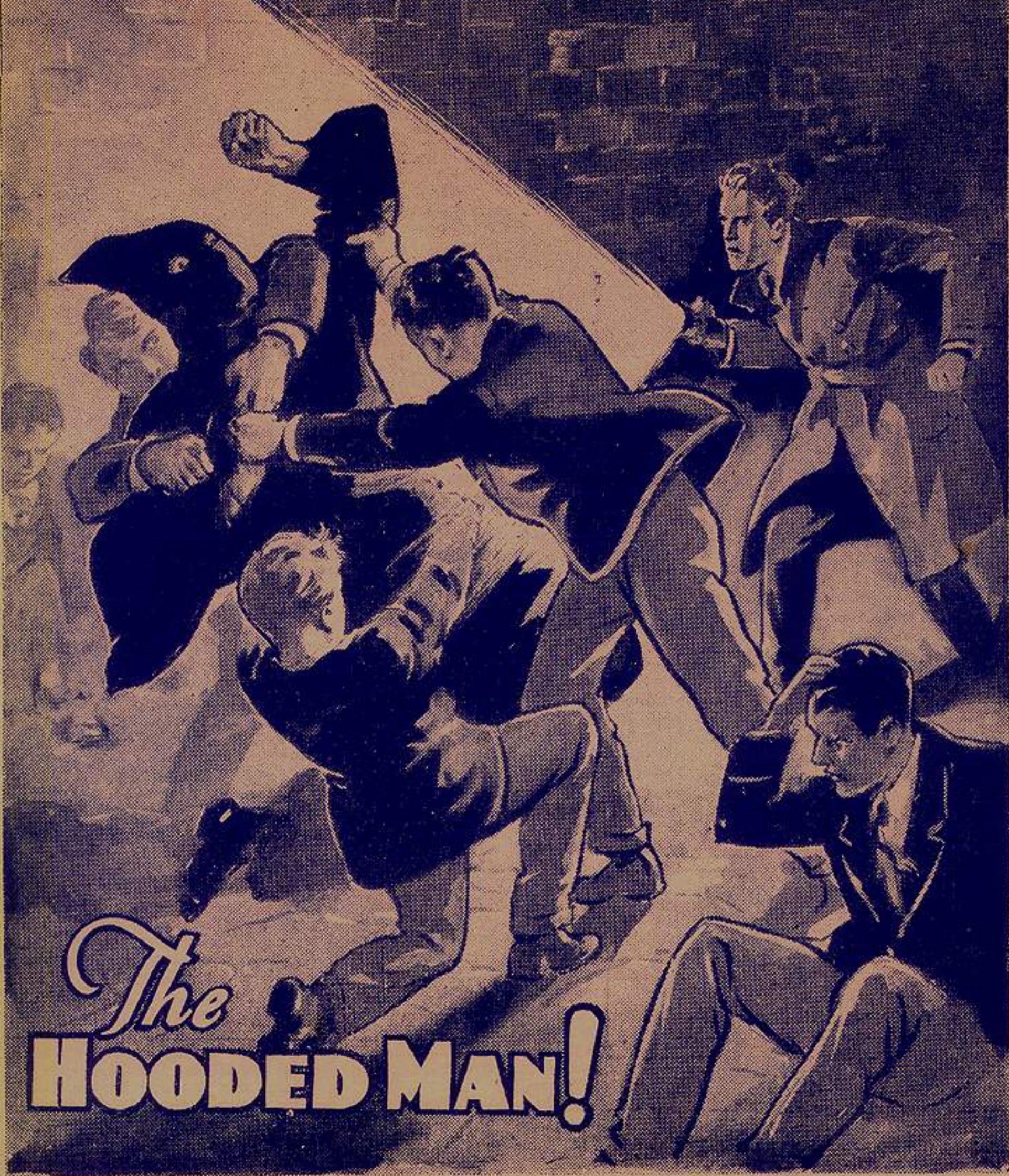


**THE  
MAGNET**

**THRILL-PACKED SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE-ADVENTURE YARN!**

# *The Magnet* 2<sup>D</sup>



## *The* **HOODED MAN!**



MISSING FROM GREYFRIARS—MR. QUELCH, MASTER OF THE REMOVE, AND BILLY BUNTER! AND THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNOWS OF THEIR WHEREABOUTS IS—

# The HOODIED MAN!



By  
**FRANK  
RICHARDS**

The juniors watched the hooded man cut swiftly across towards the moat house. "Come on—and not a sound!" breathed Jack Drake.

## WHERE IS BUNTER?

"WHERE'S Bunter?"  
"Where the dickens is that fat ass?"

"O where, and O where can he be?" sang Bob Cherry.

"Bother him!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton & Co. were puzzled, and getting a little worried, as they stood looking out at the hall door at Wharton Lodge into the winter's night.

Billy Bunter did not precisely add to the gaiety of existence in the Christmas party at Wharton Lodge. The sight of his fat face was not generally regarded as a boon and a blessing. But it would have been a relief to behold him now.

It was getting late.

Billy Bunter had gone out quite early that evening in the dusk. He had not come in.

He had missed supper, which in itself was remarkable, if not unprecedented. But now it was near bedtime, and still Billy Bunter had not come in.

"Lost his way in the black-out?" suggested Frank Nugent.

"But how could even Bunter lose his way on a straight main road?" asked Harry Wharton.

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"Bunter could lose anything, except his appetite," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Where did he go—and why?" grunted Johnny Bull. "He was up to something when he went out—we could all see that. He said he was going to Wimford—so most likely he wasn't."

"Blessed if I see where else he can have gone!" said Harry. "He can't have been walking about in the snow all these hours."

The Famous Five of Greyfriars were quite perplexed.

That Billy Bunter would willingly have missed his supper was impossible. Something must have kept him away. But what?

Had the snow been still falling they might have supposed that he had taken shelter somewhere. But no snow had fallen that day, though there was still plenty about.

Neither was it a dark night. Bright stars gleamed in a steely sky.

Bunter couldn't have missed his way in the dark—as it wasn't really dark. But where was he?

"We can't go to bed and leave him out!" said Harry.

"Blow him!" said Johnny Bull. "I'm sleepy. But I suppose we can't."

"The bedfulness would not be the

proper caper in the idiotic circumstances," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We've got a giddy detective here," he said. "Let old Drake solve this jolly old mystery—mysterious disappearance of a prize porpoise! Perhaps he's disappeared like poor old Quelch at Greyfriars. It may be catching."

"Fathead!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Drake!" called out Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Roll out, old bean! Professional services required!"

Jack Drake's cheery face looked out of the hall door.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Bunter hasn't come in! Bunter's missed supper. That's a mysterious occurrence that might beat your governor, Ferrers Locke. First time in history that Bunter's missed a meal. Impenetrable mystery! Can you solve it?"

Jack Drake laughed.

Ferrers Locke's boy assistant was passing his Christmas holiday with his old Greyfriars friends, while his governor was engaged on the search for Mr. Quelch, the missing Remove master of Greyfriars School. It certainly did not occur to him at that moment, or to Bob, who made the



playful suggestion, that there really was another mysterious disappearance to deal with at Harry Wharton's home eighty or ninety miles from the school.

"What about going along and looking for Bunter?" he asked. "We shall have to round him up before we go to bed."

"I suppose we'd better," said Harry Wharton. "The fat ass must be somewhere about, I suppose."

The Greyfriars juniors went back into the hall for coats and caps.

Colonel Wharton, who was standing by the fire in the hall, gave them an inquiring look.

"You've not seen Bunter?" he asked.

"No, uncle," answered Harry. "We're thinking of going up the road to look for him."

The old colonel gave a grunt.

"Young ass! He should have been in long ago. I suppose he cannot have gone to the moat house on some foolish ghost-hunting expedition?"

"Oh, my hat—I mean, not likely! Bunter doesn't like ghosts at close quarters," said Harry, with a smile.

The other fellows grinned. The least likely place for Billy Bunter, in their opinion, was the haunted moat house in Redgate Lane, where the fat Owl of Greyfriars had had the fright of his fat life a few days before Christmas.

"Well, perhaps you had better look for him," agreed the colonel.

And the schoolboys, having wrapped themselves up against the sharp cold, sallied forth in a crowd.

The six of them tramped away down the drive, frozen snow crunching under their boots.

Cold as it was, it was clear and fine, and an agreeable night for a walk for fellows who were not afraid of a bitter wind, and a possible fall of snow. They walked out at the gate of Wharton Lodge in a cheery crowd. They were not alarmed for Bunter, though his failure to turn up was beginning to worry them a little.

Following the road towards the town of Wimford, they passed the corner of Redgate Lane, and glanced down the lane as they passed. In the clear, bright starlight they had a distant glimpse of the old moat house—the shattered walls of the ancient ruin glimmering snow-covered in the stars.

"No good looking there," said Bob, with a grin.

"Hardly. Come on!"

They tramped on up the high road. The road itself was clear of snow, but there were thick banks of it at the hedges on either side. It was simply impossible for the fat Owl of the Remove to have missed such a road, and they wondered more and more what had become of him. It was five or six hours since he had gone out, and it seemed impossible that Billy Bunter could have intended to remain out so long.

"Oh gum!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly, as a new idea came into his mind.

"What—"

"Can he have cleared off?" asked

Bob. "He's told us a dozen times that he would, you know."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry.

"No such luck!" said Johnny Bull, shaking his head.

Harry Wharton shook his head, also.

"Bunter isn't a whale on manners," he said, "but even Bunter wouldn't hike off without saying a word, I should think."

"He wasn't carrying a bag or anything, when he went out," said Jack Drake.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Bunter travels light," he said. "He wouldn't have much to pack if he was going. I suppose it's possible that the fat chump may have hiked off home. But—"

"If he has, we'll boot him next term for giving us all this trouble!" grunted Johnny Bull.

The juniors walked on, wondering whether that was, after all, the simple solution of the mystery.

Billy Bunter was not wholly satisfied with the company at Wharton Lodge. He did not consider that he was treated with the distinction due to so distinguished a visitor. Many times had the fat Owl declared that he had a jolly good mind to clear.

Every time, however, he had seemed to have a jollier good mind,

### Thrilling Adventures of HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREY-FRIARS, and JACK DRAKE, the Boy Detective.

so to speak, not to; for he had never done it. Still, it was possible that he had done it at last.

He was not seen, at all events, on the Wimford road. And the juniors reached the town—dark and silent at that hour. The railway station seemed the only building that was still open.

"We'll ask there," said Harry. "If he's gone, they may remember him at the booking office. Bunter's a fellow people do remember. Blessed if I know where else we're to look for him, anyhow."

The juniors turned into the darkened entrance of the railway station.

As they did so a man came hurrying out, walking so quickly that he bumped into the party of schoolboys before he saw them.

Johnny Bull gave a howl as he slipped over, and sat down suddenly under the unexpected impact.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Bob, as the man, staggering from the collision with Johnny, bumped into him.

"Oh, my hat! Is it you, sir?"

"Ooooh!" spluttered Johnny Bull, sitting up. "Ooooh! You clumsy ass—can't you look where you're going?"

"Shut up, Johnny!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hastily, as he peered at the man in the gloom. "It's—"

"Rats! The clumsy fathead—"

"Shut up, old man—it's the Lamb!"

"Oh!" gasped Johnny.

And he shut up—rather wishing he had not applied those complimentary expressions to Mr. Lamb, the art master of Greyfriars School!

### THE PRISONERS OF THE VAULT!

**B**ILLY BUNTER, sitting on an old wooden bench, leaning back against a stone wall, blinked through his big-spectacles in the dim light of an oil lamp.

Every now and then Billy Bunter wondered whether he was dreaming. This awful experience seemed more like a nightmare than reality.

But it was real—it was painfully, awfully real!

Billy Bunter, while the Greyfriars fellows at Wharton Lodge were wondering what had become of him, was hardly half a mile away. But he might as well have been a thousand miles for all the chance he had of getting back to Wharton Lodge.

The fat Owl of Greyfriars was sitting in a dim vault under the old moat house—little as the juniors guessed that he was anywhere near the moat house at all!

Only an oil lamp, on a rough wooden table, illumined that vault. There was an oil stove burning, taking the edge off the bitter chill. But it was cold, and Bunter was glad of his overcoat and scarf.

Two or three old benches, a camp-bed, and a few other articles of furniture, were in the vault. It had been prepared for an occupant—and it had been already occupied when Billy Bunter was pitched in by the man with a hidden face.

Bunter blinked at that occupant of the old vault—and every time he blinked at him it seemed as if his eyes and his spectacles must be deceiving him!

He really could not quite believe that he was blinking at Mr. Quelch, his kidnapped Form-master, who had been missing from Greyfriars before the school broke up for Christmas.

Everybody at Greyfriars had wondered what had become of Henry Samuel Quelch. Some of the fellows knew that Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, had taken up the case.

Bunter had wondered, like other fellows—but he had not given the matter a lot of thought. He was, of course, sorry that old Quelch had been kidnapped, and he wondered why anybody had kidnapped him—not, Bunter thought, because they could possibly like his company!

But the fat Owl had not missed his Form-master a lot! He had a much easier time in the Remove without Quelch!

Lamb, the art master, had taken Quelch's place for the last week or two before break-up, and Lamb did not make a fellow work like Quelch! This was a consideration of considerable importance, from William George Bunter's point of view.

After break-up, Billy Bunter had, as a matter of fact, forgotten Quelch's existence!

Had he remembered it, he would



never have dreamed of coming across the kidnapped Form-master anywhere near Wharton Lodge—and, least of all, in a hidden vault under the haunted moat house.

But there was Quelch!

There he was, looking paler and sharper in feature than was his wont at Greyfriars—evidently feeling the effects of his imprisonment in the hidden vault. There he was—the most unexpected sight upon which Billy Bunter's big spectacles could possibly have fallen!

Mr. Quelch was pacing to and fro in the vault.

Every now and then his glance turned on the blinking, staring Owl of the Remove. The solitude of the hidden vault probably told on Quelch's spirits. But his expression did not indicate that he felt fearfully bucked by that solitude being broken by the addition of Billy Bunter's company.

Certainly, he had been as astonished as Bunter by the unexpected meeting, when the fat Owl was pitched into the vault by the hooded man.

Mr. Quelch had not had the remotest idea where he was kept a prisoner—except that he guessed that he was at a safe distance from Greyfriars. It was rather a surprise to him to learn from Bunter that his hidden prison was near Harry Wharton's home in Surrey.

But Bunter's arrival, though not much of a comfort in itself, had brought a gleam of hope to the kidnapped Form-master.

Bunter was no help—he was as powerless a prisoner now as his Form-master. Only one door gave admittance to the vault—and it was locked, and outside a great mass of masonry was rolled against it.

Escape was impossible—and even a sound could not have escaped from the vault through the thick door and the great block outside. But a lonely ruin with a reputation of being haunted was the sort of place that enterprising schoolboys might like exploring—and if the holiday crowd at Wharton Lodge rooted over the moat house, there was a chance, if a faint one, that they might make some discovery.

Until Bunter's unexpected arrival, Mr. Quelch had known nothing of the place, outside the vault in which he was a prisoner. But now he had learned as much as Bunter could tell him.

He was thinking it over as he paced to and fro in the dim, chilly vault.

He came to a halt at length and fixed his gimlet eyes on the fat Owl.

"Bunter!" he rapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"You have told me that you came here secretly, unknown to Wharton and his friends?"

"Yes, sir!" moaned Bunter. "I jolly well wish I hadn't now! Oh lor'! It was all their fault, really—"

"Are you quite certain that the other boys do not know, or may not suspect, that you came here? Reflect, my boy! If they know anything

of your movements they will search here for you."

Billy Bunter shook his fat head dolefully.

"They don't know anything about it, sir!" he mumbled. "You see, I knew they were coming here this evening, so I told them I was going to the pictures at Wimford—just to keep them off the track— Oh dear! Then I got here first to give them a fright— Oh crikey! Oh lor'! I wish I hadn't!"

"You utterly foolish boy!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "If you had not been so untruthful they might have guessed—"

Quelch looked at that moment as if he might have handled his cane—had it been in the vault instead of nearly a hundred miles away in his study at Greyfriars School!

"I—I don't think they would, sir!" mumbled Bunter. "You—you see, I—I never came near the place—only once when I heard the sound of the ghost's keys rattling! Of course, I don't believe in ghosts, but—but I never came near the place—so—"

"But you came this evening—you are here now—what do you mean?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I—I happened to hear them talking, and—and so I knew they'd found out that the ghost was a spoof!" stammered Bunter. "They found out that there was a bunch of keys tied up in the ivy that somebody pulled with a string—so there wasn't any ghost at all—only somebody playing tricks!"

"Then the boys have explored the place already?"

"Oh, yes, sir, more than once!"

Mr. Quelch gave a grunt. If Harry Wharton & Co. had explored the old moat house more than once already without making any discovery of the hidden vault below, it did not look as if there was much hope for him in further explorations—if they made any.

"But if they know that your foolish fears have been dispelled, Bunter, they may guess that you came here," said Mr. Quelch.

"They—they don't know," groaned Bunter. "You see, they never knew I heard them talking about it! It—it was quite by—by accident—I wasn't anywhere near a keyhole, or anything of that kind—but—"

Snort from Quelch!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter. "I—I—I say, sir, do you think that detective chap may be able to find us here?"

"What? Who?"

"Ferrers Locke, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gave a jump.

"Ferrers Locke! What do you mean, Bunter? Has Ferrers Locke taken up this matter?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"I—I think so, sir! He came to the school to see Dr. Locke after you were missing, and a lot of fellows thought he was going to hunt for you, sir!"

"You stupid boy, why did you not tell me this before?"

"Eh?" Bunter blinked at him.

"You never asked me, sir."

"Fah!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

His pale, worn face had brightened. The news that Ferrers Locke, the famous detective of Baker Street, had taken up the case was the best news that the kidnapped Form-master could have had.

He had no doubt of it, now that Bunter mentioned it! Ferrers Locke was a relative of Dr. Locke, the headmaster of Greyfriars, and if he had been called to the school since the kidnapping, it was fairly certain that Dr. Locke had called him in to deal with the matter.

Mr. Quelch resumed his pacing of the vault.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"I—I say, sir, do—do you think that that detective chap, Locke, may be able to find us?" he asked hopefully.

"It is quite possible, Bunter—indeed, probable!" said Mr. Quelch. "I have every hope that he may succeed in doing so."

"Oh, good!" said Billy Bunter. "I'm hungry—"

"What?"

"And there isn't much to eat here—"

"Do not talk nonsense, Bunter!"

"Eh?"

"Be silent!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Bunter was silent—blinking at him! Quelch, apparently, did not care whether there was much to eat or not—that was the amount of sense a schoolmaster had. Bunter cared a great deal—a very great deal! The loss of liberty did not trouble Billy Bunter nearly so much as the loss of regular and ample meals—a much more serious matter.

He sat and blinked at Quelch in silent indignation and scorn—while the Remove master paced the vault.

A dull, heavy sound came in the deep silence from the direction of the door.

Mr. Quelch gave a start and fixed his eyes on the low oaken door, hardly four feet high, set in a deep arch in the wall of solid stone.

He knew that sound—the sound of the great block being rolled away, that always preceded the opening of the door. His eyes gleamed.

He had not expected another visit—his gaoler had already been there once; and the hooded man came only once in the twenty-four hours—by night, as Mr. Quelch guessed, though in the deep vault night and day were the same to him.

Now, however, it was clear that he was coming back; at that late hour—perhaps because another prisoner was there. It was, at all events, a change in his usual custom.

"Bunter!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"That scoundrel is about to enter! You can hear him moving the stone from the door, Bunter—"

"Oh lor'!"

"He is a very powerful man, Bunter! I have been quite unable to deal with him—though I have made the attempt on one occasion! However, with your assistance, Bunter—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"He has only twice brought a



companion with him! Generally he comes alone," said Mr. Quelch eagerly. "It is possible, Bunter, that if he is alone this time we may be able to deal with him—together—"

"Oh scissors!"

"Stand on one side of the door, Bunter, and I will stand on the other," breathed the Remove master. "We will seize him as he enters—"

"Oh jiminy!"

Mr. Quelch stepped towards the low doorway. Billy Bunter did not!

Billy Bunter remained seated on the bench, blinking at his Form-master, with his little round eyes bulging through his big round spectacles.

Quelch was an elderly gentleman—but his courage was unlimited. Billy Bunter was far from elderly—but his courage had a limit—quite a narrow limit. Bunter did not rise to the occasion. He did not rise to his feet! He sat and blinked at Mr. Quelch.

"Do you hear me, Bunter?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I—I—I mean, oh, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say—I—I mean to say— Oh crikey!"

Mr. Quelch gave an exasperated snort. He would have given a great deal for Harry Wharton, or any other member of the Famous Five, to have been in Bunter's place at that moment. Bunter was not prepared for deeds of derring-do! Bunter sat and blinked—and he was still sitting and blinking when the low door swung open and the hooded man appeared.

### THE PET LAMB OF GREYFRIARS!

**M**R. LAMB, the art master of Greyfriars, stood gasping for breath in the darkened entrance of Wimford railway station.

He had been leaving the station in a hurry, apparently having arrived by the train that had just come in, when he had run into the Famous Five.

Harry Wharton & Co. capped him very respectfully.

Johnny Bull scrambled to his feet and gave a sort of apologetic grunt. He rather hoped that Mr. Lamb had not heard him refer to him as a clumsy ass and a clumsy fathead.

"Oh! Sorry, sir!" grunted Johnny. Mr. Lamb blinked at him over his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Not at all, Bull!" he said. "Not at all—my fault entirely! I did not see you, my boy—the black-out is very confusing—and I was in rather a hurry. I have to walk a considerable distance—a very great distance—to my lodgings at Redgate, and it is very late—very late! I hope I have not hurt you, Bull!"

"I'm not made of putty!" said Johnny Bull. "I—I—I mean, no, thank you, sir!"

Jack Drake was looking rather curiously at Mr. Lamb.

He had never seen that gentleman before, though the Famous Five were very well acquainted with him. Mr. Lamb had taken up his post as art

master at Greyfriars only a week or two before the Christmas holidays; but as he had acted as master of the Remove during Mr. Quelch's absence, Harry Wharton & Co. had seen a good deal of him.

He was a rather small gentleman, with gold-rimmed glasses that gave him a slightly owl-like look.

He had been nicknamed the "Pet Lamb" in the Greyfriars Remove, and was rather liked in that Form, being ever so much more easy going than the Form-master to whom they were accustomed. His good-tempered docility led to a good deal of ragging in the Remove Form-room, though once or twice he had shown flashes of temper, rather out of keeping with his usual docile ways.

"How odd that I should meet you here, my boys!" bleated the Lamb, peering at the juniors in the gloom in his owl-like way. "I have just returned from Greyfriars, you know! How very odd to meet Greyfriars boys here!"

"You've been at the school, sir?" asked Harry Wharton, rather surprised.

Except for the headmaster and his family, the Greyfriars staff generally cleared off for the vacations.

"Yes, yes, for a few days!" said Mr. Lamb, blinking at the captain of the Remove. "It is somewhat—ah—dull in lodgings—and I was—ah—glad to take a little change. But whatever are you boys doing out at this time of night?"

The Lamb's docile face took on a rather severe expression.

"It is past ten o'clock!" he said. "I am sorry to see this, Wharton! In holiday-time, no doubt, restrictions are relaxed—but, as your Form-master at school, I must say that I do not like to see you boys out at such hours without the company of an elder—"

"We're looking for Bunter, sir!" said the captain of the Remove hastily.

"Bunter? Bunter? Who is Bunter?" asked Mr. Lamb.

"Don't you remember Bunter, sir—Bunter of the Remove?" asked Bob Cherry in surprise.

Bunter, really, was a fellow not easily forgotten; though, it was true, Mr. Lamb had been at the school only a short time before break-up for the holidays.

"Oh, goodness me, yes!" bleated the Lamb. "Yes, yes, I remember now, I think—is he not a plump boy in glasses—"

"That's the chap, sir!" said Frank Nugent.

"Bunter went out this afternoon, sir, and he hasn't come in yet!" explained Harry Wharton. "He told us he was going to Wimford, so we came out to look for him—"

"We were going into the station to inquire if he'd been seen there—as he might have gone home—"

explained Bob. "I think I remember him, now—now you mention it!" said Mr. Lamb, with a nod. "A somewhat foolish boy—I remember I had to cane him once—though as you boys know, I

object to the use of the cane—I object to it very much indeed—"

"Same here, sir!" said Bob affably. And the juniors grinned.

"Eh? What?" The Pet Lamb blinked at Bob. "Eh? Oh! Yes! No doubt! Goodness gracious me!" he added. "Perhaps it was Bunter I saw on the platform when I alighted from my train—he was taking the train on the other side of the platform—"

"Bunter was?" exclaimed Wharton.

"I cannot say for certain—but I certainly saw a plump boy taking the other train—yes, yes—a remarkably plump boy, in spectacles—"

"You saw him taking the train, sir?" exclaimed Bob. "That jolly well settles it, then!"

"I am not sure that it was Bunter. I do not remember him very distinctly," said Mr. Lamb. "I cannot say for certain. But I certainly saw a very plump lad in glasses taking the train for Redgate, I think."

"Bunter Villa's near Redgate," said Harry. "No doubt about it now. The fat duffer's gone home! Thank you very much, Mr. Lamb! You've saved us a lot of trouble."

"I am very glad," said Mr. Lamb. "Mind, I am not at all certain. Still, it seems very probable—very probable indeed—that it was Bunter that I saw. I think it very probable. There cannot be a large number of plump lads in glasses going about at this hour—what? And the boy I noticed was very plump—indeed, stout."

"Bunter's a stout lad, sir," said Bob.

"May as well get back," said Harry Wharton. "It's all right now. If you're going our way, Mr. Lamb—"

"Oh, quite; but I shall be taking the short cut by Redgate Lane," said Mr. Lamb. "I do not wish to arrive too late at my lodgings. My landlady is liable to be a little—well, a little cross at late hours. I try to keep on the best of terms with my landlady. A good soul—a very good soul—but somewhat strict in certain ways! Good-night, my boys!"

And Mr. Lamb walked off quickly across Wimford High Street.

He left the Greyfriars fellows smiling.

Little Mr. Lamb's nervousness of his landlady in Redgate was in keeping with his meek, docile manners and customs at Greyfriars.

"Not a bad little ass, that chap, is he, Drake, old man?" said Bob. "That's the new beak we told you about—drawing master—but he's taken Quelch's place while the old bean is gone. Some of the fellows rag him fearfully—especially Smithy."

"No wonder, if he's always like that," said Drake, looking very curiously after the Pet Lamb as he went. "From what I remember of Smithy, he would get a lot of entertainment out of that chap."

"He's got a temper, though," said Bob. "He gave Skinner teco once, and Bunter had a record whopping



from him, too. Bunter's told us about it. It happened when your governor was at the school to see the Head, and Bunter says that Mr. Locke chipped in, and stopped the Lamb laying it on too hard."

"He doesn't look it," said Drake. "Well, are we going back?"

"Come on!" said Harry. "We'll go by Redgate Lane, as well as Lamb. It saves a lot of distance."

Mr. Lamb had disappeared already.

The Famous Five and Drake followed the same way—went through a field gate to a footpath, and caught sight of the Lamb again in the bright starlight.

He was walking very quickly, and was a good distance ahead already, but they sighted him across the field.

The juniors walked quickly, too. The hour was late, a good deal past their usual bed-time. And now that they were satisfied about Bunter, they were anxious to get in and get to bed.

Swiftly as he moved, Mr. Lamb remained in sight, and was at the same distance ahead when he turned out of the footpath into Redgate Lane, and followed the lane onward towards the distant village.

The juniors came in sight of the moat house, which they had to pass to get to Wharton Lodge.

The old ruin lay glimmering in the starlight and at a little distance from it on the right stood the caravan, banked round with snow, in which the rat-faced man, whose name they did not know, lived.

Harry Wharton & Co., especially Jack Drake, were keenly interested in the moat house, and in the unknown man who played ghost there, whose trickery they had discovered. But they were rather surprised to see Mr. Lamb come to a halt as he reached the gap in the old wall that gave admittance to the grounds of the haunted house.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is the Pet Lamb going to look for the jolly old ghost?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"Hardly, I should think," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Well, he's stopped. Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's looking back. He's spotted us," said Bob.

Mr. Lamb, standing by the gap in the wall, looked back. The juniors saw him give a start as he spotted them in the distance.

The door of the caravan opened, and a beam of light shot into the night. A stubbly face with sharp, rat-like features looked out.

Then Mr. Lamb turned and hurried on his way.

The man in the doorway of the caravan stared at him as he passed, and then shut the door again, and the light was shut off.

A few minutes later the juniors passed the van. It was dark and silent.

Mr. Lamb, walking more quickly than before, had disappeared ahead.

Jack Drake gave the van a very keen look in passing. It was the dweller in the caravan whom he sus-

pected of being the ghost player at the moat house.

There was a slightly puzzled look on the face of Ferrers Locke's boy assistant as he walked on with his friends.

"Does your Pet Lamb know that sweep in that caravan?" he asked. "You told me, I remember, that you saw him there once."

"Only once," said Harry. "He was out on a walk, and the man let him sit down in his van to rest."

"It looked as if he was going to stop—if he hadn't seen us coming on behind."

"I don't see why that should make any difference to him," said Harry Wharton, with a stare.

"N-no, I suppose not. Where is he now?" asked Drake. "He seems to have got out of sight pretty quickly."

There was no sign of the Pet Lamb in the lane. If he had already got as far as the road, he certainly had moved quickly.

"Trotting, perhaps," said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "The poor old Lamb's fearfully nervous of that landlady of his."

Nothing more was seen of the Lamb, and the juniors reached the road, and turned in the direction of Wharton Lodge. And none of them—not even the boy from Baker Street—suspected that when they had passed, a figure stepped from behind a hedge, and walked back quickly to the caravan camped in the grounds of the haunted moat house.

### THE MAN IN THE MASK!

MR. QUELCH stepped back from the door of the vault.

Billy Bunter, still seated on the bench, blinked at the figure that entered—that of a powerful, burly man, in a long, belted coat, his head and face hidden by a hood fastened about his neck.

It was the hooded man who had tossed Bunter into the vault that afternoon like a sack of potatoes.

Billy Bunter shivered at the prospect of getting that muscular grip on him again. The mere sight of the hooded man terrified the fat Owl of the Remove.

Mr. Quelch was ready for any measures, however desperate, that promised a chance of getting out of that dreary vault. But he had no aid to expect from the shivering fat Owl.

But the next moment the Remove master saw that it would have been useless. This time the hooded man had not come alone.

Ducking his hooded head in the low doorway, the ruffian came in. He was followed by a man of slighter build, whose face was covered from forehead to chin by a black mask.

Billy Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the second man. He seemed to the fat Owl a more terrifying figure than the ruffian in the hood.

The latter shut the low door, and stood by it while the masked man advanced farther into the vault.

"So I see you again, you villain!"

said Mr. Quelch, in a low, concentrated voice. "The police have not yet laid Slim Jim, the cracksman, by the heels!"

Billy Bunter jumped as he heard that.

He had heard of the mysterious crook who was called by the strange name of Slim Jim. He knew that several cribs round about Courtfield and Greyfriars had been cracked by Slim Jim. Smithy of the Remove had actually run into the man one night at the school when an attempt had been made on the Head's safe.

The fat Owl's flesh almost crept as he realised, from Quelch's words, that he was in the presence of a crook of whom the police had been in search for years.

The masked man did not answer Mr. Quelch. He made a gesture, waving him away, and stepped towards Bunter. It was not to see the kidnapped Form-master that he had come—it was to see the new prisoner of the vault.

As the keen eyes from the cyclopes in the mask fixed on him, the hapless fat Owl blinked at the crook like a fat rabbit fascinated by a serpent.

"You fat fool!" came a voice from under the mask. "You had to butt in where you were not wanted!"

It was a low, deep voice—a voice that Bunter, so far as he knew, had never heard before. Yet he had an impression that he was known to the man in the mask—that there was recognition in the glinting eyes that fixed on him.

"I—I say, I—I didn't want to come here, you know," mumbled Bunter. "I—I'll go as—as soon as you like. I—I—I'd be glad to go, really."

The masked man stared at him.

"Fool!" was his answer.

Mr. Quelch's bitter voice broke in again.

"So your confederate warned you that there is another prisoner in this vault, you scoundrel, and it has brought you here. This boy has friends not far away—he will be searched for—the search may extend in this direction—and then—"

"No search will find you here, Mr. Quelch, you may rely upon that!" said the masked man grimly. "You may prepare for a change of quarters before long. I require only a few days, and I think I may count upon them."

He fixed his eyes on Bunter again.

"Go to the table and take pen and paper!" he snapped.

The fat Owl heaved himself up from the bench and limped to the table. Pen and ink and a writing-block were there.

Bunter picked up the pen and blinked inquiringly at the masked face.

Apparently, he was required to write something. He was ready to write anything, but he was quite astonished by the command.

"Where do you live, you fat fool?"

"Bunter Court, near Redgate!" faltered Bunter. Even at that moment he did not give his residence its name of Bunter Villa.

"Put it on the paper! You are +





The chauffeur jerked Fisher T. Fish across his knee, face down, holding him there with his left hand, he raised his right. That right came down on Fishy's trousers with a terrific concussion. Smack, smack, smack! "Jerusalem crickets!" roared the American junior, wriggling and struggling.

write a letter—as if it came from your home! Do you understand?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes!"

"Your friends at Wharton Lodge are to believe that you have gone home! Do you understand?"

"Oh crikey! But—but, I say," gasped Bunter, "if—if they fancy I've gone home, they won't look for me!"

"What?"

"They—they won't, really!" gasped Bunter. "I shouldn't wonder if they forget about me altogether, if they think I've gone home."

The masked man stared at him. A chuckle came from under the hood of the ruffian standing by the door.

"You impenetrable blockhead!" exclaimed the masked man. "Cannot you understand that that is what I want?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove was not quick on the uptake. But it dawned on his fat brain that that letter was to be written in order to prevent a search being made for him in the vicinity of Wharton Lodge.

"But I—I—I say, I—I don't want to stay here!" wailed the hapless fat Owl. "I—I want to go to bed tonight! I'm fearfully sleepy now, only I'm so fearfully hungry! I—I say, I—I'd much rather go back to Wharton Lodge, if—if you don't mind."

"Fool! Write as I tell you!"

"But—but I—I say——"

"Do you want me to wring your fat

neck like a sparrow's?" came in deep, concentrated tones from under the mask.

"Eh? Oh, no!" gasped Bunter.

"Then write as I tell you!"

Billy Bunter, with a dismal groan, wrote his address on the paper, with the date, and began "Dear Wharton——"

Mr. Quelch made a movement.

The hooded ruffian at the door made a movement at the same moment.

"Stand back, you!" he snarled.

The Remove master breathed hard, but he remained where he was. Once he had tried his strength against that of the hooded man, and he knew that it was useless. He could not intervene.

"Continue!" snapped the man in the mask. "Explain to Wharton that you have been suddenly called away and had to return home. Will he believe it if you tell him that your father has been suddenly taken ill?"

"Eh? I—I suppose so."

"Then that will do—you must give some reason! Write the letter your own way, but explain that, your father having been suddenly taken ill, you had to return home immediately."

"But——"

"But what?"

"But my father ain't ill——"

"You utter fool, do as I tell you, unless——"

"Oh, all right! I—I—I'll write anything you like!" gasped Bunter;

and he dipped the pen in the ink and started in a great hurry.

The masked man watched him, over a fat shoulder, as he scribbled. He seemed satisfied when the fat Owl had finished.

"Address the envelope!" he snapped.

Billy Bunter addressed an envelope to Harry Wharton at Wharton Lodge.

The masked man folded the letter in it, and placed it in a pocket of his coat.

He did not speak to the Remove master or look at him as he crossed to the door. Evidently, it was only on Bunter's account that he had come. He stepped out at the low doorway. The hooded man stepped after him, and the door shut.

Mr. Quelch clenched his hands, his brow black and bitter. But he was helpless; he could only submit to his fate.

It was clear from the masked man's action that he feared that Bunter would be searched for; that he desired to gain time, while he prepared some other and safer prison for the kidnapped schoolmaster. That letter, delivered at Wharton Lodge, was likely to delay search, if it did not prevent it altogether.

Mr. Quelch's heart was heavy as he heard the massive stone thud into its place outside the oak door. He resumed pacing the vault, with knitted brows.



Billy Bunter curled up on a heap of sacking as near the oil stove as he could get, and went to sleep. It was quite unlike the comfortable bed at Wharton Lodge—but Bunter, fortunately, could sleep anywhere—it was a thing at which Bunter was good.

Mr. Quelch had the pleasure—or otherwise—of hearing the deep and resonant snore that had been wont to wake the echoes of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, rumbling through the hidden vault, as he paced and paced far into the night.

### COMFORT FOR BUNTER!

“ANY letters, Wells?”

“Yes, Master Harry—one for you, sir!”

Harry Wharton & Co. and Jack Drake had been out with their skates in the cold and frosty morning. They came in with ruddy cheeks and in great spirits.

The absence of Billy Bunter did not have any perceptible effect in dashing those high spirits.

If Billy Bunter had chosen to carry out his oft-uttered threat, and “jolly well clear off,” the Greyfriars party were prepared to bear the loss with considerable fortitude.

And that, after what Mr. Lamb had told them the previous evening at Wimford, they had no doubt that Bunter had done.

The Lamb, certainly, had not said for certain that it was Bunter that he had seen taking the train. But if he had, as he said, seen a “plump boy in glasses” doing so at ten o'clock at night, there could hardly be any doubt about the matter. It was not really likely that another “plump boy in glasses” would be knocking about Wimford station while the fat Owl was missing.

Whether Bunter would take the trouble to write when he got home was not certain. There was no letter early in the morning; the fat Owl could not have caught a post after getting in so late. But when the juniors came in after skating there was a letter.

The Wharton Lodge butler solemnly picked it up from the hall table, placed it on a salver, and brought it to Wharton as he stood with his friends before the log fire in the hall.

One glance at it was enough! The handwriting on the envelope was Billy Bunter's; the postmark Redgate, near his home.

“That's from his jolly old nibs!” said Bob Cherry. “Bunter's fist! Let's hear the news!”

Harry Wharton slit the envelope and took out the letter.

Six fellows read it together.

“Bunter Court,  
Redgate,  
Surrey.

“Dear Wharton,—I'm sorrey I had to rush off all of a sudden like that, but you must excuse me as I herd that my father had been taken phearfully ill all of a sudden. They toled me on the fone while I was in Wimford. The poor old pater is rather  
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had. I will rite again in a phew days, if I get tyme.

“Yores,

“W. G. BUNTER.”

The spelling of that letter would probably have made the juniors smile; but the news that Bunter's father was ill restrained their smiles.

“Poor old fat bean!” said Bob. “I suppose he must have phoned home from Wimford, and they toled him, and he went for the train without coming back here first. Cut for the first train.”

“I suppose he would,” said Johnny Bull, with a nod. “Might have given us a ring on the phone, but I suppose he never thought of that.”

“Bunter doesn't think an awful lot,” said Nugent. “Might have been upset, too—it's a rotten thing to happen!”

“The rottenfulness is terrific!” agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

“Poor old Bunter!” said Harry.

He was feeling a slight sense of compunction.

Billy Bunter was a trying sort of guest. He had his own peculiar manners and customs, and his manners and customs did not add to the comfort of others. And it was generally believed that William George Bunter's concern was concentrated on William George Bunter, to the total exclusion of all other inhabitants of the universe.

Yet, it seemed, Bunter had rushed off for a train as soon as he heard over the phone that Mr. Bunter was ill—forgetful even of supper!

“He must have been fearfully hungry in the train!” said Bob Cherry, voicing the thought that was in the minds of all the Famous Five.

“Must have been!” said Nugent.

“Poor old Bunter,” said Jack Drake. “If we'd known this—”

“Well, we didn't!” said Johnny Bull. “And if he was squatting at the telephone, he might have given us a ring so that we should know he had gone. We should have thought he'd had some accident, if the Lamb hadn't happened to see him at the station—might have been searching all over the shop—”

“Jolly lucky the Lamb did see him!” said Harry Wharton. “I expect my uncle would have rung up the police station if we'd come back without news of him. Still, of course, Bunter never thought—”

“The thinkfulness of the esteemed Bunter is not terrific!” remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. “But this is terrifically tough luck in the Christmas holidays, and the sympathise is great.”

“I'll tell you what,” said Bob, “we all sympathise with poor old Bunter. What about showing it in a way he would really appreciate?”

“How's that?” asked Harry.

“Trot in to Wimford this afternoon—”

“What good will that do, fat-head?”

“They've got some of those big Christmas cakes left at the grocer's,” said Bob. “They're fifteen shillings each. Let's whip round and buy one

and send it to old Bunter, with a sympathetic letter in the parcel.”

There was a general grin, followed by a general nodding of heads. Bob's idea seemed a good one.

The Famous Five, in the circumstances, were feeling sympathetic. They were willing to show their sympathy in a practical way which would appeal to Billy Bunter—and there was not the slightest doubt that a whopping big Christmas cake would comfort Bunter—all the more because there was very considerable doubt among Bunter's acquaintances whether Bunter Court really was a land flowing with milk and honey!

“Good egg!” said Johnny Bull. “Bunter will like that!”

“The likefulness will be preposterous!”

“Jolly good idea!” agreed Jack Drake. “Let's!”

And it was decided nem. con. That afternoon the six juniors walked up the snowy road to Wimford, and the big cake was duly purchased—and wrapped up at the grocer's for postage.

Inside the parcel was a letter, written by Harry Wharton, in the name of the whole party:

“Dear Bunter,—We're all awfully sorry to hear that your pater is ill, and we hope he will soon be well again. We thought perhaps you would like this cake, which we are sending you with our kindest regards and best wishes.

“H. Wharton.

“R. Cherry.

“F. Nugent.

“J. Bull.

“H. J. R. Singh.

“J. Drake.”

All the party signed that letter in turn. Then, with the cake wrapped up and addressed to Bunter, they walked round to the post office and it was duly dispatched.

After which they walked back to Wharton Lodge, feeling that they had done their best to comfort Bunter—and certainly not guessing the surprise that the arrival of that cake was going to cause at Bunter Villa!

### DISCOURAGING!

“SAY, bo!”

Fisher T. Fish of the Greyfriars Remove looked into the garage yard at the school, and made that remark through his long, thin nose.

He addressed John Robinson, the new chauffeur engaged by the headmaster of Greyfriars a few days after Christmas.

John Robinson had the car in the yard and was cleaning it.

The rather lean, athletic new chauffeur was busy—too busy, apparently, to give any attention to Fisher T. Fish. His olive-skinned face was very intent over his work.

“Say, big boy, you gone deaf?” asked Fisher T. Fish.

It looked as if John Robinson had, for he did not answer or turn his head.



Fisher T. Fish gave him a glance of intense exasperation.

The afternoon was fine and sunny, frosty as it was. Nearly a hundred miles away, Harry Wharton & Co. were just then packing up a cake for Bunter, a cheery crowd of fellows. But Fisher T. Fish was all on his own!

Of all the Greyfriars swarm, Fishy was the only fellow who spent his holidays at the school. He found it fierce, as he described it in his native language. He longed and yearned for the day when the fellows would come back for the new term.

In term time, Fisher T. Fish would never have dreamed of honouring the Head's chauffeur, new or old, with any of his priceless conversation. But it was a case of any port in a storm.

There were few people at the school in the vacation, and of those few nobody wanted to listen to Fishy. As he had either to talk or burst, he had moseyed round to chew the rag with the chauffeur—regardless of the fact that John Robinson had shown a plain and unmistakable disinclination for anyone to butt into his quarters.

Fisher T. Fish, of course, had not the faintest suspicion that John Robinson was anything but what he seemed—least of all that he was Ferrers Locke, the famous detective. Fishy, like everybody else, had heard of Slim Jim and his activities in the vicinity; but he certainly did not dream that the Head's new chauffeur had any sort of a connection with the elusive crook.

So Fishy, naturally, was rather annoyed by the stand-offishness of that new chauffeur, who ought to have been honoured by Fishy taking notice of him.

So far from appearing honoured, the new chauffeur did not seem to see or hear Fishy at all! He remained impervious to Fishy's glare.

"Say, you slabsided mugwump!" said Fishy.

No answer.

"Dumb as well as deaf?" hooted Fishy.

Dumb or not, John Robinson did not speak. He concentrated on cleaning the car, oblivious of Fishy.

Fisher T. Fish breathed hard through his long nose. He guessed that it would serve that cheeky chauffeur right if he let out a boot and gave him one on the pants as he bent by the car.

"Say, Lamb's gone, you Robinson!" said Fishy, hoping to interest the chauffeur with an item of news. "You 'member that guy Lamb you fetched from the station in the car a few days ago?"

If John Robinson remembered having fetched Mr. Lamb from the station in the car, he gave no sign of the same.

"He absquatulated last night," went on Fisher T. Fish, addressing the back of the new chauffeur's head. "I guess he got a phone call. I was meandering around and heard the bell."

## What the Stars Reveal.

### WHEN IS YOUR BIRTHDAY?

By HURREESINGHO, the Famous Astrologer.

**JANUARY.**—Beware of the esteemed black eyefulness from a dark stranger. A letter will arrivefully turn up with good news, though for some persons the postal orderfulness will not be terrific. You will journey travelfully if you go anywhere, but if not you will stay at home.

**FEBRUARY.**—A good yearfulness for health, wealth, and wisdom, but beware of the planet Mars which brings jealousy. Some fellows will be jealous of your alleged goodlooksfulness—without any reason—and there is danger that the dotfulness upon the boko will be administered. Guard leftfully and smite right-hookfully, and you will achieve successfulness.

**MARCH.**—Take things easyfully, unless they belong to somebody else. It will be a fair yearfulness, with good opportunities for making new friends. If you are in any scrapefulness, your only chancefulness is to tell the whole truth. Be frank and above-the-boardfulness, and you will be okayfully all right.

**APRIL.**—The esteemed signs could not be goodfully better than this yearfulness. If you have any ambition, go right ahead and you will succeed. Beware of trusting anyone else to assist you helpfully. Rely on your own endeavourfulness, and you will gain your reward.

**MAY.**—Also a good yearfulness, especially the second half. Things will seem to come easyfully, and there is the esteemed danger that you will take too muchfulness for granted. Always remember that it is no use shutting the stable doorfulness after the esteemed worm has turned, as your English proverb has it.

**JUNE.**—Exercise carefulness in accepting the esteemed invitation to change your way of lifefulness. It may be a change worsefully. Apart from this, you should have the good

yearfulness, without much abominable trouble, and the luckfulness may be terrific.

**JULY.**—The signs are fair to goodfulness, but it may be that your worst enemy is your own esteemed self. Do not let yourself down badtemperfully, and you will do well. Also think twiceefully before you act onceefully, as this is not a good yearfulness for hasty decisions.

**AUGUST.**—Make hay while the esteemed sun shines, for this is the terrific yearfulness. The chances are that whatever you do will prosper wellfully. Everything in the august garden is lovelyfulness. Beware only of overdoing things, for that way illness lies.

**SEPTEMBER.**—If the esteemed and honoured chumfulness asks for help, give it freely, and you will reap much happiness. Generosity to friends will bring you great rewards. Also your healthfulness will increase, and you may find a new and profitable interest in an unexpected quarterfulness. Success in sportfulness is particularly terrific.

**OCTOBER.**—You will meetfully encounter for the first time a person who will play the great partfulness in your future. Be friendly and agreeable to all, but do not discussfully tell others of your private affairs, as there is dangerfulness that it may do you harm. The stars are fair to goodfulness.

**NOVEMBER.**—A rather flat yearfulness, with little excitement. The chances are that all your plansfulness will go on evenly and without trouble. Beware, however, of entering into a quarrel with an esteemed friend, as it may lead to the complete strangerfulness in future. The healthfulness should be terrific.

**DECEMBER.**—A quite good yearfulness, with rosy chances for successfulness in things like writing, painting, drawing, etc. In other things, too, the stars are goodful, particularly in competitions and prizes. Wealthfulness should be increased this year, and you may hear surprising newsfulness from a relation.

John Robinson betrayed no sign of interest in Mr. Lamb's phone call.

"I guess he hit the trail sudden!" went on Fishy. "After he got that phone call, I'll say he wasn't ten minutes before he was hopping out. He sure was in a powerful hurry, that guy!"

No sign from John Robinson.

"Now he's gone," went on Fishy, "and there ain't hardly a guy about the whole shebang! Not that he was a sociable guy—he sure was a dumb clam like you, Robinson! I'm telling you, I hardly talked ten words to the bonthead all the while he was here—he sure was a dumb guy!"

John Robinson continued his

labours, failing to display the slightest interest in Mr. Lamb and his sudden departure.

"I guess it ain't usual for a beak to horn in yere in the holidays!" continued Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say he was saving his board, what? I guess art masters ain't paid like Form-masters—mebbe he was glad to save on his board! What you figure?"

John Robinson did not state what he thought on that subject—if he thought anything. Possibly he was not so interested in the affairs of others as Fisher Tarleton Fish was.

"I guess, though, he'd get something extra, taking the Remove while Quelch was away!" said Fisher T.

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Fish. "He wouldn't do that for nothing, would he, Robinson?"

Robinson expressed no opinion.

"You pie-faced, slab-sided, pesky, bone-headed mugwump!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, his patience breaking down. "Can't you spill a word when a guy's talking to you?"

It seemed that John Robinson had no words to spill, for he spilled none, and did not even look round.

Less pertinacious fellows than Fisher T. Fish might have been discouraged and ambled away, leaving that stand-offish chauffeur to himself. But Fisher T. Fish did not amble away. Conversation, on these lines, was a sort of one-way traffic; but any conversation was better than none, to Fisher T. Fish.

"If you was my chauffeur, Robinson, I'd sure fire you right on the spot!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'd sure fire you so quick it would make your head swim!"

He paused for a reply, but there was no reply.

"Say, you got years on your cabeza?" howled the exasperated Fishy. "You got a tongue in your bully-beef container? What? Too much trouble to squint round and give a guy the once-over?"

Whether it was too much trouble or not, John Robinson did not squint round.

Fisher T. Fish, breathing hard, stepped a little nearer. If ever a guy asked for a jolt on the pants, this guy was asking for it!

As he persisted in keeping his back turned to Fishy, the chance looked good. Certainly he was not expecting anything of the kind. To land one good kick, and then burn the wind as fast as his long thin legs could carry him, seemed an attractive idea to the exasperated Fishy.

He stepped nearer and nearer.

Suddenly he shot out his foot!

Bang!

It was a good one!

It satisfied Fishy in that respect. It was quite a good one, but in other respects the matter did not turn out so satisfactory.

For, as Fisher T. Fish, having delivered the kick, shot away, the new chauffeur moved with amazing swiftness. Lightning had nothing on that chauffeur.

The fleeing Fishy had not taken six steps when a hand of iron grasped the back of a bony neck.

Fishy was caught!

He wriggled apprehensively.

"Say, you leggo a guy!" he roared. "You hear me, you Robinson! If you don't want a guy to make potato scrapings of you, you better—yarooooop!"

The new chauffeur did not speak. He seemed to have no words to waste on Fisher T. Fish. He bent a knee and jerked Fishy across it, face down.

Holding him there with his left hand, he raised his right!

That right hand came down on Fishy's trousers with a terrific concussion.

Smack!

Fishy had guessed, from his build, that the new chauffeur was a muscular man. But he had not known how awfully muscular he was! That smack came down with a force that surprised Fishy.

He roared.

Smack, smack, smack!

"Oh gum! Jerusalem crickets!" roared Fisher T. Fish, wriggling and struggling frantically. "Great John James Brown!"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yarooop! Let up!" roared Fisher T. Fish. "You hear me whisper? I'm telling you to let up, you pic-

faced bonehead! Say, you mugwump, will you let up?"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yurrop!"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Aw, wake snakes!" howled Fisher T. Fish. "Carry me home to die! Yarooooop!"

Fisher T. Fish wished he had not landed that good one. He was getting quite a series of good ones in return—better ones, in fact. He roared and howled and yelled with anguish.

John Robinson set him on his feet at last. Taking him by a long ear he led him out of the garage yard. Releasing his ear, he lifted his foot and landed it—hard! Fisher T. Fish travelled away at express speed!

Still without speaking a word, the new chauffeur returned to his task of cleaning the car—untroubled further by Fisher T. Fish. Probably he fancied that he was done with Fisher T. Fish at last.

Fisher T. Fish did not think so as he wriggled away to the House, spluttering for breath and in the worst temper ever. Fishy had a collection of aches and pains, and he was not merely exasperated—he was infuriated. Fishy, as he wriggled and squirmed and gasped and panted, concentrated his powerful transatlantic intellect on ways and means of paying out that cheeky chauffeur!

#### A TALK ON THE TELEPHONE!

**F**ERRERS LOCKE, alias John Robinson, chauffeur, stepped to the telephone in his room over the garage at Greyfriars School as the bell rang.

It was a bright, frosty morning—getting towards noon.

Locke had not been up long. Generally a very early riser, the Baker Street detective, since he had been at Greyfriars School as the Head's chauffeur, usually rose late—for a great deal of every night was spent in seeking traces of that mysterious and elusive cracksman. Slim Jim.

Every night, in the black-out, a thickly bearded man let himself out quietly and disappeared into the dark—unknown to any other inhabitant of the school.

Few, if any, eyes fell on the Baker Street detective on his nocturnal excursions; but any that had fallen on him would not have recognised "John Robinson"—he took the best care of that.

Once, so far, he had established contact, as he believed at least, with the man he sought—a brief encounter in which Locke had come off second best. But the Baker Street detective was patient. It was only by tracking down Slim Jim that he could hope to discover the Greyfriars master whom the cracksman had kidnapped—and Locke did not intend to give up the trail till he had got his man.

"That you, Robinson?" came through on the telephone.

Locke smiled.

It was Jack Drake's voice. Apart

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from the Head and Inspector Grimes at Courtfield, only his boy assistant knew that he was at Greyfriars under the name of John Robinson.

"Yes, Robinson speaking," he answered. "I hope you are having an agreeable holiday with your old school friends, my boy."

"Topping!" answered Drake. "No end of a jolly Christmas, sir. Now it's the New Year, I was going back, but—"

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"But you would like to prolong your holiday a little, my boy?" he asked.

"Not exactly that, sir! But something's turned up here," said Drake. "A pretty queer sort of thing that I should like to look into. If you're not busy at the moment, shall I spin you the yarn?"

"Carry on!" said Ferrers Locke.

"It's a rather weird business," said Drake. "Half a mile from this place there is an old show called the moat house—a place that's been in Chancery for donkey's years, and is now in ruins. It is haunted—"

"Eh?"

"By the ghost of an old miser who came to a sticky end about a hundred years ago, and who goes round with a ghostly light, rattling a phantom bunch of keys, looking for his buried hoard! That's the local belief."

"Not yours, I suppose?" asked Locke.

"Not quite!" chuckled Jack Drake. "But the light has been seen, and the clinking of the ghostly keys heard. Bunter—you remember Bunter—"

"I remember him very well."

"He seems to have parked himself in the place in a snowstorm, and saw the light, and heard the ghostly keys clinking. That was before Christmas. Later, Bob Cherry had the same experience—and he ran into somebody in the dark, who gave him a crack on the nut and knocked him out."

"A somewhat aggressive ghost!" said Ferrers Locke.

"Naturally, I looked into it, sir, when I heard about that! There's a man camped in a caravan right on the spot—a fixture, on the telephone, and all that—and I have rather an eye on him. And I've made a discovery or two."

"Go on, my boy! This is getting interesting—you seem to have had more luck on your holiday than I have had sticking to business."

"Well, I spotted the ghostly keys," said Drake. "A bunch of keys strung up in the ivy on top of an old wall, with a string to pull! After that, I went to the place after dark, with the other five fellows, and established contact with the ghost."

"Good work! And the rest?"

"A big man, with his head and face covered up in a hood—not a speck of him to be seen. We nearly had him—but he got clear, taking to the fields. The man in the caravan was out at the time, as I made sure of finding out."

"A very probable coincidence, from what you tell me. Is that all?" asked Ferrers Locke.

"That's the lot, so far, sir. But if I may hang on here a few days longer, I'd like to go through with it. It seems pretty clear that that sportsman isn't playing that game in a frozen old ruin just for fun."

"Hardly!" agreed Locke.

"What his game is has got me beaten just at present—I can't even guess," said Drake frankly. "But he must have some jolly strong motive, I should think, for hanging about that lonely old frozen place in a freezing January—and it seems that he was there all through December, playing ghost to scare people away!"

"A very strong motive, I should think," said Ferrers Locke. "This will certainly bear looking into, Drake. I can easily make arrangements, my boy, for you to stay on where you are till you get to the end of it."

"Thank you, sir—I'd really like to," said Jack Drake. "Whatever's going on, it must be something shady."

"It certainly looks like it," said Ferrers Locke. "Go into it, by all means, my boy, and let me know the result."

"Any suggestions, sir, from what I've told you?"

"It is not easy to make a suggestion from such very sparse data. The man in the caravan, obviously, will bear watching—but you are on to that already. Camping in a caravan in such a spot, at such a season, might look like a crook keeping out of the way for a time. But that would not account for the ghost."

"No! Anybody who passes can see the van and the man who camps in it—he doesn't keep out of sight. It's the old ruin that he wants to keep people away from."

"You've explored it?"

"Every spot."

"And found—"

"Nothing—except the ghostly keys."

"Obviously, there is something more to be discovered," said Ferrers Locke. "So far as one may hazard a guess on what you have told me, something is hidden in the place."

"Loot?" asked Drake.

"Scarcely! Loot could be buried in such a place, and there would be no need to haunt the spot."

"Yes, I've thought of that! Some crook hiding away, and the man in the van taking him food, and so on."

"That sounds much more probable. That would make regular visits to the ruin necessary, and would account for the ghost," said Ferrers Locke. "I think it very probable that when you put your finger on the secret of the moat house you may find somebody in hiding there."

"Well, that's what it looks like to me, sir, and in a queer old place like that there may be some hidden den I haven't got on to. You think it's worth while for me to hang on here and see it through?"

"Most decidedly," said Ferrers Locke. "Keep on to the finish, my boy, and let me know what luck you have."

"Right-ho! Good-bye, sir!"

"Good-bye, my boy!"

Jack Drake, at Wharton Lodge,

rang off, and Ferrers Locke, in the Greyfriars garage, hung up his receiver.

For some minutes the Baker Street detective reflected on what Jack Drake had told him, quite interested in the strange story.

Then his thoughts returned to his own problem—Slim Jim, the cracksmen, and the kidnapping of Mr. Quelch.

It did not dawn even on Ferrers Locke's keen mind that there was any connection between the two!

## ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE!

"BUNTER!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Billy Bunter, with a sudden guilty start.

"Just give me your attention, Bunter—"

"It wasn't me, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean, I—I—I didn't—"

"Please do not talk nonsense, Bunter, and give me your attention!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter gave his Form-master his attention. He blinked very apprehensively at Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter had been twenty-four hours in the hidden vault under the old moat house. And it had been awful.

It was Bunter's maxim that if the grub was all right everything was all right! He could have stood incarceration, he could have stood his present quarters, dim and dreary and chilly as they were, if the grub had been all right. But it wasn't!

It was far from all right!

Once in the twenty-four hours the hooded man came with food, and doubtless also to assure himself that the prisoners of the vault were still safe. Perhaps, in that solitary spot, the hooded man did not find it easy to obtain supplies; perhaps he was not much concerned for the comfort of his prisoners. Anyhow, there was a food shortage.

So far as it went, it was poor stuff compared with the meals at Wharton Lodge. Bread and corned beef in cans was the staple diet, with a few other things in cans. But Bunter could have stood even that if there had been plenty of it. There was not!

Since the hooded man had come with the masked man whom Mr. Quelch had addressed by the peculiar name of Slim Jim, the prisoners had not been visited. Mr. Quelch's last supply of provender had had to suffice for two—and one of the two was Billy Bunter!

Bunter was fearfully hungry.

Quelch did not seem to care much about food; he ate mechanically when he ate, as a sort of duty that he had to perform.

It was quite different with Bunter—it was very different indeed.

At the present moment Bunter was wondering, with an inward quake, what was going to happen when Quelch remembered that he had not eaten for a long time, and looked for something to eat.



Bunter was hungry—but not so hungry as he had been. While Quelch was pacing the vault, or comforting himself with a book, Billy Bunter had scooped the whole available supply of grub unnoticed by Quelch. It was little enough, too, Bunter thought, but at the same time he was feeling uneasy. He hoped that Quelch would not want another meal before the hooded man came again with a fresh lot.

So when his Form-master addressed him, Bunter quaked. He dreaded that Quelch was about to raise the subject of grub!

To his great relief, Quelch did not! "Listen to me carefully, Bunter," said the Remove master. "I have been thinking this matter over. I have no doubt that those rascals will remove me to a safer place as soon as they can prepare such a place, now that you have discovered me here."

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunter, not very deeply interested.

"The letter you have written to Wharton will, doubtless, allay suspicion for some time," said Mr. Quelch. "But it must transpire before very long that you are missing, and you will be searched for. Sooner or later, the search is certain to take this direction. I do not think that I shall remain here very long, Bunter."

"Oh crikey! Won't you, sir?" squeaked Bunter, in dismay. "I—I don't want to be left alone here, sir! It would be awful to be left here alone! It's not so bad so long as somebody's with a chap—even you, sir!"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"I—I mean—"

"Be silent, you stupid boy, and listen! I shall certainly be removed from here before long, and I am powerless to resist those ruffians. You are nothing to them—they only desire to be rid of you. You will certainly be released, or, at all events, left here to be found—"

"Oh, good!" said Bunter, brightening up. Whether Mr. Quelch remained a prisoner in the hands of the kidnappers or not was really immaterial so long as William George Bunter didn't!

"Now, Bunter, I have little or no hope of release, but your release is certain as soon as they can get rid of you. I shall, therefore, tell you what I can for you to inform Mr. Ferrers Locke to assist him in his search—and you must try to remember what I tell you."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I have been kidnapped," continued Mr. Quelch, "by the thief and cracksman who is called Slim Jim. You have heard of that man, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir! That's the man Smithy ran into one night, at Greyfriars—"

"Precisely! This man's appearance is utterly unknown," said Mr. Quelch. "But I have seen his face, Bunter, with the mask off, and can identify him. It is for this reason that I am kept a prisoner, to ensure the rascal's safety."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"This knowledge may be useful to

Mr. Locke," went on the Remove master. "He may, perhaps, have guessed already that that was the cause of the kidnapping—I cannot say. At all events, you will tell him, from me, Bunter, that such is the case—that my kidnapper is Slim Jim, the cracksman, and that he has kidnapped me because I am the only man who can identify him. If Mr. Locke can find that man it will lead to my release. Do you understand?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Any letter I may write would be taken from you, before you were released," said Mr. Quelch. "That would be useless. But you will remember what I have told you, Bunter! Tell your friends, Wharton and the others, as soon as you see them again, lest it should slip your memory. They will see that Mr. Locke is informed—they are more sensible than you."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Make it a special point, Bunter, to remember this, and repeat it as soon as you are free," said Mr. Quelch. "It may be of material assistance in the search for me. It may lead to your Form-master returning to the school for the coming term. Bunter!" added Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" said Bunter, blinking at him. He did not seem overjoyed at that prospect, as he ought to have been. "We're getting on all right with Mr. Lamb, sir—"

"What? Who is Mr. Lamb?"

"The new art master, sir. He took the Remove while you were away, up to break-up. You—you needn't worry about us, sir—we get on fine with Mr. Lamb!"

Mr. Quelch looked very expressively at the fat member of his Form.

"If I had my cane here, Bunter, I should cane you," he said.

"Oh crikey!"

"Now be silent, or I shall box your ears!"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter backed away, removing his fat ears to a safe distance.

Quelch seemed to be shirty about something—Bunter did not know what.

Then, to his horror, Mr. Quelch approached the table on which the food had been laid.

Quelch gave that table a puzzled glance.

He did not, fortunately, share Billy Bunter's gargantuan appetite. But he had to eat sometimes. Now he was ready for a meal. But the meal seemed difficult to spot.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch. "Have you removed the eatables from this table, Bunter? Everything seems to have disappeared."

"Eh? Oh! No, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It wasn't me, sir!"

"What have you done with them, Bunter?"

"N-nothing, sir! I—I haven't eaten the lot!" groaned Bunter. "I—I wouldn't, of course, sir! Besides, there wasn't much—only a loaf and half a pound of margarine, and a couple of pounds of corned beef, and some sardines, and a can of beans—"

"You—you—you have—" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No, sir! I—I think perhaps there's a cat about the place!"

"A cat!" howled Mr. Quelch.

"Or—or a rat, sir! Now I come to think of it, I—I saw a great big rat—" gasped Bunter. "If—if—if it wasn't a rat, sir, I—I can't imagine what's become of the grub—it—it's a mystery, sir!"

Smack!



The bearded man made a movement towards Fis' American junior. He revolved on his axis.

"Yaroooh!"

Smack!

"Oh crikey! Yoohoop!"

Mr. Quelch, fortunately, had had a pocket edition of Euripides in his pocket when he was kidnapped. It had already afforded him great comfort during his imprisonment. Now he turned to it for more comfort—in lieu of a meal—while Billy Bunter rubbed two fat, crimson, burning ears, and glared at him with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

#### STARTLING!

HARRY WHARTON stared. He stared with wide-open eyes.

He looked so astonished, that his comrades all looked at him astonished, too.



"What on earth's up?" asked Bob Cherry.

It was morning at Wharton Lodge, and the Greyfriars fellows were looking over letters in the hall after breakfast.

Harry Wharton had opened one postmarked "Redgate," addressed in a hand that was strange to him. Its contents seemed to have amazed him.

"Well, this beats it!" said the captain of the Remove blankly. "This letter is from Mr. Bunter—"

"Bunter's pater?" asked Nugent. "I hope he's better—looks as if he is, if he's written—"

"He hasn't been ill—"

"Eh?"

"Bunter said—"



er T. Fish. That was more than enough for the and flew—with almost the speed of light!

"Bunter hasn't gone home!" gasped Wharton.

"Wha-a-t?"

"But his letter—"

"What the merry thump—"

"Blessed if I can make it all out!" said Harry. "Look at the letter, you fellows—especially you, Drake. Looks as if a giddy detective is wanted here."

In great surprise, the juniors gathered round to read the letter from Mr. Bunter.

Bunter, so far as they know, had gone home. It had been on Tuesday that he had made his sudden departure. On Wednesday, his letter had been received, and the cake had been dispatched to comfort him. On Thursday he should have received that cake at Bunter Villa, and scoffed the same. Now, on Friday

morning arrived this amazing letter from Mr. Bunter:

"Bunter Villa,  
"Redgate,  
"Surrey.

"Dear Master Wharton,—A parcel having arrived for my son William, I opened it in his absence, and was surprised to find that it came from the friends with whom he is passing the Christmas vacation. I cannot quite understand this, or the reference to my illness, as I certainly have not been ill. If William has left you, no doubt he has gone to stay with other friends, and doubtless you may have misunderstood his intentions. At all events he has not returned home. I think William had some idea of passing a part of the holidays with a school friend, who is, I gather from what William has said, very much attached to him, named Mauleverer.

"As he is not at home, I have handed the cake to William's brother Samuel and sister Bessie, who desire me to convey their thanks.

"Yours sincerely,

"W. S. BUNTER."

The juniors read that letter through, and then looked at one another.

Five faces expressed blank amazement. One face was very serious—that of Jack Drake.

"Well, that beats Banagher!" said Bob Cherry. "What did the fat ass want to pull our leg for with his letter?"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry. "He said distinctly in his letter that he had to rush off home because his father was ill."

"And all the while he only cleared off to land himself on old Mauly!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Of course, Bunter always tells fibs—but what the thump did he tell that fib for?"

"The fibfulness is terrific, but the whyfulness is not clear!" remarked Hurree

Jamset Ram Singh.

"He never went home, and his pater's not ill!" said Frank Nugent. "That ass, Lamb, must have been mistaken about seeing him get into the Redgate train."

"Must have been!" said Bob. "Lamb's an ass, anyhow! Still, he never said he was sure—only that he had seen a fat chap in specs—"

"Yes; but we thought—"

"Must have been another porpoise rolling about, unless Lamb dreamed it," said Bob. "Bunter would want quite a different train, if he was heading for Mauly's place in Hampshire—and he couldn't have started so late, either, on a long trip like that."

"It's a queer business," said Harry Wharton slowly. "What Lamb told us made us give up looking for Bunter—and now it turns out that

the silly ass must have been mistaken, and it wasn't Bunter he saw. Why, if we hadn't sent that cake we should have supposed that Bunter was at home, and never thought about it—and now—"

"Well, he's all right, I suppose, wherever he is!" said Bob. "I expect poor old Mauly's landed with him!"

"I'm not so sure of that!" said Harry. "I can't make this out, and it seems a queer business to me. What do you think, Drake?"

All the Famous Five looked at Ferrers Locke's boy assistant. It was clear from Drake's expression that he, as well as the captain of the Remove, thought that it was a queer business.

"I think," said Drake quietly, "that something's happened to Bunter."

"But what—how—" ejaculated Bob.

"Wharton got a letter from him, you know," said Nugent.

"I know. But—that's what makes me think that something must have happened," said Drake. "Bunter's no end of a fibber, as we know, but it's not sense his writing that letter if he was only changing his quarters for the rest of the holidays. And—and the postmark—"

"That's what I was thinking of," said Harry. "That letter from Bunter was posted at Redgate, near his home, either late at night or very early in the morning. And—"

"And that looked like a certainty that Bunter was there late on Tuesday night, as we supposed!" said Drake.

"It did. But—"

"But he was not there. He hasn't been home, and he never made a train journey back to Redgate to post a letter that he could have dropped into the nearest pillar-box."

"Not likely!" said Bob.

"We know now that Bunter never went home. That means that he never went back to Redgate at all. It was not Bunter who posted the letter that came from him on Wednesday."

"It was his fist—" said Bob.

"And his spelling," said Johnny Bull.

"The letter was genuine, Drake!" said Harry Wharton.

"Yes. Bunter wrote it," agreed Drake. "But we want to know why—and where. He wrote it—why, we don't know yet—somebody else made a trip on a train to post it!"

"But—why?" ejaculated Bob.

"Only one reason that I can see. He, whoever he was, wanted us to believe that Bunter had gone home—so that he would not be inquired for, or searched for, in this locality," answered Drake.

"You mean that somebody made Bunter write that letter?" exclaimed Johnny Bull blankly.

"It looks like it!"

"But who? Why?" gasped Nugent. "Who the dickens—Why the thump—"

The Famous Five gave the boy detective startled looks. The deep THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,664.



gravity in Jack Drake's face alarmed them a little.

"Suppose," said Drake slowly—"suppose Bunter butted into something—and wasn't wanted to talk about it? You remember what happened to you at the moat house, Bob—before I got here?"

"I'm not likely to forget it!" said Bob Cherry. "I was knocked out by a crack on the nut when I ran into that sweep who's playing ghost there. But you don't think that Bunter—"

"Suppose Bunter spotted more than you did? Suppose it was not safe for somebody to let him get away?"

"But—but—he never went anywhere near the moat house, old chap—he funk'd it like billy-oh! We all thought he was up to something that day he left, but you can bet he never went to the haunted house!"

"No fear!" said Johnny Bull.

All the Famous Five shook their heads. Whatever had or might have happened to the missing Owl, they did not believe that it had happened at the moat house. But they could see that that idea was in Jack Drake's mind.

"You fellows never told Bunter of the discovery we made there?" asked Ferrers Locke's assistant. "If he found out that we had spotted that bunch of keys hung up in the ivy, he wouldn't have been funky of going there!"

"Not a word, any of us!" said Harry. "We agreed to keep it dark—and telling Bunter would have been as good as telling the world!"

Drake nodded slowly.

"But—Bunter wasn't too particular how he heard things," he said. "I remember he was a keyhole expert when I was at Greyfriars. Suppose he heard us discussing it? He might have!"

"He might have—being Bunter!" agreed Bob. "Blessed if I thought of that, Drake!"

"Neither did I—till now!" said Jack Drake. "But now that Bunter's missing, I've thought of it. If he found out that we had spotted the trickery at the moat house, and knew that there was nothing to be afraid of, he might have butted in. And then—" Drake paused.

The Famous Five stood silent.

"Something's happened to Bunter," continued Drake, after a pause. "And we know that there's something shady going on at the moat house. I've been in touch with Mr. Locke on the phone, and he's given me leave to stay here till I root it out. I may as well tell you what he said—that it looks as if someone is hiding at the place and that the hooded man's job is to keep him supplied."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I'm pretty certain that it's something of the kind," said Drake. "That accounts for the man haunting the place—and nothing else does. Taking it as a theory that Bunter may have butted in at the wrong moment for that sweep—and seen something that he was not wanted to see—"

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Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"You think that Bunter went to the moat house, Drake?" he asked.

"I think so."

"And that he's still there?" exclaimed Bob.

"That follows," said Drake.

"But—where? We've been all over the show—rooted over it from side to side, and end to end—"

"Without finding out the secret!" said Drake. "But there's a secret there. And if the hooded man—who, I'm fairly certain, is that rat-faced man in the caravan—has got somebody hidden there, he's hidden pretty deep!"

"Oh gum!" said Johnny Bull. "Some crook hiding from the police, perhaps!"

"Perhaps!"

"And—and if that fat chump poked his silly nose in and—and—" Bob whistled. "That rat-faced blighter wouldn't let him carry away the news!"

"Hardly!" said Drake.

He paused.

"It's all surmise, so far," he said. "We've got to know. Bunter's missing. He never went home, and his letter was meant to make us believe he had. Bunter had no reason for wanting to make us believe that—somebody else had. What happened to Bob shows that that blighter at the moat house won't stop at much! It's no good exploring the place in the daylight. But to-night—"

"To-night's the night!" said Bob. "We'll spot that blighter to-night, and if he's got our porpoise, we'll make him cough him up!"

Drake smiled.

"We'll try, at any rate!" he said. And it was left at that.

### FISHY'S BLACK-OUT BURGLAR!

FISHER T. FISH grinned—a vengeful grin.

It was black-out, and Greyfriars stood a dark mass against a dim sky.

Fisher T. Fish slipped quietly out of the House in the gloom. He stopped for a few minutes under the leafless old elms to gather up handfuls of snow and knead a snowball—a big snowball.

Fishy kneaded that snowball carefully. He wanted a good one. He guessed, reckoned, and calculated that he was going to have time for only one shot. And, unless the vengeful Fishy missed his guess, John Robinson, the cheeky new chauffeur, was going to get that snowball, planted with all the force of Fishy's bony arm, right in the middle of his features!

If that guy, John Robinson, guessed that he could slap a free American citizen on his transatlantic pants, that guy had another guess coming—in Fisher T. Fish's opinion. He couldn't—not without getting something back.

He was going to get something back in the shape of that big snowball which Fishy clutched in a vengeful hand as he walked round to the garage.

In the garage yard, Fisher T. Fish stood and looked up at John Robinson's window.

Not a gleam of light came from that window; but Fishy did not, of course, expect to see a gleam of light in the black-out. John Robinson, who was always careful, was careful to observe all the laws of the A.R.P.

Fishy had no doubt that he was there. Where else could he be?

Of John Robinson's nocturnal excursions, with a bearded face that looked nothing like John Robinson's, Fishy, of course, didn't know a thing.

Fishy had it all out and dried.

He was going to pitch pebbles up at that window till John Robinson opened it and looked out to see what the John James Brown was up. Then he was going to get John Robinson with that snowball. There was plenty of starlight for taking a good aim.

Fishy had thought this out, and laid his plans carefully. He guessed that the guy was going to be sorry that he had smacked those pants.

Standing under the window over the garage, Fishy watched it intently for a minute or so; then he groped in his pocket with his free hand for pebbles he had collected there for his purpose.

His bony arm jerked and a pebble clinked on the window-pane above. It drew no result, and Fishy whizzed another pebble with a second clink. Still there was no sound of a window opening.

But there was another sound that made Fisher T. Fish start a little. It came from the porch at the side of the garage.

In that porch was a door, which gave access to the staircase leading up to the rooms over the building. The sound that Fishy heard was that of a door opening.

"Gee-whiz!" breathed Fishy.

This sounded as if John Robinson was coming out.

If that were so, he could not have heard those clinks on the window-pane; he must have been already coming down the staircase when Fishy buzzed his pebbles.

Fisher T. Fish changed his plans on the spot. If the guy were coming out at that porch—and he must be, for somebody was coming, and John Robinson was the only inhabitant—Fishy was going to get him with the snowball as he emerged.

So he faced towards the porch, the snowball gripped in his hand, and his sharp eyes watching for John Robinson to emerge. His hand was raised over his head, all ready to hurl the missile.

The man in the porch moved very quietly; but Fishy could hear him.

A figure emerged into the starlight.

But Fisher T. Fish did not hurl the snowball. That snowball, in Fishy's bony hand, remained suspended in mid-air, like Mahomet's coffin, as Fishy stared, with starting eyes, at the figure that emerged from John Robinson's porch.

It was not the new chauffeur—or, if it were, Fisher T. Fish did not know it, and did not guess it.

What he saw was a man wrapped



in a dark, heavy coat, with a slouched hat drawn down over a bearded face. John Robinson was clean-shaven—this man had a heavy beard all over his mouth and chin.

Fisher T. Fish stared transfixed.

That strange and startling figure scared him almost out of his sharp wits.

A black-out burglar—that was Fishy's instant and terrifying thought. Who and what else could it be—an absolute stranger at Greyfriars, emerging quietly, stealthily, from the staircase of John Robinson's rooms?

Only for an instant, however, did Fisher T. Fish stand thus petrified. The bearded man saw him at once—and made a movement towards him.

That was more than enough for Fishy.

What became of the snowball he never knew. He was not conscious of dropping it; and certainly he did not hurl it. Fisher T. Fish was not bothering about snowballs. Fisher T. Fish revolved on his axis and flew—with almost the speed of light!

It seemed to the terrified Fishy that he heard a pursuing footstep behind him. Perhaps it was fancy! Fancy or not, it spurred him on!

Never had Fishy's bony legs covered the ground so fast. They fairly flashed. His feet hardly touched the ground.

He gasped for breath. He gurgled! But he never paused for a split second—and an arrow from a bow had nothing on Fisher T. Fish as he shot into the House!

"Gcc-whiz!" panted Fishy, as he reeled against a wall, spluttering for wind. "Wake snakes! I guess that was a narrow shave! Aw, search me!"

Fisher T. Fish paused only long enough to pump in a gulp or two of the breath he badly needed. Then he headed for Dr. Locke's study at a panting run. He knew that the Head was in his study, and he fairly flew to that apartment to impart the startling news.

He did not stop to knock at the door—there was no time for that, in the alarming circumstances. The sooner the Head got on the phone and got the police after that black-out burglar the better. Fishy banged the door open and bolted in.

"Bless my soul!" came a startled exclamation.

Dr. Locke was writing a letter at his writing-table. He started up, dropping the pen on the letter, with a cascade of blots.

"Fish!" he gasped.

"Yep!" gasped Fisher T. Fish.

"You—you—you insensate boy, how dare you rush into my study in that manner?" exclaimed Dr. Locke. "I repeat, how dare—"

"Burglars, sir!" spluttered Fisher T. Fish breathlessly. "I guessed I'd better burn the wind to hand you the noos, sir!"

"What?"

"One of them pesky black-out burglars, sir! I guess I spotted him—coming out of the door of Robinson's garage, sir—"

Dr. Locke gave a start.

"Robinson's garage?" he repeated.

"Yep! Surest thing you know, sir!" gasped the excited Fishy. "A guy in a beard and a slouched hat—coming out of the door side of the garage, sir! I guess that hombre Robinson must be out, and that hoodlum has sure run the rule over his things, sir—a black-out burglar—"

Dr. Locke looked at him. Fisher T. Fish could not quite understand the expression on his face. But the Head did not, at all events, look alarmed.

"And what," said Dr. Locke, in a deep voice, "were you doing at the garage, Fish, which is out of bounds for boys of this school?"

"I—I guess I—I just moseyed round, sir!" stammered Fishy. He did not want to mention the snowball that had been designed for John Robinson's features. "I'll say it's lucky I did, sir, as I spotted that burglar guy!"

Dr. Locke glanced round. But he did not reach for the telephone, as Fishy expected, to call up the police station. To Fishy's surprise and dismay, he reached for a cane!

"Fish!" he said in a still deeper voice.

"Yep!" gasped Fishy. "I'm telling you, sir, I saw him—a guy with a beard in a slouched hat—"

"Bend over that chair, Fish!"

"But—but—I—I say, sir—" gasped the dismayed Fishy, "that black-out guy, sir—that hoodlum—"

"Bend over that chair at once, Fish!" thundered the Head.

"Search me!" gasped Fisher T. Fish, and he bent over the chair in a state of dizzy astonishment.

The Head, it seemed, was going to do nothing about that black-out burglar whom Fisher T. Fish had so fortunately spotted! He was going to cane Fishy for trespassing at the garage!

Fishy was cute, and he was keen, and he was sharp, and he guessed that he had his eye-teeth cut—but this was quite beyond his understanding! All he could understand clearly was that he was going to get six. He was left in no doubt about that.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

Six strokes sounded in the Head's study, accompanied by an equal number of anguished squeals from Fisher T. Fish.

"Now," said the Head, laying down the cane, "you may go, Fish! If you ever visit the garage again, I shall punish you more severely!"

Fisher T. Fish limped to the door. Dr. Locke resumed his seat at the table.

Evidently he was going to do nothing about that black-out burglar!

Fishy stared back at him from the door.

"I—I—I say, sir, ain't you phoning up the cops?" he gasped.

"Go!"

"But that black-out burglar guy, sir—"

"Upon my word! If you speak another word of nonsense, Fish, I shall cane you again! Leave my study at once!"

There was no help for it! Fisher T. Fish left the study—wriggling and amazed.

The Head did not seem to care a boiled onion whether a bearded guy in a slouched hat lurked about John Robinson's garage or not.

Fisher T. Fish could not make it out.

He made up his mind, as he wriggled from the six, to give that garage a wide berth, especially after black-out!

He simply could not understand the Head's indifference on the subject. With all his cuteness, sliarpness, and spryness, Fisher T. Fish had to give that up—he could not guess, reckon, or calculate what the John James Brown it meant!

### CORNERED!

"QUIET!" whispered Drake.

Five fellows were quiet enough.

It was deeply dark, under the frosty trees, in the grounds of the old moat house. And it was bitterly cold.

Six fellows were warmly wrapped in overcoats and scarves and woollen gloves; and during the walk from Wharton Lodge in the winter dusk they had been warm enough. But an hour of watching on a bitter January evening made them realise that a detective's life had its tough side.

The Famous Five were keen and eager. Drake's belief that the hapless fat Owl of Greyfriars had landed in bad trouble at the haunted house made them keener than ever to penetrate the mystery of the strange old place. And to Drake's suggestion that they should remain at Wharton Lodge and leave him to carry on alone they had returned a unanimous negative.

Ferrers Locke's assistant pointed out that this was all in the day's work to him; which it certainly was not to Lower Fourth fellows of Greyfriars School. The Famous Five pointed out, in return, that they could stand it if he could stand it; and, moreover, they were jolly well going to! So there they were, in the cold and the dark—on the watch.

It was agreed, nem. con., that Drake took the lead in the enterprise. Harry Wharton & Co. were more than ready to follow his lead and back him up, leaving Ferrers Locke's assistant to give directions.

(Continued on next page.)

## STAMPS

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But they found it, as the boy detective had warned them, weary work—and fearfully cold. Hurree Jamsét Ram Singh, who hardly enjoyed the British winter at the best of times, was almost blue, and he had hard work to keep his teeth from chattering.

They had picked their way in the dark to the trees at a short distance from the caravan—taking the greatest care that their approach was not observed if the rat-faced man happened to be looking out.

Beyond the trees there was starlight; but under them, all was dark. And though there had been no fresh fall of snow, there was a great deal of it banked up among the trees, and a dozen feet gradually grew colder and colder. The attractions of a detective's life grew less and less, as the long, long minutes passed and nothing happened, except that the cold grew colder.

They were watching the caravan which, at a dozen yards distance, stood out in the starlight. If the rat-faced man was at home, the van window was well blacked out; no gleam of light came from it.

Perhaps the Famous Five, or some of them, doubted Drake's judgment in concentrating on the van; they were not assured that the rat-faced man really was the man in the hood, who had narrowly escaped them once in the ruins of the moat house. But it was for the boy detective to give directions, and the chums of the Remove played up.

From where they were in cover, in the dark, they could see if the man left the van. But how long they were likely to have to watch, and whether anything would come of it, they did not know. A long, long hour crawled by—and then Drake's whisper came softly in the silence.

The door of the caravan opened.

Silent, they watched.

A glimmer of light shone out into the winter night. It was shut off as the door closed again—the man outside.

In the starlight they saw him fairly clearly—wrapped in a coat, with a thick muffler round his neck, a cap pulled low over his brows. They even caught the glint of his sharp, rat-like eyes as he stood looking round him.

For a minute or more he stood by the van, looking round. Then he tramped to the lane and stood there, looking up and down the lane, with searching eyes.

He came back after a few minutes, and stood looking towards the moat house—a black mass, ridged with snow, against the steely sky.

Finally he went back into the van and shut the door again.

"Oh gum!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Is that the lot?"

"Anybody getting cold?" murmured Johnny Bull.

There was a sound something like castanets. Hurree Jamsét Ram Singh's teeth, in spite of his efforts, chattered at last.

"The coldfulness is terrific!" he murmured.

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Jack Drake smiled faintly.

"It's not all beer and skittles, is it?" he remarked. "But I don't think we shall have to wait much longer."

"Suppose that sweep's gone to bed?" muttered Nugent.

"Then we shall have to make a night of it!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Drake chuckled softly.

"But I don't think he's gone to bed," he said. "I fancy he came out to make sure that the coast was clear before he got moving."

"Oh!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"He had a narrow escape once, you know. He doesn't know that there's a detective on the job; but he knows that a mob of schoolboys butted in once, and might butt in again. He wanted to be sure, I think."

"Looks like it!" agreed Johnny Bull. "By gum! I hope he'll get a move on soon! It's a bit parky here!"

"The parkfulness is terrific."

"Quiet, old beans—quiet!" whispered Drake.

The caravan door opened again. This time there was no glimmer of light; the lamp in the van had been turned off. The burly figure stepped down, shutting the door and locking it after him.

For a few moments he stood clear in the starlight, and the juniors caught their breath as they watched him. For the caravanner was quite different in his aspect now. His head and face were covered by a dark hood, fastened round the neck.

"By gum!" breathed Bob.

There was no doubt now! It was the hooded man they were watching—and the hooded man and the rat-faced man of the caravan, evidently now, were one and the same!

Having locked the van door, the man cut swiftly across towards the moat house. In a few moments he disappeared into the ruins—faint sounds floating back as he tramped across the rubble that choked up the ancient moat.

"That settles it!" whispered Harry. "He's the man!"

"Come on—and not a sound!" breathed Drake.

He led the way, and the juniors, leaving their cover, followed him, treading as softly as they could.

The hooded man was inside the old roofless mansion—he could be neither seen nor heard. As quietly as they could, the Greyfriars party picked their way across the moat, and the old courtyard beyond, and entered the shattered doorway.

A spot of light winked from the darkness, at a distance at the back of the old dismantled hall of the moat house—at the spot where the stone steps led down to the underground passage.

But the juniors were not likely to believe that it was the ghostly lantern of the phantom miser revisiting his buried hoard. They knew that it was a flashlamp turned on by the hooded man, to pick his way down the steps in the blackness.

Under the old arched doorway,

where the steps led down, it was as black as a hat.

The light vanished.

The hooded man had gone down. His light was doubtless still on, but it was below the level of the old hall floor.

Swiftly, but silently, Jack Drake ran forward, the length of the old hall, his comrades at his heels.

On the previous occasion when they had spotted the hooded man in the ruins, he had been coming up from that underground recess, and he had escaped them! Now he had gone down, and they had him cornered.

Drake reached the top of the steps.

Below, in the blackness, a light winked.

The hooded man was there—his light still on.

But, even as the breathless juniors spotted the light, it vanished.

All was black!

Drake gritted his teeth. He guessed at once that the man below had heard some sound from the party as they hurried across the hall of the moat house.

He had taken the alarm and shut off his light.

It had been Drake's hope that the hooded man, shadowed on his mysterious visit to that underground passage, would have been an unconscious guide to the secret of the moat house—whatever it was. But it was evident that he was as wary as a rat or a badger.

A long minute passed.

There was no sound—no glimmer of light. Drake had no doubt that the hooded man, below, was listening intently. But a sound came at length. It was the cautious tread of a stealthy foot on the stone stair.

Every ear in the party caught that stealthy sound. For whatever purpose the hooded man had descended into that dark, damp recess, he had abandoned it, now that he had taken the alarm, and he was coming up the steps again, either knowing that someone was there, or to ascertain whether the coast was clear.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood silent and still, waiting for a sign from Drake.

Drake waited, silent.

From the impenetrable darkness below came a whispering voice.

"Is that you, Jim?"

Drake had told the chums of the Remove, already, that he had no doubt that the ghost-player of the moat house had a confederate in his strange and mysterious game at the lonely ruin. They had proof of it now—and that whisper told that the confederate's name was Jim—though who Jim was they had not the remotest idea, and he certainly was not on the spot.

Silence followed that whisper.

As there was no reply, the hooded man knew that, whoever was there, it was not Jim. The silence was broken by a sudden rush of footsteps.

The next moment, the man rushing up in the dark crashed into the juniors at the top of the steps.

"Collar him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Bag him!"



They grasped him on all sides.

There was a savage snarl of rage, and a burly, powerful man struggled desperately in the grasp of the crowd of schoolboys.

In the grip of the whole crowd he staggered on the steps, and went headlong down, the juniors clinging to him like cats. Crashing and bumping on the steps, but still clinging to their prisoner, Harry Wharton & Co. rolled down the stone stair, into the underground passage.

### NOTHING DOING!

**B**UMP! Bump! Crash!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh! Ow!"

"Look out!"

"Oh crumbs!"

A sprawling, struggling crowd landed in a wild heap at the bottom of the short flight of stone steps in black and impenetrable darkness.

There was a sudden stab of light in the dark. It came from Jack Drake's flashlamp as, the first to scramble up, he grabbed it from his pocket and flashed it on.

"Hold him!" panted Drake.

The hooded man was still struggling, though the rough tumble down the steep steps had dazed him, as it had dazed the juniors.

But he was down on the stone-flagged floor of the underground passage, and Harry Wharton had a grasp on his neck, Johnny Bull on his arm, Bob Cherry on the hood that covered his head and face. Nugent had pitched away from the rest, and lay dizzy, having banged his head on one of the masses of old masonry that had rolled down the steps in bygone days when the mansion's shattered walls and roof collapsed. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh was sprawling a few feet away, gasping for breath.

But Drake, with the light, and the nabob were on the hooded man again in a moment, before he had the slightest chance of breaking loose from the three who were still clinging to him.

Only Frank Nugent, rubbing a dizzy head, remained hors de combat, while the hooded man struggled wildly and fiercely in the grasp of five determined fellows.

But, burly and strong as he was, and in a mood of savage desperation, he had no chance against the odds.

He was pinned to the mouldy old stone flags, and Johnny Bull planted a heavy knee on his chest, while Wharton and Bob gripped his wrists and held him. He kicked savagely, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh tramped on his legs, and Frank Nugent, pulling himself together, joined the nabob. Then the hooded man was helpless, and could only writhe and gasp.

Jack Drake bent over him, holding the light, and jerked the hood from the prisoner's head.

The juniors already knew the face that would be revealed. There was no doubt that the hooded man was the lonely caravanner. In the light of Drake's flashlamp they saw the

stubbly, sharp, rat-featured face they expected to see—crimson now with exertion, and distorted with rage.

"Burn you!" gasped the prisoner, with another futile attempt to struggle. "You young 'ounds—"

"Pack that up!" said Bob Cherry. "That's enough from you! We've got him all right, Drake, old bean!"

"Keep him!" said Drake. "I'm going to have a squint round here!"

"My dear chap, we've squinted over the place half a dozen times! But go ahead!" said Bob.

Two or three more flashlamps were turned on. The dim, arched passage under the old moat house was well lighted.

Harry Wharton & Co. remained guarding the hooded man, while Jack Drake moved slowly along the passage, flashing his light to and fro on the mouldy old stone walls, creeping with damp

The dim recess under the moat house presented the same aspect as when the juniors had explored it before. Here and there lay the masses of masonry that had rolled down long ago—one great mass jammed against the wall of the passage. Nothing else was to be seen, but stone walls, cracked old flags, and reeking damp.

But as Drake went, the sharp, shifty eyes of the rat-faced man followed him with anxious intentness.

The juniors noticed it, and they wondered whether there was some hidden secret in that dim recess that he feared that Drake would discover. Unless something of the kind existed, it was hard to imagine his motive for descending into such a dreary den of darkness in the winter night.

Jack Drake had little doubt on the subject. His suspicion was that the mystery of the moat house meant that some unknown, unseen person was in hiding there—all the circumstances seemed to point to it, and that, too, was the opinion Ferrers Locke had given. With a keen eye he examined the old stone blocks in the walls, and scanned the damp flagstones underfoot, but they all seemed firm and immovable in their places.

He returned to his friends at last.

"Nothing doing?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"Nothing," answered Drake.

"Will you young 'ounds let a covey go?" came in a savage hiss from the prisoner. "I could 'ave the law on you for this 'ere!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Lots of law, if you want it," he said. "Like to walk to Winford police station with us, and explain to the bobbies what you play ghost in this old place for?"

The man gave him a black scowl, and did not answer.

"This is the rotter who gave you that crack on the head, Bob," grunted Johnny Bull. "He could be run in for that."

"Burn you!" growled the rat-faced man savagely. "Who wants you to come rooting about a place? Keep away from where you ain't got no business, blow yer!"

"Is that why you've been playing ghost—just because you don't like visitors at your camp?" asked Jack

Drake, looking at the man's savage, scowling face very curiously.

"Wot else do you think?" snarled the rat-faced man. "Think I want a crowd of schoolboys playing the fool about the place?"

"Well, if you play tricks like that, you must expect to get collared, and if you get roughly handled, you can thank yourself," said Drake. "We may as well get out of this, you fellows. We've found out who was playing ghost here, and that's what we came for. Let's get out of this."

Harry Wharton gave him a quick look. That was not, by any means, all that the Greyfriars party had come for. But he understood at once that the boy from Baker Street did not want the caravanner to guess more.

"All right," he said. "Let's."

"But I say—" began Johnny Bull.

"Come on," said Drake. "It's frightfully cold here, and Inky is turning blue. We're through here."

"Yes, but—"

"Come on, old man!" said Harry, and, grabbing Johnny by the arm, he led him up the steps.

"But hold on a minute!" said Johnny. "Now we've got hold of that blighter—"

"Oh, come on!"

The rat-faced man, released from the grasp of the juniors, stood scowling.

His evil look showed plainly enough that he would have liked to rush at them, hitting out right and left. But he had had enough of the Greyfriars fellows' handling; and it was plain enough that he was relieved to see them going.

They went up the stone steps, Harry Wharton almost dragging the expostulating Johnny, and emerged into the roofless old hall. The man with the hood followed them, more slowly, muttering to himself.

In the hall, Johnny Bull shook his arm free of Wharton's grasp.

"Look here," he exclaimed. "I jolly well think—" He broke off as Jack Drake, slipping, bumped into him. "Look where you're barging, fat-head!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Come on!" he said. "We shall be late for tea!"

"Well, I think—"

But Johnny was interrupted again as Wharton slipped an arm through his, and marched him on.

The juniors scrambled over the moat, and tramped back to the lane.

The rat-faced man followed them out of the moat house, and went towards his van. He stood by the van, watching the schoolboys in the starlight.

"Anybody cold?" asked Jack Drake.

"Just a few," answered Bob.

"The coldfulness is truly terrific, my esteemed Drake."

"Race you back to Wharton Lodge, then!" exclaimed Drake. "Line up here, and start fair! Now, then! Off!"

And the whole party went whooping along the lane towards the road.



the rat-faced man standing and watching them till the frosty hedges hid them from sight.

### JACK DRAKE'S DISCOVERY!

**H**OLD on!" Jack Drake spoke in a low voice.

He stopped where high, thick hedges, banked with snow, hid the juniors from view from the moat house and the caravan—if an eye there was still on the alert.

The Famous Five came to a halt. "What's the game now, Drake?" asked Harry.

The captain of the Remove had guessed that Drake was not finished yet, and that what he had said at the moat house was intended to pull the wool over the eyes of the ghost player.

"If you'll let a fellow speak," grunted Johnny Bull, "I think it's rot to clear like this! We came here to look for that fat ass, Bunter—if he's here—and I think it's rot to clear off without finding out anything!"

Jack Drake smiled.

"Right on the wicket, old bean!" he answered. "But if we'd asked that chap ever so politely, I don't think he'd have told us whether he had Bunter parked here. We've got to find that out for ourselves."

Four members of the Co. grinned.

"Well, we shan't find out by going back to Wharton Lodge to tea!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"No—and we shouldn't find out by sticking at the moat house, for you can bank on it that so long as that rascal knew we were around, he would stick in his caravan and wait till we went!" said Drake. "Now I fancy he's got an impression on his mind that we came to find out who had been playing ghost and, having found out, that we've gone home."

"No doubt about that!" said Harry. "And now——"

"Now," said Drake. "You fellows cut off and leave it to me. The blighter would spot a crowd—he won't spot one fellow, when that fellow is a pupil of Ferrers Locke. Get me?"

"Yes, I understand!" admitted Wharton. "You think that when he's sure that the coast is clear he will carry on with whatever he was up to in that dark underground passage——"

"That's the big idea!" said Drake. "And this is detective work, old chap—that man is as wary as a wolf, and——"

"And as savage as a tiger!" said Harry. "You remember what happened to Bob, old fellow! Blessed if I like you going back alone!"

"He won't see me," smiled Drake. "I haven't taken lessons from Ferrers Locke for nothing! Leave it to me!"

"Oh!" said Johnny Bull. "You mean that we should be in the way?"

Jack Drake grinned.

"I shouldn't put it like that, old bean!" he said. "But in a case of

special shadowing, the detective is better left on his own."

"Perhaps you're right!" admitted Johnny.

"The perhapsfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But for goodness' sake, Drake, take care, and don't get a crack on the nut like Bob."

"I'll watch it!" agreed Drake. "Cut off now—and I'll see you later—with news, I hope!"

The Famous Five tramped on towards the road; and as they went, Jack Drake pushed through the snowy hedge and disappeared.

If the man at the caravan was still watching and listening, doubtless he heard the tramping feet and the voices of the schoolboys as they went; but there was nothing to rouse his suspicions that one of the party had remained behind.

Drake did not return directly to the moat house. Taking advantage of all the cover of bushes and trees, he crossed the field beside the lane and reached an old, tumbledown fence that bordered the grounds of the old mansion. He pushed through a gap in the old palings, and a minute or two later was under the trees from which, a short time ago, the juniors had watched the van.

Then he spotted the rat-faced man again. He had been left standing near the van—now he had gone into the lane and was staring in the direction the schoolboys had taken, towards the road, obviously to make sure that they were off the scene. Drake saw the burly figure plainly in the starlight in the lane—standing motionless, staring with knitted brows, and listening.

Drake did not linger.

Leaving the trees, he skirted round to the back of the moat house, placing the building between him and the man in the lane. He scrambled across the moat, and reached one of the gaping apertures where a window once had been.

With hardly a sound he clambered in and stood in the old roofless hall. Most of it was open to the sky, and the starlight glimmered on the flagged floor and the masses of fallen masonry that cumbered it in all directions.

Drake picked his way among the rubble to the steps under the arched doorway at the back of the hall. There he blotted himself from sight in cover of a mass of old stone over which frosty ivy grew. In that chilly cover he settled down to wait.

Minute followed minute. The cold was intense, penetrating to the very bones; but Ferrers Locke's assistant seemed indifferent to discomfort. He did not stir, as he waited with the patience of a Red Indian.

He had little doubt, or rather none, that the hooded man would return when he was assured that all was safe. But how long he had to wait he did not know; and he was prepared to wait for hours, if necessary. He did not, however,

think that it would be so long as that; and he was right.

Hardly a quarter of an hour had passed after he had taken up his post before he heard stealthy, shuffling feet on the old flagstones of the hall.

Through an interstice of the frozen ivy he saw a burly figure reach the arched doorway; and he noted that the man had replaced the hood over his head and face. A speck of light showed as the hooded man stepped under the arched doorway and disappeared down the steps.

Drake's heart beat.

Silently he crept from his cover. Looking down the steps he caught the glimmer of the light below. This time there was no sound to warn the hooded man. The boy detective was as silent as a cat.

He could see the glimmer, but the low roof of the underground passage hid the man from his sight.

"Softly, feeling his way, moving inch by inch, the boy detective stepped down.

From below came a heavy, rumbling, grinding sound.

Drake stopped dead.

It was an unexpected sound; and, for the moment, he did not understand. It sounded as if the hooded man was rolling one of the masses of ancient masonry that lay in the underground passage.

Mystified, Drake stopped and listened, with bent head.

The heavy rumbling sound ceased. It was followed by another sound—the grind of an iron key in a rusty lock.

Drake's eyes gleamed.

Faintly, but distinctly, there came the sound from below of a door that opened and shut.

The glimmer of light vanished.

With a glimmering of the truth in his mind now, the boy from Baker Street stepped quietly down from step to step till he stood in the underground passage.

It was black as pitch; and there was no sound of movement or breathing. He knew that it was untenanted. And he knew, too, that this time the haunter of the moat house had guided him, unknowingly, to the secret that he sought.

He flashed on his pocket lamp.

The underground passage was untenanted. The hooded man had vanished. For a second all seemed the same as before—and then Drake saw!

A great mass of masonry that had been jammed against the wall—a mass too heavy for Drake to have moved, and which could only have been moved by a powerful and muscular man—had been rolled aside—that was what he had heard. And, revealed in the wall by the removal of that great block was a low, arched doorway, only three or four feet high, closed by an iron-clamped oaken door!

In the beam of the light from his flash lamp, Jack Drake fixed his eyes on the low door in the wall. He knew now the way the hooded man had gone—he had discovered the hidden secret of the moat house!





As Jack Drake entered the vault, there was a startled squeak, and a fat face and a big pair of spectacles turned towards him. "Oh crikey!" came a familiar voice. "Is that you, Drake? Oh crumbs! I say, you fellows, have you got anything to eat?"

#### AT LAST!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter. Billy Bunter was not enjoying life.

Neither, undoubtedly, was Mr. Quelch. But the Remove master of Greyfriars did not find solace in groaning, moaning, mumbling, and grousing. He was silent and grim. Bunter, however, put in enough for two, and perhaps a little over.

Bunter had had three days in the hidden vault under the moat house. They seemed more like three centuries to the unfortunate Owl of Greyfriars. Quelch had had more than three weeks, and he said nothing. There were great powers of endurance in the Remove master's angular, somewhat bony frame. Luckily, his thoughts did not turn incessantly, like William George Bunter's, to the fleshpots of Egypt.

"Oh crikey!" moaned Bunter. "Oh crumbs! Oh dear!"

The oil lamp burned on the table. By its light Mr. Quelch was reading Euripides.

Bunter had no Euripides to comfort him. Not that he would have found any comfort therein. He would not have accepted Euripides as a gift. If Bunter had given Euripides any thought at all, it would have been only to reflect how jolly lucky it was that they didn't have to do Greek in the Remove at Greyfriars, as well as Latin! Latin was putrid enough, but Greek,

Bunter had heard, was considerably more putrid!

"Oh lor'! Ooooh!" moaned Bunter.

Mr. Quelch raised his eyes from the volume. He fixed them on the doleful, dismal, disconsolate fat Owl.

"Bunter!" he rapped.

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

"Be silent!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

Quelch resumed Euripides.

Billy Bunter rose from his bench and rambled about the vault.

It was a long, extensive vault, with arched roof supported by stone pillars, and Bunter rambled over it several times in the hope of discovering some way out. So, probably, had Quelch, during his weary imprisonment. But there was no way out, save by the thick oak door, locked on the outside and barricaded by the great mass of masonry.

The fat Owl returned to his bench at last and sat down. He blinked indignantly at Quelch through his big spectacles. It was pretty thick, Bunter thought, if a fellow wasn't to be allowed to utter a word when he was shut up in a vault with no company but that of a bony old schoolmaster, and—worse still—hardly anything to eat!

"Oh dear! Oh lor'!" mumbled Bunter again at last.

He seemed to find comfort in it.

The gimlet eyes fixed on him again.

"Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Beast!"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't mean to say beast, sir! I—I shouldn't think of telling my Form-master what I think of him, sir! I—I'm too respectful, sir! I—I meant to say yes, sir!"

"If we were at Greyfriars now, Bunter, I should cane you!"

Billy Bunter, for a brief moment, felt glad that he was not at Greyfriars now!

"You should occupy your mind, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch severely. "I have already offered to give you some instructions to while away these weary hours. I have set you a Latin exercise. You have not touched it!"

Billy Bunter looked at him. It was fearfully weary in that beastly vault! The minutes seemed to crawl by. But if Mr. Quelch fancied that a Latin exercise would improve matters, it only showed, in Bunter's opinion, what idiots schoolmasters were!

"If you were acquainted with the Greek language, Bunter, I would lend you this volume, which I so fortunately had in my pocket when I fell into the hands of those rascals!" said Mr. Quelch.

Again Bunter was glad for a moment! Luckily, he did not know a word of Greek, so Quelch couldn't bung that putrid book at him!

"Perhaps it would ease the monotony a little, Bunter, if I told you something about this great Greek



poet!" suggested Mr. Quelch kindly.

Bunter doubted it!

"Euripides," said Mr. Quelch, "was a great tragic poet of ancient Greece, Bunter."

"Was he?" moaned Bunter. "Oh lor'!"

"He was born at Salamis, Bunter, on the same day that the Persian host of Xerxes was defeated by the Greeks."

Bunter did not seem fearfully interested in learning when Euripides was born. He rather wished at that moment that Euripides had not been born at all!

"He wrote seventy-five tragedies, Bunter," continued Mr. Quelch. "Of these only nineteen remain."

Bunter was sorry to hear that any remained.

"Of these the most celebrated are the Orestes, Medea, Iphigenia in Aulis—"

"Oh lor'!"

"What did you say, Bunter?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir!" groaned Bunter. "I—I say, sir, when do you think we're likely to see him?"

Mr. Quelch stared.

"Are you so stupid, Bunter, as not to know that Euripides lived many centuries ago?" he exclaimed. "He lived long before the Christian era, Bunter. How could you possibly suppose that you could see Euripides?"

"Eh? I didn't mean Euripides—I mean that beast who brings us the grub!" stammered Bunter.

"Wha-a-t?"

"I'm hungry!" moaned Bunter.

"Pah!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Evidently Bunter's fat thoughts had wandered from Euripides!

Billy Bunter would rather have had a doughnut than the nineteen tragedies that remained of the works of that great Greek, or even the whole seventy-five, had they been obtainable.

Mr. Quelch resumed reading, making no further attempt to ease the monotony of imparting knowledge to Bunter!

Billy Bunter had never had any great use for knowledge, and now he had absolutely none, with his podgy thoughts concentrated on the immensely more important matter of grub!

Twenty-four weary hours had passed since the last visit of the hooded man. On that occasion he had brought a rather larger quantity of grub than usual. But it had not lasted very long. Not a crumb remained now—and Bunter was hungry. He longed to hear the sound of the heavy stone rolling away from the door, announcing that a further supply was arriving.

At last—at long, long last—there was a heavy, rumbling sound that penetrated even through the thick old oak of the door.

Billy Bunter sat up and took notice at once.

The hooded man was coming again! That meant grub! It meant that life, now a weary burden, was going to be worth living once more!

Mr. Quelch laid down his book and rose to his feet. His face was dark and Litter as he fixed his eyes on the low arched doorway.

But the fat face of the Owl of the Remove had brightened. He blinked hopefully at the door, and his spirits rose as it opened.

The hooded man stepped in and immediately closed the door after him.

To the surprise of the Remove master and the fat Owl, he had the key in his hand, and he placed it in the inside of the old lock and turned it. This was the first time that the Remove master's gaoler had locked the door on the inside after entering.

To Mr. Quelch's mind it portended some new development.

Billy Bunter gave it little heed; he was thinking of the grub! His fat heart sank as he saw that the hooded man did not carry the usual bag. He had not come with a supply of food.

"Oh crikey!" moaned Bunter. "Oh crumbs! I—I say, haven't you got some grub? I say, I'm fearfully hungry! Oh lor'!"

The hooded man took no notice of the disconsolate fat Owl. He stepped towards the Remove master.

Mr. Quelch watched him, with set lips.

"You're going!" came a grunt from under the hood. "I got to fix you for the car. Keep quiet, I warn you, Mr. Schoolmaster! I'd jest as soon crack your nut as not!"

The Remove master drew a deep breath.

He had been expecting this daily, or rather hourly, ever since Bunter had joined him in the vault; for there could be no doubt that, sooner or later, the fat junior would be searched for, and that the search was likely to extend to the moat house.

Evidently the kidnapers, in the interval, had prepared another hide-out for the kidnapped Form-master, and now he was to be removed to it before a discovery was made.

The fact that he was to be taken away showed plainly enough that there was hope of rescue if he remained in his present quarters. The Remove master clenched his hands almost convulsively. He was little more than an infant in the hands of that powerful, muscular ruffian; but he would not be taken away from that chance of freedom if he could help it.

A moment more, and the hooded ruffian's grasp was on him.

With all his strength, Quelch struggled in that grasp.

But it was futile.

Billy Bunter watched what followed, with his eyes almost popping through his spectacles with terror.

He forgot that he was hungry as he watched. It would have been useless for the fat Owl to go to his Form-master's aid, if he had thought of it. One blow from a brutal fist would have knocked him out. But the terrified Owl did not even think of it. He blinked on in terror.

In a few minutes the unfortunate Form-master's resistance was overcome and he lay on the stone flags, bound hand and foot and securely gagged.

Then the hooded man grasped the heap of sacking that had formed Bunter's bed during his imprisonment in the vault and rolled it round the master of the Remove. All was ready now for the arrival of the hooded man's confederate, which plainly he expected at any moment.

How long a time passed, the frightened, fat Owl did not know; but there came at last a sudden, sharp knock at the oaken door.

### TOO LATE!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"  
"Drake, old bean—"  
"What—"

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the hall at Wharton Lodge, after tea, when Wells opened the door to Jack Drake.

Drake came in, flushed and breathless. Evidently he had been running. And the juniors could read in his face that there was news.

They gathered round him eagerly as he panted for breath.

"You've found out—" began Harry.

"Yes. Call your uncle; he'd better come. It's the finish now," said Drake. "One of you go and scrounge a crowbar—we may need it for getting a door open."

"But what—" exclaimed Bob.

"I've spotted it! Call Colonel Wharton!"

"Right-ho!" answered Harry, and he ran across the hall to the library door.

Jack Drake stood panting for breath. He had lost no time, after making the discovery at the moat house. The secret was brought to light at last, and all that remained was to force the door of the hidden vault—with enough force at hand to overcome any objections that the hooded man might make.

Colonel Wharton came out into the hall. So far, he knew nothing of the matter except that the juniors had been exploring the haunted house. He listened in astonishment to what Drake had to tell him.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "You think that Bunter—I understood that Bunter had gone home—"

"So did we all until to-day, sir," answered Drake. "But he never went home, and I have a strong suspicion, at least, that he landed in trouble at the moat house. Anyhow, we're going to find out what is on the other side of that door in the underground passage."

"Certainly we shall do that, and without delay," said Colonel Wharton. He gave the boy from Baker Street a keen look. "If you are right, Drake, we had better lose no time. We shall soon see, at all events."

The Famous Five were already scrambling into their overcoats. There seemed to be some doubt in the old colonel's mind, but the clums of the Remove had no doubt that the



boy from Baker Street had it right. In any case, they were keen and eager to explore that hidden and hitherto unknown recess under the mysterious moat house.

Hardly more than ten minutes after Drake's breathless arrival they started—Bob Cherry with a crowbar under his arm, and the colonel with a thick walking-stick, which it was quite likely might be required in dealing with the man in the caravan. Whatever mysterious secret was hidden beneath the ruins of the moat house, it was going to be revealed now.

A quick tramp brought them to the corner of Redgate Lane. In the distance down the lane, the snow-ridged shattered walls of the moat house glimmered in the starlight. There was a spot of red light in the shadowy gloom of the lane, close to the moat house.

Jack Drake uttered a sharp exclamation.

"A car—at the moat house!"

"A car!" repeated Harry Wharton. "Listen!"

The sound of a car in motion floated through the frosty air. The red light winked in the gloom, and vanished.

The car had shot away down the lane in the direction of Wimford. Its sound floated back through the silence, and faded.

Drake gritted his teeth.

"If we're too late——" he breathed.

He broke into a run.

The car was gone! For whatever purpose it had stopped at the haunted house, it had vanished into the winter night.

Was it by chance that a car had passed through the lonely lane and stopped opposite the moat house? Or did it mean that the rat-faced man, and his unknown confederate, Jim, had fled in time?

That he had not been seen or suspected when he shadowed the hooded man and discovered the secret of the vault, Drake was certain. But he had a foreboding that the car in the lonely lane meant that the birds had flown. He ran breathlessly, the Famous Five at his heels, the colonel following on with long strides.

Drake glanced at the caravan as he passed it.

It stood there, banked round with snow, dark and silent. If the rat-faced man was there, there was no sign of him. If he had gone, he had left his van behind.

Drake panted on to the moat house. Flashlamps were turned on as the Greyfriars fellows scrambled across the old moat, and the colonel followed them. They tramped up the roofless hall to the steps under the arched doorway, and Jack Drake led the way downward.

All was silent, still, and dark.

Drake set his lips as he flashed his light round the underground passage.

In that brief interval, well under an hour, while he had been gone, had the birds flown? If so, it could not have been a sudden alarm that had caused the flight—they knew nothing of Drake's discovery, nothing of what was following it. Their plans must

(Continued on next page.)

## The Secret of the Christmas Cracker!

A Rib-tickling Story of Jack Jolly & Co., of St. Sam's.

By DICKY NUGENT



**K**LANG! Klang! Klang! "Sounds like the first guests arriving for your Christmas party, Merry!" cried Jack Jolly. "I wonder who it is?"

"Wait a jiffy, and I'll see!" grinned Merry; and he left his pals, Jolly and Bright and Fearless, who were spending Christmas with him at his ancestral home, Merry Manner, and galloped off into the hall.

Jolly and Bright and Fearless eggspected him to come back with one of the cheery crowd of boys and girls he had invited to his party. Imagine their serprize, then, when he returned with the bearded figger of a rinkled old fokey of 99 or so!

"Merry Christmas, boys!" greeted the newcomer; and our heroes' faces fell—forchunitly, without suffering any damage!

"The Head!" they gasped.

"Right first pop, boys!" nodded Dr. Birchmall jenially. "I've come along to join your party."

"Look here, sir," said Merry dewbiously. "I don't seem to remember sending you an invitation."

"Oh, let's not bother about formalities, boys," went on the Head. "I never trubble about trifles—I prefer roast turkeys and Christmas poodings! Bless my sole! What a big cracker!"

Dr. Birchmall pointed, as he spoke, to a grate Christmas cracker lying across the table.

Merry smiled. The cracker in question certainly was a bewty. It was umpteen feet long and yards wide, and it was intended to be the cheef fetcher of the grate Christmas party.

"What's inside it?" asked the Head.

"Ah! That's a secret," grinned Merry. "I don't even know myself. Tuck, I daresay. Eggscuse me now, sir, won't you?"

Merry darted off again, as the front door bell started wringing. Jolly and Bright and Fearless were only too glad of an eggscuse to follow him and they left the Head to his own devices.

When they returned with the first batch of guests he had vanished. They concloded he had gone to look for something to eat, and they were not far wide of the mark. Little did they dream, however, where he had gone to look for it.

The yungsters at Merry's Christmas party that nite were as happy as birds. There were plenty of larks and heaps to swallow and, by the time the party drew to a close, Merry had good reason to crow!

At last came the ceremony of

pulling the grate Christmas cracker.

"Few! What a weight!" gasped Jolly, as he and a duzzen others lifted the cracker off the table. "Is it filled with sandbags, Merry?"

"I didn't know it was herry!" answered Merry, in serprize. "But we'll soon find out the reason. Pull the cracker, you fellows!"

Merry's guests were only too pleased to oblige. They lined up on either side of the cracker and gave a long pull and a strong pull. **BOOM!**

With a deffening eggsplosion, the cracker came asunder. As it did so there was a cry of sheer amazement from the crowd. For, among the presents that were scattered out of the cracker was a yew-man figger—a bearded yecman figger that yelled feendishly as it landed with a bump on the floor!

"Yaroooo! Help! Perlice!"

"The Head!" roared Jack Jolly & Co.

It was Dr. Birchmall, the Head, whose unwelcome presence they had forgotten in the eggstement of the party!

"The—the Head!" gasped Merry. "How did you get inside that cracker, sir?"

"Ow! I crawled in, of course. Then I couldn't get out, dash it!" groaned the Head, as he picked himself up and tenderly rubbed his injured anatomy. "I—er—thought I would like to have a look at the presents——"

"You mean you thought you'd like to feed your face while nobody was looking, didn't you?" chortled Jolly. "Have any luck, sir?"

"No luck—and no tuck, either!" groaned the Head. "There were footballs and wrist-watches and boxing-gloves—but not a scrap to eat! Not that it mattered, of course," he added quickly, "seeing that I only wanted to inspect the presents! Er—I must go now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Birchmall fled—doubtless to find the butler. He left the crowd simply shrieking. They found his uneggspected eggscit from that Christmas cracker a proper screen!

"It was just as well the Head turned up after all," grinned Jolly, when the last of the guests had gone that nite. "When he arrived, it was a blow; but when he popped out of that cracker, it was the hit of the evening!"

And the Co. decided to pass a vote of thanks to Dr. Birchmall for what he had done—which showed what remarkable results could follow when a Beak felt peckish!



have been already laid and had been carried out, barely in time. As they fled in the car they did not even know how narrow their escape had been!

"Gone!" said the boy from Baker Street bitterly.

"Gone!" repeated Bob. "How do you know?"

"Look!"

Drake pointed to the oaken door in the wall.

The great block of stone which had formerly hidden it from sight now lay clear of it. The hooded man had not taken the trouble to replace it.

That was proof enough that the haunters of the moat house no longer cared to keep the secret.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "The key's in the door!"

"By gum!"

The crowbar was not needed. It was not necessary to force the oaken door in the wall. The key had been left in the lock.

"That means that they're gone!" said Harry Wharton. "If somebody was hidden on the other side of that door, Drake, we shan't find him now!"

"No!" said Drake, between his teeth.

He turned the key back. The oaken door was flung open. From the vault beyond came the glimmer of an oil lamp. Drake ducked his head under the low doorway and entered. And there was a startled squeak as a fat face and a big pair of spectacles turned towards him.

"Oh crikey!" came a familiar voice. "Is that you, Drake? Oh crumbs! I say, you fellows, have you got anything to eat?"

### BUNTER IN A HURRY!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"Bunter!"

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!"

"Good gad! Bunter is here!" exclaimed Colonel Wharton. He had to duck almost double to enter the vault. He stared blankly at the fat Owl of Greyfriars. "It is you, Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm hungry!" moaned Bunter. "I think you fellows might have come before this!"

"Well, here we are, anyhow, old fat man!" said Bob cheerily. "You're getting out of it now, old porpoise!"

"Well, you might have come sooner, I think! I've been fearfully hungry all the while I've been here—weeks and weeks!"

"Only three days, old chap!" said Nugent.

"Well, it seemed like weeks and weeks! I've had hardly anything to eat—that beast was stingy with the grub! I say, you fellows, haven't you got anything to eat with you?" wailed Bunter.

Bunter, no doubt, was glad to be rescued from that dreary abode. He was glad to see the cheery faces of

the Famous Five again. But Bunter was hungry—fearfully hungry—famished, in fact! When Billy Bunter was fearfully hungry, other matters made little impression on his fat mind.

"Didn't you bring something to eat?" he wailed.

"Never thought of it!"

"Well, you silly ass!" gasped Bunter. "Haven't you even got some chocs—or a bit of toffee—or—anything?"

"Nothing nearer than Wharton Lodge!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Have you been here ever since you left Wharton Lodge, Bunter?" asked the colonel.

"Eh? Yes! Of course I have, as that beast grabbed me and pitched me in here!" groaned Bunter. "I've been hungry all the time! The food was beastly! But I could have stood that if there'd been enough of it—but there wasn't! Not nearly enough!"

"Why did you come here?" asked Harry.

"Oh, I—I just came! I never heard you fellows talking about coming here—I hope I'm not the chap to listen at a keyhole—and I never came here to give you a fright when you came. Nothing of the sort! I—I—I—just came, you know!"

"You fat chump!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"So that was it, was it?" grunted Johnny Bull. "Well, you jolly well asked for it, you fat frump!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, sure you haven't got any grub? You might have guessed that a fellow would be hungry! Oh lor'! It's half a mile to Wharton Lodge! Oh crikey! Of all the silly idiots——"

"Go it!" said Bob. "That's how Bunter thanks fellows for getting him out of a scrape, you men! Carry on, old fat man! It's a pleasure to listen to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

And he shot out of the door of the vault. If there were no foodstuffs available on the spot, Bunter was losing no time in getting to the nearest spot where foodstuffs were available. He flew.

"Hold on, Bunter!" called out Drake.

Bunter did not hold on.

"You fat chump!" shouted Drake. "Hold on! Was there somebody else in this vault with you?"

"Eh? Yes!" called back Bunter over a fat shoulder, and he vanished.

Bunter was not a quick mover, as a rule, but he got out of the moat house in record time, scrambled over the moat, and barged away up the lane like a runaway rhinoceros.

There was grub at Wharton Lodge—ample grub for a famished Owl; and Billy Bunter, just then, was wholly concentrated on one thing—to reach Wharton Lodge in the shortest possible space of time. And his fat little legs fairly flashed as he went.

The other fellows were not in such a hurry. They were keen to explore

*Mystery at the Christmas Party!*



**"THE GHOST OF SOMERTON ABBEY"**

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Brooks' Tip-Top  
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the hidden vault and find out what they could of the mysterious proceedings of the haunters of the moat house.

Jack Drake already had it clear in his mind that there had been another occupant of the vault. That occupant was gone—no doubt in the car that had disappeared down the lane towards Wimford. And it was hardly to be doubted that the rat-faced man of the caravan had gone with him. Drake knew now, from Bunter, that the vault had had another occupant; but, naturally, it did not cross his mind that the unknown dweller in the hidden vault was actually known to Bunter. And the fat Owl, with more important matters on his mind, had not thought of mentioning it.

The boy detective made a meticulous examination of the vault. But he found nothing to enlighten him.

"Somebody was here!" said Harry Wharton. "They bagged Bunter and shoved him in because he had spotted something. But the other party was here already. Isn't that it, Drake?"

"No doubt about that!" said Drake.

"Some giddy crook in hiding?" said Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I can think of anything else!"

"I can't make it out," said Drake. "Whoever he was, he's left no sign behind. We can get a description of him from Bunter, at any rate!"

"After he's had a meal!" grinned Bob. "You won't get anything out of him till then!"

"If that rat-faced blighter is still in the caravan—" said Johnny Bull. "Think he's gone, Drake?"

"I imagine so. But we shall soon see!" answered Drake. And nothing having rewarded the search in the vault, the juniors emerged at last and ascended into the moat house.

Colonel Wharton gripped his stick as he led the way towards the caravan. If the man was still there, he was going to be taken into custody to be handed over to the police. And the old colonel was grimly prepared to deal with him.

But it was soon ascertained that the rat-faced man was no longer there.

Drake tried the door of the van. It was shut, but not even locked. It opened to his hand.

The boy detective stepped in, and flashed a light round the interior.

The van was unoccupied—the stove cold. Cooking utensils and other articles lay about. The rat-faced man had taken nothing but his personal belongings. It was plain that he had abandoned the van and its contents, careless of what became of them.

"Gone?" asked Harry, as Drake emerged from the van.

"Gone!" answered Drake.

"He may return for the van!" said Colonel Wharton. "It must be worth a considerable amount. Surely the man would not leave it derelict?"

Drake shook his head.

"I don't fancy they'll ever be seen in this part of the country again!" he said. "They must have laid their plans to clear after that fat ass

Bunter butted in—and they carried out their plans just in time, as it happened! A caravan would be easy to trace and follow—they've abandoned it!"

"But they couldn't have meant to leave Bunter locked in the vault!" said Bob.

"No! He was only kept there till they were ready to clear—that's plain enough now! They'd let us

## COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the MAGNET, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4.

**W**ITHIN forty-eight hours of the publishing of this paper the bells will be ringing the Old Year out and the New Year in—so here's wishing my chums the world over a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Since my last chat with you fellows I've had time to make another New Year's resolution—and that is to double the circulation of the MAGNET! A gigantic task, I know, but one possible to accomplish providing every ardent reader of the MAGNET puts his shoulder to the wheel and gives me a helping hand. So many of you have dropped me a line saying how pleased you would be if only you could do something for me in return for the many happy hours you have spent reading the MAGNET. Well, here's a way in which you can be a great help in assisting your Editor to double the circulation of the MAGNET. Make a New Year's resolution to obtain at least one new reader. You will not only be doing me a great service, but you will earn the everlasting friendship of the new reader introduced to the MAGNET.

Already the MAGNET is known all over the world as the finest twopenny-worth of literary fare on the market. My duty in the coming year will consist of providing the best school stories it is possible to obtain—and the ones I already have in hand are real "gems." Mr. Frank Richards has been burning the midnight oil writing some really good yarns with which to commence our New Year programme.

Special for next week will be:

### "SMITHY'S SECRET WEAPON!"

the next yarn in our present popular series telling of the exciting hunt for the elusive Slim Jim. Another week has gone and Mr. Quelch is still missing from Greyfriars, and even the famous detective, Ferrers Locke, has failed to trace him. Meanwhile, Mr. Lamb, who is taking the Remove master's place, makes a foe of Vernon-Smith, with the result that the new Form-master has a far from comfortable time. The vengeful Bouncer finds an unexpected and entirely unlooked-for weapon ready to his hand—and he uses it for all it is worth! Don't miss "SMITHY'S SECRET WEAPON!"—it shows your favourite author kicking off the New Year in better form than ever.

Here's wishing you all the very best till we meet again.

YOUR EDITOR.

know where to find him—after they were safe off the scene. They only wanted to keep him quiet till after they were gone. A long-distance phone call to-morrow—perhaps—"

Drake wrinkled his brows.

"There's one thing beats me!" he said. "They must know that Bunter can give a description of the man in the vault, whoever he was—and they don't seem to care whether he does or not. They could have taken Bunter in the car easily enough. But it's clear that they only wanted to get shut of him—and never cared a boiled bean what he might be able to tell! I don't quite make that out, if it was a man in hiding. Nothing doing here—let's get back!"

And the party started back to Wharton Lodge—where Billy Bunter had already arrived and was getting busy!

## STARTLING NEWS!

**W**ELLS gazed at Billy Bunter. His gaze expressed disapproval mingled with amazement.

Neither worried Bunter. The Wharton Lodge butler was welcome to think what he jolly well liked, so long as he provided Bunter with grub, more grub, and still more grub, and then some more!

That Wells had done—and was still doing. Cold turkey, cold beef, cold potatoes in piles—everything that was available, in fact—travelled on the downward path at an amazing rate. Bunter had reached Wharton Lodge spluttering for breath—having covered the distance in a remarkably short time. Wells fancied that he wanted a wash and a brush-up even more than he wanted a meal, howsoever badly he wanted the latter. But that was not Billy Bunter's opinion. Bunter wanted to eat. He ate—and he ate and ate!

Three days in the vault under the moat house had left Bunter fearfully grubby. Even Bunter, later, was likely to realise that he was not really in a state to sit at a dining-table. But that did not matter at the moment. What mattered at the moment was grub, and plenty of it. And Wells—well as he knew Billy Bunter's gastronomic powers—was amazed and a little alarmed. Where Bunter was putting it all he did not know. But really it looked as if something must happen, unless Bunter was made of elastic and could stretch to any required extent.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a cheery roar.

Bunter was still going strong when the Greyfriars fellows got back to Wharton Lodge. But he had slacked down a little and was now parking mince pies—which went down almost like oysters.

However, he had taken the keen edge off his appetite, and he had leisure to blink round as the juniors came in.

They gathered round the fat Owl as he sat and ate.

"I say, you fellows, I feel better now!" said Bunter. "I haven't

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finished yet—but I'm not so fearfully hungry now!"

"So glad to hear it!" said Bob Cherry gravely. "We've been feeling terribly worried about that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "I've been practically starved. It's not much I eat, as you fellows know!"

"Eh?"

"But a fellow wants food!" said Bunter warmly. "I ain't a bony old lath like Quelch! I dare say he can do with a pinch or two of grub—I can't! But I say, you fellows, he actually smacked my head one day because I finished up the grub! Fancy that—old Quelch, you know—smacking a fellow's head because—"

"Who—"

"How—"

"What—"

The Famous Five fairly howled in their astonishment.

Jack Drake gave a bound. He was going to ask Bunter for a description of the man in the vault, as soon as Bunter finished eating—if Bunter ever did. The mention of Quelch came like a thunderclap.

"Quelch!" roared Bob Cherry, staring blankly at the fat Owl. "Did you say Quelch?"

"Eh? Yes! You see, I was hungry, and there wasn't much, and I ate it, and then old Quelch—"

"Is the fat ass potty?" gasped Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

Drake dropped a hand on a fat shoulder. His eyes were blazing with excitement, as he jerked Bunter away from the mince pies.

"Was it Mr. Quelch in the vault, Bunter?" he asked.

"Eh? Yes! Leggo my shoulder, you ass—I can't reach the mince pies! Wells, shove those mince pies this way."

"He was a prisoner in that vault?" exclaimed Drake.

"Eh? Yes!"

"Why didn't you say so?" yelled Drake.

Bunter blinked at him.

"You didn't ask me, did you?"

"You burbling idiot—"

"Oh, really, Drake—"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in utter astonishment. "Is it possible that it was Quelch in that vault under the moat house? We knew he was hidden away somewhere, but—"

"Quelch!" gasped Johnny Bull. "My hat! Or is that fat ass dreaming?"

"I say, you fellows—" Bunter grabbed a mince pie.

"Go on!" said all the juniors together.

For once they were eager to hear what Billy Bunter had to say.

"These mince pies are prime!"

"Wha-a-f?"

"Prime!" said Bunter. "Jolly nearly as good as we have at Bunter Court. You can get some more, Wells. You might bring a cake, too. If there's any jam tart, you can bring it. And—"

"You fat chump!" roared Bob. "Tell us about Quelch!"

It was utterly amazing to the Famous Five to hear that it was their missing Form-master who had been the man in the vault. They had not been able to form any surmise on the subject, except that it seemed probable that some man had been hiding there. Quelch, certainly, had been parked somewhere by the kidnappers—but they had never dreamed that it was anywhere at hand—much less that that was the secret of the moat house. Indeed, they could hardly believe it now that Bunter told them.

"Oh! Yes! All right!" gasped Bunter. His voice came muffled through the last mince pie. "I've got a message—Quelch said tell you fellows as soon as I saw you, and you'd let Ferrers Locke know—"

"Cough it up!" said Drake quietly.

"All right. I say, is Wells going to be all night about that cake? When a fellow's famished, I think—"

"What did Quelch say, you owl?" hooted Wharton.

"He told me to tell you, and you'd let Locke know!" said Bunter, with an anxious eye on the door for Wells and the cake. "He said that the man who kidnapped him—that man in the mask, I suppose—he said he was a cracksmen called Slim Jim—remember the fellow that Vernon-Smith—"

"Yes, yes; get on!"

"All right! You might ring the

bell, if Wells is going to be an hour fetching that cake. Quelch said the cracksmen had kidnapped him because he had seen him with his mask off and could identify him—see? He said that I was to tell you, and you'd let Locke know, as Locke's looking for him— But I say, see if Wells is coming, will you? I'm hungry."

Wells arrived with a cake and a large segment of jam tart.

A happy smile overspread Billy Bunter's grubby visage. He restarted after the brief interval.

The juniors gazed at Bunter. They had almost doubted whether the fat Owl had only dreamed that Quelch was in the vault. But that message from Quelch settled the matter. Jack Drake, at least, knew that Ferrers Locke was already sure that that had been the motive for the kidnapping.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" said Bob. "Poor old Quelch—old Quelch only half a mile away from here, all the time—it's jolly queer—"

"The queerfulness is terrific."

"Well, they had to park him somewhere!" said Harry. "We knew he'd been taken a distance, and this is close on a hundred miles. So that's why they didn't care whether Bunter told us what he knew or not—now they've got him away, they don't care if Mr. Locke learns that he was there. If that fat ass hadn't butted in and caused them to change their plans, we might have found poor old Quelch—"

"Pretty certain!" said Bob. "It was a near thing, as it was. I say, Drake—"

But Drake had slipped away. He was already on the telephone, calling up John Robinson at Greyfriars School, with startling news for the Head's new chauffeur.

Ferrers Locke was at Wharton Lodge at an early hour in the morning. But there was nothing that the Baker Street detective could do. A postcard, in print characters, with a London postmark, was delivered at Wharton Lodge that day, telling where Bunter was to be found—an item of information that was superfluous now, but which showed that the kidnappers had had no knowledge of how narrowly they had escaped at the moat house.

Locke's intensive examination of the deserted caravan and the hidden vault told him nothing—the birds had flown, and what direction they had taken remained unknown, and no clue had been left behind.

The kidnapped Remove master was still a prisoner in the hands of the kidnappers—where it was impossible to surmise—though with just a spot of luck, Harry Wharton & Co. certainly would have found him, when they discovered the secret of the hidden vault.

THE END.

(Look out for more exciting situations in: "SMITHY'S SECRET WEAPON!" next Saturday's super-story of Harry Wharton & Co.)

## "MAGNET" PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging views on matters of mutual interest. If you wish to reply to a notice published here you must write to the Pen Pal direct. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to the MAGNET, Pen Pals, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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A. Smith, 25, Wingfield Road, Lower Knowle, Bristol, 4; 15-15; electricity, dramatics, books, and newspapers; New Zealand, S. Africa, and U.S.A.

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MAGNET  
PEN PALS' COUPON  
6-1-40



Bunter was hungry—but not so hungry as he had been. While Quelch was pacing the vault, or comforting himself with a book, Billy Bunter had scuffed the whole available supply of grub unnoticed by Quelch. It was little enough, too. Bunter thought, but at the same time he was feeling uneasy. He hoped that Quelch would not want another meal before the hooded man came again with a fresh lot.

So when his Form-master addressed him, Bunter quaked. He dreaded that Quelch was about to raise the subject of grub!

To his great relief, Quelch did not! "Listen to me carefully, Bunter," said the Remove master. "I have been thinking this matter over. I have no doubt that those rascals will remove me to a safer place as soon as they can prepare such a place, now that you have discovered me here."

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunter, not very deeply interested.

"The letter you have written to Wharton will, doubtless, allay suspicion for some time," said Mr. Quelch. "But it must transpire before very long that you are missing, and you will be searched for. Sooner or later, the search is certain to take this direction. I do not think that I shall remain here very long, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey! Won't you, sir?" squeaked Bunter, in dismay. "I-I don't want to be left alone here, sir! It would be awful to be left here alone! It's not so bad so long as somebody's with a chap—even you, sir!"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. "I—I mean—"

"Be silent, you stupid boy, and listen! I shall certainly be removed from here before long, and I am powerless to resist those ruffians. You are nothing to them—they only desire to be rid of you. You will certainly be released, or, at all events, left here to be found."

"Oh, good!" said Bunter, brightening up. "Whether Mr. Quelch remained a prisoner in the hands of the kidnappers or not was really immaterial so long as William George Bunter didn't!"

"Now, Bunter, I have little or no hope of release, but your release is certain as soon as they can get rid of you. I shall, therefore, tell you what I can for you to inform Mr. Ferrers Locke to assist him in his search—and you must try to remember what I tell you."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I have been kidnapped," continued Mr. Quelch, "by the thief and cracksmen who is called Slim Jim. You have heard of that man, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir! That's the man Smithy ran into one night, at Greyfriars—"

"Precisely! This man's appearance is utterly unknown," said Mr. Quelch. "But I have seen his face, Bunter, with the mask off, and can identify him. It is for this reason that I am kept a prisoner, to ensure the rascal's safety."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"This knowledge may be useful to The MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,664.

Mr. Locke, went on the Remove master. "He may, perhaps, have guessed already that that was the cause of the kidnapping—I cannot say. At all events, you will tell him, from me, Bunter, that such is the case—that my kidnapper is Slim Jim, the cracksmen, and that he has kidnapped me because I am the only man who can identify him. If Mr. Locke can find that man it will lead to my release. Do you understand?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Any letter I may write would be taken from you, before you were released," said Mr. Quelch. "That would be useless. But you will remember what I have told you, Bunter! Tell your friends, Wharton and the others, as soon as you see them again, lest it should slip your memory. They will see that Mr. Locke is informed—they are more sensible than you."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Make it a special point, Bunter, to remember this, and repeat it as soon as you are free," said Mr. Quelch. "It may be of material assistance in the search for me. It may lead to your Form-master returning to the school for the coming term. Bunter!" added Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" said Bunter, blinking at him. He did not seem overjoyed at that prospect, as he ought to have been.

"We're getting on all right with Mr. Lamb, sir—"

"What? Who is Mr. Lamb?"

"The new art master, sir. He took the Remove while you were away, up to breakfast. You—you needn't worry about us, sir—we get on fine with Mr. Lamb!"

Mr. Quelch looked very expressively at the fat member of his Form.

"If I had my cane here, Bunter, I should cane you," he said.

"Oh, crikey!"

"Now be silent, or I shall box your ears!"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter backed away, removing his fat ears to a safe distance.

Quelch seemed to be shirty about something—Bunter did not know what.

Then, to his horror, Mr. Quelch approached the table on which the food had been laid.

Quelch gave that table a puzzled glance.

He did not, fortunately, share Billy Bunter's gargantuan appetite. But he had to eat sometimes. Now he was ready for a meal. But the meal seemed difficult to spot.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch. "Have you removed the eatables from this table, Bunter? Everything seems to have disappeared."

"Eh? Oh! No, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It wasn't me, sir!"

"What have you done with them, Bunter?"

"What on earth's up?" asked Bob Cherry.

It was morning at Wharton Lodge, and the Greyfriars fellows were looking over letters in the hall after breakfast.

Harry Wharton had opened one postmarked "Redgate," addressed in a hand that was strange to him. Its contents seemed to have amazed him.

"Well, this beats it!" said the captain of the Remove blankly. "This letter is from Mr. Bunter—"

"Bunter's pater?" asked Nugent, if he's written—"

"He hasn't been ill—"

"Bunter said—"

"Dear Master Wharton—A parcel having arrived for my son William, I opened it in his absence, and was surprised to find that it came from the friends with whom he is passing the Christmas vacation. I cannot quite understand this, or the reference to my illness, as I certainly have not been ill. If William has left you, no doubt he has gone to stay with other friends, and doubtless you may have misunderstood his intentions. At all events he has not returned home. I think William had some idea of passing a part of the holidays with a school friend, who is, I gather from what William has said, very much attached to him, named Maulverer.

"As he is not at home, I have handed the cake to William's brother Samuel and sister Bessie, who desire me to convey their thanks.

"Yours sincerely,

"W. S. BUNTER."

The juniors read that letter through, and then looked at one another.

Five faces expressed blank amazement. One face was very serious—that of Jack Drake.

"Well, that beats Bunter!" said Bob Cherry. "What did the fat ass want to pull our leg for with his letter?"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry. "He said distinctly in his letter that he had to rush off home because his father was ill."

"And all the while he only cleared off to land himself on old Mauly!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Of course, Bunter always tells fibs—but what the thump did he tell that fib for?"

"The fibfulness is terrific, but the whyfulness is not clear!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"He never went home, and his pater's not ill!" said Frank Nugent. "That ass, Lamb, must have been mistaken about seeing him get into the Redgate train."

"Must have been!" said Bob. "Lamb's an ass, anyhow! Still, he never said he was sure—only that he had seen a fat chap in specs—"

"Yes; but we thought—"

"Must have been another porpoise rolling about, unless Lamb dreamed it," said Bob. "Bunter would want quite a different train, if he was heading for Mauly's place in Hampshire—and he couldn't have started so late, either, on a long trip like that."

"It's a queer business," said Harry Wharton slowly. "What Lamb told us made us give up looking for Bunter—and now it turns out that

the silly ass must have been mistaken, and it wasn't Bunter he saw. Why, if we hadn't sent that cake we should have supposed that Bunter was at home, and never thought about it—and now—"

"Well, he's all right, I suppose, wherever he is!" said Bob. "I expect poor old Mauly's landed with him!"

"I'm not so sure of that!" said Harry. "I can't make this out, and it seems a queer business to me. What do you think, Drake?"

All the Famous Five looked at Ferrers Locke's boy assistant. It was clear from Drake's expression that he, as well as the captain of the Remove, thought that it was a queer business.

"I think," said Drake quietly, "that something's happened to Bunter."

"But what—how—?" ejaculated Bob.

"Wharton got a letter from him, you know," said Nugent.

"I know. But—that's what makes me think that something must have happened," said Drake. "Bunter's no end of a fibber, as we know, but it's not sense his writing that letter if he was only changing his quarters for the rest of the holidays. And—that's what I was thinking of," said Harry. "That letter from Bunter was posted at Redgate, near his home, either late at night or very early in the morning. And—"

"And that looked like a certainty that Bunter was there late on Tuesday night, as we supposed!" said Drake.

"It did. But—"

"But he was not there. He hasn't been home, and he never made a train journey back to Redgate to post a letter that he could have dropped into the nearest pillar-box."

"Not likely!" said Bob.

"We know now that Bunter never went home. That means that he never went back to Redgate at all. It was not Bunter who posted the letter that came from him on Wednesday."

"It was his fib—"

"And his spelling," said Johnny Bull. "The letter was genuine, Drake!"

said Harry Wharton.

"Yes. Bunter wrote it," agreed Drake. "But we want to know why—and where. He wrote it—why, we don't know yet—somebody else made a trip on a train to post it!"

"But—why?" ejaculated Bob.

"Only one reason that I can see. He, whoever he was, wanted us to believe that Bunter had gone home—so that he would not be inquired for, or searched for, in this locality," answered Drake.

"You mean that somebody made Bunter write that letter?" exclaimed Johnny Bull blankly.

"It looks like it!"

"But who? Why?" gasped Nugent. "Who the dickens—"

Why the thump—"

The Famous Five gave the boy detective started looks. The deep

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The bearded man made a movement towards Fisher T. Fish. That was more than enough for the American junior. He revolved on his axis, and flew—with almost the speed of light!

"Bunter hasn't gone home!" gasped Wharton.

"Wha-a-t?"

"But his letter—"

"What the merry thump—"

"Blessed if I can make it all out!" said Harry. "Look at the letter, you fellows—especially you, Drake. Looks as if a giddy detective is wanted here."

In great surprise, the juniors gathered round to read the letter from Mr. Bunter.

Bunter, so far as they knew, had gone home. It had been on Tuesday that he had made his sudden departure. On Wednesday, his letter had been received, and the cake had been dispatched to comfort him. On Thursday he should have received that cake at Bunter Villa, and scuffed the same. Now, on Friday

"Yaroooh!"

Smack!

"Oh, crikey! Yoohoop!"

Mr. Quelch, fortunately, had had a pocket edition of Euripides in his pocket when he was kidnapped. It had already afforded him great comfort during his imprisonment. Now he turned to it for more comfort—in lieu of a meal—while Billy Bunter rubbed two fat, crimson, burning ears, and glared at him with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

STARTLING!

HARRY WHARTON stared. He stared with wide-open eyes.

He looked so astonished, that his comrades all looked at him astounded, too.

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