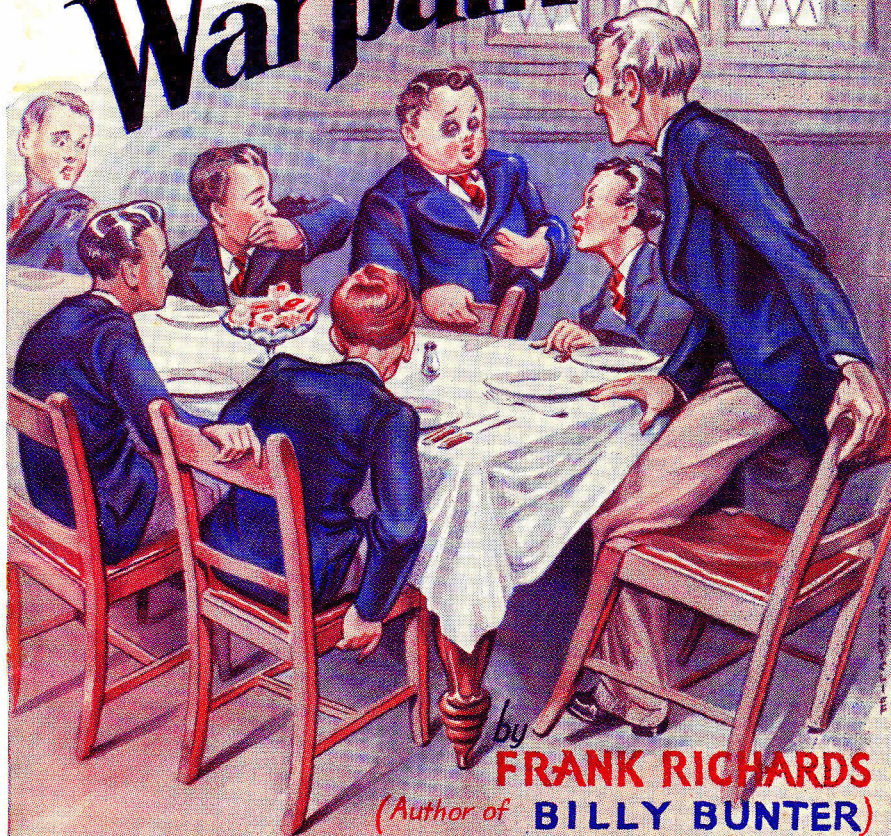


Mascot

SCHOOLBOY SERIES No. 2

Bunny Binks on the Warpath



by

FRANK RICHARDS

(Author of **BILLY BUNTER**)

A COMPLETE 'BOB HOOD & CO.' STORY

4½^D

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CHAPTER I

BOOT FOR BUNNY!

HARRY VANE, the new fellow in the Topham Remove, came into his study, with a springy step and a cheery face. It was a bright and sunny day, and the new fellow at Topham was feeling bright and sunny too.

But as he stepped into "Top Study," the cheery expression on his face faded a little.

He had heard, as he came, two voices in the study: the rather deep and pleasant tones of Bob Hood, captain of the Remove; and the squeak of Bunny Binks, the fattest and fatheadedest fellow at Topham or anywhere else.

Both died away as he entered. Grim silence greeted him. Bob Hood, who was sitting on the corner of the study table, swinging long legs, carefully avoided looking at him. Bunny Binks did look at him—but it was with a glance of ineffable scorn from the depths of the study armchair.

Neither had a word to say to the new junior. Only too clearly, the new junior was not wanted in Top Study at Topham.

Harry Vane looked from one to the other. Bunny's silence did not worry him. Bunny Binks was seldom silent: his squeaky voice generally ran on and on and on. Never was silence so golden, as when Talbot Howard Binks ceased to wag his podgy chin. But Bob Hood was a different proposition. The new fellow at Topham wanted to be on friendly, or at least civil, terms, with his study-mates; at all events with one of them. There was no real reason, so far as he could see, why Bob Hood should "bar" him, and he certainly did not want to bar Bob.

"Look here, Hood—!" he exclaimed, rather sharply.

Bob did not "look there." He gazed at the window, as if deeply interested in a distant view of the Topham playing-fields and the river winding beyond.

"Deaf?" asked Vane.

No reply.

"Or dumb?"

Bob Hood seemed both deaf and dumb, though a faint grin dawned upon his good-tempered face. There was a fat chuckle from Bunny.

"Wash it out, you new smug," he squeaked. "We don't want you in this study, and we're not going to speak to you. Bob ain't, and I ain't? See? You won't get a single syllable out of either of us."

"You fat chump," said Bob Hood. "You're talking to him now. Shut up."

"I'm only telling him that we ain't speaking to him—"

"Dry up!"

"How long are you going to keep this rot up?" asked Harry. "Mr. Carfax planted me in this study. Do you want me to go to Carfax and tell him to think again? Why not make the best of it? You get the best of the bargain, anyhow."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Bob: forgetting for the moment that he was not speaking to the new fellow.

"Well, you get my company!" said Vane. "I only get yours!"

"Why, you cheeky blot—!" exclaimed Bob, indignantly.

"Who's talking to him now?" squeaked Bunny Binks.

Bob Hood shut down. He clamped his lips shut, stared from the window, and ignored the latest addition to the Topham Remove.

Harry Vane shrugged his shoulders. He crossed to the study cupboard. He had come up to Number Eight study to tea. Hitherto, he had tea'd in the hall, owing to the grim and inhospitable atmosphere in his study. But every fellow in the Remove tea'd in his study when funds ran to it: and Vane had made up his mind that he was going to do the same—even if he ate his meal in dead silence. That day a handsome cake had arrived from the old folks at home: which he was more than willing to whack out with his study-mates if they cared to stand in. If they didn't, they could stand out!

He threw open the cupboard door. There were various things in the study cupboard: chiefly crockery and utensils. To Vane's surprise, there was no sign of the big plum cake that he had deposited there a few hours ago. Not even a crumb remained to indicate that it ever had been there.

But when he looked round from the cupboard he spotted a few crumbs. They were sticking to the fat face of Talbot Howard Binks. Under his suspicious stare, Bunny instinctively drew a fat hand across a capacious mouth, wiping away the clues to a surreptitious feast.

"Where's my cake?" asked Vane, quietly.

No reply.

"You've larked with me a good deal, since I came to this school," said Harry. "If this is another lark, well and good, But I want the cake for tea—I don't happen to have anything else. So tell me what you've done with it."

"You smeary smug!" said Bob, breaking his silence. "Do you think I'd touch your mouldy cake with a barge-pole?"

"I think Binks would, with something not quite so long as a barge-pole," answered Harry. "A fat jaw, for instance, and the widest mouth at Topham. If you haven't shifted the cake, Binks has. I left it here."

Bob Hood gave his fat study-mate a grim look.

"You pernicious pirate," he said, "have you been scoffing that smear's tuck?"

"Me!" said Bunny. "I can get all the cakes I want from Binks Park, I hope. As if I'd touch his cake. I've never even seen his cake—if he had one! I don't believe he had."

"You were in the study when I parked it here," said Harry.

"Was I?" yawned Bunny. "I wasn't taking any notice of you, if I was. I don't condescend to take any notice of you. Don't speak to me—I bar you."

"That's all right, if you bar my tuck too!" said the new junior. "But I want my tea—and I want that cake! Where is it?"

Bunny's only answer to that question was turning up his fat little nose with contempt. That did not cost Bunny much effort, for Nature had already turned it up almost as far as it would go.

"Well?" rapped Vane. "Cough it up, you fat frog. You can't have bolted the lot of it—it was too much even for you. Where's what's left?"

Bunny grinned. If the new fellow did not know that Bunny Binks could bolt a mere three-pound cake at a single sitting, he had more to learn about Bunny. But the fat junior did not deign to answer.

Harry Vane, like Brutus, paused for a reply. He had no better luck than Brutus. There was no reply.

Words having failed, he proceeded to action. He made a stride at the fat figure in the armchair, grasped Bunny by the back of a fat neck, and hooked him out of the chair. Then he shook him.

"Urrrrrrggh!" gurgled Bunny. "Leago! Urrrggh."

"Where's that cake?"

"Gurrgh! You're chook-chuck-chick-choking me. Leago! Make him leago, Bob!" spluttered Bunny, wriggling wildly in the new junior's powerful grip.

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Yooogh! Groogh! Oooch!"

"Chuck that!" rapped Bob Hood. He was off the table with a jump. He grasped the new junior's shoulders with both strong hands, and fairly wrenched him away from Talbot Howard Binks.

"Oh!" gasped Vane, as he went staggering across the study. He brought up against a bed—which was an ottoman in the daytime—caught the back of his knees on it, and sat on it with a bump.

"Urrgh! He, he he!" cackled Bunny.

Harry Vane sprang up, his face ablaze, and his fists clenched. Bob Hood's sturdy figure stood between him and the fat Bunny: and the captain of the Remove pushed back his cuffs, ready for action.

In another moment a fight would have been raging in Top Study. But Harry Vane checked himself in time.

"Will you stand aside, Hood?" he asked, as quietly as he could.

"No retorted Bob, "I won't. That fat image can't stand up to you—I can! If you're looking for trouble, I'm your man."

"Wallop him!" gasped Bunny. "I'll hold your jacket, old chap! Cheeky smug, making out that I've had his mouldy cake. He never had a cake!"

Harry Vane looked steadily at the captain of the Fourth. But he kept his hands down to his sides, and they were unclenched.

"I'm not going to scrap with you, Hood," he said, quietly.

"And why not?" grunted Bob.

Vane's face broke into a smile.

"I like you too well," he answered. "You're rather a fathead, and a pigheaded one, but every man in the Remove here seems to like you, and so do I."

Bob stared at him, rather blankly.

"Thank you for nothing!" he growled.

"Now about the cake—"

"Bunny says that he never had the cake. That's good enough for me. You're not going to lay a finger on him—unless you want a scrap."

There was a long pause. Harry Vane had a temper of his own, which he did not always find it easy to keep in complete control. He was strongly tempted to take the captain of the Remove at his word. But what he had said was quite true—he did like Bob Hood, and he knew

that he had not the least desire to plant his fist on the kind, good-tempered face under the unruly mop of hair.

He gave a shrug, and crossed to the door.

"Tea in hall for me again," he said. And he walked out of Top Study, and went along the passage to the stairs.

"Funk!" chirruped Bunny.

"Chuck that, Bunny," growled Bob. "The chap's not a funk—and I don't want a scrap any more than he does."

"Why not? You could lick him. You can lick any man in Fourth A or in Fourth B either."

"That's a reason for not scrapping with him, you fat villain," growled Bob.

"Well, I don't see it."

"You wouldn't!" grunted Bob.

"Cheeky smug, making all that fuss about a cake!" said Bunny. "It was nothing like the cakes I get from Binks Park. No marzipan on it—"

"What?" ejaculated Bob, staring at him.

"And hardly any plums in it, either," said Bunny scornfully.

"You fat burglar!" roared Bob. "Did you have the cake, after all?"

"Eh!" Bunny started. "Oh! No! Not at all, old chap! I never touched it—I never saw it when Vane put it in the cupboard—I was looking out of the window—I mean, I wasn't in the study at all. I certainly never touched it, and I hadn't just finished it when you came up to the study, and—"

"Why, you—you—you—!" gasped Bob.

The next moment in Top Study, as by the banks of Tiber of old, was tumult and affright! Wild yells and roars echoed from the study, to the accompaniment of the sound of a thudding boot. The yells and roars came from Talbot Howard Binks, as the incensed captain of the Remove booted him round the study.

"Ow! Yow-ow! Wow! Stop it!" shrieked Bunny. "I never had the cake! Besides, he's only a new smug—yaroooh! I never touched it—yow-ow-ow!—and it was only a mouldy old cake with hardly any—yaroooh!—plums in it, and I was going to give you some if you'd been here—and I never touched it or knew that he had a cake at all—I don't believe he had—and—whoop!"

Bunny roared frantically as the captain of the Remove landed a last good one. Then he dodged out of Top Study and fled for his fat life.

CHAPTER II

TROUBLE IN THE FORM-ROOM

"**O**H!" exclaimed Harry Vane.

He jumped clear of the form: a split second after sitting down on it. Every fellow in Fourth A—the Remove—stared at him. Mr. Carfax, who was at his high desk in the form-room, looked round, frowning.

The Remove had just come in for morning school. Harry Vane had noticed that Bunny Binks passed behind him, going to his place. But he had not noticed that Bunny had a tin-tack in a fat paw: and he never dreamed that Bunny, in passing, slyly and skilfully, landed that tin-tack, with the business-end upward, on the form where the new fellow was

about to sit. Bunny passed on—grinning—and Harry Vane sat down—for a split second!

Then he bounded up, with an exclamation what was almost a yell—to the general surprise and entertainment of Fourth A.

“Vane!” thundered Mr. Carfax. “Vane! What do you mean? How dare you make this uproar in the form-room? How dare you, Vane?” Carfax had a way of repeating his remarks, as if he fancied that they were worth hearing twice!

“Oh!” gasped Harry, “I—I—I—I sat on—on something, sir—”

“Do not be absurd, Vane! You are a noisy boy! I will not have noise in this form-room. You are a noisy boy, Vane! Sit down and be quiet.”

Harry Vane breathed hard and deep. His eyes glinted as he caught Bunny’s grinning glance. He was aware that he owed that sudden surprise to Talbot Howard Binks: and it needed only a word to turn the wrath of Mr. Carfax upon that fat and fatuous youth. He had no intention of uttering that word, however. Vane had not been many days at Topham: but he was aware that it was against all schoolboy manners and customs to give any man away to a “beak.” He had no desire to give Bunny away—but an extremely strong desire to kick him from one end of the form-room to the other.

That was not practicable, however: and he sat down again—with care this time. The tin-tack was brushed to the floor: and Harry sat rather uncomfortably. Carfax turned from his desk, and his sharp eyes gleamed again at the new junior.

“Vane!” he rapped. “Sit still! Why are you wriggling like an eel? Is this intended for impertinence, Vane?”

“No, sir!” stammered Harry. “I—I—”

“Be silent, and sit still!”

The new junior, with an effort, sat still. There was grinning up and down the form—the Removites knew why the new junior found it difficult to sit still, if Mr. Carfax did not.

The fat Bunny winked at Bob Hood, who frowned at him—without any effect whatever on Bunny. Bob Hood “barred” the new fellow, with or without reason: chiefly perhaps because he considered him too “fresh” for a new kid, and did not want him landed in Top Study. But he did not approve of Bunny’s methods of making the Topham Remove an uncomfortable place for the newcomer.

But Bunny was on the war-path. Bunny did not want the new man in Top Study. On his very first day at Topham, Bunny had told him he didn’t want him, and advised him to ask Carfax to change him out. And the new man, so far from caring whether Bunny wanted him or not, had only laughed at Bunny and his advice—and stayed—which was very irritating to Binks of the Remove.

There were many reasons why Bunny did not want a third man in Top Study. Bob Hood often had hampers from the farm at home: and Bunny did not want another sharer in the good things. Then, there was only one armchair in the study, which the easy-going Bob always let Bunny annex—and more than once, Bunny had found the new man sitting in it—and continuing to sit in it in spite of the most expressive glares from Bunny. Now he had added to his many offences by making a fuss about a cake, which had resulted in Bob booting the fat Bunny—a process that Talbot Howard Binks often deserved but never liked. And—most important of all—Bunny had discovered that he was a funk.

He had shaken Bunny, but—as Bunny told the fellows afterwards, in the jungle—had sneaked out of the study like a dog with his tail between

his legs when Bob got tough with him. It irritated Bunny to think that he had let the fellow shake him—not knowing him to be a funk! Now he knew, woe betide the fellow if he tried it on again! Bunny himself was a funk of the first water: but if the other fellow was afraid, Bunny wasn't! Bunny was prepared to face any foe who could be relied upon to turn tail!

The Remove were doing the *Aeneid*: and Harry Vane was called on to construe. He was quite good, and Mr. Carfax was even pleased to give him a word of commendation. At which Bunny whispered to Didcot:

“Beastly swot!”

Any fellow who knew his lesson was rather an object of scorn to Bunny. Bunny had no high opinion of fellows who worked. It was not the sort of thing that Bunny would do—if he could help it.

“Are you talking in class, Binks?” came a rap from Mr. Carfax.

“Oh! No, sir!” gasped Bunny. “I never said anything to Didcot, sir! I never opened my mouth, sir! You can ask Didcot, sir! He heard me—”

“You will construe, Binks!”

“On, blow!” breathed Bunny. He wished that he had not drawn Carfax's attention: for Bunny was in no state to deal with Virgil. Preparation, the evening before in Number Eight had been spent by Bunny in the armchair, disposing of a bag of toffees he had found in a Shell study. The lesson that morning was a beautiful blank to Binks of the Remove. At that moment he rather wished that he had put in a spot of work like the new junior—much as he despised a swot!

“Go on, Binks!” rapped Mr. Carfax, impatiently.

“Oh! Yes, sir! I—I've lost the place, sir!” stammered Bunny, to gain a few moments.

“You should not have lost the place, Binks! Go on from *At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens*” snapped Mr. Carfax.

“Yes, sir!” groaned Bunny. He gazed dismally at P. Vergilius Maro. What that verse might possibly mean, was a deep mystery to Bunny. He could have stumbled through it somehow, had he prepared the lesson. But he hadn't prepared it. It came new to him. And to translate unprepared Latin was a task beyond the powers of Talbot Howard Binks.

But he had to make a shot at it. Carfax's gleaming eye was on him.

“At—at—at pius Aeneas—!” stammered Bunny.

“Construe!” thundered Mr. Carfax.

“But pius Aeneas—!” whispered Bob Hood.

“Hood! You are speaking to Binks. Take fifty lines! Binks, if you do not immediately construe—”

“Oh, yes, sir! But pius Aeneas—!” gasped Bunny, able to get that far after Bob's whisper. “But—but—but pius Aeneas—per noctem plurima volvens—in the night taking many turnings—!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the Remove. It was rather dangerous to laugh in class, under Carfax's gleaming eye: but the idea of the pious Aeneas taking many turnings was too much for them. No doubt Aeneas was a good deal of a wanderer, and took many turnings in his time; and perhaps Bunny had that fact vaguely in his fat head when he made that desperate shot at a construe. But while it made the juniors yell, it brought to Mr. Carfax's brow a frown like unto the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner!

“Silence!” almost shouted Mr. Carfax. “Binks! What did you say? Binks, you have not prepared this lesson!”

"Oh, yes, sir," moaned Bunny. "I—I—I was swotting over it last night, sir. You can ask Bob, sir—I mean Hood—he knows how I ate the toffee—I mean how I swotted over prep. in my study, sir—"

"Vane! Translate that verse for Binks."

"Yes, sir! But the pious Aeneas, during the night revolving many things—"

"Now do you understand, Binks?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" Bunny gave Vane a glare of fierce wrath. "Yes, sir! That—that's just what I was going to say, sir—"

"You will write out that verse fifty times, Binks, after class."

"Oh, blow! I—I mean yes, sir."

Bunny Binks sat simmering with wrath after that. He had fifty lines to write, and that beastly swot, Vane, had construed the line without a pause—very likely the smeary smudge liked Latin! Bunny would gladly have punched his head. Now that he knew the fellow was a funk, he was jolly well going to do so—after class. But he could not wait till then to display his wrath and contempt.

While Carfax's attention was elsewhere, Bunny Binks scribbled a brief—a very brief—note on a slip torn from a fly-leaf. He passed it along, under the desks, with a whisper: and it passed from hand to hand till it reached the new junior.

Vane glanced down as the next fellow slipped it into his hand.

"For you!" grinned Flynn.

In surprise, Harry glanced at the fragment of paper in his hand. He stared as he read:

"BEASTLY PHUNK.

Sined,

T. H. B."

"Vane!" Mr. Carfax was looking in another direction: but he seemed to have as many eyes as Argus. "What is that in your hand? Give it to me at once." Mr. Carfax reached over, and jerked the missive from Vane's hand. "Upon my word! I will not have notes passed in this form during class. I have said so before. Why—what—who has written this? What boy in my form is capable of such spelling as this? Binks! You wrote this!"

"Oh, no, sir."

"It is in your hand!" rapped Mr. Carfax.

"It ain't, sir!" gasped Bunny. "It's in yours, sir! Why, you're holding it, sir."

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

"Silence! This boy's obtuseness is no occasion for laughter! This paper is in your hand-writing, Binks. It is signed with your initials. Stand out before the form, Binks."

"Oh, blow!" groaned Bunny. He rolled out dismally before the form, as Mr. Carfax picked a cane from his desk.

"Bend over that chair, Binks." Swipe! "That is for passing notes in form." Swipe! "That is for the spelling!" Swipe! "That is for untruthfulness!"

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

"Go back to your place, Binks. If you make another sound, I shall cane you again."

Bunny Binks crawled back to his place. He did not make another sound! He suppressed his feelings and was silent. But the glare he gave Harry Vane rivalled that of the fabled basilisk. Bunny had only one consolation. After class he was going to punch that obnoxious new man right and left, left and right, and right and left again. The fellow

being a funk, it would be easy—and the fat Bunny, bursting with ferocity, was going to have no mercy on him.

CHAPTER III ON THE WAR PATH !

“STOP !”

“Shift, fathead !”

“Yah ! I’ve got you now !” said Bunny.

“Go it, Bunny !” came a yell from a crowd of fellows in the “Jungle” —the junior day-room at Topham School. “Ha, ha, ha ! Go it, fatty !”

Bunny was “going it.”

Third hour was over, which ended school for the morning. Harry Vane was in the day-room, where he was not feeling exactly easy : for as Bob Hood, the captain of the Remove, “barred” him, many others followed the lead of the form-captain, and he was left very much to himself. Feeling the atmosphere rather chilly, as it were, Vane was about to leave the Jungle, when the fat rotund form of Talbot Howard Binks stopped him in the doorway. It was quite a wide doorway : but the ample proportions of Bunny seemed almost to fill it from side to side. And on Bunny’s fat face was a look of deadly determination.

In break that morning he had determined to punch that funk : but Vane had gone for a walk in the School Field, and did not come back till the bell rang for Third Hour. He had done so in complete unconsciousness of Bunny and his warlike intentions. But to Bunny it was clear that the rotten funk knew what was coming to him, and was dodging him. If anything could have added to Bunny’s bursting valour, it would have been this attempt at escape.

But now he had, as he said, “got him.” The wretched funk was cornered in the Jungle, and could not dodge again. Bunny had him where he wanted him ! There was no escape for him this time.

“You stand where you are, you funk !” said Bunny, much bucked by the encouragements on all sides. “I’ve got you now ! You can’t dodge me this time.”

“Dodge you !” repeated Harry, blankly.

“Put up your hands !” said Bunny. “Get back there and put up your paws ! We’ll shut the door—we don’t want beaks or prefects butting in while I’m thrashing you ! I daresay you’d like Carfax to buzz in !” sneered Bunny. “You’d like a pre. to come along and stop the scrap ! Yah !”

“You fat chump !” gasped Harry.

“You’re for it !” said Bunny. “Yah ! Funk !”

“Give him jip, Bunny !” roared Flynn. “Bedad, ain’t it a fierce little barrel ?”

“Roll over him and squash him, Bunny !” yelled King.

“Ha, ha, ha !”

Bunny, as a warrior, did not seem to be taken very seriously in the Topham Remove. But he was taking himself very seriously indeed. He was bursting with pluck and determination and wrath. Achilles’ wrath, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered, had nothing on Bunny’s.

“Are you going to put up your hands,” jeered Bunny, “or shall I give you the coward’s blow to get you going, you sneaking funk.”

“You utter ass,” said Harry, “I should be afraid to hit you—”

"Don't I know you would," jeered Bunny.

"—In case I burst you all over Topham—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you cheeky smeary smudge!" roared Bunny. "I'll give you a few extra for that! I'll make you cringe! I'll make you—"

"Chuck it, Bunny, called out Bob Hood, "don't play the goat!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunny. "You can let him off because he's a funk, if you like, but I'm jolly well not going to. Not me! Look here, Vane, you smug—Ow! Leago my neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the crowd in the Jungle, as Harry Vane suddenly caught the ferocious Bunny by his fat neck, and sat him down on the floor of the day-room.

Bunny sat hard and heavy. He spluttered for breath. Harry Vane, smiling, walked round him, walked out of the Jungle, and went up to his study. Bunny was in no state, for the moment, to pursue the retreating enemy. Bunny was always rather short of breath. The bump on the floor made it even shorter. He sat and spluttered for wind, while the Removites roared with laughter.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Bunny. He heaved himself to his feet at last. "I say, that rotten funk took me unawares—ooooogh! He's run away! Blow him! I say, Bob, go and fetch him back, and see me mop up the Jungle with him."

"Fathead!" was Bob's answer. He did not share Bunny's opinion that the new man was a funk; and any man must have been a most remarkable funk, quite a prodigy in that line, to take flight from Bunny Binks. It was, in fact, clear to everybody but Bunny, that the new man was avoiding a scrap with the fat junior, because it would have been too ridiculous. But Bunny, perhaps naturally, did not see it in that light.

"Well, I'm after his scalp!" said Bunny. "He's run away—yah! I'll jolly well go after him—I'll show him! I'll jolly well kick him all the way back here! You fellows watch!"

And Bunny rolled out of the Jungle, leaving the room in a roar.

But Bunny, at all events, was in deadly earnest. Bunny did not like stairs—he had too much weight to carry up them—but up he went, with deadly determination. The new man had run away—Bunny had no doubt that he was skulking in the study, in a state of terror—and Bunny was going to root him out. Then either he could stand up to the warlike Bunny, and take his licking—or Bunny was going to boot him all the way back to the Jungle!

Bunny rolled along to Top Study. He would not have been surprised to find the door locked and barricaded against him! But the door was open, and he rolled in. Harry Vane was standing by the window, looking out.

"Got you!" gasped Bunny. The stairs had told on his breath. "Now, you smeary smudge, you're not running away again! Got you."

Harry Vane glanced round at him, laughing impatiently.

"You blithering bloater," he said. "Roll off before you get damaged. You've done your funny turn: now pack it up."

"Funk!" roared Bunny.

"O.K. Leave it at that!"

"Yah! Funk! That's for a start!" bellowed Bunny, and he rushed at the new junior, hitting out with both fat fists.

"Oh!" gasped Vane. That sudden rush took him a little by surprise, and both the fat fists landed before he knew they were coming. One bumped on his nose, the other on his chin: and there was a spurt of

red from the nose.

Smack !

Even with a pain in his chin, and the "claret" tapped in his nose, Vane could not make up his mind to punch the absurd fat junior. But he delivered a powerful smack at the fattest head at Topham : and Bunny, with a roar, went over as if he had been struck by a cannon-ball.

He sat and roared.

"Oh ! Ow ! Keep off. I say, I give you best ! Yaroooh ! Keep off, you smudge ! Ow ! Ow ! Wow ! Oh, my napper ! Oh, my eye ! Yoo-hooop ! Keep off."

"Ha, ha, ha !" roared Vane.

That one smack was enough for Bunny !

It was, undoubtedly, a hefty smack, and it had floored him. It had knocked out all Bunny's new-found courage. For it caused the fact to dawn on Bunny's fat mind that the new man was not, after all, a funk—not so far as Bunny was concerned, at all events. If he did funk the captain of the Remove, as Bunny supposed, it was clear—only too painfully clear now—that he did not funk the fat Bunny ! One smack was enough ! Bunny woke up, as it were !

"Getting up for another ?" asked Harry, laughing.

"Oh, crikey ! Keep off ! Wow ! Ow ! Help !" spluttered Bunny.

"Ha, ha, ha !"

Harry Vane walked out of Top Study, leaving Bunny to splutter.

He went along to the bath-room to bathe his nose—which needed it, after that tap from Bunny's fat fist. Talbot Howard Binks was glad to see him go—he gasped with relief as he went.

But he cast after him a look of deep, deadly wrath. Bunny had given up the idea of thrashing that cheeky smudge—wholly, completely, and totally had he given it up. But he longed for vengeance. He yearned for it. Bunny would have given anything—at all events anything that wasn't eatable—to get back on that blot, that smear, that smudge, who had smacked his fat head, and deflated him with that single smack.

And Bunny who had a vein of slyness in him that is often found in company with dense obtuseness, fancied that he knew how he was going to do it !

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK-EYED BUNNY !

"**B**INKS !" gasped Mr. Carfax.

"Bunny !" stuttered Bob Hood.

Every fellow at the Remove table started, and stared, and ejaculated. Mr. Carfax's eyes seemed to be popping from his face. Fellows at other tables looked round. Even prefects of the Sixth Form, at the High Table, looked at Bunny. Bunny, so to speak, had the house !

The school was at dinner. Bunny, generally the readiest for a meal, was for once a little late. Every other Topham man was in his place at his table, when Talbot Howard Binks rolled into hall. Mr. Carfax, who lunched when his form dined, at the head of the Fourth A table, was already frowning—Carfax required punctuality of his form, and he was prepared to scarify Binks of the Remove with his tongue. But when Binks of the Remove rolled in, Carfax could only gasp at the sight of him.

Bunny presented an uncommon sight—indeed, a sight unprecedented at Topham School. Bunny's fat face was adorned in a very unusual manner. Bunny of the Remove had two black eyes!

Fellows had had black eyes before at Topham, but such ornaments were very uncommon. Scrapping was seldom carried to such a length. Certainly any fellow with a black eye was booked for stern inquiry. And Binks of the Remove displayed not one, but two, of those unusual adornments. From one end of hall to the other, Bunny's black eyes were visible to all.

Carfax gazed at him almost dumbfounded.

Bunny rolled to his place. He was quite aware that all eyes were upon him. But Bunny did not mind that. There was no shyness about Talbot Howard Binks. He liked the limelight, which seldom came his way. But it came his way now—he was the cynosure of all eyes. He dropped into his seat at the Remove table.

"Binks!" repeated Mr. Carfax, in a gasping voice. "Binks!" Stand up! What do I see? Binks! How dare you present yourself in hall in this disgraceful state?"

"I—I'm sorry I'm late, sir," said Bunny, meekly. "I was bathing my eyes when the dinner-bell went, sir. They—they're rather painful."

"Your eyes are blackened, Binks! You have—bless my soul!—two black eyes! Disgraceful! Shocking! You have been fighting, Binks!"

The Remove just gazed at Bunny! The most desperate fighting-man in the Lower School had never been seen with a pair of black eyes. And Bunny was anything but a fighting-man. True, he had been on Harry Vane's track before dinner—but nobody had supposed that a fight would be the result. Yet evidently Bunny must have faced a terrific knock, if it had resulted in the blackening of both his eyes!

Bob Hood turned a grim look on Harry Vane. Bunny was, no doubt, an irritating ass; but if any fellow had given a helpless fat ass like Bunny such a terrific punch in the face, that fellow was a brute, a bully, and a coward. And who else could have done it—who but the new junior whom the egregious Bunny had pursued to his study with warlike intent?

Harry Vane's face was startled.

He had smacked Bunny's head in the study, as Bunny had richly deserved, and, as indeed, the only way of dealing with Bunny. His own nose was red and swollen from Bunny's punch—and a smacked head was a mid rejoinder. Surely that smack could not possibly have had this startling effect? Undoubtedly, it had been a hard smack. But it had landed on Bunny's fat head—not on his fat face. Could the shock of the smack have produced this? It looked as if it had—unless Bunny had been in some desperate fight since; which was highly improbable.

"Binks! You have been fighting!" Mr. Carfax was repeating his remarks, according to his custom. "You have been fighting, Binks. I demand to know with whom you have been fighting, Binks."

"I—I—I had a—a fight in the study, sir!" stammered Bunny. "I—I—I'm sorry, sir! I—I—I—"

Mr. Carfax's sharp eyes swept the Remove table. They fixed upon a slightly-swollen nose that glowed red.

"Vane!" he rapped. "You have been fighting! Have you been fighting with Binks?"

Harry's face became redder than his nose.

"No, sir," he stammered, "not fighting! I smacked Binks's head

in the study, sir—he punched my nose, and I smacked his head, that’s all.”

“Binks! You have been fighting with Vane?”

“Yes, sir!” mumbled Bunny.

“Have you been fighting with anyone else?”

“No, sir.”

“Vane! You are responsible for this! That Binks may have struck you the state of your face indicates. But that is no excuse—not the remotest excuse—for striking a boy with such brutal, unheard of violence, as to blacken both his eyes. This boy, Binks, is obviously no match for you physically. You can have had no difficulty whatever in defending yourself, even if he attacked you. Yet you struck him with such violence as to disfigure him in this shocking manner. You should be ashamed of yourself.”

Harry’s face flamed.

A murmur along the Remove table showed that all the juniors were in full accord with their form-master’s opinion. There was contempt in every face. Even Legge of the Remove, who was a big fellow rather given to bullying, and had a heavy hand with smaller boys, gave him a look of scorn. Legge had never done an act like this.

“I—I did not, sir!” panted Harry. “I never struck Binks at all—I smacked his head—and I did it only to keep him quiet, because the silly ass was punching me—I couldn’t let him go on punching my face, could I? I smacked his head—”

“Enough!” rapped Mr. Carfax. “Do not prevaricate, Vane! What you did is only too clear. You must have exerted your superior strength to the full, in striking this smaller boy. Nothing less could produce such a result. Mark this, Vane—I will not permit bullying and brutality in my form. That Binks may have provoked you is no excuse whatever. It was a brutal and cowardly act!”

“Hear, hear!” murmured Bob Hood.

“I am ashamed of you, Vane, and you should be ashamed of yourself. You will be punished for this brutal action. I shall refer to it later. Now say no more—I will listen to no more prevarication.”

Mr. Carfax wound up with a snort of contempt.

Harry Vane was silent, his eyes on his plate. His face was crimson, his ears burning. He could not feel that he was to blame—he had smacked a fat fool’s head to stop his antics—after getting a hefty punch on the nose. He had never dreamed that that smack could have such a startling result—he could not have believed it possible, had he not seen Bunny’s black eyes with his own eyes. Even now he could not understand it.

But there it was—and he was condemned by his form-master, and by the whole form, as a brutal bully who had knocked out a smaller boy—a fat and clumsy fellow who could not have stood up to a fag in the Third Form. A punch on the nose, or a dozen punches, would not have justified such an act, had it been intentional. And nobody but Harry himself supposed that it had been unintentional. He knew that he had only smacked Bunny’s fat head—but nobody else, seeing those two black eyes, even thought of believing such a statement.

He was glad enough when dinner was over, and he could get out of hall. As the boys went out, there were several hisses. In the quad Headley of the Sixth, the captain of Topham, came up to him, with a grimly knitted brow.

“It’s you who’ve been knocking about that silly little ass Binks, is it?” snapped the Topham captain.

"I smacked his head—!"

"Oh, cut that out!" snapped Hedley. "Are you asking anyone to believe that smacking a fellow's head would blacken both his eyes?"

"That was all—!"

"I suppose your form-master is going to deal with you," said Hedley. "But for that, I'd have you up in my study, you young fuffian, and give you a clean dozen of the very best. I warn you that if you keep on as you've begun, you'll get kicked out of Topham, and a good riddance to you."

With that, the captain of the school stalked away, without waiting for an answer. Vane was left with burning cheeks.

Three or four Remove fellows passed him—and hissed as they passed. Bunny rolled out of the House, his pair of black eyes showing up to great advantage in the sunlight. He glanced at Vane's crimson face, and grinned.

"Yah! Sneaking smudge!" jeered Bunny.

Vane gave him a look, and turned his back. He was strongly tempted to bestow another smack on Bunny's fat head: but he restrained that impulse, and walked away. He passed Bob Hood—biting his lip as he received a glare of scorn from the captain of the Remove.

For the first time since he had come to Topham, the new junior was feeling thoroughly miserable: and from the bottom of his heart he wished that he had never come to the school. But his pride came to the rescue, and when the bell called the Remove to their form-room, Harry Vane came in with his head erect, and a look of indifference on his face—apparently oblivious of the dislike and scorn written in every other face in Fourth A.

CHAPTER V

HARD LUCK!

"VANE!" Mr. Carfax rapped out the name like a bullet.

"Yes, sir!" said Harry, quietly.

The Remove, in their places in the form-room, hung on Carfax's words. The new "smug" was "for it" now. Generally, there was sympathy for any fellow up against the vials of wrath. But nobody in the Topham Remove had any sympathy to waste on a bully. Every man in the Remove, on the other hand, hoped that whatever Vane was going to get, he was going to get it hot and strong. Never had any fellow been so thoroughly unpopular at Topham.

"I have considered," said Mr. Carfax, "how to punish your ruffianly act, Vane—"

"I have done nothing ruffianly, sir!" said Harry, in the same quiet tone.

"What? What? How dare you make such an answer, Vane—with the boy before your eyes, showing the marks of your brutal violence!" exclaimed Mr. Carfax, and Bunny Binks rubbed his black eyes, and emitted a low moan, by way of endorsing his form-master's remarks. "I have decided, Vane, to give you Extra School for four half-holidays. But I warn you that if there should ever be any repetition of such conduct, you will be reported to Dr. Chetwynd for a flogging. You will find that this kind of thing, Vane, is not tolerated here."

Harry Vane opened his lips—but shut them again.

What was the use of repeating that he had merely smacked Bunny's fat head? Nobody was going to believe that two black eyes had resulted

from a smack on the head—Vane could not understand it himself, and to everyone else it seemed a reckless and palpable untruth. He sat silent : and Bunny Binks put up a fat hand.

“ If you please, sir— ! ” squeaked Bunny.

“ What is it, Binks ? ” asked Mr. Carfax, kindly. Carfax neither liked nor esteemed that fat and lazy member of his form, and he was often very sharp indeed with Talbot Howard Binks. But he was all kindness now.

“ If you please, sir, may Vane change out of Top Study—I mean, Number Eight, sir ? I—I’m afraid to be in the same study with him, sir, after—after what’s happened.”

Vane bit his lip hard. The astute Bunny was cunningly taking advantage of the present state of affairs, to get rid of the new junior from Top Study—Bunny was not the man to let his chances like the sunbeams pass him by !

“ I will certainly consider the matter, Binks,” said Mr. Carfax.

“ Oh, thank you, sir ! ” squeaked Bunny.

Then lessons began, and the matter was dropped. But Bunny winked with a black eye at Bob Hood. He had no doubt that he had gained the long-disputed point and that the captain of the Remove and his fat self would once more have Top Study all to themselves.

That afternoon Bunny Binks had an easy time in class. Mr. Carfax passed him over very lightly—Bunny evidently not being in a state for concentration on the acquirement of knowledge. As the fat Bunny loathed work in any shape or form, with a deep and deadly loathing, this suited him very well—and his fat face was cheery in spite of the pair of black eyes.

After class, Harry Vane went for his cap, intending to get out of the House, and keep out till tea-time. But a shower of rain had come on ; and he stood in the doorway, looking out moodily into the pelting drops. Most of the Remove went into the Jungle to wait for the shower to be over. Bob Hood came to the door and looked out—carefully taking no notice of the new junior standing there. He gave a grunt at the rain, and turned to go ; and Harry Vane, on an impulse, turned to him.

“ Look here, Hood—— ! ” he began.

Bob gave him a single glance, turned his back, and walked away to the Jungle. Vane was left breathing hard.

It was hard enough to be condemned by his form-master, and by all the form, for an act that had been unintentional, accidental, unforeseen. It was hardest of all to read contempt in Bob’s honest, rugged face. He wanted more than anything else to set himself right in Bob’s eyes.

But he hesitated to go into the junior day-room. The Jungle was crowded with juniors, all of them hostile : and he thought of going up to his study. Then a flash came into his eyes, his lips set, and he went directly to the Jungle. He had nothing on his conscience, and he would not appear to shrink from the public eye. With set lips, he walked into the junior day-room.

“ We had a fight ! ” Bunny was speaking, as Vane came in. “ I gave him one or two—then he got me between the eyes, and— ”

“ Why, you lying fat tick ! ” broke in Vane, indignantly. “ You know as well as I do that I never punched you at all— ”

“ Eh ! ” Bunny revolved on his axis, and stared at him. “ Oh ! You. I say, Bob, keep him off ! ”

“ I’ll keep him off fast enough, if he’s looking for trouble,” growled Bob Hood, his eyes glinting at the new junior.

Harry Vane glanced round at a crowd of hostile faces. Then he

fixed his eyes on Bob's scornful face.

"Look here, Hood, will you hear what I have to say?" he exclaimed. "I tell you, that fat fool rushed at me in the study, and punched my face, and I smacked his head, and he sat down. That was all. I give you my word."

"And a fat lot that's worth!" said Bob. "Do you think any fellow here is ass enough to believe that smacking a fellow's head would blacken his eyes?"

"Ink!" gasped Vane. "Ink! His eyes never were blacked—I jolly well knew that a smack on the head couldn't have done it—it's a spoof!"

There was a roar from the crowd of juniors. The fight seemed to be forgotten. Bunny Binks was the centre of attraction.

His fat face was smeared—with ink! His black eyes were less black than they had been—the black had been smeared over his face. Wetted by the rain, it was running down his fat cheeks in dark trickles.

"You thafe of the world!" gasped Flynn. "Yere eyes never was blacked at all, at all—you made them black to make out that the new man had done it——"

"Oh!" gasped Bunny. "I—I—didn't! I say they—they're really black—awful black—he got me right between the eyes—they—they went black—they—they——"

"You fat villain!" yelled Bob. "The ink's got wet, and smeared all over your face—you're marked like a zebra——"

"Oh! Has it?" gasped Bunny. "Oh, crikey! Oh, lor'! That beastly rain—I mean—I never—I didn't—I—I wasn't—I—I——"

"Scrag him!" roared Bob.

Only too clear now was the astute device of the fat Bunny for "getting back" on the fellow who had smacked his head!

Bunny's eyes were not blacked—but Bunny had rubbed black ink round them, giving them every appearance of black eyes. Not a fellow had spotted the trick—even the sharp-eyed Carfax had never dreamed of it—even Vane, amazed as he had been by the unexpected outcome of a smack, had not guessed. Bunny had got by with it with absolute success—till it rained! He had landed the new junior into trouble with Carfax—he had made him the object of scorn all through the Remove—he had booked him for a fight with the heftiest fighting-man in the Lower School at Topham—and it was all a trick, spoof from beginning to end! And now Bunny was found out!

Bob, his face as red with wrath as Bunny's, was black with ink, made a rush at him. Bunny bolted. With a speed that was really remarkable, considering the weight he had to carry, Bunny tore off the scene—just in time to crash into Mr. Carfax as he came round the clock-tower!

CHAPTER VII

BEASTLY FOR BUNNY!

"OH!" gasped Mr. Carfax.

He staggered from the shock, Bunny, with a splutter, reeled back and sat down at his feet. He sat there gurgling for breath, while Mr. Carfax bestowed a glare of warth upon the crowd of excited juniors. No doubt Carfax had observed fellows streaming in the direction of the clock-tower, and guessed what was toward: and had come to investigate.

"Boys" he thundered. "What is this? Vane—Hood—you are fighting—and the rest of you, standing here in the rain—you may be

laid up with colds—upon my word! Go to the House at once, all of you—this instant—and——”

Mr. Carfax broke off.

His eyes were on Bunny Binks' face.

He gazed at that face with almost unbelieving eyes. What the juniors had already seen, the master of the Fourth now saw. He was so astounded that he took off his glasses, wiped them, and set them on his nose again, as if to make sure that he saw aright. He found his voice at last.

“Binks! Upon my word! Wretched boy! What trick is this? What wretched deception is this? Your eyes are not blacked! It is an imposture! Upon my word! You have deliberately deceived me—misled me. Bless my soul! Binks! Tell me at once why you have played this miserable trick?”

“I—I didn't, sir—I—I mean, I—I wasn't! I—I—I didn't mean to pay out the new chap for smacking my head, sir—oh, crikey! I—I didn't think you'd be down on him and turn him out of my study, sir—never thought of such a thing! It—it—it was—a—a—a joke, sir! Besides, I—I never did it! If—if there's any ink on my—my face, I—I don't know how it got there, sir! My—my mind's a perfect blank, sir—I—I don't know anything about it, sir—I never did it, and I only did it for a—a joke——”!

“Upon my word! Go to my study and wait for me there, Binks. I shall punish you with the utmost severity for this miserable, this despicable deception.”

“Oh, crikey!”

“Go!” thundered Mr. Carfax. And Bunny, in the lowest possible spirits, went. Mr. Carfax cast a grim glance after him, and then turned to the new junior.

“Vane! I'm sorry that you have been misjudged, owing to that wretched boy's extraordinary trickery. Your punishment is of course rescinded——”

“Thank you, sir,” said Harry.

“All of you go into the House at once!” rapped Mr. Carfax, and the mob of juniors streamed off to the House, in the dropping shower, the Remove master following them, frowning. And he lost no time in repairing to his study—where Talbot Howard Binks, in a state of dire apprehension, awaited execution.

* * * * *

“Look here, Vane——” Bob Hood came up to Harry Vane in the Jungle, with a red face and a hesitating manner.

“Well?” said Harry, with a smile.

“I'm sorry!” mumbled Bob. “I thought—I—I believed——”

“So did everybody else!” said Harry.

“Well, you can't blame us—you yourself thought that that tricky little smug's eyes were really blacked,” mumbled Bob. “Even Carfax was taken in. You were taken in yourself, so you can't blame us. But—I'm sorry. Look here, I don't want that scrap to go on—if you don't.”

“Same here,” said Harry. He laughed. “Didn't I tell you in the study yesterday that I liked you too much to want to scrap with you?”

“Oh!” said Bob. “Um! Well, look here, perhaps I've been rather a pig about the study—that's all washed out, see? I don't see why we shouldn't be friends, and pull together all right in Top Study. I'm willing, if you are.”

"More than willing!" said Harry. "Jolly glad, in fact."

"Then it's a go!" said Bob. "And—oh, my hat! What's that?"

"That" was a sound of woe that echoed from afar. The Jungle was a good distance from Carfax's study. But Bunny Binks's voice was going strong on its top note, and it carried the distance.

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Yooop! Oooooop! Ooooh! Yaroooooh!"

Evidently Carfax was busy with the cane. Talbot Howard Binks was suffering for his sins. Bunny was going through it—and the Bull of Bashan, celebrated of olden time for his roaring, had simply nothing on Bunny. Bunny roared, and roared and roared. It was a sad and woeful Bunny that crawled away, at last, from his form-master's study, doubled up like a pocket-knife, after that swiping. And the fact that he richly deserved every swipe was no consolation whatever to Bunny Binks.

THE END