CHAPTER I

"IF Quelch goes out—!" said Bob Cherry, hopefully.

"He won't!" said Johnny Bull.

"He often goes for a grind on a half-holiday."

"He won't this afternoon, just to please us."

"Um!" said Bob, doubtfully.

"Not likely!" sighed Frank Nugent.

"The likeliness is not terrific," concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"If he did, okay!" he said. "But—." He shook his head again.

It was a knotty problem for the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

They were "gated".

"Gates", on a half-holiday, interfered very considerably with their plans for the afternoon. Quelch had "gated" them for a ramble out of bounds: and it was not really a very severe penalty: but it came very awkwardly for five fellows who were due to walk over to Cliff House for tea with Marjorie and Co. there.

As a rule, Harry Wharton and Co. were quite law-abiding youths, and would not have envisaged disregarding an order from their form-master. But

circumstances alter cases. On this especial occasion, they couldn't, if it could be helped, let the Cliff House girls expect them in vain. They had to keep that appointment, if they could. So, for once, they were prepared to pass the sentence of "gates" by, like the idle wind they regarded not—if it could be managed.

It could—if Quelch went out on one of his long grinds. After he was gone, what could be easier than to slip out quietly, unnoticed: and, on their return, to slip in, equally quietly and unnoticed—if only that gimlet-eye was at a safe distance?

It all depended on whether Quelch did, that afternoon, set out on one of those long grinds! But that would have solved the problem so happily, that it really seemed too much to hope for.

Bob Cherry glanced out of the window of No. 1 Study. Outside in the quad, it was bright and sunny.

"Just the weather for one of Quelch's long trots!" he said.

"Just!" agreed Harry. "But—"

"The butfulness is terrific!" sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Couldn't risk it if Quelch doesn't go out!" said Johnny Bull. "And—he won't, when we want him to."

"I say, you fellows."

A fat face looked in at the study doorway, and a fat voice interrupted. Billy Bunter rolled into No. 1. There was a cheery grin on Bunter's fat face, and to the surprise of the Co. he had a rather large and rather rusty key in a fat hand.

"You fellows going out?" asked Bunter.

"Yes—if Quelch does," answered Bob Cherry. "Can't chance it if he doesn't. What the dickens are you doing with that key?"

"He, he, he! You'll miss the joke if you go out," said Bunter.

"Eh! What's the joke?"

"That's the box-room key!" explained Bunter, holding it up for view. "I've just been up and taken it out of the lock. He, he, he! I'm going to catch Skinner—"

"Skinner! What the dickens—"

"I'm on his track!" said Bunter. "You know what he did—getting me into a row with Quelch—jolly nearly got me whopped. Well, perhaps he'll be sorry for himself, when he's locked up in that box-room for a half-holiday—he, he, he."

Billy Bunter chuckled explosively.

The Famous Five stared at him. They forgot their own problem, for a moment.

Bunter shows the key

"You fat ass," said Johnny Bull. "Is Skinner going to walk into the box-room this afternoon, to let you lock him in?"

"Likely!" said Bob.

"That's all you know!" grinned Bunter. "I jolly well know, if you fellows don't, that that cad Skinner goes up to the box-room to smoke cigarettes, and I jolly well know he's going to this afternoon, because I heard him tell Snoop that he'd only got two or three, and so he hadn't any to whack out, and Snoop said he was a mean tick, and that he'd better be careful that Quelch didn't catch him smoking in the study, and he said he wasn't going to smoke in the study, and—"

"You seem to have heard him saying quite a lot, you podgy Peeping Tom."

"I wasn't listening, if that's what you mean. I happened to stop and tie my shoe-lace while they were talking. I'm not the sort of fellow to listen to fellows behind their backs, I hope!"

"Hopeful chap, Bunter!" remarked Bob.

"I'd scorn it, of course," said Bunter. "But as I just happened to stop and pick up a pin—"

"As well as to tie up your shoe-lace?"

"Oh! I—I mean, I'd stopped to pick up a shoe-lace—I mean to tie up a pin—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I've got it in for Skinner," said Bunter. "He can smoke his two or three cigarettes in the box-room, and then he won't be able to get out again! He, he, he! Serve him jolly well right, what? He's too jolly funky to try climbing from the window, and he'll be stuck there till I choose to let him out, and that won't be in a hurry. He, he, he."

"He will kick up a row there—"

"Let him!" chuckled Bunter. "Everybody's out, on a half-holiday, and who's going to hear him, from the box-room?"

"Better not let him see you at it," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"I'll watch it," grinned Bunter. "I'm going to hide in the big cupboard on the box-room landing, and wait for him to go in. Then I step out and lock the door after him. Safe as houses. Will he be wild? Will he be as mad as a hatter? What? He, he, he."

The Famous Five laughed. Skinner, recently, had played quite a scurvy trick on Bunter: and this, apparently, was Bunter's method of "getting his own back."

"You fellows will miss the joke, if you go out," said Bunter. "But I say, you can't go out when you're gated, can you?"

"We're chancing it, if Quelch goes for a grind."

"He, he, he!"

"Well, where does the cackle come in, you fat ass?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Quelch ain't going for a grind," explained Bunter.

"And how do you know, you fat chump?"

"Because I happened to hear—"

"Bunter will always happen to hear something, so long as they make keyholes to doors!" remarked Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you think I'd listen at Quelch's keyhole—"

"Didn't you?" snorted Johnny.

"No, I didn't!" hooted Bunter. "I happened to hear him speaking to Prout, that's all. I was under Common-Room window, and the window was open, so I just happened to hear what they said. Quelch said he would be at work on his 'History of Greyfriars' this afternoon, and—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Sold!" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific."

What Billy Bunter had "happened" to hear, was a blow to the hopes of the Famous Five. If Quelch was going to get busy on that "History" of his, evidently he wouldn't be going on one of his long grinds that afternoon. That visit to Cliff House had to be washed out. To walk out, regardless of "gates", while Quelch was on the spot, was simply impracticable. Five faces registered dismay.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, scat!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"But I say, I may have to stick in that cupboard a good while—I don't know when Skinner will be going up. I'd like to have some toffee or something—so if you fellows have got any toffee—"

"We haven't."

"Well, if you've got a cake in the cupboard—"

"Nothing in the cupboard."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Bunter. "I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Help!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you lend me half-a-crown, and I'll settle out of my postal-order to-morrow. What about that?"

"Nothing about it! Cut."

"Make it a bob, then—"

"I'll make it a boot, if you don't take your face away!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter took his face away—it disappeared with the rest of him. The Famous Five were left with their problem: which looked now as if it had no solution.

"Quelch might change his mind, and go out, after all, in this jolly good weather," suggested Bob, always optimistic. "We don't get a lot of fine afternoons in December. If he changes his mind—"

"If!" grunted Johnny.

"The if-fulness is terrific!" sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

It was but a faint hope!

CHAPTER II

"SKINNER!"

Harold Skinner jumped almost clear of the box-room stairs.

In that spot, and at that particular time, the last thing that Skinner expected to hear, was the voice of his form-master, Henry Samuel Quelch.

He did not know, as Billy Bunter did, that Quelch proposed to spend that

afternoon on his beloved and interminable "History of Greyfriars". But, so far as he thought of Quelch at all, he supposed that the master of the Remove would be in his study, or in Common-Room, or gone out on a grind. Assuredly he never supposed that Quelch would be up in the Remove passage, heading for the box-room stairs at the end of that passage.

Skinner, with his two or three cigarettes in his pocket, was mounting the box-room stairs. He was going up to the box-room for a quiet smoke—which was one of Skinner's ways, and no doubt accounted for his pasty complexion. Quelch's sudden voice behind him was very startling.

Skinner was too cautious to smoke his smokes in his study, since he had been caught at it there. But the remote box-room was a safe retreat. Or at least it should have been so: and would have been so, but for the unexpected appearance of Quelch on the scene.

Skinner spun round, to meet a pair of gimlet-eyes that seemed almost to pierce him.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Yes, sir."

"Where are you going, Skinner?"

Skinner caught his breath. He knew immediately that Quelch was suspicious,— as he had reason to be. Skinner was cunning, but he had been caught out more than once. Certainly, a fellow could go up to the box-room if he liked—a fellow might happen to want something from a box there. For such a reason, Harry Wharton or Bob Cherry or Mark Linley or Lord Lauleverer might have gone up, and they would have had no hesitation in telling Quelch why. But Harold Skinner was an "old offender", and he preferred not to admit that he was going to such a secluded spot at all.

"Only up the stairs, sir," said Skinner. "I—I was going to slide down the banister, sir."

"It is against the rules for boys to slide down the banisters Skinner."

"I—I forgot, sir."

"You should not forget a rule, Skinner."

"Oh, no, sir! Certainly not. I'm sorry, sir."

"As you have not done so, Skinner, you may go."

"Thank you, sir."

Gladly Skinner went. The gimlet-eye followed him, down the Remove passage, till he disappeared down the stairs. Mr. Quelch was frowning. He did not trust Skinner, and he doubted very much whether the explanation the junior had given was a veracious one. Skinner, for his part, alarmed and irritated as he was, was glad that Quelch had caught him on the stair, and not in the box-room smoking his cigarettes—it had been a narrow escape for Harold Skinner.

Mr. Quelch stood frowning, for a long minute, after Skinner was gone. Then he ascended the box-room stair, still frowning. That afternoon, Quelch intended to spend some happy hours on his "History of Greyfriars", and he was very keen to get going on that attractive occupation. But duty came first: he was a schoolmaster before he was an historian! and he was a whale on duty. Fag-ends had been found in the Remove box-room, which indicated that some members of Quelch's form indulged in smoking there: which was very much and very severely against the rules. Quelch had to look into the matter: and he was doing so, before he sat down to that entrancing History. And if he found any young sweeps smoking in that box-room, the results were going to be quite painful for those young sweeps.

He had little doubt, if any, that he had surprised Skinner on his way up with that very object in view. Skinner's excuse had to be taken at face value. But if there were others, they were caught—and Quelch had a dubious eye on such fellows as Snoop, and Stott, and Vernon-Smith. Anyhow he was going up to investigate.

Somewhat slowly, for the box-room stair was steep, Quelch ascended. He paused on the little landing above to take breath. A small window there dimly illumined the landing, from one side: on the other, was an old cupboard that extended from floor to ceiling, never used unless for odds and ends of lumber. Mr. Quelch naturally did not imagine for one moment that that dark, dusty old cupboard was, for once, inhabited. Such an idea could hardly cross his mind. Not for a moment did it occur to him that his footsteps crossing the landing were heard, by a pair of the plumpest ears in Greyfriars School: faintly, it was true, through a thick oak door, but unmistakably. A fat Owl knew that somebody had come up the box-room stair, and was crossing to the box-room. Billy Bunter could not see anything from his dusky hide-out, but he could hear: and he grinned as he heard.

Utterly oblivious of Bunter, Mr. Quelch, after pausing a moment for breath, walked across the landing. The box-room door was ajar, and he pushed it open and walked in. As he did so, he heard a faint sound behind him, and glanced back to the landing. That faint sound seemed to have proceeded from the old cupboard: as, in fact, it had, as Billy Bunter had stirred in his hide-out, to brush away a spider that had settled on his fat neck.

However, after that glance back, Quelch took no heed. In the more ancient parts of the old building, mice might stir behind the walls, and there was no reason to suppose that the sound he had heard was anything more than that.

In the box-room, Mr. Quelch glanced about him.

No one was there! If Skinner had been coming up for a surreptitious smoke, he had been coming on his own. Quelch was, in fact, glad to find no delinquent:

Mr. Quelch in the Box Room

he did not want to have to punish Snoop, or Stott, or Smith, or any other reckless young rascal. It was, in fact, a relief to him. However, now he was there, he moved about the room glancing to and fro, in search of any sign of infraction of the rules. And he frowned a thunderous frown at the sight of a couple of fag-ends, and several burnt matches, in the old grate. Evidently, smokers had been there, and not very long ago: though he had failed to make a catch.

Then, as he stood frowning at those tell-tale relics in the grate, he gave a sudden start.

Slam!

That slam of the door was startling.

Mr. Quelch stared round at it.

He had left the door half-open behind him. Someone, unseen, had dragged it shut from outside, with that sudden slam.

"What—what—!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He stood staring at the shut door. As he stared, he heard the sound of a

key turned in the lock outside. Then there was a scraping sound as it was drawn out, and then a sudden scamper of retreating feet.

Quelch stood as if rooted.

His ears told him what had happened—yet he could hardly believe it. Was it possible that anyone, within the precincts of Greyfriars School, had the nerve—the audacity—the effrontery—the unparalleled impertinence,—to lock him in that box-room? Really it was unthinkable.

"Bless my soul!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

He walked across to the door. He tried the handle. The door did not yield. Evidently, it was locked on the outside.

Breathing hard, Mr. Quelch rapped on it with his knuckles.

Rap! rap! rap!

Echo answered. But that was all. Whoever it was that had locked the door, had scampered down the box-room stair, and gone.

Rap! rap! rap! rap! rap!

"Who is there? Who was that? Unlock this door instantly! Do you hear! Is that you, Skinner? Open this door immediately."

There was no reply.

Mr. Quelch realized that the locker-in was gone. Grimmer and grimmer grew his speaking countenance. Who had done this?

His first thought was of Skinner. Skinner knew that he was there, and no other Remove fellow had been about, when he came up. But he shook his head. It was not Skinner. It was evident that the key had been taken out of the inside of the lock, deliberately, by the person who had used it on the outside, and that must have been done earlier, with the intention of doing what had now actually been done. Whoever it was couldn't have known, at that time, that Quelch was coming up at all.

Who was it, and why?

Quelch's grim brow grew a trifle less grim, as it dawned upon him that, whoever had locked him in, did not know that it was he, Henry Samuel Quelch, who was there. This was some schoolboy trick: not as he had at first supposed, an act of audacity, of effrontery and of unparalleled impertinence! He remembered that faint sound he had heard from the cupboard on the landing, and he understood. That sound had not been made by a mouse. Someone had been hiding there, key in hand, to play this trick on some other fellow—perhaps on Skinner!—that was what had happened.

"Some utterly foolish boy—!" murmured Mr. Quelch.

It was clear enough to him now. He had been heard, but not seen, and he had been locked in by mistake.

It was a relief to realize that it was nothing more than a practical joke—

"Can you hear me? I'm locked in"

and not an act of unparalleled impertinence! But the fact remained that Quelch was locked in the box-room, whether intentionally or not. Whoever had been intended to be the victim of that practical joke, it was Henry Samuel Quelch who was the actual victim of it: and until the practical joker chose to return and unlock the door, he was a prisoner in the box-room.

Rap! rap! rap!

Quelch played a tattoo on the door with bony knuckles.

Rap! rap! rap!

"Can you hear me? Can anyone hear me? It is I, your form-master! I am locked in! If anyone can hear me, come at once."

But it was only too painfully clear that no one could hear. Quelch remembered that it was a half-holiday, and an unusually fine day for December: everybody would be out of doors. He thought for a moment of Harry Wharton and Co. who were "gated", and in consequence must—so far as Quelch knew at

least—be within the precincts. But those strenuous youths were not likely to be indoors on a fine afternoon. "Gates" did not exclude the football ground, and that was a likely spot, as they couldn't go out. Quelch had to realize that he was a prisoner till he was let out—or until someone might chance to come up to the box-room for something—a slender chance.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch.

He walked across to the little window and looked out. But Quelch was long past the age for acrobatics. He shook his head.

He paced the box-room.

He had to wait!

Finally, he sat on a box, and took his pocket Horace from his pocket. Quintus Horatius Flaccus was always good company! But for once, Quelch did not find Horace so delightful as was his wont. Sad to relate, he frowned, and almost scowled, at Horace, as if that ancient Roman poet had done something to offend him. Quelch could not be wholly consoled, even by Horace: and his feelings, as he sat in that cold and dismal box-room, grew deeper and deeper.

CHAPTER III

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! He's not there."

"Can't hear the clicker."

"Not a sound."

"Can he have gone out after all?"

"Oh, what luck, if he has!"

"The luckfulness would be terrific."

"Listen!"

Five fellows had strolled, as it were casually, by Mr. Quelch's study window. That window was partly open, as Quelch's window always was in anything like good weather. From the open window, no sound came from the study within.

All the Remove knew that, when Quelch was busy on his "History of Greyfriars", the click of his typewriter was audible in his study. Had that typewriter been in action, undoubtedly the sound of the keys would have floated out into the quad. But five pairs of ears failed to pick up a sound of the machine.

The chums of the Remove exchanged hopeful glances. Had the fine afternoon tempted Quelch out, after all, leaving the "History of Greyfriars" over for a rainy day? On the other hand, he might be consulting his notes, in which case the typewriter would naturally be silent for a time.

The window was too high from the ground for the juniors to look in. But they had to know.

"I'm going to see!" whispered Bob Cherry. "Just one squint in at the window—"

"You'll get lines for squinting in, if Quelchy's there!" said Johnny Bull.

"It sounds as if he isn't—I mean, it doesn't sound as if he is! I'm going to chance it."

Bob moved quietly nearer the window, his friends watching him. He grasped the sill, and drew himself up, and shot a rapid glance into the study. Had Quelch been there, and noticed him, it was probable that "lines" would have accrued. But Quelch was not there, so that was all right.

Bob dropped back, and rejoined his friends, grinning.

"Okay!" he said.

"Not there?" asked Nugent.

"Not a sign of him."

"Good egg! If he's gone out after all—"

"Might be in Common-Room, with the other beaks," said Johnny Bull. "Prout may have kept him jawing."

"The jawfulness in Common-Room is terrific", agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"Well, we've got to know," said Harry Wharton. "Look here, one of us can go along to Common-Room and ask Quelch a question if he's there."

"I'll go," said Nugent. "If he's not there, all right! But if he's there, what am I to ask him? Must say something."

"That's easy! Ask him whether 'parco' takes the ablative or the accusative. A thirst for knowledge like that will please him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent, grinning, went into the House, leaving his comrades grinning also. But they waited rather anxiously for him to return.

He came back in a few minutes.

"Okay!" he said. "Quelch isn't in Common-Room."

"Looks better and better," said Bob Cherry. "But perhaps we'd better draw the library, before we make a move. Quelch goes there sometimes to root among the manuscripts. If he's there, a fellow can have come in for a book."

"My turn!" said Harry: and he went into the House in his turn. He also came back in a few minutes, with a cheery countenance.

"Not there!" he said.

"Safe enough to cut," said Bob. "He must have gone out! Still, we'll ask some of the fellows whether they've seen him about."

"Can't be too careful," said Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy!" roared Bob. "Have you seen Quelch about?"

Vernon-Smith stared round.

"Yes," he answered.

"Oh, blow! Isn't he gone out then! Where did you see him?"

"In form this morning," answered the Bounder.

"You silly ass!" howled Bob. "Think we want to know whether you saw him in form this morning? Have you seen him later?"

"Yes, I saw him later—"

"Where, then?"

"At dinner."

Smithy, it seemed, was in a humourous mood. But the anxious five had no use for Smithy's little jokes.

"Kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.

The Bounder, laughing, walked away. A fat figure rolled up to the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Seen Quelch about, Bunter?"

"Quelch? No! I expect he's in his study—I told you I heard him telling Prout he was going to work on that rot of his. But I say, you fellows, never mind Quelch! I say, I've done it."

"You've done what, ass?"

"Copped Skinner!" chuckled the fat Owl, "I say, I expect he's yelling to be let out by this time. You can go up and hear him, if you like. He, he, he! You couldn't let him out—I've got the key, and I'm jolly well keeping it! He, he, he!"

"Bother Skinner, and bother you, you fat ass!" answered Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, Toddy—seen Quelch about anywhere?"

"Not since dinner," answered Peter Todd. "Want him?"

"Not a lot—in fact he's precisely the johnny we don't want. Look here, you chaps, Quelch has either gone out, or he's dissolved into thin air like that chap Mercury in the Aeneid. Which do you think is likely?"

"Gone out, I should say," said Harry, laughing.

"Looks like it," said Johnny Bull.

"Must be gone out," said Nugent. "We'll chance it, what?"

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

And that was that! Satisfied, at last, that Quelch with his gimlet-eyes was off the scene, probably covering the miles with his long strides at a safe distance from Greyfriars, the chums of the Remove lost no further time. In a quiet corner of the old Cloisters, they dropped out over an ivied wall, and vanished into space. And after a walk through Friardale Wood, there was tea at Cliff House, and all was calm and bright!

CHAPTER IV

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Don't bother now—"

"But I say—"

"It's calling-over, fathead! Can't you hear the bell?"

"Yes, but—"

"Scat!"

Five fellows were in a hurry! They had no time to waste on Billy Bunter. Time pressed. Moments were precious.

The bell was ringing for calling-over. Many fellows were in hall already, and others on their way thither. Harry Wharton and Co. were coming into the House at a trot, when the fattest figure at Greyfriars interposed.

The Famous Five had intended to get back from Cliff House in good time, with a good margin. As they were supposed to be within gates, it was obviously judicious not to risk being late for call-over. Quelch, however long his walk, if he had gone out on a grind, was certain to be back for call-over, for it was his turn to call the names in hall. It behoved the truants to be back before Quelch.

So they had intended. But the best intentions are not always carried out. The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley, as the poet has told us. Instead of coming in early, with a margin to spare, the Famous Five were barely on time for roll.

There had been pleasant chat at Cliff House over the tea-cups. Then, it having transpired that the fastening of Marjorie's hand-bag was broken, Bob Cherry had undertaken to repair it. Bob was a willing worker, but not a skilful one. The last state of that fastening proved worse than its first, after Bob had manipulated it. So Frank Nugent had taken it in hand, and as he had to set right not only the original defect, but Bob's handling of it, it had taken time.

And so it had come about that the Co. had left Cliff House later than planned. They had trotted all the way back through Friardale Wood, and clambered in over the Cloister Wall, breathlessly, just in time to hear the bell ring for call-over. In such circumstances, they naturally had no time to spare for William George Bunter.

But Billy Bunter was not to be denied. He grabbed Harry Wharton's arm, as the Famous Five were trotting on.

"I say, Harry, old chap—"

"Let go my arm, you fat ass!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently. "The bell may stop any minute—"

"I say, Harry, old chap," said Bunter

"Yes, but about Skinner—"

"Bother Skinner, and bother you."

"But I say, here's the key." The fat Owl held up a large key. "I say, it served Skinner jolly well right to lock him in the box-room, after what he did, you know, but I don't want to make him miss call-over—I don't want him in a row with Quelch, you know—and Quelch takes roll this time—"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry. "Mean to say that you haven't let him out yet, you fat foozling fathead?"

"Well, I wasn't in a hurry to clamber up all those stairs—I mean, serve him jolly well right to keep him there, after what he did. I say, you cut up and let him out, old chap, will you?" Bunter held out the key.

"Cut up yourself, fathead."

"Well, look here, I expect he'll be in a pretty bad temper, after a half-holiday in the box-room," said Bunter, uneasily. "If I let him out, he'll guess that it was me locked him in, see? I don't want a scrap with Skinner. Of course, I'd knock him spinning as soon as look at him, but—but—"

Bob Cherry stopped and looked back. Nugent, Johnny Bull, and the nabob, had already gone in.

"Come on, Wharton!" bawled Bob. "What are you stopping for? Waiting for the bell to stop, or what?"

"Coming!" called back Harry.

"But I say, old chap, I'm not going to have Skinner pitching into me, if I let him out—I say, you take this key, and go up—"

"No time!"

With that, Harry Wharton unhooked the fat paw from his sleeve, and cut on after his comrades. Billy Bunter was left to release his prisoner from the box-room, or to leave him there, just as the spirit moved him to do.

It was upon the latter course that the fat Owl decided. Really, he did not want his retaliation on Skinner to go to the length of making him miss calling-over. But still more he did not want an enraged Skinner punching him right and left when he was let out! He slipped the key back into his pocket, and rolled on to hall.

Harry Wharton overtook Bob at the door, and they followed the others in. Breathless, but on time, they joined the ranks of the Remove. They cast rather anxious glances towards the dais at the upper end of hall, where the master on duty would stand to call the names. To their relief, Quelch was not there. Generally, if not always, Quelch was punctually on time. But on this occasion he seemed a laggard. Prout, and Twigg, and Hacker, and Wiggins were there: but Quelch was not.

"Good luck!" whispered Bob Cherry. "The old bean's not come in yet, and he won't notice that we cut in at the last minute."

"The goodfulness of the luck is terrific."

The Famous Five were feeling at their ease now. There they were, in their places in the Remove, ready to meet Quelch's eyes when he came in to take roll. There was nothing to indicate that five "gated" juniors had been out of gates at all. So all was well!

The bell ceased to ring. Billy Bunter, last to arrive, rolled in as Wingate of the Sixth was about to close the door. The prefect gave him a look: however, he allowed him to roll on and join the Remove, and the door shut. The fat Owl gave Harry Wharton a reproachful blink.

"Look here, Wharton, it's your fault if Skinner cuts roll—!" he squeaked.

"Fathead!" answered Harry.

"You jolly well know that I asked you to cut up and let him out—"

"Blitherer!"

"Well, I never meant Skinner to cut roll, and it's your fault—"

"You fat ass," said Bob Cherry, "Skinner isn't cutting roll. What are you driving at? Skinner's here."

"Eh! Don't talk rot, Cherry—"

"Look, fathead!"

Bob caught hold of a fat shoulder, and jerked Bunter round, with one hand: and with the other, pointed to a junior who was standing between Snoop and Stott. Billy Bunter blinked at that junior, and almost fell down in his astonishment. Skinner, so far as Bunter knew, was still locked in the Remove box-room. Yet there he was!

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Is—is—is that Skinner?"

"Or his ghost," said Bob.

"Bib—bib—bib—but—but he's in the box-room!" gasped Bunter.

"Looks as if he isn't."

"B-b-but how did he get out, then? I've still got the key! He's too jolly funky to try getting out of the window—"

"How did you get out, Skinner?" asked Bob.

Skinner stared round at him.

"Out of where?" he asked.

"The box-room—"

"I haven't been in the box-room. What do you mean? I've been out of gates most of the afternoon—only came in ten minutes ago."

"Oh, my hat!"

The Famous Five chuckled. Bunter, evidently, hadn't after all locked Skinner in that box-room. He fancied that he had: but quite evidently, he hadn't.

Billy Bunter blinked and blinked at Skinner, feeling as if his fat head was turning round.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I did lock him in," he breathed. "I jolly well know that I locked him in and I've got the key in my pocket."

"Fathead! You locked nobody in—"

"But I—I—I did!" breathed Bunter. "I tell you I was in the landing cupboard, and heard him go in, and nipped out and pulled the door shut and locked it, and cut. I tell you I know I did."

"You unutterable ass, if you locked anybody in, it wasn't Skinner."

"Oh, crikey! Think a fellow went up to the box-room, and I got him thinking it was Skinner!" gasped Bunter as that possibility dawned on his fat mind.

"No, ass! The Remove are all here, every man in the form."

"But—but it was somebody—"

"Fathead! You fancied it—"

"I—I didn't! I—I did lock up somebody, and he's still there—he must be, as I've got the key in my pocket—"

"Rubbish!" said Bob. "But we'll soon see if anybody's missing, when Quelch calls the names. I wonder why he doesn't come in."

Others, as well as Bob Cherry, wondered why Quelch did not come in. Never before had Quelch been late for a duty. But he was now several minutes late, and still there was no sign of him. Prout, Wiggins, and Hacker were glancing at the door: and exchanging remarks. Finally, Prout spoke to Wingate, who left the hall: and everyone present guessed that the captain of Greyfriars had been despatched to remind Quelch that he was on duty.

But a few minutes later, Wingate came back alone.

"Where the dickens is Quelch?" murmured Bob. "Hasn't he come in from his grind yet?"

"Looks like it!" said Harry.

"Quelch is never late," said Nugent.

"He's late this time."

"The latefulness is terrific."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Prout's going to take the roll."

The prefects called for silence, and the buzz of whispering died away. Mr. Prout proceeded to call the roll, taking the place of the master on duty who was so unaccountably absent. Billy Bunter listened with intent fat ears, wondering who was going to be missing. Somebody, in one or other of the forms, had to be missing, since the fat Owl was quite certain that somebody was locked in the box-room. But, to his utter amazement, nobody was missing—every man in every form answered to his name. Nobody was missing,—excepting the master who should have taken roll: yet it was quite certain that somebody was under lock and key in the Remove box-room. It was a bewildered Bunter who rolled out of hall after calling-over.

CHAPTER V

KNOCK! Knock!

"Oh, my hat! Listen!"

"Somebody's there!"

"Kicking up a row, too—"

"The rowfulness is terrific."

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged startled glances. After calling-over, they had come up to the Remove studies. The fat Owl of the Remove was so positive that he had locked somebody in the box-room, that they thought it as

well to make sure: for certainly, if there was anyone locked in that box-room, it was high time that he was let out!

So they came up the Remove passage, and mounted the stair at the end: and then the sound of knocking from above impinged upon their ears. Someone in a room above was knocking on a door! That certainly, bore out Bunter's statement: though who it could possibly be, they had no idea. No Greyfriars fellow was missing.

Knock! knock! knock!

"It's somebody," said Bob, with a whistle. "Who the dickens—"

"That ass Bunter—"

"He's locked in somebody or other—"

"The house-porter might have gone up for something," said Nugent. "Anyhow, we'd better see."

"Come on."

The juniors hurried up the box-room stair. Knock! knock, came in greeting, louder now that they were near at hand. They ran across the landing to the box-room door, and Bob tried the handle.

"Locked!" he said.

Knock! knock! knock!

"That fat chump was right—he's locked in somebody," muttered Bob. "Goodness knows who! Hark!"

From within the box-room came a voice. The prisoner had doubtless heard the handle turn, and knew that someone was outside.

"Is someone there? Unlock this door at once! Do you hear?"

Five fellows jumped almost clear of the landing!

They knew that voice!

It was the very last voice they would have expected to hear. But they knew it. There was no mistaking the tones of Henry Samuel Quelch!

"Quelch!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Quelch! Oh, crumbs!"

"Quelch! Oh, scissors!"

"Quelch! Oh, holy smoke!"

Everyone had wondered where Quelch was. The Co. had supposed that he had not yet come in from a grind. Evidently, now, he had not gone out on a grind! For it was Quelch in the box-room!

"Quelch!" breathed Harry Wharton. "Oh! That born idiot Bunter—."

Knock! knock!

"Who is there? Open this door! Who is there?"

"It—it—it's us, sir!" stammered Harry. "Is—is—is that Mr. Quelch?"

"It is, Wharton! Did you lock me in?"

"Oh! No, sir! Certainly not, sir!" gasped the captain of the Remove. "We hadn't the faintest idea you were here, sir."

"Open the door at once."

"The—the key isn't here, sir—."

"Upon my word! Wharton, I have been locked in! Hours—hours—I tell you, hours ago, I came up, and some boy was hidden in the cupboard on the landing, and he locked me in—do you hear? I have been locked in this box-room for hours! From time to time I have knocked on the door, but no one appears to have heard! Some Remove boy locked me in—."

"He—he—he couldn't have meant it, sir!" gasped Harry. "He couldn't have seen you, sir—he must have fancied it was some Remove fellow—nobody would lock you in if he knew, sir—."

"No doubt, Wharton, no doubt! But he will be punished with the greatest severity for playing so foolish a trick, which has resulted in my spending hours —I tell you, hours—in this box-room! I shall cane him very severely indeed! However, what is urgent now is to release me from this room! Go down and find the house-porter, and tell him to bring his bunch of keys—one of them will fit the lock."

"Certainly, sir."

The Famous Five hurried down the box-room stair. In the Remove passage below they looked at one another, eloquently.

"That awful ass Bunter—!" breathed Bob.

"That benighted idiot Bunter—!" said Johnny Bull.

"Quelch wasn't gone out after all!" said Nugent. "Oh, my hat! He was locked in that box-room—."

"That terrific ass Bunter—."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"It's tough on Quelch," he said. "But—that fat idiot did us a good turn without knowing it. We couldn't have gone over to Cliff House if he hadn't copped Quelch thinking it was Skinner—!"

"We couldn't!" agreed Harry Wharton. "So perhaps it's all for the best —though I don't suppose Quelch would think so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hardly!" chuckled Nugent. "Not a whisper about Bunter, you fellows! Quelch will take his skin off if he spots him."

"Not a syllable," said Harry. "I'll cut down to the house-porter—."

"Bunter's got the key," said Johnny.

"Yes, but we'd better not know anything about that, fathead! Phipps will have a key that will work the oracle."

Harry Wharton ran down the stairs.

He rustled down the passage and passed the Juniors

Five minutes later the box-room door was open, and Mr. Quelch came down. He came down with a set face and glinting eyes. Seldom, or never, had Quelch been seen in such a "bait". He rustled down the Remove passage, and passed the Famous Five like a thundercloud. He disappeared down the staircase, and the juniors looked at one another.

"Did he look wild?" murmured Nugent.

"Sort of!" murmured Bob.

"The esteemed Quelch is terrifically infuriated!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There will be a preposterous row."

"That ass Bunter—!"

"Keep it dark," said Bob.

"Yes, rather."

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled up the passage. "I say, I've just passed Quelch on the stairs—he looks savage about something! Has he been up here?"

"He has, you benighted chump."

"Well, something seems to have upset him, from the way he looked," said Bunter. "I wonder what it was? But I say, you fellows, here's the key, if one of you will go up to the box-room. I tell you there's somebody there, though I can't guess who it is. I jolly well know I locked somebody in, though it couldn't have been that cad Skinner after all. One of you go up and let him out—."

"He's let out, ass," said Bob Cherry. "Phipps let him out with his key."

"Oh! Who was it, then?" asked Bunter.

"Quelch!"

"Eh?"

"Quelch!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter gazed at the Famous Five in horror. His little round eyes almost bulged through his big round spectacles.

"Did—did—did you say Quik—quik—Quelch?" he stuttered.

"Yes, ass!"

"Yes, blitherer."

"Yes, ditherer."

"So—so—so that's why he was looking so wild!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, you fellows, n-n-not a word! N-n-not a syllable! I—I say, kip-kop-keep it dud-dud-dark! Oh, crikey! Quelch! Oh, crumbs! Quelch! Oh, jiminy! I say, there'll be a row. There'll be an awful row! Oh, lor'! I—I—I hope Quelch won't find out that it was me!"

Harry Wharton and Co. shared that hope! It was really awful to contemplate what would happen to Bunter if Quelch found out. Fortunately, that hope was well-founded! Fortunately, very fortunately for the fat and fatuous Owl, Quelch never found out!

THE END