

I

BREAKING BOUNDS!

“Rot!” said Johnny Bull.

“Look here, Johnny—!” hooted Bob Cherry.

“I said rot!”

“My esteemed Johnny—!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“I said rot, and I mean rot!” said Johnny Bull.

“We shall be late for Mossoo!” said Harry Wharton.

“I know!”

“You want to be late for the detention class?” inquired Frank Nugent.

Johnny shook his head.

“No more than you do,” he answered, “but it can’t be helped. We were asses to forget the time, and come so far, when we’re due in the French class-room at three. We shan’t improve matters by breaking school bounds. We’ve got to go back the way we came.”

“It’s a short cut across the fields!” said Bob. “We cut along by the fence of the Cross Keys—”

“We don’t!” said Johnny.

“Sprint all the way,” said Harry Wharton. “Five minutes will see us clear.”

"That field's out of bounds," said Johnny.

"Never been out of bounds before, in your life?" inquired Bob Cherry, sarcastically.

"Sometimes," said Johnny, "but not in a quarter like this. Smithy was copped in that field once, and he spun a yarn about a short cut: but that didn't save him from getting six from Quelch."

"Now look here, Johnny—!" said four juniors together.

"Rot!" said Johnny, once more.

Johnny Bull looked stolid. Four other fellows looked exasperated. There was a difference of opinion in the ranks of the Famous Five.

They were standing in the frosty grass, on the bank of the Sark. On one side was the river, gleaming with ice in a wintry sun. On the other was a low hedge of frozen hawthorns. In the distance, among leafless trees, could be seen the roofs and chimney-pots of the Cross Keys: an unsalubrious resort strictly out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows.

It was a half-holiday: and on a half-holiday, as a rule, there was plenty of time to spare. But on this particular afternoon, these five members of the Greyfriars Remove were due for detention with the French master. Snowballing Coker of the Fifth in the quad was not a very serious offence: but when a snowball missed Coker, and caught Mr. Prout in the eye, it became serious on the spot. Hence detention for two hours, from three to five: in company with other delinquents.

Up to three o'clock, they were free as air. There was no reason why they shouldn't walk down the Sark: and they did. And finding that the ice was thick enough to bear, there was no reason why they shouldn't slide on it—which they also did.

Whizzing down the Sark, on the ice, they rather forgot detention. It was ten minutes to three when Harry Wharton suddenly remembered, and looked at his watch. And in ten minutes it was quite impossible to return up the river in time for Monsieur Charpentier at three.

But there was another resource. By cutting across the meadow intervening between the Sark and Friardale Lane, they could make it. That short cut would save well over half the distance.

But there was a lion in the path, so to speak—or rather, two lions. One was the fact that that meadow, adjoining the Cross Keys, was out of bounds. It was very easy, from that meadow, to climb the fence into the grounds of the Cross Keys, which fellows had been known to do. The other lion in the path was Johnny Bull, who was determined not to break bounds in that particular spot.

"Have a little sense," argued Johnny, as his comrades gave him exasperated looks, "suppose we're spotted in that field—"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob Cherry. "No prefects about."

"How do you know? Might be anybody about, on a half-holiday. We

could tell Quelch we were taking a short cut, like Smithy did. He didn't believe Smithy."

"Smithy was fibbing," said Nugent.

"I know that! That makes no difference. It's up to a fellow with any sense to keep out of suspicious circumstances."

"Oh, blow the circumstances," said Bob. "We're going to take that short cut, and we might as well go the long way round, as stand here chewing the rag. Come on, you men."

Bob Cherry made a move towards the hawthorn hedge.

Johnny Bull stood like a rock.

"Come on, Johnny!" urged Nugent.

"Get a move on, fathead!" said Harry Wharton.

Snort, from Johnny.

"You're captain of the Remove, Wharton, and Quelch's Head Boy. It's up to you not to kick over the traces, more than other fellows."

"Sermon may be taken as read!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "Johnny, old man, you talk like a picture-book: but we're not going to be late for Mossos, and get another detention. Two hours of French to-day is enough for me, and a little over: without landing another lot for Saturday."

"I tell you—!"

"My esteemed Johnny," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "the speechfulness is silvery, but the silence is the bird in hand that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks. Come onfully!"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"Here's a gap in the hedge," said Bob. "Come on! Three or four minutes' sprinting, and we shall be through into Friardale Lane. Coming, Johnny?"

"No!" snorted Johnny.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Your mistake—you are!" he said. And suddenly grasping Johnny by his stocky shoulders, Bob propelled him into the hedge, through the gap, and into the forbidden field. Taken by surprise by that sudden manoeuvre, Johnny Bull found himself on the wrong side of the hedge, before he quite knew what was happening.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed, laughing. Johnny Bull gave a roar.

"Let go! Let go, you fathead, or I'll punch your head!" He struggled in Bob's grasp, in the frosty field. However, he refrained from punching his head. The chums of the Remove did not punch one another's heads, even in the most exasperated moments.

"Lend a hand, Inky," gasped Bob. He had his hands full with Johnny.

"The lendfulness will be terrific!" grinned the nabob of Bhanipur. And his dusky grasp closed on one of Johnny's arms, and pulled him onward.

Johnny still resisted.

"Give him a push, you fellows!" called out Bob.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, chuckling, gave Johnny vigorous pushes in the back. Johnny Bull was sturdy and he was strong: and he was not going across the forbidden field if he could help it. But he had no chance in four pairs of hands: and he couldn't help it. The four rushed him onward, along the long fence of the Cross Keys, which extended from the riverside to Friardale Lane.

"Will you leggo?" roared Johnny.

"Not so's you'd notice it," answered Bob, cheerily. "You're not going to be late for Mossoo, old boy, any more than we are. Put it on."

"You're out of bounds now, old man," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "Better put it on, and get through, if you fancy that prefects are going to drop from the sky, or jump up out of the earth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses—!" roared Johnny.

"Same to you, with knobs on," said Bob. "Travel, old man—I'm getting tired of lugging you about. We're half across already."

Johnny Bull breathed hard, and he breathed deep. But he was in for it now: the Sark was left far behind: and going back was as long a trip as going forward. So he made up his mind to it.

"Let go, you fatheads!" he gasped, "I'll come! But if we get landed in a row, jolly well remember that I told you so."

"Put it on!" said Harry Wharton.

The juniors fairly raced along that fence. Johnny's chums, as well as Johnny, were quite aware that the consequences might be troublesome, if they were spotted by master or prefect in that forbidden field, close by the fence of the most disreputable "pub" in the neighbourhood. They were not the kind of fellows whom their form-master, Mr. Quelch, would easily suspect of "pub-crawling". Nevertheless, rules were rules: and Quelch was a whale on discipline. They were very keen to get through, and out into the lane that led to Greyfriars School.

"Here we are!" panted Bob.

There was a gap in the hedge on Friardale Lane. They came up to that gap with a rush. At the same moment, a Greyfriars senior walked into it from the lane. It was Loder of the Sixth—a prefect! The meeting was too sudden and unexpected for the rush to stop in time. Five juniors crashed like an avalanche into Gerald Loder, and he went spinning back into the lane, and crashed, and over and round him stumbled and tumbled five panting Remove fellows.

II

LATE!

GERALD LODER sprawled on his back, gasping for breath. Bob Cherry rolled on one side of him: Hurree Jamset Ram Singh on the other. Frank Nugent was strewn across his legs. Harry Wharton staggered in

the frosty hedge: Johnny Bull sat down in the gap. The sudden and unexpected collision had, for the moment, knocked out all concerned.

Both parties had been taken quite by surprise. Harry Wharton and Co. certainly, could never have expected to see a Greyfriars Sixth-Form prefect turning into that forbidden field from the lane. Loder of the Sixth couldn't have expected five Remove juniors to come bolting out, as he turned in. The result had really been inevitable.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob, as he scrambled up.

"Oh, crumbs!" panted Nugent.

The juniors were first on their feet. Loder of the Sixth sat up, slowly. He seemed rather winded by the shock.

"Sorry, Loder!" said Harry Wharton. "We didn't see you—"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, esteemed Loder!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Hope you're not hurt, Loder," ventured Frank Nugent.

Loder sat and panted and glared. The bully of the Sixth was not a good-tempered fellow, at the best of times. Now he looked in the worst temper ever.

"You young rascals!" he gurgled. He clambered slowly and breathlessly to his feet. His eyes glittered at the five. "You've just come out of that field—you've been out of bounds."

Johnny Bull gave a grunt. His foreboding had been well-founded: there was a prefect about, and the delinquents had been "copped".

"Only taking a short cut, Loder," explained Harry Wharton, without much hope that that would satisfy Loder. "We've hardly time to get back to the school for the detention class, and so—"

"Where have you been?"

"Sliding on the Sark."

Loder sneered.

"You can tell that to Quelch!" he said. "He may believe you! I shall report all of you to your form-master. Now get back to the school at once."

"We were really only taking the short cut, Loder!" urged Bob.

"That will do!" snapped Loder. "I remember Vernon-Smith spun the same yarn last week, when Wingate spotted him here."

"It happens to be true!" said Harry Wharton, quietly.

"Get back to the school."

"Oh, come on," said Johnny Bull, sarcastically, "Loder wants us to get out of sight before he goes into that field."

"What?" roared Loder.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Is that it? Look here, Loder, you were just going into that field yourself—and it's as much out of bounds for the Sixth as for the Remove—" Bob jumped back, as Gerald Loder made a stride at him.

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, "we're late already."

The Famous Five turned their backs on Loder, and started for the school at a rapid run. Loder of the Sixth stood staring after them, with a black brow. It was not till the windings of Friardale Lane hid them from sight, that Loder stepped through that gap in the hedge again, and hurried along the fence of the Cross Keys: to a familiar spot where it was easy to clamber over.

"We're for it!" said Bob Cherry, breathlessly, as the running juniors came in sight of the school gates. From the old clock tower of Greyfriars, the hour of three was chiming.

"Late for Mossoo—and a report to Quelch to follow!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Think it was a good idea, now, to take that short cut?"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Bob.

"I told you so—!"

"Dry up!"

"Well, I did tell you so—!"

Bob checked his speed for a moment. It was a fact that Johnny had told his friends so! But it was a very irritating and annoying fact, to be rubbed in at the moment.

"We're late," said Bob, "so we can spare another minute to bang that silly ass's head on a tree."

"Oh, come on," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Look here," hooted Johnny, "I jolly well told you—"

"Shut UP!" roared Bob.

Johnny grunted indignantly, but he shut up. The five juniors came breathlessly up to the school gates. The fattest figure at Greyfriars School was lolling in the gateway: and Billy Bunter blinked at the breathless five through his big spectacles, and grinned.

"I say, you fellows, you're late," he squeaked. "They're all in with Mossoo, except you chaps and Wibley—"

The five ran on.

Billy Bunter grabbed at Harry Wharton's sleeve as he passed.

"Hold on a minute, old chap," he exclaimed.

"Let go, ass—I'm late—"

"I say, it's important," gasped Bunter, "I say, it's awfully important, old fellow—do stop just a tick—I tell you it's important—"

Harry Wharton reluctantly came to a stop while his comrades cut on to the House. He turned impatiently on the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Well, what is it—quick!" he exclaimed.

"I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"What?" Wharton almost yelled.

"A postal-order, old chap! It hasn't come! I say, could you lend a fellow half-a-crown till it comes?" asked Bunter.

Harry Wharton did not reply in words. The important matter for which Billy Bunter was delaying him, when time pressed, was to extract a little loan

from him, till the arrival of Bunter's celebrated postal-order! Words were inadequate! He grasped the fat Owl by his fat shoulders, and sat him down in the quad.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he sat.

Harry Wharton cut on after his friends, leaving Bunter sitting, and grabbing at the big spectacles that had slanted down his fat little nose.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton disappeared into the House. He rejoined his friends breathlessly at the door of No. 10 class-room, which was the domain of Monsieur Charpentier, the French master of Greyfriars. Outside that door, the Famous Five paused for a few moments to recover breath.

"Only five minutes late!" said Bob. "After all, Mossoo's a good little ass—he always goes easy."

Bang! came from within the class-room. It was the sound of a desk-lid dropping suddenly. Bob grinned. Desk-lids were wont to drop suddenly in a detention class taken by the French master. Mossoo was one of those luckless masters who are born to be ragged: a circumstance of which exuberant youth was liable to take thoughtless advantage.

Bang! bang!

"Taisez-vous, donc!" came Mossoo's shrill voice. "Ordair in ze class! You Skinner, you keep ze ordair. You Smeet, you sit down! You Todd, taisez-vous."

Harry Wharton opened the class-room door, and the five filed in. They entered with their meekest manners on, to have a placating effect on Monsieur Charpentier. After all, five minutes was not very late—fellows were often later than that, for a class presided over by the easy-going and long-suffering Mossoo. But they did not find the little French gentleman in his accustomed tolerant mood. He gave them quite a glare.

"So sorry we're a few minutes late, monsieur!" said Harry Wharton, in his politest tones.

"Cinq minutes!" snapped Monsieur Charpentier. "Is it zat you shall disrespect me—is it zat you zink it matter not? I give you feefy lines of se Henriade, each vun of you, to write out viz yourselves."

"We really couldn't help—"

"Zat vill do, you Vharton! Go to ze place."

Harry Wharton breathed rather hard, as he went to his place. Mossoo, it was clear, was not the "good little ass" he generally was, on this occasion. He was quite fierce, for once. It was rather like finding a wolf where one expected to meet a lamb!

"What's the matter with the little ass to-day?" Bob Cherry whispered to Vernon-Smith, as the juniors sat down.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"Goodness knows! He's quite rabid. Better mind your step."

"Smeet!" yapped Monsieur Charpentier. "You talk in ze class! You take vun hundred lines of ze Henriade."

Bang! It was Skinner's desk-lid again.

"Skinner! Zat is ze second time you make zat loud noise vix yourself—"

"An accident, sir!" drawled Skinner, "I—Yooooop!" Skinner's drawl changed suddenly into a yell, as a pointer rapped on his knuckles. "Ow! oh! ow!"

"I keep ordair in zis class, or I know ze reason vy not!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, his little pointed beard almost bristling. "Now, zen, ve vill go on."

After which, there was something like order in the detention class. No more desk-lids banged, as the detained juniors improved, more or less, their knowledge of French irregular verbs.

III

BOOT FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER jumped.

He jumped almost clear of the Remove passage.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles, as he jumped, at the doorway of No. 6 study.

Never, in fact, had William George Bunter been so startled and surprised.

While quite a crowd of Remove fellows were in detention that afternoon, Billy Bunter was at liberty to follow his own devices. Bunter hadn't taken part in that snowballing affair which had ended so unluckily for all the fellows who had. That was not because Bunter had any objection, in principle, to snowballing Coker of the Fifth. In fact Bunter would have been quite pleased to land a few good ones on the bulky person of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form. Coker had kicked him, more than once, and the fact that he deserved kicking did not console Bunter. It was sheer laziness that had kept Bunter out of the spot of trouble. Snowballing was an exertion: and Bunter disliked exertion in any shape or form. So when a snowball unfortunately landed in the eye of Prout, the master of the Fifth, and a whole mob of Removites were given detention for that little mischance, Bunter, who had been grinning on from a distance, escaped unscathed.

Frowsting over the fire in the Rag was much more enjoyable than French grammar in No. 10 class-room. But later in the afternoon, Billy Bunter heaved his weight out of an armchair in the Rag, and rolled up to the Remove passage. It was getting towards tea-time: and Bunter was always ready for a meal considerably in advance of time. And Bunter was aware that Micky Desmond had had a parcel that day, from the old folks at home in Ireland.

Bunter was interested in that parcel.

The three juniors who inhabited No. 6 in the Remove—Morgan, Desmond, and Wibley—were all booked for detention. That was lucky—for Bunter, not

for the three. For it meant that there would be nobody at home in No. 6, till Monsieur Charpentier dismissed his class at five o'clock. Billy Bunter, rolling up the Remove passage to No. 6, naturally expected to find that study unoccupied.

But as he blinked in at the doorway, he discovered that it was not so.

Morgan and Desmond were in the detention class. William Wibley, ought to have been, was not.

Wibley was there—standing in front of a tall looking-glass clamped on the wall beside the window. No. 6 was the only study in the Remove so provided: Wibley had installed that tall glass at his own expense. Wibley lived, and moved, and had his being, in amateur theatricals, and when he made up in one of his "character parts" he required a full-length view.

Billy Bunter frowned at his back.

Evidently, Wibley had forgotten detention with Mossoo.

That was not an uncommon kind of happening with Wib. When his mind was on his hobby, Wibley was liable to forget time and space, and everything else. Wib had been busy in the study that afternoon. The big property-box under the window was wide open, and half its contents sprawled about the room.

Trousers and coats and waistcoats lumbered the chairs, and on the table was a weird assortment of wigs and beards and moustaches, with sticks of grease-paint and other such concomitants of the histrionic business. Wib's skill in making-up was almost uncanny.

He could twist his features into almost any aspect, almost as if they were made of elastic. He could speak in any voice from the treble of childhood to the wheeze of old age. Sometimes he would give an "impersonation", causing much hilarity in the Remove, and one of his "character parts" was that of Monsieur Charpentier. It was Wib's boast that he could have impersonated Quelch himself, or even the Head, but for want of the necessary height. But he was as tall as the little French master, and the rest was easy to him.

Wibley might be so deeply interested in his latest theatrical "stunt" that he had forgotten detention with Mossoo: but Billy Bunter wasn't! Billy Bunter was interested in Micky Desmond's parcel from County Limerick: which, obviously, was out of his reach so long as one of the occupants of No. 4 was there.

So Bunter squeaked from the doorway, addressing Wibley's back:

"I say, Wibley, old chap, you're cutting detention! I—I came up specially to tell you, old fellow! You'll get toco from Quelch, if Mossoo reports you for cutting detention."

Wibley turned round from the tall glass.

It was then that Bunter jumped—almost clear of the floor, his eyes popping through his spectacles.

Wibley, seen from the rear, was just Wibley. When Wibley turned round, Billy Bunter naturally expected to see Wibley's face. But he didn't! The face

he saw was about fifty years old, with a little pointed black beard, a sallow complexion, and a good crop of wrinkles.

Bunter almost tottered.

"Wha-a-a-t—?" he stuttered.

Really, it was startling, to see a middle-aged bearded face looking at him, and a schoolboy below it. A fellow who was fifty above, and fifteen below, was an uncommon and startling sight.

"Eh, what's that?" exclaimed Wibley.

It was Wibley's voice, if not his face.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "You—you silly ass! You—you made me jump out of my skin!"

The fat Owl grasped it now. Wibley was practising one of his impersonations. His face was made up to resemble that of Monsieur Charpentier. The weird thing was that it reproduced Mossoo to the very last feature. Bunter could almost have supposed that, by some spot of magic, Mossoo's head had been transferred to William Wibley's shoulders.

Wibley grinned.

"Do I look the part?" he asked, complacently.

"Eh? Oh! Yes! I say, you'd get into a row if Mossoo spotted you got up like that—or Quelch! But I say, you're late for the detention class. I say, Froggy's got his ears up to-day—you'd better cut."

Grunt from Wibley.

"Bother Froggy, and bother detention," he snapped. "I'd forgotten all about it. I suppose I'd better cut."

"I came up specially to tip you, old chap!" said Bunter, mendaciously. "I don't want you to get into a row with Froggy. I say, you'd better make haste."

Wibley seemed to think so too. He stripped off pointed beard and curled moustache, and proceeded to wash off grease-paint, in a basin on the table. He rubbed and cleaned and towelled, and in a few minutes Mossoo disappeared, and Wibley was himself again.

Then he cut out of the study.

Billy Bunter watched him go, with much satisfaction. As it was now a quarter to five, he had feared that Wibley might not think it worth while to turn up in Mossoo's class so very late: as indeed it hardly was. But Wib had rushed off without looking at the time: which suited Bunter.

As Wibley disappeared down the Remove passage, Billy Bunter rolled into the study. Grinning, he rolled across to the cupboard. He threw the door open, and blinked in through his big spectacles.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

There was the parcel from County Limerick. It had been opened at one end, and some of the contents taken out. But Bunter could see that most remained. No doubt Wibley and Co. were going to have a spread from that parcel, at tea-time: Micky was the fellow to whack out his supplies with his study-mates.

If that was the intention, Bunter was prepared to nip it in the bud. There was going to be a spread in that study—but it was going to be a spread for one, not for three: and William George Bunter was going to be the one.

Two fat hands groped in the parcel.

They came out, with a cake in one, and a bag of jam-tarts in the other. The fat Owl grinned happily. From a distance, the three-quarters chimed out from the clock-tower. It was a quarter to five. Bunter had fifteen minutes before the detention class were out. Much less than fifteen minutes would have been enough for Bunter. In these matters he was a quick worker.

Munch! munch! munch!

A jam-tart went down like an oyster. A huge bite at the cake followed. Standing at the cupboard, Billy Bunter enjoyed life.

But suddenly he gave an uneasy start. There was a patter of footsteps coming up the Remove passage.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter.



Munch, munch, munch . . .

He spun round from the cupboard in alarm. If it was that beast Wibley coming back for some reason—!

Alas for Bunter! It was!

Wibley came hurrying into the study. Why he had come back, Bunter didn't know. But there he was.

"I say, you'll get into a row, Wib!" gasped Bunter. "I say, why haven't you gone down to Mossoo. You're late—"

"Too late to be any use," explained Wibley. "The quarter struck as I was going downstairs. Not much use turning up for a two-hour detention, one-and-three-quarters of an hour late, what?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "I—I say, I—I'd go if I were you, Wib! Mossoo ain't in a good temper to-day, and—"

"Rats!" said Wibley, "I shall get lines from Quelch, anyhow. Why—what—" He stared at the fat Owl. "Where did you get that cake?"

"Oh! I—I—I—!"

"Where did you get those jam-tarts?"

"I—I—I—!" babbled Bunter.

Even Billy Bunter, seldom at a loss for a fib, was quite at a loss now. It was, in fact, quite clear where he had got the cake and the jam-tarts: and why he was in the study at all.

Wibley came round the table.

"You fat grub-raiding octopus—!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, really, Wibley—"

"Take that!"

"Yaroooooooooh!" roared Bunter.

The cake dropped from one fat hand, the bag of jam-tarts from the other, as Bunter made a bound for the door. One kick was enough for Bunter. That, at any rate, was Bunter's own opinion. It did not seem to be Wibley's. Wibley rushed after him, letting out his foot again.

Thud! It landed hard.

"Yooo-hoop!" roared Bunter.

Thud! Wibley got in one more, as the fat Owl dodged out of the doorway.

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast! Wow!" floated back, as Billy Bunter departed on his highest gear.

Wibley, deep in his theatrical hobby, forgot Bunter's existence in about a minute: kicking Bunter was a trifle light as air, which he easily forgot. Billy Bunter did not forget it quite so easily. A booting is one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive. Wibley, dabbing grease-paint before his glass, forgot all about it—but Billy Bunter was still wriggling, and still wowing and yowing, on the Remove landing, remembering every one of those kicks quite distinctly, when five o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower, and Monsieur Charpentier's detention class poured out of No. 10 class-room: and a crowd of Remove fellows came up to the studies to tea.

Some Bunter ancestors. Showing, perhaps, how he acquired some of the finer points of his character.



H SKINNER
— PINKT

Stone-age Bunter. Food is essential.



HARVEY
SKINNER

Simon de Bunter (Middle Ages) blows his own trumpet.



William Shylock Bunter. Generosity.



William Micawber Bunter. Something will turn up . . . even a postal order.

IV

"FOR it, or not for it?" said Bob Cherry.

"I wonder!" said Harry Wharton, slowly.

The Famous Five were standing in a little group, at the foot of the staircase. They were in doubt.

Now that the detention class was dismissed, they expected something to follow. If Loder of the Sixth intended to report them to Quelch, no doubt he had already done so: in which case, a summons to their form-master's study impended. But they did not yet know whether they were "for it" or not "for it".

"We were rather asses to take that short cut!" said Frank Nugent, shaking his head.

"Sort of!" agreed Bob.

"I told you so—!" began Johnny Bull. It was a fact that Johnny had told them so: and, being a fact, Johnny did not see any reason why it should not be mentioned. Its mention did not seem to cheer up his friends.

"For goodness sake, chuck it!" said Bob. "It's all your fault really."

"Mine!" howled Johnny, indignantly.

"Yes, yours! If you hadn't wasted time arguing, by the river, we should have got through before Loder butted in," said Bob. "Half-a-minute would have done it. So it's all your fault."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Nugent.

"Look here—!" hooted Johnny, spluttering with indignation.

"Oh, pack it up," said Harry Wharton. "It doesn't matter much whose fault it was—we're booked, if Loder's reported us. But has he?"

"Sure to!" said Nugent. "He doesn't love us an awful lot, even when we don't bang into him and send him sprawling."

"And the sprawfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But what was Loder doing there at all?" said Harry. "He was coming into the meadow as we were coming out. It's as much out of bounds for him as for us. He mightn't like Quelch to know."

Snort from Johnny Bull.

"We jolly well know Loder's game," he said. "He was going into that field to get over the fence into the Cross Keys yard. Lots of fellows know he smokes in his study, and know where he gets his smokes: and he knows that frowsy bookie, Banks, at that pub. If the Head knew what lots of fellows could tell him, Loder wouldn't be a prefect long—if he stayed at Greyfriars at all."

"Exactly!" said Harry Wharton. "We were taking a short cut—but Loder wasn't. If he's got any sense, he will say nothing about it."

"Well, if he reports to Quelch, he won't mention that he was going to the Cross Keys to see Banks about a horse," said Bob, grinning. "Rotten luck that he was there, just then. We won't take that short cut again."

"If you'd listened to me—!" began Johnny Bull.

"Dry up, old man."

"I told you so—"

"Bang his head on the banisters!" said Bob. "That's the only way of hearing the last of I told you so."

"Good egg!" said Nugent, heartily.

"The goodfulness of the egg is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here—hands off—you silly asses—yaroooooh!" roared Johnny Bull, as his friends grasped him on all sides, and banged his head on the banisters, "I jolly well did tell you so, and—yooo-hooop!"

Bang!

"Stop that, you young asses!" Wingate of the Sixth came up, and the Co. released Johnny, who rubbed his head and glared at them. "You're wanted in your form-master's study—all of you."

"For it!" sighed Bob.

"What have you been up to?" asked Wingate.

"Taking a short cut," answered Harry.

The Greyfriars captain stared at him.

"No harm in that," he said. "What do you mean?"

"The short cut was along the fence of the Cross Keys," explained Nugent.

"Oh!" Wingate frowned. "Well, Quelch has asked me to send you in—cut off."

Not in the best of spirits, the Famous Five headed for their form-master's study: Johnny Bull rubbing his head as he went.

They found Mr. Quelch sitting at his table. The Remove master was looking grim. The juniors marched in meekly under the glint of the gimlet-eyes.

"Wharton! Nugent! Bull! Cherry! Hurree Singh!" Quelch rapped out the names rather like a succession of pistol-shots. "I have received a report from a Sixth-form prefect concerning you. You were out of bounds this afternoon."

"We were in a hurry to get back for Monsieur Charpentier, sir, and we took a short cut," said Harry.

"Were you in the meadow adjoining the disreputable resort known as the Cross Keys, at Friardale, or not?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir—cutting across the field—"

"Quite so!" said Mr. Quelch. "You were aware that that meadow is out of school bounds, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir! But—"

"You, as my Head Boy, are in a more responsible position than other boys in my form," said Mr. Quelch, severely. "You should set your friends a good example, Wharton, not a bad one."

Johnny Bull did not speak. But his look was eloquent. As plainly as his tongue could have done, his look said "I told you so!"

"No doubt you had forgotten that, Wharton" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I—I'm afraid I had, sir!" stammered Harry. "But—but we cut across the field at a run—it was only a few minutes—"

"I quite believe you, Wharton, but you should know better than to place yourself and your friends in suspicious circumstances."

Again Johnny Bull's look was very expressive. Quelch, really might have been echoing Johnny's own sage words!

"Only a few days ago, a boy in my form was caned for this very thing," went on Mr. Quelch. "Any boy found out of bounds in that quarter could say that he was only taking a short cut, as Vernon-Smith did."

"We're telling the truth, sir!" said Harry, quietly.

"No doubt!" said Mr. Quelch. "But you were out of bounds, precisely as Vernon-Smith was, and you have told the same story. There cannot be two weights and two measures, Wharton."

The five juniors stood silent. That sounded as if it was going to be "whops", as in Smithy's case. But Quelch's hand did not stray towards his cane.

He sat frowning at them.

The fact was, that Quelch was a judge of character, and he knew the Remove inside out. He knew that the Bounder had fibbed: and he knew that Harry Wharton and Co. were telling the truth. That naturally made a difference.

There was a long pause. The chums of the Remove waited anxiously. Whether it was going to be whops, or lines, or Extra School, or gating, none of these alternatives was exactly attractive.

The Remove master spoke at last.

"You have acted very thoughtlessly and injudiciously," he said, "but I believe what you have told me, and I shall excuse you on this occasion. You may leave my study."

Five faces brightened up quite suddenly. Really, it was like the sun coming out through the clouds.

"Oh! Thank you, sir!" said the five, in chorus.

And they lost no time in leaving the study.

"Jolly good luck!" said Bob Cherry, as they went down the passage. "Quelch is a downy bird—he knew we weren't cramming, like Smithy."

"The knowfulness was terrific," agreed Huree Jamset Ram Singh. "All's well that ends in the cracked pitcher going longest to the well, as the English proverb remarkably observes."

"Good old English proverb!" chuckled Bob.

"We're jolly lucky," said Johnny Bull, "and the next time you fellows want to take a short cut, out of bounds, you'd better listen to a chap with a spot of common-sense in his head. I told you—"

"Asking for another bang?" hooted Bob.

"You jolly well know that I told you so—!"

Bang!

Once more Johnny was grasped by his comrades, and his head tapped on

the passage wall. They tapped it once, twice, and thrice, and yet once more, and went cheerily on their way. After which, Johnny was too busy rubbing his head, to think of mentioning again that he had told them so!

V

HARD LINES!

“JE chante ce héros qui régna sur la France—”
 “Oh, blow!”
 “We’ve got to grind it out.”
 “Blow!”

It was the following day, after class. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent were in their study, No. 1 in the Remove. On the study table, propped open against the inkstand, was the “Henriade”, from which each of them had to transcribe fifty lines. Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in No. 13, and Johnny Bull, in No. 14, were getting down to the same task. The Famous Five had got off very luckily with Quelch, in spite of Loder: but they had not been so lucky with the French master.

As a rule, Mossoo was so easy-going that a fellow late for his class had no trouble to expect. But of late, for some reason best known to himself, the French master had been unusually morose and sharp in temper: and the five delinquents had had the benefit of it. Fifty lines of French was rather severe for being five minutes late for detention: and none of the five felt pleased about it.

However, the task had to be done. Most of the Remove had gathered in the Rag after class, where there was cheery talk of the coming Christmas holidays. Harry Wharton and Co. had to repair to their studies to write lines.

In No. 1 Wharton and Nugent sorted out a “Henriade” and impot paper, and sat down to it, not very cheerfully.

“Little beast!” remarked Nugent. Sad to relate, he was alluding to Monsieur Charpentier.

“I wonder what’s the matter with him,” said Harry Wharton. “Fellows have lounged in a quarter of an hour late, before now, and nothing’s happened. And we were only five minutes late.”

“We should have been on time, taking the short cut, but for Loder!” said Nugent. “He had to go blagging just at the wrong moment.”

“I suppose that was what he was up to.”

“Of course it was! Seeing Joey Banks about a horse!” grunted Nugent. “I wonder what Quelch would have said, if he knew that.”

“Oh, bother Loder, and bother Mossoo! We’ve got to push through this stuff,” said the captain of the Remove. “Go it.”

“Blow!” said Nugent.

They "went" it. Voltaire's epic was not, in itself, an unattractive work. But fellows who had to transcribe it found very little attraction in it, if any. In fact they found it very unattractive.

"Je chante ce héros qui régna sur la France," mumbled Nugent.

"Et par droit conquête et par droit de naissance," mumbled Wharton.

"Rotten stuff!" said Nugent.

"Putrid!" agreed Wharton.

"Blow Voltaire!"

"And blow Henry the Fourth!"

Never were two schoolboys more uninterested in Voltaire's chronicle of the fourth French Henry who was conqueror and father of his country!

However, they scribbled on. They wanted to get through, and get down to join the cheery crowd in the Rag. But there came an interruption. A fat face looked in at the door, and a pair of little round eyes blinked at them through a pair of big round spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hook it, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Travel, fathead! We've got lines to do," snapped Nugent.

"Well, you shouldn't have been late," argued Bunter. "If you get in late for a class what do you expect?"

"Heave that cushion at him, Franky."

"I say, you fellows, you're for it!" said Bunter, with a wary eye on the cushion. "I thought I'd come and tell you—"

"Go and tell somebody else."

"Well, Loder's got it in for you!" grinned Bunter. "I heard him talking to Walker. I wasn't listening of course—I just happened to stop and tie my shoelace, and I heard them—"

"Buzz off!"

"Loder's wild," went on Bunter. "I say, he called Quelch an old fool."

"Wish Quelch had heard it, if he did!" grunted Nugent.

"He jolly well did!" chuckled Bunter. "He said he thought the old fool would give you fellows six all round, for being caught out of bounds at the Cross Keys, and instead of that he let you off. And he said—"

"Pack up the rest"

"He said if Quelch let you off, he wasn't going to, and you'd got it coming," continued Bunter, unheeding, "so you fellows had better mind your p's and q's. He said you floored him in Friardale Lane, getting out of that meadow in a hurry. I say, you fellows, what did you go to the Cross Keys for? Smokes? I know that's where Smithy gets his smokes."

"You fat chump!" roared Harry Wharton. "We were taking the short cut from the river, along the fence—"

"Oh, crikey! Did you tell Quelch that?"

"Of course we did, fathead."

"Did he swallow it?"

"You fat, frabjous, footling, fozling freak—"

"Well, it don't seem fair to me," said Bunter. "When I try to stuff Quelch, he always seems to spot it somehow: and now you fellows get by with a yarn like that! Tain't fair!" Bunter shook a fat head. "Why, when I told Quelch I hadn't had those biscuits from the box in Common-Room, he wouldn't believe a word of it, just because he knew I had. That's the sort of justice we get here! I jolly well think—!"

"Will you travel, you fat ass, or do you want this cushion on that pimple you call a nose?" demanded Nugent.

"I hope I'm not the fellow to stay where my company ain't wanted," said Bunter, with dignity, "but there's just one other thing—"

"Forget it."

"I say, my postal-order hasn't come," said Bunter, "if one of you fellows could lend me something till it comes—"

"I'll lend you this cushion!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the cushion whizzed across the study and impinged upon the best-filled waistcoat at Greyfriars School. "Ow, beast! I hope Loder will jolly well lick you, now, and I'm jolly glad you've got lines to do for that little beast Mossoo—"

"Buntair!"

It was a high-pitched voice in the passage, with a French accent. Billy Bunter almost forgot the bang of the cushion on his fat circumference as he heard the well-known tones of Monsieur Charpentier.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a glance across the study table. If it was Monsieur Charpentier in the passage, he had come along at a rather unfortunate moment for the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter spun round in dismay.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles, at a dapper little figure in a tight frock-coat, and a sallow face with a twisted moustache and a little pointed beard. What Monsieur Charpentier was doing, up in the junior studies, Billy Bunter did not know, and couldn't guess: Mossoo was about the last person he would have expected to see there.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "I—I didn't hear you coming, sir—I—I wasn't calling you a beast, sir—"

"Buntair! Viz my own ear I hear vat you say."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I was speaking about another beast, sir—not you at all, sir—quite another beast—!" gasped Bunter.

"Zat is not how you shall speak of a master, Buntair!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I—I didn't—I mean I—I wasn't—I was only saying—oh, jiminy!"

“Mauvais garçon! Go to your study, Buntair, and write vingt—zat is to say, twenty—lines of ze Henriade.”

“Oh, lor’!”

Billy Bunter rolled up the passage to No. 7 Study. The door of that study banged after him. The next moment, the dapper figure appeared in the doorway of No. 1, and Wharton and Nugent rose respectfully to their feet. They wondered what Mossoo wanted there. If he wanted his lines, he was too early for them: the imposition was not half-through yet. They stood up and gazed inquiringly at the dapper gentleman in the doorway.

“Is it zat I may come in, mes garçons?” asked the French-accented voice.

“Oh! Please do, sir!” said Harry.

The little gentleman trotted in, with his mincing gait. He glanced at the unfinished lines on the table.

“You are busy viz ze lines, yes?” he asked.

“Yes, sir! Not finished yet,” said Nugent.

“C’est ça! Continuez! I vill sit me in ze armchair and look at ze papair.”

To the utter astonishment of the two juniors, the dapper gentleman trotted round the table, to the study armchair, that stood before the fireplace. He sat down in it, and took from under his arm a copy of “Le Journal”. Wharton and Nugent gazed at one another blankly.

It was not uncommon to see Monsieur Charpentier perusing a newspaper from his native land, in Common-Room. But why he had chosen to come up to a junior study for that purpose, was quite a mystery.

But there he was, ensconced in the armchair, the high back of which hid him from sight. There he was, with “Le Journal” open on his knees. For some utterly unknown reason, apparently, he had selected No. 1 Study in the Remove to sit and read the news from la belle France.

“Well, my hat!” murmured Nugent.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

Neither of them could make out what it meant. They sat down to the table again, and resumed their lines, and there was silence in the study, broken only by the scratch of pens, and an occasional rustle from the newspaper in the hands of the little gentleman hidden by the high back of the armchair.

Then, suddenly, came another interruption. There was a heavy tread in the passage, and the rustle of the newspaper stopped, and the scratching of the pens stopped, at the same moment, as Gerald Loder, of the Sixth Form, strode into No. 1 Study.

VI

ONLY WIBLEY!

GERALD LODER stood looking at the two Remove juniors, as they rose to their feet once more. His look was not pleasant.

Wharton and Nugent eyed him, quietly. They remembered what the fat

Owl had said: which had not surprised them, for Loder was well known to have a long memory for offences. His look showed that trouble impended: and his official ash was under his arm. As a prefect of the Sixth, Loder was invested with "whopping privileges": and he was never slow to use the ashplant. But even the bully of the Sixth had to have a pretext: and the chums of the Remove could only wonder what pretext he had thought up now.

"You young sweeps!" said Loder.

Neither made a reply to that.

"You crashed me over in Friardale Lane yesterday afternoon, when I caught you out of bounds," went on Loder.

"We didn't see you coming through the hedge," said Harry Wharton, mildly. "If we'd known you were coming in, we should have been more careful coming out."

Loder's eyes glittered at him.

Both the juniors knew what was in his mind. The crash, no doubt, had angered him. But it was the fact that they had seen him in the very act of breaking school bounds, in a specially forbidden spot, that cut deep. A Sixth-Form prefect who indulged in "blagging" had to be very careful indeed about it: and Loder did not like juniors becoming acquainted with his manners and customs.

"I saw Greyfriars caps from the lane, and stepped into that gap in the hedge to see who it was there," said Loder. "I was bound to look into it, as a prefect, as you know very well."

Wharton and Nugent had no doubt that that was how Loder had put it to Mr. Quelch. It was not much use putting it so to them. They knew perfectly well that Loder had been going out of bounds when the crash happened: and they knew, too, that that was why he was looking for trouble now.

However, they said nothing, but waited.

They rather expected Monsieur Charpentier to rise, and look over the back of the armchair. But there was no sign from the French master. He remained invisible: and Loder, evidently, had no idea that he was there. He could not see him, from where he stood: and he could hardly have surmised that a master had chosen a junior study as a place to sit down and read his newspaper.

"You rushed out at me, and knocked me spinning," went on Loder. "I hear that your form-master let you off, for being out of bounds."

"Yes, Loder," said Nugent, meekly.

"We explained to him that we were only taking a short cut, Loder," said Harry Wharton.

"And got off!" said Loder. "Well, if Quelch chooses to let you off for pub-crawling, the old ass can do as he likes."

Wharton and Nugent caught their breath. Loder, certainly, would never have alluded to any Greyfriars "beak" as an old ass, if he had known that another master was within hearing.

"But I'm not letting you off," went on Loder. "You're going to get six all round for knocking over a prefect."

"We didn't see you—"

"That will do."

"It was quite an accident—"

"You needn't say any more." Loder slipped the ashplant down into his hand, and swished it on the air. "You first, Wharton! Bend over the table."

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"The accident wouldn't have happened, Loder, if you hadn't been going out of bounds," he said, very distinctly. "It's not our fault that you were going to climb over the fence of the Cross Keys to get to the back door of that pub."

"What?" roared Loder.

"You heard what I said."

"You—you dare—" Loder seemed to choke for a moment. Then he made a jump at Harry Wharton.

"Lodair!"

It was a sharp shrill voice: utterly unexpected to Loder of the Sixth. He jumped, as he stared round in the direction of the voice.

The little gentleman in the armchair had risen now. He was looking at Loder across the high back of the chair.

Loder's eyes bulged at the sallow face with its moustached and pointed beard. The ash almost dropped from his hand. Instantly it rushed into his mind that Monsieur Charpentier must have heard him speak of Quelch as an "old ass". He goggled at the unexpected face.

The dapper little man came mincing round the armchair. His eyes were fixed sternly on Loder's startled, scared face.

"Lodair!" he snapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Loder. "I—I never knew you were here, sir—I—I—I—" He stuttered into silence. He was quite amazed to find the French master in No. 1 Study in the Remove.

"Mais non! Je le crois bien! You speak not of Monsieur Quelch as one old ass, if you zink I hear you, Lodair."

"I—I—I—"

Loder began to wish that he had not come up to the Remove studies on the trail of vengeance. But how could he have guessed that the French master would be sitting in the armchair in Wharton's study?

"Zat is impertinence zat I must report to Monsieur Quelch, Lodair! Ze good Monsieur Quelch shall know how it is zat you speak of him, Lodair."

"I—I—I—" Loder stammered helplessly. What Quelch would say, and do, if he learned that Loder had spoken of him as an old ass, was quite alarming to think of. He might take Loder to the Head! Certainly the thunder would roll. Loder almost cringed at the prospect. "I—I—I spoke hastily, sir—I—I—"

didn't mean to—to—to—. I—I hope you won't mention the matter to Mr. Quelch, sir! I—I—I am sorry I—I said what I did—”

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a grin. Never had they seen the bully of the Sixth so utterly crestfallen.

“I zink zat you sould be sorry, Lodair, to speak of ze good Quelch as one old ass, and I zink zat Monsieur Quelch vill be very angry when I report to him zat you say so.”

“I—I—I—”

“But vy you come here, Lodair? You come to cane zese garçons because of one accident, n'est-ce-pas? Zat vill not do, Lodair. I go to Monsieur Quelch, and I say, is it zat zese garçons sall be cane, because of one accident, by Lodair who call you one old ass?”

“I—I—I will let them off, if you—if you like, sir!” stuttered Loder, “I—I will forget all about it, sir.”

“Bien! Zere is to be no cane for zese garçons, or for ze ozzer garçons zat knock you ovair, Lodair?”

“Yes, sir! No, sir! If you wish it, sir, I—I will certainly let them off for the—the accident yesterday, sir—”

“Verree well! In zat case, Lodair, I will not report to ze good Quelch zat you call him one old ass. Lay zat cane on ze table.”

“It's my ash, sir—”

“I have said lay zat cane on ze table, Lodair.”

Loder, in a state of mingled fear and fury, laid the ashplant on the table. The dapper little gentleman picked it up.

“Lodair, I vill not report to ze bon Quelch vat you have said. But you vas verree impertinent to call ze good Quelch one old ass, and I give you one stroke of ze stick for zat.”

“What?” almost yelled Loder.

Wharton and Nugent stared on, dumbfounded.

Whack!

Loder's own ash whacked across Loder's shoulders. It was a sounding whack, and rang far beyond No. 1 Study, almost like a pistol-shot. The bully of the Sixth tottered.

“Now allez vous en! Go you, Lodair, or I give you some more of ze stick! Allez vous en, toute de suite!”

Loder gave him a look. Loder was big enough, and hefty enough, to have crumpled up the French master of Greyfriars. He looked, for the moment, disposed to do it!

But prudence prevailed! He swung round to the door, and tramped out of the study, his face fairly convulsed with fury. His stamping footsteps died away down the passage to the stairs.

“Oh, my hat!” murmured Frank Nugent. Nugent, and Wharton, stared at the dapper little gentleman as if he fascinated them. Never had they been so utterly astonished in their lives.

He gave them a smile.

"Zat is all right, mes garçons," he said. "You vill not get zat ash from Lodair. Look out of ze door, mon bon Vharton, and make sure zat zat Lodair he is gone, and zen I tell you vy I come here viz myself."

Harry Wharton looked out at the door. Loder of the Sixth was gone—quite gone. Herbert Vernon-Smith was coming up the passage, and he glanced at the captain of the Remove.

"What's the matter with Loder?" he asked. "He's just passed me on the stairs, looking like a demon in a pantomime."

"He's just had a whop from his own ash!" gasped Harry.

"Eh?" The Bounder stared, "Pulling my leg?"

"Mossoo's here, and he gave him a lick with it."

"Oh, great pip!" Smithy stared into the study, amazed.

"Zat Lodair—he is gone?" came the high-pitched squeaky voice.

"Yes, sir," answered Harry. "Quite gone."

"Verree good! Now I tell you vy I come to zis study. I vant you garçons



Loder's own ash . . .

to see me, so zat you recognize me as Monsieur Charpentier. It is vat you call ze pull of ze leg."

The juniors could only gaze at him.

"You Vharton, you know who I am, n'est-ce-pas?"

Harry Wharton began to wonder whether the French master of Greyfriars was wandering in his mind!

"Yes, sir," he gasped. "You're Monsieur Charpentier."

"And you also, Nugent, you know zat too?"

"Yes, sir, of course," said the wondering Nugent.

"And you Smeet—vous aussi, you know zat?"

"Of course, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "We see you often enough to know you again, sir!"

"You so not zink zat I pull you ze leg? You so not zink zat perhaps it is not Monsieur Charpentier, but—"

"But what?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Chap named Wibley!" said the French master, in quite a different voice, and three juniors jumped almost clear of the study floor, as he detached the little pointed beard from his chin, and grinned at them. "Just putting my make-up to the test, see? That's why I came here! Lucky for you fellows I did, as it turned out—what do you chaps think Loder would feel like, if he knew that it was Wibley of the Remove who licked him with his own ash?"

"W-w-w-w-Wibley!" stuttered Harry Wharton.

"Wib-wob-wub-Wibley!" stuttered Nugent.

"Wibley!" yelled the Bounder.

They stared at him. Even with the beard detached, they could not recognize William Wibley of the Remove. His make-up was really marvellous: he was Mossoo to the very life. But they knew the voice, if not the face. It was not Monsieur Charpentier who had trotted into No. 1 Study with his newspaper: it was the amateur actor of the Remove, leg-pulling.

As they stared at him, dumb-founded, a big pair of spectacles glimmered in at the door. Wibley hastily put a hand over his beardless chin.

"I say, you fellows—got any toffee?" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Buntair!" Wibley was the French master again!

"Oh!" Bunter jumped. "I didn't know you were still here, sir! I—I—"

"Have you done zose zose lines, Buntair?"

"I—I—I—No, sir! I—"

"Go back to your study and finish zem, Buntair."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, without making any further inquiries for toffee. Wibley's hand came away from his chin, with his moustache in it. Even yet he did not look like Wibley: he looked like a clean-shaven Mossoo.

"You spoofer!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"You fathead, Wibley!" said Nugent. "You took us in."

"And Loder too!" chuckled Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in No. 1 Study. The amateur actor certainly had taken the juniors in: never for a moment had they dreamed that he was not the genuine Mossoo. Neither had Loder of the Sixth! What Gerald Loder would think, and feel like, if he could know that he had taken that whop from his ash, at the hand of a Remove junior got up as Mossoo, was quite an interesting question. The juniors yelled with merriment as they thought of it. It was fortunate for the playful Wib that Loder was never likely to know!

VII

LODER IN LUCK!

LODER of the Sixth gave a sudden start.

He started so suddenly, that his cigarette almost slipped into his mouth. Fortunately, he retrieved it in time, grabbed it, and dropped it to the ground, crushing it under his heel. There was a very strict rule on that subject at Greyfriars: and a prefect of the Sixth Form could not afford to be seen breaking it.

Not that Loder had expected to be seen, in the quiet corner behind the elms to which he had retired to smoke that cigarette, after dinner. Loder was feeling quite at his ease there, leaning on a tree-trunk, smoking his cigarette, and pondering on the chances of Nobbled Nick for the two-thirty at Wapshot on Saturday. Loder had a "quid" on Nobbled Nick, with Joey Banks at the Cross Keys, and it was a matter of deep interest to him, whether his selected "gee" romped home at three to one, or whether that "quid" remained in the possession of Mr. Banks.

His ponderings on that interesting subject were interrupted by the sound of footsteps and voices: and his cigarette disappeared as if by magic. He scowled: and his scowl grew darker, as he recognized familiar voices: those of the Famous Five of the Remove. Loder's feelings towards those cheerful youths, of late, were extremely inimical. He would have been almost as glad to catch them out, with a pretext for handling the ashplant, as he would have been to see Nobbled Nick romp home on Saturday.

"Look here, Froggy's got it coming!" It was Bob Cherry's voice.

"Oh, rot!" came Johnny Bull's.

"Well, he is rather a little beast lately," said Frank Nugent. "He used to be a good little ass—now he's as acid as Hacker."

"More!" said Bob.

"The acidfulness is terrific."

"Well, he's got it coming!" said Bob. "Rapping fellows' knuckles with his dashed pointer in the French set this morning! Anybody here like his knuckles rapped?"

"Not a lot," said Harry Wharton. "But—"

"Is that what you've brought us here to jaw about?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Just that!" answered Bob. "Can't be too careful, when you're going to catch a beak in a booby-trap."

Loder caught his breath. The Famous Five had come to a halt, on the other side of his tree. Evidently they did not know that he was there. Had they walked on a few more paces, they would have seen him. As it was, they did not see him, or dream that he was in the offing.

His first impulse had been, to step into view, and order the juniors off, so that he could smoke another cigarette in peace, and resume his meditations on the chances of Nobbled Nick in the two-thirty. What he had caught of the talk of the juniors changed that intention. He remained where he was—silent, and listening. If the chums of the Remove had sought that secluded spot, to discuss a scheme, and plot a plot, for catching a "beak" in a booby-trap, it looked like Loder's chance, at last, to make those unsuspecting youths suffer for their sins. Certainly, Dr. Locke would have raised his eyebrows, very expressively, at the mere idea of one of his prefects acquiring information after the manner of Billy Bunter, by listening surreptitiously to what was not intended for his ears. But Loder had his own methods.

He remained quite still and silent, listening to the voices on the other side of the massive trunk of the old elm. He no longer regretted that his smoke, and his meditations, had been interrupted. He was deeply interested now.

Unconscious of Loder and listening ears, Bob Cherry rattled on:

"I can tell you, I'm jolly well fed up with Mossoo. Lines on Wednesday for being a few minutes late—"

"Well, we were late," said Johnny Bull. "And I told you—"

"Dry up, Johnny! Wibley cut detention and Mossoo reported him to Quelch. How often does he report a fellow? He's getting acid, like Hacker—and one Acid Drop is enough for Greyfriars. Now look at him in the French set this morning! Did I shuffle my feet?"

"You did!"

"Well, if I did, was that any reason for rapping a fellow's knuckles with a pointer?" demanded Bob, hotly. "Even Quelch only raps at a fellow with his chin, not with a pointer."

"He does seem to be an unpleasant little beast lately," said Harry Wharton. "May be something the matter with him."

"There's something the matter with his temper, at any rate!" said Bob. "He's given Bunter a hundred lines, just for mixing up his genders—"

"Well, Bunter did mix them up!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Bunter ought to know that la tour is feminine, not masculine—"

"Well, it shouldn't be," said Bob. "Blow their silly genders! What does it matter whether a tower is a boy or a girl in French?"

"Mossoo seems to think that it does," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"He would!" said Bob. "Well, he gave Smithy and Redwing fifty lines each, because Smithy spoke to Redwing—"

"Fellows shouldn't talk in class," said Johnny Bull.

"Only Smithy did—Redwing didn't—but he got the lines all the same!" snapped Bob. "If you're going to stick up for a little beast with a temper as savage as a tiger's, Johnny Bull—"

"Well, look here—"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Frank Nugent. "What's the big idea, Bob? Get it off your chest."

"Mossoo's not going to bite all round, without something coming back to him," said Bob. "When he gets a bag of flour on his napper, it may do him good."

"Think that will improve his temper?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it couldn't make it worse," said Bob, "and it will be a tip to him to draw in his horns. I've got the bag of flour all ready in my study."

"Better keep it there," suggested Johnny.

"If you're going to be a wet blanket, Bull—"

"Oh, go ahead, and don't mind me," said Johnny. "I think it's rot, but if you're keen on it, okay. It means a fearful row if we get spotted."

"The fearfulness will be terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bob," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I don't care!" snapped Bob. "At least, I mean, we'll be jolly careful, and take good care not to be spotted, of course."

Loder, behind the elm, smiled. He was beginning to enjoy this.

"If you fellows are on—!" went on Bob.

"Oh, any old thing," said Nugent. "After all, I don't see why Mossoo shouldn't get something back."

"Well, it's easy, really," said Bob. "We've got to keep it awfully dark, of course—not a word to any fellow outside ourselves, in case there's talk—and take special care that Bunter doesn't hear anything, and tattle it up and down the form. Least said, soonest mended, in a case like this."

"No doubt at all about that," agreed Harry Wharton, "but—"

"Oh, blow your butts!" said Bob, testily. "We're going to flour Froggy, as a tip to him to keep his pointer to himself, and it's jolly easy, so long as we're careful to keep it dark. Easy enough to keep an eye on Froggy, after class, the five of us on the job. We've got to make sure that he's in Common-Room, see? Then you fellows keep cave, while I nip into his study with the bag of flour. I fix it up over his door, and drop out of his window into the quad. Easy as falling off a form—if we're not interrupted! We shall have to be awfully careful about that, of course. But with five of us on the watch, it will be all right. And when Mossoo gets that bag of flour on his napper—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, is it a go?" asked Bob.

"It's a go!" agreed Nugent.

"The go-fulness is terrific."

"O.K.," said Harry Wharton.

"I think it's rot," said Johnny Bull, "but I'm on, if you like."

"That's settled, then," said Bob, "and mind, not a word—not a syllable—to any fellow in the Remove. That cad Loder's got his eye on us, and if he caught a word about it, he—Oh, great pip!"

Bob broke off suddenly, staring at a Sixth-Form prefect who came round the trunk of the elm. His eyes popped at Loder of the Sixth. The ghost of Gerald Loder could scarcely have startled him more.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Nugent.

They gazed at Loder! The sarcastic grin on his face, told them that he had heard every word. They had retired to that quiet spot to plot the little plot: only to pour it fairly into the ears of their old enemy. Dumb, they gazed at Loder.

"Quite interesting," said Loder, sarcastically. "I've no doubt your form-master will be interested, too. Follow me to the House."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

"So you were listening, behind that tree, Loder?" he said. "If you're going to report this to Quelch, are you going to tell him that you were eaves-dropping?"

Loder flushed. Even Loder, perhaps, was not very proud of his methods.

"I heard you by sheer chance, of course," he said, with a venomous look at the captain of the Remove. "That's enough from you, Wharton! Follow me to the House at once, all of you. Quelch let you off on Wednesday: I don't fancy you'll scrape out of this quite so easily. Follow me."

Loder stalked away towards the House.

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged eloquent looks. There was nothing to be said. They had to follow Loder: to an extremely painful interview with their form-master. They were not looking their usual cheery selves as they followed him.

VIII

BOB CHERRY KNOWS HOW!

"Ow! wow! wow!"

"Bunter's signature-tune!" said Frank Nugent, with a faint grin.

But the grin was very faint. And no one else in No. 1 Study grinned. Five fellows, in that study, were in a sad and sorrowful state.

"Wow!" came from the passage. "Wow! Ow!"

Obviously, it was Billy Bunter.

Vernon-Smith's voice was heard:

"What's the trouble, fatty?"

"Ow! wow! That beast Loder—wow!"

"Well, don't make that row."

"Beast!"

Making a row, apparently, was a comfort to Bunter. He went on with it.

They were not making a row in No. 1 Study. But their feelings were deep—very deep. Harry Wharton was moving restlessly about the study. Bob Cherry was leaning against the mantelpiece. Nugent stood at the table, and Johnny Bull at the window. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was wriggling. Not one member of the Famous Five seemed to feel like sitting down. Indeed the prospect of sitting down, when the bell rang for class, was far from attractive. So long as they could, at all events, they preferred to stand.

They were not interested in Billy Bunter's woes, whatever those woes might have been. Their own woes were enough to go on with.

Mr. Quelch had dealt with those five members of his form faithfully—very faithfully.

They could hardly blame Quelch. Catching an obnoxious "beak" with a bag of flour on his head might seem, to junior schoolboys, something in the nature of a lark. To a form-master, and especially to a severe form-master like Henry Samuel Quelch, it did not seem like a lark at all. Loder's report had moved Quelch to action—drastic action.

They could say nothing in defence. Certainly, they had not intended a Sixth-Form prefect to overhear that little plot for making Monsieur Charpentier sorry for himself. But they had plotted the plot—they had intended to carry it out: but for Loder, it would have been carried out according to plan, and Mossos would have had the benefit of that bag of flour. Quelch took the sternest possible view of such a "lark".

They had had a royal jaw! That they could have endured with more or less fortitude. But Quelch had followed it up with his cane. Juniors who entertained such ideas on the subject of treatment to be meted out to beaks, required, in Quelch's opinion, a severe warning. He gave them one! Each of the hapless five had to bend over in Quelch's study, in turn: and to each in turn was administered six—six of the very best.

Hence their retirement to No. 1 Study, where painful wriggles would be unobserved, and painful ejaculations unheard.

"That rotter!" muttered Harry Wharton. His eyes were gleaming. "No good blaming Quelch—it was up to him, when he knew! But that skulking rat listening behind a tree—!"

"Sneaking worm!" said Bob. "Ow! ow!"

"The sneakfulness of the absurd worm was terrific," groaned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The painfulness is also great! Wow!"

"Wasn't he glad of the chance?" mumbled Johnny Bull. "Just pie to Loder:

he was fairly longing for a chance at us. Mightn't have been, but for what happened on Wednesday: and I jolly well told you—"

"Shut UP!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Well, I told you—"

Bob reached for the inkpot on the table.

"You just say that you told us so, and you get this!" he said, in concentrated tones. "Now, then!"

Grunt, from Johnny Bull! But he refrained from telling his chums once more that he had told them so! He did not want that inkpot.

"That rat!" muttered Wharton.

"That tick!" mumbled Nugent.

"We'll jolly well make Loder sit up for it, somehow," said Bob.

"Make sure that he isn't listening behind a tree, when you fix it up!" advised Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob.

Even Bob Cherry's sunny temper was suffering. It was true that they couldn't blame Quelch. Quelch had done his duty. But Loder—! A fellow who listened hidden behind a tree—! Billy Bunter did such things, and often and often had he been kicked for it in the Remove. A Sixth-Form pre. was not to be kicked! There was just nothing that could be done about it. Loder was a spying rat, no doubt: he did things that no other Greyfriars prefect would have dreamed of doing: their scorn for him and his knavish tricks was boundless: but it had to stop there—there was simply no getting back on a prefect of the Sixth!

"I say, you fellows!"

A fat and dolorous face looked in at the doorway. Five fellows glared at it. They were not in a cheery or hospitable mood.

"Buzz off, fathead!" grunted Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut the door after you."

"Oh, really, Wharton—!"

"Oh, cut!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently. "We've had six all round from Quelch, and we're not enjoying it. Mizzle."

"Well, I've had six from Loder!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, did that beast lay them on? Wow!"

"Dear old Loder!" said Bob. "Does he like handling that ashplant of his? What did he whop you for, fatty?"

"Nothing!" groaned Bunter.

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Even Loder has to have an excuse."

"I tell you it was nothing—" howled Bunter. "I never did a thing. I suppose a fellow can lean on the passage wall if he likes, without getting six from Loder?"

Harry Wharton gave a little attention, at that.

"Was that all?" he asked.

"That's all—wow! ow!"

"Well, if that's all, you can go to Quelch," said Harry. "Quelch would stop Loder fast enough, if he whopped a Remove man for nothing."

"Um!" said Bunter. "I—I—I'd go to Quelch, only—only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, Quelch mightn't believe that I wasn't listening to what Loder was saying to Carne!" mumbled Bunter. "You see, they were talking, just round the corner, and—and—and I couldn't help hearing—"

"You fat rascal!" exclaimed Harry, angrily. "You mean that you were listening round a corner, as usual! Serve you jolly well right."

"Beast!" mumbled Bunter.

"The rightfulness was terrific, my esteemed eavesdropping Bunter," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Like Loder's cheek to whop the fat octopus for it, when it's in his own line," said Bob. "And what the dickens could it matter, if Bunter heard what one Sixth-Form swob was saying to another."

"Well, Loder fancied I heard him telling Carne that he was going out after lights out to-night," said Bunter. "I expect that was what made him so wild. I wasn't listening, of course—I just happened to lean on the wall, and I never thought they'd come round the corner and spot me—"

"You fat villain!"

"Loder asked Carne if he was coming too and Carne said no, it was too jolly risky," said Bunter. "Loder said it was safe as houses to step from a study window after lights out, and nobody would know a thing. Carne said it looked like being foggy to-night, and Loder said that was all the better. And—"

"You seem to have heard quite a lot, without listening!" remarked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"Wow! Then Loder came round the corner, and spotted me!" groaned Bunter. "He made me bend over and gave me six! Wow!"

"Serve you right!"

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "If that's all the sympathy you've got for a chap who's had six on the bags—"

"We've all had the same, old fat pippin," said Bob.

"The samefulness was terrific," mumbled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "And the layfulness on by the esteemed Quelch was preposterous."

"Ow! ow! ow! wow!"

"Go and ow-wow-wow-wow-wow! somewhere else, you fat frog!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled on up the Remove passage, still "owing" and "wowing": perhaps in search of sympathy elsewhere.

Bob Cherry kicked the door shut after him, and then crossed to the window, and looked out into the quad. It was close on time for class, and many fellows

were coming towards the House. But Bob did not look down—he looked across, in the direction of the sea. What he beheld seemed to afford him satisfaction. A heavy mist was drifting in, wisps of it already rolling over the school: and Bob gave a nod, just as if that was what he wanted to see.

There was a gleam in his blue eyes, when he turned from the window at last.

“What Bunter heard Carne say was right,” he said. “It’s going to be foggy to-night.”

“Is it?” grunted Johnny Bull. He was not interested.

“It is!” said Bob. “Looks as if it’s going to be regular pea-soup. Thick as a blanket, very likely.”

“What about it?” asked Harry.

“Lots!” said Bob, impressively. “Do we want to give Loder something back for eavesdropping behind a tree, and landing us with six all round from Quelch—or don’t we?”

“We do!” agreed the captain of the Remove.

“Yes, rather,” said Nugent. “But what—”

“The ratherfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But how—”

“Well, if it’s foggy to-night and it jolly well looks like it, we’re going to,” said Bob, still more impressively. “And I know how.”

“Blessed if I see—!” grunted Johnny.

“You wouldn’t, till I explain,” said Bob. “We’re on Loder’s trail, you men, and we’re going to make him sit up and yelp, and I jolly well know how—”

Clang! clang! clang!

It was the bell for class.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, there’s the dashed bell,” exclaimed Bob. “Well, never mind the bell for a minute or two—”

“Like to be late for Quelch, after he’s just given us six?” snorted Johnny Bull. “I’ve had enough from Quelch for one day, if you haven’t!” And Johnny marched across to the door.

“I tell you—!” hooted Bob.

“Come on!” said Nugent, following Johnny into the passage.

“I tell you I know how—!”

“Keep it till after class, old man!” said Harry Wharton. “It will keep all right! Can’t be late for Quelch!”

“Br-r-r-r-r!” grunted Bob.

He followed his chums from the study, and they lost no time in reaching the Remove form-room. If Bob Cherry knew how to make the obnoxious Loder sit up and yelp, his chums certainly were interested: but not to the extent of risking trouble with Quelch, of which they had already had enough to last them for a while. Bob’s big idea, whatever it was, had to wait till after class: but during class that afternoon, Bob was observed to grin a good many times, and heard to chuckle once or twice: indications that he was anticipating causing

Loder of the Sixth to sit up and yelp, and that he knew—or fancied he knew—how.

IX

SURPRISE FOR SMITHY!

"I WOULDN'T, Smithy!" said Tom Redwing, quietly.

"Wouldn't you?" sneered the Bounder.

"No! What's the use—?"

"Lots! I've got fifty lines from the little beast—"

"So have I—" said Redwing. "And you did talk in class—"

"And did Froggy always jump on a fellow for speaking in class?" snapped Smithy. "He's getting new manners and customs—taking Hacker for a model, it looks like. We know where we are with Quelch—but a beak has no right to be a lamb one day and a tiger the next!"

Redwing shook his head. The change in the French master at Greyfriars, who had always been good-tempered and tolerant, was not exactly pleasant to the recipients of his outbursts of irritation. Fellows had always taken it easy with Mossoo, and now they were brought up sharp at a word, or less than a word. Nobody liked it—the Bounder least of all.

"I fancy there's something amiss with him," said Redwing. "It isn't like him to be like Hacker. May be ill, or something."

"Rot!" said Smithy, decisively. "I know he gave me fifty lines of French, and I know he rapped my knuckles, and I know that I've got something to give him back for it."

"No good hunting for trouble, Smithy! Some fellows in the form got six all round from Quelch to-day, for that very thing—"

The Bounder laughed.

"I shan't talk it over, like that ass Cherry, with a pre. parked behind a tree listening-in," he said, sarcastically. "There won't be any trouble, old pippin—I'm not telling Loder like Cherry did! Mossoo keeps his overcoat hanging up in his study: and next time he goes to put it on, and finds the pockets full of gum, he may wish he hadn't been quite so free with his dashed pointer."

"I wouldn't, Smithy—"

"I would!" said Vernon-Smith: and he opened the drawer of the table in No. 4 Study, and took therefrom a large bottle of gum. It made rather a bulge, when he slipped it into the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Look here, Smithy—!" urged Redwing. "Chuck it, old man! It looks to me as if old Mossoo's got something on his mind—some worry or other—"

"I'll give him one more!"

"Might have had bad news from home, or something," said Redwing. "We all know about his relations in France—"

"Don't we?" grinned Smithy. "He bores all the other beaks to tears, in Common-Room, showing them photographs of little Adolphe, and little Henri, and little Charlot, and little Annette—pah! Wibley does him a treat—'Zat iz ze little Adolphe, mon neveu—zat is ze little Henri, mon ozzer neveu—'" The Bounder chuckled. "Well, if his dashed nephews and nieces are worrying him, that's no reason why he should worry us."

"But look here, Smithy—"

"No time, old man—I've got to make a call, while the beaks are in Common-Room. Speech taken as read!"

With that, Herbert Vernon-Smith walked out of No. 4 Study, and closed the door on Tom Redwing and his remonstrances.

He strolled down the Remove passage, and went downstairs. It was tea-time in Common-Room, and he had no doubt that Monsieur Charpentier would be there, with the other masters, and that Masters' Studies would be safe for a visitor. But he was very cautious. Nobody was in the corridor when he tapped at the door of the French master's study and opened it.

Had Mossoo been at home, the Bounder had a French exercise ready, in his pocket, as an excuse for his call. But the study was vacant, and he slipped in, and closed the door.

Outside, the December evening was dark, with a glimmer of snow here and there. But though the light was not on in Mossoo's study, there was plenty of light from the fire, which had been banked up. Mossoo suffered severely from the British climate in winter: and he was wont to pile up a fire, and keep his window clamped tightly shut, having a truly continental dislike for fresh air. The room was, in fact, almost like an oven: and Smithy certainly would not have liked to stay in its stuffy atmosphere long. But he did not intend to stay long—a few minutes would be enough to transfer the contents of the gum-bottle to the pockets of Mossoo's overcoat, hanging on a peg on the inside of the door.

The firelight, flickering on Smithy's face, showed a cheery grin there, as he extracted that big bottle of gum from his jacket. He uncorked it, and stepped to the hanging overcoat. With the gum-bottle in his right hand, he opened one of the coat-pockets wide with his left.

It was at that precise moment, however, that Smithy discovered that there was something amiss with his calculations—as the door-handle turned.

He gave a startled jump, and almost dropped the gum-bottle.

So far as Smithy knew, there was no reason whatever why Monsieur Charpentier should not stay full time at the tea-table in Common-Room. Generally he was a chatty gentleman, who liked to talk so long as listeners were to be found. But of late, Mossoo did not seem to be quite his usual self, in many ways. Anyhow he had come back to his study: and the door opened, shutting Vernon-Smith against the wall behind it.

Smithy caught his breath.

For the moment, he was hidden by the wide-open door. But that was not

likely to last long. He was fairly caught—caught as surely as Harry Wharton and Co. by Loder! He had, after all, hunted trouble—and found it.

“Zat you step in, mon bon Quelch!” came the high-pitched voice of the French master.

Smithy set his teeth. Not only had the “little beast” returned early to his study, but he had brought Quelch with him—Smithy’s own form-master. Smithy had jeered at the misadventure of the Famous Five that day. It looked as if he was booked for a similar “six” now.

The game seemed up! But again there was a respite. Smithy expected Mr. Quelch to come into the study with Mossoo, and the door to close. But Quelch’s voice came back: terribly close at hand:

“The room is somewhat warm, Monsieur Charpentier! I will remain here.”

“Comme vous voulez, monsieur.”

The Bounder, behind the door, breathed with relief, as Monsieur Charpentier trotted in alone. Quite unlike the French master, Quelch was a whale on fresh air. His study window was seldom quite closed, even in the severest weather. Quelch’s healthy lungs simply could not stand the close, stuffy, over-heated atmosphere of the French master’s study: and he remained in the doorway. The consequence was, that the door had to remain wide-open: and Smithy behind it, was still concealed from view.

It was a respite, at least. There might be a chance that Mossoo would go, when Quelch went. Smithy was not going to show up till he had to, at all events. He remained as still as a mouse behind the door, the uncorked gum-bottle still clutched in his hand.

The French master’s first action was to stir the fire, and Smithy had a momentary glimpse of his coat-tails. Luckily he did not look round. The stirring of the fire made the room hotter than ever, to the satisfaction of Monsieur Charpentier, though not to the Bounder’s—he was perspiring behind the door. However, it made it all the more assured that Quelch would not step in, which was a consolation.

“You had something you wished to say to me, monsieur?” Quelch was polite: but the Bounder could guess that he was not eager to linger. Even in the doorway, the atmosphere was a little too tropical for Quelch.

“Mais oui, monsieur!” piped Monsieur Charpentier. “But I like not zat you stand on ze feet—”

“That is quite all right, monsieur! What is it—?”

“I have ze bad news, Monsieur Quelch.”

“I am sorry to hear it.”

“Zat little Adolphe—he is verree ill!” sighed Monsieur Charpentier. “I have ze letter, and anouzzer letter, and anouzzer and anouzzer, and it is one verree great trouble on ze mind. C’est un bon garçon, ce petit Adolphe, mon neveu—un très bon garçon. Ven I have anouzzer letter to-day, I hope to find zat he is all left—”

"All right?" hinted Mr. Quelch.

"Mais oui—it is not zat it is all left, but zat it is all right! I hope to hear zat he is all right, but he is all wrong, monsieur! I zink zat it will be all left—zat is to say, all right—if I go ovair ze Channel vhen ze school he break down—"

"Break up?"

"Oui, oui, when ze school he break up for le Noël—for Kissmass. But now I zink zat I must go vizout waiting till ze school break down—zat is to say, break up—ze petit Adolphe so verree ill. I zink zat I must ask ze good Dr. Locke for leave."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch.

"It is one verree big trouble on ze mind, monsieur! It vake me in ze night, and I do not sleep. Quelque-fois, monsieur, sometimes, I stay up verree late, and valk about in ze quadrangle, to make me go sleepy, because of zat big trouble on ze mind. I do not like to ask ze head-master for leave, so near ze end of ze term, mais que faire? Vat can do? Zey tell me zat le petit Adolphe he ask for his oncle! Que faire?"

Mr. Quelch coughed.

"Certainly it would be somewhat awkward, so close on the end of the term," he said, "but I am sure, monsieur, that you would find the head-master quite sympathetic."

"You zink so, mon bon Quelch?"

"I am sure of it," said Mr. Quelch. "I certainly advise you to explain the matter to Dr. Locke, and I feel sure that he will consent at once to your leaving for France. Other arrangements can be made for your absence—I will myself take the junior set in French—"

"Oh, monsieur, zat is too good."

"Not at all," said Mr. Quelch. "I am sure that the matter can be arranged, monsieur, and I should certainly speak to the Head without delay. And now—" Quelch coughed again, "if you will excuse me, I have some work to do in my study—"

The Bounder heard footsteps recede down the passage.

Quelch was gone! No doubt he was sympathetic: but he had had enough of the stuffiness. Smithy drew a deep breath. If Mossoo went, too—!

He heard the French master moving about the study. Then he heard a muttering voice:

"Ce petit Adolphe! Le pauvre enfant! Helas!"

That mournful mumble touched a soft spot in the Bounder's by no means soft heart. For once, Smithy was feeling a little ashamed of himself.

He knew now that Tom Redwing had guessed correctly: poor little Mossoo had something on his mind. The illness of a small nephew of whom he was fond was more than enough to disturb deeply an effusive emotional little gentleman like Monsieur Charpentier. It was, perhaps, no wonder that he had been somewhat irritable and impatient of late, with that worry on his mind.

If he went, and left the way of escape open, Smithy silently resolved to take that bottle of gum with him—unused. Mossoo had enough to worry him without gum in his overcoat pockets. He heard the mumble again:

“Je m'en vais! Tout s'arrange, comme dit le bon Quelch—Je m'en vais le samedi.”

At that point, Monsieur seemed to remember that the door was still wide open. Mossoo loathed open doors, almost as much as open windows. He stepped across to it and threw it shut.

“Oh!” gasped Smithy.

“Ma foi!” ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier, staring blankly at the Bouncer, thus suddenly revealed. “You Smeets, vat you do here?”

He did not need a reply to that question. The uncorked gum-bottle in the Bouncer's hand was a sufficient answer.

A moment ago, Mossoo had been looking pensive and mournful. Now his face blazed with sudden anger. He spun round to the table, and grasped up a pointer. Then he spun back to Vernon-Smith.

“You Smeets—mauvais garçon—bad boy—you come here to play ze trick, viz ze gum, n'est-ce-pas? Très mauvais garçon—verree bad boy!”



“Ma foi!” ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

For a moment, it looked as if Monsieur Charpentier was going to handle the pointer, even more vigorously than Quelch was wont to handle the cane.

But the next moment his expression changed. The sudden anger died out of his face, and he threw the pointer back on the table. The Bounder watched that action in astonishment.

"Smeet!" said Monsieur Charpentier, quietly.

"Yes, sir!" stammered Smithy.

"I lose ze temper in ze class, and I rap you ze doigts—ze fingers, n'est-ce-pas? Zat is vy you come here viz gum! It is not left—zat is to say, it is not right, zat ze master lose ze temper in ze class! I sall not punish for zis, Smeet! Allez-vous-en."

"Oh!" breathed Smithy.

"Zat you go, Smeet!" Mossoo opened the door again. "It is all left—zat is, all right, and you may go! Allez."

The Bounder, hardly believing in his good luck, stepped into the doorway. There, he turned back:

"I'm sorry, sir!" he said, and his tone was sincere. "I'm really sorry, sir, and I hope you'll pardon me a silly trick."

Monsieur Charpentier stared at him, for a moment. Then he nodded, with a faint smile.

"C'est ça," he answered. "I am verree worry, Smeet, or I lose not ze temper in ze class. I say nozzing more about it, Smeet—it is all left!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Vernon-Smith went down the passage, and the French master's door closed after him. There was unusually thoughtful expression on Smithy's face, as he went: and he was more than glad that the gum was still in the bottle!

X

PLOTTING A PLOT!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter had more to say than that—much more. But he did not say it. Bob Cherry picked up half a loaf from the table in No. 1 Study. Billy Bunter had just time to jump back into the passage, dragging the door shut, before it whizzed. It thudded on the door.

"Beast!" howled Bunter, through the keyhole.

Then he departed. He was annoyed, and he was indignant. His visit to No. 1 Study had not been without an object. Bunter's postal-order had still failed to arrive, and he was in search of a little loan to tide him over. But Bob's prompt action was rather too discouraging for the fat Owl to proceed with that matter, important as it was. He rolled away indignant.

In No. 1 Study, five juniors were gathered round the table, though they had finished tea. A deep discussion was going on there: and the matter under discussion was not one to which other ears were wanted to listen—especially the fat ears of Billy Bunter.

"Bother the fat ass!" grunted Bob. "We've got to be careful about this. If that fat chump puts his head in again, I'll let him have this cushion, right on the boko! Look at the window, you fellows—is it getting thick?"

The juniors glanced round at the study window. There was no doubt that it was getting thick. Fog mingled with the December dusk. It was thick already, and looked like getting thicker.

"Thick enough," agreed Frank Nugent.

"The thickfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But—"

"Chuck it at that!" said Bob. "I've heard enough buts." He cast an aggrieved glance round at four faces. "I've told you the idea—ain't it a winner?"

Over tea in No. 1 Study, Bob had propounded the big idea, which had had to wait till after class. Bob was rather proud of that idea: but four members of the Co. seemed a little dubious.

"Um!" murmured Harry Wharton.

"Um!" repeated Johnny Bull.

"You don't seem to be wildly enthusiastic!" said Bob, sarcastically. "Look here, do we want to make that cad Loder sit up and yelp, or not?"

"We do!" agreed Harry.

"We know that he's going out of bounds to-night, sneaking out at his study window. We've had that, from Bunter. What's the matter with getting out of the dorm, quietly, and waiting for him there? He won't see a thing in the fog—"

"Shall we?" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Bob. "We shall hear him, and we shall see enough to let him have it. Just a glimpse will be enough."

"That's so," said Harry. "But—"

"Just a glimpse mightn't be enough," said Johnny Bull. "Might get the wrong party, in the fog."

"Talk sense!" snapped Bob. "Who's going to be walking around in the quad, on a foggy night, after lights out?"

Johnny Bull made no answer to that. It was highly improbable that any inhabitant of Greyfriars would be out of the House, at a late hour, on a cold dark, foggy December night. In fact, it was fairly certain that Loder would be careful to leave his nocturnal excursion until it was certain that nobody else would be about.

"Anybody would think you fellows would jump at a chance like this," said Bob, still aggrieved. "We can't get back on a pre. as a rule. This is the chance of a lifetime. Loder won't see a thing, and he can't do a thing afterwards. I've got a pot of green paint from Gosling's shed, too! Loder's going to get it!"

There was a chuckle in No. 1 Study. The idea of Loder of the Sixth getting the green paint, was entertaining.

"He can't get after us," continued Bob. "He won't want all Greyfriars to know that he got out of his study window late at night. He will just have to crawl back, and spend the rest of the night cleaning off paint—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He won't know a thing," said Bob. "The spying rat isn't listening behind a tree this time. Keep it awfully dark, of course—and—" Bob broke off, as the door-handle turned. "Oh, my hat, that fat blitherer again—he gets the cushion this time."

The cushion whizzed across the study as the door opened. With that deep, dark plot under discussion in No. 1 Study, Billy Bunter, always superfluous, was more superfluous than ever. There was a crash in the doorway.

"Oh!" came a startled roar.

"Take that, Bunter, you—Oh! I didn't know it was you, Smithy!" exclaimed Bob, blankly. Bob had taken it for granted that it was Bunter again. It seemed that he had taken a little too much for granted. It was not Bunter. It was Herbert Vernon-Smith who was tottering in the doorway, the cushion falling at his feet.

"You mad ass!" roared the Bounder. "What do you think you're up to?"

"I—I—I thought it was Bunter—" stammered Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the rest of the Co.

"You thought!" snorted Smithy. "Catch you thinking! You footling, fozzling, blithering, blethering fathead—"

"Sorry, old man—"

"Trot in, Smithy, old bean," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Only a mistake—you can't expect old Bob to look before he leaps—"

"Well, I thought it was Bunter again—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Br-rr-r!" growled the Bounder. He kicked the cushion aside, and came into the study, and threw the door shut after him. His unexpected reception in No. 1 had evidently not pleased Smithy! However, he had, apparently, come there with something to say, and he was going to say it.

"It's about Mossoo," he said, abruptly.

"Little beast!" said Bob. "He won't get that bag of flour now. But we'll jolly well rag him in the next French set."

"You won't," said Smithy.

"Won't we?" exclaimed Bob, belligerently. "And who says we won't, you cheeky ass, I'd like to know."

"I don't think you'll want to, after what I've got to tell you," said Vernon-Smith. "He caught me in his study with a bottle of gum, and let me off. But before he copped me, I heard him talking to Quelch, and I know now what's been the matter with the little ass. You've heard about that horde of relations of his—"

"Who hasn't?" said Nugent.

"Well, one of them, some kid he calls Adolphe, is ill, and that's what's on his mind, from what he said to Quelch. He's worried about the kid. Soft old ass to worry about his dashed relations, if you like, but—"

"I shouldn't call him a soft old ass, for that," said Harry Wharton. "Poor old Mossoo! So that's it?"

"He's going before the term ends," went on the Bounder. "He was muttering something about going before he copped me. I know he's been rather a Tartar lately: but now we know the reason, I think we can stand a yap or two without getting our ears up. We're not exactly angels, in the French class, if you come to that."

"Not quite!" said Nugent, laughing. "Poor old Mossoo! I daresay he had enough to worry him, without fellows slamming desk-lids, and coming in late—"

"Well, what about it?" said the Bounder. "He's cutting off in a day or two, to see about that sick kid in France, and my idea is to bar all rags from now on."

Five heads nodded in unanimous agreement.

"That's a go," said Harry.

"The go-fulness is terrific."

"I'm jolly glad I never gave him that bag of flour, after all," said Bob Cherry, soberly. "Mossoo always was a good little ass. If we'd had the least ideas that he was upset about a sick kid at home—"

"Well, you know it now," said Smithy. "No more rags, what?"

"Not the ghost of one," said Harry.

"Okay, then." With that, the Bounder quitted No. 1 Study, having said what he had come to say. He left the Famous Five looking rather serious. It was rather unlike the hard, cynical Bounder, to give much consideration to others: and it surprised them a little. Certainly they were more than ready to follow his lead, in making things as easy as possible for Mossoo, in the circumstances.

"Poor old bean," said Bob, remorsefully. "We do give him a few spots of bother in the French set, you know, and if he's upset about a sick kid—oh, blow! Thank goodness he never had that bag of flour."

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent.

"Well, I said it was rot, at the time!" remarked Johnny Bull. "If you'd listen to a chap when he talks sense—"

"If you're going to say that you told us so—!" roared Bob.

"Well, didn't I?"

"Never mind that," said Harry Wharton, hastily. "Keep to the subject—we were talking about Loder. Get back to Loder."

"Well, that's all cut and dried, now," said Bob. "If you fellows are going to back me up, you've only got to say so. I'm glad Froggy never had that bag of flour, as it turns out, but that doesn't make any difference about Loder—did he spy and listen behind a tree, and get us six all round from Quelch, or didn't he?"

"He did!" agreed Nugent.

"The didfulness was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and the painfulness for the obnoxious Loder is the proper caper, in my idiotic opinion."

"I'm on," said Harry. "What about you, Johnny?"

"Getting out of dorm after lights out is pretty serious," said Johnny, in his slow and thoughtful way. "I'd like to paint Loder as much as you fellows would: but rules are rules. I think it's rot."

Bob Cherry breathed hard. Bob was quite fixed in his determination to make the unpopular prefect "sit up and yelp", now that opportunity knocked, as it were. Certainly it was the only chance that was ever likely to occur, of "putting paid" to a prefect of the Sixth Form: and Bob had no use for solid common-sense from Johnny.

"If you funk it—!" he snorted.

"Who funks it?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Well, if you don't, back up, and not so much chin-wag!" snapped Bob.

"Back up, Johnny," said Harry Wharton. "This Co. always sticks together—and Loder is a rat, anyhow."

Johnny Bull grunted expressively.

"I said it's rot, and I think it's rot," he retorted, "but if you fellows are keen on it, I'm backing you up. If you're going to play the goat, I'll play the goat. But I think it's rot, all the same."

And so it was settled.

XI

LATE HOURS!

"**C**E pauvre petit Adolphe!"
Mossoo was muttering.

It was late. Dark December night cloaked Greyfriars School: and in the winter darkness, the fog eddied over the quad. Not a single light glimmered in the many windows of the House, with the solitary exception of Monsieur Charpentier's. The last stroke of eleven had died away in the foggy night. Long since, all forms at Greyfriars had gone to bed and gone to sleep: and the Staff had all followed their example, excepting the worried and troubled little French gentleman.

Mossoo, as he had told Mr. Quelch, was often sleepless of late. He was a stranger in a strange land: his heart was at home in la belle France. Quite a considerable portion of his salary went across the Channel for the behoof of beloved relatives. Other members of the Staff were kind enough to Mossoo, perhaps in a slightly patronizing way: and he was as a rule a cheerful little gentleman, patient and long-enduring under the trials of junior "sets". But present circumstances made him sad and sleepless: and he often heard the

chimes at midnight, unwilling to go to bed and lay a sleepless head on his pillow. Now he was walking about his study, thinking of the little Adolphe, and of his intention of asking the Head for leave to go before the end of the term. Quelch had assured him that he would find Dr. Locke sympathetic and amenable: but the timid little gentleman still hesitated to prefer his request, and had not yet done so.

"Que faire?" he murmured. "Que faire?"

He went to the window at last, and looked out. The December night did not look inviting. But he was tired of walking about his study, unwilling to go to a sleepless bed, and he decided to take a turn in the quad, as he had often done of late at all sorts of hours.

He stepped to the peg on the door, and lifted down the overcoat that had so narrowly escaped Smithy's gum-bottle. Having encased himself in the overcoat, wrapped a thick muffler round his neck, and buttoned the coat up to his ears, he put on his hat, and left his study, turning out the light.

There was a door on the quad, at the end of Masters' passage. All lights were out in the House at that hour, but a pale glimmer came in at windows. Mossoo walked down the passage quietly—he was a considerate little gentleman, and did not want to disturb anybody—and let himself out.

Even had Mossoo liked the British climate—which he very much didn't—he would not have found that night attractive. It was cold, it was dark, and it was foggy: and the quad was utterly dark and silent. But his only hope of sleep was to walk himself into a tired state: and he proceeded to walk, on the path under the study windows.

He walked the length of the House, and back again, passing Masters' Windows, and the Sixth-Form study windows—all dark, all closed. Little as Mossoo liked fresh air, it was doing him good, and he felt better as he walked to and fro. The fog did not trouble him, pacing a path of which he knew every inch. He walked, and walked, and walked, and felt better.

Suddenly he halted, startled.

At that hour of the night, past eleven o'clock, the last sound Mossoo would have expected to hear, was that of a window opening.

But that was what he heard, and he stared round in astonishment. Even in the mist, he could see the glimmer of the Sixth-Form windows, and it was one of the Sixth-Form windows that was opening.

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Monsieur Charpentier.

He stared at that window. He knew whose window it was—that of Gerald Loder, of the Sixth Form. Why the name of all that was surprising and unexpected, Gerald Loder was opening his window at that hour, was a mystery to Monsieur Charpentier. He stood and stared.

Up went the sash of the window: slowly, cautiously, making little sound. But little as the sound was, it was distinctly audible to the French master, in the silence of the night.

Head and shoulders appeared in the open window.

Loder of the Sixth looked out. At that hour, on a cold winter's night, Loder certainly did not expect any person belonging to Greyfriars to be abroad. He had left it late, to make sure of that. Of Mossoo's worries, and of his nocturnal ramblings, Loder of course knew nothing. He would as soon have expected to see Dr. Locke himself looming up in the mist, as the French master. But he did not expect to see anyone. It was his habitual caution that made him stare round watchfully, before getting out of the window. Sixth-Form studies at Greyfriars were also bedrooms: and it was easy for Loder to get out of bounds, when the spirit moved him so to do. But he had to be extremely careful about it. It was the "sack", short and sharp, if Loder's predilection for the chimes at midnight had become known to his head-master. Loder was as stealthy as a cat, when he paid surreptitious visits to his sporting friends at the Cross Keys at late hours.

He leaned out, and looked round. He gave a sudden start, as he discerned a dim form, barely visible in the mist. So sudden was his start, that he banged the back of his head on the raised sash, and uttered a sharp yelp.

"Ooooooh!"

Monsieur Charpentier stepped closer to the window.

"Lodair!" he exclaimed.

Loder rubbed the back of his head, and glared out at the French master with dilated eyes. The ghost of a French master could hardly have startled him more.

"Lodair! Is it zat you get out of zat vindow, at zis hour of ze night!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, startled and shocked: to such an extent that he even forgot le petit Adolphe for the moment.

Loder caught his breath. He was startled and terrified: but he tried to pull himself together. His eyes fairly burned at Mossoo.

"Is—is—is that you, Monsieur Charpentier?" he gasped.

"Mai oui! C'est moi."

Loder gritted his teeth. Gladly he would have leaned out of the window again, and smashed Mossoo's hat over his head. He was caught in the act—by that little blighter of a French master, who only the day before had given him a lick with his own ash—at least, Loder believed that he had, being happily unaware of Wibley's remarkable stunt. Loder would have given much at that moment, to crash a heavy fist down on Mossoo's hat. But he could not, of course, venture to do so.

"Lodair! Zis is verree serious. You get out of zat vindow, isn't it? At zis hour! You break ze bounds, Loder."

Loder, in the midst of his fury, was glad that he had not actually stepped out before he saw Mossoo. Only his head and shoulders had emerged, and he hoped that a little hard lying would see him through.

"Oh, no, sir!" he answered, as calmly as he could. "I was—was—was just looking out for a minute, sir—"

"You look out of ze vindow, at zis time of night when tout le monde is quick asleep!" said Mossoo, probably meaning fast asleep.

"Oh! Yes! I—I heard something," stammered Loder. "I—I heard a—a footstep, sir, and—and I thought I'd look out and see what it—it was—"

Monsieur Charpentier eyed him very dubiously. It seemed improbable that his light footfalls, on the path under the windows, could have reached Loder, through a closed window: especially if Loder had been asleep in bed, as he ought to have been. Still, perhaps it was possible.

"I—I was—was startled," said Loder. "I—I never thought of a master wandering about at this hour, sir—I—I thought of—of burglars—"

"Pouf!" said Monsieur Charpentier.

"As—as it's only you, sir, I—I'll go back to bed," muttered Loder.

"I zink you had better, Lodair!" said Monsieur Charpentier, very drily.

Loder stepped back, and closed the window. Inside the window, he shook a savage fist. His intended excursion that night was washed out—completely washed out. He dared not make the venture now, with that little idiot of a French master wandering about! His sporting friends at the Cross Keys had to expect him in vain.

In the worst of tempers, Loder went to bed, which was undoubtedly the best place for him at that time of night. And if he dreamed, he certainly did not dream of what might have happened to him, in the shape of green paint, if he had carried on!

Outside, Monsieur Charpentier shook his head very seriously. However, Loder's explanation had been more or less plausible: and Mossoo was not the man to make trouble if he could help it. He dismissed Loder from his mind, as le petit Adolphe came back into it: and resumed his pacing up and down the path under the study windows, his thoughts far away in France. The half-hour chimed from the clock-tower, and Mossoo was still pacing—his thoughts still far away in France—destined to be brought back to England, and Greyfriars, by a sudden and unexpected happening!

XII

NOCTURNAL!

"OH!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

He started up in bed, in the Remove dormitory.

Bob had not intended to go to sleep at all. He had been going to keep quite wide awake, and call the other members of the Co. at the appointed hour. Like many good intentions, that one was not carried out: somehow or other, he had slid off into slumber, without intending to. He awakened with a chime in his ears: but what hour was chiming, he did not know, till he looked at his

watch by the glimmer of a match. Then he discovered that it was half-past eleven.

"Oh!" repeated Bob.

He jumped out of bed. It was late: much later than he had intended. It was a cold night—very cold. But those circumstances did not deter him. A pot of paint was hidden in the ivy outside the House, all ready for the enterprise planned for that night: and Loder of the Sixth was going to get it, according to plan.

"Mmmmmmmmm!" mumbled Harry Wharton, as he was shaken by the shoulder. He opened his eyes sleepily and stared into the dark.

"Time!" whispered Bob.

"Oh, all right."

Not very willingly, the captain of the Remove turned out. Frank Nugent was the next to be shaken, and he opened reluctant eyes.

"Turn out!" whispered Bob.

"Urrrrgh!" mumbled Nugent. "What's the time?"

"Half-past eleven."

Nugent sat up in bed.

"You silly ass! You were going to call us before eleven! What's the good of turning out at half-past?"

"Better late than never."

"If Loder's going, he will be gone before this!" argued Nugent. "Better get back to bed, old chap."

"If he's gone, he will come back, I suppose? He's not going to stay the night at the Cross Keys, is he? It doesn't matter whether we catch him going out or coming in, so long as we do catch him."

"Oh, all right!" mumbled Nugent, and he turned out. Bob Cherry proceeded to wake Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and there was a yawn from the nabob of Bhanipur.

"Turn out, Inky!" whispered Bob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sat up and shivered.

"My esteemed Bob—" he murmured.

"Don't jaw and wake the dorm, old chap! Just turn out."

"The coldfulness is terrific," murmured the junior from India's coral strand. "And the warmfulness of the bed is preposterously comfortable. Why not let the ridiculous Loder rip?"

"Don't feel like turning out?" asked Bob.

"Not at all-fully."

"I'll help, old fellow." Bob Cherry grasped the nabob's bedclothes, and whipped them off the bed. "That better?"

"Ooooooooooh!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shuddering with the cold. He turned out and groped for his clothes.

Johnny Bull was last on the list. He awakened, with a grunt, as Bob shook him. He glared at Bob, in the gloom.

"Idiot!" he said. Having thus expressed his opinion of Bob and his enterprise Johnny turned out, and proceeded to dress in the dark.

Nobody seemed to enjoy turning out at nearly midnight on a cold December night. However, they were all out now, and hurrying on their clothes. It was half-past eleven: much later than the time for which the expedition had been planned. Still, as Bob had said, it mattered little whether Loder was caught going or coming. If he had not yet started, they would catch him going out: if he was gone, they had only to wait, lurking in the foggy dark, and catch him as he came back. In either case they would catch him: so that was all right.

The Famous Five were very quiet, as they dressed. They did not want to wake the rest of the Remove.

True, no man in the Remove was likely to give them away, if trouble followed the painting of Loder of the Sixth. But it was very much safer to keep the whole thing dark. Painting a Sixth-Form prefect was, as even Bob realized, a rather serious matter: and fellows who painted Loder could not be too careful about it.

Luckily, there was no sound of stirring in the long row of beds. Regular breathing of sound sleepers could be heard, and from Billy Bunter's bed came the more or less melodious rumble of a snore.

"You fellows ready?" whispered Bob. Bob was keen to get on the war-path.

"Ready, fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull. "May as well get on with it, if we're going to play the giddy ox."

"Look here, Bull, if you don't want to come—"

"Of course I don't."

"Then roll back into bed, and be blowed to you."

"Rats!"

"Quiet!" whispered Harry Wharton. "If this gets tattled up and down the form, we shall be for it—it would get out sooner or later—"

"Come on, then, and don't jaw."

Bob Cherry led the way. The door was opened silently, and five juniors flitted out like ghosts in the dark. The door was closed as silently, behind them.

They trod away cautiously by dark staircases and passages.

The House was sleeping: not a light glimmered anywhere. All was dark and silent, still and chill. The bare thought of Quelch hearing a footfall, and coming out to investigate, was dismaying. But Quelch was not likely to hear fellows stealing cautiously on tiptoe.

Silent almost as spectres, they groped, at last, into the junior lobby. The lobby was locked and bolted for the night: but that presented no difficulties from the inside. Bob struck a match and Harry Wharton turned back the key, and withdrew the bolts.

The match went out. In the dark, Bob drew the door open. A chill draught came in from the foggy night.

"All serene!" whispered Bob.

"The serenity is not very terrific, my esteemed Bob," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shivering.

"Looks thick outside," muttered Nugent.

"The thicker the better," said Bob, cheerily. "But keep together—don't you fellows get lost in the fog."

The Famous Five pushed out at the door, and Bob drew it shut. Outside, it certainly was a little thick. Still, that was all the better, from the point of view of juniors who were going to rag a Sixth-Form prefect. Whether Loder would venture to report an episode occurring out of the House at nearly midnight, they did not know: he would certainly have to think up some plausible excuse for having been out of doors at such an hour. But in any case, caution was indicated. They did not want to be recognized—very much indeed they did not. There was little danger of that, in the fog.

Bob Cherry groped in frozen ivy, and disinterred a paint-pot, full to the brim with green paint. He chuckled softly.

"Loder will like this, on his napper!" he murmured.

"We shall like it later!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, don't be a Jonah!" growled Bob. "Think Loder will report himself to the Head for being out of bounds in the middle of the night? He won't dare say a word about it."

"Think he won't get round that?" snorted Johnny. "Might say he heard us, and came out to see what was up. Loder's never short of a lie—he'd have been sacked before this, if he was."

"Well, let him yell it from the house-tops, if he likes—he won't know who did it!" grunted Bob. "Stop croaking, old man, and come on."

Johnny Bull grunted, but he came on. Five dim figures flitted in the mist, heading for the windows of the Sixth-Form studies. It seemed to all of the five that it was most probable that Loder was already gone, and that they would have to wait for his return, under his study window, till he came back from the Cross Keys. It was not an attractive prospect, in the chilly mist: but they were landed on it now, and had to make up their minds to it.

But, as it happened, they were not scheduled to wait! As they came tiptoeing on the gravel path under the study windows, a sound came to their ears. It was the sound of a footfall!

"Hold on!" breathed Bob. "Listen!"

They held on, listening intently. Every ear caught the light footfalls, coming along the path. In the darkness and mist they could see nothing. But they could hear.

"Loder!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"The ridiculous Loder!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob Cherry's eyes gleamed.

"Couldn't have happened better," he whispered. "Whether he's going or coming, here he is—quiet! Coming right towards us—asking for it! As soon as he's near enough, rush him, and tip him over—I'll do the rest."

"Quiet!"

In a breathless group, they listened. The footfalls came nearer and nearer. Something dim and shadowy loomed in the fog.

As it loomed, they rushed.

In the twinkling of an eye, a shadowy form was grasped, and tipped over on its back. Four pairs of hands were more than enough. A fifth pair of hands held the paint-pot, ready! In another twinkling, that paint-pot was up-ended over an upturned face, and the contents streamed out.

"Gurrrrrrrrrrgggh!"

It was a horrible, suffocated gurgle, from the recipient of the paint. Probably the startled victim had opened his mouth for a yell. It sounded like it—that horrible gurgle indicated that some of the mixture had gone in.

"Wurrrg! Oooogh! Ooooooooooooooooooogh!"

It had all happened in a couple of twinklings! In a third twinkling, the



The paint-pot was up-ended.

Famous Five were in full retreat. Bob Cherry hurled an almost empty paint-pot into space, and they flew. Wild and frantic gurglings and splutterings followed them from the foggy darkness. But those sounds faded out, as they flitted in at the lobby. The door was hastily closed, locked, and bolted.

"Quick!" breathed Bob. "Somebody will hear that row he's making—the beaks will be up! Quick!"

His comrades did not need that advice. They cut along passages, they whizzed up stairs: it was only a matter of seconds, before they were in the Remove dormitory again: breathless but secure. They whipped off their clothes and plunged into bed.

"Safe as houses, you men!" breathed Bob, from his pillow.

"Quiet!"

Sounds could be heard in the House. There could be no doubt that somebody had awakened. Opening of doors, and footfalls, and a vague sound of distant voices, could be heard.

"There's going to be a row!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"We're all right," said Bob.

"Quiet!" repeated Harry Wharton. "If they come nosing round the dormitories, we're all fast asleep."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob.

They lay and listened. It was ten minutes later that the door of the Remove dormitory was opened from outside, and the light switched on. Five pairs of very wakeful eyes were clamped shut.

Mr. Quelch's voice was heard, in subdued tones:

"Is any boy here awake?"

There was no answer to that question. Without seeing Quelch, the Famous Five were aware that he was scanning the row of beds, to make sure that all were occupied. Then the light was switched off, the door closed softly, and Quelch was gone. Silence followed, broken only by the snore from Billy Bunter's bed.

"We're all right!" repeated Bob, in a whisper.

"Let's hope so!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, go to sleep, fathead," said Bob. "Loder's got what was coming to him, and we're all right. Go to sleep and dream of Loder trying to get that paint off his chivvy."

There was a subdued chuckle. Sounds were still heard vaguely in the distance, but the Famous Five did not listen to them. They settled down to sleep and their eyes did not open again till the rising-bell was clanging out in the morning. The fog had cleared, and it was a bright frosty day: but its brightness was fated to be dimmed for the chums of the Remove.

XIII

WHO PAINTED MOSSOO?

"SACK for somebody!" said Vernon-Smith.

There could be little doubt about that!

The news was all over Greyfriars in the morning. Some of the masters and prefects, who had been awakened from slumber, had known over-night. But in the morning all the school knew.

It was heard with amazement, by all: but by five members of the Remove, with absolute consternation.

Harry Wharton and Co. indeed, could hardly believe it when they heard it. It seemed to them wildly impossible, and too awful to be true.

But it was true! It was only too true! It was unexpected, unnerving, but it was awfully true! It had happened!

Some person or persons unknown—very fortunately, unknown!—had collared Monsieur Charpentier, taking a walk in the quad at a late hour, up-ended him, and smothered his head and face with green paint!

When the news reached the Famous Five, they gazed at one another, with pale and startled faces, and went out into the quad to get away by themselves.

"Mossoo!" said Bob Cherry faintly, when they were out of hearing of other ears.

"Not Loder!" moaned Nugent.

"It can't be—!" muttered Bob. "How could Mossoo be there—right under the Sixth-Form windows, at nearly midnight—"

"He was!" said Johnny Bull.

"We couldn't see who it was, in the dark and the fog, but how could it have been Mossoo?" groaned Bob.

"The howfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the Mossooffulness is preposterous. It was the esteemed and ridiculous Mossoo that we collarfully bagged and tipfully upended in the idiotic fog, and if the absurd Head gets wise to it—!"

"The sack!" said Harry Wharton.

"The sackfulness will be terrific!"

"Oh, crumbs!" mumbled Nugent.

"We never knew—!" groaned Bob. "Poor old Mossoo! I wouldn't hurt a hair of his head—he's not got many to hurt, poor old chap. We thought it was Loder—"

"Larking in the fog is a silly mug's game," grunted Johnny Bull, "and I jolly well told you so—!"

"Pack that up!" hooted Bob.

"Well, I did tell you so—!"

"Shut up, Johnny, for goodness sake," said Harry Wharton. "Look here, you chaps, we've played the giddy ox, and landed Mossoo instead of Loder.

Goodness knows how it happened he was there—but he was: and we took him for Loder in the fog, and it can't be helped! There would have been a row if it had been Loder—but there will be an awful, fearful, frightful row, as it's turned out to be a beak. If it comes out, it's the sack. It mustn't come out."

"It was a mistake, after all—!" said Bob.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Think that would make any difference with the Head—if we told him we smothered a master with paint, intending to smother a Sixth-Form pre. with it?" he asked.

"Um!" said Bob. "No, I suppose not. Mum's the word."

"Not a word—not a syllable—not a whisper!" said Harry. "We're all sorry, but we can't tell poor old Mossoo so. Luckily, not a fellow knows that we were out of the dorm last night. Not a fellow's going to know. If it gets out, we shall go home before the school breaks up for Christmas—and stay there! Mum's the word all round."

"The mumfulness will be terrific."

"It's just sickening," mumbled Bob. "It was all planned so jolly well—not a hitch anywhere, except that we got Mossoo instead of Loder—"

"Quite a bit of a hitch, don't you think?" inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"And Loder gets off, too!" sighed Bob.

"Never mind Loder!" said Johnny, with a glare. "You start any more big ideas about Loder, and we'll scalp you. You ought to be scalped anyway."

"Quiet—here comes Smithy," muttered Wharton.

The Bounder came up to the group of juniors in the quad. His brows were knitted.

"This is pretty rotten, you fellows," he said. "I'd like to get on the track of the fellows who ragged poor old Mossoo last night. I know he's been a bit of a Tartar lately: but smothering the poor old bean with paint—ugh! From what I hear, three or four fellows were in it—Mossoo seems to have been collared right and left, from what they're saying. But who—?"

"The who-fulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"If it was Remove fellows, we'll get to know," said Smithy, "and I jolly well know I'll punch their heads for it, too. I call it a rotten dirty trick. It's the sort of thing Skinner and his gang might do—they've had their knuckles rapped in the French set—but they'd never have the nerve—"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I'm sure it wasn't Skinner and his gang," he said, gravely.

"Fourth Form chaps, perhaps," said Smithy, with a nod. "Or they might be Shell men—goodness knows! Dirty trick on poor old Froggy. They'll be sacked when it comes out, that's a comfort."

"Is it?" murmured Bob.

"And the pre's will root them out all right!" said the Bounder. "They're after them like hawks—they'll jolly well root them out, bank on that."

"Think so?" gasped Nugent.

"Bank on it!" said Smithy, confidently, and he walked on: leaving the Famous Five exchanging expressive glances. They did not find Smithy's assurance that the prefects would root out the culprits either grateful or comforting.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!" hooted Bob. The hapless quintette were in no mood for Billy Bunter.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hook it, fathead!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, who do you think did it?" asked Bunter. "Think it was Loder?"

Five fellows jumped, at that suggestion.

"Loder!" stuttered Bob.

"Well, somebody did it, and it must have been somebody who had it in for Mossoo," argued Bunter. "And you know what happened the other day—Loder getting a whop from his own ash—!"

"That was Wibley playing the goat, fathead."

"Yes, we know that—but Loder doesn't!" said Bunter, sagely. "Loder doesn't know a thing about Wibley making up as Mossoo, you know. He thinks it was Froggy gave him that whop! Looks to me as if it was Loder—"

"Fathead!" said the Famous Five, together.

"Well, that's what it looks like to me," declared Bunter. "From what I hear, it happened under the Sixth-Form windows, quite near Loder's study. Goodness knows why Froggy was there—but he was: and I rather fancy that Loder saw his chance, and mopped that paint over him. You see, I jolly well know that Loder was up last night because I heard him telling Carne—"

"It wasn't Loder, you howling ass."

"Well, I jolly well think it was!" said Bunter. "He's beast enough—didn't he give me six, making out I was listening round a corner—I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!" howled Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk away, having had enough of William George Bunter's theories on the subject. The fat Owl rolled away to propound his views to more willing listeners.

"Nobody knows at any rate!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Not even Bunter! He thinks it was Loder—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smithy thinks it might be somebody in the Fourth or the Shell! They won't get anybody!" said Bob. "We've only got to keep it dark. Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's old Wib—who do you think painted Froggy last night, Wib?"

William Wibley laughed.

"You!" he answered.

Bob jumped almost clear of the ground. His comrades stared at Wibley,

blankly. Wibley was a wonderful man at theatricals, at making-up, at impersonation of almost anybody: but nobody had ever supposed that he had detective gifts before. His answer was surprising.

"Me!" gasped Bob.

"Wasn't it?" grinned Wibley.

"What's put that idea into your head?"

"I fancy it will be put into a good many heads, when that smear of green paint on your sleeve is noticed," answered Wibley.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

Bob stared at his sleeve. His comrades stared at it. Bob had been careful in the handling of that paint-pot. But apparently he had not been careful enough. There was undoubtedly a green smear on his sleeve. It was not conspicuous: but it was there: and it had caught Wibley's eye, in the gleam of wintry sunshine.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. The next moment he was rubbing at that smear.

"What did you fellows do it for?" asked Wibley. "Mossoo's been rather a little beast lately, but mopping paint over him—!"

"We took him for Loder, in the fog!" breathed Harry Wharton. "It was—a ghastly mistake! That's all."

Wibley whistled.

"That won't help you much, if it comes out," he said. "Better keep it parked."

"We'd thought of that, already," said Nugent, with a faint grin.

"Not a word, Wib!" said Harry.

"Not a syllable!" agreed Wibley. "Why, you fatheads, it would be the sack—the Head simply couldn't do less. The long jump just before Christmas—!"

"Don't!" groaned Nugent.

There was the clang of a bell. Harry Wharton and Co. joined the crowd of Removites heading for the form-room. They noted that Mr. Quelch looked over his form very, very keenly: never had his eyes seemed so much like gimlets, to five members of his form. But those gimlet-eyes did not rest specially on them—Quelch had no suspicion. Indeed, he probably did not think that the delinquents were in his form at all.

The secret was safe: they had only to keep silence. Only Wibley knew, and they could depend on him. But it was not a happy morning for the chums of the Greyfriars Remove.

XIV

THE FAT IN THE FIRE!

"I SAY, you fellows—!"

"Kick him!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter.

He retreated promptly and indignantly, from No. 1 Study, banging the door after him with a bang that woke all the echoes.

Harry Wharton and Co. did not seem in a mood for Bunter!

It was Saturday afternoon. From the study window, they had watched a taxi from Courtfield leaving, with a little French gentleman seated in it. Mossoo, evidently, had obtained the leave he required from the Head, and was off for France: the taxi bearing him to Courtfield station to take his train for Dover.

Five faces were grave, as they watched him depart. The chums of the Remove were sorry enough for that hapless error in the fog, and would gladly have asked Mossoo's pardon for it before he went—had it been practicable. But the disastrous secret had to be kept.

Mossoo was gone! They were not going to see him again till next term—if, indeed, they were at Greyfriars at all next term! They could not help feeling a lingering doubt about that.

Nothing had come out. Nobody had any suspicion, so far. But the episode was too awfully serious to be allowed to die away. Masters were watchful, wary: keen to detect the culprits. Prefects were on the prowl. Everybody was discussing the mysterious occurrence. Everybody was keen to know who had done it. There was endless speculation about the unknown offenders. And the Famous Five, who would not willingly have harmed a hair of Mossoo's head—not a single one of the few he had left!—were the unknown offenders!

Having watched Mossoo's taxi turn out at the gates, the Famous Five exchanged rather dismal glances.

"That rotten fog the other night—!" sighed Bob Cherry. "But for that, we should never have— A bag of flour wouldn't have been so bad—but a pot of paint—!"

"We didn't mean it," said Nugent, "but—we did it!"

"The didfulness was terrific."

"Who'd have dreamed that Mossoo would be out of the House—" said Bob. "A fellow couldn't guess that one."

"I told you it was rot!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Don't tell us again!" implored Bob.

"Well, I told you so—!"

It was at that point that Billy Bunter rolled in at the doorway. He rolled out faster than he rolled in, when Bob Cherry reached out with a long leg, and the largest foot in the Remove contacted the tightest trousers in that form.

Bunter retired indignantly, banging the door.

"That fat tick!" growled Bob. "If he got hold of a word of this, it would be all over the Remove in half-an-hour—"

"And all over the school in an hour!" said Nugent. "For goodness sake, not a word when Bunter's in the offing, or the fat will be in the fire."

"We can't be too jolly careful," said Harry Wharton. "Nobody would give us away if you come to that: but once it was known and talked about, you can bank on it getting to the pre's sooner or later."

"Loder would like to know!" remarked Nugent.

"Wouldn't he just!" said Bob. "It's all Loder's fault, really. Blow Loder."

"Blow him terrifically!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Least said soonest mended," said Harry. "There's nothing we can do, except keep it dark."

"If anything came out—!" muttered Bob.

"Okay so far, at any rate," said Nugent. "And Christmas is coming—and it will all be forgotten next term. Next term we'll all be as good as gold in the French set, to make it up to poor old Mossoo for the paint."

"Yes, rather," agreed Bob.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!" concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The goodfulness of our esteemed selves will be preposterous."

"So long as we can keep it up, at any rate!" added Bob: hedging a little, as it were.

"We've got to keep it awfully dark," said Johnny Bull. "And look here, Bob, no more bright ideas about getting back on a pre. Next time you get a pot of paint for Loder, I expect you'll land it on Quelch—or the Head! I told you at the time it was rot—"

Bob Cherry pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you going to say again that you told us so?" he asked. "If you are, better guard with your left."

"Well, look here—!"

"Oh, don't rag!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We'll let Loder rip, after this, and be blowed to him! All we've got to think about is keeping it dark that it was us who mopped the paint over Mossoo last night—"

The captain of the Remove was suddenly interrupted.

The study door flew open, and a fat figure rolled headlong in, yelling. Wibley followed it in, as the juniors stared round in surprise.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter. "I wasn't listening—Keep off, you beast! I—I'd only stopped to tie my shoe-lace—"

Wibley looked across at the juniors at the window.

"You fellows talking about anything private?" he asked. "Bunter's heard it, if you were."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"He had his ear to the keyhole, as I came down the passage," explained Wibley, "so I kicked him into the study."

"I wasn't!" yelled the sprawling Owl. "I didn't—I never—I'd just stooped to pick up a pin—" Billy Bunter sat up, and blinked apprehensively at the Famous Five, as they came towards him. He had reason to be apprehensive. "I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I wasn't listening—I'd only stooped to pick up my hanky and I never heard a word you fellows were saying—not a syllable! And I ain't going to tell anybody that it was you chaps who painted Mossoo—I—I—I wouldn't—"

"You fat villain!" breathed Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"You listening worm—!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

Wibley whistled.

"Was that it?" he asked.

Harry Wharton gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.

"That was it!" he said. "It will be all over Greyfriars now. The game's up."

"The upfulness is terrific."

"I—I—I say you fellows, I—I never heard!" babbled Bunter. "I—I wasn't anywhere near the keyhole, and I never heard you say a word about mopping the paint over Mossoo last night. I—I didn't really! And—and I ain't going to give you away! I—I ain't going to say—Yaroooh! Help! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Boot him!" roared Bob.

"Yaroooooooh!"

The game was up: there was no doubt about that. Once tattled by Bunter up and down the House, it was only a matter of time—probably a very short time—before it reached official ears. And that the loquacious Owl would babble so exciting a spot of news up and down the House, there was no doubt whatever. Five feet landed on Bunter all together, and he roared frantically, and squirmed to the door. Wibley added another, as he squirmed out of the study: and it lifted Bunter into the passage.

The fat Owl rushed down the passage: and into Vernon-Smith and Skinner, who were coming up from the landing. All three staggered from the shock.

"You fat ass!" roared the Bounder. "Look where you're running."

"Ow! wow! I say, Smithy, keep them off!" howled Bunter. "I say, I ain't going to tell anybody that it was Wharton who mopped that paint over Mossoo—"

"What?" gasped Smithy.

"Wharton!" exclaimed Skinner.

"I ain't going to say a word—keep 'em off!" gurgled Bunter. "Wow! Stop kicking me, Bob Cherry, you beast! I tell you I ain't going to say—wow-ow-wow—wow—wow!"

Bob had emerged from the study, to add one more. The fat Owl, yelling, fled for his fat life. Vernon-Smith and Skinner stared after him, and then stared at Bob's flushed face.

"You!" exclaimed Smithy.

Bob tramped back into No. 1 Study without replying. Skinner, grinning, went on up the passage, to spread the news in other studies. Vernon-Smith stared into No. 1, with a knitted brow.

"So it was you fellows mopped that paint over Froggy," he said. "If you want to know what I think about it—"

"Nobody does!" snapped Bob.

"I'll tell you all the same! It was a rotten trick—"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "It was a bungle in the fog—we were after Loder—"

The Bounder stared at him, blankly, for a moment. Then he burst into a laugh.

"Well, you must be blithering idiots," he said.

"Thanks! Shut the door after you."

The Bounder, still laughing, followed Skinner up the passage: apparently amused to learn that it was a bungle in the fog! Bob Cherry kicked the door shut after him. Nobody in No. 1 Study was amused!

"The fat's in the fire now, you fellows," said Wibley.

"Don't we know it?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed Wibley."

"Look here, there's a chance yet!" said Wibley. "Cut off to Mossoo at once, before it gets out, and tell him the whole story. He's been a Tartar lately, but he's a good old boy really, and he might put in a word for you—make him understand that it was a mistake in the fog, and that you never meant it for him, and he might go easy—"

"Jolly good idea, if it wasn't too late!" said Bob. "You see, Mossoo's gone—we saw him clear off in a taxi ten minutes ago."

"Oh!" said Wibley. "That's washed out, then."

"Sort of!" said Nugent.

"Looks as if we're washed out, too," said Bob. "Interview with the Head, and the chopper—what a life! Here, let's get out into the open air, anyway—no good waiting here for the chopper to come down."

"Hold on a minute," said Wibley.

"Well, what?" asked Harry, impatiently.

"Mossoo might lose his train—he's just the duffer to lose a train—"

"What about it, if he did?"

"If he did he might come back, mmmm—"

"Why should he?"

"Well, he might—"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"Look here, I've got an idea—!"

"Take it home and boil it," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, you fellows—let's get out."

The Famous Five tramped out of No. 1 Study. They were not interested in Wibley's idea, whatever it might have been: the impending "chopper" absorbed all their interest. Wibley was left in the study, with a very thoughtful expression on his face: and the Famous Five went out into the frosty air of the quad. There was snow among the elms, and some fellows were snowballing: but the hapless five were not thinking of snowballs. They were thinking of what was coming to them: and how soon would it come: and they found that quite enough to occupy all their thoughts.

XV

IN SUSPENSE

"So it was you!" said Coker of the Fifth.

Coker was the umpteenth Greyfriars man to make that remark.

The news was spreading: and evidently it had passed beyond the Remove, and reached the senior forms. It was half-an-hour since Billy Bunter had been booted out of No. 1 Study. His fat chin had been in perpetual motion since: in other matters, the fat Owl was slow, but when it came to wagging his plump chin, he was a quick worker.

Bunter, certainly, had no idea of giving the culprits away to beaks or prefects. Even the booting wouldn't have led Bunter to that. But keeping so exciting a spot of news to himself, was a sheer impossibility. Bunter had to talk or burst. The Remove were soon buzzing with the tale: and fellows in the Fourth and the Shell were not long in learning that a whole crowd knew who had painted Mossos the night before. Up and down Greyfriars fellows were saying to one another: "Know who did it?" "Yes, Wharton's gang!" Only too well the hapless five knew that it could be only a question of time before it came to the prefects' ears. It might be hours, or it might be minutes. But it was coming.

Dozens of fellows came up to them in the quad, singly or in twos and threes: till they were tired of explaining that it had been a bungle in the fog, not meant for Mossos at all. Indeed they were tired of the subject: more than tired. They were strolling, in a far from merry bunch, near the door of the junior lobby, when Coker of the Fifth came up in his turn.

"You young ruffians!" said Coker, in his most magisterial way.

The Famous Five glared at him. They had had more than enough, and they did not want any more from Horace Coker.

"Oh, buzz off, Coker," said Harry Wharton.

"Take your face away!" snapped Bob Cherry. "Don't you know that it gives a fellow a pain?"

"Young hooligans!" said Coker. "You'll jolly well be sacked for it. I've a jolly good mind to smack your heads all round, myself."

"Try it on!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"The smackfulness might be a boot on the other leg, my esteemed and ridiculous Coker," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You're asking for it," said Coker, darkly. "And I can jolly well say this— Oh! Ow! Wooooooh!"

The door of the junior lobby, behind Coker, opened, and Wibley of the Remove came out, carrying a large bag. Wibley was swinging that large and heavy bag in his hand, and perhaps by accident, it contacted Coker. It contacted him quite suddenly and hard, and Coker, taken by surprise, pitched forward, with a yell, and stumbled over on his hands and knees.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the Famous Five.

"Oh! Ah! oh! Oooogh!" spluttered Coker, as he sprawled.

Wibley, grinning, cut off, swinging the bag. Coker of the Fifth scrambled up, and glared round. But he had no chance to pursue Wibley. Harry Wharton and Co. collared him, as one man, tipped him over, and Coker sprawled again. This time he did not get up so rapidly. The Famous Five were not in a mood, just then, to "suffer fools gladly". They rolled Coker over, stuffed handfuls of snow down his neck, and finally walked away, leaving him in a breathless and bewildered state.

They were feeling a little better, as they strolled in the quad again. Ragging Coker had cheered them up a little.

"I say, you fellows." A fat squeak reached their ears. Billy Bunter, with about a dozen fellows round him, was still telling the tale. "I say, it was Wharton's gang that painted Mossoo—I heard them talking about it in their study—"

"Pryin' little beast!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Don't yell it out, you fat ass!" said Tom Brown.

"Who's yelling it out?" demanded Bunter. "I'm only telling you fellows. I ain't going to tell Quelch! But I say, it was Wharton's gang—they got out of the dorm last night, you know, and I heard Wharton say—yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" Billy Bunter wound up with a wild howl, as Bob kicked him, in passing.

The Famous Five walked on, leaving the crowd round Bunter laughing.

"All over the shop!" growled Johnny Bull. "I wonder how long it will be before Wingate, or Gwynne, or Loder, hears something—"

"Not very long, at this rate," said Harry.

"The longfulness will not be terrific," sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Quelch will want us soon."

"That was a good idea of Wib's, if only Mossoo hadn't gone!" said Nugent. "But—he's gone."

"Too late!" sighed Bob. "I say, I wonder whether this is our last walk round Greyfriars! Think the Head will sack us?"

Temple, Dabney, and Fry, of the Fourth, came up.

"So it was you lot!" said Temple. "You ought to be bunked."

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"Looked out your train home?" asked Fry.

Once more the Famous Five found relief in a ragging. Temple, Dabney, and Fry, were suddenly strewn on the earth, and the Famous Five, leaving them in the same breathless and bewildered state as Coker, walked on. A few minutes later, Hobson of the Shell came up to speak.

"If you fellows want to know what I think of you—!" began Hobson.

It became obvious at once that the Famous Five did not want to know: for they collared Hobson, and bumped him down on the quad.

As they walked on, leaving Hobby for dead, as it were, a study window opened, and a sharp voice called:

"Wharton!"

It was Mr. Quelch, frowning from his study window. The chums of the Remove almost felt their hearts missing a beat!

"It's come!" muttered Bob.

"Quelch's heard!" breathed Nugent.

"We're for it!" said Johnny Bull. "Well, I told you so—!"

"Come on!" said Harry, quietly: and the five juniors came up to the study window, under the grim stare of the gimlet eyes. They had no doubt that it had come!—the "chopper" at last!

"Yes, sir!" said Harry. "You called us—"

"I did, Wharton! Kindly be more circumspect in the quadrangle!" said Mr. Quelch, severely. "I do not approve of horse-play, Wharton! Bear that in mind."

The study window closed again with a snap.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "He—he—he saw us tipping Hobby over—that's all!" He gasped with relief.

Once more they walked on. It was only a false alarm: Quelch had not heard yet! There was a respite!

"Blessed if I don't feel like going to Quelch, and getting it over," said Frank Nugent. "It's got to come."

"No use asking for it," said Johnny Bull. "While there's life there's hope. I'm not in a hurry to go up to the Head."

"Bet you we shall be called up before tea-time," said Nugent. "Hallo, there's Loder—I—I wonder if he wants us."

Again the hapless five felt a qualm. But Loder of the Sixth passed on, with nothing more than an inimical glance. Loder had heard nothing, yet.

The suspense was really painful. Still, they did not feel like anticipating matters. They walked in the quad, feeling themselves the cynosure of more and more eyes. The minutes dragged.

"Let's get out," said Bob Cherry, at last, "I've had enough of this. If Quelch wants us, Quelch will keep till we come in."

"Let's!" agreed Harry.

They walked down to the gates. Gosling, at his lodge, eyed them. They heard a crusty mutter:

"Young rips!"

From which they guessed that Gosling had heard!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

"What—?"

"Mossoo!" gasped Bob.

"Oh, my hat!"

A taxi was turning in at the gates. Within sat a passenger—a dapper little

gentleman with a sallow face, a twisted moustache, and a little pointed beard. The Famous Five stared blankly.

"Mossoo!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"Froggy!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Froggy!"

They stared after the taxi, as it ran on to the House.

"Lost his train," said Bob. "Why, Wibley said he might lose his train, and come back! And—he has! O what a little bit of luck! It's a chance, you men—a bit of a chance, at any rate! Come on!"

All the Famous Five realized that it was a chance, if only the ghost of one. They raced after that taxi.

XVI

SPOT OF LUCK!

"MONSIEUR Charpentier—!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Just a minute, sir—"

The taxi had stopped at the House. The dapper little gentleman had stepped out. He was telling the taxi-driver to wait, when the Famous Five came breathlessly up. They all burst out at once. Monsieur Charpentier glanced round at them. He gave them a nod and a smile.

"So glad you came back, sir!" gasped Nugent.

"The gladfulness is terrific, honoured sahib."

"If you'd spare us a minute, sir—"

"Just a minute or two, sir—"

"C'est ça! Vat is it, zen? I lose me ze train," said the little gentleman. "Zat train, he is lose, et je suis de retour, n'est-ce-pas? I come back viz me, before zat I go to catch ze next train, isn't it?"

There was a fat squeak in the offing.

"I say, you fellows! Froggy's come back."

Billy Bunter did not, perhaps, intend that to reach French ears. But it did: and Mossoo slewed round, and stared at the fat Owl.

"Vous Buntair!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, crikey! I—I—I mean, yes, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't call you Froggy, sir—I—I never do, like some of the fellows, sir—"

"I hear you viz mine own ears, Buntair! Allez! Go you to your study and write out twenty lines of ze Henriade."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Allez-vous-en, vous mauvais Buntair."

Billy Bunter rolled reluctantly into the House. Not that he was going to do

those lines! Mossoo's departure, it seemed, was delayed: but he was due to depart that day. He wouldn't be able to ask for those lines! Bunter rolled in—but not to write lines!

Mossoo turned to the Famous Five again.

"Is it zat you vish to speak to me, mes garçons?" he asked. "Parlez, donc! J'ecoute."

His manner was very kind and genial. That was a relief to the Famous Five. In that mood, there was hope.

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry Wharton. "We—we—we want to confess something, sir, and ask your pardon."

Mossoo raised his eyebrows.

"Eh bien!" he said. "Is it zat you do somezing! In zat case you go to le bon Quelch—"

"No, sir, we—we've got to tell you. It was we who—who—who—" Wharton stammered. It was not easy to get it out.

"Vat zen?" asked Monsieur Charpentier.

"Cough it up, old chap!" murmured Bob.

It had to be coughed up! Wibley had suggested that owning up to Mossoo might work the oracle, so to speak: and but for the French master's departure, the Famous Five certainly would have tried it on. Now that he had unexpectedly returned, it was their chance—and their only one.

"It was we who—who—who did it, sir—" stammered Harry.

"Who did vat?"

"Last night, sir!" said Bob, helping Wharton out.

"The—the paint, sir—!" stammered Nugent.

"We never meant it for you, sir!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We—we never knew you were out of the House, sir—it was a lark on—on a—a fellow we thought might be out—not you, sir—"

"Never dreamed it was you, sir!" chimed in Bob.

"It was that fog, sir—!" said Nugent.

"The fogfulness was too terrific for the seefulness, sir!"

"And—and we're sorry—"

"Awfully sorry, sir—"

"The sorrowfulness is preposterous."

"If you'd overlook it, sir, as it was all a mistake—"

"Just a rotten bungle in the fog, sir—"

All the Famous Five were speaking at once now. They regarded Mossoo anxiously as they poured out the tale. Was there a chance?

More than a dozen fellows had gathered round, and they listened, as well as Mossoo. Skinner winked at Snoop.

"If they think Froggy will swallow that paint, they've got another guess coming!" he murmured. And Snoop grinned and nodded.

But the expression on the Gallic face rather encouraged the Famous Five.

Mossoo had a look of surprise at first: then he frowned: and then gradually his frown faded out, and he looked again. Vernon-Smith whispered to Tom Redwing:

"By gum! Looks as if he's going easy!"

"I hope so," said Redwing.

Harry Wharton and Co. certainly hoped so! Mossoo, and his kindness of heart, were their last hope! Was there a chance?

"Mon Dieu! Zen it was you!" said Monsieur Charpentier, at last. "You speak to me to own down to zat—"

"Own up, sir!" murmured Bob.

"Oui, oui, you say to own up, not to own down!" agreed Mossoo. "Zat is left! It was verree, verree wrong vat you shall have done—zat paint, on vat you call ze napper, he is verree unpleasant—you make me to vash, and vash, and vash ze head, to get off zat verree nasty paint—"

"We're awfully sorry, sir—"

"Never meant it for you, sir—"

"Wouldn't have dreamed of it, sir—"

Monsieur Charpentier smiled. Evidently, he was moved by the plea of the anxious five. He smiled and nodded.

"Zen I forgive you," he said. "You sall come viz me to ze bon Quelch, and I vill explain to him zat you own down—zat is to say own up—and zat all is forgive, and nozzings more to be said."

Five faces brightened up, like summer sunshine coming out through winter mists.

"Thank you, sir."

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"C'est ça, c'est ça!" said Monsieur Charpentier. "Come you now viz me to ze bon Quelch and all is left—zat is to say, right!"

"Oh, certainly, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier tripped into the House. Gladly the Famous Five followed him. They left a crowd of fellows round the doorway in a buzz. Herbert Vernon-Smith gave a prolonged whistle.

"Some fellows have the luck!" he remarked.

"He's a good old chap," said Redwing.

"Yes—he let me off that time in his study, but—but—well, mopping paint over him was too thick!" said Smithy. "Blessed if I thought Mossoo would go easy about that! But—he has!"—He whistled again. "Spot of luck for them, that he lost his train and came back. He's just the old ass to lose a train, but what the dickens did he come back for, instead of waiting at the station?"

"Lucky he did! Quelch will have to go easy if he asks—"

"Blessed if I make it out," said the Bounder, puzzled. "He's had ample time to catch another train—but he's come back here, just as if he came specially to get those fellows out of the soup!"

The Bounder shook his head. The utterly unexpected return of Monsieur Charpentier was an amazing spot of luck for the Famous Five, there was no doubt about that. Really, it seemed too good to be true! He had returned, unexpectedly—still more unexpectedly, he was prepared to forgive the episode of the paint, and to see the delinquents through with their form-master. And that Monsieur Charpentier was many miles away, in the train for Dover, and that a Remove fellow named William Wibley had borrowed his identity for the afternoon, was an idea that was likely to occur to nobody!

XVII

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY

MR. QUELCH laid down his pen, with a faint frown, as a tap came at his study door. On the study table, before him, several volumes were open. One was the Odes of Quintus Horatius Flaccus, with Dillenburger's notes in Latin on the same: a most attractive volume—to Quelch! Another was Wickham's edition—with Wickham's notes. Still another, was Professor Verrall's great work on Horace, elaborating his remarkable Murena theory!

In the midst of this attractive and fascinating company, naturally Mr. Quelch did not want interruptions!

The tap at his door was not welcome. Saturday was a half-holiday to the Remove master, as well as to the Remove. Quelch, deep in the delights of Horace, had forgotten the twentieth century, and was 'way back in 23 B.C. The tap at his door brought him back, with rather a jump, over the centuries, right up to date. His voice had a slight edge on it, as he rapped:

"Come in!"

The door opened, to admit a dapper figure. Quelch gazed at the sallow complexion, twisted little moustache, and little pointed beard, which he had supposed to be at Dover by that time.

"Monsieur Charpentier!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Mais oui—c'est ça, mon bon Quelch." The little gentleman gesticulated with both hands. "I lose me ze train, isn't it? Zen I remember zat I have forgot somezing, and come back for zat zing. Yes!"

Quelch raised his eyebrows a little.

He was not surprised at Mossoo losing a train. He was not surprised at Mossoo having forgotten something, and returned for it. Such things were just like Mossoo. But he did not see why Mossoo, having lost his train and returned for something forgotten, had barged into his study, and interrupted Quintus Horatius Flaccus.

"Quite so, monsieur!" said Mr. Quelch. "But—"

"Entrez!" said Monsieur Charpentier, with a glance back from the study through the open doorway, into the passage. "Entrez donc, mes garçons."

To Quelch's astonishment, five members of his form trailed in. He stared at Harry Wharton and Co.

Mossoo's visit was slightly surprising. But why he had brought in with him five members of Quelch's form, was more than surprising. Quelch stared at the Famous Five, and then at Mossoo again.

"Why are these boys here, monsieur?" he asked.

Harry Wharton and Co. stood silent. It was for Mossoo to speak. They could only wonder, hopefully, what the effect would be on Quelch.

Mossoo gesticulated again.

"Zey confess, mon bon Quelch," he said. "Zey come to me, ven zat I arrived back viz myself, and own down—"

"Own down!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"Zat is to say, own up!" amended Mossoo. "Zey own up, and explain zat it is all one mistake in a fog—"

"A mistake in a fog!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Ze fog, last night, he is verree zick, n'est-ce-pas! Aujourd'hui—to-day—he clear off, but in ze night he is verree zick," explained Monsieur Charpentier. "Zat is how it come to go. Zese garçons mistake me for anozzer person owing to zick fog, and zat is how I get ze paint."

"Paint!" stuttered Mr. Quelch. He began to understand.

A very grim expression came over Mr. Quelch's face. So far, it had been a deep mystery who had painted Mossoo in the foggy night—to him, at least. He had not supposed that the offenders were in his form at all. Now he learned that they were!

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Is it possible? Wharton, am I to understand that it was you—you and your friends—who were guilty of last night's outrage—"

"We never meant, sir—!" stammered Harry.

"We couldn't see Mossoo in the fog, sir—!" faltered Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet. His brow was like thunder.

"It was you!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir!"

"You were out of your dormitory, out of the House, at almost midnight— You threw a quantity of paint over a member of Dr. Locke's staff—!"

"We—we took him for somebody else in the fog, sir!" gasped Nugent. "We—we thought that a—a—a fellow was out of the House, and—and we meant it for him, sir—" Nugent tactfully refrained from adding that the "fellow" was a Sixth-Form prefect.

"What! What! Another boy was out of the House at such an hour?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, sharply.

"Oh, no, sir! We fancied that he was, but he wasn't after all, and it was Mossoo that we ran into the fog, and—and—"

"All a mistake, sir—!" said Bob.

"Upon my word! You will all come with me to the head-master immediately," said Mr. Quelch. "I shall—"

"Mais non, Monsieur Quelch!" interrupted the dapper little gentleman. "Mais non—pas du tout! I forgive zem."

"Monsieur Charpentier!"

"Zey come to me—zey own down—zat is to say zey own up, and I tell zem zat all is forgive!"

"Impossible, Monsieur Charpentier! Such an offence—such an outrageous action—impossible! I am surprised that you should think of it—very much surprised indeed! I cannot allow—"

Mossoo gesticulated with both hands.

"Mon bon Monsieur Quelch, je demande pardon—I ask ze pardon for ces garçons—for zese boys! It is I who an mop viz ze paint, and I zink it is for me to forgive zem zat mistake in ze fog. You vill grant me zis vish, monsieur! I vill zrow myself at your feet—I vill implore—I vill weep—"

"For goodness sake, do nothing of the kind, monsieur!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, hastily. "I—I—I—if you are prepared to pardon these boys for the outrageous action of which you were the victim—"

"Mais oui! Yes! I pardon zem! You vill pardon zem also, mon bon ami, else I weep at your feet—"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard. The prospect of the excitable and emotional little gentleman weeping at his feet seemed to alarm him.

"Very well, monsieur! Since you, the victim of their outrageous action, ask their pardon, they shall be pardoned, and I—I will explain to Dr. Locke."

"Merci, monsieur! Zank you."

The gimlet-eye turned on the silent five.

"Wharton! Cherry! Bull! Nugent! Hurree Singh! You are pardoned, at Monsieur Charpentier's intercession, for that outrageous act. You will each take an imposition of five hundred lines, for leaving your dormitory after lights out. The matter is at an end. Go!"

"Thank you, sir!" gasped five fellows together.

"Zousand zanks, sair!" trilled Monsieur Charpentier. "Mon bon Monsieur Quelch, I zank you, and I kiss you ze hands. Allez, mes garçons—it is all left, now."

It was all right, at least: and gladly the five delinquents filed from their form-master's study. In the corridor, they exchanged eloquent glances.

"Luck, what?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The luckfulness is terrific!"

"Good old sport, Mossoo!" said Johnny Bull. "I'll jolly well punch any fellow's head who rags in the French class next term."

"Hard!" agreed Nugent.

"We'll give Mosso a cheer when he goes," said Harry.

"Yes rather! Vive la France, and then some!" grinned Bob.

The Famous Five had lines on hand. But lines did not matter. The clouds had rolled by—they were not going up to the Head—the dire consequences of that error in the fog had faded away—and all was calm and bright! With cheery faces, they went out joyfully into the frosty quad.

XVIII

AMAZING!

“HALLO, hallo! hallo!”
“Loder!”

“Too late!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Of late, the Famous Five had not felt much like laughing. But they felt like it now—and they laughed, a merry peal.

They had joined the crowd outside the House. Fellows were congratulating them on their narrow escape. They were looking, and feeling, on top of the world, when Loder of the Sixth came into the offing. His eyes were grimly on them, as he came, and they knew what the expression on his face meant. Loder, at last, had heard!

But he had heard too late!

Mossoo's unexpected return to Greyfriars, his intercession with Quelch, had saved the situation! Loder was not aware of that—yet! All that he knew was, that Monsieur Charpentier had come back: the taxi was still waiting at the House steps. He was quite unaware of what had passed in Quelch's study.

It was amusing, from the point of view of the Famous Five. A surprise was coming to Gerald Loder.

He came striding up. The Famous Five watched him, with smiling faces, as he came. Other fellows round them grinned. They could all see that Loder had the news at last—too late to be of any use to him.

“Wharton!” rapped Loder.

“Yes, Loder” answered Harry, with great meekness.

“I've just heard what seems to have been tattled up and down the school for some time. From what I hear, you were in that affair last night—the five of you.”

Loder's look was fairly gloating. Loder was not always a whale on duty, as a prefect. But he was going to enjoy doing his duty this time—taking five delinquents to their form-master.

“Have you heard that, Loder?” asked Bob.

“Isn't it true?” demanded Loder.

“Oh, yes, it's quite true!” answered Harry. “We mopped the paint over Mossoo last night. We mistook him for a fellow we thought was going out of bounds to call at a pub!”

Loder jumped.

“Wha-a-t?” he ejaculated.

"The fog, or something, kept that fellow indoors, and we mopped it over Mossoo, by mistake in the fog," explained Harry.

Loder caught his breath. He knew now what would have happened to him, had not Mossoo warned him off that nocturnal excursion.

"Guess who the fellow was, Loder!" said Bob Cherry.

Loder's eyes gleamed at the cheery five.

"I don't think a yarn like that will help you much," he said, between his set lips. "I'm taking you to Quelch now—and Quelch will take you to the Head—"

"We've been to Quelch," said Harry, "and we're not going to the Head, Loder. Monsieur Charpentier has pulled us through. He asked Quelch—"

"That will do!" snapped Loder.

"But it happens to be true," said Harry, laughing. "Mossoo begged us off, and it's all over. You can go and ask Quelch, if you like."

Loder stared at him. He could hardly believe it. It seemed incredible to him that Monsieur Charpentier, who had been smothered with green paint the night before, could have begged off the offenders. Yet the cheery smiling faces of those offenders indicated that the clouds had rolled by.

"It's impossible!" he gasped, at last.

"Ask Quelch!" smiled Frank Nugent.

"He couldn't possibly—!"

"Only he has!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as a dapper little figure came out of the House. "Ask Mossoo, Loder."

Loder stared round at Mossoo, as he tripped down the steps to the waiting taxi. He hurried across to him, as he stepped into the cab.

"Monsieur Charpentier!" he exclaimed. "Stop a minute, please."

"Vat is it, zen? I have one train zat I go to catch—!"

"I have found out who it was attacked you last night, Monsieur Charpentier—who threw the paint over you—!"

"Vraiment? Zat I already know, Lodair, since zose garçons own down to it. Zat is all forgive and zat is all ovair."

Loder gritted his teeth.

"But you can't let it pass like that, Monsieur Charpentier," he exclaimed. "Those young rascals—"

"Zey are verree good garçons, Lodair, and I zink zat it is you who are one rascal!"

"Wha-a-a-t?" stuttered Loder. He stared blankly at the little gentleman. A crowd of fellows stared at him, too.

"Mais oui! I zink you are one rascal, Lodair!" Monsieur Charpentier, sitting in the taxi, leaned out, to address his final remarks to Loder of the Sixth.

"I zink you are one peeg, Lodair."

"Look here—!" roared Loder.

"Mais oui, you are one peeg, and one rascal, and I pull you ze nose!" said

Monsieur Charpentier: and to the utter amazement of all beholders, he reached out, gripped Loder's nose between finger and thumb, and gave it a vigorous tweak. The Greyfriars fellows, staring on, wondered whether they were dreaming.

"Oooogh!" spluttered Loder, staggering back.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Smithy.

"Is he potty?" said Skinner. "Tweaking a man's nose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder, almost dazed, clasped his painful nose with his hand. The taxi moved off, gliding away to the gates. Loder, his hand still to his nose, stood staring after it, in quite a dizzy state.

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry, and the Famous Five cut after the taxi. They wanted a last word with Mossoo, and to give him a cheer as he went.

The taxi slowed and turned out at the gateway. It halted in the road. Harry Wharton and Co. came up with a rush. The sallow face with its pointed beard looked out from the taxi window, with a smile on it.

"Mossoo—!" exclaimed Harry. "We—we want to thank you just once more—"

"Zat is all left, mon garçon."

"It was good of you, sir," said Nugent.

"The goodfulness was great, and the thankfulness of our absurd selves is preposterous!" exclaimed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Zat is all left—or is it zat you say all right?"

"All right, sir!" grinned Bob.

"Zen it is all right! I have somezing to say to you, mes garçons, before zat I go to catch ze train." Mossoo leaned from the window, and lowered his voice, "What price pulling Loder's nose, what? Don't often get a chance to pull a pre's nose! Ha, ha! See you chaps later, at calling-over."

The taxi drove on.

Harry Wharton and Co. stood quite still, dumb with amazement. For Mossoo's last words had not been spoken in Mossoo's squeaky voice. They had been spoken in quite a different voice: a voice familiar to Remove ears—the voice of William Wibley!

They stood dumbfounded, till the taxi disappeared in the distance. Then they looked at one another.

"Wibley!" said Harry Wharton, quite faintly.

"Not Mossoo at all—Wibley!" breathed Bob.

"Who'd have guessed—"

"Who'd have dreamed—"

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles! That's why he begged us off—it's old Wib that begged us off—"

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five went back into the quad, in quite a dazed state. They knew now why Wibley had gone out, that afternoon, with a packed bag—to

change, and make up as Mossoo, in some secluded spot. They knew now that Monsieur Charpentier had not missed his train. He was on the Channel, by that time, on his way to France and le petit Adolphe!

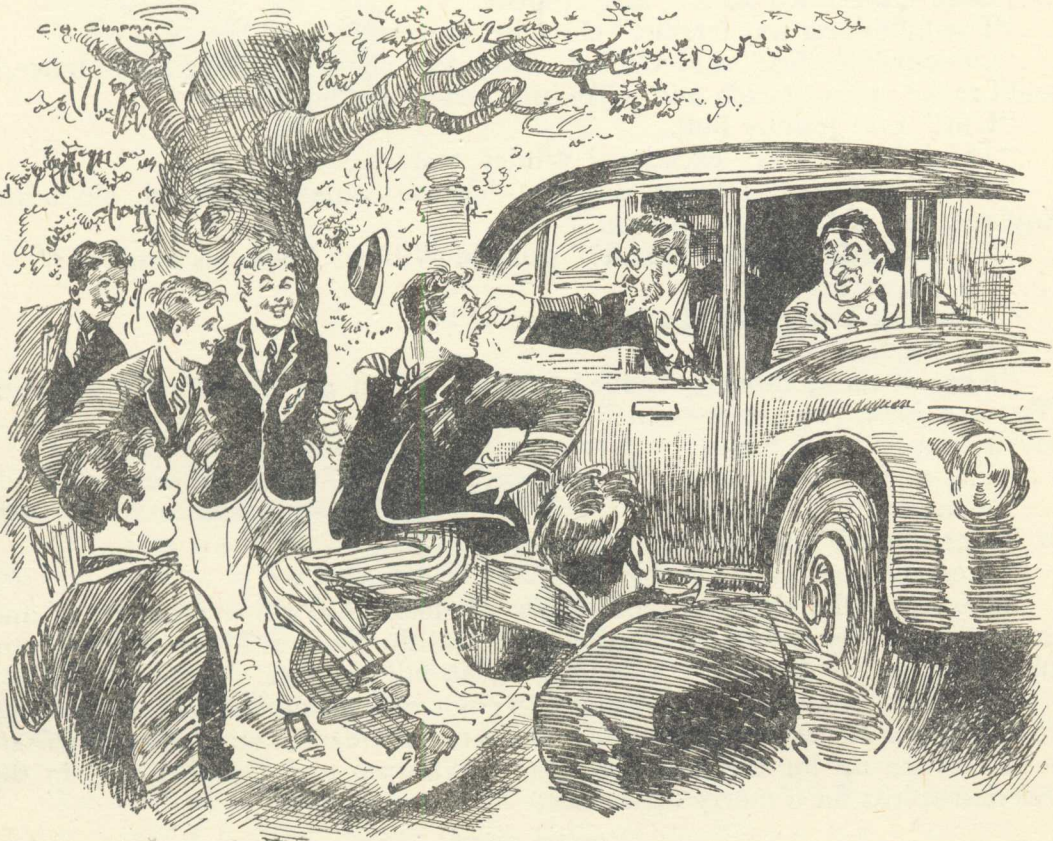
It was not Monsieur Charpentier—it was Monsieur William Wibley—who had arrived in that taxi: and not a fellow at Greyfriars had had the remotest suspicion that it was not the genuine Mossoo—even Quelch's gimlet-eye had failed to penetrate the disguise of the amateur actor of his form!

Even now they knew, the chums of the Remove could hardly believe it! They walked back to the House like fellows in a dream!

XIX

ALL SERENE!

WILLIAM WIBLEY presented his customary aspect, when he turned up for calling over in hall. The Famous Five gazed at him: and he responded



... he reached out and gripped Loder's nose.

with a cheery wink. Looking at Wibley, they could still hardly believe that, only an hour or two ago, they had taken him for Monsieur Charpentier: he did not bear the least resemblance to the French master now.

But they had! There was no doubt about that! They, and everyone else, had fallen for Wibley's remarkable stunt. He had played the part of Mossoo, while Mossoo was far away on his journey home: and in the part of Mossoo he had come to the rescue of the Famous Five in their scrape—and pulled them through. The clouds had rolled by, and all was serene: and they owed it all to William Wibley!

"Wib, you old ass—!" murmured Bob Cherry, when they came out of hall. Wibley chuckled.

"Did it work?" he grinned.

"It did!" said Harry Wharton. "We never dreamed—"

"Of course you didn't!" said Wibley, cheerfully. "When I play a part, I play it—with the accent on the 'play'."

"Even Quelch fell for it!" said Nugent.

"The fallfulness was terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Of course he did!" said Wibley. "My dear chaps, if I were a foot taller, I could make up as Quelch and make him believe he had a twin!"

"Um!" said Johnny Bull.

"Think I couldn't?" exclaimed Wibley, warmly.

"Oh! Yes!" said Johnny, hastily. "Of—of course you could, old bean! Anyhow, you did Mossoo all right!"

"Did you notice Loder in hall?" grinned Wibley. "Was his nose red?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First time I've tweaked a pre's nose—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep it dark, though," added Wibley. "If it got out—" He whistled. "But look here, you chaps—can I act?"

"You can!" said Bob.

"The canfulness is terrific."

"Wonderful!" said Nugent.

"Marvellous!" said Harry Wharton.

"Tremendous!" said Johnny Bull.

William Wibley smiled complacently. He had the artistic temperament, and could do with any amount of admiration! And the Famous Five were too grateful for services rendered, not to ladle it out in full measure.

What would have happened, if it had come out, would hardly bear thinking of. But there was no danger of that. It did not come out: and when Greyfriars School broke up for the holidays, Harry Wharton and Co. departed in the cheeriest spirits for a merry Christmas.

THE END

The Editor apologizes for the error in the illustration on page 53. Loder is shown as receiving the paint instead of Mossoo. As the reader knows, Loder was known to be going out and fully intended to go out. This was anticipated and the illustration made, but then Mossoo came along . . .