

The DEEP END!

—By—

FRANK RICHARDS



Holding it in his fat fingers, blinked at it again

CHAPTER I

LUCKY FOR BUNTER!

“BUNTER!” rapped Mr. Quelch.

“Oh! Yes, sir.”

“You will go on, Bunter.”

“Oh!” gasped Billy Bunter.

It was second lesson in the Remove form-room: on a bright and frosty December morning.

The Remove were in form with Mr. Quelch, and enjoying—more or less—the deathless verse of Publius Vergilius Maro.

It was getting near time for “break”: and a good many glances wandered to the form-room clock as the Remove fellows, one after another, stood up for “Con”.

Generally, Billy Bunter’s little round eyes, and big round spectacles, wandered to the clock more frequently than any other fellow’s. The adventures and misadventures of the “pius Aeneas” had no charms whatever for William George Bunter. Even the celebrated shipwreck episode, on which the Remove were now busy, failed to attract Billy Bunter. Indeed he was rather disposed to regret that the pius Aeneas hadn’t been drowned in that shipwreck.

But though the Owl of the Remove found no more charms than usual in Virgilian verse, he was not, as usual, blinking longingly at the clock. His fat mind was otherwise occupied.

In Billy Bunter's pocket was a chunk of toffee.

Bunter had had several bites at it before the Remove came into form. But those bites had only whetted his appetite. Whenever Quelch's attention was engaged elsewhere, during that lesson, the fat Owl stealthily abstracted that chunk from a sticky pocket and helped himself to another chew.

That chunk was growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less: but, as yet, even Quelch's gimlet-eyes had not detected the fat Owl's surreptitious chewings.

Now, all of a sudden, he swivelled round on Bunter, and bade him "Go on".

Harry Wharton had been last on "con". Wharton's look, that morning, was somewhat quiet and subdued, and a keen observer might have guessed that there was a trouble on his mind. But he was quite up to the mark in form. He was well aware that Mr. Quelch had been lenient with him, in the late affair of taking "French leave" to play Soccer at Redclyffe: and he was anxious to show that he was not ungrateful for it.

His "con" was quite faultless, a proof that he had not slacked in prep, and Mr. Quelch was looking quite pleased with it as he listened. But that pleased expression faded from his face as he fixed his gimlet-eyes on the fattest member of his form.

Bunter seemed in no hurry to "go on".

"Do you hear me, Bunter," rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I'm finding the place, sir!" stammered Bunter.

Bunter, of course, should have been listening-in, prepared to "go on" if called upon. But the fat Owl's fat mind had been wholly occupied by surreptitious chews at that chunk of toffee, and in anxious dread lest Quelch should spot him chewing. Really, he had had no leisure to attend to the lesson. His fat mind was, in consequence, wholly a blank on the subject of the shipwreck scene in Virgil's epic.

Mr. Quelch frowned. It was not uncommon for Bunter to draw a frown to that majestic brow. Often and often was Bunter inattentive: and he seemed to Quelch more inattentive than ever now.

The gimlet-eyes glinted at the fat Owl.

Little escaped those gimlet-eyes when they were turned upon any object. Now, as they turned on Bunter, they detected toffee-smears that decorated the widest mouth in the Remove.

"Go on from 'Interea magno—" whispered Peter Todd in a fat ear: as a present help in time of need.

"Oh!" Bunter blinked at his book. "Interea magno misceri—"

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I've found the place, sir."

"Stand out before the form, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey!"

The fat Owl unwillingly rolled out. He blinked in dismay at his form-master. Quelch eyed him grimly.

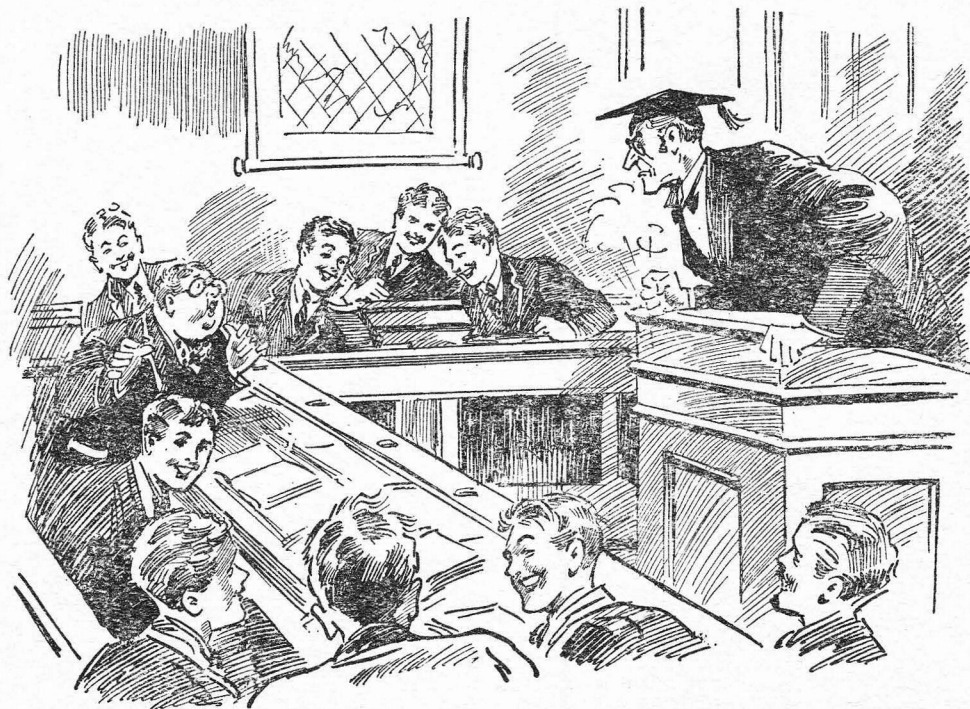
"Bunter! You have been eating sweetmeats in class!"

"Oh, no, sir! I—I haven't tasted toffee for days, sir—I—I never had any toffee in my pocket, sir, and—and it ain't in my pocket now!" gasped Bunter.

"Upon my word! Take the toffee from your pocket, Bunter, and drop it into the waste-paper basket immediately."

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter.

A sticky hand groped in a sticky pocket, and a sticky chunk came to light. There was not much left of it: bites during class had been frequent. But it was a blow to part with the remnant.



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

But there was no help for it! That sticky remnant dropped into the waste-paper basket, the fat Owl's eyes following it sadly as it dropped. Quelch's eyes dwelt with disfavour upon a sticky mouth and a pair of sticky hands.

"Bunter! You will take fifty lines."

"Ow! I mean, yes, sir," groaned Bunter.

"Leave the form-room at once and wash your face and hands, Bunter. You are an uncleanly boy, Bunter."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Go!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter, with deep feelings, rolled to the form-room door. Grinning glances followed him from the rest of the Remove. It was not the first time that William George Bunter had been sent out of the form-room for an extra wash. Quite often he had needed one. But it was very annoying to Bunter. Still, there was a solace—even a wash, much as he disliked it, was no worse than "con": and he was getting out of that.

"You will go on, Todd."

Peter Todd went on from "interea magno" as the door closed on Bunter. Outside that door, Billy Bunter stopped to shake a fat and sticky fist: which, sad to relate, he would have been quite pleased to land upon the majestic nose of Henry Samuel Quelch! Then he rolled off for his wash.

He was in no hurry to return after he had washed off the sticky smears of toffee. Quelch, no doubt, would expect him back in a few minutes, and would inquire acidly what had delayed him if he stayed out longer. But it would be easy to tell Quelch that he couldn't find the soap, or that the towel was missing, and had to be looked for. Billy Bunter and the truth had long been strangers: indeed, some Remove fellows opined that Bunter really didn't know that there was such a thing at all.

Much more interesting than going back to class was looking in the letter-rack, to see whether there was one for him. It was Trotter's duty to place the letters in the rack, in time for the juniors to take them out in break: and break was close at hand now, so no doubt the letters would be there. One disappointment about a postal-order after another had not dimmed Billy Bunter's hope that, at long last, his celebrated postal-order might turn up. So he rolled to the rack and scanned the letters which Trotter had dutifully placed therein.

But alas for Bunter! Once more that celebrated postal-order had failed to arrive. There was no letter in the rack addressed to him.

But his eyes, and his spectacles, fixed on a letter that was addressed to another fellow, with a startled blink.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter.

That letter was addressed to Harry Wharton, in the firm, clear hand-



He rolled to the rack and scanned the letters

writing of his uncle at Wharton Lodge. Bunter knew that "fist" well enough and he blinked at it in uneasy dismay.

The previous day the fat ventriloquist, on the telephone, had given the captain of the Remove what, in his fat and fatuous mind, he regarded as "tit for tat". He had, undoubtedly and effectually, "dished" Harry Wharton over the Christmas holidays. That, in Bunter's opinion, served him jolly well right! Having "got away" with that tit for tat, Bunter had let the matter drift from his fat mind. But he was rather unpleasantly reminded of it now as he blinked at that letter from Colonel Wharton to his nephew at Greyfriars.

"Oh, crikey!" repeated Bunter.

He blinked long and uneasily at that letter. Then he took it down and, holding it in fat fingers, blinked at it again.

What was in that letter?

Nothing like that talk on the telephone: Bunter could guess that. Most likely it was a cheery note from the old Colonel to reassure his nephew. If so, what was going to be the effect on Harry Wharton? It would reveal at once that he had been tricked on the telephone by some person who had

imitated the old gentleman's voice—and how long would it be before he jumped to it that that person was the Remove ventriloquist?

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Bunter again. "Oh, lor'!"

In giving the captain of the Remove that Roland for his Oliver, the fat and fatuous Owl had not looked ahead. Thinking was not much in Bunter's line. But he had to do some thinking now. If Harry Wharton found out—!

Bunter wriggled anticipatively as he pictured that. He seemed to feel already a boot crashing on his trousers.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter once more.

Obviously, from Billy Bunter's point of view it was better for Harry Wharton not to see that letter just yet! Later on, after the school had broken up for the holidays, it would not matter. But while Billy Bunter was within range of an avenging boot, it did matter—it mattered a lot! Luckily—as Bunter looked at it!—Wharton knew nothing about that letter, so far: and if he did not find it in the rack, he would continue to know nothing about it! Billy Bunter cast a stealthy blink round him through his big spectacles. There was no one to observe him. He slipped that letter into his pocket. Wharton could have it later—at present, Billy Bunter's pocket was the safest place for it! And as Billy Bunter was the only person within the wide limits of the universe who really mattered, that was, so far as Bunter could see, quite all right! This was, in fact, quite lucky—for Bunter!

Relieved in his fat mind, Bunter rolled back, at last, to the Remove form-room. A gimlet-eye glinted at him as he rolled in.

"Why have you been so long, Bunter?"

"Please I couldn't find the soap, sir—"

"Go to your place! You will go on from 'Defessi Aeneadae,' " rapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter very nearly ejaculated "Beast" as he rolled to his place. He had not escaped "con" after all! He had to go on from "Defessi Aeneadae" as far as "unda reductos" under a glinting gimlet-eye. And that struggle with the deathless verse of P. Vergilius Maro quite banished Harry Wharton's letter from his fat mind.

CHAPTER II

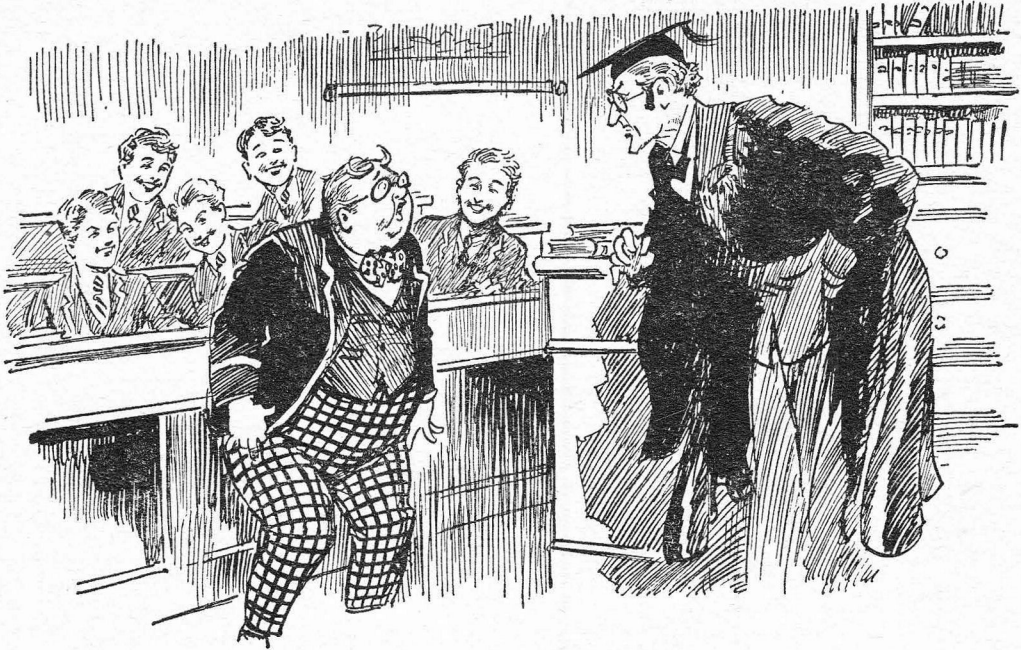
AT THE DEEP END

"NOTHING?" asked Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"Nothing!" he answered.

He was looking at the letter-rack. The Famous Five gathered there at once



"Why have you been so long?"

when the Remove were dismissed in break. For once, Billy Bunter was not prominent. Bunter already knew that there was nothing for him. Harry Wharton's hurried glance over the letters was eager. The dark look that settled on his face, when he saw that there was nothing for him, made his friends exchange uneasy glances.

Wharton smiled faintly.

"I wasn't really expecting a letter," he said. "But—" He left it at that.

After that talk on the telephone in Quelch's study, which had given him so severe a shock, it was true that he had not expected to hear anything further from his uncle before Christmas. But if he had not expected, he had had a lingering hope. Surely the old Colonel, on reflection, would realise that he had been unduly harsh, even if he did not realise that he had no just cause for anger. And if so, surely he would write a few words at least. But there was nothing—not a word!

"It's rotten," muttered Nugent.

"The rottenfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a sad shake of his dusky head.

"Can't make it out," said Bob. "It's so unlike him, from everything that we know of him."

"There's a mistake somewhere," said Johnny Bull. "And if you'd take my advice, Wharton—"

Wharton's lip curled bitterly.

"It's the end!" he said, in a low voice.

"If you'd write—"

Harry Wharton laughed: a laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

"You're still advising me to write to my uncle?" he asked.

"I am!" said Johnny.

"I'm going to. You fellows get out—I'm going up to my study to write a letter," said Harry.

Without waiting for a reply, he walked away. His friends were left looking very uneasy and troubled. Much as they liked Harry Wharton, and splendid fellow as they knew him to be, they were well aware of his faults of temper, and of the stubbornness that had more than once led him to act in haste and repent at leisure.

"What's he got in his noddle now?" muttered Bob.

"Something fatheaded, I expect," grunted Johnny Bull. "You know what he's like when he's got his back up."

"Well, any fellow would have his back up in the circumstances," said Frank Nugent, always quick in defence of his best chum. "That jaw on the phone from his uncle knocked the stuffing out of him."

"It was too thick," agreed Bob.

"The thickfulness was altogether too terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed and idiotic Wharton will not improve matters by going off at the deep end."

"Hardly," said Bob. "But—"

"Look here, we'd better go up and see," said Nugent, uneasily. "Goodness knows what he might write—you could see in his face that he wasn't thinking of a pleasant letter home. Come on."

"Let's!" agreed Bob.

And the four juniors followed Wharton up to the Remove studies. The door of No. 1 was half open, and they looked in, and saw Harry Wharton seated at the table, a pen in his hand, his brows knitted over it. He was writing hurriedly.

"Harry, old man—!" said Nugent.

"Wharton looked up.

"You fellows? Don't wait for me—I'll be down in a tick or two to post this letter in the box."

"Leave it till after class, and come down now and help us punt a ball," suggested Bob Cherry.

"I'd rather get it through."

"Look here—!" began Johnny Bull.

"Shut up a minute while I finish this letter. It's not a long one."

The pen ran on again, while the four juniors, in the doorway, watched him and exchanged glances. In a minute more the letter was finished and Wharton sorted in the table drawer for an envelope.

Johnny Bull tramped into the study and the others followed him in.

"You've written to Colonel Wharton?" asked Johnny.

"Yes."

"What I advised you to write?"

"Not quite."

"No use for advice from a pal, I suppose?" asked Johnny, sarcastically.

"None at all."

"Harry, old fellow—!" said Nugent, miserably. "Matters are bad enough—don't make them worse, old chap. You're feeling bitter now, and no wonder—but—"

"Look here, let's see what you've written, anyway," said Bob.

"O.K. Read the letter if you like," said Wharton, indifferently. "Lots of time to post it before the bell goes."

Bob Cherry drew the written sheet across the table, and four pairs of eyes scanned it. Four faces grew very serious indeed. Johnny Bull gave a very expressive grunt.

"You're not sending that letter to Colonel Wharton?" he asked.

"I haven't written it as an exercise."

They stared at the letter. It was brief and written in a firm hand. It did not begin, as Wharton's letters home were accustomed to do, with "Dear Uncle". Neither did it read like any letter that the captain of the Remove had ever hitherto written to Wharton Lodge. Wharton, in that talk on Quelch's telephone, had had a shock—and if that letter arrived at Wharton Lodge, there was no doubt that the old Colonel would have another. It ran:

Sir,

I shall not come to Wharton Lodge for the holidays: and, as I have no doubt that you wish, I shall not come again at all. From now on, you will be relieved of a burden of which you are tired. I shall remain at Greyfriars, if I can do so by my own efforts: but anything further from you I will not touch. That is all I have to say, except that I shall not write again, and that I shall not read your letter if you write to me.

H. Wharton.

Harry Wharton stood cool and quiet, a faintly mocking expression on his

face, as he watched the dismay in the faces of his chums. And for a long minute, there was silence in No. 1 Study in the Remove. Only too clearly, Harry Wharton was off at the deep end.

CHAPTER III

A RIFT IN THE LUTE!

BOB CHERRY broke the silence.
"You can't send that letter," he said.

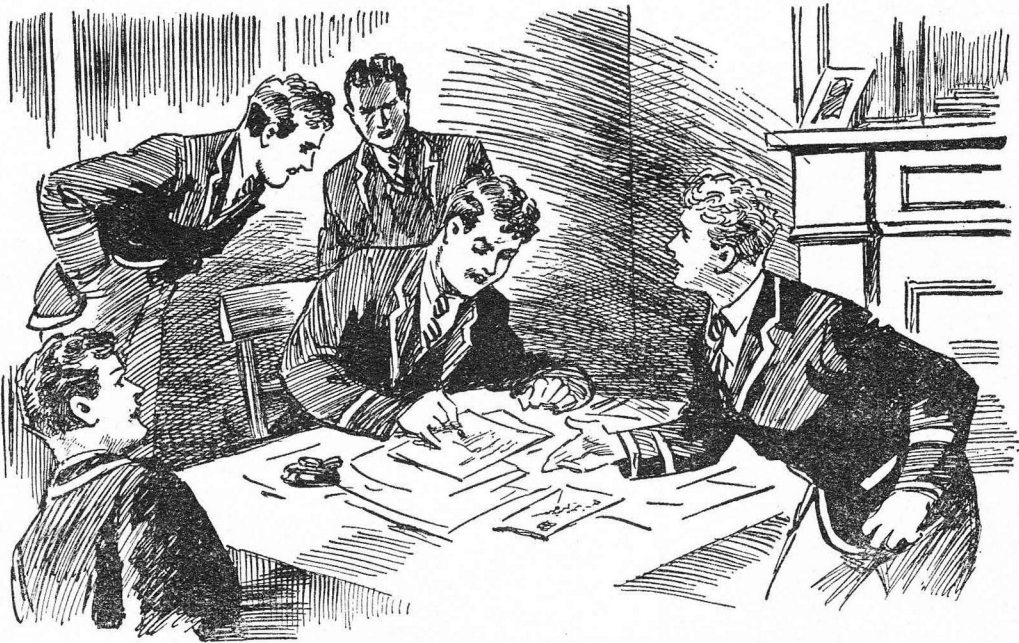
"Why not?"

"My dear chap—" said Bob, with deep distress in his honest, rugged face.
"You can't—"

"The why-notfulness is terrific, my esteemed Wharton," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his head. "The estimable Colonel would be infuriated."

"Very likely," assented Wharton.

"You can't do it, Harry," urged Nugent. "You can't write like that to a man who has been kindness itself to you all your life. You can't."



"You're not sending that letter to Colonel Wharton?"

"The kindness seems to have petered out," said Wharton, with a shrug of the shoulders. "What's the matter with that letter?"

"What isn't, you mean?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I mean what I say. Oh, look at it," exclaimed Wharton, bitterly and impatiently. "My uncle can't be offended to the extent of what he said on the telephone, simply because he missed seeing me the other day. He knows that it wasn't my fault that I missed him—but even if it had been, he had no right to come down so hard. It isn't that—it can't be—that's only a pretext—he's fed up with his brother's son dependent on him—that's what it boils down to. It can't mean anything else. Would you advise a fellow to hang on where he's not wanted?" Wharton's eyes flashed. "Am I to be a hanger-on and cadger like Bunter? Why, even Bunter would have his back up in my place. That letter's going—and it's the finish."

"But—but—think a bit," said Bob. "It's rotten all round, I know—but—but if you turn your uncle down—"

"He's turned me down."

"What are you going to do then? It's Colonel Wharton who sees you through here at school—"

"I shall have to see myself through, somehow. If I can't, I shall have to go. But I'm not at the end of my tether," said Wharton, coolly. "There are fellows in our form who see themselves through—Mark Linley for one: he's here on a scholarship, and it doesn't cost his people sixpence. Same with Penfold. What they've done, can't I do? I shall look into the list, and see what's going—"

"Pretty late in the day for that."

"Better late than never," said Harry. "If there's something open for next term, I shall be in time—with the hols ahead to swot for it. Think I couldn't swot like old Marky, if I had to?"

"I daresay you could, but—"

"But—!" said Nugent, dismally. "Harry, old chap. you're angry now—I know you've got reason, but think it over—"

"Nothing to think over, that I know of."

"The Colonel couldn't have meant—"

"I know what he meant, because he couldn't have meant anything else. Think he's changed all of a sudden, simply because I was fool enough to cheek Quelch, and was out when he called?" exclaimed Wharton, scornfully. "He's as good as told me where I get off—and I'm getting off. He's made it pretty clear that that's what he wants."

The juniors were silent again. They could understand their chum's passionate resentment and the blow to his pride. All the more because he had

truly been a grateful and affectionate nephew, trusting his uncle as he would have trusted a father, he was hurt and humiliated, and liable to take the darkest view. And the stubborn temper which had, more than once, made him his own enemy, was fully roused. Wharton Lodge had always been his home—and he had been told, harshly, not to come there for the vacation. That, in his present mood at least, meant that it was no longer his home: and he had resolved that he would never step under its roof again.

It was Wharton who broke the silence.

“No good talking! I don’t want to bother you fellows with all this—”

“We’re your friends, I hope,” said Nugent, quietly. “Harry, old man, I don’t pretend to make it all out, but I can’t believe that you’re right—Colonel Wharton isn’t the man to change like that—he’s the last man in the world to let anyone down—”

“Hasn’t he done so?”

“I know it looks like it. But—”

“I’ve said it’s no good talking! I’d better get that letter posted—none too much time now before the bell goes.”

“Never mind the bell for a minute,” said Johnny Bull, in his slow, stolid way. “If you want to know what I think—”

“I don’t!”

“I’ll tell you all the same. I think you’re making a fool of yourself,” said Johnny, deliberately.

“Thanks! Is that all?”

“No! You’ve got your back up, and on appearances you’ve got plenty of reason for it: but you’ve landed in trouble before because you had your back up and wouldn’t listen to reason: and now you’re on the same tack. Sulking never did any fellow any good—”

Wharton’s face flamed.

“Who’s sulking?” he breathed.

“You don’t know it, old chap, but that’s how it is,” explained Johnny calmly. “And the best thing you can do is to leave this over and think it over, and take jolly good care not to do anything in a hurry—”

“That’s enough.”

“Perhaps—but I haven’t finished yet. Chuck that letter into the fire, and write the one I’ve advised you to write, telling your uncle the whole story from beginning to end—”

Wharton laughed harshly.

“He knows already all I could tell him—if he wanted to know. He doesn’t. Don’t talk any more—that letter’s going, and it’s the finish.”

“You can’t do it,” said Johnny. “I believe, and you can see that the other



The letter was torn to fragments

chaps think the same, that there's some misunderstanding somewhere: I can't guess what, but there it is. That means that it's a time for keeping a cool head, not for going off at the deep end in a sulky temper—and sending a man a letter that's like a blow in the face.”

Harry Wharton, with set lips, stretched out his hand to the letter, an envelope in his other hand. Johnny stared at him steadily.

“You're going to post that letter?” he asked.

“I've said so.”

“And you've no use for what all your friends think about it?”

“None. Now chuck it.”

“Well,” said Johnny, “you're not going to post that letter, Wharton, because I'm going to stop you, whether you like it or not. You'll be glad later.”

And, as he spoke, Johnny Bull grabbed up the letter and backed away from the table with it in his hand. Harry Wharton, his face aflame, came round the table with a rush. But he was not in time. Johnny Bull did not lose a second: and that letter was torn into fragments and scattered on the floor of the study before the captain of the Remove could reach him.

“Oh, my hat!” murmured Bob Cherry.

Wharton's face blazed with anger.

"You cheeky rotter!" he shouted.

"Call me all the fancy names you can think of, old boy," said Johnny, unmoved. "I don't mind, if you feel it does you any good."

Harry Wharton's hands were clenched. It looked as if he was not going to stop at "fancy names". But Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh hastily pushed between the two.

"Steady on!" said Bob.

Harry Wharton panted.

"Get out!" he breathed.

"Look here, Harry—"

"Wharton, old chap—"

"My esteemed and ridiculous chum—"

"Get out, and leave me alone!" Wharton almost shouted. "I'm going to write that letter over again—not a word of it changed—and post it to Colonel Wharton—"

"Not now, at any rate," said Johnny Bull, coolly. "There's the bell!"

Clang! Clang! It was the bell for third school, ringing through the frosty air.



Harry Wharton stood—his face dark with anger

Johnny tramped out of the study. Bob and Hurree Singh, with troubled faces, followed him. Frank Nugent paused.

"Harry, old man—!" he muttered.

"Oh, leave me alone!"

"Very well," said Frank, compressing his lips. And he walked out of the study after the others.

Harry Wharton stood, his face dark with anger, as the bell ceased to ring. It was too late now to write that letter over again: unless he was going to be very late for class with Quelch, and even in his angry excitement, he did not want more trouble with his form-master. Slowly, he left the study in his turn and joined the Remove at the form-room door, just as Mr. Quelch arrived to let in his form.

But he did not speak to his friends or look at them. It was only too clear that there was a rift in the lute, and that Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, was right off at the deep end.

END OF FOURTH SECTION