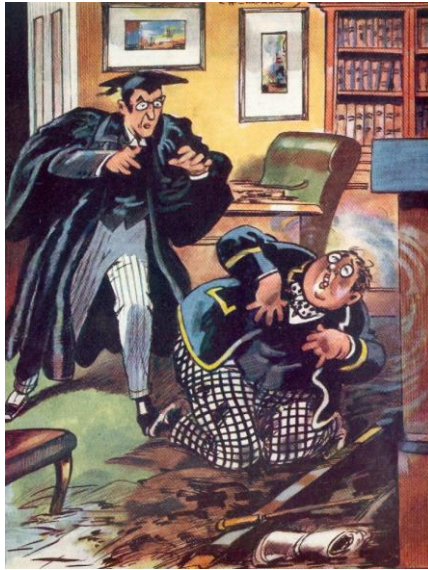


# BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT

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CASSELL AND COMPANY LTD  
LONDON



## CHAPTER 1

### NOT A TIP

'MAULY here?'

Billy Bunter asked that question in the doorway of the Rag.

There were six fellows in that apartment: but only five of them were visible to the Owl of the Remove as he blinked in.

Lord Mauleverer was deep in an armchair, of which the high back hid him from Billy Bunter's little round eyes and big round spectacles. Harry Wharton and Co. were grouped round that chair.

It was Saturday afternoon: a fine autumn afternoon, ideal for football. The Famous Five had been urging Mauly to join up for Soccer that afternoon. His lazy lordship did not seem to enthuse.

Stretched in the deep armchair, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, and his hands clasped behind his noble head, Mauly looked like a picture of lazy ease and comfort— and not in the least like Soccer.

'I say, you fellows!' squeaked Bunter again. 'Is Mauly here?'

No doubt Lord Mauleverer heard that fat squeak from the doorway. But if he heard, he understudied the ancient gladiator, and heeded not. Football talk from the Famous Five made him tired: but Billy Bunter made him, so to speak, tireder. So he followed the example of that sagacious animal, Brer Fox, and 'lay low and said nuffin','

Five Fellows grinned.

They were well aware that they had been boring Mauly with Soccer. But they were kindly prepared to save him from being bored by Bunter also.

'Looking for Mauly, Bunter?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Yes— is he here?'

'Can't see him,' answered Bob, turning his back on the lazy figure in the armchair: when, having no eyes in the back of his head, he certainly could not see Mauly.

'The seefulness is not terrific, esteemed fat Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, also with his back to Mauleverer. 'Look in the quad!' suggested Frank Nugent.

'I've looked!' snorted Bunter.

'Look up in the studies, then!' suggested Johnny Bull.

Another snort from Bunter.

'Catch me clambering up all those stairs! If Mauly's up in the studies, I'll wait till he comes down, to give him his letter.'

'His letter?' repeated Harry Wharton.

'Yes! He couldn't have looked in the rack this morning— you know what a silly forgetful, absent-minded idiot Mauly is—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Fancy leaving a letter in the rack, when there might be a tip in it! Mauly all over— silliest ass at Greyfriars or anywhere else—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the Famous Five. Lord Mauleverer grinned. Unaware that his lordship was listening in, Billy Bunter was revealing just what he thought of him. Mauly did not mind: so long as Bunter left it at that, and rolled on his way to seek him elsewhere.

'Of all the blithering idiots, Mauly is the blitheringest,' went on Bunter. 'There was his letter sticking in the rack: and I take all the trouble to fish it out to take it to him, and now I can't find him. That old ass of an uncle of his is always sending him tips— might be a fiver in it. And now I can't find the dithering dummy.'

'And so the poor dog had none!' sighed Bob Cherry. 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, if there's a tip in it Mauly might lend a fellow five bob, when a fellow's been disappointed about a postal order,' grunted Bunter. 'Mauly's a silly idiot, and a dithering dummy, and a howling ass, but he ain't mean. But if he thinks I'm clambering up all those stairs to take him his silly letter he's jolly well mistaken. I'll wait till the fathead comes down.' And Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag.

He headed for the roomiest and most comfortable armchair in the junior room. It was the one in which Lord Mauleverer reclined.

The next moment his eyes, and his spectacles, fell on the occupant of that comfortable armchair.

'Why, you beast!' gasped Bunter. 'You're here all the time!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Making out you're not here, when you jolly well knew I was looking for you—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, do stop cackling,' hooted the exasperated Owl. 'Look here, Mauly, you silly, blithering, dithering dummy— I—I mean—.' Bunter checked his flow of eloquence, remembering what might be in that letter from Mauleverer Towers. 'I—I—I mean, I've been looking for you everywhere, old chap, to bring you this letter, old fellow— just to oblige you, old boy. Don't you want your letter?'

Lord Mauleverer did not remove his clasped hands from behind his noble head. He seemed to consider.

'Yaas, if it's from nunky!' he said. 'Is it? You'd know the fist, Bunter— you're always nosing over other fellows' letters—.'

'Oh, really, Mauly—.'

'Well, is it?' yawned Mauleverer.

'It's typed on the envelope,' said Bunter. 'But it's your home postmark, Mauly.'

'Then it's from nunky's secretary. Only a tip in it, I expect.'

'Only!' gasped Bunter.

'Yaas. Brown often sends the tips.'

'You silly chump— I— I mean, you'd better open it, Mauly. Might be important. Look here, shall I open it for you?'

'If you like.'

Lord Mauleverer, evidently, did not consider a 'tip' dispatched by his uncle's secretary an important matter. To Billy Bunter, however, it was a matter of almost inestimable importance. He jabbed a fat grubby thumb into the envelope, which was Bunter's elegant way of opening a letter: and drew out a folded missive from within. Then he gave a grunt, as he unfolded it.

'Nothing in it!' he said.

'And so the poor dog—!' began Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, crikey!' ejaculated Bunter, blinking at the typed letter from Sir Reginald Brooke's secretary. 'I say, Mauly, your uncle's been knocked over by a car—.'

'WHAT!'

A moment before, Lord Mauleverer had been looking too lazy to stir at an alarm of fire. But at those words from Bunter, the change that came over him was remarkable. A kangaroo could not have bounded up so swiftly as Mauly.

In a split second, he was on his feet, and the letter was snatched from Bunter's fat hand, and Lord Mauleverer was devouring it with startled eyes. Billy Bunter blinked at him in astonishment.

'I say, Mauly, what's the matter?' he squeaked.

Lord Mauleverer did not answer that question. His eyes were glued to the letter from Mr. Brown at Mauleverer Towers.

'Shut up, you fat ass!' muttered Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

The Famous Five were all very serious now. Lord Mauleverer looked up from the letter. His face was pale, but he was calm again: very seldom did Mauly's calmness desert him for long.

'Not a bad accident, I hope, Mauly?' said Harry Wharton.

Mauly gulped.

'Brown says it's not serious— I'm not to be alarmed— but— but— nunky's getting on in years, you know, and— and— I've got to see him. I shall have to cut off home— Quelch will give me leave— I'll cut off and ask him now—.'

With that, Mauly ran to the door, and disappeared at a speed which showed that he would have been useful on the Soccer field after all.

'Poor old Mauly!' said Bob Cherry, softly. 'It's knocked him over. Quelch will give him leave as soon as he hears—.'

'Bet you he won't!' said Bunter, shaking a fat head. 'Mauly won't get out of lessons so easily as all that. Quelch is a downy bird!'

'You fat, frumpious, frowsy fathead!' roared Johnny Bull. 'Do you think Mauly's thinking of that?'

'Well, isn't he?' asked Bunter. He shook a fat head again. 'Mauly can try it on, but I'll bet it won't work with Quelch! Mauly will have to think of something better than that if he wants a holiday in the middle of the term. No good going to Quelch and saying— Yaroooh! Beasts! Leggo!'

Bump!

Billy Bunter roared.

Why the Famous Five collared him, and sat him down with a bump that almost shook the stout old oaken floor, Bunter did not know. But he knew that they did! He sat on hard oak and roared. And the Famous Five followed Mauleverer out of the Rag, and left him to roar.

## CHAPTER 2

### JAM FOR BUNTER

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Oh, blow away, Bunter.'

It was Monday, after class. Five Fellows, all looking merry and bright, seated on the old bench under the tree outside the school shop at Greyfriars, were enjoying the sunny autumn afternoon: and were about to enjoy the contents of a bag of jam-tarts, when Billy Bunter rolled into the offing.

Harry Wharton and Co. had been very much concerned about old Mauly on Saturday. But their concern had been relieved, by a letter that morning from Mauleverer, now at home in Hampshire. For in spite of Billy Bunter's sage prediction that it 'wouldn't work with Quelch', Mauly had been given immediate leave from school. Mr. Quelch certainly was, as Bunter had declared, a 'downy bird': but he did not seem to suspect that Mauly's object was to get out of lessons, — clear as that was, to William George Bunter!

'I say, you fellows, about Mauly—,' went on Bunter. 'Mauly?' repeated Bob Cherry.

As Bob was about to open a bag of jam-tarts, resting on his knee, the natural supposition was that Bunter had scented the tarts, and for that reason bestowed his fascinating society on the proprietors thereof. But it seemed that other matters were in Bunter's fat mind. Amazing to relate, he did not even notice the bag of tarts.

'Mauly's all right, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'It turns out that his uncle isn't much damaged after all. He's staying at home to see him on his pins again, before he comes back, that's all— a few days, most likely.'

'Nothing to worry about,' said Frank Nugent.

Bunter blinked at him.

'Eh? Who's worrying?' he asked. 'What I mean is, Mauly's got away with it all right. A week off from school in term time—.'

'You fat ass—!'

'Oh, really, Wharton.'

'You pernicious porpoise—.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Roll away before you're kicked!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter backed away a pace. He did not want to be kicked. But he did not roll away.

'I say, you fellows, do listen to a chap,' he said. 'I've got an idea, and I want your advice. Before I try it on with Quelch, you know. Mauly's got a week off from school. Fancy getting away from Latin with Quelch, and maths with Lascelles, and French with old Charpentier, and all that, in the middle of the term! Well, if Mauly worked it with Quelch, why shouldn't I?'

'What?'

'Quelch is downy, but Mauly seems to have pulled his leg all right,' said Bunter, blinking at the staring Co. 'I've got an uncle, as well as Mauly, and he's just as likely to be knocked over by a car,—see?'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I've been thinking it out,' said Bunter. 'It looks good, to me, after Mauly got away with it so easily. Suppose I go to Quelch, and tell him that my uncle's been knocked over by a car—.'

'Y e gods and little fishes!'

'And ask him for leave home, because I'm so cut up about it and all that,' went on Bunter, eagerly. 'My Uncle Carter, say— or perhaps my Uncle Tuck,— I can decide about the uncle later. Think Quelch would fall for it, like he did with Mauly?'

'But your uncle hasn't been knocked over by a car!' shrieked Bob Cherry.

'Keep to the point, old chap! That's the worst of you fellows,— you keep on wandering from the point—.'

'You fat fabricating foozler,' said Harry Wharton. 'If you spin Quelch a yarn about an uncle, he will smell a rat at once, and most likely whop you— and more power to his elbow if he does.'

'Think so?' asked Bunter, anxiously. 'Perhaps you're right— it would be better not to make it an uncle, perhaps. Better make it my pater! Quelch might think I'd got the idea from Mauly, if I made it an uncle! You know Quelch — suspicious! Suppose I go to Quelch and tell him my pater's been knocked over by a car—.'

'He hasn't!' roared Bob.

'Well, people do get knocked over by cars,' argued Bunter. 'Look at all those traffic jams in the City, and all that. I don't see why Quelch shouldn't swallow my pater, after swallowing Mauly's uncle.'

'You fat villain—!'

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'I wonder if Bunter has the faintest idea of any difference between telling the truth and telling crammers!' said Bob Cherry. 'Have you, Bunter?'

'Oh, really, Cherry! Of course, a fellow tells the tale to a beak!' said Bunter. 'Look at Smithy, and the way he rolls it out.'

'Smithy's example isn't one to follow,' said Harry Wharton. 'And Smithy wouldn't tell a string of lies just to get out of lessons. Forget all about it.'

'That's all very well,' said Bunter. 'But I want a holiday, just as much as Mauly does. He's got a week at home, away from it all. 'Taint fair for him to get off classes, while other fellows have to grind with Quelch. Fair play's a jewel. Perhaps you fellows don't think so! I do! I've thought this out, since Mauly went and I'm jolly well going to try it on Quelch, only—,' Bunter paused.

'Only what, you fat fibber?' asked Nugent.

'Well, he's suspicious,' said Bunter. 'He's doubted my word more than once. I don't know why—.'

'You don't know why!' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

'The whyfulness is terrific,' chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I mean to say, it's pretty low, to doubt a fellow's word,' said Bunter. "'Tain't as if it was one of you fellows! But a straightforward chap like me—.'

'Oh, crumbs!'

'That's what I wanted to ask you about,' went on Bunter. 'What do you fellows think? Mauly got, away with it, you know that. Got away with it like a shot. Just walked into Quelch's study and said his uncle was knocked over; and got leave on the spot. Well, suppose I walk into Quelch's study and say my uncle— I mean my pater— has been knocked over—.'

'Better decide whether it's your uncle, or your pater, before you spring it on Quelch!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. This is serious,' yapped Bunter. 'A week at home, going to the pictures and all that, instead of Latin with Quelch, and maths and French and all that rot: and games-practice, too! I can tell you that it's worth risking it! But—.' The fat Owl of the

Remove paused, again. 'I'd like to know what you fellows think, before I try it on. What do you think, Wharton?'

'That's an easy one,' answered the captain of the Remove. 'I think you're a fat, fibbing, fabricating fozler—.'

'You needn't call a fellow names, just because he's got the brains to think of a stunt you wouldn't have thought of in a month of Sundays!' said Bunter, scornfully. 'Bet you not one of you fellows thought of anything of the kind.'

'Right on the wicket,' said Bob, 'and you'd better stop thinking about it, you fat fraud.'

'I tell you I want a holiday as much as Mauly does.'

'I'm going to try it on, at any rate,' said Bunter, resolutely. 'Mind, don't you fellows get trying it on—.'

'What?'

'It wouldn't do,' explained Bunter. 'If a lot of fellows go to Quelch with the same yarn, he's bound to smell a rat. You'd only spoil the whole thing, by butting in. It's my idea, and you can jolly well leave it alone, see?'

The Famous Five gazed at Billy Bunter.

Really, the fat Owl had no cause for alarm. No member of the famous Co. was likely to adopt that method of getting out of lessons. Possibly they did not heartily enjoy Latin with Quelch, maths with Lascelles, or French with Monsieur Charpentier: but assuredly they would never have thought of eluding those inflictions, by inventing relatives knocked over by cars. Their ideas did not run on quite the same lines as Billy Bunter's. Bunter's fat intellect moved in its own mysterious way, its wonders to perform. But Bunter was evidently uneasy lest his great idea should be borrowed.

'I jolly well wish I hadn't told you, now,' he exclaimed. 'Look here, you jolly well keep off the grass. It's my idea — mine entirely. You leave it alone. You can try it on after I'm gone home, if you like—I wouldn't mind that! But I'm having first chance with Quelch! That's only fair.'

'You fat villain!' roared Johnny Bull.

'You prevaricating porpoise!' said Frank Nugent.

'You can call a fellow names, but you jolly well keep out of it,' said Bunter. 'I wouldn't have told you, only I wanted to know what you fellows think—.'

'I've told you what I think,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Yah!'

'And I'll tell you what I think,' said Bob Cherry, taking a jam-tart from the bag. 'I think I'll let you have one of these tarts, Bunter.'

'Oh, good!' Billy Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. Even with that masterly scheme for getting off classes working in his fat brain, and the prospect of a week's holiday if it came off, Bunter was not indifferent to the attraction of jam-tarts. 'Hand it over, old chap! And look here, if I pull it off with Quelch, you can try it on next,— after I'm gone and — oooogh! Gug-gug-gug!'

Squash!

Bob Cherry handed over the jam-tart. He handed it over in a manner quite unexpected by Bunter. It squashed suddenly on a fat little nose. Apparently that was Bob's method of making it clear what he thought of Bunter and his bright ideas.

'Gurrrrrgg!' gurgled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'



'Oh, crikey! Urrggh! Gurrgh!' Billy Bunter liked jam-tarts. In fact, he loved them, with a deep and abiding affection. But he did not like them applied like plasters to his plump countenance. He jumped away, clawing at jam.

'Have another?' asked Bob.

'Urrgggh! Beast! Gerraway!' gasped Bunter.

The fat Owl gave Bob a jammy glare through jammy spectacles, and rolled away in haste. He did not linger to inquire further what the Famous Five thought of his big idea: neither did he want another jam-tart! He rolled away, dabbing at a sticky face with a handkerchief long in need of washing, and very soon more in need of it than ever. At a safe distance, he dabbed and dabbed.

'Bunter!' A sharp voice rapped.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter. He blinked round with a jammy blink at his form-master. Mr. Quelch had come out of the House: and his gimlet-eyes fell on the fattest member of his form, with distinct disapproval. He frowned portentously at the jammy Owl.

'Bunter! How dare you appear in the quadrangle with jam smeared over your face? You are the most slovenly boy at Greyfriars, Bunter!'

'I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—I mean—I—.'

'Go into the House and wash yourself at once!' thundered Mr. Quelch. 'Take fifty lines, Bunter, and go and wash your face immediately.'

'But I—I—I say, sir—I—I—,' stuttered Bunter.

'At once, Bunter.'

'Oh, crumbs!'

Billy Bunter rolled into the House, and washed. It was an irritated, annoyed, and exasperated Owl. But there was still balm in Gilead, so to speak— the prospect of a week away from school, if he succeeded in pulling Quelch's leg to the required extent. That was, however, a large size in 'ifs'.

## CHAPTER 3

### BUNTER TRIES IT ON

MR. QUELCH smiled.

Not very often did the severe countenance of the Remove master of Greyfriars melt in a smile. But Quelch was in a very cheery mood at the moment. Classes were over: he was, for the time, done with the Remove, as happily as they were done with him. His study looked very cheerful, with the autumn sunshine streaming in at the window. And on his writing-table, before him, lay a little pile of typescript, neatly pinned at the top left-hand corner: nothing less than the celebrated History of Greyfriars which had occupied so much of his leisure for a score of years or so.

Whether that great work ever would be finished, was perhaps a moot question. It had been Quelch's companion so long, that its end might have left him feeling rather blank, like Mr. Gibbon when he reached the termination of his almost interminable *Decline and Fall*. However, it was nothing like finished as yet. Hardly a dozen chapters had been written so far, and there were dozens to come. Mr. Quelch sat turning over the typed sheets, perusing his own work, like most authors, with considerable satisfaction, his crusty visage melting into a smile of cheery contentment.

Tap!

The smile disappeared from Quelch's face, as a tap came at his study door. It was an interruption, just as he was settling down to the real enjoyment of a leisure hour.

'Come in!' Quelch's voice had quite an edge on it. The door opened: and the fattest figure in Mr. Quelch's form rolled in.

Quelch's eyes fixed on Billy Bunter.

Perhaps he noted with approval that Bunter's fat face was unusually clean. His wash had done him good. But Mr. Quelch did not seem pleased to see him.

'Well!' Quelch rapped. 'What is it, Bunter?'

'If—if—if you please, sir—.'

'Be brief!'

'Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly, sir! I—I—I—!' stammered Bunter.

The fat Owl had made up his mind to it. He was going to 'try it on' with Quelch. If Mauly had got away with it, why shouldn't Bunter? But the grim stare of the gimlet-eyes across the table disconcerted him.

'I—I—I came here, sir—!' stuttered Bunter.

'I can see that you came here, Bunter! Kindly tell me at once why you came.'

'I—I—I mean, if—if you'd be so kind as to give me leave home for a few days, sir—!' gasped Bunter, getting it out in a gulp.

'What? For what reason, Bunter?'

'My-my poor old uncle, sir—.'

'Your uncle?' repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

'I—I—I mean my pater, sir,' amended Bunter, hastily. 'I—I didn't mean to say my uncle, sir— my pip—pip—pip—poor old pater, sir—.'

'Your father—?'

'Yes, sir! My poor old uncle— I mean my poor old pater— he's been knocked over by a car, sir—.'

'Bless my soul!'

'I—I'm awfully anxious about him, sir! I—I'm afraid it's awfully serious, sir. The—the mater would like me to go home for a few days, sir, as—as it's so awfully serious. It would be a—a—a comfort to her, sir. You see, my poor old uncle's getting rather old—.'

'Your uncle?'

'I mean my pater, sir! I'm very anxious to see him, now he's been knocked over by that car—I—I'm awfully cut up about it, sir—and—and perhaps you'd kindly give me leave home, sir, like—like you did Mauleverer on Saturday.'

'Upon my word!' said Mr. Quelch. He sat and stared at Bunter.

It was a little unfortunate, perhaps, that Bunter had not finally decided whether it was his pater or his uncle who had been knocked over by the car, before coming to Quelch's study. Between the two of them, his tale had rather an air of improbability.

'When did this accident occur, Bunter?' asked Mr. Quelch.

'Eh? Oh! I—I forget—.'

'What?'

'I—I mean, it happened this morning, sir,' gasped Bunter. 'You—you know the way those cars rush about in London, sir—.'

'I know quite well how cars rush about in London, Bunter, but I fail to see how the news of this accident reached you. Do you mean that you have had a telegram?'

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'You may show it to me,' said Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, lor!'

Billy Bunter hadn't expected that. It didn't seem fair, to Bunter. Quelch hadn't asked Mauly all these questions. He had been very kind and helpful to Mauly: even looking out a train for him and ringing a taxi to take him to the station. But he did not look like being kind and helpful to Bunter.

'Well, ' rapped Mr. Quelch. 'Where is the telegram, Bunter?'

'I—I—I—'

'Produce it at once.'

'I—I—I've lost it, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'You have lost it!' repeated Mr. Quelch, in a quite terrifying voice.

'Yes, sir! I—I was so cut hearing about that car being knocked over by my poor old pater—I—I mean, about my poor old pater being knocked over by that car, sir—I—I must have dropped that uncle—I mean telegram—I—I think I—I dropped it in the quad, sir—.'

'Bunter!'

'I—I hope you don't think I'm just trying this on, sir, because Mauly got leave on Saturday—,' babbled Bunter.

'Bless my soul!'

'Tain't that at all, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'I'm not thinking of getting out of lessons like Mauly, sir,—I—I like lessons—I—I shall miss them a lot, if I go home for a week. But my poor old telegram—I mean my poor old uncle—I—I mean my poor old pater, sir, knocked over by a great big car—.'

Under the glare of the gimlet-eye, Bunter was getting a little confused.

'I—I was so cut up, Sir, I couldn't help losing my uncle in the quad—I mean my telegram—.'

'That will do, Bunter.'

'Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! C—c—can I have leave, sir?'

'You may not, Bunter! I will, however, telephone to your father, and ascertain whether anything has happened—.'

Bunter jumped.

'Oh, crikey!' he gasped. 'I—I say, sir, it—it won't be any use phoning the pater, sir,—he—he won't be home from the City yet, sir—.'

'What?' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'I—I—I mean—!' stuttered the hapless Owl.

'Bunter!'

The thunder rolled, in Quelch's study.

'Bunter! It is perfectly clear why you have come to me with this absurd story.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! My poor old telegram—I mean my poor old uncle—.'

'Silence! You will be punished for this attempt to impose upon your form-master, Bunter.'

'Oh, lor!'

'You are the most untruthful boy in my form, Bunter.'

You must learn better, Bunter. You will write out, five hundred times, the sentence: *Magna est veritas, et praevalabit*. You know what that means, Bunter?'

'Oh! Yes, sir. It—it means, great is truth, and it will prevail a bit—.'

'You obtuse boy, it means great is truth, and it will prevail. That is a lesson you must learn, Bunter. You will write it out five hundred times, and bring your imposition to my study not later than Wednesday. Now go!'

'But I—I say, sir—'.

'If you say another word, Bunter, I shall cane you.' Quelch's hand strayed to the cane on his table.

Billy Bunter did not say another word. He did not want 'whops' in addition to five hundred lines. He rolled hurriedly out of Mr. Quelch's study,—wishing from the bottom of his fat heart that he had never entered it. He had not got leave like Mauly: he had got something much less agreeable. That it was exactly what he deserved was no comfort to him at all.

Mr. Quelch gave a sniff, as the door closed on Bunter.

Then, as his eyes turned on the pile of typescript before him, his frowning brow cleared, and the smile revived, as he resumed the happy occupation of perusing his own literary work. In a few moments, he dismissed the incident from his mind.

It was not so easily dismissed by Billy Bunter. Five hundred lines, impending like the sword of Damocles over his fat head, kept it green in Bunter's memory.

## CHAPTER 4

### BUNTER KNOWS HOW

'HALLO, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?'

Billy Bunter did not look as if he was enjoying life. He was leaning on a buttness, with his fat hands in his sticky pockets, and an extremely lugubrious expression on his plump face, when the Famous Five came along, and paused to look at him. He gave them a disconsolate blink through his big spectacles.

'Looks like it!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'The enjoyfulness does not seem to be terrific!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'What's up?' asked Frank Nugent. 'Some fellow been booting you for bagging his tuck?'

'Oh, really, Nugent—.'

'Or hasn't your postal order come?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows, Quelch is the limit,' said Bunter, dismally. 'I say, he didn't believe a word I said.'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Did you try that on him? What was the result— whops?'

'Five hundred lines!' moaned Bunter. 'I've got to write out *Magna est veritas et praevalabit* five hundred times, by Wednesday.'

'It will do you good,' said Harry, laughing. 'That's a lesson you really ought to learn, Bunter.'

'I think it's pretty thick doubting a fellow's word like that,' said Bunter. 'He never doubted Mauly's. But Quelch always picks on me. Making a fellow out to be a liar, you know. That's the sort of justice we get here.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can cackle,' said Bunter, morosely. 'Mauly just walked into his study, and got away with it. Then I walk into his study, and get five hundred lines. 'Tain't fair!'

'You howling ass,' said Bob. 'Mauly was genuine, and you were trying to pull Quelch's leg, to get out of classes. That's rather a difference.'

'Well, fair play's a jewel,' said Bunter. 'If Mauly gets out of classes, why shouldn't I? Quelch doesn't seem to care if a fellow's pater is knocked over by a car. He's unfeeling.'

'You fat ass—!'

'Perhaps it was a mistake to make it a car,' added Bunter, thoughtfully. 'Quelch may have smelled a rat because I made it a car, when Mauly had said a car. I didn't think of that in time. A fellow can't think of everything. It might have worked if I'd made it a case of illness—.'

'Oh, crumbs!'

'Not that Quelch would care, very likely, if my pater was laid up with plumbago or anything—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I wish I'd made it the mater, now!' went on Bunter.

Evidently, the fat Owl had been thinking it out. 'Suppose a fellow's mater was ill— even Quelch would have to be a bit sympathetic. It's pretty serious for a fellow's mother to be ill, and him miles and miles away at school. Don't you fellows think so?'

'Is your mater ill?' asked Bob, staring.

'Eh? Not that I know of.'

'You fat villain—.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'If you spin another yarn to Quelch, it will be whops next time. Bunter,' said Harry Wharton, warningly.

'Not if he lapped it up,' said Bunter. 'I've been thinking that out. It's a bit risky. I know—.'

'More than a bit, with Quelch,' grinned Bob Cherry. 'But I've jolly well got to pull it off,' said Bunter. 'I ain't going to do five hundred lines, if I can help it. Fancy a half-holiday writing lines, when I might be at home, going to the pictures! Suppose I go to Quelch and say that the mater is ill and wants me at home. What do you think he would say?'

'Bend over!' said Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' yapped Bunter. 'I can tell you this is serious. 'Tain't only getting out of classes now,—there's those lines,—five hundred of 'em. Look here. Quelch would be bound to believe it, if I told him with tears in my eyes—.'

'What?'

'How?'

'Which?'

The Famous Five stared at the fat Owl. That Billy Bunter, like Mr. Jaggars's celebrated witness, was prepared to state 'in a general way, anything', they knew. Truth and Bunter had long been strangers. But how he was to back it up with tears in his eyes was another matter. Tears, idle tears, could not be called up to order.

'I fancy I can work it,' said Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, don't you think Quelch would fall for it, if I went to him with tears running down my cheeks—.'

'Very likely.' said Harry, blankly. 'But how are you going to pump up the tears, you howling ass?'

Billy Bunter grinned.

'There's such a thing as an onion!' he answered.

'An—an—an onion!' ejaculated the captain of the Remove.

'That's what I've been thinking out!' said Bunter. 'Look here!' From a pocket, Bunter withdrew a grubby hand. In that hand was a handkerchief, considerably jammy and grubby. Under five pairs of staring eyes, the fat Owl unfolded the handkerchief, and revealed— an onion! Harry Wharton and Co. stared at the onion.

'See that?' grinned Bunter.

'The seefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter. But what?' ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Makes your eyes water,' explained Bunter. 'You rub an onion on your chivvy, and see what happens. You'd be streaming with tears in a minute.'

'Oh, my esteemed hat!'

'That's what I've thought of!' said Bunter, complacently. 'I've got brains, you know! You fellows wouldn't have thought of a dodge like that! Now would you?'

'Hardly!' gasped Bob Cherry.

'That's the idea,' said Bunter. 'I go to Quelch, and say my mater's ill, with tears streaming down my face. Quelch won't think of onions. Why should he? He's bound to be sympathetic. Even schoolmasters have feelings, — they're human, after all. Don't you fellows think he will give me leave home at once, like he did Mauly?'

Billy Bunter blinked with anxious inquiry at the Famous Five. He had given much thought to this. He had concentrated his powerful intellect on it. He was sure, almost sure, that it would work. But there was a lingering doubt, and he was rather worried. If that onion worked the oracle, so to speak, everything would be O.K. But if it failed, there could be no doubt that it

would end in 'whops'. It was quite an anxious position for the fat Owl whose only desire was to dodge work.

'Give me that onion, you fat villain!' said Bob Cherry.

'No jolly fear!' exclaimed Bunter, warmly. 'You're jolly well not going to try it on with Quelch. Bob Cherry—.'

'I'm not going to try it on with Quelch, you pernicious porpoise! I'm going to jam it down the back of your neck!'

'Good egg!' said Johnny Bull, heartily. 'Collar him!'

'Here, I say— leggo!' roared Billy Bunter, in alarm, as Bob Cherry jerked the onion from his fat hand, and the Co. collared him. 'I say, you fellows— yaroooh! Leggo my neck— I say— Beasts! Oooooogh!'

'You hold his ears. Inky! Pull out his collar! There you are— down she goes!'

'Yurrrrggh!' gurgled Bunter.

A grasp on his fat ears jerked his fat head forward. A grasp on the back of his collar gave space for the insertion of the onion. Bob Cherry jammed it in, and shoved it down, while Billy Bunter wriggled and roared.

'Ow! Beasts! Wow! Leggo! Gimme my onion! I say, you fellows— yaroooh! Will you leggo?' raved Bunter.

The Co. let go when the onion had been rammed well and truly home. Then they walked on their way, laughing — leaving a fat Owl wriggling wildly in frantic endeavours to extract the onion from the back of his neck.

## CHAPTER 5

### TEARFUL BUNTER

'BLURBING!' jeered the Bounder.

Herbert Vernon-Smith spoke in tones of amused contempt. A fat face streaming with tears did not move his sympathy. It moved only his scorn. They did not 'blub' at Greyfriars: and any fellow seen 'blubbing', even after six from a prefect's ash, would have been long in hearing the last of it.

But Billy Bunter was, at the moment, really a quite pathetic sight. Tears welled in his little round eyes, damped his big round spectacles, and trickled down his plump cheeks. Niobe herself was hardly such a picture of woe.

Smithy was lounging in a secluded spot between the old elms and the school wall. He had retired to that quiet spot to smoke a cigarette: which was one of Smithy's little ways when the eyes of beaks and pre's were not on him. His lip curled at the sight of Billy Bunter rolling up the path by the wall, weeping— actually weeping!

'Oh! Is that you, Smithy?' Bunter came to a halt and blinked at the Bounder of Greyfriars through damp spectacles. 'I—I say, Smithy, don't you tell the fellows I was blabbing. They'd laugh.'

'Of course they would, you fat booby. Laugh their heads off.' said the Bounder, contemptuously. 'What's the matter, you cry-baby? Loder given you six?'

'Oh, really, Smithy—.'

'Quelch whopped you, or what? Rats! Go and yowl somewhere else— you make me sick. A Remove man blubbing— by gad!'



'A REMOVE MAN BLUBBING - BY GAD'

Nothing could have been more utterly contemptuous than the Bounder's words and tone. Strange to relate, so far from displeasing the fat Owl, he could hardly keep a grin of satisfaction from his fat face.

It was working!



Smithy was a keen, sagacious fellow, often doubtful and suspicious. But certainly he did not dream of suspecting that those tears in Billy Bunter's eyes were the result, not of a whopping or a booting, but of an onion! That onion, carefully wrapped in a grubby handkerchief, deep in Bunter's sticky pocket, was hidden from sight, and its scent did not escape. Neither did it occur to Smithy that Bunter knew he was there, and had come along specially, in that tearful state, to put his little scheme to the test before trying it on Quelch!

Billy Bunter was, in fact, 'trying it on the dog', to see whether it would work. If a keen-witted fellow like Smithy was taken in, it looked like being successful with Quelch. And the Bounder, keen as he was, was swallowing it whole! — lapping it up like milk. He had not the slightest doubt that this was genuine 'blubbing'. His contempt was measureless: but that did not matter to Bunter. It was evidence that Smithy believed in those tears!

'Oh, dear!' moaned Bunter. 'I—I say, Smithy—.'

'Shut up!' said Smithy.

'Beast! I—I mean—.'

'Can't you take it?' snapped the Bounder. 'Why, a fag in the Second wouldn't yowl like that over a whopping—.'

'Tain't a whopping—' mumbled Bunter. 'I—I—I've had an awful shock, Smithy—.'

'You'll get another, if you don't sheer off and blub somewhere else.'

'Oh, really, Smithy! A-a fellow can't help feeling cut up, when he's just heard that his mater's ill—.'

'Oh!' The Bounder's expression changed. 'Your mother—.'

'Oh, dear! Miles and miles away at school!' moaned Bunter. 'And—and—and she's awfully ill, Smithy, and—and I'm so anxious—.' Billy Bunter pushed up his spectacles, and knuckled his eyes.

'Oh! Sorry, old man,' said Smithy.

Smithy was rather a tough nut. He had little sympathy to waste on lame ducks, at any time. A fellow 'blubbing' after a whopping had only scorn to expect from him. But this was a very different matter. The Famous Five would have known exactly what to think of Bunter's statement and his streaming tears. But it was, so to speak, a new one on Smithy.

His rather hard face softened. Even the Bounder could sympathize, if a fellow had sought that secluded corner, because he couldn't help 'blubbing' after getting such news from home.

'Is it very bad?' asked Smithy.

'Awful!' moaned Bunter. 'She wasn't knocked over by a car—.'

'Eh?'

'Just an illness,' said Bunter. 'But it's awfully bad! I—I just broke down when I got the—the—the telegram. If—if a fellow could do anything, you know—.'

'Nothing you can do, old chap.' Probably it was the first time that Herbert Vernon-Smith had addressed William George Bunter as 'old chap'.

'Well, they send invalids things, you know,' said Bunter. 'If I could send her one of those big bunches of grapes they've got at the shop! But—but I've been disappointed about a postal order.'

Smithy gave him a sharp look. This sounded rather as if Bunter was, as usual, 'on the make'. But the tears disarmed him. How could he doubt even Bunter, when his fat cheeks were glistening with tears?

'If old Mauly was here, he'd lend me ten bob like a shot,' said Bunter. 'I—I—I'd like to send her something, you know—even if she didn't care for it, it would show that I was thinking of her,

you know, and—and that's something—I'd like her to know that I'm thinking about her while she's so awfully ill. Boo-hoo!

Billy Bunter leaned on an elm, and wept. He knuckled his eyes, and tears trickled through his grubby fat fingers. The application of onion was doing its work well.

Vernon-Smith, his cigarette between finger and thumb, stood looking at him. He was no longer scornful or contemptuous.

Smithy had plenty of money: a circumstance of which Billy Bunter was fully aware. He also had a good capacity for taking care of it—except on the occasions when the spirit moved him to 'back his fancy' on the Wapshot races. Billy Bunter was a borrower of deadly skill: but he seldom succeeded in extracting even the smallest loan from the, wary Bounder. But now—! 'Look here, Bunter—.'

'Boo-hoo!'

'Not much good blubbing, old chap: that won't do the old lady any good,' said Smithy. 'But if you'd like to send her something—.'

'You see, I'd like her to know I was thinking about her—.'

'Yes, yes I Look here, I'll stand you the biggest bunch of grapes they've got in the tuck-shop, and a box to pack it in, if you like—.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. The unscrupulous fat Owl could hardly believe in his good luck. Evidently, those tears would be effective with Quelch, if they produced this effect on the hard-fisted Bounder—! And Billy Bunter liked grapes!

'Leave it to me,' said Smithy. 'Cut up to your study—you can't take that blubby face into the school shop! I'll get it and bring it up to your study.'

'Oh, good! That's awfully decent, Smithy—thanks—.'

'Oh, rats!' The Bounder hated thanks. 'Cut off—. There's still time to catch the post, if you hurry—.'

'I—I say, Smithy, I—I'll settle up when my postal order comes—.'

'Don't talk rot! Cut off!' Smithy was capable of a kind and generous action: but he had little patience, and he did not want to hear anything about Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order.

'Wait for me in your study.'

'Oh, all right.'

Vernon-Smith threw away the stump of his cigarette, and hurried away. Billy Bunter blinked after him as he went, and grinned. There were still tears in his eyes: the onion was still going strong. But he grinned through his tears.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter. 'He, he, he!'

He rolled away to the House, clambered up the stairs to the Remove quarters, and rolled into No. 7 Study, grinning. His study-mates, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, were both out: which was satisfactory to Bunter: he did not want to 'whack out' that big bunch of grapes when it materialized. In No. 7 Study he waited impatiently for Vernon-Smith and the bunch of grapes. He really could hardly believe that it was coming! But it was!

Five minutes later, the Bounder came into the study.

The grin disappeared from Billy Bunter's face and he looked as woebegone as he could, as Smithy entered—a large cardboard box in his hand.

'Here you are, Bunter!' The Bounder placed the box on the table. 'Now wrap it up, and get it off in the post—Quelch will give you leave out of gates when you tell him.'

'Oh! Yes! Rather!' gasped Bunter.

'I'll help you, if you like—.'

'Oh! No! That's all right, Smithy—don't you bother!' gasped Bunter. Considering his real intentions, Bunter certainly did not want any assistance in disposing of that big, luscious bunch of purple grapes.

'Okay, then!'

Vernon-Smith left the study, and shut the door after him. It was scarcely shut before Billy Bunter was beginning on the grapes. His fat face fairly gloated over them as he chewed and munched.

Unaware of that little circumstance, Herbert Vernon-Smith went down the passage, a thoughtful expression on his face. He had never thought much of Bunter,—few fellows at Greyfriars did! But he had a much better opinion of him now.

The door of No. 1 Study was half-open, and a sound of cheery voices could be heard from within. Vernon-Smith stopped and looked in, at the Famous Five, gathered round the table at tea. The chums of the Remove looked round at him.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Trot in, Smithy,' said Bob Cherry. 'I've just looked in to speak to you fellows—!' began Vernon-Smith.

'About the football?' asked Harry Wharton. 'You're playing on Wednesday, of course, Smithy—.'

'No: about Bunter.'

'Bunter!' repeated the Famous Five, all together.

'Yes! Look here,' said Smithy. 'Go a bit easy with Bunter— he's in hard luck. His mater's ill, and he's cut up about it—.'

'WHAT!' yelled the Famous Five, with one voice. 'You'd hardly expect it of Bunter,' said Smithy.

'Blessed if I thought he'd ever worry about anything but grub. But he's quite knocked out by his mater being ill—.'

'Oh, my only summer hat!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Has he been springing that on you, Smithy? And have you fallen for it? Ha, ha, ha!'

The Bounder stared at him angrily.

'Nothing to cackle at, in a fellow's mother being ill, that I know of,' he snapped. 'The fat ass was actually blubbing when he told me—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared the Famous Five.

'Blubbing!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Oh, crumbs! He must have got that onion out of his back! Ha, ha, ha!'

'What the dickens do you mean?' snapped Smithy. 'I tell you the tears were fairly streaming down his face. Poor old Bunter—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It's not a joke,' exclaimed Vernon-Smith. 'Bunter's packing up a bunch of grapes in his study now, to send to the old lady. Crying over them—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here—!' roared Smithy.

'My dear chap, it's all gammon,' said Harry Wharton. 'Bunter's mater isn't ill, and if he's touched some fellow for a bunch of grapes with that yarn, the fellow must be a silly ass—.'

'Oh, pack it up,' snapped Smithy. 'I was sorry for the poor chap, and I stood him the biggest bunch they had at the shop, to send home to his mater—--.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Think it's funny?' howled Smithy.

'Well, rather,' chuckled Nugent. 'That bunch won't get very far from Greyfriars— I expect Bunter's guzzling them already—.'

'I tell you he was blubbing—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, rats to you!' snapped Smithy, and he banged the door of No. 1 Study shut, with a bang that woke every echo in the Remove passage, and stalked away. He left No. 1 Study in a roar.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Fancy Smithy falling for it— and he's such a hard nut to crack, as a rule! That fat villain—.'

Harry Wharton rose from the table.

'Look here, you men,' he said. 'This is a bit over the limit, even for Bunter, I think we'd better give him a look-in.'

And the Famous Five, leaving their tea unfinished, went along the passage to No. 7,—nothing doubting how they would find Billy Bunter occupied in that study.

## CHAPTER 6

### BUMPS FOR BUNTER!

'PRIME!' gurgled Billy Bunter.

Bunter did not find it easy to utter even that monosyllable. His capacious mouth was packed to capacity, with luscious purple grapes. He gurgled happily through delicious grapes that seemed to melt in the mouth.

It was a happy fat Owl! Smithy, for once kind and sympathetic, had done the thing well. That bunch was the biggest and best that money could buy. Probably it would have pleased an invalid,— had there been an invalid, and had it reached that invalid. Certainly it pleased William George Bunter. His little round eyes were still red, and still exuded water, from the application of the onion: but otherwise, his fat face beamed,—indeed, his expression was absolutely beatific, when the door of No. 7 Study suddenly opened, and five fellows crowded in.

Bunter gave them a startled blink.

'I say, you fellows, wharrer you want?' he gurgled through grapes. 'Look here, you fellows, gerrout—.'

'You fat brigand!' said Bob Cherry.

'Scoffing them!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Why shouldn't a fellow scoff his own grapes, I'd like to know?' demanded Bunter. 'You fellows jolly well sheer off. I'm not whacking out these grapes, if that's what you've come for. You can't expect it! You wouldn't cash a postal order for me, just because it hadn't come, and you're jolly well not coming in on this, see?'

Bunter had already disposed of half the big bunch. He did not want any help in disposing of the other half.

'Where did you get those grapes, you fat villain?' roared Bob Cherry.

'Eh! They're mine! I got them from Bunter Court to-day—a—a—a special lot from our own vineries at Bunter Court—.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'If you think Smithy stood them, you're jolly well mistaken. I haven't seen Smithy since class. Besides, why shouldn't Smithy stand a pal a bunch of grapes, if he jolly well likes? No business of yours.'

'Did you tell him your mater was ill, you pernicious porker?'

'I—I might have mentioned it. Why shouldn't I?' hooted Bunter. 'Smithy ain't hard-hearted like you chaps, —he can sympathize when a fellow's uncle— I mean his pater— that is, his mater— is ill—.'

'Collar him!'

'Here, you keep off!' exclaimed Bunter, in alarm. 'Don't you start ragging, when a fellow's awfully cut up about his mater being ill—.'

'Bag him!'

Billy Bunter grabbed up the remaining bunch, and dodged round the table.

'You jolly well keep off!' he yelled. 'I wasn't scoffing those grapes—I—I was just tasting a few, before I packed them up to send to my mater,—she's awfully, fearfully ill—.'

'Bump him!'

'Yaroooh!'

The bunch of grapes went to the floor, as Billy Hunter was collared on all sides. He wriggled and roared.

'Look out! Mind you don't tread on those grapes! Leggo! Wharrer you butting in for, I'd like to know—.'

'I'll tell you, you fat villain!' said Harry Wharton. 'You are a fat, foozling, fibbing tick, and no fellow's tuck is safe from you. You're not booted half so often as you ask for it. But spinning a yarn like that is the limit, and a little over. You're not going to guzzle those grapes. You're going to have them plastered over your silly head!'

'Beast! I say, you fellows. I tell you the poor old mater is awfully fearfully ill—. I say, do let a fellow speak—I say—Yaroooooh!'

Bump!

Billy Bunter was a good weight. He was not easy to lift.

But five pairs of hands swept him off the floor of No. 7 Study. He sat down on that floor suddenly and hard, and roared frantically.

'Give him another!' said Nugent.

'Ow! Wow! Leggo!'

'Hold on a minute,' said Harry. 'Now, Bunter, is your mater ill?'

'Ow! Wow! Yes!' roared Bunter.

'Give him another!'

Bump!

'Yoooo-hooooop!'

'Now, Bunter, is your mater still ill?'

'Ow! No! Yes! Oh, crikey! I—I—I tell you, she's awfully ill—!

Bump!

'Yaroooooop!'

'Still ill?' inquired the captain of the Remove.

'Wow—yes—!'

Bump!

'Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! Leggo! I say, you fellows, —wow—ow—ow!'

'She'd better get well, Bunter,' grinned Bob Cherry.

'We're keeping this up till she's quite well and bonny!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! Beast! Wow!'

'Give him another—'

'Leggo!' shrieked Bunter. 'I—I mean she ain't ill—never better in her life—yow—ow—ow—ow!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Happy recovery!' said Bob. 'It's a bit sudden, but we're all glad to hear it, Bunter. Sure she's quite well, or shall we give you another bump?'

'Ow! Beast! Wow!'

'Better give him a few more.' said Johnny Bull.

'Ow! Leggo! I—I tell you she's got well—she's awfully well—never better! She ain't ill at all! Never was! Now will you leggo?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The breathless fat Owl was released at last. He sat on the floor and spluttered for breath, surrounded by grinning faces.

'That's that!' said Harry Wharton. 'Now give him the grapes!'

Bob Cherry picked up the bunch.

Bunter held out a fat hand for it. But it was not Bunter's fat hand, it was his fat head that received the bunch. It squashed there with a horrid squash, and ripe juice ran in streams down Bunter's neck.

'Ooooooogh!' gurgled the hapless Owl. 'Gerraway! Oooogh! Leggo! I—I—I don't want those grapes—you can have them, if you like—oooooch!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Five fellows, laughing, crowded out of No. 7 Study.

Billy Bunter was left sitting on the floor, gurgling for breath, and grabbing burst grapes out of his hair and his collar. Billy Bunter had been enjoying those grapes before the arrival of the Famous Five. He was not enjoying them now. The expression on his fat face was very expressive: but it did not express anything like enjoyment.

'Ooooooch!' mumbled Bunter, as he tottered to his feet. 'Grooogh! I'm all wet and sticky—ooooh! I shall have to go and wash. Beasts!'

For the second time since class that day, Billy Bunter was in need of an additional wash. This time he did not need a command from Quelch. Even Bunter realized that a wash was indicated, with grape-juice plastering his fat face and oozing down his fat neck. Unwillingly but inevitably he rolled out of No. 7 Study to get that wash: and his feelings, as he splashed with hot water and soap, were deep.

But there was still a spot of comfort. He still had that onion: and what had been good enough for Smithy, was sure to be good enough for Quelch. Bunter hoped so, at any rate. He had a hopeful nature.

## CHAPTER 7

### JUST LIKE BUNTER

'OH, dear! The poor old mater! Oh, dear!' Mr. Quelch gave quite a start.

It was Tuesday. The Remove had been dismissed.

Most fellows were out of the House, in the fine autumn weather. Mr. Quelch had remained in the form-room a few minutes after dismissing his form. Now he was coming down the corridor, and had almost reached the corner, when that unexpected voice fell on his ears.

It was Billy Bunter's voice. It sounded sad and woeful. As he was round the corner, Quelch could not see him. Neither could he see Quelch. And— 'downy bird' as he undoubtedly was,— it did not occur to Quelch that Bunter was waiting for him there, knowing that he was due to pass at any minute. Still less was he likely to surmise that Bunter was trying it on again: this time with the aid of an onion!

The unscrupulous fat Owl had laid his plans with a sagacity worthy of a better cause. Behind that corner, he had rubbed his fat cheeks and his eyelids with that onion, with the inevitable result that the tears streamed. He had done it thoroughly: Niobe of old could hardly have wept more abundantly than Billy Bunter at the present moment. Its work done, that onion had been carefully wrapped in Bunter's grubby handkerchief, and shoved deep into his pocket: not a whiff of its scent was to be allowed to escape. In that woeful and weepy state, Bunter waited for Quelch's footsteps: his fat heart beating a little uneasily, perhaps.

It had worked with Smithy,—there was no doubt about that. If with Smithy, why not with Quelch? But if it failed, it meant 'whops': there was no doubt about that, either. Five hundred lines had rewarded Bunter's first failure. A second failure meant bending over under Quelch's cane. But after all, could it fail? A week's holiday from school was worth the risk, in Bunter's opinion.

'Oh, dear!' Quelch, in surprise, listened to the woeful tones round the corner. 'The poor old mater! Oh, dear!'

'Bless my soul!' murmured Mr. Quelch. He walked on, round the corner. 'Bunter!'

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter. He blinked at Mr. Quelch through damp spectacles. 'What is the matter, Bunter?'

'Oh, dear! My—my—my poor old mater, sir—.'

'Is anything the matter with your mother, Bunter?'

'Only—only—only she's ill, sir—!'

Mr. Quelch eyed him, sharply. His eyes, which the Remove fellows often compared to gimlets, were very penetrating.

'Your mother ill, Bunter?'

'Oh, dear! Yes, sir! Awfully ill, and—and she'd like me to go home for a few days, sir, if—if you'd give me leave—.'

'Only yesterday, Bunter, you came to my study with a story of an accident to your father, which was wholly unfounded—.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! Oh, dear! Boo-hoo!'

'If this is true, Bunter—.'

'Oh, dear! The pip—pip—pip—pip—.'

'What?'

'The pip—pip—pip—poor old mater—.' moaned Bunter. And he wept. Mr. Quelch's somewhat crusty face softened. Judging by appearances, which was all that Quelch had to judge by, at



the moment, Billy Bunter was 'blubbing' because he just couldn't help it. And in fact that was the case: the onion had done its work duly and truly, and Hunter couldn't have restrained his tears if he had tried ever so hard.

The crusty face softened still more. Under a severe exterior, Henry Samuel Quelch had a kind heart. Certainly, he did not approve of a Remove man 'blubbing'. But he could feel for a fellow who broke down and dissolved in tears at such sad news from home. His voice was quite kind when he spoke again.

'I am sorry for this, Bunter—.'

'Oh, dear!' moaned Bunter.

'You attempted to impose upon me yesterday, Bunter. But I cannot doubt you when I see the tears in your eyes. Calm yourself, Bunter—.'

'I—I—I'm so cut up, sir—I—I—.'

'I quite understand that, Bunter. I feel for you, my boy,' said Mr. Quelch, kindly. 'You shall certainly have leave to go home immediately, if you feel so anxious about your parent. But you must calm yourself, Bunter. Take out your handkerchief and dry your eyes, Bunter.'

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter.

He jerked the grubby handkerchief from his pocket. It was exactly like Billy Bunter to forget, for the moment, that the onion was wrapped in it. A fellow couldn't think of everything at once.

Plop!

'Oh!' gasped Bunter, as the onion dropped to the floor. Mr. Quelch gave a startled sniff. It was quite a ripe onion, and now that it was no longer folded in the handkerchief, its scent was perceptible— more than perceptible! Quelch sniffed— and stared at the onion! Bunter dived frantically after that vegetable, and grabbed it up! But it was too late!

'Bunter!' Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep.

'Oh, crikey!'

'What is that in your hand, Bunter?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I—.'

'Is that an onion, Bunter?'

'Oh, crikey! No, sir! It—it—it's an apple—!' Bunter put his hand, with the onion in it, behind him, blinking in terrified dismay at his form-master.

'An—an—an apple!' articulated Mr. Quelch. 'Upon my word! Show me at once what you have in your hand, Bunter.'

Billy Bunter could have groaned. It had all gone so well, up to that point. Already, in his mind's eye, Bunter had seen himself in the train for home, free of lessons for a week, clear of Quelch and all his works: safe from French, secure from mathematics: far from geography and orthography: indulging without stint in the laziness that was his ideal of happiness. This beatific prospect he had seen in his mind's eye: but he was, alas, not to see it with any other eye! That onion had served him well: but it had come back like a boomerang, as it were: and it was his undoing. There was no help for it— the fat hand had to emerge from behind the fat back, and the onion in the grubby fingers was revealed— only too obviously not an apple!

'Bunter!' Quelch's voice rose. 'Bunter! This is a trick. Upon my word! You are again attempting to impose upon me, Bunter! You have used that—that—that vegetable, to make your eyes water—you have rubbed them with that—that—that onion, for deceptive purposes— I do not believe that your parent is ill at all Bunter— this is a trick, a subterfuge, to elude your studies, Bunter, like the absurd story you told me yesterday—.'

'Oh,lor'!'

'No doubt your punishment yesterday, Bunter, was too lenient!' thundered Mr. Quelch. 'It will not be so lenient this time, Bunter. I shall cane you, Bunter, with the utmost severity.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Go to my study!' The thunder rolled. 'Go to my study, Bunter, and wait for me there! When I come in, I shall administer the punishment you so thoroughly deserve. The most severe caning—.'

'Oh, jiminy!'

Quelch raised his hand.

'Go!' Quelch almost roared. 'You untruthful, unscrupulous boy, go! Wait in my study till I come. Go!' Billy Bunter almost crawled away to his form-master's study.

## CHAPTER 8

### PAID IN ADVANCE

'BEAST!' groaned Bunter.

He was waiting in Quelch's study.

He had been waiting a good many minutes. Mr. Quelch did not seem to be in a hurry to deal with him. Blinking from the window, Bunter could see Quelch, at a distance, over by the elms, taking his usual trot in the quad. Quelch always took a walk after school, and he was not likely to allow so slight a matter as caning an unvarnished Owl to upset his usual manners and customs. There he was— walking and talking with Mr. Prout, just as if Bunter did not matter. Bunter mattered a lot— to Bunter.

It was going to be 'six' this time: and he knew that Quelch was going to lay it on. The fat Owl wriggled at the prospect. It was bad enough, if Quelch had got on with it, and got it over. But keeping a fellow waiting like this was the limit.

'Beast!' hissed Bunter.

Secure from observation in the study, he shook a fat grubby fist in the direction of his form-master in the quad. Sad to relate, he would have liked to plant that grubby fist fair and square on Quelch's majestic nose!

He had 'six' to come: and he had to wait for them! It seemed very unfair, to Bunter. He only wanted to get out of lessons like Mauly. Mauly had got leave— Bunter was getting six! And all because Quelch could take Mauly's word, and couldn't take Bunter's! It was pretty thick, Bunter considered, to doubt a fellow's word, and give him six over and above. Quelch all over, he reflected bitterly.

He blinked dismally from the window. Quelch showed no sign of coming in. He blinked at Harry Wharton and Co. punting a football, Tom Redwing, Peter Todd, Squiff, and several other Remove fellows. They seemed to be enjoying life! Fat lot they cared about a chap being up for six!

Bunter turned from the window, and blinked round Quelch's study. There was a vengeful blink in the little round eyes behind the big round spectacles. Certainly it had never occurred to Quelch that a junior, waiting in his study for a caning, might think of avenging that caning in advance, by playing some trick in the study. But Bunter was thinking of exactly that.

His first happy thought was to upset Quelch's inkpot over the papers on the table. But he paused in time. Would Quelch believe that the inkpot had been knocked over by accident? It was not likely: Quelch was in a sceptical frame of mind that afternoon.

Bunter shook a fat head.

He had to be wary with Quelch,— very wary!

Then a sudden bright, indeed brilliant, idea, flashed into his fat brain. He remembered the typescript on which Quelch had been busy, the previous day, in that study. All the Remove knew how precious that precious manuscript was to Quelch,— practically potty about it, in fact! If anything happened to it, wouldn't Quelch be as mad as a hatter?

Suppose— just suppose— that it was missing, next time Quelch had leisure to deal with it! Suppose it was hidden somewhere, and he couldn't find it!

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

Quelch was going to give him six! Quelch could jolly well hunt for that rubbish of his, next time he wanted it.

Bunter knew the drawer in the writing-table in which that typescript was parked. He pulled it open.

There it lay, under his eyes and his spectacles— dozens of sheets of Quelch's neat typing, pinned at the corner. Bunter stretched out a fat hand to take the bundle from the drawer. But he paused again.

There was no doubt that Quelch would be hopping mad if he missed that History of Greyfriars, on which so many of his leisure hours had been expended. On that point, there was no shadow of doubt, no possible, probable shadow of doubt: no possible doubt whatever.

But suppose he guessed that Bunter knew something about it!

Bunter cogitated on that. Quelch might think of him, knowing that he had been in the study. On the other hand, Quelch was not likely to miss the typescript at once; probably not till the leisure of a half-holiday. It might be days before he missed it. Dozens of other fellows might have come and gone, in the interval. Why should he think specially of Bunter? Even if he did, Bunter was prepared with his accustomed resource: fibbing was no new experience to him. He would know absolutely nothing about it. Quelch was a beast— but he was a just beast! He couldn't and wouldn't whop a fellow on suspicion! And ten to one he would never think of Bunter at all.

The fat Owl took another blink from the window. With what seemed to Bunter an absolutely heartless disregard for the feelings of a fellow waiting in his study to be whopped, Quelch was still walking and talking with Prout. Bunter shook a fat fist again. His feelings towards Quelch were very inimical. He was going to make him sit up, and chance it!

He turned back to the writing-table, drew out the bundle of typescript, and closed the drawer. Then he blinked round for a hide-out. Obviously, he couldn't walk out of the study with that bundle— any beak might be in the passage. He had to find a hide-out for it in Quelch's study. Somewhere where the beast wouldn't think of looking, for a jolly long time!

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter, suddenly.

The chimney, of course! In the sunny autumn weather, there were, as yet, no fires. The chimney was easily accessible, and the safest hiding-place that a mischievous fat Owl could desire.

Billy Bunter rolled up the typescript, and tied it in a roll with a fragment of string from a sticky pocket. Then he approached the fireplace. It was a roomy old-fashioned Chimney. But Bunter did not reach up with the roll of typescript: there was soot in the chimney, and even Bunter's fat brain realized that Quelch might suspect something, if he spotted soot on him when he came in.

But the fat brain was working actively now. Bunter was going to hide Quelch's precious typescript up the chimney, without getting a spot of soot on him. He lifted the poker from the fender, and jammed the end into the roll. Then he poked the poker up the chimney, and groped round with it, very carefully, till he found a spot in the irregular brickwork, where the roll could repose. Very cautiously and carefully he withdrew the poker, leaving the rolled typescript lodged. Only a few spots of soot had fallen into the grate: none on Bunter. Grinning, the fat Owl laid the poker in the fender again.

The deed was done!

Quelch's precious typescript was not damaged. It might be a little sooty when it was disinterred from its hide-out: but it would be intact— a little the worse for wear, that was all. Sooner or later, no doubt, it would be found,— the later the better, in Billy Bunter's opinion. In the meantime, Quelch would be hopping mad— and serve him jolly well right! Bunter had 'six' to come: and it was a real satisfaction to have paid Quelch in advance for that six!

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

But he ceased to chuckle, as he went back to the window, and blinked at the two masters walking and talking by the elms. Once more he shook a fat fist. Why couldn't the beast come in, and get it over? There was Quelch, 'jawing' with old Prout, just as if William George Bunter did not exist at all! Possibly he had even forgotten Bunter's fat existence!

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

He blinked round the study again, with a vengeful blink. He had already paid Quelch in advance, by hiding that precious manuscript up the chimney. But if there was something more he could add—! He blinked at the inkpot again. It tempted him. After all, if a fellow happened to knock it with his elbow, and it happened to go over, and happened to drench the papers with ink—. With a wrinkled fat brow, Bunter debated in his fat mind whether he would chance it.

*Buzzzzzzzz!*

The sudden ring of the telephone bell was startling. It made Bunter jump. He whirled round and glared at the instrument.

*Buzzzzzz!*

Somebody was ringing up Quelch. Bunter grabbed the receiver off the hooks. This was his chance to put another spoke in Quelch's wheel! No doubt Quelch would have wanted to take the call. Bunter was going to take it for him, and shut off the speaker at the other end with promptness and despatch.

'Hallo!' squeaked Bunter into the transmitter. 'Who's that? You can't speak to Quelch— he's gone out, and won't be home for hours—.'

'Eh?'

'Quelch is gone out—that's all!'

'Is that you, William?'

'Wha-a-at?'

Bunter, about to jam the receiver back on the hooks, stopped in time. To his astonishment, he knew that voice on the telephone. It was the voice of his respected parent, Mr. William Samuel Bunter. Evidently, Mr. Bunter had also recognized the voice of his hopeful son at Greyfriars.

'William! Is that you, William?'

'Eh! Oh! Yes,' gasped Bunter.

'I rang up to speak to Mr. Quelch—.'

'He—he ain't here—,' gasped Bunter. 'He—he's gone out—I—I say, if—if—if it's about my report, you—you can't speak to Quelch—.'

'It is not about your report, William.'

'Oh!' Bunter was glad to hear that, at least. Bunter's report from school never seemed to satisfy Mr. Bunter. His plump and placid mater was able to find all sorts of excuses for him, which Mr. Bunter failed to find. Quelch really never gave Bunter a good report. He had even described him as untruthful: which Bunter felt was the unkindest cut of all!

'It is a much more serious matter, William. Your mother—.'

'I—I—I've been going to write to the mater, only I—I—I forgot!' stammered Bunter. 'I mean, a fellow's kept so busy here— hard work, and hard play, and all that, and—and—and—.'

'Will you listen to me, William?' snapped the voice at the other end.

'Oh! Yes! I—.'

'Your mother is ill—.'

'The mater— ill—!'

'Yes, William! There is no occasion for alarm— but your mother is ill, and she has expressed a desire to see you at home for a few days—.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

'That is why I rang up Mr. Quelch to ask leave for you from school. You must come home at once, William!'

'Oh!'

'As you tell me that Mr. Quelch is absent, kindly tell him what I have told you, at the earliest possible moment, and ask for leave! That is all, William.'

'I—I say—!'

It was useless for Bunter to say anything further. Mr. Bunter, at the other end, had rung off at the sound of a pip. Billy Bunter dropped the receiver back on the hooks, and stood looking like a fellow stunned.

'The mater!' gasped Bunter. 'The poor old mater! And—and I hadn't written— oh, dear! The poor old mater!'

Bunter gulped. His mother was ill, and wanted to see him at home. Quite unconsciously and unintentionally, Bunter had, after all, been telling the truth— his mater really was ill! Bunter was capable of inventing that illness, as a dodge to escape lessons. But the real thing quite knocked him over. Family affection was not, perhaps, strongly developed in the Bunter clan. Billy Bunter did not bother his fat head unduly about his younger brother Sammy, or his sister Bessie over at Cliff House. But the mater—! He would forget to write home, and when he did write, it was chiefly on the subject of food. But—! The poor old mater— ill, and a fellow stuck at school miles and miles and miles away—.

'The poor old mater!' mumbled Bunter. 'The pip—pip—pip—poor old mater! Oh, dear! Ooooooooooh!' He gulped and gulped.

'I've got to get home! The poor old mater!'

He was not thinking of dodging lessons now. He was thinking of the kind, plump, motherly parent, for whom, under his layers of fat, there existed a deep and genuine affection. Bunter's fat face worked, and he gulped and gulped, and his eyes filled. Billy Bunter, in Quelch's study, was 'blubbing' again— but he did not need the aid of the onion this time: they were genuine tears that streamed down his fat cheeks— streaming fast, when at length Mr. Quelch came in.

## CHAPTER 10

### LUPUS IN FABULA

MR. QUELCH opened the door of his study, and stepped in: and as his eyes fell on Billy Bunter, his face became grim. Walking and talking with Prout in the quad, Quelch had rather forgotten Bunter.

That was really quite natural: for Quelch had been discussing with Prout the question, whether, in Ode II, 3, in Horace, the third stanza began with quo or with qua. Prout's faith was in quo: Quelch inclined to qua. With so urgent a matter in mind, Quelch could hardly be expected to remember the existence of a fat junior waiting in his study to be 'whopped'! However, he remembered him now: and his brows knitted grimly. He had been quite lenient with Bunter the previous day: giving him only lines as a penalty for seeking to pull his majestic leg. He had deserved a whopping: but he had been let off with lines: and the result was, that he had attempted to repeat the same imposture. Quelch was not going to be lenient this time. Bunter was going to learn the distinction between truth and untruth: if the application of a cane to his tight trousers could enforce that needed lesson. Stern measures were required, in Quelch's opinion: and his look indicated that stern measures would not be wanting. Indeed, Rhadamanthus himself could not have looked more stern than Quelch: Aeacus could not have looked grimmer. The gimlet-eyes glinted at the fat Owl who stood mumbling, gulping, and robbing wet cheeks with grubby fingers.

'Bunter!' Quelch's voice was deep.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' Bunter blinked at his form-master.

'I—I say, sir, can I—can I have leave from school—.'

'What?'

'My mater's ill, sir—.'

'Wha—a—a—t?' Quelch almost stuttered. 'She—she—she's ill, sir,—I.—I've got to go home—I'm awfully anxious about her, sir—.'

'Bless my soul!'

Half-an-hour ago, Bunter had told him that sad tale, backed up by tears produced with the aid of an onion! That he could have the effrontery to repeat it, after Quelch had actually detected the onion, was really unbelievable. Quelch stared at him in as much astonishment as anger.

There were tears on Bunter's fat cheeks— his eyes were red— but these signs of woe had, naturally, no effect on Quelch, who had seen the onion. Bunter, with incredible effrontery and obtuseness, was repeating his attempt to delude him— that was the Remove master's only possible conclusion.

'Bunter! How dare you?' almost gasped Mr. Quelch. 'I—I—It's true, sir—I mean it's true this time—I mean—.'

'Silence, Bunter! You utterly stupid and untruthful boy, how dare you repeat that absurd story to me?' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'But I—I—I—.'

'Silence!'

Mr. Quelch strode to the table. He picked up a cane therefrom. He swished the cane in the air.

'Now, Bunter, you will bend over that chair—.'

'I—I—I've got to go, sir—,' gasped Bunter. 'I—I tell you my mater's ill, and—and she'd like to see me at home, and—and—.'

'Bunter! You have twice attempted to deceive me, with the object of obtaining a holiday from school in term. Yesterday you invented an accident to your father. To-day you invented an illness of your mother. Now you have the audacity to repeat that story, though only your utter obtuseness could make you suppose that I could believe it for one moment—.'

'But it's true, sir!' wailed Bunter. 'You see, sir, while I was waiting for you—.'

'Silence! I will listen to no more prevarication from you, Bunter. If I did not make allowance for your almost incredible obtuseness, Bunter, I should take you to your headmaster.'

'But, sir, I—I tell you—.'

'As it is,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I shall deal with you myself, Bunter, and with such severity, that I trust it may make you see the error of your ways. You must learn, Bunter, to distinguish between truth and untruth—.'

'If you'll let me speak, sir—!' gasped Bunter.

'I will not listen to one word!' thundered Mr. Quelch. 'How dare you attempt to deceive me again?'

'I—I ain't—I mean I wasn't—I never—I mean—.'

'Bend over that chair, Bunter.'

'My mater's ill, sir—.'

'Silence!'

'I'm fearfully anxious about her, sir—.'

'Boy! Bend over that chair!' almost shrieked Mr. Quelch, brandishing the cane. 'Do you hear me, Bunter? Bend over that chair at once.'

'I've got to go home—.'

'This is almost incredible!' gasped Mr. Quelch. 'Such effrontery— such impudence— such crass obtuseness— Bunter, for the last time, bend over that chair!'

'I—I've got to go, sir!' howled Bunter, desperately. 'Can't you understand, sir, that my mater's ill, and I've got to see her—.'

'Upon my word!'

It was too much for Mr. Quelch's sorely-tried patience.

He strode at the fat Owl, and grasped him by the back of his collar with his left hand. A twist of Quelch's bony but sinewy arm, and Bunter was bending over the chair.

'Ow!' roared Bunter. 'I say, sir—.'

'Silence, you untruthful unscrupulous boy! Now—.' Up went the cane. It descended. It should have descended upon the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School. But Billy Bunter, with a rapid wriggle, just dodged it. He leaped away: and the cane came down on the seat of the chair, with a resounding crack.

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

Bunter dodged round the study table. 'Look here, sir—!' he gasped.

'Boy!' articulated Mr. Quelch.

'I've got to get home! I tell you I've got to get home— my mater's ill!' gasped Bunter. He was breathless, he was wildly excited: his little round eyes flashed behind his big round spectacles.

'Look here, sir, I keep on telling you that my mater's ill, and I've got to get home—.'

Bunter broke off, and dodged round the table, as Mr. Quelch came after him. Bunter's movements generally resembled those of a tortoise— an old and tired tortoise. But at this moment, a hare had nothing on Bunter. He whisked round that table, a yard ahead of a clutching hand.

'Bunter!' stuttered Mr. Quelch.

'Urrrggh!' Bunter gurgled breathlessly. 'I say, sir—I—.'



He broke off again and whisked once more, as Quelch came round the table. Twice the Remove master, and the fattest member of the Remove, circumnavigated the study table— Bunter still ahead.



HE LEAPED AWAY: AND THE CANE CAME DOWN ON THE SEAT OF THE CHAIR, WITH A RESOUNDING CRACK

Mr. Quelch came to a breathless halt. Billy Bunter blinked at him across the table, gurgling for breath. 'I—I—I've got to go, sir—!' he gurgled. 'I—I say, sir, my pip—pip—poor old mater, sir—.'

'Silence!' roared Mr. Quelch.

Bunter blinked at him hopelessly. Quelch did not believe a word of it: it was, as it happened, true this time: but Quelch did not and could not believe a word of it. There were too many fibs to Bunter's account. It was, in fact, a case of *lupus in tabula*: like the boy in the fable who cried 'Wolf!' so often when there was no wolf, that he could not be believed when the wolf really came, Bunter had told so many untruths, that he could not be believed now that he was, for once, stating the facts. So far from believing him, Quelch was only exasperated by his pertinacity. Rhadamanthus and Aeacus combined could not have produced the glare that Quelch gave the fat Owl across the table.

'I—I—I say, sir, do listen to me,' squeaked Bunter. 'While I was waiting for you— Yarooooh!' Quelch came round the table with a rush. This time Bunter did not circumnavigate the table. He shot to the door. Bunter was desperate. He was going home— he had to go home: Quelch or no Quelch. Quelch wouldn't give him leave—so he was going without leave! He was going, anyhow. He shot to the door, grabbed it open, and shot into the passage.

'Bunter!' shrieked Mr. Quelch.

Only the sound of fleeing footsteps answered him.

'Bless my soul!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

He strode to the door. He stared into the corridor. He had a moment's glimpse of a fat figure vanishing round a corner.

'Bless my soul!' repeated Mr. Quelch.  
Bunter was gone!

CHAPTER 10

BOLTED!

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anybody ill to-day?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, when a fellow's mater is ill—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

On any other occasion, and from any other person, a statement that a fellow's mater was ill, would have been taken seriously. But nobody was likely to take that statement seriously from Billy Bunter, in the circumstances. It was greeted by a roar of laughter from the Famous Five. Billy Bunter had erupted suddenly from the House, chasing bareheaded into the quad. His face was crimson, and he panted for breath. Harry Wharton and Co. had ceased punting the footer to stare at him, wondering what was up. What was up was, apparently, some more of Bunter's 'gammon': at least that was how it appeared to the juniors.

'I say, you fellows—!' gasped Bunter. 'My pip—pip—poor old mater is really ill—awfully ill—!'

'Ill again, when only yesterday we bumped you till she got well!' said Bob Cherry.

'Give him some more!' suggested Johnny Bull.

'The bumpfulness is the proper caper,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows, no larks!' gasped Bunter. 'It's awfully serious—.'

'Ill again—and you'd like to send her a bunch of grapes, what?' asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Better look for Smithy! He may fall for it twice— perhaps!'

'The perhapsfulness is terrific!' chuckled the nabob of Bhanipur.

'Dash it all, Bunter, try a new tack,' said Frank Nugent. 'We've had your pater and mater— make it an uncle or an aunt, for a change —.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I tell you—!' shrieked Bunter.

'Still got that onion?' asked Bob. 'I can see you've been putting on a weep. Did you try it on Quelch?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I tell you the mater's ill, and I've got to get home!' raved Bunter. 'I say, Quelch won't give me leave—.'

'Did you really expect him to?' asked Bob. 'You old fathead, Quelch is too downy for that.'

'I'm jolly well going!' hooted Bunter. 'But I—I—I say, you fellows, my postal order hasn't come—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Lend me a pound for my fare, will you?'

'Oh, my hat! Anybody got a pound for Bunter to blow at the tuck-shop?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Don't all speak at once.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I—I say, Toddy, you'll lend me a pound, won't you?' Peter Todd chuckled.

'Certainly,' he answered. 'That is, if you can take it out of a threepenny-bit and give me the change.'

'Redwing, old chap—'

'Chuck it, Bunter,' said Tom Redwing.

'But I tell you fellows, my mater's really awfully ill.' wailed Bunter. 'I told Quelch, and he wouldn't believe me—.'

'Dear me!' said Bob Cherry. 'Now I wonder, you fellows, why Quelch wouldn't believe Bunter!' 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I've got to get home!' howled Bunter. 'The mater's ill, and she wants me to go home— she's fond of me, you know—.'

'No accounting for tastes!' remarked Skinner. 'She wants to see me—!'

'You'll have to wash, then,' said Bob. 'You can't be seen unless you do!'

'Beast! I say, where's Smithy?' exclaimed Bunter. He blinked round, but the Bouncer was not to be seen among the crowd of juniors in the quad. 'I say, you fellows, know where Smithy is?'

'You fat ass!' roared Bob Cherry. 'Do you think you can diddle Smithy again to-day, after diddling him yesterday?'

'I've got to get home—my mater's ill—.'

'Try a new one!' urged Nugent. 'That one's stale. Give your sister Bessie a turn— or your Uncle Carter! Or your grandfather! Isn't your grandfather ill yet?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter blinked dismally at the laughing juniors.

His mater really was ill—the fat Owl really was in a state of distress. But it was hardly to be expected that anyone would believe so. It was *lupus in fabula* again— the wolf in the fable: Bunter was telling the truth at last, but to all his hearers it was simply the same old tale!

'I say, you fellows, it's really awfully serious!' wailed Bunter. 'I tell you the poor old mater—.'

'Tell me the old, old story!' chanted Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I've got to get home! Quelch won't give me leave, and I shall have to cut—!'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'You benighted fat ass, if you cut without leave, you'll go up to the Head—.'

'I don't care!' gasped Bunter. 'I've got to get home—.'

'Do you want to be sacked, you blitherer?'

'I tell you I don't care! I don't care about anything but the poor old mater! I'm not thinking of getting out of lessons—.'

'You wouldn't be!' grinned Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you'll lend me a pound for my fare—.'

'Trot out your quids!' chuckled Bob. 'Bunter would like another bunch of grapes! Trot 'em out!'

'Here comes Quelch!' chirruped Skinner. 'Ask him, Bunter.'

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Bunter.

He blinked round at an angular figure emerging from the House. The expression on Mr. Quelch's face, as he came, might have alarmed a stouter heart than Billy Bunter's.

'By gum, Quelch looks in a bait!' murmured Bob Cherry. 'Look out, Bunter.'

'Bunter!' Quelch's voice was both loud and deep, as he strode towards the group of juniors, 'Bunter—!'

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

He flew.

'Bunter, you ass—!' exclaimed Harry Wharton, staring after the fleeing figure of the fat Owl in amazement, 'Bunter— stop—.'

'Stop, you fathead!' shouted Bob.

Bunter did not stop. He whizzed.

Quelch accelerated.

'Bunter! ' The voice of the fabled Stentor had nothing on Quelch's, at that moment. He fairly bellowed, 'Bunter!'

The fat Owl dashed on. After him dashed Quelch, his gown flying in the wind: the juniors staring after both of them, almost petrified.

'Is he crackers?' gasped Bob.

'The crackerfulness must be terrific.'

Pursued and pursuer disappeared from sight behind the elms. Bunter was in full flight: bolting with his form-master in hot pursuit. It was such a scene as had never been witnessed in the old quadrangle at Greyfriars before. Billy Bunter was making history! Harry Wharton and Co. were left staring blankly: wondering whether the fat Owl of the Remove had taken leave of his senses,—such as they were!

'Bunter! ' Quelch's roar came floating back, as he disappeared after the fleeing Owl.

Billy Bunter did not heed that roar. His mater was ill, and he was going home. That idea was firmly fixed in Bunter's fat mind: and perhaps there was room for only one idea at a time in that fat mind. In normal moments Bunter would have trembled at Quelch's frown. Now he passed Henry Samuel Quelch by like the idle wind that he regarded not. Panting and puffing, streaming with perspiration, Bunter flew on: his amazed and exasperated form-master hot on his track.

'Bunter! Stop! Bunter!'

Bunter stopped—for a second—at the school wall. There were plenty of fellows in the Remove who could have jumped and caught the top of the wall with their hands.

Bunter had never been one of those fellows. His avoirdupois was against such a feat. But circumstances alter cases! Bunter was desperate now. He jumped,— and his fat hands clutched. He just did it,— hanging on by those fat hands as Quelch came sweeping up.

'Bunter! '

'Urrggh!' gurgled the breathless Owl. He made a frantic effort to drag himself over the wall. But from behind, a grip of iron closed on a fat ankle. Bunter, was held.

'Ow!' The fat junior wriggled frantically. 'Leggo!'

'Bunter—! '

'Beast! '

'What? What? Upon my word! Bunter, are you out of your senses! Come down from that wall at once! I shall punish you most severely! Bunter, I shall pull you down, if you do not immediately descend. I shall— OH!'

Crack!

Only sheer desperation could have made Bunter do it.

But he did it. Quelch had captured one foot,— the other was free. With that free foot the fat Owl kicked out backwards, and a sudden heel jammed on Quelch's majestic chin!

'OH!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

He tottered. Both his hands went to his afflicted chin.

For the moment, Bunter was released. That moment was enough for him. With a frantic effort he dragged himself up on the wall, and rolled over it. A fat breathless figure disappeared over the wall: and Mr. Quelch was left clasping his chin, and almost wondering whether he was dreaming.

'OH! What—!'

BUNTER ON THE RUN

Herbert Vernon-Smith jumped.

It was really more than enough to make any fellow jump.

For a moment, indeed, the Bounder fancied that the school wall was collapsing on his head. Smithy was out of gates. He had gone out with the intention of 'seeing a man about a horse': Mr. Joey Banks, at the 'Three Fishers', being always obligingly prepared to help him get rid of his too-ample pocket-money. But Smithy had not quite made up his mind between the rival attractions of Hokey-Pokey for the 2.30 at Wapshot, and Rumble-Tumble for the 3.30. He was leaning on the school wall, at the roadside, thinking out that abstruse problem, when it happened.

Leaning idly on the old wall, his hands in his pockets, meditating on his problem, Smithy was not in the least prepared for a heavy object to descend suddenly on his head. But a very heavy object suddenly did: and for a startled moment it seemed to Smithy that the ancient wall, which had stood firm since the reign of King John, had yielded at last to Father Time, and tumbled over. Smithy, at any rate tumbled: headlong. He sprawled helplessly. 'Yaroooooh!' came a roar.

It was not the ancient wall that had collapsed on Smithy. It was a fat Owl that had rolled headlong over the wall, and dropped. 'Look before you leap' is an excellent maxim: but Billy Bunter had had no time to look before he leaped. In terror of a clutching hand behind, Bunter had rolled over and dropped, never dreaming that anyone might be leaning on the outer side of the wall, below. Smithy sprawled, and Bunter sprawled over him, with a startled roar. 'Ow! What's that? Who's that? Oh, crikey! Wow!' roared Bunter.

Vernon-Smith sat up, dizzily.

Bunter sat up. They sat and stared at one another. 'Oh! You!' gasped Bunter.

'You fat maniac!' yelled Smithy. He was startled, and he was rather damaged. Bunter had fallen heavily— and Smithy had hit the road rather hard. He gave the fat Owl an almost homicidal glare.

'Oh, really, Smithy—!'

'You dithering dummy, what do you fancy you're up to?' yelled the Bounder. 'Dropping on a fellow's head— couldn't you walk out at the gates if you wanted to—.'

'I say, Quelch is after me!' gasped Bunter.

'Wait till I get up— I won't leave much for Quelch!' gasped Smithy.

The angry Bounder scrambled to his feet. Billy Bunter sat gasping for breath, for the moment unable to heave his extensive weight from the ground.

'I—I say, old chap, lend a fellow a hand up!' gurgled Bunter.

Smithy did not answer that. It was not a hand, but a foot, that he going to lend Bunter.

He was already feeling far from amicable towards that fat member of his form. The Bounder prided himself on being a hard nut to crack: but the wily Owl had pulled his leg, the day before, as easily as he might have pulled that ass Mauly's. Smithy could have kicked himself for being taken in: but he was more disposed to kick Bunter. He now proceeded to do so.

Thud! Thud! *Thud!*

'Ow! Ow! Stoppit!' yelled Bunter, squirming wildly. 'I say, Smithy, old chap—. Stop it, you beast— yaroooooh!'

'There!' panted Smithy. Thrice his foot landed on a wriggling Owl, and each time with emphasis. 'Now, you fat fozzling frump—.'

'Yow—ow—ow—ow!' howled Bunter.

Smithy dusted down his clothes, which had collected a considerable amount of dust from the road. Bunter roared. But he ceased to roar as he remembered Quelch. Quelch had been left on the inner side of the wall, nursing his chin. Obviously, he wouldn't remain there: he would resume the pursuit, spurred on all the more by the pangs in his chin. Bunter, always disinclined for exertion, was less inclined than ever, at the moment: but he had to exert himself. He had no time to lose.

He heaved himself to his feet. He gave an anxious blink up at the wall: but there was no sign of pursuit there: Quelch was no wall-climber. But Bunter had no doubt that he would come out at the gates, at a little distance from the spot: he might appear at any moment.

'I—I—I say. Smithy—!' panted Bunter.

'Get out!' snapped the Bounder.

'But I—I—I say, old chap—.'

'Do you want to be booted again, you fat freak?'

'Eh? No! I say, lend me a quid, will you, Smithy?'

'What?'

Herbert Vernon-Smith ceased to dust his dusty garments, to stare at the fat Owl in blank astonishment. Such a request, at the moment, was really a surprise. It really was not a propitious moment for extracting a loan. Smithy was more than half inclined to recommence the booting process: certainly not in the least disposed to lend Bunter anything but a boot.

'I—I've got to get home!' gasped Bunter. 'My mater's ill. Smithy—.'

'What?' Smithy almost yelled.

'My mater you know—she's ill—.'

'You fat, footling, fibbing, fozzling frump, do you think you can work that on me a second time?' gasped Smithy. 'Do you fancy I'm going to stand you another bunch of grapes, for you to wolf in your study?'

'Oh! Yes! No! I—I mean, it's true—.'

'Get out before I boot you.'

Billy Bunter backed away. He did not want a boot.

But he did want a 'quid', if he could extract one. Railway tickets cost money: and Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order, which he had long been expecting, had not arrived. The hapless Owl was in his usual impecunious state. He was going to get home,— somehow, anyhow: but Smithy was his last hope of raising the railway fare. Bunter backed out of reach of a boot: but he did not get out. He blinked along the old wall, in the direction of the gates: but Quelch was not yet in the offing. Then he blinked again at the Bounder.

'Smithy, old chap—!' he squeaked, beseechingly.

'Buzz off, and shut up.'

'My mater's really ill, and I'm going home!' wailed Bunter. 'It's really true, Smithy—I've got to go, and I—I haven't any money—.'

'Quelch would give you journey-money, if you're going home, you fibbing fozzler. Pack it up.'

'He won't give me leave to go, and-and he's after me!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I say, Smithy, you've got lots—lend me a quid for my fare, old chap—I say, Quelch may be out at any minute—I've got to get away—oh, lor!' '

Vernon-Smith stared at him, hard. He had been unaware of anything unusual going on within the school walls. But he realised that something very unusual must have been going on, to

cause the fat Owl to clamber over a high wall, and drop outside like a sack of coke. And Bunter's frantic excitement made an impression on him. Forgetful of boots, Bunter came nearer, and clutched his arm.

'Smithy, old chap, be a sport! Lend me a quid—.'

'Mean to say you're bolting?' exclaimed Vernon-Smith, blankly.

'I've got to! Quelch won't give me leave, and I've bolted! I say, he may come along any minute—Oh, crikey, there he is!' Bunter ended in a howl of alarm.

A mortar-board appeared in the gateway. A gimlet-eye glared along the road. It fell on Bunter: and Henry Samuel Quelch came striding up the road with long rapid strides. 'Bunter!' Quelch's voice came like a roll of thunder from the distance.

'Oh, crikey!'

Vernon-Smith stared at the terrified fat Owl, and then at Quelch, coming on fast: and then at Bunter again. The fat Owl, giving up hope of the 'quid', turned and ran.

'Oh, gad!' breathed Smithy.

'Vernon-Smith!' It was a shout from Quelch. 'Stop that boy!'

'Oh! Yes, sir!'

Smithy cut after Bunter. He ran twice as fast as the fat Owl, and in a few moments was at his side.

'Bunter, you ass—.'

'Gerraway.'

'You can't bolt like this—.'

'Beast!'

'Quelch will skin you—.'

'I don't care!'

'Is your mater really ill, or what?' exclaimed the Bounder. He realized that there must be something extremely uncommon the matter with Bunter, to cause him to act in this amazing manner: with a reckless disregard of authority, of which the Bounder himself, the most reckless fellow in the Remove, was hardly capable.

Bunter did not answer. He had no breath for conversation. He needed it all for sprinting.

'Bunter, you fathead—.'

Bunter pounded on.

'Look here, I'll lend you that quid, and chance it!' breathed Smithy. 'Here you are, you fat chump!'

He slipped a pound note into a grubby hand. Bunter clutched it: but he did not speak. He couldn't! He gurgled for breath as he pounded onward. From behind, Quelch's voice came again: 'Vernon-Smith! Stop that boy! Do you hear me?' Quelch was moving fast. But the dignity of a school-master prevented him from actually chasing at a run along a public highway. But though he did not run, his long legs covered the ground rapidly. It would have been quite easy for Vernon-Smith to catch at a fat arm, and jerk Bunter to a halt. But Smithy had no intention of doing so. Instead of that, he breathed into a fat ear: 'Get off the road on to the common! You can dodge him among the bushes. Best of luck, old fat man.'

'Urrrrrgh!' gurgled the breathless Owl. Smithy's tip was a useful one, though it had not occurred to Bunter's fat brain. He charged across the road, and disappeared among the hawthorns on Courtfield Common. Smithy came to a halt.

A minute more, and Mr. Quelch came panting up. He paused for a moment, to take in breath, and to glare at Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a glare compared with which that of the fabled Gorgon might have been called a sweet smile.



'Vernon-Smith! I called to you to stop that boy! How dare you let him go, Vernon-Smith?'  
Smack!

'Ow!' yelled Vernon-Smith.

If Mr. Quelch had had his cane with him, no doubt he would have 'whopped' Smithy. But he had no cane with him: and he was intensely exasperated. They did not smack heads at Greyfriars. On no other occasion, could Mr. Quelch have so far forgotten himself. Now he did— and that smack on Smithy's head made him totter!

Quelch wasted no further time on him. He charged after Bunter. Dismissing all consideration of the dignity of a schoolmaster, he charged after the vanishing Owl at top speed, and vanished in his turn among the furze and hawthorns. Herbert Vernon-Smith stood rubbing his head, with an expression on his face like unto that of a demon in a pantomime.

## CHAPTER 12

### HOMeward BOUND

'PORTER!'

'Yessir.'

Billy Bunter trembled.

It was a tired and perspiring fat Owl. Billy Bunter had dodged pursuit on Courtfield Common. Luck had befriended him. Quelch had been left rooting among bushes for a vanished Owl: what time Bunter had, at a safe distance, cut back to the high-road, where by happy chance the motor-bus from Redclyffe was rolling on its way to Courtfield. It was a lift for Bunter— and a lift was what he wanted, more than he had ever wanted even a plum cake or a sticky doughnut. The bus had landed him at the railway station: and thanks to Smithy's 'quid' he had taken his ticket for home. Now he was on the platform, waiting for his train. The five-fifteen was due: but it was not yet in sight on the line. Bunter had to wait— and he waited in breathless trepidation. If Quelch came on after him, before he caught that train—!

There was little doubt that Quelch would follow on.

That wouldn't matter, if Bunter was safe on his train. But otherwise—!

On the platform, the fat Owl had backed behind a high stack of luggage. He was out of sight, at least, if Quelch arrived. In that cover, he listened with all his fat ears. The sound of an engine whistle would have been music to those fat ears— sweeter than the music of the spheres of ancient fable. But it was not an engine whistle that he heard. It was something perhaps less unmusical: but certainly more unwelcome: the voice of his form-master calling to a porter.

'Beast!' moaned Bunter, inaudibly.

Quelch had arrived. Only that stack of baggage hid him from Bunter, and hid Bunter from him.

'Porter! — Has the five-fifteen gone yet?' Quelch, evidently, knew all about the trains:

'The five-fifteen, sir! Not yet, sir! It's 'ardly twenty past five yet, sir!' came the porter's reply.

'Have you seen a boy— a schoolboy— here, porter? A very plump boy, in spectacles?'

'Yessir! Minute or two ago, sir!'

'Where is he now, porter? I do not see him on the platform.'

Billy Bunter hardly breathed. The speakers were not three yards from him. Had the porter seen him take cover behind that stack of baggage? The clutching hand was terribly near!

'I don't see 'im about, sir. Praps in the waiting-room, sir.'

'Thank you, porter.'

Bunter heard receding footsteps, and breathed again.

Quelch was welcome to search the waiting-room, as long as he liked. Bunter only hoped that the five-fifteen would come in, while Quelch was busy there. If only he could rush for the train, while Quelch was in the waiting-room—!

But the five-fifteen did not come in.

Bunter huddled behind the baggage, perspired, and listened. There were footsteps— but they passed on: no doubt there were other passengers for the five-fifteen, as well as Bunter. But suddenly there came an emphatic tread that Bunter knew!

'Beast!' he breathed.

Quelch was coming up the platform again. He had drawn the waiting-room blank, and he was looking for Bunter. No doubt he could guess easily enough that the elusive fat Owl was dodging out of sight. If he looked behind that stack of trunks and suit-cases—.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter, as a face suddenly appeared round the stack. He had dreaded it— expected it— and there it was! But the ghost of Banquo could not have startled Macbeth more, the unknown figure that drew his curtains at dead of night could not have startled King Priam more, than the grim countenance of Henry Samuel Quelch startled Bunter. He blinked at that grim countenance with popping eyes.

'Bunter!'

'Oh, crikey!'

'You are here—!'

'Oh! No! I—I—I ain't here, sir—I—I—.' Quelch's grim face had peered round the baggage-stack.

Now the rest of Quelch followed. Foremost came an outstretched hand, to clutch at the fat Owl's collar.

Bunter jumped away.

'Upon my word! Bunter—!'

'I—I—I say, sir, I—I've got to get home—my mater's ill—I—I—I'm going home—I—I—.'

'Stop!'

Bunter bounded, as a hand clutched. He was round that stack of baggage in a split second. But he knew that Quelch would follow him round. In sheer desperation, Bunter gave that stack of baggage a shove, putting all his considerable weight into the shove.

The stack toppled and went over: —on Quelch!

Bunter heard a startled gasp. He did not stay to listen for more. He shot away like an arrow from a bow.

Pursuit, for the moment at least, was stopped. Mr. Quelch was strewn on the platform, in the midst of trunks and suit-cases and hampers. The sudden overturn of the stack of baggage had floored him.

The Remove master sat up, in the midst of tumbling baggage. Trunks, hampers, suit-cases, surrounded him. A leather trunk lay across his legs: a hamper jammed a sharp corner into his ribs. Like Marius in the ruins of Carthage, Mr. Quelch sat among the baggage, and gasped. He heard, without for the moment heeding, sounds of an incoming train. In a dazed and dizzy state, he sat and spluttered for breath.

The porter came hurrying up.

"Ere, sir! 'Ope you ain't 'urt, sir! Give you a 'and up, sir.'

Mr. Quelch was glad of a hand up.

With the help of the porter, he tottered to his feet. He gasped and gasped.

'Bless my soul! That boy—.' Having regained his wind, he remembered Bunter. 'Porter! Where is that boy—?'

'Took the train, sir—.'

'What?' It was quite a yelp from Quelch. 'The train? Has the five-fifteen gone, porter?'

'Jest going, sir! It's a bit early— 'ardly 'arf-past yet—.'

Quelch rushed away.

The train was moving out of the station. If the elusive Owl was on that train, he was out of reach. And he was! A fat face stared from a carriage window: a big pair of spectacles flashed back in the autumn sunshine. Bunter was going.

'Bunter!' shrieked Mr. Quelch.

Bunter blinked at him. The train was moving: Quelch could not get him now. But Quelch's long legs kept pace for the moment, with the moving train, and his eyes glittered at Bunter.

'Bunter! You will be expelled for this!' panted Mr. Quelch.

'I don't care!'

'What? what?'

'I'm going home—my mater's ill—!'

Perhaps, for a moment, Quelch wondered whether Bunter's mater really was ill, and whether the fat Owl really was distressed and anxious about that good lady. If so, he dismissed the idea at once. That Billy Bunter might, for once, be telling the truth, was altogether too improbable. He had attempted to obtain a holiday by trickery: he had failed, and he was bolting without leave— and Quelch's wrath boiled over.

'Bunter!'

Whisking along beside the moving train. Quelch fairly shouted, 'Bunter! Get out at the next station, and return to school—.'

'Shan't!'

'Bless my soul! If you fail to do so, Bunter, you will be expelled—.'

'Yah!'

That was Bunter's last word. Quelch had to stop, at the end of the platform: and the train glided on, and left him there. He stood watching the train blankly till it disappeared up the line: and then he turned away, breathing hard and deep, with feelings quite inexpressible. Quelch knew several languages, but in none of them could he have found words to express his feelings, as he left Courtfield Station: leaving Billy Bunter on the train, homeward bound.

SMITHY ON THE WAR-PATH

'OH, listen to the band!' murmured Bob Cherry.

There was a chuckle in the Remove passage.

It was not exactly a 'band' to which a good many grinning fellows listened. It was a sound of raised voices from No. 4 Study.

That study belonged to Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. It was not uncommon for at least one angry voice to be heard therefrom. Smithy had an uncertain temper, which was not always kept in hand: and when it was out of hand, Smithy did not care a bean if all Greyfriars became aware of it. It did not worry him for his angry voice to be heard at a considerable distance. Remove fellows, coming up to the studies, to tea, heard it— they could scarcely have failed to hear it. Most of them seemed amused.

'Oh, shut up!'

Evidently Smithy was addressing that polite injunction to his study-mate, Redwing. Tom's quieter voice was heard: 'Look here, Smithy—.'

'Will you shut up?'

'You can't do it, old man—.'

'I can and will, and you can mind your own business.'

'Quelch would raise Cain—.'

'Let him!'

'There'd be an awful row—.'

'Think I care? Think I'm going to have my head smacked?' The Bounder almost yelled. 'By gum! I'll show Quelch whether he can smack my head or not.'

Bob Cherry whistled.

'Quelch been smacking Smithy's head?' he asked. 'Must have been in a bait! Quelch doesn't smack fellows' heads.'

'Smithy must have got his rag out,' remarked Johnny Bull.

'Quelch was in a bait, chasing after that fat ass Bunter,' said Frank Nugent. 'But it's rather the limit to smack a fellow's head.'

'The smackfulness is not the proper caper,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Quelch must have been terrifically infuriated.'

'He looked it, when he was after Bunter,' grinned Skinner. 'He's still after him—he hasn't marched the fat ass in yet.'

'Smithy must have asked for it,' said Harry Wharton.

'But what—?'

'Smacked my head!' The Bounder's angry voice was going on, echoing from the study. 'By gum! I'll let him know where he gets off! And I know how! If you won't come and keep cave in the passage—.'

'I won't have a hand in anything of the kind. Smithy! You must be mad to think of it. Quelch would go right off at the deep end, if anything happened to that precious typescript of his—.'

'Let him! Something's going to happen to it, while he's out of gates!'

'You can't—.'

'Oh, shut up! Think I'm having my head smacked? I can't smack his head back. I suppose? Think I can?'

'Don't be an ass—.'

'But I know how to hit back, and to hit jolly hard. Next time he goes for that rubbish of his, he will find it swimming in ink. And that's that!'

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Skinner chuckled. But the Famous Five looked very grave. The Bounder, in moments of ungovernable temper and resentment, was capable of the wildest and most reckless acts. But if he carried out that dire intention, the consequences would hardly bear thinking of. Certainly it would hit Quelch very hard, which was what Smithy wanted more than anything else just then. But what would follow was awful to contemplate. No wonder Tom Redwing was doing his best to restrain his headstrong chum.

'Smithy— leave it till you're cooler—.' There was an almost beseeching note in Redwing's voice.

'Leave it till Quelch comes in, you mean, when it will be too late!' jeered the Bounder. 'I'll watch it. Quelch can't smack my head without something to follow.'

'Anything else—.'

'Anything else that will give him such a jolt?' sneered Smithy. 'Let him come in, and find his inkpot up-ended over his precious typescript— that will make him sit up and take notice. And if you funk lending a fellow a hand, you can keep out of it.'

'It's too thick, Smithy—.'

'Is it? Well, that's exactly what I'm going to do, and I'm going to do it now, while the coast's clear. And you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. Tom Redwing. I'm going down to Quelch's study, and I'm going to soak all the ink in the study over his precious bosh—.'

'Mad ass!' muttered Johnny Bull.

'He ought to be stopped!' said Peter Todd.

Harry Wharton tapped at the door of No. 4 Study, and threw it open. Redwing and Vernon-Smith looked round at him: the former with a troubled face, the latter with a hostile glare.

'What the dickens do you want here, Wharton?' snapped the Bounder. 'Get out, and shut the door after you.'

'Just a word—!' said Harry, quietly.

'Get out, I tell you.'

'Have a little sense, Smithy,' said the captain of the Remove. 'You can be heard by a dozen fellows—.'

'What do I care?'

'Oh, don't be a goat!' exclaimed Wharton. 'If you're going to play a mad trick on Quelch, do you want all Greyfriars to know about it?'

'Oh!' The Bounder calmed himself, a little. Angry and excited as he was, it dawned on him that a fellow about to commit an act for which he might be expelled from the school, would be well-advised not to shout it out for a crowd to hear. 'Well, nobody's going to give a man away, I suppose! You can go to Quelch and tell him, if you like I' he added, savagely.

Harry Wharton coloured.

'From what you've been yelling out, Quelch seems to have smacked your head,' he said.

'You're asking to have it smacked again!'

'Oh, rats!'

'Smithy, old man.' Bob Cherry looked in. 'Think it over before you make an ass of yourself. Quelch would be awfully wild—.'

'That's what I want.'

'That tripe of his is the apple of his eye,' urged Bob. 'That's why I'm going to soak it in ink.'

'Look here,' growled Johnny Bull. 'It's a rotten trick, and I don't see letting Smithy get on with it. Keep him in his study till Quelch comes in.'

The Bounder's eyes blazed.

'Think you can stop me?' he shouted. 'Try it on, if you like.'

'Smithy, old man—,' pleaded Redwing.

'Oh, shut up, you.'

Johnny Bull glanced round at his chums. Johnny had a great fund of solid common sense: and he had no use whatever for the Bounder's 'tantrums'.

'What about it, you chaps?' he asked. 'It's a dirty trick on old Quelch, and the silly ass will get himself sacked for it, as likely as not. Keep him in the study till Quelch gets back—.'

Harry Wharton nodded.

'I think we'd better,' he said. 'Look here, Smithy—.'

'Have a little sense, old chap,' urged Bob Cherry.

The Bounder, with set lips and glinting eyes, made a step towards the door. The Famous Five blocked the doorway. Smithy's eyes fairly burned at them.

'Will you let me pass?' he breathed.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Not to go down to Quelch's study,' he answered. 'You just can't do it, Smithy—and—Oh!'

The Bounder rushed. That sudden fierce rush spun the juniors right and left, and Smithy was through. He raced away down the passage. Evidently, Smithy was not going to be stopped, if he could help it.

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Bob, as he tottered.

'After him!' bawled Johnny Bull.

'Come on,' panted Harry Wharton. 'The mad ass has got to be stopped—.'

They ran down the passage after the Bounder. He was disappearing down the stairs as they came running across the landing. As they reached the stairs, a deep voice boomed up from below: the voice of Prout, master of the Fifth.

'Vernon-Smith! Why are you racing about the stairs in this disorderly manner? You very nearly ran into me, Vernon-Smith.'

'Sorry, sir— some fellows were ragging—.'

Grunt, from Prout, as he stared up. Vernon-Smith, at a more sedate pace, passed the Fifth-form master, and went down the lower stairs. Harry Wharton and Co. came to a halt. Prout gave them a portentous frown.

'Cease this disorder at once!' he rumbled.

There was no help for it. The scapegrace of the Remove had to be left to his own devices: and the Famous Five, leaving it at that, went back to No. 1 Study and tea.

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT!

MR. QUELCH sat down rather heavily in the deep armchair in his study.

He was tired. His unaccustomed exertions, in pursuit of the elusive Owl of the Remove, had fatigued him. He rested his feet on the fender, leaned his head back on soft leather, and frowned at a fireless grate. His frown was almost as frightful, fearful, and frantic, as that of the Lord High Executioner.

Quelch was not only tired. He was intensely irritated and exasperated. His authority had been disregarded, and set at naught. He had a twinge in his chin, where a disrespectful heel had jarred. And Bunter was gone! In defiance of all authority, he had bolted under his form-master's eyes. It was incredible—almost unthinkable—but it had happened.

Such a situation was so unprecedented, so unheard-of, that Quelch was rather at a loss how to deal with it. Certainly he was going to deal with it with a stern hand. He was not going to spare the rod.

If Bunter, coming to his senses as it were, realized that he could not do this, and came back by the next train, as Quelch had bidden him, a whopping would meet the case. Bunter would learn that mutiny was not a paying proposition, in the Greyfriars Remove, if there was any instructive power in Quelch's cane and in his good right arm.

But if he did not—!

Quelch's brow grew grimmer and grimmer. He frowned at the fireplace really as if it had given him some dire offence. If that obtuse, that disobedient, that disrespectful boy, did not return as commanded, he should not return at all. Quelch was going to apprise Mr. Bunter that his hopeful son was no longer a member of the Greyfriars community. The Head naturally would share his view that a boy who had deliberately run away from school deserved no less. Either Bunter would be back in an hour or two, or he would never be back at all— Quelch resolved on that.

But it was far from pleasant. He was sure of Dr. Locke's support: but he just hated the idea of notifying the Head that a boy of his form had treated his authority as a trifle light as air. He writhed inwardly at the thought of the comments of the other 'beaks' in Common-Room. He could see Prout's plump eyebrows lifting: Hacker's thin lip curling: Wiggins and Twigg exchanging glances. Grimmer and grimmer grew his expressive countenance.

And even that was not all. Quelch was conscious that he had acted very hastily in smacking Vernon-Smith's head. Certainly, Vernon-Smith, called on to stop the fleeing Owl, should have stopped him. But—! Quelch wished that he hadn't delivered that hasty smack. It was hasty: it was undignified: it was— Quelch had to admit it—a thing that was not 'done'. Very sincerely indeed did Quelch wish that he had controlled his wrath, and left the Bounder's head unsmacked.

Altogether, Quelch was not in a bonny mood, when he heard the door-handle turn. His frown intensified. Sitting in the armchair, its back to the door, he could not see who was coming in, but he could hear. Someone was entering his study without the ceremony of a preliminary tap. Even a beak was not entitled to do that, but Prout sometimes did. If this was Prout, coming in for one of his interminable chats, Quelch was in no humour for it. Perhaps Prout had already scented something unusual going on in Quelch's form, and wanted to know all about it. Prout never could mind his own business. Quelch was prepared to answer Mr. Prout very curtly,—if ,this was Prout coming in.



But was it?

To his surprise, Quelch heard the door close. Had Prout just looked in, and, not seeing him, as he sat screened by the high back of the chair, concluded that he was not there, and gone away again? No,—for a footstep apprised him that someone had entered.

Quelch's eyes glinted. He understood now.

It was not a master. It was some young rascal who knew that he had gone out of gates, and did not know that he had returned,—paying a surreptitious visit to his study!

Such things had occurred before. Once or twice Quelch had found gum in his ink pot. Once he had found his cane split. He could guess that this intruder had looked in, fancied the study empty, and the coast clear. Quelch's lips set in a grim line. The study was not empty: the coast was not clear, and that young rascal, whoever he was, was about to learn as much.

The footsteps crossed from the door to his study table.

No doubt it would have been a case of gum in the inkpot again, if Quelch had not been there. But he was there— and he rose to his feet, and his eyes glittered over the back of the armchair.

Then he gave quite a start.

A boy of his form— Herbert Vernon-Smith— was at the table. His back was to Quelch, and he did not see the grim figure rise into view.

Across the chair-back, Quelch stared at him.

It was not a case of gum in the inkpot. It was not a case of splitting a cane, Vernon-Smith was stooping at the drawers in the writing-table. And his hand was reaching to the knob of a certain drawer— a very special drawer— the drawer in which reposed— or had reposed! ...- the typescript of *Quelch's History of Greyfriars!*

Quelch, for a moment, hardly breathed. It was Vernon-Smith,— the junior whose head he had smacked, on the Courtfield road. And his intention was plain. It was nothing so harmless as a gummy inkpot or a split cane: it was a design on that precious manuscript: the apple of Quelch's eye!

Another moment or two, and the Bounder, unconscious of the gimlet-eyes gleaming at him over the chair-back, would have pulled that drawer open. But he was interrupted by a deep, deep voice:

'Vernon-Smith!'

Smithy gave a startled gasp.

Indeed, he had never been so startled in his life. Quelch was out of gates— in pursuit of the bolted Owl. Smithy was sure that he hadn't come in, for he had scanned the study before entering, and seen nobody. Quelch's sudden voice came like a bolt from the blue.

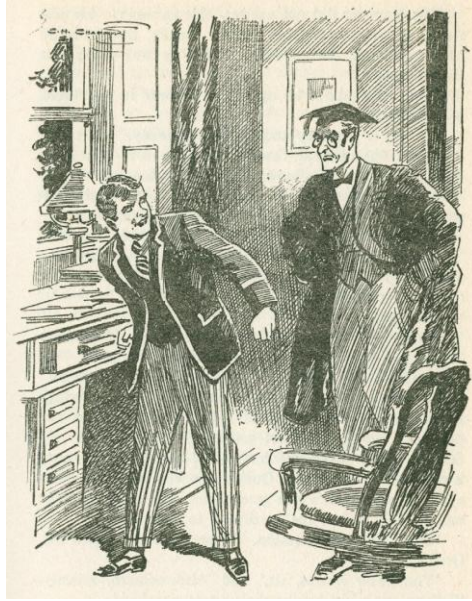
Smithy snatched his hand away from that knob as if it had suddenly become red-hot. That drawer remained unopened. He spun round, in utter amazement and dismay, and stared at Quelch.

'Oh!' he breathed.

Quelch came round the armchair.

'What are you doing in my study, Vernon-Smith?' he inquired, in a tone compared with which the grinding of a saw might have seemed musical.

The Bounder did not answer. He couldn't! He just stared at his form-master, dumb. Really, there was no need to answer the question. What he was doing was plain enough.



SMITHY GAVE A STARTLED GASP

'You were about to open that drawer in my table, Vernon-Smith.'

'I—I—.' Smithy stammered helplessly. He rather wished, at the moment, that he had listened to Tom Redwing's pleading, or allowed Harry Wharton and Co. to keep him in his study. He had had his own wilful head-strong way,— and here he was, caught in the very act.

'In that drawer—,' Quelch's deep voice deepened, 'In that drawer, Vernon-Smith, there is only one article— a typescript that is very valuable to me. You were aware of this, Vernon-Smith?' No reply.

'You were intending, Vernon-Smith, to play some foolish and disrespectful trick with that typescript.'

Vernon-Smith pulled himself together. He was caught: and Quelch knew what he had been going to do,— though probably did not guess the full extent of what Smithy had planned. Smithy was not particular about veracity, in dealing with a beak: but that was of no use to him now: it was futile to deny what Quelch saw with his own gimlet-eyes. The Bounder's face grew sullen. He had to face the music: and he had the hardihood to face it.

'Was that your intention, Vernon-Smith?' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'You know it was, sir,' said Vernon-Smith, sullenly. 'Fellows don't like having their heads smacked.'

Mr. Quelch gave a little start. The Bounder's words recalled his own reflections on that subject. His hand was reaching to the cane on his table. Smithy had never been nearer to 'six' of the very best. But that hand was slowly withdrawn.

The Remove master stood very still, his eyes on the sullen-faced junior. There was a faint tinge of colour in his cheeks. The silence was brief: but it seemed very long to Smithy, as he wondered what on earth Quelch was thinking. But Quelch spoke at last.

'Fortunately, Vernon-Smith. I was not absent, as you believed, and you have been unable to carry out your foolish and reckless intention. You may leave my study.'

The Bounder fairly blinked at him. He could hardly believe his ears. True, no harm had been done: he had not even opened that drawer. But that Quelch would let him off like this was utterly unexpected and astonishing. He did not realize that Quelch, conscious of a fault

himself, did not feel that he could punish an act which was the outcome of that fault. If Quelch was, as Billy Bunter so often averred, a beast, he was a just one!

As the Bounder stood staring at him, blankly, the Remove master pointed to the door.

'Do you hear me, Vernon-Smith?' he rapped. 'I have said that you may leave my study! Go!'

And the Bounder, almost wondering whether he was on his head or his heels, went.

## CHAPTER 15

### HOME!

'DRIVE quick!' gasped Billy Bunter.

'Yessir!' said the taxi-man, stolidly.

'Quick as you can!'

'Yessir.'

Billy Bunter leaned back in the taxi, breathing in gulps.

He was hatless: his hair untidy; his fat face bedewed with perspiration. His eyelids were red: partly from the genuine tears that had welled up in Quelch's study, though no doubt partly from the effects of the onion. Remove fellows would hardly have known him, so different did he look from the fat self-satisfied Owl to whom they were accustomed. Really, it was a new Bunter: an unexpected Bunter: a Bunter the Greyfriars fellows hardly knew.

For once, if for once only, Billy Bunter was not thinking about himself but about an entirely different person. He was tired, he had missed his tea: he had laid up for himself a tremendous account to be met later at Greyfriars: and he did not care. Almost without hesitation, he had plunged into a wild recklessness on which even the reckless Bunder would hardly have ventured,—he might be flogged, or he might be sacked, and he did not give a single thought to either outcome. He had left Quelch almost foaming: and he did not care if Quelch foamed his head off! He cared for nothing but to get home as fast as he possibly could: to see his 'mater', and assure himself that there was, as Mr. Bunter had said on the telephone, no cause for alarm.

The train journey had seemed endless.

Bunter had passed through Lantham Junction, without even thinking of getting out and changing into a train back, as Quelch had bidden him. That injunction had been the last he had heard from Quelch, as his train rushed out of Courtfield. He had forgotten it—dismissed it from his fat mind as a trifle that did not matter. It was a fast train, but it seemed slow to Bunter.

But he reached his destination at last. The station buffet did not tempt him. Remove fellows would hardly have believed that Billy Bunter, who had missed his tea, was not thinking of food. But he did not give it even a passing thought. He rushed out for a taxi.

Neither did he give any thought to the circumstance that his railway fare had not left enough out of Smithy's pound to pay the taxi-man. He had to get home!

The taxi buzzed away. The driver made good speed, but to the fat Owl's impatience, he seemed almost to crawl. It was some distance out to the country road on which the Bunter homestead stood—Bunter Court, as the exaggerative Owl called it at Greyfriars: Bunter Villa, as it turned out to be on a closer inspection. Little cared Bunter, at the moment, whether it was Bunter Court or Bunter Villa. He gasped with relief at the sight of the red-brick walls over the garden fence.

A plump gentleman was standing at the gate. No doubt Mr. Bunter was expecting his son from Greyfriars: though assuredly he could never have surmised the circumstances in which Bunter had left.

Bunter bounded out of the taxi almost before it had stopped. He rushed across to the gate where his plump pater stood. The taxi-man stared after him.

"Ere, sir, what about my fare?" he inquired.

If Bunter heard him, he did not heed. He panted up to the gate. He blinked at Mr. Bunter through his big spectacles, and met a disapproving glance in return.

'William—!' rapped Mr. Bunter.

'I—I got home as—as fast as I could—!' gasped Bunter.

'You are in a very untidy state. William.'

'Oh! Yes! Am I? I—I—'

'You do not appear even to have washed before making your journey, William!' said Mr. Bunter, severely.

'Oh! Yes! No—I—.'

'Calm yourself, William. There is no occasion for excitement, so far as I am aware.' said Mr. Bunter.

Bunter gulped.

'How—how—how is she?' he stuttered.

'If you are referring to your mother, William, she is progressing as well as can be expected in the circumstances.' answered Mr. Bunter. 'She has a good doctor, and is under the care of an excellent nurse—.'

'Yes, but—but—but I—I—I.'

'I told you on the telephone. William, that there was no occasion for alarm!'

'Oh! Yes! But—but I couldn't help—.' mumbled Bunter.

'I—I—I mean if—if—if—!' His fat voice failed.

'It is absurd, William, to upset yourself with improbable contingencies,' said Mr. Bunter. 'There was, in fact, no need to call you from school at all—none whatever. As your mother desired it, I acceded. That is all. I fail to see how your presence will benefit her in any way. You are, in fact, a troublesome boy about the house. William, as I have had to tell you on many occasion during the school holidays.'

Mr. Bunter was a practical gentleman. A man had to be practical, to keep his end up among the bulls, and bears, and stags, and other fearsome creatures in the City. Mr. Bunter saw no practical use in adding a troublesome schoolboy to a troubled household. He had conceded the point, as Mrs. Bunter wished it: but he was just a little irritable about it.

The taxi-man's voice broke in.

'Ere! Wot about my fare? I got to get back to the station.'

Mr. Bunter glanced at him, and then at his son. 'Did you take the cab from the station, William?'

'I—I—I wanted to be as quick as I could—.'

'I see no reason why you should not have taken the omnibus, William. It would have meant only a short walk.'

'Oh! Yes! But—.'

'I have warned you before about thoughtless extravagance, William. However, as you have taken the cab, you must pay the fare. Pay it at once.'

'I—I—I—.'

'Pay the driver his-fare immediately, William.' said Mr. Bunter, testily. 'What do you mean?'

'1-1-1 haven't the money—.'

'What?'

'I—I mean I haven't enough—.'

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Mr. Bunter. 'Really, William, this passes all patience. I regard this, William—.'

Bunter did not stay for more. He side-stepped his honoured parent, and cut up the garden path. Mr. Bunter stared after him: and then, with an expression of deep feeling on his plump face, paid the taxi-driver.

Bunter did not heed. He ran into the house, and ran up the stairs. On the landing above he almost ran into a uniformed figure, carrying a tray.

'Nurse!' Bunter caught at an arm, and crockery rocked on the tray, as the nurse stared at him. 'I say, how is she— my mother, you know. Can I go in and see her now? I've come from school to see her—.'

'Oh! Yes! Your mother is expecting you. You may come in with me now.'

Billy Bunter rolled in with the nurse. A plump lady was sitting up in bed, propped on pillows. The plump face was a little pale, paler than Bunter had ever seen it before: but it lighted up at the sight of the fattest member of the Greyfriars Remove. Had Mr. Bunter beheld it at that moment, no doubt it would have been borne in upon his mind that there are other considerations as well as practical ones! Mrs. Bunter, undoubtedly, was very pleased to see Billy. In her fond eyes, he was quite a different Billy from the one they knew in the Remove studies at Greyfriars.

'William!'

'Oh, Mums!' gasped Bunter. He couldn't help it: the tears oozed down his fat cheeks as he stood at the bedside. 'Oh, Mums!'

'Dear William!' said Mrs. Bunter, softly.

'I—I—I had to come, when the pater said you were ill, Mums. I—I—I just had to cut—!' mumbled Bunter.

'I am so glad to see you, dear William. But what do you mean by "cut"?' asked Mrs. Bunter.

'Oh! Nothing! I—I mean I—I didn't have to cut,' stammered Bunter. 'I—I mean, I—I cut off as fast as I could—Quelch didn't mind—.'

'You are sure he did not mind, William?'

'Oh! Yes! He—he—he saw me off at the station!' gasped Bunter. 'He—he—he stood on the platform and— and watched my train out—.'

'That was very kind of Mr. Quelch, William!'

'Eh? Oh! Yes! Kik—kik—-kindness itself,' gasped Bunter. 'Don't you worry, Mums. There— there ain't any trouble at school, and— 'and I don't care if there is. I—I'm going to look after you, Mums, and—and I don't care about anything else.'

'Dear William! Have you had your tea?'

'Oh! No! I forgot all about it.'

'Then you must be hungry,' said Mrs. Bunter.

'Eh? Oh! Yes!' Bunter realized that he was hungry.

Few fellows in the Greyfriars Remove would have credited that he hadn't realized it earlier!

'You must go and have your tea, William! Then nurse will let you come back,' said Mrs. Bunter.

'Yes, Mums.'

Billy Bunter obediently went and had his tea. But he was still in a troubled and anxious frame of mind, and his usual appetite had deserted him. He did not eat more than enough for three fellows.

## CHAPTER 16

### ASKING FOR IT

'MIND your step!' whispered Bob Cherry.

The Remove fellows hardly needed that warning. The expression on their form-master's speaking countenance, that morning, was warning enough.

Wednesday morning was bright and sunny. It was quite a cheery morning. Many fellows were looking forward to the half-holiday that afternoon, and Soccer. Harry Wharton and Co. were booked to play the Shell: and it was likely to be a strenuous game, for the Shell were Middle School, and a tough proposition for the Lower Fourth. The Co., however, were prepared to wipe up the ground with Hobson and Co. of the Shell, and anticipated that performance much more keenly than they anticipated form with Quelch. Soccer 'jaw' was going on, at the door of the Remove form-room, when Mr. Quelch came up the corridor, and Bob whispered his warning.

Mr. Quelch was not at his best that sunny morning.

A schoolmaster has many trials: and Quelch, of late, had had more than his share. A boy of his form had bolted, without leave, in defiance of authority: had recklessly disregarded Quelch's final command to catch the next train back: and was still absent. There had been a vacant bed in the Remove dormitory— there was now a vacant place in the form. Billy Bunter, apparently under the impression that he could follow the example of the ancient Israelites, when there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes, was staying away from school. Having bolted, he was, as it were, staying bolted.

It was a very disturbing state of affairs. It was very irritating and disconcerting to Mr. Quelch. He was not exactly in a bad temper. Quelch was a just man: and would have disdained to be in a bad temper when he took his form. But there was a set in his lips, a glint in his eye, which indicated that he was not to be trifled with. Quite clearly, woe betide any fellow who fancied that he could follow Bunter's example of insubordination.

The juniors knew the signs: and there were few who did not consider it judicious to 'mind their step' that morning, as Bob sagely advised. In fact, only one member of the form coolly disregarded the storm-signals, and lounged into the form-room with an ostentatious air of not caring two hoots whether Quelch looked sour or sweet: and even dropped a book, with a bang, quite unnecessarily, as he went to his place. In picking up that book, Herbert Vernon-Smith contrived to shove Skinner, and send him staggering against Snoop, who tottered against a desk. The thunder rolled at once.

'Vernon-Smith!'

'Yes, sir,' drawled the Bounder.

'Do not be so clumsy, Vernon-Smith! go to your place quietly.'

'Certainly, sir.'

The Bounder lounged to his place. Tom Redwing gave him an anxious look, and a nudge, as he sat down.

'Don't play the goat, Smithy,' he whispered. 'Are you trying to get Quelch's rag out?'

'Why not?'

'For goodness sake don't be an ass! You know he's on edge.'

'I know he smacked my head yesterday.'

Redwing gave it up. His chum, evidently, was in a malicious and mischievous mood. His resentment of that hasty smack was as keen as ever. It was rather like the reckless Bounder,

to show off his nerve, at a time when everyone else was circumspect. But that was not all. Quelch had smacked his head: and his head was not to be smacked with impunity. He was going to give Quelch all the trouble he could, and chance the consequences.

Bang!

Smithy's desk-lid dropped suddenly. It sounded almost like a pistol-shot in the form-room. Mr. Quelch gave quite a jump. Desk-lids were wont to bang in the French set: Monsieur Charpentier generally affected to turn a deaf ear: being a mild and patient little gentleman. Quelch was neither mild nor patient: and such bangs were rare in his form-room. Fellows stared at Vernon-Smith as that bang resounded.

'Silly ass!' murmured Johnny Bull.

'Asking for it!' Staid Bob Cherry.

'The askfulness is terrific!'

'Vernon-Smith!' A deep voice came from the high desk. 'You will take a hundred lines.'

'Quite an accident, sir,' drawled Smithy.

'That will do!'

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders. That shrug very nearly earned him a further penalty. However, Quelch let it pass, and the lesson commenced.

The Remove were dealing that morning with the section of the Aeneid where the wrathful Juno seeks the aid of Aeolus, lord of the winds. Harry Wharton was called on to construe. Truth to tell, Wharton's thoughts were running more on Soccer with the Shell, than on the wrath of Juno, and its dire consequences to Aeneas and Co. But he contrived to concentrate on Virgil, and his 'con' passed muster, from *talia flammato* to *Aeoliam venit*. Then Bob Cherry began at *hic vasto rex*, and proceeded with a stumble or two.

Nobody was really anxious to catch Quelch's eye: unless perhaps the Bounder. But one after another the juniors were called on: and Nugent, Johnny Bull, Peter Todd, Squiff, Tom Brown, Ogilvy Russell, acquitted themselves with more or less credit. They were at *Aeolus haec contra*, when Quelch rapped out the Bounder's name.

'Vernon-Smith! You will go on.'

'I've lost the place, sir.'

'You should not have lost the place. Vernon-Smith! You will take fifty lines for losing the place. Go on, Redwing.'

Tom Redwing took up the tale. Redwing's construe was always good, and perhaps a relief to Quelch, after listening to so many that stumbled. Tom went on to *tempestatemque potentem*, and Quelch was pleased to give him an approving nod. Then he rapped at the Bounder again. 'Go on, Vernon-Smith.' If Smithy had hoped to escape 'con' he was disappointed. Quelch came back to him.

There was a peculiar gleam in Smithy's eye as he prepared to take up the tale. Several fellows near him guessed that some further display of 'cheek' was coming.

'*Haec uni dicta, cavum con versa cuspidem montem impulit latus--*.' The Bounder read out slowly. 'Construe!' snapped Mr. Quelch.

Smithy, undoubtedly, could have construed that passage with ease. He was no dunce: he was, when he chose to be, as good at Latin as almost any fellow in the form. On this occasion he did not choose to be.

Quite well aware that the translation should have been, 'Having spoken, with turned spear he struck the hollow mountain's side', Smithy proceeded to hand out quite a different one.

'Having jawed—!' he began. He was interrupted.

'Vernon-Smith!' Quelch gasped.



Smith proceeded imperturbably.

'Having jawed, he smacked—.'

'Oh, my hat!' breathed Bob Cherry.

All the Remove knew of that luckless smack on the Bounder's head. They did not expect an allusion to it in class! Neither, assuredly, did Mr. Quelch. But the Bounder, evidently, was alluding to it. He could not possibly have supposed that *dicta* was to be translated 'jawed', or *impulit* 'smacked'. The words might perhaps bear such a meaning: but certainly not the meaning intended by Publius Vergilius Maro. The Bounder was, in fact, 'cheeking' Quelch to his face, with an allusion to that unfortunate incident on the Courtfield road.

He did not get further with it.

'Silence!' Quelch almost bawled.

The Bounder looked at him inquiringly. His nerve made all the Remove fellows wonder. Smithy liked making fellows wonder.

'Isn't that right, sir?' asked Smithy, meekly.

Quelch did not answer that question. He picked up the cane from his desk. The previous day, in his study, he had let Smithy off: why, the Bounder did not know. He did not look like letting him off now.

'Stand out before the form, Vernon-Smith!' he rapped.

The cane swished in the air.

Perhaps, for a moment, the Bounder regretted that he had gone so far. If so, he would not let it be seen. He lounged out before the form, with an air of cool indifference. 'Bend over!' Swipe! swipe!

Vernon-Smith had to set his teeth, to keep back a sound: but not a sound escaped him. All the Remove were going to see that he could 'take it'.

Mr. Quelch laid down the cane. He was intensely angry: but he resisted the temptation to make it 'six'.

'Now return to your place, Vernon-Smith!' he said. 'Another word of impertinence from you, and I shall deal with you much more severely.'

Smithy went back to his place. He sat there very uncomfortably. The lesson went on: but there was no more impertinence from Smithy. Two swipes were enough, even for the hardy Bounder. He sat with a black brow till the Remove were dismissed.

## CHAPTER 17

### PLAY UP!

'KICK-OFF at three,' said Harry Wharton.

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not reply. He was lounging outside the House, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on two figures that were going out at the gates. Tom Redwing was with him: an expression of mingled anxiety and impatience on his face. Harry Wharton could see that an argument had been going on,— or rather, expostulation from Redwing, to which the Bounder listened with sullen indifference. However, that did not concern him: Soccer was his business that afternoon.

'Time to get changed, Smithy!' added the captain of the Remove, as Vernon-Smith did not speak.

'You can leave me out.'

'Leave you out!' repeated Harry, staring.

'What the dickens do you mean, Smithy? You're down to play outside-right,— you can't walk out on the team at the last minute like this.'

'I can't play this afternoon.'

'You don't mean to say that a couple of swipes from Quelch have put you off your form!' exclaimed Wharton.

The Bounder coloured angrily. If he had been skinned instead of swiped, he would not have admitted that it put him off his form.

'Don't talk rot!' he snapped.

'Well, if it isn't that, what is it? The men are going in to change now,' exclaimed Harry. 'You've left it till the last minute to tell me this—.'

'I didn't know earlier that Quelch was going out.'

'Quelch?' repeated Harry. He glanced round, in the direction of the Bounder's scowling gaze, and noticed that Mr. Quelch and Mr. Capper were going out of the gates together. Quelch often went for a long 'grind' on a half-holiday, walking some other beak off his legs.

Apparently his going out with Capper had made a difference to Smithy's plans for the afternoon. But the captain of the Remove did not immediately catch on. 'What has Quelch to do with it?' he asked.

'Lots!' said the Bounder, sourly.

Wharton looked at him: then at Redwing's troubled face, then at the Bounder again. He began to understand, and he breathed hard.

'Does that mean that you're thinking of some potty trick in Quelch's study while he's gone out?' he asked.

'Forgotten that he smacked my head yesterday?' sneered Smithy.

'Oh, bother your silly head!' exclaimed the captain of the Remove. 'Not much in it to damage, I should think, from the way you're carrying on. Can't you forget about it?'

'Not till I've given Quelch a Roland for an Oliver,' answered the Bounder, acidly. 'I'm going to make sure this time— yesterday he came in and caught me in his study: this time I'm going to make sure he's at a safe distance, and then—.'

'For goodness sake, Smithy, have a little sense,' said Tom Redwing. 'If you meddle with that stuff of Quelch's, it will mean the biggest row ever— and he's fierce enough already, over that fat ass Bunter bolting. Give it a miss, and play football.'

'You can talk till you're black in the face, but it won't make any difference,' answered Vernon-Smith. 'Fellows' heads aren't smacked, at Greyfriars, and Quelch is getting something back for it— something that will make him squirm.'

'Quelch lost his temper, over that fathead Bunter getting away—.'

'He shouldn't have!'

'You never lose yours?' asked Harry Wharton, sarcastically.

Smithy made no reply to that. It was indeed a difficult question for him to answer: his own temper being the most uncertain in the Remove.

'Look here, Smithy, be reasonable,' went on Harry in a more conciliatory tone. 'From what I've heard, Quelch called to you to stop Bunter, and you let him pass. Now the fat ass has bolted, and goodness knows how it will end— he may be expelled for it, and you know that Quelch would hate to see a man in his form sacked. He might have given you six—.'

'I can take six,' said the Bounder, sullenly. 'I'm not going to have my head smacked!' Only too clearly, that smack rankled deeply in the Bounder's heart and mind.

'I daresay he was sorry for it afterwards—.'

'He will be sorry when he finds his precious tosh swimming in ink, at any rate.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a bawl from a distance. 'You men forgotten it's Soccer this afternoon?'

Bob Cherry came up, with Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. They looked from face to face — Wharton's clouded, Redwing's deeply troubled, Smithy's sullen and vindictive.

'Anything up?' asked Bob.

'Is the upfulness terrific?' inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Only Smithy wants to cut Soccer, so that he can play the giddy goat in Quelch's study while the old bean is out,' said Harry, tartly.

Three faces became grave at once.

'You can't cut Soccer, Smithy,' said Bob.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. That shrug implied that he could do exactly as he pleased: and that he was going so to do.

'Look here, Smithy,' said Johnny Bull. 'You know you're wanted. There would have been a song and a dance if you'd been left out. Now you tell us you're walking out on us at the last minute. You can't.'

Another shrug was the Bounder's only reply to that.

'My esteemed Smithy,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The playfulness of the game comes first.'

'I'm standing out!' snapped the Bounder.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. 'You know you're wanted,' he said. 'Hobson's crowd are a hefty team for us to tackle, and you're our best winger—.'

'Thanks,' sneered the Bounder.

'If you weren't, you could stand out, and go and eat coke,' snapped Wharton, angrily. 'But if you stand out now—.'

'I've said so.'

'There's one thing you seem to have forgotten, Smithy,' said Frank Nugent, quietly. 'Quelch caught you in his study yesterday, and knew that you were after that tosh of his. If he finds that anything's happened to it, think he won't know at once that you did it? You're not taking a chance— it's a certainty and you'd go up to the Head.'

The Bounder's look changed a little. Perhaps, in his angry resentment, and his vindictive determination to retaliate, that very obvious consideration had not occurred to him. But he was not the fellow to give in easily. He remained sullenly silent, and the other fellows exchanged glances. 'Look here, Smithy, are you coming to change?' growled Johnny Bull, at last.

'No!' snapped Smithy.

'Let's walk him into the changing-room, and change him!' suggested Bob. 'Then we'll lug him on the field by his silly ears.'

'Do— if you want a scrap on the field, instead of Soccer!' snarled Smithy.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

'Have your way,' he said. 'I'll look for another man. You're a rotter, Vernon-Smith, letting us down like this. Come on, you men— we're wasting time on that outsider.'

With that, the captain of the Remove turned on his heel, and walked away, followed by his friends. The Bounder's face flushed crimson. He glanced at Tom Redwing, who was turning away in silence. Redwing's face was troubled: but there was not only trouble in it: there was contempt also, and Smithy's flush deepened.

'Look here, Reddy—!' he muttered.

'Oh, don't say any more,' interrupted Redwing. 'If you won't do the decent thing, the less you say the better.'

'I'm going to get back on Quelch—.'

'That's enough about that.'

Redwing walked away. It was but seldom that Tom's patience failed him, with his wilful and wayward chum: but it had failed him now. He had heard enough from Smithy: and wanted to hear no more.

The Bounder stood staring after him. There was an inward struggle: the Bounder hated giving in. But he stirred at last, and hurried after the little crowd heading for the changing-room. He joined them at the door, only to be greeted by hostile glances.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What do you want?' rapped Bob Cherry.

The Bounder's answer was unexpected.

'Isn't it time to change?' he asked, mildly. 'We don't want to keep Hobby and his crowd waiting.'

Bob stared at him, and then laughed.

'Come right in!' he chuckled, and he grasped the Bounder, and waltzed him into the changing-room.

Ten minutes later Smithy was lining up with the Remove footballers.

CHAPTER 18

MISSING!

'GOSLING!'

'Sir!'

'Has Bunter, of my form, come in?'

'No, sir.'

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

Gosling eyed him curiously. The ancient porter of Greyfriars, like everyone else at the school, had heard of Billy Bunter's bolt. It was, in fact, quite a topic. Great men of the Sixth like Wingate and Gwynne and Loder had talked of it in the Prefects' Room. Fifth-form men had talked of it in the games-study. Beaks in Common-Room had discussed it, *ad libitum*: and— to Quelch's mind at least— *ad nauseam*. Gosling had discussed it with Mr. Mimble, the gardener, and Mrs. Mimble at the school shop, and expressed a strong opinion of what he described as such goings-hon. It was all extremely unpleasant to Mr. Quelch.

The Remove master had come in from his 'grind'.

Mr. Capper, whom he had as usual walked off his legs, headed at once for the House and an armchair: Quelch stopped to speak to the school porter at his lodge. He had a faint hope that the truant might have returned. That would have been a great relief to Quelch: the matter need not, after all, have gone up to the Head: Quelch could have dealt with it: and he was prepared to deal with it drastically.

But Gosling's reply dashed his hope. Bunter of his form had not come in.

'He ain't come back, sir,' went on Gosling. Possibly Gosling fancied that his opinion on the subject might interest Bunter's form-master. 'Such goings-hon, sir, I never 'eard. Wot I says is this 'ere—.'

Mr. Quelch was not, however, interested in Gosling's views. He walked on, as if Gosling had not spoken at all.

His lips were set in a tight line, as he went into the House. This was the finish! Bunter had bolted. After the lapse of twenty-four hours, he had not come back. That decided it: he was not coming back at all— Greyfriars, and Quelch's form, were done with him. Mr. Quelch did not, like Mr. Capper, seek an armchair after his walk. As soon as he entered his study, he went to the telephone. This troublesome matter was going to be settled: and it was going to be settled now.

Having put through a trunk call to Bunter Villa, Mr. Quelch waited with a grim countenance, till a voice came through. It was the voice of Mr. William Samuel Bunter that came.

'Mr. Bunter?' asked Quelch.

'Yes! Who is speaking?'

'Mr. Quelch, from Greyfriars. I understand, Mr. Bunter, that your son is now at home—.'

'He is here. Mr. Quelch. He arrived yesterday afternoon. He arrived home quite safely, if that is what you have telephoned to inquire.'

Quelch almost snorted.

'That is not what I have telephoned to inquire. Mr. Bunter. I am surprised, sir— distinctly surprised— that you refer to the matter so casually. Am I to understand, sir, that you approve of your son's action?'

'Why not, Mr. Quelch?'

'Why not?' repeated Mr. Quelch. 'Did you say why not, Mr. Bunter?'

'Certainly, Mr. Quelch. Why not?' Mr. Bunter seemed puzzled.

'You approve, sir, of your son leaving his school, without permission—.'

'Eh?'

'Practically, running away from school, sir—.' 'What?'

'If that is your view, sir, I shall not discuss it with you,' barked Mr. Quelch. 'I shall only say that, after this defiance of authority, your son will not be allowed to return here. That is all, sir.'

'I fail to understand you, Mr. Quelch.'

'Indeed, sir! I trust that I make my meaning clear. I do not know how to put it more clearly, sir. I shall place the matter before Dr. Locke. You will hear from him in due course—.'

'I repeat, Mr. Quelch, that I fail to understand you.' Mr. Bunter was barking now: his bark an echo of Quelch's. 'Am I to understand, Mr. Quelch, that you refused leave from school to my son—?'

'You are to understand that precisely, Mr. Bunter: and you are to understand that the boy fled— fled, sir!— in direct defiance of my authority: and that there is no place at Greyfriars for such a boy.'

'Really, Mr. Quelch—.'

'That is all, sir.'

'That is not all, Mr. Quelch—.'

'You are mistaken, sir— it is!' barked Mr. Quelch: and he made it quite clear by slamming the receiver back on the hooks. Communication between Greyfriars School and Bunter Villa was cut off quite suddenly.

Mr. Quelch stood breathing hard.

He had seldom been so angry. Billy Bunter's actions were exasperating enough. It was exasperating enough to have no alternative but to place the matter before the headmaster. But that brief chat with Mr. Bunter was more exasperating still. Quelch had expected him to be at least apologetic— perhaps to make some plea for the erring Owl. Instead of which, it seemed that he actually approved of the boy's conduct in bolting from school in defiance of his form-master. Quelch felt that that put the lid on— though of course that was not how he would have expressed it.

Mr. Quelch paced his study, for some time, in quite an agitated frame of mind. But he calmed at last. The matter was settled now, at any rate, and he could dismiss it from mind. And, being happily at leisure, he could turn to the perennial comfort of his leisure hours— his *History of Greyfriars*. His face cleared, and he stepped to his writing-table, and stooped to pull open the drawer in which that precious typescript was kept.

*Buzzzzzzzz!*

It was the telephone-bell.

Mr. Quelch suppressed an irritable ejaculation. Leaving the drawer unopened, he stepped back to the telephone. He jerked off the receiver with a jerk that made the instrument rock.

'Well?' he barked.

'Is that Mr. Quelch—?' It was a familiar voice.

'Upon my word! Is that Mr. Bunter?' breathed Quelch. 'We appear to have been cut off, Mr. Quelch. What you have said has perplexed me—.'

'I see no reason for perplexity, sir.'

'My son, William, arrived home yesterday afternoon—.'

'I am aware of it, sir.'

'Naturally I took it for granted that he had been given leave from school to come home—.'

'No doubt he failed to apprise you otherwise, sir. But there is such a thing as common intelligence, sir.'

'What?'

'Common intelligence, sir! Common intelligence should have made you aware that a boy would not be allowed to take a holiday in term, sir, without adequate reason—.'

'Did you say without adequate reason. Mr. Quelch?'

'I did, sir.'

'Then I can only say that our views differ, sir, as to what may constitute an adequate reason.' barked Mr. Bunter. 'Certainly I did not myself consider the boy's coming home would serve any useful purpose: but in the circumstances, sir. I conceded the point, and if you refused leave—.'

'I did refuse it, sir.'

'Then I am bound to say. Mr. Quelch—.'

'It is useless to prolong this discussion. Mr. Bunter.'

'I am bound to say, sir—.'

'Really, Mr. Bunter—.'

'Will you be kind enough to listen to me, sir? I am bound to say that I am surprised— very much surprised— that you should refuse leave to a boy in a case of illness — the illness of a parent—.'

'What?'

'Dr. Locke, sir, certainly would not have refused such leave, I am assured of that,' barked Mr. Bunter. 'And if you did refuse it, sir—.'

'Did—did—did you say a case of—of—of illness, Mr. Bunter?' articulated Quelch. '—Of—of—of a parent?'

'I did, sir! I presume that my son informed you that his mother was ill, as I instructed him—.'

'You instructed him?'

'Yes, sir, when I telephoned—.'

'You—you—you telephoned?'

'Yesterday afternoon, sir. I presume that my son informed you of the fact.' yapped Mr. Bunter.

'You were not at home, and he took the call—.'

'He—he—he took the call?'

'Yes, sir, and as you were out, I instructed him to tell you how the matter stood, and ask for leave—.'

'Bless my soul!'

Mr. Quelch stood blinking at the telephone. He had known nothing of a telephone-call from the Bunter home. He had to remember that he had not given the fat junior a chance to explain. Not for a moment had he thought, or dreamed, of believing a word from Bunter— how indeed could he have done so, after the fat Owl's endless artifices and prevarications? He had had no patience to listen to further fibbing. But now—!

There had been tears in Bunter's eyes. Quelch had not doubted that, on the second occasion as on the first, they had been produced with the aid of an onion! Now he realized that they had had another cause.

'Bless my soul!' repeated Mr. Quelch. 'I—I—I—.' He hardly knew what to say to Mr. Bunter. 'It appears, sir, that there is—was—some misunderstanding—I certainly did not know—. Let us have this clear. Mr. Bunter. You tell me that you telephoned yesterday, that Bunter took the call, that you instructed him to ask for leave—.'

'Precisely, sir!'

'I was not aware—.'

'Did not William explain?' Mr. Bunter's voice sounded a little less like a bark. 'Probably the boy was upset— confused— but really, sir—.'

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. He was angry with himself, angry with Mr. Bunter, and especially angry with Billy Bunter. The whole affair was very upsetting and unfortunate: and the misunderstanding was wholly due to the fat Owl's incorrigible untruthfulness.

Nevertheless, now that he knew the facts, there was only one thing to be done.

'I was quite unaware of what you have told me, Mr. Bunter. Now that I am acquainted with the facts, I have no hesitation in granting Bunter leave from school. I—I shall overlook his action in taking his departure without leave.' That came out with some difficulty: but it came out. 'Good-afternoon, sir.'

'I am bound to add, Mr. Quelch—.'

What Mr. Bunter was bound to add, never transpired: for Mr. Quelch jammed the receiver back on the hooks. He seemed to have heard enough from Bunter Villa.

'Upon my word!' breathed Mr. Quelch.

He stood looking, or rather glaring, at the unoffending telephone, for some minutes. Seldom had Mr. Quelch felt so disturbed, uncomfortable, and annoyed with things generally.

However, a calmer mood supervened. He was done, now, with the tribe of Bunter: and he went back to his writing-table. His troubled mind cheered at the prospect of a happy hour re-reading, revising, perhaps adding another chapter. There was still balm in Gilead, in the shape of his *History of Greyfriars*. He pulled open the drawer.

Then, as he was about to dip in his hand, to lift out the bundle of typescript, he stopped. He stared.

That drawer was empty.

It had contained—and should now have contained— a bundle of typescript, the fruit of many hours of pleasant labour: written and re-written by hand, and then typed out with sedulous care. And that drawer contained — nothing! It was empty,— the *History of Greyfriars* was gone!

Quelch gazed into the empty drawer.

His face grew more and more expressive as he gazed. His typescript was gone. His *History of Greyfriars* had been abstracted by some unknown hand.

Unknown? Quelch remembered Vernon-Smith's visit to the study the previous day, and what he had intended there. Someone had played tricks with that precious typescript. Who but the malicious fellow who had been interrupted in that very action only the day before?

Blacker and blacker grew Quelch's brow, till, like the sable arms of the rugged Pyrrhus, it did the night resemble!

For a long, long minute, Quelch gazed into the drawer where the typescript should have been, but was not: and then he left his study. Thoughtfully, he tucked a cane under his arm before he left it.



## NARROW ESCAPE FOR SMITHY

'GOAL!'

'Good old Smithy!'

'Goal! '

Herbert Vernon-Smith grinned breathlessly. Smithy was enjoying life. The keen air, the healthy game, the excitement of an uphill tussle against a strong opposing team, had banished less wholesome matters from his mind. He had forgotten Quelch: forgotten that hasty smack on his head: forgotten his disgruntled brooding over vengeance: and he looked quite unlike the sulky, sullen fellow with whom Harry Wharton and Co. had argued before the football match. Tom Redwing, looking on with a crowd of other fellows, had a cheery smile on his face. This was how he liked to see his chum, with a healthy flush in his face, a sparkle in his eyes, playing a hard game, and enjoying every minute of it.

The game had been hard and fast. The Shell were, as Harry Wharton had said, a hefty team for the Lower Fourth to tackle: and the Remove men had to go all out, and a little more, if they could. Smithy, on the right wing, was invaluable: even Harry Wharton at centre-forward, or Johnny Bull in goal, was not of more use to the side. It had gone on, ding-dong, with good play on both sides, without a score, till close on the finish. Fellows were glancing up at the clock-tower. It looked like a draw. 0—0 : till, at length, the Bounder found the net. With a long shot from the wing, a shot that nine fellows in ten would have said could never come off, Smithy landed the leather: it grazed a goal-post, just tapped finger-tips that clutched a second too late, and landed safe and sound— and every Remove man on the ground yelled 'Goal' at the top of his voice.

The whistle went. Bob Cherry rushed up to the Bounder, and delivered a mighty smack on his shoulder that made him totter.

'Good old Smithy!' he chuckled.

'Good man! Good man!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The captain of the Remove quite forgot that, not very long ago, he had called Smithy a 'rotter'. Smithy was now a man whom he delighted to honour!

The Bounder grinned. All the more because it was on the stroke of time, he revelled in that goal. Smithy had a taste for the dramatic! Right up to the finish it had looked like a draw: and he had pulled the game out of the fire. The Shell were beaten—one—nil.

He dodged another hearty smack from Bob Cherry.

Bob's smacks were rather too hearty for comfort.

'Better than ragging Quelch, what?' chuckled Bob.

'Eh! Quelch?' Smithy seemed to have forgotten that such a person existed. 'Oh! Yes!'

'Glad you played after all, old man?' asked Harry Wharton, with a smile.

'What-ho!' said Smithy.

Tom Redwing joined him, as the footballers went to the changing-room. He pressed Smithy's arm.

'That was topping, Smithy,' he said. 'You were the best man on the field, old chap.'

'Rot!' said Smithy: though, as a matter of fact, he shared that opinion. 'Just luck, Reddy.'

'Luck, and good Soccer,' said Tom, smiling. Then his face became grave. 'Thank goodness you decided to play, Smithy, and chucked up that mad idea of yours. Quelch has come in.'

'Has he?' said the Bounder, carelessly.

'I saw him, just before the finish. I don't like to think of what would be happening, if you'd gone to his study while he was out, and—and—.'

The Bounder's face became grave also.

Soccer, and success, had washed out the rankling bitterness that had been corroding his mind and his heart. He had a feeling of shame as he remembered the sulky sullenness with which he had brooded over his grievance.

'By gum, I'm glad I chucked it, Reddy,' he muttered.

Then he laughed. 'Nothing like a good game, to wash the cobwebs away, Reddy. Fresh air cures a lot of things. I'm jolly glad I never went near Quelch's study,— and I don't mind telling you, old man, that I was a silly, sulky ass, to think of anything of the kind.'

'You were,' agreed Tom, smiling.

The Bounder went cheerfully into the changing-room.

He was glad that he had not played that wretched trick in Quelch's study: and he was glad, too, that the inevitable consequences were not to follow. What Frank Nugent had said was true: Quelch must have suspected him, first of all, if it had happened: and already an irate 'beak' would have been on his track. Soccer had certainly been his best guess.

There was a buzz of cheery voices in the changing-room. Only one goal had been taken in the match, and that was Smithy's: but all the team were elated. They had beaten the Shell: and made it clear to Hobson and Co., and to all whom it might or might not concern, that the Lower Fourth could keep its end up against Middle School. 'Good old Smithy' was heard many times: and it was music to the Bounder's ears: he liked the limelight. What an ass he had been, he reflected, to think for one moment of cutting Soccer, to play a silly fag trick on a beak!

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a sudden ejaculation from Bob Cherry.

The buzz of voices died away.

Smithy, in shirt and trousers, was putting on his shoes. He looked round, and stared at an angular figure in the doorway.

All eyes turned on that figure.

Why Mr. Quelch had come to the changing-room nobody could guess, or why he had a cane under his arm, — or why his brow was set in a thunderous frown. But obviously it boded trouble to somebody.

'Wharton!' Quelch rapped.

'Here, sir,' said Harry. He had one leg in his trousers, as he hurriedly inserted the other, and tucked in his shirt. Fellows changing after a Soccer match did not expect visits from beaks.

'Is Vernon-Smith here?'

'He is here, sir.'

Smithy rose to his feet, one shoe on, the other in his hand. Something of his former sullenness came back to his face, as he stood up and faced Quelch. What did the man want?

'Vernon-Smith!' Quelch's voice was deep.

'Yes, sir!' muttered the Bounder.

'Where is the typescript you have removed from my study?'

The Bounder stared blankly.

Mr. Quelch spoke quietly: with a deadly quietness. He had looked for Vernon-Smith in the Rag, and then in his study: he had found him in the changing-room. Now he had found him, his chief concern was for the missing manuscript. To recover that precious typescript, undamaged, was the first consideration. The next, was to deal with the reckless young rascal who had abstracted it. He waited grimly for Vernon-Smith's answer. But the Bounder, taken utterly by surprise, did not speak, but only stared.

'Do you hear me, Vernon-Smith?'

Smithy found his voice. 'Yes, sir! But I don't understand.'

'I think you understand very well indeed, Vernon-Smith,' said Mr. Quelch, while the whole crowd in the changing-room stared on in silence. 'When I came in a short while ago, I found that a batch of typescript had been taken from a drawer in my writing-table. I have no doubt whatever that it was your act, Vernon-Smith.'

'Oh, suffering cats!' breathed Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton gave the Bounder a startled look. 'Smithy—!' he muttered.

'A miserable, disrespectful trick has been played in my study during my absence,' went on Mr. Quelch. 'And it was you, Vernon-Smith—.'

'It was not, sir!'

Quelch passed that by unheeded.

'If the missing manuscript be returned, immediately, and without damage, Vernon-Smith—.'

'I know nothing about it, sir.' The Bounder's voice was steady. From what Quelch said, it appeared that someone else had had the same idea as his own, of 'ragging' that precious typescript. But Smithy, certainly, knew nothing about it—no more than Quelch knew.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips in a tight line.

'Do you deny, Vernon-Smith, that you went to my study, and removed the manuscript from the drawer?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'Do you deny,' went on Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, 'that only yesterday you came to my study with that very intention, and that I detected you in the very act?'

The Bounder breathed hard.

'No, sir!' he answered, in a low voice. 'That is true!

But I have done nothing since— I have not been in your study to-day.'

'Do you expect me to believe that statement, Vernon-Smith?'

'It's true, Sir.'

'Vernon-Smith has been playing football, sir,' put in Harry Wharton. 'The game started at three, and it's only just over—.'

'You need not speak, Wharton.'

'It couldn't have been Smithy, sir,' exclaimed Tom Redwing, utterly dismayed by this unexpected turn of affairs. 'It couldn't—.'

'That will do, Redwing.'

'But, sir—!' said Bob Cherry.

'Silence!'

There was silence. Quelch's gimlet-eyes were fixed on the Bounder's face, now dark and sullen: and never had they seemed so much like gimlets! He had no doubt that Herbert Vernon-Smith could have told him, at that moment, precisely where the missing manuscript was.

Quelch was not the only one who thought so. A good many fellows in the changing-room were looking curiously at Smithy. Half the Remove knew what his intention had been: and now, it seemed, some person had carried out that intention. If that person was not Smithy, who was it?

The silence did not last long: but it was tense, and it seemed long to the crowd of juniors.

Quelch broke it.

'Vernon-Smith!'

'Yes, sir,' muttered Smithy.

'Where is the article you removed from my study?'

'I don't know anything about it, sir. I have not touched anything in your study— I have not been there at all. I have been playing football this afternoon, as any of these fellows can tell you.'

The cane slipped down from under Quelch's arm into Quelch's hand. Every fellow present expected the next item in the programme to be 'Bend over!' And never, perhaps, had the scapegrace of Greyfriars been nearer to the licking of his life. But Quelch paused. Justice was Quelch's long suit. In that line, Aristides of old had simply nothing on Quelch. He was deeply incensed: he had never been more so. And he was as good as certain that the sullen-faced junior facing him was the culprit. Yet that certainty in his own mind was not proof. The matter had to be made clear, beyond the possibility of doubt, before the penalty was exacted. Slowly, very slowly, but surely, the cane was replaced under Quelch's arm. He did not utter the fateful words 'Bend over!'

'If you persist in denying this, Vernon-Smith—!'

'I've told you the truth, sir.'

Quelch's lip curled. He did not always get the truth from the scapegrace of his form, as every fellow in the Remove knew.

'That will do, Vernon-Smith! Since you deny it, investigation will be made, and the facts established beyond doubt. That is all— for the present!' With those ominous last words, Quelch turned, and rustled out of the changing-room: leaving that apartment in a buzz of excited voices the moment the door had closed on him.

## TROUBLE IN FORM

A PIN might have been heard to fall, in the Remove form-room. Never had the Greyfriars Remove been so particularly and meticulously on their best behaviour, than they were on Thursday morning. Even Bob Cherry did not shuffle his feet. Skinner did not even dream of projecting an ink-ball at some unwary fellow. Even Vernon-Smith, reckless as he usually was, had adopted his very best manners and customs that sunny autumn morning. If Billy Bunter had been present, he wouldn't have dared to extract a chunk of sticky toffee from a sticky pocket. If Lord Mauleverer had been there, he would not have ventured upon the slightest yawn. Well-behaved fellows were better-behaved than ever: ill-behaved fellows realized that their best guess was, like Agag, to walk delicately. It was only too clear to all, that morning, that Quelch was not to be trifled with.

Quelch was, of course, quite calm. He was never anything else: or very seldom. But there was a set expression on his face, a tightening of his lips, a glint in the gimlet-eyes, that gave clear warning. The dullest fellow could see that Quelch rather resembled one of those Arctic volcanoes, smouldering under an icy exterior.

Quelch had had much to try him, of late. The affair of Bunter had been disturbing, disconcerting, extremely irritating, in fact exasperating. Bunter, absent, had been dismissed from mind: but it was a case of 'thus bad begins, but worse remains behind'. Bunter, in fact, mattered little, in comparison with what had followed. A lioness robbed of her cubs had nothing on an author deprived of his manuscript.

Where was that precious typescript? It had been taken from his study, by some surreptitious hand. It was not only a disrespectful act, a rebellious act, an outrageous act, such as introducing gum into an inkpot, or a drawing-pin into an armchair. That *History of Greyfriars*, on which so much of Quelch's leisure, during so many years, had been spent, might be lost—it might be damaged— anything might happen to it. And so far, Quelch's inquiries had led him nowhere. His suspicions centred on Vernon-Smith: but there was no evidence against him, or against anybody else.

Some disgruntled fellow in the form had done this— but which? Someone had gone to his study and taken the typescript away. But who? The most rigid inquiry had not disclosed that any Remove fellow had been seen anywhere near his study during his absence on Wednesday afternoon. Eleven fellows had been playing football: most of the others looking on. But that counted for little. Any fellow might have slipped away from the crowd,— or even one of the footballers might have done it just before the game. Quelch had the whole form to choose from, with the exception of two absent members. The delinquent, he could not doubt, was now in the form before him,— keeping his secret.

'Vernon-Smith!' Quelch barked out the name suddenly: so suddenly that it startled the silent form-room like a pistol-shot.

Smithy caught his breath for a moment. Was Quelch going to forget that he had taken Aristides for his model, and let suspicion take the place of proof?

But he answered quietly and meekly.

'Yes, sir!'

'I have every reason to believe, Vernon-Smith, that it was you who removed a packet of typescript from my study yesterday. Do you still deny it?'

'Yes, sir!'

Quelch's lips closed like a vice.

'Very well,' he said. He seemed to bite off the words. 'Very well! We shall now commence.' That was all. Evidently, Quelch was not going to act on suspicion, even if that suspicion amounted to practical certainty. He was going to be just, but it was clear that justice was going to be very, very strict in the Remove form-room. The Remove were rather glad that they were 'up' to Quelch for only one lesson that morning. French with Mossoo, even maths with Lascelles, would be a welcome change. But fellows who had been careless with prep the previous evening felt considerable trepidation, and hoped fervently that they would not be called upon for 'con'.

Smithy was called up first, perhaps because Quelch had him specially in mind. But Smithy was very wary. Certainly he was not thinking of anything like his 'con' of the day before. Beginning at *O terque quaterque beati*, Smithy rendered the whole speech of the excellent but somewhat long-winded Aeneas, without a single fault.

'The old boy won't catch Smithy out!' Skinner whispered to Snoop. It was the faintest of whispers: but Quelch's ear's seemed unusually keen that morning. A gimlet-eye gleamed at Harold Skinner.

'Did you speak, Skinner?'

'Oh!' Skinner gasped, in alarm. 'I—I—I just asked Snoop the place, sir.' Skinner was not a veracious fellow: especially with Quelch in his present mood.

'You should not have lost the place, Skinner.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir.'

'You will take fifty lines.'

Skinner did not whisper again!

'Go on, Wharton.'

Harry Wharton went on. He was followed by Redwing, then Mark Linley, then Peter Todd, then Frank Nugent. All of them, luckily, were good. Skinner suspected that the 'old boy', as he expressed it, was anxious to catch fellows out, which was like Skinner, and was certainly not the case. But there was no doubt that Quelch had no use for 'howlers' that morning.

'Cherry! You will go on.'

Bob's cheery, ruddy face, did not look its brightest, as he was called on. Bob was no slacker, either at prep or in class: but the classics had no great appeal for him: and perhaps his private opinion was that Latin, being a dead language, might as well be buried also! And he had hardly looked at prep the evening before. After that Soccer match, Bob's thoughts had run mainly on Soccer, and especially on Smithy's goal,— that brilliant shot from the wing, fairly on the stroke of time, which had pulled the game out of the fire. Bob could have discussed that goal, from every angle and under all aspects, for hours: it really was ever so much more interesting than the adventures and misadventures of the *pious Aeneas*. He rather wished now that he had given a little more attention to Virgil and a little less to Soccer. Gazing at *disjectam Aeneae toto videt aequore classem* Bob wrinkled a worried brow and paused. Quelch was in no mood for pauses.

'Did you hear me, Cherry?' he rumbled.

'Oh ! Yes, sir!' stammered Bob.

'Go on at once.'

'Yes, sir! *Disjectam Aeneae toto videt*— he sees the total break-up of Aeneas--!' stammered Bob.

'WHAT! !'

'I—I—I mean—.'

'What do you mean, Cherry?'

'I—I—I mean—!' stuttered the hapless Bob. Then the softest of whispers from Harry Wharton reached his ear. It was, of course, very severely against all rules for one fellow to whisper the translation to another in 'con'. But Bob was in so hopeless a jam, and Quelch's eye was glinting so sharply, that his chum risked it.

'He sees the fleet of Aeneas scattered over all the sea!' breathed Harry Wharton: as soft as, or softer than, the cooing dove.

'He sees—!' began Bob, cheerily.

He was interrupted.

'Wharton!' came a sudden bark.

'Oh! Yes, sir,' gasped Harry. Skinner had already learned that Quelch's ears were unusually sharp that morning. Now Wharton became painfully aware of it.

'You were speaking to Cherry, Wharton!'

'Yes, sir,' stammered Harry.

'Were you giving him the translation?'

'Yes, sir!' answered Harry, quietly. The captain of the Remove was not likely to adopt Skinner's methods.

The gimlet-eyes bored into him.

'You are the Head Boy of my form, Wharton. You should know better. You will take three hundred lines, Wharton.'

'Very well, sir.'

'Cherry! You have not prepared this lesson. You will write out the whole lesson, with the translation, after class.'

Bob nearly exclaimed 'Oh, crumbs!' but fortunately suppressed that expression of his feelings in time.

'You will go on, Bull.'

Johnny Bull went on. Other fellows followed: not happily. Lines fell right and left: indeed, by the time the lesson ended they had fallen like the leaves in Vallambrosa of old. Never had the time of dismissal been so welcome in Quelch's form-room.

But the form were not immediately dismissed, when that welcome moment came. Quelch eyed his form grimly from his high desk. There was something more to come!

'Before you dismiss, I have one word to say!' he said, slowly: and the Remove hung on his words, wondering what was coming next, and not in the least anticipating that it would be anything pleasant. 'You are all aware that, during my absence yesterday, a packet of typescript was abstracted from my study.'

Mr. Quelch paused. There was a dead silence.

'That packet must be returned, intact. The boy who abstracted it will be caned, and the matter will end.'

Another pause: and another dead silence.

'But—,' Quelch's voice deepened, 'until that packet is returned, the whole form will go into Extra School, for one hour every day after class.'

'Oh!' murmured all the Remove. 'That is all! Dismiss!'

A dismayed form trailed out of the form-room: a pair of gimlet-eyes glinting after them as they went.

NOT A REBELLION

'WE'RE not standing it!'

Thus the Bounder.

There was a crowd in the Rag after class that day. It was an excited crowd. Almost every fellow talked at once. It was quite an indignation-meeting.

Quelch's sentence had fallen on his form rather like a thunderbolt. Like the hail and the rain, it fell alike upon the just and the unjust. Every fellow in the form, whether he knew anything about the missing manuscript or not, was booked for detention till it turned up.

The Remove were out at four. After which, as a rule, they were more or less their own masters, till prep. Now they were booked for Extra— in the French class-room, at 4.15.

'Extra' was a penalty that fell upon offenders now and then. But Extra for a whole form was rather a novelty. Only too clearly, Quelch had his majestic back up. Such a sentence knocked a fellow's accustomed occupations right on the head. It was no wonder that a state of very unusual excitement reigned in the Greyfriars Remove. There was a hubbub of voices in the Rag.

'Extra every day—!'

'It's too thick.'

'The thickfulness is terrific.'

'Too jolly rotten!'

'It's not good enough!'

'What silly ass nobbled that rot of Quelch's—?'

'Bother him, and bother Quelch!'

'Not a spot of Soccer!' sighed Bob Cherry. 'French verbs instead—ugh!'

'Cheeky old ass!' said Skinner, after a glance at the door to make sure that it was shut.

'We're not standing this from Quelch!' hooted the Bounder, careless whether the door was open or shut. 'Quelch has got to think again.'

'Trot along to his study and tell him so!' suggested Squiff: and there was a laugh.

'I tell you—.'

'Not much use blowing off steam, Smithy,' said Harry Wharton. 'We've got to toe the line.'

'I'm not toeing it, for one,' snapped Smithy.

'What's the big idea?' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Thinking of bolting like that fat ass Bunter the other day?'

'Oh, don't be an ass! What about staying out, and letting Quelch see where he gets off!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Rot!' said Harry Wharton.

'The rotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy.'

The Bounder gave Wharton an angry glare.

'You're captain of the form,' he snapped. 'It's up to you to take the lead! Say the word, and we'll all stay out, and let Quelch whistle for his Extra.'

'Good egg!' exclaimed Bolsover major.

'Why not?' Harry Wharton shook his head very decidedly. Certainly, he was feeling no more pleased than other fellows in the form. But he had no use for the Bounder's reckless stunts. Smithy was always ready for trouble, careless of consequences. But the captain of the Remove had no idea whatever of hoisting the standard of rebellion in the Lower Fourth. A good many



fellows in the excited crowd, however, seemed disposed to back up Smithy's suggestion. A hubbub of voices re-started.

'It's too jolly thick,' said Bob Cherry. 'But it's all the fault of the silly ass who nobbled Quelch's tosh. Who the dickens was it?'

Harry Wharton shook his head again. That was quite a mystery: and a very puzzling one. During the day, it had been discussed up and down the Remove, but nobody seemed to know anything about it.

Had the culprit been known, the pressure of public opinion in the form would certainly have driven him to take back the missing manuscript. A fellow was free to 'play the goat' if the spirit moved him to do so: but if the playing thereof landed other fellows in the soup, it was up to him to face the music, and take what was coming to him. He would have found things very unpleasant indeed, if he had allowed the whole form to take the rap for his misdeeds. It was probable that Mr. Quelch had expected his sweeping sentence to reveal the culprit that very day.

But nothing had transpired. Not a fellow admitted that he had 'done it', or knew anything about it at all. If the culprit was in the Remove, he was hugging his secret very closely. And certainly no one was likely to think of a fat Owl, now many long miles distant, who had parked that precious typescript up the chimney in Quelch's study, and since forgotten all about it! Nobody thought of Billy Bunter, or indeed remembered his fat existence in the state of excitement now reigning.

'If it was Smithy after all—!' growled Johnny Bull. A third time the captain of the Remove shook his head.

'Not Smithy,' he said. 'He would own up like a shot, now we're all landed for it.'

Johnny Bull nodded, slowly. The Bounder, with all his wild and reckless ways, was a sportsman: he would not have kept silent now, if he had been the culprit. But who was it? Nobody could even begin to guess.

'But if the tosh doesn't turn up—!' said Nugent. 'Extra every day till it does— and perhaps it won't ever!' said Bob, with a whistle. 'Sort of attractive prospect, my beloved 'earers.'

The Bounder's voice came, in a shout. A knot of fellows had gathered round him— Skinner, Snoop, Stott, Bolsover major, Russell, Hazeldene, and several others, all evidently in a mutinous mood.

'We're not standing it! Who's for staying out?'

'Hear, hear!'

'Good old Smithy!'

'Let's stay out, and chance it.'

'For goodness sake, Smithy, don't play the goat!' exclaimed Tom Redwing. 'You've had more than enough trouble with Quelch—.'

'I'll give him some more!' retorted Smithy. 'I'm staying out, and you stick to me, Reddy—.'

'Nothing of the kind—.'

'Go and eat coke, then!' snapped the Bounder. 'If a crowd of us stay out, what can Quelch do? I'm chancing it, anyhow.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Stick it out, Smithy.'

It was quite a roar. Excitement was growing: the Bounder's reckless mood was catching! More and more fellows joined the little crowd round him. Smithy's eyes sparkled. Trouble was coming: and he seemed to be enjoying the prospect of mutiny in the Remove. In the midst of the buzz of excited voices came the chime of the quarter from the clock-tower.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Time!'

'Come on!' said Harry Wharton, quietly. And the Famous Five walked out of the Rag together. Mark Linley and Squiff and Tom Brown and Peter Todd followed them out: and then, after a moment or two of hesitation, others. The crowd round the Bounder began to melt.

'Stick together, you fellows!' exclaimed Smithy.

But the fellows did not stick together. Enthusiasm seemed to wane, now that it had come to the point. Skinner and Snoop and Stott exchanged a glance, and headed for the door.

'Where are you going, Skinner?' exclaimed Smithy. Skinner did not delay to explain where he was going.

He just went. The three disappeared: and a moment or two later, other fellows were disappearing after them. Bolsover major was the last to go: but he went, and Herbert Vernon-Smith was left standing alone, with the blackest of scowls on his face. His career as a leader of rebellion had been cut short quite suddenly: before it had fairly started, in fact!

Tom Redwing lingered at the door, with a faint smile on his face. He called across to his chum. 'Coming, Smithy?'

The Bounder scowled at him by way of reply. Then he burst into a laugh. Smithy was ready for rebellion, or any other recklessness: but he did not propose to stage a one-man rebellion!

'Coming!' he answered.

And he followed Redwing out of the Rag, and they arrived last at Monsieur Charpentier's classroom.

## CHAPTER 22

### LOST WEEK-END

'HE, he, he!'

Billy Bunter chuckled.

His fat face, which had been overcast, brightened. Some happy thought, evidently, had entered his podgy mind.

It was Friday— a golden autumn afternoon. Billy Bunter's plump limbs were stretched luxuriously in a garden-chair, in the garden at Bunter Villa. There was a stick of toffee in one fat sticky hand, at which he took an occasional chew. Smears of toffee round a capacious mouth marked his progress with it. Other smears indicated that there had recently been jam. But a golden afternoon, the sun shining on green grass and leafy trees, even a stick of toffee, did not make Billy Bunter quite happy. His fat brow had been, as the poet expresses it, sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought! This was all right so long as it lasted! But it couldn't last! School loomed ahead of Bunter,— school, and Quelch, and lessons.

Sitting in the garden at Bunter Villa, it was quite pleasant to think of the other fellows, grinding in the form-room with Quelch, happily so far away! But it couldn't last!

Mrs. Bunter was much better. If there had been any occasion— which Mr. Bunter doubted— for William to come home at all, that occasion was over. Mrs. Bunter was going to Uncle Carter's at the seaside: and Billy Bunter was going back to Greyfriars.

Bunter was in rather a mixed mood. He was both glad and sorry at the same time.

Certainly he was glad that his plump parent was on the mend. He had been genuinely distressed— he had, for a time, forgotten the person upon whom his fat thoughts were usually wholly concentrated— William George Bunter! With a reckless temerity which even the Bunder had never equalled, he had bolted from Greyfriars, regardless of Quelch and all his works. For a time, it had been a quite new Bunter.

Now, sad to relate, it was the old Bunter again! His plump mater was going to Folkestone.

Which left absolutely no reason why Billy Bunter should not return to school,— excepting one, which was a very powerful reason — he didn't want to!

So Bunter's feelings were mixed— he was glad, on the mater's account, and sorry, on his own! His fat thoughts had now resumed their accustomed course,— concentrated wholly on William George Bunter.

He was far from anxious to see Mr. Quelch again. True, Mr. Bunter had cleared up the matter on the telephone: his 'bolt' was not to draw upon him the dreaded consequences: the vials of wrath were not to be poured out on his fat head when he turned up at Greyfriars. But he had no doubt that Quelch would be shirty, all the same. Shirty or not, he would be Quelch— with a gimlet-eye on a fellow who made both a science and an art of dodging work.

Bunter would have preferred it immensely to sit it out at Bunter Villa. Lessons had no appeal for him— laziness, on the other hand, had an irresistible appeal. But he had to go back to school on Monday.

Or had he?

Bunter had been thinking it over. Thinking was not really Bunter's long suit: but the matter was urgent. He was going to get out of lessons if he could, — and as long as he could! And a bright idea had flashed into his fat brain, as he pondered over the problem.

The mater had been ill. She was getting well: but why shouldn't Bunter be ill in his turn? True, he wasn't ill: but that was a mere detail, of no consequence whatever to the unveracious Owl. If he was ill, obviously he couldn't go back to school on Monday. Why not?

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter. 'Why not? Might be a whole week, if a fellow could get away with it!'

He grinned over his toffee. He thought it over from every angle. It seemed good, to Bunter. 'William!'

It was Mr. Bunter's voice. Mr. Bunter was back from the City. The grin vanished at once from Bunter's face. If he was going to be ill, he had to play the part.

He had not heard Mr. Bunter's footsteps, on the grass.

But the voice behind his chair put him on his guard. Instead of replying in words, he gave a low groan. It was very expressive. In fact, it was almost hair-raising.

Groan!

'What? What is the matter, William?' exclaimed Mr. Bunter. He came round the garden-chair. and stared at the fat junior sprawling therein.

Billy Bunter gave him a pathetic blink through his big spectacles.

'I—I—I don't feel well!' he mumbled.

'You are not ill, William?'

'I—I've got a pain!' moaned Bunter. 'A—a—a fearful pain! I—I feel awfully ill—it came on quite—quite suddenly—ow! Oh, dear!'

Billy Bunter contorted his fat features into an expression of anguish. Mr. Bunter frowned. He was not unsympathetic: but this was disconcerting.

'Probably you have been over-eating. William!' he said.

'Oh, really—.'

'Throw away that toffee,' said Mr. Bunter.

'Eh?'

'Throw it away at once,' said Mr. Bunter, testily. 'If you are ill, William, you should not be eating sticky sweet-meats. Throw it away immediately.'

Billy Bunter almost wished, for a moment, that that bright idea hadn't occurred to him! But he suppressed his feelings, and threw away the remains of the toffee.

Mr. Bunter eyed him.

'If you really feel ill, William—.'

'Oh, dear! Awfully!' moaned Bunter. 'I—I've got a pain like—like a—a—a burning dagger—.'

'This is very tiresome,' said Mr. Bunter. 'If you are ill, William, you can scarcely return to school as arranged on Monday.'

Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. He was getting away with it.

'But probably you will be quite all right by Monday, William—.'

'I—I don't think so!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I—I feel that I'm going to be worse— ever so much worse—. This awful pain—.'

'You must see the doctor without delay— I will go in and telephone him at once—.'

'Oh!' stuttered Bunter. He hadn't thought of that! A fellow couldn't think of everything! At all events, Bunter couldn't! The fat Owl wanted to be an invalid, but certainly he did not want to see a doctor! However, he realized that illness and doctors were inevitable concomitants.

'You must have medical attention immediately!' said Mr. Bunter. 'Probably it is merely an effect of an excess of food. William! But the doctor will be able to ascertain precisely what is the matter with you.'

Mr. Bunter walked back towards the house.

'Oh, lor'!' murmured Bunter.

He hoped that Mr. Bunter's faith in the abilities of the medical profession was unfounded. Certainly he did not want the medical man to ascertain precisely what was the matter with him, since all that was the matter with him was that he didn't want to go back to school and Quelch!

But he shook his fat head sagely, and the grin returned to his face. He would pass the doctor all right! He could rely on his powers as an Ananias! He was going to be ill,— not, perhaps, seriously ill: just ill enough not to be able to go back to school on Monday. He could work that all right— and the doctor wouldn't know a thing!

That awful prospect of Quelch, and lessons, and work, faded. Bunter had a winner this time! That doctor could come as soon as he liked— the fat Owl was going to pull his leg, with a woebegone face and a tale of woe: and luxuriate in laziness for a week— perhaps a couple of weeks—.

He chuckled at the happy vista, his fat face wreathed in grins. It was a cheery if not exactly musical chuckle.

'He, he, he! It's all right—,' chuckled Bunter. 'I'll fool him all right—doctors don't know much! I jolly well ain't going back on Monday, and chance it! He, he, he!'

'William!'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

He jumped! In fact, he bounded, at that unexpected voice behind his garden-chair. He had taken it for granted that Mr. Bunter had gone into the house to telephone, as he had said that he was going to do. Apparently he had taken a little too much for granted: Mr. Bunter had turned back for another word with his hopeful son,— his voice was not a yard away.

Billy Bunter squirmed round in the chair in dismay.

His eyes almost popped at Mr. Bunter. If his pater had heard him—!

The expression on Mr. Bunter's face indicated, only too clearly, that his pater had! That expression was quite portentous.

'William!' Mr. Bunter's voice rumbled. It reminded Bunter of Quelch's, at that moment.

'William—.'

'I—I—I—,' stuttered Bunter. 'I—I—oh, lor'!'

Evidently, Mr. Bunter had heard his muttered ruminations, and the fat was in the fire now.

'William! I came back to tell you to go to your room to await the doctor. But you need not do so, William! I shall not telephone for the doctor. I am aware now, William, that you are in no need of a medical man's attention. '

'I—I—I—.'

'You will not return to your school on Monday, William!' said Mr. Bunter, sternly.

'Oh!' Billy Bunter's fat face brightened. This was good news, at any rate!

'You will return to-morrow morning—!' went on Mr. Bunter.

'Oh!' ejaculated Bunter, again. The news, after all, was not so good! The fat face was overcast again.

'I shall take you to your train in the morning, and see you off for Greyfriars. William!'

'But I—I—I say—.'

'That will do. William!'

'But—but—but—.' gasped Bunter. 'I—I—I ain't well—.'

'What?'

'I—I—I've got a pain—.'

'William!' said Mr. Bunter, in quite a concentrated voice. 'If you say another word, I shall box your ears!'

Billy Bunter blinked at him. Mr. Bunter was looking irate— which, perhaps, was not surprising, in the circumstances. His plump hand was rising. Billy Bunter decided not to say another word. He did not want his fat ears boxed! Never had a fellow deserved it more: but that would have been no comfort to him.

'Ten-thirty— to-morrow morning!' was all Mr. Bunter added, before he stalked away with a frowning brow.

'Oh, lor'!' mumbled Bunter.

It had been a bright idea. But Billy Bunter wished, from the bottom of his fat heart, that it had never entered his fat head! He had been booked for school on Monday: which at least left him a week-end at a happy distance from Quelch. That was washed out, as a result of his bright idea. He had lost that week-end!

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

He groped in a sticky pocket, and extracted a fresh chunk of toffee. His fat face cheered as he chewed. There was consolation in toffee.

## SOMETHING LIKE A RAG!

BANG! bang! bang!

Three successive bangs resounded through class-room No. 10 at Greyfriars. Three desk-lids had dropped, one after another. It sounded almost like rifle-shots.

'*Mon Dieu!*' ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

That Friday afternoon, while Billy Bunter, in the garden at Bunter Villa, was thinking out the bright idea that lost him a week-end, his form-fellows at Greyfriars were in Extra.

It was the second day of Extra School. Not a fellow in the Remove was enjoying it. Neither, certainly, was Mossoo. Mossoo was a mild little gentleman: and the Greyfriars Remove really were not a form to be successfully handled by any mild little gentleman. Especially in their present mood.

The previous day, though nobody had backed up the Bounder's reckless suggestion of 'staying out', the Remove had turned up for Extra in a mutinous mood. Mossoo had had his hands full with them. Matters had not improved since then: now he looked like having his hands over-full. Even fellows who were generally well-behaved, were rather out of hand.

, when he issued his edict, had not doubted that it would produce results, in a short time. But it had produced no results whatever. The missing manuscript was still missing. Perhaps he had not quite expected that the delinquent would own up, and take what was due to him— six of the very best. But Quelch was more concerned about the return of his precious *History of Greyfriars*, than about the punishment of the offender. Indeed he could have found it in his heart to forgive the culprit, if only that invaluable typescript had been returned intact.

The young scamp, whoever he was, could have found an opportunity of restoring it, surreptitiously; unseen and undiscovered, leaving his identity still to be guessed. Probably that was what Quelch expected to happen. Many of the Remove fellows certainly did.

They had not the remotest idea who had 'snooped' that manuscript,— only that it must have been some fellow in the Remove. Surely that fellow would take the easy step of coughing it up, so to speak, rather than go through Extra every day, day after day, with all the rest of the form in Extra with him!

But it had not happened.

Until it happened, Quelch's form were booked for Extra: and they were more than fed up with it. Monsieur Charpentier often had a troublesome class, at the best of times. It was not likely to be less troublesome now. In fact, almost every fellow in No. 10 class-room was bent on giving all the trouble he could. When Mossoo was detention-master, 'Extra' was more likely to be a prolonged 'rag' than anything else, in present circumstances.

It began at four-fifteen. At four-sixteen, Vernon-Smith pushed Skinner off the oaken form whereon he sat. Skinner made it a point to drag over a couple of fellows with him as he sprawled. Other fellows rushed to help. There was a mix-up that lasted a good five minutes, while Mossoo waved his hands, and shrieked in alternate French and English, in vain efforts to restore order.

Something like order having been restored, Monsieur Charpentier wiped the perspiration from his brow, and work began. There were many interruptions: and Mossoo grew more and more flustered and excited.

'Sherry! It is you zat stamp viz ze foot!'

'Oh! Did I, sir?'

'Is it not zat you stamp viz ze foot, Sherry?'

'Oh! Yes, sir!'

'Zat you take one hundred lines of ze Henriade, Sherry!' Bob Cherry grinned cheerfully. A hundred lines of French was not the sort of thing to make a fellow grin: but for the circumstance that Mossoo was very unlikely to ask for them to be shown up. Lines often fell like hail in the French class-room, but Mossoo seldom remembered to ask for them. Peace at any price was Mossoo's maxim, not a very useful one, in dealing with thoughtless and exuberant youth!

A few minutes later, a French grammar sailed through the air, and dropped a foot from Mossoo, who jumped.

'Smeet! It is you zat trow a book!'

'Oh, no, sir!' drawled Smithy. 'I think it was Bolsover. Was it you, Bolsover?'

'Not I,' said Bolsover. 'Was it you, Skinner?'

'No fear—I think it was Snoop! Was it you, Snoop?'

'No—was it you, Wharton?'

'Was it you, Bull?'

'Was it you, Nugent?'

'Was it you, Toddy?'

There was a hubbub of voices. Everyone seemed anxious to assist Mossoo in discovering who had projected that book through the air. Probably Mossoo knew just how much they wanted to help! He gesticulated frantically as the class-room echoed with eager voices.

'*Taisez-vous!* Zat zere is silence! Silence, zen! Sit down! Take ze place! *Je vous dis, taisez-vous!* Ordair! Silence! *On en a assez! Mon Dieu!*' Monsieur Charpentier shrieked, waved his hands, and almost waved his legs, in his excitement. 'Sherry—Smeet—Skinnaire—silence!'

'We're only trying to help, sir—.'

'*Assez! assez!* Enoff! Silence! Zat you all take fife hundred lines of ze Henriade! If zere is not silence, I take ze pointer.'

The hubbub died away. In goaded moments, Mossoo had been known to handle the pointer. Nobody wanted a rap on the knuckles. Once more there was something remotely resembling order in Extra School.

But it did not last long. Mossoo, hoping for the best— he was a hopeful little gentleman,— was standing at the blackboard, chalk in hand, when the desk-lids began to bang. He was demonstrating the imperfect subjunctive of the verb *avoir*. Never had the Greyfriars Remove been so utterly uninterested in imperfect subjunctives. They couldn't have cared less.

Bang! bang! BANG! Mossoo whirled round at his class. He was in time to see the final— and loudest— lid fall from the Bounder's hand.

'Smeet! It is you zat make one bang, Smeet.'

'Quite an accident, sir!' drawled Smithy.

'Zat is not so, Smeet! You are one mauvais garçon, Smeet! — one verree bad boy. I will have ordair in zis class.'

'What a hope!' murmured Smithy, and there was a laugh.

'Silence! It is not to laff! Silence!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'*Allons donc!* Is it zat you hear me not? Ze silence!'

Mossoo picked up the pointer. 'Ze next zat shall make one noise, I beat him! Silence zen!'



The hubbub died into a subdued buzz. Mossoo put the pointer under his arm, and resumed his chalk. He proceeded to chalk *que j'eusse*, followed by *que tu eusses*, but at that point, Skinner's desk-lid came down with a bang almost like a bomb.

Bang!

'*Nom d'un nom d'un nom!*' gasped Monsieur Charpentier. Evidently, he was in a very goaded state. Nothing less could have caused him to call upon the name of a name of a name!

'Smeed! You bad one—you mauvais garçon! Zat you take zat!'

Rap!

That was Mossoo all over. It was Skinner who had banged; but Mossoo had not seen him, and he had no doubt that it was the Bounder again. The pointer came down on Vernon-Smith's knuckles, and he gave a yell of surprise and anguish.

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Skinner.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Mossoo's mistake seemed to amuse everyone but Smithy.

There was a roar of laughter in No. 10. Smithy did not join in it— he was not in the least amused. He sat rubbing his knuckles with quite an infuriated expression on his face.

'Now zat you keep ze ordair, you Smeed!' exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, and he turned back to the blackboard.

'By gum!' breathed the Bounder. His eyes were blazing.

Smithy had really asked for that rap on the knuckles a dozen times over: but that did not lessen his resentment at getting it for nothing. He grabbed up a book and took aim, with the full intention of shying it at Mossoo's head! Harry Wharton jumped out of his place, and caught his arm, just in time.

'Smithy, you mad ass, chuck it!' he exclaimed.

'Let go, you fool—.'

'Stop it—.'

The Bounder tore his arm free, and hurled the book.

But his aim was quite spoiled, and the book, luckily, missed Mossoo's head by a foot or more. It landed on the blackboard, with a terrific crash.

'*Moan Dieu!*' gasped Mossoo.

The blackboard rocked, and went over under the shock.

There was another crash, as it hit hard oak. Mossoo almost danced.

'Vat is zat? Is it somevun trow somezing! *Mon Dieu!* Keep ze place!' added Mossoo, in a shriek.

But the unruly class were not likely to miss such an opportunity. A dozen fellows rushed out to set up the blackboard again.

'We'll set it up, sir—.'

'It's all right, sir—.'

'We'll have it up in a jiffy—.'

'Hold on, there—.'

'Don't shove, Bolsover—.'

'Get off my foot, Skinner, you swob—.'

'Stop barging, Cherry, you fathead.'

Many hands should have made light work. But the many hands that were laid on the blackboard and easel did not seem, somehow, to succeed in setting them up again. Somehow or other, every fellow seemed to get in some other fellow's way, succeeding only in making confusion more confounded.

The easel went up, but it crashed again. Three or four fellows stumbled over it, and sprawled. Five or six had hold of the blackboard, but they had no success with it, except in rubbing out the imperfect subjunctives that Mossoo had chalked there for their delectation. Other fellows rushed out of their places to give aid, till almost the whole numerous class were mixed up with blackboard and easel, with a din that rang far beyond the limits of No 10 class-room. It was, in fact, the most tremendous 'rag' that had ever happened even in Monsieur Charpentier's detention-class. On the edge of the mêlée, Mossoo shrieked and gesticulated and danced. Every fellow was shouting at once:

'Shove it up, you men! '

'Don't barge, there!'

'You clumsy ass, Cherry—there it goes again!'

Crash!

'Ha, ha, ha!'



THE EASEL WENT UP, BUT IT CRASHED AGAIN

In the midst of the uproar, the door opened. No one, in the excitement of the moment, noticed it. For a second, an angular figure stood unnoticed in the doorway, and a pair of gimlet-eyes gleamed at a scene of wild disorder. Then a voice with a razor-like edge on it cut through the din.

'BOYS!'

It was really amazing, how suddenly the din in No. 10 class-room died away, at the sound of that voice! Up to that moment, the room had echoed and re-echoed with sound. Then there was silence—sudden silence!

Mr. Quelch walked in.

'What are you doing?' he inquired, icily.

'Oh! We're setting up the blackboard, sir—!' stammered Bob.

'It—it fell over, sir—,' murmured Nugent.

'Only trying to help, sir!' said Skinner.

'You may set up the blackboard!' said Mr. Quelch. With surprising celerity, the blackboard was set up, under that gleaming gimlet-eye. There were no more accidents with it. It was in its place almost in a moment. 'Now take your places!'

The juniors took their places.

'Monsieur Charpentier!' Quelch addressed the gasping little French gentleman very courteously. 'I am afraid that my form have been giving you undue trouble.'

'*Mon Dieu!*' Mossoo mopped a perspiring brow. 'Sair, it is too mooch—zis is one garden of ze bear—.'

'Precisely,' said Mr. Quelch. 'With your permission, Monsieur Charpentier, I will take over my form for the remainder of Extra School.'

'Zank you, sair.'

'Not at all, sir!' said Mr. Quelch.

Only too gladly did Mossoo fade out of No. 10 class-room.

His gladness was not shared by the detention-class. But there were no more 'rags'. With Quelch in charge, even the Bounder did not think of whizzing books or banging desk-lids. Extra, which had started and gone on rather like a hurricane, had ended in a dead calm!

## CHAPTER 24

### TWO ON THE TELEPHONE

*Buzzzzzz!*

Mr. Quelch gave a start of annoyance.

It was Saturday morning, in break. Quelch was standing at his open window, looking out into the quad, bright in the autumn sunshine. His face was very thoughtful, and a little clouded. Plenty of fellows were to be seen in the quad. Most of them looked cheery enough— but not the fellows in the Remove. Fellows in other forms seemed to find life a pleasant proposition that sunny morning. But Mr. Quelch could not help noting that members of his form did not seem to be sharing that view.

The Famous Five were standing in a group, discussing something that did not reach Quelch's ears. But from their looks he could guess what it was. Which was confirmed, when Bob Cherry's voice, never very subdued, came floating to his ears on the autumn breeze.

'No Soccer, with Extra at three. Bother him!'

Harry Wharton spoke hastily, in a lower voice. Perhaps he had noted Quelch at the study window. Bob glanced round quickly: and when he spoke again, his voice was a little less like Stentor's.

Mr. Quelch breathed rather hard through his nose. Bob had not mentioned a name. But Quelch could hardly doubt to whom the pronoun referred. He, Henry Samuel Quelch, was the 'him' whom Bob had 'bothered'.

He could see other Remove fellows, here and there. He could read their looks easily enough. There was discontent in his form— and resentment. It troubled Quelch, who really was, at heart, a kind man, as well as a just one. The present state of affairs was far from satisfactory. Certainly, the Remove had not ventured to 'rag' in his form-room, as they had ragged in No. 10 with poor Mossoo. But he knew that they would have liked so to do. Extra School every day was a heavy sentence: and it was worst of all on a half-holiday. But—!

He could not rescind that sentence. What he had said, he had said! He had hoped, and indeed expected, that Extra every day would produce the missing typescript. It had produced nothing. Whoever had taken it away, was keeping it away. Until it was produced, the sentence had to go on. Quelch, that afternoon, was taking Extra School in person.

The buzz of the telephone-bell interrupted his troubled thoughts. It was an unwelcome interruption. There was annoyance in Mr. Quelch's face, as he stepped to the instrument and picked up the receiver. If this was some parent inquiring after the well-being of Tom or Dick or Harry—!

'Is that old Quelch?' came a voice.

Mr. Quelch almost dropped the receiver. He stared blankly at the telephone. Obviously, it could not be a parent who was addressing him in such terms. 'Wha—a—a—t—?' he stuttered.

'What—what—who—who is speaking?'

'Oh! It's you, old bean! I know your bark.'

'Bless my soul!'

'Look here, old scout—.'

'Who is speaking?' almost shrieked Mr. Quelch.

'Never mind that! Just a word in your ear, old boy— we're fed up with Extra! Fed right up to the chin!'

'Is—is—is that a boy of my form speaking?' gasped Mr. Quelch. The words certainly, indicated as much: but he strove in vain to identify the voice. Whoever was at the other end had assumed a husky tone, to disguise his natural voice, and it was quite unidentifiable. That husky voice might have been almost anybody's: though Quelch could not doubt that it belonged to a member of his form.

'Guessed it, old boy?' came the reply. 'What a brain!'

'Bless my soul! I—I—.'

'You'd better think again, Quelch. Nobody knows what's become of your tosh—.'

'My—my what?'

'Tosh! You've put it somewhere else, and forgotten where, I shouldn't wonder! You're silly enough.'

'You impertinent young rascal—.'

'Bow-wow!'

'Goodness gracious!' gasped Mr. Quelch. He stared at the telephone, with an expression on his face that the fabled basilisk could scarcely have equalled.

At that moment he would have given anything—anything but, perhaps, his *History of Greyfriars!* — to identify the young rascal who had dared to ring him up and talk to him in this strain. But he could not even guess who was the owner of that husky voice.

'Take a tip from me, Quelch, and chuck it!' went on the voice. 'We've had enough of your Extra— more than enough— and if you keep it up, there's going to be trouble. Got that?'

Slam! The telephone rocked as Mr. Quelch slammed the receiver back. He seemed to have had enough of this light and genial conversation from the other end.

'Upon my word!' breathed Mr. Quelch.

He stepped back to the window, and looked out. Nine or ten Remove fellows were to be seen— it was not one of them who had phoned. But there were a score of others, Quelch's form was a numerous one. The young rascal on the telephone might be anyone of a score— how was Quelch to know which?

*Buzzzzzzzz!*

It was the telephone-bell again. The Remove master glared round at the instrument with a deadly glare. Was it possible— was it thinkable— that that young rascal had rung up a second time?

He jerked the receiver off the hooks.

'Hallo!' came a husky voice over the wires. 'Did you cut off, Quelch? I hadn't finished—.'

Slam again! The telephone rocked. Mr. Quelch stood breathing very hard. Evidently, there was a mutinous spirit in his form: the effect of a daily dose of Extra! Quelch was prepared to deal with it, drastically,— if he could but identify the offender,— his cane was ready for some really strenuous exercise. As the palm of Cassius itched for gold, so Quelch's palm itched for the cane! But—.

*Buzzzzzzzz!*

The telephone-bell was buzzing again. Quelch stared at the instrument almost incredulously. Twice had that impertinent young rascal rung him up, and now—. He tore the receiver from the hooks, and fairly bawled into the mouthpiece: 'You impertinent rascal! How dare you ring me up? How dare you?'

A gasp of surprise came from the other end.

'Mr. Quelch—!' It was a very startled voice.

It was not the husky voice that had addressed Quelch twice before. It was quite a different voice. It was, in fact, the plump voice of Mr. Bunter, of Bunter Villa, the parent of the Owl of the Remove!

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch, utterly taken aback. He had not doubted that it was that young rascal again! Clearly, however, it wasn't!

'Mr. Quelch! Is that you, Mr. Quelch? I scarcely understand you— such language, sir— upon my word — what do you mean, Mr. Quelch?'

'I—I—I—.' Quelch could only stutter.

'I have rung you up, sir, to tell you that William is returning to school to-day— he is now on his train. I did not expect, sir, to be addressed in such a manner—.'

'I—I—I—.'

'I am surprised— shocked — and I am assured, Mr. Quelch, that Dr. Locke would be both surprised and shocked, if he was aware that a member of his staff used such expressions, sir, to the parent of a Greyfriars boy—.'

'I—I—I—I apologize, Mr. Bunter—I—I—I had no idea—I—I mean, I spoke in error—.' Quelch babbled almost incoherently. 'In error, sir— A very unfortunate error—.'

'I should imagine so, sir! Such expressions—.'

'I—I—I—please accept my apologies, Mr. Bunter. I—I—I—.'

'Such language, sir—.'

'I—I repeat—I—I—I—I will explain—I—I—.'

Pip, pip, pip, came on the telephone. There was a whirr, as the receiver at Bunter Villa was banged home. Mr. Bunter, apparently, had no use for Quelch's explanations, at the cost of a trunk call. He had out off.

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Quelch, faintly.

When the bell rang for third school, and Mr. Quelch went along to let the Remove into their form-room, he scanned every face in the form with a searching eye. That gimlet-eye lingered a little on Herbert Vernon-Smith. But the Bounder's look was quite casual: if Smithy knew anything about that telephone-call, he was giving nothing away. There was no clue to the unknown interlocutor on the telephone: a circumstance for which Herbert Vernon-Smith had reason to be duly thankful!

BILLY BUNTER BLOWS IN

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Bunter!'

'That fat ass—.'

'Blown in again—.'

'Look out for Quelch!'

Third school was over, and the Remove were out. Most of them were thinking of the 'Extra' that afternoon, which was particularly unpalatable on a half-holiday. Extra from three to four really did knock a fellow's half-holiday into a cocked hat. Nobody was satisfied: and some fellows, especially the Bounder, pondered on reprisals. The Famous Five were in the quad, discussing the perpetual topic, when a fat figure rolled in at the gates: and they forgot Extra, for the moment, as they beheld the familiar fat face of Billy Bunter. Actually, they had almost forgotten 'his fat existence, during the week that he had been absent from his accustomed place— they had had much more important things to think of than Bunter. However, they remembered him now, as he rolled in, his big spectacles gleaming back the rays of the sun. They were, in fact, rather surprised to see him. After his extraordinary 'bolt', it seemed to the other Remove fellows doubtful whether he would be permitted to return at all. But here he was!

'So you've turned up again, like a bad penny!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'If you have tears, prepare to shed them, when Quelch spots you!' said Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter grinned.

'That's all right,' he said. 'I ain't afraid of Quelch! You see, my mater being ill—.'

'Oh, suffering cats!' exclaimed Bob. 'Are you going to spin that yarn again?'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Had good hols, Bunter?' asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Well, not at first,' said Bunter. 'You see. I was awfully anxious about the mater. But she's got better: that's why I've come back. She's going to the seaside to recuperpolate—.'

'To which?' ejaculated Bob.

'Recuperpolate,' said Bunter. 'Invalids have to recuperpolate when they're convalescic.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' exclaimed Bunter, warmly. 'What are you cackling at, I'd like to know?'

'You'll need to recuperate yourself, when Quelch is done with you,' remarked Frank Nugent.

'I fancy it will be all right with Quelch,' said Bunter. 'You see, my pater was on the phone to Quelch after I got home, so I think it will be all right. I say, is he in a good temper?'

'Not so's you'd notice it!' grinned Bob.

'Worst ever, lately,' said Nugent.

'The esteemed Quelch is terrifically infuriated!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

Well, I think even Quelch would be a bit sympathetic,' said Bunter. 'I expect he's got feelings. Even school-masters have feelings, though you mightn't think it. I hope it will be all right.'

'Hopeful chap, Bunter,' remarked Bob.

'I mean, the poor old mater being ill, you know—.'

'Are you going to tell Quelch that again?'

'It's true!' howled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, you can cackle,' hooted Bunter. 'But I jolly well had to cut, and if Quelch is shirty, I don't care—.'

'Lucky you don't care!' chuckled Bob. 'Here he comes!'

'Oh, lor!'

Judging by the expression on his fat face, he did care somewhat! He blinked very uneasily at Mr. Quelch, as the Remove master came up. Quelch certainly did not look in a very good temper. He had, in fact, had much to try his temper, of late.

The gimlet-eyes gleamed at Bunter.

'So you have returned, Bunter!' said Mr. Quelch, in a deep, deep voice.

'Ye-e-es, sir,' gasped Bunter. 'I-I'm so glad to— to be back, sir—.'

'What?'

'I—I—I am really, sir! I—I've missed you, sir—I—I never thought that I should miss you so much, sir, but I—I did, sir—.'

'That will do, Bunter.'

The Famous Five looked on in silence,—not unsympathetic. What was coming to Bunter, they did not know: but they had no doubt that it was going to be something unpleasant—very unpleasant indeed. A fellow who bolted from school, and stayed absent for four or five days, obviously had something unpleasant coming to him.

Whether Quelch would march him off to the Head, to be sacked— whether he would consider that a flogging might meet the case— or whether it would be six of the very best in Quelch's study, they could not guess. Neither could they guess upon what Bunter was banking, in his hope that it would be 'all right'. They were not likely to guess that, for once in his unvarnished career, Billy Bunter had been telling the truth. Nobody could be expected to guess that one.

'You left the school without leave, Bunter—!'

'You see, sir, my— my mater being so ill, sir, and—and—and—and—.'

'Oh, my hat!' murmured Bob Cherry. It was really amazing to hear Bunter spinning that yarn over again. But what followed was more amazing. Mr. Quelch did not, as expected, go off at the deep end. He gave a brief nod.

'I am now aware, Bunter, that such was the case. I was informed so by Mr. Bunter. Otherwise, you would not have been allowed to return here at all. But for your many unscrupulous fabrications, Bunter, I should have believed your statement, and given you leave. But for your habitual unvarnishedness—your ineradicable untruthfulness—.'

'Oh, really, sir—.'

'Silence! In the circumstances—.' Quelch paused. Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at Mr. Quelch, at Bunter, and at one another, almost wondering whether their ears were deceiving them.

'We're dreaming this!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'The dreamfulness is terrific.'

'In the circumstances.' went on Mr. Quelch, slowly, 'your outrageous conduct will be pardoned, Bunter. But—.' He paused again. Billy Bunter blinked at him uneasily. It was all right' so far: but it seemed that there was something still to come.

'On Monday last, Bunter, I gave you an imposition.'

'Did—did you, sir?' stammered Bunter. He had forgotten all about those five hundred lines. Quelch, it seemed, had a better memory.



'I directed you, Bunter, to write out, five hundred times, the Latin phrase *Magna est veritas et praevalebit*,' said Mr. Quelch, grimly. 'That imposition was given you, Bunter, as a penalty for untruthfulness. You have not yet written those lines. Bunter.'

'I—I—I—.'

'You will write them this afternoon, Bunter.'

'Oh,lor!'

'You will bring those lines to my study after tea, Bunter.'

'I—I—I— say, sir—.'

'If you fail to do so, you will be caned, and your imposition will be doubled!'

'Oh, crikey!'

Mr. Quelch rustled on. Billy Bunter blinked after him, as he departed, with so ferocious a blink that it might almost have cracked his spectacles.

Bunter really had been let off lightly. After all his extraordinary antics, it was after all, 'all right',— so far as his 'bolt' was concerned.

That was all very well: but he did not want to spend Saturday afternoon writing lines. He did not want to sit in No. 7 Study scrawling, five hundred times over, *Magna est veritas et praevalebit*— useful as that maxim might have been to him, had he reflected on it! Very much indeed he did not.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

. He blinked dismally at the Famous Five.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'How did it happen, Bunter?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Eh? How did what happen?'

'According to what Quelch said, you were telling the truth for once—.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'What did it feel like, to tell the truth for the first time in your life, old fat man?' inquired Bob.

'How did it happen? Was it your idea that you'd try anything once?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap! You heard what Quelch said— jumping on a chap with lines, the minute he shows his nose in the place! I say, which of you is going to help me with those lines?'

'Echo answers which!' said Nugent.

'Esteemed echo answers that the whichfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows, there's five hundred of them!' urged Bunter. 'Suppose you fellows do fifty each, and I'll do the other hundred—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I think it's pretty thick,' said Bunter. 'Doubting a fellow's word, and giving him five hundred lines, and all that. That's the sort of justice we get here! But I say, you fellows. I've spent all my money on my railway fare,' added Bunter. 'I hadn't anything left over, and I never spent it on a cake at the station—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, do stop cackling! Will you fellows lend me five bob till my postal order comes? I told you I was expecting a postal order—.'

'Good-bye, Bunter.'

'I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!' howled Bunter, with a glare at five departing backs. 'I say— look here— Beasts!'

Billy Bunter was hungry after his journey. A cake at the station had made no difference to that. But a few minutes later, a glad sound impinged upon his fat ears: the clang of the dinner-bell! Bunter rolled into hall. There was steak-and-kidney pie! The fattest face at Greyfriars beamed over the dining-table. So long as dinner lasted, at least, the Owl of the Remove was quite pleased to be back at Greyfriars again!

## NEWS FOR BUNTER

'BLOW!'

'Bother!'

'What a life!'

'Rotten!'

'The rottenfulness is terrific!'

'Bother Quelch and his tosh!'

'Blow!'

Never had so disgruntled a crowd been gathered at the door of a form-room at Greyfriars School.

It was just on three. At three o'clock, Mr. Quelch was to let his form into the form-room, for an hour of detention. After the hilarious proceedings in the French class-room the day before, Quelch had taken over Extra School: and it was very improbable that there would be any more banging desk-lids, whizzing books, or crashing blackboards. There was going to be an hour's grind under Quelch's gimlet-eye: unrelieved by anything in the nature of a rag. And it was a half-holiday: a sunny autumn afternoon: and the open spaces called!

Smithy, with his usual recklessness, had proposed 'walking out' on Quelch that afternoon. The Remove were in a mutinous mood: but not quite to that length. But their remarks, like those of Truthful James's invalid friend, were 'frequent and painful and free'. Even quiet and sedate fellows like Tom Redwing and Mark Linley joined in the chorus.

Had Mossoo been taking Extra again that day, probably he would have had the time of his life. It was possible that even Quelch might not get through the hour without a spot of trouble.

'It's too jolly thick!' said Bob Cherry. 'Nobody knows a thing about Quelch's tosh—.'

'What silly ass could have bagged it?' said Harry Wharton. 'Why doesn't the fathead trot it back? We're all landed till Quelch gets it back.'

'And he won't be happy till he gets it!' sighed Bob.

'But who the dickens—!' said Nugent.

'Jolly well wish I knew!' growled Johnny Bull. 'I'd jolly well boot him black and blue till he coughed it up.'

'Same here,' said Squiff.

'The samefulness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But the knowfulness is a boot on the other leg.'

'Did anybody bag it?' sneered the Bounder. 'More likely Quelch has shoved it somewhere and forgotten where.'

'The elephant never forgets!' said Bob, shaking his head.

'Somebody had it,' said Skinner. 'Look here, Smithy, if it was you—.'

'Asking for a thick ear?' snapped the Bounder.

'Well, it was somebody, and you were after it—.'

'Was it you, Skinner?' sneered Smithy. 'It's just one of your monkey-tricks, and you're the fellow to leave us all in the soup, rather than own up and take your gruel.'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob. 'If it was you, Skinner—.'

'It wasn't!' yelled Skinner, in alarm. 'Think I'd be squatting in Extra every day, if I knew where the rubbish was?'

'Somebody's doing just that!' said Johnny Bull, with a suspicious eye on Harold Skinner. 'If it was you—.'

'I tell you—.'

'And I tell you—!'

'Not much use ragging about it,' said Harry Wharton. 'That won't get us anywhere. We're for it till that tosh turns up.'

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Oh, blow away, Bunter!'

Billy Bunter rolled up the corridor, and blinked at the crowd of excited and disgruntled juniors in surprise.

The fat Owl, so far, was unaware of any unusual happenings at Greyfriars during his absence. Why the Remove had gathered at their form-room door, on a half-holiday, he did not know. Since dinner, at which he had done remarkably well, Bunter had been reposing his fat person in the most comfortable armchair in the Rag. That armchair would have been still encircling his plump form, but for *Magna est veritas et praevalabit*, which was hanging over his fat head like the sword of Damocles. But those lines had to be done for Quelch, and the fat Owl had extracted himself reluctantly from the armchair at last. Now he was looking for some fellow to help him with his lines. He was quite surprised to find the Remove where he found them. The fat Owl had quite forgotten his exploit in Quelch's study on the eve of his 'bolt'. Once or twice, at Bunter Villa, it had recurred to his fat memory, and he had chuckled at the thought of Quelch hunting for his 'tosh'. Not for one moment had he thought, or dreamed, of the disastrous consequences that had accrued in the Remove at Greyfriars. Neither did he remember it now. He was not likely to remember such a trifle, with five hundred lines hanging over his head.

'I say, you fellows—!' repeated Bunter, as he rolled up.

'Don't bother, fathead.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Bunter's the lucky one,' remarked Nugent. 'The only man not in Extra. I suppose Quelch won't shove him in too, as he was away—.'

'Better roll away, barrel,' said Peter Todd. 'Quelch might rope you in too— he's jolly fierce these days.'

'You fellows in Extra?' asked Bunter. 'Not the whole form?'

'Every man Jack,' answered Bob.

'I say, that's pretty rotten,' said Bunter. 'I say, I've got five hundred lines, and I want somebody to help me with them—.'

'Bother you and your lines!'

Snort, from Bunter. Possibly he sympathized with a whole form in Extra. But if all the fellows were in Extra that afternoon, obviously there was nobody to help him out with *Magna est veritas et praevalabit*. That was where the shoe really pinched!

'Better cut off and do your lines, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'You won't find Quelch in a good temper if you're late with them.'

'Not likely!' grinned Bob. 'Henry's on the war-path these days. Bunter. You have to be wary with Henry.'

'But what have you been up to, while I've been away?' asked Bunter. 'What has Quelch given you all Extra for?'

'Nothing!' snapped the Bounder.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter. He was not likely to believe that a form-master, whose model was Aristides the Just, had given his form Extra for 'nothing'.

'You cackling fat ass, if you've come here to be booted—.'

'Oh, really, Smithy—.'

'Some silly ass has been larking in Quelch's study,' explained Harry Wharton.

'Oh, good!' said Bunter. 'Serve him jolly well right— jumping on a fellow with lines the minute he shows his nose! I say, what was it you did— was it drawing-pins in his chair? I hope he sat on them!'

'Fathead! Some potty ass bagged that tosh of his,' said Bob Cherry. 'That jolly old History of Greyfriars—.'

'Eh?'

'Nobody knows who it was—.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'And we're all in Extra till he gets it back!' said Bob. 'And goodness knows when that will be.'

'Oh, crumbs!'

Billy Bunter blinked at the crowd of juniors, his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles. This was news for Bunter — startling news! It dawned upon his fat brain that his exploit in Quelch's study had not been without consequences. Evidently, there had been happenings at Greyfriars during his absence.

'Quick—quick—quick—Quelch's His—his—history of Gig—gig—Greyfriars!' stuttered Bunter.

'Oh, crikey!'

'That very tosh!' said Bob. 'Some blithering chump pinched it out of the drawer in his study—.'

'Oh, jiminy!'

'And the potty ass is keeping it dark,' said Johnny Bull. 'We're all in Extra till he coughs it up.'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I say, is—is—is Quelch wild?'

'Is he!' said Bob. 'Sort of! Wild isn't the word!'

'Mad as a hatter!' said Peter Todd.

'The madfulness is terrific.'

'I don't envy the silly ass, when Quelch spots him,' said Squiff. 'Quelch will take his skin off!'

'Oh, lor!'

'I—I—I say, you fellows, it wasn't me!'

'We know that, fathead,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'You're idiot enough, but you were away—'

Quelch won't get after you, ass.'

Billy Bunter was glad to hear it. He had no desire whatever to interview his form-master, for the skinning process suggested by Squiff. He shuddered at the thought.

'Nobody knows who it was,' said Harry. 'I can't make it out— any decent fellow would own up, now we've all got it in the neck. The fellow must be a real rotter, whoever he is.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

'A crawling toad!' said Bob.

'Oh!'

'A genuine worm!' said Nugent.

'Oh!'

'The wormfulness is terrific.'

'Oh!'

'A measly funk,' said Squiff.

'Oh!'

'Wouldn't I just like to boot him, whoever he is!' said Bolsover major.

Bunter backed away.

'Quelch will give him enough, when he gets him!' said Bob. 'He won't leave a lot of skin on him!'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo— mind your eye! Here comes Quelch!'

Voices died away, as Mr. Quelch came rustling up to the form-room. His face was grim. Other faces were rather grim, too. As for Billy Bunter, he blinked at his form-master in terror. If Quelch guessed—!

Quelch was not likely to guess! He gave Bunter a glance. It was a frowning glance: Bunter was not in his good books: neither was Quelch in the bonniest of moods. But certainly no suspicion crossed his mind that the fat Owl blinking at him could have elucidated the mystery of the missing typescript.

'Bunter!'

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'It wasn't me, sir.'

'What? What do you mean, Bunter?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I mean—n—n—nothing, sir.'

'You are not in Extra School, Bunter. You may go,' rapped Mr. Quelch. 'Go away at once.'

Bunter went. He was glad to. Never had he been so glad to escape the penetrating glance of that gimlet-eye. He was quite in a perspiration when he rolled into his study, and sat down in Peter Todd's armchair.

'Oh, lor'!' breathed Bunter.

From the bottom of his fat heart, Bunter wished that he hadn't paid Quelch in advance! But it was rather too late to wish that now. The deed was done— the missing typescript was parked up Quelch's chimney, where, obviously, Quelch hadn't thought of looking for it! And if Quelch found out who had parked it there—! It was awful to contemplate! Quelch, certainly, was not going to make that discovery, if Bunter could help it.

'Oh, crikey!' he murmured.

Luckily, nobody was likely to find out. That, after all, was the most important point, from Billy Bunter's point of view. It was too bad that the whole form were booked for Extra,— Bunter realized that. But he was not booked for Extra with the rest— so things were not so bad as they might have been! And he had those lines to do!

He did not linger in Toddy's armchair. Quelch, evidently was in a fierce frame of mind: and he had to have those lines. Bunter rolled to the study table and sat down to it. With inky fingers, he proceeded to scrawl *Magna est veritas et praevalabit* over and over again. And he did not, as Quelch perhaps hoped, derive any instruction from the lines he was scrawling. Whether truth was great, and whether it would prevail or not, Billy Bunter couldn't have cared less.

A RAG IN THE REMOVE

'BLESS my soul!' said Mr. Quelch.

He was puzzled and irritated.

The Remove fellows stared. Some of them grinned.

Almost all were, like Quelch, puzzled. It really was surprising. Never, so far as any fellow present could remember, had such a thing happened before. What was the matter with the door of the form-room was quite mysterious,— as mysterious as the disappearance of the History of Greyfriars.

The form-room door was, as a rule, kept locked. It was Quelch's custom to let in his form at the appointed time. Now he was prepared to do the same for. Extra School, as he was accustomed to do for normal school. He inserted the key in the lock— he turned it— he pushed the door. But the door, surprisingly, did not open.

It had never been known to jam. It was a big oak door, and it rolled on well-oiled hinges. How could it jam? But if it had not jammed, there was something else amiss: for it did not open, at Quelch's push. He pushed harder, and still it remained fast.

'Bless my soul!' repeated Mr. Quelch.

It was extremely annoying. All eyes were on him: and without looking round, he was aware of faces melting into grins. Quelch's difficulty seemed to amuse his form: and Quelch did not like in the very least being an object of amusement to the Remove.

'What the dickens is the matter with it?' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Jammed somehow,' said Nugent.

'The jamfulness seems to be terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in a low voice that did not reach Quelch. 'But the longer the jamfulness, the betterfulness, my esteemed chums.'

'What-ho!' murmured Bob. 'Anything that cuts short Extra—.'

'Quitefully so!' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'All work and no play makes the cracked pitcher go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

Mr. Quelch glanced over his shoulder, with a glinting eye.

'Silence!' he rapped.

The whispering faded out. But the grins increased, as Mr. Quelch exerted himself at the door. He pushed, and pushed, and pushed. Under his exertions, the door yielded, the fraction of an inch. But it would go no further. Quelch fairly extended himself, putting every ounce into it. He was growing red in the face. Still that obstinate door did not stir.

All the form stared on, with grinning faces. Really, nobody but Quelch wanted to get into that form-room. 'Extra' was slipping by: and the longer they loafed in the corridor, watching Quelch doing physical jerks at the door, the better the Removites were pleased. In fact they were beginning to enjoy the show.

'Upon my word!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

He gathered all his strength for a final shove. The Remove watched him with deep interest. Smithy closed one eye at the Famous Five. From which they guessed that there was one fellow present who knew what was the matter with that door!

'Ooooh!' breathed Mr. Quelch, breathlessly, as he gave it up. His final tremendous shove had had no effect whatever on the door.

He turned round to the Remove. Every face became serious at once— grins vanished as if wiped off by a duster. Quelch's look indicated that it was no time for grinning.

'Something is amiss with this door!' said Mr. Quelch, in a very deep voice. 'The only explanation is that it has been secured from the inside— probably with a wedge of some kind.' It had dawned on Quelch at last!

'Has any boy present been in the form-room since third school?' inquired Mr. Quelch, in the same deep voice.

'Wasn't the door locked, sir?' asked Vernon-Smith, meekly.

'The door was locked, Vernon-Smith. Whoever entered the form-room must have done so by the window.' Mr. Quelch scanned face after face. 'I have no doubt that the boy is present here now.'

Quelch really could have no doubt about that. But if the boy was present, he gave no sign. The Bounder was looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth. Mr. Quelch breathed very hard. This was a 'rag'. Actually, some young scamp in the form was venturing to rag Henry Samuel Quelch! The form-room window was wide open in the pleasant sunny weather: any fellow who liked could have clambered in, choosing a judicious moment when the coast was clear. Some young scamp, it appeared, had done so— with the idea of putting 'paid' to Extra that afternoon! Quelch's look grew more and more expressive as he scanned faces.

But scanning faces told him nothing. He had all the Remove to choose from, if he wanted the culprit.

'Wait here!' he snapped, at last. And he rustled away down the corridor and disappeared. The Bounder chuckled.

'Is Quelch shirty?' he inquired.

'Is he?' chortled Bob Cherry.

'The shirtfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The esteemed and ridiculous Quelch is infuriated.'

'I wonder who jammed the door!' remarked Smithy.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Remove had looked very serious under Quelch's eye. But they did not look at all serious now. It was a hilarious crowd gathered at the form-room door. Quelch had awarded his form Extra— Quelch was getting a Roland for his Oliver. What he was going to do about it was an interesting question. In any case, Extra was slipping by, minute after minute.

The Remove waited. They were quite content to wait.

Chatting and chuckling in the corridor was rather more agreeable than sitting in Extra.

'What's the old boy up to, I wonder!' said Skinner. 'Getting in at the window. perhaps!'

'Oh, my hat! Quelch is a bit ancient for monkey-climbing!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'There goes the quarter!' said Bob, as a chime was heard from the clock-tower. 'That's fifteen minutes off Extra.'

'Good egg!'

'The goodfulness of the egg is—.'

'Terrific and preposterous!' chuckled Bob. 'I say, what about leap-frog in the passage while we're waiting for Quelch! He can't expect us to stand here doing nothing.'

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Better be good!' he said. 'Quelch won't come back in a nice temper.'

'Ha, ha! Not likely.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Mind your eye— here he comes.' There was sudden silence as Mr. Quelch reappeared.



Nobody was disposed to laugh, after one glance at his expressive countenance.

He came up to the form-room door, without a word.

At the door he stood, apparently waiting,— the juniors wondered for what. Then a sound was heard from within the form-room. It was the sound of a breathless grunt.

'Are you there, Gosling?' rapped Mr. Quelch. Grunt again!

'Do you hear me, Gosling?'

'I 'ear you, sir!' came back a grunt. 'I'm 'ere! Which a-getting in at that winder ain't so blooming easy at my time of life, sir, and wot I says is this 'ere—.'

'Kindly do not use such expressions, Gosling!' snapped Mr. Quelch. 'Lose no time in removing whatever obstacle it is that prevents this door from opening.'

'My eye! It's a blooming pointer—,' came Gosling's crusty voice through the door. 'A blooming pointer jammed under the blooming door!'

'I have asked you, Gosling, not to use such expressions!' hooted Mr. Quelch.

'I mean it's a blinking pointer, sir—.'

'Whatever it is, Gosling, remove it immediately.'

'Yessir.'

Gosling's breathless grunts were heard again. He seemed to find some difficulty in removing that obstacle. No doubt Smithy had driven it well home under the thick oak door: and Mr. Quelch's efforts from outside had jammed it still more securely. Gosling grunted and grunted, but the door did not open, and Mr. Quelch rapped on it impatiently. 'Gosling! Why do you not remove that obstacle immediately?' he barked. 'I am waiting here, Gosling.'

'Which it won't come out,' gasped Gosling. 'The blooming thing— I mean the blinking thing is jammed too 'ard, sir. Wot I says is this 'ere—.'

'Remove it at once, Gosling.'

Snort, from within the form-room. Then Gosling was heard grunting again over his difficult task. Behind Mr. Quelch's majestic back, the Removites exchanged joyous grins. The longer this lasted, the better, in the opinion of the Remove. Minutes were ticking by while Gosling wrestled with that pointer jammed under the door. Mr. Quelch rapped again impatiently.

'Gosling—!'

'Urrrrrrggh!'

'You are wasting time, Gosling—. You are wasting a great deal of time—.'

'More power to his giddy elbow!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Do you hear me, Gosling?'

'I got both 'ands to it!' snorted Gosling from the other side of the door. 'I'm a-lugging at the blooming thing as 'ard as I can! I think it's coming, sir, blow it.'

Bump!

It was coming— and it came quite suddenly. Gosling, with both hands to it, lugging, seemed to be taken by surprise when it came out suddenly. A loud bump told that Gosling had inadvertently sat down.

'Ow!' came a loud howl.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Mr. Quelch glanced round, at laughing faces that became sober and solemn as quickly as they could.

Then he pushed open the form-room door. The impeding obstacle had been removed. Gosling was sitting on the floor, with a pointer in his hands, spluttering for breath. Mr. Quelch gave him a glance of disfavour.

'Gosling? Why are you sitting there? Get up immediately.'

'Which I come down wallop, when the blinking thing come out!' howled Gosling. 'I'm 'urt! Wot I says is this 'ere—.'

'Nonsense! Get up, and go away at once.'

Gosling gave Quelch a look as expressive as Quelch's own. Then he clambered to his feet, and, still with a very expressive countenance, departed. The Removites went quietly to their places. The half-hour was chiming from the clock-tower. Extra was half-over before it began.

Evidently, Smithy's idea of jamming the form-room door was a winner.

Or was it?

Mr. Quelch, from his high desk, surveyed his form. He surveyed them with a glinting eye. He glanced at the form-room clock, and then surveyed his form again.

'Half an hour has been wasted!' he said.

The Remove did not look as if they were sorry to hear it. 'A disrespectful trick has been played, by some boy in this form, causing this waste of time!' pursued Mr. Quelch. 'In these circumstances, Extra School this afternoon will not be for one hour—.'

He paused for a moment. The juniors exchanged blissful looks. But only for a brief moment!

'It will be for two hours!' added Mr. Quelch. 'Oh!'

'Two hours!' repeated Mr. Quelch. 'The form will not be dismissed at four o'clock. The form will not be dismissed till half-past five! We shall now,' he added, in a voice not unlike that of the Great Huge Bear, 'commence!'

They commenced! Extra crawled on its way for two almost endless hours: and there was hardly a fellow in the form who was not longing to kick Smithy!

## THE BOUNDER'S BOOBY-TRAP

'INK?' said Harry Wharton, with a stare.

'Just ink!' answered the Bounder.

'What the dickens—?'

The Famous Five were in No. 1 Study, at tea. It was not quite so cheery as a study-tea generally was in No. 1. Two hours of Extra, with Quelch in his grimmest mood, had not been exhilarating. Even Bob Cherry did not seem to be finding life quite so jolly a proposition as he usually did. The chums of the Remove were discussing Extra, and the dismal prospect of it continuing during the coming week, when Herbert Vernon-Smith came in. To their surprise, he had a jug in his hand. To their further surprise, he requested ink. Apparently the Bounder was collecting ink. Why, was quite a mystery—for the moment.

'Trot it out,' said Smithy. 'All you've got in the study.'

'What the thump do you want a jug of ink for?' asked Bob Cherry, blankly.

'Quelch!' said the Bounder, tersely.

'Oh, my hat!'

'A rag on Quelch, do you mean?' asked Harry. 'Hasn't he asked for it?' snapped the Bounder.

'Are we going to squat in Extra every day because he's lost his tosh, and nothing done? We're going to give Quelch as good a time as he's giving us, see?'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'You and your rags!' he said. 'Forget all about it. That's my advice.'

'I didn't come here for advice— I want some more ink,' said Smithy. 'A pint or two of ink on his napper may make Quelch think again.'

'Are you going to walk into his study, and pour it over his head?' inquired Johnny, sarcastically.

'As good as!' answered Smithy, coolly. 'I'm going to fix it up over his study door, and when he goes back to his study he will get it— right on the nut!'

'A booby-trap-for Quelch— in his own study!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'Great pip! It would make Quelch jump!' he said. 'After all, why shouldn't we make him jump? He makes us jump.'

'The jumpfulness would be terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head. 'But the rowfulness would be preposterous.'

'Too jolly risky,' said Nugent.

'Safe as houses,' said Smithy. 'I've been scouting. I happen to know that there's a Masters' Meeting in Common-Room— not a beak in his study. They're safe for a good while, wagging their chins. Quelch won't know a thing— till he goes back to his study. Then—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Bob.

Harry Wharton opened his lips-but closed them again.

The captain of the Remove was very little disposed, as a rule, to enter into any of the Bounder's wild escapades. But circumstances alter cases. The whole form, in fact, were fed up with Extra: and two hours of it, that afternoon, had, so to speak, put the lid on. All the Remove were in a mutinous mood: and the Famous Five shared the feelings of the rest of the form.

'After all, why not?' said Nugent. 'But you'd better be jolly careful, Smithy. If Quelch caught you in his study—.'

'I'll watch it,' said Smithy. 'Trot out the ink. I want this jug full.'

'Here you are,' said Bob, with a chuckle.

The available supply of ink from No. 1 Study was added to the jug. It was almost full when Smithy walked out: he had already called at several studies, and gathered supplies. He looked next into No. 7.

A fat junior, sitting at the table scribbling lines, blinked round at him with a dismal and dolorous blink. Billy Bunter was still busy with *Magna est veritas et praevalebit*. Sheet after sheet had been covered with scrawl, smears, and blots: but the hapless Owl still had a considerable amount of scrawling, blotting, and smearing to do. But the dismal fat face brightened up a little as Vernon-Smith came in.

'I say, Smithy, old chap, lend me a hand with these lines, will you?' asked Bunter, eagerly. The Bounder laughed.

'Likely— after two hours in Extra,' he said. 'I want some of that ink.'

'It's five hundred,' groaned the fat Owl. 'I've still got a hundred to do, Smithy. I say, old chap, you do thirty, and I'll do the other eighty— what?'

'Fathead!'

'Beast!'

Vernon-Smith reached across the table, and picked up the inkpot. He tipped most of its contents into his jug — that receptacle was now full almost to the brim. Billy Bunter blinked at him in astonishment.

'I say, wharrer you bagging my ink for?' he demanded. 'Look here, you jolly well ain't going to bag my ink, if you ain't going to help me with my lines. Beast!' added Bunter, as the door slammed after Smithy. And the fat Owl wearily resumed *Magna est veritas et praevalebit*.

Quite indifferent to Bunter and his woes, Herbert Vernon-Smith went back to his own study, No. 4, with the jug of ink. Tom Redwing was there, and he eyed the Bounder rather uneasily as he came in.

Smithy gave him a cheery grin.

'All serene,' he said. 'I've got lots!'

'I wish you'd chuck it, Smithy—.'

'I'm going to — over Quelch!'

'But—.'

'Don't jaw, old chap! The beaks won't be wagging their chins for ever! Trot out the bottle and the tin pan. I put them in the cupboard ready.'

Redwing, in silence, handed out those articles from the study cupboard. The Bounder poured the jug of ink carefully into the bottle, and corked it. Then he slipped it under his jacket.

'That's all right,' he remarked. 'Couldn't walk into Masters' Studies with a jug of ink— somebody might notice it!' He chuckled. 'Now that pan— I've got to keep it out of sight.'

It was a light, flat, tin pan. Even the Bounder was not reckless enough to fix up a booby-trap with a heavy article that might have done damage. The tin pan weighed only a few ounces: but it was excellent for the Bounder's purpose.

There were a couple of bulges under Smithy's jacket, as he strolled out of No. 4 Study. But the two hidden articles were safely packed: and his air was quite casual as he went downstairs. With the same casual air, he made his way to Masters' Studies.

Perhaps his heart beat a little faster, as he arrived at the door of Mr. Quelch's study. But it was, as he had said, safe as houses— the coast was absolutely clear. The big oak door of Common-Room, at the end of the passage, was closed— and a faint sound of voices could be heard from that direction. The 'beaks' were all in Common-Room: the studies were deserted. Quietly and coolly, Vernon-Smith opened Quelch's door, stepped in, and closed it behind him.

He gave a quick glance round the study: remembering what had happened there a few days ago. But there was no danger of that now. Quelch was at the Masters' Meeting: and all was secure. The Bounder could not have chosen a more favourable time for his 'rag'.

But he did not lose a moment, on such dangerous ground. He laid the flat tin pan on Quelch's study table, uncorked the bottle, and poured out the ink. The empty bottle he dropped into the waste-paper basket under the table. Quelch was welcome to make what he could of that, if he found it there.

Then he opened the door a few inches, peered out, and listened. Only that faint murmur from the direction of Common-Room reached his ears.

He grinned, and placing a chair close to door, stepped on it, the tin pan in his hands. With great care he lodged the pan on top of the door, resting on the lintel over the doorway.

Quelch, when he came back, would find his door ajar.

Naturally he would push it open and enter. And then—!

The Bounder chuckled breathlessly. Then, perhaps, Quelch would realize that a daily dose of Extra for the Remove, meant something coming back!

He was through now. He replaced the chair, and cut across to the window. Outside, the autumn dusk was thickening. He pushed up the sash silently, and, after a long and careful survey of the dusky quad, dropped from the window.

The moment his feet touched the ground, he strolled away, his hands in his pockets, humming a tune: his manner elaborately casual. Certainly no beak or prefect who had noticed him, could have had the faintest suspicion that, only a few minutes ago, he had been in his form-master's study, fixing up a tin pan of ink over Quelch's door, to fall upon Quelch's unsuspecting head!

Vernon-Smith strolled into the Rag with a smiling face.

Five or six fellows there gave him inquiring looks as he came in.

'Done it?' asked Skinner.

'Sort of,' drawled the Bounder.

'You've fixed it up for Quelch—?' exclaimed Bolsover major.

'Don't shout! I'd rather Quelch didn't know!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'By gum, Quelch will be shirty!' said Snoop. 'He will be inky, at any rate.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

There was a chorus of chuckles in the Rag. Two hours of Extra School that afternoon caused quite a number of fellows to regard the tipping of a pan of ink over Quelch's majestic 'nut' with pleasurable anticipation.

'They're still jawing in Common-Room: drawled the Bounder. 'But when Quelch goes back to his study—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Bounder stood by the open door, with intent ears.

The other fellows grinned and listened in— for sounds from the direction of Masters' Studies, sounds that would indicate that the Bounder's booby-trap had claimed its victim.

And when, at length, there came suddenly, from the expected direction, a wild and frantic yell, there was a general gasp: 'He's got it!'

## BEASTLY FOR BUNTER

'OH, lor'!' groaned Billy Bunter.

It was a tired and weary Owl.

Five hundred lines was not a light imposition. It would have kept an industrious fellow busy for quite a long time. To the laziest fellow at Greyfriars School or anywhere else, it was just awful. But the hapless Owl was through at last.

He had written, or at least scrawled. *Magna est veritas et praevalebit* five hundred times. It seemed to him more like five thousand, if not five million.

Seldom, very seldom indeed, did Billy Bunter stick at a tiresome task till it was finished. But this time he did not venture to relax.

Quelch was 'shirty'. Bunter's 'bolt' had been pardoned, in view of the extenuating circumstances. But there was no doubt that it had left Quelch in a 'shirty' state, with a grim eye on the fattest member of his form. The glint in the gimlet-eye was not to be mistaken. Quelch meant what he had said: it was 'whops' if those lines were not handed in. Work was awful, to Bunter— but whops were, so to speak, awfuller. Quelch had said 'after tea': and it was already past tea time. Bunter had no time to lose. But he was done with *Magna est veritas praevalebit* at last.

He gathered up sheets that looked as if a spider had bathed in ink and then crawled over them. He hoped that Quelch wouldn't specially notice the blots and smears. Blots and smears were Bunter's long suit: and Quelch often did notice them— it was like him, as Bunter reflected bitterly.

Every line had had to be scrawled by his own fat hand.

Not a fellow had lent first-aid,— selfishness all round, as usual! True, they had been in Extra: but Extra was over now, and some fellow might have come up and helped. But no fellow had! With the selfishness to which Bunter was sadly accustomed, other fellows were thinking about their own affairs, not about Bunter's. Very likely— in fact more likely than not— they had forgotten his fat existence!

Only one fellow had even looked into his study— Smithy in quest of ink. He had passed Bunter and his lines by, like the idle wind which he regarded not. Fat lot he cared whether Bunter had lines, and whether he had to take them in that afternoon or bend over under Quelch's cane! Even his study-mates, Toddy and Dutton, hadn't come up: no doubt they were teaing in hall, heartlessly indifferent to Bunter and his woos. Very likely they didn't know he had lines at all, and didn't care! It was a selfish world!

'Beasts!' murmured Bunter.

Not for the first time, Bunter felt that Greyfriars School was a spot chiefly populated by beasts: himself the only really and thoroughly decent fellow there!

He blinked inimically at his scrawls, blots, and smears and smudges, as he gathered them up— *Magna est veritas et praevalebit* endlessly repeated. Billy Bunter loathed all Latin with a deep and abiding loathing: but towards that particular phrase, his feelings were quite deadly.

Wearily he rolled out of No. 7, and down the passage, with his imposition. As he passed the door of No. 1, he heard voices from within. The Famous Five were there discussing the one topic now reigning in the Greyfriars Remove.

'It's too jolly' thick!'

'The thickfulness is terrific.'

'Quelch will jolly well have to think again! Extra all next week. from what it looks like—.'

'Good luck to Smithy, if he gets him!'

'Um! That's rather the limit—.'

'Rot! Quelch's asked for it! There'll be more to come, too, if this goes on! Extra every day-yah!'

Billy Bunter gave a scornful snort, as he rolled on.

Selfish lot, only thinking about Extra: when he, William George Bunter, had been slogging for hours over that rotten imposition,— and now had to take it down to Quelch's study, at the risk of Quelch making out that it was blotted and smeared, and giving him more!

He made his weary way downstairs, and rolled off to Masters' Studies. As he reached Mr. Quelch's study, his fat ears caught the murmur of voices from beyond the big oak door at the end of the passage. The beaks, apparently, were in Common-Room— no doubt 'jawing' as usual! Bunter hoped that Quelch was there with the others. If so, he had only to leave his lines on Quelch's study table:— and if Quelch wasn't there, obviously Quelch couldn't yap at a fellow about a few blots and smears!

The study door was ajar. Billy Bunter peered through the opening, and was glad to observe that the study was vacant. Quelch wasn't there— which was a comfort!

With his imposition in one fat hand. Bunter pushed at the door with the other, and stepped into the doorway.

He did not get further than that!

What happened next was unexpected. It took Billy Bunter completely by surprise.

Something— he did not know what— tipped off the top of the door: something else, of a fluid nature, splashed on his fat head. The startled yell that Billy Bunter gave, as he received it, awoke every echo in every direction for quite a considerable distance.

'Yaroooooh!'

Something clanged on the floor at his feet. It was a flat tin pan. Something else drenched his hair, his face, his fat ears, his fat little nose, and his big round spectacles: ran in streams down his neck, and oozed into the capacious mouth that was opened to capacity, to emit a series of frantic howls.

'Ow! Grooogh! Whoooooh! What's that! Ow! Oh, crikey! Oooooogh!'

Bunter's imposition scattered on the floor, in a sea of ink. He tottered, spluttering ink, clawing at ink, clothed in ink as in a garment.

'Ow! Urrrgh! Grooogh! Wooch! Wow!'

Those frantic splutterings reached many ears. They reached the ears of a listening bunch of juniors, in the Rag, at quite a distance, and Smithy and his comrades exchanged blissful grins. They reached more majestic ears, in Common-Room, nearer at hand: interrupting so important a function as a Masters' Meeting! The big oak door up the passage was thrown open, and three or four beaks stared out.

'Yow—ow—ow—ow—ow! Oh, crikey! Oh, crumbs! Groooooogh!'

'Bless my soul!'

'Who—what—?'

Quelch, Hacker, Prout. Monsieur Charpentier, stared out of Common-Room. Then Quelch came striding out. There was thunder in his brow as he came.

'Bunter! Is—is—is that Bunter?' Really, Quelch could hardly recognize the fattest member of his form, in his clothing of ink.

'Ow! wow! ow! Grooogh! I'm all inky—yow—ow!'



BUNTER'S IMPOSITION SCATTERED ON THE FLOOR, IN  
A SEA OF INK

'Upon my word!' breathed Mr. Quelch.

He gazed at Bunter—at the inky tin pan—at the flood of ink on the floor, and Bunter's lines swimming in it. He understood. It was a booby-trap, fixed up over his study door—intended for whom? Bunter had walked into it—but for whom had it been intended?

'Upon my word!' repeated Mr. Quelch.

'Ow! Ow! I'm all inky—ow! Something fell on my head—wow! I'm all inky—it's running down my neck—ow! ow!'

Quelch breathed hard—very hard! He was intensely angry: but he was, at the same time, feeling a little grateful to Bunter. But for Bunter coming to his study with his lines, Quelch knew upon whose majestic nut that flood of ink would have descended!

'Bunter—!'

'Ooogh! Grooogh! Ow! Grooogh!'

'Go away at once, Bunter, and wash yourself! You are in a shocking state! Go away at once.'

'Ow! ow! Oh, crikey! Wow!'

Billy Hunter tottered away down the passage, leaving Quelch gazing, with a very expressive gaze, at the inky swamp in his doorway. The fat Owl gurgled and gasped as he went. Ink oozed all over Bunter, and he left a trail of inky spots behind him. As he turned the corner at the lower end of the passage, he almost ran into a Remove fellow. Herbert Vernon-Smith had come along, as near as he dared, in the hope catching a glimpse of Quelch reeking with ink. He jumped almost clear of the floor, in his surprise, as an inky Owl came round the corner, spluttering. 'Oooogh! Grooogh-urrrrgh—.'

'Bunter!' gasped Smithy.

Billy Bunter gave him an inky blink.

'Urrggh! Look at me!' he gasped. 'I'm all inky—grooogh! I'm inky all over—oooch! Grooogh! I say, some silly ass fixed up a booby-trap for Quelch—ooooogh!—and I got it—groooooogh—!'

'You fat chump!' yelled the Bounder.

'Oh, really, Smithy—.'

'You—you—you—!' Words failed Smithy. Evidently, Quelch hadn't walked into that booby-trap! Billy Bunter had! It was a sheer waste after all! Words failed, and the exasperated



Bounder proceeded to action. Billy Bunter ceased to splutter and yelled instead, as a foot landed, hard, on his tight trousers.

'Yaroooh!'

Why Smithy kicked him, Bunter did not know. But he knew that one was enough, and he fled before the Bounder could land a second one.

## MAULY THINKS IT OUT

LORD MAULEVERER looked very thoughtful.

It was Monday. That morning, Mauly had returned to Greyfriars. 'Nunky' had been left 'on his pins' again: and it had not occurred to Mauly, as it had to Billy Bunter, to think out a dodge for prolonging his absence from lessons and Quelch. He had returned to find his form in an unexpected state,— everything at sixes and sevens. He had heard all about it, before dinner— and after dinner, he was listening in to an excited discussion in the Rag. Almost all the Remove had gathered there: and almost every fellow present was excited and vociferous.

Mauly did not take part in the excited discussion. He sat and listened, his brow growing more and more thoughtful. Matters in the Remove were, in fact, reaching something like danger-point. Extra was due again that afternoon — Extra under Quelch's gimlet-eye, with Quelch in his grimmest mood. It was going on, apparently, world without end: for nothing whatever had been heard of the missing manuscript, and Quelch was very unlikely to relent. If Smithy had fancied that a process of 'ragging' would ameliorate the situation, he had quite another guess coming. 'Cheek' on the telephone, jamming a form-room door, and a booby-trap in his study, had made no difference— except to make Quelch grimmer than ever.

'Walk out!' The Bounder almost shouted. 'Walk out on him this afternoon. I'm going to, anyway. Who's coming?'

There was a buzz of voices. 'Walking out' on Quelch, instead of going into Extra, was a wild idea, but it had more appeal now than it had had earlier. The Remove were fed up with Extra— fed up to the chin. Even the Famous Five were disposed now to come round. A dozen other fellows buzzed approval.

'After all, why not?' said Bob Cherry.

'The whynotfulness is terrific,' concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I'm jolly well fed up, for one!' growled Johnny Bull. 'We're all fed up,' said Harry Wharton.

'But—.'

'We've had enough,' said Nugent.

'More than enough,' said Squiff.

'Try it on!' said Vernon-Smith. 'Look here, we'll all walk out after class. We'll all stay out of gates and let Quelch whistle for his Extra.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Good egg!'

'Let's!'

It was quite a roar, in the Rag. The reckless Bounder was getting his way, at last: there was mutiny in the air. Lord Mauleverer's thoughtful face became graver, as he listened.

'It's settled, then!' exclaimed Smithy. His eyes were gleaming. 'After class, we all walk out—.'

'Hear, hear!'

Lord Mauleverer sat up, in his armchair. So far, Mauly had not contributed a word. But he weighed in now. 'Hold on a minute, you fellows,' he said, quietly.

The Bounder gave him an angry stare. He was in no mood for pacific counsels.

'You needn't butt in,' he snapped. 'You're not in Extra, — you're in the clear, like Bunter. You can stick around, and if Quelch asks you where we are, you can tell him we've walked out on him, and he can go and eat coke.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Yaas, I can see myself telling Quelch that!' said Mauly. 'But do listen a minute, you men, before you bite off more than you can chew—.'

'Oh, rats!' interrupted Smithy. 'It's going to be a walkout, and Quelch can do what he jolly well likes about it—.'

'Do shut up a minute, Smithy, and let a fellow speak,' urged Mauleverer. 'If there's another way out—.'

'There isn't. Now, you fellows—.'

'Shut up, Smithy, and let Mauly get it off his chest,' said Bob Cherry.

'Rubbish! I tell you—.'

'Give us a rest, Smithy,' said Harry Wharton. 'Cough it up, Mauly, old man. We're all fed up with getting Extra School for nothing, and if it goes on—.'

'It won't go on, if that tosh of Quelch's turns up,' said Lord Mauleverer.

'It hasn't— and it won't—!' snapped Smithy. Harry Wharton shook his head.

'No chance of that, Mauly,' he said. 'The fellow who bagged it is keeping dark, whoever he is. Nobody knows who it was, or we'd jolly well boot him till he coughed it up. But—.'

'Might spot him.' said Mauleverer.

'Likely,' sneered Smithy. 'We've been in Extra since Wednesday, and nobody can begin to guess who snaffled Quelch's tosh. Think you could, you yawning ass?'

'Yaas.'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'My dear chap, it might have been any man in the form, except you or Bunter, who've been away—.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled.

'Let's chew it over, before you walk out on Quelch, and all the fat goes into the fire,' he suggested. 'I've been thinkin' it over, since I heard about it all. Somebody bagged that jolly old *History of Greyfriars* from Quelch's study. It's been missin' ever since. Quelch knows that it must have been a Remove man, and he's clamped down Extra on the whole form till it's taken back,— and you can't blame him—.'

'What?'

'Look here—.'

'You ass—!'

'Pack it up!'

There was a hubbub at once. The Remove were not in a mood of sweet reasonableness: and evidently nobody wanted to hear a word in favour of Quelch!

Mauly waited calmly till the hubbub subsided. Then he spoke again, in the same quiet tone:

'All we've got to do is to find the man, and make him cough it up. Much better than walkin' out on Quelch, in my opinion.'

'But nobody knows who it was!' roared Smithy.

'Not a clue, Mauly,' said Bob. 'Whoever it was funks owning up, and he's going through Extra like the rest of us—.'

'He isn't!' said Mauly.

'Eh?'

'Look at it!' said Mauleverer, while the juniors stared at him blankly. 'The fellow needn't own up and get toco from Quelch. All he's got to do is to walk that tosh back where it belongs, and live happy ever after! Now, it stands to reason that no fellow would stick Extra every day, if he could get out of it by chucking that bundle of tosh into Quelch's study some time when he's off the scene. If it was a fellow in Extra, it would have happened already.'

'But every fellow in the form is in Extra, Mauly.'

'Exceptin' two!' said Mauly.

'Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'You and Bunter—.'

'Exactly,' assented Lord Mauleverer.

'But both of you were away,' said Harry. 'That's why you're not in Extra with the rest. You went on Saturday, and Bunter on Tuesday: and it was on Wednesday that Quelch missed his tosh—.'

'Might have missed it sooner, if he'd happened to look for it sooner!' said Lord Mauleverer, placidly.

'Oh!' exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

'Quelch missed it Wednesday afternoon,' went on Lord Mauleverer. 'From what I've heard, he knew that a Remove man had been after it—.'

'Yes: Smithy,' said Harry. 'But it wasn't Smithy who bagged it—. He had sense enough to play football instead of going after it again—.'

'Mightn't have found it, if he had gone after it!' said Mauleverer. 'Might have been gone already. Quelch jumped to it that it had been taken while he was out that afternoon, having Smithy in mind. But either Bunter or I might have snooped it before then.'

'You!' yelled Bob. 'Mean to say that you—.'

'Not at all!' said Lord Mauleverer. 'But I'm fairly certain that if it was a man in Extra, he would have coughed it up before this. You've all taken it for granted that neither Bunter nor I could know anything about it, because we've been away. Shouldn't take things for granted, dear men. Now, before you walk out on Quelch, and get into a fearful row with the Head, suppose you ask Bunter whether he knows anything about it!'

'Rot!' said the Bounder. But he spoke rather uncertainly.

'Bunter!' said Bob Cherry. 'Oh, my hat! Nobody thought of Bunter— he was away when the row started—.'

'Easy enough to ask him a question or two!' yawned Lord Mauleverer.

'What-ho! Where's Bunter?' Bob Cherry stared round the crowded Rag. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' he roared. 'Is Bunter about? Where's Bunter? Anybody seen a fat snail crawling about?'

'Bunter!'

'Where's Bunter?'

'Bunter! Bunt! Bunt!'

Billy Bunter was not present. But as his name was shouted up and down the Rag, the door opened, and a fat face appeared, and a pair of little round eyes blinked in through a pair of big round spectacles.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Here he is!'

'I say, I heard you calling me. I say, is it a feed?' It was not long since dinner: but Billy Bunter, evidently, was prepared for more!

'I say, you fellows, if it's a feed—!'

Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag.

## CHAPTER 31

### BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER blinked round the crowded Rag. Every eye was upon him,—for once the fat Owl was the cynosure of all eyes. For once, if for once only, everybody was interested in William George Bunter. Did Bunter know anything about the missing manuscript— or did he not? Nobody had thought of it, till Mauly suggested it: but all the Remove fellows were thinking of it now.

Quelch had taken it for granted— everyone had taken it for granted— that the History of Greyfriars had been abstracted, while Quelch was out on Wednesday afternoon. But, after all, had it?

Everyone had been puzzled by the circumstance that the culprit preferred Extra every day, to 'coughing up' the missing typescript. But that was explained— if the culprit was not in Extra at all.

Quite unaware of what was coming, Billy Bunter blinked round him, puzzled. He saw no sign of a feed! 'I say, you fellows, where is it?' he inquired.

'Where's what, you fat ass?' asked Bob.

'The feed—.'

'It isn't a feed, you cormorant—.'

'Isn't it?' Bunter gave him an indignant blink. 'Then what were you calling me for. I'd like to know. I say—.'

'Shut up and listen, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'You've heard all about Quelch's missing tosh, since you came back on Saturday—.'

'Oh!' Bunter looked alarmed. That subject, of all others, was the one the fat Owl most desired to avoid.

'What about it? I—I mean. I don't want to hear anything about it. Nothing to do with me.'

And Billy Bunter rolled doorward.

Bob Cherry put his back to the door.

'Hold on, fatty,' he said.

'I say, I've got to go and see Quelch!' squeaked Bunter. 'He—he told me to come to his study after dinner—.'

'Quelch can wait!'

'I—I mean the Head! I can't keep the Head waiting! Look here. Bob Cherry, you let a fellow pass!'

'The Head can wait along with Quelch!' grinned Bob. 'Blessed if it doesn't look as if Mauly's right,' said Nugent.

'The lookfulness is terrific.'

'By gum!' said the Bounder. 'If that fat villain knows anything about it, and has been keeping it dark—.'

'What do you know about it Bunter?' asked Harry.

'Eh? Nothing at all,' said Bunter. 'How could I know anything about it, when I was away when I did it—.'

'What?'

'I—I mean, when I was away when I didn't did it!' gasped Bunter. 'Don't you fellows get trying to put it on me. Think I want Quelch on my track?'

'Did you bag Quelch's tosh before you went?' roared Johnny Bull.

'No!' roared back Bunter. 'Never touched it! Never thought of it! I wasn't in his study at all, and I certainly never thought of touching his tosh while I was there—.'

'O ye gods and little fishes!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Mauly's put us on to something! Bunter, you fat fibber—.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Did you bag it?' yelled Smithy.

'Certainly not! I tell you I wasn't in the study at all.

Quelch never sent me there when he spotted that onion and I never went. Besides, serve him jolly well right!' added Bunter, warmly. 'Keeping a fellow waiting when he was going to give him six—.'

'Then you did it?' howled Bob.

'I keep on telling you I didn't! Look here, Bob Cherry, you let a fellow pass— I've got to go to Wingate's study—.'

'Bunter, all the time!' said Bob, with a whistle.

'That fat villain, Bunter—.'

'I tell you it wasn't me,' yelled the alarmed Owl. 'Why, Quelch would take a fellow's skin off, if he knew—.'

'What did you do with it?'

'Nothing!' answered Bunter, promptly. 'Never touched it! I didn't know the tosh was in that drawer at all and I never took it out— never thought of giving Quelch one in the eye because he was going to give me six—.'

'So it was that fat ass landed us all in Extra!' exclaimed Peter Todd. 'And then walked off and left us to it!'

'I didn't know you were in Extra, when I was away, did I?' hooted Bunter. 'I thought Quelch would go hunting for his tosh, and serve him jolly well right! Not that I know anything about it, you know. Not a thing! If you fellows can't take a fellow's word—.'

'Boot him!'

'Scrag him!'

'Bump him!'

'Hold on,' said Harry Wharton. 'Bunter, you pernicious porpoise, we all know now that you bagged Quelch's tosh, and you've got to do the right thing. Go to Quelch—.'

Yell, from Bunter.

'Catch me going to Quelch! Why, he would skin a fellow! Besides, I never did it— I haven't the foggiest—.'

'Boot him!'

'Scrag him bald-headed—.'

'I say, you fellows, leggo— I say— yaroooh—!' roared Billy Bunter, as excited fellows collared him on all sides. 'I tell you I never didn't wasn't— Whooop!'

'What have you done with Quelch's tosh?' howled the Bounder.

'Nothing! I never—.'

Bump!

'Yoooo-hoooooop!'

'Now what have you done with Quelch's tosh?'

'I—I—I—leggo!—I—I never touched it, and I only did it to give Quelch a hunt for it. Keeping a fellow hanging about when he was going to give him six—.'

Bump!

'Wow! wow! wow!'

'Where is it?' yelled Bob Cherry. 'We're going on bumping you till you cough it up, fathead! Now, where is it?'

'Ow! wow! I—I don't know anything about it, but—but—but I—I think it might be up Quelch's chimney in his study!' shrieked Bunter. 'Mind, I—I never put it there— never touched it— but—but—but I—I think it might be up his study chimney!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Up the chimney in his study!'

'Oh, gad!'

'You blithering, blethering fat, frump—.'

'In his study all the time— up the chimney!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Of all the fat, footling, fozzling fatheads—!'

'Well, we know now,' said the Bounder, 'and that fat villain has got to go to Quelch—.'

'Beast!' howled Bunter. 'I'm not going to Quelch—.'

'Boot him—!'

'Hold on, you men.' Lord Mauleverer's gentle voice interposed. 'No need for Bunter to go to Quelch— it's all right so long as the old bean gets his tosh back. Bunter knows where he put it, and he can nip into Quelch's study when the coast's clear, and hook it out, and leave it on the table for Quelch—.'

'Good egg!' said Bob. 'Get on with it, Bunter.'

'I ain't going to Quelch's study—,' howled Bunter.

'Why, he might cop me there—.'

'You'll have to chance that! Get going!'

'Shan't!' howled Bunter.

'Boot him!'

'Yaroo! I—I—I mean I—I—I'll go at once!' yelled Bunter. 'Stop kicking me, you beasts! Oh, crikey! I—I—I'm going, ain't I?'

And Bunter went.

## UNEXPECTED

'*Qua*, I think,' said Mr. Quelch.

'*Quo*, undoubtedly!' said Mr. Prout, firmly. Billy Bunter drew a breath of relief, as he heard. Not that Bunter was interested in Quintus Horatius Flaccus, or his Odes, or in the disputed question of *qua* or *quo* in the Third Ode in the Second Book. Billy Bunter knew nothing of Horace or his Odes, and most emphatically didn't want to know.

But those voices proceeding from Common-Room were an assurance that Quelch was not in his study, but at a safe distance therefrom. Which was what really mattered, Quelch and Prout were arguing in Common-Room: and so long as they went on *qua*-ing and *quo*-ing, so to speak, the coast was clear.

Somewhat reassured, but in a state of considerable trepidation, the fat Owl dodged into Mr. Quelch's study, and shut the door after him.

'Beasts!' he breathed.

There was no help for it. It was risky, but Bunter had to take the risk. Somehow or other, the Remove men had 'tumbled' to it that it was he, William George Bunter, who was responsible for the mysterious disappearance of the invaluable typescript, which the juniors disrespectfully described as 'Quelch's tosh'. Once that 'tosh' was restored, the sentence of 'Extra' would be lifted, and all would be calm and bright once more. The fat Owl who had hidden it in the study chimney, had to hook it out again, and restore it.

Otherwise, the booting in the Rag was a mere sample of what was coming to him. It had to be done, and Bunter had to do it.

He rolled across to the fireplace, and picked up the poker. In fear and trembling, in momentary dread of a footstep at the door, he groped inside the chimney with the poker. But that roll of typescript did not seem easy to locate. It had been easy, when the fatuous Owl had paid Quelch in advance, to lodge it on some irregularity of the ancient brickwork. But exactly where it had lodged Bunter did not know, now that he came to grope for it. It was up the chimney, lodged on some corner or other: but he had to grope blindly in search of it. He groped and groped with the poker.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter, as a shower of soot came down.

In his previous exploit, he had dislodged only a few spots of soot. But groping round wildly with the poker in quest of the hidden roll of typescript was a very different matter.

Bunter hoped to see the roll roll down. Instead of which, it was soot that rolled down, in a shower.

'Oh, lor'!' breathed the hapless Owl.

There was a heap of soot in the grate now. There were spots of it over the fender. There were several spots on Bunter. Spots sprinkled over the hearthrug.

If Quelch came back now—!

Terrified by the bare possibility, Bunter groped, and jabbed, and plunged, with the poker: with the result that more and more soot was dislodged, coming down not in spots but in chunks. Soot scattered over lender and rug and Bunter. A large blob of it settled on his fat little nose. But he did not pause to brush it off'. He groped and jabbed frantically, dislodging more and more soot.

Then, suddenly, something rolled down. The plunging poker had hit the target at last!



It was the roll of typescript! It came down with a rush, bringing a cloud of soot with it, and banged into the fender, scattering soot.

'Urrrrrgggh!' gurgled Bunter.

He coughed and sneezed. Soot showered on his fat perspiring face, and some of it penetrated his fat little nose. He sneezed wildly.

'Urrrrrgggh! Atchoooh! Aytishooooohh!'

The roll of typescript, black with soot, lay unheeded in the fender. Bunter, for the moment, forgot it—he even forgot Quelch! He tottered on a soot-spotted rug, doubled up in a Gargantuan sneeze.

'Aytishook! Ooooooh! Atchoooh!' The door opened.

Bunter did not heed even that, for the moment. He sneezed and sneezed! Mr. Quelch, in the doorway, stared at him.

For a moment, Quelch's look was one of blank astonishment. But that was only for a moment. It was succeeded by an expression that was very expressive.

'Bunter!' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, crikey!'

'Bunter! Boy!'

'Aytishoooooh! Atchoooh! Ooooooop!'

Mr. Quelch strode into the study. Billy Bunter spun round and blinked at him with a sooty blink.

He was caught! Quelch had come back: and he was caught! There was soot all over the place, and soot all over Bunter: and Quelch had caught him in the very act! Still, for the moment Bunter could do nothing but sneeze.

'Upon my word!' Quelch's voice, never really musical, sounded now like the filing of a saw. The gimlet-eyes glittered at Bunter. 'Boy! You have dared to come to my study, and rake down soot from the chimney—upon my word!'

'I—I—aytishoooooh—!' sneezed Bunter. 'I—I—I wasn't—I—I never-atchooh!'

Mr. Quelch picked up the cane from his table. He had no doubt, of course, that this was another 'rag': and this time he had caught the offender. So far, he had not been able to trace the unknown person who had 'cheeked' him on the telephone: or the young scamp who had jammed the form-room door: or the author of the inky booby-trap that he had so narrowly escaped. But this time he had caught the ragger in the act! His study was smothered with soot—and there was Bunter, as sooty as a chimney-sweep, in the midst of what he had done!

'Bunter!' The cane swished in the air. 'I shall punish you with the greatest severity for this outrageous act—.'

'Aytishoooooh!'

'This,' said Mr. Quelch, with compressed lips, 'is what the juniors, I believe, call a "rag" . You have deliberately raked down soot from the chimney, and smothered the room with it. Upon my word! I shall—.'

'Atchooooooh! Aytishoooh!' Billy Bunter sneezed a final tremendous sneeze, and found his voice. 'I—I—I say, sir, I—I—I never—I didn't—I—I wasn't—.'

'Bend over that oh air, Bunter. I—.'

Mr. Quelch broke off suddenly. His eyes fell upon a sooty object lying in the fender.

He stared at it. For a moment, he could hardly believe his eyes, keen as gimlets as they were! Then, dropping the cane, he fairly pounced on that object in the fender.

'Bless my soul!' he gasped.

He held it up! He gazed at it. It was sooty,— it was black with soot. But he knew what it was. It was the missing typescript. tied in a roll. It was the celebrated,—found at last!

With fingers that almost trembled with eagerness, Quelch jerked off the string, and unrolled the roll. Yes, there was no mistake— it was the missing typescript! It had suffered somewhat from its sojourn in the chimney— it was shockingly sooty— but there it was— intact! So many days had elapsed since its disappearance, that Quelch had begun to fear that it was gone for good. And here it was, safe in his hands again.

Mr. Quelch drew a deep, deep breath.

The expression on his face no longer out-rivalled that of the fabled basilisk. Actually, he smiled!

'Bless my soul!' he repeated.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles, in sheer terror. He was for it, now.

But was he?

To his utter amazement, Quelch's look, when it turned on him, was almost genial.

'Bunter!' said Mr. Quelch.

'Oh,lor'. It—it wasn't me—!' groaned Bunter. 'I—I mean. I—I never—.'

'Bunter! You have performed an outrageous act here— you have smothered my books and papers with soot— you deserve the most condign punishment. Bunter— the very severest punishment I could inflict—but,' Quelch paused.

Bunter was glad to hear that there was a 'but'.

'But,' went on Mr. Quelch, 'your foolish and disrespectful act in raking soot down from my chimney, has led to a most unexpected and happy result.'

Bunter could only blink at him.

'As you were away from the school at the time, Bunter, you may not be aware that this typescript was abstracted from a drawer in my desk, and hidden by some mischievous boy in my form—.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

'Evidently,' said Mr. Quelch, 'that boy must have hidden it in my own chimney. By sheer accident, owing to the foolish trick you have played here, it has come to light!'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter, again.

'You deserve, as I have said the most condign punishment for having played so disrespectful a trick in your form-master's study— actually raking down soot from the chimney and smothering the room with it,' said Mr. Quelch, sternly. 'But in view of this very unexpected and happy result of your action, Bunter, I shall pardon you.'

Bunter blinked almost dizzily at his form-master.

Clearly, Quelch had not the faintest idea who had hidden that precious typescript in his chimney! His impression was that Bunter, ragging in his study, had brought it to light by happy accident!

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

Quelch, with the precious typescript in one hand, waved the other to the door.

'You may go, Bunter!'

Billy Bunter, hardly able to believe in his good luck, tottered from the study. And he did not grin— a sooty grin— till the door had closed on him.

## SIX OF THE BEST FOR BUNTER

'HENRY'S late!' remarked Bob Cherry.

It was the following morning,— and a very cheery morning. The sunshine was bright: and so were the faces of the Remove fellows gathered at the door of their form-room. Shakespeare's schoolboy, with his shining morning face, could not have looked more cheery than most of the Remove.

The clouds had rolled by! Trouble in Quelch's form, which had threatened to become quite serious, was over. The happy discovery of the missing manuscript had worked the oracle! Quelch was still earnestly desirous of knowing who had abstracted it and hidden it in the chimney: but he was never likely to know: Billy Bunter, at least, fervently hoped so! But that was a matter of only secondary importance to Quelch,— the recovery of his invaluable typescript, undamaged except by a little soot, was what really mattered— and that inestimably precious typescript was now safe back in his own keeping. Extra was a thing of the past.

It was a tremendous relief to everybody. 'Extra School' had fallen on Quelch's form like a blight. They had been restive under it— more than restive. Trouble had accrued: and there had been more in the offing. Now it was 'all clear'. Even the Bounder was glad that the Remove had not, after all, 'walked out' on Quelch.

So it was a cheery crowd at the form-room door. One face, however, had a very thoughtful expression on it. That was the fat face of William George Bunter. Other fellows looked almost as if they were going to enjoy lessons with Quelch. Bunter did not.

'I say, you fellows—!' squeaked Bunter.

'Henry's late!' repeated Bob Cherry. It was several minutes past time: but Henry Samuel Quelch had not yet appeared, to let in his form.

'All the better!' remarked Smithy.

'The betterfulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'He's on the phone,' said Nugent. 'I heard the phone ring in his study—.'

'Good egg!' said Bob. 'Let's hope that whoever it is, will keep him chinning. Jolly thoughtful of him to ring Quelch up just before class.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows—!' squeaked Bunter again.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, now you're back at school, old fat man?' asked Bob.

'No jolly fear!' said Bunter, promptly. 'I say, you fellows, we're going to have a rotten day. Latin with Quelch, then French with Mossoo, and then maths with Lascelles! And— and I haven't done any prep!'

'Look out for squalls, then,' said Harry Wharton.

'I—I say, it's a lovely morning,' said Bunter. 'It must be jolly at Folkestone. Lovely day for the seaside. Pretty rotten sticking in form with Quelch, if a fellow could get a run across to Folkestone.'

'A fellow couldn't!' said Johnny Bull.

'Well, a fellow might!' argued Bunter. 'Suppose—.'

'Suppose what, fathead?' asked Bob.

'My Uncle Carter lives at Folkestone. Suppose he was ill—.'

'WHAT! !'

'Well my mater really was ill, you know, just as I told Quelch. Quelch knows that now, and he knows that he can take my word! Well, suppose my Uncle Carter at Folkestone was ill—.'

'Is he ill?' asked Lord Mauleverer, staring at the fat Owl.

'Eh? No! But suppose he was—.'

'You fat, footling, fabricating fibber—!' said Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'You blithering, blethering bandersnatch,' said Harry Wharton. 'Are you thinking of trying that game again?'

'Well, now Quelch knows how truthful I am—.'

'Truthful!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Fan me, somebody!'

'Yes, now he knows how truthful I am, why shouldn't it work?' argued Bunter. 'I'd rather have a run across to Folkestone, than Latin with Quelch, I can jolly well tell you. I haven't done any prep, and I know I shall skew in con. I say, you fellows, now that Quelch knows how truthful I am, think he would doubt my word again?'

'He might!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'The mightfulness is terrific.'

'Well, my mater really was ill, you know, and Quelch knows it, so why shouldn't my uncle be? I say, you fellows, if Quelch lets me off classes to-day, who's going to lend me my fare to Folkestone?'

'You fat chump!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'If you try pulling Quelch's leg again—.'

'Still got that onion, Bunter?' asked Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here, you men,' growled Johnny Bull. 'There's a limit: and as Bunter's got nothing from Quelch for telling all those crammers, what about kicking him?'

'Jolly good idea!' said Bob. 'Turn round, Bunter!'

'Beast! I say, you fellows, who's going to lend me—?'

'Cave!' said the Bounder. 'Here comes his Nibs!'

There was silence, as Mr. Quelch appeared in the corridor: for once several minutes late for his form.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, a little uneasily. But he had made up his fat mind. It was such a lovely morning, and the Leas at Folkestone were so infinitely preferable to the form-room at Greyfriars. Latin with Quelch, French with Mossoo, maths with Lascelles— or sprawling on the sands, chewing toffee? It was worth trying on, at least. And Billy Bunter, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, squeaked at Quelch as he came up: 'If you please, sir—.'

Mr. Quelch glanced at him. His glance was not too genial. Billy Bunter's bolt had been pardoned, and so had his recent exploit in Quelch's study: but both lingered in Quelch's mind. Neither was he pleased by a telephone-call coming through just when he was due to take his form.

'Bunter!' he rapped.

'Yes, sir! If you please, sir—.'

'I have just received a telephone message, and am desired to tell you that all is well now with your parent,' said Mr. Quelch. 'That is all, Bunter.'

'Yes, sir! But I was going to say, sir—.'

'I have said that that is all, Bunter.'

'Yes, sir. But—.'

'That will do!' snapped Mr. Quelch.

He unlocked the form-room door, and the Remove marched in. Most of the fellows were grinning. Billy Bunter did not seem to be having much luck so far.

But the fat Owl was not beaten yet. While the rest of the form went to their places, Billy Bunter stood and blinked at Mr. Quelch at his desk. A gimlet-eye turned on him sharply.

'Bunter! Go to your place.'

'Yes, sir! But, sir, I—I—I'm feeling awfully upset this morning, sir—,' stammered Bunter. 'I—I—I—'

'I have told you, Bunter, that I have just received a message on the telephone, that you need have no anxiety whatever about your parent.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! But—but it's my uncle, sir—.'

'What?'

'My pip—pip—pip—poor old uncle, sir,—my—my Uncle Carter at Folkestone, sir. He—he—he's ill, sir—.'

'Bunter!'

'He's awfully ill, sir,' said Bunter, pathetically. 'I—I had a letter yesterday, sir—I—I'd show it to you, sir, only— only I've lost it! He—he's lying in bed, sir, and can't move hand or foot—I—. I mean, he can just move a hand to write a letter,— that's all, sir— he— he's got plumbago, sir—.'

'Upon my word!' said Mr. Quelch.

He sat at his desk staring at Bunter. That plump member of his form seemed quite to have taken his breath away.

'I— I'm awfully anxious about him, sir!' mumbled on Bunter. 'Now that he's down with plumbago, sir, and— and can't move, sir, I— I'd like to run across and see him, if—if you'd be so kind, sir, and give me leave. He—he's got pneumonics as well as plumbago sir!' added Bunter, as an extra touch of pathos. 'Mum—mum—may I have leave to go to Folkestone, sir—?'

Still Mr. Quelch gazed at him without speaking. The Remove looked on in silence, wondering whether the thunder was going to roll.

It was!

'Bunter!' Mr. Quelch found his voice, and it came out in a gasp. 'Bunter! How dare you? You are the most untruthful boy in my form, Bunter or in all my experience!'

'Oh, really, sir. My pip—pip—poor old uncle!'

'Silence!' Quelch almost roared. 'Bunter, you will be punished for this untruthful, this fatuous, attempt to delude your form-master.'

'But—but, sir, my pip—pip—poor old Uncle Carter sir—.'

'Silence! You are not aware, Bunter, that it was Mr. Carter who telephoned to me only a few minutes ago—.'

'Eh?'

'Oh, suffering cats!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'That telephone call, Bunter, was from your Uncle, Mr. Carter, at Folkestone—.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'And now— Bunter—!'

Mr. Quelch picked up his cane, and stepped from his desk.

'Oh, lor'! I—I say, sir,—.'

'You need say no more. Bunter! You will bend over, and touch your toes!' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'I—I didn't know it was my Uncle Carter who phoned, sir, babbled Bunter. 'I—I—I mean. I—I didn't mean my Uncle Carter was ill, sir,— I mean my other uncle, sir—.'

'What?'

'That—that's what I really meant to say, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'My Uncle Tuck, sir,—. My uncle at Twickenham—.'

'Bless my soul!'

'Not my Uncle Carter at all sir,— my Uncle Tuck, sir,— my uncle at Twickelstone— I mean at Folkesham— that is, at Twickenham, sir,— my Uncle Tuck at Twickenham, sir,— he—he—he's awfully ill, and—and—and—. I—I—I hope you believe me, sir—.'

Bunter's hope was unfounded!

'Bunter!' said Mr. Quelch, in a deep, deep voice. 'Bend over and touch your toes, immediately! Not another word, Bunter! Bend over!'

'Oh,lor'! But—but I say, sir—!'

'BEND OVER!'

Stentor, of old, could hardly have spoken with more emphasis. Billy Bunter gave his form-master one blink, and bent over, in the lowest of spirits. The cane went up. It came down.

Whop!

'Wow!'

Whop!

'Whoooooop!'

Whop! Whop! Whop!

'Yow— ow— ow!'

WHOP!

'Yaroooooh!'

The last whop rang like a pistol-shot. Louder still rang Bunter's roar.

'Now, Bunter—!'

'Ow! wow! wow!'

'Cease these ridiculous noises this instant, Bunter—.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter made an effort to cease those ridiculous noises! But really it was not easy, after those six whops. 'I have caned you, Bunter,— and in addition, you will write out, one thousand times, *Magna est veritas et praevalabit!* Now go to your place!'

A dismal, and disconsolate Owl crawled to his place.

As the ancient poet remarked, justice, though with lagging foot, will ultimately overtake the offender! It had overtaken Billy Bunter at last! It was a dolorous Bunter that sat out the lesson: and wriggled like an eel as he sat.

'I SAY, you fellows—!'

'Anybody ill again?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'How's your uncle, Bunter?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter blinked reproachfully at a crowd of laughing faces. Bunter could see no cause for merriment. Bunter had had 'six'. He had a thousand lines to come! The fellows might at least. Bunter considered, have been a bit sympathetic.

But they weren't! In fact, every fellow in the Greyfriars Remove, with the single solitary exception of the fat Owl himself, took the view that Billy Bunter had had exactly what he deserved: and could indeed have done with a little more!

'I say, you fellows. I've still got a pain,' said Bunter, pathetically.

'Good!'

'Quelch laid it on—!'

'Good old Quelch!'

'He will jolly well whop me again if I don't get those lines done—.'

'More power to his elbow!'

'Beasts! I—I mean, look here, dear chaps—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Who's going to help me with those lines?' Billy Bunter blinked hopefully at the Famous Five. 'I say, it's a thousand this time! I say, suppose you fellows do a hundred and fifty each, and I'll do the other hundred and fifty—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Sad to relate, nobody was willing to do Bunter's lines for him. And for days to come, Billy Bunter's leisure was occupied, not in reclining in the most comfortable armchair in the Rag, not in exploring other fellows' studies in search of tuck, but in grinding out, over and over again, *Magna est veritas et praevalabit*. And even Bunter began to wonder, at last, whether after all, there might not be something in it!