

THE CROWD ROARED "GOAL! GOOD OLD SMITHY!"

JUST LIKE
BUNTER

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CHAPTER 1

NO BUNK FOR BUNTER

BUMP!

'Wow!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

From Billy Bunter's point of view, it was not a laughing matter. A fellow who tumbled off a window-sill, and landed on the cold, unsympathetic earth with a heavy bump, could hardly be expected to see the comic side of the incident.

But it seemed to amuse Harry Wharton and Co. They came on Bunter quite unexpectedly.

In morning break any fellow who wanted to see Bunter—which few fellows did—would naturally have looked for him in the tuck-shop. Nobody, certainly, would have expected to see him, or hear him, tumbling off the sill of Mr. Quelch's study window.

But that was what the Famous Five saw and heard. It evoked a pained howl from Billy Bunter, and a ripple of merriment from the chums of the Remove.

That window was fairly high from the ground. But any Remove man, excepting Bunter, could have negotiated it. Bunter had more weight to lift than most fellows. He had succeeded in lifting it till he had a fat knee on the sill.

Then he had tumbled.

'Wow! Oh, crikey! Wow!' spluttered Bunter, as he sat.

'Do that again, Bunter!' suggested Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter clambered to his feet. He blinked at the high window-sill through his big spectacles.

But he did not seem disposed to 'do it again' as Bob suggested. One bump on the earth was enough for Bunter. He did not seem, like Antaeus of old, to derive new energy from his contact with the earth. It was a winded and breathless Owl.

'I say, you fellows, give a chap a bunk up!' he gasped. 'That beastly window's too high for me. It's all right—Quelch ain't in his study now.'

'We could guess that one,' said Harry Wharton. 'But what the dickens are you trying to get into his study for?'

'Nothing to eat in Quelch's study, is there?' asked Frank Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can cackle!' yapped Bunter. 'But I'm jolly well going to show him. Quelch is a beast, and I'm jolly well going to tell him so.'

'Eh!'

'What?'

'Not to his face, of course,' explained Bunter. 'You can't tell a beak what you think of him to his face. I don't want to be whopped. I'm going to leave it on his study table for him to see when he comes in. You heard him ragging me in form this morning. He said my spelling was grotacious—'

'Quelch said grotesque!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'I don't care whether he said grotesque or grotacious. I could spell his head off, and chance it. He said I couldn't write the simplest sentence in Latin without a mistake—'

'So you couldn't!' said Johnny.

'Couldn't I?' jeered Bunter. 'What about this, then?'

'Magister noster bestia est'. Is that Latin, or isn't it? Does it mean "Our master is a beast", or doesn't it?'

'Oh, my hat!'

'That's what I'm going to write, for Quelch to read!' grinned Bunter. 'Think it will make him sit up? What? He, he, he! Now one of you give me a bunk up at that window. I want to get through before Quelch comes in.'

But no member of the Famous Five made a move to give the fat Owl the required 'bunk'. They gazed at him almost in horror. That such a message left on Mr. Quelch's table to meet his eyes when he came to his study, would make him 'sit up', as Bunter expressed it, there could be no doubt. Neither could there be any doubt that such impertinence would rouse his deepest ire—with dire results for the perpetrator thereof.

'You howling ass!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'If Quelch found that on his table, he would skin you.'

'The skinfulness would be terrific my esteemed and idiotic Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'How'd he know it was me?' grinned Bunter. 'I'm not going to write it in my own fist, of course. I'm going to write it in capital letters. I'm jolly well going to let him know whether I can write a sentence in Latin. But he ain't going to know it was me. Magister noster bestia est! He, he, he! Fancy his face when he reads that! He, he, he!'

Harry Wharton and Co. could quite easily fancy Quelch's face when he read such a message. That countenance, always a little severe, was likely to assume an expression like unto that of Rhadamanthus at his most rhadamanthine. Even Smithy, the most reckless fellow in the Remove, would hardly have ventured on such a prank. But Billy Bunter seemed to have no doubts. It was a case of fools rushing in where angels feared to tread!

'For goodness sake, Bunter, don't be such a dithering ass!' said Harry Wharton. 'You can't cheek your form-master like that.'

'Wash it out, fathead!' said Johnny Bull.

'Forget it!' said Bob Cherry.

'I'll watch it!' said Bunter. 'Safe as houses! How's he to know who wrote it in capital letters? I'll jolly well show him!'

Billy Bunter, evidently, had made up his fat mind. He was going to 'show' Quelch: though certainly he was not going to let the Remove master learn who was the author of that simple sentence in Latin. All Quelch would know was that some fellow in his form had told him—in Latin—that he was a beast! He had all the Remove to pick and choose from, if he wanted to find out who had done it. Capital letters left no clue!

'Look here, Bunter, you fat duffer-!' said Frank Nugent.

'You're wasting time!' interrupted Bunter. 'Give me a bunk up to that window before somebody comes along.'

'Fathead!'

'Ass!'

'Chuck it!'

'Will you give me a bunk up, or not?' hooted Bunter.

'Not!' answered the Famous Five, with one voice.

'Beasts!'

Billy Bunter turned a fat back on the five. He blinked dubiously at the high sill. Then he clutched at it with fat hands. Undoubtedly the fat Owl was in need of a 'bunk'. But no 'bunk' being available, he was going to manage without it—if he could. Slowly, very slowly, he heaved up his uncommon weight, the Famous Five watching him.

'Stop, you ass!'

'Chuck it, you ditherer.'

Billy Bunter did not heed that good advice. Neither did he make any reply. He had no breath for replying. Breath was always in short supply with Bunter, and he needed all he had for that clamber. He gasped, he gurgled he puffed and he blew: but this time he did not tumble. With a tremendous effort, he landed his fat chest on the window-sill. There he had to pause to pump in breath. It did not occur to Bunter that he was, at the moment, remarkably well placed for a smack on the plumpest trousers at Greyfriars School. But it occurred to Bob Cherry.

Smack!

'Yarooooooh!'

Bump!

Once more, Billy Bunter landed on the unsympathetic earth. He sat there and roared. And the Famous Five, laughing, resumed their trot round the quadrangle, leaving him to roar.

CHAPTER 2

MESSAGE FOR QUELCH

'SMITHY, old chap-'

'Rats!'

'Look here. Smithy-'

'Didn't you hear me say rats?'

Billy Bunter blinked at two Remove fellows coming along by the study windows. Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. They seemed to be engaged in a not very amicable argument. Smithy and Redwing were great pals; but there were many matters on which they did not see eye to eye. One of those matters, apparently, was now under discussion, for Redwing's face was troubled and a little angry, and the Bounder's wore a sardonic sneer. What they might be disputing about. Billy Bunter did not know, and couldn't have cared less. That was of no importance. What was important was a 'bunk' for Bunter up to Quelch's study window.

The fat Owl had resumed the perpendicular. But he had not resumed his efforts to climb in at that window. He was keen-as keen as ever-on telling Quelch-in Latin-that he was a beast, and leaving him to wonder who had told him so. But he was too winded for another struggle with the Law of Gravitation. So Smithy and Redwing had come along just in time. Tom Redwing was no more likely than Harry Wharton and Co. to lend aid in such a prank. But Smithy was just the man for it. Anything that was up against authority found favour in the eyes of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

'I say, Smithy!' squeaked Bunter. Vernon-Smith glanced round at him 'Gimme a bunk up to that window, will you, Smithy?'

'Quelch's window!' exclaimed the Bounder. 'What the thump do you want in Quelch's study?'

'It's a jape on Quelch-'

'Oh, all right, then.'

Tom Redwing caught the Bounder by the arm.

'Don't be an ass, Smithy,' he exclaimed. 'That fat chump will land himself in a row with Quelch if he plays tricks in his study.'

'You shut up, Redwing,' hooted Bunter. 'Smithy can do as he likes without asking you. You gimme a bunk up, Smithy! I'm going to make Quelch sit up for ragging me in form.'

'Come on, Smithy, and don't play the goat,' said Redwing.

'Don't you let him order you about, Smithy! You gimme a bunk up to that window!' squeaked Bunter.

Vernon-Smith shook off Redwing's detaining hand.

The mere hint of being 'ordered about' was enough for the arrogant Bounder. Nobody was going to stop him from doing exactly as he pleased. .

'Get on with it, Bunter,' he said.

'Look here, Smithy-!'

'Oh, pack it up! Go it, Bunter.'

Billy Bunter 'went it' at once. Fat hands clutched at the window-sill again, and Vernon-Smith administered the required 'bunk'. Smith was a muscular fellow, as good at games as any junior at Greyfriars. But he did not find 'bunking' the fat Owl an easy proposition. Bunter clambered, and Smithy pushed and heaved, and gasped for breath.

'Oh, scissors!' he gasped. 'Does he weigh a ton, or a ton and a half? Lend a hand here, Reddy.'

'Not to help that fat chump into a row with Quelch!' answered Redwing.

'Go and eat coke, then,' snapped the Bounder.

He pushed and shoved again at the fattest member of the Greyfriars Remove. Up went Bunter.

A fat head disappeared inside the open window. A fat figure wriggled in after it. Two little fat legs whisked in the air.

Then Billy Bunter plunged in.

His plunge was followed by a bump and a howl.

'Ow! wow! ow!'

Bunter was inside the study now. He seemed to have landed there in a heap.

'Ow! Oh, crikey! Wow-ow!'

The Bounder burst into a laugh, and walked away with Redwing. Billy Bunter was left to his own devices in his form-master's study.

He picked himself up, gurgling for breath. But he did not lose time. Bunter was seldom rapid in his motions: but there was need for haste. Morning break was brief, and Quelch was very likely to come to his study before third school. The fat Owl had no time to lose. The bare thought of being caught there by Quelch was unnerving.

He rolled gasping to the study table.

On that table, among various books and papers, lay a block of foolscap. It was just what Bunter wanted. Hurriedly he picked up Mr. Quelch's pen, and proceeded to indite that simple sentence in Latin, in large capital letters, on the top sheet of foolscap.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter, as he blinked through his big spectacles at what he had written. 'That'll show him! He, he, he!' Probably it would have made any other Greyfriars fellow chuckle! For what the fat Owl had written was-

MAGGISTER NOSTER BESTIA EST!

Billy Bunter was sure that he had the Latin right. He was equally sure of the spelling. Bunter was satisfied with his own orthography, if his form-master was not.

Happily unaware that in the spelling of the word 'magisster' he had left an inevitable and unmistakable clue to the identity of the writer, the fat Owl rolled back to the window. The bell for third school was beginning to ring, as he dropped into the quad.

Grinning, Billy Bunter rolled away to join the crowd of Removites heading for their form-room. For once, Mr. Quelch, generally the soul of punctuality, was not on time to let his form in.

'Henry's late!' remarked Bob Cherry.

'He, he, he!' from Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, perhaps he's found something in his study. He, he, he!'

'Oh! you fat ass-Did you-?'

'Didn't I just!' grinned Bunter. 'You fellows wouldn't give me a bunk, but Smithy did, and I jolly well left that note for Quelch on his table! Magister noster bestia est! He, he, he! I expect Quelch is reading it now! Think he'll like it? He, he he!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, here he comes!' murmured Bob. 'He looks shirty.'

'He, he, he!'

There was no doubt that Quelch looked 'shirty'. He had a sheet of foolscap clutched in one hand, and thunder on his brow. But Billy Bunter was not alarmed, He expected Quelch to look 'shirty' after reading that impertinent message from a member of his form. The shirtier he looked, in fact, the more Billy Bunter was amused.

Billy Bunter was still grinning happily as he rolled into the
Remove form-room.

CHAPTER 3

TROUBLE FOR TWO

'BUNTER!'

Billy Bunter jumped.

Mr. Quelch was standing, with a deeply frowning brow, surveying his form with a glint in the gimlet-eyes. Obviously, a storm was about to break. For a few moments, there was a dead silence, and a pin might have been heard to drop. Then suddenly and sharply, Quelch rapped out Bunter's name.

Why, Billy Bunter didn't know and couldn't guess. If Quelch wanted to know who had left that message in his study, he had a numerous form to choose from. Quelch couldn't know a thing. Yet he rapped out Bunter's name just as if he knew! '

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. 'Yes, sir? It wasn't me, sir.'

The gimlet-eyes fixed on a fat alarmed face.

'What was not you, Bunter?' inquired Mr. Quelch, in a voice resembling the grinding of a very rusty saw.

'Oh! Nothing, sir!' stuttered Bunter. 'I-I-I mean-nothing, sir!'

Nothing at all, sir.'

'Did you enter my study during break, Bunter?'

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged glances. Evidently, the fat and fatuous Owl had left a clue of some sort-which was just like Bunter.

'Answer me, Bunter!'

'I-I-I-no, sir!' gasped Bunter. Truth and Bunter had been strangers too long, to become acquainted at a moment like this! 'I-I-I never went anywhere near your study window, sir.'

'Some boy in this form: said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, 'entered my study surreptitiously during break, and left an impertinent message on my table. Was it you, Bunter?'

'Oh, no, sir! I-I wouldn't do anything syrupstitious, sir!' groaned Bunter, 'I-I never was syrupstitious, sir.'

'I have little doubt, Bunter, that you were the offender.

I do not think that any other boy in my form would spell a simple Latin word in so absurd a manner. Did you write this, Bunter?'

Mr. Quelch held up the sheet of foolscap. All eyes in the Remove fixed on it. There was a general grin as they read:

MAGGISTER NOSTER BESTIA EST!

'Just like Bunter!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Just!' murmured Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked through his big spectacles at that sentence. Quelch, apparently, was making out that there was something wrong with the spelling, and regarded it as a clue to Bunter! So far as Billy Bunter could see, there was nothing amiss with the spelling.

'Bunter!'

'Oh, lor'! I-I mean, yes, sir.'

'Spell the Latin word "magister" at once.'

Billy Bunter brightened up at that. If that was all that Quelch wanted, the fat Owl was ready and willing to oblige. 'Certainly, sir! M-A-double-G-I-S-T-E-R!' spelt out Bunter, cheerily.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from some of the Remove fellows. 'Silence in the form! Bunter, your spelling, whether in English or in Latin, is a disgrace to this Form!'

'Oh, really, sir!' gasped Bunter, 'Is-is-isn't that right, sir?'

'No other boy in my Form would ask that question, Bunter. It appears that you are not aware that there is only one G in the word "magister".

'Oh, crikey!'

'I conclude, Bunter, that it was you who wrote this impertinent message. You entered my study surreptitiously by the window-'

'Oh! No, sir! I-I-I couldn't, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'That-that window's too high for me, sir. I couldn't do it, sir. I couldn't even get on the window-sill, sir. You can ask Wharton or Cherry, sir. They saw me fall off!'

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'Then you admit, Bunter, that you climbed on my window-sill?'

'Oh! No! I-I-I mean-'

'What do you mean, Bunter?'

'I-I-I mean, they-they didn't see me fall off, sir, because-because I wasn't there, sir. I was in the tuck-shop at the time, and they never said they wouldn't bunk me up when I asked them-I mean when I never asked them, and I couldn't get in at that window without a bunk up, Sir-'

'I have no doubt, Bunter, that some other boy gave you assistance.'

'Oh, no, sir! Smithy wasn't there at all-'

'What?'

'Smithy never gave me a bunk up, sir, and-and Redwing never tried to stop him. I wasn't there at all, sir, when they came up, was I, Smithy?' Bunter turned an appealing blink on the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith did not answer that appeal. He gave Bunter only a look. But it was an extremely expressive look. The gimlet-eye turned on him.

'Vernon-Smith!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'Yes, sir,' muttered the Bounder, through set lips.

'I gather from this foolish boy's incoherent ramblings, that you gave him assistance in entering my study by the window.'

'Yes, sir!' answered Smithy, sullenly. 'He asked me for a bunk up, and I gave him one. I didn't know what he was going to do there.'

'You must have known, Vernon-Smith, that in entering his form-master's study in so surreptitious a manner, that stupid boy intended to play some impertinent trick there?'

Smithy made no reply to that.

'The matter is now clear!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Now, Bunter-'

'It-it wasn't me, sir-!' gasped Bunter. 'I-I don't know anything about it, sir. I-I wouldn't think of calling you names, sir. I-I don't think you're a beast, sir, like the other fellows do-'

'Bless my soul! Be silent, Bunter.'

'Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'I-I hope you don't think it was me, sir. I wasn't there when I did it-I mean when I didn't did it-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence! I shall not cane you, Bunter-I can make allowance for your unexampled stupidity. You will write out the word "magister" a thousand times-'

'Oh, crikey!'

'And if you do not spell it correctly, I shall cane you.'

'Oh,lor!'

'Vernon-Smith, you will go into Extra School this afternoon.'

With that, Mr. Quelch crumpled the sheet of foolscap, and threw it into the wastepaper basket. The matter was closed: and the general opinion in the Remove was that both Bunter and Smithy had been lucky to escape six of the best from their form-master's cane.

Neither of them, however, looked either grateful or comforted. It was a half-holiday that afternoon: and Billy Bunter had been looking forward to a long luxurious laze in an armchair before the fire in the Rag. Writing out the word 'magister' a thousand times was likely to keep him busy in his study instead for most, if not all, of that afternoon. Vernon-Smith also had his plans for the half-holiday. Instead of carrying out those plans, whatever they were, the Bounder was booked to sit in Extra with other delinquents, suffering under Monsieur Charpentier and French grammar. The looks he cast at Billy Bunter during the ensuing lesson, might have warned the fat Owl of trouble to come, if he had observed them. But Billy Bunter's fat mind was concentrated on his own woes, and he forgot all about Smithy.

He was reminded of him, however, when the Remove came out after class. Why Smithy landed his foot with tremendous vim, on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars, Bunter did not know. But he knew that Smithy did-and his frantic yell woke the echoes far and wide as the Bounder stalked away scowling.

CHAPTER 4

BLUE STREAK

'BLUE STREAK!'

Billy Bunter mumbled those words aloud. Mr. Quelch gave quite a start.

After dinner, the plumpest figure at Greyfriars School was sitting, or rather sprawling, on a bench under one of the old elms. Mr. Quelch, taking his post-prandial amble, passed quite near him. But Billy Bunter did not observe his form-master in the offing. His eyes, and spectacles, were fixed upon a newspaper, held up in his fat hands. The fat Owl was concentrating on what he was reading in that newspaper, with an earnest attention that he had never displayed in the form-room.

It was quite enough to cause Quelch to give a start of surprise. Billy Bunter, as a rule, seemed to have a rooted objection to the acquisition of knowledge of any kind. There was not a subject in the Greyfriars curriculum that he did not regard as weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. Grammar, geography, maths, were all the same to Bunter -inflictions that a fellow had to endure somehow till he could get out of class. Even his English was not out of the top drawer: his French was the despair of Monsieur Charpentier, and his Latin might have made Quelch tear his scanty locks. Yet here was Bunter, mumbling over 'Blue Streak'; deeply concentrating on an abstruse scientific subject! At least, so it seemed to Quelch.

'Blue Streak', in his mind, was connected with rockets and Space research: a subject of which he would have supposed that Bunter knew nothing, and cared, if possible, less!

Mr. Quelch's glance at the fat junior was, for once, approving. He was surprised, but he was pleased. As he walked on, he wondered whether there might, after all, be some glimmer of intelligence in a member of his form whom he had been driven to regard as hopelessly obtuse.

Billy Bunter noticed neither his coming nor his going.

His eyes and spectacles were glued to that paper.

'Blue Streak!' mumbled Bunter, again. 'They seem to think he's pretty good, and Smithy thinks so too, as he's marked it. Three to one ain't bad, if a fellow could get a quid on.'

If Quelch had still been within hearing of Bunter's mumbling, no doubt he would have been enlightened, and would have realized that the fat Owl's interest in that newspaper was not a scientific one. Fortunately for Bunter, Quelch was now out of hearing.

For several minutes longer, Billy Bunter blinked earnestly and thoughtfully at that paper. Then he laid it on his fat knees, and proceeded to shove one fat hand after another into one sticky pocket after another. But those fat hands came empty away. Not a single coin of the realm came to light, after a careful exploration of every pocket.

'Blow!' grunted Bunter.

Then he blinked up, at the sound of footsteps and voices. Five fellows were talking as they came along the path under the elms.

'That ass Smithy!' Bob Cherry was saying. 'He jolly well knows that he's wanted for Soccer this afternoon, and he has to go and ask Quelch for Extra.'

'Silly ass!' said Johnny Bull.

'Can't be helped, I suppose,' said Harry Wharton. 'What cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows!' squeaked Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! How many G's in "magister", Bunter?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! I believe I had it right all the time.

Quelch don't know all the Latin he makes out. But never mind that now. I say, you fellows, which of you is going to lend me ten bob till tomorrow?'

'The whichfulness is terrific!' chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Only till tomorrow?' asked Frank Nugent, laughing. 'Not till next term, or the term after, or the term after that?'

'Oh, really, Nugent! It's only till tomorrow-I shall have three times as much tomorrow, so you needn't worry about your ten-shilling note if you lend it to me just for today', said Billy Bunter. 'I'm on to a good thing, I can tell you.'

Harry Wharton and Co. were, at the moment, chiefly interested in Soccer, and in the awkward circumstance that Herbert Vernon-Smith, being booked for Extra, had to be left out of the team that afternoon; and they were not in the least interested in William George Bunter. But as the fat Owl made that remark, they gave him their attention. Billy Bunter was a pertinacious borrower: and he could never have remembered how many shillings and half-crowns he owed up and down the Remove. Generally his borrowings went direct to the tuck-shop. But it appeared that he had now found some other destination for them.

'On to a good thing!' repeated Harry Wharton. 'That sounds more like Smithy than you, you fat ass! What have you got into your fat head now?'

Billy Bunter's fat lip curled, disdainfully.

'You fellows ain't sporting!' he said. 'I daresay you've never even heard of Blue Streak.'

'Eh! Everybody's heard of Blue Streak,' said Bob Cherry.

'I don't mean that Space rubbish,' yapped Bunter, irritably. 'Blue Streak's running at Wapshot in the three-thirty, at three to one.'

'Oh! A horse!' exclaimed Bob.

'Well, it wouldn't be a rabbit or a sheep, I suppose,' said Bunter, sarcastically. 'Of course it's a horse. And Smithy thinks he's going to win. Smithy knows something about gees. I say, you fellows, you lend me ten bob, and I'll settle up out of my winnings tomorrow, honest Injun.'

Billy Bunter blinked eagerly at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. The looks they gave him in return were very expressive.

'You blithering, dithering ass-!' said Johnny Bull.

'Oh, really, Bull-'

'You terrific fathead!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Oh, really, Inky-'

Harry Wharton's brows contracted. The Bounder's ways were not his ways, and were no concern of his. But it did concern him to see an obtuse duffer like Billy Bunter seeking to follow in Smithy's footsteps. Smithy had almost miraculous luck in evading the consequences of his recklessness. Bunter was not likely to have any such luck. Six of the best from Quelch, if not a birching from the Head, was the likeliest outcome of Billy Bunter's essay as a 'sportsman' like Smithy. The captain of the Remove reached over and jerked the newspaper from Bunter's fat knees.

'Sporting Snips!' He read out the title. 'You fat ditherer, don't you know that you'd get six if you were spotted with this rag?'

'No business of yours,' retorted Bunter, independently. 'I can do as I like, I suppose. Look here, Blue Streak is a sure snip, and I'm jolly well going to see that man Sanders at the Three Fishers, and have something on. Only my postal-order hasn't come, and he wouldn't take a bet on tick. If you fellows won't lend me ten bob-'

'No "if" about that!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Then you can jolly well clear off, and mind your own business!' yapped Bunter. 'Gimme my paper, Harry Wharton. I want to read up what they say about Blue Streak. Think you're going to walk off with my Sporting Snips?'

'Exactly that!' answered Harry. 'I'm going to walk off with it, and shove it into the fire in the Rag. That's the safest place for it. And the next time you have twopence, you'd better spend it on a stick of toffee, not on this kind of rubbish.'

Up jumped Billy Bunter, red with wrath and indignation. 'Gimme my paper!' he roared.

'Rats!'

'Will you gimme my paper or not?'

'Not!'

'Beast! You gimme my paper!' yelled Bunter, clutching at Wharton's arm. 'You ain't going to walk off with my paper. Gimme my paper, will you?'

Billy Bunter's excited yell echoed among the elms. It reached ears which Bunter certainly would not have wished it to reach. There was a footstep and a sudden sharp voice.

'What? What is all this? Have you taken away Bunter's newspaper, Wharton? What is the meaning of this?'

Quelch, as a rule, seldom had cause to rap sharply at the captain of the Remove. But he rapped very sharply now.

'Is that Bunter's paper in your hand, Wharton?'

'Oh! Yes!' stammered Harry.

'You have taken it from Bunter?'

'ye-e-e-es.'

'Upon my word! How dare you do anything of the kind? This is the first time. Wharton, that I have known you to be guilty of an act of bullying. What do you mean by it?'

Harry Wharton's face crimsoned. The Co. stood silent and dismayed. The fat was in the fire now!

'Bunter' went on Mr. Quelch, in a much milder tone.

'Oh, crikey! I-I-I mean, yes, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'I was very pleased, Bunter, to observe you interested in such a subject as Blue Streak-'

'Oh!' gurgled Bunter.

'I trust, Bunter, that your interest in such serious subjects will continue-'

'Oh!'

'I shall certainly not allow Wharton to take your paper from you. Wharton. I am surprised at this-surprised and shocked. You have taken Bunter's paper from him, and refused to return it.'

'Yes-but-I-I-I-' Harry Wharton stammered, utterly at a loss.

'Hand me that paper at once, Wharton.'

There was no help for it. Quelch held out a commanding hand. In silence. Wharton handed over the paper.

'I shall deal with you later for this, Wharton. I am surprised and shocked, as I have said. Bunter, here is your paper. I-'

Mr. Quelch broke off suddenly.

Now that that newspaper was in his hand, under his gimlet-eyes, he discerned what had never occurred to him up to that moment. The gimlet-eyes almost bulged at the title 'Sporting Snips'. And a paragraph marked round with pencil, which had so deeply interested Billy Bunter, obviously did no deal with scientific subjects! That paragraph ran:

Snipster knows something this journey,
Blue Streak.
Wapshot. 3.30.

Quelch gazed at that paragraph.

For a long, long moment, there was an awful silence. Harry Wharton and Co. stood dumb. Billy Bunter's fat knees knocked together.

Mr. Quelch found his voice at last.

'This is a racing paper!' he said. 'This-this-this-It would appear that Blue Streak is the name of a racehorse. Upon my word! I conclude, Wharton, that that is why you have taken it from this utterly foolish boy-a very proper action on your part. Bunter, how dare you bring such a publication into the school?'

'I-I-I didn't!' gasped Bunter. 'Tain't mine, sir!'

'What? This paper is yours-I heard you demanding its return-'

'Oh! Yes! No! Tain't mine!' gasped Bunter. 'I-I-I found it.'

'You found it!' repeated Mr. Quelch. 'Do you mean that it belongs to some other boy in the Remove, Bunter?'

'Oh! Yes! No! Oh, crikey!'

'If you found it, Bunter, as you state, where did you find it?'

'In-in-in a study, sir!'

'In whose study?'

'I-I-I forget!' gasped Bunter. 'It wasn't Smithy's study, sir. I-I haven't been in Smithy's study, sir. Besides, I only borrowed it-I was going to put it back, sir.'

Mr. Quelch's lips set in a tight line. Without another word, he walked quickly away towards the House, Sporting Snips clutched in his hand. Billy Bunter gasped with relief to see him depart.

'Oh, crikey!' mumbled Bunter. 'I-I say, you fellows, Smithy will get into a row if Quelch finds out that that racing paper was his! Think Quelch will find out?' Only the fatuous fat Owl was in doubt on that point!

CHAPTER 5

NO CATCH

'REDDY, you cheeky ass!'

Tom Redwing was seated in the sunny window-seat of No. 4 Study in the Remove. He was reading a letter, so intently that he did not seem to notice the door open, and his study-mate, Herbert Vernon-Smith, enter.

Neither did the Bounder, for the moment, heed the junior at the window. He closed the door, and crossed over to the armchair by the fireplace. There he stooped, and thrust his hand under the thick, heavy cushion in the seat of the armchair, evidently expecting to find something that was concealed there. But he groped in vain. Then he dragged up the cushion and stared under it. And then his loud and angry exclamation startled Redwing, and caused him to look up from his letter.

'What's the matter now, Smithy?' he asked: with some stress on the word 'now' and a note of impatience in his voice.

As a rule, Redwing was almost inexhaustibly patient with a chum whose temper was never very reliable. Remove fellows often wondered at the friendship between the two: the one so quiet and steadfast, the other so arrogant and reckless. But that friendship was deep and solid, in spite of frequent friction. Now, however, even Redwing's patience seemed to have worn a little thin.

Vernon-Smith gave him a glare, across the back of the armchair.

'What have you done with my paper?' he demanded.

'What paper?'

'Oh, don't humbug!' snapped Smithy. 'You know well enough what paper. I don't have to tell you that I keep my Sporting Snips under the cushion in this chair—you know that I have to keep it out of sight. It's not there now. What have you done with it?'

'Nothing.'

'Where is it, then?'

'How should I know?'

'I know that you've been sermonizing me on the subject, and that you'd hate to see me win a packet on Blue Streak!' snarled Smithy.

'You don't need to win money on races, Smithy, even if you could.'

Your father lets you have more than is good for you.'

'Oh, pack up the pi-jaw! Where's my paper?'

'Don't talk rot, Smithy! You know that I never meddle with your rubbish, and that I wouldn't touch your rotten racing papers with a barge-pole.'

'I tell you it's gone.'

'Well, I don't know anything about it, and don't want to know. Now shut up while I read my letter.'

'Bother your letter. Where's that paper?'

'Skinner may have borrowed it—it's in his line,' said Redwing, scornfully. 'Why can't you leave that kind of dingy rot to fellows like Skinner, or Price of the Fifth?'

'Because I don't choose!' retorted Smithy. 'If Skinner's had it, all right—but after all your pi-jaw on the subject—'

'I won't give you any more pi-jaw. If you want to play the fool and the blackguard, till you get found out and sacked, it's your own affair. Now give me a rest.' And Tom Redwing resumed the perusal of his letter.

The Bounder stood looking at him, far from amiably.

The prospect of Extra that afternoon had not improved a temper that was liable to fly off the handle at any time. Smithy was a keen footballer, and he did not want to miss the Soccer match. But that was not all that was on his mind. He had other plans, also washed out by Extra.

'Look here, Reddy-!' he said, after an angry pause. 'Do let me read my letter.'

'Anything very special in it?' sneered Smithy.

'It's from my father,' answered Redwing, quietly. 'He's home from sea, and he's written to the Head to ask for a few days leave home for me. I hope Dr. Locke will agree.'

'So do I-it will give me a rest from your sermonizing, at any rate,' snapped Smithy. 'Look here, I've got to get word to Sanders at the Three Fishers, and you know I'm booked for Extra, through that babbling idiot Bunter. No good asking you to cut across with a message, I suppose?'

'No good at all.'

'Well, I shall have to cut Extra, and chance it,' said Smithy. 'I'm not going to miss this chance of making a packet on a dead cert like Blue Streak. I'm going to be on, in time for the three-thirty.'

'For goodness sake, Smithy, don't be such a mad ass!' exclaimed Redwing. 'You know that Quelch has his eye on you already-he doesn't trust you-'

'Dear old Quelch!' jeered the Bounder.

'If you cut Extra, he will have you up in his study, and question you-'

'I know that! I've pulled the old boy's leg before, and I can pull it again. Quelch won't get much change out of me.'

'H's as rotten to tell lies to a beak, as to anyone else!' said Redwing, sharply.

'Pi! Pi! Pi!' jeered Smithy. 'Beaks are fair game. It's up to the beaks to catch us out if they can. They can't expect us to help them.'

'I know you think so,' said Tom. 'But-' He broke off, at a sound in the passage-the sound of a well-known and very firm tread. 'That sounds like Quelch now.'

'What the dickens is he coming up to the studies for?' muttered the Bounder. 'By gad, I'm rather glad Skinner's borrowed that paper, if the old ass is coming up for a look round.'

There was a sharp knock on the door. It opened, and the Remove master rustled into the study. Tom Redwing jumped up from the window-seat. Both the juniors faced their form-master; both of them uneasy. Redwing was apprehensive on his chum's account: Vernon-Smith on his own, though he did not allow the slightest trace of it to appear in his looks. The deep frown on Quelch's brow indicated trouble to come: but the Bounder of Greyfriars had, at least, the courage of his misdeeds, and he was perfectly cool.

'Vernon-Smith!' Quelch's voice was deep. 'Here, sir.'

'This paper belongs to you.'

The Bounder gave a start, as the Remove master held out Sporting Snips. With all his cool self-possession, he was taken aback.

Evidently, it was not Skinner who had borrowed that newspaper-for there it was, in Quelch's hand, his gimlet-eyes glinting over it.

'I found this paper,' went on the deep voice, 'in the hands of a foolish boy, who appears to have borrowed it from this study, Vernon-Smith. It is yours.'

For a moment, the Bounder had been quite at a loss.

But a moment was enough for his quick wits to recover. 'Not at all, sir!' he answered: an answer that made Tom Redwing wince, but which came quite coolly and casually from Smithy.

'What? Do you deny that you have seen this wretched publication before, Vernon-Smith?'

'Oh, no, sir! I've seen it before,' answered Vernon-Smith. 'It's been lying about the study since it came wrapped around a parcel.'

'Wrapped round a parcel?' repeated Mr. Quelch.

'Yes, sir! A parcel of tuck from Uncle Clegg's in Friardale. He always packs his parcels in old newspapers, sir.'

'A paragraph in this newspaper is marked with pencil, Vernon-Smith, referring to a racehorse named Blue Streak.'

'Is it really, sir? I hadn't noticed it.'

'You know nothing of this, Vernon-Smith?'

'Nothing at all, sir! So far as I remember, I threw the wrapping-paper under the table when I unpacked my parcel, sir. I'd forgotten all about it.'

There was a long pause.

The gimlet-eyes were fixed on Vernon-Smith's face, as if they would penetrate to his inmost thoughts. But the Bounder was as cool as ice: and there was nothing for even those gimlet-eyes to read. It was Quelch who was at a loss now. Smithy's explanation was so simple and so plausible that it had, so to speak, taken all the wind out of his sails.

'Very well,' said Mr. Quelch, at last. 'I trust, Vernon-Smith, that what you have told me is the truth. For the present, I shall accept it as such.'

With that, the Remove master quitted the study, that offending publication still in his hand.

The two juniors stood silent, Vernon-Smith breathing hard, as his footsteps died away down the passage. Redwing broke the silence.

'He knows, Smithy!' he said. Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

'If you cut Extra, after that-!'

'Not likely!' jeered Smithy. 'I know enough to go in when it rains, Reddy. No cutting for me this afternoon. I shall find some other way.'

'For goodness sake, Smithy, chuck up the whole silly thing!' urged Redwing.

'For goodness sake, Reddy,' mimicked the Bounder, 'chuck up pi-paw, and give a fellow a rest.'

And Tom Redwing said no more.

CHAPTER 6

ONCE TOO OFTEN

'WHARTON!'

'You ass!'

'What?'

'You fathead!'

'What the dickens do you mean?' exclaimed Vernon-Smith, angrily.

'Only what I say,' answered the captain of the Remove. 'You know that you're wanted in the Soccer this afternoon, and you had to land yourself in a row with Quelch. Why can't you keep out of rows? If the Shell beat us this afternoon, every man in the team will feel like kicking you.'

Harry Wharton's tone was not pleasant. But a football captain who had lost one of his best men, on the eve of a tough game, could not be expected to feel very pleasant about it.

'It wasn't my fault that that fat idiot gave me away in the form-room,' snapped Smithy.

'It was your fault that you helped him play that silly trick in Quelch's study, and got Extra for it,' snapped back the captain of the Remove. 'Did you get into another row, over that rag he pinched from your study?' added Wharton.

The Bounder's lip curled.

'No: I stuffed Quelch about that,' he answered. 'He wasn't satisfied, but he had to let it drop.'

'You'll try stuffing him once too often, one of these times. Anyhow you're out of the Soccer, and I've got to find another man.'

'Redwing's a good man,' said Smithy. Smithy was not at the moment, on the pleasantest terms with his chum. But he never forgot to give Redwing a leg-up in the Soccer, when opportunity offered. 'He's a good winger.'

'I know that! We shall play Redwing: but he's not half your form, and you know it. I hope you'll enjoy French verbs with Mossos, while we're playing Hobson's crowd!' added Wharton, sarcastically.

'Oh, rats!' snapped Vernon-Smith. 'Look here, I was going to ask you whether you'd seen Quelch go out?'

'Yes, about ten minutes ago,' answered Harry. 'What about Quelch? If you're thinking of cutting Extra, you'd better forget it.'

'You wouldn't know where he's gone, I suppose?'

'Of course I wouldn't! One of his long grinds, I suppose-he generally does miles and miles on a half-holiday. What the dickens does it matter?'

'Well, it might!' sneered Vernon-Smith. 'If Quelch is safe off the scene, a fellow might be able to borrow his telephone, and put a call through.'

Harry Wharton glanced up at the clock-tower. 'You're due for Extra in ten minutes,' he said.

'It won't take me ten minutes to put through a local call.'

'You'd better keep clear of Quelch's study. Do you want another row with him, if he happened to come in and catch you there?'

'Oh, he wouldn't be too shirty, if a fellow phoned home to his pater.'

'You said a local call.'

'I shouldn't say that to Quelch!'

'You'll try stuffing him once too often-'

'You've said that before! You're repeating yourself, old bean. Leave it to me to stuff him, if he does trickle in,' jeered Smithy. 'But he won't, if he's off on one of his grinds. Cheerio.'

With that, the Bounder walked back to the House, leaving the captain of the Remove frowning. However, Wharton had the football to think of, and he dismissed Vernon-Smith from mind. Quite indifferent to his form-captain's opinion of him, the Bounder made his way to Masters' Studies. He had told Tom Redwing that he would 'find another way': and his form-master's telephone was the way he had found.

Even the Bounder, with all his nerve, felt his heart beat a little faster, as he stepped into Mr. Quelch's study, and closed the door after him. All was safe, if Quelch was out on one of his 'grinds'. But he could not be sure of that. If Quelch caught him there, he had to rely on his resource of 'stuffing'. On that point, Smithy had no scruples at all. Among his form-fellows, he would have disdained to lie-in the Remove his word was as good as gold, and no fellow would have doubted it for a moment. In dealing with masters and prefects, he could be as untruthful as Billy Bunter, without the excuse of Bunter's obtuseness. Tom Redwing's different view on that subject only amused him. His opinion was that beaks and pre's were 'fair game': and he was quite satisfied with his own opinion. But he lost no time. He crossed quickly to the telephone and dialled a local number. Probably it was the first time that the Three Fishers had ever had a phone call from Greyfriars School. That insalubrious resort was very strictly out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows: and Mr. Quelch, little as he trusted that particular member of his form, could never have suspected that Smithy had acquaintances there.

A husky, beery voice came through. 'Three Fishers! Oo's speaking?'
'Is Sanders about?'
'Soapy's in the bar. Oo wants 'im?'
'Ask him to come to the phone, quick. It's urgent.'
'Oh, orlright.'

The Bounder waited impatiently. But it was a full minute before another voice came through. It was a long minute to Smithy. He was on too dangerous ground to want to linger there. If Quelch was not, after all, out on one of his 'grinds' -if he came in after a stroll-if the door-handle turned while the young rascal was speaking to a racing man at a 'pub' out of bounds-! Smithy had plenty of nerve, but he could not feel at ease. The 'stuffing' process might be tried on, as Harry Wharton had warned him, once too often-and what he was risking was the end of things for him at Greyfriars-expulsion from the school, and the morning train home. But 'Soapy' Sanders came through at last.

'Hallo! Who wants me?'

'Smithy! Don't waste time-I'm speaking from the school,' breathed the Bounder.

He heard a low whistle, at the other end.

'From the school? You've got a nerve, Master Vernon-Smith. Better cut it short, sir. What's wanted? Is it about a horse?'

'Of course it is,' snapped Smithy, irritably. 'I haven't rung you up to ask after your health, Soapy. Put me on two quids, on Blue Streak in the three-thirty. Got that?'

'I get you, sir.'

'Three to one.'

'That's the price, sir. You're on.'

'Good!'

The Bounder waited for no more. He was 'on', and that was all he wanted. When Blue Streak romped home that afternoon-Smithy who fancied that he could spot winners, had no doubt that Blue Streak would romp home! -then he would have six pounds to collect at the Three Fishers. For the money he cared little-he had always had plenty of that. His father, a millionaire, liked his son at Greyfriars to spend money freely: and if Smithy spent it a little too freely, a letter home never failed to put him in funds again. It was the excitement, and the pleasure of laughing in his sleeve at authority, that he liked, and being a law unto himself.

Now he was 'on': and that was that. A minute more, and he would be clear of Quelch's study, and heading for Monsieur Charpentier's class-room. But he was not clear of Quelch's study yet!

Even before he jammed the receiver back on the hooks, the door-handle turned, and Mr. Quelch walked in.

Vernon-Smith caught his breath.

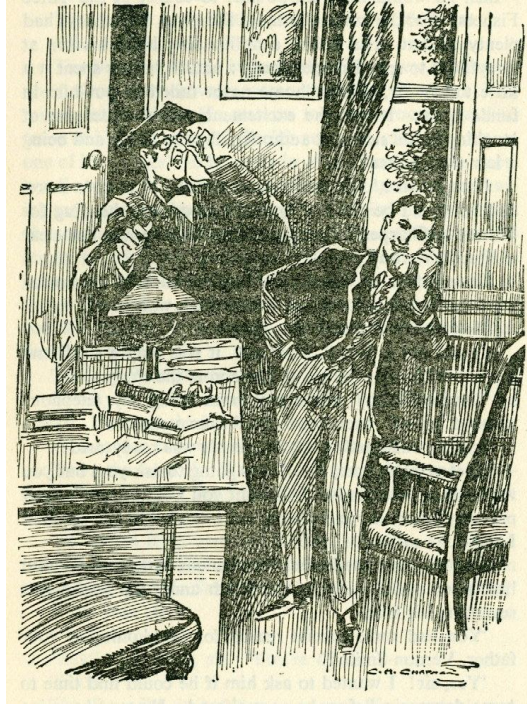
It was not a 'grind', after all: it was only a stroll and there was Quelch, staring at him across the study. 'Vernon-Smith! Have you been using my telephone without leave?' exclaimed the Remove master.

Smithy was startled. But his reply was ready-made. 'Please excuse me, sir. I was going to ask you, but you were not in your study. I thought you would not mind my phoning home, sir, and of course I intended to tell you that I had done so.'

The Bounder made that mendacious statement without batting an eyelid. He did not flinch under the gimlet-eyes searching his face. 'You had some special reason for telephoning to your father, Vernon-Smith?'

'Yes, sir! I wanted to ask him if he could find time to come down, sir, before he goes abroad. He may be going any day-something to do with the Common Market.'

'If that is the case, Vernon-Smith, there is certainly no harm done, and I shall excuse you for having used my telephone without leave,' said Mr. Quelch.



MR. QUELCH WALKED IN

'Thank you, sir!' said Smithy, meekly.

'But,' went on Mr. Quelch, grimly. 'I have my doubts on the subject, and I shall myself telephone to Mr. Vernon-Smith, and ascertain whether you have stated the facts. You may leave my study.'

The Bouncer stared at him, for a moment, dumb. 'Stuffing' Quelch was not, after all, the simple process he had fancied! He could not keep his dismay out of his face, and his form-master could not fail to note it. Quelch made a gesture to the door, and Vernon-Smith left the study without another word. It was a dismayed sportsman who sat in Extra that afternoon, with very little attention to bestow on Monsieur Charpentier and French irregular verbs!

CHAPTER 7

BUNTER'S IMPOT

'TODDY, old fellow-'

'Stony!' said Peter Todd, shaking his head.

'Tain't that!' hooted Billy Bunter. 'It's my impot, Toddy. You know Quelch made out that I spelt that rotten word "magister" wrong-'

'So you did, fathead.'

'Well, I ain't so jolly sure about that,' said Bunter. 'Quelch don't know all he makes out about orthology-'

'About whatter?'

'Orthology! That means spelling,' said Bunter, condescendingly.

'You don't happen to mean orthography?' asked Peter. 'No I don't!' yapped Bunter. 'But never mind that-I've got to write out the beastly word a thousand times. Fancy that!'

'Well, a thousand words isn't much more than a hundred lines,' said Peter, 'Fellows have had a hundred lines before, and survived it.' Snort, from Billy Bunter. Whether a thousand words approximated to a hundred lines or not, the fat Owl did not want to write them. It was not, perhaps, a tremendous task. But it was a spot of work: and William George Bunter objected to work in any shape or form. The smallest spot of work gave him that tired feeling, even before he started on it.

'Quelch let you off lightly,' said Peter. 'It would have been whops for any other fellow: only Quelch knows what a dithering duffer you are-'

'If you had half my brains, Toddy, you'd be twice as clever as you jolly well ain't,' snapped Bunter. 'But look here, old chap, what about doing half for me?'

'Nothing about doing half for you.'

'Well, what about a quarter, then?'

'Nothing about a quarter, either. I'm playing Soccer this afternoon.'

'Soccer!' snorted Bunter. 'Look here, Peter, you can cut Soccer for once, to help a pal out of a jam. Blow Soccer! Just cut it, see? Tell Wharton you can't play.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Peter Todd.

'What are you cackling at now?' howled Bunter.

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at.'

'Your little joke,' explained Peter.

'But I'm not joking-'

'You are, old fat man-one of your best!' said Toddy, and he walked out of No. 7 Study, laughing.

'Beast!' grunted Billy Bunter.

It was a disgruntled Owl. 'Magister', a thousand times repeated, loomed over his fat head like the sword of Damocles. It had to be done, and he had to spell it Quelch's way which was really like adding insult to injury. Slowly, very slowly, the fat Owl sorted out impot paper, dipped a pen in the inkpot, and scrawled the word 'magisster'. Then he stopped for a rest.

Then he blinked round at footsteps in the passages. A Remove junior was passing the open doorway.

'I say, Redwing, stop a minute!' squeaked Bunter. Tom Redwing stopped, and looked in.

'What is it?' he asked. 'Cough it up-I'm going down to the changing-room.'

'You're not playing Soccer, I suppose!' yapped Bunter.

'Just that!' answered Redwing. 'Wharton's asked me to take Smithy's place, as he's in Extra.'

'Well, look here, old chap, Wharton could easily find another man as good as you, or better-'

'Eh?'

'You're not much good at Soccer, you know,' said Bunter. 'You won't be missed, and I want somebody to lend me a hand with this impot-'

'You fat ass!' said Redwing. And he walked on down the passage.

'Beast!' hissed Bunter.

There was no help for a hapless Owl. If those thousand 'magisters' were going to be written at all, they had to be written by Billy Bunter's own fat hand. Wearily he resumed his task, and this time a dozen 'magisters' scrawled off his pen, accompanied by almost as many blots.

Most Remove fellows would have travelled through such an impot at a good rate of speed, then gone down to Little Side to see how the footballers were getting on. Billy Bunter had not the remotest desire to know how the footballers were getting on: and whether Harry Wharton and Co. were beating the Shell, or whether Hobson and his merry men were beating Harry Wharton and Co., he couldn't have cared less. His own trials and tribulations were more than enough to occupy Bunter's fat mind.

He felt the need of another res, which he took by sprawling in Peter Todd's armchair. It was half-an-hour before he stirred from that armchair.

When, at length, he did so, he did not immediately return to his impot. He opened the study cupboard, and scanned the interior through his big spectacles. It was a couple of hours since dinner: and Bunter felt that a little light refreshment would brace him for the weary task that lay ahead. If Peter Todd had laid in anything for tea after the football, he was likely to discover at tea-time that it had mysteriously disappeared.

But alas! The cupboard in No. 7 was in the same state as the celebrated Mrs. Hubbard's. It was bare. Nothing of an edible nature met the eyes and spectacles of a voracious Owl.

But a happy thought occurred to Bunter.

With Smithy in Extra, and Redwing playing football, there would be nobody in No. 4 Study, or likely to come there. And there was almost always something good in the wealthy Bounder's study. Smithy cared little how much money he spent, and the spreads in No. 4 were frequent and lavish. Billy Bunter had no more scruple about stuffing his extensive circumference with another fellow's tuck, than Smithy had about 'stuffing' his form-master in another way. That happy thought having occurred to Bunter, he rolled out of No. 7 Study, and rolled down the passage to No. 4.

His little round eyes brightened behind his big round spectacles as he blinked into the study cupboard there.

The first object that met his view was a large and luscious cake. It was one of Mrs. Mimble's 'seven-and-sixers'. Seldom, if ever, did Billy Bunter expend three half-crowns on a single item of provender. It was a trifle to Smithy.

The fat Owl feasted his eyes on that cake. Automatically, as it were, his fat hands reached out for it.

Then, with a sudden misgiving he paused.

How often Bunter had been kicked for raiding tuck in the Remove studies, he could never have remembered. But often as it had happened, he had never grown to like it! And he had a painful recollection of the kick Smithy had landed on his plump trousers

that morning. He did not want another of the same. Very much indeed he didn't! And Smithy was a suspicious beast likely to suspect at once that Bunter had had that cake.

On the other hand, Bunter was prepared to disclaim all knowledge of it, in fact prepared, like Mr. Jagger's witness, to 'swear, in a general way, anything'. There was yet an hour of Extra: and by the time Mossos dismissed his class, Bunter would be through the cake, through his impot, and strolling innocently in the quad.

He hesitated.

But that cake was too tempting: and he fell!

He rolled back to No. 7 with the cake under a fat arm. There, he did not immediately carry on with 'magister'.

First things came first with Bunter. He sat down at the table: but his attention was concentrated, not on 'magisster', but on Smithy's cake.

Bunter was a slow worker on an impot. But he was a very quick worker on tuck. Substantial as it was, that cake disappeared from existence in record time.

Feeling better, the fat Owl resumed his scribbling.

Magister, and magister, and magister, scrawled from his pen. He was anxious to get through, and get out, before Smithy came out of Extra.

But somehow or other, a snail-like pace supervened.

A weary hour dragged by, and his task was still unfinished. But at long, long last, he was very near the end-only about fifty 'magisters' remained to be written. Feeling as if he had climbed Mount Everest, or walked from John O' Groats to Land's End, the fat Owl laboured over those final 'magisters'. And the very last 'magister' had been scrawled, when his study door burst suddenly open, with a crash that made the fat Owl jump and utter a startled squeak.

Herbert Vernon-Smith strode, or rather stamped, into the study. Evidently, he was not in a good temper. Two hours in Extra, with what he had to expect from Quelch added, had made Smithy like unto a bear with a very sore head. He was in a mood to quarrel with friend or foe; when he came up to the studies. His glare at the fat Owl was almost ferocious. Billy Bunter did not need telling that he had missed that cake from No. 4.

'You fat villain, you've been snooping in my study,' he shouted.

'Oh, really, Smithy-'

'Where's that cake?'

'I-I-I don't know anything about your cake, Smithy. How could I? I never knew you had a cake. I haven't tasted cake this week.'

'Where did all those crumbs come from, then?'

'Oh, crikey!' It was just like Bunter to overlook a sea of crumbs on the table. 'I-I-I mean, it wasn't your cake, Smithy. I-I had it from Bunter Court this morning. I-I-I say- Yarooooooh! Leggo my neck, you beast!' yelled Bunter. 'I never had your beastly cake- there wasn't one in your study when I was there-and I never went near your study, either. I was sitting here doing my impot when I went-I mean when I didn't went-ow! wow! Stoppit!'

Bang!

The fattest head at Greyfriars contacted the study table.

Billy Bunter wriggled and roared. But with a grasp of iron on the back of his fat neck, he wriggled and roared in vain. 'Ow! wow! Beast! Stoppit!' shrieked Bunter. 'You're knocking my head on the inkpot-wow! wow! wow!'

Smithy did not seem to care on what he knocked that fat head. It contacted the inkpot, and over went the inkpot, its contents streaming in a flood over Bunter's impot. A thousand 'magisters' disappeared under a sea of ink.

Twice again the angry Bounder banged that fat head, Billy Bunter emitting a roar at each bang. Then he stamped out of the study, closing the door after him with another bang.

'Ow! wow! wow! ow! wow!'

Billy Bunter rubbed his head. He had quite an assortment of pains in it. But he almost forgot them, as he blinked at the impot that had cost him so much labour that afternoon. It was drowned in ink—obviously in no state to be handed to Mr. Quelch. That impot, from beginning to end, had to be written all over again: a thousand 'magisters' still hung over Billy Bunter like the sword of Damocles! Billy Bunter blinked at it, and groaned.

CHAPTER 8

THE CHOPPER COMES DOWN

'VERNON-SMITH!'

'Yes, sir.'

'You will come to my study after this class.'

'Very well, sir.'

It was the following morning, and the Remove were in third school. Many fellows glanced round at Vernon-Smith, as Quelch addressed him. Everyone could guess that that command portended trouble for the scapegrace of the form.

'What has that ass been up to now?' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Isn't he always up to something?' grunted Johnny Bull. 'He can't toe the line like any other fellow.'

'I say, you fellows, think it's whops for Smithy?' breathed Billy Bunter. 'Quelch looks like it. Serve him jolly well right! He banged my head-'

'Silence in the form!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

The whispering died away. Quelch, plainly, was not in his bonniest mood that morning, and nobody wanted to catch the gimlet-eye. Vernon-Smith's face was sullen.

That command from Quelch came as no surprise to him. He had expected it sooner. The 'stuffing' process having proved so lamentable a failure, he had to face the music: and what the outcome might be, he could not foresee. Quelch, apparently, had taken time to consider how he was going to deal with that troublesome member of his form: and the Bounder could not help wondering whether it might mean an interview with his head-master, and a train home.

Third school over, Mr. Quelch dismissed his form and immediately left the form-room to go to his study. Probably he expected Vernon-Smith to arrive there almost on his heels. Instead of which, Smithy joined the crowd of fellows at the letter-rack, looking for letters. If he was feeling dismay within, Smithy was not the fellow to display any outward sign of it. He was going to look for his letters as usual, Quelch or no Quelch!

Tom Redwing caught him by the arm. His face was clouded. He was more anxious for his chum than Smithy seemed to be for himself.

'For goodness sake, cut off, Smithy,' he muttered. 'You won't improve matters if you keep Quelch waiting for you.'

'Who cares?' answered Smithy, lightly. 'No hurry! I'm expecting a letter from the pater-'

'Never mind that now-'

'But I do mind,' said Smithy, coolly, and he jerked his arm away from Redwing, and pushed through the little crowd at the rack.

'I say, you fellows, is there one for me?' squeaked Billy Bunter, blinking anxiously through his big spectacles. 'I say, I'm expecting a postal-order-here, I say, whom are you shoving, Smithy? Think you can shove a fellow about just as you like?' hooted Bunter, indignantly.

Apparently the Bounder did so think, for he pushed the fat Owl unceremoniously out of his way, and took down a letter. It was addressed to him in Mr. Vernon-Smith's very firm hand: and he had no doubt that it came in reply to a recent letter home, and that there would be a five-pound note folded inside the parental missive.

Harry Wharton touched him on the arm as he was about to slit the envelope. The captain of the Remove was not feeling particularly amicable at that moment. Smithy was, in fact, not very popular in his form that morning. The Soccer match the day before had ended in a draw: Redwing had played a good game in his chum's place, but the Remove footballers did not doubt that with Smithy on the wing, the odd goal would have come their way. And Smithy had been sitting in Extra because he couldn't keep out of rows with his beak! But Wharton, if he was not feeling amicable, did feel concerned about a reckless fellow who seemed born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

'Don't stop to read that letter now, Smithy,' said Harry.

'Why not?'

'Do have a spot of sense. Quelch will be waiting for you. What's the good of putting his back up more than it is already? Do cut off to his study like a sensible chap!' urged Wharton.

The Bounder gave him a hard look. But he read only friendly concern in Harry Wharton's face. He gave him a nod, and put the letter into his pocket.

'Okay!' he said. 'May as well get it over.'

And he lounged away. His manner, so long as eyes were upon him, was careless and unconcerned. But his face was serious enough, and his heart was beating, as he tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered. The grimmest of grim looks greeted him, across his form-master's writing-table. Quelch lost no time in coming to the point.

'Vernon-Smith! I have, as you know, been in communication with your father. The statement you made to me in this study yesterday was wholly untrue.'

Smithy stood silent. There was nothing for him to say.

He was found out, and that was that.

'Your telephone call was not to your home. I will not ask you to whom you telephoned, for I could not expect a truthful answer; I do not desire to hear another falsehood.'

The Bounder winced, at that, and the colour came into his face. Somehow or other, it never seemed to Smithy that 'stuffing' a beak could be described by so unpleasant a word.

'But,' went on Mr. Quelch, his voice deepening, 'I have had reason, more than once, to suspect that you have formed undesirable acquaintances outside the school, Vernon-Smith, and I can have little doubt that your call was to some such person. Taken in connection with the racing paper found in your study, I can have very little doubt of the character of that person.'

Mr. Quelch paused.

No doubt he was giving Smithy a chance, if he had anything to say for himself, to say it. But Smithy had nothing to say for himself: and he remained silent. After that pause the Remove master went on:

'I have considered this matter very carefully, Vernon-Smith, in consultation with your father. I am reluctant to take an extreme step: and I shall not, therefore, refer the matter to your head-master.'

Smithy breathed a little more freely. Anything from Quelch was better than an interview with Dr. Locke, and the train home.

'Your father, naturally, is deeply concerned,' continued Mr.

Quelch, 'and he has agreed to the conditions I have laid down, if you are to be given a chance to amend your conduct. I have made it a strict condition that, from now on, you shall receive no money from home that does not pass through my hands, and this will be limited to two shillings and sixpence per week.'

Smithy gave quite a jump at that.

Even Billy Bunter, the most impecunious fellow in the Remove, was not limited to half-a-crown. This was going to be a tremendous change for the wealthy Bounder-an overwhelming change. It was difficult for him to picture himself without pound notes in his wallet. 'Quids' on dead certs, seven-and-six cakes in his study, were going to be things of the past. Smithy had hardly ever taken the trouble to count his money. He was going to be booked now for some very careful computation.

'But, sir-!' he stammered.

'That is final!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Further, you will be gated for the rest of the term, Vernon-Smith, as you cannot be trusted outside the school walls.'

'But, sir-!' muttered Smithy.

'That is all I have to say to you, Vernon-Smith, except to give you a very serious warning. If you are discovered in any further transgression, I shall have no choice but to regard you as incorrigible, and shall request Dr. Locke to send you away from the school. You may now leave my study.'

The door closed on Vernon-Smith.

He tramped down the corridor with a pale and furious face. At the corner, Tom Redwing was waiting for him. His face was anxious.

'Smithy, old chap, what did Quelch want? What-'

'Oh, leave me alone!' snarled Smithy.

'But-Smithy-'

'I don't want any sermons now. I've had enough from Quelch. Leave me alone.'

'If you're in trouble-'

'If!' snarled Smithy. 'If! I've got it in the neck, if you want to know. I'm gated for the term, and I'm going to be harder up than Bunter, and I've got to be a good little boy that loves his kind teachers, or else I'm going to be taken to the Old Man to be sacked! And if you give me any pi-jaw about it, I'll punch your face. Now leave me alone.'

And the Bounder stamped on, out of the House: leaving Tom Redwing staring after him in dismay.

CHAPTER 9

FALLEN FORTUNES

'BEAST!' murmured Billy Bunter.

It was an aggrieved Owl.

Bunter was standing at the study cupboard, in No. 4 in the Remove, blinking into the interior through his big spectacles.

But for once, the fat Owl was not on the trail of tuck.

He was on the trail of vengeance!

After his experience the previous day, which had had such disastrous results on his impot for Quelch, even the unscrupulous Owl realized that his best guess was to keep his fat fingers from 'snooping' in Smithy's study. Besides, Bunter was not, for once, hungry. He had, since class, found a cake in Lord Mauleverer's study, and a bag of dough-nuts in Tom Brown's. So he was prepared to hold out till tea-time. Not a single article was going to be missing from Smithy's supply, when the Bounder came in. But the vengeful Owl was going to leave that supply in a state that the hungriest fellow could not consider appetizing.

Bunter, like most plump persons, was generally placable. He forgot offences almost as rapidly as he forgot his lessons, or the little sums he owed up and down the Remove. But there was a limit.

Bunter's fat head had been banged-hard! He had had to write out over again, a thousand times, that beastly word 'magister'. The worm will turn: and Bunter was, perhaps, rather a worm! Anyhow he was turning!

He was not going to help himself to Smithy's tuck. He was going to 'rag' that tuck with an unmerciful fat hand. He was going to pour ink on the cake, gum on the biscuits, mix the jam with the pickles, squash the jam-tarts into a sticky heap with the dough-nuts: and in fact make a wreck of whatever that well-supplied cupboard contained. That, in Bunter's opinion, would serve Smithy jolly well right, for barging into his study and banging his head and giving him that awful imposition to scribble over again.

But-!

Billy Bunter could scarcely believe his eyes or his spectacles, as he blinked into Smithy's cupboard. He had had no doubt that that cupboard would be, as usual, like unto a land flowing with milk and honey. But-!

It was empty! The shelves were bare. Not a cake, not a dough-nut, not a jam-tart, not the ghost of a pot of jam or a jar of pickles, met Billy Bunter's little round eyes or big round spectacles. It was no wonder that he ejaculated 'Beast!' If Smithy was going to have his usual lavish spread at tea-time, if he was going to stand one of his lavish study-suppers, he had made no preparations for it so far. For all that Billy Bunter could see in that cupboard, the wealthy Bounder might have been as hard-up as the fat Owl himself. 'Beast!' repeated Bunter, in disgust.

He turned from the empty cupboard, to the table.

Upsetting the inkpot over the books and papers there was the next bright idea that came into his fat mind. An unfinished Latin prose lay there. A swamp of ink over it would be exactly what Smithy deserved for swamping his impot. Billy Bunter grinned, and reached out a fat paw for the inkpot.

As he did so, a voice came through the door from the passage outside.

'Can't you give a fellow a rest?'

It was the Bounder's angry voice: the last voice that Billy Bunter would have wished to hear at that moment. Bunter had not expected Smithy to come up to the studies: or he certainly would not have been in No. 4 at that moment. On a fine autumn afternoon, after class, most of the Remove were out of the House: and Harry Wharton and Co. were at games-practice. Smithy, who was as keen a footballer as any man in the Remove, and who was in the team for the Highcliffe match the following week, would, or should, naturally have been with them. Bunter was not aware that the sportsman of the Remove had matters on his mind that were much more urgent and pressing than Soccer.

'Smithy, old fellow-' came another voice from the passage; Tom Redwing's. They were actually at the study door.

Billy Bunter forgot all about retaliation for his many grievances. His fat fingers did not touch the inkpot. He made a jump for the armchair in the corner of the study, and ducked his fat head behind the high back. He vanished from sight like a ghost at cock-crow. But the door did not immediately open. Vernon-Smith's angry voice reached Bunter's fat ears.

'Look here, Reddy, leave me alone. I'm in a jam, and pi-jaw won't help.'

'Wharton's expecting you at the Soccer-'

'Hang the Soccer.'

'Well, look here, Smithy, if you're in a jam, perhaps I could help-'

'You're a good pal, Reddy, with all your pi-jaw.' Smithy's tone was a little less truculent. 'But there's nothing you can do, and you'd better cut down to the footer. I'm out of the games, anyhow, excepting for home games. I've told you I'm gated for the term.'

'If you don't want me in the study-'

'Oh, come in if you like.'

The door-handle turned. The two juniors came in, and Vernon-Smith closed the door with a bang. Behind the armchair in the corner, Billy Bunter palpitated-in silence. In the Bounder's present mood, the fat Owl would almost as soon have faced a lion in his den. And Bunter did not dare to be a Daniel!

Vernon-Smith sat on a corner of the table, his brows knitted in a scowl. Redwing stood looking at him, disturbed and uneasy.

'If you'd tell me-!' he said.

'Oh, all right! Quelch knows, or as good as knows, that I was on the phone to a bookie yesterday. He's gone right off at the deep end. I'm gated for the term-money cut off-and the sack if I'm nailed kicking over the traces again.' The Bounder gave a sneering laugh. 'You've said that the pater allowed me more money than was good for me. Well, that's stopped.'

'Your father knows-?'

'Quelch gave him the whole works. Listen to this!' Vernon-Smith dragged a crumpled letter from his pocket.

'What is it?' asked Redwing.

'That's the letter I had from the pater this morning. I fancied there might be a fiver in it, when I took it out of the rack.' The Bounder laughed again, savagely. 'But the pater must have written it after his jaw with Quelch on the phone. No fivers for me! Half-a-crown a week is the limit for me, from now on. I may come down to borrowing bobs and tanners, like Bunter, and forgetting to pay them back.'

'Beast!' breathed a fat Owl, inaudibly.

'I'm not blaming the pater,' went on Smithy. 'He's got to hop when Quelch says hop, if he doesn't want to see me home in the middle of the term. Listen to this:

'Dear Herbert,

I have been very much disturbed by a conversation I have had with your form-master, Mr. Quelch. I have some doubt whether my own indulgence may not have been partly the cause of your trouble at your school. But you are at school, my boy, and at school you must surely understand that authority must be respected. I have no alternative but to accede to the conditions laid down by Mr. Quelch. Otherwise the matter would go before your headmaster. You will receive no more money from home during the present term, excepting the small allowance on which Mr. Quelch insists. I must and shall keep my promise to your form-master. I urge you to be more circumspect in your conduct, to remember that you are a schoolboy, not a man of the world, and to make every endeavour to recover your form-master's good opinion. I am leaving England tomorrow on business connected with the Common Market, and hope to receive a better report of you when I return in a few weeks' time.

'Not the sort of letter I generally get from the pater, is it?' sneered Smithy, crumpling the letter into his pocket again.

'It is a kind letter,' said Redwing, quietly. 'A good many fathers would have taken a much tougher line than that.'

'Oh, the pater never was a Roman parent,' said Smithy. 'But it comes to the same thing. I'm going to be as hard up as Bunter this term, unless-' He paused, his eyes glinting.

'Unless what?' asked Redwing, with a quick look at him.

'Well, a fellow might have luck,' said Vernon-Smith, with a sneering grin. 'I may not be quite at the end of my tether yet.'

'For goodness sake, Smithy, chuck that rot right out of your head!' exclaimed Redwing, in alarm. 'You're on too thin ice now. Quelch has given you a chance. He won't give you another. For goodness sake-'

'Oh, I'm going to be wary-jolly wary!' sneered Smithy. 'Quelch isn't going to catch me out again, in a hurry. I shall have to walk delicately, like jolly old Agag, for a bit. That's all. I'm not knuckling under to being the hardest-up fellow in the Remove, I know that.'

'If you're hard up, Smithy, I'm not,' said Redwing, 'and you jolly well know-'

'Oh, I know you're the saving sort!' said Vernon-Smith, in the same sneering tone. 'You've never had a quarter as much tin as I have, but you've never splashed it about like me. Old head on young shoulders, what?' The Bounder's sneer could not have been more unpleasant. 'How much have you stacked away in the Post-Office Savings Bank?'

Redwing did not heed his sneer.

'I have twenty pounds in the bank, Smithy,' he answered, quietly.

'And you know very well that if you're in need of it, it's yours.'

'Thank you for nothing! Do you fancy that I'm going to sponge on you?' snapped Vernon-Smith. 'I haven't quite come down to Bunter's level yet. Keep it.'

Redwing breathed hard.

'Why not come down to the footer, Smithy?' he asked. 'A spot of fresh air will do you good, and it's no use brooding.'

'I've got things to think out. You cut off-I'll see you again at tea in hall.'

'In hall!' repeated Redwing. 'Aren't we teaing in the study as usual?'

'You can if you like. I can't afford to-now!' The Bounder laughed sardonically. 'It won't run to it today, or for the rest of this term. No more spreads in this study-unless I have luck! I'm teaing in hall from now on-you can do as you like.'

'I suppose I can stand tea in the study-'

'Not for me.'

'Look here, Smithy-'

'Oh, chuck it! Think I'm Bunter?' snarled the Bounder. 'There's nothing in the cupboard, and there's not going to be, so far as I'm concerned. When I want to sponge, I'll let you know-pack it up till then. Now, for goodness sake, cut-I've told you I've got some thinking to do.'

Redwing paused for a moment. But in the Bounder's present mood, a 'row' was only too likely: and he did not want that. He left the study without speaking again.

Vernon-Smith gave an angry grunt. He slid off the table and fumbled in his pockets. A cigarette came out, and he scratched a match and lighted it. Then with a sullen savage face, he threw himself into the armchair.

Under the sudden impetus of his landing in it, it slid back on its castors to the wall. The result was unexpected.

'Ow! Wow!'

It was a squeal of anguish from a fat Owl almost flattened between the armchair and the wall.

'Ow! Oh, crikey! Wooooooh!'

The Bounder leaped up, with almost a roar of rage. He whirled the armchair out of the corner, revealing a spluttering fat Owl huddled there. Billy Bunter's eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at Smithy's furious face.

'I-I say, tain't me!' gasped Bunter. 'I-I mean, I -I ain't here-I say, I was not hiding behind that chair-I-I never heard a word you said, and-and I won't tell the fellows you're hard up, and-and-I say-yarooooooh!'

For a good minute, Billy Bunter lived the exciting life of a Soccer ball, before he escaped from No. 4 Study and fled yelling down the passage. The Bounder banged the door after him, and returned to the armchair and his cigarette, scowling more blackly than before. He had told Redwing that he had some thinking to do: and if he was going to think up plans for repairing his fallen fortunes by spotting winners there was no doubt that some very hard thinking indeed would be required.

CHAPTER 10

BUNTER WITH THE NEWS

'I SAY, you fellows! Heard?'

Billy Bunter asked that question, as he rolled into No. 1 Study in the Remove.

Bunter was full of news. Bunter liked to be the fellow with the news: and on this occasion he had quite an interesting item to relate-which he had already related to at least a dozen Remove fellows. Harry Wharton and Co., having been busy on the Soccer ground, had not yet had the benefit of it.

Neither did they seem particularly keen to have that benefit. They had come in rather late for tea after the football, and they all had healthy appetites. So they were more interested in tea than in the latest tittle-tattle of the Rag and the passages. They were spreading the table when Bunter happened: and it was rather an unusually ample spread for a junior study. The Famous Five had pooled resources for tea in No. 1, as they generally did, and, as it happily chanced, they were all in funds. But for once, Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles did not immediately glue on the foodstuffs. His fat squeak having been passed by, like the idle wind which they regarded not, he repeated it.

'I say, you fellows-if you haven't heard-. I say, you'll be surprised. I've come up to tell you-'

Bob Cherry looked round from slicing a loaf. 'Thanks,' he said.

'Now cut along to some other study and tell them there-'

'But I haven't told you-'

'That's all right-nobody wants to know. Just cut.'

'And shut the door after you,' said Johnny Bull. Billy Bunter did not shut the door, and he did not cut.

He was not going with his news untold. He was not, in fact, going at all, till after tea, if he could help it.

'It's about Smithy,' he said. 'I'm sorry for Smithy! He's a cheeky beast, and he fancies he can throw his weight about, but he's for it now, I can tell you. I'm really sorry for Smithy! He, he, he!'

Billy Bunter's fat giggle did not indicate much depth of sorrow for Smithy! But he had succeeded in interesting the Famous Five.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Is Smithy in a row again?'

'Isn't he the fellow for rows?' grunted Johnny Bull. 'The rowfulness of the esteemed Smithy is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

'What's the latest?' asked Frank Nugent.

'You'd never guess!' grinned Bunter. 'You know how Smithy splashes his money about. He likes to let fellows see pound notes in his wallet. They won't see any more there in a hurry, I can tell you. He, he, he!' Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle. 'Smithy won't be splashing it about any more. He won't have any to splash. I jolly well shan't lend him any, I know that.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can cackle,' yapped Bunter. 'But I can tell you, Smithy's right on the rocks now. Hard up! Stony! His pater won't let him have another brown. He said so in a letter. Fancy Smithy-as hard up as Linley or Penfold-or harder! After all his swank! He, he, he.'

'Rats!' said Bob Cherry.

'Rubbish!' said Harry Wharton.

'Rot!' said Nugent.

'You'd better not let Smithy hear you spinning that yarn, you fat chump!' growled Johnny Bull. 'Look out for his boot, if you do.'

'I tell you it was in his pater's letter-!'

'And Smithy told you?' asked Johnny, sarcastically. 'Well, he didn't exactly tell me,' admitted Bunter. 'But I couldn't help hearing the letter when he read it out loud to Redwing, could I?'

'Lucky for you he didn't catch you at the keyhole, then.'

'I wasn't at the keyhole-I was behind the armchair. Of course, I wasn't listening-'

'You heard it without listening?'

'I tell you I couldn't help hearing it, behind Smithy's armchair-'

'And what the dickens were you doing behind Smithy's armchair, you fat fraud?' demanded Bob Cherry.

'Well, I wasn't going to let him catch me in his study, if I could help it, in one of his rotten tempers. But I say, you fellows, fancy Smithy! No more swanky spreads in his study! He, he, he! He's going down to tea in hall from now on. He told Redwing so. Bit of a come-down for Smithy, what? He, he, he! Of course, I'm sorry for the chap! Must be rotten to be hard up, scrounging tea in hall or sticking some other fellows for it-'

'You ought to know!' agreed Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! The fact is, I'd take pity on him, and ask him to tea in my study, only my postal-order hasn't come. All the same, it serves him jolly well right after all his swank. And his beastly temper, too. He kicked me when he copped me in his study-'

'Jolly good idea of Smithy's,' said Bob. 'Let's all do the same, you chaps.'

'Hear, hear!'

Billy Bunter backed rather hurriedly to the doorway. 'Look here, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'If there's any truth in this-'

'Oh, really, Wharton! Are you making out that I'm untruthful, like Quelch?' exclaimed the fat Owl, indignantly. 'I tell you I heard every word-'

'Well, if it's true, the less said about it the better. Smithy wouldn't like it tattled up and down the form.'

'I hope I'm not the fellow to tattle!' said Bunter, with dignity.

'I may have mentioned it to a few fellows. But I haven't told anybody but Skinner, and Snoop, and Stott, and Wibley, and Bolsover, and Russell, and Micky Desmond, and Penfold, and Newland-I haven't mentioned it to anybody else except you chaps. I'm not the chap to tattle about a fellow behind his back, I hope. I say, you fellows, Skinner laughed like anything when I told him. He, he, he! '

'He would!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Well, he's rather a pal of Smithy's,' said Bunter. 'But he don't like his airs and graces, all the same. Smithy puts on too much roll. He's cocky. He won't be so jolly cocky now! He, he, he! Still, as I said, I'm sorry for him. It's a bit tough to be gated for the term as well as hard up-'

'Gated for the term!' repeated Harry Wharton.

'So he said! Quelch has found out something, and gated him!' said Bunter. 'He told Redwing he wouldn't be able to play at Highcliffe on Wednesday. I say, you fellows, what do you think Quelch has found out?'

Nobody answered that question. That the Bounder had been caught out in some serious delinquency, was certain, if Bunter's news was well-founded. It was dismaying news for the captain of the Remove,

from the point of view of Soccer. Smithy was a tower of strength in the Greyfriars junior team: and the Highcliffe fixture was one of the toughest propositions they had to face. Harry Wharton would almost as soon have left himself out, as Smithy. But if he was 'gated' he had to be left out.

'What an ass the fellow is!' exclaimed Frank Nugent. 'Why the dickens can't he keep out of rows with Quelch? But is it true-?'

'Oh, really, Nugent-'

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

'If that's true, it means finding another man for Wednesday,' he said, 'and there isn't another half Smithy's form-'

'Redwing wasn't bad last time-!' said Bob. 'Nothing like Smithy-and he mayn't be available, either. He's expecting to get leave home. Who else?' growled the captain of the Remove.

'If you want a good man, you needn't look far for him!' said Bunter.

'Eh! Who, then?' snapped Wharton. 'What about me?' asked Bunter.

'You silly fat ass!' roared all the Famous Five, with one voice. Apparently they did not regard Bunter's suggestion as a solution of the problem.

'I suppose I can play Soccer!' hooted Bunter, indignantly.

'Better oil your supposer, if it works like that!' said Bob. 'Shut up, anyway, you dithering porpoise. Look here, Wharton, you'd better ask Smithy how it is-'

'I've told you!' yapped Bunter. 'Smithy's out of it. I tell you, I heard every word, and Smithy's gated for the term. I expect Quelch knows about his breaking bounds at the Three Fishers, or something like that. He won't be playing Soccer next Wednesday. He will be mooching about without a tanner in his pockets. He, he, he! Touching other fellows for half-a-crown, instead of swanking with pound notes! He, he, he! If he fancies he can touch me for anything, I shall jolly well say-Yaroooooooh!'

Billy Bunter wound up with a yell, as a grasp fell on the back of his fat neck. It was unlucky for Bunter that Smithy, on his way down to tea in hall, had come along the passage just then.

'Yaroooooooh! Who's that? Leggo!' yelled Bunter. 'Oh, crikey!'

The fat Owl whirled in the doorway, in that angry grasp. He whirled along the passage, pitched with all the force of Smithy's arm. One blink at the Bounder's scowling face was enough for him. His fat little legs fairly twinkled as he flew.

Vernon-Smith scowled into the study, at five faces looking at him. Certainly he had not wanted his fallen fortunes to become a topic for tattle in the Remove. But he knew what to expect since Bunter had heard his talk with Redwing.

'So you've had the dope from Bunter?' he jeered, scowling impartially at the five faces.

'Is it true, Smithy?' asked Harry Wharton, quietly.

'Find out!'

'What?'

'No business of yours, is it?'

'Oh, don't be an ass!' exclaimed Harry, impatiently. 'I'm asking you whether it's true that you're gated for the term. That fat chump said so.'

'Oh, that!' said Smithy. 'I thought-'

'Never mind what you thought! Is it true that you're gated for the term? If it is, you're washed out for the Highcliffe match next Wednesday, and I shall have to find another man. I want to know.'

'Yes,' snapped Smithy. 'Anything else you want to know?'

'Nothing!' answered Wharton, curtly.

The Bounder turned scowling away.

'Hold on, Smithy!' called out Frank Nugent.

Smithy turned back.

'Well, what?' he snapped.

'We've got rather a spread here,' said Nugent, amicably. 'Trot in and join us.'

'Do, old boy,' said Bob Cherry. 'We've got lots.'

'The lotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Trot infully and take a pew.' The Bounder stared into the study, with a glint in his eyes, and a sneer on his face.

'Asking me to your spread because Bunter's told you I'm hard up?' he sneered. 'Thank you for nothing.'

With that, he tramped on down the passage. And the Famous Five, though prepared to be hospitality itself, could not feel sorry to see him go.

CHAPTER 11

TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

'WHOSE jam?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Eh?'

Billy Bunter drew the back of a sticky hand across a Jammy mouth.

'Wharrer you mean, Bob Cherry? I haven't tasted jam-'

'Then appearances are jolly deceptive!' chuckled Bob. 'Does he look sticky, you chaps?'

Just a bit!' said Frank Nugent. 'The stickfulness is truly terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Billy Bunter did, undoubtedly, look sticky-not an uncommon state for Bunter. Bunter liked jam. He liked to dispose of it with a tablespoon. The largest jar of that comestible was not too large for Bunter.

On this occasion, he had evidently been somewhere where there was jam in considerable quantities. There were smears of it round the widest mouth in the Remove, and more on the fattest fingers in that Form. The fat Owl was, in fact, of the jam jammy, when Harry Wharton and Co. came on him in the quad, after class on Friday.

'I say, you fellows, don't you get saying that I've been Scoffing jam, exclaimed the fat Owl, anxiously. 'Mauly might think that I'd had it, if he missed the pot from his study. I don't want a row with Mauly.'

'Then you'd better cut in and get a wash before Mauleverer sees you,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Oh, really, Wharton.'

Billy Bunter did not seem to see the necessity for a wash. He seldom did. He gave his jammy mouth another dab with a sticky fat paw, and seemed satisfied with that. William George Bunter was easily satisfied in such matters.

'Better,' said Johnny Bull. 'If Quelch comes across you, he will send you in for a wash, you sticky fat porpoise.'

'Well, Quelch won't come across me,' said Bunter. 'Quelch is jawing in Common-Room with the other beaks. You know what the beaks are like when they're chin-wagging in Common-Room. I jolly well made sure that Quelch was safe, before I went to his study. He, he, he! Perhaps he'll have something else to think about, when he does go to his study, too! He, he, he!'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Have you left another spot of Latin for Quelch? How many G's did you shove into "magister" this time?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Not likely!' grinned Bunter. 'Quelch might guess it was me, after last time, you know.'

'No "might" about that, you fat chump. What have you been up to in Quelch's study?' asked Harry Wharton.

'That's telling!' chuckled Bunter. 'Least said soonest mended, you know. There'll be a row if Quelch gets a knock on the nut-'

'Quelch-a knock on the nut?' exclaimed Wharton. 'Well, he's bound to get a bit of a bang, with a dick coming down on his head when he opens his door-'

'Great pip!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'You footling, foozling, frabjous chump, if you've fixed up a booby-trap in Quelch's study-'

The Famous Five gazed at the grinning fat Owl, almost aghast.

Evidently, Billy Bunter was extremely pleased with himself and his

exploit. He was grinning all over his jammy fat face. But it was hardly likely to be a grinning matter, if Henry Samuel Quelch did get a bang on his majestic nut.

'A booby-trap-for Quelch!' breathed Frank Nugent. 'You dithering ass-'

'Oh, really, Nugent-'

'You frumptious chump!' said Johnny Bull. 'Quelch will skin you.'

'Fools rush in where angels fear to go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Mind, don't you fellows get saying anything,' said Bunter. 'I don't want Quelch on my track. He will be wild -a Latin dictionary coming down whop on his napper. Don't you fellows think so?'

'Sort of!' gasped Bob.

'Mind, I don't know anything about it, if there's a row,' said Bunter. 'I haven't been near Quelch's study, or Smithy's either, if there's a row.'

'Smithy's!' repeated Harry Wharton. 'What has Smithy had to do with it?'

'Oh, Nothing! I never looked into Smithy's study when I came out of Mauly's-I mean, I haven't been up to the studies at all. If anybody's had Mauly's jam, it wasn't me! I daresay he ate it himself, and forgot all about it. You know what an ass Mauly is.'

'Never mind Mauly's jam now,' said Bob. 'If you've really planted a Latin dick over Quelch's door, cut in and get it away before he goes to his study.'

'I'll watch it!' jeered Bunter.

'You'll get the whopping of your life!' said Johnny Bull.

'That's all you know!' retorted Bunter. 'Quelch won't think of me for a minute. Why should he? Think I'd stick my own dick up over his door, when all our books have to have names in them? Think I'm a fool?'

'Yes, rather.'

'The ratherfulness is terrific.'

'Well, if anybody gets into a row, it won't be me!' said Bunter. 'I don't want any rows with Quelch. Smithy seems to like them! He, he, he! He can have all he wants, and some over! He, he, he! He banged my head-'

'He doesn't seem to have banged any sense into it!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'Serve him right if Quelch gets after him!' said Bunter. 'Serve 'em both right! Didn't Quelch make out that I couldn't spell, and give me that rotten word "magister" to write out a thousand times? And then that beast Smithy upset the ink over it, and I had to do it all over again. I'll show 'em! Smithy's got it coming, I can tell you.'

'What's he got coming?' asked Bob. 'Are you going to strew the hungry churchyard with his bones?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm not going to handle him myself-'

'I wouldn't!' agreed Bob: and the Famous Five chuckled, at the idea of the fat Owl 'handling' the hefty Bounder.

'But there's such a thing as killing two birds with one stone!' said Bunter. 'Bang for Quelch's nut, and whops for Smithy. He, he, he. I'm not going to soil my hands on the fellow-'

'They're soiled enough, already, if you come to that!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Yah! He's got it coming, all the same,' declared Bunter. 'Banging a fellow's head, and booting him round a study. Just wait till Quelch gets after him.'

'Why the dickens should Quelch get after him?' asked Bob. 'He wouldn't think that Smithy was ass enough to fix up that booby-trap.'

'Wouldn't he?' grinned Bunter. 'That's all you know.'

'Well, why should he?' asked Harry.

'Quelch knows we all have our names in our books.'

Well, when he gets that dick on his nut, think he won't look into it and see whose it is? Bound to.'

Five fellows jumped, all at once. They guessed it now!

'You fat villain!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Is it Smithy's Latin dick that you've stuck up for Quelch?'

'He, he, he!'

'Is it?' roared Johnny Bull.

'He, he, he! That's telling!' said Bunter. 'I'm not 'going to tell you fellows. You might let it out to Smithy. I'm keeping the whole thing dark. I mean to say, you can't be too careful, when it's a rag on Quelch. Least said soonest mended. He, he, he!'

'You dithering, blithering bloater!' said Bob Cherry. 'Don't you know that you can't play a dirty trick like that?'

'Oh, really, Cherry-if you think I'd play a dirty trick on anybody-!' exclaimed the fat Owl, indignantly.

'Boot him!' said Johnny Bull.

'Oh, really, Bull-'

'Can't you understand that it's a rotten trick?' hooted Bob.

Evidently, Billy Bunter couldn't! To the fat and fatuous Owl, it was a masterly dodge for killing two birds with one stone!-a bang on the nut for Quelch, and whops for Smithy! Billy Bunter's fat brain moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform! Bunter was quite satisfied with himself and his masterly scheme. Needless to say, the Famous Five were not.

'Look here, Bunter, you unutterable ass!' said Harry Wharton.

'You've got to stop this. Cut in and get that dick away-'

'Smithy banged my head-'

'Bother your silly head-'

'Beast!'

'Cut in, before Quelch goes to his study-'

'He may have gone already, for all I know. Catch me going anywhere near his study,' yapped Bunter. 'Mind, don't you fellows get saying anything when he gets that dick on his napper. I don't want Quelch after me, or Smithy either. You know what Smithy's temper's like-and he's a worse beast than ever since it came out that he's hard up. Tain't safe to speak to him. He's had a row with Skinner. Skinner only asked him whether his pater had gone bankrupt, and Smithy hit out-right on the boko-'

'Never mind that now. Cut in-'

'Shan't!' said Bunter. 'The fact is, you fellows, I don't know anything about it, not a thing! I haven't touched Smithy's Latin dick, and I never stuck it up over Quelch's door, and never got out of his window afterwards. I was in the gym when I got out of his window-I mean when I didn't got-I mean-'

'You fat ditherer, will you cut in-'

'No, I jolly well won't!'

And Billy Bunter settled that point, by revolving on his axis and rolling away. Harry Wharton and Co. looked at one another expressively.

'We can't leave it at that!' said Harry.

"No fear!" said Bob. 'Look here, I'll cut in and get that dick away-and then we'll boot that fat villain all round the quad, and back again, for putting it there.'

'Go it, then!'

Bob Cherry cut off to the House at a run.

He lost no time. How long it was since the fat Owl had planted that booby-trap for Quelch, he did not know, or whether Quelch might yet have gone to his study. He hoped to be in time.

But that hope faded out, as, a little breathless, he reached Masters' Studies. He was about to turn the corner, when a sudden startling sound ahead came to his ears.

Thud!

Bump!

'Oh!'

He was just too late! Quelch had had it!

CHAPTER 12

ALAS FOR BUNTER

'OH!'

Mr. Quelch repeated that exclamation. Seldom or never had Quelch been so taken by surprise. After that 'chin-wag', as Bunter described it, in the Common-Room, the Remove master walked down the corridor to his study. The door of that apartment was ajar, and Quelch unsuspectingly pushed it open to enter. It did not occur to him to look up as he did so. There was no reason why he should. Booby-traps might sometimes be planted in junior studies: but anything of the kind in Quelch's was unthinkable. Unthinkable as it was, there it was!

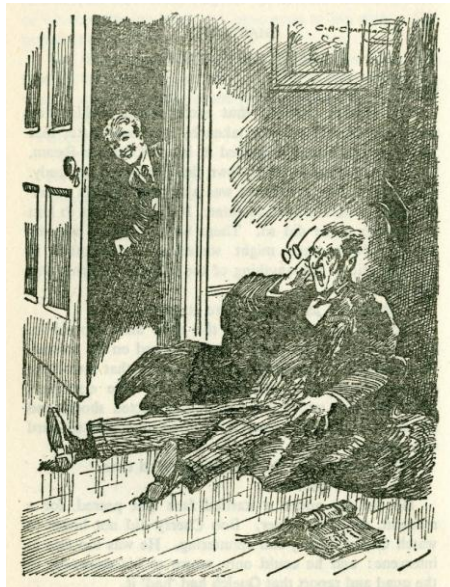
Mr. Quelch pushed open the door and stepped in.

Thud! What it was that suddenly banged on his mortar-board Quelch did not know. But he knew that something did-something hard and rather heavy. He ejaculated 'Oh!' tottering under the sudden unexpected shock, and sat down-uttering a second 'Oh!' as he contacted hard oak planks.

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch, for the third time. He sat and spluttered. He did not notice a startled face that peered, for a moment, round a corner. Bob Cherry did not linger to watch Quelch sitting and spluttering. He was too late to intervene: and he could only return to his comrades in the quad and report that Quelch had 'had' it.

'Oh!' said Mr. Quelch: a fourth time.

Such a happening was so unthinkable, so unprecedented, that Quelch was rather slow to realize what must have happened. But as his eyes fell on a Latin dictionary lying in the doorway, he did realize it.



'OH!' GASPED MR. QUELCH FOR THE THIRD TIME!

It was that Latin dictionary that had thudded on his head, and caused him to sit down so suddenly. That 'dick', he realized, must have been lodged on top of his study door, ready to crash when the door opened. He had, in fact, walked into a booby-trap prepared for him in his absence by some wildly-reckless and disrespectful person.

He rose slowly to his feet.

His lips set in a very tight line. The expression on his face was eloquent. It boded ill to the perpetrator of that prank, if discovered. And Quelch, certainly, was going to discover him. He was going to rout out that reckless young rascal, if he had to go over Greyfriars School with a small comb to root him out! He stepped further into his study, and picked up the dictionary. It was not one of his own books. There were, in Quelch's bookcase, many volumes, some of them very ponderous. A ragger might have been expected to select one of them for his booby-trap, instead of bringing a volume with him. But this volume was not Dr. Smith's Larger Latin Dictionary, which might have been found in Quelch's study. It was Dr. Smith's Smaller Latin Dictionary, such as was used by the boys of his form. Smaller as it was, it was a fairly good weight, and Quelch had had quite a knock from it. 'Upon my word!' breathed Mr. Quelch, his gimlet-eyes glinting at the volume.

He opened it at the title-page.

One glance within would be sufficient to establish the ownership of that 'dick', for all school-books at Greyfriars had to have the owner's name written in them. And this was a school-book-a Remove boy's property.

Mr. Quelch's lips set harder, as he read the name 'H. Vernon-Smith.'

'That young rascal!' he breathed.

He was not surprised. Herbert Vernon-Smith was the most reckless fellow in the Remove, mutinous by nature, always on the brink of disrespect-as near the brink as he dared. Quelch had not failed to note his sullen looks since he had been 'gated', and his too-ample supply of pocket-money had been cut off. This was a reckless act of retaliation from the rebel of the Remove.

Or was it?

Quelch, on the verge of sending for H. Vernon-Smith, paused.

That dictionary, undoubtedly, belonged to Herbert Vernon-Smith. It was Smithy's 'dick' that had banged on Quelch's head. But-Smithy was a reckless, disrespectful, and resentful young rascal. But he was no fool. So far from that, he was extremely keen and wary. Could he have been so utterly unwary, as to use his own book to bait a trap for his form-master?

Slowly, Quelch shook his head. The first thought of any fellow baiting a booby-trap for a 'beak' would be to use an object that could not be traced to him-any fellow who had his wits about him. And that particular member of Quelch's form undoubtedly had his wits about him. Had some other fellow borrowed the Bounder's book, simply to set Quelch on the wrong track?

Quelch was going to know. He was certainly going to know-and when he knew, the cane in his study was going to get some very active exercise. Quelch was a just man. In that line, Aristides of old had simply nothing on him. He was going to make sure, and to make assurance doubly sure, before the cane came into action. He laid the offending volume on the table.

Then he uttered an exclamation of annoyance and disgust. He stared at his fingers.

They were sticky!

'Bless my soul!' murmured Mr. Quelch.

He stared at those sticky fingers, and then at the dictionary, noting now that the cover was sticky also. Someone with exceedingly jammy fingers had been handling that 'dick'. There was jam on the cover, and there was jam on Quelch's fingers-sticky jam! H. Vernon-

Smith was never likely to leave any of his books in that sticky state. Smithy had his faults-their name was Legion -but he was not slovenly- he was as cleanly as any fellow in his form. But there was one member of that form who certainly was not.

'Bunter!' breathed Mr. Quelch.

He had no doubts now. There was only one fellow in the Greyfriars Remove who was capable of leaving that sticky trail behind him. Mr. Quelch wiped his fingers carefully. Then he stepped to the open window. By that window, he had no doubt, the ragger had departed, after planting the booby-trap at the door. But there was no need for rigid investigation now!-no need to go over Greyfriars with a small comb for the offender! It was only necessary to send for William George Bunter!

Quelch looked from the window. At a little distance he saw a group of five juniors apparently consulting together. Quelch interrupted the consultation, whatever it was about, with a sharp rap.

'Wharton!'

'Oh!' Harry Wharton looked round, and came towards the window.

'Yes. sir!'

'Please find Bunter at once, and send him to my study.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

Mr. Quelch turned back from the window. His next proceeding was to select a cane. There were several available. Quelch selected the stoutest. Then, with a grim face growing grimmer and grimmer, he waited.

He had some minutes to wait. Then, at length a fat figure appeared in the doorway, and a pair of big spectacles glimmered into the study. Two little round eyes blinked uneasily at Quelch through those big round spectacles. Billy Bunter was not uneasy on the subject of the booby-trap. He had no doubt whatever that that would be attributed to the fellow whose name was in the 'dick'. But he had other sins on his fat conscience. Quelch might have noticed that there was nothing left in the biscuit-box in Common-Room or he might have heard that Coker of the Fifth was making a fuss about a bunch of bananas that had disappeared from his study. A summons into his form-master's presence was always a little alarming, to the Owl of the Remove.

'Bunter!' Mr. Quelch pointed to the Latin dictionary on his table.

'You placed this book on my door, to fall when I entered my study.'

Billy Bunter jumped. This was quite unexpected. He would not have been surprised to hear something about biscuits missing in Common-Room or bananas from a Fifth-form study. But this did surprise him. He goggled at Quelch.

'Do you deny this, Bunter?'

'Oh! Yes, sir! I-I haven't been in this study, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'I-I-I don't know why you should think it was me, sir.'

'Show me your hands, Bunter.'

'Mum-mum-mum-my hands, sir?' stuttered Bunter.

'At once!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter held up two grubby, sticky paws for inspection. Mr. Quelch inspected them with a grim eye. Bunter's fat fingers were often sticky. Now they were quite uncommonly sticky. Mauly's jam told its own tale! Billy Bunter's paws were as sticky as Smithy's 'dick'.

'Now, Bunter-!' Quelch's voice was deep.

'It wasn't me, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'I don't know anything about it, sir! I-I haven't touched Smithy's Latin dick, sir-'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. 'Then how do you know, Bunter, that this dictionary is Vernon-Smith's?'

'Oh! I-I? I don't know, sir!' groaned Bunter. 'I-I never got it from his study, sir-never thought of it. Never touched it, sir.'

'You have not only touched it, Bunter, but you have left it in a disgustingly sticky state-'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Bunter! You have played a foolish and disrespectful prank in your form-master's study. But that is not all. That Bunter is not the most serious aspect of the matter. Quelch's voice deepened. 'From the name in that book, Bunter, I might have concluded that Vernon-Smith was the offender-I might have punished him in error, Bunter. By borrowing another boy's book to play this foolish prank, Bunter, you might have caused your form-master to commit an act of injustice.'

Billy Bunter goggled at him. Luckily for Bunter, Quelch did not suspect that Smithy's 'dick' had been borrowed for that very purpose!

'That Bunter, is an extremely serious matter-'

'Is-is-is it, sir?' gasped Bunter.

, 'In such circumstances,' continued Mr. Quelch, 'it is my duty to administer a very severe punishment.'

'Oh, lor!'

Mr. Quelch swished that stout cane.

'You will now bend over that chair, Bunter.'

'B-b-b-but I-I say, sir, it wasn't me!' gasped Bunter.

'I-I never touched that dick, sir, and-and I never noticed that I'd made it sticky-'

'Bend over that chair!'

A dismal Owl bent over the chair. From the very bottom of his fat heart, Billy Bunter repented him that he had ever evolved that masterly scheme for killing two birds with one stone! But repentance came too late! The cane was swishing.

Whop! whop! whop!

'Yow-ow-wow!'

Whop! Whop!

'Ow! Ooooooh! Wooooooh!'

WHOP!

It was a full six! And they were laid on well and truly.

In such circumstances, as he had said, Quelch felt it his duty to be severe. And Quelch was a whale on duty! Most Remove fellows were aware, from experience, that Quelch could whop! But never before had William George Bunter realised with what energy he could whop! The last swipe elicited a wild yell from the hapless Owl.

'Yarooooooh!'

'Now, 'Wow! wow! Oh, jiminy! Wow!'

'You may leave my study, Bunter.'

'Ow! wow! wow!'

Billy Bunter left it-doubled up like a pocket-knife.

Sounds of woe floated back as he crawled down the corridor. Five fellows were waiting for him when he emerged tottering into the quad. But if Harry Wharton and Co. had hostile intentions, they forgot them at the sight of the suffering Owl. In fact his aspect might have melted a heart of stone.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'What-?'

'Ow! Ow! Ooooh! I-I say, you fellows, Quelch knew it was me-wow! I say, I've had-wooooh!-six! Wow! Ow! Ooooh! Oh, crikey! Did he lay it on! Wow!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I tell you I've had six-wow!'

'Serve you jolly well right!' said Johnny Bull.

'The rightfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter.'

'Ow! Beast! Wow!'

The fact that, in the opinion of the Famous Five, it served him right, did not seem to comfort Billy Bunter in the very least. It was a sad, suffering, sorrowful Owl. And it was likely to be a long, long, long time, before Billy Bunter evolved any more masterly schemes for killing two birds with one stone!

CHAPTER 13

STOP!

'COME into the Cloisters.'

'What about the Soccer?'

'Bother the Soccer!' snapped Vernon-Smith, irritably. 'I'm out of the Highcliffe match next week. You know that. I'm not thinking about Soccer this afternoon.'

'Wharton's fixed a pick-up-' said Tom Redwing.

'Plenty of fellows to pick up without me, or you either. Will you come along now or not? I've got something to say.'

'Can't you say it here?'

'No!' snapped Smithy. 'Are you coming?'

'Oh, all right.'

It was Saturday afternoon. Plenty of fellows at Greyfriars were thinking of Soccer that fine afternoon; but it seemed that Herbert Vernon-Smith was not one of them. With the Highcliffe match coming along in a few days, Harry Wharton and Co. were naturally as keen as mustard. So, indeed, would Smithy have been, in normal circumstances. But circumstances were not quite normal now. Other matters, much less harmless and healthy than Soccer, were on the Bounder's mind.

Tom Redwing followed his chum rather slowly.

Smithy, it seemed had something to say which other ears were not to hear, and the old Cloisters were a quiet and secluded spot. But that was not Redwing's only uneasy misgiving. There was a certain spot in the old Cloisters where a fellow could clamber out unseen—a spot well known to the rebel of the Remove. If the reckless Bounder was thinking of disregarding Quelch's order of 'gates', there was trouble ahead.

'Look here, Smithy,' muttered Redwing. 'Why not join up for the Soccer, old chap? You may be wanted on Wednesday after all, if Wharton—'

'Bother Wharton!'

'Do let a chap speak. I've asked him if he couldn't put it to Quelch to give you special leave for the Highcliffe match on Wednesday.'

'Likely!' sneered the Bounder.

'Quelch isn't a bad sort—'

'Isn't he?' jeered Smithy.

'You know he isn't, Smithy, or you'd know it if you didn't put his back up as you do. If Wharton put it to him that you're badly wanted in the game, I believe he would stretch a point. Only for goodness sake, don't do anything that would make matters worse.'

'I won't—if you'll help me out.'

'What do you mean?'

'I'll tell you.' Vernon-Smith came to a halt, leaning on one of the old stone pillars, with his hands in his pockets. 'Look here, Reddy, I've never asked you before to mix up in my affairs, or to have anything to do with them. But I'm in a jam now. I'm gated, and Quelch is as watchful as a cat—and I know jolly well that he's tipped the prefects to keep an eye on me. I've noticed Wingate's eye on me more than once—and some of the other pre's, too. I'm a bad hat, you know, and not to be trusted,' added the Bounder, with a bitter sneer.

'You can't wonder—'

'Oh, cut that out! Will you help me or not?'

'But how-?'

'Look how I'm fixed!' muttered the Bounder. 'I'm gated, and if I'm spotted cutting gates, it means going up to the Head. I don't want to risk that, if I can help it. I shall have to if you don't help me out. But-'

'I should think not!' breathed Redwing. 'For the sake of common-sense, Smithy, don't think of kicking over the traces now. Quelch has given you a chance this time-he won't give you another.'

'I know that! But I've got to get word to a man outside the school-

'Smithy!'

'I tell you I've got to. You know I'm in Stony Street.

The pater has cut off supplies-you know that. He hadn't any choice, I know-Quelch has the upper hand. But look where it leaves me. I'm as hard up as Bunter. Do you know how much I've got in my pockets now? Two or three half-crowns, and a bob or two. All the fellows know! Think I like it? That's not all, either. This knock couldn't have come at a worse time. I was relying on a tip from home to square Sanders the two quid I lost on Blue Streak the other day. The brute came in third-I'd backed him to win. Sanders isn't the kind of man a fellow wants to owe money to.'

'I could lend you-'

'I've got other ways. Look here, Reddy, I know you hate this kind of thing-and you've told me it makes you sick, so you needn't tell me again. But I'm on to a good thing that will see me through. Blue Streak is running again next week-twice, on Monday and Wednesday. He's a good horse-'

'For goodness sake, Smithy-'

'Listen, will you?' The Bounder almost snarled. 'I tell you he's a good horse, that can romp home if they want him to. Il fancy he was pulled last time, to keep him back for a bigger stake next time, keeping down the weights, and all that, and longer odds- There's all sorts of tricks in racing-'

'All the more reason for keeping clear of it.'

'The price is down now,' went on the Bounder, unheeding. 'You can get four to one against Blue Streak now. That's what he was pulled for, I expect-to get longer odds against him on Monday. He will win hands down, if they give him his head. He's going to win on Monday, and make a packet for them-and for me, too. See? A fiver on him will clear me with Sanders, and leave me something in hand to carry on.'

Redwing stared at his eager face.

'I don't get it,' he said. 'If you can't pay Sanders a couple of pounds now, how could you pay him, if you lose on Monday?'

'Blue Streak won't lose on Monday.'

'But if he did-'

'He won't!'

'Smithy! Have a little sense! You can't know-'

'I do know! You don't savvy these things, Reddy-I do. I'd put my shirt on Blue Streak for the three o'clock on Monday.'

'You can't pay if you lose-'

'Oh, Sanders will wait even if that happened. He knows that I've always squared, and that I've always had plenty of oof. But I tell you Blue Streak will win-I'll bet he will be two or three lengths ahead of the field. But I've got to get word to Sanders at the Three Fishers. Will you cut across with a message for him?'

Tom Redwing started, as if a snake had stung him.

'Smithy!' he exclaimed.

'Don't Smithy me!' snapped the Bounder. 'Will you or not? I've never asked you anything of the kind before, and I wouldn't now, if there was any way out. You can go where you like, without the pre's prying after you-nobody would dream that an old sobersides like you would ever take a step out of bounds. Safe as houses for you-and it will see me through.'

'It wouldn't see you through, Smithy-but even if it would, I couldn't do it.' Redwing's tone was sharp.

Only too well he knew how bitterly Vernon-Smith resented the new state of his affairs. 'Stony Street' was a very unpleasant location for the wealthy Bounder, accustomed to making the money fly. Sneers from fellows like Skinner and Snoop cut him deeply. Somehow, anyhow, he was going to retrieve his fallen fortunes-if he could. Redwing knew that he could not: Smithy was stubbornly determined to believe that he could. But there was only one answer that Tom Redwing could make.

'You won't!' muttered Smithy.

'You know I can't, Smithy. I can't have a hand in anything of the kind. I'm not thinking of the risk-you know that! But I couldn't-'

'Will you do this for me or not?'

'I can't.'

The Bounder gave him a black and bitter look.

'Okay, then,' he said. 'I shall have to chance it myself. You can clear off, and play Soccer with that pi gang. Or you can go and put Quelch wise, if you like.'

'Smithy!'

'Leave me alone, at any rate.'

The Bounder swung angrily away. At a little distance was an old stone seat, backed by thick old ivy clustered on the ancient wall. That spot, where any active fellow could negotiate the wall, was well-known to breakers of bounds. The Bounder leaped lightly on the seat, and grasped up at the ivy.

STOP! 'Smithy!' exclaimed Tom, in utter dismay. He ran after his chum, and caught him by an elbow.

'Stop!'

'Let go, you fool!'

'Smithy, you're mad!' panted Tom. 'You'll be missed-you've told me yourself that Quelch is keeping his eyes on you-you'll be missed-'

'That's not your worry.'

'You're asking for it-begging for it! For goodness sake, Smithy-'

'Will you let go my arm?' Tom Redwing set his lips.

'No!' he answered. 'I won't! I won't let you do such a mad thing, Smithy. You'll be caught out, and you'll go up to the Head-and you know what that means. I won't let you go.'

The Bounder stared down at him, his eyes blazing.

'Do you think you can order me about?' he breathed. 'Mind your own business, Tom Redwing. Let go my arm, or I'll knock you spinning.' Tom Redwing did not let go his arm. Instead of that, he gave it a tug, which brought Herbert Vernon-Smith tumbling off the stone seat. The Bounder, crimson with rage, turned on him furiously, and the next moment they were struggling-both of them too breathless and excited to hear or heed the sound of approaching footsteps.

CHAPTER 14

WHERE IS SMITHY?

'TRY it on!' said Bob Cherry.

'No harm in trying!' agreed Johnny Bull.

'Might as well!' said Frank Nugent.

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded a dusky head in assent.

The Famous Five were in consultation, on a matter of keen interest to the Remove footballers. In Wharton's hand was a sheet of paper, containing a list of names. There were eleven names on the list, one of which was crossed out. The list ran: J. Bull; P. Todd, M. Linley; R. Cherry, T. Brown, R. D. Ogilvy; H. Singh, F. Nugent, H. Wharton, S. Q. I. Field, H. Vernon-Smith. It was the last name that had been deleted.

H. Vernon-Smith was out of it. But the captain of the Remove, and all the team, were very anxious to see that name in again-if possible. Smithy, with all his wild ways, was one of the best junior footballers at Greyfriars: and at Highcliffe the best men were needed. Courtenay and his men, at Highcliffe, were a hard nut to crack: and Smithy on the wing might easily make all the difference. Harry Wharton and Co. were feeling disposed to kick him, for having got himself 'gated', but still more they were inclined to leave no stone unturned to get him back into the team. Tom Redwing had suggested that an appeal to Quelch might work the oracle. Smithy was in his black books-doubted, suspected, watched. He was 'gated' because he could not be trusted outside the school. But a Soccer match in company with a crowd of other fellows, was a different matter. Smithy would go over to Highcliffe in the motor-coach with the team: he would return with them after the game: he would have neither time nor opportunity for any reckless delinquency. Having thought over Redwing's suggestion, the captain of the Remove consulted his chums about it, and they all agreed that he might, at least, 'try it on'.

'Try it on,' repeated Bob. 'If Quelch says no, it only leaves us where we were. And if he says yes-'

'We want Smithy, if we can get him,' said Frank Nugent. 'Never mind his rotten temper and his bad manners. Put it to Quelch, and see.'

'I'll try it on, at any rate!' said Harry, at last.

And that having been decided, the captain of the Remove made his way to his form-master's study, doubtful but hopeful.

'Come in, Wharton,' Mr. Quelch's tone was quite genial. 'What is it, my boy?'

Wharton coloured a little.

'I wanted to ask you something, sir, if you don't mind-'

'Please proceed.'

'It-it's about Smithy, sir. I-I mean Vernon-Smith-'

Mr. Quelch's face became a little less genial, at the mention of that name.

'Well?' he asked, somewhat sharply.

'We're playing Highcliffe on Wednesday next week, sir. It's rather a big affair for us. We want to beat them if we can-'

'No doubt,' said Mr. Quelch. 'But what-?'

'Vernon-Smith's in the team, sir-I mean, he was. I've had to take his name out since he was gated. I-I was going to ask you whether he could have special leave out of gates next Wednesday-'

'What?'

'Only for the football match, sir,' said Wharton, hastily.

"He's one of the best men we've got, and it would make a lot of difference if he had to be left out. He would come over with us, and come back with us—he would be with us all the time, sir—playing Soccer. All the fellows would be glad, sir, if you'd let him come." Mr. Quelch sat silent, pursing his lips. His first impulse, probably, was to reply in the negative. But he checked it. Under a somewhat crusty exterior, Quelch was a kindly man. He was prepared, if that troublesome member of his form transgressed again, to march him off to his head-master for condign judgment, and to see the gates of Greyfriars close behind him for the last time. But he hoped very sincerely, that it would never come to that. And if the young rascal was keen on a Soccer match, it was at least a sign of grace. Harry Wharton fancied that he could read the signs of relenting in the crusty countenance.

'I will consider this, Wharton!' said the Remove master, at last.

'Thank you, sir.'

'You may tell Vernon-Smith to come to my study.'

'Very well, sir.'

Harry Wharton left the study, leaving Mr. Quelch looking very thoughtful, and rejoined his chums in the quad.

'What's the jolly old verdict?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Quelch is going to see Smithy. If he has sense enough not to be cheeky, I think it will be all right,' answered Harry. 'I expect Quelch is going to give him a bit of a jaw, that's all.'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'Quelch is going to make sure that it's only Soccer he's thinking of for Wednesday,' he said. 'He doesn't trust Smithy an inch.'

'Well, if that's all, all right,' said Frank Nugent. 'Better tell him to cut in at once. Quelch doesn't like being kept waiting.'

'Anybody know where he is now?' asked Harry.

'He came out with Redwing after tiffin,' said Bob. 'He's somewhere around. Better look for him—the sooner we know the verdict the better. If he keeps Quelch waiting the old boy may get his back up.'

There were plenty of fellows to be seen in the quadrangle: but Herbert Vernon-Smith was not visible among them.

'You cut up to his study, and see if he's there, Frank,' said Harry. 'You look in the Rag, Bob.'

'Right-ho!'

Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry went into the House.

Wharton, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh scattered in various directions, to look for the Bounder, and inquire of anyone who might have seen him. It was a little exasperating that he should be out of sight, when he was wanted, and so much depended on the result of his visit to Quelch's study.

'Seen Smithy, Skinner?' called out Harry Wharton, as he came on Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, in a lounging group. 'No, and don't want to,' snapped Skinner. Skinner had been more or less 'pally' with the Bounder: but that, apparently, was now a thing of the past. Harry Wharton bore down on a fat figure loafing by the tuck-shop window. 'Here, Bunter—'

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles. 'Looking for me, Harry old chap?' he asked. 'Here I am, old fellow. I say, could you lend a fellow half-a-crown till Monday? I'm expecting a postal-order on Monday—'

'Have you seen Smithy about?'

'Eh! Yes! He went off to the Cloisters with Redwing, when I saw him. But, I say, never mind Smithy—if you could lend me half-a-

crown till my postal-order comes-I say, don't rush off while a fellow's talking to you!' howled Bunter. 'I say, Harry, old fellow-Beast!'

Harry Wharton hurried off to the old Cloisters, leaving an exasperated Owl blinking after him. As he came under the old stone arches, a sound of scuffling ahead reached his ears. A minute later, a startling scene burst on his view-two figures grappling and struggling, close by the old stone seat under the ivied wall. He stared blankly at that unexpected scene.

'Redwing!' he gasped. 'Smithy! Stop that, for goodness sake.' He grasped Vernon-Smith by the shoulder, and dragged him back by main force, away from Redwing. The Bouncer turned on him with face aflame. Redwing stood panting.

'You meddlin' fool, leave me alone!' hissed Smithy.

'You're wanted.'

'Leave me alone, I tell you.'

'It's Quelch-'

'Quelch!' repeated Vernon-Smith. 'Do you mean that he's sent for me?' 'Yes.'

'Oh!'

'He's waiting for you now to go to his study.'

'Oh!'

'Smithy!' breathed Redwing. 'If you'd gone-'

Smithy did not answer him. He stood breathing hard.

Quelch had sent for him to his study-and but for Tom Redwing, he would have been already gone! Harry Wharton looked from one to the other. He could guess how matters stood. It had been the narrowest of escapes for the reckless Bouncer. Smithy realized that very clearly. For a long moment he stood silent.

'Know what Quelch wants?' he asked, at last. 'Another row, I suppose.'

'Nothing of the kind,' answered Harry. 'It's about Highcliffe next Wednesday-I've asked Quelch to give you leave for the match, and I think he will-if you've sense enough not to play the goat for the next few days,' he added.

'I'll please myself about that.'

'Smithy, old chap-!' muttered Redwing.

The Bouncer gave him a dark look. But for Redwing's intervention he would inevitably have been missed, inquired after, and marched off to his head-master when he came back. But he resented it all the same. Without replying, he tramped away, to obey the summons to his form-master's study.

CHAPTER 15

THE END?

'HE, he, he!'

Billy Bunter seemed amused. His little round eyes, and his big round spectacles, glued upon a little scene that was, to Billy Bunter's fat and fatuous mind, quite entertaining.

At the moment, the fat Owl was looking for Lord Mauleverer. Harry Wharton and Co. were in the changing-room, the pick-up fixed for that afternoon being almost due. Bunter was not interested in Soccer. He did not want to urge the flying ball, neither did he want to watch other more active fellows doing so. What Bunter wanted, on a half-holiday, was a lazy frowst in an armchair in the Rag, toasting his toes on the fender. But he also wanted that frowst to be accompanied by something in the nature of sticky refreshment. How many half-crowns he had borrowed from the long-suffering Mauly during the term, Bunter could hardly have counted. But he hoped to add one more to the long list. He noticed Tom Redwing near the door of the House, and was about to roll up to him and inquire whether he had seen Mauly about, when Herbert Vernon-Smith came out. Then occurred the little scene that entertained the fat Owl.

Redwing made a quick step towards Vernon-Smith. He was anxious to know the result of Smithy's interview with his form-master.

'Smithy-!' he began. 'Is it all right-?'

Instead of replying, the Bounder stared him in the face for a moment, and then walked on, without a word.

Tom Redwing, with a flush of colour in his face, was left staring after him. He seemed rooted to the ground.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter. 'I say, Redwing, is Smithy rowing with you now? He's rowed with nearly everybody else. He, he, he.' Redwing did not heed the fat Owl: he did not seem to hear. For several moments he stood quite still. Then he followed Vernon-Smith. Billy Bunter, for the moment forgetful of Mauly and a possible half-crown, rolled after him. If there was going to be a row, the inquisitive Owl did not mean to miss it. Since the fall in his fortunes, the Bounder's unreliable temper had been more unreliable than ever. He was liable to fly off the handle at a word: ready to quarrel with friend or foe. Now, it seemed, he was 'rowing' with his last, indeed, his only, friend in the school. Billy Bunter wondered, with deep interest, whether there was going to be a 'scrap'.

Unheeding the fat junior, in fact unaware of his existence, Tom Redwing overtook the Bounder. Smithy did not stop at the sound of footsteps behind him. But he had to stop, as Redwing caught him by the arm.

Then he stared round, with a glint in his eyes and shook off Redwing's hand.

'Keep your paws to yourself!' he snapped. 'Smithy-!'

'Leave me alone.'

'What did Quelch say-?'

'Find out!'

Tom Redwing compressed his lips. He was slow to anger: and he had always been almost inexhaustibly patient with his wayward chum. But his patience was wearing thin now. But he answered quietly:

'I had to stop you, Smithy! If that's what you've got your back up about, think what would have happened if I hadn't-'

'No business of yours.'

'You'd have been missed-'

'That's not your worry.'

'As it turned out, Quelch had sent for you! If I hadn't stopped you, when Wharton was looking for you-'

'I know all that.'

'And you know what would have happened, if Quelch had found out that you'd disobeyed his order, and gone out of gates-'

'I don't need you to tell me.'

'Well, then, have a little sense,' said Redwing, sharply. 'Did you want Quelch to march you off to the Head, to be sacked, when you came in? That's what it would have come to, if I hadn't stopped you-'

The Bounder gave him a black look.

'I have to hop, when Quelch says hop!' he said. 'I'm not catching a train home, if I can help it. But I don't have to hop at your orders, Tom Redwing. I'd have knocked you spinning, if Wharton hadn't come up just then. Do you fancy you can order me about, and dictate to me? You cheeky fool!'

'I had to stop you-'

'Try it again. and see what will happen.'

'Smithy! You're not going-?'

The Bounder laughed harshly.

'No, I'm not quite a fool. I'm leaving it till later, when it will be safer. This afternoon I'm joining up for Soccer, to let Quelch see what a good little boy I am. I wouldn't wonder if he gives us a look in at the pick-up-he doesn't trust me an inch! Plenty of time later-even Quelch's eyes can't always be open. Now leave me alone.'

'Smithy, old chap-'

'I've asked you to leave me alone. Can't you understand plain English? I'm fed up with you, and through with you. Leave me alone.'

'I'll leave you alone, Smithy, if that's what you really want. But we've been friends too long to break it up now-if I can help it, at least. And you need a friend now, more than you ever did before. You're heading for trouble-'

'No concern of yours.'

'Smithy, old fellow-'

'Oh, cut that out! Leave me alone, I tell you. Can't you get it into your head that you're not wanted? Or do you want me to punch your face like I did Skinner's?'

Tom Redwing drew a deep breath. He gave Vernon-Smith one look, and turned away without another word. Vernon-Smith scowled after him, and stalked away to the changing-room. Billy Bunter, who had hovered as near as he could, an interested spectator, was somewhat disappointed. A 'scrap' between two fellows who had always been close friends, would have been quite an exciting spot of news for Bunter to spread far and wide. But there had been no 'scrap'.

'I say, Redwing old chap-!' squeaked Bunter.

'Eh!'

Tom Redwing glanced round at a fat face.

'I say, what have you been rowing about,' inquired Bunter.

'Smithy's an ill-tempered beast, ain't he? I wonder you stand his rotten temper. I wouldn't.'

'You fat ass! '

'Oh, really, Redwing! I say, you might tell a fellow what you've been rowing about.' Bunter had not ventured near enough to overhear. He wanted to know. 'Of course I won't mention it to anybody-won't say a word.'

'Fathead!'

Tom Redwing walked away, his face deeply clouded.

It was the end of a friendship that had lasted long. The arrogant Bunder could not forgive an attempt at control: neither could Tom forget the bitter words from his erstwhile chum. It was the end-and it was a heavy blow to him, little as the Bunder seemed to care. Billy Bunter blinked after him indignantly.

'Cheeky beast, walking off while a fellow's talking to him,' grunted Bunter. 'I wonder where that other beast, Mauly, is.' And the fat Owl rolled away, once more in quest of Lord Mauleverer and the loan of a half-crown-a much more important matter, after all, than a 'row' between two Remove fellows. It was some time before he found Mauly: but he ran him down at last-reclining elegantly on the old bench under the elms, where the fat Owl had sat a few days ago pondering over Sporting Snips. At the sight of the fat figure bearing down on him, Lord Mauleverer half-rose; probably thinking of retreat. However, he sat back again as the Owl of the Remove rolled up.

'Oh, here you are, Mauly,' said Bunter, affably.

'Yaas,' sighed Lord Mauleverer. Mauly had been looking placidly cheerful. Now he looked less so: Bunter did not know why.

'Anything bothering you, Mauly?' asked Bunter, blinking at him.

'Yaas.'

'What is it, old boy?'

'You!'

'Oh, really, Mauly! I say, you haven't heard the latest!' said Bunter. 'Smithy and Redwing, you know-they're at daggers drawn-'
'Rubbish!'

'That's all you know!' grinned Bunter. 'I jolly well saw them having a row. I thought they were going to scrap. He, he, he.' Lord Mauleverer looked at him. Bunter, evidently, was amused. Mauly quite failed to see anything of an amusing nature in two friends falling out.

'Smithy's been rowing right and left, the last few days,' went on Bunter. 'Now he's rowed with Redwing. They've always been so jolly thick, you know. But I daresay Reddy's fed up with his temper, now's he's hard up! Think that's it, Mauly?'

'You dithering ass!'

'Well, it looks like it to me,' said Bunter. 'Anyhow they're rowing-glaring at one another like-like tigers. I say, if they come to scrapping, I'm jolly well not going to miss it! They looked like it! He, he, he!'

Lord Mauleverer rose from the bench. To Billy Bunter's surprise and annoyance, he reached out for a fat ear.

'Ow! Leggo! Wharrer you up to?' squeaked the fat Owl.

'Only turning you round-'

'Eh! What for?'

'I'm going to kick you.'

'Why you cheeky beast-Leggo-Wow! Will you leggo my ear?' yelled Bunter, as he was twirled round by that fat ear.

Thud!

'Yarooooooh! '

Billy Bunter departed from the spot in haste: without even remembering that he had intended to 'touch' Mauly for half-a-crown!

CHAPTER 16

AFTER LIGHTS OUT

BOOM!

It came dully through the autumn night from the clock-tower. It was the last stroke of eleven.

At that hour, all Greyfriars, or almost all, slept. There might be a light still on in Common-Room, or in one or two of the masters' studies. But in other quarters all was dark, and silent, and still. In the Remove dormitory, only one sound was audible—a deep and resonant snore from Billy Bunter's bed.

But in that dormitory there was one fellow who closed his eyes in vain. Tom Redwing found it difficult to sleep.

If he dozed from time to time, he awoke again. His mind was too troubled, his heart too heavy, for slumber.

The break with Smithy weighed heavily on him.

Whether it weighed on the Bounder, he could not know. Smithy had given no sign. They had come into contact several times since that scene in the quad which had so amused Bunter—without exchanging a word or a look.

There was no help for it. The scapegrace of Greyfriars was bent on his own reckless course: regardless of remonstrance, viciously resentful of the slightest attempt at control. He had thrown over his last and only friend with bitter gibes that it was not easy either to forgive or to forget. But—

But in spite of all, Tom Redwing knew that he was still anxious about the reckless rebel of the Remove. He could not cast friendship aside so lightly as it seemed that Smithy could on the morrow morning, he was going home on leave, to stay at the cottage up at Hawkscliff while his father was home from sea. And the thought was in his mind that when he returned, Vernon-Smith might be gone from the school. Smithy was as good as asking for it—carrying on undeterred by his form-master's stern warning. Caught in some repeated delinquency, it meant the 'sack' for him, short and sharp. And in spite of all, Tom knew that if that happened, it would hit him hard.

He turned his head on the pillow, and closed his eyes, wooing slumber. He fell into a doze as the last stroke of eleven died away. But it was not for long. His slumber was uneasy: and a faint sound was sufficient to wake him.

His eyes reopened, and he stared up at the high windows glimmering with starlight. Some slight sound had awakened him—and it seemed to him that it was the sound of a door closing softly and cautiously.

He sat up in bed.

He peered, in the glimmering starlight, at the next bed—the one that was, or should have been, occupied by Herbert Vernon-Smith. To his great relief, he could make out the shape of a sleeper in that bed.

He laid his head on the pillow again.

Even Smithy, wildly reckless as he was, could not be mad enough to risk 'breaking out' after lights out. More than once before, as Tom knew, he had done so, and his luck had always been good. But such a venture now was too perilous. Quelch had given him a chance—a last chance. But he did not, as Smithy himself had said, trust him an inch. It was likely, more than likely, that Quelch might look in at the Remove dormitory before he went to bed, to be assured that the

scapegrace, 'gated' by day, did not resort to 'breaking out' at a later hour. Even Smithy could not be mad enough to run the risk. But could he not?

Tom Redwing was almost sure that it was the faint sound of a closing door that had awakened him. True, it was possible that Quelch might have looked in, and, seeing all the beds occupied, gone away satisfied. But-

Tom's eyes, sleepless, were on Smithy's bed. It looked occupied. But-was it? He knew all about the old trick of planting a 'dummy' in a bed, to delude any casual glance into the dormitory. He slipped out of bed.

A moment or two later he knew-as he stood at Vernon-Smith's bedside, and stared down at what looked like the form of a sleeper in it. He hardly needed to turn back the bedclothes to make sure. It had been carefully and cunningly done. Two or three sweaters and an overcoat, arranged with care, made up the dummy figure in the bed. Tom Redwing felt his heart stand still, as he looked.

The Bounder was gone.

He had said that he would leave it till it was later and safer. And he had left it till after lights out. If Quelch came up, the dummy in the bed would pass muster, unless under a close inspection. But Tom Redwing knew, if Smithy did not choose to know, that if Quelch was suspicious he would not be satisfied with a casual glance from the doorway. He would make sure. If Quelch came up, the Bounder was lost!

Redwing stood still in the silence. Everyone else in the long dormitory was fast asleep. There was no sound but the intermittent snore from Bunter. No one had awakened when the Bounder crept from his bed and dressed himself in the dimness: and tiptoed to the door. Only Tom had awakened at the faint sound when the door closed. That was ten minutes ago. It was too late to stop the breaker of bounds-even if Smithy would have heeded him. Or was there a chance yet? In his mind's eye, Redwing followed the Bounder's movements-creeping by dark passages, tiptoeing down stairs, stealing silently to the box-room at the end of the Remove passage, where a window he knew well gave access to a leaded roof, from which descent to the ground was easy. By that window, as he knew, Smithy had gone and returned, more than once, laughing in his sleeve at unsuspecting masters and prefects. He had risked it once more, now that he was the object of distrust and watchful suspicion.

Was it too late?

Redwing was not thinking of black looks and bitter words now. He was only thinking of saving the reckless scapegrace from his own folly, if he could. Could he? If Smithy was not yet out of the House- There was a chance still. Smithy had savagely resented his intervention that afternoon, though it had saved him from disaster. He would resent it now. But-if there was a chance-!

Redwing crossed silently to the door. The faint sound as it opened and shut did not disturb any sleeping ear. His bare feet made no sound as he crept down the dark passage to the dormitory landing. There, all should have been dark. But a faint glimmer of light struck his eyes. It came from the study landing.

Redwing caught his breath.

Someone, evidently, was up. A single light burned on the study landing, from which the Remove passage opened. All should have been dark, at that hour. With beating heart, he crept to the banisters and peered over.

No one was to be seen.

But a sound came up to his ears-footsteps! That sound came from the Remove passage. It could not be Smithy-he would move on tiptoe. Someone was coming along the Remove passage, careless of the sound of his footsteps. A master or a prefect-it could be nobody else? Had Smithy been caught already?

A figure crossed the lighted landing below. Peering down over the banisters, Redwing recognized Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars. It was a relief to see that he was alone. Smithy had not been caught-yet! He must have got clear before Wingate came up. Did Wingate know anything? Why was he there at all?

The stalwart figure of the Greyfriars captain crossed the study landing to the lower staircase. He was going down. But he left the light burning. His footsteps died away on the lower stairs. Redwing listened intently. It was useless for him to venture further, for Smithy obviously was already out of the House. But what was to follow now?

In the deep silence, there came from below a sound of voices. Wingate was not the only person up at that hour. He had joined someone else below, at the foot of the lower staircase. Redwing could guess who that someone was, before he heard Quelch's voice.

'Well, Wingate?' Faintly from the distance, but clearly, that incisive voice came up to Redwing's intent ears.

'I'm afraid it's a case of breaking out, sir,' answered Wingate. 'I've found the window of the Remove box-room unfastened-the sash a few inches up. I-I suppose the house-porter may have overlooked it, but-but it looks-'

'I have no doubt on the subject, Wingate. I have, as you know, reason to suspect a boy in my form of this very act. Thank you, Wingate, for your assistance. I will now take the matter into my own hands. Good-night, my boy.'

'Good-night, sir.'

Tom Redwing stayed for no more. Quelch was coming up-to investigate! He hurried back to his dormitory with a heart like lead.

CHAPTER 17

THE ONLY WAY

TOM REDWING stood by his bed, in the dim silent dormitory. He could do nothing.

The game was up for Herbert Vernon-Smith. He was out of bounds-late at night. Where he was gone, and why, Redwing knew. And Quelch was coming up-in a matter of minutes he would be on the spot. That the 'dummy' in the Bounder's bed would deceive him, for one moment, was hardly to be hoped. A master on a late round, in normal circumstances, would doubtless be satisfied with a glance from the door. But a master who knew that a window had been left unfastened in the Remove quarters, and whose suspicions of a Remove man were very strong, would not be so easily satisfied. Redwing knew that Quelch, when he came, would make absolutely sure that Vernon-Smith's bed contained a living occupant-not a 'dummy' rigged up to give the appearance of a sleeper. And what he would find was an overcoat and two or three sweaters! The game was up!

Or was it?

Tom Redwing's thoughts moved swiftly. Could he yet save his erring chum-even at overwhelming risk to himself? Could he-at the risk of taking his place as a culprit-of facing the anger and contempt of the master he respected, and whose good opinion he valued-of being taken to his head-master for judgment? Could he?

He could!

Moments were precious now-but in less than a minute.

Tom Redwing had decided.

He moved very quickly.

He dragged the 'dummy' from Vernon-Smith's bed, and with hurried hands, placed it in his own, covering it carefully with the bedclothes.

Then he slipped into Smithy's bed.

With a steady hand, he drew up the sheet so that it concealed his face. Only the top of his head remained visible, on the white pillow. Then he lay still, striving to calm the beating of his heart.

Would it work?

There was every chance in his favour. The bed was occupied-Quelch, if he bent over it, would hear the breathing of its occupant. He could have no doubt that a Remove fellow was in that bed-and how was he to suspect that it was not its usual occupant? Satisfied on that point, he was very unlikely to wake a sleeper. Why should he? But- If, with the unfastened box-room window in his mind, he examined the other beds? Then he would discover the 'dummy' in Redwing's. He would conclude-he could only conclude-that while he had distrusted Vernon-Smith, another Remove boy, whom he had never dreamed of distrusting, was the breaker of bounds.

There was a sound at the door-a slight sound. It opened very quietly.

Tom Redwing hardly breathed.

The light had been switched on in the passage. It glimmered in at the open doorway.

There was the faintest of footfalls.

Tom Redwing could see nothing. He dared not uncover his face. But his ears were strained to hear.

It was Quelch. In a few moments more, the Remove master's keen eyes would be scanning Vernon-Smith's bed.

He made little or no sound. He did not want to alarm a junior form at that hour of the night. He was there to ascertain whether the rebel of his form was present or absent. Having ascertained the fact, he would leave as quietly as he had come. Certainly a 'dummy' in that bed would not have deceived him.

Tom Redwing breathed hard. Intentionally, he made his breathing audible. Quelch was at the bedside.

The gimlet-eyes were fixed on the outline of the occupant of the bed-on the ruffled hair on the pillow. It seemed to Redwing that he could feel the penetrating stare of those keen eyes.

He stirred a little, as a sleeper might stir in his sleep.

His steady breathing went on, audible to the ears that bent over the bed.

There was a long, long, tense moment.

Long as it seemed to Redwing, it was brief. Then Mr. Quelch turned away. He was satisfied.

If Redwing could have seen his face, he would have seen that his expression indicated relief. Quelch had come up, with hardly a doubt that he would find Vernon-Smith's bed vacant. He was quite prepared to discover a 'dummy' in the vacant bed, in the place of the young rascal who was out of bounds after lights out. But it was a relief to him to find that it was not so. Satisfied that the suspected junior was asleep on his bed, as he should have been, Quelch turned away-relieved.

He stood, for a few moments, glancing up and down the dormitory. Tom Redwing's heart beat almost to suffocation. He knew what was in the Remove master's mind. A window had been left unfastened below in the Remove quarters. On the score of Vernon-Smith, Quelch was evidently satisfied. But he was making sure that no other member of his form was absent. And if, by disastrous chance, he discovered the 'dummy' in Redwing's bed, what was he to think?

But Quelch's glance up and down the row of beds was only cursory. Every bed was or appeared, occupied: and it was only Vernon-Smith who had been the object of his suspicions.

Redwing heard faint footfalls again. Quelch was satisfied that, if that unfastened window indicated a breaker of bounds, the offender was not a member of his form.

A door closed softly. All was dark again. Quelch was gone.

It had been a matter of only a few minutes. But it seemed to Tom Redwing that it had lasted an age.

He sat up in Smithy's bed, and wiped perspiration from his face. The ordeal had told on him. He was feeling almost giddy with the relief.

But it had been a success.

He had saved Smithy from certain discovery: from a grim interview with his head-master, and the train home. That was an immense relief. Smithy had another chance -if he had sense enough, decency enough, to make the most of it. But if he had not-Redwing's face set harder at that thought. If the Bounder did not, from now on, toe the line, he was done with him.

The risks of that night were not yet over. He had more to do, if all that he had done was not to go for nothing. Whether Quelch concluded, or not, that that box-room window had been left carelessly unfastened, it was quite certain that he would secure it before going to bed. When Smithy came back, probably at a much later hour, he would find that window shut and fastened-and he would be shut out of the House. He had to be let in, when he returned, and Tom Redwing had to let him in-there was no other way.

He had to wait till he was sure that Quelch had gone to bed and the whole House was sleeping-and then creep down in the dark, on tiptoe, like a thief in the night-unless the scapegrace was, after all, to be left to his fate. There was bitterness, as well as anxiety, in his heart, as he turned out of bed and dressed himself in the dark.

CHAPTER 18

PARTED PALS

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH caught his breath.

He was standing on the leads, under the window of the Remove box-room. He had slipped his hand under the lower sash, which he had left a couple of inches up for his return, and which he found as he had left it. He had pushed up the sash to clamber in. And then-! Up to that moment, the Bounder had been feeling no uneasiness.

'Breaking out' at night was a perilous business for the inevitable result, if discovered, was the 'sack'. But it was no new experience to the scapegrace of Greyfriars. He had risked it more than once: and indeed the risk seemed to give an added zest to his reckless escapades. They had never 'nailed' him so far: and he believed in his own luck. But now-!

He caught his breath, and his heart gave a jump, as a shadow moved in the room within. Someone was there!

With his hands on the window sill, about to climb in, he stopped, and stared with startling eyes into the dim interior of the box-room. Caught-that was the word that flashed into his brain. Caught at last! For one moment as he stood there, he was petrified: all the overwhelming consequences of his reckless folly rushing to his mind-Quelch, the Head, the sentence of expulsion, the miserable journey home!

But the next moment came a whisper.

'Smithy!'

It was Tom Redwing's voice.

The Bounder panted with relief. It was not a 'beak': it was not a 'pre': he was not caught out. But he had had a very bad moment: and his eyes glinted with rage at the dim figure within.

'You-Redwing-!' he muttered.

'Yes.'

'You fool! You dolt!-I thought it was Quelch, or a pre. You meddling fool, what are you doing here?' hissed the Bounder.

'Get in!'

Breathing hard, Vernon-Smith climbed in at the window. He shut it silently after him, and fastened the catch. Then he turned on Tom Redwing, his eyes smouldering. 'You fool! You had to meddle! What have you come down from the dorm for? Can't you mind your own business?'

'I came down to let you in.' Tom Redwing's voice was very quiet.

'Did you want to be shut out for the night!'

'I left the window unfastened-'

'Wingate found it unfastened, and either he or Quelch fastened it again.'

'Oh!'

The Bounder peered at him, in the glimmer of starlight from the window. He realized that there had been happenings, during his absence.

'Did Quelch come up to the dorm?' he muttered.

'He did.'

'He never found the dummy in my bed-' breathed Smithy. 'He would be up now, waiting for me, if he had.'

'He would have found it, but-'

'But what?' snarled Smithy.

'But I had shifted it into my own bed, and taken your place in yours. But for that he would have found it.'

'Oh!'

'You must have been mad, Smithy, to fancy that you could fool him with a trick like that. If he hadn't heard a fellow breathing in the bed, he would have spotted it at once.'

The Bounder was silent for a moment or two. Then he gave a low chuckle.

'Oh, gad! If he'd looked further, and found the dummy in your bed, what a shock for the old boy. You, the old sobersides-spotted rigging up a dummy in your bed and breaking out! What else could he have thought?' He chuckled again. 'But of course, Quelch wouldn't even look at your bed-doesn't he know that you're the good little schoolboy that loves his kind teachers, and never even dreams of kicking over the traces?'

Redwing breathed very hard: but he answered quietly:

'I had to take the risk, or the game would have been up for you, Smithy. As it was, Quelch was satisfied. But I knew that that window would be fastened for the night, and I had to come down.'

'Much obliged! But you needn't have waited for me here, and startled me nearly out of my wits!' snapped Vernon-Smith. 'Why the dickens couldn't you go back to bed?'

'I've something to say to you, before we go up to the dorm.'

'You can keep it till the morning.'

'I'm going home in the morning-and it won't keep.'

'What the deuce do you mean! If it's more pi-jaw, you can pack it up. I'm going to bed.'

'You're not going to bed till I've said what I have to say.'

'You cheeky fool!'

Vernon-Smith made a stride across the box-room to the door. Tom Redwing placed his back to the door. His face was set.

'Now listen-!' he said.

'Get out of my way!'

'Not till I'm finished.'

Herbert Vernon-Smith clenched his hands. His eyes glittered at the quiet junior who stood with his back to the door.

'Do you want a shindy at this time of night?' he breathed. 'Do you want to wake the House?'

'You can wake the House if you choose, Smithy.'

Quelch has gone to bed long ago: but wake him if you like.'

'Will you get away from that door?'

'No!'

'Oh, carry on if you like!' sneered the Bounder. 'What is it you've got to say? Something special in the way of pi-jaw?'

'I've got this to say,' answered Redwing in the same quiet tone.

'This afternoon you told me that you were through with me. I couldn't quite take that-and tonight I've pulled you through. I've let myself be dragged into your rotten dingy blackguardism, making a fool of a master I respect. That's the limit. I want you to give me your word that this will be the last of it-that you'll chuck up all connection with that crew at the Three Fishers-that from now on you will toe the line like a decent fellow, like Wharton or Bob Cherry or Mark Linley-'

'You fool!'

'If you give me your word, I know you'll keep it!' said Redwing.

'That's what I want you to do, Smithy.'

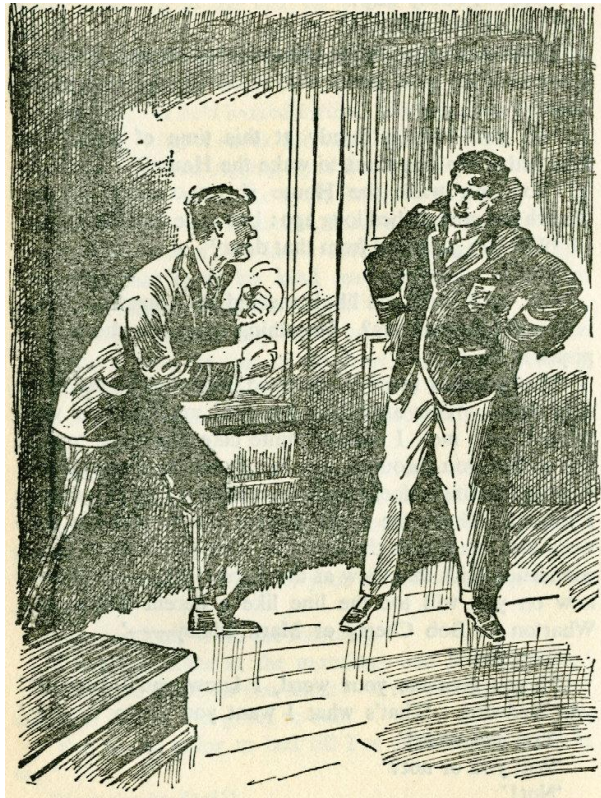
'You can want!'

'Will you or not?'

'Not!'

Tom Redwing drew a deep, deep breath.

'That does it, then!' he said. 'You've told me that you're through with me. Now I tell you that I'm through with you, Vernon-Smith. From now on we bar one another. When I come back next week, I shall ask Quelch to let me have another study—you can keep No. 4 for your racing papers and your smokes and you won't hear any more pi-jaw. Go your own way, till you're found out and kicked out—I'm through.'



**HIS EYES GLITTERED AT THE QUIET JUNIOR WHO STOOD
WITH HIS BACK TO THE DOOR**

With that, Tom Redwing opened the box-room door, and stepped quietly out. The Bounder, with a shrug of the shoulders, followed, in silence. It was the end: and, for the time at least, he did not care. And when, the following morning, Tom Redwing left for Hawkscliff, he went without a word to his former chum.

CHAPTER 19

'PLACED!'

'BUNTER!'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter prudently backed away as he made that rejoinder. Why Herbert Vernon-Smith came up to him in the quad after class on Monday, the fat Owl did not know: neither did he particularly want to know. His feelings towards Smithy were quite inimical, and he had no use for him whatever. In Smithy's palmy days, not so long ago, Billy Bunter could no doubt have forgiven and forgotten bootings on his plump trousers, and bangings of his fat head. But Smithy's study was no longer like unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Lavish spreads in that study were things of the past. So there was no reason at all for Billy Bunter to waste any civility on Smithy: and he was not going to waste any. He backed away out of reach of a boot, and turned up his fat little nose.

Vernon-Smith's eyes flashed for a moment. His temper, never much kept in control, was more uncertain than ever these days. But he checked it. He had a use for Bunter, if Bunter had none for him. His voice was as amicable as he could make it, as he went on:

'You know I'm gated, Bunter-'

'Serve you jolly well right,' said Bunter, backing away a little further.

'I can't get out-!'

'I know that!'

'Will you cut down to Friardale for me-?'

'Wha-a-at?' Billy Bunter fairly stuttered, in his surprise at that request. It was almost a mile to the village of Friardale. There were eight furlongs in a mile which was seven more than Bunter liked when he exercised his little fat legs. The idea of covering that distance, to oblige a fellow who had banged his head, did not appeal to Billy Bunter in the very least. 'Did-did you say cut down to Friardale?'

'Yes. You see-'

'No, I jolly well won't!' yapped Bunter. 'Like your cheek to ask me. Yah!'

'I'll do your lines for you while you're gone.'

'Oh!'

Billy Bunter was about to roll indignantly away. But he paused at that. Bunter had lines to do-only too often he had! Having 'skewed' in 'con' that morning, he had been rewarded with a hundred lines from Quelch. Since class he had asked at least a dozen fellows to help him out with that impot: but there was, as usual, selfishness all round-nobody wanted to do Bunter's lines for him. So Smithy's offer came as rather a windfall for a lazy fat Owl.

'Oh!' repeated Bunter. He considered the matter carefully. A walk down to the village implied exertion, it was true. On the other hand, a walk on a pleasant autumn afternoon was preferable to sitting in a study grinding out Latin lines. He nodded a fat head. 'I say, I've done ten-I'll cut down to Friardale for you if you'll finish the hundred. What do you want there?'

'Only a newspaper.'

'Oh! No fear!' said Bunter, promptly. 'I'm not getting your Sporting Snips for you, Smithy! I'm not having Quelch after me again.'

'It's not that, you fat ass! Only an evening paper-any evening paper,' muttered the Bounder. 'No harm in that, if Quelch did see it-only you needn't shove it under his nose, all the same, when you trot it in.' Billy Bunter blinked at him. Newspapers did not, as a rule, interest Greyfriars juniors. Then the fat Owl guessed, and he chuckled a fat chuckle.

'He, he, he! Stop-Press-latest from Wapshot, what?' grinned Bunter. 'All right, Smithy! Leave it to me. I say, mind you make your fist look like mine, with those lines. I don't want Quelch making out that I got another fellow to do them. It would be like him!'

'Cut off, then.'

Billy Bunter cut off quite cheerfully. The Bounder scowled after him, and slouched away with his hands in his pockets, his brow dark and moody. He was not in a happy frame of mind that day. Possibly he missed Tom Redwing's quiet friendly face, though he would not have admitted that even to himself. He was not thinking of Redwing now. He was thinking of the three o'clock at Wapshot, in which that dead cert, Blue Streak, was running. The race was long over, and Blue Streak had won-he was sure of that. Sure as he was, he was anxious and uneasy; almost feverishly anxious to see the result, in plain print, in the evening paper. If Blue Streak, after all, did not pull it off-

He had to win-he had to, or the sportsman of the Remove would find himself in very deep waters indeed. Already, he owed Soapy Sanders a small sum. Soapy had not hesitated to book a 'fiver' on Monday's race. That had been satisfactorily arranged on Saturday night. A fiver at four to one meant twenty pounds-if Blue Streak was the 'dead cert' he believed him to be. Ample to clear off his petty debt to Soapy, and leave him with a handsome sum in hand. But-if anything went wrong, it would leave him owing Soapy seven pounds-and the once-wealthy Bounder had not so many shillings. Soapy, no doubt, would be accommodating-he knew that his young friend had always had plenty of money, and knew nothing of his change of fortunes. But- It was no wonder that the scapegrace's brow was dark with moody thought, even while he believed, and was determined to believe, that there was nothing to fear.

A sudden smack on the shoulder startled him out of a gloomy reverie. He turned with an angry exclamation, to stare at a cheery face surmounted by a mop of flaxen hair.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' boomed Bob Cherry. 'Enjoying life, old boy?'

'Keep your paws to yourself!' snapped Smithy.

'Oh, don't be so jolly touchy,' said Bob, good-temperedly. 'Look here, we're having a spot of Soccer before tea-coming?'

'No!'

'Nothing like keeping in trim, when we're playing Highcliffe on Wednesday,' urged Bob. 'Jolly decent of Quelch to give you leave for the match, and you want to be at the top of your form.'

'Get off to your Soccer-I'm not coming.'

'Better than mooching about looking as if you were going to your own funeral,' retorted Bob.

'Oh, rats!'

'Same to you, and many of them!' said Bob, and he walked away.

Perhaps it occurred to Smithy that he might have been better occupied in a healthy spot of exercise with Harry Wharton and Co.,

than in brooding over his dubious chances in a miserable gamble. He gave an angry shrug of the shoulders.

Again and again he glanced up at the clock-tower. How long was that fat ass going to be, crawling to Friardale and back? Bunter was not likely to hurry-while every minute was a long one to the hapless sportsman.

He went into the House at last. There was Bunter's impot to be done. He was feeling much more like kicking the fat Owl than writing his lines: but Smithy, with all his many faults, was a man of his word. In No. 7 Study he found the impot Bunter had begun. The fat Owl had started at 'Arma virumque cano' and progressed as far as 'tot adire labores' when laziness supervened. Smithy scowled at an almost illegible scrawl not unlike the trail of an inky spider, and sat down to finish the impot in a similar scrawl. By the time he arrived at 'correpta sub undis' he hoped to see a fat figure roll in. But there was no sign of Bunter yet. He left the study, and went down the passage to the Remove landing. There he lounged against the banisters, with an eye on the stairs for Bunter. It was close on tea-time now, and Bunter was not likely to miss the tea-bell.

A little crowd of juniors came up, fresh and ruddy after the Soccer. They glanced at the lounging Bounder, and Harry Wharton paused for a moment. But he went on with his friends without speaking. Smithy was too 'touchy' in his new circumstances to be asked to tea in the study.

But a little later, a fat grunt on the staircase revealed that Billy Bunter was in the offing. The fat Owl had taken his time on that walk, but he was not missing tea! Bunter could be relied upon to show up at meal-times. Vernon-Smith cut across to the top of the stairs as the Owl of the Remove came grunting up.

'Got it?' he breathed. Bunter blinked at him.

'What about those lines?' he asked. 'Give me that paper, you fat fool.' 'Oh, really, Smithy-'

'Quick!'

'Look here, if you haven't done that impot-ow! Leggo my neck, you beast! Wharrer you grabbing a fellow for? Here's your paper! Leggo.'

Vernon-Smith snatched the newspaper from the fat hand. Leaving the fat Owl blinking indignantly, he cut up the passage to his own study. He slammed the door, and then stood scanning the paper with feverish eyes. Blue Streak had won-he must have won-there was no room for doubt-But his hands were unsteady, and his heart beat unpleasantly, as he scanned the paper for the Stop-Press News- And then- Then a feeling almost of sickness came over him, as he read:

TOMMYDODD
PINCH OF SNUFF
BLUE STREAK

The newspaper dropped from his hand.

Blue Streak, that infallible 'dead cert', had come in third. He was 'placed': but a 'place' was of no use to a sportsman who had backed him to win. He had been 'placed' last time-now he was 'placed' again. He might as well have come in at the tail of the field, so far as Herbert Vernon-Smith was concerned. The Bounder of Greyfriars had 'backed his fancy' not wisely but too well. And now-what was he going to do?

CHAPTER 20

ANOTHER SPOT OF LATIN FOR QUELCH

'I SAY, you fellows-'

'Dry Up, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, Cherry-'

'Give your chin a rest, old fat man.'

No member of the Famous Five seemed keen on conversation from William George Bunter. Much more interesting matters occupied their minds. It was after class, the following day, and Harry Wharton and Co. in the Rag, were talking Soccer. The next day, Wednesday, the Highcliffe match was due: and Smithy, after all, was to go over to Highcliffe with the team. Harry Wharton's intervention had been successful: Quelch had conceded the point: the Remove footballers were not to lose their best winger; so all was, so to speak, calm and bright. The name of H. Vernon-Smith was once more in the list posted up in the Rag, and everyone was glad to see it there. With such a topic under discussion, nobody wanted Billy Bunter to contribute a fat squeak.

But the fat Owl persisted in squeaking.

Billy Bunter was seated at a corner of the long table, with a pen in his hand, inky smudges on his fat fingers, and concentration in his fat brow. Anyone who did not know Bunter might have fancied that he was hard at work.

But when he blinked round and squeaked, there was a grin on his fat face. Work, assuredly, would not have made Bunter grin.

'I say, Bob, old chap-!'

'Jolly decent of Quelch to let Smithy off gates for tomorrow,' said Bob Cherry, regardless of fat squeaks. 'He's a good old boy really.'

'I say, Wharton-'

'The goodfulness of the old boy is preposterous,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, Nugent-'

'Smithy's the man for goals!' said Frank Nugent.

'I say, Inky-'

'We should have missed him pretty badly,' said Harry Wharton. 'They play good Soccer at Highcliffe, and we want our best men to beat them.'

'Johnny won't let a lot get through,' said Bob. 'Will you, Johnny?'

'Not if I can help it,' said Johnny Bull.

'I say, you fellows-'

'Oh, do dry up, Bunter.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter wanted attention. He was getting absolutely none. Six or seven other fellows, as well as the Famous Five, were talking Soccer, a subject they seemed to prefer to anything the fat Owl might have to say. One fellow, however, who might have been expected to be specially interested, was taking no part in the discussion. Herbert Vernon-Smith was standing at the open window, staring out into the quad, his hands in his pockets, and a moody resentful expression on his face. His eyes were fixed on an angular figure—that of Mr. Quelch, taking his usual amble after class. No doubt Smithy was glad that he had been let off 'gates' to play at Highcliffe. He was keen on the game: he had no doubt that he would prove too good for the Highcliffe goal-keeper: and the general relief, when it was known that he was going to play, was

flattering to his vanity, of which he had a good share. Like the others, he was looking forward to Wednesday afternoon. But there were other matters on his mind, to which even Soccer had to take a second place. At the moment, he was not thinking of football: but of the troubles of his own making: to which Quelch had added the sentence of 'gates'. He did not heed, if he heard at all, the buzz of voices in the Rag, or the fat squeak of Billy Bunter.

That fat youth rose from his chair, and picked up a sheet of cardboard from the table, on which he had scrawled a sentence in smudgy capital letters. Bunter was going to get attention!

'I say, you fellows-'

'Buzz off, Bunter.'

'Look at this!' howled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, you just look at this! What do you think of that? What?' Billy Bunter held up the card for inspection. Then, for the moment, Soccer ceased as a topic, and there was a howl of laughter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Think Quelch will like that?' grinned Bunter. 'Mind I ain't going to land it in his study myself. Quelch would guess it was me, after last time. I want one of you fellows to slip it under his door while he ain't in his study, see? I'm going to stay here, and if Quelch pounces on me, all you fellows can tell him that I haven't been anywhere near his study. See?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I've put it in Latin for him,' grinned Bunter. 'Quelch likes Latin! He, he, he! Will it make him wild, especially when he won't be able to spot who did it? What? He, he, he! Quelchius asinus est! That means, Quelch is an ass! He, he, he! This time he won't be able to nail me for it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the juniors.

Evidently, Billy Bunter had been very astute. He had taxed his fat intellect to the limit, to evolve this artful scheme. A fellow who called his form-master an ass, was booked for 'toco'-if identified. But this time Bunter was not going to be identified. He had a cast-iron alibi-a crowd of witnesses to testify that he hadn't been anywhere near Quelch's study! Quelch could only conclude that some other impertinent junior had taken a tip from Bunter's former exploit in the same line. All that Bunter needed was some other hand to slip that card under Quelch's door-there being no clue in the card itself-so far as Bunter knew, at least. It seemed, to Bunter, safe as houses: but hardly so to the other fellows, who read on that card the remarkable sentence:

QUELCHIUS ASSINUS EST

Billy Bunter had learned-by painful experience-that there was only one 'g' in the word 'magister'. But he was apparently unacquainted with the fact that there was only one 's' in 'asinus'. So, by whosoever hand that card might be slipped under Quelch's door, only Bunter was unaware that the authorship could be immediately traced to a fat and fatuous Owl.

'I say, you fellows, which of you is going to slip this under Quelch's door?' asked Bunter. 'I've got to keep clear, of course. Which of you-?'

'Echo answers which!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'Won't you slip it under his door, Bob?'

'Not in these trousers.'

'I say, Harry, old chap-'

'Fathead!'

'What about you, Franky?'

'Nothing about me,' answered Nugent.

'What about 'you, Bull?'

'Less than nothing.'

'I say, Toddy-'

'Chuck it, you fat duffer.'

'Well, of all the funks!' exclaimed Billy Bunter, indignantly.

'Here I've taken all the trouble to think out a rag on Quelch, and not one of you has the nerve to back me up. I say, Smithy.' The Fat Owl blinked round at the Bounder, standing at the open window staring moodily out into the sunset in the quad. 'I say, look at this, Smithy.'

Vernon-Smith did not turn his head. The fat Owl rolled over to him, and poked a fat thumb into his ribs to draw his attention. Then the Bounder looked round, with an angry exclamation. Billy Bunter held up the card.

'Look at this, Smithy! I say, will you-'

'Leave me alone, you fat fool!' Smithy, evidently, was in no mood for the fat Owl's antics.

'But I say, old chap, look at it! Will you- Here, I say, wharrer you at?' howled Bunter, indignantly, as the irritated Bounder smacked the card out of his fat hand, and it flew out at the open window.

'Beast!' roared Bunter.

The Bounder gave him a scowl, and stalked out of the Rag. Billy Bunter cast an infuriated blink after him. Then he blinked from the window at the card, which had fallen on the path below.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

An angular figure, coming along that path, paused, and bent over the card. Billy Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles, as they beheld Mr. Quelch pick up the card and glance at it. One glance seemed enough for Quelch. Then the gimlet-eyes shot up to the horrified fat face at the window.

'Bunter!' It was almost a roll of thunder.

'Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! Tain't mine, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Bob Cherry. 'Is that Quelch?' A dozen juniors stared down from the window. It was, undoubtedly, Quelch: with Bunter's card in his hand, and thunder in his brow. His voice came up like the grinding of a saw.

'Bunter! How dare you?'

'It-it wasn't me, sir!' moaned Bunter. 'I-I've never sus-sus-seen it before, sir. I-I-I wouldn't call you an ass, sir-I-I-I'm too respectful to tell a beak what I think of him, sir-I-I-I never-'

'Go to my study at once, Bunter.' 'But-but-but-but-I-I-I say, sir-'

'At once!' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, lor!'

Sadly and sorrowfully Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag, while Quelch whisked away to the door of the House. Sadly, sorrowfully, an unhappy Owl rolled into Mr. Quelch's study. Still more sadly and sorrowfully he left it, a few minutes later, uttering sounds of woe and wriggling like an eel. It was improbable that Billy Bunter would ever favour his form-master with another spot of Latin!

CHAPTER 21

DOUBLE OR QUILTS

MIDNIGHT!

Herbert Vernon-Smith's eyes were wide open. They had not closed since Wingate of the Sixth had seen 'lights out' in the Remove dormitory.

He did not want to sleep. And it was easy enough for him to keep awake, with harassing thoughts thronging in his mind.

After lights out, there had been the usual chatter from bed to bed: mostly on the subject of the Soccer match on the morrow. The Bounder had not joined in it. He hardly answered any remark addressed to him. His thoughts were elsewhere: and he was relieved when sleepy voices died away, and there was silence. He lay with open eyes staring at the glimmering starlit window, while all others slept.

What was he going to do? That problem had hammered in his mind all day: and he had at last, decided what he was going to do. And what he had decided amounted to a last desperate throw of the dice—a final tempting of Fate.

He owed money to the dingy racing tout at the Three Fishers—money that he could not pay. There was no help from home—once a horn of plenty. Redwing would have helped: but he had spurned from him the loyal friend who had risked so much for him. Soapy Sanders would wait a few days, no doubt: but Soapy had his own obligations to meet, and he would want his money. Delay and excuses would make him suspicious—and if he realised that he was not going to be paid, he would undoubtedly become exceedingly unpleasant. And Smithy, who had, not so long ago splashed pound notes about, had now to count his cash in sixpences and shillings. But there was one way out—Blue Streak!

Twice that unreliable 'gee' had let him down. Twice he had been only placed instead of romping home. But he would win, if they wanted him to: Smithy was convinced of that. He was running for a third time on Wednesday, the last day of racing at Wapshot, in the two o'clock. This race was a much bigger event, the Wapshot Cup for a large sum. Had the horse been deliberately kept back, to get the weight down and the price up, reserving him for a bigger prize? Smithy had no doubt of it. He was, perhaps, determined to have no doubt of it. The 'sport of kings' was full of such trickery. Blue Streak had been 'pulled' when he might easily have won, but he would not be 'pulled' on Wednesday: the Wapshot Cup was too big a prize for that. That was what he had been kept back for, by owner and jockey. In the two o'clock on Wednesday he would go all out, and romp past the post. The Bounder was as sure of it as if it had already happened, and he had seen it with his own eyes.

So all he had to do, was to get 'on', with a larger stake than before, to win back all he had lost, wash out his debt to Soapy, and have pound notes in his wallet again. But there was the rub. How was he to get 'on' when communication with Soapy was so completely cut off? The previous Saturday night he had 'broken out', after lights out, and only Tom Redwing's devotion had saved him from discovery. He dared not make that venture again, after so narrow an escape. But there was one other way: and it was upon that way that he had decided.

Quietly, he slipped from his bed, and drew on his trousers over his pyjamas, and put on a pair of slippers. If he was caught out of the dormitory-if Quelch or a prefect looked in while he was absent-he had little to fear. He could not be suspected of having intended to 'break out' in pyjamas and slippers! Some tale of planning a 'lark' on another dormitory would see him through. Dormitory 'raids' were not unknown: more than once Smithy had joined in one. A heavy imposition, for leaving his dormitory after lights out, mattered little to him-if he was spotted. If only he got through to Soapy on the telephone, he cared for nothing else.

Dark passages and shadowy staircases at dead of night had no terrors for the Bounder. He made no sound as he left the Remove dormitory and crept away. All was dark, all was silent, as he tiptoed downstairs. His heart beat a little faster, but he was perfectly cool, as he groped his way to Masters' Studies. At that hour, the last door had closed: the last light was out. In the daytime Quelch had caught him at the telephone. He was not likely to catch him at midnight!

Softly, he stepped into Quelch's study, and closed the door silently. A glimmer from the window fell on the telephone. With a steady hand, Herbert Vernon-Smith dialled the Three Fishers. At that insalubrious establishment, they kept very late hours, and he had no doubt that Soapy would be up.

In fact, it was Soapy Sanders' voice that answered the call.

'Hallo! That you, Mike?' Mr. Sanders was, apparently, expecting a late call from somebody named Mike!

'No! No! It's I-Vernon-Smith!' breathed the Bounder.

He heard a startled ejaculation from the other end. That his young friend at Greyfriars was a reckless young rascal, Soapy knew. But a telephone-call from him at midnight was the limit.

'Cor'!' came from Soapy. 'You, sir! My eye! At this time of night! Ain't it risky, sir?'

'Never mind that! I can't get across-I was nearly nailed last time-I'll be seeing you later on-'

'There's a matter of seven pound, sir, as soon as convenient. Mebbe I'll see you in a day or two.'

'Yes, yes, but listen now. I'm backing Blue Streak again for the two o'clock tomorrow-the Wapshot Cup.'

'He's a good horse, sir. You know how to pick 'em out.'

'Put on a tenner for me.'

'Oh!'

Silence followed that monosyllable. Vernon-Smith set his lips. The man seemed to be hesitating. Soapy had never hesitated before to book bets from him. Soapy had done very well, on many occasions, out of Smithy's belief that he could 'pick 'em out'. But now there was an overdue account of seven pounds: to which, if Blue Streak failed again, ten more would be added. There was a long moment of silence, before Soapy's voice came back.

'You ain't going in too deep, sir?'

Only too well the Bounder knew that he was going in 'too deep'. He had not the remotest prospect of settling his loss, if Blue Streak failed him again. He was playing 'double or quits', and if it turned out to be 'quits', he dared not think of what the outcome might be. But his answer to Soapy was snapped back as aggressively as if he still had a wad of notes in his wallet.

'That's my business.'

'Yes, sir, of course, sir-but-'

'Am I on or not?' snapped the Bounder. "Yes or no?"

'Certainly, sir, you're on all right,' came back from Soapy Sanders. 'Ten quids on Blue Streak for the two o'clock sir. I was only saying-'

'That's that, then!' interrupted the Bounder. 'I've got to mind my step here just at present, Soapy, but I'll get across to see you before long. There's one more thing. I want you to phone me the result as soon as you can after the two o'clock.'

'Not at your school, surely, sir!' gasped Soapy.

'No! No! I shall be over at Highcliffe tomorrow afternoon, playing football. Kick-off's at three. That gives you plenty of time to put me wise. Phone Courtfield 2022 - that's the porter's lodge at Highcliffe. The man there has taken messages for me before, and he will take one again. Got the number?'

'Yes! But-'

'Nothing about the race, of course,' snapped Smithy. 'Put it in code. The man wouldn't take a racing message, of course.'

'I fancy not, sir. But-'

'Put it like this. "Aunt Emily is better" for a win.

"Uncle James is very ill" if-if it's the other thing. Got that? The man will think I'm anxious about relations-see?'

There was a beery chuckle from the Three Fishers.

'I get you, sir! You're a card, you are! You know your way about.

"Aunt Emily is better" if Blue Streak pulls it off: "Uncle James is very ill", if he gets left. Leave it to me, sir.'

'Get it through as soon as you can after the two o'clock, and I'll get the message from the porter as soon as we get to Highcliffe.'

'Okay, sir.'

Vernon-Smith replaced the receiver. He stood for some moments, breathing hard. He was 'on', with a stake that would see him through-if Blue Streak was the 'cert' he believed him to be. He could not and would not doubt that. Yet why was he so anxious to hear the result of the race at the earliest possible moment? Was there a lingering dread that Blue Streak might let him down again? If so, he would not admit it to himself. Blue Streak was going to win: and the message he was going to get through the Highcliffe porter was going to be 'Aunt Emily is better'-relieving him of all doubts and fears. He crept back to his dormitory as stealthily as he had left it. All were sleeping there-Billy Bunter's snore rumbling through the shadows. But it was long before the Bounder slept. Blue Streak was going to win the two o'clock. But if he did not-

CHAPTER 22

THIRD TIME LUCKY?

'HALLO, hallo, hallo! Anything up?' asked Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton came out of Mr. Quelch's study, the following afternoon with a thoughtful and slightly troubled expression on his face. It was almost time for the junior football team to start for Highcliffe when the Head Boy of the Remove was called into his form-master's study. Wharton, like the rest, was looking forward with cheery anticipation to Soccer at Highcliffe. But what Quelch had had to say had apparently given him other and less palatable food for thought. His friends were waiting for him at the end of the corridor, and they noted at once the cloud on his brow.

'What did Quelch want?' asked Frank Nugent.

'It's about Smithy!' answered Harry.

'Oh, my hat! Don't say that Quelch has changed his mind about letting Smithy off this afternoon!' exclaimed Bob.

'He wouldn't!' said Johnny Bull.

'Not likefully!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

'No! It isn't that! But-'

'But what?' asked Bob. 'Smithy was rotten in form this morning. I know; but Quelch wouldn't-'

'No! No! But-he doesn't trust him out of gates,' said Harry. 'We all know why he was gated, and I fancy Quelch knows a lot more than we know. Anyhow he knows that Smithy has been in touch with some disreputable rotters outside the school, and-and-'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'And he wants to be sure that Smithy's only after Soccer this afternoon, with nothing else up his sleeve!' he growled.

'It amounts to that!' said Harry. 'Anyhow it's up to me to see that Smithy is under my eye while we're over at Highcliffe-I'm not to lose sight of him. Sort of responsible for him till we get back. Of course, I know it's all right-Smithy's only thinking of Soccer today-'

'Is he?' grunted Johnny. 'You never know, with Smithy. The leopard doesn't change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin, in a hurry.'

'Well, I shall have to see that he toes the line this afternoon, at any rate,' said Harry. 'If he's got anything but Soccer on his mind, the sooner he washes it out the better. Know where he is?'

'He went out into the quad after tiffin.'

'I'd better speak to him, I suppose.'

Not in the most patient of moods, the captain of the Remove went out into the quadrangle to look for the Bounder. He found him sauntering with his hands in his pockets, a wrinkle in his brow. Smithy was not looking his best. A fellow could not remain awake half the night, beset by harassing doubts and fears, without showing signs of it. Neither had he been up to the mark in form that morning. He had 'skewed' in 'con': and several times Quelch's eyes had been sharply on him. Little escaped those gimlet-eyes in the Remove form-room.

'Feeling fit, Smithy?' asked Harry.

'Eh! What? Yes-fit as a fiddle.' The Bounder's lip curled in a sneer. 'Fancy I'm going to let you down, after you've begged me off with Quelch?'

'Nothing of the kind. We're relying on you for goals!' said Wharton, amicably. 'But Quelch has just spoken to me about you, Smithy. I've got to keep you under my eye this afternoon-that's a condition for letting you go.' The Bounder's eyes glinted.

'Mind, I don't suppose for one moment that you've got anything up your sleeve,' said Wharton, hastily. 'You're coming over to Highcliffe to play football, and that's that. But Quelch has put it up to me-'

'Are you taking a leaf out of Bunter's book, and setting up as a Paul Pry or Peeping Tom?' sneered Smithy.

Harry Wharton's face crimsoned.

'You're asking to have your cheeky face punched,' he said. 'Let's have this plain, Smithy. We want you in the game-you're our best winger-you know you're wanted. But if you've got anything but the game in mind, you've got to wash it out. Quelch has put it up to me, and I'm responsible. You've got to toe the line. And if you don't like that, say so, and I'll look for another man, even at the last minute.'

Vernon-Smith gave him a black look.

An angry and defiant reply was on his lips. But he did not utter it. He had to get that phone-call at the porter's lodge at Highcliffe. He had to be sure that he had backed a winner!

'Well?' said Harry, sharply, as Vernon-Smith did not speak.

His eyes were very keenly on the sullen face. Nothing like suspicion had crossed his own mind. He had taken it for granted that Smithy, like himself and the rest of the team, was thinking only of Soccer at Highcliffe. But he was growing suspicious now.

'Quelch doesn't trust me very far, does he?' sneered Smithy.

'Can you expect him to?' snapped the captain of the Remove. 'We all know why you've been gated. Look here, Smithy, if you're coming over to Highcliffe to play the game, and nothing else, it's all right. But I've got to see that there's nothing else, so long as you're out of gates. You've got to keep with the rest of us all the time. If you don't agree to that, you're out.'

'You'd chuck your best winger at the last moment?'

'Yes, if you're playing double,' answered Wharton, scornfully.

'I'm as keen on the game as you are.'

'I know that! But-!'

'I might be getting a phone-call while we're at Highcliffe!' muttered the Bounder.

Harry Wharton's eyes flashed.

'That does it!' he said. 'I can guess the rest. You're out.' He turned to walk away.

'Hold on a minute, Wharton,' exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

'You've said enough.'

'Hold on, I tell you. Any harm in getting a phone-call about a sick relative?' Harry Wharton turned back, staring at the Bounder.

'A sick relative!' he repeated. 'You could get a phone-call about a matter like that here. Quelch would take the call for you. What do you mean?'

'Just what I say. I shan't be here-I shall be at Highcliffe, this afternoon. The porter will take the call, and give me the message.'

'Look here, Smithy-!'

'You can come to the porter's lodge with me, and hear the message!' said Vernon-Smith. 'I expect it will come through before kick-off.'

Harry Wharton stood looking at him: a hard and searching look. There was, assuredly, no harm in such a phone-call as the Bounder described. But-

'You can hear the message, and repeat it to Quelch, if you like,' said Vernon-Smith, with a sneer.

'If that's all--!' said Harry, slowly.

'You can judge for yourself.'

'All right, then-if it's as you say!' said Harry, after a long pause. 'Mind, I shall see the porter at Highcliffe with you, and hear him give you the message-that's understood.'

'Quite!'

'That's that, then.'

Considerably relieved in his mind, the captain of the Remove left Vernon-Smith. The Bounder looked after him, as he went, with a sneering grin. He was glad-doubly glad now-that he had arranged that 'code' with Soapy Sanders. He did not care if Harry Wharton, and every other man in the Greyfriars team, heard that message that 'Aunt Emily was better'.

That, of course, was the message that was coming through. It was past two o'clock now, and the race at Wapshot was over-and Blue Streak had won the Wapshot Cup! He dared not doubt that. Twice had that 'gee' let him down-but it was 'third time lucky'.

'Third time lucky!' Smithy muttered the words to himself. 'Third time lucky! Aunt Emily is better!' And he laughed.

A quarter of an hour later, the motor-coach was rolling off to Highcliffe, packed with the footballers, and as many other Remove fellows as could pack in. There was a cheery buzz of voices all the way, most of the fellows talking at once. Only Vernon-Smith's voice was not heard in the cheery buzz. Keen as he was on the game, the Bounder was not thinking of Soccer-he could not. His thoughts were concentrated on the message he was going to hear from the Highcliffe porter. Third time lucky-or was he hopelessly sunk in the pit he had dug for his own feet?

CHAPTER 23

DOWN AND OUT

'COMING?'

'Yes.'

The Bounder's tone was mocking. Harry Wharton's was curt as he answered. Kick-off was due in ten minutes, and he did not want to leave the cheery football crowd. But while he chatted with Courtenay, the Highcliffe junior captain, he had to keep the scapegrace of the Remove in mind. Quelch did not trust that member of his form out of 'gates': and leave had been granted on the condition that he remained under his form-captain's eye. Harry Wharton had no choice in the matter: but it was irksome enough. However, there was no help for it, and he walked down to the porter's lodge with Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder walked lightly and airily. By sheer force of will, he had banished lingering doubts from his mind. He was going to get the code message that Blue Streak had won. After that, exhilarated by the certainty that all was well, he was going to play the game of his life, and let everyone see how indispensable he was in the team. They were going to beat Highcliffe, and Smithy was going to have a lion's share in the victory. They were going to roll back to Greyfriars victorious, everyone in the best of spirits:

Smithy most elated of all. That was his present mood. Third time lucky--there was no doubt of it.

'By gum! I feel like a dozen goals, one after another!' he said.

'We're going to mop them up, Wharton.'

'I hope so,' said Harry. 'Here we are, Smithy.'

The Highcliffe porter was standing in his doorway. He touched his hat to the two Greyfriars juniors.

'Master Vernon-Smith--'

'Here,' said Smithy. He slipped one of his few remaining half-crowns into a willing hand. 'You've got a phone message for me, Judson, I think.'

'Yes, sir, it came through at half-past two,' answered Judson. 'I'm sorry it isn't better news for you, sir.'

The Bounder's heart stood still, for a moment. What did the man mean?

'Very sorry, sir,' said Judson, with respectful sympathy. 'Your Uncle James--'

'Uncle James!' Vernon-Smith repeated the name mechanically. That was not the name he had expected to hear. 'What do you mean? Have you got the message right? What was it exactly? Quick?'

'Uncle James is very ill, sir! That was the message I was asked to give you, sir.'

Vernon-Smith stared at him almost wildly. Every vestige of colour drained out of his face.

Was he hearing aright? Had Soapy made some mistake? 'Aunt Emily is better' was the code for a win by Blue Streak. 'Uncle James is very ill' meant that Blue Streak had lost the race. And the message that had come to Highcliffe over the telephone was 'Uncle James is very ill'! Blue Streak had been beaten again!

'Oh!' panted the Bounder.

The blow was too sudden, and too overwhelming. He almost tottered. Harry Wharton made a quick step towards him, alarmed by the ghastly pallor in his face.

'Smithy!' he exclaimed.

Vernon-Smith did not heed him. For some moments he seemed unable to speak. Then his voice came huskily: 'You're sure you had the message right, Judson?'

'Oh, yes, sir! I wrote it down at once, sir. I'm very sorry, sir, that it's bad news.'

The Bounder stared at him, without speaking again, and turned away. He was shaken from head to foot, and his step was uncertain. Judson glanced after him, and then at Harry Wharton.

'The young gentleman seems very upset, sir, about his uncle,' said Judson.

Harry Wharton nodded, and hurried after the Bounder.

He touched him on the arm. Like Judson, he had no suspicion-so far-of the real import of that message about 'Uncle James'.

'Smithy, old chap-'

'Leave me alone.'

'I say, I'm sorry, Smithy! It's rotten bad news about your uncle-but brace up, old fellow.'

'Fool!'

'Wha-a-at?'

'Fool!' In his misery, the Bounder found relief in a burst of fury.

'Fool! Think I'd be knocked over like this about an uncle, or a dozen uncles? Fool!'

'But the message-'

'Fool!'

Harry Wharton stood looking at him. Slowly, he began to understand. Whether he guessed or not, the Bounder did not care. Had the message from Soapy Sanders been what he had expected, what he had banked on, he would have been careful to keep up the deception. Now he cared nothing. What did it matter now, what did anything matter, now that Blue Streak had let him down, and all was lost, and he was down and out?

'You rotter!' said Harry, at last. 'So it was a trick-?'

'Fool!'

'That message was a trick-some sort of a code-the phone call was about some rotten race-?'

'Fool!' repeated the Bounder.

'Yes, that's right-you've made a fool of me. And Quelch-'

The Bounder laughed harshly.

'Yes, I've made fools of both of you-but not so big a fool as I've made of myself, if that's any comfort to you. Fool! Fool! Fool!'

The Bounder repeated the word, with bitter self-contempt. 'Old Redwing was right after all, with his pi-jaw. If I'd had the sense to listen to him-!'

'Better if you had!'

'Think I don't know that? But-but-' The Bounder gritted his teeth,

'I was sure of it-a dead cert-third time lucky-' He burst into another harsh laugh. 'Well, I've got what I've asked for, and I'm down and out. You can report this to Quelch, if you like. What do I care?'

'I shall say nothing to Quelch. But-'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a shout. 'What are you fellows confabbing about? Forgotten the game?'

Harry Wharton gave a start. He had, for the moment, forgotten the game. Bob Cherry's stentorian roar reminded him.

He gave Smithy a quick look.

'We're here to play football,' he said. 'I'd have dropped you, like a shot, if I'd known this before we started. But now-are you feeling too sick to play?'

The Bounder drew a deep, deep breath. His face had been white as a sheet when he received Judson's message. But the colour was returning to it now. He had had a blow-an overwhelming blow. It had knocked him over. What the outcome would be, of his disastrous speculation on Blue Streak, he hardly knew: but he knew that it was disaster. He owed money that he could not pay, to a man who was certain to give trouble if he was not paid. He was, as he had said, down and out.

But he braced himself. It was a crushing blow, but he was not going to crumple under it. The Bounder prided himself on being able to 'take it on the chin'. If Sanders gave trouble-if it all came out-if this meant the 'sack' from Greyfriars-if the Highcliffe match was the last game he was ever going to play for his school, he was not going to weaken-he was not going to be contemptuously discarded as a lame duck.

'I'm all right!' he said. 'You'll see. Coming, Cherry,' he called back.

Harry Wharton regarded him doubtfully.

'If you're not feeling fit-I can pick a man from the crowd that's come over-'

'Fit as a fiddle! Do you want to chuck me?'

'No! But-'

'Come on, then. We can't keep them waiting.'

'Hurry up, you two!' roared Bob.

Harry Wharton could not help feeling dubious. But the Bounder seemed quite himself again now, keen and eager: and discarding his best winger, when the footballers were ready to go into the field, was a drastic step he was very reluctant to take. He said no more: and a few minutes later, Herbert Vernon-Smith was lining up with the Greyfriars team. And the captain of the Remove was soon reassured.

Smithy was at his best. With iron self-control, he banished from his mind the black trouble that lay heavily upon him, and gave himself wholly to the game. It was a hard game, well-fought on both sides, with nothing for either in the first half. But in the second, there was a goal for Greyfriars from the right wing: and the crowd that had come over roared:

'Goal! Good old Smithy!'

And as it proved it was the only goal taken, and Greyfriars came off the field winners by one to nil. It was a joyous crowd that rolled homeward: the Bounder's face as cheerful as any. He was 'taking it on the chin': and no one, looking at him, could have guessed from his looks that he was 'down and out'.

CHAPTER 24

A LOYAL PAL

'WHARTON!'

'Yes, Wingate.'

'Quelch's study.'

'Oh!'

The great man of the Sixth walked on.

It was after class the following day. Five cheery juniors, in the quad, were enjoying the fresh air and autumn sunshine, grateful and comforting after the grind with Quelch in the form-room. They were not enjoying the company of Billy Bunter, which, however, the fat Owl of the Remove persisted in bestowing upon them. Harry Wharton and Co. were thinking of plans for the Saturday half-holiday. Billy Bunter was not looking so far ahead. Bunter was thinking of tea-time and foodstuffs. He was explaining, to inattentive ears that the non-arrival of an expected postal-order had left him in the sad state known as 'stony', and in consequence in need of a little loan to tide him over. Wingate's brief announcement that the captain of the Remove was wanted in his form-master's study interrupted.

Whereupon the fat Owl emitted a fat cachinnation.

'He, he, he! You're for it, old chap! What have you been up to?'

'Nothing that I know of, fathead!' answered Harry.

'He, he, he! I wonder if Quelch saw you fellows knock Coker's hat off,' chuckled Bunter.

'Oh, scissors!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'If it's that, Wharton, tell Quelch that Coker's hat doesn't matter, or his head either.'

Harry Wharton laughed. It was true that, in exuberant spirits on release from class, coming on Coker of the Fifth stalking in the quad as if it belonged to him, they had playfully knocked his hat off. But even if a gimlet-eye had witnessed that incident from afar, it was not a very serious matter, and Harry Wharton walked away quite cheerfully to the House. He found Mr. Quelch in his doorway, apparently just about to leave his study.

'You sent for me, sir,' said Harry.

'Yes, Wharton.' Quelch's manner was quite genial.

Evidently, it was not the matter of Coker's hat! 'You are aware that Redwing is now at home, with his father at Hawkscliff.'

'Redwing! Yes, sir.'

'He has telephoned, and asked for leave to speak to you,' said Mr. Quelch. 'You may take the call, Wharton.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Mr. Quelch walked up the corridor, and disappeared into Common-Room. Harry Wharton went into the study. The receiver was off the hooks, and he picked it up, wondering what Tom Redwing could have to say to him. Old John Redwing's cottage at Hawkscliff was not on the telephone, and Redwing must have walked a mile to the nearest post-office to put through the call. Wharton was friendly with Redwing: the sailorman's son was liked by all the Remove: even Skinner and Co. rather liked him. But Smithy had always been his special pal, and if he phoned at all, he might have been expected to ask to speak to the Bounder.

'Hallo! That you, Redwing?'

'Yes,' came back Tom's quiet voice. 'Quelch has given me leave to speak to you on the phone. Wharton. Is he in the study?'

'No: he's gone.'

'Good! I mean, I wouldn't like him to catch anything of this. It's about Smithy. You and I haven't any secrets to keep, old fellow, but-but-'

'But Smithy has,' said Wharton, rather drily. 'But look here, Redwing, Quelch would let you speak to Smithy, if you wanted to.' 'That wouldn't do.'

'Okay! Carry on,' said Harry.

There was a pause, before Tom Redwing went on. He seemed to find some difficulty in getting it out. Wharton waited, wondering more and more.

'We're not friends now,' said Redwing, at last. 'There was something-never mind what-but-but we've parted, and agreed to bar one another.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said Harry. 'Sorrier on Smithy's account than on yours, Reddy. You did him good.'

'Well, that's how it is. But-but-' Another long pause- 'I know you don't pull very well with Smithy, Wharton, but I'm sure you'd do him a good turn if you could.'

'Of course I would,' answered Harry, at once. 'I'm afraid he's in trouble.'

Harry Wharton remembered the message at the Highcliffe porter's lodge of the day before, and its effect on Vernon-Smith. He could have no doubt that Redwing was right. But he smiled a little. If Redwing had parted with his pal, and they 'barred' one another, it seemed that he was still anxious about the wayward fellow. Wharton could surmise that that friendship was not wholly dead on Redwing's side, whatever might be the case with the Bounder.

'He kicked the winning goal at Highcliffe yesterday,' said Harry. 'He was in great form.'

'Yes, that's Smithy all over. He wouldn't let a spot of trouble knock him out. He's hard as nails, and packed with pluck. But-but I'm afraid for him. After what he's been used to, he can't knuckle under to being hard-up. It wouldn't hurt a chap like me so much-I've been through it. But Smithy hasn't! It gets him on the raw. I-I'm afraid that he's making a fool of himself.'

Wharton made no rejoinder to that. What had happened at Highcliffe had made it only too clear that Smithy was making a fool of himself!

'I'd better speak out, Wharton. I know you won't talk about this-' 'Of course not.'

'Smithy's carrying on the same game, after Quelch's warning. I daresay you know that much.'

'Well, yes,' admitted Harry.

'I know what you think of it, and I've no right to ask you to bother your head about him-'

'That's rot, old chap! Anything I could do-'

'It can only end in a crash, if Smithy owes money he can't pay.'

'He wouldn't-'

'I'm not sure. And-and that man at the Three Fishers would give trouble, if he's not paid his due. He's not the kind of man to take that quietly.'

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. That a man who would take bets from a schoolboy was an arrant rascal, was no doubt true. But if Smithy had been gambling on the principle of 'heads I win, tails you lose', was he much better? However, he said nothing, and Redwing's troubled voice went on.

'I'm not due back at the school till next week, and-and I'm worried. It will be all up with Smithy if there's a row. Quelch

meant every word he said to him, and if it all comes out, it's the sack.'

'Yes, I know that.'

'I can't do anything. I can't even speak to him. But if he's gone in over his depth, it means trouble. I've taken my money out of the Post Office Savings Bank. It's enough to see him through, even if he's been plunging, and I'm afraid he has.'

'Oh!'

'But even if we were still friends, he would be as likely to chuck it in my face as not. And we're not friends now. But-but it's there, if it's any good.'

'Smithy must be a mad ass, to lose a pal like you, Reddy.'

'Perhaps it was partly my fault. I had my back up. But never mind that. Smithy's really a good chap, in-in his own way and we were pals for a long time. I can't forget that.'

'I understand.'

'That's why I'm speaking to you now, Wharton. If-if trouble breaks out before I come back, I may be able to help.'

'Nothing so far,' said Harry. 'Look here, Reddy, Smithy's got all his wits about him-he's keen as a razor. He's always in scrapes, but he always gets out of them somehow. I think he had rather a knock yesterday, but he played a great game just afterwards. He's all right.'

'I-I hope so. But-but-if there's a row-if Smithy should be up for trouble, I-I want to know. If anything comes out-if he gets landed-or-or any thing-I want to help if I can. You'd know at once if-if anything happens. Then get word to me. Will you do that? I know it's rather a cheek to ask you-'

'Of course I'll do just as you want,' said Harry. 'If Smithy's in a scrape, I expect he'll wriggle out of it as he always has. But if anything does happen, I'll put you wise as soon as I can get up to Hawkscliff on a bike. That all right?'

'It's jolly good of you-'

'Bow-wow! Not to worry,' said Harry. 'Smithy always falls on his feet. But rely on me for the news if anything happens here.'

'Thanks, and thanks again! Good-bye, old fellow.'

'Good-bye, Reddy.'

Harry Wharton put up the receiver, and left Mr. Quelch's study. As he came out into the quad, he caught sight of Herbert Vernon-Smith, sauntering in the autumn sunshine with his hands in his pockets, looking like a fellow who had not a care in the world-certainly not like a fellow who was likely to be 'up for the sack'. But he could not read the thoughts behind that cool unconcerned face.

CHAPTER 25

Loser PAYS?

'FOOL!'

Harold Skinner gave quite a jump.

He was turning the door-handle of No. 4 Study in the Remove, when that exclamation, from within, in low bitter tones, fell upon his ears. He wondered to whom Vernon-Smith could be addressing it: his study-mate being away from the school. The tone in which it was uttered told of deep and bitter feeling.

The next moment, the door was open: and he saw that the Bounder was alone in the study. Evidently, it was to himself that Smithy had addressed that uncomplimentary epithet.

Smithy was moving restlessly about the study. The cool unconcern which he contrived to keep up in public, dropped from him like a cloak when he was alone. His face had an almost haggard look.

He spun round as the door opened, and stared angrily at the junior in the doorway.

'You needn't come in, Skinner,' he snapped.

'Who wants to?' sneered Skinner.

The Bounder gave him a black look. There had been a time, not so long ago, when Skinner and Co. had been glad to gather in No. 4. But there was no attraction in that study now. The wealthy Bounder had been worth while: but Skinner had told Snoop and Stott that he hadn't any use for 'airs and graces' from a fellow who hadn't a bean to bless himself with: and Snoop and Stott had agreed that they hadn't either.

'Well, shut that door, and keep on the other side of it!' snapped Vernon-Smith.

'Glad to!' said Skinner, shrugging his shoulders. I've only looked in because I've got a note for you. And look here, Vernon-Smith, if you're keeping on with that man Sanders, just give him a tip to find some other way of getting through. I don't like that kind of man stopping me in the lane. I couldn't refuse, as-as he knows me, but-'

'Sanders!' repeated Vernon-Smith.

'There's his note.'

Skinner flung an envelope on the table, stepped out of the study, and closed the door after him with a slam.

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not immediately pick up that missive from Soapy Sanders. He stood staring at it, with a black and blacker brow. He dreaded to know what it contained. On Wednesday, he had lost a 'tenner' on Blue Streak, which, added to his earlier indebtedness, made a total of seventeen pounds. He had not so many shillings. He had hoped-he had believed-that he would pull off a win, which would see him clear, and more than clear. And he had lost! He knew now-now that it was too late-that his fancy that he could 'spot winners' was an idle dream. He had been determined to believe that Blue Streak had been 'pulled' the previous week, to reserve him for a bigger stake. He knew now that Blue Streak lost races simply because he couldn't win them.

'Fool!' he said, aloud. 'Fool, and fool again! And I fancied that I was so jolly clever! Fool and idiot.'

What did that note from Soapy contain? In his palmy days, the reckless young rascal had always paid his losses on the nail. Now it was two days since the race, and Soapy had had no word from him. Was the man suspicious already? What would he think-what would he

do, if he was not paid? If such a man realised that he had been 'diddled' by a schoolboy, who would have taken his money if he had won, and could not pay if he lost-Smithy could picture his rage and resentment. Somehow, it had not occurred to Smithy that what he had done was dishonest-the fever of gambling had blinded him. But he knew how Soapy would look at it-if he was not paid. And he could not be paid. Loser pays-but the loser could not pay!

He snatched up the dingy envelope at last. He was going to know the worst, at any rate. At that moment came a heavy thump at the door, and it flew open. Smithy crumpled the note in his hand, as he stared round at Bob Cherry.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are Smithy! I say, we've fixed up a bike spin for tomorrow afternoon-a jolly crowd of us-like to join up, if Quelch will let you off?'

'No! Shut that door.'

'Lot of fellows coming,' said Bob. 'Us, and Toddy, and Squiff, and Browney, and Oggy, and Mauly if we can persuade him to get on a bike. Tea at the bun-shop at Lantham and Quelch would let you come, with a mob of us-'

'Shut that door.'

'Okay! Keep your wool on. Sure you won't ask Quelch, and-'

'Will you get out?'

'Smithy, old man, what I specially like about you is your polished manners,' said Bob, affably.

'Cheerio!'

The door closed on Bob. The Bounder scowled at it, and tore open the dingy envelope. A single grubby sheet of notepaper was folded within. He unfolded it and read, scrawled in pencil:

Friday.

I ain't ad a word from you since Wednesday. You know what appened. I wouldn't urry you if it was a matter of a couple of quid, but seventeen pounds is money, and I got to meet losses same as you ave. If you can't get across you can post it by a friend. I can't wait later than tomorrow, Saturday, fust post.

S.

'Saturday!' muttered the Bounder. 'Tomorrow! Oh, what a fool I've been!'

That note from Soapy Sanders was civil. But Smithy could read doubt and suspicion in it. Soapy wanted his money. If he did not get it, he could only conclude that the Greyfriars sportsman either could not or would not pay. There would soon be another demand, in less civil terms. And after that-?

Vernon-Smith resumed his restless pacing of the study, his brows knitted. He was in a jam-a hopeless jam. It was the 'sack' if it all came out: and it must come out unless he could keep Soapy quiet. And he could not keep Soapy quiet unless he paid him, which he could not do.

He might have come to the desperate resolution of confessing his folly and misdeeds to his father, who, incensed as he must have been, might have intervened to save him. But even that was no resource, even if he could have resolved on it. Mr. Vernon-Smith was abroad on business not to return for several weeks, as he had said in his letter:

His hope that he would hear a better report of his son when he returned was not likely to be fulfilled!

Where else was there hope of help?

Tom Redwing could, and would, have helped. He had sneered at Tom as a fellow who saved money instead of throwing it about. But that steady-going old sobersides had cash in the bank, and he would have handed it over without hesitation to save his friend. To ask help even from a friend would have been bitter enough to the arrogant Bounder. But they were no longer friends. Tom had been his only real friend in the school, and he had spurned him and his friendship.

What a fool he had been! And-he winced as it came into his mind-what a rotter! That night when he had 'broken out' Tom had saved him from discovery, regardless of the risk to himself. What had he asked in return? Only a promise that would have preserved the wretched sportsman from the disaster that now overwhelmed him! But it was useless to think of that now. What was done, was done, and could not be undone. As likely as not, more likely than not, he would be 'sacked' before Tom came back to the school. Tom, very likely, would be glad to have seen the last of him.

A bell rang, and there was a tramp of feet in the passage. Vernon-Smith left his study. Skinner and Snoop and Stott were in the passage, and they all looked at him. Skinner, at least, had a suspicion that Soapy Sanders was 'dunning' him. But they read nothing in the Bounder's face, as he sauntered down the passage. Near the door of No. 1 Study was a cheery group, and Bob Cherry's voice was audible.

'Tea in hall this time, you chaps! Save your bobs and tanners for a spread at Lantham tomorrow, what? Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy? Coming down for a whack in the doorsteps and dishwater?'

The Bounder's look gave nothing away, as he went down to hall with the Famous Five. 'Doorsteps and dishwater' was the disrespectful name the juniors gave the school tea; once disdained by the wealthy Bounder. But as he sat at the Remove table, Smithy would have been very glad to know whether he would be sitting there the following week-even for doorsteps and dishwater!

CHAPTER 26

SHOCK FOR SMITHY

'BUNTER!'

'Oh, lor!'

 breathed Billy Bunter.

'You will go on, Bunter.'

Tap!

A tap at a door was not, as a rule, a particularly interesting sound. But at that moment, it came as a boon and a blessing to William George Bunter.

It was third-and last-school on Saturday morning. Quelch, in the Remove form-room, was naturally thinking of the lesson in hand. That, from a schoolmaster's point of view, was the subject that should have occupied all thoughts, as well as his own.

But it was probable that other minds, as well as Billy Bunter's fat one, were straying, from the Sixth Book of Virgil's immortal Aeneid. On a bright sunny autumn morning, with a half-holiday in prospect, thoughts were liable to stray from the dusky old form-room to the open spaces. Nine or ten Remove fellows were booked for a bike run that afternoon: and Harry Wharton and Co. couldn't quite help thinking about spinning along green shady lanes in a cheery crowd. There was one member of the form who had much more weighty matters on his mind. As for Billy Bunter, he was thinking chiefly about dinner, and wondering whether the form-room clock was slow, or whether it had stopped altogether.

Quelch's sharp voice was most unwelcome to Bunter's fat ears. It was just like Quelch to pick on him for 'con' when he hadn't done his prep.

Mark Linley had been last on 'con', and Quelch had stopped him at 'pandetur ab urbe'. So Billy Bunter had to carry on with 'Talibus ex adyto dictis Cumaea Sibylla': at which he blinked with a hopeless blink. A glint came into the gimlet-eye.

'I have told you to go on, Bunter!' rumbled Mr. Quelch.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' mumbled Bunter. 'Talibus-tut-tut-talibus-'

The tap at the door interrupted.

The Remove master cast an irritated stare at the door.

Billy Bunter emitted a gasp of relief. Any interruption was welcome to a lazy Owl who hadn't the remotest idea what Virgil meant by 'talibus ex adyto dictis Cumaea Sibylla'-even if he meant anything at all!

The door opened, and Trotter's chubby face looked in.

'Well?' Quelch shot that monosyllable at the House page like a bullet. He did not share Billy Bunter's feelings in the very least.

'It's the telephone, sir,' said Trotter.

'You should have told the caller that I am engaged. Trotter. Go and do so at once.'

'Yessir! But-'

'But what?' snapped Mr. Quelch.

'But the person asked to speak to Master Vernon-Smith, sir.'

The Bouncer gave a violent start. The colour faded for a moment in his cheeks. He had been wondering what Soapy would do. Was this it?

'Vernon-Smith!' repeated Mr. Quelch.

'Yessir. He said I was to say that it was Mr. Vernon-Smith's secretary speaking, sir, from his father.'

The Bouncer breathed again.

Mr. Quelch frowned. There was no objection to Mr. Vernon-Smith's secretary speaking on the telephone to Mr. Vernon-Smith's son: and

no doubt he knew nothing of Greyfriars time-tables, and did not know that he was interrupting a 'school'. But it was an interruption all the same and Quelch-unlike a good many members of his form-did not like interruptions in class. However, he turned to the Bounder.

'Vernon-Smith! You may leave the form-room and take the call.'

'Thank you, sir.'

The Bounder left his place. He had had a momentary shock, dreading that it was Soapy on the phone. But a call from his father's secretary was not alarming. The form-room door closed on him, and Billy Bunter, who had hoped for a happy moment that Quelch would have to go to take the call, was left to wrestle dismally with the mysteries of 'talibus ex adyto dictis Cumaea Sibylla'-so unsuccessfully that he was rewarded with fifty lines.

Vernon-Smith found the receiver off the hooks in Mr. Quelch's study. He picked it up and in his relief, spoke quite cheerfully into the transmitter.

'Here I am. That you, Munson? Vernon-Smith speaking.'

An unexpected voice came back.

'No, it ain't no Munson, young Vernon-Smith. It's me.' Vernon-Smith almost dropped the receiver. He knew that voice. It was nothing like that of his father's secretary Munson. It was the voice he had last heard on Tuesday night, when he had had the hardihood to ring up the Three Fishers. His sudden dread in the form-room had been well-founded. It was the voice of Soapy Sanders.

For some moments he could not speak. Then he stammered: 'You, Soapy! I-I thought-'

'You thought what I meant your school-master to think, if he took the call: came back from Soapy. 'I ain't giving you away to your school-master if I can 'elp it. What'd he do if I'd said I was ringing from the Three Fishers about a matter of seventeen quid owing on the races?'

Vernon-Smith shivered.

'You wouldn't, Soapy-' he muttered. 'Look here, ring off, for goodness sake. If Quelch tumbled-'

'I've got to speak to you, and I got to speak plain. Did you lay a tenner on Blue Streak, when you was already owing me seven quid, or didn't you?'

'Yes, yes, but-'

'Ave you paid up?'

'No! No! But-'

'Don't I 'ave to pay if an 'orse don't get 'ome?' demanded Soapy.

'I trusted you, didn't I, taking your bet on tick, like I always have. Well, where's the lolly?'

'I-I-I-I'm in a difficulty-I-I-I'll do what I can-' The Bounder hardly knew what to say. 'I-I'm in a jam-'

'Was you in a jam when you put that tenner on, already owing me seven quids?' jeered Soapy. 'You fancy I can't see the game? Didn't I tip you that you was going in too deep? Lot you cared, when you was thinking of paying me with my own money if Blue Streak pulled it off, and leaving me to whistle for it if he was beat. You young diddler, you!'

Evidently, the sharper at the Three Fishers could see it all. The Bounder's cheeks burned. The man called him a 'diddler'-and what else was he? That was the depth to which 'backing his fancy' had brought him. He had not realized it: but it was true. If he did not pay up he was a 'diddler'. And Soapy Sanders was the last man to be 'diddled' with impunity, by a mere schoolboy. The surly resentment

in his voice could not be mistaken. Soapy was going to give trouble.

'Well?' went on the voice over the telephone, as Vernon-Smith did not speak. 'What have you got to say, young Vernon-Smith? Am I getting my money or ain't I getting my money?'

'I-I-I-!' stammered the Bounder.

'I'm waiting to 'ear.'

'I-I can't settle now,' said Vernon-Smith, desperately. 'You'll have to give me time, Soapy. I'm in a jam-I'm sorry-'

'That won't do!' came back. 'You pay up, or else-'

'I can't!'

'That does it, then.' It was a savage snarl. 'I'll give you to Monday. You 'ear'? If I don't see the colour of your money then, I'll ring up again-and then I won't spin a yarn about being a secretary-I'll put your schoolmaster wise what a young diddler he's got in his school. Mind, I mean it. I'll give you till six o'clock on Monday. Not a minute later! That's the limit. That's my last word.' With that, Soapy Sanders rang off.

The Bounder put up the receiver. He stood staring at the telephone, and wiping a spot of perspiration from his forehead. Monday! He had no more prospect of raising the money on Monday than on any other day. And he knew that Soapy meant what he said. It was all coming out, and he was going up to the Head to be sacked. Greyfriars would end for him at six on Monday!

For some minutes he stood there. Then he remembered that he was due back in form. Slowly, he left the study. But his face was composed, and his manner casual, as he walked into the Remove form-room. His heart was like lead: but he was keeping a stiff upper lip to the end.

CHAPTER 27

NO BIKE FOR BUNTER

'I SAY, you fellows.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Coming, Bunter?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

It was a merry crowd in the bike shed, when Billy Bunter rolled in. Quite a large party had gathered for the 'spin' that sunny afternoon.

The Famous Five were all there: and Squiff, and Tom Brown, and Peter Todd, and Tom Dutton, and Ogilvy, and several other fellows: even including Lord Mauleverer, whom Bob Cherry had succeeded in rounding up.

Bob had mapped out the spin, which was scheduled to cover more miles than Billy Bunter had ever dreamed of, even in a nightmare. Bob's sinewy legs were tireless: and he did not perhaps make full allowance for fellows of a less hefty build. Miles were nothing to Bob: but it was probable that some of the party might tail off en route. However, there was to be a rendezvous at the bun-shop at Lantham, where everybody was to turn up at five o'clock, for a right royal spread before the run home; and fellows whose legs were not quite so sinewy as Bob's might perhaps avail themselves of short cuts.

Billy Bunter was not keen on cycling, or any other form of exertion. But he was very keen indeed on the spread at Lantham. So there was Bunter too.

'Do come, Bunter,' said Bob, while the other fellows laughed.

'You're the chap for a really long spin. But you'll have to carry your bike. It doesn't look as if it will carry you.'

'Oh, really, Cherry-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter's bike did undoubtedly look somewhat dilapidated. The fat Owl was not careful with his machine. It was seldom a going concern. At the present moment, both tyres were flat with punctures, the mudguard hanging by one end, and dried mud clothed it like a garment. Several times had Bunter thought of putting that machine in order: but laziness had always supervened.

'I say, you fellows, I'm coming!' said the fat Owl. 'I say, think Smithy would lend me his bike? He won't want it, as he's gated.'

'Better ask him!' grinned Bob. 'Don't forget to guard with your left when you ask him.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I-I suppose he would kick up a row if I borrowed it without asking him-'

'Bank on that,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Well, look here, you fellows, there ain't much wrong with my bike, really. Suppose you mend it-many hands make light work, you know-'

'Topping idea!' said Bob. 'Hear that, you fellows? Let's all squat round mending Bunter's bike, because he's too jolly lazy to keep it in order. Now, then, don't all speak at once!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you're all too jolly selfish-'

'We are-we is!' said Bob. 'Come on, you chaps-let's get off, now Bunter's done his funny turn.'

'I say, Toddy, will you mend those punctures for me-?'

'Not in these trousers.'

'Inky, old man, you might fix that mudguard-'

'The mightfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter,' answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But the fixfulness is a boot on the other leg.'

'I say, Wharton-'

'Fathead!' said Harry Wharton. 'Get to work on that jigger yourself, and if you turn up at Lantham by five o'clock, we'll let you in on the spread at the Arcade. Cheerio!'

'Beast!'

Harry Wharton laughed, and wheeled out his machine after the others. A merry crowd pushed out on the road, leaving a fat Owl blinking after them with a devastating blink.

They disappeared from view: and Billy Bunter turned his spectacles on his dilapidated jigger. He contemplated it thoughtfully. Certainly, he had no desire whatever to cover miles and miles and miles on a bike: he was more than willing to cut out the spin, so far as that went: if he could make sure of the spread. Dilapidated as that jigger looked, a spot of work would have made it a going concern again. And for some minutes, Billy Bunter actually contemplated that spot of work! But the contemplation was brief. He shook a fat head and rolled away.

There was, after all, another resource. Bike spins did not matter-it was the spread at the Arcade at Lantham that mattered. He could walk it! It was a long walk-and Billy Bunter did not like even short walks. But a spread at the bun-shop was, perhaps, worth it. Was it or wasn't it? Billy Bunter rolled in the quad, thinking out that knotty problem. Two or three miles there, and two or three miles back-that was dismaying. But a spread at the Arcade instead of 'doorsteps and dishwater' in hall-that was very attractive. His meditations on that urgent problem were interrupted by a sharp voice.

'Bunter!'

It was Quelch. Billy Bunter blinked round at him remembering 'talibus ex adyto dictis Cumaea Sibylla!'

'Oh! yes, sir.'

'Have you written your lines, Bunter?'

'Yes, sir! I-I mean, no, sir! I-I'm just going to, sir. I-I wasn't going out before I'd done them, sir.'

'You had better not, Bunter! Your imposition will be doubled unless shown up before tea.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly, sir.'

Mr. Quelch walked on. Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at a majestic back. It was just like Quelch to bother a fellow about lines, when a fellow had no time to spare. It was true that the rendezvous at Lantham was not till five o'clock. But if Billy Bunter was going to walk two or three miles, he had to take that distance by easy stages, with frequent rests by the wayside. He really had no time for lines. But it was unlucky for the fat Owl that Mr. Quelch glanced round as he expressed his feelings by brandishing a fat fist.

'Bunter!' thundered Quelch.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

'What are you doing, Bunter?'

'I-I-I was only-only brushing a fly off my nose, sir,' stuttered Bunter. 'Jig-jig-Just a fuf-fuf-fly, sir-'

'Go to your study immediately, Bunter, and write one hundred lines of Virgil instead of fifty.'

'Oh,lor!'

Quelch walked on, with that. Billy Bunter blinked after him, with a fearfully expressive blink. Then he rolled away dismally to the

House. In No. 7 Study, he sat down to a hundred lines of the Aeneid: and never had the deathless verse of Virgil been so utterly and thoroughly unappreciated by any fellow at Greyfriars School. That task left him little time for a tortoise-like walk to Lantham by five o'clock! Sadly he gave up the idea. But hope springs eternal in the human breast! Smithy, being 'gated', couldn't use his bike, and was there a chance, if he caught the Bounder in a good temper for once, that he might lend him his jigger? It did not seem probable: either that Smithy would be caught in a good temper or that he would lend him the bike. Still, he might-and the fat Owl, having smeared and smudged his weary way through his hundred lines, and delivered them in his form-master's study, made his way to No. 4 in the Remove in the faint hope of catching the Bounder in a good temper!

CHAPTER 28

TOO LATE?

'DEAR Tom.'

Herbert Vernon-Smith sat at his study table, staring at those words on the paper before him.

It was half-an-hour since he had written them. And he had got no further. He did not know whether he was going further or not. Twice or thrice he had stretched out his hand to crumple the sheet, and throw it into the fireplace. But it still lay there and he still sat staring at it, a struggle in his mind.

He was, as he had said to Harry Wharton at Highcliffe, 'down and out'. He knew that the resentful rascal at the Three Fishers would make his threat good. If Soapy did not get his money, he was going to get at least the satisfaction of 'showing up' the schoolboy who had made a fool of him. It was all coming out, on Monday: and Vernon-Smith would be sent for to his form-master's study, and taken to his head-master. It was the finish for him at Greyfriars, unless-

There was one spot of light on a dark horizon-Tom Redwing. Tom could and would have helped him through. Would he now?

He had thrown his only friend over, with bittergibes.

And Tom, his sorely-tried patience exhausted, had thrown him over in turn. They were going to 'bar' one another when Redwing came back to the school-if indeed Smithy was still there when he came back. But-

It was not like Smithy to reflect very much on his conduct, and it was quite unlike him to feel ashamed of himself. But he had been thinking very hard of late, and he was conscious of a feeling of shame-shame for his unruly temper, shame for his cynical ingratitude. What a fool, and what a ratter, he had been. If he had listened to his loyal friend, instead of mocking him for 'pi-jaw'- if he had had sense enough, decency enough, to realize what he was losing in losing that loyal pal- But it was too late to think of that now.

Or was it?

Was it too late?

Friendship did not die so easily. He knew that, at the bottom of his heart, he liked steady old Tom as much as ever: that he missed his quiet friendly face from the study: that he would have been glad to hear his voice, even in 'pi-jaw'. He knew what he had thrown away in his arrogant pride and folly. It cost him a struggle, even to think of putting that arrogant pride aside, and making the first advances towards a reconciliation. But in that he had succeeded, as the words 'Dear Tom' on the paper before him showed. He had been in the wrong-stupidly and wickedly in the wrong-and he had, at length, made up his mind that he would admit it. But-

But he shook his head.

In other circumstances, in his present chastened frame of mind, it would not have been so hard. But what would it look like now? A contrite letter, humbling himself, asking his friend to forget offences, and resume the old friendly footing-he was prepared for that, taking the chance of a rebuff. But what would Redwing think, except that he wanted money to settle his gambling debt: that that was all it meant?

That was why the Bounder sat staring at the sheet before him, the pen idle in his hand. Would Tom believe, could he believe, that so tardy a repentance was genuine, in such circumstances? Or was he more likely to curl his lip in contempt, and throw the letter aside unanswered?

Smithy's cheeks burned, at the thought. If that was the outcome, he had asked for it, and deserved it. But that did not make it less bitter. He shook his head again. But for that miserable problem of the money, he could have written frankly and freely. But a repentant letter accompanied by an appeal for help-impossible! He snatched up the paper, tore it across, and threw the fragments into the fireplace. He could not do it.

He moved about the room restlessly thinking. He had to face it-and what he had to face was the 'sack'. Would Tom care, when he came back and found him gone? Why should he? And yet-- Old Tom had always been so loyal, so steady, so sensible, and never in the least doubting or distrustful. He would know, he would surely know, that such a letter was sincere, and not merely a last resource to extricate a reckless young rascal from the pit he had dug for himself. He could trust Tom to read that letter aright. He sat down at the table again, and dipped the pen in the ink. Once more he wrote 'Dear Tom'-and paused. But he had made up his mind now. And after that pause, he wrote rapidly.

Dear Tom,

If you were here, I'd tell you this. But you're miles away, and I'm gated, so I'm going to get some fellow to bring this to you. I'm sorry. I've been a fool and an ungrateful brute. You know that already, so I needn't pile it on. But I want you to forget all about it, and be friends again when you come back.

But I shall not be here when you come back, unless you save my skin. The game is up for me on Monday, unless I can pay that man Sanders seventeen pounds.

I know what this looks like: and if you believe that it's only the money I want, don't answer. But if you want to see me again-no reason why you should-get the money to me. Just a word to let me be sure it's coming, and I can keep him quiet, till it comes. Just a word on the telephone. Quelch will let me take a call from you-he trusts you if he doesn't me. I'll hang about waiting for your call. But I won't bank on it.

H. V.S.

Having made up his mind, Vernon-Smith dashed off that letter in a few minutes. He folded it an envelope, addressed to Tom Redwing at the cottage at Hawkscliff. He could ask some fellow to cut across to Hawkscliff on a bike, on a half-holiday-Harry Wharton, or Bob Cherry, or Frank Nugent, or Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, would not refuse to do that for him. Then he suddenly remembered that Quelch had given leave out of bounds for a numerous cycling party in the Remove-the Famous Five among them. They would all be gone long ago. Tom Redwing had to have that letter without delay.

Whom could he ask to take it up to Hawkscliff? It was not much use asking Skinner, or Snoop, or Stott-once very willing to oblige him

in any way, but certainly no longer so. But he had to find somebody-
Who was going to be the messenger? As if in answer to that question, the door opened, and Billy Bunter rolled into the study.

CHAPTER 29

JUST LIKE BUNTER

BILLY BUNTER blinked warily at the Bounder, through his big spectacles, as he rolled into No. 4. Bob Cherry had advised him to guard with his left, if he asked Smithy for the loan of his bike.

'That, perhaps, was not quite necessary: but Smithy's temper was unreliable; and he was quite likely to snap at a fellow to get out, or even to shy a 'dick' at a fat head.

To the fat Owl's relief, Smithy did neither. He was standing by the table, with a letter in his hand, and he glanced round at Bunter without a sign of a scowl.

'I say, Smithy-' began Bunter.

'What do you want?' Smithy's tone was mild. It occurred to him that this might be the messenger he wanted -if the laziest fellow at Greyfriars or anywhere else would consent to push a bike as far as Hawkscliff.

'I say, Smithy, I've got to get to Lantham!' explained Bunter, 'and-and-and my bike's got some punctures. I-I was wondering if-if you'd lend me your jigger, old chap. You won't want it, as you're gated. I'll get another evening paper for you, if you want one.' That so far as Bunter knew, was an inducement. He was unaware that the Greyfriars sportsman was done with evening papers and stop-press news.

Bunter blinked anxiously at Smithy. He seemed, for once, to have been caught in a good temper! Nobody, really was likely to lend Bunter a bike, which he was likely to return with punctures he was too lazy to repair, or smothered with mud he was too lazy to clean off. But, as it happened, the Bounder was unexpectedly amenable, for his own reasons.

'You're going to Lantham?' he asked.

'Yes, and that beast Quelch jumped on me for lines, and it's too late to walk it,' explained Bunter. 'I've got to get there by five o'clock, or I shall be late for the spread at the Arcade-I mean, I've promised to meet the fellows there, and I don't want to let them down. I wouldn't like to disappoint them.'

'You wouldn't-if there's a spread on,' agreed the Bounder.

'Oh, really, Smithy-'

'Those fellows are stopping at Lantham for tea on the way home, is that it?' asked Vernon-Smith.

'That's it, Smithy. Wharton said they would let me in on the spread if I turned up at five o'clock-I mean, he asked me specially not to be late. If you'd lend me your bike, I've got lots of time.'

'I'll lend you the bike-'

'Oh! Thanks, old chap.'

'Hold on a minute. I'll lend you the bike, if you'll call in at Hawkscliff, and give this letter to Tom Redwing at his father's cottage there.'

'Eh! Haven't you rowed with Redwing?'

'Never mind that. I want him to get this letter this afternoon. You can cut across to Lantham from Hawkscliff-it won't put on more than a couple of miles extra.'

Billy Bunter considered that point. He did not want a couple of extra miles on a bike-or a couple of extra yards, for that matter. On the other hand, he did want to get to Lantham for the spread at the Arcade. That was well worth a couple of extra miles.

He nodded a fat head.

'All right, Smithy, if you'll lend me the bike! I'd do more than that for a fellow I really like,' said Bunter, affably. 'Chuck it over.'

Vernon-Smith handed over the letter. The fat Owl shoved it into a sticky pocket.

He rolled out of No. 4 Study greatly relieved. His hope of borrowing a bike had been faint. It was quite a happy coincidence that Smithy wanted to get that letter to Tom Redwing that afternoon. Otherwise he would have had to try his luck elsewhere, with a very improbable chance of success. But it was all right now—and the fat Owl rolled away to the bike-shed, with the letter in his pocket, and his fat mind dwelling in happy anticipation on the spread at the Arcade after he had delivered it to Tom Redwing at Hawkscliff.

He wheeled out Smithy's bike in cheery spirits.

For the first two or three miles, even a lazy fat Owl rather enjoyed a bike spin in sunny autumn weather. After that he slowed down considerably.

There were several uphill stretches on the way up to the distant fishing village: and Billy Bunter dismounted and walked the bicycle up every one of them. This he did not enjoy: but he was comforted by the knowledge that from Hawkscliff to Lantham it was downhill all the way—easy work for even Bunter, once he had delivered that letter at the Redwing cottage.

So he pushed on cheerfully.

It was half-past four when he pushed the bike up the last acclivity, and arrived at Hawkscliff—a tiny village of hardly more than a dozen scattered cottages. By that time his fat little legs had had quite enough of both walking and pedalling. But it was as good as journey's ending down to Lantham was all that remained. Billy Bunter knew the Redwing cottage: the first in the rugged irregular village street. He leaned the bicycle on the wall, and wiped a spot of perspiration from his fat brow. Then he thumped at the door. There was neither knocker or bell, so Bunter thumped with a fat fist.

The door did not open: and only the echo of his thump answered from within. Thump! thump! thump!

Then he tried the door-handle. Still the door did not open. It was locked. It dawned on Bunter that the cottage was vacant. Tom Redwing and his father were out somewhere.

The fat Owl gave an irritated snort.

Really, it was not surprising that an active sailorman, and an active schoolboy, should be out of doors on a fine afternoon. But it was irritating to a fat Owl who wanted to get rid of that letter to get off to Lantham.

He blinked round him through his big spectacles.

There was nobody at hand excepting an ancient mariner who was leaning on a post, smoking a pipe, and gazing meditatively out to sea.

The fat Owl rolled over to him. 'I say-!' began Bunter.

The ancient mariner transferred his gaze from the North Sea to a fat face, without speaking.

'I suppose you know the Redwings?' asked Bunter. It was fairly certain that in a tiny place like Hawkscliff, everybody knew everybody. The ancient mariner nodded. He seemed a man of few words.

'Know where Tom Redwing is now?' asked Bunter.

Another nod.

'Well, where is he? I've got a letter for him.'

The ancient mariner removed the pipe from his mouth, and pointed with the stem to a steep gully in the cliff. 'Down at the jetty?' asked Bunter.

Another nod.

'Know when he's coming back?' A shake of the head!

Billy Bunter breathed hard. The ancient mariner returned the pipe to his mouth and transferred his gaze to the sea again. Billy Bunter blinked at the gully with an exasperated blink. Descending it to the little wooden jetty at the foot of the cliff was not a laborious enterprise. Clambering up it again was! At that moment, Bunter was strongly tempted to head for Lantham with Smithy's letter still in his pocket.

But even William George Bunter had a conscience-of sorts-and also he was aware that if he did not deliver that letter, after borrowing the bike, the Bounder was likely to cut up extremely rusty. He wanted to get off to Lantham: but he did not want Smithy to boot him up and down the Remove passage. He made up his fat mind to the necessary effort, and rolled away to the gully.

A breathless fat Owl rolled out on the beach. Near the wooden jetty, a boat was rocking on the water, with a man and a boy in it- John Redwing and his son. Old John was stepping the mast, and Tom Redwing shipping the tiller. Evidently the boat was about to run out to sea, and Smithy's messenger had caught it only just in time. Billy Bunter hurried along the jetty, and yelled: 'Hi!'

Tom Redwing glanced round, and then stared. He was not expecting to see any Greyfriars fellow, least of all Billy Bunter. Neither, perhaps, was Bunter's fat face a particularly welcome and pleasing addition to the landscape. But Redwing was always friendly and amicable, and he waved his hand to the fat junior.

'Hallo, Bunter!' he called cheerily across the intervening water.

'Like a run out on the sea?'

Grunt, from Bunter. He did not want a run out on the sea: he wanted to get off to Lantham and the spread at the Arcade. And he had no time to waste, with that beastly gully to clamber up, before he could remount Smithy's bike and get going again. He grabbed the letter from the sticky pocket.

'Letter for you, Redwing!' he squeaked.

'For me?' repeated Tom, blankly. How and why Billy Bunter should be the bearer of a letter for him, he could not imagine.

'Yes. Catch! I'll chuck it to you.'

'Hold on a minute-I'll pull in.' Redwing picked up a boat-hook, and hooked on to the jetty, to pull the boat closer in.

But Billy Bunter did not hold on a minute. He tossed the letter to Redwing over the rail of the jetty.

As the boat was moving in, while the letter was whizzing out, the natural result was that it whizzed across the boat, and dropped over the opposite gunwale, into the water.

Bunter remained happily unaware of that catastrophe.

He had 'chucked' that letter to Redwing in the boat, and neither his little round eyes nor his big round spectacles detected the trifling circumstance that it had missed the boat and gone into the sea.

Having delivered the letter, Billy Bunter revolved on his axis to depart without delay.

Tom Redwing plunged across the rocking boat, and groped in the water after the letter. But he groped in vain. It had sunk and was gone. He stood up and shouted after Bunter.

'Bunter!'

The fat Owl gave a backward blink.

'Can't stop!' he squeaked over a fat shoulder: and rolled on into the gully. Redwing shouted again.

'Was that letter from Quelch?'

But the fat Owl was already out of hearing, clambering up the rocky gully. Tom Redwing compressed his lips. The letter was gone: and the bearer of it was gone. Unless it was a note from Quelch referring to his return to the school, Tom could not guess what it was. He did not even think of the Bounder. His estranged pal was not likely to write to him! Somebody had sent him a note by Bunter's fat hand, which the fat Owl had delivered in a way that was, really, just like Bunter. Tom had to give it up: and he dismissed the incident from mind as the boat ran out to sea.

Billy Bunter also dismissed it from mind.

That unlooked-for delay at Hawkscliff had wasted time.



HE TOSSED THE LETTER OVER THE RAIL OF THE JETTY

It was close on five o'clock now. And the rendezvous at Lantham was scheduled for five. Unpunctual in all other matters, Billy Bunter was never unpunctual at a spread, if he could help it. His little fat legs were feeling the effects of clambering up a steep gully: but luckily, he did not have to make further demands on them. Even Billy Bunter could make good speed when he only had to sit in a saddle without turning a pedal and he made quite a rapid run down to Lantham. Nevertheless, it was a good many minutes after five, when he rolled off Smithy's bike at the bun-shop in the High Street.

A cluster of bicycles were stacked round the big shady tree in front of the Arcade. A crowd of juniors were seated at two or three tables under the shady branches. A cheery roar greeted the fat Owl. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo! You're late, Bunter! Fancy Bunter being late for a feed, you fellows.'

'Oh, really, Cherry-!'

'Lots left, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'That's Smithy's bike!' said Johnny Bull. 'Look out for scalping when you get back, Bunter.'

'Smithy lent it to me-'

'Does he know he did?' asked Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Yes, he does,' yapped Bunter. 'He wanted me to take a note up to Redwing at Hawkscliff-that's why.'

'Smithy did?' exclaimed Harry, in surprise.

'Yes, he jolly well did! and Redwing was out, and I had to clamber up and down a beastly gully after him to give him the note, and I'm jolly tired. I say, you fellows, haven't you got a chair for a fellow?'

'Here you are, old fat man.'

Billy Bunter sat down, resting his weary fat limbs at last. He was tired: but he was not too tired to make a vigorous onslaught on the foodstuffs. He was a little late: but Bunter was the fellow to make up for lost time in such matters. Fortunately, it was an ample spread: and even Billy Bunter had had almost enough by the time the cheery crowd mounted their machines for the run back to Greyfriars.

CHAPTER 30

SILENCE!

MR. QUELCH raised his eyebrows.

He was glancing from his study window into the quad.

His eyes were on a Remove fellow loitering there, not far from the window. Several times, during the last hour or two, he had noticed him there: now he noticed him again.

Quelch did not approve of idle loitering. It was true that Herbert Vernon-Smith was 'gated': and therefore not at liberty to go out of the precincts. But there were plenty of occupations for any fellow within the walls. Neither was Smithy, as a rule, a fellow to loaf about aimlessly with his hands in his pockets. And if he chose so to do, there was no reason why he should choose to do so almost under his form-master's window-so far as Quelch could see.

Naturally it did not occur to Quelch that the junior might be listening for the sound of a telephone bell in that study.

Mr. Quelch threw up the sash, and called to him. 'Vernon-Smith!'

The Bounder look round, and came up to the window. 'Have you nothing better to do, Vernon-Smith, than to loiter about in that aimless manner?' asked Mr. Quelch, severely.

'I'm gated, sir!' muttered the Bounder.

'You would not be gated, Vernon-Smith, if you could be trusted outside the school. The gymnasium and the library are open to you. But if you prefer to loiter, kindly do not do so under my study window.'

With that, the Remove master snapped down the sash. Vernon-Smith walked away, with a knitted brow. It was past five o'clock now. Long since, Bunter must have delivered that letter at Hawkscliff, and gone on to Lantham. It was true that Redwing had to walk a mile to get to a telephone. But surely he would lose no time-if he intended to answer Smithy's appeal at all.

Did he?

If he did, Quelch's telephone-bell might ring at any moment. Smithy was in his form-master's black books: but Redwing was a member of Quelch's form of whom he had a very high opinion: it was certain that Quelch would allow him to take a call from Redwing-if it came! But would it come? He could not be sure. Had he, after all, worn out his chum's long-tried patience? It was only too likely. What was Tom to think of his letter, except that he wanted money to save him from the consequences of his own reckless folly? How was he to believe in the sincerity of the fellow who had spurned his friendship, mocked and derided his friendly counsels, and never given him another word until-until he wanted money? He could picture Tom reading that letter, and then throwing it contemptuously aside. That, he knew, was what he deserved. Was it what he was going to get? What a fool he had been! But-but if only that telephone-call came-!

He had to wait. If the call came, Quelch would send for him. He drifted into the Rag. Skinner and Co. were there, and they exchanged sneering glances as he came in. He gave them a scowl, and drifted out again. The minutes were long and weary. He could do nothing, think of nothing, but that telephone-call-which might never come!

Six o'clock boomed from the clock-tower. The call had not come-or, had it come, and had Quelch shut Redwing off? That was not likely:

but he had to know, and he went at last to his form-master's study, and tapped at the door.

'Come in!'

Mr. Quelch looked up from a pile of Form papers, as he entered the study.

'What is it, Vernon-Smith?'

'If you please, sir-' The Bounder was unusually meek.

'Be brief!'

'Yes, sir. I-I thought that perhaps Redwing might call me on the telephone, sir, and-and if he did, perhaps you'd be kind enough to let me take the call.'

'I should certainly allow you to take a call from Redwing, Vernon-Smith. If it should come, I will send for you.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Vernon-Smith left the study. Evidently, there had been no call so far. There had been ample time-more than ample time. Redwing was passing his appeal unheeded. Or like a drowning man clinging to a straw-he had one last hope. Was it possible that Tom had not yet received that letter? He might have been out-perhaps out in his father's boat-if so, Bunter could not have delivered it, and it might still be in the sticky pocket. Or had the fat Owl failed to deliver it for any other reason-lost it, perhaps, on the way up to Hawkscliff-he was fool enough for that, or for anything else? He could not know, till Bunter came in.

But it was close on lock-ups now, and the cycling party would soon be back, and Billy Bunter with them. Smithy went down to the bike-shed to wait for them there. If Tom had not had the letter, he could somehow get it across to him on Sunday, and all might yet be well. But he felt that he was clinging to straws, as the miserable minutes crawled by.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

He was standing in the doorway of the bike-shed, when Bob Cherry wheeled in his machine-first in of the cyclists. Bob gave him a cheery grin.

'Topping run!' he said. 'Wish you'd come, Smithy!

All round by Woodend and Uphill and Dilcot-'

'Where's Bunter?'

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'Crawling in last, of course,' he answered. 'I raced the other fellows home, but they're not far behind. Last I saw of Bunter he was puffing and blowing in Oak Lane. I'm not sure that he will get in alive.'

The Bounder gritted his teeth. He still had to wait. One after another the other cyclists came in, and put up their machines. There was still no sign of Bunter when they had all cleared off. The Bounder was left alone, still waiting, with a black brow. But at length a fat figure wheeled in a bicycle. Billy Bunter had crawled in at last!

He blinked at the Bounder.

'I say, Smithy, you might shove your jigger on the stand, will you? I'm a bit fagged-all those miles from Lantham-'

'Did you give Redwing that letter?'

'Eh! Of course!' Billy Bunter gave him an indignant blink. 'Think I wouldn't, after you lent me your bike?' The Bounder's last hope left him.

He tramped out of the bike-shed, without another word.

Billy Bunter cast a disparaging blink after him and exerted himself to the extent of putting up the machine. Then he rolled away, to

repose his weary fat legs in an armchair in the Rag till the bell rang for calling-over.

Herbert Vernon-Smith went in with the rest, to answer to his name in hall. His face was a little pale: but his manner was quite casual as he answered 'adsum' when the master taking roll called his name. But he did not join the crowd in the Rag after call-over. He shut himself up in his study, with no company but black and bitter thoughts.

Bunter had delivered that letter-as indeed, the fat and fatuous Owl fully believed that he had done. And there was no word from Redwing. What, after all, could he have expected? He had humbled himself for nothing-repentance had come too late.

Or was there still a glimmer of hope? Something, anything, might have prevented Redwing from answering his appeal. The answer might come the next day. If no word came on Sunday, that would settle the matter beyond the possibility of doubt.

And on Sunday, no word came.

CHAPTER 31

A TERRIBLE TEMPTATION

CRASH!

'Oh!'

'Smithy-'

'You mad ass-!'

'Great pip!'

'You terrific fathead!'

Harry Wharton and Co. all exclaimed together. Herbert Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders. What he had done, he had done deliberately, and for the consequences he cared nothing. He was past caring for anything on his last day at Greyfriars.

It was morning break on Monday. 'Black Monday' for the Bounder. It was his last day at the school, and he knew it. That day, he knew that the racing man at the Three Fishers would carry out his threat. Soapy, no doubt, would give him the day-his last day of grace. He would prefer his money, if he could get it. But there was no possibility of that: and sooner or later the blow would fall.

Quelch would send for the young rascal whom he had warned in vain, and take him to his head-master any minute after six o'clock' That knowledge made the Bounder utterly reckless. He was going up for the 'sack': and in such circumstances, a fellow always mutinous was not likely to care much what he did. On the morrow he would be gone.

But to the other fellows, who knew nothing of the black bitterness in his mind, his action came as a horrifying shock. Remove fellows were punting a football in break, Smithy among them, by the wall of the gym: a spot where such punt-aboutings were allowed, when Mr. Quelch came out of the House. Nobody heeded him, at the distance, as he walked majestically to the path under the old elms, for his accustomed amble before third school-nobody but the Bounder. But Herbert Vernon-Smith's eyes glinted at the 'beak' who was scheduled to march him off to the Head to be sacked.

He hooked the ball away from Bob Cherry, and cut off with it, dribbling it away across the quad. The others followed him, three or four voices shouting to him to send the ball back.

The Bounder did not heed the calling voices. He ran on with the ball at almost lightning speed, heading for the path under the elms, into which his form-master had paced.

Then, within measurable distance of the majestic figure under the elms, he kicked-directly at Henry Samuel Quelch.

Smithy was a goal-getter. That shot was as swift, and as accurate, as the winning goal he had kicked at Highcliffe a few days ago.

Quelch, as it happened, was turning to retrace his steps.

A muddy Soccer ball crashed on his ear as he turned taking him completely by surprise. Never, in fact, had Henry Samuel Quelch had such a surprise in his life. He uttered a startled 'Oh!' as he went spinning under the crash, sprawling headlong in the grassy path. For some moments he hardly knew what had happened to him. He sprawled and spluttered incoherently.

'Smithy!' Harry Wharton came panting up, and grasped the Bounder roughly by the shoulder. 'Smithy' Are you mad? You did that on purpose!'

'Think so?' drawled the Bounder.

'You mad fathead!' panted Bob Cherry. 'Do you think that Quelch will fancy it was an accident?'

'He can fancy what he likes.'

Mr. Quelch sat up, dizzily. He put his hand to his ear.

It came away wet with mud. He stared round him.

The Famous Five rushed to help him up. Vernon-Smith lounged after them, a grin on his face. Quelch was going to march him off to the Head to be sacked, and no doubt would be glad to see the last of such a member of his form! Well, he had at least given Quelch something to remember him by! Not for a moment was he sorry for what he had done. He was elated.

Quelch tottered up, with the help of willing hands.

Nugent picked up his mortar-board, which had flown off as he fell. For some moments, the Remove master stared dizzily at the anxious faces round him. Then, as he realised what had happened, thunder gathered in his brow.

'What? what? That is a football-it was that football that struck me and caused me to fall. Upon my word! Wharton! You are well aware that you are not allowed to kick a football about here-'

'Yes, sir,' stammered Harry. But-'

'So sorry, sir!' gasped Bob Cherry.

'It was I that kicked the ball, sir!' said Vernon Smith.

'What? what? You are all equally to blame for this accident-you will all know very well the limits within which you are permitted to punt a ball. All of you will be severely punished-every boy here.' Quelch's gimlet eye noted every boy there, at a glance. 'I shall deal with you all later.'

'But, sir-'

'That will do.'

Mr. Quelch walked away to the House. He was very much shaken, and evidently did not feel equal to continuing his amble.

The Bounder looked after him, as he went, with a sardonic grin. The other fellows looked at the Bounder, and their looks were expressive.

'You rotter, Smithy,' said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. 'You knocked Quelch over on purpose-we all saw you kick the ball at him.'

'Why not?' drawled Smithy.

'Why not?' repeated Bob Cherry, hotly. 'There's a limit, Smithy, though you don't seem to know it. It was a rotten trick and it's landed us all in the soup.'

'Extra School all round, I expect,' said Frank Nugent. 'Even if Quelch doesn't make it whops. Bump him!'

'Hear, hear!' exclaimed Bob. 'If you don't know there's a limit, Smithy, it's time you learned. Bump him!'

'Go it,' said Harry Wharton.

'Hands off,' shouted the Bounder, angrily, as the Famous Five closed round him, and collared him on all sides. 'You cheeky rotters-Oh!'

He hit out savagely as he was grasped. But that did not help him. He was swept off his feet, and came down with a heavy bump, on the spot where he had floored his form-master. He yelled as he landed there.

'Give him another!' growled Johnny Bull.

Bump!

'One more for luck!' said Bob.

Bump!

'That's a tip, Smithy,' said the captain of the Remove, as the Bounder sat spluttering with breathless fury. He picked up the

Soccer ball. 'Come on, you fellows. You come near this ball again, Smithy, and we'll boot you instead of the ball.'

The juniors crowded away, leaving Herbert Vernon-Smith sitting and spluttering. He picked himself up at last, and stood leaning on a tree, panting for breath. As he stood there, in a mood of angry bitterness, something glimmering in the grass almost at his feet caught his eyes.

It was a small key-ring, with several little keys strung on it. He scowled at it. He knew what it was—he had seen it often enough before, in his form-master's hand. Evidently, it had fallen from one of Quelch's pockets, as he sprawled in the grass. One of those little keys unlocked Quelch's desk in the Remove form-room. Another unlocked the drawers in the writing-table in his study, in one of which he kept the precious typescript of his 'History of Greyfriars'. Quelch, evidently, was unaware of its loss, as he had gone back to the House without it.

Vernon-Smith stooped and picked it up. The malicious thought was in his mind of throwing it over the school wall. That would be a rather serious spot of trouble for Quelch. He would not be able to open his desk in the form-room. He would not be able to unlock the drawers in his study table; one of which was always kept locked as it contained money. Next time he wanted money from that drawer, he could send for a locksmith from Courtfield to get it open for him. Any spot of bother for Quelch was welcome to the Bounder, in his present mood.

With the key-ring in his hand. he made a few steps along the path. Then he stopped.

He caught his breath.

A sudden, strange, and terrible thought had flashed into his mind. It was a thought that startled him, scared him, and caused the colour to drain from his cheeks. One of those little keys would open any drawer in Quelch's writing-table. It would open the one that was always locked: the one in which, as many fellows knew. money was kept. Money! Money that would save him—save him from the 'sack'—save him from leaving his school in disgrace—save him from that miserable journey home—from having to face an angry father, when Mr. Vernon-Smith returned from the continent to learn that his son had been expelled from Greyfriars. And nobody would ever know—nobody could ever know! Easy enough to find an opportunity—fatally easy!

He shuddered.

He had sunk low enough already. Could he sink still lower—could he take that final plunge? He could not—he would not! But—the thought hammered in his mind—it would save him, and no one would know. He himself would know that he was a thief—a thing unclean. But it would save him!

He wiped a spot of perspiration from his forehead. He could not sink to that terrible temptation. He would fling it from him—and fling back the key-ring where he had found it. But--

A bell began to ring. It was the bell for third school.

He stared at the key-ring in his hand. He made a motion to fling it away. But it did not leave his fingers. A hard, desperate look came over his face—a look that made it appear years older. He slipped the key-ring into his pocket. It was still in his pocket when he went into the form-room with the rest of the Remove.

CHAPTER 32

ON THE BRINK

'HENRY'S shirty!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'No wonder!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Quiet!' breathed Harry Wharton.

No member of the Remove needed telling that 'Henry' was 'shirty'. That indeed was a mild description of Mr. Quelch's aspect. His look indicated that he was in the grimmest of moods. All the juniors who had taken part in the punt-about had reason to feel uneasy. Quelch, no doubt, took it for granted that the bang of the Soccer ball on his majestic nut was accidental. He could hardly have imagined that a member of his form had 'floored' him of malice aforethought! Nevertheless, he had been floored by the footer, and there was still a lingering ache in the majestic 'nut' contacted by the Soccer ball. And his impression was that a crowd of thoughtless juniors had been kicking the ball about in a spot where they all knew very well that such proceedings were prohibited-hence the accident! It was an occasion for stern measures.

Only the Bounder was to blame: all the rest regarded what he had done as a reckless and ruffianly act. And they had made their opinion unmistakably clear by bumping him for it. But they could not tell Quelch so: and they were all 'in the soup' together. Mr. Quelch stood beside his high desk, surveying his form with a grim eye, in a silence that could almost be felt. It was a brief silence: but it seemed long to Harry Wharton and Co. Then he barked suddenly-so suddenly that Billy Bunter jumped, and almost swallowed the remnant of a bullseye which he had not quite finished when he rolled into form.

'The boys concerned in the incident in break this morning will stand up!' barked Quelch.

The boys concerned stood up.

'Such an incident cannot be passed over lightly. Each of you will be caned severely.'

'It's going to be whops!' sighed Bob Cherry.

Evidently, it was. Mr. Quelch picked up the cane from his desk. He gave it a preliminary swish. 'May I speak, sir?' asked Vernon-Smith. The gimlet-eye glinted at him.

'You may speak, Vernon-Smith, if you have anything to say. Be brief.'

'Only I was to blame, sir, for the-the accident!' said the Bounder, quietly and coolly. 'I ran away with the ball, and the other fellows only ran after me to stop me and get it back. I kicked the ball before they could catch up with me. They'd have stopped me if they could. They had nothing to do with the accident.'

'Good old Smithy!' murmured Bob.

There was a pause. The Rhadamanthine expression on Quelch's speaking countenance relaxed considerably. His voice bore less resemblance to a bark when he spoke again. 'Then you alone, Vernon-Smith, were responsible for the accident?'

'Only me, sir.'

'Then you alone will be punished for such an act of unthinking recklessness. The others may sit down.'

Much relieved, the others sat down.

Then there was another pause. Mr. Quelch stood cane in hand. The Bounder stood facing him, waiting to be called out from the form for 'whops'; which he was prepared to take with his usual

hardihood. It was going to be his last 'six' at Greyfriars, unless-!

It was a long pause. Then, to the surprise of all the form, Mr. Quelch laid the cane down on his desk.

'You will take five hundred lines, Vernon-Smith!' he said.

'Very well, sir!'

The Bounder could almost have laughed. Five hundred lines-he would not be there to write them, little as Quelch knew it so far.

Unless-unless-

English History was the lesson in third school. Billy Bunter, for once, was not the member of Quelch's form who was least interested in the annals of his native land. To Herbert Vernon-Smith, Quelch's voice was only a meaningless drone. His thoughts were racing-but assuredly not on the subject of English History.

What was he going to do? He felt himself on the edge of an abyss, into whose dark depths he shuddered to look. The key-ring was in his pocket-Quelch had not missed it yet. What was he going to do with it? He hardly dared think what he was going to do.

Once he glanced round over the form, scanning face after face, trying to think what other fellows might have done in such a jam. There were black sheep in every flock -he was not the only one! There was Skinner, selfish and unscrupulous: there was Snoop, by no means a good specimen: there was Fish, mean and miserly: there was Bunter, who never hesitated to help himself to another fellow's tuck. But he could not think that any of them would ever dream of doing what he contemplated doing. Even Bunter, who would snoop a cake from Lord Mauleverer's study without a second thought, would not have given Mauly's wallet a second blink had he found it there. Not one of them-not one-was capable of such an act. Was he himself capable of it?

But-it would save him-and somehow or other he would replace the money later. Even as that thought passed through his mind, he knew that it was self-deception. If he touched money that did not belong to him, he knew what he would be!

A bell rang at last; third school was over; and the Remove were dismissed. As the juniors marched out, there was an exclamation from Mr. Quelch.

'Bless my soul!'

During the lesson, the Remove master had not had occasion to open his desk. Now, apparently, he had: for he was standing at it with a puzzled expression on his face, fumbling in his pockets. He was still fumbling-Herbert Vernon-Smith could easily guess for what-as the form poured out of the form-room.

'Good old Smithy!' In the corridor, Bob Cherry gave the Bounder a smack on the shoulder, which made him stagger. Bob had a rather heavy hand.

'What the dickens do you mean?' snapped Vernon-Smith. 'Can't you keep your paws to yourself?'

'It was jolly decent of you to own up as you did!' explained Bob.

'It would have been whops all round if you hadn't.'

'So surprising that I should do anything decent, isn't it?' sneered the Bounder.

'I don't mean that, of course-'

'Oh, rats!'

The Bounder stalked away scowling. Bob Cherry looked after him, with a grin.

'Nice good-tempered sort of chap, isn't he?' he remarked. 'Perhaps he hasn't got over that bumping yet. Come on, you chaps-let's get out-race you round the quad.'

The Famous Five went out cheerily into the autumn sunshine. Vernon-Smith stopped at a window, and stood staring out gloomily into the quad. He could not join a crowd of carefree schoolboys-there was too heavy a weight on his mind for that. What was he going to do? He slid his hand into his pocket-the key-ring was there, if he dared to use it. It seemed almost to burn his fingers.

What a fool he had been! He might have been as care-free as Bob Cherry, but for that kink of blackguardism in him, which he had recklessly indulged instead of trying to control. He had had a friend who would have stood by him, had he not tired out his patience with ingratitude and mockery. And even Quelch-what after all had Quelch done, except his duty as a school-master? The other fellows had been down on him for that vicious act in knocking Quelch over with the Soccer ball, and he knew that they were right and that he was wrong. If only he had a chance to start afresh! But he had no chance-unless-!

Staring from the window, he caught sight of Mr. Quelch in the quad. The Remove master disappeared into the walk under the elms. The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. Quelch had lost his key-ring, and it had occurred to him where he must have dropped it. He was going to look for it in the grass under the old trees. He was not likely to find it there!

Then it came into Smithy's mind that this was his opportunity. Quelch was at a distance from his study, and not likely to return to it for a while. It was as if Fate was playing into his hands. How easy to slip into the vacant study-it would be a matter of only a few minutes-!

And it would save him. There was still time to keep Soapy quiet! He moved away in the direction of Masters' Studies.

Even yet he did not know what he was going to do. But-if the coast was clear-

He almost hoped that some beak might be in the passage, making it impossible for him to enter Quelch's study unseen. But the corridor was deserted; there was no eye to fall on him, as he reached the door of that study, and stepped quietly in.

He stood at the writing-table with its columns of drawers, and drew the key-ring from his pocket. He knew the drawer he wanted-he had the key that would fit it. Nobody would know-Quelch might not even miss the money for days-nobody would know-nobody could guess -only himself! He slipped the key into the lock of the drawer.

And then, on the very brink of the abyss, he realized that he could not do it. Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, he had known all along that he could not. He knew it now, at all events. He snatched the key out of the lock.

Five minutes later, he was on the path under the elms.

He smiled sourly at the sight of a bending figure, scanning the grass.

'If you please, sir-'

Mr. Quelch rose, and looked round at him. 'What is it, Vernon-Smith?'

'Is this your key-ring, sir? I picked it up. I think it's yours, sir.'

'Bless my soul!'

Mr. Quelch took the key-ring, and slipped it into his pocket. He gave the Bounder a quite benevolent look. 'Thank you very much,

Vernon-Smith! I should have been put to very great inconvenience if my keys had not been found. I am much obliged to you, Vernon-Smith.' Then, after brief pause, 'I shall excuse your thoughtless and reckless act in break this morning, Vernon-Smith. You need not write the lines I imposed.' For once, at least, the Remove master was pleased with the most troublesome member of his form! Mr. Quelch walked back to the House, much relieved by the recovery of his keys, and feeling very kindly towards the junior who had found them. And Herbert Vernon-Smith was left to wait for the blow to fall.

CHAPTER 33

EXIT SMITHY

'TROT in, Smithy.'

'Trickle in, old boy.'

'Just in time for a whack at the chocs.'

It was quite a cordial greeting in No. 1 Study, as Herbert Vernon-Smith appeared in the doorway.

After class that afternoon, the Famous Five had gathered in the study, for the agreeable purpose of disposing of a handsome box of chocolates which had arrived, with some other good things, from Harry Wharton's Aunt Amy at Wharton Lodge. They were certainly not expecting a visit from Smithy. Their feelings towards him were, in fact, rather mixed. They had bumped him for that vicious act in break that morning: after which they had hardly expected him to speak up as he had done in the form-room. But he had done so: and averted the vials of wrath. So, on the whole, they were ready to be friendly if Smithy was friendly: while if his visit was a hostile one, they were equally prepared to land him in the passage 'on his neck'.

But there was nothing hostile in the Bounder's look now.

His look and manner were quite amicable, as he lounged into the study, with his hands in his pockets.

'I've looked in to borrow a time-table, if you've got one in this study,' he said.

Five fellows stared at him blankly.

'A time-table!' repeated Harry Wharton.

'Yes: got one?'

'Yes, I've got one, and you can have it if you like. But what the dickens do you mean, Smithy? You're not catching a train, I suppose?'

'Just that!'

'But you're gated!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

'I hadn't forgotten that,' he drawled. 'But, just for once, I shall have to disregard authority-painful as that will be to a good, dutiful, obedient chap like me.'

'There'll be a row when you come back!' said Frank Nugent.

'I'm not coming back.'

'WHAT!' The Famous Five all exclaimed at once.

Vernon-Smith kicked the door shut.

'Not a word outside this study,' he said. 'Not till I'm gone, I mean... After that, you can spread the happy news, and I expect there will be a lot of dry eyes when I'm missed from the Remove. I thought I'd rather like to say goodbye to you fellows before I cut. We haven't been pals exactly, but I shall miss you, believe it or not.'

'We should all miss you, if you went,' said Harry. 'But-you're not going, Smithy. You can't. Do you mean going home?'

'Where else?' The Bounder gave a hard laugh. 'Quite a surprise for the pater, when he comes back from Brussels, or Bonn, or wherever he is pottering about the Common Market. I don't fancy that it will be a pleasant surprise for him: but that can't be helped now.'

'But why-?' asked Johnny Bull.

'It's not a matter of choice,' explained the Bounder. 'I'm catching an afternoon train instead of a morning train tomorrow, that's all.'

'Oh, scissors!' exclaimed Bob. 'Sacked?'

Every face in No. 1 Study was very grave now. So far as the chums of the Remove could see, Vernon-Smith's words could only mean that it had come at last! It was not really surprising, if it had come—the surprising thing was that it had not come before. No fellow could be a law unto himself at school, and carry on in reckless derision of authority, without disaster sooner or later. Smithy had asked for it, over and over again—and now it had come!

'Sacked!' repeated Harry Wharton. 'Oh, Smithy!'

'Not yet!' The Bounder laughed again. 'I'm anticipating the happy event by a few hours, that's all. Going while the going's good, see?'

'But-!' exclaimed Harry.

'The game's up for me here. I've asked for it and got it. Quelch doesn't know a thing yet. He will know in a couple of hours from now. I've lied myself out of tight corners more than once—but I can't lie myself out of this one. I've been a fool, and a rotter. I've called the tune to please myself, and now I've got to pay the piper. But-' the Bounder's eyes glinted, 'I'm not going to be walked off to the Head to be bunked. I shall be gone before they want me. Six o'clock's the limit. I shan't be here at six.'

'Isn't there any chance left?' 'None at all.'

'While there is life there is hopefulness, my esteemed Smithy,' said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

'Where's that time-table?' asked Vernon-Smith, unheeding.

'Here. But-'

'Thanks.'

The Bounder, standing by the window, opened the timetable, holding it in a steady hand, to look out his train. Harry Wharton and Co. watched him in silence. They had rather a stunned feeling. They had never, as Smithy said, been exactly pals: Smithy's ways were not their ways. But they knew that they would miss him, if he went. They knew, too, that only his own reckless misconduct could have brought this upon him. But they did not care to think of that now. They could only sympathise with a fellow who was down and out, who had thrown away all his chances, and now had to pay the penalty. Smithy threw down the time-table.

'London express leaves Lantham at six,' he said. 'I've bags of time to get to Lantham. If I have to wait for the train there. I'd rather wait for the train than for Quelch to walk me off to the Old Man.' He glanced round at five clouded faces with a sardonic grin.

'What are you fellows looking like a lot of moulting owls about?'

'We're sorry, Smithy,' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

'The sorrowfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy.'

'It's rotten,' muttered Bob.

'You're a fool to cut, Smithy,' said Johnny Bull. 'It mayn't be as bad as you think-'

'Not when Quelch warned me that it would be the sack if I was caught out again, and he finds that I carried on the same as before, laughing at him in my sleeve?'

'Oh!' said Johnny. 'If it's as bad as that-'

'Just as bad as that. One more thing, you fellows—I've no money. Can you scrape up a pound to lend me? I suppose you can trust me to square later—I'm not down to Bunter's level yet.'

'Of course,' said Harry.

A ten-shilling note, and four half-crowns, were immediately forthcoming. The Bounder winced as he took them. But he slipped them into his pocket. 'Thanks,' he said. He moved across to the

door. 'I can borrow a quid from Munson to settle this. Mind, not a word outside this study till I'm clear. I don't want a pre's paw dropping on my shoulder. Not that I'd let a pre stop me-or a beak, either! No bunking for me!' He looked back from the doorway. 'Good-bye you chaps-and-and tell Reddy, when he comes back, that I'm sorry we couldn't mend it, but it was all my fault and I don't blame him for chucking my letter away without an answer.'

With that he was gone.

He left a dead silence behind him. It was broken by a fat squeak in the doorway, as Billy Bunter blinked in through his big spectacles.

'I say, you fellows.'

'Oh, scat!' snapped Bob Cherry.

'But I say, what's up with Smithy?' asked Bunter. 'He passed me on the landing just now, and smacked me on the shoulder, and said "Good-bye, Bunter, glad to see the last of you!" What do you think he meant by that?'

Nobody explained to the fat Owl what Smithy had meant by that! But the next moment Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles fell on the chocolate-box on the table. and he forgot Herbert Vernon-Smith's existence.

'I say, have you got chocs? I say, mind if I have some?' Without waiting to ascertain whether anyone minded.

Bunter helped himself to the chocs. The Famous Five did not heed him-least of all Harry Wharton. The captain of the Remove was thinking of his promise to Tom Redwing. He had not expected the crash to come. The Bounder, somehow, had always fallen on his feet. But Redwing had feared it-expected it-and Harry had made him a promise which he had to keep. The crash had come, and he had promised Redwing to let him know, if it happened, as soon as he could get up to Hawkscliff on a bike. He left the study quietly, and went down to the bike-shed.

CHAPTER 34

THE LAST CHANCE

TOM REDWING sat on the bench outside his father's cottage at Hawkscliff, looking out beyond the cliffs to the sea, rolling bright in the autumn sunshine. He was alone at the cottage: John Redwing had gone to Dover to sign on for a new voyage. In a couple of days more, Tom would be back at Greyfriars: and he was thinking of Greyfriars now, and of the friend he had left there who was no longer his friend. He had been sitting there mending a net—Tom's hands were seldom idle. But the net lay beside him now, as he stared at the sea with troubled thoughts in his mind. What would it be like at Greyfriars when he went back—barring Smithy, and barred by him?

It had been a chequered friendship: but very real and strong, and its end left a gap. It was only by a lucky legacy that he was a Greyfriars fellow at all. He had made many friends there. Fellows like Harry Wharton and Co. did not care whether he came from a little cottage in a fishing village, or from a magnificent abode like Lord Mauleverer: they did not give it a thought. And Smithy, with all his faults, had never seemed to see any difference between a millionaire's son, and the son of a seafaring man who sailed before the mast.

He sighed.

He had to make up his mind to it. And Smithy, he knew was in trouble, and the course he was following could only land him in worse. When he returned to the school, he would see Smithy again, and what would he see? An indifferent, perhaps a sneering, face. He had one comfort—Wharton had promised to let him know if Smithy was up for trouble: and he had heard nothing from Wharton. If the Bounder was, as he feared, heading for the 'sack', it had not happened yet. He would still be there when Tom went back.

'Reddy!'

He gave a start, as his name was called. Deep in painful thought, he had not heard the sound of a bicycle. He started, and looked round—at Harry Wharton.

'Wharton!' he exclaimed.

'Reddy, old chap!'

Tom Redwing caught his breath. It had happened, then—it had happened, or Wharton would not have been there.

'Smithy!' he breathed. 'That's why you've come.'

'Yes. I'm afraid its bad news, but you wanted me to let you know if it happened-' said Harry.

'Yes, yes, yes. Its good of you to come. But—what's happened? Is Smithy up before the Head? Have they found out-?' Tom's voice faltered. 'Is it the sack—is it the finish?'

'I can only tell you what Smithy told us in my study, before he left-'

'He's left?'

'He's at Lantham by this time, waiting for the London express. He's cut, rather than wait to be sacked. From what he said, Quelch knows nothing so far, but he will know some time this afternoon, and Smithy cut before they could bunk him.'

'Oh!' panted Tom. He stood staring at the captain of the Remove.

'But—but if nothing's come out-'

'Nothing so far.'

'Then why-why?' muttered Redwing. 'Smithy's not the fellow to take a scare without cause.'

'Anything but,' said Harry. 'He would carry on to the last minute, if he fancied there was a chance of pulling through.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Tom. It came to him in a flash. 'It's the money-'

'The money!' repeated Harry.

'You remember-I told you on the phone the other day-he owes money to that rogue at the Three Fishers, and-and he had a mad idea of getting clear by going in deeper! Is that it? He can't have paid the man-you know that he's hard up, and if he's plunged, and lost more-that brute Sanders is the kind of man to threaten him-Is that it?'

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'It's likely enough, I suppose,' he said. 'But I don't know. All Smithy said was that six o'clock was the limit, and he was going while the going was good. But-' Wharton recalled the episode at Highcliffe. 'I'm pretty sure he's been losing money, Reddy. That may be it.'

'That is it!' said Redwing, with conviction. 'If only he would have let me help! Now he's gone, without a word.'

'Not without a word,' said Harry. 'He left a message for you, Reddy. Whatever the row was about, he was sorry for it, and blamed himself.'

'Oh!' Redwing's clouded face cleared a little. 'What was the message?'

'He asked us to tell you, when you came back, that he was sorry you and he couldn't mend it, that it was all his fault, and that he didn't blame you for not answering his letter.'

Redwing stared blankly. 'His letter? What letter?'

'His letter on Saturday-'

'I never had a letter. Could he think I wouldn't answer it if he sent me a letter? Of course I would. But I never had a letter.'

'Well, that's what he said,' answered Harry, puzzled. 'I don't make this out, Reddy. Bunter told us at Lantham on Saturday that he gave you a letter from Smithy-'

'Bunter?'

'Yes, the fat ass wanted to turn up at Lantham, and Smithy lent him his bike, to go round by Hawkscliff and take you a letter from him. He told us he had to come down the gully to give it to you, and it made him late at Lantham. Didn't he give it to you after all, or what?'

'Oh!' exclaimed Redwing. 'Was that from Smithy? Oh, that fat clumsy owl! I never even dreamed that Smithy would write. It never came into my head at all. That fat chump chucked the letter to me in the boat, and it went into the water, and was lost-'

'Oh!' exclaimed Harry.

'I thought that perhaps it might be a note from Quelch, about my going back, and I wrote to tell him that my father was sailing again on Wednesday, and I should be back that day.'

'Oh!' repeated Harry. 'Then-'

'But-but-from what you say, it must have been from Smithy, and I never knew-never dreamed of it. How could I know?'

'You couldn't!' said Harry.

'But-but- Oh, that fat ass-!'

'Just like Bunter,' said Harry. 'He believed you'd had the letter-he couldn't have seen what happened to it, the fat owl. Just like Bunter.'

'Oh, just!' said Tom, bitterly. 'And it left Smithy thinking that I'd had his letter, and still had my back up and wouldn't answer. But-but-if Smithy wrote on Saturday, and if he said what you've just told me before he left, it means that he's ready to wash it all out, if I am-'

'No "if" about that, I think,' said Harry smiling. Then his face clouded. 'But-he's gone, Reddy.'

'Is it too late?' breathed Redwing. 'You say he's at Lantham-'

'He must be there by this time, if he took the train from Courtfield, with half-an-hour to wait for the express.'

'Half-an-hour!' repeated Redwing.'

'Yes its just on half-past five. I could easily catch him at Lantham, if-if-'

'If what?'

'If there's still time to keep that man quiet! It's that-I know it's that-it can't be anything else-that brute's going to give him away if he's not paid-it's that and nothing else-I'm sure of it. Only a matter of the money-and thank goodness I've got that. If only there's time-if only there's time! '

'Cut off and try it on,' said Harry.

Tom Redwing nodded, and ran into the shed adjoining the cottage. He emerged wheeling his bicycle. He gave Wharton a wave of the hand, flung himself into the saddle, and vanished from sight almost in a moment, riding like the wind.

Harry Wharton remounted his machine, to ride back to the school. He was glad, very glad, that he had ridden up to Hawkscliff with the news for Tom Redwing, little as he could have foreseen the outcome. That letter on Saturday, which Bunter had delivered in a manner so like Bunter, was evidently the olive-branch-and Tom needed only a word from Smithy, to forgive and forget all offences. Whether Tom had judged the circumstances aright whether he could yet save the scapegrace from the penalty of his own reckless folly, Wharton could not know: but he hoped for the best. There was a hope, at least, that Smithy might yet answer 'adsum' to his name when Quelch called the roll in hall.

CHAPTER 35

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

'SMITHY!'

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave quite a jump.

He was pacing the platform at Lantham Junction, not patiently. The minutes seemed very long to him, as he waited for his train. The train from Courtfield had landed him at Lantham, in more than ample time for the London express. He had to wait-and he waited impatiently. He was anxious to be gone.

His brow was dark and moody as he paced restlessly.

He was going home, in the middle of the term. He was glad, at least, that his father was not at home: he would not have to face him immediately. But it had to come, sooner or later: and what was he to say for himself? That he had gone on his own reckless and wilful way, regardless of admonitions: throwing away the last chance he had been given to amend: and that he had run away from school only in time to escape the final disgrace of expulsion! Mr. Vernon-Smith had said, in his letter, that he hoped to hear a better report of him, when he returned from the continent. And that was the report he was to hear!

And that was not all. He had thrown away all his chances: and he had thrown over the best pal a fellow ever had. He had lost everything-including his best, his only, friend. That was the bitterest blow of all! What a fool, what a rotter, he had been! The Bounder was in a chastened mood now: he could see himself, at last, as others saw him. If only old Tom-loyal old Tom-had been able to forgive and forget. But he had tried his patience too far: and from Tom there had been only silence.

'Smithy!'

It was a panting voice. He stared round.

A breathless fellow was running down the platform towards him. He could hardly believe his eyes, as they fell on that sunburnt familiar face. Tom Redwing was the last person he could have expected to see at Lantham Junction. He stared at him blankly. Redwing came panting up.

'Smithy! You're here-thank goodness I've caught you-'

'Reddy!'

'I came at once when I heard-I'd asked Wharton to let me know if-if there was trouble, and he came up to Hawkscliff to tell me-I made the bike fly, getting here-'

'Did you?' A trace of the Bounder's old mocking manner came back.

'Why? Did you want to say goodbye after all?'

'Smithy!'

'Well, you've lots of time. My train doesn't go till six, bother it. Did Wharton tell you I've cut?'

'Yes, yes, and-'

'Dear old Quelch will miss me at roll. He will fancy I've cut gates.' The Bounder laughed. 'It will dawn on him later that I've cut for good-he won't have the pleasure of marching me off to the Head to be bunked. I should like to see his face when Sanders rings him up! It would be worth seeing.'

'Smithy. old chap-I guessed it was that-'

'Just that!' assented Smithy. 'You can guess what a diddler feels like, when he gets diddled himself! And I've diddled him!' Then the Bounder's manner changed. 'I'm glad you've turned up to say goodbye, Reddy. I left a message for you with Wharton-'

'Yes, yes, he gave it to me-'

'And I mean it! I don't blame you for not answering my letter. Why should you? If ever a fellow had a right to feel fed up, you had! I was a fool to think you would give me a ring on Quelch's phone on Saturday or Sunday. Why should you? What I can't make out is why you've taken the trouble to hike here on a bike to see me off! Why did you?'

'Do listen to me, Smithy! There's no time to waste-'

'Bags of time-my train doesn't go till six. Anything more to say?'

'Did you ask me to phone, in that letter?' The Bounder stared at him.

'Don't you know I did?' he snapped.

'I don't know what was in the letter, because I never had it, and I've only just heard from Wharton that you wrote at all.'

'Wha-a-a-t?'

'That fat fool Bunter-'

'Bunter's a fool, but I asked him when he came back if he'd given you the letter, to make sure: and he said he had--'

'He thought he had! The fat ass believed he had. But-'

'But what the dickens-'

Tom Redwing hurriedly explained. Vernon-Smith listened to him in silence. He clenched his hands, hard, as he heard what had become of the letter he had entrusted to the fat Owl of the Remove.

But he unclenched them again. There was no angry outburst. Smithy was in a very chastened mood!

'My fault!' he said. 'My fault from start to finish!

I couldn't make up my mind to eat humble-pie-I couldn't own up that I was a fool and a rotter-I could have written to you the day before, and you'd have had the letter by post, but-but-but-I wouldn't! Not till I could make up my mind to put my silly pride in my pocket-and you never thought I'd do that, Reddy-'

'No! But-'

'Well, I did, in the end, and then-then that fat chump never got the letter to you, and I-I had to believe that-that- You see, I told you in that letter not to answer if you thought it was only the money and-and- Oh, Reddy, I was feeling pretty sick, hanging about for that phone-call that never came-'

'Forget it all now, Smithy! It's not too late-it can't be too late. It's that man Sanders-I guessed as much-isn't that it?'

'Yes, that's it! He's going to ring Quelch at six-he said that was the limit-if he isn't paid-and I've paid him nothing-'

'That's easy now, if you can get to the brute in time. He won't give you away if he sees his money.'

'Not likely! It's his money he wants-he'd be civil enough if I turned up with seventeen pounds to pay him. I've not got seventeen pence! I had to borrow my railway fare from Wharton's crowd. No good telling me you'd let me loot your cash in the Savings Bank, Reddy-it's too late for that now.'

'It's not too late, Smithy! I drew the money out last week, in case I could use it to help you-and I've got it in my pocket now-twenty pounds-'

'Oh!' gasped the Bounder.

'And here it is, old chap! Look here, you can get to the man before six, if you don't lose a minute. Take my bike, and burn the wind!' The Bounder drew a deep, deep breath.

'I'm not worth it, Reddy,' he said. 'You're a fool to stick to a fellow like me.'

'I'm sticking all the same,' said Tom. 'But don't lose a minute now, Smithy. So long as you turn up at the school for calling over, it's all right.'

The Bounder made a rapid calculation, and nodded: 'I can do it!' he said. 'I shall get lines for cutting gates, but that won't matter much. If I get back for calling-over, it's all right. I can do it, if you lend me your bike-'

'Come on!' said Redwing.

They left the railway station together.

Tom Redwing's face was bright, as he walked back to Hawkscliff. Smithy had time-time to see the man at the Three Fishers and settle his debt-time to get back to the school and answer to his name when the roll was called. It was at the very eleventh hour that his chum had saved him. But he had saved him. Smithy would still be at Greyfriars when he went back, and surely he had learned his lesson, and would dig no more pitfalls for his own feet. Tom hoped so and believed so: and at any rate, matters would be on the old friendly footing in No. 4 Study. Tom Redwing's heart was lighter than it had been for many days.

CHAPTER 36

'ADSUM!'

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Run away and play, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, Cherry-'

Frank Nugent glanced at his watch. 'Ten past six!' he said.

'Call-over in five minutes!' said Harry Wharton. 'I wonder-'

He did not finish the sentence.

The Famous Five were in the Rag. They were standing by the big bay window, every now and then glancing out into the dusky quad.

The same thought was in all their minds. Harry Wharton, on his return from Hawkscliff, had told his chums that there was still a chance for Smithy—that Tom Redwing believed so, at any rate. Nobody cared to remember now that it was the Bounder's own wilful folly that had brought him to disaster. They only hoped that he could, and would, pull through—that his luck, which had always been phenomenal, would not fail him now. But time was getting very close—the last minutes were ticking away.

The 'gated' junior had not been missed so far. They could guess that he had dropped out, unseen, and it was not yet known that he had 'cut gates'. But it would become known at once if he did not answer to his name in hall. That would matter little, if he was not coming back. Was he coming back? Little as they liked the Bounder's ways, often as they had had spots of trouble with him, every member of the Co. would have rejoiced to see him walk in at the door of the Rag. But it was only Billy Bunter that rolled in. In that anxious frame of mind, the chums of the Remove had no use whatever for conversation from William George Bunter. But Billy Bunter never knew when he was superfluous.

'Five minutes!' said Bob Cherry.

'Four!' said Johnny Bull.

'I say you fellows-'

'Oh, blow away, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, Wharton-'

'Pack up the jawfulness, my esteemed idiotic Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Oh, really, Inky-'

'I wonder-!' said Harry: and again he did not finish the sentence.

'I say, you fellows, what's the worry about calling-over?' asked Bunter. 'We're all here, when the bell goes. Except Smithy! He, he, he! I say, I believe Smithy's cut gates. I haven't seen him about for hours. Quelch will be shirty, if he has. I say, you fellows, think Smithy's cut gates?'

Billy Bunter blinked inquiringly at the Famous Five.

As nobody answered his question, he babbled on. 'Looks like it to me. I haven't seen him about. If he doesn't turn up for roll, Quelch will jump on him. Think he'll get lines or whops, you fellows?'

'Fathead!'

'I fancy it will be whops,' said Bunter. 'The fact is, you fellows, whops will do Smithy good. Look at his rotten temper-booting a fellow all round the study because he happened to be sitting behind an armchair! He wouldn't have lent me his bike on Saturday, only he wanted me to go round by Hawkscliff with a letter for Redwing-'

'You fat ass!' said Harry. 'Redwing never had that letter—you chucked it into the water instead of the boat.'

'Well, Redwing must have been a clumsy ass, to let it go into the water,' said Bunter. 'Some fellows are awfully clumsy! Still, I don't suppose it mattered much. I say, you fellows, the bell will be going in a minute or two. I'll bet you Smithy's going to be late for roll, and Quelch will make it whops if he is, and serve him jolly well right-Yaroooooooh!'

Billy Bunter's cheery conversation turned suddenly into a frantic yell, as a boot crashed on his tight trousers. As the fat Owl had his back to the door, he did not see a newcomer stroll in. He became aware of Herbert Vernon-Smith's arrival, only as the Bounder's foot landed.

'Smithy!' exclaimed Harry Wharton and Co. with one voice.

'Ow! wow! wooooh!' roared Billy Bunter. 'Who's that? Wow!' The fat Owl spun round, and blinked at Vernon-Smith. 'Is that you, Smithy, you beast? Wow!'

'Have another?' asked Smithy.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter did not want another. He dodged promptly out of reach. A bell began to ring. 'Just in time, Smithy!' said Harry Wharton.

'Just!' agreed the Bounder.

The Bounder's manner was quite casual. He looked as if he had merely strolled in from the quad to join the crowd going into hall. Only a short while ago he had 'cut' to elude the sentence of expulsion, never expecting to see Greyfriars again. No one could have guessed it, from his looks.

Evidently, the clouds had rolled by, Smithy, certainly, hadn't come back to be 'sacked'. He had come back to answer 'adsum' to his name when Quelch called the roll-as if nothing out of the common had happened at all. It was a tremendous relief to the Co.

'All serene now, Smithy?' asked Bob.

'Why not?' drawled the Bounder.

'Well, I'm jolly glad.'

'The gladfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Thanks!' The Bounder lowered his voice. 'I daresay you fellows have guessed what the trouble was-anyhow, old Redwing pulled me through it, and lent me his bike to get back on. I've cut it rather fine-you see, I had to make a call on the way back, to save Quelch the trouble of answering a phone-call from a rather disreputable character-I'm rather glad I've saved him that trouble. Know whether I've been missed?'

'I don't think so,' answered Harry. 'It will be all right if you show up in hall on time.'

'Good! I don't want any more trouble with Quelch.'

I don't want any more trouble at all, in fact. I've had enough to last me for the rest of this term. I've been doing some jolly serious thinking lately-'

'Not much in your line,' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Quite! But I have,' said Smithy, 'and I've come to the conclusion that, clever fellow as I fancied I was, Bunter isn't the biggest fool in the Remove. That distinction belongs to me.'

'Hear, hear!' chuckled Bob.

'Now there's going to be a change. I'm going to be good-so good that old Redwing won't know me when he comes back. I'm going to toe the line, and say "Yes, sir!" and "No, sir!" and "Please, sir" and "Oh, sir!" just like you fellows-'

'Fathead!'

'And if ever you fellows feel like wandering from the strait and narrow path, keep an eye on me. From now on you can take me as a model-an example to youth.'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'So long as you play the game, and don't play the goat, you'll be all right,' he said. 'And you may as well begin by not being late for hall. The bell's stopping.'

'Come on!' said Bob.

Vernon-Smith strolled into hall with the Famous Five.

Mr. Quelch was the master taking roll, and when he rapped 'Vernon-Smith' the Bounder's answer came promptly: 'Adsum!'

Quelch, keen as he was, never dreamed how narrow an escape that member of his form had had of never answering 'adsum' to his name again in the old hall of Greyfriars School.

CHAPTER 37

BAD LUCK FOR BUNTER

MR. QUELCH smiled.

Smiles did not come often, or easily, to Quelch's somewhat crusty countenance. But he smiled now, very pleasantly.

He was passing the open doorway of No. 1. Study in the Remove. There was a cheery buzz of voices in that study. It was crowded. Seven fellows there seemed to be in the best of spirits. It was Wednesday and Tom Redwing was back at the school. It was also tea-time: and a feast was toward! All the Famous Five were glad to see Redwing again, and they were celebrating the occasion. Funds had been pooled for a royal spread, and Tom Redwing and Herbert Vernon-Smith were guests of honour. All faces were cheery: Tom's the brightest of all, and Smithy seemed to have forgotten what it was like to be disgruntled.

Quelch's face had been a little severe. He had come up to the Remove to look in at No. 7 Study, and inquire after lines long overdue from Billy Bunter. But as he passed No. 1, he paused to glance in, and smiled. It was really quite a pleasant scene, and it pleased Quelch to see it. And as his face, with its unaccustomed smile, dawned on the merry party in the study, seven juniors jumped up, and there were several exclamations at once.

'Do come in, sir.'

'Oh, do, sir.'

'May we offer you a cup of tea, sir?'

'Here's a chair, sir.'

'These cream puffs are jolly good, sir.'

'And the meringues sir-topping.'

'Do sit down, sir.'

Mr. Quelch's smile became still more genial. He stepped into the study.

'Well, perhaps a cup of tea!' he said. 'I fear that I am somewhat past the age for enjoying cream puffs and meringues. But a cup of tea, certainly.'

'Here's a chair, sir.'

Mr. Quelch sat down.

'Sugar, sir?'

'Milk, sir?'

'Here you are, sir.'

Mr. Quelch sipped a cup of tea. Severe gentleman as he sometimes was, he liked to see happy faces round him, and every face in the study was merry and bright. It was not often that Quelch unbent: but he unbent now, quite pleased by his hospitable welcome in the study.

He even forgot that he had come up after Bunter's lines.

But he was scheduled to be reminded of that member of his form.

A grunt was heard in the passage. Then a fat figure appeared in the doorway: and Billy Bunter blinked in through his big spectacles.

'I say, you fellows!' squeaked Bunter. 'I say, is it a feed? You might have told a chap!'

The fat Owl did not, for the moment, notice Quelch.

Only on very rare occasions did the Remove master unbend to this extent. Bunter, certainly, did not expect to see him in the study. And Bunter's eyes and spectacles were on the good things on the study table.

'I say, you've got meringues-and doughnuts-and cream puffs! You might have told a fellow there was a spread on. Here I've been stuck in my study doing lines for that beast Quelch-'

'Quiet!' gasped Harry Wharton.

'Shut up!' breathed Bob Cherry.

'Shan't!' retorted Bunter. 'You fellows jolly well know what a beast Quelch is. A hundred lines for skewing in con-and I believe I had it right all the time-Quelch don't know all the Latin he makes out. I've only done fifty, and I've a jolly good mind to tell Quelch that I won't jolly well do his dashed lines, blow him. Who's Quelch, I'd like to know! I say, you fellows, what are you making faces at me like that for?'

Billy Bunter discovered, the next moment, why seven juniors were making him almost frantic signs to be silent-as Mr. Quelch rose from his chair! Quelch was no longer smiling!

'Bunter!'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter. 'Is-is-is that Quelch?'

Oh, jiminy! I-I didn't see you, sir! I-I never knew you were here, sir! I-I wasn't calling you a beast, sir-I-I was speaking about another beast, sir-not you at all, sir-I-I-I-oh, lor!'

'You will follow me to my study, Bunter.'

'Oh, crikey!'

The spread in No. 1 Study went on without Billy Bunter.

Bunter was having a much less enjoyable time in another study!

Often and often had the fat Owl wanted to tell his 'beak' what he thought of him! Now he had done so-inadvertently! It was just like Bunter!