

# MUSIC HATH CHARMS!



By  
FRANK RICHARDS

*"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast," is an old saying. But not many fellows would dare to prove the truth of it on a savage Form-master. Vernon-Smith of the Greyfriars Remove does—with amazing results!*

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

HOSKINS' BRAINWAVE.

"**B**UZZ!"  
"Look here, Vernon-Smith"

"Buzz!" repeated Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of the Greyfriars Remove. "We've got trouble enough in this study already, Hoskins, without a half-baked piano-thumper like you buttin' in an' addin' to it! Buzz!"

Claude Hoskins did not buzz. He blushed instead. The musical genius of the Shell regarded himself as something of a prodigy on the pianoforte, and to hear himself described as a half-baked piano-thumper by a mere Remove kid was rather an unpleasant shock.

Hoskins' first instinct was to wade

through the crowd of Removites in Smithy's study and give Smithy a punch on the nose. But he remembered that he had called on a mission particularly demanding patience and good humour, and conquered the instinct in time. He held up some tickets.

"Don't be so dashed rude, Vernon-Smith!" he said. "I've called to ask you fellows if you'd like——"

"We wouldn't!"

"If you'd like to come to a piano recital I'm giving in the music-room——"

"We wouldn't! Now buzz!" snapped the Bounder. "To return to Quelchy, you fellows, my mind's made up. He's declared war on me, an' now I'm goin' to declare war on him!"

" Ass ! "

" Idiot ! "

" You'll only make matters ten times worse," said Harry Wharton. " It's bad enough for the Remove team to lose you for to-morrow's game. We don't want you to lose your halfers for the rest of the term—and that's what'll happen if you really get Quelchy's rag out ! "

" Hear; hear ! "

Vernon-Smith's face hardened.

" If Quelchy is goin' to detain me for things I haven't done, it doesn't matter whether I act the giddy goat or not ! He said I was talkin' in class. I wasn't. "

" You've told us that already. "

" I'll tell you it again—I wasn't ! " snapped the Bounder. " He detained me all the same. Well, now I'm goin' to give him somethin' to detain me for. That's fair, isn't it ? "

" Possibly ; but it's dashed silly, too, old bean," said Wharton patiently. " Quelchy has made a mistake this time, but it's not likely to happen again. "

" The old ass was out of sorts, Smithy," explained Bob Cherry. " We all know why. It's because the Head has given him the job of calling on Major Thresher this afternoon to apologise for our trespassing on his land. "

" Exactly. So he took it out of me ; an' now you're askin' me to stand for it ! " said Vernon-Smith bitterly. " Nothin' doin' ! "

" About these tickets——" broke in Hoskins from the doorway. But nobody heeded Hoskins.

" Forget it, Smithy ! " they were urging.

" Chuck it, old sport ! "

" Go to him nicely and tell him again he was mistaken," suggested Frank Nugent. " He's sometimes a

beast, admittedly ; but he's a just beast. If you handle him like a Dutch uncle he'll admit he was wrong and cancel your detention. "

Vernon-Smith shrugged.

" It's not my habit to go cap in hand to anybody, let alone Quelchy ! My detention stands—an' Quelchy's for it ! "

" Well, of all the chumps——"

" Half a minute, you chaps ! Perhaps I can help. "

The hubbub ceased. All eyes were turned to the doorway. Hoskins had succeeded in attracting attention at last.

" You help ? " asked Wharton, rather blankly. " How the dickens can you help, Hoskins ? Thinking of acting as a mediator ? "

Hoskins' dreamy brow was furrowed with thought. He nodded slowly.

" Something like that. I think I may be able to mediate very successfully—with the aid of music. "

" Eh ? "

" Music ! The very thing ! The more I think of it, the better I like it ! " said Hoskins, quite an enthusiastic gleam coming into his dreamy eyes. " You can take it from me, you fellows, the one thing to put Quelchy right is music ! "

" What the thump——"

" You say he's out of sorts—bad-tempered. The fact is," said Hoskins, " his nerves want soothing. Music is the one thing to do it ! "

" Oh, crikey ! "

" If I could get Mr. Quelch locked up in the box-room next to the music-room for about an hour, I bet I could do it, too—by playing suitable music to him on the piano. "

" Ha, ha, ha ! "

" Dashed if I see anything to laugh at ! " said Hoskins warmly. " Of

course, he might be a little annoyed at first——”

“ ‘ Might ’ ! ” murmured Wharton, quite faintly. “ Ye gods ! I imagine that’s quite likely ! ”

“ But, after a time, the soothing influence of my music would permeate his whole being,” Hoskins went on. “ ‘ Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast,’ you know. It’s an old saying and a true one. Unconsciously Mr. Quelch would throw aside the anger that possesses him at present. A mood of peace and goodwill would descend on him. My music would be designed to that end. His first rage on finding himself locked in would give place to tranquillity. By the time we let him out he’d be simply eating out of your hands ! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

The Removites simply shrieked. The idea of Quelch—Quelchy of the gimlet eyes and tight lips—being locked in a box-room and emerging in a state of blissful tranquillity as a result of Hoskins playing the piano to him struck them as really funny. They roared.

The surprising exception was the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith did not laugh. He eyed Hoskins closely instead. There was a slight gleam in his keen eyes.

“ Perhaps this isn’t so funny, after all,” he said. “ You chaps can cackle ; but I’m wonderin’ myself if there’s somethin’ in what Hoskins says.”

The Removites stared. Hoskins smiled.

“ I’m glad there’s one chap here who has some idea of the power that music possesses,” he said. “ You think it’s a good idea, Vernon-Smith ? ”

The Bounder smiled—a somewhat peculiar smile—and nodded.

“ I think it’s a regular bright one,

old bean. If you’re willin’ to help by playin’ the piano, I’ll see that Quelchy’s locked up in that box-room ! ”

“ Oh, crumbs ! ”

The Remove fellows gazed at Vernon-Smith almost in horror.

“ Mean to say you’re seriously thinking of locking up Quelchy in a box-room ? ” gasped Bob Cherry. “ Why, you must be potty ! ”

“ Better chuck it, Smithy,” said Wharton, with a frown. “ You know well enough that this is about the barmiest wheeze that was ever invented. It only appeals to you because you can see it leading to trouble ! ”

“ Nothin’ of the kind. It appeals to me because I want to give Hoskins’ music a chance to change Quelchy’s character ! ” said the Bounder, with a mocking grin. “ Hoskins an’ I are goin’ to perform a giddy miracle between us. Mum’s the word, everybody, of course ! ”

The Removites grinned. Wharton compressed his lips.

“ We’ll keep mum, naturally. But I think you’re a complete idiot.”

“ Thanks. Now you’d better all run along an’ leave me an’ Hoskins to work out a plan,” said Vernon-Smith coolly. “ Wish us luck ! ”

“ Fathead ! ”

“ Half a minute ! What about these tickets ? ” asked Hoskins, as the Removites turned to go.

“ Leave ’em to me, old bean,” chuckled the Bounder. “ If we pull off this stunt, I’ll sell the whole lot for you.”

And Hoskins thanked Vernon-Smith profusely.

Apparently the musical genius of the Shell had no doubts whatever that they would “ pull off ” the “ stunt ” with entire success !

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

SOOTHING THE SAVAGE BREAST

**T**HUMP! Thump! Thump!  
" Bless my soul ! "

Mr. Quelch put aside his book and frowned.

Afternoon classes had just finished and the master of the Remove had retired to his study for a quiet half-hour with Sophocles.

He was not in the best of moods. At the end of the half-hour he had to call on Major Thresher to discuss a recent trespassing offence on the part of members of the Remove—a task which he would gladly have shirked. The thought of that interview rather marred the joys of Sophocles.

Those diluted joys were still further marred when a terrific thumping broke out on the floor above Mr. Quelch's study.

Thump! Thump! Thump!  
" Goodness gracious ! "

Mr. Quelch's brow grew quite thunderous. He rose to his feet.

It was a fine summer afternoon and, classes being over for the day, the School House was nearly deserted. What could be the cause of this nerve-racking din was a mystery—a mystery that Mr. Quelch intended to solve at the earliest possible moment.

The Remove master quitted his study and made for the stairs, frowning portentously. He would have frowned still more portentously had he suspected that the noise that had brought him out was caused by Vernon-Smith jumping about on the floor above with the deliberate intention of luring him upstairs. But naturally that thought did not occur to Mr. Quelch.

Bang! Thump! Thud!

The din grew louder as Mr. Quelch hurried up the stairs. Mr. Quelch's

lips tightened as he came in sight of the landing and spotted a box-room door open.

He broke into a run and made a dive for the box-room, fully expecting to find there the explanation of the thumping.

Rather to Mr. Quelch's surprise, however, the box-room was empty. The Remove master stood in the middle of the room, glaring round suspiciously. But there was nothing in sight to arouse suspicion.

The noise had stopped now. Mr. Quelch turned to go.

Then he received a shock. There was a slight "click" from behind him. The door had closed—and been locked from the other side! Mr. Quelch simply blinked.

With quite an extraordinary expression on his face, he crossed over to the door and turned the handle. The door was undoubtedly locked. He rattled the handle and tapped sharply on the door panel.

" What are you doing ? " he barked.  
" Unlock this door at once ! "

There was no reply. Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

" If this is a practical joke, I warn you that the consequences will be serious unless you open this door at once ! "

Still no answer. The Remove master tapped on the door again more sharply than before. The tapping became a knocking and the knocking a thumping. The time came when Mr. Quelch was beating quite a deafening tattoo on the stout oak door of the box-room. And still there was no result!

Then the prisoner in the box-room uttered a sudden grunt of relief. A sound had broken the ominous silence outside.

Somebody had struck a chord on a piano in the music-room next door ;



Mr. Quelch stood in the middle of the box-room, staring about him suspiciously. Then suddenly there was a sharp click behind him. The Remove master blinked round. The door had been closed and locked from the other side!

and the sound struck a chord of hope in Mr. Quelch's heart. It was an unusual experience for Mr. Quelch to feel glad at the sound of a piano from the School House music-room; but he felt decidedly glad now. He left the locked door and went over to the wall dividing the box-room from the music-room. He started tapping on the wall.

Mr. Quelch's expression, which had relaxed a little, hardened rapidly again in the course of the next minute. His vigorous tapping must have been clearly audible to the pianist in the next room, who was playing one of the celebrated Nocturnes by Chopin on a particularly soft pedal. But the pianist was carrying on regardless!

The master of the Remove almost foamed at the mouth.

"Stop! Stop playing that piano at once! Do you hear me?" he roared. "This is Mr. Quelch speaking.

I order you to stop playing that piano. I am locked in this box-room. Find what has happened to the key at once!"

The soft and dreamy tinkling of the piano continued.

Mr. Quelch's eyes fairly glittered. Unless the pianist in the music-room was deaf—which would be absurd—he could not possibly have failed to hear his voice. It was an act of deliberate defiance!

"For the last time I order you to stop!" he shrieked.

The opening notes of the "Moonlight Sonata" were the only answer he received!

In the music-room next door, Claude Hoskins allowed his hands to stray lightly over the piano. He was in a mood of quiet optimism.

"Spring Song" and "Liebestraum" followed the "Moonlight Sonata." The musical genius of the

Shell had an extensive repertoire of soft and soothing melodies, and he was prepared to go on for hours if it proved necessary.

Hoskins was confident that ten minutes would do the trick. He smiled cheerfully as he heard Mr. Quelch's furious banging—serene in the assurance that the storm would give place to blessed peace as the dulcet notes from the music-room penetrated the inner reaches of the Remove master's heart.

But something went wrong with Hoskins' calculations. Ten minutes went by and the banging and shouting from the box-room grew louder and more insistent than ever.

Hoskins grimly kept on playing. But as time went on without result, his confident smile began to fade and a somewhat uneasy expression appeared on his face.

Hoskins felt himself assailed by the first pangs of doubt and alarm.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

#### TROUBLE IN THE OFFING!

"ANYBODY here seen Smithy?" Bob Cherry asked that question in the cricket pavilion after net-practice that afternoon. It drew a general shaking of heads from the juniors who were putting away kit in their lockers.

"Nothing doing," said Bulstrode. "He was due to turn up to practice, but he didn't."

"Losing his halfer to-morrow put Smithy right off his stroke, I'm afraid," remarked Tom Redwing, who shared Study No. 4 with the Bounder. "Who wants him, Bob?"

"Wharton. He's just been across to the House and there's the very dickens of a shemozzle going on." Bob chuckled. "Wharton says the Quelch-bird sounds as if he's wrecking

that box-room. Meanwhile, Hoskins is carrying on his snake-charming act on the piano like a Trojan—but without success!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared. But Tom Redwing, who was guide, philosopher and friend to the Bounder, did not join in the laughter. He frowned instead.

"Sounds as if Smithy is piling up trouble for himself," he said gravely.

"Just what Wharton said," nodded Bob Cherry. "He wants to find him to advise him to let Quelch out—pronto. Sure none of you have seen him?"

"Positive."

"All serene." And Bob quitted the pavilion, with a troubled-looking Tom Redwing following him—to find outside that Harry Wharton had just received news of the missing Bounder.

"It's all right, Bob," he called out. "Bunter has just seen him in the tuckshop."

"Oh, good. Going along now?"

"Right now," answered the captain of the Remove grimly. "If that door isn't opened soon, I can see Quelch bursting—and the Bounder getting the sack!"

And Wharton set off, with the rest of the Famous Five and Tom Redwing to keep him company.

They duly found Vernon-Smith in the tuckshop. He was seated on a tall stool at the counter, calmly imbibing a glass of lemonade through a straw. He smiled cynically when he saw them.

"Hallo, you men! Have a lemonade?"

"Don't be an ass, Smithy. This isn't a social call and you know it," said Wharton bluntly. "Quelch's up in that box-room and he can't get out."

"Good! Then everythin's goin' accordin' to plan! Is dear old Hoskins playin' soothin' music still?"

"He is—and it's having such a soothing effect on Quelchy that he sounds as if he's wrecking the place!"

"Good again! The change will do him all the more good when the music does work," grinned the Bounder. "It's all a matter of time. After an hour or two you'll find that butter won't melt in his mouth. He'll come out of that box-room with peace in his soul an' a seraphic smile on his face an'—"

"Chuck it, you utter idiot!" said Wharton impatiently. "This is serious and we've come to tell you it is. Unless you want the sack this afternoon, Smithy, there's only one thing to do, and it will have to be done quickly. You must take up the key of the box-room and slip it under the door—then run for your life!"

"Nothin' doin'. Think I want to be taken for a fag?"

"You'll be taken for a ride if you're not careful—with Wingate to keep you company as far as the station," said Wharton, with grim humour. "Listen to reason, Smithy. We're here for your good."

"Wharton's right, Smithy," put in Tom Redwing quietly. "It was a mad trick from the start, and your only chance of getting away with it is to free Quelchy quickly and trust to luck that he doesn't go all out to find who did it."

"Leave it any longer and it's a dead cert. that Quelchy will be so wild he'll willingly devote days to getting his man," said Frank Nugent. "You've got to call it off—simply must!"

"The mustfulness is simply terrific, my esteemed and ludicrous Smithy!" said Hurree Singh gently.

Vernon-Smith knitted his brows.

Wild horses could not drag him from his course once he had made up his mind about it. But he was not altogether unaffected by outside influences where he had not committed himself too deeply. There was a streak of common sense running through the Bounder, despite his reckless and defiant ways.

This time, for once, it came to the surface.

"Well, you all seem very anxious over me," he said, with a wry smile. "I don't want to cause a giddy upheaval in the Form. I only want to get even with Quelchy, and if he's as wild as you say he is, I've done it. He can have the key back."

"Good man! The odds are against you getting away with it even now, but there's just a chance," said Wharton. "Dash back to the House and try it, anyway. Stop Hoskins and slip Quelchy the key, then bunk."

"It's a deal!" grinned the Bounder.

He quitted the tuckshop on his own. There was no sense in attracting attention by taking the crowd.

The tinkling strains of Hoskins' music were still mingling with a feverish crashing and banging from the adjoining room when the Bounder reached the music-room. But Hoskins soon stopped playing when the Bounder entered.

The musician of the Shell looked relieved to see Vernon-Smith. He looked worried, too, and not a little puzzled.

"I say, Vernon-Smith, do you think it's working?" he whispered. "I've played all the most soothing music I know, but—"

"No time for debates," interrupted the Bounder firmly. "Kim on!"

And he seized Hoskins by the

shoulder and ran him out of the music-room.

"Run!" he hissed, when they reached the landing.

Hoskins, after a moment's hesitation, took his tip and ran.

Vernon-Smith tip-toed back to the box-room. The banging was still going on furiously. Mr. Quelch's voice, a little husky by this time, was still calling for help.

The Bounder grinned. He knelt down and flicked the key under the door.

Then he followed Hoskins down the stairs at express speed.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### THE MIRACLE!

MR. QUELCH jumped.

He had been doing quite a lot of jumping during his unwilling sojourn in the box-room, but it was a different kind of jump this time—a jump of surprise.

Somehow, the last thing Mr. Quelch ever expected after such a long interval was to see the key skimming towards him from under the door. He had quite resigned himself by this time to waiting till his shouts and bangings attracted attention, and thereafter sending for Gosling and a master key. He certainly had not anticipated that the perpetrator of this outrageous hoax would have the effrontery to return.

But there was the key right enough—slithering across the floor towards him. Mr. Quelch was surprised; but he did not allow his surprise to prevent him making a bid to find out who had sent it.

He fairly swooped on to the key, fielded it, and dived at the door.

Hardly two seconds could have elapsed between the appearance of the key and Mr. Quelch's opening of

the door. If he broke his bones in the process, the Remove master intended to make an attempt to catch the man who had just posted that key to him.

But, quick as he was, he was not in time to spot his quarry. The only evidence of another human being in the vicinity was a sliding sound suggestive of somebody going down the banisters at breakneck speed; but by the time Mr. Quelch reached the top of the stairs that sound had ceased and there was nobody in sight.

Mr. Quelch came to a stop with an expression of concentrated fury on his face. He was not a remarkably good-tempered man at the best of times, and his experience on this occasion had driven him to breaking point.

Almost choking with anger, the Remove master rushed back across the landing and looked into the music-room on the chance that the pianist was still there. A glance into the silent room showed him that it was empty. He stamped out again, slamming the door behind him with a slam that rattled the window of the adjacent box-room.

Mr. Quelch's glinting eyes looked again into the box-room, as he passed the open door.

That momentary glance had no result till he reached the landing once more.

Then the recollection of it suddenly penetrated Mr. Quelch's consciousness.

Something happened to Mr. Quelch. He stopped with a faint gasp and slowly retraced his steps. This time, he gave the box-room far more than a momentary glance; in fact, the more he studied it, the more agitated he grew.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch at last.



All his rage had suddenly evaporated. In its place was embarrassment. Something suspiciously like a blush had appeared on his cheeks. There was panic in the quick movement with which he turned to see if anyone had yet appeared on the stairs.

Mr. Quelch drew out a handkerchief and mopped his brow, as he surveyed the scene of his recent imprisonment.

The box-room looked a wreck!

A window-pane was broken; so was an electric bowl-fire with which he had tried to smash the lock; two suitcases were badly dented and a large piece of plaster had been knocked out of the wall. The contents of the room were in dreadful disorder. Really, it looked as if a riot had taken place.

Mr. Quelch looked at it and blushed. It was all his own work; and it shocked him.

A tendency to dyspepsia and lum-

bago made the Remove master on occasions severe and irritable; but he usually preserved a pretty tight control over his feelings. The lapse from his normal standards which was now plainly revealed to him was most distressing. He gazed at the box-room in blank dismay.

Then a footstep behind him brought his gaze back to the stairs.

It was Gosling who appeared on the landing. The school porter was frowning, as he touched his cap.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, sir: if I find the young rip as broke that winder, I'll report 'im. I saw it go with my own heyes, sir, an'——"

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath—a breath of relief. He also drew out his notecase.

"Never mind, Gosling. I want you to inquire no further into this unfortunate matter. Do you understand?"



"Run!" hissed Vernon-Smith. Hoskins took his tip and ran. Then the Bouncer tip-toed back to the box-room, with the key in his hand. Mr. Quelch's voice, a little husky, was still calling for help.

Gosling scratched his head.

"Yessir, but wot I says is——"

"I want you to tidy up this room and make good all the damage with as little fuss as possible. I want you to send the bills to me and I will see that they are settled promptly. You will kindly say nothing to any other person regarding the matter. You understand?"

Mr. Quelch slipped a ten-shilling note into the porter's horny palm.

Gosling blinked at it, and then a smile dawned in his crusty old face.

"Ho, yessir! Suttinly, sir. Thank'ee, sir!"

"Thank *you*, Gosling!"

And Mr. Quelch rustled away.

His face was inscrutable as he descended the stairs; but there was no longer a trace of the rage that had been simply oozing from him only a few minutes before.

Leaving Gosling, he went straight to the Shell passage and sought out Hoskins. Hoskins was in his study. He registered quite a lot of alarm when Mr. Quelch stalked in.

But the Remove master's manner soon reassured him. Mr. Quelch seemed most unusually mild.

"You play the piano, I believe, Hoskins," he said. "Were you by any chance playing in the music practice-room upstairs this afternoon?"

Hoskins nodded dumbly. Now that his amazing experiment in the soothing powers of music was over, he felt considerably less certain of the outcome than he had felt before it began.

"In that case, Hoskins," said Mr. Quelch, "surely you must have heard me calling to you to assist me to escape from the adjoining box-room in which I had been locked?"

"'M'yes, sir! But—but don't think because you got no answer that we

meant any actual disrespect to you, sir," he added. "You see——"

"By 'we,' Hoskins, you presumably mean yourself and the boy who locked me in the box-room," pursued Mr. Quelch, calmly and unemotionally. "May I ask the name of your fellow-conspirator?"

Hoskins suppressed a groan.

"I'm afraid I can't sneak, sir. It was my idea, anyway. I thought that music of the right kind would put you in a better temper and——"

Mr. Quelch's lips twitched. His gimlet eyes gleamed. He looked as if he had found at last something he had long been seeking.

"So that was the scheme, Hoskins! You locked me in the box-room and played music to me in order to put me in a good temper!"

"That's it, sir," assented Hoskins, growing bolder as he saw that the Remove master was showing no signs of animosity. "You were in a bad temper because you had to call on Major Thresher——"

"What!"

"So I told this chap you'd punished unjustly that the best thing to do was to lock you up in a room and make you listen to soothing music whether you wanted to or not! And we did it!"

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath.

"I understand, Hoskins; and I can only say that your behaviour was foolish in the extreme."

"Oh, sir!"

"However—ahem!—on this occasion I shall not report you to your Form-master," went on Mr. Quelch. "Please do not behave in such an absurd manner in future, Hoskins!"

That was all. He turned without another word and departed.

From the Fourth passage he turned his footsteps in the direction of Masters' passage.

Half-way there he met Dr. Locke. The Head, for some reason, looked quite relieved to see him.

"Ah, Quelch! Then you have not gone yet!"

"I should have gone, sir," said Mr. Quelch, "but unfortunately——"

"I am delighted that you have not had to waste your time!" beamed the Head. "Major Thresher has just been on the telephone to me. He was in

Smith to his study, the general opinion was that Smithy was fairly "for it."

The Bounder felt so, too. But a big surprise awaited him. To his utter amazement, Mr. Quelch was in a most friendly mood.

"Vernon-Smith! You locked me in a box-room this afternoon!"

"Ye-es, sir!" gasped the Bounder.

"It was a foolish trick, Vernon-



"I want you to tidy up the box-room and make good all the damage with as little fuss as possible," said Mr. Quelch. "Do you understand?" The Remove master slipped a ten-shilling note into Gosling's hand and the porter pocketed it. "Ho, yessir!" he said. "Suttinly, sir!"

an unusually gracious mood and I was able to settle up the little point of difference between us most amiably. Pray do not let it trouble you any further!"

"Oh! Ah! Very well, sir! Very well indeed!"

Quite a flustered Mr. Quelch went on his way, fairly rejoicing.

Naturally, the Remove had no idea that he was rejoicing. When, five minutes later, he summoned Vernon-

Smith. But I will overlook it this time. With regard to your detention to-morrow afternoon, I have been reconsidering the matter. Do you give me your solemn word of honour that you were not the boy who was talking in class this morning?"

"Yes, sir. Absolutely!" said the Bounder in astonishment.

"Very well. The detention is cancelled. You may go."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" gasped

Vernon-Smith. He left the Form-master's study in quite a daze.

The crowd waiting at the end of the passage greeted him with an eager chorus of inquiries.

"What is it, Smithy? The sack?"

"Booked for a Head's swishing, old bean?"

"Neither!" answered the Bounder dizzily. "He knows I locked him in that box-room—an' yet he's let me off scot free, an' cancelled the detention, too!"

"Ye gods!"

"Has he gone off his rocker?"

"Well, that's one possibility," acknowledged the Bounder, with a chuckle. "Yet he seemed sane enough to me."

"Ask Gosling how he found him," suggested Frank Nugent, as slow and ponderous footsteps became audible from the stairs. "He was the first man to meet Quelchy out of the box-room, so he must have seen him at his worst."

"Good wheeze!"

There was a rush to the foot of the stairs to meet Gosling.

"Keep your distance, chaps!" sang out Tom Brown. "You never know. After climbing all those stairs for nothing, he may bite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the juniors were in for another surprise. When Gosling reached the bottom of the stairs he was registering none of the unhappiness that they had expected. On the contrary, his crusty face bore on it an unwonted expression of geniality.

"What cheer, Gossy?" greeted Bob Cherry. "Let's hear your view on the burning topic, old bean. Is Mr. Quelch potty, or has he turned soft-hearted in his old age?"

Gosling rubbed his chin and eyed the juniors with a ruminating eye.

"Wot I says is this 'ere: I dunno wot you're talkin' about, but Mr. Quelch is wot I call a gentleman!" he said gruffly. "One o' the best, 'e is, an' nobody can convince me different!"

"My hat! Gosling's changed, too!" said Vernon-Smith in astonishment. "It must be an epidemic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere," continued Gosling. "Mr. Quelch is no more potty than wot I am meself, an' if you say 'e is, Master Cherry, I'll report yer!"

"All serene, Gossy; I was asking you, not telling you!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Gentlemen, chaps and fellows, Gossy has settled it! Quelchy is not potty!"

"Then what's the explanation?"

"Let's ask Hoskins!" ventured Redwing.

And to Hoskins' study in the Shell passage they all adjourned—to find the musical genius of Greyfriars with a ready answer to their question.

"It's simple!" he said, with an elegant wave of his long hand. "Surely it's not necessary for me to explain it! 'Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast'!"

"Great pip!"

"I told you that soft, soothing music would cure Quelchy. Well, I've proved it. Nothing surprising in it at all to me!" said Hoskins cheerfully. "Now what about those tickets for the piano recital, Vernon-Smith?"

"Give 'em to me; I'll get rid of them for you if I have to buy the lot myself!" grinned Vernon-Smith. "But I shall never understand it as long as I live! Quelchy must be a jolly good fellow, after all. An' even then, it's a miracle!"

And a miracle it remained to everybody at Greyfriars—with the possible exception of Gosling!