

# BILLY BUNTER

## and the BOUNDER



Bunter bent the fattest head at Greyfriars School, and blinked through the keyhole. "Oh, crikey!" he breathed. "What's Smithy up to now?"



*Why did Herbert Vernon-Smith alter the time of the clock? That was what Billy Bunter wanted to know, in this amusing story of the Famous Fat Owl and the boys of Greyfriars School!*

### Smithy Asks For It!

"**H**AS Quelch come in?"

Billy Bunter asked that question, blinking anxiously at Harry Wharton through his big spectacles as he did so. The captain of the Remove was coming from Mr. Quelch's door as the fat Owl rolled up the passage.

"No," answered Harry.

"Oh, good!" said Bunter, relieved; and he rolled on past Wharton to his form-master's door.

Harry Wharton glanced after him in surprise.

"I tell you Quelch isn't in, fathead," he exclaimed. "I've just been to his study to see him about the Form papers, but he isn't there."

"He, he, he! That's all I wanted to know," grinned Bunter, as his fat hand turned the door-handle of the study.

"Hold on, you fat ass! What are you going to do in Quelch's study?"

"Oh! Nothing!"

"If you're going to play some potty trick there——"

"Nothing of the kind! Don't you get saying anything of that sort, or Quelch might hear of it, and think that I did it!" exclaimed Bunter, in alarm.

"He might think you did what?"

"Oh! Nothing! I—I haven't got a bottle of gum in my pocket, and I ain't going to pour it into Quelch's inkpot. Besides, he gave me lines this morning, as you jolly well know. Serve him right."

Harry Wharton made a stride back towards his form-master's door, with hand outstretched to collar Billy Bunter.

But he was not in time. The fat Owl pushed open the door and rolled into the study. Harry Wharton looked in at the doorway.

"Bunter, you ass, come away," he urged. Slam!

The study door closed, slamming almost on Harry Wharton's nose. Billy Bunter, evidently, was not in a mood to listen to reason. Harry Wharton put his hand to the door-handle; but at the same moment another door farther up the passage opened, and the irritable face of Mr. Hacker, the master of the Sixth Form, looked out.

"Wharton!" he snapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"What do you mean by slamming doors in this passage?"

"I—I did not slam the door sir, I—I——"

"What? I heard the door slam! It disturbed me. Go away at once, Wharton, and leave this passage immediately."

"Very well, sir."

Harry Wharton turned away. He could not explain without revealing the fact that the fatuous Owl of the Remove was in his

form-master's study, planning antics with a bottle of gum. Mr. Hacker, with a sniff, drew his head back into his study and closed the door; and Harry Wharton departed—leaving William George Bunter to his own devices.

Left to his own devices, Billy Bunter proceeded to get busy in his form-master's study. First he noticed with satisfaction that the inkpot on Mr. Quelch's inkstand was almost empty and needed filling. Then he extracted the bottle of gum from his pocket and commenced operations on the cork.

It was then that difficulties arose. The cork was well jammed in, and Bunter's fat fingers failed to make any impression on it. No corkscrew was available: Bunter thought of that too late. It was one of Billy Bunter's ways to think too late, on the rare occasions when he thought at all.

"Blow!" breathed Bunter.

He grabbed up Mr. Quelch's pen from the table. He jabbed the nib into the cork, by way of corkscrew. But it was a forlorn hope. The nib snapped off short in a moment.

Bunter was getting desperate. The fat Owl bent down to the fireplace, seized the poker, and banged the neck of the gum-bottle with that implement. Bang!

That did it! Fragments of glass flew in the fender, and a trickle of gum ran over a fat hand.

But he had done it now! Half the gum remained in the bottle, the other half being distributed over the fender and Bunter's fat fingers. But half a bottle of gum was sufficient for Billy Bunter's purpose. He leaned over his form-master's writing-table and carefully poured the gum into the inkpot. The gum filled it almost to the brim.

Bunter grinned.

The next time Quelch dipped his pen into that inkpot he was booked for a happy surprise! Which, of course, would serve him right for giving Bunter lines! It was quite an amusing prospect—to Bunter!

But the next moment he ceased to be amused, at the sound of a footstep outside the study door.



"Bunter, you ass, come away!" urged Harry Wharton. But Bunter meant business with that bottle of gum!



He jumped.

For a second his eyes, and his spectacles, fixed in terror on the door. The next second he had ducked under the table.

It was a large table. There was plenty of cover for Bunter, unless someone stooped and looked under. He could only hope that someone wouldn't!

The door opened. Someone entered.

It was not Quelch. It was a much lighter tread than Quelch's. But it was somebody! Bunter heard the door close, and then footsteps crossed the study to the telephone, which stood on a little table beside the window. A faint sound told him that someone was dialling.

Someone had come in to use Quelch's telephone. Bunter, under the table, had a glimpse of shoes and trouser ends. But it might be a senior man—perhaps a prefect! Bunter remained very still.

Then a voice came.

"Is that you, Joey?"

"Oh!" breathed Bunter.

He knew that rather strident voice: it was that of Herbert Vernon-Smith, of the Remove: the Bounder of Greyfriars. And he knew who "Joey" was—Joe Banks, Smithy's sporting friend at the Cross Keys. Smithy was a fellow of tremendous nerve; but even all Smithy's nerve was needed to phone on his form-master's telephone to a sporting man at Friardale.

"The two-thirty to-morrow—a quid on Sunny Jim!" went on the Bounder's voice.

Billy Bunter grinned again. There was no danger from Smithy—no need to hug cover. And the fat junior was about to emerge from under the table when the study door suddenly opened again, and Mr. Quelch came in. And Billy Bunter did not emerge! He remained where he was, petrified.

#### Bunter Hears All!

"VERNON-SMITH!"

"Oh!"

Mr. Quelch stared, grimly, at the junior standing at the telephone. Vernon-Smith, the receiver still in his hand, stared back. Smithy had presence of mind, and

heaps of nerve; but for the moment he was dumbfounded. He was fairly caught!

"Well?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! I—I hope you'll excuse me, sir, for using your telephone without leave." The Bounder pulled himself together. "I wanted to ask Snell's about my football boots, sir—they were promised yesterday, but they haven't come, and——"

Mr. Quelch gave him a keen, searching glance. Smithy, certainly, should have asked leave to use the phone; but there was no great harm in ringing up the cobbler at Friardale about football boots.

"Very well, Vernon-Smith," said the Remove master, after a pause. "On another occasion, take care to ask leave before using the telephone."

"Oh, certainly, sir."

"You may go, Vernon-Smith."

"Thank you, sir."

And the Bounder went—and did not grin till he had carefully closed the door after him. Then he did grin, as he strolled away to the Rag with his hands in his pockets to confide to Skinner that he had got by with it, and "fooled old Quelch a treat!"

Billy Bunter could have groaned.

But he did not dare to groan.

Smithy was gone, and Mr. Quelch had sat down in his chair at the table. Evidently he had come to stay.

He did not know that Bunter was there. Carefully the fat Owl avoided contact with the long legs stretched under the table. Quelch, naturally, never thought of stooping his tall head to glance under that table. Bunter was safe—for the moment. But Quelch had sat down to write—and when he discovered that there was gum instead of ink in the inkpot——

Bunter trembled as he heard a sudden sharp exclamation.

"Bless my soul! My pen—the nib has been broken! It certainly was not broken when I left it here! Can that boy Vernon-Smith have done this?"

Mr. Quelch half rose—but he sat down again. There was a suspicion in his mind that he had interrupted Herbert Vernon-



"Vernon-Smith!" Mr. Quelch stared grimly at the Bouncer standing at the telephone. Bunter remained where he was—petrified!

Smith in a "rag" in the study; and the broken nib looked like it.

However, he fitted a new nib to the pen and drew a pile of Form papers towards him. Again Billy Bunter almost groaned as he heard the rustle of papers. Quelch was going to use that pen, and the discovery of the gum could not be long delayed now.

Happily unaware of an apprehensive fat Owl huddled under his table, Mr. Quelch dipped his pen into the inkpot.

It came out stickily, with a trickle of gum dripping from it.

Mr. Quelch gazed at that gummy nib.

He did not speak. He gazed, with thunder gathering in his brow. Someone had replaced the ink in that inkpot with gum! The Remove master breathed hard, and he breathed deep.

He rose from the table.

Under it, a fat Owl quaked. But Quelch did not stoop. He crossed over to the telephone.

Vernon-Smith had been in that study. He had done this! That was Mr. Quelch's natural conclusion. He had gummed the inkpot and had been about to play some trick on the telephone, also, when his Form-master's sudden entrance interrupted him! There seemed little doubt of it! But Henry Samuel Quelch was a just man! He was going to make sure. Vernon-Smith had stated that he had rung up Snell, the cobbler, about his football boots. If that statement proved to be true, well and good. If it were false, Quelch knew what to think! And he proceeded to dial Mr. Snell's number at Friardale, to inquire.

"Is that Mr. Snell?"

"Snell speaking."

"This is Mr. Quelch, at Greyfriars. Have you received a call within the last quarter of an hour from a Greyfriars' boy named Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"



"Quite, sir! No call from the school to-day at all."

"Thank you, Mr. Snell."

Mr. Quelch replaced the receiver, crossed to his table, and picked up a cane. The matter was clear now. Vernon-Smith had given a false explanation of his presence in the study. That settled it for Mr. Quelch. With the cane under his arm, he left the study, and went along to the Rag to look for the Bounder of Greyfriars.

### Smithy Gets It!

**H**ARRY WHARTON & Co. were in the Rag. A dozen other fellows were there, among them Vernon-Smith and Skinner, who were grinning over the masterly way in which Smithy had "fooled old Quelch a treat"! But the grins faded from their faces as an angular form and a frowning brow appeared in the doorway.

"Is Vernon-Smith here?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered the Bounder.

He felt a sinking at the heart. Had he not, after all, "fooled old Quelch a treat"?

"You stated to me, Vernon-Smith, that you had telephoned from my study to Mr. Snell at Friardale."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I have inquired of Mr. Snell! You did nothing of the kind, Vernon-Smith. Your statement was untrue," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You invented this, Vernon-Smith, to account for your presence in my study. Do you deny this?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

All eyes were on the Bounder. He stood silent, biting his lip.

"You were in my study to play disrespectful tricks on your form-master, Vernon-Smith!"

"No, sir! I—I——"

"What? Then why were you there?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

The Bounder was silent again. Certainly he could not explain that he had been in the study to ring up a sporting friend at the Cross Keys! That meant the "sack." Anything was better than that.

Mr. Quelch slipped the cane down into his hand.

"Bend over that chair, Vernon-Smith."

In sullen silence the Bounder bent over the chair. Six times the cane rose and fell; and if there had been any dust on the Bounder's trousers, not a speck of it was left. The juniors looked on in silence. Evidently the Bounder had asked for it—and he was getting it, hard!

"Now write a hundred lines by this evening, and let that be a warning to you, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch grimly, and he tucked the cane under his arm again and walked out of the Rag—leaving Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a furious face, wriggling like an eel.

Billy Bunter could hardly believe in his good luck.

Quelch was gone!

Bunter was left alone in the study, and the way of escape was open.

He rolled out from under the table. He blinked out of the doorway. The coast was



Mr. Quelch breathed hard. Someone had filled the ink-pot with gum!

clear, no one was in sight. With a gasp of relief, Bunter rolled out of the study and scuttled down the passage.

At the corner he almost rolled into Mr. Quelch, coming back to his study after administering stern justice in the Rag.

"Look where you are going, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

To his immense relief, Quelch rustled on, with that! Evidently he had not the faintest idea that Bunter had been in his study, and had just come out of it! Greatly comforted, the fat Owl rolled on to the Rag.

There was a buzz of voices in that apartment. Bunter blinked in at Vernon-Smith, pale and furious, wriggling and twisting. He wondered what had happened.

"I say, you fellows, what's up?" squeaked Bunter.

"Smithy's had six!" answered Bob Cherry. "And got a hundred lines, too!"

"What for?"

"Japing in Quelch's study."

"Oh, crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

"I tell you I didn't!" howled the Bouncer. "I couldn't tell Quelch why I was there—but somebody else must have done something—I wish I knew who it was! —I'd pulverise him——"

"Oh, crikey!" ejaculated Bunter again.

Bunter said no more. Silence was not Billy Bunter's strong point, but even the fat Owl realised, on this occasion, that silence was golden.

### What Bunter Saw!

"I SAY, Smithy——"

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not heed the fat squeak from the fat junior loafing in the Remove passage near the door of Study No. 1, later that same day.

He seemed rather in a hurry.

He had come up the stairs two at a time, and crossed the Remove landing swiftly. He seemed a little breathless as he came into the passage.

The fat Owl squeaked again as Smithy passed him.

"Smithy! I say, is Wharton coming up? I'm waiting for him! Beast!" added Bunter, as Vernon-Smith, still unheeding,



Bunter blinked at the Bouncer, who had just had six of the best from Quelch!

went into Study No. 1 and shut the door.

The fat Owl of the Remove looked at the door with an angry blink through his big spectacles.

"Shirty beast!" grunted Bunter. "In one of his tantrums, because Quelch whopped him this afternoon. Serve him jolly well right! I wonder what he's gone into Wharton's study for—the fellows ain't there."

Billy Bunter was well aware that Study No. 1 was vacant. He had been waiting for Harry Wharton & Co. to come up to tea in that study, and they had not arrived yet.

Smithy's own study was No. 4, farther up the passage. Bunter wondered why he had gone into No. 1 and shut the door after him. He must have seen at a glance that nobody was there. Yet he had gone in and closed the door, carefully latching it. It looked—to Bunter—as if Smithy was "up" to something in Wharton's study; though what, he could not begin to guess.



### The Clock Trick

But when Billy Bunter was curious he had his own methods of acquiring information. He bent the fattest head at Greyfriars School, and blinked through the keyhole.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter, in astonishment at what he saw.

Vernon-Smith had crossed the study to the fireplace, and, as Bunter peered through the keyhole, he was taking the clock from the mantelpiece. That clock indicated a quarter past five, as even the Owl of the Remove could see at so short a range.

Smithy opened it at the back, and twisted something inside. The fat Owl's little round eyes grew wider with astonishment behind his big round spectacles. Smithy was altering the time of the clock. For some utterly mysterious reason, he wanted it to indicate some time other than a quarter past five!

"Oh, scissors!" breathed the amazed Owl. "What's the Bounder up to?"

He watched Smithy set the clock on the mantelpiece again. He blinked at it as it stood there. It now indicated five o'clock! Vernon-Smith had put it back a quarter of an hour!

Bunter glimpsed a sour grin on the Bounder's face as he turned away from the mantelpiece. The next moment he came towards the door, and the fat Owl backed hastily away.

He was leaning on the opposite wall, his blinking gaze turned in the direction of the landing, apparently quite uninterested in Study No. 1, when Smithy opened the door of that apartment.

But Smithy did not come out, as Bunter expected. Having set the door open, he went back to the study armchair, and sat down in it—apparently to wait, like Bunter, for Harry Wharton & Co. to come up to tea.

It was quite a puzzle to Bunter why Smithy had played that apparently meaningless trick in Study No. 1. But the fat Owl forgot all about it, as there was a tramp of feet on the stairs, and a cheery crowd of juniors came across the landing into the Remove passage. Harry Wharton & Co. had arrived—hardly a couple of minutes after the Bounder.

"I SAY, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "How did Bunter know that we had a parcel for tea?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—I was going to say——"

"You needn't," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "We can guess that you've been disappointed about a postal-order, old fat man."

"Speech can be taken as read!" said Johnny Bull.

"Beast! I—I mean, look here, dear old chaps, my postal-order hasn't come, and if you'd like to ask a fellow to tea, I—I—I'll come——"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We've got lots, for once," he said. "You can roll in if you like, old barrel."

It was not a pressing invitation. But anything short of a boot on his trousers was good enough for William George Bunter. He rolled cheerfully into Study No. 1 after the Famous Five.

Herbert Vernon-Smith rose from the armchair. He gave Harry Wharton and Co. a friendly nod.

"You fellows mind if I scrounge a tea here?" he asked. "Redwing's gone out, and a fellow doesn't want to feed on his lonely own."

The Famous Five, for a moment, glanced at him in surprise. It was quite unlike the arrogant Bounder to ask himself to tea in another fellow's study. A fellow could do so with a pal: but Smithy certainly was not "pally" to that extent with Harry Wharton and Co. But they were friendly and hospitable: and they were glad, too, to see Smithy looking so good-tempered—they had rather expected him to look savage and sullen after his experience with Quelch that afternoon. He received a warm welcome on all sides.

"My dear chap, you're as welcome as the flowers in May," said Harry Wharton.

"We've got a spread," said Frank Nugent. "Glad to see you around, Smithy."

"You seem to have got over that six all right, old chap," said Johnny Bull.



The Famous Five—and Billy Bunter—rolled in, and were surprised to see Vernon-Smith in the armchair.

The Bunder's eyes glinted for a moment. But he nodded and smiled.

"I can take it," he said lightly. "Pretty stiff—six on the bags and a hundred lines as well, to be handed in before prep." He glanced at the clock. "I shall have to get on with those lines after tea. Is that clock right—I don't want to leave it late——"

"Yes, it keeps pretty good time," said Harry. "A few minutes after five now——" He glanced at the study clock.

"I thought it was later," remarked Nugent.

"Oh, that leaves me lots of time," said Smithy. "No, don't bother about a chair—that box is all right——"

"My dear chap, visitors have the chairs," said Nugent. "Here you are! What are you grinning at, like a Cheshire cat, Bunter?"

"Eh? Oh! Nothing!" said Bunter hastily. Nugent had remarked that he thought it was later: and Billy Bunter knew

that it was later, as he had seen Smithy alter the clock. He grinned all over his fat face.

Smithy had made the Famous Five believe that it was fifteen minutes earlier than it actually was. Why, Bunter could not begin to guess. However, he was not specially interested—his interest was concentrated on the parcel that Nugent had landed on the study table. Two fat hands were already at work unpacking it.

"Oh, crikey! What a topping cake!" gasped Bunter. "And a meat pie—— Good! And biscuits—and honey—and—— Splendid! I say, you fellows, this is all right!"

Undoubtedly it was all right. Seven fellows were rather a crowd in a junior study, but they found room round the table somehow, and sat down to tea. Billy Bunter concentrated on the foodstuffs, and his fat jaws were too busy for speech; but the other fellows chatted about Soccer and other interesting topics. Vernon-Smith seemed very cheery and affable, apparently having his



best manners on for the occasion; and Harry Wharton & Co., as a matter of fact, were rather glad that he was there. It would have been like Smithy to be thinking of some reckless retaliation on his form-master; and so long as he was in Study No. 1 he was safe out of mischief.

"By gum! That plane looks like falling!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith suddenly. He was staring at the study window.

"What?"

"Something wrong with it—look——" Vernon-Smith jumped to his feet. "If it comes down on the school——"

"Oh, my hat!"

Five fellows jumped up from the table and ran to the window. It was not uncommon for planes from Manston to roar over Greyfriars School, and they were hardly heeded. But the bare idea of an aeroplane in trouble, crashing down on Greyfriars, was startling. Even Billy Bunter forgot meat pie for the

moment and rolled to the window after the Famous Five, with a squeak of alarm.

Vernon-Smith did not follow them.

For the moment six backs were turned to him; and the Bounder whipped the clock off the mantelpiece, inserted his fingers at the back, and gave a twist. He replaced the clock, now advanced fifteen minutes, and indicating the right time.

It was the work of hardly more than a moment, and six backs were still to him as he went towards the window.

"See it?" he asked.

"Blessed if I can see anything," said Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"Pulling our leg, or what?" he asked.

The juniors turned from the window. It was a false alarm; there was no plane to be seen. They looked rather expressively at Vernon-Smith. The Bounder burst into a laugh.

"O.K.," he said. "I only wanted to make Bunter jump!"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

"Is that what you call a joke?" asked Bob, staring at him. "Well, you made us all jump, as well as Bunter. Of all the silly asses——" Bob broke off at that, remembering that Smithy was a guest in the study.

"Sorry," said the Bounder amicably. "Rather a fool joke, come to think of it. Forget it."

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

Relieved of his alarm, the fat Owl returned to the foodstuffs. Harry Wharton & Co. sat down round the table again, politely refraining from telling the Bounder what they thought of him and his jokes. And the incident was forgotten as tea went on.

### Mr. Quelch Storms In!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! That sounds like Quelch!"  
It did!

Tea was over in Study No. 1, but Billy Bunter was finishing up every vestige of the eatables, when a sharp voice was heard in the passage.

"Ogilvy! Have you seen Vernon-Smith? He is not in his study."

There was a note of deep wrath in Mr.



"I've been here since five, sir, as these other fellows can tell you," said Smithy, pointing to the clock.

Quelch's voice. Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged rather startled looks.

"Better tell him I'm here," drawled the Bounder.

Harry Wharton stepped to the door.

"Vernon-Smith's in this study, sir," he called out.

The next moment Mr. Quelch swept in, with billowing gown, rather like a thundercloud. He fixed his eyes on the Bounder.

"Did you want me, sir?" Smithy asked.

left to go to the headmaster's study at about five minutes past. What has happened there happened after that, during my absence. Where were you, Vernon-Smith, from five o'clock till the present moment?"

"In this study, sir," said the Bounder composedly. "I was here before five, waiting for these fellows to come up. Wharton happened to notice the time when he came in, and it was a minute or two after five. I've been here ever since, as these fellows can tell you."



"He, he, he!" Billy Bunter sniggered, and helped himself to the jam-tarts as the Famous Five threw the Bounder out!

"Have you been in my study since class, Vernon-Smith?"

"I, sir? No, sir."

"Someone," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "has been in my study and upset ink over my papers. A great deal of mischievous damage has been done. Vernon-Smith, I require to know where you were at five o'clock, and where you have been since."

"Five o'clock, sir?" repeated the Bounder.

"I was writing in my study till a few minutes after five," said Mr. Quelch. "I

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Is that correct, Wharton?" he rapped.

"Quite, sir," answered Harry at once. "It was only two or three minutes past five by that clock when we came in, and Vernon-Smith was already here. He stayed to tea, and hasn't been out of the study."

"That is so, sir," said Frank Nugent, and the other members of the Co. nodded assent. Billy Bunter's eyes were bulging. But nobody heeded Bunter.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips harder.



He looked at his watch, and looked at the clock; it was exactly right. Obviously, if Harry Wharton & Co. were stating the facts, Herbert Vernon-Smith could not be the fellow who had ragged in his Form-master's study—he must have been in Study No. 1 in the Remove at the time! Mr. Quelch drew a deep, deep breath.

Although he was often a stern old tyrant according to the boys of the Remove Form, Mr. Quelch was a stickler for justice and fairness in all things.

"You are the Form-captain, Wharton, and I am happy to accept your word on this matter," he said.

"Thank you, sir," nodded Harry.

Mr. Quelch turned to Vernon-Smith, who was standing there with a bland look of innocence on his face.

"It appears that I was mistaken in my first impressions of what had occurred in my study, Vernon-Smith," he added.

"I am sorry if you have been put to any inconvenience, sir," replied the artful Bounder, still looking bland. "I haven't forgotten the hundred lines I am to do for you, sir. I will go to my study and get on with them straight away."

Mr. Quelch adjusted his glasses and drew another deep breath. He seemed just a little disappointed with himself for not having found the culprit in Smithy.

"Very well!" he said. And with that he left the study and rustled away down the passage—no doubt to seek a clue to the ragger in other directions.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter exploded into fat laughter.

"I say, you fellows—he, he, he! I say, ain't he deep? He, he, he! I say, fancy pulling old Quelch's leg like that! He, he, he!"

"You fat ass," said Harry Wharton. "Nobody's pulled Quelch's leg. We told him the exact truth."

"He, he, he! The truth! He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter. "Quelch swallowed it all right—he, he, he! He wouldn't have swallowed it if he'd known that Smithy altered the clock and put it back a quarter of an hour before you fellows came up! He, he, he!"

"What?" roared the Famous Five with one voice.

The Bounder started. He gave Bunter an almost deadly look. But the fat Owl was too convulsed with merriment to heed it.

"I jolly well saw him!" chortled Bunter. "I wondered what he did it for—now I jolly well know! He, he, he! It was Smithy ragged in Quelch's study—and he's got you fellows to swear he was here at the time—he, he, he——"

"You fat chump, the clock's exactly right by Quelch's watch," said Harry.

"He, he, he! It wasn't when you fellows came up! Smithy must have put it right while you weren't looking—he, he, he!"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton. "That aeroplane——"

"Smithy, you rotter——"

"Smithy, did you——"

Vernon-Smith made a movement towards the door. Harry Wharton, with a grim face, pushed him back.

"We've got to have this out," he said. "If you've diddled us into telling Quelch a string of lies without knowing it——"

"He, he, he! I saw him through the key-hole—he, he, he——"

"Is that why you spoofed about that plane, Smithy, to get us to turn our backs while you put the clock right?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't know that fat rat was spying on me," he sneered. "Thanks for the tea—I'll be going now. Hands off!" he added in a yell, as five fellows grasped him all at once.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had few, if any, scruples about lying to a "beak." But the Famous Five were a little more particular. And they made it painfully clear to Smithy that lying was not in their line. The Bounder had escaped a licking from Quelch by that astute "alibi," but he almost wished that he hadn't by the time the Famous Five were done with him. It was a bumped, breathless, dishevelled and dilapidated Bounder who was kicked out of Study No. 1, to sprawl, gasping, in the passage.

Really, it was rather more severe than six from Quelch!

THE END.