

FRANK RICHARDS

BILLY BUNTER
AND THE
CROOKED CAPTAIN



PAUL HAMLYN

CHAPTER I

Declined with Thanks!

‘WHY not the Fifth?’

Harry Wharton asked that question in Study No. 1 in the Remove at Greyfriars.

‘The Fifth!’ repeated Bob Cherry.

‘The Fifth!’ ejaculated Frank Nugent.

‘The Fifth!’ said Johnny Bull.

‘My esteemed chum—’ murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

The captain of the Remove had succeeded in astonishing his comrades.

The Famous Five were at tea in Study No. I. They had been talking cricket, now the chief topic in Remove studies. So far the season had been a very successful one for the heroes of the Greyfriars Remove. They had beaten the Fourth and Shell in Form matches. They had beaten Highcliffe and Rookwood. They had no doubt that they were going to beat St. Jim’s when that fixture came along. They had been winning matches all along the line. and now, like Alexander of old, they sighed for fresh worlds to conquer.

Still, there was astonishment in Study No. 1 when the captain of the Remove proposed playing the Greyfriars Fifth. The Fifth were a senior team—they were the Upper School—they included members of the First Eleven—they were great men at cricket: great men in every way, according to their own estimation, at least.

‘My dear chap—’ murmured Bob.

‘Well, why not?’ demanded the captain of the Remove.

‘They wouldn’t play a junior team,’ said Johnny Bull. ‘They think a lot too much of themselves.’

‘The playfulness would not be terrific,’ remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘The esteemed and absurd Fifth would decline thanklessly.’

‘I don’t see why they should,’ argued Wharton. ‘We can fix up a date with them. It would be no end of a giddy triumph for the Remove to beat an Upper School team.’

‘Terrific!’ grinned Bob Cherry. ‘But I fancy the Fifth wouldn’t run the risk of having their colours lowered like that.’

‘If they refuse—’

‘No “if” about it! They would!’

‘Well, if they refuse, we’ll chip them into it,’ said the captain of the Remove. ‘We’ll let all Greyfriars know that they’re afraid of a licking. That ought to bring them up to the scratch.’

‘Hem!’

‘Look here, let’s send them the challenge and see what they say,’ said Harry Wharton.

‘If they refuse we’re no worse off.’

‘Try it on, anyhow,’ agreed Bob Cherry. ‘You write the letter, as secretary, Frankie.’

‘Right-ho!’

A corner of the study table was cleared and Frank Nugent took pen and ink and paper to write the letter. The Co. gathered round him with eager looks.

‘How’s that?’ asked Nugent. ‘All right?’

The Co. read the letter and pronounced it all right. It ran:

*‘The Remove C.C. will be glad to arrange a date for a match with the Fifth Form.
An early reply will oblige.’*

‘That’s all right,’ said Harry Wharton. ‘A fellow can take that along to their secretary, Price.’

‘I say, you fellows—’

The door of Study No. 1 opened, and a fat face and a large pair of spectacles looked in.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo! Just the man we want, Bunter.’

‘I say, you fellows, you never mentioned that you had a feed on, or I’d have come before,’ said Billy Bunter. ‘I mean, I dropped in to ask you chaps to a spread in my study, but as you’re so pressing I’ll join you here. I say—’

‘Take this letter to Price of the Fifth, Bunter.’

‘You’ll find him in the games study, most likely. Wait for an answer.’

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five. William George Bunter had come to Study No. 1 like a lion seeking what he might devour, not looking for a job as a messenger.

‘I say, you fellows—’

‘Buzz off with it!’

‘Oh, really, you fellows! You seem to have finished tea,’ said Bunter. ‘If you’re not going to finish that cake—’

‘But we are!’ grinned Bob.

‘Oh, really, Cherry—’

‘Take the letter, Bunter, and bring back an answer and then you can pile into the cake,’ said Harry Wharton, laughing.

‘Oh, all right!’

Harry Wharton & Co. finished their tea while they were waiting for the Owl of the Remove to return. It was ten minutes or more this time before the fat face of William George Bunter loomed again into Study No. 1.

His big glasses turned instantly on the cake. It was still there, and Bunter gasped with relief.

‘Well, got the answer?’ asked Wharton.

Bunter started on the cake.

‘Oh, yes!’ Bunter’s mouth was full as he spoke. In such matters as these Bunter did not believe in losing time. ‘I say, you fellows, this is a good cake. Not like the cakes I get from Bunter Court, of course—but a jolly good cake for all that. Got another in the cupboard?’

‘Did you see Price, fathead?’

‘Eh? Oh, yes! He was in the Fifth Form games study,’ said Bunter. ‘A lot of the Fifth were there—Blundell and Bland and Hilton and Fitzgerald and a lot of them. They laughed like anything.’

‘I don’t know what was in your letter,’ said Bunter. ‘But it must have been something awfully funny. They simply howled over it when Price passed it round.’

‘Oh!’ said Wharton.

‘Um!’ said Bob Cherry.

‘Simply yelled,’ said Bunter. ‘Must have been something frightfully funny in it. What was the joke, you fellows?’

The Famous Five looked at one another. It was true that the Fifth were a senior Form and great men of the Upper School. Still, they ought to have known that the Remove were cricketers to be taken seriously. Apparently, however, they were not taking the Remove seriously.

‘Look here, did Price give you an answer, you fat frump?’ asked the captain of the Remove gruffly. He was not entertained by a description of the uncalled-for hilarity in the Fifth Form games study.

‘Oh, yes! Here it is!’

Bunter crammed his capacious mouth with cake and fumbled in his pocket, and drew out a sealed envelope.

Nugent opened it and stared at the contents.

‘This is our own letter,’ he said. ‘They’ve sent our own letter back to us.’

‘Price wrote something on the back,’ said Bunter. ‘I say, you fellows, is there any more cake?’

Nugent turned the letter over. On the back of it was a pencilled reply:

‘Many thanks. But the Fifth don’t play marbles—Yours truly,

‘S. PRICE.’

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another again. Wharton frowned, and Bob Cherry grinned faintly.

‘I say, you fellows, what’s it all about?’ asked Bunter. ‘The Fifth were simply killing themselves laughing—you might tell a fellow the joke.’

But the chums of the Remove did not tell Bunter the joke. It was not a joke that they desired to impart to the rest of the Remove. They left the study, leaving William George Bunter to finish the cake to the last crumb.

CHAPTER II

Wanted on the Phone!

Buzzzzzz!

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, frowned.

The buzz of the telephone-bell was not music to his ears. A Form-master who had got through a day with a junior Form, and after that had corrected a number of exercises, and after that had prepared a number of papers for the morrow, and after that had settled down in an easy-chair with slippers feet resting on a hassock to enjoy half an hour of undisturbed bliss with Sophocles, did not want to be disturbed.

Buzzzzzz!

The telephone buzzed merrily.

Mr. Quelch laid Sophocles down, removed his slippers feet from the hassock, suppressed his feelings, and rose. He grabbed the receiver from the hooks and hissed into the transmitter:

‘Well?’

‘Mr. Quelch?’

‘Speaking!’ snarled Mr. Quelch.

‘Very good!’ No doubt you remember me; Mr. Gedge—’

‘I do not.’

‘Captain Marker’s legal representative in London, sir. I came to Greyfriars a few weeks ago to bring a lad named Da Costa—a boy in your Form, sir—’

Mr. Quelch recalled that rasping voice now.

‘I remember!’ he snapped. ‘I recall your name now, Mr. Gedge! May I inquire why you have rung me up?’

‘To request permission to speak to Arthur da Costa.’

‘Indeed!’ snapped Mr. Quelch.

‘I should not trouble you, sir, but the matter is important,’ said Captain Marker’s legal representative in London. ‘I desire very particularly to speak to Arthur da Costa.’

‘Most irregular,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘You are no doubt aware, sir, that boys in the Lower Fourth Form at school are not permitted to receive telephone calls.’

‘Quite, sir! But the circumstances are exceptional,’ said the rasping voice. ‘I may mention that Captain Marker has now returned to England on leave, and—’

‘I am unacquainted with Captain Marker, Mr. Gedge.’

‘He is the gentleman who sent Arthur da Costa to school in England, Mr. Quelch, from Lucknow.’

‘Oh, yes, I remember! However—’

‘It is very important for me to speak to Da Costa. With your kind permission, I should like him to take the call.’

If Form-masters of mature years and exemplary manners could be supposed to snort, the sound that Mr. Quelch uttered just then would certainly have been taken by any hearer for a snort.

‘Oh, very well!’ he answered. ‘This is most irregular—very unusual—I may say unprecedented. However, I will send for the boy.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Quelch.’

Mr. Quelch did not wait for Mr. Gedge’s thanks. He laid down the receiver and looked out into the corridor, hoping to see some individual whom he could send for the Eurasian junior.

The only person in sight was George Blundell of the Fifth Form, the captain of that Form, and a member of the Eleven, and a tremendous ‘Blood’, greater than some of the Sixth. Blundell was speaking from a window to some fellow in the quad, and had his back to Mr. Quelch. Sending a Fifth Form man with a message was impossible; but he could be *requested* to take a message. Time was precious if Mr. Quelch was to

enjoy the delights—if any—of Sophocles before he had to repair to the headmaster's study. Mr. Quelch, therefore, addressed Blundell's back.

'Blundell!'

The captain of the Fifth glanced round.

'Will you kindly step to the Remove passage—'

'Eh?'

'To No. 1 Study. You will find the juniors at preparation—and request Da Costa, of my Form, to come here immediately.'

Blundell looked at Mr. Quelch.

He could not help wondering where a Form-master found the neck to ask a Fifth Form man and a Blood to carry a message to a fag in the Lower Fourth. But his manners were equal to the occasion. Later on Blundell confided to other men in the games study his opinion that Quelch was getting cheeky. But just at present he said with stately politeness:

'Certainly, sir.'

'Thank you, Blundell.'

'Not at all, sir,' said Blundell, with the same Jove-like dignity.

Mr. Quelch retreated into his study.

Blundell of the Fifth walked away. He did not hurry himself. With slow and calm dignity he made his way to the Remove passage and the door of Study No. 1.

CHAPTER III

Blundell Asks for It!

PREPARATION, according to Mr. Quelch, was going on in the Remove studies. Undoubtedly, it should have been going on there. But things were not always as they should have been. In Study No. 1 Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent and Arthur da Costa had not even sorted out their books, They were talking cricket. They were discussing that challenge to the Fifth Form, and the derisive reply received from the Fifth. That challenge seemed to the Remove fellows a right and proper thing, considering what a remarkable junior team they were.

The reply of the Fifth seemed to them sheer cheek and swank, and the reference to marbles rankled deeply.

Any fellow looking into Study No. 1 just then would never have dreamed that Arthur da Costa had been Harry Wharton's enemy—and a ruthless and unscrupulous and dangerous enemy. There was no sign of it now. Da Costa's handsome olive face was bright and cheery, and he seemed on the best of terms with his study-mates. Since the day of the Rockwood match, when the boy from the East had finally made up his mind to break with the plotters who had sent him to Greyfriars, he had been a changed fellow. Captain Marker, in picking out the Eurasian to carry out his peculiar purpose at Greyfriars, had certainly not foreseen the possible influence of Greyfriars on his emissary.

Instead of the schemer leading Harry Wharton into wrongdoing, or fastening upon him accusations of wrongdoing of which he was guiltless, the frank and wholesome atmosphere of Study No. 1 in the Remove had worked a total change in the schemer himself.

Arthur da Costa looked nothing but a cheery, happy schoolboy now, as he sat on the corner of the table in Study No. 1, talking cricket with the two chums.

'We'll jolly well make them play a match!' the captain of the Remove was saying.

'We'll make 'em somehow.'

'Somehow,' agreed Nugent.

The door of Study No. 1 opened, and Blundell of the Fifth gave a careless glance into the study. The three juniors looked at him.

'Don't they tap at doors in your slum at home, Blundell?' inquired Frank Nugent politely.

Blundell ignored that remark.

'Da Costa is wanted,' he said. 'Is he here?'

Arthur da Costa was only six feet from Blundell; so it was really rather superfluous to ask if he was there. But the captain of the Fifth loftily affected not to know these fags by sight. Lower-Fourth fags were like unto the flies that buzzed against the window-panes in summer; noisy little beasts that one disregarded.

'Yess, I am here,' said the Eurasian.

'You're wanted in your Form-master's study,' said Blundell; and he turned to the door again.

'Oh!' exclaimed Wharton. 'You haven't come here to tell us that you're fixing up that match, Blundell?'

Blundell gazed at him.

'What match?' he asked.

'We've challenged you to a cricket match—'

'Oh! Wasn't it marbles?' asked Blundell. 'We sent a reply, you know. I really thought marbles was your game.'

'Are you playing us?' demanded the captain of the Remove warmly.

'When we take to marbles—yes! Or hopscotch!' added Blundell thoughtfully. 'Not before then.'

'You don't mind the school knowing that you're afraid of getting licked at cricket?'

Blundell did not reply to that in words. Blundell was a good-tempered fellow, but there were limits. At this point in the discussion the captain of the Fifth felt that actions were needed rather than words. He made a sudden grab at Wharton's ear.

'Oh!' roared Wharton.

'There, you cheeky little rascal!'

'Yarooogh! Collar him!'

It had not crossed Blundell's mind for a moment that so great a man as he might be ragged by fags. Coker of the Fifth was sometimes ragged by juniors; but Coker was Coker, and Blundell was Blundell. To the great surprise of the captain of the Fifth, he was jumped upon just as if he had been a mere Coker.

Harry Wharton grasped him, Frank Nugent grasped him, and Arthur da Costa grasped him. With astonishment and a heavy bump, Blundell landed on the floor of No. 1 Study.

'Whoop!'

The next moment No. 1 Study resembled pandemonium.

A powerful Fifth Form man was struggling wildly with three Removites, but, powerful as he was, Blundell was not more than a match for the three. He rolled over in desperate combat, and the study table went crashing, and the study chairs crashed, and there were other crashes. Three breathless juniors rolled over with Blundell, and they rolled him out into the Remove passage.

By that time the uproar had brought a dozen Removites out of their studies.

'Fifth Form cads!' yelled Squiff.

And there was a rush.

How Blundell of the Fifth got down the Remove staircase to the next landing he

hardly knew. But he got there in a breathless, gasping, and dismantled state. He disappeared down the lower stairs; not, of course, fleeing from the fags, but retiring rather rapidly from a disorderly scene that was unworthy of the dignity of a Fifth Form man and a Blood. A yell of defiance and derision followed him from the Remove landing.

‘That’s that!’ chuckled Peter Todd.

‘But what was the row about?’ asked Bob Cherry. ‘Coker of the Fifth sometimes comes up here and asks for trouble; but it’s rather new for Blundell. What did he want?’

‘Oh,’ ejaculated Da Costa, ‘I forgot! He came to tell me that Mr. Quelch wanted me in his study. I had better go.’

And Arthur da Costa hurried down the stairs to the Remove master’s study.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Gedge will not take No for an Answer!

SOPHOCLES was taking an enforced rest.

Mr. Quelch was not so restful as that eminent Greek of ancient times. He was prowling round his study, growing more and more irritated, and was about to start for the Remove passage himself, when Arthur da Costa, fortunately, came hurrying breathlessly to his study.

The Remove master gave him a look that was very nearly a glare.

‘You sent for me, sir!’ said the Eurasian.

‘I did!’ snapped Mr. Quelch. ‘You have kept me waiting! You have wasted my time! You have kept Captain Marker’s legal representative waiting! You will take a hundred lines!’

‘Yess, sir! But—’

‘That is enough! Mr. Gedge desires to speak to you on the telephone. It is most irregular! It is most unusual!’ Mr. Quelch looked as if he would have liked to give Mr. Gedge a hundred lines, too. ‘But you may take the call, Da Costa! Be brief!’

‘Yess, sir!’

Da Costa went to the telephone.

‘Mr. Gedge, are you there?’ asked the Eurasian quietly.

‘Oh, you are there!’ rasped Mr. Gedge. ‘I have been waiting— waiting a very long time, Arthur!’

‘That is a matter of no moment to me, Mr. Gedge.’

‘You impertinent young rascal!’

‘I did not ask you to telephone. I did not want you to telephone. I want you to keep your distance, and leave me alone, Mr. Gedge.’

‘Are you out of your senses, Arthur?’

‘No. But, no doubt, it must seem to you that any honourable and decent fellow must be out of his senses,’ said Da Costa.

‘You know why you were sent to Greyfriars,’ hissed Mr. Gedge. ‘I have received your insolent letter. I have written twice to you without getting an answer. What do you mean by this?’

‘I mean exactly what I said in my letter. I am done with you! I am done with Captain Marker! You may go and eat coke, Mr. Gedge!’

‘What—what?’

‘Coke!’

‘You—you—you—’ spluttered Mr. Gedge.

‘Will you have another three minutes?’ a gentle, feminine voice inquired somewhere.

‘What? Yes—yes!’ snarled Mr. Gedge. ‘Arthur, are you there—Arthur, I must see you! I shall come down to-morrow, and wait at the usual place on the towpath. You hear me?’

‘I hear you.’

‘Captain Marker is now in England. He has been greatly disturbed by your letter. He foresaw nothing of this.’

‘No doubt.’

‘The term approaches its end, Da Costa. You do not desire to leave Greyfriars, and give up all your prospects?’

‘No. But I have no choice.’

‘You will think this over, Arthur. You will come back to a sense of your duty to your benefactor.’

‘Oh, cut it out!’ snapped Da Costa. ‘Captain Marker found me at that wretched school at Lucknow, a despised outcast, an envious pariah. He picked me out because of that. He made me promises that dazzled me. Even then I hesitated. Now I do not hesitate. I will have nothing to do with him!’ Da Costa’s voice was low and bitter. ‘Tell him so! I have learned here to play the game. I have made a friend of the boy you sent me here to injure. Nothing would induce me to harm him now.’

‘Take care—take care!’

‘It is for you to take care, Mr. Gedge! You may ring off when you please.’

‘I shall see you to-morrow, Arthur. You will meet me at three o’clock in the usual place. Even if you are resolved upon this folly, you owe me an explanation. You must at least see me and explain yourself.’

‘If I meet you to-morrow, Mr. Gedge, you will regret it.’

‘Nonsense. That is settled, then.’

And the legal gentleman in Chancery Lane rang off.

Wharton and Nugent were at prep when Da Costa came back to the study.

‘A row with Quelchy?’ asked Nugent, noting the Eurasian’s dark looks as he came in. Da Costa shook his head.

‘Anything up?’ asked Wharton.

‘Yess. It was a telephone call from Mr. Gedge.’

‘Oh!’

‘I am to meet him to-morrow.’

Wharton and Nugent looked at the olive-skinned junior in silence. His dark eyes met theirs.

‘Wharton, you know why I was sent here,’ he said in a low voice. ‘You believe that I play the game, as you call it, now?’

‘Yes,’ said Harry slowly.

‘They want to drive me back into what I have forsaken,’ muttered the Eurasian. ‘I am to hear threats and promises. Will you stand by me in this, and help me to keep to what I have resolved to do?’

‘Yes, rather!’ said Harry. ‘You bet!’

‘Then when I meet Mr. Gedge to-morrow afternoon, will you and your friends be there?’

‘To see Gedge?’

‘Yess, and to make him sorry that he came—to make him understand that he must not come again, and must let me alone.’

Wharton's eyes glinted. The mere thought of the boy from the East being driven back into the mire of treachery and deceit from which he had dragged himself roused his deepest anger. Little as he understood the strange, tortuous nature of the half-caste, Wharton realised very clearly that Arthur da Costa must have had a hard struggle with himself to do as he was doing now. He had been capable of actions that Wharton regarded with loathing, but he was fighting hard now to play the game, and Harry Wharton was the fellow to help him.

'Rely on us,' said Harry. 'We'll back you up all along the line, Da Costa. You can depend on that.'

'Yes, rather!' said Nugent emphatically.

There was likely to be a surprise in store for Mr. Gedge the following afternoon.

CHAPTER V

Quite a Party!

MR. GEDGE stopped on the towpath by the shining Sark and stared along the bank of the rippling stream. Mr. Gedge's hard face was extremely irritable in expression. It always was irritable when he had to leave his dusky den in the city and make a troublesome journey among green meadows and rippling streams and sunny downs. Now it was more irritable than ever.

Mr. Gedge was in a worried and anxious mood. His coming interview with the boy from the East worried him deeply. That anyone should turn from evil to good surprised him very much indeed, and, in fact, confounded him. He simply did not know what to make of it; and he could only explain it to himself on the ground that it was some trick—that the Eurasian was trying to put up his price, or something of the sort.

He saw the Eurasian coming along the towpath, and his eyes glinted at him. He stepped into the wood, to meet Da Costa out of sight of passers-by, as was his custom. In a few minutes the Eurasian joined him under the trees.

'You have come,' said Mr. Gedge.

'Yess. But we cannot speak here. Follow me.'

'But—' muttered Mr. Gedge irritably.

He did not like taking directions from this boy.

Unheeding him, Da Costa moved away among the trees. The legal gentleman followed him, breathing hard. Da Costa stopped in a deep glade, screened on all sides by trees and undergrowths.

'This is the place,' he said, facing Mr. Gedge.

'I am glad to see you so cautious, Arthur,' said Mr. Gedge, pushing back his hat, and wiping his perspiring forehead.

'You were determined to see me,' said Da Costa. 'I warned you not to come. What have you to say?'

'Let us be frank,' said Mr. Gedge. 'You have surprised me very much, Arthur. I cannot believe that you are serious. What is your object?'

'I have told you, Mr. Gedge.'

'You do not seriously intend to break with Captain Marker, and give up the reward for your services to him?'

'Yess.'



'Show yourselves you fellows!,' called out Da Costa

'I repeat, let us be frank,' said Mr. Gedge, in his most rasping tones. 'You think that you are in a position to make terms, Arthur. A great deal depends on you, and you have been reflecting on this, and you imagine that you can dictate terms. Is that it?'

'No.'

'I am a reasonable man, and Captain Marker is a reasonable man,' said Mr. Gedge. 'If you are not satisfied, no doubt an arrangement can be made. You have failed, so far, to effect the purpose for which you were sent to Greyfriars School. All your attempts have been failures. You have not proved of so much use as Captain Marker expected when he selected you for this business. I have told you we expect results, and that you will be taken away from Greyfriars if you continue unsuccessful. Is that why you have taken up this attitude?'

'I will tell you! I want to be clear of you and Captain Marker! I want to be left alone! I want to be decent, like my friends at Greyfriars. I know that I must leave the school at the end of the term. Even if Captain Marker would pay my fees there, I would accept nothing further from his hands, or from your hands, Mr. Gedge. I am sick of deceit. I am sick of treachery. When I look back to what I have done at Greyfriars, I loathe myself. It will cost me all my prospects if I play the game now. But I will play it to the end, even if it costs my life! Is that clear enough?'

Mr. Gedge stared at him blankly.

There was no doubting the earnestness of the boy from the East.

'You are Out of your senses, Arthur,' said Mr. Gedge at last.

'I have come to them,' said Da Costa.

'You will change your mind. You will forget this folly,' rasped the lawyer. 'I heard all this from you once before, and you changed again.'

The Eurasian smiled bitterly.

'That is true! But I have guarded against myself as well as against you, Mr. Gedge. I have placed it out of my power to change, if I should be weak under temptation. All that I know of Captain Marker's plot I have told Wharton, to place him on his guard. That is not all. Hitherto you have kept this matter a secret. You have taken care that no witness should ever be able to say that Mr. Gedge, solicitor, is engaged in a dastardly plot. But now there are witnesses.'

Mr. Gedge started violently.

'What? What?' he breathed. 'Witnesses?'

'Show yourselves, you fellows!' called out Da Costa. There was a rustling in the undergrowth. From different points in the thick greenery enclosing the little shady glade five Greyfriars juniors stepped into view.

Mr. Gedge stared at them, astonished, startled, and almost terrified.

CHAPTER VI

Mr. Gedge Has Enough!

'IT—it is all a mistake—an error!' he stammered. 'That boy, Da Costa, is an absolutely untruthful and unfaithful young rascal! Whatever he may have told you is false.'

'Only it's proved by what you've just been saying to him,' said Harry contemptuously. 'Da Costa made us come to hear with our own ears and get absolute proof of the game you set him to play. You couldn't understand that he'd thought better of it, and chucked it up, you cur! You wanted to keep him to it against his will! You ought to be in prison!'

'What about yanking him along to the police-station and making a charge against him?' asked Johnny Bull.

Mr. Gedge turned almost green.

That his plotting rascality was now known to these schoolboys he knew, but Mr. Gedge was too cautious a legal gentleman to allow any legal proof to be in existence. Not a single letter that he had written to Da Costa contained a single phrase that could harm him; he had taken care of that. Except once or twice, by chance, it could not be proved that he had even met Da Costa since the Eurasian had been at Greyfriars. Even now, taken by surprise as he was, the Remove fellows could not have said that his own actual words had incriminated him. Mr. Gedge made a movement.

'Stay where you are!' said Harry.

The lawyer panted.

'I shall go to your school—I shall lay a complaint before your headmaster and—'
'Get on with it when we've done with you. We shall tell Dr. Locke why we handled you,' said Harry. 'You're going to have a lesson, you fox. Were you ever bumped when you were at school?'

'Eh—what?'

'If not it will be a new experience for you. Collar him!'

'Stand back!' yelled Mr. Gedge.

'Bow-wow!'

The wretched man struck out fiercely as the juniors collared him. But in a moment he was whirled over.

Bump!

In the grasp of six juniors Mr. Gedge was bumped heavily in the grass. He gasped and spluttered wildly.

Bump!

'Yooogh! Help! Ow!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Now bring him along to the river,' said Harry. 'He is going to have a ducking next.'

'Hear, hear!'

'Right in?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Nunno! He's rather an ancient rotter for that; we don't want to give him pneumonia! Just his napper. Pick out a muddy spot!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

A spot that was thick with soft mud was soon found. There was a wild gurgle from Mr. Gedge as his head was plunged into it.

He drew it out again, an uncanny sight. His sharp nose and little beady eyes and hard mouth were thick with clinging mud. He gasped and gurgled and spluttered and

stuttered.

‘Grooogh! Ooooh! Oooooch!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Now hook it,’ said Harry Wharton coolly. ‘If we find you anywhere near Greyfriars again, Mr. Gedge, you’ll get the same and a little more. You can tell your precious Captain Marker that he will have to deal with my uncle, Colonel Wharton. Now hook it! If you’re not out of sight in one minute you’ll go into the mud again.’

Mr. Gedge was not an athlete. But he put on a very creditable speed now, and in less than the minute allowed he vanished from sight.

‘That’s that!’ said Bob Cherry.

Da Costa drew a deep breath.

‘It is done,’ he said. ‘You fellows believe me now—you trust me now?’

‘Yes, rather, old bean.’

‘The trustfulness is terrific.’

‘Even you?’ asked Da Costa, with a curious look at the Nahob of Bhanipur.

‘Even I, my esteemed and ridiculous Da Costa,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

And Harry Wharton & Co. walked back to Greyfriars, hoping that they had done for good with Mr. Gedge.

As a matter of fact, there was little doubt on that subject; the lesson he had received on the bank of the Sark was enough for the lawyer. Keen as he was upon legal proceedings and damages, he did not contemplate taking action against the parents of the schoolboys who had ragged him. He did not think of anything but the harm such a story might do him professionally if it was talked abroad. The matter was no longer a secret. Mr. Gedge was too cautious to have anything further to do with it. In his dusky den in Chancery Lane Mr. Gedge returned to his happy occupation of spinning meshes for the unwary feet of his fellow-men; and Captain Marker had lost his legal representative.

CHAPTER VII

Rather Mysterious!

HARRY WHARTON looked puzzled.

He was reading a letter that had been handed out in morning break, and the contents seemed to perplex him a little.

‘Anything up?’ asked Bob Cherry, as the captain of the Remove finished the perusal at last.

‘Not exactly. My uncle’s coming down on Wednesday afternoon—to-morrow,’ said Harry. ‘I’ve been expecting a visit from him for some time. But—’ The captain of the Remove paused. ‘Listen to this. It sounds rather mysterious.’

And Wharton read a passage from the letter: ‘I have some news for you, my boy, which will probably surprise you considerably. I hope you have been on your best behaviour, and earning a good report. Upon your good conduct at school depends more than you have ever supposed. But I will go into this when I see you.’

‘A bit mysterious,’ remarked Frank Nugent.

‘I’m blessed if I can imagine what my uncle is alluding to,’ said Harry.

‘Same here,’ said Nugent.

‘The samefulness in my own absurd case is not great. You are aware that there has been a deep and prosperous scheme to blacken the character of our execrable chum Wharton, and to drive him from this ridiculous school in disgrace. We do not know

the reason; but there must have been a reason for the ludicrous rascality of Captain Marker. Now, at the time when Captain Marker desires the preposterous Wharton to be found guilty of bad conduct, Colonel Wharton tells him that it is very important to be of eminently good conduct. Two and two addfully united make four, my esteemed chums. We shall learn from the esteemed colonel what Captain Marker's game is.'

Bob clapped the dusky nabob on the shoulder.

'Good old Inky! Depend on it, he's on the wicket. We're going to learn the history of the giddy mystery. Da Costa doesn't know; but it looks as if the colonel does—though he doesn't know what has been going on here.'

Harry Wharton nodded.

'Looks like it,' he agreed. 'I'm jolly anxious to hear what my uncle has to tell me. I can't imagine any connection between me and Captain Marker—a man I'd never heard of before Da Costa

came here. But, of course, there must be some connection—the rotter isn't doing all this scheming for nothing.'

'The knowfulness will soon be terrific.'

'I've been waiting for my uncle to come, to tell him what's been going on,' said Harry, after a pause. 'I'm bound to tell him—especially about that banknote affair. But'—he paused again—'I don't know what he will think about Da Costa. The fellow's square enough—he's proved that by breaking with that foxy rascal Gedge. But goodness knows what view Colonel Wharton will take—and he's a governor of the school, too.'

'You'll have to put it to your uncle tactfully, and make him see somehow that Da Costa is all right now,' said Nugent.

'I'll do my best, anyhow.'

Wharton left his chums, and went to look for the Eurasian. That Colonel Wharton must be appraised of what had been happening at Greyfriars that term was certain. But Wharton was very unwilling that Da Costa should find himself in trouble in consequence. But what view the old military gentleman would take was doubtful. Da Costa greeted the captain of the Remove with a cheerful smile when he found him. But his handsome olive face became very grave when Wharton mentioned his uncle's letter.

'The colonel is coming here, then?' asked Da Costa slowly.

'On Wednesday.'

'You will tell him—'

'I'm bound to, of course.'

The Eurasian nodded.

'I know. I shall see him also, and I shall tell him all I know of Captain Marker's plot—without any reserve.'

Wharton looked troubled.

'If you tell him, Da Costa, I can't answer for it what view he will take. He is a governor of the school.'

'I understand. But I shall risk that—when I made up my mind to play the game I knew what I was risking,' said Da Costa quietly. 'After all, if he should insist on my leaving Greyfriars at once, after my confession, it will matter little—I must leave at the end of the term, in any case. I should have liked to play in the rest of the matches, though,' he added, with a sigh.

'I'll make him see things as I do, somehow.' 'You're going to play for us all this term, and win matches for the Remove—beginning with the Fifth!' said Wharton, with a smile.

CHAPTER VIII

The Fifth on the War-path!

'THEY asked for it!' said Blundell, in the games study, on Wednesday afternoon.

'They did!' agreed Bland.

'Begged and prayed for it entirely,' said Fitzgerald. 'And now they're going to get it!' said Potter. Blundell looked round over the little crowd in the games study.

There were a dozen Fifth Form men present. Some of them had fives bats in their hands, and two or three had cricket stumps. They looked a rather warlike array, and looked in a determined mood.

'Of course this isn't a rag,' said Blundell.

'Of course not,' said Hilton of the Fifth, quite shocked at the bare idea of the Fifth Form men engaged in a rag.

'Nothing of the kind,' said Greene. 'But we can't let those Remove fags cheek us as much as they like.'

'We've got to deal with the matter ourselves,' said Blundell. 'We aren't going to play fags at cricket, and we aren't going to have a mob of fags chipping us. Thrashing them all round is the way. They've asked for it.'

'Hear! Hear!'

'I happen to know that the ringleaders in this cheeky lot will be in Wharton's study,' said Blundell. 'I've been keeping an eye on the little brutes, as a matter of fact. I find that they're having one of their ghastly fag gorges—what they call a spread—in No. 1 Study. We shall find Wharton and his gang there. They're the ringleaders, and if we make an example of them, it will be a warning to all the Remove.'

'Good egg!'

'Well, come on!' said Blundell.

And the war-party of the Fifth marched out of the games study, and took the war-path to the Remove passage.

Blundell was feeling rather pleased with his strategy. He was going to catch the ringleaders of that cheeky Form in their quarters, when a large number—probably the majority—of the Remove would be elsewhere. Ten minutes or so in the Remove passage would be enough. In less than ten minutes the Famous Five could be made to feel that life at Greyfriars was not worth living for fags who cheeked the Fifth.

Blundell leading, the Fifth Form invaders marched across the Remove passage. Near the door of No. 1 Study was a fat youth, who gave the invaders one startled blink through his big spectacles, and fled, yelling.

'I say, you fellows, look out! The Fifth!' squeaked Billy Bunter, in wild alarm, as he negotiated the passage as if it had been a cinder-path.

Blundell & Co. rushed on to the door of No. 1 Study.

The captain of the Fifth turned the door handle, and hurled open the door.

A second more and Blundell would have rushed headlong into the study, with his followers at his heels.

Instead of which he halted dead in the doorway, so suddenly that Potter, who was just behind him, bumped into him, and staggered back on Greene.

'Oh,' gasped Potter, 'you ass!'

'Ow!' stuttered Greene. 'Gerroff my foot! Oh!'

'What the thump—' exclaimed Fitzgerald.

'Get on with it!' roared Smith major, from the rear.

Blundell did not get on with it.



*Blundell stammered: 'G-Good afternoon, sir!
N-Nice day, sir!'*

His eyes were fixed, almost in horror, upon a tall, bronze-complexioned gentleman of military bearing, who had risen from the table in No. I Study, with a teacup in his hand, and a surprised look on his face.

'Good gad!' ejaculated the bronzed gentleman, staring at Blundell of the Fifth. Blundell gasped.

'G-g-g-good-afternoon, sir! Nice day, sir!'

And the captain of the Fifth backed out, bumping into the fellows behind him, treading recklessly on toes. He drew the door shut, and gasped.

'Oh, my hat!'

'What?' exclaimed Fitzgerald.

'Let's cut!'

'But what—'

'Hook it!' snarled Blundell. 'Get out! Bunk! There's a dashed old school governor in the study! Beat it!'

'Oh crumbs!'

And the Fifth Form men beat it promptly.

CHAPTER IX

Amazing News!

COLONEL WHARTON stared at the door of No. 1 Study, after it had closed on the discomfited Fifth-Formers.

He was astonished.

He stood with his teacup in his hand, staring.

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned.

They were quite aware that they had had a narrow escape. The raid from the Fifth would have been hard to deal with had it come off according to plan.

'A rag, I suppose,' said the colonel presently.

'Well, something like that,' admitted Harry Wharton.

'What have you been doing—hay? Those fellows were seniors—the Fifth Form—hay?'

'Yes. A little matter about a cricket match.'

Harry Wharton explained, and the colonel laughed heartily over the challenge of the

Fifth, and the remarkable methods the Removites were adopting to induce Blundell & Co. to accept it.

'If that match comes off, I shall have to come down again and see it,' said Colonel Wharton. 'You must let me know the date, Harry.'

'That settles it,' said Harry Wharton. 'We'll make 'em play, if we have to carry them down to the ground.'

'But you young fellows don't imagine you can beat a senior team at cricket, surely?'

'Yes, rather!'

'The ratherfulness is terrific!'

'You see, uncle, we're all pretty good at the game,' the captain of the Remove explained, 'and we've got a new fellow here who is a giddy miracle. Chap named Da Costa, whom I've mentioned in my letters—plays cricket like that Ranji you've told me about, only more so.'

'By gad! I'd like to see that boy,' said the colonel. His brow clouded a little. 'You mentioned that he was sent here by Captain Marker, Harry. I want to see him and ask him some questions. However, never mind now.'

The Co. were aware that Wharton's uncle had something to say to him, and as soon as tea was over they gracefully retired from the study, and left Colonel Wharton with his nephew.

The colonel seated himself in the study armchair and lighted a cigar. He regarded his nephew very thoughtfully.

'Did my letter surprise you, Harry?' he asked.

'Well, a little,' said the captain of the Remove. 'I'm awfully keen to know what you meant, uncle.'

'I've lately had the news from India,' said Colonel Wharton. 'When I received this news, I could not help thinking that it was odd, at least, that there should be an Eurasian boy here, sent by Captain Masker. It was my intention to see the boy. I am not a suspicious man, but it seemed to me at least an odd coincidence. However, you tell me the boy is a fine fellow.'

'A fine cricketer, anyhow,' said Harry.

'You like him?'

'I rather like him now; I didn't at first. We've become friends,' said Harry. 'I've something to tell you about that, uncle. But you're going to give me your news first.'

'Yes. You have been behaving yourself this term—hay?'

'I think so—as much as usual,' said Harry, with a smile.

'I hope I shall get a good term's report from your Form-master.'

'I hope so, uncle.'

'Not only this term, but all the time you are at Greyfriars,' said the colonel. 'Much depends on it, Harry. You know that I am fairly well off in this world's goods, and the most of what I have will fall to you some day. It will not make you a rich man. But if you keep a good record at your school, Harry, you will be rich some day—very rich.'

'That sounds jolly interesting,' said Harry. He realised that he was about to learn the explanation of the mystery that had so deeply puzzled him. 'But of course I don't understand in the least, so far.'

'If you keep a good record at Greyfriars, Harry, and leave your school finally with credit and honour, you will become entitled to the sum of fifty thousand pounds!'

'Oh!'

'If you should be guilty of bad conduct, to the extent of being expelled from the school, you lose every farthing of that great legacy.'

'Oh!' repeated Wharton.

‘Now you know how you stand,’ said the colonel. ‘Keep it in mind. You are a straight lad, Harry, and when all that money comes into your hands you will make a good and honourable use of it. But if you fail, it will go to a bad man—a thoroughly bad hat—’ ‘Captain Marker!’ exclaimed Wharton.

He understood now.

Colonel Wharton stared at him.

‘Exactly; but how the deuce did you guess that?’

CHAPTER X

Light at Last!

‘I KNEW it,’ said Harry. ‘At least, I was sure of it! But tell me about it, uncle. I don’t understand yet.’

‘I’ll put it in a few words,’ said the colonel. ‘Captain Marker is related to a rich merchant of Calcutta—a man of great wealth, named Cortolvin—a distant connection of my own. It happens that when I was in India I saved Mr. Cortolvin from being robbed and murdered by thugs. That was a long time ago, of course—before the War. What I did was simply in the way of my military duty. I was a young officer at that time, employed in stamping out thuggism in one of the provinces of Bengal. I should have forgotten the matter, but old Mr. Cortolvin made a great account of it.

‘That little affair, and the fact that we were distantly related, made us great friends. He knew your father, also, and respected him highly. You, of course, he had never seen, though I showed him a photograph of you when you were a little kid.’

The colonel ejected a stream of cigar-smoke, and the captain of the Remove coughed a little.

‘Eric Marker was Mr. Cortolvin’s nephew,’ went on the colonel. ‘The old gentleman was wrapped up in him—extremely attached to him. Marker was always a bad hat, and it nearly broke the old man’s heart when he was expelled from school for disgraceful conduct.’

‘Oh!’ said Harry.

‘That, of course, made a great difference to the young man’s prospects. It barred him off from the brilliant career his uncle had planned for him. He became an officer in a small regiment. I knew him in India, and a doocid unpleasant fellow he is. A gambling, spendthrift fellow, always in the clutches of native moneylenders, and in danger more than once of being cashiered. The very last man in the world to do a philanthropic action—or to afford to be able to do one, either. He had a large allowance from his uncle, but he was always in difficulties. A thoroughly bad hat!’ Wharton listened without interrupting. That Captain Marker was a thoroughly ‘bad hat’ he knew even better than his uncle did. Da Costa’s mission at Greyfriars was proof of that.

‘Mr. Cortolvin recently died at a great age,’ went on the colonel. ‘There was a clause in his will regarding you, Harry. His interest in you was based on his regard for your father and myself; but you are also a distant relation of his through your grandmother. You have probably never heard of him, but it is the fact—beside his nephew, Captain Marker, he had no blood relatives at all but ourselves, distant as we are.’

‘I see.’

‘Apart from other legacies, chiefly to charities, he has left the sum of a hundred thousand pounds,’ said the colonel. ‘Half of this goes to Eric Marker, and every shilling of it, I suspect, will be grabbed by moneylenders and other sharks who have

been lending the young rascal money for years on his expectations. I shall be surprised if he has much left, even out of so great a sum.'

'He must have made the money fly,' said Harry.

'Money goes fast in India if a man is a spendthrift and the native moneylenders get hold of him,' said the colonel. 'The fellow is simply piled with debt. Now the other half of that great sum, Harry, will come to you—but on conditions.'

'I think I see light,' remarked Wharton.

'The condition is that you do not become a mucker as the old gentleman's own nephew did,' said Colonel Wharton. 'If you turn out no better than Captain Marker, obviously there is no reason why you should benefit under the will instead of that rascal. That was how Mr. Cortolvin looked at it. The test is that you finish your school career in honour.'

'If you should be expelled from Greyfriars, Harry, the clause in Mr. Cortolvin's will lapses, and the fifty thousand pounds will go to his nephew, Eric Marker.'

There was a pause.

'Now, Harry,' said the colonel at length, 'when this news reached me I could not help thinking of what you had told me in your letters—of a half-caste boy sent to Greyfriars by Captain Marker. If Eric Marker has taken up kind-hearted philanthropy, he has changed very much for the better since I knew him. If that is the case, I am, of course, glad. But frankly I do not think so for one moment. I think it is a very strange coincidence that he should have sent this half-caste boy here at this special time. It is quite probable that he had early knowledge of what was in his uncle's will—that he knew of this clause before the Calcutta lawyer communicated it to me. He may have known of it quite a long time ago—in time to lay plans.'

Wharton was silent.

The colonel's words showed that some glimmering suspicion of Captain Marker's scheme had come into his mind—as it could scarcely have failed to do in the circumstances.

The colonel eyed him keenly.

'I can see that you have something to tell me, Harry,' he said very quietly. 'You must be frank.'

'I have something to tell you, uncle.'

'Go ahead.'

In succinct sentences Wharton told all he knew of the Eurasian and his business at Greyfriars. He told the whole story of the treacherous scheming and tortuous plotting concisely; but he spoke more at length when he told of the change that had been wrought in the boy from the East—of his repentance and his endeavour to make up for what he had done.

Colonel Wharton listened in grim silence.

He did not interrupt the junior until he had heard the whole story to the end.

Then he sat thinking for some time.

'If the young rascal is sincere in his repentance, if he has genuinely broken with the rogues who sent him here, I would certainly not be hard on him,' he said. 'But I must be sure, Harry. I am not surprised at the first part of your story; but very much surprised indeed at the second part. However, I will see the boy, and I do not think he will be able to deceive me. Send him to me here.'

Wharton left the study.

Five minutes later Arthur da Costa entered; and Harry Wharton, in the Remove passage, waited anxiously for the interview to end.

CHAPTER XI

Brought up to the Scratch!

COLONEL WHARTON left Greyfriars that evening.

Harry Wharton had told his chums the news of the legacy left by the Calcutta merchant, and the Co. congratulated him warmly.

That that legacy was a sure thing all the Co. agreed; for Harry Wharton was never likely to be guilty of anything to earn the 'sack' from Greyfriars.

So far as Arthur da Costa was concerned, matters were not quite so satisfactory. The colonel had gone unconvinced.

He had to admit that the Eurasian had given proofs of good faith. But it was hard for him to believe that a leopard could change its spots, or an Ethiopian his skin. He distrusted the Eurasian; though he confessed that Da Costa, by open and complete confession, had placed it out of his own power to do further harm. Not only this, but he had furnished definite evidence that Eric Marker was plotting for the legacy, as the colonel had vaguely suspected. Nevertheless, the colonel doubted. It was not easy to believe that so treacherous a character had changed so much; and he left Greyfriars with this doubt in his mind.

'I'm sorry,' Wharton said to the Eurasian in the study that evening. 'But, anyhow, my uncle has said nothing to the Head. If he doubts, he is giving you the benefit of the doubt.'

Da Costa smiled faintly.

'That is something, perhaps,' he said. 'And I know that I do not deserve more. At any rate, I shall soon be gone from Greyfriars; and then your uncle will not fear that I shall do more harm. So long as you trust me I do not care.'

'I trust you,' said Harry.

And the subject was dropped with that. That any danger might come from the schemer whose designs were now clearly known, Wharton did not think likely and, in point of fact, he gave Captain Marker and his miserable scheming very little thought. Matters of more immediate interest occupied his mind, as well as the minds of most Remove fellows in these days. Something like a state of warfare existed between the Remove and the Fifth, and alarms and excursions were many and exciting.

Blundell of the Fifth had not had much luck so far. He found, to his intense exasperation, that an impression was spreading—real or affected—that the Fifth actually were afraid of getting licked if they met the Remove at cricket. Many men in the Sixth Form affected to take this view solemnly and seriously—doubtless for the cheery purpose of getting Blundell's 'rag' out.

Blundell finally made up his mind that the best way to put a stop to the whole ridiculous thing was to play the Remove.

He propounded that decision in the games study one evening. 'We'd better play those kids,' said Blundell, looking over the gathering of great men. 'I'm fed up with their cheek! It's no good cuffing them—we get mixed up in scuffles. The thing's gone beyond a joke. After all, we play the Shell sometimes. These cheeky little sweeps will have to shut up and chuck rotting if we wipe them off the cricket-field'

'They haven't an earthly, anyhow,' grunted Hilton.

'I'm going to make sure they haven't—we can't even afford to win by a narrow margin—we've got to make it so overwhelming that the cheeky little sweeps will look fools for having challenged us. We've got to beat them by an innings and a bagful of runs, see?'

'That's so,' agreed the Fifth.

'Send the little rotters a note, Price, and fix up a date,' said Blundell.

And it was so.

There was loud cheering in the Remove passage when that note was received. The Remove quarters rang with jubilation.

CHAPTER XII

Captain Marker at Greyfriars!

SECOND lesson in the Remove Form-room was drawing to a close when Trotter, the page, tapped on the door and put his chubby face in.

Mr. Quelch glanced round at him sharply. Mr. Quelch did not like interruptions in classes.

'Well?' rapped out Mr. Quelch, hurling that monosyllable at Trotter like a bullet from a rifle.

'Message from the 'Ead, sir,' said Trotter.

'Be brief!'

'Yessir,' said Trotter. 'A gentleman, sir—'ere's his card, sir— has called, sir—he's in the visitors' room now, sir, to see Master da Costa, sir, and—'

'Very good.'

Trotter retired.

'Da Costa,' said Mr. Quelch, after a glance at the card.

'Yess, sir.'

'Captain Marker has called to see you, and you have your headmaster's permission to see him in the visitors' room. You may go.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Da Costa.

Harry Wharton glanced at him. It was on the Eurasian's lips to refuse to go—a refusal that certainly would have astonished Mr. Quelch very much; the Remove master being quite ignorant of the peculiar terms upon which Da Costa stood with the philanthropic gentleman who had sent him to Greyfriars.

But Da Costa changed his mind very quickly. He did not want his peculiar footing with his supposed benefactor to become the talk of the Remove, and a nine-days' wonder in the school.

'Yess, sir,' he said, after that brief hesitation.

And he left the Form-room.

Second lesson went on; while Da Costa, with a set, hard face, and a glint in his eyes, made his way to the visitors' room.

He entered the apartment quietly, with his soft tread, and a man who was standing by the window turned towards him.

Da Costa's dark eyes fixed on him—on the hard face burned by tropic suns, the narrow eyes, set close together, the mouth, with loose lips—the face of a hard-living, self-indulgent man; a man well dressed, with something of a military bearing, and yet with an air of suppressed blackguardism about him. This was the man who had sent Arthur da Costa to Greyfriars School.

A flash came into the narrow, glinting eyes at the sight of the junior. Da Costa did not need telling that Captain Marker's feelings towards him were the reverse of amicable.

'So you have come here!' said the Eurasian junior.

'I had to see you. Shut the door.'

'I will leave the door open,' said Da Costa coolly. 'I have no objection to anyone

hearing what you have to say to me.'

'Take care, boy!' said the captain, between his teeth. 'You may carry this insolence too far.'

Marker crossed to the door himself and closed it. It was a surrender to the boy whom he had come there to bully and to threaten.

'Now,' he said, facing the Eurasian, 'what does this mean, boy?'

'Has not Mr. Gedge explained to you?'

'He has.'

'Then it is not necessary for me to explain. You know that I have done with you, and will have no hand in your rascality—'

'In what?' breathed the captain.

'In your rascality. More, I have told the whole story, so far as I know it, to Wharton and his uncle, Colonel Wharton. As they know now about old Mr. Cortolvin's will at Calcutta, they know everything. Your teeth are drawn, Captain Marker, and if you keep on your rascality you will do so at your peril.'

The captain drew a hissing breath.

'And this,' he said, his eyes burning, 'this is the beggar, the outcast, the envious toady, whom I picked out of a school where he was despised—the half-caste whom I selected because of the treachery that was second nature to him!'

'But changed,' said Da Costa, 'changed as you cannot believe possible, because you are a rascal incapable of a decent thought or feeling. You had better go, Captain Marker. You will serve no purpose by staying.'

There was a buzz of voices in the quadrangle. Second lesson was at an end, and the Remove were out.

Captain Marker stood silent for some moments, his eyes on the Eurasian, and then returned to the window and looked out into the sunny quad. His narrow eyes roved over the cheery crowd of juniors at a little distance.

'These are your Form fellows?' he asked.

'Yess.'

'And you—a half-caste—you fancy that you are on a footing with these schoolboys!' said the captain. 'You dare to talk to me as one of them might talk—as if you were one of them.'

'This is not the school at Lucknow,' said Da Costa. 'Here the fellows care nothing if I am of mixed blood. While I was a rascal, obedient to your orders, they loathed me—now they trust me, and I have many friends in the Remove—chief among them the boy you would ruin if you could. You may see, if you wish, my name posted in the list of Remove men who are to play in the biggest cricket fixture this term—and Wharton himself has told me that he would rather spare any other man from the eleven. You made a mistake in sending me here, Captain Marker.'

The captain's eyes were still on the juniors in the quad.

'Wharton is among them?' he asked.

'Yess.'

'Which is he? Point him out to me.'

The Eurasian smiled sarcastically.

'So that you may know him by sight, and find it easier to carry on your miserable scheming? I will not point him out.'

The captain gritted his teeth.

'I shall easily ascertain—'

'You will not ascertain,' said Da Costa coolly. 'You will leave Greyfriars at once, Captain Marker, and you will never come here again. You will go directly to the gates

when you leave this room.'

The captain stared at him. Da Costa went to the door and threw it wide open. His eyes glistened at the discomfited adventurer.

'Are you going?' he asked, in a loud voice, evidently careless of any ears that might hear in the corridor.

'Boy!'

'Go, you rascal!'

The captain made a furious stride at him. Arthur da Costa stepped out into the corridor. In the distance the portly figure of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, could be seen. Captain Marker controlled his rage at the sight of the Fifth Form-master. He gave the Eurasian one deadly look and strode away. His power was gone over the boy, who had become indifferent to promises of reward; and an accusation of his rascality before all Greyfriars was most assuredly not to the taste of Captain Marker. But he turned back again, and spoke to the Eurasian in a low voice.

'I will go! I shall go now! But you, you rascal, will not remain long. It was I who sent you here; and I shall inform your headmaster that I was mistaken in my opinion of you, and that I desire you to leave the school without delay. You will remain but a day longer.'

'You will not speak one word to the headmaster, unless you desire me to explain your motives to him; and I am assured that Dr. Locke will allow me to remain to the end of the term, when he knows that you have turned against me because I refuse to carry out your instructions,' said Da Costa coolly. 'Put me to the test, if you like—I will come with you to the headmaster now.'

Captain Marker seemed on the point of choking. He turned away again, and this time he did not turn back. Da Costa, from the door, watched him stride down to the gates and disappear.

CHAPTER XIII

The Match with the Fifth!

BLUNDELL of the Fifth frowned as he strode on the cricket-field. The great day had come.

Blundell had told his men to go all out and pile up a score that would turn the thing into an obvious jest at the expense of the Remove. He wanted to make assurance doubly sure. But as a matter of fact, his men, while of course intending to overwhelm the Remove with ignominious and crushing defeat, were hardly disposed to exert themselves much to that end. Those wretched little microbes, as Hilton said, could be crushed without an effort; Blundell was making a fuss over nothing, and most of the Fifth agreed.

But the heroes of the Remove looked cheery enough, in spite of the sword of Damocles that was suspended over their devoted heads. Harry Wharton had kept his men up to the mark, and they were all at the top of their form——especially his latest and greatest recruit, the Eurasian.

Quite an army of fellows gathered to see that historic match begin. Fellows of all Forms, from the Sixth to the Second, came to look on. Masters came down to the field—two masters, at least: Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout. Harry Wharton had duly informed his uncle of the date of this great fixture, and the colonel, true to his word, was coming down to see the Remove make Greyfriars history. He had not arrived yet, but he was coming, and the captain of the Remove hoped that he would arrive to see

the Remove winning.

Had the Fifth batted first, it was Blundell's intention to knock up a hundred without losing any wickets, and then let the Remove in, and let them follow on their innings, without any runs at all. This sort of thing would have put the fags in their place, beyond a doubt. Perhaps it would not have worked out like that; but, anyhow, it fell to the Fifth to go into the field, the Remove taking first innings. The Remove opened with Arthur da Costa and Harry Wharton.

'Give 'em beans, old man,' said Harry, as he went out with the Eurasian.

'Yess!' smiled Da Costa.

Now, there was no doubt that Harry Wharton was a good man with the willow, and that Da Costa was a marvellous man for his age. But seniors were seniors, and juniors were juniors. The Fifth Form bowling was not remarkable for a senior team, but it was remarkably hot stuff in comparison with what the Lower Fourth were accustomed to. Harry Wharton found that he had all his work cut out; even Arthur da Costa had to devote his energies rather to saving his sticks than to scoring.

Still, the runs came, though more slowly than the Remove had hoped. This was rather a surprise for the Fifth, who had anticipated a blank score for the juniors. Still, they smiled when Wharton's wicket went down after he had scored six. They smiled still more broadly when wicket after wicket fell to bowling that was rather too hot for juniors, while the score went up creepingly. With Arthur da Costa not out, the Remove tailed off with twenty-five for the innings, which was twenty-five less than they had hoped for, and twenty-five more than the Fifth had expected them to make. 'This is going to be a bowler's game,' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Inky and Da Costa will be making them open their eyes soon.'

Blundell and Bland opened for the Fifth when their innings started. Blundell took his work seriously, as he always took games, but Bland was obviously lofty and contemptuous of Remove bowling, a frame of mind that cost him dear. Bland looked astonished when Da Costa's ball found his off stump, and the umpire's 'Out!' seemed to him like a voice heard in a dream. However, it was not a dream; it was horrid reality, and Bland, with a crimson face, carried out a bat that had been given no exercise.

And when Potter met with a similar fate, amid cheers from the Lower School, it dawned upon the Fifth that they could not afford to take this match with careless contempt, and that old Blundell, after all, had been right in telling them to go all out. After that the Fifth Form men played up as if they were playing the Sixth. Not that they dreamed of defeat, but victory, to serve its purpose, had to be overwhelming, and for an overwhelming victory the Fifth realised that they had to fight hard.

With Hurree Singh to alternate with Da Costa in the bowling, the Remove looked for good things. Hurree Janset Ram Singh was a bowler of renown, almost as good as the new man. But the glorious uncertainty of the great game of cricket was exemplified once more. Fitzgerald, of the Fifth, was caught and bowled by Hurree Janset Ram Singh, but after the over the Nabob of Bhanipur came up to his captain with a rueful, dusky face. He held up a damaged hand.

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Wharton, in dismay.

'The regretfulness is terrific.'

'Well, it was a ripping catch,' said Harry.

'The ripfulness also was terrific, so far as my esteemed and ridiculous paw is concerned,' said the nabob ruefully.

'Squiff's a good man, anyhow.'

Squiff was a good man, and Vernon-Smith was another, but their bowling did not do

the Fifth much damage. Arthur da Costa was as good as ever, but the nabob was no longer available for bowling, though he was still useful in the field. The Fifth were all down for ninety—a long score in the eyes of the Removites, but remarkably different from a hundred for no wickets which the seniors had anticipated.

‘Ninety will do us, though,’ Blundell said to his men. ‘Take care that they don’t get more than a dozen in their second innings. If they tie, I tell you, I’ll sack this team and get fresh men from the Second Form. If we don’t beat theirs by an innings, we may as well chuck up cricket. Mind, you men, we simply must not bat again.’

‘Oh, of course not!’ said Potter.

And the Fifth were taking the game with extreme seriousness when the Remove went in for their second innings. But the Remove men seemed to have taken the measure of the Fifth Form bowling now, and they faced it with much more success than at first. Wickets went down more slowly, and runs came much faster. Blundell glared at the score when the Remove had piled up fifty for their second innings—more than half of them scored by Da Costa. The score was approaching danger-point. Sixty—seventy—Blundell almost gaped at the score. The Fifth had to bat a second time—that was inevitable now. And a horrid feeling was creeping over Blundell, that the Fifth not only had to bat again, but might possibly bat in vain.

CHAPTER XIV

Glorious!

COLONEL WHARTON tapped his nephew on the shoulder as Harry stood with his eyes fixed on the batsmen. The captain of the Remove glanced round.

‘How goes it, my boy?’ asked the Colonel, with a smile.

‘Set fair!’ said Harry, laughing. ‘The Fifth will have to bat again, anyhow. They never expected to.’

‘Good!’ said the colonel.

‘Bravo!’ yelled Bob Cherry. ‘Well hit! Oh, well hit, sir!’

‘Bravo, Da Costa!’

Da Costa and Johnny Bull were running again. Wharton waved his cap and shouted:

‘Good man! Oh, good man!’

He caught his uncle’s arm.

‘That’s the chap, uncle—that’s Da Costa! Look at him! Some cricketer, what! The real goods!’

Colonel Wharton nodded.

‘A good man,’ said the colonel. ‘One of the best, my boy! By gad, he can run! He looks as if he were enjoying the game, too, by gad!’ The colonel was an old cricketer himself, and had captained the Greyfriars first eleven in his time. His bronzed face lighted up as he watched Arthur da Costa.

He was worth watching. The best bowlers of the Fifth failed to handle him, and in the field he gave not the ghost of a chance at a catch. He was set for the innings, anyone could see that, and when the end came he was not out for 50—the total score for the Remove innings being 100.

‘We want 36 to beat the cheeky little sweeps!’ grunted Blundell. ‘That’s not what we were going to do. You know that! Luckily, we can get 36 on our heads! If we’re licked—’ The captain of the Fifth did not finish that sentence. Such a contingency was too awful to contemplate.

But in the Remove, at least, there were high hopes now that the Fifth were going to be

licked. Wharton eyed his latest recruit rather anxiously.

‘Feeling a bit fagged?’ he asked.

Da Costa smiled.

‘Not at all!’

‘Feeling like taking wickets?’

‘Yess!’

‘Inky won’t be bowling. You’ll have to whack it out with Squiff and Smithy and Pen. You know you’re the goods, of course,’ said Harry.

‘Yess,’ said Da Costa, smiling. ‘You shall see me do my best— if only to leave you something to remember me by when I am gone from Greyfriars.’

Colonel Wharton looked at him.

‘You are leaving Greyfriars?’ he asked.

‘My benefactor who sent me here is not pleased with me,’ said Da Costa ironically. ‘I leave at the end of the term. Captain Marker has been very disappointed in me.’

‘Hum!’ said the colonel thoughtfully.

He watched the Eurasian when the Remove went into the field. Da Costa was given the ball for the first over, and Blundell of the Fifth took the bowling. He took it for only one ball, however, for it was a wily ball, that somehow—Blundell never knew how— wound round his bat in the most unexpected way and jerked out his middle stump, leaving his wicket looking toothless. Blundell gazed at that wicket.

‘How’s that?’ roared all the Remove, even Billy Bunter’s fat squeak joining in the roar.

‘Out!’

‘Well bowled! Oh, well bowled!’

Blundell, like the weary ploughman homeward, plodded his way. He gave Potter a word of warning, passing him going in.

‘Look out for that coffee-coloured little cough-drop!’ Potter looked out, but he looked out in vain. He snicked at the ball where he could have sworn it was; but it could not have been there, for it swiped away his bails the next second. And Potter went bootless home, and was replaced by Fitzgerald. And when Fitzgerald swiped the empty air and his wicket went down, there was a shriek from the Remove.

‘The hat trick! Hurrah!’

Harry Wharton, as he heard his uncle’s deep voice join enthusiastically in the roar of cheering, smiled. He realised that Arthur da Costa had won his way into the good opinion of the colonel at last.

And Da Costa had not finished yet—that wonderful over was not at the end of its surprises—for the fourth batsman went home with a duck’s egg to his credit. And the Fifth Form men looked blue and green. This was the fag team they had been going to hold up to ridicule by an overwhelming and absurd defeat—this was the fag team that they had scornfully refused to consider as real cricketers. Four wickets for nil was the answer of the Remove. That overwhelming victory was gone from the gaze of Blundell & Co. like a beautiful dream. They were actually relieved, and their hearts were lighter, for staying in the rest of the over, without thinking of taking a run.

With Smithy bowling, though he bowled well, the Fifth began to score. Hilton was knocking up runs till there came a sudden yell: ‘Oh, well caught!’

And Arthur da Costa held up the captured ball.

‘Well caught!’ the colonel’s deep voice boomed. ‘Oh, well caught, sir! By gad, well caught!’

Five down for eight—and Da Costa took the ball again. His face was bright, his eyes were glowing. He was living only for the game he played, and playing it at the top of

his wonderful form. When the second hat trick followed, the Remove crowd, and all the Lower School, roared and raved and threw up their caps. And Sixth Form men joined in the cheering. Wingate of the Sixth was seen shouting like a fag, and Colonel Wharton, regardless of the dignity of an old military gentleman, was waving his hat. After that it was evident that the 'rot' had set in with the Fifth, and the innings tailed off dolorously for a total of fifteen. The Remove had won that historic match by twenty runs!

It was a bitter pill for the Fifth to swallow. That cheeky challenge had been justified after all—the Remove had made it good. Blundell could scarcely believe in the result, even when he saw the figures and heard the delirious cheering and yelling of the Remove.

Blundell made a wry grimace as he watched Da Costa, the hero of the match, being chaired by the excited Removites. But the captain of the Fifth was a sportsman. He came over to Harry Wharton and clapped him on the shoulder.

'Good for you,' he said. 'You've pulled it off. I don't think you could do it again; but you've done it! You've got a man that's a giddy miracle, and you've beaten us. Congrats!'

'Thanks!' said Wharton, with a smile. 'We had a lot of luck!'

'The luckfulness was great,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But the cricketfulness of the esteemed Da Costa was terrific.'

At the great celebration in the Rag that followed the victory, Colonel Wharton was a distinguished guest. But it was the boy from the East that the Remove delighted to honour. And when the colonel was leaving he said quietly to his nephew:

'That lad is the right stuff! Something will have to be done for him. He is not going to lose by playing the game. The right stuff, by gad!'

And the colonel's opinion was shared by all the Remove—the boy from the East was the right stuff.

CHAPTER XV

Something for Captain Marker!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

'What—'

'Look!'

Bob pointed through the trees.

Harry Wharton & Co. and Da Costa had stopped to rest a little, after a long tramp through the scented summer woods. It was a glorious day, and a half-holiday for the Greyfriars chums.

All of them were glad to sit down in the ferns and moss under the old trees of Redclyffe Wood, in deep shade, and take their ease for a while. They were twenty feet above a bridle path, and the slope down was almost sheer, where at some distant period a great mass of chalk had fallen away after the rains.

Along the bridle-path below, appearing and disappearing from moment to moment among the trees, a horseman came riding. He was a youngish man, dressed in well-cut riding-clothes.

'I've seen that johnny before,' said Harry Wharton, as his eyes followed the direction of Bob's pointed finger. 'But who—'

There was a quick-drawn breath from Arthur da Costa.

'It is Captain Marker!'

‘Captain Marker!’ muttered Wharton.

He had had only a glimpse of the man before; on the single occasion when Eric Marker had come to Greyfriars he had departed hurriedly, and as the Remove happened to be out of class the juniors had seen him as he went.

‘So he is still hanging about!’ said Frank Nugent. ‘It’s a week since he came to the school. What is he doing here?’

‘Mischief!’ said Johnny Bull, with a grunt.

Wharton watched the man in silence.

This was his enemy, the man who had plotted and schemed to blacken him.

Wharton’s eyes glinted.

At a walking pace the horseman below came nearer and nearer. Wharton glanced down at him again.

‘Look here, you men,’ he said slowly, ‘that rascal is hanging about here for mischief. He’s a thoroughly bad egg. I don’t see how he can do any harm but we jolly well know he will do all he can. What price ragging him?’

There was a chuckle among the juniors.

‘Good egg!’ said Bob Cherry heartily. ‘You have jolly good ideas sometimes, old chap.’

‘The goodness of the egg is terrific,’ grinned Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Wharton watched the rider below.

‘He will pass right underneath us in a couple of minutes,’ he said. ‘We can’t get down this bank, but we can jolly well pelt him from where we are. Get hold of something.’

‘Hear, hear!’

‘But do not show yourself, Wharton,’ said the Eurasian uneasily.

‘Why not?’

‘Marker does not know you by sight. The day he came to the school, he wanted me to point you out to him, and I would not. All he knows of you is that you are in the Remove at Greyfriars. Let him know no more. I tell you he is dangerous—let him not know you.’

Wharton laughed carelessly.

‘Just as you like.’

The horseman was below the juniors now. Da Costa moved a little forward, on the very edge of the steep, chalky bank.

‘Captain Marker!’ he called out.

The rider started and looked up. His eyes glittered at the sight of the olive face of the half-caste. He started as five grinning faces looked down at him from the thickets on the edge of the bank.

‘Fire!’ chuckled Bob Cherry.

Whiz, whiz, whiz! Crash!

There was a startled yell from the horseman as the fusillade started from above. His hat flew off, whirled from his head by a whizzing lump of turf. The horse, as startled as the rider, made a sudden bound, and there was a bump as Captain Marker sprawled in the grassy bridle-path.

‘Goal!’ yelled Bob Cherry.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Captain Marker sprawled in the grass for some moments, his dark face convulsed with fury. The startled horse galloped on down the path and vanished from sight in the wood. The captain staggered to his feet, gripped his riding-whip, and started clambering up the steep bank, with the evident intention of getting to close quarters and taking summary vengeance on the raggers. With gleaming eyes and grating teeth,

the man from India started clambering furiously up the bank.

‘Go it!’ roared Johnny Bull.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

From the top of the steep bank, missiles fairly rained on the clambering man. Half-way up the captain discovered that the bank was too steep for climbing. Pelted mercilessly from above, he spat out savage words, unable to advance farther. A lump of chalk scored a hit on his chin, and he lost his hold and rolled helplessly down the steep slope to the grassy path at the bottom.

‘This way, old bean!’ roared Bob Cherry. ‘Come up again, old top! Let’s see you do that again!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Captain Marker scrambled to his feet again. He brandished his riding-whip furiously at the grinning faces above; but he did not attempt to negotiate the bank a second time. With lumps of chalk still raining on him, he started along the path in the direction the runaway steed had taken, catching up his hat as he went. A roar of laughter from the Removites followed him.

‘Here endeth the first lesson!’ chuckled Bob Cherry. ‘I shouldn’t wonder if he has had enough of Greyfriars now.’

CHAPTER XVI

Borrowed Plumes!

‘FAN me!’ ejaculated Skinner of the Remove.

‘Help!’ gasped Snoop.

Peter Todd put his hand before his eyes, as if dazzled by the glorious vision that had burst suddenly upon him.

It was a vision of William George Bunter in all his glory!

William George Bunter had many failings and drawbacks; but a tendency to dandyism was not included among them. There were well-dressed fellows in the Greyfriars Remove—Lord Mauleverer was rather a dandy, Harry Wharton was always carefully clad, the Bounder was rather dressy. But William George Bunter, so far from being a dandy, had often been reprovved by his Form-master, Mr. Quelch, for slovenliness. Bunter had been known to be sent out of the Remove Form-room to put on a clean collar—even to wash his hands! Bunter generally had baggy knees to his trousers, stickiness on his waistcoat, and shining elbows to his jacket.

According to the Owl, the Bunters were landed people; and according to Skinner, Bunter had brought all the family land to Greyfriars with him, under his finger-nails and round his neck. It was on record that Bunter had once been given a forcible bath in the Remove dormitory; and it was rumoured that on that occasion, all sorts of things had been discovered, such as garments that Bunter had worn in earlier years, and had lost and forgotten.

That was no doubt an exaggeration. But it was certain that the Owl of the Remove had reduced ablutions to a minimum; and that a detective’s eye was not needed to trace on Bunter’s fat countenance what he had had for his last meal.

Hence the amazement of the Removites who saw Bunter issue forth from the House into the sunny quadrangle, dressed to kill.

It was an absolutely new Bunter—almost unrecognisable but for his unmistakable and unforgettable circumference.

The Removites gazed at him. Bunter was newly swept and garnished—his fat face

was spotlessly clean; the keenest eye at Scotland Yard could not have detected what Bunter had had for dinner. His trousers were well-cut and pressed—extremely tight, it is true, looking as if they had been made for a much slimmer fellow, but very handsome trousers. His waistcoat fitted as tight as the skin of a drum; but it was a beautiful waistcoat. His jacket was rather grubby—but it was carefully brushed, and had no crumbs or stickiness on it. His necktie was a bright new one; his collar spotless; his shoes delightful to behold; his silk hat reflected in the sunshine like a mirror, and did not look in the least like a busby as Bunter’s topper generally did. On one of his fat fingers was a ring, with a gleaming ruby in it.

‘My only hat!’ said Peter Todd, in a hushed voice. ‘What’s come over Bunter?’

‘Somebody else’s silk hat!’ said Skinner.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Billy Bunter bestowed a lofty and disdainful blink on the grinning juniors.

‘I say, you fellows—’

‘What does it mean?’ demanded Peter Todd. ‘Have you been asked to take a walk with the Head?’

‘Oh, really, Toddy—’

‘Where did you get that clobber?’ roared Skinner. ‘Whose hat?’

‘Whose necktie?’ howled Snoop. ‘Why, I know whose it is! That’s Nugent’s best necktie!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘And Da Costa’s ring,’ yelled Ogilvy. ‘I remember seeing that Indian chap sporting a ring when he first came here. He chucked it afterwards.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Da Costa lent it to me!’ said Bunter hastily.

‘Does he know?’ inquired Skinner.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Whose topper?’ asked Bolsover major, jerking the silk hat suddenly from Bunter’s head.

‘Ow! Beast! Give me my hat!’ yelled Bunter.

‘Wharton’s hat!’ roared Bolsover major. ‘Wharton’s Sunday hat!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘‘Tain’t!’ yelled Bunter. ‘It’s my own best hat! Give it to me, you beast!’

‘There’s Wharton’s name in it!’ howled Bolsover.

‘Oh! I—I mean, Wharton lent me that hat!’

‘Who lent you the trousers?’ shrieked Skinner.

‘They’re not Johnny Bull’s best trousers, if that’s what you think, Skinner.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’



The Captain thought he had stopped a runaway tank!

‘Whose waistcoat?’ yelled Snoop. ‘I believe I’ve seen that waistcoat on Bob Cherry on state occasions.’

‘Nothing of the kind! Besides, I suppose a pal of mine can lend me a waistcoat if he likes?’

‘Won’t he be surprised to hear that he lent it to you, when he gets it back sticky?’ asked Peter Todd.

‘Beast!’

‘That’s Inky’s cane he’s got under his arm!’ roared Russell.

‘Inky lent me this cane!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘He’s got his own jacket on,’ chuckled Skinner. ‘He couldn’t get any other fellow’s on—that’s the reason. Bet you ten to one in doughnuts that that waistcoat is split up the back and pinned!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Billy Bunter grabbed Wharton’s Sunday hat from Bolsover major, jammed it on his well-oiled head, and rolled onward. The juniors followed him. It was quite a procession down to the gates.

‘I say, you fellows, don’t play the goat!’ exclaimed Bunter peevishly. ‘Haven’t you ever seen a chap well-dressed before?’

‘Not you!’ grinned Skinner.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘But what’s the game, Bunter?’ asked Peter Todd. ‘Where are you going in that style?’

‘Find out!’ retorted Bunter.

‘Let’s go with him,’ suggested Skinner.

Bunter looked alarmed.

‘I say, you fellows, I don’t want you butting in at the bun-shop! You jolly well keep your distance!’

‘The bun-shop!’ repeated Peter Todd. ‘Is all this gorgeous magnificence for the bun-shop?’

‘Certainly not! The fact is, I’m going for a—a ramble in the woods,’ said Bunter.

‘Nice day for a walk, you know. Mind your own business, anyhow! Look here! Sheer off, you beasts!’

Some of the juniors sheered off, laughing, as Bunter reached the gates. But Skinner and Snoop and Bolsover major followed on. They were loafing about that half-holiday with nothing to do, and they found Bunter an entertaining diversion. And they

were quite curious to know what it all meant. Bunter rolled as rapidly as his weight would allow towards Courtfield, and the three grinning juniors walked behind. Bunter accelerated, and Skinner & Co. accelerated. The fat junior blinked round at them in great exasperation.

‘You beasts, sheer off!’ he roared. ‘I’m not taking you with me to the bun-shop!

Besides, I’m not going to the bun-shop!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Billy Bunter rolled on again. He broke into a run, and Skinner & Co. trotted behind. Bunter was puffing and blowing as he came out on the path across Courtfield Common, which was a short cut into the town. Three grinning young rascals trotted behind. Bunter, in the desperate hope of shaking them off, put on a spurt.

Crash!

Bump!

‘Oh, gad!’

‘Yaroooh!’

A man in riding-clothes, with a whip under his arm, had emerged from a path through the trees into the path Bunter was following—just in time to meet Bunter.

Really, Bunter was hardly to blame for the collision.

But it was a serious collision.

Bunter was going at full speed. And Bunter’s charge, with Bunter’s weight behind it, was something like that of a battering-ram.

The man in riding-clothes went spinning, and rolled over. Bunter sat down with a heavy concussion, his silk hat spinning in one direction, his nobby cane in another. Quite winded by the collision, the Owl of the Remove sat and spluttered. Not so the man he had floored. That gentleman leaped up, his dark face convulsed with rage, and gripped his riding-whip savagely. Skinner & Co., as they noted the whip and the savage look on the face of the man who held it, decided at once that the spot was not a healthy one for them, and they departed at great speed, leaving William George Bunter to it.

CHAPTER XVII

Whose Hat!

‘GROOOGH!’

‘You clumsy young fool!’

‘Oooch!’

‘You young rascal!’

‘Gr-r-r-r-r!’

Bunter spluttered breathlessly. The dark-complexioned man in riding-clothes came towards him, his eyes glittering under his dark brows. Captain Marker was not a good-tempered man at the best of times, and on this sunny summer’s afternoon he was particularly bad-tempered. His experience at the hands of Harry Wharton & Co. in Redclyffe Woods might have annoyed even a good-humoured man. And since then the captain had been in chase of his runaway horse. On the open stretches of Courtfield Common the runaway had led the captain up and down and round about, still keeping at a safe distance, till Eric Marker gave it up at last in despair.

Had the captain succeeded in recapturing the steed, certainly the animal would have suffered severely at his hands. But he had not succeeded, and the runaway was grazing peacefully at a distance, with one wary eye open for the discomfited rider.

Captain Marker, seething with rage, tramped across the common towards the road, with the intention of walking into Courtfield and getting a taxicab there. And then had happened his sudden meeting with William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove. It was no wonder that the captain's face was black and savage as he approached Bunter, whip in hand. What he could not give to Harry Wharton & Co., and what he could not give to the exasperating runaway, he could bestow on this fat fool who had run into him and knocked him over. And that was Captain Marker's intention. There was solace in the thought of Bunter yelling under the whip of the captain. But that thought, which was so solacing to the gentleman from India, had no attractions whatever for Billy Bunter.

He sat and gasped, feeling as if he could not have moved at that moment to save his life. But as he caught the expression on Marker's face he found that he could move, quite quickly.

Before the enraged captain was at close quarters Billy Bunter made a sudden bound, and just escaped the cut of the whip as he bounded.

'Ow!' gasped Bunter.

'You young rascal!' hissed the captain. 'You clumsy young idiot! I—I'll—I'll tan your hide, you young scoundrel!'

'Whoop!'

Bunter bounded again. It was really a wonderful bound, considering the weight that Bunter had to lift.

Again he just escaped the lash.

He plunged headlong into furze and hawthorns, forgetful of the silk hat and cane on the path—forgetful of everything but his wild desire to escape that lashing whip and the furious man who wielded it.

Fear is said to lend wings. It seemed to lend Bunter not merely wings, but planes. He fairly flew.

'Stop!' yelled the captain.

'Ow! Oh! Ooooh!'

Captain Marker, rushing in chase, fortunately caught his foot in a trailing root in his haste, and went sprawling headlong. Among the hawthorns was a liberal growth of nettles and thistles, and the captain found them as he fell. The discovery did not please him; the remarks that streamed from his lips almost turned the atmosphere blue. He scrambled up again, more infuriated than ever.

But Bunter had gained a minute—of which he had not lost a second. He burst through the hawthorns into the open common and ran for his life. Fellows in the Remove supposed that Bunter could not have run with a man-eating tiger behind him. He had too much to carry. But Bunter could run on occasion, as he demonstrated now. Any fellow witnessing his performance at this moment would have admitted that Bunter had a good chance for the school mile if he kept up the same form. His fat little legs fairly twinkled as he flew.

Captain Marker, bursting savagely through the hawthorns in pursuit, found Bunter fading into the horizon across the wide common.

He made a few strides in pursuit, but slackened down and stopped. His long chase of the runaway horse had tired the captain, who was never in very good condition, anyway. Bunter had a good start, and was going strong, and the captain gave it up. He brandished the riding-whip at Bunter, and hurled after him some verbal expressions that he had doubtless learned in India, of an expressiveness in accord with the sultriness of the climate. Then he tramped savagely back to the path, leaving the Owl of the Remove to his own devices.

On the path lay the cane and the silk hat that Bunter had dropped when he collided with the captain.

Marker picked up the cane and twirled it in the air and sent it spinning to a great distance, where it dropped into deep grass and vanished. It was unlikely that Hurree Janset Ram Singh would ever see that nobby cane again. Then he picked up the silk hat, with the intention of knocking in the crown, and then sending it after the cane. And then he paused suddenly, and stood staring into the hat with a stare of astonishment and dismay.

‘H. Wharton.’

That name, stamped on the lining of the hat, stared him in the face, and it seemed to petrify the captain.

‘Great gad!’ he ejaculated. ‘So that was Wharton! If I had only known—’

He gritted his teeth.

If he had known that that fat junior was Wharton, there and then had occurred his opportunity to become acquainted with him, to talk to him and ‘size him up’; to ascertain whether he was a fellow to listen to evil counsels, to follow an evil example and pave the way to his own ruin. If he had only known!

He tramped through the hawthorns again, and stared across the common. But the fat junior was out of sight now beyond some grassy fold of the wide common. It was too late.

‘Hang him! Anyhow, I know him now! I should recognise him anywhere!’ he muttered. ‘That’s something! I cannot go to the school now that that rascal Da Costa has turned against me! It might have taken me a long time even to get to know the boy by sight, and until I know him nothing can be done or even attempted. After all, I have gained something.’

Bang!

Wharton’s best hat crumpled up under a savage blow from a clenched fist, and the captain tossed the wreck of it into the bushes. Then he tramped away towards Courtfield, with a black and moody brow.

CHAPTER XVIII

What’s in a Name?

‘OH, dear!’

Billy Bunter gasped.

He had run and run till his little fat legs were incapable of further exertion. Even had the angry gentleman from India been close at hand, with riding-whip upraised, Bunter could not have taken another step. He had come out of the common upon the road to Courtfield, about half a mile from the town, and he sank down—or, rather, collapsed—upon one of the long wooden benches which a thoughtful rural district council had placed at intervals along the road. Never had a seat been so welcome to William George Bunter. That hard, wooden bench was as welcome as a bed of roses. ‘Ow! Wow! Oh dear! Beast!’

Bunter was quite winded. Perspiration poured in glistening streams down his fat face. He was moist and sticky all over. And he was no longer in the gorgeous state in which he had walked out of Greyfriars that afternoon. Wharton’s hat was gone. Inky’s cane was gone. Nugent’s collar had jerked loose from its stud. Nugent’s best necktie hung loose from one end. Johnny Bull’s best trousers were thick with dust and scratched by thorns. Bob Cherry’s waistcoat, already slit up the back to enable it to go round

Bunter, had finished slitting up to the neck.

Bunter's wild exertions had told severely upon his borrowed plumes, and he was in a dusty, dishevelled, and draggled state, as slovenly to look at as if he had kept to his own wardrobe.

'Ow!' groaned Bunter. 'Beast!'

Luck had been against William George Bunter.

That afternoon he had gone forth to conquer. More than once, when he had dropped in at the bun-shop in Courtfield, he had noticed—he could not help noticing—that the golden-haired young lady who handed out tea and cakes had glanced at him and smiled.

Full of the belief that he had made a conquest, the Owl of the Remove had sallied forth that day in his best—or, rather, in several other fellows' best—to fascinate the young lady at the bun-shop.

Whether he would have succeeded was perhaps doubtful. But there was no doubt about it now. Even Bunter had to admit that, at the present moment, he did not look fascinating.

He looked—as he felt—a wreck!

Bunter sat and gasped for breath in a dismal, pessimistic mood. His only comfort was that he still had in his pocket a ten-shilling note that he had borrowed from Lord Mauleverer, and which he had intended to expend at the bun-shop. It still remained to be expended; and ten shillings' worth of tuck would be a comfort.

Bunter leaned back on the bench and rested. He heard, without heeding, the footsteps of a pedestrian on the road.

But a sudden ejaculation made him look up.

He jumped.

'Oh, dear! Here, you keep off!' he gasped.

Captain Marker stared at him in happy surprise. Striding along the road towards Courtfield, he had noticed the dusty figure sprawling on the wayside seat, and as he came nearer he recognised the fat junior whose hat he had smashed and left in the bushes. His dark, angry face brightened at this unexpected stroke of luck.

He stopped directly in front of Bunter, who blinked at him through his big spectacles in sheer terror.

Escape was impossible.

He was within reach of the captain's grasp if he stirred; and he could only sit and blink at the man, like a fat rabbit fascinated by a snake.

But, to his amazement and relief, there was no anger in the dark face of the stranger now; no threatening motion of the riding-whip.

The man was smiling.

'So we've met again, my dear boy,' said the captain genially. Bunter could not believe his ears.

'Eh! What? Yes,' he stammered.

'I'm glad of it! I'm afraid I was a little put out when you crashed into me a little while ago,' said Captain Marker. 'I apologise.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

He could not understand this change of temper in the least. But he could understand that he was no longer in danger of a terrific thrashing.

'The fact is, you rather winded me,' said the captain, smiling, 'and perhaps we get a little short of temper in India; a hot climate, you know. I hope I did not alarm you, my dear lad.'

'Oh! No! Not at all!' articulated Bunter.

‘You have lost your hat,’ went on the captain. ‘I hope you will allow me to replace it. There are some good shops in Courtfield, I believe, and I shall insist upon your allowing me to buy you a new hat.’

‘Oh!’ gasped Bunter.

He almost wondered whether he had fallen asleep on that wayside seat, and was dreaming this.

Captain Marker took a seat on the bench beside him.

‘A little fatigued, what?’ he asked, with a smile.

‘Eh? Oh! Yes!’

‘I shall never forgive myself for having lost my temper,’ said the captain. ‘Had I known who you were, of course, I should have been only too glad to meet you—even in the rather informal manner in which we met—ha, ha!’

‘Oh!’

‘I am glad of this opportunity of offering my apologies, and shaking my old friend’s nephew by the hand,’ said the captain.

Bunter could only blink. This seemed to imply that the man knew one of his uncles.

‘Perhaps you guess who I am, Wharton?’ added the captain.

Bunter jumped.

The fellow’s conduct had already been inexplicable. Now he called Bunter by another fellow’s name. The only explanation was that he was a little out of his mind. Bunter cast a longing blink round. But there was no escape—he felt that if he moved the man beside him on the seat would clutch him. Bunter could only hope that he would continue calm. If he was a lunatic, he seemed a good-tempered and peaceable one, at the present moment.

‘You are surprised?’ asked the captain.

‘Eh? Yes! Not’

‘You did not think I knew your name?’

‘Oh! Nunno!’

‘Your resemblance to my old friend and comrade-in-arms, Colonel Wharton, naturally struck me at once,’ said the captain.

‘Oh, crumbs!’

‘And, in point of fact, I saw the name in the hat you left behind,’ said Captain Marker.

‘Oh!’

‘Had I guessed that I should meet you again this afternoon, I should certainly have brought the hat along with me,’ said the captain. ‘I regret very much now that I did not do so.’

Bunter grinned.

The man was not a lunatic, after all. He was some fellow who knew Harry Wharton’s uncle, and supposed that Bunter was Wharton, because of the name in the hat. The explanation was simple enough.

Naturally, Bunter did not think of setting the captain’s mistake right. He did not want the fellow to lay the riding-whip round him, instead of grinning at him in this friendly manner.

Captain Marker was watching the fat face intently, with sidelong glances. He was a little puzzled by the changing expressions on Bunter’s face. But he thought he guessed the cause.

‘I am afraid, Wharton, that you have been led into holding a somewhat poor opinion of me,’ he said. ‘I fear that you have been deceived and deluded by a young rascal whom I befriended, and who has repaid my kindness by the grossest ingratitude. You guess, of course, that I am Captain Marker?’

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

He had not guessed anything of the kind. He turned his big glasses on the captain in a stare of amazement and uneasiness.

'I—I——'

'I fear that that treacherous boy Da Costa has represented me to you as your enemy, Harry. I will prove that it is false. You will give me a hearing, I am sure?'

'Yes,' gasped Bunter.

CHAPTER XIX

Under False Colours!

'HARRY—You don't mind my calling you Harry—'

'Not at all!' stammered Bunter.

He did not mind, as a matter of fact, whether the captain called him Harry, or Hubert, or Hildebrand, or anything else, so long as he did not discover that he had, so to speak, the wrong pig by the ear. That was the important point, from Bunter's angle of view.

'Well, Harry, you must hear my explanation,' said the captain. 'Probably you had never heard of me till you met that young rascal Da Costa; but we are, as a matter of fact, distantly related, both of us being connections of the late Mr. Cortolvin, of Calcutta.'

'Are we?' gasped Bunter.

'Has not your uncle told you so?'

'Nunno!'

'But you have seen your uncle since Da Costa came to Greyfriars?' exclaimed the captain.

'Oh, yes!'

'Has he told you nothing about Mr. Cortolvin?'

'Not a word!'

Bunter's uncle certainly would have found it difficult to tell him anything about a Calcutta gentleman of whom he had never heard.

But the captain, of course, was thinking of Colonel Wharton, and he was a little perplexed.

He could only conclude that Colonel Wharton had not considered it advisable to tell his nephew of the terms of Mr. Cortolvin's will. Yet that was not in accord with what Da Costa had said; he had had the impression from the Eurasian that Harry Wharton knew the whole story.

He watched Bunter's face with almost fierce intentness.

'You may be frank with me, Harry,' he said, in his softest voice. 'I repeat that we are relations, and I am your friend. You believe me?'

'Oh! Yes!'

'The boy Da Costa is a young rascal!' said the captain. 'I found him at a school in Lucknow, poor and despised; and as he seemed to be a clever lad I resolved to give him a chance at a Public School in England. But I fear that his nature is incurably treacherous. From what I hear, he has ingratiated himself with your uncle, Colonel Wharton, by telling him untruths about me and prejudicing your uncle against me. I hope, my dear lad, that you will be on your guard against this wretched half-caste.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. 'Yes!'

'He has told me that you are friends,' said the captain. 'I was sorry to hear it; he is no

friend for you, Harry. I hope you will take my advice and be on your guard against the young rascal.'

'Oh! Certainly!'

'And I hope you will learn to trust me, and regard me as your best friend,' said the captain.

'Certainly!' gasped Bunter. His cue now was to agree with everything the captain might say—until he could get away from that friendly gentleman.

'You may need a friend,' said the captain slowly. 'Schoolboys are often in little difficulties that they do not care to confide to parents or guardians. I remember that from my own school-days.'

'Oh, yes, rather!' agreed Bunter.

'Sometimes money runs out,' said the captain, with a smile; 'and a letter home does not always produce the desired effect.'

'What-ho!' said Bunter, with deep feeling. He had been there, as it were, many times. The captain breathed hard. Was this fat bird going to fall into the snare as easily as all this?

'My dear Harry, if you should ever be in any such little difficulty, remember you have a friend in me,' he said.

'Oh!' said Bunter.

He blinked at the captain with a new interest.

The greed in his fat face was not to be mistaken. Captain Marker smiled—a very unpleasant smile.

'Come, come!' he said. 'I dare wager that you are short of pocket-money at the present moment.'

'I'm down to my last ten bob,' said Bunter, 'and I had to borrow that off Mauly. I've written home, but there's nothing doing.'

'Then you must let me stand your friend.'

Captain Marker took out a little note-case and counted from it five pound notes.

Bunter could scarcely believe his eyes. He could scarcely believe his fat fingers when they closed on the little bunch of currency notes that the captain pressed into his hand.

'Oh!' he gasped. 'I—I—I say—'

'Say nothing, my dear lad!' said the captain pleasantly. 'Only remember that I am your friend, and desire to prove it. Now shall we walk into Courtfield, and buy that hat? You do not want to return to school without one.'

Bunter jumped up with alacrity.

Captain Marker's company was no longer alarming or obnoxious. Bunter was beginning quite to like him.

'Let's!' he exclaimed.

'And anything else you may want,' said the captain, with a genial grin. 'What about a round of shopping?'

Bunter's eyes danced behind his spectacles. This was better than fascinating the young lady at the bun-shop.

'I say—' he began.

'Well, my boy?'

'We might drop in somewhere to tea after we've done a bit of shopping,' suggested Bunter.

'The very thing!' said the captain. He took a cigarette from a case and lighted it. 'No good offering you one of these, I suppose?'

'Yes, rather!' answered Bunter, with emphasis.

'I mustn't let you break any of the rules of your school while you are in my company,

Harry.'

Bunter winked, a fat wink.

'That's all right,' he answered. 'Fellows ain't supposed to smoke, but they do a lot of things they ain't supposed to do, sometimes. The fact is, I'm rather a bit of a dog.'

'A—a what?'

'A bit of a dog,' explained Bunter. 'Nothing "pi" about me! Never could stand pi.

Give me a smoke.'

Captain Marker presented his case. Bunter selected a cigarette, and lighted it with a swaggering air.

The captain's eyes gleamed.

It was more than he had dared to hope. He had not had the faintest idea that Harry Wharton was like this!

Bunter coughed, and grinned at the intent face of the man from India.

'Ripping!' he said. 'Topping! Of course, a man has to keep these things dark at school! But why not kick over the traces a bit sometimes?'

'Why not?' agreed the captain.

'The fact is, I'm rather rorty at times,' said Bunter.

'Oh!' ejaculated the captain.

'Awfully rorty, when I get going,' said Bunter. 'You should see me in the hols sometimes. Painting the town red, you can bet!'

'I can see we are going to be friends,' said the captain; and he walked off towards Courtfield with William George Bunter.

CHAPTER XX

Late Hours!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. arrived at Greyfriars in time for call-over, a little tired, but quite merry and bright after their long ramble through the woods and lanes and over the chalky downs. They noted that there was a general smile among the Removites, as they joined their Form in Hall; and wondered what was the cause. They noted also that Bunter was not present—a fact that became known to Mr. Quelch, when the Remove master called the roll. Mr. Quelch repeated the name of Bunter, crescendo, but there was no answering 'adsum' from the ranks of the Remove. And Mr. Quelch looked thunder and marked W. G. Bunter as absent. William George, apparently, was making a day of it.

After roll-call the Famous Five of the Remove found that they were the centre of smiling faces when they went to the Remove passage. It was clear that some joke was on, and they rather restively inquired what the merry dickens it was, anyhow.

'Seen Bunter?' grinned Peter Todd.

'Bunter! No; he's missed call-over,' said Harry Wharton. 'We haven't happened on him out of gates. I fancy he went to Courtfield.'

'If you'd seen him you'd have been dazzled!' chuckled Peter. 'No end of a dandy!' chortled Skinner. 'Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like Bunter!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Gammon!' said the Famous Five, with one voice.

'Honest Injun! And he had on a clean collar.'

'Draw it mild!'

'And a nobby silk hat.'

'Whose?' asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Yours.'

'Wh-a-at?' Wharton ceased to laugh quite suddenly, while all the other fellows shrieked.

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Bob Cherry. 'The fat burglar! It will look more like a busby when he brings it home.'

'And his waistcoat!' grinned Skinner.

'Somebody else's waistcoat?' shrieked Bob.

'Yes, rather.'

'Whose?'

'Yours.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled a crowd of Removites, at seeing Robert Cherry reduced to sudden gravity.

'And his trousers!' chuckled Skinner. 'I'm afraid you'll find them rather burst next time you want them, Bull.'

'My trousers!' roared Johnny Bull.

'Your best Sunday bags, old chap.'

'Why, the fat villain! I—I—I'll——' Words failed Johnny Bull.

'He had Inky's cane, too,' yelled Snoop.

'The terrific and execrable rascal!' ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'And Da Costa's ruby ring—'

'Oh!' exclaimed the Eurasian.

'And I think it was Nugent's necktie—'

'My necktie!' exclaimed Frank.

'The fat villain!' roared Johnny Bull. 'That's why he was so anxious for us to go out of gates this afternoon.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'll burst him!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'The burstfulness will be terrific!'

'But what was the silly owl dressing up for?' asked Harry Wharton. 'I think he was going to the Courtfield bun-shop; but there's no need to dress up to go there.'

'I fancy I've spotted it,' grinned Skinner. 'There's a beautiful young lady at the bun-shop, with golden hair at two-and-six a bottle. I've seen her grin at Bunter—I know she's often wondered where he put so much tuck, and why he didn't burst all over the bun-shop——'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'But he had bad luck,' added Skinner sorrowfully. 'We walked after him, and he ran for it, and biffed into a bad-tempered gent—and we left him to it. I think Bunter's clothes will have been damaged by the whip the man had in his paw. We didn't stay to see—he looked very cross, and he might have given us some. We were willing to let Bunter have it.'

'Quite!' chuckled Snoop.

'I dare say that's why he hasn't come in for call-over,' added Skinner cheerily. 'That bloke looked as if he was going to make mincemeat of poor old Bunter. I dare say he left him for dead.'

'If there's anything left of him, I'll leave it for dead, if he's had my trousers,' said Johnny Bull ferociously.

'And my best hat!' exclaimed Wharton wrathfully.

'Your hat right enough—I saw the name in it,' chuckled Bolsover major.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Evidently the Removites were taking Bunter's borrowed plumes as a screaming joke.

But it did not seem quite so funny to the owners of the property that Bunter had so recklessly annexed.

The Famous Five proceeded to look for the articles in question, and found that they were undoubtedly missing; and Arthur da Costa's ring was missing from No. 1 Study. So there was no doubt that what they had heard was true; and six juniors waited for William George Bunter to come in, with the intention of scalping him as soon as he arrived.

But Bunter was slow to arrive.

He had not come in when the Remove went to prep; and after prep Peter Todd looked in at No. 1 Study with a rather serious face.

'Bunter's not come in yet,' he said.

'Perhaps he knows what he'll get when he does,' remarked Wharton.

'I can't make it out,' said Peter. 'It's only an hour now to dorm, and Bunter will get into a frightful row if he's out after bed-time.'

'Can't be at the bun-shop all this time,' said Frank Nugent.

'Of course not; it's closed hours ago. I say, do you fellows think something may have happened to him?'

'What could have happened?'

'Blessed if I know,' confessed Peter. 'But it's not like Bunter to stay out like this. I don't catch on at all.'

When the Removites went down to the Rag, Bunter was the general topic. He had not come in, and others beside Peter Todd were beginning to wonder whether something had happened to him. Mr. Quelch was seen to go down to the big doorway and peer out into the summer evening, and walk back to his study, with a grave and perturbed air. Bunter was one of the most troublesome fellows in Mr. Quelch's Form, being the laziest and most obtuse member of the Lower Fourth, but he was not in the habit of giving trouble of this kind. It was rare indeed for the fat Owl to cut call-over and stay out of gates after lock-up. Probably Mr. Quelch was beginning to wonder uneasily whether there had been some accident.

The big door was open to let in the cool air of the evening. The day had been hot. A group of Remove fellows gathered there to look out for Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the sound of a distant tinkling bell was wafted across the quad. 'That's somebody.'

'Bunter at last!' grinned Vernon-Smith.

'No accident, after all, anyhow,' said Peter Todd, as a fat figure and a pair of large spectacles loomed up in the summer dusk.

'No such luck!' remarked Skinner.

'Bunter!' There was sudden silence as Mr. Quelch appeared. 'Bunter, you have returned, then?'

'Yes, sir,' said Bunter.

He blinked at the Remove master. Mr. Quelch's stern eyes fixed on him with a look that might have daunted a bolder youth than Bunter. But the Owl of the Remove seemed quite undaunted.

'Bunter, how dare you remain out of gates till this hour?' exclaimed the Remove master sternly.

'I'm sorry, sir. I couldn't help it,' explained Bunter. 'I got into the wrong train.'

'What?'

'I—I was afraid I might be late back from Courtfield, sir, so I took my ticket to Friardale,' said Bunter. 'I had lots of time, sir. Only a fool of a porter pointed out the wrong train, sir, and, being short-sighted, I didn't find it out till it had started, and I

was booked for Lantham, sir.'

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

'I've only just got back from Lantham, sir,' said Bunter. 'I took the next train back, sir. I'm awfully sorry!'

Mr. Quelch gazed at him.

The explanation was a plausible one. Bunter was exactly the fellow to get into the wrong train, and to find out his mistake after it had started. He had in fact a genius for such things.

'Well,' said Mr. Quelch at last. Then he sniffed. 'Bunter, you have been smoking!'

'Oh, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'There is a distinct smell of tobacco about you, Bunter!' exclaimed the Remove master.

'A lot of nasty racing men got into the carriage, sir,' said Bunter. 'They were smoking all the time, sir, though I told them it wasn't a smoking carriage. I was very nearly sick, sir. I feel quite ill now.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Quelch.

His glance dwelt upon William George Bunter searchingly and suspiciously. Bunter's explanations were prompt and plausible—perhaps a little too prompt and a little too plausible. Had it been Skinner or the Bounder, Mr. Quelch, no doubt, would have known what to think. But it seemed scarcely possible to suspect the fat Owl of having gone on a disreputable 'spree'. Still, Mr. Quelch was extremely searching in his look. 'Very well, Bunter,' he said at length. 'I will refer to this matter again later.'

'Yes, sir,' said Bunter.

Mr. Quelch returned to his study, with a very dubious expression on his face; and William George Bunter rolled into the Rag, grinning, where he was immediately the cynosure of all eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

The Rorty Dog!

BILLY BUNTER blinked round at the Remove fellows complacently.

He was receiving a great deal of attention. All the Form, for once, were interested in Bunter. That, of course, was exactly as it should have been. For once, the Owl of the Remove was receiving the limelight that was always his due.

'I say, you fellows—' began Bunter.

'You podgy pirate!' said the captain of the Remove. 'You've been borrowing our clobber right and left.'

'Oh, really, you fellows!' exclaimed Bunter. 'I hope you don't think I'd borrow your old clothes.'

'But you did!' roared Bob.

'Oh, cheese it!' said Bunter. 'If I've got anything that belongs to you men, give it a name.'

The juniors stared at Bunter. With the exception of Arthur da Costa's ring, his borrowed plumes were entirely gone. He had returned to Greyfriars better dressed than he had ever been seen before; and there was a striking newness about all his garments. The mystery was absolutely inexplicable. Apparently the Owl of the Remove had gone out in borrowed clothes, and had bought himself a new outfit to replace them. The cut of the clothes, and the quality of the material, showed that he had gone to the school's outfitter's in Courtfield, and made his purchases regardless

of expense. That the school outfitter would let Bunter run up an account of twenty pounds or so, without written authority from a master, was in the highest degree improbable. That Bunter had paid cash for the goods was not merely improbable, but impossible. So the mystery was very deep.

‘Where did you get all that clobber?’ asked Bob Cherry at last.

‘Oh, I thought I’d drop in and get myself a new outfit,’ said Bunter carelessly.

‘Making hay while the sun shines, you know.’

‘Eh? What do you mean by that?’

‘Oh! Nothing,’ said Bunter hastily. ‘If you think I’ve made a new friend and let him stand me these things you’re making a mistake. Nothing of the kind, of course.’

‘My only hat!’

‘Where did you get the tin?’ shrieked Peter Todd.

‘Oh, really, Toddy! You remember I told you I was expecting a postal-order,’ said Bunter. ‘Well, it came.’

‘A postal-order for about twenty pounds?’

‘Exactly!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Had it come when you were dunning Mauly for a loan this afternoon?’ chuckled Hazeldene.

‘I believe Mauleverer lent me a trifle,’ said Bunter, with dignity. ‘I don’t need it, as it happens, and I want to see Mauly to square.’

‘Well, my hat!’ ejaculated Skinner. ‘Bunter squaring a loan! What ass said the age of miracles was past?’

‘Oh, really, Skinner—’

‘What have you done with our clobber, you fat frump?’ demanded Johnny Bull.

‘I don’t know anything about your clobber,’ answered Bunter disdainfully. ‘Don’t worry me about your cheap old things! Have a smoke?’

‘What?’



‘Cigarette, old chap?’ Bunter asked the astounded Wharton

Bunter drew from his pocket a handsome, evidently expensive, gold cigarette-case, opened it, and presented it to the general view. It was full of an expensive brand of Turkish cigarettes. The Remove fellows gazed at it blankly. The possession of such an article was enough to earn Bunter a severe caning; but that was not all. The case must have cost several pounds at least; and the smokes it contained were expensive. Unless William George Bunter had found the purse of Fortunatus during his ramblings that

afternoon, there really was no accounting for these wonders.

‘Where did you get that, Bunter?’ Peter Todd almost gasped.

‘Oh, a friend gave it to me!’ said Bunter carelessly. ‘Any of you fellows care for a smoke?’

‘You footling ass!’

‘Oh, really, Wharton—’

‘Put that thing away before a prefect sees it, you thumping chump!’ growled Johnny Bull.

‘Who cares for prefects?’ jeered Bunter. ‘Who cares for masters, if you come to that? I don’t!’

‘You burbling bandersnatch—’

‘Oh, rats!’ said Bunter. ‘I’ll tell you fellows what! Next half-holiday come along to the Three Fishers with me. That place up the river, you know. You can have a jolly good time there. I’ll stand a car, and the smokes, and a whisky-and-soda, if you like.’

‘A what?’ yelled Bob Cherry.

‘Whisky-and-soda.’

‘Ye gods!’ There was a yell in the Rag.

Bunter gave the yelling juniors an angry and disdainful blink.

‘I say, you fellows—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘I can jolly well tell you I’ve had a high old time!’ snorted Bunter. ‘I’ve been round the town, I can tell you. I can tell you I’m rather a dog when I get going.’

‘Do you mean rather a hog?’ asked Peter Todd.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘No, I don’t!’ roared Bunter. ‘You fellows are a lot of pi duffers! You don’t know what life is. I’ll bet you’ve never been rorty, Peter.’

‘Rorty!’ gasped Peter. ‘Nunno, I can’t remember ever having been rorty!’

‘The rortiness of our esteemed selves is not terrific!’ chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bunter sneered.

‘Well, I’m the man to show you round the town, when you want to see life! I can tell you that when I get going I’m a rorty dog!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘If any of you fellows want to see life, just give me the tip,’ said Bunter. ‘Only too glad to oblige, you know.’

‘Oh, fan me!’ gasped Skinner.

‘Hold me, somebody!’ moaned Bob Cherry. ‘Oh, my ribs!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

The door of the Rag opened, and Wingate of the Sixth looked in. It was bed-time for the Remove. The cigarette-case disappeared into Bunter’s pocket as if by magic. It seemed that he did, after all, care for prefects—when a prefect was in the offing.

‘Dorm!’ said Wingate laconically.

And the Remove marched off to their dormitory, more interested than ever in William George Bunter. Something had happened to Bunter—that was clear. He was in possession of funds—remarkable funds! He had been playing the giddy ox that was certain. He had been taking a considerable stride on the way to getting sacked from Greyfriars—not a desirable destination, had Bunter thought it over. But thinking was not in Bunter’s line. Bunter’s genial propensities had hitherto been restrained by a dearth of cash. Now he had plenty of cash he was coming out, as it were.

The Remove had fancied that they knew every kind of an idiot William George

Bunter was; but he had still one more surprise for them. And Bunter as a 'rorty dog' took the Remove by storm; and it was a hilarious Lower Fourth that marched off to the dormitory.

CHAPTER XXII

The Mystery of Billy Bunter!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER looked a little off colour the next morning. Possibly he had overdone the smokes on his day out. A rorty dog, of course, had to expect that 'next-dayish' sort of feeling in the morning. But Bunter was peeved. He ate only enough for two at breakfast, so it was clear that the wild excitement of a rorty dog had affected his appetite.

In the Form-room that morning he was peevish and moody, and rather sickly to the view.

It was possible that, for a time, he rather repented him of his rorty doggishness. But that passed off. After dinner—having recovered from the effects of his doggishness—Bunter was in high feather.

Of Captain Marker, and his meeting with that designing gentleman, he said no word. It was difficult for William George Bunter to keep a secret; but he realised very clearly that he had to keep this secret. His new and amazing prosperity was founded upon the fact that Captain Marker had taken him for Harry Wharton. But that Marker, believing him to be Wharton, was seeking to undermine his character, to lead him into rascally ways, with destruction marked out for him, Bunter did not understand, and did not dream of suspecting.

Bunter's view was that Captain Marker was a jolly good fellow, as generous as they make them, and that Wharton was a fool not to have sought out the captain and made a friend of him. With a friend like that staying in the neighbourhood of the school, a fellow could have a good time—a ripping time—a glorious time; could be, in fact, a rorty dog.

Bunter blessed the circumstances that he had been wearing Wharton's hat that eventful afternoon. Had the captain seen the initials on the inside of Bunter's collar, he might have taken him for Frank Nugent. But he had not seen the inside of Bunter's collar; he had only seen the inside of Bunter's hat. Bunter blessed the borrowed plumes in which he had gone forth to conquer; blessed even the chivvying of Skinner & Co., which had led to his meeting with Captain Marker, and his profitable acquaintance with that gentleman.

Bunter had had a great time. The captain's munificence was unbounded. The more greed the fat junior had shown, the more the captain had been pleased. Every bad quality that Bunter displayed made the captain feel more and more certain of success in his scheme for the downfall of Harry Wharton.

Bunter had stood himself a new 'rig'. He had fed gloriously at the Courtfield bun-shop, and made glad eyes through his big spectacles at the smiling young lady there—who had smiled more than ever, doubtless at the weird effect of glad eyes through the medium of a large pair of glasses. After which Bunter had fallen in gleefully with the captain's suggestion of a 'hundred up', and he had gone in a car up to the Three Fishers—a resort which was severely out of bounds for Greyfriars men.

Bunter, however, cared little for school bounds on the rare occasions when he had a chance to be rorty. He had played billiards with the captain, and won his money easily—a circumstance which did not make him suspicious, but only made him feel

what a ripping billiards player he was. He had nearly given himself away by telling the captain about the magnificent billiards-room at Bunter Court, but fortunately remembered in time that his identity had undergone a change.

After that glorious jamboree, Bunter had felt a little uneasiness as to what might happen when he got back late for call-over, almost late for dormitory. But his kind friend, the captain, had suggested a line of defence—and the falsehoods he had suggested had been gobbled up so greedily by the fatuous Owl, that the captain's opinion of him was more than confirmed.

A fellow who was ready to take all he could get from a stranger, to break the school rules recklessly, to smoke, and play billiards for money at a forbidden resort, and to tell falsehoods to account for his absence when he got back to school—that was the kind of fellow the captain had hoped to find Harry Wharton to be—but the kind of fellow he had hardly dared to dream that Wharton would be. Really, it seemed hardly a matter for scruples, to get this unpleasant young blackguard kicked out of Greyfriars.

All the captain's motives were lost on Bunter. He only knew that Marker was treating him in this generous way because he believed him to be Wharton, and for that reason he wanted Marker to go on believing that he was Wharton. So long as the captain believed so Bunter was going to lead the merry life of a fat pig in clover.

That afternoon Bunter was beaming. He had an appointment to meet his new friend again on Saturday afternoon. There was a plan of going to the races in a car, of meeting some sporting fellows and having a high old time. It was a blissful anticipation to Bunter. That it meant the sack from the school if he was found out, he hardly reflected at all. He was accustomed to wriggling out of scrapes by the aid of his wonderful inventive powers; and had he thought the matter out, no doubt he would have relied upon his remarkable gifts as an Ananias to see him through. But, as a matter of fact, he did not think the matter out—mental exertion of any sort did not appeal to Bunter. He was going to be a rorty dog, and have a glorious time, and that was enough for him.

Meanwhile, the affair of Bunter's borrowed plumes, and the total loss of those borrowed plumes, did not worry anyone but the owners of the property that was missing. Bunter, finding that the captain was willing to foot the bill, had done himself well and expensively at the school outfitter's, and had left the discarded clothes at that establishment.

It was a matter of no moment to Bunter. But it was a matter of some moment to the juniors to whom the trousers, the waistcoat, the shoes, and the other things, belonged. After class that day they tackled Bunter once more upon the subject, much to the fat junior's annoyance.

Bunter promptly denied having borrowed the clothes, and further asserted that he did not know what had become of them, rather unfortunately adding that the trousers had been too tight, anyhow, and that the waistcoat a rotten thing that had split up the back.

'But where are they?' demanded Wharton. 'You seem to have got yourself a lot of new clobber, goodness knows how. What did you do with the others?'

'I never had them,' explained Bunter; 'and they're not worth worrying about, anyhow. The trousers burst.'

'My best bags!' roared Johnny Bull.

'If you think I'd be found dead in your trousers, Bull—'

'You'll be found dead in your own, if you don't hand over mine!' hooted Johnny Bull.

'I say, you fellows, this sort of thing is rather sordid, you know,' said Bunter. 'I told

them to chuck the old things away. I couldn't be bothered with them! There! Look here, I'll pay for them!

'Oh, my hat!'

'Pip-pip-pay for them!' ejaculated Bob Cherry dazedly.

'My only esteemed hat!'

'Certainly!' Out came Bunter's expensive note-case. 'How much did you give for your silk hat, Wharton?' asked the fat junior derisively. 'Ten-and-six?'

'Never mind how much I gave for it,' said the captain of the Remove quietly. 'If you had the money, we'd certainly make you pay for the things, you fat rascal. But I'd rather know where that money came from before I touch any of it.'

'It's mine!' roared Bunter.

'You were stony yesterday—'

'My postal-order came—'

'Oh, cheese it, you ass!'

'I mean, I had a registered letter from my pater!' explained Bunter. 'That's what I really meant to say. Full of notes! See?'

'Not much difference between a postal-order and a registered letter full of notes!' remarked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

'Exactly! I suppose you can take a fellow's word.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Where did you get the money, Bunter?' asked the captain of the Remove quietly.

'Find out!'

And Billy Bunter, elevating his fat little nose—not a difficult task, as Nature had started it well on its way in that direction—turned on his heel and rolled haughtily away. He did not roll more than two steps, however; for five pairs of hands were laid on him, and William George Bunter smote the quadrangle with a resounding bump.

'Yaroooh!'

'That's for bagging our clobber,' said the captain of the Remove. 'Now give him another for telling lies.'

Bump!

'Yooop!'

'Now another for luck!'

Bump!

'Yow-ow-ow-ow-woooop!'

Billy Bunter sat and spluttered. The Famous Five walked away and left him to it.

CHAPTER XXIII

Asking for It!

'THE sackfulness will be terrific!' Hurree Jamset Ram Singh made that statement, and four heads were nodded in unanimous assent.

It was morning break on Saturday, and the Famous Five were sauntering in the quad. For once the subject of discussion was not the summer game, or the approaching match with St. Jim's, or plans for the half-holiday that afternoon. William George Bunter was the subject.

Bunter, the rorty dog, had surprised and amused all the Lower Fourth. But he had rather alarmed some of them. Bunter was not exactly a credit to his Form or school.

But nobody wanted to see him expelled. Peter Todd, his study mate, was willing at any time to give him away with a pound of tea. Nevertheless, he regarded himself as in some measure Bunter's keeper. And he was anxious about him now.

It was not, perhaps, particularly the business of Harry Wharton & Co., but they felt concerned. Wharton, as captain of the Form, felt a little responsible in the matter. A resolute fellow like the Bounder had to be let go his own way—a fellow of vicious tendencies like Skinner was not amenable to his Form captain's influence. But it was different with a fatuous ass like Bunter.

The Remove knew him, and knew that he was a prize duffer. His dabblings in 'rortiness' only made them sillier. But if Bunter was discovered by the school authorities to be pub-haunting or backing horses, Bunter was booked for the sack, short and sharp. That was certain. The fact that he was a fool would not save him. And the chums of the Remove realised that it is the duty of the strong to help the weak, of the sensible to guide the erring footsteps of the foolish. Bunter was a prize ass. And on many an occasion the Famous Five had been fed-up with him; but they did not want to see him expelled from Greyfriars.

'He's asking for it!' said Bob Cherry. 'Fairly sitting up and begging. He dropped a cigarette in the Form-room yesterday. I wondered Quelch didn't spot it! Luckily Squiff got his foot on it.'

'Toddy found a pink sporting paper in the study with Bunter's favourite gee-gee marked in Bunter's fist,' grinned Nugent. 'He destroyed the paper and banged Bunter's head on the door. But—'

'Now he's sneaked off into the Cloisters,' said Harry. 'He's gone there to smoke.'

'And he's got something on for this afternoon,' said Johnny Bull. 'He's confided to half the Remove that he's going to paint the town red this afternoon at the races.'

'The crass ass!' said Wharton.

'The sackfulness will be the dead cert!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The esteemed and absurd Bunter is terrifically superfluous, but the sorrowfulness would be great to see him sack-fully bunked!'

'The whole thing's jolly mysterious,' said Harry, knitting his brows. 'From what I can make out, he has made a friend outside the school who has lent him no end of money, bought him a lot of things, and taken him to a disreputable place to play billiards, and is going to take him to the races this afternoon. It beats me hollow why any man should do it; he's got nothing to gain from Bunter.'

'The mystery is terrific!'

'But there it is,' said Harry. 'It's just incomprehensible; but there it is, and the rotter, whoever he is, has got to let Bunter alone.'

'Yes, rather!' agreed Bob Cherry. 'The fellow seems to be playing the same game with Bunter that that blighter Captain Marker would play with you if he could. But I suppose no old gent in Calcutta has left Bunter a fortune, too, on condition that he doesn't get bunked from the school?'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'Not likely!'

'It's jolly queer, though,' said Nugent. 'The man, whoever he is, is deliberately leading Bunter into things that will get him the sack. Bunter thinks he's a friend, but he can only be an enemy. What is he doing it for?'

Wharton shook his head hopelessly.

The facts of the matter seemed clear enough, but an explanation of the facts was not to be found.

'We're going to chip in,' said the captain of the Remove. 'We're not going to let a

man in our Form be sacked to amuse some rotter outside the school! Bunter's not going to the races this afternoon.'

The Famous Five walked into the Cloisters. A scent of tobacco guided them to the spot Bunter had chosen for his smoke. They found the fat Owl leaning on a buttress with a cigarette in his mouth.

'I say, you fellows, have a fag?' he asked.

'Fathead!'

'Be men, you know!' said Bunter. 'Jolly good smokes, I can tell you! I had them from a friend—a man who knows a good smoke!'

'The man who lent you a lot of money?' said Harry.

'He may have lent me a few pounds,' said Bunter. 'I won a few pounds off him at billiards, too. I'm rather a dab at billiards!'

'You crass ass!'

'Oh, really, Wharton; you fellows haven't any go in you!' said the Owl of the Remove scornfully. 'I'll bet you don't dare to go to the races this afternoon and chance it!'

'I suppose you know it means the sack if you're spotted, Bunter?' said the captain of the Remove.

Bunter grinned.

'Oh, I'm wide,' he answered— 'jolly wide! I shall take care! If anything happens, I shall stuff the beaks all right! Didn't I last time?'

'You didn't quite stuff Quelchy, and he's got an eye on you!'

'Oh, rats! Who cares for Quelchy!' jeered Bunter. 'Old-fashioned frump! Quelchy can go and eat coke! Look here, if you've any fancy for the races this afternoon, I'll get the money on for you—see? Dash it all, I'll lend you the money if you're hard up!'

'Hasn't it all gone to the tuck-shop?' grinned Bob.

'I can get some more if it has!' sneered Bunter. 'I'm not likely to be hard up again this term! I've got a friend who will lend me as much as I like to ask for!'

'And why?'

'Oh, that's telling!' said Bunter, with a fat grin. 'Not that I shall need to borrow anything off him, most likely. I expect to win a potful of money this afternoon! I say, you fellows—'

'Why—what——'

It was the voice of Wingate of the Sixth, and it interrupted Bunter. The captain of Greyfriars came sauntering along the Cloisters, with Gwynne of the Sixth, and he came fairly on Bunter with the cigarette in his mouth.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

Wingate stared at him.

'You young rascal! Smoking!'

'Oh! Ow! No!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I—I was—was—was—'

Wingate gave Wharton a frown.

'You ought to have stopped this, Wharton! You're head boy of the Remove, and you're looking on at that fat fool playing the goat like this! You know very well you ought to have stopped him!'

Wharton turned red.

'Bunter, bend over!' rapped out Wingate, slipping his ashplant from under his arm into his hand.

'I—I say, Wingate—' stuttered the rorty dog of the Remove.

'Bend over!'

'Oh dear!'

Bunter dropped the cigarette and bent over. The ashplant fairly rang on his tight trousers, and Bunter's yell of anguish echoed from one end of the Cloisters to the other.

'I shall have an eye on you after this, Bunter!' said Wingate, tucking his ashplant under his arm again. 'I warn you to be careful!'

'Ow, ow, ow!'

The great men of the Sixth walked on, leaving Billy Bunter wriggling and squirming. He had had only one cut, but it had been a searching one. The fat junior wriggled frantically.

'Ow! Beast!' he groaned. 'Oow!'

In third lesson that morning Bunter wriggled very uncomfortably on his form. That hefty lick from Wingate's ashplant had taken a considerable amount of the rortiness out of the rorty dog of the Remove. But it was only for a time. After dinner Bunter had recovered from the ashplant and recovered all his rortiness. He was dressed in his best, with a flower in his jacket, when he rolled down to the school gates to go out, evidently to keep his appointment with his mysterious sporting friend.

Harry Wharton was staring after the departing Owl, with a knitted brow, when Arthur da Costa tapped him on the arm.

'Games practice this afternoon?' asked the Eurasian cheerily.

Wharton shook his head.

'No—we're going out of gates first. Like to come along—we're going to look after Billy Bunter.'

'Yess,' said Da Costa. 'What does Bunter matter?'

The captain of the Remove laughed.

'Not very much; but some shady rotter has got hold of him, and is getting him into mischief, and we're going to stop him. He will be sacked before the end of the term if this goes on.'

'Ready,' called out Bob Cherry, coming out of the House with Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh. 'Bunter's started.'

'Come on,' said Wharton. 'You coming, Da Costa?'

'Yess.'

And six juniors walked out of the gates on the trail of William George Bunter.

CHAPTER XXIV

Stalking Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER blinked round cautiously several times as he rolled along the road towards Courtfield Common.

Bunter had all the recklessness of fatuous folly; but he knew he was doing a risky thing. Going to the races with his sporting friend, sitting in a car to watch the races, and backing his fancy, appealed to the sporty dog of the Remove very strongly. But even Bunter realised that a little caution would not be out of place on such an occasion. So, like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way; and was relieved to see the road behind him clear. He did not want to see a Greyfriars master or prefect just then; and he had had a suspicion that those beasts, Harry Wharton & Co., had some intention of keeping an eye on him. But his cautious blinks over his shoulder revealed nothing but an empty, dusty road, and Bunter rolled on satisfied.

Had he been a little less short-sighted, and a little less obtuse, he might have observed six juniors, who were not following the road, but following the same direction in the

fields.

He turned from the road over the common, into a footpath across the grass, among the hawthorns, that led to another road; where Captain Marker was to be waiting for him with his car.

Bunter's fat face was bright with anticipation. Nothing had happened to undeceive the captain on the subject of his identity. Eric Marker was still in the firm belief that he was dealing with Harry Wharton. Bunter, in his obtuseness, believed that it was the captain's object to give Colonel Wharton's nephew a good time—had Bunter been given to reflection. But if Bunter reflected at all, it was only upon the glorious time he was going to have—letting loose, at last, all the rortiness that had been bottled up so long for want of financial resources. His opinion of the captain now was that Marker was a very pleasant, agreeable, and sporting fellow.

He rolled on cheerily, heading for the Wapshot road, and at a little distance behind him six juniors with grinning faces walked on his trail, the clumps of trees and hawthorns covering them from view as they stalked Bunter.

From a rise in the common, the juniors had a view for some distance ahead, where the Wapshot road, white and dusty, ran in a streak across the green expanse.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a car!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

A motor-car, untenanted, was halted by the side of the road. Near by was a wayside seat, and on that seat a man was sitting. His back was to the common, and the juniors could see little of him.

'Is that Bunter's sporting friend, I wonder?' said Bob.

'That's what Bunter's heading for, at any rate,' said Harry Wharton. 'I fancy that's the man.'

As Bunter drew nearer to the man on the seat, and the pursuers drew nearer in their turn, the latter became more cautious. They did not want to have taken all this trouble for nothing. The matter had to be settled there and then. Bunter's sporting friend was to receive a severe lesson before he got away, and he was not to be given an opportunity of starting up the car and clearing off unpunished.

Close by the roadside seat was a clump of trees, and the juniors kept that clump in a line with the seat as they advanced. Bunter passed beyond the trees and disappeared from their sight. Harry Wharton & Co. hurried on, the clump concealing them from the man on the seat and from Bunter, who had now joined his mysterious friend.

They heard the sound of voices as they came up to the trees, which were only a few yards from the road.

'It's the man right enough!' murmured Bob Cherry. 'Bunter's talking to him.'

'Make quite sure, though, before we collar him,' said Nugent.

Da Costa gave a sudden start as a man's deep voice was heard. The juniors did not hear the words, but they heard the voice that was speaking in answer to Bunter. A strange look came over the Eurasian's face.

'I know that voice!' he whispered.

'Seems to me I've heard it before,' muttered Bob Cherry. 'Anyhow we'll see the fellow in a minute.'

The juniors pushed through the clump of trees. Keeping in cover, they looked out on the roadside. The man on the seat had risen to his feet now, and was standing facing Bunter. Harry Wharton & Co. had a full view of his face, and they stared at it almost in stupefaction. It was a face they knew.

'My only hat!' breathed Wharton.

'Captain Marker!'

CHAPTER XXV

Well Thrashed!

CAPTAIN MARKER greeted Bunter with great cordiality. He told his young friend that he was glad to see him—and that undoubtedly was the truth.

During the days that had elapsed since he had seen Bunter, Captain Marker had doubted and feared. Unless the fellow was absolutely a born fool, he must suspect what the game was. He must have sense enough to keep clear of the tempter. Knowing what depended upon his keeping a clean record, he must surely have common sense enough to keep away from the man who was almost openly plotting his ruin. Captain Marker felt that it must be so; and, though he had kept the appointment, hoping for the best—or, rather, the worst—he had scarcely believed that the junior, on his side, would keep the appointment also.

Bunter's arrival was, therefore, a great relief to him. Undoubtedly he was glad, as he said, to see his young friend.

'Here we are again, old bean!' said Billy Bunter cheerfully. 'Haven't kept you waiting, what?'

'Not at all,' said the captain. 'I came early. I'm really very glad to see you, Harry!' Bunter grinned.

He was relieved, as well as Marker. Cordial as Marker was, there were lines in his face, a glint in his eyes, that warned even the fatuous Owl of the Remove that he was a bad man to trifle with. Had he discovered the cheat, Bunter was aware that the meeting would have been a painful one for him. But it was evident that the captain suspected nothing. It had not even occurred to him that this fatuous, foolish fellow was capable of taking him in. He did not make allowance for the slyness that so often accompanies fatuousness.

'It's only half an hour's run to Wapshot from here,' went on the captain cheerily. 'We shall be in time for most of the races. I hope we're going to have an enjoyable afternoon.'

'What-ho!' grinned Bunter.

The captain smiled cynically.

His plans were cut and dried for the afternoon. It was useless, and might be dangerous, to prolong the affair. If Colonel Wharton learned that his nephew had made friends with Captain Marker he was likely to become very suspicious. The nephew might be a fool, but Marker knew only too well that the uncle was nothing of the kind.

The matter was to come to an end that day. Bunter, sitting in the car watching the races, was to be left to it. The captain was to slip away on some excuse, leaving him there. A telephone call to Greyfriars would apprise the Head that a Greyfriars junior was to be found at Wapshot races—all particulars given. Wapshot was only three miles from the school. It was certain that a master would be sent at once to take the young rascal away. After that, it was all clear for the captain!

There was not a flaw in the scheme, and but for the intervention of Harry Wharton & Co., now close at hand, it was certain, at least, that the schemer would have succeeded in getting Billy Bunter expelled from Greyfriars!

But the chums of the Remove were on the scene now. The Famous Five and Arthur da

Costa made a sudden rush from the trees, and in a moment or little more they had surrounded Bunter and the captain.

Captain Marker gave a violent start at the sight of them. He recognised at once the party of juniors who had pelted him a few days before in Redclyffe woods. His brow grew black as midnight, and his deep-set, narrow eyes glinted at the Greyfriars crowd. Billy Bunter stared at them through his big spectacles in surprise and indignation.

‘I—I say, you fellows—’ he stammered.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo!’ said Bob Cherry cheerily. ‘Just off to the races, what? You rorty dog!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘I say, you fellows, you sheer off!’ exclaimed Bunter, in alarm. ‘No bizney of yours, you know! You clear off!’

‘The clearfulness off will not be terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!’ chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

‘Oh, really, Inky—’

‘What do you want here?’ said Captain Marker between his teeth. ‘I am taking my old friend’s nephew for a drive in my car. How dare you come rushing up here like a gang of hooligans!’

Wharton’s lip curled contemptuously.

‘We know all about that drive,’ he answered quietly. ‘Bunter has let out to half the Form that he’s going to the races this afternoon.’

‘Bunter?’ repeated the captain blankly.

‘Yes.’

‘I—I say, you fellows—’ stammered the hapless Owl of the Remove, in dismay. He backed a little away from his sporting friend. It was evident that the truth was coming out now, and Billy Bunter did not want to be too near Captain Marker when it came out.

‘You scoundrel!’ went on Harry Wharton, in cold, cutting tones. ‘I know what your game is with me—we all know your rotten game! But why you’re making a fool of Bunter and leading him into getting the sack, I don’t know and can’t guess. But you’re going to stop it—and we’re here to see that you stop it!’

‘Yes, rather!’

‘The ratherfulness is terrific.’

The expression on the captain’s hard, dark face was extraordinary. He stared at Wharton, stared at Bunter, and stared at Wharton again.

‘What do you mean?’ he exclaimed at last, in a gasping voice. ‘What are you driving at, you young fool? I do not know anyone of the name of Bunter!’

‘Wha-at?’

‘Oh, my hat!’

It was the turn of the Removites to be astonished.

‘You don’t know anyone of the name of Bunter—when you were just going to take the fat, blithering idiot to the races in your car!’ exclaimed Johnny Bull.

The captain started almost convulsively. His glance turned on the Owl of the Remove again, and Bunter backed farther off.

‘That boy is not named Bunter!’ said Captain Marker hoarsely. ‘That boy is named Wharton—Harry Wharton.’

‘Oh, great pip!’

‘Bunter, you fat, spoofing villain—’

‘Oh, my only hat!’

Harry Wharton & Co. understood now. They could not even imagine why the captain

took Bunter for Wharton; but now that they were aware of his mistake, they understood his motives.

‘You took Bunter for me!’ exclaimed Harry Wharton blankly.

‘You!’ breathed Marker.

He stared at the captain of the Remove with burning eyes.

‘Bunter, you spoofing porpoise, have you been using my name?’

‘Oh, really, Wharton—’

‘Wharton!’ repeated Captain Marker huskily. He was utterly taken aback and dismayed. ‘Wharton! You are Wharton?’

‘You should not have told him,’ muttered Da Costa. ‘He knows you now.’

Wharton laughed scornfully.

‘Let him know me! I’m not afraid of the rotter! You cur!’ His eyes flashed at the discomfited captain. ‘You miserable worm! So that’s why you’ve been making a fool of Bunter—you thought you had got hold of me! And he let you think so, I suppose, to make something out of you!’

‘That accounts for the milk in the giddy coco-nut!’ chuckled Bob Cherry.

Captain Marker stood rooted to the ground. The sudden discovery that he had been deceived—or, rather, that he had deceived himself—that all his scheming, so near to success as it had seemed, had gone for nothing, had overwhelmed him. He knew Wharton now—and one look at him showed that the game he had played with Bunter would be futile with the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. He was not, as he had supposed, at the end of his task; he was only at the beginning. He stood breathing hard, staring at Wharton with burning eyes, utterly thrown off his balance.

‘But how did the silly ass come to make such a mistake?’ said Bob Cherry, in wonder.

‘How did you spoof him to that extent, Bunter?’

‘I—I didn’t!’ gasped Bunter. ‘He saw the name in the hat, and thought I was Wharton! He would have pitched into me if I’d told him I wasn’t.’

‘My hat—that you borrowed last half-holiday?’ exclaimed Wharton.

‘Yes. You see—I say, you fellows, keep him off!’ yelled Bunter in terror.

Captain Marker had been standing like a man in a trance. But he woke up suddenly, as it were, and with a face disfigured by fury, made a spring at Billy Bunter.

‘Yarooogh! Help! Help!’ roared Bunter.

Bunter was in need of help. The captain’s grasp had closed on him, and he was thumping the fat junior right and left. So sudden had been his action that the Co. had had no time to intervene. Billy Bunter roared and yelled and struggled frantically under a shower of savage blows.

‘Rescue!’ gasped Bob Cherry.

‘Collar him!’

Captain Marker seemed beside himself with fury, and Bunter certainly would have been seriously damaged had not help been at hand. But there was plenty of help for Bunter. Six juniors rushed at the infuriated captain and dragged him away from his victim by main force.

‘Yow-ow-ow-ow!’ gasped Bunter, collapsing in the grass. ‘Yow-wow! I say, you fellows, bump him—rag him—yarooogh—ow—wow!’

‘Give him jip!’ gasped Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton & Co. had come there to make an example of Bunter’s sporting friend. They made an example of him. Certainly Captain Marker no longer needed warning off, so far as Bunter was concerned. Now that he knew the Owl’s real identity, it was certain that he would be fed up with Bunter, and would have nothing more to do with him. But the cheery juniors made an example of him, all the same.

For some minutes they had their hands full with the captain, who struggled and fought like a tiger. But the odds were too heavy for him, and in a few minutes Captain Marker was getting the ragging of his life. When the breathless juniors left him at last, they were all looking rather untidy and considerably fatigued; but it was the wreck of a captain that they left gasping in the grass.

CHAPTER XXVI

Being Kind to Bunter!

‘BULLY Boy!’

Harry Wharton glanced round.

‘Snooker Pool!’

Wharton gazed fixedly at Billy Bunter.

‘Gay Colt!’

‘My only hat!’ murmured the captain of the Remove.

Billy Bunter was sprawling in the window-seat on the Remove landing. He was too deeply immersed in his thoughts to notice, or heed, the captain of the Remove. In his fat hand he held a little paper-covered book, upon which he was bestowing a deep attention that he never bestowed on school books. As he scanned that little book, William George Bunter was muttering to himself, with a thoughtful, anxious wrinkle in his fat brow.

‘What have you got there, Bunter?’ asked Harry.

‘Nothing.’

‘Fathead!’

‘Oh, really, Wharton! Mind your own business, you know!’ said Bunter warmly. ‘No bizney of yours if a fellow likes to have a little flutter. Not that I’m having a flutter, of course. I’m doing Latin.’

‘Let’s see the book, and I’ll help you with the Latin.’

Bunter did not accept that generous offer.

‘The—the fact is, I—I don’t want any help, you know,’ he explained. ‘I can play your head off at Latin, same as I could at cricket if I was given a chance in the matches. I say, isn’t that Bob Cherry calling you, old chap?’

Wharton sat down in the window-seat beside William George Bunter and jerked the little book out from under Bunter’s jacket, and there was a yell of wrathful protest from the Owl of the Remove.

‘Beast! Gimme my book!’

Wharton held up the little book out of Bunter’s reach and looked at it. It bore the attractive title of ‘Sure Snips: The Sporting Tipster’s Weekly Racing Guide.’ It was open at the page that dealt with racing at Wapshot, a few miles from Greyfriars, and that evidently was the subject that had so deeply interested the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove.

‘You footling chump!’ said Harry. ‘What would Quelchy say if he saw this precious rubbish?’

‘Blow Quelchy!’

Bunter made a grab at the book, and missed. He turned a glare on the captain of the Remove that almost cracked his spectacles.

‘You cheeky beast! Gimme my book!’ he howled.

‘Where did you get it?’ demanded Wharton. As the price of the book was sixpence, he did not think it likely that Bunter had purchased it. Bunter’s sixpences generally found

their way to the tuck-shop.

'Find out!' snorted Bunter.

'That's why I'm asking you, old fat man. If somebody gave you this book, I'm going to punch his head,' explained Wharton.

'Beast! I picked it up,' confessed Bunter. 'That fellow Ponsonby of Highcliffe dropped it. At least, he chucked it away. It's a jolly good book. Of course, you wouldn't understand. You ain't sporting. I dare say you've never backed a gee in your life!' said Bunter, with crushing contempt.

'Never!' grinned Wharton.

'Well, if you want a sure snip for next Wednesday at Wapshot, put your shirt on Bully Boy,' said Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!' growled Bunter. 'I can tell you Bully Boy is a jolly good thing! So is Snooker Pool, and Gay Colt is good for a place. My idea is to back Bully Boy both ways—'

'Win and place, you know,' explained Bunter.

'You know all about it,' chuckled Wharton.

Bunter smirked.

'Yes, rather! I'm rather a dab at spotting winners!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Wharton. 'I can see you rolling off with the bookmaker's cash. Bookmakers live on their losses, don't they?'

'Oh, don't be an ass, you know!' said Bunter. 'Look here, if my postal-order comes in time, and if I can find a man to put my money on Bully Boy, and if he gets home, I shall make a jolly good thing out of it!'

'Rather a lot of ifs!' remarked Wharton. 'And can't you do it without this encyclopaedia of useless knowledge?'

'Well, no. You see, that book gives the weights and the names of the jockeys and the records of the gee-gees, and so on. I fancy Bully Boy, but I've got to go into it carefully before I back him. Suppose Snooker Pool pulled it off, after all, you see—or Gay Colt, or Mutton Chop! I'm going into the thing carefully.'

'Then this book is really indispensable, before you can back your fancy?'

'Yes.'

'That settles it!' said Wharton, as he slipped the 'Sporting Tipster's Racing Guide' into his pocket and rose from the window-seat. 'That's an easy way of stopping you from playing the giddy ox, and asking for the sack. Good-bye!'

'Gimme my book!' shrieked Bunter in consternation.

The vision of boundless wealth that had danced before Bunter's eyes—if he backed the right horse—vanished, as he saw that mine of priceless information disappear into Wharton's pocket.

He rolled off the window-seat and rushed after the captain of the Remove.

'Gimme that book, you beast!'

'Good-bye!'

The captain of the Remove walked away to No. 1 Study.

William George Bunter was not a fighting man. But there are times when even the worm will turn. A lioness robbed of her cubs was something like the Owl of the Remove deprived of his infallible guide to spotting winners. He rushed after Wharton and collared him, and the captain of the Remove, taken by surprise, came to the floor with a crash.

'Ow!' gasped Wharton. 'Oh, my hat! Why, you fat frog—ow!'

'Gimme that book! I—I—I'll jolly well lick you if you don't!' gasped Bunter.

The next moment Wharton was on his feet, and it was William George Bunter who was on the floor.

Tap, tap, tap!

It sounded like a carpenter at work, but it was only William George Bunter's bullet head tapping the floor of the Remove passage.

'Yow-ow-ow!' roared Bunter.

'There, you fat ass!' gasped Wharton.

'Yarooooo!'

The captain of the Remove went into No. 1 Study—still with the priceless guide to winners in his possession. But William George Bunter did not follow him further. He sat in the Remove passage and rubbed his head. For the present Billy Bunter had something else to think about, and he rubbed his head and spluttered, and forgot all about spotting winners.

CHAPTER XXVII

Ponsonby's Pal!

'ORDER!' said Bob Cherry impressively.

'What—'

'I never see Pon's head,' explained Bob, 'without wanting to punch it. I know you fellows feel the same. And the more Pon's head is punched, the better—as a rule! But on the present occasion, my beloved 'earers, as we're going over to Highcliffe to tea, and if Pon disgraces Highcliffe by belonging to it, let him rip.'

Six juniors of the Greyfriars Remove were sauntering along a path across Courtfield Common, the short cut to Highcliffe School on the other side. They were following a path that wound among hawthorns and willows; and Bob Cherry's remark was called forth by the sight of an elegant junior, who appeared in view among the thickets. It was Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, and he was occupied in a way that might have been expected of him—blowing little clouds of smoke from the cigarette he was smoking. As his face was partly turned from the Greyfriars fellows, he did not observe their approach, as their footsteps made no sound on the thick grass. The Famous Five were walking over to Highcliffe for tea, and taking Arthur da Costa with them. They were going to tea with Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar, their friends at Highcliffe, and on such an occasion it was, as Bob remarked, judicious to avoid trouble with their Highcliffe enemy, Ponsonby. So there was a general nod of assent as Bob expounded his views—unusually pacific for Robert Cherry, for undoubtedly Bob felt a powerful desire to punch Pon's head whenever he beheld the same.

'Let him rip!' said Nugent. 'We don't want a row with Pon.'

'The ripfulness is the proper caper,' assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh. 'Let us give him a friendly and absurd smile, and greet him good-afternoonfully.'

'Smoky bounder!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Come on,' said Harry.

'After all, why not punch his head?' said Bob.

'Oh, bother his head!' said the captain of the Remove. 'Bother him from head to foot! Come on; we're due at Highcliffe.'

Bob grunted, and the juniors walked on. They were passing within six paces of the dandy of Highcliffe among the trees at the side of the path, and as they came abreast of him their eyes fell upon the individual to whom he was speaking. Harry Wharton

came to a sudden halt then, and his comrades followed his example. All of them knew the dark-faced, narrow-eyed man who stood leaning against a tree with a cigar in his mouth.

‘Captain Marker!’ exclaimed Harry.

‘Still hanging about here!’ said Johnny Bull. ‘What he wants is another ragging.’

The man with the cigar gave a sudden start as his eyes fell on the Greyfriars juniors.

His narrow eyes glinted at them.

It was little more than a week since the chums of the Remove had given Captain Marker the ragging of his life, and their impression had been that the man from India would clear out of the neighbourhood of Greyfriars. Evidently that had been a mistaken impression.

Ponsonby looked round with an insolent smile on his face.

‘You men want anythin’?’ he asked. ‘If not, will you be good enough to clear? You’re not wanted here, you know.’

‘Just a word, Ponsonby,’ said Harry, quietly. ‘That man you seem to have picked up with is Captain Marker—’

‘I know that.’

‘A rotter, a rank outsider, and a thorough scoundrel,’ said Wharton, in the same quiet tone.

Ponsonby stared at him.

‘You cheeky rotter—’ he began. ‘What the thump are you buttin’ into my bizney for?’

‘I’m not going to butt in,’ said Harry. ‘I’m warning you that you’ve made the acquaintance of a thorough rascal, very nearly a criminal. It’s only fair to tell you so, as I suppose you don’t know the kind of rotter he is.’

‘What the thump do you mean?’ shouted Ponsonby angrily.

‘I mean that that rotter is hanging about Greyfriars to play dirty tricks, and we’re going to stop him!’ answered Harry.

‘You’ll clear off and mind your own business!’

‘This is our business, dear man!’ grinned Bob Cherry. ‘We’ve made it a rule that that rotter is to be ragged till he’s fed up with this part of the country. If he doesn’t like it, he can complain to our headmaster. We’re quite ready for that.’

Ponsonby stared at the Greyfriars juniors, and looked at Captain Marker, obviously puzzled as well as angered. It was in the billiards-room at the Three Fishers that Pon had made the valuable acquaintance of the captain, and he had found Eric Marker a man quite to his taste. But it was plain that he knew nothing of the captain’s connection with Harry Wharton of Greyfriars.

Taking no further notice of the dandy of Highcliffe, Harry Wharton & Co. gave their attention to Marker. He lifted his stick as the juniors circled round him with determined looks.

‘Stand back, you young scoundrels,’ said Marker between his teeth. ‘I warn you that you will get hurt—’

‘Collar him!’

‘Get out of this, you cads!’ shouted Ponsonby furiously. The juniors did not heed Ponsonby. They closed in on Captain Marker, who, with a savage face, struck furiously with the heavy Malacca. The blow was aimed at Bob Cherry, who was foremost in the rush, but Bob dodged it and closed in, tackling the man from India at close quarters. The next moment five more pairs of hands were laid on Marker, and he went to the ground with a crash.

He struggled fiercely in the grasp of the Greyfriars juniors.

‘Help me!’ he panted.

Ponsonby stared at the scene in amazement and anger for a moment or two, and then he rushed in to help the captain. Bob Cherry gave a roar as he received Pon's fist on his ear.

'Ow!'

He released the captain and turned on Ponsonby.

'You will have it, then!' he exclaimed. 'You fellows, you handle that rotter, and leave Pon to me!'

'What-ho!'

And Ponsonby, fighting furiously, was driven back under Bob's hefty attack, while the rest of the Co. proceeded to deal faithfully with the man from India.

In a few moments he was overpowered, and, with the rest of the Co. holding the rascal, Da Costa proceeded to thrash him with his own walking cane.

It was the most painful five minutes of the villain's life, and he was white with rage and twisted with pain when Da Costa threw the cane away.

'Let that be a lesson to you, you scoundrel,' said Wharton. Captain Marker gritted his teeth.

'I'll make you suffer for this!' he said in a choking voice. 'Better give him a few more!' suggested Johnny Bull. Harry Wharton laughed.

'That will do! Let's get on.'

And the juniors left the spot—leaving the man from India gasping on the grass.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

Bob Cherry rejoined his chums. He was a little out of breath, and he was rubbing his knuckles, but looked very cheerful.

'Where's Pon?' asked Harry.

'Taking a rest under the trees yonder,' grinned Bob. 'He says he doesn't want any more, and I suppose he knows best.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He's got a jolly tough boko,' said Bob. 'I've barked my knuckles on it. Still, I dare say his nose feels worse than my knuckles!'

Harry Wharton & Co. walked along the path, and in a few minutes passed the spot where Ponsonby was taking a rest, as Bob described it. The dandy of Highcliffe lay in the grass, completely winded, and clasping his nose with one hand and a discoloured eye with the other. He gave the chums of the Remove a savage glare as they passed him, but said nothing—evidently he did not want any more trouble.

The chums of the Remove arrived at Highcliffe and were greeted cheerily by Courtenay and the Caterpillar. They were at tea in Study No. 4 with the Highcliffe chums when Smithson of the Fourth looked into the study with a grinning face.

'You men seen Pon?' asked Smithson.

Courtenay looked round.

'No; anything happened?'

'Collision with a motor-car, I think,' grinned Smithson. 'Pon's nose looks as if he had been butting into a lorry.'

And Smithson chuckled and went on his way. The chums of the Remove looked a little conscious; they had not mentioned the happening on Courtfield Common. The Caterpillar's glance dwelt on them and rested for a moment on Bob's right hand, which Bob hastily dropped into a pocket.

'Poor old Pon!' sighed the Caterpillar. 'I wonder what he butted his nose against.'

'I—I wonder!' murmured Bob.

Harry Wharton hastily changed the conversation. When the Greyfriars fellows were leaving, a damaged face and a discoloured eye glared at them from a study window—

the window of Pon's study. Ponsonby spent the remainder of that afternoon bathing his eye and his nose, and nursing thoughts of vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Like a Thief in the Night!

CAPTAIN MARKER dropped lightly from the wall into the Cloisters, stood quite still, and listened. It was an hour after midnight, and all Greyfriars lay still and silent. The last light had been extinguished, the last door had closed. A wind from the sea wailed softly among the old stone pillars of the ancient Cloisters.

The man who had dropped from the wall stood for long minutes, listening, watching. It was Eric Marker who had entered the precincts of Greyfriars like a thief in the night; but anyone who had seen him would hardly have recognised him. A thick moustache and beard half-hid his face, and a loose cap was pulled down deep over his brows. For long minutes the disguised schemer stood listening, with beating heart; but at last he stirred and moved silently and cautiously along the Cloisters. From shadow to shadow the dim figure glided, till he stood close under the ivied wall of the House. And there he paused again, a long pause, staring up at the many windows.

All was still and silent. In the great building all were sleeping. But Eric Marker's heart was beating sharply. There was risk in what he was going to do—terrible risk. If he was discovered within the school at that hour of the night, having entered it like a thief, he would scarcely be judged as anything but a thief, and would certainly be handed over to the police. But the time had come for him to take risks, if he was not to abandon his dastardly scheme entirely.

He scanned the many windows, and his eyes fixed at last on the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove. Captain Marker had visited Greyfriars only once; and on that occasion he had been nowhere near the Remove passage. But his acquaintance with Ponsonby of Highcliffe had stood him in good stead. Pon had friends at Greyfriars—Angel of the Fourth, and Skinner of the Remove. Many times Pon had visited the school and dropped into Skinner's study in the Remove passage. From Ponsonby the captain had learned all that he needed to know, and in the clear starlight of the summer night he counted the windows, and picked out that of Wharton's study. He tried his weight on the thick ivy that clung to the wall, and found that it bore him easily. It was not a difficult climb to an active and determined man—and Marker was both. Slowly, steadily, he worked his way up, finding handhold and foothold in the thick tendrils of the ivy that had clung and thickened on the walls for centuries. But he was breathing hard when he reached the wide stone sill of the window of Study No. I, and he was glad to crouch there and rest.

But he stirred again very soon.

The study window was fastened with a simple catch, and it was quickly forced back, and Marker raised the sash.

A few moments more, and he was standing inside the study.

Starlight glimmered in at the window, giving him plenty of light for what he wanted to do.

He glanced quickly about the room.

The old oak desk in the corner, carefully described to him by Ponsonby, met his eye at once.

He stepped towards it softly.

From his pocket the disguised rascal drew a bunch of keys. One after another he tried

them on the locks of the desk.

A drawer came open under his hand at last. The captain examined the contents—old letters and papers, the sort of lumber that was likely to accumulate during the term. Obviously that drawer was not often used, and it exactly suited Marker's purpose. He drew from an inside pocket a tiny object that glittered and sparkled in the starlight, and the next moment it was thrust out of sight under the old papers in the drawer, and the drawer was closed and relocked.

Captain Marker drew a deep breath.

He had accomplished the mysterious object for which he had entered the school so surreptitiously while all slept. It only remained to go—undiscovered.

Quietly he drew himself out of the window, and closed the sash after him. The fastening he could not close from the outside, but that was a trifle. If anyone chanced to notice in the morning that the sash was unfastened, it could only be supposed that it had been left so overnight. Having closed the sash down firmly, he swung himself on the thick ivy and descended to the ground.

Like a shadow he flitted away, and the dusk of the summer night swallowed him.

Five minutes later Captain Marker was outside the precincts of the school and walking swiftly towards Courtfield Common.

CHAPTER XXIX

Ponsonby Causes a Surprise!

'WHAT rot!'

That was Gadsby's opinion.

'Utter rot!' said Monson. Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders.

'I'm goin'!' he said.

'But—' said Gadsby and Monson together.

'It's up to me,' explained Ponsonby. He passed his hand over the eye that still showed a dark shade. 'It was all a misunderstandin' the other day. I've thought it over, and my belief is that Wharton meant to be doin' me a good turn. I cut up rusty—misunderstandin' him. It's been rather on my mind since.'

Gadsby and Monson stared at him.

They simply could not understand. That Ponsonby's feelings towards Harry Wharton, of the Greyfriars Remove, were bitter and vengeful, they knew only too well. That he would stop at little or nothing to repay Harry Wharton & Co. for what he had received at their hands there was no doubt whatever. So his present attitude was hard to understand.

'It's simple enough!' exclaimed Ponsonby impatiently. 'The fellow found me talkin' to a man he fancied was a bad hat, and he gave me a tip on the subject. I cut up rusty without reason, and there was a row. I don't like the fellow, as you know; but that's no reason for not givin' him his due. I'm going to speak to him, and tell him I'm sorry I didn't take his tip a bit more reasonably. Any decent fellow would.'

'I dare say, but—' Gadsby broke off.

As he was Pon's pal, he did not express his opinion that what was to be expected from a decent fellow was not to be expected from Ponsonby.

'Well, come along with me!' said Pon. 'A walk over to Grey-friars won't hurt us.'

'Oh, all right!'

The three juniors of Highcliffe walked out of the gates. Cecil Ponsonby sauntered along the road with the air of a fellow who was quite at ease with himself; but Gadsby

and Monson looked at one another several times in doubt and uneasiness.

'Look here, Pon!' exclaimed Gadsby at last. 'What are you really goin' over to Greyfriars for?'

'I've told you.'

'I mean the real reason.'

'I suppose it's somethin' up against those cads,' said Monson. 'If it is we're with you all the way. But you might let a fellow know. Look here, I'm not doin' any scrappin' at Greyfriars! We don't want to walk into the place and ask for a raggin'!'

The Highcliffians arrived at the gates of Greyfriars, Gadsby and Monson still wondering and uneasy, Pon airy and cheery.

The school gates were open, and several Greyfriars fellows were passing in and out. Some of them looked rather cautiously at the Highcliffians as they stopped in the gateway—especially at Pon's shady eye.

Ponsonby called to a Remove fellow.

'Hallo, Ogilvy!'

'Hallo!' returned Ogilvy briefly.

Ogilvy of the Remove had no liking for the knuts of Highcliffe, and he was passing on, when Pon spoke again.

'Hold on a minute! I've called to see Wharton!'

'Well, you can cut in if you like, I suppose,' answered Ogilvy. 'No charge for admission.'

'Not like the other zoo—what?' asked Gadsby blandly.

'Shut up, Gaddy!' exclaimed Pon hastily. 'We haven't come here to rag. Look here, Ogilvy, I want to speak to Wharton. But I don't want to go in. There's been a lot of ragging, and I don't want it to begin again here. If you'd give Wharton the tip he'd come down to the gates.'

Ogilvy paused. He did not want to carry messages for Ponsonby, but the Highcliffe fellow's manner was so civil that the Removite felt bound to answer civilly.

'Oh, all right!'

And Robert Donald Ogilvy went in at the gates.

Wharton came at last, with a very surprised expression on his face.

Pon, who was leaning elegantly against one of the ancient stone pillars of the gateway, detached himself from it as Harry Wharton appeared.

'Hallo!' said Wharton, with a nod. 'Ogilvy says you wanted to speak to me, Ponsonby. What is it?'

'I owe you an apology, and I've called to make it,' said Ponsonby gracefully. 'Hope I'm not interruptin' anythin' important?'

'Well, the fellows are at games practice,' said Harry. 'But it's all right. If you mean what you say I'm glad to hear it.'

He regarded Ponsonby with a puzzled expression. If Ponsonby was really serious in what he said, undoubtedly Wharton was glad to hear it. But he knew Pon too well to trust him lightly.

'The fact is, I was in the wrong the other day on Courtfield Common,' said Ponsonby with an air of great frankness. 'Thinkin' over it afterwards, I thought that you meant to be good-natured in givin' me that tip. You weren't just raggin', as I thought at the time.'

'That's quite true,' said Harry.

'Well, I'm sorry there was a misunderstandin', that's all,' said Pon. 'I dare say the matter's of no great consequence, but I wanted to get it off my mind. I got the worst of the trouble, so you hadn't really much to grumble at. Still, I was in the wrong, and I

wanted to say so.'

'It's all right,' said Wharton, in great astonishment. 'That man you were speaking to is a thoroughly bad hat, Ponsonby, and we had a good reason for handling him as we did. You may be sure of that from his letting the matter drop afterwards—he dare not come here and speak to Dr. Locke about it. I'm sorry there was any trouble with you.' Ponsonby nodded cheerily.

'I've no doubt you're right, Wharton,' he answered. 'I never saw the man before or since, and never knew anythin' about him—I don't expect ever to meet him again. He's nothin' to me, of course—merely a chance acquaintance I happened to pick up. Did you say you were at games practice?'

'Yes,' said Harry.

'Your return match with Highcliffe is gettin' near due,' remarked Ponsonby. 'You'll find Highcliffe in great form when you come over. How are your men shaping?'

'Oh, pretty good!' said Harry, more and more astonished by Pon's genial cordiality, and wondering whether he had, after all, done that superb youth an injustice in his opinion of him. 'We'll give Highcliffe a good game, I hope.'

'Any harm in a fellow lookin' on and seem' how they shape?'

'Not at all; come right along, if you like.'

'Come along, you men,' said Pon to his two almost dazed comrades; and the three Highcliffians went in with the captain of the Remove, and walked down to Little Side with him.

CHAPTER XXX

Inexplicable!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'What the dickens—'

'It's Ponsonby.'

'Well, my hat!'

The crowd of Remove fellows on Little Side stared at Wharton as he came along with Ponsonby & Co. Pon sometimes dropped in at Greyfriars to see Skinner, or Angel of the Fourth; but to see him on friendly terms with the captain of the Remove was a novelty and a surprise.

Wharton himself was puzzled. Knowing Pon as he did, he could not help thinking there might be some trickery under Pon's bland geniality; but for the life of him he could not spot it.

'Where's that wonderful man you've got that I've heard such a lot about, Wharton?' asked Ponsonby. 'I'd like to see him if he's here. Terrific bowler, I've heard.'

'Yes, he's here,' said Harry. 'Terrific bowler and batsman, too! Send down a few to Smithy, Da Costa.'

'Yess,' said the Eurasian.

Vernon-Smith stood up to the bowling from the Eurasian, and Ponsonby watched him with apparent interest.

'Well, I suppose I must be goin',' said Ponsonby at last regretfully. 'I shall tell Courtenay that he will have to pull up his socks if he thinks he's goin' to beat your crowd, Wharton. Will you walk a little way with us? Some of the fellows mayn't know that this is just a friendly call—and we don't want any trouble here.'

Wharton smiled.

'Right-ho! I'll see you off the ground, if you like.'

He walked away with the Highcliffians. Ponsonby glanced at Gadsby and Monson, whose hangdog air only too plainly proclaimed their uneasiness.

'You men cut on ahead,' he said. 'I've got something to say to Wharton.'

'Oh, all right!'

Gadsby and Monson were not sorry to cut on ahead; a friendly attitude in the presence of a fellow they thoroughly disliked was repugnant to them. They were not quite so unscrupulous as their pal Pon.

'What is it?' asked Harry in surprise as Ponsonby came to a halt. They were still in sight of the cricketers, but out of hearing now.

A mocking gleam came into Ponsonby's eyes.

'Only this,' he drawled. 'I've given you a look-in to-day to see whether you were really the sort of fellow a man could be friendly with. I find you're not.'

Wharton stared at him blankly.

The sudden change in Ponsonby's manner took him quite by surprise.

'I find you're just the same old outsider and sneakin' sort of cad I've always thought you!' said Ponsonby.

'What?'

'A low cad, and one of a set of low cads,' went on Ponsonby. 'Every man at Greyfriars is a rank outsider, and you're the rankest of the lot!'

'Did you come here to say that?' asked Harry, his eyes glinting. But he was more puzzled than angry; the whole line of conduct of Cecil Ponsonby that afternoon was a puzzle to him.

'Yes; among other things,' assented Ponsonby. 'I won't tell you all I think of you—it would take too long.'

'You won't!' said Harry. 'You'll get out before you get another eye to match the one you've got if you're wise. I can't understand why you came here at all; but I might have known it was a trick of some sort, knowing the kind of cur you are! Get going!'

Wharton turned away with that.

Smack!

He started, and almost yelled as Ponsonby's open hand struck him across the cheek. Gadsby and Monson, looking back, almost staggered in surprise. Pon had come for trouble, after all, as it appeared, and he had woke up trouble with one of the best fighting-men in the Remove. Gadsby and Monson stared at the scene dazedly.

Wharton spun round on the dandy of Highcliffe. He had been willing to get rid of the fellow without a row; but that sudden and unexpected blow quite altered his intentions. In a second he was springing at Ponsonby, his eyes blazing and his hands up.

In a moment they were fighting.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' roared Bob Cherry, staring at them from the cricket pitch.

'They're going it!'

There was a rush to the spot.

Ponsonby reeled right and left under Wharton's fierce blows. But he closed in and clinched with the captain of the Remove, struggling furiously. For a minute they struggled, and then Ponsonby was thrown away, and fell crumpling up on the ground.

He lay there gasping.

Harry Wharton's eyes blazed down at him.

'Do you want any more, you rotter? Get up and take it if you do.'

Ponsonby panted.

'Oh! Ow! No! Let me alone, you cad! Ow!'

'Get out, then!'

Harry Wharton turned his back contemptuously on the sprawling Highcliffian, and walked back towards the cricket pitch with a flushed face, meeting a dozen of the cricketers on the way. The brief fight was over before they could arrive on the scene of action.

‘What on earth was the row about?’ asked Nugent.

‘Blessed if I know! The fellow suddenly turned on me,’ answered Harry. ‘I can’t make it out at all—why he came, and why he put on friendly airs, and why he kicked up a row. I suppose he had a reason, but I can’t catch on to it. Hang him, anyhow—let’s get back to the cricket.’

Ponsonby picked himself up and limped away, and rejoined Gadsby and Monson. They stared at him in silence, and the three hurriedly cleared off Greyfriars ground. On the way back to Highcliffe, as Ponsonby did not speak, Gadsby broke out at last. ‘What does it mean, Pon? What did you go there for?’

‘I told you.’

‘Then why did you row with Wharton?’

‘I didn’t! He rowed with me.’

‘Did he?’ said Monson suspiciously. ‘I never heard what was said, of course; but I thought—’

‘Never mind what you thought; he picked a row with me,’ said Ponsonby. ‘He called me names, and I smacked his face, and then he went for me. You saw it all. Oh, my nose! What does it look like, Gaddy?’

‘Squashed strawberry!’ said Gaddy.

‘Oh, don’t be a fool! Lend me your pocket glass!’

Gadsby produced his pocket mirror, and Ponsonby slid it open, and looked at the reflection of his face in the glass. Then he uttered a sudden exclamation.

‘Where’s my tie-pin?’

‘Is it gone?’

‘My diamond pin is gone!’ said Ponsonby, feeling over his tie.

‘You weren’t wearing it, old bean,’ said Monson. ‘I should have noticed it.’

‘I was wearin’ it!’ said Ponsonby positively. ‘I remember specially stickin’ it into my tie before I came out.’

‘Well, it’s gone, then! You must have dropped it tusslin’ with that Greyfriars cad.’

‘I didn’t drop it,’ said Ponsonby coldly. ‘It fastens safe enough; but I fancy I know now why Wharton collared me. He’s got it.’

‘What?’ roared Gadsby and Monson together.

‘He’s got it!’

‘You—you—you fool!’ exclaimed Gadsby, aghast. ‘Is that your game? It won’t hold water for a second. You know Wharton hasn’t got it. You know jolly well he’d be hanged, drawn, and quartered before he’d take it. What’s the good of putting up such stuff? Do you think for a minute that you’d get away with it?’

‘Chuck it, for goodness’ sake!’ urged Monson. ‘You’re wild now, Pon, but you’ll think better of it when you’re cool. An accusation like that is a jolly serious thing. You know there’s nothin’ in it, as well as we do; and it will simply make you look a fool—an’ worse.’

Ponsonby laughed unpleasantly.

‘I’m absolutely certain of it,’ he answered.

‘I tell you it’s impossible.’

‘And I tell you I’m certain; and as soon as we get in, I’m goin’ to Mr. Mobbs about it,’ said Ponsonby deliberately. ‘I’m not havin’ a pin that cost ten guineas pinched without gettin’ it back somehow.’

'I tell you it's rot!'

'We shall see.'

'I tell you you'll look a fool, and worse. Every fellow will know at once that you're tryin' to plant a rotten accusation on Wharton because he licked you. For goodness' sake, chuck it.'

'Suppose it's found on him?'

'It won't be!' answered Gadsby. 'You didn't have a chance to stick it into his pocket,' he added sardonically.

'Well, I'm going to Mr. Mobbs about it.'

'More fool you, then.'

CHAPTER XXXI

Bunter's Discovery!

'FISHY, old man!'

Fisher T. Fish, the Transatlantic member of the Greyfriars Remove, waved Billy Bunter away impatiently.

'Absquatulate, you fat clam,' he said. 'I'm busy.'

'I say, Fishy—'

'Unless you've come to settle that bob you owe me,' added Fishy. Hope springs eternal in the human breast, and Fisher T. Fish still nourished a delusive hope that that shilling might yet come home again.

'The fact is, that's exactly it,' said Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles.

Fisher T. Fish extended his hand.

'Shell out!' he said laconically.

'I haven't got it at the moment—'

'You fat mugwump!' roared Fisher T. Fish. 'Absquatulate, I keep on telling you.'

'I want you to lend me—'

'Beat it, you galoot!'

'To lend me—'

Fisher T. Fish looked round for a missile.

'Your bunch of keys!' said Bunter hastily.

'Oh!' said Fishy. The merchant of the Remove was always ready to do business, even with a fellow who owed him a shilling which had to be marked off as a bad debt. 'If you want a key, it's threepence. If you want to borrow the whole bunch, it's the same. Shell out!'

Fisher T. Fish was the happy possessor of a bunch of innumerable keys, obtained cheaply at second-hand shops. Fellows often lost keys to desks and lockers, and Fisher was always ready to supply the deficiency—for a small consideration.

'I happen to be stony—' explained Bunter.

'Get out!'

'Because I've left my money in my desk—'

'Tons of it, I suppose!' said Fisher T. Fish sarcastically.

'And I've lost the key,' explained Bunter. 'Lend me your bunch, and I can get the desk open, old chap.'



'Well, my hat,' breathed Billy Bunter

Fisher T. Fish eyed him. Billy Bunter was a borrower of dreaded skill, and he was seldom or never known to settle a debt. But even Bunter could not be suspected of having nefarious designs on an old bunch of rusty, worthless keys. With such a commodity even William George Bunter could be trusted, even by so suspicious and cute a galoot as Fisher T. Fish.

'I guess I'll lend you the bunch,' said Fisher T. Fish. 'Bring them back when you've opened your desk.'

'Right-ho!'

Fisher T. Fish sorted the jingling bunch of many and various keys out of a drawer and handed it to Bunter. The chance of recovering that long-lost 'bob' was worth it, though it gave Fishy a pain to lend even a bunch of old keys for nothing.

The Owl of the Remove rolled away down the Remove passage. Fisher T. Fish prided himself upon being the smartest, cutest, and spryest galoot ever; so William George Bunter felt quite bucked at having pulled Fishy's Transatlantic leg so easily.

Bunter did not head for his own study; he headed for Study No. 1, and rolled into that famous apartment and closed the door after him.

He gave a fat chuckle as he stopped before Wharton's desk.

It was not to open his own desk in search of non-existent cash that Bunter had wanted that bunch of keys; it was to open Wharton's desk in search of that valuable work, 'Sure Snips', without which Bunter felt that it was probable that he would not be successful in spotting winners.

The coast was quite clear. Harry Wharton & Co. were at games practice, and had certainly forgotten the existence of William George Bunter.

Among the innumerable keys on Fishy's bunch Bunter was certain there would be one that fitted Wharton's desk. After which, all was plain sailing. With 'Sure Snips' once more in his possession, the 'rorty dog' of the Remove was going to spot winners—and a field of illimitable wealth lay open before him.

With a grinning fat face, Bunter opened drawer after drawer of the desk when he had found a key to fit, which he easily did. Drawer after drawer was searched thoroughly; but that infallible guide to spotting winners—which a generous gentleman sold for sixpence, instead of spotting the winners himself—was not to be found.

'Beast!' grunted Bunter, when he had examined two or three drawers without result.

It was possible, of course, that that beast Wharton had put the valuable pamphlet somewhere else. Still, he could not be carrying it about with him, and the desk was the likeliest place. The Owl of the Remove proceeded with his search, unlocking drawer after drawer, and searching it from top to bottom.

Under a stack of old papers in a bottom drawer his fat fingers came in contact with a small, hard object. He drew it out and blinked at it, and his little round eyes grew wide with amazement behind his big spectacles. The object in his hand glittered and sparkled in the sunlight from the window, flashing as he moved it. It was a diamond tie-pin, and, little as Bunter knew about precious stones, he could see that the diamond was a valuable one for its size. He stared at it, almost dumbfounded. Fellows did not usually sport diamonds at Greyfriars. The Bounder had one—he had many things of that sort. But certainly Harry Wharton had never been seen with a diamond pin. Such a find in Harry Wharton's desk was simply astounding. For several minutes Bunter blinked at it, amazed. If it belonged to Wharton, he had never worn it at Greyfriars, at least. Back into Bunter's mind came a forgotten incident: he remembered how he had hidden a watch in Wharton's desk which he had taken for a fatuous practical joke. Had somebody played a similar trick with Smithy's diamond pin?

But he shook his head. This was not Smithy's pin; the diamond was smaller and of a purer water.

'Well, my hat!' said Bunter at last. Really it was no business of Bunter's. For that reason, no doubt, he was all the more interested.

'It's Wharton's all right!' he decided at last. 'I've never seen it before, but it's his all right; bit too dressy to wear at school, that's why he keeps it locked up.'

Slowly a fat grin overspread Bunter's face.

He could not find his priceless guide to illimitable wealth; Wharton had apparently put it somewhere else. But he had, as it were, a hostage in his hands now. Wharton refused to give up 'Sure Snips'—butting into Bunter's personal business in the most unwarrantable manner, keeping the fat Owl out of trouble, whether he liked it or not. Well, now Bunter had something in exchange—and he would change back when Wharton would!

He chuckled at that idea. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. The diamond tie-pin disappeared into Bunter's pocket, and he locked up the last drawer of the desk and rolled out of the study.

CHAPTER XXXII

Swap!

'I SAY, you fellows!'

The Remove fellows on Little Side did not heed Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove blinked round inquiringly. A group of juniors stood there staring at something that was going on at a little distance. Cricket had stopped for the time.

'I say, you fellows, where's Wharton?' demanded Bunter.

'Punching Ponsonby!' answered Vernon-Smith, with a grin.

'Eh?'

Bunter turned his big spectacles on the scene across the field. He beheld Ponsonby of Highcliffe sprawling, Gadsby and Monson waiting a little farther on, and Harry Wharton coming back towards the cricket pitch, with a little crowd of the Removites. Bunter had arrived just in time to see the finale, as it were. He grinned as he saw Ponsonby pick himself up and limp away and disappear with Gadsby and Monson. Wharton's face was flushed and his brow knitted as he came back to the cricket pitch.

'I say, Harry, old chap—'

'Oh, scat!' said Wharton.

'I say, I want—'

'Roll away, fathead!'

'Look here—' roared Bunter.

'Hook it!'

And, heedless of Billy Bunter, the juniors returned to games practice. The Owl of the Remove stood watching them, in a state of deep annoyance.

All this time, while he was watching games practice, he might have been studying the form of Bully Boy, Gay Colt, and Snooker Pool, and making up his fat mind which of those gee-gees to back at Wapshot!

Really, it was hard lines on a rorty dog!

However, there it was. Cricket was the order of the day, and Bunter had to wait. It was not till games practice was over, and the Famous Five were walking back to the House, that Bunter succeeded in making his dulcet voice heard. He rolled after them, and ran them down in the Remove passage at last.

'I say, you fellows—'

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

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I've got to speak to Wharton!' said Bunter. 'Wharton's pinched my "Sure Snips"—'

'You fat chump!' exclaimed Wharton. 'Dry up! Chuck it! If you say "Sure Snips" again I'll bang your silly head on the door!'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'Shut up!' roared Bob Cherry.

'Shan't!' retorted Bunter. 'I've asked Wharton to give me back that book. He refuses! All right! I'm going to keep his diamond pin until he does!'

The juniors in Study No. 1, all busy lending a hand towards getting tea, suddenly stopped that occupation to stare at Bunter. He had succeeded in astonishing the Co.

'You're going to keep what?' ejaculated Wharton blankly.

'Your diamond pin. I've been looking for my racing guide,' explained Bunter. 'I borrowed Fishy's keys, and went through your desk while you were at cricket.'

'You cheeky toad!' exclaimed Wharton wrathfully.

'Oh, really, Wharton! I mean it! I'm keeping your diamond pin so long as you keep my race book! I'm ready to swap when you are.'

Harry Wharton stared at him.

'If you've got my diamond pin, you can keep it,' he answered, 'As I have never owned a diamond pin in my life, it's a safe offer.'

Bunter blinked at the captain of the Remove.

'Mean that?' he demanded.

'Certainly!' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'I tell you I haven't a diamond pin, and never had one.'

'Then whose was the one I found in your desk?'

'You never found one there, fathead! You're dreaming!'

'I've got it in my pocket now!' roared Bunter.

'You've got a diamond pin in your pocket that you found in my desk?' exclaimed the captain of the Remove, stupefied.

'Yes.'

'You're dreaming! Let's see it!'

'Here it is!' grinned Bunter.

There was a flash and a sparkle in the study, as Billy Bunter jerked out the diamond

pin and held it up. Harry Wharton stared at it, dumbfounded. His comrades blinked at it with almost unbelieving eyes. That it was a valuable diamond, and that it did not belong to Harry Wharton, all of them knew. And Bunter had found it locked up in Wharton's desk.

'You say you got that from my desk, Bunter?'

'Yes; it was under the rubbish in the bottom drawer—same place where I put that watch once.'

'Was the drawer locked?'

'Yes. I got it open with Fishy's keys.'

Wharton's face was a little pale now, and hard set. He turned to look at Da Costa and his chums followed his look. Every eye in the study was fixed on the Eurasian.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Hand of the Enemy!

ARTHUR DA COSTA stared from face to face, his own growing white.

The Eurasian gave a cry—it was like a cry of pain.

'Wharton! You cannot think—you cannot suspect—'

His voice trailed off, and he looked round him wildly.

'You cannot believe—'

Wharton looked at him hard.

'What am I to think?' he said, in a low voice. 'I've trusted you. I've believed you. But that diamond was locked up in my desk, just as the things were that Quelchy found, and that you owned up to. You had a key then—' He broke off. 'Goodness knows, I don't want to doubt you, Da Costa. But that diamond belongs to somebody, and it has been stolen—it has been stolen and hidden in my desk—in a locked drawer! What's a fellow to make of that?'

'It looks clear enough!' muttered Nugent. 'But—'

'The clearfulness appears to be terrific!' said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. 'But let us not be hasty, my esteemed chums. Make haste slowly is an esteemed proverb.'

Arthur da Costa leaned one hand on the study table. He seemed almost giddy, and his breath came in panting gasps.

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors in astonishment. The matter was developing in a way far from expected by the Owl of the Remove.

'I—I—I say, you fellows, doesn't that pin really belong to Wharton?' he stuttered.

'No, you ass!'

'Then that fellow put it there,' said Bunter. 'You remember I warned you about Da Costa—'

'It is false!' almost shrieked the Eurasian. 'Wharton, I tell you—I swear I know nothing of it! I turned that villain Marker down.'

'I—I know,' muttered Wharton. 'But—'

'I know nothing of it. I cannot understand it. I swear that I know nothing of this!' said the Eurasian huskily. 'Cannot you believe me?'

'Then what does it mean?'

'I know nothing. I cannot understand it. But I am innocent of any knowledge of it.'

There was a long pause in the study. The Eurasian's statement was incredible, for who else could have concealed a stolen diamond in Wharton's desk—evidently to be found there, and the finding to be followed by an accusation of theft. Yet the haggard earnestness in the olive face impressed the juniors deeply.

Wharton spoke at last.

'I believe you, Da Costa,' he said slowly—'I believe you, and I'll trust you. I believe you.'

'I will prove, somehow, that it was not my doing,' panted Da Costa. 'It is a fresh move of Captain Marker's; you all know that.

Captain Marker has planned this. I warned you that you were not done with him.

Perhaps you have a right to doubt me, but I swear I am telling the truth.'

'I don't—I won't doubt you,' said Harry firmly. 'I hope you fellows all say the same.'

'The samefulness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh quietly; and the other fellows nodded.

'We've got to go into this,' said Harry.

'First of all, we want to find out to whom that diamond pin belongs,' said Johnny Bull. 'Hand it over.'

The diamond pin passed from hand to hand. Arthur da Costa's eyes gleamed as he examined it.

'I have seen that before,' he said.

'Then you know—'

'It belongs to that fellow we saw with Captain Marker on Courtfield Common a few days ago—the fellow who came here today and kicked up a row.'

'Ponsonby!' exclaimed all the juniors together. 'Yess. He was wearing this pin the day we saw him with Marker. I noticed it then, and I know it again,' said Da Costa positively.

'I remember seeing Pon sport a diamond tie-pin more than once,' remarked Bob Cherry.

The esteemed Da Costa has hit the right nail on its ridiculous head,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'I remember that pin perfectly, now that I examine it, my excellent chums. It belongs to the absurd Ponsonby.'

'You are sure, Inky? Da Costa's seen it only once.'

'But I am sure,' said Da Costa.

'The surefulness is terrific,' said the nabob. 'I can identify that esteemed tip-pin swearfully.'

'I say, you fellows, I thought it looked like Pon's tie-pin,' gasped Bunter. 'I noticed that when I found it.'

Wharton's face was grim.

'Pon's diamond pin!' he said. 'So that's why that villain Marker has made friends with Pon. That's why he's hanging about the neighbourhood. He's been spying and getting information, and he's got on to it that Ponsonby's on bad terms with us, and he's got hold of Ponsonby, and he's found him rascal enough to help him.'

'Looks like it,' said Nugent. 'In fact, it can't be anything else, as Pon's pin was found in your desk. It's plain enough that you're going to be accused of stealing it; it couldn't be there for anything else.'

'But how did it get there?' asked Johnny Bull. 'Pon came here to-day, but he never came near the House. He hasn't been at Greyfriars for weeks, and Da Costa says he was wearing this pin only a few days ago. Pon never had a chance of planting the thing here.'

The juniors looked at one another in silence. They had discovered that it was Ponsonby's diamond—they had no doubt that the blackguard of Highcliffe was in confederation with Captain Marker. Yet the matter still remained unexplained. It was obviously impossible for Ponsonby, or any other Highcliffe man, to have placed the diamond where it had been found by Bunter.

‘If that fat idiot hadn’t been rummaging my desk, the pin would have stayed where it was hidden,’ said Harry. ‘I never use that drawer. There’s only lumber in it. It was there to be found— after I’ve been accused of stealing it, and a search demanded by Ponsonby. That’s clear. That means that an accusation is coming, and may come at any moment.’ The captain of the Remove gave a sudden start. ‘That’s why Ponsonby came over here this afternoon. That’s why he forced a scrap with me. It was to make out that I’d had an opportunity of pinching the tie-pin. Of course I could have done it while I was grappling with him, if I’d wanted to, and if he had had it on. That was the game.’

‘And the pin was hidden here all the time,’ said Bob, in a hushed voice. ‘What an awful rascal!’

‘We know Ponsonby,’ said Wharton bitterly. ‘We know he worked up a scheme to get that chap Courtenay sacked, when he first came to Highcliffe, and very nearly got away with it. He’s capable of anything. Just the fellow that villain Marker wanted to get hold of.’ His lips set. ‘I’m going to Quelch now. You’ll come with me, Bunter! I’ll hand over this pin to Quelch, and tell him the whole story. That’s the way to put paid to Ponsonby in advance. When we get the accusation from Highcliffe, Quelch will know how to handle it, knowing the whole story before it comes.’

‘Good egg!’ said Bob.

‘Come with me, Bunter.’

And Harry Wharton, taking the Owl of the Remove with him, went down at once to Mr. Quelch’s study; where the master of the Remove listened to a story that made him open his eyes wide with astonishment and horror.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Accusation!

‘MOBBY!’ remarked Vernon-Smith.

‘Little Mobby!’ said Ogilvy. ‘I wonder what he wants.’

The Bounder grinned.

‘He’s got Pon with him! Dear old Pon has been complainin’ about havin’ his head punched here this afternoon.’

‘Pon came here and started that,’ said Redwing.

‘Well, he hasn’t come to render thanks, anyway,’ said Smithy. And the juniors laughed.

A good many fellows looked rather curiously at Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, as he walked up to the House with Cecil Ponsonby walking at his side.

At the present moment, Mr. Mobbs was bristling with indignation and disgust. He had lost no time in getting over to Greyfriars after hearing Ponsonby’s statement that he had been robbed there. It was a matter that could not be settled too soon. The wretched thief had to be exposed, and the plunder recovered, before he had had a chance of disposing of it, or concealing it where it could not be found.

Mr. Mobbs frowned at the group of Greyfriars juniors as he passed them. Ponsonby glanced at them with his usual insolent air, secure in the knowledge that he could not be kicked in the presence of his Form-master.

They entered the House.

From his study window, Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, beheld the visitors, and his lips set in a tight line at the sight of them. When Mr. Mobbs entered, he found

Trotter, the page, waiting for him.

‘This way, sir!’ said Trotter.

‘I have called to see the headmaster,’ said Mr. Mobbs stiffly.

‘Mr. Quelch said to show you to his study, sir.’

Mr. Mobbs blinked at Trotter.

‘I fail to understand,’ he grunted. ‘This call was not expected by Mr. Quelch.’

‘That’s what he said, sir,’ answered Trotter. ‘This way, sir.’

In a very puzzled frame of mind, Mr. Mobbs followed Trotter into Masters passage. It was impossible that Mr. Quelch had been expecting the call, as he had only decided to come over to Greyfriars after hearing Ponsonby’s story at Highcliffe, and had sent no word. However, he followed Trotter, and was shown into Mr. Quelch’s study with Ponsonby, and Trotter drew the door shut and departed.

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

The grimness of his face was rather striking to the view. But he gave the Highcliffe master a formal bow, taking no notice of Ponsonby.

‘Be seated, sir,’ said Mr. Quelch grimly, and he waved his hand to a chair. ‘I have been expecting this call.’

‘I will not sit down, thank you,’ rasped Mr. Mobbs, ‘and I utterly fail to understand, sir, how you can have been expecting this call. I may add that it is the headmaster I desire to see.’

‘Your visit concerns a member of my Form, I believe?’

‘That is correct; though really—’ Mr. Mobbs was surprised and suspicious, and Ponsonby, with all his alert coolness, had a vague feeling of uneasiness. It really was inexplicable how Mr. Quelch knew all this.

‘Dr. Locke leaves all matters pertaining to my Form in my hands,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘I will therefore hear what you have to say. If you consider it worth while to trouble the Head in the matter afterwards, you are at full liberty to do so. In the meantime, pray allow me to hear what complaint you have to make concerning a Remove boy of this school.’

‘It is not merely a complaint, sir!’ snapped Mr. Mobbs. ‘It is an accusation, a most serious accusation!’

‘Indeed?’

‘Yes, indeed, sir!’ said Mr. Mobbs tartly. ‘This boy Ponsonby has been robbed—robbed, sir, of an article of value.’

Mr. Quelch’s eyes narrowed and glinted.

But he did not look astonished or shocked as might have been expected. Really, it seemed as if Mr. Quelch had been anticipating the accusation as well as the visit.

Which was inexplicable, if it was the case.

‘Of what has this boy been robbed, sir?’ he inquired.

‘A diamond tie-pin—an article of great value,’ said Mr. Mobbs.

‘You accuse a Greyfriars boy?’

‘I accuse a boy named Wharton.’

‘Not of your own knowledge, I presume?’ inquired the Remove master, with an inflection of sarcasm in his voice.

‘Naturally not,’ said Mr. Mobbs. ‘Ponsonby reported his loss to me, with all particulars; and I have taken the matter in hand immediately.’

‘Your accusation, then, depends wholly upon Ponsonby’s report to you, Mr. Mobbs?’

‘Quite! I trust Ponsonby’s word absolutely.’

‘You will scarcely expect me to do so when he charges a Greyfriars boy with an act of unscrupulous wickedness,’ said Mr. Quelch dryly.

‘It is a matter for proof!’ said Mr. Mobbs, ‘and the proof will be forthcoming.’

‘I am waiting to hear it,’ said Mr. Quelch.

‘Ponsonby, as he informs me, came over here this afternoon to see Wharton. Two friends came with him—’

‘One moment,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘It has frequently been brought to my notice that this boy Ponsonby is on unfriendly terms with Wharton. I desire to know why he came to visit a boy with whom he is on unfriendly terms.’

‘That is easily explained, and redounds to the credit of Ponsonby. He was engaged in some dispute with Wharton a few days ago, and on reflection he considered that he had acted hastily, and that he owed the boy an apology. He came here specially to tender that apology, sir.’

‘Very much to his credit, if correct,’ said Mr. Quelch, ‘and may I ask what transpired, or what Ponsonby told you transpired?’

‘Wharton treated him in a friendly manner while in the presence of other boys. But when Ponsonby was leaving, and out of hearing of the others, Wharton insulted him and attacked him, and there was a scuffle. I have no doubt,’ added Mr. Mobbs, bitterly, ‘that Wharton would represent the reverse as having been the case.’

‘I have no doubt of it, sir,’ said Mr. Quelch, unmoved, ‘and I should have no hesitation whatever in taking Wharton’s word on that point.’

‘And I, sir, take Ponsonby’s word without question,’ said Mr. Mobbs, raising his voice a little.

‘We will agree to differ on that point, which after all is immaterial,’ said the Remove master calmly. ‘Let us come to the alleged theft.’

‘While scuffling with Wharton, Ponsonby felt his necktie tugged, but at the time, and in the excitement of the moment, did not specially heed it. It was after he had left the precincts of Greyfriars, and had started to return to Highcliffe with his friends, that he missed his tie-pin. Then he recalled the incident; and very properly reported it to me at once.’

Mr. Quelch looked hard and long at Ponsonby. There was something like wonder in his look; and it was not the look that Ponsonby expected. It increased the vague uneasiness that troubled him.

‘In a word,’ said the Remove master, ‘Ponsonby accuses Wharton of having forced a scuffle upon him, for the purpose of stealing his diamond pin.’

‘I do,’ said Ponsonby.

‘You have come here with your Form-master to make this accusation, and to claim the return of your property?’

‘Yes, sir!’

‘Very good!’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘If Wharton, of my Form, has committed a theft, the stolen property will undoubtedly be returned, and the boy will be expelled ignominiously from Greyfriars.’ Ponsonby’s eyes glittered for a second. ‘But in a matter such as this, we cannot be too careful, Mr. Mobbs. May I ask what steps you propose taking?’

‘The boy should be called in, sir, and confronted with Ponsonby,’ said Mr. Mobbs. ‘If he has the audacity—as I do not doubt—to deny his guilt, he must be searched.’



'Is this the pin?' snapped Mr. Quelch

'And then,' said Mr. Quelch, 'admitting that the stolen property is not found on him, what then?'

'His belongings, sir, should then be searched—his study, and receptacle such as a desk, a box, a locker,' said Mr. Mobbs. 'Really, sir, these questions appear to me frivolous. Search must be made, in my presence. I am bound to say, sir, that I refuse to allow the slightest opportunity for the stolen article to be smuggled out of sight.'

'Indeed, sir!'

'Indeed!' snapped Mr. Mobbs. 'This is not a matter for ceremony, sir. I say plainly that unless the search of Wharton and his belongings is conducted in my presence, I shall place the matter in the hands of Inspector Grimes at Courtfield, with a formal accusation of theft against Wharton.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Quelch, still unmoved. 'And if the stolen article be discovered in Wharton's study, f'rinstance, you will take that as absolute proof that he purloined it?' Mr. Mobbs stared.

'Naturally!' he snapped.

'Naturally,' assented Mr. Quelch.

He removed his blotting-pad and there was a flash and a sparkle where it had lain.

'Is this the pin?' he asked.

Ponsonby stirred slightly, shivering. The diamond tie-pin, which Captain Marker had concealed in a locked drawer of Wharton's desk in Study No. 1—as he had told Ponsonby, at least—lay in full view on Mr. Quelch's table, gleaming and sparkling in the sunset.

Mr. Mobbs bent forward.

'That is the article, sir,' he said triumphantly. 'That is it—a dozen persons can identify it if necessary! I cannot understand, sir, why you have wasted so much time, when the stolen article has already come into your possession—'

'It did not, sir!' said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. 'This diamond pin, sir, was found by another junior, in Wharton's desk in his study half an hour before Ponsonby came to Greyfriars this afternoon!'

CHAPTER XXXV

A Clean Breast of It!

THERE was a dead silence in Mr. Quelch's study.

Ponsonby, almost sick, put his hand on the back of a chair for support. His legs seemed to be crumpling under him.

‘This accusation,’ went on Mr. Quelch’s grinding voice, ‘is false and malicious from beginning to end. In some unknown way, Ponsonby contrived to have this diamond pin concealed in a drawer of Wharton’s desk in his study—concealed there in a way that made it utterly unlikely that Wharton would discover it. Had it never been found until a search was instituted, many would have taken it for proof that Wharton had committed a miserable theft—I fear—I greatly fear—that such evidence would have made me doubt him. For even now I cannot imagine how the diamond was placed there—though Ponsonby will explain that point before he leaves this study, or else he will leave it in the custody of a constable.’

Mr. Mobbs gasped for breath.

‘I—I—I fail to—to—to understand this, sir!’ he stuttered at last. ‘There is some—some mistake. You say that this diamond pin was found in Wharton’s desk—by whom, sir?’

‘By a boy named Bunter. He showed it to Wharton, who, knowing that it was not his, immediately brought it to me.’

Mr. Mobbs gulped.

‘Wharton brought it to you, sir?’

‘He did!’

‘Goodness gracious!’ gasped Mr. Mobbs.

‘I have carefully questioned the boys,’ went on the Remove master. ‘The diamond pin was found in the desk half an hour before Ponsonby came to Greyfriars this afternoon. Bunter had it in his pocket at the very time that Wharton was scuffling with Ponsonby—Bunter believing, at that time, that it was Wharton’s. At the time, sir, that Ponsonby states that Wharton snatched his diamond pin from him in a scuffle, his diamond pin was in the pocket of a boy standing at a distance watching the scuffle.’

‘Oh!’ gasped Mr. Mobbs.

He gave Ponsonby one look—a bitter, scathing look, which indicated his feelings at being landed in a situation like this.

Mr. Quelch picked up the diamond pin from the table, dropped it into a drawer, and snapped the drawer shut.

‘That pin, sir, remains here until a constable arrives to take official charge of it!’ he answered icily.

‘What—what!’ gasped Mr. Mobbs.

‘You, sir, are at liberty to depart as soon as you please; but the same does not apply to Ponsonby. I shall detain Ponsonby here until a constable arrives from Courtfield Police Station to take him into custody.’

Mr. Mobbs sank down into the chair again, his legs failing to support him. His face was chalky white. The thought of the scandal, the indelible disgrace, that was impending, almost overwhelmed him. A Highcliffe boy taken into custody by the police, charged with crime! The name of Highcliffe School bandied from mouth to mouth—in all the newspapers—endless shame and scandal! Mr. Mobbs gasped helplessly.

‘For mercy’s sake, sir!’ panted Ponsonby. ‘I—I—— For mercy’s sake, sir, don’t—don’t—oh, don’t!’

The cool insolence of the rascal of Highcliffe had deserted him now. He was white as a sheet, and trembling with fear.

Expulsion from Highcliffe was a matter of course, if Mr. Quelch took his threatened action. What the legal penalties might be Ponsonby did not know; but the bare thought of being taken into police custody chilled him with terror to the very marrow of his bones.

Mr. Quelch's steely eyes fixed on him ruthlessly.

'I have no pity for you, Ponsonby. You have acted with a wickedness almost incredible in a boy of your age. You are an unscrupulous scoundrel! More, you are a dangerous character! The most complete and public exposure of your rascality is all that remains. For the sake of the boy against whom you have plotted, I cannot afford to be lenient. This matter must be placed in the hands of the police.'

Ponsonby groaned aloud.

'For pity's sake, sir—' he moaned in utter misery and fear.

There was a pause.

'I can make no promise, Mr. Mobbs,' said the Remove master at last. 'The boy Wharton must be protected from further dastardly scheming of this sort.'

'Ponsonby will never—never——'

'I must have assurance of that!' said Mr. Quelch icily. 'I repeat that I can make no promise. But I will say this: I will do my best to keep this matter to our knowledge only, and leave Ponsonby's punishment to his own headmaster, if the wretched boy will, here and now, make a full and frank confession, write it down in my presence, and sign it, with you, sir, and myself as witnesses. This is the very least that I must require for the protection of the boy against whom he has plotted so wickedly.'

Ponsonby raised a haggard face.

'I'll do it, sir—I'll do anything—anything——'

'Then speak,' said Mr. Quelch. 'In the first place, confess how the diamond pin was placed in Wharton's desk unknown to him.'

'That villain—Captain Marker!' groaned Ponsonby. 'It was his doing from beginning to end. I—I never meant—'

'Keep to the truth, you miserable boy!'

'Who is Captain Marker?' stuttered Mr. Mobbs. 'I never heard of him.'

'The man, sir, who stands to benefit under a will, if Wharton should be disgraced, and therefore proved unworthy of a certain legacy, left him on conditions. Proceed, Ponsonby!'

'Marker fixed it all up, sir,' groaned Ponsonby. 'I never knew his reason, except that he had some trouble with Wharton, and I hated him. I—I met him by chance. I—I don't know much about him. He got into Greyfriars last night, and planted that diamond pin in Wharton's desk—'

'How did he know how to find his way about this building?'

'I—I told him—I've been here a lot of times, and I—I told him how to get about,' muttered Ponsonby. 'I saw him to-day and—and he told me it was all fixed—he had a lot of keys, and he'd unlocked a drawer in Wharton's desk and hidden the diamond under a lot of things where it wouldn't be found by chance—'

'Good heavens!' breathed Mr. Mobbs. The master of the Highcliffe Fourth was genuinely shocked and dismayed.

'And then you came here this afternoon to force a scuffle on Wharton to give colour to the story that he had abstracted the diamond pin,' said Mr. Quelch sternly.

'It—it was Marker's suggestion, sir. It had to be fixed up somehow that Wharton had an opportunity of taking it. I—I'm sorry—'

'Your sorrow, I think, is entirely for yourself,' said Mr. Quelch with biting scorn. 'No doubt this charge may be brought home to Captain Marker—he will be required to account for where he was last night—and doubtless his fingerprints may be traced on Wharton's desk by an expert. Where is the man to be found?'

'At the Red Lion in Redclyffe, sir.'

'Very good! Ponsonby, you will make a full confession of this matter, with a detailed

account of your dealings with Captain Marker. Sit at this table—here is pen and paper.’

Ponsonby wrote, under the Remove master’s eye. He wrote feverishly, only hoping that the confession might save him. After he had finished Mr. Quelch read the paper through slowly and carefully and then requested Mr. Mobbs to read it and sign it as a witness. Mr. Mobbs having done so, the Remove master signed it in turn as a second witness. Then he folded the paper and locked it in his desk.

‘For the present, the matter ends here,’ he said. He took the diamond pin from the table-drawer. ‘You may take this now, Ponsonby, and go! The outcome depends largely upon Colonel Wharton’s actions and views and upon Captain Marker’s attitude; but if I can help it, it shall not be made public. That is all I can say. Go! Mr. Mobbs, I wish you good afternoon!’

CHAPTER XXXVI

Captain Marker’s Last Blow!

ARTHUR DA COSTA stopped suddenly.

The Eurasian junior was sauntering along the path across Courtfield Common, the same path that Harry Wharton & Co. had been following a couple of weeks before, when they had come upon Ponsonby and Captain Marker.

Several days had passed since that scene in Mr. Quelch’s study at Greyfriars, when the hapless Mr. Mobbs had departed in so crushed a state with the defeated schemer.

It was Wednesday now, and that afternoon the Remove were playing the Upper Fourth. For a cricket match with Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth, the Remove did not need all their best men, and Harry Wharton had left the captaincy in the hands of Vernon-Smith, and walked over to Highcliffe to see Courtenay. He was aware that Frank Courtenay knew something of the affair of the diamond pin. Neither was Da Costa in the Remove eleven—so mighty a man was not needed against the Upper Fourth. So after watching the Form match for a time, Da Costa strolled away, and walked across the common to meet Wharton as he came back from Highcliffe.

It was a somewhat lonely path across the wide common, winding among trees and hawthorn bushes. Da Costa sauntered along in a leisurely way, having plenty of time on his hands. It was the sight of a figure ahead of him on the shady path that caused him to stop suddenly, a gleam coming into his eyes.

At the end of the shady path, beyond which lay the open common stretching to the Highcliffe road, a man stood back under the trees, his back to Da Costa, watching the open expanse.

Da Costa did not need to see his face to know who it was. It was Captain Marker. The Eurasian stood quite still for a moment and then stepped off the path into the trees.

That Captain Marker was watching and waiting for somebody there, was evident from his attitude—he was watching for someone to approach from the direction of Highcliffe.

The Eurasian’s heart beat faster.

Before long, Wharton would be coming along that path. He was sure, or almost sure, that the captain knew it, and was waiting for him.

What did he intend?

The defeated schemer, whose last desperate blow had failed, was at the end of his tether now, whether he knew it or not. Nothing was left to him but to abandon his

rascally scheme against his rival for a fortune; and that meant ruin to the spendthrift, who was involved in endless debts and difficulties. What did he intend—as he half-crouched there in the hawthorns at the end of the shady path, watching the common? What fierce and desperate thoughts might be working in the mind of the man from India?

The Eurasian breathed hard.

He could only wait and watch; ready to intervene, and help, if danger threatened the captain of the Remove. And every instinct warned him that Wharton was in danger now.

There was a sound of running footsteps on the grassy path. Da Costa backed deeper into cover as the captain came running. Marker stopped, not six yards from the hidden junior, and backed behind a tree close to the path.

Da Costa could hear his deep, hard breathing as he stood there—watching.

The Eurasian could guess what that action meant. Marker had sighted Wharton coming across the common, about to enter the path through the trees—and he had chosen to wait for the Greyfriars junior in the very heart of the thicket: a proof that he did not desire any eyes but his own to see what was about to happen.

As he stood behind the tree Marker glanced up and down the path, and peered into the thickets round him, sharply, suspiciously.

Da Costa kept close in cover. The expression on Marker's face startled him—so savage and malignant and intense was it. It was the face of a desperate and ruthless man that Da Costa glimpsed through the thickets.

A few minutes later there was the sound of footsteps on the path again, and Harry Wharton came in sight.

He came swinging along carelessly, with a cheery face, evidently unconscious of danger on the path.

With a sudden spring Marker came out into the path as the captain of the Remove was about to pass him.

Wharton stopped

'You!' he ejaculated.

Captain Marker stood in the path before him, his eyes fixed on the Greyfriars junior. The malignancy of his expression made Wharton back away a few paces. He clenched his hands, watching the captain warily.

'So I've got you!' said Marker. 'I've got you now, boy. Your friends are not with you now. It will not be a ragging this time, Harry Wharton!'

'Keep your distance, you rotter!' answered Wharton coolly. 'Are you hanging about here to meet Ponsonby? You won't see him again.'

'You are still at Greyfriars?'

Wharton laughed contemptuously.

'Yes; and Ponsonby is lucky to be still at Highcliffe. Hasn't he sent you word? No wonder you're anxious to see him.'

'Then you know?'

'Ponsonby has written and signed a confession,' said Harry, his lip curling. 'The game is up. If that's what you wanted to find out from Ponsonby, you can hear it from me. You are going to be called to account for having broken into Greyfriars at night, and hiding the diamond pin in my study. You've overstepped the law at last, you rotter, and given yourself away! Anything more you want to know?'

'No,' said Captain Marker, in a low voice. 'That is enough. If that young rascal has betrayed me, I know the game is up. And from what you say it is clear enough. I came here to wait for him, after sending him a message. But I suppose he will not come.'

‘You can bet on that,’ said Harry. ‘He’s too busy taking care of himself and wondering whether he will be sacked from Highcliffe to bother about you.’

‘No doubt.’

‘Now let me pass,’ said Harry.

The captain laughed a low, unpleasant laugh.

‘The game is up,’ he said, ‘I have been beaten all along the line. Now that I know what has happened, I do not want to see Ponsonby. But I am very glad to see you, Harry Wharton, in this lonely place, with no eyes to witness. You are at my mercy here.’

‘Not quite,’ said Wharton coolly, though his heart was beating fast. ‘If you lay a finger on me, Captain Marker, you’ll find that I know how to use my hands. I’m not afraid of you.’

The captain laughed again—a very ugly laugh.

‘Under the will of that old fool in Calcutta you inherit a fortune, if you keep a clean record at school—if you do not get expelled as I was in my time. You know that that is why I have worked against you. I have failed, and that game is up. But you will not profit much by beating me. There are other ways, Harry Wharton. Old Mr.

Cortolvin’s fortune would come to me if you fell into disgrace at school. But it may come to me in other ways. It would come to me if you did not live to inherit it.’

Wharton started.

‘Have no fear of that,’ sneered the captain. ‘I am not fool enough to put my neck into a rope, even to revenge myself upon you. But there are still other ways. What will happen if you are not to be found when the time comes for the fortune to be handed over? If you have been missing all those years, and are not to be found? The fortune will then be mine.’

‘I’m not likely to be missing, I suppose?’ said Harry, staring at the malignant face blankly.

Again came that ugly laugh.

‘I think so, boy—I think it very likely. My car is waiting on the road a short distance from here. After dark you will be placed in that car, unconscious, and driven away.’

Wharton’s hand clenched harder.

‘I have laid my plans, boy,’ said the captain, quietly and menacingly. ‘You have driven me to more desperate measures than I anticipated; but I do not lose a fortune because of that. At midnight you will be on board a vessel—your destination you will discover later—and you will vanish from all human knowledge. Do you understand?’

‘I think you must be mad!’ said Harry. ‘If you are thinking of kidnapping me, you won’t get away with it easily.’

‘What is to save you?’ jeered the captain. ‘There is no help for you here. And one blow from this will place you helpless at my mercy.’ From under his coat the captain drew a short, loaded stick. ‘What now?’

Wharton’s heart throbbed. He was face to face with an utterly desperate man—a man who, at the end of his resources, had now thrown caution to the winds, and was prepared to take desperate chances. The Greyfriars junior sprang back, and the captain followed him up with gleaming, malignant eyes. There was a sudden rustling in the thicket, and a hidden figure leaped out behind the captain as his arm was uplifted to strike. Da Costa, with the spring of a tiger, was on the ruffian, dragging him back.

A yell of rage burst from the captain at the utterly unexpected attack.

He whirled round on the Eurasian.

‘Da Costa!’ panted Wharton, in joy and relief. ‘Oh, good man!’ And he rushed at the captain to help his friend.

Crash!

The loaded stick in the ruffian's hand struck down Da Costa.

With a gasping cry, the Eurasian fell in the grass.

Wharton, his eyes blazing, was on the ruffian at the same moment. His clenched fist struck the captain behind the ear as he was turning back from the fallen Eurasian.

Captain Marker reeled over and fell in the path, dizzy from that hefty blow. The loaded stick dropped from his hand.

'Da Costa!' panted Wharton.

The Eurasian stirred feebly, but no word came from him. Wharton snatched up the fallen stick. There was blood on the half-caste's olive face. It was plain that he was badly hurt. Captain Marker was staggering to his feet as Wharton turned on him, fierce wrath in his face, and the loaded stick gripped in his hand. The Greyfriars junior struck with all his strength, and the blow stretched Captain Marker in the grass, stunned and senseless.

'Da Costa!'

Wharton threw the stick into the thickets, and dropped on his knees beside the Eurasian.

'Old chap,' he panted huskily, 'you're hurt!'

But the Eurasian did not speak, and his dark eyes were closed. A streak of crimson ran from under his thick hair. Wharton, kneeling by his side, gazed at the white, set face in horror. Arthur da Costa, once his enemy, had saved him. And a terrible fear was in Wharton's heart that the Eurasian had saved him at the cost of his life.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Dark Days!

'I SAY, you fellows—'

'Shut up, Bunter!'

'I say, you know Wharton's come in!'

'Oh, Wharton come back from Highcliffe!' said Bob Cherry. 'Then we'll get in to tea.'

The Form match on Little Side was over. Temple, Dabney & Co. had met their usual rapid fate at the hands of the Remove cricketers. Bob Cherry and his friends were strolling towards the House, when Billy Bunter met them, his fat face full of excitement.

'I say, you fellows,' he gasped. 'Wharton—'

'What about him, ass?' asked Johnny Bull.

'Looks as if he's seen a ghost,' said Bunter. 'I asked him what was up, and he didn't answer, but went into Quelchy's study. I say, you fellows, something's happened—something awful!' said Bunter impressively.

'Rot!' grunted Bob.

But the chums of the Remove hastened their steps to the House.

They found a group of Remove fellows at the end of Masters passage.

All of them looked excited. Bunter's news was evidently well-founded for once; something had happened.

'Seen Wharton, you men?' asked Bob.

'He's just gone into Quelchy's study,' answered Skinner. 'What on earth has happened? He was as white as a sheet.'

'I say, you fellows, I told you so! Looked as if he had seen a ghost,' squeaked Billy

Bunter.

'Something's jolly well happened,' said Bolsover major. The chap looked fairly knocked out.'

'What the dickens could have happened—he's only been over to Highcliffe to see Courtenay,' said Nugent. 'Might have had a row with Pon over there, perhaps.'

'Something more serious than that, from his looks,' said Hazeldene.

The chums of the Remove had come off the cricket ground in a cheery mood, but they were grave enough now. They waited anxiously for the captain of the Remove to come out of Mr. Quelch's study. Something had happened, apparently, which he had to report to his Form-master, and the juniors wondered uneasily what it was.

'Da Costa was going to meet him on the way back,' said Bob. 'Did Da Costa come in with him, you fellows?'

'Haven't seen him!'

'I say, you fellows, Da Costa wasn't with him,' said Bunter. 'He came in alone, and when I asked him what was up he never even answered. Perhaps Da Costa's been run over by a motorcar!'

'Fathead!'

'Or gored by a mad bull!' suggested Bunter cheerfully.

'You fat idiot, shut up!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

The door of Mr. Quelch's study opened, and all eyes were fixed on Harry Wharton as he came out.

Bob Cherry caught his breath, at the sight of his chum's face. Wharton was white as chalk, and almost haggard. His usual elastic step was unsteady as he came down the passage.

Bob Cherry caught him by the shoulder.

'Harry! What's happened?'

'The happenfulness must have been terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, gazing in wonder at Wharton's stricken face.

'Da Costa!' said Harry, in a low voice. 'He's hurt!'

'But what—'

'That villain, Marker, attacked me on Courtfield Common—on that lonely path, where we ragged him,' said Wharton. 'Da Costa seems to have come to meet me on my way back from Highcliffe—anyhow he was there, and he chipped in, and he got what Marker meant for me.'

'But—but what—' gasped Bob.

'Marker had a loaded stick, and he struck Da Costa down with it,' said Harry. 'He was stunned. I got him as far as the Courtfield Road on my back and stopped a passing motor-car, and the man gave me a lift into Courtfield with him—to the hospital.'

'The hospital! Then—he's bad?'

'Yes,' said Harry.

'Not—not——' Bob Cherry's voice faltered. There was a hush.

Wharton shook his head.

'They say not—though I was afraid of that, at first. But he's going to be laid up a long time—he's hard hit. He got it to save me—that villain meant it for me—Da Costa's in a rotten state now—bandaged up and only half-conscious——'

'Poor old chap!'

'But—you say Marker went for you and him,' said Johnny Bull. 'How did you get away with Da Costa, if—'

'I got hold of the stick, luckily, owing to Da Costa chipping in, and gave Marker a lick on the head with it,' said Harry. 'He was stunned. I left him where he fell down—I wasn't bothering about the brute, you may be sure. I told them at the hospital, and they telephoned to the police station—I dare say the police have taken Marker by this time. He will get a long sentence for this—that's one comfort!'

'The terrific rascal!' said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

'It's rotten!' muttered Wharton miserably. 'I heard them saying something about concussion—goodness knows how it will turn out. And he got it helping me!'

Arthur da Costa was missing from calling-over that evening. Mr. Quelch's face, when he took the roll, was very grave.

The next day the Eurasian's place was vacant in the Remove Form-room.

A shadow had fallen upon the cheery spirits of the chums of the Remove.

Of late they had chummed with the Eurasian, and almost forgotten what he had once been, why he had come to Greyfriars in the first place. He had changed, and they had grown to like him and respect him; and now he had given a terrible proof, if proof was needed, that he deserved their friendship and respect. Now he lay in pain in a hospital ward, struck down in defence of the fellow whom he had been sent to Greyfriars to ruin. It was the fullest atonement he could have made. Anxiously, the chums of the Remove waited for news of him.

The news, when it came, was good.

Da Costa was booked for a long illness, that was certain; but no permanent injury had been done. That, at least, it was good to know.

Meanwhile, there was no news of Captain Marker.

The police had searched for him on Courtfield Common, but evidently the rascal had recovered his senses before their arrival, for he was gone. The inn where he had stayed at Redclyffe was promptly visited; but the officers could only learn that Captain Marker had returned there in his car, hastily packed his bag, and departed in the car again at a furious speed. After that he seemed to have vanished.

He was a hunted man now; with a term of penal servitude waiting for him when he was captured. But he was not captured. It was discovered at last that he had left the country; but it was certain that he would not dare to return to India; his career there was ended. Captain Marker was a fugitive now, a wanderer on the face of the earth—a ruined and desperate man slinking from justice; and that, perhaps, was a sufficient punishment for his crimes. Harry Wharton gave him little thought; his thoughts were all for the boy who lay on a bed of pain in a hospital ward.

But the time came at last when Wharton was allowed to visit the hospital to see the fellow who had saved him at such a cost to himself. Arthur da Costa, propped on pillows, still bandaged and pale, greeted him with a smile.

'I'm mending, old fellow,' he said.

'Thank goodness for that,' said Harry, with a shake in his voice. 'Old chap, can you guess what I've been feeling like. I—I wished sometimes that you hadn't chipped in, and that I'd got it instead.'

The Eurasian smiled.

'I am glad!' he said. 'I owed it to you—after all that I had done—'

'Don't speak of that.'

'No—but I think of it,' said Da Costa. 'But you believe in me now, you believe and trust me?'

'Yes, yes! And once we get you back to Greyfriars—'

The Eurasian shook his head.

'I shall not return to Greyfriars,' he said. 'I am sorry—but—I go to my own country.'

Your uncle, Colonel Wharton, has been here to see me, several times. He would be willing to see me through at Greyfriars, but—'

'You must let him,' said Harry. 'We won't let you leave.'

Again Da Costa smiled, and shook his head.

'The doctors think I shall recover better in my own country,' he said, 'and I feel that it is so. But I shall not go back friendless and poor, as I was before—I shall not again be the poor and envious wretch that Captain Marker took from the school at Lucknow. Colonel Wharton has made me an offer—which I have accepted because—because I think I shall be able to repay him some day for his kindness, and I know you would not like me to refuse it. I am to be placed at school in Bombay; and when I am older I shall study the law—owing to Colonel Wharton's kindness, my future is assured. But—at Greyfriars or in India—I hope you will always be my friend.'

'Always!' said Harry.

'You will forget why I came to Greyfriars, and—and what I have done—and only remember that while I was with you, I learned to play the game!' said the Eurasian softly.

'I shall only remember that you're one of the best fellows breathing,' said Harry Wharton.

The time came at last when Arthur da Costa was able to leave the hospital; and for a few days he returned to Greyfriars.

On the day he left, at last, Colonel Wharton came down to Greyfriars, and Da Costa left with him in his car. Almost all the Remove turned up to give him a send-off; and the Famous Five bade him farewell with clouded faces—Hurree Jamset Ram Singh assuring him that the regretfulness and sorrowfulness were terrific.

'We shall miss him,' said Harry, as he and his chums walked back to the House.

'The missfulness will be terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But the esteemed and absurd Da Costa will escape the ridiculous rigour of the execrable English winter, which will perhaps compensate him a little for the loss of our preposterous society.'

'Fathead!' said Bob.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Oh, dry up, Bunter.'

'And the St. Jim's match,' said Bob Cherry suddenly. 'That comes off next week, you know! We had old Da Costa as a rod in pickle for St. Jim's! He won't play now.'

'I say, you fellows, that's all right,' said Billy Bunter. 'You won't miss Da Costa in the St. Jim's match. You can play me instead, and it will be as right as rain.'

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

Billy Bunter's generous offer had supplied the necessary comic relief.

THE END