

SPARSHOTT SERIES N° 6

PLUCK WILL TELL

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"STOP THAT!" SHOUTED PLUM

1/-

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By FRANK RICHARDS

CHAPTER I.

NOISY NEIGHBOURS!

PLUM TUMPTON growled.

"At it again!" he said.

Plum, whose plump face was generally bright and cheerful as the sun at noon, was frowning.

"Eh! Who's at what?" asked Harry Vernon, without looking round.

"That rotter Scafe——."

"Oh, bother Scafe!"

"Will both of you shut up?" asked Tom Rake, in a tone of exaggerated patience and resignation. "Do you expect a fellow to get this dashed radio to rights if you go on cackling like a couple of old women?"

The chums of the Sparshott Fourth were in their study, No. 3. Tom Rake was busy with his radio. But there was a spot of bother. The radio emitted squeaks, squeals, grunts, gasps, and other inharmonious sounds. When Tom's radio took the bit between its teeth, as it were, and Tom concentrated on bringing it up the way it should go, it behaved his chums to imitate Agag of old and walk delicately. At all other times Tom Rake had a sunny temper. But every now and then that radio made it stormy weather.

Harry Vernon was helping—all he could. He helped by giving Tom his best attention, and occasionally uttering sympathetic noises. That was all he could do, so he did it.

Plum's thoughts were elsewhere.

Plum, indeed, had offered to set that radio right if Tom liked—Plum having an unbounded faith in his own ability to do that or anything else. Tom did not share that faith, and his refusal had been quite curt. Indeed, he had warned Plum that if he so much as laid a fat finger on the wireless, he would brain him with the study poker.

So Plum ceased to take interest in the recalcitrant radio. Moreover, his attention was drawn to loud sounds from the next study—louder even than the gurgles, and gasps, and snorts, and yells of Tom's rebellious wireless. The next study, No. 4, was tenanted by Scafe, Gidge and Merrick—the last-named a new fellow in the Sparshott Fourth. Scafe was a bully of the first water; Gidge was not much better, and Louis Merrick seemed a defenceless sort of fellow, who had a tough time in No. 4—and the noise from that study, penetrating through a rather thick wall, indicated that Merrick was going through it once more.

Hence Plum's frown.

Plum was a good-natured fellow. He was good-nature all through. What he lacked in head he made up in heart. His best pals admitted that Plum was every known kind of an ass. But, as Tom Rake had remarked, he had a heart of gold along with a head of solid wood!

"It's rotten!" said Plum. "They're ragging that chap Merrick in No. 4——"

"Quiet!" whispered Vernon. He realised, better than Plum, that it was injudicious to talk while Tom Rake was working on a rebellious radio. At such times in No. 3 Study, silence was golden.

"Look here," said Plum, "never mind that thingummy, Tom. You're always bothering about with that what's-its-name. Look here, that rat Scafe——."

"Park it!" warned Vernon.

"That rat Scafe is ragging Merrick again. Gidge is helping him. Let's go to No. 4 and wipe it up with Scafe, what?"

Tom Rake turned a red face round from the radio.

"Vernon!" he snapped.

"Yes, old chap?"

"You can see I'm busy, can't you? Why can't you kick Plum out of the study, or at least stuff a sock in his mouth?"

"Look here——!" roared Plum, indignantly.

"Ring off, old fathead," said Harry. "You know what Tom's like when the radio back-fires! Quiet."

"But that poor kid Merrick——."

"Oh, rot! He can punch Scafe's head if he doesn't like it! Shut up."

"Well, I think——."

Tom Rake glanced round—not at Plum, but looking for a missile. A cushion was handy, and he picked it up and hurled it.

"I think——yarooop!" roared Plum, as the cushion caught him fair and square in the middle of his plump features. "Oh, jiminy-whiskers! Whooop!"

Plum sat down suddenly on the floor of No. 3.

"Now jump on him, Vernon, if you call yourself a pal!" hissed Rake.

Harry Vernon laughed. He did call himself a pal—but not to the extent of jumping on Eustace Percival Tumpton.

Plum staggered to his feet. His face was red with wrath.

"You cheeky ass!" he roared. "I've a jolly good mind to chuck your silly wireless out of the study, and you after it. I've a jolly good mind——."

"Hand me the poker, Vernon."

"Eh! You can't repair a radio with a poker!" said Harry.

"I can brain Plum with it."

"Oh, my hat! Plum, old man, you'd better go for a walk," said Harry. "Nice afternoon in the quad——."

"Shan't!" roared Plum.

"Go and ask Barnes-Paget if he's finished with my 'Autumn Pie.' I lent it to Barney——."

"Shan't!"

"Go and ask Lazy Lovelace if he's coming to tea——."

"Shan't!"

"I shall have to brain him," said Tom Rake, getting up. "Where's that poker? Where's that dashed poker? Where's that beastly poker got to?"

"I jolly well think——!" roared Plum.

There was a sudden crash from the next study, followed by a yell. Things seemed to be getting hectic in No. 4, with Scafe and Gidge and Merrick.

"Hear that?" snorted Plum.

"Go and see what they're up to," said Vernon. "Stop them, old chap."

He had touched the right chord at last. Plum turned to the door.

"All right," he said, "I'll do that——I'm fed up with Scafe and his bullying—and if he doesn't let Merrick alone, I'll jolly well wallop him! I'd like to know what you're grinning at!" added Plum, staring at the Captain of the Fourth.

"Oh! Nothing, old chap! Cut off and tell them to stop that row!" said Harry. And he shut the study door after Plum, fortunately before Tom found the poker.

Rake snorted, and returned to his radio. The radio resumed squealing, squeaking, snorting, and howling. Tom laboured with it, Harry Vernon adopting an attitude of tactful and sympathetic helpfulness. While Plum, indignant and truculent, proceeded to the next study to tell Scafe to "stop it"—and "jolly well wallop him" if he refused so to do.

CHAPTER II.

PLUM TAKES A HAND!

"**L**EAVE GO!" panted Merrick.

"Make me!" grinned Scafe.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Gidge.

The three were too busy to notice that the study door had opened, and that a fat and wrathful face was looking in.

Plum stared at the scene in No. 4.

Scafe of the Fourth was a burly fellow—the biggest fellow in the Sparshott Fourth. He had a heavy, aggressive jaw, and little eyes close-set on either side of a rather prominent nose. Scafe was not bright—he was at the bottom of the form and content with that distinction—but what he lacked in brains he made up in brawn, and he often had a heavy hand with smaller fellows. At the moment he had Merrick by the neck, pinning him against the study wall—Gidge looking on, grinning, and pelting the hapless junior with school books as Scafe held him helpless.

This was what Scafe called a "lark." Merrick's wild excitement and frantic anger only added to his enjoyment.

"Now, then, get him with the dick, if he doesn't do as he's told," said Scafe. "You hear me, Froggy! Talk French!"

"I won't!" panted Merrick.

"I've told you to!"

"I won't!"

Merrick was a rather slim fellow—sturdy enough, but with nothing like Scafe's size or strength. He was half-French by descent, his mother belonging to that country, though no one would have guessed it to look at him.

But probably the French strain made him unduly sensitive in the rough-and-tumble of life in a junior form at school, where nobody was expected to have a thin skin.

Scafe had found that he could exasperate him by calling him "Froggy"—after which Scafe never had any other name for him. It was one of Scafe's amusements to make him "talk French"—which, as Scafe was as bad at French as at everything else in the Sparshott curriculum, sounded to Scafe's stupid ears as a meaningless rigmarole and too funny for words. Merrick's refusal led to ragging—which Scafe perhaps did not realise was bullying.

"Obstinate little frog, ain't he, Gidge?" said Scafe. "He's an amusing little beast when he talks French, and he won't talk it! We'll make him! Now then, Looney—fancy a chap having a girl's name—ha, ha——!"

"Louis is not a girl's name!" yelled Merrick.

"It jolly well is," said Scafe. "I've got a cousin named Louise, and she's always called Looney."

"It is quite different! You are a fool."

"Oh, am I?" said Scafe, warmly. "Well, I'll bang your napper for that!"

Bang!

There was a roar from Merrick as his head struck the study wall. He struggled in Scafe's powerful grip.

"Now, that's a tip," said Scafe cheerfully. "And now talk French!"

"I will not."

"Pelt him, Gidgers."

"What-ho!" chuckled Gidge. And he took aim with a Latin dictionary.

So far Plum had stared on, undecided. It was true that Merrick was no match for Scafe, and must have been hopelessly beaten in a scrap with him. Nevertheless, Plum's view was that he should have made a fight for it, as Plum assuredly would have done in his place. Plum was not sure that he would, after all, intervene. But as Gidge aimed the dictionary, Plum decided all at once that he would.

"Here, stop that!" he rapped.

All three stared round at him. Plum strode into the study, grabbed the Latin dictionary from Gidge's hand, and flung it into a corner of the room.

"You cheeky ass!" roared Scafe. "Get out of my study."

"Rats to you!" retorted Plum.

Gidge jumped after the dictionary and grabbed it up. Plum promptly grabbed it from him again, and landed it, with a loud crack, on Gidge's head. Then he tossed it across the room.

"Oh!" roared Gidge, rubbing his head.

"Better leave that dick where it is," said Plum cheerfully. "You're not going to chuck it at Merrick."

Gidge, rubbing his bullet head, eyed him evilly. Gidge was always ready to follow Scafe's lead in bullying; but he was not ready to engage in combat on his own. Plum looked too warlike for Gidge, and he contented himself with muttered threats and black looks.

Not so Scafe! The bully of the Sparshott Fourth glared at Plum Tumpton with a deadly glare. He released Merrick, and came towards Plum with his big fists clenched and his chin stuck out aggressively.

"I've told you to get out of this study," he said.

"You're not going to bully Merrick!" retorted Plum. "Let the chap alone, and I'll get out, and glad to—I don't like the company here."

"Want me to knock you across the study?" asked Scafe.

"I'd like to see you do it!" said Plum derisively.

It was one of Plum's cherished beliefs that he was a first-class boxer and a terrific fighting man. Certainly, Plum had pluck—heaps and tons of it. But he boxed like a windmill, and his extensive circumference made him rather short of wind. Even Gidge, probably, could have knocked out Plum if he could have made up his mind to try. Nevertheless, Plum was always ready to plunge into combat—and he would have stood up to Barnes-Paget or Mick Egan or Tom Rake at a moment's notice, though any of the three could have knocked him out with one hand.

Scafe was big and aggressive, half a head taller than Plum, and powerful in proportion. But Plum was ready for him, never dreaming that Scafe could have knocked him sky-high in a single round.

He had stated that he would "like" to see Scafe "do it." In another moment he would have seen Scafe do it, without a shadow of doubt, as the burly Fourth-former drew back his muscular arm for a punch.

But just then Merrick weighed in. If Louis Merrick had less than Plum's reckless pugnacity, he had rather more commonsense. He knew if Plum didn't, that that punch would have spun the clown of Sparshott right across the room: and he leaped at Scafe, grasped him by the collar with both hands, and dragged him over.

That sudden attack was quite unexpected on Scafe's part. It took him by surprise. He went over with a crash, and his head banged on the study floor.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" ejaculated Plum.

Merrick panted.

"Now run for it, Tumpton, before he gets up."

Plum stared at him.

"Run for it?" he repeated, blankly.

"Yes; he'll smash you."

"Oh, don't be funny," said Plum, "and look here, don't you grab a chap like that and up-end him all of a sudden. Punch him if you like."

"I tell you he will smash you!" panted Merrick. Scafe was scrambling to his feet, his face like thunder.

"Let him get on with it," grinned Plum. "You watch."

Scafe was on his feet again, with a helping hand from Gidge. He gave Plum a deadly glare, but turned to Merrick first.

"You lugged me over," he said. "My head's had a crack! I'll—
Stop him, Gidgers."

Gidge made a grab, but he was not in time. Merrick dodged out of the study, and cut down the passage.

"Well, that froggy will keep!" said Scafe, with a deep breath. "Now I'll give you a lesson, Tumpton."

"Go it!" said Plum. "Ready to learn, if you can give me one, Scafe."

The next moment he was learning.

Scafe rushed at him, hitting out. Plum faced up to him, his plump arms understudying the sails of a windmill, which was Plum's masterly method of boxing. How he came to be extended at full length on the study carpet Plum did not know. But there he was—extended, with a pain in his nose, and a dizzy brain.

Scafe danced round him, brandishing his fists.

"Get up!" he roared.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!"

"Get up and have some more."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Plum.

He sat up in a dazed state. Then he scrambled to his feet, panting and furious. He jumped at Scafe.

By sheer luck his plump fist landed on Scafe's nose, and a punch with Plum's weight behind it was bound to tell. Scafe staggered back with his nose streaming crimson.

He dabbed at it with his hand, and his fingers came away red.

"By gum!" gasped Scafe.

He fairly hurled himself at Eustace Percival Tumpton. Plum, in a dizzy state, boxing like an insane windmill, was driven all round the study under a shower of punches. Valiantly Plum stood up to it, but he had to give ground all the time: it was really a miracle that he kept his feet at all.

Gidge looked on, chuckling. But Scafe was not chuckling: that jolt on his prominent nose had roused his fury, and he was red with rage, and going all out to give Plum the licking of his life.

There was a step in the passage, and Valentine Barnes-Paget, the Buccaneer of Sparshott, looked in. The Buccaneer grinned for a moment, but his face became serious, and he stepped in.

"That will do," he said. "Chuck it, Scafe."

"Mind your own business, Barney!" roared Scafe.

"I'm making this my business, old top! I said 'chuck it'!" said the Buccaneer quietly.

Scafe breathed fury. But he dropped his hands and stepped back. Big as he was, inches taller than Barnes-Paget, he did not want trouble with the Buccaneer.

"Perhaps he's had enough," he jeered.

Barnes-Paget grinned. Poor Plum certainly looked as if he had had enough.

But if Plum had had enough, and indeed a little too much, Plum was not aware of it. He gave Barney an indignant glare.

"You keep out of this, Barney," he snapped.

"What?" ejaculated Barnes-Paget.

"Mind your own business. I'm going to thrash Scafe——."

"Oh, my only summer hat!"

"Come on, Scafe, you rotter!" panted Plum. "You're not getting off with that. I'm going to stop your bullying, see? Come on."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gidge. And even Scafe grinned. Barnes-Paget stared blankly at Plum for a moment, and burst into a chuckle.

The Buccaneer of Sparshott was a hard nut to crack, and he rather

prided himself on his toughness: but he could be good-natured, and he rather liked Plum.

"Chuck it, old man," he said. "You're making row enough here for bring up a pre."

"Blow the pre's!" retorted Plum.

"Lamb may come up——."

"Blow Lamb!"

"Come along to my study——."

"Blow your study!"

"I've got a cake——."

"Eh?"

"A toppin' cake, from home," said Barnes-Paget. "I thought you'd like to sample it, Plum. I was comin' along to your study to tell you."

"My dear chap, I'll come!" said Plum at once. He dabbed his flushed and flustered plump face with his handkerchief. "I'll come like a shot!"

And he came!

CHAPTER III.

WALKING THE PLANK!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Harry Vernon and Co. looked round.

It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday. The chums of the Fourth were on the footpath through Oke Wood. Plum had suggested a walk over to the headland, and a look at the ships passing far out to sea. Vernon and Rake were perfectly well aware that Plum's real idea was that they might fall in with Meg Ridd, of Headland House School, in whom the plump Plum had a deep and abiding interest. Like good chums, they assented: and there they were, en route. The path lay, for some distance, along the bank of a woodland stream, a tributary of the Jade. It was from the other side of that little stream that a voice suddenly hailed them. There was something familiar in the fat squeak that reached their ears: they had heard it before somewhere.

"Who's that fat chap?" asked Plum.

At which his comrades grinned. It was true that the fellow on the other side of the stream was plumper than Plum. But there was not a lot in it. Plum was not slim!

"I've seen him before somewhere," said Tom Rake. "I know those specs."

"Greyfriars man, I think," said Vernon. "What the dickens is he doing here—it's a good step from Greyfriars."

"I say, you fellows!" came the squeaky yell again.

"Same to you!" called out Tom Rake. "Anything wanted?"

"Is that plank safe?"

Across the woodland stream was a plank bridge—a single plank. In summer days it was high above a trickling rivulet. But the autumn rains had filled up the stream with brimming banks, and water washed over the plank. No doubt it was safe enough for a light and active fellow. But the fellow on the other side did not look very active, and he certainly was no light-weight.

"I remember him now," said Tom, staring intently at the fat school-boy. "His name's Punter, or Grunter, or something——."

"Gunter, or Stunter, or something," agreed Vernon. "We've seen him at Greyfriars when we've played matches there."

"Too jolly fat to get on that plank," said Plum, shaking his head, and his comrades grinned again.

"I say, you fellows, is it safe?" yelled the fat junior. "I'm a jolly good swimmer, you know, but I don't want a ducking."

"A wash would do him good," murmured Rake. "But it wouldn't be polite to tell him so, perhaps."

"Better steer clear, Gunter," called out Harry Vernon. "It looks a bit slippery after the rain."

"Who are you calling Gunter, I'd like to know?" snorted the fat schoolboy.

"Isn't your name Gunter?"

"No, it jolly well isn't."

"Well, Punter, then——"

"'Tain't Punter! It's Bunter."

"Oh, Bunter!" said Harry. "Right—got it right at last!"

"I want to get across," called out Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you're Sparshott, aint you? I've seen you at Greyfriars more than once."

"We are!" agreed Rake. "We is."

"Jolly glad to meet you," said Bunter affably. "It's a bit of luck to fall in with pals in this benighted place."

The Sparshott Co. smiled. They were friendly, if not actually pally, with Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars School, whom they met in regular matches. But they were quite unconscious of being pals of this fat youth in the big spectacles.

"You see, I'm rather stranded," Bunter went on to explain. "Smithy—do you know Smithy—an awful beast—a frightful outsider—a regular worm—a slimy toad—an awful rotter——"

"We know Smithy, if you mean Vernon-Smith, of the Greyfriars Remove," said Harry, "but not by that description, Bunter."

"He's let me down," said Bunter. "Stranded me. He had a car out this afternoon, and I jolly well knew he was going out of bounds. I said I'd come."

"He must have been overjoyed to hear that!" said Tom Rake solemnly. "Sort of pleasure no fellow would want to miss."

"Well, you'd think so," said Bunter. "He said I could come—I mean, he pressed me to come. Mind, I wasn't going to give him away if he didn't—I'm not the fellow to sneak, I hope. Still, one good turn deserves another. Quelch would jump on him if he knew. If I keep his secrets for him, why shouldn't I have a joy-ride in the car? What?"

"Oh!" said the Sparshott three.

"Well, and what do you think he did?" snorted Bunter. "Took me in the car, and stopped miles and miles and miles away from Greyfriars, and then tipped me out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" roared Bunter. "He stranded me at a rotten village called Oke——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Told me I could walk home, and left me to it! Pulled my leg, you know—stranded me—and I can't walk back to Greyfriars, can I?"

"You'll have to go by train," said Harry Vernon, laughing.

"But I can't."

"Why not?"

"You know what those beastly railways are. You have to take a ticket, and pay for it," snorted Bunter. "How can I do that, when I haven't any money?"

"Oh!" said the three again.

"Mind, I've got lots of money," added Bunter hastily, "lots and lots! In fact, only yesterday I had a postal order from one of my titled relations. But, not thinking that I should want any on a joy-ride in Smithy's car, you know, I left it in my study at Greyfriars."

"Too bad!" grinned Tom Rake.

"Well, it's beastly awkward," said Bunter. "I've left all my currency notes in my study, and haven't the price of a railway ticket on me. So, as I remembered that Sparshott was not far from Oke, I thought I'd look in and borrow a quid from a pal——"

"Best of luck," said Tom Rake, "if you've got a pal at Sparshott, and if he's got a quid, you're O.K."

"Well, they told me this was the shortest cut to the school, but they never said anything about this beastly water," said Bunter. "I've got to get across. Is that plank safe, that's the question. If you fellows like, I'll walk back to the school with you, and I daresay you'd like to stand a fellow a spot of tea, and then you can lend me a quid, and then—I say, you fellows, don't walk off while a fellow's talking to you!" roared Bunter.

But Vernon and Rake did walk off. The prospect of entertaining William George Bunter, and lending him a quid, did not seem to attract them somehow. They strolled on, regardless of the voice of the charmer.

"I say, you fellows!" shrieked Bunter.

Vernon and Rake seemed deaf. But Plum halted. Billy Bunter's methods of obtaining a joy-ride, and his intention of borrowing a "quid" because he was in want of eighteenpence for a railway ticket, did not impress Plum favourably. But Eustace Percival Tumpton was always good-natured—overflowing with the milk of human kindness. While his comrades walked on, Plum waved a plump hand to Bunter across the flowing stream.

"Look here, I'll hold the plank for you," he said.

"Oh, good," said Bunter. "Mind you hold it safe."

"That's all right."

The good-natured Plum stooped by the margin, and gripped the end of the plank. It was undoubtedly a little wobbly; but a strong grip on it was sufficient to keep it steady while a fellow walked across.

Plum's intention was to give it that strong grip, holding it fast while the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove rolled across in safety.

But Plum's performances seldom came up to his intentions. Plum meant well—he always meant well—but things did not usually work out as he intended.

He gripped that plank with two plump hands. Billy Bunter, on the other side, put one foot on it, and then another, gingerly.

Then Plum slipped a little on the muddy bank, and his grip, instead of holding the plank fast, gave it a sudden jerk.

That did it!

There was a startled yell from Billy Bunter as he slipped off the plank.

Fortunately, he had taken only one step. He slipped off, with a resounding splash into shallow water at the margin. The stream flowed round his fat knees as he stood there spluttering wrath.

"You silly idiot!" yelled Bunter.

"You clumsy ass!" retorted Plum.

"Beast!"

Bunter scrambled back to his own bank. He was wet up to his fat knees—and he had had enough. On the bank, he squelched water and mud, and shook a fat fist at Plum Tumpton across the stream.

"You silly cuckoo!" he yelled, "why didn't you hold it?"

"I did hold it," answered Plum, warmly, "you're clumsy——."

"I'm wet!" yelled Bunter, "Muddy! Beast!"

"Try again! I'll hold the plank——."

"You blithering idiot!"

Billy Bunter did not seem disposed to try again, with Plum holding the plank. Walking the plank seemed to have no attraction for him.

"Look here, if you can't be civil——!" exclaimed Plum.

"Look at me——soaked to the skin!" roared Bunter, "you howling chump——."

"If that's how you thank a chap for helping you——."

"Beast!"

"Then you can jolly well go and eat coke, and be blowed to you!" exclaimed Plum indignantly. And he marched off after his comrades, leaving Billy Bunter, still on the wrong side of the stream, squelching mud, and glaring after him with a glare that almost cracked his big spectacles.

CHAPTER IV.

PUTTING PAID TO SCAFE.

“WHAT THE DICKENS——!” ejaculated Harry Vernon.

There was a sudden crashing in the thickets beside the footpath, and a running figure burst into view.

It was Louis Merrick, of the Sparshott Fourth. He came panting into the footpath.

Harry Vernon and Co. stared at him. Merrick of the Fourth was red with exertion, with spots of perspiration on his brow. He halted suddenly at the sight of the Co., and his red face grew redder.

“Well, what’s this game?” asked Tom Rake, “running a foot-race all on your lonely own, or has a rabbit scared you?”

Merrick did not answer that question; but his face became still more deeply crimson.

“Frightened at something?” asked Plum, “some tramp?”

“I’m not frightened,” blurted out Merrick.

“Well, you look it,” said Plum.

There was a rustling in the wood at a little distance, and a voice was heard calling. It was Scafe’s voice—there was no mistaking the loud bark of Rufus Scafe.

“Seen him?”

“He’s dodged!” That was Gidge’s voice.

“We’ll get him!”

“He’s somewhere about.”

“Beastly funk! I’ll whop him for giving us all this trouble.”

The rustling in the wood came nearer: Scafe and Gidge were making for the footpath beside the stream. The Sparshott Co. understood now: and Harry Vernon shrugged his shoulders, Tom Rake curled his lip, and Plum Tumpton sniffed.

“So that’s it!” said Harry. “Those two fellows after you Merrick? What the dickens do you let them rag you for?”

“I can’t handle two fellows,” muttered Merrick.

“That’s all rot,” snapped the captain of the Fourth, “you’d only have one to handle if you made a fight for it.”

“I can’t handle Scafe.”

“Plenty of fellows in the Fourth can’t handle Scafe. Lovelace couldn’t, and Banks couldn’t, and Ridd couldn’t—but think they’d let him rag them, as you let him rag you?”

“Tackle him,” said Plum encouragingly, “perhaps you can’t lick him as I did the other day——.”

“What?” ejaculated Merrick.

“It was lucky for him that Barney butted in, when he did,” said Plum, “but I fancy he had enough, anyhow. Give him some of the same. Look here, what are you laughing at, young Merrick?”

“Oh! Nothing!” gasped Merrick, “But——ha, ha! I mean——.”

“Well, I don’t see where the cackle comes in,” said Plum, gruffly, “if Scafe wants any more he’s only got to ask for it.”

The thickets rustled and Scafe and Gidge burst out, a few feet from where Louis Merrick was standing. The half-French junior gave a startled glance round at them.

“Here he is!” roared Scafe.

“Got him,” chuckled Gidge.

“Oh, chuck that, you two!” exclaimed Harry Vernon, “can’t you leave that kid alone? Clear off, see?”

“We’ll please ourselves about that,” retorted Scafe.

“Will you,” exclaimed Plum, with a warlike look, “want some more of what I gave you in the study the other day?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared Scafe. “Come on and give me some.”

Vernon and Rake exchanged glances. They had a strong distaste for Scafe and his bullying ways: and they certainly were not going to see Plum punched right and left by the bully of the Fourth. Plum was already pushing back his cuffs, with a warlike gleam in his eyes.

"Bag him!" said Tom

"Go it!" agreed Vernon.

And they rushed at Scafe and collared him.

"Here, you leago!" roared Scafe, struggling, "leago, I tell you! I'll jolly well—ow! Mind what you're doing—you'll have me in the water next!" He struggled frantically. "Here, Gidgers, lend me a hand, will you."

"Look after Gidge, Plum," called out Harry.

"Leave him to me!" chuckled Plum, "come on Gidge, if you want your features altered—any change would be for the better, really, but it might be painful! This way for the K.O."

But Gidge, who had made a half-hearted movement to go to Scafe's aid, retreated promptly from Plum's brandished plump fists. And as the warlike Plum followed him up, he dodged back into the wood, and disappeared.

Meanwhile, Scafe found himself on the margin of the stream, bent over the water in the grasp of Vernon and Rake. He was a burly and powerful fellow, but he was of no use in the grasp of two pairs of strong hands. He glared at his reflection in the water and spluttered.

"Will you leago?" he yelled.

"Are you going to chuck bullying Merrick?" demanded the captain of the Fourth.

"Mind your own business."

"Yes or no?" snapped Tom.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Duck him!" said Harry.

Splash! Scafe's head dipped in the muddy water, and there was a wild splash and splutter. His face came up dripping.

"Urrrgh! Gurrgh! Leago! Ooogh! I'll smash you! Grooogh!"

"Are you going to chuck bullying Merrick?"

"Urrrgh! I'll smash him, and you, too! I'll—gurrrrgh!" gurgled Scafe, as his head went into the water again.

He spluttered frantically when it came out.

"Say when!" said Tom Rake, genially, "we'll keep this up as long as you do, Scafe. Are you going to chuck bullying Merrick?"

"Urrrgh! I—I—Yes!" yelled Scafe, as his head was about to go in for a third time, "yes, blow you! Ooogh! Grooogh! Leago! I'm all wet! Ooogh!"

"O.K.," said Tom, and the bully of the Fourth was released.

He stood gasping for breath, crimson with fury, dabbing water from his face, his ears, and his hair, with a handkerchief that was soon a wet rag. He gave Merrick a deadly look, as he caught a grin on that youth's face.

"You wait a bit!" he breathed.

"Hallo, what's that" exclaimed Tom, "aren't you tamed yet? Boot him."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Plum.

Scafe did not wait to be booted. He darted into the wood, and disappeared, the way Gidge had gone.

"You're all right now, Merrick," said Tom, "if Scafe bothers you again, hit him in the eye, and chance it. We can't always be around to duck his head."

Louis Merrick did not answer that. He stood leaning against a tree, staring gloomily across the stream, where Billy Bunter's fat figure could still be seen at a distance on the other side, as the Sparshott Co. walked on. Plum looked back. The deep gloom in Merrick's face touched Plum's kind heart.

"I say, hold on, while I speak to Merrick," said Plum.

"Oh, bother Merrick."

"He looks frightfully glum," said Plum, "look here, I'll catch you up: I'm going to give that chap some good advice."

"Oh, all right," said Harry: and they sauntered on, while Eustace Percival Tumpton turned back, and rejoined Merrick: with the benevolent intention of giving him sage counsel from his own immense stores of wisdom!

CHAPTER V.

DANGER!

LOUIS MERRICK did not seem to notice Plum as that plump youth came back.

He seemed sunk in dejection, as he leaned limply on the tree-trunk, deep gloom in his face.

Some distance down the stream, where the plank bridge was, a fat figure still stood—with one foot on the plank. William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove seemed to have made up his fat mind to cross that plank, risky as it looked. But he still hesitated, blinking uncertainly at the rolling water, through his big spectacles. Merrick could see him, from where he stood, but he did not heed him. He did not know William George Bunter, and was not interested in him, anyway.

His thoughts were of his own position in the Fourth Form at Sparshott, where he had not had a day's happiness since he had come to the school.

Had all the fellows been like Vernon, Rake, or Plum, like Lovelace, or even like Carboy and Root, or even Barnes-Paget, he would have found Sparshott pleasant enough. Vernon and Co. were decent fellows. Carboy and Root were hardly that, but they were not aggressive and truculent like Scafe. Barnes-Paget was a rather tough character, with a fierce temper, almost as ready with a blow as a word: but he had no taste for bullying a quiet and inoffensive fellow. In fact, Rufus Scafe was the only fellow in the form who was a real bully, though other fellows, more thoughtless than really bad-hearted, would follow his lead—taking his view that it was "fun" to rag the half-French junior.

What was he to do, Merrick wondered.

He couldn't lick Scafe, that was obvious. Few fellows in the Fourth could—in fact, only Tom Rake and Valentine Barnes-Paget could have counted on victory in such a scrap: though Harry Vernon and several others could have given Scafe more than he wanted. But, as the captain of the Fourth had told him, Scafe did not "rag" such fellows as Banks, or Reggie Ridd, who could no more have stood up to him in combat than Merrick could. They would have done, at least, their best, if Scafe had tried it on: and Merrick had to realise that he did not do his best. More than once he had resolved to hit out, when Scafe pounced on him—but—so far, he had never done it. He hardly knew why, but he never had.

"Bit down in the mouth, what?" asked a plump, cheery voice.

Merrick started, and looked round at Plum. His harassed face coloured.

"Eh! No! Yes," he muttered, confusedly.

"I've come back to speak to you," said Plum, genially: "Look here, you're going the wrong way to work, Merrick. Being French—"

"I'm not French!" snapped Merrick.

"Well, half and half," said Plum. "Don't snap a fellow's head off. Being half and half, you don't get on to the ways here like another chap. See? But there's no need to be funky—"

"I'm not funky."

"Well, p'r'aps you ain't," said Plum, placidly, "but you jolly well act as if you were. You've got to pull yourself together. I can tell you this—you'll never get a minute's peace in No. 4 Study, or in the form, as long as you let a brute like Scafe ride the high horse over you. You can't

expect other fellows to take care of you, if you don't take care of yourself."

"I don't expect them to," said Merrick, with a touch of sullenness. "I've never asked anyone to help me."

"Well, you were getting it rather hot and strong the other day, when I barged in and whopped Scafe," said Plum.

Merrick's frowning face cleared, and he smiled, as he looked at Plum. Plum, apparently, was fully persuaded that he had been "whopping" Scafe that day when Barney had looked into No. 4 and saved him from the licking of his life. Plum's plump brain moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform!

"And you'd have gone through it this afternoon, if Vernon and Rake hadn't collared Scafe and ducked his head," pursued Plum.

"I know," muttered Merrick.

"Well, take my tip," said Plum, "stand up to him! You can't lick him as I can—if you grin at me, young Merrick, I'll punch your head—what are you grinning at like a Cheshire cheese—I mean a Cheshire cat——?"

"You couldn't whop Scafe any more than I could," said Merrick.

"Oh, couldn't I?" exclaimed Plum, warmly, "well, whether I could or not, I'd tackle him any day, if he gave me any of his ginger, and you jolly well know it."

Merrick was silent. It was true, and he did know it. Plum couldn't in point of fact, scrap for toffee, though he fancied he could. But he would not have retreated before Rufus Scafe, or a dozen Scafes.

"Are you afraid of getting hurt?" demanded Plum.

"No!" growled Merrick.

"Then why don't you tell Scafe where he gets off!"

"I—I don't know."

Plum laughed.

"Well, you'd better make up your mind to it," he said, "you're going the wrong way, young Merrick. You're a peaceable chap, and that's right—I'm a peaceable chap, myself. But if a hulking brute like Scafe howls for trouble, you've got to give him what he wants. I can tell you that he'd jolly soon get tired of having a scrap on his hands every day, even if he licked you every time."

Merrick smiled faintly.

"I don't want a scrap every day," he said.

"Nobody does," said Plum, "but if you let a chap bully you, that chap will go on doing it, and you can bank on that. Punch his head and he will begin to think. See? That's my advice."

"But——!" muttered Merrick.

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing," said Merrick, wearily: "I wish I'd never come to Sparshott."

"Well, that's rot," said Plum, "Sparshott's the goods. It's the pick of the bunch. We go to some pretty good shows, for cricket and football—but nothing quite up to Sparshott. Greyfriars and St. Jim's are all right, of course—but give me Sparshott! Topham and Oakhurst and Ferndale are good shows—but are they in the same street with Sparshott? Not on your life! Don't you be a silly ass, young Merrick."

Louis Merrick did not answer. He was looking down and across the stream, at the fat figure hesitating at the plank bridge. And he was taking heed of Bunter now. For the fat Greyfriars junior, having made up his mind at last, was venturing on the plank, in a very gingerly way.

"What are you staring at?" asked Plum, realising that Merrick was giving him no attention, and he followed Merrick's gaze down stream.

"Oh, that Greyfriars chap! Fat ass!"

"That plank doesn't look any too safe," said Merrick.

"Not with that fat chump on it," agreed Plum, "he's got too much weight to carry. He doesn't look as if grub's short at Greyfriars, does he?"

"You don't look as if grub's short at Sparshott!" grinned Merrick.

"Oh! Don't I" snorted Plum, who was a little touchy on the sub-

ject of his circumference, "if you're asking for a thick ear, young Merrick —."

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Merrick, "look at him."

"The rat duffer!" said Plum.

Billy Bunter had almost reached the middle of the plank, when his foot slipped on the wet surface. He sat down suddenly. The startled yell he gave reached the ears of the two Sparshott juniors.

"Ooooooooooh!"

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" ejaculated Plum, "he'll be in if he's not careful! The water's jolly deep in the middle——."

Merrick gasped.

For a moment or two, the fat Greyfriars junior had sat on the plank. Then, as he strove to scramble up, he slipped off, over-balancing. There was a loud splash, and a terrific howl, that ended in a gurgle, and Billy Bunter went rolling helplessly in deep water.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers! If he can't swim——!" gasped Plum.

Merrick started running along the bank.

Plum rushed after him.

A fat hand shot from the water, and clutched at the plank, and caught. Billy Bunter held on, his fat, white, terrified face above the water, his eyes almost starting through his spectacles. But the current that swept under the plank bridge, rushing on its way to the river, was strong, and the fat figure in the water was tossed about like a cork.

"Help!" shrieked Bunter, "Oh, crikey! Help! I'm drowning! Help!"

Merrick and Plum rushed on. They hoped to reach the plank before Bunter was swept from his hold, and to drag him back to safety. Their feet seem'd hardly to touch the ground as they ran.

But there was no chance. They reached the plank, only in time to see the fat fingers vanish, and the Greyfriars junior swept away in the flood.

That he could not swim was very clear: he rolled in the water as helplessly as a drifting log.

"He'll be drowned!" gasped Plum, "I'm going in after him!"

Plum threw off his cap, threw off his jacket, and ran along the bank, to dive in. He caught his foot in a trailing root, and crashed, with a shock that half-stunned him.

It was fortunate for Billy Bunter that there was another on the spot. Louis Merrick passed the sprawling Plum like a flash, plunged headlong into the racing stream, and grasped the helpless fat junior. Plum scrambled to his knees, and stared—as Merrick, with Bunter in his grasp, afloat but helpless against the current, was swept back into the wide waters of the Jade.

CHAPTER VI.

RESCUE!

"LOOK out!" muttered Carboy.

"Want us to capsize?" grunted Root.

Valentine Barnes-Paget did not heed either of them. He stood up in the boat, shaded his eyes with his hand against the sunshine, and stared across the water.

Carboy and Root were pulling. The three had taken the boat out for the afternoon: not because they were keen on a pull on the river, but with the intention of tying up at the end of the garden of the Feathers Inn, which extended down to the bank of the Jade. That was rather a safe way of getting out of bounds, unseen by the watchful eyes of masters or prefects.

Mr. Lamb, the master of the Fourth, had seen them push off from the school raft, quite pleased to see the Buccaneer and Co. engaged in so

healthy and harmless an occupation on a half-holiday. Certainly, Mr. Lamb did not dream of guessing the secret destination of the three.

They were at a good distance from Sparshott School now, and pulling past the spot where the woodland stream from Oke Wood poured into the Jade. At that spot it was necessary to be careful, for the stream was swollen by recent rains, and came out into the Jade in a turbid flood. Carboy and Root were pulling well out from the bank, but the boat rocked a good deal; and it was just then, that the Buccaneer stood up, to stare across at the bank, much to the uneasiness of his companions.

"By gad!" ejaculated Barnes-Paget:

"Look here, sit down!" howled Carboy, "you'll have us over in a minute."

"Pull round to the bank. I'll steer—."

"What do you mean? What—."

"There's somebody in the water—two of them! Quick!"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Carboy.

"Quick, I tell you!" snapped the Buccaneer, "one of them's a Sparshott chap—that ass Merrick—the other's that fat chump we've seen at Greyfriars—fellow named Bunter—goodness knows what he's doing over here, unless he came over specially to get drowned—pull round, I tell you."

Carboy and Root stared round across the shining water. Then they saw what the Buccaneer had already seen.

In the midst of the flood that rolled out from Oke Wood into the Jade, were two figures—one, apparently, unconscious, the other struggling for life. Merrick was still supporting Billy Bunter, who clung to him like a limpet, but made no motion to save himself. Probably, if not unconscious, he was too dizzy and confused to do anything but cling frantically to his rescuer.

Merrick was swimming strongly. He was a good swimmer, that could be seen at a glance: but whether he could save Bunter, or himself, was doubtful. All his desperate efforts had not saved him from being swept out of the woodland stream into the broad river. Now, swept into the wide Jade, he was fighting for his life—and Bunter's—but all he could do was to keep up, and keep Bunter up—he could not reach the bank.

"Pull!" shouted the Buccaneer.

And even Carboy and Root pulled with a will, when they saw two fellows in the water in danger of death.

The boat swung round and headed for the swimmer. It rocked wildly on the turbid water. The Buccaneer, his eyes fixed on Merrick, steered, Carboy and Root pulling hard. The boat swept down on the swimmer.

"We're coming!" shouted the Buccaneer, "hold on to him, Merrick!"

Louis Merrick did not call back: he was at the end of his tether. But he heard, and never had any voice been so welcome to his ears. The struggle in the water had exhausted him—his soaked clothes were dragging him down, and Bunter was a dead weight upon him, helpless and cumbersome. How he had survived so long was almost a miracle, but he was very nearly spent now, and had almost given up hope of reaching the bank. Then came the Buccaneer's cheery call, giving him new life.

The boat rushed down. Barnes-Paget, leaning over the gunwale, watching, grabbed at Merrick as it swept by, and caught him by the collar.

Merrick was dragged on, as the boat surged onward. His grasp was still tenacious on the Greyfriars junior, dragging him through the water.

"O.K., kid!" grinned the Buccaneer. "Give me that fat parcel! Looks as if we want a steam derrick to get him into the boat! But I'll manage it."

Merrick held on to the gunwale as Barnes-Paget relieved him of Bunter. With a tremendous exertion of strength, Barney landed the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove into the boat. Carboy and Root threw their

weight on the other side—but a surge of water came in with Bunter, and for a moment it looked as if the boat would capsize. But it righted again.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Carboy, “we were nearly over—.”

“A miss is as good as a mile,” said the Buccaneer, coolly: “Now then, Merrick, old boy—let me give you a hand in.”

Merrick clambered in with the Buccaneer’s help. He sank down utterly spent and exhausted.

“Thanks!” he gasped.

Then he lay panting, running with water. Carboy and Root pulled and the boat glided out into the river again.

“Home!” said Barnes-Paget.

“Look here——!” began Carboy. Carboy was not disposed to give up the afternoon’s excursion.

“Back to the raft, fathead,” said Barnes-Paget, “it’s the quickest way of getting them back to school—they’re both pretty far gone.”

“Oh, all right,” said Carboy, sullenly.

The boat pulled up towards the distant school raft. Barnes-Paget helped Merrick into the stern seat, where he sat, still panting for breath.

“Urrrrrggh!” Billy Bunter sat up, and blinked dizzily round him through wet spectacles, “I say, you fellows—urrgh!”

“O.K. now, old fat man,” said Barnes-Paget, “We’ll soon get you to Sparshott, and get you dried.”

“I’m all wet!”

“The river’s wet,” said Barney, solemnly, “that’s why, Bunter! You should fall into a dry river if you don’t want to get wet.”

“Urrrrrrggh!”

“How did it happen, Merrick?” asked Barnes-Paget.

“He tumbled off the plank in Oke Wood——.”

“And you went in for him?”

“Yes.”

The Buccaneer whistled.

“Well, you’re a queer fish,” he said, “you might have been drowned along with him—it’s rather a miracle that you weren’t. Did you think of that?”

“There wasn’t much time to think.”

“No! A good many fellows would have stopped to think, all the same,” said the Buccaneer, drily, “you’re a queer fish. You let that fat-head Scafe rag you—and you go into deep water to fish out that ass Bunter. Doesn’t seem to fit together somehow. Scafe wouldn’t have done it.”

Merrick did not answer. It had not occurred to his mind, till the Buccaneer spoke, that he had done a brave action—a very brave action. He had done what many fellows could not and would not have done—he had shown a courage, in the moment of emergency, of which many were not capable. He could hardly understand it himself. He let himself be bullied by Scafe—yet he had rushed, without a moment’s thought, into the very shadow of death, to rescue a stranger. It puzzled him—and it was very plain that it puzzled the Buccaneer. Hitherto, so far as Barnes-Paget had noticed Merrick at all, it had been with cynical disdain, and indifference. But his manner was different now.

“Urrgh!” Billy Bunter made himself audible again, “Urrgh! I’m soaked! Urrgh! I can’t see through my specs—they’re all wet.”

“Lucky you didn’t lose them,” said Barney, and he took the spectacles from the fat Owl’s face, and wiped them on his handkerchief.

“Here, mind my specs!” yapped Bunter.

“Don’t you want them wiped, you ass!”

“Yes, but mind you don’t break them. If you break them you’ll jolly well have to pay for them.”

“Oh, my hat!” said Barnes-Paget.

“I’ve got a pain in my arm,” said Bunter, rubbing it. “That silly idiot twisted it! Grabbing a fellow like that!”

Merrick stared at him blankly. He had grasped Bunter anyhow he

could, to save the fat junior from a watery grave. Possibly his grip had told on the fat and flabby arm. Perhaps he had expected a word of thanks from the Greyfriars fellow, whose life there could be little doubt that he had saved. But he was not yet acquainted with William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove. Thankfulness for services rendered was not Billy Bunter's long suit.

"Might have had a little sense," said the fat Owl. "Twisting a fellow's arm! Wrrrggh!"

"I never meant——!" began Merrick.

"Never mind what you meant!" grunted Bunter. "That was what you did! Urrggh!"

"You fat, floptious freak," roared Barnes-Paget. "Do you understand that Merrick jumped in for you and saved your life? You can't swim, and you'd have gone down like a stone."

"Who can't swim?" snorted Bunter. "I'm the best swimmer in the Remove, and chance it. Bob Cherry thinks he can swim, but he's not in the same street with me."

"Oh, you can swim, can you?" said Barney. "Well, you can't get much wetter—so I'll tip you out and see you swim!"

"Here, you keep off," yelled Bunter, in alarm. "I say, you fellows, stop him! Yaroooh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Carboy and Root.

The Buccaneer chuckled.

"They must be fond of that chap at Greyfriars," he said. "You must be frightfully popular in the Remove Bunter."

"Most popular chap in the form," answered Bunter. "I could be form captain if I liked, but I let Wharton have it—I don't care about it really. I shouldn't be here now, only Smithy insisted on my coming in his car, and wouldn't take no for an answer. It's a bit awkward sometimes, being so popular—it takes up a fellow's time and all that. I say, you fellows, I suppose I can get a change of clobber at your school—I'm wet through."

"Well, I don't know," said Barnes-Paget thoughtfully. "Plum's things might stretch round you—but even Plum hasn't got a ten-foot waist——."

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

"I'll find something for you, Bunter," said Merrick.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I couldn't get into the clobber of a skinny sparrow like you," he answered. "I've got a figure."

"I'm not exactly skinny," said Merrick, mildly.

"Well, you look it" said Bunter. "Look at you beside me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Look here, how long have I got to sit in this rotten boat, drenched to the skin, shivering with cold, catching influenza, and very likely pneumatics——."

"Pneu-whatter?" gasped Barnes-Paget.

"Pnematics, and very likely plumbago——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here——!" roared Bunter.

"Here we are at the raft," said Barnes-Paget, chuckling. "And there's Lamb, our giddy beak—he will take you under his wing, Bunter. And he's welcome to you."

"Yah!" said Bunter. "Can't you help a fellow out of the boat? Don't grab my neck like that, you idiot—leggo my arm, you dummy, you're twisting it—yaroooh! Will you leago? Beast!"

Bunter landed on the raft.

CHAPTER VII.

PLUM KNOWS HOW!

“IT'S QUEER!” said Plum.

He spoke thoughtfully.

The Sparshott Co. were in their study after class, on the day following the exciting adventure on the river.

From the adjoining study, No. 4, came a sound of commotion—which sounded as if Scafe was ragging again, with the unlucky Merrick as the victim.

Plum was rather busy at the moment. He had been rubbing his fat little nose with cold cream, and was eyeing it in the looking-glass. Plum's nose was, like Marian's in the ballad, red and raw. It had had a rather severe knock the day before, on the bank of the woodland stream.

Plum had fully intended to plunge into the stream to the rescue of Billy Bunter. Unfortunately, he had caught his foot, crashed, and knocked himself out. There was a strong scent of Elliman's all over Plum, rubbed on bruised knees and shins and elbows. And his nose was red and raw. It had tapped rather hard on the earth when Plum landed. Plum doctored it continuously with cold cream, which added a bright polish to it.

“It's queer!” repeated Plum.

“Well, it will get better, old chap,” said Tom Rake comfortingly. “If you bang it on the ground, you can't expect the result to be beautifying. Besides, it always was a bit queer.”

“Eh! Wharrer you mean?” asked Plum, looking round from the glass. “Gone off your onion? I say it's queer——.”

“So it is,” said Harry Vernon. “But never mind, old scout. It will be all right next week.”

“What will be all right next week?” roared Plum.

“Your nose.”

“Who's talking about my nose?”

“Eh! Weren't you?”

“You silly ass! I mean it's queer about that chap Merrick——.”

“Your nose isn't about that chap Merrick—it's about you, Plum,” said Tom Rake in surprise. “Not the sort of thing a chap would like to have about him—but there it is. Forget it.”

“I wasn't speaking about my nose,” shrieked Plum. “Blow my nose.”

“Dash it all, you can't expect a pal to do that for you!” remonstrated Tom. “Haven't you a hanky?”

“You silly chump!” gasped Plum. “You jolly well know what I mean. You jolly well leave my nose alone, Tom Rake.”

“Wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole, old chap. And never mind it being a bit queer—you have to take your nose as you find it——.”

“I didn't say anything about my nose,” raved Plum. “I was speaking of Merrick. It's queer about that chap. Look what he did yesterday, when that fat chump, Bunter, rolled off the plank. I was going in for him, but I fell over——.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“But Merrick went in for him,” said Plum. “Now, that was plucky!”

“Jolly plucky,” said Harry Vernon.

“As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, ‘the pluckfulness was terrific,’” grinned Tom Rake. “But what about it, Plum?”

“Well, it's queer,” said Plum, giving his nose a last rub, and sitting down. “A chap risks his life to save a fat bladder of lard he's never seen before—and he lets himself be bullied by a smudge like Scafe. Ain't that queer?”

"Jolly queer! What about tea?"

"Blow tea! I'm talking!" said Plum, with dignity.

"You generally are!" sighed Tom.

"It's queer about Merrick," said Plum. "He's got tons of pluck—that's plain. He can't be afraid of Scafe, if he ain't afraid of being drowned. And you can hear Scafe ragging him in his study at this very minute!"

"He shouldn't let Scafe rag him."

"Of course he shouldn't, but he does," said Plum. "He can't fight Scafe, but he could give him enough to make him sorry for himself. Why don't he?"

"Ask me another," yawned Tom. "Let's see—we've got a loaf, and a spot of cheese, and one egg, and a bit of cake——."

"Never mind that," said Plum, "I'm thinking of Merrick. I rather like the chap. I can't keep on going into his study and thrashing Scafe——."

"Oh, holy smoke!" No, you can't do that, certainly."

"He can't box," said Plum thoughtfully. "If he could box, he might take Scafe on and give him a lesson. He's got pluck, but he can't box, see? Well, why shouldn't I take him in hand——."

"You!" ejaculated Rake and Vernon together.

"Yes, and teach him to box——."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Vernon and Rake.

The idea of Eustace Percival Tumpton teaching anybody to box seemed to be too much for them. They yelled.

"Well, where does the cackle come in?" demanded Plum. "Can't I box?"

"You can, old man," chuckled Tom. "Why, a windmill has nothing on you when it comes to boxing."

"If you can't talk sense," said Plum, "you'd better shut up. You fellows know how I box. I don't brag of it—but there it is! Could I knock you out in a couple of rounds, Tom, or could I not?"

"Not!" said Tom.

"Oh, couldn't I?" said Plum warmly. "Well, if you think I couldn't, we'll jolly well have the gloves on, and see. Chuck over those gloves on the window-seat, Vernon."

Harry Vernon, laughing, "chucked" over the gloves. Plum caught them—in his own inimitable way. His plump hands missed them: but he caught one with his nose, and the other with his ear.

"Oh!" gasped Plum. "Ow."

"Ha, ha, ha."

"You can cackle," said Plum, breathing wrath. "Wait till I knock your nose through the back of your head, Tom. I'll jolly well wallop you like I did Scafe the other day, if you say I can't box."

"My dear old duffer——."

"Put up your hands!" snorted Plum. "I've got the gloves on—I don't want to hurt you—only to show you! I wouldn't hurt a pal, of course."

Tom Rake chuckled. He was not exactly afraid of getting hurt: he could have boxed Plum's head off—or all his heads, if Plum had had as many heads as Hydra.

"But I'm going to punch your nose," continued Plum. "See if you can save it! Punch mine if you can! We'll jolly well see who can box in this study."

Plum advanced on his chum: but Tom Rake did not stand up to it. He retreated before Plum's advance, and the warlike Plum followed him all round the table.

"Look here, stop!" gasped Plum. "I can't punch your nose if you keep on walking backwards like a crab, can I?"

"You can't punch it at all, old chap."

"I'll jolly well show you."

Plum rushed, with brandished fists. Tom Rake jumped back. This brought him with his back to the wall, and he could retreat no further. Plum followed him up with a cheery grin.

"You've got it coming now!" he announced. And he closed in on Tom, and punched.

Tom Rake moved his head quickly aside. Plum's punch passed his ear by a couple of inches, and Plum's fist crashed on the wall.

"Oooooop!" yelled Plum.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Harry Vernon.

"Ow! Oh! Ow! Whoop! Wow! My fingers!" Plum tore off the boxing-glove and sucked his knuckles frantically. "Ow! Ooooooh!"

It was rather lucky for Plum that he had had the gloves on. But his knuckles had had rather a knock, all the same. He sucked them and spluttered.

"Ow! Ah! Oh, jiminy-whiskers! My knuckles—wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha."

"You cackling cuckoos," yelled Plum. "I've nearly busted my knuckles on that dashed wall! Yow-ow-ow."

"Is that how you're going to teach Merrick to box?" asked Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

Plum sucked his plump knuckles, and glared. There was a pain in those plump knuckles, and Plum, for the moment, did not feel up to any more boxing!

"Now Plum's done his funny turn, let's have tea," suggested Tom.

And they had tea.

After tea, Plum collected two pairs of boxing-gloves.

"You fellows can cackle," he said, "but I'm going to teach young Merrick how to box, and then you'll see what you'll see."

And Plum marched out of No. 3 Study, leaving his pals grinning. They wished Plum luck, and Merrick luck: but if Merrick learned boxing from Plum, it did not seem probable, in their opinion, that Merrick's last state would be much better than his first. Plum, however, had no doubts. He never had.

Barnes-Paget came along the passage as Plum headed for the door of No. 4 with the boxing-gloves. He stared at them.

"Hallo," he exclaimed. "Scrap on, Plum!"

"Not exactly," answered Plum. "I'm going to give young Merrick some lessons in boxing."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Buccaneer.

"What are you sniggering at, I'd like to know," snorted Plum.

Barney did not explain what he was sniggering at—he walked on, still sniggering! Plum, with a snort, banged open the door of No. 4 Study.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOXING INSTRUCTOR!

LOUIS MERRICK was alone in the study.

Safe and Gidge had gone down, which no doubt was a relief to the harassed junior. But he was not looking merry or bright when Plum happened.

He gave the plump Plum a dejected look.

"Ragging again?" asked Plum.

"Yes," muttered Merrick.

"Didn't you tackle Safe, like I advised you?"

"N-no."

"Why didn't you?"

Merrick made no answer to that.

"The trouble with you," said Plum, "is that you can't scrap. You've got pluck—heaps of it—look what you did for that fat Grey-

friars chap yesterday! If you hadn't got pluck, I wouldn't bother my head about you. But you've got lots—if you'd only give yourself a chance. Can you box?"

Merrick shook his head.

"Well, I'm going to teach you," said Plum. "Put on those gloves." He threw a pair on the table.

"I'm no good at it," muttered Merrick.

"Of course you're not, till you pick it up," said Plum. "I couldn't box once—but look how I handled Scafe the other day!"

"Oh!" gasped Merrick.

"You try it on, and stick to it, and some day you'll box like I do," said Plum encouragingly. "Now, shove on those gloves, and I'll give you the first lesson here and now."

"But I—I—"

"If you don't shove on those gloves, I'll punch your head," said Plum. "Do you want me to rag you as well as Scafe?"

"Oh, no! But—"

"Then put on those gloves."

Merrick rose to his feet and put on the gloves. Plum shifted the study table to one side of the room, to give space for the boxing. Then he donned his own gloves. Merrick stood uncertain and hesitating.

"Now," said Plum, "you mustn't mind a tap or two! I shall have to give you a tap or two, you know. Do you mind?"

"Well, yes! I—" Merrick stammered.

"All the more reason why I should give you a few taps," said Plum. "The more you get, of course, the more you'll get used to it. The first thing to learn is to stand up to it and take punishment. See?"

"Oh! Yes! But—"

"Now, brace up! Don't stand like a sack of coke. Put up your hands. Try to fancy that I'm Scafe, and you're going to knock me out," said Plum encouragingly.

Merrick smiled faintly. It was rather hard to fancy the plump Plum the burly overpowering bully of the Fourth.

"You're to punch my nose, if you can," said Plum. "Punch it as hard as you like—if you can! I fancy you will find my guard pretty good. But if you don't punch my nose, I shall punch yours. See?"

"But I don't want to hurt you," said Merrick.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Plum. "You won't hurt me in a hurry. I can box, you see! You won't get your fist very near my nose. But try your hardest—I'm coming for your boko, so get mine if you can."

Plum's plump arms began to saw the air. Merrick, taking him at his word, did his best. He found it easier than he had expected. His fist came through Plum's sawing arms, landed on a plump little nose with quite a heavy jar: and Plum—to his own surprise and Merrick's—sat down suddenly on the floor of No. 4 Study.

"Oh!" gasped Plum. "Oh! Jiminy-whiskers!"

Merrick looked down at him.

"Was that right?" he asked.

"Eh! What? Oh! Yes!" gasped Plum. "That—that was a fluke! I wasn't quite ready! I mean, I never thought you had it in you! Oh, Jiminy-whiskers! Ow! All right—we'll try that on again."

Eustace Percival Tumpton scrambled to his feet. His nose, already red, was redder—and a lingering pain in it now was more pronounced. Plum had had quite a jolt on his nose. He was very careful now—he did not want any more sudden jolts on that painful spot.

He squared up to Merrick.

"Now go it!" he said. "Mind, I shall punch you if you don't punch me—that's the only way to learn! If you want to save your boko, get mine. Go it!"

Merrick went it. Plum delivered a punch which missed his head by some inches, and another that passed over his shoulder. Then Merrick's fist landed again—right on Plum's unlucky nose.

Bump!

"Oooogh!" gasped Plum as he sat down, for the second time, with a bump that made the furniture jump in No. 4 Study.

"Was that right?" asked Merrick, eagerly.

"Ooogh! Oh, my boko! Oo, Jiminy-whiskers! Oooogh!" spluttered Plum. "You've jolly nearly pushed my beak through my head, young Merrick! I'll show you whether it was right or not, blow you, when I gerrup! Ooooh."

Plum seemed rather excited as he scrambled up. He had not expected to find Merrick so apt a pupil. There was a fearful pain in Plum's nose, and it was dripping crimson.

"Now look out for your nose!" roared Plum, and he rushed.

Plum's plump fists flailed the air. He did not seem to realise that his guard was wide open. But Merrick did, and he put in a swift punch: and, for the third time, there was a crash on Plum's unfortunate nose.

"Whooooop!" roared Plum.

This time he flew backwards, stumbled over a chair, and rolled headlong on the study carpet.

"Fine!" exclaimed Merrick, his eyes dancing.

He could not help feeling pleased.

It was, at bottom, his distrust of his own powers, his doubt whether he could put up anything like a scrap, that caused his hesitation and irresolution in dealing with Scafe. But what had happened now was distinctly encouraging. This was the first time in his life that Louis Merrick had ever seen any fellow go down under his punch. He had never expected to see such a thing happen—he had never ventured to dream of it. Now it had happened. Twice had Plum Tumpton sat down—and now he had gone headlong, almost heels over head, fairly knocked across the study by Merrick's drive. So it was no wonder that Merrick was pleased.

But Plum was not pleased.

Plum was far from pleased.

For the pupil to knock out the instructor in this manner could never have been gratifying to any instructor! And it was painful! Plum's unhappy nose streamed crimson as he rolled on the floor. He was dazed and dizzy, astounded and exasperated.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" panted Plum. He sat up, his head swimming and singing, and blinked at the happy Merrick. "Oh, my nose! Ow, my boko! Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! Ugh! Oooogh! Great pip!"

"I hope I haven't hurt your nose," said Merrick—a remark which seemed to indicate that Louis Merrick had a hopeful nature!

"Hurt it!" gasped Plum. He clasped his nose in anguish. "Ow! Oh, no! I like having my nose bunged into my napper! Wow! It's nice! Yow-ow! Quite nice! I'm enjoying it—yow-ow-ow."

He staggered up.

Plum had come to No. 4 Study full of the kindest intentions. He had been going to teach Merrick how to box, so that Merrick could tackle the bully of the Fourth. He had planned to teach Merrick to stand up to punishment by the simple and friendly process of punching him. Plum had had it all cut and dried. But it hadn't worked out as Plum had planned it—Plum's plans often didn't work out as planned. And in the excitement of the moment Plum forgot his kind and friendly intentions—and remembered only the fearful pain in his battered nose.

"Now you look out!" he spluttered.

"But I say——!" stammered Merrick.

"That's for your boko!"

Plum rushed and punched. His fat fist landed, and Merrick gave a gasp as he got it. But he did not back away: he was inspired by his previous success, and full of beans. He counter-attacked hotly, and Plum

did not get in a second punch. Plum's fat fists sawed the air wildly, as Louis Merrick punched and punched, and drove him right round the study.

"Urrrrrggh!" the hapless Plum gurgled. He was generally a little short of wind. Now he was breathless. "Urrgh! Gurrgh!"

He made a wild effort to rally, but it was no use. The fact was that Plum couldn't box for toffee. Merrick couldn't either, but he was quick on the uptake, quick on his feet, and active and wary—and Plum was not. Right round the study Merrick drove him, and right round again until Plum's legs came into contact with the armchair, and he sat down unintentionally. He plumped into the chair like a sack of coke.

"Urrrrrrrggh!" he gurgled.

Merrick dropped his hands. He was a little breathless, but in nothing like so parlous a state as Plum. Poor Plum seemed on the point of asphyxiation.

"Wurrrrrrrrggh!" he gurgled.

"Chuck it?" asked Merrick.

"Gurrrrrrggh!"

Evidently Plum was going to "chuck" it, for the simple reason that he couldn't go on—he could not even have got out of the armchair. He sprawled there gurgling for breath.

Merrick peeled off the gloves. He could not help feeling pleased and elated. For the first time he had something like confidence in himself. True, Plum was no fighting-man, Merrick could see that. Still, it was something to knock our Plum, who at least had unlimited pluck and lots of determination. It was a good omen for the future. It was a beginning—and what might not the end be?

But Merrick was a good fellow, and he could feel for poor Plum—who had come there as instructor, and had been knocked into a cocked hat. It was rather a sore experience for poor Plum. It made him look, and feel, an ass! True, he was an ass—but it would not have been kind to rub it in. Merrick had tact.

"Thanks, Tumpton," he said. "I say, this was jolly good of you!"

"Urrrrrrrggggh!"

"I'm no end obliged," said Merrick.

"Wurrrrrrggggh!"

"Of course, you'd have knocked me all over the shop if you'd gone all out," said Merrick innocently.

"Ooogh!" gasped Plum. "Yes! Exactly! Quite! Urrrrrggh!" He sat up. "Wait a minute till I get my breath, and I'll show you——."

"No fear, I've had enough," said Merrick, diplomatically. "Look here, like some lemonade? And I've got a cake from home."

When Eustace Percival Tumpton left No. 4 Study, he left on the best of terms with Merrick. He was still a little winded, and his nose was like a flaming beacon and very sore: but he was full of cake, and happily convinced that, if he had gone all out, he would have knocked Merrick all over the shop! So Plum departed satisfied: and he left Louis Merrick feeling that things were going to change for the better in No. 4 Study.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WORM TURNS!

"**G**ET OUT of that, Froggy!"

Merrick looked up.

Gidge of the Fourth came into No. 4 Study. Merrick was seated in the armchair—his own armchair. There was another in the study, which belonged to Scafe. But it was old and rather dilapidated, with dislocated springs, which made things a little uncomfortable for the occupant. Both Scafe and Gidge preferred Merrick's armchair. Scafe had it when he wanted it: Gidge had it at other times. Merrick was a bad third when it came to possession of his own armchair.

So when Gidge came into No. 4 and found Merrick in the armchair, he naturally ordered him out. Gidge wanted that chair—Scafe being off the scene.

Gidge was not, in himself, a tough customer. It was only because he was Scafe's pal that he was able to throw his weight about in No. 4. More than once Merrick had thought of putting paid to Gidge; but there was always the hefty bully of the Fourth looming in the background, and he had never ventured.

But it was rather a new Merrick now. Who, after all, was Gidge? Instead of getting out of the armchair, Merrick sat tight. His heart was beating rather fast; but he did not stir.

Had Scafe come in with Gidge, probably he would have yielded as usual. But he was not going to be bullied by Gidge. That was the first step in the "war of independence"—and he owed his new resolution to Plum.

Gidge stared at him. He did not quite understand the look on Merrick's face—and still less his cool disregard.

"I told you to get out of that chair, Froggy," he said.

"I heard ybu."

"Well, get out of it."

"It's my armchair," said Merrick, mildly.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Lots, I think."

"If you're getting your ears up, Froggy——."

"Stop that!" said Merrick.

"Eh?" Gidge blinked at him. "What?"

"I don't like being called Froggy," said Merrick. "I'm French on one side, but a British subject; and British all over, if that interests you. So please cut out the Froggy."

"Froggy!" said Gidge at once, "Froggy!"

"Don't say Froggy again," said Merrick. "If you do, I shall smack your head."

Gidge fairly jumped.

"You'll smack my head!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, and kick you out of the study," said Merrick. His own words surprised him—he could hardly believe that it was himself speaking! But he meant every word.

"Well, my only hat!" said Gidge. "You'll smack my head, you rat—you'll kick me out of the study, you rabbit! Ha, ha! That's good! You'll be howling if I lay a finger on you, as you jolly well know."

"Lay it on and see!"

"Get out of that armchair!"

"Rats to you!"

"Last time of asking, Froggy!" said Gidge menacingly. He stood before the junior in the armchair, his fists clenched, and his narrow eyes glinting. Gidge, backed by Scafe, had ragged and bullied Merrick for half a term: and he could not realise that the worm was turning at last.

Merrick rose to his feet, and Gidge laughed.

"I thought you'd think better of it," he jeered.

"I've got up to smack your head," said Merrick. "I said I would, if you called me Froggy again. Now I'm going to do it."

"Ha, ha!" roared Gidge. "I'd like to see you do it, Froggy."

Smack!

"Oh!" roared Gidge, as an open hand landed on his ear with plenty of vim. He had said that he would like to see Merrick do it: but now that Merrick did it, he did not seem to like it, somehow. He staggered back, clasping a hand to a burning ear, spluttering.

"Why, you—you—you cheeky froggy——!" he gasped.

Smack!

Merrick's other hand landed on Gidge's other ear. The second smack was harder than the first, and Gidge staggered against the table.

The next moment he was leaping at Merrick, hitting out with both fists. But Merrick did not back away, and he did not go down under Gidge's punches. He took them without flinching, and hit back, right and left; and Gidge went over backwards.

"Oh!" gasped Gidge as he landed.

Merrick grinned down at him. If he had been doubtful, his doubts were gone now. He knew now that he could handle Gidge, at least. And he was going to.

"Get up!" he snapped. "Get up and have some more."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Gidge, staring up at him blankly. It seemed almost like a dream to Gidge. This was the first time that "Froggy" had hit back—and he hit hard, and was evidently prepared to hit again. He was eager for the fray!

But Gidge was not. Gidge had no use whatever for hard hitting. He lay where he was, blinking dazedly up at Merrick.

"Get up, you worm!" snapped Merrick.

"Oh, crumbs! Look here—you wait till Scafe comes in!" gasped Gidge.

"Never mind Scafe now! I'm handling you!" said Merrick. "Get up, or I'll kick you till you do, you rat."

Gidge staggered up.

"Now put up your hands."

"I'm not going to fight you!" muttered Gidge.

"Your mistake—you are!" said Merrick grimly.

And he came at Gidge.

Gidge had to put his hands up. But he retreated round the table, and then, as Merrick followed him up, backed to the open doorway.

"Look here——!" he spluttered. "Keep off! You wait till Scafe hears of this! I'll jolly well—yaroooooh!"

Merrick's right came crashing on his chin, followed up by the left on his nose. Gidge spun over into the passage, and sprawled there.

"Have some more?" asked Merrick. He eyed Gidge from the doorway. "If you want any more, come back into the study. Mind, if you do, I shall kick you out."

"You cheeky worm——!" gasped Gidge.

"That will do! Any more from you, and I'll bang your head on the floor," said Merrick. "Not another word!"

"Look here, you rotter——!"

"That does it!" said Merrick, and he stepped out of the study, and grasped the sprawling Gidge by the collar.

Bang! bang! bang! Thrice Gidge's bullet-head smote the floor, and thrice his yells echoed and re-echoed along the Fourth-form passage.

Three or four fellows looked out of their studies—and stared. It was a startling sight to see Merrick on the warpath.

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Sir Algy Lovelace. "What's the name of this game?"

"The jolly old worm turnin'!" chuckled Barnes-Paget.

"Yaroo! Leago!" yelled Gidge. "Oh, crikey! Oh, crumbs! Ow! oh! wow; Leago my collar, will you? Oh, scissors!"

Gidge wrenched his collar away, and scrambled to his feet. Merrick made a step towards him—and he fairly took to his heels, and ran for the stairs. There was a shout of laughter in the passage as he went.

Merrick, a little breathless, but triumphant, went back into No. 4 Study.

He had "put paid" to Gidge! Gidge had learned, beyond doubt, just where he got off! The glow of victory, after his experiences of half a term, was very grateful and comforting. Merrick, for the moment, was feeling rather on top of the world.

But other thoughts followed. He had beaten Gidge—but, after all, any fellow in the Sparshott Fourth could have beaten Gidge. Scafe re-

mained to be reckoned with—and Scafe, bully as he was, was no funk like Gidge—he was tough all through. And as Merrick reflected on what would follow—what was certain to follow—the happy satisfaction died out of his face. And his heart beat very unpleasantly when a heavy tread in the Fourth-form passage announced that Scafe was coming!

CHAPTER X.

STANDING UP TO IT!

WHOP!

“Oh!”

Whop!

“Ow!”

Valentine Barnes-Paget paused. He was coming up the Fourth-form passage when those sounds from No. 4 Study fell upon his ears.

And he paused.

The sound of a fives bat whopping on trousers told fairly plainly what was going on in No. 4. Louis Merrick was paying for his victory over Gidge—Scafe of the Fourth was administering “togo” with a heavy hand.

The Buccaneer of Sparshott would have shrugged his shoulders and passed on his way, but for one consideration. What happened to Merrick was no business of his, and though he might intervene to save Plum Tump-ton from Scafe’s hammering fists, he was not interested in Merrick. But since the episode on the Jade river, when Merrick had risked his life to save the fat Greyfriars junior, the Buccaneer’s thoughts had taken a new turn. Pluck was a quality that appealed to him more than any other, and Merrick had pluck, and could be resolute enough in a serious crisis, though so hesitatingly irresolute in dealing with a bullying schoolfellow. And so the Buccaneer paused and, instead of passing on his way, threw open the door of No. 4 Study.

There were three fellows in the study. Merrick was stretched face down across the table, with Gidge holding him by the collar. Scafe was wielding the fives bat, and it descended again, with a ringing whop, as Barnes-Paget looked in.

Whop!

“Oh!” yelled Merrick.

Whop!

“Oh, you rotten bully!”

“Bully, eh?” said Scafe. “I’ll give you a few extra for that, Froggy. I’ll teach you to get your froggy ears up in this study, by gum.”

“Hold on, Scafe,” said Barnes-Paget quietly.

Scafe glared round.

“Look here, don’t you keep on butting into my study, Barney,” he snapped. “Froggy’s asked for this, and he’s going to have it, see?”

“If he’s fathead enough to take it, let him have it, by all means,” said the Buccaneer with a nod. “But give the chap a chance. Let him get off that table.”

“He can get off the table if he likes,” sneered Scafe. “He’d rather have the bat on his bags than stand up in a scrap. He’s got his choice.”

Scafe stepped back, and Gidge released Merrick’s collar. Merrick rolled off the table and stood on his feet, panting.

The Buccaneer eyed him.

“Now, look here, Merrick,” he said. “I saw you handling Gidge—and I saw you in the river the other day. What are you letting Scafe bully you for?”

Merrick’s face was crimson.

“I—I can’t handle Scafe,” he muttered.

“I know that! Lots of fellows in the Fourth couldn’t. That cuts no ice. I can handle Scafe, but if I couldn’t, think he’d dare to try laying into me with a fives bat?” asked the Buccaneer contemptuously. “Stand up to him.”

"Ha, ha!" roared Scafe. "Do! I'd like to see it."

"I—I can't!" muttered Merrick. "What's the good?"

"You can, and it's lots of good. Now then, off with your jacket, and I'll see you through it," said the Buccaneer encouragingly. "You'll get licked, of course. That will teach you to stand up to it without howling."

"I—I—I——."

"Think that rotten funk would stand up to me for a minute?" jeered Scafe.

"He's not a funk—he's only a silly ass," said Barnes-Paget, "and he's going to try, anyhow. Stand up to it, Merrick. What the thump does it matter if you get a few hard knocks? Are you made of putty?"

"I—I——!" stammered Merrick.

"I'll help you off with your jacket." Barney did so, as Merrick stood irresolute. "Now push back your cuffs. Better have the gloves on—get out the gloves, Gidge."

Gidge, grinning, sorted out boxing-gloves. Barnes-Paget helped Merrick on with a pair. He shut the study door, pushed the table aside, and spun Merrick into the middle of the room.

"I'll keep time," he said. "Ready?"

"B—b—but——!" stammered Merrick.

"Now, look here, you're going to fight Scafe," said the Buccaneer impatiently. "Ready? You ready, Scafe?"

"Ha, ha! I'm ready!" chortled Scafe.

Merrick cast an almost hunted look round him. All the resolution he had shown in dealing with Gidge seemed to have vanished.

"Look here," he said, "I—I——."

"Would you rather let Scafe whop you like a sneaking little fag?" snapped Barney. "Pull yourself together, and stand up to it."

"I can see him doing it!" jeered Scafe.

"Well, you will see me doing it, you bully," exclaimed Merrick, with a flash of spirit. "I—I'm ready, Barnes-Paget."

"Good!" said the Buccaneer. "Time!"

Scafe came at Merrick like a bull. For a matter of seconds Merrick stood up to the attack; then he went over, swept off his feet.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gidge.

"That's enough from you, Gidge," said Barnes-Paget. "Now then, Merrick, old bean, up you get."

He helped Merrick to his feet. The junior stood panting. Scafe watched him, grinning. Scafe was finding the "scrap" more amusing than the batting.

"Have some more?" he chuckled.

"My man's going to fight till he drops," said Barnes-Paget. "He's got ten times your pluck, Scafe, if he had sense enough to know it. You're going to fight till you drop, aren't you, Merrick?"

"Yes," said Merrick between his teeth.

"Time!"

Scafe came on again, laughing. But he ceased to laugh as Merrick's fists came lashing into his face, right and left. He staggered back with a yell.

"Go it!" shouted the Buccaneer. "Go it! That's the stuff to give the troops! Pile in and win."

Merrick piled in, though he had little prospect of winning. Scafe, with a very ugly look on his face, rallied, and came on to the attack again. For a long minute there was hard hitting on both sides. Scafe's prominent nose spurted crimson, and he breathed fury. But his heavy fists came home, hard and fast, and at last Merrick went down again, fairly knocked out.

"How's that?" grinned Gidge.

"Out!" said the Buccaneer, shrugging his shoulders.

He picked Merrick up. The dizzy junior leaned heavily on his arm. It was clear that he could not go on.

"Had enough?" jeered Scafe.

"My man's had enough for this time," said Barnes-Paget. "Next time you'll find him a bit tougher, Scafe."

Merrick seemed to shiver. Evidently the idea of facing those hammering fists a "next time" dismayed him.

"Well, if you've had enough, you worm, we'll get on with the batting," said Scafe.

"You won't!" said Barnes-Paget. "Come along with me, Merrick—your face wants bathing."

"Look here——!" roared Scafe.

"Oh, shut up!" said the Buccaneer, and he led Merrick tottering from the study.

He stood by him while he bathed his blazing face at the tap at the end of the passage.

"You'll have a rather dark eye, and a nose like a beetroot," he remarked. "Better than taking a batting, what?"

"Yes—es——!" mumbled Merrick doubtfully.

"You can't fight," said the Buccaneer. "All you know about boxing could be put into a nutshell, leaving lots of room for the nut. Look here, you'll have to tackle Scafe again, if you're going to stop his bullying. I'm going to take you in hand. You're going to have the gloves on with me in the gym, every day from now on, till you teach your hands to guard your face. See?"

"Oh!" said Merrick.

"Plum was going to teach you boxing, wasn't he?" said the Buccaneer, grinning. "Well, you'll find me rather different from Plum. There's only one man in the Fourth better at the game than I am—Rake; and he's not much better. I'm going to put you through it, Merrick—and you're not going to have a minute's peace till you're fit to stand up to Scafe and whop him, see?"

Merrick laughed.

"O.K." he said. "I—I'll try to do you credit, Barnes-Paget! I don't know why you're doing this for me—you've never bothered about me before——."

"And I shouldn't bother about you now if I hadn't seen you fishing that fat Greyfriars fellow out of the river. Think Scafe would have done that? Can't you see, you fathead, you're worth ten of him if you do yourself justice?"

"Oh! Think so?" said Merrick.

"Yes, ass! And you're going to lick him—next time. I'm going to make a boxer of you, and you've got pluck—and pluck will tell! And that's that!" said the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XI.

A LETTER FROM GREYFRIARS.

HARRY VERNON glanced round from the letter-rack.

"One for you, Merrick!" he called out.

"Oh! Thanks," said Merrick.

He came up to take his letter. Scafe was looking at the rack, and he made a motion with his foot as Merrick came up. But Mr. Lamb, the master of the Fourth, was in the offing, and Scafe decided not to deliver the kick.

Merrick took his letter and glanced at it in some surprise. It was morning break: a week since the batting and the scrap in No. 4 Study. The week had not been a peaceful one for Merrick: it was rather a dog's life in No. 4 Study. But he was looking a good deal more contented with existence than he had ever looked before since coming to Sparshott. Every day he was going through boxing practice with Valentine Barnes-Paget: and he found Barney an instructor very different from Plum. And a hope

was rising in his breast that sooner or later he might be able to tackle Scarfe on something like equal terms—after which things would be very much changed in No. 4 Study.

At the moment, he forgot Scafe as he looked at the letter in his hand. It was addressed in a scrawling, sprawling "fist" that was quite unknown to him. The postmark was Courtfield, of which he had never even heard. However, he opened the envelope, and unfolded a somewhat grubby sheet of paper inside, and read the following:

Dear Merrick,

Perhaps you will be surprised to hear from me, but the fact is that I feel very depely what you did for me when I phell into the rivver. I don't think I've ever knone so braive a chap. It was reely magnificent of you. Feeling as I do I feel that I must come over and see you agane, my deer chap. So I will dropp in on Wenesday afternoon this weak, and if you like I'll stay to tee in studdy.—Always yores,

W. G. BUNTER.

"Oh!" ejaculated Merrick.

He stared at the letter. Evidently it was from Billy Bunter at Greyfriars, the fat youth he had rescued in the river, and whose existence he had since almost forgotten.

Billy Bunter, perhaps, expected the receipt of that letter, with the promise of a forthcoming visit, to delight the schoolboy who had rescued him. But Merrick did not look very delighted.

He knew little of William George Bunter. But the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove had not impressed him very happily. Bunter, after his wild adventures in the waters of the Jade, had been taken in hospitably at Sparshott, accommodated with a change till his clothes were dried, given a plenteous meal, and finally speeded on his way with a spot of cash sufficient for his railway fare home. That, so far as Merrick and Sparshott generally were concerned, was—or should have been—the end of Billy Bunter. Now he was going to turn up again.

According to his letter, he was moved by feelings of gratitude and admiration for his rescuer. Without being unduly dubious or suspicious, Merrick could not help thinking that there might be other motives. Bunter had not struck him as a grateful sort of chap. But he had been struck by Bunter's really remarkable performance at the spread that had been hospitably placed before him. And he remembered that Bunter had made strenuous efforts to borrow a "quid" from him before he went. It was barely possible that the fat Owl of the Remove was thinking of a repetition of that spread, and of renewed efforts to borrow the quid!

Scafe had his eye on Merrick; and Mr. Lamb having disappeared out of the offing, the bully of the Fourth made a sudden snatch at the letter in the junior's hand. His curiosity, perhaps, was aroused by the varying expressions on Merrick's face as he read.

"What's it all about, Froggy?" he asked.

Merrick's eyes flashed.

"Give me my letter," he shouted.

He made a jump at Scafe. Scafe fended him off with one hand, and held up the letter in the other.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated. "That fat barrel that rolled in here a week or two ago and ate us out of house and home! Coming here again, is he?"

"Mind your own business! Give me my letter."

"Give Merrick his letter, Scafe!" said Harry Vernon quietly.

Scafe gave the Captain of the Fourth a desinant stare; but he tossed the letter to Merrick. His loud voice had been heard by a dozen fellows.

"Bunter?" said Tom Rake. "Is he a friend of yours, Merrick?"

"I'd never seen him before that day he fell into the water," answered Merrick.

"But he's coming to see you?" asked Plum.

"So he says."

"He says he's coming to tea in the study," chuckled Scafe. "Well, if he rolls into my study, I'll roll him out again."

"He's coming as my visitor," said Merrick, "and I hope even you, Scafe, will be civilised enough to be civil to a visitor from another school."

"Hopeful chap, aren't you?" grinned Scafe. "Just you wait till that fat barrel rolls in, that's all!" And Scafe walked away laughing.

Merrick, with a rather worried expression, went up to his study with the letter.

He did not, as a matter of fact, want to see Bunter again—indeed, few people who met William George Bunter were ever afflicted with a desire to see him again! And he couldn't and didn't believe that gratitude for services rendered was really Bunter's reason for coming over to Sparshott on a half-holiday. He was too good-natured to like the idea of rebuffing any fellow—even a pushing bounder such as he could not help thinking Bunter to be. But for Scafe, he would have done nothing in the matter, and simply have left it that Bunter was coming.

But Scafe, evidently, intended to make himself obnoxious—as usual. Scafe had been annoyed by the rescue episode, which had put Merrick on a much better footing in the form. And Scafe's manners and customs were deplorable, at the best of times. Scafe was much more likely than not to make himself unpleasant—even to the extent of starting a "rag" on the fat fellow from Greyfriars. It would be better in every way for Bunter not to pay that visit.

So Merrick, after some thought, sat down to write:

Dear Bunter,

Thank you for your letter. I'm sorry to say that it won't be convenient for you to call on Wednesday.—Kind regards,

LOUIS MERRICK.

That was the best Merrick could think of; and, after all, it was good enough for a fellow, practically a stranger, who calmly asked himself to tea. Merrick dropped that letter into the post-box as the bell rang for third school; and was relieved to feel that he had finished with Billy Bunter of Greyfriars.

But had he?

He did not quite know his Bunter—yet!

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY BUNTER BLOWS IN!

"**I** SAY, you fellows!"

It was Wednesday afternoon. There had been games practice, after which the chums of the Fourth were sauntering in the quad, thinking of anything but William George Bunter, of Greyfriars School. A fat voice hailed them, and they looked round to see a fat figure that had rolled in at the gates.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Rake.

Billy Bunter gave them an affable grin and a nod, and blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"So here you are!" said Harry.

"Yes, old chap, here I am," said Bunter cheerily. "I told Merrick I'd give him a look-in. Where is he?"

"Somewhere about," said Plum. "I think I saw him go into the House. Is he expecting you, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes, rather. I dropped him a line."

"But I asked him if you'd be coming, and he said he had written, and you wouldn't be," said Plum, puzzled. "Didn't you get his letter?"

"No! Must have got lost in the post," said Bunter, breezily. "I'm very keen to see him—chap who saved my life, you know. I can't make out why he said it wasn't convenient—it's quite convenient to me."

"Then you did get his letter!" exclaimed Rake.

"Oh, no! Never knew he had written at all. Perhaps he forgot to post it," said Bunter. "He seemed a bit of a fathead. Well, I suppose I can go in and look for him."

"I suppose so," said Harry, and Bunter rolled on towards the House.

The three juniors stared after him, and then looked at one another. Tom Rake was grinning, and Plum looked perplexed.

"That's jolly queer," said Plum. "How could Bunter know what Merrick said in his letter if he never received it?"

"Echo answers how!" chuckled Tom. "He's turned up, anyhow; let's hope Merrick will enjoy his company. The fat duffer may be sorry he called if he runs into Scafe."

Harry Vernon frowned.

"Scafe's not going to let down Sparshott with bad manners to a visitor," he said. "Perhaps we'd better keep an eye open."

"May as well," agreed Tom.

Meanwhile Billy Bunter rolled cheerily into the House. There he encountered Barnes-Paget, who stared at him.

"You!" said Barney.

"Yes, I've come over to see Merrick. Know where he is?"

"He went up to his study."

"Where's his study?"

Barnes-Paget gave the necessary directions, and Billy Bunter mounted the stairs, leaving the Buccancer staring after him.

On the study landing he met Gidge. Gidge gave quite a jump at the sight of him, and grinned.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated.

The Owl of Greyfriars Remove blinked at him.

"Yes," he answered, "I'm looking for Merrick's study."

"No. 4 up that passage," said Gidge, "I'll go and tell Scafe."

"Eh! Who's Scafe?" asked Bunter.

"Chap who wanted to see you if you called!" chuckled Gidge, and he cut down the stairs.

Bunter rolled up the passage, found a door with the number "4" on it, and tapped. He opened the door and blinked in.

Louis Merrick was in the study. He was taking a rest after games-practice, before turning up in the gym for his usual boxing practice with Barnes-Paget. He sat bolt upright in the armchair as Bunter rolled in.

"Bunter!" he exclaimed.

"Jolly glad to see you, old chap," said Bunter, heartily.

"Didn't you get my letter?"

"No! Did you write?" asked Bunter, "I never got it. Perhaps the postman couldn't make out the address. I noticed that your fist was fearfully scrawly."

"What?" gasped Merrick.

"I could hardly make it out myself," said Bunter.

"Then you got it?"

"Oh, no, never knew you had written at all. Well, here I am," said Bunter. And, as Merrick had risen from the armchair, Bunter sat down in it. "I say, old chap, am I in time for tea?"

"Oh! Yes! Lots of time."

"I hope you haven't taken the trouble to lay in anything special," said Bunter, "No need to make a fuss of me. I don't care much for grub, really—so long as there's plenty, and it's good, I'm always satisfied."

"Look here——!" said Merrick, restively.

"What I really came over for, was to thank you once more for saving my life," said Bunter, "I've told all the fellows at Greyfriars that you saved my life. I'm fearfully grateful, old chap——I simply had to come and tell you so."

"Um!" said Merrick.

"It was magnificent," said Bunter, "of course, you can't swim like I do——."

"Eh?"

"But I must have had a spot of cramp, or something. I needed help," said Bunter, "I've told all the fellows how you helped me. I didn't say you were a clumsy ass, grabbing at a fellow and twisting his arm."

"Oh!" gasped Merrick.

"I've just seen that chap who hauled me in the boat," said Bunter, "Rather a beast, isn't he? Bumping a fellow down in a boat like a sack of coke! I hope he's not a friend of yours."

"As it happens, he is."

"Oh! Well, I daresay he's all right—for Sparshott!" said Bunter, "of course, one doesn't expect Greyfriars style here. I say, this isn't a bad study. A bit poky, perhaps—not like mine at school—but not too bad. You must come over and see me at Greyfriars some time, Merrick. You'd like to see what a really first-class public school is like, I'm sure."

Merrick did not reply immediately to that. Perhaps he was at a lost for words. As he stood gazing at the fat figure parked in the armchair, there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and the door was flung open.

Scafe loomed in the doorway, grinning: with Gidge grinning behind him. Merrick spun round towards them.

"Look here, Scafe, I've got a visitor," he said, "you can leave me the study for a bit."

"I jolly well know you've got a visitor," grinned Scafe, "that's why I've come. I came as soon as Gidgers told me. How do you do, Fat Bill of the Tallow Factory?"

Billy Bunter blinked at him, through his big spectacles, with an indignant blink. Bunter's own manners, perhaps, left something to be desired. But there was no doubt that Rufus Scafe's were worse.

"Oh, really, you know——!" began Bunter.

"Are there any more at home like you?" asked Scafe.

"Look here——!"

"Jolly glad to see you, anyway," said Scafe. "It's free I suppose?"

"Free?" repeated Bunter.

"Yes! They charge for it at the Zoo," said Scafe.

"Look here——!" roared Bunter.

"That will do, Scafe," said Merrick, "leave Bunter alone."

"My dear chap, I'm going to help you entertain your visitor," said Scafe, "what about rolling him along the passage Gidgers? He would roll like a barrel."

"Good egg!" grinned Gidge.

Scafe made a step towards the fat junior in the armchair. Billy Bunter blinked at him, his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles in his alarm. Merrick caught his breath for a moment. Then he jumped in the way.

He faced Scafe, his heart beating hard, but his look determined.

"Stand back, Scafe!" he exclaimed.

"Get out of the way!"

"I tell you——."

"And I tell you that I'm going to roll that barrel of lard along the passage, on his beam ends," roared Scafe, "and for two pins I'd roll him down the stairs, too."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. The Owl of the Remove began to wish that he hadn't paid that visit to Sparshott School. But he hadn't expected anything like Scafe. Scafe was a new one on him.

"You won't touch him," said Merrick.

"And who'll stop me?" jeered Scafe.

"I will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Scafe, "want to try your luck in a scrap again? Well, I don't mind whopping you before I roll Bunter."

"I——I——I say, you fellows——!" gasped Bunter.

"You shut up, Fat Jack of the Boncheap," said Scafe, "you've got it coming. Now, then, Merrick, get out of the way, before I sling you."

Merrick stood like a rock. He had intended that a scrap with Scafe should come, sooner or later—he had made up his mind to that. But he had hoped to leave it till he had benefited a little from Barnes-Paget's instruction. But there was no help for it—it had to come now. Billy Bunter certainly was not a visitor whom he delighted to honour: but he was not going to stand by while Scafe ragged him. It was now or never, and he realised it.

"Are you getting out of the way?" demanded Scafe.

"No!" said Merrick, between his teeth.

"Then I'll shift you."

Scafe rushed. Merrick made one step back—then he had himself in hand. His fists went up: his eyes gleamed over them. Scafe's big fists—much to his surprise, and perhaps to Merrick's—were knocked into the air, and Merrick's right, clenched and as hard as iron, came with a crash fairly upon Scafe's prominent nose—a terrific punch, with all his weight behind it. It almost lifted Scafe, burly as he was, from his feet. The bully of the Fourth, with the 'claret' spurting from his nose, went over backwards, sprawling through the study doorway into the passage.

"Oh!" gasped Gidge.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Merrick drew a deep, deep breath. He was for it now—win or lose—victory, or the most terrific thrashing he had ever had in his life. And he had no fear.

CHAPTER XIII.

SCAFE MEETS HIS MATCH!

"OH, jiminy-whiskers!"

"A fight!"

"Scafe——and Merrick!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a rush of feet in the Fourth-form passage. Harry Vernon and Co. had been coming up to the Fourth, intending to keep an eye on Scafe—and they arrived in time to see him spin out of the doorway of No. 4 backwards, and crash in the passage. Barnes-Paget and Sir Algy Lovelace were next on the scene: and after them came Ridd, and Banks, and Cook, and Carboy and Root, and a dozen other fellows. In a minute or less the passage outside No. 4 was swarming.

Gidge was picking Scafe up. Scafe, panting, dabbed his nose with his handkerchief, which was thickly spotted with red. His face was fairly convulsed with fury.

Barnes-Paget, grinning, passed him, and went into the study. The Buccaneer was proud of his pupil, at that moment.

Merrick stood breathing hard. Billy Bunter, in the armchair, blinked through his big spectacles with an alarmed blink.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

But nobody heeded Bunter.

Barney clapped Merrick on the shoulder.

"You'll do!" he said, "you only wanted winding up, old bean—and I've wound you up! Now you're going strong. Where are the gloves?"

Scafe lurched into the study, breathing rage.

"You worm! I'll smash you for that—and that fat freak afterwards!" he spluttered, "now then, you worm——!"

"Hold on," said Barnes-Paget, "this is a fight, Scafe—you'll have the gloves on, and regular rounds, and a time-keeper. You keep time, Vernon. I'm Merrick's second."

"Right-ho!" said Harry.

"I'm going to smash him——!" roared Scafe.

"Pack that up, Scafe," said the captain of the Fourth. "Get the gloves on, and save your wind for scrapping."

Scafe gave Merrick a glare of fury. He would have preferred to rush on with the bare knuckles. But he had to toe the line, and he sullenly assented.

Barnes-Paget helped Merrick off with his jacket, helped him on with the gloves, and he was glad to see that he looked quite calm and self-possessed. Gidge lent his aid to Scafe. Harry Vernon stood, watch in hand, waiting till all was ready. Tom Rake brought a tin basin of water and a sponge from the sink at the end of the passage. Furniture was shoved out of the way: the armchair, with Bunter in it, backed into a corner, to leave space for the combat.

Round the open doorway was a crowd of juniors, pushing for places. A couple of weeks ago, nobody would have supposed that Louis Merrick had a ghost of a chance in such a scrap—and, in fact, he would not have had the palest ghost of a chance. But there had been a change, since then. The way Scafe had gone over backwards through the study doorway showed that Merrick had a big punch—if he had the pluck and determination to use it. All he had needed was some knowledge how to use his hands, and confidence in himself—and now he had both.

"Feeling fit, what?" whispered Barnes-Paget.

"Yes!" breathed Merrick.

"You'll beat him if you stick to him. If you don't, you'll beat him next time. You're the best man—keep that in mind! You'll beat him."

"I'm going to try!"

"Ready," called out Harry Vernon. "Time!"

And the fight began.

Scafe came on like a bull. But he did not rush Merrick down as he expected. Even in the brief space of a couple of weeks, Merrick had made wonderful progress under so able an instructor as the Buccaneer. Scafe had little skill: he depended on brute strength and hard punching. He found that his heavy punches did not meet Merrick's cool, resolute face—they seemed to be brushed away, and once, twice, thrice, hard raps came home on his own flushed and furious face. He threw all his weight into the attack: but Merrick side-stepped, and backed, and kept him at arms-length, all the while putting in punches, till the captain of the Fourth called time.

Scafe stood panting. Merrick looked as fresh as paint. Plum Tump-ton's voice was heard from the passage.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers! Can he box! I only gave him one lesson, you know—just one!—But can he box? What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Barnes-Paget fanned his man with an atlas.

"You're all right!" he said, "stall him off, and punish him all the time. You can beat him—and you're going to!" And the Buccaneer's words gave Merrick new confidence.

"Time!"

The second round was the first over again. But in the third, Scafe's chance came, and he got in close, punching hard with coke-hammer fists.

Merrick stood up to it. The Buccaneer's look was anxious for a moment or two: and the buzz of excitement at the crowded doorway died away. Everyone wanted to see the bully of the Fourth licked: but it looked, for the moment, as if sheer strength and weight would carry the day.

Then Merrick broke away, hard hit but still game, and fended his adversary off, till the welcome call of time gave him a much-needed rest.

"Time!"

Barnes-Paget sat him down in a chair, sponged his flaming face, and fanned him, and whispered encouraging words. But Merrick did not need encouraging now. His face was set with bull-dog determination: his eyes glinting. When the call of time came again, he leaped back into the fray.

"Good man!" grinned the Buccaneer.

The fourth round was hammer and tongs. There was hard hitting on both sides. In the fifth, Scafe exerted himself to the utmost: the fear of defeat entering his mind for the first time. Merrick was hard pressed, and driven to defence till the call of time. But the minute's rest refreshed him, and he started the sixth round as cool, as determined, as in the first. Scafe, by that time, was gasping for wind, and he was knocked right and left, his punches going wild, and his guard nowhere.

"Can he box?" trilled Plum, "only one lesson from me—but can he box?"

"Time!"

Scafe slumped into his corner. Gidge fanned him—he sat panting and panting. When Harry Vernon called time again, he lurched into the ring.

"Merrick's got him beat!" breathed Tom Rake. And Plum nodded, with a complacent grin. Plum was glad he had taken Merrick in hand! Barney was glad too—with rather more reason. There was not much doubt now that the bully of the Fourth was a beaten man. And so it proved: for in the seventh round, Merrick's right met the point of Scafe's aggressive chin in a terrific upper-cut, that laid Rufus Scafe on his back with a crash.

"Man down!" grinned Plum.

Harry Vernon began to count.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine..." There was a breathless pause for a fraction of a second, but Scafe did not stir.

"OUT!"

He might have counted twenty or thirty, and still Scafe could not have got on to his feet. He was beaten to the wide—knocked out as any Sparshott fellow had seldom been knocked out in a fight before. Breathless, spent, dazed, beaten, he sprawled at the feet of the fellow he had

bullied for half a term—but whom he was never to bully again. The bully of the Sparshott Fourth had fallen from his high estate: and great was the fall thereof.

“ I SAY, you fellows, any more jam? ”

“ No.”

“ Any more cake? ”

“ No.”

“ Well, I’ll finish these biscuits if you fellows don’t want any.”

Billy Bunter did not delay to ascertain whether other fellows round the tea-table in No. 3 study wanted any: he finished the lot.

Harry Vernon and Co. were entertaining the distinguished visitor in No. 3. Merrick was there, tired, and a little battered, but very cheerful: Barnes-Paget was there, in a very gleeful mood. Scafe was up in the dormitory, wearily bathing a visage that was likely to be a long time before it came back to normal. Nobody bothered about Scafe. It was a cheery tea-party in No. 3 Study: though the distinguished visitor made Harry Vernon and Co. deeply glad that he belonged to Greyfriars and not to Sparshott.

Having finished the biscuits, Billy Bunter blinked over the tea-table through his big spectacles, to ascertain whether anything eatable remained. But nothing eatable remained: and having made assurance doubly sure by another searching blink, the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove rose to his feet.

“ Well, I’ll be pushing along,” he remarked. “ Let’s see, I’ve got my return ticket, I think—.” Bunter felt in his pocket: “ No, by gum—must have dropped it somewhere. Lend me ten bob, will you, Merrick? ”

“ Sorry! ” said Merrick, politely.

“ Oh, really, you know—.” Bunter went through his pockets again: “ Well, I haven’t got my ticket home—and I’ve left my money in my study—.”

“ Same as you did last time! ” remarked Tom Rake.

“ Yes, old chap——coincidence, isn’t it? Who’s going to lend me ten bob? ”

Apparently nobody was: for nobody answered. There was quite a painful pause. Then Merrick extracted a half-crown from his pocket, and pushed it into a fat palm.

“ Oh! Thanks! ” said Bunter, “ I’ll send you a postal-order for this from Greyfriars, Merrick——if I don’t forget.”

As it happened, Bunter did forget.

END.