

The Rebel of Greyfriars



by **FRANK RICHARDS**

CHAPTER I

BUNTER THE LEG-PULLER

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Scat!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Hook it!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"Buzz!" exclaimed the five juniors in No. 1 Study in the Greyfriars Remove, with one voice.

Billy Bunter, standing in the doorway of that study, blinked at Harry Wharton and Co. through his big spectacles. He did not "scat". He did not hook it. He did not buzz!

Bunter was not wanted in No. 1 Study just then. Bunter, in fact, was not often wanted anywhere. Especially at tea-time he was superfluous. But it

was at tea-time that Bunter was likeliest to look into some other fellow's study—rather like a lion seeking what he might devour!

There were, as it happened, short commons in No. 1. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent had been able to supply only toast and a spot of "marger". Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had brought along a tin of sardines from No. 13. Johnny Bull, from No. 14, had brought a bag of dough-nuts.

Really, there was little to tempt Billy Bunter. He could have disposed of the whole lot in one brief sitting. An invitation to tea would have been of little use to him—a sixth part of that scanty supply would not have lasted him a minute. Nevertheless, he did not depart.

"I say, you fellows—!" he repeated.

"Nothing doing, you fat ass!" said Frank Nugent. "Cut along to Smithy's study—he's got lots and lots."

Bunter shook a fat head.

"Smithy's in a rotten temper," he said. "Quelch gave him six for smoking. He was rowing with Redwing when I passed his study. I'm steering clear of Smithy, I can tell you."

"Steer clear of us, too!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"The steer-clearfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in the remarkable English he had not learned at Greyfriars.

"But I say—"

"Roll away, there's a good barrel," said Harry Wharton. "And shut the door after you."

"Oh, all right," retorted Bunter. "If you'd rather Wingate came up after you—!"

"Wingate!" repeated Harry Wharton. And his comrades sat up and took notice, as it were. Wingate of the Sixth, captain of Greyfriars, was a man having authority: saying "Do this!" and he doeth it! If Bunter had brought a message from Wingate, Lower Fourth fellows had to sit up and take notice.

"If you don't want me to tell you—!" yapped Bunter: and he revolved in the doorway, as if to roll away.

"You fat ass, if it's a message from Wingate, cough it up!" exclaimed Harry.

"You fellows bumped Temple of the Fourth on the stairs after class," said Bunter. "I jolly well saw you—"

"Wingate didn't," said Bob Cherry. "He was nowhere about. Temple asked for it, too—if a fellow turns up his silly nose, he must expect something to happen."

"Temple wouldn't sneak to a prefect," said Nugent.

"That's all you know!" grinned Bunter. "That's what Wingate wants you

for, anyway. I say, you fellows, he looked jolly grim, too—he had his ash on the table. You're jolly well for it!"

And with that, Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the Famous Five to digest that unpalatable news.

They exchanged dismayed glances. An interview with the head-prefect of Greyfriars—with his ash ready on his study table—instead of tea in No. 1, was a change distinctly for the worse. And they were wrathful, as well as dismayed.

It was true that they had bumped Cecil Reginald Temple, of the Fourth Form, on the staircase after class. That, from the point of view of the Remove fellows, was a trifle light as air. Cecil Reginald Temple had looked supercilious: as he often did: and the chums of the Remove had sat him down on the stairs, rather emphatically perhaps, but quite playfully: certainly never dreaming that any Greyfriars man would carry a complaint to a prefect.

"Rotten!" sighed Bob Cherry. "Bother that ass Temple—"

"He asked for it, too!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The askfulness was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But perhaps we had better go at oncefully, my esteemed chums. Prefects do not like the waitfulness."

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We're for it, I suppose! We'll jolly well boot Temple for this!"

"Hard!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather."

The chums of the Remove left the study with glum facts. In the passage they passed Billy Bunter, who grinned at them as they passed. But they did not heed the fat Owl of the Remove. They trailed on, leaving Bunter grinning.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as they came out on the study landing. "Here's Temple!"

Cecil Reginald Temple, of the Fourth, was lounging elegantly on the landing. At sight of the Famous Five he looked wary—no doubt remembering his recent bumping on the stairs. They gave him almost deadly looks. Temple, no doubt, had not enjoyed his bumping: but it was against all laws, written and unwritten, for any fellow to carry tales to a prefect. And that, it seemed, was what Cecil Reginald had done.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Boot him!"

"Here, I say—!" exclaimed Temple. He ceased to lounge elegantly, and made a rush for the Fourth Form studies.

But he had no time to escape! The Famous Five rushed after him as one man. Fellows who told tales merited a booting: and every member of the Co. was anxious to plant a foot on Cecil Reginald's elegant trousers.

How many kicks he collected before he escaped into the Fourth Form passage, Cecil Reginald hardly knew. It seemed to him like dozens.

Leaving Temple of the Fourth yelling, and feeling a little comforted, the Famous Five went down the stairs, and headed for Wingate's study in the Sixth.

Harry Wharton tapped at the study door.

"Come in!" called out a cheery voice.

Wharton opened the door, and the five juniors trailed in. Wingate of the Sixth was sitting at his table, a pen in his hand, and a Latin prose before him. The official ash was not to be seen. Wingate, apparently, was at work on that Latin prose, and he did not seem pleased by the interruption. But the big, rugged captain of Greyfriars was always good-tempered, and he laid down his pen, and looked across at the juniors.

"Well?" he said.

"We've come," said Harry.

Wingate stared at him.

"I can see you've come," he answered. "If it's about football, you'd better come another time—I'm busy now."

Five fellows blinked at him.

"But—!" said Harry.

"I've said I'm busy! I know you're playing Carcroft on Wednesday, Wharton, and if you want to consult me about the team, come along later. Shut the door after you."

"But—!" stammered Harry, bewildered. "It isn't about the football, Wingate—it's about Temple—"

"Temple!" repeated Wingate. "What do you mean! What about Temple?"

"About bumping him this afternoon—"

"Did you bump him this afternoon? What have you come to tell me for, you young ass? Do you want six!"

"But—but—but you sent for us!" babbled Bob Cherry. "Bunter told us you wanted us, and that it was about bumping Temple on the stairs—"

Wingate stared, and then laughed.

"Pulling your leg, I expect," he said. "Anyhow I never sent for you, and you're wasting my time. Get out and shut the door."

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

Five fellows crowded out of Wingate's study, and shut the door after them. Outside the door, they looked at one another with feelings almost too deep for words. Wingate had not sent for them. He had never even heard of the bumping of Temple. They had booted Temple for telling him—and Temple had not told him! The whole thing was, apparently, an extraordinary practical joke on the part of the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove!

Harry Wharton drew a deep, deep breath.

"Come on—and let's look for Bunter!" he said.

And the Famous Five went to look for Bunter—and, judging by their looks, the Owl of the Remove was booked for the time of his life when they found him.

CHAPTER II

SMITHY ON THE WAR-PATH

"SMITHY, old man—!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Look here—!"

"Give us a rest!"

"What are you going to do with that catapult?"

"Find out!"

Tom Redwing compressed his lips, rather hard.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, of the Remove, was nicknamed the "Bounder" in his form, and not without reason. Often and often he did things which, according to the Greyfriars code, were "not done". When Smithy was in a bad temper, as was not infrequently the case, nobody who came near him was left in any doubt about it. Lord Mauleverer had described his manners as deplorable: and other fellows did not find them polished. In his "tantrums", Smithy was not always civil even to his study-mate, Tom Redwing: and there was no doubt that Smithy was in a "tantrum" now! His eyes were smouldering under his knitted brows, as he stood in No. 4 Study, slipping a catapult up the sleeve of his jacket.

With all Smithy's faults of temper, and of manners, he had good qualities: which Tom Redwing seemed able to see more clearly than any other fellow in the Remove. At all events, they were great pals in No. 4 Study: and Smithy in a "tantrum" was rather an object of anxiety than of resentment to his chum.

The Bounder was wriggling a little as he stood. It was half-an-hour since Mr. Quelch, his form-master, had given him "six": but the Bounder was an old and reckless offender, and no doubt Quelch had laid the cane on hard. Smithy was the man to "get back" if he could on a beak for a whopping: and much too reckless to reflect that that might make matters worse instead of better.

"Look here, Smithy—!" Redwing began again. The scowl on the Bounder's brow, the glint in his eyes, were not so alarming, as the sight of the dangerous implement he had slipped up his sleeve, evidently to keep it out of sight when he went out of the study. "You know jolly well that catapults are not permitted in the school—."

"Tell me something I don't know," jeered the Bounder.

"If I'd known there was one in the study, I'd have smashed it!" snapped Redwing, with a flash of anger. "It's a rotten thing for any fellow to have."

"Better tell Skinner that!" sneered Smithy. "It's his—I've borrowed it from him."

"For Quelch!" asked Redwing, with a deep breath.

"Why not?"

"You mad fool! You'd be sacked!" exclaimed Redwing, in utter dismay, "and you'd jolly well deserve it, too!"

"Thanks!"

The Bounder turned to the door. Whatever his purpose was, evidently he intended to carry on with it, regardless of his anxious chum's remonstrances. But he did not open the door: for Redwing, with a quick stride, placed himself in front of it.

The Bounder eyed him, with evil eyes.

"Will you let me pass?" he asked, between his teeth.

"Not with that catapult up your sleeve," answered Redwing. "You're not going to do a dirty, sneaking, rotten, cowardly thing, and get sacked from the school for it, if I can stop you."

"Think you can?" sneered Smithy.

"I'll try, anyhow."

"Will you stand aside?"

"No, I won't."

"I shall shift you if you don't."

Redwing did not answer that. But he stood like a rock at the door. Vernon-Smith clenched his hands hard. He was in a bitter and evil temper: and in that mood, was almost ready to quarrel with friend as with foe. For the moment, he looked as if he would rush at Redwing, hitting out right and left. The merest hint of interference with his liberty of action irked the arrogant Bounder sorely.

But even Smithy hesitated to come to blows with his only friend at Greyfriars School. Perhaps, too, in spite of his black and bitter mood, he was not wholly insensible to Redwing's anxiety for him. He paused.

"Smithy, old man, have a little sense," urged Redwing. "You know jolly well that a fellow gets whopped for smoking if he's caught—what's the good of brooding over it and getting ratty! Look here, you're booked to play Soccer for the school on Wednesday when Carcroft come over. Do you want to be gone when the match comes off?"

"Oh, don't be a fool, Reddy," snapped Vernon-Smith. "They don't sack a man for larking, even if he's caught—which I shan't be."

"Do you call catapulting a lark?"

"I said don't be a fool! Do you think I'm blackguard enough to catapult a man, even a rusty old bean like Quelch, who's given me six?" snarled the Bounder, savagely. "It's nothing of the kind, you dummy. I tell you it's a lark—now get out of the way: you're wasting time."

"What are you going to do?"

"I tell you you're wasting time—"

"You're not going out of this study till I know."

Vernon-Smith breathed hard.

"I tell you it's only a jape on Quelch!" he snapped. "He's grinding in his study now. I'm going to make him sit up."

"I don't see—!"

"Lots of things you don't see! Think he will be amused, up to his neck in Form papers, when he hears gravel clinking on his window, every two or three minutes?"

"It would make him as mad as a hatter, I think," answered Redwing. "But you'd be caught first shot, you fathead—there's dozens of fellows in the quad who couldn't fail to see you—"

"Not if I park myself in that old elm opposite Quelch's window, and buzz gravel with a catapult at ten yards distance."

"Oh!" exclaimed Redwing.

"Now you can get out of the way—now that I've explained that I'm not a hooligan thinking of catching a man in the eye!" snarled Vernon-Smith.

Redwing eyed him dubiously. When the Bounder was in a savage and resentful temper, there was really no telling what he might or might not think of doing, and his pal could not feel quite reassured.

Smithy gave him a very dark look.

"Don't you believe me?" he muttered.

"Yes!" said Redwing, slowly. He moved away from the door. "But look here, Smithy, why not chuck it? Let's go down and punt a footer, and forget all about that whopping from Quelch—"

"I'll forget about it when I've made him sit up!" jeered the Bounder, and he dragged open the door of the study.

"But, old chap—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Smithy—!"

Slam!

The slam of the door cut short Redwing's expostulations. Smithy was gone: and Redwing was left alone in No. 4, with a worried and troubled brow. He believed what his chum had told him, and to that extent he was relieved: but that revengeful strain in Smithy was quite foreign to his own frank and healthy nature, and it jarred on him. And he could not help feeling that Smithy, confident as he was in himself, was heading for more trouble with his form-master. There were masters at Greyfriars who were "ragged": but Henry Samuel Quelch was not one of them: ragging Quelch was about as safe a game as twisting the tail of a tiger.

Quite regardless of what Redwing might be thinking, Vernon-Smith hurried down the Remove passage to the landing. He was anxious to get to work on the "rag" that was to make Quelch "sit up"—if all went according to plan. He was passing the open doorway of No. 1 Study almost at a run, when a fat figure emerged from that study, also in a hurry, and there was a

sudden collision. Smithy did not see Bunter, and Bunter did not see Smithy, till they met—and they met with a crash.

“Oh!” gasped Smithy, staggering back from the shock.

“Oooooogh!” spluttered Billy Bunter. The old oak planks of the Remove passage almost shook, as the Owl of the Remove sat down suddenly. “Ow! Wow! I say, you fellows, it wasn’t me! I haven’t been in your study! I haven’t touched the sardines, and I haven’t got the dough-nuts in my pockets—wow! You keep off, you beasts! Ow!”

“You fat fool!” roared the Bounder.

“Eh!” Billy Bunter blinked up at him. “Oh! Is that you, Smithy? I thought it was those beasts coming back! Ow! Wharrer you knocked me over for, you beast? Ow! Tain’t your sardines, or your dough-nuts, either. Wow!”

Vernon-Smith gave him a glare.

“You fat porker! You’ve been grub-raiding in Wharton’s study.”

“I haven’t!” gasped Bunter. “I never told them Wingate wanted them, and if I did, it was only a joke! I haven’t touched their grub—that wasn’t why I sent them down to Wingate—yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast! You kick me again, and I’ll jolly well—whoooooooooop!”

Luckily for Bunter, the Bounder was in a hurry. He stayed only to bestow a couple of kicks on the sprawling fat junior, and then hurried on his way. A couple, however, seemed enough for Bunter: wild yells followed the Bounder across the study landing and down the stairs.

“Ow! wow! wow! Beast! Yow—ow—ow!”

But Billy Bunter realized that time was precious. How long Harry Wharton and Co. might be gone, he did not know: but it was not likely to be long before they discovered that the fat Owl had sent them on a fool’s errand. Bunter had expended only two minutes in the study: after which there remained no trace of toast or sardines: but he had not ventured to stay to finish the feast: the dough-nuts were crammed into his pockets, to be devoured in a safer spot. Billy Bunter was not very bright: but he was bright enough to know that the Co. would very soon be looking for him! He heaved up his weight, and followed Vernon-Smith down the stairs, and was out of the House only a minute after the Bounder.

CHAPTER III

SAFE SPOT!

“SEEN Bunter, Browney?”

“No!”

“Seen Bunter, Fishy?”

“Nope!”

"Seen Bunter, Hazel?"

"No: and don't want to."

Harry Wharton and Co. were asking every fellow they passed as they came up to the studies after their interview with Wingate of the Sixth. Why the fat Owl had played that extraordinary trick, had not yet dawned on them: but they were very anxious for a meeting with Bunter—as anxious as Bunter was to avoid one! But nobody seemed to have seen Bunter about the House.

"The fat villain!" breathed Wharton, as they came into the Remove passage. "Temple never said a word to Wingate—we booted him for nothing."

"We'll boot Bunter for something!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The bootfulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But where is the esteemed and execrable Bunter?"

"Seen Bunter, Skinner?" called out Frank Nugent, as Harold Skinner of the Remove came down the passage.

"Lots of times!" answered Skinner.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Do you know where he is now?"

"I can guess."

"Well, where, then?"

"Somewhere where there's something to eat."

Skinner walked on, grinning: but the Famous Five did not grin. They were in no mood for Skinner's little jokes. Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation. That remark of Skinner's had put a suspicion into his mind.

"Look in the study!" he exclaimed.

"He wouldn't be there," said Harry. "Think he would wait for us to come back and boot him?"

"I can jolly well guess why he pulled our leg, and sent us down to Wingate. He was after the dough-nuts—"

"Oh!" exclaimed four fellows, together.

They rushed into No. 1 Study. It dawned on them now. They realized that it was not merely for an extraordinary practical joke that Bunter had sent them down to Wingate. The fat Owl had had ulterior motives. Bunter had wanted them off the scene while he dealt with the foodstuffs!

If Billy Bunter had still been in No. 1 Study when they arrived, he would most certainly have had a hectic time.

But they had arrived too late!

Bunter was gone! So was the feed—such as it was! Billy Bunter's movements, as a rule, resembled those of a very old and very tired snail. But he could be a quick worker at times. This, evidently, was one of the times! There was no sign of Bunter in No. 1 Study—neither was there any sign of edibles on the study table. Two or three crusts remained of the toast: but only an empty paper bag remained to indicate that there had once been dough-nuts. Bunter had been—and gone!

They gazed at the denuded tea-table.

"So that was his game!" said Harry Wharton. "The fat villain! We might have guessed, really—"

"The mightfulness is terrific."

"Every dashed crumb!" said Johnny Bull, "and it's too late for tea in hall Why, I—I—I—I'll—!" Words seemed to fail Johnny.

"This is the jolly old limit!" said Bob Cherry. "Bunter's got to learn that he can't do these things! After him!"

Five juniors crowded out of the study again. They tramped up the passage to No. 7: Bunter's study and hurled open the door. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were in No. 7: but their fat study-mate was not present.

"Seen Bunter, Toddy?"

"Not since tea in hall," answered Peter.

"Seen Bunter, Dutton?"

"Eh?" Dutton, the deaf junior, looked at the excited five inquiringly.

"Did you speak to me, Cherry?"

"Seen Bunter about?" roared Bob.

"Who's a lout?"

"Oh, my hat! I didn't say lout! I said seen Bunter about?" bawled Bob.

"Bunter. Did you say Bunter?"

"Yes, Bunter!"

"Well, he's not a nice chap, but I don't see why you should call him a lout. What are you calling him a lout for?"

"Oh, crikey! Have you seen Bunter?" roared Bob, in a voice that Stentor might have equalled, but never beaten.

"Oh! Yes! You needn't shout—I'm not deaf!"

"Great pip! Where did you see him?"

"In the quad."

"How long ago was that?"

"I know he's fat! Think I see him every day without noticing that he's fat? What do you mean?"

"Help!" gasped Bob Cherry. He under-studied Stentor again. "How long ago did you see him in the quad?"

"Just before I came up to the study—a few minutes ago."

"Was he going out?"

"Look here, Bob Cherry, I don't think you ought to keep on calling him a lout. What are you laughing at, Toddy? Nothing funny in fellows coming here and calling Bunter a lout, is there?"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Bob. "Let's draw the quad for him."

And the Famous Five hurried down the passage again. On the stairs they passed Tom Redwing, going down with a very serious and rather troubled face.

"Seen Bunter, Reddy?"

"Bunter!" Redwing smiled faintly. "He looked into our study and Smithy buzzed a cushion at him! I haven't seen him since. That was some time ago."

"Come on!" said Bob.

They scuttled down the stairs, and out into the quadrangle. There they came on Sampson Quincy Iffiey Field, the Australian junior, and hailed him:

"Seen Bunter, Squiff?"

"Yes—over by Masters' Studies—"

"Oh, good!"

Five fellows, more than ever anxious to see Bunter, cut off towards the windows of Masters' Studies. They were on the track at last.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There he is!"

"Bunter—!"

"Got him!"

But they had not quite "got him". There, certainly, was Bunter: full in view, his spectacles gleaming in the westering sun. He was leaning on the wall directly under the window of Mr. Quelch's study. The window was shut: but had Mr. Quelch looked out, he could not have seen the fat junior, for Bunter's head did not quite reach up to the high, projecting stone window-sill, which screened him from view had the Remove master glanced from the window.

The Famous Five came to a halt.

They had been hunting Bunter—and they had found him! But dealing with him was quite another matter!

Bunter had found a safe spot!

After his many and manifold sins, they were simply yearning to collar him, bump him, boot him, and generally make it clear to him that there was a seamy side to the career of a fat grub-raider. But collaring him, bumping him and booting him, directly under a form-master's window—especially when that form-master was Henry Samuel Quelch—was what Hurree Jamset Ram Singh would have called a boot on the other leg. It just could not be done!

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his big spectacles.

He did not seem alarmed.

He had selected that safe spot with care! As they gazed at him, almost wolfishly, his fat hand went into his pocket, and he drew therefrom a dough-nut, which he proceeded to devour. Calmly, under the eyes of its proprietors, Bunter ploughed through that dough-nut!

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry.

"Our dough-nuts!" breathed Johnny Bull.

"Bunter, you fat villain—!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"Bunter, you terrific toad—!"

"Bunter, you podgy brigand—!"

Bunter chewed on, regardless.

"Look here, we're jolly well going to collar him!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Chance Quelch—!"

"Hold on!" said Harry.

"Look here, I tell you—."

"Fathead! Quelch will go off at the deep end if there's a shindy under his window. Do you want Extra School on Wednesday afternoon when Carcroft come over?"

Johnny Bull breathed hard, and he breathed deep. But he did not want Extra School on Wednesday, when he was booked to keep goal for the Remove. He suppressed his feelings.

For a long, long minute the chums of the Remove stood and gazed at William George Bunter. But there was no help for it—he was in a safe spot, and they had to leave him there. They gave him expressive—very expressive—looks, from a distance: looks which, expressive as they were, did Bunter no apparent damage. Regardless of expressive looks, the fat Owl continued to lean on the wall under his form-master's window-sill, and help himself, with fat and sticky fingers, to dough-nuts from sticky pockets. And with deep feelings, Harry Wharton and Co. departed, and left him to it.

CHAPTER IV

MYSTERIOUS!

PING!
Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove, looked up from his writing-table with a glint in his eyes.

It was the second time that a "ping" had sounded at his study window.

The first time, Quelch had hardly heeded it. But the second time, he sat up and took notice. His eyes fixed on that window with almost the look of a basilisk.

"Upon my word!" breathed Mr. Quelch, "Someone is throwing pebbles at my window. At MY window!"

It was almost incredible.

Henry Samuel Quelch was seldom, or never, "ragged", as other masters sometimes were. Capper, the master of the Fourth, often had his leg pulled. Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, lived and moved and had his being amid incessant rags. But never Quelch! Quelch was made of sterner stuff. One glint from his gimlet eyes was enough to subdue any fellow, as a rule. Even Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, the most reckless fellow in the school, was very wary of Quelch. A thoughtless fellow might

have "buzzed" a pebble at Capper's window, or Mossoo's: or even at Prout's. But Quelch's—!

Yet it was happening!

Twice had a pebble impinged upon the glass. Obviously this could not be accidental. It was a "rag".

Quelch was a busy man. At the moment, he was at work in his study on Form papers. It was a task that required his whole attention. It was not a task to be interrupted by a thoughtless rag! Quelch was not the man to be patient with a ragger at the best of times. And when he was hard at work his patience was absolutely nil.

Ping!

It came again, while Quelch sat staring at the window. For the third time, a pebble tinkled on the glass, and rolled on the broad stone window-sill, where it rested with the two earlier arrivals.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard through his nose.

Some person unknown was pelting gravel-stones at his window: and Quelch was the last man at Greyfriars, or in the wide world, to take it equably.

He rose from his chair, and stepped to the window. He looked out into the sunny quad. Someone outside the House, was pelting his window: thrice had a pebble landed, and apparently the unknown ragger intended to keep up this peculiar game. Quelch glared from that study window rather like a lion from its lair.

There were plenty of fellows in sight, and the gimlet-eyes roamed over them, in search of the culprit. He could see Loder, Walker, and Gwynne, of the Sixth, on the Sixth-form green: but Sixth-form men and prefects could not of course, be suspected of ragging a beak. Coker of the Fifth was walking with Potter and Greene of that form: Temple, Dabney and Fry, of the Fourth, were strolling at a little distance. Lord Mauleverer of the Remove was sauntering under the elms. Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, were standing in a little group. Fisher T. Fish could be seen crossing the quad with his jerky steps. Tunn of the Third was arguing with Nugent minor of the Second Form. Harry Wharton and his friends could be seen, at a distance. Other fellows were spotted about. The gimlet-eye in search of the culprit had plenty to select from. It glinted at one after another. But not a single fellow, so far as Quelch could see, was near enough to have "buzzed" a pebble at his window. It was very strange and puzzling and intensely annoying.

There was one fellow in the quad whom Quelch could not see. That was a fat junior leaning on the wall under the window, screened by the broad stone sill. Bunter was quite invisible to Quelch.

Not that Bunter, of course, had any idea of ragging Quelch: he would as soon have ragged a wild hippopotamus. Bunter, any more than any other fellow in the quad, had no idea that a "rag" was going on at all. If he heard the "pings" on the glass above his fat head he paid no heed, and he saw

nothing of the pebbles, which remained on the broad sill after hitting the glass. Bunter was deeply engrossed in chewing dough-nuts, and so long as the dough-nuts lasted, Bunter was blind and deaf to everything else.

Happily unconscious of the fat Owl under the window-sill, Quelch stared out, scanning fellow after fellow, with keen suspicious eyes. But not a fellow was near his window—no one was even looking towards it. He set his lips hard. He had to conclude that the ragger, after buzzing those pebbles, had hurried on, and dodged round the corner of the building. It was too late to spot him.

Breathing hard, the Remove master returned to his table, and sat down to work again. A considerable pile of Form papers remained for him to travel through: and some of them were not calculated to banish the frown from his brow. Lord Mauleverer's paper, indeed, caused that frown to intensify: and the one that bore the name of W. G. Bunter was still more exasperating. Quelch, gazing at that paper, could not help wondering whether words were a sheer waste on Bunter, and whether he had not better perhaps rely wholly on the cane in dealing with that member of his form.

On the other hand, Mark Linley's paper had the effect of unknitting Quelch's knitted brows, and he almost smiled over it. And he looked quite pleased when he picked up the one that was written in the hand of his Head Boy, Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove. It was quite a good paper—indeed, excellent, for a boy in a junior form: the fact that Harry Wharton was the best junior footballer at Greyfriars, did not prevent him from being a good man in class also.

Quelch actually forgot those "pings" at his window, and the incredible impertinence of that unknown ragger, as he looked at Wharton's paper, and nodded his head with approval over it. Harry Wharton, at that moment debating with his friends the knotty problem of "scrounging" a tea somewhere in the Remove, did not even dream of the placating effect his Latin paper was having on his form-master! Had the Bounder, hidden in the elm at a distance opposite the study window, abandoned his peculiar "rag" at that point, all would have been well. But Smithy had no intention of abandoning it yet. He was, in fact, now warming to his work!

Quelch's crusty face was quite amiable. Many Removites seemed to be of the opinion that as the tongue of Virgil, Cicero, and Quintus Horatius Flaccus was a dead language, it ought to be buried also: and they had no desire whatever to dig it up. Pupils like Bunter sometimes made Quelch wonder whether a school-master's life was, after all, worth living. But Wharton's paper was good: and a good Latin prose had a calming and cheering effect on Quelch. His brow was unknitting, and he almost smiled.

PING!

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. There was thunder in his brow again.

He fairly bounded to his feet.

The unknown ragger was at it again. This time it was quite a hard knock on the pane, which almost cracked under it.

The "rag" was going on! Some young rascal, greatly daring, had set out to worry Quelch: persistently and incessantly. Quelch almost tore to the window, determined to spot him this time.

But he stared out blankly into the sunshine. He had the same view as before—quite a quiet and peaceful scene. Not a man in the quadrangle was near enough to have flung a pebble at the window.

It was perplexing, as well as fearfully irritating. Quelch had reached the window so swiftly, that it seemed impossible for the ragger to have reached a safe distance. Yet nobody was to be seen anywhere near the window.

Who was it?

Quelch thought of Herbert Vernon-Smith—a very reckless fellow, whom he had recently caned. Of all the Remove, Smithy was the most likely man.



Quelch glared down and grabbed.

From the window, a pair of gimlet-eyes searched the quad. But Vernon-Smith was not to be seen at all. He was nowhere in view. Quelch had to conclude that the offender was not Smithy. But who was it?

Quelch, at last, turned back to his table. Then, on second thoughts, he turned to the window again. He did not doubt that there would be another "ping" at the glass before long. This time he was going to watch—and woe betide the buzzer of pebbles when he spotted him!

Standing beside the window, half-hidden by the curtain, Quelch watched, his gimlet-eyes glittering like pin-points. He was, by this time, almost in a boiling state. His work was interrupted—his time was wasted—and some young rascal was laughing in his sleeve! He would have little reason to laugh, once Quelch knew who he was! Quelch's stoutest cane, in a vigorous hand, was going to be featured in the next act.

Crack!

Quelch jumped almost clear of the floor at that crack at the window.

It was a larger pebble, and it cracked the pane. But the amazing thing was, that the form-master, watching from within, could see no one near the window. The pebble had banged on the glass—the pane was cracked—yet everybody visible in the quad was at a distance, not even looking towards his study! It really seemed as if that pebble must have whizzed of its own volition, untouched by human hand!

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

For some moments he stared in blank amazement. Nobody was anywhere near the window—yet the pebble had banged. And then, suddenly, a suspicion shot into his mind! There was only one explanation, so far as Quelch could see. As he had not seen the ragger come and go, he must be still on the spot! He had ducked out of sight under the broad stone-window-sill! Was that it?

As soon as the thought of that, Quelch had no doubt about it. Indeed he wondered that he had not thought of it before. It was quite a simple explanation. Anyhow it was easily put to the test. If there was a fellow under the window, with his head ducked under the sill, Quelch had him!

Grimly, Mr. Quelch pushed up the lower sash. He leaned out of the window, and looked down.

His eyes fairly blazed at the top of a fat head.

There was a fellow under his window: the fattest fellow in Quelch's form! He was leaning on the wall under the stone sill. Quelch glared down at him: then he reached down and grabbed. The young rascal was not going to be given time to bolt! A hand like iron grasped the back of Billy Bunter's collar: and from the Owl of the Remove, startled almost out of his wits, came a frantic yell:

"Yaroooooooh!"

CHAPTER V

ALARMING!

BILLY BUNTER yelled.

Never had the fat Owl been so suddenly and wildly surprised. Life is full of surprises: and no doubt William George Bunter had had his share of them. But never, in all his fat career, had he been so taken by surprise as now.

It was true that Greyfriars fellows were not supposed to loaf about under form-masters' windows. Had Quelch looked out, and ordered him off, Bunter would have been annoyed, but not surprised. But this—!

The fat junior hardly knew what was happening, for some moments. Something like an iron vice was gripping the back of his collar, a set of bony knuckles grinding into his fat neck. Bunter sagged in that grip like a sack of coke, yelling and spluttering dizzily wondering whether he was on his head or his heels.

“Urrggh! Leggo!” yelled Bunter, frantically. “Wow! Who’s that? Leggo you beast! Grooogh! Leggo! Oooh.”

“Bunter!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

He realized that it was his form-master who had so suddenly and unexpectedly gripped him from above.

But that really only made it the more surprising. It was quite extraordinary conduct on the part of Mr. Quelch.

“Ow! Grooogh! Leggo!” wailed Bunter. “Urrgh! You’re chook-chook-choking me! Yurrrrrgggh!”

“So it is you, Bunter!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

“Eh? Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter, still more surprised by that question. Quelch knew him by sight well enough!

Bunter was happily unaware that a “rag” had been going on. He had not the slightest suspicion—any more than Mr. Quelch had—that a mischievous junior hidden in one of the old elms at a distance, had been pelting the window with the aid of a catapult! That he was supposed to have been “ragging” at that window Bunter had no idea. He could only wonder dizzily what on earth was the matter with Quelch.

“You!” repeated Mr. Quelch. “I have caught you, Bunter!”

“Urrrrgh! I—I say, sir, I—I—I—grooogh!” spluttered Bunter. Quelch, undoubtedly, had caught him. That was only too painfully certain. Bunter could only wonder, in amazement, why!

“You young rascal!”

"Oh, really, sir—grooogh! Leggo my neck!" gurgled Bunter. "I'm chook-chuck-chick-choking—urrrggh!"

Quelch did not let go. He did not relax his grasp. He appeared to be quite heartlessly indifferent whether he choked the fat member of the form or not! Leaning from the window, he held him fast, with his left hand, while with his right he seized the cane from under his arm.

Billy Bunter twisted his fat head round, and blinked up at his form-master. Quelch glared down at him. Bunter's look was like that of a startled and terrified owl. Quelch's was like that of a Gorgon.

"I—I—I say, sir—!" gasped Bunter, as Mr. Quelch right hand emerged from the window, with the cane in it. "I say—yaroooh!"

Swipe!

The iron grip twisted Bunter over into a favourable position for swiping with the cane. The cane came down with all the vigour of the sinewy arm that wielded it. It fairly rang on Bunter's tight trousers like a pistol-shot: and the frantic yell that answered from Bunter woke echoes far and wide.

Swipe! swipe!

"Yaroooh! Yow-ow! Whoooooop!" roared Bunter. "Gone mad! What—Yarooop!"

Swipe!

"Wow! Ow! wow!"

Fellows in the quadrangle stared round. It was quite an unusual sight, at a study window at Greyfriars School.

Quelch did not heed distant stares. He concentrated on Bunter. Bunter—Quelch had no doubt—had been ragging him: clinking pebbles on his window-panes, and hiding under the sill all the time! Quelch was fairly on the boil by the time he discovered Bunter there. There was only one idea in Quelch's mind at the moment: to make it abundantly clear to Bunter that it did not pay to rag his form-master.

"Swipe! swipe!

"Ow! Help! Wow! ooh!" roared Bunter, struggling wildly. "I say, you fellows—yaroooooh! Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! I say, he's gone crackers! Wow!"

He wrenched frantically at the grasp on his collar. Why Quelch had broken out like this, for no apparent cause, was quite inexplicable: unless, indeed, the Remove master had suddenly and unaccountably gone "crackers".

Really there seemed no other explanation of a form-master suddenly grasping a fellow who had done nothing at all, and pitching into him with a cane!

"Crackers" or not, there was no doubt that Quelch was in a fierce mood. The cane fairly rang on Billy Bunter.

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

"Oh, scissors! Oh, help! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

Quelch, for the moment, was unheeding, indeed unconscious, of astonished stares fixed on him from various directions. Bunter's frantic yells reached every ear in the quad, and every fellow there stared round towards Quelch's window. Harry Wharton and Co. ceased to discuss the problem of tea, and stared across at their form-master with popping eyes. They had been longing, indeed yearning, to lay hands on the artful fat Owl who had parked himself in so secure a spot, and bestow upon him the "scragging" he richly merited. Now, however, he was getting something much more severe than any "scragging" they would have dreamed of handing out. Quelch was laying it on as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet!

"Great pip!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Look! What's the matter with Quelch? What is he pitching into Bunter for?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Serve him jolly well right, whatever it's for!" grunted Johnny Bull. "He's getting it from Quelch instead of us!"

"Not such a safe spot as Bunter fancied!" said Frank Nugent. "But—what is Quelch up to?"

"Can't be whopping Bunter like that just for loafing under his window," said Harry Wharton, quite mystified.

"But what—?"

"The whatfulness is terrific."

"Look at that!" It was the loud voice of Coker of the Fifth. "Look! Has that old bean gone batchy, or what! Look!"

Every fellow in the quad was looking! Frantically from the wriggling, squirming fat Owl came howl after howl.

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Stoppit! Wow! I haven't done anything, have I? Yaroooh! Stoppit! Oh, crikey!"

"You disrespectful young rascal!" Quelch, almost breathless with his exertions, panted. "How dare you pelt my window with stones?"

"Eh! What? I didn't!" roared Bunter. "I haven't done a thing! Will you leggo my collar! Stoppit! Yaroooh."

Swipe! swipe!

"Wow! I say, you fellows—yaroooh! Whoooooop!"

Bunter gave a tremendous wrench, and Mr. Quelch almost toppled out of the window. He caught at the sash to save himself, perforce releasing the fat Owl's collar, and the cane dropped from his hand to the ground.

The instant his grasp relaxed, Billy Bunter shot away like an arrow from a bow. Seldom did Bunter move swiftly. But just then, an arrow in its flight had nothing on Bunter. He whizzed.

"Bunter!" roared Mr. Quelch.

Bunter flew on.

"Bunter! Come to my study at once! Pick up that cane and bring it to my study with you."

Bunter heard, but like the ancient gladiator, he heeded not! He careered on, his fat feet seeming scarcely to touch the ground.

"Wharton!" Mr. Quelch called, or rather shouted, across to his Head Boy. "Wharton! Stop that boy!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped the amazed captain of the Remove. He made a grasp at Bunter as the fat Owl flew by: carefully missing him. Whatever Bunter had done—and apparently he had done nothing at all—Wharton could not help thinking that he had had enough! Bunter charged on past the Famous Five, shot into the House like a fat rabbit into a rabbit-hole, and disappeared.

Quelch compressed his lips, hard.

He was conscious of the amazed stares on all sides. He realized that fellows who did not know how Bunter had offended, must be astonished at that sudden and remarkable scene at a master's study window. He beckoned to Wharton, who came up.

"Pick up that cane, Wharton, please, and hand it to me."

"Certainly, sir."

Harry Wharton picked up the cane, and handed it in at the window. Quelch breathed very hard.

"Wharton! Find Bunter and tell him to come to my study."

"Oh! Yes, sir! Has—has Bunter done anything, sir?" stammered the captain of the Remove.

"What? what? No doubt you saw him throwing stones at my window, Wharton, as you were not very far away," snapped Mr. Quelch.

Wharton jumped.

"Oh! No, sir!" he gasped.

"He was doing so, Wharton, whether you saw him or not! Find him at once and send him to my study."

Harry Wharton stared blankly at his form-master.

"But, sir—!" he stammered.

Mr. Quelch's window shut with a bang. Harry Wharton turned away, and rejoined his friends, quite bewildered. Having been commanded to look for Bunter, he did so—but probably he did not look very hard, or very far: for the Remove master, in a state of intensifying wrath, waited in his study for a fat Owl who did not arrive!

CHAPTER VI

UP A TREE!

WINGATE of the Sixth stared.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

The Greyfriars captain was sauntering under the leafy branches of one of

the old elms. That leafy tree was just opposite the window of Mr. Quelch's study, at some distance. Wingate, as he strolled past, had no idea that any fellow was hidden in the branches above—he made that discovery suddenly and unexpectedly.

Any fellow who climbed that tree was safely out of sight from the quad, and the windows of the House. On the side furthest from the school buildings, it was easy to climb the gnarled old trunk unnoticed, its massive width being more than enough to hide the climber from general observation.

Not that any fellow was allowed, or supposed to climb trees in the Greyfriars quad. It was very strictly forbidden. Fellows with a fancy for tree-climbing had to indulge that fancy, if at all, outside the precincts of Greyfriars.

But some fellow, undoubtedly, had climbed that particular tree, regardless of rules: for as the captain of Greyfriars was passing under it, a foot emerged from the foliage above his head—obviously that of someone in the act of coming down: no doubt quite unaware that a Sixth-form prefect was in the offing.

Wingate stared at it.

Some fellow was in that tree, against rules and regulations: and for whatever reason he had been there, he was now descending at an unlucky moment for himself. The trunk would have screened him from fellows in the quad: but it couldn't screen him from Wingate, who was passing on the further side. Being right under the tree, the Greyfriars captain could scarcely have failed to observe that foot—in fact it fairly dangled before his eyes.

As he ejaculated "Oh!" there was a quick breath above, as the unseen climber thus became aware of him: the foot ceased to descend, and made a move to jerk up again. But Wingate reached up swiftly and grasped the ankle attached to the foot.

"Oooh!" came a startled gasp, as he grasped it. The owner of the foot above dragged hard: but the Greyfriars captain held on to his capture.

"Come down, you young sweep!" he exclaimed. "I've caught you! Come down out of that tree at once! Do you hear?"

The unseen one certainly heard: but he made no reply, and no move to descend. Holding on to the upper branches, and still hidden in foliage, save for a foot and a length of leg, he dragged desperately to release that foot. As he must have known Wingate's voice, he knew that he was dealing with a Sixth-Form prefect: whose duty it was to call him to account for breaking rules. Perhaps all the more for that reason he strove hard to pull loose: but the Greyfriars captain pulled harder.

There was a slithering sound, and another foot, and another leg, came into view. Wingate was getting the best of that peculiar game of tug-of-war.

"Are you coming down?" he rapped.

A breathless gasp was the only answer. Wingate gave another powerful

tug, and more of the tree-climber came into sight. A crumpled jacket, caught on a jutting twig, was dragged almost up to the climber's ears, revealing a waistcoat. From the pockets of that crumpled garment various articles exuded, and fell to the ground below. A fountain-pen tapped on Wingate's head as it fell: then a handkerchief, a penknife, and a catapult, scattered at his feet. Still the climber held on to an upper branch, while a shower of gravel-stones dropped after the other articles that had fallen.

"Will you come down, you young ass?" exclaimed Wingate. "You'll get a pretty hard bump if I have to pull you down."

"I—I—I can't!" came a panting voice. "My jacket's caught! Let go! I'll come down if you let go, Wingate."

Wingate knew that voice. The tree-climber was Herbert Vernon-Smith of the Remove: the "Boulder" of Greyfriars.

"You, Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed Wingate.

"Will you let go?" howled the Boulder. "I can't get my jacket loose—it's hooked."

Wingate released the ankle. Now that the delinquent was known, it was useless for him to dodge back into the higher branches.

"Come down at once," rapped Wingate.

There was a scrambling sound, as Smithy unhooked his jacket. Then he dropped from the branches, and stood facing Wingate, with flushed face, panting for breath. Wingate glanced at the objects that had fallen to the ground, and frowned.

"Pick those things up! Now hand me that catapult!"

Vernon-Smith stooped, and collected his property. He handed the catapult to the Greyfriars captain in silence.

"You young rascal!" said Wingate, angrily. "You'd have had fifty lines for climbing that tree—but a catapult is a very different matter. You know they are not allowed in the school."

Vernon-Smith stood sullen and silent.

"Have you been catapulting the pigeons?" demanded Wingate.

The Boulder's colour deepened. He was a wild and reckless fellow, and he had his faults—indeed, their name was Legion. But there was nothing mean or cruel in him. His eyes glinted at the Greyfriars captain.

"No, I haven't," he snapped, savagely, "and you've no right to ask me, either."

"You didn't climb a tree with a catapult for nothing."

No answer.

"What were you doing in that tree, with a catapult?"

Still no answer.

"Very well," said Wingate. "I shall take you to your form-master, Vernon-Smith. Quelch will deal with you."

Herbert Vernon-Smith caught his breath. He did not want Quelch to hear

of a Remove fellow in the tree opposite his window, with a catapult! Only too probably, Quelch would guess who was the unknown ragger who had been pelting his window with gravel-stones. Smithy had indulged in that reckless rag, regardless of possible consequences. But the consequences were certain to be very painful, if Quelch discovered who had been ragging him.

"I—I say, Wingate—!" he stammered.

"Well?" rapped the Greyfriars captain.

"You needn't take me to Quelch!" muttered the Bounder. "Look here, fellows have climbed trees before, without a song and a dance about it."

"Not with catapults," snapped Wingate.

"I tell you I wasn't catapulting the pigeons—I wouldn't!"

"What were you doing with the catapult, then?"

No answer.

"That will do," said Wingate, gruffly. "Quelch is in his study now, I believe—I'll take you to him at once."

"I tell you I wasn't—"

"You can tell Quelch that! If it wasn't the pigeons, you must have been watching for some fellow to catapult him. You young ruffian, people have had an eye knocked out by a catapult stone. If—"

"I tell you it was nothing of the kind. I'm not such a fool."

"Then what were you up to?"

Vernon-Smith made no answer. There was a chance, at least, that Quelch might not guess: and he did not intend to confess that he had been catapulting his form-master's window. Such an act of disrespect, if found out, meant dire consequences—it might even mean going up to the head.

"Come with me," rapped Wingate, as the junior did not answer: and he turned and walked away towards the House, the catapult in his hand.

The Bounder followed him, with a dark and sullen face. There was no help for it. He had been caught, and he had to face the music. He could only hope that Quelch would not be able to put two and two together, and jump to it that the gravel-stones on his window-panes had come from a catapult. But that, he knew, was rather under-estimating his form-master's arithmetical powers—and the hope was very faint. In fact, the Bounder's sullen face registered alarm and despondency, as he followed Wingate into the House, and into Mr. Quelch's study.

CHAPTER VII

QUELCH COMES DOWN HEAVY!

"MR. QUELCH—!"

"What is it, Wingate?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

It was not like Mr. Quelch to snap at George Wingate, of the Sixth-Form,

captain and head-prefect of Greyfriars School. In normal circumstances he would never have dreamed of snapping at him.

But circumstances were not normal just now. Indeed they were very far from normal.

Quelch was in a boiling state. Seldom or never had any Greyfriars master been so thoroughly on the boil.

His work had been interrupted: his time wasted: he had been subjected to a reckless "rag": and in addition to all that, the delinquent had had the audacity, the temerity, to keep away from his study when ordered to come there by a just-incensed form-master.

Bunter had been commanded to come to the study. Wharton had been commanded to find him and send him there. Quelch, naturally, had expected to see him in a few minutes.

But no fat Owl had materialized. Quelch had waited, simmering: ready for Bunter. But Bunter had not come.

It was amazing, as well as exasperating. Disobedience in his form was a thing to which Mr. Quelch was quite unaccustomed. Certainly if Wharton could not find Bunter, he could not send him in: but Bunter should have come as ordered—the circumstance that a further licking awaited him should have made no difference to that. Apparently, however, it had! Quelch, still unaware—though he was about to learn—that Bunter was not the culprit, had no idea that the fat Owl, startled out of his wits by what seemed to him an utterly unaccountable outbreak on his form-master's part, had an uneasy dread that Quelch had suddenly gone "off his onion". Unless he was reassured on that point, Billy Bunter was not likely to present himself in that study in a hurry.

The state of affairs was quite sufficient to make any form-master boil, if not boil over. It was an added irritation to Quelch when Wingate came in with Vernon-Smith at his heels. He did not want to be bothered by anyone just then: he wanted to concentrate on William George Bunter. At that moment he might almost have snapped at the reverend Head himself. He snapped at Wingate.

The Greyfriars captain raised his eyebrows slightly. Really, he was not to be snapped at, like some junior in Quelch's form.

However, having registered disapproval by that lift of his eyebrows, Wingate proceeded to explain.

"I have brought this junior to you, sir—"

"Why?" Quelch still snapped.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood silent. Wingate's eyebrows lifted again.

"If you do not wish me to make my report, sir—!" he said stiffly. Two snaps were more than enough for him.

Mr. Quelch made an effort to control his intense irritation.

"Not at all, Wingate." This time he contrived not to snap. "As a matter of

fact, I have been somewhat disturbed this afternoon—a foolish boy in my form was so irresponsible as to throw stones at my study window—”

“Indeed, sir.”

“That foolish boy Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch, and the Bounder gave a jump.

From the elm branches, he had witnessed the scene at Quelch’s window, following the banging of gravel-stones on the glass: but like other witnesses, he had only wondered why Quelch had pounced on the fat Owl. Now he began to understand.

He realized that Quelch, not having the faintest idea that a young rascal with a catapult was fusillading from a tree, had jumped on Bunter as the offender.

If he had had a hope of getting through this without bad trouble, it was abandoned now. He could guess what Quelch’s feelings would be like when he learned that he had punished a boy in his form without cause. Quelch was a just man. Aristides of old had nothing on Quelch in that respect. And he was now going to learn that those whops of the cane, at his study window, had been administered to Bunter absolutely without cause. Herbert Vernon-Smith had plenty of nerve: but he could not help feeling a tremor now—a very unpleasant tremor. If Quelch guessed how the matter stood—which he could hardly fail to do—the Bounder of Greyfriars was “for it” with a vengeance! He stood in uneasy silence, waiting.

“Pray proceed, Wingate,” said Mr. Quelch, quite unsmilingly, and his gimlet-eyes turned on Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a glint in them that made the Bounder, with all his nerve, quake inwardly. “What has Vernon-Smith done? I shall scarcely be surprised at anything you have to tell me. Only to-day I have caned him for smoking in his study. Is it that again?”

“No, sir!” Wingate laid the catapult upon the table. “I found Vernon-Smith in a tree—”

“In a tree?” repeated Mr. Quelch.

“The old elm tree opposite your study window, sir. He had this catapult, and a lot of gravel-stones—”

“Gravel-stones!”

“He denies that he was catapulting the pigeons, or lying in wait to catapult some fellow passing the tree. I leave it to you to judge, sir.”

Quelch’s gimlet-eyes were fixed on Vernon-Smith’s face. Often, in the Remove, had Quelch’s eyes been compared to gimlets, for their penetrating qualities. But never had they seemed so like gimlets as now. They seemed almost to bore into Smithy.

Quelch did not speak immediately. He stepped across to the window, for what reason Wingate had no idea, though the dismayed Bounder could guess.

From the window Quelch glanced at the sill. Five or six gravel-stones still lay there, that had “pinged” on his panes. Then he glanced across at the

leafy old elm. It was opposite the window—a good way off, but within range of a catapult in skilful hands.

Vernon-Smith, watching him, could read his face! He knew that Quelch knew! And he drew a deep breath. He was aware that Quelch had got after the wrong man—but he knew that Quelch was after the right man now.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

He had not, in the first place, thought of a catapult fusillading from a distance, from the cover of a leafy tree. Finding Bunter under the window, he had taken it for granted that Bunter was the pebble-hurler. It now dawned on his mind that he had taken altogether too much for granted.

Vernon-Smith, the most reckless young rascal in his form, whom he had caned that very day, had been hidden in that tree opposite his window, with a catapult and gravel-stones. Quelch did not need telling more! Bunter was not the man! Vernon-Smith was the man!

Mr. Quelch turned from the window. He was calm—with a deadly calmness.

“Thank you, Wingate,” he said, quietly. “I am perfectly well aware why Vernon-Smith was concealed in that elm tree with a catapult. Had I been aware of it earlier, I should have known that it was he who was raining pebbles on my window, and not that foolish boy Bunter.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Wingate.

“Vernon-Smith has been guilty of a most disrespectful prank, Wingate. It is what he would, I presume, call a ‘rag’. Quelch’s eyes glittered. “I shall endeavour to make it clear to him that his form-master is not a proper object for such trickery. A short while ago, Wingate, my work was interrupted, and I was extremely annoyed, by stones rattling on my window continuously—”

“Oh!” repeated Wingate.

“I supposed that it was Bunter, as I found him under my window. I know now that it was this disrespectful and malicious junior. Thank you for reporting him to me, Wingate! But for this, a very regrettable injustice might have been done to another boy in my form. I am much obliged to you, Wingate.”

“Not at all, sir,” said Wingate, and he left the study. Herbert Vernon-Smith would have been very glad to do the same. But there was no escape for Smithy.

“Vernon-Smith!”

“Yes, sir!” muttered the Bounder.

“Do you deny that you were catapulting gravel-stones at my window?”

The Bounder made no answer. The “bad hat” of the Remove was not very particular about facts when he was dealing with a “beak”. But it was useless to deny what was obvious.

“You have caused me great annoyance, and much more serious than that, an undeserved punishment has fallen upon another boy!” said Mr. Quelch, sternly. “I supposed that it was Bunter—”

“I—I never knew that, sir,” muttered the Bounder.

"Probably not! That does not alter the case," said Mr. Quelch. "I have already caned you to-day; Vernon-Smith! I shall not cane you again."

Smithy brightened up a little. Lines, even a Georgic, or Extra School, were much preferable to a caning from Quelch, in his present mood. But Quelch's next words damped him down again. Mr. Quelch, angry and exasperated as he was, did not feel he could administer a second "six" so soon after the first. But as he went on, the Bounder rather wished that he had! Six, or even a double six, would not have been, to the hardy Bounder, quite so severe a penalty as the one that was coming. Quelch was not going to handle the cane: gladly as he would have done so. But he was not in a lenient mood: far from it.

"You will go into detention for every remaining half-holiday this term, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. "On each occasion a special detention task will be set you: and if you fail to complete it satisfactorily, you will be caned. Every Wednesday and Saturday for the rest of the term, Vernon-Smith, you will come to the form-room at half-past two, and I shall leave you there with your task, to remain until five o'clock. But for the fact that I have caned you already to-day, I should cane you in addition to this. Now leave my study."

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood looking at him. His face was sullen, and his eyes glinted. It was a heavy sentence—no heavier, perhaps, than the Bounder might have expected, in the circumstances: nevertheless, such a sentence as was seldom passed on any junior at Greyfriars. It was not merely leisure hours that were washed out: games were washed out also: and the Bounder, as keen a footballer as any man in the Remove, was practically barred from Soccer for the rest of the term. So far from playing in the Carcroft match, as he had intended and was expected to do, he had to cut that match, and all following matches up to Christmas—Rookwood, St. Jim's, Felgate, and the rest. Mr. Quelch, no doubt, was not thinking of football: but the Bounder thought of it at once as he heard his sentence. A caning, a Head's flogging, would have been preferable to this—but this was the sentence.

"Go!" snapped Mr. Quelch, as Vernon-Smith did not stir.

The Bounder opened his lips to speak. But he closed them again: he knew that it was useless. With a black brow and glinting eyes, he left the study, in silence.

CHAPTER VIII

ALL RIGHT FOR BUNTER

"**B**UNTER, sir!"
 "Oh! Come in!"
 "Leggo, Wingate—"

"You young ass—"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Come in at once! What do you mean by this? Bring him in, Wingate."

"Yes, sir!"

Wingate of the Sixth had been requested, after Mr. Quelch's interview with the Bounder, to look for Bunter, and bring him to the study. Evidently he had been successful: for here he was, accompanied by the fat Owl. He opened Mr. Quelch's study door with one hand, the other grasping the collar that encircled a fat neck. But for that grasp on his collar, Billy Bunter certainly would have bolted. His form-master's study was not an attractive spot, at the best of times. Now it seemed to the fat and fatuous Owl rather like a lion's den. Bunter was no Daniel to venture into the lion's den if he could help it. But he couldn't! With that grasp on his collar, the captain of Greyfriars propelled him into the study, and he had no chance whatever of bolting.

Mr. Quelch—aware now of the mistake that had been made, and that Bunter had had those whops at the window for absolutely nothing, was prepared to be kind and patient. He was not in a genial mood—far from it! but certainly he regretted those rather hasty whops. The fat Owl had nothing to fear, if he had only known it.

"The young ass was hiding in the attics, sir," said Wingate. "I found him in the top attic—"

"The top attic! You absurd boy, Bunter—" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "How dare you go up to the attics?"

"Oh, crikey!"

"I have been waiting for you for a considerable time, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, severely. "How dare you—!"

"I—I—I—Oh, lor'!" babbled Bunter. His little round eyes popped through his big round spectacles at his form-master.

"Thank you, Wingate," said Mr. Quelch. "Now, Bunter—"

The Greyfriars captain left the study, and shut the door after him. Billy Bunter made a step in the same direction.

"Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Stay where you are!"

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Bunter.

He blinked at his form-master, backing towards the door. The alarm in his fat face made Quelch breathe very hard. But he realized that that sudden whopping at the window must have seemed utterly unaccountable to Bunter: he was determined to be patient.

"I am not going to punish you, Bunter," he said, hastily.

"Oh! Ain't you, sir?" gasped Bunter.

"I have now learned, Bunter, that it was not you, as I supposed, who pelted my window with pebbles."

"Did—did anybody, sir?"

Quelch breathed harder!

"Yes, Bunter! Vernon-Smith was hidden in a tree with a catapult, and it was he who projected the pebbles at my window. Being quite unaware of this at the time, I concluded that it was your action, as I found you under the window, where certainly you should not have been. Do you understand now?"

Bunter, perhaps, began to understand. But he blinked at his form-master very dubiously.

"It was a mistake, which I regret!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Then—then—!" gasped Bunter.

"Then what, Bunter?"

"Then—then you ain't batchy, sir—"

"What?"

"I—I mean crackers, sir—"

"WHAT!"

"I—I thought you'd gone nuts, sir, when you grabbed me and pitched into me for nothing—!"

"Bunter!"

"I—I—I hadn't done a thing, sir—"

Mr. Quelch's hand dropped on his cane. With an effort, he withdrew it. With another effort, he continued to be patient with this remarkable member of his form.

"I am aware now, Bunter, that you had not offended, and I regret that I caned you at the window—"

"So do I, sir!" said Bunter, with a reminiscent wriggle. "I—I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought Bunter!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, but I thought you'd gone—"

"That will do, Bunter."

"—crackers, sir! I—I kept out of the way, sir, because I thought—"

"You need say no more, Bunter." Quelch's patience was very near the breaking-point. "I shall excuse your foolish and disrespectful action in disobeying my order to come to this study, in the—the circumstances."

"Oh!" said Bunter. He breathed more freely. Even the fat and fatuous Owl realized that his form-master had not suddenly developed "nuts". It had been a mistake. "I—I never knew anybody was larking at your window, sir, so of course I thought—"

"As you were standing under the window, Bunter, you must have heard the pebbles strike on the glass above your head."

"I never noticed, sir—I was eating—"

"What?"

"I—I mean I wasn't eating, sir," amended Bunter, hastily. "I hadn't any dough-nuts about me, sir—"

"Dough-nuts!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir—I mean, no sir! I—I haven't tasted a dough-nut for—for weeks, and I certainly never found any in Wharton's study, and they weren't after me, either, and that wasn't why I was sticking under your window, sir—"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, it appears that you had taken refuge under my window, to devour comestibles belonging to another boy. In these circumstances, I no longer regret that I caned you at the window, Bunter. You fully deserved it."

"Oh, really, sir—!"

"You may leave my study, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Billy Bunter was glad, at least, to leave the study, and he rolled doorwards with alacrity. In fact, he fairly shot out of Quelch's study into the passage, and the door closed on him.

Mr. Quelch was feeling comforted. It had weighed on his just mind that he had administered those whops at the window without cause. But a fat Owl who had parked himself in that spot out of reach of fellows whose tuck he was devouring, certainly deserved "whops": so Bunter, after all, had only had what he merited. Indeed, Bunter's supposition that his form-master had gone "crackers" almost made Quelch wish that he had added a few more!

At last—at long last!—Quelch sat at his table to complete those Form papers: with no prospect whatever of a spot of leisure to follow for his celebrated "History of Greyfriars". He was working his way through the pile, when a distant fat squeak floated in at the open window.

"I say, you fellows, it's all right! Quelch ain't crackers after all! It was Smithy pulling his leg, and he thought it was me—I jolly well thought he was as mad as a hatter—"

Mr. Quelch rose, and closed the window, with lips compressed very hard. It was that young rascal, Herbert Vernon-Smith, who was the cause of all this: if he offended again—!

CHAPTER IX

MAN WANTED

"THAT ass!" said Harry Wharton, frowning.

"That goat!" agreed Bob Cherry. "He ought to be booted."

"That terrific fathead!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Which doesn't help much!" said Frank Nugent. "Smithy's out of the Soccer, and that's that!"

Johnny Bull contributed a grunt, which no doubt expressed his feelings.

It was the following day: and on Harry Wharton's mind, as junior football captain, there was the weight of a problem. His friends duly sympathized: but describing Smithy variously as an ass, a goat, and a fathead, did not materially help. No doubt he was all these, and more: and no doubt he deserved to be booted for his folly: but the fact remained that he was out of the Soccer. And as Smithy was one of the best men in the eleven, that was a serious matter—especially as a match was due on the morrow, in which Wharton had counted on playing the Bounder in the front line. But in that match and in subsequent matches, obviously he would not be able to count on the Bounder. There were plenty of keen footballers in the Remove, and it was easy enough to fill his place, so far as that went: but filling it with another man of the same quality was quite another question.

The Famous Five were discussing it in No. 1 Study after tea. Harry Wharton's brow was wrinkled in a frown, as he coned over the football list. Originally that list had run: J. Bull: M. Linley, S. Q. I. Field: T. Brown, R. Cherry, R. Penfold: R. D. Ogilvy, P. Todd, H. Wharton, H. J. R. Singh, H. Vernon-Smith.

That was as good a team as the Greyfriars Remove could put into the football field: though there was a good many fellows who fancied that it could have been improved by the inclusion of their noble selves.

A good team was needed: for Compton and Co. of Carcroft were known to be in great form: and nobody wanted the Carcroftians to come over and wipe up the ground with the home team. At best, the game would be touch and go: the best winger at Greyfriars left out, and a second-rater put in his place, prospects seemed more cloudy.

And there was no reason why Smithy should not have played: no reason whatever, except that a well-deserved "six" from Quelch had put his arrogant back up, and he had set out to "get back" on Quelch by catapulting his window while he was at work in his study. He was sorely missed from the team: but all the footballers were feeling like kicking him.

"Well, he's out of it," said Harry Wharton. "It can't be helped, and I shall have to play another man." His glance rested on Frank Nugent, who laughed. Frank knew what was in his chum's mind. He was Harry Wharton's best chum: but the captain of the Remove would never have played him with a better man available: Soccer came first. But now that Smithy was inevitably out of the team, it was a chance for Wharton to do what he would always have liked to do.

"Franky's a good man," said Bob Cherry, catching on at once. "Not in the same street with Smithy, I know—"

"Thanks!" grinned Nugent.

"Well, you know it as well as I do, old chap," said Bob. "But Smithy's

kicked himself out: and you're as good a man as Russell, or Hazel, or Morgan—and better than the others. Why not Franky?"

"I say, you fellows—!"

"Buzz off, Bunter!" roared five fellows all at once, as a fat face and a big pair of spectacles dawned in the doorway.

"Oh, really, you fellows—!"

"No dough-nuts here!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"So you needn't hand out another spook message from Wingate!" said Bob. "That reminds me—we haven't booted you for pulling our leg like that! Come in and turn round!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Scat!" snapped Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, I hear that Smithy's out of the team," said Bunter. "I say, he's in a frightful temper about it—I heard him slanging Redwing—"

"Smithy all over!" grunted Johnny Bull. "He would slang somebody if he's in a tantrum! I wonder Reddy doesn't punch his cheeky head."

"But I say, Harry, old chap, you'll want another man to-morrow," said Bunter, with an owl-like blink at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles. "Chance for you to play a better man than Smithy."

"Eh? If there's a better man than Smithy available, I'd like to hear of him," answered Harry, staring at the fat Owl.

"Well, there jolly well is!" said Bunter. "Smithy's no great shakes, if you come to that. Look how he sticks to the ball when he ought to pass, and thinks he jolly well owns the whole football field! You don't know a lot about Soccer, Wharton, or you'd pick out a better man fast enough."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'm willing to learn," he answered. "Go ahead and instruct me from your vast stores of knowledge, old fat man."

"Well, I could name a chap who could play Smithy's head off, and yours too, and chance it," said Bunter. "You'd see, if you gave him a chance."

"Well, who?" asked Wharton, puzzled. "If I've missed some budding International in the Remove, I'll be glad to hear about him. If you mean Russell—"

"I don't mean Russell."

"Or Tom Dutton—?"

"I don't mean Dutton."

"Well, give it a name," said Bob Cherry. "Listen to the oracle, you fellows! Bunter's the man who knows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" said Bunter, disdainfully. "But I could name a chap in the Remove who could play all your heads off."

"Cough it up!" said Bob.

"Well, what about me?" asked Bunter.

"You!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter, as there was a roar in No. 1 Study. "I'll bet Carcroft would sit up and take notice, if they found me playing for Greyfriars—"

"I'll bet they would!" gurgled Bob Cherry, "and they'd want to know how a barrage balloon got loose on the footer ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" snorted Bunter. "Look here, Wharton, you can't play Smithy to-morrow, and he's no good if you could—I'm a better man any day. If I couldn't play Soccer better than that scowling, ill-tempered rotter Smithy, I'd—yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter's remarks ended in a frantic yell, as a hand grasped the back of his fat neck. He blinked round over his shoulder at the angry face of Herbert Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had come along at a rather unfortunate moment for Bunter.

"Ow! Leggo!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows—wow!"

Bang!

Billy Bunter's fat head smote the door. Only too clearly, the Bounder was in a very bad temper, which had not been improved by the fat Owl's remarks.

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter, wriggling frantically in the Bounder's grasp. "Leggo! I—I wasn't calling you a rotter, Smithy—I—I was speaking about another rotter—"

Bang!

"Yow-ow-ow! wow!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows, make him leggo! Wow!"

"You can chuck that, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, sharply.

"I'll do as I choose."

"You won't!" The captain of the Remove jumped to his feet. "You can keep your rotten temper to yourself, Vernon-Smith! You bang Bunter's head again, and you'll get some of the same."

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry, emphatically.

"The ratherfulness is terrific, my esteemed scowful Smithy."

"Get out, you fat fool!" snarled the Bounder. He swung Bunter out of the doorway: and, with another swing of his sinewy arm, sent him spinning and tumbling along the passage. Then he walked, or rather stamped, into No. 1 Study—under five grim and unwelcoming pairs of eyes.

CHAPTER X

NOTHING DOING!

“WELL?”

Harry Wharton snapped out that monosyllable.

Nobody in No. 1 Study was feeling like wasting much civility on Herbert Vernon-Smith just then.

The Bounder, evidently, was in a towering temper. They had no doubt that his pal Redwing had been getting the benefit of it, as Bunter had said: and the fat Owl had had his turn. But if Smithy fancied that he could throw his weight about in No. 1 Study, he had quite another guess coming: and five fellows were prepared to tell him so in the plainest possible language.

“It’s about the Soccer,” yapped Smithy.

“Well?” repeated Harry.

Smithy glanced at the football list on the table, and his scowl became blacker as he noted that the name “H. Vernon-Smith” was crossed out. He could hardly have expected anything else, as he was booked for detention on Wednesday afternoon: but all the same, it seemed to have on him much the same effect as a red rag on a bull.

“So you’ve chucked me?” he breathed.

“You’ve chucked yourself, you mean,” snapped Harry, “and left us in the lurch too, with your fool tricks on Quelch.”

“You’d like to leave me out—”

“Oh, don’t talk rot! You know I don’t want anything of the kind. You ought to be jolly well booted for letting us down as you’ve done!” exclaimed Harry, angrily.

“Look here—!” The Bounder’s voice rose.

“Don’t shout in this study! This isn’t No. 4: and we’re not a party of Redwings to put up with your airs and graces. If you can’t speak civilly, get out.”

“And the sooner the better,” grunted Johnny Bull.

“The betterfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Smithy!”

“Oh, shut up, you!” snarled Smithy.

“Shut up yourself!” snorted Johnny Bull. “You’ve let us all down, with your silly tricks to get back on Quelch for a whopping, which served you jolly well right! You’re a rotter, just as Bunter said—and now try banging my head on the door, like you did his, if you feel like it!” added Johnny, with a glare at the Bounder rather like that of the “tyke” of his native county.

For a moment, Vernon-Smith looked like taking him at his word, and Johnny’s substantial fists clenched in readiness. But with an effort, the Bounder controlled his temper.

"I came here to speak about the Carcroft match to-morrow, Wharton," he said, as quietly as he could.

"Nothing for you to say about that," answered Harry. "You're out of it, as you'll be in detention."

"Fellows have cut detention before now."

"Oh, don't be an ass! Do you think you could cut, and play football right under Quelch's nose, without being spotted!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently. "Talk sense."

"I'd chance it—"

"I daresay you would! You'd chance anything rather than take what you've asked for!" said Harry, with a curl of the lip. "But you won't find me chancing it. We're not having the Carcroft match stopped by a beak coming down to the ground to march a man off. If that's your idea, you can forget all about it."

Smithy gave him a bitter look.

It was to be said, to his credit, that he was keen on the game, that he wanted to kick goals for his school, and that he knew his value to the team—and that he assuredly never would have set out to "get back" on Quelch, if he could have foreseen this outcome. Now that it had happened, he was reckless enough to take the wildest chance to get out of the pit he had dug for his own feet.

But the captain of the Remove had not the slightest idea of backing him up in anything of the kind. Even had he felt disposed to do so, he knew that there was not the remotest chance of success: as indeed Smithy himself would have realized if he had considered the matter coolly. It was quite certain that a fellow supposed to be sitting in the form-room over a detention task, could not play Soccer almost within sight of Quelch's study window, without being spotted. It was equally certain that Quelch, when he discovered what was going on, would intervene in the most drastic manner. Smithy might be prepared to risk such a sensational episode on the Greyfriars football ground: but the captain of the Remove certainly was not.

"If that's all—" added Harry, as the Bounder did not speak: and he glanced at the door, as a hint that the caller's room was preferable to his company.

"I'm going to play, somehow," muttered the Bounder, sullenly. "You can't beat Carcroft without me, and you know it."

"Oh, we'll try," said Johnny Bull, sarcastically. "Of course we know that you're practically the whole bag of tricks, and every other fellow just an also ran: but we'll do our poor little feeble best!" And there was a chuckle in No. 1 study.

"What sort of a dud are you going to shove in, in my place, if I don't play, Wharton?" snapped Vernon-Smith, after scowling at the sarcastic Johnny.

"Oh, you're not the only pebble on the beach, Smithy. I know you're our best winger, and there's no need for you to shout it out yourself: but there are other fellows in the Remove who can play Soccer."

"Up to my form?" sneered the Bounder.

"No! But that can't be helped, as you've chucked yourself out, since you prefer catapulting windows to playing soccer. We've got to play without you."

"And get licked?" snarled Smithy.

"Is soccer a one-man game, and is Smithy the one man?" inquired Bob Cherry. "Or is that an error on your part, Smithy?"

"You've not told me who's taking my place, Wharton."

"I've been thinking it out, and it's only just settled," answered Harry. He took up his pencil, and wrote "F. Nugent", under the crossed out name in the list. "There you are!"

"Nugent?" said the Bounder, with a bitter sneer. "Chance for you to play your own pal, as you've always wanted to do, now I'm out of it, what?"

Frank Nugent flushed, and Harry Wharton's brow knitted.

"Yes," he said quietly. "It's a chance for me to play my own pal, as I've always wanted to do—but never done when a better man was available. Anything else you want to know?"

"There's one thing you've forgotten, in picking Nugent."

"What's that?"

"We're playing Carcroft at soccer, not at marbles. Marbles is Nugent's game, isn't it?"

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"That's enough from you, Herbert Vernon-Smith," he said. "You can get out of this study on your feet, or on your neck, just as you please. You're a better man than Nugent on the footer field: but in everything else you're not good enough to clean his boots. Get out!"

"Oh, I'm going," sneered the Bounder. "You can chuck away a football match, for the pleasure of playing that milksop, if you like, as you happen to be skipper. But I can tell you—!"

"Get out!" roared Johnny Bull.

The Bounder stepped out of the study. He stepped out only in time: for in another moment he would have been pitched out "on his neck". Johnny Bull slammed the door after him with an emphatic slam.

Vernon-Smith, with an expression on his face that made several fellows in the passage exchange grinning glances, tramped back to his own study. In that study Tom Redwing met him with a rather anxious glance. No one would have guessed that he was Smithy's best pal, from the look Smithy gave him. No doubt his chum had been trying to reason with him.

"I've spoken to our Great Panjandrum, and he won't hear of playing me to-morrow if I cut," muttered Vernon-Smith.

"You might have known that! He couldn't," said Redwing, quietly.

"I'd risk it, if he would."

"Wharton's got more sense."

"Oh, shut up." The Bounder gritted his teeth. "I'll tell you this, Tom

Redwing—I'm going to play soccer to-morrow, Quelch or no Quelch. Wharton's jumping at the chance of playing his pal in my place—"

"That's rot, and you know it."

"It's not rot, and I don't know it! He's not going to give my place to that dud if I can help it."

"Nugent's not a dud."

"Is he anything like my form?" snarled the Bounder.

"No: but he can play soccer: and he won't play silly tricks and get detention on a match day, either," said Redwing, tartly. "You've asked for this, Smithy: and now you're letting your silly temper rip, because you've got what you asked for. You make me tired."

Vernon-Smith stared at him. This was unusually plain speaking from Redwing to his wayward chum. It looked as if even Tom's almost inexhaustible patience was running out.

"If you're asking for a row—!" muttered the Bounder, with an evil look.

"Oh, rats!"

Tom crossed to the door and left the study. He did not want a "row" with his pal: but he was on the verge of one: and he sagely decided to leave Smithy alone with his "tantrums".

Vernon-Smith gave the door a savage kick, shutting it after Redwing, and then threw himself into the armchair, with a black brow.

There was nothing doing! He was out of the football, and there seemed no help for it! But the arrogant and obstinate Bounder was determined that somehow, anyhow, there should be some help for it! His mutinous mind was made up on that point: he was going to play in the Carcroft match on the morrow, though the stars in their courses fought against him as against Sisera of old. His captain had taken his name out of the list: his place in the team had been filled: he was booked for detention when the Carcroft match was played, and a gimlet-eye would be upon him:—a series of obstacles that might well have seemed insuperable to any other fellow, but which only made the Bounder of Greyfriars more passionately determined to follow his own bent, whithersoever it might lead him. He was going his own way, at any risk and at any cost—and the only question was, how? But that was a question which certainly did require some very considerable thinking out!

CHAPTER XI

TRYING IT ON!

"SI VERA est fama—"

"Construe!"

"If Vera was hungry—"

"What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Why Mr. Quelch ejaculated "What!" in a voice not unlike that of Stentor of old, and why there was a ripple of merriment in the Remove, Billy Bunter did not know. When the fat Owl perpetrated one of his many "howlers", in class, it was wont to afford a little comic relief in the form-room: but Bunter himself remained in blissful ignorance of the enormity he had committed. On the present occasion, Bunter had excelled even himself: this really was one of his best! Even Lord Mauleverer would hardly have construed "si vera est fama" into "if Vera was hungry". Only Bunter was capable of it.

Every fellow in the Remove form-room grinned or chuckled or both. The only person present who was not amused was Mr. Quelch. Quelch's gimlet-eyes fixed on Bunter as if they would bore holes into the fattest member of his form.

"What—?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"If Vera was hungry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter! How dare you!"

"Eh?" Billy Bunter blinked at his form-master. "I'm construing, sir—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the form! Bunter, is this intended for an impertinent jest?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, really, sir—!" protested Bunter.

It was quite an unfounded suspicion. Bunter was feeling in no jesting mood. Construing Virgil was no jesting matter: especially when a fellow had not looked at his prep the previous evening.

Bunter had been too busy for prep—busy sitting in the armchair in No. 7 study while Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were at prep. So that section of the Third Book of the Aeneid, assigned for preparation, remained a mystery to him: and he had hoped, as usual, that Quelch might not call on him for con. Called upon, Bunter could only do his best! No fellow could do better than his best: but it unfortunately happened that his best was worse than any other fellow's worst.

"You have not prepared this lesson, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes, sir! I was—was working like anything at it sir!" Truth had never been one of Billy Bunter's resources, and he was not likely to think of it now, with that thunderous frown on Quelch's speaking countenance. "I—I was simply slogging at it, sir! You can ask Toddy, sir—he knows that I wasn't sitting in the armchair all the time—"

"You will write out the whole lesson after class, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey!"

"Silence!"

"But—but have I—I got it wrong, sir?" babbled Bunter. He blinked at the Latin page again. "I—I think that's right, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Quelch's gimlet-eye glittered over the form.

"The next boy who laughs in class will be detained this afternoon!" he rapped.

Sudden gravity descended on the Remove. Especially the footballing fellows looked—or tried hard to look—as sober as judges. Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday, and the Carcroft match was due. Nobody wanted to share the Bounder's fate, and sit in the form-room at a detention task, while other fellows were playing soccer. Billy Bunter's howlers might be funny: but detention was not funny at all—it was awfully serious.

Having restored gravity to his form, Quelch fixed that gimlet-eye on Bunter again.

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" moaned Bunter. "I—I think that was right, sir—"

"Are you so stupid, Bunter, are you so utterly ignorant of the rudiments of Latin, that you cannot construe that simple phrase, which would present no difficulties to a boy in the Second Form?" Quelch almost hooted, "si vera est fama, Bunter, means 'if the tale be true!'"

"Oh! Does it, sir?" gasped Bunter. He seemed rather to doubt it: it was so very different from his own masterly rendering.

"You will bring me the whole lesson written out, after tea to-day," said Mr. Quelch, "Vernon-Smith, you will go on."

It was a relief to Bunter, at least, not to have to go on. Herbert Vernon-Smith took up the tale, and the fat Owl was given a much-needed rest.

But his fat face was very morose. Bunter, certainly, was not thinking of football that afternoon, like so many other fellows: whether Carcroft walked over the Greyfriars team, or were sent defeated home, Bunter couldn't have cared less. Frowsting in an armchair before the fire in the Rag interested Bunter more. But a whole lesson to write out was calculated to interfere very extensively with that comfortable frowst. Bunter was annoyed and indignant. It was like Quelch, he reflected bitterly, to pick on him like this! Only last Monday he had whopped him for nothing—grabbing a fellow by the back of the neck and pitching into him!—and now he was picking faults in his "con", and giving him lessons to write out on a half-holiday! Bunter could not help feeling indignant. Full of his own woes and grievances, the fat Owl gave no heed to what followed: he was not interested in Virgil: in fact he could not have been more uninterested in anything. But all the other Removites gave Smithy attention as he went on "con". Never had a better "con" been handed out in the Remove form-room. Evidently the Bounder had not followed Bunter's example and neglected his prep.

That Smithy was in a fixed mood of bitter resentment and irritation, was no secret: he had made it plain enough to all the form. The previous afternoon he had come very near to leaving No. 1 study "on his neck": he had been on the

verge of a "row" even with his patient chum, Redwing: he had hardly been able to speak without a snap. Nobody expected him to be in a mood that morning to please Quelch: and he would naturally have been expected to hand out the most slovenly "con" he could venture upon. Instead of which, he proceeded to construe Virgil without a fault: and the Remove fellows stared, and Mr. Quelch's frowning brow relaxed. The Bounder's construe that morning was as good as Harry Wharton's or even Mark Linley's: which was very unusual, and seemed to indicate that Smithy, for once, was on his best behaviour.

Skinner winked at Snoop, as he listened. As Quelch's attention was fixed on the Bounder, he ventured to whisper:

"Greasing up to Quelch to get off detention this afternoon, what? Bet you it won't work!"

And Snoop nodded and grinned.

Quelch, undoubtedly, was pleased. Such an excellent con, especially coming just after Bunter's remarkable performance, was naturally gratifying to the Remove master. It was unexpected, too, from the most mutinous and troublesome boy in his form, under sentence of detention.

"Very good, Vernon-Smith—very good indeed!" he said, with a nod of approval. "You may go on, Wharton."

For once, Wharton's con was no better than the Bounder's. Tom Redwing nudged his friend.

"You've pleased Quelch for once, Smithy," he whispered.

"Think he'll let me off this afternoon?" sneered Smithy.

"Oh!" Redwing's face clouded. "If that's it—no, I don't think that's likely, Smithy."

"You never know!"

Redwing said no more.

When the Remove were dismissed, Vernon-Smith lingered behind the rest, as they filed out, and Skinner gave Snoop another wink.

"Trying it on!" he murmured. And Snoop giggled.

Mr. Quelch, at his desk, gave Vernon-Smith an inquiring glance. His look was more kindly than usual. Any sign of improvement in that hard and obdurate member of his form was welcome to Quelch.

"What is it, Vernon-Smith?" he asked.

"May I speak to you, sir?"

"Certainly."

"About this afternoon, sir." The Bounder's manner could not have been more meek and respectful. "There's a football match, and—"

The Remove master's face hardened, and he held up his hand.

"That will do, Vernon-Smith," he interrupted, and the kindly look was quite gone from his face—no doubt what had occurred to Harold Skinner much earlier, now occurred to the Remove master. "You will be in the form-

room at two-thirty, and I shall set you a detention task. You may go.”

For a second the Bounder's eyes glinted. But he answered quietly and respectfully:

“Very well, sir!”

And he left the form-room without another word.

CHAPTER XII

BUNTER'S BRIGHT IDEA!

“I SAY, you fellows—”

“Scat!”

“Oh, really, Bull—”

“Is Vera very hungry?” asked Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter blinked morosely at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. After dinner, they were strolling in the quad, discussing the coming match and Frank Nugent looked the cheeriest of the cheery five. While he did not flatter himself that he was as useful as Smith in a soccer match, now that Smithy was unavoidably out of the team, he was elated by the chance to play for his school, and in great spirits. Billy Bunter, on the other hand, was looking far from cheery. All the helpings he had been able to obtain at dinner, though a great comfort, had not quite consoled him for the prospect of writing out a Latin lesson on a half-holiday.

“We shall get through all right without Smithy,” said Johnny Bull, ruthlessly regardless of Bunter. “You'll have to pull up your socks, Franky.”

“I say, you fellows—”

“Roll away, Bunter.”

“For goodness sake, stop chewing the rag about soccer for a minute!” yapped Bunter, irritably. “I say, you heard what Quelch said to me in the form-room this morning—”

“And we heard what you said to him!” chuckled Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, I expect I had it right,” yapped Bunter. “Quelch isn't the whale on Latin he makes out. Vera—”

“You howling ass!” said Johnny Bull. “Vera is an adjective, meaning true—verus, vera, verum—”

“You can't teach me Latin, Bull.”

“I wouldn't like to try!” grunted Johnny. “Quelch doesn't seem to have much luck!”

"The fact is that Quelch is down on me," said Bunter, with a morose and sorrowful blink. "He didn't like me thinking he'd gone crackers on Monday—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now he makes out that I've skewed in con, and gives me a lesson to write out on a half-holiday! It's pretty thick, I think. I'd jolly well like to make him sit up: and I jolly well know how," said Bunter, darkly.

"You fat ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Smithy's got detentions for the rest of the term, for playing fool tricks on Quelch! Do you want to keep him company in the form-room every half-holiday?"

"It's as safe as houses," said Bunter. "Quelch wouldn't know a thing. Easy enough to nip into his study while he's jawing with the other beaks in Common-Room. Now, you know that rot he types on his machine on half-holidays—"

"You'd better let Quelch hear you call it rot!" chuckled Bob. "That jolly old History of Greyfriars is the jolly old apple of his jolly old eye!"

"That's just it!" said Bunter, eagerly. "There's a stack of it in his table drawer—lots of fellows have seen it. What would Quelch feel like if he couldn't find it?"

"Like a tiger, I fancy," said Bob. "You mad porpoise, if you're thinking of meddling with Quelch's precious manuscripts—"

"I tell you it's as safe as houses!" said Bunter. "Quelch will be jawing in Common-Room. A fellow nips into his study, and hides that stack of typescript in his bookcase or somewhere—see? Won't he be shirty? He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter emitted an unmusical chuckle, evidently entertained by the idea of Quelch missing his precious typescript. The Famous Five did not chuckle. They regarded the fatuous fat Owl almost with horror. There was no doubt that if Quelch missed that typescript, he would be "shirty"—only "shirty" was much too mild a word for it! The feelings of a lioness robbed of her cubs would, in fact, be quite gentle, in comparison with Quelch's, robbed of his *History of Greyfriars*, the work of so many leisure hours during so many years.

"You unutterable idiot!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Quelch would raise Cain all over the school if anybody laid a finger on it."

"He, he, he!"

The idea of Quelch raising Cain seemed to amuse Bunter.

"You potty porpoise," said Bob. "You'd better steer clear of Quelch's study and his typescripts. Henry would be as mad as a hatter."

"I tell you it's as safe as houses! I—I ain't exactly going to do it myself," explained Bunter. "Quelch might think it was me, as he's down on me—but one of you fellows—"

"Fathead!"

"What about you, Bob? Quelch jawed you in form this morning for

shuffling your feet. You'd like to make him sit up, old chap. I say, will you nip into Quelch's study—"

"Not in these trousers."

"What about you, Bull? You're a Yorkshire chap, so you've got plenty of pluck! Will you—?"

"Kick him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Beast! What about you, Inky? You've got more pluck than all these chaps put together! Will you—"

"The answer is in the absurd negative, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter," grinned the nabob of Bhanipur.

"Well, if you're all too jolly funky, I'll jolly well ask Smithy," said Bunter. "Smithy ain't funky of Quelch like you fellows. I say, know where Smithy is?"

"You howling ass—!"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter revolved on his axis, and rolled away—in search of Smithy. That bright idea for making Quelch "sit up" was, in Bunter's opinion, one of his brightest: but he was not disposed to carry it out personally. What the fat Owl wanted was a catspaw: and having drawn the Famous Five blank, as it were, he hoped for better results from the disgruntled Bounder. Smithy was the man for any reckless enterprise: and there could be no doubt about his keenness to make Quelch "sit up". On the other hand, the penalty he was paying for his last attempt in that line might have warned him off. Bunter could only hope for the best as he proceeded to look for the Bounder.

Smithy was not easy to find. Several fellows had seen him in the quad since dinner, but did not know where he was now. Bunter rolled, at last, into the quiet secluded walk by the school wall, under the elms, and there at length he sighted the fellow of whom he was in quest. Vernon-Smith was not alone. Tom Redwing was with him: and Billy Bunter blinked at the two curiously. Even the short-sighted Owl of the Remove could see the trouble and dismay that were very plainly written in Redwing's face, as he listened to the Bounder, and he wondered what Smithy was saying, to bring that look to his chum's face. Redwing's voice came suddenly and sharply to his fat ears, interrupting the lower voice of the Bounder.

"The top attic?"

"Don't shout, you fool!"

"You're mad, Smithy! After what you've done already, and after what you've got for it—oh, you're mad."

"I didn't bring you here to listen to a sermon." The Bounder's angry voice was raised a little. "It's all cut and dried, and what I want to know is, whether you will help. You know I can't ask any other fellow."

"I should think not! And you're mad to ask me." The handsome, sun-burnt face of the sailorman's son was flushed with anger. "Mad to think of such a thing! I certainly won't have a hand in it."

“Safer if you help! I don't want to be seen near Quelch's study, or near the the attic, either. He would never dream of suspecting you—”

“No—because I'm not fool enough, or disrespectful rotter enough, to play such a mad trick on a master!”

“And you call yourself a pal!” sneered the Bounder. “Well, let me down if you like—I can go it alone.”

“Smithy, for goodness sake—”

“I've swallowed humble pie, and asked him to let me off. You know that! It didn't buy me anything. I'm going to play soccer this afternoon.”

“It's mad—”

“It's fixed and settled, whether you take a hand or not. Keep it under your hat, if you won't help—I—”

“Quiet—there's Bunter—he will hear!” breathed Redwing, hurriedly, as he caught sight of Bunter under the elms.

Vernon-Smith stared round, with a black brow and glinting eyes.

Billy Bunter had been looking for Smithy, and had run him down, at last, in that secluded spot. But the look on Smithy's face decided Bunter at once that he didn't want Smithy's company. Instead of rolling on to join him, he revolved rapidly, and rolled away—but he did not roll quite rapidly enough. The Bounder, with a savage face, rushed after him, and his foot shot out, and landed with a crash on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School.

“Yaroooh!” roared Bunter.

And he flew.

Whatever it was Smithy was discussing, in that quiet corner, with his chum, Billy Bunter heard nothing more of it. Having quite abandoned his idea of enlisting Smithy in his campaign against Quelch, the fat Owl departed from the spot on his highest gear.

CHAPTER XIII

OUTRAGEOUS!

MR. QUELCH started.
He frowned.

His gimlet eyes glinted.

A moment ago, Mr. Quelch had been looking unusually genial and indeed pleasant. He was looking forward to a happy afternoon. A half-holiday for the Remove was a half-holiday for the Remove master also: and Quelch had very pleasant plans for that afternoon.

He was not, certainly, thinking of Soccer, like many fellows in his form. He was not thinking of pushing out a bike, like many other fellows. But his

intended occupation, though less strenuous, was quite as agreeable: at least in the estimation of Henry Samuel Quelch. He was going to spend that happy afternoon on his celebrated *History of Greyfriars*. His typewriter stood ready on the table, and its cheery click would soon be sounding: adding another page or two, to the considerable stack of typescript already reposing in a drawer of that table. It was two o'clock. Quelch had only one task on hand, before he relaxed into a happy historian. He had to prepare a detention task for Herbert Vernon-Smith—which was not going to be a very easy one!—and see that recalcitrant junior duly sitting at his desk in the form-room and at work on it. Then he would be free for the afternoon: and as happy in his own way as the boys of his form in theirs. After a pleasant after-lunch chat with his colleagues in Common-Room, Quelch walked along to his study, walked into it, and closed the door after him. And then, as already related, he started, frowned, and his eyes glinted.

The cover had been removed from his typewriter on the table. Quelch, a careful man, always kept his machine covered, safe from dust. Now the dust cover had been taken off, and thrown carelessly on the floor.

Someone had been in that study while Quelch was chatting in Common-Room with the other beaks. It looked as if that someone had had the temerity to use the typewriter: otherwise, why was the cover off?

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch, apparently addressing the typewriter, at which he was staring. "Upon my word! What impertinent boy has been here?"

No fellow was entitled to enter that study unbidden. Certainly no fellow was entitled to touch that typewriter. Someone had done both: and Quelch now observed that the roller was not vacant, as it should have been: a sheet of paper had been put into the machine, and something was typed on it.

"Upon my word!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Who has been here! If it is that obtuse, that stupid boy Bunter again—!" His lips closed in a tight line.

He recalled an incident of the previous term. He had found a sheet of paper in his machine, with a single word typed on it. That word was "BEEST". Bunter had had no idea that he had left a clue behind! Unluckily for the fat Owl, his original style in orthography had betrayed him: and to his surprise and dismay he had been what he called "copped": and the outcome had been quite painful! Recalling that incident, Quelch wondered whether the fattest and most fatuous member of his form had been at his antics again.

He stepped closer to the table, and fixed his eyes on a single line of writing typed on the paper on the roller.

He stared at that typed line. Evidently it had been typed to meet his eyes when he came to the study. But what it meant puzzled him. It ran:

If you want your rubbish, you can fetch it down from the top attic.

Quelch fairly blinked at it. He did not, for the moment, see what it could mean. If it was Bunter's work, his spelling seemed to have improved, since his former exploit on that typewriter. But what did it mean?

Had something been taken from the study and conveyed to that remote attic at the very top of the building, for the impertinent and iniquitous purpose of giving Quelch the trouble of ascending endless stairs to retrieve it? It seemed incredible to Quelch that any boy in his form could have the hardihood to think of playing such a trick.

And what was the "rubbish" alluded to? So far as Quelch knew, there was no "rubbish" in his study.

From a schoolboy's point of view, perhaps, many of the abstruse volumes in Quelch's book-case might come under that description. But a glance showed that no books were missing from their places.

Then Quelch, with a jump, noticed that one of the drawers in his writing-table was partly open. It was the drawer in which, as a rule, reposed a pile of typescript: all that had been written, so far, of his *History of Greyfriars*. He caught his breath.

Was it possible, was it imaginable, that his precious typescript had been meddled with: that it was his *History of Greyfriars*, that beloved work of many years, that some disrespectful young rascal described as "rubbish"?

With a hand that almost trembled, Quelch pulled the drawer further open. Then his worst dread was confirmed. The drawer was empty.

Not a single typed sheet remained in it. There had been at least fifty sheets, clipped with a paper-clip. Not one remained.

Henry Samuel Quelch gazed into that empty drawer. His typescript—his *History of Greyfriars*—the apple of his eye as Bob Cherry had truly remarked, was gone—it had been meddled with—it had been taken away: it might be damaged—lost—! Quelch's feelings, as he gazed into the empty drawer, could not have been expressed in words.

For a long, long minute he gazed. Then he strode across to the door of his study.

Quelch was a vigorous man, for his age: but he did not like stairs very much. And it was a long way—a very long way—up to the top attic, in the oldest portion of the ancient building of Greyfriars. But twice the number of stairs would not have deterred Quelch, in his anxiety for his precious typescript.

That typescript, impertinently described as "rubbish", had been taken from his study, and carried up to the top attic: by some utterly disrespectful young rascal: whose discovery and punishment had to wait till he had recovered it. Anything might have happened to it, in careless hands: not a moment was to be lost in retrieving it. Afterwards, Quelch would investigate, and discover who had done this—and the doer would find life scarcely worth living, even at Greyfriars! Quelch's stoutest cane, in a very heavy hand, would get more

exercise than it had ever had before—once he knew the perpetrator. But that had to wait till the precious typescript was safe.

Mr. Quelch strode away, at unusual speed, with grim brow and rustling gown. Generally his motions were leisurely and stately. But he was neither leisurely nor stately now! His long legs fairly whisked up the staircase.

CHAPTER XIV

BUNTER WANTS TO KNOW!

“SEEN Smithy?”
“No!”

Tom Redwing asked that question, looking into the Rag. Harry Wharton and Co. were there, and, while Bob Cherry answered Redwing's question, all the Co. looked rather curiously at Redwing. Tom was not much of an adept at hiding his feelings: and it was easy to see that he was troubled and uneasy.

“Not here,” said Harry Wharton. “Haven't seen him since dinner, Reddy.”

“He, he, he!” came a fat cachinnation from an armchair. Billy Bunter, blinking at Redwing through his big spectacles, emitted that cachinnation. Bunter seemed to be amused.

“Is Smithy playing the goat?” asked Bob. “He's got to turn up for detention at half-past. He can't be ass enough to cut.”

“The esteemed Quelch would be terrifically infuriated,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Better look for him, Reddy, and persuade him not to play the goat, if you can,” said Harry Wharton, drily.

Redwing nodded and walked away. The Co. looked at one another, while the fat Owl sat grinning in the armchair.

“The silly ass!” said Harry. “He knows jolly well that he can't play in the match, even if he does cut. He can't be ass enough to cut just to get Quelch's rag out.”

“Reddy's an ass to bother about the sulky tick at all,” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Oh, he's his pal, you know,” said Bob tolerantly.

Another grunt from Johnny!

“He, he, he!” came from Bunter: and the Co. glanced round at the fat Owl.

“For goodness sake stop that alarm-clock, Bunter,” said Bob.

“Eh! I haven't got an alarm-clock! Wharrer you mean?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Cherry!” Bunter realized that Bob was comparing his unmusical chuckle to the note of an alarm-clock, and in fact there was some resemblance.

“Look here, you cheeky ass—”

"You'd better get on with that Latin paper, Bunter—and don't make Vera hungry this time," said Bob.

"I say, you fellows, what is Smithy up to?" asked Bunter. "He's jolly well up to something, as I jolly well know. I heard him talking to Redwing under the elms—"

"You hear too much, with those big ears of yours," said Johnny Bull, with a snort. "Can't you mind your own business?"

"Oh, really, Bull!" Minding his own business had never had any appeal for Billy Bunter. "I say, I jolly well know that Smithy's got something on, and Reddy said he wouldn't have a hand in it. Do you fellows know what Smithy's got on?"

"I do!" said Bob.

"Oh! What is it, then?" asked Bunter, eagerly.

"His socks!"

"You silly ass!" yelled Bunter.

"And his collar and tie—"

"Look here—"

"And other things, I expect," said Bob.

"Oh, don't be a goat!" yapped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, what on earth can Smithy be up to in the top attic?"

"The what?" ejaculated Bob.

"The which?" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

All the Famous Five stared at Bunter.

"The top attic," repeated Bunter. "That's what they were talking about, and Redwing looked flabbergasted, I can tell you—but I never heard any more—of course I wasn't listening to what they were saying when I came up—"

"You wouldn't!" said Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm.

"Of course not!" agreed Bunter. "Not my style! But they were talking about the top attic—"

"Rot!" said Bob.

"I tell you I heard them—"

"Without listening?"

"Eh! Oh! Yes! But Redwing saw me, and that beast Smithy rushed at me and kicked me—"

"Good!" said Bob.

"Hard, I hope!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast! But I say, you fellows, it's jolly queer, ain't it?" said Bunter. "Smithy's up to something, and it's got something to do with the top attic, but I can't make it out! What do you fellows think?"

Billy Bunter blinked inquiringly at the chums of the Remove. Bunter was deeply interested. As it did not concern him in the very least, he was curious to know all about it. Inquisitiveness was Bunter's besetting sin. The fat Owl always wanted to know.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Bob Cherry. "I think you're a fat inquisitive ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I think you're a nosey Parker!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Come on, you men," said Bob. "If that ass Smithy is up to something, let's hope that Reddy will make him see sense, for once."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Bow-wow!"

The Famous Five went out of the Rag: not sharing Billy Bunter's curiosity in the very least. Certainly, they hoped that the Bounder was not meditating some new act of defiance, or that, if he was, his chum would succeed in persuading him to think better of it. But they were more interested in Soccer than in Smithy, and the Bounder was dismissed from their minds.

He was not dismissed from Bunter's, however. With a Latin lesson to write out that afternoon, the fat Owl really had other matters to think of. But Bunter's curiosity was too keen. And really it was rather mysterious. The few words he had caught under the elms had roused his curiosity without satisfying it. What on earth could Smithy be up to, in which the top attic, that remote spot out of sight and hearing of all Greyfriars, played a part?

Hardly a fellow ever went up that dim winding stair to the disused attic. Billy Bunter had done so to dodge Quelch on Monday: but it was not to be supposed that Smithy had any such idea in his head—if he was thinking of "cutting" he would go out of gates: assuredly he would not think of hiding in the attic as the fat Owl had done. It was now nearly two o'clock, and until half-past Smithy was free to do as he liked: and he could be miles away, if he chose, when the time for detention came.

As Redwing was seeking him, and evidently could not find him, it looked as if he might have gone out of gates. But if that was so, what did he mean about the top attic? Whatever it was that Smithy was scheming, had something to do with that—clearly, something was going on, or was scheduled to go on, in the top attic that afternoon.

It was, of course, quite easy to ascertain, by ascending the stairs, and looking into the attic! Whatever might be going on there, would be discovered at once by the extremely simple process of looking in at the door! But there was, so to speak, a lion in the path. Bunter hated stairs: the weight he had to carry up was a deterrent. An ordinary staircase was enough for Bunter, if not a little too much. The addition of a narrow winding stair at the top of the House was very discouraging.

Bunter sat in the armchair and pondered it over. But curiosity got the upper hand. Bunter wanted to know: and when Bunter wanted to know, he was capable of exertion. And at length he heaved his rotund form out of the armchair, and rolled out of the Rag.

In the passage he passed Tom Redwing, standing at a window and looking out moodily into the quad, and he gave the sailorman's son a curious blink. Redwing was, apparently, no longer looking for his chum. He did not heed the fat Owl rolling by: but even the short-sighted Owl could read the trouble in his face. His curiosity was keener than ever to know what was going on: and he rolled away quite briskly to the staircase.

As the fat Owl went up the stairs, Mr. Quelch, in his study, was making a startling discovery. Had Bunter been aware of it, the mystery of the top attic would have been a mystery no longer. Quite unaware, however, of what had happened in Quelch's study, Bunter negotiated the staircase, and rolled across the landing into the Remove passage.

At the further end of that passage was the stair to the box-room. By the time he reached the box-room landing, Bunter's breath, never in good supply, was giving out.

He stopped to rest his fat legs, and pant for breath, blinking morosely at the narrow winding stair that led upward. However, having recovered his breath a little, he started up that stair, at the pace of a snail.

It seemed endless to the fat Owl: but at last he rolled out on the little landing at the top.

Half that landing was taken up by a large cupboard, with old oaken doors from floor to ceiling. That cupboard was never used, and had probably never been used for centuries, and was inhabited only by spiders. One of the oak doors was half an inch ajar, though Billy Bunter did not note the circumstance. He would have been very much astonished, had he become aware that a pair of glinting eyes were watching him from the narrow opening. But no such idea occurred to the fat Owl as he rolled across to the attic doorway, which was wide open. It was not likely to occur to him that any fellow was hidden in that spidery old cupboard, waiting and watching.

He rolled into the attic.

There he came to a halt, blinking round him through his big spectacles, with eager curiosity.

The attic was dim. There was only one small window, which gave on old red roofs, with a view of chimney-stacks. The panes were thick with dust and cobwebs. Save for an old box in a corner, the room was quite empty. Bunter blinked to and fro in irritated surprise. He had toiled up all those stairs to discover what was going on there: but, so far as he could see, there was no sign of anything going on, or of anything having gone on. The old attic presented its usual aspect, precisely as when the fat Owl had visited it a couple of days ago. There was nothing, apparently, to be discovered.

"Oh, lor'!" breathed Bunter.

He blinked round and round, and blinked round and round again. Nothing met his eyes, or his spectacles, but dimness, and dust, and cobwebs. With deep feelings, he sat down on the old box in the corner, to rest his weary

fat limbs. It dawned on his fat brain that he had had that laborious ascent for nothing—there was nothing to be discovered! Bunter had clambered up to that remote attic to gratify his curiosity: and all that remained for him was to go down again with his curiosity ungratified: like the famous Duke of York, who marched up the hill and then marched down again!

“Beast!” hissed Bunter.

But Bunter’s return journey was not to be made so soon as he supposed. As he sat gasping for breath on the box, a sound of hurrying footsteps came to his fat ears. Somebody was coming up the attic stair: at a pace much more rapid than Bunter’s had been. Was it Smithy? If it was Smithy, the inquisitive fat Owl was on the spot to see what he was “up to” in that old attic. He blinked across at the open doorway.

Hurried footsteps crossed the little landing, and a figure appeared in the doorway. But it was not Smithy! Billy Bunter’s little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles, as Mr. Quelch, with thunderous face and billowing gown, strode into the attic.

CHAPTER XV

CAUGHT IN THE TRAP!

MMR. QUELCH billowed into the attic, panting a little. His gimlet-eyes swept round sharply, in the dim light from the little cobwebby window. They did not light on the missing typescript. They lighted upon a fat form seated on a box in the corner, and on a fat face, and a pair of round eyes popping through big spectacles. And they fixed there: and Quelch’s brow, already thunderous, became positively terrifying.

“Bunter!” he exclaimed.

“Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter.

“So it was you!”

“W-a-was it, sir?” gasped Bunter. He had not the faintest idea to what his form-master was alluding.

“You!” repeated Mr. Quelch. “What have you done with it, Bunter?”

“Eh?”

“Where is it?” thundered Mr. Quelch. “If it is damaged, Bunter, you will regret it. In any case your punishment will be most severe—”

“Oh, crikey!”

“But if it is damaged, I shall make an example of you, Bunter! What have you done with it? Answer me at once. Is it here?”

The fat Owl could only blink at him in terrified bewilderment. Indeed he

almost feared, for the second time, that Quelch had gone "crackers". What he could possibly mean was beyond Bunter.

"Will you answer me, boy?" Quelch strode across to the corner where Bunter sat as if glued to the box, grasped him by a fat shoulder, and hooked him up. "Now, Bunter—"

"Ow! Leggo!" Bunter tottered. "I—I haven't—I didn't—I—I wasn't—it wasn't me—I never didn't wasn't—oh, lor—"

"Where is it, Bunter?" The thunder rolled again.

"Where is what, sir? stuttered Bunter.

"What? what? You know perfectly well, Bunter! I find you here—no doubt you intended to be gone before I came up—but I find you here—it was you, Bunter, who removed the typescript from my study, and left that impudent message on my machine—"

Bunter jumped.

"The—the—the tut-tut-top-tap-typescript!" he stuttered. "Oh, crikey!"

"What have you done with it, Bunter?"

"N-n-nothing, sir—"

"I do not see it here! Where is it?"

"I—I—I—" Bunter babbled helplessly. Evidently, something had happened to Quelch's precious typescript! Bunter, it seemed, was not the only fellow who had had the bright idea of giving Quelch a hunt for it! Bunter, certainly, knew nothing about it: nothing would have induced him to act personally on that bright idea of his. "I—I—I—"

"Answer me, boy!"

"I—I haven't touched it, sir!" wailed Bunter. "I—I—I never meant to, sir—if any of the fellows have said so, sir, tain't true—"

"What? No one has said anything on the subject, Bunter! What do you mean?"

"Oh! I—I—I mean, I—I was only joking, sir—I—I never meant to hide it to make you shirty, sir—" babbled Bunter. "Never even thought of it, sir! I—n-n-never dreamed of it, sir, and I never said anything about it to the other fellows, sir—besides, I only said it for a joke—I—I—I don't know anything about it sir—"

That statement was not likely to convince Mr. Quelch.

He had come up to the top attic in quest of the missing typescript. He had found Bunter there, where neither Bunter nor any other fellow had any business. And the fat Owl's incoherent babble revealed that he had, at least, entertained the idea of playing tricks on that typescript.

"I—I—I hope you believe me, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I never—"

"I do not believe a single word you have uttered, Bunter."

"Oh, really, sir—"

Quelch's eyes fairly glittered at the fat Owl. Had he had his cane with him, there was no doubt that the fat Owl would have felt its weight at that moment.

Luckily for Bunter, Quelch had not brought up his cane. But his look was almost as alarming as his cane.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, lor! I—I mean, yes, sir," moaned Bunter.

"A pile of typescript has been removed from the table-drawer in my study. It was removed by you—"

"Oh! No, sir—"

"An impudent message was typed on my machine that it had been taken up to this attic. I find you here—and the matter is clear. I command you to tell me at once what you have done with the typescript."

"I—I—I haven't—"

"Immediately!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—I never didn't—!" stuttered Bunter.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard, and he breathed deep. He regretted that he had not brought up his cane: as certainly he would have done, had he anticipated finding the delinquent in the top attic. Quelch had never been known to smack a boy's head—such an act was miles below his dignity: but at the moment, he required all his self-control to keep from smacking Bunter's.

But he turned from Bunter, for the moment, and looked round the attic again. Bunter either would or could tell him nothing: but if the typescript was there, it only needed looking for.

Quelch's gimlet-eyes scanned the room again. The missing article was not to be seen. If it was there at all, there was only one place in which it could remain out of sight—in the box on which Billy Bunter had been sitting.

The Remove master turned to the box, grasped the lid, and raised it: Billy Bunter blinking at him in silence. The lid creaked up on rusty old hinges.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

That old box was not quite empty! At the bottom lay a pile of type-written sheets, neatly fastened at the corner with a clip!

Angry as he was, indeed exasperated to the utmost degree, Quelch's thunderous brow cleared a little, as he beheld it. There it lay—undamaged: simply laid at the bottom of the old box! Bunter, all unknowingly, had been sitting on it.

Quelch lifted it out, with tender hands.

He was about to examine it, to make assurance doubly sure that it was not damaged, when suddenly he started, and stared across towards the door of the attic. Billy Bunter, equally surprised, blinked in the same direction. For a moment, Quelch could hardly believe his eyes, or Bunter his spectacles. For the attic door, which Quelch had left open, was suddenly drawn shut from outside: and as Quelch and Bunter stared at it, it banged, and the bang was immediately followed by the click of a key in the lock outside!

Click!

"What—!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Bunter.

The fat Owl stood blinking. Quelch, for a moment, stood quite still, staring. Neither of them had seen the person who had pulled the door shut: whoever he was, he had taken care not to show himself. The door-handle on the other side had been grasped, the door dragged shut—and the key turned in the lock on the outside: not even a footstep had been heard, and nothing had been seen. It was amazing—astounding!

But it was only for a moment or two that Quelch stared. Then he strode across to the door, grasped the handle, and tugged. He could scarcely believe that he had been locked in—it was too incredible! But the door did not open at his tug.

"Upon my word!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

He tugged again! The door remained unresponsive. A faint scuttling sound was heard without, dying rapidly away: Quelch knew that it was the sound of footsteps hurriedly retreating down the attic stair. With an extraordinary expression on his face, Mr. Quelch rapped on the door with his knuckles.

"Open this door at once!" he thundered.

But answer there came none! There was no sound, save the echo of Quelch's angry tap. The door was locked: the unknown person who had locked it was gone: and Henry Samuel Quelch and William George Bunter were prisoners in the top attic!

CHAPTER XVI

O.K. FOR SMITHY!

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

"Smithy, you ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Hunting for more trouble?" asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"The troublefulness will probably be terrific, my esteemed Smithy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Several other fellows stared, or made remarks, as Herbert Vernon-Smith, with his hands in his pockets, strolled into the changing-room. Harry Wharton and Co. and the rest of the Remove footballers, were there. The Bounder had been due for detention a quarter of an hour ago: yet here he was: obviously not sitting in the form-room at a detention task, as he should have been.

"You'll have old Quelch after you, Smithy," said Frank Nugent. "For goodness sake don't be such an ass. Quelch will be waiting for you."

"Some fellows ask for trouble, and no mistake!" remarked Squiff.

"Cut off, Smithy, and don't play the giddy ox!" said Peter Todd.

"Hook it, fathead!" said Ogilvy.

The Bounder laughed.

"Anybody know where Quelch is?" he asked

"Waiting for you at the form-room door, of course," said Harry Wharton, "and getting madder and madder every minute he waits, too."

"Wrong!" said the Bounder, coolly. "Think he's gone out? He's not at the form-room, and not in his study."

"Oh! exclaimed Harry.

The impression in the changing-room, when Vernon-Smith walked in, was that he was cutting detention, regardless of Quelch, with rather more than his usual recklessness. In which case, Quelch would be either waiting for him, or looking for him: with dire results to follow. But his words caused a general stare of surprise.

"Quelch can't have gone out and forgotten you," said Bob.

"Looks as if he has."

"Have you been to the form-room?" asked Nugent.

The Bounder raised his eyebrows.

"I'm for detention, ain't I?" he asked. "Of course I went to the form-room at exactly half-past two, as ordered by my respected and beloved form-master. Think I wanted Quelch to chase me round the quad?"

"Quelch wasn't there?" asked Harry.

"Not the ghost of him."

"Well, that's dashed queer," said Johnny Bull, with a suspicious stare at the Bounder. "Quelch isn't the man to forget things like that."

"The queerfulness is terrific!"

"Deep in that jolly old History of Greyfriars, perhaps!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "You'd better have gone to his study, Smithy, instead of coming here. If he's forgotten, you can bank on it that he will remember later."

"I did go to his study."

"And he wasn't there?" asked Bob.

"No."

"Might have been in Common-Room," said Squiff. "When the beaks get jawing they forget time and space."

"I did look into Common-Room. Prout was there, and I asked him, and he said he had not seen Quelch since he left Common-Room, at about two."

"Well, my hat!"

"So I hiked back to the form-room, and waited," drawled Smithy. "We have to wait a quarter of an hour, you know. But Quelch never came."

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Harry Wharton. "If Quelch doesn't turn up—!" He paused.

"He hasn't, at any rate!" said Vernon-Smith, "and you know the rule, Wharton, as well as I do. A quarter of an hour is the limit, and if the beak doesn't turn up, it's washed out."

Bob gave a whistle.

What the Bounder said was true enough. Not often, but sometimes, it happened that a beak was late: and in such cases, fellows were not expected to wait for ever. From time immemorial it had been an unwritten law that, if a master did not materialize, no fellow, or even a whole class, was bound to wait longer than fifteen minutes. Indeed it was on record that the Fourth Form had once escaped a whole lesson, by the simple expedient of Cecil Reginald Temple jamming a wedge under Mr. Capper's study door: it having taken the luckless Capper more than a quarter of an hour to deal with it. If the Bounder as he stated, had waited fifteen minutes for Quelch, and Quelch had not come, he was free to go, and do as he liked.

"Oh!" said Harry Wharton, slowly. He could guess what was in Smithy's mind now. If matters were as he stated, he was free from detention, and there was no reason why, being free, he should not play in the Soccer match.

But the captain of the Remove had doubts. It was singular, indeed almost unimaginable, that Quelch could have forgotten—especially in the Bounder's case. And he knew Smithy: knew only too well that he would stick at little, or nothing, to carry on in his own wilful way.

Yet the Bounder seemed to have done all, and more than all, that was required. According to him, he had not only waited the full time, but had looked for Quelch in his study and in Common-Room, which he was not bound to do. But was he telling the truth? Smithy was not very particular on such points if he had a purpose to serve.

Frank Nugent's face was a little clouded. He, as well as his chum, knew why the Bounder was there. If all went well for Smithy, Frank's chance of playing for the school was gone. True he was willing, and more than willing, to stand out for a better man, and he freely admitted that Smithy was a better man at the game. But it was a jolt all the same.

The Bounder looked at the captain of the Remove, with a faintly mocking expression on his face.

"Well, what about it, Wharton?" he asked. "As Quelch hasn't turned up, my detention's washed out, isn't it?"

"I—I suppose so. But—" Wharton hesitated.

The Bounder's eyes glinted.

"You've given Nugent my place, because I was under detention. Is he keeping it now that I'm free to play?"

Nugent coloured.

"I'm ready to stand out, Harry," he said, quietly. "If Smithy can play, he's the man that's wanted."

"Well, that's so," said Bob, uncomfortably. "But—"

"Soccer's soccer!" said Squiff, oracularly. "If Smith's available, we want Smithy in the team."

"That's so, Wharton," said several voices.

"Yes, that's so," said Harry Wharton, slowly. "But we've got to be jolly sure of this. If it's as Smithy says—"

"If!" repeated the Bounder, with a black look.

"Yes, if!" said the captain of the Remove, coolly. "You're ready to play any fool trick, Vernon-Smith, and you wouldn't care two straws if you landed us all in a row with Quelch, and had the Carcroft game stopped in the middle, to get you own way. If you're free to play, Nugent will stand out and you'll play—but I'm not taking the chance on nothing but your word."

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"Like to go and look for Quelch yourself?" he sneered.

"Exactly!" answered Harry. "It won't take me a few minutes to see whether he's about. If he's not at the form-room, or in his study, or in Common-Room, as you say, all right! If he's gone out and forgotten you, your detention is washed out, and I'm glad of it. But I'm going to be sure."

"Go ahead!" said Vernon, shrugging his shoulders.

Harry Wharton left the changing-room at once. Many doubtful looks were, cast at the Bounder by the other fellows. Every man in the team, including even Nugent, would have been glad to see him in the ranks to face Carcroft. But no one had any use for a reckless act of defiance and mutiny which could only end in disaster for all concerned. They waited anxiously for the captain of the Remove to return with confirmation, or otherwise, of what the Bounder had stated.

Smithy seemed to have no doubts. He peeled off his jacket, and proceeded to change for football. That certainly looked as if he had told the truth, and expected Wharton to confirm it. He was in footer rig by the time the captain of the Remove came back.

All eyes were on Harry Wharton when he entered.

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

Wharton was looking perplexed, but relieved.

"O.K.," he answered. "I've looked in the form-room, in Quelch's study, and in Common-Room. Quelch must have gone out."

"Good luck!" said Bob. "Couldn't have gone for a walk at a better time what?"

"I can't make it out," said Harry. "It's not like Quelch—but there it is! It's all right for Smithy." He glanced at Nugent. "Sorry, old chap, but—but—"

Nugent laughed.

"All right," he said, "Smithy's the man to take the goals. I'll stand around and watch him doing it."

And that was that! When the Greyfriars footballers went into the field, Herbert Vernon-Smith was one of them: and the crowd that gathered to watch the game were all glad enough to see him there: with one exception. Tom Redwing looked on with a dark and troubled face, which did not lighten even when the Bounder kicked the first goal for his side.

CHAPTER XVII

IN DIREST PERIL

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH set his lips hard.

Billy Bunter—sitting on the box again—eyed him with uneasy eyes. Never had he seen his form-master in such a “bait”.

From the bottom of his fat heart, the Owl of the Remove repented him of the inquisitiveness that had led him up to that remote attic. Certainly he had never dreamed of anything like this. He was a prisoner in the attic. That was bad enough, but it would not have been so bad without Quelch. The hapless fat Owl, as he blinked at Quelch, felt rather like a fellow shut up in a cage with a lion.

Bunter sat on the box—he never stood, if there was anything he could sit upon. Quelch did not seem to want to sit down. He roamed about the attic like an imprisoned wild animal. Even yet Quelch found it hard to believe that any person at Greyfriars could have had the temerity to lock him in that attic. He had banged on the door. He had shouted. But he knew all the time that neither bangs nor shouts could be heard from that remote spot. Indeed, he knew that that was the reason why the top attic had been chosen for entrapping him: the whole thing would have been futile had it been possible for him to make himself heard below. Whoever had locked him in, had done so with the intention of keeping him there: for how long, and for what reason, Quelch did not know, and could not guess.

He had ceased to bang and to shout. Both proceedings were somewhat undignified: and as they were also useless, he gave them up. Now he paced about the little attic, thunder in his brow and lightning in his eyes: more intensely angry than he had ever been in his life before. He, Henry Samuel Quelch, master of the Remove, an honoured member of Dr. Locke's staff, was locked in an attic—to remain there till the young rascal who had locked him in chose to let him go! It was incredible—unbelievable—unthinkable—but it had happened, and there it was.

Who had done this?

Quelch was, undoubtedly, in a towering rage. But he was thinking too, as he roamed the attic like a caged lion. Who had done this? He had not had a glimpse of the person who had pulled the door shut and locked it. It might have been anybody. Who had it been?

Quelch was going to discover him, of course. He was going to take him to Dr. Locke, and demand his instant expulsion from Greyfriars School. But how was he going to discover him?

He stopped at last, and fixed his gimlet eyes on Bunter. A cold shiver ran down the fat Owl's podgy back.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, crikey!" moaned Bunter. "It—it wasn't me, sir! I—I never locked the door, sir—really, sir—"

"You utterly absurd boy, do not talk nonsense. Do you know who locked the door, Bunter?"

"Nums, sir! I—I haven't the foggiest, sir."

Quelch eyed him, with gimlet-eyes that almost penetrated the fat Owl. He had had no doubt that it was Bunter who had conveyed the missing typescript to the attic, since he had found him there. But since the locking of the door, he had realized that the taking away of the typescript, and the impudent message left on his typewriter, had been a deliberate device to draw him up to the attic, so that this final trick could be played on him. Someone had planned this from the beginning, laying the trap into which he had walked. Certainly it was not Bunter who had locked him in. Bunter was a prisoner in the attic along with him. How far Bunter was concerned in the matter, Quelch did not know: but plainly he was not the prime mover in this iniquitous scheme.

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" moaned Bunter. "I—I never—"

"Was it you, or was it not you, who abstracted the typescript from my study, and brought it here?"

"Oh, no, sir! I wish I'd never thought of touching it!" groaned Bunter. "Besides, I—I didn't think of it, sir—the idea never entered my head—"

"I found you here, Bunter—"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I wish you hadn't! I—"

"I can only suppose, Bunter, that you have acted in collusion with the boy who has turned the key on me here."

"I—I—I never—oh, lor'!"

"That boy, whoever he may be, must have followed me up—or—" Quelch guessed it suddenly, "or probably, he was already concealed in the cupboard on the landing, outside, waiting for me to come up. Yes, that is more probable. You were aware of this, Bunter."

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter. "I—I never knew there was anybody about, sir—I—I never knew there was anything in this box—I—I—oh, crikey! I—I never had anything to do with it, sir."

"I cannot believe you, Bunter: I found you here, though doubtless you had intended to go before I came up: and certainly you must have had some reason for coming up so many stairs to this remote attic. If you were not acting in collusion with the—the person who has locked me in, Bunter, why are you here at all?"

"I—I—I just wanted to know what was going on, sir," groaned Bunter. "I—I wish I hadn't, now. That's all, sir—I—I only wanted to know what was going on—"

"What was going on?" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Do you mean, Bunter,

that you knew that something was going on in this attic, and that you were not concerned in it, but only wished to find out what it was?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter. "That's all, sir. I couldn't make out what it was, and—and I just came up to see, sir, and—and then you came in—"

"And how did you know that something was going on, Bunter, as you express it, if you had no hand in it?"

"I—I heard a fellow talking, sir—he said something about the top attic, and I jolly well knew there was something on, and—and—"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, really, sir, I did hear him, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I couldn't make head or tail of it, sir, but I knew Smithy must be up to something, and I—I just came up to see what was going on—"

"Smithy!" Quelch jumped. "Do you mean Vernon-Smith, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir! Reddy said he was mad to think of such a thing, so I jolly well knew something must be on, but—but when I came up here, there was nothing going on at all, and I—I was just going down again, sir, when you—"

"Upon my word!"

The fat Owl's voice trailed off. Quelch was no longer listening to him.

What he had said already, was enough for Quelch. The mere mention of the name of Vernon-Smith was enough.

Vernon-Smith: the young rascal who had catapulted his window, and caused him to act hastily and unjustly: the mutinous junior who was booked for detention that afternoon: it was Vernon-Smith. Quelch, in his stress of mind at finding himself a prisoner in the top attic, had forgotten the Bounder and his detention—but he remembered now. The fat and fatuous Owl, whose fat brain worked slowly when it worked at all, had not connected the typescript in the box with what he had heard Smithy and Redwing discussing: but Quelch leaped to it at once. Vernon-Smith had done all this, from start to finish: and he had done it to evade detention, added doubtless to revengeful motives. But for Bunter, there would not have been a clue to him—Quelch might, perhaps, have suspected, but he could not have acted on vague suspicion. Now he knew.

The thunder in his face made Billy Bunter quake.

"I—I say, sir—!" babbled Bunter. "I—I really never—"

"That will do, Bunter."

"But I never—"

"Be silent, Bunter! I am satisfied that you were not concerned in this outrageous occurrence: you need say no more."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, in great relief.

Quelch gave him no further heed.

He paced the attic, with deep feelings, growing deeper and deeper. There was no doubt in his mind—Vernon-Smith had done this. Back into his mind came the recollection of the Bounder in class that morning. The young rascal

had been on his very best behaviour: which had surprised Quelch, but had surprised him no longer when Vernon-Smith revealed his motive by asking to be let off for the football match. That was it! It was not only to harass his form-master—it was not only to escape detention—it was to play football, that Vernon-Smith had done this! Quelch was assured of it—assured that in these very moments, while he paced the attic like a caged animal, that young rascal, laughing in his sleeve, was playing football! Quelch trembled with anger at the idea.

The Soccer was going on—Vernon-Smith playing in the ranks of the Remove! He had to be permitted to get away with this amazing, this insolent, this unheard-of trickery! Quelch had to remain a prisoner in the attic, while the reckless young rascal carried on, in defiance of all authority! There was no remedy.

But was there not?

Quelch stepped to the little cobwebby window. The sash groaned and creaked as he dragged it up. He looked out—on a vista of sloping red roofs. Only in a mood of such bitter anger could Quelch ever have thought of such a



A strong firm grasp

feat as clambering out of one high window and clambering into another—he was long past the age of clambering. But he was thinking of it now.

He stared out. Below the little window was a roof-ridge, at right-angles to the window. On either side it sloped down to a gutter. At the end of the ridge was the window of another attic.

Quelch breathed hard as he looked.

There were fellows in his form who had the activity, and perhaps the nerve, to work their way along that high ridge from one window to the other. But it would have been at the risk of a fall: and a fall from that terrible height meant only one thing. Mr. Quelch stood looking out, for long minutes. He could do it—it required only nerve, and the Remove master's nerves were of tempered steel. If he hesitated, it was because such a resource was undignified, not because it was perilous. But there were no eyes on him—that high roof-ridge was invisible from below. Quelch made up his mind.

Billy Bunter gave a jump, as he blinked at his form-master, squeezing out of the little window.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter. “I—I say, sir—”

Quelch disappeared from the window.

“Oh, lor’!” gasped Bunter.

He rolled across to the little window, and blinked out through his big spectacles. Quelch was already three or four yards along the ridge of red tiles, working his way along slowly but surely.

Bunter's eyes almost bulged through his spectacles with terror as he watched him. A mere blink at the yawning gulf on either side of those sloping roofs made Bunter giddy. And Quelch—!

The fat Owl hardly breathed as he watched.

Slowly, slowly, Quelch worked his way along, till he was half-way to the window of the opposite attic. Then he stopped, no doubt to regain his breath. The exertion was telling on him, more than he had expected. But after a few minutes' rest he started again. And then—!

Bunter, almost unconsciously, uttered a shriek. Under his starting eyes, the long lean form on the ridge-tile slipped. For a dreadful second, it seemed that Quelch would roll down the sloping roof, to shoot off into space. But he he had grasped at the ridge, and was holding on.

Bunter, dumb with horror, watched him strive to drag himself up to the ridge again. But the effort was too much for his strength. He could not regain the ridge. With his hands grasping, his long lean form extended at full length down the slope of the roof, Quelch hung on. His face was set, and as white as chalk: his lips tight. Once his eyes turned on the fat terrified face staring from the attic window. But there was no hope in his look. Bunter could not help him.

He hung on.

It was death to lose his grasp. But there was no help—no hope of help!

No one but Bunter could see him: and Bunter could not help him. In his anger, in his determination not to be flouted by a rebellious schoolboy, he had taken too great a risk.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He turned from the window, and rushed across to the attic door. On that door he thumped and banged with both fat fists, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Help! Help!"

But there were no ears to hear.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRIENDS OR FOES?

"GOAL!"
 "Bravo, Smithy!"
 "Good old Bounder!"
 "Goal! Goal!"

There was a roar round the junior football ground. Fellows shouted, and yelled, and waved their caps. Even Tom Redwing, for the moment, forgot the weight of trouble on his mind, and cheered that goal of the Bounder's—the winning goal in a hard-fought game. Frank Nugent, a looker-on at the match in which he had expected to play, shouted as loudly as any. It was in fact a magnificent goal, just what was wanted and just when it was wanted. There was no doubt that Smithy was the right man in the right place, in the Carcroft match.

It had been hard and fast from the start. Carcroft had come over in great form: Compton, and Drake and Lee, and Vane-Carter, and the rest, had put up a first-class game. The first goal had come to Greyfriars, from the Bounder's foot: but it had been followed up for Carcroft by Vane-Carter: and at the interval it was one all. In the second half Harry Wharton had led off with a score, but Compton of Carcroft put the ball in to equalize again: and after that it was ding-dong right up to the finish: and many fellows in the crowd looked up at the clock-tower, and noted the brief minutes that remained, and opined that it would be a draw. And it very nearly was. In the very last minute Greyfriars were penned in their half, Carcroft attacking hotly: and somehow, fellows could hardly see how, the Bounder had emerged from the press with the ball at his feet, for a run up the field: two Carcroft halves had rushed him down and almost got him, but as if by magic he eluded them: he evaded one back and shouldered the other, and kicked for goal—a hurried kick that, with the Bounder's usual luck, shot straight for the spot, missed the goalie's

outstretched finger-tips by an inch and landed in the net. And the whole crowd roared with glee.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Good old Smithy!"

"Good old Bounder!"

"Good man, good man!" roared Bob Cherry, with a clap on the Bounder's shoulder that made him stagger. "That's the stuff to give 'em! Good man!"

"The goodfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Smithy!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Topping, old man!" said Harry Wharton. "Smithy's the man to deliver the goods, and no mistake."

The Bounder, panting for breath, grinned as he panted. This was the moment of his triumph, and he enjoyed it to the full—all the more, perhaps, because of the reckless risks he had taken to win back his place in the eleven. Life seemed very good to Smithy just then.

It was the finish: the Bounder's goal was almost on the stroke of time. Greyfriars had won a hard-fought match by three goals to two: and the footballers trooped off the field, Smithy the cynosure of all eyes.

There was only one clouded face in the crowd in the changing-room: and Smithy made a grimace as he looked round at a touch on his shoulder, and met the troubled eyes of Tom Redwing.

"Good game, what?" he grinned.

"Fine!" said Tom. "That was a splendid goal, Smithy! But—"

"Never mind your butts now!"

"Did you—?" whispered Tom.

The Bounder laughed.

"You know I did," he answered. "I couldn't have played otherwise. You refused to help me: but I managed all right on my own."

"It was mad," muttered Tom.

"We beat Carcroft!" answered the Bounder, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"But Quelch—?"

"Don't jaw here, you fathead!" breathed the Bounder. "Do you want others to hear? Don't you know there will be a fearful row about it?"

"Only too well," answered Tom. "Get out of this as soon as you can, Smithy—I must speak to you."

"What's the hurry?" said the Bounder, coolly.

Redwing compressed his lips. He had known, or as good as known, that Vernon-Smith had carried out his wild and reckless plan: that the Remove master had been tricked up to the top attic and locked in there: otherwise, as Smithy had said, he could not have played. Now that the match was over, the Bounder did not seem to care how long it went on—but Redwing did.

"Look here, Smithy—!" he said.

"Oh, give us a rest!"

"If you don't want me to speak about it here, you'd better join me outside pretty soon, that's all."

Redwing left the changing-room without speaking again, but his face was expressive. And Vernon-Smith lost no time in changing, and getting away from the crowd, to join him. He found Redwing waiting.

"Now—!" began Redwing.

"Don't jaw here—come up to the study," snapped the Bounder.

Redwing followed him in silence up to the Remove passage. The Bounder did not speak again, till they were in No. 4 Study, with the door shut. Then he gave his chum a rather unpleasant look.

"You'd better steer clear of this, Tom Redwing," he said. "Quelch will be as mad as a hatter when he gets out—"

"No doubt about that," said Tom, dryly, "and he will be after the fellow who locked him in, like a tiger. And he will suspect you."

"Let him!" There isn't a clue!" said Smithy. "I've done all that any beak could expect a fellow—didn't I wait the full fifteen minutes at the form-room door—half-a-dozen fellows saw me there!" He grinned. "Quelch hasn't any kick comin'. He can suspect me if he likes—I'm goin' to be as astonished as anybody, when it comes out that he's been coolin' his heels in an attic all this while."

Redwing knitted his brows.

"I hope you'll get clear, Smithy—it means the sack if you're nailed: but I suppose you know that."

"Quite!"

"But Quelch—he's got to be let out—you've got the key, I suppose?"

"Here it is."

"Well, then—for goodness sake, Smithy, think of him, shut up alone in that attic all the afternoon—"

The Bounder chuckled.

"He's not alone."

"Not alone?" repeated Redwing, staring.

"No: he's got company," grinned Smithy. "That fat fool Bunter—"

"Bunter?"

"He had to butt in, and I shouldn't wonder if he's sorry for it by this time. Quelch has had his company, and he's had Quelch's—I hope he enjoyed it, the meddlin' fat idiot!"

"But I don't understand—how did Bunter—?"

"He came up, the fat Owl, goodness knows why. You see, I snooped that precious typescript from Quelch's study, while he was chinning in Common-Room, and left a message on his typer which I knew would bring him up after it. I was hidden in that old cupboard on the attic landing, and when I heard somebody comin' up, of course I thought it was Quelch—but it was Bunter—"

why the fat chump was nosin' in, I don't know and don't care—but there he was. He went into the attic, and a couple of minutes later, Quelch came, never dreamin' that a fellow in that old cupboard was waitin' and watchin' for him—” Smithy chuckled.

“But Bunter—”

“Quelch found him in the attic. I heard him hooting. I had the key ready, and tiptoed out, pulled the door shut—”

“He didn't see you?”

“Think I'm fool enough? Of course he didn't see a thing! I pulled the door shut from outside, locked it, put the key in my pocket, and cleared. The dear man hasn't been on his lonely own—he's had Bunter to keep him merry and bright. What are you lookin' so solemn about?” added the Bounder, with an impatient snap. “Quelch can't put it on me. He mayn't even think of me at all. If he does, he hasn't a clue—”

“Bunter!” breathed Redwing. “Why was he there?”

“I've told you that I don't know and don't care.”

“Oh, you ass!” breathed Redwing. “Can't you see—why do you fancy Bunter clambered up all those stairs? He must have heard something when he nosed us out under the elms—he must have guessed that something was cooking—he must have gone up there prying—”

The Bounder started. He had given hardly a thought to the fat Owl who had been caught in the trap with Quelch—as he had said, he did not know and did not care, why Bunter had been there. But he looked as if he cared now! Redwing's words startled him.

“Oh!” he breathed. “You think—”

“Bunter knew, or guessed, something, and that was why he was there—and whatever Bunter knows, you can bet Quelch has screwed out of him by this time,” said Redwing.

“Oh!” repeated the Bounder.

There was something like consternation in his face for a moment. Then he burst into an angry laugh.

“I don't care! I can face the music, if there's a row. If they boot me out, I shall go with my chin up, at any rate. Now I've had enough of your croaking, I expect you've worked it out all wrong, anyway—”

“Give me the key!”

“Let Quelch stick where he is!” snarled the Bounder. “If you're right, he's going to walk me off to the Head to be sacked, as soon as he gets loose! Think I'm in a hurry for that?”

“It's bad enough already, Smithy—don't make it worse! Give me the key and I'll go up, and—”

“You won't!”

“Smithy, don't be a mad fool! You've got to let him out sooner or later—”

"I know that! I was going to slip up quietly and put the key in the outside of the lock. Then, when they hunt for Quelch, somebody would spot it sooner or later. But I'm in no hurry now—the longer he cools his heels in that attic the better, if he's wise to me as you think," snapped the Bounder, savagely.

"It won't do, Smithy."

"Won't it?" sneered Smithy. "Why, you fool, if you went up and unlocked the door, are you going to tell Quelch that you got the key from me?"

"I shall say nothing, as you know very well, Smithy. But Mr. Quelch has got to be let out of that attic, and at once."

"Forget it!"

"Will you give me that key?"

"No, I won't!"

Redwing drew a deep, deep breath.

"It can't go on, Smithy! I can't let it go on! If you don't give me the key, I must take it from you."

The Bounder's eyes blazed.

"Here's the key, in this pocket," he said. "Take it—if you can, and dare!"

"Give it to me, old chap."

"Rats!"

"Smithy, old man—"

"Oh, shut up!"

The Bounder swung towards the door. But he did not reach the door. Redwing grasped him and pulled him back. He made a last appeal:

"Smithy! Do listen to reason! I—" The Bounder interrupted him with a violent shove on the chest, which made him stagger.

"Now let me go, you fool!" hissed Vernon-Smith.

But Redwing's grasp did not relax. It hardened. Vernon-Smith, with a furious face, struggled in that grasp, and struck out, and struck again. But strong and sinewy as he was, the Bounder was no match in a struggle with the sturdy sailorman's son: and he was forced to the wall, and Redwing pinned him there with one strong hand, while he dragged the key from his pocket with the other. Then he released the Bounder.

"I'm sorry for this, Smithy! But—"

"You rotter! You rat!" Vernon-Smith choked with passion. "I'm done with you, you rotter—I'm through with you! By gad, I'll—I'll—" He came at Redwing with clenched first and blazing eyes.

Redwing pushed him back and he staggered against the table. As he reeled there, panting, Tom Redwing hurried out of the study: and in a few seconds more he was racing up the winding stair to the top attic.

CHAPTER XIX

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH!

“OH, crikey!” groaned Billy Bunter. He blinked from the little attic window, through his big spectacles, his fat face white as chalk: at the long, lean figure stretched on the sloping tiles, dreading every moment to see it roll down the slope and shoot off into space.

For long, long minutes, the hapless fat Owl had yelled, and shouted, and shrieked for help, and thumped and banged on the attic door till his plump knuckles were sore. But there were no ears to hear: and he had given it up at last, and returned to the window. Mr. Quelch was still there—he was still holding on, though with weakening grasp. In terror Bunter had watched him make a last desperate effort to drag himself up to the ridge. But that last effort had failed: and the Remove master had given himself up for lost. Yet he still held on, as if hoping against hope. Still his tenacious fingers gripped the ridge-tile, holding him back from death.

He did not even look at the terrified fat face peering from the window. He could expect nothing of Bunter. Other boys in his form might have been able to help—Harry Wharton, or Bob Cherry, or even the reckless young rascal Vernon-Smith—or Tom Redwing, the sailorman’s son, accustomed in early boyhood to clambering in high rigging, indifferent to heights. But the hapless Owl was as helpless as Quelch himself. Indeed, had Bunter made an attempt to come to his aid, the Remove master would have ordered him back, with his last failing breath, for it was certain that, had he climbed out of the window, he would have rolled off the sloping tiles like a stone.

Bunter was not thinking of that. All he could do was to watch the man in such desperate peril, in horrified fear.

There was no help—no hope! No one below could hear a sound from that remote attic—no one could see—no one could know! Bunter knew it, and Mr. Quelch knew it, as he still clung on for his life. But with numbed fingers that threatened every moment to slip from their hold, he held on.

Click!

Billy Bunter jumped, as he heard that click behind him, and spun round from the window. It was the click of a key in a lock!

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter, as the attic door flew open. His eyes popped behind his spectacles at Tom Redwing.

Redwing stepped quietly in.

Then he stared, in surprise, round the attic. He had expected to see Mr. Quelch there, as well as Bunter. From what Smithy had said, the Bounder had locked his form-master in the attic, along with the Owl of the Remove. Had

he made some strange blunder, and failed, after all, in what he had intended? Redwing's heart lightened at the thought.

"Bunter!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, crikey!"

"I thought Quelch was here! It's all right, you fat ass—you can get out now," said Redwing, staring at the fat Owl's chalky face. "What's the matter with you? Nothing to scare you in this attic, is there?"

"Oh, scissors! I—I—Quelch!" articulated Bunter.

"Quelch hasn't been here—"

"Oh, crikey! Yes. He—he—he—"

"But the door was locked," exclaimed Redwing. "I had to unlock it to come in. What do you mean?"

"He—he—!" Bunter's gasping voice failed, and with a trembling fat finger, he pointed to the open window.

Tom Redwing caught his breath.

"What? You don't mean—?" He did not finish the question: he leaped across to the attic window.

His sunburnt face was almost as white as Bunter's as he looked out. His starting eyes fixed on the long lean form in the master's gown, stretching down the slope from the roof-ridge, to which the aching, numbed fingers clung.

He understood. Quelch had attempted to get along that ridge to the opposite attic window—and failed! It was this—this, to which the Bounder's reckless folly had led—it was this, for which the rebel of the Remove was responsible—for this, and for what must follow, if no help came to the man clinging desperately to the ridge of the roof.

But help was at hand now.

For a moment, Tom Redwing's brain almost swam with horror. But in a second he had pulled himself together. There was no time to lose now—seconds were precious, if Quelch was to be saved: if the Remove rebel's recklessness was not to end in overwhelming, irretrievable disaster.

"Mr. Quelch!" Redwing steadied his voice, and called, "Hold on, sir! For heaven's sake, hold on! I can help you."

The Remove master's head turned. His colourless face, his eyes in which there was no hope, looked towards the junior at the window. For a moment his face lighted. But it was only for a moment.

"Go back!" Tom Redwing was already clambering through the little window. "Go back, Redwing." His voice came faint with exhaustion. "Go and get help, if you can—I forbid you to risk your life."

It was the first time that Tom Redwing had passed unheeded an order from his form-master. But he passed it unheeded now. Before Quelch had finished speaking, he was out of the window, and astride of the roof-ridge. Quelch's haggard eyes fixed on him.

“Redwing—!”

“I can help you, sir! Hold on, for mercy’s sake! I’m used to heights, sir—this is nothing—hold on, and I will save you.”

Mr. Quelch said no more. There was, in fact, something reassuring, in the way in which the active sailorman’s son worked his way along the narrow ridge of tiles. It was not exactly “nothing”, as Tom Redwing had said: but it was easier to him than it could have been to any other Greyfriars man: to him, who had been at home in tossing rigging in a North Sea gale. The frightful gulf on either side did not affect his nerves—death lay on either hand, but he gave it not a thought. Swiftly, he worked his way along the ridge towards the clinging man: and as he came, there was a glimmer of hope in the form-master’s face. Billy Bunter, from the window, watched with bulging eyes.

“Oh, crikey!” breathed Bunter.

“Here, sir!” Redwing’s voice was steady. “Grip my hand, sir—I’ve got you! Steady!”

He had reached the clinging man. Quelch’s grasp was slipping. How long he had hung there, between life and death, he did not know—it seemed an eternity. But he knew that he could not have held on many minutes longer. Redwing had come only in time. But a strong, arm grasp closed on a slipping hand, and it was as if new strength was infused into him from that helping grasp.

Redwing astride the ridge, had to lean down to him. But he clamped his legs firmly on either side of the ridge, as in earlier boyhood he had clamped them on a swaying boom over stormy waters. And he exerted all his strength—and his strength was great. As cool and steady as if he had been on the firm earth, heedless of the dizzy space round him, he pulled. And between his own efforts, and that steady pull from above, Mr. Quelch was drawn higher, till he was able to throw an arm over the ridge.

“Oh, crumbs!” breathed Billy Bunter, blinking dizzily from the window.

For several minutes, Mr. Quelch lay with his arms over the ridge, safe from falling, while he breathed hard, and something of his strength returned. Then he spoke, faintly:

“God bless you, Redwing! You are a brave lad! Get back now—I shall manage—get back, my dear boy.”

“If you’re sure, sir—”

“Quite!” said Mr. Quelch, in something like his old tone. “Go back at once, Redwing—I shall follow.”

“Very well, sir!” said Tom, quietly.

Quelch was in fact, safe now so long as he did not lose his head—which Henry Samuel Quelch was not likely to do. Redwing clambered back to the attic window, active as a squirrel: the Remove master, sprawling on the ridge with his head and arms on one side, his legs on the other, followed more slowly—much more slowly, working his way along with painful efforts. Billy Bunter

blinked almost incredulously at Redwing, as he backed to give the sailorman's son room to clamber in.

"I—I—I say, you—you—you ain't been killed!" babbled Bunter, as if he could hardly believe it: as indeed he hardly could.

"Not quite," said Tom, and he smiled. But his face became grave again, as he stood at the window, watching Mr. Quelch's slow progress towards safety. He leaned from the window, with arm outstretched, hand ready to give aid. It was only minutes, but it seemed hours, before Quelch reached the window, and Tom's ready hand grasped him and helped him in.

"Thank heaven!" breathed Tom, when Mr. Quelch was in the attic at last. The Remove master sank down on the box: exhausted, breathing in gulps, but with the colour slowly returning to his waxen cheeks.

CHAPTER XX

A BLOW FOR THE BOUNDER!

"I SAY, you fellows."

Billy Bunter fairly yelled.

There was a crowd of fellows in the Rag. The Carcroft men had gone, but the Carcroft match was the topic on all tongues. All the fellows who had played in that match, and all the fellows who had watched it, were playing it over again, as it were: and Soccer being much more interesting than Bunter, nobody heeded the fat figure that rolled in, or the excited squeak from the fat Owl.

"That was a topping goal, Smithy," Bob Cherry was saying, for perhaps the tenth time.

"The topfulness was terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Dashed if I thought you'd make it," said Johnny Bull. "But you did, Smithy." Johnny was not always very cordial to the Bounder: but he was cordial now.

Smithy was, in fact, the hero of the hour. He had brought off the winning goal, against all chances: there had been luck in it, no doubt, but there had been a good deal more: and all the footballing fellows had something to say about it, and all that they said was very agreeable to the Bounder's ears—"kudos" was like meat and drink to Smithy. "Swank" was one of his failings: but he had proved, at all events, his value to the side, and that he was not a man who could be left out.

"Jolly glad Quelch went out for a walk and forgot you, Smithy," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "I was jolly keen to play, but—I couldn't have bagged that goal in a lifetime."

The Bounder made a grimace.

So far all the fellows supposed that Quelch had gone out, and forgotten him and his detention, unaccountable as it was in the methodical Remove master. The Bounder was enjoying the ovation he was receiving: but there was a spot of grim trouble at the back of his mind. Nugent's words reminded him of what was coming. Redwing had gone up to the attic to release the Remove master: and Smithy knew that he might hear from him at any moment. But his face did not reveal that spot of trouble at the back of his mind: he was cool and careless in his manner as usual.

"I say, you fellows—!"

"Buzz off, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"Right at the finish, you know," said Bob. "Right on the tick of time! And the way Smithy dodged the halves—"

"The backs ought to have had him," said Squiff. "But—they didn't."

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

"You'll have to be on your best behaviour, Smithy, after this, and get Quelch to let you off more detentions," said Harry Wharton. "We simply can't spare you from the side."

The Bounder laughed. Quelch was not likely to "let him off", if Redwing was right, and he knew who had locked him in the attic! Quelch was much more likely to take him to the Head to be "sacked" if Redwing was right!

"I say, you fellows, will you give a chap a chance to speak!" yelled Bunter, indignantly. "I say, Quelch—!"

Bunter liked to be the fellow with the news. Now he had news that was calculated to make every fellow who heard it jump: and they went on talking Soccer, as if Bunter mattered no more than a buzzing insect! It was very annoying to Bunter. However, the mention of Quelch drew a little attention at last.

"Quelch!" repeated Peter Todd. "Has he come in?"

"He hasn't been out!" gasped Bunter. "You see—"

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry. "I can see him forgetting Smithy, and letting him play football, if he was in! I don't think!"

"I tell you he hasn't been out at all!" howled Bunter. "He's been in the top attic all the time. He was locked in by somebody."

"What?"

Bunter had attention now! There was no doubt about that. Even the Carcroft match, and Smithy's magnificent goal, were forgotten. Every fellow in the Rag stared at the fat Owl.

"Quelch—locked in the attic—!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, blankly.

"Rot!" said Squiff.

"Great pip!"

"The great-pipfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, it's true!" spluttered Bunter. "You see, I was there! I was locked in with him! I can tell you he was waxy!"

"We could have guessed that one!" said Bob Cherry. "But if Quelch was locked in the attic, who locked him in?"

"I don't know," confessed Bunter. "Quelch knows it wasn't me, because I was locked in too. Somebody bagged that fatheaded *History of Greyfriars* from his study—"

"So you did it after all!" exclaimed Bob.

"No!" yelled Bunter. "I didn't! Never touched it! It was somebody else, and he carted it up to the top attic, and Quelch came up after it and found it there, and the fellow must have followed him up, and locked him in—"

"But who—?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

He broke off, his eyes fixing on the Bounder. A dozen other fellows followed his glance. If Quelch had not, after all, gone out: if some fellow had contrived somehow to lock him in an attic out of the way, a good many of the Remove fellows could guess whose hand had turned the key.

"Smithy, you mad ass—!" breathed Bob Cherry.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"So that was how you got off to play soccer!" said Johnny Bull. "Quelch locked in an attic—phew!"

"If you fancy so, don't yell it out!" said the Bounder, sarcastically. "Walls have ears, you know! If Quelch was locked in, Bunter—"

"He jolly well was—"

"If he was, does he know who did it?"

"Well, I don't see how he can know," said Bunter. "He never said so, anyway, only he knew it wasn't me. I say, I can tell you he was like a jolly old tiger in a cage! Fancy Quelch climbing out of the window—at his time of life, you know—"

There was a general jump.

"What do you mean, you fat idiot?" exclaimed the Bounder. His face had gone white. "He wouldn't—he could—that window!—it's impossible—"

"He jolly well did!" gasped Bunter. "Trying to get across to the other attic window, you know—the one opposite! I can tell you I felt jolly queer, watching him clamber over that high roof—"

"He didn't!" yelled the Bounder. "He couldn't have! You fat owl—"

"He did!" yelled back Bunter, "and he couldn't make it, either, and he would have fallen off the roof but for Redwing—"

"Redwing!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

"You see, Redwing got hold of the key somehow, and came up!" explained Bunter. "Blessed if I know where he got the nerve to go out of the window after Quelch—but he did—"

"Redwing did!" panted the Bounder. He made a savage stride towards

Bunter, and grasped him by a fat shoulder. "You fool—you babbling fool—tell me what's happened—quick—!" He shook the fat Owl fiercely.

"Ooooooogh—!" spluttered Bunter. "Stop shaking me you beast—"

"Tell me!" yelled Smithy.

"Ow! Leggo! I'm all out of breath—groooogh! If you don't stop shaking a fellow, I'll—I'll—ooooogh!"

"Let him speak, Smithy, you ass!" Harry Wharton caught the Bounder's arm, and dragged him away from Bunter. "Now, what's happened—?"

"Oooogh! Shaking a fellow—!"

"Has anything happened, you fat chump?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ooogh! Yes! Quelch was hanging on the tiles, and he was going to fall any minute—groogh—only Redwing got to him and pulled him up—ooogh—and they got in all right—woooogh—"

"They're safe?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Eh! Oh! Yes! Quelch was hanging on—you see, he slipped down the slope, and couldn't pull himself up—but Redwing got to him—ooogh—!"

"Oh!" breathed the Bounder. His face was like chalk. He put his hand on the table to steady himself. He had quarrelled with his friend: in the struggle in the study he had struck him—and if Redwing had not gone up to the attic, what would have happened? Only too well he knew, now, that his reckless and rebellious arrogance would have led to a tragedy that would have haunted him with remorse for the rest of his days. And Redwing—Redwing had risked his life to save the man whom the Bounder's mutinous folly had endangered—he had done what only he, perhaps, in all Greyfriars, could have done, but he had done it at the risk of a terrible death! Vernon-Smith leaned weakly on the table. The rebel of Greyfriars was shaken to his very soul.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, Smithy, was it you locked Quelch in? I jolly well knew you had something on in that attic—"

"Where's Redwing now?" asked Harry Wharton.

"He was coming down with Quelch. I say, you fellows, if they'd both fallen off that roof—"

"Shut up, you fat ass."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Brace up, Smithy," said Harry Wharton, softly. The Bounder's face was ghastly. "It's all right now—"

"Yes," muttered Smithy. "It's all right—but—but if it hadn't been! If—if Reddy—" He broke off. "I'm going to Quelch—he needn't hunt for the man who locked him in—I'm going to tell him—" He broke off again, and crossed to the door, and all eyes were on him as he went out of the Rag.

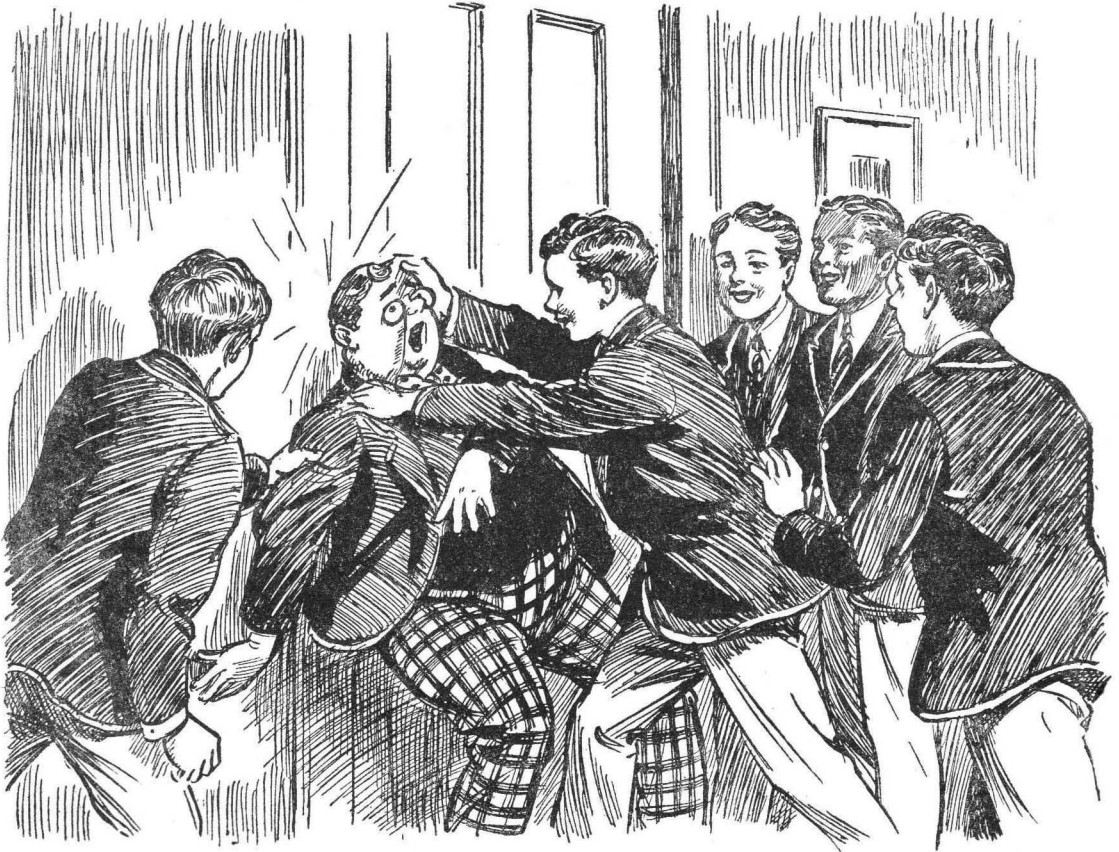
CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST CHANCE

“REDWING!”

“Yes, sir,” said Tom.

They were in Mr. Quelch's study. The Remove master sat at his writing-table, on which lay the typescript of the *History of Greyfriars*—unheeded now. Quelch's face was still a little pale: otherwise, he looked his normal self. No doubt the strain had told on him: but iron self-control was Quelch's long suit. Anything in the nature of an exciting episode was abhorrent to Quelch: he liked to go on the even tenor of his majestic way, calm and unmoved. Indeed his chief desire was that there should be as little talk as possible about



Billy Bunter's fat head smote the door.

that exciting episode in the top attic: and that, the offender once expelled and done with, it should be forgotten. But there was an unusual kindliness in his look, and in his voice, as he spoke to Redwing.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Quelch, "what you have done is beyond thanks. You have shown a courage, an intrepidity, beyond all praise. I can only say, Redwing, that if an opportunity should occur to repay something of what I owe to you, I shall welcome it gladly."

"Thank you, sir," said Redwing.

"Now you may go, my boy."

"Yes, sir! But—" Redwing hesitated.

"What is it, Redwing?"

"May—may I ask you a question, sir?" Redwing's face flushed.

"Certainly."

"Someone locked you in the attic, sir—"

The Remove master's brow darkened. He had no doubt who had locked him in the attic, and he was prepared to deal with him. The Bounder of Greyfriars had had many narrow escapes: but he was not to escape this time.

"May—may I ask if you know who it was, sir?" faltered Redwing.

Quelch's jaw set grimly.

"I have no doubt who it was, Redwing. I intend to send for Vernon-Smith at once, and question him. I do not expect the truth from him: but the matter will be made clear—and he will be expelled from the school, if it was he who did this, as I have no doubt whatever that it was."

Redwing stood silent, his cheeks burning. He hardly dared say what was in his mind. But he was resolved to say it.

Quelch gave a little start, as he remembered that Redwing and Vernon-Smith were close friends: indeed more than once he had been puzzled, as many of the Remove fellows had been, by that friendship between the headlong, reckless Bounder, and the quiet, steady Redwing: between the millionaire's son, and the sailorman's son who had come to Greyfriars on a scholarship. He recalled it now, as Tom stood before him with flushed face, hesitating. And he frowned.

"I am sorry, Redwing, as I understand that Vernon-Smith is a friend of yours," he said, and his voice was colder. "I have thought that such a friendship might lead him into better ways: but it has not proved so."

"Smithy's a good chap, sir, really," faltered Redwing. "One of the best, sir, though I know he has his faults. If—if it was he who locked the attic—"

"There can be no doubt about that, Redwing."

"Couldn't you, sir—couldn't you?" Redwing's voice trailed off.

"What?"

"I—I—I—" Redwing stammered. Then he got it out. "You said, sir, that you'd be glad to do something for me, if you could—"

"I trust that you do not doubt that, Redwing."

"No, sir! Oh, no, sir! But—but—if you'd give Smithy another chance, sir—if—if—if—"

"Redwing!"

"I—I know I've no right to ask, sir! But—but—if Smithy's sacked, I wouldn't care to stay at Greyfriars—he's my pal sir, and—and—and nobody understands him as I do, sir—with all his faults, he's one of the best chaps breathing, sir—really and truly—"

Redwing's voice faltered into silence. But his face was eloquent. He hardly knew how he had dared to speak to Quelch like this. But Smithy was his pal, and only he could save him, if he could be saved. He stood with crimson face and sinking heart, as he waited for Mr. Quelch to speak. It was Smithy's last chance.

There was a long, long silence. Then the Remove master spoke at last.

"What you have done for me to-day, Redwing, leaves me no choice but to grant what you ask. For your sake, certainly not for Vernon-Smith's, I shall allow the matter to close here. You may tell Vernon-Smith that there will be no inquiry." Quelch breathed very hard. "You may tell him that the whole matter is at an end."

"Oh! Thank you, sir—!"

"You may go, Redwing."

Redwing, in silence, turned to the door. As he reached it, there was a hurried knock, and it opened. Tom Redwing stared at the Bounder's white face.

"Smithy, old man—!"

"You're safe, Reddy." The Bounder's voice was husky. "Reddy, old man—"

"It's all right, Smithy—"

"It isn't! It isn't! I've got to speak to Quelch." Vernon-Smith pushed past his chum, and crossed the floor to the Remove master's table, unheeding the cold, icy stare of the gimlet-eyes that met him. "Mr. Quelch—"

"Why are you here, Vernon-Smith?" Quelch's voice seemed to come from the deepest depths of a refrigerator.

"I've got to tell you, sir! I've only just heard of what happened—it was all my fault—all my fault—it was I locked you in the attic, sir—now you can take me to the Head to be sacked!" panted the Bounder.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch, rather blankly.

"I—I—I never dreamed of anything like that, sir—you believe me?—I couldn't have dreamed of it!" panted Vernon-Smith. "I—I locked you in, sir, but you know—you must know—that I never dreamed—"

"I am aware of that, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch. "Nevertheless, your act endangered my life, and that of Redwing—"

"I know! I know! But I never dreamed—but I'm not making excuses, sir—you know what I did now—I know I'm going to be sacked, and I don't care—I came here to tell you as soon as I heard—"

The grim, crusty face staring at Smithy across the table softened.

"I was already aware, Vernon-Smith, that you were the culprit, said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! You knew—?" stammered the Bounder. Redwing had been right!

"And I had already granted Redwing's request to pardon you."

"Oh!" gasped Vernon-Smith.

He stared at his form-master, almost bewildered. Then he looked at Redwing, waiting at the door. Then he stared at Quelch again.

"You—you don't mean that I'm let off, sir, now you know—!" he muttered.

"I mean exactly that, Vernon-Smith! You may leave my study."

"Oh!" gasped Smithy. "I—I—I—I'm sorry, sir! Do believe that I'm sorry. I—I've been a fool, sir—a cheeky fool, and a rotter too—I—I hope you believe that I'm sorry, sir—"

"I believe you, Vernon-Smith." Quelch's keen eyes read the Bounder's face, and his voice was quite kind. "You need say no more: the matter ends here."

Herbert Vernon-Smith went unsteadily from the study. Redwing caught his arm, and drew him into the passage, and closed the door. Mr. Quelch was left with a very thoughtful expression on his face. Possibly he was not sorry, after all, that he had yielded to Tom Redwing's plea, and that the rebel of Greyfriars had been given another chance.

In the passage, Vernon-Smith pressed Redwing's arm.

"Reddy, old man—" he muttered.

"All right now, Smithy," Tom Redwing smiled. "Thank goodness it's ended like this—"

"You saved Quelch, and—and you've saved me, from the sack, and I—I—I punched you in the study," muttered the Bounder, remorsefully. "I'm a brute—a rotter—Reddy, you're a silly ass to stick to me—"

"I'll stick all the same," said Reddy.

CHAPTER XXII

NOT TAKING ANY!

"I SAY, you fellows."

"Blow away, Bunter."

"But I say—"

"Hook it!"

"I say—"

"Shut the door after you."

"Will you listen to a chap?" howled Billy Bunter, with an indignant glare at

the five fellows in No. 1 study that might almost have cracked his big spectacles, "I say, you know Quelch told me to write out that rotten Latin lesson yesterday—!"

"Roll away!"

"And how could I, when I was locked up in that attic with Quelch? demanded Bunter. "I couldn't, could I?"

"You had lots of time afterwards."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Too jolly lazy?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Travel!" said Bob Cherry.

"I wish you'd let a fellow speak! I never did it, and now, what do you think Quelch has done? He's told me to write it out twice!"

"Then you'd better go and do it, before he makes it thrice!" suggested Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Take your face away, anyhow."

"Beast! I mean, look here, old chaps! Quelch is in his study now—I heard his typewriter going—that fatheaded *History of Greyfriars* of his, you know—well, what about ragging him?"

"What?"

"Serve him jolly well right, what?" asked Bunter. "He was as mad as a hatter the other day when Smithy catapulted his window from that tree. You know how he pounced on me, grabbing a fellow by the back of the neck, and making a fellow think he'd gone crackers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What, about banging at his door, and then cutting away down the passage?" asked Bunter. "Make him wild, what?"

"No doubt about that!" chuckled Bob.

"The wildfulness would probably be terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Quelch would be preposterously infuriated."

"Well, which of you fellows is going to do it?" asked Bunter. "I—I'd do it myself—but—but—but Quelch might guess it was me, you know! What about you fellows?"

"Nothing about us fellows," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Now shut up, and roll away, like a good barrel."

Sniff, from Bunter.

"Might have known you'd funk it, in this study," he said. "I'll jolly well go and put it up to Smithy—he's the man for it! Bet you he'll jump at it."

"Smithy's on his best behaviour now—"

"Oh, that's all gammon!" said Bunter. "Catch Smithy behaving himself! I'll jolly well go and put it to him, and you'll see."

And the fat Owl rolled out of No. 1 study and rolled up the passage to

No. 4. Hardly a minute later, there was a startling sound in the Remove passage. It was the sound of a heavy bump, followed by a loud yell:

“Yarooooh!”

Harry Wharton and Co. chuckled. Evidently Billy Bunter's latest proposition for a “rag” on Quelch had met with a negative—a very emphatic negative—from the rebel of Greyfriars!

THE END