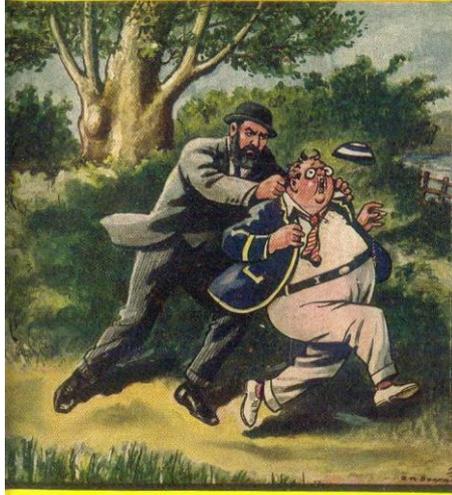


**BACKING UP  
BILLY BUNTER**



**FRANK RICHARDS**

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By  
**FRANK RICHARDS**

Illustrated by  
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UNDER COVER OF THE NEWSPAPER, THE FAT OWL  
BREATHED HARD

## CHAPTER 1

### BAT FOR BUNTER!

'BUNTER!'

No reply.

'Bunter!'

Still no reply.

The door of No. 7 Study, in the Remove passage at Greyfriars was half-open. Billy Bunter was in his study. Undoubtedly he heard Harry Wharton's voice calling in the passage. But if he heard, he heeded not.

Bunter was busy.

Billy Bunter had lines on hand for Mr. Quelch, his form-master. But he was not busy on those lines. He had a translation to do for Monsieur Charpentier, the French master. But he was not busy on that translation.

Such things as these, Billy Bunter was wont to put off till the last minute: or even a little later.

But he was busy: much too busy to heed a calling voice in the passage. He was eating! On the study table was a large cake: Or, more accurately, what had been a large cake. It had been large when it arrived in No. 7 Study, ten minutes ago, under a fat arm. Since then the work of demolition had been proceeding without pause.

Slice after slice, transferred to the most capacious mouth in the Greyfriars Remove, had disappeared on the downward path.

But much remained. And so long as a plum or a crumb remained, Billy Bunter was not likely to heed calling voices. What the captain of the Remove wanted, he did not know.

Neither did he care. He concentrated on cake! From No. 7 Study, a sound of steady munching floated out into the passage. And it went on, uninterrupted, as Harry Wharton called along the passage from the landing.

Wharton's voice was heard again.

'Seen Bunter about, Smithy? Nugent said he came up to the studies.'

There was a chuckle: then Smithy's voice.

'I haven't seen him—'

'Oh! Bother!'

'But I've heard him! Unless there's a gee-gee in No. 7 champing corn.'

'The fat ass! If he's in his study, why can't he answer?'

Tramping footsteps came up the passage to the door of No. 7.

Still Billy Bunter did not heed. He was not interested in Harry Wharton or what he might happen to want. He did not even blink round through his big spectacles as the door was kicked wider open, and the captain of the Remove looked in.

Munch! munch! munch!

Bunter did not take the trouble to reply. Indeed he would have found it a little difficult, at the moment, to become vocal, through a barrage of cake. He went on munching.

'You're wanted, fathead—'

Munch! munch! munch!

'Quelch wants you in his study,' hooted Wharton. 'He's just told me to send you in.'

'Oh!'

Billy Bunter's musical effect ceased, at that. He turned his spectacles on the captain of the Remove, with a startled and alarmed blink.

'Oh!' he repeated. 'Did—did you say Quelch?'

'Yes, I did say Quelch, fathead, and you'd better not keep him waiting.' With that, Harry Wharton turned from the door. The captain of the Remove was due for nets after class, and he was in flannels, with his bat under his arm. His friends were waiting for him below: and possibly he was not too pleased to be sent in search of a fat Owl.

'I—I say, hold on a minute!' exclaimed Bunter. He rose from the table, for the moment almost forgetful of even cake. 'I—I say, what does Quelch want?'

'How should I know, ass?'

'I—I mean, is—is it anything about a cake?' gasped Bunter.

Harry Wharton stared at him: and then bunt into a laugh.

'You fat villain—.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Whose cake is that you are scoffing?'

'It's mine, of course, it—it came from Bunter Court this morning.' answered Bunter, hastily. 'But—but did Quelch say anything about a cake? I—I mean, if the House-dame's missed a cake. Quelch might think—.'

'He might!' agreed Harry Wharton. 'Very likely, I fancy.'

'Well, I never had it! I haven't been down the kitchen stairs since class—why should I? But—but Mrs. Kebble might think I had—'

'Why should she, if you haven't?'

'Well, she saw me coming up, you know: and you know what women are—suspicious—!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'So—so if Quelch said anything about a cake—.'

'He didn't say anything, except send you to his study at once.'

'Oh! Perhaps it's only my lies, then.' said Bunter.

'He asked me for my lines in form, you know, and I said I'd left them in my study, and he said take them to him after class—.'

'Better take them with you, then!'

'Only-only I haven't done them!' explained Bunter. 'I—I'd rather not see Quelch yet. He might think I told him a crammer about leaving the lines in my study, if he found out that I hadn't done them. You know Quelch!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a roar from the landing at the end of the Remove passage. 'You coming, Wharton?'

'Coming!' called back Harry.

'I say, hold on a minute I' exclaimed Bunter. 'I say. I don't want to see Quelch just yet. I've got to finish this cake—I mean, I've got to get my lines done. I say, you cut back, and tell him you haven't been able to find me.'

'Wha-a-t?'

'That will keep him quiet!' explained Bunter. 'He will think I went out of gates after class, if you can't find me. That will be all right.'

'But I have found you!' howled Harry Wharton.

'For goodness sake, keep to the point!' said Bunter, peevishly. 'The point is that I don't want to see Quelch just yet, see? That's important. You go and tell Quelch that you can't find me anywhere—.'

Harry Wharton gazed at the fat Owl of the Remove from the doorway. His bat, under his arm, slipped down into his hand. That was a danger-signal, if Bunter had heeded it. But Billy Bunter's fat thoughts were concentrated on cake, lines and Quelch, and he was oblivious of danger-signals.

'Tell him you've looked everywhere, and nobody", seen me anywhere.' he went on. "That will do for Quelch. You might mention that you saw me going out of gates after class—that would be better, really. See?'

'You fat, frabjous, footling fibber—.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Get a move on!' Harry Wharton came into the study, bat in hand.

'I tell you I don't want to see Quelch yet! You go to him and say—yaroooooh! Keep that bat away, you beast! Whoooooop!'

Harry Wharton did not keep the bat away. Having prodded the business-end of the bat at the plumpest ribs in Greyfriars School, he prodded again, and yet again. Billy Bunter, with a series of breathless squeaks, dodged round the table.

'Wow! Beast! Will you keep that bat away?' he roared. 'I—I say, old chap, have some of the cake! Have a slice of—yow-ow-ow-ow-ow! Wow! If you don't stop prodding that bat at me, I'll jolly well—Whooooooop!'

'Are you going?'

'No—I—I—I mean, yes! Wow!'

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study. Really there was no arguing with a cricket bat, in an energetic hand, prodding at his plump ribs. He rolled down the Remove passage to the landing, the captain of the Remove following him, still prodding. A surprised stare from Bob Cherry greeted them as they arrived on the landing.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's this game?' inquired Bob.

'Yarooooh!'

'Quelch wants Bunter,' explained Wharton. 'And Bunter wants me to tell Quelch that he's gone out of gates. I'm going to prod him as far as Masters' Studies.'

'Good egg!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, heartily. 'I'll help!'

'Yoo-hooooop!'

Billy Bunter did the staircase in record time.

## CHAPTER 2

### NOT A ROW!

MR. Quelch glanced up from his writing table, as a tap came at his study door.

'Come in!' he rapped.

The door opened, disclosing the fattest figure at Greyfriars School. That fat figure hesitated at the doorway.

Billy Bunter did not want to see Quelch. But he realised that he had to see Quelch.

As Harry Wharton—for reasons incomprehensible to Bunter—had refused to tell Quelch that the fat Owl was out of gates when he was in his study, there was no choice about that. But with an unwritten imposition, and a purloined cake, on his fat conscience, Quelch's study was rather like a lion's den to Bunter just then; and Bunter was not the fellow, if he could help it, to dare to be a Daniel. He paused in the doorway, really as if his fat little legs refused to carry him in.

'Come in, Bunter!' rapped Mr. Quelch, sharply.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter. And he came in slowly and reluctantly. 'If—if you please, sir, it wasn't me—.'

'What?'

'It wasn't really, sir,' said Bunter, earnestly. 'I never knew that Mrs. Kebble had been baking cakes at all—.'

'Cakes!' repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

'I—I haven't been below stairs at all, sir! If—if Mrs. Kebble thought she saw me coming up, sir, I—I expect she mistook some other fellow for me. I—I was in the quad, sir, when she saw me on the stairs—I mean when she didn't see me—.'

'Upon my word!' ejaculated Mr. Quelch. 'Bunter! I shall inquire of Mrs. Kebble whether anything of an edible nature is missing below stairs. I have heard nothing of it so far.'

'Oh, lor!'

gasped Bunter. Evidently, he had been a little too early with his protestations of innocence. It was not on account of the cake that his form-master had sent for him.

'I shall certainly inquire into the matter,' said Mr. Quelch, sternly. 'However, that is not why I asked Wharton to send you here, Bunter.'

'If—if it's the lines, sir, I—I—I can't find them! I—I've been looking an over my study, but—but Toddy or Dutton must have moved them, sir. I—I was looking for them when Wharton came up, sir! I—I wasn't eating anything—nothing at all, sir, especially cake—I was—was hunting for those lines—I—I was going to write them over again, sir, as—as I couldn't find them. M-m-may I go and—and write them now, sir?'

'You have not written your lines, Bunter! Your imposition is doubled.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'However, it was not in reference to your lines that I sent for you, Bunter!'

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose. Again he had been a little too previous, as it were. It was not the cake, and it was not the lines. He wondered, dizzily what other of his manifold sins of commission or omission might have come to his form-master's knowledge. Could Quelch have heard anything about a bag of oranges that had mysteriously disappeared from Coker's study in the Fifth? Bunter—in too much of a hurry as usual—recommenced:

'If it's the oranges, sir—.'

'Oranges!' repeated Mr. Quelch.

'I—I expect Coker ate them, sir, and forgot all about it. I never went near his study yesterday—.'

'Bunter!' said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, 'you are a greedy, and untruthful boy. I should give you Extra School to-morrow afternoon—.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. The morrow was Wednesday, and a half-holiday. Extra School was better, perhaps, than 'whops'. But it was not attractive.

'But,' continued Mr. Quelch, 'I have already told your father that you may have leave out of bounds to-morrow, Bunter. I sent for you, Bunter, because your father has telephoned, and desires to speak to you!'

'Oh!' stuttered Bunter. It was not a 'row' after all!

That was about the last thing he would have expected to hear. Seldom, if ever, did Mr. Bunter telephone to his hopeful son at Greyfriars. Mr. Bunter was a stockbroker in the City: and Greyfriars was seventy miles from the City. Trunk calls were much too expensive to be indulged in lightly.

'It appears,' said Mr. Quelch, 'that your father is now at Folkestone, Bunter—.'

'Oh!' said Bunter for the third time. That explained it. It was only a "toll" call from Folkestone!

'And as Mr. Bunter is still holding the line, you had better take the call at once, Bunter,' snapped Mr. Quelch.

'Oh! Yes sir! Certainly, sir!' gasped Bunter.

Really, the fat Owl of the Remove could have kicked himself. It was not the cake, it was not the lines, it was not the oranges—it was not a 'row' at all: Quelch had sent for him simply because his father was on the phone!

The fat Owl rolled across to the telephone: and Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow, resumed his work at the table. Telephone calls from parents were not one of the joys of a school-master's life: though not of course, quite so bad as actual visits from parents! Billy Bunter took up the receiver, which was off the hooks, in a rather sticky and very grubby hand, and squeaked into the transmitter.

'Is that you, father?'

'Is that William speaking? You have kept me waiting, William. Are you not aware, William, that it is a totally unnecessary expense to hold a telephone line?'

'I—I—I—.'

'Do not waste further time, William. Listen to me. I am at Folkestone now, staying at your Uncle Carter's. I shall be staying here over to-morrow night. My secretary, Mr. Tregg, is with me. He drove me down in the car.'

'Oh! Yes!' said Bunter.

'I don't think you have ever met Mr. Tregg, William.'

'Nunno.'

'You will see him, to-morrow. Wednesday, I understand, is a half-holiday at your school.'

'Oh! Yes.'

'I shall not be using the car to-morrow, William, and it would be a treat for you, if I sent Mr. Tregg across with it, to take you for a motor-run on your half-holiday.'

'Oh, good!' said Bunter. His fat face brightened.

This really was a very happy thought on the part of Bunter, senior. A motor-run on a half-holiday was quite an attractive idea. Moreover, it would show the Remove fellows that there really was a car in the Bunter family.

True, it was not the magnificent Rolls that Bunter had often described to doubting form-fellows. Still, it was a car. Bunter would have preferred it to arrive driven by a liveried chauffeur, rather than by some secretary or other from Mr. Bunter's City office.

Nevertheless, a car was a car: and a motor-run was a motor-run.

'You can take your friends with you. if you wish,' went on Mr. Bunter's plump voice over the wires. "Tregg will pick you up about two o'clock. He will drive you wherever you wish, bringing you here to tea at your Uncle Carter's at half-past five."

'Good!' said Bunter.

'You may make the party up to six if you desire, William. Your Uncle carter would be quite pleased to see your friends whom he met one Christmas—I do not recall their names—Sherry, I think, was one—.'

'Cherry,' said Bunter. 'Bob Cherry, and Wharton, and Bull, and Nugent, and—.'

'Yes, yes, yes! If you like this idea, William—.'

'Oh, yes, rather!' squeaked Bunter. 'Jolly glad you thought of it, father!'

'As a matter of fact, it was Tregg who suggested it.' said Mr. Bunter. 'I had not thought of it till he suggested it. However, that is no matter. I shall expect to see you and your friends at half-past five here to-morrow, William. As I have said, Tregg will pick you up in the car about two o'clock. That is all, Good-bye.'

There was a whirr on the line. Mr. Bunter, at Folkestone, had rung off, having said all that he had to say: and having, apparently, no use for further remarks from William.

Billy Bunter's fat face was very cheery, as he turned from the telephone. It became a little less cheery, as he met a grim glance from his form-master.

'Bunter!' rapped Mr. Quelch. 'Oh! Yes, sir! I——'

You will have leave out of school bounds to-morrow afternoon. You will bring me your doubled imposition this evening before preparation.'

'Oh Yes! —.'

'If you fail to do so, Bunter, your leave to-morrow afternoon will be cancelled.'

'Oh, crikey! I—I—I mean——.'

'You may go. Bunter!'

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study, and closed the door after him. He waited till the door was shut, before he murmured 'Beast!'—no doubt by way of thanks to Quelch for leave out of bounds on Wednesday. Then he rolled away: quite a cheery and exhilarated Bunter.

## CHAPTER 3

### QUID PRO QUO

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Bikes!' said Johnny Bull.

'I say—!'

'What about running the old boat out?' asked Bob Cherry.

'I say—!'

'What about a spot of cricket?' suggested Harry Wharton.

'Look here, you fellows—!'

'What about a ramble on the cliffs!' said Frank Nugent.

'I say—!'

'Or the swimfulness in Pegg Bay!' suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter snorted.

Five fellows in No. 1 Study in the Removes were discussing the morrow's half-holiday, when the Owl of the Remove blinked in through his big spectacles. They went on discussing the morrow's half-holiday, just as if they weren't in the least interested in Billy Bunter. As a matter of fact they weren't!

It was glorious summer. The weather was behaving itself. The Famous Five seemed to have different ideas about the spending of the half-holiday: they were, in fact, spoilt for choice. Johnny Bull's idea of a spin on the bites was attractive. So was Bob Cherry's idea of running out the old boat on the shining waters of the Sack. So, also, was Harry Wharton's idea of picking up sides for cricket.

Nugent's idea of a ramble on the cliffs overlooking Pegg Bay was attractive too. So was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's suggestion of a swim in the bay. But they were, at all events, all agreed upon one thing: it had to be something out of doors.

As the Famous Five of the Remove were generally in a bunch on a half-holiday, they were going to discuss the matter, and decide upon one of the five varied attractions. Really, they had no use for Billy Bunter at the moment.

'Might run up to Popper's Island, in the boat!' said Bob Cherry. 'It's jolly on the river in this weather.'

'Might get right round Lantham, and back by Redclyffe Hill, on the bikes,' remarked Johnny Bull. 'Topping run.'

'I say, you fellows, will you listen to a chap?' roared Billy Bunter, indignantly. 'Here I've come all the way up those dashed stairs to speak to you, and you can't listen to a chap! I've a jolly good mind not to take you on a motor—run to-morrow at all!'

'Eh?'

'What?'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that Bunter?' asked Bob Cherry, looking round. 'What's that about a motor-run, old fat man?'

The discussion of the morrow's programme was suspended. All the Famous Five looked inquiringly at the fat Owl.

'A motor-run!' repeated Harry Wharton. 'Who's standing a motor-run to-morrow?'

'I am!' announced Bunter. 'My pater's car will be here to-morrow at two, to pick me up.'

Run round the country in a topping car, and tea at Folkestone at my Uncle Carter's. I can take my friends if I like. I'm asking you fellows—if you've got time to listen to a chap!'

added Bunter, sarcastically.

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'Might make it about fifteen miles, if we go on the bikes,' he said, just as if the Owl of the Remove hadn't spoken at all. 'Still, if you're keen on the boat, Bob, we'll run the boat out, if the other fellows agree. We shall have to steer clear of Popper's Island, though. We don't want old Popper coming along and kicking up a row again about fellows landing on his dashed island.'

'I say, you fellows—!'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'Let Bunter say his piece,' he said. 'I suppose it's gammon, as usual—.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Of course it's gammon,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'We know all about that Rolls at Bunter Court—we've heard enough about it.'

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'The gammonfulness is probably terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

'Well, I like that!' said Bunter, with an indignant snort. 'Any chap in the Remove would jump at it. I ask you fellows, because you're pals of mine, and you can't so much as say thanks! Yah!'

'Well, you know what you are, old fat frump,' said Bob Cherry. 'But if your pater's really sending over that jolly old Rolls—.'

'Tain't the Rolls,' said Bunter, hastily. 'The—the Rolls is at—at Bunter Court. It's the car my pater uses in the City. Jolly good car, though, and my pater's sending it across from Folkestone to-morrow, with his secretary Tregg driving it, see?'

'Oh!' said the Famous Five, all together.

This looked as if Bunter was stating facts. Facts were not, as a rule, expected from William George Bunter. Fiction was his strong suit.

Had Bunter stated that a magnificent Rolls was coming over, driven by the most superb of chauffeurs, the Co. would have taken it for granted that it was just one more specimen of Bunter's accustomed fiction. They would have taken it for granted that, at the last moment, Bunter would have some yarn to spin, to account for the non-arrival of the superb chauffeur with the magnificent Rolls. But a common-or-garden car, so to speak, driven by a person in Mr. Bunter's employ in his City office, was much more probable.

'You see, the pater's at Folkestone now, staying with my Uncle Carter!' explained Bunter. 'He says Uncle Carter would like to see you chaps again—you remember you had a Christmas with him—.'

'Oh!' said the Co. again. It was sounding more and more probable.

'Tregg's his secretary in the City,' went on Bunter. 'I've never seen him—he never comes to Bunter Villa—I mean Bunter Court—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! The pater says Tregg suggested the trip, as the car won't be wanted to-morrow, so you fellows may as well be civil to Tregg,' added Bunter.

'We can pack six into the car. Well, will you fellows come? A run round in the car—a whiff of the sea at Folkestone—and tea at Uncle Carter's! What?'

'Folkestone's miles out of bounds, even on a half-holiday,' said Bob Cherry.

'That's all right—I've got leave from Quelch. You see, the pater phoned him—that's what Quelch wanted me for: explained Bunter. 'The pater was on the phone. I'd have told you before, only you were fooling about at the nets. Well, are you coming?'

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged glances. They were feeling just a little remorseful.

Now that Bunter had got it all out, he had succeeded in convincing them that that motor-run was a reality, and not one of his accustomed airy nothings. And really the reception

they had given him was not exactly what was due to a fellow who had selected them to enjoy the trip with him.

And it was quite a pleasant prospect.

They remembered Bunter's Uncle Carter at Folkestone, and quite liked the idea of seeing that plump old gentleman again. Possibly they remembered that there was a well-spread board at Uncle Carter's, which would be quite attractive after an afternoon's run in a car. And a run round the country, miles and miles from Greyfriars, was undoubtedly an attraction.

'We'll come, old fat man,' said Harry Wharton, having received four nods, from four heads, in response to an inquiring glance. 'And many thanks for the kind invitation!' he added, gravely.

'The many-thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, solemnly. 'Quite a jolly stunt,' said Bob Cherry. 'We're on, Bunter.'

'Glad to come,' said Frank Nugent, politely.

Johnny Bull contented himself with a nod. Possibly Johnny still had some slight lingering doubt about the car!

'O.K!' said Bunter. 'You'll have a jolly good time.'

Uncle Carter knows how to feed a chap, I can tell you.

Oh! There's just one thing!' added Bunter, as if he had suddenly thought of it.

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'It's my lines!' explained Bunter. 'Quelch has doubled my impot, so I've got two hundred to do. And—and he said if they ain't handed in before prep, he will cancel my leave for to-morrow afternoon. That would wash the whole thing out.'

'Better hand them in. then: said Frank Nugent.

'Well, you see. I haven't done them. I—I was going to, but—but I haven't! If you fellows would like to help—.'

A still more emphatic grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'As I'm standing you a jolly topping motor-run, I think you might lend a hand with the lines,' said Bunter, warmly. 'Sort of quod quid quop, you know.'

'Sort of whatter?' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

'Quod quid quop,' said Bunter. 'I suppose you know what that means—something for something else—one thing for another—.'

'Oh! A *quid pro quo*!' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'I said a quod quid quop, and I mean a quod quid quop!' retorted Bunter. 'If you think you can teach me Latin. Harry Wharton—.'

'Not at all, old fat man! Quelch can't, and I'm sure I couldn't.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'One good turn deserves another,' he said. 'We'll let Bunter have his quod quid quop—!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'There wouldn't be any run out of bounds to-morrow, if Quelch knew we'd done Bunter's lines for him!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'More likely Extra School all round.'

'True. O King! But we're not going to confide it to Quelch!' said Bob. 'And the fat ass hasn't left himself time to do the lines before prep.'

'I say, you fellows, it won't take long, whacking it out!' said Bunter, encouragingly. 'I'll do the first twenty—there! I'm not lazy, I hope! Then if you fellows do fifty each, that will make up the two hundred, see?'

'If Quelch heard that, old fat man, he would think your arithmetic as good as your Latin,' remarked Frank Nugent. 'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well. I'm pretty good at arithmetic,' said Bunter. 'Quick, clear, intellect, you know—that's all it needs. Nothing for you fellows to cackle at, that I can see. I just happen to be a dab at arithmetic: that's all.'

'Five fifties added to twenty makes two hundred and seventy, not two hundred!' hooted Johnny Bull.

'Oh! Does it?' said Bunter. 'Well, then, you fellows do thirty each—that will make two hundred, with my twenty.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you fellows are going to cackle every time a fellow opens his mouth—'

'My dear chap, your arithmetic would make a stone image chortle,' said Bob Cherry. 'Have another go!'

'I—I mean forty each—you fellows do forty each—that makes a hundred and sixty-six—then with my twenty—'

'Oh, my hat! This gets curiuser and curiuser, as Alice said in Wonderland,' chuckled Bob. 'We'll do thirty-six each, old fat man.'

'Don't you jolly well be lazy, Bob Cherry! You jolly well do forty—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you're too jolly lazy to do forty each—'

'Five thirty-sixes is a hundred and eighty!' yelled Johnny Bull. 'Twenty to that makes two hundred!'

'I suppose you think you can teach me arithmetic, Bull, just like Wharton thinks he can teach me Latin—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, it's got to be two hundred,' said Bunter. 'Quelch always tots up the lines. Look here, the bell will be going for prep soon—'

'All hands on deck!' said Bob Cherry. 'Mind you make the lines look as if a spider had inked his legs and crawled over the paper, or Quelch will smell a rat. Go it!'

And as it was agreed that Billy Bunter should have his *quid pro quo*—or, as he preferred to call it, his *quod quid quop*—the juniors sat down round the table: six pens were dipped in the ink, and many hands made light work. The bell for prep had given its first clang, when the fat Owl rolled away with the completed imposition: just in time, and all was clear for the motor-run on the morrow. Though, as Johnny Bull remarked, had Mr. Quelch guessed how many hands had been employed on those two hundred lines, Extra School all round would have been much more probable than a motor-run that half-holiday.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRIOR ENGAGEMENT

'SMITHY, old man—.'

'Rot!'

'Exactly!' said Tom Redwing, 'that's what it is, Smithy —just rot! What's the use of asking for trouble?'

'Safe as houses!' said the Bounder. 'Old Popper's away—.'

'His keepers aren't away.'

'Bother his keepers! Cut on to the study, Reddy—I'm going to speak to the fellows in No. 1.'

Five fellows, in No. 1 Study, glanced rather curiously at Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, as he appeared in the doorway. They had been about to separate for prep—Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to No. 13, Johnny Bull to No. 14, leaving Wharton and Nugent in No. 1, when Vernon-Smith and Redwing came up from the landing. Billy Bunter had left the door open, and the words exchanged between the Bounder and his pal reached all ears in No. 1. From which they deduced, without much difficulty, that the scapegoat of the Remove was bent upon some escapade, from which his more sober-minded chum wanted to dissuade him. Which was a far from unusual state of affairs.

'You fellows like the idea of a picnic up the river?' asked the Bounder. 'I'm fixing it up, and I'd like to make a party of it. Popper's Island in the Sark—.'

'Popper's Island!' repeated Harry Wharton.

'Jolly spot for a picnic,' said Smithy.

'Jolly enough,' agreed the captain of the Remove. 'But it happens to be out of bounds, Smithy. You know the Head put it out of bounds, after Sir Hilton Popper kicked up such a fuss about fellows landing there.'

'Yes, I know that! But I wasn't thinkin' of mentionin' it to the Head.'

'Old Popper would mention it fast enough, if he found a crowd of Greyfriars fellows there.'

'He wouldn't! He's away in London.'

'Oh!' said Bob Cherry. 'Well, while the cat's away, the mice will play. It's the jolliest spot on the river for a picnic.'

'Topping!' said Nugent.

'The topfulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'And during the absence of the absurd cat, the playfulness of the mice is preposterous, as the English proverb remarks.'

'Um!' said Johnny Bull. He seemed doubtful.

Harry Wharton was more than doubtful. He was quite decided. The Bounder of Greyfriars was a rebel by nature. It was only necessary for any spot to be put out of school bounds, to make it attractive to Smithy. As captain of the Remove, the Head Boy of the form, Harry Wharton, did not see eye to eye with Smithy in such matters. He shook his head.

'Lots of jolly spots up the river, Smithy,' he said. 'Why not give Popper's Island a miss, and steer clear of a row.' The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

'I'm not afraid of a row,' he answered, with a stress on the personal pronoun, that brought a gleam into Harry Wharton's eyes.

'Well, nobody here is afraid of a row,' said Johnny Bull. 'But it's not sense to sit up and beg for one. The Head would come down jolly heavy on trespassing on that island, after the fuss old Popper has made about it.'

'It isn't trespassing,' retorted Smithy. 'Old Popper calls it his island, but I fancy he would have to guess again if he were asked to show the title-deeds. Lots of people say it's really public land.'

'Lots of people may be right, or they may be wrong,' said Harry. 'But we all know that the Head's put it out of bounds.'

'Because old Popper's on the governing board, and the Old Man doesn't want a spot of bother with a governor of the school!' sneered Smithy.

'That's as may be: but—.'

'Oh, come down to brass tacks,' snapped Smithy. 'I'm going to picnic on Popper's Island, and Reddy is coming. If you fellows funk it, you can play "safety-first", and be blowed!' 'Who's funking it?' roared Johnny Bull, glaring at the Bounder rather like a 'type' of his native county.

'Looks to me as if you fellows are!' retorted Smithy. 'If you're not, join up, and we'll have a jolly picnic on the island to-morrow afternoon.'

'That washes it out, anyway,' said Harry Wharton. 'We're all booked for to-morrow afternoon, Smithy! Thanks all the same!' he added, with a touch of sarcasm.

It was rather a relief to the captain of the Remove to hear that Smithy's excursion was timed for the Wednesday afternoon. As the Famous Five had already agreed to join Bunter in his motor-run, that certainly washed out the picnic on Popper's Island for them, if they had otherwise been disposed to join the Bounder in a reckless escapade. And some of them, at least, had plainly been so disposed.

Vernon-Smith's lip curled in an unpleasant sneer.

'Booked?' he repeated. 'There's no match on to-morrow, that I've heard of.'

'It's not cricket,' answered Harry.

'Something else jolly important?' sneered Smithy. 'Quite convenient to have a prior engagement. Why not own up that you funk it?'

The captain of the Remove breathed hard.

'We're going on a motor-run,' he said, curtly. 'Bunter asked us, not half-an-hour ago, and we agreed—.'

'Bunter!' repeated the Bounder. He stared blankly at the captain of the Remove. 'Bunter's asked you on a motor-run?'

'Yes: what about it?' snapped Wharton. The Bounder laughed.

'Bunter was trying to borrow a bob from me this afternoon,' he said. 'Looks as if he can stand a motor-run! Talk sense.'

'His father's car is coming over—.'

'The jolly old Rolls from Bunter Court!' chuckled the Bounder. 'Mean to say you've fallen for Bunter's gammon?' He chuckled again. 'I'll bet you ten to one in doughnuts that the car doesn't turn up. We all know Bunter.'

Harry Wharton made no reply to that.

'So that's it!' sneered Smithy. 'You won't come to Popper's Island, not because you funk it, but because that gammoning Owl has spun you a yarn about a motor-run—which you believe no more than I do.'

'Look here—!'

'Oh, chuck it,' said the Bounder, rudely. 'Bunter's car will come about as soon as Bunter's postal-order. And you know it. They say that any excuse is better than none: but that's the thinnest I ever heard!'

'I tell you—.'

'Pack it up! If you funk it, you funk it, and that's that! You might as well own up to it.'

With that, the Bounder swung round in the doorway, and tramped up the passage to his own study. Harry Wharton, with a knitted brow and glinting eyes, made a step towards the door, his hands clenching. Bob Cherry caught him by the arm.

'Steady the Buffs!' murmured Bob. 'No good rowing with Smithy, old chap. Smithy can't help being a bit of a bounder.'

'He thinks—.'

'Let him think what he likes! You won't change his views by punching his nose,' said Bob.

'And he will look a pretty ass when that car turns up to-morrow. Never mind Smith—prep!'

Harry Wharton nodded. Bob and Johnny and the Nabob left No. 1, to go to their own studies for prep: and Wharton and Nugent sat down at the table with their books. But a frown lingered on the brow of the captain of the Remove. Smithy's sneers had left a sting behind: and he half-regretted that he had let the Bounder go without punching his head.

## CHAPTER 5

### SIX SISTER ANNES!

'SISTER ANNE, Sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?' Skinner of the Remove asked that question, at half-past two on the following afternoon. Several fellows chuckled as he asked it. Other fellows smiled.

Harry Wharton and Co. neither chuckled nor smiled.

They were not feeling like either chuckling or smiling.

They were, in fact, beginning to feel like kicking themselves: and still more, like kicking William George Bunter.

They were standing in a group by the ancient gateway.

Old Gosling, looking out of his lodge, stared at them, more than once, no doubt wondering why a bunch of Remove juniors were hanging about the gates on a half-holiday, for so long a time. They had been there half-an-hour!

Billy Bunter, certainly, was the fellow to loaf about: but the Famous Five were decidedly not. Yet there they were—idly loafing.

After the school dinner, they had made their preparations for the motor-trip. At two o'clock they were ready. At two, according to the fat Owl, the Bunter car, driven by Mr. Bunter's secretary, was to arrive, and pick them up. They had walked down to the gates to wait for it there. They were still waiting. Half-past had chimed from the clock-tower: but there was no sign on the road yet of Mr. Tregg in Mr. Bunter's car. Other cars passed—quite a number of them—but none stopped, or turned in, at the gates of Greyfriars School. Like half-a-dozen Sister Annes, they watched the road in vain.

But if old Gosling was puzzled to know why those usually strenuous youths were idling about at the gates, Remove fellows were not. Everybody in the Remove knew by this time about that motor-run: and most of the fellows seemed to take the Bounder's view, that Billy Bunter had, as usual, been talking out of the back of his fat neck, and that the Bunter car was likely to arrive at about the same time as Billy Bunter's celebrated postal-order.

Certainly it had not arrived yet.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott came along, with grinning faces. Other fellows, going out of gates, smiled as they passed the waiting group. That group was growing restive. It grew more and more restive as more minutes ticked away.

'I say, you fellows, what's the time?' squeaked Billy Bunter.

'Nearly a quarter to three!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Look here, Bunter, is that car coming, or were you just pulling our leg to get your lines done?'

'Oh, Really, Bull—.'

'Blessed if it doesn't look like it,' said Bob Cherry. 'Anyhow, we can't hang about all the afternoon.'

'Might have been miles away on the bikes by this time!' grunted Johnny.

'Or a mile up the river in the boat!' sighed Bob.

'Or getting off with Smithy on that jolly old picnic of his!' remarked Frank Nugent.

'The mightfulness is terrific!' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But if the absurd car is coming—.'

'If!' grunted Johnny. 'Look here, how long are we going to stand about with the fellows grinning at us? Let's kick Bunter and clear.'

'Beast!'

Harry Wharton gave the fat Owl a sharp look. All the Co. could not help a suspicion, now, that he had invented that motor-run for the sake of the '*quid pro quo*.' Bunter had had his '*quid pro quo*': his lines had been written for him! But the Co. did not look like getting the

motor-run. Not that they cared particularly about that. They had many other attractive resources for a half-holiday. But assuredly they did not want to hang about waiting for a car that was not coming.

On the other hand, Bunter was waiting with them, which looked as if the fat Owl really did expect that car to arrive. Otherwise, the fattest and laziest member of the Greyfriars Remove would have been more likely to be sprawling in an armchair in the Rag.

But—the car had not come! It was hardly twenty miles' run from Folkestone: and even if Mr. Tregg had started late, even if he had missed his way and had to find it again, still he should have materialised before this. He was three-quarters of an hour late on an hour's run: and there was still no sign of him.

'Look here, Bunter, you fat ass!' exclaimed Harry, at last. 'If you've been pulling our leg, own up before we waste any more time.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Cough it up!' growled Johnny Bull. 'You bamboozled us to get your lines done, and we were asses enough to fall for it.'

'I didn't!' howled Bunter. 'I tell you the pater said the car would be here at two o'clock—. I just can't understand why it hasn't come. You can go and ask Quelch, if you like.'

'Yes: I can see us doing it!' said Bob Cherry. 'I—I suppose it's possible that Tregg's had some accident on the road.'

'Rot!' said Johnny Bull, tersely.

'He's a good driver: said Bunter. 'I know he often drives the pater's car: and he drove him down from London yesterday.'

'Well, why hasn't he turned up, if he's going to?'

'Blessed if I know. He will turn up all right!' said Bunter, confidently. 'You just wait!'

'I've waited long enough, for one!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Oh, give him till three!' said Bob. 'If Tregg isn't here by three, we'll boot Bunter for spoofing us, and chuck it.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

And the Co. waited on: waiting for Mr. Tregg to arrive in the Bunter car, or alternatively, for three o'clock to boom out from the clock-tower. Herbert Vernon-Smith sauntered up, with his hands in his pockets, and a sneering grin on his face.

'Waiting for that car?' he inquired.

'Yes!' answered Harry Wharton, curtly.

'Still keeping it up?' grinned Smithy. 'What's the good? Look here, Reddy's gone down to the boat-house, and I'm just going. Why not chuck up playing the goat and come along to Popper's Island? You fellows are not usually funks.'

'If you're asking to have your cheeky head punched, Smithy—.'

The Bounder laughed, and glanced up at the clock-tower.

'What time was the car coming?' he asked.

'Two o'clock.'

'It's just on three. What's become of it?'

There was no answer to be made to that question.

Indeed, the Famous Five were more than beginning to believe, now, that that car was just one more figment of the fat Owl's fat imagination. Smithy laughed again.



'HE WILL TURN UP ALL RIGHT! YOU JUST WAIT!'

'Why not screw your courage up to the sticking-point, as jolly old Shakespeare puts it, and come along to the island?' he said. 'I tell you old Popper's away in London, if that's what scares you. He won't look in at the picnic.'

'Oh, shut up!'

'I'll have some hot-water bottles shoved in the boat, if you like,' said the Bounder, chuckling.

'What on earth for?' asked Bob Cherry, staring.

'Cure for cold feet!' explained Smithy.

And with that, he walked away laughing. He left the Famous Five with very expressive expressions on their faces. Smithy, evidently, thought—or chose to think—that it was 'funk', pure and simple, that kept them from joining in the excursion to the island up the river. He did not believe in the Bunter car, and did not believe that they believed in it. As a matter of fact, by this time their belief had worn very thin.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, there goes three!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, as a chime came through the sunny air.

Harry Wharton cast a last glance into the road. Not a ear was in sight. Tregg, only too clearly, was not coming. He turned back with a knitted brow.

'That does it!' he said. 'I suppose we might have known that that fat ass was spoofing—.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Chuck it, anyway,' said Bob. 'Look here, there's still time to join up with Smithy.'

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Shut up, Bunter!'

'Beast!'

'Come on, and let's push the boat out,' said Bob.

'Let's!' agreed Nugent.

'Smithy makes out that we funk it,' growled Johnny Bull. 'And it jolly well looks like it, too. He jolly well knew that car wasn't coming, and we were asses to let Bunter pull our leg—.'

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'Shut UP!' roared Johnny. 'Look here, you men, Smithy's not going to crow over me. He can keep his dashed picnic: but I'm not going to let him crow.'

'But—!' said Harry.

'Dash it all, if there's a row, we can stand it,' said Bob. 'We've been in rows before, and lived to tell the tale! Let's go.'

Harry Wharton paused. He was unwilling to follow the Bounder's lead in a reckless escapade. But he was evidently in a minority of one. Even Johnny Bull, generally a monument of common-sense, gave him no support. He nodded, at last.

'Let's, if you like,' he said.

'But I say, you fellows!' howled Bunter. 'I tell you it's all right. The car's coming over from Folkestone—.'

'You fat fibber! Look here,' said Johnny Bull. 'We've wasted an hour hanging about, sticking here for nothing. Bump that fat spoofer.'

'Hear, hear!' said Bob Cherry.

'If that's how you thank a fellow for asking you on a motor-run, I can jolly well say— whooop! Leggo! Beasts!'

Bump!

The Famous Five were quite convinced, by this time, that Tregg—if such a person as Tregg existed—was not coming in the Bunter car—if the Bunter car existed! Billy Bunter's 'gas,' as they no longer had any doubt, had wasted a precious hour of a half-holiday: and if ever a fellow deserved to be bumped for his sins, William George Bunter did. So they bumped him.

Billy Bunter sat down in the old gateway, with a bump that almost shook the county of Kent. He roared as he sat. And the Famous Five walked away to the school boatthouse, and left him to roar.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE TENT ON THE ISLAND

'JOLLY!' said Bob Cherry.

There were few things within the wide limits of the universe that the cheerful Bob did not regard as more or less jolly!

But really, it was quite jolly.

The Sark rippled and glimmered under summer sunshine, between its green wooded banks. Popper's Island, thick with trees, rose green from the rippling water. Seven fellows were crowded in the boat, as well as a basket packed with Smithy's lavish supplies for the picnic; but it was a roomy old craft, and they found room. Four of them were pulling, and the boat, well-laden as it was, made good speed up the river. Greyfriars had fallen far astern, and the island rose ahead of them, and the cool shade of the trees looked very inviting.

'The jolliffulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob.' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head. 'Not a soul about,' said the Bounder, scanning the bank, backed by the shady woods of Popper Court. 'Nothing to get into a flap about after all.'

'Who's getting into a flap?' inquired Johnny Bull, in a voice rather resembling that of the Great Huge Bear.

'The flapfulness is not terrific, Smithy, but it would be a boot on the other leg if a keeper came out of the wood, and spotted us landing on the esteemed old Popper's Island.' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

'Who cares?' he answered.

'I do, for one, Smithy,' said Tom Redwing, quietly. 'And the sooner we get out of sight from the bank, the better. I'm not keen on a row with Quelch, if you are.'

'Put it on!' said Bob.

The Bounder gave another shrug. As a matter of fact, he did not care very much if the excursion out of bounds ended in a 'row'. The scapegoat of Greyfriars seemed to thrive on rows.

But the other fellows, at all events, had no desire to stand before a sternly-inquiring gimlet-eye in Mr. Quelch's study at Greyfriars. Four oars pulled harder, as the boat approached the forbidden island, and it shot into the wide channel between the island and the bank.

Harry Wharton stood up and scanned the bank.

Luckily, there was no one to be seen. Smithy, probably, had nerve enough to step ashore on the island, if old Joyce, the head-keeper of Popper Court, had been standing on the bank staring at him. Smithy liked displaying his nerve. But the other fellows, who had no use for swank, and still less for lines from Quelch, would have pulled on up the river, past the island, had a keeper shown up. But there was no sign of one: Popper's Island seemed as solitary as Robinson Crusoe's.

'O.K.,' said Harry. 'Pull in!'

And the boat shot into the landing-place on the island. It bumped on a grassy margin, under the shade of wide-spreading branches. The juniors landed, and the picnic-basket was handed out. Then the boat was pulled and pushed into cover among thick bushes on the island's edge. Even the reckless Bounder did not think of leaving it tied up in full view from the opposite bank.

From the little landing-place, a trodden path led into the interior of the island, winding among trees and thickets. The juniors knew their way about: Greyfriars fellows had often

landed there, before the fussy old baronet of Popper's Court had caused it to be placed outside school bounds. They tramped in single file up the path, Redwing carrying the basket, the Bounder lounging last in the file with his hands in his pockets. Smithy was not going to display the slightest hurry in getting out of sight from the bank.

But it was a relief to all the party to reach the little open glade in the centre of the island: over-topped by a mighty oak that was a landmark for many miles. The glade was circled by trees and thickets that completely hid them from the view of anyone on the bank or on the river.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' ejaculated Bob Cherry, the first to emerge into the open glade. 'Oh, my hat! Somebody's here already!'

'What—?'

'Oh, crumbs!'

The whole party stared. They had expected to find Popper's Island as solitary as it looked. They stared in surprise at a tent standing under the branches of the big oak. The tent-flap was closed, and whether there was anyone inside it, they could not see. But they all stared blankly at the tent.

'Somebody camping here!' said Nugent with a whistle.

'Looks like it!' said Harry.

'By gum! I wonder if old Popper knows!' said Bob. 'He makes fuss enough about a fellow setting foot on his island. But a camping party—.'

'He must know,' said Harry, after a moment's thought. 'A tent couldn't be put up here without everybody at Popper Court knowing. The old bean must have given them leave.'

'Friends of old Popper's, I suppose,' said Bob, with a nod. 'That rather washes out our picnicking here, Smithy.' The Bounder sneered.

'Don't yell before you're hurt!' he suggested. 'Who-ever's camping here, they're not on the island now. There's nobody in that tent—it's been put up for somebody, but that somebody hasn't turned up yet. I'll jolly soon see.'

And the Bounder walked across to the tent. The other fellows watched him, feeling far from easy in their minds. It was not likely that a camper would be shut up in a closed tent on a hot summer's afternoon: but they could not be sure. Smithy coolly proceeded to make sure.

He gave the tent-flap a rough shake. 'Anybody at home?' he called out.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. Had there been 'anybody at home', that 'anybody' could not have failed to look out of the tent with the whole party of breakers of bounds under his eyes. But the captain of the Remove said nothing. He had joined Smithy's party against his better judgment: and had to make the best of it.

However, there was no answer to the Bounder's call. It seemed that the tent was unoccupied, as Smithy had declared.

Smithy, doubtless to make assurance doubly sure, unfastened the tent-flap, threw it wide open, and looked into the tent. Then he glanced round at the waiting group, with a sarcastic face.

'All serene!' he called out. 'Nobody here.'

They joined him, and looked into the tent. It was unoccupied: but evidently prepared for occupation. The earth was covered by a large ground-sheet, on which lay a couple of rugs. A camp-bed was fixed up ready for use. There was a small trestle-table, and a folding chair: an oil cooking stove, a large can of paraffin: a number of cooking utensils, crockery, and other odds and ends. Several boxes stood about, shut and locked. A single bed and a single chair seemed to indicate that the tent was intended for only one person's use: but evidently it was not the camp of some wandering hiker. The furnishings must have made at least a good boat-load. On the table lay a rather expensive-looking fishing-rod, which looked as if

the unknown camper might be there for the fishing in the Sark. But there was no sign of him, and no sign that the tent had, as yet, been occupied at all. It looked as if it had been prepared for the camper when he came: but he had not come yet.

'O.K.,' said Vernon-Smith, letting the tent-flap fall. 'May as well get that basket unpacked, Reddy.'

Tom Redwing gave him a look.

'Well?' snapped Smithy. 'Are you scared by an empty tent?'

'We'd better get off, Smithy,' said Redwing, quietly. 'Whoever had this tent put up, must have hired the island from Sir Hilton Popper. I've heard that it's been let more than once, for holiday camping and fishing. It's plain enough that it's been let to somebody again.'

'Not much doubt about that,' said Bob, 'and we don't want the jolly old tenant to drop in and find us here.' The Bounder looked obstinate.

'I'm not going,' he said.

'Have a spot of sense, Smithy,' exclaimed Harry Wharton, sharply. 'If the island's let to some tenant, we're trespassing here.'

'What about it?' sneered Smithy.

'Lots about it,' said Johnny Bull. 'We don't want a row with old Popper's tenant, whoever he is: and we don't want to stay here till we're ordered off.'

'And a row with Quelch to follow, most likely,' said Frank Nugent.

'I'm not going!' repeated the Bounder, stubbornly. 'Look here, Smithy—!' exclaimed Redwing.

'Have you got the wind up, like these fellows?' asked the Bounder, sarcastically, 'We've come here for a picnic, and if old Popper's let the island to some camper, it doesn't make any difference to me. That tent's been put up ready for him, but he hasn't blown in yet, and there's no reason to suppose that he will blow in to-day any more than yester-day or the day before. Even if he does, I don't suppose he's a fussy old ass like Popper, or that he would care a boiled bean whether we picnicked on the island or not. I'm staying, anyhow.' 'Smithy—'

'You can clear, if you like,' sneered Smithy. 'I'm staying.'

Redwing bit his lip hard. Like Harry Wharton, he had joined in the escapade against his better judgment, and he would have been glad to go, now that it had transpired that the river-island had a tenant. But he knew that it was useless to argue with the obstinate Bounder: and he did not think of leaving Smithy on his own, to face whatever trouble might accrue.

He looked at the Famous Five.

'I shall stay if Smithy does,' he said. 'What about you fellows?'

Harry Wharton's eyes glinted for a moment. He was feeling far more inclined to punch the Bounder's head than to join in his picnic: but he was not going if the Bounder stayed. And his friends, though equally disposed to punch Smithy's obstinate head, agreed with him in that.

'We're staying, if you fellows do!' said Harry, curtly.

'Chance it,' said Bob Cherry.

And that having been settled, no more was said, and the picknickers proceeded to unpack the basket. It was undoubtedly very pleasant, on the thick green grass, with the sunlight filtering through the mighty branches of the oak overhead: and the Bounder's lavish supplies were welcome enough, after the pull up the river. It was quite a cheerful party: though every member of it hoped that the unknown tenant of Popper's Island would not turn up while they were there: a hope that was to prove unfounded.

## CHAPTER 7

### HE COMETH NOT

'OH, lor!' mumbled Billy Bunter.

It was a worried Owl.

Billy Bunter had expected to be enjoying life that sunny summer's afternoon. But there was no trace of enjoyment in his fat face, as he lingered dismally in the old gateway: every now and then blinking down the road through his big spectacles for the car that did not come. Four o'clock chimed from the clock-tower. It was an hour since Harry Wharton and Co. had left him to it.

Bunter was still playing Sister Anne.

After an hour's wait, the Famous Five had had no more doubt than Smithy that that motor-run was one more sample of Bunter's airy fiction. But Billy Bunter knew, if no one else did, that the car really was scheduled to arrive at Greyfriars School that afternoon. His pater had told him so on the telephone. Obviously Mr. Bunter could not be given, like his hopeful son, to talking out of his hat! The car was coming! Only—it hadn't come! Why, was a mystery to Bunter: and a very irritating mystery. Several times he thought of asking leave from Quelch to telephone to Uncle Carter's at Folkestone, to inquire about that car. But any minute it might turn up. Only—the minutes passed, and the car did not turn up.

At four o'clock, Bunter was quite tired of playing Sister Anne at the gate. Indeed he rather regretted that he had waited so long. It did not look much like a motor-run, and tea at Uncle Carter's, now: and there was a picnic on Popper's Island, in which he might have joined, if he had not waited for that wretched car. True, Smithy hadn't asked him to the picnic: but that was a trifle light as air to Bunter: he could have wedged in somehow. Now he made up his fat mind. If that wretched car was not coming, he was going after the picnickers before it was too late.

He rolled off to the House at last.

Skinner and Co., lounging on the steps, grinned at him. 'Back from Folkestone already?' asked Skinner: and Snoop and Stott chuckled.

Disdaining to answer that frivolous question, Billy Bunter rolled into the House, and headed for Mr. Quelch's study. If Quelch was there, he would give him leave to phone: if he was not there, Bunter was prepared to phone without the formality of asking leave. He tapped at the door and opened it.

The study was vacant: Quelch was not there. The fat Owl rolled in, picked up the receiver, and rang Uncle Carter's number at Folkestone.

A plump inquiring voice came through. 'Hallo!'

'Is that Uncle Carter?' squeaked Bunter.

'What? what? Who is speaking?'

'Billy speaking from Greyfriars. I say, the pater said the car would be here at two, and it hasn't come—.'

'Hold on! I will ask your father to come to the phone.' Bunter held on. The voice of the paternal Bunter was heard a few moments later.

'Is that William?'

'Yes—I—.'

'What does this mean, William? Why are you not in the car, and on your way here?'

Explain yourself.'

'The car hasn't come, father—.'

'Nonsense!'

'But it really hasn't—,' wailed Bunter.

'Nonsense!' repeated Mr. Bunter. 'The car left here at one o'clock, to pick you up at your school at two. What do you mean by saying that it has not arrived, when it is now past four o'clock?'

'But it hasn't!' howled Bunter. 'I've been waiting ever since two, and it hasn't come.'

Grunt on the telephone.

'If you are sure of this, William—?'

'Of course I'm sure! I've been waiting all this time. The other fellows have turned it down and gone off. I say—.'

Another grunt.

'I fail to understand this, William. Tregg left here at one, with ample time to reach Greyfriars by two. Yet you tell me that he has not arrived, three hours later. I fail to understand why.'

'If—if he's missed the way—.'

'Nonsense.'

'Or—or had an accident—.'

'Absurd!'

'But if he started—.'

'I have already told you, William, that Mr. Tregg started from here at one o'clock. It is now three hours since he left Folkestone.'

'Then where is he?' gasped Bunter.

Mr. Bunter did not reply to that question. It was evidently a surprise to him to learn that Tregg had not arrived at Greyfriars School. But as he had not arrived, Mr. Bunter certainly did not know where he was.

'I—I say, think he's gone off on a joy-ride on his own?' asked Bunter.

'Do not be ridiculous, William!'

'But he hasn't got here—.'

'You have already told me so. But Mr. Tregg has certainly not gone off on a joy-ride, as you term it. He is a most respectful young man, and quite incapable of such irresponsible conduct,' snapped Mr. Bunter. 'Moreover, it was his own very kind and thoughtful suggestion that the car should be used to-day to give you an outing.'

'But he hasn't come—.'

'It is useless to repeat that statement over and over again, William. No doubt he will arrive later.'

'It's past four now—.'

'I am aware of it.'

'Well, if he doesn't turn up pretty soon, there won't be time for me to get to Folkestone and back before lock-ups.'

'No doubt he will turn up soon—.'

'But if he doesn't—.'

'In that case, William, obviously the excursion cannot take place. Is that all?' asked Mr. Bunter.

Billy Bunter breathed hard.

'No doubt Mr. Tregg will arrive before long, and explain the cause of the delay,' went on Mr. Bunter. 'Possibly there may have been engine trouble. I must add, William, that it was quite unnecessary to incur the expense of a toll call. Good-bye!'

'But—!' began Bunter. 'I say—oh, lor!'

It was useless for the fat Owl to say more. His parent, at the other end, had hung up.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter: referring to the unpunctual Mr. Tregg.

He had been rather disposed to think well of Mr. Tregg, whose happy suggestion it had been to give him a motor-run that afternoon. Now he was feeling very much disposed to punch Mr. Tregg's head—hard!

He rolled out of Mr. Quelch's study with a corrugated fat brow. Skinner and Co. grinned again, as he rolled out of the House: but the disconsolate fat Owl did not heed them.

That motor-run, and tea at Uncle Carter's well-spread board, were off. Whatever might be the cause of Tregg's delay, the fat Owl was not inclined to resume his role of Sister Anne at the gate. Possibly, as Mr. Bunter had suggested, there might have been a spot of engine trouble. Mr. Bunter's car was not in its first youth, and Bunter was aware that there had been such spots on previous occasions. Anyhow, Tregg had not arrived, and very likely wasn't going to arrive in time for the excursion to Folkestone: and Bunter was quite fed up with waiting for a car that did not materialise.

Fortunately, there was still balm in Gilead, so to speak: there was the picnic on Popper's Island. No doubt the Bounder and his party had already arrived on the island, and the picnic was going on. But it was not too late, if the fat Owl lost no time.

Certainly, Bunter had no fancy for pulling a boat a mile or more up the winding Sark. Neither was he likely to arrive in time for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, if he foot-slogged all the way by the tow-path. But there was a short cut through Popper Court Woods, which would bring him out on the bank of the Sark almost opposite the island. A yell across the water would apprise the Bounder and Co. that he was there: and they could send the boat across for him—that was all right. Possibly they might be disinclined to take that trouble, in order to add Bunter to the party: for, fascinating fellow as Bunter knew himself to be, it was a fact that often and often fellows did not seem to yearn for his company. But that, too, was all right—fellows out of bounds would not want a chap yelling at them across the Sark!

Billy Bunter rolled out of gates.

He gave a final blink along the road. But there was still no sign of Mr. Tregg in the Bunter car.

'Beast!' hissed Bunter: and with that he dismissed Mr. Tregg from his mind. He rolled away up the road towards Courtfield, squeezed through a fence, and, with wary eyes and spectacles watchful for keepers, plodded through the dusky green shades of Popper Court Woods, heading for Popper's Island and the picnic.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE TENANT OF POPPER'S ISLAND

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

He paused, with a glass of ginger-beer half-way to his mouth, and listened. The other fellows listened too.

'Somebody's coming!' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

'Sounds like it!'

'Copped!' said Johnny Bull.

'The copfulness is terrific!' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. Apparently he did not care whether the picnic party were 'copped' or not.

The picnic on Popper's Island had been going on cheerily. Smithy was at least a lavish host. The picnic-basket had been well and truly packed: and the supplies were good and ample. The Bounder was wholly at his ease: and the rest, as the pleasant minutes passed, rather forgot that they were in forbidden precincts.

Now they were reminded of that unwelcome fact, as unmistakable sounds came through the trees and thickets, from the landing-place.

The sound of oars had been heard, more than once, as boats passed the island. But this time, the rattle of oars in rowlocks was closer at hand, and followed by the bumping of a boat on the grassy margin. Someone unseen had landed on Popper's Island.

The juniors all looked round: but the trees and thick underwoods hid the landing-place from view. The sounds told them that a boat had stopped at the island, but they could see nothing of it or its occupant.

Further sounds, however, apprised them that, the unseen newcomer was tying up his boat. Then there was a rustle in the thickets.

'He's coming here!' muttered Redwing.

Whoever it was that had landed, having tied up his boat, was now pushing along the track towards the centre of the little island. Evidently the glade was his destination. 'If it's a keeper—!' murmured Nugent. 'That means a row.'

'The rowfulness will be terrific.'

'May be only that jolly old tenant, the chap who had that tent put up!' said Bob. 'If it is, let's hope he's a nice good-tempered man who likes to see nice schoolboys about, what?'

Vernon-Smith, with ostentatious nonchalance, poured out a glass of ginger-beer. Smithy was not going to display any sign of alarm or uneasiness.

But all the party kept their eyes fixed on the spot where, in a minute or two, the newcomer would emerge from the trees into the glade. They could only wait for him to appear, and hope that he was not one of Sir Hilton Popper's keepers. The owner of the tent, who had apparently rented the island from the lord of Popper Court, might perhaps take a good-tempered view of the situation: but discovery by a keeper inevitably meant a report at the school, with trouble to follow.

'Here he is!' muttered Johnny Bull. A figure appeared among the trees.

'Not a keeper!' remarked Vernon-Smith. 'No need to get the wind up!' he added, sarcastically.

It was a relief to the whole party. The first glimpse of the newcomer revealed that he was not one of the keepers of Popper Court. The Greyfriars juniors had a good view of him as he emerged from the trees: and they saw a slight man in town clothes, with a dark and rather thick beard, heavy dark eyebrows, and thick dark hair under a bowler hat. He

looked like a middle-aged City man: though possibly the beard made him look older than he was, for he walked with a very light and springy step, and carried a rather large bag with apparent ease.

The juniors watched him, silently, as he emerged into view. Coming out into the open glade, he moved directly towards the tent. They could hardly doubt that this was the hitherto unknown tenant of Popper's Island, and that he had come to stay—at a rather unlucky moment for the party from Greyfriars.

He had made several steps towards the tent, when he became aware of the presence of the picnickers. No doubt he had expected to find Popper's Island quite solitary, and the sight of a little crowd of schoolboys there surprised him. He spun round towards them, staring at them blankly.

If they had hoped that the tenant of Popper's Island was, as Bob had expressed it, a nice good-tempered man who liked to see schoolboys about, they were undeceived on the spot. For one moment, he stared at them blankly, and then the anger that flashed into his bearded face was quite startling. Anger, indeed, was a mild word for it: it was something like fury that blazed from the bearded face.

He threw the bag down by the tent, and came striding towards them, with knitted brows and glinting eyes.

The whole party rose rather hurriedly to their feet. 'Oh, my hat!' murmured Bob Cherry. 'There's going to be a row, my beloved 'earers.'

Only too plainly, there was going to be a 'row'.

Why the man was so savagely angry was rather a puzzle.

No doubt a person who rented a quiet remote spot for a fishing holiday, might be annoyed or irritated to find a crowd of schoolboys picnicking there. But the bearded face did not express merely annoyance or irritation. It was clear that this unexpected interview with the tenant of Popper's Island was going to be very unpleasant.

'Who are you?' The bearded man rasped out the words, as he came up. 'What are you doing here?'

Six abashed schoolboys were in no hurry to reply. But the Bounder, not at all abashed, or at any rate determined not to be abashed, answered in a cool drawl.

'Who are you, if you come to that?'

'What? what? I am the tenant of this island—I have rented it from Sir Hilton Popper, the proprietor, for the fishing this summer. What are you doing on this island?'

'Picnicking,' answered Vernon-Smith. 'I should think you could see that for yourself.'

'Smithy!' muttered Redwing.

'How dare you come here!' exclaimed the bearded man. 'No one is allowed to land on this island. You are trespassing here.' He scanned the party with angry eyes. 'You are schoolboys—I shall complain to your headmaster.'

'Only a picnic, sir!' said Bob Cherry, soothingly. 'No harm done.'

'The harmfulness is not terrific, esteemed sahib!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh: a remark that caused the bearded man to stare at him. No doubt it was the first time he had heard that remarkable variety of the English language.

'We'll go at once, sir!' said Harry Wharton, quietly. 'Shove those things into the basket, you fellows.'

'The sooner the better,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'We were silly asses to come here. Get a move on.'

'Nothing to get into a flap about, Mr. Beaver!' said the Bounder, with cool impertinence.

'We'll clear, if you don't like our company.'

'Shut up, Smithy!' muttered Nugent.

'What? - What?' The man stared at Vernon-Smith. 'What do you mean? My name is not Beaver—my name is John Robinson. What do you mean?' Then, as it dawned upon him that Smithy was making a slangy allusion to his beard, he made a stride at the Bounder, with uplifted hand, evidently intending to smack his head.

Vernon-Smith jumped back, his eyes gleaming.

'Hands off!' he snapped. 'You'll get as good as you give, if you start that game. Keep your paws to yourself, my man.'

'You impertinent young rascal—!'

'You impertinent old rascal!' retorted the Bounder. 'For goodness sake, shut up, Smithy!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'We're trespassing here, as the man says, and he has a right to order us off. Let's get out of it.'

'Where is your boat? You must have come here in a boat. I did not see it when I landed!' exclaimed the tenant of Popper's Island.

'We left it in the bushes by the landing-place,' answered Harry. 'It won't take us long to get off, Mr. Robinson, and we're sorry we came.'

'You belong to a school somewhere near here?'

'Yes.'

'What is it called?'

'Find out!' said Vernon-Smith, before the captain of the Remove could reply.

The man gave him a glare.

'I shall certainly find out,' he rapped. 'I shall lay a complaint before your headmaster, or ask Sir Hilton Popper to do so. I will not have this island invaded by a gang of young hooligans.'

'Oh, chuck it!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'That's enough from you. Mr. Robinson. Keep a civil tongue in your head.'

'Politeness is the procrastination of princes, as the English proverb remarks, esteemed Mr. Robinson,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Buck up with that basket,' said Bob. 'Keep your temper, sir—we'll be gone in two shakes of a lamb's tail.'

The half-finished picnic was hurriedly packed into the basket. Every member of the party was anxious to get off Popper's Island: excepting, apparently, the Bounder. Smithy lounged with his hands in his pockets, as if desiring to make it quite clear that he was not at all disconcerted by Mr. Robinson's outburst of bad temper. But if Smithy was willing to prolong that extremely uncomfortable scene, the other fellows were not: and they lost no time.

Under the bearded man's angry glare, the basket was quickly packed, and Bob Cherry picked it up and started. The rest followed him, the Bounder last: and Mr. Robinson followed on to the landing-place, evidently intending to see the party off the island.

'Heave out the boat, you men,' said Bob. 'Lend a hand Smithy, if your paws aren't glued in your trousers' pockets.'

'What's the hurry?' drawled the Bounder.

'Oh, don't be an ass!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'Get that boat, you fellows.'

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. But six pairs of hands heaved the boat out of its cover in the bushes, and the juniors crowded in. Harry Wharton picked up an oar to shove off. Smithy loitered on the bank. Smithy was going to display his nerve, and his contemptuous disregard of the angry tenant of Popper's Island, up to the latest moment.

'Jump in. Smithy!' exclaimed Bob.

'For goodness sake, come on, Smithy!' said Tom Redwing, impatiently.

'I don't see why a fellow shouldn't take his time!' drawled Smithy. In quite a leisurely way, he put his foot on the gunwale.

But if Smithy did not see why a fellow should not take his time, Mr. Robinson apparently did: for he came up behind the Bounder, and gave him a violent shove in the back, which pitched him headlong into the boat.

'Oh!' yelled the Bounder, as he sprawled among many legs.

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Bob.

The boat rocked wildly. Harry Wharton shoved the oar at the bank, and the boat slid out into the Sark, as Vernon-Smith, red with rage, scrambled to his feet. He spun round towards the island, his fists clenched and his eyes blazing, evidently intending to leap back to the shore. Luckily, the water had already widened too far for a leap. Tom Redwing caught his chum by the arm.

'Don't be a mad ass. Smithy!' he muttered.

'By gad! I—I'll—!' The Bounder panted. 'Get back to the island—get back, do you hear, and we'll give that hairy rat what he's asked for.'

The other fellows were not likely to heed. Certainly, Mr. Robinson seemed a most ill-tempered, unpleasant, and objectionable person: but a shindy on Popper's Island had attractions for nobody but Herbert Vernon-Smith. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull already had oars out, and they pulled: and the boat glided away from the island, Mr. Robinson glaring after it from the margin.

The Bounder panted.

'Get back, I tell you—.'

'Oh, don't be a goat!' growled Johnny Bull. 'You've landed us all in a row already, and that's enough to go on with.'

'Quite!' said Harry Wharton.

'The quitefulness is terrific.'

Vernon-Smith gave them an angry stare. Then, stooping, he clutched out an apple from the picnic-basket. Before the other fellows could intervene, or even realise his intention, he sent the apple whizzing back at the bearded face staring from the landing-place on the island. His aim was hurried, but it was accurate. The apple landed fair and square on the bearded face, and Mr. Robinson, taken quite by surprise, went backwards, and sat down suddenly and heavily in the grass.

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Bob. 'You mad ass, Smithy—!'

'Pull, for goodness sake!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The boat shot away from the island. The juniors, looking back, had a glimpse, under the shady trees, of Mr. Robinson scrambling up and shaking an infuriated fist. Then the island and its tenant dropped astern, and the Greyfriars fellows pulled on down the river: not in the happiest of moods. The Bounder's last reckless act had, so to speak, put the lid on: and the most hopeful member of the party could hardly hope that they had heard the last from the tenant of Popper's Island.

## CHAPTER 9

### COKER COMES IN USEFUL

'I SAY, you fellows!'

Billy Bunter shouted.

In fact, he bawled.

It was a hot, tired, and peevish Bunter.

The fat Owl had plodded on the footpath through Popper Court Woods: luckily without encountering any of the Popper Court keepers. He had emerged on the tow-path by the Sark: and rolled up the tow-path to a spot opposite the island in the river. Blinking across the shining water at the island, he could see nothing of the picnic party. But he had no doubt that they were screened from sight, in the interior of the little island—as, indeed, they would have been, but for the unexpected and disconcerting arrival of Mr. Robinson, which had interrupted and terminated the picnic.

Quite unaware of the existence of John Robinson, and never dreaming that Harry Wharton and Co. had pulled away in their boat half-an-hour ago, Billy Bunter bawled across to the island, at the top of his fat voice.

But answer there came none.

If, as the fat Owl had no doubt, the picnickers were there, screened by the trees, they did not heed the voice of the charmer. Billy Bunter bawled, and bawled again, and yet again: till wind failed him: and still there was no answer but an echo from the woods.

'Beasts!' breathed Bunter.

He leaned his weight on a tree-trunk, extracted from his pocket a handkerchief much in need of a wash, and mopped a perspiring forehead.

It was hot that afternoon: and Bunter had been exerting himself. True, he had walked only half-a-mile. But in a half-mile there were four furlongs more than Bunter liked on a hot summer's day. It was a warm, fatigued, and very irritated Owl that mopped perspiration from a fat shining face.

'Beasts!' repeated Bunter.

He had quite banked on this. Fellows out of bounds, in danger of being spotted by a keeper and reported at their school, would surely realise how injudicious it was to leave an exasperated fat Owl yelling across to them from the bank. It was only too likely to draw attention to their presence on Sir Hilton Popper's property. But they did not seem to care. If they were there, they gave no sign. Billy Bunter expended all his available breath without result.

'Beasts!' said Bunter, for the third time.

Leaning on the tree, mopping a damp visage, he blinked across at the little wooded island, through his big spectacles, with exasperated blinks. The mere thought of the probable contents of Smithy's picnic-basket made his mouth water. They couldn't have finished yet: and Bunter was hungry. But evidently those indescribable beasts were going to pass him by like the idle wind which they regarded not. If only he could get across to the island, all would be well: at least Bunter hoped that it would. But he couldn't!

A sound of oars in rowlocks caused the fat Owl to transfer his blink from the island, to the upper river. A boat was coming down the Sark, from the direction of Courtfield Bridge.

Bunter's fat face brightened.

All he wanted was to get on Popper's Island: and if he hailed the passing boat, its occupants might give him a lift across. It was a chance, at least: hope springs eternal in the human breast!

He fixed his eyes and spectacles on the boat, as it drew nearer, and came into the channel between the island and the bank. There were three fellows in it, and they were seniors of Greyfriars: Coker, Potter, and Greene, of the Fifth Form. Billy Bunter rolled to the water's edge, waved a fat hand, and squeaked:

'I say, you fellows.'

Potter and Greene, who were pulling, had their backs to him, and did not bother to turn their heads. Horace Coker, who sat in the stern, stared at the fat figure on the bank, and frowned.

Bunter waved again.

'I say, Coker, hold on here a minute!' he howled. Coker of the Fifth continued to stare at him, frowning, but gave no other sign. Coker of the Fifth was, in his own esteem at least, a somewhat important person. He was not pleased by a Lower Fourth junior waving and howling at him from the bank of the Sark. He loftily ignored Bunter.

As the boat surged on Potter and Greene glanced at the fat Owl. But they did not cease to pull. They were not interested in Bunter.

'That fat ass, Bunter,' remarked Potter.

'I say, you fellows, stop!' howled Bunter. 'Pull in here, will you?'

'Likely!' said Potter. 'Pull on, Greeney.'

'Fat ass!' remarked Greene, and he pulled on. 'Will you stop a minute?' yelled Bunter.

'Not a second!' answered Potter.

Really, Fifth-form men, pulling on the river, had neither time nor inclination to stop at a squeak from a fat junior on the bank. It was like that junior's cheek to yell at them at all. On that point, Horace Coker certainly was in accord with his comrades. Nevertheless, at this point Coker became vocal. Coker was one of those fellows who like to speak as one having authority, saying, 'Do this! And he doeth it!' It was not for lesser mortals to decide the matter.

'Hold on, you fellows,' said Coker.

'Look here, Coker—,' grunted Potter.

'I said hold on!' pointed out Coker.

'If we're getting back in time for tea—!' said Greene.

'I said hold on.'

Potter and Greene looked at Coker, and looked at one another, with quite expressive looks. However, they shipped their oars, and held on.

'What do you want, Bunter?' called out Coker.

Actually, he was not in the least interested in Bunter or what he might happen to want. But Potter and Greene had to learn who was who, and what was what.

'I say, I want a lift across to the island, Coker!' squeaked the fat Owl. 'My friends are picnicking there, and I can't get across.'

'Popper's Island!' exclaimed Potter.

'Yes: you see—!'

'You young sweep, it's out of school bounds! Catch us giving you a lift across!' hooted Potter.

'No fear!' said Greene.

Again Potter and Greene were a little too previous.

Coker, on his own, would no doubt have refused such a request. But it was only necessary for any fellow to express any opinion, on any subject, for Coker, automatically as it were, to take the opposite view.

'Why shouldn't we give the kid a lift across?' demanded Coker. 'If his friends are there, why not?'

'Out of bounds,' said Potter.

'We're not prefects, that I know of,' said Coker. 'Shove the boat in and give the kid a lift across.'

'Look here, Coker—!' hooted Potter and Greene together.

'I said shove the boat in.'

'But look here—.'

'Rot!' said Coker, decisively. And he settled the matter by picking up a boathook, catching a branch on the bank, and pulling the boat in. 'Hop in, Bunter.'

The fat Owl gladly hopped in.

'Now pull across, and don't waste any more time jawing,' said Coker, and he sat down again: satisfied that he had made it clear to Potter and Greene who was who and what was what.

Potter and Greene dipped their oars again, resisting a strong indignation to jab them at their great leader: and pulled across to the island. In two or three minutes the boat bumped on the grassy margin.

Billy Bunter scrambled out at the landing-place. The Fifth-form boat pulled on down the river, leaving the fat Owl grinning with satisfaction on Popper's Island.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

He was on Popper's Island at last. He was in time to wedge in at the picnic-lots of time. Leaving the landing-place, he rolled under the trees, following the track to the glade in the centre of the island: nothing doubting that he would find Harry Wharton and Co. there, seated in the grass round the Bounder's ample spread. That the Greyfriars party had long been gone, and that Popper's Island had a new and unexpected inhabitant, Bunter did not yet know. He was about to make that disconcerting discovery.

## CHAPTER 10

### BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!

'OH, crikey!' ejaculated Billy Bunter.

He blinked round the little shady glade in dismay.

He had rolled out of the trees into the glade, expecting to find the picnic party gathered there. But the glade was quite deserted. There was no sign to be seen of the picnickers. All that met Bunter's view was the tent standing under the branches of the big oak in the middle of the glade.

'Oh, crikey!' repeated Bunter.

It dawned upon his fat brain that Harry Wharton and Co. were gone. Evidently, they had departed before Bunter's arrival.

The tent under the oak looked as if the island was tenanted, as Bunter now remembered that it sometimes was, in the summer. No doubt that accounted for the absence of the picnic party. But whatever the reason, they certainly were not on Popper's Island.

Billy Bunter was landed—and stranded!

Coker had given him a lift across to the island. But Coker was not available to give him a lift back to the bank. He had succeeded in getting on the island: but how he was to get off again was rather a problem.

'Oh, lor'!' said Bunter, dismally.

It was a crushing blow. Bunter was hungry. He had banked on wedging into the picnic. And there was no picnic. There was still time to get back to Greyfriars for the school tea—had a boat been available. No doubt the unknown tenant had a boat, as Popper's Island was inaccessible without one. But there had been no boat tied up at the landing-place when Bunter landed: the tenant, evidently, was not at home. Billy Bunter, for the present at least, was stranded like Robinson Crusoe.

'Oh, jiminy!' moaned Bunter.

It had been a luckless day. First of all, that beast Tregg had let him down, and Uncle Carter's well-spread board at Folkestone had faded out. Now the picnic was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. And even the 'doorsteps and dish-water' in hall at Greyfriars were out of his reach. The hapless fat Owl felt rather like the Raven's unhappy master, whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster!

'Oh, lor'!' mumbled Bunter.

It was an unhappy Owl that stood blinking round the deserted glade. Finally his eyes and spectacles fixed on the tent.

Obviously, that tent had been put up for a camper on the island. Somebody must have rented the island for a fishing holiday. Whoever he was, he was not there. But one thing was certain—anyone who camped in a remote spot like Popper's Island, would have to lay in a supply of food! It seemed clear, to Bunter, that there must be food in that tent!

Whoever had got that camp ready for the camper, couldn't possibly have overlooked so very important an item. Billy Bunter was hungry: and he felt assured that there must be food in the tent. He rolled across to it.

The tent-flap was fastened. In a moment it was unfastened, and Bunter was blinking in the tent. The interior did not present quite the same aspect as when Harry Wharton and Co. had looked in, earlier in the afternoon.

They had seen no signs of occupation. But there were plenty of signs of occupation to meet Billy Bunter's eyes. And what he beheld, made those little round eyes glisten behind the big round spectacles.

'Oh, good!' gasped Bunter.

On the trestle table was quite a pile of various kinds of provender. A box lay open, as if recently unpacked. Evidently whoever had prepared that camp, had not forgotten the most important of all items! Potted meats, potted spaghetti, little boxes of cheese, tins of condensed milk: all sorts of pots and tins were piled there, eatables and drinkables of all kinds. Either the unknown camper had an appetite like Billy Bunter's or he had laid in supplies for a long stay, and had no need to go shopping during his sojourn on Popper's Island.

There were indications that a meal had lately been eaten at the table. The camper had been there, though he was not present now.

Billy Bunter made a step into the tent. Then he paused, and blinked round him, at the glade, with a watchful and cautious blink. The lure of food was quite irresistible. At Greyfriars, no fellow's study cupboard was quite safe from Bunter. But even the hungry fat Owl realised that it would be awkward, to say the least, if the tenant of Popper's Island came back suddenly and found him there, devouring the foodstuffs.

But all was silent and still, save for the twittering of the birds in the branches. There was no sound or sign of the man to whom the tent—and the foodstuffs—belonged.

The man, whoever he was, had been there—that was plain. Very likely it was his coming that had cut short the picnic, and caused the picnickers to depart in haste. But he was gone. It looked as if he had stayed only for a meal, and then cleared off.

Possibly he had gone fishing in his boat: or perhaps up to Popper Court on some matter connected with his tenancy: or—if Bunter had guessed it—to lay a complaint about trespassers on the island.

Anyhow, he was not there. Billy Bunter, like Moses of old, looked this way, and looked that way. But he saw nothing to alarm him: and he made up his fat mind, and rolled into the tent.

He deposited his weight in the chair at the table, where the camper had been sitting at his meal, and started.

His fat face had been clouded. But the clouds had rolled by now. The foodstuffs were good and ample. The food was all right: and when the food was all right, everything was all right, at least in the fixed opinion of William George Bunter.

The problem of getting off the island remained unsolved. But that could wait till he had satisfied the yearnings of the inner Bunter. First things came first!

A quite cheery fat face beamed over that ample supply of provender: which, under Billy Bunter's vigorous onslaught, grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

The fat Owl had intended to keep an eye, and an ear, for the unknown camper. The man was gone: but he might, of course, return at any time: in fact was certain to return sooner or later. Billy Bunter did not want to be caught in the tent, in the very act of devouring the provisions.

But when Billy Bunter was eating, he was accustomed to concentrate on it and forget lesser things. He forgot the camper.

He was suddenly reminded of him.

After a quarter of an hour of uninterrupted munching and crunching, the keen edge was taken off Bunter's appetite. He slowed down. But he was still busy, when a shadow fell across the opening of the tent.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. He jumped and blinked round. He was dealing with a pineapple he had extracted from a tin. Bunter liked pineapples. But he forgot even the attractions of a juicy pineapple, as that shadow suddenly darkened the sunlight.

A man stood at the opening, staring in. Apparently he was surprised to find the tent tenanted. He did not look pleased. He looked quite the reverse of pleased.

Billy Bunter blinked at a bearded face, and a frowning brow under a bowler hat. He had never seen the man before, but he could guess that this was the camper: and the proprietor of the foodstuffs he had been parking at such a rate. A pair of sharp eyes glinted at him from under dark bushy brows.

'You young rascal!' rasped a most unpleasant voice.

'Oh! I—I—' Bunter heaved up from the chair, in alarm. 'I—I—I say, I—I haven't eaten anything—.'

'What?'

'I—I—I mean, I—I—I—.' stuttered Bunter. He backed away, his eyes and spectacles fixed on the angry bearded face that stared at him. The man looked as if he was about to rush in, and smack Billy Bunter's fat head right and left.

But if that was his intention, he changed it. The angry expression on his face changed, as he stared harder at the fat features of the Owl of Greyfriars. It was as if he saw something familiar in those fat features: something that he appeared to recognise.

'Who are you?' he snapped. 'What is your name?'

'Bib-bob-bub—.'

'What?'

'Bib-bob-bub—Bunter!' stuttered the alarmed fat Owl.

'Bunter! Your name is Bunter?' The man stared harder, as if those sharp eyes would pierce the fat face.

'Oh! Yes! I—I—.'

'You belong to Greyfriars School?'

'Oh! Yes!' gasped Bunter.

'Why are you here?'

'I—I—I—I came to join some pals of mine, who were picnicking here,' gasped Bunter.

'But—but they were gone, and—and I couldn't get off the island—a fellow gave me a lift across from the bank, but he's gone, and—and—and I—I—I couldn't get off, and—and—and—.'

'I see. You are trespassing on this island, like the other young rascals. And I find you looting my tent.'

'I—I—I—Ow! Leggo!' yelled Bunter, as the bearded man made a stride at him, and grasped him by the collar. 'I—I say—ow! Leggo!'

Mr. Robinson did not let go. With a grip of iron on the fat junior's collar, he swung him out of the tent, hooking him out rather like a fat winkle from a shell.

He did not speak again. With his knuckles grinding into the back of a fat neck, he marched the hapless Owl across the glade, and along the path under the trees to the landing-place.

Billy Bunter stumbled along, gasping for breath, wriggling in that iron grasp. Middle-aged as he looked, Mr. Robinson seemed to have plenty of muscle. The fat Owl was quite helpless in his grip.

At the landing-place, a small boat rocked on the water, tied up to a willow. This evidently was Mr. Robinson's own craft.

'Get in!' he snapped.

He pitched Bunter towards the boat. The fat Owl scrambled in. The camper followed him in, cast loose the painter, picked up the oars, and pushed off. Billy Bunter sat blinking at

him, with his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles, as he pulled for the bank. In a few minutes the boat was bumping under the tow-path.

'Get out!'

Bunter scrambled out. A shove from an oar, in the middle of his fat back, assisted him, and he sprawled on the tow-path, with a howl.

'Ow! Beast wow!'

Without speaking again, the man dipped his oars, and pulled back to the island. Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet, and glared after him with a glare that might almost have cracked his spectacles.

'Beast!' he roared.

And having delivered that valediction, the fat Owl rolled away, to tramp back to Greyfriars.

## CHAPTER 11

### SENT UP TO THE HEAD

'POPPER!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'The esteemed and ridiculous Popper!'

'Gentlemen, chaps, and fatheads,' said Bob Cherry. 'There's going to be a spot of bother!' No member of the Famous Five doubted that, as they gazed at the tall, bony figure of the lord of Popper Court, striding in at the gates of Greyfriars.

It was the following day, after third school. Harry Wharton and Co. were not feeling quite at ease that morning.

So far, nothing had been heard about the escapade of the day before. They hoped that nothing would be heard about it. But they could not help feeling that in all probability something would. And the sight of Sir Hilton Popper confirmed that uneasy foreboding. True, Sir Hilton was one of the governors of the school, and might have called on business quite unconnected with fellows in the Lower Fourth. But that seemed rather too much to hope.

'He doesn't look too jolly good-tempered!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'That's nothing new,' said Nugent.

'Cap him,' said Bob. 'May as well let him see what nice-mannered, respectful chaps we are, what?'

And the Famous Five 'capped' Sir Hilton, as he passed.

Sir Hilton did not even deign to acknowledge that respectful salute. He stalked on towards the House regardless. There was a frown on his brow, and a glint in his eyes, into one of which his eyeglass was screwed. Clearly, it was not in the best of tempers that the baronet was paying that visit to Greyfriars School.

But though he took no notice whatever of the Famous Five, he did give heed, as his eye and eyeglass fell on a fat figure in the quad. He stared at Billy Bunter, who blinked back at him in alarm.

'Huh!' grunted Sir Hilton.

Having grunted, he stalked on, and disappeared into the House.

'If it's about that dashed island, he doesn't know it was us!' remarked Bob. 'He never even looked at us.'

The Bounder came up to the group. Redwing, who was with him, was looking grave: but Smithy seemed quite at his ease. He smiled sarcastically as he glanced over five very thoughtful faces.

'Getting the wind up already, because that old goat's blown in?' he asked.

'Oh, shut up!' growled Johnny Bull. 'It looks like a row: and it's you that's landed us all in the soup.'

'We're not in the soup yet,' said Vernon-Smith. 'That cross-grained old beaver on the island couldn't know that we're Greyfriars men. He's a stranger in these parts. He wouldn't know a Greyfriars cap from a Highcliffe or St. Jude's or any other. How would he know we belong here?'

'That's so!' said Harry Wharton, slowly. 'But—.'

'If the Beaver came here, he could pick us out,' said Bob.

'He hasn't come! Old Popper's come. He can't know a thing—and he's not going to know, from me,' said Smithy. 'If I'm asked questions, I wasn't within a mile of Popper's Island yesterday afternoon.'

'Smithy!' murmured Redwing.

'Oh, don't be an ass!' exclaimed the Bounder. 'If the Beaver came here, the game would be up, but so far as old Popper's concerned, we've only got to tell the same story, and stick to it.'

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

'If that's good enough for you, Smithy, it's not good enough for this Co.,' he said. 'We were silly asses to let you jeer us into going to the island at all, and we've only got ourselves to blame. But we're not getting out of it by telling lies if we're asked questions.'

'No fear!' said Bob, emphatically.

'The no-fearfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Great is truth and it shall prevail upon the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

'If you choose to ask for trouble—!' he sneered.

'I say, you fellows!' squeaked a fat voice. The Owl of the Remove rolled up, with a worried fat face.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Got any news of that jolly old car, Bunter?' asked Bob Cherry. 'Asking us for another motor-run after class?'

'Oh, really, Cherry—I—I say, you fellows, did you see old Popper come in—?'

'Sort of,' answered Bob.

'I—I—I say, think he's after me?' asked Bunter, anxiously.

'After you!' repeated Bob. 'Why should he be after you, old fat man? There can't be a pie or a cake missing from Popper Court.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He jolly well stared at me, before he went in,' mumbled Bunter. 'Looks to me as if that beast on the island may have told him.'

All the juniors stared at the fat Owl.

'You weren't on the island,' said Harry Wharton. 'What do you mean, you fat ass?'

'You—you see, that car never came after all,' said Bunter. 'I—I waited till four, and then chucked it, see, and—and I thought I'd join up with you fellows for the picnic, and Coker gave me a lift across to the island in his boat.'

'Oh, my hat! Then you're in it too!' exclaimed Bob. 'Did the Beaver catch you on his island?'

Billy Bunter gave a wriggle, as if he could still feel the knuckles of the tenant of Popper Island grinding into his fat neck.

'I—I never found anybody there,' he explained. 'And—and the beast came back suddenly, and caught me in the tent—.'

'In the tent!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'What were you doing in his tent?'

'Oh! Nothing!' said Bunter, hastily. 'He—he may have thought that I was scoffing his grub, you know, as—as he saw me—.'

'You fat villain!'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'You blithering, blethering, bloated bloater!' exclaimed the Bounder, savagely. 'You didn't yell out that you belonged to Greyfriars, did you?'

'Oh, really, Smithy—.'

'Did you?' howled Smithy.

'Well, he asked me,' said Bunter. 'Come to think of it, I don't know how he knew: perhaps he knows our colours. Anyhow he asked me my name, and I told him, and then he asked me if my school was Greyfriars, and I said yes, and—.'

'You fat idiot!'

'That does it!' said Bob Cherry. 'If the Beaver caught one Greyfriars man, it wouldn't take him long to guess that the others were out of the same packet. We're for it, my beloved 'earers.'

'That's why old Popper's here, then,' said Frank Nugent, with a nod. 'Lines all round from Quelch, or Extra School on Saturday! Not much good your spinning a yarn about being miles away from the island, Smithy, when old Popper knows as much as we could tell him.'

The Bounder scowled. Obviously, his resource of 'telling the tale' was of no use, in the circumstances. Billy Bunter had put 'paid' to that.

'But—but I say, you fellows, think old Popper's after me? Perhaps—perhaps he's only after you fellows!' said Bunter, hopefully. 'What do you think?'

The fact that seven other fellows were 'in the soup' did not seem to be worrying the fat Owl unduly. But evidently he was very much worried about his own share of the soup. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes old Wingate!' ejaculated Bob Cherry, glancing towards the House. 'He's looking for somebody—think it might be chaps about our size?'

'The mightfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob.'

Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, had come out of the House, and was looking about him: evidently in search of somebody. As his eyes fell on the group in the quad, he came directly towards them.

'Bunter!' he rapped.

'Oh, lor'! I—I say, it wasn't me, Wingate!' gasped Bunter.

'What wasn't you, you young ass?'

'Oh! Nothing—I—I mean, anything I—I—I never went to Popper's Island, and—and I only went because I thought there was a picnic—.'

'That will do,' said Wingate. 'You're to go to the Head's study, Bunter.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Your name is known,' said Wingate. 'There are seven others whose names are not yet known.' He fixed his eyes on the disconsolate group. 'Dr. Locke has told me to send them to his study, and I've got to sort them out. I think perhaps you young scamps can save me the trouble. You all went off in a boat together yesterday afternoon—I saw you from the raft. Well?'

'No need to look further, Wingate,' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

'Guilty, my lord!' said Bob Cherry.

'You young asses!' said Wingate. 'Why can't you keep in bounds? It seems that that island is let to some johnny from town, who is kicking up a fuss about trespassers. You ought to have had more sense, Wharton, at least—you're Head Boy of your form, and ought to know better.'

Harry Wharton coloured.

'I know that, Wingate,' he said.

'Well, you're all to go to the Head!' said Wingate. 'Cut off.'

Seven juniors walked away to the House: six of them with serious faces, one of them scowling. Slowly, Billy Bunter got into action, and rolled after them. Evidently, their form-master was not going to deal with the matter: it was not going to be 'lines from Quelch'. They were 'sent up to the Head': and kind old gentleman as Dr. Locke undoubtedly was, the last thing that any Greyfriars fellow ever desired was to be 'sent up' to him! It was a dismal party that arrived at the door of the headmaster's study, and reluctantly entered that dread apartment.

## CHAPTER 12

### STERN JUSTICE!

'HUH!'

Sir Hilton Popper uttered, or rather grunted, that remark, as he bent his grizzled brows at the little crowd of delinquents, and his eyeglass gleamed at them.

Dr. Locke sat at his table with a frowning brow. Sir Hilton sat as bolt upright as a ramrod. He looked—as in fact he was—extremely angry. Dr. Locke looked perturbed and annoyed. Possibly his annoyance was as much due to Sir Hilton's visit, as to the delinquency of eight members of the Greyfriars community. Sir Hilton was a baronet, a land-owner, and a governor of the school: quite a great man. But his company was not exhilarating.

'Huh!' repeated Sir Hilton. 'Are these the boys? Mr. Robinson was able to give me the name of only one—Bunter. There were seven others.'

'Wharton!' said the Head. 'I have received a serious complaint from Sir Hilton Popper—'

'Very serious indeed, sir!' barked Sir Hilton.

'It appears that a number of Greyfriars boys trespassed on the island in the river yesterday afternoon,' continued Dr. Locke, apparently deaf to Sir Hilton's bark. 'Are you and your companions the boys concerned?'

Harry Wharton hesitated a moment. 'Trespassing' was a rather disagreeable description of the excursion to Popper's Island. Still, it was a true bill: and he had to answer.

'We were there, sir!' he said.

'Only a picnic, sir!' ventured Bob Cherry. 'No harm done.'

Snort, from Sir Hilton Popper.

'No harm done!' he repeated. 'Did you say no harm done, boy? Huh! Dr. Locke, I have told you that the island is let to a visitor—a Mr. Robinson—for the fishing. Mr. Robinson, sir, when he engaged to rent the island several weeks ago, made it a point—a very particular point—that he should be undisturbed there. He desired, sir, a quiet holiday—a rest, sir, in a quiet and remote spot, free from disturbance. This, sir, I guaranteed to him. I had reason to suppose, sir, that I could give such a guarantee, with respect to a portion of my own property, sir! And what was the result?'

'Really, Sir Hilton—'

'What, sir, was the result?' repeated Sir Hilton. 'When I returned from London yesterday, sir, I found Mr. Robinson awaiting me at Popper Court. I learned that he had already called in the afternoon, sir, to complain of trespassers on the island. He called again in the evening, sir, to renew his complaint, with the addition, sir, that still another trespasser had been on the island—'

'Quite so! And—'

'He was very much annoyed, sir!' Sir Hilton barked on, as if Dr. Locke had not spoken.

'And he had reason to be annoyed, sir, as I was compelled to admit. He pointed out, sir, that I had engaged that he should be undisturbed on the island in the Sark, and he alluded, sir, to the circumstance that he had paid the rent for the island in advance, trusting to my guarantee to that effect. It was an extremely unpleasant interview for me, sir.'

'No doubt, Sir Hilton. I—'

'Most unpleasant!' barked Sir Hilton. 'I could only assure Mr. Robinson, sir, that I would take every step to put a stop to such annoyance as he had suffered. A most unpleasant position for me, sir. I was placed in the position, sir, of having failed to keep an engagement, after having received the consideration due, sir, Huh!'

Sir Hilton, red in the face by this time, snorted again, most emphatically. It was clear that his interview with his tenant had been very perturbing and disagreeable. The Greyfriars juniors had not found Mr. Robinson an agreeable man to deal with. Neither, evidently, had the lord of Popper Court.

'It was most unfortunate—!' said the Head.

'Most, sir!' barked Sir Hilton. 'I am not used, sir, to being called to account—practically called to account, sir—by a—a—a person from the City! But Mr. Robinson's complaint was just, sir, as I could not deny. He laid emphasis, sir, on the circumstance that he had paid his rent in advance, and had expended a not inconsiderable amount, sir, on hiring the appurtenances of his camp from Chunkley's Stores in Courtfield: paying their by no means moderate charges for fitting up his camp, sir, ready for his arrival. And when he did arrive, yesterday afternoon, he found that camp in possession of a mob of schoolboys, who treated him, sir, with impertinence when he ordered them off.'

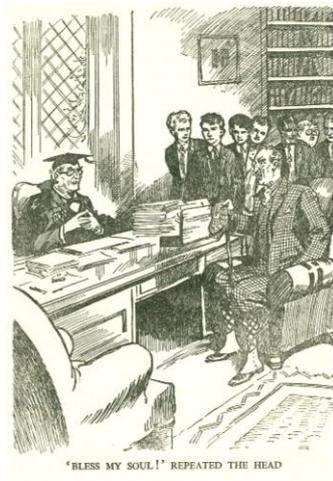
'I trust not, Sir Hilton—.'

'I repeat, sir, that he was treated with impertinence; one of the boys actually throwing an apple at his head as they left in their boat.'

'Bless my soul!'

'And later, sir, when he returned from his call at Popper Court in the afternoon, he found another boy—this boy Bunter—actually inside his tent, sir, actually engaged in devouring his provisions, as if the place belonged to him.'

'Bless my soul!' repeated the Head.



'Luckily, sir, he learned from Bunter where to look for the trespassers,' went on Sir Hilton. 'That is why I am here, sir, I demand the most condign punishment, sir, for all concerned in this—this outrage! Mr. Robinson, sir, described it as an outrage, and I can only endorse his words.'

Sir Hilton paused at last; possibly because he was running short of breath.

The hapless juniors had listened in silence to the tirade. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that the lord of Popper Court was angry. His tenant had certainly made matters very unpleasant for him—evidently as unpleasant as he could: with the object of making the trespassers suffer for their sins. He had practically set Sir Hilton on them like a bulldog. Sir Hilton having ceased to bark, Dr. Locke was able to speak at last. He fixed his eyes sternly on the juniors. 'Have you anything to say?' he rapped.

'Only that we never knew the island was tenanted when we went there, sir,' answered Harry Wharton.

'You were aware that the island was out of school bounds?'

'Oh! Yes!'

'You have trespassed on private property,' said Dr. Locke. 'You have caused annoyance to a gentleman who came to this vicinity for a quiet holiday, and to Sir Hilton Popper. I cannot but take a very serious view of the matter.'

The Head paused, frowning. Possibly, in his own mind, he regarded the tenant of Popper's Island as a cantankerous person who was making a mountain out of a molehill, and the whole affair as a storm in a tea-cup. But Sir Hilton's demand for stern justice could not be disregarded.

'Every boy concerned in this thoughtless and reckless escapade will be severely caned, by me!' said the Head, after pausing a moment or two.

'Oh, crikey!' came in a gasp from Billy Bunter. The others stood silent, the Bounder scowling blackly.

Sir Hilton Popper rose to his feet.

'Very good, sir!' he barked. 'I trust it will be a warning to them to respect the rights of property, sir. If there should be further trespassing—'

Dr. Locke breathed rather hard.

'There will be no further trespassing. Sir Hilton!' he said, icily. 'In such an event, a flogging will be administered. But I am quite assured that these boys will be very careful not to offend again.'

'I trust so, sir!' barked Sir Hilton. 'Good morning, sir!'

Sir Hilton Popper marched out, stiff as a ramrod, apparently satisfied with the punishment awarded to the offenders. He was the only person who was satisfied! Dr. Locke was left with an unwelcome task: still more unwelcome to eight members of the Remove! The headmaster took a cane from his desk.

What followed was painful.

When it was over, seven fellows trailed out of the Head's study, in grim silence, but looking as if they found life hardly worth living even at Greyfriars. One rolled out uttering sounds of woe. Smithy and Redwing and the Famous Five could bear what had come to them in silence, if they liked: but Billy Bunter had no use for silence. Billy Bunter mumbled and moaned. and gurgled and groaned, and like Rachel of old mourned and could not be comforted—till at length the clang of the dinner-bell brought him a ray of consolation.

## CHAPTER 13

### BUMPS FOR THE BOUNDER

'SHUT that thing off!' snapped the Bounder.

Six fellows looked at him, rather expressively.

It was after tea, in No. 1 Study in the Remove. Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, had tea'd with the Famous Five: and he had brought along his portable radio from No. 2 Study. It was standing on the table, and at the moment, was discoursing sweet music, when Vernon-Smith looked in at the door.

Smithy did not look in a good temper.

It was one of the Bounder's ways, when his temper was irritable, to allow signs of the same to be seen. He had not, and would not have cared to have, a spot of the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. If Smithy was 'shirty', anybody at Greyfriars—or anywhere else—was welcome to observe the same. And Smithy had been decidedly and unmistakably 'shirty' ever since the visit to the Head's study that morning.

Nobody liked being sent up to the Head. Still less, did anybody like bending over under a cane. Billy Bunter seemed to find some solace in yelling: the Bounder in scowling: while the Famous Five had taken it as philosophically as they could. Most of the pangs having worn off by tea-time, they were feeling fairly cheerful: and they were quite interested to hear, on Tom Brown's radio, the county cricket news, which was almost due. Smithy, to judge by his look, was not taking the affair in the least philosophically: though really he had less of which to complain than the others, for it was in fact his own wilful recklessness, and his malicious jeers, that had landed the whole party in the 'soup'.

He had come to No. 1 Study after tea, apparently to speak to the Co.: but the radio was, so to speak, an impediment in his speech. With his usual deplorable manners when he was 'shirty', he snapped to the juniors to shut it off.

Tom Brown looked at him, looked at the other fellows, and twiddled a dial. The music ceased. He did not look pleased. Neither did Harry Wharton and Co. They wanted to hear the news on the radio: and they did not want to hear anything from Herbert Vernon-Smith. They had had enough of Smithy, of late.

'Want anything, Smithy?' asked Harry.

'I want to speak to you fellows, if you can manage without that din for a minute or two!' grunted Smithy. 'If it's about the cricket—'

'It isn't.'

'What is it—another run out of bounds?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically. 'Like us to join up in playing the goat again, and ask the Old Man for another six?'

The Bounder gave him a scowl.

'We've been licked all round, for nothing—or next to nothing!' he said. 'If you fellows feel like taking it lying down, I don't.'

'Rot!' said Bob Cherry, tersely.

'I'm not blaming the Old Man,' went on Smithy. 'He had to play up when that old goat Popper came here and chivvied him. I'm not blaming him—.'

'That would comfort him, if he knew!' remarked Johnny Bull, still sarcastic.

'I'm not blaming old Popper much, either. He's a disgruntled fussy old goat, but that man Robinson chivvied him into coming here and kicking up a fuss. You know that from what he said.'

'Well, what about it?' asked Harry, restively.

'Old Popper was only a puppet, with that man Robinson pulling the strings. It was that hairy rat on the island who got us sent up to the Head. And why?'

'He doesn't seem to love us very much!' sighed Bob Cherry. 'No accounting for it—but he doesn't.'

'What was there to make a fuss about?' said Vernon-Smith, with smouldering eyes. 'We all knew that it would be lines from Quelch if it came out that we'd been on the island. That's all in the day's work. That vicious brute landed us in a row with the Head, with a whopping all round. Where was the harm in a picnic on his dashed island, even if he was renting it from old Popper? What was there for him to fly off the handle about, as he did?'

'Nothing much,' said Harry. 'He seems to have a rotten temper, that's all.'

'The rottenfulness was terrific.'

'Well, I'm not getting the benefit of his rotten temper, without giving something back!' snarled the Bounder. 'He can learn to keep his rotten temper in hand.'

'There are fellows who don't take much trouble to control their tempers,' remarked Johnny Bull, who seemed in a quite sarcastic mood that afternoon. 'They don't all live on Popper's Island, either.'

'True, O King!' grinned Bob Cherry.

'Look here, Smithy, you're talking rot!' said the captain of the Remove quietly. 'That man on the island seems a disgruntled brute, and he's kicked up a tremendous fuss about next to nothing. Every fellow here would like to punch his head, if you come to that—.'

'Hear, hear!' said Bob.

'But that's all,' added Harry Wharton. 'It's over and done with. Forget all about it.'

The Bounder sneered.

'I'm not taking it lying down, if you fellows are!' he said. 'The Beaver is going to get something back from me.'

'Oh, rubbish!'

'If you fellows will back me up—.'

'Forget it!'

'I tell you, we can make that hairy rat sorry for himself!' said the Bounder, savagely. 'We can rag his tent, or set his boat adrift and leave him stranded, or—.'

'You heard what the Old Man said.'

'I don't care two straws what the Old Man said.'

'Well, we do!' said Wharton, drily. 'Nobody here wants a Head's flogging for ragging on that dashed island.'

'The wantfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Smithy,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his head. 'Let the execrable Beaver rip.'

'I'll let him rip when I've given him a Roland for an Oliver!' said Vernon-Smith, 'and if you haven't the nerve to back me up, I'll go it alone. This is the study for getting the wind up, and no mistake.'

Harry Wharton's brow darkened, and the other four members of the Co. gave Vernon-Smith grim looks. On the previous day, they had allowed the Bounder's jeers to land them in a reckless escapade, with extremely uncomfortable results all round. They were not to be caught twice with the same bait.

'That's enough from you, Vernon-Smith,' said Harry. 'If you can't keep a civil tongue in your head, keep out of this study. There's the door.'

'So you funk it all round, what?' asked Vernon-Smith, with a glare of savage contempt at the whole Co. 'Of all the rotten funks—.'

The Bounder got no further than that. Five fellows jumped up, as if moved by the same spring. The Co. seemed fed up with Smithy's jeers: which was not, perhaps, surprising.

Smithy, apparently, had more to say: but he did not get it out. He was interrupted by being collared on all sides.

'Bump him!' said Bob Cherry.

Bump!

'Oh!' yelled the Bounder, as he sat down in the doorway of No. 1 Study. 'Why, you rotters—you—you—you—!'

'Give him another!'

Bump!

'Oh, gad! I—I—Let go! I—I—I'll—!'

'One more for luck!' said Bob Cherry.

Bump!

'Now chuck him out!'

Vernon-Smith, ruffled and rumped and spluttering for breath, rolled out into the Remove passage. The door of No. 1 Study slammed after him.

He scrambled to his feet, red with rage. His hand flew to the door-handle, to hurl open the door. But he paused. He was powerfully inclined to charge back into the study, hitting out right and left. But he realised that he did not want to be 'chucked out' again, to land on his neck in the passage. He breathed fury: but he did not charge back into No. 1. He turned away, and tramped up the passage to his own study, in the worst temper ever.

CHAPTER 14

VERY QUEER!

'I SAY, you fellows—!'

'Shut up, Bunter.'

'But I say—.'

'Put a sock in it!' hooted Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'Pack it up!'

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly into No. 1 Study, through his big spectacles. It seemed that he was, as so often happened, superfluous.

Really, it was too bad. Time had been wasted by the Bounder's visit. The news was on at Broadcasting House, but it was not on in No. 1 Study in the Remove at Greyfriars. The Bounder had departed—on his neck, as it were. Probably the news was half-over by that time. In the general news the juniors were not much interested. But they did want to hear about the cricket. And no sooner had they settled down after Smithy's drastic departure, than Billy Bunter happened. The charms of Bunter's conversation, if any, had long since palled on his form-fellows. They wanted to hear from the B.B.C. not from W.G.B.

'Shove it on, Browney!' said Johnny Bull. 'I want to know how Yorkshire are doing, if it's not too late.'

'And Surrey—!' said Harry Wharton.

'I say, you fellows—.'

'Kick Bunter, somebody.'

'Beast! I say, I'm in a row with Quelch!' said Bunter, dolefully. 'I say, I've had six from the Old Man to-day: and now Quelch has started. Mrs. Kebble makes out that somebody snooped a cake from below stairs, and of course they put it on me—you know the way it's always put on me, if any grub is missing! That's the sort of justice a fellow gets here.'

'Ring off!'

'I've got two hundred lines—.'

'Good! Go and do them.'

'Beast! I mean, look here, old chaps, suppose we whack them out, as we did yesterday, what?' asked Bunter, hopefully. 'As Browney's here, he can help: and if the six of you do twenty each, that will be a hundred and ninety, and I'll do the other ten—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, when a fellow's got lines after a licking from the Old Man!' said Bunter, warmly. 'Look here, you chaps, you help me with the lines—same as you did yesterday—.'

'You fat fibbing foozler.' said Bob Cherry. 'You diddled us into doing your lines, with a yarn about a motor-run. Got another motor-run up your sleeve?'

'Well, it wasn't my fault Tregg never turned up,' said Bunter. 'He was coming over from Folkestone all right—.'

'Gammon!'

'I tell you I got the pater on Quelch's phone, and he said that Tregg started from Folkestone at one o'clock yesterday—.'

'Is he still on the road, then?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically. 'He hasn't hit Greyfriars yet. It's taking him a long time to do twenty miles.'

'Shove it on, Browney.'

Tom Brown turned the dial.

'I say, you fellows, don't start that thing!' howled Bunter. 'A fellow can't hear his own voice with that beastly radio on.'

'Anybody want to hear Bunter's voice?' asked Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Apparently nobody did. In fact, if the radio drowned Billy Bunter's voice, that circumstance probably added to its attractions, in No. 1 Study. Anyhow, Tom Brown turned it on, and out came the announcer's voice, loud and clear.

Unluckily, it came out only to make the more or less interesting announcement, 'And that is the end of the news!'

'Missed it!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Bother!' said Bob Cherry.

The announcer's voice continued, 'But here is a police message'.

'May as well shut off,' said Tom Brown. 'We don't want that.'

'Not a lot!' agreed Nugent.

'I say, you fellows, keep it on!' squeaked Bunter. 'Might be a jolly interesting murder or something.'

'You fat ass!'

'Yah! You keep it on, Browney,' hooted Bunter. 'Let's hear it, I tell you. Might be a murder in a trunk, or something.'

Billy Bunter did not mind missing the cricket news.

But anything of a more lurid nature evidently had an appeal for him.

'Oh, all right,' said Tom Brown. And the announcer was allowed to run on, for the edification of William George Bunter.

The next moment, every fellow in No. 1 Study jumped. 'Mr. Eldred Tregg, who left Folkestone in a Ford car at one o'clock yesterday, is requested to communicate with Scotland Yard without delay,' said the announcer.

'Tregg!' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

'Listen!' said Nugent. 'If that's Bunter's Tregg—.'

The voice went on:

'Mr. Tregg, who is secretary to Mr. W. S. Bunter of Bunter Villa, Surrey, left Mr. Humphrey Carter's residence at Folkestone, at one o'clock on Tuesday, to drive Mr. Bunter's car to Greyfriars School, a distance of about twenty miles.'

'Oh!' gasped all the juniors. There was no doubt now!

'It has been ascertained that the car did not call at the school, as arranged. Mr. Tregg appears to have driven in a totally different direction, after leaving Folkestone, as the car has been found abandoned on a road in Sussex.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'What the dickens—.'

'Nothing has been heard of Mr. Tregg since. He has not been seen, and has not communicated with his employer. No accident appears to have occurred, as the car was found quite undamaged. The police authorities are very anxious to get in touch with Mr. Tregg, and the following description has been issued: Age about thirty, slight in build, clean shaven, close-cropped fair hair, dark eyes. Anyone in possession of information regarding Mr. Tregg or his movements, is requested to communicate at once with Scotland Yard. That is the end of the message.'

Sweet music followed: but Tom Brown shut the radio off.

'Oh, crikey!' said Bunter.

'Then—then there really was a Tregg, and there really was a car!' said Bob Cherry. 'That's Bunter's Tregg all right.'

'And Bunter wasn't gammoning, for once!' said Johnny Bull, in wonder. 'Who could have guessed that one?'

'Well, of course we thought he was pulling our leg, as the car never came,' said Frank Nugent. 'But—'

'We bumped him for spoofing us, and he hadn't!' said Harry Wharton. 'You shouldn't be such a fibber, old fat man—'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'We take it back, old porpoise!' said Bob Cherry. 'You can consider yourself unbumped.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I jolly well told you the car was coming!' said Bunter. 'You didn't believe me. Perhaps you'll believe me another time.'

'Perhaps!' said Bob. 'A large size in perhapses, though.'

'The perhapsfulness is terrific, my esteemed fibbing Bunter,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Yah! But I say, you fellows, what on earth's become of Tregg?' asked the fat Owl. 'I thought he might have gone off on a joy-ride on his own, when he never turned up. But he seems to have left the car in another county, and disappeared. It's queer.'

'The queerfulness is terrific.'

'The pater must have had to go back to London by train.'

I expect he was waxy. He will sack Tregg for this. I shouldn't wonder. But I say, what about my lines?'

Billy Bunter was surprised and interested, as all the juniors were, by that unexpected explanation, on the radio, of Mr. Tregg's non-arrival at Greyfriars the previous day. Tregg's conduct undoubtedly was 'queer': indeed inexplicable. But it was, after all, of little importance, compared with Bunter's lines!

But there was no reply to Bunter's question. Harry Wharton and Co. had been momentarily interested in Mr. Tregg. They were not interested in Bunter's lines.

'There's a Guards' band next,' said Tom Brown. He turned on the radio.

'Stop that row, and let a fellow speak,' howled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows. Quelch wants those lines before prep, and there's two hundred. Look here, if you fellows will do fifteen each, I'll do the other forty—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, if you're too jolly lazy to do fifteen, what about a dozen—?'

'Shove it on, Browney.'

'I say, you fellows—!' yelled Bunter. 'Make it a bit louder,' grinned Bob Cherry.

Tom Brown gave the dial another twist, and the radio roared. Billy Bunter roared too.

'I say, you fellows! My lines—'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Are you still talking, Bunter?'

Put it on, Browney.'

Browney put it on full force. The radio fairly bellowed.

If Billy Bunter bellowed too, his bellow was unheard: even on his top note he had no chance against the B.B.C. at full blast.

'Beasts!' yelled Bunter: unheard.

And he rolled out of No. 1 Study, realising that if Quelch was going to have those lines, those lines had to be written by his own fat hand. After which, Browney moderated the radio's transports, as it were: and Harry Wharton and Co. listened in to the music, which they seemed to like ever so much more than the dulcet tones of William George Bunter.

## BLOW FOR BUNTER

'BUNTER!'

'Ye-e-e-s, sir!' mumbled the fat Owl.

The plumpest member of Mr. Quelch's form stood in Quelch's study, blinking uneasily at his form-master through his big spectacles.

Why Quelch had sent for him, Bunter, did not know.

But it was never cheering or exhilarating to be called into Quelch's study. It was especially disconcerting on a half-holiday: and it was Saturday afternoon.

True, Bunter had nothing particular to do that afternoon. He was not disposed to join Harry Wharton and Co. at cricket: nor to join Smithy, who had gone down to the boat-house, in a pull up the river: nor yet to push out a bike with Peter Todd and Tom Dutton. But he had his own enjoyable way of passing hours of leisure. He had been going to sprawl comfortably in an armchair in the Rag, and he had found a packet of toffee in Ogilvy's study, to keep him pleasant and sticky company.

Instead of which he was called into Quelch's study. He found his form-master looking grave: but, to his relief, not 'waxy'. Still, he could hardly doubt that a spot of trouble was coming. He wondered whether some beak or other had noticed that the biscuits in the biscuit-box in Common-Room had diminished at an unusual rate. If Quelch was going to make a fuss about a few bikkers—!

'You will remain within gates this afternoon, Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch.

'Oh!' mumbled Bunter. 'I—I haven't done anything, sir! I—I—I haven't been anywhere near Common-Room, sir—.'

'Common-Room?' repeated Mr. Quelch, staring at him. 'Nowhere near it, sir!' said Bunter.

'If—if—if—if it's anything about the biscuits, sir, I—I never had them—.'

The Remove master gave Bunter a very fixed look.

But, to the fat Owl's relief, he did not follow up the subject of biscuits.

'You will remain within gates this afternoon, Bunter, because your father is coming to the school to see you,' he said.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. His fat face brightened.

It was not, after all, a spot of trouble. It was only a parental visit. It might even mean a parental tip!—if Mr. Bunter was in a good temper, and if fortune had smiled on his mysterious operations among the bulls and bears of Throgmorton Street.

'I have received a letter from your father, Bunter,' went on Mr. Quelch. 'He states that he will call at the school this afternoon, probably about four o'clock.'

'Yes, sir!' said Bunter, quite cheerfully: wondering a little why Mr. Bunter had written to Quelch instead of to him.

'But that is not all, Bunter,' added Mr. Quelch. 'Your father's letter also deals with your future prospects at this school.'

The fat face fell!

'Oh, lor!' breathed Bunter. 'I—I—I hope the pater—I mean my father—was—was—was pleased with my half-term report, sir.'

The Remove master stared at him.

'If you hope any such thing, Bunter, you must take singularly optimistic views,' he said, grimly. 'I cannot imagine any parent being pleased with a report such as yours, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, sir—.'

'Your slackness in class, Bunter, is only equalled by your slackness in games, and your report stated the precise facts.'

Billy Bunter breathed hard. That was Quelch all over—giving a fellow a bad report! Fat lot Quelch cared whether it might dish a fellow in the matter of tips from the old folks at home!

'But it is not your report, Bunter, that is the matter of immediate concern,' went on the Remove master.

Bunter was glad to hear that, at least!

'Your father has made inquiries, Bunter, concerning the Founder's Scholarships!' said Mr. Quelch.

Bunter blinked at him, quite blankly.

He knew all about the Founder's Scholarships, of course. Mark Linley was at Greyfriars on one of those scholarships: so was Dick Penfold, the son of the Friardale cobbler. But why Mr. Bunter was interested in them, was quite a mystery to his hopeful son. In his most imaginative moments, Mr. Bunter could scarcely have imagined that scholarships had any attraction for William George. A fellow had to work to bag a schol: and work hard, too.

'You are perhaps aware, Bunter, that one of these scholarships is now vacant.'

'Is—is—is it, sir?' stammered Bunter.

'It is, Bunter, and the examination will be held at the end of the present term. Your father desires your name to be entered for it.'

Billy Bunter very nearly fell down.

'Me, sir!' he gasped.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles.

'No doubt you are surprised, Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch, drily.

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I can't make it out, sir! I—I d-d-don't want to—to put in for a schol, sir.'

'That is for your father to decide, Bunter.'

'But—but—but—but those schols are intended for—for poor chaps, sir, whose people can't afford the fees!' stammered Bunter. 'Perhaps—perhaps you'd explain that to the pater, sir. It—it wouldn't be fair, sir, for a fellow in my position to bag one of them, sir—it—it would be on my conscience, sir.'

Billy Bunter's sudden concern for poor chaps, whose people could not afford to pay their fees, was really quite touching, But Mr. Quelch did not seem to be touched. Possibly he suspected that Bunter's concern was not so much for those poor chaps, as for his fat and lazy self.

'What you say is quite correct, Bunter--.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir! If—if you point that out to the pater, sir—.'

'Kindly allow me to finish, Bunter. What you say is quite correct, but I gather from your father's letter that this step is absolutely necessary.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Your father, at all events, seems very anxious that you should enter for the scholarship, Bunter, and do your best. I shall therefore give in your name.'

'Oh, crumbs.'

'No doubt your father will explain the matter further, Bunter, when he sees you this afternoon,' said Mr. Quelch.

'I will only add, Bunter, that if you seek dutifully to carry out your father's wishes. I will give you every assistance in my power—.'

'Oh, lor!'

'Even to the extent of some extra tuition, Bunter, when I have leisure,' added Mr. Quelch. Billy Bunter gazed at him.

Really, it was kind of Quelch, who was a busy man, with little leisure, and plenty of occupations for that leisure. But it was not the sort of kindness that Billy Bunter could appreciate. He had more than enough tuition from Quelch already, without any extra added thereunto.

'I—I—I say, sir—!' stammered the hapless fat Owl.

'That is all, Bunter.'

'B-b-b-but, sir—.'

'You may leave my study, Bunter.'

A dismal and dolorous Owl rolled out of Quelch's study. This was a blow!

It was in fact a stunning blow. A detention, an imposition, even a whopping for snooping the biscuits in Common-Room, would have been a mere nothing to it. Before Billy Bunter's dismayed eyes floated an awful vision of work—swotting like that chap Linley! His father couldn't be earnest about this—he just couldn't! Really, expecting Billy Bunter to work was something in the nature of cruelty to animals!

Bunter fell rather than sat in that armchair in the Rag.

He found little comfort even in Ogilvy's toffee. It was a sad and sorrowful Owl that met Mr. Bunter when he arrived.

## A SUPRISE FOR SMITHY!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH rested his oars in the rowlocks, and sat looking towards the landing-place on Popper's Island.

He had pulled into the channel between the island and the Popper Court bank, at a good speed. Anyone observing him from the woods, or the tow-path, would have supposed that he had set out on a vigorous pull up the river to Courtfield. And if a keeper had appeared from Popper Court Woods, or the 'Beaver' had looked out from the greenery of the island, Smithy would have pulled on, as if interested in nothing but rowing that sunny afternoon. But there was no sign of a keeper to be seen along the bank.

Neither was anything to be seen of the 'Beaver'. If he was on the island, no doubt he was at his camp in the glade, under the big oak, out of sight from the river. Very likely, the Bounder thought, he was not there. Popper's Island was a pleasant spot for camping, quite a good spot for fishing: but the man was alone, and surely would not want to stick on the island all the time, with no company but his own.

Anyway, the Bounder had no doubt about ascertaining whether he was there or not. If he was away, his boat would be away with him, for obviously Mr. Robinson could not leave the island without it.

Smithy's plans were cut and dried.

If the boat was there, the man was there: and he was going to set the boat adrift, and leave the Beaver stranded. Later, he could have the pleasure—or otherwise—of hunting for his boat along the Sark, when somebody gave him a lift off the island.

But if the boat was not there, it meant that the man was off the island: and Smithy was going to land and 'rag' his camp. When he returned, the Beaver would find his tent down, his camping outfit scattered over the glade, and everything at sixes and sevens.

Smithy had pulled a little past the island. He allowed the current to drift him back, as he watched the landing-place with intent eyes.

His heart was beating a little fast.

The Bounder had little respect for authority, if any.

But he had a considerable respect for the headmaster's birch. A flogging was a very rare event at Greyfriars: but Smithy knew that Dr. Locke had meant every word he had said. More trouble on Popper's Island meant more trouble for the trouble-maker.

And now that he was on the spot, it dawned on Smithy, much more clearly than before, that he did not want to bend over, any more than the other fellows did, under his headmaster's birch.

Another 'row' on the island, another visit by Sir Hilton Popper to Greyfriars, and Smithy would have reason to wish that he had played cricket that afternoon instead of pulling up the river, on vengeance bent.

But he set his lips doggedly.

He was going through with it, and he was going to give the Beaver a Roland for an Oliver.

The man was a disgruntled brute, who had made himself quite unnecessarily unpleasant: and Smithy rather prided himself on giving back as good as he got.

But, as he dipped an oar, and edged his little skiff closer in, he was very cautious. He knew that he was asking for more trouble than he wanted: and with all his cool nerve he was very anxious not to be spotted.

He could see nothing of the tenant's boat. Edging in nearer and nearer, he scanned the landing-place with searching eyes.

But there was no sign of a boat.

It was a relief to Smithy. Had the boat been there, he would have cut it adrift, at the risk of being seen from the island. But it was not there, and if the tenant was absent, the coast was clear.

He had to take the risk of the man returning: but he was not going to linger, and be caught like Billy Bunter. He did not need more than ten minutes to 'rag' the camp right and left, and then he would be gone. The Beaver, when he came back, could try to guess who had been there—there would be no clue to Smithy.

Satisfied that the boat was gone, and the tenant, necessarily, in it. Vernon-Smith pushed in briskly under the overhanging branches that spread over the landing-place and the rippling water.

He jumped out, hooked his painter to a willow, and after a last keen glance over the shining river, plunged into the trees, to follow the track to the glade in the centre of the island.

The underwoods rustled as he pushed rapidly through: but that mattered nothing, as he was assured that there were no ears to hear.

But suddenly he gave a violent start, as a rustle came in the thick underwoods that was not made by his own movements.

'Oh!' breathed the Bounder.

He caught his breath. He was sure, absolutely sure, that he was alone on the island. The boat was gone and the tenant must be gone. But his heart thumped unpleasantly all the same. The man could hardly have concealed his boat, as the Greyfriars juniors had done on their visit: why should he? But if he was, after all, on the island—!

The next moment Smithy knew, as a sudden grasp was laid on his collar from behind. He uttered a startled cry.

Never had a fellow been so taken by surprise.

He twisted round in that angry grasp, and stared blankly at a dark, angry, bearded face.

It was the tenant of Popper's Island. The Beaver, after all, was at home! Whatever he had done with his boat, he was there—and the dismayed Bounder was in his angry grasp.

'You young rascal!' The man's voice came rasping, and his eyes glinted under the bushy brows.

The Bounder panted. 'Let go! I—I—.'

'I have seen you before, you young rascal!' The man, grasping the Bounder's collar with his left, raised his right to smack his head.

Evidently he recognised Vernon-Smith as one of the visitors of Wednesday, and as the fellow who had pitched the apple at him and caused him to sit down so suddenly. Possibly he was pleased to get his hands on that cheeky schoolboy. At all events, he smacked his head, with a smack that made it ring.

The Bounder wrenched desperately to free himself. 'Let go!' he yelled. 'By gum, if you touch me again, I'll hack your shins.'

Smack!

The Beaver touched him again, before the words were quite out of his mouth, and he touched him hard. That smack rang over Popper's Island almost like a pistol-shot.

Smithy was as good as his word. He had been caught, and he had to face the music at Greyfriars: but he was not going to be man-handled, if he could help it. He kicked out, and it was the Beaver's turn to yell. A crash on his shin was as painful as the smacks on Smithy's luckless head.

But he did not let go. That hack seemed to give the final touch to his extremely bad temper, and he smacked, and smacked again. In sheer desperation, the Bounder grappled with him, hooked his leg, and they stumbled over together in the thickets. The tenant's hat was brushed from his head, and—to the Bounder's utter amazement—his thick dark hair

along with it! That thick dark hair, evidently, did not grow on Mr. Robinson's head! It was a wig!

That utterly unexpected occurrence was a stroke of luck for Smithy. The tenant of Popper's Island released his grasp, and clutched after the dark wig entangled in the thicket.

That was enough for the Bounder. He did not give the man a chance to grasp him again. He leaped out of reach, and ran.

Whether the man pursued him or not, he did not know.

In a matter of seconds he reached the landing-place, tore the painter loose, and leaped into his skiff. It shot out on the river under the impetus of his leap, spinning across towards the bank, rocking wildly. The Bounder grasped the oars, jammed them into the rowlocks, and pulled breathlessly. Looking back, as he pulled, he saw nothing of the man on the island.

## CHAPTER 17

### BRACE UP, BUNTER!

'WILLIAM!'

'Yes, father!' mumbled Bunter.

No. 7 Study, in the Greyfriars Remove, had two occupants. One was Mr. William Samuel Bunter, stockbroker, of Bunter Villa, Reigate, Surrey. The other was his hopeful son, William George Bunter of the Remove. Mr. Bunter's plump form filled Peter Todd's armchair. Billy Bunter's plump form leaned on the study table. Mr. Bunter's plump face looked very serious and very grave. Billy Bunter's plumper visage was almost woebegone. He stood before his parent like a fellow awaiting a sentence of doom.

Mr. Bunter's grave aspect certainly looked as if his letter to Quelch had been written in deadly earnest. Bunter knew that after his arrival, Mr. Bunter had had a talk with the Remove master. Now he was going to have a talk with William George. Bunter had no hope of enjoying the parental conversation.

It looked—he could not help feeling that it looked—as if Mr. Bunter meant business about that scholarship. It was almost too awful to contemplate: but it had to be contemplated. Seldom had Bunter's spirits been lower.

'William! Matters are very serious!' said Mr. Bunter.

'Are-are they?' stammered Bunter. He realised that this meant good-bye to the faint hope of a parental tip!

'They are, William! They could scarcely be more serious!' said Mr. Bunter. 'I have been placed in a very precarious position, William, by the unexpected dishonesty of a person in my employ—the man Tregg!'

'Tregg!' repeated Bunter.

'My secretary, Tregg!' said Mr. Bunter. 'The man has absconded, William, with bonds to the value of five thousand pounds.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

'Not my property,' added Mr. Bunter. 'The property of a client, William: but if they are not recovered, I am responsible for that sum.'

'Oh!' repeated Bunter, in another gasp.

'They are Bearer Bonds, William, which pass from hand to hand, and very difficult to trace,' continued Mr. Bunter. 'In fact, if the man succeeds in escaping with them, they must be written off as a dead loss.'

'Oh!' said Bunter, for the third time.

'You will remember, William, that the man Tregg was to drive over here on Wednesday to take you for a motor-run. Instead of doing so, he drove a great distance into the next county, abandoned the car, and disappeared.'

'Oh!' said Bunter: his fourth Oh.

'It has transpired,' went on the portly gentleman in the armchair, 'that before driving down to Folkestone that day, Tregg, who had a key to my office safe, removed the bonds. They must have been concealed about his person while he was driving me down, William. His plans were very carefully laid. What he had done could not become known till I returned to London. It was Tregg's suggestion to drive over here and give you a motor-run on Wednesday. I had no suspicion. By this trick, he was enabled to get a very long start. The car has been found in Sussex, but no trace of Tregg has been discovered. The man has vanished—with the bonds.'

'Oh!' said Bunter, once more.

'The police, of course, are searching for him. The radio has been called on to assist. I have not given up hope that he may be found, and the bonds recovered. But the hope is very faint, William. There is little doubt that the rogue had long laid his plans, and made his preparations. He is not likely to succeed in getting out of the country, if that is his intention, at least at present. But—he has vanished from all knowledge, William, and not the remotest clue to his whereabouts can be discovered.'

'Oh!'

'If I have to make this loss good, William, as appears practically certain, my resources will be strained to the uttermost. You understand that.'

'Oh, lor!'

'I have explained the matter to you fully, William, so that you may realise the position,' said Mr. Bunter. 'You understand that all expenses must be cut down with an unsparing hand.'

'Oh!'

'You must help, William.'

'Oh!'

'Your school fees—'

'Oh!'

'—are a very heavy item, in the circumstances. If you could save me this expense, William, it would be a great help to me.'

'Oh!'

'I have had a talk with your form-master, William. I cannot say that Mr. Quelch seems very sanguine about your chance of obtaining a scholarship here. But he has kindly undertaken to give you every assistance in his power, if you work hard for it.'

'Oh!'

'I rely upon you, William, to brace up, and do your very best to help, in this time of severe trouble,' said Mr. Bunter.

'Oh!' mumbled Bunter again. He stood blinking at his father. He was silent.

But his fat thoughts were working. And, for once they were not wholly concentrated on his fat self.

Generally, Billy Bunter's horizon was filled up by one fat figure: that of William George Bunter. It was but seldom, if ever, that he gave any thought to less important persons. But something stirred in the fat Owl, as he gazed at the troubled face of the plump gentleman in the armchair.

He was dismayed—utterly dismayed. But there was, after all, something more than fat, even in Billy Bunter.

His father was in trouble. The family finances were strained to the limit. He could help. It was up to him: he knew that. Not often did the fat Owl bother his fat head about what it was up to him to do. Now he did.

He drew a deep, deep breath. The prospect of hard work was as awful as ever. But Bunter was going to face it! It was up to a fellow, and he was going to do it.

'Well, William?' said Mr. Bunter, breaking the silence. 'What have you to say, William. Now, that you know how the matter stands?'

'I'm jolly well going to help, father!' said Bunter, heroically, 'You rely on me. I—I—I'm going in for that schol. and—and I'll jolly well pull it off, if I can. I'll work like—like billy-o!'

Mr. Bunter gave him a nod of approval.

'I am glad to hear it, William.'

'And why shouldn't I pull it off, if you come to that?' went on Bunter. 'There's a chap here named Linley, who pulled it off: and I hope I've got more brains than he has. It just means a spot of jolly hard work. Well, I can work ...'

'That is the right spirit, William!' said Mr. Bunter.

'Leave it to me, father!' said the fat Owl. 'I jolly well won't let you down. I'll simply slog at it, getting ready to do that paper. It's mainly classical stuff, and after all, I'm a dab at Latin.'

'Are you, William?'

'Well, Quelch doesn't think so,' admitted William. 'But schoolmasters don't know everything. I daresay Quelch will be surprised if I pull it off. Well, I'm jolly well going to surprise him.'

Billy Bunter spoke with great firmness. He had made up his fat mind. He was quite resolute. It was the right thing, and he was going to do it. He was jolly well going to show Quelch, and everybody else, what he could do. It meant hard work. Well, he was going to work—in fact, to slog! His fat mind was firmly made up. His resolution was fixed.

It was barely possible that later, when the hard work came along, that fixed resolution might come unstuck, as it were. But for the moment, at least, Billy Bunter was as firm as a rock.

'Don't you worry, father,' he said, reassuringly. 'I'm jolly well going to play up. I'm going to swot like that chap Linley. I'll begin this very day—and you'll see!'

Mr. Bunter's plump face registered approval and satisfaction. He rose from the armchair.



'Do your best, William,' he said. 'If you succeed, you will help your father in a time of very severe strain. Do your very best, William.'

'Rely on me!' said Bunter, valiantly.

When Mr. Bunter departed, the fat Owl stood blinking after the taxi, till it disappeared, with a very thoughtful face. That fat face grew more and more thoughtful.

But Bunter's fat mind was made up. He had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point, as it were, and it was still sticking. For quite a long time he stood, looking very thoughtful indeed. But when he moved, at last, he did not roll out into the quad, to sit under a shady tree. He did not roll into the Rag, to sprawl in his favourite armchair. Slowly—very slowly—but still resolutely, he tramped up the stairs to the Remove studies.

If he was going to have even a dog's chance, in that examination in a few weeks' time, he had to swot Latin. Well, he was going to swot Latin. He shuddered at the prospect: but he was going to do it, And when Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, later, came up to No. 7 Study

to tea, they had the surprise of their lives—nothing less than Billy Bunter sitting at the study table, surrounded by books with a pen in his hand, ink on his fingers, and a distinctly tired look on his fat face—swotting Latin!

CHAPTER 18

BACK UP!

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Too late!' said Bob Cherry, 'Eh?'

'As jolly old Shakespeare remarks,' continued Bob,  
*'One day too late, I fear, my noble lord,  
Hath clouded all your happy days on earth.'*

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'In the present case, exactly ten minutes too late!' said Bob.

'Wharrer you mean, you ass?'

'I mean that we finished tea ten minutes ago.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter blinked through his big spectacles at five grinning faces, in No. 1 Study, and frowned.

Harry Wharton and Co. had tea'd rather late, after cricket. But late as they were, Billy Bunter was later: and the table in No. 1 Study was cleared. If the fat Owl had as usual, arrived in the role of a lion seeking what he might devour, there was nothing doing.

'Better give Smithy a look-in, old fat man.' added Bob, kindly.

'Better not!' said Johnny Bull. 'I saw Smithy come in, and he didn't look in a good temper. Looked like biting.'

'I haven't come here to tea!' hooted Bunter, indignantly.

'I've been working—.'

'Working!' gasped Bob Cherry.

'Yes—working, and jolly hard, too,' said Bunter, 'and I didn't leave off for tea, either. I had just a mouthful to go on with.'

'There's a food shortage ahead, if Bunter had a mouthful!' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Where on earth did you get all the stuff, Bunter?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter gave the humorous Bob a devastating blink through his big spectacles. It was true that Bunter's mouth was extensive. But really and truly it was not so extensive as all that.

'I've been hard at work, while you fellows have been loafing about at cricket,' he said, scornfully.

'Well, cricket isn't exactly loafing about, old fat man!' said Harry Wharton. 'But what have you been working at? Lines for Quelch?'

'Swotting,' said Bunter.

'Draw it mild!'

'Tell us an easier one.'

'I tell you I've been swotting,' hooted Bunter. 'I'm going in for the Founder's Scholarship at the end of the term—.'

'Gammon!'

'The gammonfulness is terrific.'

'You can ask Quelch, if you like,' snorted Bunter. 'My pater's seen Quelch about it, and my name's down. So yah!'

Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at the fat Owl. Really, it was not easy to swallow that statement. There were fellows at Greyfriars who 'swotted'. But Billy Bunter certainly was not one of them. If there was anything that Billy Bunter loathed more than getting up in

the morning, it was work. He slacked at prep. He slacked in class. He slacked at games. He slacked at everything except the demolition of foodstuffs. He made both a science and an art of dodging work. In fact he would take twice as much trouble to dodge a spot of work, as it would have taken to get it done. The bare idea of Billy Bunter swotting—and swotting for a difficult examination—was more than enough to take any fellow's breath away.

'I suppose he's fibbing, as usual!' said Johnny Bull. 'But what is he fibbing for this time?'

'Oh, really, Bull—.'

'Can't guess that one!' said Bob. 'What are you fibbing for this time, Bunter?'

'I tell you it's honest Injun!' hooted Bunter. 'That's what I've come here to speak to you fellows about. I want you to back me up.'

'Pile it on,' said Johnny.

'If you fellows don't believe me—!' howled Bunter. Harry Wharton laughed.

'Well, it's not so jolly easy to believe that you're going to do any work, without Quelch's cane behind you!' he said. 'If it's so, what are you doing it for? No fellow is bound to enter for a schol.'

'It's up to me, you see,' explained Bunter. 'I don't want to, of course. But it's up to me, as matters stand.'

'How, why, and wherefore?' asked Bob Cherry.

'I've got to help the pater out of a jam!'

They gazed at him.

'It's jolly serious,' said Bunter. 'You remember that man Tregg, who was coming over in the car on Wednesday, and never came—the man they were talking about on the radio? Well, it turns out that he's bolted—.'

'Bolted!'

'Yes, and he snooped a bundle of bonds from the pater's safe before he cleared. Nobody knows where he is, and the bobbies can't trace him. If they can't get the bonds back, the pater has to make it good—and that means five thousand quid.'

'Oh, crumbs!'

Five grinning faces in No. 1 Study became serious. It dawned on the Famous Five, at last, that Bunter was in earnest—serious earnest.

'It's put the pater in a jam,' went on Bunter. 'He came to see me this afternoon, and—and it was a bit of a shock, I can tell you. He's got to cut down, and I've got to help—and I'm jolly well going to, see? I'm going to save him the school fees by bagging that schol.'

'Oh!' gasped five fellows together.

'If—if I can!' added Bunter.

It occurred to the Famous Five that that was a very large size of 'ifs', so to speak. But they did not say so. They were quite sympathetic now.

'Hard lines, old fat man,' said Bob.

'Tough!' said Johnny Bull.

'The toughness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'and the sympathise is preposterous, my esteemed fat Bunter.'

'Best of luck,' said Frank Nugent. 'It will be pretty hard going.'

'I know that!' said Bunter, dismally. 'I've asked Linley what the paper was like last time, and it seems that it's a real stinker. But—but—but I've got to tackle it somehow. A fellow's bound to brace up when his pater's in a jam.'

'Hear, hear!' said Bob.

'If there's anything we can do to help, old fat man, you can bank on us!' said Harry Wharton.

'That's just it,' said Bunter. 'I want you fellows to back me up. Mind, I'm going all out for that schol. I'm getting extra toot from Quelch.' Bunter shuddered. 'I'm going to swot. I'm going to stick to it. But—'

Bunter paused. It seemed that there was a 'but'.

'It won't be jolly easy,' he said. 'A—a fellow might—might slack down—without meaning to, exactly, you know—'

'The mightfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I—I mean to say, I—I might have a paper to do for Quelch, and—and I—I might put it off—'

'Such things happen!' said Bob Cherry, gravely.

'I might let prep slide—I've let it slide sometimes—'

'More often than sometimes!' remarked Johnny Bull.

'I—I might forget to turn up for extra toot with Quelch—!' mumbled Bunter. Evidently, the fat Owl had misgivings.

'It's just possible!' assented Harry Wharton.

'You never know,' mumbled Bunter. 'Well, look here, you fellows back me up, see? I—I want you to keep me up to the mark, if—if—if I let things slide. Jolly well make me stick to it.'

Billy Bunter blinked anxiously at five sympathetic faces.

His resolution was fixed: but only too clearly he had a lingering doubt whether it would remain a fixture.

'My dear chap,' said Bob Cherry, cordially, 'if that's what you want, you've come to the right shop. We'll back you up all right.'

'The back-upfulness will be preposterous, my esteemed Bunter.'

'It's a go!' said Harry Wharton. 'Rely on us, old fat man.'

'We'll jolly well see that you swot for that schol, if we have to hold you by the back of your neck while you do it!' declared Bob.

'Oh! Ah! Yes!' gasped Bunter. 'That—that's what I want—you back me up, you know—keep me at it! I'm going back to my study to swot now. Oh! I say, Mauly!'

Lord Mauleverer came up the passage, and Bunter blinked round at him.

'I say, Mauly, had your tea yet? I say, I'll come and help you get it, old chap.'

Billy Bunter rolled up the passage after Lord Mauleverer. He left five fellows in No. 1 Study grinning.

Bunter was in earnest. He was taking this thing seriously. But though the spirit was willing, the flesh seemed a little weak. Tea in Mauly's study was more attractive than swotting in No. 7. There was no doubt that Bunter, if he was going to bag that schol, would need some considerable backing up and keeping up to the mark.

## CHAPTER 19

### GO TO IT!

BILLY BUNTER uttered a dismal groan.

Peter Todd grinned.

It was after class, on Monday. Most fellows were out of the House, in the summer sunshine. Bunter was sitting at the study table in No. 7, with a lugubrious fat face. He had a pen in a fat hand, a blank sheet before him, and a deep wrinkle in a fat brow.

Bunter was going to swot!

On Saturday his resolution had been fixed. Over the weekend it had wobbled. It was now in a very wobbly state. Peter Todd was sympathetic: but he grinned.

'Go to it, old fat man,' he said, encouragingly. 'Quelch has set you a paper—all you've got to do is to shove it into Latin—.'

'All!' groaned Bunter.

'Brace up. It only means a spot of work.'

Bunter shuddered. Even the word 'work' made him feel as if he had a headache coming on.

'I—I'm going to do it, of course,' he said. 'It's up to me, Peter.'

'Keep that in mind,' said Peter.

'Ye-e-es! I—I'm going to stick to it! The pater's in a jam, and—and I'm not going to let him down. But—.'

'Wash out the butts!' advised Peter.

'But—but I've been thinking—.'

'That's right—think it out, and begin—.'

'I—I mean, I—I've been thinking that it would hardly do to—to overdo it at the start,' said Bunter, with a stealthy blink at Peter Todd through his big spectacles. 'A fellow gets stale, you know, with—with too much swotting all at once. I—I'll trot out with you, Peter, and—and do this paper later. Mind, I'm going to do it! But—but I think I shall tackle it better after a spot of fresh air. A fellow has to keep himself fit. Toddy! Mens sanders in corpus sandy, you know, old chap.'

'Which?' gasped Peter Todd.

'That means a healthy mind in a healthy body,' explained Bunter. 'You don't know much Latin if you don't know that, Toddy. Not much good you going in for the Founder's—he, he, he!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Toddy.

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!' hooted Bunter. 'What are you cackling at, I'd like to know.'

'Perhaps you mean *mens sana in corpore sano*,' suggested Toddy.

'No, I don't!' snorted Bunter. 'I mean what I said—mens sanders in corpus sandy, and if you can't construe that, Toddy—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' gurgled Toddy. 'You'll have to pull up your socks, old fat man, if you're going to walk off with that schol. Get to it.'

Bunter rose from the table.

'Later,' he said. 'I'm not going to overdo it—that might spoil the whole thing. I've heard of fellows swotting so hard for an exam, that they get stale, and can't do a thing when it comes round. I shouldn't like that to happen, Peter.'

'Don't you be afraid,' assured Peter. 'Nothing will happen because you've worked too hard. That's the last thing that's likely to happen.'

'Oh, really, Toddy—.'

'Now sit down and get to it,' said Toddy. 'Quelch will expect to see that paper before prep.'  
'Oh, lor!'' moaned Bunter. Reminded of Quelch, he sat down again. He blinked dismally at Peter. 'The rotten stuff's full of catches, you know. Look at those beastly verbs that look like the infinitive, and turn out to be something else. And—.'

'I'm waiting to see you start.'

'You—you needn't wait. Peter. I—I'm just going to begin. You—you get along to the nets. Peter. Wharton will be expecting you—.'

'Get going! Or perhaps,' added Peter, thoughtfully, 'you'd like me to give you a swipe with this bat before I go. I will if you don't begin on that paper.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter dipped his pen in the ink. He blinked dismally at the paper Mr. Quelch had set him in English, to be transcribed in Latin. And he started.

Peter Todd left the study, and shut the door after him.

He had seen Bunter started on his task. Had he looked in a minute later, he would also have seen him leave off.

Instead of getting on with it, Bunter sat and blinked at it.

Having blinked at it for several minutes, he rose from the table. He was not going to slack.

The fat Owl was quite determined on that. He was going to do that paper. But after all, there was no hurry—later on would do. Billy Bunter had considerable powers of self-deception. Later on he was going to slog at that paper. Just at present, he wasn't.

He rolled out of the study.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a cheery roar from up the passage.

The fat Owl blinked round.

Bob Cherry was coming down the passage, and he hastened his steps as he beheld the fattest member of the Remove emerge from No. 7 Study.

'Done that paper for Quelch already?' he asked. 'Oh! No! I—I—,' stammered Bunter.

'Then jolly well roll back into your study and get on with it.'

'I—I—I mean, I—I—I've just finished it!' gasped Bunter. 'That—that's what I really meant to say—.'

'Quick work, if you have,' grinned Bob.

'Well, I—I—I'm a pretty quick worker, you know. I—I—I just knocked it off, see?'

'Good! Let's see it,' said Bob, cheerily.

'Oh! I—I—I forget where I—I—I put it, now—.'

'You'll have to find it for Quelch, old fat man. I'll help you look for it, if you've forgotten where you put it. Come on.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'You fat ass!' said Bob. 'Is that how you're going to swot for a schol—slacking over the very first paper Quelch has given you. Lucky for you you've got fellows to back you up. Come on.'

'Ow! Leggo my neck!' yelled Bunter. 'I—I'm going to do it later—.'

'No time like the present.'

'Beast! Leggo.'

Bob Cherry did not let go. With a firm grasp on the back of a fat neck, he propelled Billy Bunter into No. 7 Study. The fat Owl wriggled in his grasp.

Bob glanced at the study table. On Bunter's blank sheet of paper was written the single word 'Caesarem'. That was as far as Bunter had got with his Latin prose!

'You fat slacker—!' said Bob.

'Beast! Leggo, will you?' yelled Bunter. 'I—I'm going to—to swot over it later—not just this minute. You jolly well mind your own business, see?'

'Didn't you ask us to back you up?' demanded Bob.

'Oh! Yes! But—.'

'Didn't we say we would?'

'Oh! Yes! But—.'

'Well, we're going to,' said Bob. 'Sit down in that chair.'

'Shan't!' yelled Bunter. 'Oh! crumbs! wow!'

Bump! With the help of Bob's vigorous hand, Bunter sat down in the chair, rather hard. He sat and spluttered. 'Ow! ow! Beast!'

'Now get going,' said Bob, cheerily. 'You let me catch you outside this study before you've done that paper, and I'll boot you all the way back. I'll keep an eye open, old chap—rely on me.'

'Beast!'

Bob Cherry, chuckling, left the study and banged the door. Billy Bunter glared after him.

But he did not think of quitting the study again. He did not want the largest foot in the Remove to contact the tightest trousers in that form.

'Oh, lor!'

groaned Bunter. For long minutes he sat, blinking at the single word 'Caesarem'. Then, at last, he picked up his pen, dipped it into the ink, and re-started.

## CHAPTER 20

### FRIENDS IN NEED

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!

Billy Bunter certainly heard that cheery hail. Most ears at Greyfriars must have heard it. But if the Owl of the Remove heard, he did not heed. He was sitting on the old oaken bench under one of the shady elms, with a newspaper open on his fat knees. And as that stentorian roar impinged upon his fat ears, he hurriedly lifted the newspaper, and held it up as if to read—thus screening his fat face from the general view.

Harry Wharton and Co. as they came along, had a view of an outspread newspaper. Behind that newspaper, the upper half of William George Bunter was invisible. Probably it did not occur to Bunter that his fat little legs remained on view below: and that those fat little legs could not possibly be mistaken for any others at Greyfriars School.

Under cover of the newspaper, the fat Owl breathed bard.

It was Tuesday. Class was over. Mr. Quelch, in the kindness of his heart, had prepared another little paper for Bunter. This time it was a history paper. There was a spot of history in the list of attractions for the Founder's examination: and Bunter, undoubtedly, was weak in that subject.

It was kind of Quelch. Really he had quite enough to do, without adding this extra attention to Bunter. But Quelch's kindness was beginning to pall on the fat Owl.

The day before, he had struggled through that Latin prose. Quelch had not been much impressed by the result: but he had been encouraging. Having done that Latin prose, Bunter was disposed to rest upon his laurels, as it were. He was going to work—and work jolly hard, too—for that exam! It was up to him, and he was going to do it. But in matters of work, Bunter preferred the future to the present tense. It was so much more agreeable to sit under a shady tree, and think about the work he was going to do, than actually to do it. So there was Bunter, an hour after class, with his history paper in his pocket, his newspaper in his fat hands screening him, hoping that the Famous Five would pass him by unseen: and rather regretting that he had ever asked them to back him up in the task of bagging the Founder's Scholarship. He had realised that he needed backing up. Now he realised that he did not want it so much as he needed it.

Five fellows grinned as they came towards him. They were looking for Billy Bunter: which was quite kind of them, as they had plenty of other things to do. But their kindness had palled on Bunter as much as Quelch's. Bunter did not want to be found.

'Artful old deceiver, ain't he?' murmured Bob Cherry. 'We're not supposed to know that he's there. Can't see him through that newspaper. Might be anybody, what?'

'Not in those trousers!' grinned Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Like a jolly old ostrich, with his head in the sand,' said Bob. 'Well, if Bunter wants to play hide-and-seek, let's play up. Come on—and don't let on that you know a thing.'

The chums of the Remove, grinning, came on. They came to a halt a couple of yards from the screening newspaper, behind which Bunter hardly ventured to breathe. 'Anybody know where Bunter is?' asked Bob, loudly. 'He cleared off after class, and he's got a paper to do for Quelch. We've got to see that he does it.'

'That's a "must"!' agreed Harry Wharton. 'We promised to keep him up to the mark.'

'We're backing him up!' said Johnny Bull.

'The back-upfulness is the proper caper,' declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But where is the esteemed and idiotic Bunter?'

'Can't see his fat face anywhere,' said Frank Nugent. 'We've got to find him,' said Bob.

'Oh, yes: we've got to find him.'

'Where on earth can he be?'

Behind the newspaper, Billy Bunter grinned. Evidently—to Bunter—Harry Wharton and Co. had no idea that he was within a couple of yards of them. If they noticed a fellow reading a newspaper under the elm, they did not, apparently, connect him with the fat Owl they were seeking!

Bunter hoped that they would pass on, and seek elsewhere. But they did not pass on.

'We said we'd keep him up to the mark, and we're jolly well going to keep him up to the mark,' said Bob. 'Quelch will jolly soon let him drop if he doesn't play up. We're going to see that he does play up.'

'Yes, rather!'

'The ratherfulness is terrific.'

'But where is he?' asked Bob. 'Better ask somebody if they've seen him. I'll ask that chap behind the newspaper—'

'Oh!' came a startled gasp from behind the newspaper.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, whoever you are!' roared Bob. 'Seen a fat lizard crawling about in the sun?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Seen anything like a barrel rolling on one end? We're looking for Bunter.'

No reply from behind the newspaper. Hope springs eternal in the human breast: and Billy Bunter hoped that the chums of the Remove, receiving no answer, would walk on to inquire of somebody else.

It was a delusive hope.

'Why, that might be Bunter, so jolly deep in his newspaper that he hasn't heard us!' said Bob. 'Is that you, Bunter, or is it somebody who's borrowed your trousers?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast!' gasped Bunter. It dawned upon his fat brain that the Famous Five knew who was behind that newspaper.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, that sounds like Bunter!' exclaimed Bob. He gave the outspread newspaper a smack, and it collapsed on Bunter's fat knees, revealing the hitherto hidden upper half of the fat Owl. 'Bunter all the time!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You jolly well knew it was me, you beast!' hooted Bunter. 'Pulling a fellow's leg!'

'He's guessed it!' said Bob. 'What a brain! Come on, old fat man: we're going to walk you up to your study.'

'I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I—I'm going to do that history paper after tea—I—I'm a bit tired now—.'

'Too tired to get off that bench?' asked Bob, sympathetically.

'Yes, old chap.'

'That's all right: I'll roll you off.'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap—I—I say, look at this newspaper,' gasped Bunter. 'I say, it's got that man's photograph in it.'

'Whose?' asked Bob.

'That man Tregg! They've published his picture. I say, you fellows, look at it—you—you—you might see the man about, you know, and—and recognise him.'

Five fellows chuckled. They thought it rather improbable that they might see that man Tregg about and recognise him! Billy Bunter, evidently, was desirous of gaining time: postponing as long as he could the awful moment of sitting down to that history paper in his study.

However, they were interested to see the picture of the man who was on the run, and they all looked at the photograph in Bunter's newspaper. There was a heading in large type:

THIS IS THE MAN THE POLICE WISH TO  
INTERVIEW

Under that heading was the picture of a young man of about thirty, with a rather clean-cut, clean-shaven face, and close-cropped hair. There was nothing very remarkable about the face, except that the dark eyes seemed, to the juniors, to have a wary and watchful expression in them, and the mouth a hard line. Still, it was a face they would remember, and recognise, if they chanced to see it again. Under the picture was the name:

ELDRED TREGG

Probably a million pairs of eyes had glanced at that picture, in the newspaper, and would recognise Mr. Tregg if they fell on him in the flesh. With the Press and the radio assisting the police, it seemed amazing that the absconding secretary had evaded discovery and capture so long. But there was no news of him. It was as if he had vanished into thin air. 'That's the beast!' said Bunter. 'They haven't got him yet! Somebody ought to spot him now everybody knows what he looks like. If they got him, it would be all right for the pater, and I wouldn't have to bother about that ghastly exam. But—.'

'But they haven't,' said Harry Wharton, 'and you've got a history paper to do for Quelch!' 'Oh! Yes! But—.'

'Get going,' said Frank Nugent.

'I—I just want to look at the—the cricket news first,' stammered Bunter. 'I—I'm awfully keen on the—the Test match—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Eh! Wharrer you cackling at?' demanded Bunter. 'If you fellows ain't interested in the Test match, I jolly well am—I—I'll go up to the study later—'

'No good looking in the paper for that,' said Nugent, laughing. 'You see, there doesn't happen to be any Test match going on.'

'Oh! Isn't there? I—I mean the county matches— I—I'm jolly keen to see how Surrey are getting on—my county, you know—.'

'Surrey aren't playing to-day!' grinned Johnny Bull. 'I—I—I mean Yorkshire—.'

'You mean anything except swotting Quelch's paper, what?' chuckled Bob Cherry. 'You'll have lots of time to see the Yorkshire score later, as they aren't playing till next week—.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I—I—I meant to say Middleshire—I—I mean Somersex—.'

'Take his other ear Johnny and we'll help him off that bench.'

'Yaroooh!'

Billy Bunter rose from the bench quite quickly.

He rubbed two fat ears, and gave the Famous Five a devastating blink through his spectacles.

'Look here, you beasts—!' he hooted.

'That's how Bunter thanks fellows for backing him up!' said Bob. 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless Bunter.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I—I—I'm going to do that paper, but—but I—I'm going for a walk first—.'

'You are!' agreed Bob. 'Just as far as your study.'

'Look here—!'

'Kim on!' said Bob. 'Gather round, my infants, and walk him to the House, and trot him up to his study.'

'I can go to my study by myself—.'

'You might miss the way, old fat man, and land in an armchair in the Rag! Kim on.'

Five fellows gathered round Billy Bunter, and walked him to the House. He went slowly and sadly, but he went. They walked him up to the Remove studies, and into No. 7.

'Now where's that history paper?' asked Bob.

Bunter groped in his pocket

'Oh! I—I—I've lost it!'

'Now isn't that just too bad?' sighed Bob. 'After all the trouble we've taken, he's lost Quelch's paper. Never mind, old fat man—I'll cut down and tell Quelch you've lost it, and ask him for another.'

'You silly ass!' yelled Bunter, in alarm. 'Quelch would be as mad as a hatter if he thought I'd lost that paper.'

'Can't be helped. Mad or sane, he will have to cough up another, if you've lost that one.'

'I—I—I've found it,' gasped Bunter. 'It—it's in my pocket all the time—.'

'I thought it might be! Trot it out.'

The history paper was 'trotted' out. The hapless fat Owl, at the end of his resources, sat down at the table, with Quelch's paper before him.

'Now wire in, old fellow,' said Bob, encouragingly. 'We'll give you a look-in later, and if you haven't done that paper, we'll bang your head on the table. Can't say fairer than that!'

'Hear, hear!'

'The bangfulness will be terrific. '

'Go it, Bunter!'

And slowly, sadly, and sorrowfully, Billy Bunter 'went' it: and the Famous Five left him to it.

THE BOUNDER MEANS BUSINESS

'COMIN' on the river, Reddy?'

'Yes, if you like. But—.'

'Well?'

'Not to that island.' The Bounder laughed.

'Think I want to see the Old Man again?' he asked. 'I had enough from him on Saturday: quite enough to go on with.'

Tom Redwing eyed his chum rather doubtfully.

For two or three days, Herbert Vernon-Smith had hardly alluded to the man on the island, and seemed, in fact, almost to have forgotten him. But Redwing well knew the Bounder's stubborn obstinacy and unforgiving temper, and he could not feel easy in his mind.

Certainly, a fellow who had had to bend over under the headmaster's birch might be expected to take it as a warning to mind his step. Few fellows would have thought of risking it a second time. But Smithy was a fellow to take the most reckless risks, when his back was up.

'Well, if it's not that. Smithy—!' said Tom, slowly.

'My dear man, I wouldn't step on Popper's Island this afternoon for love or money!' said Smithy. 'If I give the Beaver another call, it won't be for the pleasure of walking into his clutches again. Come and get the boat out.'

'Oh, all right.'

Redwing was always ready for a pull on the river if it came to that. He was a sailor's son, and loved the water, fresh or briny. His face was cheerful as they went down to the boat-house.

'Might run down as far as Pegg Bay, what?' he asked.

'We're going the other way.'

Redwing gave him a quick look. Pegg was down the river. Popper's Island was up the river. If they were 'going the other way' they had to pass the island tenanted by the disgruntled 'Beaver'. Redwing's uneasiness revived.

'Look here, Smithy, we're keeping clear of that man Robinson,' he said. 'There's been more than enough trouble with him.'

'Much more!' agreed the Bounder. 'In fact, as Inky would say, the morefulness is terrific.'

'Well, why not give him a wide berth?'

'We have to pass his island going up to Courtfield Bridge. Can't keep off the river because there's a savage Beaver on an island.'

'If we pass it, all right,' said Redwing. 'But look here, Smithy, I can jolly well see that you've got something in your mind, and if your idea is to stop at the island, I shall pull on, whether you like it or not.'

'Do!' said Smithy, laughing.

'O.K. then.'

They carried the Bounder's light skiff out to the water.

It was a very light craft, easy for the two to handle. It slid into the water, and they were about to push off, when there came a call from the raft. It was Wingate of the Sixth, and he came across towards them.

'Here, Vernon-Smith! Where are you going?' he asked.

'Courtfield Bridge,' answered Smithy.

'All right-if you are!' said the Greyfriars captain, giving the Bounder a very searching look. 'Is that so, Redwing?'

'Yes. Wingate.'

'Well. I can trust you, at any rate,' said Wingate. 'We want no more trouble with Sir Hilton Popper over his dashed island, or his tenant there. Mind you steer clear of it.'

The two juniors pushed off, the Bounder grinning sarcastically. Tom Redwing sat to the oars, and pulled.

'Might have stopped me, if you hadn't been with me.'

Reddy!' grinned the Bounder. 'The pre's don't seem to trust me as they do you, old sober-sides. It's rather an advantage for a bad hat to have a respectable sort of pal, sometimes.'

'You can see that the pre's have an eye on you. Smithy! If you've got anything up your sleeve, you'd better forget it. You'd be nailed to a certainty.'

'Don't I know it!' said Smithy shrugging his shoulders. 'Caution's my cue. Reddy: they won't nail me again in a hurry.'

Redwing made no reply to that. It was clear that Smithy was as keen as ever on his 'feud' with the man on the island. Indeed, his last painful interview with his headmaster seemed to have made him keener.

But the Bounder merely glanced at Popper's Island, as they pulled on past it up the river. His eyes smouldered.

'No sign of Robinson Crusoe,' he remarked. 'Nor his boat either! But I know now that he keeps it out of sight, goodness knows why. Looks as if he doesn't want people to know he's there at all. Pull on.'

Redwing was glad to pull on, and leave the island astern. A quarter of an hour later, the winding of the Sark hid it from sight, as they looked back.

'Pull in to the bank. Reddy,' said the Bounder, suddenly. 'We stop here.'

'Don't you want to go as far as the bridge?'

'No: pull in, I tell you.'

Redwing, puzzled, did as the Bounder asked. Vernon-Smith jumped out, glanced quickly up and down the tow-path, and called to his chum.

'Get out.'

'Are we landing here, then?' asked Redwing.

'We are! And for the love of Mike, get a move on, and don't hang about till somebody comes along the tow-path,' said Smithy, irritably. 'Shift!'

Redwing stepped out, puzzled and vaguely uneasy. He was about to tie the painter to a projecting root in the bank, when Smithy grabbed it from his hand. Then, to Tom's amazement, he grasped the light skiff and dragged it up the bank. Redwing stared at him in astonishment.

'What's this game, Smithy?' he exclaimed.

'Lend a hand with the boat, and don't jaw. Get it across the tow-path into the wood-and quick!' snapped the Bounder.

In utter amazement, Redwing lent a hand, helping the Bounder to carry the light skiff across the tow-path, into the wood a few yards back from the stream. A fence divided the wood from the tow-path: but it was broken in many places, and there were ample gaps.

With a rustling and crackling of thickets, the skiff was landed in the wood.

'Smithy!' exclaimed Redwing.

'What—?'

The Bounder did not heed him. He stepped back to the gap in the fence, put out his head, and scanned the river bank. There was no one in sight and he was satisfied that they had not been seen. He turned back to Redwing with a grin.

'All serene,' he said. 'Now we've got to shove it out of sight in these hawthorns. I don't suppose anybody will come rooting about in this particular spot: but I don't want to run risks with it.'

'But why?' exclaimed Redwing.

'Oh, guess!' said the Bounder, jeeringly. 'Or better still, lend a hand and don't jaw. I'll tell you as we walk back.'

Are we walking back, then?

'Yes: unless you'd rather swim.'

Redwing compressed his lips, but he said no more. The little skiff was carefully and deeply concealed in the hawthorns.

Then the Bounder stepped out through the gap, and Tom Redwing followed him. Vernon-Smith started at once walking down the tow-path.

'Look here, Smithy, tell me what all this means,' exclaimed Redwing. 'It's got something to do with that man on the island: I know that. What have you hidden your boat a quarter of a mile above the island for? It's no use to you there, that I can see—.'

'Lots of things you can't see, Reddy. Could I come down to the boat-house for a craft after dark?'

'After dark!' repeated Redwing, blankly.

'Could I knock up the boat-keeper, and get a boat out?' grinned the Bounder. 'He might mention it to Quelch—or to the Head!'

'Of course he would! But—.' Redwing was quite aghast. 'Smithy! You can't be thinking of getting out, after lights out—!'

'Why not?' said the Bounder, coolly.

'Smithy! You—you're thinking of going to that island, at night—after dark—!' Redwing fairly stammered.

'That's why I've hidden my skiff in Hogben's Wood. I can get it when I want it, and no questions asked.'

'It will be missed if you don't take it back to the boathouse.'

The Bounder laughed.

'Think I haven't thought of that one? It's sprung a leak, and I've left it at the boat-builder's at Courtfield Bridge for repairs, if anybody wants to know. Undergoin' repairs, dear man, which will last just as long as I want to keep the boat out.'

Evidently, the Bounder had thought it all out carefully. Redwing walked on, in silence. He was utterly dismayed. That Smithy intended to carry on his 'feud' with the cross-grained tenant of Popper's Island, he had had no doubt. But he had never dreamed of this. Of all the wildly reckless proceedings of the scapegoat of Greyfriars, this was the wildest.

There was a long silence, as they tramped on: Redwing's face dark with dismay, the Bounder's sardonically amused. Redwing spoke at last.

'It's mad, Smithy! I tell you—.'

'Speech may be taken as read!' drawled the Bounder. 'That hairy rat on Popper's Island is going to have his tent brought down on his head—tit for tat—a Roland for an Oliver. I fancy he's pretty wary in the daytime—but he won't be expectin' visitors at midnight—he will be fast asleep in his little bunk, old bean, and his tent will come down on him—wallop—!' The Bounder laughed. 'He won't hear me pulling out the pegs, Reddy—he won't know a thing till the crash comes. I'm only sorry that I shan't be able to tell him who did it—I'd like him to know that it was the fellow whose head he smacked! But I've got to cover up my tracks! What?'

'It's mad, Smithy! After going up to the Head, too, last time. If it comes out—.'

'How could it?'

'It's too risky. Breaking out at night, too! Smithy, do have a spot of sense. It mayn't be a flogging next time. It may be the sack.'

'Shouldn't wonder—if they nail me!' jeered the Bounder. 'But they're not going to, Reddy! I've thought this thing out, and it's as safe as houses. There won't be a clue, old man.

But—.' The Bounder's hard face set grimly. 'But if the risk was ten times what you fancy it is, I'd carry on all the same. I'm the man to give back as good as I get—and that hairy rat's got it coming to him. Nobody's going to smack my head, and nothing done!'

'But—!' muttered Redwing.

'No good talking!' interrupted the Bounder. 'I've got it cut and dried—fixed like the laws of the jolly old Medes and Persians. You can talk your head off, Reddy, and it won't make a spot of difference. I mean business this time.'

Redwing did not 'talk his head off'. He knew only too well how futile it was to argue with his stubborn chum. They finished the walk back to Greyfriars in silence.

## CHAPTER 22

### BUNTER THE SWOT!

'HARRY, old chap—.'

Harry Wharton smiled, and shook his head. Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday, but it was not always quite a holiday for fellows who had no taste for games. On certain dates there was 'compulsory' games-practice. On such dates, fellows like Skinner and Snoop and Stott had to bid a temporary farewell to cigarettes in their study: lazy fellows like Lord Mauleverer had to get a move on: Wibley had to tear himself away from his property-box and his dreams of playing Hamlet: Fisher T. Fish had to leave off counting his money: and Billy Bunter, fattest and laziest member of the Remove, had to squeeze himself into flannels, and get a spot of fresh air and exercise which was really good for him, but with which he would gladly have dispensed.

It was one of the duties of the captain of the Remove to see that members of his form turned up at the due time on the due dates. For good reason given, a fellow might be let off: and William George Bunter was never in lack of excellent reasons. His reasons did not always, or often, convince. But he was always ready to try it on again.

So when, after dinner on Wednesday, he rolled up to the captain of the Remove in the quad, and began with 'Harry old chap', Harry old chap knew what was coming, and smiled: accompanying the smile with a shake of the head.

'Three o'clock,' he said.

'I was going to ask you—!'

'I know!' said Wharton, gravely. 'You were going to ask me the time for games-practice. because you were afraid you might be late. You turn up at three.'

Billy Bunter blinked at him. He was quite aware that games-practice was at three, as it was posted up in the Rag. Really he did not need information on that point.

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'Sharp three!' said Harry.

'I—I was going to ask you—.'

'I've told you!'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap. I—I was going to ask you to leave me out this afternoon, because—.'

'Because you've got a pain?' asked Harry, laughing. 'The same pain you had last week, or the one you had the week before?'

'Nunno! I—I haven't got a pain this time!' stammered Bunter. 'The—the fact is. I'm going to swot.'

'Oh!' said Harry.

'You know I'm working for that exam,' explained Bunter. 'Fairly slogging at it, you know. I simply can't afford to waste time.'

'Healthy exercise isn't waste of time, old fat man. It keeps you fit and you have to be fit to sit out an exam.'

'Oh! Yes! I know all about mens sandy in corpus sankey,' said Bunter, 'but this is very special. Of course, I'm keen on cricket. But I've just got to bag that schol if I can.'

'Um!' said Wharton, doubtfully.

'I can't afford to waste a—a—a minute. It's up to me, and I'm sticking to it, like glue!' said Bunter. 'You fellows promised to back me up, you know.'

'I know! But—.'

'Well, now's your chance. I'm going to swot at Latin all the afternoon. My pater's in a jam, and it's up to me. I simply can't afford time for games-practice.'

Billy Bunter blinked anxiously at the captain of the Remove.

He was not often lucky with his excuses. Imaginary aches and pains had only too often been ruthlessly disregarded. But the fat Owl considered that he was backing a winner, so to speak, this time.

He was swotting for an exam. Harry Wharton and Co. had promised to back him up in that enterprise. Their backing had not, so far, been wholly gratifying to the lazy fat Owl. But letting him off games-practice was a form of backing that Billy Bunter really could appreciate.

'It will be all right, if you speak to Wingate,' he went on. 'You just can't drag me away from work, in the—the circumstances, old chap. It's up to you, after promising to back me up, you know.'

Harry Wharton eyed the fat Owl dubiously.

Bunter, no doubt, had made up his fat mind to swot for that schol. Really, it was more than most fellows would have expected of Bunter, and Harry Wharton and his comrades were more than willing to give help. They had given him some already, not wholly to his satisfaction. Bunter undoubtedly needed keeping up to the mark. His intentions were good, but laziness was only too likely to supervene. How much swotting he was likely to do, while the other fellows were on Little Side, was a rather open question.

'Well, look here,' said Harry Wharton, at last. 'If you're really going to swot, Bunter, and stick to it—'

'Like glue!' assured Bunter, eagerly.

'All right, then! But if it turns out that you've been frowsting instead of swotting, you get six from a cricket stump.'

'I—I—I'm going to swot like billy-o!'

'Keep to that,' said Harry. 'Six on the bags if you've been pulling my leg. I'll speak to Wingate, and it will be all right. Don't forget that stump.'

With that, the captain of the Remove walked away to join his friends and change for cricket. Billy Bunter was left in a greatly relieved frame of mind.

Exactly how much swotting he was going to do, with no eye on him, Bunter himself did not know. But at least he had got off games-practice: and that was so much to the good, from the point of view of a fat Owl who made both a science and an art of dodging anything in the nature of exertion.

But if Bunter was going to swot, he did not seem in a hurry to begin. His fat form was leaning on a buttress, when, ten minutes later, Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing came out of the House. Redwing was in flannels: the Bounder was not. He was speaking as they passed, and Billy Bunter grinned as the words came to his fat ears.

'I wish you'd chuck it, Smithy, and come along to cricket with the rest—'

'I've got leave from Wingate.'

'Oh, I know that! I suppose you've spun him some yarn,' said Redwing, impatiently. 'Look here, Smithy—'

'Cheerio!' said the Bounder, and he walked away to the gates, leaving Redwing with a clouded brow.

'He, he, he!' came from Bunter. 'Where's Smithy going, Redwing? Anywhere near the *Three Fishers*, what? He, he, he!'

Redwing glanced at him, and walked away without replying. Perhaps the same suspicion was in his own mind.

He was assured, at least, that the Bounder was not heading for Popper's Island and more trouble in that direction:

Smithy was not going there again in the daytime. But it was only too probable that the scapegoat of the Remove was heading for some other spot out of school bounds.

Billy Bunter continued to adorn the buttress with his fat person. He was quite comfortable there, and felt no yearning whatever to begin his attack upon the language of Horace and Cicero. Indeed the more he thought of Latin papers, the more disposed he was to continue leaning on that buttress.

He was going to work that afternoon! For quite a long time, he remained in the state of 'going-to'. Actually getting down to it required an effort which Bunter felt less and less inclined to make.

After all, what was the hurry? A fellow couldn't slog all the time. It was jolly hot: and he would feel more like swotting after tea, when it would be cooler. Bunter nodded with satisfaction as that bright thought occurred to him.

On the other hand, his form-captain had promised him six with a cricket stump if he frowsted about, after getting off games-practice specially to work. Bunter did not want six from a cricket stump.

Still, Wharton wouldn't know, he reasoned further, so that was all right. At that stage of his cogitations, Coker of the Fifth passed him, and gave him a stare of disfavour. 'Fat frowster!' said Coker, in passing.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter: not till Coker was out of hearing.

He detached himself from the buttress at last. He was going to work—but he was going to postpone work till tea. But Coker's remarks reminded him that he had better not be seen 'frowsting about'. Sitting under a shady tree by the river was a rather attractive idea, and there he would be out of the general view. And—a last solace to his fat conscience—he could take Virgil under his arm, and have a shot at the brute while he was sitting under that shady tree!

He paused.

Virgil was in his study: and there were a lot of stairs up to the Remove studies. Stairs told on Bunter. He had so much weight to carry up. His pause lasted two or three minutes. Then he rolled away to the gates—without Virgil!

## QUICK WORK!

'OH!' breathed Herbert Vernon-Smith.

He came to a sudden halt on the tow-path, staring at the shining river, and at a man in a boat on the water, pulling down-stream.

His eyes gleamed as he stared, at the rower's back. Smithy was not, at the moment, thinking of the tenant of Popper's Island. His plans with regard to the obnoxious Beaver were, as he had told Redwing, cut and dried. His skiff was concealed, in readiness, up the river, in Hogben's Wood, and his next call on the Beaver was to be paid at a very late hour: exactly when, he had not yet decided. Stubborn and reckless as he was, Smithy was well aware that another visit to the forbidden island, which included 'breaking out' after lights out, was a very risky proceeding. He was accustomed to taking risks which no other fellow thought of taking, and to relying upon his luck to pull him through. But he was going to be very cautious all the same, and choose his time with care. He had, for the moment, dismissed the 'Beaver' from his mind—till he was now reminded of him.

He was, as the fat Owl had suspected, on his way up the Sark to the *Three Fishers*, a far from delectable establishment which was strictly out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows. Smithy had to 'see a man about a horse': a circumstance which would have earned him another painful interview with his headmaster, had it become known. Luckily for him, beaks and prefects were unaware of his interest in the two-thirty at Wapshot on Saturday. But he forgot about that horse, and 'backing his fancy', as he stared at the man in the boat on the Sark.

He was in sight of the gate of the Three Fishers, on the tow-path: the tree-tops of Popper's Island, further up the river, were just visible. The boat was coming down from the island: and though the rower's back was to him as he pulled, the Bounder knew him at once. He knew that if the man in the boat had turned round, he would have seen a bearded face. It was the Beaver.

Smithy's eyes gleamed at him.

He noted, with a sardonic grin, the thick dark hair that showed under the hat. The wig that had been tom off by the brambles, in the tussle on the island, was in place on the Beaver's head.

He stood still, watching the approaching boat.

Mr. Robinson did not often leave the island: he knew that. But he was leaving it now, coming down the river. Smithy wondered whether he might be going to the village of Friardale, for shopping: or perhaps as far as Pegg, where there were seaside attractions.

If so, it was a chance for the Bounder to pay his visit to Popper's Island, without the risk of breaking bounds after lights out to do so.

With that thought in his mind, he backed behind a tree close to the fence, near the inn gateway, to keep out of view, and watch the man pass in his boat. If, unseen, he watched him out of sight down the river, it was his chance.

But the boat did not pass.

Opposite the gateway of the *Three Fishers*, the man pulled in to the bank, and Smithy realised that he was going no further. The riverside inn was his destination.

The Bounder gave a low whistle.

Mr. Robinson's destination was the same as his own!

For which reason, Smithy evidently had to postpone his own call at that insalubrious resort. He certainly did not want to run into Mr. Robinson there.

He watched the man pull in, step ashore, and tie his painter to a post.

Had he been still standing on the open tow-path, the Beaver would have seen him as he landed. But behind the tree he was invisible to Mr. Robinson, who did not even glance in his direction.

Leaving his boat tied up, the tenant of Popper's Island crossed the tow-path and went in at the inn gateway. He passed within a few yards of Vernon-Smith, behind his tree, Smithy hugging cover very carefully till he had gone in.

'By gum!' breathed the Bounder. His eyes danced.

The idea flashed into his mind of borrowing the Beaver's own boat, to pull up to the island: leaving Mr. Robinson to whistle for it when he came out—what time the Bounder was raggng his camp on the island! That was a scheme after the reckless Bounder's own heart. If the man stayed only ten minutes at the inn, it would give him time to pull out of sight, even against the strong current of the Sark. And surely his stay would be longer than that, if he was seeking company as a change from the solitude of his camp.

But even as that thought formed in Smithy's mind, a voice came to his ears, plainly audible over the fence, close to which he was standing under the tree.

'Have the papers come?'

It was the Beaver's voice.

He had not gone into the inn. He was speaking to someone just inside the gateway.

The Bounder caught his breath.

It seemed that Mr. Robinson had not called at the *Three Fishers* for company, or for a game of billiards, or—as Smithy had intended to do—to see a man about a horse. He had merely called for newspapers. No doubt he had an arrangement with the inn-keeper to take the newspapers for him: it sounded like it.

That, probably, meant a very brief call: in which case, a fellow pulling a boat against a strong current would be still in sight when he came out.

'Yessir! They're ready for you in the bar,' came another voice.

'Thanks.'

The Bounder stood still for a moment, thinking hard.

The man might stay to look at the newspapers: but Smithy could not bank on that. Likely enough he had called for them to take them back to his camp. Smithy abandoned on the spot the idea of pulling up the Sark in the Beaver's boat.

But he did not abandon his designs on the boat. The man would be two or three minutes, at least, and that gave time for a swift spin down-stream.

He stepped out from behind the tree, and gave a quick cautious glance in at the gateway.

The Beaver had gone into the inn: and the man to whom he had spoken was not in sight. For the moment, at least, the coast was clear: and that was enough for Smithy.

He ran down to the water. To cast loose the boat's painter was the work of a second. He leaped into the boat, stumbled over a thwart, and sprawled. But that sprawl sent the boat rocking out from the bank.

He scrambled up breathlessly and grasped the oars, jammed them into the rowlocks, and pulled with all his strength. Aided by the strong current, the boat shot down the Sark. Well knowing that it might be a matter of moments, the Bounder pulled as if in a race.

He stared back as he rowed. The *Three Fishers* was falling rapidly astern. He was already too far off for recognition if the Beaver came out.

But he was only in time.

Staring back, he saw a man come out at the inn gateway, and cross the tow-path, with a bundle under his arm. He was too far off for Smithy to make out his features, or even his beard: but he easily guessed that it was the Beaver. Evidently, Mr. Robinson had not stayed to read the newspapers. He was taking them back to his camp on the island to read

them there. That, at least, was his intention: but he was not likely to get back to his camp so soon as he fancied.

The Bounder chuckled, breathlessly. He was putting all his beef into pulling at the oars. The Beaver could have followed the boat, down the bank, and recaptured it before long, had Smithy simply cut it adrift. But he had no chance of recapturing it now. It was almost whizzing.

Smithy could see the man, on the bank, staring about him for the missing boat, and then staring up and down the river. Then, it seemed to him, the man's eyes fixed in his direction.

That did not perturb Smithy in the least. As the Beaver was too far off for recognition by the Bounder, evidently the Bounder was too far off for recognition by the Beaver. He was not going to be 'nailed' this time.

Possibly, even at the distance, the man might pick out the Greyfriars cap. But assuredly he could not know upon whose head it was. And Smithy was already formulating in his mind an 'alibi' if questions should be asked about his movements that afternoon!

He pulled on, hard and fast: and the man on the bank, and the red roofs and chimney-pots of the Three Fishers, disappeared from his view.

But he did not think of pulling so far as the school. He did not want any Greyfriars eye to fall upon him in the Beaver's boat.

Far out of sight of the Three Fishers, he pulled in to the bank, still a good distance short of the school boat-house.

He jumped out, and with a powerful shove, sent the boat spinning out into the Sark. The current caught it and carried it on, the Bounder grinning after it as it went.

Grinning, he turned away, to walk along the river as far as a footpath that led to the Courtfield road. The picture palace at Courtfield was his 'alibi' if questions were asked!

'I say, Smithy!'

As he turned into the footpath, under the shady trees, a fat voice squeaked.

The Bounder glanced round.

A fat figure was sitting in the grass, under a shady tree, at the corner where the footpath entered the wood. That fat figure leaned lazily back against a gnarled trunk, and two fat little legs were stretched out in the grass. Billy Bunter blinked up at the Bounder through his big spectacles.



'I say, got any toffee, Smithy?'

The Bounder gave him an indifferent stare, and walked on, into the wood.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

The fat Owl was enjoying his lazy slack. Sitting under a shady tree by the river was an immense improvement on games-practice on a warm summer's afternoon. But there was a fly in the ointment, as there generally is in this imperfect universe. There was one thing needful: something to eat! A stick of toffee, a chunk of butterscotch, or a bag of bull's-eyes, would have given the finishing touch to Billy Bunter's fat and lazy comfort. But the Bounder, evidently, was not interested.

The next moment, however, Vernon-Smith turned back. Billy Bunter eyed him hopefully. 'If—if you've got a spot of toffee, Smithy—.'

'I haven't! Why aren't you at games-practice?' asked Smithy.

'I'm let off, as I've got some work to do!' explained Bunter. 'You know I'm swotting for the Founder's—.'

'Is that how you swot?'

'I—I—I'm going to tackle it a bit later—it's so jolly hot! After tea,' explained the fat Owl.

'Lots of time after tea. If you've got any chocs, Smithy—.'

'Like a trot to Courtfield?'

'No jolly fear!' answered Bunter, promptly.

'I'm going to the pictures,' said Smithy, casually. 'Like to come? We can pick up the bus on the road.'

'Oh!' said Bunter, thoughtfully. He considered it carefully. Certainly he would have liked to go to the pictures, if the Bounder paid for the tickets. Neither did he object to sitting in a motor-bus. But it was a walk of a quarter of a mile through the wood to the Courtfield road! Slowly, Bunter shook a fat head.

'Tea at the Arcade after the pictures,' added Smithy.

That did it.

The Arcade, at Courtfield, was a most attractive establishment, where the food was magnificent, and the prices still more so. Smithy could afford those prices.

Billy Bunter couldn't. Tea at the Arcade, with Smithy footing the bill, was irresistible.

A moment ago, Billy Bunter had looked too lazy to move. Now he jumped up, as if he had a spring in his fat legs.

'I'm on!' he said.

'Come on, then,' said Smithy: and the fat Owl rolled by his side as he walked on along the shady footpath.

Why Smithy was 'standing' him the pictures, and tea at the Arcade afterwards, Billy Bunter did not know. Certainly he did not dream of guessing that he was going to be a witness to Smithy's 'alibi', if it transpired that Smithy needed one! But Bunter did not want to know why. That did not matter. What Bunter wanted was a feed at the Arcade, and his fat mind dwelt in happy anticipation on that feed, as he rolled on through the wood: and his plump face was as bright as the summer sunshine as he rolled.

## QUELCH WANTS TO KNOW

WINGATE of the Sixth tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered the study. The Remove master was seated at his table, with a pen in his hand. But he was not using the pen. His face was grim, and frowning: and he was evidently thinking of something other than the pile of Form papers on the table before him.

'Trotter says you wish to see me, sir!' said Wingate.

'Yes, Wingate! It is another complaint from Sir Hilton Popper, who has telephoned to Dr. Locke, on account of his tenant. Mr.—er—Robinson! You remember the incident last week—.'

'I remember it, sir.'

'The headmaster has asked me to make inquiries, as a boy of my form may be concerned. This time, it seems, the man's boat has been taken away.'

'Indeed, sir.'

'It appears that he had landed at the riverside inn, and when he came out, he missed his boat, which he had left tied up. He is positive that the person he saw rowing it away wore a Greyfriars cap, although he was already at too great a distance to be recognised.'

Mr. Quelch paused.

'In this case,' he went on, 'I hope that no boys of my form are concerned, but—in view of Vernon-Smith's reckless conduct a few days ago—.' He paused again. 'As Head of the Games, Wingate, you will know whether any Remove boy was missing from games-practice this afternoon.'

'Certainly, sir! Two!' said Wingate. 'One was Bunter — Wharton asked for him to have leave off, as he is working for an examination.'

'And the other—?'

'Vernon-Smith, sir!' said Wingate. 'He asked me for leave, as he had had a knock from a cricket-ball. Vernon-Smith is no slacker, sir—he is very keen on games, and I have no doubt that it was as he said.'

'No doubt, no doubt!' said Mr. Quelch. 'But, as he was absent, he may have been the boy concerned in this foolish prank. If he has been out of gates—.'

'He has, sir, as I noticed him coming in half-an-hour ago—.'

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

'Then I must question him,' he said. 'Will you be good enough to send him here, Wingate?'

'Certainly, sir.'

The Greyfriars captain left the study.

Mr. Quelch dipped his pen in the ink. But it still remained unused in his hand. The frown deepened on his brow. There had been, in Quelch's opinion, quite enough trouble with that disgruntled tenant of Popper's Island—and more than enough communications from the irate baronet at Popper Court. True, this time it was not a trespass on that wretched island: it was a prank played with a boat. But it was disturbing, irritating, and exasperating. Dr. Locke had been a little tart on the subject. The very last person he ever desired to hear from was Sir Hilton Popper, and now he had had to hear from him: and indeed he seemed to take it for granted that one of Quelch's boys was the culprit again. Unfortunately, Quelch himself could not help coming to the same conclusion. If it proved so, the cane in his study was going to have some very strenuous exercise.

There was a tap at the door, and Herbert Vernon-Smith came in. Mr. Quelch's eyes fixed on him with gimlet-like sharpness.

'You sent for me, sir!' said Smithy, meekly.

There was often, in the Bounder's manner, a kind of suppressed impertinence, even in dealing with his form-master. But this time Smithy was very much on his guard. He was quiet and respectful: and looked, as much as he could, as if butter would not have melted in his mouth.

'Yes, Vernon-Smith,' said Mr. Quelch, the gimlet-eyes still fixed on the Bounder's face. 'It appears that you had leave from games-practice this afternoon.'

'Yes, sir! I had a knock from a ball, and Wingate gave me leave off,' answered Smithy, meekly.

'You were out of gates?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I require to know how you spent your time out of gates, Vernon-Smith.'

'Courtfield is in bounds on a half-holiday, sir!' said Smithy. 'We're allowed to go to the pictures at the *Imperial*, sir.'

Quelch's eyes became, if possible, more gimlet-like. 'That is quite correct, Vernon-Smith. If you spent your time in Courtfield this afternoon, I shall be very much relieved. Some boy, at present unknown, who is stated to have been wearing a Greyfriars cap, took away a boat belonging to Sir Hilton Popper's tenant, Mr. Robinson. Your headmaster has been troubled with a complaint on the subject. I trust that it is only a coincidence that you were out of gates at the time.'

'Plenty of other fellows out of gates, sir, on a half-holiday!' said Vernon-Smith. 'I don't see why they should fancy it was a Remove man.'

'That is what I have to ascertain,' said Mr. Quelch, grimly. 'Kindly give me an account of your movements this afternoon, Vernon-Smith.'

The Bounder assumed an air of reflection.

'I went for a stroll, sir. Then I thought I'd get on the bus and go to Courtfield for the pictures, sir.'

'At what time?'

Smithy reflected again.

'I wouldn't know exactly, sir, but it was very soon after three.'

The gimlet-eyes seemed almost to penetrate Smithy, as he made that artless statement. Mr. Quelch was aware that it was considerably later than three when Mr. Robinson missed his boat at the riverside inn. Sir Hilton Popper had been particular about details.

'You went to the cinema Vernon-Smith after taking the omnibus to Courtfield?'

'Yes, sir.'

'When did you leave?'

'About an hour later, sir!'

'Where did you go then?'

'The Arcade, sir, for some cakes and ginger-beer.'

'Were you alone all that time, Vernon-Smith?'

The Bounder breathed rather hard for a moment. But he was prepared for that.

'Oh, no, sir, another fellow was with me all the time,' he answered, quite casually.

'Oh!' That answer took Mr. Quelch aback a little. 'In that case, you may give me the boy's name, Vernon-Smith.'

'Bunter, sir.'

'Bunter!' repeated Mr. Quelch. 'Wingate has told me that Bunter was given leave this afternoon. Bunter went to the pictures with you?'

'Yes, sir. I should have asked Redwing, but he was at games-practice, so I went with Bunter.'

'Bunter will, I suppose, bear out your statement, Vernon-Smith?'

'Of course, sir, when he comes in, if you ask him.'

'Did he not return with you?'

'He's such a jolly slow walker, sir. We came back by bus, but we have to walk from the corner of Oak Lane, and Bunter just crawls, sir. I left him crawling.'

Mr. Quelch sat looking at the Bounder across his table.

If all this was true, it certainly cleared Vernon-Smith: and undoubtedly Quelch would have been glad to know that the culprit, in this case, was not a boy of his form. His frowning brow had relaxed very considerably.

'Very well, Vernon-Smith,' he said, at last. 'I am glad, very glad, that you were so harmlessly occupied. I shall speak to Bunter, and if he corroborates your statements, there is nothing more to be said. You may leave my study.'

The Bounder's manner was still meekly respectful as he left the study. Not till the door was closed did he allow a grin to dawn upon his face. He walked away with his hands in his pockets, humming a tune. And when, half-an-hour later, a tired fat Owl crawled in, and was called to Mr. Quelch's study, what he had to say could only corroborate the Bounder's story. Billy Bunter had not the remotest idea that he had been used for an 'alibi': neither had Quelch: and it looked 'all clear' for the unscrupulous scapegrace of the Remove.

## TOO CLEVER!

'Go it!' said the Bounder, sarcastically.

He was lounging in the window of No. 4 Study, his hands in his pockets, a mocking sneer on his somewhat hard face.

Tom Redwing sat on the edge of the study table, looking at him, without speaking: but if his tongue was silent, his look was quite eloquent.

He had wondered, uneasily, how his chum was occupied that afternoon, while the rest of the form were at cricket. Now he knew: Smithy had told him. Smithy had been in a state of considerable glee over his success. He had scored over the obnoxious Beaver: and he had come through scatheless: his 'alibi' with Billy Bunter's unconscious aid, had worked like a charm. If beaks and prefects were looking for the fellow who had worn a Greyfriars cap in a boat on the Sark, they were not looking for Smithy. Which was quite satisfactory to the Bounder—but did not seem so to his chum.

'Get going!' jeered Smithy. 'You're generally ready with a sermon—and I can see you're thinkin' one out.'

'I suppose it's no use telling you what I think,' said Redwing, breaking his silence at last.

'Oh, do!' sneered Smithy. 'You don't know how amusin' you are, Reddy, when you get on to sixthly or seventhly! Go it.'

Redwing's lips set a little.

'It's rotten, Smithy,' he said. 'I suppose you can't see it, or you wouldn't do it: it's some kink in you. I—I wish you could look at things like other fellows—Wharton or Bob Cherry, or old Mauly—.'

'Well, what have I done?' snapped the Bounder. 'I've set the Beaver's boat drifting down to the sea. Didn't he smack my head? That isn't all that's coming to him, either. But is that a reason for pulling a face as long as a fiddle?'

'I'm not thinking of that, and you know it,' said Redwing, quietly. 'The man's a brute, and he's asked for a knock back, if you come to that. If you could have done it without telling a string of lies about it—.'

Vernon-Smith flushed.

'That's not a nice word, Reddy!' he said, a gleam coming into his eyes.

'What do you call it, then?'

'Oh, rot! We tell the tale to the beaks—it's up to them to spot us, if they can. That's understood.'

'I suppose you think so,' said Redwing, with a sigh. 'I know you're a decent chap, Smithy, and you wouldn't do anything you knew was mean.'

'I don't like that word, either.'

'Then I'd better say nothing at all. Lying is lying, whatever name you call it by: and it's one of the meanest things a fellow can do. Bob Cherry or Nugent or Squiff might have played a prank on the man's boat—but do you think they'd have got out of it as you did?'

'Oh, rot!' repeated the Bounder.

'It's not even sense,' went on Redwing. 'The truth always comes out, somehow, and lies come home to roost.'

'If that's all, you needn't worry,' sneered the Bounder. 'Quelch is properly stuffed. I knew that questions might be asked, as I'm a dog with a bad name: and I fixed up an alibi with a witness—that sees me through.'

'If it comes out, it will land that fat ass Bunter in a row too—.'

'Oh, don't be a goat!' exclaimed the Bounder, sharply. 'Bunter never had the least idea that I was making use of him: and do you think I shouldn't tell Quelch so, if I did get nailed after all?'

'Yes, I'm sure you would, Smithy,' agreed Redwing, in a more cordial tone. 'You wouldn't let another fellow down. But—.'

'But it couldn't come out: nothing to worry me but my jolly old conscience for stuffing Quelch!' grinned the Bounder.

'There's that to answer for, as well as the prank with the Beaver's boat, if it does all come out—.'

'By gum! Quelch would be shirty!' said the Bounder, with a whistle. 'But it won't come out—it's safe as houses. Don't be such a croaker, old man.'

'Well, I hope it won't come out,' said Tom. 'But—but I—I wish you'd think differently about such things, Smithy. It's not good enough, for a fellow like you—.'

'Let's get off the subject, or we shall be rowing over it,' snapped the Bounder. 'No other fellow could call me a liar without getting his head punched.'

The Bounder spoke angrily: almost savagely: all the more so, perhaps, because Tom Redwing's words had gone home. If they had not exactly stirred his conscience, they had at least made him feel much less satisfied with his success in 'telling the tale'. For once, Smithy had been made to feel dissatisfied with himself: and it was not a feeling he liked. Redwing compressed his lips, and said no more. Certainly, he did not want a 'row' with his chum, or to carry the argument to the length of punching heads!

They sat down to tea in the study: not in the cheeriest mood. Redwing was silent and troubled: the Bounder irritated and dissatisfied. Both were rather relieved when a cheery ruddy face, surmounted by a mop of flaxen hair, looked in at the door, and a powerful voice boomed:

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Trot in,' said the Bounder. 'Just in time for tea, and Reddy and I are fed up to the teeth with one another's company.'

Bob Cherry laughed.

'I'm Mercury!' he explained. 'Messenger of the gods, if you don't remember who jolly old Mercurius was, Quelch wants you, Smithy.'

The Bounder started.

'Quelch!' he repeated.

'Just Quelch—he's sent me to call you.' Bob's cheery face became graver. 'I hope you haven't been up to anything this afternoon, Smithy—Quelch was looking jolly grim. Best of luck, old bean.'

Bob Cherry departed: and the Bounder rose from the table, breathing rather quickly.

Redwing looked at him in silence.

'What does he want?' muttered the Bounder, between his teeth. 'They can't connect me up with that rotten boat—that's all settled and done with. What has the old ass got into his noddle now?'

Redwing made no reply, but his face was anxious.

Without saying more, the Bounder left the study and went down. He told himself, as he went, that it was all clear: his 'alibi' had worked: he had 'told the tale' with absolute success. Quelch had been satisfied: there was nothing more to come. Redwing had said that the truth always came out somehow: but that was only his pi-jaw. He was safe—perfectly safe—but all the same, he was feeling very uneasy as he presented himself in his form-master's study.

Bob Cherry had not exaggerated in stating that Quelch looked 'jolly grim'. His face could not have been grimmer, as he fixed his gimlet-eyes on the scapegrace of his form.

'Vernon-Smith!' His voice was a sharp rap.

'Yes, sir!' muttered the Bounder.

'The boat belonging to the tenant of Popper's Island, which was sent adrift this afternoon, has been recovered,' said Mr. Quelch. 'The boat-keeper at the school boathouse saw it drifting, and took it in.'

'I'm glad it has been found, sir!' said Smithy, as casually as he could. Why Quelch had sent for him to tell him this, was quite a mystery to him.

'The boat-keeper reported it to Wingate, as he did not know to whom the boat might belong,' went on Mr. Quelch. 'Wingate looked over it, and found something in it, Vernon-Smith.'

'Did he, sir?' murmured the Bounder. He tried to remember whether he could possibly, in his haste, have left something in the boat. But he was quite sure that he had not.

'He found this!' said Mr. Quelch, grimly, taking up a little silver-handled penknife from his table. 'Apart from the fact that your initials are engraved on the metal, Vernon-Smith. I have seen this penknife in your possession. You do not. I presume, deny that it is yours?'

The Bounder stood quite still.

He was taken utterly aback. Nothing could have been more unexpected. Yet nothing could have been more simple. A fellow tumbling headlong into a boat was quite likely to drop some small article from his pocket. He had not thought of it: in his haste and hurry he had thought only of getting to a distance as rapidly as he could. He had not, he believed, left the ghost of a clue behind him. And all the while—!

What became of his precious 'alibi' now? There, in Quelch's hand, was proof positive that he had been in the Beaver's boat that afternoon.

He had been very clever indeed! He had, in fact, been a little too clever. He had that 'alibi' to answer for now, as well as the rest.

'Well?' rapped Mr. Quelch.

Still the hapless Bounder did not speak. The red came into his face, and spread till he was crimson. If Smithy did not scruple to 'tell the tale', at least he could feel shame and humiliation when it was brought home to him.

'You may take your penknife, Vernon-Smith.'

Smithy took it, still dumb.

'It was you who sent the boat adrift, Vernon-Smith. That is a minor matter, compared with the prevarication with which you deluded me, with the assistance of another boy in my form. Have you anything to say, Vernon—Smith?'

The Bounder found his voice at last.

'Only that Bunter had nothing to do with it, sir,' he answered, quietly. 'He hadn't the faintest idea why I asked him to come to the pictures with me. He knew nothing whatever about the boat.'

'I can believe you to that extent, Vernon-Smith. Is that all you have to say?'

Smithy was silent: and the Remove master rose from the table. He picked up his cane: and the Bounder closed his lips hard, bracing himself for the ordeal.

'You will bend over, Vernon-Smith.'

In silence the Bounder obeyed.

It was a severe 'six'. It was well-known in the Remove that Quelch could 'whop', when occasion required. Evidently Quelch thought that the present occasion required severity. The Bounder uttered no sound: but his face, which had been crimson, was pale when it was over.

Mr. Quelch laid down the cane.

'One word more, Vernon-Smith,' he said, 'as you cannot be trusted to heed your form-master's, or even your headmaster's commands, you will remain within gates on all half-

holidays, so long as Sir Hilton Popper's tenant remains on the island in the Sark. You may now leave my study.'

The Bounder went, without a word.

On the Remove landing, he came on Bob Cherry, who gave him a glance of sympathetic inquiry.

'Had it bad?' asked Bob.

Smithy nodded, without speaking: and went on to his own study. He went in, and shut the door, and then stood leaning on the table, breathing hard. Tom Redwing stood looking at him, in miserable silence.

It was some minutes before the Bounder spoke. And then, rather to Tom's surprise, it was not to break out into words of passionate anger and resentment. His voice was very quiet.

'I've been through it, Reddy,' he said.

'I can see that, old chap,' said Tom.

'Six—and gating so long as that hairy rat stays on the island. They don't mean to give me another chance at him.' The Bounder's eyes glittered for a moment. 'We'll see about that!' he said, between his teeth. Then he went on, in the same quiet tone as before. 'You were right, Reddy, old man! I thought I was jolly clever, and I was a fool for my pains. It's not the six—I can stand that, but—but—I felt such a rotten worm under Quelch's eyes, when he knew I had been rigging up a string of lies to take him in. I'm done with that, Reddy.'

'Stick to that, old fellow.'

'I'm going to!' said the Bounder, and then, with his old sardonic grin, he added, 'perhaps!' He gave himself a shake.

'Let's finish tea! Sit down, Reddy—I'll feed standing up, like a horse. By gum, Quelch can whop!'

WHERE IS BUNTER?

'BUNTER!'

'Bunty!'

'Bunt!'

Voices were calling.

Billy Bunter hardly breathed.

The fat Owl of the Remove was ensconced in a deep armchair in the Rag. The high back of the chair hid him from any fellow looking in at the door. A number of fellows were looking in, and calling. Bunter hoped, from the bottom of his fat heart, that Harry Wharton and Co. wouldn't guess that he was there.

There was only one other fellow in the Rag after class on Thursday. That was Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Smithy was seated in another armchair, quite near Bunter, who was under his full view. He had a newspaper in his hands, his interest being centred in the racing columns. At the moment, however, he was glancing at a photograph in the paper: that of Mr. Eldred Tregg, the man the police wanted to 'interview'. That hard, clean-shaven face was familiar to all the Remove fellows by this time: it had appeared many times in the papers, though always with the news that there was no news, as it were: Mr. Tregg had not been 'interviewed' so far.

'Bunter!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter!'

The Bounder glanced up irritably from the newspaper.

He stared across at the fellows in the doorway, and then at Bunter.

Billy Bunter made him an almost frantic sign to be silent. The Bounder stared at him, grinned, and dropped his eyes to the newspaper again. If Bunter wanted to keep doggo, Smithy was not going to give him away to the fellows who were seeking him.

And Bunter did want to keep 'doggo'.

He was due in Quelch's study for an hour of 'extra toot', in a few minutes. Quelch, in the kindness of his heart, was giving up a whole hour of his scanty leisure, to help the fat junior on his way towards a Founder's Scholarship.

There was no doubt that Bunter needed that extra tuition. He was aware of it himself. Really, he wanted it, as well as needed it. But he did not want it at that precise moment. Bunter was going to work for that schol. His fat mind was made up to work for it. At some time or other in the future tense, he was going to slog and swot like anything. But not at the moment! It was the present tense that worried Bunter.

So, like that sagacious animal, Brer Fox, Billy Bunter lay low and said 'nuffin': and as the Bounder also said nothing, he hoped that he was going to escape. Laziness chained him to that armchair. The mere thought of an hour with Quelch in his study made him feel that life was weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. Later on he was going to swot. Not now—if he could help it!

'Where has that fat idiot got to?' exclaimed Bob Cherry, in the doorway. 'Squiff said he came here.'

'Dodged out, I expect,' said Frank Nugent, laughing. 'Poor old Bunter! I expect he's sorry by this time that he asked us to back him up.'

'Well, it's up to us,' said Harry Wharton. 'The fat chump is trying to do the right thing, for once, and we're bound to help if we can. I suppose he can't help being the laziest slacker at Greyfriars as well as the fattest.'

'Beast!' murmured Bunter, under his breath.

'Might as well let him rip!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Fat chance he will have for the Founder's, at this rate.'

'Well, we said we'd keep him up to the mark, and he jolly well needs it,' said Bob. 'We're going to keep him up to it. We must be cruel only to be kind, as jolly old Hamlet remarked.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'But where has the fat snail crawled since class?' exclaimed Bob. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Seen anything of Bunter, Smithy?'

The Bounder glanced up from his newspaper again. 'Lots!' he answered. 'There's plenty of him to be seen.'

'Fathead! Know where he is now?'

'He was here five minutes ago.'

'Oh! Then he can't be far off. Come on, you men.' Bob Cherry tramped away with his friends, to look further afield.

Billy Bunter gasped with relief. The danger had passed, for the moment at least. The Bounder's reply, though actually veracious, had certainly given the Famous Five the impression that Bunter was no longer in the Rag. They were welcome to look for him anywhere else, as long as they liked.

The Bounder gave him a sarcastic glance.

'You fat ass,' he said. 'What have you entered for the Founder's at all for, if you're too slack to do a spot of work for it?'

'Oh, really, Smithy—.'

'Why not brace up, you fat slacker? If your pater's in a jam, as you've been telling the world for a week or more, it's up to you.'

'I—I—I know!' mumbled Bunter. 'I—I ain't going to slack, Smithy! I—I'm going to work jolly hard! But—but—not just at this minute, you know—.'

'Any time but the present, what?'

'It—it's deponent verbs!' moaned Bunter. 'Quelch is going to take me through those rotten verbs that are Thingummy in form and What-do-you-call-it in meaning. Besides, it—it may not be necessary after all, you know. They may get hold of that man Tregg.'

'Looks a lot like it!' said the Bounder. 'They've got his mug here again, and somebody thinks he's seen him in Hampshire—which probably means that he's a hundred miles away from Hampshire. The other day somebody saw him—or more likely didn't—in Wales.'

'Well, his picture's all over the place,' said Bunter. 'Anybody who saw him would know him—.'

'Rot! Think he wouldn't alter his looks, with his photograph in every newspaper in the country! I don't suppose he looks anything at all like his mug here, since he bolted.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Bunter.

'If you're banking on that, old fat man, you may as well forget it,' said the Bounder. 'Look here, get a move on—Quelch will be shirty if you don't turn up for extra toot.'

'Well, I can tell him I forgot the time. I suppose he will take a fellow's word about that?' said Bunter, with dignity.

'Oh, my hat!' said Smithy: and he returned to his newspaper: this time to the racing columns. He had given Bunter good advice: but he was not disposed to take trouble about him like Harry Wharton and Co. He was much more interested in the two-thirty at Wapshot on Saturday, than in William George Bunter.

Bunter stretched himself luxuriously in the armchair.

He was going to Quelch's study later—perhaps half-an-hour later—perhaps a little more!

The more he thought about those irritating Latin verbs which are passive in form but active

in meaning, the less he was disposed to make a closer acquaintance with them. And it was very comfortable in that deep armchair.

But alas for Bunter!

Hardly ten minutes had elapsed, when there was once more a tramp of feet in the doorway: and this time the Famous Five came in.

'Has Bunter been here, Smithy?' called out Harry Wharton.

'Blow Bunter!' answered the Bounder, without looking up.

'Well, blow you, if you come to that!' said Bob Cherry, cheerfully. 'Look round for him, you men—he doesn't seem to be anywhere else, and I shouldn't wonder if he's parked in one of those armchairs—.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' Five fellows came round the fat Owl's armchair, and stared at the plump figure sprawling therein. 'You fat villain—.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—.'

'We've been looking for you all over the shop, you fat slacker!' exclaimed Frank Nugent.

'Have—have—have you?' gasped Bunter. 'I—I say. I—I—I—.'

'You're five minutes late for Quelch, already,' said Johnny Bull. 'Get up and go, you lazy fat frump.'

'I—I—I'm just going!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I mean, I—I'm going in a minute or two. Don't you fellows wait, I—I expect you want to go down to the nets, and—and I wouldn't like to waste your time—.'

'Get a move on, my esteemed Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'A stitch in time saves ninepence, as the English proverb remarks.'

'I'll take him to Quelch's study,' said Bob. 'Come on, Bunter.'

'Wow! Leggo my ear!' yelled Bunter.

'I'm going to take it to Quelch's study. You can come with it or not, just as you like.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Yaroooooh!'

Billy Bunter almost bounded out of the armchair. With Bob's finger and thumb fastened like a steel vice on a fat ear, and pulling hard, the fat Owl was stirred to unusually rapid motion.

'Yow-ow-ow! Will you leggo my ear?' he yelled.

'Yes—at Quelch's door!'

'Ow! Beast! wow!'

Bob Cherry walked across to the door. Bunter's fat ear went with him, in that vice-like grip. Needless to add, Bunter went with the ear! A parting would have been altogether too painful. The fat ear accompanied Bob Cherry, and with a series of indignant squeaks, Bunter accompanied the fat ear!

They arrived together at Mr. Quelch's door.

With his free hand, Bob tapped at the door and opened it. Then he released that fat ear. It was too late for Bunter to escape. The gimlet-eye was on him.

'Bunter!'

'Oh! Yes. sir!'

'You are six minutes late.'

'Oh! I—I—I—.'

'You may come in!' said Mr. Quelch.

Bob Cherry walked away, leaving Billy Bunter to Quelch and deponent verbs.

## AFTER LIGHTS OUT

HARRY WHARTON'S eyes opened, in the glimmer of moonlight in the Remove dormitory. The summer moon sailed over the ancient roofs of Greyfriars School, turning the old quad into a pool of silver, and glimmering in at the high windows. Something had awakened the captain of the Remove, at that late hour: some faint sound close at hand in the shadowy dormitory.

He lay half-awake. From the shadows came a rumbling snore, indicating that Billy Bunter was fast asleep. Drowsily, Wharton wondered for a moment or two, whether it was Bunter's resonant snore that had disturbed his slumber. Then another sound came to him, closer at hand: the sound of whispering voices.

'Smithy, for goodness sake—!'

'That will do!'

'But-Smithy—.'

Harry Wharton started into wide wakefulness. It was Tom Redwing's voice, in tones of almost beseeching earnestness.

He lifted his head from the pillow, and looked in the direction of the whispering. Two other fellows, at least, were awake, in the sleeping dormitory. In the dimness, he made out a figure standing fully-dressed. It was Herbert Vernon-Smith: and a gleam of moonlight on his face showed it dark and angry. Tom Redwing was sitting up in bed.

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

The Bounder was up, and dressed, at an hour when all other Greyfriars fellows were asleep in bed. That could only mean that he was 'breaking out' that night: as he knew that the scapegrace of the form had done a good many times before. No doubt the *Three Fishers*, or the *Cross Keys*, was his destination: where the sportsman of the Remove had sporting friends.

It was the Bounder's reckless way to take such risks: indeed he seemed to enjoy the risk as much as anything else. Wharton, as he heard Redwing's anxious whisper, did not suppose that it would influence Vernon-Smith in the least. The Bounder had no use for wise counsel, when he was bent on a reckless escapade.

'But-Smithy—!' mimicked the Bounder. His voice was not as low as Redwing's. 'Chuck it, Reddy! What's the good of jaw? I'm goin'!'

'Smithy, don't be so mad!' muttered Redwing. 'Think of the risk—breaking out at this hour—.'

'More risky than ever, if you wake the worm.' sneered Smithy. 'Go to sleep, for goodness sake, and leave me alone.'

'If you're missed—.'

'Was I missed last time, or the time before that?' jeered the Bounder. 'Think Quelch is likely to be rambling about at midnight?'

'You never know! Quelch has got a special eye on you now, and he may be suspicious. You've shown him pretty plainly that you're keeping up that feud, and now you're gated, you can't go anywhere near the island during the day—he may suspect—.'

'Rubbish!'

'He knows you, Smithy, and what a reckless fellow you are. He might guess—.'

'If he looked in here—.'

'Oh, chuck it, Reddy! Think you can put the wind up me, and scare me off!' snapped the Bounder. 'If there's a spot of risk, I don't care. It's past eleven, and you know that Quelch goes to roost at eleven as regular as clockwork.'

'What does that man on the island matter, anyway?' urged Redwing. 'He's a cantankerous brute, but he's not worth this risk.'

Harry Wharton gave a little start, as that came to his ears. Apparently it was not the *Three Fishers* or the *Cross Keys* this time, but some move in the Bounder's feud with the tenant of Popper's Island, that had caused Smithy to turn out at that late hour.

'He matters a lot to me, till I've given him something back,' answered the Bounder. 'And he's getting it to-night, Reddy. I'm going to make that cheeky rotter sorry that he laid hands on me.'

Harry Wharton sat up in bed. 'Smithy!' he whispered.

Vernon-Smith stared round, in the glimmering moonlight, as he heard Wharton's voice.

'Oh! You're awake, are you?' he snapped.

'You two woke me up,' answered Harry, quietly. 'Look here, Smithy—.'

'Better wake up the rest of the fellows, Reddy, while you're about it,' said the Bounder, sardonically. 'If this is the talk of the form to-morrow, Quelch may very likely hear something. Is that what you want?'

'Smithy—!' exclaimed Redwing.

'Oh, shout!' said Smithy, in the same sardonic tone. 'If you want every man here to sit up and see me off, I don't mind. I'm goin' all the same.'

Redwing made no reply to that.

'If you won't listen to Redwing, Smithy, listen to me for a minute,' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

'Oh, go it!' sneered the Bounder. 'As I've had sixthly from Redwing, I may as well have seventhly from you. Carry on.'

Wharton compressed his lips.

'If you're thinking of going to that island—!' he said.

'Just that—if you want to know,' jeered the Bounder.

'I'm not seeing a man about a horse this time—I'm going to rag the Beaver's camp, and bring down his tent on his head! Shout it out all over Greyfriars if you like.'

'Have a little sense, Smithy! You won't be able to get a boat out—.'

'I've fixed that up all right.'

'Oh! I've heard that your skiff's at the boat-builder's for repairs—you won't be able to get it at this hour—.'

'Sez you!' jeered Smithy. 'If you're interested, my skiff's hidden in Hogben's Wood, a quarter of a mile above the island, waiting for me when I want it. Anything more you'd like to know?'

'Oh!' repeated Wharton. He realised that Vernon-Smith had laid his plans well in advance for this escapade. 'Well, look here, Smithy—you know that it's the sack for breaking out at night—.'

'And don't need you to tell me,' interrupted Smithy. 'I'll tell you this, at any rate,' said Harry. 'I believe that Quelch has his eye on you, as Redwing has told you.'

'You can believe what you like.'

'I'm pretty sure of it,' said Harry, 'and when beaks are suspicious, they sometimes make a round of the dormitories—.'

'How often?' sneered Smithy.

'Not often, I know. But you've as good as yelled it out to Quelch that you won't leave that brute on the island alone. You're gated for that very reason. Think it might not occur to Quelch that you might try it on after lights out? He may have looked in here last night, while we were all asleep, for all you know.'

'He's welcome to look in! I've fixed up a dummy in my bed, and if you struck a match you'd see that it looks exactly as if I were in it.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a sleepy murmur. 'Somebody up?'

Bob Cherry was awake now.

'Keep quiet, you fathead!' hissed the Bounder.

'That you, Smithy?' Bob peered through the shadows. 'Go back to bed like a sensible chap!

'Go and eat coke.'

Vernon-Smith, certainly, had no intention of going back to bed. His plans were laid, and he was going to carry them out—risk or no risk.

'Smithy, old man—.' Redwing spoke again, at last. Make a conversazione of it,' sneered Smithy. 'I'm going. Cheerio.'

The Bounder disappeared into the shadows. There was a faint sound as the door opened: another faint sound as it closed.

Smithy was gone.

'Silly ass!' commented Bob Cherry. 'Smithy will bank on his luck once too often.'

Bob laid a sleepy head on his pillow again. Harry Wharton followed his example. But Tom Redwing's eyes did not close. He was too anxious about his wayward chum to sleep.

Smithy had always had wonderful luck, and he was wont to bank on his luck, as if fortune could never let him down. But there was more than usual risk this time: and Tom, sleepless, listened for a sound he dreaded to hear—the sound of an opening door. If Quelch was suspicious—and if he came—! He knew that it was possible—that it was indeed likely: and his heart was heavy. This time the reckless Bounder was running more risks than he realised, or at least chose to realise.

The long minutes passed slowly.

Wharton and Bob Cherry had gone to sleep again: all the dormitory was deep in slumber, with one exception. There was a distant chime from the clock-tower. It was a quarter to twelve.

Redwing closed his eyes. But they opened again. He could not sleep. All was silent, save for the breathing of many sleepers, and the rumble of Billy Bunter's snore. It was useless to remain awake, awaiting the Bounder's return—Smithy would be absent for hours, if he carried out his intention: and that he would do so, there was no doubt. But sleep would not come to his anxious chum. And suddenly, through the deep silence of night, came a sound that caused Redwing to start and catch his breath. It was the sound of a footstep in the corridor—and it stopped at the door of the Remove dormitory.

## THE ISLAND AT MIDNIGHT

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH tramped up the tow-path by the Sark, under the summer moon, between the dark shadowy woods on one side, the river rippling silvery on the other. At that late hour, woods and river and tow-path were utterly solitary: he seemed alone in a world of glimmering moonlight and dusky shadows. But silence and solitude did not affect the Bounder's nerves. Both were welcome to him, for he was well aware of what must be the outcome, if he were seen out of school bounds at such an hour.

He swung on his way with a steady stride, and did not pause, till he reached the point on the bank opposite the island in the Sark.

There he paused, to look across.

All was dark, silent, and still, on the little wooded island. There was no gleam of a light among the thick trees. The tenant, no doubt, was fast asleep in his blankets at that hour. Smithy had no doubt of it: and no doubt that the Beaver was booked for a sudden and startling awakening!

After scanning the island, he resumed his tramp up the river. It was a quarter of a mile further up the Sark, to Hogben's Wood, where his skiff was hidden. His vigorous strides covered the ground rapidly, and he was soon at the spot where he and Redwing had concealed the little craft a few days ago.

He plunged through the gap in the old fence, and groped among the hawthorns for the boat. It was exactly as he had left it: no one had chanced upon it, hidden deep in the thicket. Heedless of scratches from the thorns, he dragged it out, and dragged it to the gap in the fence.

He put his head through the gap, and scanned the tow-path cautiously, before going further. But all was as solitary as he expected and wished it to be. From somewhere, in the far distance, came faintly the chime of midnight. No one was likely to be abroad at that hour.

He stepped out, dragging the skiff after him. In a few minutes he was sliding it into the water. The Sark flowed round it in a thousand ripples of silver.

Coolly, he sat to the oars, and pulled, helped by the strong current. Out on the river, it was almost as bright as by day: and Smithy would have been glad of a cloud over the moon. But there was no cloud on a sky of deep dark blue: and he was a conspicuous object on the shining water.

But there were no eyes to see. Even the tenant of Popper's Island, watchful and wary as he seemed by day, was certain to have closed his eyes at midnight. A chance passer-by must have seen him. But at midnight there was no chance passer-by.

And it was not a long pull. As he neared the forbidden island, the Bounder ceased to row: silence was his cue, and the current was sufficient to carry the skiff onward. He steered in silence towards the dark mass that rose against the shining water.

He steered into the channel between the island and the Popper Court bank. But he did not steer for the landing-place opposite the bank. That was the easiest way: but the Bounder was too wary for that. He was going to land at quite another point.

There was some wind on the river, and the Beaver, when his tent collapsed on his head, might suppose that the tent-pegs had pulled out unaided, as tent-pegs will sometimes do. Smithy hoped so: and that the man would not guess that there had been a midnight visitor on the island at all. That would make matters safer for him at the Greyfriars end.

But it was quite possible that the man might guess that a hostile hand had been at work. In that case, he would be raging on the track of the midnight visitor: and he was not going to know where to look for him or his boat. Smithy had thought his plan out in every detail. He might get through without trouble. Or he might have some very active dodging to do, not only to escape the angry man's hands, but to escape being seen and recognised in the bright moonlight. He did not want those hefty smacks to land on his head again: and still less did he want a report at Greyfriars, with the 'sack' to follow for 'breaking out' at night. In such a reckless adventure, he could not be too wary.

But the Bounder of Greyfriars was as wary as a fox.

He steered silently past the dark mass, and round the lower end of the island. There, a landing was more difficult, but it was more secure.

At the lower end, trees and bushes grew thickly down to the water's edge. He dipped an oar, and silently steered round, and ran his skiff under thick, dark, overhanging branches. There he laid down the oar, and catching a branch overhead, pulled himself in with his skiff.

Under the trees, with their heavy masses of foliage, it was almost as black as a hat. His boat floated in darkness.

Beyond that darkness, the river flowed like polished silver. But within the deep shadow of the trees, the Bounder could hardly see his hand before his face.

But he was well acquainted with Popper's Island. He knew of a tiny inlet at the lower end, almost buried in bushes. He could see little or nothing: but he pulled himself, from branch to branch, standing up in the skiff, till he found the little inlet, and pushed the boat in.

There he tied up.

He scrambled out, unavoidably rustling the thick tangled undergrowth as he did so. But the sound was faint, unlikely to reach sleeping ears at a little distance.

His heart was beating faster, as he stood on the island at last, in deep darkness under the trees.

He was on Popper's Island again: in hardy defiance of his headmaster's commands. And he was there at midnight—out of school bounds at such an hour! What would come to him, if this were discovered at the school, he was only too well aware. And if, as both Redwing and Wharton believed, Quelch was suspicious—!

He set his teeth.

He had not come so far, to falter now. He could not help that unpleasant beating at his heart. But his head was cool: and his determination was unshaken.

Quietly, steadily, he groped his way, cautious as a fox, watchful as a badger. He pushed through thick bushes, parting branches, eluding rustling twigs—more and more cautious as he neared the little open glade in the centre of the island.

Gleams of moonlight came to him now.

He stood, at last, on the edge of the open glade, and looked from the shadows into bright clear moonlight. The glade lay open to the moon, that sailed above like a bowl of silver.

All was silent and still.

He stared across at the tent under the branches of the great oak. There it stood, exactly as he had seen it on the day of that unlucky picnic. The tent flap was closed: the camper, no doubt, within, and fast asleep.

But the Bounder was leaving nothing to chance. He had not forgotten how he had been taken by surprise, and caught, on his last visit to the forbidden island. For long, long minutes, he stood in the shadows, scanning the glade, and listening intently.

But no sound came to his ears, save the sough of the wind from the sea, in the branches overhead: and nothing stirred. Assured at last that all was secure, he tiptoed out from under the trees, across the glimmering grass towards the tent.

He was breathing quickly, but silently, when he reached it, and bent his ear to catch any sound from within. The faintest of sounds came through the taut canvas—the regular breathing of a sleeper.

The Bounder's eyes glittered. That was all he wanted to know: the man was there, and he was fast asleep.

He drew a deep, deep breath. Now was his time, and he did not lose another moment. Stooping, he began to loosen a tent-peg. It was not easy work, for the pegs were well driven in. But he was patient. Much rather he would have slashed the ropes with his pocket-knife, and saved time and trouble. But he was not going to leave a clue, if he could help it. The penalty that hung over him at the school, if this came out, was too overwhelming, for even the reckless Bounder to add unnecessary risks.

And all he needed was patience. Slowly, silently, indefatigably, he worked one peg loose after another, on one side of the tent: the side nearest the massive trunk of the great oak. One after another they came loose, and the canvas began to sag.

At any moment, now, the collapse might come: and still the regular breathing within went on uninterrupted. Not till the crash came, would the Beaver know that anything was happening.

It came so suddenly that the Bounder himself was startled. A gust of wind from the sea rustled the trees, and caught the sagging canvas. One moment the tent was still standing—the next, it was collapsing in a heap of billowing canvas: and from within, as it collapsed, came a startled spluttering exclamation. The Beaver had awakened—suddenly—with his tent wallowing over him as he lay.

That gasping exclamation was followed by an angry howl. The canvas billowed over a struggling form, as the awakened sleeper strove to free himself. A pyjama-clad leg shot into view.

Vernon-Smith fairly bounded. In the twinkling of an eye, he reached the trunk of the great oak, and dodged round it. He had no time to lose, for the man was already struggling out from under the collapsed tent. But that massive trunk covered the Bounder from view: and having placed it between him and the tent, he did not lose a second—with the activity of a monkey he clambered up the trunk into the oak branches.

Hidden deep in foliage, he held on to the branches, suppressing his hurried breathing as much as he could, and listening. If the Beaver spotted him there, he had to take his chance of cutting across the glade to the trees. But the Beaver was not likely to spot him there.

He heard the sound of rustling and rumpling canvas, and the growling voice of an angry man. He had only been in time, for the camper had emerged from the ruins of the tent.

Through an interstice of the foliage, Smithy had a glimpse of a form in pyjamas, sitting in the grass and panting for breath. He grinned, and moved the leaves a little, to get a fuller view of the man he had so suddenly startled out of slumber.

The next moment, Herbert Vernon-Smith almost lost his hold on the oak branches, in his utter astonishment. He stared at the face, clear in the bright moonlight, with unbelieving eyes. He had roused out the Beaver, the tenant of Popper's Island: who else could have been in the tent? He had expected to see the bearded face, the thick dark eyebrows, that he well knew. But he saw nothing of the kind. Amazed, thunderstruck, the Bounder of Greyfriars stared down through the oak leaves at a face that was nothing like the Beaver's—at a hard, clear-cut, clean-shaven face—a face he knew! And he stared at that face, a face he had seen pictured in the newspapers, like a fellow in a dream.

## ONCE TOO OFTEN!

MR. QUELCH started a little, and laid down his pen, as the chime of twelve came through the summer night.

It was not often that the Remove master of Greyfriars heard the chimes at midnight. His manners and customs were orderly and sedate. Late hours were bad for one's health, bad for one's temper, and bad for one's work. Seldom was the light burning in Quelch's study after eleven o'clock.

But circumstances alter cases. On this particular night, the chime of twelve reached Quelch, sitting at his study table, pen in hand, with a closely-written manuscript before him.

That manuscript was of intense interest to Mr. Quelch.

It dealt with the Odes of Horace: the mere mention of which would have given most fellows in his form a tired feeling, but the mention of which would always make Quelch's eyes glisten.

In that paper, Quelch was developing some views of his own, with regard to the Odes: views in which he ventured to disagree even with such tremendous authorities as Maclean, Orelli, and even Dillenburger!

But it was not that paper on Horace, fascinating as it was, that had kept Mr. Quelch up to so late an hour. It had been merely a pleasant pastime while he sat up in his study.

Quelch was sitting up late on account of a much less considerable person than Quintus Horatius Flaccus.

It was on account of the scapegrace of his form: Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton and Tom Redwing both surmised that Quelch might be doing that very thing. The Bounder had contemptuously scouted the idea. In that he had not shown his usual sagacity. For that was what Quelch was doing.

The Remove master's suspicion of that member of his form was deep. Smithy had disregarded his form-master, disregarded his headmaster, and carried on in his own wilful way: and made it clear enough that a caning, or even a flogging, would not stop him.

There was only one way of dealing with a Greyfriars fellow who could not be made to toe the line even by those drastic measures: he had to go. Greyfriars was no place for a truculent fellow who was determined to be a law unto himself.

That the reckless scapegrace would carry on, if he could, Quelch had no doubt. Vernon-Smith was a rebel by nature, who enjoyed rebellion for its own sake. It was like meat and drink to him, to defy authority, and get away with it. That he could not hope to do, if he carried on openly. But after lights out, when all were sleeping?

More than once, the Bounder had been in a bad spot for 'breaking out': but somehow or other, his phenomenal luck had pulled him through. It was no new thing to him, at all events. Was he likely to try it on again?

In Quelch's opinion, it was quite likely. The added risk would be more an incentive than a deterrent to Herbert Vernon-Smith. And at the thought of it, Quelch's jaw set grimly. If the rebel of the Remove carried disregard of authority to that length, it would be for the last time.

This was Quelch's second late night. The previous night, he had looked in at the Remove dormitory at a late hour: and had been relieved to see that all was well. But he knew that member of his form: if that intention was in his mind, he was wary enough to let a night or two elapse before he put it into practice.

Quelch did not like sitting up late. He disliked any disturbance of his accustomed habits. A Remove fellow might think it a lark, or an adventure, to turn out after bedtime: but between fifteen and fifty-five there was a great gulf fixed. It was no lark to a sedate middle-aged gentleman to hear the chimes of midnight. All the more for that reason, the 'chopper' was coming down ruthlessly on the rebel of the form, if he did transgress.

There was a spot of balm in Gilead, so to speak.

Quelch, sitting up late, had the entrancing company of Quintus Horatius Flaccus! That was a consolation.

And, truth to tell, Quelch, in his deep interest in that paper on the Odes, had almost forgotten Vernon-Smith, till he was reminded of him by the chime from the clock-tower.

In that paper, he was dealing with a point of almost thrilling interest to a scholastic gentleman like Quelch—nothing less than the substitution of *te* for *me*, in the twenty-ninth line of the Maecenas Ode, the first in the first book. Prout, in Common-Room, had argued on the side of *me*: pointing out that *te* did not occur in a single surviving manuscript of the Odes. This Quelch had to admit: pointing out, however, that common-sense and lucidity were both on the side of *te*. Prout, impervious to common-sense and lucidity, stood like a rock for *me*: which of course confirmed Quelch in his fixed belief that it ought to be *te*.

Quelch was elaborating this in his paper, while he sat up on Vernon-Smith's account: so really the time passed very pleasantly!

However, the chime from the clock-tower recalled Quelch from the Sabine Farm to Greyfriars School!

He laid down his pen, and rose. 'Bless my soul!' he murmured.

He had not intended to leave it quite so late as this.

But Quintus Horatius Flaccus had the same effect on Quelch, as a jam-tart on Billy Bunter: quite irresistible.

However, he gave Q.H.F. a rest now. He was going to bed—after glancing into the Remove dormitory to make sure that every bed there had an occupant. He switched off the light, left his study, and went up the stairs.

At that late hour, Quelch did not want to wake any sleepers: and he trod quietly. No sleeping ear in the Remove dormitory would have heard him approach: and at that hour, certainly no fellow in a junior dormitory should have been awake.

But there was one who was wakeful: and Tom Redwing's heart beat painfully, as he caught that quiet tread in the corridor. As it stopped at the dormitory door, Redwing laid his head on the pillow and closed his eyes. He knew that it must be Quelch: and Quelch was not to see that anyone was awake. There was perhaps a chance for Smithy yet.

The door opened, and the light switched on.

Redwing lay quite still. Everyone else was fast asleep. There was nothing seen from the door, to rouse suspicion. If Quelch was satisfied with looking in from the doorway, the dummy in the Bounder's bed would pass muster. From a short distance it looked exactly as if a sleeper lay there.

There was a moment or two of dead silence, as the Remove master stood looking in.

Then Redwing's heart gave a painful throb, as he heard the quiet tread coming in. Quelch was not satisfied with a distant view. Evidently, he was suspicious: equally evidently, his suspicion centred on one particular member of his form, for he went directly towards Vernon-Smith's bed.

Redwing, without opening his eyes, knew that his form-master was standing beside that bed, looking down at it.

He heard a low exclamation. 'Upon my word!'

His heart was like lead. Quelch knew!

That dummy in the bed was skilfully contrived. It would have deceived a glance from a distance. But it could not deceive a gimlet-eye at close range. Quelch knew!

Redwing opened his eyes. Quelch, standing by the Bounder's bed, had turned back sheet and blanket, and was staring down at an interesting collection of sweaters and a folded overcoat. And the expression on his face rivalled that of the fabled basilisk.

'Upon my word!' repeated Mr. Quelch.

Had Vernon-Smith been asleep in bed, as on the occasion of Quelch's visit the previous night, the Remove master would have gone as quietly as he had come, and nobody would have been the wiser. It would have been a relief to Quelch: for determined as he was that if the scapegrace of his form offended, it should be his last offence at Greyfriars, he did not want an expulsion in his form. But Vernon-Smith was not asleep in bed: he was not in the dormitory at all: he was out of bounds after midnight! Quelch did not go. He stood where he was, his face growing grimmer and grimmer as he stared down at the empty bed. He looked up suddenly and caught Tom Redwing's eyes on him in utter dismay and distress. 'Ah! You are awake, Redwing.'

'Yes, sir,' muttered Tom.

'I regret that you should be disturbed at this hour.'

Quelch was always considerate. 'A boy is missing from the dormitory, Redwing. I must wait here till Vernon-Smith returns.'

'Oh!' breathed Tom.

Two or three other fellows awoke, at the sound of voices. Bob Cherry sat up, blinking in the unexpected light.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'What—!' came from Frank Nugent's bed.

'Quelch!' came a mutter from Skinner.

'Oh, my hat!'

Harry Wharton sat up. His glance shot to the Bounder's bed, where the 'dummy' was revealed to all eyes: and he caught his breath. This was the finish of Smithy! He had tempted fortune once too often!

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. It was annoying to him to awaken his form at that late hour. But in the circumstances it was unavoidable.

'Is anything the matter, sir?' ventured Peter Todd.

'Yes, Todd! Vernon-Smith is out of bounds at this hour. I shall remain here until he returns: but there is no occasion for you to disturb yourselves, my boys. You may go to sleep.'

The Remove fellows were not likely to go to sleep!

More and more of them had awakened: and eyes that opened were not likely to close again, with Quelch in the dormitory, waiting for the breaker of bounds to return and walk into his hands! Even Billy Bunter's snore ceased to rumble.

'By gum!' breathed Bob Cherry. 'Smithy's done it now! He's banked on his luck once too often.'

'The onefulness too often is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows—!' came a fat squeak.

'Kindly be silent, all of you!' rapped Mr. Quelch. Kindly or not, the Remove fellows were silent. Quelch did not look in a mood to be trifled with. But they did not close their eyes.

Mr. Quelch sat down on the foot of the Bounder's bed—grimly, to wait! He had sat up late with Q. Horatius Flaccus. Now he had to sit up later, without the consolation of that great classic's company. And as the minutes ticked away, and he still waited, his speaking countenance grew grimmer and grimmer and grimmer.

## A STARTLING DISCOVERY!

SMITHY hardly breathed.

He stared through the little opening in the thick foliage about him, scarcely able to believe what his eyes saw.

Dumb with amazement, he stared.

The tent was down, under the wide-spreading branches, loose canvas flapping in the night wind. The man within had scrambled from under the flapping canvas and rolled clear. He sat in the grass, where it shimmered in the moonlight, and panted and panted for breath.

Full on his face shone the moon that sailed high over the island in the Sark.

In the bright light, every feature and detail of that face was clearly revealed. The hard mouth, the smooth chin, the light eyebrows over the sharp eyes: the close-cropped fair hair on the head. Anyone at Greyfriars who had seen the picture of Eldred Tregg in the newspapers would have known him at a glance. The Bounder knew him—knew him beyond the shadow of a doubt: yet it was so utterly unexpected, so utterly amazing, that he doubted the evidence of his eyes.

Eldred Tregg—the man on the run! The absconding secretary, who had disappeared with £5,000 worth of bearer bonds from Mr. William Samuel Bunter's safe! The man who had vanished in the car more than a week ago, leaving no trace behind—only the abandoned car in a Sussex lane a good hundred miles from this spot! The man the police wanted to 'interview'—the man in hiding—the man who could not be traced! That was the man at whom the amazed Bounder was staring from the thick branches of the oak on Popper's Island.

The man sat in the grass, panting and panting. He had had a sudden startling shock, and a breathless struggle getting out from under the collapsed tent. But he seemed to remember something, all of a sudden: and his hand went up to his face, over the smooth chin.

He leaped to his feet.

For a moment, he stood, staring about him in the moonlight, his eyes glistening and glittering like that of a startled wild animal: fear on his face—fear, as the hidden junior could see, that eyes might be upon him.

Then, as his searching eyes failed to pick up any living object, he gasped with relief.

He turned, and plunged head and shoulders under the wallowing canvas of the fallen tent. Evidently, he wanted something that was there. The canvas rustled and flapped as he groped under it.

'Oh, gad!' breathed Vernon-Smith. He was beginning to understand.

He had expected to see Mr. Robinson, the tenant of Popper's Island: the 'Beaver': and what he saw was Eldred Tregg, the man on the run: the man whose face was pictured in every newspaper in the kingdom. But it dawned on him now what it all meant. They were one and the same!

With a clean-shaven chin, light eyebrows, and close-cropped fair hair, the man was Tregg—the man who was 'wanted'. With a dark wig, dark bushy eyebrows, and a beard, he was Mr. Robinson, Sir Hilton Popper's tenant! Popper's Island in the Sark was the hide-out of the man who was wanted: and for more than a week he had lived there in absolute security: his secret unknown and unsuspected: and it would have remained unknown and unsuspected, but for Herbert Vernon-Smith's midnight visit to the island.

'Oh, gad!' repeated Smithy, under his breath.

He had nicknamed the man the 'Beaver' because of his beard! And that beard was a fake, and the bushy dark eyebrows were a fake: like the dark thick hair that, a few days ago, had

jerked off in the brambles as the Bounder struggled with him. Smithy had known that that thick dark hair was a wig, but he had given it no thought: and it had not occurred to him that it was a disguise: middle-aged men with bald patches did sometimes seek to conceal by such means the ravages of Father Time.

But he knew now.

The face at which he had stared in the bright moonlight was not a middle-aged man's face. It was the face of a young man, not over thirty.

Smithy remembered his struggle with the man, a few days ago, and how he had been surprised, and taken aback, by the muscular powers displayed by a man who looked so well on in years. That was explained now.

He remembered his own words to Bunter: that the man on the run would take care to look nothing like his photograph in the papers. Certainly the 'Beaver' had looked nothing like it. He remembered, too, what Billy Bunter had said, the day after the picnic on the island. The 'Beaver' had known that Bunter belonged to Greyfriars: how, the fat Owl did not know. But the Bounder, now, could guess that he had seen a resemblance in Bunter's face to the plump features of Mr. Bunter.

Smithy's thoughts raced, as he listened to the man fumbling and groping under the wallowing canvas.

He hardly needed telling of what the man was in search.

When he went to bed, alone on a solitary island, the man naturally discarded the wig, the false beard, the fake eyebrows. In the surprise and excitement of the moment, when the tent collapsed on him, he had struggled out undisguised, as he had slept.

But he had quickly remembered. Even if he believed that the tent had collapsed by accident, he would not venture to set it up again, in the bright moonlight, without his disguise on. He was not in a position to take chances. And likely enough, he suspected that someone might be on the island.

If he found that someone—!

Smithy, with all his nerve, felt a slight tremor at that thought—recalling the savage grip that had fallen on him once. He had come to Popper's Island to play a trick on a disgruntled camper who was there for a fishing holiday—but he had roused out a crook on the run!

If the man discovered that his secret was known!

Smithy had run the risk of the 'sack' at his school, in breaking out for that reckless expedition. It came into his mind now that there were other risks, of which he had never dreamed.

He peered down from the foliage.

But he knew that he could not venture to drop from the tree and run. The man might look round, any second. And if he saw him—!

The Bounder shut his teeth hard.

He had to see this out! And if his heart was beating harder than usual, his head was as cool as ever. If he was forced to it, he would trust to his luck in dodging the man among the shady trees and thickets. But so long as his presence there was unsuspected, the branches of the oak were his safest refuge.

Muttered angry words from the man below reached his ears. Several times his head appeared in view, as he dragged the canvas about. Once or twice the watching Bounder caught the glitter of hawkish eyes.

But the man was not long in finding what he wanted.

In a few minutes he stepped away from the fallen tent: and as he stood in the moonlight, the Bounder's lips curved in a sardonic grin, as he noted that the tenant of Popper's Island was now the 'Beaver' again: thick dark hair, dark bushy eyebrows, dark beard and all!

Eldred Tregg had vanished, and Mr. Robinson had taken his place. No eye that fell upon him now could have recognised him as the man on the run. He had thrown on a coat over his pyjamas, and evidently he was more at his ease.

He stood looking about the moonlit glade, sharply, suspiciously, but no longer in fear. He did not care who might see him now.

At length he turned to the tent, and began an examination of the loose pegs. Again the Bounder's heart quickened in its beat. He had calculated, and hoped, that the Beaver would conclude that those tent-pegs had pulled loose of themselves, under the wind from the sea. Still more fervently did he hope that Eldred Tregg would come to that conclusion. Apparently he did, for the Bounder heard him give a grunt which expressed nothing more than annoyance.

But the man was all wariness. He did not immediately set about re-erecting the tent. He straightened up, and stared about the glade again: and then, with rapid steps, cut across to the track that led down through the trees and thickets to the landing-place.

Smithy was thankful that he had been too cautious to tie up his boat there. He knew that that was what the man was going to look for. He grinned as the 'Beaver' vanished into the trees.

He would find no boat. Certainly he could never have found the Bounder's skiff, hidden deep in thickets at the lower end of the island, even if he thought of looking elsewhere for a craft.

Smithy listened to the rustling in the thickets, dying away towards the landing-place.

The man was out of sight now: and was likely to remain out of sight for a few minutes at least. But the Bounder did not stir from his perch in the oak. The 'wanted' man was as wary as a wild animal: and even a slight sound might have drawn his attention. The screening oak branches were Smithy's best guess, unless he was forced into flight.

In a few minutes the man emerged into the moonlit glade again. From his manner and his look, it was easy for the watching Bounder to see that he was satisfied now. He had found no boat at the landing-place: he had seen no sign of one on the shining river. Indeed it was only excess of caution that had caused him to make the search, for to all appearance, the fall of the tent was merely accidental, as Smithy had planned that it should seem.

Anyhow, the 'Beaver' obviously was easy in his mind now. He lighted a cigarette, and set about setting the tent up again. Several times the Bounder heard a growling angry word, as he hammered in tent-pegs, but it told only that the man was irritated by that unlooked-for task in the middle of the night. He had no suspicion.

The tent was up at last.

It was a deep relief to Vernon-Smith, silent in the branches above, to see the man disappear into it, and close the flap after him. A creak that came to his ears told that the Beaver had thrown himself upon the camp-bed. The man was settling down again for the night.

But Smithy did not stir yet. Caution was his cue, within a few yards of a hunted man, whose liberty was forfeit if his secret became known. Long minutes passed before Smithy made a move.

And when he moved, at last, it was with infinite caution.

There was hardly a rustle in the foliage, as he descended from the oak, on the further side of the massive trunk, where he had climbed it. And a Red Indian on the warpath could hardly have trodden more lightly than the Bounder, as he crossed the moonlit glade to the trees, and plunged into their shadows. Even at that distance, he did not forget to be cautious: he wound his way silently through trees and bushes, back to the little inlet where he had hidden his skiff. He breathed freely, at last, when he pushed out the skiff, and floated on the glistening waters of the Sark: and the current bore him away from the shadowy island and its strange secret.

When he landed, the Bounder did not head for the school. He headed for Courtfield. He had a call to make, even at that late hour: at Courtfield Police Station, with startling news for Inspector Grimes of the County Police.

## CHAPTER 31

### THE END OF HIS TETHER?

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

There was a stir in many beds.

Not a fellow in the Remove dormitory was asleep.

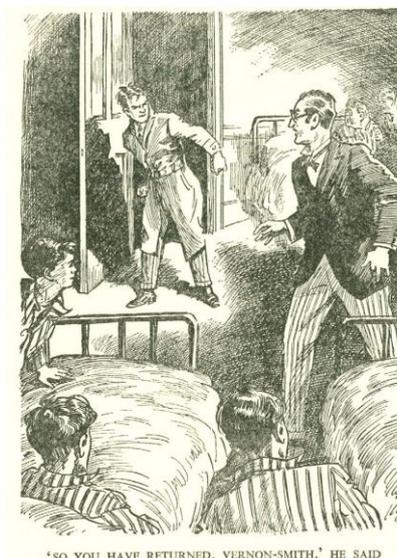
Even Billy Bunter was wide awake, and he had jammed his spectacles on his fat little nose, and was sitting up in bed, blinking through them. There was deep, if suppressed, excitement in the Remove.

Mr. Quelch, silent as a stone image, stiff as a ramrod, sat on the foot of Vernon-Smith's bed-waiting. Everyone was silent: not a fellow ventured on the faintest whisper. Never before had there been such a spot of excitement, at such an hour, in the history of Greyfriars School.

Tom Redwing's face was almost pale with distress.

This was the finish for his chum, and he knew it. The Bounder had banked on his luck once too often, and now it had let him down with a crash. He would come back, after hours out of bounds in the middle of the night, and find his form-master waiting for him—walking straight into Quelch's hands. There was no escape—no excuse—nothing! It was the end. A brief interview with his headmaster in the morning, and the train home: that was what lay before the scapegrace of Greyfriars. He had asked for it, more than once: and now it was coming to him. One look at Quelch's grim face was enough to reveal what the breaker of bounds had to expect from his form-master.

It was almost a relief when a faint sound was heard at the door—the end of the tension. The Bounder was returning.



Every fellow stirred in bed. All eyes were on the door.

The door-handle was turning. Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

The door opened, with hardly a sound. Evidently, the breaker of bounds, returning after one o'clock in the morning, did not know yet that he had been missed, and had no suspicion of what awaited him in the dormitory which he expected to find dark and buried in slumber.

The next moment he knew.

'Oh!'

It was a sudden gasp.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, his hand still on the door-handle, stood in the half-open doorway, blinking in the light.

All eyes were upon him.

For a long moment, there was dead silence, after the Bounder's startled gasp. Then Quelch's voice was heard: not loud, but deep.

'Come in, Vernon-Smith.'

The Bounder stared at him. He stared at the many faces that looked from the long row of beds. Then he stared at Quelch again. Seldom had any fellow been so taken aback, as Herbert Vernon-Smith was at that moment.

But almost in a moment, he recovered himself. He stepped quietly into the dormitory.

Quelch's eyes seemed almost to bore into him. But the Remove master's manner was calm: with a deadly calmness.

'So you have returned, Vernon-Smith,' he said.

'Yes, sir!'

The Bounder answered quietly, almost casually.

Smithy's nerve was well known: and he did not seem to have lost it now. From his manner, he might have been answering a question in the form-room.

'You have been out of school bounds—at this hour!'

'Yes, sir!'

It would not have been of much use for the Bounder to deny it, if he had thought of doing so. But he made the admission without the flicker of an eyelid.

'Where have you been?'

'To Popper's Island, sir.'

'At this hour of the night!'

'Yes, sir!'

'I had little, or rather no, doubt of it,' said Mr. Quelch; but his look at the Bounder was puzzled. Probably he had not expected such prompt and frank answers. 'I am glad at least, Vernon-Smith, that you are admitting the truth, without resorting to futile prevarication.' Smithy coloured a little, but he did not answer that. 'How did you obtain a boat, Vernon-Smith, at this hour of the night?'

'I had one hidden, sir, in the wood up the river.'

'Then you had planned this?'

'Oh, yes, sir.'

The Remove fellows could only stare blankly at the Bounder. If Quelch had been asking him about the weather, he could not have replied more composedly.

'And why did you go to the island, Vernon-Smith?'

'To pull out the tent-pegs, and let the tent down on that man's head.'

'Have you done so?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Upon my word!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'Vernon-Smith, I am amazed at your effrontery.'

'You asked me, sir.'

The Remove master set his lips.

'Very well!' he said, in a tone which indicated very plainly indeed that it was far from well!

'Very well! I will say nothing further now, Vernon-Smith. You will appear before your headmaster in the morning, to be expelled from this school. You may now go to bed.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the Bounder, imperturbably.

Mr. Quelch said not a word more. He crossed to the door, and stood waiting there till Vernon-Smith had turned in. Then he switched off the light, and left the dormitory, closing the door after him with a snap.

'Oh, crikey!' came a fat squeak from Billy Bunter's bed. 'I say, you fellows, is Quelch shirty?'

'The shirtfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'You awful ass, Smithy,' said Harry Wharton. 'What did you want to cheek Quelch for?'

'Did I cheek him?' drawled the Bounder.

'Didn't you?' grunted Johnny Bull.

'I just answered his questions, like a good little boy who loves his kind teachers,' drawled Smithy. 'He seemed interested, so I told him all about it.'

'You've really been to Popper's Island?' asked Skinner.

'Didn't you hear me tell Quelch so?'

'Did the man spot you?'

The Bounder chuckled.

'Not on your life. I spotted him, but he never spotted me. I fancy he would have cut up rusty—very rusty—if he had!'

'Anybody would, I think,' said Harry Wharton. 'You were lucky—.'

'Oh, my luck's pretty good,' said the Bounder, airily.

'You'll need it all now,' said Peter Todd. 'Now you've walked right into Quelch's hands, sitting up and waiting for you.'

'Dear old Quelch!' yawned the Bounder. 'What a night for him! He's lost his beauty sleep.'

'Smithy,' muttered Redwing, miserably. 'Smithy, old man—it's the sack: it can't be anything else—.'

'Oh, you never know! Might be extenuating circumstances,' drawled Smithy. 'You never feel the chop till the chopper comes down. It hasn't come down yet.'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'You don't fancy the Head will go easy, after this, do you, Smithy?'

'I shouldn't wonder.'

'Well, I hope you're right,' said Bob. 'But I'm blessed if I can see what you're banking on now.'

The Bounder laughed.

Amazing as it was to every fellow in the Remove dormitory, he was in high spirits. If the 'sack' impended over his head, it appeared to have no terrors for him. And that it would be the sack, short and sharp, not a single fellow could doubt. Not a fellow in the form could believe that Herbert Vernon-Smith would ever walk into the old form-room again. But if that was so, he did not seem to care.

'Smithy,' muttered Redwing. 'I can't make you out!

You've asked for it—begged for it—you've left them nothing else to do now. Yet you think—.'

'Don't you worry, Reddy, old man.' The Bounder's mocking voice became softer. 'I tell you, the game's not up, not by long chalks.'

'But what—?'

'I've got a trump card to play! My luck hasn't let me down, old bean. Mum's the word now—but you'll hear some news in the morning. You're not going to lose your old pal, Reddy.'

'I can't see—.'

'Take my word for it, and go to sleep! I advise all you fellows to do the same. Late hours ain't good for little boys. I'm going to!'

And Vernon-Smith closed his eyes on his pillow.

If Redwing derived comfort from his chum's words, no other fellow in the Remove dormitory gave them much heed. The Bounder's number was up—there seemed not the slightest doubt of that: on the morrow, the gates of Greyfriars would close behind him for

the last time. The Bounder had always had phenomenal luck: but he was at the end of his tether. Or, after all, was he?

## BUNTER KNOWS HOW

'BUNTER!'

'Urrrrrgh!'

It was rather unfortunate that Billy Bunter had just filled his mouth, to capacity, with jam, when his form-master addressed him. His reply to Mr. Quelch was a suffocated splutter.

'Bunter!'

'Wurrrrggh!'

Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eye gleamed along the breakfast-table. Quelch was not in the best of tempers that morning. Perhaps, indeed, he was in the worst! He looked it.

Quelch was never at his bonniest early in the morning.

A very late night did not make him bonnier. He had not gone to bed till half-past one, and he was feeling the effects of it. Moreover, he was deeply disturbed in mind.

No master could possibly like an expulsion in his form.

And that morning a member of Mr. Quelch's form was to be expelled from Greyfriars.

It might, perhaps, be a relief, in a way, to see the last of a reckless, mutinous fellow who was always more or less of a thorn in his side. But it was very disturbing and very unpleasant.

Such an event was rare, very rare. If it had to happen, it was very disconcerting that it had to happen in Quelch's form. With his mind's ear, as it were, Quelch could already hear the comments in Common-Room. With his mind's eye, he could see the sarcastic glances, the raising of eyebrows, among the other beaks.

At the breakfast table he carefully took no notice of Vernon-Smith. The Bounder was there—for the last time, most of the juniors took for granted. Many glances were cast at him—even Billy Bunter, though deeply and earnestly occupied with the foodstuffs, gave him a blink or two through his big spectacles.

But Bunter had little leisure to bother about Smithy and his affairs. In the first place, a meal was a very serious matter to Bunter, requiring much more careful attention than he ever bestowed on his lessons. In the second place, the fat Owl was worried over a paper from Quelch, which he should have done the previous day, but hadn't!

Bunter had been going to do that paper. Really and truly, Bunter did want to bag that schol, and he was going all out to bag it. He was going to help his pater out of that jam! Somehow or other, however, the state of 'going-to' lasted till dorm, and the paper was not done. Bunter was dreading to hear from his form-master about it.

Breakfast was at an end when Mr. Quelch addressed the fattest member of his form, with a sudden bark. It was an unpropitious moment. Bunter had noticed that there was still some jam remaining on the dish. It was not Bunter's way to leave anything edible uneaten—especially jam. At the last moment, Bunter was bolting that jam, when Quelch barked out his name.

A series of suffocated splutters came from the Owl of the Remove, by way of reply.

'Urrgh! Wurrgh! Groogh! Oooh!'

There was a jammy impediment in the fat Owl's speech. The gimlet-eye gleamed at him. Quelch was not in a patient mood.

'Bunter—.'

'Wurrrrrrgg!'

'Bunter ! You are a gluttonous boy! You are actually choking over your food, Bunter—.'

'Oooooo-er!'

'Cherry! The foolish boy is choking—pat him on the back—quickly. Do you hear?'

'Oh! Yes, sir!'

To hear was to obey! —and Bob was quite willing to help. He gave Bunter a pat on the back.

Smack!

Perhaps it was Bob's idea that if a thing was worth doing, it was worth doing well. Or perhaps he was just a little heavy-handed anyhow. That pat on Bunter's back sounded rather like a pistol-shot.

'Yaroooooh!' roared Bunter.

The smack had, at least, relieved him of the impediment in his speech! His dulcet voice came out in full force. 'Owl wow! Wharrer you punching me for, you beast? Whooo-oooh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence!' hooted Mr. Quelch.

'Bunter—.'

'Oh! Ow! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'You have not handed me the Latin paper I set you yesterday, Bunter. It should have been handed to me before preparation. You will bring it with you to the form-room, Bunter.'

'Oh! Yes! No! I—!' stuttered Bunter.

'If you have not done that paper, Bunter—!'

'Oh! No! Yes! I mean—oh! I—I—.'

'Listen to me, Bunter.' Quelch's voice was deep, with an edge on it. 'I have endeavoured, Bunter, to give you assistance in preparing for the examination, at the end of the term, for the Founder's Scholarship. You have shown little or no appreciation of this, Bunter. You appear to be incorrigibly idle.'

'Oh, really, sir—'

'Unless that Latin paper be shown up, Bunter, completed, and carefully done, I shall cease to place any faith whatever in your desire to study for the Founder's Scholarship, and I shall not continue to give you extra tuition. Bear that in mind, Bunter.'

'Oh, lor!'

'Vernon-Smith!'

'Yes, sir!'

'You will go to my study.'

'Very well, sir.'

The fattest face in the Remove was also the longest as the juniors went out into the sunny quad. Most of the fellows were thinking of Smithy, and what was coming to him: but the worried fat Owl was not likely to waste a thought on Smithy. Much more important matters occupied his fat mind.

'Extra toot' from Quelch was not the sort of thing that Billy Bunter could enjoy. In fact, he just loathed it. Quelch in the form-room was bad enough, in Bunter's opinion. Quelch in the study was worse.

But—! Even with Quelch's kind assistance, it was doubtful whether Billy Bunter ever would bag that schol. Without it, the case was hopeless. Bunter was in the peculiar position of very much wanting something that he very much didn't want!

Quelch meant what he said. If that Latin paper was not handed in, when the Remove went to their form-room, he was done with the fat Owl as a candidate for the Founder's. And the hapless Owl hadn't even touched it, so, far. 'Going-to' had not got even so far as beginning on it!

In the quad, he clutched Harry Wharton by the arm.

There was still one recourse, though perhaps a doubtful one. Quelch had to be satisfied. And Bunter knew how, at least, he hoped so.

'I say, Harry, old chap—!' squeaked Bunter.

'Don't bother! Smithy will be going up to the Head soon—.'

'Eh? Blow Smithy,' yapped Bunter. 'What does Smithy matter, I'd like to know.'

'You fat Owl!'

'Never mind Smithy! Think of me!' exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. 'You heard what Quelch said at brekker—.'

'Yes—leggo my arm—.'

'He meant it,' said Bunter. 'I'd be jolly glad to chuck up extra toot, of course, and jolly glad to tell Quelch so, too! But I've got to bag that schol!' wailed the fat Owl. 'I—I ain't going to let the pater down! And—and I've got to take that putrid Latin paper to Quelch when we go into form—.'

'Take it, then, and give a fellow a rest.'

'But I—I—I haven't done it!' groaned Bunter. 'I—I was—was going to, of —of course, but I—I haven't. I say, Harry, old chap, I've got to show up that paper to keep Quelch quiet, see? I've just got to! I say, you said you'd back me up—you jolly well said so—. And I know how—.'

'Well, what can I do?' asked Harry.

'The Latin paper!' said Bunter, blinking at him.

'Wha-a-at?'

'You're a dab at Latin, old chap,' said Bunter, persuasively. 'You could do that paper on the back of your neck. There's time before class, if you push at it. You cut up to the studies and do the paper, and I—I'll copy it out, and have it ready for Quelch—see? There ain't time for me to do it, but you—.'

Harry Wharton gazed at him.

'Quelch won't know a thing!' urged Bunter. 'He will think I did the paper, as it will be in my fist, and it will keep him quiet! And—.'

'You fat villain!'

'Oh, really, Wharton—.'

'You spoofing octopus—.'

'Beast! Didn't you promise to back me up—?' howled Bunter.

'I'll back you up all right, you fat frump. I won't diddle Quelch by doing your paper, but I'll boot you all the way up to your study to do it yourself. That's for a start!'

'Yarooooh!'

One jolt on his plump trousers seemed enough for Bunter. He did not wait for more. He departed in his highest gear. His last resource had failed him: and there was nothing for it but to swot at that Latin paper every minute till the bell rang for class—an awful prospect which made Billy Bunter wonder whether life on this planet was not, after all, a delusion and a snare, and hardly worth living at all!

## THE BOUNDER'S LUCK!

'VERNON-SMITH!'

'Yes, sir!'

'I shall now take you to your headmaster, and report to him what occurred last night. I have no doubt of the view Dr. Locke will take, and that you will be expelled from Greyfriars. Follow me.'

The Bounder drew a deep, deep breath.

He had been waiting some minutes for Mr. Quelch, in his study. They had seemed long minutes to him. But he was quite cool and collected when the Remove master entered. If it came to the worst, the Bounder had the nerve to face up to it. But he still had a card to play: and as usual he banked on his luck. No one at Greyfriars knew, as yet, of the strange discovery he had made on Popper's Island. Mr. Quelch was about to learn. What difference it would make, Smithy could not be sure: but he knew that it must make a difference.

'May I speak to you, sir, before you take me to the Head?' he asked.

Mr. Quelch gave him a cold stare.

'You may, if you have anything to say,' he answered curtly.

'You have believed, sir, that the man on Popper's Island was a holiday-maker—a camper there on a fishing holiday—.'

'So I have understood. What do you mean?'

'He was nothing of the kind, sir! He was a crook hiding from the law, with valuable loot hidden in his camp.'

Mr. Quelch gave almost a jump.

'Vernon-Smith!'

'I found this out last night, sir, when I was on the island. He did not see me—I was careful to keep in cover, and he supposed that his tent had blown over—but I saw him and recognised him—.'

'Boy!'

'When he scrambled out of the tent, sir, he was without the disguise he had been wearing. We nicknamed him the 'Beaver', sir, because of his beard. I saw him without the beard—and without the wig and false eyebrows, and knew him at once. His picture is in all the newspapers.'

Mr. Quelch gazed at the Bounder. His breath seemed to be taken away, for the moment.

'You must have seen his picture too, sir. He is the man Tregg, who bolted with the bonds belonging to Bunter's father.'

Mr. Quelch gasped.

'I know, sir, that this is no excuse for my having broken bounds after lights out,' said Smithy, in his meekest tone. But as I have been the means of bringing that man to justice, sir, and recovering Mr. Bunter's property. I hope, sir, that you will take that into consideration.'

Quelch still gazed at him. Indeed, the gimlet-eyes seemed almost to pop at the Bounder.

'If I hadn't gone to the island last night, sir, that man would still be carrying on there, quite safe, and nobody dreaming of suspecting him. Only my going there bowled him out, sir.

Perhaps you will consider that in my favour, sir.

The Bounder's tone and manner could not have been meeker. There was no trace of impertinence about him now. Too much was at stake for that.

The Remove master seemed to gasp for breath.

'Vernon-Smith! Certainly I should consider what you have told me in your favour, if I believed a single word of it!' Quelch almost stuttered. 'I am amazed, Vernon-Smith, that you should venture to relate such a story.'

'It is true, sir.'

'Nonsense!'

'Inspector Grimes will bear me out, sir.'

'What? What? What do you mean?'

'I called at the police-station in Courtfield, sir, on my way back. That is why I was so late.'

'Absurd! Impossible! You said nothing of this—.'

'Mr. Grimes warned me to say nothing, sir, until he had had time to act.'

'Bless my soul!' articulated Mr. Quelch.

Amazing as it was, utterly unexpected and almost incredible, it dawned upon Mr. Quelch that there was something in this. He stood gazing at Vernon-Smith, for some moments of silence.

'Vernon-Smith.' He spoke at last. 'You have made a statement—a fantastic statement—which can easily be put to the test. I have only to call Mr. Grimes on the telephone, and inquire—.'

'I hope you will do so, sir.'

There was another silence. Then, making up his mind, Mr. Quelch stepped to the telephone, and dialled Courtfield Police Station. He glanced at the Bounder as he did so.

'Do you still adhere to this extraordinary story, Vernon-Smith, when I am about to speak to Inspector Grimes?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'Very well!' Mr. Quelch spoke through close lips. 'If this is one more attempt at deception, Vernon-Smith, it will be your last in this school. I shall inquire.' He turned back to the telephone, as a voice came through. 'Mr. Quelch speaking from Greyfriars—can I speak to Inspector Grimes?'

'I will ask him to come to the phone, sir.'

A few moments later a fruity voice came through. 'Inspector Grimes speaking! Good morning, Mr. Quelch.'

'Oh! Good morning, sir! May I ask whether, last night, you saw anything of a boy belonging to this school—named Vernon-Smith? The boy has made a statement to that effect, having been discovered out of school bounds.'

'Oh!' There was a moment's pause. 'If Master Vernon-Smith has told you, Mr. Quelch—!'

'He has told me so. Do you corroborate his statement?'

'Certainly, sir!'

'Oh! The boy has made a most extraordinary statement, concerning Sir Hilton Popper's tenant on the island in the Sark—.'

'The man is now in custody, Mr. Quelch, thanks to Master Vernon-Smith. We do not as a rule disclose names, sir, when acting upon information received: but if Master Vernon-Smith has reported the matter to you, it is certainly a fact.'

'Bless my soul!'

'The boy came to the police station, sir, at a very late hour last night, with a story that seemed scarcely credible. However, I was sent for at once, and having questioned him, it was my duty to look into the matter. At dawn, sir, I visited the island in a boat with a constable, and found the man there, and very soon satisfied myself that he was Eldred Tregg, who absconded with bonds belonging to Mr. Bunter, his employer. After a search, the bonds were found concealed in his camp. Mr. Bunter has already been notified by telegram of their recovery.'

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

'I have no doubt, sir, that it is very gratifying to you to know that a Greyfriars boy has rendered so great a service to the law—.'

'Oh!'

'A very great service indeed, sir. The man Tregg is now, as I have said, in custody here, and bonds to the value of five thousand pounds have been recovered intact. I should be glad, sir, if you would convey my personal thanks to Master Vernon-Smith.'

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch, again, 'Oh! Certainly!

Bless my soul!

He put up the receiver, and stood looking at Vernon-Smith. Strange and startling as Smithy's story was, it was true: he knew that now. The man on Popper's Island was the man who had been hunted in vain, day after day: lying low, in disguise, unsuspected: waiting, doubtless, for the hue and cry to die down, to escape abroad with his plunder. The breaker of bounds had put 'paid' to that. Scotland Yard had failed to trace him: and a rural inspector had taken him into custody, thanks to Herbert Vernon-Smith. Was it possible to reward him, after that, with the 'sack'?

Obviously, it was not.

Indeed Mr. Quelch, as an upholder of law and order, could hardly wish that Smithy had stayed in bed the previous night instead of going to Popper's Island—in view of the outcome!

There was a long silence. The Bounder waited.

'Vernon-Smith!' said Mr. Quelch, at last.

'Yes, sir!' murmured Smithy, meekly.

'I—I must consider this matter further. I shall not take you to your headmaster. I shall deal with the matter myself, in the—the circumstances! For the present, you may leave my study.'

'Thank you, sir!'

The Bounder quietly left the study. He drew a deep breath, as he closed the door. It had been Smithy's narrowest escape: but his luck, after all, had not let him down, and he had pulled through. His step was light as he walked down the passage.

'Smithy!'

Tom Redwing was waiting at the corner, and he caught his chum by the arm.

'Smithy! What—?'

The Bounder laughed.

'O.K.,' he said.

'You're not going to the Head?'

'Not in these trousers.'

'But—but—what—?'

'Come on—I'm going to tell the world now, and make the fellows jump. Good news for everybody—they're not going to lose me.' Smithy chuckled. 'Good news for Bunter especially!'

'Bunter?'

'He won't have to swot for that schol now. Come on.'

A crowd surrounded the Bounder, as he came out into the quad with Redwing. Harry Wharton and Co. had not expected to see him again so soon—most of the fellows, indeed, had hardly expected to see him again at all. But there he was, cool as a cucumber, with a grin on his face, the cynosure of all eyes, and enjoying it. He had said that he would make the fellows jump—and there was no doubt that they did jump, when the Bounder told his tale. Before the bell rang for class, it was all over the school.

CHAPTER 34

GORGEOUS!

BILLY BUNTER groaned.

He groaned a deep, heart-felt groan.

On that bright and sunny summer's morning, a Greyfriars fellow, or any other fellow, might have been expected to be enjoying life.

Bunter was not enjoying it.

Indeed, to judge by the expression on his fat face, William George Bunter was plunged into the deepest depths of woe. If looks went for anything, all the troubles of a troubled universe had landed, in one tremendous stack, on Billy Bunter's fat shoulders.

Bunter was working!

He sat at his study table. Down below, in the quad and the passages, excited fellows were discussing exciting news. Bunter had not heard a word of it, so far. Smithy of the Remove was up for the sack! Bunter couldn't have cared less. Smithy, with his usual amazing luck, had pulled out of it. Bunter didn't know, and wouldn't have wanted to know. If a hum of voices reached him from a distance, he did not heed it. Bunter was working at Quelch's Latin paper in his study, and he had to get through somehow before the bell for class. That was more than enough to fill Bunter's fat mind.

He sat with that Latin paper before him—a dictionary at his right hand, a Latin grammar at his left—blinking from one to another, and from another to one, with a lack-lustre blink through his big spectacles.

He was tempted—strongly tempted—to chuck it.

If he did not hand in that paper in the form-room extra tuition from Quelch was to stop! From the depths of his podgy heart Bunter longed for it to stop. But—! If it stopped, his chance of bagging that schol, slim at the best, was a goner! And he had to bag that schol, if he could! He had made up his fat mind to it, and he was going to do it. Somewhere under Billy Bunter's layers of fat there must have been a spot—if only a small spot—of heroism! Laziness was almost too strong for him. The mere mention of work gave him a tired feeling. Yet here he was—working, hard, against time. He longed to hurl the Latin dictionary out of the window, and the Latin grammar after it: and to jump on Quelch's Latin paper! Instead of which, he swotted.

He had to get through before the bell rang. There was none too much time, and it meant real hard work! Billy Bunter groaned, and worked.

There was a sudden tramp of feet in the passage.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a familiar roar.

Five cheery faces looked in at the door.

Bunter gave them an irritated blink.

'Don't come in!' he snapped.

'But—!' began Harry Wharton.

'Go away!'

'My esteemed fat Bunter—!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Shut up!'

'We've got news for you!' said Johnny Bull.

'Keep it!'

'My dear old porpoise—!' began Frank Nugent.

'Shut UP!' yelled Bunter, with a glance at the Famous Five that might have cracked his spectacles. 'Can't you see I'm working?'

'Poor old Bunter!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Does it hurt?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Get out!' howled Bunter. 'I've got to get this through for Quelch! 'Tain't more'n five minutes to class now. Go away and let a fellow work!'

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Harry Wharton. 'Look here, Bunter, we've got news—Smithy isn't going to be sacked after all—.'

'Blow Smithy!'

'He found out something on that island last night—.'

'Blow that island!'

'And—!'

'Will you clear off and let a fellow work?' shrieked Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you don't clear, I'll jolly well shy the inkpot at you. Get out!'

'But we've got news!' bawled Bob Cherry. 'They've got that man Tregg—.'

Bunter jumped! Ink shot from his pen, and scattered blots over Quelch's Latin paper. He did not heed them. His little round eyes popped through his big round spectacles at the Famous Five.

'What?' he gasped.

'They've got him—and the bonds he bolted with, too!'

'Oh, crikey!'

'It's all over the school, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'We came up to tell you—!'

'Oh, jiminy!' gasped Bunter.

He jumped up from the table. The fat face that had registered woe and anguish, brightened up. It was like the sun coming out!

'They—they—they've got him?' he stuttered.

'Got him under lock and key—.'

'And—and the pater's bonds—that he bolted with—?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, crumbs! Then—then the pater won't lose anything?' gasped Bunter.

'Not a thing!'

'Oh, crikey! I—I—I say, you fellows, then it's all right for the pater?'

'Right as rain!'

'The rightfulness is terrific.'

'Gratters, old fat man!'

Billy Bunter blinked at them. Then he blinked round at the table: at the Latin paper, the Latin dictionary, and the Latin grammar. Then he blinked at the Famous Five again.

'I—I—I say, you fellows, if it's all right for the pater, I—I—I needn't go on swotting for that putrid schol!' he gasped.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Now it's all right—.'

'Why not keep it up, now you've started?' grinned Bob Cherry.

'Eh? Mad?' asked Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'll watch it!' gasped the fat Owl. 'No more swotting—no more extra toot—oh, crumbs! I say you fellows, I was really going all out for that putrid schol—I wasn't going to let the pater down—but now—now it's all right—.'

Billy Bunter grabbed the Latin dictionary from the table, and hurled it into the fireplace. He grabbed up the Latin grammar, and it landed with a crash on the Latin dictionary.

Then he grabbed up Mr. Quelch's Latin paper, hurled it to the floor, and jumped on it.

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the Famous Five, as they watched those proceedings.

Evidently, Billy Bunter's career as a 'swot' was over.

Extra toot was a thing of the past. The Famous Five were not required to back up Bunter any more. Whoever was going to bag that schol at the end of the term, his name was not going to be William George Bunter!

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, ain't it gorgeous! I say, ain't it prime! I say—.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the bell!'

Billy Bunter rolled joyously out of the study, and rolled down the passage with the Famous Five. His fat face was like unto the summer sunshine as he rolled into the form-room. The wicked had ceased from troubling, and the weary Owl was at rest: after so many trials and tribulations, Billy Bunter was enjoying life once more.