



BILLY BUNTER AND THE SCHOOL REBELLION

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FRANK RICHARDS

BILLY
BUNTER
AND THE
SCHOOL REBELLION

PAUL HAMLYN

CHAPTER 1
Out on a Limb!

In ordinary circumstances the Remove were considered rather small beer by the senior Forms; indeed there were Sixth Form men who affected not to know that the Lower Fourth existed at all.

But the circumstances were not ordinary now. They were extraordinary. In fact, they might have been termed *extra* extraordinary, for the Greyfriars Remove, en bloc, had marched out of school as a protest against the dismissal of Mr. Quelch, their Form-master. Furthermore, under the youthful leadership of Lord Mauleverer they had taken up residence at High Oaks, an old manor house which Lord Mauleverer had bought and turned into a school. Here they were determined to stay until Mr. Quelch was reinstated.

Never before in the history of Greyfriars had the Lower Fourth, or Remove, filled the limelight to this extent. Never before had that rather unruly Form filled the thoughts of the Head, the staff, and the other Forms, senior and junior. But now any stranger who had dropped in and heard the talk going on in the prefects' -room, or the Fifth Form games study, or the Rag, would have concluded that the Remove was the most important Form in the school. Anyone who had heard the talk in Masters' Common-room would have supposed that the staff were more interested in the Lower Fourth than in their own forms. At the present time the Remove were getting the spotlight and getting all of it.

But one thing the Remove *weren't* getting a lot of was work; indeed, a look at the present existence of that honourable form showed they were doing no work at all! "Where's Mauly?"

There was a roar of voices. High Oaks School was in a state of uproar.

"Where's that ass Mauly?" roared Bolsover major.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Where's Mauly?"

Considered as a school, High Oaks was not in a satisfactory state. Over the gate was a gilt-lettered board, announcing the fact that the one-time manor house was now "High Oaks School". But if it was a school in name, it did not look much like a school in fact.

Some boys, setting a good example to the rest, were lounging in the class-room. Harry Wharton and Co. were there, and half a dozen other fellows. The rest of the Remove were roaming at large, looking for Lord Mauleverer—their leader—with the intention of ducking him in the pond.

Rebellion in the Remove had degenerated into riot, and the juniors were quite out of hand. The leading spirits in the outbreak were Bolsover major and the Bounder and Skinner, but a majority of the form had joined in. They were fed-up with "playing at school", as Skinner described it, and their idea was that so long as the Remove remained away from Greyfriars the Remove were going to have a high old time, with nothing in the nature of lessons even mentioned.

"I say, you fellows," yelled Billy Bunter, "he's gone into the House! He's got somebody with him!"

"Come on!" shouted Bolsover major.

"Have him out!" yelled Skinner.

"Duck him!"

"We'll jolly well show Mauly whether we're going to have classes here!" grinned Snoop. "What's the good of getting out of Greyfriars if we're going to have classes?"

"No good at all," grinned Hazeldene. "Let's have Mauly out and give him a lesson!" "What-ho!"

And the crowd of Removites rushed for the big doorway of the House. Lord Mauleverer was in the old hall of High Oaks, and he smiled as he heard the rush coming. Mauleverer had a surprise in store for the rebels. He stood with his back to the fireplace, his hands in his pockets, waiting for the rush. Beside him stood James Juggins, otherwise known as Jimmy the Pug, a thick-set man, with a damaged nose and several missing teeth—a very tough-looking customer.

Mr. James Juggins had been a boxer and a chucker-out at a dance hall, and several other things. Now he was going to be Lord Mauleverer's right-hand man at High Oaks.

James looked puzzled as he heard the rush of footsteps and the roar of voices outside.

"Row going on here, me lord?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"My eye!" said Jimmy the Pug. "Is that the job you've got me for, me lord?"

"Yaas."

"Right-ho!" said James. "You'll find me all there, me lord." And James spat on his hands as a preliminary.

Mr. Alfred Juggins, school porter and general factotum at High Oaks, bolted into the hall like a rabbit into a burrow. The exuberant juniors had met him outside, and Mr. Juggins looked as if the meeting had been a stormy one. He was breathless and dishevelled and dusty.

"My lord—" he spluttered.

"Yaas."

"The—the young gentlemen seem very excited, my lord," spluttered Mr. Juggins.

"They—they have rolled me in the gravel, my lord!"

"Oh, begad!"

"They—they are looking for your lordship."

"Yaas."

"I—I fear they are going to duck your lordship."

"Yaas. It's all serene, Juggins," said Lord Mauleverer. "Your cousin James has arrived. He's here."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Juggins.

He gave James a nod and a grin, and James winked in response. More than a dozen Jugginses were now in the service of the new owner of High Oaks, and James was the latest recruit. He was likely to prove the most valuable, in the present state of affairs.

"The fellows are rather out of hand, James," explained Lord Mauleverer. "They're a bit excited. They're kickin' over the traces, and I'm goin' to restore order. You're goin' to help me, see?"

"Leave it to me, me lord," grinned James. "I rather think you can do it, dear man." Certainly James looked as if he could.

"I say, you fellows, here's Mauly !" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Here he is!" roared Bolsover major.

"Have him out!"

"Collar him!"

"Duck him!"

"You're for it now, Mauleverer!" grinned the Bounder. Lord Mauleverer held up his hand.

"Silence!" he rapped.

"Collar him!"

"Give a man a chance to speak!" urged Mauleverer. "Just a few words, dear men."

"Rats!" roared Bolsover major.

"Oh, let him chin," said the Bounder. "We're goin' to duck him, anyhow. Get it off your chest, Mauly, but buck up."

"Only a few words," said Lord Mauleverer placidly. "Look here, you men, I don't call this playing the game."

"Rats!"

We left Greyfriars as a protest against the Head dismissin' our Form-master, Mr. Quelch. We settled that we wouldn't go back till Mr. Quelch was reinstated. So long as the Head was obstinate, an' refused to do Quelchy justice, we meant to run High Oaks as a school. That's why I bought the place. That programme still holds good. The whole Form elected me leader—"

"We've chucked you now," grinned Hazel.

"I'm not goin' to be chucked," explained Lord Mauleverer calmly. "I decline to be chucked; I decline most distinctly. I'm goin' to keep order here, and all you men are goin' to toe the line. Got that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How are you going to do it?"

"Collar him!"

"Is that all?" demanded the Bounder.

"Yaas, exceptin' that I order you all to go into the class-room; and if you go at once, an' keep order, I'll overlook this."

"You—you—you'll overlook it!" gasped Bolsover major. "You great ass, we're going to duck you!"

"Collar the silly ass!"

"Hold on!" rapped out Lord Mauleverer as the Removites advanced on him. "I've got a man here to keep order. James!"

"Yes, my lord?"

"I'm goin' to cane all these fellows for disobedience to orders. You're to see that they take it quietly."

"Yes, my lord."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated the Bounder, staring at Mr. Juggins' cousin James. "Do you think we'll let that scarecrow bully rag us, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"We'll jolly soon show you!" shouted Vernon-Smith. "Collar that tramp, you fellows, and run him out of the place, and then we'll give Mauly what he has been asking for."

"What-ho!"

Cousin James, with a grin on his scarred and damaged face, placed himself before Lord Mauleverer. His big knuckly fists were closed, his square jaw protruded, his little deep-set eyes gleamed. He looked so exceedingly tough a customer that some of the Removites hesitated, and Billy Bunter promptly backed to the rear, and some other fellows followed his prudent example. But the rebels were strong in numbers, and most of them were plucky. Led by the Bounder and Bolsover major, they rushed at James, and the next moment the old hall of High Oaks was the scene of a terrific affray.

CHAPTER 2

Order!

Harry Wharton and Co., in the class-room, looked at one another.

Loyally the Famous Five had gone into class. They had agreed to back up Lord Mauleverer as leader of the Remove rebellion, and they were backing him up.

A few other fellows had followed their example.

Mark Linley was taking the place of a Form-master in the class-room, and his class, though few in numbers, was orderly.

There had been backslidings, to some extent, even on the part of the Famous Five. In a school without a master it was really not easy for them to keep up to the mark.

But Harry Wharton and Co. were keeping up to the mark now, and had their example been followed High Oaks would have been quiet and orderly. But their example was not followed. Indeed, Mark Linley had had to lock the door to keep the rioters out of the class-room itself, the Bounder and his companions having decided to wreck the class-room and make a bonfire of the school books.

The din in the hall penetrated to the room where the more dutiful portion of the Remove sat in class, and the din was growing louder and louder.

"Look here, we'd better see what's going on," Bob Cherry declared at last.

"Mauly told us to stop here!" murmured Nugent.

"Mauly's an ass!"

"Yes, but we agreed—"

"Sounds to me as if Mauly is getting the ragging of his life," said Harry Wharton. "He can't want us to stop here while he gets it."

"Not likely," grinned Johnny Bull. "Let's go and see— Mauly may be in pieces by this time."

"The piecefulness is probably terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a chuckle.

"Mark's Form-master," said Bob. "Shall we go and see what the row is, Marky, old bean?"

Mark Linley nodded.

"I really think we'd better," he said. "It sounds as if poor old Mauly's getting an awful ragging."

Come on then."

And the class left their places. Mark unlocked the door and the juniors poured out. They ran down the passage to the hall, the uproar growing simply tremendous as they drew nearer to the scene of action.

"What the thump—" gasped Bob Cherry, as he stared into the hall through an open doorway.

The juniors stared blankly at the scene in Hall.

Lord Mauleverer stood with his back to the fire, his hands in his trousers pockets, and a serene smile upon his noble face. Evidently Mauly was not in trouble.

The trouble had fallen upon the recalcitrant members of the Remove.

Cousin James, alias Jimmy the Pug, was busy.

Six or seven Removites lay on the floor, breathless, dizzy, almost wondering what had happened to them. Still more were dodging away in alarm. James had Bolsover major by the collar with one hand, and the Bounder by the collar with the other. Both the juniors were sturdy fellows, but they were like infants in the Herculean grip of Jimmy the Pug. As Harry Wharton and Co. looked in James was bringing their heads together with a resounding concussion.

Crack! Crack!

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bolsover major.

"Ow! Ow!" shrieked the Bounder.

Crack!

"Yooooop!"

"Rescue!" yelled Smithy. "You rotten funks! Lend me a hand!"

Two or three of the rebels made a desperate rush at James. The old pug released Smithy and Bolsover, who rolled yelling to the floor. He grinned as he faced his new assailants, and hit out right and left.

The rebels went over like ninepins.

Jimmy the Pug was by no means hitting his hardest. Had he done so there would have been serious hospital cases at High Oaks.

But he was hitting hard enough. Boys who received his punches felt as if a mule had kicked them.

The Bounder scrambled furiously to his feet and sprang at Cousin James like a tiger. He struck at the scarred face of the veteran with all the strength of his arm, and the blow landed.

Cousin James did not even wink.

Hefty as the Bounder was, and powerful as was that drive of his strong right arm, it had absolutely no effect on the old pugilist. Doubtless it was a mere jest after what Jimmy the Pug had been through in his days in the roped ring.



Indeed, an observer might have supposed that James Juggins did not even know that he had been punched, but for the fact that he turned on the Bounder and gave him a tap on the chest.

It was what James would have called a tap. Anyone else would have called it a terrific drive.

It lifted the Bounder clean off his feet and laid him on his back with a crash.

“Ow!” he gasped, and lay where he was. The tough Bounder was *hors de combat* now; and he had had enough of James at close quarters.

“My only hat!” murmured Squiff. “Mauly’s got a good man there. Who is that merchant, and where did he spring from?”

Bob Cherry chuckled.

“I told you Mauly had something up his sleeve,” he said. “That is what he had up his giddy sleeve. That chap looks like a prizefighter.”

“He hits like one!” grinned Nugent. “I’m rather glad that I made up my mind to be good!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“The goodfulness is the proper caper in the esteemed circumstances,” chortled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

There was no doubt that the fellows who had toed the line were better off than the fellows who hadn’t. Bolsover major and his merry men were having the time of their lives.

Half the rebels of the Remove had fled, and the other half strewed the floor round about the Hall.

Cousin James, who had not turned a hair, looked inquiringly at Lord Mauleverer, and jerked his stumpy thumb at the doorway where Harry Wharton and Co. stood, interested spectators.

“Shall I mop them up, too, my lord?” he asked.

“Oh, gad! No!” Lord Mauleverer glanced across at the Co. “What are you men doin’ out of the class-room?”

“We came along to save your life, Mauly!” chuckled Bob.

Lord Mauleverer grinned.

“James is doin’ that,” he answered. “You hike back to the class-room. The rest of the

Form will soon be there.”

“Right-ho, old bean!”

Harry Wharton and Co. returned to the class-room. They had little doubt that the rest of the Form would soon join them there. Lord Mauleverer’s measures were drastic, and looked like being crowned with success.

“Mauly’s the man for them!” chuckled Squiff. “I fancy we’re going to have order at last.”

“The orderfulness will be—”

“Terrific!” chuckled Bob Cherry. “Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here they come!”

Billy Bunter bolted into the class-room, gasping for breath. Skinner and Snoop and Stott came in after him, equally in a hurry. Hazel was the next, and after Hazel came a dozen more.

Order was being restored. Classes seemed to have a sudden attraction for the rebels, who only a short time ago had abolished classes at High Oaks, and had been looking for Mauly with the intention of ducking him in the pond.

“I say, you fellows,” gasped Bunter, “that awful beast Mauly has sprung a prizefighter on us!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Desperate diseases require desperate remedies!” chortled Bob. “You can read that in Shakespeare, Bunt.”

“Blow Shakespeare! Blow Mauly! I say, you fellows, if this goes on I shall have to protest strongly.”

“We’re not standin’ it!” snarled Skinner.

“No fear!” hissed Snoop.

“Go and tell that old pug so!” chuckled the captain of the Remove. “No good telling us.”

“I say, you fellows, Bolsover’s got a black eye—”

“He’s welcome to it!” grinned Bob.

“Smithy looks as if he’s been under a traction-engine—”

“Smithy’s always asked for it! It will do him good to get what he asks for for once.”

“I shall jolly well go back to Greyfriars if this sort of thing is going on here!” howled Hazeldene.

“Better stick it out! There’s a Head’s flogging waiting for any fellow who goes back to Greyfriars.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Bolsover!”

Bolsover major was coming, but he was not coming willingly. His protesting voice was heard as he came.

“I won’t! I tell you I won’t go! Leggo, you ruffian! I’ll bash you! I tell you I won’t—Yaroooh!”

Cousin James appeared in the doorway of the class-room with the bully of the Remove in his grip.

Bolsover major flew in.

He sprawled along the floor, yelling.

“Welcome home, Bolsover!” yelled Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Yarooooh!”

Jimmy the Pug grinned and departed, and returned a few minutes later with the Bouncer struggling in his grasp. The Bouncer was tossed into the class-room like a sack of straw.

Then Lord Mauleverer walked in.

His lordship was calm and cheerful and smiling. He seemed to be quite satisfied with the method he had adopted of restoring order at High Oaks.

"All here?" he asked cheerfully. "I'll call the roll, and you men answer to your names! Stand by the door, James!"

"Yes, me lord!"

James stood grinning in the doorway. The job which Mr. Juggins had obtained for his Cousin James at High Oaks seemed to suit that gentleman down to the ground. James looked as if he had enjoyed his morning.

Lord Mauleverer called the roll. Both Bolsover major and the Bounder refused to answer to their names; but as they were sprawling and gasping in Mauly's sight, that did not matter. But there were six other fellows who did not answer because they were absent.

"Six men missin'!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Will you round them up, James, and persuade them to come here?"

"Yes, me lord!" grinned James.

He departed on his mission.

In a few minutes he returned with a junior in either hand, gripped by the collar. He tossed them, sprawling, into the class-room. James' methods were somewhat rough and ready, but quite effective. There were four more absentees, but in ten minutes James had rooted them out, and conducted them to the class-room forcibly.

"That the lot, me lord?" asked James.

"That's the lot, James. Now come in and close the door."

"Suttingly, me lord!"

James came in and closed the door. Lord Mauleverer glanced mildly over the class.

"Take your places, you men!"

And for the remainder of the morning Mark Linley had a very quiet class to deal with—as orderly as ever the Remove had been in their old Form-room at Greyfriars under the gimlet eye of Mr. Quelch.

CHAPTER 3

Bunter is Not Satisfied!

"Mauly's done it!"

"It's a giddy miracle!"

"Looks like it!"

Really, it did look like it. It was evening, and the Remove were at prep in their studies at High Oaks. Every fellow had turned up to prep; the Removites might have imagined that they were still at Greyfriars.

Even the Bounder was there in the study he shared with Tom Redwing, working as quietly as any other fellow.

If he was not subdued, at least he appeared to be so. He was at least toeing the line with the rest of the Remove. Even Billy Bunter rolled up to prep, though he had loudly declared that he was going to bar himself out, as he had done once before since arriving at High Oaks. Bunter seemed to have given up that idea, for the present, however; Cousin James had a terrifying effect on the Owl of the Remove.

Lord Mauleverer had been absolutely successful in restoring order; High Oaks was a school once more instead of a bear-garden, though it still lacked a master. Mauleverer had telephoned to Mr. Quelch, who was staying at the hotel in Courtfield, begging him to come over to High Oaks and take control. Mr. Quelch's answer had been short and sharp, and most decidedly in the negative. But Mauly was prepared to carry on,

minus Henry Samuel Quelch, the presence of Jimmy the Pug being a guarantee of order and discipline.

There is always a fly in the ointment somewhere, and the drawback to Lord Mauleverer's success was the fact that he had to toe the line himself with the rest. Personally, Mauly greatly preferred a school where there were no lessons and no prep. But this was a drawback that could not be helped, and Mauly played up manfully.

"Fancy old Mauly!" grinned Frank Nugent, as he sorted out his books for prep.

"Who'd have thought that he would turn out a leader like this?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Mauly's done it," he said. "I'm backing him up all along the line."

"Same here!" said Frank.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter's fat face and glimmering glasses looked in at the study doorway.

"Hook it!" said Wharton. "Prep, you know."

"That's all rot," said Bunter peevishly. "I say, you fellows, I'm fed up with this. We might as well be at Greyfriars."

"We've left Greyfriars to back up Mr. Quelch, fathead!"

"Blow Mr. Quelch!"

"Blow him in your own study!" suggested Nugent. "You'd better get on to prep, or you may get a licking in the morning."

"I say, you fellows, what do you think the Head would do if a fellow went back to Greyfriars on his own?" asked Bunter.

He blinked anxiously at Wharton and Nugent. Evidently the Owl of the Remove was thinking of deserting the school which was turning out so very unsatisfactorily, from his point of view.

"I fancy the Head would make an example of any fellow who went back," answered the captain of the Remove, laughing. "So long as we stick together we're all right. If you want a specially tough flogging, you've only got to walk over to Greyfriars and ask for it."

"I—I don't think I—I shall go back," said Bunter. "Of course, I wouldn't desert you fellows. But I say—"

"Prep!" interrupted Wharton.

"Oh, blow prep! Look here, Wharton, you're captain of the Remove, and you've let Mauly take it out of your hands. That's rather rotten for you, you know. I think you ought to put Mauly in his place. I'll back you up. I don't like to see Mauly swanking over you, old fellow."

Frank Nugent laughed, and Wharton fixed his eyes on the Owl of the Remove.

"You'd like to see me go for Mauly, what?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"That's it, old chap," said Bunter eagerly. "Put him in his place, you know. Mop him up."

"Well, I won't go for Mauly," said Wharton. "I'll go for you, old fat bean—like this!"

"Yaroo!" roared Bunter, as the captain of the Remove grasped him by the collar.

Bang!

There was a fiendish yell from William George Bunter as his bullet head smote the study door.

"Whooooop!"

"Now, if you've got any more suggestions to make—" said Wharton.

Bunter hadn't. At all events, he did not stop to make any. He jerked himself away and fled for his life.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter from the distance.

Wharton chuckled and closed the study door.

Billy Bunter rubbed his head and wandered dismally on his way. Prep was going on in all the studies, but Bunter was not keen on prep. The trouble was that if a fellow neglected his prep at High Oaks, under the new regime, he was likely to be licked in the morning, just as he might have been at Greyfriars. That state of affairs roused Bunter's deepest ire; but there it was! Bunter was wrathful and indignant; but he did not intend to argue the matter out with Jimmy the Pug.

He blinked into Smithy's study dolefully. Bunter felt that Smithy, at least, would sympathise with a fellow who was up against Mauly. He found both the Bounder and Tom Redwing busy with prep.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Cheese it!" said Redwing, without looking up.

"You go and eat coke, Redwing! I say, Smithy, old chap—"

"Prep, you know," said the Bounder, with a sarcastic grin. "We're under orders now. Mauly will stand no nonsense."

Redwing glanced at his chum.

"Mauly's right, Smithy," he said very quietly.

"Quite!" agreed the Bounder. "That's why I'm goin' to give him a fall."

"I say, Smithy, you're the man to do it," said Bunter eagerly. "You're the very chap to put that beast in his place."

"I was thinkin' that you were the chap," said Smithy.

Bunter jumped.

"Me!" he ejaculated.

"Just you, old fat bean."

"I—I—I'd rather not have any row with Mauly," said Bunter hastily. "I—I can't enter into any vulgar argument with that man James Juggins. He's rather too low for me to argue with. Beneath a fellow's dignity, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redwing.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," grunted Bunter. "I dare say you like that low rotter, Redwing. Birds of a feather."

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" said the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"You'd better get going on your prep. There's a licking in the morning otherwise. Mauly will have that old pug on hand, and I fancy no fellow is going to argue with him."

"It's rotten!" groaned Bunter. "What's the good of a rebellion if we have classes all the same?"

"No good at all," agreed Vernon-Smith. "I'm against it; but I've been handled by that pug once, and I don't want any more. But you—"

"I decline to touch the low beast."

"I hardly think you could handle him," grinned the Bounder. "But there are other ways, old fat man. You're so jolly clever——"

"Eh?"

"You've got such intellectual gifts that—"

"That's so, old chap," agreed the fatuous Owl. "But I don't see—"

"I do, and I'll go into it with you tomorrow. Now cut off and let a man get his work done."

CHAPTER 4

Loder's Luck!

“It’s Wharton!”

“Good luck!”

Gerald Loder of the Greyfriars Sixth grinned.

Loder of the Sixth was on the warpath.

Wingate had loftily disdained to have anything to do with the plan suggested by Loder, as Loder was well aware he would do when he had suggested it. Hanging about High Oaks, watching and spying for a chance to get hold of the Remove rebels singly, was not a plan that recommended itself to the captain of Greyfriars. But if it was not good enough for Wingate, it was quite good enough for Gerald Loder.

And there was little doubt that if the prefect succeeded in putting an end to the present parlous state of affairs he would be in high favour with the headmaster, and very likely indeed to wrest the head-prefectship from Wingate, who had failed.

Fortune seemed to be smiling on Loder now. The three Sixth-Formers had been hanging about in the vicinity of High Oaks all day, on and off; and now, rather late in the afternoon, the very fellow whom they would have selected from all the Remove was walking fairly into their arms.

Wharton was quite unconscious of danger till he heard the sound of running feet behind him on the road. Then he glanced over his shoulder, and started at the sight of Loder, Carne, and Walker.

The three seniors came up with a rush, and they were round the Removite in a moment.

“Got the young cad!” grinned Loder.

Wharton clenched his hands.

“Keep your distance!” he said quietly. “You’ve nothing to do with me now, Loder; we’re not at Greyfriars.”

“You’ll jolly soon be at Greyfriars, though,” chuckled Loder.

“We’ve been looking for you, my pippin.”

“Oh!” said Harry. It dawned upon him that this was not a chance encounter, as he had supposed for the moment.

“You’re the first,” explained Loder, with great satisfaction. “We’re bagging the ringleaders, and I fancy you’re the worst of the bunch, what? You’re coming to Greyfriars with us now.”

“I’m not!” said Harry coolly.

“Take him along!” hissed Loder. “I’ll start him!”

And he kicked the junior savagely.

“Oh, you rotter!” yelled Wharton.

“Better come quietly,” grinned Carne. “Give him another, Loder.”

Loder gave him another, and then, seeming to find solace in it, gave him a third and fourth. Wharton struggled furiously, but he could not get his arms free.

“Now, are you going?” grinned Loder.

Wharton went.

With a big senior grasping each arm, and Loder behind him with a ready boot, he had no choice in the matter.

Back along the road he went; but he had not given up hope yet. If they passed the gates of High Oaks a yell would bring a crowd of Removites to the rescue.

But they did not pass the gates of High Oaks. Loder was too wary for that. They made a wide detour by the field-paths, keeping quite out of sight of High Oaks.

“Halo, they’ve brought Wharton back!” roared Coker of the Fifth, as the captain of the Remove was marched across the quad.

There was a rush to see the prisoner.

“They’ve got you, old bean,” chuckled Temple of the Fourth.
 “Looks like it,” assented Wharton.
 “Hard luck,” grinned Hobson of the Shell. “You’re for it now.”
 “Head’s flogging!” said Tubb of the Third. “The Head’s in a fearful wax, Wharton.”
 Bolsover minor of the Third gave the prisoner a sympathetic look. Having a brother in the Remove, Bolsover minor rather sympathised with the rebels.
 “Is my major at High Oaks, Wharton?” he called out.
 “Yes,” answered Harry.
 “Good! They won’t get him in a hurry,” said Bolsover minor; and the next moment he gave a yell, as Loder cuffed him. Yow!”
 Bring the young rascal in, you men,” said Loder.
 And Harry Wharton was marched into the House, where, in the Hall, he met Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars.
 “Wharton, sir!” said Loder cheerfully. “I’ve brought this junior back to Greyfriars, sir!”
 “You have done well, Loder,” said Dr. Locke. “I am very much obliged to you.”
 “Not at all, sir!” said Loder modestly.
 “You may release the boy,” said the Head.
 Walker and Carne released Wharton’s arms.
 The captain of the Remove gave a quick glance round. But there was no chance of making a bolt; Loder and Co. were ready to seize him again, and there were a dozen other fellows between him and the door. The captain of the Remove realised that he was “for it,” and he faced his headmaster with all the equanimity he could.

CHAPTER 5

Up to Mauleverer!

“My lord!”
 “Yaas?”
 “The telephone, my lord,” said Juggins.
 Lord Mauleverer yawned deeply.
 Mauly had played up manfully that day, setting an example to the Remove of attention to lessons and devotion to study. It was much against his noble grain, but he felt that it was up to him, and he did it. Classes being over at High Oaks, his lordship was now taking a well-earned rest in the most comfortable armchair that could be supplied by Chunkley’s Stores in Courtfield. And he was not glad to hear that he was wanted on the telephone.
 “Juggins!”
 “Yes, my lord.”
 “Take the call, old bean.”
 “I’ve taken it, my lord,” answered Juggins. “It’s a message for your lordship from Greyfriars School, my lord.”
 “Oh!” Lord Mauleverer sat up and took notice. “Oh, gad. If it’s the Head ringin’ up to say he’s givin’ in, I shall be jolly glad to hear it. Is it the Head, Juggins?”
 “A small boy, I think, my lord, from the voice,” said Juggins.
 “Oh, gad! I suppose I’d better go,” sighed his lordship.
 “You’re sure he asked for me, Juggins?”
 “Yes, my lord.”
 “Very well then.”
 Lord Mauleverer made a manful effort, and detached himself from the armchair. A

telephone call from Greyfriars was rather unexpected, and Mauly understood that it might be important. He remembered that Nugent minor, of the Second Form, had rung up to give warning on the celebrated occasion when the Fifth-Formers had come over to High Oaks on the warpath. It might be a warning of some new move on the part of the enemy, and Lord Mauleverer lost no time in getting to the telephone.

"Hallo!" he yawned into the transmitter.

"Is that Mauleverer?" came a very youthful voice.

"Yaas."

"Bolsover minor speaking on Quelchy's phone."

"Oh! Fire away, kid."

"They've got Wharton!"

"Loder and some other prefects bagged Wharton, and they've got him here, locked up in the punishment-room."

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer in dismay.

"I've spoken to him through the keyhole, and he asked me to give you the tip, Mauly."

"Thanks no end, old bean."

"Loder and Carne and Walker have gone out again, and I rather fancy they're hanging about High Oaks now, looking for a chance to bag some more of you. I say, tell my brother to look out."

"Oh, yaas!"

"Wharton says you're to look out, because it's Loder's game to hang round and catch you one at a time. See?"

"I see."

"Wharton's going to be flogged at roll-call."

"Is he, by gad!"

"They've got him for keeps. Mind you tell my brother Percy to keep his eyes open," said Bolsover minor anxiously.

"Yaas, dear boy."

"That's all," said the fag. "Mind you tell Percy."

And Bolsover minor rang off.

Lord Mauleverer left the telephone, with a very thoughtful expression on his face. Juggins was waiting in the hall, and he eyed his lordship very curiously. Every day that High Oaks School continued Mr. Juggins was more and more surprised that it did not come to an end. But Mr. Juggins was by no means anxious for it to come to an end; he was anxious, on the other hand, to see it continue. High Oaks was a land of plenty to Mr. Juggins, and to innumerable relatives of Mr. Juggins, who were having the time of their lives in Lord Mauleverer's service. The end of High Oaks School meant that the horn of plenty would run dry, which was not, from the Juggins' point of view, a consummation devoutly to be wished. So Mr. Juggins' expression was rather curious and rather anxious as he eyed Lord Mauleverer.

"Nothin' wrong, I hope, my lord?" he ventured.

"Yaas."

"I'm very sorry to 'ear it, my lord."

"Thank you, Juggins. You're a sympathetic chap," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm much obliged to you, Juggins. One of my friends has been kidnapped, Juggins."

"Kidnapped, my lord!" ejaculated Mr. Juggins.

"Yaas."

"Perhaps my cousin James can help, my lord," said Mr. Juggins. "James is very eager to oblige your lordship."

Lord Mauleverer grinned. Jimmy the Pug had been remarkably useful in restoring order at High Oaks, but Mauly doubted whether even the redoubtable Pug would be useful in the present emergency. A frontal attack on Greyfriars, even with so hefty an auxiliary as Jimmy the Pug, was rather too large an order.

"You see, Juggins, my pal Wharton has been kidnapped by the Greyfriars crowd," he explained.

"Oh, my lord!"

"His headmaster, you know. Rather an obstinate old gentleman, but I don't think it would be quite the thing for James to give him his left."

"Oh, dear! No, my lord!" gasped Mr. Juggins. "Certainly not, my lord."

"I've got to get the chap away from them Juggins," remarked Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully.

"Have you, my lord?" murmured Mr. Juggins.

"Yaas. Only the Beak will be too wary to let us nip him away. And I fancy they'll see that he doesn't get away on his own. It looks like a fix, Juggins."

"It does, my lord," murmured Mr. Juggins.

"But he's going to be flogged this evenin', Juggins. I've got to stop that, somehow."

"Yes, my lord."

"The question is, how?" said Lord Mauleverer. "I suppose you haven't any idea how, Juggins?"

"Nunno, my lord."

Mr. Juggins did not state his private opinion, which was that these young rascals who had walked out of their school, and defied their headmaster, would be all the better for a flogging all round. That was Mr. Alfred Juggins' fixed opinion; but he deemed it judicious to keep it strictly to himself.

"Ring the school bell, Juggins," said Lord Mauleverer.

"Yes, my lord."

In a few minutes the bell was clanging, drawing the Removites to Hall from all quarters of High Oaks. Only a short time ago most of the Remove would have passed the clang of the bell unheeded. Cousin James' advent had changed all that. The juniors rolled up to the clang of the bell as promptly as they had ever done at Greyfriars. Any fellow who did not turn up was liable to be looked for by Cousin James. Nobody wanted to be specially looked for by Jimmy the Pug. The Pug had a heavy hand in carrying out his lordship's orders.

The Remove gathered in Hall, and all but Wharton were present by the time the bell ceased to clang.

"Well, what's this game?" asked the Bounder.

"Think you can make us turn up in Hall whenever you like, Mauleverer?" demanded Bolsover major.

"Yaas."

"You cheeky ass—"

"Oh, shut up, Bolsover," said Bob Cherry. "What's the row, Manly? Something happened?"

"Yaas."

"Is the happenfulness serious and terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Rain Singh.

"Yaas."

"Well, give it a name," suggested Nugent.

"They've got Wharton," said his Lordship.

"What?"

Lord Mauleverer explained how the matter stood.

“Well, the silly ass!” said Skinner. “If they’ve got him they’ll keep him. You won’t be able to get him away, old bean.”

“Not likely,” said the Bounder. “The Beak will be wise to that now.”

“So that’s their game, is it?” said Bob. “Catching us one at a time. I hadn’t looked for that.”

“Just like Loder!” said Johnny Bull, with a sniff.

“The justfulness is terrific.”

“Well, they’ve got him, and there’s an end,” said Skinner. “They’re welcome to him, as far as I’m concerned.”

“Same here,” grinned Snoop.

“Shut up, you rotters!” bawled Bob Cherry. “We’ve got to get him back, if we have to march over to Greyfriars and pull the blessed place down!”

“Mauly’s leader,” said the Bounder, with a sneer. “What are you going to do, Mauly?”

“We’re all ready to back you up, Mauly,” said Tom Redwing quietly.

“Hear, hear!”

“What’s the orders, Mauly?”

Lord Mauleverer was waiting placidly till the buzz of comment died down.

“Bolsover minor tipped me on the telephone what had happened,” he said. “He particularly desired me to put you wise, Bolsover, He wants you to keep your eyes open, in case they catch you in the same way.”

Bolsover major snorted.

“Catch them catching me!” he said contemptuously. “I’m not an ass like Wharton, I hope, to walk into their claws. Rats!”

“I told the kid I’d give you his message,” said Lord Mauleverer mildly. “Now shut up a bit, old chap.”

“Look here—”

“I said shut up, old bean,” said Mauleverer gently. “We’re going to get Wharton back, of course.”

“I can see you doing it!” jeered the Bounder.

“Thank you, dear boy. I want a dozen chaps,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Must be hefty chaps, and fellows who can shut up and obey orders. The rest will keep within bounds till we get back. Now I’ll call the names of the fellows I want.”

Lord Mauleverer ticked off a dozen names, which included the four remaining members of the Co. and Peter Todd, Redwing, Linley, Penfold, Squiff, Tom Brown, Newland and Ogilvy. Leaving the rest of the Remove in a buzz of excited discussion, his lordship marched out with his merry men, all of them utterly puzzled to know what Mauly’s intentions were, but prepared to back him up through thick and thin.

CHAPTER 6

Sauce for the Gander!

“Well, of all the jolly luck!”

Gerald Loder’s face fairly beamed.

Loder and Co. were lurking along the Courtfield road, within sight of the chimneys of High Oaks over the trees, when the bully of the Sixth spotted Lord Mauleverer. Loder had rather had an idea that as Wharton did not return some fellow might go to Courtfield to look for him; and now it looked as if Loder’s surmise was well-founded. Of Bolsover minor’s performances on the telephone Loder had not the faintest suspicion; he had no idea that the rebels were on their guard. That was one of the

many things that Loder of the Sixth did not know.

Lord Mauleverer was strolling along the road with his hands in his pockets and a careless face. Certainly he did not look like a fellow who knew that danger threatened. Mauly's pace was never rapid; but at present he seemed to be understudying a small snail as he sauntered along. Loder fairly grinned with glee at the sight of the leader of the Remove rebellion alone and walking into the hands of the enemy precisely as Harry Wharton had done.

"Jevver see such luck?" grinned Loder.

"Well, hardly ever!" chuckled Walker.

"Looks like an easy thing," remarked Carne. "Blessed if I thought your wheeze would work out as easily as this, Loder. It's simply perfect!"

"Come on!" said Loder.

Lord Mauleverer stopped and glanced round him, and stood looking at the three seniors as they cut across towards him. He regarded them calmly and thoughtfully for a few moments, and then, as if making up his noble mind in his usual leisurely manner, he turned and walked back towards High Oaks. Even then he did not run; he walked sedately. In a couple of minutes the three prefects, running hard, came up with him, and they surrounded him with grinning faces.

Surprised to see us—what?" chuckled Loder.

"Not at all, dear man," answered Lord Mauleverer. "The fact is, I was rather expectin' to see you."

"That's why you came out alone, I suppose?" said Loder with grim banter.

"Yaas."

"Well, you're coming to Greyfriars with us now. It may interest you to know that we've got Wharton."

Dear man, a little bird told me that long ago," said Lord Mauleverer "But I'm afraid I can't come to Greyfriars now. Hands off!"

"Collar him!" grinned Loder.

Three pairs of hands were laid upon his lordship. At the same moment there was a sudden roar in the well-known tones of Bob Cherry, and Bob came bursting through a hawthorn hedge beside the road.

"Rescue, Remove!" he roared.

"Hallo! Here's another of the young rascals!" exclaimed Loder. "We'll take him, too, and— Oh—ah— oh! My hat!"

Loder broke off with a startled glare as a crowd of other Removites appeared behind Bob. The whole dozen of Lord Mauleverer's selected party rushed on the scene.

"Give 'em beans!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Hurrah!"

"Give them terrific beanfulness, my esteemed chums!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Walker in dismay.

The three Sixth-Formers let go Lord Mauleverer to defend themselves as the crowd of Removites rushed on them. Even Sixth Form men were not of much use against odds of four to one. Loder and Co. were fairly overwhelmed and knocked right and left.

They had let go Mauleverer, but Mauly had not let go Loder. He held on to Loder tenaciously, and three or four other fellows followed suit. Carne and Walker, gasping and furious, ran for it, and went down the road as if they fancied themselves on the cinder path. Loder would gladly have followed their example, but there was no escape for Loder. In the grip of the crowd of juniors Gerald Loder was a powerless prisoner.

"Got him!" chortled Bob Cherry.

"The gotfulness is—"

“Terrific!” chuckled Johnny Bull. “Hurray!”

“Leggo, you young scoundrels!” roared Loder. “I’ll smash you! I’ll skin you! I’ll—I’ll——”

“Bring him along, dear men,” said Lord Mauleverer placidly. “Much obliged to you, Loder, for walkin’ into the trap like this and savin’ us a lot of trouble.”

“You—you— you——” spluttered Loder.

“Bring him along! Kick him, somebody, to start him!”

“Yarooogh!”

“Come on, old bean! We’re wastin’ time!”

“You young villain!” gasped Loder. “You—you—— I’m not going to High Oaks! What the thump do you want me at High Oaks for?”

“You’re staying there as long as Wharton stays at Greyfriars!” explained Lord Mauleverer.

“What!” shrieked Loder.

“Don’t I make my meanin’ clear? Kick him again, Cherry! He will, understand that!” said Lord Mauleverer.



“Whooooop!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Loder evidently did understand that, for he moved off in the midst of the crowd of Removites, grasped on all sides, a helpless prisoner. Surrounded by the triumphant juniors, the bully of the Sixth was marched in at the gates of High Oaks, and loud cheers greeted his appearance as he was marched into Hall. By which time Gerald Loder doubted very much whether his actions would earn him the coveted distinction of becoming head prefect of Greyfriars.

CHAPTER 7

Exchange No Robbery!

Dr. Locke, in his study, stood with a birch in his hand and thunder on his brow. He had hoped that the problem of the Remove was near solution—instead of which it appeared now to be further from solution than ever. There was only one solace. One

of the young rebels—one of the ringleaders—was in his hands, and that one could be adequately punished. His grasp tightened on the birch as his thoughts turned to Wharton.

Buzzzzzzzz!

It was the telephone-bell and the Head impatiently laid down the birch and took up the receiver.

“Well?” he snapped.

“Is that Dr. Locke?”

“Dr. Locke is speaking.”

“Good-evenin’, sir!”

“What?”

“Mauleverer speakin’ from High Oaks, sir.”

“Oh!”

The Head felt a sensation of relief. No doubt this young rascal, whom he now understood to be the chief leader of the rebellious Removites, was frightened at what he had done, and was seeking to make his peace. No doubt he was telephoning to announce that the rebels were at last returning to their duty. No doubt he was seeking to make terms before he arrived; and the Head smiled grimly at the thought. The only terms for the rebels were unconditional submission and severe punishment.

“So that is Mauleverer speaking?” said the Head, after a pause.

“Yaas, sir.”

“Very good. You may return, Mauleverer—”

“Eh?”

“And bring your Form-fellows with you. Your punishment will be decided upon later.”

“Oh, gad! You’re offside, sir.”

“What?”

“We’re not comin’ back, sir.”

Dr. Locke realised that he had jumped to a conclusion rather too quickly. It was not surrender.

“Not unless Mr. Quelch is coming back, too, sir. In that case we’ll be very glad to return to Greyfriars.”

“You impudent young rascal !”

“Hem! I rang you to speak about Loder, sir. He’s here.”

“You will tell Loder to return to Greyfriars immediately!” snapped the Head.

“I think he would jump at the chance, sir. But we’re not lettin’ him off. What we want is a fair exchange of prisoners.”

“What?” gasped the Head.

“That’s the big idea, sir. You’ve got Wharton, and we’ve got Loder. We’ll hand over Loder in exchange for Wharton. Is it a go?”

“Bless my soul!”

“As soon as Wharton gets here, sir, we’ll let Loder go. I suppose you want him back?”

“This unexampled impudence, Mauleverer—”

“I don’t see it, sir. An exchange of prisoners is fair play— that’s why we nobbled Loder—”

“Silence! You will release Loder at once. As for Wharton, he is about to be flogged most severely.”

“In that case, sir, there will be reprisals.”

“What? What?”

“If you flog Wharton, sir, we shall flog Loder.”

“What?” shrieked the Head.

“Sorry, sir; but we’re bound to do it. If Wharton’s flogged Loder gets the same—that’s fair play. So long as Wharton is kept at Greyfriars, Loder will be kept here. Catch on, sir?”

The Head breathed hard and deep.

“Mauleverer, unless you release Loder immediately I shall invoke the aid of the police to deal with you.”

“Nothin’ in it, sir,” answered Lord Mauleverer calmly. “High Oaks is my property, bought and paid for, and nobody has a right to step on it without my permission. When you sent the prefects over here, sir, I could have had them run in for trespassing if I’d liked. I let them off that, sir, out of consideration for you.”

“Bless my soul!” said the Head faintly.

“You can’t send police here for Loder, sir, without a search-warrant, the place bein’ my property. Excuse my instructin’ you in the law of the land, sir, but you don’t seem to know much about it. I’m rather well up in the laws relatin’ to property and things. Now, unless you give me your word at once that Wharton will not be flogged, Loder will be flogged. How about it, sir?”

The telephone in Dr. Locke’s study rocked as he slammed back the receiver on the hooks. It was extremely fortunate for Lord Mauleverer that he was not within his headmaster’s reach at that moment. The slamming of the receiver was Dr. Locke’s reply to the chief of the High Oaks rebels, and he picked up the birch again with a brow of thunder.

CHAPTER 8

Nice for Loder!

Lord Mauleverer put up the receiver and went down to meet his Form-fellows. In the Hall the Removites were swarming, and in the midst of the crowd was Loder of the Sixth, with a face that Bob Cherry likened to that of a demon in a pantomime.

“Well, what does the Head say, Mauly?” asked Bob Cherry. “He’s rung off,” answered Mauleverer. “He seemed to be in a bad temper about somethin’.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“The badfulness of the temper is probably terrific,” chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Well, the man might be reasonable,” said Mauleverer. “I’ve offered him a fair exchange, and exchange is no robbery. We want Wharton—and he wants Loder. Wharton’s no use to him—and Loder’s no use to us. Blessed if I see what use he is at all; but the Head must think somethin’ of him, or he wouldn’t have made him a prefect. The Beak says that Wharton is goin’ to be flogged, although I’ve warned him that Loder will be flogged, too.”

“You young scoundrel—” began Loder.

“Shut up, Loder! You’re dead in this act!”

“If you don’t let me go at once—”

“Will you dry up, Loder?”

“No!” roared Loder furiously. “I tell you, you young rascal— “Kick him, Cherry!”

“Yaroooh!”

“Sorry, Loder, old bean; but it seems to be the only way to make you shut up,” said Lord Mauleverer politely.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Loder suppressed his feelings, glaring at Lord Mauleverer as if he would have liked to bite him.

“What time is callin’-over at Greyfriars, you men?” asked Mauleverer. “Anybody remember?”

“Seven, you ass!”

Mauleverer glanced at his watch.

“Five minutes to seven,” he said. “Place a chair for Loder, you men. He will have to bend over a chair.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

A chair was placed for Loder to bend over. Lord Mauleverer swished the cane.

“You really mean it, Mauleverer?” asked the Bounder.

“Eh? Yaas!”

“If you dare to lay a finger on me—” hissed Loder.

“I’m not goin’ to lay a finger on you, old bean. I’m goin’ to lay this cane. The Head will give Wharton six. I’m goin’ to give you six. Make up your mind to it.”

Loder gasped. It was almost unbelievable from the point of view of a Sixth Form prefect; but Loder had to believe it. Lord Mauleverer was evidently in deadly earnest.

“Look here,” panted Loder, “let me speak to the Head. If I—I go back and—and speak to him—”

“I’m afraid I couldn’t trust you to come back here and take your floggin’, dear man.”

“Hardly!” chuckled Nugent.

“I—I—I’ll speak to him on the telephone!” gasped Loder. “Let me phone to the Head, for goodness’ sake.”

Lord Mauleverer smiled faintly. As a matter of fact, he had been waiting for Loder to make that suggestion.

“Any old thing,” he said. “If you can persuade the Beak to listen to reason you’re welcome to try, old bean. Bring him to the telephone, you men.”

“Better give him a few first,” said Bolsover major.

“Shut up, Bolsover!”

Loder was marched to the telephone. As his hands were tied, Lord Mauleverer obligingly held the receiver to his ear.

Loder called up Greyfriars, palpitating with apprehension. The Head’s deep voice came through.

“Loder speaking, sir!” gasped the prefect.

“Indeed!”

“I’m a prisoner here, sir, at High Oaks.”

“So I understand from Walker.”

“They—they’re going to flog me, sir, with a cane, if you flog Wharton, sir,” gasped Loder.

“Nonsense!”

“It’s true, sir. They’ve tied my hands, and they’ve got the cane ready. I—I don’t think, sir, that you ought to let me be flogged when I got into this through trying to do my duty as a prefect, sir.”

“Nonsense.”

“You—you see, sir—” gasped Loder.

“I am assured that the juniors will not dare to do anything of the kind,” snapped the Head.

“Oh, dear! I—I assure you, sir, they’re just goin’ to flog me,” panted Loder. “The little beasts are fairly enjoyin’ it, sir. I give you my word.”

“You should not have allowed these Lower boys to make you a prisoner at all,

Loder.”

“I—I couldn’t help it, sir.”

“Nonsense.”

“I did my best, sir,” groaned Loder. “You can’t let me be flogged by these young scoundrels, sir.”

There was a pause. Loder listened hopefully.

“I can scarcely believe, Loder, that these juniors, rebellious as they are, would dare to proceed to such a length,” said the Head at last. “In the circumstances, however, I shall postpone Wharton’s flogging until you have returned to Greyfriars, and you may tell them so.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!”

“You will return here at the earliest possible moment, Loder.”

“I—I—I will, sir.”

Lord Mauleverer smiled cheerily. He was close enough to the receiver to hear what was said from Greyfriars.

“That’s all right,” he said. “The floggin’s off, you men. Wharton’s in the punishment-room at Greyfriars, I think, Loder?”

“Yes,” growled Loder.

“We haven’t a punishment-room here—another oversight,” said his lordship. “But any old room will do. You’re goin’ to be locked up, old bean, so long as Wharton is locked up at Greyfriars.”

“Look here—”

“Call Juggins, you men,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Here, my lord!” Alfred Juggins was at hand at once. Juggins had the great gift of being always at hand.

“Juggins, this fellow is bein’ kept shut up,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Yes, my lord.”

“See that he’s fed and fairly comfortable, Juggins.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Thank you very much, dear man.”

And Loder, enraged, amazed and utterly dismayed, was locked in and left to his meditations.

CHAPTER 9

Bunter Does it!

Billy Bunter blinked at Smithy, his little round eyes growing rounder behind his big spectacles.

“Oh!” he gasped. “Oh, my hat!”

It was the following day, and although Harry Wharton was still a prisoner at Greyfriars, and Loder of the Sixth was a prisoner at High Oaks, the new school was proceeding evenly.

Even the arrogant spirit of Vernon-Smith seemed to have been tamed. But that was only in seeming.

Had the Bounder been elected undisputed leader of the High Oaks rebels, doubtless he would have been satisfied, though certainly, in that case, High Oaks would not have much resembled a school. But the Bounder could not bow his head to authority. Even at Greyfriars there had often been trouble between Smithy and the captain of the Remove, for that reason. At High Oaks, in a state of rebellion against authority, Smithy had no idea at all of playing second fiddle and taking orders from another

Removite. With most of the Remove backing up Lord Mauleverer, and the rest in awe of Jimmy the Pug, it looked as if Smithy would have to lump it, if he did not like it; but the Bounder's thoughts had been busy, and it was upon William George Bunter that he fixed to help him bring about a change. What might follow that change the Bounder did not care about in the least; he was reckless of results as usual.

"You can do it, you fat duffer," he said. "It's the only thing you can do; but you can do that."

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"You're a helpless dud at everything else, but you can do fatheaded ventriloquial tricks," said the Bounder. "You nearly got me into a scrap with Bolsover the other day with your trickery, and I jolly well kicked you for it."

"Look here—"

"Goodness knows how you do it! It can't require any brains, or you couldn't," went on the Bounder. "Still, the fact remains that you can. Now, all the fellows know you're a rotten ventriloquist, but that brute James Juggins doesn't, so you've got a clear field with him."

"But—" faltered Bunter.

"But what, ass? Aren't you fed-up with playing at school here, and going into class, same as if we were at Greyfriars?"

"Yes, rather!" said the Owl of the Remove promptly. "But—"

"Aren't you fed-up with Linley playing at Form-master, and giving us lessons, and lines, and Mauleverer captaining us with that prizefighter to protect him?" demanded the Bounder savagely.

"Yes; but—but—but he's a dangerous beast, you know," said Bunter uneasily. "Look how he chucked you about like a sack of coke when you tried to tackle him—and Bolsover, too."

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"That's why we're going to get shut of him," he said. "It can be done by your ventriloquial trickery. Once we get that old pug out of the place, we'll all do as we jolly well like, and give Mauly the ragging of his life. Most of the fellows are backing him up now, but they'd come round fast enough if they weren't scared of that bruiser."

"Yes, but—"

"You've got to do it!" growled the Bounder. "You're afraid that that pug might lick you if he spotted it, what?"

"Not afraid, of course," said Bunter. "Still, he would, you know."

"Well, if you don't try it on, I shall lick you," said the Bounder.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I'll tell you what, Smithy. I was expecting a postal-order the day we left Greyfriars—"

"You fat idiot!"

"Of course, it hasn't come here—the Head's not sending on our letters," said Bunter.

"Can you let me have the—the pound? Of course, I'll hand you the postal-order when—when we get back to Greyfriars. It's there, you know, waiting for me. In fact, there's probably more than one. I was expecting several postal-orders—from my titled relations, you know."

The Bounder breathed hard.

"It's a go—if you do as I tell you!" he snapped.

"Right-ho, then!" said Bunter. "Of course, I can do it. I'm a jolly clever ventriloquist, as you know. I'll jolly well make that prizefighter sit up, I can tell you! Mauly, too,

and the fellows who are backing him up. Leave it to me!”

“I’ll tell you exactly what to do—”

Bunter made a disdainful gesture.

“You needn’t tell me anything, Smithy. I know what to do!”

“I tell you—”

“Rats! Lot you can teach me!” said Bunter.

Vernon-Smith suppressed his desire to take William George Bunter by the scruff of the neck and bang his head against a tree. He promised himself that pleasure later. At present Bunter was needed and he had to be placated.

“Well, go ahead,” said the Bounder. “Have your own way.”

“I mean to,” answered Bunter calmly.

“There’s the bruiser now,” said Smithy, with a glance towards Jimmy the Pug, who was strolling down a path with his pipe in his mouth, and an expression of amicable satisfaction on his battered face.

It was after morning class at High Oaks, and as the weather was fine, most of the fellows were out of doors. Skinner and Snoop were detained in the class-room for carelessness in lessons, and they did not even think of leaving the class-room without permission. Cousin James had instructions to take them back if they did, and they were anxious not to give Cousin James that trouble.

Some of the juniors were kicking about a ball, and Jimmy the Pug stopped to look on. Bob Cherry came along to join the punters, passing Cousin James as he stood on the path. The Bounder heard Billy Bunter give his fat little cough, always a preliminary to his ventriloquial stunts.

“Get out of the way, you low rotter!”

Cousin James spun round towards Bob Cherry. For the moment even the Bounder supposed that Bob had spoken, so exactly had the Remove ventriloquist imitated his voice. The fat grin on Bunter’s face enlightened him, and he grinned, too, and watched developments.

“Wot?” ejaculated James Juggins. “Wot’s that, young Cherry?”

“Eh, what?” said Bob, staring at him. Bob had heard the remark, and wondered who had spoken; but he did not recognise his own voice, naturally. Jimmy the Pug had recognised it, and he was wrathful.

“You impudent young rascal!” exclaimed James, justly incensed. “Do you want to be walloped?”

“What the thump do you mean?” exclaimed Bob angrily. “If you think you can bully me, my man, you’re making a mistake! Get out of the way, please!” James had planted himself in Bob’s path, with a belligerent look.

“For two pins,” roared James, “I’d lay you across my knee and spank you, young Cherry!”

“Oh, shut up, and don’t be a fool !” retorted Bob.

“That does it!”

And Cousin James grasped Bob Cherry in an angry grasp.

“Here, chuck that!” roared Bob.

Bob struggled.

But, powerful fellow as he was, he was powerless in the grasp of the old pugilist.

“Rescue, you men!” shouted Bob.

A crowd of the Removites ran up. The Bounder chuckled, and Billy Bunter grinned with glee. There was no doubt that the Remove ventriloquist had done it now. Cousin James was grasping Bob in a grip of iron with one hand, and smacking him forcibly with the other—and Bob was punching at him furiously.

“Stop that, you ruffian!” shouted Johnny Bull.

“Chuck it!” exclaimed Nugent.

“Collar him!”

“Rescue!” yelled Bob.

“All right, Bob, we’ll be with you in a sec!”

There was a rush at James.

So many hands were laid on James Juggins that even the redoubtable old pug was overpowered, and he went to the ground with a dozen Removites clinging to him like cats. The Bounder grinned gleefully as he grasped James’ prominent ears, and banged his head on the hard earth. Muffled roars came from Cousin James under the scrambling heap of juniors.

“Duck him!” roared Bolsover major.

“Hurrah!”

“Shove him in the pond!”

“Ere, you stow it!” howled James. “You chuck it, you ’ear me! Oh, crikey! Oh, crumbs! Ow!”

Jimmy the Pug was bundled along helplessly to the pond, struggling and roaring. In a yelling mob, the Removites reached the pond, and Cousin James was hurled headlong in. Splash!

“Groooogh! Gug-gug! Oooch!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared the Removites.

“Now cool down there, you cheeky rotter!” bawled Bob Cherry. “And you’ll get some more of the same if you ask for it!”

“Yes, rather!”

“The ratherfulness is terrific!”

And the Removites crowded away, leaving Jimmy the Pug to crawl dismally out of the pond, looking and feeling as if he did not find life at High Oaks worth living.

CHAPTER 10

The Only Way!

Harry Wharton stood by the window of the punishment-room at Greyfriars, staring out at a patch of blue sky, which was all he could see of the outside world, when there was a sound of footsteps in the corridor. He turned to the door, expecting to see Trotter, the page, with a tray and dinner. But it was Wingate of the Sixth who entered the punishment-room.

Wharton gave him a nod and a smile.

“Halo, Wingate!”

“Getting fed-up with this?” asked the captain of Greyfriars.

“Yes, rather!” answered Wharton promptly.

“You’re going now.”

“Oh, good!”

“Head’s order to let you out,” said Wingate.

“Oh, my hat! That’s good news,” said Harry. “But why?”

“I suppose you don’t know what’s been happening,” said Wingate, with a grin. “Your precious friends over at High Oaks have got Loder.”

“Good for them!” said Harry.

“They’ve kept him a prisoner,” said Wingate. “He’s been away all night, and he’s still at High Oaks.”

Harry Wharton laughed.

Mauly's some leader," he said. "Is the Head letting me go so that Loder can come back?"

"I imagine so. Anyhow, the orders are to let you out of the punishment-room, and you're to take a message to Loder to return to Greyfriars at once. That's all I've been told."

"I'll take that message with pleasure," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "In fact, I've never been so pleased in my life to take a message. Does the Head want to see me?"

"He doesn't!" answered Wingate, dryly.

He threw the door open wide, and Harry Wharton walked out of the punishment-room. His face was very bright as he walked down the corridor and down the stairs. The Greyfriars fellows were not yet out of the Form-rooms, and Wharton guessed that the Head had let him depart while the fellows were still in school, so that his departure should not be witnessed. It was a defeat for the Head, and he did not want all Greyfriars to be witnesses to his defeat.

Wharton walked across cheerily to the gates and away up the Courtfield road towards High Oaks.

He had had more than enough of the punishment-room at Greyfriars, though he had been supported by faith in the amazing qualities of leadership that Lord Mauleverer had developed. He had hoped, at least, that Mauly would find some way of getting him out of 'durance vile', and now Mauly had done it. He strolled along cheerily in the spring sunshine, and turned in at the gates of High Oaks.

"Groogh! Gug-gug! Oooch!"

Wharton heard those remarkable sounds as he walked up the drive and glanced round. At a short distance from the drive was the pond, and from the pond a drenched and dripping figure was crawling.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton, as he recognised Jimmy the Pug. He turned off the drive and approached the old pugilist.

"Been swimming with your clobber on?" he asked humorously.

James gave him a dripping glare.

"I'll smash 'em!" he mumbled.

"But what—"

"You're one of 'em! I'll smash you!"

"Here, I say— Oh, my hat!" roared Wharton, as the enraged James grasped him.

"Leggo! Yarooogh!"

Possibly James, with his eyes full of water and mud, did not recognise Wharton, and did not remember that the captain of the Remove had been absent that morning.

Perhaps he did not care. In his present frame of mind he was yearning to thrash somebody, as was natural in the circumstances, and Wharton had come along at the right moment for that purpose. With a grasp on the astonished junior's collar, James proceeded to smack his head right and left.



“Take that, you young rip—”

“Whooop!”

“And that—and that—”

“Leggo! Yow-ow-ow !”

James had a heavy hand, and he was using it with vigour.

“And that—and that—and that—”

“You potty idiot, leggo!” shrieked Wharton.

“And that!” gasped James.

Fortunately, Wharton succeeded in hooking his leg into James’ and giving the exasperated pugilist a shove at the same time. James staggered back, and, being still on the edge of the pond, he sat down in the water. There was a mighty splash, and a muffled roar from James.

Wharton did not linger.

His head was singing from James’ hefty smacks, and James was struggling out of the water again, with an expression on his battered face which told only too plainly what the junior had to expect if he was still on the spot when James emerged from the pond. Wharton started for the house at a run.

He was rather breathless when he dashed into the hall of High Oaks. The Removites were at dinner there.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob Cherry. “Here’s Wharton!”

“Hurray!”

“You got away?” exclaimed the Bounder.

“I’m released in exchange for Loder,” said Harry. “I fancied you’d manage it somehow, Mauly, old man.”

“Yaas, I rather thought it would work, you know,” said Lord Mauleverer amiably.

“The Head couldn’t very well leave Loder here as a permanent fixture. Juggins!”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Go to the punishment-room, Juggins, and let that fellow out. Tell him to clear off.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Juggins departed. Harry Wharton dropped into a seat at the table beside Bob Cherry. He was ready for dinner.

“Jolly glad to see you back, old chap,” said Bob.

“And I’m jolly glad to get back,” said Harry. “Has anything happened here this morning?”

“Hem! Yes.”

“I found that old pug crawling out of the pond,” said Harry. “He went for me and I pushed him in again. What’s the row?”

“The rowfulness has been terrific, my esteemed chum,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “The excellent and ludicrous James has been ducked for his own esteemed good.”

“He asked for it,” growled Bob.

“Begged for it, in fact,” said Johnny Bull.

“He, he, he!”

That fat chuckle came from Billy Bunter.

Smithy gave the Owl of the Remove a fierce warning look. Billy Bunter winked at him reassuringly.

“All serene, Smithy. I’m not letting anything out,” he said fatuously.

“You fat idiot!” hissed the Bounder.

“Oh, really, Smithy—”

“Shut up!” hissed Vernon-Smith.

“If you think I can’t keep a secret, Smithy—”

“What’s that fat duffer burbling about?” asked Nugent.

“Oh, really, Franky—”

Bob Cherry explained to the captain of the Remove. “He thought he could smack my head, just as if it were Skinner’s—”

“You cheeky chump!” interjected Skinner.

“Blessed if I know what was the matter with him,” went on Bob. “Just flew into a temper and flew at me.”

“He, he, he!”

“For goodness’ sake, stop going off like an alarm-clock, Bunter What are you cackling at, you fat duffer?”

“Oh, really, Cherry—”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! There goes Loder!”

Through the open doorway, Loder of the Sixth could be seen, heading for the gates. Loder was not looking grateful for his release. His face was furious. Probably he did not expect a very agreeable reception when he returned to Greyfriars. Bolsover major jumped up.

“Let’s see Loder off!” he exclaimed.

“Good egg!” exclaimed half a dozen of them and there was a rush out of the doorway.

“Hold on!” called out Lord Mauleverer.

But Mauly was not heeded. Six or seven fellows rushed down the drive to see Loder off; and Loder, as he saw them coming, broke into a run. At the same time, the battered Jimmy the Pug could be seen striding wrathfully towards Mauly’s study.

“Look ‘ere—”

“My dear man!” said Lord Mauleverer mildly.

“Ducked!” roared James. “Drenched! Dripping! Look ere—.”

“I’m not deaf, dear man,” said Lord Mauleverer in a tone of plaintive remonstrance.

“Would you mind moderatin’ your voice a little? Shoutin’ rather gets on my nerves.”

“Ducked!” roared Jimmy the Pug. “Ducked in a blinking pond! Wet! Muddy! Smothered!”

James was not moderating his voice as requested. Rather was he intensifying it. There was no doubt that James, when he was excited, erred on the side of emphasis.

“Did I come ‘ere to be ducked?” hooted James. “Did I come ‘ere to be chunked in a blinkin’ pond? I arks you, as man to man.”

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

“To the best of knowledge, my dear fellow, you did not come here for any such purpose,” he said soothingly.

“Am I goin’ to stand it?” roared James.

“My dear man—”

“Am I the sort of bloke to stand it?”

Lord Mauleverer sighed. James was propounding a series of queries, just as if he were asking Mauleverer a set of conundrums. He did not, like Brutus, pause for a reply. His own eloquence appeared to suffice for James,

“Am I the sort of man to put up with this ‘ere?” demanded James in great wrath, and then, at last, he answered his own question. “No, sir, I ain’t! Not by long chalks! I ain’t the man to be ‘andled like this ‘ere! Drenched! Soaked! Muddy! I found a blooming frog down my neck when I got out! Then a young rip pushed me in again. Look at my eye! Punched! Look at my nose! Bashed! Think I’m going to stand it? Don’t you make any blinkin’ error! I ain’t!”

James had changed his clothes since his ducking, and he was dry, but his temper had not improved. James’ battered face, which retained many signs of ancient damages, now showed a good many more; in the struggle with the Removites he had not been handled gently. One of his eyes was nearly closed; his nose, which had always had a list to port, now looked almost on its beam-ends. James was damaged, and James was hurt, and James was in a towering rage.

If this sort of thing was going to happen to High Oaks, James had had enough of High Oaks; in fact, a little too much. James was so excited that Mauleverer, had he been a suspicious fellow, might have suspected that James had warmed himself, after his ducking, with some liquor of a potent nature. James was actually brandishing a knuckly fist, almost under his lordship’s nose, to give point to his remarks.

“The young rips!” continued James. “The whole gang of ‘em! Why, I’ll limb ‘em! I’ll bash ‘em! You mark my words. I’ll bash ‘em!”

Alfred Juggins came out of the house with a worried look. Hitherto, the numerous members of the tribe of Juggins who had gathered at High Oaks in Lord Mauleverer’s service, had proved extremely satisfactory. They were on to a good thing, so to speak, and they did not want to lose it. But James was rather different from the other Jugginses. In the prize-ring, and in his later position as “chucker-out” in a dance hall, he had not learned refined manners.

“Here, stow it, Jimmy!” he said, anxiously. “That ain’t the way to talk to his lordship.”

“You ‘old your jaw, Alf,” replied James. “I’m tellin’ his lordship that I’m going to bash them young rips, and, you mark my words, that’s just what I’m going to do.”

“You’ve been drinking!” said Mr. Juggins accusingly. “If a bloke took a drop, after being ducked in hicy water, ain’t a bloke a right to do so?” demanded James hotly.

“I’m telling his lordship, fair and square, that I’m going to bash them young rips. Callin’ a man names, and ducking him in a pond!”

“He, he, he!”

James stared round as he heard that noise. It was quite involuntary on Billy Bunter’s part, and the next moment he was sorry that he had giggled, as James’ baleful eye fell on him.

“That’s one of ‘em!” said James, and he made a rush at Bunter.

“Yaroo!”

The fat Junior fled for his life, with James in hot pursuit. Lord Mauleverer stared after them in dismay.

“Oh, gad!” he ejaculated.

“My eye!” murmured Mr. Juggins. He rushed after James and caught him by the shoulder. “Now, look here, James, you behave—none of your chucker-out games here, you know— Oh!”

A jab from James’ elbow took effect on Mr. Juggins’ waistcoat, and he sat down suddenly with a gasp, as if punctured.

“Ooooooh!”

“James!” ejaculated Lord Mauleverer.

James did not heed. In his present frame of mind, he was deaf to the voice of the charmer.

He rushed on in pursuit of Bunter. Bunter, as a matter of fact, had had no hand in the handling of James; Bunter was not the fellow to take a front seat on such an occasion. But it was all one to James. He was on the warpath and he rushed after Bunter with vengeance in his eye.

“Oh, dear!” gasped Lord Mauleverer.

The institution of James at High Oaks had worked, hitherto, like a charm. But it seemed to have its drawbacks now. Lord Mauleverer had congratulated himself upon his astuteness in engaging James to keep order. But keeping order was not really James’ long suit. Probably, in his chequered career as a boxer and a chucker-out, he had been more accustomed to disorder. Certainly he was quite out of hand now.

Lord Mauleverer hurried down the drive after James. That infuriated member of the Juggins clan had almost overtaken Bunter, and stretched Out a knuckly paw to seize him. In sheer terror, Bunter dropped on the ground—so suddenly that James stumbled over him before he knew what was happening, and went full length, landing with his nose in the gravel. The roar that proceeded from James as he landed would have done credit to the Bull of Bashan.

Bunter sat up dazedly, groping for his spectacles.

“Yaroogh ! Help! Murder! Fire! I say, you fellows, help! Yoooooop! Keep him off!” roared Bunter.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

“What the thump—”

Remove fellows came running up on all sides.

“That bruiser’s broken out again!” chuckled the Bounder. “Collar him!”

“Yaroogh! Help! Keep him off!”

James staggered up, gouging gravel from his features. If he had been enraged before, he was berserk now. Lord Mauleverer hastily interposed between him and Bunter.

“My dear man, take it calmly,” said Mauleverer. “I shall have to sack you if you kick up a shindy, you know— Whooooooo!”

A knuckly fist landed on Mauleverer’s noble nose, and he sat down—on Bunter.

There was an expiring gasp from the Owl of the Remove.

“Oh, gad!” gasped Mauleverer. “Oh, dear! Hold him, you fellows! Oh, my nose! Oh, my hat! Ow!”

“Mop him up!” yelled the Bounder, in great delight.

“Collar him!”

“Collar me, will you!” roared James. “I’ll bash you—I’ll bash the lot of you! ‘Ere goes. I’m arter you!”

And James, without waiting to be collared, rushed to the attack. Lord Mauleverer, sitting breathlessly on Bunter, clasped his nose, and gazed at James in horror.

“Oh, gad!” he murmured feebly.

“Ow! Gerroff!” moaned Bunter. “You’re s-s-squashing me, you beast! Gerroff! Ow! You silly idiot, gerroff!”

The Removites scattered before James’ rush, but they closed up again. James, fighting valiantly, was borne to the ground by weight of numbers. He almost disappeared under the swarm of juniors.

“Sit on him!” gasped Wharton. “Hold him!”

“Yaroooh! Let a bloke go!” roared James. “I’ll bash you! You mark my words, I’ll bash the lot of you!”

“The bashfulness will not be terrific!” gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, holding on to James’ ears.

“Duck him again!” shouted Bolsover major.

“Turn him out!” yelled the Bounder.

Lord Mauleverer staggered up—much to Bunter’s relief.

“Turn him out!” said Mauleverer breathlessly. “James, you’re sacked! Take him out of gates, you men!”

“Yes, rather!”

“Juggins! Where’s Juggins?”

“Here, my lord!” gasped Alfred Juggins.

“I’m awf’ly sorry, Juggins, but James will have to go.”

“Yes, my lord!” gasped Juggins.

“Pay him a month’s wages, Juggins.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Will you go quietly, James?”

“I’ll bash you!” roared James. “I’ll bash the whole lot! You mark my words—I’ll bash you!”

“Help him out, you men!”

James was helped out. The Famous Five grasped him, together with the Bounder and Redwing and Squiff and Toddy and five or six others. Hefty as James was, the odds were too heavy for him. There was hardly enough of James to go round with so many fellows grasping him. In the midst of the juniors James was dragged and hustled along through the gateway and landed in the road. By the time he landed there, even James had had enough. He sat and spluttered in the road; and Mr. Juggins prudently locked the gates.

James staggered to his feet at last, and for a quarter of an hour he stood at the gates and told High Oaks School at the top of his voice what he thought of them. It was quite a relief when James ceased at last, and, after shaking a knuckly fist at High Oaks by way of farewell, tramped away up the road to Courtfield.

CHAPTER 11

Called to Account!

“Not our fault, Mauly old man!”

“Couldn’t be helped, old chap!”

“The faultfulness of our esteemed selves was not terrific, my esteemed Mauly!”

Lord Mauleverer shook his head. His lordship’s face was very thoughtful at tea in the hall at High Oaks. Once more the leader of the Remove rebellion was up against trouble; and the boys who were backing him up were sympathetic; James had been Mauly’s right-hand man in keeping the recalcitrant spirits in order; and now he was gone, refusing to remain after the indignity he had suffered, and discipline had gone

with him. There was a malicious grin on the Bounder's face. His scheme had worked out even more successfully than he had hoped. Skinner and Co. were openly gleeful, and Billy Bunter was in great spirits. But Lord Mauleverer was worried.

"All serene, you men," he said. "I'm not blamin' anybody. I suppose it couldn't be helped, though I can't quite make it out. Blessed if I can understand why James went off at the deep end today."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cacklin' at, Bunter?" asked Mauleverer, fixing his eyes on the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, nothing!" grinned Bunter. "I don't know anything about it, Mauly. He, he, he!" The Bounder gave him a dark glance across the table; a circumstance which did not pass unnoted by Lord Mauleverer. His lordship was not suspicious, but he was sometimes very keen to observe.

"Somethin' must have happened to make James break out like that," he said. "You don't know anythin' about it, Bunter?"

"Nothing at all, old chap," said Bunter. He winked at the scowling Bounder. "Smithy doesn't either. He, he, he!"

"Have you been playin' any tricks, Bunter?" asked Lord Mauleverer very quietly.

"Certainly not, old fellow!" Bunter blinked at Mauleverer through his big spectacles, a little alarmed by Mauly's expression. "Nothing of the kind, old chap. I wouldn't, you know. If you think Smithy said anything to me this morning, you're mistaken. I haven't spoken to Smithy at all today, have I, Smithy?"

"You fat fool!" growled the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It was that fat villain all the time—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It's not the first time that fat rotter has kicked up a shindy with his beastly ventriloquism!" exclaimed Bob wrathfully. "That was it, of course! I remember now—"

"It wasn't!" yelled Bunter in alarm. "Nothing of the kind. I wasn't there—Smithy can prove I wasn't there—he was with me on the spot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Smithy put you up to it?" demanded Lord Mauleverer.

"No!" howled Bunter. "Don't I keep on telling you I never did it? I never spoke to Smithy at all this morning— never saw him in fact."

"You fat chump!" roared Peter Todd. "You've just said he was with you on the spot!"

"I—I mean— I mean he wasn't with me on the spot," gasped Bunter. "That's what I meant to say. As for his offering to cash my postal-order, that's got nothing to do with it. I'm going to hand him the postal-order when we get back to Greyfriars—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner. "So it was Bunter! Good for you, Bunter!"

"Juggins!" called out Lord Mauleverer.

"Yes, my lord?"

"Will you take Bunter away and thrash him, Juggins?"

"Oh, my lord!"

"It was Bunter who set James going, Juggins, and caused all the trouble. I'd be much obliged, Juggins, if you'd take him away and thrash him."

"Certainly, my lord!"

"Look here," roared Bunter, "if you think I'm going to let a dashed man-servant touch me, Mauly—"

“Yaas, I rather think so,” said Lord Mauleverer placidly. “Thrash him rather hard, Juggins.”

“Yes, my lord!”

Juggins went round the table and took William George Bunter by the collar. Bunter roared.

“Yow! Leggo! It wasn’t me! It was Smithy all the time! Own up, Smithy, you beast! You know you put me up to it! Yarooooogh!”

“This way, Master Bunter!” said Juggins.

Bunter was jerked out of his chair, and Juggins marched him out of the hall yelling. Louder and louder yells were soon heard from the distance, which indicated that Juggins was getting busy with a cane in the class-room, and carrying out his lordship’s instructions with no lack of vigour.

“That’s for Bunter,” said Lord Mauleverer. “As for you, Smithy—”

“Are you going to tell Juggins to lick me?” sneered the Bounder. “You’d better insure him first!”

“I’m goin’ to lick you myself,” answered Lord Mauleverer quietly. “You’re a bad hat, Smithy, and you’ve acted like a rotter. You put Bunter up to that rotten trickery—”

“Admitted!” said the Bounder coolly. “And now, what about it?”

“I’m going to lick you.”

Lord Mauleverer rose from the table.

All the Removites were on their feet now. From the classroom the yells of William George Bunter still rang loud and long, but they rang unheeded. The Bounder jumped up with a mocking sneer on his hard face.

“And how are you goin’ to lick me, you silly ass?” he asked contemptuously. “You haven’t got that prizefighter now to back you up. Do you think I’m going to bend over at your order, you slackin’ dummy?”

“We’ll jolly soon bend you over if Mauly gives the word!” exclaimed Harry Wharton.

“Say the word, Mauly!” shouted Bob Cherry. “We’re backing you up!”

“The backupfulness is terrific!”

“Hear, hear!”

“I’m backing up Smithy!” shouted Bolsover major.

“Hold on!” said Lord Mauleverer. “We don’t want a free fight here. I’m not tellin’ you to bend over, Smithy, I’m goin’ to lick you. Take off your jacket!”

“Oh, my hat!” ejaculated the Bounder. “Why, you tailor’s dummy, do you think you could lick one side of me?”

“I’m goin’ to try.”

Lord Mauleverer sedately peeled off his well-fitting jacket and pushed back his spotless cuffs. The Bounder eyed him in blank astonishment. Mauly had never figured as a fighting-man before, and Vernon-Smith had not the slightest doubt that he could knock out the schoolboy earl in a single round.

“Think again, you silly ass!” he exclaimed derisively. “You’ll want a new set of features when I’m done with you!”

“I’m riskin’ that, dear man. Are you ready?”

“Leave him to me, Mauly,” urged Bob Cherry.

“Thanks, old bean, I’m handlin’ him myself. You keep time, Wharton, will you?” said Lord Mauleverer.

“I’d rather you kept time for me, Mauly,” said the captain of the Remove.

“Rats! Waitin’ for you, Smithy!”

The Bounder gave a jeering laugh.

“I won’t keep you waitin’, you dummy!”

He threw off his jacket, and the Removites made a ring in Hall round the two combatants. Harry Wharton took out his watch.

"Poor old Mauly!" sighed Skinner. "If you have any tears, prepare to shed them now, my beloved 'earers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder came on with his hands up, grinning over them. He had no doubt whatever about knocking out the dandy of the Remove, and few of the onlookers had any doubts. Harry Wharton and Co. looked anxious, Skinner and Co. gleefully anticipative.

But Lord Mauleverer, who had surprised the Remove so much since the beginning of the rebellion, had not finished surprising them.

He stood up to his opponent quietly and coolly, without a trace of the swagger that was noticeable in the Bounder. And he did not go down, as the Removites expected, under Smithy's slashing attack. He gave ground a little, and then a little more, and as Vernon-Smith rushed in to finish, Lord Mauleverer seemed to wake up suddenly. His right came through the Bounder's guard and caught Vernon-Smith on the side of the jaw, and as Smithy spun half-round under the force of the blow, Mauleverer's left crashed in and the Bounder went spinning.

Crash!

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Skinner in amazement.

"Man down!" trilled Bob Cherry. "Good old Mauly! Keep that up!"

"Bravo, Mauly!"

Harry Wharton began to count. It looked almost as if the Bounder would be counted out in the first round. But Vernon Smith scrambled to his feet and rushed on with a furious face.

"Go it, Mauly!"

Lord Mauleverer was going it. No one, looking at him now, would have taken him for a slacker. He looked more like a live wire. He met the Bounder with right and left, and just as Wharton was calling time the Bounder went down again.

There was a roar in the hail. Skinner picked the Bounder up with amazement on his face. Smithy leaned on him, gasping for breath.

"Good old Mauly!"

"Bravo!"

"Who'd have thought it?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Old Mauly's a dark horse. It's Mauly's fight, you men! Bravo, Mauly!"

"Time!"

The Bounder sprung to the attack like a tiger. The second round was hard and fast. The Removites watched it breathlessly. Nobody had ever suspected the quiet, unassuming schoolboy earl of being a fighting-man. But Mauleverer was putting up a fight now that astonished the Remove. Amazing as it was, he was out-classing the Bounder, who was well known to be a good man with his hands. He took severe punishment without flinching, and he drove in blows that made his adversary gasp. When Wharton called time for the third round the Bounder came on much more cautiously. He realised by this time that he had to go "all out," and his confidence in the result was very much diminished. He sorely remembered, too, the cigarettes he had smoked that afternoon. Those cigarettes were taking their revenge now; the Bounder had bellows to mend. He fought fiercely for the upper hand; but he fought in vain, and there was a roar that echoed from one end to the other of High Oaks when the Bounder went down again with a crash to the floor.

"Licked!" gasped Skinner. "Oh, my hat! Smithy's licked!" Wharton was counting. All

eyes were on the Bounder, sprawling dazedly on the floor, gasping painfully for breath.

“One, two, three, four, five, six—”

The Bounder made a fierce effort to rise. But his head was swimming, and he sank back again.

“Seven—eight—nine—”

Again the Bounder made an effort, and again he failed.

“OUT!”

“Licked!” roared Bob Cherry. “Bravo, Mauly!”

Harry Wharton put away his watch. Smithy was counted out, and the fight was over.

Lord Mauleverer sat on the edge of the table and fanned himself with his handkerchief. Two or three fellows helped Vernon—Smith to his feet, and the Bounder stood unsteadily, still dazed. One of his eyes was closed; his nose streamed red; his breath came and went in panting gasps.

He blinked dizzily at Mauleverer.

“You—you—you’ve licked me!” he gasped at last, Lord Mauleverer nodded.

The Bounder stood for some moments gazing uncertainly at Mauleverer. Then his damaged countenance broke into a twisted grin.

“You’re a good man, Mauly,” he said. “Blessed if I thought you could lick me! But you’ve done it, and done it fair and square. Blessed if I thought you had it in you. Look here, I—I’m sorry I played that rotten trick—I know it was rotten. I’m backing you up after this.”

And the Bounder, leaning rather heavily on Tom Redwing’s arm, went to bathe his face—which needed it badly.

“Prep!” said Bob Cherry.

“The prepfuiness does not appear to be terrific!” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

The nabob was right.

Not more than eight or nine fellows turned up in their studies to prep that evening.

Among them, however, was the Bounder, who had joined the party of law and order.

The licking in Hall seemed to have inspired Smithy with a real respect for Lord Mauleverer, and when Redwing went to prep, the Bounder went with him.

There was a ceaseless roar in Hall, where Bolsover major and Skinner and Co., and a crowd of other fellows, were riotously displaying their independence. That evening Lord Mauleverer telephoned to Mr. Quelch to request him once more to come over to High Oaks and take control; and, as before, was answered by a curt refusal.

Mauleverer had a thoughtful look when he strolled into Wharton’s study.

“Quelchy’s refused again,” he remarked. “There’s only one thing to be done, you men.”

“Back to Greyfriars?” asked Wharton.

Mauleverer shook his head.

“Not without Quelchy bein’ taken back by the Head,” he answered “Not while there’s a shot in the locker, anyhow.”

His voice was drowned for a moment by a terrific roar from Hall, accompanied by a crashing of furniture.

“That can’t go on,” he remarked. “As Quelchy won’t come and take control, there’s only one thing to be done.”

“What’s that?” asked Harry.

“I’m going to engage a headmaster.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“I’ve been in communication with a man,” replied Mauleverer. You see, I put an advertisement in the paper, and he answered it. From what he says, he seems to be all right.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Wharton.

“I’m goin’ to tell him to come,” said Mauleverer. “I’m sure he will be a suitable johnny for the job.”

“How do you know?”

“Well, he says so.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“That’s settled, then,” said Lord Mauleverer. “There will be a Head of High Oaks tomorrow—and everythin’ will be O.K.” And, with a cheery nod, Lord Mauleverer ambled away.

Wharton and Nugent looked at each other with a grin.

“I wonder—” murmured Wharton.

“I wonder—” murmured Nugent.

And they left it at that.

CHAPTER 12

Ponsonby’s Wonderful Wheeze!

“Those Greyfriars cads—”

“Eh?”

“Are askin’ for it.”

Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School made that declaration.

Pon of the Fourth was sitting on the edge of the table in his study, with his feet resting on a chair.

He had a newspaper in his hands.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour loafed in their chairs, smoking cigarettes.

They looked surprised when he mentioned Greyfriars. For once Pon was not thinking of horses, and the sums that might be made—or lost—in backing those elusive animals.

“Oh, bother Greyfriars!” said Monson. “I’m fed-up with Greyfriars an’ Greyfriars cads!”

“Fed up to the chin!” agreed Gadsby.

“Absolutely!” yawned Vavasour.

Ponsonby did not heed those remarks. Pon was monarch of all he surveyed in that study, and when Pon said turn, the study had to turn.

“They’re asking for it,” he said. “Begging for it, in fact. Those Remove cads, you know—Wharton and his mob.”

“Now, look here, Pon,” said Gadsby. “I’m as much against that mob as you are, but I’m fed up. What’s the good of denying that we always get the worst of it when we row with them? Look at what Bob Cherry did to your eye last term.”

Ponsonby scowled.

“I’m going to make Bob Cherry sorry for what he did to my eye, Gaddy.”

“Look at the way Wharton handled Monson last time—”

“Oh, cheese it, Gaddy!” grunted Monson.

The reminder seemed rather painful to Monson. He passed his hand tenderly over his rather prominent nose as he spoke.

“I know you’re funky of them, Gaddy. You needn’t take the trouble to explain that,”

snapped Ponsonby.

"Well, I don't want an eye to match yours, or a nose to match Monson's," argued Gadsby. "Why not let them rip?"

"Absolutely!" concurred Vavasour.

"If you'll give a man a chance to speak, I'll explain," said Ponsonby, unheeding.

"There's been a lot of jolly queer goings-on in the Greyfriars Remove lately. From what I hear, Dr. Locke dismissed their Form-master, and the Remove got their backs up about it. Goodness knows why, but they did. Anybody would have expected them to be glad to get shut of a biting old blighter like Mr. Quelch. But they weren't."

"No accounting for tastes," said Monson. "I know I shouldn't kick up a fuss if our head sacked Mr. Mobbs. I should chirp."

"Well, the Greyfriars chaps didn't chirp. They seem to have broken out into a sort of rebellion," explained Ponsonby. "That slacking, footling ass, Mauleverer, appears to have taken the lead. I've had it from Skinner. They just walked out of Greyfriars——"

"Cheek!" said Gadsby.

They always were a cheeky crew," said Monson. "I hope they'll all get flogged, or sacked or something worse. But what the deuce does it matter to us, Pon, what those cads do?"

Lots!" answered Pon. "They walked out of their school, and refused to return unless the Head took their Form-master back. That idiot Mauleverer bought a place called High Oaks—you know that old manor house near Courtfield, that's been empty for dog's ages. His guardian seems to have let him do it—he's a millionaire, you know. They've turned it into a school—of sorts, and they're just sticking there and defying their headmaster till he comes down off his perch and takes their Form-master back. Of course, he won't do it—so there you are! Goodness knows how it will end! Not that I care.

"Only——"

"My hat! They must be havin' a high old time!" said Monson enviously. "No masters—no lessons—easy thing all round——"

"Offside!" said Pon. "From what I hear, Mauleverer is makin' them toe the line, and most of the men back him up. They're tryin' to run the place as a school, with classes, an' so on. But, of course, a lot of the fellows don't see it, and there's no end of shindies, accordin' to what Skinner tells me."

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour yawned in unison. They were not particularly interested in the remarkable proceedings of the Greyfriars Remove, and they wondered what Ponsonby was driving at—without specially wanting to hear. But if they did not want to hear, Ponsonby wanted to tell them. And Pon's word was law in Pon's study. So Pon went on: "I've been thinkin' it over, and wondering whether there was a chance of getting at the rotters," said Ponsonby. "Now they're asking for it, and fairly playing into our hands. I've got a wheeze."

Gadsby raised a hand in protest.

"I know your wheezes!" he remonstrated. "I've had some. I've seen them before. There's always somethin' just a little bit wrong somehow, and we get the beatin'. Wash it out, Pon!"

"Listen to this," said Ponsonby, unmoved. "It's an advertisement that the stupid chump, Mauleverer, has put in the paper.

Skinner says they've been tryin' to get Mr. Quelch to go to High Oaks as their headmaster, and Quelch's not taking any.

Now Mauleverer's advertising for a headmaster."

“What!” yelled the three.

They sat up and took notice at that.

“Here’s the advertisement,” said Ponsonby. And he proceeded to read it out of the newspaper, Gadsby, and Vavasour, and Monson listening with amazed attention now.

“Headmaster wanted for High Oaks School, Courtfield. First-class recommendations, and so on, will be required.— Apply by letter to Lord Mauleverer, High Oaks.”

“My only sainted aunt!” said Gadsby, in amazement. “Is the fellow potty? Advertising for a headmaster, as if he wanted a gardener! He won’t get any answers from headmasters—or any masters, for that matter.”

“Not likely!” chuckled Monson. “First-class recommendations, and so on! I like the ‘so on’. That sounds like Mauleverer.”

“All the same, they’re going to get an answer,” said Ponsonby.

“From whom?”

“What price me?” asked Pon.

His comrades stared at him.

“You?” ejaculated Gadsby.

“Little me!” said Pon complacently. “They’re asking to have their silly leg pulled, and I’ve been looking for a chance of pulling it. They’re offering me the chance now— asking for it. I can get a man to write the letter, and then—”

“You can’t walk into High Oaks and ask for a job as headmaster!” stuttered Gadsby.

“Just that. Just that, and nothing more or less,” answered Ponsonby coolly. “And if I pull it off, I’ll give them such a high old time that they’ll wish they’d never left Greyfriars.”

“But—but—but you’re potty!” babbled Gadsby. “Won’t they know you, you ass? And do you think even an ass like Mauleverer is looking for a headmaster no older than himself? Are you wandering in your mind, Pon?”

“Don’t be an ass!” said Ponsonby curtly. “I’m not thinking of walking into High Oaks in school uniform. You saw me got up as a man of fifty when we did the theatricals in the Christmas term—I borrowed Mobby’s cap and gown, and got old Lazarus to make me up—and fellows would have sworn I was a middle-aged Form-master. I can do it again, I suppose?”

“Oh, crumbs!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“But—but they’d lynch you if they caught you pulling their leg like that!” gasped Vavasour.

“They won’t catch me.”

“Mean to say you’ve got the nerve to go to High Oaks got up as a schoolmaster?” said Gadsby dazedly.

“Yes, ass! I tell you I can pull it off!” said Ponsonby confidently. “Mind, not a word outside this study—specially to Courtenay or the Caterpillar! It’s got to be kept deadly dark. I can get leave from Dr. Voysey to go home for a few days. I can get all the things I need at old Lazarus’ shop; and old Lazarus will help me make-up—he’s a dab at it! I could do it on my head!” Ponsonby chuckled. “Fancy those Greyfriars rotters with me as their headmaster! I shall really put them through it!”

And though Pon’s chums had considerable confidence in Pon, and Pon had unbounded confidence in himself, Gadsby and Co. were glad that it was their chief, and not their noble selves, who was to enter High Oaks School as a bogus headmaster— feeling that the venture was remarkably like the ancient exploit of Daniel in entering the lions’ den.

CHAPTER 13

Surprising News at High Oaks!

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But, I say," howled Billy Bunter, "there's a notice on the board!"

"Blow it!" sniffed Bolsover major.

"Bother it!" said Skinner.

"But I tell you—"

"Rats! Think anybody wants to read Mauly's silly notices on his silly board?" snapped Hazeldene.

"But, I say, you fellows, there's a headmaster coming—"

"What?"

"A new headmaster!" said Bunter.

"Rot!"

"It's on the board, in Mauly's fist!" said the Owl of the Remove. "I say, you fellows, I'm not going to stand it, you know!"

Bolsover major snorted.

"We'll give him headmaster! Let's go and see it, you fellows! If Mauly springs a headmaster on us, we'll give him socks!"

"Yes, rather!"

And there was a rush of the Removites into Hall at High Oaks to see that new notice on the board.

The malcontents of the Form, of whom Bolsover major was the acknowledged chief, though his following varied from day to day, received the news of the new headmaster with astonishment and indignation. They crowded to the notice-board in Hall to read the paper that was pinned up there, in the well-known hand of Lord Mauleverer.

That notice bore Out Bunter's statement:

"NOTICE TO THE SCHOOL

"A headmaster of High Oaks has now been appointed, and will arrive today. The school will assemble in Hall at five o'clock to meet the Head.

MAULEVERER."

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Bolsover major. "cheek! Of all the neck! Does that chump think to stand it?"

"But where on earth has he dug up a headmaster?" asked Skinner, in perplexity. "You can't hire schoolmasters by the hour like window-cleaners."

"Where's that idiot Manly? I'll jolly well talk to this," said the bully of the Remove.

"Anybody seen

"I guess he's in class," said Fisher T. Fish. "Class!" Bolsover major snorted. "Class! We'll have him out of class—and we'll rag the class-room, go and have Manly out, and rag all those swots who are playing at classes."

"Hurrah!"

Bolsover major jerked the notice down from the board.

"I'll make Maully eat this!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Bolsover major, with the paper crumpled in his hand, and his rugged face red with wrath, led the way to the class-room, where the more orderly members of High Oak School were at lessons. A crowd of fellows followed him, keen for a "rag" to relieve the monotony of existence. Shouting and trampling, they poured along the passage to the class-room. The door was closed, and Bolsover major opened it by the simple expedient of planting a heavy boot against it with a terrific kick.

"Class going on, what?" roared Bolsover.

"If you've come in for lessons," exclaimed Harry "you can sit down quietly—if not—"

"Outside, and sharp!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Yaas, get out, you know!" yawned Lord Mauleverer. "You're interrupting the work, you know."

"That's what we've come for!" said Bolsover major. "Maully, you crass ass, you've stuck this notice on the board?" Bolsover major held up the crumpled paper.

"Yaas!"

"What does it mean?" demanded Bolsover major.

"What it says, dear man!"

"Mean to say you've engaged a headmaster to take control of High Oaks?" thundered Bolsover major.

"Yaas!"

"Think we'll take any notice of him?" shouted Skinner.

"Yaas!"

"You're going to eat this!" roared Bolsover major. "See? I'm going to make you eat your words—paper and all."

"Outside, you rotter!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"And we're going to rag the class-room, and stop all this rot, and when your precious headmaster comes we're going to rag him!" roared Bolsover.

"Oh, gad! Will you get outside?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "I keep on tellin' you you're interruptin' the work. You men, lend me a hand to shove them out."

"You bet!"

"Pile in!" shouted the Bounder.

"Kick 'em out!"

"Hurrah!"

The whole class fairly rose to the task. They were the orderly members of High Oaks—they were playing the game sticking to work, and setting an example. But there was no doubt—no doubt at all—not the shadow of a doubt—that they preferred a shindy to lessons. In the present circumstances, a shindy was required in the case of law and order—and the orderly section jumped at the chance. And any stranger, looking in at High Oaks just then, would have been extremely puzzled to distinguish the orderly fellows from the disorderly ones—they certainly all looked much of a muchness, as they scrambled and scrapped and struggled and yelled, in the midst of overturned forms, and inkwells, and scattered books and papers.

CHAPTER 14

War-Wounded!

The class-room was a wreck. Forms were overthrown, books and papers trampled underfoot, ink scattered in all directions. The room looked as if a cyclone had struck it.

"My hat!" said the captain of the Remove.

"My nose!" mumbled Johnny Bull.

"Ow! My eye!" moaned Frank Nugent.

"We've beaten the rotters!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "They're licked, anyhow!"

"The lickfulness is terrific!" gasped Hurree Jamset Rain Singh. "The painfulness in my esteemed boko is also great."

"Look at my nose!" said Johnny Bull.

"What about class?" asked Mark Linley.

A chorus of groans answered him.

"Oh, blow class!" said Peter Todd. "I'm jolly well going to bathe my eye! Look at it!"

"Bless class!" said Squiff. "Look at my nose!"

"Yaas, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I shall have to go out and get a clean collar! Look at my collar after Skinner's paws have clawed it! Class is dismissed for the day."

"Right-ho!" said Mark. "I can do with a rest. Blessed if I know what the new headmaster will think when he sees us. I never saw such a collection of prize noses and thick ears."

"The new Head will keep order," said Lord Mauleverer.

"I hope so," said Mark, rather dubiously.

"The hopefulness is terrific; but the likeliness is a boot on the other leg," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, he will be all right!" said Lord Mauleverer confidently. "I've gone into that with him in my letters, you know. He knows he's got rather a handful here, and he's prepared for it. I'm goin' to change my collar."

The juniors streamed out of the class-room. Class was over for the day; the casualties had to be attended to now. The troubles at High Oaks had come to a head now; something like civil war was reigning at that remarkable scholastic establishment. If the new headmaster engaged by Lord Mauleverer succeeded in establishing order and maintaining it, it would certainly be a considerable feat on his part; and all the fellows had very strong doubts on the subject.

A man like Mr. Quelch, no doubt, would have performed the task; but it was very unlikely that a man like Mr. Quelch would take on the post at all in the extraordinary circumstances. Indeed, the juniors wondered very much what sort of a schoolmaster it was who had answered Lord Mauleverer's advertisement and secured the appointment of Head of High Oaks.

That afternoon Lord Mauleverer, having removed all the signs of combat that he could, dressed with care and telephoned the Courtfield garage for a car. He was going to meet the new headmaster at Courtfield Junction, he explained to the Famous Five, and bring him to High Oaks.

"And for goodness' sake have the fellows in order if you can," said his lordship rather plaintively. "We don't want Mr. Buncombe to think we're a lot of giddy hooligans, you know."

"The orderfulness of our esteemed selves will be terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the other esteemed fellows—" He shook his dusky head.

"Let's go for 'em and mop them up again," suggested Bob Cherry. "That will teach them manners."

Barry Wharton laughed.

“Don’t you think there are enough black eyes and swollen noses at High Oaks already?” he asked.

“Well, a few more would do ’em good.”

“Mr. Buncombe, if that’s his name, will find all his work cut out here,” said Johnny Bull. “Can’t understand the man taking on the job. Does he know we belong to Greyfriars, Mauly?”

“Yaas.”

“He knows we’ve cleared out of school and started on our own, and told our headmaster to go and eat coke?”

“Yaas.”

“And still he’s taken on the job?”

“Yaas.”

“Blessed if I catch on. How many answers did you have to your advertisement?”

“Only Mr. Buncombe’s.”

“Where does he come from?”

“Lantham.”

“Any recommendations?”

“Lots!”

“Well, what are they?”

“He’s goin’ to tell me when he comes.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“Sure he’s a schoolmaster at all, and not some moocher looking for a job?” asked Nugent.

“Yaas.”

“Well, how do you know?”

“He’s told me so.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, I must be off,” said Lord Mauleverer, glancing at his watch.

“You must be off,” agreed Peter Todd. “*Right off*, I should say, if you take on a man on his own recommendations without seeing him.”

“You see, it’s a case of Hobson’s choice,” explained Lord Mauleverer. “I’d rather have had Mr. Quelch here, and if Quelchy wouldn’t come Marky could have run the school if the fellows played the game. But they haven’t. Must have a headmaster, and if only one offers, must have that one. See?”

“Well, he may turn out all right,” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “He will be a good man if he can keep order here, at any rate.”

“Yaas! You fellows will promise to obey orders, and back him up all along the line, of course?” said Lord Mauleverer. “With half the Form backin’ him up he will soon get the rest to toe the line.”

“Rely on us, old bean.”

“The backupfulness will be terrific.”

And Lord Mauleverer, the car having arrived from Courtfield, stepped into it and departed to meet the new headmaster at the station. Bolsover major and Co. saw him start, and exchanged grins.

“He’s coming back with the new Head,” said Bolsover. “We’ll all turn up in Hall to meet him—and give him the ragging of his life. We’ll make him glad to take the next train home.”

“Hear, hear!” said the rebels in chorus.

The new headmaster was evidently going to have a very mixed reception at High Oaks School.

CHAPTER 15

A Change of Identity!

“Pon! Oh, my hat!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour chuckled in chorus. Mr. Lazarus rubbed his fat hands and grinned.

In the little parlour behind Mr. Lazarus’ shop in Courtfield High Street the Highcliffe boys had gathered that Wednesday afternoon. There Ponsonby had undergone a remarkable transformation.

Pon, undoubtedly, was clever at amateur theatricals. He was, in fact, clever at many things, had he chosen to use his cleverness for good ends—which he seldom or never did.

Mr. Lazarus, who kept a stock of goods for private theatricals, did a good deal of business in that line with fellows belonging to Highcliffe and Greyfriars, and sometimes he gave his skilled assistance in making-up. He had been very successful with Ponsonby on this occasion. Certainly Pon’s nearest and dearest relation would not have recognised him now.

Ponsonby looked about fifty, with long hair and a black beard, and scholastic wrinkles in his brow.

Elevators in his boots added considerably to his height, and he was naturally rather tall and slender, and his slenderness was now disguised by skilful padding.

A large pair of horn-rimmed glasses added to his age and his scholastic look, and helped to disguise him beyond the remotest possibility of recognition.

His boots had elastic sides, and squeaked as he walked, like Mr. Mobbs’ boots at Highcliffe.

The Highcliffians left Mr. Lazarus’ establishment together. A car was drawn up to the kerb.

“Well, good-bye, old chap, and good luck!” said Gadsby.

Ponsonby stepped into the taxi.

“Redclyffe Railway Station!” he said to the driver in his squeaky voice—the voice he had practised carefully for his character of Mr. Buncombe.

“Yessir!” said the taxi-man.

The driver evidently had no suspicion that this elderly gentleman was no older than the schoolboys who were saying good-bye to him.

The taxi rolled away, and Gadsby, Monson and Vavasour walked back, chuckling, to Highcliffe. In all the alarums and excursions of the Highcliffe boys against the Greyfriars Remove Pon and Co. had generally come off worst. But this time, they agreed, it looked as if Pon would score. The Greyfriars fellows had, as he said, fairly asked for it, and Pon was going to give them what they had asked for.

Ponsonby grinned under his disguise as the taxi bore him away to Redclyffe Station.

In his correspondence with Lord Mauleverer, in answer to the advertisement, Pon had used a Lantham address, having acquaintances in the town, and Lord Mauleverer understood that the new Head was coming from Lantham by railway. Pon had no intention of travelling ten miles, however; he intended to pick up the train at a near station. Quite easily Pon had obtained leave to go “home” for a few days—Mr. Mobbs had obligingly arranged that for him—and at Highcliffe it was supposed that Pon had gone home that afternoon. Only Pon’s immediate friends and cronies knew where Pon had planned to pass those few days.

The taxi arrived at Redclyffe, and Pon stepped out at the station and dismissed the car.

He walked into the railway station with a suitcase in his hand. He was in good time for the train, and had ten minutes to wait before it came along for Lantham.

“Oh, gad!” murmured Ponsonby, below his breath, as he caught sight of several Greyfriars fellows on the platform, evidently waiting for the same train.

Wednesday was a half-holiday at Greyfriars as well as at Highcliffe. The Greyfriars men were Coker, Potter and Greene, of the Fifth Form. Pon’s first impulse was to avoid their sight; his second was to court it, as a test of his disguise. Coker and Co. knew him well by sight in his natural person—indeed, Coker had once taken it upon himself to cuff the dandy of Highcliffe, whom he had found smoking a cigarette in the lane—Coker being a fellow who was always ready to mind anybody’s business as his own, if not readier.

Ponsonby walked past the three Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars with the slow and leisurely tread of a middle-aged gentleman.

They glanced at him carelessly as he passed, but took no further heed of him, evidently supposing that he was what he looked—a middle-aged man who was a stranger to them.

The train came in, and the disguised Ponsonby sprawled on a seat in an attitude strangely at variance with the years and dignity his make-up supported.

CHAPTER 16

Lord Mauleverer’s Headmaster!

Lord Mauleverer stood on the platform at Courtfield Junction and watched the train come in from Lantham.

The train stopped, and nine or ten passengers alighted from it. Lord Mauleverer glanced them over and picked out at once a rather little old gentleman in horn-rimmed spectacles.

This was the only passenger who could possibly have been taken—or mistaken—for a schoolmaster; the others being obviously nothing of the kind. So Mauleverer approached the horn-rimmed gentleman and raised his hat with great politeness.

“Excuse me, sir,” said Mauleverer respectfully, “am I speakin’ to Mr. Buncombe?”

The middle-aged gentleman blinked at him through his huge spectacles. It did not occur to Mauleverer that the man knew him by sight. Certainly it was not likely to occur to him that a man with horn glasses and grey hair and beard was no older than himself.

“Yes, my boy,” said the gentleman, blinking at him. “My card, sir—my card.”

The horn-rimmed gentleman, with the deliberation of middle age, took out a card-case and extracted therefrom a card, which he handed to Lord Mauleverer. Mauleverer looked at it and read:

“JOSEPH BUNCOMBE,
M.A., Oxon, O.B.E.”

Lord Mauleverer looked at the little gentleman again. He was rather impressed by learning that the man was an O.B.E. A man who had obtained the Order of the British Empire was bound to be more or less distinguished in some way or other.

A man who was not only a Master of Arts of Oxford, but an O.B.E., was surely a suitable headmaster for High Oaks School.

“I’m glad to see you, sir,” said the schoolboy millionaire. “I’m Mauleverer, sir—”

“Quite so, quite so—Lord Mauleverer, I understand,” squeaked the Master of Arts.

“Yaas. If you’ll come with me, sir, I’ve got a car waitin’—”

“Very good, very good!”

Mr. Buncombe walked out of the station with Lord Mauleverer, a porter following with his bag.

“Any more baggage, sir?” asked Mauleverer.

“Yes, quite, quite,” said Mr. Buncombe, who seemed to have a way of repeating his words not uncommon in middle-aged gentlemen. “My trunks—hem—two large trunks, will come on; the guard failed to put them in his van at Lantham. I saw them on the platform—hem—as the train went out. Most annoying! But never mind, never mind; they will be sent on; they are labelled.”

“I’ll phone along the line, sir, if you like—”

“Not at all, not at all! The railway is quite reliable; the trunks will arrive in due course.”

“Very well, sir.”

Lord Mauleverer conducted the O.B.E. to the car, and followed him in. The chauffeur started for High Oaks at once.

“Perhaps I’d better warn you, sir, that you may find the fellows at High Oaks a little out of hand,” said Mauleverer.

“No doubt, no doubt.”

“You’ll know how to handle them, sir.”

“Oh, quite, quite! I have been used to unruly boys,” said Mr. Buncombe. “I have had great experience as a Form-master, and headmaster also—very great experience. I assure you that I maintained very careful discipline when I was—hem—a Housemaster at Eton.”

“You’ve been a Housemaster at Eton, sir?” asked Mauleverer, feeling that this was an additional recommendation.

“Quite, quite. I gave up my Housemastership in the War,” explained Mr. Buncombe, answering the question Mauleverer was too courteous to ask. “War work kept me very busy—hem. It was then I was—hem—awarded the—hem—trifling distinction I bear—hem. Having considerable private means, I have allowed myself a long holiday, devoted chiefly to study. No doubt at High Oaks I shall find time for continuing my work on the Earlier Greek Poets.”

“Yaas, sir,” said Mauleverer, feeling his respect greatly increase for a man whose constitution and intellect would stand the Earlier Greek Poets. “We don’t take Greek in the Remove,” he added rather hastily. “Only two or three fellows had Greek with Quelchy—I mean Mr. Quelch.”

“My favourite subject,” said Mr. Buncombe. “Possibly it may be practicable to institute a special Greek class.”

“I—I don’t fancy the fellows will exactly rise to it, sir,” said Mauleverer in dismay.

“Well, well, we shall see!” said Mr. Buncombe, winking into space with the eye that was away from Mauleverer.

Ponsonby of Highcliffe’s knowledge of Greek was limited to two words which he had heard in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera in the holidays. In these circumstances, certainly Mr. Buncombe would have found some difficulty in dealing with a Greek class at High Oaks.

The car had glided out of Courtfield now, and was following the road across the common, which led to High Oaks, and beyond that scholastic establishment to Greyfriars and Friardale.

By the roadside a tall, angular gentleman was walking, and he glanced at the approaching car.

Mr. Buncombe looked at him, and so did Mauleverer—the latter recognising Mr. Quelch, late Remove master at Greyfriars.

Mr. Quelch, though dismissed from Greyfriars School, and steadily refusing to have anything to do with High Oaks, was still staying on in Courtfield.

Perhaps he was at a loose end now that his duties as a Form-master had closed, and considered that Courtfield was as good as any other place in which to spend his leisure. Perhaps anxiety for what was happening to his late Form kept him there. Or perhaps he was simply haunting the scene of his former activities because he could not tear himself away, like a ghost revisiting the glimpses of the moon. Certainly his dismissal had been a heavy blow to Mr. Quelch, and he could not reconcile himself either to idleness or to seeking another post in another school.

There was a cloud on his face as he walked along the road over the common in the sunny spring afternoon. But his expression changed at the sight of Lord Mauleverer in the car.

Mauleverer signalled to the chauffeur to stop the car. Mr. Quelch had stepped into the road, and evidently desired to speak. The car drew up, and Lord Mauleverer saluted his old Form-master very respectfully.

Mr. Buncombe looked away from him out of the window on the other side. No doubt he had his own reasons for not desiring to meet the gimlet eyes of Henry Samuel Quelch, if he could help it.

“Good-afternoon, sir,” said Lord Mauleverer. “Takin’ a little walk this nice afternoon, sir?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Quelch, glancing past Mauleverer at the horn-rimmed gentleman, and obviously curious, or at least interested. “I am sorry to see, Mauleverer, that you and your friends have not yet returned to school.”

“We’re at our own school, sir.”

“Nonsense!”

“Hem’!”

“Although I am no longer your Form-master, Mauleverer, I have not lost my interest in my late Form,” said Mr. Quelch.

“You’re very kind, sir.”

“I trust that something like order is being preserved in the Remove, in spite of their rebellious conduct.”

“Well, sir, the fellows have been a bit out of hand,” said Lord Mauleverer. “I engaged a prize-fightin’ chap to keep order—”

“Wha-a-at?”

“But there was a bit of misunderstandin’, and a row, and he went. But it will be all right now, sir,” said Mauleverer.

“We’ve got a headmaster now.”

“Impossible.”

“This gentleman, sir,” said Mauleverer, indicating his companion in the car.

“I repeat, impossible,” said Mr. Quelch. “No headmaster would assume control at High Oaks in the circumstances.”

“Mr. Buncombe has done so, sir,” said Lord Mauleverer.

“Perhaps I’d better introduce you, sir—”

“Nothing of the kind,” interrupted Mr. Buncombe, still with the back of his head towards Mr. Quelch. “In the circumstances, it is better not, my boy. It would be most awkward for me to come into any contact with your former master.”

“I stand corrected, sir,” said Mauleverer. “As you like, sir.”

Mr. Quelch was fixing a penetrating look on the back of Mr. Buncombe’s head, as if

he really desired to pierce through it to his features beyond.

"I cannot understand this, Mauleverer," said the late Remove master. "I can understand no man taking on such a responsibility. I trust, Mauleverer, that you have not been deceived."

"Oh, sir!"

"By some charlatan!" said Mr. Quelch grimly.



Lord Mauleverer flushed.

"That is scarcely civil, sir, to Mr. Buncombe," he said. "Perhaps we had better drive on."

And at a sign the car passed on, Mr. Quelch standing in the road staring after it with a blank expression on his face.

That any headmaster of a proper standing would accept the headmastership of High Oaks, as matters stood, Mr. Quelch felt to be impossible. That the simple and unsuspecting Mauly had been taken in by some charlatan was the only explanation of which Mr. Quelch could think.

He was feeling deeply uneasy as he stared after the car. Perhaps at last he was beginning to reconsider his resolve not to have anything to do with High Oaks School. If some charlatan—some man of dubious character—was imposing himself upon the juniors as a headmaster, it was assuredly time for somebody to intervene.

Mr. Quelch's face was deeply thoughtful and perturbed as he resumed his walk towards Courtfield.

"I apologise, sir," said Lord Mauleverer. "I'm sorry we stopped to speak to Mr. Quelch, sir. I hope you're not offended, Mr. Buncombe?"

"No—no; the man is doubtless annoyed by his dismissal, and speaks bitterly in consequence," said Mr. Buncombe. "But I, of course, cannot have any contact with a dismissed Form-master. It would be—hem—infra dig. Is that High Oaks?" he added, as the car turned into the drive.

"Yaas, sir. We're there now."

There was a yell from a fat junior loafing near the gates.
“I say you fellows, he’s come!”
And there was a rush of the Removites to behold their new headmaster.

CHAPTER 17

Thee Heavy Hand!

Mr. Buncombe stepped from the car.
He stood on the steps of High Oaks, surveying the mob of juniors who gathered round. Lord Mauleverer stood by his side as the car glided away down the drive to the gates.
“So that’s the man!” snorted Bolsover major.
“I say, you fellows, he’s rather a guy! Look at his specs!”
And Billy Bunter blinked through his own big glasses at the horn-rimmed spectacles of Mr. Buncombe with great entertainment.
“What a specimen!” grinned Skinner.
“Not much of him, but what there is isn’t much to look at!” remarked Sidney James Snoop.
“Order!” shouted Bob Cherry.
“Rats!”
“Shut up, Bolsover.”
“Go and eat coke!”
“Rag him!” yelled Stott.
“Order!”
There was a roar of contradictory voices.
A trace of uneasiness might have been observed in Mr. Buncombe’s wrinkled, owlsh, spectaclad visage.
He backed a little behind Lord Mauleverer.
“This—this reception—” he stammered.
“I’m afraid some of the fellows are a bit unruly, sir,” said Lord Mauleverer apologetically. “But we’ll jolly soon bring them to order. Shut up, you ruffians!”
“Yah!”
“Go and eat coke, Mauly!”
“Duck that old image in the pond!” yelled Bolsover major.
“Good egg!”
“Rally round, you men!” exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.
“Yes, rather!”
Harry Wharton and Co. formed a bodyguard round the new headmaster at once. Whatever they thought of Mr. Buncombe, and of his accepting the extraordinary appointment Lord Mauleverer had offered him, they were ready to stand by him and uphold his authority.
“Line up, you fellows!” said Harry Wharton.
“The line-upfulness is terrific.”
“Back up!” shouted Peter Todd.
Toddy joined the bodyguard, and Squiff, and Tom Brown, and the Bounder and Redwing followed suit. Nearly half the form were on the side of law and order; and of the others several stood aside as neutral. Bolsover major and Co. found themselves in a considerable minority.
But the bully of the Remove was in a truculent temper.
“Rag the old donkey!” he roared.

Shut up, Bolsover!”

Rag him!” yelled Bolsover; and he led a rush at Mr. Buncombe.

That gentleman was quite reassured now. He knew the Removites better than they supposed; and he was aware that all the hefty fighting-men of the Form had raffled for his protection.

“This is most disorderly!” he repeated in his squeaky voice. “I was—hem—far from expecting this! Order! I repeat— order!”

“Rats to you!” roared Bolsover.

He came on with a rush; but in face of the determined attitude of Lord Mauleverer’s supporters, Bolsover’s followers melted away. Bolsover arrived alone within punching distance.

And the punching, when it started, was all received by Bolsover major, the whole bodyguard falling upon him and smiting him hip and thigh.

It is said to be more blessed to give than to receive; and that is undoubtedly true in the matter of punches straight from the shoulder.

Bolsover major went spinning off the steps, and he crashed down on the drive with a heavy concussion and a loud roar.

Mr. Buncombe stepped forward. He was feeling sure of himself now.

“What is your name, boy?” he asked.

The bully of the Remove glared at him.

“Find out!” he snapped.

“That is not the way to address your headmaster!”

“Rats!”

“Discipline must be restored in this school,” said Mr. Buncombe.

“School!” yelled Bolsover derisively. “It ain’t a school, and you ain’t a schoolmaster, or you wouldn’t be here. We belong to Greyfriars, and we’ve chucked our headmaster, and we’re not taking on another—see?”

“Shut up, Bolsover!”

“Rats to you!”

“Your name is Bolsover, I understand,” said Mr. Buncombe. “Bolsover, you will obey my orders!”

“Catch me!” sneered Bolsover.

“Mauleverer!”

“Yaas, sir!”

“I presume that there is a cane in the school?”

“Oh, yaas!”

“Kindly fetch it here for me!”

“Certainly, sir.”

Lord Mauleverer went in for the cane. Bolsover major gave the horn-rimmed gentleman a glare of concentrated wrath.

“You think you’re going to lick me?” he bawled.

“I am going to flog you, as an example,” said Mr. Buncombe. “Why, you—you—you blinking old owl, I’ll smash you if you lay a finger on me! I could knock you into pieces with one punch!”

“Take hold of that boy!” said Mr. Buncombe, pointing at the bully of the Remove, and addressing the Famous Five. “Bend him over, and hold him!”

The next moment Bolsover major was struggling furiously in the grasp of five pairs of hands.

Bolsover was a powerful fellow; but his hefty struggles availed him nothing. He was unceremoniously dragged over, bent in a favourable position for a flogging, and held

there in a grasp of iron. Lord Mauleverer came back with the cane and handed it to Mr. Buncombe. That gentleman's eyes gleamed over his horn-rimmed glasses. There had been an occasion when Bolsover of the Remove had kicked Ponsonby of Highcliffe. He was going to pay for that kick now, though he was quite unaware of it. Mr. Buncombe flourished the cane, and amid a breathless silence on the part of the Remove brought it down on Bolsover major with a terrific cut.

Bolsover's yell rang far beyond the confines of High Oaks.

Whack, whack, whack!

Mr. Buncombe laid on the cane with all the strength of his arm, which was considerable.

Six terrible swipes brought a succession of fearful yells from the bully of the Remove. The juniors looked on breathlessly.

They had seen floggings at Greyfriars, some of them severe; but they had never witnessed such a thrashing as this.

Bolsover major fairly crumpled up under it.

"Leggo!" he yelled. "I give in. Let a fellow go! Oh, my hat! Keep that brute off!

Yarooooogh! I give in! Ow!"

"That's six sir," hinted Harry Wharton, as Mr. Buncombe raised the cane for another lash.

"Silence, Wharton!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold your tongue, boy!"

Wharton coloured, and was silent. The cane came down again, with another terrific swipe, and Bolsover major fairly howled.

"Isn't that enough, sir?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"Silence!"

"Oh, begad!"

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged a glance, and released Bolsover major. He had asked for a thrashing, but there had been enough of it, in the opinion of the Famous Five. Bolsover major squirmed away just as the cane descended for the eighth time, and escaped the slash.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" he roared.

Mr. Buncombe tucked the cane under his arm.

"That will do," he said. "Take that as a warning, Bolsover. You will be flogged again if you are disobedient."

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now go into Hall!" said Mr. Buncombe.

In deep silence, the Removites marched into Hall, Bolsover major limping in with the rest, his rugged face white and furious, but all the truculence taken out of him, for the time being. And when the roll was called Bolsover major answered to his name as obediently and promptly as if he had been in the old hall at Greyfriars, with Dr. Locke calling the roll. Skinner and Co. were even more prompt. The look on Bolsover's face was enough for the malcontents of the Form. And, for the present, at least, there was no resistance to the authority of the new Head of High Oaks.

CHAPTER 18

The New Head of High Oaks!

"Juggins!"

"Yes, my lord?"

“Show Mr. Buncombe to his room, Juggins.”

“Yes, my lord!”

Lord Mauleverer was a little troubled by the severity of the punishment inflicted on Bolsover major. He strolled along to Wharton’s study after a time, and found all the Famous Five there.

“Halo, hallo, hallo, here’s Mauly!” said Bob Cherry. “Well, how do you like your new Beak, Mauly?”

“He looks like keepin’ order,” said Mauleverer.

“Hem! Yes.”

“You fellows think him rather a brute?” asked Mauleverer.

“Well, I couldn’t help thinking so,” said Wharton candidly. “He seemed fairly to enjoy thrashing Bolsover, and he laid it on frightfully hard. Almost as if he knew the chap, and had a grudge against him.”

“Yaas. But, after all, Bolsover asked for it. You can’t call a headmaster names to his face, you know.”

“Oh, yes; that’s all right. But—”

The captain of the Remove did not finish.

“You’re not quite satisfied yourself, Mauly,” remarked Johnny Bull, with a grin.

“Well, perhaps not quite,” assented Mauleverer. “But my idea is give the man a chance. We want a man to keep order; and he can do that. I’d rather chuck up the tussle an’ go back to Greyfriars than run this place as a bear-garden, with a hooligan like Bolsover doin’ as he chooses.”

“Same here!” agreed Wharton.

“The samefulness is terrific.”

“Yes; give him a chance, by all means,” said Harry Wharton. “I don’t quite understand the man. There seems to be something about him—”

Wharton paused, looking puzzled, as he felt.

“Something a bit queer,” said Bob Cherry.

“Out of the common, anyhow,” said Wharton. “I can’t exactly give it a name, but—well, he may be all right. We’ll give him a chance. Rely on us to back him up, Mauleverer.”

“That’s what I want,” said his lordship, relieved. “If you men set the example the others will follow, an’ things will soon be goin’ on swimmingly at High Oaks. We wanted a headmaster, an’ we’ve got one, and it’s no good gousin’ first shot.”

“Right as rain, old bean.”

“I say, you fellows—”

William George Bunter blinked into the study.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! How do you like the new Beak, Bunter?” grinned Bob.

Snort from Bunter.

“I can jolly well tell you that I don’t like him at all. If he thinks he’s going to lick me he’s making a mistake.”

“Fathead!”

“Oh, really, Cherry—”

You’re going to toe the line, with the rest of us, old fat bean,” said Frank Nugent.

“You’d better do your prep this evening, too. Mr. Buncombe will be taking the class in the morning.”

I say, you fellows, he can’t be much of a schoolmaster, or he wouldn’t come here,” said Bunter. “Mauly’s idiot enough to be taken in by any spoofer, you know. Ain’t you, Mauly?”

“Oh, begad!”

"Skinner says that if he's an O.B.E., O.B.E. stands for Old Bad Egg!" went on the Owl of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skinner says he wears a wig—"

"How does Skinner know?"

"Well, he says so," answered Bunter.

"Most schoolmasters are a bit bald on the crumpet," said Bob Cherry. "Perhaps Buncombe feels the cold there this weather. No harm in a man wearing a wig if he's lost his mane. He may have lost his mat wearing a tin hat in the War. Lots of men did."

"Skinner says he's going to fish for it out of a window with a fishing-rod and line and hook it off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob involuntarily, and the other fellows grinned.

Lord Mauleverer chuckled, but he became grave again at once.

"Skinner will get skinned if he does anythin' of the sort!" exclaimed his lordship. "As a matter of fact, you men, I noticed that Mr. Buncombe was sportin' a wig in the car comin' here—at least, I thought so. No reason why he shouldn't, if he wants to. Look at the polished tops in Masters' Common-room at Greyfriars—not a beautiful sight, is it?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter! Prep."

Billy Bunter rolled away to prep. He was angry and indignant at having prep to do; but after what had happened to Bolsover major he considered it judicious to get his preparation done, and he did. And the rest of the Remove did the same. Nobody in the Form wanted a licking from the new headmaster in the morning. But—if they had only known it—there were lickings to come, whether asked for or not. It was a case of the wolf and the lamb over again, as the Removites would have understood had they been aware of the real identity of Mr. Buncombe. But that, so far, was a deep secret.

CHAPTER 19

The Prefects of High Oaks!

Clang, clang, clang!

The rising-bell rang out loudly at High Oaks in the clear spring morning.

Every fellow in the dormitory turned out at once. Even Billy Bunter did not linger for a few moments more of balmy slumber.

Harry Wharton and Co. were setting an example. But an example was hardly needed. The thrashing of Bolsover major was example enough.

When the juniors repaired to the class-room after breakfast—which they did at the first clang of the school bell, rung by Juggins—they did not find Mr. Buncombe there. The new headmaster did not seem to be in a hurry to assume his official functions.

"Taking it easy," sneered Skinner.

"Well, he can't take it too easy for us," remarked Hazeldene. "I'm not in a hurry to begin."

Lord Mauleverer sat down, and yawned, while the other fellows played leap-frog, or loafed about the class-room. It was more than half an hour later that a step was heard in the passage.

"I say, you fellows, he's coming!" gasped Billy Bunter, and he made a dive for his place.

"Sit down, you chaps," called out Harry Wharton. "Order when the Head comes in."

"The orderfulness will be terrific."

"Rats!" said Skinner; but he sat down, all the same. Until a large majority of the Form should turn against Lord Mauleverer's headmaster, it was Skinner's intention to be very good indeed.

Mr. Buncombe appeared in the doorway.

He blinked at the class through the big horn-rimmed glasses, and there was silence.

Why Mr. Buncombe was so late to take the class the juniors did not know; and certainly they did not guess that he had hesitated to face them in the class-room for reasons that were good to himself. But he had made his mind up to it at last, and here he was.

The juniors eyed him intently. Now that it was lighter, they could see that he had elevators in his boots, and were sure that his grey hair was a wig. They little dreamed, however, how much more of him was an imposture.

"Good-mornin', sir!" ventured Lord Mauleverer. "Good-morning, sir," said several other fellows at once, with great politeness.

Mr. Buncombe breathed hard for a moment. Perhaps he had doubted whether his get-up would stand the full glare of day in the class-room. If so, he was reassured now.

"Good-morning, good-morning," he said, in his squeaky voice. "I have—hem—a few words to say before we—er—commence. As there are no other masters in this school, I shall select members of this Form to act as prefects."

This struck the Removites as quite a good idea.

"Very good, sir," said Lord Mauleverer. "Wharton's captain of the Form, sir—"

"I am not in need of advice, boy."

"Oh, begad!"

"Bolsover!" rapped out Mr. Buncombe.

Bolsover major jumped.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he ejaculated.

"I appoint you head prefect of High Oaks."

Bolsover major stared at him blankly. This was about the last thing he would have expected to hear, after his experience with Mr. Buncombe. There was a murmur in the class. In the general opinion of the Remove, the Head had made the worst selection possible.

"You will be head prefect, Bolsover, with power to cane the other boys, as is usual with prefects," said Mr. Buncombe.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bolsover major.

"Skinner!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You are appointed a prefect also."

"Oh, my hat! I—I—I mean, thank you, sir!" stuttered Skinner, in utter amazement, hardly believing his ears.

"Stott! Snoop!"

"Yes, sir!" almost gurgled Snoop and Stott. Was the amazing Head going to make them prefects also?

He was!

"I appoint you prefects of High Oaks!" said Mr. Buncombe. "Four, I think, will be sufficient—Bolsover, Skinner, Snoop, and Stott. I trust that I shall be able to rely upon you."

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped the astounded four.

The rest of the Remove simply stared.

The new headmaster had picked out the bully of the Form and the three worst slackers

to appoint as prefects! True, as a stranger to the Remove, he could not be supposed to know the characters of the fellows yet. But surely a man with any sense at all would have waited till he knew the fellows a little before appointing prefects! It did not occur to the Removites that their new Head knew—only too well—what he was doing!

Bolsover major was grinning now. His savage sullenness had vanished. At one swoop he was turned from Mr. Buncombe's bitterest enemy into his most enthusiastic supporter. Bolsover could be relied upon—if not exactly to be a dutiful prefect, at least to bully and rag and hector any fellows who were in his power. Undoubtedly Mr. Buncombe knew what he was doing—if his intention was to give the Remove an exceedingly unpleasant time during his headmastership!

"Well, my only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry, in utter disgust. Mr. Buncombe blinked round through his horn glasses.

"Someone is talking in the class! It was you, I think, Cherry."

"Tell me the truth, boy."

Bob flushed angrily.

"I shouldn't tell you anything else, sir," he snapped.

"No impertinence," said Mr. Buncombe. "Answer me at once, and answer me truthfully. Did you speak?"

"I did!" grunted Bob.

"Take a hundred lines."

Grunt from Bob Cherry.

"Do you hear me, Cherry?"

"Oh! Yes!" Bob Cherry's manner rather lacked the respect due to a headmaster, there was no doubt about that.

"You will write out the lines after class, Cherry, and hand them to the head prefect before dinner."

"Very well, sir," said Bob, breathing hard and deep.

"It is my intention," said Mr. Buncombe, "to keep order in this school. Indiscipline and disrespect are things of the past at High Oaks. I shall keep the strictest order, supported by my prefects."

His prefects grinned.

The four bitterest opponents of the new Head had been turned into his firmest supporters. There was no doubt that they would back up Mr. Buncombe for all they were worth. Mr. Buncombe might look rather an owl, and rather a guy; but he knew what he was about! He was following the ancient Roman maxim of "divide and govern"—a maxim which, it is to be feared, most rulers keep in mind, especially in troubled times.

Lord Mauleverer felt called upon to raise a remonstrance. After all, the Head was a headmaster of his own appointing.

"If you please, sir—" said Mauleverer.

"I do not please, Mauleverer. Take a hundred lines for talking in class."

"Oh, gad! But really, sir—"

"Two hundred lines!"

"The fellows you have selected as prefects, sir, aren't of much account in the Form," explained Mauleverer. "You see—"

"Silence! Another word and I shall cane you."

"Oh, my hat!"

Lord Mauleverer was silent, feeling rather like the man in the fable who warmed a viper to his bosom, and was stung in return for his kindness. This really was not what

he had expected of his new headmaster. He sat silent, dismayed and perplexed. "We shall now commence," said Mr. Buncombe. "I desire you all to understand that slacking, and disorder, and carelessness in lessons, are at an end. Work is now the order of the day. While I hold my appointment here, I shall keep High Oaks up to the mark. You have your Latin grammars, I presume? Each of you will take six Latin irregular verbs, and write them out with their complete conjugations."

"Oh!"

"The prefects will keep order here, as I have some other matters to attend to—matters of some importance. The prefects will not take part in the lesson; they will take charge of the class and keep order. You understand me, Bolsover?"

"Oh, quite, sir," grinned Bolsover major.

"During my absence, do not let me hear a sound from this class-room," said Mr. Buncombe. "Any indiscipline will be severely punished. Proceed with your lesson." And Mr. Buncombe walked out of the class-room.

CHAPTER 20

Bend Over!

Harry Wharton and Co. looked at one another.

Lord Mauleverer sat blinking.

To say that the Remove were amazed would be to put it very mildly. They were astounded.

Some of the fellows had doubted whether the new Head would be able to restore discipline at High Oaks. Their doubts on this point were now set at rest. It was obvious that he was a strict disciplinarian. But the fellows who had been keenest to see order restored were the fellows who were now most deeply incensed against the new Head. The malcontents were the fellows who were backing him up most enthusiastically now.

Bolsover major was still feeling the effects of his thrashing.

But he had forgiven Mr. Buncombe for that now. He fully approved of stem discipline, when it gave him the power to bully and hector.

Skinner and Co. were equally satisfied.

They had escaped work—which was their chief object. They were invested with official powers. They were amazed, but they were decidedly pleased.

For some moments nothing was said. The juniors were too astonished to speak. They did not proceed with the task Mr. Buncombe had assigned them.

That task astonished them as much as anything else. Writing out Latin conjugations from their grammars was not a lesson. They could have done that "on their own" if so inclined; a headmaster was not required to give lessons of that sort. If this was Mr. Buncombe's method of instruction, Mark Linley was a better master than the new Head.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, at last, "this beats it! What sort of a potty freak have you dug up, Mauly?"

"The freakfulness is terrific!"

"Those rotten slackers appointed prefects," growled Johnny Bull, "and let off lessons, too! What does the man mean?"

"I say, you fellows, I'm not going to write out six irregular verbs," wailed Bunter. "I hate irregular verbs, you know."

"The man must be mad!" said Wharton.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Nugent.

“Look here, Mauly, I’m fed up with your dashed headmaster!” exclaimed Peter Todd.

“Call him a headmaster!”

“Sack him, Mauly!” suggested Squiff.

“Say the word, Mauly, and we’ll kick him out,” said the Bounder.

“Hear, hear!”

The four “prefects” had left their places in the class, and stood in a grinning group; the only fellows in the Remove who were pleased with the amazing turn that events had taken.

From all the rest of the class came a growl of deep discontent.

Lord Mauleverer looked worried and distressed. Hitherto, Mauleverer had proved a remarkably efficient leader for the Greyfriars rebels. But in this appointment of a new headmaster it looked as if Mauly had made a rather bad break at last. But Mauleverer was not the fellow to turn back at the first discouragement. He had appointed the Head of High Oaks, and to cancel that appointment on the first morning in class was not to be thought of. Mauleverer was distressed and disappointed, but he was loyal.

“Take it calmly, you men,” said Mauleverer, at last. “We wanted a headmaster, and—and we’ve got one.”

“We have—no mistake about that!” growled Johnny Bull.

“Some headmaster!” jeered Hazeldene.

“What’s the good of grousin’?” argued Mauleverer. “We’ve got to play up. We’re bound to give the man a free hand; and if his methods don’t exactly please us, we’ve got to stand it. After all, he’s restored order in this school, and that was what we wanted.”

“Ye-e-es—but——” said Wharton restively.

“You men promised to back him up,” said Lord Mauleverer quietly. “I hold you to it.”

“That’s all right. But——”

“The butfulness is terrific.”

“He’s got a sinecure as headmaster, if he’s going to teach us by setting us to write out verbs, while he goes out for a walk!” jeered Wibley.

“I dare say that’s his method——”

“Rot!”

“Rubbish!” howled Bunter. “I’m not going to write out verbs, I know that.”

“Shut up, Bunter!”

“Oh, really, Mauly——”

“It’s all rot!” said Peter Todd.

“Utter rot,” said Russell. “I’m jolly well thinking that Bolsover was right, and we don’t want a headmaster here at all. I’m going to back up Bolsover, Mauly.”

“Same here,” said Newland.

“Yes, rather!”

“Hear, hear!”

“Play the game, you know,” urged Lord Mauleverer. “We’re bound to play up; it’s up to us.”

“Rats!”

“Rot!”

Lord Mauleverer opened his Latin grammar, and took up his pen. He liked Latin irregular verbs no more than the other fellows; indeed, the mere thought of the task before him made him feel tired. But he felt that it was up to him, and he was loyal. The Famous Five, though with deep feelings, followed his example. Mark Linley and Penfold were already at work. Squiff and Tom Brown and Toddy joined in more slowly. One or two other fellows—Redwing and Ogilvy, followed on. But the others

talked, in rising tones of indignation. Most of them were prepared to obey a headmaster who was a headmaster; but this sort of headmastership “got their goat,” as Fisher T. Fish expressed it.

Bolsover major could have counted upon a big majority now, had he been planning an outbreak against the Head. But Bolsover major was now thinking of nothing of the kind.

Bolsover major was tasting the sweetness of power, and he was more than satisfied with the new regime. No work and official permission to bully and overbear suited Bolsover major down to the ground. Undoubtedly the new headmaster knew very well what he was about. The loyal members of High Oaks were put on their honour; and the disloyal members were influenced by having it made worth their while to support the new Head. There was a surprise in store for the fellows who looked to Bolsover major as a rebel leader.

“I say, Bolsover!” called out Bunter.

“Bolsover, old man!” exclaimed Russell.

“We’re on your side, old chap!” said Hazeldene.

Bolsover major approached the class. The expression on his rugged face was unpleasant and domineering.

“Too much talking in class!” he rapped out. “Silence!”

“Eh’

“What?”

“Oh, really, Bolsover—”

“Silence!” shouted the bully of the Remove, alias the head prefect of High Oaks School.

“Look here, you beast—” howled Bunter, in breathless indignation. “You cheeky beast, do you think you’re going to come the prefect over us? Go and eat coke!”

Bolsover major eyed him grimly.

“Hand me the cane, Skinner, will you?” he said.

“You bet,” grinned Skinner.

“Do you think you’re going to cane me?” shrieked Bunter.

“You heard what the headmaster said!” chuckled Bolsover major. “Prefects can cane fellows for cheek and disobedience, same as at Greyfriars!”

“You’re jolly well not going to cane me!” yelled Bunter. “You’ll see!”

Skinner handed Bolsover major the cane. The prefects of High Oaks were enjoying their morning, at all events.

“You beast, Skinner!” yelled Bunter. “Why, only yesterday you were saying you’d fish off Old Bad Egg’s wig with a fishhook!”

“Yesterday isn’t today!” grinned Skinner. “I wasn’t a prefect yesterday!”

“You’re not a prefect now, you cheeky beast!” shrieked Bunter. “And Bolsover isn’t, either! Yah!”

“I’ll show you whether I’m a prefect or not!” said Bolsover major. “Stand out before the class, Bunter!”

“Shan’t!” yelled Bunter.

“Hook him out, you men!”

“What—ho!”

The other three prefects proceeded at once to hook out William George Bunter. This exercise of their new and unexpected powers greatly delighted Skinner and Co. As Skinner had remarked, yesterday was not today; and today Skinner and Co. had no fault to find with their new headmaster.

They approved of him and his methods with all their hearts. Bunter, roaring protest,

was hooked out before the class.

Bolsover major brandished the cane.

“Bend over, Bunter!”

“Shan’t!” shrieked Bunter. “I say, you fellows, rescue! I say, lend a hand!

Yarooooogh!”

Peter Todd half-rose, and sat down again. Bolsover major was only exercising the powers conferred upon him by a headmaster—and there was no doubt that a real prefect at a real school would have made Bunter bend over, in the circumstances.

“Toddy!” yelled Bunter.

“Bend over!” roared Bolsover major. “Bend him over, you chaps!”

Skinner and Co. bent Bunter over a chair. The Owl of the Remove roared in fearful anticipation.

Whack!

“Yaroooooh!”

Whack!

“Whooooooo! Help! Fire! Murder! Whooooop!” Bolsover major tucked the cane under his arm in the manner of a Greyfriars prefect with his ashplant. Undoubtedly Bolsover fancied himself in the role of prefect.

“That will do. Go back to your place, Bunter!”

“Yow-ow-ow-ow!”

“Stop that row!” snapped Bolsover.

“Cease those ridiculous noises, Bunter!” said Skinner solemnly, in imitation of Mr. Quelch’s style.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, dear! Ow, ow, ow!”

Billy Bunter crawled back to his place. It was borne in upon his fat mind that Bolsover major really was a prefect—to all intents and purposes, at least.

The head prefect of High Oaks cast a vaunting look over the class.

“Anybody else kicking over the traces?” he asked. “I warn you that I’m going to keep order here—jolly good order!”

“You’d better draw it mild, all the same, Bolsover!” said Harry Wharton.

“Draw what mild?” sneered Bolsover major. “You’ve been ragging me for not obeying the new Head—ragging me for kicking over the traces! Now I’m obeying orders, and doing exactly as I’m told! What have you got to grouse about, I’d like to know?”

The captain of the Remove was silent. Bolsover major, for once, was in the right—at least, it was difficult to make it appear that he was in the wrong.

“Get on with your verbs!” said Bolsover major, in his most bullying tones. “No slackers allowed in this class! You’re so jolly keen against slackers that you ought to be pleased!”

The other prefects chortled.

“Any more cheek from you, Wharton,” added Bolsover major, “and you’ll get the same as Bunter!”

“Yes, rather!” chuckled Skinner, in great glee.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“Mind, I mean it!” said Bolsover major. “I’ll have you out before the class and lick you for two pins, Wharton!”

“Better not!” said Harry.

There was a gleam in the junior captain’s eyes that warned the newly-appointed head-prefect not to exceed his authority. His nose had come in contact with Wharton’s fist

on more than one occasion.

And Bolsover major, on second thoughts, seemed to decide that he had better not. Class that morning at High Oaks finished without any more lickings.

CHAPTER 21

Going Strong!

The Remove poured out of the Form-room after class, most of them with angry, discontented faces. Four of them were smiling cheerily—the four prefects. Some of the more quiet fellows, like Linley and Penfold, took the new order of things philosophically, and made no complaint. But the greater part of the Remove were infuriated.

Having fellows like Bolsover and Skinner and Co. set in authority over them was exasperating, especially to the Famous Five. But the Famous Five, undoubtedly, were in a difficult position. They had been keenest of all on keeping order at High Oaks—keenest of all on running the place as a school, and not as a refuge for slackers and frowsters. They had given Mauleverer their word to support the authority of the new headmaster. To appoint a headmaster and then to criticise and interfere with him, and call him to order, was obviously not the thing.

There seemed nothing for it but toeing the line, exceedingly unpleasant as that was; but the chums of the Remove were indignant and sore and savage, and most of the fellows shared their feelings.

“It’s rot!” was Bob Cherry’s opinion. “We could write out Latin verbs without a master at all! It’s not a lesson! Isn’t the man going to do any work now you’ve got him here?”

“I dare say he has his own methods, dear man,” said Mauly.

“Blow his methods, then!”

“The worst slackers in the Form are still slacking, and more than before!” said Nugent.

“Yaas. I dare say he knows best.”

“Bolsover a prefect!” Bob Cherry clenched his hands. “Why, he may be ordering me to bend over next!”

“Yaas.”

“Well, do you think I’ll do it?” bawled Bob.

“Yaas.”

“You silly chump! You’ll see!”

“Yaas.”

“Don’t you think you’re the biggest idiot ever, Mauly?” asked Nugent.

“Yaa—I mean, no!”

“Blessed if I know what’s going to happen now!” said the captain of the Remove. “I suppose it’s up to us to stand it if we can!”

“I’m fed-up with the Old Bad Egg, anyhow!” growled Johnny Bull.

“You ought not to speak of your headmaster like that, Bull! That was Skinner’s name for him! I suppose you’re not going to pick up Skinner’s ways now you’re dissatisfied?”

“Oh, rats!” grunted Johnny Bull. “I’m going to stand it— as long as I can, anyhow! But if these precious prefects think they can cane me—”

Johnny clenched his fists at the idea.

When the juniors came in to dinner they did not see Mr. Buncombe. He was not taking the head of the table. From Juggins it was learned that the headmaster was

lunching in his study. Apparently Mr. Buncombe was bent upon keeping himself in lofty seclusion from the school, like a god under cloudy Olympus. The juniors certainly did not miss his company; they were glad he was not there.

Bolsover major took the head of the table. Bolsover was blossoming more and more under the influence of his new position. The greatest of poets has told us that man, vain man, dressed in a little brief authority, plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep.

Bolsover major was dressed in a little brief authority now, and the usual result accrued. Like most rebels, Bolsover became a tyrant the moment power was placed in his hands. He hated obeying orders, but he delighted in giving them.

"There's too much talking at this table!" snapped Bolsover.

It was a remark Mr. Quelch had sometimes had to make at Greyfriars, often because Bolsover's own tongue was too busy.

But circumstances had changed since then. Bolsover was the top dog now.

"Oh, can it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Silence, Cherry!"

"Rats!"

"Take a hundred lines," said Bolsover.

"Bosh!"

"I shall expect those lines before class this afternoon!" said the head prefect of High Oaks.

"You can expect!" assented Bob.

"If they're not done, you'll get a licking!"

"Somebody will get hurt, I fancy."

"Bob, old chap!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob. "Do you think I'm going to be bullyragged by a swanking cad like Bolsover?"

"Silence, Cherry!" shouted Bolsover major.

"Rats!"

"I shall report this to Mr. Buncombe."

"Report, and be blowed!"

"I shall not cane you myself, Cherry," said Bolsover major, no doubt realising that the task would prove a little more troublesome than caning Bunter. "I shall report you to Mr. Buncombe for a caning."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Who's kicking over the traces now?" sneered Hazeldene. "That's the sort of thing you fellows were ragging us for."

Bob Cherry coloured uncomfortably.

Dinner was not a cheery meal. The chums of the Remove were glad when it was over, and they got away from the obnoxious company of Bolsover major.

Mr. Buncombe was not seen again till afternoon class. The juniors little dreamed what motive he had for keeping himself out of sight as much as possible. Cool and confident as he was, and successful as his imposture had been, Ponsonby of Highcliffe could never feel so many eyes upon him without a lurking uneasiness.

He appeared, however, for afternoon class. All the Remove were in the class-room on time when the horn-rimmed gentleman came squeaking in in his elastic-sided boots.

"I have to report Cherry, sir," said Bolsover major. "He says he refuses to do the lines I gave him."

"Is that the case, Cherry?" snapped Mr. Buncombe.

"Yes, sir!" grunted Bob.

“Stand out before the class!”

Bob hesitated a moment. Then, with deep reluctance, he obeyed the order. Mr. Buncombe signed to Bolsover to hand him a cane, and the bully of the Remove grinned and handed it over.

“Bend over that chair, Cherry!”

Bob Cherry did not move.

“Do you hear me, Cherry?” exclaimed Mr. Buncombe. “Is this how you obey your headmaster?”

“Play up, old man!” whispered Lord Mauleverer.

All eyes were fixed on Bob Cherry. There was a struggle in his breast. But he realised that it was up to him, and, with deep, suppressed feelings, he bent over the chair.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

It was the first time that Ponsonby of Highcliffe had had the opportunity of thrashing Bob Cherry with impunity. He made the most of it.

The “prefects” looked on, grinning. The rest of the Remove watched in silence.

“Now go to your place, Cherry! You are a disobedient and unruly boy!” he squeaked.

“I will keep order in this school! Wharton, what do you mean by scowling in that manner?”

Wharton breathed hard.

“Hold out your hand, Wharton!”

There was a pause, and then the captain of the Remove held out his hand.

Whack!!

“Nugent!”

“Oh! Yes, sir!”

“I will not allow you to look at me in that impertinent way.”

“Hold out your hand!”

Whack!

Mr. Buncombe handed the cane back to Bolsover major.

“I shall be busy this afternoon, preparing some—some exercises for the school,” he said. “You will take charge as before, Bolsover.”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Cane any boy who is disobedient or disorderly.”

“You bet, sir—I mean, certainly, sir!”

“I rely upon you to keep order. You may use severe measures.”

“Oh, yes, sir; rely on me.”

“The class will write out six more Latin irregular verbs,” said Mr. Buncombe, who evidently had his own methods of instruction. “The prefects will keep order as before, without taking part in the lesson. Tomorrow we shall begin work in earnest. I am very disappointed in this class—a set of lazy, ignorant, stupid boys, in my opinion.”

With that, Mr. Buncombe departed.

“Get going, you fellows,” grinned Bolsover major. And there was a chortle from Skinner and Co. Mr. Buncombe was an amazing headmaster, but Skinner and Co. were beginning quite to like him.

The Remove got going, with feelings too deep for words. Bolsover major eyed the class, looking for a chance to exercise authority. But for a time, at least, he had no chance. The Juniors settled down to work, and the prefects yawned and chattered and loafed, and rapped out commands for silence whenever there was a whisper in the class. Bolsover and Co. were still enjoying themselves; but the rest of the Remove were getting very near to breaking-point.

CHAPTER 22

Bunter Has Had Enough!

Billy Bunter blinked round him cautiously.

Bunter had made a pretence of being busily at work to satisfy the searching eye of Bolsover major. But William George Bunter found it impossible—really impossible—to concentrate his fat brain on Latin irregular verbs. Bunter hated all the nine parts of speech—verbs more than any other. Latin verbs more than English, and irregular Latin verbs most of all. Bunter couldn't, and wouldn't, write out six Latin irregular verbs in all their conjugations.

Once before in the history of High Oaks School Bunter had had what he was pleased to call a “barring-out” on his own, and on that occasion he had barred himself out for much less reason. What he had to put up with then was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with what he had to put up with now.

Bunter, instead of cogitating over Latin irregular verbs, was thinking of another barring-out all by himself, to last as long as Mr. Buncombe lasted at High Oaks, and longer, if another master came in his place.

For a long time the Owl of the Remove had no chance.

But the four prefects, bored at last with watching and faultfinding, gathered in a half-circle on chairs round the fire, and entertained themselves by eating toffee from a packet produced by Bolsover major.

Then William George Bunter, blinking round with the utmost caution, rose in his place.

From the class many glances turned on him; but the prefects had their backs on him just then, and did not see him—and Bunter took care that they should not hear him.

On tiptoe Bunter left his place, and on tiptoe he reached the door of the class-room.

Softly, cautiously—with almost agonising caution—Bunter turned the handle and opened the door wide enough for his fat form to glide through.

The whole class were grinning as they watched him. Nobody made a sound to betray him. It was for the prefects to look after truants. No one was inclined to do their work for them.

Bunter wriggled silently through the doorway, and with infinite caution closed the door behind him.

The Owl of the Remove was gone.

Just as if the Owl of the Remove had been a fat balloon, he had suddenly, silently vanished away.

The class resumed Latin verbs with grinning faces. It was a quarter of an hour later that Bolsover major, having finished the toffee and tired of loafing by the fire, turned his attention to the class again.

He was rather puzzled to see a large number of smiling faces; he did not expect Latin verbs, especially irregular ones, to make the juniors smile. Then he noticed that a place was vacant.

“Where's Bunter?” he rapped out.



Puzzle—find Bunter!” murmured Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Stop that row in class, or I’ll jolly well lick the lot of you!” shouted Bolsover major truculently. “Wharton, where’s Bunter?”

“Find out!”

“Do you want a thrashing?”

“Oh, shut up!”

“The shutupfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed bullying Bolsover!” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “The thrashfulness would be a boot on the other leg!”

“Will you tell me where the fat rascal’s gone?” roared Bolsover.

The juniors grinned, but made no answer.

“The fat slug must have crawled out while our backs were turned,” said Skinner.

“We’ll make an example of him!”

“You fellows keep order here while I look for Bunter,” said Bolsover major, and he strode angrily out of the Form-room.

He tramped savagely up the stairs. His little brief authority had been defied—and by so negligible a nobody as W. G. Bunter. The bully of the Remove tramped upstairs in a towering rage.

Bolsover major headed for the room which had been set aside for Mr. Quelch’s bedroom first; and when he found that the door was locked, he knew that he had trailed down William George Bunter.

Bang, bang!

Bolsover major’s fist smote the door wrathfully.

“Bunter!” he roared.

“Yah!”

“You fat scoundrel, unlock this door!”

“Rats!”

“What?” gasped Bolsover major.

“Rats!” jeered Bunter through the keyhole. “Think I care anything for you, you long-legged, fat-headed frump? Go and eat coke! I’ve locked that door, and I’ve got all the furniture against it, and I’ve got some grub here, too—lots, I can tell you! It’s a barring-out—and I ain’t coming out again, see. Go and chop chips!”

“You fat villain!” bawled Bolsover major. “I’ll smash you!”

“Yah! You couldn’t smash a white rabbit!”

“Wha—at?”

“I’ve a jolly good mind to come out and thrash you! But you ain’t worth the trouble! Yah!”

Bunter, behind a locked door, was evidently a new Bunter—a bold and defiant Bunter, remarkably different from the Bunter who had been caned in the class-room. Bolsover major banged on the door, kicked at it, yelled threats through the keyhole, and fairly stamped with rage. While he was thus occupied, William George Bunter told him—through the keyhole—what he thought of him, of his looks, and of his manners; and all that Bunter thought—and stated—was uncomplimentary.

Bolsover major tramped away at last, and went down to the new Head’s study. This was a matter for Mr. Buncombe to take in hand.

He tapped at the study door and opened it.

“Oh, my hat!” he ejaculated involuntarily.

Mr. Buncombe had said that he would be busy that afternoon preparing exercises. The exercises were not in evidence. Mr. Buncombe was seated in a chair by the fire, tilted back, with his feet on another chair, reading a novel and smoking cigarettes.

Cigarette-ends littered the floor round him, and the room was blue with smoke.

Oddly enough he had laid aside his horn-rimmed glasses for reading; and without them his face had quite a different aspect; and there was something strangely familiar in it to Bolsover’s eyes.

Mr. Buncombe started as he saw the junior in the doorway. In a moment he had dropped the novel, caught up the horn-rimmed spectacles, and jammed them on. He stared angrily at Bolsover major.

“What do you want?” he snapped. “Why are you not in the class-room, confound you?”

Bolsover fairly gasped. Mr. Buncombe’s voice had lost the squeaky tones he knew; it sounded different—younger, boyish, in fact, and strangely familiar to Bolsover’s ears. But Mr. Buncombe recollected himself the next moment.

“What does this mean?” He was squeaking now. “I left you in charge of the class—” Bolsover major stuttered out an explanation.

“Nonsense!” snapped Mr. Buncombe. “I will deal with Bunter later. Go back to the class. Cane anyone who has misbehaved in your absence. You may go!”

“Yes, sir!” gasped Bolsover.

And he went—his brain almost in a whirl. There was something about Mr. Buncombe that perplexed him strangely. He realised that there was more in the new headmaster than met the eye; but for the life of him he could not puzzle out what it was.

But he was soon to know—as well as the rest of High Oaks School. The new Head was nearer than he dreamed to the end of his tether.

CHAPTER 23

An Astonishing Discovery!

Harry Wharton and Co. eyed Bolsover major with smiling faces as he came back into the class-room. The fact that he came alone showed that William George Bunter had found a safe retreat. For once the Famous Five felt that their sympathies were with the Owl of the Remove. It required little more, in fact, to make them go and do likewise. Only their promise to Lord Mauleverer to uphold the authority of his amazing headmaster kept the Famous Five from drastic measures. And that promise certainly

did not bind them to submit to bullying from Bolsover major. They smiled cheerily as the bully of the Remove came scowling in.

"Letting Bunter off—what?" grinned Bob Cherry.

Bolsover major gave him a scowl. Billy Bunter's defiance of his prefectorial authority had exasperated him; and Bunter was safe out of his reach. Bob Cherry was within his reach; and Bolsover was in his most truculent and bullying mood.

"Cherry!" he rapped out. "I've warned you before about cheeking a prefect."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

"Stand out before the class!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Skinner, hand me that cane!"

"Here you are, old bean!" grinned Skinner.

The head prefect of High Oaks swished the cane.

"Stand out, Cherry, and bend over!"

"I don't think!" said Bob.

"Look here, Bolsover," said Harry Wharton, "don't be a fool!"

"What?" roared Bolsover major.

"Fool!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've ordered you to bend over, Cherry!" said Bolsover major. "I'll deal with you next, Wharton. Will you stand out before the class, Cherry?"

"I rather think not!" said Bob. "I've got a sort of an idea not!"

"Then take that!"

Bolsover major strode along the Form, and the cane whacked down over Bob Cherry's shoulders. There was a roar from Bob.

"Whooop!"

The next moment there was another roar, from Bolsover major, as Bob's fist caught him on the point of the chin.

Crash!

Bolsover major went spinning along the class-room, and landed with a terrific concussion on his back.

"Hurrah!" roared Johnny Bull. "That's the stuff to give 'em! Hurrah!"

"Look here, you men—" gasped Lord Mauleverer. The Bounder leaped to his feet.

"Mop them up!" he shouted.

"Give them socks!"

"My dear fellows—" murmured Lord Mauleverer. Mauly was unheeded. The Bounder led the rush, and a dozen fellows followed him. Bolsover major, staggering to his feet, was swept over again; and Skinner and Stott went spinning right and left. Sidney James Snoop dodged out of the Form-room, and fled for his life.

"Bump them!" roared Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump those jolly old prefects!" yelled Bob Cherry. "We'll give 'em prefects!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Skinner. "Leggo! Oh, my hat! Help! Yooooop!"

"I'll smash you!" raved Bolsover major. "Leggo! Help! Mr. Buncombe! Whoop! Yarooooogh! Oh, crikey!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yah! Oh! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hapless prefects tore themselves loose at last, and rushed for the door.

“After them!” yelled the Bounder.

“Oh, gad!” gasped Lord Mauleverer in dismay. “This is the giddy finish. Look here, you men—”

“After them!”

“Rag the rotters!”

The wildest excitement reigned in the Remove now. The Upholders of law and order were more out of hand than the rest. There was a fierce rush in pursuit of Bolsover major, Skinner and Stott. Down the corridor the crowd of excited juniors went whooping, and the wretched prefects ran for their lives. With one accord they headed for Mr. Buncombe’s study, and the protection of the new Head.

“Collar them!” shrieked Peter Todd.

“Mop ’em up!”

Skinner was collared and dragged over, shrieking. Stott was captured next, and yelled wildly as he was bumped and rolled. Two or three hands clutched Bolsover major; but he tore himself away, and reached Mr. Buncombe’s study door and hurled it open and rushed in. Mr. Buncombe leaped to his feet in alarm, just in time to meet Bolsover major, as the bully of the Remove rushed in with an excited mob at his heels.

Crash!

“Oh!” gasped Bolsover major.

“Oooch!” spluttered Mr. Buncombe.

The new headmaster went spinning from the shock, and rolled on the floor. His mortar-board tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, and his wig became dislodged. His horn-rimmed glasses slipped from their moorings, so to speak. He sat up dazedly, with his beard hanging on one side of his face, bewildered and dizzy.

There was a startled yell from the Bounder.

“Look! Look at him! Great Christopher Colombus!”

“My only hat!” spluttered Peter Todd, his eyes fixed on the face of Mr. Buncombe—eyes that he could scarcely believe.

The mob of juniors had halted at the doorway, two or three of them inside the study. The Bounder, and a good many of the others, was prepared to handle Mr. Buncombe himself—they were quite fed-up with the new Head. Whether the Famous Five would have defended him at this stage of the proceedings was rather doubtful. But the disarrangement of Mr. Buncombe’s disguise settled the matter beyond a doubt.

The fellows had suspected that Mr. Buncombe’s hair was a wig—but that had not made them suspect the imposture; middle-aged gentlemen sometimes sported wigs when Nature unkindly gathered in their natural crop at too early a period to please them. They had supposed, of course, that a bald pate was under the wig. But now that the wig was gone they saw a close crop of dark hair—quite thick hair. And the disarrangement of the thick beard revealed a chin that was innocent of the slightest hirsute growth—not even a clean-shaven chin, but obviously a chin upon which hair never had grown—a boy’s chin. The Removites fairly stuttered in amazement as they realised that Joseph Buncombe, M.A., O.B.E., instead of the testy old gentleman they had supposed, was a fellow no older than themselves, in a clever disguise.

Lord Mauleverer came panting up.

“You fellows! Remember you promised to back up the Head—play the game, you know—”

“Look at him!” yelled Toddy.

“It’s some swindler!” yelled Hazeldene. “Why, he’s a boy—not a man at all! He’s got up—”

“Disguised!” howled Johnny Bull. “Oh, crumbs!”

“He’s some spoofer—”

“Some swindler—a thief, very likely—a burglar—”

“You fathead, Mauly—”

“You blithering ass! Look at him!”

“Got up like a chap in private theatricals!” gasped Wibley. “I knew he had a wig—I spotted that. But—”

Lord Mauleverer gazed at his new headmaster. The fellow, whoever he was, was not yet recognisable, owing to the make-up on his face. But it was easily to be seen that he was a boy and not a man at all; and obvious that Lord Mauleverer had been taken in by some extraordinary spoof. The Bounder burst into a yell of laughter.

“You great ass, Mauly! It’s some spoofer pulling your silly leg! No wonder his baggage hasn’t arrived—and his credentials—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Master of Arts!” gasped Nugent. “Some Master of Arts!”

“O.B.E.!” shrieked Bob Cherry. “Some O.B.E. He’s not an Old Bad Egg—he’s a young bad egg!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, gad!” gasped Lord Mauleverer. His lordship felt as if his noble brain was turning round, as he gazed at the discomfited spoofer.

“Do you still want us to back up your jolly old headmaster, Manly?” asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

“Some headmaster!” chuckled the Bounder.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, begad! No! I—I—I’ve been taken in!” stuttered Lord Mauleverer. “I—I—suppose I ought to have made him show his credentials.”

“If any!” chortled Squiff.

“The anyfulness is terrific!”

“Who are you, you spoofin’ outsider?” demanded Lord Mauleverer indignantly. “I seem to know your face—what I can see of it. Who are you?”

Ponsonby of Highcliffe scrambled to his feet. He cast a longing glance at the window; the doorway was crammed, and the room was half-full of juniors. There was no avenue of escape for the spoofer of Highcliffe; and the game was up now with a vengeance. ‘The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley’, as the poet has told us; and Pon’s wonderful scheme had gone astray in the full tide of success.

“Look here!” he gasped.

“I know that voice!” exclaimed Wharton. “Who—”

“Not a Greyfriars man,” said Bob Cherry. “Who are you, you rotter?”

“Collar him!” shouted the Bounder. “We’ll bump it out of him!”

“Mr. Buncombe” jumped back.

“Hands off!” he gasped. “I—I—I own up. It was only a jape. You fellows asked for it, with that silly advertisement for a headmaster. Hands off!”

“I know him now!” yelled the Bounder. “Ponsonby!”

“Ponsonby!”

“That Highcliffe cad!”

“Ponsonby!” gasped Harry Wharton almost dazedly. “We’ve been spoofed by a Highcliffe cad! Your new headmaster is a Highcliffe Fourth-Former, Mauly! You ass!”

“Oh, gad!” stuttered Mauleverer.

“Hands off!” shrieked Ponsonby. “It was only a jape—”

“Japing is all very well,” said Bob Cherry. “We’d let you off for the jape as that

fathead Mauleverer asked for it. But caning fellows isn't a jape—and what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander! It's your turn now to bend over—before you're kicked out!"

"Fetch a cane!" yelled Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ogilvy rushed to the class-room for a cane. Ponsonby made a wild rush to escape, and was collared on all sides. Still in the garb of Mr. Buncombe, M.A., O.B.E., but minus his hair and horn-rimmed glasses, Ponsonby of Highcliffe was forcibly bent over a chair. Bob Cherry wielded the cane.

High Oaks had seen many extraordinary sights since it had had a local habitation and a name. But certainly it had seen none so extraordinary as this—its new headmaster yelling and squirming in the grasp of the juniors under the whacking cane. Really it was the climax.

CHAPTER 24

At Last!

Buzzzzzz!

Lord Mauleverer went wearily to the telephone.

High Oaks School was still in a state of wild excitement.

The new Head was gone!

He had been glad to go!

In a state of dizzy and dusty dishevelment Ponsonby of Highcliffe had been kicked down the drive and kicked out of the gates of High Oaks. Such was the outcome of Pon's great scheme of giving the Greyfriars Remove what they had asked for. But it was not to be denied that the Highcliffe spoofer had scored a success—and that it was largely by accident that he had been shown up. Ponsonby crawled away from High Oaks feeling tired of life; but the Remove fellows had to admit that the episode was "one up" for Highcliffe.

Once more High Oaks was a school without a master, and this time it looked as if that masterless state would be permanent. And then came the ring at the telephone, and Mauleverer took up the receiver. He gave a jump as Mr. Quelch's voice came through.

"Mr. Quelch!" he ejaculated.

"Is that Mauleverer?"

"Yaas, sir."

"I have been feeling very anxious, Mauleverer, concerning you and the other foolish boys at High Oaks. I was absolutely alarmed to learn that you had engaged a—a—a person as headmaster. I have not the slightest doubt that the man is some charlatan." Lord Mauleverer grinned faintly. At the present stage he had no doubt about it himself.

"I am very much perturbed," went on Mr. Quelch. "I am extremely anxious. Very anxious indeed, Mauleverer, and as Dr. Locke is apparently taking no measures to control the Remove, I feel that I cannot allow matters to go on as they are at present any longer. The—the person you have so foolishly engaged is—"

"He's gone, sir."

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Yaas, sir!" He—he turned out to be a spoofing rotter, sir, and we've kicked him out."

"Bless my soul!"

"You see, sir—"

“I see, Mauleverer, that the Remove require control, and that some serious disaster may occur, if the present state of affairs should continue. I shall come to High Oaks, Mauleverer.”

“Oh, good, sir!” gasped Mauleverer.

“I shall take control of High Oaks, and remain as your master until you return to Greyfriars. I shall call upon Dr. Locke and acquaint him with my intention in order that there may be no misunderstanding.”

“We’ll all be jolly glad to see you, sir. It’s what we wanted all the time. We’re backing you up, sir, and stickin’ to you like—like glue, sir.”

“Nonsense!”

And with that characteristic reply Henry Samuel Quelch rang off. Lord Mauleverer put up the receiver and strolled back into Hall, smiling.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! What’s the glad tidings?” asked Bob Cherry.

“Quelchy’s coming.”

“Quelchy!”

“He’s agreed to take control here,” said Lord Mauleverer. “He seems to have got the wind-up over that blinkin’ new headmaster, and he thinks it’s up to him.”

The news spread through High Oaks that Mr. Quelch was coming over to take control. It was received with rather mixed feelings; but most of the fellows agreed that it was good news. Billy Bunter was informed—through the keyhole—that Mr. Quelch was coming, and told to come out. But Billy Bunter refused to come out. His answer was that Quelchy was a worse beast than the other beast, and he added that he would see Quelchy blowed before he would come out.

CHAPTER 25

Mr. Quelch Takes Control!

Harry Wharton and Co. lined the drive at High Oaks, and there were loud cheers. Mr. Quelch raised his hat slightly in response to the cheers of his old Form. Nearly all the Remove were there to meet Mr. Quelch, and they shouted uproariously. The arrival of the Remove master to take control at High Oaks meant lessons, and the old grind, and the end of a rather easy time; but most of the juniors were glad to see him, all the same. For they realised, that a school without a master was not a practical proposition, and that the alternative to Mr. Quelch’s control was a return to Greyfriars. And that was surrender.

The advent of Mr. Quelch saved the situation. Even fellows who were far from keen on classes and had no desire whatever to increase their store of knowledge were glad to see him arrive.

They crowded round Mr. Quelch, cheering, as he walked up the drive towards the big door of High Oaks.

Mr. Quelch entered the great hall of the house.

The juniors followed him in—almost all the Remove.

“Wharton!”

“Yes, sir,” said Harry Wharton promptly.

“You will kindly call the roll.”

“Certainly, sir.”

The captain of the Remove called the roll, and all the fellows answered to their names, with two, exceptions; Skinner and Bunter were absent.

“Wharton, you will find Skinner and Bunter, and tell them to come here at once.”

“Yes, sir.”

Harry Wharton left the hall on his mission. Mr. Quelch stood by the fireplace, as immovable as a bronze image.

As he had not given the word to dismiss, the Removites remained where they were, standing in order. But some of them very soon grew restless. This was rather a change from a school without a master, and to very many of the juniors the change was not agreeable. Bob Cherry shuffled his feet, Johnny Bull grunted, Bolsover major began to talk to Snoop. In a minute more there was a hum of voices.

Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes turned on the Form.

"Silence, please!" he rapped out.

There was silence.

Still Harry Wharton did not return with the two absentees, and the restlessness grew in the Remove. The fellows considered that they were not, after all, at Greyfriars, and Mr. Quelch was only in authority at High Oaks by request of the Remove. Some of the fellows were not keen on implicit obedience to a master whom they had themselves appointed. Bolsover major spoke at last.

"May we go now, sir?"

Mr. Quelch's eyes gleamed at him.

"No, Bolsover, you may not go!"

Bolsover major shifted uneasily.

"The fact is, sir—" he began.

"You need not speak, Bolsover."

"But, sir—"

"Silence!"

Bolsover major scowled and gritted his teeth, but he was silent, though he was looking and feeling extremely rebellious. But just then Harry Wharton re-entered, leading in Skinner, with a grip on Skinner's arm. Harold Skinner obviously did not want to come, but a grip of iron on his arm had persuaded him to do so.

"Take your place with the Form, Skinner," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "On this occasion I shall not punish you for being late; but you will remember in future that I require punctuality."

"Oh!" gasped Skinner, in great relief. "Yes, sir! Certainly, sir!" And Skinner retreated into the ranks of the Remove.

Wharton left the hall again to fetch Bunter. Again there was a long delay, and again restlessness grew. Two or three fellows whispered to Bolsover major, and the burly Removite spoke to Mr. Quelch at last.

"I'm tired of standing here, sir."

"What?"

"Tired of it, sir," grunted Bolsover.

At Greyfriars, assuredly, Bolsover major would never have ventured to address Mr. Quelch in that strain.

"You are impertinent, Bolsover!" he said icily. "That is not the way to address your Form-master!"

"We're not at Greyfriars now, sir," mumbled Bolsover major sulkily.

"Quite so. Mauleverer!"

"Yaas, sir?" said Lord Mauleverer, with prompt respect. Mauly, at least, wanted to make it clear that he respected the Remove master as much at High Oaks as at Greyfriars.

"No doubt there is a cane in the class-room?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Kindly fetch it for me."

“Oh! Yaas, sir.”

Lord Mauleverer went for the cane. There was a murmur among the juniors, and Bolsover set his lips hard. If Mr. Quelch was going to begin by caning fellows— The Remove master took the cane from Mauleverer when he came back. Bolsover drew a deep breath.

“Bolsover! Step here!”

The bully of the Remove did not stir for a moment. But there was command in Mr. Quelch’s look and tone, and before his steady glance Bolsover major quailed. He left the ranks of the Remove and advanced sullenly. Mr. Quelch pointed to a chair with the cane.

“Bend over that chair, Bolsover!”

“You’re not going to cane me, sir?” muttered Bolsover major.

“I certainly am, Bolsover!”

“You’re not our Form-master now!” muttered Bolsover sulkily. “You’ve no right to cane us!”

“Shut up, Bolsover!” said Bob Cherry. “Play the game!”

“You need not speak, Cherry!” snapped Mr. Quelch.

“Oh! No, sir!” stammered Bob.

“I am waiting, Bolsover, for you to bend over that chair!” said Mr. Quelch sternly.

Bolsover major paused, breathing hard. He looked at the Remove, hoping to find support there. But there was no support for a rebel. Skinner and Co. sympathised, but they were not likely to offer active support; and almost all the other fellows were strong in support of Mr. Quelch’s authority. Only grim looks met Bolsover major, and at last, reluctantly and sullenly, he bent over the chair.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

It was six, and as severe a six as Mr. Quelch had ever administered in the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars. Bolsover major fairly wriggled and squirmed under it.

“You may go back to your place, Bolsover,” said Mr. Quelch quietly.

Bolsover major limped back. He wriggled in his place painfully, but he did not speak again, and the other fellows did not speak. The Remove were waiting the pleasure of Henry Samuel Quelch, and it was borne in upon every mind that the school without a master had a master now, and a master who would stand no nonsense.

CHAPTER 26

Bunter Thinks Twice!

It was the fat voice of William George Bunter.

Bunter was speaking through a keyhole.

The door of the room in which the Owl of the Remove had taken refuge was locked and barricaded with furniture; and Bunter, safe behind his defences, hurled defiance at the captain of the Remove through the keyhole.

“You fat ass!” breathed Wharton.

“Yah!”

“You’ve got to come out.”

“Rats!”

“Quelchy is here.”

“Blow Quelchy!”

“I tell you he has come to High Oaks, and he is master now!” exclaimed Wharton.

“He may be your master, old bean, but he ain’t mine!” jeered Bunter. “I tell you I ain’t comin’ out! I don’t care for Quelchy! Quelchy can go and eat coke!”

“You fat chump!” roared Harry.

“Rats! Quelch ain’t my Form-master,” said Bunter. “He was sacked from Greyfriars by the Head, and a jolly good thing, too! Best thing the old Beak ever did! Like his cheek to come here, I consider! He’s jolly well not going to come the Form-master over me!”

“Will you come out?” roared Wharton.

“No, I won’t!”

“Mr. Quelch has told me to take you.”

“Tell him from me to go and eat coke!” retorted Bunter. “Tell him he’s an old donkey, and I don’t care a snap for him, or for a dozen of him! Tell him that, and—”

“You fat idiot!”

Harry Wharton turned away and went down the stairs. It was for the Remove-master to deal with the fat rebel. Billy Bunter was full of defiance now, but Wharton had a strong suspicion that the first snap of Mr. Quelch’s sharp voice would reduce him to order. A fat chuckle from the locked room followed him.

“Mind you tell him to go and eat coke, Wharton!” yelled the Owl of the Remove.

“Fathead!”

Wharton did not deliver Bunter’s message. When he returned to the hall alone, Mr. Quelch gave him an inquiring look.

“Where is Bunter, Wharton?”

“He’s in a room upstairs, sir,” said Harry. “He—ahem ! — doesn’t seem to understand, sir. Perhaps if you spoke to him, sir—”

“Very well,” said Mr. Quelch. “I will deal with Bunter presently. I have a few words to say to you juniors.”

Evidently it was those few words for which the Remove had been kept waiting. Mr. Quelch looked at his Form, and the Removites waited quietly and respectfully for him to speak.

“My boys,” said Mr. Quelch, “you are here under somewhat peculiar circumstances. Lord Mauleverer, with his guardian’s permission, has purchased this building, as you know, and whatever I may think of that proceeding, I will offer no comment. You boys have left Greyfriars, as a protest against the Head’s dismissal of your Form-master. I disapprove strongly of your action.”

“Oh!” murmured the Remove.

“Nevertheless,” resumed Mr. Quelch, “I thank you for your attachment to me, though I think you have displayed it in a very mistaken manner. I have advised you to return to Greyfriars. This advice you have not taken. I fully expected the Head to compel you to return. He has not done so. In the circumstances, I felt it my duty to come here and take control. I shall remain in control until you return to Greyfriars or until your parents otherwise decide. Classes will proceed on precisely the same lines as at Greyfriars—the same work will be done and the same discipline will be maintained. I desire this to be understood very clearly. You are schoolboys, and, now that I am in charge, you are at school, and there must be nothing in the nature of disrespect, disobedience, or rioting. I trust I make myself clear?”

“Yaas, sir,” said Lord Mauleverer. “We ask nothin’ better, sir.”

“Hear, hear!”

“Very good,” said Mr. Quelch. “That matter is now settled, and you may dismiss.”

And the Removites dismissed and, as it was not yet dark, most of them went out of the house, to discuss the new state of affairs at High Oaks with more or less approval, generally less. Lord Mauleverer remained, and he approached the Remove-master.

“May I show you to your study, sir?” he asked.

Thank you, Mauleverer!

Mr. Quelch glanced round the room to which Mauleverer led him. It was a large and handsome room, furnished regardless of expense. Lord Mauleverer was one of the most valued customers at Chunkley's Stores in Courtfield, and his simple system was to telephone to Chunkley's for anything he thought was wanted, or that any other fellows thought was wanted. The schoolboy millionaire did not count the cost, that was left to Chunkley's.

"I am afraid you have been expending a great deal of money, Mauleverer," said Mr. Quelch, perhaps by way of thanks for being provided with such very comfortable quarters.

"Yaas, sir," said Lord Mauleverer innocently.

"It is extraordinary, Mauleverer, that your guardian should give you permission to do so."

"Oh, not at all, sir!" said Mauleverer. "Nunky—I mean, my uncle, sir—has no end of faith in my judgment, sir. He knows I spotted a good property in High Oaks, sir—no end of a bargain."

Mr. Quelch looked at him.

"Indeed!" he said dryly.

"Oh, yaas, sir!" said Mauly. "If we don't keep the place on as a school, sir, it will be sold for buildin', and it will bring in about twice as much as I paid for it in bulk, sir. I'm rather a business man in this line, sir. I know my way about."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch.

"But I hope, sir, that we shall keep on High Oaks, and that you will remain as headmaster of the new school, sir," said Mauleverer.

Mr. Quelch smiled slightly.

"We will not discuss that now, Mauleverer. Certainly I shall remain in charge until something definite is decided in the matter."

"Yaas, sir. I'd like to show you to your room upstairs, sir, but that ass Bunter has locked himself in that very room."

"I will deal with Bunter now."

"Very well, sir."

Lord Mauleverer led Mr. Quelch up the stairs and along to the handsome apartment which had been furnished as a bedroom for the Form-master, and of which Bunter had taken possession.

His lordship tapped at the door.

"Bunter, dear man!"

"Go and eat coke!" came Bunter's voice. "I'm barring-out the lot of you, and that includes old Quelch, too. I've got lots of grub here, and I can jolly well tell you I'm not coming out, see?"

"Mr. Quelch—"

"Blow Mr. Quelch!" interrupted Bunter.

"He's here, you fat ass!" gasped Mauleverer.

"I don't care where he is—"

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch's voice was not loud but deep. There was a gasp from within the locked room.

"Who—who—who's that?"



“It is I, your Form-master, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch in his deep voice.

“Oh, lor’!”

Lord Mauleverer grinned. William George Bunter’s defiance had burst like a pricked bladder. His courage, such as it was, had oozed out at his fat finger-tips. The well-known, authoritative voice of the Remove-master was enough for the fat rebel.

“Open this door at once, Bunter!”

“Ow! Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter.

There was a hurried sound of removing furniture, and a crashing as several articles, removed rather too hurriedly, went whirling over. In a wonderfully short space of time Billy Bunter had demolished his barricade, and the key turned back in the lock and the door opened. The Owl of the Remove blinked out at the Remove-master, quivering like a fat jelly with terror.

“What does this mean, Bunter?” snapped Mr. Quelch.

“I—I—I—” stuttered Bunter.

“How dare you!”

“I—I—the fact is, sir, I—I—I—”

“You may go, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch. “But you will remember that discipline is now restored, and you will behave yourself, you absurd boy!”

“Go!” rapped out Mr. Quelch.

“Ow! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter.

And he fled.

CHAPTER 27

An Unexpected Visitor!

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

“What——”

“Your jolly old uncle, Wharton.”

“Oh, my hat!”

It was the following day, and morning class was over at High Oaks. Harry Wharton

and Co. were kicking a football about, when Bob spotted the tall, soldierly figure that was coming up the drive from the gates.

Colonel Wharton sighted the juniors at the same time, and fixed his eyes upon them rather severely.

“Phew!” murmured Nugent. “Something’s going to happen now. What’s your uncle doing here, Harry?”

“Goodness knows!” said Wharton.

“You haven’t heard from him that he was coming?”

“Nunno! I haven’t had any letters, of course—letters would go to Greyfriars, as usual, and I suppose we can’t expect the Head to send them on to High Oaks.”

“Ha, ha! Hardly!”

The colonel had halted on the drive and beckoned to his nephew. Harry Wharton left his comrades, and hurried to meet his uncle.

He was feeling rather dismayed.

What view Colonel Wharton would take of the revolt of the Remove Harry did not know; but he had a strong suspicion that the old military gentleman would not approve of rebellion of any kind.

Certainly his look now was not approving. His brows were contracted as he waited for his nephew to come up.

“Well?” he rapped out as Harry joined him.

“Well, uncle,” said Wharton.

“What does this mean, Harry?”

“What, exactly?” asked Wharton.

The colonel frowned portentously.

“This!” he rapped out. “Why are you not at Greyfriars?”

“I—I—I’m here, you know!” stammered the junior.

“I do not need telling that,” said the colonel. “As I had no answer to a letter I wrote you at Greyfriars, Harry, I telephoned to the Head this morning, and he informed me—to my great amazement—that you were the ring leader in the rebellion.”

“Well, not exactly that, uncle,” said Harry. “We elected Mauleverer leader—and a jolly good leader he was, too. I was his first lieutenant.”

The colonel stared at him.

“You do not appear to be ashamed of yourself, at all events!” he exclaimed.

“Well, no. You see—”

“You have rebelled against the authority of your headmaster?”

“Yes; but—”

“You have left your school without leave?”

“Yes. You see—”

“You have led the rest of your Form into the same rebellious conduct?” exclaimed the colonel sternly.

They didn’t need much leading, uncle. We’re all together in this. If you’ll let me explain—”

“I was simply astounded when Dr. Locke told me what had happened,” said the colonel. “I could scarcely believe my ears. You are aware, Harry, that I am a member of the governing board of Greyfriars. You should have thought of that before placing me in this position. The Head can scarcely do anything but expel you from the school.”

“You see, uncle—”

“A nephew of mine, expelled from school!” snorted the colonel.

“I’m not going back to be expelled,” said Harry. “Neither are the other fellows. We’re

all standing together. The Head can't expel a whole Form. We shan't go back till he comes to terms."

"Are you presuming to dictate to your headmaster?" demanded Colonel Wharton.

"Yes."

"Oh, good gad!" ejaculated the colonel, quite taken aback by the reply.

"You see, we're in the right," said Harry. "If you'll let me explain—"

The rest of the Co. had come up now, taking off their caps very respectfully to Colonel Wharton. Other fellows looked on from a distance, with great interest. All of them realised that matters had taken a serious turn, now that a governor of the school was on the spot.

"You see, sir, we couldn't do anything else," said Bob Cherry. "I'm sure you'll think so when you know the facts."

"I think that's very unlikely!" grunted the colonel. "But I'm waiting for you to explain."

"We're backing up our Form-master," explained Harry. "You know Mr. Quelch, uncle—"

"I know Mr. Quelch, and respect him very highly," said the colonel. "Do not tell me that Mr. Quelch approves of your conduct. I am sure that he does nothing of the kind."

"Well, not exactly," said Harry. "But we're backing him up all the same. You see, he was sacked by the Head—"

"I mean dismissed—"

"Do you mean that he resigned?"

"No; he was dismissed, without any reason that anybody knows," said the captain of the Remove. "Just turned off."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the colonel. "Dr. Locke could never have acted in such an arbitrary manner."

"But he did, uncle."

"The didfulness was terrific, honoured sahib," assured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and we were all terrifically infuriated."

"We backed up Quelch, sir," said Johnny Bull. "It was an insult to the Remove for our Form-master to be sacked for nothing."

"We weren't going to stand it, sir," said Nugent. "It was Mauleverer's idea to march out of Greyfriars as a protest; but we were all keen on it, except a few sneaks."

Colonel Wharton stared at the juniors in puzzled perplexity. Evidently Dr. Locke had not told him, on the telephone, of the dismissal of Mr. Quelch.

"I cannot understand this," said the colonel at last. "I have learned from Dr. Locke that you boys left Greyfriars and took possession of this place, and that he has not yet decided by what means to compel you to return to the school. It is incredible to me that the Head can have treated Mr. Quelch in the way you describe. Do you seriously tell me that Mr. Quelch was dismissed from his post?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Without a reason?"

"No reason was given," said Harry. "Nobody at Greyfriars knows of any reason, and I'm sure that Mr. Quelch does not."

"This is extraordinary. Mr. Quelch was the Head's personal friend, as well as colleague," said Colonel Wharton. "There must have been some sort of a misunderstanding. That, however, does not excuse the rebellion of junior boys against their headmaster's authority."

"We stood by our Form-master, sir," said Bob.

"We felt bound to back him up, uncle," said Harry. "The Head had no right to treat him as he did."

"That is not for Lower Fourth boys to decide," said the colonel. "I am sure that Mr. Quelch did not approve of your backing him up, as you call it."

"Well, no, he didn't," admitted Wharton. "But it was the principle of the thing, you know."

"Yaas," chimed in Lord Mauleverer, joining the group on the drive. "Very glad to see you here, sir. As a governor of the school, you may be able to persuade the Beak—I mean, the Head—to see reason, sir. We're not goin' back to Greyfriars without our Form-master."

"Hear, hear!"

"I must see Mr. Quelch," said the colonel. "Can you tell me where he is at present?" The juniors grinned.

"Here, sir," answered Nugent.

"Here!" ejaculated the colonel.

"He came here to take control, a few days ago," explained Harry. "I'll take you in to him, uncle."

"Do so," grunted the colonel, and his dutiful nephew led him away to the house.

"Well, something's going to happen now," remarked Bob Cherry. "Now a governor of the school is taking the matter up, something's bound to happen. All the same, we're not going back to Greyfriars without Quelch, governor or no governor!"

"No fear!"

"Perhapsfully the esteemed colonel will be able to set the matter right," suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Perhaps!" said Bob doubtfully. "I suppose there really was some sort of a misunderstanding between the two old donkeys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And a third old donkey butting in may clear it up!" suggested the Bounder with a grin.

"Shurrup!" murmured Bob Cherry, as Harry Wharton came back from the house.

"Well the fat's in the fire now, you fellows," said Harry, as he rejoined his comrades.

"I suppose it was bound to happen sooner or later. But we're still standing by Quelch."

"Yes, rather!"

"Whether he likes it or not," grinned the Bounder.

"It's the principle of the thing, dear man," said Lord Mauleverer.

"I thinkfully opine that there is a terrific probability that the esteemed colonel may set the matter right," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "He is an esteemed codger of terrific understandfulness, and a friend of both the ridiculous parties. Perhaps he may roll away the cloud of misunderstandfulness between the two esteemed old jossers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors hoped—though with doubt—that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh would prove to be right.

CHAPTER 28

The Colonel Takes a Hand!

Mr. Quelch greeted his unexpected visitor with stiff politeness.

Certainly the Remove master was not pleased to see a governor of Greyfriars at High Oaks.

His own position there was too anomalous for that. It was, in fact, very awkward for him to be found in charge of a junior Form, who were in a state of rebellion against their headmaster, and that position was exceedingly difficult to explain.

Mr. Quelch was stiffly prepared for misunderstanding and condemnation; to which he would have retorted with icy dignity and reserve. Fortunately, Colonel Wharton was a gentleman of tact.

He began by shaking hands most genially with Mr. Quelch, just as if he had called to see the Remove master at Greyfriars.

"I am afraid I have taken you somewhat by surprise, Mr. Quelch," he said.

"A little, sir," said the Form-master. "No doubt you are surprised to see me here, in charge of boys who have left their school without leave."

There was a challenge in the Remove master's tone; but the colonel tactfully did not observe it.

"I am bound to say, first of all, Mr. Quelch, that I have no doubt that you are acting from the best possible motives, and from a strict sense of duty," said the colonel.

"From my knowledge of you, sir, I can entertain no doubt on that point."

Mr. Quelch simply had to melt.

"You do me no more than justice, Colonel Wharton," he said, much more cordially. "I am aware how very extraordinary the present position must seem to a governor of Greyfriars. I trust that I need not tell you how deeply I regret—"

"I am sure of it, sir."

"When I was dismissed, sir"—Mr. Quelch boggled a little at that word, but he got it out—"when I was dismissed, my boys followed me from a feeling of attachment to me, and from a sense of the injustice that had been done me. I disapprove most strongly of their action, and advised them most earnestly to return to the school. Yet you find me here in charge of them, Which I am aware needs explaining."

I think I can guess the explanation, sir," said the colonel.

"If the boys were here without a master, they certainly needed to be taken into control by someone."

"That is precisely how the matter stood, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "You apprehend my meaning exactly. I fully anticipated that the Head would, in some way, persuade or compel the boys to return to Greyfriars. This did not happen—and I could not leave them to disorder. I came here, therefore, to take control till some arrangement was made—first calling upon Dr. Locke to explain my intention."

"I quite understand."

"You, sir, as a governor of Greyfriars, have authority to take the boys in hand," said Mr. Quelch. "I relinquish the charge of them into your hands with pleasure."

The colonel shook his head.

"Not at all, Mr. Quelch. They could not be in better hands than they are in at the present time."

"It is very kind of you to say so, sir; but Dr. Locke is unfortunately not of the same opinion," said the Remove master, with some bitterness.

"That is a matter I should like to discuss with you, Mr. Quelch," said the colonel. "I was quite unaware that you had left Greyfriars—"

"Dismissed, sir—dismissed!" said Mr. Quelch. "I must admit that the Head offered me the alternative of resigning. I refused to resign. Resignation would have been tantamount to an admission of fault; and I was conscious of no fault."

"But Dr. Locke gave a reason—"

"None, sir."

"No reason for requesting your resignation?"

"None whatever."

"But this is amazing, sir," said the colonel, in astonishment. "I cannot believe that my old headmaster has acted thoughtlessly, tyrannically arbitrarily. There must be some misunderstanding."

"I know of none, sir."

"But doubtless there was some disagreement—some dispute—"

"Nothing."

"Upon my word!" said the colonel, quite nonplussed.

"Indeed, sir, I had some thought of appealing to the Governing Board against the Head's dismissal," said Mr. Quelch. "I considered, however, that it would be beneath my dignity to do so. For years, sir, I have been a Form-master at Greyfriars, and Dr. Locke had no fault to find with me. I will be frank, sir—I was guilty of one act of carelessness—which no head-master would have commented upon—upon which it was beneath the dignity of a headmaster to comment. This was apparently made an excuse by Dr. Locke for dismissing me."

"My dear sir, you—"

"I can use no other words," said Mr. Quelch. "I will tell you the facts, sir. For the first and only time in my remembrance I forgot class. I was busy at the time on some literary work—I believe you are aware that I was compiling a History of Greyfriars—and for once, sir, immersed in my task, I forgot class; and the boys unfortunately took advantage of my absence to indulge in horseplay in the Form-room."

"Boys will be boys!" said the colonel with a slight smile.

"Quite so, sir—the matter was not in the least serious. The noise in the Remove room brought the headmaster there—he sent one of the juniors to fetch me, and handed the class over to me. I punished the rioters; and supposed that the matter was at an end. Judge of my amazement, sir, when I found that the Head avoided me—that he declined to speak to me—and that he finally sent me a note by a servant requesting my resignation."

Mr. Quelch's voice trembled with indignation.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the colonel.

"That is what happened, sir. I admit the fault—such as it was. I was guilty of a slight act of carelessness—such an incident as occurs not at all infrequently with some masters at Greyfriars, sir—but very infrequently indeed with me. Obviously, it was used by the Head simply as a pretext to dismiss me."

"He must have had some reason—"

"If so, he did not confide it to me, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "I was treated with the grossest injustice and tyranny—all Greyfriars was aware of it—indeed, the rebellious conduct of the Remove demonstrates what was thought of it in the school."

"You amaze me, sir!! There must surely have been some misunderstanding—perhaps mischief made by some ill-disposed person—"

"I know of nothing, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "I have acquainted you with the circumstances, Colonel Wharton, because, as a governor of Greyfriars, you have a right to know how the matter stands. Now I desire nothing better than to hand over my charge here to you and to retire from the scene."

The colonel shook his head.

"I request you to carry on, Mr. Quelch. The juniors, of course, must return to Greyfriars. Until they do so, they cannot be in better hands than yours. I shall see Dr. Locke on that subject at once."

"As you please, sir."

He was a very perplexed old gentleman as he walked back to his car, which was

waiting at the gates.

That his old headmaster had acted in the tyrannical way described by Mr. Quelch was incredible to him; yet it was impossible, of course, to doubt the Remove master's statement.

There was some extraordinary misunderstanding or deception in the matter; the colonel felt assured of that; and he hoped to be able to set the matter right.

Harry Wharton met his uncle at the gates.

"You've seen Mr. Quelch, uncle?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy."

"Now you know how the matter stands, you don't blame us for backing him up?" asked Harry.

"Hem!" The colonel coughed. "I will not express an opinion, at present, on that point, Harry. I am going to Greyfriars now."

"And we?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"You will remain here for the present."

"Good!"

The car rolled away with the colonel.

CHAPTER 29

In Black and White!

"A jolly old governor!" remarked Coker of the Fifth.

"Eh?" said Potter.

"That old codger is Colonel Wharton, a governor," said Coker, with a nod towards the soldierly gentleman who was alighting from the car at Greyfriars. "Relation of that kid Wharton in the Remove, I think."

Potter and Greene looked round with a little interest.

"Well, the governors were bound to butt in sooner or later," remarked Greene. "Those fags have got to be brought to order."

Apparently unconscious of the widespread interest his arrival had caused, the colonel entered the House and was shown to the Head's study.

Dr. Locke greeted him with some embarrassment.

It was not pleasant for a headmaster to face a governor of the school in the present circumstances.

The Head was well aware that it was his business to have gathered in the Remove, somehow, and brought them back to the school. He had not been able to do so. But it was difficult to explain that to a governor of the school.

Colonel Wharton, however, did not immediately refer to the secession of the Lower Fourth. The question of the dismissal of Mr. Quelch was uppermost in his mind.

After a few words, therefore, he came to that subject, and immediately a deep frown darkened the face of the headmaster.

"That is a matter which, I fear, it would be unprofitable to discuss," said the Head stiffly.

"I hope not," said the colonel blandly. "The matter is entirely in your hands, sir, and no governor would dream of interfering between the headmaster and a Form-master. But—"

"I had reasons for my action, Colonel Wharton."

"No doubt. But"—the colonel coughed—"these reasons have not been made public, I think."

"No, sir. I should not be likely to publish to the school a Form-master's derogatory

criticisms of his chief.”

“Surely Mr. Quelch did not—”

“He did, sir.”

“I have seen Mr. Quelch, Dr. Locke, and he appears to be quite unaware of the cause of his sudden dismissal.”

“He cannot fail to be aware of the cause, sir. I did not go into details with him; it would have been beneath my dignity to do so. I have no objection to explaining to you, as a governor of the school, if you insist, though the subject is very painful to me.”

“Certainly I do not insist, Dr. Locke; but I think some misunderstanding may have arisen,” said the colonel.

“No misunderstanding can have arisen, sir, when Mr. Quelch expressed his contemptuous opinion of me in writing, sir, in his own hand.”

“Is it possible?”

“It is not only possible, but true, sir. It was a great shock to me—a very great shock,” said the Head, with a tremor in his voice “Mr. Quelch was my most valued colleague, but more than that—he has been my personal friend for a quarter of a century. I was accustomed to rely upon his judgment, his assistance, his friendship. I learned that, while I trusted him, he regarded me with contempt and dislike, and actually said as much in letters written from this school. I could scarcely retain his position here after making such a discovery.”

“Most decidedly not,” said the colonel. “But—”

“A letter—or, rather, a portion of a letter—came into my hands by accident,” said the Head. “I will explain. There was a slight incident—Mr. Quelch forgot his class, and there was a riot in the Remove Form-room, and I had to go to them. Afterwards, thinking that Mr. Quelch might be feeling a certain awkwardness over this incident, I went to his study to see him, in order to assure him that my confidence in him was unimpaired. On my way to his study I was stopped by a Remove boy, who had picked up a paper in the passage, and this paper the junior handed to me. It proved to be a portion of a letter written by Mr. Quelch, in which he referred to me, sir, in the most bitter and scathing terms.”

“Good gad!” ejaculated the colonel.

“I should not, of course, have looked at the paper had I known it was part of a private letter, but I was unaware of this until I had seen it. Fortunately, it was folded, and the boy Skinner had not seen its contents. Having seen that paper, sir, I did not carry out my intention of calling on Mr. Quelch. I was pained, grieved, disgusted, as you may imagine.”

“No doubt, sir. But you are sure that there was no mistake—no trickery in the matter?”

“I have the paper here, sir, and you shall see it,” said the Head. “It is a sheet from an ordinary writing-pad, and evidently part of a letter. I did not return it to Mr. Quelch, because I disdained to enter into a discussion with him on so sordid and unpleasant a topic.”

The Head unlocked a drawer of his desk.

He took out a sheet of paper and handed it to Colonel Wharton.

“You are acquainted with Mr. Quelch’s hand?” he said.

“Quite.”

“Then you will see that this is written by him.”

“Undoubtedly,” said the colonel.

The old military gentleman stared blankly at the sheet. He could scarcely believe his

eyes as he read, in the well-known handwriting of his nephew's Form-master, the following:

“The Head was arbitrary and tyrannical. It is painful to write such words of the headmaster of Greyfriars, but it is the undoubted fact. His tactless interference in the Form-rooms, between masters and boys, earned him both dislike and contempt.”

“Good gad!” said Colonel Wharton blankly.

Dr. Locke compressed his lips.

“Are you satisfied now, sir, that I had no alternative but to dismiss Mr. Quelch?”

“Quite sir!”

Colonel Wharton rose to his feet, his brow very dark.

“I had no idea of this, sir—no idea whatever,” he said. “Certainly I have always had a great respect for Mr. Quelch—a respect which appears to have been misplaced. The man who could write in this strain of a headmaster who trusted him and confided in him is a—a—” Colonel Wharton paused. “I will not say that. Obviously, you were deceived in him, and he is quite unsuitable to hold a responsible position at Greyfriars or any other school.”

“I had no doubt you would think so, sir, when you knew the facts,” said the Head. “A disloyal colleague and a false friend—”

“It is shocking!” said the colonel, his eyes glinting. “Such hypocrisy is appalling. I quite understand why you did not desire to make this public, sir, preferring rather to allow Greyfriars to receive a mistaken impression of your action. Unfortunately, the Remove boys, knowing nothing of the facts, looked upon their Form-master as a wronged man, and their chivalry led them to act lawlessly in his support. If my nephew, for instance, had been aware of this—”

“It must not be made public, sir,” said the Head hastily.

“Quite so—I fully agree! But in the circumstances, sir, you may very well pardon this outbreak on the part of the boys, if they return to their duty. They have acted in error.”

“But they have not returned yet, sir,” said the Head.

“I shall see that they return, Dr. Locke,” said the colonel grimly. “I fully agree that this disagreeable matter should be kept strictly secret; but there is no reason why I should not tell my nephew and his friends that I have investigated the matter, as a governor of the school, and found that Mr. Quelch's dismissal was just and necessary that I should have advised you, had you consulted me, to dismiss him instantly. I have no doubt that this assurance from me will have the desired result.”

“I agree with you, sir,” said the Head, relieved. “That would certainly be a very satisfactory ending to a very unpleasant episode.”

Allow me to retain this paper, sir,” said the colonel. “I must see Mr. Quelch again—and I desire very much to show him this paper, and request him to reconcile it with his explanations to me, and his assertions that he is unaware of the cause of his dismissal. I have no doubt that he will be overwhelmed with confusion.”

Dr. Locke hesitated.

“As you please, Colonel Wharton,” he said at last. “The paper is, after all, the property of Mr. Quelch; and you may return it to him if you so desire.”

“Very well, sir. I shall return to High Oaks at once, and I have no doubt whatever that

those young rebels will have returned to their duty in a few hours from now.”

And a few minutes later the car was whirling back on the Courtfield road towards High Oaks, the old military gentleman sitting bolt upright in it, with a grim frown on his face that boded a very unpleasant interview for Mr. Quelch at the end of his journey.

Mr. Quelch was in his study at High Oaks when Juggins announced Colonel Wharton. The Remove-master rose to greet him, with an amiable smile on his severe face. After his interview with the colonel that morning Mr. Quelch was naturally feeling very amiable towards the old military gentleman. But, as the colonel entered, he could see at a glance that his visitor was not feeling at all amiable. The friendly smile froze on Mr. Quelch’s face.

“I have returned, sir,” said the colonel formally. “I am here to direct the Remove boys to return to Greyfriars immediately.”

“Indeed, sir!” said Mr. Quelch.

“I shall explain the circumstances to them sufficiently, sir, to ensure their immediate obedience, sir,” said Colonel Wharton. “They are quite unaware of the cause of Dr. Locke’s action, Mr. Quelch, and I do not intend to acquaint them with it, but I shall enlighten them to a certain extent. They will take my word for it that their headmaster’s action was fully justified.”

“Indeed?” repeated Mr. Quelch.

His look was hard and bitter.

“You informed me this morning, sir, that you were unaware yourself of the cause of your dismissal from Greyfriars.”

“I stated the facts, sir!” said Mr. Quelch icily.

“Then I shall be glad to hear, sir, how you reconcile your statement with this description in your own handwriting,” snorted the colonel.

And he tossed the sheet from Mr. Quelch’s writing-pad on the table before the Remove-master.

Mr. Quelch glanced at it carelessly.

Then he picked it up and scrutinised it. To the colonel’s surprise, he did not seem overwhelmed with confusion in the least.

“That is your property, sir?” said the colonel.

“Quite so; and I am quite at a loss to understand how it came into your possession,” said Mr. Quelch. “I had not missed it, but certainly it is my property.”

“You do not deny that it is written in your hand?”

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

“Certainly it is written in my hand,” he said. “Why should I deny it, Colonel Wharton?”

“This is effrontery, sir!” said the colonel sternly. “You are at a loss, you say, to understand how that paper came into my hands. It was handed to me by Dr. Locke.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Quelch dryly. “Then I am equally at a loss to know how it came into Dr. Locke’s hands.”

“It was handed him, as he explained to me, by a junior boy named Skinner, who picked it up in Masters’ Passage at Greyfriars on the day following the episode in the Remove Form-room which you have described to me.”

“I quite fail to understand why Skinner should hand a paper belonging to me to anyone else.”

“The letter was folded, and the boy did not know what it contained, as Dr. Locke tells me. He handed it to the Head, thinking that it was a paper belonging to some Form-master, and Dr. Locke naturally unfolded it and looked at it to ascertain to whom it

belonged.”

“Quite so. A very natural explanation,” said Mr. Quelch. “But I am still at a loss to know why Dr. Locke did not return it to me, as he must have known that it was my property.”

“Dr. Locke did not care to enter into a discussion of such a matter, sir,” said the colonel. “Very properly, too, in my opinion. He declined to speak one word to you on such a subject. But you, sir, were perfectly well aware of what you had written, though you did not know that it had fallen into Dr. Locke’s hands. You cannot, therefore, have been ignorant of the cause of your dismissal. You must have known that Dr. Locke had somehow discovered your true opinion of him, sir.”

“But the paper does not refer to Dr. Locke!” gasped Mr. Quelch.

“What?” ejaculated the colonel. “Good gad! To whom, then, does that paper refer, Mr. Quelch?”

“To Dr. Trumpington, who was headmaster of Greyfriars in the last century, at the time of the great barring-out.”

“Wha-a-at? A headmaster of a hundred years ago?” exclaimed Colonel Wharton.

“Certainly. This sheet is one of hundreds, the written notes I have made for my ‘History of Greyfriars’.”

“Your—your—your ‘History of Greyfriars’!” stuttered the colonel.

“Certainly,” said Mr. Quelch. “On the afternoon when the episode in the Remove Form-room occurred I was busy with my history, and for that reason I forgot, for once, the hour of class. I remember writing out this very note that afternoon—it was left on my table with a large number of others, when I was suddenly called away to the Remove-room.”

“Good gad!” exclaimed the colonel.

There was silence in the room for some moments.

Mr. Quelch’s face was very distressed.

He understood at last the reason of the Head’s sudden and unaccountable resentment and anger towards him; but he was not now feeling angry himself. He was only feeling deeply distressed at the pain he knew must have been given to his kind old friend by the discovery of his supposed disloyalty.

“I understand, sir,” said Colonel Wharton at last. “Please excuse any—ahem—expressions I may have said. I certainly took the same view of this paper, that was taken by Dr. Locke. No name is mentioned in it, and a reference to the headmaster of Greyfriars could only be supposed to refer to the present headmaster by anyone unacquainted with the circumstances. I beg you pardon, Mr. Quelch.”

“Not at all, sir,” said Mr. Quelch cordially. “I am only too thankful that your intervention allows this unfortunate misunderstanding to be explained. It is very unfortunate that this one paper, among so many others, should be the one to fall into Dr. Locke’s hands—a most lamentable chance.” Mr. Quelch paused suddenly.

“Indeed, I scarcely believe that it was a chance. The paper may have been placed in Dr. Locke’s hands with the intention of creating mischief. You have mentioned that it was Skinner who handed it to Dr. Locke, and I recall now that it was Skinner who was sent to call me to the Form-room that day, and that I left him in my study with my papers after caning him for impertinence. I shall question Skinner very closely. In the meantime, sir—”

“In the meantime, Mr. Quelch, I shall convey your explanation to Dr. Locke, who, I am sure, will be very glad to be enlightened,” said the colonel. “I will lose no time.”

There was a whir of a car on the road when the Remove fellows went in to dinner.

The colonel was gone.

"I wonder what the game is?" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Something on," said Squiff.

It was clear that something was on, and the Remove rebels could only wonder what it was. They were soon to know.

CHAPTER 30

Friends Once More!

Buzzzzzzzz!

Billy Bunter blinked round as the telephone-bell rang at High Oaks.

Dinner was over, and all the fellows excepting Bunter were out of doors. Mr. Quelch was strolling up and down on the terrace, with his hands clasped behind him, and a deeply thoughtful expression on his face. William George Bunter was frowsting in an armchair near the fire in the old hall when the telephone-bell rang. And William George Bunter immediately left that armchair and rolled away to the instrument.

William George was perfectly well aware that the telephone-call could not be for him. Had it been for him, indeed, he would not have been so keen on taking it. But Bunter had no doubt that the call came from Greyfriars, and Bunter wanted to know.

Something was going on—something of which Bunter knew nothing. Bunter wanted to know what it was, and intercepting a telephone-call seemed quite an easy way.

So the Owl of the Remove rolled hurriedly to the phone, hoping that that ring had not reached Mr. Quelch's ears, and dragging off the receiver before the bell could ring a second time.

He put the receiver to a fat ear, and grinned.

"Hallo," he remarked in the transmitter.

"My old friend!" came an agitated voice over the wires. Bunter jumped.

"Eh?"

"My old friend, Colonel Wharton, has explained the matter —explained the unhappy misunderstanding. How can I express my regret?"

Bunter blinked.

It was Dr. Locke's voice—the Head of Greyfriars was speaking. He seemed to be in a changed and chastened mood.

Bunter's curiosity was intense.

It was obvious that Dr. Locke had rung up High Oaks to speak to Mr. Quelch, and that he supposed that he was addressing that gentleman. The Owl of the Remove cheerfully left him in error.

"I was deceived," went on the Head's agitated voice. "I was deluded—but your own handwriting, my dear Quelch—"

"My hat!" murmured Bunter.

"What did you say, Mr. Quelch?"

"Oh! Ah! Please go on!" gasped Bunter, making his fat voice as deep as he could in the hope that the Head would take it for Mr. Quelch's.

Dr. Locke was in too disturbed a frame of mind just then to distinguish carefully the tones of a voice on the telephone wires.

"Your own handwriting, Quelch! No name was mentioned in the paper. I was naturally deluded. True, I should have known you better—I should have trusted you more implicitly. I realise that now."

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter as the Head paused, apparently like Brutus, for a reply.

"It was most unfortunate that the paper fell into my hands, my dear fellow, most unfortunate."

“What paper?” gasped Bunter, devoured by curiosity.

“What! The paper—that section of your ‘History of Greyfriars’ which was picked up by Skinner of the Remove and given to me—”

“Oh!” stuttered Bunter.

“How was I to guess, my dear Quelch, that the reference thereon was to a headmaster of Greyfriars of a hundred years ago?”

“Phew!”

“I was quite unaware that the paper was merely a written note belonging to your compilation of the History of Greyfriars. I am aware, now, of course, that such was the case; now that the matter is explained. I could not guess at the time. Could I?”

“Nunno!” gasped Bunter.

“It was very unfortunate that Skinner found that particular paper and handed it to me. I am sure that the boy was unaware of its contents—and was unconscious of the harm he was doing.”

“He, he, he!”

Bunter simply could not restrain that giggle.

He understood the whole matter now; and at the idea that Skinner had caused all the trouble without intending to do so, Bunter could not help chortling.

He remembered some remarks Skinner had made, before the trouble occurred, about the probability of Mr. Quelch getting the “sack”; remarks which had puzzled the Remove fellows and which had been very strangely borne out by subsequent happenings.

Those remarks of Skinner’s were no longer puzzling—to Bunter.

The Head might believe, if he liked, that Harold Skinner had caused all this trouble inadvertently. Bunter was not likely to believe it.

“He, he, he!”

“Bless my soul!” came the Head’s startled voice, as the transmitter faithfully transmitted that fat cackle to his ears. “Is—is—is not that Mr. Quelch! To whom am I speaking?”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter.

He realised that he had given himself away, and that his fat laugh had cut off the supply of information from Dr. Locke.

“Who is speaking?” rapped out the Head. “Whoever you are, call Mr. Quelch to the telephone at once. Do you hear?”

Bunter heard, but he did not answer. He did not intend to let it become known who had intercepted the Head’s call. He was quite well aware that he deserved a thrashing for his inquisitiveness, but Bunter always had a strong objection to getting what he deserved.

He replaced the receiver quietly, and rolled away.

Buzzzzzz!

“The telephone, sir,” said Juggins to Mr. Quelch, a few minutes later on the terrace.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Quelch, and he went to take the call.

Mr. Quelch sat at the telephone a good ten minutes, in conversation with Dr. Locke at Greyfriars.

His face was very bright and cheerful as he sat and talked with his old chief.

All was explained now—the clouds had rolled by.

The Head was full of regrets and apologies—he asked his old friend to forgive him, and his old friend was only too willing to do so. Colonel Wharton had been the means of clearing up a painful misunderstanding; and the two old gentlemen agreed that the colonel’s visit had been a blessing.

That Mr. Quelch was to resume his old position at Greyfriars, in all honour, was a foregone conclusion.

The Head begged him to return; and Mr. Quelch was only too glad, in his present state of enlightenment, to accede.

"I should have come over to High Oaks, my dear Quelch," said the Head, "but I could not delay—I desired to speak to you at the very earliest possible moment—to assure you of my regret, my remorse, my unshaken confidence and friendship."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Quelch, deeply moved, "need I say how deeply I appreciate your kindness, your benevolence? How deeply I regret that unfortunate misapprehension—"

"My fault entirely, my dear Quelch, and—"

"Not at all, sir! My carelessness was the prime cause—"

"I will not allow you to say so, my dear Quelch! I blame myself absolutely. You will return—"

"I shall return with pleasure, sir—"

"I shall await you with eagerness, my dear Quelch."

"I shall not lose a moment, sir."

Ten minutes at least—and at the end of that talk Mr. Quelch's face looked ten years younger! He was going back to the old school that he loved, where his best years had been spent; he was going to resume his old duties, and resume his labours on that celebrated "History of Greyfriars" which was the cause of all the trouble—plus Skinner. Mr. Quelch's steps were quite light and springy when he walked out of the house, to call together the Remove.

CHAPTER 31

All's Well That Ends Well!

"He, he, he!"

Thus William George Bunter.

Bunter was almost suffocating with mirth.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what's the jolly old joke?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Oh, dear! He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter.

Never had Billy Bunter been in possession of so huge a joke. He chuckled and cackled and gurgled with tears in his eyes.

"What's the cackle about!" demanded Peter Todd.

"He, he, he!" gasped Bunter.

"You fat dummy—"

"Oh dear! I say, you fellows, I've found it all out!" gasped Bunter. "It was Skinner all the time! He, he, he!"

"What was Skinner, ass?" asked Harry.

"He, he, he! He pulled the Head's leg, and pulled Quelch's leg—he, he, he! He started them rowing like two old donkeys! He, he, he! You fellows remember Skinner saying that Quelch would be sacked?"

"I remember," said Harry. "What about—"

"Well, and he was sacked, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but—"

"And Skinner did it! He, he, he!"

"You fat idiot, how could Skinner have done it?" demanded Bob Cherry. "What are

you burbling about?"

"He, he, he!"

"Explain, you fat chump!" roared Bob.

Billy Bunter got it out at last.

All the Remove gathered round to hear his tale of what he had learned on the telephone.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"Something about a former headmaster in Quelch's 'History of Greyfriars.' And Skinner got it to the Head, and the Head thought Quelch was writing rotten things about him," gurgled Bunter. "Skinner did the whole thing. That's how he knew Quelch was going to be sacked. He, he, he! He did it because Quelch licked him, you know. He, he, he!"

"The dirty trickster!" exclaimed Wharton.

"And you think it's funny, do you, you fat villain!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather! He, he, he! No end of a joke! He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "Fancy those two old donkeys! He, he, he! Yarooooogh!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter.

"That's because you think it funny for Skinner to make mischief," said Bob Cherry.

"Now give him another for listening to a private conversation on the telephone."

Bump!

"Do you still think it funny?" demanded Bob. "If you do we'll give you some more."

"Ow! No!" yelled Bunter. "It's not funny at all! Nothing of the kind. Leggo!"

Yarooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys!"

It was Mr. Quelch's voice.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"My boys," said Mr. Quelch, in a moved voice, "it has transpired that there was a—misunderstanding between Dr. Locke and myself. The Head was—hem!—deluded by—by certain peculiar circumstances. All is now explained, and Dr. Locke has requested me to resume my old position at Greyfriars."

"Oh, sir!"

"I shall return to Greyfriars immediately," said Mr. Quelch. "I have asked the Head, in the circumstances, to pardon my Form for rebellion and disobedience, and Dr. Locke has very kindly consented to do so, on condition that you return to Greyfriars at once."

"With you, sir?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"Certainly!"

"That's all we wanted, sir," said Lord Mauleverer. "If you're going back, sir, we'll all be jolly glad to go back."

"Yes, rather!"

The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Hurrah!"

"There will be no punishment if you boys return to your duty at once," said Mr. Quelch. "Please lose no time."

No time was lost.

The Remove had marched out of Greyfriars in support of their dismissed Form-master. Now that he was reinstated in all honour, the cause of the rebellion no longer existed. Certainly, it was only indirectly that the Remove rebellion had brought about

the reinstatement of Mr. Quelch. Still, he was reinstated, and that was the important point.

Mr. Quelch walked back to Greyfriars with his Form, and it was quite a triumphal march.

A crowd of Greyfriars fellows gathered to see them march in at the gates.

“Now for the lickings!” said Coker of the Fifth.

But Coker was mistaken. There were no lickings.

Mr. Quelch went in immediately to see the Head.

A little later the two gentlemen were seen walking in the quadrangle together, evidently on the best of terms; and all Greyfriars could see that the trouble, whatever it had been, was over. Both of them shook hands very fervently with Colonel Wharton, when that gentleman took his leave.

Later, Mr. Quelch had an interview with Skinner. He suspected very strongly that Skinner had not acted inadvertently or innocently in placing that paper in the hands of his headmaster. But Skinner affected complete ignorance, and Mr. Quelch dismissed him at last, unpunished, giving him the benefit of the doubt.

But Skinner did not long remain unpunished. The Remove did not give him the benefit of the doubt, for there was no doubt in their minds.

The Remove gave him the ragging of his life.

For two or three days after the return to Greyfriars, Skinner had more aches and pains than he could have counted, and it was borne in upon his mind once more that the way of the transgressor is hard.

At the temporary home of the Remove, where once a gilt-lettered board had displayed the legend: “High Oaks School”, there was now an estate agent’s board announcing: “This Valuable Building Land for Sale”.

And so ended the rebellion of the Greyfriars Remove.

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