



"QUIET! I feel sure I'm going to catch something in a minute."
(Puzzle: Find the Farmer)

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN

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FOREWORD

LAST year Billy Bunter came into his Own! Here he is a second time, hoping to meet with as cheery a reception as before; and accompanied as before by Sammy and Bessie. Other old acquaintances crowd these pages; including the Felgate fellows and King of the Islands, all specially written for this volume: for, many years ago—more than he really cares to remember—Frank Richards adopted a motto from Horace: *carmina non prius audita virginibus puerisque canto!* and he has spent happy weeks in chronicling the new adventures of old friends. The verdict he leaves to you, dear reader.

FRANK RICHARDS



The RIGHT BY THING!

FRANK RICHARDS

CHAPTER I

MINORITY OF ONE !

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob Cherry.

There was really no need for Bob to roar.

Neither Harry Wharton nor Frank Nugent was deaf; and they were quite near at hand: looking out of the window of No. 1 Study when Bob looked in at the door.

But it was one of Bob's little ways to put on steam when he was in exuberant spirits—his usual state! There was rain that afternoon, which had damped everything except, apparently, Bob's spirits. Judging by his cherry ruddy face, Bob Cherry couldn't have cared less.

It had been a fine summer's morning. It was the rainiest of rainy afternoons. Black clouds had rolled in from the sea. Rain splashed on windows and window-sills. The old elms were weeping. The cricket-ground was doubtless getting more and more like a swimming-pool every minute. Which had a somewhat disgruntling effect on Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove who had planned a practice game for that afternoon, in preparation for the match with St. Jim's, due in a week's time. The rain washed it out. The hardiest cricketer could scarcely have thought of urging the flying ball, with the water coming down almost in sheets.

A day earlier or a day later it would not have mattered. Remove men could grind Latin with Quelch, or French with Mossoo, or maths with Lascelles,

while rain splashed unheeded on window-panes. But a sudden heavy rain-storm on a half-holiday was the limit.

"Blow the rain!" Harry Wharton was saying, as he stared from a wet window into a drenched quadrangle. Nobody was to be seen out of the House. Even Quelch, the Remove master, who faced almost all weathers in his walks abroad, had given it a miss. Undoubtedly the Remove cricketers had to give it a miss also.

"Bother it!" agreed Frank Nugent.

"It would rain on a half-holiday!"

"It would!"

"Looks like cricket, doesn't it?"

"Hardly!"

"Oh, blow!"

"What about table-tennis in the Rag?!" suggested Nugent.

"Blow table-tennis in the Rag."

That duet was interrupted by the hurling open of the study door, and a stentorian voice waking the echoes of the Remove passage.

Wharton and Nugent looked round from the window. The cheery ruddy face in the doorway certainly presented a more agreeable view than the rainy quad without. Frank Nugent smiled. Harry Wharton did not. He was not feeling like smiling.

"Enjoying the weather?" he asked, sarcastically.

"Nice weather for ducks, at any rate!" said Bob.

"Fathead!"

"Thanks! What's the odds so long as you're 'appy?" argued Bob, "Lucky we're getting it this Wednesday instead of next, when we're playing St. Jim's—."

"There's that!" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

"Br-r-r-r!" was Harry Wharton's rejoinder. His thoughts were in the present, not the future, tense.

"Well, what about getting up a game?" asked Bob. "Must do something on a rainy day."

"Nugent's suggested table-tennis," said Harry Wharton, still sarcastic, "Are you going to suggest marbles! Or hop-sotch in the passage!"

"Anything but! What about cricket!"

"In that downpour, ass!"

"No, in this passage."

"Rot!" said Harry Wharton tersely.

"Is the rotfulness terrific, my esteemed Wharton?" Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's dark smiling face looked in over Bob's shoulder.

"Jolly good idea, I think," said Johnny Bull, looking in over the other shoulder, "Can't loaf about doing nothing, like Bunter."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"We've played passage cricket before!" urged Bob Cherry.

"And a jolly row there was, last time, when Smithy knocked a ball through the landing window," answered Harry.

"Accidents will happen! We'll tell Smithy to be more careful—."

"I can see that hot-headed ass being careful!"

"Well, dash it all, a fellow must do something," said Bob, "Do you want to stick in the study saying things about the weather!"

"Blow the weather!"

"Oh, quite! But that doesn't help! You don't want to frowst in the Rag in an armchair along with Bunter, do you?"

"Ass!"

"Or join Skinner and Snoop in a smoke in their study—?"

"Fathead!"

"Mark Linley's swotting Horace in my study. Like to help him dig up what old Flaccus meant, if he meant anything?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

None of those resources, evidently, appealed to the captain of the Remove. He cast a glance towards the window. If he hoped to see a sign of lessening rain, there was nothing in it. Torrents were coming down.

"It won't stop yet awhile," said Bob, following his glance, "We can get up a game. Smithy's found some cracks in the floor for sticking up the stumps—."

"And helped them with his pocket-knife, I expect."

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed Bob, "O.K. so long as they stick up. Come on, old man—don't be a wet blanket—there's enough wet about, without that. There's a dozen fellows keen on it."

"Me for one!" said Johnny Bull.

"And me anotherfully," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Quelch—!" began Harry.

"Oh, he's gone out," interrupted Bob, "Rain won't stop Henry from going on his grind. Anyhow we shouldn't be heard from Masters' Studies. I know it's against the rules: but the rain has washed out everything else, so it may as well wash out the rules, for once."

"Rot!"

"Can't play without our captain," urged Johnny Bull. "Be a sport, old man."

"I happen to be Head Boy of the form, as well as captain. Quelch expects his Head Boy to keep some sort of order in this passage, even on a rainy day."

Bob Cherry made a grimace.

"Oh, all right!" he sighed, "If you're going to mount the high horse, I'm done. Let's wash it out!"

"I'm not mounting the high horse! Quelch gave me a royal jaw last time, and I don't want the mixture as before."

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh, exchanged glances. It was true that Head Boy had responsibilities that were not shared by

the other fellows in the form. But they could not help thinking that the disgruntling effect of the rain had something to do with it.

But the "Famous Five" of Greyfriars always pulled together. If their leader turned down the proposition, the Co. were at least prepared to argue the point.

There was a pause; which was broken by a strident voice from the passage. Herbert Vernon-Smith looked into the study.

"You men ready?" he asked, "I've pitched the stumps up the passage. Single wicket—bowl from the landing. It'll be a game, if it won't be cricket. Come on!" The Bounder of Greyfriars looked round from face to face, "Anything up!"

"Wharton's against it, Smithy," said Bob Cherry, uncomfortably, "Wash it out. Might get up a rag on Coker of the Fifth, instead—"

The Bounder gave Harry Wharton a very unpleasant look.

"Never mind Coker of the Fifth," he snapped, "We're going to play passage cricket. What's the objection, Wharton?"

"Quelch—!"

"Who cares for Quelch?"

"I do, if you don't, Smithy."

"Stick in your study, then, and keep out of it," said Vernon-Smith, "You needn't join up if you funk a spot of trouble with Quelch. You fellows coming—or are you going to sit around being good little dear schoolboys who love their kind teachers like Wharton?"

"Oh, shut up, Smithy!" exclaimed Frank Nugent, sharply; while Harry Wharton's face crimsoned.

"Rot!" snapped the Bounder. "We've got to do something: and a sermon from Wharton won't amuse us. I'm going to play passage cricket, and so are a dozen other fellows. If you're funky, stick here, and keep out of a row if there is one. Better keep the door shut, so that the beaks will know that you were not mixed up in it!" added Smithy, with a sneer: and he stalked out of the study and banged the door after him.

Harry Wharton breathed hard. His friends looked red and discomfited. Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"We can't stick in here, and let the fellows think we're afraid to get mixed up in it!" he growled.

"Please yourself!" said Harry Wharton, curtly.

"Well, look here," said Bob. "You're Head Boy, and perhaps you ought to keep clear! But we're only common-or-garden chaps, and if there's a row there's no reason why we shouldn't take it like the other fellows—"

"I've said please yourself!" said Harry, dryly.

"Well, if you don't mind—!" said Bob. There was already a tramping of feet, and a buzz of voices, in the passage: and Bob, undoubtedly, was keen to join the crowd.

"How often do you want me to say please yourself?"

"Oh, all right!" he said, "I'll please myself." And he opened the door, and walked out of the study.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh made a step to follow, but paused, with a somewhat perplexed look on his dusky face. Finally he followed Bob. Johnny Bull paused still longer: Johnny was slow and sure, and never did anything in a hurry. But he gave a nod at last.

"I'm going," he said, "I'm not Head Boy, thank goodness: just one of the mob. What's good enough for the rest is good enough for me." And Johnny walked out in his turn.

Only Frank Nugent remained with the captain of the Remove. Wharton's eyes turned on him with sarcastic inquiry.

"Aren't you joining up too?" he asked.

"Not if you don't," answered Nugent, "But—!" He paused.

"Well?"

"Well, I think it's rather rot," said Nugent. "There's always a spot of ragging when the rain keeps fellows indoors. We're not expected to be little tin angels, you know. A fellow doesn't like to be thought funky."

Harry Wharton laughed: not wholly a pleasant laugh.

"That leaves me in a minority of one!" he said. "All right—we'll chance it." He crossed to the corner of the study, where a cricket bat was standing, and picked it up, "Come on."

Nugent followed him from the study. A few minutes later "passage cricket" was going strong. It was not remarkably like cricket, perhaps: but it was lively, and it was noisy—undoubtedly it was noisy. In spite of the rain, most of the Remove fellows were after all enjoying life.

CHAPTER II

TOO LATE!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

Bunter was amused.

The sight of a group of three angry, annoyed "beaks", standing at the foot of the staircase, exchanging opinions in acidulated tones, was amusing to Bunter.

Generally, sounds from the studies above could not be heard at the foot of the big staircase. But sounds could now be heard—quite loud sounds. Indeed, those sounds were so loud, that they had reached Billy Bunter's fat ears, in an armchair in the Rag, and caused the fat Owl of the Remove to roll forth, to ascertain what was going on.

Something was going on, upstairs. That was only too clear. Innumerable feet could not tramp on old oak planks without noise. A cricket ball could not bounce from study doors without a din. Fellows could not collide in rushing after it without an uproar. Neither could they shout at the top of their voices without waking many echoes. Cricket, really and truly, was not an indoor game. The Remove men were warming to it, and the more they warmed to it, the louder became the din.

"Scandalous!" said Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. Prout, plump and portly, frowned portentously; "Such a disturbance—"

"The Remove, I think!" said little Mr. Capper, the master of the Fourth, "Yes, the Remove—!"

"Quelch's boys!" said Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, compressing his thin lips hard, "Quelch's boys, undoubtedly."

"Such a riot—!" said Mr. Capper.

"Unparalleled!" boomed Prout.

"Quelch should be here," said Mr. Hacker, "I would intervene personally, but Quelch resents any intervention in his form, as you all know—"

"Only too well!" boomed Prout. "Only too well!"

"Probably Quelch has gone out—!" suggested mild Mr. Capper.

"Quelch has not gone out!" answered Mr. Hacker, "Quelch is in his study. He must have heard this din—it is audible all over the House. Yet he takes no notice. No doubt his view is that his form may do as they please."

There was a sudden roar from above.

"Look out—!"

"Get that ball, Squiff—!"

"Oh, my hat! It's over!"

Thud! thud! thud! came from the upper staircase. Apparently the ball, propelled by the bat at one end of the Remove passage, had shot across the landing at the other end: and, eluding the numerous fieldsmen, whizzed over the banisters. Now it thudded from stair to stair on its way down. It was followed by trampling feet on the upper staircase, and a scramble on the middle landing. Even the reckless Removites, perhaps, were rather anxious that it should not escape as far as the ground floor.

"Oh, crickey!" murmured Billy Bunter, blinking at the three beaks through his big spectacles. They looked more thunderous than ever.

"This is intolerable!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker.

"Unparalleled!" repeated Mr. Prout.

Mr. Hacker stared up the staircase. The ball had rolled across the middle landing, and started on a merry descent of the lower stairs. But Herbert Vernon-Smith flung himself after it, and grabbed it just in time—almost tumbling down the stairs himself as he did so.

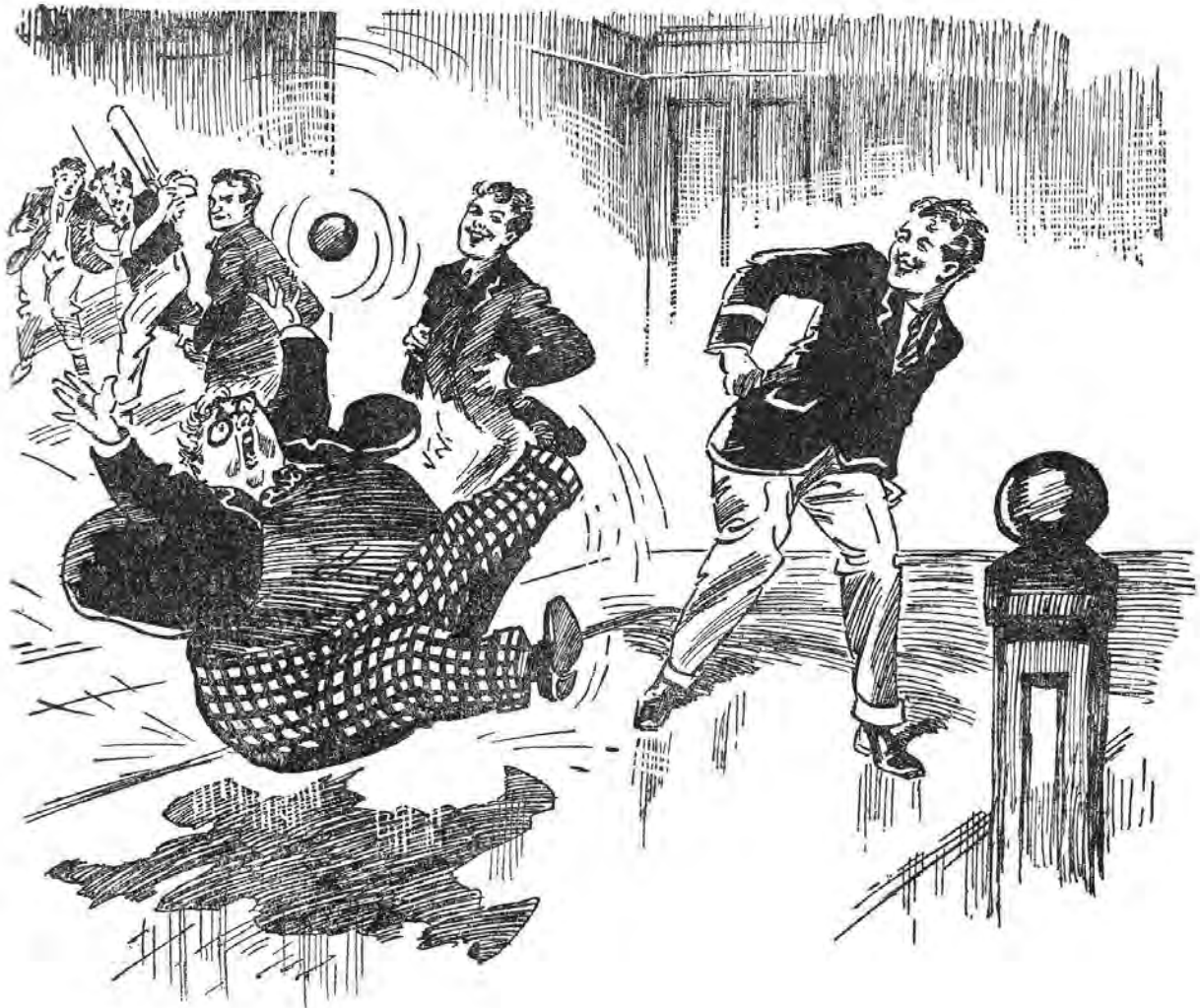
"Ware beaks!" called out Squiff, catching sight of Mr. Hacker's sour face looking up from below.

The Bounder cast a breathless glance down.

"Only the Acid Drop!" he called back. And he disappeared up the upper staircase with the ball.

Mr. Hacker stood almost trembling with anger. Smithy, perhaps, did not realise that his voice would reach Hacker's ears: or perhaps he did not care. The Bounder was always reckless. Hacker, no doubt, was aware that he was nicknamed the "Acid Drop" among the juniors: but it was not a nickname that could possibly gratify any master.

"Upon my word!" breathed Mr. Hacker. He was aware of a faint smile on Mr. Capper's face, and suspected a twinkle even in Prout's eye. They had heard him called the "Acid Drop". It was the limit. Hacker spun round, with billowing gown. "This is—is intolerable! As Quelch does not choose to come, I shall call him—I shall point out to him that his boys cannot be permitted to riot in the House."



And Hacker, with thin lips set like a vice, billowed away in the direction of the Remove master's study.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Billy Bunter.

Hacker had gone for Quelch! Why Quelch had not arrived on the scene already was rather perplexing, unless he had suddenly become deaf. But there was no doubt that he would arrive now, and promptly: and when he did arrive, it was certain that the thunder would roll. And Billy Bunter, with the kindly intention of warning the Removites that the storm was about to break, rolled to the staircase, circumnavigated Prout and Capper, and mounted. Up he went, somewhat at the pace of a tired snail. He rolled across the middle landing, snailed up the upper staircase, and rolled breathlessly on the upper landing, where Vernon-Smith was about to bowl to Harry Wharton, at the improvised wicket at the other end of the Remove passage.

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "You joining up, Bunter?"

"Eh? Oh! No! No fear! But I say—"

"Look out!" came a roar, "Get that ball!" Shouting and trampling of feet drowned Billy Bunter's fat voice.

Smithy had bowled, and the ball came whizzing back, hot from the bat. The fieldsmen in the passage had no luck, and it whizzed out on the landing, where five or six fellows rushed for it. It was rather unfortunate for Billy Bunter that he was in the way: for fieldsmen in a hurry had no time to go round Bunter. The fat Owl of the Remove found himself suddenly up-ended, and he sat down on the landing with a bump that made the old oak planks creak. He sat and spluttered.

"Grrrrrhgh! Grooogh! Oh, crickey! Oooogh!"

Nobody heeded Bunter. Bob Cherry just saved the ball before it slipped through the banisters and dropped into space. He returned it with a whiz to Vernon-Smith, who caught it with his left hand, and prepared to bowl again. The fat Owl spluttered unregarded.

"Urrrrrggh! I say—wurrgh! Groogh! Beasts! Urrrrggh."

"Keep out of the way, you fat ass!" called out Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—urrrggh—!"

"Roll off, barrel."

"Beast! I say—oooooch!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I came up here to—ooogh—wooogh—grooogh—!"

Bob Cherry, laughing, cut across the landing to give the breathless fat Owl a hand up. He heaved the fattest member of the Greyfriars Remove to his feet.

"There you are, fatty! Now keep out of the way!" he said.

"Oh, really, Cherry—ooogh—."

"You can't go to your study now, ass—do you want to stop the ball with your face! It would look less like a face than ever if you did."

"Urrrgh! I ain't going to my study!" gasped Bunter, "I came up—grooch—to tell you fellows—ooogh!—that Hacker—"

"Never mind the Acid Drop."

"Urrrggh! He's gone—urrgh—to call Quelch!" Bunter got it out at last. "Quelch will be up here in a tick—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob. "Look out, you men—Bunter says that Quelch is coming up—Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles—here he comes!"

It was too late!

CHAPTER III

UNFINISHED GAME

KNOCK!
It was not a tap—it was a sharp knock, almost a bang, at the door of Mr. Quelch's study. It caused the Remove master to give quite a jump. His rather bony fingers came to rest on the keys of his typewriter: the click of the keys, which had been almost incessant, died away: and Henry Samuel Quelch stared across at his door, with quite a grim look. He was startled, and he was annoyed.

Quelch had been enjoying that half-holiday. Rain had washed out his usual "grind": but there was still balm in Gilead, so to speak: in the shape of the celebrated "History of Greyfriars" upon which Quelch had been engaged for more years than most Remove fellows could remember. Rain splashed on his study window unheeded. The typewriter clicked merrily. Quelch, deep in his subject, forgot time and space.

He was, perhaps, dimly aware of some unusual sounds in the distance. But he did not heed them. He was concentrated on the work in hand: and perhaps the clicking of the machine, close at hand, helped to dim-out sounds from afar. At all events, Quelch had not heeded those sounds of revelry which had drawn several other beaks from their studies, and even William George Bunter from his armchair in the Rag. He heeded nothing till that knock, or rather bang, came at his door: and then, at last, he sat up and took notice.

"What—what—?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. He did not want interruptions: but a tap at his door would have been in the normal course. That sharp loud knock was not at all normal. Quelch's brows fixed in a frown as he stared at the door, and ejaculated "What—what—?" If a Remove boy had ventured to give such a knock at his door, that Remove boy was booked for closer acquaintance with Quelch's cane.

The door flew open. It was not a Remove boy who presented himself: it was Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, with a very angry face.

Quelch's gimlet-eyes almost bored into him.

"Really, Mr. Hacker!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Quelch! I am here to apprise you of a riot in your form, of which you are apparently not aware!" rapped Mr. Hacker. "Will you be kind enough, sir, to put a stop to a disturbance which is becoming quite intolerable!"

"I was not aware—"

"No doubt, sir. But you are aware now, I presume! You have only to listen!" snapped Mr. Hacker.

That certainly was the case. Now that the study door was open, the sounds from afar were very much more audible. Subconsciously, no doubt, Quelch had been aware that something must be going on: but he had not heeded. He heeded now.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "There is certainly an uproar somewhere—I have been busy, Mr. Hacker, and had not noticed it—"

"Now that you notice it, sir, will you have the kindness to step out and speak to your boys!"

Mr. Quelch's face set, and his gimlet-eyes glinted like cold steel. If there was anything calculated to touch Quelch on the raw—to get his goat, as Fisher T. Fish would have expressed it—it was the intervention of another "beak" in matters pertaining to his form. Even Prout, who often bestowed kindly but unwelcome counsel on his colleagues, seldom ventured to do so with Quelch. The Remove master bristled at Hacker's words.

"Certainly I will do so, Mr. Hacker, if the boys of my form are concerned in this disturbance," he rapped. "Have you any reason—?"

"This riot, sir, is going on in the Remove passage, and all, or almost all, of your boys are concerned in it!" retorted Mr. Hacker.

"If you are sure of that, Mr. Hacker—"

"I have not only heard them, but seen them, sir, and one of them, Vernon-Smith, applied an opprobrious epithet to me!" yapped Mr. Hacker. "If your boys, sir, are to be permitted to turn the House into a bear-garden on a half-holiday, they are not, I presume, to be allowed to apply insulting nicknames to members of Dr. Locke's staff."

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

The look on his face was almost deadly. Even Mr. Hacker was satisfied, as he saw it, that the Remove would be dealt with faithfully, when their form-master arrived on the scene.

"I will go at once, sir!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Very good, sir," snapped back Hacker, and he faded out of the study.

Mr. Quelch picked up a cane. Seldom had the Remove master been so angry. His work was interrupted: his absorption in his "History of Greyfriars", the solace of his leisure hours, had been rudely shattered. His boys were out of hand: and Quelch was a strict disciplinarian. Complaint had been made of his form: and worst of all, the complaint was well founded and justified. Quelch put the cane under his arm, and rustled out of the study after Hacker: and the

look on his face was more than enough to have made the Removites, had they seen it, quite tired of cricket as an indoor game. They were going to see it, soon!

"Oh! Here is Quelch, at last!" boomed Prout. "Quelch, you hear what is going on—you hear—"

"I am not deaf, Mr. Prout!"

"What? what? Really, Quelch, I must say—I am bound to say—I feel compelled to say, Quelch—"

Quelch was gone before Prout could get further. He did not exactly run up the stairs. But he mounted them very quickly, his gown flying behind him. Prout was left to boom unheeded.

Mr. Quelch arrived on the upper landing like a thundercloud. He heard Bob Cherry's voice as he arrived. The news that Quelch was coming would doubtless have caused a general and rapid exodus from the scene, had it come in time. But it had come too late.

A moment ago, hubbub had reigned on the landing. But as that grim figure arrived, with frowning brow and glinting eyes, there was sudden silence. Even the reckless Bounder, about to bowl along the passage to the captain of the Remove at the other end, paused, the ball glued to his hand. Consternation reigned. There was almost a dead silence, as Mr. Quelch swept on the landing.

"Cherry!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Bob.

"What is all this!"

"Oh! We—we—we—we were playing cricket, sir! I—I hope we—we—we haven't been making much noise, sir!"

If Bob hoped that not much noise had been made, it showed that he had a hopeful nature! Certainly, nobody had intended to make noise enough to draw Quelch from his lair. It had just happened.

As Bob finished stammering, a voice came from the Remove passage. The fellows up the passage had not yet seen Quelch. It was Harry Wharton's voice that called.

"Are you sending down that ball, Smithy?"

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He rustled across the landing, and stared up the passage. A silent crowd of juniors, behind him, looked at one another. The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. The other fellows looked dismayed. Undoubtedly there had been more noise than was judicious. A little noise, among a crowd of junior school-boys kept indoors by the rain might have been excused. But the Remove fellows realised that there had not been a little noise. There had been a lot!

Mr. Quelch did not heed the silent crowd behind him on the landing. His eyes fixed on the batsman at the wicket up the passage: no other person than Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, and Quelch's trusted Head Boy. And if his speaking countenance had been grim before, its grimness now intensified. Head Boy of the form should have been endeavouring, at least, to

keep such rowdiness within bounds. Instead of which, evidently he was taking a leading part in it. Never had Quelch looked so grim. The fabled basilisk could hardly have looked grimmer.

"Wharton!"

"Oh!" ejaculated the captain of the Remove. He stared along the passage at the grim face at the landing end.

He was ready for Smithy to bowl again. But he did not expect Smithy to bowl now. Indoor cricket in the Remove was booked to be an unfinished game. Wharton's face crimsoned. Against his better judgment, he had joined in this noisy "rag": or rather, had allowed himself to be dragged into it. What might really have been expected had now accrued: Quelch had come on the scene. Harry Wharton felt, at the moment like kicking himself: and still more like kicking Herbert Vernon-Smith. His face burned as he met the gimlet-eyes glinting at him from the landing end of the passage.

Quelch's gimlet glance took in the scene: fieldsmen scattered along the wide passage: the stumps pitched in cracks in the floor: cracks that had certainly been helped out, as Wharton had remarked, by the Bounder's pocket-knife. And his Head Boy at that illicit wicket!

"Oh!" repeated Harry, "Yes, sir!"

"Come here!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "All of you."

"Very well, sir."

Harry Wharton leaned his bat on the wall, and came down the passage: followed by the others. And a silent crowd, on the landing, faced their form-master's gimlet-eye: everyone of them doing his best to avoid meeting it.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEAVY HAND!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir!" said Harry, quietly.

"There has been a disturbance here—a most unseemly disturbance. Several of the masters have been disturbed, and complaint has been made to me. I find you taking a leading part in it. That is not what I should have expected of my Head Boy."

Wharton stood silent. He was singled out for the sharpest edge of Quelch's wrath, which was only to be expected. He was Head Boy: and he could not explain that he had been influenced by the Bounder's jeers, and the unreflecting example of his friends. All he could do now was to "take it". He took it in silence.

"We were all in it, sir—!" ventured Bob Cherry.

The gimlet-eye glinted at Bob.

"I am aware of that, Cherry! Every boy present will go into Extra School on Saturday afternoon, for French with Monsieur Charpentier. If this riot should be renewed, every boy will be caned."

The Bounder winked at Tom Redwing, with the eye furthest from Quelch. Really, the "riot" was not likely to be renewed, after Quelch's visit to the Remove quarters. Nothing could have been less likely.

"With you, Wharton, I must deal more severely," continued Mr. Quelch; and Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. Most of the juniors expected to see Quelch slip the cane from under his arm into his hand. However, the Remove master stopped short of that. The cane remained under his arm—for the present. "Wharton! You will go into your study, and remain there till tea-time, and write lines from the first book of the Aeneid. I shall expect two hundred lines by tea-time."

"Very well, sir!" said Harry.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" The Bounder started a little. Apparently he too was to be singled out: he did not know why. True, he had been the noisiest and most reckless of the whole crowd, from sheer love of rowdiness, if that counted. He had quite forgotten Hacker's sour face on the staircase.

"Vernon-Smith, you have been guilty of impertinence, indeed insolence, to one of my colleagues!" said Mr. Quelch, sternly.

"Oh!" murmured the Bounder. He remembered Hacker; and realised that the "Acid Drop" must have heard him.

A sullen look came over his hard face. Everyone in the Remove knew that there was no love lost between Quelch and Hacker. In spite of that, or perhaps all the more because of it, Quelch was not likely to allow impertinence from a Remove boy to the master of the Shell to pass unpunished. He had come down heavy on his Head Boy; but it was the Bounder, after all, who was booked for "toco" in its severest form. The cane was slipping down into Quelch's hand now.

"Mr. Hacker informs me that you applied a—hem—an opprobrious epithet to him, Vernon-Smith."

"I haven't spoken to Mr. Hacker, sir."

Mr. Quelch knitted his brows.

"Did you, or did you not, utter a derogatory nickname referring to Mr. Hacker, Vernon-Smith?" he rapped.

"Everyone calls Mr. Hacker the Acid Drop, sir!" said Vernon-Smith, sullenly.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch. "I trust that such disrespect is not usual here, Vernon-Smith. At all events, it is my duty to punish it, with severity, when it comes to my notice. You will bend over and touch your toes, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder's eyes glittered. He had cared little or nothing whether Mr.

Hacker heard that "opprobrious epithet" when he uttered it. But he had to care now, under Quelch's stern eye, with the cane swishing in Quelch's hand. It was not uncommon for Smithy's recklessness to lead to painful consequences.

Slowly, very slowly, he bent over, and his finger-tips touched his toes—the appropriate attitude for "whops". The cane swished in the air.

Whop! whop! whop!

The crowd of Removites on the landing looked on in silence. That Quelch was deeply angry was evident, for the swipes of the cane rang almost like pistol-shots. Not a sound came from Vernon-Smith. He was as hard as nails: and it was the Bounder's pride, too, to show the other fellows that he could take a whopping without giving a sign. He set his teeth and was silent.

Whop! whop! whop!

It was a full "six". Even the sixth swipe did not draw a sound from the hardy Bounder. But he had to clench his teeth to keep it back.

Mr. Quelch tucked the cane under his arm again. He cast one stern glance round over the silent crowd of juniors, and walked across the landing to the stairs. A far squeak arrested his progress.

"I—I—I say, sir—!"

Mr. Quelch glanced at Bunter.

"You need not speak, Bunter."

"Oh, really, sir!" Bill Bunter did not agree with his form-master on that point at all. He simply had to speak. Every Remove boy present was booked for "Extra" on Saturday afternoon: and Bunter was present. But the fat Owl had not been taking part in the rag. He had arrived on the scene hardly a minute before Quelch himself. Bunter was a quite innocent party: justice required that he should be excluded from the general sentence. Bunter wanted to make that clear. It was of the first importance—to Bunter. "I—I say, sir—I—I wasn't—I mean I didn't—I never——"

"That will do, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—but—I wasn't never didn't—" stuttered the fat Owl, "I—I wasn't here, sir—"

"What? You are here, Bunter—"

"Oh! Yes! But I never wasn't—I mean I didn't—I—oh, crikey!"

Mr. Quelch rustled on, unheeding, and disappeared down the stairs: leaving the fat Owl blinking after him, through his big spectacles, in great dismay.

"I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter fairly howled in his indignation. "I say. I wasn't in it—was I? I only came up to tip you fellows that Quelch was coming—I jolly well wish I hadn't now. Me for Extra when I haven't done a thing! I say, Wharton, you're Head Boy—you go after Quelch and tell him I hadn't done anything—I say, Wharton, you beast, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!" yelled Bunter.

But Harry Wharton did walk away. He went back to No. 1 Study, followed

by his friends, all of them with glum faces. William George Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

Tom Redwing slipped his arm through the Bounder's, and led him up the passage to No. 4 Study. Smithy's face was set, and his eyes were smouldering. The "six" had told on him, and though his pride kept him silent, he could not resist a painful wriggle. The door of No. 4 closed on them.

In No. 1 Study, five fellows looked as if they were not at their bonniest. Even Bob Cherry, for once, did not seem to be enjoying life. Harry Wharton, in a rather grim silence, sorted out Virgil, and propped that great poet up against the inkstand on the table. The rain was still dashing and splashing on the window, but that did not matter much now to the captain of the Remove: he was booked to spend the remainder of the afternoon in that study, grinding out Latin lines. He sat down at the table, dipped his pen in the ink, and glanced at four glum faces, with a faint smile.

"You fellows had better cut," he said. "Dear old Virgil for me."

"It's rotten, old chap," said Nugent.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"All our fault," said Bob. "I—I thought Quelch had gone out! But—but I suppose we did kick up rather a row—"

"More than rather," said Harry. "It can't be helped now. If Quelch hadn't been in, some of the prefects would have come up."

"Bother the Acid Drop!" grunted Johnny Bull."

"Better not let him hear you call him that." I fancy Smithy's sorry he spoke, by this time."

"But I say, it's awfully rotten about Saturday!" said Bob. "No cricket to-day, and none on Saturday—and we're playing St. Jim's next Wednesday—"

"After the esteemed feast comes the reckoning which makes Jack a dull boy, and saves a stitch in time, as the English proverb remarkably observes," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, sadly.

"It's all our fault," said Frank Nugent, remorsefully, "we practically chivvied you into it, Harry, and now you've got this—"

"Rot!" said Wharton, lightly. "A Head Boy who lets himself be chivvied into breaking the rules deserves what he gets for it. I've no kick coming."

"Well, I'm glad you look at it like that!" said Bob, relieved. Harry Wharton glanced at him, and laughed.

He was aware that there was a stubborn spot in his temper: and his friends would not have been surprised had he sat down to those lines in a mood of resentment. Fortunately he had also the saving gift of common sense. Quelch had been angry, and he had come down hard: but he had been just, and Harry Wharton was able to see it. Neither was he in the least inclined to reproach his friends for having been the thoughtless cause of landing him in a "row" with his form-master. He blamed himself and no one else. But it certainly was a relief to the Co. to see him taking it so cheerfully.

"Well, let's get down to the Rag," said Bob. "Might get up some boxing, if that foul rain doesn't stop. Look here, I'll round up Squiff and Browney and Oggy and old Marky, and we'll fix up a four-handed mill, what?" Bob Cherry's thoughts always ran on strenuous lines.

Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed Bob from the study. Frank Nugent lingered a moment at the door. It was rough luck on Harry Wharton, shut in his study for the afternoon, with no better company than P. Vergilius Maro.

"If you'd rather I stopped, Harry—!"

Wharton looked round.

"What rot!" he said. "I've got to stick here—you haven't! Cut along and get going with the other fellows. But for goodness sake, not too much row in the Rag—Quelch will be all ears now!"

"Right-ho, then."

Frank Nugent followed his friends. Harry Wharton settled down to lines. Latin ran steadily under his pen. The rain ceased to splash on the window, at last, and a burst of sunshine lighted up the study. Voices floated up from the quad: the Greyfriars fellows were getting out, glad to get out after the rain. But there was no getting out for the Head Boy with whom Mr. Quelch was displeased. He had to remain in that study and write lines till tea-time. He rose from the table, and threw the window wide open, to let in the summer breeze and the sunshine. Then he sat down again, and resumed transcribing the deathless verse of Publius Vergilius Maro: of which the beauties, it is probable, were somewhat lost on him, in the circumstances.

CHAPTER V

BUNTER BEGS FOR IT!

"I SAY, Harry, old chap—!"

"Cut off!"

"But I say—"

"Hook it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Scat!"

"Beast!" roared Billy Bunter, indignantly. He stood in the doorway of No. 1 Study, blinking at the junior busy at the table, through his big spectacles in indignant wrath.

Harry Wharton did not even look up as he answered. Truth to tell, he was not in the best of tempers: and in no mood to be bothered by the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove.

He was dissatisfied with himself for having allowed the Bounder's jeers to influence him: and for having followed the lead of others when he ought to have given a lead himself. Nor was he quite satisfied with Quelch: who had been just, no doubt, but undoubtedly severe. And he was concerned about the cricket. No games practice had been possible in the rain that day: and all the cricketing fellows were booked for "Extra" on Saturday, the only other half-holiday before the St. Jim's match. And a team had to be at the top of its form to go over to St. Jim's and meet cricketers like Tom Merry and Co.

Added to these troublesome thoughts, the sun had come out after the rain, and was blazing down on the quad, and crowds of fellows were out of doors—while he had to "stick" in his study, grinding lines. It was no use hurrying over them, dashing them off at top speed as fellows often did: for he had been ordered to remain in his study till tea-time: and he had to obey that order, or hunt for more trouble with Quelch. Possibly Quelch's view was that detention in his study would keep him out of mischief: a rather disparaging view for him to take of his Head Boy, and not at all gratifying to Wharton.

Altogether, the captain of the Remove was in a considerably disgruntled state: his brow was clouded, and that cloud did not lift at the dulcet sound of Billy Bunter's fat voice. If Nugent had come up, or if old Mauly had dropped in, it might have been a relief, as a respite from P. Vergilius Maro. But William George Bunter did not come as a relief. Even Virgil's company was preferable to Bunter's.

So he went on with his lines, heedless of an indignant fat Owl blinking at him from the doorway. What Bunter wanted he did not know. Neither did he want to know. His pen scratched on regardless.

But Billy Bunter was not to be ignored like this. His concentrated blink at the top of Harry Wharton's bent head was so expressive, that it might almost have cracked his spectacles. But it produced no effect whatever on the captain of the Remove. Lines continued to run under his pen.

"Look here, Wharton," hooted Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you that I ain't going in to Extra on Saturday, when I never did a thing. See!"

"Buzz off!"

"Not a thing!" said Bunter. "I came up to tip the fellows that Quelch was coming! That's all. I wasn't in it. Tain't fair! You're Head Boy, Wharton, and it's up to you. You go down and tell Quelch that I wasn't in it, see!"

Harry Wharton looked up, at last, impatiently.

"If that's so, go and tell Quelch yourself," he rapped.

"Well, he mightn't believe me!" said Bunter. "Quelch has doubted my word before, as you jolly well know. He might just think that I was trying to dodge out of Extra."

"Very likely," assented Wharton.

"Well, you go and tell him, as Head Boy," urged Bunter. "I want him to know before he gives in the names to Mossoo. See? Cut down now."

"You heard Quelch tell me to stick in this study till tea-time!" snapped Wharton.

"Never mind that—"

"Well, I do mind, a little. I'm not looking for another row with Quelch. Now buzz off, like a good bluebottle."

"Well, will you tell him when you take down your lines?"

"Not at all! I was up the passage, and don't know whether you were in the crowd on the landing or not. How could I know?"

"I've told you!" hooted Bunter.

"What difference does that make?"

"Why, you—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "Ain't my word good enough for you?"

"Hardly!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter, more indignant than ever.

"Thanks! Now roll away, and let me finish my lines."

"Lots of fellows know!" howled Bunter. "I tell you I came up all these stairs just to give the fellows the tip, when the Acid Drop went to fetch Quelch. Bob Cherry knows—"

"Well, if that's the case, you can ask Bob to speak to Quelch, and tell him so. I can't tell him so, as I don't know."

"You know now I've told you."

"Not in the least."

"Beast!"

"I've heard that one."

"It's up to you as Head Boy. Quelch always takes your word."

"He'd take yours, if you'd give up fibbing."

"Beast!"

"You're repeating yourself, old fat man. Blow away, and shut the door after you." Harry Wharton resumed lines.

Billy Bunter did not blow away. Once more his spectacles were in danger from the concentrated glare he fixed on Harry Wharton's bent head. It was an unfortunate fact that Billy Bunter's word was worth no more than that of Baron Munchausen: indeed, Skinner had been heard to declare that if Bunter said it was raining, a fellow had to look out of the window before he believed him! But, like many persons indifferent to the truth, Bunter did not like his veracity doubted. It made him indignant.

"Well, you beast, if you won't go down to Quelch—!" he hooted.

"No 'if' about it."

"Well, I'll ask Bob Cherry. He jolly well knows I wasn't in the rag, and he ain't an ill-tempered grumpy beast like you."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Leave it at that!" he said, over his shoulder. "Now roll away. If you weren't mixed up in the rag, Quelch will let you off: he's just a beast. Buzz off."

Billy Bunter snorted, and revolved on his axis to roll away. But he revolved again, and blinked into the study once more. There was a gleam in Bunter's little round eyes behind his big round spectacles.

"Look here, Wharton—!" he squeaked.

"Oh, my hat! Are you still there?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "Wound up?"

"Quelch told you to stick in this study till tea-time—"

"Yes, ass: I'm going to."

"He will be jolly waxy if you don't!" said Bunter.

"I know that!"

"You'd jolly well get six!" said Bunter. "Might be sent up to the Head. I can tell you Quelch's frightfully shirty. He hates the other beaks butting into his affairs: and he's had to stand it from Hacker and Prout. He will jolly well make an example of you if you get out before tea-time."

"Tell me something I don't know."

"All right!" said Bunter, grinning. He backed away a few paces from the open doorway, and continued, with his disdainful blink fixed on the captain of the Remove, "You're a rotter, Wharton."

"What?"

"And a tick—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"And a good bit of a prig," went on Bunter, happily, while the captain of the Remove stared at him blankly. Satisfied that Harry Wharton would not venture to leave the study in which he had been bidden to remain, and ready to bolt if he reached out, the fat Owl considered himself on safe ground. For once, if only for once, Billy Bunter was free to tell the captain of the form what he thought of him: and he proceeded to do so, with considerable enjoyment. "My opinion of you, Wharton, is that you're a stuck-up prig."

"You fat ass—!"

"Yah!"

"Will you buzz off, you fat animal?"

"Not unless I jolly well choose!" retorted Bunter, independently. "Who are you? Think you're the Great Big Panjandrum? Who are you, I'd like to know! Yah!"

Harry Wharton rose to his feet. Billy Bunter, grinning, backed across the passage to the further side. He was ready to bolt: and if the captain of the Remove left the study in chase of him, it amounted to direct disobedience of his form-master's orders! And the wily fat Owl did not doubt that Harry Wharton had had enough trouble with his form-master that day, and did not want any more.

Wharton gave the fat junior a very, very expressive look. Then he shut the study door with a bang, and went back to the table.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

He waited a few moments, and then tiptoed across the passage to the door.

He turned the handle, hurled the door wide open with a crash, and backed promptly across the passage again.

"Oh!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. He gave a jump as the door crashed open, and a blot dropped from his pen—on his lines! He glared round, through the open doorway, at the grinning fat face across the passage.

"He, he he!" cachinnated Bunter.

"You fat lunatic—!" roared Wharton.

"He, he, he!"

"Will you clear, you burbling bloater!"

"He, he, he! Come out and make me!" invited Bunter. "Perhaps you'd like another spot of trouble with Quelch! What? He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton looked at him for a moment or two. He could not leave the study, and chase the exasperating Owl up the passage. But there were other means. He reached out and grasped a cushion from the armchair. Up went his hand, with the cushion in it, and it whizzed—as straight for the target as any cricket ball he had ever sent down to a wicket.

Thud!

"Yarooooooh!"

Billy Bunter had not been prepared for that. He had not thought of it. Really, he might have: but he hadn't. The cushion thudded on the fattest chin in the Greyfriars Remove, knocking the fattest head in that form backward, with a crack, on the wall. Bunter did not merely roar. He bellowed.

"Oh, oh! ow! wow! Beast! Yaroooooh! Wooogh!"

"Now cut, you fat ass—!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

He rubbed the back of a fat head, his very spectacles gleaming with wrath. Then he clutched up the cushion. With a swing of a fat arm, he sent it whizzing back into the study, aimed at the junior sitting at the table.

Crash!

Bunter was not a good shot. The whizzing cushion did not land, as intended, in the middle of Harry Wharton's features. It swept across the table, carrying away the inkpot, and several written sheets, in its flight. It thudded down on the floor, in company with a streaming inkpot, and most of the Latin lines that Harry Wharton had written during more than a weary hour.

Wharton leaped to his feet. He stared down at the ruin. He had written about two-thirds of his task: and every one of those weary lines had to be written over again: every sheet was splashed, or rather drenched, with ink! Lines could not be taken to Quelch in that state. For a moment, Wharton stared at his inky impot: then he whirled round to the doorway: and the expression on his face was enough—more than enough—for Billy Bunter. Evidently he had quite forgotten Quelch's order to stay in the study—he was coming out—for Bunter! With a squeak of alarm, the fat Owl bolted up the passage: and hot on his track, in the very worst temper ever, hurtled the captain of the Remove.

CHAPTER VI

SMITHY ON THE WAR-PATH

"COMING OUT, Smithy?"

"No!"

"The rain stopped a long while ago—"

"I know that."

"A spot of fresh air would do you good, Smithy."

"Rot!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith was standing at the window, in No. 4 Study in the Remove, staring out into a sunny quad. The summer rain-storm had passed over: the sky was blue, the air balmy: rain-drops still clinging on the old elms glistened like jewels. It was a very cheering change of scene since the rain: but it did not seem to cheer the Bounder of Greyfriars. His hard face was dark and sullen.

Dozens of fellows were to be seen in the sunshine. Most of the Remove were out. Temple, Dabney and Co. of the Fourth were sauntering by the elms. Coker and Potter and Greene of the Fifth were heading for the gates. Hobson and Hoskins and Stewart, of the Shell, were chatting in a cheery group. Tubb of the Third was in the very act of snatching the cap off the curly head of Nugent minor of the Second Form, and bolting with it—that being George Tubb's idea of a joke. Old Gosling, at the door of his lodge, was blinking out into the sunshine. Several masters were taking a walk in the quadrangle, doubtless as glad as the younger generation to get out after the rain—the portly Prout was walking with the thin and acid Hacker, deep in conversation—quite possibly on the subject of the Remove, and the obstreperous manners and customs of that form. It was quite a cheerful scene. But the Bounder scowled at it—and his scowl was specially directed towards Mr. Hacker. He was still wriggling from that "six" from Quelch's cane: and it was to the Acid Drop that he owed that six.

Tom Redwing, sitting on the edge of the study table, eyed him, without speaking again. He was accustomed to disgruntled moods in his chum: and he was very patient with them. Smithy had had it hard, and Tom was sympathetic—though the Bounder had little use for sympathy. Smithy chose to stay in the study, till the effect of the "six" had worn off: he did not want any eyes to behold his wriggles. Redwing remained, to keep him company: but the rain had long since stopped, and he would have been glad to make a move. As his chum did not seem disposed to make a move, however, he sat where he was, while Smithy stared moodily from the window. He noted the blackening of Smithy's brow, as the Bounder stared down at Mr. Hacker in the quad,

and it made him a little uneasy. In that savage and resentful mood, no fellow ever knew what Herbert Vernon-Smith might do, or think of doing.

Smithy turned suddenly from the window, came across to the table, and picked up a cricket-ball that lay thereon: the ball that had been whizzing about the Remove passage and landing a short while ago. Ball in hand, he returned to the window, and with his left hand, pushed up the lower sash.

Redwing jumped off the table.

"Smithy! What's that game! What—?"

Vernon-Smith looked round, a glitter in his eyes.

"You'd better cut, Reddy," he said.

"I'll stay in till you feel like coming out—"

"I said you'd better cut."

Redwing, with a worried face, came across to the window. What was in his chum's mind he did not know, but he was alarmed.

"Look here, Smithy, what—!"

"You'd better keep clear," snapped the Bounder. He gripped the cricket-ball, hard. "See him—they're walking this way—the Acid Drop will be in easy range in a minute or two—"

Redwing looked at him, aghast.

"Smithy! Have you gone crackers? You're not thinking of buzzing that ball at Hacker—!"

"Just that! I'm going to knock his mortar-board off!" said the Bounder, coolly. "Make him jump, what! Give him something more to do a song and dance about—only he won't be able to nail me this time."

"Don't be a mad ass, Smithy! You'll land in a frightful row—"

"Think I'm going to stand at the window till he spots me, after I bowl?" asked the Bounder, sarcastically. "He won't know a thing. Get out of the study, Reddy—I shall be off like a shot after I've got Hacker."

Redwing compressed his lips.

Knocking a beak's mortar-board off with a cricket ball was an idea that would hardly have occurred to any fellow at Greyfriars excepting the Bounder: not even to the Bounder in a less savage mood. Such a reckless act could not fail to be followed by a most tremendous "row": with dire consequences to the offender if discovered.

"Smithy, you're mad," muttered Redwing. "Look here, come out for a run in the fresh air, and let Hacker slide—"

"After I've got him!" said Smithy. "Didn't he get me six from Quelch? Isn't he always poking his long nose into things that don't concern him? I tell you it's as safe as houses, you fathead—how's he to know which window the ball came from, even if he knows it was a window at all?"

"It's a rotten thing to do, Smithy, even if it was safe—"

"Oh, shut up."

"But it's not safe," said Redwing. "Every pre. in the school will be hunting

for the man. And you'll get it worse than any other fellow—there are too many black marks against you already, Smithy. You'd be sent up to the Head—why, you might be sacked for it."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. He was well aware of the truth of what his anxious chum stated. The Bounder was a rebel by nature: he was always a thorn in the side of authority, and prided himself upon it. He liked to let fellows see how little he cared for beaks or prefects. He was, in fact, an old offender: and if such an act as this was brought home to him, it might quite possibly be the finish for him at Greyfriars. Other fellows might get off more lightly: but with the most reckless and troublesome fellow in the Remove, it might prove to be the last drop in the cup, as it were. Nevertheless, he did not think of hesitating for a moment. Even the risk had its appeal for him: and he relied on his luck, which had always seen him through so far.

Unheeding Redwing, he watched the two masters in the quad. They were walking slowly: Hacker accommodating the strides of his long thin legs to the



slower motion of the ponderous Prout. But they were coming along the path that ran within easy range of the study windows above. As soon as they arrived opposite the window of No. 4, the thing was easy. Smithy could handle a cricket-ball almost as accurately as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh: and getting Hacker's mortar-board was a simpler proposition than getting a wicket. Taking no heed whatever of Tom Redwing's anxious remonstrance, he watched and waited.

"Smithy—!" breathed Redwing.

"Pack it up!"

"I tell you, Smithy—"

"And I tell you you'd better get out!" snapped the Bounder. "If you stick here, you might get mixed up in it. Cut before I get going."

"You're not going to get going, Smithy," said Redwing, determinedly. "You're in too many rows, and one more may mean the long jump. Stop it!"

And Redwing, too anxious for his reckless chum to care about his temper, grasped his arm, and pulled him back.

The Bounder's eyes turned on him with a blaze in them.

"You fool! Let go my arm."

"Not till you drop that ball."

"Do you think you can give me orders?" hissed the Bounder.

"I can stop you making a fool of yourself. Somebody might see you at the window—you'd have to go up to the Head! Have a little sense, Smithy! Hacker will be as mad as a hatter—"

"Let him! Leave me alone, you meddlin' fool!"

Vernon-Smith wrenched his arm free. Redwing, with a set face, pushed between him and the window. Seldom did Redwing quarrel with his study-mate, though often he had cause. But he was prepared to quarrel with him now, if nothing else would stop him.

"Get away from that window!" said Vernon-Smith, thickly.

"I won't!"

"You fool! You fool! In two or three minutes it will be too late—"

"That's what I want."

"By gum! I—I—I'll—!" For a moment, it looked as if the enraged Bounder would hurl himself at the junior standing between him and the window. Redwing breathed hard: but he stood like a rock.

But Smithy restrained his fury. He gave Redwing a black look, and swung away to the door. Redwing drew a deep breath of relief. Smithy could fling out of the study in a temper, if he liked: so long as he gave up that mad idea, the rest did not matter.

Smithy's hand was on the door-handle, when there was a sound of pattering feet outside in the Remove passage. Somebody was racing up the passage from the landing end. Another swift patter followed: somebody else, evidently, in pursuit. Both were past by the time the Bounder dragged the door open.

He banged the door after him, and stared up the passage, after the chase that had passed his door.

He had a back view of the fat figure of Billy Bunter, scuttling up the box-room stair at the upper end of the passage, like a frightened fat rabbit: and another back view of Harry Wharton, rushing up the stair after the fleeing fat Owl. Both of them were going strong, and they disappeared the next moment.

"What the thump—!" ejaculated Smithy.

But he was not much interested in that flight and pursuit. The door of No. 1 Study stood wide open, and there was no one in the study, for the moment: nobody to interfere with the Bounder as Tom Redwing had done. It was exactly what Smithy wanted. He had not by any means given up that mad idea of getting Hacker with the cricket-ball. He had not merely flung out of his own study in a temper, as Tom supposed: he hoped there was still time to get Hacker from another window—and after one glance up the passage, he cut into No. 1 Study. The window was wide open, and he ran across to it.

He was in time.

Taking care not to show himself, he peered from the window. Prout and Hacker had reached a point in the path just opposite No. 1 Study. In his own study he would have had to wait a few moments more. Here he was precisely in time—the Acid Drop was just where he wanted him.

Not for a second did he hesitate. One cautious look from the window, and then his hand went up, and the cricket-ball flew. Swift as the delivery was, it flew with deadly accuracy, and there was a loud crack as it struck, knocking the mortar-board from the head of the master of the Shell. Smithy was well back from the window in a split second. From the quad came a loud startled howl, and loud exclamations in other voices. Herbert Vernon-Smith did not stay to listen. Hacker's howl, Prout's astonished boom, the startled exclamations of a dozen fellows in the quad, floated up—through the open window—as the Bounder, grinning, cut across to the door. He cut out of the study, and hurried down the stairs. Reckless as he was, he realized very clearly that his best guess was to establish as strong an alibi as he could: and he did not lose a second in cutting down to the bike-shed and pushing out his jigger.

CHAPTER VII

BY WHOSE HAND?

HARRY WHARTON came back into his study with a flushed face, rather breathlessly. He arrived there less than a minute after the Bounder had disappeared down the stairs. He tramped into the study with an angry brow. He had not even had the satisfaction of kicking Billy Bunter for the damage

he had done. The fat Owl had bolted up to the box-room, and bolted the door just in time before the pursuer arrived. And Harry Wharton, remembering Mr. Quelch's injunction, hurried back to his study, where he had to remain till tea-time. He had been absent only a couple of minutes: but a couple of seconds would have been enough to rouse Quelch's ire, if he learned that his command had been disregarded.

That anyone had entered the study during his very brief absence, naturally did not occur to him. There was no sign of anyone having done so. His thoughts were chiefly on the Latin imposition, wrecked by the fat Owl's antics. He picked up the inky sheets from the floor, and breathed hard as he looked at them. They were smothered with spilt ink: obviously in no state for delivering to Mr. Quelch. The task had to be done over again. And though there had been ample time to finish two hundred lines before tea, with two-thirds done, it was quite a different proposition when he had to begin again at the beginning. This meant quick work and hard slogging, if he was to finish by tea-time.

Seldom had the captain of the Remove felt so annoyed and angry. The mishaps of that rainy afternoon might have given an edge to the most amiable temper: and this final disaster put the lid on, so to speak. With deep feelings, Wharton crammed the spoiled sheets into the waste-paper basket under the table, and prepared to recommence. For some moments he heard, without heeding, something like an uproar in the quad under his window: but as the buzz of excited voices floated up, he crossed to the window, and looked out, to see what was going on outside.

There was quite a crowd, and Harry Wharton stared down at it, wondering what could possibly have happened.

Twenty or thirty fellows at least were gathered there. In the midst of the crowd stood Mr. Prout and Mr. Hacker. Hacker had his mortar-board in his hand, and Prout's plump hand held—of all unexpected things—a cricket ball. Prout was looking thunderstruck: Hacker was almost pale with fury. Fellows of all forms had gathered round them, staring and exclaiming: it was quite an unusual spot of excitement in the Greyfriars quad. Utterly unaware of what had happened, Harry Wharton could only stare down in wonder. Something, it seemed, had happened to Hacker: though what, he could not guess.

Something, certainly, had!

It was an amazing happening: justly described by Mr. Prout as unprecedented and indeed unparalleled!

It was so very unexpected.

Mr. Hacker, walking and talking with the master of the Fifth, could never have dreamed that some missile would suddenly knock the mortar-board from his head: incidentally giving that head rather a sharp tap. But that was what had happened. Hacker could almost have supposed that he was dreaming, when the knock came, and his mortar-board flew. Prout almost gibbered, as the cricket ball, shooting from Hacker's head, tapped his plump

shoulder, and fell at his feet. Hacker had clutched up his mortar-board: Prout had picked up the cricket ball: and a swarm of startled fellows who had witnessed the amazing occurrence, crowded round. Mr. Quelch was coming towards the spot with long strides, having seen the startling occurrence from a distance.

"Amazing!" Prout was booming, as Harry Wharton looked down. "Unprecedented! A cricket ball—!"

"Flung at me!" said Mr. Hacker, in tones of concentrated acid. "Flung at my head!"

"Unparalleled!" boomed Prout.

"But who—?"

Hacker's sharp eyes roamed over the surrounding crowd. He did not, for the moment, think of looking up at the windows.

Someone had "buzzed" that cricket ball at his head: or at least at his hat. Hacker was aware that he was not popular in his form. His glinting eyes sought the faces of Shell fellows in the crowd. Hobson, Hoskins, Stewart, and several others in the Shell, were there: and they tried hard to avoid catching Hacker's gleaming eye. Certainly, they knew nothing about the buzzing of the cricket ball: but Hacker was looking positively dangerous.

"An assault—an assault upon a member of the Staff!" Prout was booming again. "Who threw this cricket ball at Mr. Hacker?" Prout's rather bulging eyes wandered from face to face.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Harry Wharton, at his study window. What he now heard enlightened him as to what had happened.

He smiled faintly. He had no sympathy to waste on Mr. Hacker. Hacker had a heavy hand in his form: and if some Shell fellow, in a wildly reckless moment, had knocked off his mortar-board, Harry Wharton certainly hoped that that misguided youth would not be spotted.

Mr. Quelch came up, and the fellows in the quad made way for him. The Remove master's face was very stern. Wharton, as he noted it, wondered for a moment what was the matter with Quelch. He had no concern with what might go on in Hacker's form. Then it flashed into his mind that it was not, perhaps, a Shell fellow who had buzzed that ball at Hacker: but quite possibly a Remove man, as a reprisal for the Acid Drop's interference that afternoon. He gave a soft whistle. If that was it, Quelch might have seen it all, as he was walking in the quad when it happened. In that case, there was bad trouble in store for some man in the Remove.

"Mr. Hacker—!" Quelch's voice was like the filing of a saw. Evidently he was very angry. Hacker interrupted him.

"You saw what happened, Mr. Quelch—!" Hacker almost choked.

"I did!"

"Did you see who threw the ball, Quelch?" boomed Prout. "The boy must be here—he cannot be far away."

"The ball was thrown from a window!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" exclaimed Prout.

"Oh!" repeated Mr. Hacker, like an echo.

All eyes swept round to the windows. Harry Wharton, staring down from the open window of No. 1 Study, was the cynosure of all those eyes.

"You saw it, Mr. Quelch!" Hacker almost hissed. "You saw who threw the ball—"

"I did not see who threw the ball, Mr. Hacker—it happened so very suddenly and unexpectedly. I saw the ball shoot from a window, but whoever threw it must have backed away instantly, for I did not see him." Mr. Quelch set his lips hard. "But there is, I fear, no doubt on the subject: and I can only express my deepest regret, Mr. Hacker, that a boy in my form should have perpetrated so disrespectful an act."

"A Remove boy!" breathed Mr. Hacker. "I am not surprised—a Remove boy!"

"A Remove boy!" echoed Mr. Prout. "Neither am I surprised! Really—really—Mr. Quelch—!"

"The offender will be adequately punished, Mr. Hacker: you may be assured of that," said Mr. Quelch, taking no heed of Prout. "I have little doubt—or rather no doubt—of his identity." Quelch's gimlet-eyes were fixed on the face at the window of No. 1 Study, and he raised his voice, "Wharton—!"

Harry Wharton started, a little.

"Yes, sir," he called back.

"It was you who threw that cricket ball at Mr. Hacker."

Wharton jumped.

"I, sir!" he stuttered.

"You, Wharton—!"

"No, sir!" gasped Harry, blankly. "Certainly not, sir! I—I never knew that anything had happened till I looked out of the window."

Quelch's eyes glinted up at him.

"Come down to my study, Wharton."

"Yes, sir! But—!"

Harry Wharton broke off, as Mr. Quelch turned away. Evidently there was no doubt in his form-master's mind. The captain of the Remove drew a deep, deep breath, and left the window, and the study. His brow was dark, as he went down the stairs. Why Quelch had picked on him, he could not fathom: unless, as he bitterly reflected, Quelch was glad of a chance to pick on him, again, after what had occurred that afternoon.

"So it was Wharton!" said Mr. Hacker, through compressed thin lips. "Now I think of it, the ball certainly struck from above—from a window—"

"From the window of Wharton's study!" said Mr. Quelch, "and Wharton undoubtedly was in the study, as I had given him orders to remain there till tea-time. You may rely on me to deal with the matter, Mr. Hacker."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mr. Hacker, not very cordially. Quelch, certainly, looked as if the offender was going to be sorry for himself: he was not the man to permit such an outrageous act to pass without due punishment. But it was not likely that his ideas of punishment accorded with Mr. Hacker's. Hacker, just then, would hardly have been satisfied with anything short of something lingering with boiling oil in it!

Mr. Quelch walked away to the door of the House, to lose no time in dealing with the offender. Hacker replaced the mortar-board on his head, at last, and resumed his walk with Mr. Prout: to an accompaniment of indignant booms from the master of the Fifth. The crowd were left in a buzz. Sad to relate, many of the fellows seemed to see a comic aspect in the matter, and there were grins on many faces after the masters' backs were turned. The serious aspect from the junior point of view, was that the fellow who had buzzed the ball was going to get "toco" from his beak.

"Rough luck on young Wharton!" said Hobson of the Shell, commiseratingly.

"Young ass!" said Stewart.

"Well, he couldn't know that his beak had an eye on his window just at the moment, you know! What a nerve—knocking the Acid Drop's tile off!"

"Some nerve!" agreed Hoskins.

"Cheeky young ruffian!" said Temple of the Fourth. "He knocked my hat off the other day. Now he's knocked off Hacker's. These Remove kids are the limit."

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"Game kid, though," said Fry. "Lots of chaps would like to knock Hacker's hat off—or his head, if you come to that! Rotten luck for him that his beak spotted him!"

"It can't have been Wharton!" Bob Cherry was the speaker. "Wharton wouldn't be such a mad ass!"

There were four fellows in the crowd to whom the incident brought despondency and alarm. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were deeply dismayed.

"He wouldn't!" said Nugent. "He couldn't! That kind of thing is in Smithy's line—not Wharton's."

"Quelch might have been mistaken about the window!" said Johnny Bull. "He couldn't have been looking at it specially—just happened to see the ball—"

"Um!" said Bob. "Quelch doesn't make mistakes like that. He wouldn't pin down a Remove man if he could help it. He hates to let Hacker score over him: and this will be the talk of Common Room for days."

"The mistakefulness of the esteemed Quelch was not terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head. "That absurd ball came from Wharton's window. But somebody else—"

"But Wharton was there!" said Bob. "He had to be there—you remember Quelch bunged him in his study till tea-time—"

"If it was somebody else, Wharton ought to have stopped him, as he was there," said Johnny Bull.

"He would have—!" said Frank: but he did not finish that remark. It was hardly possible that Harry Wharton would have allowed so reckless a prank to be played in his study by another fellow. But if that was not it, who but Wharton himself could have "buzzed" the ball?

"Bother Hacker!" said Bob. "It wouldn't have happened, if he hadn't dragged Quelch out of his lair to rag us this afternoon. But—but—but—if it was Wharton, he's up for a fearful row!"

"The rowfulness will be preposterous!" sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Quelch is terrifically infuriated."

"I—I suppose he's with Quelch now!" muttered Frank. "Let's go in and wait for him."

They went rather dismally into the House, to wait for Harry Wharton to emerge from his form-master's study. In that study Wharton was now with Quelch: and the Bounder, several miles away on his bike by that time, little dreamed of the spot of trouble he had left behind for another fellow.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR IT!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I shall deal with you severely for this."

"For what, sir?" asked Harry Wharton, coolly.

Mr. Quelch gave him a look—a very expressive look.

The junior's face was set: almost sullen. His eyes met Mr. Quelch's steadily, with what seemed to the Remove master a hint of defiance in them.

"You threw a cricket ball from the window of your study, Wharton, at a member of Dr. Locke's staff!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I did not!" answered Harry.

"Do you deny, Wharton, that you threw the ball which struck Mr. Hacker?"

"Certainly I do, as I never knew that anything of the kind had happened till I heard what was said under my window."

Mr. Quelch gazed at him. The matter was so absolutely certain in his own mind, that he had not expected denial. He had no doubt whatever that that lawless action was a sequel to the "row" in the afternoon: reprisals on Hacker for having brought the Remove master on the scene.

But Quelch was a just man. He was deeply incensed: but if the junior had anything to say, he was going to hear it, and weigh it. He controlled his anger, and answered quietly:

"The ball was thrown from your study window, Wharton."

"I don't think so, sir."

"What? what? What did you say, Wharton?"

"I said I don't think so, sir!"

"Upon my word!"

Mr. Quelch's eye strayed to the cane on his table. However, he did not reach for it. Harry Wharton was his Head Boy: hitherto trusted and relied upon. Quelch was going to be as patient as he could.

Wharton stood silent, waiting for more. He had spoken as he believed: it did not seem possible to him that the ball had come from his study window. The incident had occurred during his brief absence from the study, for it was immediately after his return that the hubbub in the quad below had attracted his attention. But he had been absent only a couple of minutes. Had some fellow dodged into the study, hurled the cricket ball, and dodged out again, in that brief space of time, disappearing before he came back? It did not seem likely to Wharton.

"There is no doubt whatever, Wharton, that the ball was thrown from your window," said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard.

Wharton did not reply to that. He gave a slight, almost imperceptible, shrug of the shoulders. Almost imperceptible as it was, Mr. Quelch noted it, and his eyes glinted.

"Listen to me, Wharton! I should have expected the truth from you—"

"You will hear the truth from me, or nothing, sir!" answered Harry. "I did not throw the ball, and I do not believe that it came from my window."

"It was I who saw it thrown, Wharton."

"Not from my window, sir!"

"From your window, Wharton! I was in the quadrangle, and chanced to be looking towards the House. My attention was caught by seeing something shoot down suddenly from a study window—an open window! I did not for the moment realize what it was, or that it was a missile intentionally thrown—but the next moment it struck Mr. Hacker. That drew my attention to him, or I should doubtless have seen you at the window, in the very act—"

The set, obstinate look on Wharton's face changed a little. In the face of this categorical statement, he had to believe that the ball had come from his study window. Quelch could believe his own eyes: and Harry Wharton had to believe them too.

"—when I did look up at the window, however, you were looking out," continued Mr. Quelch. "You were there—"

"I was looking out to see what the row was, sir! I had not been at the window when it happened."

"You were in the study!"

Wharton was silent. He realized now, that, improbable as it had seemed, some unknown person must have whipped into his study during those few minutes while he was in pursuit of the irritating fat Owl. Quelch was taking it for granted that he had remained in the study, according to orders. That made it possible for him to come to only one conclusion.

"If you still deny that action, Wharton—"

"I do, sir."

"Very well!" said Mr. Quelch, quietly, "in that case you must be aware by whose hand the ball was thrown. The act could not have been perpetrated in your presence without your knowledge."

No answer.

"I am willing to hear what you have to say, Wharton, if you have anything to say. Was some other boy in the study with you?"

"No, sir."

"Did anyone enter at the time?"

"I—I—I don't know," stammered Harry.

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

"You do not know!" he repeated. "You were in your study, writing lines, and you tell me that you do not know whether anyone entered!"

Wharton's face crimsoned. It had to come out, now.

"Well?" rapped Mr. Quelch, as the junior did not speak.

"I—I—" Wharton stammered. "I—I was not in the study, sir, just at that moment—"

"What?"

"I—I—"

"Let us have this clear," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. "This afternoon you joined in the disturbance in the Remove passage, and you were ordered to remain in your study till tea-time and write lines. Are you now telling me that you disobeyed and disregarded that order—you, the Head Boy of my form?"

"N—n—no! A fellow was—was ragging in the passage, and I—I went out to him for a minute or two—a couple of minutes—not more—"

"Indeed! You now tell me that, although commanded by your form-master to remain in your study, you left it, and that this occurred at the precise time when the assault was made on Mr. Hacker from your window?"

"It—it must have been, if—if it was my window, sir—!" Wharton's voice faltered.

Quelch's face set like iron.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Wharton! Your conduct this afternoon has been wild and reckless, joining in a disturbance which, as Head Boy, you should have done your best to control. Now a lawless act has been perpetrated in your study, where only you were present—and all you can say

in your defence is that you deliberately disregarded a positive order from your form-master, and left your study: and that at that precise time, and no other, someone else threw a cricket ball at Mr. Hacker from your study window! Do you expect me to believe this?"

Wharton did not speak. It must have happened so: but he could not help realizing how utterly improbable it must seem to Quelch.

"That you left your study, against orders, I am quite prepared to believe," went on Mr. Quelch, grimly. "You appear to be in a reckless and unruly mood to-day, Wharton, and I have no doubt that you had added disobedience to orders to your other offences. But that it was you who threw the ball from the window there can be no doubt—"

"I did not—"

Mr. Quelch raised his hand.

"You need say no more, Wharton! I have assured Mr. Hacker that the offender will be adequately punished. You are the offender. I am bound to take into consideration your good conduct hitherto: otherwise, I should send you to your headmaster." Quelch's eye strayed to the cane on the table again. But it was only for a moment, and he went on: "You will be given detention for four half-holidays, exclusive of Extra School on Saturday: and you will write out a whole book of the Aeneid. I shall trust, Wharton, that this will be a lesson to you to keep your temper in better control. You may leave my study."

Harry Wharton looked at him, and opened his lips to speak. But he closed them again, and walked to the door.

At the door, however, he turned. His face was dark, and there was a glint in his eyes. But he was very calm: respectful, indeed meek.

"May I ask you one question, sir?" he said, in quite a silky voice.

"What is it, Wharton?"

"Is my detention to go on, if you find out who really threw that ball at Mr Hacker?"

Mr. Quelch fairly jumped at that unexpected question. He could scarcely believe his ears. He stared blankly at Harry Wharton for a moment, and then made a stride to the table and clutched up the cane.

"Leave my study, Wharton! Another word and I shall cane you severely."

Wharton did not utter another word. He walked out of the study, closed the door quietly after him, and walked down the passage: leaving his form-master with the cane gripped in his hand, and half-regretting that he had not given it exercise.

CHAPTER IX

UP TO SMITHY!

"SMITHY—!"
"Cut in—"
"But—!"

"Do you want to be late, ass?"

Herbert Vernon-Smith, at all events, did not want to be late. It was just on lock-ups when he wheeled in his bike: and as he came out of the bike shed, the bell was ringing for calling-over. Tom Redwing met him as he was hurrying across to the House, and caught him by the arm: but he shook off that detaining grasp, and hurried on. The Bounder was not always so particular about being punctual for roll: but after his exploit that afternoon, he did not want to draw a gimlet-eye specially on himself. He cut on, and Tom Redwing, with a clouded and troubled face, hurried after him.

"Smithy! I've been waiting for you to come in—"

"Well, I'm on time! Think I want another row with Quelch to-day?" snapped the Bounder. "Come on."

"I've got to tell you—"

"Pack it up till after roll."

"But—!" Redwing caught his arm again.

"Oh, rot!" The Bounder dragged his arm free, and cut into the House. Redwing could only follow him into hall, with what he had to say still unsaid.

Vernon-Smith's look was quite casual and unconcerned, as he joined the ranks of the Remove. It was his cue to know nothing of the Hacker episode. The effect of the "six", and the savage resentment it had evoked, had passed off, during a long spin on his bike in the open air. In cooler mood, Smithy had realized, much more clearly than before, how very serious the consequences of his act might be—especially for him. There were, as his chum had told him in the study, too many black marks against him already, for any hope that he might be let off lightly if discovered. It was as good as certain that he would be sent up to the Head: quite probable that this final act of reckless insubordination might be his last at Greyfriars. There was no "good conduct" to be remembered in favour of the fellow who liked to give all the trouble he could to those placed in authority over him. Vernon-Smith realized that he had to walk very warily, till this incident blew over: and if questioned, he was prepared to declare that he had gone out on his bike before it happened: he was no stickler for the facts, with a row in the offing. But there was, so far as he could see, no danger: unless Redwing talked: which Redwing was not

likely to do. Even Redwing could not know for certain, though no doubt he would guess.

Smithy, with an indifferent face, glanced round at other faces in the Remove. Even if he had known nothing, he could have seen that something unusual had occurred. There was a buzz of whispering among the juniors. Billy Bunter was grinning from one fat ear to the other, as he blinked through his big spectacles at Mr. Hacker, coming into hall with Capper and Prout. Skinner and Snoop and Stott and Bolsover major and several other fellows were grinning too. On the other hand, five members of the Remove were looking unusually serious. Harry Wharton's face was almost grim: Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked glum—why, the Bounder neither guessed nor cared. He gave Skinner a nudge.

"Anything up?" he asked.

Harold Skinner looked round at him, grinning.

"Haven't you heard?"

"I've been out on my bike since the rain stopped. Anything happened? What are the fellows staring at Hacker for?"

Skinner chuckled.

"Hacker's in the news," he answered. "A beak's tile isn't knocked off every day in the quad."

"Somebody knocked off Hacker's tile?"

"Yes; with a cricket ball."

"Oh, my hat!" said the Bounder. "Accident, I suppose?"

"Lot of accident about it!" chuckled Skinner. "Got him fair and square from a study window, while he was ambling in the quad with Prout. Was Hacker wild?" And Skinner chuckled again.

"Some chap in Hacker's form?" drawled the Bounder.

"No fear: Remove man."

Vernon-Smith started just a little. He was quite certain that he had not shown himself at the window of No. 1 Study when he had "got" Hacker. He had not supposed that it would be known that the cricket ball had whizzed from a Remove study at all, among innumerable windows. Apparently more was known than he had supposed.

"How do they know it was a Remove man?" he inquired. "Must have had a nerve—but how do they know?"

"Quelch was in the quad, and saw the whole thing." Skinner's grin became almost as wide as Billy Bunter's. "Bit of a shock for him, what?—his Head Boy! Not much of a form-master's favourite just now!"

"Head Boy!" repeated the Bounder, blankly. "You don't mean Wharton—?" He stared at Skinner, completely taken aback.

"Sort of!" grinned Skinner. "You see, Quelch spotted the ball coming from the window, as it happened: and of course he knew which was Wharton's window. So it was a fair cop!"

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder.

He glanced across at the captain of the Remove. He understood that black look on Wharton's face now; and the glum expression of his friends. He breathed quickly. Not for a moment had he expected anything of this kind. He had not supposed that there would be a ghost of a clue to the culprit: that anyone could even surmise from which, among so many windows, the ball had whizzed: or indeed that it had whizzed from a window at all. And all the while, a gimlet-eye had witnessed the whole affair!

"Oh!" repeated the Bounder. He glanced round at Tom Redwing's clouded face. He knew now what Redwing had wanted to tell him. He coloured as he met Redwing's eyes, and looked away again.

"I say, you fellows." It was a fat whisper from Billy Bunter. "I say, the Acid Drop looks jolly shirty, what? He, he, he!"

"Has Wharton been called up for it?" muttered the Bounder to Skinner.

"Of course he has! Quelch was after him like a hawk! I'll bet you Hacker's shirty because Quelch didn't come down heavier!" grinned Skinner. "Bet you he'd have liked the bad lad to be sent up to the Head."

"Silence there!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

Mr. Quelch was preparing to take the roll. The buzz of whispering voices died away.

The Bounder fixed his eyes curiously on Harry Wharton. He knew, if no one else did, that Wharton had had nothing to do with the Hacker episode: and he could guess what he was feeling like. What form his punishment had taken Smithy did not know: but he concluded that it was a licking, with all Quelch's beef in it. Smithy, with all his wild ways, had his good qualities: he was not the man to let another fellow take his "gruel", if he could help it. But in this case, he could not have helped it: he had been out of gates, never dreaming that the wrong man had been caught: and it had been all over before he came back. He could not help a feeling of relief that it was all over. Nothing he could say now would undo what had been done: and he certainly did not want to say anything.

After roll, Redwing slipped his arm through the Bounder's.

"Come up to the study," he muttered.

"I'm goin' into the Rag—I want to hear the latest details of the latest spot of excitement!" drawled Smithy.

"Come up to the study."

"Oh, rot!"

"You'd better, Smithy: I've got to speak to you."

Vernon-Smith gave him a dark look: but he acquiesced, and they went up to the Remove studies. In No. 4, Redwing shut the door: the Bounder eyeing him angrily and impatiently.

"Well?" he rapped. "Cough it up! What's the long face about?"

"Wharton's been nailed for what happened to Hacker," said Redwing, quietly.

"Well?"

"He denied knowing anything about it. I believe him—after what you were doing in this study only a few minutes before it happened. It was you, Smithy!"

"Was it?" jeered the Bounder.

"Wasn't it?"

"Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies, my pippin." The Bounder laughed. "Think our infallible beak has made a mistake?"

"Quelch can't be blamed. He saw the ball come from Wharton's window and Wharton had been ordered to stay in, and ought to have done so. I hear that that fat fool Bunter was ragging him, and he cut out for a minute or two—that must have been when it happened. Smithy, old man, it was you—it happened hardly a minute or so after I had stopped you at this window—"

"You shouldn't have butted in, old boy. Meddlin' always does more harm than good!" jeered the Bounder.

"You must have cut into Wharton's study while he was out—"

"Think so?"

"Didn't you?" breathed Redwing.

"Find out!"

"This won't do, Smithy! Wharton's not the fellow to play such a mad trick even if he had his back up: but you—it's you all over: and you'd have done that very thing from this window if I hadn't stopped you. Smithy, you can't leave it on him."

The Bounder sneered.

"What's the odds?" he snapped. "Suppose I did it—which I don't feel in the least inclined to admit—suppose I did, Wharton's had his whopping, and what good would it do him, if I went to Quelch and asked for another? And I shouldn't get off with a whopping, either, like Wharton—my record is a bit different from his. I should have to go up to the Head. Think I want to see the Old Man and have a heart-to-heart talk with him?"

"I warned you of that—"

"Oh, cut the cackle. It's over and done with, and the least said, the soonest mended," snapped the Bounder, impatiently, "Let's go down—"

"It's not over and done with, as you seem to think Smithy! Wharton hasn't had a whopping—"

"Not!" ejaculated the Bounder. "By gum, if Quelch has let him off with lines, the Acid Drop will rage! Phew."

"He has detention for four half-holidays, with a book to write," said Redwing. "Everyone knows excepting you, as you've been keeping out of the way."

The Bounder whistled.

"I never knew that—!" he muttered.

"You know it now."

Vernon-Smith did not answer. His brows were knitted, and his face troubled. He had taken it for granted that all was over, and it had been a relief to him. It was extremely disconcerting to learn that it was not all over by any means. The penalty was not over and done with: it lay ahead of the supposed offender: which altered the case very considerably.

Redwing watched him anxiously. As he did not speak, Tom broke the silence at last.

"You can't leave it like that, Smithy!"

The Bounder gave him a dark and bitter look.

"What do you want me to do?" he muttered.

"What any decent fellow would do, when another man is lagged for what he did. Do you think Wharton would leave it on you, if it were the other way about?"

"I'm not a little tin angel like Wharton," sneered Smithy. "Besides, he's got himself to thank. Quelch ordered him to stay in his study, and he chose to disobey orders. That's his look-out! How was I to know that Quelch was in the quad, and happening to be looking up! I never dreamed that anyone would guess where the ball came from."

"I know that! But now—"

"Oh, don't be a fool!" said Vernon-Smith, harshly. "If it were just an ordinary rag, and another fellow got nailed, I'd own up like a shot, and you know it. But this—it's different. Think Quelch would let me off with detentions and a book!"

"I'm afraid not! But—"

"Why, you fool, it might be the sack—you said so yourself!" snarled the Bounder. "Do you think I'm going to ask to be turfed out of Greyfriars, to save a fellow from detentions? Don't make me laugh."

"It was you, and not he—!"

"You'd better not say so outside this study, Tom Redwing. You'd have to prove it!"

"Smithy!"

"You don't know that it was I—you guess: and you'd better keep your guesses to yourself! Now leave me alone." The Bounder swung round to the door.

"Smithy, old chap—! It's up to you—"

"Oh, rats!"

The Bounder dragged open the door, and stamped out of the study. He closed the door after him with a bang. Tom Redwing made a step to follow him: but stopped. There was nothing more he could say, to any purpose, for the present at least. He was left with a deeply troubled mind. If the Bounder's too was troubled, his face did not reveal it, when he mingled with the other fellows in the Rag.

CHAPTER X

WHO ?

"WHO?" said Bob Cherry.

Bob asked that question in break, the following morning. It was a bright and sunny summer's morning, after the rain of the previous day. But its brightness was not reflected in the faces of the Famous Five of the Remove. For once, the usually cheery Co. were clouded.

"The who-fulness," sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "is terrific."

"Smithy was out!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"Was he?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Never mind Smithy," said Harry Wharton, quietly. "Smithy's got some sticky ways, but he's not the man to let another fellow take his gruel."

The Co. nodded assent to that: though Johnny Bull seemed to hesitate a little. What had happened to Hacker seemed, to him, much more in Smithy's line than in anyone else's: it was wildly reckless, even for the Bounder.

The Co. knew that Harry Wharton had had nothing to do with the Hacker episode: his word was good enough for them: though the penalty had fallen upon him. But it followed that if Wharton had not buzzed the ball at Hacker, someone else had, and the question was, who?

It was a rather urgent question, for all concerned. After Extra School on Saturday, detentions for four half-holidays lay ahead of the captain of the Remove, which looked like playing ducks and drakes with the cricket. On the next Wednesday they were going over to St. Jim's to play Tom Merry and Co.: and their best batsman would have to be left behind, grinding out a "book" in the form-room. Vernon-Smith, as vice-captain, would skipper the side, no doubt efficiently: and a new recruit would be found to fill the vacant place. But it was not a happy prospect—especially for Wharton himself.

"If we could spot the man," said Bob, "we'd jolly well boot him till he owned up to Quelch. That would make it all right."

"The bootfulness would be preposterous!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the spotfulness is a boot on the other leg."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Quelch wouldn't jump at admitting that he's made a mistake, even if something did come out!" he said.

Four fellows frowned a little, at that remark. It was an indication of the deep and bitter resentment that Harry Wharton was feeling.

"Oh, that's rot, old chap," said Bob, uncomfortably. "The old boy is just—He would be glad to set it right if he knew he'd nailed the wrong man."

"It's up to a beak to nail the right man, or nobody."

"Um! Yes! But—"

"You see, you rather asked for it," said Johnny Bull, in his slow and thoughtful way. "It couldn't have happened in your study, if you'd stayed there as Quelch told you to—what's a beak to think, when a fellow's only defence is that he disobeyed orders?"

Harry Wharton's eyes glinted.

"So far as Quelch can see, it was you or nobody," went on Johnny. "I don't see that Quelch could look at it any other way, unless it comes out that some fellow dodged into the study just at that moment when you were out—and that does sound jolly unlikely, too."

"Does that mean that you think I buzzed that ball at Hacker, when I've told you I did not?" asked Harry, very quietly.

"You know it doesn't," answered Johnny, calmly. "I know you didn't, as you say so. But it's no use getting your back up because Quelch doesn't look at it as your own pals do. If you'd stuck in the study—"

"That won't get us anywhere, Johnny," interrupted Bob. "It was that fat idiot Bunter's fault—"

"It was Bunter made Wharton cut out of the study, as he's told us," said Frank Nugent, with a snap in his voice.

"Well, he shouldn't make him!" said Johnny, stolidly, "Wharton shouldn't—"

"My esteemed Johnny," murmured the nabob of Bhanipur. "Speechfulness is silvery, but silence is the bird in the bush that makes Jack a dull boy, as the English proverb remarks."

"I'm only talking sense," said Johnny.

"You talk too much sense, old man—too much and too often," said Bob. "When you feel it coming on, just put a sock in it."

"Look here—"

"Oh, let him run on," said Harry, sarcastically. "It seems that I'm to blame all along the line, and perhaps I ought to go to Quelch and thank him for jumping on me for nothing."

"Not quite for nothing, old chap," said Johnny. "You see—"

"Pack it up, Johnny!" interrupted Bob. "We'll take it as read. The question is, can we spot the man who did it, and boot him till he squeaks! Who the dickens can it have been?"

"It's the sort of thing Smithy might do, in one of his tantrums," said Johnny.

"Smithy was out of gates when it happened," said Bob. "He never heard of it till Skinner told him at roll. I've heard him say so."

"Um!" said Johnny.

"I tell you, you can leave Smithy out," said Harry, sharply. "He wouldn't leave it on another fellow if he'd done it. Skinner or Snoop might—not Smithy."

"Might have been a Shell man!" said Bob. "They loathe the Acid Drop in his form! But—a Shell man wouldn't be in the Remove studies—and Quelch is certain it came from a Remove window—"

"Might have been almost anybody," said Nugent. "Quelch may find out something later—before St. Jim's day—"

"He isn't looking for anyone!" said Harry Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "He's satisfied with getting the first man that came to hand."

"Oh, bosh," said Bob. "Quelch is rather a Tartar, but he's a just Tartar. He's let Bunter off Extra School on Saturday, because I told him the fat ass wasn't mixed up in the rag yesterday."

"Nice of him to take your word for it," said Harry.

"Why shouldn't he?" demanded Bob, rather warmly.

"He doesn't take mine."

"Well, that's different—the whole thing's different. Don't be an unreasonable ass, old chap. Look here, what we want to get at is this, who did it? We could jolly well make him own up if we knew. We're not going to leave you behind next Wednesday, if we can help it."

"I'm not so sure that I should be left behind anyway," said Harry Wharton, coolly. "I don't feel like cutting the biggest fixture of the cricket season to please Quelch."

"You'll be in detention—"

"Fellows have cut detention before now."

"Why, you thumping ass!" exclaimed Bob aghast. "If you cut, to go over to St. Jim's with the team, Quelch would be as mad as a hatter—"

"The madfulness would be terrific."

"Harry, old chap!—" murmured Nugent. Johnny Bull did not speak: but an expressive grunt expressed his views.

"Why not?" said Wharton, in the same cool tone. "I don't see sticking in detention because Quelch makes silly mistakes. Why shouldn't I play cricket on a half-holiday, as I'm entitled to do! That's what I'm thinking of, at any rate."

"Better think twice!" said Bob, dryly. "You'd have to go up to the Head. There's a limit!"

Harry Wharton made no reply to that.

"No good thinking of wild and woolly stunts like Smithy's," said Bob. "One Bounder is enough in the form. If we could spot the man—I wonder he hasn't owned up already: any decent man would, in the circumstances, rather than leave it on another chap. Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the bell! Come on."

The bell for third school was ringing. Four members of the Co. started for the House. One member remained where he was. Bob looked round.

"Come on, Wharton!"

"Any hurry?"

"Can't you hear the bell?"

"I'm not deaf."

"Well, you ass, do you want to be late?" exclaimed Bob. "Quelch isn't in the best of tempers with you already."

"Dear man!" said Wharton.

The Co. came to a halt. Fellows on all sides were heading for their form-rooms. The captain of the Remove seemed in no hurry to do so.

Nugent ran back and caught him by the arm.

"Come on, old fellow," he said. "What's the good of looking for more trouble with Quelch?"

"Why not?"

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"I'm going in!" he said. And he went. Three fellows hesitated. Wharton, evidently, was in a reckless and rebellious mood: the result of a sense of injustice. So far from desiring to placate Quelch, his idea seemed to be to irritate him further.

"Do come, old fellow," urged Nugent.

"No hurry. You cut in."

"Look here," exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Are you coming?"

"Cut in, and leave me alone."

"Isn't a 'book' enough for you?" hooted Bob. "Do you want a lot more lines from Quelch?"

"I don't care."

"Oh, you're an ass!" exclaimed Bob, impatiently. "Come on, Inky—come on, Frank. The bell will be stopping."

Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh cut off. Frank Nugent did not follow. He remained with his disgruntled chum.

"Better cut in, Frank," said Wharton. "The bell's stopping."

"You don't want to be late for class, Harry—"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right!" said Nugent. "I'll stay out too."

"Look here, cut in, I tell you."

"Not unless you do."

Harry Wharton gave him almost a grim look. for a moment. But it was only for a moment. Then he smiled.

"Come on!" he said. And they ran for the House together: arriving at the door of the Remove form-room just as Mr. Quelch was letting in his form.

CHAPTER XI

THE REBEL

"I SAY, you fellows—!"

"Scat!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton glanced round at the doorway of No. 1 Study, and picked up a Latin dictionary from the table, without speaking.

"Scat" from Bob Cherry had no effect whatever on Billy Bunter. But the dictionary seemed to impress him. Instead of rolling into the study, he remained in the doorway, blinking warily at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles.

Five fellows were gathered in that study after class on Friday. Not one of them was looking merry or bright—least of all Harry Wharton. An argument was proceeding in the study, and it was growing warm. Billy Bunter interrupted it. Always superfluous, the fat Owl of the Remove was more superfluous than ever, at the moment.

"Can't you chuck cricket for a minute, and let a fellow speak?" demanded Bunter, indignantly.

"We're not talking cricket!" said Frank Nugent, "and nobody wants to hear you squeak. Buzz off."

"Shut the door after you!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—!"

Harry Wharton took aim with the dictionary.

Generally, he was more or less patient with the fat and fatuous Owl. But his patience was at a low ebb now. Bunter's antics had led to disaster for the captain of the Remove: and really No. 1 Study was rather dangerous ground for him.

"Where will you have it, you fat ass?" asked Wharton.

"Beast!"

Bunter, apparently, did not want it anywhere. He backed into the passage, and Bob Cherry kicked the door shut.

But it opened again a moment later, and a pair of little round eyes blinked in through a pair of big round spectacles.

"I say you fellows, do listen to a chap!" squeaked Bunter. "It's important."

Five separate and distinct glares were fixed on the fat face. But glares did not worry Bunter unduly. So long as the dictionary was not hurled, he was prepared to carry on.

"You fellows are booked for Extra School to-morrow afternoon," went on Bunter. "I'm not, see! I'm going to the pictures at the Regal."

"Is that what you've come here to tell us?" asked Bob, staring.

"That's it, old chap! But I'm in rather a jam," explained Bunter. "I think I told you fellows I was expecting a postal-order—"

"You howling ass—!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! It hasn't come," said Bunter, sadly. "I don't know why, but there it is—it hasn't! Which of you fellows is going to lend me half-a-crown?"

"The whichfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here, what are you fellows confabbing about?" asked Bunter, blinking curiously at the Famous Five. "Is anything on?"

Harry Wharton took aim with the dictionary.

"One second to hop it!" he said, briefly.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter "hopped" it promptly. The study door closed with a bang, and Harry Wharton laid down the dictionary. Really, the Famous Five had more urgent matters to think about than Billy Bunter's financial embarrassments, due to the non-arrival of a long-expected postal-order.

But Bunter had not "hopped" far!

Five fellows were "confabbing" in a study, on a glorious summer's day, instead of heading for the nets as they might naturally have been expected to do: all the more because there could be no cricket on Saturday afternoon, when they had to be in "Extra". Inquisitiveness was Bunter's besetting sin: he always wanted to know. When Bunter wanted to know, he had absolutely no scruple about his method of acquiring knowledge. It was said in the Remove that there was hardly a keyhole at Greyfriars to which Bunter had not had a fat ear. So, having banged the door, as a sign that he had departed, the fat Owl, grinning, bent a fat head to the keyhole. Billy Bunter was going to know what that confabulation was about!

"Now that bloater's gone, we can get this settled!" came Johnny Bull's voice: and Bunter's fat grin widened.

"Nothing to settle, that I know of!" answered Harry Wharton.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I'll leave that to you."

"Look here—"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the good of ragging? It's rough luck, Harry: but a fellow has to take the rough with the smooth. You don't want to play the goat in Smithy's style."

"Not at all. I want to play cricket."

"It's mad, Harry." There was a note of deep anxiety in Frank Nugent's voice. "You can't cut detention on Wednesday—"

"The cutfulness is not the proper caper, my esteemed and absurd Wharton," urged Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The roughfulness of the luck is terrific, but what cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarkably observes."

"Have a little sense!" said Johnny Bull. "Quelch has made a mistake, but he wouldn't have if you hadn't—"

"I've heard that one!"

"It may come out before Wednesday who it really was that knocked Hacker's lid off!" said Bob.

"It won't!" said Harry Wharton. "It happened two days ago, and the fellow, whoever he is, has kept mum: that makes it pretty clear that he's going to keep mum."

"Quelch may spot him, all the same—"

"He thinks he has spotted him, and that's good enough for Quelch. He isn't looking for anybody else."

"Well, I suppose not: but—"

"If it does come out before Wednesday, O.K." said Harry. "But if it doesn't, and it won't—!"

"Then you'll have to toe the line," said Johnny Bull.

"I shall go over to St. Jim's with the team, and play cricket!" said Harry Wharton, coolly. "It's no good talking—that's settled."

Billy Bunter, on the other side of the keyhole, almost gasped aloud, as he heard that! So that was what they were confabbing about! The fat Owl's eyes bulged behind his spectacles. This was a spot of exciting news for the fellows in the Rag! Bunter liked to be the fellow with the news—especially startling news! There was no doubt that the news that the captain of the Remove intended to clear off on Wednesday, in reckless defiance of authority,



Billy Bunter almost gasped.

and play cricket at St. Jim's instead of sitting in detention at Greyfriars, would startle every fellow who heard it.

"You can't do it, Harry," said Nugent.

"I think I can."

"Quelch will stop you—!" said Bob.

"Quelch won't know a thing. I shall slip out quietly, and join the team outside the school. All Quelch will know is that I've cut detention, when he's ready for me in the afternoon."

"If he guesses where you've gone—"

"Oh, rot."

"Even if you get clear, which seems jolly unlikely to me, you'll be called up for it afterwards," said Johnny Bull.

"I know that!"

"It means going up to the Head."

"Let it!"

"It's asking for trouble," said Johnny.

"Why not, when I get the trouble whether I ask for it or not?" said Harry Wharton, savagely. "Look here, it's no good talking, I tell you—and mind you don't say a word outside this study: I don't want Quelch watching me like a hawk next Wednesday—!"

"Yaroooooh!"

A sudden terrific yell, just outside the door, interrupted the captain of the Remove. It was accompanied by the sound of a thudding foot. Harry Wharton broke off: and all the juniors in the study stared round towards the door.

"Ow! wow! Leave off kicking me, Smithy, you beast! I wasn't listening at the keyhole—yaroooooh!—I only stooped to tie my shoe-lace—yow-ow-ow—if you kick me again, you rotter, I'll—whoooooop!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

The study door was flung open, and Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in. From up the passage came an echo of scudding feet and an anguished howl.

The Bounder glanced at the startled faces in the study.

"You fellows talking secrets?" he asked. "You didn't know Bunter had an ear to the keyhole, I suppose? I spotted him as I came up, and booted him."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"That tears it!" he said. "It will be all over the shop, Wharton, old man, you'll have to chuck it up now—!"

"Nothing of the kind."

"It may get to Quelch now—"

"I don't care." Harry Wharton compressed his lips. "No secret about it, Smithy, though I'd rather Quelch didn't know. I'm going over with the team on Wednesday for the St. Jim's match, that's all."

The Bounder started.

"All!" he repeated. "Mad. You can't do it."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I should have thought you'd approve!" he said. "It's rather in your own line, isn't it, to back up against the beaks? Anyhow, I'm going."

"Quelch—"

"I'm not bothering about Quelch."

"He will bother about you, if he gets wind of this," said Vernon-Smith. "For goodness sake, Wharton, have a little sense—"

"I've had that from these fellows, thanks." Harry Wharton crossed to the corner of the study, and picked up a cricket bat. "Coming down to the nets, you men? We're in Extra to-morrow, you know."

He left the study, with the bat under his arm. Four fellows exchanged rather expressive glances, and followed him. The Bounder, with a dark and rather troubled brow, walked up the passage to his own study, kicked open the door, and went in.

CHAPTER XII

BUNTER'S BRIGHT IDEA!

"EXTRA!" groaned Bob Cherry.

Saturday afternoon was bright and sunny: quite a contrast to the last half-holiday. But the outlook for the cricketing fellows in the Remove was gloomy. But for that unfortunate "rag" on Wednesday, all would have been calm and bright. Cricket on Little Side would have been the order of the day: and it was glorious weather for cricket.

But most of the Remove were booked for Extra School, and were due in No. 10 class-room at half-past two: up to Monsieur Charpentier. Never had French irregular verbs seemed so utterly unattractive. Even Bob Cherry, for once, did not seem to be enjoying life. Really it would have been a spot of comfort, had it rained that afternoon, as it had rained on Wednesday. But there was not a cloud in the blue sky over the old quad.

"Extra—on a day like this!" said Bob. "I—I wonder whether a fellow could cut! Mossoo hardly ever reports a fellow for cutting Extra. He's a jolly good little ass!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I like that, after the sermons you've been giving me about cutting next Wednesday!" he remarked.

"Um!" said Bob. "I—I suppose we've got to stick it. But it's rotten."

"The rottenfulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But after the esteemed feast comes the ridiculous reckoning, as the proverb remarks."

"All our own fault!" said Johnny Bull. "We asked for it, you know. Wharton was against it, and if we'd had as much sense—"

"Well, a fellow must do something on a rainy day," said Bob. "And I thought Quelch had gone out—he hardly ever misses his grind on a half-holiday. He had to stick in that afternoon."

"And we've got to stick in this!" sighed Frank Nugent. "You ever propose passage cricket again, old man, and we'll bump you bald-headed."

"Well, we should have chucked it, but for that obstinate ass Smithy!" said Bob. "Bother him! Bother Quelch! Bother Hacker! If the Acid Drop hadn't barged in—"

"Shurrup, you ass!" breathed Nugent, hastily.

"What—?"

"Ware beaks!"

"Oh!"

The Famous Five were in a group in the sunny quad. Mr. Hacker, coming out of the House, passed quite near them, and his sour glance turned on the juniors. Bob reddened, as he glanced round at the master of the Shell. Bob's voice was never low, and he wondered whether Hacker had caught his words.

It appeared that he had not, fortunately: for after that sour glance at the Remove group, he walked on, towards the gates.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob. "If he'd heard me call him the Acid Drop—"

"Six from Quelch, if he had!" said Johnny Bull. "That's what Smithy got the other day. Hacker doesn't like fancy names."

"The esteemed Acid Drop did not hear, and the missfulness is as good as the milefulness!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bother him!" murmured Bob. "No wonder some fellow knocked his lid off the other day—Hacker asks for these things."

"I wonder—!" said Johnny Bull, slowly.

"What and which?"

"Nothing's come out about that," said Johnny. "It's jolly queer that nobody knows a thing, when it must have been a Remove man. I wonder—"

Harry Wharton frowned. He wondered, as his friends did, who could have "buzzed" that cricket ball at the Acid Drop. Very gladly indeed would he have identified the unknown "buzzer". But he had no use for Johnny Bull's surmises on the subject. He interrupted, rather sharply.

"If you're thinking of Smithy, wash it out!"

"I was thinking of Smithy," answered Johnny, calmly. "Smithy had six, and all through Hacker. I know he's supposed to have been out of gates at the time, and all the rest of it. But I wonder—"

"Whoever it was, it was not Smithy!" snapped Harry Wharton. "It was his fault there was a row at all—and mine, for letting him jeer me into it—but he wouldn't let another man take his gruel—that's all rot."

"Um!" said Johnny. He did not seem at all sure. "Somebody's letting you take his gruel—"

"Not Smithy! He's rather a rotter in some ways, but he's too decent for that," said the captain of the Remove. "He's got a spot of decency."

"Thanks!" said a sardonic voice: and the Famous Five looked round at the Bounder. He gave them a somewhat unpleasant stare. "Talking about me?"

"Why shouldn't we?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Glad to hear you think I've got a spot of decency. Wharton, though I'm a rotter in some ways!" sneered Smithy. "Many thanks for your good opinion."

Harry Wharton looked at him steadily.

"You know what I think of you, Smithy," he answered. "If you heard what I said, it's no news to you."

"Not at all! But you were speaking to Bull, and I didn't hear what he said. What was it, Bull?"

The Famous Five did not speak: four of them feeling somewhat uncomfortable, but Johnny merely taking time to think before he spoke. The Bounder's look grew more unpleasant and aggressive. It was quite clear that he was in a mood for trouble, and ready to quarrel at a word. Possibly a quarrel with Harry Wharton might have furnished some sort of solace to his conscience.

"I'll tell you, if you like," said Johnny Bull, calmly. "I was wondering whether it was you buzzed that ball at the Acid Drop, and I said so. Wharton thinks it couldn't have been, or you'd have owned up, as any decent fellow would. I'm not so jolly sure."

"Oh!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. Something of the truculence faded out of his face. He gave Johnny a look, and then turned his eyes on the captain of the Remove.

"You don't think so?" he asked.

"No!"

"Why not?" sneered Smithy.

"I think you'd own up, if you did it," said Harry. "You couldn't be rat enough to keep mum, when another fellow was nailed in your place."

The colour came into Vernon-Smith's cheeks. The word "rat" struck him very unpleasantly, in the circumstances.

"I say, you fellows." A fat voice interrupted, perhaps to the Bounder's relief. "I say—!"

"Oh, blow away, Bunter," grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Hook it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Beast! I mean, do listen to a chap," urged Bunter. "I'm not in Extra, you know, and I told you I was going to the pictures. But—but my postal order didn't come this morning, after all."

"Fathead!"

"They've got a jolly good picture on at the Regal in Pegg," went on Bunter, "Three murders in it, I've heard! Or four! If one of you fellows would lend me half a crown—"

"Scat!"

"Look here," said Bunter. "I'll tell you what. The Acid Drop's going over to Pegg this afternoon—I heard him tell Prout he was taking a walk on the cliffs—"

"Bother the Acid Drop, and bother you!"

"But look here," urged Bunter. "Hacker's got you all into a row—Extra School for the lot of you, and Wharton stacked with detentions for buzzing a cricket ball at his napper—"

"As it happens, I did not, you fat ass," said Harry.

"He, he, he!" Bunter's fat cachinnation hinted that he doubted that denial. "Well, anyway, you're for it, old chap, and I'll tell you what! Hacker's sure to take the short cut through the wood to Pegg, ain't he?"

"What about it, ass?"

"Well, I'm going to Pegg," said Bunter. "What about shifting the plank on Friardale Water after I've got across? The Acid Drop would have to walk a couple of miles round, when he came back. See?"

"You dithering ass!"

"Well, that would pay him out for getting you fellows into Extra," said Bunter. "Hacker ain't a walker like old Quelch—I expect he'll be pretty well cooked by the time he gets back to the stream. He, he, he! Make him walk two or three miles round when he's jolly tired see? His skinny legs will be dropping off by the time he gets back to the school! He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter chuckled, loud and long. The idea of making Mr. Hacker walk two or three miles round, on his homeward route, apparently amused the fat Owl. He seemed to expect the chums of the Remove to chuckle too. But they did not appear to share Bunter's amusement. They only stared at the fat Owl.

"Serve him jolly well right, after getting you fellows bunged into Extra, what?" said Bunter, breezily. "I'll jolly well do it, if you'll lend me half a crown for the pictures at the Regal—"

"You benighted chump—!" said Bob Cherry.

"—and half a crown for a taxi back!" added Bunter. "You see, if I shifted the plank, I couldn't walk back that way, and I don't want to have to go miles round like Hacker. Lend me a couple of half-crowns—"

"I'll lend you a couple of thick ears, you fat foozler," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! You're going to stick in Extra—well, while you're doing French with Mossoo, you can think of Hacker coming back and finding that plank gone—fancy his face!" said Bunter. "Mind, I'll settle the five bob when my postal order comes on Monday."

"You blithering bloater—"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, don't walk off while a fellow's talking to you," howled Bunter.

Unheeding that injunction, the Famous Five did walk off. They seemed to have had enough of Billy Bunter and his bright ideas about reprisals on Hacker. The fat Owl turned his spectacles, not very hopefully, on Vernon-Smith. The wealthy Bounder had more ten shilling notes than other fellows had half-crowns, and it would have cost him little to accede to the fat Owl's request—if he chose so to do. That was a very doubtful point however. But hope springs eternal in the human breast.

"I say, Smithy, Hacker got you six the other day!" said Bunter. "You've got to go into Extra this afternoon, too! I say, if he finds the plank gone, he might try to jump it, and go in—wallop!"

The Bounder laughed. The idea of Mr. Hacker trying to jump the woodland stream in Friardale Wood, and going in "wallop", seemed to amuse him. He slipped his hand into his pocket.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes glistened behind his big round spectacles. The Famous Five had had no use for his bright idea. But it appeared that the Bounder had. Smithy's was not a forgiving nature: and his feelings towards the "Acid Drop" were as acid as Mr. Hacker's own temper.

"Here you are, fathead!" he said.

The fat Owl could hardly believe in his good luck, as a couple of half-crowns were dropped into a fat palm.

"Oh! Thanks!" he gasped, "I'll settle this on Monday, of course, Smithy—"

"I don't think!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! My postal-order can't be later than Monday—it's from one of my titled relations, you know—"

"Pack it up!" said the Bounder, "Hike off. And don't forget to shift that plank, Bunter. I'll take a trot that way after Extra, and if you haven't done it, I'll boot you all over Greyfriars."

"Oh, really, Smithy—!"

The Bounder slouched away, consoled a little, no doubt, by the prospect of the Acid Drop, on his return, facing the alternative of walking several miles round, or risking a ducking. Billy Bunter blinked after him through his big spectacles, murmured "Beast!" and then rolled away to the gates. Bunter, at least, was going to enjoy that half-holiday: with a picture with three or four murders in it, and a taxi home afterwards. It was a cheery fat Owl that rolled away for Pegg: leaving quite a crowd of Remove fellows behind him who were feeling anything but cheery.

CHAPTER XIII

A WARNING FOR WHARTON

"WHARTON!"
"Yes, sir!"

The famous Five came to a dismayed halt.

It was almost time for "Extra"; but not quite. They were in the quad, with a number of other Remove fellows—due in the French master's classroom at half-past two. The St. Jim's match on the coming Wednesday was the subject they were discussing: though Harry Wharton had little to say. There was a faintly dogged expression on his face, which his chums understood only too well.

Four members of the Co. were worried. They were thinking of the fixture at St. Jim's, less as a cricket match, than as the probable date of a very bad spot for the captain of the Remove. For Harry Wharton's determination was quite fixed: he was going over to St. Jim's with the cricketers when that date came round—detention or no detention, Quelch or no Quelch. And if that had been a wildly reckless plan before, it was doubly so now, since Billy Bunter had heard of it, and, of course, spread the news. Every fellow in the Remove, and some fellows in other forms, knew that Harry Wharton was going to "cut" on Wednesday, flouting authority to the very limit. It was a topic among dozens of fellows: and it seemed impossible that it should not reach Quelch's ears, sooner or later. Nobody, of course, would mention it in his hearing intentionally: but careless words were very likely to be dropped: and the merest hint would be enough for Quelch. That added danger seemed to make no difference to Harry Wharton: but it was a matter of deep anxiety to his friends.

Now, as the Remove master called to Wharton, the Co. could not help thinking that he had heard. Quelch's face wore its grimmest look. There was a glint in the gimlet eyes, and his lips were compressed in a hard line. He rapped out Wharton's name like a bullet.

Harry Wharton answered him respectfully. But his face did not register dismay like those of his friends. He met his form-master's grim glance with perfect calmness.

"Wharton! I have something very serious to say to you."

"Indeed, sir."

"You are under detention, Wharton, for four half-holidays, after to-day."

"I had not forgotten, sir."

Mr. Quelch breathed a little hard. Wharton's manner was respectful, indeed almost meek: yet there was a hint in it of cool impertinence. Quelch did not need telling that that member of his form was in a mood of dogged

defiance. It was a change in Harry Wharton: it was almost as if he had, for the nonce, changed characters with the Bounder. Quelch was not a man to take it with much patience.

The Co. stood silent in dismay. Other fellows gathered round, wondering, like the Co. whether Quelch had heard what all his form had heard. Vernon-Smith, Squiff, Tom Brown, Peter Todd, Lord Mauleverer, and five or six other fellows, looked on, in silence.

"I trust, Wharton, that you have not forgotten—and that you will not forget," said Mr. Quelch, in a very deep voice.

"I've quite a good memory, sir."

Again Quelch breathed very hard.

"I will speak plainly, Wharton." Something has reached my ears, to the effect that it is your intention to disregard your form-master's authority, and leave the school on Wednesday."

Wharton made no answer to that.

Since Billy Bunter's keyhole performance, and the tattle up and down the Remove, he had more than half-expected Quelch to hear something. Now, evidently, Quelch had. It made no difference to his determination: except, perhaps, to harden it.

"I regret," went on Mr. Quelch, "that your just punishment should interfere with school games. But for that you have only yourself to thank. You are well aware, Wharton, that such a punishment is light, in view of your action, and that it would have been more severe, had not your previous good conduct been taken into consideration.

No reply.

"I trust," went on Mr. Quelch, "that what I have heard is merely idle talk. But I feel it my duty to give you a very serious warning, Wharton."

"Thank you, sir."

"What? What did you say, Wharton?"

"I said thank you, sir."

Skinner, in the little crowd that was gathering round, winked at Smithy. Wharton was asking for it, as hard as he could: which was amusing to the amiable Skinner. But the Bounder gave him only a scowl in response to his wink. Smithy's look was troubled. The Bounder's conscience was somewhat elastic, and did not often perturb him. But it was troubling him now.

The gimlet-eyes glinted at the captain of the Remove.

"Listen to me, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, his voice deeper.

"I am listening, sir."

"I am speaking to you in the presence of your friends, who may have some influence on you in this matter," said Mr. Quelch, "I trust that they will exercise it, if you actually have any such intention as I have mentioned. For if you should carry out any such intention, the consequence will be drastic."

No answer.

"I scarcely understand you of late, Wharton. Your riotous conduct on last Wednesday, when you should, as Head Boy, have exercised a restraining influence on your thoughtless form-fellows, was a painful surprise to me—"

Bob Cherry broke in.

"That wasn't Wharton's fault, sir—"

"You need not speak, Cherry."

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! But it really wasn't, sir—Wharton was against it all the time, and we rushed him into it—"

"The rushfulness was terrific, sir," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It was all our fault, sir," said Frank Nugent.

"It was, really and truly, sir!" said Johnny Bull.

"And mine, sir!" The Bounder, unexpectedly, spoke, causing all the fellows on the spot to stare at him. "I said he was funking it, and—!"

"Silence!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Whatever may have been the cause of your joining in that riot, Wharton, you are well aware of what was your duty as Head Boy."

Wharton coloured.

"I know, sir!" he said, in a low voice, "I was to blame in that. But I did nothing more than that—I do not even know who pitched that cricket ball from my window at Mr. Hacker."

"That matter has been inquired into and judged, Wharton, and I desire to hear nothing further from you on the subject."

"Very well, sir!" said Harry, quietly.

"I have, as I have said, a warning to give you. If you are indeed meditating an act of open rebellion against authority, I trust that your better sense may prevail, or that your friends may influence you for your good. For understand, this, Wharton, clearly—if you should be guilty of such a flagrant defiance of authority as to leave this school on Wednesday, against orders, I shall report your act to your head-master, and request your expulsion from the school."

"Indeed, sir."

"That will be the penalty," said Mr. Quelch. "If you carry your obduracy to such a length, you will know what to expect. That is all!"

With that, Mr. Quelch turned away, and rustled into the House. He left a silent crowd of juniors behind him. All eyes were on Harry Wharton: but his indifferent face expressed nothing.

"By gum!" Bob Cherry was the first to speak, "Quelch is in a bait."

"The baitfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, dismally.

"That tattling ass Bunter—!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"You'll chuck it now, Wharton?" The Bounder eyed him anxiously. "It was pretty decent of Quelch to give you that warning, you know—he doesn't want to come down hard if he can help it. He's given you a chance."

Wharton glanced at him.

"Thanks for your advice," he said. "It's of no use to me, but thanks all the same."

"You won't carry on—after that?"

"Why not?"

"Harry, old chap—!" breathed Nugent.

"For goodness sake—!" mumbled Bob.

"Quelch meant every word he said!" said Peter Todd.

"So do I!" said Harry. "If I'd pitched that ball at Hacker, I should have no kick coming. I should deserve it, and more. But as it happens, I did not—and I'm not going to cut a cricket match because Quelch doesn't choose to sort out the right man."

"Who did—if you didn't?"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask me another! That's for Quelch to sort out—he's the beak! Some rat dodged into my study, when that fat idiot Bunter ragged me into chasing him up the passage—that's all I know. It's up to Quelch to sort out the facts. If he doesn't choose to, it's not my fault, is it?"

"But, my dear chap—!" said Squiff.

There was a chime from the clock-tower.

"Time!" said Harry "Better not be late for Mossoo. You fellows coming?" He walked away to the House.

His friends followed him, in glum silence.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RIGHT THING

"SMITHY—"

"Chuck it."

"We shall be late for Extra—"

"I'm not keeping you."

"I know! But—"

"Give us a rest."

Herbert Vernon-Smith, plainly, was not in a good temper. Tom Redwing was used to that, and he was tolerant: all the more, because he knew that Smithy's savage humour was due chiefly to the gnawing of his conscience.

Smithy had not gone with the crowd to Mossoo's class-room. While the rest went into Extra, the Bounder had slouched off to his study, with a black brow. Redwing followed him there, to remind him that he was due in No. 10 class-room: and, as the Bounder refused to stir, he remained. Tom was far from sharing his chum's reckless manners and customs, and he was generally as punctual as a clock. But it looked as if he was going to be late for once.

The Bounder, lounging by the study window, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, gave his chum a scowl.

"That mule!" he muttered.

Redwing smiled faintly, for a moment. He knew to whom the Bounder referred.

"That stuck-up noodle!" went on Smithy. "He can't take what comes to him like other fellows—too much of a Great Big Panjandrum."

"It's the injustice that's put his back up, Smithy," said Redwing, quietly. "I think he's wrong—in fact I know he is—but I can understand how he feels about it. He never buzzed that ball at Hacker—"

"How do you know?" sneered Smithy.

"I know and you know," said Redwing, sharply. "It was you, and I know just as well as if I'd seen you."

"Suppose it was? Didn't Hacker ask for it, the meddlin' ass! Why can't he mind his own business, and leave the Remove alone?"

"There was a fearful shindy, Smithy! Any beak was bound to barge in, as Quelch didn't—"

"Are you sticking up for the Acid-Drop?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Smithy. Hacker's a pain in the neck, if you like. But that doesn't alter facts. You got him with that cricket ball from Wharton's study window, and that's the trouble."

"I couldn't have if Wharton had been there, as he ought to have been. If he chooses to disobey orders—"

"I know! I know! But—come down to brass-tacks, Smithy. Wharton never did what he was nailed for—and you did!"

"And why can't he take it, like any other fellow?" demanded the Bounder. "Think he's the first man at Greyfriars, or the first man in the world, to land a spot of injustice? It isn't a flogging—not even six from Quelch—it's detention—and a fellow can stand that without yowling."

"It's a cricket match too! But I'm not defending him—he's a hot-headed ass, to think of kicking over the traces like that, and I hope his friends will make him think better of it before next Wednesday—"

"Some hope!" sneered the Bounder. "He's as obstinate as a mule, and you know it. He'd rather leave the school on his neck, than put his precious pride in his pocket."

"If it comes to that, Smithy—"

"Well?" snarled the Bounder.

"You can't let it go on, old chap."

"Can't I?"

"It's not good enough. I can see that that's what's worrying you now—"

"It's not worrying me."

"I can see that it is, and so it ought, Smithy. Quelch meant every word he said, and you can't see a man sacked for what you did."

"For his own mulish obstinacy, you mean," snarled the Bounder. "He got detentions for bowling Hacker—that's all. If he gets the sack, it will be for defying Quelch."

"I know! But—"

"You fancy that I ought to walk into Quelch's study and own up?"

Redwing did not reply to that. But his look was enough.

"And suppose I did?" said Smithy, breathing hard. "Think I should be let off lightly on my good record, as Wharton was?" He laughed savagely. "It would be the last drop in the bucket for me—I should be sacked, and you warned me yourself—and you know it."

"It mightn't come to that—"

"You'd like me to take the chance—because a fellow can't put up with a spot of injustice without doing a song and dance about it?"

"It's up to you, Smithy. The time to think of the consequences was when you did that silly, disrespectful, mad thing—not now. You chose to carry on with it, and you can't leave it on another fellow."

"That's all you've got to say?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better leave me alone!" snarled the Bounder. "Get down to French verbs—you're late already."

"We're both late already—for goodness sake, come along, Smithy, and don't make matters worse by cutting Extra."

"Extra go hang! Think I'm feeling like French conjugations with that little ass Mossos now? I'm not going into Extra."

"But—"

"Oh, chuck it, and leave me alone."

"If you'd rather I went—"

"Much rather! Think I want to listen to your sermons? If you've got to hand out sixthly and seventhly, let Wharton have the benefit of it—he needs it as much as I do, now he's setting up to be a law for himself. Tell him that it's a good little boy's good little duty to obey his kind teachers," jeered the Bounder. "Anyhow, give me a rest!"

Redwing moved to the door, but he hesitated. He was unwilling to leave his chum to himself in that savage mood. The Bounder eyed him almost malevolently.

"Perhaps it will do him good," he jeered. "Perhaps he will listen to you—perhaps! Anyhow leave me alone."

Tom Redwing opened his lips, but he closed them again, and left the study without another word. The Bounder kicked the door savagely shut after him.

Left alone, he moved about the room restlessly. He would have been glad to dismiss the whole matter from his mind: but that he could not do.

Smithy was a hard case, in many ways. More than once, the "sack" had

impended over him: and fellows who knew him best, often wondered how he had escaped it so long. His luck had always been phenomenal. Somehow or other he had always eluded what seemed inevitable: and he had laughed in his sleeve at his success. To delude the masters, to bamboozle the prefects: to carry on in his own wilful way regardless of authority: all that was like meat and drink to the reckless fellow, and it never troubled his conscience. But—there was a limit! To let another fellow bear the brunt of his misdoings was mean, and it was cowardly: and meanness and cowardice were not in his nature. It was intolerable to him to sink in his own esteem: to feel contempt for himself.

It was very unusual for Smithy to have to wrestle with his own conscience. Yet for the past few days he had been doing little else. He argued that detentions, after all, were little, even if undeserved: and that was all that had come to Harry Wharton: while in his own case, judgment would undoubtedly have been much more severe. Was he to ask for the "sack", just to save a fellow from giving up a few half-holidays?

That argument had not satisfied his conscience: but it had lulled it. But now the case was altered. It was Wharton over whom the "sack" impended: for he knew that Quelch's warning had made no difference to him. The rankling sense of injustice was driving Harry Wharton to act as the Bounder himself might have acted: and the outcome, after what Mr. Quelch had said, was not doubtful. That Wharton was obstinate, stubborn, unreasonable, might be all true: but it did not alter the fact that he was going to pay the penalty of what Herbert Vernon-Smith had done. Could he let it go on? He knew that if he did, he would despise himself for ever afterwards.

Smithy, with such thoughts in his mind, was not likely to bother his head about extra French with Mossoo. In fact, he forgot that he was booked for No. 10 classroom with the other participants in that unlucky game of indoor cricket. He moved about his study like a caged animal, and then stood staring with a black brow from the window.

He scowled at the sight of Mr. Quelch, walking in the quad with Prout. He pictured the expression on Quelch's face, if he went to him with his confession. Quelch, unintentionally, had been unjust: he had had to act on the evidence, which seemed conclusive: nevertheless, his sentence on the captain of the Remove had been an injustice, and that injustice had turned his Head Boy into a mutineer. Quelch's feelings, if he learned the truth, could easily be imagined. He would be as hard as iron. There would not be a spot of mercy for the delinquent who had caused him to act unjustly. If Smithy had owned up in the first place, he might have had a chance—but he would have no chance now! He knew what he had to expect—one grim, icy glare from Quelch: an interview with his head-master, and the train home. That was what Redwing seemed to expect him to ask for!

And that, as Smithy knew at the bottom of his heart, was what he was going to do!

But for that scene in the quad, it could have gone on. It could not go on now. He knew that it could not.

He left the study at last. He did not head for No. 10 classroom, or remember it. He headed for Masters' Studies. Quelch was out of the House: neither did Smithy want to see him. He had no use for Quelch's glares or biting words. He walked into the Remove master's vacant study, with a set, sullen, savage face. He was going to do the right thing: but it was in a mood of bitterness and angry resentment that he was going to do it.

He picked up the Remove master's pen, and selected a blank sheet of paper. With a firm hand he wrote:

Mr. Quelch.

Sir,

It was I who knocked Mr. Hacker's mortar-board off with a cricket-ball last Wednesday.

H. Vernon-Smith.

Leaving that message in a conspicuous spot on Mr. Quelch's blotter, he left the study.

At the end of the passage he paused.

The temptation was strong to return to the study, and undo what he had done. For a long moment he hesitated.

Then, setting his lips, he walked on. A few minutes later, he was out of the House, and out of the school: tramping away with a set savage face for Friardale Wood: he had done the right thing: but it had left him in the worst temper ever.

CHAPTER XV

BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!

"YAROOOOH!"

Billy Bunter yelled.

He was taken by surprise. Seldom, indeed, had the fat Owl of the Remove been so utterly taken by surprise.

The very last thing Billy Bunter would have expected, at that moment, was a sudden grasp on the back of his collar. Least of all could he have expected that the hand that grasped would appertain to Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell. It came like a bolt from the blue.

Billy Bunter was, as he had told the Famous Five, going to the pictures, at the Regal, at Pegg. Naturally he took the short cut through Friardale Wood, as he had also told the Co. It saved miles: and not only miles, but furlongs,

indeed yards, were a matter of importance to Bunter when he walked abroad. That, he had no doubt, was the way Hacker had gone: and that was the way he was going—having succeeded in extracting the necessary loan from Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Bunter's progress was slow. He rolled down Friardale Lane: he rested his fat person on the stile for quite a long time, while he recovered breath, never in extensive supply with the fat Owl. At length he rolled on by the leafy, shady footpath through the wood: which, at a certain point, was continued by the plank bridge over the woodland stream that rippled under shady branches on its way to the Sark. Having arrived thus far, the Owl blinked rather dubiously at the stream, before he rolled across the plank.

Friardale Water, generally low in the summer, was full to overflowing. The heavy rains on Wednesday had made a great difference.

The stream filled up and overflowed its banks. It even lapped a little over the heavy old plank that formed a bridge across. Billy Bunter did not quite like the look of it. The bridge was perfectly safe, as a matter of fact: still, if a fellow slipped on wet wood—! Such a fellow, on most summer days, would have slipped off into a foot of water and a foot of mud, and scrambled out again unharmed save for a muddy drenching. But on the present occasion, such a slip would probably have had much more serious results: for there was a depth of six or seven feet now, and the water was running almost like a mill-race.

Billy Bunter blinked at the stream, and almost wished that he had gone the long way round. He did not like the look of that rushing water and a wet plank at all.

But he really couldn't go round the long way, by Friardale village. The fat Owl finally made up his mind to risk it, and he rolled across the plank, treading in a very gingerly manner: and uttering a startled squeak as flowing water washed over his feet.

However, he rolled off the other end of the plank in safety: and then he would gladly have rolled on his way to Pegg, leaving the plank precisely as it was. But a bargain was a bargain: and still more to the point, a boot was a boot! Safe off the plank, he turned, and stopped, to grasp it and shift it, as he had undertaken to do, for Mr. Hacker's behoof.

It was a heavy plank: but, luckily—or perhaps unluckily—the flowing water dashing over it had loosened it, and Bunter was able to heave up the end. It was not much trouble, really: and after all, it was rather amusing—to Bunter—to think of the Acid Drop coming back, and finding that he could not get across.

It did not occur to Bunter's fat brain that, a considerable time having elapsed, Hacker might be already on his way back.

He had himself remarked that Hacker was no walker like Quelch. That made it all the more entertaining to give him a long walk round to get home!

But it also made it probable that Hacker's walk on the cliffs at Pegg might be brief, and that he might start back quite early.

Bunter did not think of that. It had not occurred to his fat brain that the late heavy rains might have made Friardale Water overflow: neither did it occur to that fat brain that Hacker might be already in the offing on his way back. Things did not occur to Bunter's fat brain very readily. And in fact, had he blinked up the footpath in the direction of Pegg, probably he would not have observed a lean figure coming along, in the shadow of leafy branches: his vision being limited, even with the aid of his big spectacles.

But in point of fact, a lean figure was in the offing: and, little as Billy Bunter guessed it, a pair of sharp suspicious eyes were on him, from a distance, as he stooped and heaved at the plank. The Acid Drop was unseen by Bunter, who had of course no eyes in the back of his fat head. But Bunter was in full view of the Acid Drop, as he panted and heaved at the plank.



A sudden grasp on the back of his collar.

Hacker gazed at a fat back as he came on.

For a moment or two, he did not understand what Bunter was at. Then he realized that that Remove boy was playing tricks with the plank bridge. Actually he was shifting the plank, thus making the stream impassable.

The look that came over Mr. Hacker's acid face was extremely expressive. Not only was this an insensate trick, likely to cause inconvenience to the public: but it would bar Hacker's own way home, giving him a long extra walk. Hacker was not, perhaps, particularly concerned about the public: but he was very much concerned about his own thin long legs, already tired. As soon as it dawned on him what that fat Remove junior was doing, Hacker hastened his strides, to come up with him and stop him in time. He was more eager to stop that insensate trick of Bunter's, than he had been to stop the shindy in the Remove passage at Greyfriars a few days ago. His long legs fairly whisked.

Splash!

He was just too late!

Bunter had the end of the plank up. He heaved it to one side, intending to detach it at the other end. But there was not sufficient beef in the fat Owl for such a heave as that. The other end of the plank still rested in its place: Bunter's end dropped into the water, splashed, and sank out of sight. The plank was left sloping down into the water from the opposite side of the stream, leaving quite a wide space unbridged.

The next moment Hacker reached him.

It was then that Billy Bunter had the surprise of his life. The splash of the dislodged plank was followed by a startled yell that woke most, if not all, of the echoes in Friardale Wood.

"Yaroooh!" yelled the startled fat Owl.

Hacker panted. "You young rascal!"

"Yow-ow! Leggo, you beast! Ow! Will you leggo!" yelled Bunter. He wriggled round in Hacker's grasp, and his eyes almost popped through his spectacles, as he saw who had so suddenly grasped him. "Oh! Oh, crikey! The—the—the Acid Drop! Oh, lor'!"

Shake! shake! shake!

Hacker came very near boxing Bunter's fat ears. However, he contented himself with shaking the fat Owl. It was a severe shaking, and the hapless Owl sagged and squeaked as he shook.

"Ow! Leggo! Wow! Oooogh! I say—ow! Stop shick-shack-shaking me, will you—ow! If you make my specs fall off—ow!"

"You young rascal!" repeated Hacker. "You have been playing tricks with the plank—"

"Oh! No! I never touched it!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I—wouldn't—wow!"

"I saw you—"

"Oh! I—I mean, I—I—I was—was—was—was—wow! Leggo my collar! You're chook-chook-chook-choking me!" gurgled Bunter. "I—I was only going to sake it mafe—I—I mean make it safe—wow!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Urrrrrgggh!" gurgled the fat Owl. "Will you leggo? Urrrgh!"

Mr. Hacker did not let go. A wide flowing stream lay before him, and he had to jump it at the risk of a ducking, or walk a long way round on bony legs that were already fatigued. Even a good-tempered man might have been annoyed. Hacker's temper, never sweet, was at its sourest. Instead of letting go, Hacker shook, and shook, till the fat Owl felt like a quivering jelly: and finally, resisting temptation no longer, he smacked a fat head—and apparently deriving consolation from that, smacked it again, and yet again. Wild and frantic yells from Billy Bunter accompanied the smacks.

Then Mr. Hacker, at last, let go—or rather, he threw Bunter away like a sack. The fat Owl stumbled and sat down: and roared:

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

Hacker stared at the rippling stream with glinting eyes. How was he going to get across? Plenty of Greyfriars fellows could have jumped it: but Hacker was even less of a jumper than a walker. He did not like the look of it at all. On the other hand, he liked still less the prospect of a long, long walk round by the road and the village. Having stared at the stream he stared round at Bunter: and he was so evidently meditating further smacks for the fat head, that the Owl of the Remove scrambled up in hot haste, and bolted.

The master of the Shell cast a black look after him, as he charged up the footpath, and disappeared in the direction of Pegg. He would gladly have smacked that fat head again.

However, Bunter's fat head was now out of his reach: and, after all, smacking it would not have solved his problem. Hacker turned back to the stream once more, and debated that problem in his mind—to jump or not to jump! He was still hesitating, when a Greyfriars junior came in sight from the direction of Friardale Lane: and Herbert Vernon-Smith stared at Mr. Hacker across the flowing water.

CHAPTER XVI

VERY UNEXPECTED!

"MAIS qu'est-ce-que-c'est?" snapped Monsieur Charpentier.

Extra School was going on the uneven tenor of its way, when a knock came at the door of No. 10 class-room. The door opened, and the chubby face of Trotter, the House page, looked in.

Mossoo was not enjoying Extra, any more than the detained juniors. He

had an unusual number of offenders in the detention class: and most of them were in rather an unruly mood. Dropping books and banging desk-lids accompanied French irregular verbs, and Mossoo's patience was wearing thin. So when Trotter looked in and interrupted, he snapped.

"If you please, sir—!" began Trotter.

"But vat is it, zen?" snapped Mossoo, "Mon Dieu! Ordair in ze class! Sherry, zat you shuffle not ze feet. Vy you drop vunce more zat book, you Todd? Field, zat you talk not viz Brown. Taisez-vous, donc! Vat is it, Trot-tair? Vy you come?"

"Mr. Quelch, sir, wishes to see Master Wharton and Master Vernon-Smith in his study, sir!" said Trotter.

"Phew!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Smithy's copped. Lucky you're here, Wharton."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was not present. The Bounder had "cut" Extra. Quite possibly Monsieur Charpentier might have failed to report that circumstance to Quelch, for he was a kind though irritable little gentleman, and disliked handing over offenders to strict justice. But Smithy, undoubtedly, was "copped", as Bob expressed it, now. Quelch had sent for him, and he certainly could not obey the summons, as he was not there.

"Vharton! Vernon-Smeet!" Monsieur Charpentier glanced over the class, "Ah, cc! Vernon-Smeet is not here. Vharton!"

"Yes, sir."

"Zat you go at vunce to Monsieur Quelch. Trottair, you vill tell Monsieur Quelch zat Vernon-Smeet is absent."

"Yes, sir!" said Trotter: and he departed.

Harry Wharton's face was set, as he rose to follow. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, all glanced at him uneasily. Why his form-master had called him away from Extra, not one of the Co. could begin to guess: but after that little scene in the quad, they wondered whether it portended further trouble. That idea certainly was in Harry Wharton's mind, as his expression very plainly revealed.

Nugent caught at his sleeve.

"Harry, old chap!" he whispered. "You don't know what Quelch wants—!" Wharton's lip curled.

"Not in the least," he answered, "Unless somebody's done something, and Quelch wants somebody to fasten it on, and I'm the happy man."

"That's rot," grunted Johnny Bull.

"Is it?"

"The rotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Wharton," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"For goodness sake, don't check Quelch!" whispered Bob Cherry.

"Why not?"

"Isn't there enough trouble on hand already?" grunted Johnny.

"If Quelch wants more, I can't stop him."

"Look here—"

"Vharton!" yapped Mossoo, "I say zat you go at vunce to Monsieur Quelch. Ze ozzers, be silent! Taissez-vous! Go at vunce, Vharton."

"Very well, sir."

All eyes followed Harry Wharton, as he went to the door. Most fellows would have liked to be called out of Extra: though certainly not to Quelch's study. The Co. were left feeling very uneasy. Why Quelch wanted Vernon-Smith, they did not know, or care very much—though Tom Redwing certainly did. But they were concerned for their stubborn chum, who was answering Quelch's summons to his study in a mood very likely to make matters worse rather than better.

Wharton did not hurry on his way to Masters' Studies. He was in no mood to be particularly prompt at his form-master's orders. Like his friends, he wondered what Quelch wanted, with little doubt that it meant more trouble. One injustice was not enough: there was more to come! It was in a bitter frame of mind that he arrived, at last, at Mr. Quelch's study, tapped, and entered.

Mr. Quelch was standing by his table, with a paper in his hand. The expression on his face was not grim and unbending, as Wharton had expected to find it. He looked perturbed, and indeed distressed, and the junior looked at him in wonder. This was an unusual and unexpected Quelch. Something, evidently, had occurred that had disturbed the Remove master very deeply: but it did not look as if it spelled trouble for the junior who now stood before him.

"You sent for me, sir?" Wharton's tone was quite respectful.

"Yes, Wharton! I—I—" Quelch was almost stammering. Evidently he was very much disturbed, "I—I have something to say to you, Wharton—I—I—have to express my regret—my deep regret—"

Wharton could only stare.

What this implied, was a mystery to him. He had last seen Quelch in his hardest, grimmest mood. Something had changed him, somehow. To his amazement, he saw the colour flush into his form-master's cheeks.

Mr. Quelch coughed.

"A few days ago, Wharton, you were judged guilty of the disrespectful act of—of throwing a cricket-ball at Mr. Hacker."

"Oh!" breathed Wharton. He began to see light! Evidently, something must have occurred to enlighten his form-master on that subject. Had they, at last, found the right man?

"I had no choice but to act on the evidence, which appeared conclusive, Wharton. But—but—it now appears that it was the act of another Remove boy, who must have entered your study during your brief absence, as you told me—" Mr. Quelch paused.

Wharton did not speak.

But the angry, resentful, mutinous feelings in his heart were fading out fast. He had come there bitterly expecting one injustice to be piled on another. And he found his form-master deeply disturbed by the discovery that there had been a single act of injustice. He had been angry, and he had felt, like the prophet of old, that he did well to be angry. But now—! Now he was feeling more like kicking himself!

"I regret this, Wharton, very deeply! I regret that I was unable to accept your word when you told me you knew nothing of the affair. I cannot help feeling that I should have known you better!" said Mr. Quelch, in a low voice.

"Oh, no sir!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, impulsively, "It was my fault—if I'd stayed in the study, it couldn't have happened—I can't see how you could have believed anything but what you did, sir, in the circumstances. But I—I—I'm glad you know now that it was not I."

"There is no doubt about that now. Wharton, and your sentence of detention for the four half-holidays is of course, rescinded."

"Oh!" breathed Harry.

He felt his cheeks crimson. His sentence was washed out: he was free to go over to St. Jim's with the cricketers when Wednesday came. And he had been determined to go, in defiance of authority: flouting the master who, as he could now see, and as he realized he ought to have known, was only anxious to be just. Shame was a rather unaccustomed feeling for Harry Wharton: but at that moment, no fellow at Greyfriars School had ever felt so thoroughly and utterly ashamed of himself. His face burned as he stood silent.

"The matter is now clear," went on Mr. Quelch. "The boy responsible for the act has now confessed: and his punishment will not be light." Quelch's face set grimly, "This will be his last offence at this school. I understand from Trotter that he is absent from Monsieur Charpentier's class?"

Wharton gave a start.

"You—you don't mean Vernon-Smith, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly I do."

"But—but—!" Wharton stammered. "It—it can't have been Smithy, sir—there's some mistake—Smithy would have owned up like a shot, sir, when it was put on me—he couldn't have kept mum—he wouldn't—"

"He has confessed, Wharton."

"Oh!" gasped Harry.

"You may see this note!" said Mr. Quelch. "I found it on my table when I came into my study a short while ago."

Harry Wharton stared blankly, as the Remove master held up the paper in his hand. He read, with amazed eyes, what Herbert Vernon-Smith had written there. He knew the Bounder's hand well enough. Smithy, after all, had owned up!

"Oh!" he gasped, again.

"Vernon-Smith has chosen to absent himself!" said Mr. Quelch, with a

glint in his eyes. "He will be dealt with immediately he returns to the school, and he will leave Greyfriars to-day. I sent for you, Wharton, to apprise you that the facts were now known and to express my regret for an involuntary act of injustice. You may now return to Monsieur Charpentier's class."

"Thank you, sir."

Wharton moved to the door. But he paused, and turned back.

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir!" he stammered, with crimson cheeks. "I—I—You know that I—I was thinking of—of kicking over the traces on Wednesday—for the cricket match—I—I—I—I can see now that my friends were right, and I was a fool—an obstinate fool—I—I'm sorry that I ever thought of any such thing, sir."

And without waiting for a rejoinder, he hurriedly left the study.

CHAPTER XVII

JUST LIKE SMITHY!

THE Bounder laughed.

Mr. Hacker, across the woodland stream, gave him a dark look.

Smithy was not in a laughing mood. He had tramped out of the school, after leaving that note for Quelch in the form-master's study, in the blackest temper ever. He had done the right thing—he had done what he knew he must do—but only too well he knew what the consequences would be. Only too well he knew what awaited him when he went back. He tramped on the footpath in Friardale with a black brow, sullen and savage. He remembered that he had been booked for Extra, and shrugged his shoulders as he remembered it. He was not likely to care about that, with the "sack" impending over him. Indeed, now that all was up, he was rather glad that one more mutinous act had been added to the tally: and, as Quelch would undoubtedly be waiting for him to come in, he was coolly determined to cut calling-over, and leave Quelch to wait! If he was going, he was going with his chin up, defiant to the last. But black and bitter as was his mood, he burst into a laugh at the sight of Mr. Hacker on the other side of the stream in the wood.

Billy Bunter, evidently, had carried out his fatuous plan. The plank, on Smithy's side of the stream sloped down into the water, far out of reach from the other side, where the fat Owl had tipped it in. Hacker, on the bank, was frowning, or rather scowling, and it gave the Bounder some sardonic amusement to watch him. The Acid Drop, at least in Smithy's opinion, was the cause of all the trouble that had now overwhelmed him, and Smithy would have been very pleased to see him attempt the jump, with a ducking for his reward.

Mr. Hacker's dark brow grew darker, as he looked across at Vernon-

Smith. His predicament was annoying enough, without a Remove junior laughing disrespectfully in his very face. His eyes glinted at Smithy. He would have been very glad, at that moment, to smack Smithy's head harder than he had smacked Bunter's.

"Vernon-Smith!" he rapped out.

"Hallo, old thing!" answered the Bounder: an answer that made the master of the Shell doubt his ears. "Stranded, what?"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Hacker, "Vernon-Smith! How dare you answer me with such insolence?"

The Bounder laughed again. Certainly he would not, in ordinary circumstances, have addressed Hacker in that strain. But he had nothing to lose now. Hacker's anger was nothing to a fellow booked for the "sack."

"Oh, can it, Acid Drop!" he called back. "Save your breath for the jump!"

Mr. Hacker goggled at him. Knowing nothing of what Smithy had done, and wholly unaware of what awaited the Bounder on his return to the school, his breath was fairly taken away by Smithy's impertinence.

"Boy!" he gasped.

"Man!" answered Smithy.

"Are you out of your senses, Vernon-Smith?" gasped Mr. Hacker.

"Not at all, old bean! Are you out of yours?"

"Upon my word!"

"Jump it!" said the Bounder, encouragingly. "Or are you understudying the jolly old yokel in jolly old Horace, and waiting for the stream to run by?"

"You impertinent young rascal!" roared Mr. Hacker.

"You impertinent old rascal!" retorted the Bounder.

"What? what?" stuttered Mr. Hacker, "Vernon-Smith, I shall report this insolence to your form-master, immediately I return to the school."

"Oh, do!" drawled the Bounder. "Good old Acid Drop! Never happy unless you're reporting somebody for something, what? Well, go ahead and be happy. While you're chinning with Quelch, tell him, from me, that he's a pain in the neck, and that I'm as fed up with him as I am with you."

Mr. Hacker's eyes bulged at Vernon-Smith. He was too astonished to speak: he stared with bulging eyes.

Smithy laughed again: he found that absolutely flabbergasted expression on Mr. Hacker's face amusing. It was some consolation to him, in the present circumstances, to tell the Acid Drop what he thought of him: and he went on:

"Funk the jump, what? You're rather a poor fish, Hacker. Any man in the Remove could jump it! Go it—see what your spindle-shanks will do! I'll stand here and catch you by that long nose of yours, if you like—that long nose you're always poking into what doesn't concern you."

"Boy!" gurgled Mr. Hacker, "I shall report this, not to your form-master, but to your head-master! You shall be expelled for this insolence, Vernon-Smith."

"You old ass!" retorted the Bounder, contemptuously "do you think I should be talking to a beak like this, if I wasn't booked for the sack already? Quelch knows now that I knocked your mortar-board off your silly head the other day with a cricket-ball."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Sorry it didn't knock your silly head off, instead!" added the Bounder.

"That—that was Wharton—"

"I was I, you old ass, and I've owned up to Quelch, and I'm going back to Greyfriars to be sacked for it," jeered the Bounder. "You can tell Quelch that I may drop in about midnight—I'm in no hurry. If he's thinking of my catching a train home to-day, tell him to forget it. I'll go when I please, and Quelch can go and eat coke! Tell him that from me."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Hacker.

He understood, at last, why the Bounder was addressing him in that



unexpected strain. The most outrageous recklessness cost Smithy nothing now.

"You will certainly be expelled, Vernon-Smith, if it was you—"

"No 'if' about it, Acid Drop! It was I, and Quelch knows now. Fancy the old bean's face, finding out that he's jumped on his precious Head Boy for nothing! Think he would go easy, after that?" sneered Smithy. "I fancy he's feeling like a jolly old tiger, waiting for me to drop into his claws! Well, he can wait! Tell him I may be home with the milk in the morning."

Mr. Hacker breathed hard.

"Vernon-Smith! The plank is on your side of the water—you could push it out, so that I can cross—"

"Likely!"

"I order you to do so!" bawled Mr. Hacker.

"Order away!" jeered the Bounder. "Why, you old ass, do you think I care two hoots for you and your orders? Pack it up, Hacker."

Hacker's eyes fairly flamed at him, across the whirling water. Herbert Vernon-Smith, undoubtedly, was booked for the "sack": but at that moment, Hacker yearned for something even more drastic—if only that mocking, insolent junior had been within reach—!

Hacker had been debating whether to risk a jump, or to resign himself to a long walk round. Now he made up his mind. Vernon-Smith was not going to get away with this unexampled insolence: neither was he going to remain out of gates so long as he chose—he was going to be walked back to Greyfriars with Hacker's bony hand on his collar. With set lips and glinting eyes Hacker backed from the bank, to take a little run for the jump.

"Go it!" called out the Bounder, mockingly. "Screwed up your courage to the sticking-point, Acid Drop? Mind you don't get wet."

Mr. Hacker made no reply to that. He came on at a run, and, reaching the bank, leaped across the water.

Vernon-Smith watched him, with a grinning face. He doubted very much whether Hacker would make it, without getting a ducking. Hacker was no athlete: and a leap that would have been more or less easy for Smithy, was far from easy for Hacker. It was a sheer satisfaction to Smithy to picture the master of the Shell splashing into the water and mud by the bank.

The next moment, he had that satisfaction.

Hacker came flying across the stream—and reached the bank, just! But he reached it too barely to make his footing good. For a split second, he strove to throw his balance forward—and failed! Another second, and he splashed back into the water, and his long legs shot up into the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder.

Hacker, certainly, had a ducking: and a much more severe ducking than Smithy had anticipated. He disappeared under the flowing water, his legs for a moment in the air, and then they followed him. There was a wild and

frantic splashing in the middle of the stream: and the Bounder, watching from the bank, roared with laughter. Smithy was enjoying this.

Then, suddenly, his laughter ceased: as a white face showed above the water, for a moment, and then vanished again.

"Oh!" gasped Smithy.

For the first time, it flashed into his mind that Hacker was in danger. He had not thought of that, or dreamed of it. But the glimpse of that colourless face drove the colour from his own.

For a moment he stood transfixed, staring at the widening circles in the water where Hacker had gone down. It flashed into his mind that Hacker could not swim: and that he was out of his depth. The master of the Shell was utterly helpless in deep, rushing water.

A hand was thrown up—a white face glimmered again. The next second, the Bounder of Greyfriars had dived in. The rushing waters rushed him away, away towards the broad Sark in the distance—but his grasp was on Hacker, and that white face was above the water now: and Herbert Vernon-Smith, the teckless rebel, the hard case who was booked for the "sack", was fighting for two lives—that of the man he had mocked and derided, and his own!

CHAPTER XVIII

BOOKED!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh, blow away, Bunter."

"But I say—!"

"Br-rr-r-r!"

"Extra" was over: and the Remove fellows who had suffered for their sins were out at last, in the sunshine: as happy to have done with Mossoo, as Mossoo was to have done with them. But Harry Wharton and Co. were not looking their usual cheery selves. Certainly, it was good news, great news, that the captain of the Remove had been cleared: that the spot of trouble with his form-master was over: and that his wildly reckless programme for St. Jim's day had been washed out. That was a tremendous relief to his friends, and to Harry Wharton himself. But great as that relief was, it was rather dashed by the knowledge of what was coming to the culprit who had, at long last, done the right thing.

Smithy was out of gates, and had not come in. Few doubted, or could doubt, what was going to happen to him, when he did come in. It was the finish for Smithy: even Redwing could not hope that it was anything else. And it cast a shadow over five faces that were usually as bright and cheery as any at Greyfriars School.

Billy Bunter's fat face, also, was very glum, as he rolled in at the gates, and joined the group of juniors who were discussing Smithy. It appeared that the fat Owl, had not, after all, enjoyed that half-holiday: though he had been free of Extra, and Smithy's half-crowns had made it possible for him to view a delightful film with three or four murders in it, and take a taxi home from Pegg. Bunter did not look as if he had taken that taxi when he rolled in. He looked as if his little fat legs were almost dropping off.

But the Famous Five did not want to hear about Bunter's woes, whatever they were. They were concerned about Smithy, not at all about a fat Owl. They bade him blow away. Instead of doing so, Bunter leaned a fatigued plump back on an elm, and blinked at them dolorously through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—!" he squeaked, plaintively.

"It's all up with him!" said Bob Cherry, ruthlessly regardless of fat squeaks, "It was jolly decent of him to own up: but that won't cut any ice. Quelch will walk him straight off to the Head when he comes in. It's tough on Smithy."

"Bound to," said Johnny Bull. "If Smithy had a chance, he's washed it out himself by keeping mum all this time, and making Quelch jump on the wrong man."

"Henry couldn't get over that!" said Bob, dismally.

"He couldn't!" said Nugent, shaking his head. "It's made him look rather an ass, too—beaks aren't supposed to nail the wrong man. And Quelch is such a whale on being just, and now—"

"Jolly old Aristides hadn't a thing on him, in that line!" sighed Bob, "and now he's got to chew on it that he's been unjust—and he won't be able to get it down."

"The esteemed Quelch will be terrifically infuriated!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, sadly.

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

"And I've made matters worse," muttered Harry Wharton. "I—I ought to have toed the line, and taken it—and—and I didn't! I—I wish I had seen that a little sooner."

"Well, we told you so!" remarked Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton made no reply to that. It was true enough: but he did not seem to derive much comfort from it.

"Well, you were rather a hot-headed ass—!" said Bob.

"Thanks!" said Harry, with a grimace.

"Well, you were, you know: but after all, you never did what Quelch nailed you for, and it was pretty tough to have to cut the St. Jim's match—for nothing. But after all the fuss Quelch will be grimmer than ever."

"The grimfulness will be preposterous."

"I say, you fellows, I wish you'd listen to a chap! I've had an awful time this afternoon!" said Bunter, pathetically.

"No murders in the film after all?" asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"I haven't been to the pictures!" said Bunter, dolorously. "That beast Hacker—that beastly Acid Drop, you know—"

"You fat ass!" said Bob. Have you been getting into a row with Hacker?"

"Well, it wasn't my fault!" said Bunter. "How was I to know that he would be coming along, just as I was shifting the plank?"

"You potty porpoise, did you shift the plank?"

"Didn't I tell Smithy I would?" yapped Bunter. "That was why he lent me the five bob—half-a-crown for the pictures, and half-a-crown for the taxi back. And—and he said he'd boot me if I didn't do it after all—I—I mean. I'm a fellow of my word, I hope! Well, just as I was shifting it, that beast Hacker came up—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And grabbed me by the back of the neck!" wailed Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five were feeling serious enough over the misadventures of the Bunder. But the misadventures of the fat Owl seemed to afford a spot of comic relief.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter, indignantly. "Hacker grabbed me by the back of the neck, just as the plank went in, and shook me—"

"Good!"

"And smacked my head—"

"Hard, I hope!"

"Beast! And then pitched a fellow over, just as if he was a sack of coke!" howled Bunter, "and when he found he couldn't get across Friardale Water, he was jolly well going to pitch into me again, only I bolted—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter, bitterly. "I—I ran nearly all the way to Pegg. And—and when I got to the Regal, and was going in, I—I found I'd lost Smithy's half-crowns. They must have dropped out of my pocket when that beast Hacker was shaking me and pitching a fellow over!"

"And so the poor dog had none!" said Bob.

"And I couldn't go into the Regal, and I had to walk back!" moaned Bunter. "And I couldn't come back by the short cut, you know, as I'd tipped the plank into the water, and I had to go round by the village, and I can tell you, I'm awfully tired. Just tired out! And all you fellows can do is to cackle!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" remarked Johnny Bull. Which appeared to be all the sympathy he had to bestow on a weary and woeful Owl.

"Beast!" moaned Bunter. "My legs are nearly dropping off! Miles and miles, you know! Oh, lor'!"

"You thought it would be funny to make Hacker walk the long way round," grunted Johnny Bull, "Didn't you find it funny yourself?"

"Beast!"

"The long-walkfulness for the esteemed lazy Bunter is a boot on the other leg," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Seen anything of Smithy out of gates, Bunter?" asked Bob.

"Blow Smithy! I wish he hadn't lent me that five bob now!" mumbled Bunter. "I never got into the pictures, and I've walked miles and miles and miles and miles. Bother Smithy! I passed him in the lane coming back—"

"You passed him?" ejaculated Bob Cherry. All the Famous Five stared at Bunter. It was surprising news that Billy Bunter had "passed" anybody on the road. As a rule, he would have been unlikely to pass a tortoise, or even a snail.

"Eh! Yes! Just before I got in," said Bunter. "He was just crawling. Looked as if he was done in. I jolly soon left him behind. But I say, you fellows, what's that you're saying about Smithy? Is he in a row?"

"Sort of," said Bob. "He's owned up to buzzing that cricket ball at Hacker's nut last Wednesday—poor old Smithy!"

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter. "Wasn't it you after all, Wharton?"

"No, ass!"

"Quelch jolly well thought it was—"

"He doesn't think so now, fathead, now that he knows it was Smithy, fathead."

"He, he, he!" Bunter chuckled. "I say, you fellows, Quelch will look an awful ass—getting the wrong pig by the ear, you know. He, he, he! I'll bet he's as mad as a hatter! He will take it out of Smithy. He, he, he!"

"Kick him!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Smithy!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. The Bounder appeared in the gateway. Tom Redwing, who was waiting there, joined him, and they came in together.

The Famous Five eyed Vernon-Smith curiously as he came. He looked, as Bunter had said, "done in". His face was a little pale, and weariness was written all over him: it was almost as if he could hardly drag one weary foot after the other. But he grinned sardonically as he met the eyes of the Famous Five.

"Anything happened out of gates, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes."

"You look all in," said Bob.

"That's how I feel."

"I'm glad you've come in, Smithy," said Tom Redwing, in a low voice. "We all heard about it, old chap, after Extra—we know what you did—it was splendid, old chap—I—I knew you'd own up, in the long run.—"

"Can it!" grunted Smithy.

"You did the right thing, Smithy," said Nugent.

The Bounder's lip curled.

"So uncommon for me to do the right thing, what?" he sneered. "Thanks—

"I didn't say so——"

"You thought so!"

"It was jolly decent, Smithy," said Harry Wharton, quietly. "You've got me out of an awful scrape by owning up to Quelch."

"And got myself into one!" said the Bounder, savagely. "Think I don't know that I'm booked? Quelch would go easy with his precious Head Boy—good conduct and all that—think he will go easy with me? You couldn't take what was coming to you, could you? You had to get your back up, hadn't you? Well, I had to own up, after what Quelch said today, and I knew you'd carry on all the same—I couldn't let it go as far as that! I'd not have said a word, not a syllable, if you'd toed the line like any other fellow would have done. It was only detentions for you, and it was the sack for me! I'd have kept mum, but for your hoity-toity high-and-mightiness! Now you've got me sacked, and I wish you joy of it!"

With that, the Bounder slouched on, scowling, leaving Harry Wharton with a crimson face, and his friends uncomfortably silent. Tom Redwing went with him to the House. As they reached it, a grim face appeared in the doorway: and the sharpest of sharp voices rapped:

"Vernon-Smith!"

The Bounder stared sullenly at his form-master.

"Well?" he snapped.

Redwing pressed his arm, in distress. The Bounder was "booked": there was no doubt about that. But insolence to Quelch certainly could not improve matters, if there was still room for improvement.

Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted.

"So you have returned, Vernon-Smith—?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" sneered Smithy. "If you're interested, I was going to stay out of gates till midnight—"

"What?"

"In a hurry to get me bunked?" jeered the Bounder. "Well, I wasn't in a hurry. But I've come back, for my own reasons—something's happened that's tired me out, and I want a rest. That's why I've come in, just to suit myself."

"Where have you been?"

"Out."

"What have you been doing?"

"Making a fool of myself."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips very hard.

"I have no doubt, Vernon-Smith, that this insolence is derived from your knowledge that this is your last day at Greyfriars," he said.

"What a brain!" jeered the Bounder.

"Eh?"

"You've hit it! Is that the lot?"

"Smithy!" almost groaned Redwing.

The Bounder did not heed him. His eyes were fixed in sullen defiance upon Mr. Quelch's expressive countenance. The Remove master seemed at a loss for words, for some moments. He spoke at last.

"Go to your study, Vernon-Smith, and remain there until you are sent for!" he said, very quietly. "As soon as your head-master is at leisure to deal with you, I shall take you to him. Now go!"

The Bounder slouched sullenly in, with his anxious chum. Mr. Quelch's eyes followed him, glinting. And his look indicated very clearly, for all eyes to see, that if there had been a ghost of a chance for Smithy before, there was none now.

The Bounder's number was up!

CHAPTER XIX

HAPPY LANDING!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"The Acid Drop!"

"What's the matter with Hacker?"

"Looks pretty sick!"

"What the dickens—?"

"Hacker! My dear fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. It was the first time that Quelch had ever thus addressed the master of the Shell. He did not esteem Mr. Hacker. He disliked Hacker's interfering ways. Even in Common-Room they seldom met without a little sparring. But circumstances alter cases. Hacker, at the moment, looked so thoroughly and completely "sick", that all the kindness in Mr. Quelch was aroused. He was quite concerned.

A taxi had driven in and stopped at the House steps. From it emerged Mr. Hacker. Fifty pairs of eyes, at least, fastened on him: Harry Wharton and Co. and a crowd of other fellows, stared at him: Billy Bunter blinked at him with little round eyes almost popping through big round spectacles. Hacker certainly did not look as usual. His face was very pale, his eyes looked hollow, and he almost tottered as he stepped from the taxi. Quelch fairly whisked down the steps, and gave him an arm, upon which the master of the Shell leaned heavily. Few at Greyfriars liked Hacker: but every face was concerned now: even the taxi-driver gave him a commiserating glance before he drove away. Something, evidently, had happened to Hacker: he looked at the end of his tether.

"My dear fellow—!" repeated Mr. Quelch. "What—?"

"My dear Hacker!" Mr. Prout rolled up. "What has happened? What—?"

"By gum!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Hacker's been through it! What on earth—"

"I say, you fellows, what—"

Hacker leaned his weight on Quelch's strong arm. He seemed utterly spent: unable even to mount the steps of the House. When he spoke, his voice was low: quite unlike the usual sharp, sardonic tones of the Acid Drop.

"Thank you, Quelch! Please lend me your aid for a few minutes—"

"Certainly, certainly. Has there been an accident—?"

"I have had a narrow escape from drowning, Quelch!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Hacker shivered. His nerves were in a twitter from the recollection of what he had been through.

"A foolish boy moved the plank over Friardale Water, and I found it gone," said Mr. Hacker. "I jumped it, and—and—fell in."

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl was pushing forward, to see what was to be seen. Now he suddenly reversed, and backed away through the crowd. Bunter was not the fellow, as a rule, to elude the limelight, if any came his way. But he was very anxious not to come into it now!

"You fat chump!" hissed Johnny Bull into a fat ear.

Bunter did not reply to that. He backed out of the crowd and disappeared. It had seemed quite funny to Bunter to give Hacker a long walk round, or alternatively, a ducking if he tried to jump the stream in the wood. It did not seem funny to him now. Evidently that "ducking" had been much more serious than the fat and fatuous Owl had dreamed. Bunter, in haste, faded out of the picture.

"I was swept away by the water." Hacker shivered again. "I was quite helpless—I gave myself up for lost. Had not help been at hand, I should have been swept out into the Sark, and—and—" He did not finish.

"Bless my soul!" said Prout.

"Thank heaven that help was at hand," said Mr. Quelch. "It is a very solitary spot—it is very fortunate that someone was there—"

"A Remove boy," said Mr. Hacker. "He was there—"

"Oh! A boy of my form!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. Concerned as he was for Hacker, Quelch could not help a pleased note in his voice.

"Yes! He dived in for me, and—and after a long struggle, succeeded in helping me to the bank," said Mr. Hacker, faintly. "I was quite exhausted, and so indeed was Vernon-Smith—"

"Eh?"

"Vernon-Smith—"

"Did—did you say Vernon-Smith?" stuttered the Remove master.

"I did!"

"But—but—what—"

"It was with the greatest difficulty that he helped me to the doctor's house in the village," said Mr. Hacker. "I have been resting there, till I felt equal to coming back in a cab. It was a terrible experience, Quelch."

"I have no doubt that it was! But—but you said—Vernon-Smith—is it possible that it was Vernon-Smith—Bless my soul!"

"Good old Smithy!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"The goodness of the esteemed old Smithy is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Smithy!" muttered Harry Wharton, "Smithy, who buzzed that cricket-ball at his head, went into the water for him—"

"No wonder he looked all in," said Nugent. "And he hasn't said a word about it."

"It's like him, really," said Johnny Bull. "Good old Smithy!"

"I must speak to you about that boy, Quelch!" Mr. Hacker was going on. "He has admitted to me that it was he, and not Wharton, who was guilty of that outrageous action last Wednesday, when I was struck by a cricket ball—"

"He has confessed to me, Hacker." Mr. Quelch's expression was quite extraordinary. "I was about to take him to his head-master for judgment—"

"A brave lad!" boomed Mr. Prout. "A very brave lad! Surely, Quelch, in the circumstances—"

"I ask you, as a favour, Quelch, to allow that matter to pass," said Mr. Hacker. "The boy was disrespectful—insolent—I am very far from condoning his conduct, or thinking of doing so. But this afternoon, Quelch, he risked his life to save me—I ask you, sir, to pardon him, and to allow that matter to end here."

"My dear Hacker—"

"You will not refuse what I ask, Quelch?"

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Most certainly not, Hacker! How could I do so? But now, pray let me help you into the House, my dear fellow—you must rest—"

With Quelch on one side, and the portly Prout on the other, Mr. Hacker was assisted into the House. The crowd in the quad were left in a buzz of excitement. Five fellows detached themselves from the buzzing crowd, cut into the House, and fairly raced up the staircase. There was news for Smithy—and they were eager to let him hear it.

The door of No. 4 Study in the Remove was shut. It flew open with a bang as Bob Cherry reached it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was leaning back in an armchair. Tom Redwing standing, with an anxious face, stared round as five Removites burst into the study rather like a hurricane. The Bounder scowled at them.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"We've come—!" panted Bob.

"I can see you've come! Now I want to see you go! Shut the door after you," snapped Smithy.

"Smithy, old man—!" muttered Redwing.

"Oh, pack it up!" snarled the Bounder. "I'm for it, and jaw won't help! Can't you fellows leave a fellow alone?"

"My esteemed and ridiculous Smithy—!"

"You see, old chap—"

"Hacker—"

"Quelch—"

"We've come to tell you—"

The Famous Five all spoke at once. Vernon-Smith interrupted them savagely, before they could get the news out.

"Get out of my study!"

"But we've just heard!" roared Bob. "Hacker's come in—"

"Blow Hacker!"

"He looked just washed out—"

"He would!" sneered the Bounder. "Weedy specimen."

"He's told Quelch how you went in for him, in Friardale Water, and saved him from drowning!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Smithy!" Redwing jumped. "Did you? What—"

"Suppose I did!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Think I could let the old ass drown under my eyes? I got him out. What about it?"

"Oh, Smithy—!" gasped Redwing.

"Oh, Smithy!" mimicked the Bounder. "Are you thinking that that will make any difference, you ass? Hacker's a badger, all bite. Think he's the man to put in a word for me? Don't be a goat."

Evidently the Bounder expected nothing of the Acid Drop!

"But he has!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Rot!"

"I tell you—!" yelled Frank Nugent.

"Rubbish!"

"Hacker's got his good points—!" said Harry Wharton, "and—"

"I'd like to see them!" jeered the Bounder. "I've never seen any sign of them, so far. Is that what you've rushed in to tell me, you fatheads? You could have saved yourselves the trouble. Now get out, and leave a fellow alone. I'm booked for the Head any minute now."

"But Hacker said—!"

"I don't want to hear what Hacker said. Give a fellow a rest."

"And Quelch said—"

"Bother Quelch!"

"Will you listen, you silly ass?" bawled Bob Cherry.

"No, I won't! Get out of my study."

"You've got to listen, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "Hacker's not so tough as you think—"

"Rats!"

"He asked Quelch to let you off!" howled Bob.

"Oh, did he?" said the Bounder, scoffingly. "I can see Quelch doing it, after the way I talked to him!"

"He's done it!" shrieked Bob.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Hacker asked him, and he said yes, he would! It's all over! Now get that into your fat head, you ass!" roared Bob. "You're all right—right as rain!"

The Bounder sat bolt upright in the chair. He stared at the Famous Five, blankly. He seemed unable to believe what he heard. He had expected nothing of Mr. Hacker—nothing at all. And now—

"Oh, good!" Redwing's eyes danced. "Oh, jolly good! Of course Hacker would speak up for you, Smithy, after what you've done—"

"I never thought he would—"

"Well, he did," said Harry Wharton, "and you're through, Smithy—you're not going up to the Head—you're O.K. You'll be playing for Greyfriars next Wednesday at St. Jim's. Got it now?"

The Bounder whistled.

"Sure it's straight?" he asked. He seemed still to have a lingering doubt.

"Straight as a string!" chuckled Bob.

"The straightfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Smithy!"

The Bounder laughed. He could laugh now.

"By gum!" he said. "The Acid Drop's not such a bad sort, after all. I wish you'd stopped me buzzing that cricket ball at his nut, Reddy. By gum! I know what I'm going to do—I'm going to beg his pardon for being such a cheeky ass, next time I see him. Good old Acid Drop!"

BILLY BUNTER was of opinion that the Bounder's happy landing was due entirely to him, William George Bunter, for his bright idea in shifting that plank. He had the further bright idea, that, in view of this, it was up to Smithy to cash a postal-order he had long been expecting. Nobody, however, seemed to understand that credit was due to Bunter—least of all Mr. Quelch, who rewarded his exploit with five hundred lines. Which the fat Owl dolorously scribbled, with many smears and many blots, on Wednesday, while the Remove eleven were playing cricket at St. Jim's: led by Harry Wharton, on the best of terms now with Smithy, who had at long last done the Right Thing.

THE END

WHAT HAPPENED TO SNOOKS

by
FRANK RICHARDS



VERSES

The tale of what happened to Snooks of the Third,
Is one of the queerest you ever have heard,
And it shows how a man
May fall down on a plan,
With results unexpected and rather absurd.

Alfred Snooks, of the Third Form, was feeling a pain
After six of the best from his form-master's cane,
And he set out to seek
A revenge on his beak,
And his plan was well laid, though he laid it in vain.

Quite regardless of Snooks, after class Mr. Todd
Ambled happily out in the sunshiny quad,
With a deckchair and book,
To sit down in some nook,
There to read in the shade, or more likely to nod.

Alfred Snooks of the Third, without stopping to think,
Lost no time in collecting a jugful of ink,
With some eggs old and stale,
Which he mixed in a pail,
Surreptitiously snaffled from under a sink.

All around him he cast the most watchful of looks,
With a wariness equal to old Chingachgook's,
 But the coast was quite clear,
 Not a beak or pre. near,
And so everything seemed quite auspicious to Snooks.

To his form-master's study he cautiously trod,
Vacant now, with his beak sitting out in the quad,
 Tiptoed cautiously in,
 And at once, with a grin,
Set to work on a booby-trap ready for Todd.

Standing up on a chair—he was not very tall—
Lodged the pail on the door-top, just touching the wall,
 So that when Mr. Todd
 Ambled in from the quad,
And pushed open the door, it was certain to fall.

Now of course when the hare-brained and venturesome chap,
Had arranged for his beak that astute booby-trap,
 He could not hope to flee
 By the doorway, for he
Couldn't possibly squeeze through so narrow a gap.

But he didn't, of course, think of staying inside,
And his plans for escaping were all cut and dried,
 His work done, he had but
 By the window to cut,
And that window his beak had left open and wide.

So across to the window he scudded, to beat
From his form-master's study a hurried retreat,
 He glanced left, he glanced right,
 There was no one in sight,
But appearances often are merely deceit.

For it happened that under the window-sill there,
Was the spot where old Todd had located his chair,
 And if Snooks had leaned out,
 And glanced downward, no doubt
He'd have seen the bald spot in his form-master's hair.

But he didn't! He looked to the left and the right,
Ascertained that no prefect or beak was in sight,
Placed his hands on the sill,
Vaulted out with a will,
Little dreaming, poor fellow, on what he'd alight!

Then a sudden wild yell from amazed Mr. Todd,
Woke the echoes all over the House and the quad,
As upon his bald head,
Like a cargo of lead,
Crashed the boots with which Snooks of the Third Form was shod.

And the deck-chair collapsed, with a creak and a squeak,
Mr. Todd sprawling on it with shriek after shriek,
While young Snooks, all amazed,
Dizzy, dithering, and dazed.
Spread out breathlessly spluttering over his beak.

Poor old Snooks tumbled off him and rolled on the ground,
With the earth and the sky wildly spinning around,
He sat up in a daze,
With a horrified gaze,
As he saw what had happened, and whom he had downed.

Mr. Todd scrambled up, without saying a word,
But he pounced like a hawk upon Snooks of the Third,
Rushed him off to the Head,
Fairly quaking with dread,
And the Head flogged him soundly for what had occurred.

So the booby-trap never came off after all,
Which young Snooks had so carefully planted to fall
On his form-master's nut,
The whole scheme had gone phut,
And that flogging left Snooks hardly able to crawl.

It was awful rough luck on young Snooks of the Third,
Though it made all the other chaps laugh when they heard,
And it shows how a man
May fall down on a plan,
With results unexpected and rather absurd.

SIX for SAMMY!

by FRANK RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

“BILLY—”
“Don’t bother!”
“But I say, Billy—”
“Br-r-r-r!”

Sammy Bunter, of the Second Form at Greyfriars, stood in the doorway of No. 7 Study in the Remove, blinking into that study through his spectacles, at a bent head over the table.

Billy Bunter hardly troubled to turn his own spectacles on the fat figure in the doorway.

The Owl of the Remove was busy, writing lines. He had no time to waste on his minor in the Second Form. Why Sammy had come up to his study, Billy Bunter did not know. Neither did he want to know. Billy Bunter’s lines, left till the last moment as was the fat Owl’s happy custom, had to be handed in to his form-master by tea-time: and it was close on tea-time.

Close on tea-time, Billy Bunter was generally thinking of tea. But he was not even thinking of tea now. He was thinking of what might happen if those lines did not reach Mr. Quelch on time. He had fifty more to write, and time was short. In such circumstances, Billy Bunter did not want a visit from his minor. All he wanted was to see Sammy’s back: and the briefest view of it would have sufficed.

Sammy, however, went on:

“Billy, old chap—”

"Hook it!"

"But I say—!"

Billy Bunter raised a fat head, at last, from his task, and glared at his minor with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles.

"Will you hook it?" he hooted. "I've got to get these putrid lines done for Quelch! It will be whops if I don't take them in before tea. Mizzle."

"I'll help you if you like."

"Eh?"

"I'll do some of the lines for you—"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter's unbrotherly glare faded out. His look became quite genial. He had not expected that.

"Well, that's jolly decent of you, Sammy," he said. "Come in, old fellow. Squat down! Here you are! You begin at 'Defessi Arneadae'——"

"If you'll lend me——!" continued Sammy.

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's fat face became unbrotherly again. Evidently, there were strings attached to Sammy's unexpected offer. Sammy wanted a *quid pro quo*.

"Lend me——!"

"Br-rr-r-r!" grunted Bunter. "Cut off! I've nothing to lend—I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and——"

"—that old hassock——" went on Sammy.

"What?"

Billy Bunter blinked at his minor in astonishment. Sammy, with a fat finger pointed to a dusty, tattered old hassock, lying near the armchair. For what imaginable reason Sammy Bunter wanted to borrow that old hassock, was beyond guessing. But apparently he did.

That old hassock belonged to Billy Bunter—it was one of the few articles in his study that did! The armchair, in which Bunter was wont to rest his fat limbs, belonged to Peter Todd. But when the fat Owl reclined in Toddy's armchair, he had the satisfaction of resting his feet on his own hassock—a poor thing, but his own. It was old, it was worn, it was tattered, it was dusty: even Bunter did not place a high value on it, and nobody else would have taken it at a gift. It was hardly possible to shift it without a cloud of dust exuding, through some of its many rents.

"What on earth do you want it for?" exclaimed the astonished Owl.

Sammy grinned.

"Twigg!" he answered.

"Your beak?" exclaimed Bunter. Mr. Twigg was master of the Second Form. "What does Twigg want it for, then?"

Sammy's grin widened.

"He doesn't," he said. "He's going to get it without wanting it, see? He's going to get it on his nut when he goes back to his study after tea."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Twigg's been ragging me in form!" said Sammy. "He actually rapped my knuckles in geography, because I said the capital of Spain was Lisbon—"

"Well, you asked for it!" said Bunter. "As if any ass doesn't know that the capital of Spain is Oporto."

"Twigg said it was Madrid, and I've got to write it out a hundred times," said Sammy, darkly. "I'll give him Madrid! I don't care whether it's Lisbon or Oporto or Madrid! I ain't going to have my knuckles rapped, and a hundred lines, from old Twigg, because he gets shirty in form. You lend me that hassock—"

"I say, that's a jolly good hassock, and I don't want to lose it—"

"Is it?" said Sammy, derisively.

"Yes, it jolly well is, and—"

"Well, you won't lose it! Twigg will have it chucked into a dust-bin, to get rid of it, and you can get it back."

"Look here—"

"It's because it's so jolly old and ragged and crammed with dust that I want it," explained Sammy. "Think what Twigg will look like—smothered in dust—when it drops on his napper? What?"

Sammy chuckled. Billy Bunter echoed his chuckle. The idea of Mr. Twigg smothered with dust from that ancient hassock, seemed to entertain both Bunters. But the fat Owl became serious again.

"I say, that's all very well, fixing up a booby-trap for your beak," he said. "But if Twigg knew it was mine, he might think—"

"How'd he know?" argued Sammy. "Twigg's never put his nose into a Remove study. He would think it was picked off a dust-heap, from its look."

"Look here, Sammy, don't you be cheeky—" exclaimed Billy Bunter, warmly. "That's a jolly good hassock— It cost something when it was new—"

"Before our time!" remarked Sammy.

"I've had it for whole terms—"

"It looks it!" assented Sammy.

"If you're going to be cheeky—"

"You lend me that hassock, and I'll help you with your lines," said Sammy. "You'll get it back all right—Twigg won't eat it. I'll get it back for you after it's been chucked away. How many more lines have you got to do?"

"Fifty!"

"I'll do twenty—"

"Twenty-five!" said Bunter.

"Twenty—!"

"Twenty-five—"

"Oh, all right!" Sammy yielded the point, evidently very keen on that hassock for his form-master's nut, "Let's get on with it."

Sammy sat down at the table in No. 7 Study, and picked up Peter Todd's pen. Billy pushed a sheet of impot paper across to him.

"Make your fist as decent as you can," he said. "It's got to pass with Quelch, you know. Make it look as if you've learned to write."

"Wouldn't that make your beak suspicious?" asked Sammy. "Don't you want him to take it for your fist?"

Billy Bunter breathed hard.

"Get on to it, and don't jaw!" he snapped.

They got on to it. Billy Bunter, undoubtedly, was glad of a lift with his impot. Sammy's scribble was sufficiently like his own scrawl to pass: and he was going to get through in time now. Two pens worked twice as fast as one: and Bunter's lines were completed, just as the bell began to ring.

"O.K." said Bunter. "You can borrow the hassock, Sammy—and cut. Mind Twigg doesn't catch you going to his study with it." And mind you bring it back afterwards."

"That's all right—I'm going to wait till he's at tea in Common-Room with the other beaks," grinned Sammy. "He won't spot it perched over his door when he comes back! I'll give him Madrid, and rapping a fellow's knuckles! Will he look a picture when it's dropped on his head? He, he, he!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Billy Bunter.

And both Bunters were grinning, as they quitted No. 7 Study: Billy with his lines for Mr. Quelch, and Sammy with that dusty old hassock under his arm.

CHAPTER II

MR. TWIGG, master of the Second Form at Greyfriars School, hardly knew what was happening.

It was so surprising, and so very unexpected.

Mr. Twigg had "tea'd" in Common-Room with the other beaks. Prout, master of the Fifth, walked back with him to the studies. The two masters stayed for a few minutes to finish their conversation, before Twigg opened his study door to enter. That anything unusual was scheduled to happen when he pushed open a door that stood ajar, naturally never occurred to Mr. Twigg. He was not thinking of Bunter minor and the fat knuckles he had rapped in geography. He had quite forgotten the incident which Sammy remembered. Raps on the knuckles are numbered among the things which it is more blessed to give than to receive: and no doubt it was natural for that incident to linger longer in Sammy's memory than in Twigg's. If Twigg was thinking of anything specially at that moment, it was of his desire to escape from Mr. Prout's conversation, which like the poet's little brook went on for ever. He pushed open that door, all unwary: and then—

Then it happened.

Something that had been lodged on top of the door, resting against the lintel, naturally fell, when it no longer had any visible means of support.

It fell on Twigg's head.

Thud!

Clouds of dust flew from it as it thudded. Mr. Twigg might have fancied, for a moment, that he was in the midst of a whirling dust-storm in the Sahara. The amount of dust that had collected in Bunter's ancient hassock, during several terms in which it had never been shaken once, was quite phenomenal. Twigg had the benefit of most of it.

"Oooooooooogh!" gurgled the master of the Second Form.

He staggered in the doorway.

"Ugh! Urrrgh! Ooooocher!" he spluttered.

It would have been wiser, if he had thought of it at the moment, to keep his mouth shut. But he did not think of it at the moment. His mouth opened wide with startled exclamations, and immediately filled with dust. Twigg gurgled and choked and spluttered wildly.

"Wooooogh! Ogggh! Grrr-r-r-gh! Ooocher! Wooooch!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Prout, staring at him.

"Urrrgh! What—what—how—who—which—grrrrrrrg!"

A dusty old hassock dropped on one side of Mr. Twigg. His mortar-board dropped on the other. Smothered with dust, dusty from head to foot, choking and spluttering, Twigg tottered. His first impression was that Greyfriars was collapsing on his head. It was not so bad as that. But it was startling—it was amazing—and it was horrid. Twigg lived and moved and had his being in dust.

"What—what—what!"

"Upon my word!" Prout boomed, "It is a—a—a hassock! Upon my word! It has been placed over your door, Twigg, to fall on your head! It is what the junior boys would call, I believe, a booby-trap! Amazing! Unprecedented! Unparalleled!"

"Grrrrrggh!"

Mr. Twigg realized that Greyfriars was not toppling on him. He ejected dust from his mouth and clawed it from his eyes and ears and hair. And the expression on his face was like unto that of the fabled basilisk.

"A—a—a booby-trap!" he gasped. "A—a—a bib-bub-bob-booby-trap—! In my study—some young rascal—some disrespectful young rascal—oooooooo. I—I am smothered with dust—I—I am choked with dust—I—I—I—groooooogh. Who has done this? What disrespectful young rascal has dared to—ooooooooch!"

Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, came down the passage from Common-Room. He stopped to stare at Twigg.

"Why, what—?" began Mr. Hacker, staring.

"A booby-trap!" boomed Prout. "Mr. Twigg has been caught in a booby-trap, in his own study! Look at him, Hacker!"

Hacker was looking at him. His face, usually rather acid, melted into an

involuntary smile. Prout, sympathetic and indignant as he was, also smiled. Twigg, at the moment, covered with dust, red as a peony, clawing at ears and hair, gasping and spluttering, might really have made a stone image smile.

"Scandalous!" said Mr. Hacker.

"Unparalleled!" agreed Prout.

But they both smiled. Mr. Twigg's eyes fairly flashed at them, through a screen of dust.

"This is not amusing, Mr. Prout!" he bawled. "This is not in the least amusing, Mr. Hacker!"

"Oh! No!"

"Certainly not!"

"Pah!" snapped Mr. Twigg.

He strode—or rather stamped—away, without even picking up his mortar-board. He was in need of a wash, more than anything else, at that moment: and he had no use for smiles from his colleagues. He stamped up the passage, leaving Prout and Hacker still smiling.



"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Prout.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, coming away from Common-Room, stopped and stared, as he met Twigg face to face.

"What—what—what—?" he ejaculated.

Twigg did not stop. He passed the Remove master like a thundercloud, leaving Quelch to stare. The Remove master glanced at Prout and Hacker.

"What—?" he asked, blankly.

"A booby-trap!" boomed Prout. "Poor Twigg!"

"Twigg does not keep his boys in hand!" said Mr. Hacker. "Poor Twigg!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch. And he too smiled. "Poor Twigg!"

Poor Twigg himself did not feel like smiling. Generally quite a mild gentleman, he breathed wrath and vengeance during the somewhat lengthy process of getting rid of the dust from Billy Bunter's ancient and dilapidated hassock. He wanted, he longed, in fact, he yearned, to know who had done this. "Six" of the best—the very best—would be the culprit's reward, if Twigg discovered him. Some young scamp in his form, no doubt—but which? There were plenty of scamps in the Second Form, and there was not a clue. When Mr. Twigg, at last, newly swept and garnished, walked out into the quadrangle, he eyed members of his form whom he saw there with almost wolfish eyes.

But there was not a clue!

CHAPTER III

"SAMMY!"
Billy Bunter squeaked.

Sammy Bunter passed his elder brother's fat squeak unheeded. Bunter minor was not interested in Bunter major. Sammy was interested in two things at the moment, neither of which was his brother Billy. The first and most important was the circumstance that Gatty of the Second had a half-crown which he was going to expend at the school shop on doughnuts, which Sammy was to share. The second was his form-master, Mr. Twigg, who was standing near the door of the tuck-shop, with a decidedly cross expression on his usually mild face. Sammy knew the cause of that unusual grimness in Twigg, and he grinned as he noted it. Twigg glanced at Bunter minor, but it was only a perfunctory glance: evidently he had no suspicion in that quarter. Sammy grinned, and winked at Gatty, who grinned too. And so far from heeding his major's squeak in the rear, Sammy rolled on regardless, Billy Bunter blinking after him indignantly through his big spectacles.

"Sammy!" howled Bunter. "Stop."

Sammy did not stop. The prospect of doughnuts drew him onward: and like the ancient gladiator, he heard but he heeded not.

"Look here, Sammy—!" hooted Bunter.

Sammy rolled on, with Gatty. Billy Bunter, annoyed and indignant, rushed

after him. He did not observe Twigg in the offing. His eyes, and his spectacles, were fixed on Sammy. He grabbed Sammy by the shoulder.

"Look here, you cheeky little ass!" hooted the indignant Owl, "Where's my hassock? You said you'd bring my hassock back when you borrowed it. Well, you jolly well haven't. I can jolly well tell you that I'm not going to lose that hassock! You can make out that it's jolly old and dusty if you like, but I can jolly well tell you that I want it, and if it's left in Twigg's study, you've jolly well got to get it back, see?"

"Shut UP!" almost shrieked Sammy Bunter. He was aware of Twigg, if Billy was not.

Billy Bunter did not shut up. Shutting up was never much in his line, anyway: and he was indignant now, and anxious about that hassock.

"I tell you I want that hassock back," he hooted, "and if it's left in your beak's study I jolly well tell you—"

Billy Bunter was interrupted.

"Bunter minor!" Mr. Twigg's voice sounded, at the moment, like the filing of a saw, "Bunter minor! Follow me to my study."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter. He blinked round at Twigg. "Oh, crumbs! Oh, scissors! Oh, jiminy."

Mr. Twigg did not heed him. He heeded Sammy!

"Do you hear me, Bunter minor!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" moaned Sammy. "I—I—"

"Follow me at once!"

"Oh, lor'!"

A dispirited Sammy followed Mr. Twigg into the House. A minute or two later, any fellow passing Twigg's door or window might have heard a rhythmical sound from Twigg's study, as if somebody there was beating a carpet.

But Mr. Twigg was not beating a carpet.

It was Six for Sammy!

THE END



CHAPTER I

“JILL!”
Jack of All Trades heard the loud voice shouting, and paused on the stile, to look round.

It was a bitter December day.

Hedges were topped with snow. The branches of the great tree that stood near the stile were leafless, and glistened with frost. There was bright winter sunshine, but it did not melt the snow that lay thick in the meadows, or the ice on the ditches and ponds.

Jack had been following a winding, seemingly endless Somerset lane, trudging through snow and slush, for miles: and sturdy lad as he was, he was getting tired. He was glad to reach the stile which, as they had told him back at Froude, gave on the footpath to Cheed: a short cut across Farmer Huggett's meadows that saved a mile on the road. Jack was anxious to get to Cheed, where a job and a dinner awaited him. But he paused, and looked round, as the loud voice shouted in the meadow he was about to enter.

“Jill! Where are you, Jill?”

He glimpsed a big man in gaiters. His red tanned face had a look of mingled anger and anxiety.

He caught sight of Jack the next moment, standing on the stile, with one leg over. He stared at him.

“Here, you!” he called out. “Have you seen a kid wandering in the lane—a little girl?”

"No: I've seen nobody!" answered Jack.

The man in gaiters gave an angry snort, and turned away. Apparently he was in search of a little girl named Jill who had wandered. Jack could understand that he was anxious, for a child might very easily have tumbled into one of the deep snow-drifts by the hedges. Indeed, tired as he was getting, and more than ready for that dinner at Cheed, he would willingly have offered his services to help in the search. But the farmer, without waiting for another word from him, tramped away by the hedge.

Jack stepped over the stile into the meadow, to go on his way. The sight of the village spire in the far distance was more than welcome to his eyes. He trudged on cheerily: but he had not taken a dozen steps, when there was a shout behind.

"Here, you! Stop!"

Jack turned round.

The big man in gaiters was striding towards him. He had had a stick under his arm. That stick had now slid down into his hand. And the look on his rugged red face indicated that he was thinking of a use for it.

Jack eyed him warily, as he came striding up, Mr. Huggett did not look a good-tempered man: and perhaps his anxiety for the missing Jill had given an edge to his temper. Jack liked neither his look, nor the look of the stick in his hand.

"Where are you going?" demanded Mr. Huggett.

"Cheed!" answered Jack briefly.

"You're not going across my land!"

"It's a footpath—"

"It's not a public footpath, and I don't allow tramps on my land. I've missed too many things from my sheds to want tramps about. Get back over that stile, and sharp."

Jack's face flushed crimson.

"I'm not a tramp!" he exclaimed, indignantly.

"Ain't you? You look it!" sneered Mr. Huggett. "Get off my land! I'll have no more thieving fingers round here."

"If you think I'd touch anything in your sheds—"

"I don't think—I know!" interrupted the farmer. "Are you getting back over that stile, or waiting for a lick from this stick?"

"I'm going across to Cheed—Oh!" gasped Jack, as Mr. Huggett, losing patience, strode nearer, and lashed out with the stick, across his shoulders.

"Now get going, you young rascal! Here, I'll see you safe off my land—Oh!"

It was Mr. Huggett's turn to ejaculate "Oh!" as he grasped the boy by the collar. Much to his surprise, Jack gave grasp for grasp, hooked his gaitered leg, and spun him over. The big man was utterly taken by surprise. He went over with a crash, landing on his back in snowy grass.

"Oh!" he spluttered. "Oh!"

Jack's eyes flashed down at him.

"Now keep your stick to yourself!" he snapped.

"Oh! By hokey!" gurgled Mr. Huggett. He dragged himself to his feet, his eyes blazing. "You just wait a second—"

Jack of All Trades did not wait a second. He had floored Mr. Huggett, taking him by surprise. But he would have been an infant in the hands of the brawny farmer, once Mr. Huggett was on his feet—without counting the stick! He did not wait a split second for the farmer to get into action. He ran back to the stile: and he ran hard, hoping to jump it before the farmer could get near enough to handle the stick on him.

Fast behind him came tramping feet.

That fall seemed to have hurt Mr. Huggett a little. Certainly it had given the final touch to a temper already irate. He chased after the running boy, his long legs covering the ground at a great rate, and Jack of All Trades could hear his heavy breathing close behind.

Jack reached the stile just as the farmer reached him. But he did not jump it, as he had first thought of doing. The farmer could have run him down in the lane quite easily. The boy leaped on the top bar of the stile, and caught at a branch overhead. He swung himself into the air, just as the stick lashed out, and it barely missed as he swung up into the great tree.

"Why, you young limb!" gasped Mr. Huggett.

He clambered on the stile, much less nimbly than Jack, and steadying himself with one hand against the tree-trunk, lashed out with the stick in the other, at the boy in the branches.

But Jack of All Trades did not linger on a lower branch. He clambered from branch to branch, high in the tree, far out of the reach of Mr. Huggett and his stick. Sitting astride of a high branch, holding on to another, he looked down at the farmer—and laughed. The baffled expression on Mr. Huggett's face was quite entertaining. He glared up at Jack, and brandished the stick, and roared:

"Come down out of that, you young rogue!"

"Not likely, you old rogue!" retorted Jack.

"I'll limb you, when I get my hands on you!"

"Come up after me!" suggested Jack.

Mr. Huggett glared up. But he did not attempt to clamber up. Tree-climbing was not in his line. And frosty branches that easily bore the boy's light weight, would certainly have cracked and snapped under Mr. Huggett's bulk. Jack of All Trades was out of his reach: and Mr. Huggett had to leave him out of reach.

"Will you come down?" he roared.

"Hardly!"

"I'll thrash you—"

"You won't!" said Jack, laughing. "I'll stay here as long as you stay there, I'll keep up this game as long as you do."

Mr. Huggett breathed wrath.

"You wait till I get my hands on you, you young tramp!" he said. "I'll keep an eye open for you, and when you come down—well, you just wait!"

With that, the farmer put the stick under his arm, and moved away from the stile. Jack heard his voice again, calling "Jill!" Apparently he was in search of Jill again. But he did not move very far away: and Jack of All Trades realized that his best guess, for the present, was to stay where he was, perched in high branches: with a wide view of fields and lanes and meadows, snowy hedges and frozen ponds, if that had been any consolation.

CHAPTER II

"OH!" exclaimed Jack of All Trades.

He gave so sudden a start, that he almost lost his hold. Hanging on to a high branch, he stared across the frosty meadow. It was a wide, extensive meadow, bounded on the further side by a thick line of willows. From the ground, it was impossible to see into the next field: the willows barred the view. But from a high tree, there was a clear view over the tops of the low willows, and the adjoining field was spread out clearly before Jack's eyes. And in that field something had suddenly riveted his attention.

A glistening patch, shining back the sun, was the surface of a frozen pond. Something red showed on the edge of the pond. Staring at it Jack made out the figure of a small girl, clad in warm woollies, with a red scarf tied round her neck. In the distance, he might not have noticed her at all, but for the red scarf. But that spot of bright colour leaped to the eye in the sunshine. Looking at her, a tiny figure in the distance, he wondered whether this might be the "Jill" of whom the angry Mr. Huggett was in search. If so, the child evidently had wandered through some gap in the willows into the next field, far beyond sound of the farmer's calling voice, out of sight and out of hearing. While Mr. Huggett searched and called in one field, the child was roaming on the edge of the frozen pond in the next.

Jack could not help smiling. The footpath he had wanted to follow ran on through the next field, close by the pond: and had the disgruntled Mr. Huggett permitted him to follow it, he would have found Jill there—if that was Jill, as he did not doubt—and could and would have called back the news to the anxious father. Now, as he watched the red scarf, he was considering whether to drop from the tree, and seek Mr. Huggett with the information that the little girl was in the next field: but that required thinking out. Mr. Huggett might begin with the stick without waiting for him to speak: nor could he be quite certain

that the little girl in the next field was Jill. He looked round, to ascertain whether the big man in gaiters was within shouting distance. He had a glimpse of Mr. Huggett's hat, far away along a hedge, where he was peering into a snow-drift. He was too far off for a calling voice.

Jack looked round again, at the spot of red in the next field. The smile lingered on his face. Mr. Huggett was searching and searching, and a word from the boy in the tree would have put him wise. Only his own bad temper and big stick kept him from learning what he wanted to know.

But suddenly the smile was wiped from Jack's face. He uttered a startled exclamation, his attention riveted on the tiny figure by the distant pond. The child was stepping out on the ice. Even at the distance, Jack could see that there were long cracks in the ice on the pond, where the water welled up. It was not thick ice: it was a sheet of thin ice that covered the pond, unsafe for any foot to venture upon: and the child, utterly unaware of danger, was walking across towards the further side.

"Oh!" panted Jack.

His ruddy, sunburnt face paled, as he stared, his heart jolting. At any instant, the ice might crack under those little feet, and the child disappear from sight. And even as he stared, in horror at what he saw, he discerned a long crack breaking in the ice just behind the little girl. He could hear no sound, at the distance: but evidently the child heard the cracking of the ice, she turned round and looked—and then stood still, staring. The danger she was in had suddenly dawned on her mind, and she stood motionless, evidently too frightened to move. It was fortunate, perhaps, that she did so, for another step might have caused another crack, and she might have been engulfed under the boy's horrified eyes.

Only for one moment did Jack stare. Then he was slithering madly down the tree. To cut across the meadow, to run as he had never run before, and reach the child in the next field before she went through the ice, was the only thought in the mind of Jack of All Trades. He forgot Mr. Huggett—he forgot everything but that little figure frozen with terror on the cracking ice. The branches swayed and rustled, as he scrambled from one to another. He dropped panting to the ground, and started at a run on the footpath.

But if he had forgotten Mr. Huggett, Mr. Huggett had not forgotten him. There was a roar from a distance.

"You young limb! By gum! Stop! Stop! You hear me! Stop!"

Jack was not likely to stop. He tore on, and the angry man roared after him.

"Crossing my land, by gum! You young rascal, running across my land under my own eyes! Stop! I—I—I'll—!"

Words seemed to fail Mr. Huggett. Leaving the snow-drift under the hedge into which he had been peering, he started to run in pursuit. Utterly unaware of what was happening in the next field, beyond the screening willows, the

angry farmer could only suppose that the boy was following the footpath to get to Cheed, in cool defiance of him, his orders, and his big stick. His rugged face was red with wrath as he charged in pursuit, the stick gripped in his hand. And he covered the ground fast.

But Jack had a good start: and he was running like the wind. The snowy grass seemed to whiz under his feet. Heedless, hardly conscious, of the angry man in his rear, charging after him like a bull, he tore onward. He could see nothing of the child in the red scarf now—now that he was on the ground, the willows blocked the view. He could only hope and pray that she would be still above the ice when he reached the pond.

He reached the willows, and tore through a gap into the next field—no doubt the way the child had wandered. He vanished from the eyes of the angry man charging on behind.

He burst into the next field. A spot of red met his eyes as he cleared the willows, and he panted with relief. The child was still on the ice—standing as



Jack struggled back to the bank.

he had seen her from the tree-top. But the thin ice was cracking all round her, and water washed over her little shoes. It was a matter of moments—and Jack panted on desperately towards the pond.

Crac-c-c-ck!

The ice was going.

"Oh!" Jack almost sobbed for breath, as he panted on. A few yards more—but madly as he ran, he could not reach the pond in time. The thin ice cracked all round the child, and there was a frightened whimpering shriek, as the little figure went through, and the red scarf disappeared in welling water and fragments of broken ice.

A moment more, and Jack reached the pond.

Splash!

He was in the icy water, swimming. Something touched his hand, and he grasped—it was the red scarf. A little unconscious face, with drenched hair, came up—and remained up. Keeping that little face above the water Jack of All Trades struggled back to the bank, and dragged himself from the pond, with the child in his arms, just as Mr. Huggett, brandishing his big stick, came charging through the gap in the willows.

CHAPTER III

"JILL!"

Mr. Huggett came to a sudden halt. The stick dropped from his hand. His eyes bulged from his rugged face, at the drenched and dripping boy on the pond's edge, with the unconscious child in his arms.

"Jill!" he gasped.

Jack panted for breath.

"She's all right! She was only a second in the water! I saw her from the tree-top—that was why—"

"Jill!"

Mr. Huggett caught the child from Jack's arms. He turned to stride away towards the farm-house in the distance. Jack began to wring the water out of his drenched clothes. He was soaked from head to foot, and almost freezing with the cold. He realized that he was safe from Mr. Huggett's big stick: but he was in sad case to go on his way. But the farmer looked back over his shoulder. His face was not angry—there was no sign of bad temper about Mr. Huggett now.

"Here, boy!"

Jack looked at him.

"May I go by the footpath now—?" he began.

Mr. Huggett interrupted him.

"You young fool! You're drenched! Come with me, and dry your clothes."

"Oh!"

"And sharp!"

"Oh! all right."

Mr. Huggett strode away with long strides. Jack had to trot to keep pace. And never had he been so glad to feel the warmth of a fire, as he was when he reached the Huggett farm-house.

JACK did take that forbidden footpath after all. But it was later in the day, warm and dry, with a good dinner inside him, a parting hand-shake from Mr. Huggett, a parting kiss from the farmer's wife, and a wave of the hand and a smile from little Jill.

THE END

The FATHEAD of FELGATE

By

FRANK RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

"LET him wait!" said Skip, darkly.

Tom King and Dick Warren looked at Skip Ruggles, looked at one another, and then looked at Skip again. They did not quite know what to say.

Of course, they sympathized.

Skip had been kicked: apparently hard. He was still wriggling from the effects, when his chums found him in Study Four.

But though they sympathized, Skip's pals could not help thinking that he had asked for it. The fat Skip was always asking for it. Not that Skip ever meant any harm. He never meant harm. But he did quite a lot without meaning to. Anyhow, Denver, of the Sixth had kicked Skip, and Skip was wrathful. He was going to get back on Denver: which was quite a wild idea, for of course you couldn't get back on a pre. Sixth-Form prefects at Felgate were tremendous personages, not to be got back upon by mere juniors in the Fourth Form.

It had come about in this wise. Denver, of the Sixth, was a keen radio fan. A kind uncle had presented him with a portable radio at Christmas, and Denver had brought it back to Felgate with him. Often and often it was heard in Denver's study: oftener, perhaps, than other members of the Felgate Sixth quite relished. Doors of other studies were sometimes heard to slam when Denver's radio was on. When it was going strong, it could be heard as far as the Prefects' Room, where the strains of brassy bands were not always welcome. Denver seemed never to tire of it. He would listen to the comedians, and laugh over their jokes, just as his grand-father had laughed over the same jokes in his time. The deepest depression that ever spread from Broadcasting House never

bored Denver. He revelled in radio. More than once, he had had to be fairly dragged away from it to play Soccer.

When Langdale, the captain of Felgate, sent Skip to Denver's study with a message, the radio was on, as a matter of course. Denver was reclining in the window-seat, the portable standing on a little round one-legged table close at hand, discoursing sweet music. Skip had to give Denver Langdale's message, but he could not make his voice heard above the din. Denver only gave him a careless glance as his fat face appeared in the doorway, and did not turn the thing off. Skip came across the study and shouted:

"Langdale says go to the changing-room at once."

Denver did not hear, with the radio going full blast. Neither did he seem to want to hear. He motioned Skip impatiently away. But Skip simply had to speak. A message from the captain of Felgate had to be delivered, though the skies fell. He leaned over to shout at closer range—and that did it! Even a four-legged table was hardly safe from Skip, who was as clumsy as he was plump. A single legged table had no chance at all. Skip, of course, did not intend a fat elbow to knock that table over. The fat elbow did it unintentionally.

The table tipped, and the portable shot off, landing on Denver's knees. It rolled from his knees to the study carpet. There was sudden silence, as the set shut off.

"Oh! Sorry!" gasped Skip.

Skip was sorry—and he was still sorrier the next moment. Denver bounded from the window-seat, with an expression on his face that made Skip bolt for the door without even delivering Langdale's message. The radio was silent: and silence, though said to be golden, was not what Denver wanted. But that was not all. Denver had no doubt that the set was damaged, having shut off so suddenly: in his mind's eye he saw a long bill for new valves and things. A long bill—and perhaps days before he heard another sound from Broadcasting House! In the circumstances, it was not really surprising that, as Skip bounded for the door, Denver bounded after him, and kicked.

Denver packed a tremendous kick, Skip had the full benefit of it. It fairly lifted him, and landed him in the passage without. He alighted there on fat hands and knees, roaring. But he did not linger to roar. Denver was coming out of the study after him. Skip flew. Denver went back into his study and picked up the radio. He took it up tenderly, treating it with care. He made the happy discovery that it was not damaged, after all: contact with the carpet had simply turned the knob, shutting it off. The next minute that portable was going as strong as ever: and in his happy relief, as he listened in, Denver rather regretted that he had kicked that young idiot, Ruggles, quite so hard. Still, that was an unimportant episode, which Denver of the Sixth soon forgot.

Skip, naturally, had a longer memory for it.

He was twisting most uncomfortably in Study Four, in the Fourth when he

told his friends. about it. King and Warren sat on the study table while they heard the tale of woe. Skip stood. There was an armchair at hand, and Skip loved armchairs. But at the moment he had no use for a chair of any kind. He twisted as he stood, and wriggled like a plumpel. And he boiled with indignation.

"Booting a man!" said Skip, in almost shrilling tones. "I only went to his study because old Langdale sent me, you know. His radio was making an awful row, and I couldn't make him hear. That's how it happened. Was it my fault the beastly thing went over, when I just touched the table—barely touched it, really. And he booted me right out of the study. Wow! He seemed to fancy that he was kicking for goal on Big Side! Wow! Think I'm going to stand it? Let him wait!"

"Tough, old man!" said Tom King, sympathetically.

"Rough luck!" said Warren.

"But—!" went on Tom.

"But—!" added Warren.

"Let him wait!" said Skip, vengefully. "I'll jolly well show him whether he can boot a man for nothing!"

"Well, it wasn't quite for nothing, old boy," said Tom, soothingly. "If the radio was damaged—"

"It wasn't! I heard it kicking up an awful row again after I got away."

"Well, I expect he thought it was damaged—!" said Warren.

"I don't care what he thought! I tell you he fairly lifted me off the floor with his foot!" hooted Skip. "Let him wait! If he wasn't a pre, I'd punch his head. But you can't punch a pre's head!"

"You can't!" agreed Tom.

"Not quite!" assented Warren.

"Besides, he's too big for me, anyway," added Skip, perhaps remembering that he would have required a step-ladder, or at least a chair, in order to get within punching distance of Denver's head, "I can't punch him. He would just whop me."

"He would!"

"Hard!"

Skip's chums did not always agree with his views. But in this they agreed heartily. It was passed nem. con. in Study Four that Stanley St. Leger Ruggles couldn't punch Denver of the Sixth!

"He's got it coming, all the same!" said Skip. "A man isn't going to boot me on the trousers, and get away with it. I'm getting back on him, see?"

"You can't get back on a pre," said Warren shaking his head.

"Can't I?" said Skip. He seemed to think that he could.

"Denver ain't a bad chap, really," said Tom. "Fellows like him, you know. He just lost his temper—"

"After all, if you barge into a pre's study and knock things over—" argued Warren.

"I'll knock a few more over, before I'm done with him!" said Skip, grimly. "I can't punch him, and I can't boot him like he did me, and I can't even tell him what I think of him without bending over and taking six for it. But there's one thing I can do, and I'm jolly well going to do it."

"And what's that?" asked Tom.

"Ship his radio!" said Skip, triumphantly. "What do you think of that? What do you think Denver will feel like, when he misses his radio, and finds it standing in a bath full of water?"

"Wha-a-a-t?" stuttered King and Warren together. They gazed at their plump chum in horror. "His—his—his radio! Oh, crikey!"

"Think he would be wild?" grinned Skip.

"Wild?" gasped Tom King. "No, not just wild! Mad as a hatter—dangerous as a hungry tiger—why, you mad ass, if you touch his radio—!"

"I'm going to."

"You're not!" yelled Warren.

"I jolly well am!" declared Skip. "That will jolly well get back on him—booting a man on his trousers! Wow! I'm going to nip into his study when he's not there, snoop that portable, and take it up to the bathrooms—"

"You mad ass—"

"Fill a bath with water, and stick it in! Denver can hunt for it when he wants it, and find it! Ha, Ha!"

Skip laughed! Evidently he was greatly tickled by the idea of Denver of the Sixth missing his radio, hunting for it, and finding it in a bath of water. He was so tickled that he almost forgot the lingering effects of that hefty kick. He roared. Study Four echoed to his mirth.

Skip seemed to expect his friends to join in his merriment. But they did not. They only stared at him, with a horrified stare.

"You mad ass!" repeated Tom King. "If you go ragging in a Sixth-form study, you'll get the whopping of your life."

"Who's to know?" grinned Skip. "I shan't leave my card on Denver's table."

"Look here, you fat ass," said Dick Warren. "Just forget all about it, see? That radio's the apple of Denver's eye. Why, everybody knows that he's nuts on it. You're not going anywhere near Denver's radio."

"Ain't I?" said Skip. "Ain't I just!"

"No!" hooted his two chums, together.

"I want you fellows to back me up," said Skip, unheeding. "They're at soccer practice now—hardly a man in the Sixth form studies. I want you fellows to come and keep cave in the passage, while I nip into Denver's study—"

"Fathead!"

"Forget it!"

"If you won't—!" snapped Skip.

"No 'if' about that!" said Tom King. "We won't, and you won't either!"

You're not going to land in the biggest row of your fatheaded life, if we can stop you."

"You just try stopping me!" said Skip, with a warlike look. "I'm going to Denver's study now, and if you fellows won't keep cave, I'll chance it! And that's that, and you can put it in your pipe and smoke it."

And Skip, indignant, marched towards the door.

But "that" was not quite "that". Tom King and Dick Warren exchanged a glance, and then they pinned Skip Ruggles by either fat arm.

"Coming out for a walk, Skip?" asked Tom.

"No!" roared Skip.

"You are!" said Warren.

And Skip did. With a loyal pal gripping either arm, Skip had no choice about going out for a walk. He went protesting—but he went. And his friends did not walk him back to Felgate till tea-time, when there were plenty of seniors about the Sixth-Form studies, and even Skip was not ass enough to think of carrying out his fell designs on Denver's radio.

CHAPTER II

"THIS way, fathead!"

"Hurry up!"

"The bell's stopping, Skip."

"This way, you ass!"

It was "break" the following morning. Crowds of fellows were out in the quad. Among them were the three chums of Study Four: one of whom—the fattest member—cast inimical glances at a tall Sixth-form man on the Sixth-form green. Denver of the Sixth was unconscious of Skip's existence. He had quite forgotten kicking Skip, and probably forgotten that there was such a junior at Felgate at all. Denver was talking to Langdale and Loring, of his form, and Skip might have directed at him a frown as frightful, fearful, and frantic, as that of the Lord High Executioner, without Denver dreaming of noticing it. However, when the bell rang for third school, fellows headed for the form-rooms: and Skip went in with the rest. But before reaching the Fourth-form room, he quitted his chums, and cut off in another direction—Tom King and Dick Warren staring after him, and calling after him, and wondering what Skip fancied he was up to.

"You needn't wait for me!" Skip called over a fat shoulder, and then he disappeared up the staircase.

"That ass!" said Tom.

"That goat!" said Warren.

And they went on, to the form-room, with Bullinger, and Reece, and

Preece, and Carton, and the rest of the Felgate Fourth. Had Skip cut off in the direction of the Sixth-form studies, they might have suspected that he still had designs on Denver's radio. But the Sixth-form studies were on the ground floor, and Skip had cut up the staircase: so it was not that. Which was a relief: for quite probably Denver had gone to his study for his books, for class with the Head: and Skip might have run into him there.

Mr. Charne, the master of the Fourth, let in his form, and noted the absence of his plumpest pupil with a frown. However, Skip was not very late. The others had taken their places, when Skip burst in, panting and breathless. Evidently he had hurried.

"Ruggles!" rapped Mr. Charne.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Skip.

"You are two minutes late."

"I—I—I hurried like anything, sir!" gasped Skip: and it was so clear that the breathless Ruggles had hurried, that Mr. Charne left it at that, and only motioned him to go to his place.

Skip sat down, breathing rather hard but with a lurking grin on his face. Tom King and Dick Warren eyed him. They were well aware that Skip had not abandoned his intention of taking reprisals on Denver of the Sixth. He had recovered from that hefty kick of the day before: but it lingered in his memory. He was going to "get back" on Denver, if he could: and if his loyal chums could not stop him. They had done their best, so far: keeping an eye on Skip, ready to head him off if he made a step in the direction of Denver's study. It annoyed Skip, in fact it exasperated him: but that could not be helped: they were going to keep him out of an awful row, if they could. Now, however, he was safe in form, under Charne's eye: and Denver's radio was safe while Denver was in class with the Head. Yet they could see that something was working in Skip's fat brain.

What it was, they did not know. But they knew ten minutes later, when there was a fat squeak from Skip.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Charne glanced at him.

"What is it, Ruggles?"

"I—I remember I—I left the bath-tap running, sir!" stammered Skip. "M-m-may I go up and—and turn it off, sir?"

Mr. Charne gave him a grim look.

"You may certainly do so, Ruggles, and at once: and you will take fifty lines for your carelessness."

"Yes, sir!" said Skip, meekly.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Tom King. He looked at Warren. Both of them understood. In fact, Skip gave them a fat wink, as he rolled to the door.

"The artful ass!" breathed Warren.

They could do nothing! Skip had leave from the form-room to go up and

turn off that bath-tap. It was, of course, a pretext to get out of the form-room, while Denver was safe in class with the Head! Not a man would be in the Sixth-form studies—Denver's radio was at Skip's mercy: once he was out of form.

That was why he had cut up the stairs when the bell was ringing for third school. He had cut up to the bath-rooms to turn on a tap!

He had told Mr. Charne that he had left a tap turned on! So he had! Skip was a stickler for the truth. He had specially turned on that tap, so that he could tell Charne that he had left it turned on. Besides, he needed a bath of water, when he got hold of Denver's radio!

But his loyal pals were helpless now. Out of form, they could keep a watchful eye on Stanley St. Leger Ruggles. Now they could do nothing: they could not chase out of the form-room in class, after Skip! Ruggles, like an obstinate horse, had to be given his head.

"The ass!" murmured Tom.

"The goat!" muttered Warren.

"If he's spotted—"

"Let's hope he won't be!"

That was all that Skip's anxious chums could hope now. After all, Skip had laid his plans with unexpected artfulness. Denver would not even know that the portable was gone from his study till after his hour with the Head. He would hunt for it, no doubt wild with wrath: and ultimately discover it in a bath of water. Unless Skip left some clue, how was anyone going to know that Skip had had a hand in it? If it had been any fellow but Skip, King and Warren would have felt easier in their minds. But the fathead of the Fourth was born to bungle. They could only hope fervently that he would not bungle this time.

"The ass—!" murmured Tom.

"The burbling chump—!" muttered Warren.

Mr. Charne glanced up from his desk with a frown.

"Silence in the class!" he rapped. Whispers seemed to have reached him.

And Skip's chums ceased to confide to one another what they thought of Skip! They were doing Latin papers in the Fourth, under Charne's eye. There was silence in the form-room, save for a scratching of pens. But Tom and Warren, in their anxiety for their chum, were producing the two worst Latin proses that had ever been seen in Mr. Charne's form-room. It could not be helped. They were too worried about their fat and fatuous chum to concentrate. Where was Skip, and what was he up to?

They suddenly knew!

The silence was broken with startling suddenness. From somewhere came a burst of unexpected, amazing, startling, thundering sound! It was the sudden roar of a band, playing the "Grand March" from Tannhäuser, and playing it at full force and close range. That sudden burst of march music echoed in every corner of the school. It was heard in every form-room—in every other inhabited spot—It roared, it bellowed, it thundered. Latin in the Fourth-form room

ceased as suddenly as Greek in the Sixth. Mr. Charne, generally the calmest of men, bounded. Tom King, Dick Warren, and every other Fourth-former, jumped, and stared, and exclaimed.

Never, at Felgate, had lessons been interrupted in so extraordinary a manner before. It was amazing—incredible—unbelievable! But there it was! Felgate echoed and re-echoed to the roar of the Grand March from Tanhäuser, going full blast. Charne rushed to the door—every other master at Felgate came out of his form-room—even the majestic Head himself, Dr. Leicester, emerged from the Sixth.

“What—?”

“Who—?”

“How—?”

“Skip!” groaned Tom King. “He’s done it, now!”
Skip had!

CHAPTER III

SKIP told his chums afterwards that it was not his fault. It was just one of those things! Just rotten luck! The sort of thing that a fellow really couldn’t help! Undoubtedly it was the sort of thing that Skip couldn’t help. If there was the remotest chance of bungling anything, the fathead of Felgate was not the man to lose that chance.

It had all gone beautifully according to plan—up to a point. Skip had laid that plan with uncommon artfulness. He was out of form, when every other fellow was in. He had the run of the House unobserved and unsuspected. Denver, in class with the Head, couldn’t even dream that his precious radio was in danger. There was no one to interfere with Skip. Skip Ruggles was free to do that which was right in his own eyes: and that which was right in Skip’s eyes was bagging Denver’s radio, and consigning it to a bath full of water, in reprisal for the kick in the pants bestowed on him by Denver. Skip was grinning all over his fat face, as he trod into Denver’s study, in the Sixth, and picked up that portable. He was grinning as he left Denver’s study, with the portable under a fat arm. Portable as that radio was, it was a little heavy for Skip to carry: and it nearly slipped from under the fat arm in Denver’s doorway. But he retrieved it, and marched on. He reached the staircase.

All that remained was to carry the portable up, deposit it in the bath, and then return to his form-room, triumphant. But the portable, as stated, was heavy for Skip to carry: and it was not surprising that he stumbled on the stairs with it. Skip was the man to stumble. He was on the fourth stair when he stumbled, and the radio, this time, did slip from under his fat arm, and bumped on the stairs.

That would not have mattered so much, if the bump had not shifted the knob that turned it on!

But it did!

Instantly, and with a suddenness that deafened Skip, the radio burst into music. They happened, at that moment, to be broadcasting the Grand March from Tannhäuser: a sufficiently emphatic piece of music. The Grand March blared out of Denver's radio at full blast.

That radio was turned full on: and when it was turned full on, it was a goer. It roared—it blared—it bellowed!

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Skip.

He plunged at the dreadful thing to stop it.

Skip's cue was silence. He did not want to attract attention while he was conveying Denver's radio from the Sixth-form studies to a bath-room. But he realized that he must be attracting attention now. Only an extremely deaf person, if there had been any such at Felgate, could have remained unaware of the Grand March from Tannhäuser. He plunged wildly at the radio, his hurried grab pushing it from the fourth stair to the third, and a second hurried grab helping it on to the next below: and Skip, losing his footing in those hurried grabs downward, slipped over and rolled after it.

It was, as Skip said sadly afterwards, really rotten luck. When he had knocked over that radio in Denver's study the day before, it had turned the beastly thing off. Now dropping it had turned it on! It was almost as if the wretched thing had a will of its own, and was bent on bothering Skip. Even rolling from stair to stair did not stop its thunderous roar. It landed at the foot of the staircase, with Skip sprawling headlong after it, and roared on.

A minute ago, Skip had been quite on his own. But in less than a minute, the spaces round Skip became quite thickly populated, with amazed masters billowing out of form-rooms. The Sixth-form room being nearest, Dr. Leicester was first on the scene: and he gazed in wrathful astonishment at a plump junior sprawling, and a radio roaring, at the foot of the staircase, Mr. Charne was only a moment or two after him, from the Fourth-form room. Mr. Morney, from the Shell, Mr. Kye, from the Fifth, Gudge the house-porter, Monsieur Pin the French master, arrived—and Langdale, Denver, Loring, and other prefects followed the Head. Many eyes fixed on Skip Ruggles as he scrambled up: Charne's with a deadly gleam in them.

"Boy!" gasped the Head.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Skip.

"Ruggles!" thundered Mr. Charne.

"My radio!" almost yelled Denver of the Sixth.

"Stop it!" Dr. Leicester put his hands to his ears. "Stop that dreadful noise—stop it at once!"

Denver jumped at the radio. He grabbed it and shut it off. Silence, blessed silence, fell on the scene: and never had silence seemed so golden.

Skip stood almost gibbering. Denver gave him a look, which hinted of things to come. Charne's eyes fairly glittered at him. The Head's face was like a thundercloud.

"Is—is—is that dreadful instrument yours, Denver?" gasped the Head.

"Yes, sir—it's my radio—"

"Take it away."

Denver took it away.

"Mr. Charne!" Dr. Leicester gazed at the Fourth-form master. "This boy, I think is in your form—"

"Yes, sir—Ruggles of my form—"

"I am amazed, Mr. Charne! I fail to understand this! The boy is out of form in third school—he has caused a disturbance interrupting lessons—a dreadful disturbance—an unheard-of disturbance—This is not what is expected, Mr. Charne, of a form-master at Felgate!"



The radio burst into music.

Mr. Charne had to take that, as it came from the Chief. The Head turned, and rustled back to the Sixth form room. Charne's eyes almost burned into Skip.

"Ruggles!" His voice was like the filing of a saw.

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir!" moaned Skip.

"Follow me at once."

Skip limped after his form-master to the Fourth-form room. Tom King, Dick Warren, all the Fourth, stared at him, as he came in. Mr. Charne picked up the cane from his desk.

"Bend over, Ruggles!"

"Oh, lor!"

What followed was painful: very painful. Charne had had to take it, from the Head: Skip had to take it, from Charne. It was a suffering Skip that wriggled, and wriggled, and wriggled, during the remainder of third school.

SKIP's chums walked Skip off to Study Four after third school, and sympathized. But they could not help grinning while they sympathized. It was so like Skip—it was just exactly Skip—it was Skip all over! They sympathized and chuckled.

"Poor old Skip—ha, ha!"

"Rough luck, old fellow—ha, ha, ha!"

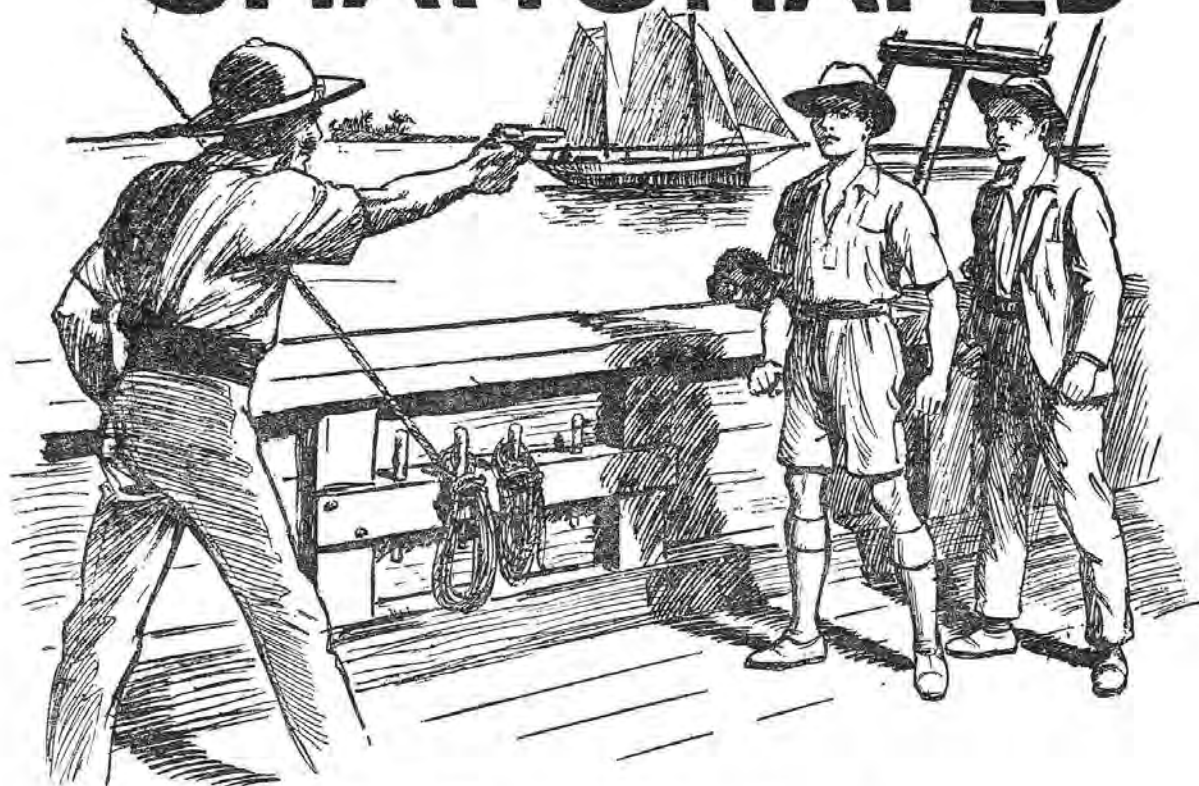
"Wow!" moaned Skip. "Ow! wow! I say, Charne laid it on! Wow! Ow!"

Skip wriggled and wriggled.

But there was at least one good outcome: Skip was no longer on the war-path. He had had enough of the war-path. Denver had kicked him—and in fact, during the next day or two, Denver gave him a few extra ones. But Skip planned no more plans: that radio in Denver's study was, henceforth, quite safe from the fat hands of the fathead of Felgate.

THE END

SHANGHAI-ED



by Charles Hamilton

A Story of the King of the Islands

CHAPTER I

BECALMED !

"**T**HAT feller sing out plenty too much, mouth belong him!"

Koko, the brown-skinned boatswain of the *Dawn*, made that remark, ceasing for a moment to twang his ukelele.

The yell of pain and anguish that came echoing across the blue water did not disturb Koko's serenity: though it made King of the Islands and his mate, Kit Hudson, knit their brows.

There was a dead calm on the Pacific.

The ketch *Dawn* lay like a log on the blue water. King of the Islands scanned the sea, in vain, for the slightest sign of a ripple. Kit Hudson whistled for a wind—in vain.

Ken King's handsome ketch, which was wont to skim the waves with the speed and grace of a sea-bird, lay like a painted ship on a painted ocean.

Hardly a cable's length distant, equally helpless on the motionless sea, waiting for a wind, lay the *Sea-Cat*—Dandy Peter Parsons' cutter from Lukwe.

The tall palm-tops of the island of Tovuku nodded on the horizon, to the east.

With a wind, the *Dawn* would have made the island almost in a matter of minutes. But there was not the faintest breath to stir the canvas. For long, long hours those palm-tops had nodded tantalizingly in sight, while the ketch lay immobile. Skipper and mate watched sea and sky, hoping against hope for a sign of a catspaw, while Kobo sat on the coamings of the cabin skylight and twanged his ukulele, and the Hiva-Oa crew lolled in contented laziness and chewed betel-nut.

To the Kanaka crew of the *Dawn*, what might be happening on the Lukwe cutter was a matter of no interest. The brown boys did not trouble to turn their heads, as the wild yelling came across the water. But the frown was darkening on the brow of King of the Islands.

Dandy Peter of Lukwe was no friend of the boy trader. Chance had becalmed them within a cable's length, as Ken King was making Tovuku, and Peter Parsons sailing away from it. Dead calm chained them both to the spot, till the wind came. But Ken would have given no heed to the Lukwe cutter, but for the sounds that came across the sea.

Looking across Ken and Hudson could see the neat, dapper dandy of Lukwe, in his spotless ducks—handsome, slim, elegant, but hard as nails, ruthless as a tiger-shark. Dandy Peter sailed his cutter with a crew of three black Lukwe boys, and he was always as ready with a blow as with a word, and as ready with the lawyer-cane as with his knuckles. But what was going on now was something out of the common, even on a floating hell like Dandy Peter's cutter. Some hapless native "boy" was howling under the lawyer-cane—and the howling and yelling had gone on, intermittently, for a long time. Why even Dandy Peter, cat-like as he was, was keeping it up so long, was a puzzle to the shipmates of the *Dawn*, and their faces grew darker and darker as they heard.

"My word, sar, that feller along cutter sing out plenty too much!" said Koko. "Tinkee white master kill that feller altogether too much along lawyer-cane."

"The swab!" muttered Ken.

"The lubber!" grunted Kit Hudson. "Look here, Ken, there's a limit. Are we letting this go on?"

Ken set his lips.

To intervene between a skipper and his crew was against all the laws and customs of the sea. But there was, as the Australian mate said, a limit. Whatever might have been the native boy's offence, it could not justify such con-

tinued punishment. Ken King had hesitated long: but now, as his mate spoke, he made up his mind.

"No!" he said. "It's going to stop! Koko!"

"Yessar!"

"Lower the whaleboat."

"Yessar."

Immediately there was activity on board the *Dawn*. Koko laid down his ukulele, and shouted to the crew. The whaleboat dropped from the davits to the sea: and in a minute more, was pulling for the Lukwe cutter, with Tomoo and Lompo at the oars, and Ken and Kit in the stern.

From the ketch, Koko and the Hiva-Oa boys watched it, interested now, even Danny the cooky-boy coming out of his galley to watch. They knew how little the desperado of Lukwe was likely to tolerate interference on his own deck—and they knew, too, the grim set look on Ken King's face. And they watched in excited anticipation of an affray on the *Sea-Cat*.

The low freeboard of the cutter gave the shipmates a full view of the scene, as the whaleboat approached Dandy Peter's craft.

Peter Parsons was sprawling in a Madeira chair, smoking a cigarette. A native was standing face to the mast, round which his arms extended—a rope securing his wrists together on the further side. A black boy was wielding the lawyer-cane—another black boy looked on with indifferent face. Dandy Peter generally sailed with a crew of three: and it came into Ken's mind that the man tied to the mast was not, perhaps, a member of his crew at all, but some native whom he might have "shanghaied" on the beach of Tovuku. And that suspicion grew stronger, as the boat drew nearer, and he discerned that the tied man was a brown Polynesian, like his own crew. The Lukwe boys were black, and he could see only two of them.

"My sainted Sam!" muttered the boy trader. "That's not a Lukwe boy, Kit—it's not one of that brute's crew. May be a Tovuku boy. It would be like that swab to shanghai a boy on the beach if he wanted an extra hand."

"He's seen us coming," said Hudson.

Dandy Peter had half-risen from the Madeira chair, and was looking towards the whaleboat. An unpleasant glint came into his dark handsome eyes. His look showed plainly enough that if the shipmates of the *Dawn* were coming to interfere, trouble awaited them on the deck of the *Sea-Cat*.

Trouble with the dandy of Lukwe had no terrors for King of the Islands. He had had trouble with him before, and Dandy Peter had not had the best of it.

"Washy washy plenty quick, you feller boy," rapped King of the Islands: and the whaleboat shot on towards the cutter.

Kit Hudson stood up, and held on, as it floated under the low rail. Dandy Peter leaped from the Madeira chair, and came to the side, with the quick, elastic tread of a panther. The two Lukwe boys stared at the boat.

The beating ceased, though the native tied to the mast still howled. His bare brown back was a criss-cross of scoring from the lawyer-cane.

"What do you want here, King of the Islands?" Dandy Peter's voice was cool, but his eyes were gleaming. "I reckon I haven't asked you to step on my craft."

"We're coming aboard," rapped Ken.

"Guess again!"

Ken, without answering, put his hands on the rail. The dandy of Lukwe clenched his hands.

"Keep in your boat, King of the Islands," he said, between his teeth. "If you step on my cutter, I'll knock you back into the sea."

"Handle that boat-hook, Kit, if that swab uses his hands," said King of the Islands.

"Aye, aye!"

Ken swung himself lightly over the rail. Dandy Peter's arm was drawn back for a blow. But the blow did not come. Before it could be delivered, Dandy Peter had to jump back from the lunge of the boat-hook in the Australian's hand. Hudson lunged straight at him, and the desperado of Lukwe just saved himself by a backward leap.

A second more, and King of the Islands was standing on the cutter: another second, and Kit Hudson had followed him on board: and Dandy Peter, his handsome face red with rage, snatched a heavy Navy revolver from the back of his belt.

"Get off my ship! Or—!"

The barrel was rising, as King of the Islands leaped forward. The revolver spun from Dandy Peter's hand, and whirled into the scuppers, exploding as it fell: as Ken King's fist, clenched and as hard as iron, crashed into the dark handsome face, and Dandy Peter of Lukwe, lifted from his feet by that terrific jolt, went rolling headlong on his own deck.

CHAPTER II

TOKOLOO OF TOVUKU

KING OF THE ISLANDS stepped towards the bound man at the mast. The Lukwe boy who had been wielding the lawyer-cane at his master's order, eyed him very uneasily as he came.

"Drop that feller lawyer-cane, hand belong you!" rapped Ken.

The Lukwe boy hesitated, glancing at his master, sprawling on the deck, dizzy and breathless. Dandy Peter was, for the moment, in no state to intervene. The lawyer-cane dropped to the deck.

"My sainted Sam!" muttered Ken. His brow was dark, as he looked at the brown back of the prisoner, scored again and again by cruel lashes.

Dandy Peter sat up, his hand to his bruised face. He sat dizzily, his eyes burning with malevolence at the shipmates of the *Dawn*. Ken gave him no heed, but Hudson kept a wary eye on him, prepared for any desperate move on the part of the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

"You feller boy!" rapped Ken.

"Yessar," mumbled the Lukwe boy.

"Cast loose rope along hand belong this feller."

Again the Lukwe boy glanced at his master. Again he obeyed the order, as there was no sign from Peter Parsons.

The rope was cast loose, and the prisoner tottered from the mast, and turned, to face his rescuers.

Ken scanned the brown face, drawn with pain.

He knew already that the man did not belong to Lukwe, as he was brown, and the Lukwe boys were black. Now, looking at him, he could see by the bluish tattoo-marks on the brown skin that he was a native of Tovuku. It was no new feat on Dandy Peter's part to kidnap a Kanaka. Evidently Parsons had picked up this brown-skinned "boy" at Tovuku. The "boy" was more than twice Ken's age—but all Kanakas were "boys".

The brown face, anguished as it was from the cruel beating, lighted up, as the Tovuku boy looked at the boy trader.

"Feller King of the Islands!" he exclaimed.

Ken nodded and smiled.

"I've seen you before, I think," he said. "You know me?"

"Savvy plenty, sar! Me see you, eye belong me, along you stop along Tovuku, trade along big-feller chief Kameka, master belong me. Me Tokoloo, sar."

Ken nodded again. He knew the man now.

"What name you sail along Cap'n Parsons, Tokoloo?" he asked.

"No wantee, sar! Cap'n Parsons makee."

Peter Parsons staggered to his feet. Tokoloo's black eyes shot round to him, dilating with terror. He moved closer to the boy trader.

"Oh, sar, you good feller along this feller Tokoloo," he panted. "You no likee lawyer-cane stop along back belong me, sar."

"They won't touch you again, Tokoloo," said King of the Islands. "I heard you from my ketch, and came across to put a stop to it! You no fright along feller Cap'n Parsons."

Peter Parsons came towards him. His eyes were smouldering with rage, but he kept his temper in check. He was in a mood to use the revolver, had it been still in his hand. But the revolver lay in the scuppers, and Kit Hudson stood ready to knock him spinning if he made a movement towards it. Force

was on the side of the shipmates of the *Dawn*, and they cared nothing for the half-suppressed fury of the dandy of Lukwe.

"You swab!" breathed Parsons. "You've come on my ship without leave, and laid your hands on me—"

"I'll lay them on again, fast enough, if you give trouble," snapped Ken, contemptuously. "I've more than half a mind to give you a taste of the lawyer-cane before I go."

Parsons trembled with rage.

"Get off my craft!" he breathed. "You've no right here, King of the Islands—you've come on my ship like a pirate—"

"Oh, belay it," said Ken. "I'll go, and take this boy with me. I'm making Tovuku as soon as the wind rises, and he's going back where he belongs."

"You can't take a man off my ship, King of the Islands."

"If the man belonged to your crew, I'd take him all the same, after the way you've used him. But he is no man of yours—you've shanghaied him on Tovuku—he is a servant of old chief Kameka—"

"He stays here," snarled Parsons.

"That's for Tokoloo to say," answered Ken. He glanced at the Tovuku boy with a smile. "You likee stop along Cap'n Parsons?"

"No, sar! No likee plenty too much!" exclaimed Tokoloo, in great haste.

"You likee come along *Dawn*, along we sail along Tovuku?"

"Yessar! Me likee altogether too much," grinned Tokoloo.

"That's that!" said Ken. "Step into my boat, Tokoloo."

"Yessar!"

Still eyeing Peter Parsons with scared eyes, the Tovuku boy sidled towards the rail. The dandy of Lukwe seemed to choke.

"You're taking that boy off my ship, Ken King?" he breathed.

"Aye, aye."

"If I had a gun in my hand—!" muttered Parsons, hoarsely.

"You had—but it didn't help you much!" snapped Ken. "Throw that gun into the sea, Kit!"

Hudson, grinning, picked up the revolver, and tossed it overboard. It splashed and sank.

"That's that!" said Ken, again. "You step along boat, you feller Tokoloo."

"I tell you you're not taking that man off my ship!" breathed Peter Parsons. "You can see I'm short-handed—one of my crew deserted at Tovuku, and I cannot sail my cutter with a couple of black boys. I picked up that swab on the beach because I needed a man. He got the lawyer-cane because he refused to jump to orders. I'm keeping that man on my cutter, King of the Islands—I'm not pulling out to sea with a crew of two—"

"That's enough!"

Ken turned his back on the sea-lawyer of Lukwe, and went to the side. Tokoloo jumped down into the boat. King of the Islands and Kit Hudson

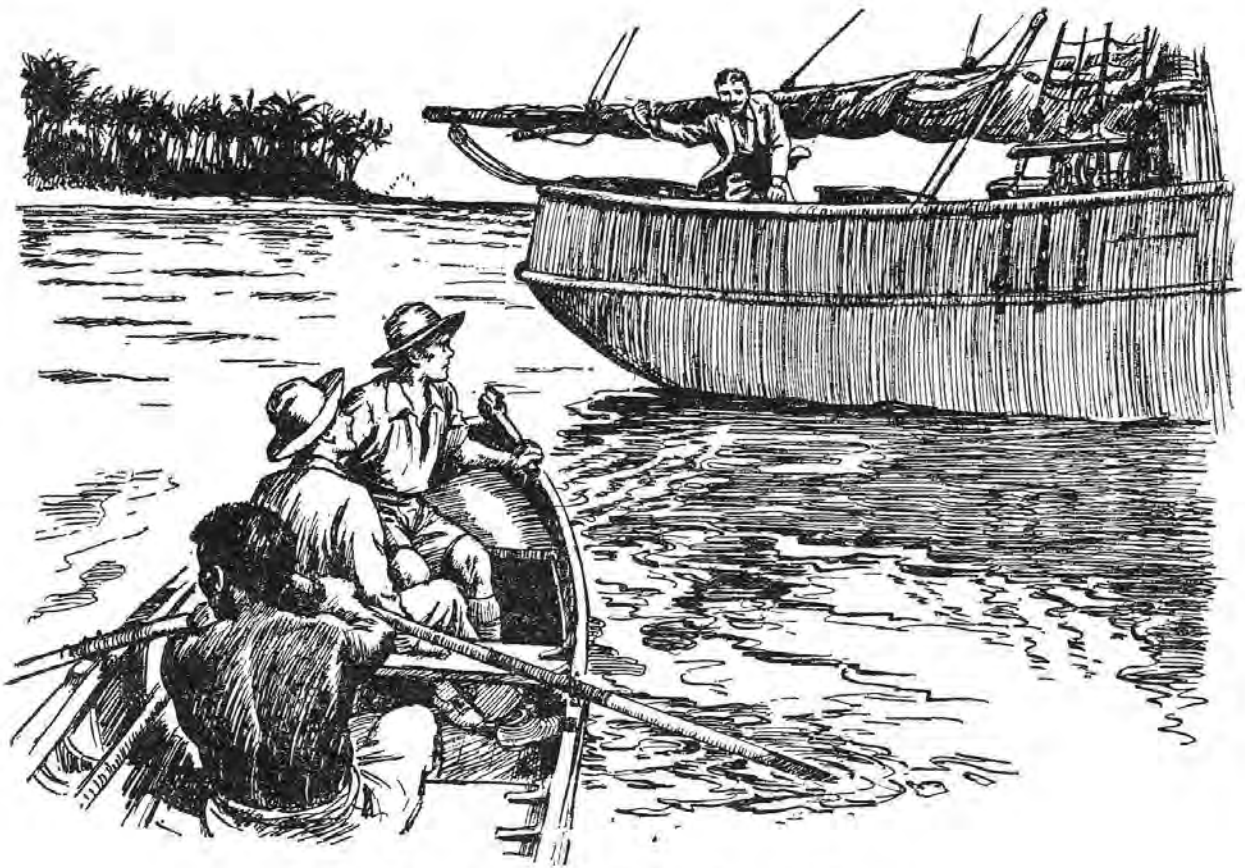
followed him. Dandy Peter stood staring after them, his hands clenched, his eyes blazing. The desperado of Lukwe could scarcely control his fury. But there was nothing he could do. He had been knocked down on his own deck, and the man he had shanghaied was taken off his ship under his eyes—and he was helpless to prevent it.

"Washy-washy along ketch, you feller boy," said King of the Islands.

Dandy Peter leaped to the low rail, and stared down, as the boat pushed off from his cutter. His eyes burned at King of the Islands. The boy trader eyed him with cool contempt: Hudson with a grin.

"I'll remember this, King of the Islands!" Dandy Peter's voice came in a hoarse gasp of fury. "I'll remember this! I'll give you reason to remember it, too! My turn next—!"

His voice died away as the whaleboat pulled back to the *Dawn*.



... the whaleboat pulled back to the *Dawn*.

CHAPTER III

A PUZZLE!

"THE wind at last!" said Kit Hudson.

There were catspaws on the calm water. At long, long last, the wind was coming, and the becalmed ketch could get into motion.

It was several hours since the spot of trouble on Dandy Peter's ketch. Through the long hot hours, the two vessels had lain in sight of one another, hardly a cable's length between. Every now and then the shipmates of the *Dawn* had had a glimpse of Dandy Peter's savage face, staring across at the ketch. They gave it no heed. Dandy Peter's rage, and his threats of revenge, passed by the shipmates unregarded. They were through with the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

Tokoloo sat on a tapa mat on the ketch's deck, with a cheerful brown face. Koko had rubbed his scored back with a native ointment, and Tokoloo was feeling better, though he still wriggled and twisted: it was likely to be long before he ceased to feel the effect of the lawyer-cane on the *Sea-Cat*. But the prospect of returning to Tovuku, as soon as the wind came, was enough to make the brown boy cheerful. His eyes were on the distant nodding palm-trees as he wriggled.

But the wind was coming at last. The catspaws that ruffled the calm surface of the Pacific were followed by the wind, and it came fair for Tovuku. It was a tremendous relief to the shipmates to shake out sail, and feel the ketch moving at last. The nodding palms drew nearer and clearer; over the sea to the east.

King of the Islands glanced back at the *Sea-Cat*, as his ketch glided through the blue waters. Dandy Peter was making sail too. He was shouting to the two Lukwe boys, who were jumping to his orders. But there was no doubt that the cutter was short-handed with a crew of two, and Parsons missed the "boy" who had deserted on Tovuku. The shipmates could see that he had himself to lend a hand with the bellying canvas, which was not in the least to Dandy Peter's taste. But he had no choice, for his boat-steerer had to attend to the tiller, and a single man was not enough to handle the sails. Kit Hudson chuckled, as he looked back, and watched the dapper dandy of Lukwe pulling and hauling like a Kanaka.

"No wonder Parsons picked up a boy on the beach at Tovuku," he remarked. "Three boys on that cutter is cutting it fine: and a crew of two means more work than that swab has a fancy for. I daresay the boy who deserted had had enough of the lawyer-cane and Dandy Peter's knuckles."

"More than likely," said Ken, with a frown. "Let him pull and haul, all the way back to Lukwe: it may be a lesson to him."

But the boy trader's look grew puzzled, as the ketch glided on, and the cutter swung into motion. The shipmates knew that Parsons had sailed out of Tovuku before the wind failed, and they expected him to set a course for his home port, Lukwe, or some other island. But Peter Parsons was doing nothing of the kind. He was setting the same course as the ketch, and heading back to Tovuku.

Kit Hudson whistled.

"By gum, we haven't seen the last of that Lukwe blackguard, Ken," he said. "He's not pulling out—he's making Tovuku again."

Ken's face set grimly.

"If he's looking for more trouble, he will get all he wants, and a little over," he answered.

"More likely looking for a chance to shanghai another Tovuku boy," said Kit. "He doesn't choose to sail short-handed."

King of the Islands laughed.

"He won't have much chance on Tovuku," he said. "As soon as Tokoloo sets foot ashore, and spins his yarn, Parsons life won't be safe on the beach there. He can't be mad enough to land on Tovuku after what he's done. Tokoloo's a servant of the old chief Kameeka, and Kameeka would be more likely than not to send Parsons to the cooking-pots, if he set foot on the beach".

Hudson nodded.

"But he's making Tovuku!" he said.

There was no doubt about that whatever the Lukwe sea-lawyer's intentions were, he was making Tovuku. The tall sail of the cutter, bellying in the wind, danced on the sea, astern of the *Dawn*, heading for the same destination. Whether to seek further trouble with the shipmates of the *Dawn*, or in the hope of picking up the hand he wanted for working the cutter, Peter Parsons was following the ketch to the island he had left earlier in the day.

As the wind strengthened, the *Dawn* flew before it, and the cutter dropped further astern. The *Sea-Cat* was a good boat, and Dandy Peter, blackguard as he was, knew how to sail her: but she did not equal the speed of Ken King's handsome ketch. Further and further astern the tall sail dropped. But it was still in sight, and still on the same course.

It was a puzzle to the shipmates. After what he had done on the beach at Tovuku, Peter Parsons could not fail to know that the whole island would be hostile. He could anchor in the lagoon: but he could not step ashore without taking his life in his hand. Indeed, one glance at Tokoloo told what the sea-lawyer had to expect if he landed. The Tovuku boy was watching the cutter's sail astern, at first in astonishment, and then with a malicious grin. He looked round at King of the Islands.

"That feller Parsons he comey along Tovuku, sar!" said Tokoloo.

"Looks like it!" answered Ken.

"My word! Him kill back belong me, along lawyer-cane," said Tokoloo.

"Sposee him comey along Tovuku, big chief Kameeka makee kaikai along that feller Parsons. Him comey along beach along Tovuku, me plenty too much please altogether."

And Tokoloo resumed watching the cutter, with a grin on his tattooed brown face: a grin of anticipation.

The shipmates exchanged glances.

"The man must be mad to make Tovuku," said Ken. "He will have a hundred natives on him if he steps off his cutter. Mightn't even be safe in his anchorage, after Tokoloo's spun his yarn to Chief Kameeka. But he's coming on."

The *Sea-Cat* was still keeping the same course. The tall sail was far astern, but it was clearly visible over the sea, when the *Dawn* ran the reef passage into the lagoon at Tovuku. Dandy Peter was coming to the island.

There, the shipmates dismissed him from mind, however. They were at Tovuku to trade, and the stay was to be brief: and many hours had been lost in the calm. Late in the afternoon, the shipmates landed, and Tokoloo was taken ashore in the whaleboat. The excitement on the beach, when Tokoloo had told his story of the kidnapping, and of Peter Parsons' drastic method of "breaking in" a new hand, was intense. Crowds of natives gathered to listen to Tokoloo's tale and to stare at the marks of the lawyer-cane on his brown back. And when the tall sail of Peter Parsons' cutter was seen over the reef, there were yells, and howls, and brandishing of spears and clubs.

Ken's face was very grave when the *Dawn's* boat pulled back to the ketch in the sunset. His eyes were on the *Sea-Cat*, coming in at the reef passage. A howling swarm on the beach watched the cutter coming in.

"The man's mad!" muttered Ken. "He's woke up a hornet's nest here, and now he's putting his head into it. We'll give him a hail, Kit, and warn him."

"I can't make out his game!" said Hudson. "He can see from his cutter what's waiting for him on the beach."

"It beats me! But we'll give him a hail."

The whaleboat pulled to intercept the cutter as she glided into the lagoon. King of the Islands stood up and shouted:

"*Sea-Cat* ahoy!"

A dark handsome face, with a dark bruise on it, looked at him over the rail, and Dandy Peter's eyes glittered at him. The whaleboat pulled closer.

"Peter Parsons—!" shouted Ken.

"What do you want?"

"If you've got the sense of a tunny-fish, pull out!" exclaimed Ken. "Look at the beach—you've roused up the whole island. Have you come back here to be kai-kai'ed?"

Parsons shrugged his slim shoulders.

"Didn't I tell you I was short-handed?" he sneered. "I've come back here to pick up a man for my crew."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Ken. "You'll be torn to pieces if you step ashore."

"That needn't worry you."

"We don't want to stand by while a white man goes to the cooking-pots!" snapped Ken. "But we could not help you—"

"I've not asked your help."

"You're a dead man if you step on the beach. You won't be safe on your cutter after dark. They may pull out in canoes—"

"Belay your jawing tackle, and mind your own business."

"You're asking for it!" exclaimed Hudson.

"No concern of yours."

"Are you mad enough to fancy that you can pick up a man here, when the whole island's up?"

"Why not?" said Parsons, coolly.

The cutter glided on, and the whaleboat pulled back to the ketch. There was nothing more that the shipmates could do, and Dandy Peter had to be left to his own devices.

But if the sea-lawyer of Lukwe was wildly reckless, he was not, at all events, reckless enough to land on the beach swarming with exasperated natives. The *Sea-Cat* anchored far out in the lagoon: and her dinghy, trailing at the end of its tow-rope, was not pulled in for Dandy Peter to go ashore. If the sea-lawyer had plans in his mind for kidnapping the extra hand he wanted, he was not thinking of carrying them out at once. The *Sea-Cat* rode to her anchor as the sunset deepened to dark: and the last the shipmates of the *Dawn* saw of Dandy Peter, he was lounging in a Madeira chair on his deck, smoking cigarettes, apparently deaf or indifferent to the savage howling from the beach. Then the swift tropical night fell, and the *Sea-Cat* and her skipper were blotted from view.

CHAPTER IV

SHANGHAI-ED!

KING OF THE ISLANDS hardly knew what happened.

It was dark on the lagoon of Tovuku. The sunset had died out: the moon had not yet risen. Only a glimmer of starlight fell on the lagoon and the beach. In that star-glimmer, a native dance was going on, on the beach, in which the Hiva-Oa crew of the *Dawn* were joining. Koko the boatswain, Tomoo, Lompo, Lufu, Kolulo and Danny the cooky-boy, were all on shore leave. Kit Hudson was taking his watch below, fast asleep in his bunk in the state-room. King of the Islands sat with a ledger on his knees, a pencil in his hand, totting up accounts by the glimmer of a lantern. Once or twice he glanced

at the beach, where the natives danced with garlands of the scarlet hibiscus trailing as they moved, to the twanging of the ukeles—once or twice in the direction of the *Sea-Cat's* anchorage, where Dandy Peter's cutter rode unseen in the distance and the gloom. But he did not heed a faint splash that was audible for a moment, and even if he had looked, he would hardly have discerned the dim shape of a small dinghy, dark in the darkness. Of peril on the ketch he never even dreamed. That Peter Parsons, on the cutter, might be in peril from the incensed natives of Tovuku, he knew: but there was no peril for the shipmates of the *Dawn*. If he gave Peter Parsons a thought at all, it was only to hope that the sea-lawyer of Lukwe would have sense enough to pull out to sea, and give up his mad scheme of picking up a hand at Tovuku.

And then suddenly came the crash: and for a split second the boy trader saw a thousand dancing lights, before blackness rushed on him, and he knew nothing more.

Consciousness came back slowly. Ken stirred, and a blinding pain shot through his head. His eyes opened, dizzily, and as in a dream, he saw a face grinning down at him: the dark handsome face of Dandy Peter. He stared at it blankly, and stared round him. He was no longer on his own deck. He was lying on planks, and the motion told him that he was at sea. A great sail bellied over him. He glimpsed another face—a black face—the face of a Lukwe boy. It seemed to him like some strange hallucination. But consciousness lasted only a few moments, and he sank again into insensibility.

His eyes opened again. He stared up at a cloudless blue sky, feeling the motion of a ship. His aching head was slow to clear. A full round moon sailed in the blue heavens, dazzling him with its light.

Was it a wild nightmare?

He had been sitting on his own ship, with a ledger on his knees. He remembered that. But this was not his own ship. He was at sea—but the *Dawn* was not due to pull out till the trade at Tovuku was through. There was a blinding ache in his head. Surely he was in his bunk on the ketch, and dreaming!

He stirred, and passed a hand over his aching head. There was a bruise under the thick hair—a large bruise! Slowly he realized what must have happened. He had been struck down—struck from behind—and stunned. Struck down on his own deck, while his crew were ashore, and his mate sleeping below. He was no longer on the *Dawn*. But if he was not on the *Dawn*, where was he—and what did it all mean?

He heard a voice. It was a voice he knew: a mocking sardonic voice.

"The lubber's coming to! Souse him with that bucket, you feller Suloo."

Ken's brain reeled. He could not be on board Dandy Peter's cutter—it was impossible. But it was Dandy Peter's voice that broke on his ears.

A splash of cold water followed. A grinning Lukwe boy "soused" him with a brimming bucket, and Ken gasped for breath. But the effect of the sudden

cold water was to awaken him thoroughly, and clear his head. He struggled to a sitting position, and stared round him, in the brilliant moonlight.

He was on the *Sea-Cat*. The Lukwe cutter was gliding through the water. One of the black Lukwe boys was at the tiller—the other handled the bucket. A slim figure in white ducks stood looking down at him, grinning.

It was no dream! He was on the *Sea-Cat*, out at sea, and it was Dandy Peter of Lukwe who was grinning down at him with malicious amusement. How it had happened he could not understand. But it had happened. He lay on his elbow, staring up at the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

"You've taken your time to come round, King of the Islands!" grinned Dandy Peter.

"This—this is the *Sea-Cat*?" gasped Ken.

"Aye, aye!"

"How did I get here?"

Peter Parsons chuckled.

"You're shanghaied!" he answered.

"What?"

"Don't you know the meaning of that?" grinned Dandy Peter. "You're shanghaied, my man—shanghaied on board my cutter."

Ken could only stare at him blankly.

"You took a man off my cutter!" Dandy Peter's tone was venomous. "You knocked me down on my own deck, King of the Islands, and took a man off my ship. Didn't I tell you that I put in at Tovuku to pick up another man in his place? You didn't guess what man I had in mind."

He chuckled again.

"You chose to take away my Kanaka," he said. "You told me I couldn't pick up another on the beach at Tovuku, and you were right. I've picked up you."

"You—you've picked up—me!" breathed Ken.

"That was why I came back to Tovuku!" Parsons passed his hand over the bruise on his handsome face. "You've got this to pay for, King of the Islands—and other things. I don't leave this kind of account unpaid. You'd have done better to steer clear, and leave me that Kanaka Tokoloo. I'm not sailing short-handed, my man. You're in my crew now."

"In your crew?"

"Chew on that, and get it into your head that you're not a skipper now, but a foremast hand jumping to orders!" said Parsons. "Give me any lip, and you know what Tokoloo was getting yesterday—there's the lawyer-cane ready."

Ken could only stare. It was not easy for him to believe that the ruffian was in earnest.

"I had it all cut and dried, when I got sail up after the calm," went on Dandy Peter. "You in the place of the nigger you took off my ship! That's why I dropped my hook in the lagoon at Tovuku, King of the Islands. I was watching

for a chance—and you gave me one.” He laughed. “It was easy money! You never saw my boat in the dark—or heard it. Your crew ashore—your mate taking his watch below—you were asking for it, my man! A crack from a revolver-butt on the back of your head—”

Ken understood now.

“You treacherous swab!” he muttered.

“I reckon your mate wonders what became of you!” grinned Parsons. “He never woke up while we lifted you into the dinghy and pulled back to my cutter. I reckon he’s awake now and wondering. Not that he could have stopped me—he’d have stopped a bullet if he’d woke up and chipped in. I didn’t lose any time in pulling out of Tovuku, after I had you aboard.” Dandy Peter waved his cigarette towards the horizon. Ken followed the gesture with his eyes, and had a faint distant glimpse of nodding palm-tops in the far distance. “That’s Tovuku, King of the Islands. You won’t see Tovuku, or your ship, again, in a hurry! You’re in the crew of the *Sea-Cat* now—under my orders, and by hokey I’m sorry for you if you don’t jump to them. We shall be well under the horizon before morning. You’re my man now!”

Ken’s eyes blazed at him.

“Got it clear?” jeered Parsons.

“I’ve got it clear, now! You’ve kidnapped me off my ship—!”

“Correct!”

“You’ll answer for it!”

Parsons shrugged his shoulders.

“I’ll take my chance of that!” he said, banteringly. “We’ve had trouble more than once, King of the Islands, and you’ve had the best of it. My turn now! You’re shanghaied in the place of the nigger you took off my ship! You’re going to turn to and work for your keep! Get that clear! Now get on your feet!”

“You lubberly swab—!”

“Get on your feet!” snapped Parsons. “I warn you to belay your jawing-tackle, King of the Islands. I don’t allow my hands to give me any back-chat on this hooker. Get up!”

King of the Islands struggled to his feet. His head was reeling—he was far from recovered from the blow that had knocked him out. But the rage that burned in his heart was like a spur. It was not easy to believe that the ruffian of Lukwe intended to carry out his threat: but he had to believe it. It was no new thing for Dandy Peter to knock a Kanaka on the head and kidnap him. That he would dare to try the same game with a white man Ken had never dreamed. But the grinning rascal was evidently in deadly earnest: this was his revenge for King of the Islands’ intervention on his ship: the boy trader was to take the place of the Kanaka he had rescued from the lawyer-cane. Ken, with burning eyes, staggered to his feet, and his hand went to his hip-pocket. But the pocket was empty: his revolver was gone. Dandy Peter had not neglected to

take precautions, while the boy skipper of the *Dawn* lay senseless on his deck.

"You swab!" King of the Islands panted with rage. "You treacherous shark! You've shanghaied me as you did that Tovuku boy—you—" He did not finish, but like a tiger he sprang at the sea-lawyer of Lukwe.

Dandy Peter snatched a revolver from the back of his belt. He was on the watch for a desperate move on the part of the kidnapped skipper of the *Dawn*.

The next moment the boy trader was upon him. But the dandy of Lukwe swung up the heavy revolver, and the barrel crashed on Ken's head, sending him spinning over. He crashed back on the deck.

"Mutiny, will you, you dog?" said Dandy Peter. "By hokey, I'll teach you to feed from my hand, before I'm through. You feller Suloo."

"Yessar!"

"You take lawyer-cane along hand belong you, givee that white feller plenty too much lawyer-cane along back belong him."

"Yessar."

The black boy picked up the lawyer-cane which, the day before had lashed the brown back of Tokoloo. King of the Islands, half-stunned, lay on the deck, as the lawyer-cane rose and fell. He strove to struggle up, and Dandy Peter grasped him, and pinned him down. In his present condition, he was no match for the wiry, sinewy sea-lawyer of Lukwe: Dandy Peter handled him with ease. And the lashes of the lawyer-cane rained on him. Not till twenty lashes had fallen, did Peter Parsons sign to the black boy to stop.

He grinned down at King of the Islands.

"Chew on it that you're in the crew of this hooker," he said. "Jump to orders, or you get the lawyer-cane every time. Got that?"

Ken did not speak.

"I'll have no mutiny on my craft!" said Parsons. "I've broken in Kanakas, my man, and I'll break you in. Chew on that! Now get on your feet."

Ken did not stir. He was utterly spent, and he lay panting for breath. But as Dandy Peter made a sign to the Lukwe boy, and the lawyer-cane rose again, he made an effort, and staggered up.

Dandy Peter laughed.

"That's better!" he said. "You're learning, my man!"

Ken, his head reeling, leaned on the mast for support. Dandy Peter looked at him, grinning, and then strolled aft and left him. The kidnapped skipper of the *Dawn* leaning on the mast, watched him with burning eyes as he went. Far away, the palm-tops of Tovuku waved and nodded under the bright moon that shone down on the ketch riding at anchor in the lagoon—the ketch whose skipper was "shanghaied" on board Dandy Peter's cutter, and on his way to distant Lukwe—a prisoner in the power of Dandy Peter!

CHAPTER V

OVERBOARD!

"YOU feller boy!"

Ken gritted his teeth.

It pleased Dandy Peter to address him, as he addressed the black crew of his cutter, Dandy Peter had the upper hand now, and he was the man to rub it in.

For a while, King of the Islands had been left to himself, leaning on the mast, his strength slowly returning, as the *Sea-Cat* glided over the Pacific waters in the bright moonlight.

Far away to the east, the tall palm-tops of Tovuku still nodded under the soaring moon. The wind had been fair for the *Sea-Cat* and the *Dawn* to reach Tovuku, after the calm. But it was not fair for getting away from the island. Dandy Peter was beating to the west, his course set for distant Lukwe: and only by a series of long tacks could the cutter make headway.

The sea-lawyer had had no choice about pulling out, as soon as the kidnapped skipper of the *Dawn* was on his ship. He dared not remain near the *Dawn's* anchorage. But it was weary work beating against the wind, and progress was slow. After hours of tacking and wearing, the palm-tops of Tovuku still nodded on the horizon in the moonlight.

To Ken, the sight of those palm-tops was a consolation. If Kit Hudson, when he came up from his watch below, and missed him, surmised what had happened, there would be immediate pursuit. He could guess that Dandy Peter feared it, and was keenly anxious to drop the palms below the sea-line.

The *Sea-Cat* was running on a long tack, as Ken leaned on the mast, with a long white wake astern, on which the trailing dinghy danced. Like many small vessels in the South Seas, the cutter had no davits, and towed her boat. The dinghy danced astern, the tow-rope sometimes taut, sometimes sinking under the water. Ken had heard Dandy Peter's voice, cursing the wind: and now the sea-lawyer came striding towards him, with a scowling brow.

"You feller boy!" he snapped. "Turn to! Handle the sheets with Suloo, and handle them lively or you get what's coming to you."

"You swab—!"

"No lip!" said Parsons, threateningly. "You've had one lesson, you feller King! Do you want more lawyer-cane?"

King of the Islands breathed hard and deep. He was at the mercy of the dandy of Lukwe. Peter Parsons' hand was very near his hip-pocket: he was ready to snatch out his revolver if it was needed. Even the desperado of Lukwe might have hesitated to shoot a white man, but he was prepared to knock him spinning with the butt. Ken's eyes wandered, for a moment, to the pin-rail—With a belaying-pin in his hand—!

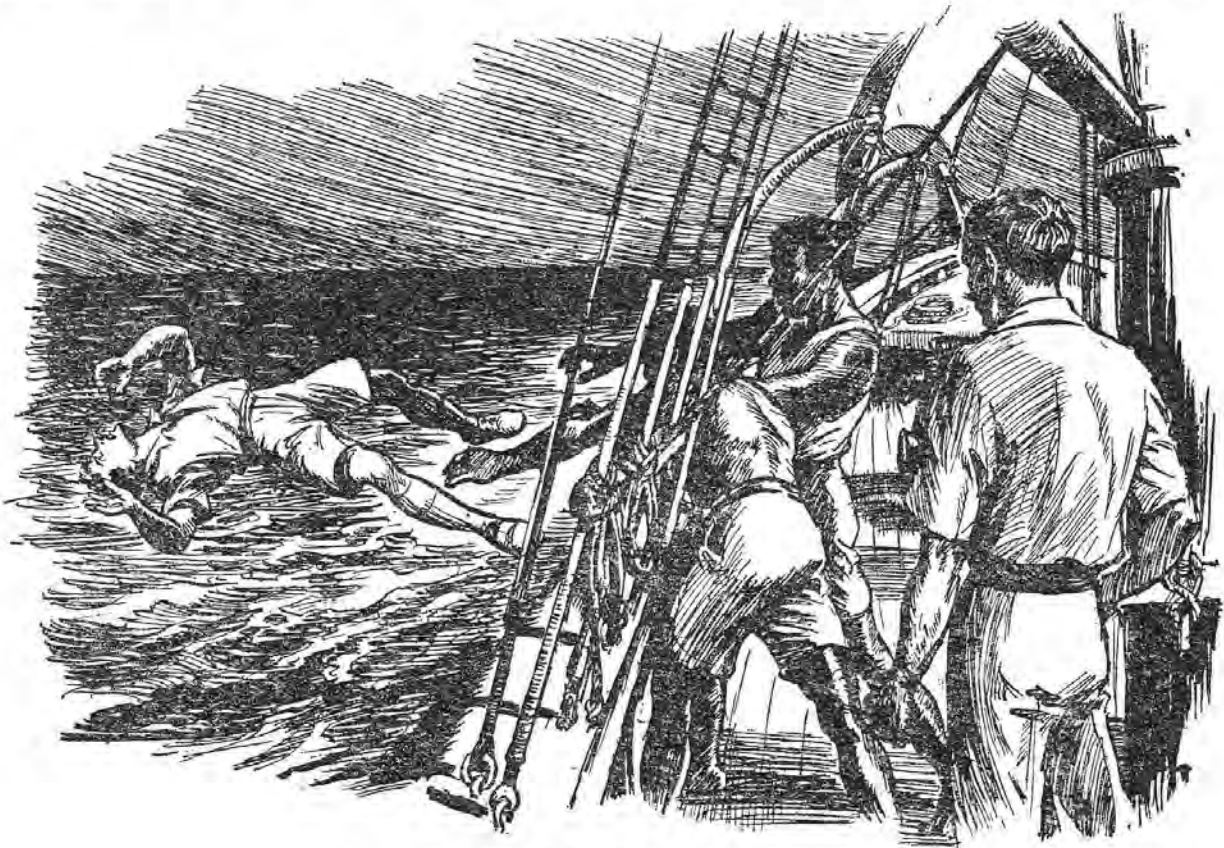
Dandy Peter, easily reading his thoughts, gave a sarcastic laugh, and the revolver glimmered in his hand, his finger on the trigger.

"Forget it!" he said, menacingly. "Give me trouble, you scum, and you go down on this deck with a bullet through you. I'm not taking chances with you, King of the Islands. You're pulling with the Kanakas, on this hooker, and you're my man till I raise Lukwe, with the lawyer-cane to teach you manners—but lift a finger, and you go down, and your carcase to the sharks. I reckon the sharks won't tell the tale of what became of you. That's a warning."

Ken clenched his hands, hard. He knew that Parsons meant every word of it. At the first attempt to turn the tables on him, he was ready to pull the trigger: and a belaying-pin in his hand would not have helped.

"Now turn to!" snapped Parsons. "I'm short-handed on this hooker, and I'll have no idlers. Jump to orders, or it's you for the lawyer-cane."

Ken made no reply: but, as Parsons rapped out orders, and Suloo handled the sheet, he joined him, in swinging the boom. The *Sea-Cat* was taking a new tack, and every hand was wanted. Nolulu, the boat-steerer, was at the tiller, and Parsons himself lent a hand with the sheets, and the cutter shifted to



The dark sea stretched below him.

her new tack. But still the palm-tops of Tovuku nodded on the moonlit horizon.

But the moon was dimming now towards dawn.

Between the setting of the moon and the sunrise there would be an interval of darkness, and that was the thought that was working in Ken's mind. Peter Parsons had no doubt that he was going to "break in" the kidnapped skipper of the *Dawn*, as he had broken in many a shanghaied man in his time: and he was going to revel in the breaking-in process. But there were very different thoughts in the mind of King of the Islands. If a chance came in the dark—! The most desperate chance was good enough for Ken. As the risk of the sea-lawyer's revolver, at the risk of being flung to the sharks, he was fiercely resolved that sunrise should not find him a shanghaied "hand" in the Lukwe cutter.

The moonlight faded, and the palm-tops of Tovuku disappeared in darkness. There was relief in Dandy Peter's face as he stared back towards the unseen island. The cutter was making but little way to the west, but he was safe from pursuit now, hidden in the darkness if Kit Hudson followed on in the *Dawn*: and by sunrise the *Sea-Cat* would be well below the horizon: and Hudson, if he pursued, would be welcome to comb the Pacific for her.

The last gleam of the moon was gone, as he stared back in the direction of Tovuku, and he laughed as he turned away. The next moment the laugh turned into a yell of rage, as something whizzed through the air, and struck him on the head.

He staggered, as a belaying-pin dropped clanging at his feet. He had been off his guard only for a moment: but a moment had been enough for the shanghaied skipper of the *Dawn*.

As he staggered, King of the Islands came with a rush.

Dandy Peter, staggering from the blow, tore at the revolver in his hip-pocket. At that moment, he would have shot down his prisoner without a second's hesitation.

But the boy trader was too swift for him. Even as he dragged the weapon out, Ken's hands were upon him, and he was borne backwards to the deck. The revolver spun from his hand as he crashed.

"Now, you scum—!" breathed Ken.

Parsons struggled fiercely, giving grip for grip. And as he struggled, he yelled madly to the Lukwe crew.

"You feller boy! You Suloo, you Nolulo! Help here, you feller boy! You seize that feller King, hand belong you!"

There was a padding of bare feet on the deck. Suloo flung himself on King of the Islands, and grasped him. Nolulo hesitated a moment before he abandoned the tiller: then he joined Suloo, and the cutter yawed wildly as the tiller swung free. Parsons struggled and yelled, as the boy trader's clenched fists beat in his furious face.

For a moment or two, Ken hoped—it seemed that he had a chance. To

knock the dandy of Lukwe senseless: then, with the belaying-pin in his hand, to face the Lukwe boys—he had no fear of them with Parsons *hors de combat*. It was a chance—but it was the most desperate of chances, and it failed. The grasp of Suloo was on him too swiftly, and he was dragged over, still clinging to his enemy, and then Nolulo's grasp was added, and he struggled and wrestled in vain in the brawny clutches of the Lukwe boys.

They dragged him off the sea-lawyer, still fighting fiercely.

Peter Parsons sat up dazedly. The blood was streaming down his face. That face was, for the moment, the face of a demon. He caught at the low rail, and dragged himself to his feet, his eyes blazing at the boy trader struggling in the grasp of black hands. His voice came in a splutter of fury.

"Throw him overboard! Do you hear? You feller boy, you makee that feller stop along sea, plenty quick!"

Ken King was fighting like a wildcat. But the two pairs of strong black hands were too much for him. They grasped him, and held him but the Lukwe boys did not immediately obey their skipper's furious order. Many a dark deed had been done on Dandy Peter's cutter, but throwing a white man into the sea taxed the obedience of his crew to the limit. They stared at him with rolling eyes.

The sea-lawyer of Lukwe, beside himself with rage, almost gibbered at them, foaming.

"You hear me, ear belong you?" he yelled. "You make that feller stop along sea, or me knockee seven bells out of your black hides! Makee stop along sea, plenty too quick."

They hesitated no longer. A swing of sinewy black arms, and Ken was over the low rail. The dark sea stretched below him: he had a last glimpse of Dandy Peter's furious face, and then he was flung headlong over the side. There was a heavy splash in the water, a choked cry, and King of the Islands sank deep in the Pacific—and the yawing cutter surged on without the "hand" that Peter Parsons had shanghaied at Tovuku.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST CHANCE!

DEEP down in the sea, deep under the rushing water, King of the Islands sank. The Pacific closed over him in the darkness. It was the end—his desperate bid to turn the tables on Dandy Peter had failed, and all was over. But he struck out, in the deep water, and came to the surface, panting and panting for breath, as his head came clear of the water again. Hope there seemed none: flung overboard many a long mile from the nearest land. But while there was

life there was at least a glimpse of hope: and Ken King was not the man to give way to despair while life beat in his veins. He was a strong swimmer, and the sea was calm. He swam strongly and stared about him in the baffling darkness. A dark shadow that loomed against the dark sky was the tall sail of the cutter—it loomed almost over him.

He wondered for a moment that it was still so near: then he remembered that Nolulo had abandoned the tiller at Dandy Peter's yell for help, and that the cutter was yawing uncontrolled. Through the darkness, he could hear the voice of Peter Parsons, though he could not distinguish the words. The sea-lawyer of Lukwe was yelling orders to his crew; the cutter, with the tiller swinging free, had swung into the wind. If Dandy Peter had been disposed to waste a thought on the man who had been flung overboard, he had no time for it now: he was concentrated on getting his craft under control again.

The *Sea-Cat* was still close at hand: but there was no help or hope for Ken King from that quarter. There was no help or hope at all—for Tovuku was too far away for the strongest swimmer. He had been hurled to his death: and the dim waters were to close over his head for ever when his strength failed and he could swim no longer. He knew it: but he swam steadily and strongly. And then, suddenly, a shudder ran through him, as something touched him in the water, with the terrible thought of sharks.

But it was not a shark. Something struck against him as he swam, but after one dreadful second, he knew that it was not a shark. It was a rope—and his hand shot to it and clutched it.

A rope! For a moment he wondered whether Dandy Peter, or one of the Lukwe boys, had thrown it, to save him. But that was only for a moment. He knew that it was not that. The three on the cutter were too busy to give him a thought, even if they had cared to do so. But the rope was there—and as he held on to it, it dragged him through the water, holding him above the surface. Suddenly it slackened, and he dipped under. But he did not let go the rope, and he came up over the sea again as it tautened once more.

He knew now what it was—the tow-rope, at the end of which trailed the cutter's dinghy.

He could not see the trailing boat: the *Sea-Cat* itself was only a looming shadow in the dark. But he knew that it must be the tow-rope to which he clung, for it could be nothing else.

It slackened again, and he dipped under—again it tautened, and he came up. His hold on the rope was vice-like: it was all that stood between him and death in the deep waters.

For long minutes he held on to the rope, dipping under and coming up again, as it slackened or tautened with the motion of the cutter. Then, slowly and carefully, hand-over-hand, he worked his way along the rope towards the boat. He reached it in a few minutes and breathed a prayer of thankfulness as he grasped at the gunwale. A few moments more, and he had dragged him-

self out of the water, and lay in the dinghy, panting and panting for breath.

The cutter was under control again. Once more she resumed her course, Nolulo at the tiller, the bellying sail slanting to the wind on her port quarter. Once more Dandy Peter was on his way: to distant Lukwe, leaving behind him, as he believed, his enemy to death in the deep waters. If he thought of King of the Islands, he thought of a dead man rolling in the waters like a fragment of driftwood. Either by moonlight or sunlight, he could have seen that the trailing dinghy now had an occupant: but in the darkness he could see nothing of the boat. For the time—until the light came—King of the Islands was safe from the desperado of Lukwe. Dandy Peter sailed on in the veil of darkness, never dreaming that he was towing astern the boy trader who had been flung into the sea.

Ken sat up in the boat, his eyes on the dim shadow that was the sail of the *Sea-Cat*. He was saved from the sea—safe till the light came. But it could not be long now till dawn—and when the sun rose over the Pacific, he would be seen—every eye on the cutter would be upon him: within easy range of Dandy Peter's revolver. Hope had revived in his heart: there was a chance yet, and he was the man to make the most of it.

With a grim, set face, he thought it out, as he sat in the dinghy, towing in the darkness behind the cutter. It could last only till dawn, and dawn would soon be glimmering on the Pacific. If he was to save himself he had to act while darkness still veiled the sea.

And he was not long in forming his plans. Kneeling in the bows of the dinghy, he grasped the rope, and pulled it in. Slowly, but surely, he coiled in the tow-rope, drawing closer, inch by inch, foot by foot, fathom by fathom to the cutter's stern. It was slow work and hard work: but he did not pause for one moment, in dread of seeing a glimmer from the eastern sky. Darkness was his only friend: life or death depended on getting through, before the first gleam of the rising sun tipped the Pacific surges with gold.

There was a slight thud—the bows of the dinghy touched the stern of the *Sea-Cat*. The boat glided under the starboard quarter, lightly scraping against the hull. Ken was on his feet in a moment, and his grasp changed from the tow-rope, to the low freeboard of the cutter. Standing on the boat, he was able to look over the low rail, and scan the deck. There was only a glimmer of the binnacle lamp in the gloom. He glimpsed Nolulo at the tiller, and Suloo at a distance, standing holding to a sheet. For the moment, he saw nothing of Peter Parsons. Then he made out the glimmer of a white Panama hat, over the back of a Madeira chair. The sea-lawyer's back was to him.

King of the Islands drew a long, long breath.

Under his feet, the boat was dragging. No eye was upon him in the gloom—for the moment! To clamber over the low rail was easy—he would be on the deck, before any man on the *Sea-Cat* knew he was there—before they knew that he was still living. And then—!

Then he would be one against three—but with the advantage of the sudden surprise. He had to take the chance—it was all that was left to him. Already, in the eastern sky over Tovuku, there was a faint glimmer. Ken set his teeth, and swung himself on the rail. The boat under him shot away to the end of the tow-rope. He did not heed that. With a swift spring, King of the Islands leaped on the deck of the *Sea-Cat*.

CHAPTER VII

THE TABLES TURNED!

DANDY PETER was nodding, half-asleep, in the Madeira chair. The *Sea-Cat* was running on a long tack: Nolulo at the tiller, Suloo at the sheets: and the sea-lawyer of Lukwe was easy in his mind. Far astern, as he had no doubt, King of the Islands had gone down to his death in the depths of the Pacific: and there was no remorse in the hard heart of the handsome blackguard of Lukwe. Before the sun lighted the ocean, the *Sea-Cat* would be below the sea-line: there would be no clue for the mate of the *Dawn* to follow, even if he guessed that his ship-mate had fallen into the hands of his old foe—and would he even guess? There was no fear, and no uneasiness, in Dandy Peter's mind, as he sprawled drowsily in the Madeira chair on deck. His course lay clear before him, and he was done, for ever, with the boy trader he had always feared and hated. He had not planned that last crime: but if a shanghaied "hand" kicked, he had to take what was coming to him—that was all that Dandy Peter thought or cared about. He could afford to take his ease now.

But drowsiness, and easiness of mind, left him suddenly, at a sudden startled outbreak of yells from the two Lukwe boys. Nolulo and Suloo had seen King of the Islands leap aboard, at the same moment, and they stared at him with eyes popping from their black faces, as if he had been a ghost from the sea—as indeed they supposed him to be, for the moment. Neither of them made a movement, but their terrified howls rang over the cutter. Dandy Peter leaped up from the Madeira chair, and spun round.

He had an instant's glimpse of a set, fierce face and blazing eyes. But he had only one glimpse, for one instant: for the next, a clenched fist crashed between his eyes and he went down like a log, crashing on his back. As he sprawled half-stunned by that terrible blow, King of the Islands was upon him like a tiger, groping with a hurried hand for the revolver in his hip-pocket. The revolver was in Ken's hand, his finger on the trigger, before the sea-lawyer knew what was happening, or indeed that anything was happening at all.

"Now, you scum!—" panted Ken.

Dandy Peter, sprawling, could only give him a dazed and dizzy stare. Ken turned, revolver in hand, on the Lukwe boys. He would have fired on either

or both, without a moment's hesitation, had it been needed. But it was not needed. Suloo and Nolulo only stared at him in terror.

"Feller King of the Islands!" babbled Suloo. "That feller no walk about along bottom of sea—"

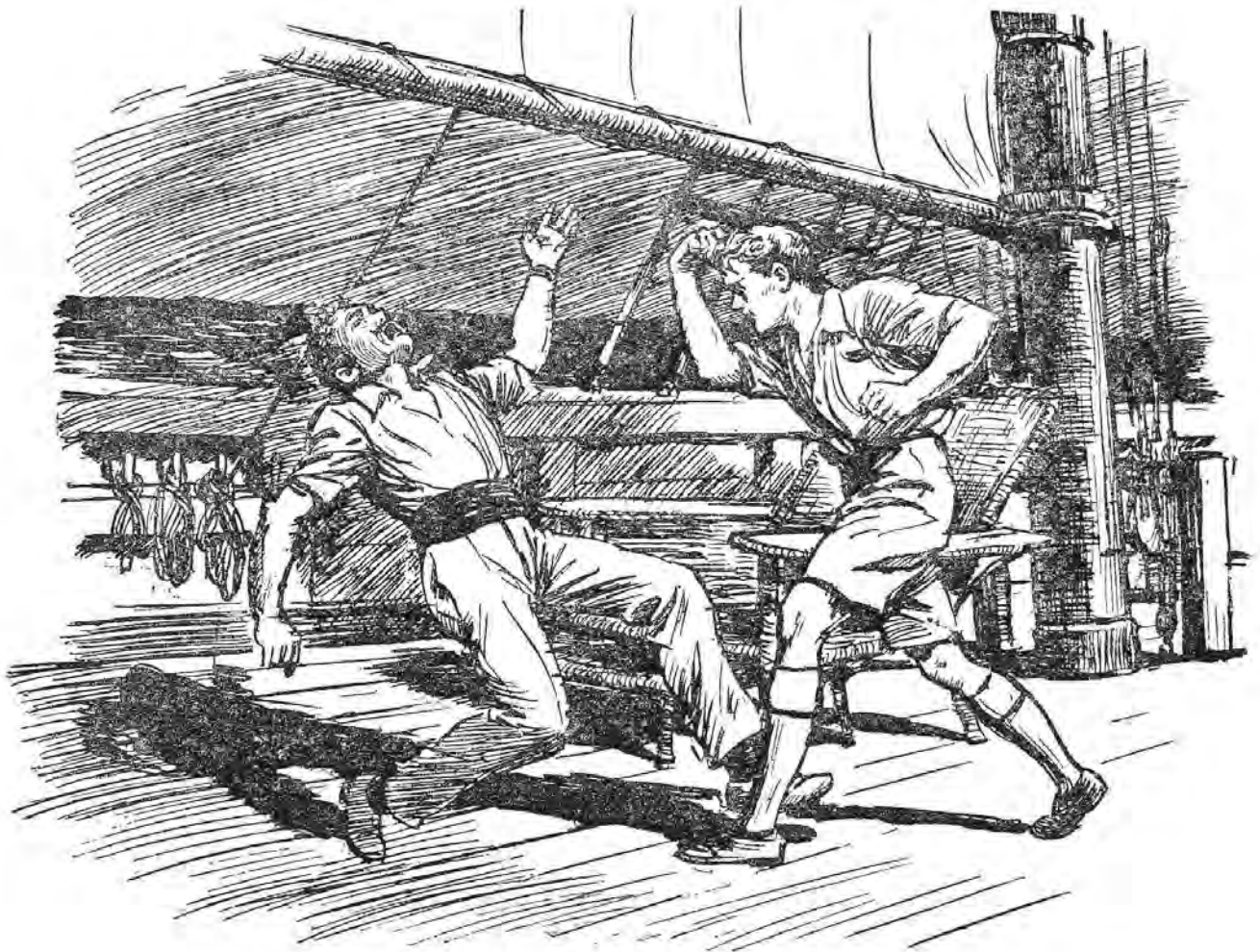
"That feller stop!" stuttered Nolulo. "That feller stop too much altogether! He no go finish along sea."

Ken's eyes glittered over the levelled barrel.

"You feller Lukwe boy, you lift hand belong you, you go finish close-up!" he rapped, with a menacing motion of the revolver. "You no good boy along me, you go finish altogether."

"Oh, sar, you no shootee along this feller!" gasped Suloo. "This feller boy good feller along you, sar."

"Plenty good feller too much!" howled Nolulo.



... a clenched fist crashed between his eyes.

There was no danger from the Lukwe boys, with a firearm in the white man's hand. Ken turned to the sprawling sea-lawyer.

Dandy Peter, with swimming brain, was striving to get on his feet. Ken's eyes glittered at him. Even yet the dazed ruffian of Luke hardly knew what was happening. Ken watched him stagger to his feet: and he stood unsteadily, his hand on the Madeira chair for support. The boy trader looked at him, over the half-raised revolver.

"You scum!" he said, between his teeth. "My turn now, Peter Parsons! Lift a finger, and you go down on your own deck, you scoundrel."

"You!" breathed Peter Parsons. His dizzy eyes were almost unbelievably on Ken's face. "You! You alive—"

"No thanks to you, you villian!" said Ken. "Stand where you are, Peter Parsons. I'd as soon shoot you as not. I've turned the tables on you, you scum, and I'm master of this hooker now. Get that into your head, you sea-thief."

"By hokey! I—I—" Dandy Peter clenched his hands, convulsively, his eyes burning at the boy trader. "You—master of my ship—by gum—!"

"You feller Suloo!" rapped Ken.

"Yessar!" gasped Suloo.

"You take feller rope, hand belong you, tie up that feller Parsons, hand belong him, foot belong him."

"Yessar!"

Parsons made a movement. Ken lifted the revolver, and the barrel looked the sea-lawyer full in the face. And Dandy Peter stood still.

Suloo came to him, rope in hand. His threatening glare had no effect on the Lukwe boy. It was King of the Islands whom Suloo feared now. The sea-lawyer panted with rage, as the black boy dragged his wrists together, and bound them fast. But he did not venture to resist, with the levelled revolver only half a fathom from his furious face. The rope was knotted: and then knotted again round his legs, hard and fast. He sank into the Madeira chair, unable to stir hand or foot. But his eyes smouldered at King of the Islands.

Over the Pacific, from the east, came a glimmer, heralding the sunrise. Ken shouted orders to the Kanakas, and lent a hand with the sheets. The cutter swung into the wind. Nolulo at the tiller, Suloo at the ropes, jumped to the orders of the boy trader. The helpless desperado of Lukwe watched them, with fury in his face.

"King of the Islands!" His voice came panting. "You're giving orders on my ship—you're seizing my craft like a pirate—"

Ken glanced at him, and laughed.

"I'm running this cutter back to Tovuku," he answered. "I've taken command, Peter Parsons, and I'm giving orders to your crew. Make the best of it: and think yourself lucky that I don't order the Kanakas to throw you into the sea. Do you think they would jib at obeying the order, if I gave it?"

Dandy Peter made no answer to that. He sat silent, writhing with rage in the knotted rope, as the sun rose higher, and gleamed on the rolling Pacific. The palms of Tovuku were below the horizon now: but Ken had set the course for the island, and before long, the feathery fronds rose into view in the bright sunshine. The west wind against which the cutter had been so long beating, was a fair wind for Tovuku: and the *Sea-Cat* skimmed the waves at seven knots.

Ken's face brightened, as he watched the island rising into view in the sunlight. The face of Peter Parsons grew blacker and blacker. But he was helpless on his own deck: it was King of the Islands who was giving orders on the *Sea-Cat*, and the Lukwe boys jumped to them. Under the blaze of the tropical sun, the Lukwe cutter ran down to Tovuku, and ran the reef passage into the lagoon.

CHAPTER VIII

TIT FOR TAT!

"KEN!" shouted Kit Hudson.

Koko gave a yell

"Little white master!"

The Hiva-Oa crew of the *Dawn* stared blankly.

The sun was hot on the beach of Tovuku. Natives thronged there, most of them staring towards the anchored ketch. That morning Kameka, and his chief man Tokoloo, had expected King of the Islands ashore to trade and copra and pearl-shell and ivory nuts were ready: but that morning there was no trade. King of the Islands was missing from his ship.

It was a blank mystery on the *Dawn*.

Kit Hudson had turned out after his watch below, to find no one on deck. The whaleboat was still at the beach, to bring the crew back later: and he could only wonder whether Ken had called a native canoe to take him ashore. In the moonlight he noted that the Lukwe cutter was gone: but from that he had only concluded that Dandy Peter had taken the hint to go while the going was good: he did not connect it in his mind with King of the Islands. Not for a moment did he suspect that the Lukwe sea-lawyer had crept on the ketch like a thief in the night, and that Ken had been "shanghaied" on his own deck. Later, no doubt, that suspicion might come to him: but for the time, he was simply puzzled and perplexed by Ken's disappearance.

The crew came back from shore leave in the whaleboat, but they had seen nothing of the boy trader. If he had gone ashore in a canoe, he had not fallen in with Koko the boatswain or any of the Hiva-Oa boys. More and more puzzled, Hudson paced the deck till the sun rose, and all Tovuku was spread before his eyes in the light of day. His binoculars failed to pick up any sign

of a white man on the circling beach: and a dozen natives in canoes, to whom he called, could tell him nothing of his shipmate. It was as if the boy skipper of the *Dawn* had vanished into thin air. Yet so far as Hudson could see, he could only have gone ashore, for some unexplained reason: if it was not that, what was it?

But as the morning hours advanced, his perplexity was mingled with alarm. His thoughts turned, at last, to Dandy Peter: the enemy who had been anchored in the lagoon when the sun set, and who had disappeared in the hours of darkness. Could the Lukwe sea-lawyer have had a hand in this? There had been no sound in the night—no shot: no struggle on deck: Hudson would have awakened at once, at either—no sign that the Lukwe skipper had been anywhere near the ketch. Tokoloo came out in his canoe, to inquire why the white men did not come ashore for trade: and rolled his eyes in astonishment to hear that the white master was missing. Since then, Tokoloo and a crowd of natives had been searching for him on the island: but nothing had transpired.

Where was King of the Islands? It was a question that had no answer: unless, as Hudson was beginning to believe, Dandy Peter of Lukwe knew the answer. And he resolved that, if no trace of his shipmate was discovered at Tovuku by noon, he would pull out of the lagoon, and search the seas for the Lukwe cutter.

But it was not yet near noon, when a tall sail was seen glancing over the reef, and the *Sea-Cat* ran in from the Pacific. Hudson gazed in sheer surprise at the Lukwe cutter as she glided into the lagoon: the very last thing he would have expected, was Dandy Peter's return to Tovuku. But a greater surprise was in store for him: for as he stood with his eyes fixed on the cutter, a well-known figure was seen on her deck, and a hand was waved to him.

"Ken!"

In utter amazement, the mate of the *Dawn* shouted the name. He could scarcely believe his eyes, as they fixed on the well-known sunburnt face of his ship-mate, standing on the deck of the *Sea-Cat*.

"Ken!" he repeated. "Shipmate ahoy!"

"Little white master!" gasped Koko. "Little white master stop along feller Parsons' cutter—little white master comey back along *Sea-Cat*."

"Ahoy the *Dawn*!" came back from the cutter.

"Ken, old man!"

King of the Islands shouted orders to the Lukwe boys. The sail dropped, and the *Sea-Cat* glided alongside the ketch. With a single bound, Hudson was on her deck.

His eyes popped at the sight of Dandy Peter, bound hand and foot in the Madeira chair. Dandy Peter's eyes burned at him. But the Australian gave Parsons only one astonished glance. Then he gripped the hand of his ship-mate.

"Ken, old man! How—what—why—thank heaven you've come back safe

and sound—in another hour I should have been sailing to hunt for you—I half-suspected that Lukwe shark—but how—what—?”

King of the Islands pressed his hand.

“That swab got me, last night, on the *Dawn*,” he said. I was stunned by a blow from behind—”

“And I asleep below!” muttered Hudson.

“I came to, on the *Sea-Cat*—shanghaied!”

“Shanghaied!” stuttered Hudson.

“Just that! Shanghaied in the place of the Tovuku boy we took off the cutter yesterday! That was Dandy Peter’s game.”

“The swab! By gum—!”

“But that’s a game that two can play at!” said King of the Islands, grimly. “Here, you feller Koko!”

“Yessar!”

“Cut that swab loose, and put him on the *Dawn*.”

“Yessar,” grinned Koko.

While Dandy Peter was released from the ropes, Ken related, in brief words, what had happened on the cutter. Kit Hudson’s face grew grim as he listened. The Hiva-Oa boys held the cutter alongside the ketch. Dandy Peter, freed from the ropes, struggled in the grasp of Koko. But the sea-lawyer of Lukwe was little more than an infant in the boatswain’s mighty grasp. Koko swung him to the side, and tossed him on board the *Dawn* like a sack of copra, amid a cackle of laughter from the Kanaka crew. Dandy Peter sprawled on the deck of the *Dawn*, spitting with rage.

Ken and Kit followed. Suloo and Nolulo, staring, were left to themselves on the cutter, as it drifted away from the *Dawn*.

Dandy Peter struggled to his feet. He shook a furious fist in the faces of the shipmates. For the moment, rage outweighed fear, and he looked as if he would spring at them like a tiger. But Koko’s big brown hands were ready to grasp him again, and he controlled his fury.

“What’s this game, King of the Islands?” he panted. “Put me back on my ship! What do you want with me here?”

King of the Islands eyed him coolly.

“You shanghaied me on your craft!” he said. “You’ve shanghaied Kanakas, many a time, and now you’ve shanghaied a white man. Now you’re going to have your turn. You’re shanghaied!”

“What?” yelled Parsons.

“You’re shanghaied on board this ketch, to work with the crew!” said King of the Islands. “You sail on the *Dawn* as a foremast hand, Peter Parsons. Koko!”

“Yessar!” chuckled Koko.

“Keep an eye on that feller Parsons! Sposee he no jump to orders, you givum plenty too much lawyer-cane.”

"Yessar."

Dandy Peter breathed fury.

"You—you—you—!" He panted. "What's to become of my ship, left to those Lukwe niggers—?"

The boy trader shrugged his shoulders.

"That's your worry, not mine," he answered. "You're going to get your own medicine, Peter Parsons—get it down as best you can. You sail on the *Dawn* when we pull out of Tovuku, and you won't be kicked ashore till we raise Olua, which won't be for three weeks from now. Chew on it, and make the best of it."

Kit Hudson chuckled.

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, Parsons!" he said. "By gum, you'll be fed up with shanghai-ing hands on your cutter, by the time we raise Olua."

Dandy Peter, white with fury, made a spring for the pin-rail. Ken made a sign to Koko, and the boatswain's grasp closed on the sea-lawyer of Lukwe. Peter Parsons was swept off his feet, with a crash to the deck.

Ken glanced down at him.

"Better turn to, and obey orders, Parsons," he said. "Koko knows how to handle a lawyer-cane! You'd better jump to it."

With that, King of the Islands turned away. He was through with the sea-lawyer of Lukwe: the new "hand" on the *Dawn* was left to the boatswain.

TRADE was brisk on the beach of Tovuku that day. At sunset the ketch pulled out. Among the crew sailed the dandy of Lukwe: ignored by the skipper and mate, but very carefully looked after by Koko the boatswain. He looked back at his cutter, left to the Lukwe boys, and wondered whether he would ever see it again. But during the following days, Dandy Peter had little leisure to think of his cutter, or anything else, but making himself useful on board his new ship. For the first two or three days, his savage temper broke out: and the lawyer-cane in Koko's brown hand had plenty of exercise. Two or three days were sufficient to tame even Dandy Peter: after that he was almost feeding from the boatswain's hand, and jumping to orders with even more alacrity than the Kanakas. By the time the *Dawn* raised Olua, and he was kicked ashore, Dandy Peter of Lukwe had had ample time and opportunity to realise what it was like to be "shanghaied."

THE END

BESSIE BUNTER'S BIG IDEA!

BY
HILDA RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

WHOSE JAM?

"I SAY, you girls!"

"Too late!"

"Wharrer you mean, Clara?"

"We've finished tea."

"Cat!" said Bessie Bunter.

The plumpest member of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School rolled into the doorway of No. 7 Study. Three junior girls in that study looked at her and smiled. There had been tea in No. 7: but Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn had finished, and Dolly Jobling was winding up the very last crumb of the cake. The study was as bare as Mother Hubbard's well-known cupboard: and if Bessie Bunter had dropped in to tea—as too often she did!—she had dropped in a little too late.

When Bessie Bunter filled a doorway with her ample form at tea-time, it was only to be expected that she had come to tea. But on this occasion it was the unexpected that was going to happen.

"Think I've come to tea?" demanded Bessie.

"Haven't you?" asked Clara.

"I've had tea."

"Then why the unexpected, not to say superfluous, pleasure of your call?" inquired Clara.

Bessie Bunter blinked at Clara Trevlyn, through the big spectacles that

were so like those of her brother Billy at Greyfriars. It was an extremely indignant blink.

"Well, I like that!" she said. "When I come here to whack out a pot of jam with you girls—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Oh!"

There were three ejaculations all at once. All three indicated surprise. Bessie Bunter, with an indignant sniff, rolled into the study. Three pairs of eyes fixed on an object under a fat arm. It was a pot of jam, and there was a tablespoon sticking in it.

There were smears of jam on Bessie's plump face, and smears on her plump hands. It was always easy to discern when Bessie had been near jam. In a burst of generosity, apparently, she had come to No. 7 Study to share that pot of jam with Marjorie and Clara and Dolly. But she had not been able to resist its attraction en route. Evidently she had been helping herself with the tablespoon before arriving in No. 7.

Which did not, as a matter of fact, make even strawberry jam attractive to the chums of No. 7. They were a little more particular in such matters than Miss Elizabeth Bunter.

"It's good," said Bessie. "I've tasted it. I've brought it here to whack out. I've had tea in this study sometimes. Well, now I've got a big pot of jam, I've brought it here. See?"

"That's very kind of you, Bessie," said Marjorie. "But—"

"Awfully kind," said Clara. "But—"

"But—!" murmured Dolly Jobling.

"I mean it!" said Bessie. "It's a three-pound pot, and there's lots." She landed the jampot on the study table. "Sort out your spoons and help yourselves."

Three girls looked at Bessie, and looked at one another. It was kind of Bessie: there was no doubt about that. Her intentions were good—in fact of the very best. Seldom, if ever did Bessie's pockey-money run to the purchase of three-pound pots of strawberry jam. Now, in possession of that expensive luxury, she was offering to whack it out in No. 7 Study. Neither did it dawn upon her fat brain that anyone might hesitate to share a pot of jam from which she had already been guzzling with a tablespoon. That, to Bessie, was a trifle light as air.

"Thanks so much, Bessie," said Marjorie, gently. "But—"

Clara interrupted. Her eyes fixed searchingly on that pot of jam. It was an unusual possession for Bessie Bunter. And it was well known in the Cliff House Fourth that Bessie had no more respect for the rights of property, in matters of tuck, than had her brother Billy.

"Where did you get that pot of jam, Bessie?" asked Clara, suddenly.

"Eh? Oh! I—I bought it at old Janet's tuck-shop, of course."

"What a coincidence!" said Clara, "Just before tea I saw Stella Stone buy one exactly like it from old Janet."

"Oh!" exclaimed Marjorie, startled. "Bessie, you haven't—!" She gazed at the plumpest junior at Cliff House in alarm.

Stella Stone, of the Sixth Form, was Senior Prefect at Cliff House. If that pot of jam belonged to Stella—!

"You silly little fat donkey," said Dolly Jobling. "If that's it, you'll get into an awful row—!"

"Taint Stella's!" exclaimed Bessie Bunter, "I tell you I got it at Janet's shop—"

"This morning," said Clara, "you were trying to borrow sixpence off half-a-dozen girls one after another. You didn't buy that jam, Bessie."

"I—:—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I—I—I mean, my brother Billy sent it to me," explained Bessie. "He—he had it in a hamper at Greyfriars, and—and—"

"Bessie!" gasped Marjorie.



"Think I've come to tea?" demanded Bessie.

"Think it isn't mine?" demanded Bessie. "I tell you I bought it from my brother Billy—I mean, Janet sent it to me in a hamper—I—mean—" Bessie seemed to be getting a little confused. "Look here, if you don't want any of my jam—"

"Take it back where it belongs, you little donkey," said Clara. "If Stella hasn't missed it yet—"

"Well, she wouldn't know," said Bessie. "She'd gone to ask some Sixth-Form girls to tea in her study—"

"Then it is hers?" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Tain't!" hooted Bessie. "I haven't been near the Sixth-Form studies, and Stella's door wasn't wide open, and I never saw it on her table. Can't you take a girl's word?"

Marjorie and Co, it seemed, couldn't! They gazed at Bessie almost in horror. Bessie's little ways, as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, in the Fourth, were well known: nobody's jam or toffee was really safe, with Bessie Bunter about. But while Bessie's peculiar manners and customs were more or less tolerated in the Fourth, it was a vastly different matter in the Sixth. There was no doubt that the thunder would roll, if it came out that Bessie had annexed a pot of jam from a Sixth-Form study.

"Bessie, for goodness sake—!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"You little idiot!—" said Clara.

"Take it back at once," said Polly.

There was a tread in the passage—a rather heavier tread than that of a junior girl. A tall figure appeared in the doorway. It was that of Stella Stone, Senior Prefect of Cliff House School. Stella was tall: she was invariably calm: she was a little haughty, as became her high position. One stony glance from her calm eyes was enough to quell the most exuberant junior at Cliff House. Those calm eyes glanced into No. 7.

"Is Bessie Bunter here?" Stella's voice was as calm as her glance. "Oh! You are here, Bessie!"

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bessie. She stood between the jampot on the table and Stella in the doorway, her ample form screening it from view.

"Have you taken a pot of jam from my study?"

"Oh! Nunno!"

"I have missed it," said Stella, still severely calm. "Miss Bellew saw you with a pot of jam under your arm ten minutes ago, Bessie. You were coming from the direction of the Sixth-Form studies."

Marjorie and Clara and Dolly were silent. The pot of jam, behind Bessie, was still not visible to the tall prefect in the doorway.

"You have been eating jam," continued Stella, with a glance of distaste at a smeared mouth and sticky fingers.

"I—I—I haven't tasted jam for—for—for weeks!" gasped Bessie.

"Your face and fingers are sticky, Bessie."

"Oh! Are they?" gasped Bessie. She was unaccustomed to take note of such trifles as that!

"They are!" said Stella. "Do you know anything about the pot of jam that is missing from my study, Bessie?"

"Nun-nun-nothing at all!" mumbled Bessie. "I—I haven't seen it, and—and I never touched it, and—and I haven't got it here now—"

"What?"

Stella Stone advanced into the study. Bessie Bunter, sad to relate, never hesitated at a fib. But somehow her fibs always failed to convince: why, Bessie did not know.

"Bessie!" Stella's eyes fell, at last, on the pot of jam. "Bessie! Did you find that in my study?"

"Oh! No! I—I—I—"

"If it is your own, Bessie, you need only explain," said the Cliff House prefect, with undiminished calm. "Where did you obtain it?"

"My—my brother Janet sent it to me from hamper—I—I mean I bought it at Greyfriars—I—I—I mean—I—I—I—"

Bessie's fat voice trailed away. Stella Stone stood looking at the jampot and the sticky tablespoon embedded in the jam. The expression of distaste on her calm face was more pronounced. Bessie Bunter blinked at her guiltily. The calm gaze turned on her, rather like the petrifying gaze of Medusa.

"I shall report this to Miss Primrose, Bessie!" Stella's voice seemed to emerge from the deepest depths of a refrigerator.

"I—I—I say—"

"You will go to the Head—"

"Oh, lor'!"

Stella swept out of No. 7 Study—leaving the pot of jam where it was. Doubtless, like Marjorie and Co, she did not feel like disposing of that jam, after Bessie's performance with the tablespoon.

"Cat!" breathed Bessie, as she went.

Stella Stone glanced back.

"Did you speak, Bessie?"

"Oh! I—yes—no—I—I never said a syllable—I—I only said thank you, Stella!" stuttered Bessie.

Stella gave her a very expressive look, and walked away. Not till she was quite, quite sure that the prefect was out of hearing, did Elizabeth Bunter venture to utter again that expressive word: "Cat!"

CHAPTER II

BESSIE KNOWS HOW!

"SEEN Bellew?"

"Miss Bellew? No," answered Marjorie.

"Hasn't she gone out yet?"

"I think she's in the Staff Room," said Clara.

"Chattering with the other cats, I suppose!" said Bessie. "Don't they chatter in the Staff Room! Always at it!"

At which Marjorie and Co. smiled. It was true that there was a great deal of talk in the Staff Room. But when it came to chattering, Bessie Bunter was without equal at Cliff House. Her capacious mouth was seldom still. When she was not eating, Bessie was generally talking.

"Keeping me waiting!" grunted Bessie.

"Keeping you waiting!" repeated Marjorie, in surprise. "Do you want to see Miss Bellew?"

"I want to see her come out of the House."

"You could go to the Staff Room, if you want to speak to your beak," said Clara.

"I don't want to."

Which was rather puzzling! Marjorie and Co. were coming out of the House, when they came on Bessie, leaning on a buttress near the steps. Her eyes and spectacles were fixed on the doorway. Apparently she was waiting there for Miss Bellew, form-mistress of the Fourth, to come out: but did not want to speak to her. However, Bessie proceeded to explain.

"I heard her tell the Bull that she was going down to Friardale after tea," said Bessie. "I'm waiting for her to go."

"But why?" asked Marjorie.

"Well, I can't go to her study while she's in the House! She might catch me there," explained Bessie.

"Is there a pot of jam in Bellew's study?" asked Clara Trevlyn, sarcastically. And Dolly Jobling chuckled. Marjorie looked alarmed. After Bessie's exploit in a prefect's study, which had led to an interview with the Principal Bessie might have been expected to steer clear of studies where she had no business. But it seemed now that she had designs on the study of no less a personage than her form-mistress.

"Bessie, you silly little thing," exclaimed Marjorie, "what are you thinking of in Miss Bellew's study?"

"That's telling!" said Bessie. "I may be going to tell Stella Stone what I think of her, and I may not. That's telling. Look what she did!" went on

Bessie, her eyes gleaming wrath behind her big spectacles. "Making out that that pot of jam wasn't mine, just because it was hers, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can giggle," hooted Bessie. "But I had to go to the Primrose, and she jawed me as if I'd been doing something wrong—"

"Oh, dear!"

"A good five minutes of it!" said Bessie, with deep indignation. "And I've got to pay for the jam! It's going to be stopped out of my pocket-money! Fancy that! That's the sort of justice we get here!"

Marjorie and Co. gazed at Bessie Bunter. Evidently the fat junior of Cliff House was deeply indignant. Bessie Bunter's plump brain moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.

"And even that's not all!" said Bessie, "I've got a detention. Stella likes reporting a girl, you know. She's a cat."

"But it was her pot of jam!" gasped Marjorie, "and you did take it from her study, and she had to report you to Miss Primrose—"

"You take her side, of course," said Bessie, bitterly. "Ungrateful, I call it, after I brought the jam to your study to share it out. Ingratitude is a sharper child than a serpent's tooth, as Shakespeare says."

"Oh, suffering cats!" ejaculated Clara. "Did Shakespeare put it like that, Bessie?"

"Yes, he did, as you'd know if you remembered what we get in English Literature from Bellew," said Bessie. "But never mind that! Stella's a cat, and will she sit up and take notice when I call her one! He, he, he!"

"You can't—!" gasped Marjorie.

"Can't I jolly well?" jeered Bessie. "You wait till Bellew's gone out, and I can get into her study, and you'll see."

"But Stella isn't in Bellew's study—she's in the Prefects' Room," said Clara.

"What do you mean, Fatima—if you happen to mean anything?"

"Well, I shouldn't call her a cat to her face, should I?" snapped Bessie. "I don't want to go up to the Primrose again. There's a telephone in Bellew's study, see?"

"A—a telephone—!" exclaimed Marjorie. "But—"

Bessie grinned.

"And there's a telephone in the Prefects' Room," she went on. "See? That's how I'm going to call her a cat without getting into a fearful row."

"Oh!" exclaimed the three juniors together.

They understood now.

Bessie, in her indignation, was thinking of reprisals. She was going to tell Stella Stone, Senior Prefect of Cliff House School, what she thought of her. She was going to call her a cat! But even Bessie understood that a Fourth-Form junior couldn't talk like that to a Sixth-Form prefect—without the skies falling, or something like it. Certainly it would have led to another, and much

more serious, interview, with Miss Primrose, the Principal. But Bessie had thought this out. "Safety first" had to be considered. But by the medium of that most useful invention, the telephone, you could talk to a person without being seen—or recognized—or known! At the end of a telephone-wire it was quite safe to call anybody a cat! That was the big idea!

"You little idiot!" said Clara.

"Minx!" retorted Bessie.

"You benighted little fat chump—!" said Dolly Jobling.

"Yah!"

"Bessie, dear, for goodness sake put it right out of your head," urged Marjorie, earnestly. "Forget all about it—"

"I'll watch it!" said Bessie.

"Come out for a walk instead—"

"Stuff!"

"You'll get into a row," said Clara.

"How are they going to know?" grinned Bessie. "Think Stella can see along a telephone wire? Bellew won't know anybody's been to her study. They won't know a thing; not a thing! I shall scream on the phone, so Stella won't know it's me. He, he, he!"

Evidently, the fat junior of Cliff House had been doing something on this subject.

"Don't be such a little ass—"

"Pack it up," said Bessie, hastily. "Here comes Bellew."

Miss Bellew, form-mistress of the Fourth, came out of the House. She walked away to the gates, Bessie's eyes and spectacles following her. Miss Bellew disappeared: safely off the scene: and Bessie turned to the chums of the Fourth with a triumphant blink.

"She's gone!" said Bessie. Now—"

"For goodness sake—!" urged Marjorie.

"Bosh!" said Bessie.

"Look here—!" said Clara.

"Tosh!" said Bessie.

And she rolled in at the doorway of the House: leaving Marjorie and Co. looking at one another in something like consternation.

Bessie seemed to have thought it out. It looked safe enough. But—! She was going to enjoy the unusual experience of calling a Sixth-Form Prefect a cat: and get away with it! But—. No more at Cliff House than at Greyfriars School could a junior in the Fourth Form express such candid opinions to a prefect of the Sixth! There was no doubt that there would be a "row": whether Bessie was found out or not.

"I—I hope she won't—!" muttered Marjorie.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!" pronounced Miss Clara, oracularly, "She will!"

"Stella will be furious!" breathed Dolly Jobling.

"Mad as a hatter!" agreed Miss Clara. "Madder, in fact! This way, old dears—I want to see Stella's face when she gets that call!"

Clara walked away to the big bay window of the Prefects' Room. That window was wide open, and several Sixth-Form girls could be seen within: among them, the tall and stately Stella. Marjorie and Dolly followed: more alarmed than interested to see Stella's face when she got the call. Marjorie hoped, at least, that Bessie would think better of it, before she got on Miss Bellew's telephone. But that hope died away as they sauntered past the big open window of the Prefects' Room: for from within that apartment, the ring of a telephone bell came out sharply audible into the quad.

Buzzzzzzz!

"She's going it!" breathed Clara.

She was! The big idea was going into action.

CHAPTER III

"CAT!"

STELLA STONE lifted the receiver from the hooks. As Head Girl of Cliff House she naturally took the call. Five or six other senior girls either stopped talking, or subdued their voices, as Stella placed the receiver to her ear.

She started a little, as a voice came through. It was rather a scream than a voice. Certainly it did not sound like the fat tones of Miss Elizabeth Bunter. It was more like a train whistle.

"That Cliff House?"

"This is the Prefect's Room at Cliff House School," answered Stella calmly, in spite of the screaming voice. "Who is speaking?"

"Find out!"

"What?"

"Cat!"

"Eh!"

"Cat!"

Stella Stone almost dropped the receiver. She stared, with popping eyes. Stately calm was Stella's long suit. Seldom did it fail her. But it failed her now. She almost gibbered in her amazement.

"Who—who—who is speaking?" she stuttered, at last.

"Wouldn't you like to know? Cat!"

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Stella.

"I've rung you up to tell you what all the girls think of you," went on the screaming voice. "You're a cat, Stella Stone."

There were startled exclamations in the Prefects' Room. That loud, shrill scream on the telephone was audible far beyond the instrument. Perhaps the speaker intended it to be so. Every senior girl in the room heard it, and they gathered round Stella Stone, almost breathlessly.

"Who can be speaking?" exclaimed Isabel Drake.

"Cut off, Stella!" suggested Phoebe Long.

Stella Stone did not cut off. Her face set in an expression more like Medusa's than it had ever exhibited before. It was obvious, to Stella, that this was some Cliff House girl speaking—no stranger without the gates could possibly have rung her up to say things like this. Some impertinent junior, no doubt, upon whom she had had to come down with the prefectorial authority, was "getting back" in this remarkable way. Stella was deeply angered: but her chief thought was to discover who was the speaker.

The voice was wholly unrecognizable. It was merely a scream. It was somebody whose voice Stella would have known, in its natural tones. But who?

"Cat!" went on the scream. "Minx!"

Stella breathed hard! Some Cliff House girl, using one of the school telephones—that was it! But which?

"From where are you speaking?" asked Stella. The Head Girl of Cliff House couldn't possibly have said "Where are you speaking from?" Even in that moment of indignant wrath, she was careful with her prepositions.

"Guess!" screamed the voice.

"You are a Cliff House girl!"

"Cat!"

"You will be reported to Miss Primrose for this insolence."

"Yah!"

"You will be severely punished."

"I don't think!"

"Give me your name at once!" rapped Stella, with all the authority of Head Girl and Senior Prefect.

"Cat!"

"Will you give me your name at once?"

"Cat!"

Stella breathed harder. Face to face, no Cliff House girl would have disregarded her voice of authority. But the length of a telephone wire made all the difference. Whoever it was that was speaking over the phone, passed that authoritative voice by, like the idle wind which she regarded not.

"Still there, cat?" went on the scream. "I say! All the girls think you are a cat, Stella Stone! Every one of them! Do you know what the girls call the Prefects' Room? They call it the Cats' Home! Yah!"

Stella's cheeks were pink. The other senior girls exchanged looks, and eyes gleamed. Nobody in the Prefects' Room was enjoying this telephonic conversation. They did not smack heads at Cliff House: but had a certain fat

head been within reach at that moment, it was probable that it would have received several smacks.

"Who is it?" breathed Isabel.

"Who can it be—?"

"A junior girl—"

"Of course, but who—?"

"Speaking in the school—on some phone in a study—"

"We must find out," said Stella. She set her lips. "We must certainly find out, and—"

"Good-bye, cat!" came the scream. "I heard what you said, cat! I'm going! Cat! Cat! CAT!"

The final word came fairly in a yell. Then there was silence.

Stella listened. But the unknown interlocutor had cut off. With a face almost pale with wrath and offended dignity, Stella Stone put up the receiver. Whoever had put through this impertinent call was gone: and was not likely to be found in any of the Staff studies.

With set lips, Stella stepped to the window, and looked out. After class there were plenty of girls to be seen in the quad. Stella's searching eyes ran over them. Whatever girl was in the quad at the moment was not the guilty party. But there were some dozens not to be seen.

Three junior girls were quite near the big bay window. But Marjorie, Clara, and Dolly turned away as Stella appeared there. They were careful not to smile until their backs were to Stella.

Still with compressed lips, Stella turned back from the window. All the senior girls looked at her. She was calm: with a quite deadly calmness.

"This—this impertinent junior must be found!" said Stella. "All the prefects will begin inquiries at once."

And no time was lost.

All the Sixth-Form prefects of Cliff House were extremely busy for the next hour. Every one of them was quite keen to discover the offender: for report to the Principal, to be followed by the severest punishment ever meted out at Cliff House School.

But the result was precisely nil.

The voice on the phone gave no clue. Nobody's voice at Cliff House was anything like that shrill scream. Neither was there any other clue. The unknown telephoner had, undoubtedly, entered some Staff study and used the instrument there: equally undoubtedly, she had taken to flight before the search began. As Miss Bellew was out, it was most likely that Miss Bellew's phone had been used. But there was nobody in Miss Bellew's study when prefects looked in. The mysterious telephoner had vanished, and Stella, with deep feelings, had to give up the quest.

CHAPTER IV

STICKY!

"HE, he, he!"

Bessie Bunter was in high feather.

Marjorie was smiling. Clara was laughing. Dolly was chuckling. Certainly, they did not approve of Bessie's antics. Never, never would they have done anything of the kind themselves—never even dreamed of it. All the same, it had an element of the comic. Stella Stone's face, at the window of the Prefects' Room, had been, Clara declared, worth a guinea a box. For the first time in history, the Head Girl and Senior Prefect of Cliff House had been called a cat! And the caller had got away with it! And it was Bessie Bunter, who had not only the fattest figure but the fattest head in the Fourth Form, who had done it, and laid her plans so cautiously that there was no clue! For an hour the Sixth-Form prefects had been going up and down and round about, seeking the offender, but finding her not. To junior girls, there was something a little amusing in the impotent wrath of the majestic Sixth!

"Did I tell her off?" chuckled Bessie. "He, he, he! I say, you girls, did I tell her off! Did I call her a cat? He, he, he!"

"For goodness sake, don't talk about it," said Marjorie. "If it came out—"

"He, he, he! It won't come out," grinned Bessie. "I daresay it would if you girls had done it! But I've got brains. They won't spot me! He, he, he!"

"Stella's face—!" murmured Clara.

"She looked a picture!" chuckled Dolly.

"He, he, he!"

"But you shouldn't have done it, Bessie," said Marjorie. "For goodness sake, never do anything of the kind again—"

"I'll watch it!" retorted Bessie. "Why now I've thought of it, won't I just? Next time Bellew gives me lines, I'll get her on the phone and call her a cat too!"

"Bessie!" exclaimed all three, in horror.

"Why not?" grinned Bessie, "Ain't it safe as houses! And look here, I'll jolly well talk to the Primrose, too!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"She jawed me!" said Bessie. "Well, why shouldn't I jaw her?" She wouldn't know, if I scream like I did to Stella? You wait! I'll make 'em all sit up, I can tell you—all the Staff, one after another! He, he, he!"

"You little idiot!" gasped Clara.

"Yah!"

"You potty little porpoise—!" exclaimed Dolly.

"Cat!"

"For goodness sake, Bessie—!" beseeched Marjorie.

"I can jolly well tell you—," hooted Bessie.

"Hush—here's Bellew!"

Miss Bellew came in at the gates. Bessie Bunter suddenly ceased to speak. She was thinking out tremendous plans, in her fat mind, for making all the Staff at Cliff House "sit up". But certainly she did not want any member of that Staff to hear anything about it! And Miss Bellew, as she came in, was glancing towards the little group of schoolgirls.

She came across to them.

"Bessie!"

"Oh! Yes, Miss Bellew!" stammered Bessie.

"I have spoken to you several times, Bessie, about leaving traces of jam and such sticky things on your face and hands."

"Oh!" gasped Bessie. For a moment, she had dreaded that Miss Bellew had caught a careless word. But it was not that! It was only the accustomed sticky state of the fattest member of her form that had drawn Bellew's attention.

"Your face shows traces of jam, Bessie—"

"Dud-dud-does it?"

"And your fingers are sticky—very sticky—"

"Are—are they?"

"Go into the House, Bessie, and wash your face and hands at once!" said Miss Bellew, severely: and she swept on.

"Cat!" breathed Bessie.

Bessie Bunter did not like an extra wash. Really, after her exploits with Stella Stone's pot of jam that afternoon, even Bessie might have thought of soap and water as desirable. But she hadn't. She disliked such things: in fact, that dislike seemed to run in the Bunter family: her brother Billy, at Greyfriars, felt just the same about it. Bessie was quite satisfied with her sticky state: and extremely annoyed by Bellew's fussiness on the subject.

"Cat!" she repeated. "I've got to go in and wash—cat! Won't I jolly well call her a cat over the phone for this! You just wait!"

And Bessie rolled off to get that unwelcome wash.

Miss Bellew went into the House: where, before two minutes had passed, she was apprised of the spot of excitement that had occurred in the Prefects' Room during her absence. Very properly Miss Bellew was shocked to hear of it, and like other members of the Staff, prepared to do her best to help in tracing the culprit—especially as it seemed probable that it was her own telephone that had been used for the heinous purpose of calling the Head Girl and Senior Prefect a cat!

It was not a matter that could be allowed to rest, if there was anything to be done. Unfortunately, it seemed that there was nothing to be done. For a whole hour the prefects had investigated and inquired: but had investigated

and inquired in vain. Members of the Staff had investigated and inquired: but their investigations and inquiries had proved equally fruitless. There was simply no clue.

Or was there?

Bessie Bunter, rolling in the quad with an unusually clean face, and fingers that were hardly sticky at all, felt as safe as houses. She did not know that Miss Bellew, in her study, had occasion to ring up the bookshop at Courtfield about some books that had not been delivered at Cliff House: and she would not have cared if she had known.

But—!

CHAPTER V

ALAS FOR BESSIE!

“OH!” ejaculated Miss Bellew.
She gave quite a jump.

Quite an extraordinary expression came over the face of the form-mistress of the Fourth.

In her study, she picked up the receiver to ring up the Courtfield bookshop. That was quite a normal proceeding. But it was not normal to find her fingers sticking to a sticky telephone-receiver. Miss Bellew, always as clean and neat as a new pin, as became a schoolmistress, certainly had not left that telephone-receiver in a sticky condition. Someone with jammy fingers had used it since she had last done so.

“Oh!” repeated Miss Bellew.

She released the receiver, and looked at her fingers.

They were sticky!

Then she bent her head over the receiver, and examined it microscopically. It was sticky!

“Oh!” said Miss Bellew, for the third time.

Jammy fingers had clutched that receiver during her absence. No Sherlock Holmes or Ferrers Locke was required to detect that! The receiver was jammy and sticky, and Miss Bellew’s fingers, where they had touched it, were jammy and sticky. And only a quarter of an hour ago, she had sent Bessie Bunter in to wash her hands, because her fingers were jammy and sticky!

Miss Bellew drew a deep breath.

Someone had used that telephone, during her absence, to ring up the Prefect’s Room and call the Head Girl and Senior Prefect a cat! Miss Bellew knew now who that someone was!

She glanced from the study window, at a fat face in the quad, which was no longer sticky, but which wore a happy grin. Bessie Bunter was still in high

feather. At that very moment, she was thinking out her plans for telling Miss Bellew what she thought of her—telephonically—just as she had told Stella Stone. But those plans were scattered from her fat brain as a sharp voice rapped from Miss Bellew's window.

"Bessie!"

The fat junior stared at the window.

"Oh! Yes, Miss Bellew."

"Come to my study at once."

"I—I—I've washed, Miss Bellew," exclaimed Bessie, warmly. She held up a pair of almost clean hands in evidence of that statement.

"Come to my study!"

"Oh, very well, Miss Bellew."

Indignantly, Bessie Bunter rolled into the House, to repair to her form-mistress's study. Bellew, she supposed, wanted to inspect those hands at closer range, to ascertain that they had been well and truly washed—just like a fussy cat! Inwardly, Bessie resolved that her next performance on the telephone should make Miss Bellew feel quite sorry for herself.

She rolled into Miss Bellew's study.

"I've washed them, Miss Bellew! Look!" Once more Bessie held up a pair of fat hands.

But Miss Bellew did not even glance at them.

"Bessie! You used my telephone during my absence."

Bessie jumped.

"You used it to speak to the Senior Prefect—"

"Oh, lor'!"

"—in the most impertinent way—"

"I—I—I—"

"I shall now take you to the Principal!" said Miss Bellew.

Bessie Bunter blinked at her. Her little round eyes almost popped through her big round spectacles. Miss Bellew did not ask her if she had used that phone. She stated it as a fact! She knew! How she knew was a deep mystery to Bessie! It seemed to her like black magic.

"I—I—I—I—I—" stuttered Bessie. "I—I—I didn't! I—I wasn't! I—I was in the quad with Marjorie and Clara and Dolly when I telephoned—I mean when I never telephoned—I—I—I—I don't think Stella's a cat, Miss Bellew—I—I—I—I wouldn't call her a cat for—for anything, and I jolly well know that she never knew my voice, either, especially as I never phoned at all—"

"Come with me."

"But I—I—I never—wasn't—didn't—wouldn't—."

"Come!"

"Oh, lor'!"

A dismal, dolorous, doleful Bessie followed Miss Bellew to the Principal's study. For the second time that day, Bessie Bunter had to interview the Head!

Marjorie, Clara, and Dolly, as they saw her trailing dolorously after Miss Bellew to the dreaded apartment, gave her sympathetic looks. They were sorry for Bessie—though not half so sorry as Bessie was for herself!

THERE were no more telephone stunts at Cliff House. All Bessie's extensive plans in that line were completely washed out—after her interview with the Head! Whatever Bessie thought of the Prefects and the Staff, not a single member of either the Prefects or the Staff was ever called a cat again over the telephone!

THE END

NOTE: The Bunter Books, in which are chronicled the adventures of Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars School, are published by Cassell and Co. Ltd., Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4.