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FRANK RICHARDS

BILLY
BUNTER
AND THE
SECRET ENEMY



PAUL HAMLYN LONDON

Lost, Stolen or Strayed!

‘BUNTER!’

‘Eh?’

‘Will you scoot up to my study—’

‘No!’

‘And fetch—’

‘Rats!’

There was no hesitation about that reply from William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove. He made his meaning quite clear.

Lord Mauleverer sighed.

His lordship was leaning gracefully on the old shady tree in front of the school shop at Greyfriars. He had been leaning there quite a long time, since class. Perhaps he liked the shade. Perhaps he was too lazy to move. At all events, there he was. Billy Bunter was blinking in at the tuckshop window through his big spectacles.

From the direction of the cricket ground came five cheery juniors, looking decidedly warm, but very merry and bright. The summer heat did not keep Harry Wharton and Co. from cricket practice. They were getting into great form to beat the Rookwooders when the Rookwood match came off. Now they were heading for the school shop for light refreshment in the shape of ginger beer. Bob Cherry had suggested ginger-pop, and it had

been passed unanimously. It was a case of five souls with but a single thought; a quintet of hearts that beat as one.

Lord Mauleverer, as he sighted the Famous Five in the offing, made a movement to detach himself from the tree, but did not quite detach himself. A disinclination to exertion distinguished his lordship.

Bunter blinked at him indignantly. His lordship was lazy, no doubt but so was Bunter. Indeed, Bunter could even beat Mauly in that line. Lord Mauleverer had a mild dislike for exertion; Bunter hated it.

‘Of all the cheek!’ said Bunter warmly.

‘Dear man!’ murmured Lord Mauleverer gently.

‘Catch me fetching things from your study!’ hooted Bunter. ‘If you want anything from your study, you can jolly well fetch it yourself. See?’

‘Yaas.’

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo!’ The summer heat had not reduced the power and volume of Bob Cherry’s voice. ‘What price a gingerpop, Mauly?’

‘I say, you fellows—’

‘Shut up, Bunter!’

‘Look here—’

‘Just what I was thinkin’ of when I saw you men comin’,’ murmured Lord Mauleverer. ‘I was going to ask you to join me in a stone ginger.’

‘Happy thought!’ said Johnny Bull, with a grin. ‘You have jolly good ideas sometimes, Mauly.’

‘Yaas. But—’

‘Never mind the buts; come on,’ said Frank Nugent.

‘But——’

‘The butfulness is superfluous, my esteemed Mauly,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Get a move on.’

‘But I’ve left my tin in my study,’ explained Lord Mauleverer. ‘I was askin’ Bunter to run up and fetch it, but he didn’t seem to jump at the idea. Bunter’s growin’ lazy.’

Billy Bunter stared.

‘You didn’t say—’ he began.

‘Perhaps one of you fellows might like a walk up to the study?’ suggested his lordship.

‘Healthy exercise, you know, walkin’ up and down stairs—and you men are whales on exercise. Thingummy sana in what’s-his-name sano, you know. Nothin’ like exercise.’

‘Do you mean mens sana in corpore sano, fathead?’ asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

‘I shouldn’t wonder,’ assented Mauleverer. ‘Healthy mind in a healthy carcass, or somethin’ of the sort, what? You’ll find a fiver under the inkstand.’

‘I say—’

‘Don’t, old fat man,’ said Mauleverer gently. ‘I hate pointin’ it out, Bunter, but you talk too much.’

‘Oh, really, Mauly! I’ll cut up to the study with pleasure,’ said Bunter. ‘You know I’m always willing to oblige a pal.’

‘And are you willin’ to oblige me, too?’ asked Mauly. Apparently his lordship did not realise that he was a pal of Bunter’s.

‘Oh, don’t be an ass, you know!’ said Bunter, as the Famous Five chuckled. ‘Where’s that fiver?’

‘Under the inkstand on the study table.’

‘You cheerful ass!’ said Bob Cherry. ‘Is that how you take care of your fivers?’

‘Yaas. I’m always careful with money,’ answered Lord Mauleverer. ‘I once had a banknote blow away. I put the ink-stand on this one.’

‘Oh, my hat!’

‘Wait for me!’ said Bunter. ‘I’ll be back in two ticks.’ And the Owl of the Remove cut off to the House—forgetful of the heat and of the weight he had to carry—more than willing to oblige Lord Mauleverer now that he knew what it was that was to be fetched from Study No. 12.

Bob Cherry linked an arm in Mauly’s and hooked him away from the tree.

‘Come on, slacker!’

The cheery crowd of juniors walked into the tuckshop.

‘My treat!’ said Lord Mauleverer gently.

‘Any old thing!’ said Bob.

And the chums of the Remove proceeded to dispose of ginger-pop, which was grateful and comforting after cricket practice on a hot day.

Mrs. Mible bestowed upon Lord Mauleverer a genial smile which she never wasted on Billy Bunter. Five or six more fellows joined the little crowd, and the ginger-pop flowed freely. There was a merry buzz of talk in the shop, which was interrupted by the return of William George Bunter.

‘You ass!’ was Bunter’s first remark, addressed to Lord Mauleverer.

‘Thank you, dear boy! Where is it?’

‘That’s what I want to know!’ grunted Bunter. ‘I’ve been up to your study; but there isn’t any fiver under the inkstand, you chump! Pulling my leg, I suppose?’

‘Dear man, I remember leavin’ it there,’ said Lord Mauleverer. ‘It’s there all serene.

Perhaps you want a new outfit in specs, dear man.’

‘You silly chump!’ hooted Bunter. ‘I tell you it isn’t there. Nothing of the sort. You’ve put it in your pocket and forgotten it.’

‘Well, I’ve done such things,’ admitted Lord Mauleverer. ‘But I really don’t think so in this case. Go and look again, old fat man.’

‘Rats!’ hooted Bunter.

‘Look here, Mauly, old man, you ought to be more careful with banknotes,’ said Harry Wharton seriously. ‘It may get lost at this rate.’

‘Accordin’ to Bunter, it’s lost already,’ sighed his lordship. Frightful worry losin’ a fiver! I shall have to write to my uncle for another. I hate writin’ letters.’

Hazel in a Hole!

HARRY WHARTON and Frank Nugent came together into Study No. 1 in the Remove. An olive-skinned junior who sat there looked up as they entered, but did not speak.

Wharton glanced at him. Arthur Da Costa had his books at one end of the study table for prep. Nugent began to sort odd books; but the captain of the Remove stood looking at Da Costa.

When the Eurasian had first come to Greyfriars Harry Wharton had been friendly enough to him. The fellow had been put into his study—he was a stranger from a far land, and he had shown a wonderful aptitude for cricket, which was a passport to Wharton’s good opinion. But any friendliness between the two had soon come to an end; for more than a week now they had hardly spoken, and Da Costa was on the same distant terms with Wharton’s friends. The captain of the Remove had wanted to make the best of him; but one example of treachery and duplicity had been enough, and he had dropped the Eurasian like a hot potato.

Prep was still going on when there was a tap at the door, and Hazeldene of the Remove looked in.

‘Still sticking to it?’ he asked sarcastically.

‘Not much choice about that, till we’ve finished,’ said Nugent.

‘Mind if I stay here?’

‘Stay, if you like, of course.’

Hazel sat in the armchair. He watched the juniors with growing irritation. The matter on Hazel’s mind, at the present moment, was far more important than prep, in Hazel’s opinion, at least. He fumbled in his pocket, and took out a cigarette; then, as if remembering where he was, he scowled and put it back.

Frank Nugent pushed back his books at last. He rose from the table with a faint grin on his face.

‘You men coming down to the Rag?’ he asked.

‘I’ll follow you down, old chap,’ answered Wharton. And Nugent smiled and left the study.

Da Costa had finished his work; but he did not leave the study. Hazel looked at him very expressively, but the Eurasian did not seem to notice it. Wharton glanced at him, too. It was so obvious that Hazel desired to speak in private to the captain of the Remove, that Da Costa might certainly have stepped out of the study as Nugent had done. But he showed no intention of doing so.

Hazel rose to his feet at last.

‘Can’t talk here,’ he said abruptly. ‘Will you come along to my study, Wharton?’

‘Yes, if you like.’

The two juniors left Study No. 1 together, Hazel giving the Eurasian a look of dislike as he went. They entered Study No. 2, which Hazel shared with Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior; but it was empty now. Brown had finished his work and gone down. Hazel shut the door with a slam.

‘The blighter Da Costa wanted to hear what I had to say to you,’ he growled.

The same thought had occurred to Wharton. At the same time, he was irritated by Hazel having something to say to him that other fellows might not hear. Hazel and his dismal little secrets and troublesome confidences rather got on the nerves of the captain of the Remove.

‘Well, what is it?’ asked Harry restively.

‘I’m in a hole!’ said Hazel abruptly. ‘Well?’ said Harry.

‘I’ve got into a scrape,’ went on Hazel. ‘You needn’t preach at me, in your usual style—that’s not what I want. I know I’ve done wrong, and, if you want to know, I’m sorry about it—not that you’ve got any right to take me to task, that I know of. Anyhow, what’s done is done, and I shall get into a fearful scrape if I can’t settle!’

‘You don’t mean an account at the tuckshop?’ Hazel laughed scoffingly.

‘No, I don’t! I mean something quite different. I don’t see any necessity for going into details. If you’ll lend me the money I can settle up in a week or two. If you won’t, you can say so.’

‘It depends on the amount, to some extent,’ said Harry quietly. ‘How much do you want?’

‘Five pounds!’

‘Oh, my hat! Of course, I can’t do anything of the kind,’ said Harry.

‘You mean you won’t.’

‘Yes, I mean I won’t, if you prefer it that way!’ snapped Wharton. ‘Better say no more about it. I don’t want to row with you.’

And with that the captain of the Remove quitted Study No. 2, and shut the door after him rather hard.

Lord Mauleverer was standing in his study, staring at the inkstand on the table. It was a heavy inkstand, and no banknote could possibly have blown away from underneath it.

Really, the disappearance of that banknote was very mysterious. Mauly distinctly remembered putting it there. He had a rotten memory, as he said himself, but he remembered that. He had been looking through his financial supply, and had placed the banknote there while he went through his notecase for currency notes, without finding any. He had left it there simply because he forgot to pick it up again. He had remembered it about an hour later, when he was at the tuckshop, and the desire for ginger-pop had reminded him that he had nothing in his pockets.

Now he was regarding the inkstand with a perplexed stare. How had that banknote shifted itself out from under that heavy inkstand and vanished? Certainly, any fellow in the Remove could have dropped into the study and taken the banknote, had he happened to notice it there. But it did not even cross Lord Mauleverer's mind that any fellow in the Remove had done so. Thoughts of that kind did not come easily to Lord Mauleverer; indeed, they did not come at all. He was quite prepared to give the thing up as an insoluble mystery; but he was not in the least prepared to suspect any Greyfriars man of pinching a banknote. There was a tap at Mauleverer's door, and Arthur Da Costa came in.

Lord Mauleverer gave him an amiable nod.

As a matter of fact, he did not like Da Costa. He admired the way the fellow played cricket, and he considered that a fellow who played such a splendid game of cricket must be some sort of a good sort in his way. Still, he did not like him, from some deep instinct of distrust. But Mauly was always civil, whether he liked a fellow or not, and indeed he hardly realised consciously that he disliked Da Costa.

Certainly he had never asked the Eurasian into his study, and he wondered why Da Costa had come there now.

'I hear that you have lost a banknote, Mauleverer,' said Da Costa.

'Yaas.'

'Some of the fellows have been talking about it in the Rag,' the Eurasian explained. 'I thought I would come and offer to help you look for it.'

'Thanks very much, dear man, but it's all right.'

'You have found it, then?'

'Not exactly,' admitted Lord Mauleverer. 'But it's all right, all the same.'

Da Costa smiled.

'But it should be found,' he said. 'It will be very disagreeable if it is not found.'

'Oh, that's all right! I'm goin' to write to my uncle,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Awf'ly kind of you to look in, but it's all right.'

'I mean, it will be disagreeable for other fellows,' the Eurasian had to explain.

Mauleverer stared at him.

'I don't see that,' he answered. 'It's rather a bother to me personally, but I don't see that it need worry anybody else.'

'I mean, that when money is missing there is likely to be a suspicion that it has been stolen.'

'Rubbish!'

'You do not think so?'

'Rot! Of course not!'

'But if it is not found—'

'That's my bizney!'

'But surely you will report your loss to your Form-master if you do not find the note?' exclaimed the Eurasian.

'I shall please myself about that.'

Da Costa flushed again. Lord Mauleverer hated snubbing any fellow. He did not snub even Bunter. But the Eurasian irritated him deeply with his suspicious suggestion of a

theft in the study, and excited his contempt at the same time.

Da Costa looked at him, and then quitted the study quietly, with his soft tread that was so like that of a cat.

‘Good gad!’ murmured Lord Mauleverer. ‘What sort of a blighter have they pushed into Greyfriars now? Good gad! That fellow seems to suspect chaps of stealing as naturally as he breathes! I wonder Wharton doesn’t kick him out of his study! I’m dashed if I don’t wish I’d kicked him out of this!’

Da Costa’s visit seemed to have left an unpleasant flavour in Lord Mauleverer’s mouth. But that there was anything more in the matter than the suspicion of a base nature, Lord Mauleverer did not suspect. The contempt he was feeling for Arthur Da Costa would have deepened into scorn and horror could he have read the thoughts in the boy’s tortuous mind.

Mr. Gedge hears Good News!

ARTHUR DA COSTA walked down to the school gates after dinner that day and strolled out with an air of casual carelessness. At a little distance from Greyfriars that careless air left him, and he walked sharply like a fellow in haste to reach a fixed destination. From his pocket he drew presently a letter, at which he glanced as he walked, a sardonic smile playing over his handsome olive-skinned face.

The letter was from Mr. Gedge, of Chancery Lane, London, and anyone who had seen that letter by chance—a Form-master, for instance, or some prying fellow, like Bunter—would have seen nothing whatever in it out of the ordinary. It ran:

‘Dear Arthur,—I am indeed pleased to hear that you are progressing so well at your new school. I shall duly inform your guardian in India.

Yours sincerely,

J. GEDGE.’

That that letter was in code was not likely to occur to anyone who should happen to see it. Mr. Gedge, the worthy legal representative of Captain Marker, was fox-like in caution, and he was never likely to put pen to paper in a way that would involve himself in any possible trouble. He had his own code of communication with the boy from the East, who was at Greyfriars to carry out Captain Marker’s mysterious plot. The word ‘progress’ or any variation of that word, in a letter from Mr. Gedge, was understood to imply that he had come down to the neighbourhood of the school to see his hopeful protégé.

The word ‘India’ connoted two o’clock. Had Mr. Gedge desired to see his protégé at three o’clock, his sentence would have run ‘I shall duly inform your guardian at Lucknow.’

Four o’clock would have been implied by ‘I shall duly inform your guardian in your native country.’ Such a code would have worried the memory, probably, of any other Greyfriars fellow, for Da Costa did not take the risk of writing it down. But the retentive memory of the Oriental made nothing of it. Da Costa never needed to reflect for a moment before ascertaining the precise meaning of Mr. Gedge’s peculiar communications.

The place of meeting never needed to be specified. It was understood that Mr. Gedge would be sauntering on the towpath, between the school and Friardale, at a certain distance from Greyfriars.

It was in that direction that Da Costa was hurrying now, cutting across the fields to save time.

Mr. Gedge had seen Da Costa a good many times since the Eurasian had been at Greyfriars. Had he visited the school every time—as he might have done, if so disposed—

certainly such frequent visits would have excited remark. And it was Mr. Gedge's object to excite no remark at all. It was said of old that he who has a secret to hide should not only hide it, but hide the fact that he has it to hide. Mr. Gedge acted upon that cautious maxim. Certainly no one at Greyfriars had any reason to suspect that Captain Marker's solicitor took any unusual interest in the junior whom Captain Marker had sent from India. The man was pacing up and down the towpath when Da Costa arrived at the appointed place. He did not speak to the junior on the open path by the river, however. There were two or three boats on the water, and an occasional pedestrian on the towpath. Mr. Gedge carried caution almost to the point of fastidiousness. Having sighted the Eurasian coming, the solicitor moved off the path into the trees that bordered it, and Da Costa followed him there. Under the shady trees of Friardale Wood, screened from general observation, the two met at last.

Then Mr. Gedge fixed his sharp, flinty eyes on the Eurasian, and rasped:

'Well?'

'Little, so far,' answered Da Costa.

'You have nothing to report?'

'Little, as I have said.'

'I shall not hurry you,' said Mr. Gedge. 'I am well aware that the—the business in hand requires time and care. But I hope you are not wasting time, Arthur. Something will be expected by Captain Marker before the end of the present term.'

Da Costa's lip curled.

'Or, he will not pay my fees for next term?' he sneered.

'Possibly not,' said Mr. Gedge, 'possibly not. But I hope it will not come to that, for your sake, Arthur. If you disappoint your kind friend in India, you will lose a brilliant career.'

'I shall not disappoint him,' said the fellow coolly. 'I am taking care of that. Had Wharton remained my friend I should have kept to my resolve, and refused to harm him, as I told you. He has made himself my enemy, and he must take the consequences.'

'Be brief,' said Mr. Gedge at length. 'I have a train to catch, and it is not judicious to prolong the interview here. What have you done so far?'

'A banknote has disappeared from a study in the Remove.'

'And you—'

'It has disappeared,' said Da Costa; 'that is enough. Never mind how, Mr. Gedge. But it will be found.'

'Where?' breathed Mr. Gedge.

'In a letter.'

'A letter?'

'Received by Harry Wharton in the course of post.'

'From whom?'

'His uncle, Colonel Wharton.'

Mr. Gedge stared at the Eurasian.

'You cannot contrive such a thing, Arthur,' he said.

'I think I can, Mr. Gedge,' said Da Costa coolly. 'What do you suppose the fellow will do when he finds a five-pound note in his uncle's letter?'

'Spend it, I presume, in the usual extravagant way of a schoolboy,' said Mr. Gedge. 'He will naturally suppose that his uncle has sent it to him as a tip, as I think they call it at school, if he finds it in the colonel's letter, as you describe.'

'Yess,' lisped Da Costa, 'he cannot think anything else. He will spend it—indeed, I have heard him make a compact to share out with some friends any remittance received by any of them. That makes it certain that he will change the banknote.'

'Quite!' said Mr. Gedge.

‘After it is changed it will be gone beyond recovery,’ said the Eurasian. ‘Then the missing note will be inquired for, and it will be found that Wharton has changed it.’

Mr. Gedge eyed him.

‘If it is your own banknote, Arthur, drop the whole thing. You must not be mixed up in any accusation against Wharton.’

‘I am not a child,’ said Da Costa contemptuously. ‘Do you think I do not know that? The note belongs to a boy named Lord Mauleverer, a friend of Wharton’s.’

‘That is better,’ agreed Mr. Gedge.

‘I shall, of course, not be seen in the matter at all. When Wharton is called to account he will tell a story of having received the banknote in a letter from his uncle. Colonel Wharton will be referred to, and he can only say that he sent no banknote in the letter. What will the school think of Wharton’s explanation?’

Mr. Gedge gave a rusty laugh.

‘They will think it the lamest and silliest explanation that a thief could possibly give,’ he answered.

‘And then—a thief would not be allowed to stay at Greyfriars,’ said Da Costa. ‘Captain Marker may be prepared to hand over his reward.’

‘If you are sure you can do as you say—’

‘I am sure.’

‘Very good!’ said Mr. Gedge, in his rasping voice. ‘I shall wait for news with keen interest, Arthur. If you have anything to communicate in a hurry you may always telephone—not from the school, of course. I need not caution you to take care what you say on the telephone.’

A few more words, and the gentleman from Chancery Lane walked back to the towpath and disappeared.

Laying the Snare!

THE morning was warm.

The windows of the Remove Form-room were wide open, to let in such air as there was. But the Form-room was very warm.

Billy Bunter perspired and grunted. Billy Bunter did not like a heat wave—it made him realise the extent of his circumference, and the unusual weight he had to carry.

Oddly enough, Da Costa seemed to be feeling the heat more than Billy Bunter.

In the second lesson, Mr. Quelch’s eye turned sharply on the Eurasian as he swayed over his desk.

‘Da Costa!’

The Eurasian straightened up at once.

‘I am sorry, sir! I feel a little faint,’ he said. ‘I—I do not think I am very well this morning, sir! If I might walk in the open air for a few minutes, sir—’ said Da Costa apologetically.

‘You may certainly do so, Da Costa,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘You may remain in the open air till you feel recovered, my boy.’

‘Thank you, sir.’



Quite cool and collected, Da Costa opened the envelope

Da Costa left the Form-room and went down the Form-room passage. The big door of the House stood wide open, but Da Costa did not head in that direction—his need for fresh air did not seem to be pressing, now that he was outside the Remove room. He moved along slowly, his watchful eyes about him. All the other fellows were in Form-rooms or class-rooms; the House seemed deserted. Trotter, the page, appeared for a moment in the distance, and then vanished below stairs. Monsieur Charpentier, who was not taking a class just then, came in sight, and went out into the quad and vanished.

There was no eye on Da Costa when he stopped at the rack where the letters were placed for the juniors, to be taken in morning break—due in about a quarter of an hour. The Eurasian's keen eyes flashed over the letters, and in a second or little more, one of them disappeared into his pocket.

A minute later, Da Costa was in his study in the Remove passage.

There was no danger of interruption there, at that hour; but the Eurasian turned the key in the lock. What he was about to do, if discovered, meant his instant expulsion from the school, if the consequences were not still more serious.

But he was quite cool and collected.

He lighted the little spirit stove that stood in the study fender, used by the juniors for making tea when the weather was too warm for a study fire.

Very soon steam was issuing from the spout of the kettle.

The old trick of opening an envelope, without leaving a trace to catch a casual eye, by means of the steam kettle, served the schemer's turn now.

The letter in his hand was addressed to Harry Wharton. It was addressed in the handwriting of his uncle, Colonel Wharton; and was, of course, the letter that the captain of the Remove had been expecting.

Carefully the Eurasian steamed and opened the flap of the envelope.

A minute later it was stuck down again, but now the envelope contained something that Colonel Wharton had never enclosed in the letter.

Da Costa left the study.

With a careless and negligent air, but with eyes watchful as a cat's, he made his way to the letter-rack.

When Da Costa went out into the quadrangle, Harry Wharton's letter was in the rack with the rest, waiting for the captain of the Remove to take it in morning break.

Arthur Da Costa strolled to and fro in the quad, under the shade of the elms, taking care to walk within view of the Remove room windows, in case Mr. Quelch should happen to glance out.

His design had succeeded—he had known that it would succeed. A fellow like Wharton had no chance in dealing with him—not the shadow of a chance. He would have done

better to seek the Eurasian's friendship, Da Costa bitterly reflected; that was the only thing that could have saved him. Every word of scorn he had uttered was to be paid for—dearly! Da Costa did not linger long in the quad. He returned to the Remove room before second lesson reached its end.

Mr. Quelch gave him a glance as he came in.

'You feel recovered, Da Costa?'

'Yes, sir; thank you.'

'Very good; you may go to your place.'

That he had not been slacking, the Eurasian soon proved, by his deep and careful attention to the remainder of the lesson. When the Form were dismissed for break, Mr. Quelch glanced after the lithe, graceful figure of the Eurasian as Da Costa went out with the others. The new junior was a hard worker—he was well-behaved, quiet, inoffensive; he seemed to desire to please his Form-master, and to live on amicable terms with his Form. He was the kind of pupil who made Mr. Quelch's task an easier one. Mr. Quelch approved of him. He had a feeling that he ought to have liked him—he was rather inclined to take himself to task for not liking Arthur Da Costa.

But he did not like him!

Plain English!

'I HOPE you found the banknote, Mauleverer.'

Lord Mauleverer set his lips. Mr. Quelch, coming away from the Remove room, was passing within hearing when Arthur Da Costa made that inquiry.

Had the fellow deliberately planned to make the affair of the banknote known to the Remove master, he could not have acted otherwise.

Mauly did not suspect that that was Da Costa's object. Mauly never suspected anything. But he was intensely irritated by what seemed to him crass tactlessness, as well as an uncalled-for interest in his personal affairs. Friends might inquire about the banknote; but Da Costa was not a friend of his; he hardly knew the fellow.

Mr. Quelch, rustling along to his study, paused, and fixed his gimlet-eyes on the two juniors.

Mauleverer did not answer the Eurasian. He was feeling more inclined to punch his head than to answer him.

'You will not suppose that the banknote has been stolen,' said Da Costa. 'But it will be very strange if it is not found.'

'Shut up!' hissed Mauleverer.

'But why——'

'Can't you see Quelchy?' breathed Mauleverer.

'I did not notice——'

'Oh, you silly ass!' groaned Mauleverer, as Mr. Quelch changed his course and bore down on them.

'Mauleverer!' rapped out Mr. Quelch.

'Yaas, sir.'

'I heard Da Costa's remark. Have you lost a banknote?'

'I—I've mislaid one, sir,' said Mauleverer.

'That is all?'

'That is all, sir.'

'From what Da Costa said I gathered that there has been a suggestion that it may have been purloined,' said the Remove master sternly.

'Nothin' of the sort, sir,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Da Costa is the only fellow at Greyfriars

who is likely to think of such a rotten idea, sir. Nobody else would fancy so for a moment.'

Da Costa coloured.

'I did not mean——' he began.

'Da Costa,' said Mr. Quelch, 'you should not have made such a suggestion. I am afraid that your mind turns very easily to miserable suspicions. I have not forgotten your utterly unfounded accusation against a Remove boy, in the matter of my watch that was hidden for a foolish practical joke by a foolish junior. You must endeavour to cure yourself, Da Costa, of this proneness to base suspicions.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled faintly. The Eurasian almost writhed under that sharp reprimand; but for once Mauly did not sympathise with a fellow who was getting the acid edge of Quelch's tongue. Da Costa deserved all that he was getting, and more, in Mauly's opinion.

'You hear me, Da Costa?' rapped out Mr. Quelch.

'Yess, sir!' muttered the Eurasian.

'Bear what I say in mind.' Mr. Quelch turned to Mauleverer. 'Nevertheless, Mauleverer, the banknote, if missing, must be found. You will see that it is found, at once, and you will report to me when you have found it. You understand?'

'Yaas, sir.'

Mr. Quelch rustled on.

Corn in Egypt!

HARRY WHARTON picked a letter from the rack, dropped it into his pocket, and went out of the House with his chums. Four members of the Co. had looked for letters without finding any. Their affectionate relatives really seemed to have forgotten them; being, no doubt, quite unaware of the greatest financial crisis in the history of the Famous Five. Unless Wharton's letter turned up trumps, the cheery Co. were doomed to another day of stoniness.

Under the shade of the elms the captain of the Remove slit open the envelope and took out the folded letter.

'Look!'

'Three cheers for the jolly old colonel!'

'Bravo!'

'The cheerfulness is terrific.'

'Well, my hat!' said Harry Wharton. 'Uncle must be a thought-reader; he's weighed in with this just at the right moment.'

Blessed if I quite catch on, though! He never sends me fivers; I thought there might be a pound note, perhaps; but a fiver—'

Wharton whistled.

'Something special,' said Bob. 'I dare say he explains in the letter. If that fiver is sent for any special purpose, of course, we call off that little arrangement about whacking it out. That was only meant for a common or garden tip.'

Harry Wharton nodded, and looked at the letter. It was brief, like most of the communications he received from his military relative.

'Dear Harry,—I find that I shall not have time to come down to the school so soon as I hoped. But I shall look in before the end of the term, and will let you know later.'

Your affectionate uncle,

JAMES WHARTON.'

The captain of the Remove read that letter aloud for the benefit of his comrades.
'Is that all?' asked Bob.
'That's all.
'He doesn't mention the fiver, then?'
'Not a syllable.
'Must have shoved it in at the last moment, as a sort of consolation prize for not coming down to see you,' grinned Bob.
Harry Wharton laughed.
'I suppose so! He may have been in a hurry; it's quite unlike him to put in an enclosure without referring to it. And I simply can't understand him sending a fiver in an unregistered letter. A pound note, perhaps—but a fiver! It's jolly odd, really!'
'Still, the fiver's the thing,' said Bob. 'If it was a last minute thought, I must say that the jolly old colonel has happy thoughts at the last minute.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'
'We owe something to the tuckshop on account of that picnic on Popper's Island,' said Wharton. 'We'll square that, and whack out the change. And ginger-pop all round wouldn't come amiss, what?'
'Good egg!'
The chums of the Remove started for the school shop, which was open in morning break. Billy Bunter rolled along with them. This was a scene in which William George Bunter was bound to be 'on'.

But Harry Wharton paused suddenly at the sight of a junior sitting on a bench under the elms with a miserable, harassed face. It was Hazeldene of the Remove.
He took no heed of the cheery group of juniors. But Wharton's eyes rested on him, and he stopped.

There was a banknote for five pounds in his hand; and that was the exact sum that Hazel required to pull him out of his latest hole.

'Come on, Harry, old fellow!' exclaimed Billy Bunter.

But Wharton had halted.

There was a struggle in his breast. The fiver had come utterly unexpectedly—it was like corn in Egypt after the lean years.

'Let's leave changing the fiver till after third lesson, you men!' said the captain of the Remove abruptly.

'What about ginger-pop?' asked Bob. 'There's plenty of time before the bell goes.'

'I've a reason, if you fellows don't mind.'

'Oh, all right!'

'I say, you fellows——' exclaimed Billy Bunter, in alarm. A vision of jam-tarts and ginger-pop faded from William George Bunter like a mirage of the desert.

But William George Bunter was not heeded. Puzzled as they were by his sudden change of mind, Wharton's chums acquiesced at once, and the Famous Five walked away towards the House, instead of the tuckshop. And Billy Bunter—with that vision of a spread gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream—blinked after them, his very spectacles glittering with wrath, and ejaculated:

'Beasts!'

Happy Hazel!

HARRY WHARTON had a very thoughtful look in third lesson that morning. If Mr. Quelch noticed it and supposed that the junior was bestowing unusual thought on the lesson, Mr. Quelch was in error.

Wharton was thinking of Hazel's scrape, and of the five-pound note that had come so unexpectedly in the letter from his uncle.

Fivers were rare enough with the chums of the Remove, and Wharton had a naturally strong objection to parting with that fiver for nothing. He had a still stronger objection to letting it go to settle a gambling debt. All the same, he was thinking of rescuing the scapegrace of the Remove from the 'hole' he was in, and there was only one way of doing so.

After the Remove were dismissed Wharton left the House and walked over to where he saw Hazeldene lounging about dejectedly.

Hazel gave him a look of dislike and bitterness as he came up.

'More sermons?' he sneered. 'You can keep them!'

'No!' said Harry quietly.

Hazel's angry bitterness hardly stirred his resentment. The fellow was almost in hysterics with anxiety and fear.

'I've got a last chance, at least,' snarled Hazeldene. 'I'm going out after dinner, and I may be able to raise the tin. You won't see me sacked from the school yet awhile.'

'Cliff House, I suppose?' Wharton could not help saying.

Hazel gave him a fierce look.

'No business of yours, is it? I know you'd be jolly glad to see me sacked. My sister will help me if she can. She's worth the whole crew of you.'

'Likely enough,' said Harry. 'Worth the lot of us, and a lot more. But I came to look for you—'

'You could have saved yourself the trouble. When I want sermons I can get them from the Head. Mind your own business.'

'Will you let a fellow speak?' exclaimed Harry Wharton impatiently. 'You asked me to lend you five pounds, but—'

'And you refused! Go and eat coke!'

'I've got the fiver—'

'What?'

Hazel stared blankly, his eyes almost bulging from his head as Harry Wharton slipped the five-pound note into his hand.

'A—a—a fiver!' he stuttered.

'Yes. That will see you clear?'

'Oh!' gasped Hazel. 'Yes, that's all right! Oh!' He leaned weakly on the old stone wall of the library under the stained-glass windows. 'I—I say, I'm sorry for—for what I said. That is jolly decent of you. I say, I'll settle this as soon as I can, honour bright. I—I'm really no end obliged. I say, this is ripping of you.'

The relief was almost too much for Hazeldene. Ten years seemed to have been taken off him. Wharton gave him a nod and left him, the five-pound note crumpled in his hand.

Enquiry!

'I SAY, you fellows, there's something on!'

Billy Bunter was not alone in that opinion.

All the Remove, in fact, guessed or felt that something was on. Mr. Quelch's face, never very good-natured early in the morning, had been uncommonly grim at the breakfast-table.

The Remove fellows went into their Form-room with a feeling that there was thunder in the air.

Mr. Quelch came into the Form-room looking more like a gargoyle than ever.

‘Mauleverer!’

All the Form knew what was on as soon as Mr. Quelch rapped out that name. It was the missing banknote that had gathered thunder on their Form-master’s majestic brow.

‘Yaas, sir!’

‘You have not informed me that your banknote has been found.’

‘No, sir.’

‘Has it been found yet?’

‘Hem! Not yet, sir.’

For a second Da Costa’s eyes gleamed at the captain of the Remove; then his olive face was impassive again.

‘This matter cannot be allowed to rest,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘Had you lost the banknote, Mauleverer, I should have caned you for your carelessness, and the matter would have dropped. But I require to know in what circumstances you missed the banknote. I understand that you did not actually lose it. Kindly give me the details immediately.’

There was no help for it now.

‘I left it in my study, sir.’

‘About the room, do you mean?’

‘On the table, sir, under the inkstand. I laid it there and forgot it.’

‘Do you mean to say that it disappeared from your study, where you left it under an inkstand on the table?’

‘Yaas, sir.’

‘In that case, Mauleverer, it could not have been lost. It must have been intentionally removed from the place where you left it.’

‘I think not, sir,’ answered Mauleverer.

‘What! How else do you account for the banknote being missing?’

‘I can’t account for it, sir. It’s rather a mystery.’

‘Then for what reason do you declare that it was not taken from your study?’

‘Because nobody would have taken it, sir.’

‘Good old Mauly!’ murmured Bob Cherry.

‘Silence! Mauleverer, the banknote must have been taken from your study. That is obvious. You should have acquainted me with this before. The matter is most serious.’

Lord Mauleverer did not reply to that. As a matter of fact his lazy lordship was beginning to realise that the matter was rather more serious than he had supposed.

‘You left your study, leaving the banknote under an inkstand?’

‘Yaas, sir.’

‘When did you miss it?’

‘I asked a fellow to fetch it for me, sir, and he came back and told me it wasn’t there.’

‘Then he was the person to discover that it was missing. Who was it?’

‘Bunter, sir.’

‘Very good! Bunter!’

‘Ow!’

‘What? What is the matter, Bunter?’

‘I didn’t, sir!’ gasped Bunter.

‘What? You did not what?’

‘I didn’t pinch that banknote, sir!’ gasped Bunter. ‘Tain’t fair to put it on me! I never saw it, sir! Besides, I wouldn’t.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Silence!’ thundered Mr. Quelch. ‘Bunter, you stupid boy, you are not accused of having taken the banknote. Do not be absurd!’

‘Oh!’ gasped Bunter. ‘All right, sir!’

‘You went to the study to fetch the note for Mauleverer?’
 ‘Yes, sir. Mauly asked me, and as he was too lazy—’
 ‘Never mind that. You did not find the banknote?’
 ‘No, sir; but it was all right.’
 ‘What—what do you mean? How was it all right?’
 ‘Mrs. Mimble let Mauleverer have the spread on tick, sir.’
 ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ yelled the Removites. They really could not help it. Mr. Quelch stared blankly at the cheerful Owl.



Mr. Quelch stared blankly at the cheerful Owl

‘You utterly obtuse boy! Silence! This is not a laughing matter! You returned to Mauleverer and told him that the banknote was not there, Bunter?’
 ‘Yes, sir.’
 ‘YOU are sure it was not there at that time, Bunter?’
 ‘Oh, yes, sir! I was afraid there wouldn’t be a spread if Mauly didn’t get the banknote, sir, so I knew it was important, and I made jolly sure! You see, sir——’
 ‘That will do, Bunter. Mauleverer!’
 ‘Yaas, sir!’ groaned his lordship.
 ‘You have made an efficient search for the banknote, I presume?’
 ‘Oh, yaas, sir. Lots of fellows have helped me,’ said Lord Mauleverer. ‘Every dashed thing—I mean, everything has been turned inside out, sir, and all my pockets gone through, and— everything, sir. Can’t find it.’
 ‘The banknote must have been taken from your study, Mauleverer. That is beyond doubt, unless you are mistaken in believing that you left it there.’ Mr. Quelch paused. ‘This is a most disagreeable matter. It must be cleared up immediately. Do you know the number of the note?’
 ‘No, sir.’
 ‘From whom did you receive it?’
 ‘My guardian, sir.’
 ‘Very well. Sir Reginald Brooke will undoubtedly be aware of the number, and I shall ascertain it from him. The matter will stand over for the present. In the meantime, all boys of this Form will be confined to bounds within gates.’
 ‘Oh!’ gasped the Remove.
 ‘We shall now commence.’
 And the Remove commenced.

Dark Suspicions!

‘BUNTER’S done it at last!’

That was Skinner’s idea of a joke. It drew a laugh from some of the fellows in morning break, and a roar of wrath from William George Bunter.

‘Why, you beast—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Shell out, Bunter!’ chuckled Snoop.

‘You rotter!’ yelled Bunter. ‘I say, you fellows, the banknote wasn’t there, just as I told Quelchy. I—I—I—’

Billy Bunter fairly spluttered with wrath and indignation.

‘That’s a rotten sort of joke, Skinner,’ said Harry Wharton quietly.

Skinner scowled and swung away.

Billy Bunter blinked round anxiously at the group of juniors in the quadrangle.

‘I say, you fellows, you don’t think it was me?’ he asked.

‘Of course not, you fat ass!’ said Wharton.

‘I say, Mauly—’

‘Yaas.’

‘You don’t think it was me, do you?’

‘Yaas.’

‘What?’ yelled Bunter.

‘Eh? I mean, no!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo! There goes Quelchy!’ murmured Bob Cherry, as the angular figure of the Remove master crossed the quad, in the direction of the tuckshop. ‘He’s going to ask Mrs. Mible who’s been changing banknotes this week.’

‘He’s got the number by this time,’ remarked Peter Todd. ‘He’s been on the telephone to Mauly’s jolly old guardian. I suppose if any fellow bagged the banknote he would have to change it at the shop—he wouldn’t like to ask a master to change it for him, in the circumstances.’

‘That’s so,’ admitted Todd. ‘I suppose the school shop is the only place where a Greyfriars man could change a note without questions asked. And whoever pinched it took it for granted that Mauly would let the matter drop—as he wanted to. It’s not through Mauly that this happy inquiry is goin’ on.’

‘No fear!’ said Mauleverer.

The bell rang for third lesson, and as the Remove went in Billy Bunter squeaked out the news that there was a fresh notice on the board in Quelchy’s fist. As that notice evidently referred to the matter that was now a burning topic in the Remove, there was a rush of the juniors to read it.

‘Lost! Five-pound banknote numbered 100010002. Anyone finding same is requested to inform me.

H. S. QUELCH.’

‘He’s got the number!’ said Peter Todd. ‘Got it on the phone, as I thought. No doubt about the note now if it turns up.’

The juniors went on to the Form-room. One of them remained behind, staring at the notice in Mr. Quelch’s handwriting, with eyes that seemed to start from his head. It was Hazeldene. His face was white as chalk, and fear and horror mingled there. He scanned that notice as if he could scarcely believe what his eyes read.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo!’ Bob Cherry shouted along the passage. ‘You’ll be late, Hazel.’ Hazel started and turned away from the notice-board. He almost staggered as he made his way to the Remove room. The number of the stolen banknote—I000I0002—danced before Hazel’s eyes as if in figures of flame. The number of the note posted on the board by Mr. Quelch was the number of the note he had received from Harry Wharton, and paid to the bookmaker Joe Spratt of Wapshot! Hazel sat through third lesson that morning in a haze of horror.

Accused!

‘You mad fool!’

Hazel dragged Harry Wharton away after class, the captain of the Remove following him in sheer astonishment. A dozen fellows looked at Hazel, but he was blind to their wondering stare. Out of hearing of the others he stopped and panted out the words, his face white, his eyes burning. Wharton could only gaze at him in wonder.

‘You mad fool!’ Hazel’s voice was a shrill whisper. ‘Why did you do it? I never knew—you can’t pretend that I knew! You can’t!’

‘Have you gone off your rocker, Hazel? If not, what the thump are you talking about?’ demanded Wharton.

‘That banknote!’ hissed Hazel. ‘Don’t pretend you don’t understand—this isn’t a time for fooling. Why did you do it?’

‘Why did I do what, you ass? What have I done?’

‘The banknote!’ hissed Hazel.

‘The one I lent you, do you mean?’

‘Yes—the one you stole from Mauleverer.’

Wharton almost gasped.

‘Are you mad?’ he asked.

‘Will you chuck up pretending not to understand?’ snarled Hazel. ‘You know that the banknote you lent me was Mauleverer’s.’

‘Don’t be a fool!’

‘You’re not going to deny it?’

‘I think you’ve gone out of your senses,’ said Wharton contemptuously. ‘What can possibly have put such an idea into your head? If I were a thief do you think I should steal banknotes to give them away? Have a little sense!’

‘I—I can’t understand that! You must have been mad to do it! But it was Mauleverer’s note.’

‘Oh, chuck it!’ snapped Wharton.

‘I tell you it was Mauleverer’s banknote. Notes have different numbers; the same number means the same note. Quelch has put the number on the board.’

‘You noticed the number of the note I gave you?’ asked Harry, hardly knowing what to make of Hazel’s wild excitement, and his wilder accusation.

‘Yes—yes, I tell you! I took the number. I don’t have my pockets full of banknotes like that fool Mauleverer. I might have lost it— or it might have been pinched, like Mauly’s note—the same note as it turns out. Of course I took the number. I took it and wrote it down. It was the same number that Quelch’s put on the board!’

‘That’s impossible.’

‘I tell you it is so!’ almost shrieked Hazel, ‘I’ve got the number written down in my pocket-book!’

‘You made a mistake then,’ said Harry coldly. ‘Don’t be a fool! I hardly know why I don’t knock you spinning for what you’ve said.’

‘Where did you get that banknote, then?’

‘From my uncle.’

‘Colonel Wharton!’ gasped Hazel. He was so astounded that his jaw dropped, and he stared at Wharton like a fellow in a dream.

‘Yes; it came in the letter I had the other day.’

Hazel passed his hand over his moist forehead.

‘I never made a mistake about the number,’ he said. ‘I wrote it down—I’ve got it written down in my pocket-book now. They may have made a mistake printing the notes at the bank—’

‘Rot!’

‘I tell you the number’s the same.’

‘And I tell you it can’t be. Pull yourself together, you weak-kneed fool,’ said Wharton scornfully. ‘You’ll have all Greyfriars staring at you at this rate. Do you want them all to know about your racing foolery?’

‘The number’s the same,’ said Hazel. ‘That’s a cert! But if you got the banknote from your uncle, I can’t understand. Look here, Wharton—show me your uncle’s letter—I tell you, I’m scared out of my wits at this—if you’ve made me get rid of a stolen note——’ he choked.

‘You wretchedly cowardly fool!’ Wharton spoke between his teeth. ‘It would be no use showing you my uncle’s letter—as it happens, as he does not mention enclosing the banknote.’

‘Your uncle sent you a five-pound note in a letter without mentioning that he was enclosing it?’

‘Yes.’

‘A registered letter?’

‘No.’

Hazel laughed savagely.

‘You expect me to believe that? Do you expect anybody to believe such a silly rotten lie?’

‘A what?’ roared Wharton.

‘Lie!’ panted Hazel. ‘A rotten, silly lie—the silliest lie I’ve ever heard. As if any man in his senses would put a five-pound note in an unregistered letter, and never even mention that he was enclosing it. Are you making out that your uncle is a doddering old fool?’

‘You’d better mind what you say, Hazel. I know it was unusual—it surprised me at the time. But there it was—the banknote was in the letter.’

‘With the same number as the note that was pinched from Mauly’s study!’ jeered Hazel savagely. ‘What’s the good of telling me such stuff?’

Wharton clenched his hands.

‘I was a fool to help you out,’ he said. ‘A fool for my pains! I ought to have let you get sacked, as you deserved.’

‘Better that than passing a stolen note,’ hissed Hazel. ‘The sack is better than going to prison. But, look here, if it all comes out I shan’t take it on myself. I never knew it was Mauleverer’s banknote—you can’t say that I did!’

Wharton breathed hard.

‘I tell you, you rotter, that it was not Mauleverer’s note,’ he said as calmly as he could.

‘You made a mistake about the number. Can’t you see that you must have?’

‘I’ve got it written down.’

‘Rubbish! Do you think for one moment that I should steal a fiver to help a cur like you out of a hole?’ said Wharton. ‘If I were a thief I shouldn’t steal for a reason like that. Is there any sense in it?’

‘No—I can’t understand it! My brain seems to be turning round,’ groaned Hazel. ‘I can’t

grasp it! But it was Mauleverer's banknote—the number's the same.'

'Then you're accusing me of stealing Mauleverer's money to give it to you!' exclaimed Wharton, almost as amused as angry.

Hazel panted. Put like that, it seemed ridiculous enough on the face of it. Yet he knew that the number of the stolen note was the number of the note Wharton had handed to him.

'I can't catch on to it,' he muttered. 'Didn't you look at the number of the note yourself?'

'I never thought of it. I was going to change it at the tuck-shop as soon as I got it from the letter—only—' Wharton's lips curled. 'Only I was fool enough to let you have it instead. You have always been an ungrateful rotter, Hazel—but this is the limit!'

'It was the same note!' said Hazel doggedly.

'I tell you it was not.'

'And I tell you it was—and I tell you that you'll have to stand the racket if it comes out—you shan't make out that I was the thief because I passed the note on,' said Hazel passionately. 'I tell you——'

'Hold your tongue!' Wharton's voice was low and concentrated. 'I've stood all I mean to stand. Keep away from me, you cur—keep your distance! You make me sick!'

Wharton turned his back on Hazel and walked away. That Hazel had made a mistake in the number of the note he took for granted. There was no other possible explanation to his mind, and Hazel had been in such a frightened and nervy state that such a mistake was not surprising.

But Hazel knew that he had made no mistake. He knew that Harry Wharton had given him the banknote that was missing from Lord Mauleverer's study. And there was only one conclusion that

Hazel could draw.

'A thief—Wharton a thief!' he muttered with ashen lips. 'And he got me to pass the note—why, why? He must have meant to do me a good turn, I suppose—but—but he must have been mad to do such a thing! But he did it—he did it! It was the same banknote!'

'Feelin' merry and bright, old bean?' drawled the Bounder's voice at his elbow.

Hazel spun round with a gasp.

'Rowin' with Wharton, what?' smiled the Bounder.

'Mind your own business!' snarled Hazel.

He stalked away, the Bounder grinning after him. Herbert Vernon-Smith had witnessed the altercation from a little distance with a keenly interested eye; and perhaps he was not far from guessing what it had been about. He had seen Hazel's scared eyes glued on the notice on the board, and he had noted his dazed look since that notice had been put up. His own talk with the captain of the Remove was fresh in the Bounder's mind. A cynical smile was on the Bounder's hard face.

'The immaculate Wharton!' he murmured. 'The spotless character of the Remove! The jolly old example to the Form! My only hat! I'd never have believed it if it wasn't as clear as daylight! Good gad!'

And the Bounder whistled.

The Nabob's Warning!

ARTHUR DA COSTA paced restlessly to and fro in No. 1 study. There was a wrinkle of tormented thought on his brow, a dark cloud on his face.

Another day had passed, and another; and there was no fresh light on the mystery of the missing banknote.

The Eurasian could not understand it.

His keen intellect examined the problem from every aspect, and he could not elucidate it. Wharton had received the stolen banknote, he knew that. On that point there was no possible doubt. Wharton had been in debt at the tuck-shop; moreover, he had made a compact with his chums to whack out the next remittance. That made it absolutely certain that Wharton, in possession of that unexpected tip as he supposed from his uncle, would change the banknote at once. Da Costa had not doubted that for a moment—there seemed no possible doubt about that. He had counted as an absolute certainty upon Harry Wharton taking the banknote to the school shop to pay it over the counter to Mrs. Mible—as indeed the captain of the Remove had very nearly done.

Had he done so, the result was inevitable.

Da Costa knew that Mr. Quelch had inquired at the school shop, and had taken it for granted that the banknote was in Mrs. Mible's till, or at least had been through her hands and could be recovered. The number of the note was an infallible identification.

According to all that was probable, therefore, Mr. Quelch ought to have received total proof that Wharton was the thief.

In the whole dastardly scheme the emissary of Captain Marker could not see a flaw.

It should have worked inevitably to its appointed end.

Only—it had not done so.

Mr. Quelch, instead of returning from his interview with Mrs. Mible armed with proof that the captain of the Remove was a thief, had taken no steps whatever, excepting to place the notice on the board.

It was inexplicable.

Of Hazel and his troubles Da Costa knew nothing, and cared nothing. That Wharton had given the banknote away for nothing did not even occur to his mind—indeed, he would not have believed it had it been told him.

What, then, could have happened?

Why had not Wharton changed the banknote? He owed an account at the school shop.

And he was very careful in such matters. He was seldom in debt, and when he was he always settled the debt at the earliest possible moment. Yet in this instance he had not done so.

Was he keeping the note in hand? If so, why? He could not desire to change it outside the school; he had no motive for that. Had he even the remotest suspicion that the banknote did not belong to him he would never have dreamed of keeping it at all. Da Costa knew that well enough.

But Da Costa, in Wharton's study, was able to observe the captain of the Remove. He knew that Wharton was hard up now. Tea in the study was very spare these days. Once or twice Wharton and Nugent had 'tea'd' in Hall; two or three times all the Famous Five had tea'd along the passage with various friends. It was quite a joke in the Remove about the Five being stony. It was obvious that they were short of money, Wharton as much as the rest. Yet if Wharton had not changed the banknote he must have five pounds in his pocket all the time.

Da Costa tried to penetrate the mystery, but he could not. He had to confess himself beaten on all sides.

Something had gone wrong with his plot. What it was he could not imagine, but he had failed. As he had failed before, so he had failed again, and his task remained yet to be done.

Of what Hazel believed and the Bounder suspected Da Costa knew nothing. They were not likely to utter their thoughts on the subject. In the minds of his two Form-fellows Wharton had sunk very low. But he did not realise it himself, and Da Costa knew nothing of it.

Da Costa ceased his restless pacing as he heard a footstep outside the study. He sat down at the table and opened a book, and as the door opened he did not look up, apparently deep in Latin. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came into the study.

The Nabob of Bhanipur closed the door behind him and stood looking at the Eurasian with a very curious expression on his dusky face.

Da Costa looked up at last.

‘What do you want? Wharton and Nugent are down at the cricket.’

‘Quitefully so!’ assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘That is whyfully I have come to this esteemed study. I have to make a few remarkable observations to your honourable self.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘The ludicrous banknote belonging to the esteemed fathead Maully has not been found,’ said the nabob. ‘There is going to be an official search of the Remove passage. The ridiculous Quelchy is very much in earnest about this execrable matter.’

Da Costa’s eyes gleamed for a moment.

‘A search of the studies?’ he asked.

‘Precisefully.’

‘And of the fellows themselves?’

‘Every esteemed fellow, I understand, will be required to turn out his ridiculous pockets in the honoured presence of Quelchy.’

Da Costa bent his head to hide the glitter of triumph in his eyes. It was success, after all! The banknote must still be in Wharton’s possession. Where else could it be? If it was found upon him the Eurasian’s scheme had succeeded.

‘Beforefully the excellent search takes place,’ went on Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in a low and very distinct voice, ‘I have a few remarkable words to say. It is you, Da Costa, who have caused all this terrific fuss about the banknote. You are the cause of this esteemed search being made.’

‘I think the matter ought to be cleared up, certainly,’ said Da Costa, without meeting the nabob’s eyes. Deep in his heart was a fear of the penetrating glance of the Indian junior.

‘Quitefully so!’ agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Perhapsfully you have forgotten, my esteemed Da Costa, that on the day you came to Greyfriars the respectable, spyful Bunter heard some talk between you and the honoured Mr. Gedge in a railway train.’

Da Costa started.

‘I remember the fat fool told some silly story,’ he answered. ‘I have quite forgotten it.’

‘I will refreshfully stir your esteemed memory. It was a story of a plot in which you were concernfully moved to disgrace my esteemed pal Wharton and get him turned out of the school.’

Da Costa felt a chill of ice at his heart. Always he had feared the nabob, the only fellow at Greyfriars whose penetration he dreaded.

But he contrived to answer calmly.

‘Bunter told you that childish nonsense in my presence. You did not believe anything of the kind?’

‘It is true that the esteemed Bunter is a terrible fabricator,’ assented Hurree Singh, ‘but the watchfulness has seemed to me the proper caper since then, my esteemed Da Costa. I am from India, and I know the Eurasian better than fellows here. You were very keen on the affair of the esteemed Quelchy’s watch. I strongfully suspect that you stranded the excellent Wharton on Popper’s Island to land him in trouble for breaking bounds. I have observefully noticed that you, and you alonefully, have kept up this business of the missing banknote. It has occurfully come into my head that the banknote may be found.’

‘Well?’ said Da Costa huskily.

‘That it may be found in Wharton’s desk, or in Wharton’s pockets,’ said the nabob grimly.

‘Oh!’

‘In which case, my esteemed Da Costa, the matter will not end at that esteemed point. The excellent jawful Bunter will be called upon to tell his preposterous story to Mr. Quelch; and the inquiry into the banknote will go deeper than you may have supposefully reckoned on.’

Da Costa sat like stone.

‘That is all,’ said the nabob amiably. ‘A nod is as good as a wink to a pitcher that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb says. If that banknote is found in Wharton’s possession, my esteemed reptile, the inquiry will not end—it will begin!’

With that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh left the study and closed the door after him.

Da Costa did not move.

Terror chained him to his seat.

The note must be found on Wharton—the note must be found on Wharton! How could it fail to be found on him? And then——

His hands trembled.

Then he would be accused of the treachery of which he had been guilty! The one fellow who came from his own country, the one fellow at Greyfriars who was able to read him like an open book, the fellow whose careless, smiling face had hidden unsleeping vigilance, had told him what to expect if the banknote was found in Wharton’s possession! What would come of such an accusation—backed up by Bunter’s fantastic story? Da Costa hardly knew. But he feared—he feared in the very marrow of his bones.

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Mr. Quelch presided over the search in the Remove passage. Mr. Quelch was in his grimmest mood, determined that the affair of the banknote should be settled for good and all. The search was rigid enough. Every study was rooted over by Trotter under Mr. Quelch’s gimlet eye. Every fellow in the Remove turned his pockets out. Lord Mauleverer’s face was the picture of dismal colour. He realised that all this was the result of his carelessness. Some of the fellows took it all as more or less of a joke. Others were deeply annoyed and irritated. All of them had to go through it. Nobody, certainly, was feeling any uneasiness—with the exception of Arthur Da Costa.

The ordeal was sheer torture to him.

Wharton was bound to produce the banknote; he would produce it in all innocence. It would be identified! Wharton would be accused! Then would come the counter-accusation of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh; and to what that might lead Da Costa did not know, but he feared in the very depths of his heart.

And when at the end of that rigorous search the banknote was not found, Da Costa breathed deeply with relief. Somehow—he could not imagine how—the banknote was no longer in Wharton’s possession; he could not account for it, but he felt the dark eyes of the nabob on him, and his relief was immense.

After the search was over the master of the Remove addressed his Form in the Remove passage.

‘The matter is now conclusively settled,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘It is obvious that the banknote was lost by Mauleverer, and that he was mistaken in thinking that he left it under the inkstand on his table. Mauleverer!’

‘Yaas, sir?’

‘This is not the first time you have lost money. You are very careless, Mauleverer.’

‘Yaas, sir; I’m sorry.’

‘You should be more careful, Mauleverer. You have caused an immense amount of

unnecessary trouble. It is clear that your memory played you false, and that you did not leave the banknote in your study as you supposed. I presume that you realise that now.' Mauleverer did not realise it in the least. But he was only too anxious for the matter to come to an end.

'If you think so, sir, the matter's settled,' he answered.

'Very good! The loss of the banknote, Mauleverer, is a proper punishment for your carelessness. Probably you lost it out of gates, in which case it may never be found. You deserve this.'

'Yaas, sir.'

'And in order to impress upon you the necessity of care in such matters, Mauleverer, I shall cane you!'

'Oh!'

'Severely!' added Mr. Quelch.

'Um!'

'Follow me to my study, Mauleverer!'

Lord Mauleverer followed Mr. Quelch to his study. When he emerged his hapless lordship's look was a clear indication that the Remove-master had not spared the rod.

And, by way of comfort, all the Remove told Mauleverer that he deserved it.

The affair of the banknote was at an end. Few fellows doubted that Mr. Quelch was right and that Mauly had lost the fiver. Lord Mauleverer's own opinion was unchanged, but he did not state it. Two fellows in the Remove did not agree with Mr. Quelch—Hazel, whose fixed belief was unchanged, and the Bounder, whose suspicions were as keen as ever. As for Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, that dusky junior was perplexed and dubious. There was one point upon which he was not doubtful, and that was that his vigilance should never sleep.

But Da Costa the schemer was not finished yet!

A Letter from Mr. Spratt!

'WHARTON!'

'Yes, sir!'

'You will follow me to my study!'

'Oh! Yes, sir!'

Harry Wharton did not look pleased.

That morning, in the Remove Form-room, Mr. Quelch had addressed him more than once with unusual sharpness.

Wharton was quite unconscious of having done anything to deserve it. His work had been good—generally it was quite good, and this morning it had been unusually good. In other matters in class he had been quite up to the mark. It was not, indeed, in such matters that his Form-master found fault. He seemed out of humour with Wharton personally somehow.

The Remove were being dismissed for morning break when Wharton was told to follow Mr. Quelch to his study.

He compressed his lips as he went.

If this was going to be a 'jaw' or a ragging from Quelchy, the captain of the Remove did not mean to take it patiently. He was fed-up with sharp treatment for nothing.

Many eyes followed him as he went. His chums were rather concerned. Arthur Da Costa smiled as he went out into the quad. Herbert Vernon-Smith glanced after Wharton very curiously.

'Wharton's for it!' remarked Skinner with a cheery grin. 'Quelchy seems to be getting fed

up with his jolly old favourite'

If a fellow deserved commendation from his Form-master and received it, Skinner's description thereof was favouritism. Skinner and his friends, at least, were not sorry to see the captain of the Remove under the frown of the beak.

'Quelchy's got a down on him!' remarked Peter Todd. 'Blessed if I know why!'

'Nor anybody else!' growled Bob Cherry.

'It doesn't seem much use trying to please Quelchy!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'He's got his back up with Wharton! What about, I'd like to know!'

'Nothing!' said Nugent.

'The nothingfulness is terrific!' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The esteemed Quelchy is ratherfully a tartar!'

'Nothing?' asked Vernon-Smith, eyeing Harry Wharton's chums in a rather peculiar way.

'Well, what is there for Quelchy to get his rag out for?' demanded Bob.

'Oh, nothin' that I know of, of course!' answered the Bounder. And he walked away with Tom Redwing before any more questions could be asked. The juniors went into the quad, where the Co. hung about the doorway in a rather uneasy mood, waiting for Wharton. Meanwhile, Mr. Quelch had rustled into his study, and Harry had followed him there. The junior stood waiting with a rather sulky brow, while the Form-master fumbled in the drawer of his table. Mr. Quelch's hand came out of the drawer with a letter in it, and he fixed his eyes on Wharton. Never had Mr. Quelch's penetrating eyes looked so like gimlets as they did now.

'This letter came for you this morning, Wharton!' he said abruptly.

Wharton raised his eyebrows.

'Letters for us are generally put in the rack, sir,' he said.

'Quite so. But you are aware that supervision is exercised over all correspondence of junior boys.'

'I know that, of course, sir. But that's no reason why a letter for me should be stopped!' said Harry stubbornly. 'I've never had a letter at Greyfriars that anyone might not have read out to the whole school, so far as I know!'

'The letter in my hand could scarcely be read out to the whole school, Wharton! It is a letter that you must explain if you are to remain at this school!' said Mr. Quelch in an icy voice.

Wharton stared at his Form-master.

'I don't understand!' he answered.

'Were you expecting a letter this morning, Wharton?'

'Not specially, sir. There might be a letter from my uncle or my aunt, I suppose.'

'You were not expecting a local letter?'

'No—unless one of the Highcliffe fellows wrote.'

'A letter from Friardale,' said Mr. Quelch.

'I don't know anybody in Friardale who would be likely to write to me,' answered Wharton, more and more surprised.

'Are you acquainted with a man named Spratt?'

Wharton started violently.

Spratt was the name of a racing man to whom Hazel had owed money. He was amazed to hear that name on Mr. Quelch's lips.

The Remove master's brow grew very grim.

'I see that the name is not unfamiliar to you, Wharton! You admit an acquaintance with this man?'

'Certainly not, sir!' exclaimed Harry indignantly. 'I am not likely to know such a man, I hope! I've heard the name, that's all, and I was surprised that you asked me such a

question! I think any fellow would be surprised!’

Mr. Quelch’s eyes searched ‘Wharton’s face. Only angry indignation was to be read there, but Mr. Quelch was not convinced.

‘Some short time ago, Wharton, it came to my knowledge that you had gone out of bounds and visited Popper’s Island. A mere thoughtless escapade I should think little of, but you went to the island in the river immediately after your headmaster had specially and solemnly warned you not to do so! That was an act of reckless disrespect which very considerably changed my opinion of you!’

Wharton flushed.

‘I—I never knew you knew, sir!’

‘The matter came to my knowledge in such a way that I could not properly take cognizance of it,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘For that reason I said nothing. I was disappointed in you, Wharton!’

‘If you’d let me explain, sir——’ began Wharton, realising now why Mr. Quelch had been so extremely acid for some time past.

‘You cannot explain away an act of deliberate disrespect to your headmaster! But, as I have said, the matter did not come officially to my notice, and we need not go into it!’ said Mr. Quelch coldly. ‘I was disappointed in you, Wharton, and I had reason! Now this letter arrives, and it makes me doubt very strongly whether my former opinion of you was a mistaken one, or whether you have changed very much for the worse. You tell me that you are unacquainted with a man named Spratt?’

‘Certainly!’

‘You know that he is a man of disreputable character?’

‘I have heard so.’

‘Do you state explicitly that you do not know the man and have no dealings with him of any sort?’

‘Yes, sir; most certainly!’

‘Then how do you account for this letter, which came by this morning’s post, addressed to you at this school?’ exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

He threw the letter across the table to the junior. Wharton, in blank amazement, picked it up, and he could scarcely credit his eyes as he read, in a scrawling hand on a beer-stained sheet of paper:

‘Deer Master Wharton,—I got your note all right, sir. You can lay to it that I ain’t mug enough to come too near the school to see you. I know it would get you into a row. When you want another little flutter on a horse, you hop along the towpath to the usual place, and you’ll find yours truly there, ready to oblige.—Yores respectfully,

J.

SPRATT.’

Inexplicable!

WHARTON stared at the letter blankly. Mr. Quelch’s eyes were fixed on his face as he stared at it.

Wharton could not speak. He was so utterly overwhelmed by amazement that words failed him.

Quelch rapped out the word.

Wharton tried to recover himself. His brain was in a whirl.

His first thought was that the man Spratt had written to Hazeldene, that Mr. Quelch had mistaken the name on the envelope. But there was his own name on the letter itself. That was not the explanation. There seemed to be no explanation.

A man he did not know, a man he had never spoken to, a man he had never seen to his knowledge, had written him this letter—a letter that was enough to get him sacked from the school if taken seriously by the headmaster.

‘Well?’ repeated Mr. Quelch.

Wharton gasped.

‘Did this letter come for me, sir?’

‘It came in an envelope addressed to you, and your name is written on it, as you see. My attention was specially drawn to the letter by the coarse hand in which it was addressed, and by the fact that the envelope was stained with beer, and smelt of tobacco,’ said Mr. Quelch sternly. ‘This letter was written to you by the man Spratt. It refers quite plainly to an acquaintance existing between you.’

‘I can’t understand it.’

‘The man refers to a note sent him by you.’

‘I never sent him any note.’

‘He refers to an accustomed meeting-place.’

‘I have never met him.’

‘He speaks of a flutter, as he calls it, on a horse. That refers to some kind of betting transactions between you.’

‘I’ve never had anything to do with him.’

‘Wharton!’

‘I know nothing of the man,’ said Harry steadily. ‘Why he should write to me is a mystery. I can’t understand it. If there were any other fellow of my name here I should think the letter was for him. It can’t be for me, anyhow. I don’t know the man.’

‘The letter is for you, Wharton. There is no doubt upon that point.’

‘Then I can’t understand it.’

‘You desire me to believe that a man you do not know, and have never seen, has written you a letter in a familiar strain; that he refers to your dealings with him, though you have had no dealings whatever with him.’

Wharton panted.

‘I know it sounds queer, sir, but that’s it! The man must be mad, I should think, to write that rot to me. I don’t see how he even knows my name.’

‘Neither do I, if he is totally unacquainted with you,’ said Mr. Quelch dryly. ‘Wharton, tell me the whole truth, frankly. I desire to keep my good opinion of you if I can. Have you ever been foolish enough to get into touch with a man of this character?’

‘Never.’

‘Have you even had some quarrel or dispute with such a man? If you can tell me that you have even done that I might suppose that this letter was written in revenge, to get you into trouble at your school.’

‘I’ve no recollection of anything of the kind, sir! The man can’t be an enemy of mine when I’ve never seen him.’

‘If this letter is a surprise to you, Wharton, as you say, and if you have had no dealings with the man, how do you account for this man Spratt writing to you at all?’

‘I can’t account for it.’

Mr. Quelch took the letter back from the junior and placed it in his table drawer again.

‘If that letter, Wharton, is well-founded, you will be expelled from this school,’ he said.

‘If it is demonstrated that you have deceived me to such an extent as this as to your true character, you are not a fit boy to remain at Greyfriars. But such a very serious matter

must be dealt with carefully, and certainly not in haste. Some way may be found of accounting for this letter, which, on the face of it, condemns you as a thoroughly bad-hearted and deceitful boy. I shall consult your headmaster, and you will probably be called before him for investigation later. In the meantime, you may go.'

'I give you my word, sir, that I know nothing of the man, and haven't the faintest idea why he should have written to me,' said the captain of the Remove earnestly.

'I should be glad to believe you, Wharton, but such a very extraordinary statement requires proof. Unless this man Spratt is out of his senses, he would not write a meaningless letter to a person he did not know, referring to an acquaintanceship that had never happened. How does he know even your name?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Very well, you may go, Wharton,' said Mr. Quelch, with a sigh. 'I trust that this matter may not turn out to your discredit.'

Harry Wharton left the study. It seemed to him that his brain was turning round and round as he went. The happening was so utterly inexplicable that he could not even begin to understand it.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What the merry thump!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the captain of the Remove came out into the quad.

'Harry, what on earth's up?' exclaimed Nugent.

Wharton's bewildered face drew the attention of the chums at once. They surrounded him with anxious looks.

'What's happened?' asked Johnny Bull.

'The happenfulness must have been terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Give it an esteemed name, my ludicrous chum.'

'I don't know how to tell you,' said Harry unsteadily. 'I'm in disgrace! I don't know how or why! I can't make it out! You'll hardly believe me when I tell you. I can hardly believe it myself! But I'm in disgrace—you can take that as a cert.'

'But what the thump——'

'Suppose I tell you that a man I've never seen, and never heard of except by name once or twice, has written me a letter in a familiar style, mentioning all sorts of things that have never happened.'

'Draw it mild, old bean,' murmured Bob.

'Well, that's what's happened,' said Harry.

'You'd better make it a bit clearer,' said Johnny Bull. 'That sounds as if you're pulling our leg.'

'I'll make it as clear as I can.'

Wharton explained what had taken place. His comrades listened in deep amazement and incredulity. When he had finished the captain of the Remove looked round from face to face.

'What do you think of that?' he asked.

'The man must be out of his mind to write such a letter,' said Bob Cherry. 'But if he's some giddy lunatic, why has he fixed on you specially?'

'That's what Quelch wants to know.'

'It will want some explaining,' said Johnny Bull.

Wharton gave him a quick look.

'Does that mean that you think, as Quelch does, that I know this man Spratt, and that the letter is genuine?' he asked very quietly.

Johnny Bull shook his head.

'Don't go off at the deep end, old bean. I know it isn't that, but, as I say, it wants some

explaining. You're quite sure you've never come into touch with this Spratt merchant?'

'Quite.'

'But you say you know his name.'

'I say that I've heard it.'

'From whom?'

'What does that matter?'

'It matters this much, that it's the only connection you have with the man, and it shows that some Greyfriars chap knows him, if you don't. I suppose it was from some chap here you heard of him?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Well, who was it? No secret about that, I suppose?' asked Johnny Bull rather impatiently.

'No secret among ourselves, but certainly from anybody else,' answered Harry. 'Spratt is the man Hazel owed money to; you remember I let him have my uncle's fiver to settle. I don't know whether I mentioned the man's name when I told you about it, and put it to the vote about letting him have the fiver. Anyhow, Spratt was the man. I've never heard of him except from Hazel.'

'Hazel!' repeated Johnny Bull. 'I think I see light, then.'

'How?'

'Hazel's just the fellow to dip into muck and be afraid of what he was doing all the time. Just the fellow to give a false name. Just the fellow to give another chap's name.'

'What?'

'Suppose he gave a false name in dealing with Spratt?' said Johnny Bull. 'He might have used your name, or anybody else's, to screen his cowardly self.'

'Even Hazel wouldn't——'

'If he did, Spratt would think that was his name, and might write to him as Wharton.

Looks to me as if that's the only way out,' said Johnny Bull. 'Hazel's the only man here, so far as we know, who knows Spratt; the only Greyfriars man Spratt would write to.'

The chums of the Remove looked at one another. That Hazel, in his dingy adventures outside the school, was exactly the fellow to use a false name, was true enough—if he had thought of it. But it seemed unlikely that he would use the name of another Greyfriars fellow—any false name would have served his purpose. Yet it was possible—and it was the only gleam of light where all seemed dark.

'We'll soon know, anyhow,' said Bob Cherry abruptly. 'We can ask Hazel, and make him tell the truth.'

Harry Wharton nodded, and the Famous Five proceeded at once to look for Hazeldene.

No Clue!

HAZELDENE was loafing under the elms, talking with Skinner and Snoop, when the chums of the Remove found him. His face set at once as Harry Wharton came up. Skinner and Snoop exchanged a curious look. They knew already that Hazel was 'off' Wharton, and did not know why, but were very curious to know why. Their private opinion was that it was like Hazel's cheek to be moody with the captain of the Form, compared with whom he was an insignificant nobody; and they did not think that Wharton would mind very much, except so far as it made matters awkward concerning his friends at Cliff House. But Skinner, at least, was glad to see it; Skinner was a fellow who thrived on trouble for others. If there was trouble, Skinner was ready to add a little fuel to the fire, if he could.

'I want you a minute, Hazel,' said Harry, as he came up. Hazel gave him a dogged look.

'I'd rather you let me alone,' he answered.

'I must speak to you; come this way.'

Hazel did not stir.

'I'm talking to Skinner,' he answered.

'Skinner won't mind,' said Harry. 'Come this way, Hazel; I must speak to you before the bell goes.'

'Well, I won't!'

Snoop looked rather uncomfortable and walked away. Skinner did not follow his example. Skinner wanted very much to be on in this scene. He scented trouble of a more serious kind than ever he had hoped for.

'Hazel's with me, you know,' drawled Skinner. 'Hazel doesn't mind you speakin' before me. What's all this jolly old mystery about?'

Wharton compressed his lips.

'Do you want me to speak before Skinner?' he asked.

'I don't want you to speak to me at all,' answered Hazel. 'I've told you so, and that would be enough for any decent chap. Leave me alone.'

'I must speak, and if you want it before Skinner you can have it,' said Harry. 'It's about a matter that you may not care to have talked up and down the Remove, though. If you like to trust Skinner with it, have your own way.'

Hazel flushed hotly.

'You mean——' he stammered.

'Yes, I mean exactly that.'

'You can't let that rest.'

'As it happens, no.'

'I'll come along with you,' muttered Hazel, and he walked away with the Famous Five, leaving Harold Skinner simply devoured by curiosity—which was not to be gratified, however. Skinner was not a fellow Hazel would have cared to trust with knowledge of his sporting speculations.

'Now, what is it?' asked Hazel savagely, halting at a little distance. 'Get it over and leave me alone! I'm right off you, Harry Wharton, and you know why. Leave me alone!'

'You're off Wharton, you worm!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Do you know what you're talking about?'

'Wharton knows!' said Hazel bitterly.

Wharton's eyes gleamed at him.

'Nugent knows, too,' he said. 'You fellows may as well know. I let Hazel have that fiver that came from my uncle. He's got it into his head that it never came from my uncle at all, but that it was the banknote Mauleverer lost. He thinks I pinched it.'

'Great pip!'

Bob Cherry clenched his hands.

'Have you got me here to rag me?' asked Hazel, between his teeth. 'I'll yell for a prefect if you begin. If you want the matter shouted out all over Greyfriars, I don't care.'

'Is the fellow mad?' asked Johnny Bull, in wonder.

'He says that the number of the note I gave him was the same number that Quelchy posted on the board when Mauly's note was lost.'

'So it was!' said Hazel. 'It was Mauleverer's banknote.'

'How could it have been when it came in a letter from Wharton's uncle?' demanded Bob.

'It didn't! Wharton spun you fellows that yarn to account for having the banknote.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'He admitted himself that his uncle never referred to it in the letter, and the letter wasn't registered,' sneered Hazel. 'I'll bet you'll find that Colonel Wharton knows nothing about it, if you ask him.'

'You must be simply potty,' said Bob. 'Wharton's bound to mention it to his uncle, if only

to thank him for sending it.'

'I've done so already,' said Harry quietly.

'You've written to your uncle to thank him for that bank-note!' exclaimed Hazel, stupefied.

'Of course!'

'Gammon! I don't believe it! Colonel Wharton never sent you the note, and you know he did not. It was Mauly's note.'

Hazel spoke with savage earnestness.

'Why don't you knock the slanderer cur spinning across the quad, Wharton?' demanded Johnny Bull. 'He wouldn't call me a thief without having his features altered a bit!'

'The fool believes what he says,' answered Harry. 'My uncle is coming to Greyfriars soon, and I'm going to make Hazel repeat this in his presence.'

'I'd do that fast enough,' jeered Hazel. 'You don't dare to put it to such a test! You know that.'

'We'll leave that over till Colonel Wharton comes here,' said Harry quietly. 'That isn't what I have to speak about now. Quelchy called me into his study to show me a letter written by your sporting friend Spratt.'

Hazel turned white as chalk.

'A letter—from Spratt!' he muttered hoarsely. 'The—the beast! I paid him—every penny! He can't have written.'

'The letter was addressed to me.'

'To you!' shouted Hazel.

'Yes. I don't know the man, or anything about him except what I've heard from you. It looks as if you must have used my name in dealing with him. That's what I want to know. Did you?'

Hazel stared at him.

'Of course I didn't! If I'd used a false name I shouldn't have used yours. I couldn't have used a false name, anyhow, as I saw him at the Cross Keys—and the men there know my name well enough.' 'Oh!' exclaimed Wharton.

'I've seen a fat man in a gaudy waistcoat loafing about the Cross Keys,' said Johnny Bull. 'Is that the man?'

'That's the man,' answered Hazel sullenly.

The chums of the Remove were silent. It was obvious that Hazel could not have used a false name at the Cross Keys, where his own name was quite well known to Mr. Cobb, the landlord, if not to others. Elsewhere he might have done so; but in that particular delectable spot it was impossible.

'So you've had a letter from Spratt, have you?' went on Hazel venomously. 'You're mixed up with the man—after preaching at me for getting mixed up with him! And you'd like to put it on me; you'd like to make out that he wrote to me and not to you! You rotter! You won't land this on me, as you did the passing of a stolen banknote!'

'Come away, you men,' said Wharton. 'I shall damage that cur if I hear any more from him! Come on!'

The Famous Five left Hazel. Johnny Bull's suggestion, which had seemed to let light on the strange mystery, was evidently groundless; Hazel had not used Wharton's name; that point was clear; but it only made the mystery deeper and more inexplicable. And though Harry Wharton did not realise it, the faith his chums had in him was being put to a very severe test. But it stood the strain.

Up to Coker!

‘WHY not mind your own business?’

Potter of the Fifth made that suggestion.

Greene of the Fifth nodded.

To Greene it seemed a good idea.

Good ideas, brilliant suggestions, were wasted on Horace Coker. Horace Coker always knew better than other fellows; besides, minding his own business was not in his line.

‘If you can’t talk sense, George Potter, why talk at all?’ asked Coker. ‘I’ve told you already that I’m taking this matter up.’

‘It’s a matter for a prefect, not for a Fifth-Form man,’ Greene pointed out. ‘It’s nothing to do with the Fifth. You’re not a prefect.’

‘That’s the Head’s fault, or his misfortune, as the case may be,’ answered Coker. ‘I’ve told you before that I’m not satisfied with the way Dr. Locke runs this school. I could suggest a lot of improvements. I don’t say that every Fifth-Form man is suitable for a prefect’s job. You fellows, f’rinstance, would be no good.’

‘Oh!’

‘But I’m fairly cut out for it,’ explained Coker. ‘I’ve a short way with fags, and I know how to keep the scrubby little beasts in order. However, that’s neither here nor there. I’ve gone so far, as you know, as to suggest to the Head that I should be appointed prefect. He declined—and not at all civilly, I can tell you. That ends that! It would be beneath a fellow’s dignity to take the matter up again.’

Coker paused, but not for a reply. Coker had no use for replies. Coker’s conversation was generally a very one-sided affair.

‘I can’t leave the matter where it is,’ he said. ‘I saw a Remove kid sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys yesterday! I saw it with my own eyes.’

‘You could hardly see it with anybody else’s!’ remarked Potter, with a flippancy that was not in the least in accord with Coker’s serious mood.

Horace gave him a freezing stare.

‘If you’re trying to be funny, Potter, chuck it! Take my advice and don’t try to be funny. It doesn’t suit you. I saw that foreign kid Da Costa sneaking into the back way of a pub, as I’ve said. If I were a prefect I should report him to the Head. Not being a prefect, I can’t very well do it. The fellows would misunderstand! They would make out that I was sneaking—like some snivelling little fag in the Second Form.’

Coker shook his head sorrowfully. He was not accustomed to being misunderstood. But he did not want to be misunderstood to that extent.

‘The question is—what am I going to do in the matter?’ added Coker thoughtfully.

Potter did not repeat his bright suggestion that Coker should mind his own business. He realised that it would be futile. Coker couldn’t do such a thing. Many things Coker could do, but not that.

‘I’m bound, in the circumstances, to deal with the matter personally,’ said Coker.

‘Thrashing the dingy little beast may do him good. It would give him a lesson, anyhow. What?’

Three Remove fellows looked up as Coker strode into Study No. 1. Wharton, Nugent, and Da Costa were all at prep there.

Wharton waved an impatient hand at the Fifth-Form man.

‘Cut off, Coker! No time for fags now! Prep!’

Coker, unheeding, closed the study door, and stood with his back to it. The Removites rose to their feet. What Coker wanted they did not know; but guessed that he was, as usual, looking for trouble. Nugent picked up the inkpot, and Wharton selected a stout ruler.

‘I’ve not come here for you kids,’ said Coker, with unexpected mildness. ‘It’s Da Costa I

want to see.'

'Yess,' said the Eurasian, in surprise.

'Yes, you, you young scoundrel!'

'What?'

'You little beast!'

'Wha-a-at?'

'I'm going to thrash you!' explained Coker. 'You're setting out to get yourself sacked, and to disgrace the school you ought never to have been let into. I'm going to stop you! See? You've pulled the wool over the eyes of your Form-master and fooled the prefects! But I'm on to you, my boy! I'm going to give you a lesson! That's what I'm here for, you little sneaking, pub-haunting sweep!'

Fed-Up!

ARRHUR DA COSTA stared at Coker. The colour wavered in his olive face. The plotting Eurasian had too much to keep secret for Coker's exordium to fail to alarm him.

Wharton and Nugent looked at Coker and looked at Da Costa. Coker had astonished the natives, as it were.

'Did you dream this, Coker?' asked the captain of the Remove at last.

'Do you think I can't believe my own eyes?' roared Coker. 'I saw Da Costa yesterday afternoon sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys!'

'Rubbish!'

'I saw him, I tell you, when I was going down to Friardale with Potter and Greene!' roared Coker.

'Utter rot,' said Harry. 'You saw somebody and took him for Da Costa, perhaps.'

'Is there any other fellow here like that yellow-skinned little toad?' jeered Coker.

Wharton looked at Da Costa. Never once had he thought of suspecting the Eurasian of anything of the kind. But Coker's positive statement rather staggered him. There was little to be said for Coker's intellect, but nothing was the matter with his eyesight. And the olive-skinned, dark-haired Eurasian was not likely to be mistaken for any other fellow—there was no fellow whom he in the least resembled; and it followed that no other fellow was likely to be mistaken for him.

Da Costa had quite recovered his coolness now. He smiled.

'It is not true,' he said.

'It's some mistake,' said Harry decidedly. 'I dare say Da Costa was here at the time you thought you saw him, Coker. What time was it?'

'After I came here after Bunter—about half an hour afterwards,' said Coker.

Wharton started a little. He remembered that it was a long time after that that Da Costa had returned.

'Well, Da Costa was out of gates at that time, I think,' he said. 'Still, I'm sure he never went pub-haunting. You can take my word for it that you've made a mistake, Coker. Now travel.'

'I haven't made a mistake!'

'Well, anyhow, travel! We've got our prep to do! What the thump does it matter to you, anyhow?' demanded Wharton. 'You're not a prefect.'

'It's up to me,' explained Coker. 'I'm going to thrash the young rascal as a warning.'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'You've come here to thrash a Remove man!'

'Yes.'

'I fancy you'll have to thrash all the Remove then. Why not walk off while the walking's

good?’

‘Are you kids backing up that dingy little beast in his dirty tricks?’ roared Coker.

‘Rats! Get out!’

‘I dare say you’re all much of a muchness in this study!’ hooted Coker. ‘That may be it! A set of precious young sweeps!’

‘Are you going?’



‘Let a chap have a kick at the beast,’ yelled Billy Bunter

‘I’ve come here to thrash that disgraceful young scoundrel!’ bawled Coker. ‘You chip in, and I’ll thrash you, too.’

Harry Wharton took a business-like grip on the ruler.

‘Get out!’ he said.

A fat voice squeaked in the Remove passage.

‘I say, you fellows! Fifth-Form cad! I say, Coker’s come up here again!’

Evidently Coker’s powerful voice had been heard beyond the confines of Study No. 1.

There was a shout in the Remove passage, and the sound of many doors opening. The alarm was given.

Peter Todd opened the door of No. 1 and looked in.

‘Coker here! Bunter says—— Oh, here he is!’

‘He’s come here to thrash the Remove!’ grinned Frank Nugent. ‘He thinks he didn’t get enough when he came yesterday!’

‘Roll up, Remove!’

‘Hurrah!’

Ragging Coker was a welcome relief from prep. Almost every man in the Remove rolled up to lend a hand. Once more it was borne in upon the powerful brain of Horace James Coker that he had bitten off more than he could masticate. Once more he travelled down the Remove staircase at express speed, assisted in his descent by more kicks and punches than he could possibly have counted.

‘I say, you fellows, lemme gerrat him!’ yelled Billy Bunter.

‘Let a chap have a kick at the beast! He had my pie! Lemme gerrat him!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Give him socks!’

‘The sockfulness is terrific!’

‘Good-bye, Coker!’

Potter and Greene, in their study in the Fifth-Form passage, looked up with smiling faces when Coker came home. He came home in one piece; but he felt as if he was in many pieces. He collapsed into a chair and gasped.

And Potter and Greene, with a great effort, controlled their emotions.

A Shock for Wharton!

‘HARRY!’

Frank Nugent started to his feet.

Wharton came into the study with a letter in his hand.

There was a dazed expression on his face—the expression of a fellow still bewildered from a shock.

‘Harry! For goodness’ sake, what’s the matter?’

Wharton looked at him.

‘I don’t know!’ he said huskily. ‘I begin to think that I’m going potty, or that the whole world’s gone potty. I can’t make things out now, and I’d better give up trying.’

‘But what—’

Wharton threw the letter on the table.

‘First there was the letter from the man Spratt! I’ve been before the Head about that twice. Now there comes this letter.’

‘That letter—’

‘From my uncle.’

‘What can there be to upset you in a letter from Colonel Wharton?’ exclaimed Nugent, in wonder.

‘Read it!’

Frank picked up the letter from the table. He began to read it in sheer wonder; but as he proceeded something like alarm came into his face.

‘Dear Harry,—Thank you for your letter, I am glad to hear that you are anxious to see me at Greyfriars, and you may depend upon it that I shall come as soon as I can. But I do not understand your reference to a tip in my last letter. If you are in need at any time, my boy, you are aware that you have only to tell your uncle so. But there was no enclosure in my last letter, and I certainly should not be likely to post a banknote in an unregistered letter. I really do not know what you mean, my boy.

Your affectionate uncle,

JAMES WHARTON.’

Nugent laid down the letter, and stared at his chum. Wharton met his eyes with a look of hopeless bewilderment.

‘What can a fellow make of that, Frank?’

‘Goodness knows.’

‘All you fellows were with me when I opened my uncle’s letter and took the banknote out,’ said Harry. ‘You might have actually seen me take it out.’

‘Well, I didn’t see you take it out,’ said Frank. ‘But I know you did, of course, as you said so.’

‘What can it mean, Frank? I thought at the time it was odd for uncle to put a fiver in a letter without mentioning it. Now he says he never put one in at all. But it was there! I should think that I’d dreamed it, only all you fellows saw the fiver in my hand, and you know I gave it to Hazel. What can it mean?’

Nugent shook his head hopelessly.

The strange problem was beyond him.

‘I was going to ask uncle when he came the number of the note he sent me to convince that fool Hazel!’ said Wharton. ‘I can’t now, as he says he never sent me a note! Why, if

Hazel saw this letter, Frank, he would take it as proof that I never had a fiver from my uncle at all!’

‘It’s unaccountable.’

Wharton pressed his hand to his brow.

‘Uncle says he never sent it. He knows. He never did send it, Frank, but it was in the letter. Hazel says the number was the same as the number of Mauly’s lost fiver. Frank, put the two things together! Why, any fellow would think that I’d pinched Mauly’s fiver and made out that it came in my uncle’s letter to account for having it at all.’

Nugent looked at him.

In spite of himself, in spite of his strong faith in his chum, a chill of hideous doubt was in his heart.

But he drove it from him like an unclean thing. He could not, and would not, doubt.

There was a silence.

‘What can I do?’ asked Wharton hopelessly. ‘My uncle’s puzzled at my thanking him for a note he never sent. No wonder! He may think it’s a sneaking, roundabout way of hinting for a tip!’ Wharton flushed. ‘Goodness knows what he thinks! He never sent the fiver, but it was in the letter! What fiver was it, Frank? Hazel says it was the same number as the missing note! Frank, how did Mauly’s lost fiver get into my uncle’s letter—which I opened?’

‘You’re sure it hadn’t been opened when you got it?’

‘Quite! I slit the envelope with my penknife to open it.’

‘It seems like black magic!’ said Nugent in a halting voice. ‘For goodness’ sake, let’s keep it dark! Any fellow would think that—that——’

‘Do you think so, Frank?’

‘Never! But——’

‘I’m not going to talk about it, of course,’ said Harry. ‘I know what it looks like! Any fellow who didn’t know me jolly well would think me a thief on that evidence! Hazel does know me well, and he thinks so! But our own friends must know, Frank. I’m not going to keep any fellow’s friendship on false pretences! Any fellow who thinks me a thief, on any evidence whatever, is a fellow I shall never speak to again or touch with a barge-pole! Go and tell them to come here, Frank! They’ve got to know!’

Nugent nodded and left the study. He came back with Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and Colonel Wharton’s letter passed from hand to hand, and there was a silence of blank amazement.

What the Nabob Knew!

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH broke the silence.

There was a deeply thoughtful shade on the dusky face of the Nabob of Bhanipur, and his dark eyes were gleaming.

‘My esteemed friends,’ said the nabob, ‘the surprisefulness of this letter is terrific! But I have a few suggestive remarks to make.’

Wharton looked at him.

‘You don’t doubt me, Inky, old man?’

‘The doubtfulness would be terrifically preposterous!’ answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Moreover, the matter does not puzzle me so ridiculously as it does your honourable self.’

‘Mean to say you know what all this means?’ gasped Bob Cherry. ‘It’s knocked me as flat as a pancake!’

The Nabob of Bhanipur smiled.

‘If my esteemed friends will lend me their excellent ears I will proceed,’ he said gently. ‘It is preposterously clear that that fiver was Mauly’s fiver, supposed to be lost.’

‘I think that,’ said Harry.

‘The esteemed Mauleverer stated that he left the banknote in his study in a certain place. My own esteemed belief is that it was not lost; it was pinchfully stolen!’

‘Inky!’

‘It was pinched by the esteemed and ridiculous rotter who placed it in the colonel’s letter!’

‘But why,’ exclaimed Wharton— ‘why? If any fellow were beast enough to steal the fiver, why should he give it to me—for that’s what it amounts to?’

‘Can you answer that one, Inky?’ asked Bob Cherry with a faint grin.

‘I think so. The esteemed Wharton gave the fiver to the ridiculous Hazel, which the thief cannot possibly have foreseen or thoughtfully imagined. But for that, Wharton would have changed the banknote at the school shop.’

‘I was going to,’ said Harry. ‘You remember—’

‘Quitefully so. Had you done so, my ridiculous chum, Quelchy would have found the note at Mrs. Mible’s shop, and you would have been clearly proved to have stolen it, and expelled from Greyfriars.’

Wharton’s eyes flamed.

‘Inky! Hang you, do you dare to say—’

‘My esteemed idiot,’ said the nabob reproachfully, ‘if you will not allow a fellow to speak—’

‘Shut up, Wharton!’ said Frank. ‘Inky’s working out something in his mind. Give him a chance.’

‘The esteemed Wharton was saved by the circumstances that he helped the preposterous Hazel out of a hole with that fiver,’ said the nabob. ‘Owing to that ridiculous circumstance, the stolen note never was found inside the school at all, and it was supposed to be lost by the excellent and fatheaded Mauleverer. It was a plot, and it missed fire.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Wharton. ‘But who—who could have done such a thing? And how? I tell you my uncle’s letter was unopened when it came into my hands.’

‘And I tell you, my esteemed fat-headed chum, that it must have been opened, or the stolen note could not have been planted in it.’

‘But I should have noticed—’ stammered Wharton.

‘It was opened, whether you noticed it or not, because otherwise there is an impossibility!’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Possibly the letter was sneakfully purloined before you got it and opened by the steamfulness of the common or garden kettle.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Wharton.

Bob Cherry gave a roar.

‘Good old Inky! I knew he’d work it out in his old noddle! Inky’s got right on the wicket.’

‘But who—’ Wharton’s voice was husky, ‘who could be villain enough—dastard enough—reptile enough—to lay a snare like that? There’s nobody at Greyfriars—nobody outside a prison who would do such a thing.’

‘Da Costa!’ said the nabob.

‘What!’

‘When the note was being searched for,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, ‘I came to see the esteemed Da Costa in his study. I told him that if the banknote was found, and found in any of Wharton’s pockets or property, I should know who had placed it there, and would proclaim the same all over Greyfriars.’

‘You did!’ gasped Johnny Bull.

‘I did, my esteemed chum. But the trick was not so simple as all that,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘The esteemed Da Costa is deeper than I imagined. Had Wharton changed the

banknote at the school shop, and had Quelchy found it there, the esteemed Wharton's game would have been up. He would have been convicted beyond a doubt. By saving the ridiculous Hazel he saved himself.'

'Oh!' gasped Wharton.

'But why—why?' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'If Da Costa is really such an awful villain as you make out, Inky, why—'

'It's impossible!' said Wharton. 'Impossible! How could a fellow plan such awful villainy against a chap who's never harmed him? We rather ignore one another, but that's all. I've never done him any harm.'

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled slightly.

'You have forgotten the esteemed Bunter—'

'Bunter?' repeated Wharton blankly.

'The excellent and ridiculous Bunter, who bilked the honourable railway company by travelling under a seat the day Da Costa came to Greyfriars. He told us of the talk between the esteemed Eurasian and the honourable Mr. Gedge, the legal johnny.'

Wharton stared.

'One of Bunter's silly yarns,' he said. 'Something about a man in India having sent Da Costa to Greyfriars to get me disgraced and sacked. I thought it was all rot, of course.'

'Same here,' said Nugent.

'The samefulness of my esteemed case was not terrific. I have been keeping a widefully open eye on the Eurasian,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'There is no proof against him—he is too sharp for that! But Da Costa is at Greyfriars, my esteemed Wharton, to get you sacked, at the order of a man named Captain Marker, who lives in Lucknow.'

'But—but——' stammered Wharton.

'If that's true, the reptile ought to be booted out of the school without a minute's delay,' said Johnny Bull.

'It is true, but the esteemed reptile cannot be booted out of the school, because there's no proof,' said the nabob quietly; 'but he can be observefully watched, and caught out the first time he makes a ridiculous slip.'

Wharton passed his hand over his brow.

He had been, obviously, the victim of a treacherous plot on the part of some unscrupulous enemy. That much was clear.

'That enemy was in the school! Evidently he had not been in the school before Da Costa came. Bunter's fantastic story of an overheard conspiracy had a new significance now. There was a long silence in Study No. 1.

'There is no proof for the Head!' Hurree Singh broke the silence. 'No proof for the esteemed Quelchy! We must keep our own counsel! But there is proof for our esteemed selves.'

'And what is that?'

'The letter from the esteemed and disgusting Spratt.'

'That!' exclaimed Wharton. 'You think Da Costa had a hand in that?'

'I know!' answered the nabob quietly.

'But he's never heard of the man—can't know anything about the fellow!'

'Why did the excellent and ridiculous Coker come ragging in this honourable study last evening?'

Wharton started.

'Oh! I told you—he said that he had seen Da Costa sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys.'

'Where the esteemed Spratt lodges,' said the nabob. 'Coker was mistaken, as usual, in thinking that Da Costa was pub-haunting. He was not there to bet on horses like the

preposterous Hazel, or to play billiards like the fatheaded Bounder. But he had an object.' 'You think Coker really saw him?' exclaimed Nugent. 'Quitefully so! I think the ludicrous rascal was there to tip the esteemed Spratt to write that letter to Wharton. It was the next move in the game.' 'Oh, my hat!' Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned. 'Let us go down to play cricket for a little while, to get the taste of the esteemed reptile out of our absurd mouths,' he suggested. And the Famous Five went down to Little Side, and for the present they tried to dismiss the matter from their minds.

News for the Remove!

'I SAY, you fellows!' Skinner yawned. 'What's the latest, Bunter?' 'Heard about Wharton?' Harold Skinner was interested at once. 'What about him?' 'Well, if you haven't heard, perhaps I'd better not tell you,' said Billy Bunter cautiously. 'Wharton's a pal of mine, and I'm not going to spread anything about him, especially a yarn like this. Of course, I don't believe it myself. I'm sure that isn't why old Quelchy's down on him. As if Wharton would have had a letter from a bookie!' Skinner's eyes gleamed. 'Letter from a bookie—Wharton? My only hat!' 'Cough it up, Bunter,' said Snoop. Five or six fellows gathered round in the Rag. William George Bunter was the centre of interest now. 'Out with it, Bunter,' said Bolsover major. 'Mind, there's nothing in it,' said Bunter. 'Wharton's got his faults. Only yesterday he refused, quite uncivilly, to cash a postal-order for me. He made out a few days ago that I'd bagged a pie from a Fifth Form man's study. He's rather a beast. I must say that, though he's a pal of mine, and I like him.' 'What would you say if you didn't like him?' grinned Wibley. 'Ha, ha, ha!' 'But what's that about a letter from a bookie?' demanded Bolsover major. 'I thought the fellows knew,' said Bunter. 'I shouldn't have mentioned it otherwise. I'm not a fellow for tattling, as you know. Da Costa mentioned it to me, as something he had heard the fellows saying in the passage, I don't believe it—still, it looks rather suspicious. All you fellows must have noticed that Quelchy has a down on Wharton.' 'Yes, rather!' 'He bites him at sight, these days,' grinned Skinner. 'I've noticed that Wharton has been called into the Head's study more than once lately, too. Snapped a fellow's head off when a fellow asked him what was up! I jolly well knew there was something.' 'Well, of course, the Head would be waxy,' said Bunter. 'It's a bit thick, you know, a Greyfriars man getting letters from a racing tout.' 'Oh crumbs! Is that it?' exclaimed Snoop. 'Mind, I don't think it's true,' said Bunter. 'Wharton's a pal of mine, and I'm standing up for him. In fact, I shouldn't mention the thing at all, except to say it isn't true. Still, the beaks are down on him. They wouldn't be down on him for nothing, would they?'

‘Not likely!’ grinned Skinner,

‘Da Costa says he heard a fellow telling another fellow that Wharton had had a letter from a bookmaker, and Quelchy opened it,’ said Bunter. ‘I dare say Da Costa got it all wrong. Still, the man’s name is known—man named Spratt. Fat man who hangs about the Cross Keys. I’ve seen him.’

‘I’ve seen him, too,’ smiled Skinner. ‘I’ve got an idea that Hazel knows him, too. What about it, Hazel?’

Hazeldene, who was on the edge of the little group, walked away without replying. He did not want to discuss Mr. Joseph Spratt.

‘Just what I say,’ agreed Bunter. ‘Utter rot! Still, the beaks are down on Wharton. They must think there’s something in it. Fellows seem to be talking about it up and down the passages. Nothing in it, of course. Still, I must say it looks jolly suspicious.’

That evening there was not a fellow in the Remove who did not know about Mr. Spratt’s letter.

Harry Wharton could not help noticing that he received a good many curious glances in the Form; but he did not pay much heed.

The captain of the Remove had plenty of matters to occupy his mind just then.

He had been convinced by Hurree Singh’s elucidation of the mystery of the five-pound note. Yet incredulity still lingered. The nabob was right; he felt that the nabob must be right. Yet his mind wavered on the subject. He seemed unable to get it into his head that any fellow could play the part of a snake-in-the- grass.

Many times since that talk in the study he had observed Da Costa; but the olive-skinned junior from the East baffled his penetration. Looking at the fellow, Wharton simply could not believe that he was guilty of such black treachery.

And yet the nabob must be right. There was no other explanation of what had happened. One matter on which all the Co. had agreed was that the bank note given to Hazel was in reality Mauleverer’s lost banknote; and in consequence, that sum had to be returned to Mauleverer. Whether Hazel repaid the debt or not, Mauleverer had to be repaid.

That was a matter of some little difficulty, and gave the chums of the Remove food for thought.

Other matters were troubling the captain of the Remove at the present time. Several days had elapsed since Mr. Spratt’s letter had been opened by the Remove master.

Wharton’s direct denial on the subject perplexed both Mr. Quelch and the Head. The matter could not be dropped, yet it was difficult for the headmaster to decide how to proceed.

Several times the captain of the Remove had been questioned by his headmaster. He could only repeat the unvarying statement that he knew nothing of the man Spratt.

To mention Hurree Singh’s surmise that Da Costa had ‘squared’ the racing sharper to write that letter, to carry out a treacherous plot, was impossible.

There was absolutely no proof—not a vestige of proof.

When the captain of the Remove came down to the Rag after prep that evening, every eye in the room turned on him. He noticed it without heeding it. Skinner and Co. were grinning maliciously. Squiff came over to Wharton.

‘Something I’d better tell you, old bean,’ he said.

Wharton looked at him inquiringly.

‘You’d better know, I think, as you don’t seem to have heard,’ said Squiff. ‘Fellows are saying that you’ve had a letter from a man named Spratt, and that Quelchy’s seen it, and that’s why he’s down on you. Better knock it on the head before it spreads all over the school.’

Wharton started.

‘So that’s out, is it?’ he said quietly.

‘Nothing in it, is there?’ asked the junior, with a stare of surprise. ‘I took it for granted that there wasn’t, of course.’

‘Nothing at all,’ said Wharton, in a distinct voice heard by every fellow in the Rag. ‘I’ve never seen Spratt; but he wrote a letter addressed to me, and Quelchy stopped it. I think he was put up to it by a fellow who wanted to do me a bad turn. That’s all I can say about it.’

‘Great Caesar!’ ejaculated Squiff.

‘And who’s the fellow?’

‘I can’t give his name without proof. I’ve nothing more to say about it.’

Catching a Spratt!

‘THAT’S the rotter!’

Johnny Bull made that remark. It was Saturday afternoon, and the chums of the Remove were sauntering down to the village. Outside the Cross Keys a fat man in a gaudy waistcoat, with a bowler hat on one side of his greasy head, was loafing under the shade of a tree.

‘That’s Spratt!’ said Johnny Bull. ‘I’ve seen the rotter loafing about here before.’

The juniors looked at the man.

Mr. Joseph Spratt glanced at them carelessly. Evidently there was no member of the Famous Five that had any interest for the fat man.

Having given them that careless glance, Mr. Spratt gave them no further heed. He lighted a cigarette and blew out a little cloud of smoke.

The juniors walked on. There was a thoughtful look on the dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

‘What about collaring that fat brute and ducking him in the horse-trough?’ inquired Bob Cherry.

‘Good egg!’ said Johnny Bull. ‘It would mean a row; but it’s worth it. Let’s.’

‘My esteemed chums,’ murmured the nabob, ‘a wheezy idea has occurred to me.’

‘Give it a name,’ said Wharton, with a smile.

‘The esteemed and disgusting Spratt wrote a letter to Wharton.’

But Wharton does not know him, and he does not know Wharton! You saw how he looked at us; you could see that he did not recognise any of us.’

‘Well?’ asked Nugent.

‘The esteemed Spratt is a newcomer in this honourable neighbourhood,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘He has come here for the Wapshot races, like other preposterous sharpers and touts. He was put up to writing that execrable letter to fall into Quelchy’s esteemed hands. But he doesn’t know the absurd Wharton by sight.’

‘I don’t see how he could,’ answered Harry. ‘Da Costa gave him my name, I suppose; but he could never have pointed me out to him. He would not dare to be seen with the man out of doors.’

‘Exactly.’

‘Well, what are you getting at, Inky?’ asked Bob.

‘My excellent chums, suppose the rascally Spratt could be made to admit that he does not know Wharton by sight? Would not that knock his ludicrous letter on the head?’

‘Of course! But catch him admitting it!’ said Bob. ‘A man who would write a thing like that for a tip, wouldn’t mind telling a few lies about it.’

‘But he might be made to admit the esteemed fact.’

‘How?’ asked Wharton.

‘Suppose we ask him to walk to the school with us—’

‘My hat! He wouldn’t!’

‘We could refusefully decline to take no for an answer!’ suggested the nabob, with a dusky grin. ‘There are five of us, and that fat and boozy Spratt is not an athlete.’

‘Oh, scissors!’ ejaculated Bob Cherry.

‘Suppose we walked him to the school, to the honourable presence of the absurd headmaster, and demanded that he should point out Wharton!’

Wharton gave a gasp.

‘Oh, my hat! That would jolly well prove that his letter was all bunkum and that I’ve never had anything to do with him. But—’

Bob Cherry’s eyes danced.

‘It’s a ripping wheeze! You’re worth your weight in currency notes, Inky. It’s a go!’

‘Hold on!’ said Wharton. ‘It’s a good idea, if we can work it. But if we collar that brute where he’s loafing now, it means getting mixed up in a shindy with the crew in the pub.’

‘There are more ways of slayfully terminating the career of an esteemed cat than by chokefully suffocating it with cream,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh cheerfully. ‘Listen to the words of wisdom, my esteemed chums.’

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh proceeded to explain, and the chums of the Remove listened to the words of wisdom.

There was a general chortle.

‘It will work like a charm!’ said Bob Cherry. ‘Leave it to me! You fellows cut round by the fields and get between the Cross Keys and the school all ready to chip in.’

‘What-ho!’

Bob Cherry was left sitting on a fence while his comrades departed. Bob waited there, with a grinning face, for ten minutes, to give the Co. plenty of time to make a detour and get back to the other side of the Cross Keys. Then he prepared for business.

Mr. Spratt, loafing on the bench under the tree in front of the inn, smoked his cigarette in peace and contentment. His restful ease was interrupted by a schoolboy who came along from the village. That schoolboy stopped directly in front of Mr. Spratt.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo!’ he said.

‘Allo!’ said Mr. Spratt, staring at him. ‘What may you happen to want, young shaver?’

‘Look at this!’ said Bob Cherry.

He came closer to Mr. Spratt and held out his hand. Mr. Spratt stared at the hand and what it contained. It was a large and juicy jam-tart, recently purchased at Uncle Clegg’s shop in Friardale.

‘That’s for you!’ said Bob.

‘Eh?’

Joseph Spratt blinked at the junior. To say that he was astonished would be to put it mildly.

‘I’ve come here to give this tart to you, Mr. Spratt,’ said Bob. ‘You are Mr. Spratt, aren’t you?’

‘Yes, I am, but if you’re a blooming young lunatic, you go back to your asylum,’ answered Mr. Spratt gruffly. ‘Don’t you come playing your larks about ’ere, young feller-me-lad! Cut orf!’

Smack!

Bob Cherry gave Mr. Spratt the tart. He gave it to him on his crimson fat nose with a sudden smack.

Mr. Spratt started to his feet, gurgling and gasping wildly, Jam-tart was plastered all over his fat face.

‘Groooogh! Oooch! Gug-gug-gug——’

Bob Cherry made a hurried snatch at Mr. Spratt's rakish bowler. He grabbed the hat from the greasy head and fled.



Bob Cherry gave Mr. Spratt the jam tart

Hat in hand, Bob Cherry raced up the lane towards Greyfriars. Mr. Spratt stood gurgling, almost petrified with amazement for some moments. Then, with a roar of wrath, he rushed in pursuit of the schoolboy.

'Grooogh! You young villain!' he roared. 'Stop! Give me that 'at!' You 'ear me? Bring back that 'at!'

Bob Cherry turned and waved the hat at the fat man. His other hand he placed to his nose, with the fingers extended—a gesture of mockery that was really unworthy of a Remove man of Greyfriars, but which had an exasperating effect on Mr. Spratt.

'You young 'ound!' gasped Mr. Spratt. 'Why, I'll smash you! I'll—I'll—I'll——' Without wasting more breath in words, the fat man chased after Bob Cherry. Bob waved the hat triumphantly until the fat man was quite close; then he ran up the lane.

Mr. Spratt laboured after him, bursting with fury.

Bob Cherry could have run the fat man off his legs quite easily had he so desired. But he did not so desire. He ran just fast enough to keep a few yards ahead of his pursuer, and every now and then slacked down to let Mr. Spratt come quite close. Every moment Mr. Spratt expected his grasp to close on the collar of the cheeky schoolboy who had jammed his face and annexed his hat. But that grasp never quite closed.

A hundred yards from the Cross Keys, hidden by the thick trees bordering the lane from that building, Bob halted. Mr. Spratt, with a face thick with jam and crumbs, and wild with rage, rushed right on him.

'Now I've got yer!' he panted.

And he grasped Bob Cherry at last. At the same moment four active figures leaped from the hedge and grasped Mr. Spratt.

Bump!

Joseph Spratt went down in the road with a concussion that shook every ounce of breath from his fat body. In a dazed state Mr. Spratt sprawled there and blinked up dizzily at the Famous Five.

Under Escort!

'WALK!'

Harry Wharton rapped out the order.

Five pairs of hands assisted Joseph Spratt to his feet—not gently. Five pairs of hands grasped him so hard that he had no chance to resist even had he had the breath left for a struggle.

Mr. Spratt gasped wildly.

‘Leggo! Let a man go! What’s this ’ere game?’

‘Walk!’ grinned Bob Cherry.

‘Look ’ere, you lark with me and I’ll come up to your school and complain to your ’eadmaster—I will that!’ roared Mr. Spratt.

‘That’s what we want!’ grinned Bob. ‘We want you to take a little walk with us this nice afternoon, Mr. Spratt.’

‘You young rip—’

‘Hold him, Wharton!’ said Johnny Bull, addressing Bob Cherry. ‘You bet!’ answered Bob, tightening his grasp on Mr. Spratt’s dingy neckcloth.

Mr. Spratt’s eyes glinted. The name evidently struck him and he stared at Bob for a moment, twisting his head round to look at him. The juniors were playing up to the ‘wheezy idea’ that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had so sagely propounded. That Spratt did not know Wharton by sight was absolutely clear now, for Johnny Bull’s addressing Bob by that name obviously gave him the impression that the name belonged to Bob.

‘Bring him along!’ said Harry. ‘Will you walk, Mr. Spratt? Or will you be kicked along the lane?’

‘I ain’t going—yarrooh!’ roared Mr. Spratt, as Harry Wharton planted a hefty kick on his fat person.

‘Will you walk now?’

‘Elp!’ roared Mr. Spratt.

‘The helpfulness will not be terrific, my esteemed rascally Spratt,’ chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘The excellent and loathsome rotters at the Cross Keys cannot hear you, my absurd friend. Come onfully.’

‘This ’ere is a plant!’ gasped Mr. Spratt. He realised—rather late—that he had been deluded into chasing Bob Cherry up the lane, in order to fall into this ambush far from aid. ‘Exactfully!’ said Hurree Singh. ‘Get an esteemed move on.’

‘I won’t—yoop!’ howled the unfortunate Spratt, as a couple of boots fairly rang on him. Mr. Spratt had said that he would not, but he decided that he would. There really was no arguing with the drastic methods employed by the Famous Five.

As he stumbled and puffed and blew on his way to Greyfriars, Mr. Spratt tried to imagine what was the meaning of this extraordinary prank. But he could not fathom it. He could only attribute it to a ‘lark’, the outcome of the schoolboys’ exuberant spirits. The juniors turned into the road again quite near the school; but Mr. Spratt could not believe that they were actually taking him to Greyfriars until he was jerked into the ancient gateway of that scholastic establishment.

‘You young idjits! Whatcher bringing me ’ere for?’ he gasped. ‘You’re such a nice man,’ explained Bob Cherry, ‘we want our headmaster to make your acquaintance.’

‘You young lunatic! If I see your ’eadmaster, I’ll see that he wallops the lot of you for this ’ere!’

‘Well, you’re going to see him!’ grinned Bob. ‘Come on!’ There was a shout in the quadrangle when Mr. Spratt was sighted there. Fellows swarmed up on all sides.

One fellow—Hazeldene of the Remove—turned quite white at the sight of Joseph Spratt. He cut off out of sight as fast as he could. Another fellow, looking from the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove, stared in blank amazement at the scene, his olive face startled, his dark eyes dilated. Arthur Da Costa stood petrified at the study window.

‘Heave ahead, my hearties!’ chuckled Bob Cherry; and the fat and perspiring and enraged Mr. Spratt was hustled on to the School House.

By that time half Greyfriars had gathered round. Wingate of the Sixth came striding up, with a frowning brow.

‘What does this mean?’ he shouted. ‘How dare you bring this man here? What do you mean?’

‘We’ve brought him to see the Head,’ answered Bob.

‘What?’ gasped Wingate.

‘Well, this is the limit!’ said Coker of the Fifth to Potter and Greene. ‘This is the outside edge!’

‘You young rascals!’ thundered Wingate. ‘How dare you! Let the man go at once! Who is he! What—what—’

‘Call Mr. Quelch!’ said Bob. ‘Mr. Quelch will see that the Head sees him! He’s got to see him!’

‘Let a man go!’ roared Mr. Spratt. ‘I’ll ’ave the law on yer! This ’ere is kidnapping this ’ere is! Let a cove go!’

Mr. Quelch, with thunder on his brow, came striding out. There was a hush on the excited crowd at once. Never had the master of the Remove looked so furious.

‘What does this mean? What is the cause of this riot?’ thundered the Remove master.

‘Who is this man?’

‘Esteemed sahib—’

‘Explain this at once, Wharton!’ thundered the Remove master.

Wharton gave no sign. Bob Cherry answered promptly. The little deception was being carefully kept for the benefit of Mr. Spratt.

‘This is the man Spratt, sir!’ said Bob.

‘Spratt! Spratt!’ repeated Mr. Quelch.

‘That man who wrote that letter to Wharton, sir!’ said Nugent. ‘We’ve made him come here to own up that it was a trick, sir!’

‘Bless my soul! If that is your object—But, goodness gracious! Spratt, if Spratt is your name, have you anything to say to me?’

‘I’ve got this ’ere to say!’ roared Mr. Spratt. ‘I’ll ’ave the law on you! Kidnapping a bloke when he’s smoking peaceful outside a pub! I’ll ’ave the law on you, old covey!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Silence!’ almost roared the Remove master. ‘Silence at once! This riot—this—this unprecedented uproar— Silence!’

‘Mr. Quelch,’ said Johnny Bull steadily, ‘that man wrote a letter to Wharton, making out that he knew him—making out that Wharton knew the rotter! It was all lies, and we can prove it! He doesn’t know Wharton by sight!’

‘What? What?’

‘Tell him to pick Out Wharton, sir,’ said Nugent. ‘If he knows him, as he said in the letter, he can pick him out. Tell him to do it.’

‘Bless my soul!’ gasped Mr. Quelch.

But the thunder had left the Remove master’s brow. Undoubtedly Mr. Quelch was anxious to have the truth of that matter established, even by such extraordinary methods as the Removites had employed.

‘Spratt—Mr. Spratt—if you are the man who wrote a letter to Wharton—I presume you are—you must be acquainted with the boy, unless your letter was a dastardly trick. I command you, immediately, to point out the boy named Wharton among all these boys.’

‘Course I can!’ hooted Mr. Spratt. ‘There he is, ’ang him!’

And Mr. Spratt’s stubby, unclean forefinger pointed at Bob Cherry of the Remove.

Truth Triumphs!

HARRY WHARTON and Co. had released Mr. Spratt. They stood round him in front of the House steps, on the lowest of which Mr. Quelch was standing. Round them was a swarm of fellows—a mob of excited juniors, with a good many of the Fifth and the Sixth. Mr. Spratt, of course, had no doubts. He knew none of the juniors by sight—indeed, could not have said positively that they were Greyfriars fellows at all, till they marched him into the school. Bob had been addressed by the name of Wharton by the other fellows in the rascal's hearing. Naturally it had never occurred to him that the juniors were 'stuffing' him to show up his roguery. Had he known Wharton, as his letter claimed, he could not have been 'stuffed'. He demonstrated now, with the utmost clearness, that he did not know him.

Mr. Quelch gazed at the rogue almost in stupefaction. Both he and the Head had pondered deeply on the matter, unable to credit the junior's denial of all knowledge of the man who had written to him in such a strain, yet unable to decide that Wharton was guilty of hypocrisy and deception. To what decision the two masters would ultimately have come can hardly be said, but for the utter exposure of Mr. Spratt's falsehood. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's 'wheezy idea' had turned up trumps.

There was a rustle behind Mr. Quelch, and a murmur ran through the excited swarm of Greyfriars men.

'The Head!'

'What does this extraordinary scene mean, Mr. Quelch?' asked Dr. Locke quietly.

'These juniors, sir, have brought this man here—the man Spratt; a most extraordinary proceeding

on their part; but it would appear, sir, that the man is a rogue—a rogue of the most amazing effrontery——'

'Oh, dror it mild, guv'nor!' interjected Mr. Spratt. 'I never wanted to come 'ere, did I? I was 'ustled 'ere by these young rips! I could 'ave the law on you for this 'ere, and so I tell you!'

'This man, sir,' resumed Mr. Quelch, unheeding the rascal, 'wrote the letter I handed to you, sir, addressed to Wharton, and opened by me. You will recall, sir, that he claimed to know Wharton well, to have met him in an accustomed place, to have had dealings with him. Now it transpires that he does not even know Wharton by sight.'

'Is it possible?' exclaimed the Head.

'It is absolutely certain.'

'Come off, gov'nor!' said Mr. Spratt. 'Ain't I a-pointing out the covey at this blessed minute?'

'Fellow, the boy you indicate is not Wharton!'

Mr. Spratt started.

'Oh, my eye!' he stuttered. 'Them other blokes called him Wharton.'

'Just pulling your leg, old bean,' grinned Bob Cherry. 'If you knew Wharton, you wouldn't fancy I was Wharton.'

'Bless my soul!' ejaculated the Head. 'Spratt—if you are Spratt—point out Wharton at once, if you know him.'

'Oh, crimes!' said Mr. Spratt.

He had not the faintest idea which of the juniors was Wharton. He blinked uneasily round him, and cast a longing glance towards the distant gates.

'Wretch!' said the Head, in a deep voice. 'You do not even know by sight the junior boy with whom you claimed to be closely acquainted.'

'My eye!' said Mr. Spratt. 'This 'ere is a fair do, this is! Look 'ere, you tell these young coveys to let a man go! I been made to come 'ere, and you ain't a blooming magistrate to ask a man questions, that I know of. I ain't going to be jawed by a blinking schoolmaster!'

I'll 'ave the law of you, and so I tell you!'

The Head's look of majestic scorn almost withered Mr. Spratt.

'Rascal!' said the Head. 'Your infamous letter, addressed to an honourable lad, with whom you are totally unacquainted, amounts to a slander. I shall take legal advice on the subject, and ascertain whether you can be prosecuted for having written that letter. You shall receive the most rigorous punishment that the law provides!'

Mr. Spratt turned quite sickly to the view. Mr. Spratt and the law were on the very worst of terms. Whether that letter was actionable Mr. Spratt hardly knew, but he did not want to put the matter to the test. Very much did he not want to do so.

'Guv'nor,' he whined, 'it was only a joke—only a little joke, s'elp me! I never meant any 'arm. Look 'ere, you let a bloke go! I got an appointment at Wapshot this arternoon.'

'Take the man away,' said the Head.

He turned back into the House, accompanied by Mr. Quelch. The Greyfriars fellows closed in on Mr. Spratt rather like the waves of the sea on a wreck.

The Head had said: 'Take him away.' The Head had not specified who was to take him away, or in what manner he was to be taken. But the Greyfriars fellows decided for themselves. That letter of Mr. Spratt's was the talk of the school now—all the fellows had heard of it, and they now knew, beyond doubt, that it had been written by this rascal, for some unknown reason, to blacken a Greyfriars junior's character. And they testified unto Mr. Spratt what they thought of such a thing.

A shouting crowd of fellows surged towards the gates. Somewhere in the midst of them was Mr. Spratt.

A gasping voice was faintly heard in wild protest. Mr. Spratt's protests were not heeded. Bumped and thumped and hustled and bustled, rolled and dragged and shoved and jerked, Mr. Spratt made his way towards the school gates—breathless, dizzy, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

'Chuck him out!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bump!

Mr. Spratt landed outside the gates.

He sprawled there, gasping and gurgling, a sorry sight. If Mr. Spratt had been under a lawn-mower he would probably have looked a good deal like he looked now. He sat up, blinking and gasping.

'Ow, ow, wow!' spluttered Mr. Spratt. 'Ow! Yow! Grooogh!'

'Kick him back to Friardale!' yelled Bob Cherry.

'Hurrah!'

'Ow! Wow! 'Elp!' spluttered Mr. Spratt; and he staggered to his feet and ran. Terror lent him wings as a novelist would say, and Mr. Spratt, wrecked as he was, fairly flew up the road and disappeared.

'That's that!' remarked Harry Wharton, as the chums of the Remove walked back cheerily to the House.

'The thatfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

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Hazeldene met Harry Wharton and Nugent as they came away from Bob Cherry's study after tea.

'I've got it!' he muttered. 'Here.'

He shoved an envelope into Wharton's hand.

'What—'

'It's what I owed you. I said I'd square—that's it!' And with that Hazel turned and walked

quickly away and went into his own study.

Wharton, in astonishment, opened the envelope. Five pound-notes were inside it. Frank looked at them and whistled.

'Fancy Hazel settling!' he said, with a grin.

'It's because—' Wharton frowned and broke off. 'Anyhow, he's settled, the worm! This is Mauly's, Franky, and he's going to have it.'

'Yes, rather.'

Harry Wharton tapped at Study No. 12, and went in. Lord Mauleverer was taking a rest on his study sofa after tea. He looked round rather apprehensively—perhaps in dread of seeing Billy Bunter. But he smiled cheerily at the sight of the captain of the Remove.

'Trickle in, old bean,' he said affably. 'Take a pew.'

'I've dropped in to settle, Mauly.'

'Eh?'

'I owe you five pounds.'

'Do you?'

'Yes, and here it is.'

Mauleverer blinked at the captain of the Remove in astonishment. 'But you don't owe me anythin', old bean,' he protested. 'I'm sure I should remember it if I'd lent you a fiver. Quite sure.'

'Take my word for it, old fellow,' said Wharton, laughing. 'It's your lost fiver, Mauly. I'll explain if you insist on it, but I'd rather not.'

'Oh, gad!' said Mauleverer. 'If you give me your word it's mine, of course I—'

'I do.'

'That does it, then. All serene—no need to explain,' said Mauleverer placidly.

And so the matter was settled.

In the Rag that evening Harry Wharton looked curiously at the olive face of Arthur Da Costa. That inscrutable face expressed nothing. What the Eurasian thought of his defeat, whether he was thinking of it at all, could not be read in his impassive features. Once more the snake-in-the-grass had struck, and once more he had missed, and there were keen eyes on the watch for him if he should venture to strike again.

Too Much for Bunter!

'HARRY, old chap——'

'No!'

'Eh?'

'No.'

'Why, you beast, I haven't asked you yet!' exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly.

Harry Wharton laughed.

'No, all the same,' he answered. 'Now roll away, Bunter— we're going to play cricket, you know.'

'Oh, really, Wharton——'

'Buzz off, you fat fly!' said Bob Cherry cheerily. 'Where's my bat? Hand me my bat, Franky—I want to prod Bunter.'

'Oh, don't be an ass, you know,' said Billy Bunter peevishly. 'I say, Harry, old fellow, I was going to ask you——'

'No!'

'The answer is in the esteemed negative!' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There was a chuckle from the Remove cricketers gathered on Little Side.

Stumps were pitched for a Form match—the Remove were playing the Fourth that

afternoon. Harry Wharton & Co. were ready—the heroes of the Remove were always on time on such an occasion. The Fourth were not quite ready. Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Fourth, was a leisurely youth, never in a hurry; and he did not mind in the least keeping the other side waiting.

‘I say, Harry, old man—’

‘Hook it, Bunter!’

‘Will you—’

‘No!’

‘Lend me——’

‘No!’

‘Your bike?’ Bunter got it out at last.

‘No!’

‘Now, look here, Wharton, you’re not using your bike this afternoon,’ argued Bunter.

‘Now, are you?’

‘I don’t use a bike, as a rule, in playing cricket,’ answered the captain of the Remove gravely. ‘A bat is more usual.’

‘Oh, don’t be a funny ass, you know! If you’re not using your bike, why can’t you lend it to me?’

‘Fathead! Why can’t you use your own?’

‘Oh, really, Wharton! You know my bike’s got five or six punctures, and the pedals twisted, and the chain snapped, and one wheel skewed. It’s been like it all this term,’ said Bunter sorrowfully. ‘I’ve asked all you chaps, one after another, to put it right for me. You can’t say I haven’t.’

‘Dear man!’ said Bob Cherry. ‘Now, where will you have the end of this bat, Bunter? Fore or aft?’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Keep that bat away, you beast! I say, Harry, old fellow, don’t be selfish, you know,’ urged Bunter. ‘Why can’t you lend me your bike?’

‘You see, I don’t want to have five or six punctures, and the pedals twisted, and the chain snapped, and one wheel skewed!’ explained Wharton. ‘You may like a jigger in that state, old fat man, but I should hate it. So if you don’t mind, let my bike alone!’

‘But I do mind!’ urged Bunter.

‘Let it alone, all the same!’

‘Look here, old chap——’

‘Buzz off!’

‘Look here, you beast—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘You fellows ready?’ drawled Cecil Reginald Temple. ‘I hope you’re not goin’ to keep us waitin’.’

‘Ready and waiting,’ answered Harry Wharton. ‘Now, roll away, Bunter—don’t bother!’

‘But, I say—’

‘Prod him, Bob!’

‘Yaroooooh!’ roared Bunter, as Bob Cherry gave him a playful poke with the business end of the willow. ‘Ow!’

Bunter jumped back.

Then there was another roar. Bunter did not see very clearly before him, hence the big spectacles that adorned his fat little nose. Even with the aid of those big spectacles Bunter could not see behind him. That was only to be expected. So when he jumped back from Bob Cherry’s lunging bat, Bunter really was not to blame for landing on the foot of one of the Remove cricketers—who happened to be Arthur Da Costa.

It was not Bunter's fault. It was Arthur Da Costa's misfortune. But it was not a light matter. Bunter's weight was no joke, and when he came down suddenly on a fellow's foot, every ounce told. Bunter's weight could hardly be computed in ounces. According to the Remove fellows, it had to be computed in tons; and even then it was necessary to go into high figures.

That, of course, was an exaggeration. But the roar of anguish from Da Costa showed that William George Bunter was not, at all events, a lightweight.

'Oh! Ow! Oh!'

It was Arthur Da Costa's turn to jump. He jumped on one foot, clasping the other with both hands.

'You fat duffer!' roared Bob Cherry.

'I say, you fellows, I trod on something——'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bunter blinked round to see what he had trodden on. The next moment his head was in chancery, and Arthur Da Costa was punching his fat little nose with terrific energy.

'Ow! Yarooogh! Help!' roared Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, dragimoff! He's gone potty! Yarooogh! Help!'

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Wharton. 'Stop him!'

The Eurasian was in a blaze of passionate temper, and certainly he would have hurt Bunter had he not been stopped. But three or four of the Removites grasped him and jerked him away from the Owl of the Remove.

'Nuff's as good as a feast!' said Johnny Bull.

'Let me go!' yelled Da Costa. 'I—I will smash him! I'll——' Bob Cherry caught Bunter by a fat arm and twirled him away from the Eurasian.

'Hook it, you fat duffer!' he said.

'Ow! Wow! Yow——'

'Hook it, ass! Do you want any more, you chump?'

Apparently Billy Bunter did not want any more. He gave one blink at the furious face of the Eurasian and hooked it promptly. Da Costa was struggling with the fellows who held him back.

'Chuck it, Da Costa,' said Harry Wharton sharply. 'It was an accident. Don't play the goat!'

Da Costa gave him a fierce look, but he calmed himself with an effort. Cecil Reginald Temple was staring at him with a curling lip; there was derision in the faces of many of the juniors. Outbreaks of passionate temper like this were not at all the thing at Greyfriars.

'The fat fool hurt my foot!' muttered Da Costa sullenly.

'Well, feet have been trodden on before without a volcanic eruption following,' remarked Vernon-Smith. 'We don't like wild cats here, Da Costa.'

The Eurasian's eyes gleamed at the Bounder, and he opened his lips for an angry retort. Harry Wharton interposed hastily.

'That's enough—chuck it! We're here to play cricket, not to rag! Chuck It, I tell you!'

Da Costa turned sulkily away, his olive face dark and sullen.

'Now, then, Temple——'

Choice of innings fell to the captain of the Remove. He elected to bat first, and called to the Eurasian.

'Da Costa! You open with Bob!'

'Yess.'

The sullen scowl vanished from Da Costa's face. Temple and his men lounged into the field, and Bob Cherry and Arthur Da Costa went to the wickets. Harry Wharton's glance followed the Eurasian curiously. The olive face was bright and cheery; every movement

of the figure active and alert; he looked every inch a cricketer. And the captain of the Remove, watching him, wondered—as many times he had wondered when he watched the Eurasian on the cricket-field. Knowing what he did of the fellow, his feeling towards him was one of loathing—the feeling he might have had for a snake in the grass. But when he was playing the summer game, Da Costa seemed a totally different fellow; and on the cricket ground it came oddly into Wharton's mind that he could have liked him, and made a friend of him.

Bunter has a Good Time!

BILLY BUNTER—from a secure distance—watched the Remove cricketers. He was not interested in the game—he watched them only till the match had fairly started. Then he rolled away, and his footsteps took him in the direction of the bike-shed. Harry Wharton and Co., being occupied with cricket, naturally had no eyes for Bunter, and Bunter's next proceedings required that no eyes should be upon him.

Bunter had decided on a bike spin that afternoon. He was not specially keen on a bike spin, but a fellow had to do something on a half-holiday. He would joyfully have taken a run on the motorbike that belonged to Coker of the Fifth, but for the absolute certain fact that Coker of the Fifth would have left him for dead afterwards. He would even have joined Mr. Quelch and Mr. Wiggins, who had gone out in a car, had they desired the company of a nice, well-mannered, fascinating fellow. But they didn't.

So it was really a case of any port in a storm. A fellow had to do something, and Bunter decided that the something should be a bike spin.

He could have found a rather useful occupation in repairing his own bike, which undoubtedly needed it. But that sort of occupation did not appeal to Bunter. He lived in hopes of somebody else repairing his dilapidated jigger. Until that happened, Bunter's own bike was likely to rust unused. Bunter had pointed out that Bob Cherry spent hours and hours, and made himself as black as a coalman repairing the bike that belonged to Marjorie Hazeldene of Cliff House. Why he couldn't do the same for Bunter was a mystery to Bunter. But either he couldn't or he wouldn't.

Bunter did not, therefore, think of touching his own unhappy jigger. He had decided on Wharton's bike, which was a handsome machine, and always in good order. He had asked Wharton to lend it to him, fair and square. A fellow couldn't do more than that. Bunter felt that he had done all that could reasonably be expected of him, and now he went to the bike-shed for the bicycle.

Like Moses of old, he looked this way and he looked that way. But the Remove fellows were playing cricket far off, and thinking of anything but William George Bunter. The Owl of the Remove wheeled the bike safely out, and prepared to mount in the road. William George Bunter rather prided himself upon his figure; there was, as he justly remarked, no other figure like it in the Remove. To this he attributed his distinguished appearance. Still, it was a fact that his little fat legs could hardly reach the pedals when he was in Wharton's saddle. Considered sideways, Bunter was a tall fellow; vertically, he rather lacked inches.

Putting the saddle down to its lowest extent would have been judicious, but that involved labour. Not much, it is true, but some; and any exertion failed to appeal to Bunter. He decided to chance it as it was, and started on his spin under those rather unfavourable conditions.

It is said that a lazy man takes more trouble to dodge work than an industrious man to get it done. That was the case with Bunter, at least. On that sunny summer's afternoon he might have enjoyed a spin through the leafy lanes and by the shady paths under the old

beeches and ashes in Friardale Wood. But, with his feet missing the pedals every now and then, and every push requiring a plunge to port or starboard, that spin was anything but enjoyable. Bunter had to exert himself to keep going at all, and he was soon hot, and perspiring, and exceedingly irritable.

He negotiated the lane and a path through the wood, and by that time he was fed-up with cycling. The glimmering waters of the Sark showed ahead through the trees, where the woodland path joined the towpath by the river. Bunter rolled off the bike, leaned it against a tree, and sat down on a grassy bank by the towpath to rest. Rest was what he felt he needed. Flies buzzed over his perspiring face, the drowsy hum of insects was in his ears, and Bunter, leaning back in the rich grass, nodded off to sleep.

There were three undiluted delights in Bunter's fat existence. The first, of course, was eating; the second was talking; the third was sleeping. There was nothing on the towpath for Bunter to eat; there was no one to inflict with the pleasure of his conversation; but he could sleep. And he slept—and his deep snore mingled with the murmur of the Sark rippling through the rushes.

William George Bunter was, after all, enjoying his half-holiday!

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'I say, you fellows!'

Coker of the Fifth stared.

Potter and Greene stared. To three men of the Fifth Form it came as a surprise that a Remove fag could possibly possess the 'neck' to hail them in this style. Coker and Co. were pulling up the Sark in a boat—or rather, Potter and Greene were pulling, and Coker was telling them how to do it. The three seniors had been down the river in the boat, and they had to pull back to the school, which naturally caused them to pass the spot where William George Bunter had been enjoying his half-holiday on the towpath.

At the sight of a Greyfriars boat Bunter hailed. The Owl of the Remove had awakened from his long, happy nap, refreshed and frightfully hungry. 'I say, you fellows!'

Coker and Co. stared, and then gave no further heed. This cheek, on the part of a fag of the Lower School, was unworthy of their notice.

Potter and Greene were rather tired with pulling; there was a fairly strong current on the Sark. They were still more tired at Coker's instructions in the art of rowing. They did not, of course, follow Coker's instructions—they had to get the boat along. They listened to them, because there was no getting out of the range of Coker's voice without jumping overboard. And they refrained from braining Coker with their oars chiefly because Coker was going to stand tea in the study when they reached Greyfriars.

'I say, you fellows!' yelled Bunter for the third time. 'Give me a lift back to the school, will you?'

Disdaining to reply, Potter and Greene continued to pull, and Horace Coker continued to instruct. The boat glided on.

'Beasts!' roared Bunter.

He rolled along the tow-path, keeping pace with the boat. Heedless of the fat junior, Coker and Co. pursued their way.

'I say, Coker, will you give me a lift?' shrieked Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, give a chap a lift to the boathouse. Do you hear me?'

Coker heeded at last.

'You fat young sweep!' he shouted back. 'Shut up, and cut off!' Billy Bunter glared at the Fifth-Formers. From sheer Fifth-Form swank, the beasts would not take a Remove man into their boat. Possibly they might also have objected to Bunter's weight as cargo, so far

as the oarsmen were concerned; Potter and Greene were perspiring over the oars already. Anyhow, they did not intend to give the Owl of the Remove a lift, that was certain; and Bunter, as there was no lift for him, decided to take it out in slanging. Fellows in a boat could not reach a fellow on the towpath; so for once it was safe for Bunter to tell Horace Coker what he had long thought of him.

'I say, Coker,' yelled Bunter. 'I say, what's that on your face?' Coker passed his hand over his face, thinking that perhaps some insect had alighted there.

'You can't brush it off!' howled Bunter. 'I see now—it's your nose! I thought for a moment it was a beetroot!'

Coker's complexion was a good deal like that of a beetroot, and, following this remark, Potter and Greene grinned.

'You cheeky little sweep!' roared Coker. 'If I could get at you——'

'Yah!'

Safe on the tow-path, with the wood at hand to dodge into if the incensed Coker showed a sign of landing, Bunter let himself go. It was rather a novelty to be able to cheek Fifth-Form men without being slain on the spot.

Coker glared round at Bunter.



'Cut off, you fat freak!' roared Coker

'Cut off, you fat freak! Do you hear?'

'Yah! Go and eat coke!'

'Pull, you slackers, will you?' yelled Coker.

Potter and Greene pulled. But it was quite easy for even William George Bunter to keep pace, on the tow-path, with a boat pulling against the current. He rolled on abreast of the boat, and continued to tell Horace Coker what he thought of his features, his manners, his rowing, his cricket, and everything else that was his. Everything that Bunter thought on these topics was uncomplimentary. Coker's red face grew redder and redder; and he glared round the boat for a missile to hurl at Bunter. There was an apple left from a supply of tuck the Fifth-Formers had taken with them; and Coker grasped it.

Whiz!

'Yarooogh!'

Bunter received that apple on the widest part of his considerable circumference. It struck him on the equator, as it were.

He sat down on the tow-path with a gasping roar.

'Ow! Ooooooh! Guggle-guggle-gug!'

Bunter was winded. The flow of his eloquence was cut off; and he sat on the tow-path and gasped and spluttered for breath, Coker grinned back at him as the boat glided on, in sight of the Greyfriars boathouse now.

Coker and Co. were out of sight when the Owl of the Remove, having got his second wind, staggered up at last. He pressed a fat hand tenderly to his extensive waistcoat. 'Ow! Beast! Wow!'

Still, the pursuit of Coker's boat, and the slanging of Coker, had entertained Bunter on his way home; he had hardly noticed the distance he had covered, with that entertainment on hand. The old tower of Greyfriars was visible over the trees, and Bunter turned from the tow-path to take a short cut across to the school.

Then he uttered a sudden ejaculation of dismay.

'Oh, crumbs! That bike!'

He had utterly forgotten Wharton's bike till that moment. That bike, leaning against a tree close by the tow-path, was now a mile behind Bunter, and at the bare idea of walking back a mile for it Bunter simply shuddered.

He decided to 'forget all about it'. Bunter rolled on to Greyfriars quite satisfied. More important matters occupied his mind. He was fearfully hungry, and there was the question of tea. So Bunter dismissed that trifling affair of the bike from his fat mind, and rolled on to the school, thinking of more important matters.

A Bolster for Bunter!

WINGATE of the Sixth jumped.

It was half-past nine, which was bed-time for the juniors at Greyfriars. Wingate of the Sixth, whose duty it was to see lights out in the Remove dormitory, was heading for the staircase when a fat figure came bolting along, and fairly cannoned into him.

The captain of Greyfriars was a powerful fellow. But a cannon with Billy Bunter's weight behind it was no jest. Wingate staggered, and almost went over. Bunter, reeling from the shock, went quite over. He sat down at the feet of the captain of the school, and ejaculated: 'Whooooop!'

'You fat young ass!' roared Wingate. 'What the thump do you mean?'

'Oooooop!'

Rapid footsteps in pursuit showed what was the cause of the disaster. Coker of the Fifth, going strong, came round a corner, evidently after Bunter.

Bunter whipped to his feet with unusual activity, and dodged behind George Wingate.

'Keep him off!' he roared.

Coker halted, just in time to avoid a collision in his turn. Wingate gave him a grim look.

'Well?' he rapped.

'Oh!' gasped Coker. 'I—I want that young sweep!'

'Keep him off!' yelled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows! Keep that beast off!'

A number of Removites were gathering round on their way to the dormitory. But for Wingate's presence they would have collared the Fifth-Former without ceremony. They did not know why Coker of the Fifth was after Bunter, and did not want to know; but they were prepared to handle any Fifth-Form man who adopted high-handed methods with a Remove man. But in the presence of the captain of the school the heroes of the Remove had to restrain their natural impulse to make an example of Coker.

'Shall we take Coker back to his study, Wingate?' asked Bob Cherry, meekly.

'No, you young ass! Coker, what the dickens are you chasing a Remove kid like this for?' demanded Wingate.

'He cheeked me!' hooted Coker. 'Walked along the tow-path cheeking me in a boat! I've been looking for him all the evening.'

'I didn't!' howled Bunter. 'I only told him his nose looked like a beetroot. So it does!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

‘You can cackle, you cheeky fags!’ roared Coker. ‘Thanks; we will!’ said Peter Todd.

‘Ha, ha, ha! All the same, Bunter was making a mistake. It’s more like a turnip!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Wingate grinned.

‘You can clear off, Coker,’ he said. ‘And don’t play the goat like this, or you’ll be called to the prefect’s room for a beating.’

‘What?’ gasped Coker.

‘Just that! Now shut up, and clear off!’

Coker, with difficulty, swallowed his wrath and cleared off.

‘What have you been doing to Coker, fatty?’ asked Peter Todd, after lights were out in the Remove dormitory, and Wingate had shut the door and gone.

‘I told him what I thought of him,’ explained Bunter, sitting up in bed. ‘I can tell you I’m not afraid of Coker, like some fellows in this Form.’

‘Bunter the bold!’ chuckled Bob Cherry.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Well, you wouldn’t have talked to him as I did, and chance it,’ said Bunter. ‘I treated him with scorn! Ragged him like anything. I’m not afraid of any man in the Fifth, I can jolly well tell you!’

‘Is that why you were bolting from him when you biffed into Wingate?’ asked Vernon-Smith.

‘Oh, really, Smithy——’

‘You were putting on a good speed for a fellow who wasn’t funky,’ remarked Squiff.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Beast! If you’d heard me talking to him you’d have opened your eyes,’ said Bunter. ‘I told him he couldn’t row and couldn’t play cricket. I told him his face was like a grid-iron, and that he had the brains of a rabbit and the manners of a pig!’

‘Oh, my hat! You couldn’t have been in his reach when you told him these painful truths!’ said Bob.

‘Well, I was on the tow-path and he was in a boat,’ said Bunter.

‘He could have come ashore for me. But, of course, I dare say he knew I’d have knocked him into the water.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ yelled the Removites.

The whole dormitory roared at the idea of William George Bunter knocking the hefty Coker into the water.

‘So I would have!’ hooted Bunter. ‘I told him so. The beast wouldn’t give me a lift in the boat, you know. I wanted a lift in the boat, and he refused—just Fifth-Form swank, you know. I gave it to him hot and strong. As if he couldn’t give a Remove man a lift in his boat, the swanking ass! He wouldn’t!’

‘And so the poor dog had none!’ sighed Bob Cherry.

‘But what on earth did you want a lift in a boat for when you were on a bike?’ asked Ogilvy. ‘I saw you start out on a bike.’

‘Oh, I—I didn’t—I—I wasn’t—I mean, I—I never went on a bike, after all, you know,’ stammered Bunter, realising that the talk was taking a dangerous turn. ‘I changed my mind, you know.’

‘You mean you had a spill, and had to walk home,’ chuckled Ogilvy. ‘You went on a bike. I was behind you on the road as far as Friardale Wood, and watched you plunging. You had a bike too big for you.’

‘Oh, really, Ogilvy——’

‘Whose bike?’ chortled Bob Cherry. ‘What man was ass enough to lend Bunter a bike? It will want some repairing after Bunter.’

‘Nothing of the kind, Cherry! I never had a spill. I’m rather too good a cyclist to have a spill, I fancy,’ said Bunter. ‘Not like some clumsy asses I could name.’

‘Then you did go on a bike?’ asked Bob.

‘Oh, no! Nothing of the sort. Ogilvy must have seen some other fellow and fancied it was me.’

‘Likely!’ chortled Ogilvy. ‘There’s no other fellow at Greyfriars, or in the giddy universe, half your width, Bunter!’

‘You cheeky ass—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ roared Russell. ‘I can guess whose bike it was. I noticed that Wharton’s stand was empty when I put my jigger up.’

‘Mine!’ ejaculated Wharton.

‘Oh, really, Russell—’

‘I told you not to take my bike, Bunter!’ exclaimed the captain of the Remove, in great wrath.

‘Oh, really, Wharton——’

‘Did you take it?’ demanded Harry.

‘I should disdain to borrow a bike from a fellow who refused to lend it, Wharton! Blow your old jigger,’ answered Bunter. ‘The rotten thing isn’t fit for a fellow to ride, either—unless he’s spindle-shanked like some fellows. A chap’s feet don’t touch the pedals.’

‘You fat villain! Did you damage my bike?’

‘Certainly not! It’s as good as new. I got fed-up with the rotten thing and got off, that’s all!’

‘Then you admit you had it out, you fat fraud?’

‘Oh, no! Certainly not! The—the fact is, I borrowed a Fourth-Form man’s bike! Temple’s, to be exact.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

That statement came rather too late in the day to carry conviction. The captain of the Remove sat up in bed, both angry and alarmed. None needed telling what was likely to happen to any bike ridden by Bunter; and Russell’s statement that it was missing from the bike-shed was rather alarming.

‘Where did you leave that bike, Bunter?’

‘I never had it, old chap.’

‘Russell says it’s not in the bike-shed.’

‘Russell’s rather an ass, you know. I expect he made a mistake,’ said Bunter. ‘Besides, the bike is all right. I never had a spill. I got off simply because the saddle was too high for me.’

‘Where is it now?’ shrieked Wharton.

‘Oh, really, Wharton, I don’t think you ought to expect me to know where your bike is. The fact is, I haven’t seen it.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘This isn’t a laughing matter,’ exclaimed Wharton. ‘If that fat villain has left my bike out of gates for the night—’

‘My hat! Even Bunter wouldn’t do that!’ ejaculated Johnny Bull.

‘He left Inky’s bike at Lantham a few weeks ago. Bunter, tell me where my bike is before I take a pillow to you.’

‘I expect it’s in the bike-shed all right, old fellow. I assure you that nothing happened to it. Besides, it was Coker’s fault. If he’d given me a lift in the boat I should have put the bike in. Then it would have been all right. That beast Coker—’

‘Where’s the bike?’ shrieked Wharton.

‘I don’t know anything about your bike, Wharton. I think it’s rather like your cheek

expecting me to look after your bike, especially after refusing to lend it to me. I decline to discuss the matter further.'

There was a sound of a Remove man getting out of bed, and Billy Bunter blinked anxiously through the gloom.

'I—I—I say, Wharton, old chap, is that you getting up?' he stammered. 'Wha-a-at are you getting up for, old chap?'

'To slaughter you, you fat villain!' answered the captain of the Remove in sulphurous tones. 'To bang you with my pillow till you tell me where that bike is!'

'I—I say, it's all right!' gasped Bunter. 'It was Coker's fault! Besides, you can get it tomorrow! I—I'll fetch it in myself, if you like—there! It's quite safe—leaning against a tree, you know—I put it there very carefully. I'm always careful with another chap's things, as you know——'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows——Yaroooogh!'

There was a roar in the Remove dormitory as Wharton's pillow smote. Billy Bunter rolled out of bed on the other side and bumped on the floor.

'Now where's that bike, you villain?' demanded Wharton in concentrated tones.

'Yaroooogh!'

Wharton came round the bed with uplifted pillow.

'I—I say, it's in the wood,' gasped Bunter. 'It's all right. Leaning on a tree at the end of the path where it joins the towpath. You know the place. You'll find it easily enough tomorrow—— Yarooogh!'

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

William George Bunter rolled under his bed for safety. He had feared that that beast Wharton might cut up rusty if the matter of the bike came to his knowledge. His anticipations had proved well-founded. Wharton had cut up decidedly rusty.

'Come out, you fat sweep!'

'Yow-ow-ow!'

'Come out and have some more!'

'Wow! Beast!'

Billy Bunter remained under the bed.

The Biter Bit!

HARRY WHARTON looked out of the high window of the Remove dormitory. It was a soft, calm summer's night—a silver sickle of moon gleamed from fleecy clouds. It was a night upon which a walk along the river would have been pleasant enough had the rules of Greyfriars allowed fellows out of the school at such hours. On that point, of course, rules were very strict; and a fellow who broke bounds after bed-time was booked for the most serious kind of trouble if his escapade came to the knowledge of the powers. But that was not what the captain of the Remove was thinking of.

His bike was a mile down the river, left out for the night—if, indeed, it was still where Bunter had left it. Already some tramp might have spotted it and walked off with it. But even if it was safe from purloining, which it certainly was not, no fellow liked the idea of his machine remaining out all night in the thick, woodland dews. To send Bunter after the bike was, of course, out of the question; if it was to be fetched in, Wharton had to fetch it. And after a thoughtful gaze from the window, Wharton began to dress in the shadows.

'Going after the bike?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Yes,' answered Harry. 'I can't leave it there. And it's not much good going down to ask Quelchy for leave to go out for it. He would refuse, and give me lines for going out of

dorm.'

'That's a cert,' agreed Bob. 'But you can't leave the jigger out all night. It would be pinched before you could get it tomorrow.'

'Jolly risky breaking bounds after lights out,' said Peter Todd. 'I know that,' answered Harry. 'But what will happen to the bike if it's left out till morning?'

'I'd scalp Bunter!'

'Oh, really, Toddy——'

'Scalping Bunter won't bring the bike home,' said Harry, who was dressing rapidly while he spoke. 'I can trot down there pretty quickly, and it's a fine night, too. I can get the bike back as far as the Cloisters, and leave it safe there till morning.'

'I fancy I'd chuck the idea if I were you, Wharton,' said Peter Todd seriously. 'We know you all right, but you never know how the beaks might take such a thing if they spotted you. It's jolly easy to be misunderstood when you're doing a thing flat against the rules.'

'The beaks wouldn't be likely to suspect me of pub-haunting, I hope,' said Harry rather sharply.

'I think you're running the risk. There was talk about you and a racing man a few days ago; I know it was knocked on the head, and there was nothing in it. Still, things like that leave a sort of——'

'Of what?' snapped Wharton.

'Oh, nothing—if you're going to be ratty!' said Peter. 'All I say is this—that in the circumstances you ought to be jolly careful not to lay yourself under suspicion.'

'Rot!'

'Blessed if I quite like it, Harry!' said Nugent uneasily.

'I can't leave the bike where it is,' answered Wharton. 'It's a thousand to one it wouldn't be there tomorrow. I'm off!'

Taking a pair of rubber shoes in his hand, Harry Wharton quietly left the dormitory. The door closed softly behind him.

Billy Bunter crawled back into bed.

Bunter, at least, was glad that the captain of the Remove had decided to go after the bike. It enabled him to leave his comfortless refuge under the bed and get back into his blankets without dread of an avenging pillow.

'After all, it's as safe as houses really,' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Wharton won't be gone an hour. I'll make a dummy in his bed in case a beak should look in—and it will be all right.'

'Good egg!' agreed Nugent.

Bob Cherry turned out, and in a few minutes Wharton's bed was skilfully arranged to look as if it still contained a sleeper. There was sometimes a quiet inspection of dormitories at a late hour, and in such a case a fellow could not be too careful. Bob Cherry went back to bed with some idea of remaining awake till Wharton came in. But there was no special object in remaining awake, and Bob was soon fast asleep.

A quarter of an hour after Wharton had gone there was silence in the Remove dormitory, broken only by the steady breathing of sleepers and the rumbling snore of Billy Bunter. Half an hour of silence had passed, when there was a faint sound made by a fellow sitting up in bed.

There was no other sound—not a whisper. Arthur Da Costa's dark eyes gleamed in the gloom as he stared up and down the long row of beds and listened.

The silence satisfied him.

Softly, stealthily the Eurasian crept from his bed. With scarcely a sound he drew on trousers and jacket and slippers.

Noiselessly he crept across the dormitory to the door.

There was no sound, save the breathing of numerous sleepers, and a soft sigh from the

wind stirring the old ivy round the windows. That any fellow in the dormitory was still awake was unlikely enough; and the movements of the Eurasian were so stealthy and soft that even a wakeful junior would have been unlikely to notice that anyone was stirring. Softly the door opened and closed again.

Arthur Da Costa was gone.

And then another junior sat up in bed, and a dusky face was bent as a pair of keen, dusky ears listened intently. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh slid noiselessly from his bed, his dark eyes gleaming. Again the door of the Remove dormitory opened and closed softly. Little dreaming of the keen eyes that had been on the watch, Arthur Da Costa trod softly along the dark corridors and reached the lower box-room. He knew the way Wharton must have gone—that surreptitious way out of the House was no secret in the Lower School. The Eurasian opened the door of the box-room and groped his way in.

Opposite the doorway was a window that slid on flat runners, and the Eurasian glided across silently to that window.

As he expected, he found it an inch open at the bottom.

That was the way Wharton had gone; and he had left the window a trifle open, to raise the sash again when he came back.

Da Costa's olive face twisted in a sardonic grin. If his conscience had troubled him earlier in the day, it was sleeping again now. Now he was the cool, calculating, ruthless schemer—the unscrupulous tool of the man in India who, for reasons known only to himself, had plotted against a schoolboy at Greyfriars. The olive fingers groped over the window. Soundlessly the sash was shut down and fastened securely.

When the junior now out of bounds returned he would climb the leads to the box-room window, never doubting. He would find the window closed and fastened on the inside. Harry Wharton was shut out of the House for the night! When he was discovered in the morning he could tell any tale he liked; no explanation or excuse would alter the fact that he had had a night out.

Da Costa turned from the window.

He had only to leave the box-room now and return to his dormitory as surreptitiously as he had left it. There was nothing to connect him with the base trick that had been played. If it came out that the window had been fastened after Wharton, it would only be naturally supposed that some master or prefect, making his round, had found it unfastened, and fastened it. Da Costa felt quite secure.

But as he crossed softly to the door again he gave a sudden gasp and stopped dead, a shudder of startled affright running through him.

The box-room door was drawn shut.

With a faint sound it closed. With another faint sound the key turned in the lock outside.

Da Costa stood rooted to the floor.

His heart beat in great throbs, and his dark eyes were dilated.

He was locked in the box-room.

The key, he knew, must have been on the inside of the door when he entered. While he was at the window some unknown hand had reached in and taken it without a sound and placed it in the outside of the lock. Now the door was locked on him, and he was a prisoner.

For a long minute the Eurasian stood quite still, only his heart thumping in great throbs. Then he went to the door and tried it. He knew that it was fast, and he found it so.

Who had done this?

It seemed to him that in the gloom he could see the dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a mocking smile on it. He felt—he knew—that it was the Nabob of Bhanipur who had played this trick on him.

He gritted his teeth as he turned from the door and crossed to the window again, and stood looking out into the moonlight. To leave the box-room by the window, as Wharton had done— what was the use? There was no other way of entering the House, locked and shuttered for the night. He could not return to his dormitory; there was no way back, save by the door of the box-room—and that door was locked against him. The biter had been bitten with a vengeance!

A Faithful Chum!

‘My esteemed chum!’

Harry Wharton fairly jumped.

‘Inky!’ he breathed.

From deep shadow under a tree by the wall the dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh glimmered into view.

‘My esteemed and absurd chum,’ murmured the nabob. ‘I hopefully wish that I did not make you jump——’

‘You jolly well did!’ said Harry. ‘You were an ass to come out, Inky. It’s more risky for two than for one—’ He broke off. ‘Is anything up? Have the beaks spotted that I was out?’

‘Not at all-fully! Let us get the esteemed jigger in, and I will explain, my ludicrous chum.’

Two pairs of hands negotiated the bicycle easily. It was lifted over the wall and wheeled into a deep and dark recess under the old stone pillars of the Cloisters. There it was safe till morning. Wharton took a rag from the saddle-bag and rubbed the dew from the machine. He was rather more careful in such matters than William George Bunter.

‘What made you come out, Inky, if there’s nothing up?’ asked Wharton, as he rubbed the machine down.

‘There is something up, my esteemed chum,’ answered the nabob.

‘What, then?’

‘The excellent and execrable Eurasian.’

‘Da Costa?’ asked Wharton, with a start. ‘Exactly!’

Wharton stared at his dusky chum.

‘I don’t catch on! What is Da Costa up to?’

‘He is now in the excellent box-room, having sneaked there after you to fasten the ludicrous window on the inside.’

Wharton set his teeth.

‘The miserable worm! You’re sure, Inky?’

‘The surefulness is terrific. You see, my absurd chum, I remained awakefully to keep open the watchful and suspicious eye,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘The absurd Da Costa supposed that the sleepfulness in the dormitory was terrific, but it was not quite so terrific as he supposed.’

‘I never thought—’ muttered Wharton. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned.

‘It was such a chance for the esteemed reptile that I wakefully watched to see whether he would chip in,’ he explained. ‘I followfully tracked the absurd rotter to the box-room, and put the key

on the outside of the lock, and turned it on him.’

‘Oh, my hat! Then he’s locked in the box-room?’

‘Exactly!’

Wharton chuckled.

‘The sneaking worm! Let him stay there, then! But how are we going to get back into the House, Inky? How did you get out?’

‘By the window of Study No. 1, my absurd chum. I rigged up a rope to the leg of the

excellent table, and descendfully slid from the window.'

'Good man!'

'We shall climbfully return the same way, esteemed old bean, when you are ready,' chuckled the nabob. 'The execrable Da Costa may spend the night in the box-room. I hopefully trust he will enjoy his atrocious self there. But we will let him out before rising-bell; if he is found there, it will cause a terrific fussfulness.'

'My hat! I wonder what he's feeling like—locked in that box- room?' Harry Wharton chuckled again. 'Let's get in, old fellow.'

The juniors stole away through the Cloisters. Many windows in the great facade of the House were still lighted; but the two juniors kept carefully out of the radius of the lights. In the thick ivy below the window of Study No. 1, the rope hung where Hurree Singh had left it. One after the other, the active juniors climbed, and clambered in at the study window.



One after the other, Harry and the Nabob climbed the rope

The rope was replaced in a box, and the window closed; shoes were taken off, and on tiptoe the two juniors crept back to their dormitory. All was silent there.

Without waking the other fellows, Wharton and Hurree Singh turned in. But there came a yawn from Bob Cherry's bed. Bob sat up and blinked in the darkness.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! You back, Wharton?'

'Yes, old bean; safe and sound.'

'Got the bike all right?'

'Yes.'

'Good!' yawned Bob; and in a minute or so he was asleep again. Harry Wharton was not long in following his example. The thought of the plotting Eurasian locked in the box-room brought

a grin to his face as he closed his eyes. Da Costa had planned a night out for the captain of the Remove; but it was Da Costa who was getting the night out. He was not likely to enjoy it.

Wharton was soon fast asleep. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh closed his eyes in peaceful slumber. But there was no sleep that night for the enraged schemer pacing the box-room—pacing wearily, or sitting on a box to rest—while the long, dreary hours wore away.

Wharton Speaks Out!

CLICK!

Arthur Da Costa started.

The early summer dawn had long been streaming in at the window of the box-room. It lighted a haggard olive face. Da Costa, utterly weary, had dozed several times, seated on a box, leaning against the wall; but only for spells of a few minutes at a time. Daylight found him weary and pale, and consumed with rage, and bitterly apprehensive of what the day would bring.

That the nabob had locked him in he felt certain; but whoever it was, it was a friend of Wharton's; and that friend would have admitted the captain of the Remove by some other window. He was assured of that. While Da Costa was aching with weariness in the box-room, Wharton had returned to the dormitory to sleep soundly there; and the Eurasian gritted his teeth when he thought of it.

It was getting towards time for rising-bell, when the sudden sharp click at the box-room door caught his ear.

He started up.

He knew that the door had been unlocked on the outside. It was a relief to him. They did not intend to leave him there to be discovered and questioned. Not for his own sake, doubtless, but because if he had been forced to tell why he was there Wharton's escapade would have come to light. At all events, he was released; and he was glad enough of it. He crossed quickly to the door. But when he opened it the passage outside was vacant. Whoever had unlocked the door had slipped away immediately after turning back the key. The House was still silent; rising-bell had not yet begun to ring. Faintly from the distance came some sound of an early housemaid. Arthur Da Costa left the box-room, and hurried to the Remove dormitory. The light of the early summer morning showed him the long row of beds, every one but his own tenanted.

He glanced savagely along the beds. Whoever had unlocked the box-room door, had lost no time in getting back to bed. The fellow was still awake, he was sure of that; but, if so, he gave no sign.

Da Costa turned in. He was tired to the bone, and glad to get even half an hour's sleep before the Form had to turn out. His eyes closed as soon as his head touched the pillow.

Clang, clang, clang, clang!

The rising-bell rang out over Greyfriars—a second or two, as it seemed to the weary Eurasian, after he had closed his eyes.

It was after classes were over that Arthur Da Costa came up to the captain of the Remove, watching his opportunity to speak to him alone.

Wharton looked at him coolly and contemptuously.

'You know?' muttered the Eurasian.

'About your cowardly trick last night? Yes.'

Da Costa winced.

'It was Hurree Singh who locked me in the box-room?'

'Find out!' answered Wharton curtly.

'Will you let me explain? I never intended——'

The captain of the Remove interrupted him.

'Save your breath, Da Costa! I know exactly what you intended, and you need tell me no lies. I know what your game is at Greyfriars; my friends know it, and you'll never have a chance of pulling it off. Keep on trying, if you like,' added the captain of the Remove, with bitter scorn. 'As soon as you make a slip, and give yourself away, look out! Let me get hold of proof enough to satisfy the Head or Quelch, and I'll let all Greyfriars know that Captain Marker sent you here from India to play a dirty and treacherous game, and you'll get kicked out of the school so quick it will make your head swim.'

The Eurasian turned deadly pale.

There had been many indications, to his keen eyes, that he was more than suspected by the

chums of the Remove, but it was a shock to him to hear Wharton speaking as one who possessed certain knowledge.

‘You think——’ he faltered.

‘I don’t think—I know! Keep on with your dirty game; you’ll find decent fellows more than a match for you!’ said Harry contemptuously.

‘You are making some mistake——’

‘Oh, chuck it!’

Da Costa’s eyes gleamed at him.

‘After this, then, you will not want me to play in the cricket match at Rookwood?’ he asked.

‘This makes no difference to that,’ Harry said. ‘I can’t tell all the fellows what I know about your vile rascality, because I have no proof. I couldn’t explain to them why you were chucked out of the cricket. Besides’—he paused again— ‘I don’t want to chuck you out of the cricket, Da Costa. You’re the rottenest, trickiest, most unscrupulous rotter I’ve ever come across; the worst fellow at Greyfriars is a shining character in comparison with you. But you’ve got one good point: when you’re at cricket you play the game. It’s the only decent thing about you, and I’d be sorry to take it away. I can trust you in cricket, though in nothing else. You will play at Rookwood, unless you stand out of your own accord.’

The dark face lightened. It was evident that Da Costa felt a weight lifted from his mind by Wharton’s reply.

‘I am glad of that, at least,’ he said.

Wharton was turning away, but he turned back. An impulse urged him to speak.

‘Look here, Da Costa! You’re a queer beggar, as thoroughly wicked in some ways as any fellow could be, and yet you’re not all bad. I believe there’s a lot of good in you somewhere; you could make yourself a decent fellow if you tried. Why not try? It’s never too late to mend. A rascally man in India has put you up to this—goodness knows why. But you’re not bound to obey orders. Why not chuck it up and play the game, and be a decent chap off the cricket field, as well as on it?’

Wharton spoke quietly and earnestly, and the Eurasian’s face showed that his words had an effect. But the strange boy from the East did not speak, and Wharton turned away from him, leaving him silent, still, with a deep cloud on his brow.

Blow for Blow!

‘HOLD on!’

Hazeldene of the Remove snapped out the words.

Wharton stopped.

‘Well?’ he said curtly.

Hazel was loafing on the tow-path by the Sark, when the captain of the Remove came along. He was loafing there with his hands in his pockets, and a sullen frown on his brow. As Harry came up the tow-path, heading for the old stone bridge over the Sark, Hazel stepped out into his way with a lowering brow, and called on him to stop. The captain of the Remove eyed him coolly.

‘Stand aside and let me pass,’ he said. ‘I want to keep my hands off you if I can.’

‘I won’t—you thief!’

That was too much for Wharton. He advanced on the sullen junior with hands clenched and eyes glinting.

‘Stand aside!’

Hazel’s reply was a blow full at his face—a rather unexpected blow, which landed on

Wharton's cheek and left a red mark there.

The next moment Hazeldene was spinning backwards, and he went sprawling in the grass on the tow-path.

'Ow!' he gasped.

'He sprawled for a moment or two, and then scrambled to his feet and rushed furiously on the captain of the Remove.

Wharton, with his hands up, backed away a pace or two. 'Keep off, you fool!' he shouted. 'Keep off! I tell you I don't want to knock you out!'

Hazel followed him up furiously.

There was no help for it; and in a moment more the two juniors were fighting fiercely.

Hazel was no match for the captain of the Remove; but fierce anger and resentment lent him a fictitious strength, and for a few minutes his passionate attack drove Wharton back, and several of his furious blows came home on his opponent's face.

But Wharton rallied and came on, and Hazel was soon being knocked right and left.

He fought fiercely and persistently, but at last he went down in the grass and this time he did not rise. He lay panting and spent, staring up at the captain of the Remove with bitter hatred.

'You rotter!' he muttered thickly. 'You've licked me! But—'

Wharton dabbed his nose with his handkerchief.

'I never wanted to touch you,' he said. 'You asked for it, Hazel; and even now I'll tell you the truth about that banknote, if you'll listen to me.'

'Leave me alone, you rotter!'

Hazel rose unsteadily to his feet. His nose was streaming, and his good-looking face was not good-looking now. He leaned against a tree, panting for breath.

Wharton looked at him, and then, without another word, turned and walked back the way he had come. He had received some damage in the fight, and was not in a fit state to present himself at Cliff House; neither did he desire to see Marjorie Hazeldene, fresh from a fight with her brother. He disappeared from sight in a few minutes, Hazel staring after him sullenly and bitterly.

He moved from the tree at last, groaning. He stooped over the margin of the stream and bathed his face. He was feeling spent and almost sick with the reaction after the excitement of the fight. The sight of a Greyfriars cap in the distance on the tow-path made him withdraw out of sight into the wood, where he sat down wearily, resting against the trunk of a beech, hidden by the thick brambles.

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Mr. Gedge came along the tow-path from the direction of Friardale, with a squeak of elastic-sided boots. The City gentleman was not looking happy on that glorious summer's afternoon. He gave not a glance at the shining river on his left, or the deep dark woods on his right; not a glance at the summer sky with its fleecy clouds, or at the blue sea that shimmered in the distance. Such things did not appeal to Mr. Gedge, who looked on every excursion he had to make into the country as a martyrdom. Mr. Gedge was no doubt making a good thing out of his business with Captain Marker, of Lucknow; but whenever he came down into Kent to see Da Costa he felt that he was earning the money.

Mr. Gedge sighted a Greyfriars junior in the distance—a junior with an olive face and black eyes. It was Arthur Da Costa coming to the appointed place to meet the 'legal johnny'.

As was his custom, Mr. Gedge did not approach the junior on the open tow-path. As soon as he knew that Da Costa had seen him, he turned into the shade of the wood and waited

for the junior under a tree there, out of sight of passers-by. Mr. Gedge was a cautious gentleman, and in such a matter as he had in hand he could not be too careful.

Da Costa turned from the tow-path into the wood, and joined the lawyer under the spreading beech. Round them the woods were deep and still, the silence broken only by the twittering of the birds in the trees.

Mr. Gedge wasted no time in greeting. He fixed his sharp, beady eyes on the olive face of the Eurasian. What he read there did not seem to please him.

'I have heard nothing from you, Arthur,' he said abruptly.

'I had nothing to tell you.'

Mr. Gedge looked unpleasant.

'This will not do, Arthur,' he said, in a low, acid voice. 'The last time I saw you you outlined a plan that seemed assured of success. According to what you told me, you had matters cut and dried. A banknote stolen from a junior's study was to be placed in a letter addressed to Wharton, unknown to him.

'He was to suppose that it was a tip from his uncle, Colonel Wharton. He was to spend the money unknowingly, and then the note was to be identified by the number, and Wharton denounced as a thief. His expulsion from the school was to have followed, and the orders of Captain Marker would then have been carried out. All this you explained to me, and I have waited to hear the result.'

Mr. Gedge paused.

But as the Eurasian did not speak, he went on, more acidly than before:

'Apparently there has been no result! Apparently you have failed again, as you failed before! Apparently Captain Marker has spent his money for nothing in placing you at Greyfriars. This will not do, Arthur!'

He paused again.

'It was not my fault,' said the Eurasian at last. 'I cannot understand it even now. The banknote was taken from Mauleverer's study. It was placed in the letter that came from Colonel Wharton. It was received by Harry Wharton.'

'Well?'

'I cannot understand the rest. For some reason that I cannot imagine, Wharton did not change the note. What has become of it I do not know. It seems as if Fate has befriended him.'

'Nonsense!'

'I cannot understand how he escaped such a snare, at least. That the banknote reached him, that he believed it was a tip from his uncle, I am absolutely certain. But he did not change the note. Nothing has been heard of it since. It baffles me.'

'You are sure?'

'I am sure of what I say. I know nothing further. He could not have lost the banknote. There would have been inquiry. He cannot have given it away to someone outside the school—at least, I cannot think so. He has escaped the snare as if by magic. I—I sometimes think—'

'What do you think?'

'I think perhaps he is fated to escape,' said the Eurasian, in a low voice. 'We are fatalists in my country, Mr. Gedge, and it seems to me that there is Fate in this. Every time I strike he escapes the blow. I bribed a racing man to write him a letter—which I knew must fall into his Form-master's hands, and give the impression that he was associating with racing men.

'But this failed, too. His friends forced the man to come up to the school, where it was proved that he did not know Wharton by sight. Only last night Wharton went out of bounds at a late hour to fetch in a bicycle that had been left in the wood. I fastened the

box-room window after him. He was fated this time to be caught, I believed. Some friend of his intervened, and he escaped again. It is Fate!’

‘Nonsense!’ rasped Mr. Gedge impatiently.

The Eurasian gave him a sullen look.

‘It seems so to me!’ he muttered. ‘How do I know? It may be that cunning and treachery are useless against one who is brave and honourable and straightforward—that such attacks will fall harmless from him, like arrows from a breastplate. After all, that is the teaching of all experience and history.’

‘What? What do you mean?’ rasped Mr. Gedge.

The Eurasian smiled bitterly.

‘If astuteness and cunning and dissimulation and false dealing could overcome courage and honesty, the English would not be the race they are,’ he said.

‘You must pull yourself together, Arthur. Things cannot go on like this for ever. Captain Marker went to a great expense in sending you here, and he will expect results.’

‘I have done my best,’ said the Eurasian sullenly. ‘I have stifled my conscience. I have done all I could. I have failed!’

‘Next time you will not fail.’

‘I am sick of it all!’ muttered Da Costa. ‘At the school in India it was different. Here there is a changed atmosphere. There are bad fellows in this school—bad characters, they would be called. But the worst of them would shudder to come near me if he knew what I am, and what I am doing. There are times when I loathe myself.’

‘Nonsense!’

The Eurasian looked at him.

‘Are there not times,’ he asked, ‘when you, though you are grown old in trickery and chicanery, feel that you would gladly be a different man—that you would like to be open and honest and healthy, and dare to look honourable men in the face?’

Mr. Gedge blinked at him.

‘You impertinent young rascal!’ he rasped. ‘How dare you talk to me in such a strain!

Upon my word! Arthur, I am here to give you a serious warning. Whether you are doing your best to carry out Captain Marker’s orders, I cannot say; but if you have no success to show before the end of the present term, different methods will be employed.

‘If you fail you are useless, and you can return to your own country and your beggarly prospects there, leaving the task to be done by abler hands. I warn you, Arthur, that the present term at Greyfriars is your limit. If you have not succeeded by then you will be thrown aside like a useless tool.’

The Eurasian did not answer.

‘That is all!’ rasped Mr. Gedge. ‘Drop all this nonsense from your mind, and set to work to carry out the task you are paid to do. Let me know—and soon—that you have made progress. That is all I have to say to you at present, Arthur Da Costa.’

With that, the lawyer turned angrily away, walked back to the tow-path, and the squeak of his elastic-sided boots died away in the direction of the village.

Da Costa stood for some moments after Mr. Gedge had left him, buried in deep and troubled thought. Then he sighed, and turned away, and followed the tow-path in the opposite direction from that taken by Mr. Gedge.

Hazel Makes Amends!

HAZELDENE lay like a fellow in a dream.

Indeed, for some minutes, while the voices of Mr. Gedge and Da Costa were in his ears, he fancied that he must be dreaming.

The big trunk of the ancient beech and a mass of bracken hid the junior as he lay at the foot of the tree, and it was on the other side of the beech that the lawyer and Da Costa had talked.

Every word, cautious as the tones were, had come quite clearly to Hazel.

Mr. Gedge, for once, had been a little too cautious. Six or seven times already had the man from Chancery Lane met Da Costa in that lonely, secluded spot, and there had been no ears to hear. It was only by the sheerest chance that anyone was there now. Hazel, fatigued and moody, had lain silent where he had thrown himself down, and the talk from the other side of the beech had reached him without the slightest intention on his part to play the eavesdropper. After the first few sentences he had listened with a sort of incredulous horror.

He knew the truth now. He knew whence had come that bank-note that belonged to Lord Mauleverer, and that Harry Wharton had given him to satisfy a greedy bookmaker, and save him from exposure and disgrace. Knowing that the banknote was Mauleverer's when he had learned the number of Mauly's lost note, Hazel had believed that Wharton was a thief! Even now, he asked himself what else he could have believed? But he knew the truth now—knew how that banknote had come into the hands of the captain of the Remove, who, in the belief that it was his own, had given it to him.

It was long before Hazel stirred.

He rose to his feet at last, and came out of the wood to the tow-path.

Mr. Gedge had long gone; Da Costa had returned to the school. Hazel moved off slowly in the direction of Greyfriars.

He had almost forgotten the fight now, and the damage he had received. He was reminded, when he came into the school and met Skinner in the quad. Skinner gave him a cheery grin.

'Been through it?' he asked.

Hazel started.

'Eh! No—yes!' he stammered.

'Did Wharton lick you?'

'Mind your own business!'

Skinner laughed.

'I noticed Wharton's nose when he came in,' he remarked. 'I wondered who had been the happy victim. My dear chap, you were an ass to give Wharton a chance at you; he was waiting for a chance to lick you, of course.'

'Oh, go and eat coke!' snapped Hazel.

He went on to the House.

'Hazeldene!'

Mr. Quelch called to him as he went in. 'Yes, sir!' muttered Hazel.

'You have been fighting!' said the Remove master severely.

'Your face is in a disgraceful state, Hazeldene. With whom have you been fighting?'

'Wharton, sir!'

'Indeed! Then why—'

'It was my fault, sir!' said Hazel quietly. 'I ragged him into it! Wharton wasn't to blame!' Two or three fellows who heard that reply glanced rather curiously at Hazeldene. Mr. Quelch looked at him.

'Indeed!' said the Remove master dryly. 'I am glad that you are so frank, Hazeldene. You will take a hundred lines.'

'Very well, sir.'

Hazel went up to the Remove passage. On the Remove landing Billy Bunter met him—with a fat laugh.

'Been under a car, old chap?' chortled Bunter. 'I say, your chivvy is a corker!'

'Oh, shut up!'

'He, he, he! I say— Yaroooh!' roared Bunter, as Hazel gave him a shove and he sat down on the landing. 'Ow! Wow! Beast!'

Hazel went on to Study No. 1. He could hear cheery voices in that study, and he hesitated outside for a few moments. Then he tapped and opened the door.

Harry Wharton and Co. were at tea there. Wharton's nose was rather red and bulbous to the view; but otherwise he showed no sign of the fight on the towpath. The Famous Five all looked at Hazeldene as he stood in the doorway, his damaged countenance flushing crimson.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' said Bob Cherry, breaking an uncomfortable silence.

'Can I come in, Wharton?' asked Hazel very quietly.

'If you like.'

Hazel entered the study. The juniors there regarded him with curious inquiry.

'I—I've got to speak to you, Wharton,' stammered Hazel. 'I—I've found something out! I—I—I'm sorry!'

'Sorry we scrapped?' asked Wharton. 'So am I, if you come to that! I never wanted to.'

'That—and something else! I want to speak to you—if these fellows know about—about that matter, I can speak before them. I—I mean—'

'The banknote, do you mean?'

'Yes.'

'They know all about it—all that I would have told you if you'd have listened to me,' answered Harry. 'I don't see how you can have found out anything about it without my telling you.'

'Well, I have,' said Hazel huskily. 'I know now who took that banknote from Mauleverer's study, and got it somehow into that letter from your uncle. I know it was a trick to make you out a thief.'

'Great pip!' ejaculated Johnny Bull. 'And how the thump have you found that out, Hazel?'

'I know it was Da Costa,' said Hazel. 'I heard him say so.'

'My only hat!'

'I—I believed—' stammered Hazel. 'Hang it, Wharton, what was I to believe, when the number on the note you gave me was the same number as that of Mauly's lost note? But I'm not making excuses—I'm sorry—awfully sorry! I dare say I was a fool! Anyhow, I know now—and I'm ready to go to the Head, if you like, and tell him what a reptile he's let into Greyfriars.'

'But how—' exclaimed Wharton in amazement.

Hazel explained.

The Famous Five listened in deep silence, forgetting their unfinished tea. Hazel stammered out his story shamefacedly. He had repaid Wharton, who had saved him from disgrace, with an accusation of theft; and there was no doubt that he was contrite enough now.

'Well, my only hat!' said Frank Nugent, at last. 'That puts the lid on! It's not a matter of suspicion now, Harry, but of proof— Hazel can prove it against that rat Da Costa.'

'I'll go to the Head if you like,' said Hazel. 'That fellow is a dangerous villain and ought to be kicked out of the school.'

'This ought to fix Da Costa!' said Bob.

There was a footstep outside; and Arthur Da Costa came into the study. Evidently he had heard Bob Cherry's remark, for his dark eyes glanced quickly and suspiciously round the circle of faces.

‘You speak of me?’ he asked, with a sneer.

‘Yes, you reptile!’ said Hazel.

Da Costa turned on him in surprise. He had had little to do with Hazel since he had come to Greyfriars, and had had no trouble with him. The junior’s words, and his look of bitter scorn, startled the Eurasian.

‘What do you mean, Hazeldene?’ he asked. ‘What have I done to you?’

‘You reptile! I was on the tow-path—under the trees in the wood—when you met that rascally villain an hour ago.’

Da Costa started.

‘I heard every word that you and Mr. Gedge said to one another,’ said Hazel contemptuously, ‘and I’m only waiting for Wharton to say the word, to go to Dr. Locke.’

All eyes in the study were fixed on the Eurasian. The effort he made to pull himself together, under this unexpected accusation, was visible to all the juniors. But in a few seconds he was his cool, self-possessed, impassive self again.

‘I do not catch on,’ said Da Costa calmly. ‘I have not been on the tow-path to-day—I know nothing of any meeting in a wood.’

Hazel gasped.

‘You mean to deny it?’ he ejaculated.

Da Costa laughed.

‘I deny what is not true,’ he said. ‘Have you been telling a fanciful story, like Bunter? I have not seen Mr. Gedge, whom you mention, since the day he brought me to Greyfriars—and if you doubt it, I have no doubt that Mr. Gedge will be able to prove, if it is needed, that he has not been near the school since that day.’

Hazel could only gasp.

‘Go to the Head, if you choose,’ said Da Costa coolly. ‘Tell him any absurd story you please! I have no fear that he will believe you.’

‘My word!’ stammered Hazel. ‘You—you awful beast—denying what you know is true.’ He stared round at the Famous Five. ‘You fellows—you believe what I told you—what I heard—and——’

‘Every word!’ said Harry Wharton. ‘Of course! But I’m afraid the Head wouldn’t take what you heard as proof, old chap. Da Costa knows that.’

Da Costa smiled.

‘Let him put it to the test,’ he said.

Bob Cherry rose to his feet.

‘You sickening worm!’ he said. ‘You may be safe, for all I know. You’re as wily as a snake, I know that. But if you can deceive the Head, you know that we know the kind of miserable reptile you are. Get out!’

‘This is my study——’

Bob Cherry’s powerful arm rose, and his clenched fist struck the Eurasian full in the face.

Da Costa spun through the study doorway and sprawled at full-length in the Remove passage.

‘You fellows don’t mind my knocking that reptile out of the study, I hope?’ asked Bob.

Harry Wharton laughed.

‘No fear! More power to your elbow!’ chuckled Nugent.

Da Costa leaped to his feet, and came back into the study with the spring of a tiger. Bob Cherry’s face set grimly, and he met the Eurasian with right and left.

Crash, crash!

Da Costa sprawled in the Remove passage again. Bob closed the door on him.

‘That’s that!’ he said.

‘The thatfulness is terrific,’ grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

‘Take a pew, Hazel, old man, and have tea!’ said the captain of the Remove. ‘All serene now—what?’

‘I’m sorry for what—what I said to you!’ stammered Hazel.

‘That’s all right now. Squat down.’

And Hazel stayed to tea in Study No. 1; and later that day all the Remove knew that Hazel was now back on friendly terms with the captain of the Form. But what Hazel had heard under the old beech by the tow-path was not told outside the study. It was too wild a tale to be told without convincing proof, and that proof was lacking. But more and more the traitor of the school was becoming known in his true colours; and more and more likely it seemed that his words to Mr. Gedge would prove prophetic, and that it would not be Harry Wharton, but Arthur Da Costa, who would be turned out of Greyfriars in disgrace—at long last.

The Rookwood Match!

ARTHUR DA COSTA was among the Greyfriars cricketers who went over to Rookwood. In view of the terms he was on with the Famous Five, it was odd enough that the captain of the Remove was not only willing, but keen, to play him in the cricket eleven. But undoubtedly Wharton was quite keen on that. It was not only that Da Costa was a cricketer of amazing powers for his age, but, as he had told the Eurasian, Wharton would have been very unwilling to turn him out of the cricket so long as he stayed at Greyfriars. That the traitor should go, as soon as proof could once be obtained of his treachery, was a settled thing, and all the chums of the Remove were anxious to see the last of him. Nevertheless, all the Co. agreed with Wharton that he should play for the Form. Cricket was the one thing that seemed to lift the strange boy out of the mire of deceit and double-dealing, and on the cricket ground he could be trusted.

For quite a long time the Remove men had been getting into great form for that great fixture. But—as sometimes happens in such cases—when the date came round the eleven was nowhere near top form—nothing like even the team that had played Temple and Co. Such things happened sometimes, and could not be helped.

The Bounder was in poor form, which alone made a big difference. Penfold had to stand out, and Hazeldene had been given his place; and, though Hazel was on his best behaviour now, and very keen to distinguish himself, he was nowhere near Pen’s form. Mark Linley was working for an examination, and was not available. Peter Todd had crocked his wrist, and his place was taken by Russell—a good man, but not up to Peter’s form. Squiff was down with a cold, and his place had been given to Tom Redwing; a good man enough, but miles behind the Australian. Frank Nugent was in the team; and, though Wharton was very glad to see his best chum there, that did not make him believe that Frank was quite up to the form required to play Rookwood.

Taken altogether, the eleven was what Bob Cherry called very ‘so-so’, and there was no doubt that Arthur Da Costa was worth his weight in gold in the circumstances. The fellows who liked him least were glad that he was there, when, in the Rookwood first innings, Jimmy Silver and Co. piled up a hundred runs.

But it is said that it never rains but it pours.

Arthur Da Costa opened the Greyfriars innings with Wharton, and was bowled first ball by Jimmy Silver of Rookwood.

Wharton, at the other end of the pitch, simply stared at him. ‘How’s that?’ inquired about fifty Rookwooders round the field. ‘Out!’

Wharton could hardly believe his ears.

The best batsman must have bad luck sometimes, and there was no doubt that ‘Uncle

James' of Rookwood was a wonderful bowler. But the collapse of Da Costa's wicket for no runs was utterly unexpected. A black suspicion forced itself into Wharton's mind that the Eurasian was carrying his treachery into games—was deliberately letting down the cricket captain, whose enemy he was.

Da Costa's face expressed nothing as he walked back to the pavilion with his unused bat. With the best batsman down for nothing, and a weakened list to follow him, the Greyfriars innings, naturally, did not amount to very much. That initial failure had a discouraging effect on the other batsmen, too. The Bounder, usually a tower of strength, made a poor show, and only Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Tom Brown put on any runs to speak of. The innings was over much sooner than anticipated with a total of 55.

After that rather deplorable innings, some of the Rookwooders were seen to exchange very cheery smiles; and Arthur Edward Lovell of the Rookwood Fourth was overheard to opine that the home team would not have to bat again unless they liked. The Rookwooders were very confident and cheery, and even Jimmy Silver—who never counted a game won till it was lost—had no doubts about the finish this time. As for the olive-skinned Greyfriars recruit, Jimmy had noticed him only as a fellow who had bagged a duck's-egg, but whose bowling had been good, though nothing wonderful.

'What on earth's the matter with Da Costa?' the Bounder asked the captain of the Remove. 'He bowled wonderfully against the Fourth last week. His bowling here is nothing to sing a song about. And this is the first duck's-egg he has scored since he came to Greyfriars. Has he saved up his rottenest form for this match?'

'Looks like it,' said Harry glumly.

'A chap can't always be at the top notch,' remarked Tom Redwing.

'Still, there's a limit,' said the Bounder. 'He's a queer beggar, and gets his back up very easily. Blessed if I don't half think he's letting the game down on purpose.'

'Oh, rot!' said Redwing.

Wharton did not answer Vernon-Smith. The thought that had crossed the Bounder's mind was rankling very deep in Wharton's.

Where was the wonderful form Da Costa had shown as a bowler? Where was his wonderful form as a batsman?

Wharton was not the skipper to 'rag' any man while a game was on. If a fellow failed, he failed, and there was an end to it. It was taken for granted that he had done his best.

But that was just what the captain of the Remove could not take for granted in the present case. If the tortuous double-dealing of the Eurasian had been brought into this game—and it seemed only too likely—Wharton could not forgive himself for having trusted the fellow. And yet—

When Rookwood went on again, Da Costa was not given the bowling. During a good many overs, he looked many times at Wharton; while the Rookwood score mounted. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh enlivened his side with a hat-trick; but the change bowlers were far from deadly, and Rookwood were quite satisfied with their progress. In other circumstances, Wharton would have put Da Costa on to bowl as a matter of course; but after his display in the Rookwood first innings, and with that dark doubt in his mind, he left him in the field.

At last, while the field crossed after an over, Da Costa found an opportunity of speaking to his captain.

'You will not let me bowl?' he muttered. Wharton gave him a look.

'No.'

'But why not?' asked the Eurasian.

Wharton made no answer.

'I did not do well in their first innings,' muttered the Eurasian.

'I was not at my best. I—I was thinking—I have many things on my mind—I was troubled—downhearted! But that has passed—I give you my word that I am fit—I can get their wickets. Will you not give me a chance?'

'Your word!' said Harry.

Da Costa crimsoned.

'Yess—my word,' he repeated.

'What is that worth?'

'Oh!' muttered Da Costa.

His dark eyes dilated as he looked at Wharton. 'You think—' he faltered.

'I don't know,' said Harry. 'I'm sorry if I'm unjust—but I can't trust you. I was a fool to play you, knowing you as I do. You are my enemy—you've played any number of dirty tricks—you may be letting me down in this match for all I know. If I'm wrong, I'm sorry—but I can't trust you, and you won't bowl again.'

There was no time to say more—and it was not needed. Arthur Da Costa turned away with a set, white face. He did not approach the captain of the Remove again; and in the field he missed more than one catch that should have come to him. Rookwood made exactly another hundred in their second innings; and Greyfriars were left with a hundred and forty-five to get to equal their score—a task which the most hopeful of the merry men from Greyfriars hardly hoped to accomplish.

“Play Up!”

BOB CHERRY and Johnny Bull were told to open the Greyfriars second innings. Arthur Da Costa came over to Wharton, with a gleam in his dark eyes. Some of the Removites, looking at him, thought that a burst of his passionate Oriental temper was coming; but the Eurasian remained quite calm. He spoke to Harry Wharton in a low voice:

'Wharton! I was down to open the innings.'

'I know that.'

'Well, then—'

'Now you're at the other end. A duck's-egg is better to wind up with than to begin with.'

Da Costa breathed hard.

'Then—when do I bat?'

'Last.'

Da Costa turned away without another word. There was no anger in his face now; but a look of deep pain that touched Wharton's heart. He opened his lips to speak, but closed them again. After all, he could not trust the fellow, and he said no more to him.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were at the wickets now, and making runs. Their innings was a good one; but Jimmy Silver caught out Bob at last; and when the Bounder took his place, Arthur Edward Lovell caught out the Bounder in very quick time. The clean-bowling of Frank Nugent followed, and then a catch that sent Russell home.

'This is a jolly old procession!' Bob Cherry remarked lugubriously. 'Did you ever learn to play cricket, Smithy? The Rookwood men will think that your game is marbles.'

The Bounder scowled.

'We've got a rotten streak of luck, and no mistake,' said Frank Nugent. 'I shan't write home about my runs.'

'The luckfulness is not terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But an esteemed game is not lost till it is won! Perhaps there will still be a stitch in time to save the cracked pitcher from going longest to the well, as the English proverb says.'

And that English proverb cheered up the Greyfriars batsmen a little!

There was rather a change for the better when Harry Wharton went in, and when Hurree

Singh joined him the Rookwooders were shown that Greyfriars, after all, knew how to bat. The score mounted; but Jimmy Silver put paid at last to the nabob. Wharton was still going strong; and with another bat of the same quality to back him up, might yet have pulled the game out of the fire. But at the other end of the pitch wickets went down fast. Greyfriars were only forty for the second innings when the last man was called.

Defeat more overwhelming than they had ever experienced before, loomed over the men from Greyfriars. They had ninety-five against two hundred, with one wicket to fall. Harry Wharton looked as if he might have held the enemy till the light was gone; but last man in was Arthur Da Costa—and Harry expected nothing of him but a duck's-egg. The game was over, in the opinion of the captain of the Remove, and he only waited for Jimmy Silver to knock out the Eurasian with the first ball.

But the ball did not knock out Da Costa. It went travelling, and the Eurasian was running—and Wharton was so taken by surprise, that for a moment he stood still, watching the lithe figure that was flashing towards him like a streak of white. Then he understood, and ran—ran his hardest. Again the batsmen ran before the ball came in, and Da Costa had the bowling again. And a weight was lifted from Harry Wharton's mind and heart as he watched the boy from the East deal with the bowling.

Jimmy Silver almost rubbed his eyes. The fellow he had bowled for a duck's-egg seemed a new man now. Duck's-eggs were things of the past. Arthur Edward Lovell had told his friends that it would be a 'pair of spectacles' for this especial batsman. Arthur Edward had to modify that opinion. If Da Costa had been off colour at the beginning of the game, he was at the top of his form now.

'Bravo!' roared Bob Cherry, in great delight. 'Well hit!'

'Hurrah!'

'The esteemed Da Costa is terrific!' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, his dark eyes watching the Eurasian curiously.

Harry Wharton's face was bright. He was sure of himself; and he was sure now of his partner at the wickets. The traitor of the Remove, false in all other things, was, after all, justifying Wharton's faith in him. It was bad luck, and not a bad heart, that had caused his failure earlier in the game. He was more than making up for it now.

The hopes of the Greyfriars men began to rise. It looked as if the game might be pulled out of the fire, after all.

'That chap can bat, and no mistake,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Wharton's good, but Da Costa is twice his form.'

'The twicefulness is terrific.'

'Bravo!'

'They'll do it yet!' grinned Bob Cherry. 'They'll pull it off! You listen to your Uncle Robert, my infants—they'll pull it off yet!'

'Looks like a chance, anyhow,' said Hazel.

'Hurrah!'

'Over a hundred to get on the said giddy wicket—and we're going to pull it off!' said Bob. 'Why, Rookwood can't touch them! How's the score—jumping like a giddy kangaroo?'

'The jumpfulness is incessant and terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Did I not remarkably observe that a game is not lost till it is won. The esteemed victory is now an absurd possibility.'

'Bravo, Da Costa!'

'Good man!' roared Bob Cherry as the Eurasian drove the ball away again to the boundary.

No one would have guessed at that moment that the Famous Five of Greyfriars were on

the worst possible terms with the olive-skinned fellow at the wickets. Had he been their dearest chum they could not have cheered him more enthusiastically. Wharton, passing Da Costa on the pitch, gave him a cheery, breathless grin.

‘Keep it up, old bean!’ he called in passing.

The Eurasian smiled, with a flash of white teeth.

‘What-ho!’ was his answer.

It seemed as if Captain Marker’s emissary at Greyfriars was dead and gone, and a first-class sportsman had come to life in his place.

Victory!

‘THE sting’s in the tail!’

Jimmy Silver of Rookwood made that remark.

Arthur Edward Lovell nodded assent.

The Rookwood men were being given some of the hardest work they had ever put into a cricket match.

Right up to the ‘last man in’, the Greyfriars game had been, on the whole, a poor game, though there had been bright patches. Now, almost at the finish, Greyfriars had awakened to new life. The sting was in the tail, as Jimmy remarked.

Jimmy Silver was a bowler of renown, and he had worked havoc among the Greyfriars wickets that day. But though he was as good as ever, he was powerless now. Harry Wharton was at his very best, and when he was at his best, Wharton was a very good man indeed. But no one on the field would have denied—least of all Wharton himself—that good as he was, Arthur Da Costa was better. The boy from the East seemed born to handle a bat; no bowler could touch him, and the field had absolutely no chance. It was hard to believe that he was the same fellow who had lost his wicket for a duck’s-egg in the first innings.

Wharton was more than satisfied now. He had doubted the Eurasian—he had had only too much reason to doubt him. But he knew now that his judgment had been right—that Da Costa was to be trusted in games, at least. The fellow might very well have resented his captain’s distrust, and played a poor game for that reason alone, sensitive and touchy as he was. But there was no sign of that. With the willow in his hands, he was thinking only of the game.

The score was going up by leaps and bounds. It seemed almost like a miracle to the Rookwooders, who had been so near to a sweeping victory, when they saw the Greyfriars score at 130 for the second innings. The long summer’s day was far from its close; there was ample time for the finish, and that sweeping victory was gone from the vision of the Rookwooders—gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream.

Victory was more than doubtful now. There was only one wicket to fall; and fifteen were wanted to tie; but that one wicket did not seem at all likely to fall; Da Costa looked as if he were good for a century if they had been wanted, and Harry Wharton was firmly set. Jimmy Silver and Mornington and Erroll, of Rookwood, laboured in turns with the leather, and laboured in vain. The men in the field were tired with leather-hunting; but they were alert and watchful for chances—but chances for the field were few and far between.

‘That’s three’ said Bob Cherry.

Three it was!

Another three followed, and a four.

‘Bravo!’

From the group of Greyfriars men came a ripple of clapping. Rookwood men were

cheering, too; they were good sportsmen at Rookwood, and could take defeat like sportsmen. A few of them doubted that it was going to be a defeat. Five wanted to tie—six to win—and Arthur Da Costa drove the ball away for three; and Wharton cut it for two; and there was a yell from Bob Cherry when the score tied.

Jimmy Silver sent down his last ball, and put all his skill into it. Wharton cut it way for the single run that was wanted.

‘Hurrah!’ roared Bob Cherry.

‘Bravo!’

‘Good man!’

Bob Cherry rushed on the field and clapped Wharton on the back—a clap that made the captain of the Remove stagger.

‘Ow!’ he gasped.

Half a dozen fellows surrounded Da Costa as he walked off. The Eurasian’s face was bright, his dark eyes glowing. Harry Wharton, flushed, breathless, and joyous, joined the Eurasian, and almost unconsciously slipped an arm through his as they went to the pavilion.

‘You’ve played the best game the Remove have ever put up, old chap,’ he said.

Da Costa looked at him.

‘It was a good game,’ he said.

‘It was ripping! My hat! You were worth your weight in gold,’ said Harry. ‘Thank goodness you came over to Rookwood!’

The Eurasian smiled.

‘Yet you did not trust me.’

‘Oh!’ Wharton coloured. He had forgotten. ‘I—I’m sorry for that—but—but—but—’

He dropped Da Costa’s arm as he remembered.

A bitter look came over the Eurasian’s face.

‘You were right,’ he said in a low voice. ‘It was just—why should I blame you? But—if you had known what was on my mind, you would not have blamed me for being off my form.’

‘I’m really sorry,’ said Wharton.

It was all he could say. He wondered, too, what it was that had troubled the strange boy from the East so deeply that day. It must have been some deep and heavy trouble, to put such a cricketer off his form—considering how he had played up since.

But confidence between the two was impossible. Da Costa’s words had recalled to Wharton what he was—and for what he had come to Greyfriars. No more was said by either of them.

On the way home to Greyfriars the victorious team were in a merry mood—with one exception. Da Costa seemed to be plunged into the blackest depression. He was the hero of the hour—all the fellows knew that he had won the game for his side; that he had saved them from an overwhelming defeat. And the game he had played for Greyfriars was likely to be long remembered at Rookwood. The fellows who liked him least could not help feeling cordial towards him at the present moment—trying hard not to think of what he was, what they knew he was.

The Eurasian might have been expected, in the circumstances, to be as merry and bright as any fellow in the cheery party; but he was plunged in deep gloom, avoided joining in the cheery talk of the cricketers, and uttered scarcely a word on the journey home.

A number of Remove fellows met the returning cricketers at the school gates in the dusk of the summer evening.

‘How did it go?’ asked Peter Todd.

‘Licked?’ asked several fellows.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'It was a jolly old victory,' he said.

'Licked right up to the finish, and then Da Costa pulled the game out of the fire,' said the Bounder.

'Just that!' said Harry Wharton. 'It was a close thing, but a miss is as good as a mile. I'd have taken twopence for our chances before Da Costa went on to bat; but we've beaten Rookwood!'

'Hurrah!'

'I say, you fellows—'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Feeling anxious to know how we got on, fatty?' roared Bob. 'We've won, my fat pippin!'

'What about supper?'

'Eh?'

'What about supper in the study?' asked Bunter. 'The fact is, I've been waiting for you fellows to come in. My idea was to have a ripping supper in the study all ready for you fellows—'

'Jolly good idea!' said Wharton, laughing.

'Only my postal-order didn't come in time—'

'Fathead!'

'I think I told you fellows I was expecting a postal-order—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Come on, you men,' said Bob. 'I can manage some supper, but I think I'd rather have supper in Hall than wait till Bunter's postal-order comes!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! I say, Mrs. Mimble will let us have the stuff, and, if you like, I'll do the shopping, and—I say, you fellows!' yelled Bunter. 'Oh, really, you know—Beasts!'

Victory at Rookwood did not produce a study supper for William George Bunter—in consequence of which, victory at Rookwood was to the Owl of the Remove a trifle light as air. But all the rest of the Remove rejoiced—and Arthur Da Costa received many congratulations. Yet his olive face was dark and gloomy when he went to the dormitory with the Remove.

The Last Blow!

'TROT in, old bean!'

Harry Wharton called out that invitation as a tap came at the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove.

It was a few days after the Rookwood match, and the three occupants of Study No. 1 were at prep.

Wharton jumped up the next moment with a red face as the door opened to admit Henry Samuel Quelch, the master of the Remove.

'Oh, sir!' ejaculated Wharton.

It was the first time he had ever addressed his Form-master as 'old bean'; and it was quite inadvertent on his part. He had not been expecting a call from Mr. Quelch.

The Remove-master, however, took no notice of that informal greeting. He came into the study with a grim face and with a sheaf of papers in his hand. Wharton, to his surprise, recognised his own writing on the top sheet—it was an imposition he had lately handed in at his Form-master's study.

Mr. Quelch held it up.

'These lines were written by you, Wharton?' 'Yes, sir!' said Harry in wonder.

'They were left on my table.'

‘Yes, sir; you weren’t in your study when I took my lines in.’

‘Quite so! You were probably unaware of the state of these lines when you left them in my study!’ said Mr. Quelch grimly.

Wharton made no reply to that. It was true that the lines had not been written with great care—lines seldom were. But if a carelessly-written impot had to be done over again, there was no reason for this thunderous frown on his Form-master’s face as far as Wharton could see.

Mr. Quelch turned back the top sheet. On the second sheet was a small round black mark surrounded by a tiny hole in the paper. It was a burnt mark, and obviously had been made by the lighted end of a cigarette—as if a cigarette had been carelessly laid on the sheet. Wharton stared at it blankly.

‘That mark on the paper, Wharton, can have been made in only one way,’ said Mr. Quelch sternly. ‘You are well aware of the strictness of the rule against smoking in junior studies. It would appear that smoking is so habitual in this study that you are careless enough to lay a lighted cigarette on an imposition.’

Wharton gasped.

‘Certainly not, sir! I don’t know how that mark came there. It was not there when I left the lines in your study, sir!’

‘Do not be absurd, Wharton!’

‘It was not there, sir!’ repeated the captain of the Remove. ‘Nobody ever smokes in this study, and the mark cannot possibly have been made here.’

‘Indeed! Then how do you account for it?’ asked the Remove-master with grim sarcasm.

Wharton was silent, but his eyes fixed on the olive face of the Eurasian. Da Costa and Frank Nugent were standing at attention while their Form-master was in the study.

‘There’s only one way of accounting for it, sir,’ said the captain of the Remove steadily.

‘That mark was made after I left the impot on your table, and it was made by some fellow with a grudge against me.’

‘That is scarcely possible, Wharton. It could, of course, have happened, but it is very improbable indeed.’

Mr. Quelch laid the lines down.

‘In the circumstances, Wharton, I shall search this study very carefully. If smoking goes on here I shall no doubt find some proof of it.’

‘You are welcome to search the study, sir,’ said Nugent. ‘Nobody ever has any cigarettes here.’

‘No one, sir!’ said Da Costa.

‘That is what I shall ascertain,’ said Mr. Quelch icily. ‘You will turn out everything in the study under my inspection.’

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a look. The same thought was in both their minds—that this was a new trick of the Eurasian. Arthur Da Costa’s face expressed nothing.

‘This desk is locked, I think,’ said Mr Quelch, eyeing the old and rather massive desk that stood in a corner of the study.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Harry. ‘I keep it locked since the time Bunter played that silly practical joke with a watch.’

‘Unlock it!’

Wharton felt for his keys.

The old desk had several drawers and receptacles with locks. The same key opened all of them; and the desk was soon laid open to Mr. Quelch’s inspection.

‘Upon my word!’

The Remove-master uttered a sharp exclamation.

From one of the drawers, after removing several books and old papers, he drew a packet

of cigarettes and a pink paper—evidently a racing paper, with pencil marks against the names of certain horses.

Wharton stared at it dumbfounded.

Nugent gasped.

The drawer had been locked, and the key, as Wharton well knew, had never left his possession. Yet this discovery had been made in the locked drawer. The Remove-master's face was like iron now.

'It would appear, Wharton, that you have spoken falsely, and that you are not only in the habit of smoking, but that this racing paper belongs to you,' said Mr. Quelch in a grinding voice. 'You were suspected a short time ago of association with a racing man. I allowed myself to be convinced of your innocence. It appears that I was deceived.'

Wharton panted.

'Those things don't belong to me, sir. I've never seen them before. They've been put in my desk.'

'You keep this desk locked?'

'Y—yes, sir!'

'Have you left the key about at any time?'

'N—no, sir!'

'Do you ask me to believe that some ill-disposed boy has placed these articles in a locked desk when you had the key in your possession?'

'Yes, sir!' gasped Harry. 'That's the only way they could have come there. They're not mine.'

'You may tell that absurd story to your headmaster, if you choose,' said Mr. Quelch coldly. 'I shall now take you to Dr. Locke.'

'One moment, sir!' said Da Costa.

Mr. Quelch turned on him.

'Do you know anything of this, Da Costa?'

'Yess, sir!'

For one moment the Eurasian paused. Then he spoke again in a quiet, firm voice.

'Those things do not belong to Wharton, sir.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Then to whom do they belong?'

'To me, Sir!'

'You!'

'Yess, sir!'

There was a moment of dumbfounded silence in the study. Mr. Quelch stared at Da Costa as if he could scarcely believe his ears. Wharton and Nugent gazed at him in blank wonder. For the moment a pin might have been heard to fall in Study No. 1 in the Remove.

A Clean Cut!

ARTHUR DA COSTA stood facing the Remove-master with a calm, impassive face. He did not look at Wharton.

Mr. Quelch found his voice at last.

'Da Costa! What does this mean? Is this some absurd story to shield your study-mate? If these things belong to you, how could you place them in a locked drawer of which Wharton has the key?'

'I had a key that fitted the lock, sir.'

'Bless my soul!'

'Oh!' breathed Wharton. He had felt, he had known, that this was some new device of his

enemy; but he had not expected this. The locks on the old oaken desk were not of a common kind; and it could not have been easy to obtain a key to fit them.

‘Do you mean that you kept these things in Wharton’s desk with his knowledge, Da Costa?’

‘No, sir. I placed them there without his knowledge,’ said the Eurasian. ‘They have not been there two hours. I placed them there after I had entered your study secretly and made that mark on Wharton’s lines.’

‘Oh!’ gasped Nugent.

Mr. Quelch’s face was a study in itself.

‘Da Costa! I hardly understand you! Are you confessing that you have had a base scheme to cause another boy injury?’

‘Yess, sir!’

‘And why?’ demanded Mr. Quelch. ‘Why have you taken all this trouble, all this risk, only to confess to me in this way?’

‘Because I have changed my intention, sir,’ said the Eurasian calmly. ‘When I did what I have done I was half-hearted—I was not sure that I would do it—but I went on to the end. But I will go no further. I am ready for punishment, sir—to be sent away from Greyfriars if you think fit. I have been a rascal, but I cannot go on with it.’

There was another long silence in the study.

Mr. Quelch was gazing at the boy from the East in utter wonder. He spoke at last.

‘For such a wretched trick, Da Costa, you certainly would be expelled from Greyfriars had it come to my knowledge in any other way. But your confession, before harm has been done, makes a very great difference. I presume that you were actuated by some foolish malice, and that you have repented in time. Such a matter cannot be passed over, Da Costa.’

‘Yess, sir.’

‘Wharton, I am sorry that I have misjudged you,’ said the Remove-master. ‘This boy’s confession places the matter in a very different light. Da Costa, you will follow me to my study.’

‘Yess, sir!’

The Eurasian, without a look at his study-mates, followed the Remove-master.

When they were gone, Wharton and Nugent looked at one another.

‘Well, my hat!’ said Harry. It was all he could say.

‘How could he have got a key?’ muttered Nugent.

‘Goodness knows.’

‘And why did he own up?’

‘I can’t make it out.’

Prep was forgotten in Study No. 1. In sheer amazement the juniors waited for Arthur Da Costa to return.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo! You men finished?’ Bob Cherry looked in at the open study doorway.

‘Hallo, what’s up?’ he added in surprise.

Harry Wharton explained, and Bob gave a long whistle. The three juniors waited a while in the study, but Da Costa did not return, and they went down to the Rag at last.

The Eurasian was not seen there that evening. But there was news of him. Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag with a fat, grinning face.

‘I say, you fellows.’

‘Well, what’s the latest?’ yawned the Bounder.

‘Da Costa’s got it!’ said Bunter. ‘He, he, he! I saw him coming out of old Quelch’s study—he looked done to the wide! Old Quelch has been laying it on with a trowel, I fancy! He, he, he!’

‘That fellow in a row with Quelchy?’ said Skinner. ‘He’s generally on Quelchy’s safe side. What has he been up to?’

‘Perhaps Quelchy’s found out the Sort of worm he is!’ remarked Hazeldene.

‘Frightful worm!’ agreed Skinner, with a wink at Snoop. ‘Makes no end of a score at cricket when other fellows bag duck’s-eggs and things.’

‘I’m not talking about his cricket. His cricket’s all right. But he isn’t!’ growled Hazel.

‘I say, you fellows, he’s an awful beast,’ said Bunter. ‘A savage, ill-tempered beast! I just smiled at him when I saw him come squirming out of Quelchy’s study, and he shoved me over. He did really. I only gave him a smile—quite a pleasant smile!’

‘Gammon!’ said Bob Cherry. ‘You couldn’t do it with those features!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Oh, really, you beast—’

‘I wonder what he’s licked for, though?’ said the Bounder.

‘Let’s go and ask him,’ suggested Skinner.

But Da Costa was not to be found when Skinner looked for him; and he was not seen by the Remove again till bed-time.

He turned up in the Remove dormitory then, and several fellows asked him questions; but Da Costa had nothing to say. He went to bed with hardly a word, and without even a look at Harry Wharton.

Harry Wharton and Co. knew why the Eurasian had had that painful visit to Mr. Quelch’s study, but they said nothing on the subject. The latest development had quite surprised them, and even Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had to admit that he did not catch on.

It was not till the following morning that the boy from the East broke his silence. The Famous Five were in the quadrangle after breakfast, when Da Costa came up. The juniors stopped.

‘I should like to speak to you, Wharton,’ said Da Costa in a low voice, and the Co., after a glance at Harry, walked on and left the Eurasian with the captain of the Remove.

‘Well?’ said Harry, wondering what was coming. He could not understand the expression on the olive face.

Da Costa looked at him with a slow smile.

‘It is over,’ he said.

‘What?’

‘Did you not understand—in the study? It was on the Rook-wood day,’ said Da Costa, speaking slowly. ‘You thought I was betraying you—letting down the game. I do not blame you. But that was a mistake—as I think I proved to you.’

‘You did,’ said Harry.

‘I had much to think of that day,’ said Da Costa. ‘That morning I had received a key—you can guess for what use from what happened last evening. Never mind how I obtained the key. It is now at the bottom of the Sark, and will never be used again. I had that scheme in my mind, but—you do not know what this means to me, and I shall not tell you. But it became clear to my mind at last that I could not do what I had come to Greyfriars to do. And yet—’

He broke off.

‘Yes?’ said Harry, in wonder.

‘Yesterday I was tempted; it means a great deal to me to give up all that has been promised,’ said Da Costa. ‘It means much—very much. I stifled my conscience once more and laid that snare, and then—then, when success was in my hands, I spoke out, as you heard me speak. You told me that I was false to the marrow of my bones, and perhaps it is true. Later, I might waver again, but now I have placed it out of my own power. After what happened yesterday, and my confession, it would be futile for me to plot again, if the

temptation seized me. My confession of such trickery will not be forgotten. You understand now—'

'I think I do,' said Wharton slowly.

'You have called me a reptile,' said the Eurasian bitterly. 'Well, if I am a reptile I have now drawn my own fangs, and I cannot harm you, if I would. You will never understand me, or perhaps forgive me, but at least you may be sure that I shall not harm you again.' Harry Wharton stood silent. It was difficult for him to understand the strange nature of the Eurasian boy, but he believed what Da Costa was telling him now—that he had made a resolve to play the game, and to give up the treacherous purpose for which he had been sent to Greyfriars School. That resolve—for the moment, at least—was sincere, though that it might change again was very possible. Da Costa, watching Wharton's face, read what was passing in his mind and smiled.

'Even now you do not believe me,' he said. 'It is natural enough. But I have written a letter. I want you to read it and then drop it into the school letter-box.'

Wharton took the envelope the Eurasian held out to him. It was addressed to Mr. Gedge, in Chancery Lane.

'You want me to read this?'

'Yess, yess.'

'But—'

'Read it!'

Wharton drew the letter from the envelope and read, with deepening amazement:

'Dear Mr. Gedge,—The key you sent me is now at the bottom of the river. I am done with you. I have your letter, and refuse to meet you again, as you ask. You may tell Captain Marker to find another tool. I will do nothing for him.
'ARTHUR DA COSTA.'

'You are sending this to Mr. Gedge?' said Harry Wharton, replacing the letter in the envelope and looking blankly at the Eurasian.

'I ask you to post it, that you may be sure.'

'Well, my hat!'

Arthur Da Costa turned and walked away to the House, leaving Wharton with the letter in his hand.

His comrades rejoined him when the Eurasian was gone, and they watched while their skipper dropped the letter into the box. It was gone beyond recall now.

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What Mr. Gedge's feelings would be like when he received that curt missive, Harry Wharton wondered, though he cared little.

Arthur Da Costa did not seem to care at all. The blackness that had weighed upon his spirits since the day of the Rookwood match seemed lifted now; a weight seemed to have rolled from his mind. For the short time that he had to remain at Greyfriars the boy from the East, who had played so strange and treacherous a part, had placed it out of his own power to fall to temptation if his resolve wavered, and in Study No. 1, if there could not be friendship, there was at least respect for the fellow who, almost in spite of his own nature, had resolved upon playing the game.