

**BILLY BUNTER'S  
BEANFEAST**

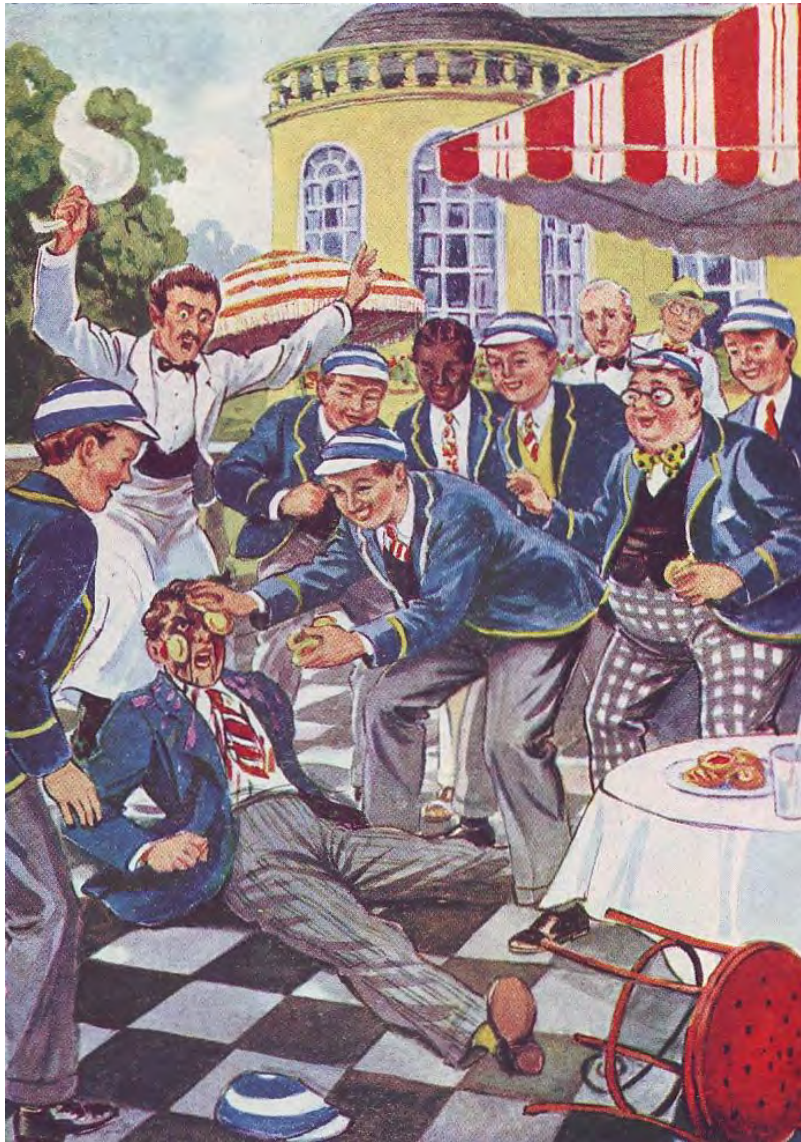


**FRANK RICHARDS**

# BILLY BUNTER'S BEANFEAST

By  
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Coker, his eyes and nose and mouth full of jam,  
spluttered horribly

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## CHAPTER 1

### APPEARANCES ARE DECEPTIVE

MR. QUELCH gave Billy Bunter an approving glance.

Probably it was the first time on record that he had done so.

Approving glances were not likely, as a rule, to come Billy Bunter's way, in the Remove form-room.

Bunter, in form, was not the kind of pupil to gladden a form-master's heart.

Often he neglected his prep. Often he perpetrated howlers that caused chuckles up and down the Remove. Often, too often, he blinked through his big spectacles at the form-room clock: thinking not of his lesson, but of the happy end thereof. Often, when called upon to construe, he did not know even the place, let alone the translation.

William George Bunter was, in fact, the kind of fellow to make a form-master wonder whether it was a mistake, after all, to take up a school-mastering career.

Now there seemed to be a change.

The fattest and laziest member of Mr. Quelch's form seemed to have changed all his manners and customs, on this particular morning.

His attention was not wandering. He was not surreptitiously chewing toffee. He did not bestow a single blink on the clock.

His eyes, and his spectacles, were fixed upon his book, with a concentrated gaze. He seemed absorbed in it — in fact entranced.

They were beginning on the second book of the *Æneid* in the Remove, where the good if somewhat long-winded *Æneas* relates his adventures, with *Dido* listening-in. Judging by Billy Bunter's look of intense concentration, he was finding a deep and abiding interest in the tale told by the Trojan hero to the queen of Carthage.

Which was unusual: indeed remarkable.

Billy Bunter's well-known opinion of *Virgil* was that it was all rot. He loathed the great Mantuan and all his works. Indeed his chief feeling towards *P. Vergilius Maro* was that he would have liked to step back a couple of thousand years and punch his head!

So it was no wonder that Quelch, for once, was pleased with Bunter. In lessons fellows were expected, or at least supposed, to concentrate on the work in hand. For the first time. Billy Bunter was, apparently, doing so.

Mr. Quelch's eyes were keen. Indeed they were often compared, in his form, to gimlets, for that reason. But even Quelch's keen eyes could not penetrate the cover of a book and he did not know — what half-a-dozen fellows near Bunter knew — that the fat Owl of the Remove was not looking at the Latin at all, but had a letter open inside his book, which he was devouring with eager eyes.

That letter did undoubtedly interest Billy Bunter, if *Virgil* did not.

Bunter had received the letter in break that morning. He had read it then and he had read it over again twice before the bell rang for third school. But that letter from the old folks at home evidently contained something of great and unusual and surpassing interest: for three readings did not satisfy Bunter: and now he was reading it over again, in form, under cover of his book. Quelch's look, had he known, would certainly not have been approving. But Quelch did not know: so, for once, he had an approving eye on Bunter.

Harry Wharton was on "con ". He was giving a good translation, as he usually did. But Quelch, while he listened to Wharton, had an eye — an approving eye — on

Bunter. For once, it seemed, the fat Owl was taking a keen interest in the lesson, and might be expected to hand out a “con” that would not make the Remove grin and the Remove master frown.

So Mr. Quelch signed to Wharton to stop at “ab alto”, and called on Bunter to construe.

“Bunter! You will go on.”

Billy Bunter did not look up from his book.

Quelch’s voice was not loud, but it was deep: and distinct to all ears in the form-room: — excepting, apparently, Bunter’s fat ears. Bunter was too absorbed to hear or heed it!

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows: and then his voice. “Bunter!” he repeated, crescendo. This time Billy Bunter heard, and he gave a little jump: as if suddenly brought back to earth, as it were. He blinked up guiltily at his form-master, through his big spectacles.

“Oh! Yes, sir! Did you speak, sir?”

“I did, Bunter.” Quelch’s tone was quite kindly. A fellow who was so deeply absorbed in the immortal works of Virgil that he did not hear his master’s voice was, after all, excusable! “I am glad to see you so attentive to the lesson, Bunter.”

“Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter.

“You will go on where Wharton left off, Bunter.”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter.

Deep — not in Virgil, as Quelch supposed, but in that unusually interesting letter from Mr. Samuel Bunter, stockbroker, of Bunter Villa, Surrey — Bunter had not heard a word: and he had not the remotest idea where Wharton had left off.

He blinked at P. Vergilius Maro in dismay.

“You have not lost your place, Bunter?” asked Mr. Quelch, still kindly, but puzzled. Bunter could hardly have lost his place, when he had apparently been following the lesson with such concentrated attention. Yet he did not seem to know where to begin.

“Oh! No, sir! Not at all, sir,” stammered Bunter, “I — I ———.”

“Well, go on now, Bunter.”

“Infandum regina, fathead!” whispered Bob Cherry, greatly daring. It was not a safe game to give another fellow tips under Quelch’s gimlet-eye.

“I am waiting, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch, rather less genially.

“Oh! Yes, sir! Infandum regina, fathead,” stammered Bunter.

“What?” Mr. Quelch almost jumped clear of the floor. Every head in the Remove was turned, to stare at Bunter.

“Oh! I — I mean —!” gasped Bunter. The hapless fat Owl realised that, in his haste and confusion, he had taken Bob Cherry’s tip rather too literally, “I — I — I mean.”

“What do you mean, Bunter?” asked Mr. Quelch, in a very deep voice.

“I — I mean, —” Bunter had the place now, “I — I mean, Infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem —.”

“Construe!” said Mr. Quelch, sharply. His glance at Billy Bunter was no longer approving!

Billy Bunter, as frequently happened, had hardly looked at his prep in No. 7 Study the evening before. There was some excuse for Bunter. Founder’s Day was near: and Founder’s Day was a whole holiday at Greyfriars School. Quite a lot of Greyfriars fellows were more interested in a whole holiday, than in Latin lessons and preparing for the same. But it was rather unfortunate that Bunter had not been able to give a little time to prep. “Infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem” bristled with difficulties. But Billy Bunter had to make a shot at it, at least.

“The infant queen —!” began Bunter.

The expression on Quelch's face stopped him, at that. It was borne in upon Bunter's fat mind that, whatever "infandum regina" might mean, it did not mean "the infant queen."

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Frank Nugent: and there was a chuckle in the Remove. Bunter's howlers often added to the gaiety of existence in the form-room: furnishing a little much-needed comic relief. But "the infant queen" was rather rich, even for Bunter.

"Silence!" rapped Mr. Quelch. Quelch did not seem amused! Neither was there a vestige of approval in the look he fixed on Bunter. Only too clearly Billy Bunter had not, after all, been concentrating on the lesson. It had looked like it: but appearances were deceptive. "Bunter! How dare you!"

"I — I mean —," stuttered Bunter, "I — I didn't mean the — the infant queen, sir, I — I — I meant —."

"Well, what did you mean?" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"I — I meant the — the infamous queen, sir —!" gasped Bunter. It was another shot in the dark: with no better luck than before.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the Remove fellows. In spite of Quelch's frown, they could not help it. The "infant queen" was rich but the "infamous queen" was priceless. Billy Bunter really was excelling himself.

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

"Oh, yes, sir," gasped Bunter. "I — I was swotting like anything in the study last night, sir — Toddy was there, sir — he knows. I wasn't sitting in the armchair talking about Founder's Day, was I, Toddy?"

"If you do not immediately construe that verse, Bunter —!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep, deep voice.

"Oh! Yes, sir! I — I think I've got it right." Bunter gave a hopeless blink at "infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem", and made another wild shot in the dark.

"The infamous queen orders new sorrows —."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" Quelch seemed less amused than ever. "Bunter, you will write out that verse, with its translation, after class, and bring it to me in my study before dinner."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter, greatly relieved. It was easy enough to ask some other Remove fellow what that rotten verse meant, after class.

"If your translation is not correct, Bunter, I shall cane you.,"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"And if any other boy in this form should give you help in the translation," continued Mr. Quelch, with a grim glance over the Remove, "he will be given a detention for Founder's Day next week."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

His brief hope vanished. Almost any fellow in the form could have done that translation for Bunter. But it was extremely unlikely that any fellow would incur the remotest risk of a detention on Founder's Day! It looked as if the hapless Owl would have to deal with "infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem" by his own unaided efforts.

"You will go on, Bull," rapped Mr. Quelch. "Go on from „Trojanas ut opes“,“ he added: which, as Bunter bitterly reflected, was just like him. He was not going to let Bunter hear Johnny Bull translate that troublesome verse.

For several minutes, Billy Bunter's fat face was long and lugubrious, as construe went on in the Remove. Working out the translation of that verse for himself meant a spot of work with grammar and dictionary, Bunter hated work — he loathed grammars,

and detested dictionaries.

But only for a few minutes was the fat brow of the Owl of the Remove overcast. Then it cleared, as he blinked into his Virgil again. Once more he had the appearance of following the lesson with concentrated attention. But appearances were deceptive. Once more Bunter was perusing that letter from home: and the contents of that letter, whatever they were, had the effect of banishing gloom from his brow, and causing him to forget even the awful prospect of having to do a little work.

## CHAPTER 2

### BUNTER WISHES HE HADN'T

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Halo, hallo, hallo! How's the infant queen getting on?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter cornered the Famous Five in the quad, after the Remove had been dismissed from third school. He had his Virgil under a fat arm: and evidently he was in search of a little present help in time of need. Unlikely as it was that any Remove man would risk a detention on Founder's Day, the fat Owl hoped for the best. Certainly any member of the famous Co. could have reeled off the required translation at a moment's notice, — if he had chosen so to do.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," grunted Bunter, eyeing the chums of the Remove reproachfully through his big spectacles. "Quelch is going to whop me if I don't take him that rotten translation before dinner. You heard what he said."

"Better get on with it, then," suggested Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton —."

"You fat slacker," said Johnny Bull. "It won't take you five minutes."

"Oh, really, Bull —."

"Better get it right," advised Frank Nugent. "Put a wet towel round your head, old fat man, and swot over it."

"Oh, really, Nugent —."

"Cut in and get it done, fathead," said Bob Cherry. "No good asking us — we're not going to be detained on Founder's Day next week."

"Quelch wouldn't know," argued Bunter. "If Quelch asks me, I shall tell him I did it all on my own, so that's all right."

"You fat villain!"

"Oh, really, Cherry —."

"Kick him!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Turn roundfully, my esteemed and prevaricating Bunter."

"Oh, really, Inky! Look here, you fellows, you might help a fellow out of a jam," urged Bunter. "Quelch couldn't know a thing. I've simply got to get this right, and I don't want to have to swot over it. I say, Harry, old chap, you're awfully good at Latin — cleverest fellow in the Remove —."

"Thanks!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"I mean it, old chap! I — I've often wondered how you do it, it's so jolly clever," said Bunter. "You've got brains, old chap! Intellect, and all that. I'm not saying this just because I want you to do that translation for me, you know."

"No?" asked Harry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

“Not at all, old fellow! You’re so jolly good at it, I believe you could teach Quelch himself a lot,” declared Bunter. “I say, you’ll do that translation for me, won’t you?”  
“No!”

“Beast! I don’t suppose you could, anyway — you’re rotten at Latin. I say, Bob, old chap, you’re a lot better at Latin than Wharton — he’s not in the same street with you. Will you translate that rotten verse?”

“Not in these trousers!”

“What about you, Nugent?”

“Nothing about me.”

“What about you, Johnny, old chap?”

“Less than nothing.”

“I say, Inky, old fellow —.”

“The answer is in the absurd negative, my esteemed fat Bunter,” answered the nabob of Bhanipur, with a shake of his dusky head.

“Well, I like that!” said Bunter, with a scornful blink at the Famous Five. “After all I’ve done for you fellows, you let me down like this! I daresay you know what the rotten stuff means, all the time, without working it out.”

Harry Wharton laughed.

“So would you, if you’d done your prep last night,” he said. “Look here, you fat ass, nobody’s going to risk a detention on Founder’s Day because you’re too jolly lazy to do a small spot of work. Cut in and get on with it.”

“Beast!”

Billy Bunter turned a fat back on the Famous Five, and rolled away in search of help in other quarters. It was true that it was only a small spot of work, if he made up his fat mind to it: but Billy Bunter had strong objections to the smallest spot of work. Work was a last and desperate resource to which Bunter was not likely to turn until he had explored every avenue.

“I say, Smithy!” A fat hand grabbed the Bounder’s arm. “I say, old chap, you might just squint at this and tell me ——.”

“Fathead!” was Herbert Vernon-Smith’s answer. And he shook off the fat hand and walked on. Smithy, evidently, was not taking any risks on Founder’s Day to save Bunter from that small spot of work.

“Beast!” hooted Bunter.

He bore down on Peter Todd. Peter was his study-mate in No. 7, and surely it was up to Peter to help a fellow in his own study, with a spot of work hanging over his fat head like the sword of Damocles.

“I say, Toddy, old chap! You were doing this rot in the study last night — lend me a hand with it, will you? If Quelch asks you, you can say you didn’t —.”

“No, I won’t lend you a hand,” said Peter. “But I’ll tell you what — I’ll lend you a foot!”

And he did.

“Ow! Beast!” howled Bunter, departing on his highest gear before Peter could repeat the loan.

Billy Bunter breathed hard, and he breathed deep. It was, as usual, selfishness all round. But Bunter did not despair. Like many lazy people, he was prepared to take more trouble to dodge work than would have been required to get it done. And a bright idea came into his fat mind as he spotted Coker of the Fifth in the quad. Remove men might be detained by Quelch: but Fifth-form men couldn’t. Coker wouldn’t care a boiled bean for Quelch. On the other hand, Coker of the Fifth was a very lofty personage, with a very disdainful eye for Lower boys. Still, Bunter thought



it was worth trying on: and he rolled up to Coker of the Fifth.

“I say, Coker —!” began Bunter, in his most ingratiating tone.

Horace Coker looked down at him. He frowned.

“Did you speak to me, Bunter?” he asked.

“Yes! You see —.”

“Well, don’t!” said Coker. “Cut off, and don’t be cheeky.” It was, in Horace Coker’s opinion, cheek for a mere fag to come up to him in the quad, under the eyes of all Greyfriars, just as if he knew him!

“But I say, old fellow —!” urged Bunter.

That did it! Horace Coker’s dignity as a Fifth-form senior could hardly tolerate a fag of the Remove coming up and speaking to him in the quad. It could not possibly tolerate “old fellow” from that fag.

Coker did not speak. He reached out with a large and heavy hand, grasped the fat junior by the collar, and sat him down on the hard, unsympathetic earth. Bunter sat down with a heavy bump and a loud yell.

Virgil flew from under his arm, and landed two or three yards away. It opened as it flew, and a letter fell from between the pages, — the letter Billy Bunter had been reading with such deep interest in the form-room. It floated further on as Virgil thudded on the ground.

“Yaroooh!”

Coker gave the fat Owl a glare, and stalked away.

“Ow! Beast!” spluttered Bunter. He scrambled up, and grabbed up Virgil, sorely tempted to send that great poet whizzing at the back of Coker’s head. “Ow! Wow! Fifth-form cad! Yah!”

Coker of the Fifth looked round, with knitted brows, and made a step to return. That was enough for Bunter. He flew.

Happily unaware that the letter had fallen from the book, and was drifting on the summer breeze, Bunter bolted at top speed.

It was a breathless fat Owl that rolled into the Rag, and plumped down in the nearest armchair. There were three Remove fellows in the Rag: Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, frowsting about as usual. They grinned at the fat Owl as he rolled in.

Bunter gave them a morose blink. Skinner could have done that troublesome translation for him quite easily: but Skinner was not the fellow to lend a fellow a hand, even had no penalty impended. Still, Bunter realised that he would lose nothing by asking.

“I say, Skinner, old chap, think you could do that translation—*infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem*?” asked Bunter.

“If I couldn’t, I’d ask the Head to shove me back into the Third Form,” answered Skinner.

“Well, I know you’re a dab at Latin, old fellow — cleverest fellow in the form, if you come to that,” said Bunter. “Wharton thinks he’s a dab at it, but he isn’t in the same street with you, Skinner. You’re really clever at it — I fancy you know as much as Quelch — or more, too. I — I say, what does that rotten verse mean, Skinner? You might tell a chap.”

“And get a detention on Founder’s Day?” asked Skinner.

“How’s Quelch to know?” urged Bunter. “You can say you didn’t, if he asks you.

Wharton or Toddy would make a fuss about telling lies to a beak, but you don’t mind, do you, old chap? I mean to say, you ain’t jolly particular about anything, are you? You often tell whoppers, so one more won’t hurt you. So it’s as safe as houses, old chap.”

“How nicely you put it, Bunter,” said Skinner, while Snoop and Stott chuckled. “You sort of make a fellow yearn to help you out. Dashed if I don’t risk it.”

“Don’t you be an ass, Skinner,” said Snoop. “Quelch meant what he said, and he’s a downy bird — he will spot any fellow who helps Bunter out.”

“You shut up, Snoop!” exclaimed Bunter, warmly. “You mind your own business, and let Skinner alone. I say, Skinner, give me the translation, like a good chap.”

“Well, let’s see “ said Skinner, thoughtfully. “Chuck it, fathead,” said Stott. “It ain’t safe.”

“You shut up, Stott!” hooted Bunter. “Go on, Skinner. Quelch wants that con before tiffin, and the bell will be going soon. Cough it up, old chap.”

“O.K.,” said Skinner, blandly. “Let’s see — *infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem* — the jujubes renew the pain of the queen’s infant.”

Snoop and Stott almost collapsed, as they heard that remarkable translation from P. Vergilius Maro. They realised that the playful Skinner was pulling a fat leg: and turned their faces away to hide their emotions.

“Oh!” said Bunter. He heaved himself out of the armchair, and went to the table to write it down.

Skinner suppressed a gurgle. He had, for a moment, a doubt whether even the egregious fat Owl could have his podgy leg pulled to that extent. But he need not have doubted. Had Bunter thought it over, it might have seemed a little improbable, even to him. But Bunter did not think it over, —thinking was not his long suit, anyway. He just wrote it down.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott exchanged glances, behind a fat back. It was not easy for the young rascals to suppress a yell of laughter, at the idea of Bunter taking that extraordinary translation to Mr. Quelch. But they contrived to keep their faces serious, as Bunter blinked round.

“That’s all right,” said Bunter. “Of course. I really knew that that was what it meant, Skinner —.”

“Oh! Did you?” gasped Skinner.

“Oh, yes! I’m pretty good at Latin,” said the fat Owl. “I just wanted to make sure: but you haven’t helped me at all, really. I knew all the time.”

And having thus expressed his gratitude, for services rendered, Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag, and headed for Mr. Quelch’s study. If Skinner had experienced a pang of remorse for his practical joke on the fat junior, the Bunter brand of gratitude would probably have banished it. Bunter rolled away, leaving Skinner and Co. almost doubled up with merriment.

Billy Bunter tapped cheerfully at Mr. Quelch’s door and rolled into his form-master’s study, his paper in his fat hand. It was still ten minutes to “tiffin”, and Bunter was on time, owing to Skinner’s kind offices. Mr. Quelch fixed a grim inquiring glance upon him.

“Have you brought me your translation, Bunter?”

“Yes, sir! Here it is, sir.”

“If anyone has helped you with it, Bunter —.”

“Oh, no, sir! I never asked any of the fellows, and they never said they wouldn’t —.”

“What?”

“I — I did it entirely by myself, sir,” gasped Bunter. “It — It wasn’t very hard, sir, when — when I came to do it, sir.”

“You may hand it to me, Bunter.”

Bunter handed it to him. Quelch glanced at it. Quite an extraordinary expression came over his face, as he read. As Bunter had had ample time to work out the translation of

that verse, and as even Bunter was capable of it if he chose to put in a spot of work, Quelch expected to read:

“Terrible, O Queen, the sorrow thou bidst me renew,” or words to that effect. But what he read was:

Infandum regina jubes renovare dolorem  
The jujubes renew the pain of the queen’s infant.

Mr. Quelch gazed at it. He seemed speechless for a moment or two. Billy Bunter, blinking at him, felt an inward misgiving that Skinner must have got it wrong somehow.

“Upon my word!” said Mr. Quelch, at last. “Bunter! I refuse to believe that even you are capable of stupidity to this extent — this is impertinence!” He rose to his feet, and picked up his cane. “Bunter! Bend over that chair!”

“Oh, crikey 1” gasped Bunter. “I — I say, is — is — isn’t that right, sir?”

“Bend over that chair!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

“Oh, lor”!

Billy Bunter sagged dismally over the chair. There was a rhythmic sound of cane contacting trousers, and a series of howls. It was a sad and sorrowful fat Owl that tottered away from Mr. Quelch’s study, folded up almost like a pocket-knife. Billy Bunter had succeeded in dodging a spot of work, — but from the bottom of his fat heart he wished that he hadn’t.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BOUNDER MAKES PLANS

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars sat in his study, No. 4 in the Remove, after class, his eyes glued upon a paper that lay on the table before him. It was a sheet of thin foreign-looking note-paper, covered with figures in columns. The Bounder was so deeply absorbed in it that he did not notice the study door open, or his study-mate, Tom Redwing, look in. Redwing stood in the doorway, looking at him in surprise.

After class, on a bright summer’s day, most of the fellows were out of the House. It was not like the Bounder to frowst in a study — unless sometimes perhaps to smoke a surreptitious cigarette — and Redwing had come up to look for him. His occupation was rather surprising. If Smithy was not likely to “frowst” in his study, he was still less likely to linger there for studious purposes. But he looked, at the moment, as if he were swotting as hard as Mark Linley ever did.

“Busy, old chap?” asked Redwing.

His unexpected voice startled the Bounder. With a swift and sudden movement, he covered the sheet of figures with the blotter, before he looked round. An angry scowl had leaped to his face: but it cleared as he saw that the newcomer was his chum Redwing.

“You ass!” he said. “You made a fellow jump. It’s all right, Reddy — come in, and shut the door.”

Redwing came in and shut the door, a little puzzled.

“Not coming down to the nets?” he asked.

“Bother the nets,” said the Bounder, irritably.

“Wharton’s crowd have gone down —.”

“Bother Wharton and his crowd.”

The Bounder removed the blotter, revealing the sheet of figures. Redwing gave it a glance, more puzzled than ever.

“Something for Lascelles?” he asked.

“Hardly!” the Bounder grinned. “Lascelles is a beak! I shouldn’t like him to see this Reddy. Not that I suppose that even a maths master would understand it.”

“What the dickens is it?” asked Redwing, staring at the figures. “You’re not sitting in here doing simple addition. I suppose.”

“Fathead!”

“Well, I can’t make head or tail of it. Still, if you’re busy, I’ll cut, and leave you to it.”

“Take a pew, old man! I want to talk to you about this,” said Vernon-Smith. “Look at that paper.”

Redwing sat down, took the paper, and examined it. His expression grew more and more perplexed. Certainly it was not a problem for Lascelles, the mathematics master, or anything like it. If it was an arithmetical exercise, it was too simple to tax even the capacity of Bunter minor of the Second Form. It looked like a series of extremely simple addition sums that had not yet been added up.

9	8	7	9	1	8	3	2	4	7	6	9	9
9	8	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	7	6	4	1
1	5	5	4	9	2	1	3	5	5	5	9	7
5	8	1	6	7	4	3	5	9	3	6	7	9
2	1	4	7	6	1	8	7	9	6	7	8	8
1	4	4	2	7	5	1	6	6	3	1	5	2
4	5	6	9	7	6	4	5	6	3	4	5	4
5	9	8	4	2	2	6	5	2	1	4	2	1
9	8	1	1	5	3	9	9	1	8	4	1	5

There was more of it: much more. The figures were small, and they covered a large sheet. There were endless repetitions of the numbers from 1 to 9, in every kind of order or disorder: column after column of single figures, never exceeding nine.

What it could possibly mean, if it meant anything at all, was a puzzle to Tom Redwing. From the fact that Smithy was unwilling to let a “beak” see it, he could guess that it was something on which authority would have frowned—if authority could have made head or tail of it. More than once, Redwing had seen the Bounder deeply occupied working out “systems” on backing horses: but it was clear that this could have nothing to do with horse-racing. But it was something of that nature, though he could not guess what it was.

A grave and troubled look came over Redwing's honest, sunburnt face, as he scanned those apparently meaningless figures.

It was not without reason that Herbert Vernon-Smith had been nicknamed the "Boulder" in the Remove. He had many good qualities, as his chum knew well: but there was a kink of blackguardism in him that seemed ineradicable. If a Greyfriars cap was seen over the fence at the Three Fishers or the Cross Keys, it was only too likely to be on the Boulder's head. If a fellow crept out of the Remove dormitory after lights out, it was fairly certain to be Herbert Vernon-Smith. When other fellows scanned the evening paper in the Rag for the county cricket news, Smithy's interest was often centred on the stop-press column, with the latest winners.

No two fellows could have been more unlike than the reckless, sardonic Boulder, and the sailorman's son, open and frank and honest as the day. Yet the friendship between them was very deep and real. Redwing shut his eyes, so far as he could, to what shocked and pained him in his friend: while the Boulder sometimes listened to good advice from Redwing, which he would have mocked from anyone else.

A sarcastic grin came over Smithy's face, as he watched the expression on Redwing's.

"Got it yet?" he asked.

"I suppose it's some more of your rot, Smithy, but I can't make it out," answered Redwing. "Chuck it away and come down to the cricket, old man."

"Likely!" said the Boulder. "I've been working on that for some time, Reddy, and I've got on to it, I fancy. There never was a game that couldn't be beaten, one way or another. I'm goin' to beat that game, on Founder's Day."

"Is it a game?" asked Redwing, blankly.

"It's a game, you innocent old sobersides, and it's called la boule."

"A French game?" said Redwing, still blankly.

"Exactly."

"Do you mean a gambling game, Smithy?" asked Tom Redwing, very quietly.

"What else?"

"I don't see how you know anything about it —."

"Lots of things you don't see, and never learned when you were coasting in the lugger with your pater, Reddy," said the Boulder, banteringly. "I took down those lists of numbers on a holiday in France, after losing a packet at the green table."

"Smithy!"

"Quite a usual thing in a continental casino," said Smithy. "You chuck away all the money you've got about you: then you take down the numbers and pore over them, working out how you might have won if you hadn't lost. I've seen plenty of mugs at that game." The Boulder gave a sneering laugh. "Fools and their money are soon parted, you know."

"I won't tell you what I think of this kind of thing, Smithy —."

"No, don't! Sermon may be taken as read," said the Boulder, with a nod.

"But I'm jolly glad that you can't get anything of the kind in this country, at any rate. What's the good of working out that rubbish for nothing?" asked Redwing. "You can't cross the Channel to try your luck — or your ill-luck, rather."

"Can't I?" grinned the Boulder. "You've forgotten Founder's Day next week, Reddy! A whole holiday, my pippin — no beak or pre's for a whole jolly day — and a jolly little casino in the woods only thirty miles from here."

"But you can't —."

"My dear man, I'm getting across to Boulogne on Founder's Day," said the Boulder, coolly. "Haven't you heard of the jolly old day trips, without passports — you just

step on the steamer, as if you were going to Margate or Southend, and pull up at Boulogne. You get the best part of the day there, and when you're in Rome, you do as the Romans do, see — which applies to Boulogne as well as Rome."

Redwing stared at him.

"You'd have to ask leave for a trip like that, Smithy, and you wouldn't get it from Quelch, or the Head either —."

"I've heard of fellows doing things without leave," remarked the Bounder, casually.

"Besides, I think I could get leave for a harmless and pleasant little sea-trip in such well-known and improvin' company as yours, Reddy."

"Mine!" exclaimed Redwing.

"Of course."

"If you think I'd have a hand in that kind of thing, Smithy —."

"Not at all!" the Bounder chuckled. "I can't see you staring with eagle eyes, like jolly old Cortez, while they spin the ball and squeak out the numbers. Not in your line at all, Reddy! They'd skin you down to the shoelaces before you knew what was happening. You're comin' with me to see me through, and see me safe home, this side up with care, after I've rooked those blighters at their own game."

Redwing stared, and then laughed.

"Smithy, old man! You can't help being a bit of a blackguard, I suppose — but you've never been a fool! I don't know anything about that game, if it is a game: but I know people don't win money at it. You must know it too. A casino is run on profits, not on losses."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" said the Bounder, mockingly. "Right on the wicket, Reddy! But suppose a fellow had a system —."

"Rot!"

"I tell you I've worked out a system on these numbers," said Vernon-Smith, "and I tell you I've simply got to get across the Channel, to pick up money."

"Rubbish!"

"I'll explain it to you, in words of one syllable, suitable to your undeveloped intellect, old scout. Look here." The Bounder picked up the sheet of figures, and his bantering tone dropped from him, his face becoming hard and eager and excited: looking, for the moment, years older. "I tell you I've worked it out, and it's a dead cert. I tell you —."

The study door opened, and a fat face and a big pair of spectacles looked in. Billy Bunter blinked at Smithy and Redwing, and at the sheet of figures in the Bounder's hand.

"I say, you fellows —," he began.

He got no further. The Bounder uttered almost a yell of rage as he was interrupted. He threw down the paper — too late to keep it from Bunter's view — and leaped to his feet. Stopping only to throw the blotter over the paper, he made a rush at Bunter.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. He spun round to flee. A boot landed on his tight trousers as he fled: and he departed in greater haste than he had intended.

A roar floated back from the Remove passage, as the Bounder savagely slammed the door of No. 4 Study.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

The Bounder breathed hard, his eyes glinting.

"That fat fool!" he muttered. "He saw that paper —."

"He wouldn't understand it," said Redwing.

"I don't want it tattled up and down the Remove," snarled the Bounder. "If a word got out, it would be all U.P. with my trip to France. I can fancy Quelch's face, at the idea

of a Remove man backing the numbers in a French casino.”

Redwing’s face set.

“You can’t do anything of the sort, Smithy.”

“Oh, don’t be a goat! I tell you I’ve got it all cut and dried. I’m goin’ to get back at Boulogne the packet I lost at Nice and Cannes last year, and some more to it, too.

Now, look here, you go through these figures with me. and I’ll explain the system — .”

Redwing rose.

“I’ll get down to the cricket,” he said. “You’d better come too, Smithy.”

The Bounder gave him a dark look.

“Will you go into this with me, and let me explain —.”

“No, I won’t! It makes me sick just to look at it. Chuck it.”

“You cheeky fool —!”

“Thanks.”

Redwing crossed to the door. For once he seemed to have less patience than usual with his chum. Vernon-Smith’s eyes glinted as they followed him.

“You’ll come across with me on Wednesday, Founder’s Day?” he said.

“Not for that game.”

“So you’re going to let me down?”

“I won’t have a hand in anything like that! If you want a sea-trip, we can get a cutter out, at Pegg, and have a jolly day. But —.”

“Oh, don’t talk rot! If you’re going, go, and shut the door after you.”

Tom Redwing went out of the study, and shut the door after him. Herbert Vernon-Smith scowled at the door as it closed. But the scowl faded from his face as he sat down again with his precious list of numbers. Once more he sat with his eyes glued on the figures, counting and calculating, his face hard and concentrated: forgetful of Tom Redwing’s existence and of everything else but the figures before him, and a vision of a green table with yellow numbers on the baize.

## CHAPTER 4

### LOST!

“A BEANFEAST?”

“Just that!” said Billy Bunter.

Five fellows were gathered round the study table in No. 1, at tea, when Billy Bunter rolled in. Harry Wharton and Co. looked very bright and cheery, after a spot of cricket. They did not look more cheery as Bunter rolled in — perhaps a little less so. And they stared in surprise at the announcement Bunter had to make.

“I suppose you know what a beanfeast is,” yapped Bunter, as the Famous Five stared at him.

“Sort of,” admitted Bob Cherry. “A beano for short.”

“And I’m standing it,” said Bunter.

“You are!” ejaculated Frank Nugent.

“Little me!” said Bunter. “Why not? We get a whole holiday on Founder’s Day next week, don’t we? Well, my idea is to make a regular beanfeast of it — start early and finish late — and have a terrific time! What?”

“Regardless of expense?” asked Johnny Bull sarcastically.

“Exactly!” said Bunter, with a nod.

“Has your postal order come?” asked Bob Cherry: and there was a chuckle in No. 1

Study.

“Well, as a matter of fact, it hasn’t,” admitted Bunter. “I’m expecting a postal order, as I think I mentioned to you fellows —.”

“I think you did!” assented Harry Wharton. “I seem to have heard of something of the sort.”

“Well, there’s been some delay in the post,” explained Bunter. “It’s coming all right. It’s from one of my titled relations, you know. But it hasn’t exactly come yet. To tell you fellows the truth,” added Bunter, sadly, “I’m actually short of money at the present moment.”

“What does it feel like, old chap, to be short of money for the first time in your life?” asked Bob Cherry, gravely.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Cherry! The fact is, I’d like one of you fellows to lend me half-a-crown till my postal order comes —.”

“You’re standing a beanfeast on Founder’s Day — and you’d like somebody to lend you half-a-crown!” said Johnny Bull. “Are you going to save up the half-crown to stand the beanfeast?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Bull! My pater’s weighing in on Founder’s day, of course. I had a letter from him this morning — I was reading it in my Virgil when Quelch jumped on me this morning — I can tell you it was topping! I say, you fellows, you’ve heard of those day trips without passports — across the Channel —.”

“Haven’t we?” sighed Bob, “There’s a steamer starts from Pegg Bay — and we were thinking of it for Founder’s Day, only the cash won’t run to it.”

“Well, that’s the idea,” said Bunter, “We’re going —.”

“Eh?”

“We get most of the day in France —.”

“Do we?” grinned Nugent.

“Entirely at my expense,” said Bunter, impressively.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,” exclaimed Bunter, warmly. “If that’s how you thank a chap for asking you to a tip-top beanfeast —.”

“Awfully good of you to ask us,” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “But do you think you could stand a beanfeast on half-a-crown — even if one of us lent you the half-crown?”

“I tell you my pater’s standing it — it was in his letter this morning,” hooted Bunter.

“You fellows needn’t count up your bobs and tanners and thrippenny bits. I shall get a bundle of tickets for the steamer on Founder’s Day.”

“I believe they’d cost pounds and pounds,” said Nugent.

“Well, that cuts no ice with my pater,” said Bunter. “He’s got lots of oof — lots and lots and lots. Haven’t I often told you so?”

“Too often,” agreed Harry.

“I’m going to take a party,” went on Bunter. “I’m asking you fellows — though you treated me badly over that translation. I got whopped, through that beast Skinner giving me a spoof con. I jolly well shan’t ask him to my beanfeast.”

“He will lose a lot!” said Bob, compassionately.

“The lotfulness will be terrific,” grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Well, it will be a topping do,” said Bunter. “Steamer across the Channel to Boulogne — lunch at a spiffing French hotel — sight-seeing up and down the coast — don’t you fellows like the idea?”



“Sounds good!” grinned Bob.

“We’d like it all right, fathead,” said Harry Wharton. “But it would run to rather too much for fellows in the Lower Fourth —.”

“I tell you I’m standing it,” howled Bunter.

“Bow-wow!”

“Mean to say you don’t believe me?” demanded Bunter, indignantly. “Why, I’ll show you my pater’s letter if you like — it’s all in his letter — I tell you it’s honest Injun.” The Famous Five chuckled. It was true that Billy Bunter had told them, too often, of the vast amounts of “oof” that appertained to the Bunter clan. But none of that “oof” had ever seemed to travel as far as Greyfriars School. As the fat Owl had obviously come to the study with the intention of borrowing — if he could — a half-crown, it was really a little difficult to swallow the “beanfeast”, which, on the lines mapped out by Bunter, would certainly run into quite a considerable sum. In fact, nobody in No. 1 Study doubted that Billy Bunter’s beanfeast was merely a figment of his fat imagination — merely that and nothing more!

“Honest Injun!” repeated Bunter.

“But your Injun isn’t very honest, old fat man,” said Bob, shaking his head. “Now, if you’ve done your funny turn —.”

“So that’s how you thank a chap!” said Bunter. “Talk about a thankless tooth being sharper than a serpent’s child! I’m asking you to a trip on the continent, all expenses paid, and all you can say is —.”

“Bow-wow!” said Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I was going to ask Smithy,” went on Bunter. “But the beast flew into a temper, I don’t know why, when I looked into his study. I jolly well shan’t ask him now, or Skinner either. I say, I wonder what was on that paper Smithy popped under his blotter when I looked into his study! He kicked me —.”

“Smithy has good ideas sometimes,” said Johnny Bull. “Let’s all do the same, you fellows.”

“Beast! I mean, look here, old chaps. I’m asking you to my beanfeast on Founder’s Day, and I think you might lend me half-a-crown till my postal order comes. Why, that trip will cost pounds and pounds!” exclaimed Bunter, indignantly, “If you don’t believe me —.”

“No, jif about it, old fat man,” said Harry Wharton. “Shut the door after you.”

“Perhaps you’ll believe me when I show it to you in my pater’s letter,” hooted Bunter. “You can see it in black and white if you like.”

“Hem!”

“Well, here’s the letter,” snorted Bunter, and he shoved a fat hand into a sticky pocket, and groped.

Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at him. Knowing their Bunter as they did, they had taken it for granted that the fat Owl was simply talking out of the back of his fat neck. Now, as he groped in his pocket for the letter, they wondered whether, after all, there might be a spot of fact in Bunter’s fiction. Certainly if he showed it to them in black and white, there could be no doubt. If Mr. Bunter had written it to his son at Greyfriars, it was so.

But it was only for a moment that they wondered, Bunter’s fat paw came out of his pocket empty.

“Well, where’s the letter?” grinned Bob.

“I forgot — I left it in my Virgil, where I was reading it in class,” said the fat Owl.

“It’s in my study —.”

“Cut along and fetch it!” chuckled Nugent.

“So I jolly well will!” snorted Bunter.

The fat Owl revolved on his axis, and rolled out of the study. Harry Wharton and Co. glanced at one another.

“Can’t be anything in it,” said Bob.

“Just gas!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“The gasfulness is terrific,” agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Well, if it’s in his father’s letter, it must be all right,” said Harry Wharton, puzzled.

“and he’s gone for the letter.”

“He will come back without it, fathead,” said Johnny.

“Yes, I suppose he will,” assented the captain of the Remove.

“Halo, hallo, hallo! Here he comes!”

The fat figure reappeared in the doorway of No. 1 Study. On the fat face there was a dismayed expression.

“I say, you fellows,” squeaked Bunter, “have you seen a letter lying about anywhere?”

“Lost it?” chuckled Bob.

“Well, it ain’t in my Virgil where I had it,” said Bunter. “I must have dropped it out somewhere.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“What are you cackling at?” howled Bunter. “I tell you it was all in my pater’s letter — and the letter was in my Virgil — but it’s lost —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I tell you —!” shrieked Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Look here, if you fellows keep on cackling whenever a fellow opens his mouth, I jolly well won’t take you on my beanfeast on Founder’s Day!” roared Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter glared at five laughing faces, with a glare that might almost have cracked his spectacles. Then, with an angry and indignant snort, he rolled out of No. 1 Study, and slammed the door after him with a bang that echoed up and down the Remove passage. He left the chums of the Remove still laughing.

## CHAPTER 5

### UNEXPECTED

“WHY not?” said Coker of the Fifth.

Neither Potter nor Greene, of that form, answered Coker’s question. They were at tea in the study in the Fifth. Potter was helping himself to Coker’s jam, and Greene was sampling Coker’s cake. Both of them were busy, at the moment. Still, they would have answered Coker, had they had any idea of what he was driving at.

But they hadn’t.

Coker had been silent for some time, with a very thoughtful expression on his face. Why he was silent, Potter and Greene did not know: it was rather unusual for Coker. Still, they were glad of it! Coker’s jam and Coker’s cake were excellent: but Coker’s conversation had long since palled on his pals. The less they had of it, really, the better they liked it. Silence never seemed to them so golden as when Coker left off talking.

Coker broke the silence quite suddenly, shooting that question across the table at

Potter and Greene, rather like a bullet.

“Why not?” he repeated. “A jolly good idea, I think. I suppose you fellows know that next Wednesday is Founder’s Day?”

“Sort of,” agreed Potter.

“A whole holiday,” said Coker. “No classes, and no Prout, for a whole day. We can do just what we jolly well like. Well, I’ve been thinking.”

Potter and Greene refrained from asking Horace Coker what he had been doing that with. They only wondered.

“I’ve been thinking it out,” continued Coker. “and I’ve been making plans for next Wednesday, you chaps. Don’t you fix up *anything* for the day. You can leave that to me.”

“Oh!” said Potter.

“Oh!” said Greene.

They exchanged a rather surreptitious glance.

As a matter of fact, Potter and Greene had already “fixed up” something for that whole holiday. They had agreed — privately — to push out their bikes quite early in the morning on Wednesday, and enjoy a long run, unaccompanied by Horace Coker. Coker was their pal: and in his own way he was a good pal. Potter and Greene had a generous whack in the hampers that came to Coker from his Aunt Judy; and those hampers were frequent and well-filled. At tea-time a fellow could hardly want a better pal than Coker.

But there were other times. At those other times, Potter and Greene often felt that Coker’s company might be too much of a good thing. Coker was, in fact, just a little overpowering. He did not like argument. He did not like contradiction. He did not like interruptions when he was talking. And he was generally talking. The prospect of a whole day, miles from Coker, seemed very attractive to Potter and Greene. Coker was looking forward to a whole day with no classes and no Prout. Potter and Greene were looking forward to a whole day with no Coker.

“I’ve thought it out, and it’s settled,” went on Coker. Coker did not know that he was a dictatorial fellow: but he had rather a way of speaking as one that hath authority, saying, “Do this!” and he doeth it! “I fancy you fellows will enjoy it, too.”

“Oh!” said Potter and Greene, again.

They felt just a little guilty. Old Horace did not know what a tremendous bore he was, and they wouldn’t have liked to tell him. But there was one thing on which they were determined: they weren’t going to have Coker ordering them about on Founder’s Day. They were going to have that day at a good distance from Coker. He could have their company again when they came back after a long day’s spin: Coker’s study suppers were good. But for a whole day they were going to dodge Coker. That, in the minds of Potter and Greene, was as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

“We start early,” went on Coker, unsuspectingly, “and we don’t get back till late. I shall look after you fellows — you’ll be all right.”

“But —!” said Potter.

“But —!” said Greene.

Coker waved a large hand.

“No need to but,” he said. “I’ve thought it out, and now I’ll tell you fellows what we’re going to do.”

“Sorry!” murmured Potter.

“Awfully sorry,” murmured Greene.

Coker stared at them across the table.

“What are you sorry about?” he asked. “Nothing to be sorry about, when I’ve fixed up

everything for Founder's Day, is there?"

"I mean, we're fixed up already," said Potter, taking the plunge. "We're getting off early on the jiggers —."

"You can wash that out," said Coker.

"There's a chap at Carcroft expecting us," explained Potter. "It's rather a long run from here into Sussex, and that chap at Carcroft —."

Never mind a chap at Carcroft," said Coker. He waved a large hand again, brushing the chap at Carcroft out of existence, as it were.

"Well, you see, it's a promise," said Potter, regretfully. "That Carcroft chap is expecting us, and we can't let him down."

"Couldn't let a man down, Coker," said Greene, with a nod.

"Oh!" said Coker, frowning.

Potter and Greene were a little doubtful how old Horace would take this. They hoped that a chap expecting them to drop in at Carcroft would satisfy him. If it didn't, it couldn't be helped. They were prepared, as a last resource, to tell Coker to go and eat coke on Founder's Day. But that was a very last resource. They wanted a rest from Coker: but they did not want a row with him.

Coker, to their relief, seemed to take it like milk.

"Well, if it's a promise, that alters the case," he said. "A Greyfriars man can't let a man down. Unless you could phone him and put him off —." He looked at Potter and Greene inquiringly.

They shook their heads sadly. It did not seem possible, apparently, to phone the chap at Carcroft and put him off. Indeed, it would have been extremely difficult to do so, as Potter had invented that chap at Carcroft for the sole purpose of stalling Coker off.

"Well, then, it seems that you're booked," said Coker. "You can't come with me if you're biking over to Carcroft on Wednesday."

"Sorry!" murmured Potter.

"Awfully sorry," murmured Greene.

"Oh, all right," said Coker. "I'll ask some other fellows — I don't want to make the trip on my own, of course. I daresay old Fitz would like to come."

Potter and Greene doubted it. Fitzgerald of the Fifth had never, so far, displayed any keen appreciation of Coker's company and conversation.

"And Hilton," went on Coker. "Might ask him — no, he's a lackadaisical ass — I don't want that nincompoop loafin' about with his hands in his trousers pockets on the boat, looking tired of life. Might ask old Blundell.

"On the boat?" repeated Potter. "Having a boat out?"

Coker smiled.

"Not a boat really — the steamer," he explained.

"The steamer!" said Greene.

"The *Flamingo*," said Coker. "You've heard of the *Flamingo* — *Thanet* Day Trips — Boulogne for the day — France without passports — and the rest of it."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene simultaneously. They sat up and took notice: Potter, for the moment, forgetting Coker's jam: Greene, for the moment, oblivious of Coker's cake.

They had dreaded a whole day with Coker, and had laid a masterly plan to dodge the same. But this put quite a different complexion on the matter. A trip to France was a trip to France, and a catch, even with Coker thrown in. Simultaneously, Potter and Greene began to regret that they had invented that chap at Carcroft. This was quite unexpected.

But it was too late now! The chap at Carcroft had been invented, and stated as a fact!

They couldn't wash out that chap at Carcroft now.

"I'd rather you fellows came, as you're my pals," went on the unsuspecting Horace. "But I'd be the last man in the world to ask you to let a man down! That's all right." "Oh!" said Potter and Greene again.

Coker dropped the subject, and devoted himself to the foodstuffs on the table. Potter and Greene exchanged glances.

"So that's the idea?" said Potter: not so willing to drop the subject as Coker appeared to be. "One of those day trips across the Channel without passports —."

"That's it," said Coker. "I've thought it out, and it looks all right. The steamer leaves Pegg Bay early and we get practically a whole day in France — jolly good grub there, too — they order these things better in France, as some old johnny said in a book once. You don't have passports or any of that foolery on these day trips — simply step on the boat and step off again. Bit of a change; you know, even one day in a foreign country — and there won't be any trouble for me, speaking French as I do."

"Oh!" repeated Potter and Greene. They wondered rather dizzily what the natives of France would think of Coker's French — if they recognised it as French, which was improbable.

"Sorry you chaps can't come," added Coker. "I expect Fitz and Blundell will join up all right when I ask them. Of course, I'm standing the exes, as it's my trip. Hope we shall get good weather on the Channel — not that a blow would worry me — I'm a pretty good sailor. And I hope you fellows will have a jolly day in Sussex with that Carcroft chap," added Coker generously.

Again Potter and Greene exchanged glances.

A rest from Coker, for a whole day was attractive. But it was not nearly so attractive as a day on the Continent, with all expenses paid. They could have kicked themselves — and one another — for having invented that chap at Carcroft. Non-existent as he actually was, he stood like a lion in the path, barring them off from a run in France on Founder's Day!

Coker rose from the tea-table.

"Well, I'll hike along and speak to old Fitz," he said. "Better get it settled, or he may get fixed up for Founder's Day like you chaps."

Coker crossed to the door. Behind his back, Potter and Greene looked at one another with eloquent looks.

"You ass, Potter!" breathed Greene.

"You fathead, Greene!" breathed Potter.

Coker opened the door. He was going — to ask old Fitz: and Potter and Greene had no doubt that old Fitz would jump at it, as indeed any man in the Fifth would. Was it, after all, too late to wash out that non-existent chap at Carcroft?

"Hold on a minute, Coker," exclaimed Potter.

Coker glanced round.

"What—?" he asked.

"Well, come to think of it, I don't suppose that chap at Carcroft would care a lot if we saw him another time," said Potter. "We don't get a whole holiday very often, and — and we should rather miss you — a whole day, you know —."

"I — I was just thinking of that, too," said Greene, taking his cue from Potter. "We should miss you, Coker, a — a — a whole day, you know —."

"We could put him off," said Potter.

"He wouldn't mind, I'm sure of that," said Greene.

"It would hardly seem like a holiday, really, without old Coker, would it, Greeney?"

"Hardly," said Greene.

It was one of Horace Coker's most charming characteristics that his leg could always be pulled. He gave his friends a very genial smile.

"Well, if you put it like that —!" he said.

"We do!" said Potter.

"Certainly," said Greene.

"Then you'll be coming?" asked Coker. "Yes, old chap."

"Certainly, old fellow."

Coker shut the door — much to Potter and Greene's relief — and came back to the table. For the next hour, Horace Coker talked, and Potter and Greene listened-in attentively, and did not yawn once. A trip to France was worth it.

## CHAPTER 6

### BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER stopped outside the door of No. 4 Study, in the Remove passage, and blinked through his big spectacles up the passage and down the passage. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that, and there was no man. And having ascertained that no eye was upon him, the fat Owl opened the study door, rolled in, and shut the door after him.

Any Remove man who had observed the fat junior would have supposed, as a matter of course, that there was tuck in the study cupboard, and that Bunter had wind of it. But for once, if for once only, Billy Bunter was not thinking of tuck. He was thinking of that mysterious-looking paper which Smithy had so suddenly shoved out of sight under his blotter. Inquisitiveness was Billy Bunter's besetting sin: he was always curious, and he always wanted to know. The mere fact that Vernon-Smith evidently did not want him to see that mysterious paper was a sufficient reason — to Bunter — for seeing it! And if it was still where the Bounder had placed it, Billy Bunter was going to see it.

He had chosen his moment well. It was still a quarter of an hour to prep: and hardly a fellow had yet come up to the studies. Smithy and Redwing were not likely to come up, so far as Bunter could see, till the rest of the form came: so he had ample time for investigation into what did not concern him: which interested him all the more for that reason.

Having carefully closed the study door, the fat Owl rolled across to the study table, and lifted the blotter.

There it was!

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

He blinked at the mysterious paper. Smithy had left it under the blotter, out of sight if anyone should enter the study. But it was full in view when Bunter removed the blotter: and the fat Owl's eyes and spectacles fixed on it with intense curiosity.

Curiosity gave place to astonishment as he blinked at the apparently meaningless columns of figures.

"Oh!" repeated Bunter blankly.

The inquisitive fat Owl had not known what to expect. Certainly he had not expected anything like this. Unless Herbert Vernon-Smith had been amusing himself with some very simple arithmetic, Billy Bunter did not know what to make of it.

He read down the first column of figures, in sheer wonder.

"Nine, nine, one, five, two, one, four, five, nine! Oh,— crikey! The silly ass! If it's addition, it ain't added up!

What the thump —!”

He blinked and blinked at the sheet of figures. There was, Bunter knew, something secret about that paper: Smithy’s sudden outbreak of angry excitement, and his hasty action in concealing it under the blotter, proved that. Whatever that mysterious paper meant, Smithy did not want other eyes to fall on it. But why? What secret could there possibly be in an apparently meaningless repetition of endless figures? Bunter had come there to find out what it was: but if there was any meaning in that mysterious paper, it was beyond Bunter.

And as he stood blinking at it, in amazement and wonder, a sound of footsteps in the passage came to his ears. He jumped. Along with the footsteps came the sound of a familiar voice — the Bounder’s. “Oh, come on, Reddy.”

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

His blink was transferred from the mysterious paper to the door. Smithy and Redwing were coming to the study — more than ten minutes before prep. Billy Bunter had calculated that the coast would be clear: but evidently his calculations were out! For some reason or other they were coming up early. And Bunter was in the study — looking at that mysterious paper! Smithy had kicked him merely for glimpsing it by chance that afternoon. What would be do if he found the fat Owl prying into it?

“Oh, crumbs!”

Billy Bunter did not often move quickly. But at the sound of the Bounder’s voice and footsteps in the passage, he moved with amazing celerity. There was no escape from the study. The startled fat Owl gave one blink round, and an arrow from a bow had nothing on Bunter as he shot across to the corner in which the armchair was backed. To shift that armchair out a foot or so, to cram his fat person into the corner behind it, was the work of a moment. They couldn’t be coming up for prep yet — Smithy was coming to the study for something, perhaps for that mysterious paper. He had only to keep out of sight for a minute or two. At all events, he hoped that that was so. If they remained in the study, Billy Bunter was in rather a scrape.

The door opened. Bunter heard the Bounder’s voice again, with an irritated note in it. “Aren’t you coming in, fathead?”

“Look here, Smithy, I’m really not interested in that rot, and I’d rather hear nothing about it.”

“Are you coming in or not?”

“Oh, all right.”

Tom Redwing followed the Bounder into the study, and Bunter heard the door close. His fat heart palpitated. This did not look as if Smithy had merely come up to the study for something, and was going again. It looked as if the beasts had come to stay! The next moment, Billy Bunter barely suppressed a squeak of apprehension, as he heard an angry roar from the Bounder. He could not see what was going on, but he could guess that Vernon-Smith had found that mysterious paper no longer covered by the blotter. The fat Owl had had no time to think about that.

“Did you move that blotter, Redwing?”

“No! I haven’t been in the study.”

“Somebody has! I left that paper under the blotter — now look.”

“Perhaps you forgot —.”

“Don’t be an idiot! Somebody’s been here — that prying fat worm Bunter very likely! By gad, I wish I’d caught him prying — I’d have smashed him into little pieces!” hissed the Bounder.

Billy Bunter was deeply thankful that the Bounder hadn’t caught him prying! And he could only hope that Smithy wouldn’t guess that the fellow who had moved the

blotter was still in the study.

“By gad! I’ll go and look for him with a fives bat —.”

“What does it matter, Smithy? Nobody could understand what the paper meant, even if he did look at it.”

“I don’t want it chattered about! Oh, never mind,” snapped the Bounder. “Look here, look at it, Reddy. Lots of time before prep —.”

“I’ve said that I don’t want to know anything about it, Smithy.”

“Yes: don’t sing it over again! You make out that there isn’t such a thing as a system for beating the game in a French casino —.”

“It doesn’t need making out — that speaks for itself.”

“Well, I’m going to prove to you that it can be done,” said Vernon-Smith, while a fat Owl hidden behind the armchair opened his eyes wide behind his spectacles. Billy Bunter was getting an inkling now of the hidden meaning of that mysterious paper. “I tell you I’ve worked on these figures, taken down at the actual table, and I’ve worked out a system. You needn’t tell me that it’s a swindling game in a continental casino,” added the Bounder, sarcastically. “I’m not a baby! I know that they can spin the ball as they choose, and bring up any number they like — a kid could do it, after a little practice. A punter who places his stake before the ball goes, is asking for it. But after —.”

“Look here, Smithy —!” said Redwing, restlessly.

“I suppose you know how this game is played?” snapped the Bounder.

“I don’t know, and don’t care.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. It’s something like roulette, but simpler. There’s a sort of shallow bowl on a green baize table, with numbers marked round it, one to nine. The man spins the ball in the bowl, and it falls into a numbered slot. That’s the winning number. You get seven times the amount of your stake if you win — with the chances eight to one against you — that’s a point in favour of the bank. See?”

Redwing gave a sort of grunt.

“Mugs think it a game of chance,” went on Vernon Smith. “I’m not that sort of mug. It’s wangled, of course. But after the ball has left the croupier’s hand, he can’t touch it again — and that’s where an experienced player comes in. Now, in these things there’s a law of averages. Odd numbers and even numbers are bound, in the long run, to balance. You see that?”

“I suppose so.”

“Well, you can play on the numbers, or on pair and impair — that’s even and odd. Now, suppose an odd number has come up three or four times, it’s jolly likely that an even number will follow — the law of averages working out, see?”

“Um!”

“And that,” said Vernon-Smith, “is where you catch them! I mean, that’s where I’m going to catch them, Reddy. On the even chances you get even money — if you put fifty francs on pair, or even, you get fifty francs, and your stake back, if an even number comes up. See?”

“Oh! Yes.”

“Now, suppose impair, or odd, has come up several times, pair, or even, is due to turn up,” said Vernon-Smith. “Of course, there may occasionally be a long run of odd, or of even: but generally the runs are short. What you’ve got to spot is the average length of a run before it changes over. Got that?”

“Um!”

“And that’s what I’ve spotted in this list of numbers,” said the Bounder, eagerly. “The usual run is four — then it changes. Look at this list — nine, nine, one, five — then



two! Then the third column — even, three, five, one, and then four. In the fifth column, one, three, nine, seven, six. In the sixth, eight, two, two, four, and then one. You needn't go through the lot — it works out like that again and again and again." The Bounder's voice was almost husky with eagerness. Evidently, he was convinced that he had found a method of beating the game on the "la boule" table: and was intensely keen to put it into practice. Whether he was right or wrong, Tom Redwing would not tell, though he doubted very much whether professional gamblers could ever be beaten at their own game. But in either case, it sickened him to see his chum so deeply eager and excited from such a cause: and to see the hard, greedy look on Smithy's face. It seemed, at the moment, as if the very spirit of gambling had taken possession of the scapegrace of Greyfriars.

"Have I made it clear, Reddy? I don't say, of course, that the change always comes after four spins — that would be absurd. But it has to come. You wait till odd, say, has come up four times. Then you back even. The chances are that you will win. But if there's a slip, and odd comes up for a fifth time, you double your stake on even next. And if odd still comes up, you re-double. That makes it a cert. You win, and get back all you've lost, with an amount equal to your stake over and above. I tell you, Reddy, that a man playing on this system couldn't lose."

Redwing did not reply.

"Haven't you got it clear?" asked the Bounder. "Can't you see that it's a dead cert — money for jam? I tell you, I'm coming back on Founder's Day with my pockets full of loot."

"It doesn't sound likely to me, Smith! But even if it is so —"

"No, if about it: it is so."

"Well, even if it is so, it's not good enough, Smithy. You don't want to touch their dirty money — it's not fit for you to touch."

The Bounder laughed.

"I'll touch it fast enough, when I get a chance," he said. "They touched a lot of mine, last time. Didn't jolly old Vespasian say that the smell of all money is sweet? Don't be a goat, Reddy."

"You've got lots of your own, Smithy! You've told me that your pater has sent you a tanner to spend on Founder's Day."

"I'm going to multiply it by ten at Le Chalet! That's a jolly little place a few miles out of Boulogne, in the woods near the sea — toppin' little spot, Reddy. You'll enjoy it —"

"Smithy! You can't do it!" said Redwing, earnestly. "Why, you'd be sacked from Greyfriars if it came out."

"You won't mention it to Quelch when we come back, I suppose," said the Bounder, sarcastically.

"You might be spotted. Other fellows may be going across on that day trip on Wednesday. I've heard something about Bunter going — he's been talking about going with a party —"

"That fat ass! Only his gas. Anyhow we're not going to stroll into the big casino at Boulogne — we're going to run out to Le Chalet —"

"They wouldn't let a schoolboy in, Smithy! Even those blighters must have some sort of a limit."

The Bounder laughed again.

"A pretty wide one, if any," he said. "But that's easy, Reddy, you innocent old duck — you stick on a moustache and look old enough to prevent questions being asked." There was a tramp of feet in the Remove passage. The juniors were coming up to

prep. Smithy did not heed it. He was not thinking of prep. A fat junior parked behind the armchair heard it: and heeded it. But there was no escape for Billy Bunter. Billy Bunter had to stay where he was parked.

“Well, now I’ve put it clear,” said Vernon-Smith. “You know now that I’m not a silly ass going over the water to chuck money away. I’m going over to skin the tiger, Reddy. And you’re coming with me —.”

“If I do, I shall try all the time to keep you out of that show.”

“Some fellows are born to be wet blankets,” said the Bounder. “But I like you somehow all the same, Reddy. I want you to come.”

“I’ll come! But —.”

“Wash out the butts, and don’t put on a face as long as a fiddle. Look here, let’s go right through these numbers —.

“For goodness sake, put that rot out of sight, and let’s get to prep,” said Redwing, impatiently. “I’ll come with you — you’ll need a pal to see you through after you’ve lost all your money. But give a chap a rest now. Let’s get to prep.”

“But look here —.”

“Oh, rats!”

The Bounder scowled for a moment, and then laughed, and put away his precious list of numbers. They got out their books and sat down to prep. And a fat Owl, cramped behind the armchair in the corner, with pins and needles creeping in his fat legs, almost groaned aloud. Billy Bunter had learned the secret of that mysterious paper, for what that was worth. But for the second time that day, Bunter wished he hadn’t. He had heard every word: and he simply dared not reveal his presence in the study. The prospect of what the Bounder would do if he discovered him there was too terrifying. Billy Bunter could only hope that he wouldn’t — as he squatted cramped in the corner, with pins and needles to keep him company!

## CHAPTER 7

### A SPOT OF EXCITEMENT IN NO. 4 STUDY

“Wow!”

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave a jump. Tom Redwing stared round in astonishment. That sudden and unexpected ejaculation, in the silent study, startled both of them. Really, it was quite unaccountable, as they were unaware of a fat Owl cramped behind an armchair in the corner, with pins and needles creeping along his plump legs.

“What —?” exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

“Who —?” ejaculated Redwing.

They had been sitting in silence for some time: Redwing working quietly and steadily at his preparation, as he always did: Smithy’s thoughts wandering to yellow numbers imprinted on a green baize cloth, rather to the detriment of prep. But Redwing forgot Virgil, and Smithy forgot the yellow numbers, as the silence was suddenly broken by that unexpected and agonized “wow!”

Billy Bunter could not help it. He was cramped, and cramp was not to be argued with. He had borne it in suffering silence as long as he could. But when flesh and blood could stand no more, the fat Owl involuntarily relieved his feelings by that squeak of anguish.

He repeated it the next moment, as he heard the exclamations of the two juniors in the study. He shut his teeth on another anguished squeak, hoping against hope to remain

undiscovered.

“What the thump —!” Vernon-Smith jumped to his feet, and stared round the study. “Somebody’s here! Where —?”

He hardly needed to ask where. There was only one possible spot of cover in the study — behind the armchair in the corner. The Bounder’s eyes fixed on that corner, gleaming with rage.

“That prying pipsqueak, Bunter! I knew he’d been here — he moved that blotter! By gad, I’ll — I’ll —”

“Hold on, Smithy,” exclaimed Redwing, quite alarmed by the expression on the Bounder’s face.

Smithy did not heed him. He tramped across to the corner, to drag the armchair away. He grasped it, and whirled it aside on its castors, revealing a fat figure crammed in the corner, with two terrified little round eyes almost popping through a pair of big spectacles.

“I — I say, I — I ain’t here —!” gasped Bunter. “I — I mean —. I — I mean to say — yaroooooh!”

Billy Bunter squirmed out of the corner, under the propulsion of a foot planted in fat ribs. He roared as he squirmed. Smith’s foot was drawn back for another of the same, when Redwing caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back.

“Hold on, Smithy —.”

“Let me go, you fool!” yelled the Bounder. “That fat scoundrel has been here all the time — he’s heard it all —.”

“I haven’t!” gasped Bunter. He dodged rapidly round the study table, to place it between him and the enraged Bounder. “I — I never heard a word you said to Redwing! I haven’t seen that paper, and I don’t know what it means — I never heard you say anything about going over to Boulogne to gamble on Founder’s Day — not a syllable! Besides, I ain’t going to tell anybody, Smithy — I won’t repeat a word that I heard, and I never heard a word, either — not a word —.”

Vernon-Smith tore himself away from Redwing, and rushed round the table after Bunter. With an activity that was really remarkable, considering the weight he had to lift, Billy Bunter skipped round the table, ahead of the pursuing Bounder.

“You keep off, you beast,” he yelled. “I say, Redwing, keep him off! Oh, crikey! I tell you I never heard a word — I wasn’t listening behind that chair — wow! Stop kicking me, you beast! Wow!”

Redwing caught hold of the Bounder again, as Vernon Smith grasped the fat Owl by the back of a fat neck.

“Hold on, I tell you,” he snapped, and he dragged the Bounder away from Bunter by main force. Bunter promptly circumnavigated the study table again, getting it between him and Smithy once more.

“Let go, you dummy,” hissed the Bounder. “That prying fat worm has heard it all — it will be all over the Remove — all over the school — I’ll smash him — I’ll —.”

The Bounder was almost stuttering with rage. Bunter, evidently, must have heard all that had been said in the study: which meant that all the Remove would hear it soon. One word reaching the ears of authority meant the end of the Bounder’s darling scheme. Certainly he was not likely to get a chance of crossing the Channel in the excursion steamer on Founder’s Day, if Quelch had the remotest suspicion of what he intended to do on the other side. He was more likely to get a detention for the day, than permission to embark on the *Flamingo*. And Bunter — not very reliable in other matters — could always be relied upon to tattle anything that

came to his fat ears. It looked like the K.O. for Smithy's masterly scheme of "skinning the tiger" by means of the wonderful system he had evolved.

"Let me go, you fool! I'll — I'll smash him," panted the Bounder. "The game's up now — I daresay you're glad of it. Will you let me go?"

Redwing held on to his arm. Bunter, certainly, deserved to be kicked. But the infuriated Bounder looked like doing him some real damage.

The fat Owl blinked at them across the table with popping eyes. He longed to make a rush for the door, but that would have taken him within reach of Smithy's clutch. He remained on his own side of the table, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

"Look here, Smithy —!" urged Redwing.

"Let go, hang you."

The Bounder, with a savage wrench, freed his arm from Redwing's grasp. The next moment he would have been whipping round the table after Bunter. But in that moment the fat Owl, without even thinking, acted promptly. He grasped the edge of the study table and up-ended it at the Bounder, almost hurling it at him.

Books and papers and inkpot shot off, in a shower, round Smithy, and the table-top crashed on him. He tottered back and sat down suddenly.

That was enough for Bunter! He had a moment or two — and he made the most of them. He fairly flew across to the door, tore it open, and jumped out of the doorway. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the old oak planks as he flew down the passage.

Vernon-Smith scrambled up, panting. He rushed to the door, shoving Redwing savagely aside as he would have interposed. He tore into the passage — in time to hear the door of No. 7 Study slam: and the key turn in the lock. Billy Bunter had lost no time in hunting cover. And the Bounder, with feelings too deep for words — though he had picked up some quite expressive words from his sporting friends at the Cross Keys — went back into No. 4 scowling rather like a demon in a pantomime.

In No. 7 Study, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, sitting at prep, stared up in surprise at the fat and breathless Owl as he bolted in, slammed the door, locked it after him, and stood spluttering for breath.

"What on earth's that game?" asked Peter.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. "That beast Smithy — he's after me — oh, lor'! I'm all out of breath — ooooooogh!"

"Snooping his tuck?" asked Peter.

"Oooogh! No! I haven't done anything," gasped Bunter. "I never heard him tell Redwing that he was going to Boulogne on Founder's Day to gamble at the casino — oooogh — besides, I'm not going to tell anybody — not even you, Toddy—. Oooooogh!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Toddy

"I'm not the chap to give a man away, I hope," said Bunter. "Smithy doesn't understand that, Toddy — he's no gentleman, you know. I shan't say a word about it, of course — and if anybody finds out that Smithy is going to Boulogne to play the goat at the casino, it won't be from me. I can keep a secret! What are you sniggering at, Toddy?"

Toddy did not explain what he was sniggering at: he just sniggered. Billy Bunter's method of keeping a secret did not seem to indicate that the Bounder's plans for Founder's Day would remain secret very long!

## CHAPTER 8

### SKINNER KNOWS HOW

“WHAT’S that?” ejaculated Skinner.

“Only a bit of waste-paper,” said Snoop.

“Looks like a letter.”

“Oh! That fat freak Bunter has been saying that he lost a letter yesterday —.”

It was after class the following day. Remove fellows were occupying their leisure in the sunny summer weather in various ways. Harry Wharton and Co. were at the nets, strenuous as usual. Strenuousness did not appeal to Skinner and Co. Skinner, Snoop, and Stott had retired to a quiet spot in the old Cloisters to smoke cigarettes, unseen by the eyes of beaks or watchful prefects. Thus it was that Harold Skinner chanced to notice a crumpled sheet of paper lodged in the old ivy, evidently blown there by the summer breeze. It looked, as Skinner said, like a letter: and at a second glance, Skinner discerned some words on it, “My dear William.”

Everybody in the Remove had heard of Billy Bunter’s lost letter. Sad to relate, nobody believed in it. According to Billy Bunter, his respected pater had written to him that he was to have a tremendous, gorgeous holiday on Founder’s Day, regardless of expense — a regular “bean-feast”, as Bunter described it. Not only Bunter, but any friends he chose to take with him, were to enjoy a trip on the excursion steamer going to Boulogne-sur-Mer, all expenses paid by the munificent Mr. Bunter — which sounded too much like a figment of the fat Owl’s fat imagination to be taken seriously. Everybody would have been surprised, had Bunter displayed the letter in which that magnificent programme was mapped out. But nobody was surprised to hear that Bunter had lost the letter! Nobody, in fact, believed a word of it, least of all Harold Skinner. Certainly he would not have pulled Bunter’s fat leg over the translation of “infandum regina” if he had supposed, for one moment, that the Owl of the Remove was in a position to stand a gorgeous “beanfeast” on Founder’s Day. But that scrap of paper sticking in the ivy, with “Dear William” written on it in a hand Skinner had seen on letters in the rack addressed to Bunter, did look as if Bunter had really lost a letter. And Skinner, refraining for the moment from lighting a second cigarette, stepped over to the ivy and picked out that scrap of paper.

He looked at it—and then stared at it: and then he whistled. Snoop and Stott eyed him curiously.

“Is that Bunter’s?” asked Snoop.

“It is, by gum!” said Skinner, with another whistle.

“Then he really had a letter, and lost it?” said Stott, “I thought it was all his gammon, as usual.”

“So did I,” said Skinner. “But — look here!”

“You’re not going to read it?” said Stott. He was a shade more particular in such matters than his pals.

“Sort of,” answered Skinner. “I say, this is jolly interesting. Looks as if Bunter was telling the truth — or as near to it as he could get! That beanfeast of his isn’t all balderdash.”

“What?” ejaculated Snoop and Stott together.

“Listen to this!” said Skinner. And he proceeded to read out the letter addressed by Mr. Samuel Bunter to his son William at Greyfriars.

My dear William,

I have received your letter, referring to the whole holiday next week at your school on Founder’s Day. It will not be possible for you to join in the excursion to Brighton on that day, with your brother Samuel and your sister Bessie, as I have obtained only two

free tickets for that excursion. But I have made other plans for you, which I think you will like better.

You are aware that I am a director of Thanet Continental Excursions, Ltd. This company runs the excursion steamer *Flamingo*, which will start from Pegg Bay at 10 a.m. on Wednesday next, taking a party of excursionists to France for the day: a holiday trip without passports. I am in a position to send you eight tickets for the excursion, so you will be able to go, and take with you a party of friends if you wish, and it will cost you nothing. You will, of course, ask your form-master's leave: but I am writing to Mr. Quelch on the subject, and have no doubt that leave will be granted. In the circumstances I shall send you a cash remittance, to reach you on Tuesday morning, to meet incidental expenses during the day you will spend on the Continent. I trust that you and your friends will have a very enjoyable holiday.

Your affectionate Father,

W. S. Bunter

"Oh, my hat!" said Snoop, when Skinner had finished reading out the letter. "Then it's genuine!"

"Looks like it, by gum," said Stott.

Skinner stood with the letter in his hand, staring at it. He was surprised, as any Remove fellow would have been, to learn that Billy Bunter had been getting anywhere near the truth. He was also deeply interested. A free holiday across the Channel would have suited Skinner admirably. Skinner had little in the way of cash, and he was accustomed to making use of other fellows when opportunity offered. It had never occurred to him that the fat and fatuous Owl might be of any use. But that letter from Bunter Villa settled that. The impecunious Owl of the Remove, who was always borrowing "bobs" and "tanners" up and down the form, and whose long-expected postal order was a standing joke, was — amazingly — in a position to ask any fellow he liked to share in a real beanfeast! Bunter was going to take a party of friends across to France on Founder's Day: and Skinner regretted that he had never thought of becoming a friend of Bunter's. He wondered whether it was too late now! A free trip to France — and a cash remittance for expenses! It really sounded most attractive!

"Genuine after all," said Snoop, "or as near genuine as Bunter could get! He never mentioned that his pater was able to bag free tickets for the steamer."

"It won't cost him anything," remarked Stott.

"Not a red cent," said Snoop. "He wangles it, as a director of the company. Not much in it, really — sort of Bank Holiday crowd on an excursion steamer!"

"It would cost a good many quids to buy those tickets, though, at the company's office," remarked Stott.

"Bet you it hasn't cost Bunter's pater anything!" jeered Snoop. "The Bunters don't spend money. They haven't any to spend."

"Bunter all over," said Stott, with a nod. "Making out it was a tremendous sort of thing, when it's only a cheap trip on an excursion steamer."

"Bunter's gas, as usual," said Snoop.

Skinner looked up from the letter, which he had read carefully a second time. There was a serious, indeed severe, expression on his face.

"Not so much of that, you fellows," he said. "I don't see why you want to run old Bunter down." "Eh?"

“What?”

“Old Bunter’s not a bad lad,” said Skinner.

“Old Bunter?” repeated Snoop, almost dazedly. Skinner generally alluded to Bunter as “Fatty” or “Podgy” or “Porpoise” or “that fat freak”. Now, all of a sudden, he seemed to have become, affectionately, “old Bunter”. Snoop and Stott could only stare, quite taken aback by Skinner’s sudden revision of his opinion of the Owl of the Remove.

“He’s got his faults,” said Skinner, argumentatively. “But who hasn’t? Fellows are down on Bunter, but he’s got some jolly good qualities, really —.”

“Has he?” gasped Stott.

“He jolly well has,” said Skinner, “and it’s not really fair to set down everything he says to bragging and bouncing. Fair play’s a jewel.”

“What are you driving at?” asked Snoop. “You jolly well know that he’s a fat lazy toad, always snooping tuck, and telling crammers, and —.”

“Well, the truth is, I always rather liked him,” said Skinner. “He’s got his good points, and I can see them, if you can’t, Sidney Snoop.”

“Oh!” said Stott, suddenly. “Do you think there’s a chance of Bunter asking you to join his party, Skinner?”

“Oh!” ejaculated Snoop, “Is that it?”

“That’s a rather rotten way of putting it,” said Skinner, reprovingly. “Of course, if Bunter asked me to join his party on Founder’s Day I shouldn’t say no — why should I, when it would be jolly pleasant to have a holiday in his company?”

“He wouldn’t, after you pulled his leg over that con yesterday, and got him whops from Quelch,” said Snoop.

“Well, that was only a joke,” said Skinner. “Bunter’s a good-tempered chap — very pleasant fellow really — he won’t nurse a grudge over a joke. Besides, a fellow can say he’s sorry.”

“But you’re not sorry,” said Stott.

“Fathead!” said Skinner, brushing that aside. “Look here, you fellows, the fact is that fellows haven’t been fair to Bunter. I hear that he asked Wharton’s crowd to join up for his beanfeast, and they only laughed. That’s not the sort of way to take a generous invitation. I hope I should have better manners. I shall certainly be civil to Bunter about it.”

“He will know why, when he knows you’ve found that letter,” said Stott.

“Idiot!” said Skinner, politely. He crumpled the letter, and put it into his pocket.

“Wharton’s crowd seem to have turned it down. I daresay they would be jolly glad to turn it up again, if they knew. Well, they can set old Bunter down as a gas-bag, if they like — I believe in doing a fellow justice. I shan’t mention to Bunter that I’ve seen this letter — no need to talk about that, so far as I can see. But I shall certainly be civil to him, and if he asks me to join his party for France, I certainly intend to treat him a bit more politely than they did in No. 1 Study.”

Snoop chuckled.

“Might be worth trying on,” he said.

“Don’t put it like that, Snoopey! It sounds sordid,” said Skinner, reproving again.

“Bunter’s all right, and I don’t care who hears me say so. I think we might ask him to tea in the study. After all, we’re friends.”

“Are we?” said Stott.

“Yes, we jolly well are — or at least we’re going to be, you silly fathead, if you want a look-in on Founder’s Day,” snapped Skinner. “Let’s go and look for him now — come on.”

Skinner and Co. parked their cigarettes, and went to look for Bunter. Quite unknowingly, the Owl of the Remove had suddenly made three devoted friends in his form.

## CHAPTER 9

### HAPPY LANDING!

BILLY BUNTER, with a disconsolate fat face, stood outside the school shop, blinking at the window with a disconsolate blink through his big spectacles. Like a podgy Pen at the gate of Paradise, he gazed on the good things that were not for him to touch.

Not for the first time in his fat career, Billy Bunter was in the sad state known as “stony”.

A postal order, long-expected, had failed to arrive. He had looked for Lord Mauleverer and failed to find him. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton had gone out, with what Bunter could only consider a heartless disregard of a fat Owl who wanted somebody to stand him tea in the study. It looked like tea in the hall for Bunter: the last resource of the hard-up. “Dishwater and doorsteps” in hall were not what Billy Bunter wanted. Cakes and buns and jam were more in his line. But it was a hard and heartless world: nobody seemed to care whether Billy Bunter had to struggle along somehow without cakes and buns and jam. With all that magnificent prospect before him of a gorgeous beanfeast in the near future, Billy Bunter would have been glad, at the moment, of a loan of a humble threepenny bit. It was no wonder that his fat face was disconsolate as he blinked in at the tuck-shop window: so near, yet so far from the succulent things within.

“I say, Smithy!” The Bounder came along, to go into the tuck-shop, and Bunter turned a hopeful blink on him. Smithy had lots and lots of money: everybody knew that his pater had sent him a “tenner” for Founder’s Day: Smithy did not keep such details secret. A tenth or a twentieth part of that tenner would have made Billy Bunter as happy and sticky as his fat heart could have desired. “I say, old chap —.”

Bunter was a borrower of great skill. It was on record that he had even borrowed money from Fisher T. Fish. But it showed that Bunter had a very hopeful nature, to tackle the Bounder after what had happened in No. 4 Study the previous evening. Vernon-Smith did not answer him. He simply reached out with his foot and kicked him. Then he went into the shop, leaving Bunter spluttering.

“Ow! Beast!”

Squiff and Tom Brown came along, with Wibley and Russell and Ogilvy. A fat squeak greeted them.

“I say, you fellows —!”

They went into the shop as if they hadn’t heard!

“Beasts!” mumbled Bunter.

Then there was a tramp of feet as five fellows came out of the tuck-shop in a cheery bunch. Harry Wharton and Co. had been refreshing themselves with the harmless and necessary ginger-pop after a spot of cricket practice. Billy Bunter turned his eyes and his spectacles on them.

“I say, you fellows!” he squeaked.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! How did that porpoise get out of the Zoo?” exclaimed Bob Cherry.

“Oh, really, Cherry —.”



“Or is it Bunter?” asked Bob.

“Beast! I mean, hold on a minute, old chap! I say, my postal order hasn’t come,” said Bunter pathetically.

“Too bad!” said Bob, sympathetically. “It hadn’t come last term, had it, or the term before? Think you’ll know it when it does come? It must have grown whiskers by this time.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, I think a fellow’s pals might ask a fellow to tea, when a fellow has asked his pals to a tremendous beanfeast,” said Bunter, reproachfully. “How often do you get a trip across the Channel, I’d like to know?”

“Not too often,” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “Found that letter yet?”

Bunter shook a fat head.

“It must have blown away somewhere,” he answered, “But you wait till Tuesday. My pater’s sending me a cash remittance for the trip — he said so in that letter. I expect it will be a tenner — a fiver at least! And that isn’t all,” added Bunter, impressively. “I expect to have lots and lots of money on Wednesday.”

“A whole crop of postal orders?” asked Nugent.

“Some fellows know how to make money,” said Bunter. “I may have heard something in Smithy’s study, and I may not. I’m not going to tell anybody. But I jolly well know I’m on a jolly good thing on Wednesday. But never mind that now — I’m thinking of tea. I say, Toddy’s gone out, and there isn’t anything in my study — you know how selfish fellows are. Now, you fellows are coming on my beanfeast on Wednesday —.”

“If any!” grinned Bob.

“I tell you I shall get a letter from my pater on Tuesday, with the tickets and the cash remittance in it,” hooted Bunter. “Perhaps you’ll believe it when you see them.”

“The seefulness is the believfulness,” admitted Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Well, you’ll all come, won’t you?” asked Bunter. Bob Cherry chuckled.

“Oh, we’ll come, if there’s anywhere to come,” he said. “We won’t turn down a continental trip — if any! Will we, you fellows?”

“Not at all,” said Nugent. “With the accent on the ‘if’.”

“The if-fulness is terrific.”

“Well, you just wait and see,” said Bunter. “But as it happens, at the present moment, I’m stony —.”

“Come on, you men,” said Johnny Bull. “We shall be late for tea.”

“I say, you fellows, don’t walk away while a fellow’s talking to you,” howled Bunter.

“Look here, you’re coming on my beanfeast that’s settled. Well, I think you might ask a chap to tea, after that —.”

“You’d like to come to tea with us to-day?” asked Bob.

“Yes, old chap! You see —.”

“Well, you’re as welcome as the flowers in May,” said Bob. “We’ll be jolly glad for Bunter to come to tea, won’t we, you fellows?”

“The gladfulness will be terrific.”

“Certainly,” said Harry Wharton. “Trot in by all means. Why not?”

“Yes, rather; why not?” grinned Johnny Bull. “Come on, Bunter.”

The Famous Five walked across the quad to the House, and Billy Bunter, no longer disconsolate, trotted after them. Whether the Co. were influenced by the prospect of the beanfeast or not, the problem of tea seemed to be solved for the fat Owl.

“I say, you fellows, what have you got for tea?” asked Bunter. “Something decent, what?”

“Not too bad,” answered Bob. “Let’s see—there’ll be as much as a fellow could eat of — of —.”

“Of what?” asked Bunter, eagerly.

“Bread and marger —!”

“Eh?”

“No limit on the bread, and enough marger to go round,” said Bob. “But that isn’t all.”

“I should jolly well hope not,” grunted Bunter. “What else?”

“Tea!” said Bob.

“Tea!” repeated Bunter.

“Not very strong, perhaps,” said Bob, “but strong tea is bad for the inside, you know: and you’ve got an awful lot of inside —.”

“Oh, really, Cherry —.”

“And there may be a spot of jam, if we’re not too late,” added Bob. “Come on, Bunter, — and I hope you’ve a good appetite.”

“You silly ass!” hooted Bunter. “Mean to say you’ve got nothing for tea but bread and marger? If that’s all you’ve got, I might as well tea in hall.”

“We’re teaing in hall,” explained Bob.

“What?” yelled Bunter.

“Funds are low to-day: nothing in the study, but there’s always tea in hall —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You — you — you blithering idiot!” gasped Bunter. “I thought you meant tea in the study. What’s the good of asking a fellow to tea in hall? I could tea in hall if I liked, without you asking me.”

“Of course you could,” agreed Bob, “but you seemed to want us to ask you —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Beast!” roared Bunter.

The fat Owl came to a halt. He seemed no longer keen on teaing with the Famous Five!

Harry Wharton and Co., laughing, went into the House, to the “doorsteps and dishwater” in hall. Billy Bunter remained where he was, frowning after them with a frown like unto the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner.

“Oh, here you are, Bunter,” said a genial voice.

The Owl of the Remove blinked round at Harold Skinner, who gave him a nod and a pleasant smile. Snoop and Stott grinned at him in the most friendly way. Bunter eyed them morosely and suspiciously. Even Bunter did not expect to be able to borrow anything from Skinner and Co. and he had no use for those youths, genial as they looked.

“Looking for you, old fellow,” said Skinner, amicably.

“Well, now you can go and look for somebody else,” grunted Bunter.

Skinner coughed.

“Had your tea, old chap?” he asked.

“No!” grunted Bunter.

“Come up to our study, old fellow. We’ve got rather a spread,” said Skinner, blandly. He tapped a parcel under his arm. “Do you like plum cake?”

“Oh!” Bunter was immediately interested.

“And strawberry jam —?”

“Do I?” gasped Bunter.

“Come on, then. We’d all like you to come up to tea — wouldn’t we, you chaps?”

“Yes, rather,” said Snoop.

“Jolly glad, if Bunter will come,” said Stott.

“Will you come, old fellow?” asked Skinner.

Would he? Evidently he would, for he did! Why Skinner and Co. were so friendly all of a sudden, Bunter did not know: neither did he care. What he knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, was that he did like plum cake and strawberry jam: ever so much more attractive than the school fare in hall, disrespectfully described by the juniors as “doorsteps and dishwater.” It was quite a cheery fat Owl that rolled up to No. 11 Study in the Remove with Skinner and Co. — happily landed at last!

## CHAPTER 10

### FISHER T. FISH GETS THE NEWS

“WALL, what yer know!” murmured Fisher T. Fish. Fisher T. Fish was puzzled. Fisher T. Fish, who had been raised in New York, where guys cut their eye-teeth early, prided himself upon being cute, and spry, ever so much more so than the inhabitants of the island in which he now sojourned, whom he regarded as a crowd of dumb boneheads, gecks, and jays, in comparison. But he was puzzled.

It was morning break at Greyfriars, and Fishy, at the moment, was leaning his bony person against a buttress near Mr. Quelch’s study window, with his bony hands in his pockets, his keen narrow eyes on a bunch of fellows in the quadrangle. There were four fellows in the bunch — Billy Bunter, Skinner, Snoop, and Stott. Seldom or never had they been seen in a friendly and amicable bunch before.

It was still more uncommon to see Skinner and Co. — or anybody else — listening to Billy Bunter’s remarks with rapt attention, as if pearls of wisdom were falling from his capacious mouth, and as if he were a fellow whom they delighted to honour. But that, unmistakably, was the case now. Skinner and Co. hovered round William George Bunter, as fellows might have hovered round Wingate, the captain of the school.

And even that was not all. They had just come out of the school shop, and there was a smear of jam on Bunter’s fat face, and a packet of toffee in his fat hand. Obviously his new friends had been standing treat.

In break that morning, Bunter had not taken the trouble to look for Lord Mauleverer. He had passed by Harry Wharton and Co. with an unregarding eye. His friends had gathered round him when the Remove were dismissed from their form-room, and walked him off at once to the tuck-shop. And there, evidently, there had been jam and toffee.

It was rather a new experience for Billy Bunter to be surrounded by friends eager for his society: especially friends who were prepared to accompany him to the tuck-shop. He seemed to be rather enjoying it. His jammy fat face wore an expression of fatuous satisfaction.

And Fisher T. Fish was puzzled. Skinner and Co. hitherto, had heeded Bunter’s fat existence only to the extent of calling him fancy names or pulling his fat leg. With remarkable suddenness, they seemed to have discovered attractive qualities in Bunter, and bestowed upon him their hearty friendship. Friendship, to be appreciated by Bunter, had to be translated into terms of food. Skinner and Co., whose cash resources were limited, seemed to be expending those resources on the only way to Bunter’s fat heart. There was likely to be a shortage of cigarettes in No. 11 Study in consequence. So it was no wonder that Fisher T. Fish was puzzled.

Fishy, of course, had heard of the “beanfeast”. Everybody in the Remove, and a good many out of it, had heard of the beanfeast: Nobody believed in it — least of all Fishy,

who was too cute and spry to believe practically anything. Now he began to wonder whether there was something in it. If there was, Fisher T. Fish was quite as keen on a free trip to the Continent on Founder's Day, as Skinner and Co. could be. Fishy was prepared to revise his opinion of Bunter as an all-fired geck and a dumb goof, and discern attractive qualities in him, just as Skinner and Co. had done — if there was anything in it. But was there?

It looked as if Skinner and Co. thought there was! If there was, Fisher T. Fish, guessed, reckoned, and calculated, that they weren't going to have that fat clam all to themselves on Founder's Day. Fisher T. Fish was coming into the picture. Even if it meant expending spot cash on tarts and buns for Bunter, Fisher T. Fish was not going to get left. But — was there? The expenditure of cash was a serious, not to say a solemn, matter to Fisher T. Fish: and he wrinkled his bony brows in deep cogitation over the problem.

"Fish!"

So deep was Fisher T. Fish in his cogitations, that he was quite startled when Mr. Quelch's voice barked from the open window. He gave a jump, and spun round. Quelch was looking out of the window.

"Aw! Yep, sir!"

"Please tell Bunter to come to my study, Fish. You may tell him that I have received a letter from his father."

Mr. Quelch disappeared from the window. Fisher T. Fish detached his bony person from the buttress, and jerked away across the quad towards the happy group on which his eyes had been fixed.

"Say, big boy, Quelch wants you," said Fishy, digging a bony thumb into fat ribs.

"Oh, crikey!" ejaculated Bunter. The happy satisfaction faded from his fat face. A summons to Quelch's study was seldom gratifying to a Remove man. And Billy Bunter had many sins on his fat conscience. He could not help wondering whether that summons had something to do with lines that as yet unwritten, or with a pie missing from the pantry, or a cake that had mysteriously disappeared from the study of Coker of the Fifth.

Skinner and Co. looked sympathetic. Only the day before they would have grinned. Now they deeply sympathised.

"What's the trouble, old chap?" asked Skinner. "If it's lines, you've got pals to help you out."

"We'd help with pleasure," said Snoop.

"Jolly glad to, Bunter, old scout," said Stott.

Fisher T. Fish drew a deep breath through his sharp nose. If this did not mean that Skinner and Co. had somehow nosed out that the "beanfeast" was genuine, Fisher T. Fish could not guess what it did mean.

"Well, it might be lines," said Bunter, dismally. "Quelch gave me a hundred yesterday for skewing in con, you know. But if it's about a pie, I never had it: and if Coker has been making a fuss about a cake, I expect it was Potter or Greene who had it — they're in his study, you know. I never went near Coker's study. Besides, nobody saw me there. I'm sure of that. Quelch is always down on me."

"Tain't that, old-timer," said Fisher T. Fish, comfortingly, "Quelch said it was about a letter from your popper."

"Oh!" The fat face brightened up at once. "That's all right! The pater said in his letter that he was writing to Quelch about leave on Founder's Day. If it's about a letter from the pater, it's all right."

And Billy Bunter rolled off to the House quite cheerfully. Fisher T. Fish eyed Skinner

and Co.

“Say, you guys figure that it’s straight about that trip on Founder’s Day? “he asked, “I reckoned it was Bunter’s usual bally-hoo. You opine that it’s on the level?”

“I don’t know what you mean about Bunter’s usual bally-hoo,” said Skinner, coldly.

“If you want to run old Bunter down, you needn’t talk to us.” And Skinner and Snoop and Stott turned their backs on Fisher T. Fish, and walked away.

“Gee-whiz!” murmured Fishy.

This looked more and more as if there was something in it! Fisher T. Fish would have given a great deal to know for certain. That trip across the Channel was worth pounds and pounds to a galoot who could cinch it. And it occurred to Fishy’s cute, spry brain that there was a way of getting what he would have called the “noos.” Bunter had gone to Quelch’s study, about that letter from Mr. Bunter: and Quelch’s window was wide open to let in the summer breeze. Fisher T. Fish’s bony legs went into quick action, as that happy thought flashed into his cute mind. Almost in a twinkling, Fishy was once more leaning on that buttress beside Quelch’s study window — his eyes on the fellows in the quad, but his ears sharply attentive to voices from within. He was in time. Mr. Quelch’s voice floated out quite distinctly.

“. . . from your father, Bunter, referring to a proposed excursion on the steamer *Flamingo* on Founder’s Day. He desires me to give you leave to cross the Channel for a day trip.”

“Yes, sir!” came Bunter’s fat squeak.

“It appears, Bunter, from what your father states in his letter, that the plan is for you to take a party of friends on the excursion.”

“Yes, sir!”

“I quite approve of such an excursion in itself,” said Mr. Quelch. “Such excursions to a foreign land have an educative value —.”

“Have they, sir? I — I mean —.”

“They have, Bunter. Hearing French spoken in France may possibly lead to an improvement in your own French, with which Monsieur Carpentier is very far from satisfied”

“Oh! Yes, sir!”

“But —!” said Mr. Quelch, slowly. And he paused.

“I — I hope you’ll give me leave, sir,” came an anxious squeak. “I — I’m very keen on — on French, sir —.”

“Indeed! You appear to have shown no sign of it in the French set, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch, drily.

“I — I — I mean —.”

“I quite understand, Bunter, that you are very anxious not to miss this excursion,” said Mr. Quelch, “and it is certainly very kind and generous of Mr. Bunter to undertake the expenses of a party of holiday-makers on Founder’s Day. But —.” He paused again.

“The fact is, Bunter, you are so obtuse a boy —.”

“Me, sir?” ejaculated Bunter, apparently surprised.

“So very obtuse, and so very irresponsible,” said Mr. Quelch, “that I doubt whether it would be judicious to allow you to visit a foreign country, even for a single day.”

“Oh, really, sir —!” gasped Bunter.

“I am afraid, Bunter, that you might get into some trouble, under your own guidance — you might even miss the return boat, and become lost in a foreign country — and my decision must depend upon whether you are accompanied by someone wiser than yourself, upon whom I can place reliance —.”

“Wharton’s coming, sir —.”

“Oh!” Mr. Quelch’s tone seemed to change at once. “If that is the case, Bunter —.”

“Oh, yes, sir, Wharton and his friends are coming — we — we’ve fixed that up already, sir — I shall look after them all right, sir —.”

“I can, at least, rely upon Wharton to look after you, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch. “Very well, Bunter, you have leave for the excursion on Founder’s Day, on the distinct understanding that you are accompanied by my Head Boy. You may take any friends you like, so long as it is clearly understood that Wharton is in charge of the party.”

“Oh! Thank you, sir.”

“That is all, Bunter! You may go.”

Fisher T. Fish heard a door close.

Not a word in the study had escaped the keen ears outside the window. Fisher T. Fish grinned. He was “wise” to it now. He had the “noos”; and it was okay! Somehow or other, Skinner and Co. had got on to it earlier: but Fisher T. Fish had got on to it now: and was Fisher Tarleton Fish going to “get left”? He was not! If Skinner and Co. fancied that they were going to keep that fat goob and his beanfeast to themselves, they had another guess coming! Once more Fishy’s bony legs went into quick action: and he was waiting at the door when Billy Bunter rolled out of the House.

A friendly, if somewhat bony, thumb, jabbed into fat ribs, for the second time that morning.

“Say, bo —!” began Fisher T. Fish.

“Wow!” yapped Bunter. “Don’t puncture me, you bony ass.”

“Say, the bell don’t go for five minutes yet, old-timer,” said Fisher T. Fish, eagerly.

“Coming across to the tuck-shop? Lots of time for a ginger and a jam tart before the bell goes.”

Billy Bunter blinked at him for a moment, in astonishment. This, from Fisher T. Fish, was more surprising than from Skinner. Billy Bunter would almost as soon have expected the Founder’s statue in the quad to find voice and invite him to the tuck-shop for a ginger and jam tarts, as Fisher T. Fish.

But he blinked only for a moment. Astonishing as that invitation was from Fishy, Bunter was not the man to let it, like the sunbeams, pass him by.

“Come on, big boy,” said Fishy, persuasively — quite unnecessary persuasion! “The bell goes in a few minutes. Coming?”

“What-ho!” said Bunter.

And he came. It was only a few minutes till the bell for third school, but Billy Bunter, in the tuck-shop, made the most of them. Ginger and a jam tart were followed by another ginger and more jam tarts: and Fisher T. Fish was rather glad when the bell rang and interrupted Bunter — otherwise he looked like going on, and on, and on, and on! It was a sticky, shiny, happy Bunter that rolled off to the Remove form-room for third school.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE RIVALS

BOB CHERRY rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

“Anybody guess that one?” he asked.

Four fellows grinned and shook their heads. No member of the Famous Five seemed able to “guess that one”.

“Just look!” said Bob.

All the Famous Five looked. Really, the little scene was worth looking at. It was

interesting, indeed intriguing.

Harry Wharton and Co. in a cheery group in the quad, had been discussing the coming whole holiday: though without reference to Billy Bunter's beanfeast: of which, sad to relate, they did not believe a word. They had heard too many of Billy Bunter's airy flights of fancy, to attach much importance to his latest: and they were not likely to "get wise" to the facts by such methods as those which came easily to Skinner and Co. and Fisher T. Fish. They were not, in fact thinking of Bunter at all, till they were reminded of his fat existence by seeing him roll out of the House. Neither were they anxious for his little round eyes or his big round spectacles to fall upon them: few fellows at Greyfriars were really keen on meeting Bunter about tea-time: and it was just on tea-time now.

But, as it happened, they need not have bothered about that. Billy Bunter did not cast a single blink in their direction.

About tea-time, Bunter might have been expected to be blinking about him in search of some fellow from whom he could raise a little loan to tide him over till his postal order came, or some fellow who was not too unwilling to entertain a fat and voracious Owl to tea in a study. But Bunter was no longer appearing in his well-known role of a lion seeking what he might devour.

Fellows often dodged Bunter: and absolutely nobody had ever been known to display delight in his society. But now things were changed. Bunter seemed to have achieved popularity all of a sudden, at least with some fellows in the Remove.

As he rolled out into the quad, Skinner and Co. approached him from one direction, with smiling friendly faces. From another Fisher T. Fish bore down on him, his bony features contorted into an amicable grin. Four members of the Remove, at least, found some attraction in Billy Bunter that nobody had ever found before. And the Famous Five, looking on, could not help wondering:

and they certainly could not, as Bob expressed it, "guess that one". For why Skinner, Snoop, Stott, and Fishy were beaming on Billy Bunter with effusive friendship really was a thing that no fellow could be expected to understand.

"Oh, here you are, old chap," said Skinner, affectionately.

"I guess I been looking for you, old-timer," said Fisher T. Fish.

They spoke simultaneously: and Billy Bunter blinked from one to the other.

"Coming up to the study, old chap?" asked Skinner. "We've got rather a spread."

"I'll mention that Bunter's coming to tea with me in No. 14," said Fisher T. Fish.

"Ain't you, Bunter, oldtimer?"

Billy Bunter blinked at Fishy, whose bony face was friendly and persuasive. He blinked at Skinner, who was equally friendly and equally persuasive. He blinked at Snoop and Stott, who beamed on him.

It was quite gratifying to Bunter to be sought after in this way. It was unusual, but it was very agreeable. Bunter liked it. This was the first acknowledgment he had ever received of the undoubted fact that he was a very attractive and charming fellow. But it was unusual, and it was a little surprising. It was, of course, only his due: but he had never had his due like this before. Quite unaware that Skinner and Co. had seen Mr. Bunter's letter, that Fishy had got the news under Quelch's window, Bunter was somewhat perplexed. But there was no doubt that he liked it.

There was no occasion now for him to track down Lord Mauleverer, or to explain to Harry Wharton and Co. that it was up to them to stand a fellow a study spread when they were going on a fellow's beanfeast — or to clear out the study cupboard in No. 7 before Peter Todd came up to tea, at the risk of Peter's boot: or to haunt the vicinity of Coker's study in the Fifth in the hope that Horace Coker had had another cake from

his Aunt Judy. These resources did not need to be called upon now. Bunter was safe for a spread in a study: indeed two if he liked. It was all very unexpected: but it was all very pleasant.

“Well —!” began Bunter, undecided between the two claimants. It really seemed to be a case of “how happy could I be with either, were t’other dear charmer away”. Never before had rivals contended for the pleasure and distinction of Bunter’s company.

Skinner gave Fisher T. Fish a black look. Fishy was unexpectedly a rival for Bunter’s good graces: and Skinner could only wonder whether he had somehow got wise to the fact that the beanfeast on Founder’s Day was the genuine goods. It was very irritating to Skinner. He wanted to make sure of that Channel trip before it got out that the trip really was coming off, when probably Fishy would not be the only rival in the field. Fisher T. Fish retorted to that black look with an angry glare. Fishy was quite determined to stake out his claim in the fat guy.

“Come on, Bunter, old fellow,” said Skinner, persuasively.

“I guess Bunter’s coming with me,” said Fisher T. Fish “This way, big boy.”

“Look here, Fishy —!” snapped Skinner.

“Look here, Skinner —!” snapped Fishy.

“Bunter’s coming with us,” said Snoop. “You can leave him alone, Fishy! Nobody wants you butting in.”

“Yes, get out of it, Fishy,” said Stott. “Come on, Bunter, old chap.”

“Aw, can it!” snapped Fishy.

“There’s your lines, Bunter, old man,” said Skinner. “We’re going to help you with your lines, after tea, you know.”

“I guess I’ll do Bunter’s lines, if he wants,” said Fisher T. Fish. “This way, Bunter, old top.”

Fisher T. Fish slipped a bony arm through a fat one, to lead Bunter away. Skinner promptly slipped an arm through Bunter’s other arm. Fisher T. Fish certainly was not going to walk off the fat prize in that cool manner, under his nose, if Skinner could help it.

Harry Wharton and Co. at a little distance, looked on with more and more interest. Really, there was no accounting for this. With the sole exception of Fisher T. Fish, Skinner was the meanest fellow in the Remove. Yet both were not only willing, but eager, for a greedy and voracious Owl to feed in their studies: so eager, indeed, that both of them had hold of Bunter, by his fat arms, trying to pull him different ways. Between the two of them, the fat Owl looked like being dragged hither and thither, like the body of Patroclus between the contending Greeks and Trojans.

“I say, you fellows —!” gasped Bunter.

“This way, old chap.”

“Nope: this way, old-timer.”

“Look here, Fishy, you cad —.”

“You go and chop chips, Skinner, you mugwump —” Skinner gave a pull at Bunter’s right arm. Fisher T. Fish gave a pull at his left. Bunter gave a squeak.

“Wow!”

“Leave Bunter alone, Fishy, you bony smudge —.”

“You leave him alone, Skinner, you pesky bonehead.” Skinner gave another pull.

Fisher T. Fish gave another pull. Billy Bunter rocked to one side, and then to the other.

“Ow!” howled Bunter. “Leggo!”

The fat Owl did not seem keen on understudying the body of Patroclus! He jerked his



fat arms away from both contestants. Skinner and Fisher T. Fish eyed one another almost wolfishly.

“You’re coming with us, Bunter, old fellow,” said Skinner.

“I guess you’re coming with me, Bunter, old pal,” urged Fisher T. Fish.

“Yes,” gasped Bunter, apparently making up his fat mind in favour of Fishy. “Another time, Skinner, old chap.”

“But —!” began Skinner.

“I’ll tell you what, though,” added Bunter, “if you like to do my lines for me, old chap —.”

“What?”

“I’ll look in at your study for them, after tea,” said Bunter. “Come on, Fishy.”

And he walked off with Fisher T. Fish. Fishy grinned with triumph, while Skinner and Co. exchanged glances which indicated how deep their feelings were.

“The fat freak!” breathed Skinner. “The podgy frump!” said Snoop. “That bony cad must have got on to it somehow,” muttered Skinner. “He couldn’t be after Bunter for any other reason. But he won’t cut us out with Bunter — he’s too jolly mean to feed him.”

“Bunter wasn’t satisfied in our study yesterday,” said Stott, with a shake of the head.

“He asked if there was another cake, and there wasn’t! I daresay that’s why he’s giving Fishy a turn.”

“Well, nobody could stand Bunter as much as he could eat!” growled Skinner. “And a trip to Boulogne wouldn’t be worth it! A trip round the world wouldn’t, if you come to that.”

“I suppose we’re going to do the fat frump’s lines,” said Snoop.

“I suppose so!” grunted Skinner.

“Blow him!” said Stott.

Skinner and Co. went into the House to go up to their study and get on with Bunter’s lines. And Harry Wharton and Co., having gazed at that little scene till the finish, looked at one another.

“Guess that one?” asked Bob, again.

“Blessed if I make it out,” said Harry Wharton. “Bunter seems to have become popular all of a sudden.”

“The popularity seems to be terrific,” remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. “But the whyfulness is an esteemed mystery.”

It was indeed a mystery: and the Famous Five could only shake their heads over it and give it up.

## CHAPTER 12

### FIERCE FOR FISHY!

“SQUAT down, old-timer,” said Fisher T. Fish, hospitably.

Billy Bunter did not immediately “squat” down.

He rolled into No. 14 Study with Fisher T. Fish, with an expression of cheery anticipation on his fat face. But that expression faded a little as he blinked at the tea-table. Fisher T. Fish had made some preparations for his honoured guest. But Fishy was in a curious sort of difficulty in this affair. He was torn between two conflicting desires — one, to insinuate himself into Bunter’s favour to the extent of horning into the beanfeast on Founder’s Day: the other, to avoid spending money. Spending money was always a painful process to Fishy. Every sixpence came out like a tooth. There

was an easy way into Bunter's favour — feeding him! But feeding a fellow — especially Bunter — cost cash. Two gingers and four jam tarts, in the tuck-shop that morning, had given Fisher T. Fish six separate and painful pangs. And that, of course, was a mere nothing, compared with a spread in the study.

The supplies on the study table were ample in only one particular. There was plenty of bread — which was supplied by the school. In other respects the diet looked rather thin. There was a tin of sardines, a spot of margarine, and a cake — but it was a very small cake. There were biscuits — but only six. There was a pot of jam — but it was the smallest size in pots of jam that Fishy had been able to obtain. There was milk in the milk-jug: but not very much. There was sugar in a sugar-basin: but only four lumps. Fisher T. Fish was overflowing with hospitality, so far as that went. Fishy was ready to overflow with anything that did not cost money. But the comestibles certainly did not impress Bunter as overflowing: quite the reverse, in fact. He eyed them through his big spectacles with a disparaging blink.

Bunter liked a lot! He hadn't been satisfied in Skinner's study the previous day — it was, in fact, no easy task to satisfy William George Bunter at meal-times. He had favoured Fisher T. Fish on this occasion, in the hope of something better. Instead of which, this was far inferior to what Skinner and Co. had provided.

So he did not "squat" down as hospitably requested by Fishy. He stood and blinked at the tea-table, and considered whether he might not do better by rolling along to Skinner's study after all.

Fisher T. Fish, reading the fat thought in the fat face, hurriedly crossed to the study cupboard.

"I guess I'll get the things out, old fellow," he said. "Squat down."

Apparently the supply on the table was not all. There was more in the cupboard.

Bunter condescended at last to squat down.

Fisher T. Fish stepped quite briskly to the cupboard. But he slowed down when he reached it. Actually, there were further supplies there: Fishy had hardly hoped to get away, as it were, with the supply he had placed on the table: if he had had a hope, it had been a very faint one. But having expended precious cash on good things to eat, Fishy felt a deep reluctance to see them disappear down Bunter's fat neck. Fisher T. Fish was going to leave in the cupboard, in fact, exactly as much of his provender as he could save from Billy Bunter's capacious gullet.

Slowly, almost painfully, Fisher T. Fish handed out another small pot of jam. Bunter blinked at it without enthusiasm. It was followed by a small pot of marmalade. Bunter did not seem impressed. Desperately, Fishy hooked out a cake, and a jar of honey, and a dish of eggs, at one fell swoop.

Bunter's fat face brightened a little. With reckless abandon, Fisher T. Fish added a meat-pie, a plate of sausages, and a box of dates. There was more in the cupboard, for Fishy was prepared for the worst. But he still nourished a hope of leaving them where they were.

Billy Bunter smiled quite genially.

"I say, old chap, I'll cook the eggs and the sosses," he said. "Where's the fry-pan? Shove some spirit in the stove. Let's see — you've got six eggs here, and four sosses. Aren't you going to have any?"

Fisher T. Fish suppressed his feelings.

"Nope!" he gasped. "Don't care for them."

"Oh, all right," assented Bunter. "I can manage this lot, if you don't want any. There's other things to fill up on, too."

There was one form of work that Billy Bunter did not hate with a deadly hatred. That

was cooking. His fat face was quite merry and bright as he cooked the eggs and sausages over the spirit-stove in the fender. Bunter could cook, if he could do nothing else. He could eat even more efficiently than he could cook. Fisher T. Fish contrived to twist his bony features into a hospitable grin as the fat Owl disposed of the eggs and sausages.

Six eggs and four sausages would have made quite a meal for some fellows. But if Fisher T. Fish had hoped that they would make a meal for Billy Bunter, he had to wake up. To that fat and hefty trencherman, they were little more than a passing trifle to begin with. Having demolished them, Billy Bunter, like Alexander of old, was prepared to look for new worlds to conquer.



His fat face was quite merry and bright as he cooked the eggs and sausages over the spirit-stove

Fisher T. Fish felt a pang as Bunter followed on with the sardines. He felt a deeper pang as the meat-pie disappeared. He barely suppressed a groan when Billy Bunter, having disposed of one cake, started on the other, which he finished down to the last crumb and the final plum. And he almost yelled, when Bunter opened the jar of honey, and started operations on it with a tablespoon. This was, as Fishy would have expressed it in his own language, “fierce”.

Bunter blinked across the table at him.

“You’re not eating much, Fishy,” he remarked.

“Aw! Nope!” gasped Fishy. “I guess I ain’t much appetite, old-timer.” Which was really true: for Billy Bunter’s inroads on the foodstuffs had quite taken away Fishy’s appetite. He had hard work to keep a hospitable grin on his bony face. His expression was almost haggard, when Bunter was not looking at him.

Jam followed honey, and marmalade, jam. Bunter hardly touched the bread, of which Fishy would have been glad to see him consume any quantity. One by one the other things vanished, till the table, at last, was bare. Billy Bunter blinked over it, as if in search of something further, and Fisher T. Fish, with deep feelings, produced a box of chocolates from the cupboard. After that, nothing remained but a pineapple, which Fishy still hoped to preserve from Bunter’s rapacious maw.

He was glad to see that his guest was slowing down a little now. The chocolates went

at quite a leisurely rate. Fishy even hoped that some might be left in the box. It seemed to Fisher T. Fish time to drop a hint on the subject of Founder's Day. He had hoped that Bunter, under the genial influence of food, would come to that subject of his own accord. Bunter, however, was thinking wholly of food: and if his fat thoughts strayed from it for a moment, it was only to wonder whether there was anything more in the cupboard. So Fishy — while anxiously counting the chocolates as they disappeared one after another on the downward path — broached the topic himself.

"I hear that you've got a sorta trip on for Founder's Day, old-timer," he remarked, casually.

"Eh? Oh! Yes! I'm taking a party of friends on a beanfeast," answered Bunter, carelessly. "Trip to France for the day, you know — party of eight — regardless of expense — my pater's footing the bill. Money's nothing to him, you know. They ain't free tickets he's got because he's a director of the company, or anything of that sort."

"Oh!" gasped Fishy.

"Nothing of the kind! The trip will run him into pounds and pounds and pounds. I say, these chocs are good, Fishy."

"Glad you like 'em," almost groaned Fisher T. Fish. The chocolates were going comparatively slowly: but it was growing clear that none was going to be left in the box. Bunter, indeed, did not believe in leaving anything eatable uneaten: so long as there was, so to speak, room at the inn! And there was still a good extent of space unified within Billy Bunter's extensive circumference.

"Got any more?" asked Bunter.

"Eh? Oh! Nope!"

"Well, I'll finish the box, if you don't mind."

"Aw! Do!" gasped Fisher T. Fish: manfully resisting a wild impulse to brain Bunter with the teapot.

Bunter went on munching. Fisher T. Fish gave up hope of saving any of the chocs: though he still clung to the hope that the pineapple in the cupboard might yet escape.

"Party of eight, what?" he said. "Picked 'em out yet?"

"Oh! Yes! Quelch makes it a point of Wharton going, and Wharton wouldn't go without his gang. That's five — six with me," said Bunter. "I'm going to ask two other fellows —" Bunter paused, and blinked into the chocolate-box — it was empty. He blinked round over the table. Nothing of an edible nature remained but a single lump of sugar in the sugar-basin. Bunter took it between a fat thumb and forefinger, and transferred it to a wide mouth. Fisher T. Fish watched it as it went.

"Well, look yere, old-timer," said Fisher T. Fish. It had still not occurred to Bunter to add Fishy to the beanfeasters, and there was nothing for it but to give his fat mind a push in that direction. "If you're looking for a friend to make up the party —"

"Oh that's settled," said Bunter. He gave one more blink over the denuded tea-table, and rose to his feet. "Thanks for the feed, Fishy —"

"Yep! But look yere —"

"I think I'll be getting along to Skinner's study — I've got to take those lines down to Quelch —"

"Hold on a minute, old boy," gasped Fishy. "Care for a pineapple? I've one in the cupboard." It was the last sacrifice, and Fisher T. Fish, with real heroism, made it.

"Oh!" Bunter sat down again. "Yes, rather! Trot it out."

Fisher T. Fish did not exactly "trot" it out. It came out of the cupboard, in fact, at a funeral pace. Still, it did come out, and it was duly sliced, and Bunter proceeded to dispose happily of the slices.

“Tell you what, Bunter, old fellow,” said Fisher T. Fish, coming out into the open. He had to get it out before the pineapple was gone, for it was clear that when the pineapple was gone, Bunter would be gone too. “Tell you what, I’d jest like that trip over to Boulogne.”

Bunter blinked at him.

“Sorry, old chap.” His voice came muffled through pineapple. “I’m asking Smithy, and Smithy wouldn’t come without his pal. That makes up the eight.”

Fisher T. Fish gazed at him across the table.

He had expended cash — spot cash — priceless cash — on that feed. Bunter had eaten him out of house and home. Not a choc, not a spot of jam or marmalade, not a slice of pineapple, not even a lump of sugar, remained on the table. And Bunter, realising that the pineapple was positively the last item in the programme, rose to his feet, this time to go. He did not mean to ask Fishy to the beanfeast! He was not going to ask Fishy to the beanfeast! All Bunter was going to do was to walk off with Fishy’s feed inside him: leaving Fishy, like Rachel of old, to mourn for what was lost, without any prospect of comfort. Words failed Fisher Tarleton Fish.

Bunter rolled to the door.

“Thanks, old chap,” he said. “You must come to a spread in my study some time, when — when I get my postal order. Cheerio!”

Bunter rolled away.

Fisher T. Fish gazed after him. He glared after him. He gazed at the denuded table, and thought of his expenditure at the tuck-shop, and groaned. It had been worth it, for that continental trip on Founder’s Day: it had been a sprat to catch a whale. But there was nothing to show for it, after all; Fisher T. Fish had got “left”. He had come out at the little end of the horn. There had been a feast for Bunter, but there was not going to be any beanfeast for Fishy!

“Wal,” said Fisher T. Fish, at last. “I’ll say this is fierce! I’ll tell a man, it’s sure fierce!”

A happy sticky Bunter rolled away to Skinner’s study for his lines. It was all right for Bunter. But for Fisher T. Fish it was, undoubtedly, fierce!

## CHAPTER 13

### COKER IS NOT PLEASED

“WHAT’S this I hear?”

Horace Coker, of the Fifth, asked that question. He addressed it to four members of the Famous Five, after second school on Monday morning.

The Remove had been dismissed for break, but the Head Boy of the form had been kept back for a few minutes as his form-master had something to say to him. So Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, were waiting at the end of the corridor till Quelch was done with Wharton, and he came out to join them. It was then that Coker of the Fifth happened. He came up to the group of juniors with a frowning brow, which indicated that Horace Coker was displeased: something or other, evidently, had come between the wind and his nobility!

The fact that Coker of the Fifth was displeased did not perturb the cheery chums of the Remove in the very least. Had Coker’s wrath been like unto that of the son of Thetis, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered, still it would not have caused them to turn a hair. Coker’s own unlimited estimate of his own importance was not shared by the Famous Five.

Neither did they know what Coker was driving at. He seemed to expect them to know, as he glared at them with angry inquiry. But they really had no idea.

"I said what's this I hear?" repeated Coker, as he received no reply.

"Which and what?" asked Bob Cherry, mildly.

"About this trip on Founder's Day!" snapped Coker, condescending to become more explicit. "I hear that a gang of scrubby fags in the Remove are talking about going on the *Flamingo* from Pegg Bay on Wednesday. You young sweeps, from what I hear." Whereat the four juniors smiled. The news of Bunter's beanfeast, it seemed, had reached ears in other forms. Coker had heard of it, in the Fifth. Why it should perturb him was rather a mystery. In the first place, the Co. did not believe a word of it, regarding it only as Bunter's usual "bunkum". In the second place, it was hard to see how it could concern Horace Coker, or anyone else, what they might or might not do on Founder's Day.

"From what I hear," continued Coker, becoming more explicit. "Six or seven of you are going with that fat young ass Bunter. A sort of Bank Holiday crowd on a beanfeast." Coker gave a contemptuous snort. "Well, it won't do."

"Why not?" asked Frank Nugent, blankly.

"I'm going!" said Coker.

"You won't want the whole steamer, all to yourself, will you?" asked Bob, "I expect there will be a hundred passengers at least. If there's a bit of a crush, you could hang your feet over the side —."

"What?"

"And make room for dozens of people —."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker breathed hard. He had, it was true, an unusually large size in feet. He did not like allusions to their extent.

"I don't want any cheek," he said.

"Well, we don't, if you come to that," said Johnny Bull. "Run away and play, Coker, and don't be cheeky."

"I'd better make it plain," said Coker. "I'm going on that Channel trip on Wednesday, with a couple of friends. I don't want a gang of fags hanging about, making out they know a chap, before a lot of people. Why, people might think that I was one of the party."

It dawned on the juniors that it was this awful possibility that was perturbing Coker. Horace Coker was the most "Fifth-formy" of all the Fifth: his dignity, as a senior, was a precious thing in his eyes. The bare idea of getting mixed up with a bunch of hilarious juniors on a holiday trip was quite intolerable to him.

"It won't do," said Coker, in a tone of finality. "If that's what you're thinking of, you can wash it right out. I can't have a crew of noisy obstreperous fags on the steamer with me. It's altogether too thick! Wash it right out."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes Wharton —."

"I'm speaking to you, Cherry —."

"Yes: shut up a minute, Coker. What did Quelch want, old man?"

Harry Wharton came down the corridor with quite a surprised expression on his face. Judging by his look, what Quelch had had to say was something unusual and unexpected.

"Wonders will never cease, you fellows," he said. "Guess what Quelch wanted to speak to me about!"

"Give it a name, old bean."

"Look here —!" roared Coker.

But the juniors did not “look there”. They wanted to know what Quelch had had to say to the captain of the Remove, and they gave Harry Wharton their whole attention: disregarding Horace Coker just as if he didn’t matter.

“It’s Bunter’s jolly old beanfeast,” said Harry.

“So it’s got to Quelch,” said Bob. “But what about it?”

“It’s genuine,” said Harry.

“Eh?”

“What?”

“The straight goods,” said Harry, laughing. “There really is going to be a beanfeast on Founder’s Day, and Bunter’s pater is standing it, and he’s written to Quelch about it.”

“Great pip!”

“The great pipfulness is terrific!”

“Bunter seems to have told Quelch that we’re going with him,” went on Harry Wharton, “and he wanted it clear before he gave Bunter leave. Bunter wouldn’t be allowed to go on his own, but if we’re with him, it’s okay. We’re to look after the fat ass and see that he doesn’t land in trouble, or miss the steamer home, or do any of the idiotic things Quelch would naturally expect him to do. Looks as if it’s up to us.”

“Then Bunter was telling the truth about it,” said Bob, blankly. “It wasn’t all bunkum and gammon and hot air.”

“He really had a letter — and he really lost it!” said Nugent. “Well, no fellow could be expected to guess that one!”

“Are we going, then?” asked Johnny Bull.

“Well, Bunter wouldn’t be allowed to go without some bod to look after him, and he’s asked us,” said Harry.

“It would be rather letting him down not to go — as there really is going to be a beanfeast.”

“Blessed if I make it out,” said Johnny Bull. “It will run his pater into pounds and pounds and pounds.”

“Must be okay, if Quelch says so,” remarked Bob.

“Much obliged to Bunter’s pater — it will be a jolly trip. We shall be able to air our French — parley-vooo Frongsay, Mosssoo?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Where’s Bunter now?” asked Harry.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

“Skinner walked him off to the tuck-shop when we came out. I wonder if Skinner’s got wind of it that there’s something in it.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“It’s settled, then?” asked Nugent.

“Well, yes: I told Quelch we’d go with him and see him through,” answered Harry.

“Couldn’t do less, I think. Better go and look for Bunter and tell him it’s O.K.”

Horace Coker had listened to all this, with thunder growing in his rugged brow. Harry Wharton and Co. were carrying on just as if Coker wasn’t there! Coker of the Fifth was the last fellow in the world to be regarded as if he wasn’t there! Now he intervened, with emphasis.

“You can wash that right out, Wharton,” he said grimly.

Harry Wharton stared at him.

“I’m going,” explained Coker, “and I’m not going to have a scrubby crew of Lower boys on the steamer with me. Too thick altogether. You can do anything else you like on Founder’s Day —.”

“Oh! Thanks,” said Harry, laughing.

“But you’re not going on that steamer,” said Coker, firmly. “A Fifth-form man can’t have a crew of fags hanging about like a Bank Holiday crowd on Hampstead Heath. Wash it right out, see? I’m going.”

“Well, if you’re going, Coker —.”

“I am!” said Coker.

“Then I hope you’ll wash —.”

“What?”

“And put on a clean collar! And you might brush your bags, too. Don’t let us down before a lot of people.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the Co. quite entertained by the expression on Horace Coker’s rugged face as he listened to this.

“By gum!” gasped Coker. “Now, look here — are you chucking it up, or do you want me to smack your heads all round!”

“Get on with it,” grinned Bob.

Coker needed no more than that. He got on with it. He delivered the first smack at Bob’s head — missing by a foot or more as Bob dodged. It was not only the first smack, but the last: for the next moment, all the Famous Five had hold of Coker and he was whirled off his feet. Walls and ceiling spun round Coker as he whirled.

“Oh!” he gasped, “Leggo! I — I — I’ll —.”

Bump!

“Woooooooooogh!”

Horace Coker landed on the floor with mighty concussion. He sprawled there and spluttered for breath. Harry Wharton and Co. went cheerily out into the quad: leaving Coker for dead, as it were. And as Coker struggled up, gurgling for wind, it was borne in upon his mind that the chums of the Remove would not be dissuaded from making that continental trip by the simple process of smacking their heads all round!

## CHAPTER 14

### ALL RIGHT FOR SMITHY

“YOU fat fool!”

“Oh, really, Smithy —.”

“Get out!” snarled the Bounder.

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not seem to be in a good temper.

He was, in fact, in a very bad one.

After class that day, Smithy had lingered behind, when the Remove came out, to speak to Mr. Quelch. As it was Monday, and the Boulogne trip was on Wednesday, it was high time for the Bounder to make sure of leave for that trip. The reckless scapegrace was quite prepared to take French leave, rather than give up his darling scheme of “skinning the tiger” at the green tables. But even the reckless and headstrong Bounder hesitated at that, for the result could not fail to be extremely unpleasant. He was going to ask meekly for leave.

But he did not ask.

Several times, of late, he had fancied that Mr. Quelch’s gimlet-eyes had fixed on him with a very penetrating look: and had wondered, uneasily, whether some echo of Bunter’s tattle might have reached his form-master’s ears. If that was so, it was certain that leave would not be granted. And if it was definitely refused, taking “French leave” would be ten times more risky: it could mean nothing less than a Head’s flogging, and perhaps the “sack”. So, at the last moment, the Bounder



followed the form out without speaking to Quelch: and the matter was still unsettled. He found no comfort in Redwing. Tom Redwing was going with him, if he went: but he did not conceal his hope that something would prevent the Bounder from going. Instead of joining Redwing in the quad, Smithy gave him a scowl, and went up to his study, to think the matter over with the assistance of a cigarette or two.

It was an exasperating position to the Bounder. Quelch, if asked, might give leave as he had already given it to Bunter and the Famous Five. But if there was some suspicion in his mind, and he definitely forbade the Bounder to go, asking him would only make matters worse. Undecided, disturbed, irritated, and generally disgruntled, the Bounder stamped into his study — and an almost deadly look came over his face, as he beheld Billy Bunter seated there, in the armchair, apparently waiting for him to come in. The sight of Billy Bunter, just then, had rather the effect on Smithy of a red rag to a bull. It was Bunter's eavesdropping and tattling that had caused his present spot of worry. He looked at the fat junior as if he could have eaten him.

Bunter gave him an amicable blink.

"Will you get out, you fat smear?" snapped the Bounder. He stood beside the doorway, his foot ready for Bunter as he went.

But Billy Bunter did not get out. He did not want to be booted through the doorway: and he had something to say to Smithy. He remained where he was, in the armchair, blinking amicably, but warily, at the angry Bounder.

"I say, Smithy, nothing to get shirty about, old chap," he said. "I've come here to ask you to join up —."

"What do you mean, idiot?"

"My beanfeast, you know —."

"You fat chump —."

"Oh, really, Smithy! I can tell you that a jolly good many fellows would jump at it," said Bunter, warmly. "Continental trip, regardless of expense — me to talk French and make things easy —."

"You blithering owl!"

"Wharton's gang are coming," said Bunter. "They jolly soon fixed it up when they heard from Quelch that it was O.K., I can tell you. I'd a jolly good mind to turn them down, after the way they've treated me — refusing to cash a fellow's postal order, and all that. But Quelch made it a point about Wharton coming. Look here, Smithy, there's room for two more in the party; and you can come, if you like, and I don't mind if you bring Redwing along."

Herbert Vernon-Smith stood looking at him.

He had a strong desire to hook Billy Bunter out of the armchair, pitch him through the doorway, and boot him along the passage. But he checked that desire. It came into his mind that this might be the way out of his difficulty. Since Mr. Quelch's talk with Wharton that morning, it was known to all that the "beanfeast" was, after all, not a figment of Bunter's fat imagination, but the genuine goods. Bunter was going to Boulogne on Wednesday, and Harry Wharton and Co. were going with him. Smithy was very quick on the uptake. He realised at once that if he went with Wharton's party, suspicion, if any, would be allayed. It would be all clear.

Certainly, he had not expected Bunter to ask him to join the party. He could hardly remember how many times he had kicked Bunter since the day he had rooted him out of the corner of the study. And Bunter, often as he had been kicked in his fat career, had certainly never grown to like it. Why the fat Owl, after so many kickings, was so amicable, was rather a puzzle: but Smithy was quite ready to make use of him. The

scowl faded from his face.

“What about it, old chap?” rattled on Bunter. “Jolly trip, you know — all expenses paid — run on the Continent, and all that. I really want you to come. We’re both sportsmen, old fellow.”

Bunter gave him a fat wink.

“I know what your game is, old scout,” he said, “and I’m on. My pater’s sending me a cash remittance with the tickets, to-morrow — it will be a fiver, at least — a tenner, most likely. We can dodge Wharton in Boulogne —.”

“Dodge him!” repeated the Bounder.

“Well, they’re pi, you know,” said Bunter. “They wouldn’t be found dead in a casino. But I’m a bit of a dog, old chap, when I get going.” Bunter grinned. “Quelch thinks that Wharton’s going to look after me — he, he, he! I’ll jolly soon let him know where he gets off! I’m going in with you to break the bank, Smithy.”

“Oh!” gasped Smithy. He began to understand why the fat Owl had come along with that kind invitation to join up for the beanfeast. Billy Bunter was going not merely for a holiday in France: he was going on he “razzle”. He was not going to see the sights with Harry Wharton and Co. — he was going to “skin the tiger” with Smithy! At least, he fancied that he was!

“That’s the big idea,” said Bunter, complacently. “I’ve been thinking about it ever since you were talking to Redwing the other day, Smithy. Easy money, old chap! All a fellow needs is a cool head, clear judgment, and an iron nerve — well, that’s me all over.”

“Oh!” gasped Smithy, again.

“Redwing said they mightn’t let schoolboys in, and you said that you’d fix up a moustache and look older,” rattled on Bunter. “Well, I’ll do the same, see? We know the ropes, don’t we, Smithy?”

“Oh!” gasped the Bounder, for the third time.

“We’re wide, old chap, what-? No flies on us!” grinned Bunter. “Is it a go, old man? Coming on the beanfeast?” The Bounder laughed. He was in quite a good-humour now.

“Done!” he said. “I’ll come.”

“Good,” said Bunter. “We’ll make the fur fly, Smithy! We’ll paint the town red, what?” Bunter chuckled, and heaved his weight out of the armchair. “I say, Smithy, I shall be in funds to-morrow- — could you lend a fellow five bob till that cash remittance comes from my pater?”

“Certainly,” said Smithy.

Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 4 Study, unkicked: with two half-crowns clutched in a fat hand. The Bounder laughed again, when he was gone. The Owl of the Remove had solved his problem: it was plane sailing now. There would be no difficulty with Quelch, if he went with Wharton’s party: and he was going with Wharton’s party. As for the fat and fatuous Owl’s idea of “skinning the tiger” in his company, the Bounder had his own ideas about that. Smithy was a reckless young rascal, but he had his limit: and certainly he would have no hand in leading other fellows astray: neither had he any idea of being bothered by the fat Owl once he had landed in Boulogne. He was, in fact, simply and unscrupulously making use of Bunter: whose usefulness would end as soon as they stepped on the quay at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Bunter was welcome to dream of making the fur fly, and painting the town red: he would wake up, as it were, later on.

There was quite a cheery grin on Smithy’s face, when Tom Redwing came up to the study to tea.

“All serene for Wednesday, Reddy,” he said.  
 “Has Quelch given you leave?” asked Redwing.  
 “He will, when he knows that we’re going with Wharton’s crowd — joining up with the jolly old beanfeasters,” grinned the Bounder.  
 “But are we?” asked Redwing, puzzled.  
 “We are! Bunter’s just called in to invite us to join the party — and I’ve accepted for both of us! What price that?  
 Redwing’s face became very grave.  
 “You’ll have to wash out that rotten game, then, Smithy,” he said. “Wharton will be in charge of the party: and he wouldn’t stand for anything of that kind.”  
 “Think I’m going to ask him?” said the Bounder, disdainfully. “We shan’t see much of him, I fancy, after we’re across the Channel. Easy enough to drop that bunch.”  
 “But —.”  
 “Like to run over those numbers with me, Reddy?”  
 “No!”  
 “Let’s have tea, then. And try not to look like the wettest blanket ever,” added the Bounder, sarcastically.  
 Redwing made no reply to that. Undoubtedly he did look a good deal like a “wet blanket” as he sat down to tea in No. 4 Study. One member of the party of schoolboy trippers certainly was not looking forward to enjoying Billy Bunter’s beanfeast.

## CHAPTER 15

### SUDDEN END OF A FRIENDSHIP

HAROLD SKINNER kicked open the door of his study, entered, and kicked the door shut after him. Snoop and Stott, who were in the study, stared at him. Skinner was not a good-tempered fellow, certainly: but he was not often so demonstrative of bad temper. Kicking the door about was more like the Bounder in a “tantrum “. But for once, Skinner seemed to be letting himself go. He looked in the worst temper ever.  
 “What’s up?” asked Snoop.  
 Skinner kicked a chair out of his way, before replying.  
 “That fat smudge!” he hissed.  
 “Bunter?” asked Snoop and Stott together. Apparently they recognised the description.  
 “That bloated, burbling, benighted bladder of lard!” hissed Skinner. Clearly he was referring to Bunter!  
 “I say, you haven’t rowed with Bunter, have you?” asked Stott. “Not much good expecting him to ask us to join up, if you row with him, Skinner.”  
 “You were standing him ginger-pop after class,” said Snoop. “Pally as anything. What’s happened?”  
 “Sold!” said Skinner, savagely. “We’ve been feeding that fat cormorant for days, pulling his silly leg, and listening to his silly chin-wag — and we’re sold! He made up that party for Founder’s Day, and we’re left out.”  
 “I heard that Wharton’s crowd are going with him,” said Snoop. “That needn’t stop us going.”  
 “Smithy and Redwing are going too,” snarled Skinner. “How many does that make? Do you know enough arithmetic to add two to five, and make seven of it? The fat idiot himself makes it up to eight. That’s the limit — that’s all the tickets that his pater has been able to wangle as director — you remember that letter we found in the

Cloisters.”

“Oh!” said Snoop and Stott together.

“I’ve just heard,” went on Skinner. “All Wharton’s gang are going, but that left two tickets — the fat villain might have asked two of us, if not three. But he’s asked Smithy and Redwing: and that washes us out. Pulling our leg all the time!”

“Well, he wasn’t exactly pulling our leg, Skinner,” said Stott, in his slow way. “He hasn’t said anything to us about his beanfeast. We were pulling his leg, to get him to ask us. We seem to have pulled our own.”

Skinner scowled at him, “Got anything else silly and idiotic to say?” he snapped.

“Well, look here —.”

“Oh, shut up!” howled Skinner. It was not agreeable to a keen, wary, astute, and unscrupulous fellow like Skinner, to have it pointed out to him that he had pulled his own leg! “Look here, we’re not having this! We’ve been feeding that fat animal for the Boulogne trip, not because we wanted to fatten him like a turkey for Christmas.”

“If we’re left out, we’re left out,” said Stott.

“It mayn’t be too late. I can’t imagine why he’s asked Smithy — Smithy’s been kicking him all over the shop for prying in his study — but he’s done it. Well, he can wash it out again,” snapped Skinner. “He’s coming up to this study before prep — I’ve asked him to come up for something special.”

“Have we got anything special for him?” asked Snoop.

“Yes—an inkpot, a bottle of gum, and a fives bat — if he doesn’t put us on the list for the Boulogne trip,” answered Skinner.

“Oh, my hat!”

“He’ll be up in a few minutes, — you can bet he won’t be late, as he thinks there’s something to eat,” growled Skinner. “Well, when he comes in, we’ll put it to him — nicely! If he plays up, all right! If he doesn’t, he gets what I’ve been wanting to give him for a week past. Quiet — here he comes! That’s Bunter — if it isn’t a pig that’s wandered into the House.”

There was a sound of a fat grunt in the passage. Somebody was short of breath after coming up the stairs.

That it was Billy Bunter and not a pig that had wandered into the House, was clear a few moments later, as the door opened and a fat face adorned by a pair of big spectacles looked in.

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Trot in, old chap!” said Skinner. There was quite a remarkable change in Harold Skinner. A minute ago he had been looking like Roderick Dhu, when dark lightnings flashed from Roderick’s eye! Now he was all smiles, and looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth. Snoop and Stott, taking their cue from him, grinned affably at Bunter. If there was still a chance of getting in on the beanfeast, they were going to make the most of it.

Bunter rolled in: little dreaming that he was rather in the position of Daniel stepping into the lion’s den. All, so far as Bunter knew, was still calm and bright!

Skinner shut the door after him. He did not kick it shut this time. Skinner was all amiability.

Bunter blinked at the study table, and then round the study. As he had been asked to No. 11 for something special, he expected to see that something special on the table. But all he saw on the table was an inkpot, a bottle of gum, and a fives bat, which Skinner had placed there in readiness if required.

“Take a pew, old fellow,” said Skinner, and Bunter sat down. “I hear that you’ve got leave from Quelch for your party on Wednesday. old chap.”

“Oh! Yes,” said Bunter, carelessly. He was not there to discuss Wednesday’s party. He was there to discuss foodstuffs. “I say, it will be the bell for prep pretty soon. You said —.”

“How many friends are you taking?”

“Seven,” said Bunter, “It’s all fixed up. I say —.”

“Jolly decent of your pater to stand a beano like that,” said Skinner. “I daresay if you asked him he wouldn’t mind making it a bigger party. You’ve got other friends who’d like to come, Bunter.”

“Oh, yes, rather,” agreed Bunter, “Lots!”

“Well, then —!” urged Skinner.

“The pater said eight, in that letter I lost,” said Bunter. “I don’t know why he fixed it at eight — tain’t because he was only able to get eight free tickets, you know, or anything of that kind. But he said eight, and that’s that. I say —.”

“Well, you don’t really want all those fellows you’ve asked,” suggested Skinner.

“Why not wash some of them out, and ask some other fellows you like better — real pals, old chap.”

“Fellows in this study!” suggested Snoop.

Bunter blinked at him.

“Well, that wouldn’t quite do,” he said, shaking a fat head.

“Why not?” asked Stott.

Bunter shook his head again.

“Well, a chap has to be a bit particular when he’s taking a party on a continental trip,” he explained. “Such a thing as keeping up appearances, you know.”

“Wha-a-at?” ejaculated Skinner, Snoop, and Stott, in a sort of chorus.

“A fellow likes his friends to do him credit, on a holiday, you know,” said Bunter.

“This study would hardly do.”

Skinner gazed at him. Snoop gazed at him. Stott gazed at him. They did not speak. Perhaps their feelings were too deep for words.

“Sorry, and all that,” went on Bunter, cheerfully. “But it wouldn’t quite do. But I say, you said you had something special, Skinner —.” Bunter’s spectacles turned towards the study cupboard again.

Skinner and Co. exchanged glances — very expressive glances. Skinner rose to his feet, breathing hard.

“Yes, so I have,” he answered. “And you’re just going to get it, you fat, frowsy, footling freak.”

“Eh?”

“Collar him!” hissed Skinner.

“Here, I say — wharrer you up to — gone mad?” yelled Bunter, in surprise and alarm, and Skinner and Co. suddenly and unexpectedly fell on him on all sides. “I say, you fellows — leggo — yaroooh ! — oh, crikey — I say — whooop!”

“Collar him!”

“Scrag him!”

“Oh, crikey! Yaroooh! Help! I say, you fellows — oh, crumbs! Will you leggo?” shrieked Bunter. “Keep that ink away you beast — keep that gum away, you rotter — yow-ow-ow-ow! Keep that bat away, you smudge! Yaroooooooop!”

What was happening seemed rather like a nightmare and an earthquake rolled into one, to Billy Bunter.



Skinner and Co. suddenly and unexpectedly fell on him on all sides

Why Skinner and Co. broke out like this in the middle of a pleasant and agreeable chat, Bunter did not know. But he knew that they did! Only too well he knew that! Skinner, grabbing him with one hand, poured the inkpot over his head with the other. Snoop, grabbing his collar, emptied the gum-bottle down his back. Stott, snatching up the fives bat, landed out with it, reckless where the swipes fell, so long as they fell on Bunter.

Inky, gummy, breathless, and gurgling, Billy Bunter wriggled and squirmed under the fives bat, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

He hardly knew how he got out of the study. But he knew that what seemed like innumerable feet thudded on him as he went.

An inky, gummy, spluttering, yelling fat Owl flew down the passage, and Skinner slammed the study door after him. It was a sudden and unexpected end of a friendship!

## CHAPTER 16

### BUNTER ALL OVER

“ROLL in, old barrel!” said Harry Wharton.

“Oh, do,” said Frank Nugent, politely.

And Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh put on welcoming grins, especially for the occasion.

After prep, the Famous Five were gathered in No. 1 Study. On the table was a box of chocolates, of which they proposed to dispose before going down to the Rag. Various kind relatives had weighed in with welcome remittances for Founder’s Day: and the Co. were rather in funds. That large and handsome box of chocs was one of the early results. It greeted the eyes and spectacles of Billy Bunter as he blinked into the study after prep.

Five fellows turned hospitable faces towards the fat figure that almost filled the doorway.

Harry Wharton and Co. were not, perhaps, exactly yearning for the fascinating society

of William George Bunter. They were going to have it all day long on Wednesday and a little of it went a long way.

But Bunter, or at least Bunter's munificent pater, was standing the beanfeast on Founder's Day: and they were undoubtedly looking forward to the trip across the Channel to la belle France. So they felt that something was due to the founder of the feast, as it were. If Bunter was standing a beanfeast, obviously it was up to them to stand Bunter!

For which reason, they all turned welcoming looks on the fat Owl: and Bunter was not bidden to roll away, buzz off, hook it, or bunk, as so often happened when he blinked into fellow's studies, especially when there were foodstuffs about.

Instead of that customary greeting, Bunter was politely invited to roll in: and the Co. looked, as much as they could, as if they were glad to see him.

Not that Bunter needed an invitation. He was going to roll in, anyway, especially after spotting the box of chocolates on the table.

There was a fat and rather sarcastic grin on his face as he rolled. Seldom, if ever, was Bunter so cordially welcomed in any study: and he fancied that he knew the reason for this unwonted cordiality.

"I say, you fellows —."

"Here you are, Bunter! Take the armchair, old fat man."

"Like chocs, Bunter?"

"Help yourself, old scout."

Nothing could have exceeded the genial hospitality of No. 1 Study. And Billy Bunter's fat grin widened as he noted it, and grew still more sarcastic.

Such a warm welcome, was very, very unusual. But Bunter knew why — or at least fancied that he did.

He, William George Bunter, was standing a continental trip, if for one day only! He, William George Bunter, was taking these fellows on a beanfeast, regardless of expense — more or less! So these fellows had realised that they had better mind their p's and q's: lest they should lose that gorgeous excursion on Founder's Day! Bunter, if he jolly well liked, could jolly well leave them out in the cold, and they jolly well knew it! That was why they had their best manners on — "greasing" up to Bunter! The fat and fatuous Owl had no doubt about it! He had had it from Skinner and Co. — now he was getting it from Harry Wharton and Co.! Bunter could see it all!

So it was no wonder that he grinned as he rolled in, and that his fat grin was sarcastic.

"Jolly civil all of a sudden, ain't you?" he remarked, pleasantly. "Think I might change my mind, and take some other fellows on my beanfeast? What? He, he, he!"

"You fat ass —."

"Oh, really, Wharton —."

"I mean, have some of these chocs, Bunter," said Harry, hastily. "Help yourself."

Billy Bunter helped himself.

Bunter had his own way of helping himself. He took a handful of chocs from the box with his right paw. Then he took another handful with his left paw. The box was left with a rather denuded look. Thus supplied, the fat Owl plumped down into the armchair, filled a large mouth to capacity, and proceeded to munch.

Four fellows grinned, and one grunted. Heedless alike of Johnny Bull's grunt, and the other fellows' grins, Bunter munched. His next remark came somewhat muffled through a barrage of chocolates.

"I say, you fellows, don't worry!" said Bunter, reassuringly. "I ain't the fellow to turn fellows down."

"We're not worrying a whole lot," remarked Bob Cherry.

“The worryfulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“I’ve asked you to join up for my beanfeast,” went on Bunter, unheeding. “Well, I mean it. You fellows haven’t treated me well. You jolly well made out that there wasn’t any beanfeast, after I lost my pater’s letter —.”

“Hem!”

“Then you got it from Quelch, and you jolly soon changed your tune, what?” grinned Bunter.

“You fat owl —!” began Johnny Bull.

Bunter waved a fat and sticky paw.

“That will do, Bull,” he said.

“What?”

“I said that will do!”

Johnny Bull’s hand strayed towards a cushion. However, he did not pick it up. Banging Bunter with a cushion was not the way to deal with founder of the feast! Bunter, unconscious of his narrow escape, munched chocolates.

“As I said, you fellows haven’t treated me well,” he went on, still a little muffled.

“Only the other day you refused to cash a postal order for me, simply because it hadn’t come. Then you jolly well cackled when I told you about my beanfeast! You needn’t deny it — you jolly well did! But I’m going to treat you fellows generous, all the same. I always was a generous chap, as you fellows know. Kindest friend and noblest foe, and all that. I’m going to give you a jolly good time, regardless of expense.”

“Oh!”

“I’m taking you on an expensive continental trip. I can afford it.”

“Oh!”

“It will run into pounds and pounds and pounds,” said Bunter, impressively. “The tickets run into pounds and pounds and pounds. They’re not free tickets, you know.”

“Eh?”

“Nothing of that kind. The pater didn’t say eight because he couldn’t get more than eight free tickets. It hasn’t anything to do with him being a director of the company, you know.”

“Oh!”

“I’m taking Smithy and Redwing, too. But what’s the good of having lots of money, if you don’t spend it? What?”

“Oh!”

“I’m the fellow to treat you well,” went on Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five.

“Money no object! You’ll have the time of your lives. Lots of fellows would jump at it. Well, I’m taking you! You’re in luck, and I fancy you know it. You came round fast enough when you heard from Quelch that it was O.K. He, he, he!”

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter. He munched the remaining chocolates, and blinked at them cheerfully.

Bunter was feeling in high feather. Seldom did the fat Owl have a chance of throwing his extensive weight about. Now he had — or at least fancied that he had. He rattled on.

“Of course, I shall expect you to play up! A fellow likes his friends to do him credit on an expensive continental trip. You won’t be going in those trousers, Bull, I suppose.”

“What’s the matter with them?” asked Johnny Bull, in a deep voice.

“Well, look at them!” said Bunter. “And you’d better tie your tie straight for once,



Cherry —.”

“What?”

“And you, might as well brush your hair, while you’re about it. And none of your larking about. We don’t want to look like a Bank Holiday crowd — at least, I don’t!”

Bob, in silence, looked at Bunter with a very expressive look.

“My esteemed fat Bunter —!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

A fat sticky hand was waved again.

“Don’t jaw while I’m talking, Inky! Now about you, Wharton —.”

“Anything about me?” asked Harry, mildly.

Quelch makes out that you’re going to look after the party, taking charge, and all that,” said Bunter.

“He said so,” assented Harry.

“Well, Quelch can make out what he likes. I’m not going to argue with Quelch. But I don’t want any of it from you!”

“You don’t?”

“No!” said Bunter, emphatically. “I don’t! If you’ve got any idea like that in your head, you can wash it out at once. I don’t want any of your swank, Harry Wharton, on my continental trip! You may as well get that clear at the start.”

Bunter paused, but not for a reply. He munched the last chocolate, and continued.

“You may as well forget that you’re captain of the Remove, and a little tin panjandrum, when you’re at home, Wharton. It won’t do for me, while I’m standing you an expensive holiday. See?”

“I see!”

“Keep that in mind,” said Bunter. “Cut out the swank, and mind your p’s and q’s, and you’ll find me all right. Otherwise, I may decide to chuck you fellows, and take another party. And I may as well say —.”

Harry Wharton laughed.

“The rest of the speech may be taken as read, I think,” he said. “Time to travel, old fat man.”

“Eh?”

“Roll out the barrel,” said Bob Cherry.

“Oh, really, Cherry! If you fancy you can talk like that when a fellow’s standing you an expensive continental holiday —.

“But you’re not, old porpoise,” said Harry. “We’re not coming!”

“Eh! You’re coming,” said Bunter. “I haven’t changed my mind about that —.”

“We’ve changed ours, old porcupine,” grinned Bob.

“The changefulness is terrific.”

Kick him!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“I — I — I say, you fellows —.”

“Travel!” hooted the Famous Five, all together.

Billy Bunter blinked at them. He was taken quite aback: indeed, he seemed hardly able to believe his fat ears. Slowly it dawned on him that the Famous Five were not by any means minding their p’s and q’s lest he should change his fat mind. So far from that, they were washing out the beanfeast, lock, stock, and barrel, and were prepared to boot him out of the study over and above! It was quite a surprise for Bunter.

Johnny Bull set the door open.

“Going?” he hooted.

“Oh, really, Bull —.”

“Tip him out of that chair, Franky.”

“What-ho!”

“But I say — I was going to say — yaroooooh!” roared Bunter, as Frank Nugent tilted the armchair, and he rolled out on the carpet. “Wow!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Beast!” roared Bunter. “I’ve a jolly good mind to — wow! wow! You kick me again, Bull, and I’ll jolly well — whooooo!”

Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 1 Study: and like Iser of old, he rolled rapidly! Harry Wharton shut the door after him.

“That’s that!” he remarked.

“The thatfulness is terrific!” agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

But “that”, as it soon transpired, was not quite “that”. A few moments later the study door reopened, and a fat face and a big pair of spectacles blinked in.

“I say, you fellows —!” squeaked Billy Bunter.

“Buzz off” roared Bob Cherry.

“But I say —.”

“Hand me that cush, Johnny —.”

Slam! The door closed just in time as the cushion whizzed. This time the Famous Five had no doubt that they were done with Bunter. But again that idea proved delusive. Hardly a minute elapsed before the door was cautiously opened a few inches, and there was a glimmer of spectacles.

“I say, Harry, old chap —.”

“Oh, blow away,” exclaimed the captain“ of the Remove, exasperated. “Somebody buzz the inkpot at him.”

“Beast! I mean, look here, old chap — dear old chap — you can’t let me down on that beanfeast!” gasped Bunter. “Quelch won’t let me go if you don’t go too — he said so. I — I don’t mind if you swank, old chap —.”

“What?”

“I — I like it, old fellow!” gasped Bunter. “I — I do, really! Look here, you’ve promised to come, and you can’t let me down, and give my beanfeast the K.O. I was only jig-jig-jig —.”

“You were whatting?”

“Only jig-jig-joking, old chap! I — I want you to take charge, and — and shoss the bow — I mean boss the show — and — and — swank as much as you like, old fellow! There!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the Co. considerably entertained by the expression on Harry Wharton’s face.

“You fat, footling, frabjous fathead —.”

“Oh, really, Wharton! I — I say, you’re coming, ain’t you?” asked Bunter, anxiously.

“We’ve always been pals, old chap — you wouldn’t let a fellow down! If you don’t come, Quelch will wash it all out, — I — I mean, it wouldn’t be like a holiday without you — nothing like it — I shouldn’t enjoy it a bit —.”

Harry Wharton glanced at his friends. They had turned down Bunter’s beanfeast. But that pathetic appeal disposed them to turn it up again, as it were! There was a general nodding of heads in response to Wharton’s enquiring glance: much to Billy Bunter’s relief.

“Oh, all right,” said Harry, at last. “We’ll come! Now take your face away, before it gives us a pain in the neck.”

“Oh, really, Wharton —.”

“Bunk!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Oh, really, Bull —.”

Johnny Bull picked up the inkpot. The door closed on Billy Bunter again, and this time it remained closed.

## CHAPTER 17

### NOT A TENNER

BILLY BUNTER wore an expansive grin, when he rolled out of the Remove form-room in break the following morning. That was not, of course, all he wore: but the expansive grin predominated.

Bunter was feeling fine! Everything, for once, seemed to be going Bunter's way! On the morrow, there was a whole holiday: and there was to be a gorgeous beanfeast. Bunter, for once, was not a wedger-in: he was the founder of the feast. He was the goods. He was the fellow who could afford to stand a continental trip, regardless of expense. He was somebody! Quite a number of fellows in the Remove and the Fourth had been quite unusually civil to Bunter; no doubt being unaware that the number of the trippers was strictly limited to eight, already selected.

Smith, who generally seemed to regard Bunter as something that the cat might have brought in, was actually friendly: being very anxious, for reasons of his own, to run no risk of exclusion from the party. Harry Wharton and Co. were at least patient and tolerant. The fact that Skinner and Co. scowled at him, and that Fisher T. Fish looked at him as if he would have liked to bite him, did not detract from Bunter's satisfaction. Rather it added to it. It was a new experience for Bunter, to be in a position to turn fellows down: and he enjoyed that new experience.

Everything, in fact, was set fair! A whole day away from lessons and Quelch was topping. A trip across the Channel to la belle France, a happy land where grub was unrestricted, was, so to speak, topping! And the cash remittance that was to arrive that morning was toppingest!

Often and often had Billy Bunter been in expectation of a remittance. Often and often, only too often in fact, that expectation had been disappointed. But it was all right this time. This morning the post was to bring him, not only the tickets for the Channel trip on the *Flamingo*, but a cash remittance from his pater, to cover incidental expenses on the trip. So it was no wonder that Bunter's fat face registered happy satisfaction, and that his expansive grin expanded to such an extent that it almost looked like meeting round the back of his fat head.

Exactly to what that cash remittance would amount, Bunter did not know. He hoped for a tenner. But he banked on a fiver at least. Mr. Bunter must have been in an unusually exuberant mood, to mention a cash remittance at all. His dutiful son hoped that the exuberance would extend to a tenner. Everybody knew that Smith's pater had sent him a tenner for Founder's Day: and obviously Bunter's pater could not do better than follow the excellent example. Mr. Bunter knew, of course, that continental trips were expensive. You got hundreds and hundreds of francs for a "quid": but you had to pay hundreds and hundreds of francs for the simplest thing. Undoubtedly, a fellow required cash in his pockets, when he landed in la belle France. Bunter hoped that that was quite clear to Mr. Bunter, and that he had played up accordingly.

He blinked up at the letter-rack through his big spectacles: not in doubt, for once, that the expected remittance was there!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's one for you, Bunter," said Bob Cherry.

"That's from my pater," said Bunter, complacently. "Hand it over, old chap." Bob Cherry handed it over.

It was quite a bulky letter, no doubt containing the steamer tickets. Billy Bunter's happy grin became, if possible, still more expansive, as he received it. He chuckled a fat chuckle.

"That's all right, you fellows," he said. "The pater's sent me the tickets for to-morrow. They've run him into pounds and pounds and pounds and pounds."

"The poundfulness must have been terrific, my esteemed Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, solemnly: while the other members of the Co. grinned. They were aware, from Bunter's inimitable method of keeping it dark, that Mr. Bunter, as a director of the excursion company, had obtained those tickets free, gratis, and for nothing. They were also aware that, but for that circumstance no continental trip would have come Billy Bunter's way on Founder's Day. So they grinned.

"There's a cash remittance in the letter, too," went on Bunter, brightly. "A fiver at least. I'll bet none of you fellows has had a fiver for Founder's Day! He, he, he!"

"Nothing like *it*, old fat man," said Bob Cherry. "You're in luck."

"Gratters!" said Frank Nugent.

"The gratterfulness is preposterous, my esteemed Bunter."

"Well, you see, money's nothing to my pater," said Bunter, carelessly. "We rather roll in it, at Bunter Court. I hope he's made it a tenner. He could just as easily, you know. You get thousands and thousands of francs for a tenner, in France. I'm going to do the thing in style, you fellows. Nothing mean about me, I hope. There's a jolly good restaurant I've heard about in Boulogne where you get a tremendous feed — I daresay the price is tremendous too — but what's the odds? First thing when we land in France we're getting a spread there. It's called the Solid Door —."

"The whatter?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"The Solid Door," said Bunter. "That's the name of the restaurant — fine place — best of grub — everything top-hole. The Solid Door — that means the Golden Sun in English," explained Bunter.

"Oh, my hat! Does it?" stuttered Bob Cherry. "Yes! You fellows wouldn't know — but I'm rather dab at French. Solid Door is French for Golden Sun."

"Oh! Soleil d'Or!" said Harry Wharton. Billy Bunter's French would probably have had any native of France hopelessly guessing: but as he stated that it meant "the Golden Sun" the juniors were able to construe.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Not solly daw," he said. "You heard what I said — Solid Door! That's what it's called in French. You don't know much French, old chap! Better leave the talking to me while we're in France."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" yapped Bunter. "Solid Door — that's the name of the place. If you think you can teach me French, Wharton —."

"Not at all," said Harry, laughing. "Even Mossosoo can't do that."

"Well, you take it from me that it's Solid Door," said Bunter, with a sniff. "You see, I've got the accent — that's where you fellows skew."

"The esteemed Bunter's absurd accent is preposterous," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Leave the talking in French to me — I'll see you through," said Bunter, reassuringly.

"You'll see us through a solid door?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows are going to cackle every time a fellow opens his mouth, I've a jolly good mind not to —!" Bunter paused. He remembered what had transpired in No. 1 Study the previous evening.

“Not to what?” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Oh! Nothing! I wasn’t going to say that I’ve a jolly good mind not to take you on my beanfeast — nothing of the kind —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, do stop cackling! And mind you leave the talking to me in France — if you fellows try it on, you’ll only make ‘em laugh! I say, here’s the tickets.”

Billy Bunter opened the bulky envelope, by the simple and elegant process of jabbing a fat and grubby thumb into it. He extracted tickets to the precise number of eight: accompanied by a folded letter.

Something was folded inside the letter. Bunter had no doubt that it was the cash remittance so generously promised by Mr. Bunter. His only doubt was whether it was a tenner or a fiver.

But, as he unfolded the letter, and beheld the enclosure within, a change came o’er the spirit of his dream, as the poet has expressed it.

He blinked at that enclosure. He blinked at it again, as if he could not quite trust the evidence of his spectacles. Then he gasped.

“Oh!”

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged a smile. It looked as if that cash remittance was not quite up to Billy Bunter’s happy expectations.

Bunter did not heed them.

He stood with his eyes and his spectacles glued on the cash remittance from his pater. It was not, as he had wildly hoped, a tenner. Neither was it, alas, a fiver! It was not a banknote at all! It was not even a currency note. It was a postal order for five shillings! Apparently Mr. Bunter had a very modest idea of what a fellow’s incidental expenses might be like on a continental trip!

“Oh!” said Bunter, again.

Often and often had Billy Bunter expected a postal order that had never come! Now he hadn’t expected one, — and it had come! But its arrival did not seem to afford the fat Owl great joy. He blinked at it! He stared at it! He glared at it!

“Oh!” said Bunter, for the third time. “Oh, crikey!” Harry Wharton and Co. strolled away. Billy Bunter did not waste a blink on them. They left a sadly-deflated fat Owl glaring through his spectacles at that unexpected postal order, with a glare that might almost have cracked them!

## CHAPTER 18

### THE TRIPPERS

“JOLLY!” remarked Bob Cherry.

There were few scenes, circumstances, or situations, which the cheery Bob was not prepared to regard as “jolly”. But really and truly it was quite jolly.

The excursion steamer was fairly well crowded. The weather was bright and sunny. The sea rolled bright and blue.

On a fine summer’s morning, with a whole holiday in hand, and an excursion to a foreign land ahead, most schoolboys would have considered it jolly: and Harry Wharton and Co. certainly did.

Holiday-makers on the steamer looked merry and bright: but none merrier and brighter than the Greyfriars party. The Famous Five were glad that they had, after all, joined up for Billy Bunter’s beanfeast. Billy Bunter, having apparently recovered from the shock of that cash remittance the day before, grinned cheerfully all over his

fat face. Tom Redwing looked perhaps a little graver than the rest of the party: but his chum Smithy was in great spirits. No doubt his precious list of numbers was in his pocket, by the aid of which he was going to “skin the tiger” — perhaps! But Redwing, though he was concerned about his wayward chum, was prepared to enjoy the excursion and the sunshine and the sea-breeze: and if his sunburnt face was a little grave it was cheerful. Eight fellows, in fact, looked as if they were enjoying life, as undoubtedly they were.

“Jolly, what?” repeated Bob, as the *Flamingo* churned out of Pegg Bay to the open sea.

“Quite!” agreed Harry Wharton.

“The jolliffulness is terrific!” declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Not to say preposterous!” grinned Bob.

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?” boomed Bob.

“Eh? Oh! Yes! I say, you fellows, how many frongs do you get for a bob?” asked Bunter.

“How many which?” asked Frank Nugent.

“How many whatter?” asked Johnny Bull.

“Frongs,” said Bunter, impatiently. “We shall have to get French money to spend in France, you know. You can get it on the steamer. How many frongs —?”

“Oh! Francs?” asked Nugent. “If you mean francs —.”

“I don’t mean frongs, Nugent — I mean frongs. Don’t start teaching me French. How many frongs for a bob?” yapped Bunter. Billy Bunter was seated in a deck-chair, with a packet of toffee in a fat hand, of which he was happily disposing. But he seemed to be engaged in mental arithmetical calculations at the same time.

“Over nine hundred to a pound, I believe, at the present rate of exchange,” said Harry Wharton. “Nearer a thousand, I think.”

“Oh!” said Bunter. He wrinkled his fat brow over hat. “Let’s see — say a thousand frongs to the quid: that would be a hundred frongs to the bob, or just about.”

“Would it?” grinned Bob.

“Guess again!” suggested Johnny Bull.

“Perhaps you think you can teach me arithmetic!” snorted Bunter. “I shall jolly well make ‘em give me a hundred frongs to the bob, I know that.”

“Forty or fifty,” said Harry Wharton.

“Rot!” said Bunter. “You can’t teach me arithmetic.”

Whereat the Famous Five chuckled. Certainly they had no desire to teach Billy Bunter arithmetic. That task seemed to have proved beyond even Mr. Quelch’s powers. But they did not consider it probable, low as the French exchange had fallen, that the fat Owl would succeed in getting a hundred “frongs” for a humble “bob”.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had moved a little away from the Famous Five: and Tom Redwing rather unwillingly moved with him. It was an understood thing that the party were to keep together, with the captain of the *Remove* in charge: but Redwing was well aware that Smithy had other ideas in his mind, and it troubled him.

“We’re off, Reddy,” murmured the Bounder, with a glimmer in his eyes. “We’ll soon be dropping the jolly old white cliffs of Albion, and raising the still jollier old white cliffs of France. Topping, ain’t it?” He glanced back towards the fading shore, “I almost thought that something might happen at the last minute —.”

“Why should it?” said Redwing.

The Bounder laughed.

“I fancied Quelch looked a bit doubtful when he gave me leave, Reddy. But it was all

right — going with Wharton’s crowd.” He laughed again. “Our impeccable form-captain can be trusted to see that we behave like good little boys while we’re out of sight of our kind masters and dutiful prefects.”

Redwing compressed his lips a little.

“It’s up to us to play up, Smithy,” he said. “If you play the goat in Boulogne, it’s letting Wharton down, as he’s responsible.”

“Dear me!” said the Bounder, mockingly.

“If he knew —!” muttered Redwing, uneasily.

“He doesn’t, unless he’s heard Bunter’s tattle. Not that it would make any difference to me even if he did.”

“We don’t want a row on this trip, Smithy,” said Redwing, sharply.

“You can bank on one, if anybody thinks of butting into my concerns,” said Vernon-Smith, with a glint in his eyes. Then he laughed again. “But don’t worry — easy enough to dodge that crowd when we get ashore.”

“We’re expected to keep together —.”

“Under Wharton’s wing?” sneered the Bounder, “Don’t be an ass, Reddy. We’re chucking them as soon as we get to Boulogne. If you’d rather stick to them, you can leave me alone.”

Redwing made no reply to that. It was quite clear that anything that he could say would not influence his wilful chum: and he could only make up his mind to stick to Vernon-Smith, and keep him out of trouble, so far as he could.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” came a sudden ejaculation from Bob Cherry. “Know that figure-head, you fellows?”

“Coker!” said Harry Wharton, with a smile.

“The esteemed and ludicrous Coker!” remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

The tall head of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form, and the rugged features appertaining thereto, appeared among the crowd on the deck. Potter and Greene were walking on either side of him. His powerful voice was audible above the buzz of other voices.

“Leave it to me, you fellows. We have to go through the Dane —.”

“The what?” asked Potter.

“Douane!” suggested Greene.

“I mean Douane,” said Coker. “You needn’t butt in, Greene. It’s what they call the Custom-House in French. Now, if you fellows start talking to them, you’ll get everything mixed up, and they may think we’re smugglers as likely as not. Leave it to me.”

“But —.”

“They ask you if you’ve got anything to declare,” explained Coker, “and you just answer „Rong:”

“Rong?” repeated Potter, blankly.

“Just rong,” said Coker.

“Wouldn’t that be a wrong answer?” asked Greene, blandly.

“Don’t be an ass, Greeney. I said rong, not wrong — rong is a French word. It means „nothing”. The French chap will say, „Voo navy rong a declaray”, and you just say „rong”. That’s all. But you’d better say nothing at all — just leave it to me.”

“I thought it was something like „rien”,“ murmured Potter.

“You can think what you like, Potter. But don’t start airing your French and landing us all in the soup,” admonished Coker. “If you say anything at all, say „rong”. But you’d better keep quiet, see?”

There was a chuckle almost at Coker’s elbow, and he stared round frowning at the

Remove group. Really a chuckle was excusable. Coker really seemed to have derived about as much benefit as Billy Bunter from Monsieur Charpentier's instructions at Greyfriars. It seemed probable that the French Customs' officer would be left guessing when Coker talked French to him.

"Oh!" said Coker. He stared at the Famous Five, at Billy Bunter, and at Smithy and Redwing, his frown intensifying as he stared. "You!"

"Us!" agreed Bob Cherry, affably.

"The whole gang of you, it seems!" snapped Coker.

"The whole gangfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Coker," smiled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Well, keep your distance," said Coker, sternly. "It's like your cheek to come on this steamer at all. You know that! But keep your distance, and don't make out that you belong to me. I don't want to be taken for one of a bunch of rowdy schoolboys on a spree. Just keep your distance, and don't get making out that you know me, or anything of that kind. If you speak to me I shall smack your heads. That's a tip!"

"You hear that, you fellows?" said Bob Cherry. "A tip straight from the donkey's mouth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker breathed hard, and he breathed deep. Coker had, as he often said, a short way with fags: and he had no use for cheek from such inconsiderable microbes as Lower boys. He made a step towards the cheery Bob.

Potter and Greene hastily interposed. They did not want to begin the day with a shindy on the deck of the excursion steamer, under a hundred pairs of eyes. They linked arms with the great Horace.

"Come on, Coker, old man," said Potter, hastily.

"Look here, Potter —."

"This way, old chap," said Greene, "Look here, Greene —."

But Coker allowed himself to be led onward. Perhaps even Horace Coker realised that the deck of the *Flamingo* was not a suitable spot for a rough-and-tumble with a mob of juniors. Perhaps, too, he remembered the disastrous outcome of the head-smacking process a day or two ago. And after all, Coker's chief object was to avoid being taken for a member of that merry holiday-party himself, a mere schoolboy on a spree. Coker was very particular indeed about not being taken for a mere schoolboy. Anyhow he allowed himself to be led away by Potter and Greene: and once more, all was calm and bright!

## CHAPTER 19

### ON THE CHANNEL

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton and Co. did not immediately heed the fat squeak from the deck-chair. They were standing by the rail, watching a yacht running before the wind, at a little distance across the blue waters. A white sail glancing on the blue of the sea was interesting to the chums of the Remove — more so, it appeared, than Billy Bunter. Bunter sat up in his deck-chair, frowning over his spectacles at five unregarding backs.

Bunter had finished his toffee. He had gone through his pockets in search of other sticky things, but the toffee was the last of the supply he had thoughtfully packed. The fat Owl had, in fact, invested that cash remittance from his pater, in a sticky supply



for the Channel crossing. Now the last of it had gone on the downward path. There was to be, as per programme, a tremendous feed at the Restaurant Soleil d'Or — or Solid Door, as Bunter preferred to call it — at Boulogne-sur-Mer — though it was not quite clear how Billy Bunter was to stand that tremendous feed in the total absence of financial resources. But Bunter was not prepared to wait for lunch before replenishing the inner Bunter. And five shillings' worth of sticky things left him still feeling like a lion seeking what he might devour. Hence his indignant frown at the heedless backs of the Famous Five, and the note of indignation in his fat voice as he repeated his squeak.

"I say, you fellows! Deaf? I say, I think you might take the trouble to answer a fellow who's standing you a ripping beanfeast! I say, have you got any stickers?"

Harry Wharton looked round.

"Better go easy on the stickers, Bunter," he said. "The sea's a good deal rougher in the middle of the Channel, and the boat will be rolling —."

Sniff, from Bunter.

"Fat lot I care how much she rolls," he answered, disdainfully. "I'm a pretty good sailor, I think. You fellows may be sea-sick. I'm all right."

"You'll lose all that tuck you've been packing away, old fat man," said Bob Cherry.

"Yah!"

"Want to make room for that big lunch you're going to stand at the Solid Door?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, I jolly well know you've got some chocs, Wharton — I saw you put the packet in your pocket, see? Don't be selfish."

"Here you are!"

It was quite a large packet of chocs, which Harry Wharton had intended to hand out among the whole party. However, he passed it over to Bunter: who grabbed it in a fat hand, and proceeded to add the contents to the toffee, bull's-eyes, butterscotch, and other sticky things already parked in his capacious interior. After which, even Billy Bunter felt that it was, perhaps, time to stop, especially as the steamer was beginning to roll a little in the chops of the Channel.

"I say, you fellows —"

"Sorry nothing more to eat till we get in," answered Harry, over his shoulder.

"Oh, really, Wharton! That isn't what I was going to say. I'm not a fellow always thinking of eating, like some fellows I could name! I say, where's Smithy?"

"Smithy?" Harry Wharton looked round. "On the deck somewhere, I suppose — haven't seen him for some time."

"I think I'll stroll along and look for him," said Bunter, and he heaved his weight out of the deck-chair. "I want to speak to Smithy particularly before we get to Boolong. It's rather important."

To which the Famous Five had absolutely no objection to raise. Smithy was more than welcome to the company and conversation of the fat Owl.

Billy Bunter rolled away, steering a course among deck-chairs, and out-stretched legs, and blinking round through his big spectacles for Herbert Vernon-Smith. A familiar voice fell on his fat ears, as he passed three deck-chairs in a row by the rail.

"Don't be an ass, Potter."

Bunter blinked at the three Fifth-formers. Coker, in the middle chair, had a wallet open on his knees, and was examining the contents, which almost dazzled Bunter's eyes as he blinked at them. Coker of the Fifth was always well supplied with that useful article, cash: and no doubt his Aunt Judy had weighed in liberally for

Founder's Day. There were four five-pound notes among the currency notes that Coker was counting.

"Well, look here," said Potter. "If you let everybody see what's in that wallet —."

"I said don't be an ass, Potter."

"Lots of pickpockets about," said Greene. "You don't want to get stranded with your wallet gone, Coker."

"Don't be a goat, Greene."

"Well, look here —."

"I'd like to see the pickpocket who could get my wallet off me," said Coker, derisively. "I'm not a mug, I hope."

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance, across Coker, which indicated that, in their opinion, Coker's hope was ill-founded. Coker, just to show Potter and Greene that he did not need advice from inferior intellects, continued to keep that wallet open, fingering the contents, regardless of any eyes that might fall on it. Coker had no doubt that he was a match for any pickpocket who might be plying his peculiar trade on board the excursion steamer: with all the pickpockets on the Continent thrown in, for that matter.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter.

Potter and Greene glanced at him. Coker stared at him — grimly.

"I say, seen Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"One of those fags!" said Coker. "Didn't I tell you, Bunter, that if you spoke to me on this steamer, I should smack your head?"

"Oh, really, Coker—Yoo-hoop!" spluttered Bunter, as a long arm and a heavy hand reached out and contacted a fat head.

Smack!

"Ow! Wow! Beast! Fifth-form cad! Wow!" gasped Bunter: and he promptly retreated, rubbing a fat ear, without seeking any further information about Smithy from the Fifth-formers.

Coker settled back complacently in his seat. A couple of dozen people stared at him, without perturbing him in the least. Coker was quite indifferent to the opinions of common mortals. His short way with fags was effective, so far as Billy Bunter was concerned, at least: for the fat Owl rolled away, and, once more understudying the River Iser, rolled rapidly.

It was not easy to find a fellow on a crowded deck: especially a fellow who, perhaps, did not want to be found. But again a familiar voice fell on Bunter's fat ears.

"That fool Coker is asking for it, Reddy! I'll bet there's two or three pickpockets in this crowd. They all know by this time that Coker's got a wallet packed with oof. I wonder how long he will keep it."

Billy Bunter blinked round. Smithy and Redwing were standing by a boat, swung inboard, Smithy leaning on the boat with his hands in his pockets, his sneering glance fixed on Horace Coker at a distance.

"Oh, here you are, Smithy," said Bunter, cheerily. "I've been looking for you, old chap."

The Bunder glanced at him.

"Looking for me?" he asked.

"Yes, old chap."

"Mind going and looking for somebody else?"

"Oh, really, Smithy —."

"Take your face away," said Vernon-Smith, "and you might as well wash it, while you're about it. Do you want all Boulogne to know that you've been guzzling toffee

and chocs?”

Billy Bunter blinked at him, almost speechless with indignation. Smithy had been very civil, of late, indeed quite friendly. This was a rather surprising and far from pleasing change.

“Look here, you cheeky beast!” gasped Bunter.

“Oh, roll away, fathead.”

“This is Bunter’s trip, Smithy,” said Tom Redwing, quietly. “No harm in being civil to the fellow who’s standing it.”

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. He had, as Redwing knew, coolly and unscrupulously made use of Bunter and his beanfeast, in order to travel with Harry Wharton and Co. and thus allay any uneasy doubts Mr. Quelch might have had. Once at sea, and at a safe distance from Quelch, he had no further use for Bunter.

“I should jolly well think so,” gasped Bunter. “Look here, Smithy, don’t be a rotter. I — I — I’ve forgotten to bring any money with me —.”

“Was there any to bring, if you hadn’t?”

“Beast! I — I mean, look here, old chap, you can lend a fellow a few quids. Only for the day, you know,” added Bunter, reassuringly. “I shall have lots of money by the evening. I know where to get it.”

The Bounder laughed. He believed, or at least hoped, that he was going to have good fortune in the peculiar process of “skinning the tiger” at a French casino. But he certainly did not think for a moment that Billy Bunter *was* likely to have any luck at that game.

“You fat ass,” he said.

“Oh, really, Smithy —.”

“Roll away, and don’t bother.”

“Will you lend me —?”

“I’ll lend you my boot, if you don’t buzz off.”

Billy Bunter blinked at him, his spectacles almost gleaming with wrath and indignation. Since that cash remittance from his pater had materialised only in the form of a postal order for five shillings, now parked inside Bunter in the shape of sticky things, it was clear that he could not tempt fortune at the green tables without financial aid from somewhere. The Bounder, who had plenty of money, was the obvious source of supply — which surely he could not refuse to the fellow who was standing him a continental trip! It appeared, however, that the Bounder could!

“Look here,” gasped Bunter. “I tell you I’m actually stony —.”

“Quite a new experience, what?”

“I can’t play at that show without some money —.”

“Dear me!”

“Didn’t we arrange to go into it together —”

“Did we?” yawned the Bounder.

“You jolly well know we did!” howled Bunter.

“Then it’s time for you to wake up, old fat frump. Now buzz off.”

“Why, you — you — you beast!” gasped Bunter. “Pulling my leg all the time, just to get on this trip — Quelch wouldn’t have let you go except in my party — pulling a fellow’s leg —.”

“Exactly,” assented Vernon-Smith, “and now if you bother me any more, I’ll pull a fellow’s ear — like that!”

“Wow!” howled Bunter, as a finger and thumb closed like a vice on a fat ear. “Yow-ow! Leggo! Wow!”

The hapless fat Owl jerked his ear away, and departed, rubbing it. The Bounder

shrugged his shoulders, and glanced sarcastically at Redwing's set, frowning face. Then he took a paper from his pocket, and, as he ran his eyes down lists of numbers, forgot the existence of Billy Bunter, and of the chum who was standing at his side.

## CHAPTER 20

### NOT SEA-SICK!

"OOOOOOOGH!"

That peculiar sound caused Harry Wharton and Co. to glance round.

The *Flamingo* was in mid-Channel. And, bright and fair as the day was, in the middle of the Channel there were chops.

The chops of the Channel did not affect Harry Wharton and Co. who were fit as fiddles. But they seemed to be producing some effect on the fattest member of the Greyfriars party. Looking round, the Famous Five perceived that Billy Bunter had rejoined them, after his wanderings on

the crowded deck. The steamer gave a roll: and as the steamer rolled, Bunter rolled too: and as he rolled, he emitted a sound which seemed to indicate that the sticky things packed within his extensive circumference were not on the best of terms with one another.

"Ooooh! Woooooh! Wooooch!" came from Bunter. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat bean?" "Wooooogh!"

Bunter was tottering, and gurgling as he tottered. Bob Cherry kindly gave him a hand, and steered him to the rail. Bunter hung on to the rail, dreading the effect of another roll.

Fortunately, the *Flamingo* ceased to roll, for the moment: and as she glided on smoothly, the fat Owl recovered his confidence. There had been quite a queer feeling in his extensive inside, but it seemed to have passed.

"All right now?" asked Bob.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Of course I'm all right," he retorted. "Think I'm going to be sea-sick? I'm a pretty good sailor. You fellows are looking rather peaky, though. You're quite pale, Nugent?"

"Am I?" said Nugent, laughing.

"Yes! You're looking a bit green, Wharton."

"I don't feel green."

"Well, you look it. Feeling it coming on, Bull?"

"Not at all!" answered Johnny Bull.

"Well, you look a bit yellow. So do you, Bob! I fancy you're getting it — he, he, he! Like me to call the steward, Inky?"

"I have no use for the esteemed steward," answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head.

"Well, he'll bring you a basin, if you want it," grinned Bunter. "I fancy you'll want it soon. You fellows ain't sailors like me, you know. I've never felt better in my life — oooooogh!"

Bunter gave another gurgle as the steamer gave another roll. Once more, for an awful moment, there seemed to be strife among the toffee, bull's-eyes, butterscotch, and chocolates.

"Wooooooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

"Shall I call the esteemed steward, my fat and absurd Bunter?" inquired Hurree

Jamset Ram Singh, with a grin.

“Urrggh! Beast! I’m all right. I’m not sea-sick! Wurrgh!”

Again the spasm passed: though probably it was only lying in wait for Bunter when the steamer should give another roll. For the moment, however, Bunter was himself again.

“I’m all right,” he repeated. “Don’t you fellows worry about me. I’ll look after you when you get it bad. I say, you fellows, is that Boolong?” Bunter blinked across sunny waters at a dim blur in the distance.

“The French cliffs,” answered Harry Wharton. “We shall be in in half-an-hour or so.”

“Jolly trip, ain’t it?” said Bunter. “I’m perfectly at home at sea, you know — a life on the ocean wave, a home on the rolling deep, and all that. I couldn’t be sea-sick if I tried. I say, you fellows, mind you keep together — don’t let me lose you when we get ashore.”

Billy Bunter’s original happy intention had been to “dodge” the Famous Five, in company with the Bounder, as it was absolutely certain that they would take no part in “painting the town red”. But since Smithy had so unexpectedly and unpleasantly turned him down, the fat Owl was very anxious not to part company with the Co. They were now, as it were, his only visible means of support!

“We’ll keep together, all right,” said Bob. “I wonder where Smithy’s got to, and Redwing. Better keep an eye open for them, you fellows — easy enough to lose a fellow in this crowd.”

“He, he, he!”

Bob stared at the fat Owl.

“What are you he-he-heing about now?” he inquired.

“Bet you, you won’t find Smithy in a hurry,” grinned Bunter. “Smithy don’t want to be found. He, he, he! Not that I want the rotter! I jolly well wish I hadn’t asked him on this beanfeast at all. He’s ungrateful. We shan’t see much of him to-day, and I’m jolly glad.”

“That’s rot,” said Harry Wharton, sharply. “The whole party is to keep together — that’s understood.”

“He, he, he — ooooooch!” Billy Bunter’s fat chuckle suddenly changed into an agonised gurgle, as the *Flamingo* suddenly plunged and rolled. “Oooogh! I say, you fellows — oooooogh!”

Bunter hung on the rail. His ruddy complexion had changed to an art shade of pale green. His little round eyes seemed to wobble behind his big round spectacles. This time it was not merely one roll — the *Flamingo* rolled, and rolled, and rolled: and it was all up with Bunter. Toffee and bull’s-eyes and butterscotch and chocolates were stirring wildly within, almost like the eruption of a volcano.

“Urrrgh! Oh, crikey! Wurrrrgh! Ooooch!” moaned Bunter.

“Poor old Bunter!”

“Groogh! I — I — I ain’t sea-sick — I’m a jolly good sailor — grooogh! I expect you chaps will be sea-sick — ooogh! But I — I — I ain’t! N-n-nothing of the kik-kik-kind! Ow! Groogh! Ooooe-er! Help! Urrrrgggh!”

Billy Bunter collapsed on the rail, with a ghastly fat face overhanging the waves.

The Famous Five gathered round him. They were sympathetic and helpful, and they did all they could. But there was little they could do. Billy Bunter was in the grip of the dreaded mal-de-mer: and he gurgled, he gasped, he groaned, he moaned and he mumbled: a sad, sorry, and suffering Bunter.

The remainder of that voyage was little over half-an-hour: but it seemed like half-a-century, if not a whole one, to the fat Owl. He longed for land, as he had never longed

even for jam tarts or cream puffs. The white cliffs of France, and the town of Boulogne, shimmering in the summer sun, rose into view, unheeded by the suffering Owl, hanging limply over the rail.

But he seemed to recover a little, when Bob Cherry clapped him on the shoulder, and announced: "We're in, old fat man."

Bunter cast a dismal blink around. The steamer was moving to the quay, and the deck was no longer uncertain under his feet. He was no longer feeling as if he had no inside left.

"Feeling better, old chap?" asked Harry.

"Ooogh! I'm all right! I haven't been sea-sick —"

"What?"

"Not what you'd call sea-sick," said Bunter, "I'm a pretty good sailor, you know!

Right as — grooogh — rain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I can jolly well say — oooooch!

It was the last spasm. At long last, to Bunter's immense relief, the steamer was motionless. When the vessel was motionless, even Billy Bunter was a good sailor. It was a pale and flaccid Bunter that moved off with the Famous Five towards the gangway, as the passengers prepared to go ashore. But there was, so to speak, a spot of balm in Gilead: the tremendous feed at the Restaurant Soleil d'Or was to come: and there was no doubt that Billy Bunter had ample room for it! On that point there was no shadow of doubt: no possible probable shadow of doubt: no possible doubt whatever!

## CHAPTER 21

### BEWARE OF PICKPOCKETS

HORACE COKER frowned.

"Don't barge!" he snapped.

"My esteemed and ridiculous Coker —."

"Shut up, and don't barge."

The Remove fellows were not barging. There was a crowd pressing on to the gangway to the quay, and some bustling and pushing here and there. But the Famous Five were behaving themselves with sedateness and circumspection, as became tourists in a foreign land. Coker of the Fifth, less circumspect, stalked regardless of less important persons, jammed elbows into ribs, trod on toes pushed and shoved. Potter and Greene, not quite so regardless of the amenities as their great leader, fell behind, leaving Coker to enjoy his pushing and shoving all on his own. It was like Coker, while he barged others, to feel extremely annoyed and indignant when someone barged into his back, and he glared round at Harry Wharton and Co., who were behind him. It was a slim, dark Frenchman who had barged him, but Coker's indignant and angry glare was fixed on the juniors.

"If you barge me again —!" he said darkly.

"But we didn't barge you, old scout," said Bob Cherry, mildly. "But you'll get barged if you don't get out of the way. Trot on."

"Somebody did!" snorted Coker, "and if you do it again —."

"Pack it up, and move on," said Johnny Bull.

Coker gave Johnny a look, which indicated that he was meditating assault and battery. But the crowd were pushing on, and Coker, breathing hard, went onward.

The slim, dark Frenchman who had pushed against him had receded into the crowd, but he now slipped forward again close to Coker's side, and Harry Wharton glanced at him rather curiously. The man could easily have passed Coker and gone ahead, if he had liked, but he seemed desirous of sticking close to Coker, and again he pushed against the great Horace. Again Horace Coker glared round with darkening brow.

"You cheeky fags —!" he began.

Coker stopped at that, as he discerned that it was not one of the juniors who had pushed him, but the dark foreigner. He transferred his glare from the juniors to that foreigner.

"Look here —!" he hooted.

"Pardon, monsieur!"

"Don't shove!" snapped Coker.

"Comment?"

"Oh, you don't understand, I suppose?" snorted Coker. Coker had a hearty contempt for foreigners who couldn't understand plain English! "Ne shovez vous pas, see?" added Coker, putting it into French, or what he seemed to believe was French.

"Je ne comprends pas, monsieur!"

"Well, whether you comprong or not, you'd better not shove me again," said Coker.

"I haven't come here to be shoved about by foreigners, I can tell you. Keepez-vous vos paws to yourself see?"

Whether the Frenchman understood Coker's words or not, he understood his angry glare, and backed away a little. But as the crowd moved on, the juniors behind noticed him slip quietly to Coker's side again. It really seemed as if the burly Horace had some attraction for him.

Harry Wharton's eyes were on him intently now, as the juniors followed on. Coker disdained the idea of a pickpocket relieving him of his wallet: but, in point of fact, Horace Coker was exactly the fellow one of that light-fingered fraternity might have liked to meet. It seemed to Harry Wharton that the man's actions were suspicious, and he kept an eye on him as the passengers moved on.

On the gangway to the quay, Coker seemed to realise that his pals, Potter and Greene, were no longer at hand, and he stopped and stared round at them, fairly butting into the dark Frenchman, who at the same moment was pressing close by him.

"Oh! You again!" snorted Coker. "Can't you give a chap room to move? Pourquoi vous bargez comme ça, what?"

"Pardon, monsieur, je ne comprends rien —."

"You'd better comprong that you'll get barged, if you barge me again," said Coker.

"Potter! Greene! Come on, you fellows. Don't get lost!"

If Potter and Greene heard, they heeded not. Coker gave a snort and marched on.

Having reached the end of the gangway, he stopped on the quay to wait for Potter and Greene. The dark Frenchman, following him off, slipped, stumbled, and fell heavily against Coker, catching at him as he fell.

"Well, you clumsy foreign ass!" gasped Coker, as he staggered with the Frenchman clinging to him. "Get away! Don't hang on me!"

"Je vous demande pardon, monsieur! Je glisse —."

"Leggo, will you?"

The Frenchman detached himself from Coker, and stepped back. Coker gave him a glare, without the faintest suspicion that his wallet was now in a foreign hand.

But Harry Wharton was aware of it, for his eyes had been on the pickpocket, and he had seen the whole transaction. As the man turned away from Coker, the captain of the Remove shot forward, grasped the pickpocket as he was turning away, hooked his

leg, and brought him down on the quay with a crash.

A well-filled wallet, which the man had been in the act of transferring from his hand to his pocket, dropped to the ground. Harry Wharton snatched it up as the man sprawled panting and dizzy.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” ejaculated Bob Cherry, “What the thump —.”

“My esteemed Wharton —.”

“What’s the row?”

“Harry —!”

“Well, my hat!” Coker, forgetting Potter and Greene for the moment, stared round.

“Wharton, you young ruffian, is that how you’re going to behave in a foreign country? You young hooligan— .”

The pickpocket, dizzy for the moment from the sudden crash, sprawled panting, But it was only for a moment. The next, he was on his feet, and running along the quay like a deer. Coker’s wallet was out of his reach now, and the snapper-up of unconsidered trifles was only anxious to place himself out of reach of the gendarmes.

Coker stared after him as he ran.

“Well, my hat !” he repeated. “If I were that chap, I’d smack your head right and left, you young ruffian! Dragging a man over for nothing —.”

“You silly ass —!” gasped Harry.

Coker waved a large hand at him.

“That will do!” he snapped. “Behave yourself, you young hooligan, now you’re in a foreign country. What do you expect all these dashed foreigners to think of you! Barging into a man and knocking him over —.”



The captain of the Remove brought him down on the quay with a crash

“You howling ass —!”

“I said that will do!” roared Coker. “If you want your cheeky head smacked, young Wharton —.”

“You footling fathead!” shrieked Wharton. “That man was a pickpocket —.”

“Don’t talk rot!”

“He picked your pocket —.”

“I said don’t talk rot.”

“I tell you —.”

“I’d like to see a dashed foreigner pick my pocket!” said Coker. “Don’t be a fool, if you can help it! And clear off! I’ve warned you not to make out that you belong to me



—.”

“Do you want this wallet or not?” asked Harry, holding it up to view.

Coker stared at it.

“Wha-a-at’s that?” he ejaculated.

“Your wallet, you fathead.”

“My wallet’s in my pocket —,” began Coker. But even Coker could recognise his own wallet when he saw it. He slipped his hand into the pocket where the wallet should have been. His hand came out empty. “Oh!” ejaculated Coker.

“You howling ass,” said Harry. “The man picked your pocket right under my eyes, and he dropped the wallet when I tackled him. Do you understand now, wooden head? Do you want this wallet or not?”

Apparently Coker did want it, for he stretched out his hand to take it. Barry Wharton and Co. went on, leaving Coker waiting for Potter and Greene, and staring at the wallet in his hand, with quite an extraordinary expression on his face.

## CHAPTER 22

### COKER IN THE CUSTOMS

“WHERE’S Smithy?”

“The wherefulness is terrific.”

“He, he, he!”

The Famous Five were looking, and feeling, a little impatient. Billy Bunter seemed amused.

Most of the passengers were off the boat now, and it was not like the Bounder to linger behind and be the last ashore. But they had seen nothing of him or Redwing, and they waited at the entrance of the Douane, through which the crowd was streaming. In such a crowd it was easy enough for fellows to miss one another, if they did not keep their eyes open: and Wharton, who was responsible for the party, did not want to miss any of its members.

“They’ll have to come this way,” said Bob Cherry. “Everybody has to pass through the Customs.”

“Might be ahead of us, in this crowd, if we’ve missed them,” said Frank Nugent.

“He, he, he!”

“Well, Smithy isn’t a blind bat, and Redwing isn’t walking in his sleep,” grunted Johnny Bull. “They’ll find us if they want us.”

“He, he, he!”

“We’ve got to keep together,” said Harry, frowning. “Bunter, you fat ass, cut off the cackle.”

“He, he, he!” cachinnated Bunter. “I say, you fellows, let’s get on — we want that feed at the Solid Door, you know.”

“We want Smith and Redwing, fathead.”

“He, he, he! You won’t see Smithy again till we take the boat back,” grinned Bunter.

“He’s dodged us, and made Redwing dodge us too.”

“Why should he dodge us, you fat ass?”

“He, he, he! If you knew why Smithy came over .”

“He came over for a holiday, like the rest of us, ass! What do you mean?”

“He, he, he!” Billy Bunter’s fat cachinnation went on and on. “If you want to know where Smithy is, you’d better look on the tram going out to Le Chalet. That’s where Smithy’s going, to skin the tiger.”

“To what the which?” ejaculated Bob Cherry.

“He, he, he! You fellows are rather mugs,” said Bunter, grinning. “Smithy’s got a list of numbers, and he thinks he’s going to break the bank at the casino .”

“Wha-a-t?”

“That’s why he came,” grinned Bunter. “You won’t see him again, so we may as well get on to the Solid Door. I’m hungry.”

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged glances, and the captain of the Remove compressed his lips.

“And how do you know, Bunter?” he asked quietly.

“He, he, he! I jolly well know,” chuckled the fat Owl. “Mind, I never listened to what Smithy was saying in his study last week — if I happened to hear anything, it was entirely by accident. I’m not the fellow to listen to a fellow behind an armchair, I hope. And I never told anybody, either — I don’t suppose Quelch heard anything, though Smithy fancies he might have. I say, you fellows, what an awful cad to join up for my beanfeast, meaning all the time to give me the go-by — me, you know, after we’d arranged —.”

“Arranged what?”

“Oh! Nothing! I say, let’s get on — I’m awfully hungry. We shan’t have much time in Boolong if we hang about here. It’s no good waiting for Smithy — I tell you he’s dodged us and cleared. He’s on the tram to Le Chalet by this time, so what’s the good of waiting about? I keep telling you I’m hungry,” added Bunter, warmly. “You don’t seem to understand.”

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. For a moment, his eyes gleamed with anger. He knew the Bounder and his ways. He knew, now that it was brought to his mind, how likely it was that Vernon-Smith might take advantage of the holiday trip to kick over the traces.

The Bounder’s ways were no business of his, little as he liked them, at other times. But they were very much his business when he was in charge of the holiday party, trusted by his form-master. The idea that the Bounder had made use of him, intending to “dodge” him on the French side of the Channel and plunge into reckless gambling at a casino, was deeply irritating. Yet, if Smithy was determined to go his own wilful way, it was difficult to see what he could do. Certainly, he had a very strong desire to punch Smithy’s head: but an absent head could not be punched, even if that drastic measure would have done any good.

“If that fat ass has got it right —!” said Bob Cherry, slowly.

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

“It’s right,” he said. “We might have guessed. We know Smithy!”

“But —!” said Frank Nugent.

Another grunt from Johnny.

“He was keeping out of our way on the steamer. That’s why. Ten to one he’s skulked away long before this, and we’re waiting here for nothing.”

“But Redwing —!” said Frank.

“He will stick to Smithy — goodness knows why he does, but he does,” grunted Johnny. “We’ve seen the last of both of them till the boat goes back to-night.”

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Oh, dry up, Bunter!”

“Beast! If that’s the way you talk to a chap who’s standing you this trip —,” hooted the indignant Owl.

“I suppose it’s no use waiting —!” said Harry.

“I should jolly well say not!” spluttered Bunter, “Didn’t you hear me say I was

hungry? Deaf?"

"Oh, come on," said Johnny Bull. "Look here, if Smithy wants us, he can spot us easily enough — we're big enough to be seen, I suppose. We should have spotted him if he wasn't jolly well taking care that we shouldn't! Let's get out of this."

In a somewhat uncertain frame of mind, the Famous Five moved on into the big Customs shed, Billy Bunter rolling after them, considerably relieved to see the party in motion again. Bunter had stated no more than the facts when he stated that he was hungry. He was, indeed, ravenously hungry. A life on the ocean wave had provided Bunter with so much empty cargo space, that he simply yearned for food.

"This way, you fellows. Don't get lost again." A voice not unlike that of Stentor of olden time fell on the ears of the juniors. "Keep with me, Potter! Don't wander away, Greene! I can't spend all day hanging about looking for you! And mind you don't get your pockets picked — I can't be looking after you all the time. Stop at this counter — that fat johnny with the chalk in his paw is the Customs man, and he won't let us pass without asking silly questions. Don't barge in the way, you cheeky fags."

A plump French gentleman, on the other side of a long wooden counter, had a chalk in his plump fingers, to mark the bags of passengers who had nothing to "declare". As the Greyfriars party had no bags, the polite official was prepared to let them pass merely with a polite formal question. The juniors stopped, as Coker of the Fifth pushed in front of them: regardless, as usual, of lesser mortals.

"Vous n'avez rien a declarer?" asked the plump man behind the Customs' counter.

"Rong!" announced Coker.

"Comment, monsieur?"

"Non, monsieur!" said Potter. Coker gave him a reproving glare.

"I think I warned you not to butt in, Potter. Leave it to me. I can make the man understand, if he understands his own language, though some of these foreigners don't seem to."

"Non, monsieur!" said Greene.

"Will you shut up, Greene?"

"Mais vous, monsieur," said the Customs' official, looking at Coker, "Avez vous quelque-chose a declarer?"

Potter and Greene's "non" seemed to have satisfied him, and they passed on towards the exit on the further side of the building. But he did not seem quite satisfied with Coker, and was eyeing him sharply. It was probable that he did not recognize "rong" as a French word, and supposed that Coker had something to declare.

"I don't know what you mean by kelker-shows," said Coker. "I've said, that I've nothing to declare. Think I'm a smuggler, or what? Je n'ai nothing to declare — got that?"

"Plait ,,il?"

"Plate be blowed! Who's talking about a plate! Oh, these foreigners!" exclaimed Coker, out of patience, "Lookez-vous here, je vous ai dit rong — rong—RONG! Understandez-vous?"

"Qu-est-ce-que-c'est?"

"Rong!" hooted Coker. "N'understandez-vous pas votre own language, what? Je vous ai dit rong, and i'm jolly well not going to stand here all day saying it over and over again."

With that, Coker prepared to march on, having, he considered, wasted sufficient time on a Frenchman who seemed unable to understand his own language. But the Customs' official was quite suspicious by this time, and he rapped out sharply.

"Attendez! Que voulez-vous dire? Je vous ai demande, avez vous quelque chose a

declarer? Repliquez donc.”

It was French: but it might have been Greek, to Coker. He gave the man an impatient stare.

“I tell you I’ve nothing to declare,” he bawled. Coker was not the only traveller who had the idea that a foreigner could be made to understand English by shouting it!

“Nothing at all! See?”

“Qu’est-ce que cela veut dire?”

Gabble, gabble!” said Coker, “These foreigners do nothing but gabble. Look here, I’m going, see?”

“Ne vous ecartez-pas, monsieur — pas encore —,” snapped the Customs official, now quite suspicious of Coker. “Ne bougez pas.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Coker, “Think I can understand that gabble?”

“Comment?”

“I’ve wasted enough time here, and I’m going, and you can gabble as much as you like to somebody else,” hooted Coker, and he marched on, only to find his elbows suddenly gripped by two men in uniform, who had closed in on him on either side at a sign from the plump gentleman behind the Customs counter.

“Poor old Coker!” said Bob Cherry, as the juniors, having answered “non” to a polite question from another official, went on their way. “It will take him about an hour to make them understand that he’s not a smuggler, or an anarchist, or a Russian spy, or something of the sort.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The juniors passed on out of the Customs building, a roar from Horace Coker echoing after them as they went.

“Wharrer you up to? Leggo! I tell you I’ve rong to declare! Isn’t that plain enough for you? Think I’m a smuggler, or what? You dashed French fatheads, will you let a fellow go? Je vous puncherai les têtes if you don’t jolly well laissez moi passer. Got that! Je tell you —.”

That was the last they heard from Coker. No doubt he succeeded, in the long run, in satisfying the Customs that he was not a smuggler or any other suspicious character: nothing, in fact, but a harmless fathead. Harry Wharton and Co. left him to it, and walked out into the town of Boulogne in the bright sunshine: and, to Billy Bunter’s immense satisfaction, arrived at the Restaurant Le Soleil d’Or, or, as Bunter preferred to call it, the Solid Door. They sat down to lunch at a table under a shady tree in a sunny garden, with foodstuffs so ample that Billy Bunter’s fat face beamed as brightly as the summer sun itself, and at long last the fat Owl was really able to enjoy his beanfeast!

## CHAPTER 23

### THE CASINO

“LE Chalet-aux-bois!” called out the conductor. The tram clanged to a stop on the long dusty road.

Herbert Vernon-Smith rose to his feet with alacrity, almost as if he had a spring in his limbs. Tom Redwing rose more slowly.

The Bounder’s face was keen and eager. Redwing’s was clouded. He did not exactly want to be a “wet blanket”, but he could not quite help it. It was a worry on his mind that they had deliberately “dodged” the rest of the party after landing from the steamer: a trifle that did not worry the Bounder in the very least. From a distance,

Redwing had glimpsed Harry Wharton and Co., but his companion had impatiently hurried him on, and lost no time in getting on the tram to take them out of Boulogne. Billy Bunter's beanfeast had served the Bounder's turn: and he was done with Bunter and with the Famous Five. Considering what he had in mind, it was no doubt judicious to keep the Co. at arm's length, as Redwing had to admit: but he would have given much to stick to the party, for a happy and harmless holiday, had Smithy been willing. Smithy would have laughed that idea to scorn. He was not there as a holiday-making schoolboy: he was there as a reckless young rascal rejoicing in freedom from control.

"Come on, Reddy!" he snapped, as the tram clanged to a halt. "Here we are at Le Chalet."

"I'm coming."

The tram was crowded. Many of the passengers were going on to Wimereux or Hardelot: but six or seven alighted at the same time as Smithy and Redwing. The road, at this point, ran quite near the sea. Tom Redwing looked in that direction — at a shining beach, and bathers, and white sails dotting the water. A bathe, a swim, a run in a boat, would have been a pleasure to him. But Vernon-Smith did not even glance at the sea. His eyes were at once on a wide gateway at the roadside, inside which was a pay-box, and into which the other passengers who had alighted from the tram were passing. It was the entrance to the grounds of the Casino-le-Chalet. The tram rolled on its way. Vernon-Smith caught Redwing's arm.

"Are you coming, or are you going to stand mooning there?" he asked, impatiently. Redwing, without replying, followed him.

They followed the others in at the gate, where the Bounder paid for admission, and Tom looked about him with some interest. He had glanced at the big casino in Boulogne before leaving the town: but Le Chalet was a smaller and no doubt more select establishment. Within the high wall, it was surrounded by shady woods, through which a path ran from the gate under shady branches. At the end of the path under the trees, was a glimpse of green smooth lawns and bright flower-beds, and a white building with green verandas.

"Come on!" said Smithy. "You've never been in a show like this before, Reddy."

"No!"

"Well, you live and learn." The Bounder gave a sudden chuckle, "I wonder what Quelch would say, Reddy."

"I'd rather not think about that."

"We're all right! We're going to have a good time while those duffers are rubber-necking about Boulogne like a mob of Margate trippers," said the Bounder, contemptuously. "Jolly spot, this — restaurant, café, dance-hall, and everything you could jolly well want, as well as the boule room. We'll get a spot of lunch, and then —"

The Bounder did not finish the sentence, but he breathed hard and deep with anticipation.

"I wish you'd chuck it, Smithy —."

"Fathead!"

"We could get a boat out —."

"We could have done that at Pegg, without crossing the Channel. Don't be an ass, Reddy."

"We could pick up the other fellows at Boulogne, and —."

"Good old wet blanket! Come on — this way!"

To Redwing's surprise, the Bounder turned off the path and led the way into the thick

of the wood. At a short distance from the path, however, he stopped, in a deep green and shady glade, screened from all eyes by the thick trees round them. There he drew a small leather case from an inside pocket.

“What —?” began Redwing.

“A spot of art,” explained the Bounder, with a grin. “I’ve been in this show before, and it’s best to be on the safe side.”

Redwing watched him in silence as he unpacked the little case. He fixed a pocket-mirror on the trunk of a tree, smoothed out a little curly artificial moustache, dabbed it with a spot of adhesive fluid, and proceeded to affix it to his upper lip. He grinned at his reflection in the mirror. The false moustache did not disguise the Bounder’s identity, but it certainly made him look a good many years older. Smithy was dressed in light tweeds, of a pattern somewhat larger and louder than good taste would have dictated, though well-cut and undoubtedly expensive: and he wore a diamond pin that gleamed in a tie of several pronounced colours. The moustache seemed to give him the finishing touch, as it were: and it came uncomfortably into Redwing’s mind that his chum had not been given his nickname without reason. In his present get-up Smithy might easily have been taken for a young man over twenty, which was his object: he might also have been taken for a “bounder”, which certainly was not his object. But if Tom Redwing was conscious of discomfort, Smithy was quite satisfied, and he grinned at the silent junior.

“How’s that?” he asked. “You old owl, can’t you look a spot less solemn when we’re on the giddy razzle?”

“I’m not,” said Redwing, curtly. “I’m sticking to you Smithy whatever you do: but that’s the limit.”

“You don’t feel like plunging, just for once, on the green cloth?” asked the Bounder, sarcastically.

“Not in the least!”

“Well, I knew that,” said Smithy, with a change of tone. “I wouldn’t have brought you here, Reddy, if I’d thought you’d fall for it. Believe it or not.” He laughed, “Come on — we’ll get a spot of fodder, and you can listen to the band, and drink coffee, and watch the dancing, while I beard the jolly old lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall! Gad, I’m keen to get to it!”

Redwing did not need telling that. His wayward chum’s eyes were glittering with excitement. They returned to the woodland path, and followed it to the open lawns and gardens that surrounded the casino. At little tables, dotted about the lawns, people were sitting drinking coffee or wine, and smoking and chatting. There was an air of brightness and gaiety about the whole place that was somewhat infectious, and Tom Redwing would have been content and cheerful enough, but for what was to come. It was not only his distaste for the Bounder’s pursuits that troubled his mind. He could not help thinking of the outcome. Smithy was full of confidence, on top of the world, as it were, at the moment. He believed fully in the precious “system” he fancied that he had evolved: but Redwing had far too much common sense to believe in it. It was better, perhaps, that Smithy should lose his money, as a lesson and a warning to him: but if that was the outcome, his disappointment would be deep and bitter and overwhelming, and it troubled Tom to think of it.

By a flight of wide stone steps adorned with statues they entered the building, and Smithy, lounging with his hands in his trousers’ pockets, and looking, as Tom miserably knew, more like a bounder than ever, led the way to the restaurant. They sat down to lunch, and Redwing thought that the garcon’s eyes, when he came to take their order, lingered on Smithy’s moustache. Smithy spoke to the man in French, of a

somewhat different variety from Coker's. Redwing caught the waiter's answer, which showed that Smithy had been inquiring about the matter that was uppermost in his thoughts: that, indeed, excluded everything else.

"Le jeu n'ouvre qu'à trois heures, monsieur."

The Bounder gave a grunt, as the man went.

"Lots of time for tiffin, Reddy. The game doesn't open till three o'clock — for the afternoon session. It isn't perpetual motion here as at jolly old Monte Carlo. It isn't roulette, either — they stick to la boule at this show, as I've told you. No jolly old wheel spinning round — just a bowl that they chuck the ball into. Easy as winking to get the dough off the mugs who come here to play — unless there's a system that will beat the bank. I fancy that there is, Reddy."

Tom made no reply. He did not want to be more of a wet blanket than he could help. Smithy was determined to play, when the tables opened for the afternoon: and it was futile to argue: neither did he wish to dash his chum's cheery and happy mood. That would come soon enough, when he had tried his luck at the tables: it was not likely to be the "tiger" that would be skinned!

It was a pleasant and well-served lunch, running, into uncounted francs, which the Bounder paid with a smile, adding a generous *pourboire* for the *garçon*. But it was not yet three o'clock, and they strolled out on to the terrace, where Smithy lit a cigarette. In the study at Greyfriars the Bounder never put on a smoke when Redwing was present: but he seemed to have forgotten that self-imposed restriction now. He smoked two or three, one after another, and looked continually at his watch. Strains of music from within the building reached their ears. The afternoon concert was beginning.

"Come on, Reddy," said the Bounder, suddenly. He threw away the stump of a cigarette, and led his chum back into the building, into the concert-hall.

A good many people had already taken their seats there: the orchestra was in full swing. From an adjoining spacious apartment, through a wide, open arch, came a sing-song voice: "*Faites vos jeux, messieurs.*"

The gaming-room adjoined the concert hall: and the game, evidently, was beginning. At the sound of the *croupier's* droning voice, Vernon-Smith pricked up his ears, like a war-horse scenting the battle from afar.

"Here you are, Reddy — stick here," he said, hastily, and in another moment was gone.

Tom glanced after him. The Bounder, evidently forgetful of his existence already, disappeared through the wide arch into the gaming-room. The droning voice came again, audible through the music.

"*Les jeux sont faites? Rien ne va plus!*"

Tom Redwing suppressed a sigh, and settled down in his seat, to listen to the music. But he could not give it much heed. His thoughts were with his reckless chum in the adjoining *salle*: and he wondered how long it would be before Smithy rejoined him — and in what mood!

## CHAPTER 24

### BILLY AND A BILL!

BILLY BUNTER beamed.

Harry Wharton and Co. looked very cheerful.

It was pleasant enough, at the table under the shady tree, in the sunny garden of Le

Soleil d'Or in Boulogne. There were other tables, with other parties at lunch: and waiters came and went, knives and forks rattled, corks popped, and glasses clinked. Food was good and ample: and the Famous Five had good appetites for it: though compared with Billy Bunter they were merely also-rans. Bunter had great spaces to fill, and he was evidently determined to fill them to the full, if not to overflowing. The waiter who looked after the party of six was kept busy chiefly by the hungry Owl. Every now and then the juniors glanced round, half-expecting to see Smithy and Redwing. But they saw nothing of them: and they had to come to the conclusion that what Bunter had told them was correct, and that Smithy and his comrade were miles away — and intended to keep miles away. But when lunch was half through, a familiar voice was heard, though it was not Smithy's or Redwing's.

"Chuck it, Potter! The man can't possibly understand you! Leave it to me, will you."

"Dear old Coker!" murmured Bob.

The juniors looked round, and beheld the burly form of Horace Coker, with Potter and Greene. Evidently, Coker had got through the Customs somehow, and collected his friends again, and apparently they had arrived at the Soleil d'Or for a rather late lunch.

"But I say —!" murmured Potter.

"Don't jaw, old chap! Leave it to me! Here, garson, nous voulong lunchey," said Coker. "Findez us a table, see?"

"Comment, monsieur?"

"It's dashed queer that they keep on saying commong when I speak to them," said Coker, irritably. "Deaf, perhaps! Now, look here, my man, noos avong farm, see? Farm! Nous voolong lunchey. Mongjee! Baw! Comprong?"

"No speak English, monsieur."

"I'm speaking French," hooted Coker. "What are you grinning at, Potter? What are you sniggering at, Greene? The man's a fool, but there's no need to snigger at him. There's such a thing as manners, in a foreign country, though you fellows don't seem to know it. Now, Lookez-vous here, garson —."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker stared round, and frowned as his eyes fell on the party of six. He stared at them, and glared at them. They were laughing!

"Those fags again!" he exclaimed. "I suppose they're going to haunt us all day. What are you fags sniggering at?"

"French as she is spoke!" answered Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've a jolly good mind —."

"For goodness sake, Coker, don't kick up a row here," exclaimed Potter, in dismay.

"Come on — I can see an empty table over there —."

"Look here, Potter —."

"Suivez-moi, messieurs," said the waiter, who no doubt understood what the Fifth-form party wanted, though not by way of Coker's French.

"What the dickens does he mean by sweevey?" grunted Coker.

"Suivez-moi means follow me," murmured Greene.

"I don't want you to teach me French, Billy Greene. I've a jolly good mind to wallop those cheeky fags —."

"We've not got too much time, if we're going out to Le Chalet for the afternoon, Coker," murmured Potter. "Come on."

"If we were at Greyfriars now, I'd jolly well get and bang their heads together all



round —.”

“We’re not at Greyfriars now, old chap —.”

“I know that, Potter! Talk sense! And come on — don’t hang about wasting time when we’re late already —.”

“There’s an empty table —.”

“I can see that table, Potter, and I don’t need you to point it out to me. Come on: for goodness sake, let’s get away from that mob of fags — people will think that they belong to us. Gettez-vous going, garsong.”

“Plait-il?”

“Now he’s talking about a plate, just like that goat in the Customs. Nothing about a plate,” bawled Coker. “Gettez-vous a move on, see? Noos voulong lunchey ici, and we don’t want to be tout le jour about it. Comprenny? I think he understands now, you fellows, from the way he’s grinning. Come on.”

Coker and Co. walked on, to the vacant table: which, to Coker’s comfort, was at a considerable distance from the junior party. It was evident that Horace Coker derived no satisfaction whatever from the proximity of those cheery youths: though, with great self-restraint, he had refrained from banging their heads together all round.

The Famous Five continued, and finished, an excellent lunch: after which they were prepared to get a move on. But though they had finished, Billy Bunter had by no means done so: and as Billy Bunter was the founder of the feast, it was scarcely polite to make a move till he was through. One lunch did not amount to much with Bunter, especially after his wild experience on the *Flamingo*. While the Famous Five sat at ease, and chatted, or watched the sea, Billy Bunter went on and on and on: and the garçon in attendance was kept on the trot.

Sticky things, Bunter found, much to his satisfaction, could be obtained in any quantity: and the quantity of sticky things that William George Bunter could consume at a sitting was really remarkable.

The fat junior grew happier, shinier, and stickier, minute by minute: indeed, he seemed to be growing fatter and fatter. He gave his orders with reckless abandon, like a fellow who did not have to bother about such sordid details as paying bills. It was Bunter’s own business, as he was standing the spread at the Soleil d’Or: but the other fellows could not help thinking that he would get something of a shock when he saw the “addition”.

“Not finished yet?” asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically, when the fat Owl, at long last, seemed to pause.

“Well, not quite,” said Bunter. “I think I could do just one more of those creamy cakes. And some coffee! You fellows have some. We don’t get a beanfeast in France every day, you know.”

“Oh, all right.”

Coffee and creamy cakes were brought, and the other fellows had some. Billy Bunter found that he could “do” not one, but three, more of the creamy cakes. But after that, even the fat Owl had to come to a halt. Even Bunter seemed to have reached the limit at last.

“Jolly good feed, you fellows,” he said. “What?”

“Topping!” agreed Bob Cherry.

“The topfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter.”

“We don’t get grub like this at home, what?” said Bunter. “Spread yourself while you’ve got the chance, what? When you’re on a beanfeast, enjoy yourself, regardless of expense — that’s my idea. Nothing mean about me, you chaps, when I’m standing you a spread.”

“Well, it was a jolly good spread,” said Frank Nugent, “and I rather think it will be a jolly good bill, Bunter.”

“Oh! Ah! Yes!” Bunter blinked at him, it seemed to the juniors a little uneasily.

“Time we got a move on, you fellows. Here, garçon ! Le bill, s’il vous plait.”

“L“addition,” added Harry Wharton.

The waiter presented the “addition”. The number of items on it formed quite a lot of reading matter. But the juniors were less interested in the items than in the total sum that appeared at the foot of the “addition”. Bunter had stinted neither himself nor his guests, and unstinted hospitality had to be paid for. Bunter, according to his own account, had been provided with cash to meet incidental expenses on his continental trip: but the incidental expense of that lunch was likely to be somewhat substantial. It was Bunter’s own affair, if he had the money and chose to spend it: and the other fellows had been quite unable to keep him from “spreading” himself. They expected that “addition” to be rather startling. And it was!

“How much is it?” asked Bunter, “Combong, garçon?” By which the fat Owl probably meant “combien”.

“Sept mille francs, monsieur,” answered the waiter.

What does he mean by set-mil frong, you fellows?”

“Seven thousand francs,” said Harry.

“Oh!” Bunter had a slightly uneasy look. “How much is that in English? You get no end of francs for a quid, you know.”

“About seven pounds ten shillings.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Bunter.

Bob Cherry rose.

“Time we got going,” he remarked. “That’s a pretty steep bill, Bunter: but I suppose you know best. We’ve been here a jolly long time — let’s get moving.”

“Oh! Yes! Wait a minute!” gasped Bunter. He groped a hand in an empty pocket, and then another hand in another empty pocket, “I — I — I say, you fellows —.”

They looked at him.

“I — I say, I — I must have left my — my money at home!” gasped Bunter, “I — I — I don’t seem to — to have any money with me.”

“What?”

“I — I — I — !”

“Do you mean that you can’t pay that bill you’ve run up, you fat villain?” exclaimed Harry Wharton. “Is that what you mean?”

“Oh! No! Yes! I — I mean, I — I’ll settle up when we get back to Greyfriars, of — of course! I — I — I’m expecting a postal order —.”

“What?” yelled five fellows.

“A postal order! It — it will be all right! You fellows settle this bill, and I — I’ll square later, when — when my postal order comes! I — I hope you’re not going to be shirty, after I’ve stood you the spread of your lives —.”

“Oh, suffering cats and caterpillars!” exclaimed Bob Cherry, “Has that fat villain landed us with a bill for seven pounds ten, making out that he was standing us a spread? Why, you pernicious porker —.”

“Oh, really, Cherry —.”

“Diddled!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Done!” said Frank Nugent.

“The donefulness is terrific,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “After the absurd feast comes the ridiculous reckoning, as the proverb remarks.”

“You fat spoofer!” said Harry Wharton. The Famous Five looked at Billy Bunter, and looked at one another. Certainly, it had been a good lunch, no doubt worth the price that was charged. The reckless liberality with which Bunter had run up the bill was explained now. It had really been the chance of a lifetime for Bunter. Billy Bunter’s beanfeast was run on lines which, knowing their Bunter as they did, the chums of the Remove might really have expected — only they hadn’t!

Obviously, that bill had to be paid. Equally obviously, the fat Owl was not going to pay it.

“You bloated brigand,” said Bob Cherry, at last. “Haven’t you got any cash at all?”

“I — I’ve got some English money —.”

“How much?”

“Tup-tup-tuppence.”

“Oh, my hat!”

Twopence being the limit of Billy Bunter’s Worldly wealth, it was clear that he could not go very far towards settling a bill for seven pounds ten. Bunter’s beanfeast looked like being an expensive trip for the participants therein.

Fortunately, the Famous Five were in funds. There was only one thing to be done: to whack out all round and settle the bill. Which was accordingly done, and they left the Soleil d’Or, Billy Bunter rolling after them with a sticky, shiny, quite happy fat face. A fellow who had given orders to the extent of seven pounds ten shillings, with only the moderate sum of twopence in his pocket, might have been expected to worry a little — but not a fellow named W. G. Bunter. Bunter was not thinking about the bill—he was thinking about the spread, enjoying it over again in retrospect: and whatever the other fellows were feeling like, Billy Bunter was feeling fine, as he rolled out of the sunny garden of the Soleil d’Or.

## CHAPTER 25

### FAITES VOS JEUX

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stood very still.

He had rather a stunned feeling.

The *salle-des-jeux* at Le Chalet was crowded. Every seat round the long table was occupied, and punters who could not find seats stood behind the others. At intervals along the table were seated the croupiers, with their long rakes. In the centre of the table was the wide round bowl, with the numbered slots, in which the ball spun. The numbers ran from one to nine. On the green cloth, extending along the table on either side of the bowl, these numbers were marked in sections: with a special space for “pair and impair”, or even and odd. The game, to call it one, was simple enough. You placed your stake on the section marked with your favourite number, and if that number came up, received seven times the amount of the stake. As a rule it did not come up. Or you backed “pair” or “impair”, in which case you received the amount of your stake if you had it right: unless the winning number was *cinq*, or five, which was similar to zero in the game of roulette, and cleared the table. This was “*la boule*”: a method of getting rid of money compared with which horse-racing, or the “dogs”, or football pools, were as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine.

Smithy had dabbled in the game before, on continental holidays. He was observant and hard-headed, and he did not believe that the ball ran by chance. Reckless punters who plunged heavily on a number usually found that for some mysterious reason that number refused to materialize. But the Bounder had faith in his “system”. The “law of

averages” was in his favour. He left the plain numbers to punters whom he contemptuously regarded as “mugs”: and worked his “system” on odd and even. By this slow and steady method, he had no doubt that he would score over the game — “skin the tiger”, in fact.

But it did not work out like that.

It looked plausible enough, at least to a fellow who was determined to gamble and hoped to win. Obviously, neither odd nor even could come up for ever. After a certain succession of “pair”, “impair” was bound to supervene, and vice versa. According to the list of numbers on which he had calculated, this happened, as a rule, after a run of four or five. No doubt that was so on some occasions: but, as Smithy found, it was not so on all occasions.

He resisted the temptation to depart from the “system” and plunge. He allowed coup after coup to pass, without participating, waiting for the run to suit the system. It was slow and impatient work, and the Bounder was far from patient by nature: but he resolutely kept to it. He had started with a pile of counters representing ten pounds. It was not till they were all gone that he realised that he might as well have pitched them into Boulogne Harbour.

After a run of four pair, he backed impair. It did not come up. He backed it again with a doubled stake. Still it did not come up. He backed it again with a quadrupled stake, and still it refused to come. Doubling and redoubling, and doubling again, made deep inroads into his pile of counters. But he set his lips and kept on, till he reached the limit, when he had to stop, and carry on without doubling his stake further. A win came at last, but it left him with half his pile of counters gone.

That, he considered, was just a run of bad luck, which after all a fellow had to expect sometimes. And as he continued to play, several wins encouraged him. Then came another run, when impair persisted in coming up, when according to the system it ought to have been pair. And now the Bounder stood, with a blank look on his face, and his hand, which had been crammed with counters empty.

He stood quite still, breathing hard.

Was the “system” after all, mere moonshine? He would not believe it. He had more money about him, though he had not expected to have to use it. A glance round brought the ever-ready “changeur” to his side. Four pounds more — all he had — was exchanged for counters: and the Bounder, with a set face and a steely look in his eyes, recommenced.

And — though he still clung to his faith in his darling “system” the new supply followed the rest: and once more he stood, looking on, with black rage in his heart.

And — as if to tantalize him — the chance he had been backing, turned up, in the very next spin, if only he could have doubled again ———! 1

But his last counter was gone.

He moved away from the table. He was tired, and nervy with the excitement: but the spirit of gaming had taken entire possession of him. His only thought was to carry on, to force the game his way, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. There was only one resource: and he went slowly back into the concert-hall to look for Tom Redwing. Redwing was still where he had left him. From the orchestra came the merry strains of the “Veuve Joyeuse” waltz. Redwing looked up, as a hand fell on his shoulder.

“Smithy!” he murmured.

He was glad to see his friend again but sorely troubled by the hard, bitter look on his face. He did not need to ask how the play had gone.

“Lend me some money, Tom.”

“But——.”

“Will you lend me some money?” The Bounder’s voice was a whisper: and it sounded almost like the hiss of a snake, in its intensity. I’ve had a run of rotten luck — but — it’s all right — it only needs time — will you lend me some money?”

“But, old chap —.”

No one could have guessed that Tom Redwing was Smithy’s best pal, indeed his only pal, from the look that the Bounder gave him.

“You fool! You nincompoop! Are you going to sermonize me now? Will you lend me some money or not?”

“I’ve only three pounds —.”

“Lend it to me.”

Redwing hesitated for one moment. He knew, as very likely Smithy knew at the bottom of his heart, that this only meant that Redwing’s money was to be thrown away after the Bounder’s. He did not care for the money: he only wanted Smithy to chuck it. But the mingling of anger, misery, eagerness, pleading, in Smithy’s face, was too much for him. Silently, he passed the money into the Bounder’s hand.

Without a word, the Bounder left him.

It was not much, but it was something — it might yet see him through: all that was wanted was a spot of good fortune: a chance for that precious system to work! The Bounder returned to the *salle-des-jeux* with gleaming eyes and a firm step. Tom Redwing was left with a clouded face and a heavy heart. He did not expect for a moment that Smithy’s luck would change — indeed, he could hardly hope that it would. Winning on the green table would only mean that the Bounder would keep on, and on, and on, till at long last all was gone again. But his heart was full of pity for him: he would have done anything to help him. But there was nothing he could do. It was hardly a quarter of an hour later that the Bounder was at his side again.

Redwing did not need to ask how the game had gone. Smithy gave him a haggard look, as he whispered.

“Have you any more money?”

“No!”

“Sure?” The Bounder’s look was angry and fierce, “If you could help me out, and you choose to let me down —.”

“I’d give you anything I had, Smithy. You know that. But — I’ve nothing more. Only a few francs — enough for our tram fare.”

Smithy stood silent. Redwing was his only resource, and he had cleared him out. He was at the end of his tether — he had to retire from the game defeated — for want, as he was determined to believe, of a little more money. His last counter had gone, just when the numbers — as he fancied at least — were going his way! A few miserable pounds —! A few francs were of no use. He had a few francs himself. But Redwing had no more. For a long, long minute he stood in savage silence, his face black and bitter. Then he muttered — “Let’s get out of this! My head’s aching. Let’s get some coffee.”

They moved away towards the café, which adjoined. But Redwing paused as they were about to pass through the wide doorway.

“Hold on a minute, Smithy —.”

“Oh, come on, and don’t jaw now,” muttered the Bounder.

“But — have you any money left?”

“You know I haven’t. About the tram fare — that’s all.”

“I haven’t either! We can’t pay for the coffee, Smithy.”

“Oh!”

The Bounder stopped, and stared at him, quite blankly. Then he broke into a mocking, sardonic laugh.

“Oh, gad! That’s funny! Ha, ha!”

“Let’s get out into the air,” said Tom.

The Bounder nodded, and they left the building: Tom at least feeling better, in the open air and the sunshine. The Bounder was silent, dark, and moody. And as they came across the terrace, dotted with little tables where people sat with coffee and cigarettes, a cheery voice hailed them.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

## CHAPTER 26

### NO CHANCE FOR BUNTER

“I SAY, you fellows —.”

“Here’s the tram!”

“But I say —.”

“Roll on, barrel!”

“Beast! Will you listen to a chap?” hooted Bunter. “Whose beanfeast is this, I should like to know? Look here, we don’t want to cram into that rotten tram. What about a car?”

Five fellows gave Billy Bunter expressive looks, at the “halte” of the tramway in Boulogne.

The Greyfriars party had had a walk round Boulogne-sur-Mer, after that happy spread at the Soleil d’Or. But the afternoon was yet young, as Bob Cherry remarked, and they had time to see something outside the town. They were going on the tram to Le Chalet-aux-Bois, where there were all sorts of attractions for tourists: including la boule, if they had had tastes in common with the Bounder, which luckily they had not. And, after what the fat Owl had told them, there was a chance of running across Smithy and Redwing at Le Chalet. So there they were, ready to take the tram — with the exception of Billy Bunter. Bunter, it seemed, had rather more expensive ideas.

“No good being mean, when you’re on a beanfeast,” said the fat Owl, blinking at them. “What’s the good of packing into a tram? Let’s have a car — and a good one, too — I’m standing it, of course.”

“You’re standing it, are you?” grunted Johnny Bull. “Same as you did the spread at the Soleil d’Or?”

“Oh, really, Bull —.”

“Roll on that tram, fathead, before all the places are taken,” said Frank Nugent.

“But I say, you fellows, let’s do the thing in style,” urged Bunter. “We don’t go on a beanfeast every day, you know. Spread yourselves, a bit, what? I tell you I’ll stand the car.”

“Can you hire cars at twopence a time in Boulogne?” asked Bob Cherry. “Let’s see — twopence is about eight francs, more or less. Rush off and change your English money into French, Bunter, and we’ll have the car.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I suppose you fellows can lend a fellow a spot of cash, when a fellow’s standing you a magnificent holiday, regardless of expense —.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“Besides, I know where to get lots of money,” urged Bunter. “That’s what Smithy’s up to, at Le Chalet. You leave it to me. I’ve got more brains than Smithy, I hope. I

know all about that game. I should simply rake it in. If you fellows lend me, say ten quids —”

“Kick him!” said Johnny Bull.

“Look here, you fellows, have a spot of sense,” urged Bunter. “I tell you I should simply rake it in — you see, I know! It wouldn’t be any good you fellows trying it on — it needs brains —.”

“Great pip!”

“And nerve, and presence of mind, and all that. Well, that’s where I come in. What’s the good of packing into a tram? Let’s have a car — I’ll settle for it afterwards —.”

“After you’ve raked it in at that game at Le Chalet?” asked Harry Wharton, staring at the fat Owl.

“Yes, old chap! Leave that to me! I shall be rolling in it,” assured Bunter. “You needn’t be funny about it — Quelch can’t see us here, I suppose. Think he’s got a telescope on us, or what? They all do it here — when you’re in Rome, you do as the Trojans do, you know —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Now, what about that car?” asked Bunter.

“Nothing about that car,” answered Harry Wharton. “After the way you stood us lunch, old fat man, we can’t afford to let you stand us a car.”

“Oh, really, Wharton —.”

“And now roll on that tram, if you’re coming to Le Chalet. And if you so much as shove the tip of your silly nose anywhere near that game at the Chalet, we’ll boot you all the way back to Boulogne.”

“Beast!”

Billy Bunter rolled morosely on to the tram. He felt indignant. It was his beanfeast, and he was ready to spend money right and left, quite regardless of expense. The spot of bother was that he hadn’t any. And these fellows, with the seffishness that Bunter really expected of them, weren’t going to let him spend their money right and left — especially as they had very little left after Bunter’s generous spread at the Soleil d’Or. It was the tram or nothing, and Bunter rolled on to the tram. The Famous Five followed him, filling the last places. The tram was full: and other passengers coming up had to wait for the next. Among them was one who, apparently, was not prepared to wait for the next.

“Jolly old Coker again!” murmured Bob Cherry as the burly Horace came pushing on, with Potter and Greene hanging back behind. Probably they could see that the tram was full up, if Coker couldn’t.

“Here you are, you fellows,” came Coker’s powerful voice. “Jump in before it starts. This is the tram for Le Chalet.”

“But —!” began Potter.

“Don’t jaw, Potter! We shall lose the tram if you stop to jaw.”

“But —!” said Greene.

“Don’t gabble, Greene. Jump on the tram.”

Coker pushed on, Potter and Greene still hanging back. But the conductor barred Coker’s way, to his surprise and annoyance.

“Complet, monsieur,” he said, politely.

Coker stared at him.

“Eh? Wharrer you mean? This is the tram for Le Chalet, ain’t it? Le tram goey to Le Chalet,” added Coker, putting it in French. If that conductor understood Coker’s French, he must have been a very unusual and exceptional Frenchman: but no doubt he caught Coker’s meaning from the words Le Chalet.

“Oui, monsieur! Mais c’est complet.”

“Say Compley,” repeated Coker, blankly. “Why the thump should I say Compley when I mean Le Chalet? Oh, these foreigners! Dashed fatheads, the lot of them!” He glanced over his shoulder at Potter and Greene. “Come on, you fellows! This is our tram.”

“But the conductor says —!” began Potter.

“I heard what the conductor said, Potter. I’m not deaf,” interrupted Coker, testily. “I daresay the tram goes to Compley as well as Le Chalet, — I don’t know and don’t care. Jump on before it starts. Here, get out of the way,” went on Coker, as the conductor still barred ingress. “Je go on cette tram to Le Chalet — comprenny? Gettez-vous out of the way, can’t you?”

“Complet!”

“I know all that, but I’m not going to Compley, I’m going to Le Chalet,” bawled Coker. “Le Chalet? Comprong? Shuttez-vous up and let a fellow get on the tram, blow you.”

“Complet —.”

“By gum! If he keeps on gabbling to me about Compley, I’ll jolly well dot him on the nose,” exclaimed Coker, exasperated.

“Complet means full up, Coker,” called out Harry Wharton.

Coker stared into the tram, and became aware of the Greyfriars party. He gave a truculent glare at grinning faces.

“Those fags again — haunting us all over the shop!” he exclaimed. “You’d better shut up, young Wharton. I don’t want any cheek from you. Get out of this, you fellows — we’re not cramming into a tram with that mob of fags.” It did not seem to have penetrated Coker’s powerful brain, even yet, that he couldn’t cram into that tram, anyway, as it was full up. He glared at the juniors, expressed his feelings further by an emphatic snort, and stepped off the tram — which was just as well for Coker, as the conductor was about to push him off.

The tram rolled off, the Famous Five smiling back at Coker as they went. In return for those cheery smiles, they received a glare that really ought to have withered and wilted them on the spot. Coker and Co. were left behind to take the next tram, and Harry Wharton and Co., quite unwithered and unwilted by Coker’s glare, rolled on their way.

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Trot out that English money of yours, Bunter,” said Bob. “The conductor wants some of it.”

“Oh, really, Cherry — I — I think one of you fellows had better take the tickets —.”

“The betterfulness will be terrific,” grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Much better, unless we want to be run in for bilking,” agreed Bob. “You’d better not wander away like Smithy, old fat man — you won’t get back to Boulogne on twopence.”

“Beast! I mean, look here, old fellow, I know where to get lots and lots. You fellows lend me a few quid to start with, and see me rake it in!” urged Bunter. “I’ll stand you a splendid supper afterwards, with a bottle of fizz if you like — and a car back to Boulogne, and —.”

“I suppose we can’t kick him here,” said Bob, thoughtfully. “You’ll have to wait till we get off the tram, Bunter.”

“Beast!”

The tram clanged on its noisy way, and stopped, at last, at Le Chalet-aux-Bois. The Greyfriars fellows descended, and walked in at the gate. It was Billy Bunter’s



beanfeast, but another member of the party had to pay at the box, and they walked in, up the path under the shady trees that Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing had followed earlier in the day.

“Jolly place,” said Bob, as they came out of the shady path to the open sunny lawns and flower-gardens, the white casino building with its well-populated terrace facing them, “I wonder if Smithy’s here.”

“I say, you fellows, never mind Smithy. If you lend me —.”

“We can kick him here,” said Bob. “Turn round, Bunter.”

“Beast!”

Billy Bunter did not turn round — he backed out of reach. His fat face wore a deep frown as he rolled after the Famous Five, and they stopped on the terrace. Smithy had let him down, and now these fellows were letting him down: and he was not, after all, going to “rake it in” at the green table: he was not going to “skin the tiger”, and walk off with uncounted thousands of francs in his pockets. It was deeply irritating and exasperating to Billy Bunter: but once more there was balm in Gilead. His fat face brightened when the party sat down round one of the tables on the terrace, and a waiter brought coffee and a tray of sticky cakes, — on which the fat Owl commenced operations without wasting a moment. And he was hardly through his seventh cake when two fellows came out of the casino on to the terrace, and Bob Cherry ejaculated, “Hallo, hallo, hallo!” at the sight of Tom Redwing and the Bounder.

## CHAPTER 27

### NOT A HAPPY REUNION

HARRY WHARTON and Co. stared at the Bounder. They knew him at a glance, in spite of the little dark moustache that curled on his upper lip. That was not the only change in his looks. Smithy was a Remove fellow like themselves, but there was nothing boyish about him now. His face, always a little hard, seemed harder, years older. If the Bounder had had an elder brother, ten years older than himself, they might have supposed that this was he. Howsoever the Bounder had spent his afternoon, evidently it had not conduced to cheerfulness or contentment. His hard, moody face, the restless glitter in his eyes, told of an angry, disappointed, bitter spirit within.

He heard Bob’s cheery hail, but hardly glanced round. Tom Redwing, however, came to a stop, and looked across at the party, the colour coming into his cheeks. He was conscious, if the Bounder was not, of a feeling of shame. His look showed very plainly that he hesitated to rejoin the party whom he and his chum had “dodged” and deserted, though undoubtedly he was glad to see them again.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips for a moment.

He knew now if he had doubted before, that what Bunter had stated was true, and it was scarcely possible to avoid a feeling of angry resentment, at the knowledge that he, and Mr. Quelch’s trust in him, had been made unscrupulous use of by Vernon-Smith for his own dubious purposes. But it was only for a moment that his face darkened. He was glad, and relieved, to see the two truants again, and to gather them back into the fold, as it were. Johnny Bull gave an expressive grunt, but he left it at that. Nugent and the nabob, though they could not help staring at Smithy’s moustache, looked as welcoming as they could. As for Bob Cherry, he was not thinking about anything but cheery friendliness, and he waved a beckoning hand at the two juniors.

“This way, you fellows,” he called out. “Here we are again! Come and have a spot of

coffee, and sample these cakes before Bunter scoffs the lot.”

“Oh, really, Cherry —.”

Tom Redwing’s face brightened, and he touched Smithy’s arm, as the Bounder would have gone on.

“Come on, Smithy,” he said, in a low voice. “May as well join the other fellows — now ————.”

“I don’t want them,” muttered the Bounder.

“They seem to want us, and it’s pretty decent of them, after the way we’ve let them down.”

“Oh, do as you like! What do I care?” Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders, and followed Tom to the juniors’ table.

A waiter brought two more chairs, and a new supply of coffee and cakes. The two juniors sat down, Redwing cheerful, if a little self-conscious: the Bounder taking no trouble whatever to banish the dark moodiness from his face. He did not care a straw whether he joined up with the party or not: he did not care whether they received him in a friendly spirit or not: indeed, he would almost have welcomed a “row” in his present mood. He did not, in fact, care for anything in the wide world just then, except the game he had had to leave, and which was going on in the *salle-des-jeux*, without him. His thoughts were on the green cloth and the yellow numbers, and he still seemed to hear the drone of the croupiers, “Faites vos jeux, messieurs!” A little more capital — only a little more capital — a mere few pounds — and he would have forced Fortune’s wheel to turn in his favour — against his own common sense he was sure of it. But there was no hope now — he was down and out, and he sat in moody, savage silence, hardly conscious of the cheery boyish faces around him.

Billy Bunter paused a moment, over his eighth sticky cake to blink at Smithy through his big spectacles. Then he grinned a fat grin. Even the Owl of the Remove could read in the Bounder’s face what his experience had been like at *Le Chalet-aux-Bois*. That precious “system”, only too clearly, had let him down: and from the fact that he had left the casino, it was easy to deduce that he had been cleared out. Whereat the fat Owl grinned over his sticky cake.

“Here you are, Smithy! Jolly good coffee here,” said Bob.

“Oh! All right.”

The Bounder drank strong black coffee. He had a spot of head-ache, which was not surprising after hours of concentration, excitement, and the final bitter and crushing disappointment.

“Been having a good time, you fellows?” asked Tom Redwing, rather awkwardly.

“Oh, topping,” answered Bob. “You should have seen Coker in the Customs — jolly good entertainment, free gratis, and for nothing. And such a spread at the *Soleil d’Or!*”

“I say, you fellows, you missed that,” said Billy Bunter. “I stood these chaps the spread of their lives at the *Solid Door*. Biggest feed they’d ever seen.”

“And the biggest bill!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Oh, really, Bull —.” “Bunter stood the spread,” explained Bob. “He stood everything excepting the bill —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Cherry —.”

“He was going to stand us a car to come out here,” added Bob. “But our cash wouldn’t run to it —.”

“Yah!”

“And he’s going to stand us supper here, after the show,” went on Bob. “Ain’t you,

old fat beanfeaster? We shall have to be careful to keep enough for our tram fares back to Boulogne, if he stands us supper.”

Tom Redwing laughed.

The Bounder looked up suddenly. A new idea seemed to have flashed into his mind. His face flushed a little, as he looked almost furtively at Harry Wharton.

“Could you lend me something?” he asked, abruptly.

“Smithy!” breathed Tom Redwing.

The Bounder did not heed him.

“I’ve run out of money,” he said, as casually as he could. “I suppose you know I shall settle when we get back to Greyfriars, —I’m not Bunter —.”

“Oh, really, Smithy —.”

“A few pounds —,” muttered Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton looked directly at the Bounder. He had hoped that nothing need have been said about the afternoon’s proceedings. He was only too willing to pass over what had happened, in silence: content to gather his flock together again, and carry on with the holiday trip as if there had been no rift in the lute at all. Smithy, obviously, had lost all he had, and could play the fool no further, and that was enough. But at that question from the Bounder, his face set, and the look he gave him was direct and uncompromising.

“What do you want it for, Smithy?” he asked, very quietly. And silence fell on the other fellows, even Bob Cherry’s cheery face becoming grave.

The Bounder’s lip curved in a sneer.

“Never mind that! You’ve got some money — will you lend me a few quid or not?”

The Bounder was eager, anxious, passionately eager and anxious to get hold of money, somehow, anyhow, to get back to the green table. Yet he could hardly put it civilly.

“I’d better speak plainly,” said Harry, in the same quiet tone. “I know that you’ve been gambling in that rotten show, Smithy —.”

“You can’t mind your own business?”

“I think it is my business, in the circumstances. Never mind about that. If you want me to lend you money for anything else, I’m your man. But I won’t lend you a single sixpence for that.”

“Smithy —!” muttered Redwing, miserably. He had never been so ashamed of his chum.

Vernon-Smith did not heed him. He gave Wharton a look almost of hatred, and with a sneering face, glanced round at the others.

The Bounder hated asking favours. It irked him to receive one. But just then he would have borrowed money from anyone who would have lent it.

But the other faces were as uncompromising as Harry Wharton’s — Johnny Bull’s openly contemptuous. Vernon-Smith bit his lip hard. He had put his pride in his pocket for nothing.

He rose abruptly from the table.

“Not going, Smithy?” said Bob Cherry, as genially as he could. “They put on a variety show here, and we’re all going in to see it, after tea. Why not come in with us?”

“Do,” murmured Nugent.

Vernon-Smith did not seem to hear them. “See you later, Reddy,” he said, as he turned away.

“But — Smithy ———.” Tom half-rose.

“When you’re through with your present improvin’ company,” added the Bounder, with a bitter sneer.

"I'll come with you, Smithy —."

"You needn't trouble." Evidently Smithy, in his bitter mood, resented his chum's action in rejoining the party.

"But —," said Redwing.

"Oh, leave me alone," snapped the Bounder, savagely: and with that, he walked away, and went back into the building. Tom Redwing sat down again, with a burning face. There was an uncomfortable silence, broken by a fat cachinnation from William George Bunter.

"He, he, he!"

"Stop that alarm-clock," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry —."

"Stuff in another cake, old fat man, while there's time," said Nugent. "You haven't had a dozen yet."

Bunter stuffed in another cake, but his fat chuckle came through it.

"He, he, he! Smithy's shirty! Ain't he jolly shirty? He, he, he! Looks as if he's had a fat lot of luck with that system of his! He, he, he! I say, Redwing, has he been borrowing your money too?"

Redwing rose.

"I think I'll go after Smithy, if you fellows don't mind," he said, and he moved away without waiting for a reply.

Bunter blinked after him.

"I say, is Redwing shirty too?" he asked. "What's Redwing shirty about, you fellows?"

"You fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton —."

Billy Bunter's fat squeak was interrupted by a familiar voice.

"Here you are, you fellows — here's a table! Sit down here, Potter — you here, Greene. Waiter. I mean garsong! Garsong! Apportez-nous café and gaiters — do you hear? Coffee and gaiters."

"Plait-il, monsieur?"

"Yes, a plate if you like, but coffee and gaiters, got that?"

"You mean gateaux, Coker —," suggested Potter. "I know what I mean, George Potter, without you

telling me. Garsong! Gaiters! Gaiters with the coffee, see?"

"But they call their cakes gateaux, old man —," murmured Greene.

"I know what they call their cakes, Billy Greene. Comprenny, garsong! Café and gaiters," said Coker.

And Coker and Co. sat down at the next table to the Remove party — of whose proximity Horace Coker became aware a moment or two later. And as he became aware of it, the frown he gave them was twice as frightful, fearful, and frantic, as that of the Lord High Executioner.

## CHAPTER 28

### JAM FOR COKER!

HORACE COKER breathed hard, and he breathed deep. The mere sight of the cheery Remove party seemed to rouse his ire. Really, they were quite inoffensive, except that they were smiling — and how could mortal help smiling at Coker's French? But Coker was already incensed. It was cheek, in his opinion, for a mob of fags to go on

the same excursion as himself, on the same steamer. Having done this, the least they were bound to do was to keep their distance, — instead of which they were, as Coker expressed it, haunting him all over the shop!

It did not occur to Coker that he, too, was haunting the junior party all over the shop! Coker did not exactly think that Boulogne-sur-Mer and its environs belonged to him. But really one might have supposed that he did.

“Oh!” said Coker. “You again!”

“And you again, old pippin,” said Bob Cherry, cheerily. “Turned up like a bad penny once more, what?”

“You can’t keep your distance?” said Coker, ominously. “I’ve a jolly good mind —!” He paused.

Potter and Greene looked alarmed. The terrace was crowded with little parties at little tables: there was an incessant buzz of conversation, clinking of coffee-cups and wine-glasses. It was the very last spot that Potter and Greene would have chosen for a “row”. But they dreaded that Horace Coker was impervious to such trifling considerations. However, Coker paused.

“I’ve a jolly good mind —,” he repeated: and again he paused.

“You have?” inquired Bob. “Hear that, you fellows? Coker says he’s got a jolly good mind. Did you know he had a mind at all?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Let alone a jolly good one,” added Bob. “Sorry, Coker: that’s a little too steep! Tell us an easier one.”

Coker, breathing harder and deeper, rose.

Potter grabbed him by one arm, Greene by the other. They dragged together. This combined operation landed Coker in his chair again, with a sudden bump.

“Oh!” ejaculated Coker. He gazed at Potter, and then at Greene. “What the thump do you fellows think you’re up to?”

“Don’t rag here, for goodness sake, old chap!” breathed Potter.

“Rag?” repeated Coker.

“People are looking at us already,” whispered Greene.

“Let ‘em look,” said Coker. “Did you say rag, Potter?”

“Yes, I did.”

“You think I’m a fellow to rag on holiday — me!” said Coker. “I’d like to know what you mean by that, George Potter?”

Coker, evidently, did not regard a row with the juniors as “ragging”. Perhaps he regarded it as a stern and necessary administration of justice. Anyhow it was clear that he had no use for criticism from his friends.

“I’m not standing cheek from those fags,” went on Coker. “If that’s what you mean, Potter, you can forget it.”

However, Coker, being in his chair again, remained there, contenting himself with casting a devastating frown at the junior table. Possibly even Coker realised that the crowded terrace of Le Chalet was not a suitable spot for administering stern justice. But his eyes remained on the party, and it was clear that his wrath was straining at the leash, as it were.

“Here comes the waiter with the coffee and cakes,” said Greene.

Coker grunted: but he condescended to partake of coffee and cakes. Harry Wharton and Co. carefully refrained from even looking at the Fifth-formers. They certainly did not want to astonish the natives by a sudden rough-and-tumble on the terrace: even the exuberant Bob didn’t. Very carefully ignoring the Fifth-form party, they chatted round their table, while Billy Bunter added sticky cake to sticky cake.

“Less noise there!” rapped out Coker, suddenly.

At which the Famous Five all stared round. The buzz of cheery voices did not, apparently, please Coker. He rapped out “Less noise there!” just as a prefect at Greyfriars might have rapped it out in the doorway of the Rag.

“Coker, old man —!” whispered Potter.

“Shut up, Potter.”

“Look here, Coker —,” breathed Greene.

“Dry up, Greene.”

Coker fixed a stern eye on the junior party.

“Less noise there!” he repeated. “You’re not in the Remove passage now you noisy young sweeps. Less noise, see?”

“Oh, shut up, Coker,” said Johnny Bull.

“What?”

“Shut up! Don’t be a cheeky ass. Just shut up!” It was the last straw. Coker had been — for Coker — patient. Now, like Hitler, he felt his patience exhausted. He rose to his feet, with an expression of his rugged face which indicated only too clearly his intentions.

Potter and Greene grabbed at his arms again — in vain. Coker brushed them aside like flies.

They exchanged a sort of hopeless glance. Coker was standing them this trip, in his usual open-handed way, scattering money with a royal hand. That was all right. But at that moment, Potter and Greene fervently wished that they had kept that imaginary appointment with the non-existent chap at Carcroft!

There was going to be a row! Coker was not to be restrained. And Potter and Greene, having exchanged that look, rose from their chairs and moved away with as casual an air as they could. Their only hope now was that people wouldn’t notice that Coker belonged to them.

Heedless of their desertion, in fact unconscious of it, Horace Coker stepped over to the junior table: at which, all the Famous Five jumped to their feet, and even Billy Bunter paused in the consumption of his umpteenth sticky cake.

Coker was going to smack Johnny’s head. That, Coker considered, was the least he could do, in the circumstances. A hundred pairs of staring eyes had no effect on Coker. If the whole population of France had been staring at him, it would have had no effect.

“Shut up, hay?” said Coker, grimly. “Well, take that —!”

Johnny Bull, being within reach of a heavy sweeping hand, had to take it — that could not be helped. He gave a roar as he took it. The next moment Johnny was as oblivious of staring eyes as Coker himself. He came at Coker like a stone from a catapult.

Coker, having smacked Johnny’s head, was prepared to leave it at that. But as Johnny was not prepared to leave it at that, Coker had to carry on with the good work. He spluttered as Johnny’s left landed on his nose, followed up by Johnny’s right, in his eye. His mighty grasp closed on Johnny Bull — and the next second, he was in the grasp of four other fellows: and — not for the first time — he discovered that the Famous Five were too many for him. They grasped him on all sides, whirled him over, and landed him on the terrace, on his back, with a concussion that almost shook Le Chalet.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Billy Bunter.

“Messieurs!” shrieked the waiter. “Messieurs!”

Innumerable people jumped to their feet, stared, exclaimed, and gesticulated. It was quite an unprecedented scene on the terrace of that select resort, Le Chalet-aux-Bois.

“Messieurs! Messieurs!”

“Mon Dieu!”

“Ces Anglais —.”

“Comment —?”

“Fi donc —.”

“Qu’est-ce que cela?”

It was quite a chorus. Coker, on his back, breathless, stared up. Then he heaved.

Coker was not satisfied with this — evidently, he was going on. There was going to be a battle-royal, if Coker got on his feet. But Coker didn’t. With great presence of mind, Bob Cherry grabbed a double handful of tarts from the table, and jammed them down on Coker’s face, plastering them there vigorously. Coker, his eyes and nose and mouth full of jam, spluttered horribly, sprawled, and clawed wildly at jam.

He sat up, wildly clawing.

By the time Coker succeeded in clearing his vision, and glaring round in search of the juniors, they had vanished. They did not want a battle-royal, if Coker did. To shove a note into the waiter’s hand, and depart, without waiting for the change, had been the work of moments — Billy Bunter rolling after the Co. with a half-finished cake in a fat hand. They were inside the building, going into the variety show, as Coker cast a dizzy and jammy glare round in search of them. Neither did he see anything of Potter and Greene. Potter and Greene were keeping their distance, only hoping that nobody in France would notice that they were connected with Coker in any manner whatsoever.

“Urrrggh!” gurgled Coker, as he scrambled up at last.

That he was the cynosure of all eyes did not bother Coker. He was conscious chiefly of jam, and the need of a wash. He grabbed the waiter by the arm.

“Here, you, Garsong! Where can I get a wash — je wanty washy. Comprenny! Takez moi where je can washy, see?”

“Oui, monsieur!” gasped the garçon. He understood Coker’s need of a wash, if he did not understand his French, “Suivez-moi, si’il vous plait.”

And Coker, still clawing jam, was led away for the wash that he really seriously needed.

## CHAPTER 29

### THE LOWEST DEPTH

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH plunged his burning forehead into the basin of cold water, and drew it out dripping. His head was aching, his temples throbbing. The Bounder was, in fact, almost in a fever, with excitement, disappointment, bitter chagrin, and the fierce desire to carry on with the gaming which had turned out so disastrously, but which he was determined to believe would turn in his favour — if only he could carry on. He was standing at one of the rows of white basins at the end of the “vestiaire”, heedless of others who came and went, heedless even of the false moustache that had slipped off as he bathed his heated face. One thought was hammering in his fevered mind — if he could but carry on — if he could but return to the salle-des-jeux and push his fortune on the green baize — but there was no hope! He was down and out: and Redwing could not help him: he had cleared Redwing out. The others could have helped, if they had chosen: but he had humbled himself for nothing: all he had to expect from them was pi-jaw. And with even a few pounds — even, perhaps, with one — he could have swung fortune in his favour — at least, in

his unreasonable determination to believe what he wanted to believe, he fancied so. The bitterness in his heart was beyond words. At that moment, Smithy was no longer a schoolboy: he was a gambler desperate with disappointment, and there was little at which he would have hesitated to find the resources to carry on with the game. But there was no chance — no hope — he was down and out, and had to go defeated. He plunged his burning face into the cold water again.

“Voilà le vestiaire, monsieur!”

Vernon-Smith heard the voice at the doorway, without heeding it. But he heeded the voice that followed: “Oh, all right! Mercy!”

The Bounder lifted his head, and scowled round with a dripping face. It was that fool Coker. Coker had plenty of money — oodles of it — not much use trying to borrow money off Coker of the Fifth! He plunged his face in the water again.

“Mercy!” repeated Coker, at the door. Even Coker could be civil to an attendant: though as he pronounced the French word “merci” as if he were asking for mercy, that attendant probably did not know that Coker was rendering thanks.

Coker came in with his heavy tramp.

The Bounder lifted his face again, and gave him one glance, as he stopped at a row of pegs and took off his jacket and collar and tie. How Coker had become so jammy, Vernon-Smith could only wonder — but his face, his ears, his neck, seemed of the jam jammy, and he undoubtedly needed a good and thorough wash. Coker did not glance at the junior or notice his existence at all. Coker was wholly concerned with himself and jam.

“Cheeky young scoundrels!” Smithy heard him mutter: from which Smithy was able to guess the source of the jam. “Cheeky young sweeps! I’ll smash ‘em — I’ll spifflicate ‘em! Urrrggh!”

Only for a moment Smithy’s glance dwelt on him. In his desperation, he had thought, for a moment, of somehow getting Coker to lend him money. But he knew that that was futile. Coker might, or might not, have smacked his head for his cheek: but certainly he would not have acceded to any such request. Only desperation could have made him think of it. Once more he plunged his throbbing head in cold water. Coker passed him, unnoticed. going to a basin six or seven yards further along the row, where he turned on hot water, and began to splash with soap. Smithy drew his face out of the water again, and standing with his back to Coker, began towelling himself dry. Then, noticing the false moustache floating in the basin, he snatched it up, and having dried his face, fastened it in place again. It was of no further use to him, as he was finished with the *salle-des-jeux*. But was he?

A thought had come into his mind — a thought at which his face grew pale.

Normally, no such thought would or could have come to him: but the Bounder of Greyfriars was not normal now.

As he stood with the towel in his hands, his heart beating hard, his eyes were on the jacket Coker had hung on the peg.

Coker had plenty of money! Plenty of money — plenty of money. The words seemed to hammer in his brain. Coker carried his wallet in his breast-pocket — it was in that jacket, hanging on the peg — he was fool enough to hang it there, and turn his back on it, splashing soap and water heedless of it. But the Bounder was not heedless of it. The fathead was asking for it. Any pickpocket among the constant stream of people in and out of the vestiaire could have gone through the pockets of that jacket, unnoticed and unheeded by its owner. Plenty of money — plenty of money! Smithy felt something like a trembling in his limbs. But his face was setting, his mind hardening. Coker had not noticed the fellow with his face in the basin — had not once glanced at



Smithy. No doubt he would notice him, if Smithy was still there when he finished splashing soap and water. At the moment, Coker could not see Smithy or anything else, with his rugged face in a lather. He was asking for it — begging for it —. Vernon-Smith put down the towel, and adjusted his collar and tie. He felt his hands shake as he did so: but his purpose was growing fixed. After all, why not — why not? Sophistry was ready, to blind him to what he was going to do. He needed cash in hand, to give his system a chance — he was going to win, and the money could be replaced. Somehow or other he would be able to get it back to Coker — perhaps even before he missed it! And if the worst happened, the very worst, if he lost the money, still he would and could repay it later — some time, somehow, at Greyfriars. It was only borrowing it — only borrowing it for a time!

Such miserable sophistry did not really deceive him: it would hardly have deceived Billy Bunter. But he shrank from realising what he was going to do, from realising what he would be if he did it. He was like a drowning man catching at a straw. For his mind was made up — he was going to do it. He was going to do it!

It was fatally easy! His own cap was on the next peg to Coker's: he had actually to touch Coker's hanging jacket, to get at his cap. Coker could not even see him, and did not know he was there at all: nobody else was interested in him. He pressed against the hanging jacket as he reached for his cap with one hand — the other hand slipping into a breast-pocket, and feeling there a fat wallet. In the fraction of a second that wallet was slipped into his own breast-pocket, and he was turning away from the pegs, calmly adjusting his cap, and giving his tie a final touch, before a mirror near at hand. He was calm, perfectly calm: though his head seemed to be burning, and his heart was beating in almost suffocating throbs.

Splash, splash, came from Coker! He lifted a wet face, and glanced round for a towel! An attendant, probably scenting a tip, hurried up with one, and Coker buried a wet face in it. Herbert Vernon-Smith did not linger — Coker had not seen him there, and was not going to see him there. Taking care to be casual in his movements, he lounged out of the vestiaire: and, once outside, walked quickly down the corridor. He had done it!

Suddenly he stopped, in the middle of the corridor. For a moment, his brain seemed to clear, and what he had done rushed into his mind with terrifying clearness, and for that moment, he felt quite sick. Three or four people, passing, glanced at him: he did not see them. For that moment, he stood with his brain in a whirl, only longing to undo what he had done: to escape at any cost becoming what he would be if he kept that wallet — a thief.

But it was only for a moment. Further along the corridor was a doorway, open into the *salle-des-jeux*. From that apartment, faint in the distance, but quite distinct, came a droning voice: "Faites vos jeux, messieurs!"

It was enough! Its effect on the Bounder was that of a spur on a flagging horse. His face set hard, his lips set in a snarl. He was going through with it. Whether he won or lost, whether he could repay later what he had taken or not, he did not care: he was going through with it. He did not, and could not, care for anything then but the green cloth, the yellow numbers, the spinning ball, the feverish excitement of tempting Fortune. He went on his way with a firm step, the last doubt and hesitation banished, and passed through the open doorway into the gaming-room.

His eyes went, as if drawn by magnetic attraction, towards the gaming-table. It was still surrounded as he had left it — punters seated and standing — the croupiers sitting with their rakes, the chef-de-partie on his high seat watching the table, the "changeur" with watchful eyes for anyone who desired more counters in return for cash:

individuals had come and gone but the intent crowd was the same. Vernon-Smith drew a deep, deep breath. For a long moment he stood staring at the crowded scene, drinking it in, as it were: and then he stepped towards the table. The merest gesture attracted the attention of the changeur, and the man came towards him bowing and smiling, and Vernon-Smith drew Coker's well-filled wallet from his inner pocket. Almost at the same moment, he felt a touch on his arm, and staring round impatiently, saw Tom Redwing.

## CHAPTER 30

### LE DERNIER COUP

"SMITHY!"

"Get out!"

"I've been looking for you, Smithy."

"Leave me alone," breathed the Bounder.

Tom had been looking for his chum, since he had left Harry Wharton and Co. on the terrace. He was anxious and uneasy.

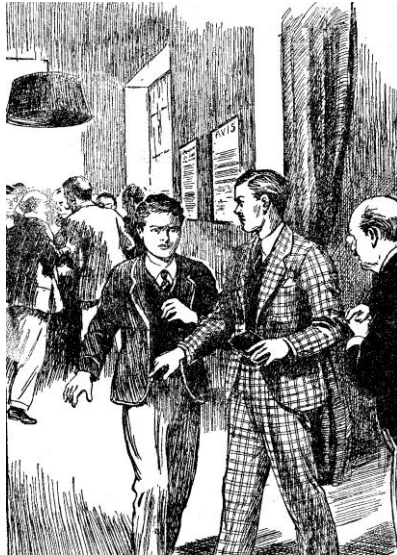
He saw nothing of Smithy in the foyer, or in the coffee-room: and at length he looked for him in the *salle-des-jeux*. Smithy had no more money, and could not play: but it was likely enough that he might stand watching the game in which he could no longer take a part, like so many hapless losers. He did not see Smithy among the crowds lining both sides of the long table: but as he walked along the spacious *salle*, looking about him, Vernon-Smith came in by a doorway from the corridor, under his eyes.

And Redwing joined him at once, glad and relieved to find him again.

But Smithy's look perplexed him. The Bounder was no longer looking dark, moody, bitter. His face was eager, his eyes glistening. And he had signed to the changeur, who was coming towards him. He had no money, and could not play — a few odd francs in his pockets might suffice for the tram fare back to Boulogne, but would not pay for a single one of the bone counters that were used in the game. What did he want with the changeur?

"Smithy —."

"Will you leave me alone?"



The changeur came up, smiling and bowing

“But — what’s the good, Smithy? You’ve got nothing left — what’s the good of hanging on here —?” Tom Redwing broke off, as he noticed the wallet in the Bounder’s hand. It was not Smithy’s own expensive Russian-leather wallet, which he knew well enough. It was quite another — a larger one: and it was one that Redwing had seen on the steamer that day, in the hand of Horace Coker. Even had he not recognized it, the initials H. J. C. stamped on it would have told the tale.

Tongue-tied, Redwing stared at it.

A dark, dull flush came over the Bounder’s face. Hurriedly he slipped the wallet back into his pocket — too late! Tom had seen it. Amazement was in Tom Redwing’s face, giving place to incredulous horror. Where had Smithy got hold of Coker’s wallet?

What was he going to do with it?

What he had been going to do with it was plain enough.

The changeur came up, smiling and bowing.

“Monsieur desire —?” he began.

“Smithy!” Redwing found his voice.

“Leave me alone, Tom Redwing!” The Bounder almost hissed the words, through his teeth.

“I can’t, Smithy! I can’t! For heaven’s sake come out of this! Smithy, old man, come —.”

“You fool! You fool! Get away. Leave me alone!”

The changeur looked from one to the other, shrugged his fat shoulders, and moved away. Even the Bounder hesitated to draw the wallet from his pocket again under Tom Redwing’s eyes, and the changeur left them to it. Apparently the young man with the moustache, in the pronounced tweeds, was disputing with his boyish companion: and the changeur shrugged and murmured “Ces Anglais” as he retired. Redwing touched the Bounder’s arm. Vernon-Smith struck his hand away with savage violence.

“You fool! Will you leave me alone?” His voice came thick with rage. “Get out of this — leave me alone. Do you want a row here?”

“Smithy, you’re mad,” breathed Redwing. “That’s Coker’s wallet — you know it as

well as I do — we both saw it on the steamer —.”

“Mind your own business.”

“How did you get hold of it —?”

“Find out!”

“Smithy! You’ve no money of your own! You’ve got to get out of this,” panted Redwing. “Does Coker know —?”

“Fool! Fool! I — I’ve borrowed this! Now shut up and leave me alone,” hissed the Bounder. “If you get in my way now, Tom Redwing, I’ll knock you spinning. Leave me alone.”

“I can’t, Smithy —.”

Herbert Vernon-Smith clenched his hands, his eyes burning. Tom was his friend, his loyal and his only friend: but he forgot that now. This unexpected check, at the very moment when he was about to plunge into the excitement of the game, maddened him. For the moment he was like a tiger balked of his prey. His look at his chum was one of black and bitter malevolence.

“You meddlin’ fool! Leave me alone! Go back to that pi gang — they want you — I don’t! Keep out of my business — keep out of my way! I tell you I’ll knock you spinning if you meddle now.”

From the green table, as if to draw the Bounder on, came the drone of the croupier: “Faites vos jeux, messieurs.”

The Bounder made a stride towards the table. Tom Redwing stood like a rock in his way. Vernon-Smith’s clenched fist was half-raised: he was going to be as good as his word: he was hardly sane at that moment. But Tom did not stir aside — he could not. It was another fellow’s money that the Bounder had in his pocket: it was another fellow’s money with which he was going to gamble, and which he was going to cast into the rapacious maw of the game after his own. Somehow, that careless fool Coker’s wallet had fallen into his hands — and he was going to use the money — sinking to the level of the wretched pickpocket on the steamer: lost to shame, lost indeed to sanity, in his mad eagerness to tempt Fortune once more. Redwing could not stand for it — even at the cost of a scene of violence, he had to stop him.

“Stand aside!” hissed the Bounder.

“Smithy —.”

The croupier’s drone went on: “Faites vos jeux. Le dernier coup, messieurs!”

Another moment, and the Bounder’s infuriated fist would have been lashing at his friend. But at that, he stopped, as if struck!

“Le dernier coup!”

It was the “dernier coup” — the last spin of the ball! The game was closing down! Smithy had forgotten that the *salle-des-jeux* was not permanently open for play at Le Chalet-aux-Bois. It was opened twice, for the afternoon session and the evening session. In his stress of mind, his feverish excitement, he had lost all count of time. But it was now six o’clock, and at “six heures” the afternoon session closed. It reopened after dinner, at “huit heures”, eight o’clock! Two hours! Two centuries! Smithy stood quite still. Even his rage passed, in his overwhelming disappointment and dismay.

Le dernier coup! If he had thought of rushing to the table for a single coup before the game shut down, it would have been in vain, for the croupier’s drone went on: “Rien ne va plus!”

Which was the warning that no more stakes could be placed on the table. The ball was spinning in the bowl for the last time: and as the Bounder stood rooted, the announcement of the winning number followed: “Le cinq!”

And the croupier's rakes were busy, taking in innumerable stakes on all sides: for "cinq" in la boule was equivalent to "zero" in roulette, and cleared off all stakes excepting those placed on cinq itself.

"Oh!" muttered the Bounder, quite blankly.

It was a crushing blow. To Redwing, it came as a relief. The game had closed down: already the crowd was breaking up, hurrying or lounging away to the café or the cocktail bar, or the

salle-a-manger for "le diner". The table, crowded a minute ago, was deserted: bored croupiers were packing up counters; the ball lay idle beside the bowl: the chef-de-partie yawning as he chatted with the changeur. Still the Bounder stood there, as if he could not tear himself away.

Redwing touched him lightly on the arm. Glad and relieved as he was that the wretched game had shut down, and that the Bounder had been saved, willy-nilly, from his mad folly, he could only feel pity for the almost haggard misery in Smithy's face. He spoke in a low voice: "Smithy, old man, let's get out of this."

His voice seemed to recall the Bounder to himself. He gave Redwing a bitter look, cast one glance at the deserted table, and swung on his heel, tramping back into the corridor from which he had entered the salle-des-jeux. Redwing hurried after him.

"Smithy —!" He caught his arm.

The Bounder wrenched it away, turning fiercely on him.

"Will you leave me alone?" His eyes blazed. "Do you think I'm finished? Do you think you can dictate to me, you fool? Go and join Wharton's gang — that pi crew are fit company for you. Keep away from me."

"Smithy, you can't go on with it —."

"Can't I?" The Bounder hissed out the words. "Well, I'm going on! I've got to wait — wait till eight o'clock! But I'm going on! Do you think you can stop me, you meddlin' fool? The minute they reopen the table, I shall be there — and if you dare meddle —."

"You can't, Smithy! We've got to get back to Boulogne in an hour, or we shall miss the boat. Have you forgotten the boat?"

"The boat?" Evidently the Bounder had utterly forgotten the *Flamingo* and that the Greyfriars party had to be on board before the excursion steamer pulled out of Boulogne Harbour.

"We can't lose the boat, Smithy —."

"You needn't lose it! Go back with Wharton's gang, and leave me alone. I shall do as I choose."

Tom looked at him almost helplessly. In his utter recklessness, the Bounder was prepared to lose the boat back: to remain behind when the rest of the party went: regardless, for the time at least, of the trouble to follow. Greyfriars, Quelch, the Head, were far from him now: and further still from his thoughts. He was going on his own wild way, caring nothing for the outcome. It was not a moment for the only friend he had to leave him alone!

The Bounder was turning savagely away, but Tom caught him by the arm again.

"Smithy —."

"Will you let me go, you fool? I've warned you —." breathed the Bounder.

"Smithy, you must listen! You can't go on with this — I can't let you! I know what you've done — it makes me sick to think of it — it will make you sick too when you're cool — Smithy, if you go to that table again, I'd rather drag you away with my own hands than let you play with stolen money —."

The Bounder started, as if a whip-lash had stung him. For a moment he stared at Redwing, startled, confounded by the word that described what he had done. Then, with a blaze of fury in his face, he struck out with his clenched fist, and Tom, as it crashed on his chest, reeled back, let go his hold, stumbled, and fell. He was on his feet again almost in a moment. But in that moment, the Bounder had darted through a doorway into the crowded foyer, and was gone.

## CHAPTER 31

### SMITHY ON HIS OWN

“I SAY, YOU fellows —.”

“Say on, old fat man!”

“Well, what about grub?” asked Billy Bunter.

Whereat the Famous Five smiled.

To that tremendous lunch at the Soleil d’Or in Boulogne, Billy Bunter had added uncounted sticky cakes at Le Chalet-aux-Bois. But apparently there was still available space within the fat Owl’s circumference for more. His fat thoughts were running, as usual, on provender.

The juniors had seen the tail-end, as Bob described it, of the variety show in the Chalet. It had shut down at six, with a second performance to follow in the evening, when the Chalet woke to life again, as it were, after dinner. There was still a numerous crowd about the place, most of them converging on the *salle-a-manger*. Billy Bunter was keen to join in the converging so to speak: but five members of the party had no idea of spending their short remaining time in France in watching Billy Bunter eat.

“Nothing to grin at,” said Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles.

“There’s a jolly good restaurant here — you can get as good a spread in the *sally-monje* here as we had at the Solid Door in Boulogne —.”

“And as big a bill?” asked Bob.

“Oh, really, Cherry! I hope you’re not going to be mean, when a fellow’s standing you a beanfeast —.”

“We are!” assured Bob, “Frightfully mean!”

“The meanfulness is going to be terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,” grinned Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

“You see,” explained Harry Wharton, “we just haven’t money enough left for you to stand us a tremendous supper, Bunter.”

“Oh, really, Wharton —.”

“Many thanks for the kind invitation, all the same,” said Frank Nugent. “But it wouldn’t run to it, old porpoise.”

“Oh, really, Nugent —.”

“Come on,” said Bob, “there’s a café at the tram terminus in Boulogne where we can get a spot before we go on the boat. But you won’t be able to feed the fishes going back as you did coming over, Bunter.”

“Beast!”

The juniors passed through the foyer, and went out on the terrace, Billy Bunter casting a longing, lingering blink behind, at the open doorway of the *salle-a-manger*, where innumerable waiters were hurrying to and fro, attending to the wants of numerous diners, to whose number the fat Owl would have been glad to add one more. On the terrace they came to a stop and looked about them. Billy Bunter was thinking of food:

but the Famous Five were thinking of Smithy and Redwing.

There was more than ample time to get back to Boulogne for the boat, and Wharton was rather anxious for the whole party to go together. Having found the two truants at Le Chalet, he did not want to lose them again.

“Better collect those two before we go, you fellows,” he said.

Bob Cherry grinned.

“Smithy didn’t look as if he wanted us to collect him, last we saw of him,” he remarked.

“Well, he can’t be at that rotten game now: it’s shut down till the evening,” said Harry.

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

“He couldn’t be at it anyway: he was cleared out, the silly ass! May be gone already — that was all he came here for.”

“Redwing wouldn’t go without a word to us, and he knew where to find us,” said Harry. “We can wait a bit, anyway: if they’re still inside, we shall see them as they come out, if we stay here.”

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Still want to feed the fishes, old fat man?”

“Beast! I mean, look here, old chap, if you’re going to wait for Smithy, let’s sit down at one of those tables, and I’ll call a garçon —.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Smithy, moustache and all!”

Herbert Vernon-Smith came out of the doorway on the terrace. He seemed to be in haste. He did not even notice the Greyfriars group, as he started crossing the terrace hurriedly towards the steps that led down to the lawn, and he would have been gone in another moment, had not Harry Wharton interposed.

“Hold on a minute, Smithy —.”

The Bounder stopped, impatiently. He gave the captain of the Remove a far from friendly look.

“What is it? What do you want? Don’t bother me now — I’m in a hurry —.”

“If you’re going back to Boulogne —.”

“Yes, yes! Get out of the way, will you?”

“No reason why we shouldn’t all go together, old chap,” said Bob Cherry, amicably.

“We’re only waiting now for you and Reddy —.”

“I don’t want your company.”

“Frightfully polite, and all that,” remarked Johnny Bull, with a grunt.

“The politeness of the esteemed Smithy is terrific,” murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh. “But the soft answer turns away the wrath of a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks.”

Vernon-Smith would have pushed roughly by, but Harry Wharton caught him by the arm and stopped him. Smithy gave him a savage look.

“I’ve told you I’m in a hurry,” he snarled. “Let me go, will you? You don’t want my company any more than I want yours.”

“What’s the hurry?” asked Bob.

“Find out.”

“You can keep to yourself, if you like, Smithy,” said Harry Wharton, quietly. “But where’s Redwing? You seem to have left him, and I know that he would like to go back with us. Where is he?”

“Look for him if you want him.”

“Does that mean you’ve rowed with Redwing, you disgruntled rotter?” growled Johnny Bull, contemptuously.

“Yes, if you want to know, it does,” snarled Vernon-Smith. “And now, will you let me pass, Harry Wharton, or do you want your face punched?”

The Bounder’s hand was savagely clenched, his eyes glittering. Harry Wharton released his arm.

“Cut as soon as you like,” he said. “Don’t forget that the *Flamingo* pulls out at seven.”

The Bounder gave a harsh laugh, and hurried on. The juniors stood looking after him in silence, as he cut down the steps and hurried through the gardens towards the woodland path that led to the gates and the tramway. He was going back to Boulogne by the tram, evidently, without Redwing, and without them. In that savage and hostile mood, they certainly did not want his company, and were not sorry to see the last of him.

“Nice chap to pal with on a holiday, what?” said Bob, with a grimace. “Bunter, old porpoise, you ought to be a bit more careful in selecting your beanfeasters.”

“Ungrateful cad,” said Bunter. “I jolly well know that Quelch had an eye on him, and he wouldn’t have got away on the trip if I hadn’t asked him to join up for my beanfeast. And then he let me down, you know. I should have been raking it in, thousands and thousands of francs —.”

“Kick him!”

“Beast!”

“We’d better wait for Redwing,” said Harry. “If that disgruntled ass has quarrelled with him, he will come back with us. He may come out any minute — there’s nothing for him to stay for.”

“I say, you fellows, we’d better look for him,” said Bunter. “No good standing about here. Let’s look for him in the sally-monjee. I expect he’s stopping for something to eat —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, what else could he be stopping for?” asked Bunter. “Let’s go and look for him in the sally-monjee.”

“We shouldn’t be able to screw you out again, old fat man, so long as they had any grub left,” chuckled Bob Cherry. “Stick here, old porpoise.”

Snort, from Bunter. Whether Tom Redwing was likely to be in the *salle-a-manger* or not, that apartment was very attractive to Billy Bunter. But there were no more feasts for the fat beanfeaster. The combined resources of the Famous Five would not have run to another such spread as that at the *Soleil d’Or*.

“Well, I’m jolly well not going to stand about,” grunted Bunter. He plumped down in a chair at one of the little tables on the terrace, “*Garçon! Garçon!*”

“Bunter’s the lad to make the money fly on a beanfeast,” remarked Bob. “He’s going to blow that two-pence.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Cherry! When a fellow’s standing fellows a splendid continental trip and a magnificent holiday, I think fellows might stand a fellow a cake or two! I really think that!”

“For goodness sake, stuff in something and shut up,” said Johnny Bull.

“Beast!”

A *garçon* brought sticky cakes, and Bunter munched and was happy once more. He was quite content to wait for Redwing, so long as the supply of cakes lasted. Harry Wharton and Co. stood in a group watching the entrance, where people came out from time to time. Two Fifth-form men of Greyfriars came along the terrace, looking about them. They stopped to speak to the juniors.



“Seen anything of Coker?” asked Potter.

“He must be about somewhere,” said Greene.

“Not since we gave him the jam,” answered Bob. “Perhaps he’s still washing it off.”

“Well, we’d better find him,” grunted Potter. “He’s ass enough to miss the boat back.”

“Blithering idiot enough,” agreed Greene.

And they moved off again, still looking for Coker. For some time Potter and Greene had not been at all anxious to find Coker. They seemed to find Le Chalet-aux-Bois a pleasanter spot with their great leader not in the offing. But it was time now for a spot of solid refreshment before taking the tram back to Boulogne, and once more Coker was a useful fellow to know. They drifted away, leaving Harry Wharton and Co. still waiting for Redwing, till at length Wharton, leaving the Co. on the terrace, went back into the building to look for him.

## CHAPTER 32

### THE LAST CHANCE

TOM REDWING stood in the foyer, by one of the doorways that opened into the gaming-room, watching the people as they came and went, his brow clouded, his heart heavy. He was feeling at a hopeless loss. The bitter words, even the angry blow, had made no difference: his loyal heart was steady to his erring friend and he was going to save him, if he could, from the pit he had dug for his own feet. But he had seen nothing of Smithy since that angry scene in the corridor, and he had looked for him in vain.

If Herbert Vernon-Smith was still at Le Chalet, the la boule table would draw him, like a magnet, when the game reopened. That was the Boucher’s intention, and that was what Redwing was determined to prevent at all costs. To throw away his own money on the green baize was folly:

but what he now contemplated was crime: it was not his own money that he was going to fling recklessly away. When he was cool again, when this fit of madness had passed, he would be utterly sick at what he had done: overwhelmed with shame. But until that time came, Redwing had to care for the fellow who could not care for himself: he had to save him, even at the cost of his bitterest enmity — even at the cost, if need were, of a wild scene in the salle-des-jeux, which could only result in both of them being “chucked out” together! Even so he would not hesitate if it came to that.

But as he stood there, at the doorway of the deserted salle-des-jeux, it came into his mind that Smithy, knowing what to expect if he carried on at Le Chalet, might have gone. If that was so, the game was up.

It was likely, indeed more than likely, now that he thought of it. He had looked almost everywhere for Smithy, failed to find him. If Smithy had left Le Chalet, where was he?

Perhaps, in those very moments, speeding back to Boulogne on the tram, while Tom watched and waited for him here. There was the big casino at Boulogne-sur-Mer — and even if Smithy did not care to venture into so public a spot, there were other such places, many of them. As he thought of it, Tom felt something like despair in his heart. To wait and watch, for the fellow who might be gone — or to hurry away, perhaps leaving him behind — it was a hopeless problem.

He noticed a burly form among the people moving to and fro in the foyer: Coker of the Fifth, looking about him as if in search of somebody or something. Redwing felt a

shiver, as he saw him. It was Coker's wallet that was in Smithy's pocket, crammed with money. How he had obtained it Tom could not guess: but there was no doubt about the fact. If Coker knew —.

If Coker knew, it was the end of all things for Herbert Vernon-Smith at Greyfriars School. Did he know?

Coker, catching sight of the junior, came striding towards him. Redwing's heart was like lead. If Coker knew —.

"Here, young Redwing!" grunted Coker, gruffly. "Seen Potter? Seen Greene? Horace Coker, in fact, was looking for his friends-while they, elsewhere were looking for him! He wanted to know if Redwing had seen them: but Coker had little civility to waste on a Remove junior. His brow was frowning, and his voice was gruff. But Coker's question, deplorable as his manners were, came as a relief to Redwing.

Evidently, Smithy was not in his mind. He did not know!

"Deaf?" snapped Coker, as Tom did not immediately answer. "Have you seen Potter, you young ass? Have you seen Greene, you young nincompoop? What?"

"Oh! No!" stammered Tom.

"The silly asses!" growled Coker. "I've warned them again and again, about getting lost — now they go and get lost, the minute my eye's off them. There's still time for a spot of grub before we go back if the silly fatheads hadn't gone and got lost! Pah! They'll lose the boat back, I shouldn't wonder. Pah!"

Tom could only stare. It came into his mind that Coker could not have missed his wallet yet. Certainly Coker did not look like a fellow who had lost his supply of cash. Obviously he was not bothering about that — he was only bothering about Potter and Greene. So far from knowing, or suspecting, what Smithy had done, Coker did not even know yet that his wallet was gone! Redwing stared at him blandly.

"Sure you haven't seen anything of them?" yapped Coker, with a glare at Redwing. "What?"

"No, I've seen nothing of them," answered Tom. "Hold on a minute, Coker — I — I've lost Vernon-Smith-have you seen him?"

"Eh? No! Think I should be likely to notice a fag, even if he was around?" grunted Coker. "Bother Vernon-Smith and bother you! I wonder where those silly asses are!" Coker went on his way, still looking for Potter and Greene, Tom staring after him as he went.

Then he resumed watching the passing faces. But he had little hope now of seeing Vernon-Smith. It was borne in upon his mind, more and more, that the Bounder was gone. Yet he could not be sure. He was at a hopeless loss, and did not know what to do.

"Oh, here you are, Reddy."

It was Harry Wharton's voice. Redwing started, and felt a beating at his heart, as the captain of the Remove came towards him, and he felt a flush rising into his cheeks. But Wharton, of course, could know nothing: only Redwing knew of his friend's guilt and shame.

"Looking for you, old fellow," said Harry. "Time we got back to Boulogne — we don't want to miss the boat, and get home with the milk in the morning, you know! If you're waiting here for Smithy —."

"Oh! Yes! I — I —."

"Well, he's gone already," said Harry. "He passed us twenty minutes ago, on the terrace, heading for the tram."

"Oh!" gasped Redwing. He had felt almost sure of it. Now he knew. But he knew too

late. If Smithy had been heading for the tram twenty minutes ago, he was well on his way now, and there was no possibility of overtaking him. He had to be left to his own wild courses.

“He — he’s gone!” repeated Redwing. “Oh!” The flush died out of his face, and he became so pale, that Wharton looked at him startled.

“What’s the trouble, old man?” he asked, in a low voice. “I know you’ve had a spot of a row with Smithy — he let out as much, when I spoke to him on the terrace. But — you know Smithy: he’ll be all right when he comes out of his tantrums. We’ll find him at the boat —.”

Redwing gave him an almost ghastly look. Smithy, he knew, was not heading for the boat. He was heading for a casino and a green table, where, out of the reach of his chum’s intervention, he could carry on with his mad scheme of “skinning the tiger”; gambling with money that was not his own. And there was no stopping him now. He had gone to his ruin, and his chum could not save him.

Wharton slipped his arm through Redwing’s. He was puzzled by the almost haggard look on his face: a “row” with Smithy could hardly account for it. Something was wrong — something more than a row between a hot-headed, wilful fellow and his patient friend. What it was, Harry could not guess: but he knew where the blame lay, and at that moment he would willingly have punched the Bounder’s head, hard.

“Come on, old scout,” he said. “No good staying here any longer, is it?”

“No! Let’s get out,” muttered Redwing.

They went out on the terrace, to where the Co. were waiting: greeted by a rhythmical sound of munching, from Billy Bunter still busy with sticky cakes. The fat Owl did not waste a blink on Redwing: but Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh, all looked curiously at his pale and harassed face.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here we are again!” said Bob. “Time to tussle for the tram, Reddy — Smithy’s gone ahead.”

“Yes, I — I know! But —.”

“Better get a move on,” said Johnny Bull, as Redwing stood irresolute. “It’s a bit of a run back to Boulogne, you know, and the *Flamingo* pulls out at seven.”

“I know!” muttered Redwing.

Still he made no move. He was trying to think — what he could do, whether there was anything that he could do. These fellows would help him, if they could — but he could not tell them what was at stake. Not a word of what Smithy had done could pass his lips. And how could they help him? Smithy was gone — it was too late.

“Look here, Redwing,” said Harry Wharton, very quietly. “We can all see that something’s wrong — what is it? Smithy’s all right. We all know he has been playing the fool here, and has lost his money — but nobody’s going to give him away at Greyfriars — so what’s the trouble?”

“I — I’ve got to get to him,” muttered Redwing. “And — and it’s too late! If I could get after him, in time —.”

“We shall find him at the boat,” said Nugent.

Redwing did not answer that, but the look on his face made the juniors exchange startled glances. Wharton’s lips set hard. He was responsible for the Greyfriars party, and he had tolerated a great deal from Vernon-Smith that day. But there was a limit.

“Look here, Redwing! Isn’t Smithy going to the boat?” he exclaimed. “Is that what you mean?”

Redwing nodded. He could tell them that much, at least, though he could not tell them the rest.

“Oh, scissors!” breathed Bob Cherry.

“But — but he must catch the boat!” exclaimed Nugent, blankly. “There’ll be a fearful row if he doesn’t come back with us — he will be up before the Head — why, it will all come out —. It will be the sack for him —.”

Redwing could have groaned. It would be the “sack”, and worse than the sack, for Smithy, if he carried on. But how was he to be stopped —?

“Can you fellows think of anything?” he breathed. “Smithy’s not so much to blame as you think — he’s just wild and excited — but — but if he goes on — Oh! Is there any way —?”

“He’s half-way to Boulogne by this time,” said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. “We shan’t see him again if he doesn’t want us to.”

Harry Wharton’s eyes glinted.

“We’re going to see him again,” he said. “Smithy’s not going to play this mad trick. Smithy’s coming on the boat with us, if we have to carry him —.”

“But how —?”

“We can get a car here, if we can pay for it,” said Harry. “Scrape up all the cash you’ve got — let’s see.”

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Oh, shut up, Bunter.”

“Oh, really, Wharton! Nice way to talk to a fellow who’s standing you a beanfeast!” said Bunter, scornfully. “Will you listen to a chap? Look here, if we’re having a car back to Boulogne, there’s lots of time for a spot of dinner in the sally-monje ———”

“Will you dry up, you fat ass? How much have you fellows got?” asked Harry. “We can cut out everything else — all right so long as we get to the boat — with that fool Smithy in tow —.”

“I — I’ve got nothing —!” stammered Redwing.

“We’d guessed that one,” said Johnny Bull, drily.

“Well, we’ve all got something left, even after Bunter stood treat at the Soleil d’Or,” said Bob. “Lucky we didn’t let him stand us anything else!”

“Oh, really, Cherry.”

There was a hasty pooling of resources. The total proved to be four thousand francs, or a little over four pounds.

“That will see us through,” said Harry. “We can get a car here for that, or less.”

“I say, you fellows —.”

“Will you pack it up, Bunter?”

“No, I won’t!” hooted the fat Owl, indignantly. “You jolly well know that I’ve only got twopence left, and if you blow all you’ve got on a car, how are we going to get anything to eat before we go on the boat?”

“That’s an easy one, old fat man,” answered Bob. “We’re not!”

“Beast!”

Unheeding the fat Owl, Harry Wharton hurried away. There were any number of cars for hire at Le Chalet, for persons able to afford the by no means moderate charges for the same. The chums of the Remove were not exactly able to afford it: but they had enough, and that was all that mattered. In three minutes, a car was ready, and the party packed into it — Billy Bunter thoughtfully snatching the last sticky cake from the dish to devour en route.

“Allez vite!” said Harry to the chauffeur.

“Oui, monsieur.”

It was hardly necessary to tell the driver to go quickly. French drivers went quickly by a sort of law of nature. The car whizzed away, turned out at the gates with half-an-

inch to spare, and rocketed along the dusty, bumpy road as if the driver fancied he was competing for the Grand Prix. It passed tram after tram on the road: and suddenly, in a tram still half-a-mile short of Boulogne, the juniors glimpsed a face they knew.

“Smithy!” breathed Redwing.

The Bounder did not notice the passing car, among dozens of others: his eyes were fixed on a paper spread on his knee: a paper with a list of numbers on it. And it was only for a second that they saw him: the car shot past, racing on to Boulogne ahead of the slow-moving tram. But they knew, now, that they were ahead of him: and Redwing’s heart was lighter. What the Bounder’s fury would be like, he knew only too well: for that, he cared nothing. Even at the eleventh hour, he was going to save him from himself, and that was all he cared about. His face brightened, as the car rocketed dizzily on.

## CHAPTER 33

### AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stepped from the tram at the terminus at Boulogne-sur-Mer. There was the usual crowd there: and he did not, for the moment, notice familiar faces among so many. He was not thinking of Tom Redwing — left behind at Le Chalet: still less of Harry Wharton and Co. He was thinking only of his fixed determination: to carry on as he chose, free from interference: to push his fortune at the green table, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. If doubt, or remorse, or shame, had assailed him, he had banished them: and the dire consequence of failing to return to Greyfriars at the appointed time weighed nothing with him. Nothing mattered but the mirage that danced before his eyes and lured him on to ruin: all his keenness and sagacity, even common sense, seemed to have deserted him: he was more like a fellow in a wild dream than one awake. All was clear now, and he was going on —. Or was he?

“Smithy!”

He almost bounded, at that unexpected voice. He had left Tom Redwing at Le Chalet: yet here he was, waiting for him at the tram terminus at Boulogne! And he was not alone. Five other fellows were with him: and behind them, was the grinning fat face of Billy Bunter.

For a moment, the Bounder stared blankly. Then his eyes blazed.

“You again!” he breathed. “You fool — you meddlin’ fool! How did you get here? Not that I care! Get away.”

“It’s time to get on the boat, Smithy,” said Redwing, almost beseechingly. “We’re all here — come with us now, Smithy —.”

“Fool!”

“You must — you must, Smithy! I tell you —.” Without replying, the Bounder shoved him roughly

aside. But the next moment, both his arms were pinioned. He glared in fury at Harry Wharton on one side and Bob Cherry on the other and wrenched madly at his arms. But they had him fast, and held him fast. Redwing stood back: but there were three other fellows ready to lend a hand if needed.

It was not needed. The Bounder was securely held, panting with rage. He wrenched and wrenched in vain.

“Will you let me go?” His voice came in a hiss.

“What do you mean? Have you gone mad? Let me go, will you?”

“No!” said Harry Wharton, quietly. “You’re coming with us to the boat, Smithy.”

“I’m not —.”

“You are!” said Bob. “Don’t play the goat, Smithy, and make a scene here. You’ve got a dozen Froggies staring at you already.”

“Let me go!” The Bounder wrenched again. “What do you mean? Do you fancy you can dictate to me what I shall do?”

“Just that!” said the captain of the Remove, in the same quiet tone. “Do you deny that you intended to miss the boat back, Vernon-Smith?”

“I shall do as I like,” hissed the Bounder.

“You won’t! Quelch put me in charge of this party, and every man in it is going back on the steamer — you with the rest. Will you come?”

“No!” hissed the Bounder.

“You can come quietly, or you can kick,” said Harry, with cool determination.

“Kicking won’t help you. If you want to be carried on the boat like a screaming kid, you can have your way: but you’re going on the boat.”

“You rotter — you fool — you meddlin’ puppy —.”

“You can pack that up! Get him along,” said the captain of the Remove.

“Come on, Smithy,” urged Bob. “You’ve simply got to go on the boat, you know. We can’t leave you here.”

“Will you mind your own business? I shall do as I like! Let go my arms.”

“Come on,” said Harry.

The Bounder resisted desperately. But the grip on his arms was like iron, and he had no chance of getting loose. A crowd of people were staring at the scene, whispering and ejaculating, some of them grinning. The Bounder did not even see them. He was almost foaming with rage. At the last moment, all his plans were knocked to pieces — he had never dreamed of this, and it had come like a bolt from the blue. He struggled.

“Redwing! Lend me a hand,” he panted, desperately.

“You’ve got to come, Smithy!”

“Oh, you rotter!” The Bounder gave him a look of hate. “You’ve done this — you’ve told them —.”

“I’ve told them you meant to miss the boat. It was the only way of stopping you. Nothing else,” muttered Tom.

“Tell them the rest, if you like! I won’t go! Do you hear? I won’t go! Let me go, or I’ll shout for help.”

“Shout as much as you like,” said Harry. “If we have to explain to a gendarme you’ll be pushed on the boat fast enough. You’re coming, anyway. You chose to come with this party, and you’re going back with this party. When you’re safe on the boat, we’re done with you — and shall be jolly glad to have done with you. But you’re going on the boat.”

“Better come quietly, Smithy,” urged Nugent.

“The betterfulness is terrific, my esteemed blackguardly Smithy!” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, persuasively. “What cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.”

“Get him along, for goodness sake,” growled Johnny Bull. “We shall have half Boulogne round us at this rate. Boot him if he won’t come.”

The Bounder made a final furious struggle. The moustache brushed off his face and was trodden underfoot. But his resistance availed nothing. He could not loosen the grip on his arms, and he was walked away between Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, with the other fellows round them, Billy Bunter rolling, grinning in the rear, and a

crowd staring after the party. And then, as it was clear that if he did not walk he would be carried, the Bounder at length gave in, and with a pale and furious face, walked quietly.

Once, as they came out on the quay, he made one tremendous effort. But the grip on him did not relax. Breathless, exhausted, panting, desperate, he was walked across the gangway to the deck of the *Flamingo*.

“Will you let me go now?” he breathed.

“Not till she pulls out,” answered Harry. “We can’t trust you, Vernon-Smith.”

“Oh, you rotter!”

“Blow off steam as much as you like, old scout,” said Bob Cherry, affably. “You’ll be glad tomorrow that you came home with us.”

“The gladfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Smithy.”

“Oh, shut up!” snarled the Bounder.

The Greyfriars fellows stood in a group by the rail, Wharton and Bob still linking arms with the Bounder. If he had thought — as probably he did — of a desperate spring back to the quayside at the last moment, there was nothing in it. He had, as Wharton had said, chosen to come with the party: and he was going back with them: and there was no help. Had Wharton known what Redwing could have told him, he would have been even more determined: as it was, he was quite resolved that he would not report to Mr. Quelch that one of the party trusted to his care had been left behind in a foreign country. As the Bounder would not yield to reason, he had to submit to force: and that was that: and the captain of the *Remove* was quite indifferent to his black and bitter looks.

Passengers were coming back on the *Flamingo*: crowding along the deck, looking for deck-chairs, chatting, jostling, most of them in cheery mood after their day in la belle France. It was close on seven, and the *Flamingo* was preparing to pull out. The gangway was on the point of being pulled in, when three belated figures came sprinting across the quay.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

“Coker!” grinned Johnny Bull. “Jolly nearly missed it!”

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave a violent start. His eyes fixed on Coker, charging across the quay with Potter and Greene at his heels and a burning wave of crimson came over his face. It was as if the sight of Coker recalled, or rather made him realise, what he had done, and what he had become. He looked round quickly at Redwing, and met his eyes — and his own fell. The flush died out of his face, leaving him quite pale. From that moment the Bounder stood very still: and, if the juniors had known it, it was no longer necessary to hold him.



Three belated figures came sprinting across the quay

Bob, with one arm still linked in Smithy's, waved his cap, with his free hand, to Coker, in encouragement.

"Put it on, Coker!" he roared. "Buck up, Horace, old man! Look lively!"

Coker panted on. Potter and Greene panted on. They reached the gangway, and panted across it. They were the last: the gangway was drawn in. Coker and Co. had just made it!

"You asses!" Coker's voice reached the ears of the juniors, and most other ears on the *Flamingo*. "You jolly nearly missed it! Getting lost, and giving a chap a hunt for you all over the shop —. Did I warn you not to get lost, or didn't I? Did I warn you a dozen times over, or didn't I? What? We could have had a spot of grub before we left, if you fellows hadn't got lost! Just because my eye wasn't on you for just a minute, you go and get lost, like a couple of silly fags! Lucky I found you at all —."

"You didn't find us," hooted Potter. "We found you —."

"Don't argue, Potter —."

"We found you, mooning about like a lost sheep!" hooted Greene.

"Don't jaw, Greene."

"Look here, Coker —."

"Shut up, the pair of you," said Coker. "I've had trouble enough with you, hunting for you all over the shop, because you go and get lost, and I don't want any jaw from you. You can't get lost on this steamer, that's one comfort. Don't get lost when we get ashore," added Coker, sarcastically. "I daresay you'd lose yourselves between Pegg and Greyfriars, if you could."

The *Flamingo* was in motion: the water widening between the steamer and the quay. Boulogne shimmered astern in the westering sun. The chops of the Channel were ahead: and it was just as well for Billy Bunter, perhaps, that he had not added a gargantuan feed at Le Chalet to the tremendous spread at Le Soleil d'Or. Probably he would have been in danger of losing both. Herbert Vernon-Smith, no longer held, stood looking back at Boulogne, and the shining casino as it slowly faded from sight, a strange expression on his face.

The Co. more than half-expected an outbreak of savage temper. But the Bounder seemed to be in a subdued mood. On the steamer, drawing further and further away from the French shore, he was free to do as he liked: they were done with him now.



He moved away from the party, at last, without a word, and disappeared among the crowd of passengers. It was an hour before they saw him again.

## CHAPTER 34

### ALL 'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

“COKER!”

“That will do.”

“But —!”

“I said that will do!” said Coker, his voice rising. “Cut off, young Smith, if you don’t want your cheeky head smacked.”

Coker, Potter, and Greene were seated in deck-chairs, in a more or less happy row of three, Coker in the middle. Coker was talking, which was his usual state: and he did not want to be interrupted, especially by a Remove fag. Potter and Greene were listening, because there was no help for it. Once, before the white cliffs of England came in sight, they had “lost” Coker in the crowd on deck: but Coker had rounded them up again, and now they were under his eye, more or less resigned to their fate. Coker was explaining to them just what asses they were, when Herbert Vernon-Smith came lounging along, his hands in his trousers pockets, a faint grin on the face that, an hour ago, had been so dark and bitter.

He stopped to speak to Coker, who waved him away like a troublesome blue-bottle. Coker was as particular as ever that “people” shouldn’t take him for a mere schoolboy, a member of a mob of schoolboys on a holiday. He frowned at Smithy, very much inclined to follow up the wave of his hand with a smack at the Bounder’s head.

At a little distance, Harry Wharton and Co. leaning in a cheery row on the rail, glanced across at them. There were exceedingly “strained relations” between them and the Bounder: but they were quite prepared to collar Coker and bump him on deck, if Smithy needed aid.

Vernon-Smith, declining to be waved away like a bluebottle, came to a halt directly in front of Coker. Apparently he had something to say to him, and intended to say it.

“Will you let me speak?” he rapped.

“No!” retorted Coker. “I won’t! I’ve warned you fags to keep your distance, and if you jolly well don’t —.”

“You silly ass —!”

“What?” Coker gathered up his long legs, preparatory to rising from the deck-chair.

“That does it!

I —.”

“For goodness sake, Coker, don’t kick up another shindy here!” exclaimed Potter.

“Keep quiet, for goodness sake.” urged Greene.

Coker looked at them. Potter and Greene seemed to be losing patience a little with their great leader. Perhaps a whole day of Coker had been too much for them: as indeed they had feared when they were making their plans for Founder’s Day. And on the steamer they couldn’t lose Coker as they had at Le Chalet.

“Wha-a-t?” ejaculated Coker.

Snapped at on one side by Potter, and on the other side by Greene, Coker stared from one to the other, and from the other to the one. Something like an explosion seemed imminent: but Coker’s attention was drawn to the Bounder again, as Smithy went on.

“Have you lost something, Coker?”

“Lost something!” repeated Coker. “No! What do you mean?”

“Got your wallet safe?”

“My wallet! Of course.”

“Well, if you’re sure of that —.”

“Of course I’m sure of it, you cheeky young ass! What are you driving at?” snapped Coker. “Think I should lose my wallet, with all my money in it, except the change in my trousers’ pocket.”

“You jolly nearly lost it getting off the steamer to-day,” said Potter.

“If young Wharton hadn’t — !” began Greene.

“You fellows needn’t jaw,” said Coker. “You’re like a sheep’s head — all jaw. My wallet’s safe enough in my inside pocket.”

“Better make sure,” said Potter.

“I am sure,” answered Coker.

“Well, if you’ve lost it again —,” said Greene.

“I haven’t lost it,” said Coker.

Five fellows, at the rail, smiled at one another. Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle. Smithy, as he stood in front of Coker, had his hand behind him, and his back was to the juniors. They could see that he had something in his hand: and it looked to them like a fat wallet.

“Oh, gum,” murmured Bob Cherry. “Has that fathead lost his wallet again, and has Smithy got it back for him this time?”

“Looks like it,” said Harry Wharton, laughing.

Tom Redwing’s eyes were intently on the Bounder. He was not smiling, like the other fellows. But he was very intent.

“Quite sure you haven’t lost it, Coker?” asked the Bounder, blandly.

“Yes!” snapped Coker.

“Won’t you feel in your pocket and make sure?”

“No, I won’t — and I don’t want any more cheek from you, young Smithy! I give you one second to clear off before I smack your head.”

“O.K.,” drawled the Bounder.

He brought his hand round from behind him and displayed, to Coker’s startled and astonished eyes, a well-filled wallet, with the initials H. J. C. stamped on the leather. Coker stared at it. He blinked at it. He goggled at it. Then his hand shot into an empty pocket to grope there. Then he goggled at the wallet again.

“Oh!” he gasped.

Potter and Greene exchanged a grin. Coker seemed dumbfounded: but his friends were not surprised. Coker was the fellow to have his pocket picked a dozen times over, or to drop his wallet anywhere about the steamer, in the opinion of his pals.

“Oh!” repeated Coker, blankly.

“As you’re sure you haven’t lost your wallet, this can’t be yours, Coker,” drawled Smithy. “Anybody know whose it is?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh!” said Coker, for the third time, “It — it — it’s mine! There’s my initials on it — besides, I know it — it — it — it’s my — my wallet —.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” from the Famous Five.

“He. he, he!” from Billy Bunter.

“Yours?” asked the Bounder, laughing.

“Yes, you young ass, you jolly well know it is! Hand it over,” snapped Coker.

“Catch!” said Smithy.

He did not hand it over — he tossed it over! Coker’s large hand was a little too late to

catch it. However, he caught it — with his nose! There was quite a bang as it landed there.

“Ooooh!” gasped Coker.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Herbert Vernon-Smith walked away, laughing. Horace Coker grabbed the wallet with one hand, and rubbed his nose with the other. He half-rose — but sat down again. Up to that moment he had not missed his wallet: but no doubt he was glad to have it restored to him: and even Coker of the Fifth realised that smacking Smithy’s head was not a suitable reward for the finder! With unusual self-restraint, Coker allowed the Bounder to walk away laughing with his head un-smacked.

Harry Wharton and Co. were laughing too, and Billy Bunter grinning all over his fat face. The Bounder did not glance at them, or seem to see them at all. But as he lounged away forward by himself, Tom Redwing quietly left the cheery group and followed him.

Smithy was not laughing, as he leaned on the rail, at a distance from the Greyfriars party, and stared at the white cliffs that rose nearer and clearer in the blaze of the setting sun. A dark and moody look had settled on his face, that told of the bitterness within. He had undone, as far as he could, what he had done: but now that the feverish excitement had passed, now that he was cool, and what he had done came clearly home to his mind, he was sunk into shame and misery that words could not have told. He was staring gloomily, moodily, unseeingly, at the white cliffs, when he felt a touch on his shoulder, and looked round at Tom Redwing.

He looked at him in silence.

“Smithy, old man —!” muttered Tom.

“Smithy, old man!” mimicked the Bounder. “Still „Smithy old man“ — after what I’ve done — after what you know I’ve done —.”

“You must have been crackers when you did it, Smithy — you weren’t yourself,” said Tom. “It’s washed out now, and no harm done. Smithy, old man, you’re glad now that we stopped you —.”

The Bounder gave a shiver.

“If you hadn’t —!” he muttered. “Tom, old chap, you’re still sticking to me — after — after — you’re fool enough to stick to a rotter —.”

“Quite — if I’m a fool to remember that we’re pals, and that a fellow never had a better pal,” said Tom. “Come back to the other fellows, Smithy — it’s all over now.”

“Wait a minute.”

The Bounder drew a paper from his pocket, with a list of numbers on it: a paper that his chum knew only too well. Quietly, he tore it across and across, and tossed the fragments over the rail into the sea.

“That’s that!” he said.

And Tom Redwing’s face was bright, as he linked arms with the Bounder, and walked him back to the Greyfriars party. Harry Wharton and Co. eyed him rather curiously as he came up. But the Bounder was his old self again now, in seeming at least: whatever his feelings were, they could not be read in his cool and careless face. He gave the chums of the Remove a cheery nod.

“Thanks,” he said.

“What?”

“Jolly decent of you to see that I didn’t miss the boat,” drawled the Bounder. “I should have landed into a terrific row with Quelch, if I had. Thanks.”

Which was quite a surprise: but a very pleasant one. It was a cheery party that landed, at last, at the quay at Pegg, and rolled home to Greyfriars in the summer sunset: and a

happy ending to Billy Bunter's Beanfeast!