

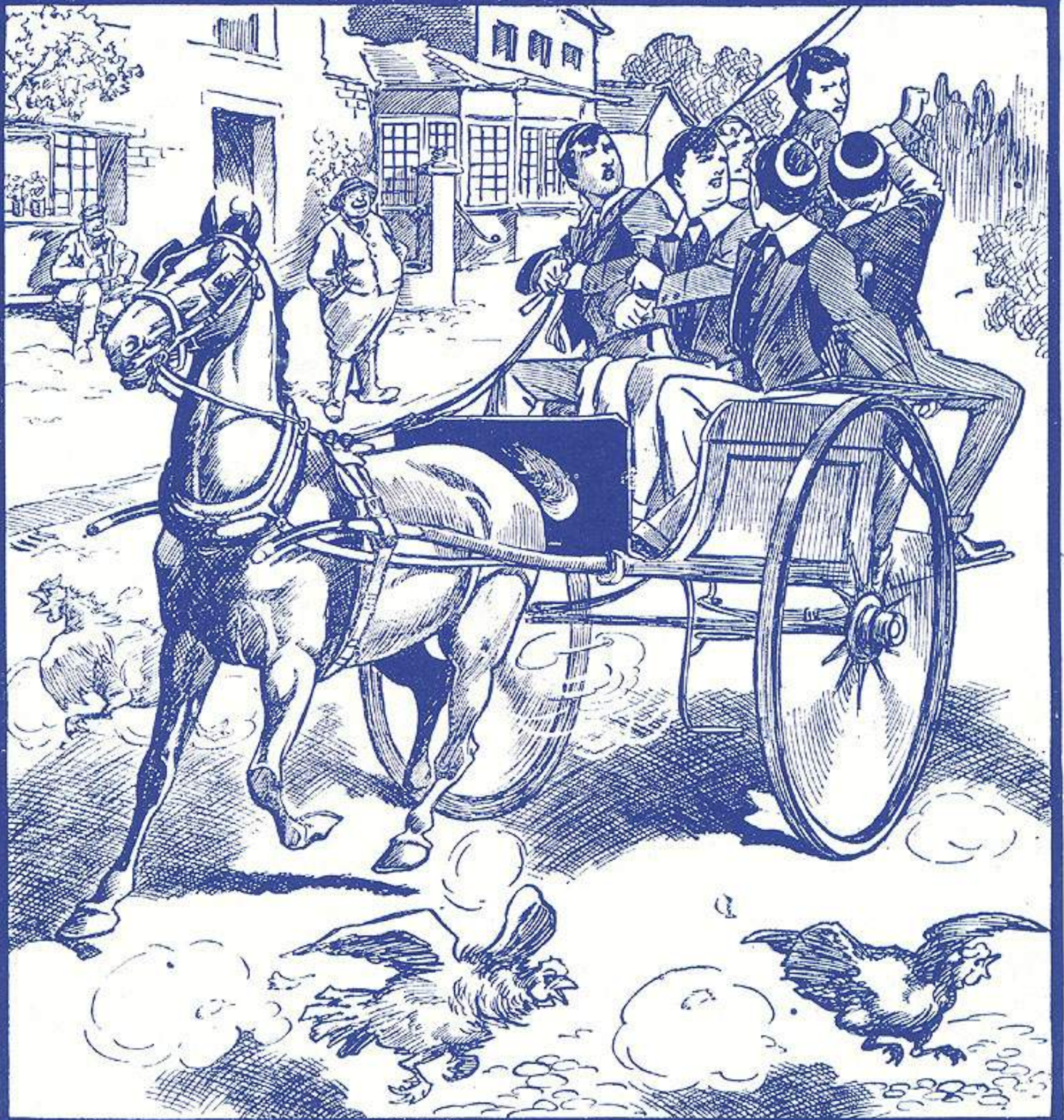
# A LESSON FOR SKINNER!

A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.



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## BEING KIND TO THE BOUNDER!

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# A LESSON FOR SKINNER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of  
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Under Suspicion!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here's old Wingate!"

"Looks like trouble for somebody. I can see!" remarked Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton & Co. were chatting in the Remove passage near the head of the staircase when Bob Cherry spotted Wingate of the Sixth coming upstairs.

Wingate came up two steps at a time, and his brow looked very grim.

The Famous Five of the Remove eyed him curiously.

Unless George Wingate's looks belied him, there was trouble for somebody—evidently somebody in the Remove quarters.

"Is it little us?" murmured Bob Cherry reflectively. "Any of you fellows done that which you oughtn't to have done, or left undone that which you ought to have done?"

"Well, I've left my lines undone," grinned Nugent. "But they're for Quelch, not Wingate."

"I knocked Coker's hat off in the quad," observed Johnny Bull. "But Wingate wouldn't mind that."

"I've punched Temple's nose," remarked Harry Wharton. "But Wingate can't be bothering about Temple's nose."

"Can't be because I was sliding down the banisters" said Bob thoughtfully. "I did land on Coker minor; but Coker minor's nobody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you sinned any sins, Inky?"

Horree Janset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Blaupur, grinned, and shook his head.

"My esteemed conscience is quite clear," he replied. "The sinfulness of my honourable self is not terrific."

"Then we're all right," said Bob. "We can give Wingate a hearty welcome. It's an honour for the captain of the school to look in at our humble quarters."

Wingate of the Sixth had reached the landing by this time, and the Famous Five, feeling that it could not be any sins of theirs that had brought the captain of Greyfriars to the Remove passage, were prepared to give him a welcome.

Bob Cherry made a graceful bow.

"Hail!" he said.

Wingate stopped, and stared at him.

"What?" he ejaculated.

"All hail!"

"You cheeky young ass!" growled Wingate.

"Altera! So good of you to look in at our quarters," said Bob Cherry affably. "Are you looking for recruits for the First Eleven, Wingate? If so, here are five—five of the very best!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. heartily.

The captain of Greyfriars made a

movement towards the humorous Bob, and Bob prudently retreated.

"Is Vernon-Smith here?" Wingate asked abruptly.

"Smithy? In his study, I think," said Wharton.

"Right!"

"I'll tell him you're coming, Wingate," said Bob Cherry. And he ran up the passage.

"You needn't trouble!" called out Wingate, hurrying after him.

But Bob Cherry seemed deaf for once. He ran on to Vernon-Smith's study, and threw the door open. As a matter of fact, it was as likely as not that the Bounder of Greyfriars was smoking in his study, and Bob Cherry, though emphatically down on such practices, felt that it would only be good-natured to give the black sheep of the Remove the tip that a prefect was coming.

Fortunately, there was no atmosphere of smoke in the study. Herbert Vernon-Smith was changing his necktie before the glass, and Skinner, his study-mate, was scribbling at the table. The two juniors were elaborately ignoring one another's presence in the study, being on the worst of terms personally.

The Bounder looked round from the glass as Bob burst in.

"Hallo! Don't they knock at a door in the place you come from?" he asked coolly.

"Wingate's coming here."

"Oh! Let him come!"

"Well, I thought— Yaroooooh!" roared Bob Cherry, as a finger and thumb gripped his ear and spun him round.

Wingate was close behind him.

"Yow! Leggo!" roared Bob indignantly. "That's my ear, Wingate!"

The Sixth-Former did not let go. He led the junior into the passage by his ear, and released him there.

"Cut!" he said.

"Anything to oblige!" said Bob, rubbing his crimson ear. "I can't say you're very pleasant company at present, Wingate. If you weren't a pal I'd jolly well bill you!"

And Bob Cherry scudded off just in time to save his other ear.

Wingate turned back into the study.

Skinner had risen, pen in hand. The Bounder was standing before the glass, trying on his necktie again.

"Vernon-Smith!" rapped out Wingate.

"Hallo!"

Wingate eyed the junior sharply, frowning the while. Vernon-Smith was perfectly cool. A surprise visit to his study did not disturb the nerve of the Bounder, though he had more secrets to keep than any other fellow in the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

"I've come here to ask you some questions," said Wingate.

"Fire away!"

"Have you any smokes about you?"

The Bounder raised his eyebrows.

"Smokes?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"You shock me with that question, Wingate!" said the Bounder, with great gravity. "Do I look like a fellow who would have smokes about him?"

"Don't give me any of your cheek!" snapped the prefect. "Some time ago you were punished several times for smoking. I want to know whether you've taken it up again. Turn out your pockets!"

Vernon-Smith's eyes glittered.

"Am I under suspicion?" he asked.

"Yes. Do as I tell you!"

"Haven't I a right to know why I'm suspected?"

Wingate hesitated a moment.

"You wouldn't treat Wharton like this, or Cherry, or Field, or Todd!" said the Bounder, with a sneer. "Why am I picked out?"

"Because it's not quite forgotten what you used to be like, Vernon-Smith," said Wingate quietly. "You came near being sacked. I don't know why the Head let you stay, considering what a young rascal you were. Your Form-master is not at all satisfied with you. Neither am I."

"So sorry!" said the Bounder mockingly.

"You've been in Friardale this afternoon."

"Admitted."

"You went to the tobacconist's there and bought cigarettes?"

"Did I?"

"That's what I want to know. In any other junior I should think such an act was a silly trick, but in you it's more serious, and looks as if you are playing your old tricks over again."

"Quite so!" smiled the Bounder. "One chap may steal a horse, while another mayn't look over the fence. If I should smoke a cigarette, it's a plain sign that I'm going direct to the merry bow-wows. I understand perfectly. But might a chap humbly inquire how you know anything about my proceedings in the village this afternoon? If you saw me, you don't need to ask questions."

"I did not see you. Someone in Friardale has just rung up on Mr. Quelch's telephone to report you."

"Oh, my hat! Must be somebody in want of something to do," said the Bounder, with a whistle. "Who's the Johnny?"

"Sir Hilton Popper."

"Interfering old ass!" commented the Bounder.

"If Sir Hilton saw you, it was his duty to report you, especially as he has been a governor of the school. I took the call for Mr. Quelch, as he is with the Head, and came up here at once," said Wingate. "Now, I want to know the truth. Turn out your pockets!"

"Certainly!"

With negligent carelessness the Bounder turned out his pockets. Nothing

in the nature of smokes came to light, however.

"Satisfied?" smiled the Bounder.

"It's very odd that Sir Hilton Popper should report you for nothing," said the Sixth-Former. "I'll look round your study!"

"You're welcome to!"

"Unlock your desk!"

"With pleasure."

Vernon-Smith stood with a sarcastic smile on his lips while the prefect looked through his desk and about the study. It was not a pleasant task for Wingate, but he went through it grimly. Carefully as the black sheep of the Remove covered up his tracks, doubtless there had been signs which had awakened suspicion in his direction, and he realised now that it behoved him to be very careful indeed. But Wingate's search was fruitless.

"I'm glad there's nothing here," the prefect said at last. "Sir Hilton Popper may have been mistaken, though it's odd. That's all!"

And Wingate, relieved in his mind, perhaps, quitted the study, leaving the Bounder smiling.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Kidnapped!

"ANYTHING wrong?"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked into the study when Wingate was gone. They were a trifle concerned for the Bounder, much as they disapproved of his shady manners and customs.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"Nothing. It seems that somebody saw me buying cigarettes in Friardale this afternoon, and telephoned to Quelch, and Wingate took the call. Lucky I was only getting them for Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, and handed them to him before I came home!"

And the Bounder laughed.

"Very lucky—for you!" said Wharton drily.

"Who telephoned?" asked Nugent.

"Sir Hilton Popper, from what Wingate says. That meddling old bounder who won't let us picnic on the island in the river!"

"Well, it was right enough to report you," said Johnny Bull. "Serve you right if Wingate had bowled you out!"

"Thanks awfully!"

"You'll get spotted some day," continued Johnny, with a snort, "and for something worse than smoking, perhaps. And the sooner it happens the better for the Remove! That's my opinion!"

"So kind of you to give me your opinion!" said the Bounder urbanely. "All the kinder because I haven't asked you for it!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Johnny Bull, turning away.

The Co. followed him, Wharton, at least, relieved to know that the Bounder had not been spotted. He deserved to be, undoubtedly; but the captain of the Remove was glad that he had another chance.

Skinner had seated himself at the table again, and was writing. The Bounder tapped him on the shoulder, and he looked up sullenly.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"It's lucky for you the busybody on the telephone gave his name," said Vernon-Smith, with a glint in his eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Otherwise, I should have put it down to you, Skinner. It's like the trick you played me the other day, when you got Quelch to come here, and nearly caught me napping!"

Skinner sneered.

"I suppose I couldn't telephone from Friardale while I was sitting in this study?" he growled.

"No!" The Bounder laughed. "You couldn't very well, Skinner. But you might have got another fellow to do it!"

"Oh, rot!"

The Bounder regarded him curiously.

"Look here, Skinner," he said at last. "We've been on cat-and-dog terms in this study long enough. You've got it up against me because I prevented you from playing a rotten trick on Jimmy Vivian. Isn't it about time you dropped it?"

Skinner made no reply; but his hard, thin face was full of sullen malevolence. Skinner was not a fellow who could forgive easily.

a clever dodger, but he can't keep up that game without suspicion getting about. Suppose Quelch should get word this afternoon—suppose, when Smithy's had time to settle fairly down in old Cobb's parlour—"

Skinner's eyes glittered, and he returned to the table to finish his lines.

Meanwhile, the Bounder had gone out of gates, and was sauntering down the leafy lane towards Friardale. He caught sight of a trap on the road ahead, with five juniors in it, proceeding at a walk up the rise in the road. He recognised Harry Wharton & Co. Bob Cherry,



Mr. Quelch visits the Cross Keys. (See Chapter 2.)

"I'll tell you what," said the Bounder, eyeing him. "Come with me this afternoon, Skinner!"

"Where are you going?"

"The Cross Keys. There's a jolly party there—Jerry Hawke, and Cobb, and some others. If you're hard up, I'll lend you a quid to start. What do you say?"

"No, thanks!"

The Bounder knitted his brows.

"Well, if you choose to keep it up, keep it up," he said. "It doesn't hurt me, as far as that goes. But I'm getting pretty sick of seeing you scowling about the study. I wish you'd change out!"

"Well, I'm not going to change out!" sneered Skinner. "And you're not so sick of me as I am of you, Vernon-Smith! You gave me away over the Vivian affair, and I got a ragging from the Form. When I've got even, we can talk about letting bygones be bygones, not before!"

The Bounder laughed carelessly, and, having adjusted his necktie to his satisfaction, sauntered out of the study.

Skinner cast a dark look after him.

The cad of the Remove was nursing his supposed injury, and his resentment was made all the more bitter by Vernon-Smith's good-humoured contempt for him.

He was bitterly determined that the Bounder should yet learn that he could be dangerous.

Vernon-Smith crossed the quadrangle towards the gate, and Skinner, from the study window, watched him go.

"The Cross Keys!" muttered Skinner. "Quelch's got an eye on him already, and the prefects are suspicious. Smithy's

looking back, sighted him at the same moment.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Smithy!" murmured Bob. "Two to one I can tell you where he's going!"

"The two to onefulness is terrific!" grinned Hurreo Singh, who was driving. "The esteemed Smithy is going on the merry ran-dan!"

"Silly rotter!" growled Johnny Bull.

"It's not our bizney," remarked Nugent mildly; "and perhaps Smithy isn't going to do anything of the kind, either!"

Harry Wharton was silent. Bob burst into a sudden chuckle.

"Let's give him a lift!" he said.

Johnny Bull snorted.

"Give him a lift to the Cross Keys!" he exclaimed. "Go and eat coke! We don't want a smoky rotter in this trap!"

"You don't savvy, my son! We'll give him a lift further than that, if he gets into the trap!"

"I tell you he's going to the Cross Keys!" growled Johnny Bull. "As a matter of fact, I heard him tell Bolsover major he was going there to-day!"

"He may change his mind after he gets into the trap, and come to Wapshot with us!"

"Rats!"

"We'll give him a chance!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Slow down, Inky!"

Hurreo Jamsset Ram Singh slowed down, and the Bounder, with his quick, springy strides, soon overtook the trap. He gave the chums of the Remove a careless nod.

"Jump in!" said Bob cheerily.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"My destination isn't the same as yours," he replied.

"We're going to Wapshot Camp to see the soldiers," said Harry Wharton.

"I hope you'll find 'em entertaining. I'm going to the Cross Keys to see a set of boozy blackguards!" said the Bounder coolly.

"Pity Quelchy doesn't come by and hear you bragging of it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Well, we pass the Cross Keys," said Bob, with undiminished cheerfulness.

"Jump in, Smithy!"

"Look here——" began Johnny Bull wrathfully.

"Oh, ring off, Johnny! Give us a rest," urged Bob. "Jump in, Smithy! There's plenty of room!"

"The roomfulness is terrific, my esteemed, disgusting Smithy!" chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The nabob had caught Bob Cherry's idea.

"Sure I sha'n't contaminate you?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"Not at all; but we'll chance it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The trap had stopped now. The five juniors made room for Vernon-Smith, who climbed in. A lift on that warm summer's afternoon, on a dusty road, was very welcome. The trap crawled on to the top of the rise.

"Wouldn't you care to come along to Wapshot, Smithy?" asked Wharton. "There's going to be some manoeuvres, and a lot of people are going."

"Not in my line, you know," yawned the Bounder. "Thanks for the lift, though. I've walked it once this afternoon."

"You're welcome as the flowers in May, my son," said Bob Cherry. "See if that geegee can go a little faster, Inky!"

The trap crossed the top of the rise, and there was a long run downhill, past the Cross Keys, into Friardale village. The trap gathered speed, and dashed on at a good pace. The Bounder rose as the inn came in sight.

"Better stop a bit away from the building," he said, laughing. "You don't want to be seen landing a passenger there!"

"Oh, we sha'n't be seen doing that!" said Bob.

"But——"

"It will be all right. You'll see!"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh gave a chuckle, and cracked his whip. The horse was making the pace now. The trap fairly whizzed along. It passed the Cross Keys at a rush, and the juniors caught a glimpse of Mr. Jerry Hawke, the sharper, smoking a cigar in the garden. The Bounder sat down again involuntarily, as the trap rocked and bumped.

"You're taking me past!" he exclaimed.

"Go hon!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Look here——"

"Wouldn't you rather come to Wapshot with such distinguished and agreeable company?"

"No, I wouldn't!" rapped out the Bounder.

"What a pity!"

"Why is it a pity, fathead?"

"Because you're going, anyway!" grinned Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The trap was rattling down the old High Street of Friardale now. Vernon-Smith jumped up, but Bob grasped his arm and pulled him down again. The Bounder gave him a fierce look.

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"Will you let me get down?" he exclaimed, between his teeth.

"Yes—at Wapshot."

"You meddling idiot——"

"Thanks!"

"You silly chump——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Stop that horse, you black duffer!"

"The stopfulness will not be terrific, my esteemed, smoky Smithy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, in chorus.

The Famous Five were in great spirits. Bob's extraordinary idea of kidnapping the black sheep of the Remove struck them as funny. Hurree Singh kept the horse at a gallop. Vernon-Smith's brows contracted with anger, and he made an effort to rise. He was quite reckless enough to leap out of the trap while it was tearing along on the Wapshot road.

But Bob Cherry had grasped one arm, and Johnny Bull—understanding at last—had grasped the other. The Bounder was powerless.

"Better take it smiling, Smithy," grinned Bob Cherry. "You'll enjoy yourself at Wapshot seeing the soldiers. Ever so much better than smoking and playing with dirty cards with a gang of sharpers!"

"Can't you mind your own business?" howled Vernon-Smith.

"Sorry—no!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The trap was bowling along the Wapshot road now, and the Cross Keys was more than a mile behind. There would have been a long walk before the Bounder if he could have escaped. But he could not escape.

His face was dark with anger for some time. But the Bounder had the gift of philosophy, and his brow cleared at last, and he burst into a laugh.

"You've done me!" he said. "I might have guessed you meant some jape, you grinning fatheads! Let go my fin—I'm going to Wapshot!"

"Right-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry, and he released the Bounder. And six juniors instead of five arrived at Wapshot that sunny afternoon to see the soldiers.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A Nice Walk for Bunter!

**H**AROLD SKINNER finished his impot, and yawned, and rose to his feet. He picked up his cap, and left the study. It was a good half-hour since the Bounder had started, and he had had ample time to get to the Cross Keys and settle down to the little game planned for that afternoon. And now his amiable study-mate was ready for business.

Skinner walked quickly across the quad, dodged Billy Bunter—who was looking for somebody to cash a postal-order for him in advance—and went out at the gates. Billy Bunter hurried after him. The Owl of the Remove was on his own that afternoon, no one seeming to yearn for Bunter's company for the half-holiday.

"I say, Skinner, hold on!" puffed Bunter.

Skinner walked faster.

"Skinney, old chap! Hold on, you rotter!" Billy Bunter broke into a run, and came alongside, keeping at a run to keep pace with Skinner's thin legs.

"Look here, Skinner——"

"Clear off!" snapped Skinner. He did not want anybody in the village with him that afternoon—least of all the chatterbox of the Remove—for very important reasons.

But Bunter did not clear off. He had

been looking for somebody to fasten himself upon, and he had found Skinner.

"I say, I'll come with you, if you like," said Bunter. "Those rotters—Wharton and that gang—have gone to Wapshot, you know, and they've left me behind. That beast Cherry said they couldn't afford an extra horse to pull me along, you know. I say, Skinner, are you going to Uncle Clegg's?"

"No, I'm not!" snapped Skinner.

"If you're going to the grocer's——"

"I'm not going to the grocer's, you porpoise!"

"I'll tell you what, Skinner. If you want anything, I'll do the shopping for you, and take all the risk," said Bunter. "Those grub rules are all rot, you know! I'll get the grub for you, and we'll go halves—what?"

"I'm not going for grub!" roared Skinner. "Shift off!"

"Well, where are you going, then?" asked Bunter inquisitively.

"Find out!"

"Oh, really, Skinner——"

Skinner hurried on, and Bunter's little fat legs twinkled as he kept pace. It was not easy to shake off William George Bunter. The Owl of the Remove was suspicious. His thoughts ran always upon grub, and he suspected Skinner of intending to pay a surreptitious visit to the village tuckshop—in defiance of the food regulations. Billy Bunter was not shocked; he was only keen to have his whack in the plunder. If Skinner's purpose in visiting the village was quite innocent, why was he so anxious to get rid of Bunter—a charming and entertaining fellow like Bunter? Echo answered why?

So the fat junior made up his mind to stick to Skinner like glue. Skinner put on speed in the hope of shaking him off, but Bunter kept pace, though he panted and blew like old bellows.

"I say, old chap, don't hurry!" gasped Bunter. "I'm coming, you know. Look here, Skinner, if you like to cash a postal-order for me, I'll stand my whack in the grub—honour bright! I'm expecting the postal-order this evening, you know. Of course, it's all the same to you if you hand me the money now. You can rely on me to hand over the postal-order immediately it comes."

Skinner gritted his teeth, and halted.

"Will you sheer off?" he shouted.

Bunter blinked at him through his big glasses. He was more suspicious than ever now. Indeed, Skinner's anxiety to get rid of him was quite enough to make him suspicious.

"No, I won't!" he said loftily. "I suppose I can walk to Friardale if I like? Have you bought up the road?"

"I don't want you, you fat rotter!"

"Oh, really, Skinner!"

Skinner started off again, running this time. Bunter broke into a run to keep pace, but it was hard work.

"Stop for me, Skinner!" he howled.

"I say, look here, Skinner, I'm not going to have you breaking the grub rules! I consider it my duty to mention the matter to a prefect. Stop, you rotter!"

But Skinner did not stop. He ran harder. Billy Bunter was at a hopeless disadvantage. He had twice Skinner's weight to carry. He slacked down, gasping for breath, as the village came in sight.

"Yow-ow-ow! Oh, the rotter!" gasped Bunter. "I jolly well know he's after the grub! Unpatriotic beast! Disgusting, I call it—in fact, revolting! If there's one thing I can't stand, it's a food-hog!"

Billy Bunter kept on at a walk. He was disgusted with Skinner's supposed iniquity, but he still hoped to bag a whack in the loot. If he found Skinner

in possession of forbidden tuck, he was prepared to insist upon a share, with the threat of reporting the iniquity to the Remove-master.

Skinner vanished from sight in the village street, and when Bunter arrived in Friardale he blinked round for him in vain. Uncle Clegg was standing in the doorway of his little shop, and Bunter rolled up to him.

"Is Skinner here?" he asked.

Mr. Clegg shook his head.

"Oh, dear! Have you seen him, Mr. Clegg?"

"Master Skinner's just gone into the post-office."

"Oh, my hat!"

Bunter rolled on, and stopped outside the post-office. That establishment was also a grocer's shop, and Bunter's suspicions were almost certainties now. But if Skinner was buying provisions to eke out the frugal war-provender at Greyfriars, his secret purchases were not likely to remain secret long. Bunter paused only to recover his breath, and then he rolled in.

To his surprise Skinner was not to be seen. Bunter blinked round the grocery department and round the post-office department in vain. Harold Skinner was not there.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Bunter, in utter disgust.

He rolled up to the counter, and addressed the young lady who handed out stamps and took in telegrams:

"Excuse me, miss, has my friend gone—a Greyfriars chap, who just came in—"

"Second box!" said the young lady briefly.

"Eh?"

"I have just given him his number."

"His number! Oh!"

Bunter understood.

There were two telephone-boxes in the post-office for the use of the public. One was occupied.

Billy Bunter blinked at the telephone-cabinet in utter disgust.

Skinner had come there to telephone! It wasn't an expedition in search of secret tuck after all; it was simply a matter of telephoning! And Bunter had run nearly a mile to find out that Skinner was telephoning!

Bunter's feelings were too deep for words as he turned away. In utter disgust he rolled out of the post-office, and grunted and perspired his way down the dusty road to Greyfriars. Never had it seemed to the fat junior such a long, long way to Greyfriars as it seemed that warm afternoon.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Told on the Telephone!

"DEAR me!" murmured Mr. Quelch.

The Remove-master was enjoying himself that afternoon. He was sitting at his typewriter in his study, and his celebrated "History of Greyfriars" was growing under the clicking keys.

A buzz of the telephone-bell was very unwelcome. But Mr. Quelch rose to attend it, and took up the receiver.

"Is that Greyfriars?" came a somewhat harsh voice.

"Yes! Mr. Quelch speaking!"

"Ha! I rang you up earlier this afternoon, Mr. Quelch, but someone else took my message—a prefect, I think."

"Quite so; it was Wingate of the Sixth Form. You are Sir Hilton Popper, I presume?"

"That is so."

"Thank you very much for having reported Vernon-Smith, Sir Hilton! I am much obliged to you! The matter has been investigated."

"Huh! I have another report to make."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips a little at the transmitter. Doubtless it was Sir Hilton's duty to make such reports, especially as he had been a governor of Greyfriars. But it was possible to have too much of a good thing. As the baronet was no longer connected with the school in any way, and, indeed, was not on the most friendly terms with the Head, his excessive sense of duty savoured a little of crusty interference.

But Mr. Quelch could not decline to hear the new report, and he contented himself with compressing his lips.

"The boy I reported to you—Vernon-Smith, of the Lower Fourth Form—is now in Friardale again."

"There is no rule against a junior visiting Friardale on a half-holiday, Sir Hilton."

"Huh!"

"I trust you have not seen him paying another visit to the tobacconist's?" added Mr. Quelch, with a slight inflection of sarcasm in his voice.

Wingate's report of his examination in the Bunder's study had quite satisfied Mr. Quelch. He had little doubt that Sir Hilton, who was a hasty old gentleman, had been mistaken.

"No, I have not! I have seen him enter a much more disreputable place—the Cross Keys Inn!" came the harsh tones on the telephone.

Mr. Quelch started.

"Sir Hilton!"

"I trust you do not regard this as unwarranted interference on my part, Mr. Quelch. Having been a governor of the school, I still take an interest in its good name."

"Quite so, quite so! I am much obliged to you. But are you sure that there is no mistake, Sir Hilton? Do you know Vernon-Smith well by sight?"

"Perfectly well!"

"You have actually seen him enter that building?"

"With my own eyes, sir!"

"The fact is, Sir Hilton, that your previous report this afternoon turned out to be ill-founded."

"Huh!"

"Wingate examined Vernon-Smith at once, and no cigarettes were found about him or in his study."

"Doubtless he had cunningly disposed of them."

"It is possible, of course. However—"

"I presume, Mr. Quelch, that you will act upon the information I am now giving you! A Greyfriars boy is at this moment in the company of sharpers and sporting touts at a public-house."

"I shall certainly investigate the matter," said Mr. Quelch. "I trust it will turn out to be a mistake."

"I repeat that I saw him enter the building, and saw him accompany the fellow Cobb in by the back door."

"Bless my soul!"

"I considered it my duty to report the circumstance to you."

"Quite so, quite so! Thank you very much!" Mr. Quelch's brows were darkly knitted now. "I will see into the matter at once, Sir Hilton."

"Very good!"

Mr. Quelch replaced the receiver on the hooks.

He cast a glance towards his typewriter, but there was no more literary work for him that afternoon. As Vernon-Smith's Form-master, he was bound to make the fullest investigation at once into the allegation against the junior. It was not a matter he could entrust to a prefect.

In a state of great annoyance and exasperation, Mr. Quelch took his coat and hat and left the School House.

There was only one way in which he

could prove the truth or otherwise of the accusation. He had to visit the Cross Keys himself.

Every nerve in his body shrank from the idea of a personal interview with the fat and greasy Mr. Cobb, the landlord of the inn, and the rowdy sporting crew who haunted the place.

But there was evidently nothing else to be done. If the reckless junior was there, he could not leave him there. He could not wait for him to return and question him. He would certainly deny the accusation. And Sir Hilton's word was not proof. The baronet was both hasty and short-sighted, and might have been mistaken. Indeed, Mr. Quelch hoped sincerely that he had been mistaken.

If the Bunder had, in truth, pushed his reckless rascality to such an extreme, there was only one thing to be done—to catch him in the act, and take him to the Headmaster. And in that case the Bunder was not likely to trouble Greyfriars with his presence much longer. The Head had been merciful before, on the Bunder's promise of reform. Vernon-Smith was not likely to escape cheaply a second time.

Mr. Quelch whisked out of the gates in a great hurry and a very bad temper. His temper would not have been improved if he had known that Skinner of the Remove had just quitted a telephone-box in Friardale post-office, and that Sir Hilton Popper was dozing in his library at Popper Court.

The Remove-master passed Billy Bunter in the lane, fagging along with a red, perspiring face and many grunts. He had nearly reached the village when he passed Skinner, who capped him very respectfully.

After Mr. Quelch had passed him, Skinner stopped and looked round. He was very interested in the movements of the Greyfriars Form-master.

Mr. Quelch strode on to the Cross Keys, on the outskirts of the village. There he paused. His objection to enter the place was almost insurmountable. Two or three frowsy men were holding a warm argument outside the door on the subject of "bloomin' Uns." The Remove-master made up his mind, and passed down the path at the side of the inn. He had been told on the telephone that Vernon-Smith had been seen to enter the inn at the back, so it was doubtless there that he would find him, if at all.

"By gad!" Skinner drew a deep breath as the Remove-master passed the gate and disappeared from view. "By gad! It's a fair catch!"

Not the slightest doubt did Skinner entertain that the Bunder was at that very moment seated in the back parlour of the Cross Keys smoking and playing cards with the sporting gentlemen there. He knew with what intention the Bunder had left Greyfriars.

Skinner turned again, and strolled on towards the school, with a smile on his face. His old and bitter grudge against his study-mate seemed likely to be paid at last, with interest. He was quite in a good humour when he arrived at Greyfriars, overtaking Billy Bunter in the gateway.

The Owl of the Remove gave him a savage blink. Bunter was tired in every fat limb, and damp all over with perspiration.

Skinner grinned at him.

"Had a nice walk?" he queried.

"Yah! Beast!"

Skinner chuckled and walked on. Squiff of the Remove met him in the quad, and looked at him.

"Hallo! What rotten trick have you been playing?" asked Squiff.

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"Eh? What do you mean?" asked Skinner, taken aback.

"Well, you're looking so jolly satisfied about something," said Sampson Field. "That generally means that you've made somebody uncomfortable, doesn't it?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Skinner, passing on.

Skinner was, as Squiff observed, in a very satisfied mood. He was picturing the Bounder's feelings when Mr. Quelch came upon him. The Bounder had intervened to frustrate a miserable trick Skinner had designed upon Sir Jimmy Vivian of the Remove, with the result that Harold Skinner had had a Form ragging. That old account was to be paid in full now. Skinner waited, in a happy state of anticipation, for the denouement.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Not Nice for Mr. Quelch!

MR. QUELCH looked round him as he entered the garden at the back of the inn. He had some vague idea in his mind of tapping at a back door, and being admitted there. Had he entered at the front, any Greyfriars boy in the place could have escaped at the back long before he could have been caught. But the Form-master felt that he was upon delicate ground. Mr. Cobb, if he allowed schoolboys to come to his premises to gamble, deserved to be sent to prison. But the matter was not proven. And meanwhile, it was indubitable that the Greyfriars master was treading upon private property, and liable to an accusation of trespass if the landlord of the Cross Keys chose to cut up rusty.

So he paused, and considered the situation. If the reckless black sheep was there, he did not intend to let him escape unseen. But exactly how to nail him was a question that had yet to be answered.

The Remove-master was bitterly angry that such a task should be imposed upon him. His feelings towards Vernon-Smith were not kind just then.

Behind the inn, looking upon the garden, was a low wooden veranda, upon which several windows opened. One of them was wide open on account of the warmth of the afternoon, perhaps also on account of the fumes of smoke and drink within. Voices came floating to the Remove-master as he stood in the weedy, neglected garden.

"Your deal, Jerry!"

"Give us a match!"

"My 'at, it's 'ot 'ere!"

An expression of disgust crossed the Form-master's face. This was the kind of person he had to interview. But it was borne in upon his mind that if Vernon-Smith was in the building this was the room in which he would find him. And he ascended the rickety wooden steps of the veranda.

As he approached the open French window of the room, a bulky form emerged from within, filling it. There was a sound of a quickly-moved chair, which fell backwards, so hastily had it been moved. That sound made Mr. Quelch's suspicion a certainty. Someone had been alarmed by his approach—and none of the habitués of the inn had any reason to fear him.

"Arternoon!" said the fat gentleman in the doorway, who was Mr. Cobb himself, and he nodded familiarly to the Remove-master.

"Kindly allow me to enter!" said Mr. Quelch icily.

Mr. Cobb did not move.

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"This 'ere is private," he explained. "You enter at the front for refreshments, sir."

The Remove-master reddened.

"I have not come here for refreshments, as you know very well!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Ow should I know it, sir?" asked Mr. Cobb, unmoved. "Folks generally come 'ere for refreshments. What might you be wanting, then?"

"I am a master at Greyfriars School," said Mr. Quelch, with forced calmness. "You know me by sight, Mr. Cobb."

"Now I think of it, I believe I do. Mr. Squelch, ain't it?"

"My name is Quelch."

"My mistake!" said Mr. Cobb blandly. "Werry pleased to meet you, Mr. Quelch, and if it wasn't for the no-treatin' order, I'd be pleased to offer you somethin' on this 'ot arternoon. But this 'ere is a law-abidin' 'ouse. Bless you, sir, I shouldn't dare to break one of the regglations!"

"I have reason to believe that a boy belonging to Greyfriars is here, and I desire to enter, to ascertain whether that is the case."

Mr. Cobb looked surprised.

"Now, wot could 'ave put that idea into your 'ead, sir?" he exclaimed. "Surely, sir, you know it's agin the law to serve schoolboys with licker?"

"I have no reason to believe that the law is carefully observed in this establishment," said Mr. Quelch bitterly. "Neither do I suppose the foolish boy came here to drink. That is scarcely possible. But I believe that he is here, and unless you allow me to enter and satisfy myself, Mr. Cobb, I shall immediately apply to the police for assistance!"

Mr. Cobb looked injured.

"I don't know as you could make out a case for perlice interference," he said. "But I ain't no objection to satisfying a reasonable man. There ain't any boys on my premises, 'cepting the pot-boy. You don't want to see 'im?"

"I desire to see whether there is a Greyfriars boy here."

Mr. Quelch's eyes were glittering with anger now. The fat landlord's portly form filled the half-open French window, and Mr. Quelch could not pass without violence. He suspected that Cobb was deliberately wasting time in order to give his schoolboy visitor time to make his escape by another route. But Mr. Cobb, if that was his object, had apparently effected it now, for he stepped back into the room, and made Mr. Quelch a sign to enter.

Three frowsy and beery-looking fellows rose up, grinning, as the Remove-master stepped in. There was no schoolboy in the room.

But Mr. Quelch noted an empty chair at the table at once, and an ash-tray on the table before it.

It was clear that there had been another member of the party, who had disappeared while Mr. Cobb was keeping him out.

"Satisfied, sir?" asked Mr. Cobb, with smiling blandness. "Tain't Jerry 'Awke you want to see, nor Jim Spicer, nor yet Smiley Dick? There ain't nobody else 'ere, as you see for yourself."

"Very pleased to meet the gentleman!" said Mr. Jerry Hawke, with a grin. "Do you smoke, sir?"

Mr. Hawke offered his case.

"He, he!" came from the pimply young man alluded to as Smiley Dick.

"I do not smoke, thank you," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "Mr. Cobb, has the boy who was here left the house?"

"Boy! What boy?" asked Mr. Cobb, in astonishment.

Mr. Quelch pointed to the empty chair.

"There was a boy here."

"Not at all. My brother was 'ere," explained Mr. Cobb. "That's his cheer, sir."

"Old George 'as gone for a drink," said Mr. Hawke.

It was clear that the statements were false, and Mr. Quelch did not take heed of them. His quick, keen eyes roved about room. But the schoolboy who had escaped had left no trace behind him.

The Form-master had no doubt whatever that Vernon-Smith had been there.

Unless it was a Greyfriars boy, there was no reason why he should flee so precipitately at the warning of the Remove-master's approach. And if it was a Greyfriars boy, there could be no doubt of the accuracy of Sir Hilton Popper's statement.

"Like to search the 'ouse, sir?" asked Mr. Cobb, with bland impertinence. "I don't know as you've any right to come in 'ere like this, interrupting a gentleman's game, but I'm an obliging man. If you'd like to search the 'ouse, you're welcome. I'll call the barman to show you over the 'ouse if you like, from the cellar to the blooming garret!"

Mr. Quelch bit his lip.

He knew that the fugitive must be well off the premises by that time. He turned to the French window.

"Satisfied, I 'ope?" said Mr. Cobb.

"Thank you, yes," said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"Arternoon, sir!" said Jerry Hawke affably. "You won't 'ave a fag, sir? P'raps you'd like to sit down and take a 'and in a little game among gentlemen, you know. You play poker, sir?"

Mr. Quelch did not answer that impertinent question. He strode out on to the veranda with burning cheeks. He had never felt so insulted and humiliated in his life before. His anger against the Bounder, who had caused it all, was quite implacable now.

He strode away, and reached the road, leaving the blackguards in the inn parlour grinning and chuckling. They had rather enjoyed Mr. Quelch's visit.

The Remove-master strode along the road to Greyfriars, his brow grim and dark. Near the school gates he sighted Snoop of the Remove, who was heading for the school. Snoop was tramping along in a tired way, as if he had been running. He looked round at the sound of the Form-master's rapid footsteps, and started.

Mr. Quelch hardly noticed him. He strode on to the gateway, and passed in.

Sidney James Snoop looked after him, his weedy face quite white.

"My hat!" murmured Snoop. "My hat! If he only knew—"

Snoop shivered, and slunk in at the gates—after giving Mr. Quelch plenty of time to get ahead.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### A Trump Card!

"VERNON-SMITH!" Wingate rapped out the name.

It was close on time for evening call-over, and the Greyfriars fellows were gathering towards Hall. Wingate apparently was on the look-out for the Bounder, and he rapped out his name as soon as he entered the House.

The junior looked at him coolly.

"Hallo! Am I wanted?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Anything wrong?" yawned the Bounder.

"I fancy so!" said the captain of Greyfriars grimly. "You're wanted in the Head's study, at once!"

"Before calling-over?" queried the Bounder.

"Yes. At once!"

"Oh, all serene!"

Vernon-Smith turned away to obey the summons, with a shrug of the shoulders. He was cool and composed; but his eyes were glittering. Harry Wharton joined him in the passage.

"Not trouble?" asked Harry.

"I suppose so," said Vernon-Smith, with a sarcastic grin. "The Head doesn't usually send for a Lower Fourth chap for the pleasure of his conversation, does he?"

"Well, no. But—"

"It's all serene, I think. I have an unusually clear conscience to-day, owing to Bob Cherry's fatheaded trick," said the Bounder. "Even Quelch can't grumble at my going to Wapshot to see the soldiers, I fancy."

He nodded to Wharton, walked on coolly, and tapped at the door of the Head's study.

"Come in!"

The Bounder entered.

Mr. Quelch was in the study with Dr. Locke; and the Bounder perceived at once that he had entered a thunderous atmosphere. Never had the Remove-master's face looked so grim; never had he seen the Head's brow knitted in so stern a frown. The junior drew a deep breath. But he was cool as ice. He knew that he had earned the sack from Greyfriars a dozen times over since he had slipped back into his old reckless ways. His secrets were well kept; but they might have come to light. He knew, too, that Skinner would have betrayed him if he could. That was always a danger, since he had been on ill terms with his study-mate.

But whatever danger might threaten him, it was certain to find the Bounder cool and hardy, prepared to face the music with iron nerve.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said calmly and quietly.

"I have sent for you, Vernon-Smith, to tell you that your conduct has been discovered, and that you are to leave Greyfriars this day!" said the Head sternly.

The Bounder started.

"Leave Greyfriars!" he exclaimed.

"You are expelled."

"Oh!"

"Once before," said the Head, "I came to this resolution. On your promise of reform, Vernon-Smith, I gave you a chance to redeem your faults. I observed you, and it seemed to me that you were keeping your word. I received favourable reports of you from Mr. Quelch. But of late your Form-master has had reason to be dissatisfied with you. To-day the proof of your duplicity has come to light. You know what to expect."

The Bounder set his lips.

"Am I not to be allowed to defend myself, sir?" he asked, with a half-suppressed sneer. "Mustn't I say a word?"

"Most certainly, if you have anything to say. I cannot imagine that you have any defence to make, and I warn you that it is useless to resort to falsehoods," said the Head sternly.

"I don't know yet what I am accused of," said the Bounder, inwardly wondering which of his many delinquencies had come accidentally to light. He was prepared to defend himself to the last inch, whatever the accusation was.

"Nonsense, Vernon-Smith! Your visit to a public-house, and consorting with gamblers there—"

"When, sir?"

"This afternoon," said the Head, raising his voice a little. "What is the use of this prevarication, Vernon-Smith?"

You are perfectly well aware of all the circumstances."

"This afternoon!" repeated the Bounder almost dazedly.

He could scarcely believe in his good luck. His shady secrets, after all, had not come out, then!

He had nothing to fear!

"Do you deny it?" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"Most certainly, sir. I have certainly not visited a public-house this afternoon—or at all, for that matter."

The Head made a gesture.

"Since you deny what is quite clear, Vernon-Smith, I will explain that it is useless to prevaricate. Sir Hilton Popper telephoned to Mr. Quelch this afternoon—"

"I proved to Wingate, sir, that he was mistaken, and that I had no cigarettes in my possession."

"I am not referring to that. Sir Hilton telephoned again later, and informed Mr. Quelch that he had seen you enter the Cross Keys Inn."

"My hat!" ejaculated the Bounder involuntarily. The Head took no notice of that remark.

"Mr. Quelch proceeded to that disreputable place, and almost caught you there. One of your low associates delayed him while you made your escape by another door. You were not actually seen. But the proof is clear enough. If you have anything to say, say it!"

"I was not there, sir!"

"That will do," said the Head, frowning. "When you stole away from Mr. Quelch's sight, you were unaware that you had been seen to enter the place. Now that you are aware of it, cannot you see the uselessness of prevarication?"

"I was not there!"

"That a Greyfriars boy was there is quite clear," said Mr. Quelch icily. "If he had not belonged to this school, there was no reason why he should dread discovery by me. That fact, added to Sir Hilton Popper's report, makes the case quite clear, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder smiled bitterly.

He had no doubt that some Greyfriars fellow had been nearly caught at the Cross Keys by Mr. Quelch. It might have been Snoop or Skinner or Stott, or perhaps Bolsover major—or perhaps even Loder of the Sixth, or Carne. Certainly, but for Bob Cherry's little joke, the Bounder would have been there, and would have run the same risk.

But for the fact that he had spent the afternoon in company with the Famous Five, he would have been condemned beyond hope.

The Bounder had yet a card to play; and it was a trump card.

The Head was pointing to the door, signifying that the interview was over. But the Bounder did not go.

"I suppose, sir, that you will allow me to prove that I was not at the Cross Keys this afternoon?" he said.

"You cannot prove a falsehood, Vernon-Smith!"

"I can call witnesses, sir."

"You may have concocted a story in case of discovery," said Dr. Locke. "I believe you are clever enough for that. I am only sorry that your cleverness has been turned to such bad ends."

"I think you would rely on my witnesses, sir, if you allow me to call them. I will give you their names—"

"You may do so," said the Head impatiently.

"Wharton—"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Did you say Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"I should certainly accept Wharton's word," said the Remove-master, in great

astonishment. "If you are merely seeking to gain time, Vernon-Smith—"

"Not at all, sir. If you will send for Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, and Hurree Singh, they will prove that I have spoken the truth."

There was a pause. The Bounder had named five juniors whose word the Remove-master would certainly take. Dr. Locke eyed him sharply, with a doubt beginning to form in his mind.

"Where were you this afternoon, Vernon-Smith?" exclaimed the Head abruptly at last.

"At Wapshot, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

"What were you doing at Wapshot?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"I went there to see the soldiers, sir, with Wharton and the rest. There were some manoeuvres to-day, and the public were allowed to see them," said the Bounder calmly.

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch, quite at a loss.

The Head touched a bell, and Trotter appeared. Dr. Locke briefly instructed the page to call the five juniors to the study. In a few minutes Harry Wharton & Co. appeared, looking considerably surprised.

"Come in, my boys!" said the Head kindly. "Wharton, I desire your evidence as to where Vernon-Smith spent this afternoon. Was he with you?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Ah! Where did you go?"

"Wapshot Camp, sir, in a trap."

"At what time did you start for Wapshot?"

Wharton reflected, his companions remaining silent and wondering.

"We got the trap about half-past three, sir. We picked up Vernon-Smith in the lane soon after that."

"When did you return from Wapshot?"

"About twenty minutes ago, sir."

"Was Vernon-Smith with you the whole time?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do not doubt you, Wharton, but your companions will kindly speak. Do you all corroborate Wharton's statement?"

"Yes, sir!" said four voices together. And Hurree Janset Ram Singh added that the corroborateness was terrific—a remark which Dr. Locke did not seem to hear.

He looked at Mr. Quelch.

The Remove-master pursed his lips.

"There appears to be a mistake," he said slowly. "Sir Hilton Popper was evidently wrong in supposing that he saw Vernon-Smith enter the Cross Keys. Evidently, also, the boy I almost caught there could not have been Vernon-Smith. Some other Greyfriars boy, I fear, but certainly not Vernon-Smith!"

Dr. Locke nodded.

"I shall communicate with Sir Hilton Popper," he said. "He has made a reckless statement, which has very nearly caused serious injustice. Vernon-Smith, I am sorry that you have been suspected of a disgraceful action, and you may go, quite cleared of any kind of suspicion."

"Thank you, sir!" said the Bounder.

He left the study with the Famous Five. In the passage he indulged in a soft chuckle.

"Blessed if I quite see what it's all about!" said Nugent. "But you seem to have had a narrow escape, Smithy!"

"Owing to that giddy genius Bob Cherry!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "Cherry, you howling ass, I'll give you a tenner, if you like, for yanking me off to Wapshot this afternoon!"

"Blow your tenners!" said Bob. "But I'm glad I did it, as it seems to have saved you from getting the chopper. If

you've got any sense, you'll keep clear of that kind of rot in the future!"

The Bounder laughed, and walked away in a very cheery mood. He was smiling when he went in to call-over with the other fellows, and Skinner of the Remove watched his smiling face in a state of angry mystification.

The denouement Harold Skinner had been waiting for had not materialised after all!

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Defeated!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! You're looking pretty sick, Snoopey!" Bob Cherry greeted Sidney James Snoop with a thump on the shoulders which made Snoop howl.

Snoop was mooching in the Remove passage, with his hands in his pockets, and a decidedly seedy expression on his face, after calling-over. Bob greeted him with his usual heavy-handed good-nature.

"Don't break my back, you ass!" snapped Snoop.

"But is anything the matter?" asked Bob.

"No!"

"You look quite ill!"

"Oh, rats!"

Bob Cherry laughed, and went on to his study. Snoop evidently didn't want his sympathy.

Snoop scowled after him, and mooched about restlessly. Skinner came upstairs, and Snoop followed him into his study. Skinner was looking, as he felt, puzzled and annoyed and worried. The chopper had not come down upon the Bounder, and Skinner could not understand it. True, the Bounder's luck had always been wonderful, but how could his luck have saved him this time?

Even if Mr. Quelch had not actually caught him red-handed at the Cross Keys, surely he had at least ascertained that the Bounder had been there? How could he have failed?

"I—I say, I've had an awful shock, Skinney!" mumbled Snoop. "I—I'm still feeling jolly queer about it! You'd better give the Cross Keys a wide berth for a bit, Skinney!"

"What do you mean?" growled Skinner crossly.

"Quelch jolly nearly spotted me there!"

Skinner jumped.

"What?"

"I thought it was safe enough this afternoon," said Snoop plaintively. "Quelch was busy with his typer, and nothing short of an earthquake would take him away from that piffle he scribbles. What on earth put it into his head to come down to the Cross Keys I can't guess!"

Skinner stared at Snoop with wide-open eyes.

"You were there?" he breathed.

"I—I just dropped in, you know. I had a remittance from my uncle the other day, and I was flush. I never really meant to go; but I was passing, and old Hawke spoke to me, and I went in. We were playing poker when I sighted Quelch in the garden at the back, coming up on the veranda. I—I thought I should faint!" Snoop's face was quite white. "If he'd found me—my word! Luckily, old Cobb kept him back while I got clear. I could hear his voice. I sloped by the side door into the alley, and scooted round behind Uncle Clegg's shop, and ran for Greyfriars! Oh, crumbs!"

"You?" muttered Skinner. "You—you would have been sacked—flogged, at least!"

"Don't I know it?" Snoop shivered.

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"I'd nearly got to Greyfriars, when Quelch came tramping on behind. I—I thought he was after me for a minute, and my heart stopped beating, I'm sure. But he passed on, and hardly looked at me. He didn't guess I'd been at the Cross Keys. He was after somebody else, I suppose!"

"Was Smithy there?"

"Smithy? No!"

"He wasn't there?" said Skinner, gritting his teeth. "He left Greyfriars specially to go to the Cross Keys. He told me. He asked me to go with him, and I refused. He wasn't there?"

"Not while I was there, anyway. Lucky for him, too! Wingate called him up before the Head just before call-over. Do you think Quelch was there after Vernon-Smith?"

Skinner nodded.

"Well, he can't suspect me," said Snoop, relieved. "But—but I'm jolly well going to give the place a wide berth after this! It's not good enough. I advise you to do the same, Skinner!"

"Thanks! It's queer the Bounder wasn't there, though!" said Skinner.

"You look as if you wish he had been!" said Snoop, staring at him. "It's no joke to be caught pub-haunting by a master! It would mean the push for Smithy. I know you've rowed with him, but you don't want that, I suppose? Look here, Skinner, what did Quelch go there for?"

"Ask me another!" said Skinner, shrugging his shoulders.

"It looks to me as if somebody's let something out," said Snoop uneasily. "I've spoken to Stott; he doesn't know. I suppose you haven't been jawing, have you, Skinner, where a prefect could hear you?"

"Of course I haven't!"

"It couldn't have come from the High-cliffe chaps. Nobody here would know, even if Ponsonby or Gaddy jawed. How did it get out, then? Quelch was there after somebody, and he knew somebody was there!"

"Blessed if I know!" said Skinner, with a yawn.

"I shouldn't wonder if somebody's been sneaking!" Snoop drew a deep breath. "If that's it, I wish I knew the chap!"

"You'd lick him?" sneered Skinner.

"I'd try to," said Snoop, setting his teeth. "I ain't much of a fighting-man, but I'd try to smash any cad that had given me away for nothing!"

Vernon-Smith came into the study as he was speaking. He grinned as he heard Snoop's words.

"Hallo, Snoopey, on the war-path?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, if I can find the cad who sent Quelch to the Cross Keys this afternoon!" said Snoop. "I was nearly lagged!"

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

"Nice, amusing incident, isn't it?" said Snoop savagely. "You came jolly near it yourself, from what Skinner says!"

Vernon-Smith gave his study-mate a sharp and curious look.

"Quite so!" he agreed. "I changed my mind at the last moment, and went to Wapshot with Wharton & Co. Lucky for me!"

"Oh!" said Skinner, through his teeth.

"Quelch would have spotted me, otherwise," grinned the Bounder. "It seems that he jolly nearly spotted you instead, Snoopey. He went there specially for me."

"How did he know you were going there, then?" asked Snoop. "There was a sneak at work somewhere."

"What rot!" said Skinner uneasily.

The Bounder smiled grimly.

"Quelch got a telephone-call from Friardale, telling him I'd been seen going in," he replied. "The name given was Sir Hilton Popper's. That old fool had already reported me once this afternoon. But as I never went to the Cross Keys, I couldn't have been seen going in; and so it's pretty certain that the second call on Quelch's 'phone never came from old Popper."

"Who could it have come from, then?"

"Somebody who knew that Popper had made a report already, and thought of using his name to give me away!" said the Bounder, with a steely look at Skinner. "Somebody who knew that I'd started for the Cross Keys!"

"And who knew all that?"

"Skinner did."

"Skinner!" shouted Snoop. "Skinner, you cad, you nearly got me nailed by giving Smithy away! You sneak, you —"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Skinner. "Don't be such an ass, Snoopey! I did nothing of the kind. If Smithy can prove it, he's welcome to!"

"I can't," said the Bounder. "I suspect it, that's all. But I feel pretty sure of it, all the same, and I'm going to know the truth, Skinner. And when I know it, I'm going to draw your teeth, my boy! You are rather too dangerous as a study-mate, if what I suspect is true—"

"It isn't!"

"We shall see! The Head will know this evening whether old Popper really telephoned the second time to Quelch. And then—"

The Bounder did not finish. He shrugged his shoulders, and sat down to his prep.

Sidney James Snoop gave Skinner a slow, bitter look. He had shared the Bounder's suspicions, and he was still palpitating with the terror of his narrow escape. He left the study without a word, however.

Skinner, pale now, looked at his study-mate. Vernon-Smith did not heed him. He had plunged into his work quietly and steadily. But there was a growing fear in the breast of the sneak of the Remove.

He had struck his revengeful blow, which was to have ruined the Bounder, and he had missed the mark! And when the Bounder's suspicion became a certainty—what then?

He knew well the grim implacability of the Bounder's nature—he knew that the Bounder would not endure the incessant menace of treachery. What would he do? That evening was not a happy one to Harold Skinner.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### Billy Bunter Knows Something!

THE following morning, when Mr. Quelch came into the Remove Form-room, his brows were knitted. The Removites saw at once that something was to happen before lessons commenced.

"Vernon-Smith!" said the Form-master quietly.

"Yes, sir?"

"I have a statement to make concerning you which I wish the whole class to hear. I am sorry that you fell under unjust suspicion yesterday. I was misled in the matter by some utterly unscrupulous person at present unknown." Mr. Quelch's lips tightened expressively. "Dr. Locke has communicated with Sir Hilton Popper."

There was a movement of interest in the Remove. All the juniors knew now of the happenings of the previous afternoon, and how narrow an escape the Bounder had had.



"Sir Hilton denies that he made a second call on my telephone yesterday afternoon," continued Mr. Quelch. "He maintains that he saw you, Vernon-Smith, and that incident is closed, as you have satisfied the head prefect on the subject. But Sir Hilton did not make a second call. The person who rang me up, and used his name, was an impostor, though this I did not think of suspecting at the time. It was, perhaps, a practical joke of some boy of this school." Here Mr. Quelch swept a steely glance over the silent class. "At all events, the message was given by an impostor, and if I had been aware of that, of course, I should not have attached the slightest importance to it. As there seems no reason why a stranger should play such a trick, I conclude that it was done by some Greyfriars boy, and inquiries will be made into the matter."

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Billy Bunter.

The fat junior blinked at Harold Skinner through his big glasses. Bunter had not forgotten that run to Friardale, and his disappointment at discovering that the supposed food-hog had only gone to the post-office to make a telephone-call.

Billy Bunter was not particularly keen; but he did not need much further enlightenment than Mr. Quelch's words gave him.

Mr. Quelch's eyes, scanning the faces in his class, rested upon the Owl of the Remove. The excitement in Bunter's fat face did not pass unnoticed.

"Bunter!" he rapped out.

Bunter started.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"You were in the village yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh, no, sir!" stammered Bunter, in dismay.

"I passed you in the lane, Bunter."

"Oh! I—I mean yes, sir! I meant to say yes, sir!"

"Did you telephone to me, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Are you aware who did?"

"Nunno, sir! I—I haven't the faintest idea, sir!" gasped Bunter, wondering in dismay why Mr. Quelch had picked on him. "Not at all, sir!"

"Very well, Bunter," said the Remove-master quietly, with another keen look at Bunter. "I hope you are telling the truth."

"Oh, certainly, sir! I always do, sir! I—I sometimes get disliked for being so truthful, sir!" stammered the Owl.

"That will do, Bunter! Vernon-Smith, I repeat that I regret that injustice was done you, on the word of some false and cowardly schemer! The matter is now ended."

There was a momentary pause, and then Mr. Quelch resumed:

"I visited the Cross Keys public-house under a misapprehension, owing to this trick. But although Vernon-Smith certainly was not there, some boy belonging to Greyfriars was there. I concluded at the time that it was Vernon-Smith. That was a mistake. I hope"—Mr. Quelch's voice deepened—"I hope that it was not a boy belonging to my Form. If, however, it was a boy now present in this Form-room, I invite him to stand forward and make a full confession of his fault, and undertake that he will be dealt with as mercifully as possible."

Sidney James Snoop's eyes were fixed on his desk.

He did not move.

"If no boy present has anything to say, the matter closes," added the Form-master. "But I may add that strict inquiry will be made, and that the facts will doubtless be discovered."

Snoop set his thin lips.

Silence followed the Remove-master's

words; and, after waiting a minute or so, Mr. Quelch dismissed the matter, and the juniors plunged into first lesson.

But they were thinking quite as much about Mr. Quelch's statement as about his instructions that morning.

When the Form was dismissed after morning lessons, most of the fellows were discussing it after they left the Form-room.

Many of them knew of Snoop's narrow escape, and most of them regarded his dingy blackguardism with contempt and aversion. But there was only one opinion on the subject of the fellow who had so nearly betrayed him to severe punishment.

"There's a sneak somewhere!" Bob Cherry said.

"A mean, sneaking sneak!" said Bol-sover major. "A deep rotter, too, or he wouldn't have thought of using the telephone to hide behind!"

"Whoever informed Quelch meant the Bounder to be caught," said Harry Wharton. "It was someone who knew the Bounder intended to be there."

"He, he, he!"

"Did you know, you cackling ass?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"He, he! No! Somebody did!"

"Well, we know somebody did, fat-head!"

"The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed, chortling Bunter!"

"It would have served Smithy right if he'd been nailed there, and it would have served Snoop right," said Johnny Bull stolidly. "It's a pity they weren't both caught on the hop! All the same, the sneak ought to be made an example of, if he's found out!"

"Let's hope he will be," remarked Skinner. At which there was another explosive cackling from William George Bunter.



Risking his neck for Skinner! (See Chapter 12.)

"An awful rotter!" said Frank Nugent. "Snoop's a shady cad, right enough; but informing is more caddish than blagging. What do you think, Harry?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Whoever gave information to Quelch didn't do it because he was down on blagging," he said. "Chaps don't do mean, sneaking things from high motives. If a sneak informs, he does it because he's a crawling, mean informer!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

"No reason to suppose that it was a chap in the Remove, though," remarked Skinner casually. "Might have been anybody, even if it was a Greyfriars chap at all."

"He, he, he!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you cackling at, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter chortled.

"Skinner thinks it wasn't a chap in the Remove. He, he, he!"

"Well, very likely it wasn't!" said Bob warmly. "We don't have sneaks in the Remove!"

"Unless it's Snoop!" grinned Johnny Bull. "And Snoop wouldn't give information against himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### The Amateur Blackmailer !]

SKINNER of the Remove went into his study at tea-time with a moody brow. He was not feeling satisfied with himself or things generally. He knew that Vernon-Smith suspected him. He feared that Bunter did. And he dreaded what would follow if his treachery came to light.

The terms he was upon with his study-mate, too, made a difference to Skinner. Vernon-Smith was wealthy, and Skinner had been accustomed to sharing the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, so to speak. In a time of war rations that was rather an important matter to Skinner. He sat down discontentedly to his frugal tea. But before he could begin on it the door was opened, and a pair of big glasses glimmered into the study.

"Oh, here you are, Skinney!" said Billy Bunter.

"Get out!"

"Smithy not come in? Good! I want a little jaw with you, Skinney."

"Clear off, you slug!"

"Rations are getting awfully short," said Bunter, unheeding the compliment. "What I miss specially is the sugar. I

like sugar. I don't think you care for it much, Skinner, so I'm going to make a proposition. I see you've got your two lumps allowance there. Can I have them?"

Skinner stared at him.

"No, you can't, you fat porpoise!"

"And those oatcakes," said Bunter calmly. "I like them better than war bread, but I don't get enough—not nearly enough. Did you say I could have them, Skinner?"

"You cheeky ass! What do you mean?"

"If you want any, you can buy some, you know, instead of spending your money on telephone-calls at the post-office," grinned Bunter.

Skinner closed his thin lips hard. He understood now.

"Let my grub alone, you fat rotter!" he said, through his teeth.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"And get out of my study!"

"I'll wait for Smithy to come in, if you don't mind," smiled Bunter. "Smithy will be interested to know about your going down to Friardale to telephone yesterday afternoon."

"I—I didn't!" hissed Skinner.

"He, he, he! I followed you to the post-office, and you were shut up in the telephone-box," chuckled Bunter. "Who was it you were telephoning to, Skinner? Old Quelch—what? He, he, he!"

Skinner breathed hard.

His hands itched to be upon Bunter, but he restrained himself. He dared not risk the Owl's betraying what he knew.

"Can I have the sugar, old chap?" asked Bunter affably.

Skinner nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

"And the oatcakes?"

Another nod.

"Thanks awfully! Sure you don't want them, old fellow?" asked Bunter, very considerately.

Skinner did not reply. He nearly choked. Bunter gathered up the two lumps of sugar, which he transferred to his capacious mouth at once, and then collected the oatcakes, and the slice of currant cake, and a jar of honey. Skinner watched him speechlessly. This was the price of Bunter's silence!

"You don't mind if I take the lot, old chap, as you're not hungry?" said Billy Bunter, blinking at him.

"Get out!" muttered Skinner in a suffocating voice.

"Well, as you're so pressing, I'll take the lot," said Bunter. "I'll give you a look-in again to-morrow, Skinner. He, he!"

Skinner immediately resolved to have his tea in Hall the next day. Bunter moved to the door, but paused and looked back.

"By the way, could you cash a postal-order for me, Skinner?"

"No!" gasped Skinner.

"You had a remittance to-day?"

"I—I—"

"I saw you take it out of the envelope, Skinner," said Bunter calmly. "You haven't changed it yet? Well, we'll say to-morrow. Perhaps you could cash a postal-order for me to-morrow?"

Skinner clenched his hands.

"Can you, or can't you?" demanded Bunter.

"Yes," panted Skinner, "if—if you like!"

"Right-ho, old chap! I knew you'd oblige me, as we're such pals," said Bunter, affable again. "Don't forget. In fact, I'll remind you to-morrow morning. Ta-ta!"

And Bunter opened the door and

rolled out of the study, leaving Harold Skinner pale with rage.

A moment later there was a roar in the passage.

"Yaroooh! Leggo!"

"You fat boulder!" came Bob Cherry's stentorian voice. "Burgling again—what? Kim on!"

"Yaroooh! You beast! They're mine! Leggo!"

"Kim on!"

Bob Cherry kicked open the door of the study, and swung Bunter in by the collar, and marched after him. Bunter's fat hands were full of his plunder, and Bob had not unnaturally supposed that the Owl had been performing a raid on the Boulder's study—a practice to which Bunter was much given in lean times.

With Bob's iron grip on his collar, Bunter had no choice about coming back into the study.

"Now shove that grub back where you got it!" said Bob. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! You here, Skinner?"

Bob stared at Skinner. He had supposed that Bunter had been raiding an unoccupied study.

"Yah! Lemmo alone!" roared Bunter. "Skinner gave them to me! Yow-ow! Didn't you, Skinner? Yooop!"

"Skinner gave you his own tea?" exclaimed Bob, in astonishment.

"Yes, he did! Ask him! Yah!"

Skinner's eyes fell before Bob's stare of astonishment. Skinner was about the last fellow in the school to give away his own rations. He had to back up Bunter's statement or take the consequences. But how was he to explain the astounding circumstance to Bob Cherry?

"Did you give your grub to Bunter?" asked Bob blankly. "I thought the fat boulder was picking and stealing, as usual!"

"I—I—I—"

"Tell the silly idiot you gave me your rations, Skinner!" howled Bunter, with a threatening "blink at the wretched junior.

"I—I gave them to him, Cherry," said Skinner, in a halting voice. "I—I wasn't hungry, and—and Bunter was, so—so I gave him my—my rations."

"By gad! That was generous of you, Skinner!" said a sarcastic voice in the doorway. "Dashed generous, by gad!"

The Boulder sauntered in.

Skinner's jaw dropped.

"Well, if you gave him your grub, that's all right," said Bob, puzzled, and he released Bunter. "My mistake! I thought he'd been burgling."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob Cherry quitted the study, still quite perplexed. Billy Bunter would gladly have followed him, but the Boulder stood in the way.

"I—I say, lemme pass, Smithy!" mumbled Bunter. "This isn't your grub. It's Skinner's. He gave it to me!"

"Are you in a hurry?" smiled Vernon-Smith.

"Ye-es. The fact is, I'm rather in a hurry."

"Sorry, because you're not going just yet," remarked Vernon-Smith. And he closed the door and leaned on it. "So Skinner's been giving you his rations, Bunter?"

"Ye-es."

"Why?" asked the Boulder.

"Because—because I—I asked him, you know," stammered Bunter. "We—we—we're great pals, you know, me and old Skinner. So—so—"

"You shouldn't be as generous as this, Skinner," said the Boulder, with a shake of the head. "It's not just to yourself. It might lead a fellow to suspect that old Quelch was right this morning in sup-

posing that Bunter knew something about the chap who telephoned to him."

Skinner's face was livid.

"It might lead a suspicious chap to suppose that that prying fat rascal had spied out your little trick, Skinner, and was blackmailing you to keep it dark," smiled the Boulder.

"Oh, really, Smithy," said Bunter feebly. "Skinner gave me his grub out of—of pure friendship, you know!"

"You didn't threaten him—eh?"

"Nunno! Of—of course not!"

"You want me to believe that the meanest rotter in the Remove gave away his grub out of sheer generosity?"

"Ye-es, exactly!"

"You fat duffer! You knew that Skinner telephoned yesterday, and used old Popper's name."

"N-n-not at all, Smithy! I—I didn't follow him to Friardale!" stammered Bunter in confusion. "I—I didn't find him in the telephone-box at the post-office. I didn't really, Smithy! As for threatening him, I wouldn't threaten an old pal like Skinner. Why, he's going to cash a postal-order for me to-morrow! Ain't you, Skinney, old chap?"

Skinner did not reply, but his look was like a dagger.

"Put that grub on the table!" said Vernon-Smith.

"I—I say, it's mine, you know!" stammered Bunter. "Wha-a-are you going to do with that stump, Smithy?"

"I'm going to thrash you."

"I—I say— Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "I—I say, Smithy, I don't want the grub! You can have it. Yarooop! I—I say, keep off! I meant to tell you all along, you know, to put you on your guard! Yow-ow-wooop!" Billy Bunter dodged wildly, but he could not escape the stump. "I—I say, Smithy, I knew it was Skinner who telephoned, and I was going to tell you. I was going to come to you and say— Yaroooop!"

Bunter made a wild rush at the door and tore it open, with the stump lashing behind him, and fled, roaring.

Vernon-Smith kicked the door shut after him, and tossed the stump into a corner. He smiled at Skinner across the table.

"I've saved your tea for you," he remarked.

Skinner licked his dry lips. His hands clenched, and he stiffened up. He expected an attack, and he knew he would be licked. But the Boulder was quite good-humoured.

"I knew it was you," he remarked. "I only wanted proof, and now I've got it. It was playing it rather low-down, wasn't it, Skinner?"

"I'm ready to come into the gym, if you like," said Skinner sullenly.

The Boulder laughed.

"What's the good of licking you?" he said. "You'd only watch for another chance of playing me a dirty trick. I can't afford to run these risks, Skinner. It's the second time you've nearly got me lagged. There isn't going to be any third time, dear boy!"

"What are you going to do about it?" sneered Skinner.

"I'm going to draw your teeth!" said the Boulder quietly. "You're dangerous, Skinner. Your merry teeth are going to be drawn!"

Skinner gave him a sullen look, and quitted the study. The Boulder laughed, and lighted a cigarette.

## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### After Lights-Out!

HARRY WHARTON stirred, and awoke.

There was a movement in the Remove dormitory. The captain of the Remove looked round him sleepily

in the dim moonlight that streamed in at the high windows.

From the gloom came the soft sound of a footstep cautiously moving towards the door.

Wharton sat up in bed.

He thought of the Bounder at once. His brow darkened. He was fully awake now. Many a time, he knew, Vernon-Smith had stolen out of the dormitory after lights-out on forbidden excursions. It was now three days since Mr. Quelch's visit to the Cross Keys, and during those three days the Bounder had been quite a new fellow. He had realised the risk he had run from his Form-master's watchfulness and from the treachery of his study-mate, and he had given Skinner no opening.

Much as Harry despised Skinner's act, he was glad to think that it might mean the beginning of a new path for the Bounder.

But this did not seem like it. Wharton, peering through the gloom, spoke in a low voice.

"Smithy!"

There was no reply.

"Smithy! Don't play the silly goat! Get back to bed! What are you such a confounded blackguard for? Get back to bed, you silly ass!"

The door closed softly.

Harry Wharton laid his head upon the pillow again, angry and annoyed. It was no business of his, perhaps. He had no sufficient right to interfere. He had tried that sort of thing before, and it had done no good. But it was not pleasant to think that a fellow was risking bringing disgrace upon his Form and his school—a fellow for whom he could not help, in the depths of his heart, feeling something like friendship.

A soft chuckle in the gloom made him start.

He sat up again. He knew the ironical chuckle of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

"Smithy!" he ejaculated.

Another chuckle.

"I—I thought you were gone out. I heard somebody—"

"You're catching dear old Quelch's habit of jumping to conclusions," said the Bounder. "I thought I'd enlighten you."

"Somebody's gone out!" said Harry.

"Is it Snoop?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Snoop's voice from his bed.

"Dear old Skinner!" chuckled the Bounder. "Good old Skinner! We must all be dogs sometimes, you know! Charming old Harold! And he never mentioned to me that he was going—doesn't trust an old pal! I shouldn't have known it if Snoop hadn't been kind enough to mention it, and I should have been asleep and known nothing about it till I saw Skinner looking pasty-faced in the morning. Ha, ha!"

"I don't see why you stayed awake," said Harry.

"I wanted to see dear old Skinner off. So did Snoop. Snoop didn't go with him, on my advice. I'm going to take Snoop on my next wicked break, as a compensation for missing this happy little run with Skinner. You never expected to see me in the role of keeping thoughtless youths back from the merry road to ruin, did you, Wharton?"

"A pity you couldn't keep that fool Skinner back, too!" said Wharton drily.

The Bounder laughed softly.

"That wouldn't have done," he said.

"Why not?"

"By gad! I'm sleepy. Good-night, Wharton!"

"Good-night!" said Harry shortly.

He settled down to sleep again. He was glad that it was not Vernon-Smith who had gone out; but he was puzzled,

and a little uneasy. There was something in the Bounder's tone that disquieted him.

He had noticed that for a day or two Vernon-Smith had been quite friendly with Sidney James Snoop.

Why had he troubled to keep that shady youth from joining in Skinner's reckless excursion out of bounds? The Bounder cared nothing whether Snoop went to the dogs or not. Evidently he had used Snoop to obtain information as to Skinner's intentions, Snoop being very chummy with Skinner. Chummy as they were, however, Snoop had neither forgotten nor forgiven his fright at the Cross Keys, due to Skinner's trickery, now known to all the Remove. If the Bounder intended any retaliation upon Skinner, Snoop was likely to be a willing tool in his hands.

Wharton felt that there was something up, but he dropped to sleep again while he was thinking of it. Silence and slumber reigned in the Remove dormitory.

It was half an hour later that Vernon-Smith slipped quietly from his bed and drew on his clothes. A low whisper came from the gloom.

"Getting up, Smithy?"

It was Snoop who spoke.

"You awake?" muttered the Bounder.

"Yes. What are you up to?"

"Don't ask questions, and you'll get no lies, Snoopey!"

"Is it a trick on Skinner?" asked Snoop, unheeding.

The Bounder laughed softly.

"Skinner's dangerous, Snoopey!" he said. "He's given me away twice. That's barred, you know! You came near being sacked the other day through him. Do you want to chance it again?"

"No. But what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to draw his teeth for good!"

The Bounder went silently to the door.

Snoop, shivering, remained in silence in his bed. He remembered only too keenly the terror he had gone through on Wednesday afternoon, when Mr. Quelch had so nearly caught him among Mr. Cobb & Co. Skinner had to be stopped. His malicious betrayal of the Bounder might be fatal to any other of the blades of the school. Skinner had not cared who might suffer from his treachery so long as the Bounder suffered; and Snoop, his own pal, had had a narrow escape. Snoop had no objection to the cad of the Remove being taught a lesson, and the severer the better. But the cold, grim unscrupulousness of the Bounder scared him. He waited in shivering silence till Vernon-Smith came quietly back into the dormitory. The Bounder had not been gone five minutes.

"Smithy!"

"Go to sleep, you ass!"

"What have you done?"

"Skinner!"

"What?"

"I've done Skinner!" the Bounder chuckled. "Go to sleep!"

"Tell me what you've done!"

"I've fastened the box-room window!"

The Bounder's voice was a chuckling whisper. "Skinner's out for the night!"

"Oh!"

"I hope he'll have a good time at the pub, and win lots of money. It's his last flutter while he's at Greyfriars!"

Snoop caught his breath.

"He's shut out for the night, Smithy?"

"Yes."

"He'll—he'll be found, and—and sacked!"

"Exactly. Then we shall both be safe from his tricks, Snoopey. Do you want to be caught out next time you go on the flutter?"

"I—I— It's too thick, Smithy!"

"Rats! Go to sleep!"

The Bounder turned in quietly. But there was no sleep for Snoop. He could not help thinking of Skinner—of his terror when he should find the window fastened against him—of his anguish of mind as he waited outside for the inevitable discovery in the morning.

He had asked for it; he had provoked the bitter, merciless retaliation of the Bounder. It was on a level with what he had planned for Vernon-Smith; but—

But Snoop could not sleep, and he marvelled to hear the steady, regular breathing from the Bounder's bed. Vernon-Smith was sleeping calmly.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Shut Out!

**M**IDNIGHT had long passed when a slinking, skulking figure dodged among the shadows across the moonlit quadrangle of Greyfriars. Skinner of the Remove was returning.

He had not, as the Bounder had charitably hoped, had a good time. He had smoked cigarettes and played poker, and felt no end of a dog, certainly. But his late remittance had vanished. Jerry Hawke and Smiley Dick played poker much better than Harold Skinner did; and even the consciousness of being no end of a dog did not quite console Skinner for losing every coin he possessed in the wide world.

He was tired, irritable, and in a bad temper. It was awfully doggish to smoke half a dozen cigarettes, one after another, but it gave him a quality feeling inside. He felt more like a Channel passenger than a gay dog just now. And he was sleepy and heavy and disappointed. He climbed savagely on to the leads of the outhouse, feeling inclined to kick himself for his folly in being out of bed at all.

The window of the box-room did not open to his hand.

"Hang it!" muttered the junior savagely.

His idea was that the window had stuck somehow. It was not till he had been pressing at the sash for some minutes that he realised it must be fastened on the inside.

A cold chill ran down Skinner's back.

He stood quite still on the leads, his face growing white, and his eyes full of fear.

The window was fastened!

Someone had fastened it after him. A prefect, perhaps, had found it unfastened, and slipped the catch, or—or someone had played this trick on him. Skinner had once played just such a trick on a junior out of bounds.

"Snoop!" he muttered breathlessly.

Why should Snoop do it? Because of his own narrow escape the other day, due to his chum's trickery! Or was it the Bounder?

At the thought of the Bounder, Skinner understood at once. Smithy had been lying low for days, waiting for this. Snoop had told him, and he had struck! He had told Skinner that he would draw his teeth!

The wretched junior stood on the leads in utter dismay and fear.

He was shut out for the night!

What would be said when he was found outside the House in the morning? What defence could he make?

There was despair in his heart.

For some time he stood motionless, leaning on the cold stone window-sill, at a dead loss. He roused himself at last, and opened his penknife, and made an attempt to force back the catch through the sashes. There was a sharp snap as the blade broke.

Skinner's lips trembled. He had known the attempt would be useless, but he had tried it. He dropped the broken knife into his pocket, and slipped from the leads to the ground again.

For half an hour the hapless black sheep skulked about the House, scanning windows and doors, in a miserable hope that one might have been left carelessly unfastened.

But every door and window was fast, as he might have known it would be. He stopped at last under the windows of the Remove dormitory, where thick masses of ivy covered the old, grey stone walls.

There was his last chance!

He knew that Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and a few other bold spirits had made that dangerous ascent once or twice. It required boundless pluck and an iron nerve.

Skinner was incapable of it. He knew that he could not do it. The dizzy height made him tremble to look at it; but it was his only hope, and he stood there looking upward in the dim moonlight.

He thought of throwing up stones to the window. Some Remove fellow might awaken, and take pity on his plight. But Mr. Quelch's window was not distant, and the Remove-master was a light sleeper. If he awakened him—

But the alternative—to skulk round the House till morning, and then to be discovered out of doors! He knew what that meant. It meant for him what he had planned for Vernon-Smith. The Bounder would be safe from him when he was sent away from Greyfriars in disgrace. His teeth would be drawn with a vengeance then!

Should he attempt the climb, or throw up pebbles? If he awakened the others, the Bounder would awaken, too; and if any fellow chose to come out of the dormitory and let him in, was the Bounder likely to allow it?

He knew that Vernon-Smith would not. It would be easy for him to contrive that Mr. Quelch should be awakened, as if accidentally, so that it would be impossible for any Remove fellow to leave the dormitory.

Skinner groaned in bitterness of spirit.

He had no right to complain. It was exactly the trick he might have played on the Bounder, given the opportunity.

He tramped round the House again, looking at the lower windows. But he came back to the wall under the dormitory. His only hope was there. He knew it must be close on two o'clock by this time. In a short time the summer dawn would break; then any early riser might see him by glancing from a window.

Skinner made up his mind at last. With a white, set face, his teeth clenched, he gripped the old, heavy tendrils of the ivy, and climbed. Only desperation could have driven him to the attempt, but he was desperate now.

The ivy swayed and rustled. He knew it would bear his weight; it had borne the weight of heavier fellows. But as the ground receded further and further below him, Skinner's heart beat harder. He felt and groped for stout tendrils to cling to. He found occasional foothold amid gnarled and knotted old roots, but the strain told terribly upon him. He had not anything like Wharton's or Bob Cherry's fitness of body.

But he was spurred on now by a new fear. To ascend was easier than to descend, now that he was twelve or fifteen feet up. He knew that if he lost heart he could never reach the ground in safety. It was not only disgrace and expulsion he had to dread now; it was peril to life and limb!

He climbed on with savage despera-

tion, the ivy swaying and rustling and creaking.

The wide, solid sill of the window was above him now. It glimmered in the moonlight, only a foot above his head. His hand touched it; he got a grip on the edge.

His brain nearly swam as he realised that he could not drag himself upon it. He made a fearful effort, and his hand slipped from the sill, and he fastened a mad clutch on the ivy again. His whole body was throbbing with fear and horror. For several minutes he did not move, only holding on to the swaying ivy with the clutch of a frightened animal.

Fool he had been to climb at all! He could climb no further, and his weedy strength was going. He realised it with a pang of anguish.

The fear of discovery was nothing now. A more terrible fear had swallowed it up—the fear of death!

As he clung to the ivy he called for help; but his voice came out husky and hoarse, with a harsh croak that frightened him.

"Help!"

It was rather a groan than a cry.

"Help! Help!"

That strangled, sobbing cry would not have reached a sleeping ear; but there was one, at least, wakeful in the Remove dormitory.

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### In Peril of His Life!

**H**ARRY WHARTON & CO. were sleeping soundly, little dreaming of their Form-fellow's deadly peril so close at hand. The Bounder slept peacefully, a smile on his unconscious face. But Sidney James Snoop was awake, and troubled. And to Snoop's wakeful ears came that husky, jarring cry from the silence of the night. Snoop started and sat up.

"Help!"

He trembled.

"The fool—the mad fool!"

He understood at once, and slipped out of bed, and scrambled blindly to the Bounder's bed.

"Smithy!"

He shook Vernon-Smith fiercely.

The Bounder started into wakefulness.

"Hallo! What—"

"Wako up! Wake up! It's Skinner!"

"Hang Skinner!"

"He's at the window—calling for help!"

"By gad!"

The Bounder sat up in bed, wide awake now. He peered through the darkness at the glimmering square of the high window.

There was no sign of anyone without—only the shadows of moving tendrils of ivy waving on the glass in the dim moonlight.

"What do you mean, Snoop, you fool? Nobody's there—"

The Bounder broke off suddenly. From the direction of the window came that hoarse, harsh voice, in sobbing tones of deadly fear.

"Help!"

"He—he's there! He can't get in! He'll be killed!" stammered Snoop, through his chattering teeth. "He'll be killed!"

The Bounder was out of bed in a twinkling.

He had never dreamed of this. That Skinner would have the nerve to attempt such a climb had not even entered his thoughts. He knew that Skinner could not do it. The wretched junior's plight at this moment was proof enough that he was not equal to it. He had not counted upon desperation driving the junior to attempt what was beyond his strength.

"By gad!" muttered the Bounder softly.

He dragged a chair under the window, sprang upon it, and opened the window, leaning out over the broad sill.

Two feet below him a dead-white face looked upward.

"Skinner! It's you?"

"Help!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a murmur of voices in the dormitory now. Several of the Removees were awake.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's going on?" came Bob Cherry's drowsy tones.

"There is someone at the esteemed window, my worthy chums—"

"Smithy, by Jove!" said Squiff.

Harry Wharton leaped from his bed.

"Smithy! What the dickens—"

"Skinner's outside!" mumbled Snoop, with almost palsied lips. "He can't get in. He'll be killed!"

"Good heavens!"

Wharton ran to the window. Half the Remove were out of bed now, with faces pale with consternation.

Vernon-Smith did not heed the buzz in the dormitory behind him.

With cool, steady eyes he looked down at Skinner. The wretched junior was clinging like a cat to the ivy, unable to advance or recede. With failing strength, he was holding on. And he could not be reached from the window-sill.

A bitter, sardonic smile crossed the Bounder's lips.

In five minutes, ten at the most, Skinner would lose his hold, and go whirling down to death—unless he was saved! And he could only be saved by someone else venturing out upon the ivy, in deadly peril of his life. The ivy held one—would it hold two?

The Bounder did not know.

But at that terrible moment all that was best in Vernon-Smith's strange and tortuous nature came to the top.

He did not hesitate.

It was only for a few seconds that he looked down at Skinner's colourless, tortured face.

Then he swung himself over the sill, and held by his hands, and lowered himself into the thick masses of the ivy that clung and curled round the great window.

In a few seconds more he was close by Skinner.

"Buck up!" whispered the Bounder.

Skinner could not speak. His teeth were tightly clenched to help him keep his self-control—to keep back the screams of terror he would have uttered—the beginning of hysteria.

"Buck up, Skinner, old chap! Safe now!"

There was no enmity in the Bounder's heart then. Skinner was a schoolfellow in deadly peril, and he was there to help him—that was all.

His strong arm had already grasped the weedy junior.

His left hand was holding to a thick tendril just below the window. His right held Skinner like a vice. And by sheer strength he dragged the helpless junior up.

Skinner's clutching hands closed on the window-sill.

The relief of his weight came only just in time. The tendril to which the Bounder was holding, strong as it was, was giving.

"Hold on, Skinner!" he breathed.

Harry Wharton was at the window now. He grasped Skinner by his arm and his collar, and dragged him bodily in. Head first. Skinner scrambled blindly through the window, and two or three fellows inside received him.

"Smithy!"

The Bounder was climbing now. His left hand was loose for a moment, but he

had secured a grip with his right. For an instant he swung over terrible death, and then his left was on the window-sill, clutching. Then Harry Wharton's strong grasp was on his arm, and he climbed in, helped from above by the captain of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith dropped lightly to the floor within. He was breathing hard, and his face was pale. His pyjamas were torn and dusty.

Wharton closed the window, and stepped down from the chair.

"You might have been killed Smithy!" he said, with a catch in his voice.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. He was quite himself again now.

"Skinner, you fool!" said Johnny Bull. "You dashed fool! Oh, you fool!" Skinner did not speak.

He was hanging on to Bob Cherry, trembling in every limb, and breathing in sharp jerks—wringing to the very soul by the fearful peril he had escaped.

Bob helped him to his bed gently enough. It was likely to be some time before Skinner got over that fright. He lay silent in his bed, his eyes still staring fixedly, and Bob Cherry threw the bed-clothes over him.

"Thank goodness it's no worse," said Harry Wharton. He had been more shaken by Skinner's peril than he would have been by peril to himself. "The utter fool might have broken his neck!"

"He would have broken it, if Smithy hadn't fetched him in," said Bolsover major. "Blessed if I'd have liked to go out for him—like that!"

The Removites turned in, glad enough that there had been no alarm outside the dormitory. But it was not for long

hours that Harold Skinner closed his eyes.

Skinner was last down of the Remove in the morning. He had slept till the latest minute. He was still feeling seedy and shaken, but more himself, when he went out into the sunshine of the quadrangle. The Bounder was there, chatting with Harry Wharton & Co. The Famous Five regarded Skinner grimly.

"What made you idiot enough to climb up to the window?" asked Bob Cherry.

"You couldn't do it!"

"The box-room window was fastened after me," said Skinner, with a side-long look at the Bounder. "Somebody sneaked out of the dorm and did it."

"A dirty trick!" commented Johnny Bull. "Served you right, all the same! What were you out of bounds for?"

"I think I know who did it," said Skinner.

"If you don't, I can enlighten you," grinned the Bounder. "I did it! One good turn deserves another, dear boy!"

Skinner looked at him, not with the look he expected. He was very quiet and subdued.

"I knew it, Smithy," he said. "I—I deserved it, too. It was no worse than I'd done to you. But—but why did you come out of the window for me?"

"Because I'm a silly ass sometimes," yawned the Bounder. "Everybody plays the ox at times, you know. I did it then."

"You saved my life!"

"Wasn't worth it, was it?" grinned the Bounder.

"I did a bit of thinking last night," said Skinner quietly. "I—I'm sorry I played you that dirty trick the other day, Smithy. I'm sorry I played the fool last

night. I—I'm not going to keep on with that shady rot. I—I can see now that it's not good enough. If you like to let bygones be bygones, I'm willing—and—and I'm going to play the game after this, straight as a string. I wish you'd do the same, Smithy."

The Bounder looked at him keenly—the Famous Five in surprise. Skinner was in earnest. He had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and it had opened his mind to many things. Whether it would last was a question—but he was quiet and earnest now.

"By gad!" said the Bounder. "Skinner preaching! That beats everything!"

"I'm not preaching!" Skinner flushed.

"But—but—"

"He's talking sense for once," said Bob Cherry. "Give him your fist, Smithy, and let bygones be bygones—and take his advice into the bargain."

The Bounder laughed, and held out his hand to his study-mate.

"There's my fin, Skinny, if you like. And—and I'll think over what you've suggested. Might be something in it."

"There's a lot in it Smithy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Who knows?"

And the Bounder put his hands in his pockets and strolled away, whistling. But, carelessly as he whistled, there was an unusually serious shade of thought upon his face. That moment of peril had not been without its lesson for the Bounder of Greyfriars, as well as for Skinner.

(Don't miss "ON THE WRONG TRACK!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

## The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"ON THE WRONG TRACK!"

By Frank Richards.

The Bounder plays no part in next week's story. Perhaps, after this week's yarn, those of my readers who have been worrying about him will be easier in their minds. Nothing is much more unlikely than that the fellow who could risk his own life to save that of Skinner, his mean-spirited enemy, will fail to turn up trumps in the end.

As for Skinner, I have no belief at all in that promised reformation of his. He does not show up well in "On the Wrong Track"—though his part is a small one—and he shows up still worse in a later story which I have just read.

Skinner's remorse was just sheer funk; that's all about it.

The Famous Five and Wibley are the chief figures in next week's yarn. Ferrers Locke, the detective, also comes prominently into it; and there is a mystery which should interest you all. Most of you are keen on Wibley's impersonations, I know, and all of you admire the manner in which Harry Wharton & Co. always stand by a friend down on his luck. So you should like this story.

### SUGGESTIONS.

Shoals of letters have come along in response to my request to my readers to let me know what they would like to follow the serial lately concluded.

Two boys want historical stories. But I fear they cannot be satisfied. The taste for stories of this type seems to have vanished almost completely. I can remember the day when no boy's paper was reckoned complete without at least one historical yarn. Sometimes there were two. But now—Some day, I fancy, there may be a revival of the yarn of old days; but that time is not yet.

Two or three more want a detective serial. But the majority of my readers don't care

for this type of yarn. And those who do are splendidly catered for in the "Union Jack" and the "Nelson Lee Library."

Some vote for another adventure serial. Not many, however.

A good many ask for a school serial. This may come later. For the present, I think, I am meeting the desire of the majority by giving each week some extracts from the "Greyfriars Herald." There is no doubt about the popularity of these; and they have the additional advantage that whenever the time seems ripe for a change they can be held up and something else substituted.

### AMATEUR AUTHORS.

One correspondent asks for an amateur section. He wants prizes offered for the best stories and verses, and he thinks that the two pages or so I have to play with might be filled to the satisfaction of all by the resulting contributions.

But there never was a bigger mistake than this!

If I had a dozen pages to spare, I might give up a couple of them to this sort of thing. But I know that it would interest few beside the competitors—and most of them would only read their own efforts!

This sort of thing has been tried before—never with much success.

It is a common delusion that the readers of a paper can turn in stuff that will be read as eagerly as that of the established contributors. But it is a delusion.

Such attempts betray the 'prentice hand in every line. I have from time to time used a few readers' efforts. In nearly every case I have had to do so much in the way of improvement to them that when they appeared in print little more than the bare idea—and that has seldom been of marked originality—has remained of the MS. as it stood when reaching me. Of all who have tried only one shows such promise as justifies me in encouraging him to think of writing for his living. Even with his stuff, though it has real merit, I have to use the blue pencil very freely.

But every author was a beginner once, you may say.

True! But it is unlikely that, as a beginner, he got his stuff published.

What a beginner needs, if he is ever to make good, is drastic criticism. But he does not want it, as a rule; wanting is not one with needing. What he wants is butter, laid on thick, and to see his immature efforts in print, and to go about with his head in the air imagining himself another Frank Richards. If he once gets paid for a contribution he feels certain that he is on the high-road to making a fortune; and he finds it impossible to understand why an editor who has accepted one of his efforts should ever turn down anything he chooses to send along.

I have by me two or three articles of advice to would-be writers. I have not used them yet because I doubted whether the subject was of enough general interest. But I may find a column or two for them soon—either here or in the "Gem."

### NOTICES.

Correspondence Club, both sexes; monthly magazine. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.—Robert Bacon, 79, Westhill Drive, Mansfield, Notts.

Frank Edmunds, 7, Whinham Street, Fitzroy, Adelaide, South Australia, wants to correspond with a Canadian boy of about 16.

Readers wanted for good amateur magazine. Passed round in turn. Stamped and addressed envelope for full particulars to W. McNally, Glenview, Glenluce, Wigtownshire.

Amateur magazine on sale. First 20 copies to be given away. Price after that, 1½d. Contributions wanted.—T. Mann, Winslow, Burford Rd., Bickley, Kent.

R. H. Brown, 2, Arthur Street, Anlaby Road, Hull, would be glad to hear from readers who want to join a photographic club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Your Editor

# THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 30.—SIDNEY JAMES SNOOP.

**L**ET us say first what good can be said of Snoop.

It took only one line, you see. What! That line is blank, you say? Oh, yes! But that is only because there really was nothing to go into it!

On the other side— Well, it would not be worth while to give more space than usual in order to chronicle all of Snoop's iniquities.

There is nothing dashing or attractive about them. Skinner is a sordid enough figure, but there are times when he would shine out by the side of Snoop. He has done things worse, maybe, than Snoop ever did; there is little good in him, but there is more than in Snoop. Skinner is mean enough, cowardly enough; but Snoop is meaner than he, and far more craven.

To Skinner has sometimes, though but rarely, come a gleam of better things. For a few moments—if only for a few moments—he has felt a glow of gratitude or of shame, has taken courage, has shown himself not wholly vile.

The gleam has never fallen upon Snoop. In some fellows there is a yellow streak. Skinner's is a wide yellow streak. Stott's is not much narrower. Fish has it, and Bunter—pretty wide, too, in both cases. It is in Hazeldene, and in the Bounder, and in Bulstrode—or, if it is not now, it was. For it may be practically eradicated.

Snoop is dyed yellow. There is not an inch of him outside the streak.

If he were bolder he might do more harm than he does, but he would be a less repulsive object. He does all that he dares to do. It is far easier to forgive the hold villain, far easier to believe in the possibility of his putting his villainy from him and starting in to play the game, than it is in the case of the coward.

The snake is the beast that one thinks of in connection with Snoop, though perhaps that is scarcely fair to the snake, which really is not conspicuously lacking in courage. But the snake is secret and crawling in its methods, and the snake is poisonous; and Snoop's methods are like those of the snake.

If Snoop has friends at Greyfriars, those friends are Skinner and Stott. The three are closely allied. Could Skinner or Stott depend on Snoop in an emergency? They had better depend on any fellow they could find an enemy! Such as Snoop will do nothing for a friend.



Sidney James Snoop

Why, Snoop will do nothing even for his own father!

It is true that Snoop may be accounted unlucky in having such a father. Probably his home-life helped to make him what he is. But, after all, one's father is one's father, and it is the very limit in selfishness and cowardice to leave it to others to help him in his desperate need—or let him go under for want of help. And that is what Snoop did, as told in "Sharing the Risk," the fine story which appeared a week or two ago.

Moreover, it is what one would expect him to do. Nothing in his career would justify the expectation that he might rise to such an emergency. He owes the fact that he is able to stay on at Greyfriars to his rich uncle, yet his snobbishness came out when Uncle Huggins visited him at the school. He was chief toady to Bulstrode in Bulstrode's bad days, but that did not prevent him from letting Bulstrode get into the blackest trouble for what he himself had done, in the matter of the anonymous letter to Mr. Quelch.

He was one of Vernon-Smith's followers,

too; but the Bounder could never count upon him—no one can count upon him. He walks in Bolsover's train now, ready to do his will in anything that does not mean too much risk, or to betray him in order to save his own wretched skin, should matters come to such a pass as to make it necessary.

Many of you will remember the story entitled "Shunned by the Form," in which the bad time through which Arthur Brandreth lived at Greyfriars was recounted. Brandreth's father was believed guilty of the crime Snoop's father had committed. Snoop taunted him with it before he was well inside the gates, and was promptly knocked down.

He did not fight. Snoop never does. He would run from Bunter or Fish. More than that it would be hard to say. But in every possible mean way he made things uncomfortable for Brandreth, and it was through Snoop that the boy's hunted father fell into the hands of the police.

And then came the exposure of the truth. Brandreth's father was innocent. Josiah Snoop was the guilty man! Brandreth forgave Snoop, and stood by him in his trouble. And the other fellows were more than decent. After all, they argued, Snoop could not help having a scoundrel for a father. It was rough on him. He had been rough on Brandreth—worse than rough—but Brandreth had forgiven. That was a time when Sidney James Snoop stood at the cross-roads. He took the wrong turn, and he has kept on his way ever since.

He was one of Mark Linley's enemies, of course. It was he who made up as Mark's father, representing him as a quite unspeakable cad, at a time when the Lancashire lad was broken down by trouble at home. And Snoop was one of "The Four Heroes," the fellows who claimed the handsome reward offered by a fictitious Colonial stranger for a quite imaginary rescue.

It was all an audacious trick of the Bounder's to get revenge for the treachery of those who had toadied to him when he was top-dog, and turned upon him in his dark days. Skinner and Snoop were certain victims to such a device. Stott came in only as an accessory to Skinner's false claim. Bunter's stupid vanity and disgusting greed made him an easy prey. Bolsover major was the fourth. One thinks the Bounder must have been a bit surprised at bagging him.

Enough of Snoop! One need only refer in passing to his gay dog proclivities—a very dingy, hangdog, gay dog this one!

## Extracts from "The Greyfriars Herald."

### TURNING THE TABLES.

By BOB CHERRY.

**B**ILLY BUNTER, by all that's beautiful!"

"By jingo! What a state he's in!" cried Harry.

A more forlorn wreck than Bunter as he crawled from Wharton's study can scarcely be imagined. Strawberry jam was streaming down one side of his face, and apricot jam down the other. A number of eggs had burst on the top of his bullet head, and the yolks were streaming down his face and clothes, blending picturesquely with the jam. A number of merry little sardines were peeping inquisitively out of the back of his neck, and the scent of sardine oil pervaded everything.

asked Nugent, slapping him affectionately on the shoulder, and drawing his hand away a sticky mixture of jam and eggs and oil.

"B-b-booby-trap!" spluttered Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters! You've done this—"

"You fat chump! Do you think we'd erect a booby-trap over our own study door?" exclaimed Harry. "Look at the mess there is on the floor!"

"What were you coming to our study for, anyway?" demanded Nugent, whose affection for Bunter had slumped since he had seen the state of his own hand.

"Groooh! I—I came to set the table for tea—"

"To scoff the tea, you mean!"

"Gerrooch! I'm going to clean this stuff off!"

"Couldn't do better!" commented Johnny. The Owl rolled off to the bath-room.

"This concoction was evidently meant for us," said Harry, as we regarded the mess ruefully. "Let me catch the rotters who—"

"We came here for tea," said Johnny Bull briskly. "Let's have it!"

Laughing at Bunter's misfortune, although the mess had spoiled the carpet, Harry opened the cupboard door. His laughter ceased abruptly, and he stared with open eyes at the empty shelves.

(Continued on page 15.)

"Great Scott! Where's the strawberry?"  
"And the apricot?" yelled Nugent.

"And the esteemed eggs and the ludicrous sardines?" added the nabob.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Johnny. "That's what was in the booby-trap!"

"The cheeky rotters!" yelled Wharton. "The awful cads!"

"Still, you must admit it's funny!" I chuckled. "Using a chap's grub to—"

"How is it funny, you idiot?" roared Wharton, positively ferocious. "Nobody but a raving lunatic would see anything funny in this!"

"But you laughed at it yourself, you know—"

"B-r-r-r!"

The joke was quite beyond Wharton. Nugent was almost as bad, and Inky not much better.

As for Johnny and myself, we were quite tickled by it; but our merriment failed to have a cheering effect upon Wharton and Nugent and Inky.

"I'm going to see into this!" said Wharton, making for the door.

"Just a minute; no need to get excited," I said. "We can have tea in our study; I've got some grub. Half a loaf and a jar of treacle, as a matter of fact!"

I never knew such a chap as Wharton for looking at the black side of things. He growled like an angry dog, and strode out of the study. Nugent did likewise, and the nabob followed, with a dusky, doleful face.

Johnny and I sauntered in their train to see what would happen.

Wharton hurried along the passage, and stopped the dismal Owl at the door of the bath-room.

"Do you know who made that booby-trap, Bunter?"

"Of course I do!" groaned the Owl.

"Who?" said Harry quickly.

"It was you, you rotters!"

"It wasn't us, you fat chump!" bellowed Wharton.

"It must have been Skinner and Snoop, then. I saw them pottering about the passage, and the beasts cackled when the horrid stuff fell on me! Go and eat coke! I'm going to have a bath!"

With gleaming eyes Wharton turned from the Owl and sped along the passage.

"Next stop, Skinner's study!" I remarked, as Wharton, with Nugent and Inky at his heels, dashed past us. "Come on, Johnny! A little chat with Skinner & Co. will give us an appetite for bread-and-treacle!"

We rushed into the study like five Red Indians on the war-trail. And then we wished we hadn't.

"Ow! My napper!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Take your fist out of my eye!"

These were but a few of the remarks we uttered. The cads had tied a rope across the doorway, and we had come a terrific cropper.

Then, as we sorted ourselves out, the most hideous cackles imaginable floated along the

passage. Skinner & Co. were smiling audibly.

"He, he, he! Is that how you like it done? Now for a quiet smoke in the box-room! Come along, you chaps!"

And we heard the sound of footsteps scampering along the passage.

"I'll give them what-for!" hooted Johnny Bull sulphurously, as he bolted along the passage before us.

We were just in time to see Skinner's hoof vanish round the corner.

Smoke was issuing from the cracks round the door when we reached the box-room. We dashed in, and glared round us wrathfully. The room was full of thick volumes of tobacco-smoke, but Skinner & Co. were—

The slamming of the door behind us, and the turning of the key in the lock, told us where Skinner & Co. were. They were on the other side of the door, and we were prisoners!

The sounds of their unmelodious cackling and receding footsteps did not tend to soothe our ruffled feelings.

"What a shabby trick!" said Wharton angrily.

"What's their game?" growled Johnny. "Are they trying to suffocate us, or what? They must have been smoking for—well, ever since they rigged up the booby-trap, to make a haze like this!"

"Cigarette-ends all over the place!" growled Nugent. "I'd like to know what the giddy game is!"

The return of the japers soon enlightened us as to that.

"I was sure somebody must have gone into the box-room for a smoke on the quiet, sir," came Skinner's voice from the passage without, "so I locked the door on them when they got in!"

"Look, sir, the smoke's simply pouring through the cracks!" added Stott.

"So I perceive!" sounded the stern tones of Mr. Quelch.

We stared at each other wildly.

"The awful rotters!" gasped Harry. "What—why—"

We afterwards learned that their object was to get us gated for the next half-holiday, when we were to play St. Jim's. I suppose they had been betting on the match—backing their own side to lose, you know!

"The utter cads!" muttered Johnny Bull. "We must do something, and jolly sharp about it! What about the window?"

"N.G. They've screwed it up, the cads!"

"I've got a scheme!" said Nugent hurriedly. "That box with the tramp's clobber in!"

Without explaining further, he rushed to the box, and drew forth an old suit. It was the costume which Wibley had used in one of his recent impersonations.

The clobber had been stowed away with the notion of making use of it when the Fifth of November came round again, and a mask and clay pipe had been placed in the box along with the ragged suit.

High up in the box-room wall was a stout

hook. With deft fingers Nugent threaded a length of cord through the mendicant's clobber, and suspended it from the hook.

He buttoned up the jacket, and stuck the mask in the neck, last of all jamming the clay pipe in the grinning mouth.

Then he tore a page from his notebook, and wrote across it in big black letters the word "SPOOFED!" This he pinned to the coat.

The dummy was a bit thin, but you can't have everything.

All was done in about two minutes.

"Hide behind the door!" whispered Nugent. With bated breath we hid.

"Remain where you are!" said Mr. Quelch to Skinner & Co. "I will investigate this!"

Mr. Quelch turned the key, and entered the box-room quickly.

But he was not prepared for the dense smoke.

"G-g-goodness gracious! Ooooh!"

Mr. Quelch placed his handkerchief to his face, and coughed violently.

It was an easy matter for us to slip out unnoticed behind him. We darted on tiptoes round the nearest corner.

Skinner & Co. were gathered in a grinning group further along the passage. They looked surprised as we made our escape, but showed no pleasure.

Mr. Quelch recovered from his fit of coughing and choking, and looked round the hazy room in bewilderment.

"Extraordinary! There is no one here! Stay! Who—who is hanging by the wall?"

Mr. Quelch approached the dummy, and peered at it through the haze of smoke. "S-P-O-O-F-E-D!" he read out. "Spoofed! Spoofed! Dear me! Bless my soul! The unprecedented audacity! The gross outrage!"

He swept out of the study, and fairly dashed along the passage.

"Is it Wharton you want, sir?" said Skinner cheerfully. "He and his pals—Yooop! Yah! Yaroooh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Stoppit, sir! Yah!"

"How dare you!" roared Mr. Quelch, laying about him furiously with his cane. "Play jokes"—whack!—"upon your master"—whack!—"indeed!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Yelling like Huns, the unlucky japers fled down the passage; and, forgetting his dignity for the moment, Mr. Quelch pursued them hotly, wreaking havoc among them with his cane.

As the whole contingent vanished round the corner, five smiling faces peeped benignly after them, and their owners stepped into the passage.

"Let's go down and partake of tea out of Skinner's cupboard!" said I.

Later in the day, when the aching blades visited the box-room, and observed the direct cause of their chastisement, they said—

But I must draw a veil here, for the things they said were really—

THE END.

## THE GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST.

By DICK RUSSELL.

I.

"I SAY, you fellows—"  
Bob Cherry and Squiff were coming along the passage at top speed when Billy Bunter got in the way.

The two Remove fellows did not stop. Squiff pushed Bunter hard, and Bunter staggered, and the two juniors vanished round the corner.

"My hat!" gasped Bunter.

He straightened up again just as Nugent came tearing down the passage, which led from the Sixth-Form quarters.

"I say, Nugent—"

"Get out of the way, fatty!"

"But, I say, what are you up to?" asked Bunter inquisitively, catching Nugent by the sleeve. "You've been up to something in the Sixth passage!"

Nugent shoved Bunter, and he sat down. And then Peter Todd came dashing along, and stumbled over him.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

"Ow!" gasped Peter, sitting up dazedly.

"Grooh!"

"You fat duffer!"

"I say, Peter, what's up?" gasped Bunter. "Have you been japing Loder?"

"Find out, fathead!"

Peter Todd picked himself up, and bolted. Bunter rose a good deal more slowly. He had more weight to lift. He blinked along

the passage through his big glasses, to see if any more fellows were coming; but there weren't any more.

Billy Bunter was curious. It was pretty clear that something was on. When Bunter was curious, he never thought of anything but satisfying his curiosity.

He rolled away down to the Sixth-Form passage to look into Loder's study. It was pretty certain that if Squiff & Co. had been japing the Sixth, Loder was the victim. He was the pet enemy of all the juniors.

Loder had been making himself more than usually obnoxious of late, and the Remove were on the war-path. Bunter, indeed, had offered to make Gerald Loder sit up by means of his wonderful ventriloquism—exactly how he did not specify. Bunter certainly is a good ventriloquist; but the Remove fellows are fed-up with his wonderful gifts.

When Bunter imitated Bob Cherry's voice, and called Bolsover major names, Bob and Bolsover began punching one another, till they found out that it was the ventriloquist, and then they both began punching Bunter. Ventriloquism was at a discount, as Smithy put it.

Bunter blinked into Loder's study, and grinned.

He could see that the Remove fellows had been there.

All Loder's chairs were stacked up on the

study table, and the fender and fireirons had been added, and the clock and the hearth-rug and the bedclothes. It was quite a pyramid. Even the study carpet had been dragged up, and draped round the pyramid of furniture on the table.

There was a surprise waiting for Loder of the Sixth when he came in. Bunter chuckled as he blinked at the peculiar scene.

"He, he, he! But what were the duffers bolting in such a hurry for?" he murmured. "Loder ain't here!"

It didn't occur to Bunter for the moment that the study-raggers had seen Loder from the window coming into the House, and so had cleared off out of his quarters in a great hurry.

But that was the case, and as Bunter stood and chuckled in the doorway he suddenly heard a step behind him.

"What are you up to here?" growled Loder's voice.

Bunter spun round in alarm. Loder saw the inside of his study at the same moment.

His face became almost purple.

"You young scoundrel!" he gasped.

"I I say, I didn't do it, Loder!" gasped Bunter, in alarm. "I wasn't here—I—I'm not here now—I—I mean—I— Yaroooh!"

Loder grasped him by the collar and swung him into the wrecked study. Loder's eyes

(Continued on page 16.)

