



THE BENEVOLENCE FADED OUT OF HIS PORTLY FACE AT THE SIGHT OF A GREYFRIARS JUNIOR SITTING AGAINST THE ROCK SMOKING A CIGARETTE

BILLY BUNTER'S
DOUBLE

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CHAPTER 1

LETTER FOR BUNTER

"ONE for you, Bunter!" called out Bob Cherry.

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter's fat face brightened.

It had been clouded. It had been, in fact, lugubrious. The morning was bright and sunny. But the summer sunshine was not reflected in Billy Bunter's plump countenance. Most Remove fellows looked cheery when they came out of the form-room in break. Billy Bunter was an exception. His little round eyes blinked dismally behind his big spectacles.

Bunter was not enjoying life that day.

Generally, the Owl of the Remove found life at Greyfriars School a tolerable proposition. As a rule, his fat face was contented. But circumstances alter cases: and just now they were unpropitious. Billy Bunter had manners and customs of his own, which sometimes landed him in a spot of bother. On this particular morning, Bunter's whole horizon seemed to be spotted with bother.

Quelch had been a beast in the form-room. Bunter had been put on "con". As he had been too busy the previous evening sitting in an armchair to find time for prep, he had handed out a series of howlers, which had made the Remove chuckle, but unfortunately had not produced the same effect on the Remove master. Quelch had been quite shirty about it: and Bunter had a translation to do, which was likely to occupy his leisure hours for some time to come.

But that was not all. It was far from all.

Coker of the Fifth was making a fuss about a bag of apples missing from his study. Bunter had been almost unwilling to leave the form-room, in dread of glimpsing the burly form and rugged features of Horace Coker.

Then there was a spot of trouble with Tubb, of the Third Form. Tubb of the Third was merely a fag: any Remove man but Bunter would have smacked Tubb's head, and thought nothing of it. But Bunter did not want to contact Tubb: having a well-grounded apprehension that, in case of an encounter, it was not Tubb's head that would be smacked. Even that was not all, Bunter had little doubt that when Smithy went up to No. 4 Study, he would want to know what had become of a box of chocs he had left there. It was only too likely that the Bounder, whose temper was not very amiable, would be a beast about it. It would be just like him to suspect that Bunter had snooped those chocs: especially as Bunter had!

All these accumulated spots of bother worried Bunter.

In fact, that sunny morning, it really seemed that troubles were piling on Billy Bunter's fat shoulders, like Pelion piled on Ossa, and on Pelion Olympus!

So preoccupied was the fat Owl that for once he neglected to turn his big spectacles on the letter-rack, to ascertain whether a postal order, which he had been long expecting, might have arrived at last. Harry Wharton and Co. gathered round the rack to look for letters. They were in luck. There was a letter for Hurree Jamset Ram Singh with an exotic postmark. There was one from nearer home for Frank Nugent, with a ten-shilling note in it. There was one for Johnny Bull with a whole pound note! Which looked like a festive time for the Famous Five: for when one member of that cheery company was in funds, all the members could count on a well-spread board at tea in the study. And there was one for W. G. Bunter: and Bob Cherry,

spotting it, shouted to the fat Owl as he was rolling disconsolately on.

Billy Bunter, with a brightening fat face, revolved on his axis. and rolled up to the group at the letter-rack. Often and often had Bunter been disappointed about a postal order. But hope springs eternal in the human breast. For the moment he forgot Quelch and Latin translations, Coker of the Fifth and Tub of the Third, and Smithy and his chocs. If there was a letter for Bunter, it was possible, if not probable, that his celebrated postal order had materialised at long last.

"I say. you fellows, shove it this way!" exclaimed Bunter, eagerly, and Bob Cherry obligingly hooked the letter out of the rack and "shoved" it that way.

Billy Bunter grabbed it with fat hands, and glued his eyes and spectacles on the superscription.

Then he gave a snort.

That letter was addressed to W. G. Bunter, but not in the paternal hand, and not in an avuncular hand. It was not from the old folks at home who had remembered that schoolboys at school often ran out of cash. It was addressed in a rather boyish hand, which caused Billy Bunter's hope of a remittance to fade out on the spot. There was no comfort in that letter, for a fat and worried Owl.

"That ass!" grunted Bunter. "I thought it might be from the pater, or my uncle Carter, or one of my titled relations, you know-."

"If any!" murmured Bob.

"But it's only from that ass Wally!" said Bunter, and he crumpled the letter in a fat paw, to shove into a pocket: apparently not in the least interested in an epistle from that ass Wally, whosoever that ass Wally might be.

"Aren't you going to read your letter?" asked Bob.

"It's only from my cousin Waiter," grunted Bunter. "Nothing in it. Shouldn't wonder if it's to ask me about that five bob."

"Eh? What five bob?"

"He lent me five bob in the hols. I'd forgotten all about it of course - a chap can't be expected to remember trifles like that. Chap in an office, like Wally, would, I daresay," added Bunter, sarcastically. "Sort of thing he would remember."

At which the Famous Five smiled. It seemed to them probable that the fellow who had lent the five "bob" might remember it longer than the fellow who had borrowed it, if the latter was named William George Bunter.

Bunter shoved the crumpled letter into his pocket. Evidently he was not anxious to read what Cousin Wally had to say, no doubt preferring to go on forgetting such a trifle as a small loan in the "hols".

But Harry Wharton and Co. as it happened, were interested, if Billy Bunter was not. They remembered that Bunter had a cousin named Walter, who was remarkably like the fat Owl in looks, but remarkably unlike him in every other respect.

"Is that the cousin who came here once?" asked Harry.

"That's him!" grunted Bunter, ungraciously and ungrammatically.

"Chap just like you to look at, except that he washed?" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry-."

"Not a bad chap, I remember." said Frank Nugent.

"How's he getting on, Bunter?"

"Eh? How should I know?" grunted Bunter. "We don't have much to do with that branch of the family. They're our poor relations, really. I believe he's some sort of a junior clerk in an office, or

something, somewhere. Blessed if I know, or care either. And he's not so jolly much like me to look at, either. You can't call him good looking!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The good-lookfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, solemnly.

"Well, I don't brag of it," said Bunter, "it just happens. Fellows are jealous of me, as I know jolly well: but it's not my fault that I'm the best looking chap in the Remove."

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!" gasped Bob Cherry. "No, old fat man-you've got lots of faults, but that's certainly not one of them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I say, you fellows, I was expecting a postal order, and there's nothing but this silly letter from Wally. If you fellows have had a tip from home-."

"Time we got out," said Bob Cherry. "Get a move on."

"I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a chap's talking to you!" hooted Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk away. They seemed to lose their interest in Billy Bunter's conversation all of a sudden: and they disappeared down the corridor laughing.

"Beasts!" grunted Bunter.

He cast a morose blink after the Famous Five as they vanished. Then he cast another blink, a startled one, round him, as there was a heavy footstep in the offing, and an exclamation in a loud voice.

"Oh, here you are! Now what about my apples-?"

Billy Bunter gave one blink at a burly form and a rugged face. One glimpse of Coker of the Fifth was enough for Bunter. He flew.

CHAPTER 2

THE ARTFUL DODGER

"O TERQUE quaterque beati - Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter groaned.

After class, Billy Bunter was enjoying life no more than in morning break: rather less, in fact.

He was sitting in his study, No. 7 in the Remove. He had it to himself - Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, his study-mates, were at the nets with Harry Wharton and Co. and other Remove men. But there were no nets for Billy Bunter, if he had been disposed to join them - which he was not. The summer game had no appeal for the Owl of the Remove. But though he had no urge either to wield the willow or launch the leather, he would gladly have stretched his fat limbs in an armchair in the Rag in a luxurious laze. Next to eating, lazing came second on Bunter's list of the joys of existence.

But he dared not laze. Quelch wanted that translation.

Unless that loathsome translation was delivered in Quelch's study on time, Quelch's cane was likely to be featured in the next act.

So there was Bunter, sitting at his study table, with Virgil propped open before him, a dictionary at his right hand, a grammar at his left, a pen in his hand, a blot of ink on his fat little nose, and an expression on his fat face that might have moved a heart of stone.

The tosh before him meant something. Bunter knew that, unlikely as it seemed when he blinked at it. He was at that stage of the adventures of the "pius Æneas" when the stormy winds did blow, at the command of the disgruntled Juno, and the Trojan hero's ship was taken aback by a sudden head-wind. The good Æneas was not likely to lose such an opportunity for making one of his lengthy speeches: with which the hapless Owl now had to deal. But what he meant with his "terque quaterque beati" was quite a mystery to Bunter's fat brain.

Toddy could have helped him out: but Toddy, with the selfishness to which Bunter was sorrowfully accustomed, had gone down to cricket instead of doing Bunter's work for him.

"Oh, lor'!" moaned Bunter.

Drearily, he opened the dictionary, and from its informative columns, learned that "ter" meant "thrice", which he remembered that he knew already. This gave even Bunter a clue to "quater", which he remembered meant "four times". Another search revealed that "beatus" meant "blest", which helped him on to "beati".

"O thrice and four times blessed!" moaned Bunter.

He was getting on!

But it was slow work. It was laborious work. Bunter did not like work. The more Quelch insisted upon it, the less he liked it.

He had twelve lines to do, of which he had painfully elucidated the meaning of one! It was a dismal prospect!

He was just mumbling on to "quis ante ora patrum" when he gave a sudden start, and pricked up his fat ears like a startled rabbit.

There was a heavy footstep in the Remove passage.

It was far too heavy a tread for a Remove man. Bunter guessed only too easily whose tread it was. The tread of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form, was like unto that of the "huge, earth-shaking beast" in Macaulay. It was Coker of the Fifth who was coming up the passage, and the fat Owl could guess for which study he was heading!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

He jumped up, forgetting Latin translation, and even Quelch's cane, blinking through his big spectacles in dismay at the door.

He had dodged Coker of the Fifth several times that day. But there was no dodging Coker now. He was cornered in his study.

Bunter had hoped - he had a hopeful nature! - that with the lapse of time Coker would forget all about those apples. Clearly, however, Coker had not yet forgotten! Coker was coming!

The fat Owl blinked wildly round the study for a hiding-place. Then, just as the door-handle rattled, he made a bound, to get behind the door, so that it would hide him when it opened.

It opened the next moment.

"Now, you podgy pilferer-!" came a well-known voice: then, "Why, he's not here! Skinner said he came up to his study to do an impot." Billy Bunter hardly breathed, behind the door.

There were other footsteps, Coker, it seemed, was not alone. Three Fifth-form men were looking into the study.

"Not here," said Potter.

"Not a spot of him," said Greene.

"I'll jolly well kick Skinner for pulling my leg." growled Coker.

Bunter, behind the door, was glad to hear that!

"Well, come on, old chap," said Potter. "We don't want to be late for the pictures at Pegg."

"We're wasting time, you know," said Greene.

"We're not wasting time. Greene. I'm going to wallop that fat snooper for snooping my apples-."

"Well, he's not here-."

"I can see that he's not here, Greene, just as well as you can. I've got eyes," said Coker. "The fat villain's been dodging me all day, and I thought I had him this time!"

"Well, if we're going to the pictures at Pegg-," urged Potter.

"There's no 'if' about it, Potter. We're going. At least, I'm going:- if you fellows want to hang about, you can."

The heavy tread receded down the Remove passage.

Horace Coker was going, followed by Potter and Greene.

Billy Bunter breathed again.

Coker had left the study door wide open: evidently never dreaming that there was a fat Owl parked behind it. Billy Bunter emerged from behind the door, when the footsteps had died away towards the landing, gasping with relief. Once more he had dodged the wrathful Horace: and if Coker and Co., as he deduced from their remarks, were going over to Pegg for the pictures, he was safe from Coker for a time, at least.

That peril having been averted, the fat Owl sat down at the table again, and resumed operations on the *Æneid*.

He blinked dismally at "quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis", which was his next line.

By the time he had elucidated that this must mean something about something-or-other under the lofty walls of Troy, there came another interruption. Footsteps came up the passage from the landing.

This time it was not so heavy a tread. It was not Coker returning.

The fat Owl suspended operations on the *Æneid*, wondering whether it was Toddy coming up early to tea.

He hoped so. True, it was not yet tea-time, but Bunter was always ready for a meal. There was nothing in the study cupboard, or he would have had a meal already. If it was Toddy, with something for tea, Bunter felt that he would be strengthened for tackling that putrid translation.

But the footsteps stopped short, and he heard a voice that was not Toddy's. It was Smithy's.

"Trot in, Reddy! I've got a box of chocs in the study."

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Hunter.

He heard two juniors go into a study further down the passage. Smithy was going into No. 4 with Tom Redwing, fancying that there was a box of chocs in No. 4! Billy Bunter knew only too well that there was not!

A minute later he heard the Bounder's voice again, in loud tones: "Where's that box of chocs? I left it here this morning-."

"In the cupboard, perhaps-!" came Redwing's quieter voice.

"It's not in the cupboard! It's not in the study at all! That fat villain Bunter-!"

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Bunter.

He jumped up from the table. He could guess what Smithy's next move would be! Once more the open door was his only refuge. That suspicious beast, Smithy, had jumped to it at once that Bunter knew what had become of his chocs! It was like him!

Bunter backed behind the door, hoping that he would have as much luck with Smithy as he had had with Coker.

"I'll scrag him!" came the Bounder's angry voice, and he came tramping up the passage to No. 7.

The next moment Smithy was staring, or rather glaring, into No. 7 Study. Behind the door, Billy Bunter quaked: but he quaked in silence. He dared not make a sound! If only Smithy, like Coker, concluded that he was not there-!

"Bunter, you fat scoundrel!" roared Smithy. "You - Oh! He's not here! Seen Bunter about anywhere, Reddy?"

"No. Gone out of gates, very likely."

"Come down, and we'll look in the Rag! I'll give him a tip about snooping a fellow's chocs!- the tip of my boot! Come on."

To Bunter's immense relief, the Bounder tramped away down the passage, and Redwing followed him. The fat Owl had been as lucky with Smithy as with Coker - the Bounder had not thought of looking behind the door! He was welcome to look for Bunter in the Rag, as long as he liked!

A harassed fat Owl emerged from cover, when they were gone. But this time Billy Bunter did not return to the Æneid and translation. He was fed up with that translation for Quelch: and he was hungry, and there was no sign of Toddy and tea. It seemed to Billy Bunter that an interval for refreshments was indicated! And he remembered that some members of the Famous Five had been in luck with their letters that morning. It was probable that something quite substantial might be awaiting Harry Wharton and Co. in No. 1 Study, when they came in from the cricket!

The fat Owl blinked out into the passage through his big spectacles. The coast was clear. Coker and Co. were gone: Smithy and Redwing were gone: and Harry Wharton and Co. had not yet come in! Billy Bunter emerged from his study, and rolled down the passage to No. 1. One blink into Harry Wharton's study caused his little round eyes to dance behind his big round spectacles. On the study table lay a parcel - quite a large parcel! Evidently some of those tips from home had been expended at the school shop: and a spread awaited the chums of the Remove when they came in. Billy Bunter rolled into No. 1. and fat hands clutched at the parcel. In a moment more it was open, and those fat hands were conveying comestibles to the most extensive and capacious mouth in the Remove.

Billy Bunter forgot Quelch! He forgot translations.

He forgot Coker. He forgot Smithy. He forgot everything, in fact, but food: a thing that Billy Bunter was never likely to forget in any circumstances whatever. All the troubles that piled so heavily on his fat shoulders were dismissed from mind, as he travelled through that parcel of tuck: and life seemed to William George Bunter one grand sweet song!

CHAPTER 3

UP-ENDED!

"HOLD on!" said Coker.

"But-!" said Potter.

"Yes: but-!" murmured Greene.

"Don't jaw!"

Horace Coker came to a halt. Potter and Greene came to a halt also. When Coker of the Fifth said "hold on" there was really nothing for Potter and Greene to do but to hold on.

Why Coker halted, on the "front" at Pegg, they did not know. A moment before, Coker had been striding along with his lengthy strides, giving fellows who were less lengthy in the leg some difficulty in keeping up with him. Looking for Bunter after class had delayed Coker, and he did not want to be late for the pictures at the Regal. Now, however, he did not seem to care whether he was late for the pictures at the Regal or not, as he stood with a rugged frowning brow staring over the somewhat thickly populated "front". Pegg, originally a fishing-village, had not always had a "front". It was still a fishing-village in parts. In other parts it was a seaside resort, with an array of boarding-houses to which trippers tripped: ice-cream stands: a band that discoursed what is known as music in Tin Pan Alley: and other attractive amenities. It was quite a bright and cheery spot, and fairly well crowded in the summer: and the Regal was the latest addition to its increasing amenities: to which palatial establishment Coker and Co. were now bound.

Apparently the crowd on the front, or some individual in that crowd. interested Coker, all of a sudden.

He stared over the many heads with a searching eye.

"Look here, Coker-!" began Potter, restively.

"I said don't jaw."

Potter and Greene would have walked on and left Coker to it, but for the awkward circumstances that Coker was going to stand the tickets. If Coker stood the tickets, obviously they had to stand Coker.

"I jolly well saw him," exclaimed Coker. "It was him all right!" he added, with his accustomed contempt for such a trifle as grammar.

"It was him!"

"Who?" asked Potter and Greene together.

"That fat villain Bunter."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

They had forgotten Bunter. Coker, it appeared, had not. It seemed from his words that he had spotted the fat Greyfriars junior in the crowd on the front, and lost him again. Now he was watching for him to reappear.

"I'll give him snooping apples from my study!" said Coker, grimly.

"From what I hear, he snoops tuck right and left in his own form: but snooping in a Fifth-form study is a bit too thick. He won't come snooping again in the Fifth in a hurry, after I've done with him."

"I-I-I say, I-I wouldn't kick up a row here, Coker!" murmured Potter.

"He'll keep, you know," suggested Greene.

Coker gave them the coldest of glances. He was not in need of advice. Potter and Greene might jib at a hullabaloo before a thousand pairs of eyes on the front at Pegg: but such consideration did not influence Horace Coker in the very least. He was going to wallop Billy Bunter for snooping in his study, at the very first and

earliest opportunity, and he did not care a boiled bean whether it happened in the quad at Greyfriars or on the front at Pegg. Walloping Bunter was the thing that mattered: the locality did not. "That's why we never spotted him at the school," went on Coker, impervious to the views of Potter and Greene. "We looked in his study, you remember, and I looked in the Rag, too, and round about the quad: but he never showed up! Must have walked over here after class! Lucky we walked over too - I'll give him snooping my apples and dodging a fellow!"

"But I-I say-!" murmured Potter.

"I saw him a minute ago," continued Coker. "It was that fat scoundrel all right, though he seems to have changed his clothes to come over here, and left his specs at home. It was Bunter. Hallo, there he is again! Look -just behind that bunch of trippers!"

Potter and Greene looked. Then they stared.

A plump youth had emerged into view in the crowd.

If it was not Billy Bunter, it could only have been his twin: and Bunter had no twin! But though the fat face, the fat little nose, the plump features, and the striking circumference, were undoubtedly Bunter's, and could hardly have been anybody else's, in some respects the plump youth differed from Bunter's usual aspect.

He wore no spectacles: having apparently, as Coker said, left them at home. And he was dressed in a suit of light grey, and he was not wearing a Greyfriars cap. Billy Bunter favoured check as a sartorial design: Remove fellows said that Bunter's trousers could be recognised a mile off. But those trousers, it appeared, must have been left at home with his specs. The grey suit he was wearing was perhaps equally noticeable: but not the same.

Why Bunter should have taken the trouble to change his clothes before walking across to Pegg, and how he could see his way about without the big spectacles through which he was wont to blink like an owl, Coker did not know and did not care. All Coker knew or cared about was the fact that here was the fat depredator who had snooped his apples, walking directly towards him - right into his clutches. The fat youth came on. He must have seen Coker, Potter, and Greene standing there: but he gave them no heed whatever. Really it might have been supposed that he did not know them by sight! Odd as it was, it suited Coker admirably: for he preferred to grab the fat junior without having to chase him up and down the crowded front at Pegg.

On he came, rolling with the well-known Bunter roll.

He would have passed within a yard of the three staring Fifth-form men: had Coker allowed him to pass. That, Coker had no intention of doing.

Coker made a sudden stride and a grab.

"Oh!" ejaculated the plump youth, spinning in Coker's mighty grasp, and apparently much startled and astonished. "Here, I say - what's that game? Leggo! Do you hear? Wharrer you grabbing at me for, I'd like to know?" It was Bunter's fat squeak: and it rose to a yell as Coker's grip tightened. "Leggo, I say! Gone off your rocker?"

"Got you!" said Coker, grimly.

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance, and backed away. Two or three dozen people had stopped to stare: and Potter and Greene fervently hoped that it would not be noticed that Coker belonged to them!

Bunter, no doubt, deserved what was coming to him: but there was a time and place for all things! The front at Pegg really was not a suitable spot for a Greyfriars senior to wallop a Greyfriars junior. The fat youth wriggled in Coker's grip.

"Are you crackers?" he gasped.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't know!" grinned Coker.

"Will you leggo?"

"Hardly! You've dodged me long enough, you fat snooping sweep! Now I'm going to wallop you - and that's for a start."

Smack!

Horace Coker had a large and heavy hand. There was a report like a rifle-shot as it established contact with a fat head. The yell that came from the recipient of that smack woke most of the echoes along the front at Pegg.

Coker was going to follow up that smack with another, and then another, and yet another. That the fat Owl of the Remove could do anything about it, except take the smacks as they were handed out, did not occur to Coker for a moment. He would have laughed at the idea.

But it was an unexpected Bunter.

Having uttered that frantic yell as he received the first smack, he went into quick action before the second could be delivered.

To Coker's utter amazement, the plump youth closed with him, grasping him with a strength that he would never have dreamed that Billy Bunter possessed.

What happened next was like a dizzy nightmare to Coker. It did not seem to be real. Somehow - Coker never knew how - his leg was hooked: and the plump youth, with an exertion of that unexpected and amazing muscular force, pitched him over backwards. Horace Coker was fairly up-ended!

It was quite a crash.

Coker landed on his back, smiting the county of Kent with a mighty smite. He sprawled on his back, almost gibbering.

Potter and Greene stared with popping eyes. They, like Coker, could scarcely believe it! But there was Coker of the Fifth sprawling on his back: up-ended!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Potter.

"Oh, holy smoke!" gurgled Greene.

"Ooooooooooooooooooh!" Coker could only splutter. "Ooooooh! Woooooh!"

There was laughter among the thickening crowd of onlookers. Horace Coker's sudden downfall seemed to entertain the trippers of Pegg.

The fat fellow seemed amused, too, for he grinned as he looked down at the sprawling Fifth-former of Greyfriars.

"Keep your cheeky paws to yourself another time!" he said: and with that, he slipped into the crowd and disappeared: evidently regarding it as prudent to be off the scene before the hefty Coker was on his feet again.

"Ooooooooooooooooooh!" mumbled Coker, breathlessly.

"Wooooogh! Mooogh!" He sat up, dizzily. Then, somewhat painfully, he clambered to his feet. Coker had had a shock. He had hit Kent very hard. Quite a large number of aches and pains were distributed over Coker. "Ooogh! Oh! Where's that fat scoundrel Bunter? I'll smash him! I'll spiflicate him! I'll pulverise him! I'll-I'll - where is he? Why didn't you stop him, you fatheads? "

"He's gone-."

"I can see he's gone! What are you grinning at, Potter? What are you sniggering at, Green? Think it's funny for a Fifth-form man to be tripped up by a cheeky fag in the Remove?" roared Coker.

"Oh! No!" gasped Potter. "Not at all, old chap!

But I say, there's half-past four striking-."

"We shall be late at the Regal," said Greene.

"Blow the Regal!" snorted Coker. He stared round for Bunter. Forty or fifty grinning faces had no effect on Coker: he disregarded the crowd, as he stared round in search of the plump youth who had hooked his leg and floored him. But nothing was to be seen of that plump youth.

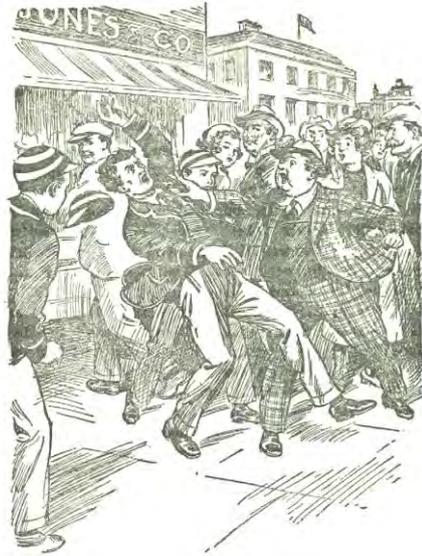
"Half-way back to Greyfriars by this time, I expect," said Potter.

"For goodness sake, come on, Coker."

"I'll smash him-."

"Yes, but we're late."

"I'll spiflicate him!"



HORACE COKER WAS FAIRLY UP-ENDED!

"Come on, Greeney," said Potter. And they went on: not so indifferent to a sea of grinning faces as Coker appeared to be. Coker or no Coker, tickets or no tickets, Potter and Greene had had enough of that exciting scene.

Coker, however, followed on. Bunter had vanished: but after all, Bunter would keep!

"I'll smash him when we get back to the school!" said Coker.

"Tripping up a Fifth-form man, by gum! I'll pulverise him!"

While Potter and Greene watched the picture at the Regal, Coker was chiefly occupied in rubbing spots that had smitten Kent, and where aches and pains lingered. His only comfort was to contemplate the process of pulverisation that was scheduled to take place when he contacted Billy Bunter at Greyfriars. That was a comfort to Coker: though probably it would have been no comfort to Billy Bunter, had he known what was coming to him.

CHAPTER 4

BUNTER'S ALIBI

"ANYBODY peckish?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Sort of!" said Johnny Bull.

"More than somewhat!" said Frank Nugent.

"The peckfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Lots in the study!" said Harry Wharton, cheerfully. The Famous Five were coming up to tea. They had lingered rather late at the nets. With the Highcliffe match in the offing, the heroes of the Remove were very keen on keeping up to the mark. Being healthy youths with healthy appetites, and rather late for tea, they were more than ready for that meal. They did not share Billy Bunter's whole-hearted devotion to foodstuffs by any means: still, they were prepared to do full justice to the supplies in No. 1 Study, and happily anticipated a very satisfactory spread.

Supplies were - or at least should have been - unusually ample. Two tips from home in one day gave assurance of that. Quite considerable shopping had been done, before they went down to cricket. A large parcel was - or should have been - awaiting them in No. 1 Study.

"The fact is, I'm hungry as a hunter - or a Bunter!" said Bob Cherry, as he tramped into No. 1. "And - hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's been here?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, suffering cats!"

Five hungry juniors stared at the study table, and what lay thereon - chiefly crumbs! Someone, evidently, had been there before them. Wrapping-paper on the floor, and crumbs on the table, were all that remained of the parcel.

There had been many good things in that parcel. There had been ham: there had been jam: there had been a cake: there had been a bag of dough-nuts: there had been meringues, and scones, and other attractive things. But all these were now in the pluperfect tense, so to speak: they had been! Every edible article in that parcel was now to be counted among the "had-beens".

With deep feelings, Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at the traces of what had been, but no longer was!

"Gone!" said Bob, with deep breath.

"The gonefulness is terrific!"

"Snooped!" said Frank Nugent. "Bunter-!"

"Bunter, of course!"

"Who else?" growled Johnny Bull. "By gum! And we're too late for tea in hall! And the tuck-shop's closed!"

Five hungry and rather excited juniors tramped out of No. 1 Study. There was nothing for them in the study: there was nothing for them in hall: and unless they could scrounge something in some hospitable study up the passage, there was nothing for it but to wait for supper! But they were not thinking, at the moment, of scrounging tea along the passage, hungry as they were. They were thinking of Billy Bunter: and never had they been so anxious to meet up with that fat and fatuous youth.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy!" roared Bob Cherry, catching sight of the Bounder in the passage. "Seen Bunter?"

"Gone out, I think," answered Smithy. "I looked for him after class, but couldn't find him."

"You'd have found him if you'd looked in our study, I think," said Harry Wharton. "Come on, you men. The fat villain had a trans. to do for Quelch, and he may be in his study."

Bob Cherry hurled open the door of No. 7. Two juniors in that study stared round. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were there: but there was no sign of William George Bunter.

"Do you always open a fellow's door as politely as that, Cherry?" inquired Peter, sarcastically.

"We're looking for Bunter!" hooted Bob. "Somebody's snooped the grub in Wharton's study! Think you can guess who it was?"

"Where's Bunter?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Blessed if I know," said Peter. "He had a translation to do for Quelch, and I thought he was here doing it, but he wasn't here when we came up. He hasn't been in to tea, either."

"Even Bunter couldn't have wanted tea here, after what he snooped in our study," said Nugent. "We're going to massacre him! Seen Bunter, Dutton?"

"Eh?" The deaf junior regarded him with surprised inquiry. "What about mutton? No mutton here, that I know of."

"Do you know where Bunter is?" roared Bob.

"Well, that's a silly question," said Dutton. "Of course I know what a hunter is. It's a man who hunts."

"Oh, my hat! Not hunter - Bunter!" shrieked Bob.

"B-U-N-T-E-R-." Bob spelt it out, at the top of a powerful voice. "B for Bloated, U for Ugly. N for Noodle. T for Twerp. E for Eating. R for Rotter! Got it now?"

"You needn't yell at a fellow - I'm not deaf-!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"If you want Bunter, he's not here - haven't you any eyes?" said Dutton. "I think he went out of gates - Coker was looking for him, after class, but I don't think he found him."

"He wasn't out of gates when he snooped that tuck in Wharton's study."

"Is Wharton muddy?" Dutton stared at the captain of the Remove in the doorway. "He doesn't look muddy - and if he is, I suppose it wasn't Bunter made him muddy, was it?"

"Oh, help!"

"Come on," said Johnny Bull. "We've got to find him. Let's look in the Rag."

The Famous Five tramped down the passage to the landing. Skinner and Snoop and Stott were coming up the stairs, and Bob hailed them.

"Seen Bunter?"

"Lots of times," answered Skinner.

"You silly ass, do you know where he is now?" roared Bob.

"I can guess."

"Well, where?"

"Somewhere where there's something to eat!"

"Fathead!"

The Co. cut down the stairs. Lord Mauleverer was lounging gracefully in the doorway of the Rag, and Bob shouted to him:

"Seen Bunter, Mauly? Is he in there?"

"Haven't seen him. Smithy was askin' after him, too. Must be out."

"Bet you he rolled off after scoffing our spread," growled Johnny Bull. "He will have to come in soon - it's close on lock-ups."

They went out into the quad, bright in the westering sun. It was not yet time for Gosling to close the gates, and Greyfriars fellows were coming in, in ones and twos and threes. Billy Bunter was not to be

seen, and the Co. gathered in a group near the gates, having no doubt that the fat Owl was out, and ready to interview him as soon as he came in. It was very probable that Bunter, after "scoffing" the spread in No. 1 Study, had gone out, in order to postpone the hour of reckoning as long as possible: especially as both Smithy of the Remove and Coker of the Fifth were anxious to meet up with him. In which case he was not likely to materialise until lock-ups. Temple, Dabney and Co. of the Fourth Form came in, and Bob Cherry called out:

"Seen Bunter out of gates, Temple?"

Cecil Reginald Temple glanced round.

"Well, we saw somethin' that looked like a barrage balloon on the stile in Friardale Lane," he answered. "Bunter, I think - Remove man, anyway: he looked as if he hadn't washed."

With which Temple Dabney and Co. walked on, grinning.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Coker! Seen Bunter, Coker?"

Horace Coker walked, or rather stalked, in at the gates, with Potter and Greene. Coker's brow was wrathful. It grew wrathier as Bob called to him. The name of Bunter, just then, had rather the effect on Coker of a red rag on a bull. Coker came to a halt, with knitted brows.

"Hasn't he come in?" he snapped.

"We're looking for him-."

"Well, I shall be looking for him, too!" said Coker, with emphasis.

"I'll teach the fat frog to hook a Fifth-form man's leg and pitch him over on his back, with a crowd of trippers looking on! I'm going to pulverise him."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Did Bunter-?"

Harry Wharton and Co. fairly blinked at Coker. That Billy Bunter, who was powerfully disinclined to encounter a fag like Tubb of the Third, had pitched Coker of the Fifth over on his back, was really an amazing statement. But Coker seemed to be in earnest.

"He jolly well did!" snorted Coker. "I was smacking his head for snooping my apples, and he hooked my leg and pitched me over,"

"But-but-but he couldn't-!" gasped Bob.

"Think I don't know whether he pitched me over or not?" snorted Coker. "I came down wallop! I'd have burst him all over Pegg if he hadn't cut before I could get up! Wait till I see him again!"

"Did you see Bunter at Pegg?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yes, on the front among the trippers. He was there when we walked over after class," grunted Coker. "I'll jolly well teach him to cheek a Fifth-form man! I'll teach him to hook a senior's leg and pitch him over! Just wait!"

"But-but-but-." The captain of the Remove was quite perplexed. "If Bunter went over to Pegg after class, and hasn't come in yet, he can't have snooped the tuck in our study. Look here, what time was it?"

"Don't know and don't care!" was Coker's gracious reply.

"Half-past four!" said Potter. "I heard it strike."

"Oh, come on," grunted Coker. "Don't stand there jawing to fags, Potter," Coker stalked on to the House, with Potter and Greene.

Harry Wharton and Co. were left staring at one another blankly.

Amazing as Coker's statement was, absolutely astonishing as it was that the fat Owl of the Remove could have floored the mighty Horace, there seemed no doubt about it. Coker was the man for mistakes: but Coker could hardly be mistaken on such a point as that. And if

Bunter had gone over to Pegg after class, and had not yet come in. how could Bunter have snooped in No. 1 Study?

"Blessed if I make this out!" said Bob Cherry, rubbing his nose in perplexity. "Somebody snooped that tuck-."

"Bunter!" growled Johnny Bull.

"But if he was in Pegg at half-past four, he must have cut across the minute the Remove were out." said Bob. "Blessed if I know how he did it in the time, too - he generally crawls like a snail. He must have put it on a bit, to get there before Coker. Look here, it couldn't have been Bunter in the study-."

"Who else?" sniffed Johnny Bull.

"Well, some cheeky fag may have snooped the tuck, if it wasn't Bunter-."

"It was!"

"But it couldn't have been, from what Potter said!" exclaimed Nugent. "Bunter couldn't be in two places at once."

Johnny Bull grunted, apparently still unconvinced: but he made no rejoinder. It was, in fact, an absolute alibi for Bunter. If he had gone out immediately after class, he had gone out before that parcel was landed in No. 1 Study. And he must have done so, if the Fifth-form men had seen him in Pegg at half-past four: on which point there seemed no doubt. Billy Bunter was capable of many things - but certainly not of being in two places at the same time!

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Well, we took it for granted that it was Bunter, of course," he said. "But-but - it does look as if we took too much for granted this time. I suppose those Fifth-form fatheads didn't dream that they met him in Pegg?"

"Hardly," said Harry Wharton. "I-I'm rather glad we heard from Coker. before Bunter came in. We were going to scrag him-!"

"The scragfulness would not be the proper caper, in the ridiculous circumstances," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We should have had the wrong pig by his esteemed ear. Look before you leap into the cracked pitcher, as the English proverb remarks."

"But-!" said Johnny Bull.

"My dear chap," said Bob. "It's a clear alibi! Whoever snooped the tuck in Wharton's study, it couldn't have been Bunter. I'm jolly glad we found that out before we scragged him. Must have been some cheeky fag."

"Um!" said Johnny Bull.

"No need to wait for Bunter now," said Harry. "Let's get in, and see whether Mauly has something in his study, and ask ourselves to tea,"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob. "Let's!"

And the Famous Five returned to the House, where, fortunately, they found that Mauly had something in his study: and the state of famine was relieved. Who had raided No. 1 Study was a mystery: but it seemed clear, at least, that whoever it was, it was not William George Bunter: unless he had the magic power of being in two places at once: which he certainly hadn't. And even Johnny was glad that they had not "scragged" Bunter, in view of that unexpected but apparently cast-iron alibi.

CHAPTER 5

THE POOR RELATION

"OH, lor'!" sighed Billy Bunter.

He was sitting on the stile in Friardale Lane, under the shady branches of a mighty beech. It was quite a pleasant spot. Behind him lay the dusky wood: before him stretched the country lane, winding between green hedges, with meadows beyond where sheep grazed, and a meditative cow gazed solemnly at her reflection in a pond. But the beauties of Nature were wasted on Bunter. The county of Kent looked lovely in its summer dress: but it might have been in rags and tatters for all William George Bunter cared.

Much more important matters than rustic scenery were on Billy Bunter's fat mind.

His sins were coming home to roost.

His escape in No. 7 Study had been narrow. Coker had not forgotten those apples: Smithy was still less likely to forget those chocs. He had luckily dodged them both: but could he dodge them for ever? Obviously he couldn't! And since his exploit in No. 1 Study, he had still more dodging to do: for he had no doubt that Harry Wharton and Co. would suspect him of having snooped that parcel of tuck. It was rotten injustice, of course: but somehow fellows always did suspect Bunter when tuck was missing.

Then there was Quelch: Quelch wanted that putrid translation before prep: but he was not going to get it, that was certain. It might be "whops": or Quelch might double it, or give him Extra School: whatever Quelch did about it, it was certain to be something beastly. Sitting on the stile, Bunter was trying to think out some excuse that would satisfy Quelch. Suppose he had actually done that trans. and left it on the study table, and Toddy had thoughtlessly lighted the fire with it? Would that do for Quelch?

Sad to relate, Billy Bunter was not in the least scrupulous about what tale he might relate to Quelch, so long as Quelch believed it. That, from Bunter's peculiar point of view, was what mattered. But he had to be wary. It occurred to his fat brain that Quelch might think it improbable that Toddy had lighted a fire at all on a warm summer's day. Really, a fellow couldn't be too careful, with Quelch.

Better, perhaps, to tell Quelch that he had left it on the study table, and it had blown out of the window. But again there was a lion in the path. There was hardly any wind that summer's day: and a fellow had to keep within the region of the probable in telling the tale to Quelch.

Best of all, perhaps, some fellows had come larking in the study, and the inkpot had been upset over that finished translation reducing it to such a state that it couldn't be shown up.

On the whole, this seemed to Bunter rather a winner: and he could only hope that it would do for Quelch.

In the meantime, he had no doubt that five hungry and wrathful Remove fellows were looking for him in the school, it was evidently Bunter's best guess to keep out of gates as long as he could. If the hour of reckoning had to come, the later it was postponed the better. Bunter was going to sit on that stile till lock-ups.

It was not very hard work, sitting on a stile: and the fat Owl would have been quite content, but for the accumulation of worries on his fat mind.

Even Bunter was not hungry, after his exploit in No. 1 Study. Still, he would have been glad of a stick of toffee, or a chunk of butterscotch, to keep him company. And in the hope of discovering a forgotten bull's-eye, or perhaps one of Smithy's chocolates, he groped in his pockets.

He did not discover either a bull's-eye or a chocolate.

But his fat fingers contacted a crumpled envelope.

He drew it out and blinked at it through his big spectacles. It was the letter he had received that morning from his cousin Wally Bunter. He had totally and utterly forgotten it: and now, as he blinked at it, he grunted, hardly disposed to take the trouble of reading it. Bunter was not in the least interested in "poor relations" or what they might have to say: especially if what they had to say referred to a forgotten loan of five 'bob'.

However, as he had nothing to do, he finally inserted a fat sticky thumb into the envelope, and jerked it open. He might as well see what Wally had to say: and if the letter referred to that irritating five bob, there was after all no need to answer it.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter, as he unfolded the letter and blinked at it.

It did not refer to that loan in the "hols". Possibly Wally, as well as Billy, had forgotten it: or more probably, he was too well acquainted with his cousin William to see any use in mentioning it. What Wally had to say in that letter was quite unexpected.

DEAR BILLY.

I'm having my holiday this week. I've fixed up to stay at Pegg and get a whiff of sea air. If you'd like to see me, run across to Pegg some time, and you'll find me at Mrs. Smallbones, 15 Marine Parade. I've fixed up there because I've heard from several chaps that the food is good. I'd like to look in at your school and see some of the fellows I met when I came once. You remember they took me for you? But if you'd rather not, don't mind saying so. Anyhow give me a look-in at Marine Parade.

Yours ever,

WALLY BUNTER.

"Yah!" was Billy Bunter's comment on that epistle. He was not interested in Wally. He was no snob, of course: he could tolerate a relative who was a junior clerk or something - or - other in an office or something: indeed, he could carry his toleration so far as to borrow five shillings off him, and forget to return it. He felt quite kind, in a patronising way, towards Wally. Still, it was rather a nerve on his part to take his holiday at a seaside resort so near Billy's school: and it was rather irritating to be reminded of the circumstance that Wally had been taken for him, owing to the resemblance between them. Bunter either couldn't or wouldn't see that the resemblance was so very close.

There were points of resemblance, he admitted that.

But while Bunter had a good well-filled-out figure, Wally was fat! He was taller than Wally. It was true that when they had measured together, they had counted up to the same fraction of an inch. But at any rate Bunter felt taller. Moreover, Bunter was good-looking -

he needed only a glance into a mirror to tell him that. Was Wally? Not in the least! So how could they be so very much alike? Besides, Bunter always thought that a face had rather a bare look without spectacles. It was his glasses that gave him his distinctive air! Wally could make out that he was just like Billy, if he liked - Billy scorned the idea.

On the other hand, there was one point in the letter that interested Bunter. Wally mentioned that the food was good at 15 Marine Parade, Pegg. After all, it was up to a public-school man to take some notice of a poor relation. Next day was Wednesday, a half-holiday. Bunter might do worse than run across to Pegg and give old Wally a look-in. It would keep him out of the way of quite a number of his school-fellows whom he was not anxious to meet, too. Certainly he wasn't going to have Wally at Greyfriars again, and fellows making out that they were just alike, and pretending to take one for the other just to annoy him. But if the food was good at 15 Marine Parade-

The faint sound of a distant bell across the meadows reminded Billy Bunter of lock-ups.

He crumpled Wally's letter into his pocket, and rolled off the stile. Slowly and reluctantly he rolled school-wards.

Once more he had to face the woes of existence: the evil hour could be postponed no longer. He had to keep a wary eye open for Coker of the Fifth, and Smithy, and even Tubb of the Third: but he nourished a faint hope that Harry Wharton and Co. might be prevailed upon to believe that he had been out of gates ever since class, and that somebody else must have raided their study. As for Quelch, he had not finally decided whether Toddy had lighted a fire with that translation, whether it had blown out of a window, or whether fellows larking in the study had spilled the ink over it. There were quite a lot of problems on Billy Bunter's fat mind, as he rolled in at the gates, just as Gosling was coming down with his keys. His eyes were wary behind his spectacles, as he rolled into the House.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a familiar roar. "Buck up, Bunter - you'll be late for roll."

Bunter gave Bob Cherry a stealthy blink.

"I-I-I say, Cherry, old chap, I-I've been out of gates ever since class," he gasped, "I-I-I haven't been up to the studies at all-."

"I know that, fathead!"

"Eh?"

"We've heard from Coker," grinned Bob.

"Kik-kik-Coker?"

"How on earth did you up-end old Horace at Pegg?" asked Bob.

Bunter gazed at him. This was the first he had heard of the up-ending of old Horace at Pegg!

"Come on, Bob," called out Harry Wharton.

"Coming!"

Billy Bunter rolled into hall after the Famous Five, perplexed but relieved. They displayed no sign of hostility: as would assuredly have been the case, had they guessed who had snooped the foodstuffs in No. 1 Study. Why Bob Cherry fancied that he had been over to Pegg, and that he had up-ended Horace Coker there, was a mystery to Bunter. But they were welcome to fancy anything they liked, so long as they did not fancy that he had snooped the spread in No. 1 Study. On the subject of the Famous Five, Bunter was relieved - now he had to worry about only Coker, and Smithy, and Quelch - quite enough, undoubtedly, for any fellow to have to worry about!

CHAPTER 6

PREP IN NO. 7

"HE, he, he!"

Billy Bunter uttered that sudden and unmusical cachinnation. Apparently he was amused.

It was prep: and Bunter was sitting at the table in No. 7 Study, with Peter Todd and Tom Dutton. Bunter was going to give prep some attention. The armchair tempted him: but he resisted it. The disastrous outcome of omitting prep on Monday evening had been a warning, even to Bunter. That miserable translation still hung over his fat head. Quelch had not inquired after it yet: but it was quite certain that Quelch would inquire in the morning: when Bunter hoped to get by with one of the three excuses he had invented for the purpose. In the meantime, even Bunter realised that he had better give prep a "squint", at least: a good "con" in the form-room might have an ameliorating effect on Quelch.

But though he sat at the table, with his books before him, Bunter had not yet started work. There was something about work that always repelled Bunter.

And the fact that he was amused, and signified the same by the utterance of a sudden cachinnation, showed that he was not thinking of prep. Certainly there was nothing amusing to be found in Virgil. "He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

Peter Todd glanced up. Tom Dutton did not, as he did not hear that inharmonious explosion of Bunter's inward merriment. Deafness was not wholly an affliction, to a fellow who shared a study with Billy Bunter.

"Found something funny in Virgil?" asked Peter. "Or are you thinking about Quelch scalping you to-morrow for not doing that trans?"

"Oh, I fancy I can stuff Quelch all right!" said Bunter.

"I've thought that out! Suppose I did that trans., and you lighted the fire with it by mistake-."

"We haven't had a fire-."

"I know that: but Quelch doesn't, does he?" yapped Bunter. "Or it might have blown out of the window. Somebody opened the door suddenly, and there was a draught, see? Think that would do for Quelch?"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Peter.

"Or fellows larking in the study upset the ink over it, and I threw it away because it was too inky to take to Quelch," said Bunter.

"What about that?"

"Oh, scissors!"

"Never mind Quelch," said Bunter. "I was thinking about that ass Coker - he, he, he!" And the fat Owl chuckled again.

"I heard fellows saying that you up-ended Coker in Pegg this afternoon, while we were at the cricket," said Peter. "Where on earth did you find the pluck to stand up to that Fifth-form fathead?"

"Pooh! That's nothing!" said Bunter, disdainfully.

"I'd up-end him again, as soon as look at him!"

"You'll have a chance to-morrow. I expect," grinned Peter. "Coker is after your gore, old fat man."

"Yah! Who cares for Coker?" said Bunter.

Peter, grinning, resumed prep, Billy Bunter did not, at the moment, care for Coker, or a dozen Cokers: but it was probable that he would care quite a lot if he found Coker in the offing. Bunter was as brave as a lion when no danger was nigh - not at other times. At the moment, however, thinking of Coker evidently amused Bunter. His fat face was irradiated by a grin that stretched almost from one podgy ear to the other.

Bunter had been quite puzzled and perplexed by the belief of the Famous Five that he had up-ended Coker at Pegg. Bunter had been nowhere near Pegg that afternoon, so obviously there was some mistake in the matter. It was a happy mistake for Bunter, establishing an alibi of which he was in sore need. All the same, it hadn't happened.

Quite a number of Remove fellows had spoken to Bunter about it. They all knew that he had up-ended Coker - though Bunter himself did not. They were all, naturally, surprised. If Bunter had scuttled like a scared rabbit at the sight of Coker, nobody would have been surprised: but standing up to him, and actually up-ending the hefty Horace, was not merely surprising - it was amazing.

Bunter was not the fellow to disclaim credit, whether due or not. If fellows chose to suppose that he had had the nerve, the pluck, and the muscle, to tackle Coker of the Fifth, Bunter was quite prepared to let them go on supposing so. It was a feather in Bunter's cap: moreover, it cleared him of suspicion in connection with the grub-raid in No. 1 Study. But how that extraordinary mistake had come about, was a puzzle to the fat Owl: and he was puzzling over it while Toddy and Dutton gave their attention to Virgil.

And suddenly it dawned upon him. Hence his sudden cachinnation. Had he not read Wally's letter, he would never have guessed. But he remembered what Wally had told him in that letter: and all was suddenly clear.

Wally was in Pegg, on his holiday! Somebody had up-ended Coker - somebody whom he supposed to be Bunter. It could only be Wally! On the occasion when Wally had visited Greyfriars, long ago, fellows had taken him for Bunter. Coker, evidently, had repeated that error. Coker must have come on Wally, walking on the front at Pegg among the other trippers, and taken him for Billy. He had smacked Wally's head in mistake for Billy's: and Wally, not Billy, had up-ended him in return. Wally was a fellow who could do such things: it was only in looks that he resembled his cousin William George. Wally was fat, but he was fit: he played cricket whenever he could, which Billy never did when he could help it: he was a good boxer, and good at wrestling: he could do quite a number of things that Billy couldn't. Even at Latin he could play Billy's head off: though he was only a chap in an office and Billy a public-school man! Indeed if Bunter had known earlier that Wally was in Pegg, he would have thought of walking across to get that translation done for Quelch! If Quelch doubted it, as was probable if Bunter's three excuses failed him, he jolly well would!

It was no wonder that Billy Bunter chuckled, as he realised that Coker had smacked Wally's head in error. It must have been rather a surprise for Wally, when a fellow he did not know came up to him and smacked his head, for no apparent reason! Probably Wally had not been amused: but it seemed very amusing to Bunter.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter again.

This was an additional reason why Wally shouldn't visit him at the school. If fellows saw Wally, and learned that he was staying at Pegg, they would tumble to it at once who had up-ended Coker. Billy

Bunter did not want to part with that spot of glory: neither did he want to be called to account for the disappearance of the foodstuffs in No. 1 Study.

Least said was soonest mended! Billy Bunter made up his fat mind to call on Wally on Wednesday afternoon, sample that good food at 15 Marine Parade, and hear all about that encounter with Coker: at the same time taking his translation with him, if Quelch doubled it.

Wally was only a poor relation: but even poor relations had their uses. Wally could do the translation while Billy sampled the food!

"Not going to do any prep?" asked Peter, looking up.

"You'll have a spot of bother with Quelch in form, fathead."

"Oh, blow prep!" said Bunter, peevisly. "Pretty rotten having to mug up this tosh, while other fellows are on holiday - holidays with pay, too? 'Tain't all beer and skittles being a public-school man, Toddy. I can jolly well tell you I'd rather be at the seaside - at a place where there's good food, of course-." Bunter sighed. "Blessed if I wouldn't like to change places, for a week, with-."

"With whom?" asked Peter, staring, as the fat Owl broke off suddenly.

"Oh! Nobody!" said Bunter, hastily. "I say, lend me a hand with this tosh, Peter. Where do we have to go on?"

"Hi summo in fluctu pendent-."

"Oh, blow!"

"It's the celebrated shipwreck scene," said Peter.

"Poor old Æneas got himself shipwrecked-!"

"Pity he didn't get himself drowned, too!" yapped Bunter. "Blow Æneas! Hi summo in fluctu pendent: his unda dehiscena - oh, blow! I suppose I'd better have a shot at it!"

The fat Owl had a "shot" at prep, at last. He could not help contrasting it with Wally's probable occupation: sitting on the front, listening to the band, and very likely eating ice-creams! True, Wally had only a week of it: and he had to take his holiday early in the summer if the "boss" told him to: and Billy had weeks and weeks of holidays to come later. Still, that did not alter the fact that Wally, at the moment, was enjoying a seaside holiday, while Billy was stuck in a study disentangling the deathless verse of Virgil.

A tramp of feet in the Remove passage announced that fellows were going down after prep. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton put their books away. Billy Bunter blinked dismally at Virgil.

He had left his "shot" rather late: and the amount of work he had done was not likely to see him through, if Quelch called on him for "con". But Bunter was not the man to carry on after other fellows had left off. He grunted, and rose from the table.

"I-I say, Toddy, squint into the passage and see if Smithy's come out, will you?" mumbled Bunter. He was anxious not to meet Smithy. Peter Todd chuckled.

"I've heard about Smithy's chocs!" he remarked.

"I never had his chocs!" hooted Bunter. "It's pretty sickening, I think, the way fellows make out it was me, if they miss anything. I never even knew he had a box of chocs in his study at all. It was only one of those half-crown boxes from the tuck-shop, too - nothing to do a song and dance about."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter. "I daresay Wharton would make out that I had the parcel in his study, only he jolly well knows that I was over at Pegg when I was in his study this afternoon-."

"What?"

"I-I mean, when I wasn't in his study this afternoon. It's the same with Smithy. I never came up to the studies before class this morning at all, and I only came to this study to get a book-."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Smithy's just a suspicious beast, making out that a fellow had his chocs. He never saw me. I know that, because I watched him go out before I came up to his study. Not that I went to his study, you know. Nowhere near it."

The door of No. 7 opened. Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in.

"Oh, here you are, Bunter," he said, genially, "I looked in for you this afternoon, you were out-."

"Oh! Did you?" gasped Bunter. "I-I say, Smithy, if it's about those chocs. I-I never had them, old chap. I never saw the box in your study cupboard. Besides, I left it there just as it was - never touched it-. Ow! Keep off, you beast! I say, Toddy, keep him off! Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter dodged round the study table. The Bounder followed him round, and there was a heavy thud, as a lunging foot contacted the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School. Bunter roared.

"That's for a start," said Smithy, in the same genial tone. "You've got more to come, Bunter, if I don't find a box of chocs in my study to-morrow! You'd better see that it's there."

With that, the Bounder walked out of No. 7. leaving Bunter wriggling.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter. "I-I say, Toddy, if Smithy's going on making a silly fuss about his chocs, I-I'd better get another box for him. Will you lend me half a crown till my postal order comes?"

"Yes, if you know how to get half a crown out of a threepenny-bit."

"Oh, lor! I say, Dutton, old chap, will you lend me half a crown?"

"Eh? Half a pound of what?" asked Dutton, staring at the fat Owl.

"Not half a pound, you deaf ass - half a crown!" howled Bunter.

"Half a crown till Saturday?"

"You'll have to ask Quelch for leave," said Dutton.

"He's not likely to let you go up to town on Saturday."

"Half a crown!" raved Bunter. "I want half a crown."

"You needn't yell at a fellow, as if he were deaf!" snapped Dutton.

"A chap can't be a little hard of hearing, without fellows yelling at him as if he were as deaf as a post. What do you mean about half a crown? You couldn't get up to town on that - the fare's fifteen shillings."

"Oh, crikey! Half a crown - just a loan!" shrieked Bunter. "Only a loan."

"Jolly glad to leave you alone - yelling at a fellow like that," answered Dutton, and he left the study: Peter Todd following him grinning.

Billy Bunter was not grinning. He was not feeling like grinning. He had escaped the penalty of his raid in No. 1 Study: but Smithy's chocs, it seemed, were going to haunt him. Smithy, evidently, was going on making a "fuss" till those chocs were replaced: which was just like Smithy! Billy Bunter could only hope that his long-expected postal order would arrive in the morning, and see him through. But it was a faint hope.

CHAPTER 7

UNLUCKY BUNTER!

"BUNTER!"

Billy Bunter drew a deep breath.

He had hardly taken his place in the form-room, the following morning, when Mr. Quelch fixed a gimlet-eye on him, and rapped out his name.

Bunter knew what was coming! It was that putrid translation! That "trans" should have been delivered the previous evening. It had not been delivered. So, before lessons began in the Remove room, Quelch was going to inquire after it. Capper, the master of the Fourth, often forgot to ask for impots: Prout, the Fifth-form beak, sometimes did. But never Quelch. Bunter was only too well aware that Quelch would be after that translation like a dog after a bone. Bunter had no "trans" to produce: but he had compiled three distinct and separate excuses to account for its non-production, and nourished a hope that one of them would be good enough for Quelch.

"You may place your translation on my desk, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch.

Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Bunter. "But - if you please, sir - I-I-."

"I trust, Bunter, that you have written out the translation of Lines 94 to 105 of the first book of the Æneid," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice. His tone indicated very plainly that there would be trouble in the air if Bunter hadn't!

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Bunter, promptly. "I was working hard at it in my study after class yesterday, sir, and got it done, sir. But-."

"Then you may produce it, Bunter."

"I-I-I-I left it on my study table, sir-."

"You should not have done so, Bunter. However, you may fetch it from your study."

"I-I mean I left it on my study table yesterday, sir, and - and when I came in it-it-it was gone, sir-."

"Bunter!" Quelch fairly barked.

"It-it-it had blown out of the window, sir!" stammered Bunter. The gimlet-eye that was fixed on him seemed almost to bore into him, and Bunter hurried out the first of his three excuses that came into his fat head. "Somebody opened the study door suddenly, sir, and-and the draught -the-the draught from the door blew it out of the window, sir-."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"If Bunter thinks that will do for Quelch-!" murmured Nugent.

Billy Bunter blinked hopefully at Quelch. It is sad to relate that Bunter had no scruple whatever about making unveracious statements to his form-master. All that worried Bunter was that Quelch might not believe them. And judging by Quelch's look, he was not in a credulous mood that morning.

"Bunter! I have had to speak to you, many times, on the subject of prevarication!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice. "You have not written out your translation, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir! I-I-I did it every word, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It-it wasn't my fault that Toddy lighted the fire with it by mistake, sir-."

"What?"

"I-I-I mean-." Bunter was alarmed, and getting a little confused.

"I-I mean, it wasn't my fault Toddy blew out of the window - I mean, the draught from the door lighted the fire with my trans, sir-."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch.

"It-it-it just happened, sir!" stammered Bunter.

"It was-was just one of those things, sir! Toddy opened the door suddenly with my translation, and the fire blew out of the window - I-I mean, the fire lighted the window - that is, I-I-I mean-."

Bunter was hopelessly confused under the glare of the gimlet-eye, and his three excuses mixed up in his fat brain. "I-I couldn't show it up all inky, sir - after the fellows larking in my study knocked over the inkpot - I mean, after the fellows larking in my study blew out of the window-."

"That will do, Bunter!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Oh! Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"I-I'm sorry I never did my translation, sir - I mean I'm sorry I never brought it to your study, sir, but it was all inky after Toddy lighted the window with it-. I mean-."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the form! Bunter, you have not written out your translation. You will translate thirty-six lines of the first book of the *Aeneid* instead of twelve-."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. He had feared that Quelch might double it! Quelch hadn't: he had trebled it!

"You will hand me the finished translation to-morrow morning, Bunter, or you will be caned."

"Oh, lor'!"

"For your absurd prevarications," went on Mr. Quelch, sternly, "you will go into Extra School this afternoon."

"Oh, jiminy!"

"We shall now commence!" said Mr. Quelch, and the gimlet-eye, at last, ceased to penetrate the fattest member of his form.

The hapless fat Owl sat in a state of dismal dismay. Bunter had great confidence in his powers as an Ananias: and a fellow with three excuses all ready might surely have hoped to get by with one of them. Not one of them had been good enough for Quelch: and even Bunter could hardly have expected to get by with a mixture of all three! Now he was landed with thirty-six lines instead of twelve: with Extra School on a half-holiday over and above! The fact that it was what he deserved did not seem to afford the fat Owl any comfort. That morning the fattest face in the Remove was also the most lugubrious.

There was not going to be a run across to Pegg that afternoon, to sample the good food at 15 Marine Parade. He would be sitting in Extra with other hapless wights, suffering under Monsieur Charpentier and French verbs. And that trebled translation would still be hanging over his fat head like the sword of Damocles. It was a sorrowful prospect.

Mr. Quelch called to Bunter, when the Remove were dismissed for break.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter, his lugubrious countenance brightening a little. Had Quelch relented?

Alas, Quelch hadn't!

"You will go into Extra School, No. 10 class-room, at two-thirty, Bunter. I shall speak to Monsieur Charpentier."

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

"What?" Quelch's ears seemed very sharp that morning. "What did you say, Bunter?"

"I-I-I said thank you, sir!" stuttered Bunter.

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

However, he let it go at that, and the fat Owl rolled out of the form-room after the Remove.

"I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter blinked dolorously at the Famous Five in the corridor. "I say, which of you fellows will do that translation for me while I'm in Extra?"

"Echo answers which!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Oh, really, Cherry-."

"Esteemed echo replies that the whichfulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky-."

"You've got Extra for telling crammers," said Johnny Bull. "Serve you jolly well right!"

"I think you fellows might be pally, after all I've done for you!" said Bunter, reproachfully. "You could do that translation on your head, Wharton, and if you jolly well won't, I can jolly well say - Yarooooooh!"

Billy Bunter yelled, and spun round. He had not known that the Bounder was in the offing. He knew now, as a foot landed on his trousers.

"More to come, until I find that box of chocs in my study," said Smithy, and he walked on, laughing.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!" gasped Bunter. "I-I say, you fellows, if one of you will lend me half a crown-. Beasts!" Bunter made that final remark to five disappearing backs.

He rolled out dismally into the quad. Three fags of the Third Form were in a group near the door: Tubb, Paget, and Bolsover minor.

"Here's Bunter, Tubby," called out Paget.

Tubb of the Third looked round, pushing back his cuffs. Billy Bunter hastily retired into the House again, before the warlike Tubb could go into action. He rolled away to the Rag: and almost ran into a burly form in the passage.

"Oh! Here you are, are you?" roared Horace Coker. "I'll jolly well teach you to up-end a Fifth-form man-!"

Billy Bunter revolved swiftly on his axis and fled.

A breathless fat Owl plumped into the armchair in No. 7 Study in the Remove, and remained there till the bell rang for third school.

Billy Bunter was feeling, by this time, that life, even at Greyfriars, was hardly worth while. What with Smithy of the Remove, Tubb of the Third, Coker of the Fifth, Quelch and his Latin translation, and Extra School with Mossos, the fat Owl felt utterly fed up - fed up, right up to his plump chin! And no doubt it was the stress of this conglomeration of trials, troubles, and tribulations, that caused the Big Idea to germinate in Billy Bunter's fat and fatuous brain.

CHAPTER 8

RECKLESS BUNTER!

"WHY not?"

Billy Bunter uttered that question: addressing it, apparently, to space.

He grinned as he did so.

After third school, Bunter was in the quad. He was leaning his considerable weight on one of the old elms. If there was nothing at hand on which to sit, Bunter generally leaned, if there was anything upon which to lean. Leaning on the elm, blinking at a crowd of fellows in the quad through his big spectacles, Bunter was thinking, and seemed greatly entertained by his thoughts, whatever they might have been.

Of late, troubles had fairly piled on the Owl of the Remove. Like the oysters in Wonderland, thick and fast they came at last, and more and more and more. His fat face had been dismal, doleful, disconsolate, and he blinked at the world with a pessimistic eye. Now there was a change.

Judging by the gleeful grin that irradiated that fat face, Bunter had found, at long last, a spot of balm in Gilead. Life, once more, was worth living, to a harassed Owl.

"He, he, he!" Bunter chuckled. "Why not? It would work! It would jolly well work! He, he, he! Why not?"

After third school, Bunter's thoughts generally concentrated upon dinner. But it seemed that he was now thinking of something more attractive even than dinner. He chuckled loud, and he chuckled long. Evidently some bright idea, some tremendous idea, had come into his fat brain.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry, coming along, spotted the joyful grin on the fat face. "Enjoying life, old fat man?"

"Eh! Oh! Yes! He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

"Has that postal order come," grinned Bob, "or are you looking forward to Extra with Mossos this afternoon?"

"Perhaps there won't be any Extra!" said Bunter. "He, he, he!"

Bob's face became serious.

"If you're thinking of cutting, you fat ass, you'd better think twice!" he said. "Quelch will give you toco."

"Think so?" grinned Bunter.

"Have a little sense," said Bob. "Quelch isn't too pleased with you already. If Mossos reports you absent, it will mean whops."

"Well, what's a whopping?" said Bunter, carelessly.

"A fellow can stand a whopping, I suppose! Who cares?"

"You will - when Quelch gets going."

"Fat lot I care for Quelch!" said Bunter, disdainfully.

"You'll jolly well see. I'm going out this afternoon. I'm not going over to Pegg," added Bunter, hastily, "nowhere near Pegg. Quite the other direction."

"Wherever you're going, you'd better not go, I tell you, Quelch-."

"Quelch can go and eat coke!" said Bunter. "I don't give two hoots for Quelch! No Extra for me. I can jolly well tell you. And if Quelch wants that translation, he can whistle for it, so yah!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob, blankly. "If that's the programme, old fat man, you're heading for a spot of trouble - quite a large spot."

"Who cares?" jeered Bunter. "I say, is that Smithy over there?" He blinked at a group of juniors in the quad. The Bounder was in the group, with Wharton and Johnny Bull and several other fellows,

discussing some matter on which they all seemed interested: probably the coming cricket match with Highcliffe.

"Yes, there's Smithy," answered Bob. "Better steer clear, if you've had enough of his boot."

"Think I funk Smithy?" sneered Bunter. "I've jolly well got something to say to Smithy, and you can come and hear it, if you like."

The fat Owl detached himself from the elm, and rolled towards the group, Bob followed him, in sheer wonder.

This seemed to be quite a new Bunter.

Billy Bunter had many faults: but wild recklessness had never been counted among them. Now it seemed to have developed all of a sudden.

He had announced his intention of cutting Extra: and stated that Quelch could "whistle" for his Latin translation. Now he was deliberately heading for Smithy, who had kicked him in break, and was fairly certain to kick him again if he came within reach of a boot. It was really amazing to see Bunter asking for it like this.

"They've not got a bowler like Inky, at any rate-!" Harry Wharton was saying, when Bunter rolled up to the group and interrupted.

"Here, Smithy!" snapped Bunter.

All the juniors looked round at him. Bunter's tone was short and sharp, and he blinked at the Bounder with a defiant and scornful blink. Smithy stared at him.

"You kicked me this morning," said Bunter.

"I'm going to keep on kicking you, till you dub up the box of chocs you snooped from my study yesterday," assented Smith.

"I'm going to give you a jolly good hiding for it." said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"That is, if you've got the pluck to stand up to a man with the gloves on, instead of sneaking up behind him and landing out with your hoof," sneered Bunter.

"What?"

"Don't I speak plain? If a fellow boots a fellow, a fellow has to put up his hands," said Bunter. "Well, you've got to, see?"

The Bounder gazed at him. Everyone gazed at him.

The juniors forgot even the Highcliffe match. Bunter seemed to have taken their breath away. The Owl of the Remove on the war-path was quite a new phenomenon.

"Mad?" asked Smithy, at last.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

"Do you mean that you're challenging me to a scrap, you fat idiot?" exclaimed the amazed Bounder.

"Got it at last?" asked Bunter, sarcastically. "I mean just that! You've got it coming, see?"

"We're dreaming this!" said Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton laughed.

"You're for it, Smithy!" he said.

"Better make your will, before you stand up to Bunter!" remarked Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter, "I mean it! Smithy makes out that I snooped a box of chocs from his study. I never even knew he had a box of chocs. Kicking up all this fuss about a few chocs that lasted a fellow hardly two minutes-."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he jolly well kicked me! Well, I'm going to thrash him for it, if he doesn't funk having the gloves on-."

"You potty porpoise," yelled the Bounder. "You'd burst all over Greyfriars if I punched you!"

"Yah! Like to crawl out of it now?" sneered Bunter. "Well, I'm not letting you off, see? I'm going out this afternoon, but to-morrow-."

"You're in Extra this afternoon, fathead," said Frank Nugent.

"I'm cutting Extra," answered Bunter, coolly. "What do I care for Quelch?"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"You fellows may funk Quelch! Not me! I'm going out this afternoon because I jolly well choose!"

"Oh, scissors!"

"You fellows can say 'Yes, sir!' and 'Oh, sir!' and 'Please, sir!' and 'No, sir!' as much as you like," said Bunter, loftily, "but I shall simply walk out when I jolly well choose, and Quelch can chew on it."

"Must be mad!" remarked Peter Todd. "The madfulness must be terrific."

"Look here, Bunter, you ass-!" said Harry Wharton.

"You shut up, Wharton! I'm talking to Smithy. I shall be out of gates to-day, Smithy, but to-morrow you've got it coming, if you don't jolly well funk it. What about behind the gym after class to-morrow?"

"You blithering, blechering, burbling owl-."

"You can call a fellow names!" said Bunter, contemptuously.

"Fearfully plucky with your mouth, ain't you? You're all gas, Smithy."

"Why, I-I-I'll-!"

"You'll turn up behind the gym after class to-morrow, or I'll jolly well come after you and smack your head!" said Bunter. "Mind, I mean that! I'll jolly well show you whether you can boot a fellow on his trousers! Yah!"

With that, Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the Remove fellows staring after him in amazement: Smithy the most amazed of all. That Billy Bunter, who had lately been seen dodging Tubb of the Third, could actually intend to stand up to the hard-hitting Bounder with the gloves on, was wildly impossible. Yet he certainly seemed to be in deadly earnest.

They gazed after Bunter, as he rolled to the House.

Coker of the Fifth was coming along to the steps, and the Juniors expected to see Billy Bunter bolt into the House like a scared rabbit. Bunter had not finished surprising them yet. Instead of bolting, he blinked at Coker through his big spectacles, and yelled: "I say, Coker!"

Horace Coker stared round.

"Know what you are, Coker?" yelled Bunter. "You're a lout!"

"What-!" stuttered Coker.

"Lout!"

With that Parthian shot, Billy Bunter did bolt into the House, and disappear: leaving Coker of the Fifth as astonished as the Remove fellows.

"Well, my only summer hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"What's come over Bunter?"

Nobody could answer that question. Something, evidently, had "come over" Bunter - it was a new, astonishing, amazing Bunter! The fat Owl who had dodged round corners to elude a warlike fag, seemed bent on hurling defiances right and left. And when, after dinner, Billy Bunter was seen to roll out of gates, regardless of Extra, regardless of Quelch, it was really the climax.

CHAPTER 9

THE BIG IDEA

"HALLO, Billy!"

"Oh, Hallo, Wally!"

They met, on the "front" at Pegg.

Billy Bunter was sitting on one of the seats facing the sea, blinking at Pegg Bay, and brown sails glancing in the sun, and row-boats pulled by trippers. Bunter had not walked over to Pegg to gaze at the sea, which did not interest him very much. But a walk of over a mile tired Bunter's little fat legs. Of the one thousand seven hundred and sixty yards in a mile, there were one thousand seven hundred and fifty-nine more than Bunter really liked. So there was Bunter, taking a rest before he pursued his way further in search of 15 Marine Parade and Cousin Wally.

A plump youth came strolling' along the front, in a light-grey suit. Plump as he was, he walked with an elastic step, evidently carrying his weight much more easily than Billy Bunter did. Except that he wore no glasses, he was, in looks, Billy Bunter over again: and it was not surprising that Coker of the Fifth had taken the one for the other. It might please Billy Bunter to believe that the resemblance was not so jolly close as fellows had made out: but in point of fact, if Bunter had discarded his spectacles, or Wally had adopted a similar pair, even Brother Sammy or Sister Bessie could hardly have guessed which was which. Indeed, many strolling passers-by glanced at the two, curiously, with an impression that they must be twins. Bunter had not noticed Cousin Wally sauntering along: but Wally's eyes were keen, quite unlike Billy's in that respect, and he picked out the fat figure on the bench, and came across.

"Coming over to see me, Billy?" asked Wally.

"Just that!" agreed Billy. "I had your letter yesterday, old chap! I read it at once, of course."

"Did you?"

"Oh, yes! I never put it in my pocket and forgot all about it till the afternoon."

"Oh!"

"Jolly glad you're here, Wally," said Bunter, genially.

"Never was so pleased to see a chap! Sit down here and let's have a chin."

Wally sat down on the bench beside his Greyfriars cousin. If Billy wanted a "chin" there was really no reason why Billy should not have joined him in his walk: except that Billy was too lazy. But Walter Bunter knew his cousin William George. Billy was going to sit: and if Wally wanted that "chin", he had to sit also. So he sat.

"Having a good time here?" asked Billy, blinking at Wally through his big spectacles.

"Topping!" answered Wally, cheerily.

"Change from the office, what?"

"What-ho!" said Wally.

"Must be pretty rotten in an office!" said Bunter, commiseratingly.

"Oh, not too jolly bad, you know," said Wally, good-humouredly. "We can't all go to expensive public schools."

"No! Horrid to be hard up!" said Bunter. "I wonder what it's like, sometimes. Got any chocs?"

"No! You can get them at the stand over there, though."

Billy Bunter ran fat hands through his pockets. They came out empty. Wally watched that proceeding with a glimmer in his eyes. Perhaps, from old experience of Billy, he knew what was coming.

"Blessed if I haven't left my money behind," said Bunter. "Actually, I haven't a bean on me, at the present moment, Wally. I say, cut across and get some chocs, old chap, and I'll settle when I see you again."

"O.K.," said Wally.

He cut across, and returned with a packet of chocolates.

Bunter opened the packet, and placed it on the bench between them.

"Help yourself, old fellow," he said, hospitably. "This is my treat, you know! What are you grinning at, Wally?"

"Oh! Nothing! How's things at school?" asked Wally. "Lots of cricket, and all that, I suppose?"

"Oh, lots!" said Bunter. "They want me to play at Highcliffe, but I'm not sure that I shall. A fellow has so many calls on his time, you know - I mean, a fellow who's popular. A chap can't really call his time his own, with practically everybody after him."

"Must be topping!" said Wally: and if there was an inflection of sarcasm in his voice, Bunter did not observe it.

"Oh, it's all right," said Bunter, carelessly. "A chap likes to be popular, of course. I say, you mentioned in your letter that the food was good at your show on the Marine Parade."

"Yes, that's all right."

"It's really good?" asked Bunter. He seemed anxious to be assured on that point, as if it very specially interested him.

"Good, and lots of it," said Wally. "They feed you jolly well, I can tell you. Like to come along to tea and sample it?"

"I'll come."

"Right-ho! Let's get a run along the front now, what?" suggested Wally: not very hopefully. Bunter looked like a fixture on the bench.

"I'd rather sit here and have a chat, old chap," said Bunter. "The fact is, Wally, I've got something rather important to tell you."

"Go it!" said Wally.

"You remember coming to the school, a long time ago, and fellows made out that we were just alike?"

"They didn't need to make it out," said Wally. "We are just alike, except for the gig-lamps."

Bunter breathed rather hard. Wally was referring to those glasses, which added to his distinctive air, as "gig-lamps"!

"I don't see that we're so jolly like as all that!" said Bunter, tartly, "but fellows did take us for one another, didn't they?"

"They did!" assented Wally. "Why, I remember your sister Bessie got us mixed once, and asked me for half a crown you owed her."

"Well, I mean, if fellows took us for one another once, they would again," said Bunter. "Of course, they'd know us apart if they saw us together-I'm not fat like you-!"

"Eh?"

"But never mind that," went on Bunter. "They won't see us together, so that's all right."

"Oh!" said Wally, rather slowly. "I'd like to see some of the fellows there again - Wharton, and Bob Cherry, and Nugent, and the rest. But I suppose they've forgotten, all about me, long ago," he added, with a sigh.

"Well, they would, of course," said Bunter, "but if you want to see them again, though I'm blessed if I know why you should, you can see them all right."

"Like me to trot back with you?" asked Wally, brightly.

"No fear!" answered Bunter, promptly. "That wouldn't do at all. Nobody at the school knows you're here, and nobody's jolly well going to know. That would spoil the whole thing."

"I don't see-."

"Of course you don't, till I explain. I've been thinking this out, Wally, entirely for your benefit!" said Bunter, impressively. "You know my way - always thinking of others, and never of myself-."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Wally. "I-I-I mean, carry on, old bean."

"How would you like a week at Greyfriars?" asked Bunter.

Wally's eyes widened.

"I'd like it no end," he said.

"Better than tripping at the seaside?" Wally laughed.

"Yes, rather! You don't know when you're well off, Billy. I jolly well wish I could change places with you."

"That's the idea!" said Bunter.

Wally jumped.

"Wha-a-a-t?" he ejaculated.

"That's what I've been thinking out, entirely for your benefit," explained Bunter. "Fellows took you for me, and me for you, when you came once - and only yesterday that ass Coker jumped on you thinking it was me. Well, you'd like a week at a public school - bit of a change from your office, what? He, he, he! - and I'd like to get away from lessons for a week. I've mapped out the whole thing, and it will work!"

"But-!" gasped Wally.

"You say that the food's good at your boarding-house, so that's all right," said Bunter. "That's important, of course."

"But-!"

"I tell you I've thought it all out. We change clothes at your show, see?"

"But-!"

"I stay on as you, and you go back to Greyfriars as me! I get a week away from school, and you get a week at Greyfriars-."

"But-!" stuttered Wally.

"Nobody will know the difference. You'll remember the fellows you met before, and know their names, and all that. You know your way to my study. You'll have to put on specs, that's all."

"But-!"

"Easy as falling off a form!" said Bunter, breezily.

"Mind, I've thought this out entirely on your account, Wally, to give you a treat. Otherwise I should never have thought of it at all. That's me all over - I always was unselfish, as you know. What do you think of the idea?"

Wally Bunter gazed at Billy Bunter. He did not seem able, for the moment, to tell his Greyfriars cousin what he thought of the idea. That unexpected and startling proposition seemed to have taken his breath away.

CHAPTER 10

CHANGE OF IDENTITY!

"BUT-!" gasped Wally, at last.

Billy Bunter wagged a fat forefinger at him.

"You keep on butting, like a goat!" he said. "I tell you I've thought it all out, and it's all cut and dried."

"But-!"

"There you go again!" said Bunter, peevishly. "I hope you ain't going to make any objections, Wally, when I've taken all the trouble to fix up a treat like this for you."

"Oh! No! It's jolly good of you, Billy! Mean to say you'd be willing to exchange Greyfriars for a seaside boarding-house, for a week?"

"Why not, to do a fellow a good turn?" said Bunter, airily. "You've just said that you'd like to change places with me. Well, now's your chance."

"I'd like it all right. But-."

"It's settled, then-."

"But-but-but-it couldn't be done, Billy. I'd like it no end. But-but it wouldn't work - it couldn't-."

"It jolly well could, and would."

"I know we're alike, but-."

"We're not so jolly much alike, if you come to that," interrupted Bunter. Even while the success of his amazing scheme for getting away from school depended on that very likeness, the fat Owl did not quite like admitting that it existed, "but so long as we ain't seen together, you'll pass all right. Didn't Coker take you for me yesterday?"

"Coker?" repeated Wally. "A long-legged fathead came up to me on the front here yesterday and smacked my head - I thought afterwards that I'd seen him before somewhere-."

"I expect you saw him at the school when you were there. It was Coker, of the Fifth." explained Bunter. "He was after me, and he got you. He, he, he! The fellows think I tipped him over! He, he, he! I couldn't make it out at first, and then I guessed it was you."

"What was he after you for?" asked Wally, staring. "Oh! Nothing! There was a mistake about some apples - nothing really. Never mind that," said Bunter, hastily. "The point is, that Coker took you for me, and smacked your head thinking it was mine - he, he, he! Well, everybody else will take you for me, just the same - especially if you wear my clobber, and put on a pair of specs like mine."

"But I couldn't see through specs," said Wally,

"You could buy a pair with plain glass. That's easy!"

Billy Bunter, evidently, had thought this matter out!

"Oh! I-I suppose I could!" admitted Wally.

"Of course you could!"

"But-."

"Look here, Wally, if you keep on butting, I'll jolly well throw up the whole thing," exclaimed Bunter. "It's a bit thick, keeping on butting when I've planned this, to give you a treat. I'm doing it entirely for your benefit. I'm not thinking of getting out of lessons-."

"Oh!"

"As for Latin translation, you can do them on the back of your neck. Why, you like doing Latin!" added Bunter, with a touch of scorn.

"Yes! But-."

"You might do me a bit of good in form, with Quelch!" said Bunter, thoughtfully. "I've no time for the stuff, really: but you'd think nothing of sticking your nose in a book and mugging up the tosh. Why, you had a Virgil in your pocket when I met you last hols. You'd get on all right with Quelch."

"I remember Quelch - he's got a jolly keen eye!" said Wally, uneasily.

"Like a jolly old gimlet!" agreed Bunter, "but he jolly well mistook you for me when you came to Greyfriars that time, all the same."

"So he did! But-."

"Oh, blow your butts!" said Bunter, testily. "It's all as easy as winking, if you've got the nerve."

"I've got the nerve all right! I'd like it no end, if it could be fixed. No harm in it, is there?" added Wally, thoughtfully.

"Of course not! Where's the harm, if that matters?" yapped Bunter.

"We're both Bunters, ain't we, and what does it matter which Bunter is at Greyfriars, and which taking it easy on the front here?"

Wally knitted his plump brows in reflection. He realised that it did matter, somewhat, which Bunter was at Greyfriars, and which at Pegg. On the other hand, Billy was very keen on this scheme: and Wally did not want to disappoint him. And undoubtedly the prospect of a week at a school like Greyfriars had a very strong appeal for Wally. Even Latin with Quelch, which made Billy Bunter almost tired of life, had an appeal for Wally, who was keen to acquire the knowledge on which his Greyfriars cousin placed no value whatever. And there was the cricket, which Wally loved as much as Billy loathed it. It was long since he had seen Greyfriars: but he remembered clearly the old quad, and shady elms, the grey old ivied walls, the dusky form-rooms, the studies in the Remove passage: often and often, in a City office, he had wished himself in Billy's place. And now, as Billy said, was his chance.

The fat Owl blinked at him impatiently.

"Well, what about it?" he yapped, at last. "I thought you'd jump at it, Wally. I took that for granted, of course. Look here, if you're going to let me down-."

"No: but--."

"Well, is it all fixed, then?" snapped Bunter.

The fat Owl was a little anxious. He had indeed taken it for granted that Wally would "jump" at it: it was upon that certain assumption that he had defied Smithy to combat behind the gym, and told Coker of the Fifth what he thought of him, and cut "Extra" that afternoon. The possibility that Wally might not, after all, take it on, was rather alarming, in the circumstances.

"I'd like it," said Wally, slowly. "But-."

"I'm fed up with your butting, Wally. I call it ungrateful," said Bunter, warmly, "and you know what Spokeshave says about ingratitude - it's sharper than the child of a serpent's tooth - I mean the tooth of a serpent's child. If you're going on butting, I shall wash out the whole thing."

And Bunter heaved himself up from the bench, with an indignant frown.

"All right!" said Wally. "Perhaps that would be best, Billy."

Bunter sat down again.

"Now, look here, Wally," he said. "I've fixed this up, and it will work to a T. I want to get away from school for a bit: and you want to go there - that's the sort of ass you are, if you don't mind my saying so. You simply can't let me down on this."

"Well, if you put it like that-!" said Wally, hesitating.

"I do put it like that!" said Bunter, firmly.

"O.K., then!" said Wally. "It's a go!"

"That's sense," said Bunter, in great relief. "Now let's get along to your boarding-house, and see what the grub's like -I-I- mean, we shall have to change clothes there, you know."

"All right!"

Two plump youths rolled along the "front" to 15 Marine Parade. The matter was settled now: and if Wally had any inward doubts, he suppressed them. Billy had no doubts: Billy was quite assured that any scheme engineered by his powerful brain was bound to be a success.

And the prospect of getting out of lessons for a week, at a safe distance from Quelch, and Extra, and Latin translations, and Coker of the Fifth, Smithy of the Remove, and Tubb of the Third, was quite exhilarating to Billy Bunter. All that was needed was a temporary change of identity: which, in the peculiar circumstances, was easy. The fat Owl of the Remove was in high feather, as he rolled into 15 Marine Parade, with his cousin Wally.

CHAPTER 11

BUNTER ?

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"That fat ass-!"

"Look at young Tubb-!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Six or seven Remove fellows were seated on the old oaken bench under the big shady tree outside the school shop at Greyfriars. They were in flannels, and looked ruddy, and cheery and bright. Harry Wharton and Co., and other Remove men had been at cricket, and now they were refreshing themselves with the harmless and necessary ginger-pop, grateful and comforting on a warm summer's day. And their eyes fell on a fat figure that rolled in at the gates.

If that fat figure was not Billy Bunter's, it was a twin to it. Certainly it did not cross the mind of any fellow there that it was not. Coker of the Fifth had taken it for Bunter's, the previous day, even in different clothes, without spectacles, and without a Greyfriars cap. But the new arrival was equipped with all these adjuncts. The specs, it was true, were rather unusually low down on the fat little nose: but they gleamed in the sun and caught the eye in the old familiar way. It was the truant from Extra that was returning to the school: not a fellow had any doubt about that, or a glimmering of suspicion that it was otherwise.

And they were rather amused.

Tubb, Paget, and Bolsover minor, of the Third Form, were in the quad. At sight of Bunter, Tubb detached himself from his friends, and cut across towards him.

Bunter did not seem to notice him.

He had seen the juniors sitting under the tree outside the tuck-shop, and was coming towards them, with the rolling walk of Billy Bunter. He seemed to have no eye, or spectacles, for the war-like Tubb.

Whereat the juniors under the tree grinned.

It was like the Owl of the Remove to walk right into some fellow he was anxious to avoid. Now he was walking into Tubb of the Third. Tubb was coming on at a run, with the obvious intention - obvious to Harry Wharton and Co. - of barging Bunter over. Blissfully unconscious of it, as if he saw no reason to take any special heed of a fag running across the quad, the fat junior rolled on.

"Collision on the line, in a minute!" remarked Nugent.

"Bump for Bunter!" said Johnny Bull.

"The bumpfulness will be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Blessed if I make the fat ass out!" said Bob Cherry.

"He knows Tubb is after his scalp, and he's been dodging him for days. Now he doesn't seem to care."

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

"He ought to be jolly well kicked for dodging a Third-form fag!" he said. "Of all the flabby funks-."

"Bunter asks for these things," said Bob. "I hear that he scoffed young Tubb's ice-cream the other day, when Tubb wasn't looking.

Hallo, hallo, hallo! there they go - what-ho, she bumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was quite a crash. Tubb, who was rather a heavy fellow for the Third, hurtled into Bunter, hurling him headlong. There was another crash as Bunter landed on the earth. Then there was a roar.

"Oh! ow! wow!"

Bunter sprawled, staring up dizzily at Tubb, who grinned down at him.

"Now get up and have another, you Remove tick!" said Tubb. "Pinching a fellow's ice-cream-yah! I've not finished yet."

Bunter sat up, gasping. He blinked at Tubb over his spectacles. Billy Bunter's double had not quite expected such a reception as this at Greyfriars. Billy had left him an unexpected legacy, as it were - indeed, more than one, if Wally had only known it.

"You young ruffian!" gasped Wally. "What are you rushing a fellow over for?"

"As if you don't know!" retorted Tubb. "Who pinched my ice-cream in the tuck-shop on Saturday when I wasn't looking?"

"Oh!" gasped Wally. He was not unacquainted with his Greyfriars cousin's manners and customs, and he understood. Tubb had barged him over: but he was feeling more disposed, at the moment, to kick his cousin Billy than to kick Tubb.

"Don't sit there spluttering!" said Tubb. "Want me to stir you up with my boot?"

Wally Bunter jumped to his feet. He certainly did not want to be stirred up by Tubb's boot.

The moment he was on his feet, Tubb of the Third rushed at him. Bunter was going over again, in the same way. Tubb was full of beans. Bunter was the only Remove man he would have ventured to barge in the quad. It was quite an exploit for a Third-form fag. Tubb was enjoying this.

But the second barge did not come off as per programme. With a wariness and celerity quite surprising in Bunter, the fat junior side-stepped the rush, and Tubb hurled past him. As he passed, Bunter's right foot shot out, landing with a thud on Tubb's somewhat grubby trousers.

"Wow," yelled Tubb.

It was quite a surprise for Tubb of the Third. Such activity and celerity would never have been expected of Billy Bunter. Tubb sprawled forward, under the impetus of the kick, and landed on his hands and knees.

"Wow! Oh, crumbs! Wow!" spluttered Tubb. Wally grinned down at him, in his turn.

"Have another?" he asked.

"Oh, crikey!" said Tubb. Still on his hands and knees, he stared round at Bunter, blankly, as if he could not quite believe what had happened.

Harry Wharton and Co., under the tree by the tuckshop, stared too. They also seemed to find it difficult to believe what had happened.

"See that?" gasped Bob Cherry. "The seefulness was terrific."

"What on earth's come over Bunter?" said Harry Wharton, in wonder.

"He's been dodging that cheeky fag for days, and now-"

"Can't make him out!" said Bob. "Look how he challenged Smithy to a scrap this morning-."

"And called Coker of the Fifth a lout!" said Nugent.

"And walked out on Quelch this afternoon, as if Quelch didn't matter," said Peter Todd. "What's come over him?"

"It's queer!" said Squiff.

"The queerfulness is preposterous," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"Tubb's had enough!" grinned Bob.

Tubb of the Third regained his feet-taking care to do so out of reach of Bunter. Evidently, he had ceased to enjoy the barging game: and was not thinking of barging Bunter over any more. He rejoined

his friends, Paget and Bolsover minor, wriggling as he did so. The fat junior's foot had landed hard.

Bunter, with a smile on his fat face, rolled on.

His greeting at Greyfriars was not exactly pleasing: he had not expected to be barged over by a war-like fag when he came in. But it was satisfactory in one respect at least: it proved that there was not the remotest suspicion of the change of identity that had taken place at 15 Marine Parade, Pegg. He was taken for the other Bunter as a matter of course.

Considerably reassured, he rolled on towards the group under the shady tree. One of his dissimilarities to his Cousin Billy was that he had a good memory. It was long since he had seen Harry Wharton and Co., but he remembered their faces and their names.

"I say, you fellows!" It was Billy's accustomed opening: and the fat voice was just Billy's.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with you to-day, Bunter?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Why this sudden change?"

"Change?" he repeated.

"Only yesterday I saw you dodging round a corner when Tubb was coming."

"Oh! Did you?" stammered Wally.

"Yes, I jolly well did! And now-."

"And there's another change, too," said Johnny Bull, staring at the fat face.

"Oh! Is there?" breathed Wally.

"Yes: you've washed."

"Oh, really, Bull-."

"By gum! So he has!" exclaimed Bob. "How did that happen, Bunter? Did you fall into the sea, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob, "there's Quelch! He's seen Bunter."

"Look out, old fat man!" grinned Peter Todd.

Wally looked round. Mr. Quelch was walking, at a distance, with Prout, the master of the Fifth. A gimlet-eye had turned on the group of juniors under the tree: and as Mr. Quelch sighted Bunter among them, he left Prout, and came across. Wally eyed him with some little uneasiness as he came. Of all the eyes at Greyfriars School, those gimlet-eyes were most likely to penetrate the change of identity. And Quelch was coming directly towards him, with a frowning brow! Wally braced himself for the ordeal.

"Bunter!" Quelch's voice was deep.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Wally.

"So you have returned!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"And what do you mean, Bunter, by this conduct?"

"Wha-a-at conduct, sir?" gasped Wally.

"What? what? You were ordered to go into Extra School at half-past two, Bunter. Instead of doing so, you left the school, and have not returned until after the detention class is dismissed. What do you mean by this, Bunter?"

"Oh!" gasped Wally.

He was dismayed - but he was relieved. Obviously, Billy must have been booked for Extra School: instead of which, he had walked over to Pegg. While Billy was sunning himself on the front, his double at Greyfriars had to pay the penalty! But it was a relief, all the same: for evidently Quelch had no doubt that it was W. G. Bunter, of the Remove, who stood before him.

"I-I-I-!" stammered Wally. He hardly knew what to say. Tubb of the Third was not the only legacy his cousin Billy had left him!

"You can have no excuse to offer, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, sternly. "You will be punished for this, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" murmured Wally.

"Go to my study at once, and wait for me there!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir!" said Wally, meekly. He rolled away towards the House obediently. Mr. Quelch, still frowning, rejoined Mr. Prout, and the two masters resumed their walk.

"Poor old Bunter!" murmured Bob. "He's for it."

"He asked for it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"True. O King: but a fellow doesn't always want to get what he asks for! Six on the bags!" sighed Bob. "Poor old Bunter!"

"Poor old Bunter" rolled into the House. At the door of Mr. Quelch's study he paused. That fat villain, Billy, had landed him in this: and he could guess what was to occur when Quelch came in. And into what else might he have landed him? Very likely there were more such surprises to come!

For a long minute, Wally stood at Quelch's study door: more than half-inclined to walk back to Pegg, and kick his cousin Billy for having planned this treat for him! But he had given Billy his word, and his word was his bond. With deep feelings, he turned the door-handle, and went into Quelch's study: to wait there till the Remove master came in.

CHAPTER 12

A SURPRISE FOR QUELCH!

MR. QUELCH stared.

Really, he could hardly believe his eyes, keen as gimlets as they were.

Seldom, if ever, had he been so surprised.

Standing at the doorway of his study, he looked in at a fat figure seated in his armchair.

Bunter, certainly, should not have been seated in his form-master's armchair. But as he had been waiting over half-an-hour in the study, that was perhaps excusable. It was not the fact that Bunter was seated in the armchair that made Quelch gaze at him so fixedly. It was Bunter's occupation. He was reading - and what he was reading was a volume which Bunter, so far as Quelch's experience of him went, regarded with loathing. It was Virgil!

He sat with the book in his plump hands, his eyes fixed on the open page, his spectacles so low down on his fat little nose that he was, apparently, reading without their aid. But it was the circumstance that he was reading Virgil that made Quelch doubt the evidence of his eyes.

Perhaps, for a moment, Quelch suspected that this might be a little scene got up for his benefit: for he knew his Bunter, and was well aware that the Owl of the Remove, obtuse as he was, had a well-developed vein of artfulness in him.

But he could see that it was not that.



STANDING AT THE DOORWAY OF HIS STUDY, HE LOOKED IN
AT A FAT FIGURE SEATED IN HIS ARMCHAIR

The fat occupant of the armchair was absorbed in the book. He had not heard Quelch's footsteps in the passage: he had not noticed Quelch push the door open. He was unaware of the gimlet-eyes fixed on him from the doorway. Quelch gazed!

He had been in no hurry to come to his study. He had finished, at his leisure, his walk and talk with Mr. Prout. It was not surprising that a schoolboy, waiting for him, had looked round for something to read, to pass the long minutes. But there were few schoolboys who would have found entertainment in the volumes available in Quelch's study. And Quelch would never have dreamed that Bunter was one of the few!

Yet there he was, deep in Virgil, unconscious of Quelch!

Varying expressions flitted over the Remove master's face as he stared. He was surprised - astonished - amazed - but, on the whole, pleased. He had come to his study to cane Bunter for cutting Extra School. So flagrant an act of reckless indiscipline indicated "six" - six of the very best. But Quelch quite forgot his cane, as he gazed at the fat face bent over a page of Latin. Often and often had Bunter been whopped for his own good. Judging by what Quelch saw now, he had derived benefit from those whoppings. Was he, at long, long last, developing something like interest in his studies? It looked like it. Undoubtedly it looked like it.

A whole minute elapsed, while Quelch stood gazing at that unexpected scene. Still Bunter, unaware of him, did not look up.

Mr. Quelch stepped in, at last.

"Bunter!" he said. For once, Quelch did not rap! His voice was quite kindly.

"Oh!" gasped the fat inhabitant of the armchair.

He bounded to his feet, with a swift activity which might have been witnessed in a kangaroo, but had never been witnessed in Billy Bunter before.

He stood facing the Remove master, his cheeks flushing crimson, the open volume in his hand. He was overwhelmed by confusion.

"Oh!" he repeated. "I-I didn't hear you, sir. I-I-."

"I am aware of that, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, in the same kindly tone, scanning the crimson confused face curiously.

"I-I thought I'd look at a book, sir, as-as I had to wait!"

stammered Wally. "I-I hope you'll excuse me, sir-."

"I am very glad to see you take an interest in that book, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, benevolently. "It is a very welcome change in you, Bunter."

"Oh! I-I-I-," stammered Wally. "It-it was on the table, sir, and I-I-I just picked it up-."

"Quite!" said Mr. Quelch, "and in what particular passage were you so interested, Bunter?"

"I was reading the shipwreck scene in the first book, sir," mumbled Wally.

Mr. Quelch nodded approval. It was the shipwreck episode in the First Book that Billy Bunter had to translate, for his sins. Wally had not yet heard of that impending translation: but this looked, to Quelch, as if Billy Bunter was taking it with becoming seriousness.

"An excellent passage, Bunter, and I am very pleased that you are able to appreciate it," said Mr. Quelch, still more benevolent. "An almost faultless passage-."

"Almost, sir," said Wally. He rather forgot, for the moment, that he was now Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove, and answered as the City youth who "mugged up" Latin in his spare time.

Mr. Quelch gave him a very sharp look. Wally had said "almost": and classical criticism was the very last thing Quelch would have expected from Bunter of his form.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Quelch. It was the first time in history that Quelch had so addressed Bunter! "Please be more explicit. To what do you take exception?"

"Well, sir, the parenthesis in the 109th and 110th lines," said Wally. "I-I suppose it's rather cheek, but-."

"Not at all," said Mr. Quelch. "Go on, Bunter. You interest me."

"Well, saxa vocant Itali, and the rest, sir," said Wally. "Isn't that rather out of place in such a scene, sir? I can't help thinking that Virgil would have cut it out, if he had lived to revise the *Aeneid*."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch.

This - from Bunter! - was quite amazing. The gimlet-eyes almost popped at the fat face.

"I-I-I expect I'm all wrong, sir," stammered Wally, remembering that he was now Bunter of the Remove, speaking to his form-master.

"Not at all, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch. "Not at all! I am glad, very glad, to see you taking so keen and intelligent an interest in classical study. This gives me great hopes of you, Bunter."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Wally.

Mr. Quelch was about to speak again, when his eye fell on the cane on his table, and he remembered why the fat junior was waiting for him there. For the moment he had quite forgotten that Bunter was a delinquent.

He frowned.

Bunter, undoubtedly, deserved to be whopped. He had asked for it - begged for it, in fact! He had been sentenced to Extra School: and he had walked out on it! If ever a Remove man had asked for six, Bunter had.

But Quelch paused.

Wally, noting the change in his look, drew a deep breath. He knew what was coming, and he had to go through with it. Mentally he promised himself the solace of kicking Cousin Billy. But that, though pleasant in prospect, was no present help in time of need. He had to bend over and take Billy's "six".

But had he?

Quelch's pause was long. But when he spoke at last, he did not reach for the cane on the table.

"Bunter!"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"It was my intention, Bunter, to punish you most severely for your reckless and insubordinate conduct this afternoon. But-."

Quelch paused again. Apparently there was a "but", of which Wally was glad to hear. He hung on Quelch's words.

"But-!" repeated Mr. Quelch, "but-since I find so great an improvement in you, Bunter, since I find you taking so very intelligent an interest in your work, Bunter, since you have given me some hope that you may yet prove a credit to your form, I shall excuse you. You may leave my study, Bunter."

"Oh! Thank you, sir!" gasped Wally. He left it - promptly!

Mr. Quelch was left with quite a benevolent, though somewhat perplexed, expression on his face. He was pleased with Bunter. The improvement in the laziest, slackest, most obtuse member of his form was marked! But it was so sudden, and it was so very unexpected, that it was perplexing.

For the first time since Billy Bunter had adorned the Greyfriars Remove with his plump presence, Quelch had hopes of him! Which hopes were likely to last just as long as Wally stayed-but, alas! no longer.

CHAPTER 13

SPOT OF BOTHER

"LAZYBONES!"

Peter Todd made that remark, coming into No. 7 Study in the Remove. Billy Bunter's double looked round, over his spectacles. Wally was seated in the armchair in No. 7. From his previous visit to Greyfriars, long ago, he remembered his way about: and he had easily found Cousin Billy's study. It was fortunate, in the unusual circumstances, that Wally had a retentive memory!

There was a cheery and contented expression on his fat face. No. 7 Study in the Remove was far from palatial. It might have been called, in fact, a little shabby. None of its three inhabitants could afford to expend much on its adornment. The carpet was old and had holes in it: the armchair was not only old, but looked as if it had never been new: the book-shelf had been put up by Toddy's own hands, of far from expensive materials, and with a slight slant to it: the clock on the mantelpiece did not go. Dog-eared books, a slipper that belonged to Billy Bunter, a frying-pan that needed quite a lot of polishing, and other odds and ends, were spotted about here and there. No. 7 Study most assuredly was not wealthy like Smithy's, or elegant like Mauly's. But Wally seemed to derive great satisfaction from its aspect, as he sat in the shabby old armchair and looked about. To him, at least, it was a delectable spot. In fact, finding himself at Greyfriars, a Greyfriars man pro tem., was rather like the realisation of a dream to Wally, and he was prepared to be pleased with everything he saw.

Peter, coming in and seeing a fat figure reclining in the armchair, addressed him as "lazybones" - but really, Wally, was not lazy. That was one more detail in which he did not resemble Cousin Billy. But he had as much weight to carry as Billy: and though he certainly seemed to carry it much more easily than Billy, he liked to give it a rest.

"Better get a move on." added Peter.

"Why?" asked Wally. "It's not prep yet."

"What about your trans?"

"Eh?"

"Did Quelch lick you for cutting Extra?"

"Oh! No."

"Blessed if I know why he let you off, then. But you can bank on it that he won't let you off if you don't hand in your trans in the morning."

"My-my-my trans?" stammered Wally.

"Forgotten it?" asked Peter, sarcastically.

"Eh? Oh! Yes! I mean-."

"Well, you always had a memory like a sieve," said Peter, "but if you don't remember to hand in that trans, you're for it. Quelch trebled it this morning: but it will be whops next time."

"Oh!" gasped Wally.

"And it won't be much use telling Quelch that you did it, and it blew out of the window, or somebody lighted the fire with it, or upset the ink over it!" added Peter. "You've tried that-."

"Oh! Have I!" stuttered Wally.

"You know you have, you fat Ananias. Look here, you lazy ass, why not get on with it, instead of squatting in that armchair like a sack of tallow? You've got thirty-six lines to do, and not much time before prep."

"Thirty-six lines!" breathed Wally.

Forgotten that too?" Peter was sarcastic again. "Well, it's a safe bet that Quelch won't forget. Look here. I'll lend you a hand to get started, as you're such a howling dud at it."

"Oh! Thanks! But-."

We've had most of it in prep! You could handle it all right if you hadn't slacked in prep. Get out of that armchair, and go to it, you fat fathead."

Wally jumped out of the armchair: a proceeding that made Peter stare. He was not accustomed to seeing Bunter jump!

Wally realised that he had a translation of thirty-six lines to do. This was the first he had heard of it: but it was borne in upon his mind that he was coming in for one more of the legacies left him by Cousin Billy!

Evidently, so long as he was Bunter of the Remove, he had to perform the tasks assigned to that Bunter. Once more he felt a strong desire to walk over to Pegg and kick Cousin Billy.

However, such a task was not, to Wally, the awful, overwhelming infliction that it was to Billy. As Billy had scornfully remarked, he liked Latin! Certainly, he did not want to spend his first hours at Greyfriars sticking at translation in a study: still, he was quite cheerful about it. Anyhow, he had to show up that trans in form the next morning.

But he had to learn somehow what it was that he was required to translate! Billy could have put him wise, had Billy thought of it! But Billy hadn't! Thoughtfulness for others had never been one of Billy's weaknesses.

"You find the place, will you, Toddy?" he asked, cautiously.

"Too jolly lazy to look that out?" asked Peter. "You'll perish of laziness one of these days, Bunter. There's your Virgil on the table - open it at the place, which you know as well as I do!"

Wally smiled. He had to feel his way, as it were, as a stranger in a strange land. Now he had learned, at least, that it was Virgil that he had to translate. It might have been Eutropius, or Suetonius, for all he had known. Still, he could not open Virgil at the "place", as he had not the remotest idea of the section with which he had to deal.

He stretched out a fat hand to the *Æneid*, and opened it at random. Peter stared at him.

"You fat ass! What are you up to?" he asked. "That's the sixth book!" From which Wally deduced that it was not the sixth book that was required. Unluckily there were eleven others to choose from.

"Look here, what's this game?" exclaimed Peter, impatiently. "Even you can't have forgotten that Quelch gave you a trans from the first book."

Wally smiled again! He was getting on! He knew that his task lay somewhere in the first book of the *Æneid*.

He re-opened the *Æneid* at the beginning. But as there were seven hundred and fifty-six lines in that "book", he was still rather at a loss. Where were the assigned thirty-six? Peter stared at the opened page.

"Are you going to begin at 'arma virumque cano'?" he asked, sarcastic again. "Think that will do for Quelch?"

"The - the fact is-!"

"Don't talk about facts - they're not in your line," said Peter.

"Look here, Bunter, you never remember anything but meals, I know: but you can't have forgotten that you've got to do the shipwreck

scene. Get on to it, and don't play the giddy ox, if you want me to give you a start."

"Oh! The shipwreck scene!" exclaimed Wally, considerably relieved. That was the passage he had been reading over in Quelch's study, and with which he was well acquainted. That translation, formidable as it was to Billy Bunter, was easy going, to Wally.

"Mean to say you'd forgotten?" hooted Peter.

"Oh! No! Yes! I mean-."

"Oh, get to it!" growled Peter.

Wally opened the book at the right place this time. He sat down at the table with it, Peter looking over his shoulder. A sticky smear, and several inky finger-prints, indicated that Billy Bunter had been at that page already.

"Now, then," said Peter. "O terque quaterque beati-go it! O thrice and four times blessed-."

It was all plain sailing now: Wally knew just where to begin: Peter, all unconsciously, giving him all the information he needed.

He dipped a pen in the ink, and started.

Peter, in the kindness of his heart, had offered to help him begin: which would have been a boon and a blessing to Billy Bunter. But to his astonishment, he discovered that first-aid was not needed, for once, by his fat studymate. The pen in Wally's fat fingers ran over the paper, and Peter fairly blinked as he watched its progress. Bunter was writing out the translation of that passage as fast as he could read it!

Wally was there to play Billy Bunter's part: but it did not occur to him, at the moment, that that part included appearing to be an obtuse duffer! Where Billy would have found a series of stumbling-blocks, Wally found none at all.

Peter watched him in growing amazement.

"What on earth's come over you, Bunter?" he gasped, at last.

"Eh?"

"You're writing a decent fist. If you can write like that, why do you always scrawl as if a spider had crawled out of the inkpot over the paper?"

"Oh!"

"And how the thump can you work out Virgil at that rate? Why, I couldn't! Have you been pulling my leg all this while, getting me to help you time and again, not because you couldn't do it, but because you were too jolly lazy?"

"Oh! No! I-I-" stammered Wally.

"You've done a dozen lines already, and as good a trans as Linley or Wharton could turn out, and not a single blot or smear! Quelch will jump out of his skin when he sees it!"

"Oh!" gasped Wally. "Will he?"

"Well, what do you mean by it?" demanded Peter.

"If you can turn out stuff like that, why have you always pretended to be the biggest idiot at Greyfriars or anywhere else?"

"I-I-I-."

"You haven't opened the dick once. You jolly well know all the answers," hooted Peter. "You've been pulling my leg! You spoofing fat porpoise, take that!"

Bang!

"Yaroooh!" roared Wally, as he took it.

Peter, grasping a fat neck, banged a fat head on the table. Then he stalked out of the study, slamming the door after him.

"Ow! Oh! Oh, crikey!" gasped Wally, as he rubbed his head. It had had quite a painful contact with the table.

It was some minutes before Billy Bunter's double gave his attention again to that translation for Quelch. Then he took a fresh paper, and re-started. Writing it out in a decent "fist", minus blots, smears, and mistakes, was evidently not the true Bunter method. Wally certainly did not want to make Mr. Quelch jump out of his skin, as Peter had expressed it. Somewhat sadly, Wally proceeded to scrawl it, putting in a "howler" here and there: finally adding a smear, a smudge, and a few blots. After which, it undoubtedly looked much more like the genuine handiwork of William George Bunter of the Remove.

CHAPTER 14

ONE FOR HIS NOB!

"ENJOYING life, old fat man?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!"

Bob looked at the fat face quite curiously. It was the next day. In the sunny morning, the Greyfriars fellows were going to the form-room. At the door of the Remove room, six or seven juniors had already gathered. Among them was the fattest member of the form. That fattest member stood with his hands in his pockets, books under his plump arm, and with a beaming face.

Most fellows felt cheery that summer's morning. But there was no doubt that Bunter of the Remove looked the cheeriest of all. His fat face registered absolute and complete satisfaction.

Which was rather unusual. Had Bunter been gazing at a lavish spread in Lord Mauleverer's study, it would naturally have called up that beaming expression. Or had his celebrated postal order arrived. Bunter might have beamed.

But he certainly was not accustomed to beam when lessons with Quelch were just going to begin. That morning the Remove were booked for Latin with Quelch, followed by English Literature, and then by "maths" with Lascelles. Bunter loathed Latin, disliked English Literature, and had a deep and undying animosity for maths. So why he looked as if he had suddenly come into a fortune was rather a puzzle. But he did!

The fact was, that Wally was feeling rather as if he had come into a fortune: though only pro. tem. He was, for a few days at least, a Greyfriars man! Fellows who were accustomed to being Greyfriars men, would hardly have guessed how much that meant to Wally, to whom it was like a dream come true.

He had slept like a top in Billy's bed in the Remove dormitory. Not a fellow there had had the faintest suspicion that it was another Bunter. Had they remained awake, they might have missed the deep and resonant snore with which Billy Bunter had been wont to wake the echoes of the dormitory: and which, more than a mile away, was waking the echoes of 15 Marine Parade, Pegg. Perhaps some of them noticed, in the morning, that Bunter was a little more particular about washing than was his custom. Many had noticed that, in little details, Bunter did not seem quite his old self. But nobody dreamed of the change of identity that had taken place. It seemed to be a brighter, cleaner, and more active Bunter than of old: that was all. Wally was almost the first out of the House in the morning. He had wandered round the quad and the playing-fields, drinking it all in, as it were. He had enjoyed breakfast ever so much more than at 15 Marine Parade, good as the food was at Mrs. Smallbones' establishment. He turned up for class feeling quite on top of the world.

He grinned cheerily at Bob.

"Lovely morning." he said. "Topping weather for cricket, what?"

"Eh?" Bob stared at him. "Quite! Fat lot you care about cricket, though, you fat ass."

"Don't I just!" said Wally: forgetting for a moment that he was Billy. "I'm jolly well going to get some cricket while I'm here."

"While you're here?" repeated Bob, blankly.

"Oh! I-I-I mean-."

"Well, what do you mean, fathead? You've been here long enough to get all the cricket you wanted, and you've always slacked and cut when you could. Wharton's had to boot you out of your study on compulsory days. Taken a fancy to the game all of a sudden?" asked Bob, sarcastically.

"Oh! Yes! No! I mean-."

"Look out, Bunter," called out Skinner. "Here comes Smithy."

Some of the juniors at the form-room door laughed.

Herbert Vernon-Smith appeared at the end of the corridor with Redwing. Wally glanced at Skinner, and then at the approaching Bounder. Unaware as yet of still one more legacy left him by Cousin Billy, he did not see any reason to "look out" because Smithy was in the offing.

But he saw, a few moments later.

Thud!

Smithy, as he came up, kicked. It was quite unexpected, by Wally. He gave a howl, and tottered, as the Bounder's foot thudded on Billy Bunter's trousers.

"Oh! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky ass!" exclaimed Wally, glaring at the grinning Bounder over his spectacles. "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't you know?" asked Smithy. "Haven't I told you that I'm going on booting you for snooping in my study?"

"Oh!" gasped Wally. He realised that Cousin Billy was due for that kick, and the Bounder had no doubt that Billy Bunter was the recipient thereof. But Wally was made of sterner stuff than Cousin Billy: and he had no idea at all of being booted for Billy's sins.

"Well, keep your hoofs to yourself, Vernon-Smith, or you'll get your head jammed on the wall!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "I'd like to see you jam my head on the wall, you fat foozler. Go it!"

"Oh, do, Bunter," chirruped Skinner. "Let's see you jam Smithy's head on the wall! Give him one for his nob!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd like to see me do it, would you?" demanded Wally.

"Yes, rather," grinned Smithy. "Do! You fat frump, I - Oh! Ah! Oh! Oh, gad! Oooooooh."

Crack!

Smithy had stated that he would like to see Bunter jam his head on the wall. But as two fat hands suddenly grasped him, whirled him round to the wall, and jammed his head on it with a loud crack, he did not seem to like it at all. The crack of head on wall rang like a pistol-shot: and louder rang the yell of the surprised Bounder. Wally released him, and stepped back. Smithy stood staggering against the wall, rubbing his head, with amazement and fury in his face. Every other fellow stared blankly at Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Look out, Bunter! Cut, you fat ass, before Smithy massacres you."

Wally laughed. He did not "cut": he stood looking at the enraged Bounder, waiting cheerfully for the next move.

For a moment or two, Smithy seemed too astonished to act. He rubbed his head, staring at Bunter. It was said of old that the worm will turn: but any person upon whom a worm turned would undoubtedly be greatly surprised.

Herbert Vernon-Smith seemed unable to realise that he had crumpled up in the grasp of Bunter, who actually had jammed his head on the

wall. But it was only for a few moments. Then, with clenched fists, and a deadly gleam in his eyes, the Bounder came at Bunter.

Tom Redwing caught his arm.

"Hold on, Smithy-!" he exclaimed.

"Let go my arm, you fool!" hissed Smithy. "I'm going to smash him! I'm going to hammer him to a jelly-."

"Quelch will be here in a minute-."

"Blow Quelch!"

Vernon-Smith tore his arm loose from Redwing's hold, and rushed at Bunter. Why Bunter did not scuttle down the passage like a scared rabbit, nobody knew. But so far from scuttling down the passage, he did not recede a step. As Smithy came at him, two fat hands flashed up. Smithy's savage punch was brushed aside like a fly, and a punch on Smithy's chest sent him tottering back to the wall again. He bumped on the wall, and leaned there, spluttering.

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!" stuttered Bob Cherry. "We must be dreaming this!"

"The dreamfulness must be terrific!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in sheer wonder.

"What on earth's come over Bunter?"

"Cave!" called out Hazeldene. "Here's Quelch!"

An angular figure appeared in the corridor. Vernon-Smith, his face ablaze, was about to rush at Bunter again. But even the Bounder checked his fury, as his form-master appeared on the scene.

Mr. Quelch gave the juniors a severe glance. He was aware that something had been going on, which his arrival had checked. However, he passed them, and unlocked the door of the form-room to admit his form.

Smithy whispered to Bunter as the form went in, Even in his form-master's presence, he seemed to find it far from easy to keep his hands off the fat junior. But he contented himself with a savage whisper.

"You fat rotter, you challenged me to a scrap yesterday-."

"Oh! Did I?" stammered Wally. It was news to him. "You know you did, you fat toad! Well, it's coming off, whether you like it or not. Behind the gym after class," breathed the Bounder, "and if I don't hammer you to a jelly-!"

Vernon-Smith left it at that. Bunter, apparently not greatly alarmed by the Bounder's threat, hung back as the juniors went to their places: not being sure of Cousin Billy's place. When he found it, however, he realised that he might have guessed that it was at the bottom of the form.

Mr. Quelch was seen to glance at Bunter, with a quite unusual kindly glance. Probably he noted that the fat junior's face was brighter and cleaner than usual. No doubt, too, he remembered the remarks on the *Aeneid* in his study the day before, and the new hopes he entertained of the laziest member of his form.

"Bunter!" His voice was quite mild. "Have you done your translation?"

Wally was thankful that he had learned about that translation in time! Otherwise, there certainly would have been a spot of trouble on his first morning in class with Quelch.

"Yes sir!" he answered, cheerfully.

"Place it on my desk, Bunter."

Mr. Quelch looked at the translation, Wally eyeing him rather anxiously. But for Toddy's hint, which had led to the second edition, that "trans" might well have caused Quelch to jump, if not

quite out of his skin. As it was, Wally hoped that he had made it bad enough to pass, without being bad enough to evoke the vials of wrath. Apparently he had succeeded, for Quelch's look indicated approval.

"This is very much better than your usual work, Bunter," he said.

"You have made several careless mistakes, however."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Wally. He could not explain to Quelch that those mistakes had been made very carefully indeed!

"But you are certainly improving, Bunter. Please try on another occasion not to drop so many blots, or to smear your paper."

"Oh, certainly, sir."

Possibly because he was pleased with Bunter, Quelch put him on "con" quite early in the lesson. The Remove fellows expected to listen to Billy Bunter's accustomed "howlers".

But to their surprise, and doubtless to Quelch's, there were no howlers. The fat junior ran on without a fault. for the first time in history putting up a "con" as good as Mark Linley's or Harry Wharton's. Evidently Bunter had not, as usual, slacked in prep.

"Very good indeed, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, graciously.

It was quite a happy morning for the fattest member of the form. Smithy glanced at him, several times, with a glinting eye. But the fat junior gave him no heed. Most of the Remove took it for granted that Bunter would be apprehensively concerned about what was coming to him later from the Bounder. No doubt Billy Bunter would have been very uneasy, in Wally's place. But Wally, in Billy's place, was quite easy in his mind: and his plump face was merry and bright when the Remove came out in break.

CHAPTER 15

THE BOUNDER MEANS BUSINESS

"SMITHY, old man-!"

"Oh, chuck it!" interrupted Vernon-Smith, with the politeness habitual to him when he was in a bad temper.

Smithy had been "shirty" all day, since the surprising Bunter had jammed his head on the wall. The turning of that fat worm was not only surprising: it was exasperating.

After class, the Bounder was thinking, vengefully, of the rendezvous behind the gym, with Bunter. He had not the slightest idea of letting the fat Owl off.

Bunter's challenge to Smithy, the previous day had astonished all the Remove. But no one was likely to take it very seriously. Who was to guess that the artful fat Owl, well knowing his Cousin Wally to be a first-class boxer, quite a match for Smithy if not a little over, intended to turn up for that "scrap" by proxy, as it were? Often as he had been kicked, Billy Bunter still disliked the process: and he was quite tired of the Bounder's boot. With a change of identity in view, the wily Owl had had no hesitation in issuing that challenge: which Wally was to make good! Of that no one had the faintest suspicion. The Bunter who was now rolling about Greyfriars School was, so far as anyone knew, the same old Bunter that had always rolled.

Certainly, in some respects, he seemed a changed Bunter. Jamming Smithy's head on the wall, for instance, was an unheard-of exploit on the part of the fat Owl of the Remove. It was an exploit which Smithy grimly resolved Bunter should never dream of repeating. And he had no use for Tom Redwing's remonstrances on the subject.

"You silly ass," went on Smithy, with a black look at his chum. "Do you think I'm going to let that fat footling foozler bang my head on the wall? Why. I'll hammer him to a jelly."

"That fat chump is no match for you, Smithy. After all, you kicked him before he jammed your head-."

"I'm going on kicking him, too! He won't try his hand at banging my head again, after what I'm going to give him this afternoon!"

"Much better wash it out." said Redwing. "A scrap with a fat owl like Bunter is simply silly. You know jolly well that he couldn't stand up to you for one round."

"He should have thought of that before he banged my head."

"Blessed if I know how he came to do it, said Redwing.

"It's not like Bunter-."

"He's starting new manners and customs:" sneered Smithy. "He doesn't seem to be the howling funk he always was. But he's not going to bang my head. If you think I'm going to let any fellow lay hands on me, Tom Redwing, without hammering him for it, you've got another guess coming."

"You can afford to let him off, Smithy - everybody knows that you could lick him with one hand-," urged Redwing.

"One finger, you mean," jeered Smithy, "I'm not letting him off, all the same. Come on - there's the fat frump, over by the elms."

Vernon-Smith tramped across to Bunter, Tom Redwing following him with a worried face. Smithy, in his chum's opinion, was simply making a fool of himself: for a "scrap" with Billy Bunter was an absurdity. But the Bounder cared nothing for that. Smithy had a somewhat unforgiving nature: and he could not forget how he had crumpled up so unexpectedly in that fat grasp. He was going to

hammer the fat junior who had laid hands on him and banged his head: and that was that! Not for a moment did he dream that he might, perhaps, receive instead of handing out that hammering.

"Here, Bunter!" snapped the Bounder, and the fat junior glanced round at him, over his glasses.

"Adsum!" said Wally, cheerily.

"Get a move on! Perhaps you've forgotten that you're booked to turn up behind the gym after class," said Vernon-Smith, sarcastically.

Wally made a grimace. He was aware of that additional legacy from his Cousin Billy. He was much more inclined to kick Cousin Billy than to scrap with the Bounder of Greyfriars. Wally, like most plump persons, had a pacific disposition: and he certainly did not want a fight on his hands, on his second day in the school.

"Look here, why not forget all about it?" he suggested. "I don't want to scrap if you don't, Smithy."

"I know you don't!" agreed the Bounder, "but you're booked, all the same. Are you ready, or do you want me to kick you round the gym?"

"Think you could?" asked Wally, with a grin.

"I'm going to, if you don't get a move on, you fat frump."

"Smithy, old chap-!" urged Redwing.

"Oh, pack it up, Reddy."

"Look here, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. A number of Remove fellows had gathered round, the Famous Five among them: and the captain of the Remove intervened. "You can't go on with this-."

"Can't I?" sneered Smithy. "You'll see whether I can or not. You saw what that fat toad did outside the form-room this morning-."

"Well, yes, but-!"

"Didn't he challenge me to a scrap? Well, if he doesn't want it, he should think twice before he speaks once."

"Can't expect Bunter to think!" said Bob Cherry.

"Nothing to do it with. Look here, Smithy, chuck it, and don't be an ass."

"I'll chuck it when I've hammered that fat ass - not before. If you're not waiting to be booted, Bunter, you'd better come on. Now, then!"

"My esteemed and idiotic Smithy-!" began the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"You shut up. Inky! Coming or not, Bunter!" Bunter seemed to hesitate.

There were two or three dozen juniors on the spot now, and they all looked at him curiously. That the Bunter they knew would venture to stand up to the hard-hitting Bounder, nobody could believe for a moment.

True, Bunter had rather surprised his form-fellows of late. He had disposed quite effectually of the war-like Tubb. He had displayed no terror even of the mighty Coker. And it was a fact that he had challenged Smithy to that scrap. Even now, with the Bounder's threatening face quite near his fat features, and Smithy's eyes glinting at him, he showed no sign of alarm. But-

"Oh, all right, Smithy!" The fat voice was quite casual. "I'd rather wash it out, if you would-."

"I know that!" sneered Smithy.

"But if you're set on it, all right."

"Come on, then, and cut the cackle!" snapped Smithy. The fat junior glanced round at Harry Wharton and Co.

"I say, you fellows, one of you going to be my second?" he asked.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "You're not really going to scrap with Smithy, Bunter-!"

"I jolly well am!"

"Well, I'll be your second, and carry away what's left of you - if anything," said Bob. "One of you fellows cut off and borrow Gosling's wheelbarrow. We shall want it for Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be a funny ass, you know," said Wally. "I fancy I can give Smithy all he wants."

"Fanciful chap, Bunter," remarked Johnny Bull.

"Keep an eye on him!" grinned Skinner. "Bunter's going to bolt, long before we get round the gym."

"I'll say that's your best guess, Bunter, old-timer!" chuckled Fisher T. Fish.

"Hook it, Bunter, while you've a chance!" advised Squiff.

Wally chuckled. He could guess, from all this, the estimation in which Cousin Billy was held, in his form. And certainly, to keep up the part he was playing, a sudden bolt from the danger-zone was indicated. But Wally had no idea of playing out his part to that extent. He walked away quite cheerfully in the midst of the crowd of juniors, to that quiet and secluded spot behind the gym, where the eyes of masters and prefects were not likely to fall upon the proceedings. And Harry Wharton and Co., as they went with him, could only wonder what on earth had come over Bunter!

CHAPTER 16

CAUGHT!

"BUNTER!"

"Oh!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He nearly swallowed a cigarette.

Billy Bunter hadn't expected to see Prout. He had forgotten the portly existence of the master of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars.

Prout happened like a bolt from the blue.

A moment earlier, Bunter had been enjoying life.

In term time, lessons were a pest that no fellow at school could hope to escape. But Bunter was escaping them. So long as he could, so to speak, go on playing a substitute in the field, he could go on escaping them. Minus Wally, he would have been grinding Latin with Quelch, or maths with Lascelles, or French with Mossoo, or rolling reluctantly down to games-practice, or dodging Coker of the Fifth. Plus Wally, he was able to sun himself on the beach, stroll on the promenade: sprawl on the sands like a fat lizard: and generally indulge in laziness to his fat heart's content. It was a change in Bunter's opinion, very much for the better.

Why Wally preferred Greyfriars to the joys of the seaside, was a mystery to Billy Bunter: but Wally did, and the fat Owl was only too willing to let him have all the Latin, maths, French, and games-practice that he wanted. He would have been glad to carry on this peculiar game of changed identity right up to the end of the term, had it been possible.

Moreover, Billy Bunter was not, for once, in his accustomed "stony" state. He had cash to jingle in his pockets.

He had pointed out that Wally was getting a "holiday with pay": so if he, Billy, was to have the holiday instead of Wally, it was only fair that he should have the pay also!

Wally had not quite seemed to see that. But when they parted, a couple of Wally's pound notes had been left with Billy. So, for the moment, the fat Owl was unusually affluent.

It was like Billy Bunter to "spread" himself, when he was in funds, and the eye of authority was not upon him. Hence the cigarette sticking out of the largest mouth in Pegg when Prout happened.

Billy Bunter fancied, or fancied that he fancied, a smoke! Why not, when he was his own master, clear of beaks, clear of prefects, free to do what he jolly well liked? So the Owl of the Remove had invested a spot of Wally's cash in a packet of cigarettes.

Now he was sitting on the soft sand, his plump back against a rock, his little fat legs stretched out in lazy comfort: blinking through his big spectacles at the sea, the boats, the trippers, the bathers, smoking a cigarette and determined to believe that he liked it.

Prout was no more in his thoughts than the man in the moon.

But it was Prout that happened. Really there was nothing surprising in a Greyfriars master taking a walk by the sea after class, if Bunter had thought of it. Prout, portly and pompous, rolled on his way rather like a stately Spanish galleon, with a benevolent eye for common mortals crowding the beach. But the benevolence faded out of his portly face at the sight of a Greyfriars junior sitting against the rock smoking a cigarette.

Prout stared. Then he glared. Then he changed course, and bore down on Billy Bunter, with a frown on his portly brow. And as an extensive shadow fell between him and the sunshine, and a well-known

voice boomed "Bunter!", the startled fat Owl gave a jump like a startled rabbit, blinked up at Prout, and gasped. He forgot the cigarette for a moment. But the next moment he was reminded of it, as it slipped into his mouth. The hot end of that cigarette was very hot. "Wow!" roared Bunter. It was doubtful whether Bunter had really been enjoying that cigarette before. Assuredly he was not enjoying it now. "Ow! Ooooh! Oh! Wow!" He spluttered that cigarette out of his mouth, and spluttered and spluttered. "Oooooogh! I'm burnt! Woooh!" "Bunter!" boomed Prout, heartlessly indifferent to the fat Owl's anguish. "Bunter! What does this mean?" "Oooooooooogh!" Bunter rubbed his mouth frantically. From the bottom of his fat heart he wished that he had not indulged that fancy for a smoke! "I find you here. You are well aware, Bunter, that Pegg is outside school bounds, except on half-holidays. Yet I find you here!" "Urrrrrrghh!" "And smoking-smoking a cigarette-." "Wurrrrghh!" "You have changed your clothes - you are not even wearing a school cap! What does this mean, Bunter?" "I-I-I-ooogh!" Billy Bunter, recovering a little from the hot end of the cigarette, blinked up at the portly Fifth-form master in dismay. He was fairly caught! He had a terrifying vision of Prout marching him back to the school, to hand him over to Quelch - with a Bunter already there! Two Bunters on one spot meant the whole scheme coming to pieces. "I shall take you to your form-master! He will deal with you!" said Prout, sternly. "Get on your feet at once, Bunter! Do you hear me? You will explain to Mr. Quelch the meaning of this Bunter! Smoking - Pah!" "Oh, lor'!" I-I ain't Bunter, sir!" gasped the fat Owl, desperately. It was his last resource. Billy Bunter did not want to make it known that a relative so closely resembling himself had come to stay at Pegg. That was a circumstance which, in the other circumstances, it was much wiser to keep dark, very dark indeed. But anything was better than being marched back to the school, to astonish Greyfriars with the unexpected sight of two Bunters at once! "What?" boomed Prout. "I-I ain't, really, sir!" stuttered the dismayed fat Owl. "I'm my cousin, sir-." "Wha-a-at?" "I-I am really, sir! We - we're much alike, sir," burred Bunter. "We - we've often been taken for one another, sir! I-I-I'm not me at all-." "Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Prout, gazing at the fat Owl. "Bunter, I doubt whether you are in your right senses-." "But I-I ain't Bunter, sir, I'm my cousin Wally-!" gasped the fat Owl. "I-I assure you, sir, that I ain't me at all, but-but another chap, sir! I-I've never seen you before, sir! I-I don't even know you're Mr. Prout, Sir! I-I-I-. Wow! Ow!" Prout stooped, grasped a collar, and jerked the fat Owl to his feet. "Now come with me!" he rapped. "Oh, lor'!" Bunter came. He had no choice about that. In utter dismay, he rolled along by the side of the Fifth-form master. He wondered dizzily whether Prout, if he had come upon the real Wally in Pegg, would

have collared him like this! No doubt Wally would have been able to convince Prout of his mistake. But Billy's fat wits were not equal to such an emergency. Somehow, he had failed to convince Prout that he was not himself but somebody else!

As they came up from the beach to the promenade, Bunter lagged behind, hoping for a chance to dodge away. An eye glittered round at him.

"Bunter!"

"Oh! I-I wasn't going to cut, sir-."

"Come!"

Bunter rolled on dismally. And as Greyfriars drew nearer and nearer, Billy Bunter's fat heart sank lower and lower, till it seemed almost to be sinking into Wally's tan shoes.

CHAPTER 17

SMITHY MEETS HIS MATCH

"TIME!" Wally smiled.

Two or three dozen fellows had gathered round, forming a ring for the combatants, in that secluded spot behind the gym. Every minute or two, one or two more fellows came round the building and joined the circle, as the news spread that Bunter of the Remove was in a scrap.

If anyone at Greyfriars knew anything about Bunter of the Remove, it was that he was a more hopeless dud in a scrap than in anything else. Even his cricket was not quite so hopeless as his boxing. And where Bunter of the Remove found the nerve to stand up to Smithy was a complete mystery. Indeed, the general opinion was that Bunter would either collapse or bolt at the first punch - even if he waited for as much as that! Judging by the looks of the thickening crowd, they regarded this rather as an occasion for hilarity. Nobody, certainly, expected Bunter to make the slightest impression on the tough Bounder: while all that Smithy had to do, was to punch Bunter as hard and as often as he liked. Skinner and Snoop and Bolsover major were ready to stop Bunter if he bolted - other fellows were prepared to open a way for him: while Harry Wharton and Co. intended to intervene and stop the scrap at the first sign from Bunter that he had had enough, whether the Bounder liked it or not.

But Bunter puzzled them.

His fat knees were not knocking together, as might have been expected. He was not blinking round for a way of escape, as might also have been expected. He was quite cool and casual, which was not to have been expected at all. It was a perplexing Bunter - almost a stranger to the experience of fellows who had fancied that they knew him inside out, as it were!

He whipped off his jacket with an activity very uncommon in Bunter. He handed his spectacles to Peter Todd to hold, but somehow his vision did not seem to deteriorate after parting with them. He slipped on the gloves with unanticipated alacrity. And when Lord Mauleverer, who was appointed time-keeper, called time, he faced up to the Bounder without turning a hair.

The faces of the Famous Five, as they looked on, registered disapproval. Tom Redwing, who was Smithy's second, could hardly look otherwise. It was true that Billy Bunter was a most exasperating person: that he snooped tuck in the studies, and had all sorts of manners and customs which made fellows want to kick him. True, too, that he had jammed Smithy's head on the wall, which was not a pleasant process. Nevertheless, scrapping with the fat, obtuse Owl of the Remove was carrying matters too far, as he obviously had no more chance than a fat punch-ball. And Smithy's look showed that he intended to hit hard and often. The arrogant Bounder simply could not get over the fact that Bunter had ventured to grab him and bang his head. If Bunter couldn't scrap, that was his own look-out. A fellow who couldn't scrap should take care not to lay hands on Herbert Vernon-Smith!

"Time!"

The Bounder came on at the word, expecting to push Bunter all round the ring under a series of hefty punches. Which, no doubt, would have been the case, had this particular Bunter been named William George instead of Walter Gilbert. Having not the faintest suspicion

that it was not the genuine Billy who stood before him, Smithy was quite surprised by what followed.

Bunter did not back away. He did not dodge round the ring. He did not essay to make a sudden bolt.

He stood up to the Bounder's attack, with a cool steadiness that made all the onlookers stare blankly. And he displayed an activity, and a skill in boxing, that made them almost wonder whether they were dreaming this.

Smithy was perhaps a little careless, expecting little more resistance from Bunter than from a punch-ball. But he had to wake up, as it were, as his lashing fists were brushed away, and a gloved fist came with a sudden knock on his rather prominent nose.

Smithy staggered.

Every fellow who was looking on felt like staggering, too! Smithy staggered back and back, and might have fallen, had he not brought up against Tom Redwing. Bunter did not follow him up. He stood and waited.

"Suffering cats and crocodiles!" breathed Bob Cherry.

"Is-is-is that Bunter, knocking Smithy across the ring?"

"The knockfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in wonder. "The esteemed and absurd Bunter is a dark horse."

"I suppose we're not dreaming this!" said Johnny Bull. "Blessed if I don't half think so!" said Harry Wharton, blankly. "He can box! Anybody ever know that Bunter could box, before?"

"And he's not in a funk!" said Frank Nugent, wondering. "What the jolly old dickens has come over Bunter?"

Vernon-Smith was as astonished as the Famous Five.

He was also a little damaged. Crimson was spurting from his nose, and he blinked and blinked. But in a moment or two he recovered himself, and the look on his hard face was almost tigerish as he rushed at Bunter again. The crowd of juniors watched breathlessly, with no doubt that Bunter would go crashing under that fierce attack.

But the fat junior did not crash. He stood up to it, his fat hands in the gloves moving like lightning. Twice, thrice, the Bounder's fists came home on the fat face, but they did not make Bunter recede an inch. He returned the punches with interest, hitting hard and hitting often as Smithy had intended to do.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Peter Todd. For the first time in history, Toddy felt something like proud of his fat studymate. "Go it, Bunter! Stand up to him, old fat tulip! Good old porpoise!"

"Oh, fan me!" murmured Bob Cherry. "What is it the jolly old poet says- 'Do I sleep, do I dream, do I wonder and doubt? Are things what they seem, or is visions about'?"

"We shall wake up presently," said Squiff.

"That fat chump!" breathed Skinner. "Standing up to Smithy - and getting the upper hand, too! "

It was hammer and tongs, the Bounder fiercely attacking all the time, but getting back twice as much as he handed out.

"Time!" rapped Lord Mauleverer.

The combatants dropped their hands at the word.

Bunter rolled back to his corner, where Bob Cherry greeted him with an almost unbelieving stare. He seemed fresh as paint after the first round.

Smithy leaned on Tom Redwing's arm, panting. His amazement was equal to his fury. He could scarcely believe that it was Billy Bunter's fat fists that had hammered him so hard.

"That fat frump!" he muttered, thickly. "What's come over him, Reddy? By gad, I'll punch him till he bursts-."

"Better call it off, Smithy," said Redwing, uneasily. "Bunter's willing, if you are - he's said so-."

"Oh shut up! I'll hammer him to a jelly."

"Time!"

The Bounder fairly leaped at the word. He was eager to get on with the hammering process. Had it been William George Bunter who was facing those lashing fists, the Owl of the Remove would certainly have been booked for the time of his life. But the fat Owl's double took it all in his stride.

Nobody had ever supposed that Billy Bunter could either box, or stand up to a hard punch. It had to be admitted now that Bunter could do both. There were some severe exchanges in that round, but hard knocks did not seem to affect the fat junior. And amazing as it was, most of the spectators could see that Bunter was getting the upper hand.

Again they parted, and the brief rest came with more relief to the Bounder than to his plump opponent.

"It's just weird," said Harry Wharton. "Why, we were going to chip in and stop Smithy hammering him too much - but who's getting the hammering?"

"Who'd have thought that Bunter had it in him?" said Johnny Bull.

"Blessed if I make it out."

"Smithy's getting all he wanted, and a little over," remarked Nugent, with a grin. "Bunter's got plenty of weight to put behind a punch."

"Lots!" chuckled Bob Cherry. He fanned a fat face with a handkerchief. "Feeling fit, old fat man?"

The fat junior grinned.

"Fit as a fiddle," he answered, "but - look here. I'd rather chuck it, if Smithy would! Ask him to call it a day."

"Oh, all right!" Bob Cherry bawled across the ring.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy! My man's willing to call it a day, if you are? What about it?"

"Do, Smithy!" said Redwing, eagerly. The Bounder gave his chum a scowl. "Do you think I'm licked?" he breathed.

"No, but-!"

"Well, shut up! That fat funk isn't crawling out of it now!" said the Bounder, savagely. "I'll finish him next round."

"How about it, Smithy?" bawled Bob.

"Rats!" snapped Smithy.

"The dear man seems to be losing his ickle temper!" grinned Bob.

"You'll have to push on, old porpoise."

"Time!"

The third round began. Smithy came on hard and fast, and for the first time, his fat adversary gave a little ground. The Bounder followed him up, pressing hard. That round was going to be the finish, if Smithy could make it so. As it turned out, it was the finish but in a manner quite unexpected by the Bounder. Hammer and tongs they went, till suddenly a fat fist came crashing, and Vernon-Smith fairly spun off his feet and crashed on the earth.

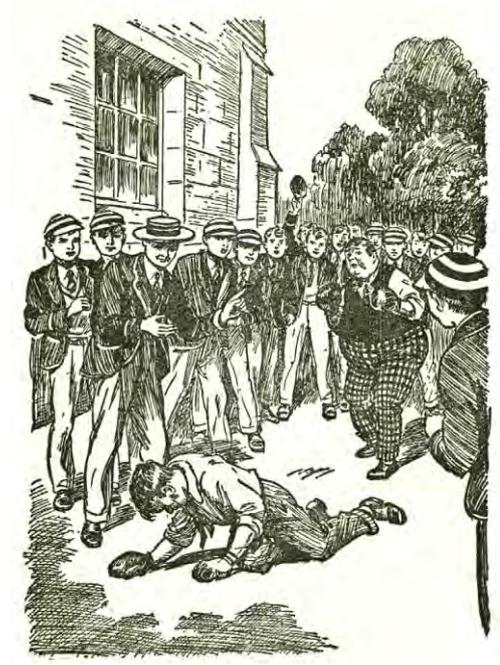
"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Man down!" grinned Skinner.

"Get to it, Mauly!"

Lord Mauleverer was counting. Vernon-Smith made an effort to rise, but he sank back again, dizzily. His lordship's quiet voice went on.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven-."



THE FIGHT BEHIND THE GYM WAS OVER. THE BOUNDER
WAS COUNTED OUT

Again the Bounder struggled up, but again he fell. With time to recover, no doubt the hardy Bounder could have gone on. But for the moment he was knocked out, and he could not get on his feet.

"Eight-nine-!"

One more frantic effort the Bounder made, and it failed.

"OUT!"

The fight behind the gym was over. The Bounder was counted out.

CHAPTER 18

BOTH BUNTERS!

"OH!"

Wally jumped.

In fact, he bounded. His eyes popped.

Never had a fellow been so startled and dismayed. Billy Bunter's double was in Billy Bunter's study, No.7 in the Remove. It was after tea. Harry Wharton and Co. had gone down to the nets, and Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, and a good many other Remove fellows, with them. Wally would have gone also: but after that rather strenuous scrap behind the gym, the fat duplicate of the Owl of the Remove was feeling like taking a rest. So there he was, in the window-seat of No. 7 Study, placidly looking down from the window into the sunny quad.

But his placidity vanished all of a sudden, as two figures came in at the distant gates.

Up to that moment, Wally had been as merry and bright as any fellow at Greyfriars: in fact, merrier and brighter than many. He had had some hard knocks in that scrap with Smithy, but they did not seem to worry him unduly. He was enjoying life as a Greyfriars man. The view from the study window, to which most fellows were too accustomed to take much heed of it, delighted a fellow who, when he was not on holiday, generally had an outlook from a small office window into a narrow street shadowed by high buildings. Wally was not a discontented fellow, and he was too plump and placid to think of grousing: but he undoubtedly did enjoy the change to Greyfriars School.

Everything upon which his eyes fell pleased him. Billy Bunter might have given the scene one indifferent blink. Wally looked at it with continued satisfaction.

The old quad, grey old walls, clustering ancient ivy, shady elms: Greyfriars fellows walking and talking: old Gosling sunning himself outside his lodge, Wingate and Gwynne chatting on a bench on the Sixth-form green: a group of Fifth-form men in flannels talking cricket: Cecil Reginald Temple of the Fourth strolling elegantly in the best-cut clothes in the Lower School: Tubb of the Third snatching a cap from the head of Nugent minor of the Second and making off with it. with Dicky Nugent in hot pursuit: even the burly figure of Coker of the Fifth stalking across the quad with the easy grace of a hippopotamus: all that he gazed at from the window of No. 7 pleased eyes that were used to far other scenes. But-

It all seemed to fall to pieces, as Wally's startled eyes fell on those two figures coming in at the gates.

One was the portly figure of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth Form. That was neither startling nor alarming. But the other-! Wally's eyes popped at the other!

For the other was, excepting for the clothes, an exact duplicate of himself: no other, in fact, than the fat and fatuous youth whose place he had temporarily taken in the school. It was Billy Bunter! There he was, rolling in with Prout.

"Oh!" gasped Wally.

That ass - that fathead - that fat chump was coming in, with Prout. Both Bunters would be on the scene at once. The game was up!

Wally felt quite dizzy for a moment or two.

Exactly what view the school authorities would take of that change of identity, if it came to light, he did not know. But he did not

expect it to be grateful or comforting. From a schoolboy point of view it was a "lark". From a school-master's, it might have quite a different aspect. The bare idea of being walked into Dr. Locke's study, to explain to an astonished head-master how and why he was in the school at all, almost made Wally's head swim. His eyes bulged at those two distant figures. The ghost of Banquo was not so unnerving to Macbeth, as the sight of the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove to the relative who had replaced him at Greyfriars.

As he watched, he saw Billy Bunter lag in the gateway, and Prout glare round at him. Then they came in together. He realised that even Billy, ass as he was, was not quite ass enough to show up at Greyfriars while his double was there, if he could help it. He was coming in because he could not help it. Prout was bringing him in. But the fact that Bunter couldn't help it was no help to Wally. Willing or unwilling, there Billy Bunter was!

That peculiar game of changed identities could go on, only as long as there was only one Bunter in the school: the other at a safe distance. Both Bunters on the same spot spelled discovery and a terrific row.

What was he going to do?

Wally was quick on the uptake. After the first few moments of utter dismay, he braced himself to face the unexpected and alarming situation.

Bunter had turned up - and that meant that Bunter's double had to vanish like a ghost at cock-crow. Luckily, he was alone in the study: and luckily, too, most of the Remove fellows were out of the House. He had to slip away quietly - if he could - and leave the real Billy to resume his old place.

But even as he stepped back from the window, and turned towards the door, there were footsteps and voices in the Remove passage.

Wally caught his breath. If somebody looked into the study, and saw him - with Billy in full view in the quad-!

Swiftly, he cut across to the door.

"For goodness sake, stop, Smithy!" came a voice he knew, in the passage. Then the Bounder's voice, thick with passionate anger, came savagely:

"Let go my arm, you fool."

"I tell you leave Bunter alone-."

"I'll leave him alone when I've hammered him black and blue."

"You can't carry it on like this. Smithy! It was a fair fight, and Bunter pulled it off - goodness knows how he did it, but he did-."

"I wasn't licked! You fool, do you think that fat flabby oyster could lick me? I could have gone on-. You know I could have gone on! By gad, I'll show that fat foozler whether he can beat me!"

"I tell you, stop-."

"And I tell you I'm going for that fat rat! I know he's in his study - and I'm going to see him there, and-."

Every word came to Wally's plump ears. His heart beat fast. Smithy was coming to the study, for him - and if Smithy found him there, with Prout marching Billy into the House in those very moments-!

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Wally.

He had almost forgotten the Bounder, till he was now reminded of him. He had not wanted that scrap with Smithy: and he had been willing to call it a "day" with neither victor nor vanquished: and anyhow it was over and done with, and it was hardly sporting of any fellow to nurse a bitter grudge over the result of a fair fight. But the Bounder was always a bad loser. It would have been hard for him to swallow his defeat, had the victor been Bob Cherry or Harry

Wharton. But to be licked in a scrap by a fat footling ass like Bunter was the limit. It filled the cup of humiliation to overflowing. Nothing would have induced Smithy to leave the matter where it was. He was going to show everybody concerned, and indeed everybody unconcerned, that he could thrash that fat, flabby, footling Owl.

Wally hoped that Redwing, who evidently disapproved of his chum carrying on a feud like this, would be able to restrain him. But that hope was brief.

"Smithy, for goodness sake chuck it, and let's get down to the cricket! You want to keep in form for the Highcliffe match-."

"Hang cricket!"

Wally heard a tramp of feet coming to the study door.

His hand groped over the lock. In a moment more, he had turned the key.

Another moment, and there was a wrench at the door-handle.

"Be a sport, Smithy! You-."

"What's the matter with this door?" Smithy wrenched and shoved.

"Why, that fat funk's locked it! Bunter! Bunter, you fat rotter! I know you're there - open this door!"

There was no reply from the study.

The enraged Bounder thumped on the door. Then he yelled through the keyhole.

"You fat funk! Let me in!"

Wally made no answer. Like that sagacious animal, Brer Fox, he lay low and said "nuffin".

Thump! thump! thump!

"Bunter, you fat rotter! Bunter, you bulging bloater! Will you unlock this door, you fat worm?"

No reply. Thump! thump! thump!

Wally, within, breathed hard. He had averted immediate discovery: the locked door saved him, for the moment. But obviously he could not escape unseen, with Smithy outside the door. He was cornered: and it was borne in upon his mind that the game was up, and that the affair would end with both Bunters standing before the head-master of Greyfriars for judgment.

CHAPTER 19

TWO OF THEM

"Ow! Wow! ow! wow!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith stared round, blankly. Tom Redwing had walked away, leaving him thumping on the door of No. 7 Study. He was still thumping angrily, when that sound of woe caused him to stare round. He stared blankly. He had been assured that Bunter was locked in that study. Now his eyes popped at Bunter, coming up the passage.

"You!" gasped Smithy, blankly.

Billy Bunter blinked at him dolorously. Prout had marched him in to Quelch: and Quelch had taken quite a serious view of that cigarette on the front at Pegg. Three swipes from Quelch's cane had rewarded Bunter: added to which he was sent up to his study to write out the verb "sum" from beginning to end!

"You!" repeated Smithy. "What are you doing in that clobber?" He stared at the bright checks, the brilliant tie, the tan shoes.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "I-I-I-."

"I thought you were in your study! Somebody's locked the door! But now you're here-!" The Bounder rushed.

"Here, I say - wharrer you at - oh, crikey! I say - yaroooh!" roared Bunter. He turned to flee, and a lunging boot up-ended him as he turned, and he sprawled on the floor. "I-I say, keep off - yaroooh!" The Bounder stared down at him, in blank astonishment. He had been resolved to hammer the Bunter who had licked him, right and left, But he forgot that foul intention now, as Bunter sprawled and roared.

He burst into a laugh.

"You fat, fozzling, flabby freak, I came up here to wallop you-."

"Yaroooh! Keep off, you beast!" yelled Bunter.

The Bounder laughed again, and walked away down the passage. Bunter - this Bunter, at any rate! - was hardly worthy of his towering wrath. He went down the stairs laughing, leaving Bunter to roar.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter, as he scrambled up.

He rolled on to the door of No. 7. and whispered through the keyhole.

"I say, Wally? Are you there, Wally?"

"Yes, you fat chump!" came back an answering whisper.

The key turned, and the door opened. Bunter rolled into the study, and Wally swiftly shut the door again, and locked it.

The two Bunters gazed at one another. Wally's face was red and wrathful. Billy was wriggling.

"Oh you priceless chump!" breathed Wally. "You've landed me here, and now you barge in-."

"How could I help it?" yapped Bunter. "Old Prout caught me smoking, on the beach, and marched me in, and Quelch whopped me - and then that rotter Smithy pitched into me when I came up, and-and - I say, wharrer we going to do, Wally?"

"Ask me another!" snapped Wally.

"They haven't seen us together yet," said Bunter, hopefully. "If they did, it would be all up, of course. I should get a Head's whopping, I expect-."

"And what about me?" growled Wally.

"Eh? I wasn't thinking about you-."

"You wouldn't be!"

"Well, they couldn't whop you, as you're not a Greyfriars man," said Bunter. "Keep to the point, Wally, and don't be selfish, thinking

about yourself, when I may get landed in an awful row. There's such a thing as consideration for others, you know. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's selfishness."

Wally gazed at him.

"I've got to keep out of a row, somehow," went on Bunter. "You can see that. If it all came out, Quelch would send me up to the Head."

"Well, the game's up, now you're here," grunted Wally.

"If you want to carry on with it, you'll have to cut."

"But I-I can't!" groaned Bunter. "Quelch would be after me like a shot. If he spotted me cutting - oh, lor'!"

"Then I shall have to cut," growled Wally. "We can change clothes here, and I shall have to get out somehow. You stick here, and I'll get back to Marine Parade. I've got to cut if you don't."

Wally sighed a little. He was enjoying Greyfriars.

Cousin Billy had left him several unexpected and unenjoyable legacies there: but nevertheless he was enjoying his brief experience as a Greyfriars man. He did not want it to end so soon if he could help it. But it looked as if he couldn't, now.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, and he too sighed - more deeply than Wally. The prospect of changing back from seaside joys to the same old grind at Greyfriars was not attractive to the fat Owl.

"I say, I was having a jolly time at Pegg," he said.

"No lessons - no Quelch - and I say, the food at Marino Parade is splendid-."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I-I say, we haven't been spotted yet!" said Bunter, with a gleam of hope. "Quelch sent me up here to do an impot - I've got to write out that beastly verb 'sum' from beginning to end. Well, look here, you can do that-."

"Can I?" yapped Wally.

"Yes, you jolly well can!" said Bunter, warmly. "Don't you be lazy, Wally. Laziness is jolly nearly as bad as selfishness. Well, suppose you stick here, writing out 'sum', and take it down to Quelch when you've done it-." Billy Bunter wrinkled his fat brows in thought. The awful prospect of getting back to lessons spurred on his fat brain to unusual activity. "Well, nobody knows anything, so far. Suppose I hide somewhere-."

"Oh!" said Wally.

"It will be all right with Quelch, so long as he thinks I've stayed in and done his rotten verb for him. See?" said Bunter, eagerly, his little round eyes glistening behind his big round spectacles. "You carry on as me old chap - and I'll cut up to the box-room, and stick there till after lock-ups, and dodge away when there's nobody about."

"Oh!" repeated Wally.

Billy Bunter had brightened up, in spite of the twinges of the cane and the pangs of the boot! The game was not yet up! At least he hoped that it wasn't.

"I can stick in the box-room, and get out of the window after lock-ups," he breathed. "That's easy - I've done it before, once, when Smithy was after me, about some tuck he made out was missing from his study. You stick here, Wally, and leave it to me."

"If you're seen-."

"I'll cut now, before the fellows come up." Billy Bunter rolled to the door. "You get that rotten verb done - Quelch will want that. He gets after impots like a dog after a bone. And-."

Billy Bunter broke off suddenly, as there was a firm - a very firm - tread in the Remove passage.

He gave an alarmed squeak.

He knew that firm tread. It was not a junior who was coming up the passage. It was the tread of the Remove master.

Wally jumped. He too heard that sound of alarm. "Is-is-is that Quelch?" he breathed.

"Sounds like him!" moaned Bunter, through chattering teeth. "Oh, crikey! If he finds us here together - oh, lor'!"

"Can't lock him out, as I did Smithy! What on earth is Quelch coming up to the studies for?" breathed Wally. "I-I-I suppose it's to see whether I've cut," moaned Bunter. "Just like Quelch - never trusts a fellow! Oh, crumbs."

That firm and steady tread came up the passage from the landing. It was a matter of moments before it would reach No. 7 Study.

Billy Bunter's fat brain fairly swam. Obviously, Quelch could not be locked out like Smithy. No doubt he was coming up to ascertain that a reckless and rebellious junior had obeyed his commands. What would happen when he found two Bunters in the study, instead of one, would hardly bear thinking of.

Wally grabbed his fat relative by the shoulder. "Quick-!" he breathed.

"Oh, crikey!"

"One of us has got to get out of sight, quick!" hissed Wally into a fat ear.

"Oh, jiminy!"

"You'd better! I can carry on! Quick! In the corner - behind the armchair-."

"I-I-I-."

"Quick, you blitherer!" hissed Wally. "Don't dither! Quick!"

"I-I-I-." stuttered Bunter.

Billy Bunter, in his dismay and alarm, could only dither.

Fortunately, Wally was more equal to the occasion.

He almost hurled Bunter into the corner of the study, and backed Peter Todd's armchair into the corner after him. Bunter, his fat head still swimming, squatted in the corner, hidden by the armchair, gasping.

"Keep quiet!" hissed Wally, over the chair-back.

"Oh, lor'."

"Quiet, you dithering duffer!"

Wally shot across to the door. Swiftly, but silently, he unlocked it. Then he shot to the table, grabbing up a pen with one hand, and opening a Latin grammar with the other. So rapid were his movements, that he was sitting writing at the table by the time that firm tread in the passage reached No. 7 Study, and had already raced off:

SUM.

Indicative Mood.

Present tense.

sum, es, est. Sumus, estis sunt.

Imperfect.

eram, eras, erat.

Then there was a tap - Quelch always tapped - and the door opened. The angular figure of the Remove master appeared in the doorway. Wally looked up, breathing fast. Billy was out of sight, and if he kept quiet, all might yet be well. Wally rose respectfully to his feet, the gimlet-eyes in the doorway fixing on him.

"Ah! You are here, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch. His brow, as he looked in, was grim: but it grew slightly less grim as he saw that Bunter was there!

"Yes, sir!" murmured Wally, while a fat Owl behind an armchair quaked in terrified silence.

"I am glad to see, Bunter, that you have not repeated your disobedient and disrespectful conduct of yesterday, when you went out against orders."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Wally.

He hoped that Quelch would leave it at that, and go.

The Remove master had ascertained that Bunter was in his study, and that he was at work on his imposition: which was why he had come up. But Quelch did not leave it at that and go. He walked into the study, paused for a moment, and then sat-down in the armchair - a fat Owl behind it barely repressing a squeak of terror as he did so.

CHAPTER 20

CORNERED!

BILLY BUNTER hardly breathed.

Wally stood dumb.

Only the chair-back intervened between the hidden Owl and his form-master. If Bunter made a sound-

Mr. Quelch's eyes, as he sat, were fixed upon the fat youth before him, with so keen and penetrating a gaze, that Wally felt a trickle of perspiration at the back of his neck. He wondered dizzily whether Quelch suspected.

But he couldn't - he just couldn't! If Quelch had ever heard of William George Bunter's cousin, Walter Gilbert Bunter, he must have forgotten him long ago. Could he begin to suspect that one W. G. Bunter had taken the place of the other W. G. Bunter at Greyfriars? He couldn't! But that fixed and penetrating gaze made Wally's plump neck trickle, all the same.

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, at last, after a very long pause.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Wally.

"I have been somewhat puzzled by you of late, Bunter."

"Oh! Have you, sir?"

"I have!" said Mr. Quelch. Then he paused again. Wally, with a sinking heart, realised that Quelch was there, not merely to ascertain that Bunter was in the study writing out his impot as bidden, but for what the juniors called a "jaw".

A "jaw" from Quelch would not have bothered Wally unduly, but for the fact that Billy was huddled in the corner behind the armchair in which Quelch sat. Billy was crammed into close quarters, and was probably getting cramped. If he made the slightest movement-! Wally could only hope for the best: hoping fervently that Quelch would cut it short and depart. Meanwhile, he stood facing the Remove master with all the unconcern he could muster.

The gimlet-eyes seemed almost to bore into him. Quelch was, as he had said, puzzled. He had believed that he knew every boy in his form inside out, as it were. Yet the most inconsiderable member of that form had him guessing, now.

It was not only that Bunter had seemed to change. He also seemed to change back - and then change again! In fact he seemed to have become a sort of kaleidoscopic Bunter.

In the form-room that day, the fattest member of the Remove had been attentive, intelligent, painstaking: quite a gratifying Bunter - a new experience for his form-master, and an agreeable one. The furtive, grubby Bunter whom Prout had marched into his study seemed, except in outward aspect, quite unlike him. But now there appeared to be a further change - this Bunter, standing before him, seemed to be the Bunter of the form-room again!

He had - apparently - changed back into his school clothes: there was no sign of the light-grey checks, the brilliant tie, the tan shoes. But that was not all. Bunter, in Quelch's study, had looked considerably in need of a wash. It seemed that he must have had one: for he was now as clean as a new pin. But even that was not all. There was some subtle change which Quelch felt rather than saw.

It was undoubtedly very puzzling. Had it been possible, Quelch might almost have supposed that this was a different Bunter!

"During the past day or two, Bunter, you have shown distinct signs of improvement," said Mr. Quelch, after another long pause.

"I-I'm glad you think so, sir," stammered Wally.

"Only yesterday," said Mr. Quelch, "in my study, you made some very intelligent remarks, Bunter, on the subject of the parentheses in the first book of the *Aeneid*."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Wally.

"You have appeared to take an interest in your studies generally. You have shown a taste for the classics. You have given me some hope of you, Bunter. Yet after all this," Quelch's voice took on a sterner note, "after all this, Bunter, your conduct since class to-day has been bad - very bad indeed."

Wally stood silent. In the silence, he fancied he heard a slight sound from the hidden corner of the study. Probably Billy was getting cramped by that time. If he stirred-

Luckily, Quelch seemed to notice nothing. His attention was fixed on the fat youth standing before him.

"Your Latin prose to-day, Bunter, was good - distinctly good. You have never shown up such a paper before," said Mr. Quelch. "I am driven to the conclusion, Bunter, that your backwardness in form for so long was not due, as I had supposed, to obtuseness, but to idleness-."

"Oh, sir!" mumbled Wally. He was listening to Quelch with one ear, as it were, the other strained to catch a sound from the corner, if Billy stirred. But if there was a faint rustle behind the armchair, Quelch still did not observe it.

"From now onwards, I shall expect better things of you in form, Bunter!" concluded Mr. Quelch. "Since you have shown of what you are capable, you will not be permitted to fall back into idle carelessness. I advise you to think over this very seriously, Bunter."

"Oh! Certainly, sir!" gasped Wally.

"And I will add-!" went on Mr. Quelch. He broke off, suddenly, with quite a start. What he had been going to add was lost: his sentence remained, like Schubert's celebrated symphony, unfinished. A sudden rustle behind the armchair quite startled Mr. Quelch, interrupting the flow of his remarks.

It was a quite distinct sound of a movement, this time. Billy Bunter, really, could not help it.

He had squatted in that corner silent, as still as he could keep.

Billy Bunter was not very bright: but he was bright enough to understand that his best guess was to keep perfectly silent and perfectly still so long as Quelch was in the room.

But how was a fellow crammed in a corner between a high chair-back and the angle of the wall to keep perfectly still, long minute after long minute, with his fat limbs getting more and more cramped every moment? Pins and needles were creeping along fat legs. Bunter stood it as long as he could: till flesh and blood - Bunter's flesh and blood at any rate - could stand it no longer. Twice he had ventured to shift a fat cramped leg just a little, and Quelch had not noticed. The third time it was quite a distinct rustle - and Quelch did!

"Upon my word!" Quelch half-rose in the armchair, staring round.

"What was that?"

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Wally. Billy had done it, now!

"Is there some animal in this study, Bunter?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No, sir! I-I-I'm sure not, sir!" gasped Wally.

"I distinctly heard something behind this chair, Bunter, and it can only have been some animal! Is this another act of disobedience on your part, Bunter? You are well aware that it is strictly forbidden to bring animals up to the studies."

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I-."

"If you have a dog here, Bunter-."

"Oh, no, sir! Nothing of the kind, sir! There - there certainly isn't a dog in my study, sir!"

"There is certainly some living creature hidden behind this armchair, and I distinctly heard it move," snapped Mr. Quelch. "I am assured of that!" Quelch rose from the armchair, frowning. "Bunter! Draw the chair out of the corner of the room."

"Oh, crikey!"

"What! What did you say, Bunter?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir! I-I-I assure you that there isn't any animal in the study, sir -I-I-I-."

"I shall ascertain that for myself," said Mr. Quelch.

"Draw the chair out of the corner at once, Bunter." He glared at the hapless Wally, as he did not stir. "Do you hear me, boy?"

Wally stood petrified. Behind the armchair, an equally petrified fat Owl huddled breathless in the corner. Billy Bunter, in his terror, almost forgot the pins and needles. As soon as that armchair was drawn out, a second Bunter would be revealed to Quelch's astonished eyes: and all the fat would be in the fire! It was an awful moment. But in that awful moment came a sudden interruption. Neither William George nor WaIter Gilbert had ever supposed, or dreamed, that either of them would be glad to hear the voice of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form. But as it suddenly became audible in the Remove passage, in loud tones, breaking in upon that tense moment, and drawing Quelch's attention from the corner of the study, the music of the spheres had nothing on it.

CHAPTER 21

COKER TO THE RESCUE

"SHUT up, Potter."

"But I say-."

"Shut up, Greene."

"Look here, Coker-."

"I know he's in his study. I've got him this time. The fat scoundrel's been dodging me all over the school, but I've got him this time! I'm going to wallop him with this stump!"

"If Quelch hears you kicking up a shindy in his form-."

"Blow Quelch!"

"Coker, old man-."

"Think I'm going to let that fat villain Bunter call me a lout?" roared Coker.

"Well, you've called him lots of names-."

"But-!" Potter and Greene spoke together.

"I said shut up! You stick in the passage, one each side of the doorway, and grab him if he dodges out! Not that he's likely to dodge me! But you just see that he doesn't, if he tries it on." Coker of the Fifth, as he issued his lordly directions, was tramping up the Remove passage to No. 7. Every word was heard in that study. Mr. Quelch, in No. 7, stood as if rooted. Coker, when he said "Blow Quelch!", certainly did not dream that Quelch was in hearing of his powerful voice. He knew that Bunter was in his study: he had not the faintest idea that Bunter's form-master was there too. But Bunter's form-master was: and the expression on his face, as he listened to Coker, was quite extraordinary.

A moment more, and the burly figure of Horace Coker appeared in the doorway. There was wrath in Coker's rugged face, and a cricket stump in his right hand. His eyes fell on a fat figure, and he did not, for the moment, notice a longer and leaner one standing by the armchair. Bunter was what Coker wanted, and now he had got him! He rushed!

"Now, you fat rotter-!" roared Coker.

"Oh, my hat! I-I-oh!" yelled Wally, as Coker grasped. Coker's powerful arm swung Wally round, and the cricket stump came down on Billy's trousers. The present inhabitant of those trousers yelled frantically.

"Whooooooooooooop!"

That was the beginning. Coker intended to go on with the good work as he had started. But he did not go on. A voice of thunder stopped him.

"COKER!"

Coker became aware of Quelch.

The second swipe was arrested, just in time. Coker's grasp on Wally relaxed, Wally promptly backed away. Coker, his rugged jaw dropping in his surprise and dismay, was left to face Quelch in his wrath.

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "Oh, crumbs! Oh!" He fairly goggled at Quelch.

"Coker!" Quelch thundered again. "How dare you, Coker?"

"Oh, crumbs! I-I never knew you were here, sir!" babbled Coker. "I-I-I - oh, holy smoke!"

Potter and Greene, in the passage, exchanged startled looks.

"Quelch!" breathed Potter.

"Bunter's beak!" breathed Greene.

Potter and Greene faded out of the picture, rapidly.

They did the Remove passage in record time. Ghosts at cock-crow could not have vanished more suddenly than did Potter and Greene of the Greyfriars Fifth. It was like Horace Coker to rush into a hornet's nest. He was welcome to have the hornet all to himself. Coker, no doubt, would have been glad to vanish like his friends. But there was no vanishing for Coker. He stood stammering in No. 7 Study, under the baleful glare of Quelch's eye.

"Coker! How dare you? I repeat, how dare you?"

The thunder rolled in No. 7. "How dare you, Coker, rush into a junior study, like-like-," Quelch paused a second, for a simile, "like-like a wild Indian, Coker, with a cricket stump, and attack - I repeat, attack - a boy of my form-?"

"I-I-I-!" burred Coker.

"I shall take you to your form-master, Coker! I shall report to Mr. Prout this act of -of -of reckless ruffianism. I shall insist upon adequate punishment, Coker! I will not tolerate this, Coker!"

"I-I-I-!" stuttered Coker.

Quelch, with billowing gown, swept like a thunder-cloud to the door. He was not thinking, now, of a possible dog behind the armchair in the corner. That trivial matter had disappeared from his mind, in his towering wrath. He concentrated on Coker.

"Follow me, Coker, to your form-master's study," he thundered, in the doorway.

"I-I-I-!" gurgled Coker.

"Will you follow me this instant, Coker?"

"Oh! Yes! But - Oh, crikey!"

Coker almost tottered out of No. 7. He limped down the passage after the Remove master. At the corner he dropped the cricket stump. He did not want that stump to accompany him to Prout's study. An utterly deflated Coker followed Mr. Quelch down the staircase.

"Oh, scissors!" murmured Wally. He peered from the door of No. 7. and watched Quelch and Coker disappear.

"I-I say, Wally-!" came a gasping voice.

Wally turned and stared at a fat perspiring face, and a pair of glimmering spectacles, that rose into view behind the chair-back in the corner. Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"Is-is-is he gone?" gasped Bunter.

"He's gone!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Billy Bunter crawled out of the corner, wriggling a cramped fat leg. He was quite dizzy from his narrow escape. He wiped streams of perspiration from his plump face.

"I-I say, if he'd copped the two of us here-!" gasped Bunter.

"Why didn't you keep quiet, you fat ass?"

"I had pins and needles in my leg-ow-!" Wally glanced into the passage again.

"If you're going to cut, now's your chance," he said, "or are you going to stand there gurgling till a crowd of fellows come up?"

"I-I-I'll cut!" gasped Bunter. "I can hide in the box-room, as I said. I-I say, sure there's nobody in the passage?"

"Nobody."

"All right then!" Bunter rolled to the door, and blinked out uneasily through his big spectacles. "All right! You get that beastly verb done. Wally - Quelch will want that. I say, though-."

"What?" yapped Wally.

"I'm hungry! Got any chocs, or toffee, or anything?"

"No! Get out, you fat chump."

"I'll just squint into the study cupboard - Toddy may have something. I'll just - whooop! wow! Wharrer you kicking me for, you beast? Stop kicking me, or I'll jolly well - wow! wow! I'm going, ain't I?"

And Billy Bunter went.

A fat figure in light-grey checks streaked up the Remove passage to the box-room stair at the end. Another fat figure sat down at the table in No. 7 Study and re-started on the verb "sum". In Mr. Prout's study, Horace Coker was having a quite unpleasant time: and it would have been no consolation to him whatever, could he have known how happily he had come to the rescue of both Bunters.

CHAPTER 22

AMAZING!

"HALLO, hallo, halla!"

"What are you doing here, Bunter?"

"Want a spot of cricket?"

"The wantfulness is probably not terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five chuckled. The idea of Bunter wanting a spot of cricket, on a day when games practice was not compulsory, was enough to make any Remove man chuckle. Even on compulsory days, Bunter generally had to be rooted out: and his excuses for not turning up were many and various.

So why the fat figure was encased in flannels, and why it had arrived at the cricket nets at all, was rather a puzzle. Bunter, certainly, had been surprising the Remove of late. But it was the biggest surprise of all if he had suddenly become keen on cricket. Wally frowned a little. He was enjoying Greyfriars: even that exciting episode in No. 7 Study made no difference to that. He was tremendously pleased to be there in Cousin Billy's place. But he did not find Cousin Billy's reputation grateful or comforting. He couldn't take over Cousin Billy's identity without taking over his reputation along with it: but he couldn't enjoy being regarded on all hands as a fat slacker and frowster.

He had delivered the complete conjugation of the verb "sum" to Mr. Quelch in his study: written out so neatly, and delivered so promptly, that the Remove master could not withhold a nod of approval. Quelch concluded that that heart-to-heart talk in Bunter's study had done the fat junior good, and that he was keeping on along the line of improvement! Once more Bunter rose in the esteem of a puzzled form-master.

After which, Wally felt the urge for fresh air and cricket. Among the many attractions of Greyfriars for a fellow who was a junior - a very junior - clerk in a London office, cricket was the foremost. Wally was a keen cricketer, and for his age, a first-class man at the game. True, by displaying a keenness for cricket, he was hardly keeping up the character he had adopted. But that couldn't be helped: he was going to get all the cricket he could, during his brief career as a Remove man of Greyfriars. So after delivering Billy's impot to Quelch, he had changed into Billy's flannels: and here he was, with Billy's bat under his arm.

Harry Wharton and Co. had been putting in a good spot of practice, in readiness for the Highcliffe match on Saturday: when they hoped to wipe Frank Courtenay and his merry men off their own ground. But enough was as good as a feast: and they were about to leave junior nets, and adjourn to the school shop for light refreshment in the shape of ginger-pop, when the fattest member of the form rolled on the scene.

"I say, you fellows-!" It was just Bunter's fat squeak.

"You can roll off, fathead," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "You don't have to turn up to-day."

"One of you chaps like to give me some bowling?" asked Wally, unheeding. "I'd have come down sooner, only I was a bit fagged after that scrap, and - and I've had an impot."

The Co. stared at him.

"Wonders will never cease!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"What the jolly old dickens has come over you, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry-!"

"He's changing somehow," said Johnny Bull. "He washed this morning-."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's licked Smithy in a scrap!" said Bob, "but don't tell us you're keen on cricket now, Bunter. Draw it mild, you know."

"Think you could take my wicket?" demanded Wally. "I fancy my minor on the Second could," said Frank Nugent, with a chuckle. "What do you mean, you fat ass?"

"Well, try it on," snapped Wally. "I fancy I could keep my end up against any bowling you chaps could give me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, try it on, by all means," said Harry Wharton.

"If you're really going to push on at games, Bunter, we're the fellows to help. You'll find it ever so much better than frowsting in an armchair, when you get used to it. You give him a ball, Inky. He won't want more than one."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned, a dusky grin, as he took the ball. The Nabob of Bhanipur was the champion junior bowler, and there were few bats in the Remove that could stand up against him. One ball from the Nabob could scarcely fail to spread-eagle Billy Bunter's wicket: and naturally no fellow there, with the fat batsman under their eyes, had any suspicion that Billy Bunter, at that moment, was lurking in a box-room, waiting anxiously for a chance to dodge out of the school in the summer dusk.

But as Wally took his stand at the wicket, Bob Cherry gave a little whistle. There was an alertness, an elasticity, about Bunter, that was quite new and quite surprising.

"He doesn't stand there like a sack of coke, as usual!" remarked Bob. "He isn't holding his bat as if he was going to chop wood with it. Blessed if I make Bunter out these days,"

The Famous Five, and half-a-dozen other fellows, looked on, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sent down the ball. To their surprise, it did not knock the wicket to pieces. Inky, certainly, did not exert himself - any ball was good enough to knock Billy Bunter's wicket over. Still, it was a surprise to see that ball whiz away hot from the bat, leaving the wicket intact and the fat batsman smiling.

"Oh, suffering cats!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"He's stopped it!" said Johnny Bull, blankly. "Great pip!"

"And a jolly good knock, too," said Harry Wharton, in wonder.

"Bunter must have some beef under all that fat."

Tom Redwing cut after the ball, and fielded it, and tossed it back to the Nabob of Bhanipur. There was quite a peculiar expression on the dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Really he would have expected to bowl Billy Bunter out, sitting in an armchair with his eyes shut! Nobody had expected Bunter to stop that ball, let alone send it whizzing like a rifle-shot.

"Pull up your socks, Inky!" called out Bob Cherry, chuckling.

"The pullfulness up will be terrific!" called back Hurree Jamset Ram Singh: and this time he was far from careless in delivering the ball. So inept a bat as Bunter was not going to stop him a second time.

But he did!

The ball came like lightning. Really, nobody would have expected Bunter even to see it. Apparently he did: for willow met leather, and the leather flew. In a game that hit would have been good for three at least.

Bob Cherry rubbed his eyes.

"Pinch me, somebody!" he said. "It's time I woke up!"

"We're dreaming this!" said Nugent.

"Has that fat ass been gammoning all this while, or what?" asked Harry Wharton. "He can play cricket! Who ever thought that Bunter could play cricket?"

"Try him again, Inky."

Ogilvy tossed in the ball, and the Nabob, with an almost grim expression on his dusky face, tried again. He was going to take that wicket if he could. And now he exerted all his deadly skill to the full.

Bunter at the wicket was given a full over: and ball after ball flew from the ready bat. There was quite a lot of leather-chasing for the fellows looking on. Wally, at the wicket, grinned joyously. He was enjoying this to the very limit - feeling quite on top of the world. And, while he realised that it was not exactly prudent, in the circumstances, to excite so much astonishment, he enjoyed the amazement in the faces of Harry Wharton and Co.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Bob Cherry.

"Bunter's stood up to an over from Inky, and he's still alive!"

"You try him, Browney!" said Harry Wharton.

Tom Brown, the New Zealander, took the ball from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Browney was a deadly bowler, and was expected to make hay of wickets at Highcliffe. But he did not make hay of the wicket of this new and surprising Bunter. Six balls, one after another, were knocked away with ease and grace.

Then the fat junior strolled away from the wicket.

"I say, you fellows, think I can bat?" he asked, with a fat grin at the Famous Five.

"You spoofing, diddling, leg-pulling octopus." said Bob Cherry. "Why have you been making out that you're a dithering dud, all this while, if you can bat like that?"

Wally chuckled.

"I don't make this out!" said Johnny Bull, staring hard at the fat grinning face. "There's something queer in this."

"The queerfulness is preposterous!"

"Look here, Wharton," said Wally. "Have you got a better bat in your team?"

Harry Wharton hesitated. Like everyone else on the spot, he was too amazed to know what to make of it. He answered at last:

"No! I don't make it out, but there isn't a man in the Remove could put up a better show. I know I couldn't. What's come over you, you fat ass?"

"Oh, I can handle a bat, you know," said Wally, carelessly, "and if you think I'm good enough, will you play me in the Highcliffe match on Saturday?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Don't be funny, old fat man," said Bob.

"Well, why not?" demanded Wally.

The Co. looked at one another, uncertainly. The bare idea of Billy Bunter playing for School was comic. And yet-

"You play a man on his form, don't you?" asked Wally.

"Yes, of course."

"Well, what's the matter with my form?"

"My dear porpoise," said the captain of the Remove. "This is a bit too sudden. But I'll tell you what I'll do. We'll fix up a practice game to-morrow, and if you're worth it on your form, you'll play at Highcliffe, on Saturday. So don't get any more Extra from Quelch for slacking, if you can help it."

"O.K.," said Wally, cheerfully.

His fat face was beaming as he left the ground with the cricketers. And for once, the famous Co. did not seem to find the company of Bunter superfluous. For the first time in history, it seemed that the fattest member of the Remove was a man whom they delighted to honour.

CHAPTER 23

PROBLEM FOR PROUT

"UPON my word!" breathed Mr. Prout.

He stared, with knitting brows, through the summer dusk. Pacing in the deepening dusk, Prout jumped, as he sighted a lurking figure in the shadows. It was a fat figure, in a light-grey check suit. Prout knew that figure, and that suit!

It was Bunter - Bunter in the same clothes in which Prout had caught him in Pegg that afternoon: Bunter, breaking bounds after lock-ups.

"Upon my word!" repeated Prout.

He frowned portentously. It was his duty - any master's duty - to stop a reckless young rascal going out of bounds after lock-ups. And what a facer for Quelch, who had walked Coker into his study that day!

"Bunter! Stop!" boomed Prout.

There was a startled squeak. For a second, a pair of little round eyes, and a pair of big round spectacles, glimmered at Prout. Then the fat figure flew.

"Stop!" thundered Prout.

He rushed in pursuit. He was going to collar that fat figure, and march it in to Quelch's study - for the second time that day! But the fat figure vanished into the shadows before Prout could get near enough to clap a fat hand on a fat shoulder.

Bunter was gone!

Prout, panting, came to a halt. As his ponderous footsteps ceased to wake the echoes, he heard a scrambling sound in the distance. It was the sound of a breathless fugitive scrambling over a wall!

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Prout.

He turned, and elephantined back to the House. He thumped rather than tapped at the door of Mr. Quelch's study, and threw it open.

"Mr. Quelch-!" he boomed.

"Well?" Mr. Quelch's tone was slightly acid. "Well, Mr. Prout?"

"A boy of your form is out of bounds, sir - I was taking my evening walk, when I saw Bunter - out of the House - he has climbed the wall - he-he-."

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. "If you are sure of this, Prout-."

"I am not likely to be mistaken, I think, Quelch! I repeat that the boy Bunter has gone out of school bounds, after lock-ups, under my very eyes."

Mr. Quelch, frowning, rose from his chair.

"It is very easy to make an error in the dark, Mr. Prout. However, I will go to Bunter's study at once, and ascertain whether he is absent.

"I will accompany you, sir!" boomed Prout.

The two masters proceeded up the staircase together.

Quelch, naturally, was unwilling to believe if he could help it, that a boy of his form was breaking bounds after dark: for which he would have to be sent up to the Head. Quelch's look showed that he had a little doubt that the Fifth-form master had made a mistake in the dusk. Which was very annoying to Prout. But Quelch, with all his obstinacy, would have to admit the facts, when they arrived at No. 7 in the Remove, and found that Bunter was not there. That was a solace to Prout.

The Remove were all in their studies, at prep. Bunter, undoubtedly, should have been in No. 7, at preparation with Todd and Dutton. Certainly neither Mr. Quelch nor Mr. Prout dreamed that a fat Owl had been lurking in a box-room, and had dodged out at last, by way of the window, hoping to escape unseen in the dark! Billy Bunter, in those moments, was putting on speed in the direction of Pegg and 15 Marine Parade. His double was at prep, with Peter Todd and Tom Dutton.

Mr. Quelch arrived at the door of No. 7 in the Remove.

Prout, a little winded by the stairs, rolled on ponderously behind. Quelch tapped at the study door and opened it. He gave a rapid glance within: and smiled, as three juniors jumped to their feet at the sight of him. Prout was, in Quelch's opinion, the man to make mistakes: and certainly it looked as if he had made one this time, for there were Peter Todd, Tom Dutton, and the fattest member of Quelch's form, all present.

"Well, Mr. Quelch?" came Prout's fruity voice, sarcastically, from the rear. "Do you see Bunter in that study?"

"I do, Mr. Prout," answered the Remove master.

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered Prout.

"Bunter is here, Mr. Prout!" smiled Quelch.

"Impossible, sir! I repeat that I saw him out of the House-."

"Will you kindly glance into the study, Mr. Prout?" Prout surged on to the doorway, and looked in. Then he almost fell down, in his astonishment. His eyes bulged at a fat face. With his own eyes, he had seen Bunter in the quad: with his own ears, he had heard him clamber over the wall. Yet here he was!

"Bub-bub-bob-bub- Bunter!" stuttered Mr. Prout. "It is-is-is-bib-bob-bub-bib-Bunter! Bless my soul!"

The ghost of Billy Bunter really could hardly have startled Prout more. Only a few minutes ago, he had seen him, dressed in quite different clothes, scuttling out of the school! Yet here he was - as large as life!

"Well, Mr. Prout, are you satisfied now?" inquired Mr. Quelch, with an extremely sarcastic inflexion in his voice.

"I-I-I-!" Prout fairly burred.

"You can see, sir, that Bunter is here-."

"Oh! Yes! No! Bless my soul!"

"Is anything the matter, sir?" asked Peter Todd.

"Nothing, Todd, except that Mr. Prout fancied that he saw Bunter outside the House a few minutes ago," said Mr. Quelch. "As Bunter was here at the time, it was obviously a mistake - an absurd mistake," added Mr. Quelch, as he drew the study door shut.

An amazed, incoherent Prout elephantined away down the passage, in a state of complete bewilderment. A sarcastically smiling Quelch followed him. In No. 7 Study, Peter Todd stared at his fat study-mate.

"You haven't been out," he said. "What on earth could have put that idea into Prout's head?"

"I wonder!" murmured Wally.

But he did not wonder very much! He guessed that a fat relative of his had been dodging out of the school while Prout was taking his evening walk. But he did not confide that to Toddy!

CHAPTER 24

BUNTER THE BATSMAN!

CRACK!

"Oh!"

"Smithy, old man-."

"Oh!" breathed the Bounder, again. He clasped his right wrist with his left hand, his face pale with pain. A crack from a cricket-ball, whizzing like a bullet, hurt.

It was after class the next day, and most of the Remove were on Little Side. It was a practice game, in final preparation for the Highcliffe match on the morrow.

Strange to relate, it was Bunter of the Remove who was the cynosure of all eyes in that game.

The bare idea of Bunter as a cricketer, above all the idea of Bunter playing in a School match, was calculated to make any fellow chuckle. Nevertheless, Bunter was being put through his paces, with a view to playing him on Saturday if he displayed the necessary quality. Some of the fellows, when they heard of it, wondered whether the captain of the form was wandering in his mind. Those who had seen Bunter at the nets the previous day wondered what on earth had come over the fat rabbit.

Bunter had been full of surprises, of late.

In the form-room he had surprised the Remove fellows, and the Remove master, by getting through "con" without a single howler. In the French set he had astonished Monsieur Charpentier by displaying a knowledge of his beautiful language that Mossos had never suspected in Bunter. He had surprised Lascelles in maths. He had amazed every man in the Remove by knocking Smithy out in the scrap behind the gym. But Bunter the cricketer, Bunter in the eleven, was too much of a good thing. That was the limit.

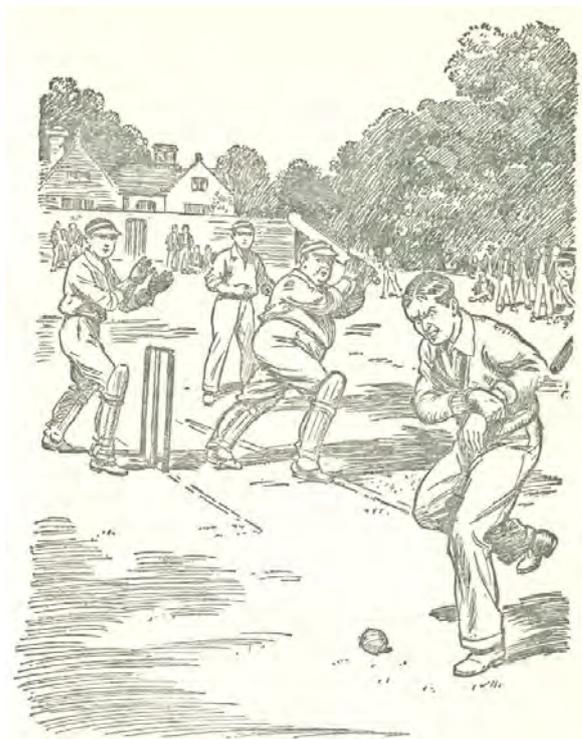
Harry Wharton, certainly, was as surprised and perplexed, as any other fellow. Such a change in Bunter was not easy to assimilate. But cricket was cricket: and a fellow who could stand up to bowling from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Tom Brown was a cricketer: even if he had hitherto borne the reputation of being the veriest "rabbit" that ever mishandled a bat or muffed a catch. In that practice game, Bunter was going to have his chance of showing what he could do, and if he proved his quality, he was going into the eleven to play Highcliffe. And Bunter was doing exactly that.

Sides had been picked up for the practice, and the captain of the Remove intentionally put the best bowlers of the form in the other side. The fattest member of the form opened the innings for his side: and he had stood up successively and successfully to the bowling of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Tom Brown of Taranaki, and Sampson Quincy Iffley Field of New South Wales. And a fellow who could do that, could stand up to anything they might send down at Highcliffe, and a little over. Wharton's own wicket had gone down to the Nabob's bowling: and Bob Cherry's to Browney's: Squiff had sent Johnny Bull bootless home. But Bunter was still going strong, in spite of all the bowlers could do, and in spite of a vigilant field. Smithy, fielding in the slips, was as watchful as a cat.

He was very keen to catch Bunter out.

Smithy was distinguished as a bat, and he was a tower of strength with the willow, but he was a good man in the field. He was not merely keen, but anxious, to get the fat batsman away from his

wicket. The Bounder dearly loved the limelight: it was meat and drink to him to do what no other fellow seemed able to do. And among the fellows who had pooh-poohed the idea that Bunter could play cricket, Smithy had been the loudest and most emphatic: so it was not exactly gratifying to him to see the fat junior putting up an innings which, visibly to all eyes, was well above his own form. From both sporting and unsporting motives, the Bounder was simply yearning to put paid to Bunter: and at length his chance came.



Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had sent down the ball: one of his best. But his best did not seem good enough for a batsman who, only a few days ago, nobody had supposed could stand up to bowling from Tubb of the Third, or Nugent minor of the Second. The flashing willow met the leather, and the ball whizzed like a bullet from a rifle between the slips. The Bounder was on it like lightning, leaping at it almost like a tiger-perhaps too eagerly, for he gave a slight stumble as his hand flashed up to the whizzing ball, and it cracked on his wrist instead of plumping into the eager hand. It was so severe a crack that it sounded almost like a shot.

The ball dropped.

Vernon-Smith stood panting, clasping his wrist. He hardly cared for the pain, severe as it was, though it made the colour waver in his cheeks. It was his chance to put paid to Bunter, and he had missed it - he had muffed the catch. Instead of bagging that ball, tossing it into the air, catching it casually in his left hand as it came down, he stood clasping a damaged wrist, the ball at his feet. Smithy was a bad loser: and at that moment, his feelings were inexpressible.

Tom Redwing ran up to him, his face anxious. "Smithy, old man - You're hurt-."

The Bounder gave him a scowl. He had only scowls, just then, for friend or foe.

"No!" he snapped. "Think I'm made of putty?" Smithy picked up the ball with his left, to return it - with all his stubborn

determination, he could not use his right. Harry Wharton came up quickly, with a puckered brow. He was thinking of the Highcliffe match on the morrow, when Smithy's runs would be needed.

"Hurt, old chap?" he asked.

"No!" breathed the Bounder. "Let's look at it-."

"Oh, rot!"

"Let's look, all the same," said Harry. "Why, you ass, it's swelling already - get off the field, Smithy-."

"I won't."

"You ass, it's only a practice game. Get off this minute, and go to the matron, and get it seen to at once. Don't be a goat, Smithy - you're wanted in the Highcliffe game to-morrow. Get a move on."

"Oh, all right!" muttered Smithy. He had to give way, and he gave way with a bad grace.

The practice game went on without the Bounder. He slouched away, with his hands in the pockets of his flannel bags, determined to keep up a casual air of unconcern, though the pain in his damaged wrist was racking: and in the worst temper ever. No doubt that was why he kicked Sammy Bunter as he passed him in the quad. The sight of any Bunter was irritating just then to the exasperated Bounder, and he was not accustomed to controlling his temper.

Sammy of the Second Form gave a loud and indignant yell as he was kicked. The Bounder slouched on, leaving him yelling.

But Smithy's luck was out that day. Even as his foot impinged upon Sammy's fat trousers, Mr. Quelch and Mr. Hacker came out of the House together: and both the masters witnessed the kicking of the hapless Sammy. Mr. Hacker shrugged his shoulders: Quelch frowned like a thunder-cloud.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" muttered the Bounder. He could barely constrain himself to answer respectfully, even to his form-master.

"I saw your action, Vernon-Smith! Go into the House at once, and remain there. I shall cane you. Vernon-Smith, when I return from my walk."

With that, Mr. Quelch walked away with Mr. Hacker, and they went out at the gates.

Sammy Bunter, ceasing to yell, grinned. Vernon-Smith, with feelings too deep for words, slouched into the House.

On Little Side, the game went on, and the fat batsman was still the cynosure of all eyes. More and more fellows gathered round the field to watch that unexpected and remarkable innings: as the amazing Bunter piled up run after run, and gave the field the leather-hunting of their lives.

CHAPTER 25

TEA FOR TWO

"SHARP at half-past!" said Loder of the Sixth.

"Oh! Yes! But-."

"Walker's coming to tea. Have it ready."

With that, Gerald Loder walked away down the Sixth-form passage: leaving Richard Nugent, of the Second Form, staring after him with an inimical eye.

Nugent minor was up against a problem. This term, Frank Nugent's young brother in the Second Form fagged for Loder. Loder, as a rule, had plenty of money, and "did" himself very well: but sometimes there was a financial stringency.

Had Loder been in funds, with Walker coming to tea, no doubt he would have handed his fag the necessary cash, or a "chit" for the school shop. Evidently he wasn't, for he hadn't! Dicky Nugent had to get tea for two: "how" was his problem.

He had had such problems to work out before, and generally contrived somehow to disentangle the Gordian knot. A loan from his major in the Remove was the easiest way out: to be "squared" when Loder was in funds again, and settled up. Aware that a Remove game was going on, Dicky trotted down to Little Side.

"Good man, Bunter!" greeted him as he arrived there. But Richard Nugent was not interested in Remove cricket, nor in the amazing performances of a fat batsman. He tugged at Frank Nugent's sleeve.

"I say. Frank-!"

Nugent shook him off, without looking round. He was interested in Wally at the wicket, if his minor was not. But Dicky tugged again.

"Don't bother!" said Nugent, over his shoulder.

"I want you to lend me five bob!" grunted Nugent minor.

"Haven't got it! Sixpence do?" asked Nugent, still without looking round.

Snort from Dicky! Sixpence would not do! His major was generally reliable for a loan: but he had struck a bad patch this time. He departed, as he snorted. He had no time to cut to waste.

He went back to the House with a wrinkled brow. In the quad he met his friends Gatty and Myers, of the Second, and stopped them.

"You men got any tin?" he asked.

The two "men" shook their heads. It was in fact unusual for "men" in the Second Form to possess much in the way of "tin". When they had any, it generally went faster than it had come.

"Oh, scissors!" said Dicky, dismally. "What the dooce is a man going to do? Loder said tea for two at half-past, and there's nothing in his study but a loaf."

"Loder's a lout!" said Gatty.

"And a rotter!" said Myers.

"Yes - but what's a man going to do? Loder would square later, if I could borrow some tin now. But I can't!"

Gatty and Myers looked thoughtful.

"You'll have to snoop it somewhere!" said Gatty, at last.

"Yes: but where?"

"Ask me another!"

That was not very helpful, and Richard Nugent went into the House, still at a loss. It was a fact that, on desperate occasions, Dicky had been reduced to "snooping" supplies, when all other resources had failed.

Sad to relate, Dicky was now pondering, not on the lawlessness of such a resource, but wholly on its practicability. Time was getting short, and Loder had to have his tea. At that moment, Nugent minor was prepared to "snoop" tuck as ruthlessly as Billy Bunter himself. In fact, as Dicky went up the stairs, it was in the character of a lion seeking what Loder of the Sixth might devour! If there was a well-supplied study-unoccupied at the moment by its owner! - his problem was solved! For the nonce, Richard Nugent of the Second Form was nothing more or less than a bold bad brigand!

He looked into Coker's study in the Fifth, because Coker's study was well known to be like unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And he gave a gasp of relief at the sight of a bulky parcel on the table there. Had Coker or Potter or Greene been in the study, he would have put up some excuse for looking in, and cut promptly. But nobody was there. The parcel was there: and Coker and Co. were not there: and after one glance, Richard Nugent darted into the study and pounced on the parcel.

That parcel might have been in peril already, had Billy Bunter of the Remove been nearer than 15 Marine Parade, Pegg. Billy Bunter, certainly, would not have been on Little Side, astonishing the natives by knocking up runs. Quite possibly Billy Bunter might have nosed out that parcel. But if it had escaped Billy Bunter, it did not escape Nugent minor. Almost in a moment the string was jerked off, the paper unwrapped, and Coker's supplies revealed to Dicky's dazzled eyes. There was ham; there were eggs; there was cake; there were doughnuts; there were other good things. Rapidly Richard made a selection. In two minutes he was out of the study again, with every pocket bulging. In two minutes more, he was industriously preparing tea for two in Loder's study, in the Sixth.

And when Loder of the Sixth came in, with Walker, he was pleased, after a glance at a well-spread board, to bestow a nod of approval on his dutiful fag. When Coker of the Fifth came in, with Potter and Greene, his feelings were quite different from Loder's.

CHAPTER 26

BUNTER OF COURSE!

"HAND me that stump!"

"But-."

"No need to jaw, Potter-."

"But-."

"Pack it up, Greene - will you hand me that stump?" hooted Horace Coker. "I'm going to look for Bunter! I'm going to whop him! I'm going to wallop him! I'm going to spiflicate him! I'm going to-."

"After all, you can't be sure it was Bunter!" urged Greene.

"Don't be a silly ass, Billy Greene! Didn't that fat snooper snoop my apples the other day? Isn't he always snooping in the studies? If it wasn't Bunter, who was it?" roared Coker.

"Well, I suppose it was Bunter, but-."

"No supposing about it! It was Bunter!" hooted Coker, "and I'm going to give him a lesson this time that he won't forget till the end of the term. I'm going to wear out that stump on his trousers, see?"

"But Prout-!"

"Blow Prout!" hooted Coker.

"But you can't blow Prout!" Potter pointed out. "Prout gave you a book yesterday for kicking up a shindy in the Remove. Do you want him to give you the whole dashed Æneid from end to end?"

"I don't care if he gives me the whole dashed Æneid, with the whole dashed Georgics and the whole dashed Eclogues thrown in!" roared Coker. "I know I'm going to wallop that fat snooping worm Bunter for snooping in my study."

"Look here. I'm not sure it was Bunter." said Greene.

"Whoever it was, he's left jolly near half the stuff - that's not like Bunter-."

"I expect he couldn't cram any more into his pockets.

You jolly well know it was Bunter, as well as I do!" bawled Coker, "and he's going to have a lesson this time, by jove! I'll skin him!"

Coker gripped the cricket stump. He was eager, indeed yearning, to lay that stump round the fat person of Bunter of the Remove.

Even Coker had been a little subdued, the previous day, by his encounter with Quelch in Bunter's study, and by the "book" from Prout. Reluctantly, he had decided to let Bunter drop. And now-this! Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered, hardly equalled the wrath of Horace James Coker, as he gazed at the denuded parcel on his study table. It was Bunter, of course - how was Coker to doubt that it was Bunter, at the same old game? As a quantity of the tuck had been left, Potter and Greene did not feel so sure. But their doubt only confirmed Coker in his belief.

Opposition had that effect on Coker.

"Know where Bunter is?" he hooted. "Seen the fat little tick about anywhere?"

"Not a sign of him," answered Potter. "I heard somebody say that Bunter was playing cricket-."

"Don't be a silly ass, George Potter! Catch that frowsting, slacking fat tick playing cricket! Frowsting somewhere as usual. I'll frowst him! Come and help me look. Some of the chaps in the games-study may have seen him."

Coker, stump in hand, stalked out of the study. Potter and Greene followed him reluctantly. They did not want a row with Prout, if Coker did: and they had come in to tea, and would have preferred to

get on with what the unknown raider had left of the parcel. However, they followed Coker.

Horace Coker stalked down the passage to the games-study at the end, near the landing. That was the apartment where most Fifth-form men did congregate: and where Prout sometimes dropped in, for one of his chatty chats with his boys: chats which Prout enjoyed, never doubting that the Fifth-form men liked them as much as he did, and never guessing that they often wondered whether Old Pompous was wound up! Coker hurled open the door of the games-study and roared in:

"Any of you men seen Bunter - that fat flabby Remove tick? He's been snooping in my study, and I'm going to smash him - I'm going to spiflicate him - I'm going to break this stump on his trousers - I'm going to - OH!"

Coker had got as far as that, before he observed that there was a portly form standing in the games-study.

"Oh!" he repeated, in a gasp, as he gazed at Prout. There were nine or ten Fifth-form men in the room.

One of Prout's chats had been going on. It ceased abruptly as Coker roared in at the door.

Mr. Prout turned round to look at Coker. His eyes glinted at that member of his form. He scanned Coker's red and angry face, and the stump in his brawny grip. And he breathed hard and deep.

"Coker!" he boomed.

"I-I-I-," babbled Coker. "I-I-I'm sorry I-I interrupted, Sir -I-I-." Coker backed away.

"Stand where you are, Coker!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" groaned Coker.

Coker had to stand where he was. Potter and Greene, coming down the passage, walked on, with as casual an air as they could muster, as if they had no connection whatever with Coker. Coker was left to Prout.

"Coker! You are a foolish, unthinking, obstreperous boy!" boomed Prout. "You will not be permitted to take the law into your own hands in this manner, Coker."

"Oh! Yes! No!" stammered Coker.

"Only yesterday," boomed Prout, "a complaint was laid before me by another master, on account of your obstreperous conduct, Coker."

"I-I-I-."

"Nevertheless," continued Mr. Prout, a little less thunderously, "I understand your annoyance, Coker, if some junior boy has been - hem - pilfering food in your study. It is not a matter to be passed over, and I shall certainly look into it. You have said that Bunter, a Remove boy, has been in your study."

"I-I-I-!" stammered Coker.

Coker was prepared to whop, wallop, smash, and spiflicate Bunter, personally. But he did not want a "beak" to butt in, and drag in Bunter's beak. But it was rather too late for Coker to think of that now. Prout was "on" this. It was Prout's duty to look into the matter: and Prout was going to enjoy the performance of that duty, after his last encounter with Quelch.

"Answer me directly, Coker."

"I-I - yes, sir!" stammered Coker.

"Is anything missing from your study?"

"Only-only some food, sir." Now that Prout was taking it up, Coker wanted to minimise the matter as much as possible. "N-n-n-nothing much really, sir - only some ham and eggs and-and-."

"That is a serious matter, Coker."

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I-I-I don't really mind very much, sir!" gasped Coker, with a faint hope that Prout might let the matter drop. Prout was as likely to let it drop, as a dog was to drop a bone!

"Whether you mind very much or not, Coker, is immaterial!" boomed Prout. "I shall deal with this matter, Coker."

"But, sir -I-I-I-."

"Mr. Quelch has gone out, but immediately he returns, I shall place the matter before him, Coker." Prout's eyes glinted, as he anticipated placing the matter before Quelch! "You may leave it in my hands."

"But, sir-I-I--!" babbled Coker. "I-I-I don't want to complain to Bunter's beak, sir-I-I mean Mr. Quelch, sir-."

"That is for me to decide, Coker. Understand!" boomed Prout, "that I forbid you to deal with this matter yourself, Coker. I will not permit you to take the law into your own hands, Coker - I will permit nothing of the kind. If I find that you have sought out Bunter yourself, Coker, I shall deal with you with the greatest severity."

"B-b-b-but, sir-."

"That will do, Coker. You may go!"

Prout waved a plump hand in dismissal: and Coker went. He was feeling, as he went, that he would just as soon have laid that stump round Prout, as round Billy Bunter!

Prout, in the games-study, resumed his chat with the boys of his form. Blundell, Fitzgerald, Bland, Hilton, Price, and the others, listened with their usual air of admiring respect. Any fellow caught, as it were, in the games-study, when Prout elephantined in, practically had to listen.

But on this occasion Prout, to the relief of the Fifth-form men, cut it short. Prout was anxious to see Quelch at the earliest possible moment. Prout was annoyed with Quelch, and he was going to enjoy reporting Bunter to his beak: and demanding - emphatically demanding - that Remove boys should be restrained - yes, restrained, my dear Quelch - from pilfering - yes, pilfering! - food in senior studies. Prout rolled away in a state of cheery anticipation: never guessing how elated those Fifth-form men were by the view of his portly back. And in Mr. Quelch's armchair in Mr. Quelch's study, Prout sat and waited for the Remove master to come in. And the minute Quelch came in, he had the pleasure - or otherwise - of hearing what the master of the Fifth had to tell him.

BUMPS FOR BUNTER

"BEATS me!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hollow!" said Frank Nugent.

"The hollowness is terrific!" concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bunter - first in and not out!" said Squiff. "What ass was it said that the age of miracles was past?"

"No good trying to make it out, unless we all went to sleep and dreamed it," said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton laughed. He was as perplexed as any other man in the Remove. But he knew that he had a first-class bat in the fat junior who had always been considered a rabbit of rabbits, and he was going to play Bunter at Highcliffe on the morrow. It was all the more fortunate, because it looked as if Smithy might have to stand out, with his cracked wrist, and another man would be needed. And astonishing as it might be, every fellow who had watched Bunter in the practice game knew that he was a better bat than even Smithy. The practice game had been single-innings: and Bunter, first man in, had been not out at the finish: and he had knocked up sixty. Bob Cherry remarked that it had to be seen to be believed: but a crowd of fellows had seen it, and had to believe it.

"Bunter's going in to-morrow," said Harry. He almost beamed on the fat junior. The cricketers were talking it over, in the Rag, after the game. Wally Bunter stood with his hands in his pockets, and a cheery fat grin on his cheery fat face. Amazing as it was to the Remove fellows, he looked fresh as paint after a gruelling innings. But they were getting used to surprises now from this extremely surprising Bunter.

"That's a 'must'!" agreed Bob Cherry.

The Bounder, loafing in the window with a bandaged wrist, scowled. He cared little for the pain, but it hurt all the same. He was chiefly disturbed by the thought that the damage might keep him out of the Highcliffe match on the morrow. He was determined that it should not: but it might all the same. He did not join in the talk, but listened with a sneer on his face.

"Mind," went on Harry Wharton, warningly. "Mind you don't get Quelch's rag out in form to-morrow morning, Bunter, and get bunged into Extra again."

"I'll watch it!" grinned Wally.

"If you do, you can't cut as you did on Wednesday: Quelch will have an eye open."

"Eh! Did I? Oh! I-I mean - that's all right!" said Wally, hastily.

"Quelch won't bung me into Extra to-morrow."

"Well, you know what you are!" said Johnny Bull.

"You stick to prep this evening, Bunter, instead of frowsting in the armchair as usual, see?"

"I'll jolly well keep an eye on him," said Peter Todd.

"You roost in that armchair, Bunter, and I'll have you out of it so quick it will make your head swim."

"Do!" chuckled Wally.

Harry Wharton glanced round at the Bounder. "How's the wrist, Smithy?" he asked.

"Not bad. I shall be all right to-morrow," answered Smithy.

"Well, I hope you will," said the captain of the Remove, "but it looked rather bad, to me-."

"Perhaps you've got another man you'd like to shove in, in my place!" sneered the Bounder. "You seem to think that that fat fool can play cricket."

"The playfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, rats!"

"Bunter was first in and not out, Smithy-!" said Squiff, sharply.

"Pretty rotten bowling," said Smithy.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"That fat ass always was a rabbit at the game," said Vernon-Smith, "and he's a rabbit now, as far as I can see."

"None so blind as those who won't see!" remarked Bob Cherry. "You're talking rot, Smithy, old bean. It's queer enough to see Bunter come out like this: but give a man his due. Bunter's going to make the fur fly to-morrow at Highcliffe. "

"If he isn't stuck in Extra for slacking in prep, or snooping in the studies," sneered the Bounder.

"That's the danger-point!" grinned Bob. "If you get into Extra to-morrow, Bunter, we're going to slay you."

"The slayfulness will be-."

"Terrific and preposterous!" said Bob.

Wingate of the Sixth looked in at the doorway of the Rag, and glanced over the crowd of juniors in the room.

"Bunter here?" he asked. Wally looked round. "Here," he answered.

"You're wanted in your form-master's study," said Wingate. "Cut off. What have you been up to this time, you young sweep?"

"Nothing!" said Wally.

"Quelch looked as if it was something, not nothing," said Wingate, laughing, and he walked away, leaving Wally looking dismayed.

Wally, certainly, had no sins of commission or omission on his conscience. But he wondered whether some of Cousin Billy's sins might be coming home to roost, as it were, on the wrong fat shoulders: one more legacy from Cousin Billy that had not yet materialised.

Harry Wharton and Co. looked at him very expressively. Bunter had risen enormously in their estimation. They simply could not account for the change in him: but it was a very welcome as well as a very unlooked-for change. And - for the first time in history - Bunter was wanted, to play cricket! And now it looked as if trouble was coming.

"You fat villain!" said Bob Cherry. "What have you been up to? Snooping in somebody's study again?"

"Do you think I would snoop in a study?" hooted Wally.

"Eh?"

"I-I-I mean-," Wally stammered, remembering that he was Billy! "I-I mean, nothing of the kind. I haven't the foggiest idea what Quelch wants."

"Better go and see," said Harry Wharton, "and if you get Extra for to-morrow, and can't play at Highcliffe, you're going to be boiled in oil. Now you've shown what you can do if you like, you're wanted, especially as we may be losing Smithy."

The Bounder burst into a scoffing laugh.

"Better not make up your mind too soon to drop me out," he sneered.

"Oh, don't be a goat. Smithy," said Harry. "You're wanted if you can play, though we shall have to find room for Bunter now."

"That fat ass can't play cricket."

"Oh, rot! Cut off, Bunter, and see what Quelch wants."

The fat junior rolled out of the Rag, the Bounder's sneering glance following him as he went.

Wally made his way to the Remove master's study.

His plump heart sank, as he entered that study, and beheld the grim expression on Mr. Quelch's face. The gimlet-eyes glinted at him.

Obviously, the Remove master was not in a pleasant mood. Prout's report had not exhilarated Quelch. It had annoyed, irritated, and indeed exasperated him.

"Bunter!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Wally.

"Mr. Prout has reported you to me, on the charge of pilfering food in a senior study!"

"Oh, sir! I-I haven't-."

"Mr. Prout's report is explicit, Bunter! You have abstracted food from a Fifth-form study - Coker's study-."

"But-but-but I-I haven't, sir," gasped Wally, bewildered. This could hardly be one of Cousin Billy's sins coming home to roost: Cousin Billy had been away from Greyfriars since Wednesday. "I-I-I never-"

"That will do, Bunter! I am too accustomed to your prevarications to listen to you!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "You are so habitually untruthful, Bunter, that I can attach no importance whatever to anything you may say."

Wally, at that moment, would have given much to have been within kicking distance of a fat relative lolling on the sands at Pegg!

"But, sir-!" he mumbled. Mr. Quelch raised his hand.

"I repeat, Bunter, that that will do! I had hopes of improvement in you. Those hopes, evidently, were unfounded. Your greed and your untruthfulness are equally shocking to me, Bunter."

"Oh, sir! I-I-!" stammered the unfortunate Wally.

"You need say nothing, Bunter!" Quelch almost thundered. "You will be given detention for the half-holiday to-morrow. Bunter-."

"Oh!" gasped Wally. Cricket at Highcliffe seemed to fade like a beatific but unrealisable vision, as he heard that.

"Last Wednesday," went on Mr. Quelch, in a deep, deep voice, "you disregarded my order to go into Extra School, Bunter, and had the audacity - the effrontery - to go out of gates regardless of your form-master's authority. On Saturday afternoon, Bunter, you will do your detention task here, in this study, under my eye. You will come to this study, Bunter, immediately after dinner, and I shall set you a task in deponent verbs, in which you have always been backward."

"Oh!" gasped Wally, again. If there had been a wild idea in his mind of "cutting" on Saturday, as his fat relative had done on Wednesday, he had to forget it now. Quelch was giving him no chance of repeating Billy's performance.

"That is all, Bunter!" rapped the Remove master. "You may go."

"But, sir-."

"Go!" It was almost a roar. Prout, evidently, had had a most exacerbating effect on Quelch.

"If-if you'll listen to me, sir-."

"I shall not listen to your foolish and unscrupulous prevarications, Bunter. I shall cane you, if you do not leave my study instantly, without another word."

That was that! A dismal fat junior limped from the study, a gimlet-eye glinting after him as he went.

Wally rolled dismally back to the Rag. Every fellow there stared at him, as he rolled in, the Bounder with a sneer.

"Hallo, hallo hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"What did Quelch want you for, Bunter?"

"What's the verdict?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I-I've got detention - to-morrow afternoon!" groaned Wally. "Oh, crikey! I-I'm to sit in Quelch's study, under his eye - at deponent verbs! I-I don't mind the deponent verbs, but-but-but-."

"Oh, you fat ass!"

"Oh, you terrific fathead-!"

"Oh, you benighted bloater!"

"But I haven't done anything!" howled Wally. "Quelch thinks I've been snooping tuck in a Fifth-form study-."

"And you haven't?" asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"No! Nothing of the sort - I've done nothing-."

"Bunter never has done anything, when the beaks or pre's come down on him," remarked Vernon-Smith. "Innocent chap. Bunter!"

"I tell you-."

"You fat villain!" said Harry Wharton, in measured tones. "You've never been wanted in the cricket before, and now the very first time you're wanted, you go snooping tuck and getting detention-."

"But - I haven't-."

"Oh, pack that up!" snapped the captain of the Remove. Really, no one was likely to believe Bunter guiltless on such a charge!

"You fat, frabjous, footling-."

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fatheads," said Bob Cherry.

"We told that fat villain what he would get if he let us down to-morrow. Bump him!"

"I-I say, leggo! yaroo!" roared Wally, as indignant juniors collared him on all sides. "I tell you - whooop! I didn't - wow! will you leggo? - Oh, crikey!"

Bump!

"Ow! Stoppit! wow!"

Bump! bump! bump! bump!

"Ooooooooooh!"

Wally Bunter sat and spluttered for breath. And for the first time since he had exchanged identities with Cousin Billy, he rather wished that he had kicked Cousin Billy instead of falling in with his scheme. Greyfriars, for the moment, was really less attractive than 15 Marine Parade, Pegg.

CHAPTER 28

SMITHY MAKES A DISCOVERY

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH caught his breath.

He was startled.

And he had reason to be.

Smithy did not want to be caught in Mr. Quelch's study.

Very much indeed he did not. Considering how he was occupied, the consequence would have been altogether too painful. And Smithy, at that moment, was in Quelch's study, engaged in the agreeable task of emptying a bottle of gum into his form-master's inkpot!

Quelch was dining with the Head that evening. He was safe off the scene - absolutely safe. It was an opportunity not to be missed by a fellow who prided himself on giving back as good as he got.

The Remove master had not, after all, caned him for that kick bestowed on Sammy of the Second. The Bounder's bandaged wrist had disarmed him, as it were. Neither had he given him lines, in consideration of that damaged wrist. He had given him twenty lines of the *Æneid* to learn by heart, which really was letting him off lightly. In return for which Smithy, having ascertained beyond doubt that Quelch was safe over in the Head's house, was now trickling gum into his inkpot.

A spot of bother was ahead for Quelch the next time he dipped a pen into that inkpot! But even as the gum oozed out of the bottle into the ink, Smithy grinning as he watched it trickle, the door-handle turned.

Many fellows, so suddenly surprised, would have been caught red-handed. But the Bounder was always quick on the uptake.

He knew that it could not be Quelch. It could only be someone who was looking in to speak to Quelch, and who would depart when he saw that Quelch was not there. Smithy, with all his wits about him, sank down out of view behind Mr. Quelch's writing-table, as, the handle having turned, the door opened.

He was just in time.

He was perfectly cool. If he was seen there, the gum in the inkpot spelled "whops" from Quelch, later. But he expected that unwelcome newcomer to glance in, note that Quelch was not there, and go.

But the newcomer did not go.

Who he was, Smithy had no idea, as he could not venture to peer round the table. But whoever he was, he came into the study, and closed the door quietly behind him. Then he crossed over to the small table by the window where the telephone stood. Smithy heard him pick up the receiver.

The Bounder breathed hard. He knew now what it meant: it was not somebody who wanted Quelch, but somebody who wanted Quelch's telephone. Whoever he was, he was not going just yet.

Still, the Bounder felt safe. Whoever was standing at the telephone could not see him, unless he came round the big table, which surely he was not likely to do. Smithy remained still and silent, waiting for the unknown person at the telephone to put through his call, and depart.

He heard the whirr of dialling. Then he gave quite a jump, as a well-known fat voice reached his ears:

"That 15 Marine Parade, Pegg?"

It was not some master or prefect who had dropped in to use Quelch's phone. There is an old adage that while the cat is away the mice will play: and it was not unknown for some venturesome junior to

borrow a beak's phone when the beak was safely off the scene. The Bounder had done so himself, on more than one occasion. Now apparently, Bunter was doing so, aware, like Smithy, that Quelch was dining with the Head. If that fat voice was not Bunter's, it was a twin to it.

Beaks or prefects would have been alarming: but there was nothing alarming in Bunter. Smithy did not care two straws whether Bunter saw him in Quelch's study or not. Certainly he did not like Bunter - less than ever, of late! - and had never before been pleased to hear his fat voice. But in the present circumstances he was glad to hear it. It came as a relief.

Another voice, on the telephone, followed those fat tones. Smithy was near enough to the instrument to catch what was said at the other end. It was a feminine voice that came.

"Yes! Mrs. Smallbones' boarding-house."

"Will you please ask Bunter to come to the phone?"

"Bunter?"

"Mr. W. G. Bunter, now staying with you. Please tell him his cousin wishes to speak to him."

"Certainly. Please hold on."

Herbert Vernon-Smith almost wondered whether he was dreaming, as he heard that. Unless his ears had deceived him, it was William George Bunter at the phone. Yet he was asking to speak to W. G. Bunter at Mrs. Smallbones' boarding-house at 15 Marine Parade, Pegg.

The Bounder had been about to rise to his feet, careless whether Bunter saw him or not. But he was too astonished to stir.

A fat voice came through from Pegg. If the Bounder had been astonished before, he was amazed as he heard it.

For that fat voice was a reproduction of the fat voice that had just spoken in Quelch's study.

"That you, Wally?" came the fat tones. "Yes, Billy-Wally speaking."

The Bounder felt as if his head was turning round. "Look here, Wally, what are you ringing me up for, you fathead? Tain't safe, from the school. And I hadn't finished dinner-."

"Yes, I knew I'd find you in, at a meal-time-."

"Well, what's up? I don't want all the pie to be gone before I get back. Tain't safe, too-."

"It's all right - Quelch is dining with the Head, and I'm on his phone, Billy. Safe as houses."

There was a grunt on the wires. Safe or not, Billy Bunter did not relish being called away from the dining-table at 15 Marine Parade. Vernon-Smith, fairly overwhelmed with astonishment, rose to his feet. He stared across Mr. Quelch's writing-table at the fat figure at the telephone.

Unmistakably, it was Bunter. The plump back was turned towards Smithy, and he had only a rear view. But seen from any angle, the plump proportions of Bunter were easily recognisable.

Bunter did not look round, and he did not see Smithy, though the Bounder was now in full view if the fat head had turned. Smithy, his eyes wide open with astonishment, stared at the fat back. It was Bunter - yet it was Bunter who was answering from the other end! Smithy did not merely stare at the fat figure - he goggled at it! He felt quite dizzy.

"That's all very well," came the fat voice from Pegg, "but what do you want, anyhow! If this means that you're tired of Greyfriars, Wally, and want to change back, you can forget all about it. I'm getting on fine here, and I'm jolly well not changing back till Monday, as we arranged."

"Will you let a fellow speak, Billy, you ass-?"

"You just listen to me, Wally. Didn't you agree to carry on at the school, while I had a holiday here?"

"Yes! But-."

"You jolly well know you did! You jolly well can't back out now. What have you got to grumble at, I'd like to know. You like Latin, you like lessons - you like all the rot they cram into a fellow's head at Greyfriars. You jolly well know you do. I can jolly well tell you that I ain't changing back before Monday, so pah!"

"You fat chump-."

"Oh, really, Wally-."

"I'm not tired of Greyfriars, you ass! I just love it. I'd like to carry on here in your place till the end of the term, if I could."

"Oh! That's all right, then! I jolly well wish you could! I'm having a good time here, Wally. The grub is spiffing. You can have as many extras as you like, too. Of course, they're going down on your bill. You don't mind that, old chap?"

"You gormandising, goggle-eyed gollywog, if you're running up a long bill for me to pay-."

"I hope you're not going to be mean, Wally. I say, old Prout nearly copped me getting away last night, but I dodged him. You watch your step at Greyfriars. Wally - you haven't my brains, you know. If it all came out, I should get into an awful row up before the Head. Goodbye-."

"Hold on, you fat chump-."

"Look here, all the pie will be gone-."

"Hold on, I tell you. Look here, Billy, shut up and listen to me. I've got landed in detention to-morrow afternoon."

"He, he, he!"

"Do you think that's funny, you image?" hooted Wally. "Well, you have to take the rough with the smooth, old chap. I'm sorry - he, he, he! You didn't ring me up to tell me that, did you? He, he, he! What have they lagged you for, Wally?"

"Somebody's been snooping tuck in Coker's study, and they put it down to me-."

"Look here, Wally, this won't do, you know. You'll get me a bad name, when I come back! Fellows will think it was me-."

"You fat, frabjous, footling fathead, it's because you snoop tuck that it's put down to me, and because you're such a fibber that Quelch wouldn't listen to a word I said!" hissed Wally into the receiver.

"Oh, really, Wally! Don't you be cheeky! I've told you before that that's not the way for an office chap to talk to a public-school man-."

"Will you shut up and listen, you fat chump? Wharton's picked me to play cricket at Highcliffe to-morrow - got that! I can't play cricket if I'm detained."

"Why not cut, like I did on Wednesday? Fat lot I care for Quelch! I'd cut, as soon as look at him! What you want is some of my nerve, Wally."

"You blithering owl, I couldn't cut if I wanted to. Quelch is going to stick me in his own study at detention, under his eye, and it's because you cut on Wednesday, you fat foozler. All your fault from beginning to end. But you can make it all right if you like, Billy."

"Eh?"

"I want you to change back for the afternoon, to-morrow."

"Wha-a-t?"

"I've thought it out," said Wally, eagerly. "I'll cut out after third school - I'm not asking you to have any lessons-."

"I should jolly well think not!" came an indignant howl. "You know the old spinney, across the road? Well, I cut out after third school, and you join me there. We change, and you come in here to dinner - I stay out. See? The team will go over to Highcliffe without me, - I couldn't be seen going with them, of course. But I can fix that up all right - join them afterwards at Highcliffe, and of course they'll suppose Quelch has let me off - see? Never mind that now. After the game, I can slip away, and cut off to the spinney, instead of coming back here with the team. It will work like a charm, if you're here to sit in Quelch's study in my place-." "I'll watch it!"

"Be a sport, Billy," pleaded Wally, "after all, you're getting out of lessons all this while, while I'm here in your place. It's only one afternoon in detention-."

"Well, I like your cheek-!"

"I'm wanted in the game at Highcliffe, Billy. Wharton's losing one of his best bats - Smithy's got himself crocked. You'll do it, Billy?"

"No jolly fear!"

"Billy, old chap-!"

"Well, you've got a nerve!" It was almost a yell of indignation from the other end, "asking a fellow to squat under old Quelch's eye, while you play cricket! Blow cricket, and blow you! I'll jolly well watch it!"

"Billy - be a sport, Billy-."

"Yah!"

That expressive monosyllable was the last remark from 15 Marine Parade. There was a whirr on the phone. An indignant fat Owl had jammed back the receiver, and rolled back to the dining-room, anxious to get back to what might remain of the pie. In Mr. Quelch's study at Greyfriars, his double stared at a dead telephone. Wally gave a sigh.

It would have worked, had Cousin Billy fallen in with the idea. But he had had only a faint hope that Cousin Billy would! And Cousin Billy hadn't!

He turned from the telephone, and made a step towards the door. Then he came to a sudden halt, at the sight of the Bounder of Greyfriars staring at him across Mr. Quelch's writing-table, with a grinning face. Up to that moment he had not dreamed that he was not alone in the study. His eyes popped at Smithy. The Bounder had heard every word: and his extraordinary secret was a secret no longer.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Bounder chuckled. "So that's the game, is it? All the fellows have been wondering - but who'd have guessed? I remember you now, Master Walter Bunter - it's a long time ago, but I remember you came here, and fellows took you for that fat Owl - ha, ha! And now - ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder chuckled, loud and long. He had wondered whether he was dreaming, when that talk on the telephone began. But it had dawned on him, as the talk proceeded, how matters stood. He had utterly forgotten the existence of Billy Bunter's cousin Wally - till now! Now he remembered him!

"By gum! what a game!" chuckled Smithy, as Wally stood looking at him in silence. "Billy bagging a holiday in term time - and you spoofing all the school, taking his place here. And nobody suspecting a thing! Oh, gad! I wonder what Quelch would say."

Wally set his lips. He did not expect much in the way of consideration from the Bounder: the fellow he had knocked out in the scrap behind the gym, and who had so savagely resented his defeat.

"Well, you know, now!" he said, quietly. "Billy wanted a holiday - and I wanted a week here, as much as he wanted to loaf on the sands. No harm done, that I know of. But you know now, and I'm not asking anything at your hands, Vernon-Smith - I'm not asking you to keep it dark."

The Bounder laughed again. "Not?" he asked, banteringly.

"No! Shout it out all over the school, as soon as you like."

With that, Wally walked across to the door. "Hold on a minute," said Smithy.

Wally glanced round.

"I don't know what would happen to you," said Smithy, "but Billy Bunter would get into the most fearful row that the fat idiot's ever tumbled into, if it came out. We've rather a rule in the Remove that we don't give a man away to the beaks. I'm not giving Bunter away."

"Oh!" said Wally. He drew a deep breath.

"Thanks!"

He left Mr. Quelch's study without another word. The Bounder was left to carry on his operations with the gum bottle: and he did not follow, till the last drop had oozed into Mr. Quelch's inkpot.

CHAPTER 29

NOT POPULAR

"I SAY, you fellows-!"

"Buzz off!"

"But I say-!"

"Oh, get out!"

"You see-!"

"Get out!" roared five voices all at once.

Five fellows, in No. 1 Study in the Remove, glared at the fat figure in the doorway, blinking at them over its spectacles. Obviously, Bunter was not persona grata in that study, at the moment.

That day, Bunter had been quite popular. He had astonished the Remove by his performance on Little Side: he had risen tremendously in their estimation: and above all, he had solved a problem for the captain of the form. Smithy, whether he liked to admit it or not, was crocked: a fellow with a damaged wrist, who could hardly hold a bat, could not be played at Highcliffe. The Bounder seemed to refuse to get it down, as it were: but he would have to get it down, all the same: and already Wharton had marked him off the list. But that, after all, was not the disaster to the team that it might have been: for a new and unexpected batsman was there to take his place - and a better batsman than Smithy at his best! It was amazing that that batsman was Bunter - it was almost incredible - but there it was: and tough as it was on Smithy, it was all right for the cricket - till it transpired after all that Bunter couldn't play - for such a reason as detention for snooping in the studies!

Whereupon Bunter's new popularity dissolved and vanished.

If he had been crocked like Smithy it would have been unfortunate, but it couldn't have been helped. But a fellow could help snooping tuck - even Bunter could help it, with an effort! But, much as he seemed to have changed in many respects, he was apparently the same old Bunter, in that line: and the captain of the Remove was left to solve the problem of a batsman to replace Smithy. The Famous Five were discussing that problem in No. 1 Study, just before prep, when the fattest member of the form loomed in the doorway. And the looks they gave him showed that Bunter's brief popularity had faded quite out.

"I've just looked in to say-!" persisted Wally. "You've just looked in to get the booting of your life, you fat freak, if you don't cut!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "You fat frump! You pernicious porker! You knew I was banking on you! It's the first time you've ever been of any use to the form, and you let us down-."

"But I never-."

"Oh, get out!"

"It's some sort of a mistake. I-I suppose Coker thought so, and Prout thought so, and Quelch wouldn't listen to a word: but I never-."

"Pack that up" growled Johnny Bull. "Think Quelch would be likely to listen to you, when he knows that you can't open your mouth without a crammer rolling out?"

"I tell you I never went near Coker's study-."

"Yes: you said the same when you pinched his apples the other day, and he got after you," said Bob Cherry. "Give us a rest."

"Kick him!" said Johnny Bull.

All the Famous Five, in fact, were feeling like kicking Bunter; but hardly as much as Wally was yearning to kick a fat relative at 15 Marine Parade, Pegg!

Billy Bunter's reputation was too much for him! In taking Billy's place in the Remove, he had taken the place of a dog with a bad name. Nobody doubted for a moment that he had snooped tuck in Coker's study. Nobody had the least idea of the urgent exigency which had driven Dicky Nugent to borrow half the contents of Coker's parcel. It was, of course, Bunter, and Billy Bunter's untruthfulness was too well known, for anything that Wally might say on the subject to carry any weight.

"Jolly good idea, Johnny," said Bob Cherry. "Let's!"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, do listen to a chap!" urged Wally.

"I don't know who snooped in Coker's study, but I never did-."

"Give us a rest!"

"It was somebody else-."

"Rats!"

"Don't you see, if we could spot who it was, it would be all right for to-morrow," said Wally, eagerly. "You fellows might be able to get on to it - you know the chaps here better than I do-."

"What?"

"I-I-I mean-."

"Well, what do you mean?" demanded Harry Wharton, staring at the fat junior. "How do we know the chaps here better than you do, you fat ass?"

"I mean - I don't mean-I-I-." Wally stammered, as he realised the slip he had made. "What-what I mean is, I-I can't guess who it was, but perhaps some of you might be able to guess-."

"Easiest guessing competition I've ever heard of," said Bob Cherry. "My guess is that it was you, you fat owl: and you jolly well know it was."

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"I tell you-!" almost wailed Wally.

"That's enough," said Harry Wharton. "You've let us down over the cricket, with Smithy crooked, because you couldn't keep your fat paws off another fellow's tuck. Boot him!"

"I say-yaroooooooh!" roared Wally. "I say-keep off - oh, crikey - whoop!"

Wally had had a faint hope, when he looked in at No. 1 Study, that something might come of it. What came of it was a rush of the indignant five: and the fat junior dodged out of the study and fled from lunging feet. Only three of them landed on him before he escaped: but they landed hard, and the yell that floated back, as Wally disappeared up the passage, undoubtedly sounded like William George Bunter on his top note.

He limped into No. 7 Study. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton had come up for prep. and they both looked at him with disfavour as he limped in.

"Well, what are you yowling about?" snorted Peter.

"Those fatheads in No. 1 - booting a chap-!" gasped Wally.

"Serve you jolly well right! You fat, frabjous, footling, foozling, flabby freak," said Peter in measured tones. "You've never been wanted in the cricket before, and the very first time you're wanted, you have to go guzzling in a Fifth-form study-."

"I didn't!" yelled Wally.

"You jolly well did! Don't spill any more crammers about it, or I'll take a cricket stump to you!" snorted Peter.

"I tell you-!"

"Shut up!" hooted Toddy, "any more crammers, and you get the stump, Bunter. That's a tip!"

Wally Bunter left it at that. Evidently, there was nothing doing. He sat down to prep with a glum fat face. That glorious prospect of playing in a School match, during his brief stay at Greyfriars, had faded out - gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

Billy Bunter could have saved the situation, had the spirit moved him so to do, by changing back for Saturday afternoon. Really, that would have been only fair, as it was on Billy's reputation that Wally was hooked. But Billy Bunter was, as usual, wholly concentrated on the comfort of Billy Bunter: and all that had come of the telephone-call to 15 Marine Parade, was Smithy's discovery of the facts, which did not improve matters. Wally was a cheerful fellow, and he had been enjoying Greyfriars immensely: but during prep that evening in No. 7 Study, his chubby face wore a fixed expression of gloom and pessimism.

Prep over, Peter and Dutton went down: but Wally did not follow them. For once he was not disposed to mingle with the cheery crowd in the Rag. He did not want to hear any more of what the Remove fellows thought of him.

After his study-mates had gone down, he sat in the armchair, thinking it over. A picture was in his mind of the cricket ground at Highcliffe: white figures on the green: the clicking bat, the whizzing ball. He sighed deeply. It would have been such a catch: the highlight of his brief career as a Greyfriars man: something for him to remember when he was back in the office in the City. And he repeated the deep sigh as he thought of it.

"Not enjoyin' life, old fat bean?"

Wally started, and looked up quickly, at that mocking voice at the door. He knitted his brows, as he saw the Bounder, and a gleam came into his eyes. But he answered, quietly:

"No!"

Vernon-Smith, lounging in the doorway, eyed him curiously. Since that scene in Quelch's study, the Bounder had been thinking. Perhaps he derived comfort from the discovery that it was not, after all, the fat and egregious Owl of the Remove, who had defeated him in that scrap behind the gym. His look now was mocking, but it was not inimical. He seemed sardonically amused.

"You're keen on the cricket to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I daresay you don't get as much of it as you'd like when you're *chez-vous*."

"No."

"That fat rabbit of a cousin of yours could see you through, if he liked. But he wouldn't, of course."

"No!"

"Not jolly old Bunter!" said the Bounder, laughing. The only number Bunter knows is Number One. By gum!" He stared at Wally. "You're as like as two peas from the same pod - I couldn't tell the difference, even now I know. Like him in other ways, perhaps! Did you snoop Coker's tuck?"

"No!"

"You won't get anybody to believe that unless you tell them the rest!" chuckled Smithy.

Wally's replies had been monosyllabic. Now he made no reply at all. The Bounder went on:

"Was it you locked in this study yesterday, and the other fat ass that I booted? Of course it was!" Smithy chuckled again. "What a game! Well, you're out of the cricket now. So am I!" He held up a bandaged wrist. "I've got to bite on the bullet - I can't handle a pen, let alone a bat. You crocked me with that ball."

"My fault?" asked Wally, sarcastically.

"No: mine. But you don't bag my place in the eleven after all. Is that what you're looking so joyful about?"

Wally rose to his feet.

"Mind getting out of my study, Vernon-Smith?" he asked, quietly.

"Your study?" peered the Bounder.

Wally coloured. He grasped the door, and gave the Bounder a grim look. Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped back into the passage, just in time, as the door slammed. The Bounder walked away down the passage laughing.

CHAPTER 30

BEASTLY FOR BUNTER

BILLY BUNTER leaned back in a deck-chair, on the sunny beach at Pegg, stretched out his fat little legs, brushed off an inquisitive fly that seemed attracted by the stickiness on his fat visage, and grinned a beaming grin at the beach, the trippers, the sea, and the landscape generally.

Bunter was enjoying life that Saturday morning.

It was a glorious summer's morning. The beach was crowded. The sun blazed. The sea rolled bright and blue. Quelch and lessons were a mile away. There was a crowd of bathers: but Bunter did not feel like bathing. There was a crowd out in boats: but Bunter did not feel like boating. There was a crowd walking on the sands, but Bunter did not feel like walking: Bunter felt like stretching his fat and lazy form in a deck-chair: and he did.

If he gave a thought to Greyfriars, it was only to remember the Remove time-table: Latin with Quelch, maths with Lascelles, and French with Mossoo, that morning in the Remove: and to thank his lucky stars that he was nowhere near the form-room. Cricket in the afternoon was a compensation to many fellows for Latin, French, and maths, in the morning: but Billy Bunter was not one of those fellows: slogging at cricket under a hot sun would have attracted him no more than Latin, French, or maths. What Billy Bunter really liked was to laze: and now he was lazing to his fat heart's content. The only fly in the ointment, was that this glorious laze had to end on Monday. On that day he had to change back with Cousin Wally. But William George Bunter was not the fellow to meet troubles half-way. Every minute of laziness was so much to the good: and Bunter was prepared to enjoy every minute of it.

From a sticky pocket, he helped himself from time to time to a sweet, sticky, sugary biscuit. He munched happily.

Wally's two pound notes had already gone the way of all cash that came into Billy Bunter's fat hands. But any number of "extras" could be piled up at 15 Marine Parade. Bunter had been piling them up with a cheery disregard of expense that made Mrs. Smallbones look on him as a very desirable guest. Few guests at 15 Marine Parade were so regardless of innumerable additional items going down on the bill. Billy Bunter could afford to be regardless: as he was not even going to see that bill, let alone settle it. That was a pleasure in store for Wally when they changed back. Bunter liked the best: and he liked a lot of it. There was generally something edible in his pockets when he rolled out of 15 Marine Parade, to bask in the sun on the beach.

"Spiffing!" said Bunter, addressing space.

It was not an elegant expression. But it expressed the fat Owl's feelings. Unlimited grub, and unlimited laziness: what could have been spiffinger?

Once for a moment Billy Bunter's beaming fat face clouded with a frown, as he remembered Wally's telephone-call of the previous day.

"Cheek!" murmured Bunter.

The bare idea of changing back for the afternoon would have made him laugh - if it had not made his frown. Wally, really, could not have known his fat relative so well as the Greyfriars fellows knew him, if he had fancied for a moment that Billy would come to the rescue like that!

However, Billy dismissed Wally from mind, and beamed again. It was getting towards lunch-time. Munching one sticky biscuit after another made no difference to Billy's anticipations of lunch. The fellows would have come out of the form-room by this time, at Greyfriars. Latin, French, and maths were over for the day: and had Bunter been where he should have been, his fat thoughts would have been dwelling upon dinner. Now they were dwelling - more happily - on lunch, at 15 Marine Parade. It would soon be time to roll back to that establishment, where the food undoubtedly was good, and where a fellow reckless of piling up extras could make it as ample as he liked.

But it was not yet time to get a move on: and the fat Owl lolled in the deck-chair, chewed sugary biscuits, and beamed.

"Oh! Here you are, Bunter!"

The Owl of the Remove gave so sudden a jump, at that unexpected voice, that he almost rolled out of the deck-chair on the sand. He blinked round hastily through his big spectacles. "Smithy!" he ejaculated.

It was the Bounder of Greyfriars. He had been sauntering along the beach, looking about him very keenly. Now he had stopped, and stood looking down at Bunter with a sardonic grin on his face.

Billy Bunter blinked at him very uneasily. In the present circumstances, he did not want any Greyfriars eyes to fall upon him. And he was surprised to see Smithy there. Pegg was within bounds on a half-holiday: but it was not yet dinner-time at the school.

"I looked in for you at 15 Marine Parade!" explained the Bounder.

"They told me you were on the beach, so I came along, see?"

"Oh! Yes! No!" stammered Bunter. "I-I say, Smithy, you're-you're making a mistake! I-I ain't Bunter."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Nothing of the kind," explained the fat Owl. "I'm very like my cousin Billy, you know - that's how it is. I don't know you."

"You don't know me!" ejaculated Smithy.

"Not at all! Never seen you before, that I know of! Who are you?" asked Bunter, blinking at him like an owl through his big spectacles.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Smithy.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! How should I know you, when I ain't Bunter?" demanded the Owl of the Remove. "I'm my cousin Wally - I-I mean, I'm Bunter's cousin Wally - that's what I mean, of course - I'm down here for a holiday from-from the office - see? Are you a Greyfriars man?"

"Am I?" gasped Smithy.

"Well, how should I know, as I don't know you," said Bunter. "I don't even know your name, Smithy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you just push off, see?" snapped Bunter. "I don't like talking to strangers, Smithy. You'd better get back to Greyfriars, too - Pegg ain't in bounds till after dinner, as you know jolly well. You'll have Quelch after you."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped the Bounder. "You're not yourself, and you don't know me: but you seem to know Quelch."

"Oh! No! Who's Quelch?" gasped Bunter. "Never heard the name before, that I know of, Look here, Smithy, don't you get thinking it's me, like Prout did the other day. It ain't!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"You see, I'm Wally!" burred Bunter. "My cousin at Greyfriars is me - I-I mean, I ain't him - he's me - I mean, he's him and I'm me-."

The fat Owl was getting a little confused. "You see, we - we're awfully alike-. Don't you remember when he came to the school once, fellows took him for me - that's how you're making this mistake, Smithy-."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can cackle!" snorted Bunter. "Like your cheek to come up and speak to a fellow you don't know, and cackle in his face. But you never had any manners, Smithy. You can jolly well sheer off - I'm going back to my boarding-house for lunch, now."

It was hardly time for lunch: but Bunter was anxious to get away. He heaved his weight out of the deck-chair, and made one step to roll off. But he made only one. The Bounder's left hand gripped his shoulder in a grip of iron.

"Hold on, Bunter," said Smithy, "Shan't!" howled Bunter. "Leggo!"

"Like to come for a walk with me?"

"No: I jolly well wouldn't."

"That's a pity!" grinned the Bounder, "because you're coming all the same."

"Beast! Leggo!"

"You're coming back to Greyfriars."

Yell, from Bunter!

"You silly ass! Leggo! Think I can go into the school while Wally's there? I-I-I mean, I'm Wally, you know? I-I ain't a Greyfriars chap at all - I don't want to go to Greyfriars - I-I'm a stranger there - Leggo!"

"Well, you can tell Quelch that, and it will be all right!" chuckled Smithy.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I-I-I say, Smithy, don't be a rotter, you know. It would get old Wally into an awful row! I-I ain't thinking about myself, of course - but poor old Wally-."

"Well, look here," said Smithy. "You're coming, if I have to boot you all the way. But if you like, I'll tip your cousin to get out before you get in. What about that?"

"I-I'd rather stay here," gasped Bunter. "Look here, Smithy, you jolly well mind your own business, see?"

"I'm makin' this my business," explained the Bounder.

"Now, are you coming, you fat fraud, or do you want me to boot you-like that?"

"Yaroooh!"

"Coming?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter decided to come.

CHAPTER 31

UNEXPECTED!

"WHARTON-."

"Yes, Smithy."

"You won't want me to-day."

"Sorry, old fellow! But you know it couldn't be done."

Harry Wharton spoke in his most conciliatory tone. He could feel for a fellow, a keen cricketer, left out of a cricket match on a half-holiday. And he did not want a "row" with the Bounder.

The Famous Five were strolling in the quad, while they waited for the dinner-bell, when Vernon-Smith came in at the gates. He had gone out immediately after third school, with Tom Redwing. He came in alone. Of which the chums of the Remove had not taken note, not being particularly interested in the Bounder's proceedings. But they rather expected black looks when Smithy came up to speak about the cricket.

But the Bounder did not seem in a mood for a "row".

He smiled.

"Oh, quite!" he said. He glanced at his bandaged wrist. "I couldn't play marbles to-day, let alone cricket. Can't be helped! It's just one of those things."

Which came as rather a relief to Harry Wharton and Co.

"It's tough, old chap," said Bob Cherry.

"The toughfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but what cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks."

"Fixed up another man?" asked Smithy.

"Well, I was going to play Bunter, of course, after the show he put up yesterday," said Harry, "but the benighted fat ass has got lagged for snooping tuck, and that washes him out. So-."

"I wouldn't be in a hurry to wash him out," interrupted Vernon-Smith. "Bunter might be let off this afternoon-."

"Not likely!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Bob Cherry. "That fat chump has been rather in Quelch's good graces lately. Quelch might stretch a point."

"Um!" said Harry Wharton, very dubiously. It did not seem likely, to him.

"Bunter's the man you want, if you can get him!" said Vernon-Smith: a remark that made the Famous Five stare. Only the previous day Smithy had been declaring almost at the top of his voice, and regardless of the evidence of his eyes, that Bunter couldn't play cricket.

"Glad you can see it," said Harry Wharton, rather drily. "You seem to have changed your mind about him, Smithy, all of a sudden."

The Bounder laughed.

"Why not?" he said. "A fellow who never changes his mind hasn't much mind to change."

"True, O King!" said Bob, "but-."

"But what's put it into your head that Bunter may be let off his detention?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Oh, just an idea!" said the Bounder, airily. "Look here, if Bunter does get off, even at the last minute, you want him, don't you?"

"Right on the wicket," said Harry, "but-."

"Leave it at that, then!" suggested Smithy. "You'll have another man on the spot if Bunter isn't available. I've an idea that he will be, all right."

"Blessed if I know why," said Harry, puzzled, "but we'll certainly leave it at that, Smithy. We get off to Highcliffe after dinner, and if Bunter's able to follow on before play begins, he goes in, and well be jolly glad to have him."

"The gladfulness will be preposterous!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Know where he is now?" asked Smithy.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That podgy object leaning on the elm over there isn't a sack of tallow, though it looks like one!" he answered: with a nod towards a fat figure that leaned on one of the old Greyfriars elms at a distance. "There's Bunter."

The Bounder nodded, and walked away: leaving the Famous Five considerably puzzled. Why Smithy fancied that Bunter might be let off, and why he cared a boiled bean about the matter at all, they could not make out. But they certainly hoped that he was right. Bunter - the amazing Bunter who had astonished the natives in the practice game, was undoubtedly wanted in the Highcliffe match: if they could get him.

Wally Bunter looked up with a clouded brow, as Vernon-Smith came up to him, under the elm: and his eyes glinted.

The fat junior was not feeling merry or bright that morning. And he was in no mood for the Bounder's jeers.

"Oh, here you are," said Smithy.

"Here I am!" grunted Wally.

"Enjoying your own company?" grinned the Bounder. "More than I'd enjoy yours!" snapped Wally. "You'd better leave me alone, Vernon-Smith. That's a tip."

"Feeling like cricket to-day?"

Wally did not answer: but he sighed involuntarily. Undoubtedly he was feeling like cricket! And if that fat, footling relative of his had consented to change back for the afternoon, he could have played cricket. But he suppressed that sigh at once, and gave the Bounder a dark look.

"Look here, Vernon-Smith, if you're asking to have your head punched-."

"Not at all!"

"Well, clear off, then, and give a fellow a rest."

The Bounder laughed, and did not clear off. He shoved his hand into his pocket, and drew out a folded note. Wally glanced at it.

"That's for you," said Smithy.

"What the dickens-?"

"Look at it!"

Wally, in wonder, took the note and unfolded it. He looked at it. Then he gave a jump, or rather a bound.

"Oh!" he gasped.

His eyes glued on that note! It was written in a well known hand: a "fist" which Remove fellows were wont to compare with the trail of a spider that had crawled out of an inkpot: in pencil, on a leaf torn from a pocket-book. If the calligraphy had not been recognisable as Billy Bunter's, the spelling certainly would have been.

It ran:

DEER WALLY,

I'm waiting for you in the spinnie. Cum out as soon as you get this noat. I'm going to do as you asked me on the tellyfone, old chap. We can change hear in the spinnie, just as you sed. I'm not doing this because that beest Smithy says he will walk me into the skool if I don't! Nuthing of that sort. I'm doing it out of sheer kindness because I want you to have a good tyme. Cum at once or I shall be lait for dinner.

BILLY.

Wally Bunter read that epistle through, and then he read it through again. Then he looked at Vernon-Smith's grinning face in sheer wonder.

"You-you've done this-!" he stammered.

"Little me!" agreed the Bounder.

"But-but-I-I-. I don't catch on-."

"Easy!" drawled the Bounder. "I walked over to Pegg, and walked that precious cousin of yours back with me. I don't think he enjoyed the walk - I had to kick him several times-."

"You've left him in the spinney?"

"He's waiting there."

"Not likely! He would cut off the minute your back was turned."

"Not under Reddy's eye!" grinned the Bounder.

"Reddy's waiting with him, in case he felt an urge to wander. I had to tell Redwing - but that's all right - Reddy's as mum as an oyster. So if you're feeling like playing cricket at Highcliffe this afternoon-!"

Wally gasped.

"Oh! Yes! Rather-. But-!"

"Wharton will play you if you turn up on time. He's said so. You can't leave with the team," the Bounder chuckled, "but you can get after them - as soon as you like. You'll change in the spinney with that fat freak - that frump will roll in to dinner - you'll stay in the spinney. You'll have to cut tiffin, but Reddy's got a bundle of sandwiches. I'll smuggle your flannels out to you - you'll turn up at Highcliffe in flannels - not in those jolly old checks that Bunter's been sporting at Pegg. Like the idea?"

Wally's eyes danced. Evidently, he liked the idea. "But-but-!" he gasped.

"But what?"

"You - you're doing this! I-I thought you'd got your back up - that you'd rather punch my head than do me a good turn - I-I - You're a good chap, Smithy - a real sportsman!" said Wally, gratefully. "I-I-I'd like to thank you - thank you no end-."

"Speech may be taken as read!" said Smithy. "Cut off, or you'll keep Billy waiting for his dinner - and that would be serious."

Wally chuckled, and lost no time in cutting off. Old Gosling, at his lodge, glancing at him as he went out of gates, smiled a crusty smile: seldom had old Gosling seen a schoolboy looking so merry and bright. Herbert Vernon-Smith stood looking after him, as he went, with a curious expression on his face. Wally wondered why he had done this: and perhaps the Bounder wondered a little himself. But he was feeling, at all events, glad and satisfied that he had done it.

The bell for dinner was ringing, when Tom Redwing came in. with a smiling face: and with a fat figure rolling at his side that was anything but smiling. Old Gosling stared at a fat face which, so far from being merry and bright, was utterly disgruntled. Billy Bunter rolled in glumly and reluctantly to take his double's place for the afternoon. But he rolled in: and the dinner-bell, at least, was a cheering sound to his fat ears.

CHAPTER 32

AFTER ALL

"BUNTER!" called out Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter did not heed.

The dinner-bell was ringing. True, Billy Bunter would much rather have rolled into 15 Marine Parade, Pegg, than into the House at Greyfriars School. But dinner was dinner! In other matters Billy Bunter might be, and often was, unpunctual. But not at meal-times. Heedless of the captain of the Remove, he rolled past the Famous Five, heading for the House-and dinner.

"Bunter, you fat ass-."

Billy Bunter rolled on, passing by his form-captain's voice like the idle wind which he regarded not.

Harry Wharton stared after him: and then made a stride after him, grasped a fat shoulder, and spun him round.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, "leggo!"

"You fat chump, listen to me!" exclaimed Harry impatiently. "I was going to speak to you, but you cut out of gates-."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat ass?"

"Oh! Nothing! I say, let's get in-."

"Smithy-."

"Blow Smithy!" yapped Bunter. The fat Owl was not feeling very amicable towards Smithy, just then! But for Smithy he would have been rolling into 15 Marine Parade, with the prospect of a prolonged laze on the beach that sunny afternoon: instead of being booked to sit in a study under a gimlet-eye!

"Smithy thinks that Quelch may let you off this afternoon-."

"Oh! Does he?" Bunter grinned again. "He, he, he!"

"What are you he-he-heing about, you footling Owl?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, the bell's going-."

"Never mind that for a minute," said Harry.

"But I do mind!" objected Bunter.

"Quelch might go easy - Smithy thinks so, at any rate," said Harry.

"You haven't been such a howling dud in form as usual-."

"Oh, really, Wharton-."

"I know Quelch has noticed it," went on Harry Wharton. "There's a chance, at any rate, that he may go easy. If he does let you off, you come over to Highcliffe with us-."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

"If he lets you off, after we're gone, you follow on," said Harry.

"You can cut across on a bike. See?"

"Oh, crikey!"

"If you turn up in time for play, it's all right! Got that?"

"He, he, he!"

"You blithering bloater, where does the cackle come in?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently.

The Famous Five stared at the gurgling Owl.

Apparently Bunter found something amusing in Harry Wharton's remarks: why, was a mystery to the Co. They were quite unaware that another Bunter would be at Highcliffe that afternoon: a Bunter who, at that moment, was disposing of a bundle of sandwiches in the spinney not ten minutes' walk from Greyfriars!

"Don't you want to play cricket?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Oh! Yes! Of - of course! I say, you fellows, the bell's stopping!" said Bunter, anxiously. "Do come in - we don't want to be late for tiffin: at least, I don't."

And Billy Bunter re-started for the House. The Famous Five followed him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's Quelch in the doorway," murmured Bob Cherry. "He's got his eye on Bunter! May be going to let him off."

"He doesn't look it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Quelch, certainly, did not look it! His look was severe: and as the juniors came in, he rapped out sharply:

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

He felt an inward tremor, as he blinked steadily at Mr. Quelch through his big spectacles.

Only Smithy and Redwing knew the strange secret.

Everyone else took Bunter at face value, so to speak. But the fat Owl felt uneasy under that penetrating gimlet-eye. Wally had been in the form-room with Quelch that morning. It was a different Bunter that now met the gimlet-eye.

If Quelch guessed-

But Quelch was not likely to guess. There was not the remotest suspicion in his mind that there had been a change of Bunters.

"Bunter! You will, as I have already told you, go to my study immediately after dinner," said Mr. Quelch. "As you deliberately disobeyed my order on Wednesday, Bunter, you will remain under my observation this afternoon."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"That is all," said Mr. Quelch.

Bunter rolled on.

"Looks like Quelch letting him off!" grunted Johnny Bull, as the chums of the Remove followed. "Smithy's an ass."

"Blessed if I know what put the idea into his head," said Harry.

"Bunter couldn't cut, as he did on Wednesday. He can't get to Highcliffe unless Quelch lets him off: and he didn't sound like it."

"While there's life there's hope!" said Bob.

"Hope springs eternal in the human chest, as the English poet remarks," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the hopefulness does not seem terrific."

Those remarks from Mr. Quelch certainly did not indicate that he had any idea of letting Bunter off. And it was absolutely certain that Bunter would have no chance of "cutting", under that gimlet eye. Still, the Co. hoped that Smithy would somehow turn out a true prophet. With the Bounder out of the team, Bunter - the new and surprising Bunter who had revealed such unexpected quality as a cricketer - was certainly wanted at Highcliffe: if he could get there. So they hoped for the best: though with a very faint hope. At dinner, the Bounder grinned at a fat face across the table. Billy Bunter responded to that grin with his most devastating blink. He would gladly have punched that grin off Smithy's face with a fat fist, had it been practical politics.

However, the dinner was good, which was a consolation.

Billy Bunter disposed of helping after helping, and was comforted.

When the Remove came out after dinner, Harry Wharton and Co. lost no time in preparing to get off to Highcliffe. But the captain of the Remove lingered for a last word with the fat Owl.

"Look here, Bunter, stumps will be pitched at two. If you have any luck - I know it doesn't look like it, but if you have - come after

us on a bike. I'll keep your place open right up to the last minute."

"He, he, he!"

"You blithering, blethering, benighted Owl, what are you he-he-heing at?" hooted the captain of the Remove.

Billy Bunter was not feeling amused that afternoon.

The prospect of sitting at a detention task, under Quelch's gimlet-eye, was not calculated to raise any fellow's spirits. But the idea of both Bunters turning up on the cricket ground at Highcliffe struck him as funny, and he he-he-he'd.

"BUNTER!"

It was Quelch's voice.

The fat Owl blinked round dismally at Mr. Quelch through his big spectacles.

"Yee-es, sir:"

"Follow me to my study, Bunter."

"Oh, lor'!"

The fat Owl trailed sorrowfully after his form-master.

Harry Wharton cast a perplexed glance after him. The previous day, Bunter had seemed tremendously keen on cricket: overwhelmed by the detention that barred him from the Highcliffe match. Now he was clearly not thinking of cricket, but was wholly concerned with the detention. It was really very puzzling.

"Blessed if I make that fat ass out at all," said Harry Wharton, as he joined the cricketers in their brake. "He was keen as mustard yesterday-now he seems just the same old Bunter he always was Bother him!"

The brake rolled off for Highcliffe. Bunter was dismissed from mind. Nobody expected to see the fattest member of the form again, until they returned to Greyfriars after the match. But it was the unexpected that was scheduled to happen.

Highcliffe School was in sight, and Frank Courtenay, the junior captain of Highcliffe, in the gateway, was waving a hand to the Greyfriars fellows in the brake, when Bob Cherry, glancing back along the road, uttered a sudden yell:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What-?"

"Bunter!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Every eye looked back. At a distance, but coming on fast, was a bicycle: recognisable as Smithy's handsome and expensive jigger. In the saddle was a fat figure in flannels: and a pair of spectacles, low on a fat little nose, gleamed back the sunshine.

"Bunter! My hat!"

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Then Quelch must have let him off after all-."

"Old Smithy had it right!"

"Looks like it!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Who'd have thought, a week ago, that anybody would be glad to see Bunter turn up for a cricket match!" he said.

"Echo answers who!" said Johnny Bull.

"Esteemed echo answers that the who-fulness is terrific," said

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the gladfulness is preposterous."

Hands were waved at the fat cyclist, as he came on almost like the wind, rapidly overtaking the brake. He grinned up at the cricketers

as he came alongside, released a fat hand from the handle-bars, and waved.

"So you got off after all, you fat chump?" roared Bob Cherry. Wally grinned a grin as wide as Billy Bunter's. "Sort of!" he called back.

"Jolly good show!"

"The good-showfulness is-."

"Terrific and preposterous!" chuckled Bob.

"Smithy lent me his bike. I'm on time, if you want me, Wharton-."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You're wanted all right, fathead." he said.

"Didn't we make that clear, with the bumping we gave you yesterday for getting detention?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no doubt that Bunter - this particular Bunter - was wanted. That another Bunter was sitting dolorously in Mr. Quelch's study at Greyfriars, sadly and sorrowfully plodding through an exercise in deponent verbs under a gimlet-eye, no one was likely to imagine. The fattest face among the Greyfriars cricketers was also the brightest, as they arrived on the Highcliffe ground. And when Harry Wharton had performed that first duty of a cricket captain-winning the toss - and elected to take first knock, the fattest member of the team opened the innings for Greyfriars with the captain of the Remove.

Wally Bunter took the first over from Rupert de Courcy of the Highcliffe Fourth. The "Caterpillar" winked at Courtenay as he went on to bowl. Why the visitors were playing Bunter was a mystery to him: from what he knew of the Owl of the Remove, he expected to send him home with the first ball. He smiled as he delivered it.



HE GRINNED UP AT THE CRICKETERS AS HE CAME ALONGSIDE, RELEASED A FAT HAND FROM THE HANDLE-BARS, AND WAVED

But he stared instead of smiling the next moment, as there was a cheery click of willow and leather, and the ball whizzed like a bullet from the bat. Harry Wharton made a movement - but a fat hand waved him back. There was no need to run.

"Oh, gum! " said Bob Cherry, watching from the pavilion. "A boundary to start with, my beloved 'earers! Can that chap bat?"

"The canfulness is terrific."

"Good old Bunter!"

Peter Todd rubbed his nose.

"No good trying to make this out!" he said. "Bunter was always the rabbitest rabbit that ever rabbited. And now-."

"Now he's turned into a jolly old Bradman!" chuckled Bob. "By gum! There he goes again! Can that porpoise bat!"

"Good old Bunter!"

"Bravo, Bunter!"

Never had such shouts impinged upon Billy Bunter's fat ears on a cricket-field. And - if the Remove fellows had only known it! - they did not impinge upon those fat ears now! Far away in a study under a gimlet-eye, Billy Bunter was dismally disentangling deponent verbs, while his double piled up runs for Greyfriars. And perhaps it might not have consoled him even could he have known that Wally was twice not out, with almost innumerable runs to his tally, and that that match at Highcliffe was a glorious victory for Greyfriars with wickets to spare.

CHAPTER 33

KEEPING IT DARK!

"I SAY, you fellows."

"Oh, here you are!"

"Roll in, old fat man!"

It was Monday, after class.

Five members of the Greyfriars Remove had gathered in No. 1 Study for tea. A sixth place laid at the festive board indicated that a guest was expected. That guest had arrived - a little late. Immediately after Mr. Quelch had dismissed the Remove that afternoon, the fattest member of the form had rolled out of gates. Gosling, at his lodge, noticed a fat figure roll out. When, considerably later, he noticed a fat figure roll in, Gosling did not even dream that it was not the same. Neither did anyone else, except Smithy who glanced at it, and grinned. The Bounder was aware that Wally Bunter was gone, after his brief and eventful career as a Greyfriars man: and that Billy of that ilk was returning, reluctantly, to his old place in the Remove, and Quelch, and Latin, and French and maths.

Still in happy ignorance of that circumstance, the Famous Five gave Bunter their cheeriest looks as his fat figure appeared in the doorway of No. 1 Study. They had asked Bunter to tea, and another had arrived: but in outward semblance it was the same Bunter. And Bunter was popular in that study now. Had not Bunter contributed more than any other cricketer in the Remove, to that glorious victory at Highcliffe? Was he not a rod in pickle for St. Jim's in the next match? Was he not in every way a new and much more agreeable Bunter? He was - or, at all events, the Co. had no doubt that he was.

He grinned as he rolled into the study.

The fat Owl had returned reluctantly to his old haunts.

Much, very much, he would have preferred to laze away the sunny days on a golden beach, and to pile up innumerable extras at 15 Marine Parade. But there was, alas! no help for it: he had had to change back, when Wally's time was up: and here he was. But there was a spot of balm in Gilead. Wally had told him that he was asked to tea in No. 1 Study: and a blink through his big spectacles revealed that the festive board was unusually well spread. The sight of food was always cheering to Billy Bunter.

"You're late, old top," said Bob Cherry, "but we've waited for you. Still lots of time for a go at the nets after tea."

"Oh, really, Cherry-."

"You'll have to stick to cricket like glue, now you've turned out such a jolly old Bradman." said Frank Nugent.

"He, he, he!"

The juniors looked at him.

"Anything funny in that?" asked Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he Yes - I mean no! I say, you fellows.

I'm ready for tea. The sea air gives you a jolly good appetite." said Bunter.

"The sea air!" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Oh! I mean-." stammered Bunter. "I-I mean -I-I haven't been near the sea to-day, of course. Nothing of the kind."

"We know you haven't, as you've been in form with us." said Johnny Bull, staring at him.

"Of-of course not." said Bunter. "I haven't just walked back from Pegg, either. I haven't been near Pegg. I-I just took a stroll after-after class, you know. That's all. Nowhere near the sea, or Marine Parade; or-or anything. He, he, he! I say, you fellows, that ham looks prime." Bunter sat down at the table, and drew the plate of ham towards him, and blinked at it appreciatively. "I say, that's as good as they had at Marine Parade-."

"Marine Parade?"

"I-I mean it-it's as good as we have at Bunter Court! But aren't you fellows going to have any?" asked Bunter, as he commenced operations with knife and fork.

His hosts gazed at him.

They had certainly been going to have some. But it did not look as if they were going to have some now.

"Tuck in, Bunter," said Johnny Bull, with a faint inflection of sarcasm in his voice.

"Thanks, old chap! I will!" assented Bunter: and he did.

Harry Wharton and Co. sat down to tea. As the ham was already requisitioned, they proposed to content themselves with an egg each: of which there were six on the dish. Unluckily Bunter helped himself to three of them, to go along with the ham. The hospitable smiles in No. 1 Study faded a little.

The Famous Five had grown quite tolerant of Bunter, of late. He had seemed to have changed so much: and so much for the better. But they could not help feeling that Bunter, at the present moment, was the same old Bunter they had always known.

"I say, you fellows, pass the jam." The ham and eggs did not last the fat Owl very long. It was soon a jammy Bunter.

Harry Wharton and Co. disposed of a rather frugal tea, while their guest disposed of a very extensive one. Bob Cherry was the first to rise from the table.

"Coming down to the cricket?" he asked.

"Yes, rather! Come on, Bunter."

"Eh?"

"You're coming down to the nets?" asked Harry.

"What?" Bunter blinked at him. "Tain't a compulsory day."

"What difference does that make?" asked Harry, with a stare.

Certainly he had anticipated no such objection from the keen cricketer who had knocked up a bagful of runs at Highcliffe on Saturday.

"Oh, really, Wharton-."

"Come on, old fat man!" said Bob.

"I'll watch it!" said Bunter. "You fellows can go and slog at the nets if you like! You won't catch me there."

The Famous Five stared at him in sheer wonder.

Unheeding their stares, Billy Bunter blinked over the table through his big spectacles, as if in search of further provender. So far, he had eaten only enough for two or three fellows.

"I say, isn't there a cake?" he asked.

"Hem! No."

"Well, I think you might stand a cake, when you ask a fellow to tea," said Bunter. "I like cake! I jolly well had a jolly good cake for tea every day at Marine Parade."

"Marine Parade?"

It was the second time that mysterious allusion had slipped from the fat Owl. The juniors could only wonder what it meant.

"Eh? Did-d-d-did I say Marine Parade?" stammered Bunter. "I-I don't mean Marine Parade, of-of course! I-I've never heard of the place."

"Oh, my hat!"

Bunter, forgetful even of cake for the moment, blinked rather anxiously at the staring five. He realised that he had made a slip: and that he had better be careful about making slips, if he was to keep his secret. If that secret came out, and reached the ears of authority, Bunter hardly knew what would happen - but he was quite sure that he did not want it to happen.

That secret had to be kept dark - very dark! Bunter was going to keep it dark! He had his own inimitable way of keeping things dark. "I say, you fellows, don't you get the idea into your heads that I've been staying at Marine Parade at Pegg!" he exclaimed. "I-I haven't been near the place - never even heard of it. I've been here at Greyfriars all the while I was at Pegg-."

"What?"

"I-I mean, all the while I wasn't at Pegg! Haven't you jolly well seen me here every day, all the while I was staying there? I suppose you can believe your own eyes?" said Bunter. "If Smithy's said anything-."

"Smithy?"

"Well, he said he would keep it dark," said Bunter.

"Not that he cared whether I got a whopping or not, the beast, but he promised Wally-."

"Wally?"

"I-I-I mean-!"

"Wally!" repeated Harry Wharton. "What about Wally?"

"Oh! Nothing! Nothing at all! You see-."

"Do you mean that cousin of yours, who was so like you, who came here, once, a long time ago?"

"Oh! No! I-I haven't seen Wally for months, or-or heard from him-."

"You had a letter from him last week." said Bob.

"Oh! Yes! I mean-."

"Well, what do you mean, you burbling owl? Is Wally about?" asked Bob.

"Oh! No! He never came down to Pegg for his holiday, and I never saw him there, and he certainly hasn't been here-."

"Here?" gasped Bob.

"Nothing of the kind. The fact is, we're not really very much alike," said Bunter. "Nobody would take him for me if we changed clothes-."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Besides, we never changed clothes. Why should we? It was me all the time, and if Smithy says anything, it's because Wally punched him behind the gym-."

"Eh?"

"I-I mean, because I punched him. It was me all the time. Don't you fellows get saying anything!" exclaimed Bunter, anxiously. "Why if Quelch knew, he would go right off at the deep end-."

"If he knew what?"

"Oh! Nothing! Absolutely nothing!" said Bunter, hastily. "Wally hasn't been here, of course, and I haven't been at Marine Parade, and I haven't just got back-."

"Oh, great pip!"

"The great-pipfulness is terrific!"

"I suppose you fellows can take a fellow's word," said Bunter, warmly. "I haven't been anywhere near Marine Parade, and I haven't come back to-day because Wally's holiday is up. Never had

the faintest idea of changing with him to get out of lessons for a week-."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Besides, I never did it to get out of lessons - it was a favour to Wally, you know, out of sheer kindness of heart - just my usual generosity, you know. I'm the fellow to be generous to a poor relation, and he was jolly keen to put in a week here, especially as he was keen on the cricket, and-."

"You-you-you-!" Harry Wharton fairly stuttered. "Your cousin Wally - the chap who's so much like you - I remember he was mistaken for you when he came here once - so he was having a holiday at Pegg, and you-you changed over with him - Oh, holy smoke!-."

"Nothing of the kind!" yelled Bunter, in alarm. "Don't you get saying anything of the sort. Smithy's keeping it dark, and I don't want any jaw about it. If Quelch heard - well, you know Quelch! He wouldn't take my word that it was me here all the time, if he found out that it was Wally! You know him - suspicious! He's doubted my word before-."

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter. They gazed at him, dumbfounded. They understood, at last.

It was amazing. But many things that were still more amazing, were explained now-now that they knew. Indeed, had they been aware that Billy Bunter's double had been so near at hand as Pegg, they thought that they might have guessed. But they had not been aware of that: and certainly they had not guessed.

Now they knew!

As they gazed at him, as if mesmerised, Billy Bunter rose from the table. There was nothing more to eat: and the fat Owl had not yet loaded up to the Plimsoll line, as he had been accustomed to do of late at 15 Marine Parade.

He hoped that there might be something going, in Lord Mauleverer's study.

He rolled to the door, the Famous Five still gazing at him. In the doorway, he looked back, giving them a last anxious blink.

"I say, you fellows, don't you get jawing," he said.

"You can take my word for it that it was me here all the time - Wally never came down to Pegg at all: he had his holiday at - at Blackpool - I mean, he never had a holiday. But you know Quelch - he's suspicious! So don't you get jawing."

With that final injunction, Billy Bunter turned in the doorway, to roll away: the Famous Five still gazing at him as if mesmerised. But as the fat Owl started to roll, they woke to life, as it were. Five fellows jumped after Bunter, as if moved by the same spring. Five feet landed all at once on the plumpest and tightest trousers at Greyfriars School.

"Yarooooooh!"

Billy Bunter did not roll away. He flew.

Luckily for Billy Bunter, no suspicion ever crossed Quelch's mind. But unluckily for him, Quelch, after a week of Wally, expected much better things than of old from Billy - which led to innumerable spots of bother for the fat Owl in the form-room. Wally, at his desk far away, had happy recollections of Greyfriars: Billy, in the Remove form-room under a gimlet-eye, wished that he had never thought up that wonderful scheme at all! - the outcome was much less satisfactory to Billy Bunter than to Billy Bunter's Double!