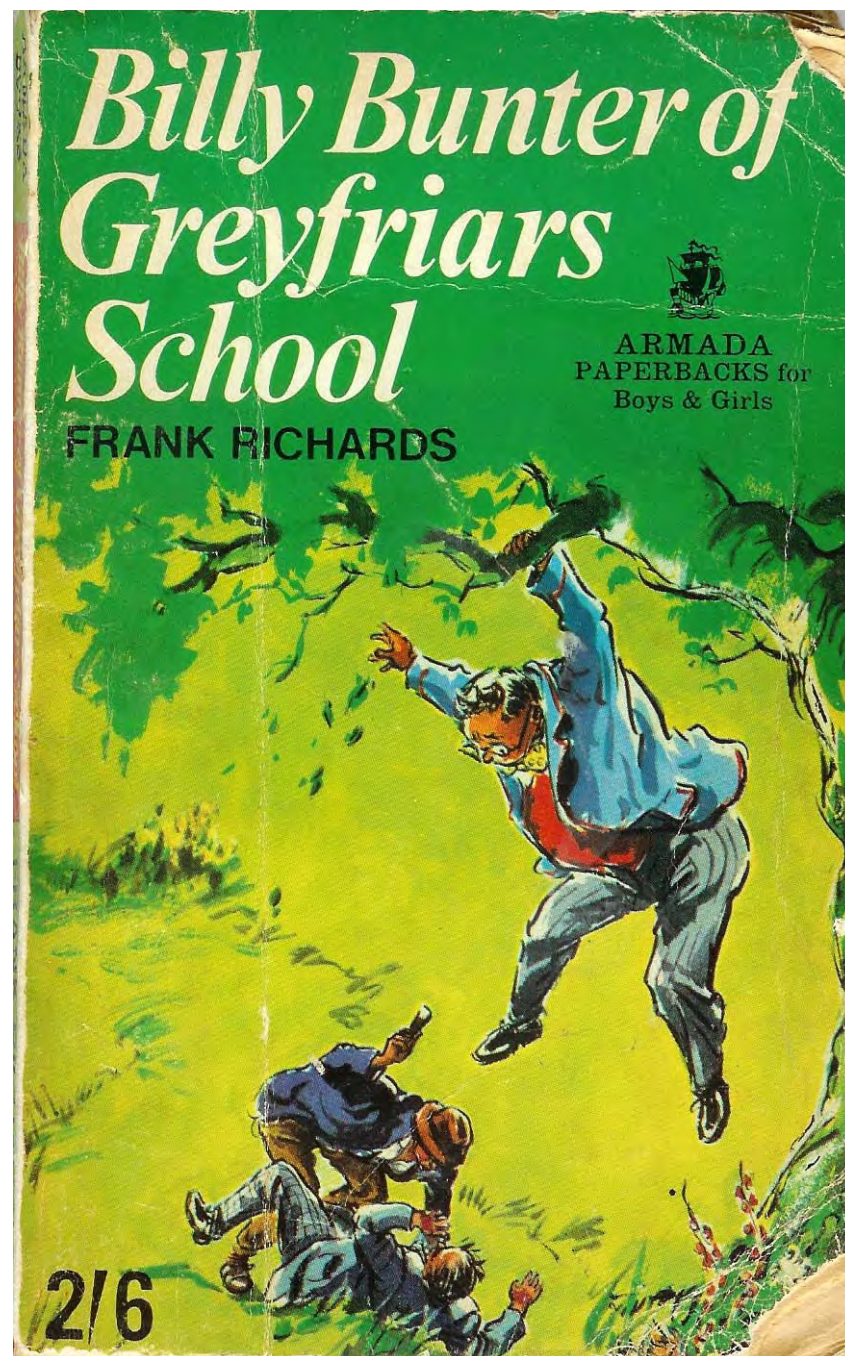




CHAPTER I

BUNTER KNOWS

“BUNTER!”

Mr. Quelch’s voice was not loud but deep. It was heard distinctly by all ears in the Remove form-room at Greyfriars School: excepting apparently, one pair of very fat ears.

Billy Bunter did not answer.

It was the second time Quelch had called his name. Quelch seldom had to call on any boy in the Remove twice. Now he had called twice, and still in vain. Bunter was silent.

There was a stirring in the Remove, as fellows turned their heads to look at Bunter, wondering why he did not reply. Really, it was not safe for any Remove man to pass Quelch by like the idle wind which he regarded not. Yet there sat Billy Bunter, staring straight at his form-master through his big spectacles, but otherwise not deigning to take the slightest notice of him!

It was a warm afternoon. Outside the sun shone from a blue sky. Within, it was a little stuffy, and a little drowsy. Mr. Quelch was expounding English history to his form, but seldom had the Greyfriars Remove been less interested in the sayings and doings of earlier generations. Lord Mauleverer had nearly nodded off, but caught himself just in time. Herbert Vernon-Smith had yawned once - but, catching Mr. Quelch’s gimlet-eye, was very careful not to yawn again. Harry Wharton and Co. could not help thinking of the cricket field, where they would have felt ever so much livelier. Many eyes turned, longingly, on the form room clock. Its hands seemed to crawl.

Perhaps Mr. Quelch would have been as pleased to dismiss his form, as the Remove would have been to hear the word of dismissal. Schoolmasters tire as well as schoolboys. But Quelch had his duty to do: and Quelch was a whale on duty. Right up to the last minute, Quelch was going to drive English history into reluctant heads. Every man in the Remove, that drowsy afternoon, would have been quite satisfied with a much less dutiful form-master.

“Bunter!”

Quelch’s voice was a little louder, and a little deeper.

“Third time of asking!” murmured Bob Cherry, and some of the juniors grinned. Bob did not intend that whisper to reach Quelch’s ears. But that afternoon Quelch’s ears seemed to be as sharp as his eyes.

“Cherry!” he rapped,

“Oh!” Bob jumped, as his name was shot at him like a bullet. “Oh! Yes, sir.”

“Were you talking in class, Cherry?”

“Oh! No! Yes! I—!” stammered Bob.

“Take fifty lines for talking in class, Cherry!”

“Oh! Yes, sir!

Nobody else ventured to whisper, Quelch, evidently, was getting shirty. Harry Wharton, ‘who had opened his lips to breathe a warning to Bunter, closed them again. Johnny Bull, who had lifted a foot to give the fat junior a warning shove under the desks, dropped it to the floor. Frank Nugent, about to drop a book and thus startle the Owl of the Remove into activity, decided not to do so. Quelch’s gimlet-eye ‘was glittering: and no fellow wanted to draw it specially upon himself.

“BUNTER!”

For the fourth time, Henry Samuel Quelch called upon the fattest member of his form: and this time his voice was not only both loud and deep, but very loud and very deep. Indeed it rather resembled that of Stentor of ancient times, It woke the echoes of the form-room, It could have been heard in the corridor outside the door and in the quadrangle under the windows. Yet, strange to relate, it produced no effect whatever on Billy Bunter.

William George Bunter sat silent, staring indifferently at Mr. Quelch. A ray of sunlight from the window was reflected on his big spectacles, making them gleam almost like headlights. No doubt that was why Mr. Quelch could not see that Bunter’s eyes were closed behind those big glasses! To all appearances, Bunter was staring him straight in the face --- but appearances ,are sometimes deceptive. Actually, the warmth and drowsiness of the afternoon, and perhaps the drone of Quelch’s voice, had been too much for Bunter, and he had dozed off. Mauleverer very nearly had. Bunter quite had.

And so it came to pass that, in the midst and shadows of sleep, Bunter did not hear the voice of his form-master and, naturally, did not reply thereto.

Certainly Quelch’s voice, when he raised it, was calculated to awaken most sleepers. But sleeping was one of the things that Billy Bunter did well. There were many things at which Bunter was not good. He was not good at games. He was not good in class. He was not good even at such simple, easy things as telling the truth. But when it came to sleeping, Epimenides himself had nothing on Bunter.

Billy Bunter had gone to sleep sitting up, though the gleam of his spectacles gave him the appearance of being wide awake. Fellows sitting near him knew how the matter stood. Fellows further off didn’t-and Quelch didn’t! Quelch gazed at him, in perplexity, and growing anger. Quelch was not a man to be lightly disregarded in his form.

“BUNTER!”

Quelch almost roared. Still Bunter did not reply. Still he did not stir. But, as if in answer to his form-master, a sound came from Bunter:

Snore!

Bunter generally snored when he slept. In the Remove dormitory, Bunter’s deep snore was wont to rumble on through the night, like the unending melody in Wagnerian music—not perhaps quite so musical! So far he had not snored in class. Now he did!

Mr. Quelch gave an almost convulsive start. The truth dawned on him. He realised that Bunter’s eyes were shut behind those gleaming glasses—that Bunter had fallen asleep in class.

“Bless my soul!” ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

Snore! Snorrrrrrrre! Having started, Bunter seemed bent on making up for lost time. His snore rumbled and echoed.

“The boy is asleep!” exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Snore! came from Bunter—only too clearly the boy was asleep!

There was a subdued chuckle in the Remove. It died away at once, as Mr. Quelch’s gimlet-eye gleamed round. It was not, so far as Mr. Quelch could see, a matter for merriment.

Quelch was angry. And like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry! He was indignant. Here was Quelch, labouring on a hot afternoon to impart valuable instruction to his form—and there was Bunter, utterly indifferent to instruction, oblivious of it, fast asleep in form! The thunderous frown on Quelch’s brow was like

unto the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner.

"Bunter!"

Snore!

"Skinner! Awaken that boy!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly, sir!" said Skinner.

Skinner reached over to Bunter to awaken him. Harry Wharton or Bob Cherry would have given the fat Owl a shake: but Skinner was not a good-natured fellow. Skinner's method of awakening Bunter was to take a fat ear between finger and thumb, and pull. He took a good grip on Bunter's ear—there was plenty of room for it—and pulled. It awakened Bunter. It awakened him quite suddenly. Billy Bunter came out of the land of dreams with a jump and a yell.

"Yaroo! Ow! Leggo my ear, you beast! Wow! I say, you fellows—yow-ow. Ow! I say, tain't rising-bell! Ow!" Bunter jerked his fat ear away from Skinner, rubbed it, and blinked round him dizzily, apparently under the impression that he was in bed in the Remove dormitory. "Ow! Beasts! I tell you tain't rising-bell——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Remove.

"Bunter!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, lor'!" The Owl of the Remove realised where he was. He blinked at Mr. Quelch in terror. "Oh! I—I say—I—I wasn't asleep, sir! I—I heard every word you were saying, sir! Every sis-sis-syllable."

"You were asleep in class, Bunter."

"Oh, no, sir. I—I had my eyes shut, because—because I listen better with my eyes shut, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I never missed a word, sir."

The look that Henry Samuel Quelch gave that member of his form might have been envied by the fabled basilisk.

"You heard what I was saying, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I was listening very carefully, it was so—so interesting," groaned Bunter.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, "I was speaking on the subject of the Royal Oak, Bunter. Tell me what you know of the Royal Oak."

Bunter blinked at him. So far as his hazy memory served him, Quelch had been droning about the reign of King Charles when he nodded off to sleep. He was unaware that while he slumbered Quelch had got to the Battle of Worcester, and the escape of Charles the Second by hiding in the branches of an oak tree—thereafter called the "royal oak."

Of that Royal Oak Billy Bunter knew nothing at all. Possibly he had heard of it before, but if so he had forgotten it—Bunter had an unlimited capacity for forgetting anything he learned. Nevertheless, the name was familiar to him. He had seen it on a sign-board, many a time and oft. There was a public-house on the Courtfield road which, like dozens of others, was called the "Royal Oak." Greyfriars fellows passed it whenever they went to Courtfield. Bunter had seen it often enough. But he was quite astonished to hear Quelch mention it in the form-room!

"Did—did—did you say the—the Royal Oak, sir?" he stammered. Really he was not quite sure that he had heard aright! A public-house was a most extraordinary thing for Quelch to be telling his form about!

"I did!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Do you know what the Royal Oak is, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Certainly." The subject was no doubt extraordinary, for a Greyfriars form-room, but it seemed an easy one to Bunter. "Of course, I've never been in it, sir."

"You have never been in it!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

“Oh, no, sir! It’s out of bounds.”

“Out of bounds!” repeated Mr. Quelch.

“Besides, I wouldn’t, even if it wasn’t, sir!” said Bunter. “My father wouldn’t like it.” Mr. Quelch gazed at him.

“Bunter! Is this intended for impertinence, or what? Answer me at once—what is the Royal Oak?”

“It’s a pub, sir.”

“A—a—a what?” stuttered Mr. Quelch.

“A pub, sir! I—I mean a public-house!” amended Bunter, hastily.

“Ha, ha, ha!” shrieked the Remove. They really could not help it. Evidently Billy Bunter had not heard a word of what Quelch had said of the Battle of Worcester and the Royal Oak, and he fancied that Quelch was alluding to the “pub” of that name on the Courtfield road.

“Silence!” thundered Mr. Quelch. “Silence in the form! Bunter, how dare you make me such an answer?”

“You—you asked me, sir!” stuttered Bunter. “It—it really is a pub, sir—I mean a public-house, sir—all the fellows know. Did—did—didn’t you know, sir?”

“Bunter! After class, you will write out, one hundred times, that King Charles the Second hid in the Royal Oak after the Battle of Worcester.”

“But, sir—!” gasped Bunter.

“Silence!”

“But I—!”

“If you say another word, Bunter, I shall cane you.” Bunter did not say another word! Billy Bunter suppressed his indignant feelings. But his indignation was deep. Quelch had asked him what the Royal Oak was. Bunter had told him. Yet he was given a hundred lines—for nothing, so far as Bunter could see. What was the use of a fellow answering questions correctly in the history class if he got a hundred lines for giving the right answer?

It was a resentful and indignant Owl that sat through the remainder of the history lesson, till at length the welcome hour struck, and the Remove were dismissed.

CHAPTER II

MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

“I SAY, you fellows!”

“How,” asked Bob Cherry, “did Bunter know that we had a jug of lemonade?”

And the Famous Five chuckled.

“Oh, really, cherry.” Billy Bunter blinked into No. 1 Study. “I didn’t know—but I’ll have some, old chap!” And Bunter rolled in.

Harry Wharton and Co. of the Remove were looking, and feeling, a good deal more merry and bright than they had looked, and felt, in the history class. Frank Nugent had brewed lemonade in No. 1 Study, and lemonade was grateful and comforting on a warm afternoon. The chums of the Remove were disposing of it before they went down to the nets for cricket practice, when Bunter happened.

“Go it, old fat man,” said Bob, hospitably. “Trot out your best jewelled goblet for Bunter, Franky.”

Drinking vessels, in the study, seemed somewhat limited. That was not uncommon in a junior study. Breakages would occur. Bob had a tumbler, Johnny Bull had a teacup with a handle, and Frank Nugent had a tea-cup without a handle, Harry Wharton had a

small jam-jar, and Hurree Jamset Rain Singh a little milk-jug. But the jug of lemonade was large, the lemonade was good, the schoolboys were thirsty, and all were contented. But a goblet for Bunter was not easy to find. There seemed to be nothing available but the inkpot: and that had ink in it.

"That's all right, you fellows," said Bunter, cheerfully, "I can make do with the jug, if you chaps don't want any more."

Without waiting to ascertain whether the chaps wanted any more, Bunter grasped the lemonade-jug in a fat hand, and tilted it to a capacious mouth. A gurgling sound followed.

"Don't mind us, Bunter," said Frank Nugent, with withering sarcasm, when the fat junior paused for breath.

"Right-ho, old chap!" answered Bunter. Sarcasm, on Bunter, was a sheer waste. He did not even know that Nugent was being sarcastic. Having taken breath, he tilted the jug again. There was another happy gurgle.

Bunter, a little breathless, set down an empty jug, and blinked at five staring faces.

"Not bad," he said. "Not like what I get at home, at Bunter Court, of course—but not bad! Got any more?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That's the lot," he said. "Come on, you men—time we got down to the cricket."

"I say, you fellows, hold on a minute," said Bunter, hastily. "I say, I want to put in some cricket practice this afternoon."

"Come on, then," said Bob, "Inky will send you down a few, and you'll stop them—perhaps!"

"The perhapsfulness will be terrific, in my idiotic opinion!" grinned the dusky nabob of Bhanipur.

"I fancy I could stop anything you sent me, Inky," said Bunter, disdainfully. "You can't bowl, old chap! I mean, you don't bowl like I do."

"Not like you do, certainly!" assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The difference is preposterous."

"But I say, Quelch said I'm to take in my lines at six! That rather knocks on the head my getting any time at the nets," said Bunter. "It's a bit sickening when a fellow's so keen on it. I've a jolly good mind not to do those lines for Quelch."

"You'd better have a jollier good one to do them," grinned Bob Cherry. "Henry is rather shirty with you today, old fat man."

"Well, look at the injustice of it," said Bunter, warmly. "I gave him the right answer, and then he goes and gives me lines—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I don't think Quelch ought to talk about pubs in the form-room, really—it's not the sort of thing for Greyfriars—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then look at the lines he's given me! Making out that Charles the Second hid in the Royal Oak after the Battle of Worcester. As if he would hide in a pub—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked No. 1 Study.

"Well, you can cackle, but I don't believe Charles the Second did anything of the kind," declared Bunter. "That's Quelch's idea of history, I suppose. Schoolmasters don't know so much as they make out."

"You howling ass!" roared Johnny Bull, "it was an oak tree that Charley hid in, and it was called the Royal Oak because he did it."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. This seemed quite a new idea to him. "Think so?"

"Ha ha, ha!"

“Well, anyhow, I’ve got the lines to do,” said Bunter. “I fancy Quelch is wrong about it, but you can’t argue with a beak. He will expect those lines. How many are you fellows going to do for me?”

“None!” answered five voices in unison.

“Well, I like that!” said the fat Owl, hotly. “It would be only twenty-five each for the six of us, to make up the hundred—!”

“Oh, crumbs!” gasped Bob Cherry. “How many?”

“I—I mean twenty,” said Bunter, hastily. “Six twenties are a hundred—you can’t teach me arithmetic, Bob Cherry.”

“I shouldn’t like to try!” gurgled Bob.

“Well, what about it?” asked Bunter. “You fellows make out that I dodge games practice—!”

“No making out about it,” growled Johnny Bull. “You do dodge games practice, you fat slacker, and you’ve been whopped for it.”

“Well, I’m not dodging it today, and it ain’t a compulsory day, either,” snorted Bunter. “I say, you fellows, I’m fearfully keen on it. I say, you help me through with my lines, and I’ll come down to the nets—it’s pretty rotten for a fellow to have to stick indoors writing lines when he wants to be at the nets. Tain’t much of an impot if we whack it out all round.”

Billy Bunter blinked appealingly at five faces, one after another, through his big spectacles.

Harry Wharton and Co. hesitated. But Bunter had touched the right chord. If the lazy fat Owl was keen on games practice, for once, instead of frowsting in a study armchair as usual, the Famous Five were the fellows to give him encouragement.

“You can make your fists like mine,” urged Bunter. “Near enough for Quelch, anyway. I’ll do some of the lines myself—there!” added Bunter, in a burst of generosity. “I mean it. I never was lazy, I hope! Why, we can get the whole lot through in ten minutes, if you fellows put your beef into it. What?”

“Oh, let’s!” said Bob. Bob Cherry was always good-natured: and there was no doubt that he was pleased to see signs of amendment in the fat slacker of the Remove.

It was not exactly unknown in the Greyfriars Remove for fellows to lend one another a helping hand with impots: and Bunter’s really seemed a deserving case. Bob looked round at his friends, and Wharton, Nugent and Hurree Singh nodded: and Johnny Bull gave a grunt. So it was settled.

“That’s right!” said Bunter. “I’ll start the rotten thing, and you fellows can carry on, see? Mind your spelling—Quelch might smell a rat if you put in any wrong spelling. Just copy what I write.”

And Billy Bunter picked up a pen, dipped it into the ink, and wrote the first line. Five grinning faces looked on as he wrote “King Charles II, hid in the royle oke after the Battel of Wooster.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled Bob Cherry. “Are we to spell it like that, Bunter?”

“Eh! Yes! I want you to be careful with the spelling, you know. Spelling’s rather my strong point, and I don’t want any mistakes.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You’re wasting time cackling,” pointed out Bunter. “Pile in and get on with it. I want to get down to the nets, you know.”

“Perhaps we’d better spell it Bunter’s way,” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “That’s what Quelch will expect—from Bunter.”

“And don’t forget a few blots and smears,” grinned Bob. “Quelch will expect them too—from Bunter.”

“I say, you fellows, get on with it,” urged Bunter.

The Famous Five got on with it. It was only necessary to scrawl in a sprawling round-hand to make the writing sufficiently like Bunter’s. And there was little doubt that when Mr. Quelch saw the spelling, he would hardly suspect that anyone but Billy Bunter had had a hand in it.

Many hands made light work. Bunter’s impot was finished in record time. The Owl of the Remove gathered up the sheets with great satisfaction.

“I’ll cut down to Quelch’s study with this,” he said. “Don’t you fellows wait for me—get down and change for cricket. I’ll join you in a few ticks.”

Harry Wharton and Co. went down to the changing-room. There, they expected to see Billy Bunter roll in, in a few minutes.

But Billy Bunter did not roll in.

So they went down to junior nets, expecting Bunter to follow. They were prepared to take quite a lot of trouble with Bunter, since he was, for once in his fat life, showing keenness for the summer game.

But, as it happened, they did not have to take any trouble with Bunter. The fat junior did not follow them down to the nets.

During the hour that they spent there, with other Remove fellows, no fat figure appeared in the offing.

Billy Bunter’s sudden enthusiasm for the summer game seemed to have petered out as sudden as it had arisen! It had, in fact, lasted exactly as long as was required to get his lines done! While the Famous Five were at the nets, Billy Bunter was reposing his ample person in a comfortable armchair in the Rag, in a state of fat and lazy satisfaction. Which really was what they might have expected of William George Bunter.

CHAPTER III

JAM FOR BUNTER!

“STAND and deliver!”

“Oh, really, Cherry—!”

“What have you got there?”

“Nothing, old chap! Nothing at all! I say, you fellows, let a fellow pass. I’m in rather a hurry.”

But the Famous Five, of the Remove, did not let Billy Bunter pass.

They were coming upstairs, as Billy Bunter came down. They met on the middle landing. Five fellows, in a grinning row, blocked Billy Bunter’s way to the lower staircase. Bunter halted unwillingly—but he had to halt.

That Billy Bunter had something hidden under his jacket was a fact that leaped to the eye. Bunter’s garments were tight. There was really hardly enough room in them for Bunter. His ample proportions filled them almost to bursting point. Any other fellow might have concealed something under his jacket without catching the casual eye. Not Bunter. On Bunter’s fat person there was a bulge—a very distinct bulge—a bulge that few could have failed to notice. Harry Wharton and Co. had noticed it at once. That was why Bob Cherry playfully called on the fat junior to stand and deliver.

Bunter was clearly in a hurry. Bunter’s movements generally resembled those of a snail—a tired snail. But he had come pattering rapidly down the upper stairs, and he came across the middle landing at a run. Only for very urgent reasons could the fat Owl of the Remove have put on such speed. But hurried as he was, Bunter had to

stop.

"I say, you fellows, no larks!" gasped Bunter. "I—I've got to see Quelch. He's waiting to see me. Let a chap pass."

"You've got to see Quelch?" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Yes, old chap—he's waiting—."

"How odd, we've just seen Quelch go out. You've missed him," said the captain of the Remove, shaking his head.

"Oh! Has Quelch gone out? I—I don't mean Quelch! I—I mean Wingate," stammered Bunter. "I've got to see Wingate! Let a chap pass—can't keep a Sixth-form prefect waiting—captain of the school, too! I've got to get to Wingate's study—."

"No good going to his study," chuckled Frank Nugent. "Wingate's on Big Side, playing cricket."

"Oh! Is he? I mean—I—I—I mean—I mean the Head! That's what I—I meant to say. I've been specially sent for to Dr. Locke's study. I say, you fellows, I shall get into a row if I keep the head-master waiting! You know old Locke doesn't like to be kept waiting—lemme pass, will you?"

And Billy Bunter made an effort to push through the row of juniors. Then he gave a startled yelp, as the bulge under his jacket slipped. He clutched wildly at the hidden article to save it, and crammed it back under his jacket— but not before the other fellows had seen that it was a jam-jar.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Are you taking the Head a pot of jam for his tea?"

"Oh! Yes! No! I—I——."

"Whose is it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Mine!" roared Bunter indignantly. "Think I've got somebody else's pot of jam? Not that this is a pot of jam I've got here, you know. It's a—a bottle of ink."

"Smithy had jam in one of his gorgeous parcels today!" remarked Bob Cherry. "You fat brigand, that's Smithy's jam."

"Tain't!" roared Bunter. "Think I'd touch Smithy's jam? I never knew Smithy had jam—I never saw Gosling hand him the parcel, and never knew he had a parcel at all, and it certainly wasn't in his study when I looked. Besides, I haven't been to his study. Will you let a fellow pass? I've got to see Quelch—I mean Wingate—that is, the Head—they're waiting—I mean, he's waiting—I mean—."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, as another junior appeared on the lower staircase, coming up. "This way, Smithy, old man."

Herbert Vernon-Smith glanced up at the group on the middle landing.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Daylight raid!" answered Bob. "If you had a pot of jam in your study, you'd better cut along and see if it's still there."

"What?" Smithy joined the group on the middle landing, and his eye went at once to the bulge under Bunter's jacket. "You fat villain! Have you been bagging my jam?"

"No!" gasped Bunter. "I haven't got anything under my jacket, Smithy—I mean, it's a bottle of ink. I'm taking it down to the Rag, to—to fill the inkpot. I say, you fellows, let a fellow pass."

"If you've bagged my plum jam—!"

"I—I haven't, old chap! This bottle of ink is apricot jam—I—I mean, this jar of apricot is ink bottle—I—I mean—." Billy Bunter was getting a little mixed. "Look here, you cut along to your study, Smithy, and you'll see your jar of jam on the table, just where you left it. You fellows go with him—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm just taking this bottle of jam down to the Rag to fill Quelch—I—I mean, I'm

taking this jar of rag down to Quelch to see the Head—. Ow! Leggo my neck, you beast!” howled Bunter, as the Bounder of Greyfriars grasped him. “I tell you I haven’t got your jam. I don’t believe you had any jam. There wasn’t any in your study when I looked, and I left it on the table, too. If you can’t take a fellow’s word—. Leggo!” Shake! shake! shake!

Vernon-Smith had a sinewy arm. He shook Bunter, and shook him again and again, and the fat Owl sagged in his grasp, like a plump jelly.

Shake! shake!

“Oooooogh!” spluttered Bunter. “Leggo! I say, you fellows, make him leggo! I say, you make him leggo, and I’ll let you have some of the jam!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Shake! shake! shake!

Smithy, grinning, put his beef into it. The fat Owl tottered in his grasp, gurgling for breath. There was a sudden bump, as the jar of jam slipped, at last, from under Bunter’s jacket, and rolled on the landing. Bunter’s plunder had been shaken out of him and was revealed, to all eyes, as a pot of plum jam.

“Looks more like jam than ink to me!” remarked Nugent.

“The jamfulness is terrific!” grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “The esteemed and execrable Bunter has been study-raiding.”

“Ow! I haven’t!” gasped Bunter. “That’s my jam! It came from Bunter Court this morning! You leave my jam alone.”

Herbert Vernon-Smith, releasing the fat Owl, stooped to pick up his pot of jam. Billy Bunter made a dive for it. There was a sudden crash, as two heads suddenly met. Vernon-Smith gave a yell of anguish, and sat down suddenly on the landing. Bunter reeled from the shock.

“Ha, ha, ha!” shrieked the Famous Five.

“Oh, scissors!” gasped the Bounder. He sat with his hand to his head, dizzy from the crash. For a moment or two, he was *hors de combat*.

Billy Bunter did not lose that moment or two. His bullet head was harder than Smithy’s, apparently. Perhaps there was not much in it to damage. Bunter clutched up the disputed pot of jam, and jumped for the lower stairs. Harry Wharton and Co. were laughing too much to stop him. Bunter went down the staircase with leaps like a kangaroo.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Vernon-Smith staggered to his feet, his hand still to his head. His face was red with wrath.

“By gum! I’ll burst him all over Greyfriars!” he gasped. And he rushed in pursuit of the fleeing fat Owl.

“Hold on, Smithy!” gasped Harry Wharton. But the enraged Bounder did not heed. Bunter had reached the foot of the staircase, and Smithy shot down in pursuit. The Owl of the Remove cast one terrified blink back, and fled for his fat life. The look on Smithy’s face was enough for Bunter.

“Oh, my hat!” gurgled Bob Cherry. “If they run into a beak or a pre., there will be a row.”

Smithy, with his usual recklessness, was not thinking of masters or prefects. Neither was he bothering about the jam. He just wanted to get hold of Billy Bunter.

Bunter, on the other hand, did not want to be got hold of. He had to get away from Smithy—and he remembered, as he careered away, that Wharton had mentioned that Quelch had gone out. Quelch’s study, therefore, was a safe retreat—even the reckless Bounder would not venture to pursue him into a master’s study. At a less hectic

moment, the fat Owl would have thought twice, or three times, before he ventured into such dangerous precincts. But it was now a case of any port in a storm—and Billy Bunter flew for Quelch's study like a homing pigeon. Smithy charged into Masters' passage, just in time to hear Quelch's study door slam ahead of him. Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth Form, looked out of his study doorway, and fixed his eyes with grim disapproval on the breathless, crimson Bunder. "Well," he rapped. "What do you want here, Vernon-Smith?" Smithy backed round the corner without replying to that question. Billy Bunter had found a safe refuge, and Vernon-Smith had to leave him to it. His only consolation was to resolve to burst William George Bunter all over Greyfriars School when he saw him again.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER THE FEAST—!

MR. QUELCH stared, as if he could hardly believe his eyes. Indeed, at that moment, he hardly could. Quelch had gone out for a walk in the quad after class, as he often did. Harry Wharton and Co. had in fact seen their form-master go out, as Wharton had mentioned to Bunter. But he had come in again. It was very pleasant taking the air under the shady old branches of the ancient Greyfriars elms. It braced Quelch, after his labours in the Remove room with a numerous and slightly troublesome form. But on Quelch's study table lay a pile of Form papers that had to be corrected, and Henry Samuel Quelch never forgot his duties. So, reluctantly but dutifully, Quelch at length retraced his steps to the House—and came to his study. Naturally, he did not expect to find that study occupied. Least of all would he have expected it to be occupied by a fat junior with a pot of jam. But that was how he found it. He opened the study door, and was about to enter, when he stopped dead, his eyes fixed on a fat figure in his armchair. Quelch's eyes were very keen—often compared, in his form, to gimlets. But at that moment he really doubted their evidence. Billy Bunter did not, for the moment, see his form-master. Bunter was busy. Bunter had sought that safe refuge simply to escape from the wrathful Smithy. He had judged rightly—Smithy had not ventured to pursue him there. He was safe—till Quelch came in. Bunter was going to stay in that study as long as he possibly could: for the double purpose of keeping out of Smithy's way, and giving Smithy time to cool down and get over his temper. When Quelch came in, he was going to account for his presence there by asking Quelch a history question, as if he had come to the study for that very purpose. That, Bunter sagely considered, would placate Quelch. Quelch, like all beaks, liked fellows to take an interest in their lessons: and he could not fail to be pleased if Bunter specially desired to know whether Magna Charta was signed in the reign of Edward the Confessor or Charles the Second! In the meantime, there was the jam! Sitting in Mr. Quelch's armchair, Bunter opened that pot of jam. Unluckily he had no

spoon. Bunter liked a tablespoon when dealing with jam. But on Quelch's table lay an ivory paper-knife which answered the purpose fairly well. With that implement, Billy Bunter scooped out jam and conveyed it to a large mouth: and chunk after chunk of delicious plum jam followed the downward path. In those ecstatic moments Bunter forgot Smithy, and even forgot Quelch. It was a happy, sticky Bunter that cleaned out the jam-jar with the ivory paper-knife.

After he had finished, Bunter was going to wipe that paper-knife clean on Quelch's blotting pad, and hide the empty jam-jar at the bottom of Quelch's waste-paper basket—and then wait for Quelch, with his history-question all ready. That was the idea. It was rather unfortunate that Quelch came in before Bunter had quite finished the jam!

There was still a spot of jam at the bottom of the jar, and it was not easy to extract it with a paper-knife. But difficulties were only made to be overcome. Bunter concentrated on that urgent task, blinking through his big spectacles into the jar resting on his fat knees, and scraping industriously. He was too absorbed to notice the faint sound of the door-handle turning. As Mr. Quelch stood at the open door, his eyes fixed on Bunter, the Owl of the Remove did not look up—he carried on with the important task in hand—and his little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles, as quite a substantial spot of jam was gathered by industrious scraping. Mr. Quelch gazed at him.

For a long, long moment, the Remove master stood quite still, gazing at that happy member of his form. He realised that his eyes were not deceiving him. Actually a boy of his form was seated in his armchair in his study, scraping out a jam-jar, with a sticky paper-knife, sticky fingers, sticky face, and a general aspect of stickiness. Quelch found his voice.

"Bunter!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Bunter jumped. In fact, he bounded. He was out of the armchair with a speed that was marvellous, considering the weight he had to lift. The jam-jar rolled on the hearth-rug. The sticky paper-knife dropped on the carpet. Billy Bunter stood blinking at his form-master with his eyes almost popping with terror through his spectacles.

"Bunter! What are you doing here?"

"Oh! I—I—I was—was waiting for you, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I came to ask you a—a question, sir, about jam—I mean about history, sir—I—I forgot whether Magna Charta was signed by Smithy—I mean King Charles the Fourth, sir, or—or Henry the Tenth—."

"I find you eating—I should say devouring—I find you devouring jam, in my study!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep rumbling voice. "Did you purloin that jam below stairs, Bunter? I have several times received complaints from Mrs. Kebble—."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I had it in a parcel from home, sir! Smithy got it this morning—I mean I got it this morning—."

"I think I understand Bunter! You have purloined that comestible from another Remove boy's study, and that is why—!"

"Oh, no, sir! It wasn't Smithy's!" stammered Bunter. "That was all a mistake, sir. If Smithy had any jam, it's still in his study. I—I didn't come here because Smithy was after me, sir—I—I came to ask you, sir, to tell me, if you'll be so kind, whether Cagna Marta—I mean Magna Charta—was signed in the reign of George the Seventh or—or—or William the Eighth, sir."

"That will do, Bunter."

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir. C-c-can I go now, sir?"

“You may not, Bunter.”

“Oh, lor’!”

“I hardly know to deal with you, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch, with slow, grim thoughtfulness. “You are not only the idlest boy in my form. You are not only the most obtuse. You are the most untruthful. You are the most unscrupulous. You have been punished on several occasions for purloining food. Punishment appears to have no effect. You seem no better for even a severe caning.”

“Oh, no, sir!” gasped Bunter. “Not at all, sir! Worse, I—I think, sir. I—I d-don’t think caning does me any good, sir.”

“Once already this term, Bunter, you have been caned for taking a pie from the pantry—.”

“That was all a mistake, sir!” groaned Bunter. “I—I never went down the kitchen stairs at all. Mrs. Kebble thought I’d gone down, sir, just because she saw me coming up—”

“On that occasion, Bunter, I gave you three strokes with the cane. It has not caused you to mend your ways,” said Mr. Quelch. “I shall not give you three strokes now, Bunter.”

“Oh! Good! I—I mean, thank you, sir, C-c-can I go now?”

“I shall give you six—!”

“Oh, crumbs!”

Mr. Quelch picked up a cane from the study table. Billy Bunter eyed that proceeding with deep apprehension. Mr. Quelch pointed to a chair with the cane.

“Bend over that chair, Bunter.”

“I—I—I say, sir—!”

“Bend over that chair!” rapped Mr. Quelch, in a voice like unto that of the Great Huge Bear.

“Oh, crikey!”

Billy Bunter, in the lowest spirits, bent over the chair.

He gave an anticipatory wriggle as he waited for the descending cane. But he did not have to wait long.

Swipe!

“Yaroooooh!” roared Bunter.

Swipe!

“Oh! Ooooooh!”

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

“Yow-ow-whoooooooooop!”

SWIPE! Mr. Quelch seemed to put extra beef in the last swipe. It fairly rang on Bunter’s tight trousers. It cracked like a rifle-shot! Louder still sounded the anguished yell of the hapless Owl.

“Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!”

“Cease that ridiculous noise, Bunter,” snapped Mr. Quelch.

“Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!”

“If you make another sound, Bunter, I shall cane you again!”

Sudden silence!

“Now leave my study,” said Mr. Quelch, “and I warn you, Bunter, to let this be a lesson to you. I warn you that you have very nearly exhausted my patience. Go!”

Billy Bunter went.

He suppressed his feelings till Quelch’s door closed on him. But as he went wriggling down the passage, his anguish found voice.

“Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!”

"Oh! Here you are!" Herbert Vernon-Smith was waiting for him at the corner. "Now, you fat villain—!"

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

The Bounder stared at him, dropped the foot he had lifted, and laughed.

"You look as if you'd had enough!" he remarked.

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

Bunter certainly looked as if he had had enough. He felt as if he had had too much! And the Bounder kindly let it go at that, and Billy Bunter wriggled on his way Un-kicked.



"Bend over that chair, Bunter"

CHAPTER V

BY WHOSE HAND?

"HE, he, he!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the joke, old fat man?" Billy Bunter did not answer that question. But he grinned—a grin so wide, that it extended from one of Bunter's fat ears to the other. A good many eyes turned on the Owl of the Remove. Bunter,

evidently, was in possession of a joke—a great joke—a joke that made him quite hilarious.

It was morning—and the Remove had been out in break. Now they were gathering at the form-room door for third school. Billy Bunter, as a rule, was among the last to arrive: punctuality had never been one of Bunter's weaknesses. On this occasion, he was among the first.

And he was chuckling and grinning. Something was stirring him to merriment, though the other fellows were quite in the dark as to what it was.

"The jokefulness seems to be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "What have you been up to, my esteemed and fatheaded Bunter?"

"Oh! Nothing!" answered Bunter. "It wasn't me."

"What wasn't you?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh! Nothing! Quelch may be going to get a surprise—or he may not! I don't know anything about it, of course," said Bunter, astutely. "I've been standing here a long time—practically all through break. So if any fellow got in at the form-room window, it couldn't have been me, could it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You howling ass," said Peter Todd. "What did you get in at the form-room window for?"

"I've just told you I didn't," snapped Bunter. "Look here, Toddy don't you get making out that I've been anywhere near the form-room window. If Quelch heard, he might think that it was me."

"That what was you?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh! Nothing!"

"You've been playing some potty trick in the form-room?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No!" hooted Bunter. "I haven't been in the form-room. So far as I know, the window wasn't left open, and if it was, I never climbed in."

"You jolly well couldn't," said Skinner. "Too much to lift."

"Of course I couldn't, without a bunk up," agreed Bunter. "And Dabney of the Fourth never gave me a bunk up, either."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What has that frumpitious fathead been up to?" asked Frank Nugent. "Didn't Quelch give you enough in his study yesterday? Asking for more?"

"I haven't been up to anything. If Quelch gives a fellow six, Quelch must expect to hear what a fellow thinks of him," said Bunter. "I couldn't sit down to prep last evening. But I haven't done anything, of course. If Quelch gets a surprise when he goes into the form-room, I don't know anything about it. How could I, when I haven't been in the form-room in break?"

"It was something with chalk in it," said Vernon-Smith with a chuckle.

Bunter jumped.

"Chalk! How do you know, you beast? I haven't touched any chalk. Don't you get saying I've had any chalk—!"

"Don't you want Quelch to know you've been handling chalk?" chuckled the Bounder.

"No fear! He might think I'd chalked on the blackboard! You know what a suspicious beast he is—."

"Then you'd better wipe the clues off your waistcoat, old fat bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, as Billy Bunter cast a startled blink downward at his extensive and well-filled waistcoat. On that garment were several smudges of chalk—which leaped to all eyes excepting Bunter's.

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “I—I hadn’t noticed that! I say, lend me your handkerchief, Wharton—I’d better rub that off.”

“Eh! Can’t you use your own hanky?” asked Harry.

“Well, I don’t want to make my hanky all chalky. Lend me yours, quick, old chap. Quelch may be coming any minute. Look here, will you lend me your hanky or not, Wharton?”

“Not!” answered the captain of the Remove, laughing.

“Beast! Lend me your hanky, Toddy.”

“I’ll watch it!” said Peter Todd.

“Beast!”

Billy Bunter extracted his own handkerchief from his pocket, and hurriedly wiped away the traces of chalk. The chalky handkerchief was jammed back into his pocket. He cast an anxious blink along the corridor: but Quelch was not yet in sight, and the fat Owl breathed more freely. The tell-tale clues were gone.

“So you’ve been chalking something on the blackboard in the form-room, you fat ass?” asked Hazeldene.

“Nothing of the kind, Hazel. Somebody may have,” said Bunter. “After all, lots of fellows think Quelch a beast, don’t they? Somebody may have chalked it on the blackboard, for all I know. He, he, he! It wasn’t me. Of course, I trust you fellows—I know you wouldn’t give a man away. But you can’t be too careful, with Quelch. So I never did it, see?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You utter ass,” said Harry Wharton. “If you’ve chalked anything of that kind on the blackboard, Quelch will go off at the deep end.”

“He, he, he! Let him! He won’t know who did it!” chuckled Bunter. “I never signed my name to it, you know! He, he! Besides, I never did it! I say, you fellows, fancy Quelch’s face when he sees it on the blackboard. He will know what the Remove thinks of him, what?” Bunter chuckled again. “I say, he will be wild! He will guess it was a Remove man—but he won’t know which man it was. I can tell you fellows, I’m fed up with Quelch! What do you think he said to me in his study yesterday? He said I was untruthful!”

“Did he?” gasped Bob Cherry. “Now what could have put that idea into his head?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You can cackle,” said Bunter, warmly. “I call it insulting. I know you fellows ain’t so particular as I am in things like that, but did you ever know me tell a lie? I ask you!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Henry!” murmured Bob.

Mr. Quelch appeared at the corner of the corridor. He gave the assembled juniors a sharp glance, and Bob wondered, for a dismayed moment, whether his keen ears had caught the word “Henry”. However, the Remove master rustled up the passage to the door on the form-room, and unlocked the same to admit his form. The Remove marched in and took their places. Mr. Quelch went to his high desk.

The blackboard, which had been used in second school, stood on its easel facing the form. What was chalked on it was, therefore, visible to all the Remove, but not, for the moment, to their form-master.

All eyes turned on the blackboard. Then there was a sudden gust of laughter. The Removites really could not help it. After what Bunter had said, they expected to see something chalked on the blackboard which was calculated to make Quelch “wild”, What they saw was an inscription in large capital letters:

QUELCH IS A BEEST!

“Ha, ha, ha!” woke the echoes of the form-room. Billy Bunter grinned—a wide grin. Bunter was quite pleased by this tribute. All the Remove were laughing—that inscription on the blackboard seemed to have taken them by storm. But Quelch wouldn’t laugh when he saw it—Quelch would be in a fearful rage—all the more because there was no clue to the writer!

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared the Remove.

“He, he, he!” cachinnated Bunter.

Mr. Quelch stared at his form, with knitting brows. That outburst of merriment took him by surprise, and did not please him.

“Silence!” he thundered. “What is the meaning of this? What—?” He realised at once that the blackboard was the cynosure of all eyes, and guessed that there must be something unusual on it. He whisked round the blackboard to see what had caused that burst of hilarity.

The laughter died away quite suddenly. Quelch’s expression, as he looked at the chalked words on the blackboard, did not encourage merriment. For a moment, Mr. Quelch stared at it: then he turned to his class.

“Bunter!” His eyes fixed on the Owl of the Remove.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter, in alarm.

Why Quelch picked on him was an absolute mystery to the Owl of the Remove. There was nothing, so far as Bunter knew, to give the remotest clue to the writer of that inscription. He had not expected for a moment that the gimlet-eyes would fix on him. But they did.

“Bunter! You have done this!”

“I—I wouldn’t, sir! I—I don’t think you’re a beast, sir, like the other fellows—.”

“Bunter!” thundered Mr. Quelch. “You wrote this! It was you, Bunter, who chalked this—this unexampled impertinence on the blackboard! Bunter, you entered the form-room surreptitiously during break—by the window—.”

“Oh, lor’! I—I never knew you saw me, sir!” groaned Bunter. “I—I thought you were in your study—oh, scissors!”

“I did not see you, Bunter.”

“Oh! Then—then I didn’t do it, sir! I—I was in the tuck-shop at the time—Mrs. Mible was serving me with a jam-tart, sir, at the very minute I was chalking on the blackboard—I mean when I—I wasn’t chalking on the blackboard—.”

“I shall not cane you again, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard. “You will be detained for the half-holiday this afternoon. I shall set you a detention task, and you will remain in the form-room until you have finished it—.”

“But—but I never—!”

“Silence!” almost roared Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter quaked into silence. Mr. Quelch took a duster and wiped the blackboard. Third lesson began in the Remove in rather an electric atmosphere. Billy Bunter sat with a fat face of woe. He was booked for the afternoon—and he knew, from experience, what Quelch’s detention tasks were like! Why Quelch had picked on him, he did not know. It seemed like magic to Bunter. It was one more proof that Quelch was a “beest”.

CHAPTER VI

NOT WANTED!

“HARRY, old chap—!”

Harry Wharton shook his head.

“Sorry!” he said.

“Eh!” Billy Bunter blinked at the captain of the Remove, in the doorway of the changing-room, in surprise. “What are you sorry about?”

“Shortage of cash,” explained Wharton. “Nothing doing! Try Smithy.”

“If you think I want to borrow anything from you, Wharton—!” said William George Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

“Don’t you?”

“No!” roared Bunter. “I don’t!”

“Then why did you call me old chap?” inquired the captain of the Remove.

“Beast! I—I mean, dear old fellow—!” said Bunter, hastily.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I say, I’m booked for this afternoon,” said Bunter, dismally. “I’ve got to go into the form-room at two, and Quelch is going to give me a paper to do—I shouldn’t wonder if it’s deponent verbs—it would be like him! And you fellows are going to play cricket! Now look here, Harry, old chap, we’ve always been pals, haven’t we?”

“Have we?” asked Harry Wharton, in surprise. “First I’ve heard of it.”

“Oh, really, Wharton! Who was it stood by you, and helped you through, and all that, when you were a new fellow here?” demanded Bunter.

“Nugent!” answered Harry, laughing.

“You don’t remember what I did for you?” asked Bunter, sarcastically.

“Yes, I do. You borrowed half-a-crown the first day. And that reminds me that you’ve never squared. What about it?”

“I wish you wouldn’t talk rot,” said Bunter, peevishly. “After all I’ve done for you, you might do a little thing for me. I want to play cricket this afternoon. You know how keen I am on the game—.”

“Oh, quite!” agreed Harry. “Very keen, when you want other fellows to do your lines. Not at other times.”

“Well, I’m frightfully keen now,” declared Bunter. “I suppose you’ve made up the eleven to play the Fourth this afternoon?”

“Sort of,” said Harry, laughing. “As we’re due on Little Side in ten minutes, I shouldn’t be likely to leave it very much later.”

“Well it’s not too late to make a change in the team!” suggested Bunter. “You’re not much of a judge of a man’s form, old fellow, and I’m blessed if I know why the fellows made you skipper: but you’ve got sense enough to leave out a dud and put in a better man if you can get one, what?”

“Oh, quite. Where’s the better man?”

“Here! Now, if you go to Quelch and explain that you simply can’t leave me out, because it’s a pretty tough match, Quelch will let me off detention, see? I specially want to go down to Friardale this afternoon—I mean, I specially want to play cricket—being awfully keen on the game, you know. I don’t want to go down to Friardale because Uncle Clegg’s got jolly good ices—nothing of the kind. I’m fearfully keen on cricket. Easy enough to make room for me in the team—you can leave out Cherry—he’s not much good.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who’s not much good?” roared Bob Cherry.

“You, old chap! Look at the way you bat!” argued Bunter. “Or there’s Toddy—no good at all, if you don’t mind my mentioning it, Toddy.”

Peter Todd gave his fat study-mate an expressive look, but no other reply.

"Or there's Squiff—or Browney—or Inky—or Nugent—or Bull—or Smithy," went on Bunter. "What about dropping Smithy? I daresay he'd rather hike along to the Cross Keys for a smoke, than play cricket, if you come to that. Wouldn't you, Smithy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fact is, I don't care whom you leave out, so long as you put me in, Harry, old chap. That's the important point. Quelch will be sure to let me off, if you tell him I'm wanted—he wouldn't spoil a Form game by detaining the best cricketer in the Remove—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Remove cricketers.

"Well, you fellows know how I play," argued Bunter. "There's a lot of jealousy in cricket, and I never have a show—but facts are facts, all the same. If Wharton knew a man's form, he would pick me out for the Highcliffe match when it comes off—not that I expect him to!" added Bunter, bitterly. "As I said, I'm used to jealousy. But it's really important this afternoon. Wharton, because I want to go down to Uncle Clegg's—I mean to Little Side. Look here, old chap, leave out any man you like," said Bunter, in a burst of generosity. "Only put me in, see?"

"I see," assented the captain of the Remove, "and now, if you've finished your funny turn, roll away, old barrel."

"You won't play me?" demanded Bunter.

"Not at cricket, old fat bean. When we play the Fourth at marbles or hop-scotch, I'll think of you."

"Beast! I mean, look here, dear old fellow, I've got to get off detention. Just go to Quelch and tell him that I'm wanted in the game this afternoon—!"

"But you're not wanted."

"Oh, really, Wharton! I wish you'd keep to the point," said Bunter, peevishly. "The point is, to get me off detention. See? Quelch won't notice that I'm not in the game—why should he? If he did, you could tell him I've been taken suddenly ill, see? How's that?"

"Out!" said Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I tell you, I don't want detention this afternoon—I'd rather play cricket than do deponent verbs—!"

"What a jolly good reason for picking a man for a match!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now you've finished, Bunter—!"

"I haven't finished—!"

"Yes, you have! Give him a prod with your bat, Johnny."

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter, as Johnny Bull's bat established contact, and he departed from the doorway in haste.

There was no cricket for Bunter that afternoon—even though he did indubitably prefer cricket to deponent verbs!

The fat junior rolled away in an indignant and morose frame of mind. It was true that Bunter was thinking more of the ices at Uncle Clegg's tuck-shop in the village of Friardale, than of the great summer game. He had borrowed half-a-crown from Lord Mauleverer specially to be expended on those ices. It was a moral impossibility to sit in the form-room grinding at a detention task, with Mauly's half-crown burning a hole in his pocket, and those delicious ices waiting for him at Friardale, Billy Bunter suddenly made up his fat mind, and rolled away towards the gates. He

resolved to chance it with Quelch. Two o'clock was striking from the clock-tower, at which hour he was due for detention: so there was no time to waste. Bunter rolled away from the House: and, like Iser in the poem, he rolled rapidly.

He eyed Gosling uneasily, as the ancient porter of Greyfriars, in the doorway of his lodge, glanced at him.

If Gosling knew that he was under detention, Gosling was quite capable of stopping him at the gate—that was the sort of brute Gosling was!”

But Gosling, apparently, did not know: at any rate, Billy Bunter passed under his ancient eyes unchallenged. He reached the old arched stone gateway, where the gates stood wide open on a half-holiday, And there, for a moment, Billy Bunter hesitated—and halted.

Billy Bunter was not, perhaps, very bright. But he was bright enough to realise that “chancing it” with Quelch was a risky business. He could explain to Quelch that he had forgotten all about his detention—forgotten it so utterly that his mind was a perfect blank on the subject. But he had a deep misgiving that Quelch would not believe him, Often and often had Quelch doubted Bunter’s word, and Bunter felt that he could not expect any improvement in Quelch in that respect.

If he “cut” detention, there would be a row. Quelch, as usual, would be a beast. And Billy Bunter, with a lingering glimmer of common-sense, hesitated to draw once more the vials of wrath upon his fat head.

He hesitated—but it is well said that he who hesitates is lost. On the one hand, were delicious ices at Uncle Clegg’s—on the other, a dismal detention task with deponent verbs in it very likely. Billy Bunter rolled out of gates, and took the lane to Friardale. And as Bunter rolled out of gates, Henry Samuel Quelch looked out of the big window in the form-room corridor. Quelch, who was as regular as clockwork, had arrived at the door of the Remove form-room as two o'clock struck—with a detention paper in his hand, and a grim expression on his face. He was ready to let Bunter into the form-room, and see him started on that detention paper—which, as the fat Owl dreaded, had deponent verbs in it! Quelch was ready: but Bunter, like Ethelred of old, was unready!

Bunter was not to be seen—till Quelch looked from the window, expecting to see him loitering on his way to the House—and even Quelch did not expect a fellow to be keen and eager for detention on a summer’s afternoon.

But he did not see Bunter loitering—he beheld, in the distance, an unmistakable fat figure rolling out of the gates. Quelch stared at that fast figure as it disappeared. His grim face grew grimmer, and his gimlet-eyes gleamed. Bunter, due for detention, was walking out of the school—as if free as a bird that afternoon.

“Upon my word!” breathed Mr. Quelch.

Two or three minutes later, Henry Samuel Quelch, complete with hat and walking-stick, was striding down to the gates. Billy Bunter’s prospect of ices at Uncle Clegg’s that afternoon was after all, doubtful!

CHAPTER VII

BUNTER MEETS NOSEY JENKINS!

“‘OLD on, you!”

Billy Bunter gave quite a jump at that command.

He was hurrying down Friardale Lane, as fast as his little fat legs could carry him. He had good reasons for haste. Ahead of him were the ices at Uncle Clegg’s—behind

him were Quelch and detention. Quelch must have missed him by that time, and would be looking for him—very likely asking the prefects to look for him. So long as he was near Greyfriars, Bunter was in dread of a calling voice astern—perhaps Quelch's, or perhaps Wingate's or Loder's or Gwynne's. So, still following the energetic example of the river Iser, he rolled rapidly.

Danger behind Bunter dreaded—but danger ahead never occurred to him—till he heard that sharp, unpleasant voice. He was nearly half-way to the village, in a spot where the overhanging branches of the trees on either side of the lane almost met overhead—a dusky, shady, solitary spot. In the dusk of the branches Bunter did not notice a man who was leaning against a gnarled tree-trunk, chewing the stem of an empty black pipe.

But the man noticed Bunter, eyed him with sharp, red-rimmed eyes as he came up and, as he drew abreast, Stepped into his path, and bade him “'old on.”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter, startled.

He held on—he could not continue on his way without walking over the man. And the man looked rather alarming. He was not well-dressed—he wore a ragged coat too large for him, shabby trousers too small for him, a battered bowler that only a very impecunious tramp would have picked up off a rubbish-heap, and a blue spotted neck cloth. His chin was adorned by a three-days beard: and the rest of his countenance looked seriously in need of a wash. He had little red-rimmed eyes, with an unpleasant threatening glint in them, and his nose had a queer twist sideways as if it had had a hard knock at some time from a very vigorous fist, and had never been able to get its bearings since.

Altogether, he looked a very unpleasant customer, and rather alarming to meet in a lonely, shady spot.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, and backed away a pace. The man with the twisted face followed him up.

“'Old on!” he repeated. He had a short, thick stick under one arm, and he let it slip down into his hand, and, to Bunter's dismay and terror, gave it a flourish in the air.

“'Old on, you fat covey! You 'ear me?”

“Oh! Yes!” gasped Bunter. “I—I say, I—I'm in rather a hurry—.”

“So'm I,” answered the man with the twisted nose. “'And it over.”

“Eh! Hand what over?” asked Bunter.

“All you've got in your pockets—and sharp!” snapped the tramp, with another flourish of the stick.

Billy Bunter blinked at him in horror. It was borne in upon his fat mind that this ugly customer was a footpad, taking advantage of that chance meeting in a solitary spot screened from general observation.

“I—I—I say, I—I haven't any money!” stammered Bunter. “I—I've been disappointed about a postal-order, and—and—Yaroooh!”

The vagrant cast a swift glance up and down the lane. Solitary as it was, someone might have come along from either direction at any moment. The winding lane was full of turns, and someone might have been within thirty yards, for all Nosey Jenkins knew. He had no time to waste on Bunter. He closed in on the fat schoolboy, and grasped a fat shoulder with his left hand, flourishing the cudgel with his right, Bunter uttering a startled yelp as he was seized.

“Now, then, sharp's the word!” he snarled. “If you don't want your silly 'ead cracked, 'and it over.”

“I—I—I say, I—I—Yooo-hooop!” roared Bunter, as Nosey Jenkins gave him a smart tap on his fat head with the cudgel, as a warning of what was to come if he did not

“and it over”. “Ow! Leggo! Help! Yaroooh!”

The next moment Bunter was sprawling on his back in the dust, and Nosey Jenkins, with his stick under his arm again, was groping through his pockets.

“Oooooooooogh!” spluttered the fat Owl. “Ow! Oh! Help!”

“Old your row, will you?” snapped Nosey Jenkins, in so ferocious a tone that Bunter gasped into silence.

Thievish hands ran through his pockets as he sprawled dizzily in the dust.

Perhaps Mr. Jenkins expected a Greyfriars fellow to be liberally supplied with cash.

No doubt he would have been richly rewarded for his trouble had his victim been Herbert Vernon-Smith or Lord Mauleverer or Monty Newland. But if he expected to make a good thing out of Billy Bunter, he was disappointed. Billy Bunter’s financial resources were limited to Mauly’s half-crown—for which it was really hardly worth Mr. Jenkins’ while to risk three months in the “stone jug”. Having found, and annexed, Mauly’s half-crown, Nosey proceeded through Bunter’s other pockets, in the hope of unearthing further plunder—a delusive hope. And as he groped and searched, a tall, angular figure came rapidly round a turn of the winding lane from the direction of Greyfriars School.

Mr. Quelch’s long legs were going strong.

Had not Bunter put on unaccustomed speed his form-master certainly would have overtaken him much nearer the school. Quelch covered the ground fast—and his expressive face grew grimmer and grimmer as he did so. He expected to sight a fat back at every wind of the lane—and now, suddenly he sighted Bunter, in rather unexpected circumstances—sprawling and spluttering in the dust, with a tough-looking tramp bending over him and going through his pockets!

Mr. Quelch gave that scene one startled look—then his rapid walk broke into a more rapid run. He was on the scene in a twinkling.

Nosey Jenkins, as he heard a rapid patter of footsteps, jumped up from Bunter, and grasped his cudgel, glaring round. As he did so, Mr. Quelch’s Walking-stick came into play.

Crack!

It was a long, thick, heavy walking-stick, and it was wielded in a very sinewy hand. It cracked on Mr. Jenkins’ battered bowler like a rifle-shot. That hat, already almost a ruin, became a complete wreck. What remained of it was crushed on Nosey Jenkins’ bullet head, and that bullet head rang and sang from the smite of the walking-stick. The yell that came from Nosey woke all the echoes of Friardale Lane and the fields and meadows adjoining.

“You scoundrel!” exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

“Strike me pink!” gasped Nosey, jumping back from another swipe of the walking-stick. “Oh, ’oly smoke! Ooooooh!”

Mr. Quelch followed him up, still swiping. Nosey grasped his cudgel, but a swipe across his arm caused him to drop it, with a howl of anguish. Another swipe landed on his ear—another on his already damaged head.

It was too much for Nosey! He fairly turned tail and ran for it, having had enough.

Mr. Quelch, perhaps not realising that Nosey had had enough, rushed after him, still swiping with the walking-stick twice and thrice it raised clouds of dust from Nosey’s tattered coat, before that hapless footpad fled for his life.

Then Mr. Quelch, with an angry sniff, turned back to Bunter.

That fat youth was sitting up dizzily in the dust, blinking at his form-master.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

Nosey had terrified the Owl of the Remove. But his form-master seemed to terrify

him still more. As he saw the expression on Quelch's face, the fat Owl would almost have preferred Nosey, of the two. He tottered to his feet, eyeing the Remove master with deep apprehension.

"Bunter!" Quelch's voice was like suppressed thunder, "I—I forgot—!" began Bunter. "If—if you please, sir "I—I forgot—."

"Return to the school this instant, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter.

It was a dispirited fat Owl that trudged back to Greyfriars. Uncle Clegg's ices were gone from his gaze, like a beautiful dream: Mauly's half-crown was in one of Nosey Jenkins' tattered pockets, and had disappeared with the tramp. All that remained to Billy Bunter was detention—and deponent verbs!

Mr. Quelch did not speak a word more till they arrived at the school, and the fat Owl rolled dismally into the Remove form-room. His feelings were, if possible, a little more dismal, when Quelch placed his detention paper on the desk before him. It was, as Bunter had fully expected, a "stinker". But, to his surprise and relief, Quelch did not pick up his cane. He stood regarding Bunter with a grim, but very thoughtful brow.

"I hardly know how to deal with you, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch at last. "I shall consider the matter. I shall consider it very carefully. In the meantime, I warn you that if you leave this form-room before your task is completed, you will be reported to your head-master for a flogging,"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

With that, Mr. Quelch left him to it. Billy Bunter cast a ferocious blink at the door as it closed on his form-master.

"Beast!" he breathed.

And the fat Owl, in the lowest of spirits, concentrated on those exasperating verbs which are passive in form but active in meaning.

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE IS BUNTER?

ANYBODY seen Bunter?"

Harry Wharton was asking that question up and down and round about. He was not looking—or feeling—very patient. After class, a Greyfriars man had plenty to do, without wasting his valuable time looking for a fat Owl who was not to be found. But Mr. Quelch had requested his Head Boy to send Bunter to his study, so there was no choice in the matter for Harry Wharton. He had to find Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Want Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry, as the captain of the Remove looked into the Rag and propounded his query.

"No fear! Quelch does!" growled Wharton. "I can't find the fat ass——."

"Looked in the tuck-shop?" asked Frank Nugent, laughing.

"Of course: I looked there first. He's not there."

"Looked in your study?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Eh! Why should I look in my study for him?" "Because you had a parcel from home this morning."

"Oh!" ejaculated Harry: and there was a chuckle from the fellows in the Rag, as the captain of the Remove turned away.

On the way upstairs he encountered Skinner.

"Seen Bunter, Skinner?"

"Bunter? Yes."

“Oh, good: thank goodness somebody’s seen him. Where is he?”

“Blessed if I know,” answered Harold Skinner, shaking his head.

“I suppose you know where he is if you’ve seen him!” exclaimed Wharton, in exasperation. “Where did you see him?”

“In class this afternoon,” explained Skinner. “Haven’t seen him since. Sorry.” And Skinner went on downstairs, grinning.

“You silly ass!” roared Wharton. Really, he had no time for Harold Skinner’s little jokes. He tramped up to the Remove landing, where he found several Remove fellows.

“Seen Bunter?”

“Too often,” answered Tom Brown.

“Oh, don’t be an ass! I’ve got to root him out for Quelch. Has anybody seen that fat chump trickling about?”

“He came up to the studies after class,” said Squiff. “Haven’t seen him go down.”

Wharton tramped on into the Remove passage. He looked into No. 1 Study—mindful of the Bunder’s suggestion. But that study was empty: and he tramped on to No. 7, which Billy Bunter shared with Peter Todd and Tom Dutton. He hurled open the door of No. 7 and looked in.

“Bunter here?”

Only one of the three proprietors of No. 7 Study was visible. Tom Dutton was there, and he looked round and nodded. Tom Dutton was afflicted with deafness—which was perhaps not wholly an affliction for a study-mate of Billy Bunter’s. He missed a great deal of Bunter’s conversation.

“Hear?” he repeated. “Yes, I can hear you. I’m not so deaf as the fellows make out. A trifle hard of hearing, that’s all. What do you want?”

“I asked you if that fat Owl was here.”

“No need to howl to make me hear,” answered Dutton, testily. “I can hear you all right. Looking for Toddy? He’s gone down, I think.”

“I’m looking for Bunter. Quelch wants him in his study.”

“How did that happen?” asked Dutton, staring. “Eh?”

“I mean, he might have got dusty, but I don’t see how could get muddy, in this dry weather. Fallen into a ditch, do you mean?”

“Oh! No!” gasped Wharton. “I’ve got to send Bunter to Quelch—.”

“Rot!” said Dutton. “Bunter’s not Welsh. First I’ve card of it, if he is. How did he get muddy?”

“Quelch wants him in his study,” shrieked Wharton.

“That’s bosh. There’s no mud in his study—this is Bunter’s study, and there’s no mud here. What do you mean? Anyhow, if he’s muddy, I suppose he’s got a clothes-brush? Is that what you’ve come for? I’ve got one if he wants it.”

“Do you know where Bunter’s got to?” howled Wharton.

“If he’s got two, he doesn’t want mine, then. Blessed if I see what he’s got two clothes-brushes for. You haven’t told me yet how he got muddy.”

“Do you know where Bunter is now?” roared Wharton. This time Dutton got it.

“No, I don’t, and don’t want to. And you needn’t yell at me, either. I’m not deaf,” said Dutton, warmly. “No need to shout. Look here, does Bunter want to borrow my clothes-brush or not?”

Harry Wharton did not answer that question. He chuckled, and departed from No. 7 Study, leaving Tom Dutton somewhat perplexed.

His next call was at No. 12 Study, which belonged to Lord Mauleverer. Mauly’s study was generally a land flowing with milk and honey, and a likely cover to draw for

Billy Bunter. His lordship, reclining gracefully on his study sofa, gave the captain of the Remove an inquiring glance as he looked in.

"Has a blithering, blethering, blathering idiot been here, Mauly?"

"Only you, old chap—"

"What?"

"I mean, nobody but you—."

"Fathead!"

The door banged, and Harry Wharton stared up and down the passage. It was probable that Mr. Quelch was losing patience, by that time—Harry Wharton certainly was.

Fisher T. Fish looked out of No. 14 Study, and grinned at his exasperated face.

"Say, bo, what's biting you?" he asked.

"Seen anything of Bunter?" asked Harry.

"Yep!"

"Know where he is?"

"Sure!"

"Well, where is he, then?" demanded the captain of the Remove.

"I guess I saw him levanting up to the box-room. Anything of yourn in the bag that fat guy had under his arm?" grinned Fisher T. Fish.

"The fat scoundrel!" gasped Wharton. He cut along to the box-room stair, and mounted two at a time, followed by a chuckle from Fisher T. Fish.

The box-room did not open to his touch. Evidently it was locked on the inside.

Wharton banged on it, and there was a startled gasp within.

"Bunter You fat villain!" roared Wharton.

"Oh! I—I'm not here—"

"Open this door, you blithering bandersnatch."

"I—I can't! I—I've lost the key! I say, old chap, it's not your cake. I'd let you in, if I could, just to let you see that it's not your cake."

"You've bagged the cake out of my parcel?" roared Wharton.

"Nothing of the kind. I never knew you had a parcel, and I certainly didn't know there was a cake in it. If it's gone, I expect Nugent had it."

"You fat brigand. Quelch wants you."

"He, he, he!"

"Quelch told me to send you to his study at once."

"He, he, he!"

"You fat chump, what are you cackling at? Nothing funny in Quelch sending for you, is there?"

"He, he be! You can't pull my leg," chuckled Bunter. "I'm not opening that door. I haven't finished the cake—I mean, I've lost the key—."

"If you keep Quelch waiting any longer, he will very likely come and look for you—."

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter. "You can't fool me, chap! I wasn't born yesterday, Wharton! He, he, he!"

"Oh, you bowling ass!" gasped Harry. Bunter evidently had retired to the safe seclusion of the box-room to devour the cake from No. 1 Study, sagely locking the door before he started on it. He was not going to unlock that door, with the owner of the cake on the landing outside—not before the cake was finished, at any rate. And he was not to be deluded into unlocking the door, by a yarn that Quelch had sent for him. Not Bunter!

Wharton thumped on the door again.

"I tell you Quelch wants you!" he roared.

“He, he, he! Keep it up!” chuckled Bunter.

“You fat lunatic, I tell you Quelch—!”

“He, he, he!”

“Wharton!” It was a bark from the foot of the short box-room stair. Harry Wharton gave a jump, and spun round in dismay. He looked down the stair at a lean, angular figure and a darkly-frowning face.

“Oh!” gasped Harry. It was more than twenty minutes since Mr. Quelch had requested him to send Bunter to his study. Evidently Quelch had lost patience, and taken the matter in hand himself. Equally evidently, he had heard Wharton’s voice, shouting through the box-room door.

“Is Bunter in the box-room, Wharton?”

“I—I—I think—!” stammered Harry.

The Remove master rustled up the stair. One grim look dismissed Wharton from the spot. Harry went down to the Remove passage, wondering what was going to happen to Bunter now.

Mr. Quelch turned the door-handle. Then he rapped on the door. From within came a cheery fat voice:

“That you, you silly ass? Look here, I’m not unlocking the door—I keep on telling you I’ve lost the key. You can’t pull my leg about old Quelch! Old Quelch can go and eat coke! Fat lot I care for old Quelch!”

“Bunter!”

“Oh, crikey!”

“Open this door at once, Bunter.”

“Oh, scissors!”

The key turned in the lock. The door opened. A fat Owl blinked at the Remove master, with his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles. There was a wedge of cake in Bunter’s fat hand—a chunk of cake on a box-lid—and a sea of crumbs on the floor. It was—or had been—a luscious cake, and Bunter had been enjoying life. But he was not enjoying life now. His look, as he blinked at his form-master, expressed anything but enjoyment.

“Bunter! Follow me to my study.”

“Oh, jimmy!”

Bunter followed.

CHAPTER IX

AWFUL!

BILLY BUNTER stood quaking.

Mr. Quelch sat at his study table, looking across it at Bunter, with a deeply-thoughtful frown on his face. A whole minute of silence had passed. It was a long minute to Bunter. Like every other minute, it contained only sixty seconds. But they seemed to crawl by on leaden feet.

Billy Bunter was not bright. He was not quick on the uptake. But he sensed something unusual in the atmosphere. He had a feeling of deep disquiet. He did not understand the expression on Quelch’s face. He could not guess of what the Remove master was thinking, as he sat silent, with his gimlet-eyes almost boring into that fat member of

his form.

Bunter did not know why he had been sent for. But he had too many sins on his fat conscience, to be able to feel easy in his mind.

Had Quelch told him to bend over, and handed out “six”, it would have been very unpleasant, but Bunter would have understood. He had been there before, so to speak. Had Quelch given him a “royal jaw”, it would have been disagreeable but normal: the sort of thing that often happened. But why Quelch sat regarding him in grim and thoughtful silence, Bunter did not know, and could guess, and it made him very uneasy. Matters were as usual: something was going to happen.

Only a minute—merely sixty brief seconds—but it seemed quite an age to Bunter, before Mr. Quelch spoke at last. Even then he did not speak angrily. Somehow or other, Bunter would have felt more assured if he had. It would have been more natural!

“Bunter!” His voice was quiet: almost mild. “I told you, on the day you evaded detention, that I should consider the matter—that I should consider it very carefully. I have done so.”

Quelch paused. Bunter concluded that he had paused, like Brutus, for a reply. So he weighed in,

“T-thank you, sir! M-mum-may I go now?”

Quelch did not reply to that question. He did not seem even to hear it. He regarded Bunter still with that thoughtful gaze.

“I have come to the conclusion, Bunter, that you are wasting your time here—and my time. You are lazy, idle, greedy, undutiful, slack in class and slack at games—in no respect whatever a credit to this school.”

Bunter blinked at him.

He was quite taken by surprise. He had had, perhaps, a vague idea that Quelch did not entertain a high opinion of him. But this was altogether too thick.

“Me, sir!” he ejaculated.

“Your stupidity,” said Mr. Quelch, “I can excuse—I can make allowance for that. But your idleness—your slackness—your incorrigible untruthfulness—these are faults that you could amend, if you chose. You are a disgrace to your form, Bunter.”

“Not me, sir!” gasped Bunter. “Perhaps you’re mixing me up with some other fellow, sir.”

“What?”

“I—I mean, perhaps you’re thinking of Wharton, sir, or Cherry—or—or Nugent—or Toddy—!” stammered Bunter.

“That you are the most obtuse boy in the Remove, is not perhaps your fault,” went on Mr. Quelch, regardless. “Yet you could make some effort, Bunter, if you chose to do so. Your idleness is phenomenal. Your preparation is always neglected—your construe invariably bad. You are consistently inattentive in class—you have even,” said Mr. Quelch, in a very deep voice, “gone to sleep in class.”

“Oh, no, sir! I—I listen so much better with my eyes shut—.”

“If you compensated for slackness in class by keenness at games, some excuse could be found for you,” said Mr. Quelch. “But you are frequently punished for evading games practice—only last week the Head of the Games punished you for this—.”

“I—I had a pain sir,” mumbled Bunter. “I—I told Wingate I had a touch of plumbago, sir—.”

“Frequently,” said Mr. Quelch, “your greediness has caused you to purloin food from other boys’ studies—.”

"If you mean the jam, sir, it wasn't Smithy's—and—and that cake wasn't Wharton's—."

"Lines and detentions, even canings, seem to effect no improvement." said Mr. Quelch. "You are incorrigible, Bunter. Greyfriars School is no place for a boy who has proved incorrigible."

Bunter jumped.

His eyes grew round behind his spectacles. Was the awful beast hinting at the "sack"? They couldn't sack a man for dodging games practice, or cutting detention, or snooping tuck, or handing out a rotten "con", or nodding off in class! What did the beast mean?

Bunter felt a cold chill trickle down his spine.

He had realised that there was something unusual in the air. Was that it? His fat knees knocked together.

"Oh!" he gasped. "I—I say, sir—oh, crikey!"

"I have lately received a letter from your father, Bunter. He expresses the deepest dissatisfaction with your midterm report."

"Does he, sir!" ejaculated Bunter. "I—I—I say, I—I hope it was a good report, sir!"

"It was a very bad report, Bunter."

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose. He could guess that Mr. Bunter, at home, would be made waxy by a very bad report. But whose fault was that? It was his form-master who made out the report. Quelch seemed to be blaming Bunter for what he had done himself!

"Mr. Bunter expresses the opinion that you seem to be deriving very little benefit from Greyfriars," said Mr. Quelch. "I cannot but agree with him. I have therefore decided to advise him, very strongly, to take you away from the school."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"I have no doubt that Mr. Bunter will act upon such advice—."

"Oh, lor'!"

"And that the present term will be your last here—."

"Ow!"

"You will be given one more chance, Bunter—."

"Oh!" Bunter recovered a little.

"I advise you to listen to me very carefully, to weigh my words, and to remember them," said Mr. Quelch, quietly but grimly. "At the end of the present term, your term's report will go to your father. If it is a bad report, as before, it will be accompanied by a letter to Mr. Bunter, expressing my views, in the strongest terms, that it will be quite useless for you to return to Greyfriars next term."

"B-b-b-but——!" stuttered Bunter, "I—I don't want to—to leave Greyfriars, sir! I—I—I—oh, crumbs!"

"If you do not desire to leave Greyfriars, Bunter, you have time to amend your conduct, and show such improvement as will justify me in sending your father a good report."

Bunter blinked at him. Quelch, apparently, saw a lot of room for improvement in Bunter. Bunter did not see it himself. But he knew that it was futile to argue with a beak: so he said nothing.

"I shall hope," said Mr. Quelch, "that you will make the necessary effort, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"If I find," said Mr. Quelch, "that you are careful and attentive in class, that you are assiduous in games—if I hear nothing further of purloining food in the studies—if, in short, you make a sincere effort to mend your ways, Bunter, and become a credit to

your form instead of a disgrace to it—in that case, Bunter, I shall feel justified in giving you a good report. If not”—Quelch’s voice took on a deep rumble—“if not, Bunter, when you go home at the end of the term, you will not return here.”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter.

“The outcome,” said Mr. Quelch, “depends entirely on yourself. I shall observe you very carefully during the remaining weeks of the term. You have ample time and opportunity to do better than you have done hitherto. Take full advantage of it, Bunter—otherwise you leave Greyfriars. That is all! You may now go.”

Billy Bunter almost tottered from the study.

CHAPTER X

FOR IT!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!”

“Here he is!”

“Where’s that cake, you fat villain?”

“Scalp him!”

“Scalp him baldheadfully!”

Five voices were in unison. Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, all speaking at once, gathered round Billy Bunter.

They found him in the Rag: and judging by their words, and their looks, the immediate slaughter of William George Bunter was the next item on the programme. Bunter did not speak. He did not stir. He just sat where he was, his ample proportions filling the biggest armchair in the junior day-room, and blinked at the wrathful quintette, with a dolorous blink through his big spectacles.

Perhaps he had forgotten the cake in the box-room. Much had happened since then—to Bunter. The Famous Five remembered it—as they had come in to tea, with healthy youthful appetites, and that cake in the parcel from Wharton Lodge had been intended to figure as the *Pièce-de-résistance* at tea in No. 1 Study. There was no hope of recovering that cake—indeed, an X-ray outfit would have been required to track it. But there was solace in bumping the grub-raider of the Remove: and Harry Wharton and Co. were prepared to roll Bunter out of the armchair, and bump him on the day-room floor, not once but many times.

But they paused.

Something unusual in Bunter’s aspect struck them. His look was woebegone. He blinked at them dismally, dolefully, dispiritedly. He seemed to be plunged in the very depths of pessimism. He did not seem to realise his danger—or even to observe that the chums of the Remove were wrathful. He just blinked at them.

“Hold on!” said Harry. “Quelch has been on his track. If the fat villain has just had six from Quelch—!”

“Whopped?” demanded Bob Cherry.

“Eh! No!” mumbled Bunter. “Worse than that! I say, you fellows, it’s awful.”

“Sent up to the Head?” asked Frank Nugent. And wrath died out of five faces. A fellow sent up to the Head was not a proper object for bumping or scalping.

“Worse than that!” groaned Bunter.

“Worse?” exclaimed Johnny Bull, blankly.

"Is the worsefulness terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

A minute ago, the Famous Five had been prepared to collar Bunter, and reduce him to a state of breathless wreckage. Now they gave him sympathetic looks. The cake missing from No. 1 Study was a trifle light as air, in comparison with the deep woe that seemed to overwhelm the unfortunate Owl.

"Not the sack, surely?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. That, so far as he knew, was the only thing worse than being sent up to the Head.

"You're not bunked, old fat man?" exclaimed Bob. "As bad as that?"

"Well, not quite so bad as that," mumbled Bunter. "But it comes to the same thing. I've got to leave at the end of the term, unless—."

"Unless what?"

"Unless Quelch gets over his prejudice against me, and does me justice," said Bunter, dismally. "That's not very likely, is it? I—I say, you fellows, do you think Quelch is quite right in his head?"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Well, it sounded to me like crackers, the way he talked to me in his study," said Bunter. "He said I was lazy, idle, greedy, undutiful, untruthful—me, you know! Not one of you fellows—I could understand that. But me!"

"Oh, my hat."

"Of course, I've never had justice here," said Bunter. "I don't expect it. You've never done me justice, Wharton, as captain of the form—you haven't played me in a single cricket match—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But a fellow has a right to expect justice from his form-master," said Bunter. "I don't get it from Quelch. He says I'm slack in class, and slack at games."

"So you are!" said Johnny Bull.

"The slackfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"He's going to give me a bad report, and advise my pater to take me away," groaned Bunter. "Fancy what you'd feel like, you fellows, if I didn't come back next term! Think of that!"

"Oh!" gasped the five.

"And that's what it's coming to, unless I can get round Quelch somehow," said Bunter. "I've been sitting here thinking it over, and—and it's awful. I don't want to leave Greyfriars. Think how the fellows would miss me!"

"Oh!" gasped the five, again. Bunter really seemed to be taking their breath away.

"And—and—and—you fellows remember once there was a spot of trouble, and the pater thought of taking me away? Well, he said that if I left Greyfriars, he shouldn't think of sending me to another school but would find something for me to do in his office. Do you realise what that means? Work!" said Bunter, in almost a hollow voice. The Famous Five gazed at him. They did not speak.

Perhaps they were overcome by the sense of tragedy in that awful prospect.

Bunter blinked at them sadly.

"I'm for it!" he said, "unless I can get round Quelch. I'm done for unless he gives me a good report this term. What can a fellow do?"

"That's an easy one," said Johnny Bull. "A fellow could chuck up being a fat, lazy, footling frowster!"

"Oh, really, Bull—."

"You could chuck up dodging games," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"You could do your prep, instead of frowsting in the armchair in No. 7 while Toddy

and Dutton do theirs!" suggested Frank Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—."

"You could chuck up snooping tuck in other fellows' studies!" suggested Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"You could chuck up the execrable fibfulness, and try your hand at esteemed veracity!" suggested Hurree Jam-set Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—."

Billy Bunter did not seem to regard these suggestions as helpful.

He had been thinking deeply and dolorously over what Mr. Quelch had said to him.

He realised very clearly that he would have to go, if he did not placate Quelch. But the path of reform seemed to offer him no attractions.

"Well, old fat man, if Quelch has got his back up to that extent, the best thing you can do is to pull up your socks while there's time!" said Bob Cherry. "Henry is a man of his word—you can bank on that. Now what about tea, you men?"

"Come on," said Harry. "Tea in my study—if Bunter's left anything there."

And the Famous Five tramped out of the Rag—followed by a dolorous blink from the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, lor'!" mumbled Bunter.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott came into the Rag. They glanced at the dolorous Owl in the armchair—and then stared at him. He gave Skinner and Co. a lack-lustre blink.

"What's the row, fatty?" asked Skinner. "Coker caught you in his study after his tuck?"

"Wharton been looking for his cake?" grinned Snoop.

"I—I say, you fellows, what do you think? I—I may have to leave Greyfriars," groaned Bunter. "You mayn't see me here next term."

"No such luck!" said Skinner.

"Too good to be true!" said Snoop, shaking his head.

"Too jolly good!" said Stott.

Skinner and Co. did not seem sympathetic.

The fat Owl heaved himself out of the armchair, and rolled out of the Rag, leaving Skinner and Co. laughing. In the passage he came on Squiff, of the Remove.

"I say, Squiff, old chap—."

"Sorry—stony!" answered Squiff.

"I say, I'm going at the end of the term, Squiff. I shall have to leave Greyfriars!" mumbled Bunter.

"Well, you couldn't expect to take it with you," said Squiff.

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled on. He grabbed Peter Todd by the arm. Peter, as his study-mate in No. 7, was sure to be sympathetic.

"Peter, old fellow—!"

"Nothing in the study," said Peter. "I'm going to tea in hall. So don't waste your old fellows on me."

"I'm for it, Peter! What would you feel like if you never saw me in No. 7 Study again?"

"Fine!" said Peter. And he went into hall, leaving Billy Bunter glaring after him with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

It really seemed that if the catastrophe happened, and Billy Bunter had to leave Greyfriars, there would be a lot of dry eyes when he went!

CHAPTER XI

NEW RESOLUTIONS!

“WHARTON, old chap—!”

“Don’t bother!”

“But I say—!”

“Buzz off!”

“Look here—!”

“Dry up!”

Billy Bunter did not dry up: neither did he buzz off. He rolled into No. 1 Study, and shut the door after him: and the captain of the Remove reached for a missile.

It was several days since Bunter’s heart-to-heart talk with his form-master in Quelch’s study. By that time, all the Remove knew of the sword of Damocles that impended over Billy Bunter’s fat head.

Sad to relate, they did not take it with due seriousness. It was awful for Bunter—but the rest of the Remove did not seem somehow to perceive the awfulness of the situation. The prospect of losing Bunter did not have the generally dismaying effect that might have been expected.

But if nobody else realised how serious it was, Bunter did. Billy Bunter didn’t want to leave Greyfriars.

The place had its drawbacks, of course. Nobody there valued Bunter at his real value. A fellow had to work—to some extent, at least. Quelch, like many schoolmasters, fancied that fellows came to school to learn things. This was quite a mistake, so far as Bunter was concerned.

Bunter was going to stick to the dear old school! But it was borne in upon his fat mind, that there was only one means of sticking to the dear old school. He had to tread the thorny path of reform. Reform, of course, was not necessary—Bunter was completely satisfied with himself. Indeed his self-satisfaction was unlimited. But it was Quelch that had to be satisfied—there was the rub! And Quelch could only be satisfied by a drastic change in William George Bunter’s manners and customs. To that resolve Billy Bunter had come at last! It was neck or nothing.

With such serious matters on his fat mind, it was very irritating to Bunter to be told to dry up and buzz off when he rolled in on the captain of the Remove.

Harry Wharton was sitting at the study table, with a paper before him, a pencil in his hand, and a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow. He was going through the list of the cricket team that was shortly going over to Highcliffe to play Courtenay and the Caterpillar and their comrades. This, to the captain of the Remove, was a rather serious matter: for the Highcliffe junior cricketers were hot stuff, and the game would be anything but a walk-over.

But it was, of course, a trifle light as air, in comparison with Billy Bunter’s problem. In fact, all the affairs of all other fellows, were the veriest trifles in comparison with Bunter’s affairs!

“Look here, Wharton, you know how I’m fixed,” said the fat Owl, with a reproachful blink at the captain of his form. “I think you might back up a fellow when he’s down on his luck—especially after all I’ve done for you.”

“Busy, old fat man. Cut off.”

“Lines for Quelch?” asked Bunter.

"No, ass—cricket list, for the Highcliffe match next week. And it's just on time for nets," said Harry, glancing at the study clock. "Roll away, like a good barrel."

"Well, I've got to speak to you about cricket, among other things," said Bunter. "I suppose you don't want me to leave Greyfriars, Wharton."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I might just be able to bear it," he answered. "A fellow's tuck would be safe in his study cupboard, at any rate."

'Beast! I mean, I want your help, old chap. You know how the matter stands. I've got to keep Quelch quiet, or he will push me out at the end of the term. He's said so. I'm going to get a good report this term, or bust!" declared Bunter. "I'm going to get a good report, even if I have to mug up Latin like Linley does, and sit up over deponent verbs with a wet towel round my head."

"Good egg," said Harry. "Best of luck! Shut the door after you."

"I'm going all out," said Bunter, impressively. "I loathe the muck, of course—but after all, it's simply a matter of brains to mug it up: and that's rather my long suit."

"Oh, scissors!"

"It will mean work," said Bunter. "But not so tough as in the pater's office. Well, I'm going to work."

"The change may do you good," assented Wharton. 'Glad to hear it. Now go and tell some other fellow about it."

"But that isn't all," said Bunter. "There's games. That's where you come in. You run games in the Remove, as captain. You can help me there. Quelch thinks I slack at games. If I get into Remove games, it will make a big difference. Good in class and good at games—that's the idea! *Mens sankey in corpus sancho*—you know what I mean."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton. "Do you mean *mens ana in corpore sano*?"

"No, I don't," snapped Bunter. "I mean what I say—*mens sankey in corpus sancho*. You can't teach me Latin, Wharton."

"I'd rather not try," said Harry, laughing. "That's Quelch's job—and I wish him joy of it. Now you're finished—."

"That's where I want your help. You've often said that I slack at games—just like Quelch. You needn't deny it—you have!"

"Guilty, my lord."

"Well, what I want is a chance," said Bunter. "You needn't give me a place in the team for Highcliffe—."

"Thanks! I won't."

"I prefer to play in a Home match," explained Bunter. "I want Quelch's eye on me. St. Jim's will be coming over soon, and Carcroft, and Sparshott, and Topham—well. I'm not particular which match I play in—I'll leave that to you," said Bunter, generously.

"Put me in one fairly soon, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Bunter.

"Your little joke."

"I'm not joking—!" howled Bunter.

"Your mistake: you are!" Wharton assured him. "Now roll away and be funny in some other study. I really want to go over this list before nets."

"Are you going to put me down for a Remove match or not?" demanded Bunter.

"Not!"

"If I make a good show, it will help to keep Quelch quiet. You see that?" argued Bunter. "This isn't a time for paltry jealousy of a better man, Harry Wharton. Put that

right aside for once.”

“You howling ass—!”

“The sooner the better,” said Bunter. “I want to get on Quelch’s right side—delays are dangerous, you know. If he sees my name on the cricket list, he will sit up and take notice.”

“I’ll bet he would!” chuckled Wharton.

“Well, will you put my name down for the next cricket match at home—?”

“Hardly!”

“Quelch would see me play—!”

“We can’t chuck cricket matches away, simply to provide Quelch with a funny entertainment.”

“You silly ass!” roared Bunter. “I can play your head off, and chance it. Mind, I don’t want to be a regular member of the eleven. I haven’t time. But I want to play in the next home game, to keep Quelch quiet, see? That’s the important point. I suppose you don’t think your dashed cricket is so important as my staying on at Greyfriars—!”

“More!”

“Beast!”

“But I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you,” said Harry. He rose from the table, and put the cricket list in his pocket. ‘If you’re keen on cricket—.’

“Frightfully keen!” assured Bunter.

“Well, I’ll see that you don’t cut nets, I’ll back you up all along the line in getting lots of practice—.”

“I don’t need the practice you do!” said Bunter, disdainfully. “The fact is, I can’t come down today—I’ve got a pain in my leg—.”

“Which leg?”

“I forget—I mean, the right leg. A pain like a burning dagger,” said Bunter. “A touch of plumbago, I think—there’s a lot of plumbago in my family. Otherwise I’d come like a—a shot. But with this bad wrist—.”

“A bad wrist as well as a bad leg?”

“I mean this bad leg! With this bad leg, I should only be in the way,” said Bunter.

“You can explain to Wingate if he asks why I’m not there.”

Harry Wharton chuckled. Bunter, apparently, was on the path of reform. But he had not progressed very far along that thorny path. He was still the same old Bunter.

The door of No. 1 Study was hurled open, a sturdy figure in flannels appeared in the doorway, and Bob Cherry’s ruddy face looked in. He had a bat under his arm.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob. “Time you changed, if you’re not going to be late, old scout.”

“Right-ho! Come on, Bunter.”

“I’m not coming, old chap! This pain in my arm—I mean my leg—.”

“Don’t be a fat ass,” said Harry, tersely. “It’s a compulsory day, and Wingate will give us a look in. Get a move on.”

“I hope you’re not going to be a beast, Wharton! You can let a man off if he’s ill, as captain of the Form. Tell Wingate I’m ill. There’s a pain in my leg like a red-hot poker,” said Bunter, pathetically. “I’m as keen as—as anything, but with this awful pain, I could do simply nothing. I believe I’ve got a touch of pneumonia in my knee—.”

“Oh, crumbs!” ejaculated Bob Cherry. “That sounds bad.”

“It is bad, old chap! I can bear it,” said Bunter, nobly.

“I’m not a fellow to make a fuss, even about agony like this. I think I’ll take a rest in

your armchair, Wharton—I couldn't even walk downstairs at this moment. I couldn't even walk out of the study."

"You fat chump, get a move on," said Wharton, impatiently.

"Oh, really, Wharton, when I'm suffering this fearful pain—!"

"Hold on," said Bob. "If Bunter's got a fearful pain, and can't walk out of the study, he certainly can't go down to the nets, and you'll have to let him off. But perhaps he exaggerates. I'll try prodding him with this bat, and I shouldn't wonder if he could walk out of the study all right."

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Keep that bat away, you silly ass! Whooop!" Billy Bunter fairly bounded.

"Well, he can jump, if he can't walk," said Bob. "A pot of prodding—!"

"Ow! wow! Will you keep that bat away!" roared Bunter, dodging round the study table. "Beast! Leave off shoving that bat at me, will you? I—I'm going. Will you leave off bunging that bat in my ribs, you beast! I'm going, ain't I?"

Billy Bunter—under Bob's cheerful prodding—found that he could not only walk, but actually run! Two chuckling juniors followed him down. Five minutes later a fat figure that looked on the point of bursting out of its flannels rolled reluctantly down to junior nets. If Billy Bunter was keen on cricket, nobody would have guessed it from the expression on his fat face.

CHAPTER XII

QUELCH IS NOT PLEASED!

"You will go on, Bunter."

"Oh, lor'!" breathed Billy Bunter.

He hoped to escape the gimlet-eye that morning! In a numerous form like the Remove, every fellow was not called upon for "con". Any fellow might be called, so it behoved every fellow to be prepared. Any Remove man who neglected "prep", and trusted to luck in the form-room, was taking risky chances. But William George Bunter was just the fellow to take the risk.

Since that serious talk with Quelch in his study, Billy Bunter had made new resolutions—he had made up his fat mind to do a spot of work: and indeed, to surprise Quelch with a display of scholarship. And for several days Bunter had kept more or less to his new resolves. But though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. Laziness supervened: and, at length, Bunter had chanced it, once more, in his happy way.

It was very unfortunate, in the circumstances. He really did want to make a good impression on his form-master—if only it could be done without exerting himself. He really did want a good report that term—a good report was in fact indispensable to him. He wanted his report to contain such phrases as "painstaking", and "conscientious worker". The only way was to satisfy Quelch in class—and the shortest cut to Quelch's esteem was a good "con". Bunter really wished he had not been too busy the previous evening to bother about prep. But it was too late to think of that now.

He had hoped that the gimlet-eye might pass him over that morning. But the gimlet-eye hadn't!

Bunter blinked dismally at his Latin page. Even when he had taken a shot at his prep, his translation was generally rather askew. But this time he had not even looked at it. A page of prepared Latin presented many difficulties to Bunter. A page of unprepared

Latin was a deep mystery to him.

But he had to construe. It was useless to tell Quelch that he had had no time for prep—worse than useless, in fact!

“I said go on, Bunter!”

“Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter. “I—I’ve lost the place, sir—.”

“You should not lose the place, Bunter! Go on from ‘*At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens—!*’” snapped Mr. Quelch.

“Yes, sir,” moaned Bunter, blinking at his page. Evidently it was something about that beast, Aeneas, but Bunter wondered dismally what the beast was up to this time. The most concentrated blink could not extract any particular meaning from the verse of P. Vergilius Maro.

“I am waiting for you to go on, Bunter,” said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice.

“Oh, certainly, sir! I—I was just—just thinking! *At Pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens, ut primum lux alma data est—!*”

“Construe!” rapped Mr. Quelch.

“But good Aeneas—!” Peter Todd ventured to whisper. It was a rather dangerous venture under the gimlet-eye.

“Todd!” barked Mr. Quelch. “Did you speak?”

“Oh! Yes! I—!”

“Take fifty lines, Todd.”

There was no more help for Bunter. Nobody else wanted fifty lines. The hapless Owl had to make a shot at it.

“But good Aeneas—!” he mumbled. There was a pause.

“Go on, Bunter.”

“Oh, yes, sir, I—I’m going on,” groaned Bunter. “It— it’s quite easy to me, sir, as I was—was so careful with my prep last night, sir.”

“If you do not immediately construe, Bunter—.”

“But good Aeneas,” gasped Bunter. “But—but—but Gig-gig-good *Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens—* turning over in bed—.”

“Wha-a-a-t?”

“But good Aeneas, turning over several times in the night—” amended Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the Remove.

“Silence! Bunter, what do you mean by this?” thundered Mr. Quelch.

“Is— —isn’t that right, sir?” stammered Bunter.

“Bless my soul!” said Mr. Quelch.

“Ut primum lux alma data est—when he was given a light!” pursued Bunter.

“Bunter! Have you the faintest idea of the meaning of that passage?” exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

“Oh, yes, sir. Aeneas was turning over in bed, and they gave him a light—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You have not prepared this lesson, Bunter.”

“Oh, yes, sir! I—I was very careful with it. I—I worked at it very hard, sir,” groaned Bunter. “I—I think I’ve got it right, sir.”

“Grant me patience!” articulated Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter looked indignant. It was true that he hadn’t prepared that passage: and he had had to make a shot at it unprepared: and that it was rather a shot in the dark. Still, his “con” seemed all right—to Bunter. He had at least got some sense out of it: and a fellow couldn’t always get any sense out of Virgil!

Quelch gazed at him, apparently at a loss for words: and Bunter went on:

“*Exire locosque explorare novos—* goes out and explores nine places—!”

“Stop!” almost shrieked Mr. Quelch.

Bunter stopped. He was glad enough to stop, so far as that went. But he could not hope that he had made a good impression on his form-master, and taken a step towards that good report that he needed so much. Only too clearly he hadn’t. He blinked uneasily at Quelch. It was borne in upon his fat mind that Quelch was going to be a beast!

“Bunter! If you prepared this lesson—!”

“Oh, yes, sir! Toddy knows—Todd’s in my study, sir! I wasn’t sitting in the armchair while you did your prep, was I, Toddy? You can ask Todd, sir.”

“If you have prepared this lesson,” said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, “you will immediately construe that passage, Bunter. If not—.”

“Oh! Yes, sir!” groaned Bunter.

So far as Bunter could see, he had construed that passage. Quelch did not seem to think so: in fact, he seemed annoyed about something. Bunter blinked at his Latin again, willing to take another pot-shot, if he could possibly disentangle any other meaning from the rot. But he couldn’t. If “*At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens, ut primum lux alma data est, exire locosque explorare novos*” didn’t mean “But the good Aeneas, turning over often in the night, when he is given a light goes out and explores nine places”, Bunter just didn’t know what it did mean or might mean.

“Well?” hooted Mr. Quelch.

“I—I think I’ve got it right, sir!” gasped Bunter. “You utterly obtuse boy—.”

“Oh, really, sir—.”

“If you had prepared this lesson, Bunter, you could not possibly make such absurd mistakes. You have done no preparation. You are making wild guesses at the meaning of that passage! Your translation, Bunter, would disgrace a small boy in the Second Form. I will not permit such idleness, such slackness—in my form! I have warned you, Bunter, of the consequences of idleness and slackness. I shall now cane you.”

“Oh, lor’!”

“Stand out before the class, Bunter.”

Billy Bunter rolled out reluctantly. Mr. Quelch picked up the cane from his desk.

Billy Bunter eyed it with apprehension.

“Bend over that chair, Bunter.”

Whack!

“Ow!”

Whack!

Bunter wriggled back to his place. He wriggled a good deal during the remainder of that lesson. When the form were dismissed, he wriggled his way out of the form-room. And he realised, very clearly, that he hadn’t made any progress towards that good report at the end of the term. On that point there was no doubt: no possible, probable shadow of doubt: no possible doubt whatever!

CHAPTER XIII

COKER’S HAMPER!

“HERE, lend a hand!”

Horace Coker did not request—he rapped out a command, in the lofty manner that was customary with Coker of the Fifth. Bunter blinked round.

He was coming upstairs, and had reached the middle landing, when Coker’s voice hailed him from behind. Coker of the Fifth was coming up after him, and Coker of the Fifth was heavy-laden. He was carrying a hamper—and it was a rather large and heavy hamper.

Coker was a powerful fellow, but he seemed to have a spot of bother with that hamper on the stairs. So, seeing a junior in the offing, he called to him to lend a hand. Some fellows, wanting a helping hand, would have put the request politely. But Coker of the Fifth had little politeness to waste on a fag of the Lower Fourth. Coker of the Fifth always spoke as one having authority, saying “Do this!” and he doeth it. It was one of Coker’s ways.

“Don’t stand there like a stuffed dummy,” went on Coker, crossly, as Billy Bunter blinked down at him through his big spectacles. “Come and lend a hand with this hamper, you fat young ass.”

“O, really, Coker—.”

“And sharp!” snapped Coker.

Many Remove fellows, addressed thus peremptorily, by Coker of the Fifth, would have told Coker where he got off, or walked on regardless. And Billy Bunter was really the least likely recruit. Bunter had plenty of weight to carry up the stairs, without a hamper added. Neither was he fearfully keen on exertion of any kind. Nevertheless, Billy Bunter turned back, to give Horace Coker the required helping hand.

It was the hamper that did it. Bunter knew Coker’s hampers—they came from Coker’s Aunt Judy, and were always crammed with good things. Miss Judith Coker believed that nothing was too good for her dear Horace. Bunter was deeply interested in the hamper, if not in Coker. So Bunter descended the stairs, and grasped one handle of the hamper, and exerted himself to be of assistance.

Between them, the hamper was heaved up to the middle landing, and across it, to the upper stairs. Halfway up to the upper landing, Billy Bunter was spluttering for breath.

“I—I say, stop a minute,” he gasped. “I—I’m out of breath.”

“You would be!” snapped Coker. “Fat, lazy, slack little porker—.”

“Look here—!”

“Don’t jaw! Get on with it,” said Coker. And he barged on, heedless of Billy Bunter’s desire for a rest.

“Beast!”

“What?” roared Coker.

“I mean, all right!” gasped Bunter. “I—I’m jolly glad to help, old chap.”

Coker glared at him.

“Did you call me old chap?” he asked. “You call me old chap again you cheeky fag, and I’ll jolly well smack your cheeky head when we get to the landing.” Coker did not like “old chap” from a Lower Fourth junior.

Billy Bunter breathed hard, and breathed deep. But he made no rejoinder, and the hamper was heaved up to the landing. There Bunter dumped down his end, and spluttered.

“Done in?” asked Coker, sarcastically. “Why don’t you keep yourself fit, you fat slacker? Here, Skinner, lend a hand with this hamper.” Skinner of the Remove was coming across the landing to go down, and Coker called to Skinner.

“—I say, I—I’ll help you with it, Coker,” gasped Bunter, anxiously. “I—I’ll help you get it to your study.” Bunter was anxious to be on the scene when that hamper was

opened.

“You can shut up,” said Coker.

“Look here, Coker——.”

“I said shut up! Skinner, take hold of this hamper.

Take one handle, and get it along to my study. Do you hear me?” added Coker, in a roar, as Skinner, unheeding, went on to the stairs.

Skinner, certainly, heard. But like the ancient gladiator, he heard but he heeded not. Harold Skinner walked by just as if Horace James Coker, of the Fifth Form, did not exist at all. He merely ignored Coker. But Coker was not a fellow to be ignored by a junior. He stepped after Skinner and let out a foot.

“Oh!” roared Skinner, as he tottered.

“Now lend a hand with this hamper, if you don’t want another!” snapped Coker.

Skinner did not seem to want another. But he did not lend a hand with the hamper. He cut down the stairs and vanished.

“I—I say, Coker, I’ll help——.”

“Shut up, and get on with it!” growled Coker.

And Bunter shut up and got on with it. The hamper was carted across the landing into the Fifth-form passage, and along to Coker’s study.

There it was safely landed, and Bunter was able to take a rest, which he badly needed, and splutter for breath, which he needed still more.

Coker unfastened the lid of the hamper. A delightful aroma reached Billy Bunter’s fat little nose, and he sniffed appreciatively. He had a glimpse of ripe red apples and luscious pears. No doubt there were other good things packed underneath—Aunt Judy’s hampers were always lavishly supplied. But there were apples and pears on top, and Billy Bunter’s eyes and spectacles dwelt on them longingly. Coker picked up a ripe luscious pear.

“Here you are, you fat ass!” he said. “Now cut!” He tossed the pear to Bunter, who naturally missed the catch.

“Now cut off,” said Coker. “Tell Potter and Greene to come here—tell them my hamper’s come. I expect they’re in the games-study.”

Billy Bunter gave him a look, and rolled out. He passed the games-study, at the end of the Fifth-form passage, without looking into that apartment. If Coker fancied that he could send Bunter on messages. Coker had another guess coming. Bunter was not in the least interested in Potter and Greene, or in calling them to the feast. But he was still interested—deeply interested—in Coker’s hamper.

Having turned a corner, Bunter came to a halt. He proceeded to dispose of the pear so generously bestowed him by Horace Coker. It was a luscious pear, and Bunter liked it. Bunter could easily have disposed of a dozen like it, one after another. And Bunter was going to, if his fat wits could work the oracle.

Having finished the pear, the fat junior rolled back to Coker’s study. He blinked in at Horace Coker, who gave him a glare. Coker was expecting his study-mates, Potter and Greene, not the fat ornament of the Remove.

“I—I say, Coker, hurry up!” gasped Bunter. “Potter’s fallen down the library steps——.”

“Clumsy ass!” said Coker.

“I—I think he’s broken his neck——.”

“What?”

“I—I mean his leg! He—he’s in awful pain, and— asking for you—poor old Greene——.”

“Greene? Was it Greene or Potter?”

"I-I mean Potter—both his legs broken—." Coker rushed from the study. He forgot all about the hamper, at that alarming news. Bunter blinked after him, as he cut down the passage, and tore across the landing. Echoes came back of Coker's big feet, going down the staircase three stairs at a time.

Coker was gone almost in the twinkling of an eye. In another twinkling, Billy Bunter rolled across to the open hamper.

He grabbed at apples and pears. As he did so, there were footsteps in the Fifth-form passage. Bunter stopped—his eyes fixed on the open doorway in alarm. In that doorway, a moment later, two figures appeared. Potter and Greene had come along from the games-study at an unlucky moment for Bunter.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Potter, staring at the fat Owl. What—!"

"What—?" began Greene.

But they did not really need to ask questions. The scene spoke for itself. Potter and Greene did not waste time in words—they went into action at once.

Potter got in the first kick. But Greene was a good second. Billy Bunter roared, and bounded for the door. An apple flew from one hand—a pear from the other—and Bunter flew from the doorway as Potter's foot landed again. He did not linger in the passage. He did that passage almost as rapidly as Horace Coker, and vanished into space.

CHAPTER XIV

NO TAKERS!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Too late!" said Bob Cherry, sadly.

"Eh! Wharrer you mean?" asked Bunter.

"Only half a sardine left!" explained Bob.

There was a chuckle in No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton and Co. had finished tea in that celebrated apartment, when Bunter rolled in.

"The too-latefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It is the early bird that goes longest to the well and saves a stitch in time, as the English proverb remarks."

"I haven't come to tea!" snorted Bunter. "I've tea'd with Mauly—I mean, I wish you fellows wouldn't think that a fellow is always thinking about grub. I can tell you I've got something else to think of, with Quelch down on me, hunting for an excuse to give me a bad report this term. You heard him this morning in form—."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Is good old Aeneas still turning over in bed?"

"And are they giving him a light?" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter. "I had it right, I jolly well know that. Quelch don't know so much Latin as he makes out."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The fact is, he's down on me," said Bunter. "I don't know why, but Quelch has never been satisfied with me. I don't know why he always finds fault—but he does."

"You don't know why?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Well, look at it," said Bunter. "I hand out a jolly good con, and he's down on me just the same. Is that what you call fair play?"

"You howling ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "Your con would have made a cat laugh. Do you think Virgil wrote the rot you handed out to Quelch?"

“Well, it’s all rot, isn’t it?” said Bunter. “Of course, we can’t say so to a beak, but we jolly well know it’s all rot, don’t we? Anyhow, it’s no good trying to please Quelch, when he jumps on a fellow who hands out a good con—.”

“But you had it all wrong, you ass!” roared Bob.

“Perhaps you think you know Latin better than I do, Cherry!” sneered Bunter. “I jolly well know I had it right, and my belief is that Quelch is ignorant. I came jolly near telling him so, too.”

“Lucky you didn’t quite!” said Harry Wharton, laughing. “If you’d done your prep, you wouldn’t have made such a howler. You see, *per noctem plurima volvens* doesn’t mean that Aeneas was turning over in the night—it means that he was turning things over in his mind during the night—.”

“And they didn’t give him a light!” chuckled Nugent.

“It was the jolly old light of dawn—.”

“And he went out to explore one place, not nine!” gurgled Bob.

“Well, I don’t see a lot of difference,” said Bunter. “My con was near enough, I think.”

“The nearfulness was not terrific,” chuckled Hurree Singh.

“I fancy I know as much Latin as you fellows could teach me,” said Bunter, disdainfully. “But look here, I haven’t come here to talk about that rot. I shall have to be jolly wary of Quelch in class, as he’s determined to be down on me for nothing—but never mind that now. It’s about Coker—!”

“Coker of the Fifth?” asked Bob. “What’s jolly old Coker been up to? I hear that he’s been kicking Skinner—Skinner didn’t seem to like it—.”

“Like his cheek to kick a Remove man,” growled Johnny Bull. “It’s about time that Fifth-form fathead was told where he gets off.”

“Just what I was thinking,” said Bunter, eagerly. “That’s what I came to tell you fellows about. Coker’s too jolly cheeky, and I know a way to make him sit up. You fellows ain’t afraid of Coker of the Fifth, are you?”

“Not a lot,” agreed Bob. “What’s the big idea?”

“Coker’s had a hamper—.”

“Nothing to do with us, if he has.”

“That’s the idea!” explained Bunter. “It’s one of those hampers from his old sketch of an aunt, and you know what they’re like. Packed with stuff. Crammed. He’s got it in his study. I daresay they had some of the stuff for tea—but there’s lots and lots! If you fellows bagged it—.”

“What?” exclaimed the Famous Five, all together.

“Mind, I don’t want a hand in it,” said Bunter, hastily. “I’ve got to be wary with Quelch. He makes out that I snoop tuck from other fellows’ studies—he’s actually said so. He thought I’d had Smithy’s jam the other day, you know, because I ate it in his study—.”

“Oh, crumbs!”

“He’s got a suspicious eye on me,” said Bunter, sorrowfully. “I don’t expect justice from Quelch. If he hears about a hamper missing from a study, I’ll bet he will think of me at once. And I’ve got to think of my report this term. I’m not going to give Quelch any excuse for making out that I snoop tuck, or anything of that kind. I’ve got to be right off the scene when you fellows raid Coker’s hamper—see?”

“When we do!” grinned Bob.

“The whenfulness is terrific.”

“You fat villain!” roared Johnny Bull, wrathfully. “Are you asking us to snoop Coker’s tuck for you?”

“Not for me, of course—equal whacks all round,” exclaimed Bunter. “I’m not greedy, I hope! You fellows get it out of Coker’s study and up to the box-room—see? I’ll be waiting for you there. But it mustn’t come out that I had anything to do with it—that’s important. I’ve got to be wary of Quelch. I say, fancy Coker’s face when he finds that hamper gone! He, he, he!”

Billy Bunter chuckled. But the five juniors in No. 1 Study did not chuckle. They stared at Bunter blankly.

“You podgy pirate!” said Harry Wharton, in measured tones. “Do you think we want to bag another fellow’s tuck?”

“Kick him!” said Johnny Bull.

“The kickfulness is the proper caper,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “Turn roundfully, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter.”

“I say, you fellows, you don’t seem to catch on. I tell you the hamper’s simply crammed with tuck—you know Coker’s hampers! Apples, pears, home-made jam—I can tell you Coker’s aunt makes topping jam—pineapples and peaches and things—I had a look into it—you can take my word for it! I believe there’s cold chicken too—think of that! Plenty to go round once we get it safe to the boxroom—!”

“You bloated brigand, we don’t want to scoff Coker’s tuck!”

“Well, that’s rot!” said Bunter. “Of course, it’s not exactly the tuck I’m thinking of. I don’t really care much for tuck, as you fellows know—.”

“Ye gods and little fishes!”

“I mean to say, I’m not greedy, like some fellows I could name,” said Bunter. “What I’m really thinking of is making that brute Coker sit up. He’s been kicking a Remove fellow—and—and we oughtn’t to stand that, you know. Well, we can’t kick Coker, but we can jolly well bag his hamper, see—as a punishment for his swank—not because of the tuck, of course—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed f I see anything to cackle at. Is it a go?” asked Bunter. “You fellows get it to the box-room. If Coker makes a fuss afterwards, you can all swear that you don’t know anything about it—.”

“What!” yelled the Famous Five.

“I mean, if you all say the same, that’s plenty of witnesses, ain’t it,” said Bunter.

“You all swear—.”

“Well, you’re enough to make any fellow swear, if he knew the words,” said Bob Cherry. “Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen, Coker of the Fifth is a silly ass and a swanking fathead, but he has good ideas sometimes. He’s kicked a Remove man. Now let’s follow his example—let’s all do the same.”

“Hear, hear!”

The famous Five jumped up like one man. Billy Bunter gave them one alarmed blink, and realised that he was the Remove man they were going to kick. He turned to flee. Five lunging feet helped him in his flight. Bunter disappeared with a roar: and the door slammed after him.

A few moments later a fat voice hooted through the keyhole:

“Yah! Rotters! Funks! Yah!”

After which there was a sound of rapidly departing footsteps.

CHAPTER XV

STUMPED!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH jumped, as his study door was suddenly opened. Tea was over in No. 4 Study in the Remove, and Tom Redwing had gone down. Smithy had lingered to smoke a cigarette after tea, which was one of his manners and customs. And he had a pink paper on his knee—being keenly interested in the prospects of Nobbled Nick for the Welsher's Handicap. So that sudden opening of his study door made Smithy jump. Had it been a master or a prefect at his door, the scapegrace of Greyfriars would have been booked for six of the very best—if not an interview with his headmaster.

But it was not a beak or a pre. that looked in. It was a fat face adorned by a large pair of spectacles.

Smithy bestowed quite a deadly look on that fat face. The Owl of the Remove did not observe that deadly look. He rolled in and shut the door after him. Smithy's cigarette and pink paper disappeared from sight: and he looked round for a cricket stump.

"You fat, frabjous, footling, frumptious foozler!" said the Bounder. "Don't they knock at doors in the slum you come from?"

"I'm in rather a hurry, Smithy, old chap! Those beasts may come after me," explained Bunter. "It's all right, Smithy—I didn't see you smoking—and I shan't tell anybody! I say, I've come here to let you in on a good thing. Looking for something, old fellow?"

"Yes. Hand me that cricket stump in the corner."

"Eh! What do you want a cricket stump for?" asked Bunter, blinking at him.

"You!"

"Oh, really, Smithy." Bunter did not hand Smithy the cricket-stump. "I say, listen to a chap, old man. I've sometimes had a jolly good spread in this study, Smithy. Well, now I'm going to stand you one."

"Has your postal-order come?" inquired the Bounder, sarcastically. "I seem to have heard that you were expecting one."

"Well, no," admitted Bunter. "There's some delay in the post—I can't quite make it out: but it hasn't come. Never mind that now. I say, Smithy, how would you like cold chicken, and jelly, and preserves, and home-made jam, tarts and buns, apples and pears, peaches and pineapples—what?"

"Got them in your trousers' pocket?" inquired the Bounder, still sarcastic.

"Nunno! They're in a—a—a hamper, at present—."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Smithy. "I've heard that Coker of the Fifth had a hamper today. Is that it?"

"Well, you ain't afraid of Coker of the Fifth, like those smugs in No. I study," said Bunter. "I've come to you Smithy, because you've got tons of pluck."

"Thanks," grinned the Bounder.

"Tons!" said Bunter, admiringly. "You've got more pluck, Smithy, than any other man at Greyfriars. Pluck's your long suit! Pluckiest man at Greyfriars. and chance it!" declared Bunter.

"Pile it on!" said Smithy.

"I mean it," said Bunter. "I ain't just buttering you because I want you to get after that hamper in Coker's study, Smithy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Smithy.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I've always admired your pluck, Smithy. I don't think you're a swanking fathead, old chap, like other fellows do."

“Oh!” gasped Smithy.

“Being the pluckiest chap at Greyfriars, with a nerve of—of iron, you won’t be scared like Wharton and his gang. Not you!” said Bunter, admiringly. “You’d walk into Coker’s study as if the place belonged to you. That’s you all over—with your pluck!” “You might hand me that stump.”

“Never mind that now. The trouble is, that I can’t come and lend you a hand with the hamper, and it’s jolly heavy,” explained Bunter. “I’ve got to steer clear of the whole thing, because of Quelch. You know how Quelch is down on me, Smithy—all the fellows know. If I don’t get a good report this term, I’m done for—so I don’t want Quelch making out that I snoop tuck, or anything of that kind. If anything comes out, my name mustn’t be mentioned. You see that?”

“Quite!” grinned Smithy.

“I’ve got it all mapped out for you,” went on Bunter eagerly. “I can’t take a hand in it—but I’m willing to do all the thinking and planning. I’ve got the brains for it, you know.”

“Oh, scissors!”

“You keep an eye on Coker’s study. They’re sure to go down after tea. The study will be empty. Well, you nip along to the study—.”

“I can see myself doing it!” agreed Smithy.

“The hamper will be there. But you couldn’t carry it off—it’s too heavy for one chap. Perhaps I might be able to—but you couldn’t, old chap—you haven’t got my muscle—.”

“Oh, holy smoke!”

“Only I’ve got to steer clear, as I said. Well, the hamper being so heavy, you leave it alone. You collar Coker’s cricket bag—.”

“Do I?” chuckled Smithy.

“That’s it, old fellow. You cram it full of things from the hamper—as much as it will hold. If it won’t hold the lot, never mind—a few things might be left for Coker—after all, it’s Coker’s hamper,” said Bunter, generously. “I never was mean. But pack in all you can, of course. Well, you carry off the stuff in the cricket-bag. Nobody will be about after tea—but if there’s anybody, it won’t look suspicious to be carrying a cricket bag—will it? You see, I’ve thought ‘it all out for you!” said the astute Owl. “I’m pretty good at planning, you know. All I need is some fellow to do the donkey work, if you know what I mean—I can do the brain work.”

“I don’t quite know what you’d do it with,” remarked Smithy. “Is that the lot?”

“That’s the lot, old chap. Easy as falling off a form, and safe as houses. We go halves in the tuck, when you get it to the box-room. Those chaps in No. 1 Study made out that they wouldn’t touch Coker’s stuff. Nothing of that sort about you, is there, Smithy?”

“Eh!”

“I mean, you ain’t jolly particular in this study, are you, old fellow?”

Herbert Vernon-Smith gazed at him.

“Well, there you are,” said Bunter, briskly. “You’re not going to let me down, are you, Smithy? They’ve let me down in Wharton’s study and if you let me down too, I shall be stumped. What about it, Smithy? What do you think?”

Vernon-Smith rose from the armchair.

“I think you’re going to be stumped!” he said. And he picked up the cricket stump from the corner of the study.

“I—I say, Smithy, if you’re going to be a beast—I say, keep that stump away!” roared Bunter. “I say—yarooooooh!”

Swipe!

“Ow! wow! Oh, crikey! I say—!”

Swipe!

“Yoo-hooop! Smithy, you beast—. Oh, crumbs! Ooooh!”

Billy Bunter hardly knew how many swipes he captured from the cricket stump before he escaped from No. 4 Study.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED NOSE!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!”

“What?”

“Jolly old Henry!” said Bob Cherry.

“Oh!”

Five Greyfriars juniors, on Redclyffe Hill, looked dismayed. In a leafy, shady lane, half-way up the hill, they had halted for a rest. They had been wheeling their machines up the hill, which was a little steep. Five bicycles stood against the wayside trees, and five juniors sat on a log under the branches, taking a rest and whacking out a packet of toffee. Bob Cherry had risen to go to his machine, when, glancing up the leafy lane that wound up the hillside, he spotted in the distance a well-known lean, angular figure, coming down the lane from Redclyffe. It was that of Mr. Quelch, the Remove master—to whom Bob alluded irreverently as “Henry”.

“Copped!” remarked Frank Nugent.

Johnny Bull grunted.

“I told you fellows it was fatheaded to take a run out of bounds without asking leave,” he remarked.

“We’re not copped yet, old beans,” said Bob. “Henry hasn’t spotted us. Get those jiggers behind the trees: and get out of sight—unless Johnny wants us to stand round while he tells us that he told us so.”

“Well, I did tell you so,” said Johnny. “And I think—.”

“Get a move on,” said Harry.

“The copfulness is not yet the foregone conclusion and *sine qua non*,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “Buck upfully.”

Harry Wharton cast a quick look up the steep lane. A hat could be seen, approaching, over hedges that bordered the winding lane. Whose hat it was, Wharton could not have said, but Bob, apparently, had had a glimpse of the face under the hat, in some opening of the hedges.

“Sure it’s Quelch, Bob?” asked the captain of the Remove.

“Either Quelch or a gargoye,” answered Bob. “Can’t be a gargoye walking down Redclyffe Hill, can there?”

“Fathead!”

Five bicycles were hurriedly pushed behind gnarled old trunks. Five juniors backed out of sight behind those trunks. If Quelch had not seen them yet, the Famous Five were safe from discovery—the Remove master would pass them unseen when he reached the spot.

Not that the chums of the Remove were up to any harm. They had gone out for a spin on the bikes, and disregarded the circumstance that school bounds ended at Courtfield Bridge. There really was no great harm in pushing on to Redclyffe, and riding back by way of Redclyffe Wood. But schoolboys and schoolmasters do not see eye to eye in

such matters. If Quelch dropped on them a mile out of school bounds, it would mean lines or detentions.

Quelch, evidently, had been for one of his long walks. Quelch was a tremendous walker, and sometimes walked Mr. Prout or Mr. Capper or Mr. Hacker off their hapless legs. This time Quelch was on his own, and seemed to have taken a longer walk than usual. But he was coming down the hill at a good rate: and it was lucky for the truants that Bob had spotted him at a safe distance. Very soon after the five juniors were in cover, they heard his footsteps in the lane.

"O.K.," murmured Bob, cheerily. "Henry hasn't a suspish—."

"Unless he saw you—!" said Johnny Bull.

"He didn't, ass."

"Well, if he did, we're copped. We're asking for it," grunted Johnny. "I told you fellows, at Courtfield Bridge—."

"The speech is silvery, my esteemed Johnny," murmured the nabob of Bhanipur, "but silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well."

Johnny Bull grunted. But he said no more: the footsteps were close at hand now. The juniors peered through the underwoods that screened them among the trees, and sighted the tall, angular figure of the Remove master. To their great relief, Mr. Quelch did not glance to the side of the lane where they were in cover. Clearly he had no idea that five members of his form were there—carefully understudying the shy violet, and keeping out of observation.

The tall, lean gentleman passed within a few feet of those members of his form, and they almost held their breath as he passed. But he did not glance round, and he swung on his way, his long legs covering the ground at a great rate.

'All clear!' murmured Bob, as the footsteps grew fainter down the lane.

"The clearfulness is—!"

"Terrific!" chuckled Bob.

"Wait till he's out of sight, though," said Harry. "If he happened to look round—can't be too careful, with Quelch—."

"True, O King! Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's somebody else on the road!" ejaculated Bob. "Some gent in a hurry."

There was a patter of running feet.

A running man passed the thickets, and the juniors could all see him as he passed: though he, like Quelch, evidently had no idea that they were there.

He wore a tattered coat too large for him, tattered trousers too small for him, a blue-spotted neck-cloth badly in need of a wash, and a hat in the last stage of wreck and decay. He had little close-set red-rimmed eyes, and a nose with a list to port. There was a cudgel in his right hand—gripped hard, as if not for carrying, but for intended use. A whiff of tobacco and spirits was wafted to the schoolboys as he ran past.

"By gum!" murmured Bob. "That's not a chap a fellow would like to meet on a lonely road, on a dark night."

Harry Wharton caught his breath.

"Is he after Quelch?" he exclaimed. "This is a pretty lonely lane—we've passed nobody coming up—and it looks—!"

"By gum!" said Bob, with a whistle.

Harry Wharton pushed hurriedly out into the lane from the thickets. He looked after the man who had passed, whose pattering feet he could still hear.

The man was still running. At a distance, Mr. Quelch could still be seen—a view of his back. And as the running man drew nearer to him, he swerved to the side of the lane, and ran on the grass verge, so that his footsteps no longer gave a sound—the

pattering ceased to reach Wharton's ears.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove guessed what that meant. The man who was following Quelch did not want the schoolmaster to hear him coming. There could hardly be any doubt of his intentions.

The other fellows joined Wharton in the lane. They all stared down the lane at the two distant figures—uneasily.

"Think he's after Quelch?" asked Nugent.

"The thoughtfulness is preposterous!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"By gum!" breathed Bob. "Is that the man Bunter told us about last week—he got Bunter in Friardale Lane, and Quelch came up and gave him teco—Bunter said he had a twisted nose and red eyes—!"

"He's after Quelch, anyhow," said Harry. "I fancy it's the same man, from Bunter's description—anyhow he's after Quelch. He's taking care that Quelch doesn't hear him behind him—you can see that."

"Bunter said that Quelch swiped him with his walking-stick," said Johnny Bull. "The blighter ran for it. Quelch can handle him all right."

"Not if that fellow gets him from behind," said Harry, his eyes anxiously on the two distant figures. "It looks to me—."

The tall figure of Henry Samuel Quelch passed out of sight beyond a winding bend of the lane. A moment later, the running figure was out of sight, hidden by winding hedges.

The juniors exchanged glances.

"Run out the bikes—quick!" breathed Wharton. "We can't chance it—it looks as if that ruffian is after Quelch—we can't leave him to it. If there's nothing in it, we get nailed for breaking bounds, but—but—we can't chance Quelch getting his nut cracked from behind—."

"Quick!" said Bob.

The chums of the Remove jumped to the bicycles. Every appearance was that the man with the twisted nose was following Quelch to attack him, whether from motives of robbery or malice: and at the risk of getting "nailed" for breaking school bounds, the juniors could not leave it at that.

The bicycles were run quickly out into the lane, and the Famous Five jumped into their saddles. With a rush and a whirr, they swept down the hill in a whizzing bunch.

CHAPTER XVII

QUELCH'S NARROW ESCAPE

"GOTCHER!" breathed Nosey Jenkins.

He lashed out with the cudgel as he breathed the words. Mr. Quelch hardly knew what was happening. The running man had drawn quite near, his footsteps making little or no sound on the grass verge by the lane. But as he closed in with uplifted cudgel, the Remove master heard him, and turned quickly—to meet the vicious blow.

Nosey was taking no chances this time! Last time, he had fled yelling from the schoolmaster's walking-stick; and that walking-stick was under Mr. Quelch's arm now. Nosey could still feel twinges where it had landed on him, wielded by Quelch's vigorous hand. He did not want any more of the same.

Nosey had been taking his ease under the trees, higher up the lane, when he had spotted, in the distance, the lean gentleman who had given him that well-deserved

swiping a week ago. It seemed sheer luck, to the revengeful Nosey, to see him again, in so solitary a place. But he realised the need for caution. He did not want to face that swiping walking-stick again. A crack on the head from behind was Nosey's game. Mr. Quelch turned, as he struck—but not in time to dodge the blow. It came down hard and heavy, cracking in the crown of his hat. Luckily the hat protected the head from its full force: but the head received a rather unpleasant knock, and the startled Remove master staggered, the walking-stick falling from under his arm, to the ground.

He had no time to retrieve it. A second swipe was coming at his head, and only by a sudden, swift backward jump did Quelch elude it.

Nosey followed him up, lashing out with the cudgel.

"You, you scoundrel!" gasped Mr. Quelch. He recognized at once the footpad of Friardale Lane.

"Gotcher!" said Nosey, with a snarl. "My turn now, old 'Un! You laid into a bloke pretty 'ard! Strike me pink and blue if I don't crack your nut."

Mr. Quelch was an elderly gentleman. But he was active. With his stick in his hand, he would not have feared the ruffian in the least. But empty-handed, he had no chance against a lashing cudgel, and he could only strive to dodge the savage blows that Nosey rained at him.

Only by a series of swift, sudden, kangaroo-like leaps and bounds and jumps, did the Remove master save his "nut" from being cracked, savage swipe after swipe barely missing him, or grazing him.

But it could not have lasted long. Had there been no help at hand, the Remove master of Greyfriars would have fared very badly.

But, all of a sudden, a bunch of cyclists swept round a bend up the lane, coming downhill at full pelt.

Bob Cherry was in the lead, and he gave a roar as he saw what was happening—Henry Samuel Quelch frantically dodging and winding and twisting to escape the lashing blows from the tramp's cudgel.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here they are!" roared Bob. "Come on!"

Bob drove at his pedals, and came down the hilly lane like an arrow. Fast after him came the other fellows.

The rush and whirr of the bicycles, and Bob's stentorian shout, caused both Quelch and his assailant to stare round.

"Help!" shouted Mr. Quelch, as he sighted the bunch of schoolboys on the whizzing bikes.

"Strike me pink!" hissed Nosey.

A few more moments would have done it—Quelch would have gone down under the lashing cudgel, with a cracked "nut". But Nosey was quick on the uptake. As the cyclists came whizzing down the hill, straight at him, he knew that he had not even one moment to spare.

He gave them one glare, and then, with a single bound, disappeared from the lane into the adjoining wood.

Quick as he was, he was only just in time: for a second later, Bob Cherry's bike rushed by. Bob jammed on his brakes, and jumped down, letting his machine reel to the roadside.

"Cherry!" gasped Mr. Quelch. Quelch rather liked that happy, exuberant member of his form: but never before had he been so glad to see Bob's cheery face. "My dear boy." He panted for breath.

"Are you hurt, sir?" asked Bob, anxiously. "You've had a knock—" Quelch's hat

was a mere wreck, and had evidently had a severe jolt.

"No—yes!" gasped Mr. Quelch. He was breathless after his acrobatic dodging of Nosey's cudgel. "The ruffian gave me one blow—I think I have a bruise—" He took off the battered hat, and rubbed his head. "It is noth—next to nothing—. Bless my soul!"

There was a whirr and a clatter as the rest of the cyclists dismounted. Mr. Quelch gave them a very kindly look. He had a bruise on his head, and a pain in it: but he knew very well how much worse matters would have been, but for the timely arrival of those boys of his form.

"Wharton—Nugent—Cherry—Bull—Hurree Singh—my dear boys, I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Quelch. "It was very fortunate for me that you came by. Very fortunate indeed."

"Shall we get after the brute, sir?" asked Harry. "He can't be very far away yet."

"We'll bag him, sir," said Johnny Bull.

"The bagfulness will be terrific."

"No! No! Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Quelch, hastily. "You must not take such risks with a desperate character, I shall telephone to the police-station from the school, and the police will deal with him. I am only too thankful that you came by and frightened him off. But—" Quelch's expression altered a little. "Have you leave out of school bounds?"

"N-n-no, sir!" stammered Harry.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"You are out of bounds, Wharton!"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Well, in the circumstances, I must say nothing more about that," said Mr. Quelch.

"You will return to Greyfriars at once, that is all."

"Yes, sir!" murmured the juniors.

"Hadn't we better stick to you, sir, in case that hooligan turns up again?" asked Johnny Bull.

Mr. Quelch stared at him.

"Certainly not," he replied. Apparently the Remove master had no use for a bodyguard of juniors during the remainder of his walk. "Please hand me my stick, Nugent."

Frank Nugent picked up the walking-stick, and handed it to his form-master.

"Now please go!" said Mr. Quelch.

Now that he was on the alert, and with that big stick in his hand, Mr. Quelch would have been pleased, rather than otherwise, to see the man with the twisted nose turn up again. He gave the juniors a nod, and resumed his way.

They looked at one another.

"That washes out our ride up to Redclyffe!" murmured Bob. "Never mind—what's the odds, so long as you're 'appy? Come on."

And the Famous Five remounted, and rode down the hill. Their ride out of school bounds was washed out: but on the other hand, they certainly had saved Henry Samuel Quelch from getting his majestic nut cracked: so they were feeling rather pleased with themselves and things generally as they pedalled cheerfully home to Greyfriars.

CHAPTER XVIII

ROUGH ON COKER!

“YAH!”

That elegant and polite remark greeted five fellows, as they came into the Rag. It came from Billy Bunter.

Bunter was seated in an armchair, with a fat and satisfied expression on his plump countenance. There was a smear of jam round his large mouth, and his general aspect was sticky and shiny. He was eating—or rather toying with—a peach. It was quite a nice peach, which Bunter might have been expected to scoff in a split second. The slowness with which he was disposing of it indicated plainly that Bunter was already loaded to the Plimsoll line. Bunter, evidently, had been somewhere where there was tuck, and plenty of it.

Harry Wharton and Co. glanced at him.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” exclaimed Bob Cherry. “What’s biting you, old fat man?”

“Is the bitefulness terrific?” inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Yah!” repeated Bunter. His fat lip curled with disdain. “You don’t know what you’ve missed! Serve you jolly well right.”

“What have we missed?” asked Harry Wharton.

“Oh! Nothing! But if you fellows think that a fellow couldn’t manage without your help, you can guess again,” sneered Bunter. “You funk’d going to Coker’s study. Well, you’ve missed something, that’s all, so yah!”

“You fat villain, have you been raiding Coker’s hamper?” asked Frank Nugent.

“Oh, really, Bull!” Billy Bunter’s fat face registered alarm. “I say, you fellows, don’t you get making jokes about me raiding Coker’s hamper. I don’t want that Fifth-form fathead on my track.” He slipped the remnant of the peach hurriedly into his pocket.

“Where did you get that, Bunter?” grinned Bob.

“From—from home,” explained Bunter. “We grow peaches, and all sorts of things, at Bunter Court. Grapes and pineapples, and peaches, and all that. I’ll take you fellows home some time, and show you the vast vineries and peacheries—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“But don’t you get saying anything,” said Bunter, anxiously. “I shouldn’t have gone to Coker’s study if you fellows had backed me up. You know how jolly careful I’ve got to be with Quelch.”

“There’ll be a row, you fat ass,” said Bob. “You can’t raid prog in another form, as you do in the Remove. If you had the sense of a bunny rabbit, you’d steer clear of senior studies. Coker will raise Cain.”

“Coker’s raising Cain already!” chuckled Vernon-Smith. “I heard him telling the Fifth-form men in the games-study—you can hear him a mile off. He came in and found the hamper empty.”

“Twasn’t empty!” exclaimed Bunter, warmly. “I couldn’t get all the things into Toddy’s cricket-bag—I had to leave a lot—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Not that I went to Coker’s study,” added Bunter. “I don’t mean that. I haven’t been near his study. Don’t you fellows get making out that I’ve been to Coker’s study. I don’t want Quelch after me—I’ve told you fellows I’ve got to get a good report this term. If—if Coker asks about me—you know what a suspicious beast he is—you can tell him I came out with you on a bike, Wharton.”

“But you didn’t!” said Harry, staring.

“Oh, really, Wharton—!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I say, you fellows, this isn’t a laughing matter. Snooping tuck was one of the things Quelch had up against me. I’ve got to be wary with Quelch this term—you know that.

If anything happened to Coker's hamper. I know nothing whatever about it. I never knew he had a hamper—if he had! I daresay he hadn't."

"Were there jam-tarts in Coker's hamper?" grinned Nugent.

"No: only a jam-roll—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, I don't know what may have been in the hamper, as I never saw it. I haven't had jam roll today—I haven't tasted jam for days and days—!"

"Your chivvy looks as if you have!" chuckled Bob.

"Eh! What?" Bunter passed a fat hand over a large mouth. "Oh! Am I sticky?"

"The stickiness is terrific, my esteemed sticky Bunter."

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter. He jerked a handkerchief, badly in need of a wash, from his pocket, and rubbed at the stickiness. "I—I say, is it gone?" He rubbed at a fat face, while a dozen fellows watched him and chortled.

Skinner came into the Rag.

"Bunter here?" he asked.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "No! I—I mean, d-d-does Quelch want me?"

"Not Quelch!" grinned Skinner. "Quelch's still out—he went out after class. But I daresay he will want you when he comes in. He's bound to hear."

"Oh, really, Skinner! If it's anything about a hamper, I don't know anything about it. I never knew there was a hamper in the House at all."

"You'd better tell Coker that!" chortled Skinner. "He's asking for you—I expect he'll be dropping in soon."

"Oh, crumbs! I—I—I say, does—does he look in a bad temper, Skinner?"

"Sort of!" chuckled Skinner.

Billy Bunter heaved himself out of the armchair. The fat satisfied look was gone from his face now.

"I—I say, you fellows, if—if Coker comes in, d-d-don't tell him I'm here," he gasped.

"I—I'll get behind the door, and—and you fellows tell him I've gone to see the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, as the fat Owl rolled behind the door.

"D-don't you tell Coker I'm here!" beseeched the fat Owl. "Tell him I've gone home, Wharton. Tell him I've gone to a—a—fuf-fuf-funeral! I say, you fellows—"

"Here he comes!"

"Oh, crikey!"

There was a heavy tread in the passage. A burly figure and a red and wrathful face appeared in the doorway. Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form, glared round over a crowd of laughing faces.

"Where's Bunter?" roared Coker. "I jolly well know it was Bunter cleared out my hamper. Potter and Greene caught him at it this afternoon, and kicked him out of the study. Now he's cleared out the whole jolly lot, or nearly.

Where is he?"

"He's left you a message," said Bob.

"Eh! What? What message?"

"He's gone to see the Head, and he's gone home to a funeral."

"You young ass! he can't have done both!" roared Coker.

"Oh, no! You pays your money and you takes your choice," explained Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't come here for silly jokes," roared Coker. "I've come here for Bunter. I want to know whether it was Bunter cleared out my hamper. If it was, I'm going to burst him all over Greyfriars. If it wasn't, I want to know who it was. And if you give me

any cheek I'll jolly well smack your head. I've a jolly good mind to smack it anyway."

"You've got a jolly good mind?" exclaimed Bob. "Then why don't you use it sometimes, Coker? Blessed if I knew you had any mind at all."

"Why, you—you—you cheeky little tick!" bawled Coker. Coker was already in a state of towering wrath. Indeed, the wrath of Achilles, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered, had not a thing on Horace Coker's wrath. Coker was simply yearning to smack a head—Bunter's, for preference. But Bunter did not seem to be present, and Bob Cherry, in Coker's opinion, was asking for it—so he strode at the cheery Bob and smote.

Smack!

"There!" hooted Coker. "That'll shut you up! I've got a short way with fags, I can tell you. Now, where's—here—leggo—keep off—why, I'll thrash the lot of you—I—I'll—yarooooop!"

Having smacked a Remove man's head in the Rag, Coker of the Fifth did not seem to expect that it would be followed by a dozen or more Removites swarming on him and collaring him on all sides. Really, he might have!

Senior men were not allowed to throw their weight about in the Rag—the special domain of the juniors. Smacking heads there was far beyond the limit. In a moment, Coker of the Fifth was whirling wildly in the grasp of many hands. Coker was big—he was powerful—he was hefty—he was rather an out-size even for the Fifth. But he was simply nowhere among so many assailants.

Harry Wharton and Co. grasped him as one man. Smithy, Redwing, Peter Todd, Squiff, Tom Brown, and Hazeldene added their grasp. Even Skinner lent a hand—mindful of that kick on the landing earlier in the day. Even Lord Mauleverer exerted himself to emerge from the easiest chair in the Rag to lend a hand in dealing with Coker. Russell and Ogilvy, Bolsover major and Micky Desmond and Widley, rushed to join in. There was hardly room on Horace Coker, big as he was, for so many hands to grasp.

His arms, his legs, his ears, his hair, even his nose, were captured. Whirling in the midst of the excited mob, Horace Coker was rushed to the doorway, spluttering frantically.

"Chuck him out!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Urrrggh! Leggo! I'll spiflicate you—I'll pulverise you—I—I—I'll——.

Whooooop!" roared Coker, as he whizzed.

Bump!

The Fifth-form man landed in the passage, with a mighty concussion. He roared as he landed, and a roar of laughter from the crowded doorway of the Rag echoed Coker's roar.

"Come back and have some more, Coker."

"The morefulness will be terrific."

"Do come in again, Coker!"

"Waiting for you, old bean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, keep him out! I say, jump on him! Making out that a fellow had his hamper, you know! I say, go after him and jump on him."

Coker, spluttering, struggled to his feet. He made a berserk rush at the crowded doorway. Many hands collared him again at once, and once more Coker whirled, and landed in the passage with a loud concussion.

There was a rustle in the passage, and a sharp voice. The uproar from the Rag seemed

to have reached official ears—which really was not surprising. Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, rustled up, his portly face wrathful.

“What—what—what is all this?” exclaimed Prout. “What is this din—this uproar—this unparalleled disturbance? Upon my word, is that Coker?” Prout stared at the sprawling Horace. “Goodness gracious! Is that a boy of my form—a senior boy—a Fifth-form boy—joining in this unseemly horse-play with a crowd of juniors—. Coker! How dare you, Coker! Are you not ashamed of yourself, Coker?”

“Urrrggh!” gasped Coker. He sat up dizzily. “I—I— urrrggh—!”

“Go!” thundered Prout. “Get up at once, Coker, and go! I am ashamed of you! You, a senior—a Fifth-form senior—indulging in such unruly horse-play with juniors—pah! Go at once, Coker!”

“I—I—I—.” Coker struggled to his feet. “I—.”

“Go!” thundered Prout.

And Coker of the Fifth went—almost foaming at the mouth.

CHAPTER XIX

REPORT OF A RAID!

“THIS is a jolly serious matter, you fellows.”

“What?”

“Which?”

Bob Cherry spoke with such seriousness, indeed solemnity, that his friends all stared at him, in surprise.

Most of the Remove fellows in the Rag were rather hilarious. The episode with Coker of the Fifth had been pleasurable exciting—and Prout’s little error, in supposing that the great Horace had been engaged in “horse-play” with a mob of juniors, considerably added to their gaiety. But Bob’s ruddy face was knitted in a deeply thoughtful frown.

“Give it a name, old bean,” said Nugent. “What’s the row?”

“Well, it looks to me like a matter for the police,” said Bob.

“Wha-a-at?”

“Well, look at it!” argued Bob. “Coker’s hamper has been raided. Nobody at Greyfriars would snaffle Coker’s prog excepting Bunter—.”

“Oh, really, Cherry—.”

“And Bunter says he didn’t,” continued Bob. “Well, as Bunter didn’t—.”

“He did, you ass!” said Johnny Bull.

“Oh, really, Bull! If you can’t take a fellow’s word, Bob can, can’t you, old chap? I never touched it—!”

“You hear that, you men?” said Bob. “Bunter never touched it. He says so, and we all know how truthful he is.”

“I should jolly well think so!” said Bunter, warmly. “Quelch makes out that I’m untruthful—he actually put it in my last report. But fellows in my own form ought to know me better, I think.”

“What on earth are you getting at, Bob?” asked the captain of the Remove, puzzled.

“We all know that Bunter snooped Coker’s tuck—.”

“But he says he didn’t—!”

“That’s proof that he did!” remarked Skinner.

“Well, we’re bound to take a man’s word,” said Bob. “It boils down to this—Bunter

says he didn't, and we know jolly well that no other Greyfriars man did. So it can't be what the police call an inside job!"

"What the thump—!"

"It's a clear case of daylight burglary—one of those daylight raids we read about in the newspapers," said Bob, "and that's jolly serious. If a daylight burglar can push into the school and snoop a hamper, goodness knows what he may do next. He might snaffle Bunter's gold watch—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or walk off with the blackboard in the form-room, or Quelch's 'History of Greyfriars,' or the Head's top hat," said Bob. "You never know! It's plain that he never left a single clue, as Coker thinks it was Bunter—."

"It was Bunter!" yelled Johnny.

"Beast!"

"Well, Bunter denies it, and we're bound to take his word, knowing him as we do. And if it wasn't Bunter, it was one of those daylight raiders, that's perfectly clear. And my idea is that it ought to be reported at the police-station without delay, so that they can get on the villain's track."

"Oh!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He gave Bob Cherry a rather uncertain blink.

Bunter, certainly, would have been glad for the raid on Coker's study to be put down to a daylight burglar, or any other sample of the underworld, rather than have had his own name connected with the occurrence. Bunter had his report to think of! But the idea of passing the news on to the police-station gave the fat Owl a cold feeling down his spine. Bunter did not want a police-constable of Greyfriars looking for that daylight raider. He was rather afraid that the raider might be found!

"Is that a joke?" asked Johnny Bull.

"It's not a joking matter," said Bob. "It's jolly serious, as I've said. What do you fellows think? Quelch is out, and we can't wait for him to come in—with a daylight raider getting away with the loot in broad daylight. I could cut into his study and ring up the police-station, and give them particulars—."

"I—I say—!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wouldn't do that—!"

He blinked round uneasily at the juniors. Many faces had become grave now. Bob Cherry, evidently, had made an impression. Bunter's fat brain was not quick on the uptake: and it did not occur to him that the fellows had caught on, by this time, to the fact that Bob was leg-pulling, and were playing up.

"Well, the way you put it, it does seem jolly serious, Bob," said Harry Wharton, thoughtfully. "Might lose anything, with a daylight raider about."

"After all, Bunter says he never did it," remarked Nugent.

"And nobody else here did!" said Johnny Bull, shaking his head.

"Well, I hadn't thought of it like that," said Vernon-Smith, "but the way Cherry puts it, it's a pretty clear case of a daylight raid."

"The clearfulness is terrific."

"Yaas, begad," remarked Lord Mauleverer, from the depths of an armchair. "Jolly serious business, you fellows."

"Coker will be getting after Bunter again," said Peter Todd. "Tough luck on Bunter, if he never did it."

"Well, what do you think?" asked Bob. "I can get Quelch's phone—and the sooner they know at the police-station, the better—."

"I—I say, you fellows—!"

"Better lose no time!" said Harry Wharton, decidedly. "They may be able to get the

man, if they're quick."

"Leave it to me, then," said Bob, and he walked out of the Rag.

Billy Bunter blinked round at serious faces through his big spectacles. He was deeply alarmed. At the same time, he could not quite believe that Bob was in earnest. Tuck had been missing at Greyfriars before—in fact, ever since Billy Bunter had honoured the old school with his distinguished presence, there had been continually recurring cases of missing tuck. But nobody had ever thought before of calling in a policeman! "I—I say, you fellows, I—I know it's only a j-j-joke!" gasped Bunter. "I—I jolly well know that Bob hasn't gone to Quelch's study."

"A daylight raid's no joke," said Squiff, shaking his head. "The sooner they get the villain the better."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Beasts!" hissed Bunter. "I—I jolly well know Cherry ain't going to phone the police-station. I jolly well know he's only pulling my leg."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag. He did not believe that Bob was going to phone the police-station. But he was very anxious to make sure. He rolled away with a fat worried brow: and as soon as he had departed, serious looks also departed from the Rag, and every face there wore a grin.

The fat junior rolled hurriedly away to Masters' passage. The door of Quelch's study was partly open. He blinked in, and his fat heart jumped, as he saw Bob Cherry standing at the telephone near the window.

"I—I say, Bob—!" he gasped.

"Robert Cherry speaking from Greyfriars School," said Bob, into the transmitter.

"It's about a daylight burglary here."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He rolled into the study. It did not occur to his powerful brain that Bob had not dialled, and that there was, in consequence, nobody at the other end to take a call! Bob's voice was audible to Bunter—but to nobody else in the wide world—but the fat Owl remained unaware of that little circumstance.

"I—I say, Bob, old chap—!"

"Please send a constable along," went on Bob, unheeding. "It's a clear case of a daylight raid—the contents of a hamper missing from a Fifth-form study—"

"Stop it, you beast!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, if—if they send a bobby, he may think it was me, just like that beast Coker, you know. I—I say, ring off, old chap, and—and I'll let you have some of the apples—."

Bunter grabbed at Bob's arm, to drag him away from the telephone, in dire alarm.

Bob gave him a shove, and there was a bump, as Bunter sat down on Mr. Quelch's carpet.

"Oooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

"Our form-master is out," went on Bob, "but he will be back by the time a constable gets here. We're all rather alarmed at a daylight raider getting into the school like this—."

Bunter scrambled up.

"Will you stoppit, you beast?" he howled. "There wasn't any daylight raider, and if a bobby comes here, he may think—."

"That's good," went on Bob. "We'll expect the constable, then. The sooner the better, of course, as the villain may not have got very far yet with the loot. It's only recently been discovered—yaroooooh!" Bob broke off with a sudden roar.

Bunter was desperate. He was going to stop that telephone call somehow. He grabbed a cushion from Mr. Quelch's armchair, and swiped.

The cushion landed on Bob's ear, and he staggered away from the telephone, leaving the receiver hanging, and crashed into Mr. Quelch's writing-table. The table rocked, and there was a rustling of papers, and the inkpot shot off, crashing into the fender.

"Oh! Ow!" roared Bob.

He scrambled up, and made a jump for Bunter.

Bunter backed promptly into the doorway.

"Keep off, you beast!" he gasped. "If you kick up a row here, you'll have all the beaks after us—."

"You fat foozling frump." Bob paused, and rubbed his ear. "Look what you've done—Quelch's inkpot upset in the grate—."

"Blow Quelch's inkpot! You're jolly well not going to get a bobby here," hissed Bunter. "Let that telephone alone, you beast."

Bob picked up the hanging receiver, but it was only to 'replace it on the hooks. He picked up the inkpot from the fender, and replaced it on the inkstand on the table. The ink had to remain where it was, in a large and spreading pool—that could not be helped.

"Look here, you beast—I mean, look here, old chap—."

"Better cut," said Bob. "Some of the beaks may have heard that row." And he cut down the passage, and round the corner.

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled after him. He did not want to be caught there by any "beak" who might have heard the crash of the inkpot. But he was deeply alarmed about that telephone-call.

"I say, Bob, old chap—" He grabbed Bob's sleeve. say, do you think they—they will send a bobby—?"

"You heard what I said," answered Bob. He jerked his sleeve away, and walked back to the Rag, with a worried and alarmed fat Owl rolling after him.

A crowd of grinning faces were turned towards Bob as he went into the Rag.

"Phoned?" asked Nugent, laughing, as Bob shut the door.

"Yes, rather! Bunter heard what I said into the phone. He seemed a bit alarmed—I don't know why if he didn't raid Coker's hamper—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you didn't really speak into the phone?" exclaimed Johnny Bull, staring.

"I jolly well did! Only I didn't dial first!" explained Bob, "so nobody can have heard what I said, so far as I know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only Bunter," said Bob, cheerily. "He heard me. I can't make out why he didn't want me to phone—unless he really had Coker's tuck—."

"Does even that fat chump believe that a bobby would come here about missing tuck?" said Skinner, chuckling. "What a brain!"

"The brainfulness is terrific."

"It will be a lesson to the fat villain," said Bob. "It's about time he had a lesson about snooping tuck. He can wait for that bobby to come—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I daresay it will dawn on him later that the bobby isn't coming. Perhaps by bedtime—!"

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

The door of the Rag opened again, and Billy Bunter rolled in. He blinked round at grinning faces through his big spectacles.

"I—I say, you fellows, d-d-do you think they'll really send a bobby here?" he asked, dismally.

"Well, it's up to the police to nail a daylight raider," answered Harry Wharton. "Glad of the chance, I expect."

"But there wasn't any daylight raider," shrieked Bunter.

"Then what became of Coker's tuck?" asked the captain of the Remove. "It's gone!"

"I—I say, if a bobby comes, he—he might think it was me!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I say, suppose—suppose he ran me in!"

"The Head would bail you out!" said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I don't believe a—a bobby will come at all—." howled Bunter. "They jolly well wouldn't send a bobby here about apples and pears and a jam-roll—."

"You see, being a case of a daylight burglary, they're bound to get the villain if they can—!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter did not wholly believe that a "bobby" was coming. But he could not feel sure. He remained in a state of deep and uneasy trepidation—and from the bottom of his fat heart, he wished that he had resisted the lure of Horace Coker's hamper. Which was quite a desirable frame of mind for Bunter to be in—though it was not likely to last, perhaps, longer than his dread of the arrival of a constable from Courtfield.

CHAPTER XX

SIX FOR SMITHY!

VERNON-SMITH strolled past the door of Masters' Common-Room, and loitered a little, with ear bent to listen.

The door of that august apartment was shut, but from many voices could be heard. Mr. Prout's deep boom mingled, in turn, with the squeak of Mr. Capper, master of the Fourth, the acid tones Hacker, master of the Shell, the bleat of Twigg, the second-form master, and the mumble of Wiggins, master the Third—with an occasional shrill interjection from Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, and a still more occasional word or two in the pleasant voice of Lascelles, the games-master. All the beaks seemed to be going strong—on the subject, as Smithy gathered, of the last Master's Meeting—no doubt an important matter to the beaks.

Which was satisfactory to Smithy, as he passed on, and turned the corner into Masters' Studies.

Smithy was not interested in the "jaw" in Common-Room. He was only interested to ascertain that the beaks were there, and not in their studies.

Smithy was, in fact, designing a visit, of a surreptitious nature, to his own beak's study. Quelch, he knew, was out—and he had heard Quelch mention to another beak, before he went, that he was going to Redclyffe. If Quelch was walking round to Redclyffe and back, he was not likely to materialise at Greyfriars for quite a long time yet. So far as Quelch was concerned, the coast was clear. But the wary Bounder did not want to be spotted by any other beak in the neighbourhood of Master's Studies—considering what he had in mind.

Having ascertained that the Staff were happily occupied in wagging their chins in Common-Room, Smithy cut along to Quelch's study without further delay, whipped

in, and closed the door after him.

He grinned at a pile of Form papers on the Remove master's table.

It was quite a large pile. And Henry Samuel Quelch, when he came in from his walk, was going to sit down to that pile, and in his unfailing dutiful way, examine every one of them.

Other beaks were not always so meticulous as Quelch in such matters. But Quelch was extremely conscientious—more so really than his form could have desired! Quelch was certain to look at every paper with a keen eye: with subsequent trouble for careless fellows who had mixed up their ablatives with their datives.

Smithy could, when he liked, turn out a really good Latin paper. But he did not always like. And he was aware that his paper, in that pile, was far from being calculated to gratify Quelch when he looked over it. His idea was that Quelch was not going to look over It.

From his pocket, Smithy drew a bottle of gum, and proceeded to extract the cork.

He had plenty of time. Quelch, on that long walk, was still miles away. Nobody had seen Smithy come to the study—nobody was going to see him leave. When Quelch found that heap of papers in a solid block—every sheet stuck to the next with gum—he would have the whole form to choose from to find the culprit.

This was Smithy's idea of a "jape" on his beak. Incidentally, it would prevent Quelch from examining his Latin prose, and save him from the just consequences of slap-dash carelessness. He chuckled softly as he extracted the cork from the gum bottle.

As he did so, he heard the sound of a car outside the House. He did not heed it—a car did not, in his mind, connect itself with Quelch, who had gone for one of his long walks.

Smithy was, of course, quite unaware of what had happened in Redclyffe Lane: and could not possibly have guessed that Mr. Quelch, with a battered hat and a bump on his head, had been glad to pick up a taxi and get back to the school on wheels.

Not for a moment did he suspect that his form-master, thus arriving back at Greyfriars a good hour earlier than he would otherwise have done, was stepping from a taxi, with a headache and a rather bad temper, while he was getting the cork out of the gum-bottle.

The cork came out of the bottle and the Bounder stepped to his form-master's table.

His left hand was stretched out to the pile of Form papers—his right held the gum-bottle ready to pour—when he suddenly paused. Footsteps came along the passage—and the Bounder caught his breath. He knew that tread.

"Quelch!"

He was fairly caught! For a moment, the Bounder of Greyfriars was utterly dismayed. But Smithy was quick on the uptake.

The gum did not pour from the bottle. He was deeply thankful that not a drip had fallen. Swiftly he jammed back the cork, and the gum bottle disappeared into his pocket. At the same moment, he stepped away from the table.

He was only in time. The door opened, and Mr. Quelch walked into the study.

He crossed directly from the door towards the telephone on the table near the window.

It was Mr. Quelch's intention to ring up the police-station at Courtfield immediately, and put the law on the track of the ruffian who had attacked him in Redclyffe Lane.

Not expecting anyone to be in his study, he had almost reached the telephone before he saw the Bounder standing there. He stopped, his gimlet-eyes fixed on Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Vernon-Smith! What are you doing here?" he rapped.

His gimlet-eyes almost penetrated into Smithy.

Mr. Quelch knew that member of his form—knew him very well indeed. He hardly needed telling that the scapegrace of Greyfriars was in “his study for no good motive. He was fully prepared to find gum in his inkwell, or in the seat of his armchair, or something of the kind. A grim frown gathered on his brow. There was an ache in the majestic nut where Nosey’s cudgel had cracked through his hat, and Quelch was not in his bonniest mood. Certainly he was in no mood for japes from reckless members of his form.

But the Bounder was quite cool now. His answer came glibly: “I hope you will excuse me, sir, I thought you wouldn’t mind my coming here to look out a word in your Greek lexicon, sir.”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Quelch, very drily.

Smithy had no scruple whatever in “telling the tale” in dealing with beaks and prefects. Among his form-fellows he would not have lied: but with a beak he was quite unscrupulous. Unluckily for him, Quelch was quite well aware of his peculiar moral code on that subject.

But Quelch was a just man. He did not, as a matter of fact, believe a word of it, but he was not going to be hasty, even in dealing with a member of his form whose word was worth very little.

“Indeed!” he repeated. “You did not come here to play some trick in my study during my absence, Vernon-Smith?”

“Oh, no, sir!” said the Bounder, innocently. “I just wanted to look out a word or two in Liddell and Scott, sir if you wouldn’t mind—.”

“I do not mind in the least, Vernon-Smith. You may tell me the words you desired to look out.”

“Oh, certainly, sir! I came on the words ‘*asbestos gelos*’ in a book, and thought I’d like to know what it meant.”

Quelch’s face cleared.

If Smithy was lying, he certainly had it pat. As a matter of fact, Smithy had come on those words in a book, but he had never had the slightest desire to know what they meant—till now. They had remained in his memory, and now he was making use of them, that was all. There was no doubt that Smithy had his wits about him!

“*Asbestos gelos!*” repeated Mr. Quelch, quite benignly.

“Very good! The phrase means ‘inextinguishable laughter’, Vernon-Smith—it is found in Homer, and refers to the laughter of the gods on Olympus when Vulcan clumsily played cup-bearer.”

“Oh, thank you, sir,” said Vernon-Smith.

“Very well, my boy: you may go.”

And Vernon-Smith went—and did not grin till he was outside Quelch’s door, with the door shut. It was, after all, easy to pull Quelch’s leg.

Mr. Quelch was left with quite a benign expression on his face. This incident looked like a sign of grace in a rather disreputable member of his form.

However, he had to telephone, and he turned towards that instrument. This brought him in sight of his fireplace, and he gave a sudden start.

Inside the fender was a flood of ink. Quelch’s eyes fixed on that inky pool with a glint in them.

Had he observed any signs of a “rag” in the study before, he certainly would not have swallowed the Bounder’s glib explanation of his presence there. But no such sign had met the gimlet-eyes—till he saw that flood of ink in the fireplace.

He breathed hard through his nose, stepped to the door, and opened it. Vernon-Smith was going down the passage, and had almost reached the corner. He stopped suddenly

at a bark from behind.

“Vernon-Smith!”

“Oh!” Smithy spun round, the grin vanishing from his face. “Yes, sir.”

“Come here at once.”

“Oh! Yes, sir.”

The Bounder bit his lip, as he walked back to the study. It looked as if he had not “got by” after all so successfully as he had supposed.

Mr. Quelch had picked up the cane from his table. The Bounder eyed it uneasily as he came back into the study.

“Vernon-Smith! You have told me that you came here to look out a word in my Greek lexicon—!”

“Yes, sir!”

“And that you had not come to play tricks in my study—.”

“Oh, no, sir.”

“As I find that my inkpot has been emptied into my fender, Vernon-Smith, I cannot accept your statement.”

“Oh!” gasped Smithy.

He was quite unaware that Quelch’s inkpot had been emptied into his fender. He had not looked at the fender or the inkpot. Some ass must have been japing in the study before Smithy’s arrival there! He blinked at his form-master in dismay.

Mr. Quelch swished the cane.

“You will bend over that chair, Vernon-Smith.”

“But, sir, I—I———!” stammered the Bounder.

“I should not cane you, Vernon-Smith, for this foolish trick—I should deem an imposition of fifty lines sufficient,” said Mr. Quelch. “But untruthfulness is a much more serious matter. I shall cane you for untruthfulness, Vernon-Smith. Bend over that chair at once.”

The Bounder, setting his lips, bent over the chair. He had not upset that ink in the fender—but assuredly he had spoken untruthfully: and it was for untruthfulness that he was going to be whopped—as he deserved. The fact that he deserved it was not much comfort to him, however, as the cane in Quelch’s vigorous hand came swiping down.

Whop! whop! whop! Whop! whop! whop! It was “six” of the best!

“You may go, Vernon-Smith!” said Mr. Quelch, grimly: and the Bounder, wriggling, went.

Then Mr. Quelch laid down the cane, and sat down to the telephone, and told his news to Courtfield Police- Station. After which, he went along to the Common- Room, where the lingering ache in his majestic nut did not prevent him from taking his full share in the tide of “chin-wag” on the subject of Masters’ Meetings.

His study was vacant once more, if Smithy had thought of carrying on with his design on the Form papers. But Smithy was not thinking any longer of exploits with a gum-bottle. Smithy was in his study in the Remove, wriggling from the swipes of Quelch’s cane—not in the least inclined to give Quelch further occasion for handling that cane.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CONSTABLE FROM COURTFIELD!

“SISTER ANNE! Sister Anne! Do you see anyone coming?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

It was Bob Cherry who asked that playful question, in the Rag. And there was a general chortle from the fellows in that apartment.

More than an hour had elapsed since Bob had—or rather had not—telephoned. Harry Wharton and Co. had been in the gym, where they had completely forgotten the fat existence of William George Bunter. But now, as they came back to the House in a cheery bunch, and strolled into the Rag, they were reminded of the fat ornament of the Lower Fourth.

Bunter was seated at the window, which gave a view of the quadrangle, and the school gates in the distance. His eyes, and his spectacles, were fastened on those gates—he was watching them like a plump Sister Anne.

Billy Bunter was not at all sure that a “bobby” would come from Courtfield. Neither was he sure that a “bobby” wouldn’t! He was in a most disturbing state of uncertainty and doubt.

As the minutes passed, and no bobby came, he felt a little more assured. But he was in dread every moment of seeing a figure in official blue appear at the gates and stride towards the House. He had other causes of uneasiness—but so long as he remained in the Rag, he was safe from Coker of the Fifth. Even the exasperated Horace was not likely to invade the junior room again. Not anywhere was he safe from the long arm of the law—if a “bobby” really was coming to investigate that daylight raid!

He blinked round at the Famous Five, as Bob called to him. It was a dismal and dispirited blink.

“I say, you fellows, I know it’s only a rotten joke,” mumbled Bunter. “You may as well own up, Cherry! I can take a jog-jog-joke! He, he, he!”

“What’s Bunter worrying about?” asked Bob. “Don’t you want that daylight raider run in, Bunter?”

“Beast!”

“You won’t be safe from Coker unless they get the right man, you know.”

“Rotter!” hissed Bunter.

“Blessed if I don’t begin to think it must have been Bunter, after all, the way he’s going on,” said Bob. “He seems worried about something. I don’t see why he should worry about a bobby getting after a daylight raider.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, if it was Bunter, his number’s up!” remarked Johnny Bull. “The bobby’s sure to get the right man. They always do.”

“Poor old Bunter!” said Nugent. “He wants a good report this term, too. It will spoil his report if Quelch puts in that he was run in for pinching.”

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter. “I—I say, it wasn’t me, you know. I—I was in the tuck-shop at the time, you fellows. I was speaking to Mrs. Mible over the counter at the very minute I went to Coker’s study—I—I mean—when I never went to Coker’s study. I—I say, you’ll tell Quelch that you were there with me, won’t you, Toddy?”

“But I wasn’t,” said Peter.

“I think you might stand by a pal, Toddy!” said Bunter, reproachfully.

“He would be likely to believe that, as we met him in Redclyffe Lane, and you weren’t with us,” said Bob. “But what’s the worry, old fat man? If you never snooped Coker’s tuck, you’re all right.”

“Look here, I—.”

Bunter broke off suddenly.

He stared from the window, with his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles, and his plump jaw dropping.

“Oh, crikey!” he gasped.

Every fellow in the Rag stared at him, wondering what was the matter with the fat Owl! Nobody—except Bunter—was likely to suppose that a constable would come to Greyfriars to investigate the mystery of Coker's hamper. But it was clear that Bunter had seen something alarming; and there was a rush to the window to see what it was.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"A bobby!" yelled Skinner.

"An esteemed and ridiculous peeler!" exclaimed Hurree Singh.

"Holy smoke!"

In amazement the juniors stared at the figure in uniform at the gates. It was a police-constable from Courtfield: there was no doubt whatever about that. He had stopped to speak to Gosling at the door of his lodge: in full view of all Greyfriars.

"Well, my only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It's a bobby—a jolly old bobby—and he's coming here!"

"Yaroooooh!" Bunter bounded from his seat. "Oh, crikey! He's after me! I say, you fellows, d-d-don't you tell him I'm here! I say—I—I won't be run in! I—I never touched Coker's hamper—I—I say, tell that bobby I ain't here—tell him I've gone home—tell him I've left Greyfriars and ain't coming back—oh, crikey!"

Bunter bolted from the Rag.

He had had doubts about the reality of the "bobby" from Courtfield—but he could have no further doubts, now that the bobby actually had materialised. The constable had left Gosling, and was coming towards the House. There was only one idea in Billy Bunter's mind—to dodge out of sight, and hide somewhere where even the eagle eye of the law could not discover him. He vanished from the Rag like a ghost at cock-crow.

Where was he going to hide—safe from the eagle eye and long arm of the law? They would look in his study first thing—they would look in the Rag—they would look everywhere for him! Then Bunter suddenly remembered that Quelch was out—and surely they would never look for him in a master's study! It was a happy thought!

Bunter bolted for Quelch's study like a homing pigeon.

He was happily unaware that Quelch had come in unexpectedly early, and was now in Common-Room, exercising his chin with the other beaks. The study, at all events, was vacant, when Bunter hurtled into it.

He shut the door, and palpitated on the inner side.

He strained his fat ears to listen. On those fat ears fell the sound of heavy official footsteps. He heard the voice of Trotter, the page.

"This way, Mr. Rance."

The footsteps came up the passage towards Mr. Quelch's door. Billy Bunter felt a cold chill down his back.

Did the bobby know he was there? Had Trotter seen him dodge into that study? The fat Owl cast a despairing blink round him for a hiding-place. Tap!

Trotter was tapping at the study door! Billy Bunter ducked under the table. It was the only hiding-place—the last refuge—the final hope!

The door opened. Billy Bunter had been just in time—only just! But he was out of sight as Trotter opened the door.

"Mr. Quelch isn't here!" Bunter heard Trotter's voice.

"I expect he's in Common-Room. You wait 'ere a minute, and I'll go along and tell him."

"O.K." said Mr. Rance.

And he came in with his heavy tread.

Billy Bunter had a view of official boots and trouser-ends. Police-Constable Rance, of

Courtfield, had no view of Bunter. The fat Owl realised that the bobby did not know that he was in the study. There was hope yet! Bunter hugged cover, under the table, trying to suppress his breathing.

The solid figure of Mr. Rance stood by the window, like a statue in uniform, waiting, while Trotter went to apprise Mr. Quelch of his arrival.

The fat Owl could have groaned. He had decided on Quelch's study as the safest possible refuge—supposing that Quelch was still out. Instead of which, that awful policeman was only six or seven feet from Bunter! If he happened to look under the table—!

However, it never occurred to Mr. Rance to look under the table. He continued to look from the window, till Mr. Quelch's footsteps were heard in the corridor. Then he turned round. And Billy Bunter's fat heart almost died in his podgy breast as Mr. Quelch came into the study and shut the door.

CHAPTER XXII

BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!



"Bunter! Emerge at once!"

"PLEASE be seated, constable."

"Thank you, sir."

"I am obliged to you for coming so promptly," said Mr. Quelch, graciously.

"Not at all, sir! Dooty, sir!" said Mr. Rance. "We shall be very glad to get hold of the

rascal, sir.”

Billy Bunter trembled under the table. He could have no doubt of the identity of the “rascal” to whom the officer of the law alluded!

“It will be a relief to me if the wretch can be found and taken into custody,” said Mr. Quelch. “I shall be very glad to hear that he is safe in your hands. A most iniquitous scoundrel.”

Billy Bunter could hardly believe his ears. Was that really what his form-master thought of him?

“From what my inspector was told on the phone, sir, I think we’ve heard of him before,” said Mr. Rance. “An old offender, I fancy, sir. I’ve no doubt you’ll be able to give me a good description of him.”

“Certainly I can give you a very accurate description,” said Mr. Quelch, “and I hope most sincerely that it may lead to his arrest. I am prepared, of course, to charge him, as soon as he is taken into custody.”

“Beast!” breathed Bunter inaudibly. He would never have expected that, even of Quelch! Quelch had always been down on him, for what reason Bunter did not know. But not to this extent! His form-master seemed to be actually looking forward to seeing that member of his form taken into custody by a police-constable!

Mr. Rance, having sat down, extracted his official notebook, to take down the description of the footpad who had attacked Mr. Quelch in Redclyffe Lane. Mr. Quelch sat down at his writing-table.

Billy Bunter gave a jump, as two long legs were projected under the table. He dodged them wildly. But he dodged in vain.

One foot missed him by an inch. The other clumped on the best-filled waistcoat in Greyfriars School.

“Ooooooh!” gasped Bunter.

He could not help it! He was almost winded. That sudden clump on his fat equator had driven the breath out of him. He gasped—and he gurgled.

Mr. Quelch gave a sudden start. Mr. Rance stared. Both were astonished by those strange and unexpected sounds from under the table.

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed Mr. Quelch. “What— what is that?—is there some animal in the study— what—what?”

He stooped to look under the table. Whether it was a dog, or a cat, that had wandered into his study, or what it might possibly be, Mr. Quelch did not know. But whatever he might have expected to see under his writing-table, certainly he did not expect to see a fat, terrified face and a large pair of spectacles.

He gazed at Bunter, petrified.

Bunter gazed at him.

There was a moment of awful silence. Then Quelch spoke, in a voice compared with which the filing of a saw might have been considered musical.

“Bunter!”

“Oh, crikey! I—I’m not here—!” gasped Bunter.

“Bunter! Is—that Bunter— Wretched boy, what are you doing here? How dare you enter my study? How dare you hide under my table? Come out at once.”

“I—I—I——!”

Mr. Quelch rose from his chair. He grasped the cane from the table. Smithy had recently had six from that cane. Mr. Quelch looked as if Bunter might receive sixty if not six hundred.

“Bunter! Emerge at once!”

“I—I—I—oh, crikey! I—I—.”

“Emerge!” roared Mr. Quelch.

But Billy Bunter did not emerge. Remove fellows were accustomed to jump to obedience at the voice of their form-master. But for once, a Remove fellow did not jump. Bunter was in terror of Quelch—but in greater terror of the constable from Courtfield. He dared not emerge.

“I—I say, sir,” babbled Bunter, “it wasn’t me I—I never did it, sir! I—I was out of gates when I did it, and I —.”

“Emerge!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

“I—I—I won’t be run in!” howled Bunter, “I—I never did it, and—and I won’t be run in! I—I ain’t a scoundrel, sir—!”

“What?” gasped Mr. Quelch.

“I—I ain’t an iniquitous scoundrel, sir,” wailed Bunter. “It’s all a mistake. I—I won’t be took—I mean taken—into custody—I won’t! Oh, crikey! I—I’ll go to the Head—he won’t let me be run in! Oh, lor’!”

“Is this boy insane?” gasped Mr. Quelch. “Bunter, come out from under that table this instant. I order you to emerge.”

And as Bunter still did not emerge, Quelch reached under the table with the cane, and swiped.

“Yarooooh!” roared Bunter.

One swipe was enough! Bunter emerged! He rolled out from under the table yelling. Police-Constable Rance stared at him, blankly, quite surprised out of his official stolidity. Mr. Quelch glared at him, as if he could have bitten him. Bunter, having emerged from under the table dodged round it.

“I—I say, sir, keep him off! I won’t be run in!” yelled Bunter. “I never touched Coker’s hamper.”

“Coker’s hamper!” repeated Mr. Quelch, like a man in a dream.

“Yes, sir! No, sir! I never went to Coker’s study at all. I never knew he had a hamper. I never saw him open it. I—I didn’t go with a cricket-bag while Coker was out, and never took the things up to the box-room, sir—I—I never thought of such a thing! I—I wouldn’t! You can ask Snoop, sir! He knows—I gave him some of the apples.”

“Bless my soul!

“It—it’s all a mistake, sir,” groaned Bunter. “If—if you won’t let me be run in this time, sir, I’ll never do it again, and I never did it at all, sir. I—I think very likely Coker ate it and forgot about it. I was out on a bike with Wharton this afternoon when I did it—I—I mean, I was in the shop talking to Mrs. Mimble, and—and—I Won’t be run in!” yelled Bunter. “Keep that bobby away! Help!”

“My eye!” murmured Mr. Rance. He gazed at Bunter.

“Bless my soul!” repeated Mr. Quelch, “Bunter! you utterly stupid boy—you incredibly obtuse boy—do you suppose that this police-constable’s visit has anything to do with you?”

“Eh! Hasn’t he come after me, sir?” gasped Bunter.

“Grant me patience!” gasped Mr. Quelch. “Bunter, you—you—you—.” Words seemed to fail the Remove master.

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “I—I—I thought—. Oh, crikey! I—I heard you say I was to be took—taken into custody, sir—. Ain’t—ain’t he after me, sir?”

Mr. Rance was grinning. Mr. Quelch was not grinning. The look bestowed on Bunter was worthy of the fabled Medusa.

“You stupid boy, the constable is here to take down he description of a footpad—a tramp—who assaulted me this afternoon in Redclyffe Lane!” shrieked Mr. Quelch.

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “I—I—I thought he’d come about Coker’s hamper, sir—. That

beast Cherry made out that a bobby was coming about the hamper—.”

“Silence!” roared Mr. Quelch. “I gather from your words, Bunter, that you have been purloining comestibles in the studies, after all my serious warnings to you. I shall deal with you later. Leave my study now.”

“I—I never—!”

“Go!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

The cane was rising—and Bunter shot to the door. He realised that it was time to go. He realised, too, that the constable from Courtfield had not come to the school about Coker’s hamper, but about quite another matter.

There was a roar of laughter in the Rag, as the fat junior rolled into that apartment.

“Hallo, hallo, halo! Not run in, Bunter?” asked Bob Cherry.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Beast!” Bunter shook a fat fist at Bob. “I jolly well knew that it was all gammon. The bobby never came about Coker’s hamper at all—!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the juniors.

“I believe you were only pretending to phone, you beast! I don’t believe you got through to the police station at all!” roared Bunter.

“He’s guessed it!” gasped Bob Cherry. “What a brain!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“And I hid in Quelch’s study for nothing, and he found me under the table, and—and he looked fearfully waxy—.”

“Oh, crumbs!”

“And I shouldn’t wonder if Quelch gives me jip when that bobby’s gone,” hooted Bunter. “He jolly well looked like it! I shouldn’t wonder if he gives me six!” Billy Bunter was right. Quelch did!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BIG IDEA!

“PREP!” said Peter Todd.

Snort, from Billy Bunter.

In No. 7, as in other Remove studies, prep was on. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were sitting at the table with their books. Billy Bunter was sitting in the armchair, with a glum and thoughtful expression on his fat face. Every now and then he gave a wriggle—reminiscent of the “six” he had received for his sins. But the effect of that six was wearing off. Other matters were on William

George Bunter’s plump mind. His fat brow was wrinkled in deep cogitation.

“Better have a shot at it, old fat man,” said Peter. “Quelch may put you on con tomorrow.”

“Blow Quelch!”

“What about that jolly old report you’re so anxious about?” asked Peter. “You won’t get a good report from Quelch if you make good old Aeneas turn over in bed till they bring him a light.”

Bunter’s fat lip curled bitterly.

“What’s the good of a chap trying to work for a good report?” he sneered. “Is it any good? Slack in class and slack at games, was what Quelch said. Well, I hand out a pretty good con—and I get whopped! I go to Wharton and ask him to put me in the eleven, to let Quelch see how good I am at games, and he refuses. Do I get a chance?

I'd jolly well chuck up Greyfriars, Peter, if the pater would send me to Eton or Harrow. I should make my mark here But—but he won't!"

"Tough on Eton and Harrow!" said Peter, sympathetically. "They don't know what they're missing."

"Well, Quelch won't know what he's missing, till I'm gone," said Bunter, deaf and blind to sarcasm. "It may dawn on him then what he's done—lost about the only fellow in the Remove likely to do him credit. Later in life, when I'm great and famous—."

"Eh?"

"—when I'm great and famous, and the name of Bunter is a household word, Quelch may realise it. He will know what he's lost. He might have been remembered as my schoolmaster," said Bunter. "Sort of reflected glory, you know."

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Peter.

"Well, he will lose all that, if I go," said Bunter. "Still, I'm jolly well not going if I can help it."

"Then you'd better give your chin a rest, old fat bean, and have a shot at prep!" suggested Peter.

"Blow prep! I've got something else to think of," said Bunter, irritably. "Quelch has got on to that rot about Coker's hamper, Peter. He makes out that I had it. He says he takes a very serious view of it, Peter. I wouldn't mind that so much, if he'd let the matter drop. But—he won't! He's made up his mind, for some reason, that I had Coker's prog, and he says it's pilfering."

"So it is," said Peter.

"Beast! He says that everything that was taken from Coker's study has got to be paid for, unless immediately returned. How can I return it when I've scoffed it—I—I mean, when I don't know what's become of it—don't know anything about the matter at all? He's actually seen Coker of the Fifth about it. What do you think of that, Peter? Coker's a beast—but after all, he wouldn't do anything more than stump a fellow—he's not sordid! Quelch is sordid, Peter. He thinks about money!" Bunter gave a sniff of scorn. "Not public-school style, is it, Peter? Goodness knows where Quelch was brought up. He's turning the whole thing into a sordid question of money! Pah!"

"Horrid!" said Peter, solemnly.

"Yes, that's the word—horrid!" agreed Bunter. "You haven't much sense, as a rule, Toddy, but you can see that. That's what it's come down to now—a sordid question of money. I've got to pay two pounds for that tuck. I've got to take the money to Quelch, to be handed to Coker. Of course, as soon as Quelch made it a matter of money, I'd have chucked the money on his table and said 'There's the money!'" Bunter swept a fat paw through the air. "Just like that, Peter, contemptuously."

"And why didn't you?" asked Peter.

"You see. I haven't any money," explained Bunter.

"Oh! Bit of a difficulty to chuck it about contemptuously, when you haven't any!" agreed Peter.

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order. I think I told you I was expecting a postal-order, Peter."

"I—I think I've heard something about it," gasped Peter. "Yes, I—I think I've heard that one, old fat man."

"Well, it hasn't come," said Bunter. "At the moment, I'm actually stony, Peter. I hardly know what to do, unless you could lend me two pounds—."

"Prep!" said Peter, turning back to his books.

"I'm not talking about prep—I'm talking about two pounds. You might lend a pal a small sum like that, Peter."

"I might," assented Peter, "but it seems to me a bit improbable."

"Well, it's got to be paid," said Bunter, morosely.

"Quelch makes a point of that. I'd be willing to let the whole matter drop, here and now. I loathe entering into sordid discussions about money. It's beneath me. It's not gentlemanly, Peter. The trouble is that Quelch is no gentleman. It was just the same once before, when I owed account at the tuck-shop. Quelch made me pay it."

"*Virginibus Tyriis*—!" murmured Peter.

"Never mind that rot, Peter. This is a bit more important than prep, isn't it?" snapped Bunter. "I've got to pay that rotten money. If I don't Quelch is going to pass it on the pater. Well, the pater would kick up a row, that's certain. He gets his ears up about extras in the school bill, so it stands to reason he would get shirty about two pounds nothing. What I want is a good report this term—not bills going to the pater. The effect would be very bad at home, Peter. It might make all the difference to my coming back next term."

"*Purpleoques*—!"

"Oh, do shut up that bosh, Peter, when a chap's worried. The long and the short of it is, that I've got to raise two quid," said Bunter. "I've got to bring my mind down to sordid questions of money, to please Quelch. Unless my pals stand by me, I don't see what's to be done."

"Couldn't you lend a pal a trifle like that, Peter?"

"You see, it's not a trifle to me," explained Peter. "I haven't any money to chuck about, old fat bean. Nine-pence is my limit."

"It must be rotten to be poor, old chap," said Bunter. "I often wonder what it's like—must be rotten. I'll take you home to Bunter Court some day, Peter, and let you see how wealthy people live. You'd like that, Peter. Open your mind a bit, after your humble home in Bloomsbury."

Peter gurgled again.

"But the trouble now is, about that two pounds—what's a fellow to do, Peter?"

"That's an easy one," said Peter. "Quelch will let you use his telephone, if you ask him. Phone home to Bunter Court—."

"Eh?"

"And the thing's done," said Peter. "They'd hardly miss a couple of quid, from all that wealth and luxury."

"Oh, really, Peter—."

"And now shut up," added Peter. "I've got to work, if you haven't."

"Beast!"

Bunter had no time for prep that evening. Once more he had to "chance it" with Quelch in the morning.

That, certainly, was not a short cut to a good report for the term. But it could not be helped.

Prep was nearly over in No. 7 Study when that fat Owl suddenly ejaculated: "Good!" Peter glanced round at him.

"Got it?" he asked.

"I fancy so," said Bunter, quite brightly.

"Gratters, old man! Who's the happy victim?"

"I'm not thinking of borrowing money, Peter," said Bunter, with dignity.

"Not!" ejaculated Peter.

"No!" hooted Bunter. "Fellows won't lend a chap as much as two pounds—most of

them couldn't, anyway—I mean, it's not the sort of thing I could do. A man can't go up and down the form borrowing money. At least, I couldn't—you might, perhaps, but I couldn't, Peter—.”

“Ye gods!” said Peter.

“But what about a fund?” asked Bunter.

“A—a—a whatter?” stuttered Peter.

“A fund! There's nearly thirty fellows in the form, and a bob or eighteen-pence all round would see me through. Smithy and Mauly might make it five bob—they've got lots. You've got ninepence, Peter—you'd put that in, of course——”

“I can see myself doing it,” agreed Peter.

“If you're going to be mean, Peter, you can keep your miserable ninepence. The fellows will rally round, I feel sure of that,” said Bunter, evidently greatly taken with his big idea. “After all, I'm popular in the form—it's jolly useful sometimes to be a really popular chap, Peter. You could take a tip from that, Toddy—always be a thoroughly decent chap, play the game, kindest friend and noblest foe, and all that, and it makes you popular. I've found it so. What are you grinning at, Peter?”

“Oh! Nothing!” gasped Peter. “Carry on, old popular bean.”

“I'll put it to the chaps after prep,” said Bunter rising from the armchair. “Perhaps I'd better draw up a bit of a notice—and stick it up on the wall, see—like Wharton does the foobal1 notices. Make room for a chap at that table.”

“There's still time for a spot of prep——!”

“Blow prep!” roared Bunter. “I've got to get my notice ready!”

The fat Owl sat down at the table with pen and paper—not for prep. Peter glanced over a fat shoulder, and read:

NOTISS THE BUNTER PHUND

Peter Todd was gurgling over what remained of his prep. Bunter did not heed him. Bunter had found the solution of his problem. All that remained was to institute the Bunter Fund, collect contributions from all quarters, and that would be that. A trifle like two pounds could be raised easily enough, in a numerous form like the Remove, for a really popular fellow: and very likely there would be something over, and a happy visit to the tuck-shop. It was so easy, that Bunter wondered that he had not thought of it sooner. Anyhow, now that he had thought of it, he was going ahead—heedless of gurgles from Peter.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FUND!

“HOLD on, you chaps!”

“Look at that before you go down.”

Bunter waved a fat hand at a paper stuck on the wall, on the Remove landing. Bunter was first out of prep. He was posted on the Remove landing when other study doors opened, and fellows came out.

First to go down the passage to the landing were Skinner, Snoop, and Stott. Bunter waved them back as they headed for the stairs, and pointed out the paper on the wall. Skinner and Co. turned, and looked at it. Then they stared at it. Then they gave a yell.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Bunter blinked at them.

“I say, you fellows, it’s not a joke!” the fat Owl explained. “I mean it! Don’t go down yet! Drop into my study first, see? Of course, I don’t expect much from you Skinner everybody knows you’re mean. Still, I think you ought to play up with the rest.”

Skinner and Co. did not go down. They seemed to find entertainment in the paper on the wall. And as Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing came out of the passage, Skinner called to them, saving Bunter the trouble.

“This way, you men! Look at this! It’s worth looking at.”

The Bounder and Tom Redwing looked at it. Then, like Skinner and Co., they burst into a roar.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, what’s the jolly old joke?” asked Bob Cherry, as he came along with his friends from the studies. “Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!”

The Famous Five yelled.

“I say, you fellows, there’s nothing to cackle at!” exclaimed Billy Bunter, crossly.

“What are you all cackling for?”

More and more fellows came out of the studies. More and more gathered at that spot on the Remove landing: and more and more yelled as they read the writing on the wall! Bunter need not have feared that any fellow would go down without looking at his “notiss”. Every fellow wanted to look at it—indeed, they pushed and barged to get a view of it. Really, it was worth reading:

NOTISS

THE BUNTER PHUND

All my pals in the Remove are hear-by rekwested to ralley rownd and help a chap out of a hoal.

THE WEAK’S GOOD CAUSE

Every fellow willing to help a pal in a bad phix, please stepp into No. 7 Studdy, and put something in the bocks on the table. Smorl contribootions thankfully receeved.

Shell out your bobbs and tanners and half-crowns.

Sined,

W. G. Bunter.

P.S. Kurrency noats will be welcome. J P.P.S. Koppers not refewsed.

Billy Bunter was rather pleased with that “notiss”. He had put more effort into it than he ever put into prep. He flattered himself that ‘it was rather well-worded. He expected it to get a lot of attention in the Remove. It was getting quite a lot, though the general hilarity surprised Bunter a little. He could not see where anything in the nature of a joke came in.

“Chance for you, Mauly!” roared Bob Cherry. “Currency notes not refused—or banknotes either, if you come to that. Smithy, here’s a chance of getting rid of some of your filthy lucre.”

“I’ll say that’s the elephant’s hind leg!” said Fisher T Fish, staring at the notice, “I’ll tell a man! It surely is the grasshopper’s whiskers.”

“Cough up your dollars and dimes, Fishy.”

“I guess I’ll watch it!” grinned Fishy.

“I say, you fellows, I hope you’re all going to play up!” squeaked Billy Bunter. “I’m in an awful hole. I’ve got to pay two pounds for that tuck from Coker’s study—not that I had it, you know. I’ve put a box all ready on my study table. I—I’d like to see every fellow in the form rally round. I want all my pals to stand by me. I think you’d better begin, Wharton, as captain of the form. You might start it with half-a-crown.”

“I might! On the other hand, I might not.”

“The might-notfulness is terrific.”

“I say, Bob, old chap, you begin it with half-a-crown, will you? You’re not so mean as Wharton about a half-crown.”

“I jolly well am!” contradicted Bob Cherry. “Worse!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“What about you, Bull? I daresay you’ve got a half-crown in your pocket.”

“I daresay I have,” assented Johnny Bull, “and I dare-say I’m going to keep it there.”

“What about you, Nugent? You’re a generous chap—as generous as they make ‘em,” urged Bunter. “You’re not stingy with a paltry half-crown.”

“Ain’t I just!” chuckled Nugent.

“Beast! I say, here, Toddy, you ought to start the ball rolling, for a fellow in your own study.”

“Oh!” said Peter Todd. “Something in that! After all, why shouldn’t we rally round Bunter, you fellows? He’s got to pay two quid for Coker’s tuck, and he objects, on principle, to paying anybody for anything. Look here, I’m jolly well going to put something in Bunter’s box, and I hope that every fellow here will follow my example.”

“Fools and their money are soon parted!” remarked Johnny Bull, sententiously. “Why shouldn’t that fat brigand pay for what he’s snooped.”

“I never snooped it!” roared Bunter, “and it wasn’t worth two pounds, either—I had to leave some in the hamper—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“You go it, Toddy! You set an example to the other fellows. If you’ve only got ninepence, old fellow, I don’t mind. Poverty ain’t a crime. I know your people are poor, old chap, and you can’t help being hard up.”

“Ain’t he nice?” said Peter. “Wouldn’t any fellow rally round a chap like Bunter? I’m jolly well going to put something in that box.”

Peter turned back to the Remove passage with that remark—bestowing a wink on the other fellows as he went—unnoticed by Bunter. There was a chuckle among the mob of juniors gathered before Bunter’s “notiss.” Perhaps they guessed that the “something” that Peter was going to put in the box was not going to be something of great value.

“Dash it all,” said Bob Cherry, “play up, you men—if Toddy puts something in it’s up to all of us!”

“Of course it is,” chirruped Bunter. “Bobs and tanners, half-crowns and currency notes—anything you like! I say, you fellows, rally round.”

So far there had been only merriment on the subject of Bunter’s “notiss”. But Peter’s example seemed to catch on. Bob Cherry followed him up the passage, feeling in his pockets as he went. The other four members of the Co. exchanged a grin, and followed Bob. Billy Bunter beamed.

The Famous Five were the leaders of the Remove. Where they led, other fellows were sure to follow.

Vernon-Smith started up the passage, taking out a well-filled note-case as he went. Redwing laughed and followed him. Billy Bunter blinked at the Bounder's wallet, and he grinned with glee. Smithy had lots of money—if he elected to part with it. And Bunter did not know that Smithy, as soon as he had disappeared into the passage, put that wallet back into his pocket—unopened.

"Play up, you fellows!" burbled Bunter. "Go to it, you know. What about you, Skinner? I know you're mean, old chap, but an occasion like this—."

"Oh! You put it so nicely!" gasped Skinner. "Come on, you men—Bunter knows we're mean, but an occasion like this, you know—." Snoop and Stott, grinning, followed Skinner up the passage.

"You playing up, Fishy?" asked Bunter. "Play up, old man! You can't help being stingy, Fishy, but what about a bob?"

Fisher T. Fish chuckled. Fisher T. Fish had never been known to part with money, if he could help it, in all the terms he had been at Greyfriars School. But now he gave Bunter quite an affable nod.

"I guess I'm on in this," he said. "It sure is the bee's knee! You can count me in, you fat clam." And Fisher T. Fish followed the crowd.

"I say, Bolsover—Hazel—Browney—Field, old chap—Mauly—Ogilvy—Morgan—Mickey—Wibley—I say, you fellows, play up!"

But Bunter did not need to exhort. A wave of enthusiasm seemed to have caught the Remove. The whole crowd poured up the passage towards No. 7 Study. Not a man remained on the landing with Billy Bunter. Outside No. 7 Study there was quite a jam—fellows crowding in, and other fellows pushing out.

The Owl of the Remove stood on the landing, and blinked up the passage through his big spectacles, in great glee. He had fancied that his appeal for funds would be a success. But he had hardly anticipated such a success as this.

It was overwhelming. Actually every man in the form was crowding into, or out of, No. 7 Study—all eager to put something in the box. Such a collection could hardly fail to be a good one. Visions of wealth floated before Bunter's dazzled eyes. It might come to pounds. That trifling account for Coker would be cleared off, leaving the happy Owl with cash in hand—and next day, when the tuck-shop was open, it was going to be a happy and sticky Bunter! Why there was such a roar of laughter over the transaction, Bunter did not know.

The Removites came crowding down the passage. The way was left open for Bunter to roll along to the study and count up his wealth. But just as the fat Owl was about to roll, there was a footstep in the Remove staircase, and a sharp voice rapped: "What is all this? What does all this extraordinary noise mean? What——?"

And the extraordinary noise was subdued, as Mr. Quelch rustled on the landing.

CHAPTER XXV

UNEXPECTED!

MR. QUELCH glanced round over his form, frowning.

Billy Bunter bestowed a blink of concentrated fury on his form-master. It was just like Quelch to butt in where he particularly was not wanted!

Undoubtedly there had been a great deal of noise on the Remove landing. Probably it had reached many other ears. Evidently it had reached Quelch's, and he had come up to inquire. Such an outburst of merriment on the part of his form naturally made Quelch suspicious. He had no doubt that some "rag" of unusual proportions was going

on in the Lower Fourth. And he had thoughtfully put a Cane under his arm before he came up.

"Wharton! What is all this? What is going on here?" Snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Nothing, sir!" stammered the captain of the Remove.

"The noise from this landing could be heard all over the House," said Mr. Quelch, crossly. "I require to know—!"

The Remove master broke off suddenly. His gimlet-eyes had fallen on Bunter's "notiss" stuck on the landing wall.

He gave quite a start: and walked across to it, to look at it more closely. The juniors looked at him, and looked at one another. Bunter's "notiss" was no end of a joke in the Remove: but they wondered what its effect might be on a beak. From experience they knew that form-masters and their forms did not always see eye to eye!

Quelch did not look amused. He scanned that notice on the wall, really as if he could hardly believe his eyes. Then he looked round at Bunter—or, rather, glared at him.

"Did you write this, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"Is it possible," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "that a boy in my form is capable of such orthography as this?"

Bunter blinked at him. He reflected bitterly that Quelch was always down on him. The beast was going to find fault with his spelling, now!

"But that is a minor point," Went on Mr. Quelch. "Bunter! I gather from this foolish, absurd, and ill-spelt paper, that you have made an appeal to your form-fellows for funds. You must be well aware that such a thing is inadmissible."

"Oh, really, sir—."

"Have the other boys been making contributions to the box in your study, Bunter?"

"Oh, lor'! Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Wharton, you should have known better than this! As head boy of my form, you should have stopped it."

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—."

"Have you yourself put anything in the box in Bunter's study?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—."

"It was a thoughtless act, Wharton. It was not what I should have expected of my head boy. Have many of the others contributed?"

"Yes, sir, every fellow here, but—."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Absurd! It will certainly not be permitted. I shall examine the box in Bunter's study, and every boy will be required to take back what he has contributed. Bunter, take down that absurd paper at once."

"I—I say, sir—."

"I shall cane you, Bunter, if you do not obey me immediately."

Bunter clutched down the "notiss".

"And now," said Mr. Quelch, "follow me! You will sort out the contents of the box, Bunter, and hand back to every boy here what he has put into it."

"Oh, crikey!"

"Remain here, all of you!" said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "Bunter, follow me!" Mr.

Quelch, with frowning brow, stalked into the Remove passage: and Billy Bunter, with feelings too deep for words, followed him.

The crowd of Removites, on the landing, looked at one another. There were suppressed gurgles on all sides. They could not venture to laugh while their form-master was in the offing.

Mr. Quelch rustled into No. 7 Study. Billy Bunter, with a face of woe, followed him

in. On the table stood a large biscuit-box.

"Is that the box, Bunter?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Oh, dear! Yes, sir!" moaned Bunter.

"I shall examine the contents, and then—!" Mr. Quelch ceased suddenly to speak.

He had lifted the lid of the biscuit-box, which had been replaced by the last contributor. He looked into 'it. He saw the contents. Billy Bunter, blinking at him, was surprised see Quelch's severe face twitch. He blinked again—more and more surprised. Quelch's face was not only twitching—he was laughing!

Why he was laughing, Bunter didn't know. Evidently, he was trying not to laugh—but could not quite succeed. The fat Owl blinked at him in astonishment. What Quelch saw in that box to amuse him was a mystery to Bunter.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch. "Dear me! Absurd! Most absurd! Bunter, you ridiculous boy, you deserve this! Perhaps it may be a lesson to you! Absurd! Ha, ha!" There was no doubt about it—Quelch was laughing! "You certainly deserve this, Bunter."

"Eh! Mum-mum-may I keep it, sir?" asked Bunter, with a gleam of hope.

"Keep it?" repeated Mr. Quelch. "Oh! Yes! Undoubtedly!"

Mr. Quelch walked out of the study.

Bunter gave him one blink of astonishment as he went. Quelch seemed to have changed his mind all of a sudden. It was hard to understand.

However, he had changed it—and Billy Bunter was permitted to keep the collection in the biscuit-box. So it was all right!

As Quelch walked out into the passage, Bunter jumped for the box on the table. His gloating eyes fixed on it—how much there was in that box, he did not yet know: but it was certain to be something considerable, as every fellow in the form had put something in. For one instant, Bunter's look was gloating—the next, he uttered a yell of fury.

One look into that box was sufficient to enlighten him. He knew now why all the Remove fellows had contributed so enthusiastically—why even stingy fellows like Skinner and Fisher T. Fish had put something in. He knew why Mr. Quelch's portentous gravity had melted away when he looked into the box—now that he looked into it himself.

The box was almost full. But not of cash! There were no currency notes. There were no half-crowns. There were no shillings or sixpences. There was not even a single, solitary copper! There were other things—such as crumpled old exercises, disused envelopes, knobs of coal from the coal-locker, an empty jam-jar, a sardine-tin, Billy Bunter's own Latin dictionary, a broken tea-cup, half a saucer, some old pen-nibs, and other such odds and ends—in great variety, but of absolutely no value whatever from a pecuniary point of view.

Bunter gazed at that collection.

He goggled at it.

He could hardly believe his eyes or his spectacles for a moment! Then he yelled with wrath.

"Beasts! Rotters! Pulling a chap's leg! Yah! Swobs! Smears! Smudges!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came back from the Remove landing.

"I say, you rotters—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A chuckling crowd of Removites went down the stairs. Billy Bunter was left with his "fund". Quelch had relented—Bunter was allowed to keep that collection! But he did not seem to want to keep it! He picked up the treasure-box, and hurled it into the fireplace with its contents.

Crash!

That was the end of the Bunter Fund!

CHAPTER XXVI

RAISING THE WIND!

FISHER T. FISH sat in his study, busy.

It was a glorious afternoon. Fleecy clouds floated in a blue sky: Light breezes rustled the leaves of the old Greyfriars elms. Through the open window of No. 14 Study came, from the distance, the cheery click of bat meeting ball. But blue skies, and summer breezes, and the call of the cricket-field, did not draw Fisher Tarleton Fish out of doors. He was, as stated, busy.

Sitting at his study table, Fisher T. Fish was counting his money. That was a little pile of shillings, another of sixpences, another of threepenny pieces: a smaller pile of half-crowns—and quite a mountain of coppers. Quite a tidy little sum was on the table, and Fisher's rather bony face was cheery and contented as he counted it.

Fishy was a businesslike youth. Business was in his blood. He was keen and enterprising, with a very sharp eye for a bargain. He couldn't wait till he grew up before he put those talents to use. There was not much scope for a real live American businessman in the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars School. But Fishy made the most of what there was.

Fish would buy anything, and sell anything. He would buy cheap and sell dear. He would lend a half-crown at a penny a week interest. A hard-up fellow could always raise something—generally not much—by selling something to Fishy, at a half or quarter its value. Fishy would keep it till he found a purchaser: and the smallest spot of profit on the transaction was welcome to him. If a fellow lost a key to a locker, or a box, or a desk, he could always come to Fishy: Fishy had an immense bunch of keys, of all sorts and sizes, which he would lend—for a consideration. If a fellow lost a school book, he could always get a dog-eared volume to replace it—in Fishy's study. It was business on a small scale, perhaps—but Fisher T. Fish guessed, reckoned, and calculated that he was making his dollars produce dimes.

Thus happily occupied after class, Fisher T. Fish was not pleased to see his study door open, and a large pair of spectacles glimmer in.

He waved a bony hand at Billy Bunter.

"Beat it!" he said, tersely.

"Oh, really, Fishy—!"

"Absquatulate!" rapped Fishy. "Shut the door after you."

Bunter was not a customer that the businessman of the Remove desired to see. Bunter would gladly have raised a loan from Fishy at any rate of interest Fishy had cared to name, to be settled when he received a postal-order he was expecting. But Fisher T. Fish, as he often remarked, had cut his eye-teeth early: and he had no use for Bunter. However, the fat Owl did not absquatulate at Fishy's bidding. He rolled into the study, and Fishy glanced round for a missile to hurl at him. Then he noticed that Bunter had a cricket bat under one arm, and a stack of books under the other, and he dropped the cushion he had picked up.

"Say, what you got there, bo?" asked Fishy. He was not prepared to do a loan business with Bunter. But he was open to trade.

"You know I've got to raise two pounds, Fishy," said Bunter. "Quelch has mentioned it again! I'm sick of the subject—but' you know Quelch! Well, I shall have to sell a

few things, that's all. I say, my pater gave four guineas for this cricket bat."

"I guess he was some mutt, if he did," commented Fisher T. Fish.

"I'll let you have it for two, Fishy."

"Forget it!"

"Well, how much, then?" grunted Bunter. "It's a jolly good bat. I've got to raise two quid, and get that rotten sordid matter off my mind. Quelch won't let me hear the end of it till it's paid, I can see that—just like he was about Mrs. Mimble's bill last term."

Fisher T. Fish took the cricket bat, and examined it. It was not the most expensive kind of bat, but it was quite good. It was the kind of article that Fishy liked to buy—cheap. There was always a demand for cricket bats when the summer game was on.

"Seven and six!" said Fishy.

"What?" howled Bunter. "I'd like Toddy to hear that!"

"What's Toddy got to do with it, you fat jay?"

"Oh! Nothing! I mean, he'd think you were welshing me. Look here, that bat cost my uncle three guineas—."

"Aw, can it!"

"I say, Fishy, make it fifteen bob—,"

"Seven and six or nix."

"Beast! Well, what about these books?" grunted Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish examined the pile of books the fat Owl landed on his table. He gave them a disparaging look.

"School books is rather a drug in the market," he said, "and these are purty tattered—all the fly-leaves gone. Tanner a time, if you like."

"Beast!"

"Take it or leave it, old-timer."

"Well, what about this?" asked Bunter. He groped under his jacket, and produced a set of instruments wrapped in paper.

"Ain't you got the box they go in?" asked Fishy.

"Well, it's got the name on it—I mean, it's got my name on it," said Bunter, hastily, "but those instruments are worth a lot, Fishy. The compasses alone are worth a guinea."

"Ten bob!" said Fisher T. Fish, crisply, "the lot!"

Billy Bunter breathed hard. Raising the wind in Fishy's study was not an easy business.

"Let's see, how much will that come to?" said Bunter, wrestling with arithmetic.

"Seven and six—and five bob for the books, that fourteen and six—and ten bob for the instruments—that's twenty-seven shillings—."

"I guess Quelch would whop you for that in class," grinned Fisher T. Fish, "Seven and six and five bob and ten bob is sure twenty-two and six, you mutt."

"Well, that isn't enough!" said Bunter. "I've got to pay two pounds, Fishy. I told you so. Make it two pounds the lot."

"You figure that I'm in business for my health?" inquired Fishy.

Billy Bunter grunted, and went through his pockets. Apparently he had a further supply of goods for sale. No doubt he had come to No. 14 Study prepared for low prices.

"What about this, Fishy?" He laid an alarm-clock on the table, "that's a jolly good clock. Not an American clock, you know. It keeps time."

"Aw, pack it up!" snapped Fisher T. Fish. "I guess American clocks can lay over anything that ever ticked on this side of the pond. But it sure ain't a bad article— five bob."

Bunter went through his pockets again.

"This is a jolly good fountain-pen, Fishy—look at it."

"Seven and six."

"Look here, I jolly well know that Wharton's uncle gave two guineas—."

"Eh?"

"I mean, Wharton's got one exactly like it, and his uncle gave two guineas for it. I daresay you've seen him using it. It's a first-class fountain-pen. You'll jolly well get a lot for it from some senior men."

"Mebbe," said Fisher T. Fish, "and mebbe not! I guess I said seven and six, and that goes."

"How much does that make altogether?" asked Bunter. The figures were getting beyond his arithmetical powers.

"Thirty-five bob," grinned Fisher T. Fish.

"Then I shall want another five bob! What about this, Fishy?" The fat Owl produced a large pocket knife, of the kind that contained all sorts of tools. "Bob Cherry's got one just like it—and I believe it cost pounds."

"Five bob!" said Fishy.

"Will that make two pounds the lot?"

"Yep!"

"All right, then," said Bunter. "It's a go. I've simply got to get that two pounds cleared off. The fellows let me down over my fund, and if they jolly well don't like it, they can jolly well lump it. I—I—I mean, buck up, Fishy—I've got to see Quelch!"

And Fisher T. Fish began to count out the exact sum of two pounds, in a variety of coins: when there was a sudden interruption.

CHAPTER XXVII

NO SALE!

"WAIT a tick!" said Peter Todd. "My bat's in my study."

"Two ticks if you like, old bean," said Bob Cherry.

Peter Todd had been talking cricket with the Famous Five, after tea, in No. 1 Study. They came out of the study in a cheery bunch, to go down to the nets. Wharton and Co. waited in a group in the passage while Peter Todd went along to No. 7 for his bat. Herbert Vernon-Smith came out of No. 4 with a frown on his brow.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, coming down, Smithy?" called out Bob.

"Look here, some fellow has been larking in my study," growled the Bounder. He held up an empty box. "Any of you fellows borrowed my instruments?"

Five heads were shaken.

"Well, somebody has, and I've got some geometry to do for Lascelles," grunted the Bounder. "The silly ass has taken out the instruments and left the box empty. That fat villain Bunter borrowed my compasses once and lost them. If it's Bunter, I'll scalp him."

Peter Todd's voice was heard from No. 7.

"Where's that dashed bat? Has some ass borrowed my bat? Seen my bat, Tom?"

"No, I haven't seen your hat, Toddy," came the voice of Peter's deaf study-mate. "I expect you left it in the lobby."

“Not hat—bat!” yelled Peter.

“Whose fat cat? Do you mean Mrs. Kebble’s cat? It comes up to the studies sometimes, but I haven’t seen it here.”

The Famous Five, with smiling faces, looked into No. 7 Study. Tom Dutton was there, standing at the bookshelf. He had apparently been looking for a book when Peter blew in.

“Seen my Latin dick, Peter?” he asked.

“Bother your dick! Where’s my dashed bat?”

“Who smashed it?” asked Dutton, in surprise. “I’d jolly well kick up a row if anybody smashed my hat! Do you mean your Sunday hat?”

“I never said hat!” shrieked Peter.

“Oh, don’t be an ass, old chap. I jolly well know that you haven’t got a red hat! You wouldn’t be allowed to wear it here if you had. Fancy a chap in a red hat, like a cardinal!” said Dutton. “Trying to pull my leg, or what?”

“Lost your bat, Toddy?” asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

“No, I jolly well haven’t lost it,” snorted Peter. I left it here, lying on the study table, when I came along to your study. Somebody’s shifted it. Look here, Dutton—.”

“I’m looking now,” said Tom. “I’ve been looking for some time, but I can’t find it. I left it here on the shelf with my other books. I wonder who’s borrowed my Latin dictionary.”

“There seems to have been a lot of borrowing going on,” remarked Frank Nugent.

“Smithy’s instruments, and Toddy’s bat, and Dutton’s dick. Can’t be Bunter—he’s , got no use for any of them.”

“Even the esteemed Bunter cannot eat a set of instruments, a cricket bat, and an absurd Latin dictionary!” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Look here, Dutton, roared Peter, “I want my bat! Not my hat—or Mrs. Kebble’s cat—but my cricket bat!”

“Eh! Did you say your cricket bat?”

“Yes, I did.”

“I don’t suppose Bunter hid it. Why should he? Did you say hid?”

“Did you see Bunter with my bat?”

“No—he hadn’t a hat! I saw him with a cricket bat. He was coming out of the study when I came up, and he had a cricket bat under his arm, and a lot of books under the other. I wonder if he had my Latin dick among them, though. I don’t see why he should, but it’s gone.”

“Where did he take my bat?”

“That’s rot, Peter! Bunter’s rather a little beast, but he wouldn’t shake a cat. Mrs. Kebble would be after him, if she saw him. Besides, I’ve told you the cat hasn’t been here. I should have seen it.”

“Where did Bunter take my cricket bat?” roared Peter, in a voice that Stentor of old might have envied.

“Oh! Your cricket bat! You needn’t yell in my ear, Toddy—I’m not deaf!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” came from the passage.

“Will you tell me where he took my cricket bat?” raved Peter.

“Of course I will, old chap, only you needn’t yell at a fellow. He went into Fishy’s study. If you see him ask him if he’s got my Latin dick among those hooks he had—he might—.”

Peter did not wait for any more: he rushed out of the study, and galloped up the passage to No. 14 Study. Harry Wharton and Co. and the Bounder, with grinning faces, followed him. Peter looked as if something might happen to Bunter, when he

found him.

The door of No. 14 Study crashed open.

It made Fisher T. Fish jump. Five or six coins dropped from his bony fingers, rolled on the table, and clinked on the floor.

“Wake snakes!” ejaculated Fisher T. Fish. “What the John James Brown—!” He glared at Peter, as he rushed in.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter. His eyes popped at Peter Todd. “I—I say, Peter, wharrer you want here? I—I say, get out, old chap—you’re interrupting—.”

“Where’s my bat?” roared Peter.

“Eh! I—I don’t know anything about your bat, old fellow. I—I think Wharton borrowed it—!”

“Guess again!” said a voice from the passage.

“Oh, I didn’t see you, Harry, old chap! I—I mean it was Nugent, Peter—he—he came into the study, and said ‘Hand me Toddy’s bat, will you?’ So I—I handed it to him, and he walked off with it—.”

“Oh, scissors!” gasped Frank Nugent, “I did, did I?”

“Eh! I—I mean it was Bull—.”

“You mean it was me!” roared Johnny Bull.

“Oh! Yes! No!” stammered Bunter, blinking at the laughing crowd of faces in the doorway of No. 14. “What I—I really mean is, it was Temple of the Fourth. He-he came into the study, and said—!”

“Why, there it is!” roared Peter. Fisher T. Fish’s purchases lay on the table: and Peter, discerning the bat, recognised it as his own. He pounced upon it and grabbed it up.

“You fat chump! You podgy piffler! What the howling dickens did you bring my bat here for?”

“I—I—I didn’t!” gasped Bunter. “I—I———.”

“Say, this is the elephant’s hind leg, and then some!” ejaculated Fisher T. Fish. “Mean to say that’s your bat, Todd?”

“Think I don’t know my own bat?” roared Peter.

“Search me!” gasped Fishy. “That fat clam has just sold it to me—.”

“What?” shrieked Peter.

“He’s sure sold me that bat for seven and six—.”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” exclaimed Bob Cherry. “What’s my pocket-knife doing here?”

He stepped into the study, and picked up another of Fishy’s recent purchases. “Your pocket-knife!” ejaculated Fishy. “Well, I’ll swow! Bunter’s sold me that pocket-knife for five bob—.”

“He’s sold you my pocket-knife!” gurgled Bob. Bunter, you fat villain, did you snoop this pocket-knife out of my study—?”

“Oh! No! I—I———Oh, lor’!”

“How did my alarm clock get here?” exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

“Yourn!” gasped Fishy.

“Oh, my hat gasped Harry Wharton. “I wonder whose that fountain pen is, and those instruments—.”

“Mine! roared Vernon-Smith. “I’ve got the box here—they’re my instruments. That fat burglar—.”

“Aw, carry me home to die!” gasped Fisher T. Fish.

“I’m telling you that Bunter’s sold me them instruments for ten bob, and the fountain-pen for seven and six!”

“Whose fountain-pen?” asked Wharton, laughing. “Looks like yours,” said Nugent.

“What!” The captain of the Remove ceased to laugh and grabbed the fountain-pen off

the table. "Why, Bunter, you—you—you——."

"I—I say, you fellows. I—I—I didn't—I—I mean I wasn't—that is, I—I mean—you see—I—I—."

Bunter was a little incoherent.

Great Christopher Columbus!" said Fisher T. Fish, "I'll say I'm glad you guys blew in! I was just going to pay that fat clam two pounds for that lot—."

"Bunter, you fat villain—."

"Bunter, you burglar—."

"Bunter, you podgy pirate— !"

"Scrag him!"

"Scalp him!"

"Boot him!"

"Burst him!"

"I—I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter dodged round the table, in alarm. "I—I say, it's all right! Let a fellow explain! I tell you it's all right! You don't think I'd snoop your things, do you? Do let a fellow explain! I say, you fellows, will you listen to a fellow?" yelled Bunter. "I can explain, if you'll give me time."

"A judge will be giving you time, some day!" roared Peter. "I'm going to give you this bat—!"

"Yaroooh! Keep off, you beast! I tell you it's all right!" shrieked Bunter. "Smithy, you rotter, keep those compasses away from my trousers, will you! Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right!" yelled Bunter. "You weren't going to lose the things. I—I only borrowed them for a day or two. I've got to raise two pounds, haven't I? I—I was only going to sell those things temporarily. Only for a few days. I was going to buy them back from Fishy, in a few days. See? Think I ain't honest, you beasts?"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Anybody here think Bunter isn't honest?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The thoughtfulness is terrific."

"I tell you it's all right!" hooted Bunter. "Just a matter of a few days—only a few days at the most—then I shall have the money, and—."

"And where is it coming from?" asked the Bounder.

"I'm expecting a postal-order——."

"What?" yelled the juniors.

"A postal-order! From one of my titled relations, you know. So you see it would be all right."

If Billy Bunter hoped that that explanation would satisfy the owners of the property he had brought to Fishy's study, it showed that Bunter had a very hopeful nature!

"Collar him!" roared Bob.

"Bag him!"

"Bump him!"

"Boot him!"

"Oh, crikey! Leggo! I say, you fellows—. Beasts! Stop sticking those compasses into me, Smithy, you smudge—if you kick me again, Wharton—leggo my ear, Bull—will you leggo my ear? Keep that bat away, Toddy—. Oh! ow! wow! Help! Fire! Yaroooooooop!"

Billy Bunter had come to No. 14 Study to raise the wind. He seemed to have raised a whirlwind! It was a wildly dishevelled and dilapidated Bunter that escaped into the passage, at last, and fled, yelling.

"Say! I guess you guys want to give him some more!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish. "I'm

telling you, he was touching me for two pounds for that caboodle! Say, you want to give him a few more, and then some.”

“I think Bunter’d had enough,” said Peter. “Now you’re going to have a few. Lend a hand here, you men.”

“What-ho!”

“Say, you gone loco?” yelled Fisher T. Fish, jumping up in alarm. “Leave that table alone—hands off—I guess I’ll make potato-scrappings of you—I sure guess—Oh, great John James Brown! Oh, Christopher Columbus! Whoop!”

The Remove merchant, in a dizzy state, rolled on the floor of No. 14. The table was upended over him, and all sorts of coins of the realm spattered on him in a shower. Then Harry Wharton and Co. crowded out of the study, leaving the businessman of the Remove to sort himself out at his leisure.

Billy Bunter was still in want of his two pounds. But it seemed improbable that he would resort again to that extraordinary method of raising the wind—and if he did, it was an absolute certainty that he would not be able to do business with Fisher T. Fish.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SPORTING!

“ONE for me?”

“Yes!”

“Oh, good!” exclaimed Billy Bunter.

In morning break, a good many fellows had come along to look in the rack for letters. Billy Bunter, of course, was there. Bunter had long been expecting a postal-order. It had not come.

Perhaps Bunter did not really so much expect a remittance, as hope for one. Certainly he was badly in need of one. As a rule, Bunter was not very keen or anxious on the subject of liquidating debts. He owed various sums, ranging from sixpence to half-a-crown, up and down the Remove, and did not allow these liabilities to worry him unduly.

But that wretched two pounds was another matter. Twice again Quelch had spoken to him on the subject. Bunter was sick and tired of it.

The fat Owl was in daily dread of the matter going home to Mr. Bunter. And he could not help feeling that the effect on Quelch was bad. He could see quite plainly that he was not rising in Quelch’s opinion. Quelch was down on him—Quelch made that quite clear. It was awfully unjust—but there it was!

So a letter in the rack for W. G. Bunter brightened the fat Owl’s worried face. There was a chance, at least, that a remittance might be in it.

“Hand it down, Bob, old chap!” said Bunter, eagerly.

Bob Cherry handed it down.

“That jolly old postal-order at last, what?” grinned the Bounder. “The one you’ve been expecting ever since you were in the Second Form!”

“Oh, really, Smithy—!”

“From one of your titled relations?” asked Skinner. “Which one, Bunter—the duke or the marquis?”

“Yah!” was Bunter’s brief and elegant reply to that question.

“One for you, Smithy,” said Bob.

“Chuck it over,” said the Bounder, carelessly. Billy Bunter blinked at his letter. It was addressed in Mr. Bunter’s hand: and his hope of a remittance was faint as he saw the parental fist. If it had been from some uncle or aunt, he might have expected better things—but he was only too sadly aware that Mr. William Samuel Bunter was more likely to send him a lecture on economy than a remittance. There was a chance, perhaps, but it was a very faint one. Having ascertained, from the envelope, that the letter came from Mr. Bunter, the fat Owl did not seem specially eager to open it. His blink left his own letter, and fastened on that in Smithy’s hand, which Bob Cherry had obligingly chucked” over.

Smithy very often had handsome remittances. Mr. Vernon-Smith, who was a millionaire several times over, often enclosed currency notes, and even banknotes, in his letters to his son at Greyfriars. There might be two or three pound notes in a letter for Smithy from home: or a fiver—possibly even a tenner! And in his own letter, Bunter expected to find nothing but sage advice about being careful to keep within his allowance!

“I—I say, Smithy—!” exclaimed Bunter, suddenly. “Eh, what?” asked the Bounder. He had thrust his letter carelessly into his pocket without even opening it.

‘Look here, we’ve got a letter each,” said Bunter. “I’ll tell you what, Smithy—you’re a sportsman, old chap— I’ll make you a sporting offer. What?”

The Bounder stared at him.

“What may that happen to mean, if it means anything?” he asked.

“Well, look here,” said Bunter. “I’ve got a letter and ‘You’ve got a letter. See? There may be a tip in yours. There may be a tip in mine. Halves!”

“What?” ejaculated the Bounder.

“We’ll whack it out, whatever it is, what?” said Bunter. That’s a sporting offer, Smithy! Ten to one there’s a tip in one of the letters, see? Well, if it’s in mine, I’ll whack it out with you. If it’s in yours, you whack it out with me. See?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared Bob Cherry. “Is that what you call a sporting offer, old fat man?” There was a general chortle among the fellows standing by the letter-rack. The Bounder joined in it.

Bunter’s “sporting” offer was rather a safe one, it seemed to the other fellows. It was possible, no doubt, that there was a remittance in Bunter’s letter from home: but Billy Bunter had been expecting a postal-order for a very long time—a very long time indeed—and, though a remittance was possible, it did not seem probable. In the Bounder’s case, on the other hand, it was very probable indeed, if his letter was from home, that there was a handsome tip in it.

“Well, I call it sporting,” said Bunter. “We go halves, Smithy, in any tips that are in these letters—that’s fair! It’s just as likely that there’s one in my letter as in yours.—!”

“Oh, just!” grinned Skinner.

“The justfulness is terrific!” chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Play up, Smithy!” chortled Bob. “You know how likely it is that there’s a postal-order in Bunter’s letter.

Don’t lose this chance!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I say, you fellows, you shut up!” hooted Bunter. “Smithy’s a sportsman—ain’t you, Smithy?”

“Oh, quite!” said Vernon-Smith, laughing. “If you mean it, Bunter—.”

“Honest Injun old chap!” said Bunter, eagerly. There was no doubt that Bunter meant

it!

"Well, I don't mind," said Smithy. "I'm a sportsman as you say, old fat man, and I'll take a sporting offer."

Billy Bunter beamed.

The fact that Bunter had not immediately opened his letter, told how little he really supposed that it might contain anything in the nature of legal tender. It was really a case of "Heads I win, tails you lose!"

"Let's have it clear," went on Smithy, while all the juniors stared at him, blankly.

"We open the letters together, and share and share alike in any remittance in either or both! Is that it?"

"That's it!" gasped Bunter, scarcely daring to believe in his good luck.

The Bunder glanced round at staring faces. "You fellows are all witnesses to that!" he said. Bunter

and I go halves in whatever dough there may be in our letters."

"I suppose you're pulling that fat chump's leg," said Harry Wharton.

"Not in the least."

"Well, what's your game, then, Smithy?" asked Peter Todd. "You know that that fat ass doesn't get a remittance once in a blue moon—."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"You jolly well know his fatheaded postal-order hasn't come," said Peter, "so what are you up to, Smithy?" "Takin' a sportin' offer," answered Smithy.

"You shut up Toddy 'hooted Bunter 'You let Smithy alone' Smithy s a sportsman and he's sticking to his word ain't you Smithy"

"Like glue!" assented the Bunder.

"Open your letter, old chap!" said Bunter. "I say, be quick——!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't make you out, Smithy," said Harry Wharton.

"But if you're leg-pulling, you can't back out now."

"Who wants to?" said Smithy.

"I say, Smithy, do open that letter—."

"All right!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith drew out the letter he had dropped into his pocket.

He slit the envelope, with all eyes on him—Billy Bunter's eyes fairly gloating through his spectacles.

All the fellows were puzzled by the Bunder's easy acceptance of Bunter's "sporting offer", and could not make the Bunder out. It was true that he had plenty of money but it was equally true that he knew how to take care of it. Yet if there was a remittance in that letter, he was bound now to "whack it out" with Billy Bunter.

But the Bunder seemed quite easy about it. He slit the envelope with his penknife, and drew out a folded letter from within.

Billy Bunter almost gasped with eagerness. He could scarcely wait while Vernon-Smith unfolded that letter. Then—!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped a dozen fellows.

Smithy held up the letter for every fellow to see. It was a single sheet with a printed heading.

To repairs of bicycle ... £1 2s. 6d.

Billy Bunter's eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at that letter. It was not, evidently, from Smithy's pater! It was not the sort of letter that was likely to contain a remittance!

Harry Wharton laughed. He had surmised that Smithy was somehow pulling the fat Owl's leg, though he could not guess how. This was how! Other fellows laughed, but Billy Bunter did not laugh. Billy Bunter gave a snort of utter disgust.

"Oh, crikey! That letter ain't from your pater, Smithy!"

"Did you think it was?" drawled Smithy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh! Of course I did!" howled Bunter. "You didn't say it wasn't! Why, you beast, I believe you knew all the time that it was from the cycle-shop!" It dawned on Bunter why Smithy had accepted that "sporting" offer!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Did you, Smithy?"

"Well, sort of!" admitted Smithy. "As 'Brown's Cycle Works' is printed on the back of the envelope, I sort of guessed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now open your letter, Bunter!" chortled Skinner. "Roll out the wealth from Bunter Court, and go halves with Smithy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave an angry grunt. His fat leg had been pulled: but that was not the worst *if*, by some miraculous chance, there happened to be a remittance in his letter! Nobody expected it—least of all, perhaps. Bunter—but the chance existed.

The fat Owl jammed a fat thumb into the envelope, which was his elegant way of opening it. He drew out a letter, and unfolded it. Then he gave a startled gasp.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Hallo, hallo, halo!" roared Bob, "a postal-order!"

"Two!" yelled Skinner.

"Great pip!"

"The great-pipfulness is terrific!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh, crikey! Oh, scissors! Oh!" And his little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles, as he blinked at two postal-orders each for £1, in his fat paw!

CHAPTER XXIX

PAY UP, BUNTER!

"FAN me!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Help!" ejaculated Peter Todd.

"What ass said the age of miracles was past?" asked Frank Nugent. "Bunter's postal-order has come!"

"O day worthy to be marked with a white stone!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We're dreaming this!" said Skinner, shaking his head. "Gratters, old fat bean," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"I guess this is the bee's knee!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll tell a man, this is the grasshopper's whiskers!"

Billy Bunter did not heed. He gazed at those postal-orders, blankly, almost as if he

half-expected them to fade away like fairy gold.

Considering how long Billy Bunter had been expecting postal-orders, it was rather extraordinary that he was so surprised to see them!

The Bounder chuckled. Certainly he had never dreamed that there was a remittance in Bunter's letter from home, when he had accepted that "sporting" offer. Bunter had been on the make, as usual, and Smithy had pulled his leg—that was all. But that unexpected supply of cash was the cream of the joke. The bargain had been made—it was "halves"—and Smithy was entitled to one of those pounds. Bunter's little scheme had worked out in reverse!

"I—I say, you fellows, the—the pater's sent me two quid!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I never expected—I—I mean—."

"It's the jolly old unexpected that always happens!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "You've been too jolly sporting, Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Halves!" said the Bounder, with a chuckle.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"I—I—I say, of course, it was—was all a joke, Smithy wasn't it?" stammered Bunter.

"Not at all!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—."

"Where does the joke come in?" asked Smithy.

"I—I—I mean—!"

"We all know what you mean!" chuckled Skinner. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up to you, Bunter," grinned Peter Todd. "You shouldn't be on the make, old man. You've diddled yourself instead of Smithy."

"Play up, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

"And pay up!" chortled Snoop.

"Waiting!" said Vernon-Smith.

Billy Bunter's fat paws closed almost convulsively on the postal-orders. He had been caught in his own toils, as he dismally realised. His sporting offer had come home to roost!

"I—I—I say—I" he stammered.

"No need to say anything, old fat man. Just shell out."

"Play up, old porpoise."

"Honest Injun, you know!"

"Shell out, Bunter."

"I—I say, you fellows, of—of course I—I'm going to shell out," gasped Bunter,

"but—but—give a fellow a chance to read his letter—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently Bunter was trying to gain time.

Seldom was Bunter keen to read the parental communications. Generally he skipped them. He was not deeply interested in advice to keep within his allowance, or the reasons why Mr. Bunter could not possibly send him anything extra.

Now, however, he concentrated on that letter from home. No doubt he hoped that the bell for third school would come to the rescue. For—sad to relate—Billy Bunter's one desire at the moment was to wash out that sporting offer and its unexpected result.

Halves in a remittance for Smithy was one thing—halves in a remittance for Bunter quite another.

Dear William,

In the course of little more than a week, I have received no fewer than four letters from you requesting a remittance. I have already explained to you several times that it is impossible for me to augment your allowance: and I recommend you to save a useless expenditure on postage stamps.

As it happens, however, your Uncle George Spoke to me on the subject of a present for your next birthday, and in the circumstances, I suggested to him that it should take the form of cash.

I therefore enclose the sum of £2—Two Pounds—from your Uncle George, to whom you will of course write a grateful and dutiful letter, expressing your thanks.

Your affectionate Father,

W. S. Bunter.

Clang! clang! clang!

It was the bell for third school.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, there’s the jolly old bell,” exclaimed Bob Cherry. “Come on, my infants—Henry likes us to be punctual.”

“Punctuality is the procrastination of princes, as the English proverb observes,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Aren’t we going to wait and see Bunter shell out?” grinned Frank Nugent.

“My dear chap, Quelch wouldn’t like us to miss a whole lesson—!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Where are you going, Bunter?” yelled the Bounder. “Lots of time before Quelch gets to the form-room. What’s the hurry?”

“The hurrifulness seems to be terrific.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter shot away.

Seldom was Bunter prompt at the sound of the bell. Often, if not always, he was last at the door of the form-room. Not infrequently he was late for class. Now the sound of the bell seemed to have quite a magic effect. An arrow in its flight was not swifter than Bunter.

“Hold on, Bunter!” shouted the Bounder. “Halves, old fat bean.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Play up, Bunter!”

“Pay up, old fat man!”

Hitherto, the only deaf fellow in the Greyfriars Remove had been Tom Dutton. Now Billy Bunter seemed deaf also—deaf than Dutton, in fact. Dutton certainly would have heard those shouts behind him—but Bunter did not seem to hear! He shot on, unheeding.

A laughing crowd followed him.

Never before had Bunter been anxious to see his form-master prompt at the form-room door. Now he would have been glad to see Mr. Quelch there, even before the bell had ceased to ring. For once, he wanted to get into class.

But Quelch had not arrived yet. The Remove gathered at the door, as usual: and Billy Bunter blinked uneasily at the Bounder as he came up. There was a cheery grin on Smithy’s face.

There was no grin on Bunter's. The fat face of the Owl of the Remove registered dismay and alarm and despondency.

Actually, Bunter's unexpected postal-order was in no danger. The playful Smithy was simply pulling his fat leg: as most of the fellows guessed—excepting Bunter. The wealthy Bounder had plenty of money of his own, and would not in point of fact have touched the fat Owl's postal-order with a barge-pole.

But Bunter did not guess that one! Bunter, in happy and unexpected possession of two pounds, was in dread of losing one of them. From the bottom of his plump heart he repented him of having made that “sporting” offer.

He had jammed those postal-orders into his pocket. He hoped that they were going to remain there—till after third school. Then Billy Bunter was going to make a rush for Mrs. Mumble's shop. He eyed the Bounder uneasily, wishing that Quelch would blow along the passage, and interrupt. For the first time in his fat career, Bunter was eager to see Quelch. But Quelch was not due yet.

“Shell out, Bunter,” chuckled six or seven fellows.

“Oh! All right! But—I—I say, Smithy—!” stuttered Bunter. “I—I suppose it will be all right if—if I let you have my next postal-order instead—instead of one of these, old chap.”

“Oh, gum!” said Skinner. “Bunter's still expecting a postal-order.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I—I expect one tomorrow, Smithy—or—or the day after at the very latest—it's bound to come—it's from one of my titled relations, you know—.”

“I know!” agreed the Bounder, “but a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. Cough it up.”

“Oh! Yes! All right! But—I say, there's Quelch Coming—.”

“I don't see him.”

“I—I mean, he—he will be coming in a minute. I—I'll speak to you after third school, Smithy—.”

“Delays are dangerous,” said the Bounder, shaking his head. “Especially in a case like this, Bunter.”

“The dangerousness of the delay is preposterous,” chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“A stitch in time is better than a cracked pitcher that goes longest to a bird in hand.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I—I—I say—I—I've got to pay Coker!” gasped Bunter. “I—I've got to pay two pounds, Smithy.” Bunter suddenly remembered that! “Now I've got two pounds, I—I'm bound to pay up. A—a chap must pay his debts, Smithy! I—I can't go on owing money, Smithy! It—it's not the sort of thing I could do! Look here, you can have my next postal-order when it comes—.”

“I shall be getting my old-age pension by then.”

“Beast!”

“Here comes Henry!” murmured Bob Cherry. “Buck up, Bunter, if you're going to shell out!”

Billy Bunter did not buck up. Mr. Quelch arrived, and let in his form: and the postal-orders were still safe in Billy Bunter's pocket when he rolled to his place in the form-room.

CHAPTER XXX

JUST LIKE QUELCH!

BILLY BUNTER sat in third school with a worried wrinkle in his fat brow. The lesson was history: but never had Bunter been less interested in the annals of the land that he distinguished by belonging to it.

Bunter had two pounds in his pocket. They were burning a hole there. It might have been supposed—by anyone who did not know Bunter—that a fellow who had a pressing bill of two pounds to meet, and who had unexpectedly received that very sum in a “tip”, would have hastened to pay that little bill, and have done with it. That was what anyone who did not know Billy Bunter might have supposed. But not anyone who did know that fat and fatuous youth.

Bunter had written home for money as often as he could borrow a stamp for that purpose. He had haunted the letter-rack in hope of a remittance. He had fully resolved that, if a remittance came, he would square that little bill, if only for the sake of keeping Quelch quiet.

But now that the remittance had so surprisingly come, Coker’s little bill was relegated to the back of Bunter’s fat mind. He was willing to plead it as an excuse for not standing by his sporting offer to Smithy. But that was as far as he was prepared to go. His fat thoughts ran on tuck. The amount of tuck that could be obtained for two whole quid was dazzling to the fat Owl. It was just maddening to be kept in the form room, listening to Quelch’s drone, with two pounds in his pocket, and a tuck-shop just across the quad.

It was no wonder that there was a worried wrinkle in his brow. He had to sit it out in the form-room for an hour. After that, he had to dodge Smithy somehow. Obviously, in such worrying circumstances, he could not give much attention to English History. It was hardly to be expected.

But Quelch did expect it. He could see that Bunter was inattentive—that in the form-room, when he should have concentrated his mind on the lesson in hand, he was thinking of other things. His serious warning to that member of his form seemed to have produced no result whatever. With a bad report—and consequent departure from Greyfriars—hanging over his head like the sword of Damocles. Bunter nevertheless showed quite plainly that he did not care a single, solitary boiled bean for the priceless knowledge that Quelch was imparting to the form.

“Wharton! What was Napoleon expecting at Waterloo?”

“The arrival of Grouchy. sir.”

“Bunter! What was Wellington expecting at Waterloo?”

No reply! Bunter, no doubt, heard his form-master’s voice—he was not asleep this time! But he was thinking of sausage-rolls in Mrs. Mible’s shop. It was difficult to detach his mind suddenly from that entrancing vision, and get back to English History.

“Do you hear me, Bunter?” inquired Mr. Quelch, in a deep rumbling voice.

“Eh! Oh! Yes, sir!” stammered Bunter, coming back to earth, as it were.

“Tell me at once what Wellington was expecting, Bunter.”

“A postal-order, sir.”

“What!” stuttered Mr. Quelch.

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “I—I mean—I don’t mean—I—I——.” The sudden transition from sausage-rolls to English history had rather confused Bunter’s fat mind—never, perhaps, very clear. “I—I—I mean—I don’t mean he was expecting a postal-order, sir—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Silence in the form!” thundered Mr. Quelch. “Bunter, what do you mean? Of what,

Bunter, were you thinking? You are not attending to the lesson, Bunter. You are giving me no attention whatever. Tell me this instant, Bunter, of what you were thinking?"

Even in the angriest moment, Mr. Quelch was incapable of ending a sentence with a preposition. Wild horses could not have dragged him into asking "What were you thinking of?"

"Oh! I—I wasn't thinking about sausage-rolls, sir—!" stammered Bunter.

"Sausage-rolls!" repeated Mr. Quelch, dazedly.

"Yes, sir! I mean no, sir. Nothing of the kind, sir! I—I don't care for sausage-rolls really, and I—I certainly wasn't thinking about Mrs. Mimble's sausage-rolls, sir. I—I never heard a chap say that she had a new lot in this morning, sir, and—and I wasn't wondering whether the fellows had scoffed them all in break, and—and—."

"That will do, Bunter. I doubt whether you have heard a word of what I have been saying to the form. I doubt whether you could tell me anything whatever about Waterloo!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes, sir," gasped Bunter, "I—I know all about Waterloo, sir. I've taken a train there more than once. It's a railway station, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Remove.

"Upon my word!" stuttered Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter blinked round indignantly at laughing faces.

"I say, you fellows, you needn't cackle—I jolly well know it's a railway-station. I've got out of trains there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Are you not aware, Bunter, that Waterloo station was named after the Battle of Waterloo?" articulated Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Was it, sir?"

"Now what can you tell me of the Battle of Waterloo, Bunter?"

"Oh! It was—was—was a battle, sir—!"

"It was a battle?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir." Bunter seemed to feel quite confident about that! "I—I think it's called the Battle of Waterloo because—because it was a—a battle, sir."

"You—you think—." Quelch seemed almost to moan. "Upon my word! Bunter, I am trying to be patient with you. Tell me who commanded the British troops at the Battle of Waterloo?"

"I—I think it was Montgomery, sir—!"

"Montgomery!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"I—I mean Nelson!" amended Bunter, hastily. He could see, by Quelch's speaking countenance, that it wasn't Montgomery. "Nelson, sir! It was when he flew his famous signal, sir, 'England expects a postal-order—I—I mean, England expects every man to do his duty!'"

"And—and he never smiled again!" added Bunter, drawing deeper on his stores of historical knowledge. "He—he never smiled again, sir."

"Grant me patience!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, you will write out fifty times, after class, that the Duke of Wellington commanded the British troops at Waterloo, and that he expected the arrival of Blucher."

"Oh, crikey!"

"And if you are inattentive again, Bunter, I shall cane you." After that, Billy Bunter tried to keep his thoughts from wandering across the quad to Mrs. Mimble's shop. Fifty lines was bad enough, without a whopping in addition. Whenever Quelch was

looking another way, the fat junior gave him inimical blinks through his big spectacles, He wondered whether that endless lesson ever would be over.

But all things come to an end: and at length the welcome hour struck. Bunter jumped up in a hurry. He was anxious to be first out of the form-room—with a wary eye on the Bounder. But Quelch did not immediately give the word of dismissal. His gimlet-eyes fixed on the fat Owl.

“Bunter!” he rapped.

“Oh, yes, sir!” groaned Bunter. Surely that awful beast was not going to keep him in—with two pounds in his pocket!

“I have a word to say to you, Bunter! I have spoken to you several times on the subject of the sum to be paid for the comestibles abstracted from a Fifth-form boy’s study. On each occasion you have told me that you were expecting a remittance from home, and I have allowed the matter to stand over. I can allow it to stand over no longer, Bunter.”

“I—I—I’m expecting a postal-order, sir—!” stammered Bunter.

“Oh, lor’!”

“You received a letter from your father this morning, Bunter. Did it contain the remittance you have assured me you were expecting to receive, or did it not?”

“Oh!” Bunter realised that Quelch, one of whose duties it was to look over correspondence in the Remove, was aware of that letter from Mr. Bunter. “I—I—— no, sir—I—I mean—yes, sir—I—I mean—Oh scissors!”

“If you have the money, Bunter, place it on my desk at once!” snapped Mr. Quelch. Bunter blinked at him dolorously. His fat hand, in pocket, clutched two postal-orders, each for a pound! There was no help for it! Sausage-rolls in Mrs. Mible’s shop faded away like a beautiful dream! It had to be!

“Do you hear me, Bunter?” rumbled Mr. Quelch.

“Oh! Yes, sir!” groaned Bunter.

He rolled to his form-master’s desk. Two crumpled and rather sticky postal-orders were placed thereon. Mr. Quelch glanced at them.

“It will; be necessary for you to cash these, Bunter, as they are made out in your name. Do so, and bring the money to my study.

“Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter.

And the postal-orders were in the sticky pocket again, as Bunter rolled out of the form-room with the Remove.

CHAPTER XXXI

A FRIEND IN NEED!

“BOB, old chap——!”

Bob Cherry was going into the quad, when a fat paw clutched at his sleeve, He halted, good-naturedly, and gave the Owl of the Remove an inquiring glance.

“I—I say, Smithy’s waiting just outside the House——!” mumbled Bunter.

“Is he?” said Bob. He glanced out into the sunny quad. Herbert Vernon-Smith was in sight, talking with Redwing and Hazeldene. Bob glanced at Bunter’s worried face.

“What about it, fatty?”

I—I say, old chap, he’s waiting for me,” breathed Bunter. “You know he makes out that he’s going to have one of my postal-orders—.”

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"You fat chump!" he said. "Smithy was only pulling your silly leg. He wouldn't pick up your postal-order with a pair of tongs."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter, peevishly. "Of course, I'm going to settle with Smithy, fair and square— I'm a sportsman, I hope! But—but a bit later, see? I'm expecting a postal-order tomorrow—."

"Fathead!"

"Beast! I—I mean, do listen to a chap, old fellow. I—I say, you could lick Smithy easily, Bob."

"Lick him!" repeated Bob, blankly.

"Easily! said Bunter. "You're the best boxer in the form, and you've got pluck—heaps of pluck. Never knew such a plucky chap as you, Bob. Every man in the Remove admires your pluck. Pluckiest chap at Greyfriars, and chance it. You're not afraid of a tick like Smithy, Bob! Not you, old fellow! I—I say, you jolly well lick Smithy, and—and I'll stand you some sausage rolls at the shop afterwards—honour bright!"

Bob Cherry gazed at him.

"You fat, frabjous, frumptious, foozling fathead—!" he began.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I don't mean I want you to lick Smithy to keep him busy while I cut across to the tuck-shop," explained Bunter. "I don't mean that at all. But because of what he's been saying about you, old fellow—."

"About me?" ejaculated Bob.

"You, old chap! What do you think he called you? A lumbering lunatic with the biggest feet at Greyfriars," said Bunter. "He says he doesn't know how Inky and Linley and Wun Lung get into No. 13 Study when you've got your feet there."

"Does he?" gasped Bob.

"Yes, and worse than that," said Bunter. "He says you can't play cricket for toffee and you can handle a bat as if you were threshing corn, and stand in the field like a sack of coke! I'd jolly well lick a fellow who said things like that about me, Bob!"

"I jolly well will!" said Bob. "At least, I'll jolly well kick him."

"That's right," said Bunter, eagerly. "You go and kick Smithy, old chap, and jolly well lick him if he doesn't like it. I forgot to mention that he said you'd got a voice like megaphone, and a face like a Turkey carpet—."

"Jolly good of you to tell me all this, Bunter! I shall certainly kick the fellow who says all those pretty things about me."

"Go it, old chap!" urged Bunter.

"Here goes!" said Bob: and he grabbed the fat Owl's collar, and skewed him round into a favourable position for kicking.

"Ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter, in alarm. "I—I say, wharrer you up to? Gone mad? I say, wharrer you going to do, you idiot?"

"Kick the fellow who said all those pretty things about me old fat man," answered Bob, cheerily. And he did!

Thud!

"Yarooooop!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Beast! Whoop!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and went on his way: leaving the fat Owl wriggling, and with the problem of Smithy still unsolved.

When he blinked out of the doorway again, the Bounder was still standing there, with Redwing and Hazel. That he had forgotten the fat Owl's podgy existence did not occur to Bunter. Bunter had no doubt that Smithy was waiting for him to claim "halves". He fully expected Smithy to pounce on him the moment he emerged from

the house.

"I say, Harry, old chap," squeaked Bunter, as the captain of the Remove came along. "Hold on a minute! I say, Quelch wants Smithy in his study. Go and tell him, will you?"

"Did Quelch say so?"

"Oh, yes, old chap! He called to me from his study a minute or two ago, and told me he wanted Smithy—."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I must be getting deaf," he remarked. "I've just seen Quelch, and I never heard him call to you."

"Oh! I didn't mean Quelch—I meant Lascelles! He's not satisfied with a problem Smithy did for him," explained Bunter. "Tell Smithy the maths master is waiting for him in his study, will you?"

"Queer that the maths master should be in his study, while the games-master's on the cricket ground," remarked Wharton.

Larry Lascelles was both games and maths master, and Wharton was on his way to see the games-master on the cricket ground. So he really was not likely to believe that the maths master was in his study!

"Oh! Is he?" stammered Bunter. "I didn't know—I—I mean it's the Head wants Smithy! Go and tell him, old chap—he can't keep Dr. Locke waiting, you know! I say, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!" howled Bunter.

But the captain of the Remove did walk away, laughing.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

His problem was still unsolved. He blinked out of the doorway again, to ascertain whether Smithy was still there.

Smithy had left Redwing and Hazel, and was coming into the House. As Bunter blinked out, Smithy walked in.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He was fairly caught. "I—I—I say, Smithy, Quelch—I mean Lascelles—that is, the Head—wants you on the cricket ground—I—I mean—."

"You fat chump!" said Smithy. "Why haven't you started for the post-office?"

"Eh?" Bunter was not thinking of the post-office: he was thinking of the tuck-shop. Mrs. Mimble would cash those postal-orders for him, in exchange for tuck.

"You've time to walk to Friardale and back before dinner. The sooner you cash those postal-orders, and hand the cash over to Quelch, the better."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I thought—." He realised that the Bounder was not after "halves", after all. "D-d-don't you want one of the pounds, Smithy?"

"No, you fat ass! No, you blithering bandersnatch! Hasn't it dawned on that lump of tallow you call a brain that I was only pulling your silly leg?" The Bounder walked on: but he turned back again. "Look here, Bunter, don't be a fool, if you can help it! Cut off to the post-office."

"I—I—I'm just going, Smithy."

And Bunter went! He was relieved of his terrors of the Bounder, and his fat face was cheerful again.

But he did not roll in the direction of the gates. Smithy had given him good advice: but good advice was a sheer waste on Bunter. The call of the tuck-shop was too insistent. Bunter rolled across the quad, heading for Mrs. Mimble's establishment behind the elms.

"Oh, here you are!" said a familiar voice.

Bunter blinked at Peter Todd, standing in the doorway of the school shop. Peter, it seemed, was waiting for him there.

“Here I am, Peter,” said Bunter, with a rather dubious blink at his study-mate. “I—I’m going to stand you some sausage-rolls, Peter—.”

“You’re not!” said Peter. “You’re coming for a walk with me, old fat man.” He linked a lean arm in Bunter’s fat one. “This way!”

“I’ve got to go into the shop—.”

“Not at all!”

“Leggo, you beast!” howled Bunter. “Wharrer you up to? I’m not going for a walk! Where do you want me to go?”

“Nice walk down to Friardale—.”

“I’m not going to Friardale.”

“Your mistake,” said Peter, “you are! Come on.”

Billy Bunter gave him a glare of concentrated fury.

“Will you leggo my arm?” he howled. “You mind your own business, Toddy.”

“Isn’t this my business?” asked Toddy. “Ain’t I your keeper?”

“Why, you cheeky beast—!”

“Come on, old fat frump. I’m taking your arm for a walk, anyway—you can please yourself whether you come along with it.”

Peter Todd walked off towards the gates, taking Bunter’s fat arm with him. Billy Bunter accompanied the arm. A parting would have been painful.

The fat Owl’s face was crimson with fury as Peter walked him out of gates. On the way down Friardale Lane, he told Peter Todd what he thought of him—not once, but many times, and with growing emphasis.

They arrived at the village post-office, Bunter, by that time, in a state of wrath inexpressible in words. But there was no help for it: inexorably, Peter marched him into the post-office.

“Where’s the postal-orders, old fat foozler?” asked Peter.

“Oh! I—I left them in the study, Peter—!”

“Not in your pocket?”

“N-nunno!”

“Better make sure,” suggested Peter. “You see, I’m going to bang your head on the counter till you cough them up—.”

“Beast! I—I think they’re in my pocket, after all—.”

“I fancied so!” agreed Peter.

The postal-orders were duly cashed. Billy Bunter rolled out of the post-office with two pound notes in the sticky pocket.

All the way back to Greyfriars, Bunter was revolving plans in his fat mind to dodge Peter when they arrived at the school. But Peter was undodgeable. His lean arm was affectionately linked in Bunter’s as they walked across the quad, and they went into the House together.

“I—I say, Peter, you needn’t come with me to Quelch!” breathed Bunter, as he was led to Masters’ Studies. “Quelch won’t expect to see you—.”

“No reason why I shouldn’t give my form-master an unexpected pleasure,” answered Peter.

“Will you leggo my arm?” hissed Bunter.

“Yes: when you’re in Quelch’s study.”

“Beast!” groaned Bunter.

Peter tapped at the Remove master’s door with his free hand. He opened it when Mr. Quelch called “Come in”. Bunter gave a last desperate wrench at his arm. Then he was pushed into the study.

“Oh! It is you, Bunter?” said Mr. Quelch. “You may lay the money on the table,

Bunter. I shall see that it is handed to Coker.”

Two pound notes were laid on the Remove master’s table. Billy Bunter gave them a last, longing blink. Then he rolled out of the study. In the passage, when the door was shut, he bestowed a look on Peter Todd, compared with which the expression of the fabled basilisk would have been considered a kindly smile.

“Beast!” he hissed. “Rotter! Tick! Smudge! Smear! Blot!”

“Hear, hear!” said Peter.

And he walked away cheerfully. Bunter, far from cheerful, rolled after him. It was true that Peter had saved him from a fearful row. But Billy Bunter was not thinking of that. He was thinking of sausage-rolls, and jam-sponge, and ginger-pop, and ripe red apples, and other things so much more attractive than paying bills. Not till the dinner bell rang did the cloud of gloom lift on Bunter’s podgy

brow. But there was steak-and-kidney pie for dinner, and plenty of it: and Billy Bunter’s fat countenance brightened as he realised that life, after all, was still worth living.

CHAPTER XXXII

BUNTER ALL OVER!

“WHY not Bunter?”

“Eh?”

“What?”

Harry Wharton asked the question in No. I Study. The Famous Five had gathered there for tea, and the talk, naturally, ran on cricket. The match at Highcliffe was due in a few days, and it rather filled the minds of the Remove cricketers. But Wharton, it seemed, was able to spare a thought or two for a much less important subject—William George Bunter, the fat ornament of the Lower Fourth.

Four fellows stared at him blankly.

“Did you say why not Bunter?” asked Johnny Bull.

“Just that!”

“The whynotfulness is surely terrific!” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Is it a joke?” asked Bob Cherry, mystified. “We’re talking cricket—not Bunter. Oil and water don’t mix.”

“All the same, why not Bunter?” repeated the captain of the Remove. “We’re playing the Fourth Form tomorrow afternoon. It’s practically a practice match, though Temple doesn’t look at it in that light. We can beat the Fourth at cricket, or anything else, on the backs of our necks. Well, Bunter’s keen to show up in games—.”

“Oh, fearfully keen!” snorted Johnny Bull. “He shows it by rolling out a string of whoppers to get off games practice.”

“Well, he is a lazy toad, and a slacking fat frog, and a prevaricating fat porker,” admitted the captain of the Remove, “but he would jump at playing in a match, to let Quelch see him doing it. See?”

“After all, we could beat the Fourth a man short, and that’s what it would come to,” remarked Frank Nugent.

“Exactly.”

“But what’s the game?” demanded Johnny Bull. “Is Bunter to be rewarded for clacking and frowsting and fibbing, by being given a place in the team?”

“Not precisely. But you know, he’s up against it,” said Harry. “He’s told everybody

who will listen—and everybody who won't, as well—that he's got to blow away for good at the end of the term, unless he gets a good report from Quelch. Quelch is fed up with his slacking. He called him slack in class and slack at games—.”

“And so he is!” grunted Johnny. “Slack at everything but snooping grub and stuffing it.”

“Still, if we could help him get a decent report—.”

“He could do that himself if he liked to put in a spot of work.”

“He doesn't like work,” said Wharton, laughing. “No reason why we shouldn't help a lame dog over a stile, if we can. We can't push him on in class. We can't make him do his prep, or hand out a decent con, or remember that Canada isn't the capital of the United States, or add two and two together without making six or seven of it, or prevent him from describing an isosceles triangle as passive in form but active in meaning—!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“All that's up to Quelch—and Quelch doesn't seem to have much luck. But it would be a point in his favour if he played in a cricket match. Quelch would sit up and take notice. He might get a run or two—.”

“The mightfulness is preposterous!”

“He might make a catch in the field—.”

“Not unless somebody gave him the ball on a plate,” said Bob.

“Anyhow, there he would be, playing cricket! It might give him a leg-up with Quelch.”

“Are we running Remove cricket to give a fat, frowsy frowster a leg-up with Quelch?” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Not wholly, old bean. But we can beat the Fourth, even with Bunter in the team. They haven't an earthly. So—why not Bunter?”

“Cricket's cricket!” said Johnny. “It won't hurt us to chuck away a wicket, playing Temple's lot. Still, cricket's cricket, see?”

“Oh, go it,” said Bob. “The fat old rooster is down on his luck, and it might help him. By gum, though, it will make the fellows stare to see his name up in the Rag!”

“I say, you fellows!”

The door of No. I Study was pushed open, and Billy Bunter's fat face looked in. He blinked in rather cautiously Fascinating fellow as he was, Bunter knew that he was not always *persona grata* in a Remove study at tea-time.

But for once, rather to his surprise, he received a hearty greeting.

“Roll in, old barrel!” called out the captain of the Remove. “Just the man I want to see.”

Bunter rolled in promptly, his fat face eager. “What have you got?” he asked. His eyes, and spectacles, roved over the table. “I say, you fellows, you seem to have finished tea. Anything more in the cupboard?”

“No! Think you could possibly think of anything but feeding for a minute or two?” asked Harry. “If so, we'll talk about cricket.”

“Oh, cricket!” said Bunter. The eagerness died out of his fat face. “I thought you meant—!”

“Well, I didn't! I've thought of giving you a chance in the eleven, old fat man. Chance for you to show Quelch that you're not such a slacker at games, see?”

“Oh!” said Bunter. He sniffed. “It's taken you a jolly long time to find out that I can play cricket, Harry Wharton.”

“Eh?”

“I'm not sure I can play,” said Bunter, loftily. “This is jolly sudden. You've left me

out ever since the matches started. Now all of a sudden you find out that you want me. Well, I'm not at all sure I shall play."

The captain of the Remove stared at him blankly. From four other fellows came a yell of laughter.

"You can cackle," said Bunter, warmly, "but that's how I look at it. I've been passed over—left out in the cold—the best cricketer in the form, and chance it. Now I'm told all of a sudden that I'm wanted. Well, I don't see it, see? Mind, I'm not saying I won't play, Wharton. But you can't expect a man to say here and now that he will play, springing it on him at the last minute like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co. Harry Wharton's face was quite a study.

"Still, I'll see what I can do," said Bunter, generously. "I'd like Quelch to see me playing for the form, as I've told you. He can hardly make out that I'm slack at games, when he sees me piling up runs for the Remove. It might make a lot of difference in my report. 'Good at games' sounds well—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you fellows wouldn't cackle whenever a fellow opens his mouth. They stand you a pretty good tea at Highcliffe, I believe. You can put my name down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You howling ass!" roared the captain of the Remove, "do you think I was thinking of the Highcliffe match, you benighted bloater?"

"Eh! Weren't you?" asked Bunter. "I remember I told you I'd rather play in a home match—St. Jim's. or Bookwood, or Carcroft. But as it happens, that's all right. I heard Quelch say he was going to walk over to Highcliffe on Wednesday afternoon to see the game. So he will see me play. Highcliffe's all right for me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Co.

"You—you—you frumpious chump!" gasped Harry Wharton. "I can see myself putting you in the eleven for Highcliffe! We're playing the Fourth tomorrow, and that's your game, fathead."

"Look here, Wharton, it's no good 'wasting a man of my form in a footling match with Temple's crowd! I'd prefer the Highcliffe match!" declared Bunter. "I may as well speak plainly—now you've found out that I can play cricket! I'll play at Highcliffe, or I won't play at all! That's that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"O.K.—you won't play at all!" said the captain of the 'Remove. "Roll out of this study before I kick you."

"Oh, really, Wharton—!"

"You fat, frumpious, footling fozzler, I was going to put you in the Form match to give you a leg-up with Quelch. But I'd rather not, see? Now roll away."

"Oh!" said Bunter, blinking at him.

It was borne in upon Bunter's fat mind that his form captain hadn't suddenly discovered his qualities as a cricketer.

"Oh!" repeated Bunter. "I—I don't mind if I play in , the Form match, old chap."

"I do! Shut the door after you."

"What I really mean is, I'm jolly keen to play!" explained Bunter. "It will do Quelch good to see me knocking up a century, even against the Fourth—."

"Ye gods!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I fancy it would take you a good many centuries to do it, old fat man."

"Yah! It's a go, Wharton! Rely on me," said Bunter. "I've got rather a lot of engagements on Saturday afternoon—you know how it is, when a fellow's popular—his time's never really his own. But I'll cut everything, and play cricket. I'm your

man.”

And Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 1 Study: leaving the captain of the Remove glaring, and four other fellows chuckling. There was nothing to eat in No. 1 Study, so there was no reason for Bunter to linger there. He rolled up the passage to call on Lord Mauleverer.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A MAN IN THE ELEVEN!

“W. G. BUNTER”.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Remove men were always keen to see the cricket list when it was posted up in the Rag. But never before had they greeted it with an outburst of merriment.

Now they did! The name of W. G. Bunter in the list was sufficient to set the Rag in a roar.

W. G. Bunter himself had no doubt that he was a cricketer. There were few things that Bunter did not believe that he could do—until he came to do them. Not that Bunter’s belief in his powers would have been shattered by his wicket going down to the first ball. Bunter would have scored a duck’s egg, or a pair of spectacles, and still retained a happy belief that he was a budding Grace, or Hobbs, or Bradman. Bunter did not feel quite certain whether he was kept out of the Remove eleven by jealousy, or by sheer stupidity. But he knew that it must be one or the other, or a mixture of both. Bunter could see no cause for the merriment that greeted his name in the list for the Form match. He was glad to see it there—but he regarded it not as his due, but as a small instalment of his due. “W. G. Bunter” should have been in the list for bigger matches, such as the fixtures with Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim’s, or Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood, or Compton and Co. of Carcroft. Still, this was something to go on with.

Could Quelch make out that Bunter was slack at games, when roars of cheering woke all the echoes of Greyfriars as Bunter piled up runs for his side? Obviously, Quelch couldn’t!

As yet, however, there were no roars of cheering. There were only roars of laughter. Even fellows who were not cricketers, yelled at the idea of Bunter playing for his form. Skinner enquired whether the captain of the Remove had gone mad. Snoop remarked that it was the giddy limit. Fisher T. Fish guessed that it was the elephant’s hind leg, and then some. Everybody stared, and everybody chuckled, or chortled, or roared. Nobody would have expected to see Billy Bunter’s name in the list in a hop-scotch eleven. In a cricket eleven, it had the same effect as Vulcan’s performance as head-waiter on Olympus—inextinguishable laughter!

“But after all, cricket’s cricket,” remarked the Bounder.

“If that’s your idea of a joke, Wharton—!”

“We can beat the Fourth a man short,” answered Harry.

“Oh! Yes! That’s what it comes to,” agreed Smithy. “We could give them three or four wickets and beat them. You’re only giving them one! Mind your eye when Bunter gets hold of a bat, though. He’s liable to brain anybody in the offing.”

“Oh, really, Smithy—.”

“And for the love of Mike, don’t let him handle the ball. Nobody’s life would be safe.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

"You'd like to keep me in the shade, wouldn't you, Smithy?" jeered Bunter. "You don't want the fellows to see how I bowl! You don't want to risk being dropped from the Highcliffe team to make room for a better man."

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"We're playing Bunter for his batting," said the captain of the Remove, laughing.

"Lesser lights like Inky and Browney can look after the bowling."

"That won't do, Wharton!" said Bunter, firmly.

"Eh?"

"I said it won't do! I admit that batting's my long suit, as you seem to have found out. But I can bowl. I don't claim to be a first-class bowler—."

"Don't you?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Why not?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Inky's as good a man as I am with the leather," said Bunter, "or jolly nearly—."

"The nearliness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And Browney can bowl—."

"Thanks!" said the New Zealand junior, laughing. "Listen to the man who knows."

"But you don't bowl quite like I do, Browney—!"

"Not quite!" gurgled Tom Brown. "Oh! No! Hardly quite!"

"I don't brag of my bowling," said Bunter, blinking round at grinning faces. "I'm not a fellow to brag, if you come to that. All I say is that I bowl better than any other man in the Remove."

"Modesty, thy name is Bunter!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Well, I don't believe in false modesty," said Bunter. "If a man can do a thing, he can do it, and what's the good of humbug about it? That's how I look at it. But the proof of the pudding's in the eating. Just give me one over, Wharton, and after that, you'll be glad to give me all the bowling you can. Hat tricks are hat tricks!"

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"You give me one over, Wharton! I'll leave it at that. You're not much of a judge of a fellow's form, if you don't mind my saying so—."

"Not at all, old fat man! Run on."

"O.K., old barrel," said the captain of the Remove. "We can afford to chuck away an over as well as a wicket, with Temple's crowd. You shall bowl an over, and if you bag a wicket, you shall bowl as many overs as you like afterwards."

"Good!" said Bunter. "That will be all right for Quelch! I say, you fellows, we ought to get Quelch to come down to the ground. I want him to see that I'm an all-round man at cricket—good at bowling as well as batting. I want to impress Quelch, you know, because of my report." Bunter smiled complacently. "He may make out, as usual, that I'm low down in class—but he won't be able to make out that I'm not a good man at games. That's something! And," added Bunter, with a disdainful blink at the hilarious Removites, "you can jolly well cackle, if you like!"

"Thanks!" gasped Bob Cherry, "we will!"

And they did.

"Done your lines, fatty?" asked Peter Todd, when the Owl of the Remove rolled into No. 7 Study for prep that evening. Bunter, as often happened, had lines. In form that morning, Bunter had construed "*O dea!*" into "Oh, dear!" which had not seemed to satisfy Quelch somehow.

"I've no time, Peter," answered Bunter.

"That means detention tomorrow afternoon, then."

Bunter winked—a fat wink.

"That's all right," he said. "Quelch wouldn't keep a man away from a match. I shall

explain to Quelch that I'm wanted to play for the Form. He wouldn't detain a man in the eleven."

At which Peter gurgled. Bunter was "a man in the eleven" now. Evidently he was going to make the most of it.

After class the following morning, Mr. Quelch duly inquired for those lines. Bunter was called back when the Remove went out, after third school.

"Have you written your lines, Bunter?" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No, sir! I—."

"Very well! You will write them this afternoon, Bunter, before you leave the House."

"If—if you please, sir—."

"That will do, Bunter! You may go."

"But, sir, I—."

"I have said that you may go, Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"But—but I'm playing cricket this afternoon, sir," gasped Bunter. "I'm wanted to play for the Form, sir—the—the fellows are relying upon me, sir—."

Mr. Quelch looked at him, long and hard. This was his first news that Bunter had been selected to play for his 'Form. He did not seem to believe it.

"My—my name's up in the cricket list in the Rag, sir!

Wharton posted it yesterday. I—I've been coming on a lot at cricket, sir—ever—ever since you talked to me in your study, sir. I—I'm pretty good at games, sir, really."

"Indeed," said Mr. Quelch, very drily. "If that is true, Bunter, I am very glad to hear it. I shall be glad to be able to give you at least one commendation in your report. If you have been assiduous at games practice—."

"Oh, yes, sir! Sticking to it like—like glue, sir! That—that's why I've been picked out to play for the form."

"Very well, Bunter, your lines may stand over till Monday. If you are seeking to amend your accustomed slack and lazy ways, I certainly desire to encourage you. You may go."

Billy Bunter rolled out of the form-room, leaving his form-master looking quite thoughtful. This really looked like a sign of amendment in Bunter. The fat Owl was still a trial and a tribulation to his form-master in class—but if he was keen on cricket, and had improved to such an extent as to play for his Form, that undoubtedly was very much in his favour. Mr. Quelch even resolved to walk down to Little Side that afternoon and see for himself how much Bunter had improved.

The inclusion of the name of W. G. Bunter in the cricket list had, undoubtedly, given Bunter a "leg-up" with Quelch. But whether that good impression would last, was, perhaps, doubtful.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE LAST STRAW!

"WHERE's Bunter?"

"Seen Bunter?"

"Where's that fat Owl?"

"The wherefulness is terrific."

"Lost, stolen, or strayed," remarked Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton breathed hard, and he breathed deep. Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Fourth, had won the toss, and elected to take first knock. Ten men of the Remove were ready to go into the

field. The eleventh was conspicuous by his absence. The fattest figure at Greyfriars School was not to be discerned on the horizon.

Why, was rather a mystery. True, cricket was a form of exertion, and W. G. Bunter did not like exertion. But there was no doubt that he did want to show off in a cricket match on Quelch's account. Scoring duck's eggs, and hurling the ball at anything other than the wicket, might not

impress Quelch with his powers as a cricketer—but, at least, he would be in the game. That would be something, if not much. Yet Bunter had not turned up.

"Where the thump can he be?" growled Wharton.

"He can't have had another postal-order," remarked Johnny Bull. "If he has, he's in the tuck-shop."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "He hasn't had a postal-order. But Mauly had a parcel today."

"Oh, rot! Even that fat villain wouldn't cut a cricket match, to snoop Mauly's tuck!"

"Wouldn't he just?" grinned the Bounder. "Why, there was jam in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I saw it in Mauly's study—tremendous jar of jolly old home-made jam from the jolly old home farm! Think Bunter could resist that?"

"We might possibly beat the Fourth without Bunter's help!" suggested Johnny Bull, with gentle sarcasm.

"What about getting going?"

"Well, we'll give him a chance," said Harry. "We can field a substitute. I'll speak to Temple."

Whether it was Lord Mauleverer's tremendous jar of home-made jam, or some other cause, Bunter did not appear: and the Remove went into the field with a substitute in the place of that valuable recruit. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Tom Brown, and Squiff bowled in turn, making hay of the Fourth Form wickets as they were accustomed to do. The Fourth Form innings lasted fifty minutes, With an inglorious total of thirty-six runs.

After which the question was again asked: "Where's Bunter?"

"It can't be Mauly's jam," said Bob Cherry. "Even Bunter can't be scoffing jam all this time."

"It was a seven-pound jar," said Smithy, "but even seven pounds of jam wouldn't last Bunter an hour."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he comes in at the end of the tail," said Harry. "Lots of time for him to turn up—if he wants to. Bother him, anyway."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Mauly." Lord Mauleverer had ambled down to the ground to see how the cricketers were getting on, and Bob hailed him as he sank gracefully into a seat. "Missed anything from your study, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"Was it jam?" "Yaas."

"Seen Bunter?"

"Not since I kicked him about half-an-hour ago, in his study. I mean to say, I wouldn't mind a chap helpin' himself, but snoopin' the whole jar, you know—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove proceeded to take their knock. That priceless recruit was last in the list, so there seemed ample time for him to roll down to the ground in time for his innings. But Bunter did not roll. The Remove innings lasted a good deal longer than Temple and Co's: and the score was at ninety for six wickets when Mr. Quelch arrived on the

scene.

Bob Cherry and Peter Todd were at the wickets, when he arrived. The other batsmen, at the pavilion, capped Mr. Quelch very respectfully as he arrived, and received a kindly smile from their form-master.

But the gimlet-eye, roving over the pavilion and the cricket-field, failed to spot an ample form in bursting flannels.

"How is the game going, Wharton?" asked Mr. Quelch, with a kindly interest.

"Oh, good, sir. The Fourth made thirty-six in their first innings—and we're ninety for six wickets."

"Very good—very good indeed," said Mr. Quelch, benevolently, "and how has Bunter shaped, Wharton? I was rather interested to know."

"Oh!" Wharton stammered a little. "Bunter's last man in, sir—he—he won't be wanted just yet."

"What was he like in the field?"

"In—in the field!" stammered the captain of the Remove.

The gimlet-eye fixed on him. Quelch did not need telling that the captain of his form was reluctant to answer questions on the subject of Bunter.

"Bunter, I suppose, was in the field, in the Fourth-form innings!" said Mr. Quelch, quite sharply.

"Well, no, sir. We fielded a substitute."

"Am I to understand, Wharton, that Bunter has not been here at all?"

"I—I think something—something's delayed him, sir—!" stammered Harry.

"Will you answer my question directly, Wharton?" inquired Mr. Quelch, in his sharpest form-room voice.

"N-n-no, sir, I—I haven't seen him."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch said no more, but his countenance was expressive. Bunter had been excused detention because he was playing cricket—and evidently, he was not playing cricket. The Remove master watched the game for a few minutes, and then walked back to the House.

"Looks like a leg-up for Bunter!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The fat slacker!" grunted Wharton. "Hallo, there goes Toddy! Man in, Squiff!"

Mr. Quelch's brow was grim as he went into the House. He had been prepared to revise his opinion of Bunter—Upward! Now he was revising it downward! He had willingly let Bunter off detention to play for his form. He had been prepared to see improvement in Bunter—he had hoped for the best! The smallest spot of improvement would have given him satisfaction. And now—!

Where was Bunter? Was this sheer lazy slacking, or was there some adequate explanation? Quelch was a just man. Bunter was going to have every chance.

He looked in the Rag. Skinner and Snoop were there, and they were grinning. Mr. Quelch glanced at them.

"Can you tell me where Bunter is?" he asked.

"In his study, sir!" answered Skinner. "I saw him there a little while ago."

"Thank you."

Skinner and Snoop grinned at one another, as their form-master walked away. Mr. Quelch went up to the Remove passage. Bunter, it seemed, was in his study, and for some reason two Remove boys regarded it as funny! Mr. Quelch rustled along the passage to No. 7.

As he reached that study, he gave quite a start. From within came a strange sound— a

sound of woe.

“Oooooo-er! Ooooooogh! Oh, lor’! Oooooh.”

The door was open—no doubt Skinner had left it so when he looked in. Mr. Quelch gazed into No. 7 Study.

“Bless my soul!” he ejaculated.

In the study armchair was stretched a rotund form. It was that of Billy Bunter. His face was ghastly. It looked at it might have looked on a Channel steamer on a rough day. Bunter’s fat paws, both sticky, were pressed to his extensive waistcoat. And he groaned. He gurgled. Something, evidently, was amiss with Bunter.

The gimlet-eye spotted what was amiss. On the study table stood an enormous jam jar—nearly empty! Beside it lay a sticky tablespoon!

Bunter was as sticky as the jar and the spoon! Often and often was Bunter sticky—but never in his sticky career had he looked so sticky as he did now.

“Bless my soul!” repeated Mr. Quelch. “Bunter!”

“Oh!” gasped Bunter. “Oooo-er!”

He did not rise from the armchair. He couldn’t!

“So this,” said Mr. Quelch, “is how you have been occupied, Bunter, when you were specially excused from detention to play cricket.”

“Ooooooogh!”

“You have been eating jam—!”

“Moooooooooh!”

“Which I have little doubt you have purloined from some other study—.”

“Grooogh!”

“—to such an extent—such a revolting extent—that you have made yourself ill—.”

“Oooooooch!”

“Whose jam was that, Bunter?”

“Gooooh! It—it wasn’t Mauly’s, sir!” moaned Bunter. “I—I mean, he—he gave it to me. He—he never kicked me when he found it here, sir—at least, it was only a joke—only a—groooooogh!”

“This,” said Mr. Quelch, “decides the matter definitely, Bunter. Your report—.”

“I—I was going to—to—to play cricket, sir—I—I was only going to sample it, sir—I—I—I’m awfully keen on cricket, sir—ooooogh—woooogh—I don’t feel very well, sir wooooooch!”

“Your report this term will be accompanied by a letter from me, strongly recommending your father to take you away—. This, Bunter, is the last straw!”

“Grooogh!”

“Pah!” snapped Mr. Quelch.

He stalked out of No. 7 Study. Billy Bunter hardly heeded him. Billy Bunter had been scoffing jam, not wisely but too well. He was past caring whether he left Greyfriars or not. He groaned and moaned, and gurgled: and when last man was called on Little Side, he was still groaning and moaning and gurgling!

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WORM WILL TURN!

“*JACTA est alea!*” said Peter Todd.

“Don’t bung rotten Latin at me, Toddy.”

“—which being interpreted, means that the die is cast—.”

“Oh, shut up!”

“Or more colloquially, the jolly old game’s up!”

“Beast!”

“And you jolly well deserve it!” added Peter.

“Oh, really, Toddy—!”

Billy Bunter could not see that he deserved it. Billy Bunter never believed that he got his real deserts. Certainly he did not believe that he had them now.

But there was no doubt that, as Peter put it, the die was cast, and the game was up!

Bunter’s report that term was settled now in advance.

Quelch was fed up. Quelch, of course, would not have expressed it like that. Probably he would have said that his patience was exhausted.

Bunter had had his chance. Of all his sins—and their name was Legion—not one had been amended.

He was as lazy at prep, as slack in class, as unpunctual, as remiss, as ever. He was still an incorrigible snooper of tuck. In matters of food he still failed to distinguish the difference between “*meum*” and “*tuum*”; and in matters of veracity, the difference between facts and fibs. And at games, he was still the slacker he had always been: not merely dodging practice, but even when picked to play in a match, preferring jam in the study! Even Quelch’s gimlet-eye failed, it seemed, to discern a single redeeming quality in the fattest member of his form. Bunter had had his warning. He had passed that warning by, like the idle wind that he regarded not. So the die was cast!

Bunter could not help feeling indignant.

He hadn’t intended to cut that Form match. He could not, of course, resist jam. But, really and truly, he had intended to take only a sample of it, before going down to cricket. Unluckily, once Bunter started on jam, it was impossible for him to stop so long as any jam remained. He admitted that he had overdone it. But surely a fellow who was ill—and Bunter really had felt quite ill after that cargo—was entitled to sympathy! Bunter did not get any sympathy at all.

On Monday, in form, he read his fate in Quelch’s gimlet-eye. When, in the geography lesson, he stated that Brussels, on the Tiber, was the capital of Poland, Quelch only gave him a look. The rest of the Remove expected the thunder to roll—but there was icy calm. It was really as if Quelch considered himself already practically done with that member of his form.

That evening Bunter made a desperate effort to do some work at prep. On Tuesday he was prepared to hand out a construe with only two or three howlers in it. And he was not called on for “con”! His unaccustomed stores of knowledge remained bottled up, as it were. His luck was out.

“Fat lot of good trying to please Quelch!” he told Peter, when the Remove came out.

“That’s what comes of slogging at prep!”

“Quelch isn’t a magician!” Peter pointed out. “He couldn’t guess that you’d done a spot of work.” form.

“Yah!” was Bunter’s reply to that.

At tea-time a morose Owl rolled into No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton reached for a cushion. But he remembered that Bunter was down on his luck, and dropped it again. There was a cake on the table. Bunter’s eyes, and spectacles, glued on it, and for the moment he forgot his troubles.

“I say, you fellows, that looks a decent cake,” he remarked “Not like the cakes I get from Bunter Court, of course—but good. I’ll have a slice, if you like.”

“Oh! Do!”

Bunter sliced a slice—leaving nearly half the cake on the plate. Five fellows looked expressively at the cake, and more expressively at Bunter. Bunter did not notice it. He was deep in cake.

“I say, you fellows.” His voice came a little muffled through cake. “I say, it looks as if I’m for it! Queer that Quelch should be down on me as he is, ain’t it?”

“The queerfulness is terrific!” grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“It’s prejudice,” said Bunter, sadly. “Schoolmasters get these prejudices, you know. Not much good a fellow trying to please a beak when he’s prejudiced. I don’t say I’m a perfect character—.”

“You don’t!” gasped Johnny Bull.

“Why not?” inquired Frank Nugent.

“Well, we’re none of us perfect,” said Bunter. “I don’t claim to be perfect. A cut above any other fellow in the Remove, that’s all. But Quelch can’t see it. None so blind as those who won’t see!”, added Bunter, bitterly. “I could understand him being down on one of you fellows. But is he? No fear—he’s down on me! It’s queer, but there it is.”

Bunter munched cake, and the Famous Five gazed at him.

“Looks as if I’m going to get a bad report, after all I’ve done,” said Bunter. “That means that you won’t see me next term. I shouldn’t wonder if you fellows get quite good reports. I’m going to get a bad one. That’s the sort of justice a fellow gets here!”

“Oh, crumbs!”

“Well, perhaps Quelch will have something to remember me by!” said Bunter. “I’ve done my best—you fellows know that—and it’s made no difference. But the worm will turn!” said Bunter, darkly.

“Eh! What have you got in your fat head now?” exclaimed Harry Wharton.

“Oh! Nothing!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I mean, I’m not going to tell you fellows,” said the fat Owl. “Least said soonest mended. I may be going to make Quelch feel sorry for himself, and I may not. That’s telling. I don’t want to wind up here with a Head’s flogging, of course. I shall have to keep it dark.”

“Keep what dark?” asked Bob.

“Oh! Nothing! I’m not going to talk about it—it might get out: and I don’t want Quelch to know what’s coming to him.” explained Bunter. “Still, Quelch may get a surprise when he walks over to Highcliffe tomorrow afternoon. He’s certain to take the footpath across Courtfield Common isn’t he?”

“I suppose so, as it saves half the distance,” said Harry, “but what the dickens—.”

“Well, you know where the footpath goes through the Common Wood, in the middle of the common!” grinned Bunter. “Branches right over the path, thick as billy-o—who’d spot a chap in a tree over the footpath?”

“In a tree over the footpath?” repeated Bob Cherry, blankly, “and what are you going to do in a tree over the footpath, you frabjous Owl?”

Oh! Nothing! I’m not telling you fellows anything— might tattle—you know what you are!” said Bunter, “but when Quelch comes stalking by under those branches, he may get a surprise, or he may not. A fellow may be perched up there with a bag of soot, and he may not——.”

“A bag of soot!” yelled the Famous Five, with one voice.

“Don’t shout it all over the Remove,” said Bunter, peevishly “I shall have to keep it dark—I don’t want to finish here with a flogging, as I’ve told you. Think Quelch will

feel sorry for himself when a bag of soot drops all of a sudden and bursts over his napper? What? He, he, he.”

“You—you dangerous lunatic!” gasped the captain of the Remove. “Quelch would skin you like an eel if you mopped soot over his napper—!”

“How will he know?” grinned Bunter. “He won’t see me up in the tree. He won’t see anything, with his eyes and nose and mouth bunged up with soot. He, he, he.”

You can’t do it, you mad ass!” gasped Bob.

“Can t I?” jeered Bunter. “Think I’m going to have Quelch down on me all the term, and giving me a bad report, for nothing, without giving him something to remember me by? You fellows will hear some news when you get back from Highcliffe after the cricket match tomorrow.”

“Look here you potty porpoise—.”

“Any more cake?”

“No, you cormorant. But look here—.”

“Sorry I can’t stop—I’ve got to see Mauly.” And Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 1 Study, leaving the Famous Five exchanging uneasy looks.

“Nothing in it,” said Bob, shaking his head. “Bunter’s too jolly lazy to walk a mile to the Common Wood, and too jolly lazy to climb a tree if he did.”

“Yes, that’s so,” agreed Wharton.

And the chums of the Remove dismissed Bunter and his vengeful schemes from their minds and resumed discussions of a much more important matter—the cricket match at Highcliffe School on the morrow.

And when, the next day, the Greyfriars cricketers rolled over to Highcliffe, they did not even remember the fat existence of Billy Bunter—and the worm was left to turn if the spirit moved him so to do!

CHAPTER XXXVI

TWO IN AMBUSH!

“THAT’S him!” breathed Billy Bunter, regardless of grammar.

Bunter’s eyes gleamed behind his spectacles, at the sound of a footstep below.

It was a sunny afternoon. But in the little wood in the middle of Courtfield Common, all was dusky. Harry Wharton and Co., playing cricket at Highcliffe, did not remember the fat Owl’s existence: but had they remembered him, they would hardly have supposed that Bunter was where he now was. Generally, it was a safe bet that if an enterprise required a spot of exertion, it was of no use to Bunter. Laziness was a lion in the path.

But Billy Bunter was in deadly earnest. He had rolled out of the school after dinner. By easy stages, taking frequent rests, he had crossed the open common, to the little wood through which the footpath ran. Under the thick branches, that met and mingled overhead from either side, that footpath was rather like a dusky green tunnel. After another long rest, Bunter had clambered up a gnarled old tree. He crawled out on a thick branch over the footpath. Thick foliage screened and hid him.

In a fork of the branch, he parked a bag he had brought with him—a paper bag crammed with soot scraped from the study chimney.

It was quite comfortable lying along that thick branch, among the shady leaves. The fat junior lay there at ease.

All he had to do, was to watch the footpath below, through interstices in the foliage. As soon as Mr. Quelch came striding by—or stalking, as Bunter had described it—all

he had to do was to drop the bag of soot.

It was as safe as houses.

Quelch, smothered with soot, would be in no state to seek the soot-hurler. Moreover, he was long past the tree-climbing stage of life. Quelch, black as a sweep, spluttering soot, would be left to splutter, while the fat Owl escaped in the branches, and dropped to safety at a distance. Bunter had it all cut and dried. His masterly brain had worked it all out.

Bunter had been nearly an hour sprawling on that leafy branch. But sprawling on a branch was not really hard work, and he was patient.

Now he heard a footstep.

He blinked down through his big spectacles and the slits in the foliage below. He wanted to make sure, of course, that it was Quelch, before he went into action. It was a lonely footpath—still, it was used sometimes, and Bunter did not want to waste his whole supply of soot on some Stranger, leaving him without any for Quelch.

A figure came into sight below.

It was not Quelch!

‘Oh!’ breathed Bunter, and his fat heart gave a little jump, as he saw who it was.

He recognized that stubbly face, with its red-rimmed eyes, and twisted nose. It was the footpad who had robbed him weeks ago in Friardale Lane, when Mr. Quelch’s walking-stick had come into play—the ruffian who had attacked the Remove master near Redclyffe, and on whose account the Courtfield constable had called at the school.

Bunter knew him again, at once: and he was deeply thankful that he was safe out of sight up a tree.

The man was coming along hurriedly, as if he had suddenly run into the little wood from the open common. Bunter was anxious for him to pass on and disappear.

But Nosey Jenkins did not pass on.

He came to a halt, looking back, and listening. Then, to Billy Bunter’s surprise, he moved off the footpath, and blotted himself out of view behind a massive trunk—the trunk of the very tree whose branches concealed Billy Bunter.

He vanished from Bunter’s view, leaving the fat junior staring. Hardly a sound came from him, after he had parked himself behind the tree. Only an occasional faint rustle showed that he was still there.

“Beast!” breathed Bunter.

This unlooked-for occurrence looked like disconcerting all Billy Bunter’s well-laid plans. Quelch could not be much longer, if he was going to see anything of his boys playing cricket at Highcliffe. And Bunter did not want to go into action with that awful ruffian on the spot. He was inclined rather to understudy the mouse with the cat at hand.

What the man’s game was, was a puzzle to the fat Owl. Bunter’s powerful brain was not quick on the uptake.

But slowly it dawned upon him what the man’s action meant—what it could only mean!

The footpad was lying in wait!

Bunter felt his fat heart jump again, as he realised that he was about to look down upon a scene of violence.

“Oh, scissors!” breathed Bunter. “Oh, crikey!”

But he dared not breathe a sound aloud. The mere sight of Nosey Jenkins terrified him. The idea of drawing his attention, made Bunter’s fat heart almost die in his breast.

He gave a little start, as footsteps again came to his ear.

Someone was coming!

Obviously it was the “someone” whom the footpad had ‘spotted on the common and for whom he was lying in wait!

Billy Bunter shuddered. From the bottom of his fat heart, he wished that he had never thought of this masterly scheme for making Quelch sorry for himself.

He wondered who the coming man was. Then, suddenly, guessed! Quelch of course!

He had been expecting Quelch every minute. That awful ruffian had attacked Quelch near Redclyffe, from motives of revenge. Now he had found another chance—and Quelch was walking fairly into his hands.

‘Oh. lor’!’ breathed Bunter.

A moment more, and a tall, lean, angular figure came in sight. It was Mr. Quelch, coming along with his vigorous stride, his walking-stick under his arm.

Billy Bunter was there to soot Quelch! But he was not thinking of sooting Quelch now!

Even as he blinked down, in terror, through the leaves, at the tall figure passing under the tree, there was a rustle, a sudden spring, and Quelch went over headlong in the grip of the man who had leaped from cover.

“Oh!” gasped Mr. Quelch.

“Oh!” groaned Bunter.

He blinked down, frozen with horror.

Quelch was sprawling in the grass, on his back. His stick had fallen under him. The man with the twisted nose was upon him, a knee planted on his chest, pinning him down.

“Gotcher!” snarled Nosey Jenkins.

Mr. Quelch, utterly helpless, stared up at the threatening stubbly face. He made an effort to throw the ruffian off and Nosey Jenkins rocked.

But it was in vain. Quelch was taken at too utter a disadvantage. He was helpless, at the malicious ruffian’s mercy.

“Setting the coppers arter a bloke!” said Nosey Jenkins.

“Laying into a covey with a walking stick, and setting the coppers arter him! Wot? If I don’t crack your blinking nut this time—!”

Up went the ruffian’s right arm. There was a short, thick cudgel in his grip. And cracked Mr. Quelch’s “nut” indubitably would have been, but for a sudden and wholly unexpected interruption.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ALL RIGHT FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER never knew how he did it!

Perhaps, somewhere under Billy Bunter’s layers of fat, there was a spot of pluck—genuine old British pluck!

He did not stop to think.

Had he done so, perhaps he never would have done it at all! For there was no doubt that the hapless fat Owl was in a funk—the bluest of funks! The mere sight of Nosey Jenkins scared him. The mere thought of coming near the ruffian, within reach of his cudgel, made him quake. Bunter was the man to run from danger, real or imaginary.

To run into danger was not in his line at all.

Yet he did it.

Clamped on the branch over the footpath, directly above the startling scene below, the Owl of the Remove blinked down in terror, almost paralysed by what he saw. He couldn't help Quelch—he couldn't try to help him—one lick of the footpad's cudgel would knock him out if he jumped down and tried it on. He couldn't—!

But, as that cudgel went up, over the helpless and unprotected “nut” of Mr. Quelch, Bunter, whether he could or not, suddenly did!

There was a sudden rustle in the leafy branches, as Bunter, for a split second, hung by his fat hands—and dropped.

He dropped right on Nosey Jenkins.

What happened, Nosey did not know. It was so entirely unexpected and unlooked-for. One moment, Nosey Jenkins was pinning Mr. Quelch down, with the stick uplifted to crack his “nut”—the next, something extremely heavy and very solid squashed him down in the grass beside Quelch: landing on him with the effect of a particularly powerful steam-hammer!

Nosey crumpled and sprawled under that solid weight. He gave a faint moan as he collapsed. He wriggled, gurgling, in the grass. He was winded to the wide. There was hardly a breath left in Nosey. He was dazed, dizzy, half-stunned, and wholly winded—and he wriggled in helpless anguish. Nosey, at the moment, had only one desire and object in life, which was, to get his wind again—if he could. He felt as if he couldn't.

Bunter rolled in the grass.

Mr. Quelch sat up.

He was as surprised at Nosey. For the moment, he did not know what had saved him, any more than Nosey knew what had reduced him to a gurgling, gibbering wreck.

Then he saw Bunter.

He staggered to his feet, grabbing up his walking-stick as he did so, in case it should be wanted. But it was not wanted. Nosey was *hors de combat*. Nosey had no eyes for him—no thought for him—no thought for anything but getting his wind.

Mr. Quelch gave him one look. Then he gazed at Bunter. He gazed at him in amazement and wonder.

Bunter sat up, in his turn.

He was breathless, he was dizzy, he was bewildered: he gasped and spluttered, and grabbed at the spectacles that had slid down his little fat nose.

“Bunter!” ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

“Ooooooh!” gasped Bunter.

Quelch gazed at him. Then he glanced upward. He realised that Bunter must have dropped from the branch above. It really was amazing.

“Bunter! You—you were in that tree—!”

“Oh! No!” gasped Bunter. He set his spectacles straight, and blinked at his form-master, remembering the soot. “Oh! No, sir! I—I wasn't—I—I—I mean I—I wasn't up to anything, sir! I—I—I like climbing trees, sir!”

He scrambled to his feet, with a terrified blink at the sprawling, gurgling, helpless Nosey. But even Bunter could see that Nosey was no longer dangerous. Moreover on his feet, with his walking-stick in his hand, Mr. Quelch was much more than a match for Nosey. Bunter was reassured.

He could not quite understand the expression on Mr. Quelch's countenance. He blinked very uneasily at Quelch. The soot was on his fat conscience—still, he realised that Quelch could not possibly know anything about the bag of soot, parked in the fork of the branch above. Still, you never could tell, with a beak! Quelch might suspect that he had been hidden in that tree for some nefarious purpose! It would be

like him!

"You have been of very material assistance to me, Bunter." To Bunter's relief, Quelch's voice was very mild. He was not barking at a fellow, as usual. "Of very material assistance indeed. Bunter."

"I—I—I wasn't afraid of that brute, sir. I—I couldn't let him cosh you with that stick—I—I mean. I—I couldn't let him crack your nut, sir—so I—I jumped down on him, sir—I—I couldn't do anything else—I—mean, I—I—I wasn't afraid—oh, lor'!" Mr. Quelch smiled.

That Bunter had been frightened out of his fat wits was evident. But that really made it all the more to his credit that he had somehow screwed his courage up to the sticking-point, and weighed in to his form-master's rescue.

Mr. Quelch knew that he had had a narrow escape from serious damage. He knew that he owed it to Bunter. And this was the member of his form whom he had decided, after deep consideration, to recommend his parent to take away from Greyfriars, in a letter accompanying the worst report ever! He had been unable to think of a single item to Bunter's credit that could be put into that report! He was able to think of one now!

What his form-master was thinking, as he gazed at him. Billy Bunter did not know. But the smile that glimmered on the crusty countenance rather reassured him.

"You have acted with courage, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, at last.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. Evidently Quelch wasn't waxy!

"I am very much obliged to you, Bunter."

"Oh!" repeated Bunter, blankly. He wondered dizzily whether this could really be Quelch speaking!

"I shall certainly refer to this incident, which is much to your credit, in your term's report, Bunter."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, again.

"And most certainly I shall not advise your father, Bunter, to take you away from the school."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, for the fourth time.

"I trust, Bunter, that, in your general conduct, you will endeavour to justify the better opinion I have formed of you!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"And now," said Mr. Quelch, "please go to Courtfield, as quickly as you can, to the police-station, report what has occurred, and request them to send a constable here to take this man into custody."

Bill Bunter rolled off to Courtfield in quite high spirits. Nosey Jenkins recovered his wind before the constable arrived from Courtfield. But as a grim-faced schoolmaster was standing over him, with a walking-stick ready for action, he had no choice but to remain where he was, until the constable arrived. After which, Mr. Quelch, in a thoughtful mood, resumed his walk to Highcliffe.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE REWARD OF VALOUR!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"It's all right, you chaps—!"

"Right as rain!" agreed Bob Cherry. "Why didn't you roll over and see us beat

Highcliffe, Bunter?"

"Eh! Did you beat them?" asked Bunter.

"Fifteen runs—!" said Harry Wharton.

"That all?" asked Bunter. "Bit different from that if you'd played me, I fancy."

"More than a bit, I think," agreed the captain of the Remove, laughing.

"Jolly good game," said Bob. "Highcliffe were in great form. But we pulled it off.

Quelch saw the finish—."

"Oh! You've seen Quelch?" asked Bunter. "Did he tell you that I saved his life this afternoon?"

"Eh"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Didn't he tell you? Well, I think he might have mentioned it," said Bunter, with a grunt. "After all, it's not the sort of thing that happens every day, is it?"

"Nunno! Not quite!" gasped Bob Cherry. "What are you burbling about now, fathead?"

"Oh! I happened to save his life, that's all," said Bunter, carelessly—quite as if life-saving was the kind of thing he did in leisure moments, without attaching any great importance thereto.

"That's Bunter's latest," explained Skinner. "You fellows haven't heard! It's his best so far—."

"Oh, really, Skinner——,"

"I guess it lays over anything he's spilt before," agreed Fisher T. Fish.

"Oh, really, Fishy—."

"Has anything happened to Quelch?" asked Bob. "He looked much the same as usual when he turned up at Highcliffe."

"He wouldn't have turned up, if I hadn't saved his life," said Bunter, "I've told these fellows. I'm not the fellow to swank, I hope. Still, when a fellow rushes into danger, and faces up to a desperate villain armed to the teeth—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton and Co. had found Bunter in the Rag when they came in. Other fellows were there, apparently in a state of merriment. Now the returned cricketers joined in the merriment. Bunter's latest seemed, as Skinner expressed it, his best so far!

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter, disdainfully. "I can tell you, that it's all right for me now! Quelch ain't down on me now I've shaved his wife—I mean, saved his life. He's going to give me a jolly good report. He's going to ask my pater, as a special favour, to keep me on at Greyfriars. He said so."

"I can hear him saying it!" grinned Peter Todd.

"You'd have heard him, if you'd been there," said Bunter. "He put his hand on my shoulder, and said 'Gallant lad!'"

"Quelch did?" shrieked Bob.

"Yes—his very words! Putting his hand on my shoulder, he said 'Gallant lad! If only the other boys in my form were more like you!'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He said 'Greyfriars cannot afford to lose you, Bunter!'"

"Go it!" chuckled Smithy. "Let's hear some more."

"I'm telling you exactly what Quelch said—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The exactfulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter," chuckled Hurree Jamset

Ram Singh.

"But how did you save his life?" asked Johnny Bull. "Did you turn away suddenly when he was just going to see your features—or what?"

"Yah! You see, you fellows, that man with the boko—the man the bobby was after—got Quelch in the wood on the common," explained Bunter. "Well, I was there! He sprang on Quelch like a tiger, and I sprang on him like a—a—a—,"

"Like a hippopotamus?" asked Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Like a lion!" hooted Bunter. "I sprang on him like a lion, and bore him—."

"Now we're gettin' the facts," remarked the Bounder. "Bunter would naturally *bore* anybody."

"That's so," agreed Bob. "He's boring us now, if you come to that. What happened after you bored him, Bunter?"

"Not bored—bore!" roared Bunter. "I bore him to the earth. Not bored, you silly ass! Bore him to the earth in a grip of iron. Heedless of his knife, I pinned him to the earth—he had a knife about a foot long, sharp as a razor. Did I care?"

"You wouldn't!" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I didn't!" said Bunter, disdainfully. "I simply took no notice of it. I sprang on him and seized him, and bore him to the earth, just in time to keep him from cracking Quelch's nut with his bludgeon—. He had a tremendous big bludgeon, with a huge knob on the end—it missed me by the fraction of an inch as I sprang. If it had hit me, it would have knocked my brains out."

"If any!" remarked Peter Todd.

"But the misfulness is as good as the milefulness," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and the esteemed Bunter lives to tell the tale."

"It was a jolly narrow escape," said Bunter. "I felt the wind of the bullet—I mean the bludgeon—as it barely missed. He was holding Quelch down—."

"Holding Quelch down!" yelled Bob.

"Yes, he had him down, holding him in a grip of—of steel—."

"Some desperado!" said Bob, "with a knife in one hand, and a bludgeon in the other, he was holding Quelch down—what hand did he use for that, Bunty?"

"Must have called in at the Labour Exchange, and taken on an extra hand!" suggested Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy sort of chap, anyhow," said Bob. "Go it, Bunter! This is getting curiouser and curiouser, as Alice said in Wonderland."

"I—I mean—!" Bunter stammered. Bunter never could tell a plain, unvarnished tale. Often he overdid the details. "I—I mean—the—the fact is—."

"Never mind the facts," said Bob. "Facts aren't in your line, old fat bean. Keep to the story."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows don't believe me—!" roared Bunter, indignantly.

"Believe you! Oh, scissors!"

"Well, I did it!" snorted Bunter. "I got the villain, and saved Quelch's life—."

"The only one he had, too!" said Bob. "Good work!"

"Yah! I jolly well did it! Like *Othello*, alone I did it! See?"

"Oh, crumbs! Do you mean *Coriolanus*?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No, I don't mean *Coriolanus*—I mean *Othello*," retorted Bunter. "You can't teach me Milton, Wharton."

“Milton!” gurgled Bob. “Wasn’t it Shakespeare?”

“No, it wasn’t! Anyhow, alone I did it! And when that desperate ruffian lay senseless at my feet, Quelch put his hand on my head—.”

“As well as your shoulder?”

“I mean, on my shoulder, and said—. Oh, crikey!”

Bunter broke off with that ejaculation, as he discerned a lean and angular figure in the doorway of the Rag, looking in.

All the juniors looked round at Mr. Quelch. They wondered what had brought their form-master to the Rag—and whether he had caught any of Billy Bunter’s thrilling tale of derring-do. If he had, they expected to hear the thunder roll.

But the Remove master’s expression was quite placable.

“Bunter!” His voice was kindly in tone.

“Oh! Yes, sir!” gasped Bunter.

Mr. Quelch walked in. He had a box—rather a large cardboard box—in his hand. To the general astonishment, he gave Bunter a kindly smile.

“Bunter, I have brought you this small gift, not as a reward, of course, for your courageous act this afternoon, but as a token of my good opinion.”

“Oh! Thank you, sir!” gasped Bunter.

Mr. Quelch glanced round at the staring juniors. They were wondering, dizzily, whether there might be a word of truth—just one word!—in the startling tale related by the fat Owl.

“Has—has—has Bunter done anything, sir?” gasped Bob.

“Certainly he has,” said Mr. Quelch. “I was attacked this afternoon by a dangerous tramp, and Bunter, who by a fortunate chance had climbed a tree on the spot, jumped down, falling on the man’s head, and temporarily disabling him. I am very much obliged to Bunter.”

And Mr. Quelch, with an uncommonly gracious smile to the fattest member of his form, walked out of the Rag.

Bunter was left with the box in his fat hands, blinking.

“Well, my only summer bonnet!” said Bob. “Wonders will never cease! I’ll bet you never told Quelch why you were up that tree, you fat villain!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Quelch didn’t mention that the tramp had a knife a foot long,” remarked Skinner.

“Well, he was a bit flurried, naturally,” said Bunter. “I daresay he never noticed it. I was cool, of course—as cool as a cowcumber—I mean, as cow as a cool-cumber—I—I mean—. I say, you fellows. I wonder what’s in this box!”

Billy Bunter was not long in ascertaining what was in the box. It was packed to the brim, with toffees. Bunter blinked at it. He beamed at it. He grabbed at the contents, and transferred a considerable quantity of the same to the largest mouth in the Remove.

“I say, you fellows.” His voice was a little muffled. “I say, these toffees are prime! I say, Quelch is no fool! He knows how to treat a fellow who saved his life! I say, these toffees are topping.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Evidently Quelch had guessed the kind of gift that Bunter would appreciate! Bunter gobbled and beamed.

“I say, you fellows, have some of these toffees! There’s lots—and lots—and lots! I say, Quelch ain’t such a beast —ooogh—grooogh—. He ain’t such a beast as you fellows think—. Grooogh! Ooogh! Wooogh!” Bunter choked, and coughed, and recovered. “Urrrggh! I say, they’re ripping! Have some,

you fellows.”

And the fellows chuckled and had some.

It was a happy and sticky Owl. The toffees were good—and almost as good as the toffees was the knowledge that Quelch had relented, and that the Remove was not going to lose its brightest ornament: that next term the happy Owl would still be Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School!