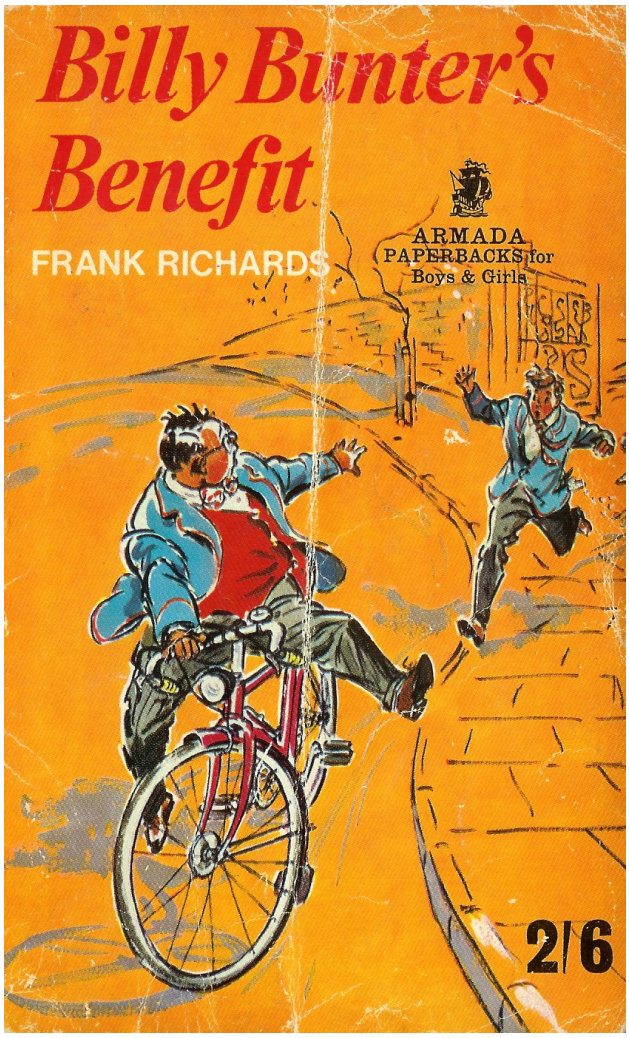



# Billy Bunter's Benefit

By

Frank Richards

## CHAPTER I

## BUNTER GOES OVER

"OH!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.
He seemed taken aback.

He also seemed peeved.
Coming into the bike-shed at Greyfriars, the fat Owl of the Remove stopped in the doorway, which his ample figure almost filled from side to side. He blinked through his big spectacles at five juniors who were taking down bicycles from the stands.
"I say, you fellows, you ain't going out on your bikes, are you?" exclaimed Bunter.
Harry Wharton and Co. glanced round at the fat figure in the doorway. As it was a half-holiday at Greyfriars School, and a fine sunny afternoon, there was nothing surprising, so far as they could see, in fellows wheeling out their jiggers for a spin. Neither could they see why it should worry Bunter—as apparently it did.
"We are!" answered Frank Nugent.
"We is!" said Bob Cherry.
"But—I say—!"
"Jump on your jigger and join up, Bunter," suggested Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm. "We're going for a fifteen-mile run, round by Redclyffe Hill."
At which there was a chuckle in the bike-shed.
A fifteen-mile run, with a steep hill thrown in, was not likely to attract Billy Bunter. A mile on a bike, on the level, was generally enough for the fat Owl, if not a little too much.
"Yes, do," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll give you a push up Redclyffe Hill, Bunter."
"The pushfulness would probably have to be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.
Sniff, from Bunter.
"I could bike your heads off, and chance it," he retorted. "But I've got to go over to Cliff House this afternoon to see my sister Bessie. I say, you fellows, I thought you were in the Rag. You jolly well know that Wibley's fixed up a rehearsal for three o'clock, and you're in it."
At which there was another chuckle.
The Famous Five were all keen members of the Remove Dramatic Society. But they were not keen on sticking indoors on a sunny half-holiday when the fresh air and the open road called.
William Wibley of the Remove, who was director, producer, stage-manager, and nearly everything else, in the Remove Dramatic Society, certainly had fixed a rehearsal of "Hamlet" for three. That was one of the reasons why the Famous Five were wheeling out their bikes at a quarter to three! It saved argument to be a mile or two away when Wibley rounded up his cast for rehearsal.

"Forgotten it?" demanded Bunter.
"Not at all," answered Bob Cherry. "In fact, that's why."
"The whyfulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Smithy said he was coming," remarked Harry Wharton. "But we'd better not wait. Blow out of that doorway, Bunter."
"I say, you fellows, you'd better cut in," urged Bunter, his extensive circumference blocking the doorway. "You can't let old Wibley down, you know. And—and—and I want to borrow a bike this afternoon, see?"
"I see," assented Harry Wharton, "and if we'd been in the Rag, you fat villain, you'd have borrowed one without asking."
"Well, which of you fellows is going to lend me a bike?" asked Bunter.
"The whichfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.
"Can't you ride your own, you fat ass?" asked Nugent. "How can I ride a bike when I've got a pedal twisted, and the mudguard loose, and the chain snapped?" demanded Bunter. "I've asked you to put it right for me a dozen times, Bob, but you've never done it. Will you lend me your bike, Nugent?"
"When I want it with a pedal twisted, and the mudguard loose, and the chain snapped,' answered Frank Nugent. "Not till then."
"Oh, really, Nugent—."
"Mind getting out of that doorway, Bunter?" asked Bob. "You're liable to get run over if you block the traffic."
"I've got to go over and see Bessie!" yapped Bunter. "It's important. I'd borrow Smithy's machine, only he's got such a rotten temper. And Toddy's gone out on his, though I asked him to lend it to me. Rotten selfishness all round. I've got to go over to Cliff House—when a chap's got a sister at a school only a mile away it's up to him to look after her a bit. Mind, it isn't because she's had a hamper from home. I don't know whether she's had a hamper or not."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, Will you lend me your bike, Wharton?"
"Not quite!"
"If you had a sister, Wharton, perhaps you'd understand a brother's feelings," said Bunter scornfully. "It's my duty as Bessie's elder brother to keep an eye on that hamper—I mean, on Bessie. What about your bike, Bob? You can put down the saddle for me, as I'm not a long-legged giraffe like you."
"You put it so nicely," said Bob. "But the answer's in the jolly old negative."
"What about your bike, Bull?"

"Nothing!" answered Johnny Bull.
"What about yours, Inky?"
"The nothingness about my bike is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."
"And now, get out of the doorway," said Harry Wharton.
Without getting out of the doorway. Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five with his most withering blink. Whether it was brotherly affection, or the prospect of a hamper, Bunter certainly did want to go over to Cliff House that afternoon and visit Bessie Bunter. Had the Famous Five been in the Rag, ready for rehearsals, Bunter would have had the choice of five machines. And apart from those five, there was on that sunny afternoon, only one other jigger in the bike-shed—Smithy's. And Herbert Vernon-Smith was not a fellow whose bike could be borrowed without leave and with impunity. It was all very annoying indeed to Billy Bunter.
"I say, you fellows, don't be selfish beasts," he urged.
"I keep on telling you that I've got to go over to Cliff House. How can I go over without a bike?"
"You'd like to go over with my bike?" asked Bob. Bunter's fat face brightened.
"Yes, rather, old chap! Put the saddle down for me— I've not got spindle-shanks like yours, you know."
"You silly ass, Bob," roared Johnny Bull. "You're not going to cut a spin and let that fat ass have your bike. Why can't he mend his own?"
"Too lazy, I expect," answered Bob. "Isn't that it, Bunter?"
"Oh, really, Cherry—."
"Get out of that doorway, or I'll jolly well buff my bike into you!" shouted Johnny.
"Beast!"
"Hold on," said Bob. "If you really and truly want to go over, Bunter—."
"Yes, old chap. I want to go over at once."
"With my bike?"
"Yes, old fellow."
"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," said Bob. "But as you won't get out of the doorway, and you really and truly want to go over, with my bike, here goes."
Bob Cherry rushed his bike into the doorway. The front wheel collided with the plumpest legs at Greyfriars School. There was a roar from Billy Bunter as he went over.
"Yarooooh!"
Bump!
Bunter sat and roared.
"That all right?" asked Bob.

"Wow-ow! Beast! Wow! Wharrer you knocking me over with your bike for, you beast?" roared Bunter.
"Didn't you ask me to?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Some fellows are never satisfied," said Bob. "Didn't all you fellows hear Bunter say that he wanted to go over with my bike? Well, now he's gone over, with my bike, and he's still grumbling about something."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Wow! Beast! Ow!"
Harry Wharton and Co., laughing, wheeled out their machines, and mounted at the gate. Billy Bunter, apparently not satisfied with the way he had gone over roared. They pedalled away cheerfully and left him to roar.

## CHAPTER II

## BORROWING A BIKE!

"SMITHY!"
"Oh! Yes!"
"Stop!"
"I'm going out."
"You're not!" hooted William Wibley.
Wibley made that rejoinder with great emphasis. There was a frown upon his brow which the Lord High Executioner might have envied. Wibley was wrathy.
It was enough to make any producer of plays wrathy, to behold an important member of his theatrical company walking off, just when a rehearsal was due.
Herbert Vernon-Smith was strolling out of the House, when Wibley spotted him. He had not spotted the Famous Five, who had started together. But he spotted Smithy, and bore down on him in wrath.
"Forgotten the rehearsal?" demanded Wibley, witheringly.
"It's such a jolly fine afternoon—."
"Think you can play Claudius without rehearsing the part? One of those born actors who can pick up a part without looking at it?"
"Another time, old man," said Smithy. "I'm joining up for a spin with some fellows—."
"You're not!" hooted Wibley.
"I jolly well am!" retorted the Bounder. "You shouldn't fix rehearsals for an afternoon like this, Wib. Save them up for a rainy day."
With that, Vernon-Smith went down the steps, Wibley glaring at the back

of his head as he went, with a glare compared with which that of the fabled Gorgon was a kindly glance.

William Wibley lived, moved, and had his being in amateur theatricals. He infused a great deal of his enthusiasm into other members of the Dramatic Society. But not sufficient to keep them indoors on a sunny half-holiday.

Harry Wharton and Co., realising that Wibley was deaf and blind to argument on the subject, had imitated the Arabs, who folded their tents and stole silently away.

Smithy, less regardful of the feelings of the President of the Remove Dramatic Society, walked off under his nose.

"Look here, Smithy—!" roared Wibley, his glare at the back of the Bounder's head having produced no effect whatever.

"Sorry—can't keep fellows waiting—ta-ta!" answered Smithy, over his shoulder.

"I'll cut the part!" hooted Wibley. "Mind, if you don't turn up for rehearsals, you're out—I'll cut the part."

Whereat Herbert Vernon-Smith chuckled. If Wibley cut the part of every fellow who did not turn up in the Rag that sunny afternoon, he was likely to be left with a very small cast.

Leaving the helpless producer, director, stage-manager and actor-manager fuming, the Bounder walked away to the bike-shed. He was going on that spin with the Famous Five. They had already started, but he had only to put on a spurt and overtake them on the Redclyffe road. He paused for a moment, before going into the bike-shed, to glance, with a grin, at a fat figure at the gate which was heaving itself into the saddle of a bike rather too high for a pair of short plump legs.

Billy Bunter landed in the saddle with a bump and a gasp, and wobbled wildly, his feet missing pedals. He disappeared out of the gateway in a wild wobble.

The Bounder chuckled, and went in for his machine.

Then he stared at an empty stand.

His bicycle, the handsome and expensive Moonbeam which was a present from his millionaire pater, was not there.

The expression that came over Smithy's face was quite alarming. Every other machine was out, excepting one— a dilapidated rusty object that had a twisted pedal, a loose mudgard, and a broken chain. Fellows sometimes borrowed one another's jiggers—but nobody ever borrowed Bunter's. And any fellow who borrowed Smithy's Moonbeam was booked for trouble. Now, evidently, somebody had borrowed it.

"That fat scoundrel!" ejaculated the Bounder.

He could guess who the "somebody" was—having just seen Billy Bunter mounting a machine too high for him, while his own old crock was left in the shed.

He rushed out of the bike-shed, and to the gate. Out on the road a fat figure was wobbling in full view.

Any fellow but Bunter might have shot away on that bike, dodging the wrath to come till he met the owner later. But the fat Owl of the Remove was in difficulties.

No other machine being available, and it being urgently necessary to arrive at Cliff House while something still remained in the hamper from home, Billy Bunter had ventured to borrow Smithy's. But he had not ventured to wait while he lowered the saddle—he did not want to be caught in the act. So Bunter, high and dry as it were, wobbled in quite a frantic manner, sometimes getting a pedal, oftener missing it, and every now and then getting a knock on a fat ankle from a whirling pedal that made him utter shrill yelps.

Bunter's idea was to get that borrowed bike to a safe distance, then dismount, open the tool-bag, and put the saddle down. But he was not at a safe distance when Smithy's glare fell on him from the gate—far from it. His hit-and-miss system of pedalling did not make for speed.

Smithy came out with a rush.

"Bunter!" he roared. "Stop! Get off that bike! Do you hear? Stop!"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He shot an alarmed blink over a fat shoulder. That almost did it—Bunter very nearly got off the bike without intended to do so.

The machine wobbled frantically, and Bunter zig-zagged across the road, kicking wildly at whirling pedals.

"Stop!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

If Bunter had been disposed to stop, and yield up the borrowed bike, the look on Smithy's face would have dissuaded him. Smithy was speeding after him, and only too clearly his countenance indicated what was going to happen to Bunter when he got within reach. Billy Bunter did not want him to get within reach. He was thinking even less of the hamper at Cliff House than of what would happen if Smithy got him. He plunged at one pedal, and then at the other, swaying wildly to starboard and then to port, but keeping going somehow.

"Stop!" shrieked the Bounder.

He fairly raced.

The pattering of rapid footsteps behind urged Bunter on. It was no easy matter for the fat Owl. As he could not possibly keep his feet on both

pedals at once, he had to deal with them alternately, plunging to one side and then to the other, and every moment the bike looked like curling up and enfolding him in its embrace.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

"Will you stop, you fat villain?" yelled the Bounder.

His voice sounded terribly close behind. Smithy, in fact, seemed able to beat Bunter on a bike. He was in little doubt of overtaking the fat Owl: but he dreaded every moment to see a crash—though his concern was wholly for the handsome Moonbeam, and not in the least for its rider.

Bunter plunged on.

Smithy put on a spurt, and came within grabbing distance. He grabbed savagely. But a wobble of the bike took it just out of his reach as he grabbed, and his grab meeting with no resistance, he lost his balance and fell forward. There was a crash on the hard high-road, a spluttering yell from Smithy, and he sat up with his hand to his nose, The Bounder had a rather prominent nose, and it had hit the road rather hard.

"Oh!" gasped Smithy.

He scrambled to his feet, with dusty knees and red nose, and a gleam in his eyes that was positively dangerous.

Bunter was plunging on. He was a dozen yards off. Smithy covered those dozen yards almost in a flash, and grabbed again. This time he captured a fat arm.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

Crash!

Over went Bunter. Over went the bike. A yelling fat Owl, mixed up with a clanking bike, sprawled on the road.

"Ow! Beast! Woo! Keep off! Whoooop!" roared Bunter.

Smithy dragged the bike up. He stayed only to give Bunter one kick—he was anxious to examine the machine for damage. One kick, however, seemed enough for Bunter, and he did not wait till Smithy had leisure for more. He squirmed away. scrambled up, and fled, still yelling.

The bike, luckily, was not much damaged. The handlebars were out of the straight, and one pedal was a little twisted. Smithy put the handle-bars straight, found that the pedal, though a little twisted, would revolve clear, rubbed his knees, and dabbed his nose, and mounted. He was tempted to ride after Bunter, and strew him about the landscape in a state of utter wreckage. But he reflected that Bunter would keep, and he pedalled away to overtake the Famous Five on the Redclyffe road—while Billy Bunter, bikeless, breathless, and bedewed with perspiration, rolled away on foot to Cliff House School, hoping against hope that something might still remain in the hamper when he got there.

## CHAPTER 111

## PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL!

"EASY!" said the Bounder.

Four fellows smiled.

Bob Cherry, a little ahead of his comrades, did not hear Smithy's remark, or doubtless he would have smiled also.

They were riding up Redclyffe Hill. Smithy had joined up with the cycling party, not in the best of tempers, with a pain and a red glow in his nose, and a bruise on one knee, and scratches on his hands.

These little spots of trouble were wholly due to Billy Bunter, the Famous Five not even knowing anything about it: so Smithy, as a reasonable fellow, ought not to have visited his irritation upon their guileless heads. But Smithy was not a very reasonable fellow when he was in a bad temper. In one of his "tantrums" Smithy was liable to snap equally at friend and foe: his irritation, like the rain, fell alike on the just and the unjust. So the chums of the Remove did not find him specially pleasant company on that spin.

In his present mood, Smithy was disposed to put on speed up the hill, making the other fellows go all out to keep pace, turning a pleasant spin into a competing race, and—if possible—leaving the Co. labouring behind, admittedly not such hefty cyclists as the Bounder. Beating them to the top of the hill might probably have restored his good temper.

Instead of which, he found that a bruise on his knee was rather a handicap; and a crooked pedal, though only a little twisted, did not improve matters. After shooting ahead he was glad to slow down, and keep on at a moderate pace: and in fact did not enjoy the pull up the hill at all.

Half-way up the hill, Bob Cherry, who could do practically anything on a bike, demonstrated to his comrades the art and science of riding with one's hands in one's trousers pockets.

Most fellows could do that on the level—at the risk of a fall. But uphill it was not easy. Bob's powerful legs could drive the pedals like machinery, and there was no risk when Bob did it. So there was Bob Cherry sailing cheerily uphill with his hands in his trousers pockets, the bike depending wholly on sustained speed to keep from curling up and crashing. His friends followed on behind, watching him, but not in the least disposed to follow his example—like sensible fellows, they kept their hands on their handle-bars. But Smithy, who always liked to out-do others, felt himself out-done, and was not pleased. So he said "Easy"—with a quite perceptible sneer.

"Easy as falling off a form," he went on, as the Co. only smiled without making any rejoinder. "See me do it."
"The easifulness is not terrific, my esteemed Smithy," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It may look easy, but there is always a slip between the cracked pitcher and the bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks."
"This hill's a bit steep for stunts, Smithy," said Harry Wharton.
"I fancy that I can do anything that any Remove man can do," answered the Bounder, disdainfully. "Just watch,."
A little forgetful of a bruised knee and a crooked pedal, the Bounder put on speed. Only sustained speed could perform that little feat. Smithy shot on like an arrow, released his handle-bars and put his hands in his trousers pockets, and sailed on merrily after Bob Cherry, in precisely the same manner.
"Silly ass!" murmured Johnny Bull.
"Oh, Smithy must always do anything any other fellow can do," said Frank Nugent. "I hope he won't come a purler."
Harry Wharton looked a little anxious. He did not like Bob performing that rather risky feat going uphill: and Smithy, stout fellow as he was, certainly was not Bob's equal in muscular strength. And a sudden crash with one's hands in one's pockets was likely to be very unpleasant.
Whether Vernon-Smith could have carried on without disaster or not, a sharp twinge in his knee did it! His bike just failed to keep up the required speed to keep it steady. In the twinkling of an eye, it curled and crashed, and the Bounder went rolling in the dust.
"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Nugent.
"Man down!" grunted Johnny Bull, "Absurd pride goes before an esteemed fall!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.
He jumped down, his example followed by his friends. Bob Cherry, hearing the crash behind him, grasped his handle-bars again, and looked back.
"Hello, hello, hello, what's up?" he exclaimed.
"Nothing's up—Smithy's down!" called back Johnny Bull.
"The downfulness is terrific."
Bob came cycling back, and jumped down. The five juniors gathered at once round the Bounder. He was sprawling and panting in the dust, his expression quite unpleasant with mingled rage and chagrin.
"Hurt, old chap?" asked Bob.
"Idiot!" was Smithy's polite reply.
"Thanks," said Bob, drily.
"Let me give you a hand, Smithy—," said Harry.

"Leave me alone."
Vernon-Smith sat up, gasping for breath. He certainly was hurt, and he was lucky in the damage being only painful, and not more serious. But it was painful enough: he felt as if he had collected all the aches and pains in the wide world, and a few over. But he felt the mortification more than the pains and aches. He had set out to do what he couldn't do, and his failure was ignominious. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall," was a text that Smithy might often have found it useful to remember.
Having savagely rejected offers of aid, Smithy found that he could not, for the moment, get on his feet unaided! He sat and panted, with a brow like thunder, his eyes glinting.
The Famous Five waited. They were sympathetic, but Smithy's look indicated very clearly that any expression of sympathy would be taken as an offence. So they waited in silence for him to get to his feet.
He got on them at last, unsteadily. Then be bestowed a scowl on five faces in succession.
"You needn't look like a funeral party," he snarled. "I'm not made of putty."
"Feel like coming on?" asked Harry, mildly.
"Of course."
Smithy did not feel in the least like coming on. He would have been glad to sit down and rest, and cut out the spin altogether. But nothing would have induced him to admit as much.
"We'll wait a bit—!" said Frank Nugent.
"You can wait, if you like hanging about," snapped Vernon-Smith. "I've come out for a spin, and I'm going on.'
He stepped, rather unsteadily, towards the crashed bicycle. Five fellows exchanged a smile. But their faces became grave again at once as Smithy flashed a look round at them.
"I should have done it easily enough, but one of my pedals was twisted," he said. "That fat fool Bunter had my bike, that's why. Nothing in it."
"Nothing in what?" asked Bob, who had not seen Smithy's performance, having had his back to him.
"Smithy was stunting like you," explained Harry. "He had bad luck."
"Oh!" said Bob. "Well, there's nothing in it, only it's a bit risky going uphill—."
"More risky for me than for you?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a glare.
"Not at all, old chap," answered Bob, soothingly. "But any fellow doing it might come a purler. Rough luck."
Herbert Vernon-Smith grunted, and turned to his machine. The

expression on his face, already sulky and savage, became positively ferocious as he picked it up. There was a sound of clanking, clinking, rattling, and scraping. Smithy, luckily, had escaped serious damage—but it was clear that the bicycle hadn't.

That handsome Moonbeam bicycle was, in fact, a wreck. The front wheel was so badly bent that it would not revolve at all, the chain was snapped, the mudguards twisted, and one of the pedals almost like a corkscrew. There were a good many other damages—in fact, their name was legion. A few minutes ago that Moonbeam bike had looked worth the twenty guineas Smith's pater had paid for it. Now it looked hardly worth picking off a scrap-heap.

"You won't be able to ride that, Smithy," said Johnny Bull.

"Fool!" said Smith. "Think I need telling that?"

Johnny regarded him thoughtfully.

"I won't punch your head for your cheek, Smithy, as you've had such a spill," he said. "But I've had enough of your rotten temper. I'm going on."

Johnny put a leg over his machine, and went on.

The other four members of the Co. exchanged glances.

Smithy, evidently, was out of that spin. Even had he been personally in a state to carry on, which evidently he was not, his bike could not even be wheeled, let alone ridden. There was nothing for him to do but wait for some obliging carter to give him a lift with the wrecked machine. The Co. were unwilling to leave him there with the wreck, on his own: but they had come out for a spin, and it did not seem very useful to stand about doing nothing. However, if they were dubious about what to do in the painful circumstances, the Bounder settled the matter for them.

"I've got to wait here for a lift," he growled. "I must get that crock to the cycle-shop in Courtfield. Cut on."

"Well—!" began Harry Wharton.

"For goodness sake, cut on, and don't jaw!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, all right."

Four fellows remounted, and pedalled on after Johnny Bull. The Bounder favoured them with a scowl as they went: and dragged his machine to the roadside. There he sat down on a grassy bank, to wait for some Good Samaritan to pass in a vehicle, for a lift into Courtfield. The Famous Five, in a bunch, swept over the crest of Redclyffe Hill, and disappeared—and probably enjoyed that spin none the less for the loss of the Bounder's company.

## CHAPTER IV

## BAD LUCK FOR BUNTER!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter opened the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove passage as he spoke. The next moment, having blinked into the study through his big spectacles, he ejaculated:

"Beasts!"

The study was vacant. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, to whom it belonged, were still out on their bikes. Which was annoying to Billy Bunter, as it was long past tea-time, and there was an aching void within his extensive circumference.

Bunter was tired. Owing to the selfishness of fellows who wanted to use their jiggers themselves, he had not been able to borrow a bike, and had had to walk to Cliff House and back. He was also disgruntled. For on arriving at Cliff House he had found that the expected hamper hadn't. It had, apparently, been delayed on the railway, and Bunter found nothing at Cliff House to console him but the charming company of his sister Bessie. This very soon palled: and Billy Bunter walked back, tired, peeved, and perspiring, to discover that he was too late for tea in hall. Hence his visit to No. 1 Study in the hope of hospitality, or alternatively, as the lawyers say, in the hope of raising a little loan on a postal-order he was expecting. And there was nobody at home!

"Beasts!" repeated Bunter.

Bunter was hungry. He had had nothing since dinner excepting some toffee he had found in Ogilvy's study. and a couple of doughnuts he had discovered in Tom Brown's study. To Bunter, these were trifles light as air: and since then he had walked to Cliff House and back. Even "door-steps and dish-water" in hall would have been welcome to the famished Owl—but even these were no longer available.

"Beasts!" said Bunter, for the third time.

Fellows who were out of gates when Bunter needed their edible or financial resources were clearly beasts, of the most beastly description. However, Bunter rolled into the study. Something might be in the study cupboard, in which case he would not miss the company of Wharton and Nugent—indeed, it might be better, on the whole, that they weren't there!

But it was a day of disappointments for Billy Bunter.

The cupboard door was locked. The key was gone.

Bunter gazed at the locked door with mixed feelings.

"Beasts!" he said, for the fourth time. "Rotten, suspicious beasts! I jolly well believe they've got a cake. Locking it up, just as if they fancied it wasn't safe in their study! Turning the key on it, as if they thought some fellow might be after it! Suspicious beasts! Yah!"

Bunter rolled out of the study.
He looked back into his own, No. 7. But his study-mates, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, were still out of gates: teaing out, most likely, regardless of a tealess fat Owl at home! He did not trouble to explore the cupboard in No. 7—he had done that earlier. He snorted, and rolled up the passage to No. 12. If Lord Mauleverer were there, he might be happy yet!
But Mauly was out, too: and the study cupboard, though unlocked, was empty.
"Beast!" groaned Bunter.
He paused in the passage to consider his next move. Matters were getting serious. Bunter was beginning to feel like a ship-wrecked seaman in an open boat at sea. To wait till supper was practically impossible. Something—or at least somebody—had to be done.
Then he thought of Wibley. Wibley wouldn't be out— he was too deep in his silly theatricals, Bunter had no doubt. He rolled along to No. 5. It was always easy to pull Wibley's leg by getting him on stage stuff, and expressing unbounded admiration. Wibley had an artistic temperament, and lapped up flattery like milk. Two or three minutes of soft sawder in No. 5 Study would be worth anything eatable Wibley might happen to have. So Bunter rolled into No. 5, and was relieved to find William Wibley at home.
But he did not find William Wibley in his usual good temper. He found him in quite an excited state. Every theatrical manager has his trials and tribulations. Wibley had had more than his share. Deep in his coming production of "Hamlet," Wibley had not even noticed whether it was fine or rainy that afternoon. But all other members of the cast for "Hamlet" had!
"I say, Wib, old chap," began Bunter, with his most propitiatory grin, "just dropped in to ask how the rehearsal went this afternoon."
Billy Bunter did not, as a matter of fact, care two hoots, or one, how the rehearsal had gone. But this seemed a good gambit.
Wibley, instead of rising to the bait, glared at him. That rehearsal was a sore subject with Wibley. Not a man had turned up in the Rag. Wibley, arriving there to superintend, had found himself alone in his glory, so to speak. Since then he had been in a state of smouldering indignation and fury.
"You silly ass!" was Wibley's reply.
"Oh, really, Wibley—."
"Oh, scat!"
"Didn't the fellows turn up?" asked Bunter, trying— not very successfully—to repress a fat grin.

"Didn't they?" hooted Wibley. "No! They didn't! I told them I'd cut the parts if they didn't! They didn't all the same."
"Rotten," said Bunter, sympathetically, "I'd jolly well cut the parts, if I were you, Wibley."
"So I jolly well would: but can I play Hamlet on my own, fathead? If I cut Horatio, and Laertes, and the King, and Ophelia, and the Ghost, and Rosenkrantz, and Guildenstern, and the rest, where's the play?" hooted Wibley. "I've heard of Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out—but did you ever hear of Hamlet with only the Prince of Denmark in? What? Think I can do a solo performance as Hamlet? What?"
"Well, Smithy says it's jolly near a solo performance, the way you take all the fat for yourself, old chap," said Bunter—rather unfortunately.
"Smithy's a silly idiot, and you're a sillier," retorted Wibley. "Shut the door after you."
"But, I say—."
"Don't bother! Get out! Buzz off! Scat!"
"But I say, Wib, old chap, I've missed my tea—."
"You won't miss my boot, if you don't travel," said Wibley, coming round the table.
Bunter decided to travel. The door of No. 5 Study banged after a hungry and disconsolate fat Owl.
"Beast!" hooted Bunter, through the keyhole.
He rolled on to No. 4 Study, which belonged to Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. It was like unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Smithy was always well-provided, even in time of dearth. Even Coker of the Fifth did not receive more generous supplies from the old folks at home. Billy Bunter's extensive mouth fairly watered at the thought of what he was likely to discover in Smithy's study. On the other hand, Smithy was a frightfully bad-tempered beast, as witness the way he had cut up rusty over the incident of the borrowed bike. If Smithy was anywhere in the offing, it was altogether too dangerous—the tuck in No. 4 was as much out of Bunter's reach, as the tempting viands out of the reach of Tantalus. Bunter, indeed, was experiencing some of the painful feelings of Tantalus as he stood in doubt outside Smithy's study.
Skinner of the Remove came up the passage, and Bunter squeaked to him as he passed:
"Seen Smithy about?"
"He went out with Wharton's gang—they haven't come in yet," answered Skinner,
"Seen Redwing?"
"Heard that he's gone up to Hawkscliff."

Skinner passed on and went into his own study up the passage. Billy Bunter grinned a cheery grin.
If Smithy was still out with the cyclists, and Redwing up at Hawkscliff, the coast was clear. Bunter hesitated no longer. He rolled into No. 4, shut the door after him, and shot across to the study cupboard.
The next moment the door of that cupboard was open, and Billy Bunter was feasting his eyes on the contents.
Only the one moment he feasted his eyes. Then he grabbed a doughnut in one fat hand, and a jam-tart in the other, and his plump jaws went actively to work. Doughnut and jam-tart went down like a couple of oysters, followed by a couple more of each. This whetted Bunter's appetite. There was a large plum cake on the shelf. Bunter lifted it out bodily, sat in Smithy's comfortable armchair, and with the cake on his fat knees, commenced operations on a large scale. There was a sound of munching and gurgling in No. 4 Study, and on Billy Bunter's plump countenance a smile of beatific happiness—which lasted till there was a sound of footsteps in the passage outside, and a voice—a voice that Billy Bunter know only too well!

## CHAPTER V

## COKER ASKS FOR IT!

"DIRTY little tick!" said Coker of the Fifth.
"Looks grubby," agreed Potter.
Greene did not trouble to speak. Redclyffe Hill was steep enough to require all Green's breath, without conversation.
Coker and Co. of the Fifth, like many other Greyfriars men that sunny afternoon, were out on their bikes. They were toiling up the hill to Redclyffe, about half-an-hour after Harry Wharton and Co. had passed that way.
Neither Potter nor Greene was quite enjoying that hill, Horace Coker, with his immense legs, on his high machine, seemed impervious to hills. Potter and Greene were lesser mortals, and they found it tough. But the pull up the hill was not all. There was Coker's conversation added thereunto: which was a second test of endurance added to the first. Coker, happily, was not talking cricket, on which subject he was wont to bore his comrades to tears. Coker was full of the activities of the Fifth-Form Stage Club, in which he was the moving spirit, and which was run largely, if not entirely, on Coker's too-ample pocket-money. Coker's ignorance of his subject was, perhaps, a little less appalling than his ignorance of the other subject. Still, his friends had to listen to him, or

at least affect to do so: which, added to the steepness of the hill, made Potter and Greene wonder, not for the first time, whether it was a mistake to cultivate Coker as a pal.

On the other hand, they were going up to Redclyffe for the most expensive seats at the Arcade, to be followed by one of Coker's magnificent feeds. Coker undoubtedly had his good points. He had lots of money, and chucked it right and left. If Coker could stand expensive seats at the cinema, and unlimited refreshments afterwards, Potter and Green felt that they could stand Coker. And they did. Coming down the hill, as Coker and Co. pedalled up,

was a Remove junior—whose appearance displeased Coker.

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not exactly look a "dirty little tick," as Coker described him. But he did look untidy and grubby and generally dilapidated. Had Mr. Quelch, his form-master, seen him abroad in such a state, he would certainly have wanted to know the reason why. But it did not concern Coker of the Fifth in the very least. Coker, however, had a wonderful capacity for concerning himself about matters that did not concern him.

"I wonder what Greyfriars is coming to!" said Coker. "Look at him!"

Vernon-Smith glanced at the three cyclists coming up the hill, and scowled. Smithy was not in a good temper. He had aches and pains without number, and a nasty consciousness that he had made a fool of himself. He knew that he looked dusty, rumpled, untidy, damaged, and dilapidated. He had sat by the roadside nearly half-an-hour in the hot sun, hoping for a lift for himself and bike. No such lift had accrued: and at last the Bounder had made up his mind to leave the wrecked machine on the grass verge by the road, walk down to Courtfield, and get the cycle-shop people to collect it for repairs. A walk of two or three miles in his present condition was not enjoyable: and the stares of the Fifth-form men, and the lofty disgust in Coker's rugged countenance, did not add to his comfort. So he gave them a black scowl as they drew nearer.

"Look at him!" requested Coker. "Disgraceful little blackguard! Looks as if he's been rolling in the dust, and hasn't had a wash for weeks! Quelch ought to look after these young ruffians in the Remove."

"Might suggest it to him!" murmured Potter, with a wink at Greene. But Greene, bending wearily over his handle-bars, did not see the wink, or grin at the sarcasm. Coker, of course, did not realise that Potter was indulging in sarcasm at all.

"I couldn't very well, Potter," answered Coker. "A beak wouldn't like it! Besides," added Coker, disparagingly, "what's the good of talking sense to a school-master? Dense lot! Look at Prout!"

Coker frowned, remembering Prout. Coker had many spots of trouble with Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth.

Only that morning Prout had rated Coker, before all the Fifth, for spelling "occiput" "oxyput." Not, of course, that Coker was going to change his orthographical methods to please Prout. When a fellow knew best, he knew best, and that was that. Still, it was annoying.

However, he dismissed Prout from mind as he caught the angry scowl on the face of Herbert Vernon-Smith. The "dirty little tick" was not only walking abroad in a state calculated to bring disgrace upon the school to which Horace Coker belonged: but he had the cheek to scowl at Coker—a mere junior of the Lower School, scowling at a senior—and that senior Coker of the Fifth!

"I'll speak to him," said Coker, grimly.

He stopped, and landed two large feet on Redclyffe Hill, "I say, what about the Arcade?" asked Potter. Potter did not want to be late for the picture, while Coker kicked up one of his innumerable shindies.

"I say, keep on, you know," added Greene.

"I said I'd speak to him," said Coker, coldly. "I generally mean what I say. You two keep on—I'll catch you up easily enough—you look like crawling before you get to the top."

Potter and Greene kept on. It was true that they were finding the hill steep, and that Coker, with his powerful legs. would be able to overtake them easily enough. Still, Coker's way of putting it was not tactful. Potter and Greene, as they pedalled onward and upward, wondered once more whether the Arcade and the feed were really worth Coker.

They passed Vernon-Smith, who walked onward and downward towards Coker. Why Coker had dismounted, Vernon-Smith neither knew nor cared: it did not dawn on him for the moment that he was the object of Coker's particular attention.

But as he reached the spot where Coker stood with his hand on his bike, he was called to a halt.

"Here, you dirty little tick!" exclaimed Coker, shifting himself and his bike to block Smithy's further progress, "what does this mean, eh?"

Vernon-Smith looked at him. He was in no mood to tolerate the lofty manners and customs of Coker of the Fifth. He was in a mood to give Coker, or anybody else, the sharpest edge of his tongue.

"Talking to me, fathead?" he snapped.

"I'm talking to you, and I don't want any cheek," said Coker, warningly. "What do you mean by going about out of gates looking like a tramp? Don't you ever wash in the Remove? Never use a clothes-brush? What? Dirty little tick! If I were a prefect I'd turn you up and give you six for showing

up in public looking as if you'd just sneaked out of the casual ward."
"Will you get out of the way?" asked Smithy.
"Not till I've finished," answered Coker. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, you dirty little tick, going about like a ragged robin? Nice for me, if anybody knew you belonged to my school."
"Nice for me, if anybody knew you belonged to mine," retorted Smithy. "They'd think I'd gone to school at a home for idiots."
Coker reddened with wrath.
Smithy's retort did it! Coker had intended only admonition. But cheek like this called for something more drastic. Holding his bike with his left hand, Coker reached out with his right and smacked Smithy's head.
That should have ended the matter. Coker was generously prepared to leave it at that, remount his bike, and ride on after his friends, leaving Smithy to rub his head and realise that it did not pay to cheek the Fifth.
But although it should have ended the matter, if didn't! Instead of the end, it proved to be merely the beginning.
So far from taking that smack quietly, Vernon-Smith uttered a yell of fury, and hurled himself recklessly at Coker, hitting out with both fists at once.
No Remove junior, however sturdy, had a chance against a big Fifth-form man. But Coker was rather at a disadvantage, at the moment, holding his bike, and Smithy's prompt retaliation being quite unexpected—by Coker.
Coker received Smithy's right, on his waistcoat, and Smithy's left under his chin. He staggered. He would have recovered in a moment but for the bike. But he staggered into the bike.
There was a loud clang as the bike went over on the ground, and a louder yell from Coker, as he tripped over it and went over also. The bike rolled to the right, Coker rolled to the left, and Vernon-Smith stared at both of them extended on the slope of Redclyffe Hill.
It was fortunate for the Bounder that he was quick upon the uptake. He had, half by accident, though wholly by intention, knocked the Fifth-form man down. What would happen to him when the Fifth-form man got up again was awful to contemplate.
Smithy had a few seconds. He made the most of them. Hardly one second after Coker had rolled, Smithy jumped at the sprawling bike.
He whirled it up from the ground, whirled it round, and flung himself into the saddle.
He did not even trouble to find the pedals. They were rather far off for him, anyway: as Coker's big machine was to Smithy rather like Smithy's own machine to Bunter. The hill was steep, and the Bounder's way lay downhill to Courtfield. He shot away, bunched on the bike: and was

whistling downhill by the time Coker sat up. He was out of reach long before Coker got on his feet.

"Here—stop—get off my bike—my hat!" Coker spluttered. "Bring that bike back, you young villain! I say! Great pip! I—I'll pulverise you!"

Horace Coker could hardly believe that a Lower-School junior could have the nerve to whisk off on his bike, under his very nose. But unbelievable as it was, it had happened! Smithy was shooting down the hill on Coker's bike, going like the wind, leaving Coker to splutter.

"Stop! Come back!" roared Coker. "Do you hear? Stop!" He chased madly in pursuit.

Coker's long legs covered the ground rapidly. But even Coker's long legs were not equal to whirling wheels. Smithy shot away from him.

Having found the pedals with his toes, and having nothing to do but free-wheel downhill, Smithy went on his way quite comfortably, glad of the lift, and vanished round a bend of the road.

Coker came to a breathless halt, in a state of wrath, compared with which the celebrated and direful wrath of Achilles was merely a momentary spot of mild irritation.

"I—I—-I'll——!" gasped Coker.

He whirled round to stride up the hill. His idea was to bag a bike from Potter or Greene, and carry on the chase.

But Potter and Greene were a good distance ahead by that time, grinding on and up to Redclyffe.

"Hold on! Stop! Potter! Greene! I want one of those bikes! Hold on! Stop!" shouted Coker.

Probably they were out of hearing, even of Coker's powerful voice. If they were not out of hearing, they understudied the Dying Gladiator, who heard but heeded not! They did not look round. They plugged on up the hill, and Coker, his feelings growing deeper and deeper, had to give up his idea.

Potter and Greene disappeared over the hilly horizon. Coker, with deeper and deeper and deeper feelings, foot-slogged the rest of the way to Redclyffe, arriving there a tired and dusty Coker, in the worst temper ever.

## CHAPTER VI

## MORE BAD LUCK FOR BUNTER

"OH, crickey!" breathed Billy Bunter. He jumped.

Sitting in Smithy's armchair, in Smithy's study, with Smithy's cake on his fat knees, chunk following chunk on the downward path, Billy Bunter had

been enjoying life.
In possession of a large plum cake and a Gargantuan appetite, Billy Bunter naturally forgot time and space. He also forgot Smithy.
He was reminded of him as he heard his voice outside the study.
"Seen Bunter, Skinner?"
Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, shot round to the study door in alarm. The Bounder, evidently, had come in. Judging by his voice, which had a very unpleasant tone in it, he was not in a good temper. Judging by his words, he wanted to see Bunter.
Bunter did not want to see Smithy. It was only too probable that Smithy was shirty about that incident with the bike. Least of all did he want to see Smithy now— in Smithy's study, with half Smithy's cake on his fat knees, and the other half parked in his capacious inside.
If Smithy had opened the study door he would have seen Bunter sitting there, in the very act of devouring his cake. But it did not occur to Smithy that Bunter might be in his study. He was inquiring after him, with only a shut door between!
"Oh, scissors!" gasped Bunter.
He jumped up from the armchair.
There was no escape from the study, with Herbert Vernon-Smith in the passage outside. And he might enter at any moment.
As the terrified fat Owl stood blinking at the door, he heard Skinner's reply from the passage.
"Yes, I spoke to him ten minutes ago. Isn't he in his study?"
"I've looked there!" growled the Bounder.
"Anything up?" asked Skinner.
"He bagged my bike! I'm going to boot him up the passage and back again. I've had a spill because of that fat tick. I'm going to give him the booting of his life."
"Beast!" breathed Bunter.
Bunter blinked wildly round the study. Then he backed behind the door. There was a chance, if a slim one, of dodging out if the Bounder did not see him when he entered. The door would hide him when it opened, if only for a moment or two.
There the fat Owl stood palpitating, with the remnant of Smithy's cake under a fat arm. Even at that thrilling moment, Bunter did not forget the cake. Bunter often forgot things—indeed the things he forgot were innumerable—but he never forgot cake.
The door-handle rattled, and the door flew open. It banged on Bunter behind it, and he barely repressed a squeak.
It was like Smithy, when he was in a temper, to hurl the door open like

that. Having hurled it open, he stumped in.
Only too clearly, the Bounder was in a bad temper, as Bunter had already guessed. Smithy's adventures that afternoon did not conduce to equanimity.
He had derived some satisfaction from getting hold of Coker's bike, and leaving Coker stranded. That bike had given him a useful lift down to Courtfield, where Mr. Parker, at the cycle-shop, had engaged to collect the wreck from Redclyffe Hill and repair the same. After which, Coker's bike had provided him with another lift, back to the school. But Smithy had too many aches and pains lingering all over him to be in a good temper. And the spill on Redclyffe Hill had damaged his self-esteem, as well as his bike and his person. He blamed Billy Bunter for that spill, not his own tendency to swank. He was as anxious to see Bunter as Bunter was not to see him.
He did not walk into the study. He stamped into it. Bunter, behind the wide-open door, palpitated. If Smithy went across the study before closing the door, the fat Owl had a chance.
Smithy did. The first object that caught his eye was the wide-open cupboard door. He crossed to the cupboard, staring at it.
Then Bunter heard his voice.
"My hat! Who's been here?"
That somebody had been there, a glance revealed. A large cake was missing, and there was a sprinkling of crumbs on the floor, where Bunter had stood at the cupboard devouring tarts and dough-nuts. As Tom Redwing, who shared that study with Smithy, was up at Hawkscliff that afternoon, it was clear that some extraneous and surreptitious person had been in No. 4 Study. And that the Bounder guessed, without difficulty, the identity of that extraneous and surreptitious person was revealed by his next ejaculation.
"That fat scoundrel!"
"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter, inaudibly.
When tuck was missing in a Remove study, fellows naturally thought of Billy Bunter. Smithy's face, already very expressive, grew more so as he stood staring into the denuded cupboard.
Billy Bunter peered from behind the door. Smithy, standing at the cupboard, had his back to the doorway. Was this Bunter's chance?
The fat Owl had a momentary glimpse of Smithy's back as he stood at the cupboard. Then Smithy moved, and Bunter popped back into hiding, his fat head disappearing behind the door like that of a tortoise into its shell.
Smithy moved across to the armchair. He stood staring at that, and the crumbs with which it was adorned.

"By gad! I'll burst him! That fat villain! He had my cake, and sat here to scoff it! "I—I—I'll——." Words seemed to fail Smithy.
Bunter, behind the door, could not see him: but Smithy's ejaculations showed him where he was—standing at the armchair. His back would be turned doorward. The fat Owl projected a fat head again beyond the cover of the door, and blinked cautiously out.
This was his chance. Palpitating, hardly daring to breathe, Bunter emerged from behind the door on tiptoe. If only the beast did not turn his head till Bunter had tiptoed out of the study—.
But he did!
Smithy, looked round. Then he jumped. Bunter had bagged his bike, and, as Smithy had no doubt, bagged his cake—and he was yearning to see Bunter! Now, unexpectedly, he saw him—creeping round the door that had hidden him, to bolt. For a second Smithy stared blankly at the unexpected sight—then he rushed across the study.
"Oh!" gasped Bunter.
Bunter did not stop to think. He had no time to think:
and thinking was not his long suit, anyway. As the Bounder charged at him. Bunter hurled the cake—and that sudden missile caught the Bounder under the chin, and stopped his charge. He staggered.
Bunter had a moment! He made the most of it! As the cake fell in fragments round the tottering Bounder, Bunter leaped through the doorway and fled. The roar of wrath from No. 4 Study spurred him on.
To reach No. 7 Study, dart in, slam the door, and turn the key, would have been the work of a few seconds. It was just unfortunate for Billy Bunter, and for Fisher T. Fish, that the latter was coming down the passage at that moment.
Bunter did not even see him. And Fisher T. Fish, naturally, was not expecting a fat figure to leap suddenly out of a study and hurl itself along the passage. They met with a crash.
"Oh!" spluttered Bunter.
"Gee-whiz!" stuttered Fisher T. Fish.
A fat figure and a bony one bumped on the floor. The fat one sprawled breathless. The bony one sat up dizzily.
"Say, whadyer know?" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "You fat clam, what's this game? You bone-headed piecan—you pie-faced mugwump—ow——wow!"
Forth from No. 4 Study, like a lion from his lair, rushed the Bounder.
What happened next, Billy Bunter remembered for days afterwards. How many kicks he collected before he escaped, he could not have calculated, without going into high figures. It seemed to him about a million. After which, Smithy went back to his study, feeling better. Billy Bunter, to

judge by the sounds of woe that floated from a distance, was feeling worse.

Hardly daring to breath, Bunter emerged from behind the door on tiptoe.

## CHAPTER VII

## BILLY BUNTER'S BIG IDEA

"The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune Were in six parts, and every part a ducat."

"OH, my hat!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Isn't that right?" asked Bob Cherry.
"Not quite!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "I think you're mixing Hamlet with the Merchant of Venice."
"The mixfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"I say, you fellows—!"
"Scat!" said five voices in unison.
Harry Wharton and Co. were in No. 1 Study, after class. The previous day they had had no time for rehearsal: since when, William Wibley had been decidedly "shirty," and had even threatened to chuck "Hamlet" altogether. The Famous Five did not like to see old Wib in a shirty state:

and they really were more or less keen on a performance of Shakespeare. A Shakespearean performance was rather ambitious for the Remove Dramatic Society: and they were prepared to back up Wibley in making a success of it. So there they were in No. I Study, sorting out their scripts, with the intention of putting in the next hour mugging up their parts. Judging by the specimen Bob Cherry had just delivered, some mugging up was needed.
They had absolutely no use for William George Bunter at the moment, and they all said "Scat" together as his fat face and glimmering spectacles looked in at the study door.
Bunter, however, did not scat. He rolled in.
"We're busy, Bunter," Harry Wharton pointed out.
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"Travel!" said Johnny Bull.
"Oh, really, Bull—."

"The superfluousness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"It's not a feed, Bunter," explained Bob Cherry. "Nothing to interest you. Run away and play."
"And shut the door after you," added Nugent.
Billy Bunter gave an impatient grunt, It was just like these fellows to be thinking of their own affairs, when Bunter's required attention.
"I say, you fellows, do let a fellow speak," he exclaimed, irritably. "You're all jaw, like a sheep's head! I'm going to have a new bike!"
"Good," said Bob Cherry, "and good-bye!"
"I've wanted a new bike for a long time," went on Bunter. "I had to walk to Cliff House and back again yesterday. I could have cut over to-day after class, to see whether that hamper's come—I mean to see my sister Bessie—if I had a bike! A chap needs a bike. I've explained that in my letters home a lot of times, but the pater hardly ever answers my letters, and when he does, he never mentions it."
Bunter shook a fat head sorrowfully.
"Awfully good of you to tell us all about it," said Bob. "Now go and tell some other chaps. Where's my script?"
"Oh, really, Cherry—."
"How many thousands of my poorest subjects—is that where I begin, Wharton?"
"Not unless we're going to do Henry the Fourth instead of Hamlet," answered the Captain of the Remove.
"For goodness sake, chuck that rot for a bit," said Bunter, peevishly. "I

think when a chap's going to get a new bike, his pals might be willing to give him a spot of advice."
The Famous Five were not deaf to that appeal. They knew all about bikes, and certainly they were willing to give the fat Owl the benefit of their knowledge, if he Wanted it.
"Oh, all right," said Harry Wharton. "Carry on, Bunter."
"Well, look at this," said Bunter. He produced a newspaper, a copy of the Courtfield and Friardale Gazette, and held it up, indicating an advertisement with a fat finger.
Harry Wharton and Co. looked. They read:

SPLENDID VALUE.
The Speedster Bicycle
ONLY SEVEN GUINEAS,
Parker's.
Courtfield.

"What do you fellows think of that?" asked Bunter,
"O.K.," said Bob, "I've seen them at Parker's shop in Courtfield, and they're jolly good machines. Parker's a straight man, too. You couldn't do better."
"Well, I think the machine's all right," said Bunter "I've decided to have it, in fact. But—." He paused.
The Famous Five smiled. The "Speedster" at sever guineas was undoubtedly good value, perhaps even splendid value, as the advertisement stated. But if William George Bunter of the Remove was in possession of the necessary seven guineas for the purchase thereof, he was in a happy financial state never known heretofore. Few Greyfriars fellows were in a position to expend such a sum, without assistance from the old folks at home. And the fact that Mr. Bunter, at Bunter Villa, carefully avoided the subject did not look promising for Bunter.
"It's a bit awkward," went on Bunter. "I want a bike— and that's a good bike for the money—only—only——.'
"Only Parker would want to be paid for it!" suggested Johnny Bull, sarcastically. "Quite awkward."
"The awkwardness is terrific."
"Well, the pater hasn't said that he won't pay for it, said Bunter, "He hasn't said that he will, but he hasn't said that he won't. He just said nothing about it at all. That's what I want your advice about. Suppose I get the bike, and send the bill home."
"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob, "You'd better put your pater wise first, you fat ass."

"Yes, rather," said Harry Wharton,
"The ratherfulness is preposterous."
"Well, a fellow has to have a bike," argued Bunter "And if he just gets it, and sends the bill home, that's what the French call a fat accomplice, isn't it?"
"A whatter?" gasped Bob,
"A fat accomplice—that means an accomplished fact explained Bunter, with an air of superior knowledge.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You see, with the bike here, and the bill sent home, the pater will be faced with a fat accomplice—."
"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Famous Five.
"Oh, really, you fellows—."
"Perhaps you mean a fait accompli!" gasped Harry Wharton.
"If you think you can teach me French, Wharton—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, do stop cackling! Look here, I'm going to get the bike, and send the bill home, and then it will be a fat accomplice—or an accomplished fact, if you don't understand French," said Bunter, scornfully. "Now, what do you fellows think of the idea?"
Billy Bunter grinned inquiringly at the grinning five. Evidently it was the fat Owl's idea to face Mr. Bunter with a fait accompli, and leave him to deal with the cycle merchant in Courtfield. This, apparently, seemed to Bunter a very, bright idea. But he seemed to have a lingering doubt. He wanted the advice of the Famous Five, not about the bike itself, but about this rather extraordinary means of becoming the possessor of one!
"Think it's a good idea?" he asked. "I don't see what the pater can do except pay up, when it's a fat accomplice."
"You utter chump!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't do anything of the kind. I don't know how any fellow's pater would deal with a fait accompli of that kind—and I shouldn't like to try the experiment."
"Wash it out, you awful ass," said Bob Cherry.
"Forget all about it," said Frank Nugent.
"The forgetfulness all about it is the proper caper, my esteemed idiotic Bunter."
"Chuck it at that, you silly owl!" growled Johnny Bull.
Sniff from Bunter.
He had asked the advice of the Famous Five. But, like many people who ask advice, Bunter wanted that advice to coincide with what he had already decided to do. Adverse advice was only irritating.
If that's all you've got to say, I needn't have taken the trouble to come

and ask you," he snapped. "I've had that from Toddy already."
Then Toddy gave you good advice," said Harry. For goodness sake, Bunter, don't think of such a silly trick. Your pater would be fearfully wild if he got a bill for seven guineas that he doesn't want to pay."
"Well, I don't mind if he's wild, so long as he pays the bill," explained Bunter. "That's what's important, you know:"
"He mightn't pay it," said Bob.
"Well, I don't see how he could help it, when it was a fat accomplice," said Bunter. "That's what I wanted your advice about. A fat accomplice is a thing you can't get out of, see? Don't you fellows think it will be all right?"
"No!" said the Famous Five, all together.
Snort, from Bunter.
"Fat lot of good asking your advice!" he snapped. "I might have known you hadn't any sense in this study! Yah!"
Billy Bunter revolved on his axis, and rolled doorward. Evidently he had no use for the advice he had received.
"Look here, Bunter—!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.
"Yah!" repeated Bunter.
"You fat ass—!"
Slam!
The study door closed, emphatically, after the fat Owl. Harry Wharton and Co. were left to mug up Hamlet, while Billy Bunter proceeded to get on with his remarkable scheme for getting a new bike, and facing his pater with a "fait accompli"—or, as he preferred to call it, a fat accomplice! It seemed probable that when Bunter had carried out that remarkable scheme, he might find his last state worse than his first!

## CHAPTER VIII

## ANOTHER HAMLET!

"HAMLET!" said Coker.
"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.
"Bedad!" said Fitzgerald.
"Us!" said Tomlinson.
There were six or seven Fifth-form men in Coker's study.
It was a meeting of the Fifth-form Stage Club. Naturally the meeting was held in Coker's study. Naturally Coker did most of the talking. Naturally he had cast himself for the part of Hamlet in the play they were going to produce. For the Fifth-form Stage Club was the work of Horace Coker's own hands. Coker was the beginning, the middle, and the end of that institution. And no earthly consideration would have induced Horace

Coker to admit that the Fifth-form Stage Club was merely an imitation of the Remove Dramatic Society. It was a fact that the R.D.S. had put the idea into Coker's head. But when Coker did not like a fact, he preferred not to see it.

Coker believed that he could act. It was a touching belief—as touching as his belief that he could play cricket.

In such matters as cricket, Coker's belief in his own wonderful powers was ruthlessly disregarded. Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, would no more have played Coker in the Form team than Wingate, the captain of the school, would have played him in the first eleven. In the Stage Club it was quite different.

There Coker was monarch of all he surveyed.

Nobody, excepting Coker, paid anything. The whole thing was run by Coker, at Coker's expense—or, to be more accurate, his Aunt Judy's. A good many of the Fifth were members. They liked the meetings in Coker's study. There was generally a hamper from Aunt Judy in that study, and Coker was a generous and hospitable fellow. In times of dearth, a free run of Coker's hampers from home was an undoubted attraction. Potter and Greene and their friends in the Fifth did not exactly admit that the chief consideration in the matter was the loaves and fishes. It did not even occur to Coker. He fed his friends well because he was a lavish, hospitable sort of fellow, and had no suspicions.

He threw his weight about, because that was his way. But he was not conscious of that either. Being the fellow who knew best in all matters, it was natural that he should have no use for argument or carping criticism. The Stage Club gave him his head.

But they seemed to get a sort of shock when Coker announced, not only that he had decided on a performance of Shakespeare, but that he had assigned himself the role of Hamlet.

Half-a-dozen fellows stared. Fitzgerald turned a laugh into a cough just in time. Tomlinson stopped with a doughnut half-way to his mouth, and gazed over it at Coker.

Coker was conscious of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the assembled company. He frowned.

"Hamlet!" he repeated firmly. "I've been looking over the part, and I fancy it will suit me down to the ground."

"Oh!" said Potter.

"What do you mean by 'oh' exactly, Potter?" inquired Coker, coldly.

"Oh! Nothing."

"Think we're up to a Shakespeare play, Coker?" murmured Fitzgerald.

"Well, frankly, no, at present," answered Coker. "I shall be all right, but

you fellows will need a lot of coaching. Well, I'm going to coach you."
"Howly mother av Moses! I—I—I mean, that's jolly good of you, Coker."
"Well, I don't mind how much trouble I take," said Coker. "I want the thing to be a success. I have a sort of gift as an actor, but naturally you fellows haven't—it's not the sort of thing that comes everybody's way. Keep your eyes on me in rehearsal, and you'll pick it all up all right."
"Help!" murmured Greene.
"What did you say, Greene?"
"I said carry on, old chap! We're all listening."
"I think it's up to us to do Shakespeare," went on Coker. "There's a gang of fags in the school, I believe, who potter about doing amateur theatricals in the Rag. We don't want to be classed with them. Shakespeare puts things on a higher footing altogether. And if you fellows feel that it's a bit above your weight, you've only got to remember that one really good actor can pull a show through."
"Who's the one?" asked Fitzgerald.
"Me!" said Coker.
"Oh, howly smoke!"
"If that means that you think I can't play Hamlet, Terence Fitzgerald—!"
"Faith, and I've no doubt you could play his head off, Coker," said Fitzgerald, amicably, "and by the same token, are ye keeping that cold chicken in the hamper?"
"Eh! Not at all! Help yourself, old chap."
The cold chicken was large and plump and delectable. It seemed to reconcile the Fifth-form Stage Club to the idea of Coker playing the Prince of Denmark.
Coker went on talking. The Stage Club had no objection to Coker talking while they ate cold chicken.
"There's a lot in Shakespeare," said Coker. "Fellows think he's awful rot because we get him in class. But there's a lot in him really. Take the soliloquy in Hamlet, for example. I've been mugging it up, as it comes into my part—I've got it written out here somewhere—."
Coker searched for his script, while the Stage Club demolished the cold chicken. He found it by the time the chicken had disappeared. There was a large cake to follow: and it followed the chicken, in segments, while Coker looked at his script. Coker's handwriting often puzzled Mr. Prout—sometimes it puzzled Coker himself a little.
"I haven't memorised this yet," Coker explained, "I'll speak it from the script. I won't give you the lot—just a specimen to show how it should be done. Just listen carefully, and pick up tips about elocution and delivery, see?"

The Stage Club ate cake, while Coker scanned his script. It was rather difficult to make out all the scribbled words, especially as some of them were smudged. But Coker was not the man to hesitate. He went ahead with confidence.
"To be or not to be, that is the question,
Whether the cobbler—."
"Cobbler?" gasped Potter.
"No—nobler—there's a smudge. Don't interrupt Potter. It cramps a fellow's style. Just listen."
"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The wings and sparrows of outrageous fortune."
"The whatter?" stuttered Greene.
"The wings and sparrows of outrageous fortune—,"
repeated Coker, frowning.
"Sure that's right?" gurgled Fitzgerald.
"Well, the writing's a bit blurred, but I think it's all right. There doesn't seem much sense in it, but of course you couldn't expect much in Shakespeare. But don't interrupt—you spoil the whole thing by interrupting."
"Sure, I wouldn't like to spoil a good thing. Carry on, Coker, old man."
Coker carried on.

"The wings and sparrows of outrageous fortune,
"Or to take arms against a sea of bubbles—."

"Isn't it a sea of troubles?" asked Price, with a wink at the other devourers of Aunt Judy's cake.
"No, it isn't," snapped Coker. "You're a bit of a fathead, Pricey, but you ought to know better than that. There's bubbles in the sea—not troubles, that I've ever heard of. Perhaps you have, though," added Coker, sarcastically.
"Well, I thought—."
"Don't you start thinking, Pricey, it's not in your line. Just listen!" And Coker boomed on.

"Or to take arms against a sea of bubbles, And by composing, mend them"

"And by composing, mend them!" said Potter, almost dazedly. "Isn't it 'and by opposing, end them'?"
"No! That would be rot."
"Poor old Shakespeare," murmured Fitzgerald. "He didn't know it was rot! Pity he was before Coker's time. Coker could have given him the tip.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Don't cackle while I'm doing Hamlet's soliloquy," said Coker, testily. "This isn't comic—it's a very serious soliloquy. Shut up. Now, I'll give you that bit over again—listen this time without interrupting."
The cake was finished. But there still remained some dough-nuts. The Stage Club proceeded with the doughnuts, while Coker proceeded with the soliloquy. They let him run on without interrupting this time. Uninterrupted, it was sooner over.

"To be or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The wings and sparrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of bubbles
And by composing, mend them!"

"There!" said Coker. "That's just a sample—but it will show you how Shakespeare ought to be handled. You can pick up the hang of the thing by keeping an eye on me. Now, if you fellows have finished feeding, we'll get the parts out."
The fellows had finished feeding. There was nothing left in the hamper, and the table was bare. Fitzgerald was edging towards the door. Tomlinson was looking at it. Price looked at his watch.
"By gum! Hilton will be waiting for me!" he ejaculated.
"Never mind Hilton," said Coker, testily. "We've got to arrange the parts. Look here, Pricey—."
Pricey did not look there. He departed in haste. His interest in the Bard of Avon seemed to have disappeared with the last doughnut.
Coker snorted,
"Don't any more of you go," he snapped. "It's another hour to prep, and that's none too much time for me to tell you what you've got to do, and show you how to do it."
"My lines!" exclaimed Fitzgerald, suddenly.
"You'll learn your lines later, after we've written out the parts—."
"I mean my lines for Prout—."
"Blow Prout!"
"Well, he's our beak, you know, and he will be shirty if I don't hand them in before prep."
"Look here, Fitz—."
Fitz, like Pricey, failed to "look there." He departed in haste.
"Blessed if I hadn't forgotten that problem I've got to do for Lascelles!" exclaimed Tomlinson. "I shall have to cut, Coker."
And he cut, without waiting for a reply. Jones major followed him out,

without even proffering lines or a problem as a reason for so doing.
Potter and Greene remained, exchanging glances.
"Well, my hat!" said Coker. "I like that!"
"Not much good going on with it now," remarked Potter, casually. "And—and I forgot I've got to see Blundell, about the cricket—."
"By gum! So had I!" exclaimed Greene. "He'll be Waiting for us in the games-study. Come on,"
"Look here—!" roared Coker.
He roared at two departing backs.
The meeting of the Stage Club had broken up quite suddenly. Coker, who had been prepared to expend a whole hour of his valuable time in explaining, instructing, and coaching, was left on his own. Further business of the Fifth-form Stage Club was unavoidably postponed—probably till Coker had another hamper!

## CHAPTER IX

## BILLY AND A LITTLE BILL!

"How many L's in 'wonderful,' Toddy?"
"One for choice."
"Sure?" asked Billy Bunter, doubtfully.
"Sort of," grinned Peter. "Of course, you could put in two if you liked—or three! Or half-a-dozen."
"Well, look here, look it out in the dick, will you, old chap?"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peter.
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You can't spell for toffee," snapped Bunter. "I want to get this right. You can't be too careful when you're sending a bill home. I don't suppose the pater will be pleased, anyhow—he hates bills. You should hear him on Income Tax!"
It was the day after Billy Bunter had propounded his remarkable scheme to the Famous Five. That remarkable scheme was now in progress.
So far, it had been quite easy. Indeed it proved so easy—so far! —that Bunter really wondered why he had not thought of it before. He had wanted a new bike for a long time. Now he had one.
All that had been needed—so far!—was to wait till Mr. Quelch was at a safe distance from his study, in order to borrow his telephone. A phone call to Parker's in Courtfield had done the trick.
Mr. Parker, naturally, had no doubts in the matter. He was more than willing to supply a bicycle to a Greyfriars fellow who ordered one. Prompt delivery being required, Mr. Parker had delivered promptly. Mr. Parker's young man had cycled over to the school, leading the new Speedster by

the handle-bars, and delivered the same—accompanied, naturally, by Mr. Parker's bill.

Had that little bill been marked "C.O.D.," difficulties might have accrued, But at a school like Greyfriars Mr. Parker, naturally, was not particular about cash on delivery. In fact, Bunter was in class when the bike arrived, and it was handed to Gosling. After class, Bunter received the bike and the bill.

The bike he was very glad to see. The bill afforded him no pleasure. It was likely to afford Mr. Bunter, if possible, even less! But it had to go to Mr. Bunter. Bunter's own financial resources, at the moment, were limited to three- halfpence. It was true that he was expecting a postal-order: but that was no present help in time of need.

So far, all had gone well. Bunter had his new bike. Now, when he wanted a jigger, he did not have to risk a booting by borrowing some other fellow's. All that remained was to send the bill home, and hope for the best. So there was Billy Bunter, in No. 7 Study, wrinkling his fat brows over his letter home. He wanted to be as tactful as possible with that letter. He did not want any mistakes in spelling—a subject upon which his parent had sometimes made quite sharp remarks.

Peter Todd did not seem disposed to look out "wonderful" in the dictionary. Bunter was, of course, too lazy to do so himself. So he had to chance it.

"If you're quite sure there's only one L, Peter—."

"Quite, ass."

Bunter was not sure that Toddy had it right. But he let it go at that, and wrote down "wunderfool"—with only one L.

"How many EE's in 'machine,' Peter?"

"One, fathead."

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Bunter, peevishly. "What I mean is, are there only two, or three?"

"Great pip!"

"I believe it has an E at the end," said Bunter. "Don't you think so?"

"Ha, ha! Bank on that," agreed Peter.

"Well, that makes three," said Bunter. "Not much good asking you anything about orthology, Peter."

"About what?" ejaculated Peter.

"Orthology—spelling," explained Bunter.

"You don't happen to mean orthography?" asked Peter.

"No, I don't. And stop cackling," snapped Bunter. "You told me the other day that there was only one N in 'money'! Fat lot of use asking you anything."

And Bunter, despising further assistance from Peter Todd, went on his way unaided with his letter home.
When he had finished it, he surveyed it with considerable satisfaction. It ran:

Dear Father,

I have not herd from you in repply to my last letter, so I rite these phew lines to hoap that you are kwite well.

You will be pleezed to here that I am getting on well in class, all threw hard wurk, and that Mr. Quelch has prazed me a good deal lately. He is partikularly pleezed with my spelling. Since you toald me last time to be more kareful with it I have been extreemly kareful, and whennever I am in dowt I look out the wurd in the dickshunary at wunce, to make shore:

Yor affectshonate Sun,

William.

P.S.—I have bort the bike I menshuned and enklose the bill. It is a wunderfool macheene for the munny wich is very cheep.

Bunter could not help feeling pleased with that composition. His great gift of tact was well displayed in it.
Mr. Bunter, on reading that letter, would find first of all an affectionate concern for his health, which could hardly fail to make a good impression to begin with. Next he would learn that his hopeful son had been working hard, and winning the commendation of his form-master. Next, that his advice to his son had been taken to heart.
By the time Mr. Bunter had read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested all that, he would come to the postscript, which would not then be too much of a shock to him—at least, Bunter hoped that it wouldn't.
Anyhow, Mr. Bunter would be faced with a fait accompli. That really was the unscrupulous fat Owl's trump card, Not that Billy Bunter realised that there was anything unscrupulous about this. Billy Bunter's powerful intellect moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.
"I fancy that's all right," said Bunter, complacently. "I say, Peter—."
"Well, what next?" asked Peter. "How many K's in 'cat,' or what?"
"Beast! I mean, can you lend me a stamp, old chap?" Peter Todd produced a stamp. Billy Bunter folded up the bill in the letter, placed it in an

envelope, sealed and addressed the same, and stamped it. Then he rolled away to catch the post with the letter.

Then, in quite a happy and satisfied state, he rolled away to the bike-shed to wheel out his new bike. Now that he had a bike, there was time after class to cut across to Cliff House, and Bunter was keenly interested to learn whether Bessie's hamper had yet arrived.

Two Remove fellows were at the doorway of the bike shed—Herbert Vernon-Smith and his chum Tom Redwing. The Bounder was scowling.

"Look here, you can borrow a jigger to come out, Smithy," Redwing was saying. "Any fellow would lend you his."

"I'm not going to borrow a machine," grunted the Bounder, "I never lent mine."

"Well, that's right, I suppose," said Redwing.

"It's all that fat fool's fault," growled the Bounder, with a scowl at Billy Bunter as he rolled up.

He stalked away, still scowling.

Bunter grinned, as he roIled in for his machine. He had a bike now—a brand-new bike—and Smithy hadn't one— which was a change: quite a pleasant change, in fact.

Smithy's bike was at Parker's for repairs. He had to wait a week for its return. A fellow who had always curtly refused to lend his jigger could hardly start as a borrower of jiggers, and Smithy hated asking favours, anyway. So for the present he was bikeless. Which rather amused Billy Bunter.

Bunter ran his machine out quite gaily.

It was a spotless and speckless new machine when Bunter pedalled away on it. It was neither spotless nor speckless when he came back. Bunter had floundered in several puddles, and contrived somehow to buckle a mudguard.

He did not, of course, think of cleaning down his machine when he put it up. The way Billy Bunter looked after a bike made it probable that his new machine would soon bear a close resemblance to his old one! —perhaps even before that "fait accompli" had caused Mr. Bunter to settle the bill. If, indeed, Mr. Bunter did settle the bill, which was by no means certain yet.

## BLACK MONDAY!

## CHAPTER X

"Oh!

Six or seven fellows looked round at Billy Bunter.

It was Monday morning.
When the Remove came out in break, some of them went to look at the letter-rack: among them, naturally, William George Bunter.
Bunter was not only expecting a postal-order, which was his perpetual state: but he was expecting a reply to his letter home.
Often and often there was no letter for Bunter when he looked. But on this particular Monday morning there was a letter. It was addressed to him in the parental hand.
Bunter opened it hopefully. His pater, at least, had replied. There existed a bare possibility of a remittance in the letter, as well as a reply.
That possibility faded out as the fat Owl unfolded the parental missive. There was no remittance. But there was an enclosure, though it was not a postal order, and bore no resemblance whatever to a postal-order. Billy Bunter blinked at it as he took it out.

PARKER'S CYCLE STORES,
Courtfield.
1 Speedster Bicycle. £7.7.0.
Terms Cash.

It was, in fact, Parker's bill, which Billy Bunter had despatched to his honoured parent for payment. It was not receipted. It had not been paid. Mr. Bunter had simply returned it, just as it was, and just as if he wasn't interested in it.
Having blinked at it, Bunter blinked at his pater's letter. It was then that he ejaculated "Oh!"
He gazed at that letter. His plump jaw dropped. His little round eyes, behind his big round spectacles, looked like those of a startled owl. Dismay was registered in Bunter's fat face. So startled and so dismayed did he look, that other fellows glanced round at him, Harry Wharton and Co., after ascertaining that there was nothing for them, were going out into the sunny quad, when Bunter's dismayed "Oh!" drew their attention to the perturbed fat Owl. They paused.
"Anything up, Bunter?" asked Harry.
"Oh, lor'!" said Bunter.
"Bad news, old chap?" asked Bob Cherry, sympathetically.
"Yes—awful!"
"Sorry, kid," said Bob, and the Famous Five gathered round Bunter. The fat Owl's reply, added to his dolorous aspect, seemed to indicate bad trouble—some sort of disaster in the home circle: and if it was that, the

chums of the Remove were prepared to be quite sympathetic.
"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, it— it's about my new bike."
"Oh!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Blow your bike, you fat ass! You looked as if it was something serious."
"So it is—jolly serious," said Bunter. "I—I thought the pater would pay for it, of course, when it was a fat accomplice—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"But—but he hasn't," gasped Bunter. "He's sent the bill back to me. And—and look what he says! Think that means that he ain't going to pay the bill at all?"
Bunter held up the parental letter.
The Famous Five looked at it.
Bunter's question really seemed quite unnecessary. Mr. Bunter's letter undoubtedly looked as if he wasn't going to pay that bill at all.

Dear William,
I scarcely understood your foolishness in purchasing an article for which you have no means of paying. I am certainly not in a position to meet any such unnecessary and unwarranted expenses.

I forbid you to send me any further communication whatever on the subject.

Your father,
W. S. Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "You've done it now, old fat man."
"The donefulness is terrific."
"Oh, lor'! I—I say, you fellows, you—you—-you think from that letter that the pater ain't going to pay for it?"
"Sort of," grinned Nugent.
"What did you expect, you fat chump?" growled Johnny Bull. "You've tried to rush your pater for a bike, and he isn't taking any. Serve you right."
"Beast!
"Well, Bunter can't help being a blithering idiot," said Bob Cherry.
"Blithering idiots are little pests—born, not made."
"But I say, you fellows, if the pater won't square the bill, what am I going

to do?" asked Bunter, distressfully.
"Well, you won't be able to do Parker's," said Bob. "You'll have to pay for that bike somehow."
"The payfulness is a deadly cert and a sine qua non," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"I say, you fellows, if you can lend me the money—."
"Gather round, and shell out your guineas, you men," said Bob. "How many of you have got seven guineas in your trousers pocket?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You fat chump," said Harry Wharton. "Parker might take something on account, and wait for the balance. How much have you got?"
"Twopence," said Bunter.
"Oh, my hat!"
"I—I'm expecting a postal-order," said Bunter. "In fact, I'm expecting more than one postal-order, from— from some of my titled relations, you know. If you fellows can lend me seven pounds six shillings and tenpence, I— I'll put up my twopence, and—and—I'll square when my postal-orders come—."
"Good-bye, Bunter."
"I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a chap's talking to you—Beasts!" hooted Bunter.
It was perhaps doubtful whether, had the Famous Five possessed seven pounds six shillings and tenpence, they would have felt disposed to invest that sum in a new bike for Bunter. But as their combined resources amounted to less than five shillings that morning, the question did not arise.
They went out into the quad, and Billy was left with his little bill and the parental letter. He was also left with a long and lugubrious face. That little bill had to be paid somehow, but the "how" was a deep mystery to Bunter.
His usual resource in hard times was to borrow, and in that line he had great skill. How many "tanners" and "bobs" and even half-crowns he extracted from other Remove fellows in the course of a term, he hardly knew, but he knew that the number was considerable. But guineas were a very different proposition. Guineas were things that fellows couldn't lend if they would, and wouldn't if they could. A fellow who set out to borrow seven pounds seven shillings in a junior form at school certainly had some uphill work before him.
"I say, Mauly," Billy Bunter spotted Lord Mauleverer in the distance, and rolled hurriedly after him. "I say, Mauly, stop a minute."
"Oh, dear!" sighed Lord Mauleverer. He stopped.

"I say, Mauly, old chap, will you lend me—!"
"How much?" said Mauly. slipping his hand into his trousers pocket.
"Seven guineas—."
Lord Mauleverer jumped.
"Wha-a-a-t!" he ejaculated.
"Seven guineas, old chap. You see—I say, Mauly! Look here—,"
But Lord Mauleverer was gone.
"Beast!" groaned Bunter.
He rolled out into the quad There he blinked—not hopefully—at Herbert Vernon-Smith. Smithy had tons of money—he was well known to have fivers in his wallet sometimes. The Bounder could have parted with seven guineas—if so disposed. But it was unlikely that he would be so disposed. Really, it was a lot to ask! Even Bunter realised that.
However, the fat Owl rolled up to him. He received a black look as he did so. Even yet the Bounder was feeling some twinges from that crash on Redclyffe Hill, which, justly or unjustly, he attributed to Bunter. The fat Owl was not "persona grata" in that quarter.
"I say, Smithy—!" bleated Bunter.
"Roll away, fathead," was the polite reply.
"But I say, old chap, I'm sorry about your bike. You haven't got a bike to ride now," said Bunter,.
"All your fault, you fat ditherer," snapped Smithy, "Get out."
"What I mean is, I've got a new bike, and I—I'll lend it to you whenever you like, old fellow."
Vernon-Smith stared at him. He was surprised by that generous offer. He had no idea of accepting it: Billy Bunter was not a fellow to whom he cared to be under an obligation. But he looked a little less black.
"You'll want a bike, if you're going up to Hawkscliff with Redwing on Wednesday," went on Bunter. "I happened to hear you mention it, old chap. Well, take mine."
Smithy looked still less black. He did want a bike on Wednesday afternoon, and he hated the idea of asking any fellow to lend him one. And here was Bunter, fairly pushing one at him—a new bike, too.
"If you mean that, Bunter—," he said.
"Of course I do, old fellow! I'll be jolly glad," said Bunter, "Take my new bike on Wednesday. Use it just as if it were your own, old boy. And I—I say, Smithy, I'm in a bit of a difficulty at the moment."
The Bounder burst into a laugh. He thought he saw, "Cough it up," he said. "You'll lend me your bike, if I lend you five bob. Is that it? Well, it's a go—all right."
"Nunno! Not at all! I—I don't mean that—," stammered Bunter. "I—I don't

want you to lend me five bob, Smithy. I—I want you to lend me seven guineas—."
"What!" yelled the Bounder.
"You—you see, I expected the pater to pay for the bike, and he hasn't, and—and Parker's want to be paid, so—so—if you'll lend me the seven guineas—."
"You blithering owl!"
Vernon-Smith stalked away.
It had been a very faint hope. Now it had dissolved into thin air.
Billy Bunter, as a rule, haunted the tuck-shop in break, If he had any money, he "blued" the same on edibles. If he hadn't, he attached himself to fellows who had. But on this particular Monday morning Bunter forgot even the tuck-shop. It was "Black Monday" for Bunter. He had a new bike—that was all right, so far as it went. And he had a bill for seven guineas—which was far from all right. Parker's, no doubt, would wait a few days—at least a day or two—but their terms, so plainly stated on their bill, were cash! Neither the twopence in Bunter's pocket, nor the postal-orders he was expecting, would satisfy Mr. Parker. Mr. Parker required the sum of seven guineas for goods delivered, and if Mr. Parker did not receive the sum of seven guineas, trouble was indicated.
How Billy Bunter was going to meet that trouble, he had not, so far, the faintest idea. On that subject his mind was a perfect blank, He found no solution during break:
and when the bell rang for third school, it was a doleful and dismal Owl that rolled into the Reform form-room— and if Mr. Quelch, in these troublous circumstances, expected Billy Bunter to give any attention to lessons, Mr. Quelch was disappointed.
From the bottom of his fat heart, Billy Bunter repented him of that bright idea of getting a new bike by facing his respected pater with a "fait accompli." But repentance, as it usually does, came too late, It was the blackest of Black Mondays for the unhappy Owl of the Remove.

## CHAPTER XI

## BIKE FOR SALE

"TODDY, old chap."
"Prep!" said Toddy.
"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Toddy. I've got something more important than prep to think about," exclaimed Billy Bunter, exasperated.
"I haven't," answered Toddy.
"Look here, Toddy—."

"Prep!"
"But I say—."
"Prep!"
"Beast!" howled Bunter.
Two fellows in No. 7 Study were busy with prep. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were deep in it. The third fellow in the study was not.
Preparation never had much attraction for Billy Bunter. Often he let it slide, and "chanced it" with Quelch. On this particular evening he was not likely to concentrate his powerful intellect on prep. Much more important matters filled his fat mind.
With a bill for seven guineas in one pocket, and two.. pence in the other, Billy Bunter couldn't really be expected to bother about prep.
Parker had to be paid for Bunter's new bike. That was an inescapable fact. Bunter couldn't pay him. That was another awful fact. His "fait accompli" had recoiled on his own fat head, and Bunter was in a fearful scrape. It would not have comforted him even had he realised that it was just what he deserved, But Bunter did not realise that in the least.
He bestowed a withering blink, through his big spectacles, on the top of Peter Todd's bent head. He bestowed another withering blink on Dutton's. Both of them were concentrated on prep, as if Quelch mattered and Bunter didn't.
"Talk about Pontius Pilate fiddling while Carthage was burning!" said Bunter bitterly.
"Ha. ha, ha!" roared Peter.
"Well, what are you cackling at now?" hooted Bunter. "Wasn't it Nero who fiddled while Rome was burning?" chuckled Peter.
"No, it wasn't! Fat lot you know about it," retorted Bunter. "But never mind that. I'm in a hole, Peter."
"You are," agreed Peter.
"Well, what's a fellow going to do?"
"Ask me another."
"I say, Peter, your bike's an awful old crock. Smithy calls it your musical box. Suppose you take the bike off my hands, and—and pay Parker! You'd like a new bike, Peter, old chap."
"I'd like it all right," admitted Peter. "Think Parker would wait till I'd saved up on pocket-money long enough to square?"
"Well, how long would that be?" asked Bunter, "Oh, a year or two—perhaps three."
"You silly ass!" yelled Bunter.
Now dry up, old man. Prep!"
"Blow prep! Look here, Peter, wouldn't your people stand you a new bike, if

you asked them?"
"If they would, old fat bean, I should have popped the question before this. Money's tight these days. I've got to carry on with the old musical box."
"Must be rotten to be poor," said Bunter, commiseratingly, forgetting his own troubles for a moment in sympathetic contemplation of Peter's. "I'll ask you to Bunter Court some day, Toddy, and let you see what a wealthy home is like."
"Why not cut off to your wealthy home on your new bike, and come back loaded with some of the wealth?" suggested Peter. "Then you could square Parker, and have something left over to stand your whack. in the study, which you haven't done so far this term."
"Oh, really, Toddy—."
"Shut up, anyhow, and let a fellow get his prep done. I don't want a row with Quelch, if you do."
"Blow Quelch!" hooted Bunter.
"Blow him as hard as you like, if he'll let you. Now shut up."
Peter Todd resumed prep, under another withering glare from Bunter, That glare had no effect whatever on the top of Peter's head. He went on regardless. Bunter blinked at his other study-mate.
"I say, Dutton!" he squeaked.
Tom Dutton was deaf, and impervious to Bunter's fat squeaks. He did not look up. Bunter put on steam.
"I say, Dutton, old chap," he roared. Tom Dutton looked up.
"Eh! Did you speak?" he asked.
"I say, old chap, I want my pals to help me out," explained Bunter. "I've got a bill I can't meet."
"You don't have to eat a pill," answered Dutton, staring at him. "You just swallow it. Has the matron been giving you pills?"
"I didn't say pill—I said bill!" shrieked Bunter.
"Bill who?" asked Dutton.
"Oh, crikey! Not Bill anybody. A bill! Just at the moment it's one I can't meet. See?"
"I don't see why you can't eat your meat. I eat mine all right."
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter.
"Oh, shut up, Toddy! Look here, Dutton, old fellow—."
"You needn't bellow at me, Bunter. I'm not deaf. I can hear you all right if you don't mumble. No need to bellow."
"I didn't say bellow, old fellow—."
"Who's a yellow old fellow? What on earth are you talking about?" exclaimed Dutton, testily. "I don't know any yellow fellow, unless you mean

Wun Lung. What about him?"
"Oh, crumbs! I've got to pay a bill, and I want my pals to lend me some money, see?" howled Bunter.
"Well, I haven't got any honey. Have you, Peter?"
"Ha, ha! No!" gasped Peter.
"Not honey—money!" yelled Bunter.
"Nothing funny about honey that I know of. What's funny about it?" asked Dutton,
"Oh, scissors! Look here, you deaf ass—I mean, look here, old chap! I've got to raise some money. Will you lend me some money?"
"How can I, when I don't keep rabbits?" asked Dutton, "Rabbits!" gasped Bunter.
"Not that I'd lend you a bunny, if I had dozens," added Dutton. "You wouldn't take proper care of it. You're too lazy."
"Money!" yelled Bunter. "M-U-N-N-Y, money. Got that?"
"Eh! Oh! No! I haven't got any money," answered Dutton. "I wouldn't lend you any if I had! You haven't squared the half-crown I lent you last week. Look here, don't jaw while a fellow's doing his prep."
"Beast!
Prep went on in No. 7 Study, so far as two fellows were concerned. Billy Bunter, regardless of prep, and of Quelch in the morning, sat and pondered over his problem.
He had pondered over it a good deal already, without much result. He had, however, realised that he couldn't keep a bike for which he couldn't pay. He would gladly have got rid of the whole affair, by wheeling the bike back to Parker's—if there had been hope that Mr. Parker would. take back a muddy bike with a buckled mudguard and call off the transaction. Alternatively, he was prepared to pass on the bike to any Remove fellow who would take it and the bill along with it. Such a Remove fellow, however, seemed to need finding. Bunter had not found one yet.
"I say, Peter—," Bunter got going again. "O lux Dardaniae—," said Peter.
"Eh! What are you talking about?" snapped Bunter.
"Hector of Troy," answered Peter.
"You silly fathead, blow Hector of Troy. I say, Peter, I shall have to sell that bike."
"Spes O fidissima Teucrum—,"
"Beast!"
Peter grinned, and went on with Virgil. Billy Bunter, utterly uninterested in Hector or any other Trojan, dipped pen in ink, and proceeded to scrawl on a sheet of impot paper. He produced the following:

BIKE FOR SAIL!
Splendid Valew.
No. 7 Studdy.
Onley seven ginnis.

When prep was over, and the Remove fellows went down, Billy Bunter posted that notice on the wall in the Rag. Quite a number of fellows came to look at it. Most of them seemed to find it amusing. There was a good deal of laughter. But there were no offers for the bike.
When the Remove went to their dormitory that night, Bunter's new bike was still for sale.

## CHAPTER XII

## HELPING BUNTER OUT!

"HARRY, old chap—."
Harry Wharton laughed.
"Do you think Parker would take sixpence to settle his account, Bunter?" he asked.
"Eh! No! Of course, he wouldn't."
"Then it's no use calling me Harry old chap! I'm down to a tanner."
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
It was Tuesday. The sun had gone down on Billy Bunter's problem, and risen on it, unsolved. Bunter's financial state was now, in fact, worse than before: for he had expended his twopence.
"You see, the man's got to be paid," said Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove. "You know what these shopkeepers are—sordid! They think about nothing but money. If I don't pay him, he will make a fuss."
"Bank on that," agreed Harry.
"Of course, I'd pay him like a shot," said Bunter, "I'm not a fellow to owe money, as you know—."
"Ye gods!"
"Only I haven't any money," explained Bunter. "Well, I don't want Parker going to Quelch, or the Head! It would mean an awful row."
"Tremendous," assented Harry.
"I'm going to sell the bike," went on Bunter. "That's the only thing I can think of. It's tough—I want it. A fellow wants a bike! Still, it's got to be paid for, and that looks like the only way."
"You can't sell an article you haven't paid for," said Harry. "People go to

chokey for that sort of thing."
"Well, if I sell it for the seven guineas, and take the money straight to Parker, that will be all right, won't it?" asked Bunter.
"Um! Who's going to give shop price for a second hand bike?"
"'Tain't secondhand! It was new last Friday, and it's only Tuesday now," exclaimed Bunter, indignantly, "It's a bit muddy, but the fellow who buys it can clean it, I suppose, and it won't cost much for a new mudguard."
Harry Wharton stared at the fat Owl.
"So some fellow is to buy a muddy, buckled bike, for the price of a new one, and clean it himself, and pay for a new mudguard over and above?" he asked. "I can't imagine any fellow looking for a bargain like that."
"Well, I know fellows are selfish, and on the make," said Bunter. "But—but we've always been pals, haven't we, old chap?"
"First I've heard of it."
"Beast! I mean, look here, old chap. Never mind those lines now," added Bunter, irritably. He had cornered the captain of the Remove in his study, writing lines for Quelch. "I'm in a fix! I think a fellow's pals ought to help him out, when he's in a fix. That's why I thought of you, Harry, old fellow."
"Thanks! Now think of somebody else," said Harry. "I've got to get these lines done, Bunter. Shut the door after you."
"Your bike is getting a bit old, you know," continued Bunter. "Wouldn't you like a new bike, old chap?"
"My old bike's all right, thanks. Anyhow, sixpence wouldn't go far towards buying a new one," said Harry, laughing. "Now, roll off, old barrel. Quelch wants these lines before tea."
"But suppose you had a crash, like Smithy the other day, only worse," said Bunter, who had evidently been thinking this out. "Your uncle would buy you a new bike like a shot, wouldn't he?"
"Very likely he would! But I haven't had a crash, and I'm not going to have one."
"Well, you could, you know," urged Bunter. "You crash the old bike, and explain to Colonel Wharton that it's past repair, and—and he stands you a new bike. You buy mine! See?"
Harry Wharton laid down his pen, and gazed at the fat Owl across the study table. Bunter seemed rather to have taken his breath away.
"See the idea?" went on Bunter, eagerly. "It's as easy as falling off a form, really. You get a new bike for an old one, and I get clear of that man Parker. And, look here, I'll stand the new mudguard, when—when my postal-order comes. Nothing mean about me, I hope. What about it, old chap?"

"You fat villain—."
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"You unscrupulous porpoise—."
"I say, old chap—."
"Get out!" roared Wharton.
"Beast!"
Billy Bunter rolled rather hurriedly to the door. Harry Wharton seemed to be getting excited,—why, Bunter did not know. It was practically certain that, if Wharton's bike went West in a crash, his uncle would stand him a new machine. Bunter had pointed out a quite simple way of getting a new jigger for an old one! What Harry Wharton saw to object to, in that, Billy Bunter didn't know and couldn't guess.
Wharton, frowning, went on with his lines. Billy Bunter, having retreated as far as the door, stopped there. He stood blinking at the captain of the Remove, with an exasperated blink.
A few days ago, Bunter had been delighted to get his new bike. Now he was more anxious to get rid of it than he had ever been to possess it. But that bike was not to be got rid of. It was clinging to Billy Bunter like the Old Man of the Sea to Sinbad the Sailor.
Bunter's notice was still up in the Rag. All the Remove knew that there was a bike for "sail" in No. 7 Study. He had had a single offer—from Fisher T. Fish. Fishy had offered him fifteen shillings for it. Apart from that inadequate offer, which was of no use to a fellow with a bill for seven guineas in his pocket, there had been nothing doing.
The bike was still Bunter's—and the bill was still Bunter's. And he had had a little note that morning from Parker's. It was a brief note, but very much to the point.

Account rendered, £7.7.0.
Settlement will oblige.

Billy Bunter would have been glad enough to oblige Mr. Parker with a settlement. He was fed up with the whole thing. But unless some fellow took that bike off his fat hands, at full shop price, there could be no settlement with Mr. Parker. And the hapless fat Owl was in deep dread of what step Mr. Parker might take next, if no settlement was forthcoming. He might apply to the Head. It might even be worse than that. Awful visions of a summons floated in Bunter's fat mind.
Harry Wharton was his last hope. Wharton had a kind uncle who, if not exactly wealthy, was always prepared to supply any reasonable want of his

nephew at school. Not to make the most of such an uncle seemed, to Billy Bunter, a sheer waste.

"I say, Harry, old fellow," began the fat Owl, after giving the captain of the Remove a few minutes to calm down.

"Get out!"

"I'm in an awful scrape, old chap," said Bunter pathetically. "I—I wish now that I'd taken your advice, and—never worked that fat accomplice at all. I am really."

"You benighted owl!"

"You might help a fellow out, after all I've done for you," said Bunter. "Look what I did for you when you first came to the school. Don't you remember your first day here?"

"Yes—I remember you borrowed half-a-crown."

"Beast! I mean, do help a chap out, Wharton, when he's in an awful scrape," urged Bunter, "That bike's got to be paid for somehow. You can see that! Look here, you needn't crash your old jigger, if you don't want to. Just tell your uncle you've smashed it, see?"

"What?" gasped Wharton.

"That would do just as well, really," Bunter pointed out. "The old josser wouldn't want to see the wreck. Just tell him you've crashed it, and that you've a chance of getting a new jigger, splendid value, for seven guineas. Don't you think he'd play up?"

Harry Wharton laid down his pen again.

Bunter eyed him hopefully.

"Quelch would let you use his phone," he said. "You could tell him your uncle's ill, or something, see? Then you ring him up and tell him about the bike,"

Wharton rose to his feet.

"That's right, old chap," said Bunter, in great relief. "You're going to help me out"

"Yes, I'm going to help you out," answered Harry, coming across to the door.

"Good! Come on," said Bunter briskly. "No good losing time about it—I don't know what Parker may do next. Come on—here—I say—gone mad? Wharrer you grabbing me for, you beast? What do you think you're up to?" yelled Bunter.

"Helping you out," answered Harry.

And he helped Bunter out. It was not what Bunter wanted, but it was what he got. With a grasp on a fat neck, the captain of the Remove twirled Billy Bunter through the doorway, and fairly hurled him into the passage.

There was a loud bump as Bunter landed. There was a louder yell.
"Yaroooh!"
The door of No. 1 Study banged after Bunter. Harry Wharton returned to his lines—uninterrupted further by Bunter. Bunter did not seem to want any more helping out.

## CHAPTER XIII

## A ROW IN THE RAG!

"CHEEK! said Coker.
Coker of the Fifth was frowning.
Something, it was clear, had come between the wind and his nobility.
Coker was wrathy.
He came into the Rag with knitted brows. A dozen juniors in that apartment looked round at him, not with welcoming looks. The Rag belonged to the Lower School. Senior men could come in, if they liked: but they were not permitted to throw their weight about. Coker came in as if the place belonged to him, which put many backs up at once.
Regardless of hostile glances, Coker of the Fifth stared round the room, and crossed it to where a paper was pinned up. That paper was in the hand of William Wibley, President of the Remove Dramatic Society. Coker stared at the paper with an intensifying frown, and ejaculated "Cheek!"
So far as Remove fellows could see, there was nothing in that paper to worry Horace Coker, or even to interest him. It was of interest only to the amateur actors of the Remove.

REMOVE DRAMATIC SOCIETY,
HAMLET.
Rehearsal Wednesday 6 p.m.
W. Wibley.

Members of the R.D.S. had read the notice, and some of them had smiled. Last Wednesday Wibley had fixed rehearsal for three o'clock, and had been left to carry on with it on his lonely own. Perhaps Wib had taken a tip from that experience. Now he had fixed it for after tea.
Why Coker was interested in Wibley's paper was rather a mystery. Why

he was wrathy was a deeper mystery. But it was clear that he was both interested and simmering with wrath.

"Cheek!" repeated Coker.

"Anything biting you, Coker?" inquired Harry Wharton, mildly.

"Is the bitefulness terrific, my esteemed Coker?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Coker stared round, at a crowd of juniors.

"Wibley here?" he snapped.

William Wibley, in an armchair with a bundle of manuscript on his knees, looked up.

"Here," he answered.

"Oh, there you are," said Coker. He pointed to the paper on the wall. "You put that cheeky rot up, did you?"

"I put up that notice of rehearsal," answered Wibley, staring at him.

"What about it?"

"Well, it won't do," said Coker. "I was told about it, and came in to see. You can wash it right out."

Every fellow in the Rag was staring at Coker now. There was quite a crowd in the Rag, after class. They all gazed at Coker. Horace Coker was well known as a fellow who never could, in any circumstances, mind his own business. But this seemed rather the limit, even for Coker of the Fifth.

"Wash out our rehearsal!" repeated Wibley, blankly.

"Wash out the whole thing," said Coker. "I believe you fags dabble in amateur theatricals. I don't mind that, You can potter about making asses of yourselves if you like. But you're not going to do 'Hamlet.' The Fifth-form Stage Club are doing 'Hamlet,' and we're not going to have the whole thing made ridiculous by a mob of fags doing the same play."

Wibley breathed hard, and he breathed deep.

Wibley could act. He really was a good actor. He could act almost half as well as he thought he could.

"Hamlet" was, no doubt, rather an ambitious programme for a junior dramatic society. Still, Wibley could act. He could stage-manage. He could lick his team into shape. His "Hamlet" was going to be a success. At the very worst, it would be whole lengths ahead of anything that Coker and Co. could put up. And Coker told him that his "Hamlet" would make the whole thing ridiculous!

Words failed Wibley.

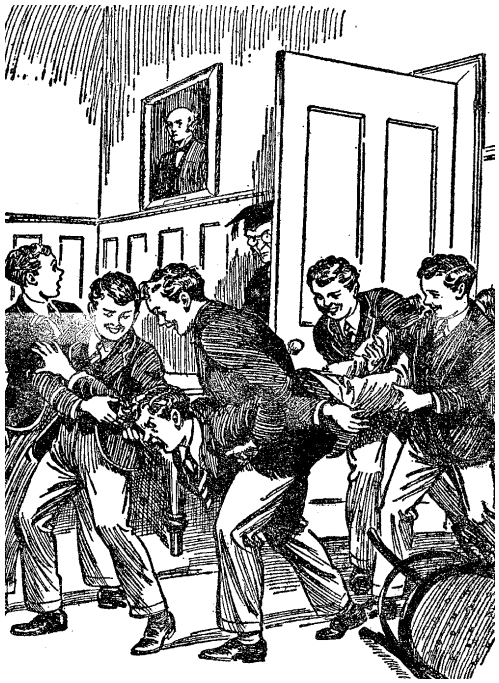
Coker went on:

"We're doing 'Hamlet' in the Fifth-form Stage Club, We're not going to have you fags guying it."

"Guying it!" gasped Wibley,

"Do anything else you like," continued Coker. "I don't mind, if you want to play the goat, you young asses. But you can't guy our show."
"So you're doing 'Hamlet' too, Coker?" asked Frank Nugent.
"We're not doing 'Hamlet' too," retorted Coker, "We're doing 'Hamlet.' I'm taking the role of Hamlet myself—."
"Oh, my hat!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Coker glared round at laughing faces. He could not see anything amusing in his announcement of his role as Hamlet. It seemed that the Removites could!
"By gum, that will be worth seeing," remarked Vernon-Smith, "I don't think Hamlet's been done as a farce before: Is it your own idea, Coker?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I don't want any cheek," snorted Coker. "The Fifth- form Stage Club are doing 'Hamlet,' You kids can't guy the show by putting up a silly kids' performance of the same play. So wash it out, see?"
"You silly ass!" roared Wibley. "You can't act, Coker. You can't begin to act. You don't know anything about it. You can't act any more than you can play cricket, and you can't play cricket any more than you can talk sense. Go and eat coke!"
Smack!
Coker was already wrathy. Wibley's words put the lid on. A verbal reply seemed inadequate to Coker. So he smacked Wibley's head.
"Yow-wow!" spluttered Wibley. His manuscripts were scattered right and left as he jumped up.
"Take that and shut up!" said Coker. "I don't want any cheek from fags. I've a short way with fags, I can tell you. And—."
Coker got no further than that. He was interrupted by something like a tidal wave closing on him. Coker was a senior man, and he was so big and brawny that even prefects of the Sixth Form treated him with some tact. Smacking a fag's head seemed a mere trifle to Coker. He did not seem prepared for what followed. Really, he might have expected it. But he hadn't.
How many hands were laid on Coker of the Fifth, he could not have calculated. They were very numerous.
The Famous Five collared him as one man. Vernon-Smith and Redwing, Squiff and Peter Todd, Tom Brown and Bolsover major, all got hold. Wibley and Morgan and Mickey Desmond clutched somehow. Other fellows crowding round were unable to get a hold—there was not enough of Coker to go round.
Bump!

Horace Coker's burly form smote the floor of the Rag with a concussion that shook it. He roared as he smote.
"By gum!" spluttered Coker, "I—I—I'll—yahooh! Leggo! I'll—I'll—whoop! I'll spiflicate you! Yoohoop! Ow! Oh, my hat! Wow!"
Coker struggled frantically.
But, big and brawny as he was, he was simply nowhere in the grasp of so many hands.
"Frog's march!" shouted Bob Cherry.
"Go it!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ow! Oh! Whooooh! Oooooh!" gurgled Coker, as an uproarious crowd marched round the long table in the Rag, with Coker in their midst, his arms and legs flying wildly.
The din was tremendous. There was often noise in the Rag. It was not uncommon for a prefect to look in, and rap out "Less noise there!" But on this occasion the uproar exceeded the record. Tramping feet, shouts of laughter, and frantic roars from Coker, echoed far and wide. In the happy excitement of the moment, the juniors forgot masters and prefects.
They were reminded of the former by a sharp voice that barked in at the doorway.
"What is all this disturbance?"
"Oh!"
Bump!
At the acid voice of Mr. Quelch, the disturbance ceased as if by magic. Coker was dropped like a hot brick. He bumped on the floor, roaring. Mr. Quelch stepped in, frowning portentously.
"Wow! I'll spiflicate 'em! Ooooh." Coker sat up. untidy, dishevelled, his collar gone, his hair like a mop, spluttering for breath. "Wooogh! Ooogh! I'll—I'll————."



Tramping feet, shouts of laughter, and frantic roars from Coker, echoed far and wide.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in great wrath. "Is that a Fifth-form boy? Coker! What are you doing here?"
"Ooogh! I—grooogh—I———-."
"Get up at once," thundered Mr. Quelch. "How dare you join in such a disturbance in the junior day-room, Coker? There is more than enough noise and horse-play in this apartment, without a senior boy joining in it and encouraging the juniors by his example. You should know better, Coker."
"I—I—ooogh—I—wooogh—-."
"Leave this apartment at once, Coker! I shall speak to Mr. Prout about this. You should be ashamed of joining in noisy horse-play with a crowd of Lower boys. Coker! Go at once."
"I—I——I—ooogh———-."
"Go!" thundered Mr. Quelch.
Coker, gurgling, went. Mr. Quelch, frowning, followed him out. And the Removites did not venture to chuckle till the door had closed on Mr. Quelch.

## CHAPTER XIV

## SOLD!

"THE fat idiot!" said Smithy.
"He's up against it," said Tom Redwing, mildly.
"Doesn't it serve him right?"
"I suppose so. But—."
The Bounder laughed mockingly. Redwing had a soft spot for any fellow who was down on his luck, without considering too much whether it was the fellow's own fault or not. Smithy was much more disposed to deride a "lame duck."
Billy Bunter's dismal and lugubrious countenance, and the scrape the fat Owl had landed himself in, only moved Smithy's contemptuous mirth. Yet, as it happened, there were thoughts in the Bounder's mind that afternoon that would have surprised his chum, and most of the Remove too. Smithy had his moments when he was capable of kind and even generous actions. And it was of just such an action that he was thinking now.
They were in the Rag after dinner. Redwing was biking up to Hawkscliff that afternoon, to see his father, who was home from sea. Smithy's bike was not yet available, and he did not care to borrow one to ride with his chum. No doubt that was partly the reason why he was thinking of Bunter and his new bike. Smithy certainly did want a machine that afternoon. Redwing had suggested hiring a bike at Parker's. That would have been easy enough. But Smithy was thinking of another solution.
Billy Bunter was in the Rag. He was looking as if he had collected most of the troubles known to mankind.
He was still the happy—or unhappy—possessor of that new bike. His notice that the bike was for "sail" was still stuck up on the wall. But there had been no sale, and there did not seem a remote prospect of one. In his pocket the fat Owl had Parker's bill, and Parker's "account rendered." He had not, so far, received any further literature from Mr. Parker: but he dreaded receiving some by every post. Still more he dreaded that Mr. Parker, getting no satisfaction, might "take steps." It was a dismal and apprehensive Owl.
He blinked at Vernon-Smith when the latter came in with Redwing, with an inimical blink. Few fellows in the Remove could have afforded to take that troublesome bike off Bunter's hands: but Smithy certainly could, had he so chosen. Bunter's blink became still more inimical as the Bounder, glancing at the "sail" notice on the wall, laughed. It was no laughing matter—at least to Billy Bunter.

"Well, coming out, Smithy?" asked Tom Redwing. "If we're going round by Courtfield, to pick up a bike, we've no time to lose."
"We're not," answered Smithy.
"Then you're not coming?"
"Yes: I'm coming."
One of the fellows lending you a jigger?" asked Redwing, in surprise. He did not expect his chum to have changed his mind on that subject.
"What does old Polonius say in 'Hamlet?'" answered Smithy. "'Neither a borrower nor a lender be!'" He laughed. "I'm buying a bike, Reddy."
Redwing looked rather grave.
"You'll be getting your Moonbeam back in a day or two, Smithy," he said. "I know you've lots of money, but you don't want to chuck it away on a new one."
'It wouldn't run to a new Moonbeam," answered Smithy. "But one of these seven-guinea Speedsters would be all right. I can afford it if I like."
"I know you can, Smithy, but it's extravagant. You could hire a jigger at Parker's for the afternoon."
"Oh, quite! But I'd rather ride my own machine." Smithy gave a nod towards Bunter's notice on the wall. "What about helping a lame dog over a stile?"
"Oh!" exclaimed Redwing. "You don't mean—?"
"I do."
Vernon-Smith walked across to the armchair that was creaking under the weight of William George Bunter.
"Sold your bike yet, fatty?" he asked.
"Beast!" was Bunter's reply.
"Had any offers?"
"Yah!"
"Still for sale?"
"Find out."
Billy Bunter had no hopes of the Bounder, and no politeness to waste on him. The Bounder laughed.
"If it's still going—," be said.
"Go and eat coke."
"I'll take it off your hands."
Bunter sat bolt upright in the chair. His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at the Bounder. This was the very last thing he would have expected to hear from Herbert Vernon-Smith.
A dozen fellows in the Rag looked round, as surprised as Bunter.
"I—I—I say," gasped the fat Owl. "Do—do——do you mean that, Smithy?"
"I generally mean what I say."

"You mean that you're going to buy that bike?" gasped Bunter.
"Yes, if it's still for sale."
"It jolly well is!" Billy Bunter's fat face brightened. The clouds rolled away. Getting rid of that bike gave him the feeling of Sinbad the Sailor in getting the Old Man of the Sea off his shoulders. "I—I say, Smithy, it's yours, old man. I—I say, though, Smithy," added Bunter, smitten with a sudden doubt, "it's seven guineas, you know. I ain't selling it cheap."
"Think I want you to sell it cheap, you fat ass?" asked the Bounder, disdainfully. "I'll take the jigger off your hands, and give you the money to pay for it. Is it a go?"
"Yes, rather," answered Bunter, promptly, hardly able to believe in his good luck. "I—I say, cash, you know! I—I'll go straight down to Courtfield and pay Parker's. You'll lend me your jigger to go on, won't you, Toddy?"
"I'll lend you twopence for the bus," answered Peter.
"Oh, really, Toddy—"
Vernon-Smith took out his wallet. The Bounder of Greyfriars did not dislike counting out seven pound notes under staring eyes. He flicked them on the table, and taking a handful of change from his trousers pocket, added two half-crowns and two shillings to the pile.
"Seven guineas," he said. "There you are! The sooner you get that to Parker the better, Bunter."
"What-ho!" gasped Bunter. He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes, or his spectacles, as he blinked at the little heap of money, and then clutched it up with a fat paw. "I'm going right off now. You'll lend me your bike to run down to Courtfield, won't you, Wibley?"
"I'll lend you my boot if you go near it."
"Beast! Can I borrow your bike, Ogilvy?"
"If you want to be found dead soon afterwards."
"Bah! I'd rather go by bus, really! Where's that tuppence, Peter?"
Peter Todd produced the bus fare. Bunter added it to the seven pounds seven shillings in his pocket, heaved himself out of the armchair, and rolled out of the Rag with an unusually active and speedy roll.
A tremendous weight had been lifted from the fat Owl's mind. He was anxious to get to Parker's and make that settlement which Mr. Parker had said would oblige. Generally Bunter's movements were slow and leisurely. Now he was quite rapid. He almost shot out of the Rag.
Peter Todd gave the Bounder a rather curious look.
"That's jolly decent of you, Smithy," he said.
"Thanks."
"Boobs and their dough are soon parted," remarked Fisher T. Fish.
The Bounder shrugged his shoulders, and walked out of the Rag with his

chum. Redwing pressed his arm as they went into the quad. All the more because Smithy was generally hard and unfeeling, Redwing liked to see those occasional glimpses of a generous heart. The Bounder grinned.
"Surprised you, Reddy?" he asked.
"Well, no," said Redwing. "It's really like you, Smithy."
"I wanted a bike this afternoon."
"That isn't why you did it. It's rather a big sum, even for you. You don't want a second bike; when your Moonbeam comes back—you'll get rid of it for about half what you gave. You've done it to get that fathead out of his scrape. Don't humbug about it."
The Bounder laughed, and left it at that. They went down to the bike-shed, Redwing for his machine, and Smithy for Bunter's new bike—now his own. Tom Redwing's face was bright as they pedalled away. Many fellows in the Remove wondered what Redwing could see to like in the hard, curt, cynical Bounder. But he did like him, and never so much as that afternoon. And Smithy, though very much inclined to sneer at himself for having been a fool, was, on the whole, satisfied with what he had done. So it was quite a cheery pair that cycled away on the hilly road to Hawkscliff—what time Billy Bunter was rolling off to Courtfield on the bus, looking quite a new Bunter.

## CHAPTER XV

## JUST LIKE BUNTER!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Bunter!"
"What on earth is he up to?"
Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at a fat figure in Courtfield High Street. The Famous Five were cycling that afternoon. They had stopped at the bun-shop in Courtfield for a little light refreshment on the way. Five bicycles were stacked against the ancient tree that grew outside the bun-shop, under whose branches were little tables, round one of which the chums of the Remove sat in a cheery circle, discussing ginger-pop.
Next to the bun-shop was the Bank: and opposite the Bank was the bus stop. So the juniors at the little table under the tree had a view of the bus when it came in, and of the passengers alighting from it. Among the alighting passengers was one they knew.
There was nothing surprising in Billy Bunter coming into Courtfield on a bus, on a half-holiday. But his subsequent proceedings, after alighting from the bus, were rather surprising.
First of all, Billy Bunter cast a blink through his big spectacles towards

the bun-shop. He did not observe the five juniors sitting under the shady tree, or take any heed of other customers sitting at the little tables. He was not interested in any of them. Having blinked at the open doorway of the bun-shop, Bunter made two or three steps in that direction, as if drawn by some hidden irresistible force.

Then he halted. For some moments he stood undecided, and then turned and rolled up the High Street. At some little distance from the bun-shop, a projecting sign could be seen, bearing the name "PARKER'S." Bunter seemed to be bound for Parker's.

But he halted again and once more turned. It seemed that the bun-stop drew him by invisible strings. He came rolling back.

Having almost reached the bun-shop, once more he stopped, and slowly, very slowly, retraced his steps up the High Street in the direction of Parker's. But he went very slowly, with lagging footsteps. More and more slowly he went.

Harry Wharton and Co. watched these antics in growing surprise. What Billy Bunter was up to was a mystery to them.

It seemed as if the fat Owl was torn two ways—Parker's attracting him on the one hand, the bun-shop on the other. His fat mind fluctuated between the two.

"He's coming here," said Nugent.

"He's going to Parker's," said Bob.

"He doesn't seem to be able to make up his mind," remarked Harry Wharton. "What on earth's the matter with him?"

"Halo, hallo, hallo, he's revolving again."

Bunter had nearly reached Parker's. Almost at the door of that establishment, he turned, and came rolling back again.

This time he seemed to have made up his fat mind. He neither halted nor turned again, but came straight on, and sat down at one of the little tables, his plump back to the Famous Five, and still without observing them.

"That's that!" grinned Bob. "He's landed at last."

Bunter was landed—but he did not seem quite safely landed. Having sat for about a minute, he half-rose, as if intending to depart without waiting for the waitress to take his order. However, he sat down again, and this time he stayed put. A waitress came, and his table was soon covered with sticky things.

It was quite a puzzle to Harry Wharton and Co. If Bunter was in funds, as he appeared to be, it was quite natural for him to visit the Courtfield bun-shop, where prices were high but the provender good. But why he had wandered to and fro between the bun-shop and Parker's turning and

turning and turning again, was quite puzzling.
Had the Famous Five been aware of what had happened in the Rag that afternoon, they would have solved the puzzle. But they had left the school on their bikes before that, and knew nothing of Smithy's unexpected action, or the fact that Billy Bunter had succeeded, at last, in getting rid of that troublesome jigger. So they did not know that the handsome sum of seven pounds seven shillings was burning a hole in Bunter's pocket.
It was rather unfortunate that the bus stop was opposite the bun-shop. But for that unfortunate circumstance, the fat Owl might have rolled on to Mr. Parker's, and all would have been well.
Bunter had left the school with that fixed intention. All he was thinking of—until he got off the bus—was settling his account with Mr. Parker, and getting out of his awful scrape.
It was the sight of the bun-shop, and of people sitting at the little tables eating and drinking, that had put new ideas into Bunter's fat head, and unsettled his resolve.
With pounds in his pocket, and unlimited quantities of sticky things to be had for the same, it was no wonder that Bunter hesitated.
Yet he had struggled with temptation. Twice he had heroically headed for Parker's, putting temptation behind him.
But it is well said that he who hesitates is lost. The call of the bun-shop had proved irresistible.
So there was Bunter, sitting at a table fairly loaded with sticky things, and scoffing the same at a great rate, regardless of consequences, his fat face irradiating happy satisfaction.
When Billy Bunter was eating he forgot lesser matters. Mr. Parker, and Mr. Parker's little bill, were relegated to the back of his fat mind. For the moment, Bunter revelled in foodstuffs, and enjoyed life.
Harry Wharton and Co., not being in possession of any such sum as seven guineas among the whole Co., were content with a ginger-pop and a bun. Not so Bunter! Perhaps, on the principle that one might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, he gave orders royally.
Jam sponges at the bun-shop, were priced at half-a-crown each. Bunter travelled through three or four with hardly a pause. Other delectable things, at equally delectable prices, followed fast. Bunter did not bother about such commonplace things as twopenny buns. Only the best, it seemed, was good enough for Bunter. And his appetite for sticky things was practically unlimited.
The Co., from their table, watched him in wonder.
Only that morning, Bunter had been seeking to borrow a "bob" up and

down the Remove. Now he was spending money right and left with an extravagance the wealthy Bounder himself could hardly have equalled.
"Well," said Bob Cherry. "This beats the band! Bunter was stony this morning—now he's blued about a pound in five minutes! I suppose he hasn't been holding up a bank!"
"Perhapsfully his esteemed and ridiculous postal-order has come!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Well, wonders will never cease—so perhaps it has!" said Bob. "But it wouldn't run to that, Inky."
The Co. were really feeling a little concerned. Even if Billy Bunter's celebrated postal-order, so long expected, had arrived at last, it seemed improbable that it would stand such a strain as this.
In fact, they could not help thinking that Bunter, carried away by the inner Bunter as it were, was rather recklessly out-running the constable. And if a fellow who fed expensively at the Courtfield bun-shop failed to pay up after the feed, the consequences were likely to be dire."
"Time we got a move on," said Harry. And the Famous Five, having settled their modest bill, went to the bikes stacked against the tree.
Bob Cherry stopped at Bunter's table. It seemed to him that, if the fat Owl was exceeding his resources in the Gargantuan feed, a tip in time might be useful.
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"
"Ooooh!" Bunter was taking a large bite out of a fat jam-tart. He gave a jump as that familiar hail fell on his fat ears, and some of the jam went down the wrong way. "Ooogh! Grooogh!"
"Enjoying life, old fat man?" grinned Bob.
"Urrggh! You silly ass—making a fellow jump!" gurgled Bunter. "Wurrggh."
"Hadn't you better go easy, old porpoise?" asked Bob. "You're running up a tremendous bill, you know."
"Wurrrggh!"
"It must be over a quid already. Hadn't you better count your wealth before you go any further?"
"Oooooh!"
"A stitch in time saves a cracked pitcher from going longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks, my esteemed Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and it is no use locking the stable door after too many cooks have spoiled the broth."
"Grooogh!"
Billy Bunter coughed, and gurgled, and cleared his fat neck. Then he turned his spectacles on the Co. with a withering blink.
"You fellows can clear off," he snorted. "You wouldn't lend me a bob this

morning! You jolly well know you wouldn't! No good coming round now! I'm not standing you anything."
"You fat ass—."
"Just keep your distance," said Bunter disdainfully. "See?"
"You burbling bloater—."
"Yah!"
"I suppose we mustn't kick him here," said Bob. "Come on, you men."
The Famous Five mounted their machines and pedalled away down the High Street. Billy Bunter forgot their existence the next moment. Jam-tart followed jam-tart: and lesser matters faded from his fat mind. The Co. rode out of Courtfield in a cheery bunch, leaving Billy Bunter still eating.

## CHAPTER XVI

## A SHORTAGE OF CASH!

"WHAT'S that game?" asked Peter Todd.
"Oh!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.
Peter, coming into No, 7 Study, stared.
The sight that met his eyes in that study was peculiar, and quite unaccustomed. Billy Bunter was seated at the study table, and, like the King in his counting-house in the nursery ballad, he was counting out his money.
There was quite a little pile of wealth on the study table in front of Bunter. There were pound notes and halfcrowns. and Bunter seemed deep in arithmetical calculations.
It was quite uncommon for Bunter to be so engaged. Fisher T. Fish, in No. 14 Study, found pleasure in counting over his money, but he was the only fellow in the Greyfriars Remove who did. Bunter, when he had any money, generally headed for the tuck-shop, as the crow flies: and seldom had any left to count.
Neither did Bunter value money, as Fishy did, for its own sake. He valued it only as something that could be exchanged for tuck. Counting it over like a miser was a new game for Billy Bunter.
Yet there he was, in possession of unaccustomed wealth, and apparently making calculations, with a deeply-corrugated fat brow.
"Been robbing a bank?" asked Peter, genially.
"Oh, really, Toddy—."
"Well, whose is it?" asked Peter.
Bunter disdained to answer that question. He resumed his arithmetical exercises.

Peter gazed at him. Peter was one of the Remove fellows from whom the fat Owl had sought to borrow a humble "bob" that day. And here was Bunter, with a sum of money running into pounds. For a moment or two, Peter was astonished. Then he guessed. Peter.
"You fat chump! Haven't you paid Parker after all?" he exclaimed.
"I—I was going to, Peter. But—,"
"You unspeakable ass," said Peter. "Didn't you go to Courtfield?"
"Oh! Yes! But—."
"Then why haven't you paid Parker? Do you want him to go to the Head?"
"I—I—-I—-," stammered Bunter. "I—I haven't got it quite right, Peter. I—I haven't enough to pay Parker."
"That's rot! Smithy gave you the exact amount— seven pounds seven shillings," answered Peter. "I saw him, and a dozen other fellows saw him. I lent you twopence for the bus. You had only to go straight to Parker's and pay him."
"Yes. But—."
"Have you lost some of it, or what?"
"Oh! Yes!" Bunter jumped at that, like a drowning man at a straw. "I—I—I've lost some—there's a lining in the hole in my pocket—."
"What!"
"I mean a hole in the lining in my pocket. I—I had it in—in this pocket, Peter, but—but there is a great big hole in the lining, and—and—it went. Can you lend me twenty-seven and six, Peter?"
"You're twenty-seven and six short!" exclaimed Peter, aghast.
"I—I think so. I'm just trying to get it right." explained Bunter.
"Oh, you fathead! You champion chump!" -
"Oh, really, Toddy! Tain't my fault there's a lining in my jacket—I mean a jacket in my lining—I mean—."
"Didn't you know there was a hole in your pocket, ass?"
"Nunno! I—I'd never noticed it! I—I never knew anything about a hole in this pocket, Peter."
Which was perfectly true. Bunter had known nothing about a hole in the lining of that pocket. There wasn't one!
He sagely decided not to mention the bun-shop to Peter. Peter was not likely to feel very sympathetic if he knew that the missing sum had gone on sponge cakes and jam tarts and other such sticky things.
Bunter realised only too clearly that he was in a scrape again, with a shortage of the sum due to Mr. Parker.
At the bun-shop he had dismissed such sordid considerations from his fat mind. He had revelled royally in very attractive and very expensive comestibles, hardly realising how his bill was piling up. It had piled up to

over two pounds. Indeed, it would have piled up to more than that, had there been more space available inside Bunter.

It had been a happy experience—Bunter had enjoyed life to the full while the feast lasted. But after the feast came the reckoning.

Obviously, it was wiser not to mention the bun-shop to Peter. And truth and Bunter had been strangers so long that they were not likely to strike up an acquaintance at this awkward moment.

"Well, how much have you got left?" asked Peter.

"These five pound notes," said Bunter. "That's five pounds to begin with."

"Right so far," said Peter, sarcastically. "Did you do that in your head?"

"Well, I'm pretty good at arithmetic, you know. Then there's two half-crowns and a shilling—thats seven shillings—."

"Six, ass!"

"Oh! Um! I mean six! Altogether five pounds six shillings," said Bunter. Taking that out of seven pounds seven leaves twenty-seven and six, doesn't it?"

"Oh, my hat! Does it?" gasped Peter.

"Well, I made it twenty-seven and six," said Bunter. "If you think that that isn't right, Peter—."

"The rightfulness isn't terrific, as Inky would say."

"I'll do it again, if you like! Only it seems to come different every time I do it," exclaimed Bunter, "You know how it is with those beastly addition sums—if you add from the bottom, and then from the top, it comes out quite different—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you wouldn't cackle when I'm doing arithmetic, Peter. It puts me out. Look here, take five pounds from seven pounds seven." Bunter wrinkled his fat brow over that intricate problem. "No, it ain't twenty-seven and six—it's three pounds four."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Think I've got it wrong?"

"Sort of! Try again," said Peter, encouragingly. "Well, let's see—five pounds six from seven pounds seven—that leaves—let's see—thirty-nine shillings! I've got it right this time! I'm thirty-nine shillings short, Peter, and—and I thought it was only twenty-seven and six—."

"Lucky for you you're not doing this for Quelch," grinned Peter. "Have another shot at it, old scout."

"Well, I think that's right. What do you make it, if you think you can do arithmetic better than I can?" demanded Bunter.

"Five pounds six from seven pounds seven leaves two pounds one, fathead."

"Sure you've got it right?" asked Bunter, anxiously. "I never noticed exactly how much I—I lost. People say there's nothing as certain as arithmetic, but that's all rot, to get it right, you know, to make it up again."
"Fathead!"
"Well, then, I'm two pounds one shilling short," said Bunter. "I say, Peter, can you lend me two pounds one?"
Bunter blinked hopefully at his study-mate.
"If you could lend me two pounds one, Peter, it would be all right," he said, persuasively. "I'll settle when my postal-order comes, of course. I believe I told you I was expecting a postal-order, Toddy."
"I believe you did," agreed Peter. "Don't tell me again. As you're such a dab at arithmetic, perhaps you can tell me whether two pounds one will come out of one and threepence."
"Eh?"
"That's all I've got."
"Oh, crikey!"
"You blithering ass," exclaimed Peter Todd, "It was just tremendous luck for Smithy to shell out as he did. Then you shove the money into a pocket with a hole in it! Lucky you didn't lose the lot."
"Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter. "W-w-wasn't it? J-j-jolly lucky! I say, Peter, what's a chap going to do? 'Twasn't my fault that it went through that great big hole in the lining of my jacket, was it?"
"I suppose not, as you're a blithering, burbling, benighted chump," agreed Peter. "If it's gone, I'll speak to some of the fellows, and we'll see what we can do. But make sure first that it's gone."
"It's gone all right, Peter. That great big hole in the lining—"
"Some of it may have stuck in the lining," said Peter.
"Oh! No! You—you see—."
"I lost a tanner once, and found it in the lining of my jacket," said Peter. "Have you looked?"
"Oh! Yes! I—I've looked, and—and it's gone. You—you see—."
"Well, I'll look too."
"Let's look, ass."
"Oh, crikey!" Billy Bunter blinked at Peter in alarm. "I—I say, it's no good looking, Peter—I've looked, you know—and—and it's gone."
"Well, if it's gone, it's gone," said Peter. "But we'll make sure. I'll go through the lining—."
"But, I—I—I say—."
"You howling ass, some of it may be stuck in the lining all the time," exclaimed Peter, impatiently. "If it's gone, I'll see what can be done—but

we'll make sure first, you chump!"
"Look here, you let my jacket alone—stop grabbing at me—I tell you—will you let my jacket alone?—look here—Beast!"
Peter Todd jerked out the lining of the jacket pocket. The next moment he jumped.
There was no hole in that pocket. But there was some thing else. It was a large packet of butterscotch—a remnant of Billy Bunter's extensive purchases at the Courtfield bun- shop. Peter Todd gazed at the intact lining. He gazed at the packet of butterscotch. Then he gazed at Bunter. His gaze grew more and more expressive.
He did not speak. With his left hand, he grasped Bunter's fat neck. With his right, he jammed the packet of butterscotch down Bunter's back. Then he tapped the fattest head at Greyfriars on the study table. It was quite a hard tap.
"Yarooh!" roared Bunter.
Peter strolled out of the study. Billy Bunter was left rubbing a fat head with one hand, and trying to extract a packet of butterscotch from his podgy back with the other. And it was borne in on his fat mind that there was no assistance to be expected from Peter in solving his financial problems.

## CHAPTER XVII

## UP TO WHARTON!

"IT'S up to you, Wharton."
"To me?" repeated the captain of the Remove.
"You!" said Wibley.
He spoke decidedly.
There was a meeting in No. 1 Study. The principal members of the Remove Dramatic Society were gathered in consultation. The subject under discussion was finance.
Like many amateur dramatic societies, the R.D.S. found some difficulties in that direction. The subscription was a rather low one, suited to the pecuniary circumstances of Lower-Fourth fellows. And some members were late with their subscriptions. Some were very late. Some indeed proffered ingenious excuses and explanations instead of subscriptions. Others, more wealthy, would make extra contributions—but these were few.
Since William Wibley had become President and general inspiring genius of the R.D.S., expenses had increased. Wibley liked to do things well. He did not believe in spoiling a ship for a ha'porth of tar. If a thing was

worth doing, it was worth doing well, in Wibley's opinion. To spoil a performance, and especially a Shakespearean performance, for so sordid a consideration as cash was not Wibley's idea at all. Cash was wanted. Cash had to be found. The only question was finding it. Billy Bunter was not the only fellow in the Remove with a financial problem on his mind. Wibley, it seemed, had thought it out, and decided that it was up to the captain of the form. He proceeded to elucidate.

"We've got to do this decently," he said. "I suppose you're all agreed on that."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Costumes and things cost money," went on Wibley.

"We'd guessed that one," said Bob.

"We've got to raise the wind. Mauly's chucked in a five-pound note already—we can't let him go over that."

"We jolly well can't," said Harry Wharton. "No more from Mauleverer."

"Smithy's put up a couple of pounds over his subscription. That's the limit in that direction."

"Quite!

"Now it's up to somebody else," went on Wibley. "We can't sponge on Mauly and Smithy while other fellows sit around doing nothing."

"No fear," said Frank Nugent. "But what can a fellow do?"

"I've said that it's up to Wharton."

"Well, what can I do?" asked the captain of the Remove. "Ready and willing—but what's the big idea? I'm not a belted earl like Mauly, and my uncle's not a millionaire like Smithy's pater. At the present moment I have ninepence. Will that see us through?"

"I want three guineas from you."

"Three guineas!" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Just that!"

"Go it," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "If you can tell me where to pick up three guineas, I'll cut off and pick it up at once. Just where?"

"Gentle shepherd, tell me where?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The wherefulness is terrific."

"You can pick up three guineas, and you're going to," answered Wibley. "It's the Latin prize next week. The Old Boy's Prize."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

"You'll give in your name at once, and you've got a whole week for swotting. There'll probably be six or seven entrants. Well, all you've got to do is to beat them, and there you are, see?"

"Is that all?" asked Harry, with mild sarcasm. "That's all! You're the best man at the game in the Remove, bar Linley. He's your only danger. Well,

you've got to go all out and beat him too."
"Um!" said Harry Wharton, dubiously. "Not so jolly easy."
"I didn't say it was easy. The Old Boy who founded that prize for his old form wasn't thinking of making things easy for slackers, so far as I know."
"It's up to you," said Wibley, firmly. "We can't take Mauly's money and Smithy's money and slack around doing nothing ourselves."
"No! But—."
"I'd take it on myself, if I could do it. I couldn't! You could! That settles it, see?"
"But I don't know that I could," protested the captain of the Remove. "Linley's better at the game than I am, and Ogilvy's as good, at least, and Russell will run us close, and there's Toddy—."
"You'll have to go all out, of course. Put a wet towel round your head, and swot," said Wibley. "You've lots of time—."
"There's the cricket, you know—."
"Never mind the cricket."
"I have to mind it, a bit, as captain of the form. And the Carcroft match is coming on, too—."
"Never mind the Carcroft match."
"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry, politely.
"Ass!" remarked Johnny Bull.
Wibley gave a snort. To William Wibley amateur theatricals were the beginning and end of all things. He lived and moved and had his being in an atmosphere of drama. Some day, Wibley had no doubt, he was going to take the world by storm on the Thespian boards. But to the other fellows games came a long way first, and the R.D.S. was only an also ran.
"It means a lot of swotting," said Harry.
"Now look here." Wibley thumped the study table to add emphasis to his remarks. "We've got to raise the wind. Mauly's shelled out, Smithy's shelled out. I've shelled out myself—I had a quid tip last week, and it went into the kitty. Now it's your turn, see?"
Four fellows in No. 1 Study grinned. One looked very serious. The prospect of swotting for a Latin prize did not seem to exhilarate the captain of the Remove. Certainly, he was ready and willing to do all he could to help the somewhat unstable finances of the Remove Dramatic Society. But a difficult Latin paper was not an attractive method.
Harry Wharton was no slacker, either in games or class. He was good at the classics—the best man in the Remove after Mark Linley. His "con" was always good in class: he had been known to read Virgil for pleasure and without compulsion: which was a remarkable thing in the Remove, But he did not want to stick in a study swotting. Very much indeed he did not.

There were so many other occupations so much more attractive.
He glanced round at his friends. He discerned that they were grinning. They seemed rather amused by Wibley's rather original idea in the way of raising funds for the Remove Dramatic Society. But the fellow who had been selected to swot for the Old Boy's Prize, like the good old Queen, was "not amused."
"Think it's up to me, you chaps?" asked Harry.
"Well," said Bob. "You could do it. We couldn't! You're rather a whale at Latin, you know."
"I'd rather be a minnow, just at present."
"But the whalefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"This Co. ought to play up," said Johnny Bull. "We can't let Mauly and Smithy shell out, without putting up our whack."
"Our esteemed whackfulness is harmless and necessary, and a sine qua non."
"Man in, Harry," said Frank Nugent, laughing.
"Oh, all right." The captain of the Remove made up his mind. "I'll have a shot at it, Wibley. Mind, I don't undertake to pull it off. If I do, the three guineas prize goes to the R.D.S. If I don't I'll jolly well punch your head for giving me a lot off swotting for nothing."
"That's that," said Wibley. He rose from the table. "Ten to six—time to get ready for the rehearsal. Go to Quelch and give your name in first."
William Wibley left the study, briskly. The Co. were left looking at one another—four of them smiling. Wharton was looking thoughtful. He had agreed now, and the die was cast. That did not make the prospect more attractive.
"Well, I'm for it, I suppose," said Harry. "Bother that Old Boy and his prize—and blow Wibley! I'd better go and speak to Quelch."
And that, as Wibley had said, was that!

## CHAPTER XVIII

## "FOOLS RUSH IN—!"

"IT'S too rotten!" said Coker,
"Mine's all right," said Potter.
"And mine," said Greene.
They were at tea in Coker's study. There were new-laid eggs for tea. Potter and Greene were giving attention to the provender, quite a natural thing at tea-time. Coker was toying with an egg, his powerful mind

occupied by other things.
He made his remark after several minutes of silence— rather a record for Coker. He seemed surprised by Potter's and Greene's rejoinders.
"What do you mean?" he grunted. "I said it was too rotten."
"Well, they came from the same farm," said Potter, "and mine's certainly all right."
"Mine's as fresh as a daisy," said Greene.
"What are you talking about?" roared Coker.
"Eh? The eggs, of course. Weren't you?" asked Potter.
"No!" hooted Coker. "Eggs!" He gave a snort of contempt. "Eggs! No, I wasn't talking about the eggs, George Potter."
"Then what's the trouble? The marger's not too bad. Anyhow, the butter's run out. What's the matter with the marger?"
"Somebody said that margarine can't be told from butter," said Greene.
"Of course, that's all rot, But it's not too bad, Coker. I shouldn't call it rotten."
"I'm not talking about margarine," shrieked Coker.
Potter and Greene gave it up. Coker had pronounced that something was too rotten. If he was alluding neither to the eggs nor to the margarine, they did not know to what he was alluding.
Neither, for that matter, did they want to know. They would have been content to remain in a state of ignorance on the subject. Coker, however, did not leave them in that blissful state.
"It's too rotten," he repeated, "and I'm not standing it. Our stage club is doing 'Hamlet'—you know that. I've been mugging up the role of Hamlet myself. And I tell you it's too rotten."
"Oh, I wouldn't say that," said Potter. "Not very good perhaps—but I wouldn't call it rotten, old fellow."
"No, not exactly rotten," agreed Greene. "You've got a lot to learn, old chap, I know—but I wouldn't call it rotten."
Potter and Greene spoke as heartily as they could.
They could not, of course, tell Coker what they really thought of him in the role of Hamlet. Their private opinion was that it was not only enough to make a cat laugh, but enough, and more than enough, to send a stone image into hysterics. But if they had told Coker so, it would have meant a sudden end to their friendship.
"You—you—you———." Coker seemed to gasp. "You fatheads! You asses! You chuckleheads! If you think I can't play Hamlet—."
Apparently there was another misunderstanding. It was not his role of Hamlet to which Coker had alluded as too rotten.
"But you said—," began Potter.

"Yes, you said—," concurred Greene.
"I was talking about the cheek of those Remove fags, butting in!" howled Coker, "and I tell you it's too rotten."
"Oh!" said Potter.
"Oh!" said Greene.
They had got it at last.
"And I'm not standing it," went on Coker, with an almost ferocious glare at his study-mates. "The Fifth-form Stage Club have settled on producing 'Hamlet.' Then these cheeky fags butt in with 'Hamlet.' It's practically guying us. It makes the whole thing ridiculous. It classes us with a mob of fags. We don't want our show laughed at."
Potter and Greene could not quite see how that was to be avoided, with Coker in the role of the Prince of Denmark. However, they said nothing.
"I told them to chuck it, as soon as I heard about it," went on Coker. "I was quite civil about it really, and I shouldn't have smacked a fag's head if he hadn't been cheeky. But what did they do? Collared me and ragged me, and then that goat Quelch barged in, and thought I was playing games with the fags—me!" said Coker, with breathless indignation.
"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Potter and Greene, involuntarily.
"Oh! You think that funny, do you?" hooted Coker.
"Oh! No!"
"Not at all!"
"Well, that's what happened," snorted Coker. "That's what Greyfriars is coming to—a mob of fags handling a Fifth-form man, and carrying on just as if he hadn't said a word to them. They've got a rehearsal in the Rag to-day
—they'll be just beginning now. Well, I'm not having it."
"I don't quite see how you can stop them, Coker," said Potter, staring. "They can rag Shakespeare in their own den if they like."
"Let them rip, old chap," said Greene.
"Well, I'm going to stop them," said Coker, grimly. "I've told them, plainly, that they can play the goat in any other way they like, but they're not to touch 'Hamlet.' I bar that. I won't have the fags guying the Fifth-form Stage Club in that style. We're going to smash that rehearsal."
"Oh!" said Potter.
"Are we?" said Greene. He seemed to doubt it.
"We are," said Coker. "You fellows are going to back me up. We're going to rush right in, and wallop them right and left, and they won't feel much like rehearsing 'Hamlet' when we're through with them."
Horace Coker was not a rapid learner, but evidently he had learned something from his last experience in the Rag. This time he was not going

to venture into that apartment on his solitary own to deal with the cheeky fags there. He did not want to be frog's-marched round the table again. This time he was going to have the support and assistance of his pals.
"As soon as they start," continued Coker, "we get going. When you fellows have finished tea—if you don't want to go on eating for ever! —we'll get along to the Rag. I chuck the door open—we rush in—and I fancy they won't be able to handle three Fifth-form men, what?"
"They'd jolly well try," said Potter.
"Let them!" said Coker.
"Might be a dozen of them—," said Greene.
"I don't care if there's two dozen."
"Um!" said Potter and Greene.
Coker finished his eggs. He rose from the table. Potter and Greene were looking at one another somewhat uncertainly. They did not want a row with Coker. Still less did they want a row with a horde of Lower boys in the Rag. They were rather in a dilemma.
"Ready?" asked Coker. "It's six—and they had the nerve to put up a notice of rehearsal at six—after what I told them quite plainly, you know."
"Look here, Coker," said Potter, as if struck by a sudden bright idea. "Let them rip. They're not worth your notice really. I should simply ignore them, Coker, if I were you!"
"But you're not me!" Coker pointed out. "If you were, you'd have as much sense as I have, and you wouldn't waste time jawing. Come on."
"But look here—," said Greene, in dismay.
"Aren't you ready?" rapped Coker.
"Oh! No! Yes! But—."
"Well, come on, then," rapped Coker, impatiently. "I've told you. I want you to back me up. We're going to give those cheeky fags a lesson. I'll give 'em rehearsing 'Hamlet,' after I've told them plainly to chuck it! For goodness sake, you men, get a move on, and don't slack about."
Thus adjured, Potter and Greene reluctantly rose. Coker was ready—full of beans: prepared to exemplify, once more, the truth of the proverb that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Potter and Greene were not ready— indeed, Ethelred of old times was not more unready than they! Not only were they far from keen on getting mixed up in a shindy in the junior day-room. They were quite determined that they weren't going to get mixed up in a shindy in the junior day-room! Argument with Coker of the Fifth was futile. Coker regarded himself as one having authority, saying "Do this!" and he doeth it! Argument rolled off him like water off a duck. Potter and Greene followed Coker from the study, not with the intention of joining Coker in rousing out a wasp's nest in the Rag. If that

was what Horace Coker wanted, Horace Coker was welcome to enjoy it all on his own.

They went down the staircase, Coker brisk, Potter and Greene reluctant. They dropped a little behind Coker, and exchanged a wink and a whisper. Coker looked round.

"Do come on," he rapped. "They'll have started—it's past six."

"Coming, old chap!"

"Well, come, then," yapped Coker.

They arrived at the door of the Rag. That door was closed, but the sound of voices could be heard within. Evidently a good many fellows were there, and it seemed that the rehearsal of the Remove Dramatic Society was in progress.

"Listen to the cheeky little ticks," said Coker, breathing indignation. "They're going it! Just listen! After I told them, as plainly as any fellow could speak, that they'd got to chuck it! That's young Wharton doing Horatio. I'll jolly well give him Horatio!"

Harry Wharton's voice came quite plainly through the old oak door, in the part of Horatio in Act I, Scene I.

"Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated,
So frowned he once, when in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice."

"Now!" said Coker.

He hurled open the door of the Rag. He rushed in. It was the cue of Potter and Greene to rush in at his heels.

But they did not take their cue.

As Coker rushed into the Rag, Potter and Greene made backward steps, turned, and disappeared down the passage. They vanished like the Ghost in "Hamlet" at cockcrow. Coker charged into the Rag on his own!

## CHAPTER XIX

## HORRID FOR HORACE

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"What—."

"Coker—."

"Get out!" shrieked Wibley.

"Oh, my hat!"

There were a dozen Removites in the Rag. They all had their script in hand. The rehearsal had started, under William Wibley's able direction. Wibley often got a little excited at rehearsal. Like a true artist, he was never quite satisfied with the efforts of others to reach his own high level of perfection! But so far, all was calm and bright. Harry Wharton was delivering Horatio's lines in a manner that almost satisfied even Wibley. Other fellows were ready to take their cues. The Remove Dramatic Society were intent on the work in progress. And then—.

Then Coker charged in.

The R.D.S. were taken quite by surprise. Coker, big and brawny and beefy, went through the Remove Dramatic Society like a scythe through grass. Hamlet and Horatio, Laertes and Polonius and Ohpelia, King and Queen and Ghost, were scattered right and left.

It was almost as if the general destruction in the last act of "Hamlet" had been transferred to the first act.

Five or six fellows were on the floor, yelling. William Wibley almost danced with rage. Coker's charge caused general havoc.

But that was only for the moment.

"Collar him!" shrieked Wibley.

"Grab him!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"Boot him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Squash him!"

"Bag him!"

The scattered Removites rallied. They forgot all about "Hamlet." Even Wibley, for the moment, forgot that rehearsal was on, in his eagerness to get at Coker for interrupting it. The juniors fairly hurled themselves at Coker.

"Back up, you men!" roared Coker, as he was attacked on all sides. "Potter—Greene—come on—back up!"

But answer there was none. Potter and Greene were not "on" in that scene! They were off! Coker was left to deal with the wasp's nest he had stirred up.

Collared on all sides, resisting heroically, Coker went down on the floor of the Rag, almost disappearing from sight under the Remove Dramatic Society.

He struggled and roared.

"Potter! Greene! Back up! Do you hear?"

"Shut that door!" shouted Wibley.

The door banged and the key was turned. If Coker had reinforcements at hand, it was too late for them to come to Coker's aid. In point of fact, his

reinforcements were already at a distance, and increasing the distance.
"Sit on him!"
"Jump on him!"
"Scrag him!"
"Gerroff!" raved Coker, struggling wildly. "I'll smash you! I'll spiflicate you! Potter, Greene! Where are you? Yaroooh!"
Had Coker's faithless pals backed him up, there would have been something like a battle in the Rag. But with Coker on his own, a dozen Remove men found it quite easy to deal. Coker, pinned to the floor by five or six fellows sitting or standing on him, could only rave. Little more of him than his red infuriated face remained on view.
"Now, you fathead!" hooted Wibley, taking hold of Coker's rather prominent nose between finger and thumb, and tweaking the same. "What do you mean by interrupting our rehearsal?"
"Oooooch! Led do by dose!" spluttered Coker.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oooogh! Didn't I tell you to chuck 'Hamlet'?" gasped Coker. "Didn't I tell you I wouldn't let you? Well, you're going to chuck it, see? I'm going to see that you do! I'll wallop the lot of you. I'll—woooooch! Will you let go my nose? Wooogh!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I'm playing Hamlet myself, as you jolly well know—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You wouldn't like to play 'Othello' instead?" asked Smithy.
"No, I wouldn't! Leggo."
"That's a pity, for you're going to! Keep him tight, you fellows, while I -get some soot from the chimney."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
There was a yell of laughter as the Bounder raked down soot from the chimney. Coker made a frantic effort to break loose. But there were too many hands grasping him. Coker was safely held. His brawny arms, his sinewy legs, the back of his collar, his tousled hair, were all grasped, and Coker could do nothing but splutter.
"Go it, Smithy!"
"Make him up!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Keep that away from me," shrieked Coker. "If you dab that soot on me, I'll—I'll—-groooooooogh."
There was no help for Coker. The Bounder, with a shovel-full of soot in one hand, and a duster in the other, proceeded to "make up" Coker as Othello. Soot was spread over his crimson and perspiring face, and well

rubbed in. Some went into his nose, and some into his mouth, and Coker gurgled horribly. There were yells of laughter as Coker grew blacker and blacker.

His face was as black as the ace of spades. His ears, his neck, were blackened in turn. The remnant of the soot was rubbed into his hair. Coker did not, perhaps, look much like Othello: but he looked a great deal like a Hottentot, and still more like a chimney-sweep.

"Think that will do, you fellows?" asked Smithy, surveying Coker with great admiration when he had finished.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oooooogh!" Coker spluttered soot, "I—I——I'll— woooogh!"

"That will be a lesson to you, Coker," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The lessonfulness will be terrific, my esteemed idiotic Coker."

"Ooooooooooogh!"

"Now kick him out!" said Wibley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door was thrown open. Coker was bundled towards it, breathlessly spluttering fury and soot.

"Leggo!" gurgled Coker. "Leggo! I—I can't go like this—look at me—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young villains—."

"Kick him out!"

"I tell you I can't—!" shrieked Coker. The sooting was bad enough. But the prospect of facing the school in that sooty state was worse. "Look here, I've got to have a wash—you young scoundrels—oh, crumbs!"

Coker went whirling through the doorway into the passage. He sprawled there, spluttering. The doorway was packed with grinning faces.

"Good-bye, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker sat up.

"You young villains! You—you-—you—I—I—I'll—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door of the Rag slammed on Coker. He scrambled to his feet. He was tempted to hurl open the door again, and charge back into the Rag. But even Coker realised that he had had enough. It was borne in upon his mind that what he chiefly needed was a wash before he was seen in his present extraordinary state. With deep feelings, Coker postponed vengeance, and turned away. A fat junior, coming down the passage, gave Coker a startled blink through a big pair of spectacles, and uttered a howl of alarm.

"Oh, crikey! Who's that? Help!"

Billy Bunter stayed only for one startled look at that wild-looking figure

with a black face. Then he bolted. Who it was, what it was, Bunter did not know, but it was very alarming. Bunter fled for his life: and Coker, with feelings inexpressible in words, tramped away, leaving the Remove Dramatic Society to carry on without further interruption.

## CHAPTER XX

## NOT A LUNATIC!

MR. PROUT jumped. He almost bounded.

Prout, the master of the Fifth, was standing on the study landing, in conversation with Mr. Quelch and Mr. Capper. Or, to be more exact, Prout was conversing, while Quelch and Capper listened-in. They were not listening with enthusiasm. Whatever charms Mr. Prout's conversation had, had long since palled on his colleagues. Quelch, in fact, was edging in one direction, and Capper in the opposite direction, each in the hope of leaving Prout to the other.

Then all of a sudden, Prout, in full flow, stopped. Prout was facing the staircase—Quelch and Capper had their backs to it: so they did not, for the moment, see what Prout saw.

What Prout saw startled him. It amazed him. It caused his fruity voice to break off in the middle of a long sentence. It made him jump. It would have made him bound, clear of the floor, if Prout had had less weight to lift. Prout stared with popping eyes.

"What—!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"What—!" ejaculated Mr. Capper.

They were not interested in Prout's conversation. They knew all Mr. Prout's views on all subjects, the same having been expounded over and over again in Common-Room, many a time and oft. But they were both interested and intrigued by that sudden and startling change in Prout. They stared at Prout's astounded face, and then turned their heads, to follow the direction of Prout's goggling eyes, and see what it was that had so startled the Fifth-form master.

Then they, too, jumped.

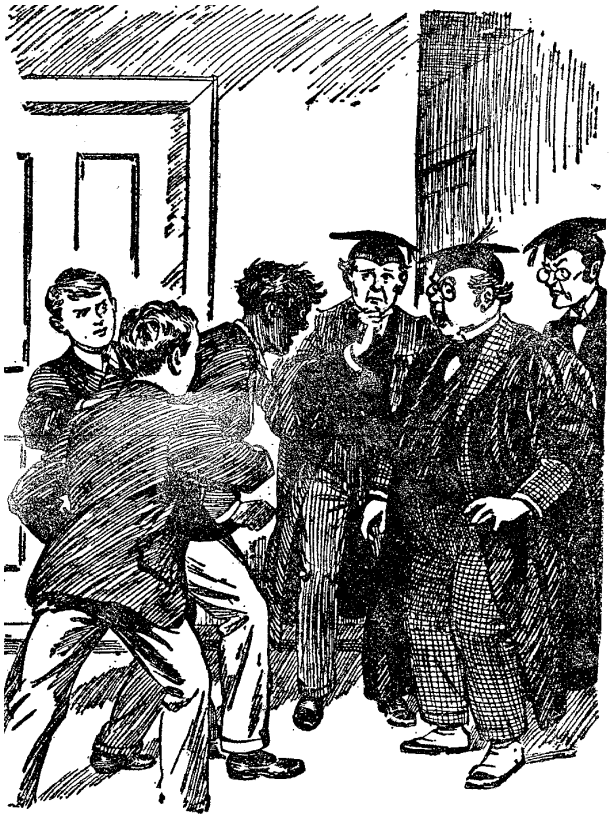
Coming up the staircase, two steps at a time, in hot haste, was the strangest figure that had ever been seen at Greyfriars School. It was no wonder that Prout had been startled. Quelch and Capper were startled too. They did not recognise Coker of the Fifth. Coker's own Aunt Judy could not have recognised him in his present state. His bosom pals, Potter and Greene, would not have known him. His form-master could not have dreamed, unless in a nightmare, that that strange and startling object was a member of his form.

"Who—who—who——-?" stuttered Prout.
"What—what—what——?" stuttered Capper.
"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Quelch.
The three masters stared blankly at a jet-black face and a tousled mop of sooty hair which, after Coker's wild adventures in the Rag, was standing on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine. They gazed thunderstruck as the black-faced apparition tore up the staircase.
Who he was, whence he had come, and what he was doing in the school, they could not begin to guess. They just gazed.
Coker hurtled on.
His chief desire in life, just then, was to escape the general view, till he had had time to wash off his new complexion. But that was not easy.
Billy Bunter had fled at a glimpse of him. Five or six other fellows had seen him as he cut for the stairs. Wingate of the Sixth had shouted "Who's that?"—Blundell of the Fifth had yelled "What's that?"—Temple of the Fourth had gasped "Great gad, look at that nigger!" A buzz of excited voices followed Coker up the staircase.
To get to the dormitory landing, where there were bathrooms, was Coker's object. He had to cross the study landing to the upper staircase for that purpose.
His luck was out. Three beaks, who might reasonably have been expected to be in their studies or in Common-Room, were grouped on the study landing—all staring blankly at Coker as he came. Among them was his own beak, Prout, the very last person Coker wanted to meet just then.
Coker did not stop.
He was aware that he was unreconised and unrecognisable. Prout did not know who he was, and Coker did not want him to know.
He hurtled on across the landing.
"Stop!" boomed Prout. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Is it some escaped lunatic? Who— what—?"
Coker shot by.
He gained the dormitory staircase. He shot up that staircase, leaving the three beaks gazing after him.
"Upon my word!" gasped Prout.
"Who can it be—what can it be?" articulated Mr. Capper. "Some negro—."
"Amazing!" said Mr. Quelch.
There was another patter of feet on the staircase. Wingate of the Sixth came up at a breathless run. He stared about the landing.
"Did you see?" he exclaimed.
"We saw him," gasped Prout. "Who is it, Wingate? Have you any idea? What is a black man doing here, rushing about the House? Some escaped

lunatic—."
"I caught just a glimpse of him, sir—he cut up the staircase. I can't imagine who he is or why he is here, but I thought I'd better see—."
"Certainly, certainly. He ran up the upper staircase! Go after him at once, Wingate—we will follow—we will follow!" exclaimed Prout. "Whoever he is, he must be secured—he must be secured."
Wingate ran up the dormitory stairs.
"Come!" said Mr. Prout. "Let us follow—Wingate may need assistance in securing him, especially if he is insane. Come."
Prout started up the dormitory staircase. Quelch and Capper followed him. They were followed in turn by several Sixth-form prefects—Gwynne, Loder, Sykes. Other fellows came crowding up. The alarm was spreading that an unaccountable black man was loose in the House, and excitement was growing intense.
"Here he is!" came a shout from Wingate, from above.
The Greyfriars captain reached the dormitory landing in time to see a black man bolt into a bath-room. Why he was heading for the bath-room, unless to hide, Wingate could not guess. He shot after him.
"Stop!" he shouted.
Coker did not stop. Wingate put on speed. Coker shot into the bath-room—the Greyfriars captain shot after him. A moment more, and his grasp was on the mysterious black man who had roused so much excitement.
"Now, then," he gasped.
"Oooh! Let go, you idiot! Oooogh! I—."
In Wingate's powerful grasp, even the beefy Coker had no chance. He was whirled back on to the landing, to meet the staring eyes of Prout, Quelch and Capper, Loder, Gwynne and Sykes, and a dozen excited fellows who followed them up.
"Here he is!"
"Wingate's got him—."
"A nigger—."
"An escaped lunatic—."
"Hold him, Wingate."
Coker, in a frantic state, was struggling. But Wingate had the back of his collar, and Gwynne and Sykes promptly secured his arm. Coker, almost gibbering in their grasp, faced a crowd of staring eyes.
"Here he is," boomed Prout. "Hold him securely! Do not let him escape."
"We've got him all right, sir."
"Do not handle him roughly—if the poor fellow is insane, he must be handed back to his keepers, who are doubtless in search of him. Obviously

he must be insane—he may be dangerous for all we can tell—keep him secure—."
"Will you leave go?" shrieked Coker.
"He speaks English!" exclaimed Prout. "He is a negro—a Hottentot, I should say—but he appears to speak English. Hold him securely while I question him."
Prout made soothing gestures. He had no doubt that the black man was some escaped lunatic: that seemed really the only way of accounting for him at all.
"Do not be alarmed, my poor fellow," boomed Prout. "Nobody will hurt you—you will be taken care of until you can be returned to your keepers. Who are you?"
"Oh, crikey! I'm Coker."
"Eh?"
"Coker!" groaned the hapless Horace.
"Do you mean that your name is Coker?" asked Prout, "There is a boy in this school—in my form—of that name. But you can scarcely be a connection of his. What are you doing here?"
"Leggo! I'm Coker."
"Yes, yes, you have told us that your name is Coker, But why are you in this building? Where have you come from?"
There was a snort from Mr. Quelch. Quelch was quicker on the uptake than Prout: moreover, at a closer view, Quelch's gimlet-eyes discovered that the prisoner's face was not black, but merely blackened.
"Absurd!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "This is Coker, Prout."
"He has said that his name is Coker, Quelch. That is something to go upon. We can ascertain by telephone whether a lunatic of that name is missing."
"That is Coker of your form, Mr. Prout."
"What!
"Coker!" gasped Wingate.
"Coker!" repeated Gwynne and Sykes, in wonder.
"Coker!" yelled a dozen voices.
Mr. Prout stood, for a moment or two, like a man in a dream. He simply could not assimilate it. Then he strode closer to the prisoner, and peered at him over his glasses. Then the expression that came over Prout's face was extraordinary.
"Upon my word!" he gasped. "This—this—this is not a negro—his face is—is—is blackened, apparently with soot, or some such substance. Is—is it possible that this is—is—is a Greyfriars boy—a senior boy—who has blackened his face to play this absurd, this ridiculous, this insensate trick? Speak! Are you Coker of my form?"

Yes," gasped Coker. "'Tain't my fault—I—I—I."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Only Coker!"
"That ass Coker!"
"What a lark!"



'Do you mean that your name is Coker?' asked Prout.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Silence!" boomed Prout. "This is not a laughing matter! Coker, if you are in your right senses, why have you done this? Why have you blackened your face in this absurd manner, to be taken for a negro?"
"I—I didn't—I—I——."
"In all my career as a school-master," gasped Prout, "I have heard of no such thing! I am amazed—astounded! A boy of my form—a senior form—the Fifth Form— deliberately blackens his face, to play an utterly insensate trick! Coker, you will answer for this to your head-master."
"That will do!" bawled Prout. "Go into that bathroom! Clean yourself! When you are clean, come to my study. I shall take you to Dr. Locke."
"But I—I—I—," gurgled Coker. Prout, with thunderous brow, stalked away. Quelch and Capper, exchanging expressive looks, followed. The crowd on

the dormitory landing were left yelling with laughter. Mr. Prout had stated that it was not a laughing matter, but most of the spectators seemed to think otherwise. Loud laughter followed Coker when, at last, he was able to get into the bath-room, to the soap and hot water he so badly needed. There for quite a long time Coker splashed, and scrubbed, and towelled: but there were still lingering traces of soot about him when he emerged, to turn his reluctant steps in the direction of his form-master' study.

## CHAPTER XXI

## UP AGAINST IT!

"ANYTHING for me, Toddy?"
"Nix!"
Billy Bunter grunted. He was scanning the letter-rack in break the following morning, with eager eyes and spectacles. Never had Billy Bunter been more in need of a postal-order. Two pounds one shilling short of the sum required to "square" Mr. Parker, and in dread of what Mr. Parker might do next, Bunter hoped against hope for a remittance that morning. But his celebrated postal-order, so long expected, had not yet materialised. There was nothing for Bunter.
The fat Owl rolled out into the sunny quad. His plump brow was corrugated with thought. His steps led him, insensibly as it were, in the direction of the tuck-shop. When Billy Bunter had any money he was the best Customer at Mrs. Mimble's little shop in the corner of the quad. He had money now—five pounds six shillings remaining out of Smithy's seven guineas. Most fellows liked a snack in break—Bunter most of all. The temptation to make a further inroad on the sum in his tattered wallet was strong. Only the thought of Mr. Parker, and what he might do, restrained him. With a great effort, Bunter turned away from the tuck-shop, and blinked round through his big spectacles for the Famous Five.
They were in the quad, talking to Wibley.
"You gave your name in to Quelch?" Wibley was saying, as the Owl of the Remove rolled up.
"Yes," answered Harry Wharton. "I'm down for the Latin prize."
"You'll have to do some swotting after class."
"Urn!" said Harry. "There's nets, you know—."
"You can cut nets," said Wibley, decisively. "You'll have to go all out to bag

the Old Boy's Prize. You've got all your work cut out to beat Linley."
"I know! But—."
"No good butting. You've got to write a copy of verses for the prize. You've got some good men to compete with. Have you done anything at it yet?"
"Not yet! Give a man time to breathe."
"Look here—."
"I say, you fellows—."
"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!" snapped Wibley.
"Shan't! I say, you fellows—."
"Roll away, barrel."
"I think you might listen to a chap, when he's in an awful hole," said Bunter, pathetically. "I say, you fellows, I—I'm worried about paying that man Parker. I'm not the fellow to owe money, and never was—."
"Oh, my hat!"
"But I'm short," said Bunter.
"And fat!" said Bob Cherry, with a nod.
"The shortfulness and the fatfulness are equally terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Oh, really, you fellows! I mean I'm short of cash— two pounds one shilling short," explained Bunter.
"Oh, crumbs! Did you run it up to that figure at the bun-shop yesterday?" ejaculated Bob. "You fat villain, we heard about Smithy letting you have the tin, when we came in. And you blued it on tuck."
"I—I suppose you fellows couldn't lend me two pounds one till my postal-order comes?" asked Bunter, blinking from face to face, with a not very hopeful blink.
"Right in one!" grunted Johnny Bull.
"You must have been oiling your supposer," said Bob. "It's running quite well. We couldn't."
"Well, look here," said Bunter. "I hear that Wharton's going in for the Old Boy's cash prize. You might get it, Wharton. If you go all out, you might beat that swot Linley, and the others ain't much. If you get it, will you lend me two pounds one out of the three guineas?"
"No so's you'd notice it," answered the captain of the Remove, laughing.
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"You fat, frabjous, frumptious frump!" hooted Wibley. "Wharton's going in for that cash prize to help out the funds of the Remove Dramatic Society. Those three guineas are booked."
"You shut up, Wibley," said Bunter. "I'm talking to Wharton. "Look here, Harry, old chap, I only want two pounds one. You can keep the other one

pound fifteen out of the three guineas."
"The other whatter?" ejaculated Wharton.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," exclaimed Bunter, irritably. "Can't you fellows do' simple arithmetic? Two pounds one out of three pounds three—that leaves one pound fifteen—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, do stop cackling!" hooted Bunter. "Look here, Harry, old fellow, we've been pals ever since you came to Greyfriars, haven't we?"
"Not that I know of!"
"Oh. really, Wharton! How much will you lend me out of the three guinea prize if you get it?"
"Nix!"
"Beast! You won't get it, anyhow," snorted Bunter. "Linley could beat you on the back of his neck. You can't swot like he does—he has to, because he's hard up—he, he, he!"
"You fat smudge—," began Bob.
"Oh. really. Cherry—."
"Kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.
"Beast! I—I mean, look here. old chaps, I'm in an awful hole." pleaded Bunter. "I've just got to raise the wind, and I can't sell my bike now—."
"Your bike!" ejaculated Frank Nugent.
"My new bike," said Bunter. "Smithy says it's his."
"Smithy says it's his!" repeated Bob Cherry, gazing at the fat Owl as if Bunter mesmerised him.
"Yes, and you know what Smithy is—grasping." said Bunter, with a sad shake of the head. "I'd be willing to sell it cheap now, as I only want two pounds one, but Smithy says it's his, and you know how selfish he is."
"Oh, crumbs!"
"The fact is, I asked him about it this morning." said Bunter. "He didn't even answer me—he just kicked me. I suppose he was in a bad temper about something. He kicked me—."
"Jolly good idea of Smithy's," said Bob Cherry. "Let's all do the same, you fellows."
"Hear, hear!"
"The samefulness is the proper caper."
"All together—!"
"Beasts!" roared Bunter, and he departed, without waiting for the Famous Five to follow Smithy's example.
It was a dismal and doleful fat Owl that morning. Billy Bunter, undoubtedly, was up against it: and with the selfishness to which he was

sorrowfully accustomed, nobody seemed to care! Somehow or other, Billy Bunter had to raise the sum of two pounds one, to add to the five pounds six that remained for Mr. Parker. But that was not his only worry. Bunter was hungry. He was always hungry in break, and at most other times. And there was cash in his pocket.

Billy Bunter was not bright, but even Bunter was bright enough to realise that he had better keep that remnant intact. On the other hand, he was hungry: and was there after all much difference between being short of two pounds one, and short of two pounds five, or two pounds ten? As he blinked in at the window of the tuck-shop, like a fat Peri at the gate of Paradise, Bunter decided that there was not!

He rolled into the tuck-shop.

He remained there till the bell rang for third school. When the bell clanged out, it was a shiny and sticky Bunter that joined the Remove crowd heading for the form-room. And the sum remaining in his tattered wallet had been reduced from five pounds six shillings to four pounds seventeen and six! Which did not look as if the fat Owl was likely to emerge from his financial difficulties in the near future!

## CHAPTER XXII

## A SPOT OF BOTHER!

"LINES?" asked the Bounder.

He came into No. 1 Study, in flannels, with a bat under his arm. Harry Wharton was alone in the study, after class. He was seated at the table, pen in hand, a book propped open against the inkstand. On a paper before him a number of lines in Latin were written,

He glanced round as Smithy spoke.

"No! Only copying out some verses."

"Swotting?" asked Smithy, with a stare.

"Sort of," admitted Wharton.

Vernon-Smith glanced at the paper on the table. It ran:

Forte sub arguta consederat ilice Daphnis,
compulerantque greges Corydon et Thyrsis in unum,
Thyrsis ovis, Corydon distentas lacte capellas,
ambo florentes aetatibus, Arcades ambo,
et cantare pares et respondere parati.

"What the thump's that?" asked Smithy. "Nothing we do in the Remove."
"Oh, no! One of Virgil's eclogues—number seven."
"You don't get enough of Virgil in class?" inquired the Bounder, sarcastically. "The Aeneid isn't enough for you—so you have to go and dig up the eclogues."
Harry Wharton laughed.
"I'm in for the Old Boy's Prize," he answered. "I've got to turn out a copy of Latin verses. I've borrowed that book from Quelch, and I shall have to take it back, so I'm copying out that one."
"Not much good plagiarising Virgil," said the Bounder. "Quelch knows that stuff by heart. He would spot an imitation on the spot."
"You silly ass! I'm not going to plagiarise! I'm studying the stuff because I'm going to do something pastoral in the same vein, that's all. Something about shepherds and flocks and lyres and things."
"Rather you than I," yawned the Bounder. "What about coming down to the nets?"
"I can't just now."
"If you're going to chuck cricket for swotting—."
"Think I want to?" grunted the captain of the Remove. "I'm for it now, and it can't be helped."
"Blessed if I see why. You're not hard up like Linley, and I don't see why you should stick in a study swotting to bag a money prize. For the love of mike, chuck it, and come down to the nets. I suppose you'd rather beat Carcroft when they come over, than bag the Old Boy's guineas," snapped Smithy.
"Yes, rather. But I've promised Wibley—."
"What on earth has Wibley got to do with it?"
"It's to help out the funds of R.D.S.," explained Wharton. "You know Wibley—he just can't cut his coat according to his cloth. Funds have got to be raised from somewhere if we're going to keep solvent. I've agreed to bag the Old Boy's guineas, if I can, to put into the kitty."
"Oh!" said Smithy.
"So cut off," said Harry, "and leave me to it. I'll come down later, after I've copied Out this dashed eclogue."
"Wibley's an ass," said Vernon-Smith. "And you're another."
"Thanks."
"Wibley thinks of nothing except his dashed theatricals," went on Smithy. "But you ought to have a spot more sense than that ass. Wouldn't your uncle stand you the tin, if you asked him?"
"I'm not going to ask him."

"You'd rather cut nets, and swot?" sneered Smith.
"Yes, I would. So buzz off and leave a fellow to it."
"Well, there's one thing you might have thought of, if Wibley didn't," said Vernon-Smith sharply. "Linley's here on a scholarship, and things aren't easy for him, and it means a lot to him to bag a few pounds in a prize. You don't need the money—and he does. You're the only man in the Remove with a chance of beating him to it, and you might have stood out."
Harry Wharton coloured uncomfortably.
"The prize is open to every fellow in the Remove," he said. "That's what it was founded for by that Old Boy. Linley wouldn't like any fellow to stand out as a favour to him."
"I know that! I'm not suggesting that you go to Linley's study and tell him you're doing him a favour," said the Bounder, sarcastically. "But you needn't have given your name in. Why couldn't you leave it to a fellow who needs it, when you don't?"
"It's not for myself—I tell you it's for the funds of the R.D.S."
"Oh, rats!"
With that, the Bounder walked out of the study.
Harry Wharton was left breathing rather hard.
He was, as a matter of fact, a very much more thoughtful and considerate fellow than Smithy. That made Smithy's reproach all the more discomforting. Now that he thought of it, he realised that he would not have stood in Mark Linley's way, if he had reflected a little more. That ass, Wibley, had rushed him into it, and there it was—an unlooked-for spot of bother!
He laid down his pen, rose from the table, and walked about the study, thinking it over, in a rather worried frame of mind.
He was "for it" now. He had given his word, and his word was his bond. He had to go all out to bag that cash prize for the funds of the R.D.S. But the more he thought about it, the less satisfied he felt.
There was a step in the passage, and Mark Linley looked in. Wharton coloured as he met the friendly, cheery glance of the junior of whom he was thinking.
'Coming down to the nets?" asked Mark.
"I—I don't know—."
"Swotting?" Mark smiled. "I hear you're in for the Old Boy's Prize. I'll give you a tussle for it, old scout."
"Oh, you'll beat me," said Harry.
"I'm not so jolly sure of that—but I'm going to try," said Mark, laughing. "We'll hope the best man will win, anyhow. I'm going down for a spot of cricket now. I'll leave you to put a wet towel round your head, if you're

swotting."
With that, and a cheery nod, Mark passed on down the passage.
"Oh. blow!" murmured Harry.
His face was clouded and he moved restlessly about the study, with his hands in his pockets, and a wrinkle in his brow. Mark, obviously, had not the faintest idea of wishing any fellow to stand out of the contest on his account. That Somehow made Wharton feel all the more that it was up to him to keep out. But for that ass Wibley—."
"I say, Harry, old chap." A fat voice squeaked, as a fat face looked into the study.
"Oh, buzz off, Bunter," exclaimed Wharton. He Was feeling worried and troubled, and in no mood for Billy Bunter.
"Oh, really, Wharton—." protested the fat Owl.
"Get out, for goodness sake."
"I say, old chap, I've got an idea—."
"Take it away and bury it."
"I wish you wouldn't keep on interrupting a chap, Wharton. You know I'm short of that seven guineas for Parker——."
"Bother Parker, and bother you! Travel!" snapped the exasperated captain of the Remove.
"He hasn't written again yet," continued Bunter. "But he's got to be paid. I'm two pounds nine and six short of the amount, old chap."
"Hook it!"
"Swotting?" asked Bunter, with a blink at the Latin paper on the table.
"Well, I won't keep you a minute. You fellows are going to do 'Hamlet'—."
"Blow 'Hamlet.'"
"Do let a fellow speak. What about a benefit performance?" asked Bunter.
"A what?" ejaculated Wharton.
"A benefit! My benefit!" explained Bunter.
"Wha-a-t?"
"Charge for admission, see, when you put up the show," explained Bunter, blinking at him. "That's the idea—and all takings go to the benefit fund. Of course, nobody wants to see you act—."
"What!"
"I mean to say, they couldn't, could they?" said Bunter. "But they'd come to a benefit performance, to raise the wind to see a chap through. See the idea? When a chap's really popular, fellows rally round and back him up. I shouldn't wonder if a benefit performance raised more than the two pounds nine and six. We'd have a spread in the Rag with what was left over'. See?"
"You howling ass—."

"Well, that's the idea," said Bunter. "You put it up to the other fellows, see? Look here, old chap, let's talk it over—."
"Will you buzz off?" roared Wharton.
"Look here, you beast—."
Harry Wharton made a stride to a corner of the study, where a cricket bat stood. He caught up the bat, and made another stride towards Bunter. There was a loud yell as the bat prodded fat ribs.
"Yaroooh!"
Billy Bunter did not stay longer to discuss his bright idea of a "benefit." He bounded into the passage.
The door of No. 1 Study slammed after him.
Harry Wharton, dismissing the fat Owl from mind, paced to and fro in the study, thinking it out, with a thoughtful and troubled brow. He did not want to stand in Mark Linley's light. On the other hand, he had engaged to do his best to swell the depleted funds of the R.D.S. If some other way could be found—!
Finally, he seemed to make up his mind. He picked up Mr. Quelch's book from the table, put the cricket bat under his arm, and left the study.
A fat junior, tenderly rubbing fat ribs in the passage, gave him an inimical blink through a big pair of spectacles. Unheeding the Owl of the Remove, Harry Wharton walked away to the study landing, and went down the stairs. The borrowed book was returned to Mr. Quelch's study: and the bat, a few minutes later was on active service at junior nets.
"Beast!" breathed Billy Bunter, as the captain of the Remove disappeared. He rolled into No. 1 study, now vacant.
There was a vengeful gleam in the little round eyes behind the big round spectacles.
Bunter had been prodded. His bright idea of a "Bunter benefit," which might have solved all his financial problems, had not even been listened to. Bunter, naturally, was wrathy.
Wharton had been swotting over his Latin paper for the Old Boy's Prize. If he had left that Latin paper on the study table, he was not going to see it when he returned. The beast could do his work all over again—and serve him jolly well right for prodding Bunter with a cricket bat!
There was the paper, lying on the study table where Bunter had seen it, The fat Owl blinked at it, and grinned.
He had no doubt it was the paper Wharton was preparing for the prize. What else could it be? Certainly it did not occur to Bunter's fat brain that Wharton had been copying out the opening verses of an eclogue of Virgil's.
Bunter was not equal to construing it. But, so far as he could make it out,

it seemed to him distinctly good— better, Bunter thought, than anything Mark Linley was likely to turn out! It must, Bunter had no doubt, have taken Wharton a lot of trouble to make up verses like that! All the better—he could have his trouble over again, after prodding Bunter!
"He, he!" chuckled Bunter, as he grabbed up the Latin paper, and crumpled in a fat paw. And he shoved it out of sight under the study carpet, and rolled away grinning.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## END OF A FRIENDSHIP!

"HEM!" said Potter.
"Hem!" said Greene.
Coker did not heed.
He was sitting in the window-seat in his study when Potter and Greene came in. He did not look at them. He seemed elaborately unconscious of their presence. If Potter and Greene, instead of being Coker's bosom pals in the Greyfriars Fifth, had been a pair of stray dogs, Coker could not have given them less heed.
It was tea-time. Generally, at tea-time, Coker's study has a somewhat festive aspect. That was indeed one of Coker's great attractions. Even in times of meagre rations, a fellow who had practically unlimited pocket-money, and an affectionate aunt who as good as bombarded him with hampers, was not likely to be in want of a well-spread board. But on the present occasion there was no sign of a spread in Coker's study. It was as bare as Mrs. Hubbard's celebrated cupboard. Coker, as he sat in the window, seemed to be thinking—but evidently not of tea. Potter and Greene, after an hour at senior nets, were ready for tea—more than ready. It was usual to feed well in that study. But it was only too sadly clear now that things were not as usual.
"Hem!" repeated Potter.
"Hem!" repeated Greene.
Coker still failed to rise to these gambits.
Coker was, in fact, giving his pals the marble eye. He had cast them off—discarded them—chucked them. So far as Horace Coker was concerned, Potter and Greene had had it!
It was their desertion of the previous day that had done it. They had failed to back up their great leader. They had not rushed into the Rag at Coker's heels, and backed him up valiantly—they had retreated in the opposite direction, leaving Coker to his fate! Coker had not spoken to them since.

That, in itself, was no hardship. It was indeed a distinct relief not to hear Coker talking cricket, and explaining what an idiot Wingate was to keep him out of the first eleven. During the day, Potter and Greene had borne this estrangement with considerable fortitude.
Coker maintained an attitude of lofty, distant dignity. Potter and Greene let him get on with it.
But at tea-time matters had altered. At tea-time, Potter and Greene considered, it was time for Coker to come out of his sulks!
"Hem!" said Potter, for the third time.
Then Coker looked at him, coldly.
"If you've got a cold, Potter, you'd better go and ask matron to give you something for it," he said.
"I haven't got a cold, old chap."
"Then don't keep on snorting about the study."
There was silence for a few minutes. Coker maintained loftly dignity, ignoring his former friends: or, as Potter and Greene looked at it, keeping up his sulks! They exchanged rather dismal glances. Then Potter took the plunge.
"What about tea, Coker?" he asked.
"Have you come up for tea?" asked Coker. with a manner that might have been evolved in the depths of a refrigerator.
"Well, it's tea-time," said Greene. "What about it?"
"I'm not stopping you, am I?" asked Coker.
"Hem!"
"Hem!"
Coker was not exactly stopping them. Potter and Greene we're at liberty to get on with tea in the study as soon as they liked—on their own resources. The snag was that their own resources were inadequate.
"I'm going to tea in hall myself," added Coker. "I don't care to tea with fellows I am not speaking to. You can have the study." He rose from the window-seat.
"Oh, I say, old chap!" protested Greene.
"We rather hoped you'd be giving us some tips about 'Hamlet,' over tea," said Potter. "I hardly know what we shall make of the play unless you give us some coaching, Coker."
Coker paused.
There was one thing about Coker that his friends liked. It was always easy to pull his leg. Often and often there was a rift in the lute in that study: but a spot of "soft sawder" generally sufficed to bring Coker round. Potter and Greene hopefully discerned signs of relenting in Coker's rugged face.

"Well, that's that," admitted Coker, after some thought. "You fellows let me down, but I'm not the man to let anybody down, I hope. You let me down rottenly. You jolly well know you did. You can't make out that you misunderstood. I told you plainly as any fellow could speak to back me up in rushing that mob of cheeky fags in the Rag. And you backed out."
"You see, old chap—," murmured Potter.
"I don't," said Coker. "You let me down! They got me, a whole crowd of them, and pinned me down and blacked my face—what are you grinning at, Potter?"
"I—I wasn't grinning, old chap—it—it was pretty thick, if you ask me, a crew of fags handling a Fifth-form man—."
"Too thick altogether," agreed Greene. "I—I wonder sometimes what this school is coming to!"
"Well, they did," said Coker. He seemed to have forgotten his intention of keeping up icy reserve and lofty, distant dignity. The urge to talk, perhaps, was too strong for him! Anyhow he went on, "That young scoundrel Vernon-Smith said he would make me up as Othello—is that anything to laugh at, George Potter?"
"Oh! No!" Potter turned a chuckle into a cough. "Far from it, old fellow! The cheek!"
"And they hoofed me out, all black," said Coker, in tones of deep and intense indignation. "And before I could get anywhere to get it off, that old ass Prout had to spot me, and take me for a nigger—an escaped lunatic—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Potter and Greene did not mean to laugh. Obviously, it was injudicious to laugh. They did it involuntarily. Really, they could not help it. All Greyfriars had been laughing over Coker's extraordinary escapade. It seemed funny to everybody but Coker.
"Oh, laugh!" said Coker, sardonically. "I don't mind! Funny, wasn't it?—me with a black face, and that old goat Prout thinking it was a black man escaped from an asylum—awfully funny, I've no doubt! Do laugh! I don't mind."
"Oh! No! You—you—see———."
"Not at all. You see—."
"He was going to take me to the Head," said Coker. "After I'd explained, the old ass left Dr. Locke out of it. But he came down on me like a ton of bricks. He made out that I was to blame. Me! He said I was to blame for the whole thing—going into the junior day-room and rowing with the fags—that's what he called it! You know Prout! I almost thought he was going to tell me to bend over! But he gave me a book!"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.
They looked serious at that! A "book" was an awful imposition. Fellows had lines—sometimes a lot of lines— but a whole book was a rare and quite overwhelming thing. A fellow who was given a "book" could count on his leisure hours being washed out for a long time to come.
"A book!' repeated Coker. "That's what Prout calls justice! A Fifth-form man calls a mob of fags to order— which really the prefects ought to be doing—and his beak makes out that he's to blame, and gives him a book! I don't know that I shall have any time to coach you fellows in acting—I'm not sure I shall be able to find time for the Stage Club at all. I've got to write out the first book of the Aeneid. All because those fags were cheeky, and because my pals let me down."
Potter and Greene looked as sad and sympathetic as they could. Indeed they could feel for a fellow who had to write out the first book of the Aeneid, from "Arma virumque cano" to "fluctibus aestas"—a total of seven hundred and fifty-six lines. It was enough to make a fellow's head ache to think of it! Still, it was getting past tea-time, and they wanted their tea. If there was going to be nothing in Coker's study, they had to go down to hall. So although they were sympathetic, they did want to get from the subject of Coker's woes to that of tea.
"Tough luck, old man," murmured Potter.
"It's the limit," said Greene.
"You'd better make a start on it, after tea," suggested Potter: rather a neat way of reminding Coker of tea.
"Yes, let's get tea out of the way, and make a start," agreed Greene, taking his cue from Potter.
"You've landed me with this," said Coker. "If you'd backed me up, as I distinctly told you to do, we should have mopped up that mob of fags and given them a jolly good lesson. Now they're carrying on just as if I hadn't told them to chuck it. Not, of course, that I'm going to let them do 'Hamlet.'"
"Not!" murmured Potter.
They gazed at Coker. Even yet, it seemed, the great Horace had not collected all the trouble he wanted. He was going to hunt for more!
"Certainly not," said Coker. "I'm not likely to change my mind, simply because the fags are cheeky, and Prout's an old ass. But, as I said, you've landed me in this, by letting me down. I'm done with you."
"My dear chap—," protested Potter.
"Coker, old man—," murmured Greene.
They could not help looking dismayed. This meant that there was not only going to be no tea in Coker's study that day. It boded ill for days to come.

"Well, look here," said Coker, relenting a little, and quite unaware that his pals were thinking less of a lost friendship than of lost feeds. "Look here, I'm in the soup with this rotten book to write. It's all your fault, as you jolly well know. I've no time to write hundreds of lines— my time's of value, as you fellows know, if Prout doesn't. If you like to write the book for me—."

"What?"

"Prout hardly looks at the lines, except to tot them up," said Coker. "That part's all right. You've helped me with impots before, and Prout never noticed. You needn't be afraid of Prout. You two can write that book for me, and save my time—."

"Our time's of no value," remarked Potter, with a deep and intense sarcasm which Coker did not even notice.

"Exactly," agreed Coker. "But mine is, you know."

"Oh!" gasped Greene.

"If that's settled, all right," said Coker, relenting still further. "I shall be glad to get that rotten book off my hands. You take half each."

Potter gave him a look. Greene gave him a look. Then they gave each other a look, and walked to the door.

Coker's friendship, or at least Coker's unlimited supply of tuck, was worth something. It was worth the trouble of pulling Coker's leg, and of listening to Coker talking about cricket. But there was a limit. The prospect of sharing the almost endless task of writing out a whole book of Virgil was beyond the limit. Potter and Greene walked out of the study.

"Here, where are you going?" called out Coker.

They were gone.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## BOOT FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER blinked up the Remove passage. He blinked down the Remove passage. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way, and there was no man! Whereupon Billy Bunter edged closer to the door of No. 1 Study, and bent his fat head to listen at the keyhole.

This was one of Billy Bunter's charming manners and customs which had earned him, in the Remove, more kicks than he could have counted. Bunter was inquisitive. He was curious. When Bunter was curious he wanted to know. And so long as keyholes were made to doors, Bunter was never likely to be left in the dark when he wanted to learn.

And he was very curious indeed now. After third school on Friday, five fellows had gone up to that study. It was bright and sunny in the quad, and most fellows naturally were out of doors after third school. But Harry Wharton had spoken to his friends when they came out of the form-room, and they had all gone up to the study, and shut the door. Something, it seemed to Bunter, was "on." Whatever might be "on" was no concern of Bunter's— but Billy Bunter's interest in what did not concern him was deep and abiding. So there was Bunter, with a fat ear applied to a keyhole, listening-in.

Harry Wharton's voice, in the study, was distinctly audible to the surreptitious fat Owl. He was too late to catch the first words, but he listened with eager inquisitiveness to what followed.

"—what you fellows think about it. I never thought, when that ass Wibley rushed me into it. But Smithy said something yesterday, and—and—well, look here, I don't want to stand in Linley's light."

"Well, old Marky wouldn't dream of wanting you to stand out, on his account," said Bob Cherry.

"I know that! But I've been thinking it over, and I don't like it! I don't mean that I think it's a sure thing for me—Linley would very likely beat me to it. But—."

"Neck and neck, I fancy," said Frank Nugent. "The neck-and-neckfulness would be terrific."

"Bother that ass Wibley!" said Johnny Bull. "Well, he's right that some of us ought to play up, after Mauly and Smithy have shelled out as they have," said Harry. "But if we can think of some other way, I'd rather take my name out, and stand aside."

"We'll jolly well think of some other way, then," said Bob. "I'd like to see old Marky walk off with the Old Boy's Prize. I know he wants some new books that he won't ask his people for."

"That does it," said Harry. "Look here, there's five of us, and among us we can manage it, one way or another—if you fellows agree."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

"That's all right," said Johnny Bull. "We'll all play up, and manage it somehow. Twelve bob each would do it."

"It's agreed then?" asked Harry.

"Yes, rather," said Frank Nugent.

"The agreefulness is terrific."

"Then I'll take my name out, and wash it out," said the captain of the Remove. "I shan't be sorry to get out of the swotting, if you come to that. There's the cricket, you know, though Wibley thinks that doesn't matter—."

"Wibley's an ass."
"Wibley's a born idiot."
"Wibley is a terrific fathead."
Harry Wharton laughed.
"Well, if we raise the tin among ourselves somehow, it will be a cert for the R.D.S. funds, and the exam was only a chance, anyhow," he said. "Wibley won't have any kick coming. It's settled, then—I'm out of it. And—."
There was a sudden interruption.
The study door flew wide open, and into the doorway rolled a fat figure, yelling. Behind it appeared Herbert Vernon-Smith, dribbling that fat figure into the study.
Five fellows jumped and stared round.
"What the thump—!"
"What the dickens—."
"Yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast! Whooohooop!" roared Billy Bunter, as he rolled on the study carpet.
The Bounder looked in, grinning.
"Did you fellows know that Bunter had his ear to the keyhole?" he asked.
"Eh? Oh! No."
"Well, he had, when I came up, so I thought I'd give you the tip."
"You fat villain—."
"You terrific toad!"
"I—I say, you fellows." Bunter spluttered wildly. "I hadn't—I wasn't—I didn't—wow! I was only stooping to tie up my shoe-lace, and—and——ow!"
The Bounder, laughing, went on up the passage. He had come up at a rather unfortunate moment for the inquisitive fat Owl. Bunter, with his ear to the keyhole, had not seen him coming, and was apprised of his arrival only by the landing of a boot on his plump trousers. It was quite a surprise for Bunter, as well as for the Famous Five.
He sat up, gasping for breath, and blinking apprehensively at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles.
"You prying fat worm!" roared Johnny Bull.
"Oh, really, Bull—."
"Boot him!"
Billy Bunter scrambled up in haste, and backed away.
"I tell you I wasn't listening," he gasped. "Just like that cad Smithy to think a fellow was listening at a keyhole, when he only stooped to pick up a pin. I never heard a word you fellows were saying about the Old Boy's Prize, or Linley, or anything! Not a syllable. I was simply tying up a pin—I mean picking up a shoe-lace—I—I mean—."

"Scrag him!" said Bob Cherry.
"The scragfulness is the proper caper!"
"Boot him!"
"Keep off, you beasts!" roared Bunter, "I tell you If never heard a word, and I don't know anything about Wharton standing out of the Old Boy's Prize. I was simply picking up a letter I'd dropped when that beast Smithy—."
"As well as a pin?" asked Bob.
"I—I mean a pip-pip-pin—I mean I was tying up my letter—that is, my shoe-lace, and if you fellows think for a moment that I'd listen at a keyhole, I can only say—yaroooooh!"
Billy Bunter had rolled into No. 1 Study under the propulsion of one boot. He rolled out again under the propulsion of five—all vigorously applied. He roared as he rolled.
The door of that study banged after him, and Harry Wharton and Co. resumed the discussion of ways and means.
A breathless fat Owl tottered into No. 7 Study, uttering a series of anguished squeaks. Peter Todd, who was working at the table, gave him a glare. Toddy was deep in his paper for the Old Boy's Prize, and he seemed to have no use for Bunter's musical effects.
"What's the row, you fat ass?" he barked.
"Ow! wow! I've been kicked," gasped Bunter.
"Good!" said Peter.
"Beast! Making out that a chap was listening at a keyhole, because a chap stooped to pick up a bullseye outside their door—."
"So they kicked you for that, did they?" asked Peter.
"Ow! wow! Yes! wow! And—."
"Jolly good idea! I'll do the same," said Peter, laying down his pen and rising from the table.
"Why, you beast—look here—keep off—oh, crikey! Wow!"
Billy Bunter departed from No. 7 Study as hastily as he had departed from No. 1. Peter had time to get in only one, but it was a good one, and the fat Owl roared as he departed.
"Ow! wow! ow! wow!" faded away down the passage. On the study landing, Billy Bunter rubbed almost innumerable aching spots, and it was borne in upon his fat mind, not for the first time, that the way of the eavesdropper was hard!

## CHAPTER XXV

## BUNTER KNOWS HOW!

"HARRY, old chap—."
"Oh, scat!"
"Hold on a minute, dear old fellow."
"Oh, bother."
After class, the Famous Five were heading for the nets. They really had no time to waste on Billy Bunter, especially as Wibley was rounding them up again at six for another rehearsal However, with a fat paw clutching his sleeve, the captain of the Remove held on.
"Cut it short," he said.
"You might give a chap a minute, when he's in an awful hole," said Bunter. "I haven't paid Parker yet."
"We've heard that one," remarked Bob Cherry.
"I'm two pounds fifteen shillings short," said Bunter.
"It's growing!" remarked Frank Nugent. "I wonder how much Parker will see of his seven guineas, at this rate."
"The wonderfulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Well, I was expecting a postal-order, you know—"
"Help!"
"But it hasn't come," said Bunter. "And—and I've thought of something else. I'm going in for the Old Boy's Latin Prize."
"Oh, my hat!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I say, you fellows, I wish you wouldn't cackle every time a fellow opens his mouth," said Bunter, irritably. "Now Wharton's out of it, it will be all right, if Wharton is willing to do the decent thing, and help."
"Eh? How's that?" asked Harry, staring. "You couldn't begin to do that Latin paper, you fat ass: and if you could, you'd be too jolly lazy. I can see you swotting over a Latin paper!"
"I'm not going to swot, of course," said Bunter. "But you're out of it now, ain't you?"
"Bunter heard that, when he wasn't listening at the keyhole this morning," remarked Bob Cherry, and the juniors chuckled.
"Yes, I'm out of it, ass," said Harry. "But any fellow who's in could walk all over you, especially Linley."
"But now you're out of it, you don't want your Latin paper," explained Bunter. "Well, as you won't want it, you can give it to me—."
"Wha-a-t?"
"It would be a waste to chuck it away, wouldn't it?" said Bunter, blinking at the astonished captain of the Remove. "You just let me have it, see, and I'll go in for the cash prize, and—and pay Parker, see?"
"Oh, crumbs!"

"I'm pretty certain your paper's better than Linley's," went on Bunter. "And you needn't bother about Linley—who's Linley, anyhow? No need to worry about him, that I can see. We're old pals, ain't we, old fellow? You let me have your Latin paper, and that three guineas is mine, and—and——."

"You fat, frabjous, frumptious, footling fathead!" said the captain of the Remove, in measured tones, "I won't let you have my Latin paper, for two reasons—first, it's against the rules for one fellow to do another fellow's paper

—second, I haven't done the paper yet, and I'm not going to."

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"So that's that," said Harry. "Now roll away, like a good barrel."

"I don't think you ought to tell whoppers, Wharton, just to get out of helping a fellow out of a hole—."

"What?" roared Wharton.

"I jolly well know you've done your Latin paper. It's a bit thick telling fibs about it," said Bunter, scornfully. "I'm surprised at you, Wharton! You make out that I tell whoppers. Well, what about you?"

"You—you—you!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Don't tell any more fibs, old chap! It's rather mean," said Bunter. "Look here, can I have that paper?"

Harry Wharton breathed hard and deep. Why Bunter supposed that he had already done his Latin paper, he could not begin to guess. He had got no further than copying out a section of one of Virgil's eclogues, with the idea of studying that great poet in the pastoral style, when the idea had been given up. But Billy Bunter, evidently, believed that he had done the Latin paper, and that he was prevaricating on the subject.

"You won't want it now," urged Bunter. "Just let me have it, and—and don't say anything about it, of course. Can I have it, old chap?"

"I tell you I haven't even touched the Latin paper!" howled Wharton.

"And I tell you that I jolly well know you have," howled back Bunter, "and I think it's jolly mean to keep on telling crammers about it, and I can jolly well say plainly—yow-ow-wow!"

Harry Wharton did not appear disposed to argue the point with Bunter, as to whether he had been telling "crammers" or not. He grasped the fat Owl by a fat neck, and sat him down in the quad, hard. Then he walked on with his friends, leaving Bunter sitting and spluttering.

"Oh! Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Beast! Ow!"

Billy Bunter resumed the perpendicular, casting a devastating blink after the Famous Five.

Seldom had Bunter felt so indignant and aggrieved.

He could see no reason whatever why a fellow who was standing out shouldn't let him have his Latin paper. True, it was against the rules: but what did the rules matter, in comparison with Billy Bunter's pressing need of cash?

But Wharton denying that he had done the paper at all really put the lid on—telling crammers, just to get out of doing a fellow a good turn! Bunter couldn't help feeling very contemptuous about that.

He jolly well knew that Wharton had done that paper. Not only had he seen it on the table in No. I Study, but he had looked at it, blinked at it, construed it so far as he could understand it, and hidden it under the study carpet, to give the beast the trouble of doing it over again! So what was the use of Wharton saying that he hadn't done it at all?

Bunter had rather expected a fuss to be made about that missing paper. But nothing had been said about it. No doubt that was because Wharton had given up the idea of entering for the prize. It was, as far as Bunter knew, still under the study carpet, where he had shoved it out of sight the previous day. Wharton, obviously, didn't want it, Yet he wouldn't let Bunter have it!

"Beastly dog-in-the-manger!" breathed Bunter, as he rolled back to the House. "Well, if he doesn't want it. I'm jolly well going to have it, I know that!"

Bunter's fat mind was made up on that point.

Wharton had done a paper for the prize—a jolly good paper, as far as Bunter could judge. It was a sheer waste to leave it where it was! Billy Bunter was going to have that Latin paper!

He rolled into No. 1 Study. He jerked back the study carpet, and blinked eagerly under it.

There was the paper, just where he had shoved it.

Bunter grabbed it up. He rolled out of No, 1 Study with his prey crumpled in a fat hand.

Grinning with triumph, the fat Owl rolled on to his own study. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were at the nets with the other Remove cricketers, and Bunter had his study to himself.

He banged the door, and sat down at the table.

He had Wharton's paper. But even Bunter's limited intelligence made him aware that it was of no use in Wharton's hand-writing. Bunter proceeded to copy it out in his own sprawling fist—little dreaming that he was copying out verses which, so far from having been written by a Remove man of Greyfriars, had been celebrated for a couple of thousand years! Their celebrity had not reached Bunter's fat ears: and he had no doubts. From "Forte" to "parati" Bunter industriously wrote out the lines which

Virgil's pen had traced twenty centuries earlier!
Satisfied with the result, he screwed up Wharton's paper and disposed of it in the study chimney! That was that!
"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.
He left the study with that precious composition in his pocket. He bent his steps in the direction of the Shell studies, to look for Stewart of the Shell. Bunter was fairly satisfied that the verses were pretty good—but he was anxious to get a second opinion! Stewart of the Shell was well-known to be a whale at Latin, and if he pronounced in favour of those verses, all was plain sailing—the three guineas as good as in Bunter's pocket!
He found Stewart in his study. The Shell fellow stared at him as he rolled in, apparently not particularly pleased to see a fat Removite.
"What the thump do you want?" he asked.
"I say. will you look at those verses, old chap, and tell me what you think of them?" asked Bunter. "I think they're pretty good, but you know more about it than I do."
"I hope so," assented Stewart.
Bunter laid his scrawl on the table, and Stewart looked at it. Being quite well acquainted with the seventh eclogue of Virgil, he naturally recognised the verses at a glance.
"Think they're good?" asked Bunter.
"Of course they are, ass," answered Stewart. "What about it?"
"Oh, you think they're really good?"
"I should be rather an ass if I didn't! What are you driving at?" asked the puzzled Shell fellow.
"Oh! Nothing! But, I say, Linley of our form is pretty good at Latin. Think he could do anything as good as that?"
"Not in a dozen lifetimes, fathead."
"Oh! Thanks!" gasped Bunter.
And he rolled out of Stewart's study with his precious paper, leaving the Shell fellow quite perplexed.
Bunter was completely satisfied now. Stewart, a dab at Latin, had passed the verses as really good, and pronounced that Linley of the Remove couldn't equal them! That was more than enough for Billy Bunter! The Old Boy's three guineas were as good as his: and his financial troubles were solved. And as he wanted only two pounds fifteen to make up Mr. Parker's account, and as he was going to get three guineas beyond a shadow of a doubt, that left a balance of eight shillings that could be safely expended on tuck! So Billy Bunter's next proceeding was to roll away to the tuck-

shop, and expend the precise sum of eight shillings on refreshments, liquid and solid!

## CHAPTER XXVI

## CATASTROPHIC FOR COKER!

HORACE COKFR breathed hard.
He breathed deep.
His feelings, indeed, were deep.
It was Saturday afternoon. That was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the Greyfriars men had been enjoying it in their various ways—with the exception of Coker of the Fifth!
Coker was not enjoying life these days.
There had been cricket that afternoon, on Big Side and on Little Side. But Coker had no time for cricket. Many fellows had gone out on their jiggers—but Coker had no time for biking. Others had pushed out boats on the Sark— but Coker had no time for boating. Coker's leisure hours these days, were wholly occupied in transcribing Latin -- that awful book Prout had given him. Every day, since Prout had given him that book, Coker had had a shot. at it, and lines were growing into quite a heap in his study. That afternoon he had laboured long and hard, till he was fed up to the back teeth with the masterpiece of the great Mantuan: and would have given a term's pocket money to step back to 20 B.C. and punch Virgil in the eye.
Now he was taking a stroll in the quad, to refresh himself, before going back to his study to get on once more with that interminable task.
His stroll took him past the windows of the Rag: and from these windows, which were open, voices floated out. He paused to listen to Wibley's

"To be or not to be, that is the question
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them."

Wherefore did Coker breathe hard and deep. They were rehearsing "Hamlet" again: those cheeky fags—regardless of Coker, indeed forgetful of his existence.
Coker tramped on with knitted brows.

He had had no time for Stage Club business lately—no time for anything but that rotten "book." The other members seemed more than willing to let things slide—indeed, he was no longer on speaking terms with two of them—Potter and Greene, formerly his bosom pals. It looked as if the masterly performance of "Hamlet," with Coker in the title-role, might never come off at all that term—while that gang of cheeky fags, who called themselves a Dramatic Society, were getting on with it actively, and had already announced the date of the performance. Scrubby little rascals, passing Coker of the Fifth by, like the idle wind which they regarded not!

However, Coker was going to put paid to that, somehow. He did not yet know how: but he was quite determined that they weren't going to get by with it.

But he did not think of charging into the Rag, and dealing with the young rascals as they deserved. Even Coker had had enough of these tactics. And he did not want another book from Prout!

He went into the House at last, and up to his study, to have another grind at that awful book. Prout was very shirty with him these days, and was quite capable of cutting up rusty if that book was not handed in soon. Impots were sometimes doubled when they were handed in very late: and the bare thought of the Second Book, added to the First, made Coker feel quite faint.

Potter and Greene were in the study, and Coker gave them an expressive glance as he came in.

They were in flannels, having just come in from the cricket. They were in the Fifth-form eleven, which rather irritated Coker. The great Horace was conscious of being a cricketer second to none. Nobody, however, knew this, excepting Coker: and he had no more chance of figuring in the Form eleven than in a Test match. Duds like Potter and Greene were picked, while a man who could have played their heads off was passed by unregarded!

Potter was sprawling in the window-seat, Greene in the armchair, and both were refreshing themselves with ginger- beer, while they discussed the afternoon's play. They paused as Coker came in, and looked at him. They were quite ready to "come round" if Coker revealed symptoms of amity: especially as it was nearly tea-time.

But Coker revealed no such symptoms.

Coker's look was grim. His glance at Potter and Greene indicated his view that they were practically worms, or microbes, or germs, unworthy of his notice. He sat down at the study table, propped P. Vergilius Maro against the inkstand, dipped pen in ink, and resumed his labours, which really

seemed to him like those of Sisyphus with no visible end.
The hapless Horace, after all his toil, had arrived at "At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens": hardly half of what he had to do. Coker was not in the least interested in the pious Aeneas, or what he was revolving in his mind nocturnally: to Coker's powerful intellect it was just so much tosh that he had to write out for Prout—merely that, and nothing more.
Wearily he recommenced: and Potter and Greene, having exchanged a wink behind Coker's burly back, resumed their conversation.
"It was rotten luck," remarked Potter. "Hilton ought to have taken that ball. Wingate would have been out."
"A perfect sitter," agreed Greene. "Rotten luck for you, old man."
"I mean to says, what's the good of a man putting up good bowling, if they go to sleep in the field and drop easy catches," said Potter. "I had Wingate on toast if that ass Hilton had had his eyes open."
"Too jolly slack, that chap," said Greene.
"When the field lets a bowler down, it's pretty sickening," said Potter. "It ought to have been Wingate caught Hilton bowled Potter, and then that lackadaisical ass misses a catch that Bunter of the Remove could have taken—a perfect sitter—."
Coker glanced round over a burly shoulder.
"I'm doing lines," he hooted.
"That's all right—we're not stopping you, are we?" asked Potter.
"I can't write out this tosh with jaw going on in both ears! Shut up."
"Look here, Coker—."
"I said shut up."
Coker turned back to his lines, breathing hard. It was bad enough to have to sit there grinding out lines, without a lot of senseless cackle going on to interrupt and confuse him. That was Coker's view. Potter and Greene, on the other hand, saw no adequate reason why they shouldn't talk, in their own study, if the spirit moved them to do so.
"Blundell's too jolly easy-going," went on Potter, just as if Horace Coker hadn't spoken. "I wouldn't play Hilton in a Form match. He's good enough when be likes—but how often does he like?"
"Not often," agreed Greene.
"Dropping a catch like that, you know—."
Coker rose from the table.
"Are you chattering asses going to shut up?" he asked. "If not, I'm going to shut you up. I can tell you I'm pretty fed up with you anyhow. Cut the cackle!"
"Can't we talk cricket if we like?" demanded Potter.
"Fat lot you know about cricket!" said Coker, derisively. "Blundell's an ass,

I know, but I wonder that he's such an ass as to play duds like you chaps. Anyhow, I've got lines to do, and it's all your fault, as you know. Shut up, if you don't want me to knock your silly heads together."

Potter and Greene sat up at that. They were used to rather dictatorial ways from Coker. But there was a limit—especially when, owing to the rift in the lute, Coker's ample hampers were no longer available to his study-mates. Coker's high-and-mighty ways, accompanied by hampers, were one thing. Unaccompanied by hampers, they were quite another.

"I'd like to see you knock our heads together, Coker!"

"I jolly well would!" hooted Greene.

"Oh, would you?" exclaimed Coker. "Then I'll jolly well do it, see?"

And he grabbed.

One brawny hand grabbed Potter in the Window-seat. The other brawny hand grabbed Greene in the armchair. Before they quite knew what was happening, Potter and Greene were whirled together, and their two heads came

into contact with a loud Concussion.

Crack!

"Oh!" roared Potter.

"Oh!" roared Greene.

Coker had done it! He had knocked their heads together, as he had said that he would. Possibly Coker expected that to end the matter, and Potter and Greene to shut up, and keep quiet, while he did his lines, If so, what he expected did not come to pass.

Potter and Greene, grabbed by Coker, grabbed Coker in their turn. They grabbed him with energy. The three of them whirled in combat. They crashed into the study table, and sent it flying. Sheets of impot paper, adorned with lines from the Aeneid in Coker's sprawling fist, went to the floor. On them landed the inkpot. And on the lines and the inkpot trampled feet, as three excited fellows whirled round the study struggling.

Bump!

Coker landed on the floor. Big and beefy as he was, Horace was not quite a match for Potter and Greene combined. They fairly crashed him down, in a breathless heap. Coker sprawled over Latin lines in a sea of ink, gurgling for breath.

Leaving him to sprawl, Potter and Greene walked out of the study—a little breathless, but not so breathless as Coker. They rubbed their hands as they went.

Coker sat up.

He was breathless. He was dirty. He was surrounded by an overturned

table and several overturned chairs, scattered books and papers.
"OOOoooh!" gasped Coker.
He staggered to his feet. He remembered his lines. He looked at them. They lay at his feet—swimming in ink. Three hundred and fifty lines out of the total of seven hundred and fifty-six—nearly half that awful "book"— inky, crumpled, trampled—obviously in no state for presentation to Prout! Coker gazed at them, with feelings that could not be expressed in English, or Latin, or any known language.
He gazed and gazed. It was quite a long time before Coker felt equal to setting up the table, sorting out fresh impot paper and starting again at "arma virumque cano."

## CHAPTER XXVII

## SURPRISING!

"BEATS me!" said Bob Cherry.
"The beatfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Potty, I suppose," remarked Johnny Bull.
"Can't make it out," said Frank Nugent.
Harry Wharton shook his head. He was puzzled: and so were most of the Remove fellows. It was really hard to understand.
Billy Bunter was "in" for the Old Boy's Latin Prize. On Tuesday the papers had to be handed in to Mr. Quelch. It was a "Form" prize, and concerned only the Lower Fourth and their form-master. It was Quelch's duty, and perhaps his pleasure, to go through the papers submitted, judge them, and award the cash prize to the best. Half-a-dozen Remove men were putting in for it. The surprising thing was that William George Bunter was one of the fellows who marched off to Quelch's study after class to hand in his paper.
It was not surprising that Bunter, well known to be in need of cash, and with the dread of Mr. Parker on his fat mind, had, in an optimistic moment, entered for the prize. Hope springs eternal in the human breast: and Bunter might have entertained a faint hope of pulling it off—when he put down his name.
That he had the faintest chance was, of course, an absurd idea. He was easily the worst man in the form at that game—even a dense fellow like Bolsover major, or a slacker like Snoop, could have beaten him hollow. Moreover, he was also the laziest member of the Remove, and even if he

could have done the paper, he would certainly have put off the labour till it was too late. So when the Lower Fourth learned that Bunter had entered, they laughed and expected to hear nothing more of that.
Nobody had expected to hear that Bunter had handed in his paper.
But he had!
Ogilvy, Russell, Peter Todd, Mark Linley, and Tom Brown had handed in papers. That was expected. But so had Bunter, That was unexpected.
Judgment was to be delivered the following day. The general expectation was that Mark Linley would be the lucky man, now that Wharton had withdrawn. Toddy and Tom Brown were possibles. But Bunter—!
Bunter, of course, would be nowhere. It was fairly certain that the Latin, if perpetrated by Bunter, would be of a kind that "would have made Quintilian stare and gasp." But that he had compiled a Latin paper at all was amazing. Howsoever badly he had done it, it meant swotting. And was Bunter the fellow to swot? Distinctly he was not.
Indeed, when Tom Brown came into the Rag, with the news that he had seen Bunter taking his paper into Quelch's study, the fellows there doubted their ears. But it was true. The New Zealand junior had been coming out as Bunter went in. He had seen Bunter add his paper to the little pile collecting on Quelch's table. So that was that!
Billy Bunter's proceedings, as a rule, did not excite much interest in his form. His unimportance was, indeed, unlimited. But Billy Bunter setting up as a competitor for a Latin paper was interesting, because it was so surprising.
"Beats me hollow," said Bob Cherry. "Quelch will have a fit when he sees the paper, you can bank on that."
"Bet you he was surprised when Bunter put his name down," remarked Squiff. "I'd like to see Bunter's paper! It would be worth seeing."
"Has Bunter been swotting over that paper, Toddy?" asked Bob.
Peter Todd shook his head. He was even more puzzled than the other fellows by this astonishing proceeding on the part of his fat study-mate.
"Not that I've noticed," he answered. "He's jolly well done no swotting when I've been in the study."
"Must be off his chump," said Vernon-Smith. "Bunter couldn't do a decent Latin paper if he swotted for a whole term with a wet towel round his fat head. And if he hasn't worked at it at all—!"
"He jolly well hasn't," said Peter. "I should have noticed if Bunter had been doing any work. Not the sort of thing you see every day!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he comes."
Billy Bunter roiled into the Rag. All eyes were turned on him at once. His

fat and fatuous countenance had a self-satisfied expression, which indicated that Bunter, at least, expected good results.
He blinked round through his big spectacles, apparently surprised to find himself the subject of so much interest.
"I say, you fellows, what's up?" he asked.
"Browny says you've taken your Latin paper to Quelch's study," said Bob.
"Eh? Yes."
"No chance for you now, Linley!" remarked Skinner, and there was a laugh.
"Will you lend a fellow a bob out of the three guineas, Bunter—when you get it?"
"No fear," answered Bunter, promptly. "You see, I've got to pay Parker. I'm three guineas short—just the amount. That's why I went in for the prize, you know."
"All right now for Parker!" chuckled Squiff.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," said Bunter. "I'm going to Courtfield tomorrow to settle with Parker, and I shall be jolly glad to have done with it. You'll lend me my bike to go on, won't you, Smithy?"
"Whose bike?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, really, Smithy! You've got your Moonbeam back, so I think you might lend me my new bike to go to Parker's to-morrow," exclaimed Bunter warmly.
The Bounder chuckled.
"I'll lend you both, if you like, if you bag the prize for a Latin paper," he answered.
"Thanks, old chap."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You haven't bagged the prize yet, old fat man," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Don't count your chickens too early."
"The countfulness before the hatchfulness spoils the broth, as the English proverb remarks, my esteemed fat Bunter."
"Oh, that's all right," said Bunter carelessly. "I'm pretty certain of the Old Boy's Prize. Sorry to knock you out, Linley, if you were banking on it. Every man for himself, you know."
"Don't mind me," said Mark Linley, laughing. "If you beat me, Bunter, I can take it."
"The if-fulness is terrific."
"Blessed if I make the fat chump out," said Peter Todd, staring at Bunter in wonder. "He really seems to think that he has a chance of bagging it."
"More than a chance, I fancy," said Bunter, complacently. "I call it a cert."

"I haven't seen you swotting over it."
"Eh? Oh! No! I don't need to swot, like you do, Peter." Bunter tapped a podgy forehead. "Brains, you know! That's what does it."
"Oh, my hat!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You can cackle," said Bunter, disdainfully. "Wait till Quelch dishes out the prize tomorrow! You're not in it, Peter! Nor you, Linley! You couldn't do a paper as good as mine in a dozen lifetimes."
"Thanks," said Mark, with a chuckle.
"Well, I asked a fellow who knows, and he said so!" snorted Bunter. "That prize is as good as in my trousers pocket. Quelch is going through the papers now, and I don't fancy he'll bother much about the rest after seeing mine. So yah!"
Billy Bunter rolled to an armchair, and deposited his fat person therein. Evidently Bunter's confidence was complete, and he regarded the Latin prize as being as good as in his trousers pocket. The trifling circumstance that the paper was not his own did not weigh on Bunter's mind. Indeed, he had almost forgotten that trifling circumstance by this time. Quelch couldn't know that it was Wharton's paper, so that was all right! That it was not Wharton's paper, but had been written two thousand years ago by P. Vergilius Maro, Bunter was as yet happily unaware. That was a discovery he had yet to make!
There was a step in the passage. An angular figure appeared in the doorway of the Rag.
Mr. Quelch looked in.
The buzz of voices and laughter died away. All the juniors in the Rag looked at Mr. Quelch, and there was sudden silence. Quelch's face, often expressive, was extremely expressive now. His brows were knitted in a frown that could only be described as terrific. Under his knitted brows his gimlet-eyes glinted. They fairly flashed over the startled crowd in the Rag.
The juniors waited for the thunder to roll! Evidently something had happened to rouse Quelch's deepest ire. They noticed that he had a paper in his hand, and a cane under his arm. That cane, evidently, had been brought there for use. They could only wonder who was going to be the happy victim.
For a moment, Mr. Quelch surveyed the Rag in a dead silence.
Then he spoke.
"Is Bunter here?"
Which was a relief to every fellow except Billy Bunter,

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## NOT BUNTER'S!

"BUNTER!"
"Oh! Yes, sir!"
Billy Bunter rose from the armchair.
He fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, uneasily, on Quelch's speaking countenance.
That Quelch was in a "bait" even the Owl of the Remove could see. Why, he did not know. But there were too many sins on the fat Owl's conscience for him to feel easy in his mind when Quelch looked like that!
Mr. Quelch came into the Rag.
His gimlet-eyes fixed on Bunter. Never had they looked so much like gimlets. They seemed almost to bore into Bunter. The other fellows looked on in silence, wondering what Bunter had done this time—and not envying him.
"Bunter!" repeated Mr. Quelch.
"It—it wasn't me, sir—!" stammered Bunter.
"What? What do you mean, Bunter? What was not you?" rapped Mr. Quelch.
"Oh! Anything, sir," gasped Bunter. "If—if it's about a cake——"
"A cake!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.
"Yes, sir! I mean, no sir! It wasn't me! I haven't been anywhere near Coker's study, and if he says—."
"Bunter! You handed in this paper to my study." Quelch, with the forefinger of his right hand, tapped the paper in his left. "This, Bunter, is the Latin paper you brought to my study a quarter of an hour ago. I have just examined it. I was amazed."
"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He realised that Quelch's visit to the Rag had no connection with a cake! It was something to do with Bunter's paper for the Latin prize.
The fat Owl felt an inward tremor. The paper was good—Stewart of the Shell had told him so, and Stewart knew. Had Quelch's suspicions been aroused by that circumstance? Did he suspect that it wasn't Bunter's own paper?
It had not occurred to Billy Bunter's fat brain that there was anything particularly reprehensible in palming off another fellow's paper as his own. He had given that aspect of the matter no thought at all. A fellow couldn't think of everything, and Bunter had left that item out of consideration.
Wharton, having withdrawn, had no use for a Latin paper. Bunter, badly in

need of three guineas, had! To leave it under the carpet in No. 1 Study was a sheer waste. That was how Bunter looked at it. It seemed reasonable enough to him.

But he was aware that Quelch, after the manner of school-masters, might take some unreasonable view of the matter. Really, you never knew where you were, with a school-master. They were down on all sorts of things that seemed quite all right to Bunter!

"I was amazed," Mr. Quelch was going on. "I was astounded! I could scarcely believe my eyes! I can scarcely believe them now! Such audacity—such unheard-of effrontery—."

The thunder was rolling now!

"Oh!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I——-."

"Such unscrupulousness — such obtuseness — such insensate stupidity!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "I can scarcely believe, Bunter, that you could hope to palm off these verses as your own."

"Oh!" ejaculated several voices in the staring crowd of juniors. They were getting a clue now to the cause of Quelch's ire.

"You have written this paper—you have signed your name upon it—you have handed it in as your own!" thundered Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Bunter! Do you dare to claim these verses as your own?" almost shrieked the Remove master.

"Oh, crikey! I—I mean, yes, sir. N-n-nobody else did them for me," stammered Bunter. "That—that's my paper, sir. 'Tain't Wharton's."

"Wharton's!" repeated Mr. Quelch, as if dazed.

"Yes, sir—I—I mean, no, sir! If—if my paper's a bit like Wharton's sir, I—I can't help it; It—it's—it's just a coincidence, sir."

"You unspeakably stupid boy, do you imagine that I could suppose that Wharton, or any boy of my form, could write such verses as these?" Quelch was shrieking again.

"Oh! No, sir! Yes, sir! Oh, lor'!" Bunter could only splutter. He was quite at a loss.

Quelch might have found out somehow that the verses were Wharton's. But it was not, it seemed, that. So what was the matter with Quelch, the unfortunate fat Owl could not begin to guess.

"Bunter! I almost doubt whether you are in your senses!"

"Oh, really, sir—."

"You have endeavoured to palm off on me, your form-master, verses which neither you nor any other Greyfriars boy could have written—.'

"Oh, lor'."

"Verses," continued Mr. Quelch, almost ferociously, "with which I have

been well acquainted ever since I was a schoolboy myself."
Bunter almost fell down.
"Verses, Bunter, which have been famous for many centuries—verses which were written almost two thousand years ago—written by the greatest poet of the Augustan age—verses with which every school-master is familiar— known to almost every senior schoolboy—."
Bunter could only goggle at him.
So far as Bunter knew, these verses had been written by Harry Wharton, of the Remove, in No. 1 Study at Greyfriars School! Hadn't he found them there, written in Wharton's fist? It seemed to Bunter that Quelch must be wandering in his mind.
"Such effrontery—such audacity—such unscrupulous mendacity—such insensate stupidity!" Quelch was almost gasping. "Could you imagine, Bunter, when you copied these verses from Virgil, that I, a school-master, was unacquainted with the works of that poet, and could be imposed upon? Could you suppose for one moment that a form-master in this school had never read the seventh eclogue of Virgil? Are you in your wits?"
"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, involuntarily.
"Oh, that fat idiot!" breathed Peter Todd.
"I am amazed,—shocked—astounded! The dishonesty of such an action is appalling! But the stupidity of it is almost beyond credence!" articulated Mr. Quelch, "You have handed in, as your own work, verses with which I have been familiar from boyhood!—copied from one of the best-known works of a celebrated poet—and apparently hoped to escape detection!"
Mr. Quelch held up the paper.
The juniors stared at it.
They had been very curious about what sort of paper Billy Bunter could have handed in for the Latin Prize. But certainly they had not expected this! They fairly blinked at that Latin paper. The hand was Bunter's—the verses were written in his well-known scrawl. But the composition certainly was not Bunter's!

Forte sub arguta consederat ilice Daphnis,
compulerantque greges Corydon et Thyrsis in unum.
Thysis ovis, Corydon distentas lacte capellas,
ambo florentes aetatibus, Arcades ambo,
et cantare pares et respondere parati.

Quelch tapped the paper again with a lean forefinger. "These verses, Bunter, copied from the seventh eclogue of Virgil, you have endeavoured

to palm off as your own!"
"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Bob Cherry.
"Oh, scissors!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
It was a serious moment. Quelch looked fearfully serious. But the juniors really could not help it. The idea of Bunter seeking to palm off as his own, verses which every master at Greyfriars knew by heart, was too much for them. They yelled.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Silence!" roared Mr. Quelch. "This is not a laughing matter! Silence, I say."
The laughter died away. But many faces were grinning. The juniors seemed to think that it was a laughing matter, if Quelch didn't.
"Bunter—!"
"Oh, lor'!" I
I can make allowances for your unusual obtuseness— for your almost incredible stupidity. This attempt to deceive me is so childish, so infantile, that I must make some allowance for such almost unbelievable foolishness. But I can make no allowance for dishonest intention, Bunter. I shall cane you with the utmost severity for that."
"Oh, crikey!"
Quelch slipped the cane from under his arm into his hand.
"Bunter! Bend over that chair!"
"I—I say, sir—."
"Do you hear me, Bunter?"
"I—I never—I—I didn't—it—it—it wasn't me, sir—!" stuttered Bunter.
"Bend over!" thundered Mr. Quelch, in a voice that made Bunter jump.
Billy Bunter bent over the chair, with dire anticipations. His direst anticipations were more than realised.
Swipe! Swipe! Swipe!
"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter.
Swipe!
"Yaroooh!"
Swipe!
!Yooo-hooooooooop!"
SWIPE!
Quelch put his beef into it. Immemorial custom prescribed "six" as the limit. Quelch kept to the six: but every one was a swipe, and the last swipe was really terrific. Billy Bunter's frantic roar woke every echo in the Rag.
"Now, Bunter—."

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"
"Let this be a warning to you!"
"Wow! Wow! Wow!"
Mr. Quelch tucked the cane under his arm again, and swept out of the Rag. He left Billy Bunter yelling with anguish, and every other fellow yelling with laughter.

## CHAPTER XXIX

## THE ONLY WAY!

"BUNTER'S signature tune," remarked Bob Cherry.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
It was after prep, and the Famous Five were in No.1 Study, chatting before going down to the Rag. Through the open doorway floated sounds that indicated that somebody was feeling hurt.
"Ow! Oooh! Wow!"
Those sounds of woe heralded the approach of Billy Bunter. Evidently the Owl of the Remove was still feeling the effects of the swiping in the Rag. Hours had elapsed since Quelch's cane had swiped. Quelch, probably, had dismissed the matter from his mind. But William George Bunter did not find it so easy to dismiss. He had too many reminiscent twinges. Quelch had felt it his duty to lay it on hard, and Quelch was a whale on duty.
A fat and lugubrious face looked into the study: to be greeted by a general grin. Mr. Quelch had taken the affair of the Latin paper very seriously. Bunter had taken it still more seriously! But the rest of the Remove roared over it.
"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, dismally.
"Done your prep?" asked Nugent.
"No!" groaned Bunter. "How can a fellow do his prep, standing up like a horse?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Quelch seemed to think he was beating a carpet!" moaned Bunter. "I haven't sat down since—just leaned on things, you know——."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It's all your fault, Wharton! You let me in for this!" said Bunter, with an indignant blink at the captain of the Remove.
"I did!" exclaimed Harry, in astonishment.
"Yes, you! Quelch said that that Latin paper was some of Virgil's tosh. I suppose he knows!"
"The knowfulness is probably terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram

Singh.
"You howling ass," said Johnny Bull. "You picked out one of the best-known of Virgil's eclogues. Did you think Quelch had never read Virgil?"
"How was I to know?" hooted Bunter. "Wharton was going to put it in, so of course I thought it was all right, I didn't know he'd prigged it from Virgil."
Harry Wharton jumped.
"You benighted ass, what do you mean—if you mean anything?" he exclaimed.
"It was your paper, wasn't it?" howled Bunter.
"My paper?" stuttered Wharton.
"Yes, yours! I asked you to let me have your Latin paper, as you didn't want it, and you refused—selfish, as usual. Dog-in-the-manger, I call it—you didn't want it yourself, and you wouldn't let me have it—."
"Oh, crumbs!"
"Well, I wasn't going to let it be wasted, so I got it out of this study—"
"What?" yelled Bob Cherry.
"But I never wrote a Latin paper at all," shrieked Wharton. "I told you so when you asked me, you fat chump."
"You jolly well did, because I found it in your study, See? and copied it out for Quelch—."
Harry Wharton stared blankly at the fat Owl.
"You found a Latin paper in this study, and copied it out!" he articulated.
"Yes, I did! I wasn't going to waste it! Why should I, when you didn't want it? Of course, I didn't know you'd prigged it from Virgil—."
"Wh-a-a-at?"
"But you had, and now it's landed on me," groaned Bunter. "I've had a fearful whopping—wow!—and I shan't get the prize, and it's all your fault."
The Famous Five gazed at Billy Bunter.
"What on earth is the fat chump driving at?" asked Bob. "He couldn't have found a Latin paper in this study if you never did one."
"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Wharton. "I wondered what had become of that exercise—but I never bothered, as I didn't want it. Bunter, you blithering bandersnatch, if you found that paper—."
"I jolly well did! Your Latin paper, and it turns out that you prigged it from Virgil—."
"You dithering dunderhead!" yelled Wharton. "It wasn't a Latin paper! It was lines copied from a book Quelch lent me. I was going to copy out the whole eclogue, only Smithy interrupted me. I was going to mug it up to get in trim for doing the paper! It was just an exercise."
"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co.
"And you pinched it, thinking it was my Latin paper!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "You fat villain! You ought to be sacked!"
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"Did you think I could write verses like that, or any other man at Greyfriars could, you benighted bander-snatch?"
"Oh! " gasped Bunter again. "I—I suppose Stewart knew it was from Virgil, when I showed it to him, and that's why he thought it so jolly good. Well, I didn't know. How was a fellow to know? I thought it was your paper, of course."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"And did you think it fair play to bag a prize with another fellow's paper, if it had been, you fat brigand?"
"Eh? You didn't want it, as you were standing out! Why shouldn't I?"
"Oh, crumbs!"
"I wasn't going to waste it," said Bunter. "I—I wish I had now, though," he added with a wriggle.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I've had an awful licking, and I shan't get the prize now," went on Bunter. "It's all your fault, leaving that tosh about the study, and making me think it was your Latin paper. Now you've landed me fairly in the soup. I was banking on that three guineas to pay Parker. I've only got four pounds four left out of seven pounds seven—."
"It's growing smaller by degrees, and beautifully less," remarked Bob Cherry.
"Case of going—going—gone!" grinned Nugent.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Well, what's a fellow to do?" demanded Bunter. "I've got to pay Parker pretty soon, or he will be going to the Head. It's up to you, Wharton, after landing me as you've done."
"You fat villain—."
"It's like you to call a fellow names, after letting him down like this," said Bunter, bitterly. "Look here, will you lend me the three guineas?"
"As a reward for pinching a paper from my study?"
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"You should keep your absurd hands from the pickfulness and the stealfulness, my esteemed fat Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head. "Honesty is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks."
"Look here, you fellows, it's up to you, after Wharton practically took me in over that Latin paper!" exclaimed Bunter, warmly.

"Oh, crumbs!"
"You've got the tin," said Bunter. "I jolly well know that! Well, lend it to me, see? It's the only way now— the only way, you know, like the chap says in the play. Now I've been as good as diddled out of the prize—."
"Oh, scissors!"
"You've been raising the wind, as I jolly well know. You've got the tin for the Remove Dramatic Society. You fixed it up to raise the three guineas, when Wharton stood out of. it, Well, look here, what I suggest is, that you lend it to me, instead of handing it over to Wibley for his silly theatrical stunt. What about that?"
The five juniors in No. 1 Study gazed at the fat Owl.
It was true that they had "raised the wind." Some of them had had tips from home, others had sold things up and down the Remove—by one means or another, they had scrounged the requisite sum for the Remove Dramatic Society. It had required a very considerable amount of calculating, scraping, and scrounging. It had left them in a stony state. The idea of handing it over to William George Bunter seemed rather to take their breath away.
"Only as a loan, of course," added Bunter. "I'm expect ing a postal-order shortly. I've simply got to pay Parker, and owing to Wharton I shan't get the prize now. It's just the same amount, so it will see me through. I say, you fellows, you can see it's the only way, can't you?"
"I suppose it's no use talking to him," remarked Bob Cherry, in a meditative way. "What about bumping him?"
"Hear, hear!"
"It's the only way!" grinned Nugent.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I say, you fellows—leggo!" roared Bunter. "I say—wow!"
Bump!
Harry Wharton and Co. walked cheerfully out of No. I Study, and went down to the Rag. They left Billy Bunter sitting on the floor, gasping for breath—his financial problems more problematic than ever!

## CHAPTER XXX

## COKER'S LATEST!

COKER frowned.
Then he sniffed.
This Combined Operation performed, Coker walked on, out of gates, regardless of his estranged pals, Potter and Greene, loafing in the gateway.

It was Wednesday afternoon. Coker had spent most of that half-holiday in his study, grinding out lines for Prout.

But at last—at long last!—that awful "book" was done. Seven hundred and fifty-six lines had, at last, piled up on Coker's table, the whole of the first book of the Aeneid from "arma virumque cano" to "fluctibus Aestas." It had occupied all Coker's leisure for days. It had driven cricket, and "Hamlet," and almost everything else, from Coker's mind. It had made him feel that life at Greyfriars was a delusion and a snare: that all was weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. But it was done, at last, and Coker wearily gathered it up, and conveyed it to Prout's study, and was through with it.

After which, feeling the need of fresh air after his exertions, and having business in Courtfield, Coker took a walk abroad. He took that walk on his own, without a word to Potter or Greene.

The estrangement was continuing. Coker was maintaining an attitude of lofty, frozen dignity and distance. Potter and Greene, on the other hand, could not help feeling that the rift in the lute had gone far enough. Certainly, they weren't going to back Coker up in rows with the Remove. But they sagely considered that that "book" from Prout must have cured Coker of any desire for further shindies in the Rag. Certainly, too, they weren't going to do Coker's lines for him. But those lines were now done—the book finished and delivered to Prout.

In these circumstances, there was no reason why the estrangement should continue: and old Horace, after all, was a pal!

Moreover, they had heard Coker's remark to Fitzgerald that he was going to Chunkley's that afternoon, if he got that "book" done before tea.

That did it! Chunkley's Stores, at Courtfield, provided everything, from lawn-mowers and vacuum-cleaners to top-hats and tinned peaches. Best of all, it had a tea-room on magnificent and imposing lines, where, in happier and more friendly days, Coker had often stood munificent spreads to his friends.

Potter and Greene had no doubt that Coker was going to tea at Chunkley's, as he often did on a half-holiday. When Coker tea'd at Chunkley's, he was a fellow worth knowing. On such an occasion Potter and Greene were prepared to overlook all differences, and to remember only that old Horace was a pal.

They were lounging, as it were by chance, in the old stone gateway, when Coker came out. Potter ventured upon a friendly smile—Green nodded. If Coker wanted his friends to walk down to Chunkley's with him, they were—ready and willing.

Apparently, however, Coker didn't. After the combined Operation of frowning and sniffing, Coker walked on regardless. His friends exchanged

a glance.
"Still on the high horse!" sighed Potter.
"Same old chucklehead!" agreed Greene.
"It's rather rotten, though, a row going on in the Study," said Potter. "Makes things pretty uncomfortable all round. I think it's up to us to let Coker see that we're not unfriendly."
"Give him a chance," agreed Greene.
And they walked out of gates after Coker.
Coker's long legs covered the ground at a good rate. But his anxious friends put on speed, and overtook him.
"Walking over to Chunkley's, Coker?" asked Potter, casually.
"Yes!" said Coker, curtly, without turning his head.
"No time to come down to the nets?" asked Potter.
"No!" said Coker, with the same curtness.
"Another time, perhaps." suggested Potter. "I'm rather anxious to get some really good bowling, when you've got time."
It was quite a charming characteristic of Coker's that his leg could be pulled with the greatest of ease, He thawed visibly.
"Well, when I come back, perhaps," he said, relenting. "I don't mind giving you some bowling, if you come to that, I'm going to Chunkley's now."
He walked on. Potter and Greene walked on, on either side of him. It was quite like old times. The subject of cricket having been started, Coker thawed still further, and proceeded to give Potter and Greene the benefit of his expert knowledge of that great game, to which they listened with such keen attention that they seemed to be hanging on his words. When Coker was talking, all he required from his hearers was an occasional "Yes" or "Just so!" Potter, on the left, said "Yes"; Greene, on the right, said "Just so!"—and in a very few minutes the happy old friendly atmosphere was re-established.
But cricket did not last as a topic. Other matters were in Coker's mind. Half-way across the common, he changed the subject.
"They've got pretty nearly everything at Chunkley's Stores," he remarked, thoughtfully.
"Pretty near," agreed Potter, thinking of poached eggs. cold chickens, cakes, eclairs, meringues, and other such attractive things—all available in the tea-room at Chunkley's, in company with a fellow whose pocket-money was practically unlimited.
"I expect they'll have what I want," said Coker, with a nod. "If not, we must try some other show,"
It was already "we": just like old times!
"Oh, sure to," said Greene. "You can order practically anything you want in

the tea-room there."
Coker laughed.
"They wouldn't have them in the tea-room," he said.
"Why?"
Potter and Greene exchanged a glance across Coker. They had taken it for granted that Coker was going to Chunkley's to tea. What else was a fellow to think? Now it suddenly occurred to them that possibly Coker's business at Chunkley's was in some other department, and that tea was not featured in the programme at all! And they had already walked a mile!
"Well, dash it all, they'd hardly stock stink-bombs in the tea-room." Coker laughed at the idea.
"Stink-bombs!" repeated Potter and Greene, blankly.
"That's what I'm going for," said Coker.
They could only blink at him. Coker was, as they knew, every kind of an ass. But that even Coker could be ass enough to play about with stink-bombs, they would never have guessed. There were naughty fags at Greyfriars who thought it funny to play tricks with such horrid things. But Coker, after all, was in the Fifth, ass as he was. Was it possible—?
"I—I say—," Potter stammered. "What—what's the big idea?"
"I've thought it out, you know, about those cheeky Remove fags," explained Coker. "I'd have told you fellows before if you hadn't been in the sulks. You know that fag gang are keeping on with 'Hamlet'—."
Potter and Greene groaned inwardly. They had indulged a hope that they had heard the last of that. Evidently, they hadn't.
"Of course, I'm not allowing it, went on Coker. "They're carrying on, just as if I hadn't spoken a word on the subject. Well, I've a short way with fags, as they will find."
"But—!" stuttered Greene.
"I've got it all cut and dried," said Coker, complacently. "They've fixed the date of the performance—next week, in the Rag. Well, let 'em get on with it. I fancy they won't get very far—not much further than the Ghost, I fancy." Coker chuckled. "As soon as the curtain goes up, the stink-bombs come down."
"Wha-a-t?"
"Easy as falling off a form," said Coker. "All it needed was brains, to think it out. Well, I've got brains."
Potter and Greene did not venture to express their strong doubts of that statement. They only stared at Coker.
"You know that trap-door in the roof, over the dormitory passage," went on Coker. "It's for use in case of fire—ladder all handy, too. Easy as winking to get out on the roof there, what?"

"On the roof!" said Potter, faintly.
"Just that! Then all I've got to do is to pick out the chimney of the Rag—."
"The—the chimney!"
"There's no fire in this weather, of course. I drop the stink-bombs down the chimney, one after another—."
"Oh, crickey!"
"And stink 'em out!" grinned Coker. "See? Think they'll carry on, with the room full of frightful smells? Bet the audience will bolt at the first pop."
"Oh, Jemima!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "Will that dish them! What? They won't be playing 'Hamlet'! They'll all be stopping their noses and scudding. Ha, ha, ha!"
Coker's merry roar awoke the echoes of Courtfield Common. He seemed to expect Potter and Greene to join in the merriment. But they didn't. They gazed at Coker in something like horror. Coker's latest seemed to petrify them.
"But—but—but you can't do it, Coker!" gasped Potter.
"Can't I?" grinned Coker. "You'll see that I can."
"There'll be a frightful row if you do—," stuttered Greene.
"I shouldn't wonder," said Coker, carelessly. "What about it?"
"Prout would march you off to the Head!"
"I'm not going to mention it to Prout," said Coker, sarcastically.
"But—but—look here, old chap—."
"If you fellows like to lend a hand," said Coker.
"No jolly fear!" gasped Greene. "Why, a man might be sacked for playing such a mad trick."
"Head's flogging, at least," said Potter. "Look here, Coker——"
"That's what I'm going to do," said Coker, calmly. "I simply shall not allow that performance to come off. That's final. Don't argue."
"But, old fellow—."
"Don't jaw, Potter."
"But, look here—," urged Greene.
"Don't blather, Greene."
Coker's mind, evidently, was made up. He had no use for argument, and none for expostulation. He had thought out this masterly plot for putting paid to the Remove Dramatic Society, and that was that! His determination was fixed, immutable, as the laws of the Medes and Persians.
"But—!" said Potter and Greene together.
"It's settled," said Coker. "When I make up my mind, it's like the manners

and customs of the Swedes and Nasturtiums—a fixture. Don't jaw."
"Well," said Potter, with a sudden inspiration. "Let's talk it over, Coker, while we have tea at Chunkley's—."
"Eh? We're not having tea at Chunkley's," said Coker.
"What?"
"I tea'd in hall before I came out. I'm going to Chunkley's for those stink-bombs, and if they haven't got 'em, I'm going over to Lantham. Put it on a bit, you fellows—no time to waste, you know."
Coker walked on, with his long strides. But Potter and Greene did not walk on. They bestowed the most expressive of looks at Coker's departing back, turned, and walked back to Greyfriars. Their friendly overtures were producing, not tea at Chunkley's, but a chance of getting mixed up in Coker's maddest stunt ever! With deep feelings, Potter and Greene walked back to the school, and the great Horace went on to Courtfield on his own.

## CHAPTER XXXI

## EASY MONEY!

"SPANKER!" said Billy Bunter, thoughtfully. "Um! Spanker!"
Bob Cherry glanced round.
Bunter, apparently, was speaking to himself—thinking aloud, as it were. He was sitting on the settee on the Remove landing, when Bob came by. There was a newspaper in his fat hands, at which he was blinking with more concentrated attention than he ever bestowed on any school book. Something in that newspaper, plainly, interested Billy Bunter very deeply. He did not even observe Bob or his surprised glance.
"Spanker!" he repeated. His fat brow was corrugated with lines of thought. "I fancy that's all right! Yes! Spanker!"
It was quite mysterious to Bob.
"I fancy Spanker will be all right!" murmured Bunter.
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "What's that game, Bunter?"
The fat Owl jumped, and blinked round at him. In a moment the newspaper was folded and jammed under Bunter's jacket—a proceeding that caused Bob to stare blankly. It seemed that Bunter did not want that newspaper to be seen!
"Oh, really, Cherry—."
"What are you burbling about?" asked Bob.
"Oh! Nothing! I—I was just reading the—the cricket news—."

"Is Spanker a cricketer?"
"Eh? He, he, he!" Bunter chuckled. "I—I mean— oh—yes! Australian cricketer, you know—. I say, the bell will be going for class in a minute."
Bob regarded him curiously. That Bunter was, as usual, fibbing, was of course obvious. Why he was fibbing was not so obvious. He had not been reading cricket news: and he had some mysterious reason for suddenly jamming the paper out of sight. It was quite mysterious—for a moment. The next, the mystery was revealed, as Bob discerned the margin of the paper sticking out under Bunter's jacket, and glimpsed the title: SPORTING SNIPS.
"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Bob. "You fat, frabjous, frumptious ass, what are you doing with a racing paper?"
"Eh? I haven't got a racing paper. It's the *Friardale Gazette*, old chap—I was reading about the fire at Giles's Farm—."
"You benighted ass!" roared Bob.
"Oh, really, Cherry! I wish you wouldn't bother a fellow," said Bunter, peevishly. "It will be class soon, and I'm awfully interested in the report about—about the new waterworks—."
"You've got *Sporting Snips* there, you fat frump."
"Oh, crikey! Did Smithy tell you he'd missed it?" ejaculated Bunter.
"No, ass—."
"Then I haven't got it! I haven't been near Smithy's study, and I never knew he kept his racing paper hidden under the cushion in the armchair, either. I'm reading about the crisis, in the *Daily Mail*—. Leggo!"
Bob Cherry made a stride towards the fat Owl, grasped him and shook him, and the newspaper dropped into full view. Bunter gave a yell.
"Leggo! Gimme my paper! You silly ass, suppose a beak or a pre. saw it! Gimme my paper."
Bob Cherry picked up the paper. Bunter, his little round eyes gleaming with wrath and indignation behind his big spectacles, held out a fat hand for it. But Bob did not place it therein.
He glanced at it. A paragraph was marked round with pencil. It ran:

Snipster knows something this journey!
Our Special Snip.
SPANKER.

The identity of "Spanker" was now revealed. Spanker, evidently, was a horse; specially selected by Snipster of Sporting Snips to win some race or other. It was that in which Bunter had been so deeply engrossed.
Bob stared at the racing paper, and stared at Bunter.

This was rather a new departure for the fat Owl. All the Remove knew that Vernon-Smith had racing papers, and sometimes backed a "gee" with a frowsy gentleman who hung about the "Three Fishers" up the river. It was one way of getting rid of his too-ample pocket-money. But really it was not in Bunter's line at all. Bunter preferred to invest his money, when he had it, in foodstuffs.

"You unspeakable idiot!" said Bob, "Are you taking up this muck like Smithy?"

"Well, it's all Wharton's fault," said Bunter. "He let me down over that Latin paper. Linley's got the prize, as you jolly well know. I've got to pay Parker, haven't I?"

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Bob. He realised that this was a new device of the fat Owl's for raising the wind! Bunter was going to settle Mr. Parker's bill by backing winners!

"I'm four pounds short," went on Bunter. "I—I had four pounds four, and the Latin prize would have seen me through, only Wharton let me down, as you know. Now I've only got three pounds seven. Well, I can get four to one on Spanker for the two-thirty on Saturday. It's easy money."

Bob gazed at him.

"That's four quid," explained Bunter. "It will just see me through, and I shall be able to pay Parker, and have done with it, I can tell you I shall be jolly glad to have done with it. I've had more than enough trouble over that bill of Parker's. Gimme that paper."

"You know all about picking winners, I suppose!" remarked Bob, sarcastically.

"Oh, that's all right! It's Snipster's Special Snip!" said Bunter. "Spanker will romp home." Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles. "Straight from the horse's mouth!"

"Smithy ought to be kicked," said Bob. "You howling ass, you don't win money on horses—you lose: as well as getting a flogging if you're spotted. As this paper is Smithy's, I'll give it back to him."

"Look, here, you jolly well mind your own business," exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "Nobody asked you to barge in, Bob Cherry."

"I'm doing it unasked, old fat top! It's up to any chap with a spot of sense to look after a born idiot," explained Bob.

"Why, you—you—you cheeky beast!" gasped Bunter.

The identity of "Spanker" was now revealed.

"If you had as much sense in your head as I've got in my little finger, you'd be twice as clever as you ain't. Gimme that paper!"
Billy Bunter made a snatch at Sporting Snips. Holding the racing paper out of reach with his left hand, Bob gave the fat Owl a gentle push with his right, on the widest part of his circumference.
"Urrrrrggghh!" gurgled Bunter.
He sat down again suddenly on the settee.
"Wurrrrrgh!"
Leaving the fat Owl urrghing and wurrghing, Bob Cherry crumpled the racing paper into his pocket, and went down the staircase. There was a frown on his sunny face. Smithy's shady ways were no concern of his: but when Smithy's racing papers fell into the hands of an egregious ass like Bunter, it was quite a different matter,
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Seen Smithy?" asked Bob, coming on the Co. at the doorway of the Rag.
"Yes, he's in the Rag," answered Harry Wharton. "What's up?"
"I've got something of his he ought to keep in a safe place. I'm going to shove it down his back."
"Wha-a-t?"
Bob Cherry tramped into the Rag, and the Co. followed him, rather startled. Herbert Vernon-Smith, seated in an armchair with one leg crossed over the other, did not heed him. The Bounder had a thoughtful expression on his face
—thinking, perhaps, of the chances of Spanker in the two-thirty! But he

looked up as Bob Cherry came to a halt directly in front of him.
"Well?" he snapped.
Bob dragged the crumpled newspaper from his pocket, and held it up. The Bounder stared at it, and so did a dozen other fellows. Skinner whistled.
"Better not let the pre's see that, Smithy," he said.
"Yours?" asked Bob.
"You silly, cheeky ass!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, his brow darkening. "What are you doing with that? Do you want all Greyfriars to see it, you chump? What the dickens do you mean by getting it from my study?"
"I didn't," explained Bob. "A howling ass borrowed it from your study, and if he'd been spotted with it, he would go up to Quelch for a whopping. If you must smuggle muck like this into the school, Smithy, you'd better keep it in a safe place. I'm going to put it in a safe place now."
"You can mind your own business," snarled Smithy.
"I've made this my business, old scout! One shady sweep is enough for the Remove—your jolly old example isn't one for Bunter to follow. Here's your rubbish."
Bob's left hand shot out, grabbing the top of the Bounder's head as he sat in the armchair. That head was forced down suddenly, before Vernon-Smith knew what was happening, leaving a space between his collar and the back of his neck. Into that space, Bob's hefty right hand shoved the crumpled newspaper, driving it well home.
There was an almost frantic yell from Smithy. He heaved madly in the armchair, tore himself loose, and grabbed at the back of his neck. But Sporting Snips was out of his reach.
"Good egg!" grinned Johnny Bull. "That's a safe place for it, Smithy."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Vernon-Smith leaped to his feet, his face flaming.
"Hold on, Smithy," called out Tom Redwing.
Unheeding him, the Bounder came at Bob Cherry with clenched fists and blazing eyes. Whereupon the whole Co. collared him right and left, and he smote the floor of the Rag with a resounding bump. And as that did not seem to satisfy the enraged Bounder, they heaved him up, and bumped him again, and yet again. Then, as the bell for class began to clang, they strolled out of the Rag, leaving the Bounder sitting on the floor, gurgling for breath.
"I say, you fellows." A fat junior met the Co. as they came out. "I say, I want that paper! Look here, Bob Cherry, you beast—."
"Ask Smithy for it," grinned Bob. "Smithy's got it."
Billy Bunter blinked into the Rag. One blink at the Bounder's infuriated face was enough for him. He did not ask Smithy for Sporting Snips.

## CHAPTER XXXII

## SPANKER

"BUNTER!"
It was very unusual for Mr. Quelch's voice to pass unheeded in the Remove form-room. But on this occasion it did.
Billy Bunter was deep in thought.
This rather unusual mental state brought a deep wrinkle to his fat brow, and made him a little oblivious of lessons. Bunter was never a very attentive pupil. Now he was more inattentive than ever.
They were doing history in the Remove in that lesson. Never had the annals of his native land had less interest for the fat Owl. Bunter couldn't have cared less.
Bunter had, to his own satisfaction, solved his financial difficulty. He had hit on a way of getting easy money—so easy, that he really wondered that he had not thought of it before. All you had to do was to get a sure snip from a man who knew, put your money on, and collect your winnings. Then all was calm and bright.
But easy and simple as it was to collect cash by this method, there were certain difficulties, when a fellow was at school. Unsympathetic beaks were liable to whop a fellow who was caught at it. The Bounder took that risk, in his sporting speculations, and Bunter was prepared to do the same, little as he liked taking the risk of a whopping. But whereas Smithy was in touch with a frowsy racing man outside the school, Bunter wasn't. If Bunter was going to collect quids at the rate of four to one on Spanker after he had romped home, obviously Bunter had to be "on." How was he going to get "on"?
That little problem had to be solved without delay. It was Friday, and the two-thirty was run at Wapshot on Saturday. Bunter, being in the happy position of knowing the horse that was going to win, was extremely anxious to be "on" in good time. It would be simply awful not to be "on" when Spanker romped home!
In such circumstances, it was no wonder that Billy Bunter had neither time nor inclination for lessons, Lessons, indeed, seemed to him a merely frivolous interruption of more important matters.
Bunter's stock of cash had been still further reduced during the past few days. Only three pounds seven remained out of Mr. Parker's seven guineas. It could not be helped: for Bunter's expected postal-order had still failed to arrive, and a fellow had to eat. But four to one on Spanker would set all

that right—if Bunter was "on" in time!
So, at the present moment, Bunter was not thinking of dead-and-gone kings and queens, or even of Quelch. He was thinking out the knotty problem of getting in touch with a "bookie."
"Bunter!"
The Remove master, quite unaware that that fat member of his form had a problem on his mind which left him no leisure for lessons, rapped out his name a second time, in sharper tones.
Fellows looked round at Bunter. The fat Owl had been known to nod off in class on a warm day.
But Bunter was not asleep this time. He was concentrated in deep thought—though the subject of his deep cogitations was evidently not English history.
"BUNTER!"
Quelch almost roared. This time the fat Owl sat up and took notice. He gave a little jump, and gave his form-master a little blink.
"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Bunter. "D-d-did you speak, sir?"
"I have spoken to you three times, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch in a deep voice. "You are not paying attention, Bunter."
"Oh, yes, sir! I—I heard everything you were saying, sir. I—I—I wasn't missing a word, sir."
"I asked you a question, Bunter."
"Oh! Did you, sir?"
If Quelch had asked him a question, Bunter hadn't heard it—or at all events heeded it. He wondered dismally what that question was. Something about some beastly king or queen, he expected. How was a fellow to answer questions about beastly kings and queens when his mind was running on Spanker? Spanker was quite enough for Bunter to think of, at the moment. All the kings and queens of England from the time of King Arthur were merely also-rans, in comparison with Spanker!
"Will you give me attention, Bunter?" rapped Mr. Quelch.
"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I———."
"What king succeeded Edward the Fourth on the throne of England?"
"Spanker, sir."
"What?" gasped Mr. Quelch.
"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.
"Oh, crikey! I—I—I mean—," muttered Bunter.
"I mean—I didn't mean—I—I—-oh, lor'!"
"Did you say Spanker?" articulated Mr. Quelch. "What do you mean by Spanker, Bunter? Is this an impertinent jest?"
"Yes, sir—I—-I mean, no, sir—oh, no. sir! I—I mean—I didn't mean

Spanker, sir—nothing of the kind. Not—not Spanker, sir—I——I wonder what made me s-s-ssay Spanker, sir!" gasped Bunter.

It was fortunate for Bunter that Mr. Quelch did not know—what some members of his form could have told him!—that Spanker was a horse engaged in the Wapshot races on Saturday. Quelch's knowledge was extensive, but it did not include the sport of kings.

"Bunter! I will give you one more opportunity of answering my question, before I cane you for inattention! What king succeeded Edward the Fourth on the throne of England?"

Bunter cudgelled his fat brains. As he had not listened to a word during the lesson, and had no memory to speak of, he was at a loss.

"Answer me, Bunter."

"George the Fifth, sir," answered Bunter, taking a shot at a venture.

"What?"

"I—I mean—." Bunter read in his form-master's expressive countenance that his shot had missed the mark. "I—I mean—I didn't mean George the Fifth, sir—I—I meant Charles the Third."

"Charles the Third!" repeated Mr. Quelch, dazedly.

"Nunno!" Again Bunter discerned that he had missed the mark. "I—I meant to say Alfred, sir—King Alfred, who let the cakes burn! He—he said, 'Kiss me, Hardy!—and—and never smiled again!" added Bunter, perhaps hoping to placate Mr. Quelch with these historical details. Mr. Quelch did not seem placated.

He picked up the cane from his desk.

"Stand out before the class, Bunter!" he rapped.

"Oh, lor'!"

Whop!

"Ow, wow!"

"Perhaps you will now contrive to pay a little attention during the lesson, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, grimly.

"Ow, wow, ow!"

Billy Bunter did contrive to pay a little attention during the remainder of the lesson. Exasperating as it was, the problem of getting "on" before Spanker romped home had to be neglected till after class.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## NOT ON!

"SMITHY!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith turned a deaf ear, "I say, Smithy!"

The Bounder walked on.

Smithy had been talking with his chum, Tom Redwing, in the quad, after class. He left Redwing frowning, when he went down to the gates. Billy Bunter, whose eyes and spectacles had been on them, rolled after him.
"Stop a minute, Smithy!" he squeaked.
The Bounder disappeared out of the gates. Billy Bunter accelerated, and rolled out in pursuit.
Smithy was strolling down the road with quite a casual air. No master or prefect who had noticed him would have guessed, from his aspect, that he was going to see a man about a horse. Still, he did not want attention to be specially drawn to him, and his eyes glinted as he heard a yell astern!
"Hold on, Smithy."
Breathing hard, the Bounder held on, for Bunter to come up. A fat Owl squeaking in his wake was particularly unwelcome, when he was heading for the "Three Fishers," to call upon Joe Banks.
"What do you want, you fat frog?" he snapped, as Bunter arrived breathless.
"I say, old chap, I know where you're going—."
"Eh?"
"I heard what you said to Redwing," explained Bunter.
"You hear too much with those fat ears of yours, Bunter," said the Bounder. "Aren't you afraid of getting them pulled?"
"Oh, really, Smithy. I say, nothing to be shirty about, old chap! It wasn't my fault Bob Cherry stuffed Sporting Snips down your neck, was it? He, he, he!" Bunter chuckled. "I say, Smithy, I want you to do something for me."
"Ask somebody else, fathead."
"Eh! Nobody else is going to the 'Three Fishers' to see Banks, that I know of. You see, I want to be on for the two-thirty on Saturday."
"Wha-a-t?"
The Bounder stared at Billy Bunter. Bunter bestowed a fat wink on him. As he was aware that Smithy was going to call on the frowsy racing man at the riverside inn, it seemed to Bunter that this was the solution of the problem that had caused him a spot of bother with Quelch in class.
"I'm on Spanker," explained Bunter. "He's going to romp home on Saturday, at four to one—Snipster says so, and he knows, you know. Well, look here, Smithy, will you put the bet on for me when you see Banks?"
"You benighted idiot!"
"You see, I don't know Banks, and you do," said Bunter, "and—and I'd rather not got to a place like that pub. Not the sort of place a decent chap would like to go to, you know. But you don't mind, Smithy."
"What?"

"I mean, you ain't particular, like I am," said Bunter, blinking at him. "You don't feel about it like a decent chap would, of course, old fellow."
The Bounder gazed at him.
"So I want you to do it for me," Bunter rattled on. "Mind, I've got the quid—I ain't asking you to lend it to me. I can't go to a low hole like that to see a blighter like Banks, but you can, old chap! Will you put it on for me, Smithy? Be a pal."
Herbert Vernon-Smith did not answer in words. But his actions made it plain that he was not going to be a pal. He made a sudden grab at Billy Bunter, caught him by the back of a fat neck, and sat him down in the dusty road.
Bump!
"Whoooooop!"
Bunter sat hard on the cold unsympathetic earth, and roared. Herbert Vernon-Smith walked away, leaving him sitting and roaring.
"Ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter. "Rotter! Wow! Ill-tempered beast, cutting up rusty like that in the middle of a friendly chat! Wow!"
Billy Bunter resumed the perpendicular. The Bounder was gone—and with him, the solution of Bunter's problem. There was no help from Smithy in getting "on" for the two-thirty!
But Bunter had to get "on." That was essential, if he was to pick up the easy money on Spanker. And he rolled away, at last, to the tow-path.
Bunter did not want to visit the "Three Fishers." Whether he was more "particular" than Smithy or not, he did not want to take the risk of going out of bounds in such a quarter. Still more, he did not want to walk a mile. Bunter did not like miles when he was walking— there were too many furlongs in a mile to suit the lazy fat Owl. But there was no help for it—if he was going to be "on."
But as he reached the tow-path his fat face brightened at the sight of five fellows pushing out a boat from the school raft. Harry Wharton and Co. were going for a pull up the river—and nothing could have suited Bunter better.
"I say, you fellows," he yelled.
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"
"I say, give a chap a lift!" squeaked Bunter.
"Oh, all right! Roll in, old barrel."
The addition of Billy Bunter's avoirdupois was not, perhaps, specially grateful or comforting to the Famous Five. But they were good-natured and raised no demur when the fat Owl rolled into the boat.
Bunter sat down in the stern, beside Frank Nugent: and Wharton, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh pulled. The boat shot

away up the Sark, and Greyfriars dropped out of sight behind.
"I say, you fellows, where are you going?" asked Bunter.
"Pull up to Popper's Island, round it, and back again," answered Harry Wharton.
That was satisfactory. Popper's Island was further up the river than the "Three Fishers." All Bunter had to do was to step out when his destination was reached.
Four oars made quick work, and the boat was soon in sight of the riverside inn, which had a gateway on the tow-path. In that gateway stood a fat and rather greasy gentleman, with a bowler hat cocked rakishly on one side of an oily head, smoking a big cigar. Billy Bunter knew Mr. Joseph Banks by sight; he had seen that frowsy gentleman before.
"I say, you fellows, pull in to the bank, will you?" asked Bunter.
"What on earth for?"
"I want to get out."
The Famous Five looked at him. They had not forgotten Sporting Snips and Spanker: and Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, were riveted on the riverside inn and the frowsy man smoking in the gateway. They looked at Mr. Banks, then at Bunter again.
"You fat, frabjous, frumptious fathead—!" began Bob Cherry.
"Oh, really, Cherry—."
"You pernicious porker—!" said Frank Nugent.
"Oh, really, Nugent—."
"What do you want to get out for, at this particular spot, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, quietly.
"You jolly well mind your own business," retorted Bunter, independently. "Just pull into the back, and let a fellow get out, see? You can pick me up again coming back."
The boat pulled on. It passed the "Three Fishers," the frowsy man in the gateway giving it an idle glance as it passed. Billy Bunter squeaked angrily.
"Look here, I tell you I want to get out! I—I say, I—I ain't going to the 'Three Fishers,' you know! I—I ain't going to see Banks about the two-thirty!"
"You're not," agreed Harry Wharton.
"I—I just want to go for a—a walk, you know."
"We know!" grinned Bob.
"The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed fibbing Bunter"
"Look here, you beast!" roared Bunter, indignantly. "I'm jolly well going to do as I jolly well like, see? I'm not sticking in this boat! I'm getting out."
"Go it!" grinned Johnny Bull.
"Get out as soon as you like," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We're not

giving you a lift to a pub, you fat frabjous footling frump. But if you want to get out, go ahead."
"Nobody's stopping you!" grinned Bob Cherry.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Billy Bunter gave the chums of the Remove a glare that might have cracked his spectacles. The boat pulled on, and the "Three Fishers," and the greasy gentleman in the gateway, dropped astern. Evidently they were not going to land him there, for an interview with Mr. Banks about a horse! And the fat Owl certainly did not feel like getting out—with the boat in the middle of the river!
Five fellows smiled, as the boat pulled on to Popper's Island. Bunter sat and glared. Smithy had failed him: and it was clear that he was going to get no help from the Famous Five in his new career as a bold bad sportsman. It really began to look as if Bunter would never be "on," and that Spanker would romp home regardless of him.
Having circumnavigated Popper's Island, Harry Wharton and Co. pulled back down the current. The "Three Fishers" came in sight again, and Bunter's eyes and spectacles turned in that direction. Mr. Banks had disappeared from the gateway: but the gate stood wide open, and the fat Owl gave it a longing blink.
"I say, you fellows—."
"Fathead!"
"Will you put me ashore, you beasts—I mean, dear old chaps———?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I've got to get on, you know," urged Bunter. "If I don't back Spanker today, it's too late! I've simply got to get 'on.' "
"Chap can't get on by backing geegees, old fat man," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "That isn't the way to get on."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You silly ass," howled Bunter. I mean I've got to get 'on'—Look here, if I'm not 'on' in time, I shan't win anything on Spanker."
"You wouldn't anyhow—that's all right."
"It's a sure snip!" groaned Bunter. "I say, old chaps —dear old fellows—do pull in and let a fellow step ashore—You rotters, will you pull in?—I say, dear old fellows—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Beasts!" roared Bunter.
The "Three Fishers" disappeared astern once more, as the boat pulled on. When they landed at the actual boathouse, there was just time to put up the boat, and cut in for calling-over. Billy Bunter rolled in, with deep feelings. He had a sure snip—he knew the horse that was going to romp

home—there was easy money waiting for his fat fingers to pick it up—and still he was not "on."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

## ALSO RAN!

"YAH"
Billy Bunter made that decisive and defiant remark. He threw into it all the derision and scorn that could possibly be thrown into a single word.
Harry Wharton and Co. looked at him. It was after dinner on Saturday. There was cricket that afternoon, to be followed by a dress rehearsal in the Rag under the superintendence of William Wibley. Between King Cricket and Prince Hamlet, the chums of the Remove had rather forgotten the existence of Billy Bunter. They were reminded of it when the fat Owl rolled up to them, and pronounced, with scorn and derision, the expressive monosyllable "Yah!"
Bunter's fat lip curled with scorn, His fat little nose was turned up—even more than Nature had turned it up to begin with. Scorn gleamed from his spectacles.
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's biting you, fatty?" asked Bob Cherry.
"Is the bitefulness terrific?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
"Yah!" repeated Bunter. "I'm on! See? So yah!"
"You fat ass!" said Harry Wharton.
"Yah! You wouldn't let a chap out of your rotten boat! Well, I've jolly well done it, see, all the same. I jolly well met Banks in the lane, and I'm on! I say, though, wasn't it lucky I met him?" added Bunter.
"Lucky for Banks," agreed Bob Cherry. "I daresay he can do with a quid—he looks as if he can't afford any soap."
"Eh? Banks won't make anything, you fathead,"
snorted Bunter. "Banks will have to pay out four quids, along with the stake, after the race, when Spanker has romped home."
"I can see him doing it!"
"Oh, that's all right," said Bunter. "I'm on Spanker at four to one, That will see me through. After I've got my winnings, I'm going over to Courtfield to pay Parker. I've had a lot of worry over that bill, especially after the way Wharton let me down over that Latin paper—."
"You fat villain!"
"Well, you jolly well did let me down, as you jolly well know. And you'd have stopped me backing Spanker, if you could! Yah! I'm jolly well on, and you

can go and eat coke! So yah!"
And Billy Bunter, having expressed his lofty scorn in a final emphatic "Yah!" turned his plump back on the Famous Five, and rolled away.
Whereupon they forgot his fat existence again!
"I say, Smithy!"
Herbert Vernon-Smith, coming out in flannels, with his bat under his arm, gave the fat Owl an impatient stare,
"Buzz off!" he snapped.
"Yah!"
"What?"
"Yah!" repeated Bunter. "You wouldn't put me on yesterday for the two-thirty! Well, I've done all right without you, see? I'm on. So yah!"
"You blithering bandersnatch—."
"Yah! I'm on! So yah!" jeered Bunter. "I—Ow! Keep that bat away, you beast! Wow!"
Bunter departed rather hastily.
That afternoon, it was quite a happy Owl. It was true that his store of cash, remaining out of Smithy's seven guineas, had been reduced to two pounds seven shillings. But that, of course, was all right. He had had to place a "quid" in Mr. Banks' greasy hands for his bet on Spanker. But that was coming back along with his winnings: exactly enough for Mr. Parker's bill when he received the cash. That evening he was going to collect the cash. On Monday he was going to pay Mr. Parker, and have done with him. Which really was a consummation devoutly to be wished, for he had received quite a sharp note from Mr. Parker on the subject, and it was plain that if Mr. Parker was not paid, there would be a spot of bother.
It was not easy for Billy Bunter, with two pounds seven shillings in his pocket, to keep away from the tuck-shop. But, with really heroic efforts, he did so. Luckily, while the Remove fellows were at cricket, he found a cake in Vernon-Smith's study, and a packet of toffee in Tom Brown's, and a box of dates in Ogilvy's. The two pounds seven shillings were still intact when the evening papers were delivered at six o'clock.
Bunter was very keen to see the evening paper. He was not anxious, as there was no doubt about Spanker. He had complete faith in Snipster's Special Snip. Still, it would be reassuring to see it in black and white. It was really just as well to know for certain that Spanker had romped home, before he called on Mr. Banks to collect his winnings.
There was an evening paper in the Rag, where many fellows were interested in the cricket news. Some of them wanted to know how their counties were getting on. Billy Bunter was not in the least interested in county cricket: and he hovered impatiently while Bob Cherry read out

interesting items to a dozen fellows.
"I say, Cherry, do let a fellow have a squint at that paper," exclaimed Bunter. "Bother Surrey! Blow Middlesex! Look here, let me see that paper."
Bob stared at him for a moment, and then, remembering Spanker, grinned.
"You fat ass—!" he said.
"Will you gimme that paper for a minute?" hooted Bunter.
"Here you are, fathead."
Bunter grabbed the paper. He knew where to look for the really interesting news. He fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, on the "Stop-Press."

F WAPSHOT, 2.30.

That was it! But what followed puzzled Bunter.

Hooker, Dandy Dick, Pretty Jane.

Bunter blinked at that list of three. He blinked at it again. There was no mention of Spanker. It was quite perplexing.
But enlightenment came, as he read a further list. It was headed:

**ALSO RAN.**
Big Bertha, Bluebottle, Huntress, Spanker, Benbow.

Billy Bunter's jaw dropped.
"Oh, crikey!" he gasped.
The newspaper dropped from his fat hands. Bob Cherry picket it up, and resumed county cricket. Billy Bunter did not stay to listen. He almost tottered from the Rag.
Also ran!
Snipster, of Sporting Snips, had not proved, after all, a quite reliable guide. Spanker, the specially selected, hadn't romped home. He hadn't apparently, done any romping at all, for he was not even "placed": he had tailed off sixth or seventh. He was an "also ran." Billy Bunter was not going to collect any winnings from Joey Banks. He was going to leave his "quid" in Joey's greasy hands.
"Oh, lor'!" moaned Bunter.
There was only one thing, in the painful circumstances, that a fellow could do: at least a fellow whose name was William George Bunter. Two pounds

seven shillings, obviously would not avail for Mr. Parker: and Bunter had no longer any hope of making up the required sum in his role of bold bad sportsman. He rolled away to the tuck-shop!

## CHAPTER XXXV

## BENEFIT PERFORMANCE!

"UM!" said Bob Cherry, thoughtfully.
There was a buzz of voices in No. 1 Study after class on Monday. The Famous Five, the Bounder, Squiff, and several other fellows had gathered there: and, of course, Wibley, as the matter under discussion was the coming presentation of "Hamlet," by William Shakespeare, by the Remove Dramatic Society.
Wednesday was the great day, and Wibley, who decided everything in his capacity of President-Manager-Producer-and-Everything-Else, had settled that it was to be a matinee performance.
Some of the R.D.S. were disposed to demur. A half-holiday, Johnny Bull pointed out, was a half-holiday. Cricket, Harry Wharton declared, was cricket. It was all very well if Wednesday turned out to be a rainy day. Otherwise, it was not all very well.
Wibley brushed all objections aside. It was going to be a matinee on Wednesday afternoon, and that was that.
Bob Cherry had taken little part in the discussion. He seemed to be reflecting. However, other matters having been settled, and there being a pause in the buzz of voices, Bob came out of his thoughtful silence.
"Um!" he said.
Wibley gave him a glare.
"Wednesday afternoon," he said, in a tone of finality. "If you're going to say 'cricket,' don't!"
"I wasn't going to say 'cricket,'" said Bob, mildly "But—."
"Nothing to 'but' about, then," said Wibley.
"But—!" repeated Bob.
"Well, we're through," said Wibley, rising. Having finished talking, Wib took it for granted that there was nothing further to be said.
"Hold on, fathead," said Harry Wharton. "Bob's got something to say. Carry on, Bob."
"Well," said Bob, "I've been thinking about that fat ass, Bunter."
Wibley stared.
"Wandering in your mind?" he asked. "Bunter's not in the cast. He can

come in as audience if he likes. What on earth do you mean?"
"He's up against it," said Bob.
"Is he?" said Wibley, staring. With his mind full of "Hamlet," Wibley was not likely to remember the trials and tribulations of so unimportant a personage as William George Bunter. "Somebody after him for raiding a cake? What does Bunter matter?"
"Not much, perhaps," admitted Bob. "But he's landed himself in an awful scrape. He hasn't paid Parker for that bike—."
"Eh? Oh! Yes! I remember. Well, now we're through—." Wibley moved towards the door. He did not seem interested in Bunter.
"We're not through till Bob's said his piece, fathead," said Johnny Bull. "Shut up a minute."
"Well, what about helping him through?" said Bob. "The fat chump thought of the idea himself, and told Wharton—a benefit performance—."
"What?" ejaculated Wibley.
"A benefit for Bunter!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.
"Bunter's benefit!" said Johnny Bull, staring. "Rot!"
"The rotfulness is somewhat terrific, my esteemed Bob."
"It would, mean charging for admission," said Frank Nugent.
"Which being interpreted means that nobody would come!" said the Bounder. "And who the thump is Bunter that anybody should bother about him?"
"Well, he's nobody in particular," agreed Bob. "But he's a born idiot—."
"Is that why you're bothering about him?" asked the Bounder, sarcastically. "A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind—is that it?"
"Oh, don't be an ass, Smithy! Look here," said Bob, "you did him a good turn yourself, if you come to that. You must have lost two or three quids on that bike you gave him seven guineas for."
"And I was an ass for my pains. He's been blowing the tin on tuck instead of paying Parker."
"I know! All the same, he's heading for a fearful row. Parker will go to the Head if he isn't paid."
"Let him!" said Smithy, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Serve him right!"
"Um!" said Bob. "I daresay it would serve the fat ass right—but that isn't the point. Give every man his deserts, and who will escape whipping—Shakespeare."
"Oh, give Shakespeare a rest! We're getting enough of him."
"Well, look here," said Bob. "Bunter's for it, if nothing's done. We could see him through by making this Bunter's benefit. Lots of fellows would play up. We could raise the amount——,"
"And hand it over to Bunter to blow at the tuck-shop?" asked Smithy.

"No fear! If we raise the amount, we'll see that it goes to Parker, of course. After all, it's up to fellows to help a lame dog over a stile," argued Bob.
"Hear, hear!" said Harry Wharton.
"Bunter's had his chance, and chucked it away," said Smithy. "It's up to him to help himself, if he wants help."
"Well, he's tried helping himself," grinning Bob. "He pinched a paper from this study, thinking it was a paper for the Latin prize—"
"Ha. ha, ha!"
"And he's tried backing a winner that came in last—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"The less Bunter helps himself the better," said Bob. "He will be trying to hold up a bank next, at this rate. Look here, you fellows, let's make this show Bunter's benefit, and see him through."
Harry Wharton laughed.
"Let's," he said.
"I think it's rot, old chap," said Johnny Bull. "But I agree."
"Same here," said Frank Nugent.
"The samefulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head. "The esteemed and execrable Bunter deserves all that is coming to him, but give every man his ridiculous deserts, and who shall escape the whipfulness, as honourable Shakespeare remarkably observes."
"It's rot," said the Bounder.
"Now, look here, Smithy—."
"But I agree, if you fellows do," added Smithy.
"Good man!"
"You're a blithering ass, Bob Cherry," said Wibley.
"Thanks."
"And a soft-hearted, soft-headed chump—."
"Thanks again!"
"But I agreed, if you make a point of it," conceded Wibley. "Bunter doesn't matter a boiled bean, so far as I can see, and if he gets sacked for diddling Parker, who's going to miss him? But—."
"Exactly," said Bob. "So we're all agreed—it's going to be Bunter's Benefit! Hands up for Bunter's Benefit!"
Every hand in the study went up. Most of the members of the R.D.S. probably agreed with Wibley's view that William George Bunter did not matter *a* boiled bean. But they all liked Bob Cherry, and were willing to back him up. And Bunter, after all, was a Remove man, though no great credit to the form. And it was certain that something awful would happen

to Bunter if somebody did not see him through. So it was settled, and Bunter's Benefit was approved *nem. con.*
After which the meeting in No. 1 Study broke up.
That evening, a notice appeared on the door of the Rag which was read with great interest by Remove fellows and fellows in other forms. Coker of the Fifth came along to read it, with a smile on his rugged visage—one of those sardonic smiles.

BUNTER'S BENEFIT!
On Wednesday Afternoon smiles.
At 3 o'clock precisely
THE REMOVE DRAMATIC SOCIETY
present
"HAMLET"
By W. Shakespeare
Tickets: 1/- at doors
Reserved: 2/6 to £1 1/- —apply No, 1 Study.

Coker of the Fifth grinned sardonically, having his own ideas about what was going to happen when the Remove
Dramatic Society presented "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare.
Other fellows grinned, apparently amused by the list of prices for tickets.
Billy Bunter's grin was the widest of all.
At last—at long last—the fat Owl saw the solution of his financial problem. And Billy Bunter's reaction to the announcement of his Benefit took the form of rolling off immediately to the tuck-shop, there to expend, to the last sixpence, what still remained of the seven guineas!
After which it was a sticky and stony Bunter.

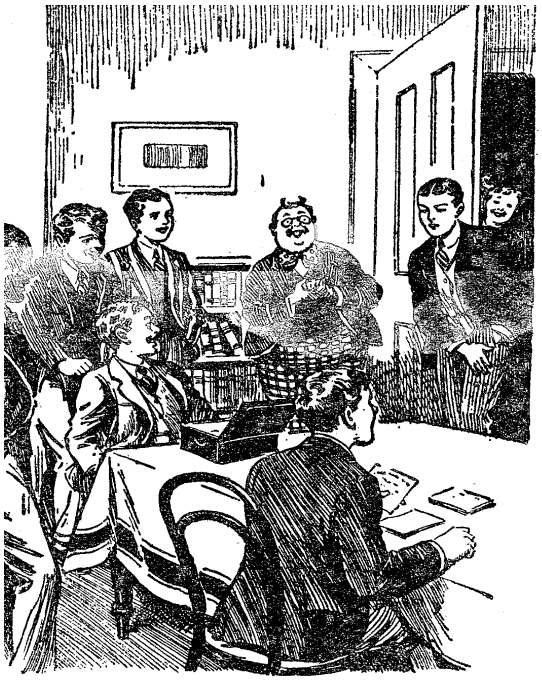
## CHAPTER XXXVI

## BUNTER ALL OVER

"I SAY, you fellows."
Billy Bunter was unheeded. -
They were busy, in No. 1 Study, after class on Tuesday. The Famous Five sat at the receipt of custom, as it were.
Clink! clink!
That musical sound told of coins dropping into a box, It was a very pleasant sound to the fat ears of Billy Bunter, as he blinked into the study.

There was a cash-box on the table. Already there were several half-crowns in it. Peter Todd had just arrived with another.
"From Quelch!" he announced.
"Good old Henry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Is he coming to the show tomorrow? We shall have to pull up our socks, with Quelchy's eye on us."
Peter grinned.
"No, he said he was sorry he couldn't be present, on account of the Masters' Meeting in the afternoon. But be took a ticket, to help on the show."
"I say, you fellows—."
"Shut up. Bunter."
"Look here, this is my benefit, ain't it?" exclaimed the fat Owl warmly. "I jolly well think—."
"Kick Bunter, somebody," said Johnny Bull.
"Beast!"
"Wibley says Quelch must be an ass to attend a Masters' Meeting, when he could come and see 'Hamlet' in the Rag," went on Peter, with a chuckle.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I say, you fellows—."
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Mauly! Trickle in, Mauly!" roared Bob Cherry, as the elegant figure of Lord Mauleverer appeared in the doorway. "You want the best seat! We have them! What?"
Lord Mauleverer ambled in, as Peter Todd went out.
"Half-crown or five bob, Mauly?" asked Frank Nugent. "A bloated millionaire ought to be good for five bob."
"A benefit performance, you know, Mauly," said Harry Wharton. "All the brilliant galaxy of talent in the Remove Dramatic Society."
"And a good cause, more or less," said Johnny Bull. "We're doing this to keep a fat diddler from getting sacked for diddling."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, really, Bull—."
"Sold many guinea seats?" asked Lord Mauleverer. There was a chuckle in No. 1 Study. Guinea seats were rather in the nature of a flourish of William Wibley's imagination. Wibley thought it looked well. But the most optimistic member of the Remove Dramatic Society did not expect any Greyfriars man to cough up twenty-one shillings for a seat.
"Not so far," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "If there's going to be a rush for the guinea seats, it hasn't started yet."
"The rushfulness will probably not be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.
"Well, look here, suppose I start the ball rollin', what?" asked Mauly. And

he laid a pound note and a shilling on the table.
"Good man!"
"Hear, hear!"
"By gum! I shall have to write out a special ticket for that," said Bob.
"Wait a minute, Mauly."
"I say, you fellows—."
"Shut up, Bunter! Here you are, Mauly."



'Sold many guinea seats?' asked Mauleverer.

Lord Mauleverer ambled out with his special ticket, Frank Nugent picked up the shilling and clinked it into the cash-box. At the same moment, a fat paw reached for the pound note.
Rap
"Yarooooh!" roared Billy Bunter, as a ruler, in Johnny Bull's hand, established sudden contact with a set of fat knuckles.
Bunter sucked fat knuckles and spluttered frantically,
Nugent picked up the pound note and slipped it into the cash-box.
"Look here, you beast—!" roared Bunter.
"Roll away, barrel. We're busy."
"Ow! wow!" Bunter, sucking fat knuckles, glared at the Famous Five. "Look here, this is my benefit, not yours. I can jolly well take charge of the cash if I like! See?"
"And where would it go?" asked Bob.
"That is my business, when it's my benefit!" hooted Bunter. "You jolly well

mind your own business, Bob
Cherry."
"Oh, my hat!"
"Like your cheek to butt into another fellow's affairs!
Just mind your own business, and leave me to mind mine!" yapped Bunter.
"You've asked for that, Bob," said Harry Wharton.
"Now who's going to kick Bunter out of the study?"
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"How's business?" Vernon-Smith came into the study.
"Hallo, what's that fat frog doing here? Don't let him get at the cash-box."
"Oh, really, Smithy——."
"Bunter would like to take charge of the cash," grinned Nugent. "I fancy his postal-order hasn't come."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Look here, you cheeky beast—."
"Three half-crowns," said Smithy, dropping them into the cash-box. "I've sold three tickets in the Shell, Shall I kick Bunter out as I go?"
"Do
"Why, you cheeky rotter—yaroooh—if you jolly well kick me, Smithy, I'll jolly well—wow-wow-wow! Wow!"
Billy Bunter faded out of No. 1 Study, with the assistance of the Bounder. Loud howls floated back from the passage.
"We're getting on," remarked Bob Cherry, giving the cash-box a shake. "Must be jolly near three quids already. And we shall take at least a quid at the doors. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that Bunter again? Buzz off, Bunter."
Billy Bunter did not buzz off. He marched into the study with a determined expression on his face. His little round eyes were gleaming with determination behind his big round spectacles. Bunter had the look of a fellow who was not going to be trifled with.
"Now, look here, you fellows!" said the fat Owl. "I daresay you mean well. I'm obliged to you, and all that. But this is my benefit, and a fellow prefers to keep his own affairs in his own hands. I'm taking charge of that cash-box, and I don't want any of you butting in. Get that clear."
Five fellows gazed at William George Bunter. The expressions on their faces were very expressive. Indeed they were frightfully expressive. The Famous Five looked at Bunter almost as if they could have eaten him.
Unheeding the danger-signals, the fat Owl burbled on.
"I'm looking after this! Mind, I don't mean that I wouldn't trust you fellows," added Bunter, kindly.
"Trust us!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"But a fellow prefers to look after his own money, explained Bunter.
"His own money!" gurgled Johnny Bull.
"Well, it's mine, ain't it?" said Bunter, blinking at him, "All takings go to the benefit, and it's my benefit. You can't get out of that. You fellows can't expect to make anything out of it."
"Make anything!" repeated Harry Wharton, like a fellow in a trance.
"I prefer to handle the cash myself. I may need some of it—."
"What?" howled Bob Cherry.
"I've been disappointed about a postal-order———."
'You fat villain!"
"Oh, really, Cherry! I suppose a fellow can spend his own money if he likes," exclaimed Billy Bunter, warmly. "Think you're going to butt in? Blessed if I ever heard of such cheek!" Bunter stretched out a fat hand to the cash-box. "I'm jolly well looking after this—."
"Let that box alone!" roared Johnny Bull.
"Shan't!" retorted Bunter, independently.
"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—."
"Yah! If you fellows think you're going to have the handling of my money, you're jolly well got another guess coming! Looks to me as if you're on the make—"
"On the make!" stuttered Bob. "Oh, my only hat! Why, you fat, frabjous, frumptious, footling freak—."
"Well, it jolly well looks like it, and I can jolly well say plainly—yarooh! Yoo-hooop! Oh, crikey! Wow!"
That was all, from Bunter. Five fellows jumped up as if moved by the same spring. Five pairs of hands collared William George Bunter. The fattest figure in the Grey- friars Remove shot through the doorway like a stone from a catapult. A bump and a roar echoed back from the passage.
The door banged after Bunter. A fat, breathless, deeply-indignant Owl tottered away—still stony, in spite of the funds that were rolling in for his benefit!

## CHAPTER XXXVII

## CURTAIN UP!

WILLIAM WIBLEY rubbed his hands.
"We're getting on," he said.
Wibley was peering through the curtain.

The Rag was filling.

It was half-past two on Wednesday afternoon. At three o'clock precisely, as announced, the Remove Dramatic Society were presenting "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare. The hour was at hand. And they looked like getting a good house. The fellows, undoubtedly, were coming in.

It was barely possible that the weather had something to do with it. Outside, in the quad, a light drizzle was falling. Fellows who had been thinking of cricket, or running out their jiggers, that afternoon were not tempted out by the weather. No doubt that helped to swell the audience in the Rag. Anyhow, they were coming in.

Many hands had laboured at turning the Rag into a temporary theatre. Every fellow in the Remove had helped, and many hands made light work. The upper end of the long room was the stage. Behind it, the washing-lobby was the green-room. In front, the Rag was crowded, not to say crammed, with forms, benches, stools, chairs, and even boxes, borrowed from everybody everywhere, to accommodate the audience. And they were coming in, in the most gratifying way.

Remove fellows acted as ushers to conduct the more expensive patrons to reserved seats. Bolsover major stood at the door, taking shillings: specially selected as the biggest fellow in the Remove, capable of dealing promptly and efficaciously with any fags disposed to be obstreperous. Morgan, at the battered old piano in the Rag, was ready to supply incidental music. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Micky Desmond stood prepared to handle the curtain at the signal "curtain up." The cast were all ready. Everything and everybody were ready. They only awaited the boom of three from the old clock-tower.

Wibley, in the role of Hamlet, looked the part. Horatio, Laertes, Polonius, Claudius, Rosenkrantz, Guildenstern, might have been recognised as Remove fellows. Ophelia undoubtedly bore a close resemblance to Frank Nugent. But Wibley was just Hamlet. At the moment, however, he did not look like a "melancholy" Dane. He locked jubilant.

"It will be 'House Full,' or jolly nearly," he said. "Who'd have thought there were so many fellows in the school with a taste for jolly good acting?"

"Lucky it's raining," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Don't be an ass," said Wibley.

"The rain's got nothing to do with it. The fellows are coming in to see me play Hamlet."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Quite!"

"Wibley's the goods, you know," remarked Smithy. "We're only also-rans."

"Exactly," assented Wibley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Don't let the audience hear you cackling, fatheads!" snapped Wibley. "What is there to cackle at, anyway?"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's old Wingate coming in," said Bob, taking a peep through the curtain. "Jolly decent of him to come."
"Six or seven of the Fifth, too," remarked Nugent. "And there's Hobson, with a gang of the Shell.
"And Temple, and Dabney, and Fry—quite a crowd of the Fourth," said Bob. "Jolly lucky it's raining—I mean, that fellows are so keen to see a really top-notch actor like Wib."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo, that .sounds like jolly old Bunter!" said Bob, as a fat squeak was heard from the direction of the door.
"I say, you fellows, I'm coming in! It's my benefit, ain't it? I'm jolly well coming in, see?"
"You haven't paid, you fat spoofer."
"Oh, really, Bolsover—."
"Don't block the doorway! Now, then! Trot in, Mauleverer—you go right in front for the guinea seats—."
"I say, Mauly! Lend me a bob, will you?"
"Eh? Oh! Yaas."
Billy Bunter rolled in with Lord Mauleverer. Then a burly form and a rugged face appeared in the doorway of the Rag.
"Shilling, please, Coker," said Bolsover major. "You young ass!" snorted Coker, "No admittance on the nod, Coker! You pay to come in! Shilling, please."
"Think I'd give a brass farthing to see a mob of fags playing the giddy ox?" snapped Coker.
"Get out, if you're not coming in!" said the doorkeeper. "You're in the way there, Coker."
"If you want a thick ear, young Bolsover—,"
"Outside! "
"I'm standing here just as long as I jolly well like," announced Coker, "and if you give me any cheek, I'll clout your head."
And Horace Coker planted himself in the doorway, staring into the Rag. Coker, certainly, had no intention of joining the audience. He was there to ascertain that the performance had started, before getting going with his own plans—now cut and dried.
Why so many fellows were willing to see a mob of fags playing the giddy ox, as he expressed it, was a puzzle to Coker, and rather an irritating one. But they were not going to enjoy the performance, at all events. The

Remove Dramatic Society were not getting away with this! Coker knew what was scheduled to happen during that performance, if nobody else did.

"Will you get out of that doorway, Coker?" bawled Bolsover major.

"No," said Coker, calmly.

"Then you'll be chucked out! Here, Linley—Russell—Hazel—Elliot—Fishy—lend a hand here."

There was a scuffle in the doorway of the Rag. Half-a-dozen Remove fellows proved equal to the task of shifting Coker. He disappeared into the passage without.

More and more fellows came in. Whether it was the rain out of doors, or Wibley in the role of Hamlet indoors, or both, the Rag was filling fast. Billy Bunter blinked round over the numerous audience, and grinned a grin of fat satisfaction. Undoubtedly Bunter's benefit looked like being a success.

Interfering fellows, much to Bunter's indignation, were keeping hold of the cash-box. But once it was over, they would have to shell out. It would be over by tea-time: and then Billy Bunter was going to have the spending of his own money!

And if Bunter had the spending of the funds raised by his benefit, it was possible that Mr. Parker, at Courtfield, was booked to wait a little longer for his little bill! Bunter was not, at the moment, thinking of Mr. Parker. He was thinking of a great and glorious spread.

Some of the audience, perhaps, were eager for the performance to begin. The fattest member was only eager for it to end.

Three o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower, The stage was cleared. The signal was given for the curtain to go up. Up it went: revealing the stage set for the first scene of "Hamlet": the ramparts of Elsinore, with the sentry at his post.

One or two late-corners trickled in. Then Bolsover major closed the door of the Rag—almost on the nose of Horace Coker. The audience ceased to scrape chair-legs and shuffle feet, and settled down to watch the Remove Dramatic Society present "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

## COKER CARRIES ON!

"COKER, old man—,"

"Coker, old chap—."

"Don't jaw!" said Coker.
"But, look here, old fellow—!" pleaded Potter, "Look here—!" urged Greene,
"I said don't jaw!" Coker pointed out. Potter and Greene were earnest. Indeed they were almost tearful in their earnestness. They were worried, alarmed, in fact horrified, by Coker's latest and maddest stunt, and his adamantine determination to carry on with it. Little as they could expect to enjoy Coker's company, they were prepared to put up with it for the whole of the afternoon, to keep him from asking for trouble.
"You see—!" said Potter.
"Don't you see," said Greene.
"They're going it," said Coker, grimly. "They've started! Listen to the cheeky little rotters! Just listen!"
Coker was standing outside the door of the Rag. Potter and Greene were trying to edge him away to the door on the quad, in the hope of getting him out for the afternoon. But Coker was not to be edged.
Voices could be heard from the Rag. They had, as Coker said, started. The Remove Dramatic Society were going strong with "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare.

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him.

"That's young Ogilvy," said Coker. "Stop pushing me, Potter—what are you shoving a fellow for?"
"I don't think the rain will last," said Potter. "We could get out on the jiggers, Coker."
"I've got something else to do, Potter. You can go out if you like."
"We shouldn't enjoy a spin without you, Coker," said Greene—perhaps considering it justifiable to exaggerate a little in a good cause.
"Well, I may come later," said Coker. "Listen to them! They've got the Ghost on now! I'll give 'em ghosts! That's young Penfold speaking!"

Looks it not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.

"And that's young Wharton," said Coker, as the next voice came.

Most like! It harrows me with fear and wonder.

"I'll jolly well harrow 'em with fear and wonder, when I get going with the stink-bombs," grinned Coker. "Come on—it's time I got going, now they're fairly started."
Coker strode away. Potter and Greene exchanged an almost hopeless look. Then they hurried after Coker.
"I say, Coker—."
"Coker, old chap—."
They caught him at the foot of the staircase. Coker gave an impatient grunt as Potter caught one sleeve, and Greene the other.
"You're wasting time," he snapped.
"For goodness sake, Coker," urged Potter. "Think a minute! You can't do it."
"Can't I?" grinned Coker. "You'll see whether I can or not. I've had a lot of trouble over this. I couldn't get what I wanted at Chunkley's the other day, and I had to go all over Lantham—."
"Yes, but look here—."
"Still, I had some luck, at the finish," said Coker. "I found a place where they had a box of 'em—old stock left over. I tried one of them in the yard, and I can tell you, it was a hummer. Wait till I send a dozen of 'em down the chimney, one after another—."
Potter and Greene had hoped that Coker wouldn't be able to get hold of a supply of the horrid contrivances necessary for carrying out his remarkable scheme. But that hope had failed.
"But, my dear chap," almost moaned Potter. "Don't do it! Why, there are Sixth-Form prefects there—."
"Fat lot I care for the prefects!" said Coker, disdainfully.
"Wingate's there, said Greene. "The captain of the school, Coker! You can't play mad tricks on the captain of the school."
"Fat lot I care for Wingate."
"A—a beak might be there—."
"That's rot, Potter! The beaks are all at the Masters' Meeting in Common-Room. Not that I should care a rap if a beak was there."
"Oh, crikey!" moaned Potter.
"But—!" groaned Greene
"The fact is, it couldn't have happened better," said Coker. "Just as well to have the beaks out of the way. They'll all be jawing in Common Room—Prout's jaw going nineteen to the dozen—."
"Hush!" breathed Potter, as a portly figure appeared on the staircase, coming down. Coker, not seeing Mr. Prout for the moment, his back being to the staircase, saw no reason for hushing.

"Jawing like billy-o," said Coker. "You know what the beaks are when they get together—jaw, jaw, jaw—."
"COKER!"
"Oh, gum!" Coker spun round, and almost goggled at Mr. Prout, on the stairs. "Oh! Ah! Oh! My hat!"
Prout gave him a look—a thunderous look!
"Coker! I heard your words—your disrespectful words! Coker, you will write out a book—the second book of Virgil!"
Prout rolled on, indignant, on his way to Common Room, to join the Masters' Meeting there. Coker was left rooted to the floor.
"A—a—a book!" he gasped. "Another book! Oh, crikey! You silly fatheads—you footling asses—!"
"What!"
"It's all your fault!" hooted Coker. "Now let a fellow alone, or I'll jolly well punch your heads."
Coker tramped up the stairs. Potter shrugged his shoulders, and gave it up. But Greene cut after Coker, and overtook him on the landing.
"Coker, old chap—."
"Leggo my sleeve, you fathead! You've landed me in a row with Prout now. Now shut up," bawled Coker.
"Look here, chuck it up, old man, and—and—and we'll help you to write out that book, honest Injun!" gasped Greene.
Self-sacrifice could not have gone further. But Coker did not even listen. He shook off Greene's detaining hand, and tramped away to his study. A minute later he came back with a bundle in his hand.
"Coker, old chap—!" implored Greene.
Coker did not even answer. Bundle in hand, he tramped up the upper staircase, and disappeared. Greene went down dejectedly to rejoin Potter. They had done all they could, short of collaring Horace Coker and sitting on his head! Old Horace had to be left to his own devices.
Old Horace's own devices led him to the ladder and the trap-door in the roof in the dormitory passage. Nobody was about the dormitories in the afternoon, and there was no eye to fall on Coker. Probably he would have carried on, anyhow, for the most mulish of mules hadn't a thing on Coker when his mind was made up. Still, he was rather glad that there was no eye about, to fall on him: for even Coker's solid brain realised that there would be a tremendous row about this. He was going to dish those cheeky Remove fags, and "stink out" the audience in the Rag: that performance of "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare was going to be cut short in the wildest uproar and confusion. But Coker certainly did not want to advertise himself as the doer of the deed.

However, all was clear: and Coker gained the roof, and emerged into a drizzle of rain. There he looked round for the chimney of the Rag.
He was in the midst of almost a wilderness of chimneys. He had to be careful not to make a mistake. For a good ten minutes, Coker scanned his surroundings, and surveyed and calculated, till he was satisfied at last. Then Coker got going.
His bundle was unwrapped. He selected one of the objects it contained, and with a steady hand, dropped it down a round red chimney-pot. Those bombs were not, of course, of a dangerous variety. They were simply planned to emit a smoky vapour and a dreadful smell when they got into action. Mischievous little boys played tricks with such things. It did not occur to Coker that he was playing the part of a mischievous little boy!
One after another, his supply of stink-bombs rattled down the chimney. It was the work of hardly a couple of minutes. Coker grinned—an expansive grin—at the mental picture of what must already be happening in the crowded room where the awful effluvia of those stink-bombs was spreading from an empty fire-place.
But he did not linger.
Prudence indicated prompt departure when his deadly work was done! Coker plunged through the trap, closed it after him, slid down the ladder, and scuttled down the stairs. At the foot of the staircase he found Potter and Greene. They gazed at him in dumb inquiry.
"Coming out?" asked Coker, cheerily. "Let's run out the jiggers—who cares for a spot of rain?"
"You—you—you've done it?" articulated Potter.
"Didn't I say I would?"
"Oh, crikey!" said Greene.
"Come on," said Coker, brightly.
They followed him out.

## CHAPTER XXXIX -

## MEETING ADJOURNED!

"Bleiss my soul!" said Dr. Locke.
Mr. Prout coughed.
Mr. Quelch suppressed a sniff.
Mr. Hacker compressed his lips.
Mr. Wiggins blew his nose.
Mr. Lascelles rose to his feet, glancing round him with a puzzled expression.
Monsieur Charpentier murmured "Mon Dieu!"

Mr. Capper gasped.
Mr. Twigg seemed to choke.
All these unusual manifestations came at the same time—most unusual indeed, at a Masters' Meeting, presided over by the head-master in person.
But the circumstances were unusual. Many a masters' meeting had been held at Greyfriars School: and if the proceedings were, as Coker had declared, characterised by "jaw, jaw, jaw," nevertheless they were always conducted with decorum, if not solemnity. On the present occasion, for the first time in history, decorum was difficult to observe, and solemnity was absolutely out of the question.
How could even a Masters' Meeting remain either decorous or solemn, with a queer vapour beginning to float in the air, and a strange, horrid, noxious smell penetrating every corner of the room?
At a Masters' Meeting at Greyfriars, the head-master sat at the head of the long oval mahogany table in Common-Room. Along either side of the same sat the form-masters. Other masters of lesser account sat around, anywhere they liked. Polished courtesy from the Head, polite respect from the staff, distinguished the proceedings. Items on the agenda were taken in dignified succession. That was as it should be—but for once things were not as they should have been.
Something was amiss!
From the great fireplace, empty save for a bowl of flowers, a sort of smoky vapour stole forth. The assembled beaks did not notice that for the moment. What they noticed was the smell.
Prout got the first real whiff, and coughed. He coughed again. Then he spluttered But they all got some of it. It was amazing-disconcerting-upsetting-unaccountable! But there it was!
"The drains!" muttered Mr. Hacker.
"I have never noticed anything of the kind before," breathed Mr. Wiggins. "But—but—dear me!"
Dr. Locke had been sneaking. But having ejaculated, quite suddenly, "Bless my soul!" he ceased to speak. He seemed deeply perturbed.
Mr. Quelch sniffed. He had suppressed the first sniff: but the second escaped him. Dr. Locke glanced at him.
"Do you notice—?" he asked.
"Indeed, I do, sir," answered Mr. Quelch. "It is very strange—very odd, indeed—but—but something—."
"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Prout. He spluttered. "I may say—grooogh! —ooogh! —woogh! —unparalleled."
"An extraordinary scent—." said Mr. Twigg.

"A—a—a very peculiar aroma," gasped Mr. Capper.
"It is growing worse," said Mr. Hacker.
"Much worse!" said Mr. Lascelles.
"Mon Dieu! Mais c'est aifreuse!" gurgled Monsieur Charpentier. "Je n'en comprends rien—mais c'est affreuse."
It was bad to begin with. But it was certainly growing worse—much worse—rapidly worse. As Hamlet, in the Rag. was remarking. "Thus bad begins, but worse remains behind!"
What was the cause of it was a mystery to the beaks. They were not likely to guess, in a hurry, that a Fifth-form man had clambered on the roof, to drop smoky stink-bombs down the chimney of the Rag and dish the theatrical performance there. Nor were they likely to guess that Coker of the Fifth had selected the wrong chimney, and was dropping his stink-bombs down the chimney of Common-Room in mistake for that of the Rag!
These things were quite unknown to the Masters' Meeting. Naturally they had not the remotest idea of the extraordinary activities of Coker of the Fifth.
"Bless my soul!" said the Head again. He half-rose.
"Something is wrong with the chimney!" said Mr. Prout, staring at the fireplace with bulging eyes. "There is no fire, but smoke is coming from the chimney—."
"Extraordinary!"
"Upon my word!"
"Oooooogh!"
"Urrrrggh!"
"Something—something is falling down the chimney!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. He started to his feet. "I distinctly saw something fall—."
"I—I—I heard something!" ejaculated Mr. Hacker. "It was rather like the popping of a cork—."
"Urrrrrgh!" gurgled Prout. "This is—is—is intolerable! Why, the room is filling with—with vapour—and the—the smell—urrrggh!"
All the masters were on their feet now. Decorum was forgotten—solemnity thrown to the winds.
"Gentlemen!" gasped the Head. A rush of aroma from the fireplace caught him, and nearly deprived him of breath, and he could only gasp,
"Gentlemen, in the—the circumstances, I think we will adjourn the meeting—."
"Groooooogh!" from Prout.
"Oooooch!" from Hacker.
Dr. Locke sailed majestically doorward. Majestic as he was, his

movements were considerably more hurried than was his wont. The whole room was reeking with vapour and horrid smells, and it was more than flesh and blood could stand. Mr. Lascelles opened the door for him, and the Head sailed out.
"Urrgh! We had better go—!" gasped Prout.
"Wurrggh! Immediately!" gurgled Mr. Capper.
"Mon Dieu!"
"But what can have happened—?"
"Goodness knows! This dreadful smell—."
"It is really frightful—."
"Urrrggh!"
The Head sailed out more or less majestically. But after him there was quite a cram in the doorway. For some moments, the scene in the doorway of Common- Room bore a resemblance to a Rugby scrum.
Lascelles lingered last, to open the windows, He was looking quite pale when he rejoined his colleagues in the corridor, and hastily drew the door shut after him, to cut off the pursuing scent.
Had Coker of the Fifth found the right chimney, there was no doubt that the performance of "Hamlet" by W. Shakespeare would have been interrupted, dished, and completely knocked on the head. Actors and audience would have fled from the devastating scene. That fine stock of ancient stink-bombs that Coker had rooted out at Lantham had, perhaps, grown more potent with keeping. Anyhow, they gave out a smell that could almost have been cut with a knife. The Remove Dramatic Society certainly would have been routed—had Coker of the Fifth found the right chimney.
"Fortunately for the Remove Dramatic Society, unfortunately for the Masters' Meeting, Coker hadn't.
"Hamlet" hadn't been stunk out of the Rag, as Coker had planned. The Masters' Meeting had been stunk out of Common-Room. And after the Head had majestically retired from the scene, a crowd of excited beaks, outside the door of Common-Room, seethed with excitement and wrath.
"It is a trick," said Mr. Quelch, in a voice compared with which the filing of a saw might have been considered musical. "Something was thrown down the chimney from above—."
"Something of a dreadfully malodorous nature!" gasped Wiggins.
"But how—?" gasped Prout.
"By whom?" stuttered Capper.
"Is it known," said Mr. Lascelles, "whether any boy in the school was in possession of those very unpleasant articles called stink-bombs—?"
"That is it!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "A trick, as I said—some sort of

smoke-bomb has been dropped down the chimney—."
"Unparalleled!" said Prout.
"We must discover, without delay, the author of this outrage." Quelch breathed hard. "He will, of course, be expelled from the school immediately he is discovered. Let us lose no time!"
The beaks lost no time. In the Rag, the performance of "Hamlet," by W. Shakespeare, was going strong, actors and audience in blissful ignorance of what was happening elsewhere. But all the rest of Greyfriars soon knew that some young rascal, with an audacity which Mr. Prout justly described as unparalleled, had dropped stink-bombs down the chimney of Common-Room and stunk out a Masters' Meeting! For which that young rascal, as soon as he was found, was going to be sacked on the spot!

## CHAPTER XL

## GOOD SHOW!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
Billy Bunter squeaked eagerly.
The show was over. "Hamlet," by W. Shakespeare, had been duly presented by the Remove Dramatic Society, to great applause. The curtain had come down on the remarkable collection of the slain which distinguishes the last act, after which the slain had all promptly come to life again, to take their call before the curtain. Now the audience was crowding out of the Rag, and the actors were cleaning off grease-paint, changing their attire, and becoming schoolboys again. Bunter's Benefit had been a success--there was no doubt about that. And Bunter, at least, remembered that it was tea-time.
"I say, you fellows!" howled Bunter.
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoyed the show, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry.
"Eh? Oh! Well, I'm glad it's over," said Bunter. But, I say, you fellows, it's tea-time. Where's the cash- box?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here. I tell you it's tea-time---."
"And what has the cash-box got to do with tea-time?" inquired Johnny Bull.
"Oh, really, Bull—."
"You fat villain," said Harry Wharton. "We've been raising the wind to pay your bill at Parker's, not to start you guzzling at the tuck-shop."
"Oh, really, Wharton—."
"Kick him out!" said Wibley.

"Look here, you beasts, it's my benefit, ain't it?" hooted Bunter: "I'm going to pay Parker, of—of course. I'm expecting a postal-order to-morrow—."
"Oh, my hat!"
"The same one you were expecting last term?" asked Nugent.
"Or the one you were expecting the term before?" inquired the Bounder.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I don't want a lot of jaw," howled Bunter. "I want my own money, see? I can manage my own affairs without you fellows butting in, I can tell you. You just hand over that cash-box, and mind your own business."
Billy Bunter blinked indignantly at a crowd of grinning faces. Words could hardly have expressed his indignation. He had sat through that performance of "Hamlet," by W. Shakespeare, from beginning to end, getting hungrier and hungrier, looking forward eagerly to the end, when he would be able to collect the cash results of his benefit. Now, it seemed, these interfering fellows were still determined to butt into his business!
Bunter, certainly, wanted to pay Mr. Parker and have done with him. But he saw no reason why he should not draw temporarily- on the cash in the cash-box, and make up any deficiency later with a postal-order he was expecting. If, unhappily, that postal-order didn't arrive, no doubt he would be in difficulties again. But that, Bunter considered, was his own business and nobody else's: and he did not want any interference with his disposal of the cash!
Little as he wanted it, however, he was going to get it! Peter Todd came across to him. He did not speak—he took Bunter by a fat ear, and slewed him round.
Bunter gave a howl of horrid anticipation.
His horrid anticipations were immediately realised.
Thud!
"Yarooogh!" roared Bunter, as Peter's foot landed on the tightest rousers in the county of Kent.
Thud!
"Ow! Beast! I tell you—."
Thud!
"Yooo-boooop!"
Billy Bunter departed—in haste.
It was tea-time: and Bunter was hungry: and the cash- box was full of cash: and it was Bunter's Benefit. Nevertheless, it was clear that Bunter, if he lingered, was going to get more kicks than ha'pence. He departed, yelling—the most indignant Owl ever.
The Remove Dramatic Society proceeded with cleaning, and changing, and

packing up theatrical "props," and generally getting things to rights. Then, at length, the cash-box was opened—without the assistance of Billy Bunter— and the contents duly counted and checked.
"Six pounds nineteen shillings!" said Harry Wharton.
"Good egg!"
"Jolly good show!"
"Not quite enough, after all, though," remarked Frank Nugent. "Parker wants seven guineas from that fat chump."
"We've got to see him through," said Bob.
"He's such a nice chap, and so grateful for services rendered," remarked the Bounder, sarcastically.
Harry Wharton laughed.
"Well, we all know our Bunter," he said. "We've given him a benefit to pull him through, and we don't want to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar. We'll have a whip- round to make up the other eight bob."
"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.
"Oh, all right!" said Smithy, and he produced a half-crown. Shillings and sixpences were added thereto: making up the sum of seven guineas.
"And now—!" said Bob.
"Now one of us had better cut down to Courtfield on a bike, and pay Parker," said Harry, "And the sooner the better."
"Right-ho! I'll go."
Bob Cherry left the Rag, with the handsome sum of seven pounds seven shillings in his trousers pocket. In the passage a fat hand clutched at his sleeve.
"I say, Bob, old chap—."
"Scat!"
"Look here, you beast—I mean, look here, old fellow—I'm jolly well not going to be done out of my benefit!" hooted Bunter. "If you fellows think I'm going to be done, I can jolly well say quite plainly—wow-ow-ow-ow-wow!"
Bob Cherry walked on, leaving Billy Bunter sitting on the floor in the passage. A few minutes later he was on his bike, speeding away to Courtfield.
Billy Bunter tottered to his feet. He was still gurgling for breath when Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came out of the Rag.
"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.
"Run away and play, old barrel."
"Where's that cash-box?" shrieked Bunter.
"Come to my study after tea, and you shall have it," said Harry Wharton,

laughing.
"I'm not going to wait till after tea! Think I'm going to tea in hall? You jolly well hand it over!"
"Bump him!" said Johnny Bull.
"Ow! Beast!"
Bump!
Once more Billy Bunter sat on the passage floor. Harry Wharton and Co. proceeded to No. 1 Study, to get tea ready for Bob Cherry's return from Courtfield. They were thus engaged, when a heavy tread stopped at the study door, and Coker of the Fifth looked in. There was a cheery grin on Coker's rugged features.
"Show over, what?" grinned Coker.
"Yes, it's over," answered Harry Wharton. The four juniors stared at Coker, wondering what it was that amused him so much. Coker, evidently, was in a state of great hilarity.
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "How did it go off?"
"It went off all right, thanks," said Harry.
"The rightfulness was terrific, my esteemed Coker," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
Coker, in his turn, stared.
"Mean to say you carried on?" he exclaimed.
"Why shouldn't we?" asked Johnny Bull.
"Oh, crumbs! But the audience never stood it—they couldn't have!" gasped Coker. "Mean to say the audience
stood it?"
"Lapped it up," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Roars of applause!"
"Well, my hat!"
Coker almost tottered away, dizzy with astonishment. How the actors could have carried on, and the audience sat it out, after his exploit with the stink-bombs, he simply could not begin to guess. On the landing he found Potter and Greene. They were looking quite pale. They had heard the news that Coker had not yet heard. They gazed at him in horror.
"I say," gasped Coker, "those young ticks say that they carried on, and the audience stuck it out—and the whole place must have been fairly reeking—."
"Hush!" breathed Potter. "Not a word about stink.. bombs! Somebody might hear you! You'll get sacked. You blithering idiot, you got the wrong chimney—."
"Don't be an ass, Potter."
"You did!" moaned Greene. "We've just heard! You got Common-Room chimney—."

"Don't be a fathead, Greene."
"You born idiot!" hissed Potter, "All the beaks and prefects are hunting for the mad ass who chucked down stink-bombs on the Masters' Meeting, and stunk them all out of Common-Room! If you're spotted, you'll go up to the Old Man to be bunked."
"Oh!" gasped Coker.
And he gazed dumbfounded at Potter and Greene— the horror in their faces reflected in his own!

## CHAPTER XLI

## RECEIVED WITH THANKS

"ROLL in, Bunter!"
"Oh!" said Billy Bunter.
He was a little taken aback.
He blinked at five smiling faces in No. 1 Study.
Bunter arrived there, after tea, in a determined mood. He had had tea in hall—provisionally, as it were. But he was prepared for something much more extensive and substantial. Mr. Parker had to be paid, of course. Bunter admitted that. Indeed he was quite anxious for Mr. Parker to be paid and finished with. But a spread for Bunter came first. Billy Bunter's fat mind was so concentrated on that spread that all other considerations appeared to him merely as trifles light as air.
Bunter was going to have this out! He was going to insist upon his right to expend, according to his own judgment, the funds raised by his benefit. He was not going to take "no" for an answer. Bunter had come to No. 1 Study for his rights, and Bunter meant business.
He was rather surprised when the Famous Five turned smiling faces on him, and bade him roll in. He rolled in. Apparently they had made up their minds to let Bunter have his rights, without more ado. Bunter was jolly well going to have them, anyhow. He was quite determined on that!
"I say, you fellows, how much did the benefit raise?" he asked.
"Six pounds nineteen shillings," answered Harry Wharton.
"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "Good!"
"We had a whip-round to make it up to seven guineas," added the captain of the Remove.
"Oh! Fine!" gasped Bunter.
He blinked round the study. Bob Cherry lifted the cash-box from the book-shelf, and placed it on the table.
"There you are, old fat man!" he said, cheerily.
"Yours!" said Johnny Bull.

"All yours!" said Frank Nugent.
"All that is in the box belongs to your esteemed and honorific self, my absurd fat Bunter," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
Billy Bunter stretched out a fat paw to the cash-box. This time his fat knuckles were not rapped. This time no one said him nay! The fat Owl beamed all over his fat face.
"I say, you fellows, of course I'm going to pay Parker," he said. "But as I've been disappointed about a postal order, I shall have to draw on this—only temporarily of course. I shall make it up for Parker when my postal-order comes. I don't want to rub it in, as I've no doubt you mean well, but the fact is, I can manage my own affairs, and I don't want you butting in. See?"
"We see!" assented Bob.
"The seefulness is terrific."
"That's all right, old fat foozler," said Harry Wharton, "Nobody's going to butt in. You can do exactly what you like with what's in that box."
"I mean to!" said Bunter, firmly.
"Do!" said Bob.
"Oh, do!" said Nugent.
"Well, if that's understood, all right," said Bunter. And he opened the lid of the cash-box, and blinked into it, with a fat paw ready to grab up the sum of seven pounds seven shillings, and glorious visions of jam-tarts, plum cakes, toffee and butterscotch, and all sorts of gorgeous sticky things, floating before his mental vision.
But the next moment a change, as the poet has expressed it, came o'er the spirit of his dream.
He blinked into the box! He stared into it! He glared into it! But no amount of blinking, staring, or glaring could conjure up what he expected to find there.
There was no cash in the cash-box. There was a sheet of paper. That was the only contents of the box, in lieu of cash. The paper had a printed heading: and it ran:

PARKER'S CYCLE STORES
Courtfield

To One Speedster Bicycle supplied to
W. G. Bunter, Esq., at Greyfriars School £7.7.O

Received with thanks
J. Parker

Billy Bunter gazed at it.
His fat face was a picture.
It was a receipt for the sum of seven guineas, duly handed to Mr. Parker in payment for a Speedster bike supplied to W. G. Bunter. Mr. Parker, at last, had been paid. Billy Bunter, at long last, was done with him. Bunter's benefit had seen Bunter through.
But the expression on Billy Bunter's speaking countenance was not one of relief, It was not one of satisfaction. It was not one of gratitude. It was one of breathless wrath and indignation.
"Beasts!" he gasped.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You—you—you've paid it away—."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Beasts!" roared Bunter. "You can cackle—."
"Thanks, old fat man! We will! Ha, ha, ha!"
"Is—is—isn't there anything for me?" yelled Bunter.
"There's the receipt!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Beasts!"
Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 1 Study, followed by a roar of laughter.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Beasts!" came back a yell from the passage. Which was the sum-total of the thanks the chums of the Remove received for Billy Bunter's Benefit!

THE END

Smithy, the Bounder, chuckled as he went into the cycle sheds. He had just watched the Fat Owl of Greyfriars disappear through the school gateway in a wild wobble. . . .

He stared at an empty stand. *His bicycle*, the handsome Moonbeam, which was an expensive present from his millionaire pater, was not there!

The expression that came over Smithy's face was quite alarming. Every machine was out – except one! A rusty dilapidated object with a twisted pedal, a loose mudguard, and a broken chain. . . .

'That fat scoundrel!' ejaculated the Bounder.

It was the beginning of a lot of trouble – all for BILLY BUNTER'S BENEFIT!