



I

“WHAT about me” asked Billy Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Four fellows in No. 1 Study, in the Remove at Greyfriars, laughed.

One fellow frowned.

The four were Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The one was Harry Wharton.

“Ass!” said Harry Wharton, politely.

“Oh, really, Wharton—”

“Roll away, and don’t bother,” exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently.

Billy Bunter did not roll away. He stood where he was, blinking at the captain of his form through his big spectacles.

“I said what about me, and I mean what about me!” said the fat Owl of the Remove. “You’re short of a man, at the last minute. Smithy’s got himself crooked and can’t play. You’ve got to fill his place. Well, I can fill it. I fancy I’m as good at outside right as Smithy.”

“Give us a rest!”

“St. Jude’s will be here soon,” went on Bunter. “You’ve got to make up your mind. Shove me down to play.”

Four fellows chuckled again. To the Co. the bare idea of Billy Bunter figuring in a Soccer match against St. Jude's was funny. But the captain of the Remove, with a problem to solve at almost the last minute, was not amused. He had to fill Smithy's place: but William George Bunter was assuredly the very last fellow he would have thought of. Bunter, it seemed, had kindly thought of it for him!

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brow over a list of names. Smithy was one of his best men, and not easy to replace. He had neither time nor inclination to be amused by Billy Bunter's claim to play for the Remove.

The fat Owl blinked at the top of his bent head.

"Look here, Harry, old chap—!" he urged.

"Pack it up!"

"It's important!" said Bunter. "I can tell you I'm jolly keen to play for the Remove. Mind, it isn't because my Uncle Carter's going to send me a pound note if I play in a School match—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Bunter. "I wasn't thinking of that at all. I'm keen on the game—jolly keen! Look here, old fellow, do the right thing for once, and give a fellow a chance."

"It will have to be Hazel," said Harry Wharton, passing by the remarks of William George Bunter like the idle wind that he regarded not. "Come on—it's time we got down." He rose from the study table. "I'll tell Hazel he'll be wanted."

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter, as the Famous Five made a move for the door. "You hold on! I tell you—"

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"I tell you—"

"Ass!" said Frank Nugent.

"Beast! I tell you I jolly well ain't going to be left out for a fellow like Hazel," exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "Does Hazel play Soccer like I do?"

"Hardly!" said Harry Wharton. "If he did old, fat man, he wouldn't play for the Remove. Forget it, fathead! Go and frowst in an armchair in front of the fire in the Rag—that's more in your line."

"The frowstfulness is your long suit, my esteemed fat Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Fancy Bunter in the front line!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Why, the St. Jude's chaps would think that a barrage balloon had got loose on the footer ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave the Famous Five a glare that might almost have cracked his big spectacles.

"Look here, Wharton, if you're leaving me out—"

"No 'if' about that!"

"Then I shall jolly well go to the games-master about it," said Bunter. "We'll jolly well see what Lascelles has to say. Lascelles wouldn't stand for keeping a jolly good man out of all the matches, just because you're jealous of his form. Lascelles will jolly well call you to order, if I put it up to him. Do you want the games-master to call you over the coals?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five. This time the captain of the Remove joined in the merriment. They could not quite see Larry Lascelles calling the captain of the Remove over the coals, for declining to play Billy Bunter in a Soccer match.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snapped Bunter. "Mind, I mean it! I'm fed up with all this jealousy, and being left out every time. You put me down to play, or I go straight to Lascelles' study, and put it to him as games-master. I fancy you'll be called to order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle—!" howled Bunter.

"Thanks!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "We will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Five, still cackling, marched out of the study, leaving the Owl of the Remove pink with wrath.

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter.

And he, in turn, rolled out of the study. His plump brow was set, over his big spectacles. Bunter, as he had stated, meant what he said. He was going to the games-master about it.

Bunter, as a rule, was not fearfully keen on Soccer, or any other form of healthy exercise. Indeed, he generally had to be rooted out when games-practice was the order of the day, and his excuses for dodging the same were many and various.

But circumstances alter cases. Uncle Carter who took a kindly interest in his fat nephew at school, was going to present him with a whole pound note, if he played in a match. The amount of tuck that could be obtained at the school shop in exchange for a pound note was quite dazzling. If Billy Bunter did not yearn to urge the flying ball, he certainly did yearn for tuck. Neither was Bunter aware—though any fellow at Greyfriars could have told him—that he was of no use on the Soccer field. It was Bunter's way to fancy that he could do things, until he actually came to do them. In his mind's eye he could see himself covering the ground at terrific speed, with the ball at his feet, and slamming it into goal amid deafening cheers. Often had Billy Bunter seen that, in his mind's eye. He had never seen it in any other!

But he was determined this time. If a fellow didn't get justice, in games, it was up to the games-master to put in a word. Bunter was convinced that he wasn't getting justice. He wanted justice, and still more he wanted Uncle Carter's pound note. So he rolled away to Mr. Lascelles' study, hoping for the best. At the worst, Lascelles could only refuse to intervene.

He tapped at that study door, and opened it. He rolled in.

"If you please, sir—!"

Having got as far as that, the fat junior discerned that the study was vacant. He was addressing empty space.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

It was, in Bunter's opinion at least, very inconsiderate and undutiful on the part of Larry Lascelles, not to be on the spot just when Bunter wanted him. It was very annoying indeed.

However, Mr. Lascelles was not there. The fat Owl decided to wait for him. He rolled across to the armchair, which stood near a bright crackling fire. It was a sharp winter's day, and that bright fire was grateful and comforting. As a matter of fact, but for the lure of Uncle Carter's pound note, Bunter would have preferred an armchair and a fire to the Soccer field. He sat down in the armchair to wait, stretching his fat limbs comfortably on soft leather.

Between the warmth of the glowing fire, and the six or seven helpings he had had at dinner, the fat junior was soon nodding. Lascelles did not seem in a hurry to come back to his study: which was easily explained by the fact that he had undertaken to referee in the match with St. Jude's: a circumstance of which Bunter was unaware. Minute followed minute: and Billy Bunter's eyes closed behind his big spectacles. Then, if Lascelles had come back to his study, he would have been greeted by a quite unexpected and unusual sound in that apartment—a deep and resonant snore. Forgetful of Lascelles, forgetful of Soccer, and forgetful even of Uncle Carter's pound note, Billy Bunter, curled up in the deep armchair, slept and snored.

And then—!

II

IT seemed to Billy Bunter too good to be true.

But there it was!

He had hoped that an appeal to the games-master would work the oracle, so to speak. Harry Wharton and Co. might consider him so much useless lumber on the football field: but Lascelles, Bunter hoped, would know better. Bunter had a hopeful nature! But hopeful as he was, he had had doubts—a good many doubts—and most assuredly he had not expected it to be so easy as this! It really seemed like a dream, as he rolled into the changing-room at the games-master's heels, and all the fellows there stared round.

"Wharton!" rapped Mr. Lascelles.

"Yes, sir!" Wharton was changing for Soccer, and he had one boot on and one boot off. He rose to his feet as the games-master addressed him, with the boot in his hand. He looked inquiringly at Mr. Lascelles, wondering why he had a frown on his brow.

"Why are you not playing Bunter?"

"Eh?"

"While I do not desire, Wharton, to interfere unduly, I feel bound to intervene now. Again and again Bunter has been passed over in the junior matches."

"Oh! Yes! You see—"

"I do not see!" interrupted Mr. Lascelles. "I have not spoken on the subject before, Wharton. I must speak now. I advise you to find a place for Bunter."

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Bunter can't play Soccer, sir," said Bob Cherry, staring.

The games-master glanced round severely at Bob.

"Cherry! Is it your opinion that you know more about Association football than I do?" he inquired.

"Oh! No, sir!" stammered Bob. "But—"

"But Bunter's no good at the game, sir!" said Johnny Bull.

"That will do, Bull!"

"He really isn't, sir—!" said Frank Nugent.

"The goodness of the esteemed fat Bunter is not terrific, esteemed sahib," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Evidently, there is some prejudice on this subject," said Mr. Lascelles. "I am sorry to see it. Wharton! Give me a plain answer. You are captain of your form: and you have left out your best winger—"

"Eh?"

"Answer me plainly—will you play Bunter, on my advice, or will you not?" rapped Mr. Lascelles.

"Oh, my hat!"

"That is not an answer, Wharton."

"Oh! No! I—I—I—," Harry Wharton stammered. "The—the team's full up, sir—I—I can't leave out a man to make room for Bunter—"

"You refuse to act on my advice as games-master?"

"Oh! No! But—"

"Then you will play Bunter, in the place of Vernon-Smith, who is, I understand, standing out of the game."

"I—I—I—"

"I think you will be satisfied with the result, Wharton. In any case, I expect you to act on my advice. In fact, I insist."

Harry Wharton looked at him. All the fellows in the changing-room looked at him. Billy Bunter grinned. This was like a dream come true. He had hoped to hear Lascelles talking to the captain of the Remove like this. Now he heard it! The fat Owl was in high feather. If Lascelles put it like that, could the captain of the Remove refuse? He could not! Billy Bunter was safe for the St. Jude's match, and for Uncle Carter's pound note. It was like a happy dream!

"Well?" rapped Mr. Lascelles, as Harry Wharton did not speak. He seemed to have some difficulty in finding his voice.

"If—if—if you put it like that, sir—!" stammered the captain of the Remove, at last.

"I do put it exactly like that!" said Mr. Lascelles.

"Then—then—I—I—I'll play Bunter, sir."

The die was cast!

The games-master turned to the grinning fat Owl.

"You hear that, Bunter? You will change for football—you are to play for the Remove!"

"Yes, sir!" chuckled Bunter.

And he proceeded to change for Soccer. At last—at long, long last!—W. G. Bunter was going to play for Greyfriars: he was going to kick goals for his school,—perhaps!—and still more important, still more gratifying, Uncle Carter's pound note was as good as in his fat hand! Undoubtedly it was rather like a dream: but there it was: and Billy Bunter, as he rolled out with the footballers, felt like the ancient classic gentleman, who was like to strike the stars with his exalted head!

III

"GOAL!"
"Bravo!"

"Good old Bunter!"

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"We're dreaming this!" said Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

It was quite a long shot from the wing: but it had come off. It had cost Bunter hardly an effort. Smithy, in his place, could never have brought off that shot. Bunter had! It was quite an unusual Bunter: he was a little surprised himself!

"Good old Bunter!"

"Who'd have thought it?"

"Bravo, Bunter."

Harry Wharton gave the fat Owl a smack on a fat shoulder. Judging by his look, he no longer regretted that he had acted on the games-master's advice, and played Bunter. Bunter had always believed that he was the goods, on the field of play. Now other fellows had to believe it. A goal was a goal!

"Keep that up, Bunter!" said Harry.

"What-ho!" grinned Bunter.

And, amazing to relate, he kept it up! By the time the whistle went for the interval, Greyfriars had put the ball in again twice: and each shot came from the foot of William George Bunter.

Fellows had often likened Bunter, on the Soccer field, to an elephant, a

rhinoceros, or a hippopotamus. Now he was a surprise to them: and perhaps to himself. It was really like magic. He skimmed the ground at a speed no other Remove man could beat. The St. Jude's forwards could not touch him—the halves strove in vain—the backs seemed nowhere. The goal-keeper watched him like a cat, but could not stop his unerring shots. Often and often had Bunter declared that he was a good man at Soccer, the man to win matches. Now it had to be admitted. He did not even tire—he seemed as fresh as paint, in spite of the uncommon weight he had to carry. After a rather gruelling first half, some of the other fellows panted a little, or more than a little: but Billy Bunter seemed quite sound in wind and limb.

To tell the truth, Bunter, as well as the other fellows, was surprised. True he fancied himself at games. But he had never fancied himself such a games-man as this! This Soccer match seemed wax in his hands. As the game progressed, it seemed more and more like a happy dream.

St. Jude's were good men, and they did their best. But there was no man like Bunter in their ranks. They did not get a single shot through. But in the second half, Bunter put the ball in thrice again. The crowd thickened round the field, shouting applause.

At the final whistle, with a glorious victory of six goals to nil, every one of them shot by Bunter, the fat Owl was on top of the world. He did not roll off the field: he was grasped and hoisted and carried off shoulder-high by the rest. For the first time in history, Billy Bunter was a man whom the Greyfriars Remove delighted to honour.

"I say, you fellows," chirruped Bunter, in the changing-room afterwards, "what about me for the St. Jim's match next week?"

"What-ho!" said Harry Wharton, "and the Rookwood match after it, and the Carcroft, too. We shall want you all the time, Bunter."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Good old Bunter!"

"Bunter's the goods—"

"Bunter's the man—"

"Bunter—!"

IV

"**B**UNTER!"

"Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Grooooooooooogh!" mumbled Billy Bunter. He opened his eyes behind his big spectacles, and blinked rather dizzily.

Somebody was shaking him by a fat shoulder.

It was Mr. Lascelles, the games-master. He was shaking Bunter vigorously. The fat Owl blinked at him. He sat up in the leather armchair, in front of the

fire, quite dizzily astonished. His last recollection was of the enthusiastic crowd in the changing-room: he did not remember coming back to Lascelles' study. But there he was, and the games-master was shaking him.

"I—I—I say—!" stammered Bunter.

"Are you awake at last?" exclaimed Mr. Lascelles. "What do you mean, Bunter, by entering my study, and going to sleep in my armchair?"

"I—I—I—did I—I fall asleep?" stammered Bunter. "I—I say, it was a jolly good game, wasn't it, sir?"

Mr. Lascelles stared at him.

"Quite a good game," he answered, "but you can know little about it, as you appear to have been asleep here, in my study, Bunter, while it was played."

"Eh?"

Bunter sat bolt upright.

"Oh, crikey!" he ejaculated.

Slowly, it dawned on him!

"I—I—I say," he gasped, "I—I thought—I—I—I mean, I—I—I—haven't I—I—haven't I been playing football?"



A goal was a goal!

"What do you mean? You have been asleep here in my armchair," said Mr. Lascelles, testily. "Are you wandering in your mind, Bunter?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"The football match is over," said Mr. Lascelles. "You should have been watching your schoolfellows play St. Jude's, Bunter—you are very lazy and very slack."

"Oh, lor'!"

"But why did you come to this study to go to sleep?" demanded Mr. Lascelles.

"I—I—I didn't—"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I—I—oh, lor'!" It came clear to Billy Bunter's fat mind, at last. He hadn't played in that Soccer match. Lascelles hadn't taken him to the changing-room and told Wharton to play him. He hadn't kicked those surprising goals against St. Jude's. The wish, in his fat dreaming mind, had been father to the thought. He had fallen asleep in Lascelles' armchair before the fire, and had slept while the Remove played St. Jude's: and dreamed the whole thing.

It was quite a blow!

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I—I—I came here to speak to you, sir, but you weren't here, and—and—and I—I think I—I fell asleep—"

"I think you did!" said Mr. Lascelles, drily, "and I had some difficulty in awakening you, Bunter. Now you are awake, leave my study."

"Oh, lor'!"

Billy Bunter detached himself from that comfortable armchair. He rolled out of the games-master's study. A shout greeted him as he rolled dismally and disconsolately down the passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where have you been, Bunter? We've beaten them, old fat man—two goals to one. Why didn't you roll up to see us beat St. Jude's, you fat slacker?"

Billy Bunter rolled on without replying. His feelings, just then, were rather too deep for words.

EVEN while that happy dream had lasted, it had seemed, to Bunter, rather too good to be true! And so it was!

THE END