

The GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST!

—By—
FRANK RICHARDS



"You fat spoofing rotter!" he roared

CHAPTER I

BLOW FOR BUNTER!

"ONE for you, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.
"Oh, good!"

Billy Bunter's fat face brightened.

It was morning break: and a good many fellows had come along to look for letters in the rack. Among them, of course, was Billy Bunter, who was in his accustomed state of expecting a postal-order.

The number of times that expected postal-order had failed to materialise could hardly have been computed. But hope springs eternal in the human breast.

Bunter's fat face had been somewhat overcast that morning. Each passing day brought the Christmas holidays nearer: and Bunter was still in an unsettled state about the holidays.

Really, Bunter had remarkable skill in landing himself for the holidays. He would have preferred Mauleverer Towers, or one of Smithy's expensive trips abroad: but he had as good as banked on Wharton Lodge as an unfailing resource. Often he had found Harry Wharton amenable. Probably he would have found him amenable again, but for recent happenings. In present circumstances, however, the fat Owl could not help realising that Christmas at Wharton Lodge was a very, very dubious proposition.

It looked as if it was going to be "home, sweet home" for Billy Bunter this time. Wherefore was his fat brow overcast, and the expression on his plump features pessimistic.

Nevertheless, there was comfort in a postal-order if that celebrated and long-expected postal-order had arrived at last.

So the clouded fat face brightened as Bob Cherry handed down a letter from the rack.

It was addressed to Bunter in the paternal hand. Letters from Mr. Bunter, at home at Bunter Villa, often contained nothing more useful or gratifying than admonitions, to be more careful in the expenditure of pocket-money, or to make an effort to earn a better report from his form-master for the term. Such admonitions were of little use to William George Bunter: and he would have preferred a postal-order for even half-a-crown to all the advice that he received in whole terms from his honoured parent.

Still, there was always a chance that something more agreeable might accrue in a letter from home. Hopefully, Billy Bunter inserted a fat and rather grubby thumb into the envelope and jerked it open.

"Nothing for us!" said Bob Cherry as Harry Wharton and Co. scanned the rack: and the Famous Five went their way: the Co. into the quad, and Harry up to the Remove studies: to make a beginning on a long, long imposition for Mr. Quelch. He had been let off lightly for taking "French leave" to play football at Redclyffe: but he still had lines on hand.

Other fellows were left opening letters, and reading them: and among them a fat face which was generally almost as broad as it was long, grew longer than it was broad! Billy Bunter had opened his letter hopefully: but hope faded out as he unfolded the parental missive and found that there was no enclosure within. Once more, the Owl of the Remove had been disappointed about a postal-order!

"Oh, blow!" grunted Bunter.

His fat face registered pessimism again as he rolled away with the letter in a fat hand.

He was in no hurry to read it. An enclosure in the letter would have interested him extremely. The letter itself didn't. He was not keen on exhortations



"Oh! blow!" grunted Bunter

to be careful with his pocket-money, or to work a little harder and gain golden opinions from his form-master. He had an immediate use for cash: none at all for good advice.

He was anxious to receive a remittance: not at all anxious to hear that owing to exorbitant demands of income-tax Mr. Bunter was unable to add anything to his usual pocket-money: or that he expected a better report of his son at Greyfriars at the end of the term. The fat Owl had heard all that before and did not want to hear it again. However, it occurred to him that there might be something about Christmas festivities in the epistle from home: so leaning on the nearest wall—Bunter always leaned, if there was anything adjacent upon which to lean—he proceeded to peruse the parental missive.

Then his fat face, already long, grew longer.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter.

He blinked at that letter in dismay. It had not contained a postal-order, which was bad enough. It contained nothing about Christmas festivities either. What it did contain was quite the reverse of gratifying. The opening words were quite familiar:

Dear William,

In reply to your recent letter, I regret to say that the present excessive taxation makes it quite impossible for me to add anything to your allowance. So far from additional expenditure, it is necessary for me to exercise economy in every way. For this reason, I was very pleased to hear that you will be passing the Christmas vacation with some of your many friends at school. I have arranged for your brother Samuel and your sister Bessie to stay for the holidays with relatives, while your mother and I will visit other relatives: and the house will accordingly be shut up for some weeks, which will be a considerable saving very useful at the present time. You mentioned that you were as yet undecided whether to accept a pressing invitation from Lord Mauleverer to stay with him in Hampshire, whether to join Vernon-Smith on a holiday abroad, or whether to pass the vacation with your friend Wharton at Wharton Lodge as you have done before. I advise you to decide without delay, as break-up at your school is now so near.

Your affectionate Father,
W. S. Bunter.

"Oh, crikey!" repeated the hapless fat Owl, blinking at that missive. It was quite a blow.

More than once, Billy Bunter had had reason to regret his constitutional disregard of the sober truth. It was an imaginative Owl, who preferred fiction to facts. Judging by Bunter's letters home, he was the most popular fellow in the Remove, who simply had to pick and choose. Now his airy nothings had come home to roost, as it were. Relying upon a happy landing for the hols, Bunter had—rather prematurely, as it now proved—turned down home, sweet home for the Christmas vacation. It appeared, from Mr. Bunter's letter, that it was now too late to turn it up again!

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter, for the third time.

Then, as an elegant Remove junior sauntered past, he detached himself from the wall, and squeaked:

"I say, Mauly—"

Lord Mauleverer accelerated. No doubt he guessed that something about the "hols" was coming. He disappeared before it could come!

Billy Bunter grunted and blinked at his letter again. He was let down all round. Even home, sweet home, his last resource, had let him down. An awful vision rose before his eyes of "hols" at the deserted school, with such company as Mrs. Kebble, the house-dame, and Gosling, the porter.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter, once more.

He rolled away to the Remove studies. He blinked in at the door of No. 1



"I say, Mauly!" Lord Mauleverer accosted by Bunter holding letter

with a dolorous blink, at a bent head at the table. Harry Wharton was deep in transcribing lines from the Aeneid with sedulous care. That imposition was going to be absolutely faultless. Deep in his task, the captain of the Remove did not glance up at the fat face in the doorway.

Bunter blinked at him anxiously. He was relieved to see that Wharton did not look, at the moment, in one of his "rotten" tempers. Even if he fancied that it was Bunter's fault that he had to write his lines over again, he couldn't fancy that it was Bunter's fault that he had missed his uncle the previous day. If the beast was not in one of his rotten tempers, was there a possible chance of Wharton Lodge turning up trumps, after all, for the Christmas hols?

"I say, Harry, old chap—!" ventured Bunter, at last.

Then the captain of the Remove looked up.

He gave the fat Owl a fixed look. Although Quelch had let him off lightly, and he was grateful for the same, nevertheless, two hundred lines was not in the very least a welcome task. Added to that, there was a lingering uneasiness in his mind about his uncle. Certainly, Aunt Amy would have cleared up the

matter with the Colonel: and his uncle was too just and reasonable a man to take offence where there was no ground for it. It was, as Harry had told his friends, as right as rain. All the same, a spot of faint uneasiness remained, with the knowledge that he had, though temporarily and unintentionally, hurt a relative who had always been kindness itself to him. And it was all, from beginning to end, due to the fat and fatuous Owl who was now blinking in at his study doorway. On that fat face, the captain of the Remove fixed a grim look.

"Harry, old fellow—!" mumbled Bunter.

"Get out!"

"I've been let down over the hols—"

"Get out!"

"But I say, old fellow—"

Harry Wharton rose from the table and stepped to the doorway. He grasped a fat neck, and Billy Bunter uttered an anticipatory yell. His anticipations were realised the next moment.

Bang!

A fat head established contact with the door.



A fat head established contact with the door

"Yaroooh!"

Bang!

"Yooo-whoooooooooop!"

"Look in again when you want some more," said Harry, as he released the fat neck.

"Wow! Beast! Wow!"

Harry Wharton returned to his lines. Billy Bunter rolled down the passage rubbing a fat head. And it was borne in upon his mind that, wherever he landed for Christmas, Wharton Lodge was the unlikeliest spot.

CHAPTER II

MYSTERIOUS!

PETER TODD jumped.

He was coming along to his study, No. 7 in the Remove, after class. Just as he reached the door, a voice from within impinged upon his ears. It was quite a startling voice.

He would not have been surprised to hear the voice of Billy Bunter, or of Tom Dutton, who shared that study with him. But it was neither of these that he heard. It was a deep voice—one that he had heard a good many times and knew quite well—the voice of Colonel Wharton, uncle of the captain of the Remove. It was startling, or rather more than startling, to hear it in No. 7 Study.

Peter knew, as most of the fellows did, about the Colonel's visit the previous day, when Harry had missed seeing him. Now, it seemed, he had called again: but what he was doing in No. 7 Study was quite a mystery. Yet, to judge by what Peter heard, there he was! The deep, resonant, unmistakable voice came clearly through the shut door.

"I will listen to nothing, Harry. You have very seriously displeased me. You have no excuse to offer. Say no more."

Peter blinked at the door. Had Colonel Wharton been in No. 1 Study addressing those remarks to Harry, it might not have been surprising. But why he was doing so in Peter Todd's study was quite inexplicable.

Then, to Peter's further amazement, came a well-known fat chuckle, following the deep voice of the Colonel.

"He, he, he! I fancy that's all right! He, he, he!"

Peter really almost fell down in his astonishment. Bunter, evidently, was in his study, as well as the old Colonel: and, apparently, Harry Wharton. The

Colonel's remarks could only have been addressed to his nephew. What it could mean was altogether too puzzling; and Peter gave it up. He pushed open the door and walked into the study.

Then, if he had been amazed before, he was doubly and trebly amazed. He expected, naturally, to see Colonel Wharton and his nephew there, after what he had heard. But he did not see them. Only one person was in the study—William George Bunter, grinning all over his fat face.

Peter stared round him. He had heard Colonel Wharton's voice through the door—he could not have dreamed it. Yet the Colonel was not there—nobody was there but Billy Bunter. If the Colonel had been there, it seemed that he must have vanished into thin air, like Mercury in the Aeneid.

"Wha-a-a-t—?" stuttered Peter, blankly.

"Oh! That you, Toddy?" asked Bunter. "Did you hear—?"

"Where's Colonel Wharton?"

"Eh! How should I know?"

"He was here—"

"He, he, he."

"I heard him," gasped Peter. "Where is he? Where's Wharton? I heard the old bean telling him off. What—?"

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

"You fat cackling ass, what does it mean?" exclaimed Peter. "I tell you I heard Colonel Wharton's voice—I've heard it often enough, and I'd know it a mile off—and now the old cove isn't here at all."

"Todd! Are you referring to a governor of the school as an old cove?" came a sudden, deep stern voice behind Peter.

Peter jumped almost clear of the floor.

"Oh! Sorry, sir!" he gasped. I—I—I—" He spun round as he was speaking, and broke off suddenly. No one was behind him. It really seemed as if he had been addressed by a disembodied voice, for there was no sign whatever of the speaker.

"Oh, crumbs! What! I can't be dreaming—!" gasped Peter.

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

Then it dawned on Peter. Disembodied voices had been heard in that study before. The fat ventriloquist was at his tricks again.

Toddy turned on the grinning Owl with a glare.

"You fat spoofing porpoise!" he roared.

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"It was you!" roared Peter.

"He, he, he! Did you think it was Wharton's uncle?" chuckled Bunter. "He, he, he! Think Wharton would have thought so, if he'd heard?"

"I've a jolly good mind—"

Bunter promptly dodged round the study table.

"Keep your temper, old chap," he squeaked. "Did I take you in? He, he, he! Only a joke, old fellow. Don't get shirty."

"You fat, footling, fozzling freak, what are you up to?" demanded Peter. "I thought the old bean was in this study, when I heard his voice from the passage. Of course I did."

"I say, Peter, I'm a jolly good ventriloquist, ain't I?" said the fat Owl, complacently.

"Too jolly good," snapped Peter. "I've a jolly good mind to boot you round the study. What are you playing this potty trick for?"

"You see, I was practising when you came up," explained Bunter. "Even a jolly clever ventriloquist like me has to have a little practice to get somebody else's voice to a T. But I'd got it to a T, hadn't I, Peter? You jolly well thought it was Colonel Wharton speaking."

"I did," admitted Peter.

"And that beast Wharton would have thought so, too," chuckled Bunter.

"I suppose he would," said Peter. "But if you're thinking of playing ventriloquist tricks on Wharton, by imitating his uncle's voice, you'd better think again, you fat ass. You've landed him in enough trouble already, and I don't know why he doesn't boot you every time he sees you. Take my tip and don't ask him for it."

"He banged my head this morning—"

"Good!" said Peter.

"And he kicked me yesterday—"

"Hard, I hope," said Peter, heartlessly.

"Beast! And he's let me down over the Christmas holidays," went on Bunter. "I was relying on him, as an old pal, you know—banked on it, if nothing better turned up, and now—now I'm just at a loose end, Peter, unless I come with you for the hols—"

"I'll watch it!"

"I mean, I could hardly spend the hols in your humble home, Peter," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm accustomed to wealth and luxury at Bunter Court, as you know—"

"I don't!" contradicted Peter.

"I've told you so often enough," yapped Bunter.

"Too often!" agreed Peter.

"Wharton's cut up rusty, I don't know why," went on Bunter. "I'm dished over the hols. Well, if I'm going to be dished over the hols, perhaps he's going to be dished too, and serve him jolly well right! Tit for tat, you know."

"What does that mean, if it means anything?" inquired Peter.

"That's telling!" grinned Bunter.

"You fat chump, what have you got in your silly head now?" asked Peter, staring at the fat Owl. "Wharton will be going home for the hols as usual—"

"He, he, he!"

"His pals are going with him, I've heard—"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you he-he-he-ing about?" hooted Peter.

"Perhaps I might put a spoke in his wheel, and perhaps I mightn't!" chuckled Bunter. "I'm not telling you anything, Toddy. He, he, he! Might be giving him a Roland for an Oliver, what? He, he, he!"

"You fat chump!"

"Yah!"

With that elegant rejoinder, Billy Bunter rolled out of No. 7 Study, leaving Peter staring. Bunter's remarks were really quite mysterious. If they meant anything, they seemed to mean that some scheme was working in his fat brain for "dishing" Harry Wharton over the Christmas holidays: but that hardly seemed within the range of possibility: though no doubt the fat Owl would have been quite pleased to give the captain of the Remove "tit for tat", as he regarded it.

"Silly ass!" commented Peter, and he dismissed Billy Bunter and his mysterious remarks from mind.

He did not know that the fat Owl, having rolled out of the House, rolled out of gates, and headed for the post office at Friardale: and he would not have been in the least interested to know. Certainly he could not have guessed that Bunter had rolled down to the post office to use the telephone there: still less could he have dreamed of the remarkable use to which the fat ventriloquist was putting that telephone. He simply forgot all about Bunter.

CHAPTER III

HARRY WHARTON GETS A SHOCK!

"**Q**UA, in my opinion!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Quo, in mine!" said Mr. Prout.

Tap!

"Qua, referring to the previous stanza—!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Quo, wholly unconnected with the previous stanza!" said Mr. Prout, firmly.



"What is it, Trotter?" "Colonel Wharton wishes to speak to you, sir"

"If you please, Mr. Quelch, sir—!" said Trotter.

Trotter had tapped at the door of Common-Room, and looked in. Neither Mr. Quelch nor Mr. Prout glanced at him. They were deep in discussion of a matter they had often discussed before, and were likely to discuss again.

No doubt it was an important matter. For it was no less than the question whether Quintus Horatius Flaccus had written "quo" or "qua" in Line 9, in the Third Ode in the Second Book!

However, as the House page addressed him, Mr. Quelch had reluctantly to turn his head, and give him an inquiring look.

"What is it, Trotter?"

"The telephone, sir, in your study. I've taken the call, sir, and it's Colonel Wharton wishes to speak to you, sir. I told him to 'old on, sir."

Mr. Quelch breathed rather hard.

The day before a call from Colonel Wharton had interrupted him in the perusal of Lucretius. Now another call interrupted him in his discussion with Prout of "quo" or "qua" in Ode III, II. It was really a little annoying. Much as he respected the old military gentleman, Quelch could not help feeling that

he was becoming rather a telephone-addict. But he rose to his feet: a governor of the school could not be left holding the line.

"Very well, Trotter," he said.

And Mr. Quelch rustled out of Common-Room, leaving the vexed question of "quo" or "qua" unsettled, and proceeded without delay to his study.

There, he picked up the receiver, and, composing his tones to as much cordiality as was possible in the circumstances, refrained from barking as he spoke into the transmitter.

"Mr. Quelch speaking. Good-afternoon, Colonel Wharton."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Quelch." The deep voice that came through was quite unmistakable. Trotter had had no doubt about it. Neither had Mr. Quelch. If that voice was not Colonel James Wharton's, it was a twin to it. "I trust I am not interrupting you—"

Mr. Quelch really could not say "Not at all" in the circumstances. But he contrived to say:

"I am wholly at your service, sir."

"I will not waste your time, sir! I desire to speak to my nephew. Perhaps you will be kind enough to let him come to the telephone."

"Certainly, Colonel Wharton," answered the Remove master, at once. "No doubt you wish to speak to him about the unfortunate episode yesterday—"

"Precisely, sir."

"I will send for him immediately. Please hold the line."

Mr. Quelch laid down the receiver, quite relieved that the call was not for him personally: and more than willing to pass it on to Harry Wharton, and get back to Common-Room and Prout and quo and qua.

Trotter was despatched at once to tell Harry Wharton that his uncle was waiting to speak to him on the telephone in his form-master's study. Then Mr. Quelch rustled back to Common-Room: and quo and qua were once more the order of the day.

A couple of minutes later, Harry Wharton came into the vacant study. He came in with a bright face. Trotter had found him in his own study finishing his lines: and the captain of the Remove had come down the stairs two at a time, in his haste to take the call. While he had no doubt that Aunt Amy had explained the matter to her brother, and that all was "right as rain" at home, he was very glad that the old Colonel had taken the trouble to ring up the school. It looked as if the old gentleman was anxious to assure him that all was well.

He ran rather breathlessly into Mr. Quelch's study, and picked up the receiver.

"Uncle! Is that you? Harry speaking." He panted a little. "I'm so glad you've phoned, Uncle. I want to tell you how sorry I am about yesterday—"

"I should imagine so!" came a sharp rap back.

Harry Wharton almost dropped the receiver in his surprise.

The answer came back short and sharp. Seldom, if ever, had Colonel Wharton spoken to his nephew in that tone.

"Uncle—!" gasped Harry.

"You need say nothing." If it was Colonel Wharton's voice, it was harder and grimmer than his nephew had ever heard it before. "I am well acquainted with all the circumstances, and there is nothing for you to say."

"But—but—uncle—!" stammered Harry.

"Listen to me—"

"Yes, yes, but—"

"I have told you to listen to me. Yesterday I came to Greyfriars to see you. You did not choose to see me."

"I never knew—hasn't Aunt Amy explained—Quelch let me use his phone and I told her all about it—surely Aunt Amy has told you—"

"What your aunt has told me is immaterial."



Harry Wharton picked up the receiver

"But—but you know now that—that—"

"I know that you were guilty of an act of flagrant disobedience to authority. Do you deny this?"

"No! Oh, no! But I never knew—"

"If you had obeyed your form-master, you would have been in the school when I came. Is not that so?"

"Yes!" stammered Harry. "But I never knew you were coming—I never got a message from Quelch as he supposed—you see—it was that fat ass Bunter who had the message, and he never gave it to me—"

"And why did he not?" came the deep voice. "Was it because you lost your temper, and gave him no chance to deliver the message?"

"I—I—I—" Wharton stammered again.

"You need say nothing more, Harry. You cannot fail to know that you have displeased me very deeply."

"I'm sorry, uncle—I—I—"

"You have flouted authority. You have treated me, your guardian, with disrespect, indeed contempt—"

"No! No! No! I—I never meant—"

"I cannot overlook this. You can hardly expect me to do so. I will listen to nothing from you. I have telephoned not merely to tell you that you have very deeply offended me—you know that already. I have telephoned to tell you that in the circumstances I cannot allow you to come home here for the Christmas holidays."

Wharton almost staggered.

"Wha-a-at?" he gasped. "What did you say, uncle?"

"Do I not speak plainly?"

"Yes, yes, but—but—"

"As you have chosen to go your own way, regardless of authority, you may continue to make your own arrangements. I have only to say that I do not desire to see you here when the school breaks up. That is all."

Harry Wharton stood very still.

It was a long moment before he spoke again. Then his voice was very subdued. His face was pale.

"Do you mean that, Uncle?"

"I mean every word I say."

"You do not want me to come home for Christmas?"

"No!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips hard. His own anger and resentment were rising now. He had been to blame: he admitted that: and the unforeseen result had been very unfortunate. But he did not deserve this: such harshness



A fat ventriloquist rolled out of Friardale Post Office with a fat grinning face

was out of all proportion to the fault. That there was a stern side to his uncle's kindly character he knew: but so harsh a judgment as this was as unjust as it was unexpected. There was a gleam in his eyes when he answered at last: and his voice was cold and hard.

"Very well! I shall certainly not think of coming where I am not wanted. You will not see me at Christmas, as that is your wish. Good-bye, sir."

Without waiting for any rejoinder, he put up the receiver, and walked out of Mr. Quelch's study with a set brow.

Little could he have dreamed that at the same time, a fat ventriloquist rolled out of Friardale Post Office with a fat grinning face. Billy Bunter had, undoubtedly, put a spoke in Harry Wharton's wheel!

CHAPTER IV

ADVICE NOT WANTED!

"I TOLD you so."

Johnny Bull could hardly have made that remark at a more unfortunate moment.

The Famous Five had gathered in No. 1 Study to tea. Harry Wharton's face was clouded. It had been arranged, and settled, that his friends were coming home with him for Christmas. Now that Christmas at Wharton Lodge was washed out, it was necessary to tell them of the changed circumstances—an extremely unpalatable task. They received the news with surprise. From what they knew of Colonel Wharton this harshness, at such a time too, seemed incomprehensible. While three fellows expressed surprise and sympathy, Johnny only shook his head: reserving his fire, as it were.

"It's rotten for you, old chap," said Bob Cherry.

"Rotten!" said Nugent.

"The rottenfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The old gentleman must be terrifically infuriated."

Wharton set his lips.

"He has no cause to go off at the deep end like this," he said. "But he can, of course, do as he chooses. I suppose I was a fool to disobey Quelch as I did—and that led to the trouble. But—"

It was then that Johnny made his unfortunate remark.

Harry Wharton's eyes turned on him with a glint in them.

"Yes, you told me so," he agreed, in icy voice. "And if you tell me so again, I'm going to punch you. Get on with it, if you like."

"Steady the Buffs!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Well—!" began Johnny.

"Shut up, old man, for goodness sake," said Frank Nugent.

"Put a sock in it," advised Bob.

"My esteemed Johnny, speech is silvery, but a still tongue shows the cracked pitcher the longest way to the well, as the English proverb remarks," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Johnny Bull opened his lips—but closed them again. Perhaps even Johnny realised that this was not a propitious moment for rubbing in the fact that he had told his chum so! Certainly, had Harry Wharton listened to his words of wisdom, he would not have been in his present plight. But really, reminders that Johnny had told him so, did not improve matters.

"Well, it's rotten, old boy, but it can't be helped," said Bob. "If nunky has got his back up, he's got it up, and that's that. But perhaps if you wrote to him and explained the whole thing—"

"It's been explained to him already."

"Well, yes, but if you wrote—"

Wharton's lips set harder.

"I shall not write a word," he said. "I'm not going to ask favours of any-

one—least of all of a man who has turned me down without any just cause. My uncle will not hear from me again.”

“I think—!” began Johnny Bull.

The captain of the Remove interrupted him without ceremony.

“I know what you think—you can pack it up,” he said.

“I tell you I think—”

“Give us a rest.”

“I’m going to tell you, all the same,” said Johnny, in his stolid way. “I think there’s something wrong somewhere, and that it might be set right. Your uncle is a reasonable man, and I just can’t understand his going off at the deep end like this. He’s got it wrong somehow. If you’ll take my advice—”

“Keep it.”

“If you’ll take my advice——”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“Very likely! But if you’ll take my advice——”

“Will you dry up?”

“No,” said Johnny, calmly. “I won’t! If you’ll take my advice, you’ll just sit down now and write to your uncle, and tell him the whole thing from beginning to end, so that there can’t possibly be any misunderstanding in the matter. I believe that would clear it all up.”

“There’s nothing to clear up.”

“I think there must be, and is!” said Johnny.

“You can think what you like,” said Harry Wharton. “But I’m not interested in what you think, so chuck it.”

“Okay!” said Johnny. “Have your own way, as you did before—if you won’t listen to sense——”

“I haven’t heard any, so far.”

Grunt from Johnny. Having grunted, he left it at that.

“I wouldn’t have bothered you fellows with all this,” said Harry, after a pause. “But as it was fixed up for you to come home with me, I had to tell you——” He paused again. “I’m sorry—but you see how it is——”

“That’s all right,” said Bob. “Don’t you worry about that, old chap. We can fix up the hols all right.”

“Of course,” said Frank Nugent. “Don’t let that worry you, old fellow. That’s nothing.”

“Nothing at all,” said Bob. “It would have been a jolly party at Wharton Lodge: but what’s the odds so long as you’re ’appy? You’ll come home with me instead, that’s all. Cherry Place isn’t quite up to Wharton Lodge, but we’ll pack in all right, and stick together just the same. What?”



A fat face grinned into the study

"The stick-togetherfulness is the sine qua non!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But—"

"But what?" asked Harry.

"If you will listen to my idiotic opinion—"

"Carry on, fathead."

"It occurs to my absurd mind that Johnny may be right, and that there may be some misunderstandfulness on the part of the respected and absurd Colonel—"

"Cut that out," said Harry, curtly.

"Well, the fact is—!" began Nugent.

"It's no good talking," interrupted Harry Wharton. "I know what the fact is, so let it drop."

His chums were silent at that. Wharton, evidently, was in a stubborn and resentful mood, and in that mood, at least, it was no good talking! Johnny Bull emitted a faint grunt: but that was all.

There was an uncomfortable silence in No. 1 Study. It was broken by the opening of the door. A fat face grinned into the study, and a pair of little round eyes surveyed the Famous Five through a pair of big round spectacles. Billy Bunter seemed amused.



There was a bump in the passage as Billy Bunter sat down

"I say, you fellows—!" he squeaked.

"Too late!" said Bob. "We've finished tea. Cut."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hook it, you fat ass," snapped Frank.

"He, he, he! You look a cheery lot!" grinned Bunter. "Talking over the Christmas hols, what? He, he, he!" Billy Bunter chuckled, loud and long. "I say, you fellows, you look like having a merry Christmas! He, he, he."

It was a fact that the usually cheery Co. were not looking so cheery as usual. But Billy Bunter's remarks on the subject were neither grateful nor comforting.

Johnny Bull reached for a cushion, while the other four gave the Owl of the Remove extremely expressive looks.

"Cut!" snapped Johnny.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Get out!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he! Sorry your uncle's turned you down for Christmas, Wharton!" grinned Billy Bunter.

"You fat villain!" exclaimed Harry. "Have you been at the keyhole?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Of course he has, or he wouldn't know," said Nugent. "By gum—!"

"I jolly well haven't," hooted Bunter. "Think I'd listen at a keyhole! I've only just got back from Friardale, and if you think I'd listen at a keyhole, I can jolly well say—yarooooooh!"

Johnny's hand went up, and the cushion whizzed so suddenly, that Billy Bunter had no chance of dodging it. It landed on the widest waistcoat at Greyfriars School, and the fat junior went over like a skittle, with a frantic roar.

There was a bump in the passage, as Billy Bunter, involuntarily, sat down there. Johnny kicked the door shut after him.

"Beast!" came a yell through the keyhole. "I'm jolly glad you're dished for the hols, so yah!"

After which, Billy Bunter departed on his highest gear: lest the door should reopen. The Famous Five were left to discuss new arrangements for the holidays: one of them, at least, looking in anything but a mood for a merry Christmas: and not one of them dreaming that that blow had fallen, not from the old Colonel at Wharton Lodge, but from the Greyfriars ventriloquist.

END OF THIRD SECTION