

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN



JUST SEE WHAT WE HAVE GOT FOR YOU THIS TIME



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**BILLY BUNTER'S
OWN**

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BRAINY BUNTER



By FRANK RICHARDS

"You cheeky little fat sweep"

CHAPTER I

FOGGY!

"LOOKS like Soccer, doesn't it?" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Not a lot!" said Harry Wharton.

"The lookfulness is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head. "But what cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks."

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh's English proverbs often made his comrades grin. But they did not grin now. They did not feel like grinning.

Five faces, generally as cheery as any in the Greyfriars Remove, were clouded. The Famous Five, for once, were disgruntled.

Really, it was enough to disgruntle any fellow keen on the open air and the open spaces. The sea-fog could not have drifted in over the school at a more inopportune time.

It was a half-holiday. It had been misty in the morning: but mist in the morning did not matter very much, while the Remove were in form with Mr. Quelch. Harry Wharton and Co. looking forward to football in the afternoon, hoped that it would clear after dinner. Instead of which, it thickened into fog, rolling in in dense masses from the sea.

Visibility was down to almost nil. It was not merely foggy. It was pea-soupy. It clothed Greyfriars like a garment. Coming out after dinner to see what the weather was like, the Co. could certainly see that much: but they could hardly see one another. Even Bob Cherry, the hardiest and most active member of a hardy and active Co. had to admit that it did not look like Soccer. In fact it was not judicious to venture far from the House, lest they should be unable to find their way back again.

"Rotten!" sighed Frank Nugent.

"Putrid!" said Johnny Bull.

"It had to drop in on a half-holiday!" growled Bob. "It wouldn't matter if we were in form with Quelch. But on a half—Blow!"

"Well, this washes out Soccer," said Harry Wharton, "Might fix up some boxing in the Rag."

"I say, you fellows," came a fat squeak from the mist.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, fancy Bunter coming out in this!" said Bob, as that fat familiar squeak fell on his ears.

The Famous Five looked round for Bunter. He was audible but not visible. But a fat figure loomed through the fog, and a pair of big round spectacles glimmered at them.

"I say, you fellows, it's jolly thick, ain't it?" said Billy Bunter, "I couldn't see you, but I heard your voices. I wonder if one of you would cut across to the tuck-shop for me."

"Go on wondering!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Why not cut across yourself?" asked Bob.

"Well, I was going to, but it's too jolly thick," explained Bunter. "I mightn't be able to find my way back."

"And it wouldn't matter if one of us couldn't?" inquired Johnny, sarcastically.

"No—I mean, I expect you'd get back all right. Don't be funky of a spot of fog," said Bunter. "I say, Mauly's lent me ha'f-a-crown till my postal-order comes. I'll whack out the toffee, if one of you fellows will cut across and get it. You'll go, won't you, Bob?"



"Why not cut across yourself," asked Bob

"Not in these trousers!" answered Bob Cherry.

"What about you, Franky?"

"Nothing about me," answered Nugent.

"What about you, Wharton?"

"Less than nothing," answered Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Well, you're a poor lot, funky of a spot of fog," said Bunter. "Old Prout's out in it—I heard Coker say so."

"Prout won't get home in a hurry, if he's out in this!" said Bob. "Must have been an ass to go out."

"Well, he went out just after dinner, before it was so thick," said Bunter. "If he's got himself lost in the fog, serve him jolly well right. He reported me to Quelch for helping myself to a few bikkers from the box in Common-Room. Quelch gave me a hundred lines for it."

"You should keep your hands from the pickfulness and the stealfulness, my esteemed idiotic Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I told him I hadn't touched the biscuits," hooted Bunter, indignantly. "He wouldn't take my word for it, just because he caught me eating them—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, if you've got nothing to do this afternoon, what about helping me with my lines?"

"Absolutely and definitely nothing about that!"

"Beasts!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's somebody else out in the fog!" remarked Bob Cherry, as a loud voice boomed through the invisibility. It was a well-known voice—that of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form.

"Prout's still out!" came Coker's stentorian tones. "It's come on jolly thick since he went out, you chaps. I shouldn't wonder if he's flummoxed in this fog. You know what an old ass he is."

The Famous Five grinned at one another. Coker had a loud voice, which it never occurred to him to subdue. Anyone in the quad might have heard him stating his opinion of his form-master,—even the portly and majestic Mr. Prout himself, had he chanced to come in at that moment.

"Oh, I expect he'll wander in sooner or later," came a reply from Potter of the Fifth.

"That's all very well," said Coker. "But if he's lost himself in the fog—."

"Not your worry, if he has," came Green's voice.

"He's my beak!" retorted Coker.

"Wasn't he ragging you in form this morning, for mixing up your infinitives with your perfect plural?" asked Potter.

"Yes, he was!" snorted Coker. "Old ass, as if it mattered. Isn't he always ragging me in form for something or other? But he's our beak, and if he's got himself lost in the fog, what about going out and looking for him?"

"Bit too thick for me!" said Potter. "I'm going in, not out."

"Same here!" said Greene.

"Hold on!" rapped Coker. "I don't care if old Pompous did rag me in form—he's my beak, and I'm not going to leave him to wander all over Kent in this fog. I'm going out to look for him, so come on, both of you."

There was no reply to that, but a sound of receding footsteps, which Harry Wharton and Co. were not surprised to hear. Coker and Co. were quite near at hand, though invisible in the fog: and the juniors could guess that the footsteps were those of Potter and Greene, going back into the House. Coker, generously regardless of the fact that Mr. Prout had ragged him in form that morning, was going out to look for his beak and guide him safely home.



Smack! "Yaroooh!" roared Bunter

Evidently Potter and Greene did not want to share in that expedition to the rescue. Coker's bawling voice followed the footsteps.

"Hold on! I said hold on! Where are you going? Ain't you coming with me to look for old Pompous?"

Answer, there came none! Potter and Greene evidently preferred indoors and a fireside, to an expedition in chilly fog.

Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"He, he, he! Coker won't find old Prout in a hurry, if he does look for him. Bet you the old donkey's lost himself."

The juniors had heard the Fifth-formers' voices: and naturally Coker heard Bunter's. A burly figure loomed up closer at hand. Coker became visible as well as audible. He glared at the fat Owl of the Remove as he towered over him.

"You cheeky little fat sweep!" roared Coker. "What do you mean by calling my beak names?"

"Eh!" Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles. "Didn't you call him an ass yourself, Coker?"

"I can call him what I like, but you can't!" snorted Coker. "If you think you can slang my form-master, you cheeky fat slug, take that!"

Smack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter.

Horace Coker had a large and heavy hand. It landed on a fat ear with a mighty smite. Billy Bunter roared and tottered under that smite.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Look here, Coker—."

But Coker did not "look there." He disappeared into the fog, leaving Billy Bunter with a fat hand clapped to a fat ear, yelling. And, having seen as much as they wanted of the weather, the Famous Five went back into the House, leaving him to yell.

CHAPTER II

BRAINY!

"**T**ODDY, old fellow."

"Don't jaw just now, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"Shut up."

"Beast!"

Peter Todd grinned, and went on with his task, which was writing lines for his form-master, Mr. Quelch. There was no particular hurry for those lines: but a foggy afternoon, which kept a fellow indoors, seemed a good opportunity for getting them done. Busy with lines, Peter seemed to have no use for conversation from his fat study-mate in No. 7 Study: William George Bunter.

Billy Bunter was seated, or rather sprawled, in the study armchair. He was as busy as Toddy, though in a different way. He was rubbing a fat ear with a fat paw. That ear had a lingering pain in it. Coker of the Fifth, like many very hefty fellows, did not quite realize the extent of his own strength and vigour. He had smacked Billy Bunter's head, as, in Coker's opinion, the fat Owl fully deserved for slanging Coker's beak. Coker, after spots of bother with Prout, was wont to call his beak all sorts of fancy names, in the Fifth. But it was not for a Remove fog to go and do likewise.

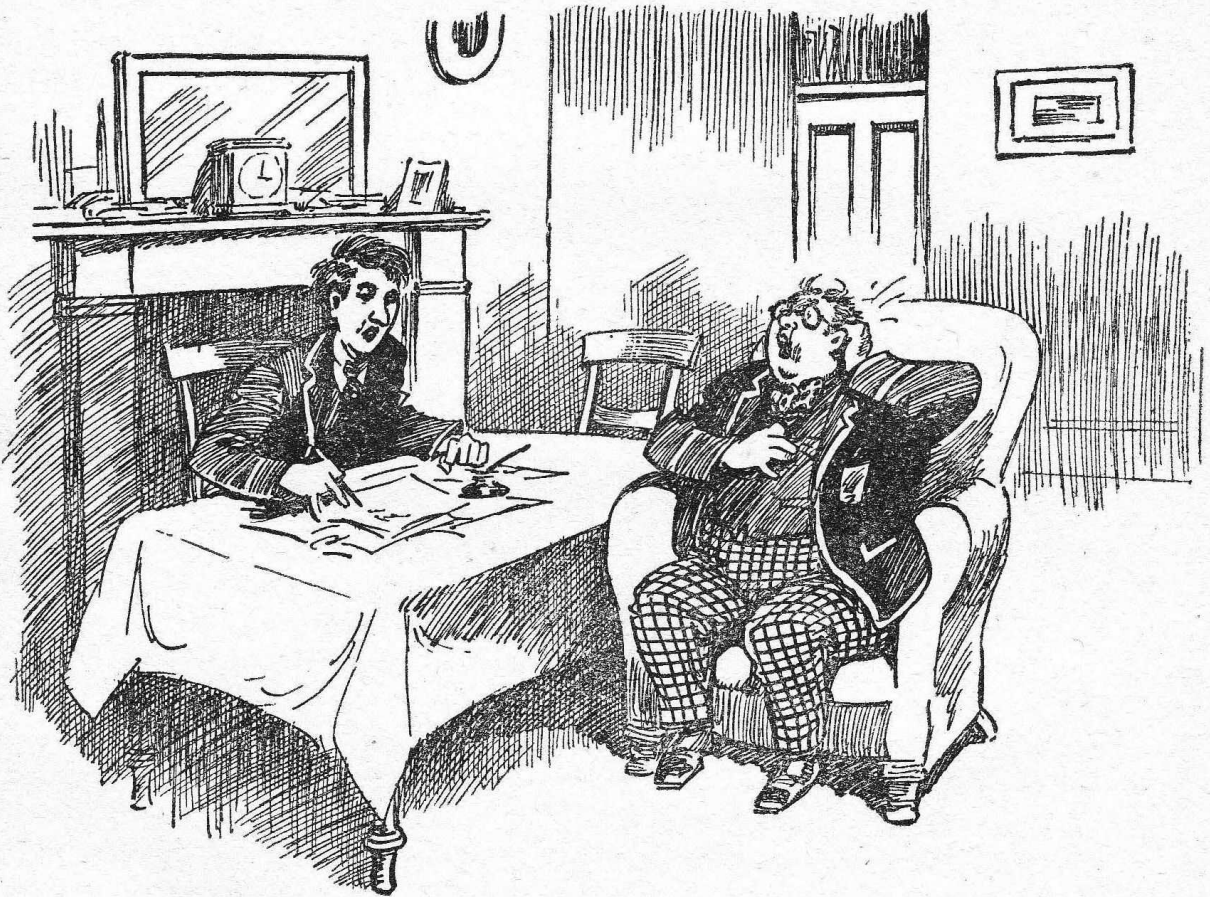
So Coker had smacked Bunter's head for his cheek: and he had smacked it not wisely but too well. Billy Bunter's fat head sang from that smack, and his plump ear burned. Coker had dismissed the trifling incident from his mind,

as he started out to look for "Old Pompous" in the fog. Billy Bunter could not dismiss it so easily. He sat in No. 7 Study rubbing that suffering fat ear, and revolving in his fat mind various ways of making Horace Coker sit up and be sorry for administering that hefty smack.

Obviously, he couldn't smack Coker's head. He would have had to stand on a chair to reach it, in fact. Coker was a big and hefty senior man, not to be smacked by a junior. Something like an earthquake would have happened to Billy Bunter, had he tried that on.

Strategy was indicated. Somehow or other, the vengeful Owl was going to get back on Coker of the Fifth for smacking his head. If Coker fancied that he could throw his weight about, smacking fellows' heads, Coker had another guess coming. But if the fat Owl of the Remove was going to make the hefty Horace sit up, quite a lot of strategy was required.

Billy Bunter rather prided himself upon being a brainy chap. Nobody else



He sat rubbing that fat ear

in the Greyfriars Remove had ever suspected him of having any brains at all. But Bunter, at least, knew that he was brainy. And while he sat rubbing that fat ear, and Peter Todd sat scribbling his lines, Billy Bunter's fat brains, such as they were, were at work: and a fat grin that overspread his fat face indicated that he had thought it up, at last. It was then that he interrupted Peter's scribbling. Peter's replies discouraged conversation, however, and he sprawled in impatient silence till Toddy had finished his lines.

"That's done!" said Peter, at length, and he threw down his pen, pitched Virgil into a corner of the study, and rose from the table. "How's that flap of yours, Bunter? Did you say Coker smacked it?"

"Yes, I jolly well did," hooted Bunter. "Jolly hard, too. I'd jolly well have knocked him down for it, too, only—only—."

"Only you couldn't knock down ten per cent of him!" grinned Peter. "Like his cheek to smack a Remove man's head. But Coker always was a cheeky ass."

"I'm going to pay him out!" said Bunter, darkly. "A jolly good hiding would do Coker good, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, my only aunt Sempronia!" ejaculated Toddy. "Better make your will before you start giving Coker of the Fifth a hiding, old fat man."

"I'm not thinking of thrashing him myself—."

"I wouldn't!" agreed Peter.

"But so long as he gets it, it doesn't matter whom he gets it from," explained Bunter. "That's what I've thought out, Peter. Suppose Prout gave him a record whopping! He would, if Coker, chucked a bundle of soot at him."

Peter Todd blinked in astonishment at the fat Owl in the armchair.

"You blithering, blethering old fat bloater," he said. "Think Coker's going to chuck a bundle of soot at his beak, just to please you?"

"It would come to the same thing, if Prout believed it was Coker chucked it," further explained Bunter. "It would be me that chucked it, and serve him right for reporting me to Quelch about those bickers. But Prout's going to think it was Coker."

"Why should he?" howled Peter.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"I've got that all cut and dried," he answered. "It only needed brains, and I've got the brains—."

"If you have, why don't you use them sometimes?" asked Peter.

"I fancy it was rather brainy, to think this one out!" said Bunter, complacently. "Look out of the window, Toddy! It's as thick as pea-soup in the quad. Prout could never spot who chucked it. Prout's out in the fog—that fathead Coker has gone out to look for him, but of course he will never find

him, an idiot like Coker. I expect old Pompous is wandering about looking for Greyfriars. But he's bound to trickle in sooner or later, isn't he?"

"Bound to," agreed Peter. "Later rather than sooner, I imagine—but he will come home to roost in the long run."

"Well, suppose a fellow waited at the gate, with that bundle of soot all ready?" grinned Bunter. "Prout gets it the minute he shows up. I shall see enough of him for that. Think he will be wild?"

"Wild isn't the word!" said Peter. "Mad as a hatter! You'd be marched off to the Head to be flogged or sacked, you fat chump."

"Coker would, you mean!" chuckled Bunter.

"Where would Coker come in, you fat fathead?"

"You see, that soot is going to be tied up in a handkerchief, in a nice little bundle to burst all over Prout's chivvy—."

"You benighted owl, all our hankies are marked. You might as well hand Prout a visiting-card, as chuck your hanky at him."



"You fat villain," roared Peter

"It won't be my hanky!" chuckled Bunter. "It will be Coker's."
Peter Todd jumped almost clear of the floor of No. 7 Study, at that.
"What!" he gasped.

"That's the big idea," said the brainy fat Owl. "And that's where I want you to lend a hand, Toddy, like a pal. You cut along to Coker's study in the Fifth and bag a hanky for me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Safe as houses," assured Bunter. "Coker's gone out, and Potter and Greene will be frowsting round the fire in the games-study. Nobody will be there. Coker leaves his things all over his study—you'll find a blazer or something with a hanky in the pocket. See?"

Peter Todd gazed at his fat study-mate.

Billy Bunter, evidently, had been using such brains as he had. He had thought up quite a masterly scheme.

Soot, bundled in a handkerchief easily identified as Coker's, was to land in Prout's portly visage. Could Prout doubt who had "chucked" it, especially after that spot of trouble in the Fifth-form room that morning, and as it would transpire that Coker was out in the fog at the time, when that fog was keeping all the other inhabitants of Greyfriars indoors? This was really quite Machiavellian of Bunter.

"See?" repeated Bunter. "You just get that hanky for me, Peter, old chap, and leave the rest to me. I—I'd rather not go to Coker's study myself, in case Potter or Greene came in—I—I mean, it's absolutely safe—."

"You fat villain!" roared Peter.

"Eh?"

"You podgy, piffling, pie-faced porker—."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"Brainy, are you?" hooted Peter. "Haven't you brains enough to understand that it would be a dirty trick?"

"Coker smacked my head—."

"I hope he smacked it hard."

"Beast! He smacked my head, and Prout reported me to Quelch," exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "Now I'm going to get back on both of them—killing two birds with one stone, see?"

"You're not!" said Peter. "You're going to forget all about it. I'm going to give you something else to think about."

"Eh! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm going to bang your head on the table for thinking up such a stunt."

"Why you cheeky beast—here, I say, leggo—yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, as

Peter grasped him and hooked him out of the armchair. "I say—whooop!"

Bang!

A fat head contacted a hard table. A fiendish yell woke the echoes of the Remove studies.

"Yaroooh!"

Bang!

"Ow! wow! Leggo! Help! Whooop!"

"There!" gasped Peter. "Now forget all about that stunt, Bunter! It's not good enough, old fat man! Wash it right out."

"Ow! wow! Beast! Wow!"

Peter Todd, grinning, left the study with his lines. He left Billy Bunter quite busy, rubbing a fat head with one hand, and a fat ear with the other. But if Peter supposed that those bangs on the table had knocked that brainy scheme out of Billy Bunter's fat head. Peter was mistaken. Billy Bunter was going on his own brainy way regardless.

CHAPTER III

BUNTER MEANS BUSINESS!

"**B**EAST!" breathed Billy Bunter.

He ceased, at length, to rub a fat head and a fat ear. There was a lingering pain in both of them: but he had no time to waste. He had to be on the spot, at the gate, when Old Pompous came in.

He rolled out of No. 7, and headed, with great caution, for the Fifth-form studies. Much—very much—he would have preferred to leave that visit to Coker's study to Peter Todd, but Peter had failed to play up like a pal, and if Bunter wanted a hanky belonging to Coker, he had to annex it with his own fat hands. Luckily, he found the Fifth-form passage deserted: and no eye fell on him as he rolled into Coker's study.

A blink round that apartment, through his big spectacles, revealed a blazer thrown carelessly on the window-seat, actually with a handkerchief hanging half-out of the pocket. Coker was a careless and untidy fellow, accustomed to leave his things lying about anywhere.

Bunter, grinning, pounced on that blazer and jerked out the handkerchief.

It was Coker's. A monogram in the corner left no doubt about that. It was a rather large handkerchief, of the finest quality, with the initials H.J.C. worked in the corner by the loving fingers of Coker's Aunt Judy. Old Pompous,



Bunter pounced on that blazer

or anyone else, couldn't doubt for a moment that that hanky was the property of Horace James Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter, as he crammed Coker's hanky into his own pocket. He rolled back to the door, and rolled out—almost into the arms of Potter and Greene of the Fifth, who were coming up the passage to their study. They stared at him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"You fat young sweep, what are you up to in our study?" demanded Potter.

"Oh! Nothing!" stammered Bunter.

"Rooting after tuck, what?" snapped Greene.

"I—I—I came to speak to—to Coker—I—I didn't know he'd gone out to look for Prout—" stuttered Bunter. Billy Bunter was seldom at a loss for a fib. But his fibs were seldom convincing.

"Get out!" said Potter, "and take that with you."

"That" was a lunge from Potter's foot. Billy Bunter yelled as he took it, and bolted down the passage, barely escaping a lunge from Greene's.

It was a breathless Owl that arrived back in No. 7 in the Remove. However, he was now in possession of the article he required for carrying out that brainy scheme to kill two birds with one stone.

He proceeded to take down soot from the study chimney into Coker's handkerchief. Quite a considerable quantity was tied up in a neat little bundle—destined to burst on the majestic features of the master of the Fifth—with the attractive consequence of a record whopping for Coker.

Be it said for Bunter, that he did not realize in the least that there was anything mean or rotten in such a scheme. Toddy had told him that it was a dirty trick: but Toddy's opinion had no more effect on Bunter than water on a duck. Did not Coker deserve a whopping for smacking Bunter's head? He did! Could Bunter give him the whopping he deserved? He couldn't. Prout could, and—jolly well would, if he fancied that Coker had buzzed a bundle of soot at him. Bunter was, in fact, whopping Coker by proxy, as it were. The cane would be in the plump hand of Prout: but the whopping would be due to Bunter. Billy Bunter could see nothing in his scheme except that it was jolly clever, and showed what a brainy fellow he was! Anyhow he was going ahead with it.

That bundle of soot would not go into a pocket. Bunter wrapped it in a newspaper to convey it undetected out of the House. With the bundle under a fat arm, he emerged from No. 7, and rolled down the Remove passage to the stairs.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came up the passage from the landing, and stared at Bunter and his bundle. "What have you got there, fatty?"

"Nothing—," stammered Bunter.

"Nothing—wrapped up in a newspaper?" asked Bob.

"I—I—I mean——."

"You fat villain, have you been raiding tuck in the studies?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"If you've been after the cake in my study cupboard—."

"You can look, if you like!" snorted Bunter.

"I jolly well will! Open that bundle."

"I mean, you can look in your study cupboard," said Bunter, hastily.

"While you dodge off with my cake?" grinned Bob. "Not good enough! Open that bundle, you pilfering porker."

"Shan't!" hooted Bunter. "It's only some socks I'm taking down for the wash. You lemme pass, Cherry."

Billy Bunter was quite satisfied with himself, and with his brainy plans for

reprisals on Mr. Prout and Horace Coker. But after what Peter Todd had said—and done!—he realized that other Remove fellows might not share his views. So he was going to keep his proceedings dark—if he could.

But his reputation as a grub-raider was too well-known. Bob Cherry was going to know what was in that bundle!

"Socks, is it?" he said. "Well, let's see the socks."

"I—I—I mean—"

"You mean you've got my cake in that bundle?"

"No!" howled Bunter. "Bother your cake! Blow your cake! I never knew you had a cake! I tell you it's only a shirt I'm taking down to the house-dame's room to be mended—I—I mean, only some socks for the wash—"

"Open that bundle!"

"Shan't!"



"Well, let's see the socks"

"Then I will!" said Bob, and he jerked the bundle from under the fat arm. The newspaper unrolled, and Bob Cherry stared blankly at a sooty handkerchief packed with soot.

"What the thump—!" he ejaculated. He had expected to see a cake. A hanky packed with soot was a surprise to him. "You benighted ass, what are you carrying a bundle of soot about for?"

"Find out!" retorted Bunter. "You gimme my bundle, Bob Cherry." The fat Owl clutched back the bundle, and wrapped up the newspaper again. He rolled on down the passage, leaving Bob staring. Had Billy Bunter been aware that there was a cake in Bob's study cupboard, no doubt it would have had his attention. But this time, evidently, the Owl of the Remove had not been tuck-raiding: though why he was carrying a bundle of soot about was a mystery, to Bob. Bob was left staring after him blankly: while Billy Bunter, with his bundle under his fat arm, rolled out of the Remove passage, on to the landing.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter, as he emerged on the landing. Two figures were standing at the big landing window, looking out into the fog. One was the angular figure of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. The other was Mr. Hacker, master of the Shell.

Bunter blinked at them uneasily. It was not a moment at which he wished to meet his master's eye! But they had their backs to him, and he hoped that neither of them would look round before he reached the stairs. Mr. Quelch was speaking as he trod cautiously past.

"It does not seem to be clearing off, Hacker."

"I think it is thickening, Quelch."

"It is very unfortunate that Prout should be out in it!" Quelch, apparently, was concerned about his colleague, out in the dense fog.

"Very!" assented Mr. Hacker.

"He will find some difficulty in returning," said Quelch.

"Probably!" agreed Mr. Hacker.

"He was going down to Friardale," said Mr. Quelch. "He may be quite lost in Friardale Lane. If he does not return soon, someone ought to go out and look for him, with a torch."

Mr. Hacker shrugged his shoulders. He did not seem so much concerned about his colleague as Quelch evidently was. The idea of groping about in a dense fog, even with the aid of an electric torch, did not appeal to him.

Billy Bunter heard no more, as he reached the stairs, and descended them. He passed two or three fellows, who glanced at him and his bundle, as he made his way to the junior lobby. Luckily, nobody was interested in either Bunter or his bundle. He found the junior lobby quite deserted, when he arrived there. Nobody was going out in such weather—except Bunter.

Indeed, the fat Owl himself, keen as he was on his brainy scheme, hesitated to emerge, when he opened the door, and chunks of fog rolled in. The aspect of the old quad was distinctly uninviting. It was chilly, it was damp, and a fellow could hardly see his hand before his face.

For several minutes, Billy Bunter hesitated, blinking into the fog. Then he made the plunge. Coker had smacked his head—Prout had reported him—and this opportunity of killing two birds with one stone was too good to be lost. The fat Owl made up his fat mind, and plunged out into the foggy quad.

He rolled away from the House, heading for the gates.

But he had under-estimated the difficulty of navigation in a dense fog.

He knew, of course, every inch of the way to the school gates—when it wasn't foggy. He had had no doubt about keeping to the path. He rolled on quite confidently, expecting to arrive at the gates in a few minutes. So it was quite a surprise to him when he suddenly bumped into a wall, and still more of a surprise when he realized that it was the wall of the gym, which was nowhere near the gates.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

He blinked round him through his big spectacles, in dismay. It dawned upon his fat brain that he had missed the way, familiar as it was minus a fog.

“Blow!” hissed Bunter.

The dim mass of the gym faded into the fog behind him, as he re-started. Slowly and very cautiously he proceeded now, anxious not to miss the way again.

Bump!

“Oh, crumbs!”

It was not a gate into which he bumped. It was the granite rim of a fountain.

That fountain was in the middle of the quad. The hapless Owl was almost as far as ever from his destination.

In the worst temper ever, Billy Bunter made another start. All this was extremely exasperating. Time was passing—and if Prout found his way home at all, he might come in while Bunter was groping and blundering about the foggy quad. The school gates seemed as far away as ever as he groped and blundered. Then suddenly, from the fog, came a grunting voice—

“Blow this 'ere fog! Wot I says is this 'ere—blow it!”

He recognized the familiar voice of Gosling, the old Greyfrairs porter,—invisible but audible.

“Blow it! Ketch me coming out again, after I get back to my lodge—jest ketch me! Blow it.”

Gosling, apparently, was not lost, like Bunter, only annoyed. Trudging footsteps came to Bunter's fat ears. In great relief, he fell in behind those foot-



"Blow this 'ere fog!"

steps, and followed on. Gosling's lodge was by the gates: and quite unconsciously he was acting as guide to a lost Owl.

Slam!

That slam of a door showed that Gosling, at last, had reached his lodge, and gone in. He had seen nothing of Bunter, and Bunter had seen nothing of him—but the fat Owl knew where he was now. He groped on his way, and the great arch of the gateway looked dimly overhead.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

Much time had been lost. But he was on the spot now. The gates stood wide open. If Prout hadn't yet come in—and ten to one he hadn't—it was all right. The fat Owl ensconced himself by the stone pillar at the side of the gateway: and the handkerchief, packed with soot, was in his fat hand now. And with all his fat ears, Billy Bunter listened for a sound of footsteps coming in—ready to hurl the sooty missile the moment Prout loomed through the fog.

UNEXPECTED!

MR. QUELCH stood gazing thoughtfully from the big landing window. In clear weather that window gave an extensive view of the Greyfriars quadrangle. Now it revealed nothing but impenetrable vapour. Mr. Hacker had gone back to the fire in Common-Room. But Quelch lingered at the window, looking out at the fog. Crusty as the Remove fellows often thought him, Quelch had a kind heart and a considerate nature. While Mr. Hacker concentrated on his own comfort, Quelch could not help thinking of Prout and his predicament.

No more than Mr. Hacker did he like the idea of going out into that ocean of damp, clinging mist. But it was a fact that by the light of an electric torch, one could pick one's way through even that blinding blanket of fog: while without such aid, it was almost hopeless. Unattractive as such an excursion was, Quelch was making up his mind to it.

He turned from the window at last, and descended the stairs. He looked into Masters' Common-Room, where the lights were on, and a bright fire was burning, with several beaks clustered round it.

"Prout has not come in?" asked Mr. Quelch, from the doorway.

"Not yet!" answered Mr. Hacker.

"I really hope that he has not lost himself in this dreadful fog!" said Mr. Wiggins, the master of the Third.

"Ce pauvre Prout!" said Monsieur Charpentier, shaking his head.

Quelch turned away. Prout had not come in, and goodness only knew when, or whether, he would, if left unassisted. That settled it for Quelch.

Having donned hat and coat and muffler, and provided himself with a large electric torch, the Remove master let himself out of the House. It seemed almost as thick as soup in the quad, and minus the torch, Quelch could hardly have groped his way to the gates. But with its aid, he was able to keep to the path, which—Billy Bunter, a quarter of an hour earlier, had failed to do. Billy Bunter was, in fact, just bumping into the wall of the gym, while his form-master was walking down to the gates: and certainly it never occurred to Quelch that any member of his form was out of doors in such weather.

He trod carefully out of gates, shining the torch before him. The light was reflected with a ghostly glimmer on the blanket of fog.

Prout, coming back from Friardale, must be somewhere in Friardale Lane. There were several ditches along that lane, and a false step in the fog might very likely have landed Prout in one of them. Quelch could only hope for the best



Shining the torch before him

as he proceeded slowly and carefully along the foggy lane, flashing the light to and fro, from foggy hedge to foggy hedge.

Friardale Lane was quite deserted. Nobody was likely to be out in that fog if he could help it. Deep silence and dimness surrounded Quelch as he trudged on. He might have been the only inhabitant of the county of Kent, for any sign he saw or heard of any other human being.

But that silence was suddenly broken.

Solitary as it seemed, there was, after all, somebody else abroad in Friardale Lane, and that somebody else came suddenly round a bend in the winding lane. At that point, there was a deep ditch beside the lane, and Quelch had paused to turn the torch on it, so he was not, at the moment, looking ahead.

Bump!

That somebody else, evidently, did not see Quelch in the fog, and as Quelch was between him and the light, apparently did not see the light either. Anyhow he bumped heavily into the Remove master.

Crash!

"Oh!" came a gasping exclamation from the somebody else. "What's that! Who's that?"

Quelch did not answer that question. He was tottering from the collision in the fog, and it had caused the torch to fall from his hand. The torch crashed on hard earth, and was instantly extinguished.

Mr. Quelch, gasping, righted himself. He breathed hard, and he breathed deep. But he contrived to speak calmly.

"Is that you, Prout?" he asked, peering through the vapour.

"Eh! No! Who's that?"

It was not Prout's voice. But it was familiar: Quelch had heard it before. It was a Greyfriars voice.

"Who are you?" he snapped. If it was not his colleague, there was no pressing need for politeness: and Quelch was very much annoyed. In the dense fog he could only make out a dim figure.

"Is that Mr. Quelch?" came the voice.

"It is! Who are you?"

"I'm Coker! I thought I knew your voice, sir. I say, have you seen anything of my form-master?"

"Coker! You utterly stupid boy—."

"Eh?"

"What are you doing out of gates in this fog? Have you not intelligence enough to remain indoors in such weather?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I came out to look for my beak—."

"What?"

"I mean Mr. Prout. He hadn't come in, so—."

"You stupid boy! Did you come out in this dense fog without a light?"

"I didn't think of it before I started out—."

"Pah!"

"I think Mr. Prout must have taken a wrong turning. I've been all over the shop looking for him—."

"Pah!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"So I was getting back, when I ran into you.—"

"You are not likely to find your way back in this fog, you stupid boy, and you have extinguished my light. You caused the torch to fall from my hand, crashing into me in that insensate manner—."

"I didn't see you in the fog, sir—."

"Pah!"

Mr. Quelch stooped, and groped for the torch. It was invisible on the foggy earth, and he groped and groped.



"Oh! Crumbs! Was that you, sir? I knocked my head on something"

"Coker!" Quelch's voice was deep.

"Yes sir."

"Cannot you assist me in looking for my torch, instead of standing there doing nothing?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I'll find it for you," said Coker. "It can't be far off, sir. I'll find it for you in a jiffy."

Horace Coker stooped and groped.

Crack!

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

Really, in a thick fog where a fellow could hardly see his hand before his face, it was hardly safe for two persons to grope about at close quarters. There were two loud exclamations, as two heads established sudden contact.

"Coker! You insensate boy—!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Crumbs! Was that you, sir? I knocked my head on something—."

"Fool!"

Seldom, if ever, did Mr. Quelch indulge in such expressions. But he was too intensely exasperated now to measure his words. Indeed, he came very near boxing Coker's ears.

"I didn't see you in the fog, sir. A fellow can't see anything in this. I don't think you ought to call a fellow names, sir, because you knocked into him in the fog," said Coker, warmly.

"Be silent," snapped Mr. Quelch. "I must find that torch, or we may both be lost in the fog. You are clumsy and stupid, Coker! Keep your distance while I look for the torch."

"I think—."

"That will do!"

"But I think—."

"Will you be silent?"

"Oh, yes, sir, if you like, but I think I've found it. I'm treading on something, at any rate. I expect that's it."

"Bless my soul! If you are treading on my torch, you may put it out of action. Stand aside." Quelch almost roared. And he didn't wait for Coker to stand aside. He helped him with a push. Coker was almost invisible in the fog but not quite—he was visible enough to receive a push, and Quelch gave him one—a quite energetic one!

It was, perhaps, a little more energetic than Quelch intended, in his alarm at the possibility of damage to the torch under Coker's extensive feet. Under that sudden unexpected impact, Horace Coker went over backwards. He uttered a howl as he landed on Friardale Lane.

"Ooooooh!"

Heedless of Coker and his howl, Quelch groped for the torch. His groping hand contacted it, and he clutched it up. Hurriedly he pressed the switch to put on the light.

But it was in vain. The light did not come on. Whether it was the fall to the ground, or whether it was the trampling of Coker's large feet, that had done the damage, there was no doubt that the damage was done. That electric torch was no longer a going concern.

Coker scrambled up, breathing indignation.

"Look here, sir, shoving a fellow over"—hooted Coker. "After I found your torch for you, too—."

"You stupid boy, you have damaged it, and it will not light!" shrieked Mr. Quelch. "I have a great mind to box your ears for your clumsy stupidity, Coker. Indeed, I will do so."

Coker jumped back.

Quelch, evidently, was getting dangerous: and Coker had had enough of him at close quarters. Coker disappeared into the fog.

"Coker!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Come here at once, Coker."

There was no answer from Horace Coker, and he didn't come there! Apparently he did not want his ears boxed! Footsteps died away in the dimness, and the Remove master was left alone, breathing very hard.

For some moments, Mr. Quelch stood there, nonplussed. He was without a light now, and looking for Prout without a light, was a rather less hopeful proposition than looking for a needle in a haystack. Quelch was reluctant to abandon his quest, but he realized that there was no choice in the matter. Coker of the Fifth had put paid to his search for the Fifth-form master. Indeed it was doubtful whether, without the torch, he could find his own way back to Greyfriars.



He gasped and spluttered

With deep feelings, he started on his return journey. He trudged, and peered and groped, through a world of fog. Several times he barely escaped stepping over the edge of a ditch. Once he bumped into a fence—twice or thrice into wayside trees. He had to proceed almost at a snail's pace. Even so he could not be sure that he had not taken a wrong turning. He thought of the ruddy fire in Common-Room at Greyfriars with deep longing.

When, at last, a dim mass of buildings loomed up in the fog, he felt like a ship-wrecked mariner sighting land at last! It was Greyfriars School—at long last!

Greatly relieved, Mr. Quelch groped on to the open gateway. Thankfully, he groped under the arch.

And then—!

What happened next came as a complete surprise to Henry Samuel Quelch. Out of the fog something came whizzing. Quelch did not know that it was coming, till it came. It landed fairly in the middle of his features, and burst open there. Something—something dusty and smelly—deluged his face, smothered him and choked him. He did not even hear a sound of running feet—he did not know that a fat figure vanished into the foggy quad. He gasped and spluttered, and tottered and gurgled and choked, breathless and bewildered, clawing wildly at clouds of soot.

CHAPTER V

KEEP IT DARK!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's that?”

“Sounded like somebody yelling—.”

“Somebody out in the quad.”

“Who'd be ass enough to go out in this?”

“Coker did—you remember he was going to look for Prout—

“If he's out, he's lost himself!”

“Listen!”

There had been boxing in the Rag. Most of the Remove were gathered there. The lights were on, glimmering from the windows into dense banks of fog. Having peeled off the gloves, after the boxing, Harry Wharton and Co. were looking from the window, to ascertain whether the fog had cleared sufficiently to give them a chance to get out of doors. They found that it hadn't,—indeed, it looked thicker than ever. Unexpectedly, a sound came to their ears—muffled by fog and a shut window, but audible.

It indicated that somebody was out in the foggy quad. If anybody was out without a light in hand, it was very probable that he had lost himself—he might have been only a few yards from the House, and quite unable to find his way in.

“Better make sure,” said Bob Cherry. “I’ll open the window, and give him a yell.”

There was a snap from Skinner, who was crowding over the fire.

“Keep that window shut, Cherry! Want the room filled with fog?”

“Somebody seems to be out of the House—.”

“More fool he! Keep that window shut.”

“Rats!” retorted Bob.

He threw the window wide open. Nobody wanted fog to roll into the Rag, but if a fellow was in need of help, Bob was the fellow to help him. He shouted from the open window.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

Bob’s voice was powerful. Stentor’s of old had little on it. That roar must have been audible in the furthest corner of the old quad.

Evidently it was heard: for a howl came back:

“Help! I say, you fellows, help! I’m lost!”

“That isn’t jolly old Coker!” grinned Bob.

“That fat ass, Bunter,” said Harry Wharton.

“Oh, my hat! Did he try to get across to the tuck-shop after all!” exclaimed Nugent.

“Looks like it,” said Johnny Bull. “He’s lost himself in the fog, anyhow.”

“I say, you fellows, where are you? I say, oh crikey!”

“It is the esteemed and idiotic Bunter,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob, again. “This way, Bunter. Roll this way, fatty.”

“Oh, crikey! I can’t see you.”

“We can’t see you either, fathead. But you can hear me, can’t you? Listen, and come this way.”

“Oh, lor!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! We’re at the window of the Rag. You’ll see the light if you roll a little nearer. Roll on, barrel.”

The Famous Five stared from the open window into the fog. Vernon-Smith, Redwing, and several other fellows joined them there, staring out. They could see nothing of Billy Bunter. Three or four voices shouted to him, added to Bob’s stentorian roar. That volume of sound guided the fat Owl, his fat ears supplying the place of his eyes and spectacles. A fat face loomed through the fog at last, and Bunter came into view. He rolled up to the window, and stood blinking up at the crowd of faces there.



We're at the window of the Rag

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"You fat ass," said Bob. "What did you go out in the fog for—?"

"I didn't—I—I—I mean—."

"Couldn't you keep away from the tuck-shop, with Mauly's half-crown in your pocket?" asked Nugent.

"Eh! Oh! Yes! No. I say,—."

"You're all right now," said Bob. "Keep close to the wall and you'll get to the lobby door all right."

"I say, you fellows, help me in! I might get lost again! I've had enough of this fog! Help me in at the window."

"Anybody got a steam-crane in his pocket?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, you fellows, help me in. I don't weigh much, as you jolly well know."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bob. "He doesn't weigh much! Bunter doesn't weigh much!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

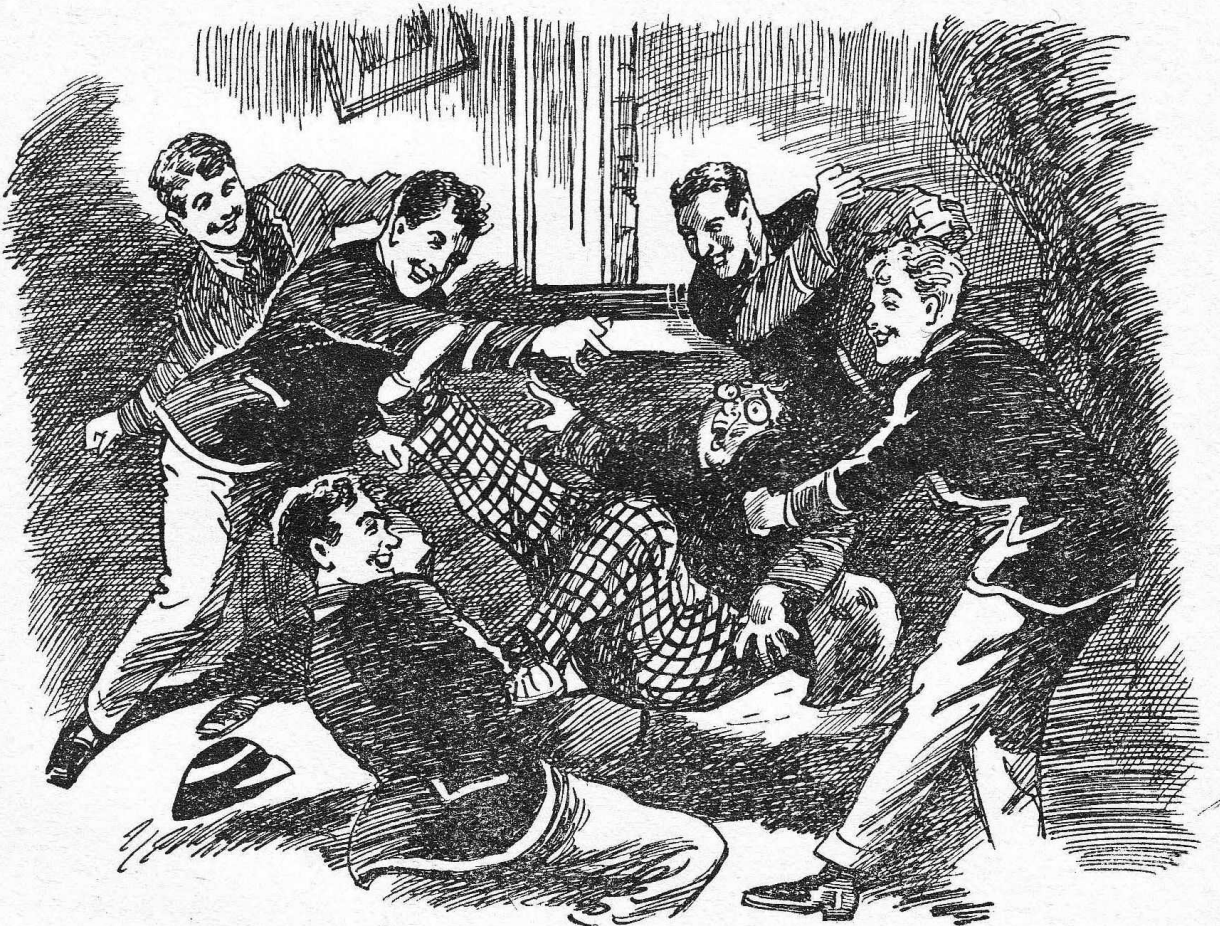
"Beast! Help me in at that window, will you?" howled Bunter.

"Okay! "All hands on deck, you men," chuckled Bob. "I daresay he will pull the lot of us out of window, but we'll chance it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent, leaned from the window, and grasped fat hands and arms. Even four pairs of sturdy hands did not find it easy to detach the fat Owl from mother earth. But with a long pull, a strong pull and a pull all together, they did it.

Billy Bunter came slithering up to the window-sill. He yelped as he came.



He landed on the floor of the Rag and yelled

"Ow! Don't drag my arms off! Wow! You're twisting my arm, Cherry, you dummy. Yow! You're squashing my fingers, Bull, you fathead! Wow! ow!"

"Roll in, barrel."

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled in.

Bump!

He landed on the floor of the Rag, and roared.

"Ow! Yaroooh! Wow!"

Bob Cherry slammed the window shut. Quite a cloud of fog had already surged in. Grinning faces surrounded Billy Bunter, as he sat spluttering on the floor. There was a sudden exclamation from Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what's this?" He held up a hand and stared at it. His fingers were blackened. "Soot!"

"Soot!" repeated Harry Wharton, blankly. "Oh, my hat! I've got some too on my hands! You benighted owl, what have you been doing with soot, out in the fog?"

"Oh! Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I haven't had any soot—."

"Why your paws are black with it!" exclaimed Smithy.

"Oh, crikey! Are they?" gasped Bunter.

He blinked at his fat hands. Brainy as he was, it did not seem to have occurred to Bunter that soot packed in a handkerchief was liable to leave traces on the fellow who handled it. As a matter of fact, it had left ample traces. Bunter's fat fingers were of the soot, sooty: and considerable smudges of it had been transferred to the juniors who had helped him in at the window.

"I—I say, I—I'd better get a wash!" Bunter scrambled to his feet. "If they see soot on me, they might think it was me."

"What have you been doing with soot?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Oh! Nothing! I—I haven't had any soot—I—I—mean—."

"You benighted bloater," said Bob Cherry. "You had soot wrapped in a hanky in that bundle I saw you carrying away from the studies—."

"Eh! Oh! Yes! No—." stammered Bunter. "I say, you fellows, don't you say anything about it. I don't want old Prout after me."

"Prout!" repeated Harry Wharton, blankly.

"Yes—I mean no! I mean to say, if—if anybody's sooted old Prout in the fog, it wasn't me—I don't know anything about it."

"Great pip!" stuttered Bob Cherry. "You've been sooting old Pompous in the fog! You potty porpoise, if that's it, you'd better wash off every speck of soot before the beaks and pre's start looking for you. You'll get a Head's flogging if you're spotted."

"I say, you fellows, you keep it dark, you know!" gasped Bunter: and he rolled across to the door of the Rag: for once in his fat life eager to get at soap and water for an extra wash.

He left most of the juniors grinning. But one face was quite serious—Peter Todd's. Peter remembered the brainy scheme Bunter had outlined in No. 7 Study. It looked now as if Bunter had carried out that scheme—it had not, after all, been knocked out of his fat head by those bangs on the study table. Peter followed the fat Owl into the passage, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Hold on, fatty—."

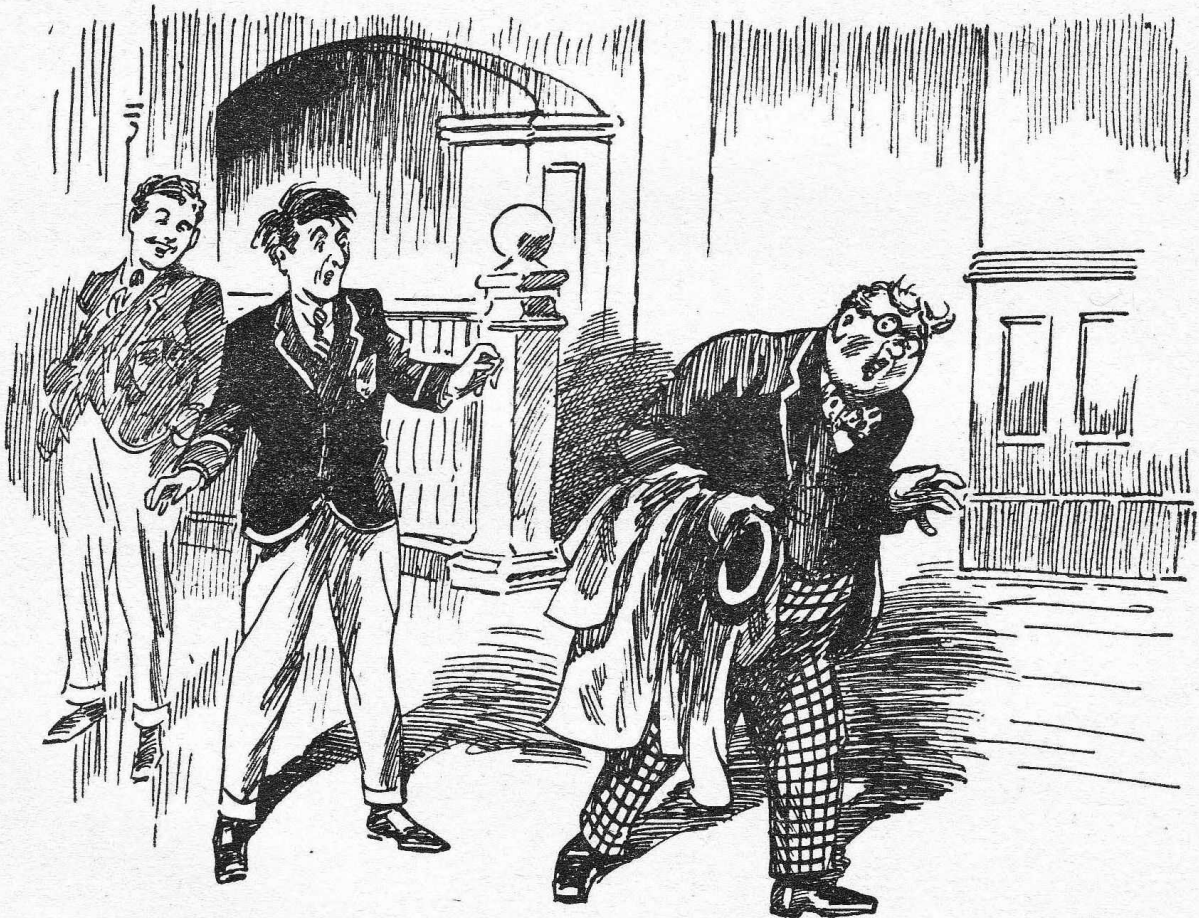
Bunter blinked round at him, impatiently.

"Leggo, Toddy," he yapped. "I've got to get a wash—."

"You've sooted old Prout—."

"Didn't he report me to Quelch about those bickers—?"

"Never mind that. Did you get a hanky belonging to Coker, as you told me



He rolled down the passage

in the study—" hissed Peter. "Have you landed it on that fathead Coker?"

"He smacked my head—."

"Bother your silly head! Have you fixed it for Coker to be up for sooting Prout? If you have, it can't be kept dark. You'll have to own up."

"Own up!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, if they get Coker for it."

"You silly idiot!"

"Look here, Bunter—."

"Yah!"

"I tell you—."

"Catch me getting Coker's whopping for him!" snorted Bunter. "Don't you get saying anything about that hanky, Peter. The—the fact is, I never went to Coker's study for a hanky, and—and I never found one in his blazer pocket on the window-seat, and—and I never sooted old Prout at all. If anybody did, I don't know who it was. I never waited for him at the gate, and never bunged Coker's hanky at him with the soot in it, and never got him right on the dial—I was somewhere else when I was there—."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"So don't you say anything, Peter. I don't even know whether old Pompous has been sooted or not. Now leggo,—I've got to get a wash before he comes in all smothered with soot. I've got to keep this dark."

And Billy Bunter jerked his fat shoulder away, and rolled down the passage, leaving Peter staring.

CHAPTER VI

SURPRISE FOR COKER!

"**Y**OU ass!"

"You fathead!"

Coker stared.

He came into his study in the Fifth, certainly not expecting such a greeting from his pals. Potter and Greene.

Coker was looking tired and worn. Long wandering and groping in the fog had told on Coker. How he had, at long last, groped his way back to Greyfriars he hardly knew. He had come in late—it was past tea-time,—but he was thankful to have got in at last.

What Coker wanted now was a rest, and hot tea. He was cold and tired and

limp. What he certainly did not want was slanging from Potter and Greene. But that was what he received as he tramped wearily in.

"You born nitwit," went on Potter.

"You dangerous lunatic!" added Greene.

"You fellows gone mad?" asked Coker. "Look here, I think you might have got tea ready. It's late. I'm famished! Get the kettle on, and don't jaw."

"What did you do it for?" howled Potter.

"Eh! If you mean going out to look for Prout, it was only decent, when an old ass like Prout was rambling about in a fog like this. I never found him, but I did my best."

"You found Quelch all right!" yapped Greene.

"Eh? I don't see how you know," said Coker, staring. "As it happens, I ran into Quelch in Friardale Lane. I think he was out looking for Prout, same as me. We bashed into one another in the fog, and he had the nerve to push me over because he dropped his torch and I trod on it. I'd have punched him, if he wasn't a beak. Pushing a Fifth-form man over, by gum."

Coker frowned at the recollection.

"Was that why you did it," snapped Potter.

"Eh! Why I did what?"

"Bunged that soot at him."

"Eh!"

"We didn't know you'd met him out. We couldn't make out what you had up against Quelch—"

"Eh! I've nothing up against Quelch, that I know of. He did push me over in the lane, but after all I did tread on his dashed torch, and I daresay he was in a flurry. It was like his cheek—a junior master—but nothing to make a song and dance about."

"Then why did you do it?"

"What the dickens do you mean? What have I done?" howled Coker.

"You laid for him at the gate—and bunged a hanky packed with soot right in his chivvy—that's what you've done," hooted Potter.

Horace Coker blinked in bewilderment.

"Did anybody?" he gasped.

"Yes—you did!"

"You silly ass," roared Coker. "I've only just got in. I got lost in the fog after I left Quelch in the lane, and I haven't seen him since."

"You saw enough of him to bung that soot at him."

"I didn't!" roared Coker. "Think I'd play a silly fag trick like that, bunging soot in a fog? Have a little sense."

"You're going to say you didn't?" asked Greene.

"Of course I am, if they ask me. If anybody's been sooting Quelch, I expect it was some young ruffian in his own form whom he's been whopping. Nothing to do with me, is it?"

"You awful ass—."

"Look here, Potter—."

"You mad fathead—."

"Look here, Greene—."

"If you wanted to bung soot at Quelch, you could have found a paper bag or something. But packing it in your own hanky—."

"I didn't!" shrieked Coker.

"You jolly well did! They've found the hanky!"

"It wasn't mine—."

"It jolly well was! Is there any other fellow in the Fifth with the initials H.J.C. worked in a monogram?"

Coker stared blankly. In his amazement and dismay, he forgot that he wanted his tea.

"Look here, tell me what's happened, while I've been out, if anything has!" he bawled.

"You don't know, of course," said Potter, sarcastically. "But I'll tell you, if you like. Quelch got a cargo of soot right on the dial as he was coming in at the gate an hour ago. He was smothered. Gosling heard him spluttering and choking, from his lodge, and went out with his lantern to see what was up. He found Quelch looking like a chimney-sweep, swamped with soot. He picked up the hanky that had had the soot in it. You can bet that Quelch pounced on it."

"It couldn't have been mine—," gasped Coker.

"Oh don't be a goat! Gosling helped Quelch to the House, with his lantern—a lot of fellows saw him come in, black as a hat. Everybody wondered who could have done it, till your hanky was recognized—."

"I tell you it couldn't have been—."

"Oh, pack that up! It was yours all right. Think it isn't as clear as daylight that you got in before Quelch, and fixed up that packet of soot for him, and waited at the gate—."

"I didn't!" yelled Coker. "I tell you I've only just got in, and I came straight up to this study—."

"The pre's can't have seen you coming in, or they'd have nobbled you already," said Greene. "They're looking for you."

"I tell you—."

"You silly ass, the minute your monogram was spotted on that hanky, everybody knew who had done it. Quelch went off for a bath and a change—I

can jolly well tell you he needed them—but he left word with the prefects to send you to his study as soon as you showed up—.”

“Like his cheek, if he did!” snapped Coker. “He’s not my beak!”

“Why on earth did you use your own hanky to pack the soot in?” asked Greene. “Didn’t you know it would be picked up, and you’d be spotted?”

“Of all the silly idiots—!” said Potter.

“Look here, you two!” roared Coker. “I tell you I had nothing to do with it, and if you can’t take a fellow’s word—.”

“It was your hanky—.”

“It was you—!”

That was too much for Coker! He made a stride at Potter and Greene. Before they could dodge he had grasped two collars.

CRACK!

Two heads came together, with a resounding concussion. There was a simultaneous yell from Potter and Greene.



Crack! Two heads came together

"Yow!" from Potter.

"Wow!" from Greene.

"There!" gasped Coker. "That's what you've been asking for. And I can jolly well tell you—."

Coker was interrupted. There was a footstep in the doorway. Wingate of the Sixth, head prefect of Greyfriars, looked in.

"Coker here?" he asked. "I hear that he's come in. Oh, here you are, Coker. Come with me: you're wanted."

Coker gave him a glare.

"Who wants me?" he snapped.

"Quelch," answered Wingate.

"Quelch isn't my beak, and he can't send for a Fifth form man," snapped Coker. "Prout's my beak. He can send for me, if he likes."

"Prout's still out," said Wingate. "Quelch wants you for that mad trick you played an hour ago—."

"I didn't—."

"You can tell Quelch that. Come on." And as Coker did not stir, Wingate added, "If you've forgotten that I'm a prefect, Coker, I've an ashplant to remind you. Are you coming?"

"I'll come!" grunted Coker.

And he came! With a frowning brow, he tramped away down the passage with Wingate: leaving Potter and Greene to rub their heads in the study.

CHAPTER VII

BOOT FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.
He felt like grinning.

Sitting before the study fire in No. 7 Study, he had warmed up after his chilly excursion in the fog. Having, with unusual care in his ablutions, cleaned off every speck of soot, nothing remained to connect him with the episode at the school gates.

He grinned at the recollection of a dim figure tottering under that sooty missile. He grinned at the anticipation of what was to follow for Coker.

His wrongs and grievances were avenged. Prout who had reported him to his form-master about those biscuits in Common-Room, had been well and truly sooted—at least, Bunter believed that he had. Coker, who had smacked



Billy Bunter grinned, sitting before the Study fire in No. 7

his head, was going to be whopped for it! The brainy Owl had succeeded in killing two birds with one stone!

True, a good many Remove fellows could hardly fail to guess that it was he who had handled the soot. But Remove men did not give one another away to the beaks. The fat Owl had no fear of that.

So he felt that he had reason to feel satisfied: and he grinned from one fat ear to the other in his satisfaction.

There was a tramp of feet in the Remove passage, and the door of No. 7 was hurled open. Billy Bunter blinked at a crowd of Remove fellows, from his armchair, as they surged in. Harry Wharton and Co., Peter Todd, Lord Mauleverer, Vernon-Smith, Squiff, Tom Brown, crowded into the study. Three or four others filled the doorway.

Billy Bunter blinked at them, in surprise. He could imagine no reason for this numerous visit.

"I say, you fellows, anything up?" he squeaked.

"You fat chump!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"You potty porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"You bloated blitherer—."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"You goggle-eyed grampus—."

"Oh, really, Smithy—."

"He doesn't know yet what he's done," said Nugent. "The howling ass, thinks he got old Pompous in the fog at the gate."

"So I jolly well did!" said Bunter. "I don't care if you fellows know. You wouldn't give a chap away."

"You never got Prout!" howled Peter Todd. "Prout's still out, wandering somewhere in the fog."

"Rot!" said Bunter. "I got him all right. Mind, if the beaks or pre's start asking questions. I don't know anything about it. I don't want old Pompous after me. He can look for a fellow in his own Form. He, he, he."

"It wasn't Prout—."

"Eh?"

"You got the wrong man, you fat ass—."

"Rubbish!" said Bunter. "Nobody was out excepting old Prout. Of course I couldn't see him in the fog, not to recognize him, but—."

"It was Quelch," roared Bob Cherry.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Quelch, your own beak, you mad ass," said Vernon-Smith.

"I tell you it was Prout—."

"And we tell you it wasn't," said Harry Wharton. "Quelch has come in smothered with soot—."

"Oh, crikey!"

"And Prout hasn't come in at all—."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You got Quelch with that soot—."

"Oh, lor! I—I never knew Quelch was out!" gasped Bunter. "What the dickens did he go out in the fog for? How could a fellow know that even a beak would be silly enough to go out in this!"

"Well, he did," said Harry, "and you got him as he came in."

"Oh, jiminy!"

"He came in black as a sweep—."

"Smothered with soot—."



"You got Quelch with that soot"

"And was he shirty?" said Vernon-Smith.

"The shirtfulness was terrific." said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Mad, as a hatter," said Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors in dismay. He was not grinning now. He was no longer feeling like grinning!

Up to that moment, he had had no doubts! It was dismaying to learn that his brainy scheme had gone awry, and that Coker's handkerchief, laden with soot, had been delivered at the wrong address, so to speak.

"I—I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter. "Mind you keep this dark! Why, Quelch will be in an awful bait, if he got that soot! I didn't mean it for Quelch—I meant it for Prout—I say, mind you keep it dark."

"It can't be kept dark," said Harry Wharton.

"What? Why you beast—."

"That soot was packed in a hanky," said Harry. "It's come out that it was

Coker's hanky. The pre's are looking for Coker now. Quelch thinks it was Coker."

"Oh!" Bunter gave a gasp of relief. "That's all right, then."

"All right, is it?" roared Bob.

"Yes. Quelch couldn't think it was me, if he thinks it was Coker of course, he would, just as Prout would have! It's all right."

Bunter was comforted by that reflection. The brainy scheme had not gone as planned. He had sooted the wrong beak! But Coker's hanky was an inevitable clue to the hurler of soot. Coker would get the blame, just the same. So— from Billy Bunter's point of view—it was, after all, all right!

That, however, was not the view of the other fellows.

"Mean to say you'd leave it on Coker?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"He smacked my head—."

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed the Bounder. "Did he use Coker's hanky on purpose?"

"Even Bunter wouldn't do that," said Nugent.

Peter Todd was silent. He knew, if the other fellows did not. But the other fellows had guessed, now!

"Did you, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"By gum, he did!" said Bob. "You fat villain—."

"Didn't he smack my head?" snapped Bunter. "A whopping will do him good—smacking a fellow's head—."

"You fat sweep—!"

"You terrific rascal!"

"Great pip!" said Bob Cherry. "He must have bagged Coker's hanky on purpose, to put it on Coker, because that silly ass smacked his silly head! That's the jolly old limit."

"That settles it," said Harry Wharton. "Coker will be up for a flogging for this. You've got to stop that, Bunter. You don't seem to understand that you've played a rotten, dirty, mean trick—I suppose you wouldn't, with a brain like yours. But you've got to set it right. Quelch is waiting for Coker in his study now. Go down to him—."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Bunter.

"Go down to him, and own up that it was you—."

"Mad?" gasped Bunter. "Why, I should get the flogging instead of Coker. I'll jolly well watch it."

"You'll get a Form ragging if you don't."

"Beast!"

"You can't do anything else now, Bunter," said Bob. "It's a 'must', Bunter."

"Beast!"

"Are you going?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"No!" yelled Bunter. "I jolly well ain't going. And you fellows can't sneak about a fellow, either. You mind your own business."

"Nobody is going to give you away, you fat villain. You've got to give yourself away. Get on with it."

"Shan't!" howled Bunter.

"Scrag him!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"I—I—I say, you fellows, you keep off," gasped Bunter, in great alarm.

"I—I say, it wasn't me at all. I never prouted Soot—I mean I never sooted Prout—I mean Quelch—if anybody sooted Quelch, I don't know anything about it. I expect it was Coker, as it was his hanky. I never got that hanky from Coker's study—I never went to his study at all, and I only went because Toddy wouldn't. I say, you fellows—yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter roared, as a forest of hands grasped him, and hooked him out of the armchair.



A forest of hands grasped him

"Going to Quelch?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Boot him!"

"Beast!"

"Now get this clear, Bunter," said Harry. "You've done a mean, stealthy, rotten thing—though you don't seem able to get that into your fat head. You've got to do the right thing now. Nobody's going to give you away—but every man in the Remove is going to boot you, and keep on booting you, till you play up. Got that?"

"Beast!"

"Boot him round the study, as a sample of what's to come," said Smithy.

"Go it!"

"I say, you fellows—yaroooh! I say, stoppit! I say, it wasn't me at all—it's all a mistake—I say, leave off kicking me, you beasts—ow! wow! Whoop!"

Billy Bunter was not good at arithmetic. But if he had been ever so good, he could not have counted the kicks that landed on his fat person, as he dodged frantically round the study in vain efforts to escape lunging feet. When the Removites, at last, crowded out of the study, Bunter was left too breathless even to yell: he could only gasp and mumble, wishing, from the bottom of his fat heart, that he had never thought up that brainy scheme for killing two birds with one stone!

CHAPTER VIII

THE ONLY WAY!

"**B**EAST!" murmured Billy Bunter.

It was the following morning.

The fog had rolled away over-night. Bright wintry sunshine streamed down on the old quad at Greyfriars.

Many faces were as bright as the morning sunshine, when the Greyfriars fellows came out in break. But some were far from bright.

It had been quite an exciting evening on the day of fog. First there had been the sooting of Quelch which could not fail to cause a tremendous row. Then there had been the discovery—from the clue of Coker's hanky—that a Fifth form senior man was the culprit. Then the news that Coker was to go up to the Head for judgment the following day. Had he been in Quelch's form, no doubt Quelch would have dealt with the matter himself—with a heavy hand. Dr. Locke was going to deal with him, after third school the next day. The next day

had now come, bright and sunny after the fog. But two faces at Greyfriars, that sunny morning, looked more gloomy and dismal than the fog itself.

One was Horace Coker's. The other was Billy Bunter's. Both of them seemed to be understudying the ancient monarch who never smiled again.

Coker's almost frantic denials of having handled the soot, or knowing anything about it, cut no ice. The hanky settled that. Coker couldn't believe, at first, that it was really his hanky—till he saw it in Quelch's study, black with soot. Then he could only suppose that he must have dropped a hanky somewhere, and that some fellow had picked it up, and used it for the package of soot.

Prout, when he came in at last—very late, after long wandering in the fog—and heard what had happened, was disposed to favour that view. "Old Pompous" often had spots of bother with Coker: but he did not want a man of his form up for a Head's flogging. But it did not rest with Prout. It was Quelch



Prout came in at last.

who had been sooted. And Quelch was going to march the sooter to the headmaster for judgment.

Few doubts or could doubt, that Coker was the man. Even his own familiar friends, Potter and Greene, had no doubts. Knocking their heads together had not altered their opinion—rather it had confirmed it.

Coker, that morning, did not appear his usual self-satisfied self. He was quite subdued. He was, in fact, in an overwhelmed state. He did not swagger in the quad as if all Greyfriars belonged to him. His loud voice was not heard laying down the law. It was not heard at all. He limped away by himself, in the lowest of spirits.

But even Coker's spirits were hardly as low as Billy Bunter's. Coker had a dreaded interview with the Head coming after third school. But Billy Bunter had something nearer at hand.

In the Remove, they knew that Bunter was the culprit. They knew, too, that the fat and fatuous Owl had actually planned to land it on Coker. So far from regarding that artful scheme as brainy, they regarded it—to Bunter's indignant surprise—as the last word in nefarious trickery. Even Skinner was shocked by it—and Skinner was not easily shocked. Worst of all, every man in the Remove agreed that Bunter could not and should not leave it on Coker. They were not going to give him away—but they were going to boot him, continuously and energetically, till he did the right thing.

Many a time and oft had Bunter been booted for his sins. But he had never had it so good before!

Over-night, he had been chased up and down the Remove dormitory. After rising-bell in the morning, the juniors only waited till they had their shoes on to give him some more. After breakfast the dose was repeated—and Bunter was glad to get into the form-room,—even for a lesson with Quelch—to escape lunging feet. When the Remove came out in break, Bunter emerged in dread—which was fully justified. The Famous Five booted him in turn—and Peter Todd, Lord Mauleverer, Smithy, and Squiff, all had a go, before he could escape. A dismal and dolorous Owl rolled away to a remote corner of the quad, for the first time in his fat life anxious to hear the bell for class.

In that remote corner, sprawling on a bench under an ancient elm, he sighted a burly form: and it was then that he murmured "Beast". He did not utter it loud enough for Coker of the Fifth to hear! He did not want another smack from that hefty hand.

But Coker, as a matter of fact, did not look in a head-smacking mood. He was slumped on the bench, in an attitude of utter dejection. There was not a trace of swank about him. He was limp. He looked down and out, as indeed he was feeling.

Bunter's blink at him was inimical. It was all Coker's fault that the fat Owl was, at present, living the life of a Soccer ball. If he hadn't smacked Bunter's fat head, the vengeful Owl would never have thought up that brainy scheme. But as he noted the dismal, dejected pessimism in Coker's usually self-satisfied countenance, the fat Owl was conscious of a pang of remorse. He even wondered a little whether the other fellows were right, and whether it had been a little too "thick" to play that scurvy trick on the headstrong Horace. Billy Bunter, after all, had a conscience. It was a very elastic one, and would stretch to almost any extent. Still, such as it was, it was there. Bunter, at that moment, wished that he hadn't done it!

Coker glanced up at him. Bunter instinctively made a retrograde movement. But it was not needed. There was nothing aggressive about Coker now.

"Has the bell gone, Bunter?" Coker's voice was quite unlike his usual bawling tones.



"Yes, I'm for it," mumbled Coker

"Oh! Not yet, Coker," answered the fat Owl. "I—I—I say, I—I hear that you're going up to the Head after third school."

"Yes—I'm for it!" mumbled Coker. "I never had anything to do with it, but Quelch won't believe a word I say, because of the hanky. I expect the Head will think just the same as Quelch! I'm for it."

It was very unusual for Coker, the most "Fifth-formy" of Fifth-formers, to chat with a Lower boy like this. He had too strong a sense of his dignity as a senior man. But in his present state of disaster, Coker seemed to have forgotten even his dignity. His self-importance was down to zero.

"They all think it was me!" said Coker, drearily. "Just because some silly ass picked up my hanky that I must have dropped somewhere. He might have been a bit more careful, not to have used another fellow's hanky."

Bunter blinked at him. Evidently Coker had not the faintest suspicion that that hanky had been selected deliberately for the package of soot. The fat Owl was conscious of another pang.

"I—I say, Coker, I—I don't believe it was you!" mumbled Bunter.

"Then you've got more sense than most fellows here, silly fat ass as you are," said Coker. "Got any idea who it was?"

"Oh! No!" exclaimed Bunter, hastily. "I—I—I—I haven't the foggiest—I say, Coker, I—I'm sorry—."

"Fat lot of use that is," grunted Coker. "I'm for it! I'm going up to the Head, and ten to one he will make it a flogging—couldn't do less, if he believes that I sooted a beak! What a fool that fellow, whoever he was, must have been, to use a chap's hanky to pack that soot. A paper bag would have done as well, or better. Must have been a born idiot."

"Oh, really, Coker—."

"Must have been," said Coker. "Just as if he did it on purpose, the nitwit,"

"You don't think he did it on purpose?" gasped Bunter.

Coker stared at him.

"Don't be a young ass!" he snapped. "Of course it wasn't done on purpose—think any Greyfriars man would play a dirty trick like that?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"But it's landed me all the same, just as if it was done on purpose!" groaned Coker, "I'm for it. Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter rolled on his way, leaving Coker slumped on the bench, looking and feeling, as if all the troubles of the universe had landed in a bunch on his burly shoulders.

"Oh lor!" mumbled Bunter, as he rolled.

His fat conscience was quite active now. Really, and truly, the fat Owl was sorry. Coker's total lack of suspicion that he had been the victim of a brainy

scheme, somehow made even the obtuse fat junior realize that it was a rotten thing to have done. Coker scorned the idea that any Greyfriars man could have been guilty of the "dirty trick" of which Bunter actually had been guilty! For once in his fat and unscrupulous career, William George Bunter sincerely repented of his misdeeds. Gladly he would have undone what he had done.

But—there was only one way of setting the matter right, and that was by owning up to Quelch. That meant transferring the impending flogging from Coker to himself! If there had been any other way, Bunter, in his repentant state of mind would have jumped at it.

But there was no other way. Either Quelch had to know the facts, or Coker had to go up to the Head.

He just couldn't do it. Coker had to take what was coming to him. There was no way out.

Or was there not?

Thinking was not much in Bunter's line. But for once he was doing some



There was no way out

hard thinking. Perhaps the prospect of continuous bootings in the Remove spurred on his fat intellect. Indeed, even a whopping from Quelch, or from the Head, was hardly worse than the incessant impact of lunging feet on his plump trousers. Between repentance for his misdeeds, and apprehension of endless bootings, Bunter's fat brain worked, and evolved a sudden brain-wave.

A bell began to ring. Break was over, and the Greyfriars fellows due in the form-rooms. Bunter rolled towards the House.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!" came a sudden roar.

"Give him a few more."

"Boot him!"

"Boot him terrifically."

"I—I say, you fellows—!" gasped Bunter, as he was surrounded.

"Last chance," said Harry Wharton. "You'll have to speak to Quelch in third school, Bunter. You'd better, if you don't want us to wear out shoe-leather on you after class."

"I—I—I say, you keep off. I—I—I'm going to let Quelch know that it wasn't Coker!" gasped Bunter. "I'm going to tell him, in the form-room."

"Stick to that!" said Bob Cherry.

And Bunter was allowed to roll to the Remove form-room unbooted.

CHAPTER IX

VERY BRAINY!

"PLEASE, sir—."

"Well?"

That monosyllable from Mr. Quelch was short and sharp. Quelch did not seem in the best of tempers that morning.

"I—I—I—" stammered Billy Bunter.

"Well?"

"I—I—I—" Bunter seemed unable to get further than that.

"Be silent."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

And silent he was!

Expressive glances were cast at him, from all over the Remove. They warned the fat Owl of what he had to expect, if he did not put Quelch wise during that class. Later, it would be too late! After third school, Coker was booked for the Head's study. It was now or never!



"I—I—I," stammered Bunter

Bunter was going to speak. He had thought up a dodge which, he hoped might see him through. But it was by no means a certainty—there was a risk—an awful risk that the fat Owl might get Coker's whopping, if he tried it on. No doubt it was worth the risk, in view of what awaited him after class if he failed to play up. But Quelch's grim countenance was far from encouraging.

However, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, Bunter tried again. Quelch had started on geography. Bunter's fat squeak interrupted geography.

"If—if you please, sir—"

A gimlet-eye glinted round at him.

"Did you speak, Bunter?"

"Eh! Yes, sir! If you please, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"If you have anything to say to me, Bunter, you may say it. If you are interrupting the lesson without cause, I shall cane you. Now what is it?"

"It—it—it—it—." It seemed to stick in Bunter's fat neck. But he got it out at last. "It—it's about kik-kik-Coker, sir."

"Coker?" repeated Mr. Quelch, staring.

"Yes, sir! It wasn't Coker!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I happen to know, sir, that it wasn't Soot that coked you—I—I mean, it wasn't Coker that sooted you, sir—."

"What?"

"I—I—I thought I ought to let you know, sir, as—as the Head's going up to Coker—I mean Coker's going up to the Head!" stuttered Bunter.

Mr. Quelch gazed fixedly at the fattest member of his form. He had not the slightest doubt on that subject. But if there was a doubt, he was of course willing to give it a hearing. Naturally he did not want punishment to land on the wrong shoulders. Geography, for the moment, was dismissed from mind.

"Bunter! Do you know anything about the occurrence at the school gates in the fog yesterday?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No, sir! I—I mean yes, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—I know that it wasn't Coker that buzzed that hanky full of soot, sir. I—I thought I—I ought to let you know, sir."

"Certainly you should let me know, if you are stating the facts," snapped Mr. Quelch. "What do you know about the matter, Bunter? Did you witness the occurrence?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"You were out of the House, in that thick fog?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I got lost in it, sir—."

"You witnessed what happened at the gates?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"You saw the person who flung the handkerchief packed with soot?"

"I—I—I did sir. I—I was right on the spot."

"You say it was not Coker, of the Fifth Form?"

"It wasn't, sir! It—it was quite a different chap. It—it wasn't a senior man at all, sir."

"Bless my soul! You mean that it was a junior boy?"

"Yes, sir!"

"A Remove boy?"

"Yee-e-ees, sir," moaned Bunter.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips, hard. His gimlet-eyes shot round over his form, as if to pick out the unknown culprit. Then they returned to Bunter.

"If what you state is correct, Bunter, you have acted very rightly in telling me this," he said. "But you must give me proof of what you say. If it was not Coker, who was it?"

No reply from Bunter.

"Do you hear me, Bunter?" Quelch's voice was deep. "All the evidence is that Coker of the Fifth Form was the culprit. If you are seeking to delude me—"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It—it wasn't Coker, sir—it—it was a Remove fellow, sir, and—and he never meant it for you, sir, only I—I—I mean he—he couldn't see you in the fog, sir—he took you for somebody else, sir, and—and it was really an accident, sir—"

"Bless my soul! If that is true, it certainly makes the matter less serious," said Mr. Quelch. "Give me the boy's name, Bunter, and I shall question him and ascertain the precise facts."

"I—I—I—"

"His name!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I'm afraid to, sir," gasped Bunter.

"What? What? Unless you give me the boy's name, Bunter, I can only conclude that you have concocted this improbable story to delude me!" thundered the Remove master. "Give me his name at once."

"I—I—I—!" mumbled Bunter.

"I am aware," said Mr. Quelch, less thunderously, "that Greyfriars boys very properly regard it as a mean action for one boy to give information about another to the masters. I wholly approve of this. But this is an exceptional case, involving a possible miscarriage of justice. You must give me the boy's name, Bunter, as proof that your statement is the truth. There is no alternative."

"Yes, sir! No, sir! Only—only I'm afraid, sir—"

"I shall see that you do not suffer in any way for obeying my command to give me the boy's name, Bunter. You may rely on that."

"If—if I'm not to be punished, sir—"

"Of course you will not be punished, you stupid boy. All your form-fellows will, I am sure, realise that you have no choice in the matter."

"I—I—I mean, by you, sir—"

"By me!" Quelch stared blankly at the stammering Owl. "How can you be so stupid, Bunter, as to imagine for one moment that I should dream of punishing you, when what you have to tell me will prevent an act of injustice? Do not be so foolish, Bunter. Now give me the name."

"Oh! Thank you, sir! It—it—it—it was—"

"Who?" snapped Mr. Quelch, impatiently.

"Me, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Me, sir."

Billy Bunter had got it out at last. Now he stood blinking at his form-master in fear and trembling. And Henry Samuel Quelch stood gazing at him:

dumb. It really seemed as if Billy Bunter's reply had taken his breath away. He did not speak: and nobody in the Remove ventured to whisper. There was a long, long pause; during which a pin might have been heard to drop, in the Remove form-room.

There was a dead, dead silence.

The juniors fairly held their breath. Mr. Quelch stood as if transfixed, staring at the fat Owl.

Whatever reply he had expected from Bunter, he certainly had not expected that one!

He stared at Bunter. The Remove fellows stared at him. Bunter had owned up! Bootings, perhaps with the aid of his fat conscience, had had their effect! He had revealed himself as the culprit! But, with an artfulness that really was amazing, he had done so in such a way as to elude the penalty due to the culprit. Quelch, of course, had expected some other name from him. He had



There was a dead, dead silence

given his own—but not till it had been expressly stipulated that he should not be punished if he gave the name!

He had, in fact, tricked Quelch. Nevertheless, what Quelch had said, he had said! Plainly he had stated that Bunter should not be punished, if he gave the culprit's name! Bunter had given it. That was that! Could Quelch go back on his word?

The juniors stared at Bunter. They stared at Quelch. In dead silence, they wondered what was coming next.

Bob Cherry ventured to whisper:

"Oh, crumbs! Can you beat it?"

The silence continued. Quelch's gaze, at Bunter, was expressive, and grew more and more so. Billy Bunter blinked back at him anxiously. A man couldn't go back on his word—especially a school-master. But the fat Owl had a lingering doubt. There was a risk, and he had had to take the risk. Every moment of that long silence was a very anxious moment for William George Bunter.

Mr. Quelch broke it at last.

"Bunter!" His voice, never perhaps very musical, sounded like the grinding of a file.

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"You confess that it was you who flung the soot in the fog yesterday."

"Yes, sir! I—I didn't know it was you, sir, in the fog—I—I thought it was somebody else—and—and as you thought it was Coker, sir, I—I thought I—I ought to own up, sir—." mumbled Bunter.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

He had been smothered and choked with soot. It had roused his deepest ire. The culprit stood before him. Seldom or never had Henry Samuel Quelch desired so keenly to get busy with his stoutest cane. He was prepared to believe that the obtuse Owl had blundered in the fog, and that certainly lessened the gravity of the deed. All the same, he had had the soot! It was on his lips to order Bunter to stand out, and bend over—his fingers almost itched to grasp the cane!

But—what he had said, he had said!

"Very well, Bunter." The words came slowly, but they came. "I have told you that if you gave the culprit's name, you should not be punished." He paused for a moment. "Otherwise, I should administer the most severe caning that has ever been administered in this form-room."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"In the circumstances, the matter ends here!" added Mr. Quelch.

Bunter was glad to hear it!



"I say, you fellows."

"We shall now resume!"

Geography was resumed. Quelch had been as good as his word—and the matter ended there!—dismissed and done with. There was good news coming to Coker of the Fifth—and there were no more bootings coming to Billy Bunter! So the outcome was satisfactory all round—except, perhaps, to Mr. Quelch.

CHAPTER X

THANKS FROM COKER?

I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter was grinning cheerily, after third school, when he rolled up to the Famous Five in the quad. The clouds had rolled by: and Bunter's fat face was as bright as the wintry sunshine.

"You fat villain!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"You artful toad!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—."

"The artfulness of the esteemed toad is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Quelch's face, in the form-room, was worth a guinea a box," he said. "But he had to stand by his word. Fancy that fat ass thinking up such a dodge!"

"It's all right for Coker now, anyway," said Nugent.

"Of course, that's why I put Quelch wise," said Bunter, "I wouldn't let another fellow take my gruel! Not my style! Kindest friend and noblest foe, you know—that's me, as Shakespeare said."

"Not Tennyson?" asked Harry.

"No, Shakespeare!" said Bunter, positively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at," said Bunter, "I know these things, and you fellows don't! But never mind that. Seen Coker about?"

"I saw Quelch speaking to him, after class," said Bob. "Coker knows it's all right now."

"Well, I want to see him," said Bunter. "Coker's a swob, and he smacked my head, but he's bound to feel grateful, now I've got him off, by owning up in a frank and manly way—."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He will want to thank me," said Bunter, "And the least he can do, after I've got him off, is to ask a fellow to a spread in his study. You know Coker's spreads! Lavish! I say, know where he is?"

"Here he comes!" answered Bob, "Looks as if he's looking for somebody."

"Me, I expect," said Bunter, cheerily, "Coker's rather a ruffian, but there's such a thing as gratitude." Bunter blinked round through his spectacles at a burly figure bearing down on the group of juniors. "I say, Coker! Looking for me? Here I am, old chap."

Horace Coker strode up.

"Oh, here you are, Bunter!" he said, "I've heard from Quelch that I'm not to go up to the Head, after all—it's come out that it was you who sooted him. You fat, foozling, frabby lump of lard—."

"Eh!"

"Leaving it on me!" said Coker, breathing hard, "Leaving it on me all this while, right up to the last minute! You fat scoundrel—."



"He will want to thank me."

"Oh, really, Coker—."

"Take that!"

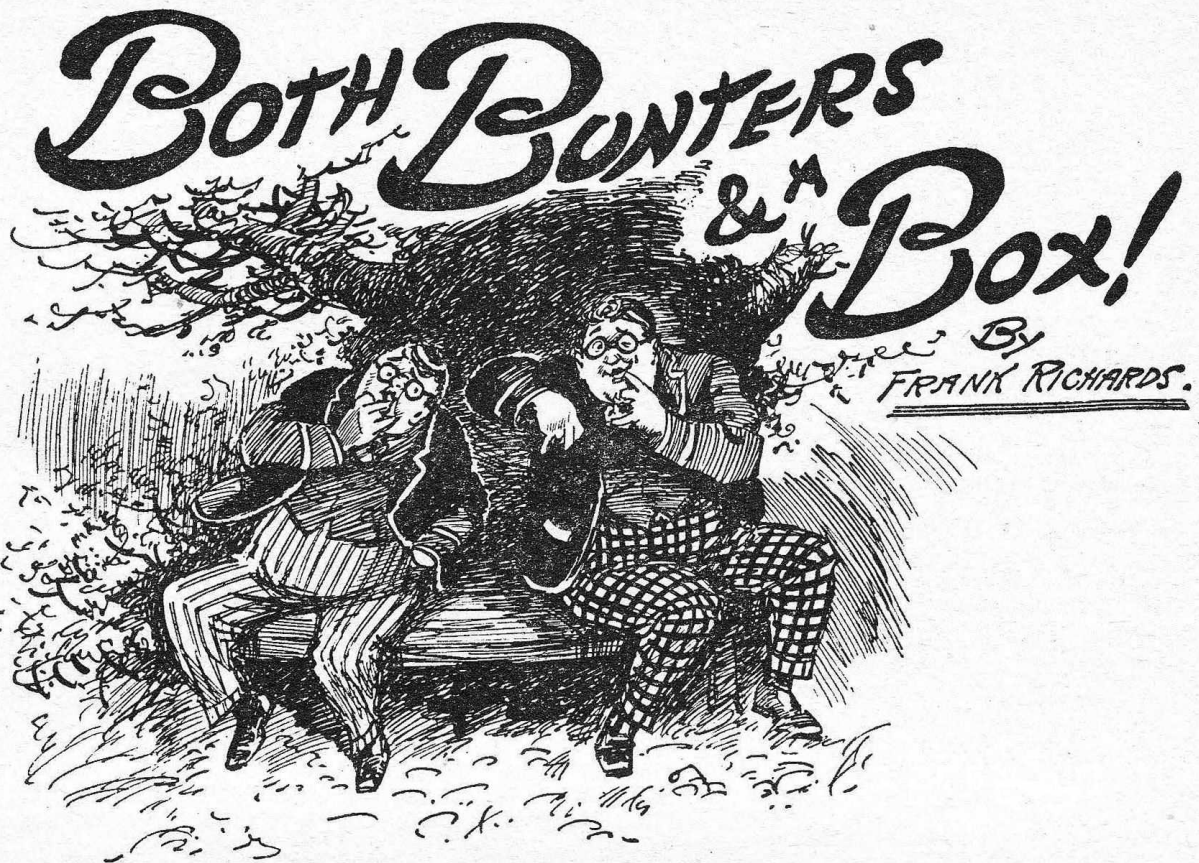
"Wow!"

"And that—."

"Yarooooh!"

Apparently it was not gratitude that Bunter was scheduled to receive from Coker of the Fifth! Not an invitation to one of the lavish spreads in Coker's study! Nothing of the kind! A fat Owl, yelling, fled as if for his fat life. After him rushed Horace Coker, letting out one foot after another, dribbling Billy Bunter across the quad like a fat football: leaving Harry Wharton and Co. laughing. It was, in their opinion, if not in the fat Owl's, a just reward for Brainy Bunter.

THE END



The two Bunters exchanged a blissful grin

CHAPTER I

BILLY BUNTER winked at Sammy Bunter.
Sammy Bunter winked back at Billy.

Both grinned.

Both, probably, would have chuckled aloud: but it was their cue to keep quiet. So they suppressed their chuckles, and contented themselves with grinning and winking.

It was really amusing—to the Bunters.

They were seated on a bench under one of the ancient elms of Greyfriars. They had been discussing ways and means. It was morning break: and both Bunters liked a spot of tuck in break. Billy—not for the first time—had been disappointed about a postal-order. So he had looked for Sammy, in the hope that his minor might be in more prosperous financial circumstances. But, as it happened, Sammy was looking for his major, for the very same reason. Both, it transpired, were in the sad and sorrowful state known as “stony”. Unless Billy could “touch” some Remove fellow for a little loan, or unless Sammy

could raise the wind in the Second Form, there was no spot of tuck for either Bunter.

And then—!

Then Harry Wharton and Co. happened. It was really odd that, as the Famous Five came along, they did not notice the two fat figures on the bench under the elm. Apparently, however, they noticed nothing. They stopped under the tree, on the other side of the trunk: which then hid the Bunters from their view if they had looked round. And the first remark that reached two pairs of fat ears was, in Bob Cherry's voice, "Keep this dark from Bunter."

So it was not surprising that Billy and Sammy winked at one another, and grinned. The Famous Five, evidently, had stopped there to discuss some matter that was to be kept dark from Bunter—in Bunter's hearing! Neither Bunter had any objection to listening-in to a discussion not intended for their ears. They winked, and grinned, and listened-in.

"If Bunter got on to this—!" It was Johnny Bull's voice.

"Once Bunter's on the track of tuck—!" It was Frank Nugent speaking next.

"Well, we all know Bunter," said Harry Wharton.

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

"Bunter ought jolly well to have a lesson about snooping other fellows' tuck!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, Bunter can't help it!" said Bob Cherry. "But so long as we keep it dark from Bunter, it will be all right. If Bunter knew that there were cakes and jam-tarts and dough-nuts about—."

"Would he be after them?" said Nugent.

"Would he?" chuckled Bob. "Sort of! But he won't know, so that's all right."

Two Bunters exchanged a blissful grin. Cakes and jam-tarts and dough-nuts about—when both Bunters were simply yearning for even a spot of tuck! Evidently this was their lucky morning! If either Bunter, or both, had the remotest chance at those cakes, and jam-tarts, and dough-nuts, it was quite certain that not the ghost of a cake, a jam-tart, or a dough-nut, would be left for the proprietors thereof. They grinned: and listened breathlessly.

"Now, let's see, here's the list," went on Bob Cherry. "One dozen jam-tarts—two dozen dough-nuts—half-a-dozen of those small cakes, and one of the big plum cakes. We can get them all at the tuck-shop. Think that's enough?"

"Might shove in a few meringues," suggested Nugent.

"All right—say half-a-dozen."

"And a dozen oranges," said Harry Wharton.

"Right-ho—a dozen oranges. What about half-a-dozen bottles of ginger-pop?"

"Good! And a bunch of bananas."

"And a couple of dozen ham sandwiches."

"And some hard-boiled eggs—all right on a picnic."

"And a box of biscuits."

"Okay! But I say, that will run up rather a bill at the tuck-shop, if we get that lot!" said Bob.

"Oh, never mind the bill. We don't have a picnic every day. We shan't have any trouble about the bill."

"Well, that's that," said Bob Cherry. "Let's get along to the tuck-shop. The bell will be going soon."

"Hold on a minute, though," said Johnny Bull, "If you leave that stack of tuck in the study, it mayn't be there when we go for it."

"Oh, Bunter doesn't know a thing."

"That's all very well: but you know how he noses out tuck. It wouldn't be safe in the study cupboard."



"Well, you can't be too careful, with Bunter about . . ."

"That's all right," said Harry Wharton. "There's a box in my study—that heavy old box we use for an extra chair sometimes. We can stow the tuck in that—even Bunter would never think of nosing into that old box."

Billy Bunter winked again at Sammy, as he heard that!

Sammy winked back.

"Um!" said Johnny Bull. He seemed doubtful. "Is there a lock on the box?"

"No: but—"

"That's all right," said Bob Cherry. "I'll put a nail in the lid, and that will be as safe as a lock, if anybody thought of nosing into it."

"Well, you can't be too careful, with Bunter about—"

"My dear chap, Bunter won't get so much as the smell of a dough-nut out of that box. You can bank on that," said Bob Cherry. "Now let's get along—we're due for third school soon."

Footsteps receded.

Two Bunters blinked round the trunk of the elm. They had a back view of Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The Famous Five walked away, without a backward glance. Then the two Bunters grinned at one another.

"Oh! crikey!" said Billy Bunter.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Sammy.

"Beasts!" said Bunter. "All that tuck for a picnic, and they never thought of asking a pal—after all I've done for them! I say, Sammy—"

"I say, Billy—"

"We're in on this!" said Billy.

"We jolly well are!" said Sammy, emphatically.

"Keeping it dark from me, as if I'd get after their tuck!" said Bunter. "Serve them jolly well right if I did, Sammy. I rather think I will!"

"Me too!" said Sammy.

"Plenty for both of us, from what they said," grinned Bunter. "They must be rolling in money, to-day. And only this morning, not one of them would lend me half-a-crown, though I told them I'd been disappointed about a postal-order! Jolly artful of them to stack their tuck in that old box, instead of the study cupboard. I'd never have thought of looking there. I fancy I'm going to look into that box, what? He, he, he!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Sammy.

Billy Bunter wrinkled his fat brows in thought.

"We shall have to be late for class," he said. "The bell will be going, by the time they've stacked away that tuck in the box. It will be all right for us when

all the fellows are in the form-rooms. Quelch will give me lines if I'm late, but it's worth it."

"Twigg can give me all the lines he likes, after I've had a go at that box," grinned Sammy.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Sammy.

One member of the Remove, and one member of the Second Form, did not turn up on time, in their respective form-rooms, when the bell rang for third school. Billy Bunter was missed by Mr. Quelch: Sammy Bunter by Mr. Twigg. Both Bunters were too busy to bother about lessons.



"Blow!" hissed Billy Bunter

CHAPTER II

"**B**LOW!" hissed Billy Bunter.

He glared at a box in No. 1 Study in the Remove. Sammy gave it a simultaneous glare. Both Bunters were deeply annoyed.

Other fellows were in the form-rooms. At the risk of lines for unpunctuality, Billy and Sammy were in a Remove study. Both of them agreed that it was worth lines from Quelch and Twigg, to have a "go" at that box in Harry Wharton's study—and it was likely to be an extensive "go". In matters of tuck, neither Billy nor Sammy cared to remember that there was a distinction between "meum" and "tuum". They were prepared to dip deep into that box: and howsoever ample the supply, it was improbable that there would be much left after the two Bunters were through. But there was, so to speak, a lion in the path! The lid had been nailed down on that box.

They had heard Bob Cherry state that he would put a nail in the lid, as there was no lock. Just one nail would have been only a temporary difficulty: the lid could have been prised up somehow. But there was more than one nail. Bob had done the nailing not wisely but too well! There was a whole array of nails and they were quite long ones, and hammered well home. At least a dozen nails secured the lid of that old wooden box: and the two Bunters glared at it in intense exasperation.

"We can't get that open!" said Sammy.

"Beasts!" said Bunter. He breathed wrath and indignation. "Suspicious beasts, you know! Fancying a fellow might be after their tuck! They've bunged it all in that old box and nailed it up, and we can't get it open without a hammer and chisel and a pair of pincers. Beasts!"

"Can't kick up a row with a hammer here," said Sammy. "Somebody would be sure to hear. It would jolly well take time too."

Billy Bunter blinked over the box through his big spectacles. Inside that box, he could not doubt, were stowed all the attractive things that the Famous Five intended for a picnic. Cakes, dough-nuts, jam-tarts, ginger-beer, oranges, bananas, biscuits—so near, yet so far! Billy Bunter's extensive mouth had watered as he listened to the list under the elm. Seldom had he been on the track of so extensive a supply of tuck. And what a spot of sheer luck it was, that he had been able to listen-in, and learn exactly where to look for that stack of tuck! And now—not so much as the smell of a dough-nut, as Bob had said, reached him from that ample supply. And the minutes were ticking away—and

he was already late for class with Quelch, as Sammy was for class with Mr. Twigg.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

That box was securely nailed. With a hammer and chisel and pincers, it could be penetrated: but it certainly would take time, and make a great deal of noise during that time. Billy Bunter's idea had been to plunge fat paws into that box without delay. He realized now that a change of plan was indicated.

"We can't bu'st it here, Sammy," he said, at last, "and it would take too jolly long if we could. We can't stay out of form much longer. But we're jolly well not going to leave it here for those beasts to walk off this afternoon. That box ain't going to be here when they come out of form, see?"

"Good egg!" grinned Sammy. "But—"

"It's jolly heavy." Bunter tipped the box, and was quite surprised to find out how heavy it was. Even the extensive supply of tuck that he had heard enumerated seemed hardly to account for the weight. Possibly the Famous Five



Bunter . . . was surprised to find out how heavy it was!

had added still further supplies. Anyhow, the weight of that box was satisfactory in one way—it indicated that it was full inside. “We can manage it between us, Sammy—we shall have to. It’s a goner if it’s still here when they come out after class. We’ve got to shift it.”

Bunter reflected for a moment or two.

“My study wouldn’t do,” he went on. “They might look there—it would be like them to think of me if tuck was missing. Fellows always do, somehow. We can get it up to the attic. Nobody will hear hammering from there, when we get going on it. I can get a hammer from Cherry’s tool-chest in his study. See?”

“Let’s!” agreed Sammy.

“After third school, I’ll get a hammer and chisel and pincers and we’ll go up,” said Bunter. “They can hunt for their dashed old box, while we’re up in the attic scoffing the tuck, see? Lend a hand, Sammy—there’ll be a row if we don’t get into form soon.”

“Go it!” said Sammy.

Both Bunters heaved at the heavy box. They gasped for breath as they heaved.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter. “It’s too jolly heavy to carry, Sammy. Trundle it.”

They trundled the box, end over end, out of the study. They trundled it the length of the Remove passage, to the stair at the end. There they halted to pant for breath. Trundling the box further was impracticable: it couldn’t be trundled up a steep stair: it had to be carried up. Having recovered their breath a little they heaved the box up the first stair. Then they stopped to pant again.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

“Oh, scissors!” gasped Sammy.

Then they heaved again, up another stair. Another pause for panting—and another heave! In that narrow old staircase that led up to the attics there were about twenty steps: but it seemed to the two Bunters that there were about five hundred. They were gasping and perspiring when they reached the landing at the top.

“Oh, lor!” mumbled Bunter, mopping a fat brow.

“Oh jiminy!” gasped Sammy, similarly occupied.

Now it was possible to trundle again, and they trundled the box into the attic. It was a tremendous relief to land it there at last. It was painful to leave it there, with its hidden treasures untasted. Still, there was the prospect of a gorgeous spread after third school, when they revisited that remote attic with a hammer, a chisel, and a pair of pincers. For the moment, Billy Bunter and Sammy Bunter had to be satisfied with pleasure in prospect.

"Come on," said Bunter. "We're awfully late—Quelch will be waxy."

"So will Twigg!" said Sammy. "Come on."

They left the attic, carefully closing the door.

Their anticipations that their respective form-masters would be "waxy" were realized. Mr. Quelch gave Billy Bunter a glare and fifty lines. Mr. Twigg gave Sammy a frown, and fifty lines. Nevertheless, both Bunters looked quite cheery in third school, that morning, with their fat minds dwelling on the tremendous feast that was to follow.

CHAPTER III

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter jumped, and dropped a hammer.

"Oh!" he gasped.

He spun round, startled and alarmed. He had not, naturally, expected Bob Cherry in No. 13 Study. After third school, it was usually as certain as anything could be, that Bob would be out in the open air.

Yet there he was, coming in at the study doorway, and startling a fat Owl with his sudden cheery roar.

Billy Bunter was in Bob Cherry's study: busy! He had sorted out Bob's tool-chest. Generally, that tool-chest was easy enough to find—but for some reason, unknown to Bunter, it had been shoved out of sight under the table, and he was several minutes in finding it. Having found it, he was selecting a hammer, a chisel, and a pair of pincers from it: when Bob's roar made him jump and drop the hammer.

Bob stared at him. From behind Bob, the smiling dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked in. Why they had come up to their study, Bunter did not know: but it was very irritating. In the circumstances, he did not want to be spotted in the act of borrowing tools.

"What are you up to in my study, old fat man?" inquired Bob.

"Oh! Nothing!" stammered Bunter. "I—I—I mean, you—you would not mind lending me your hammer, old chap, would you?"

Bunter would have preferred to keep the hammer dark. But it lay on the floor where he had dropped it. He stooped and picked it up.

"Well, you might ask a fellow, before you start rooting about his study," said Bob. "What the dickens do you want a hammer for?"

"Oh Nothing—I—I mean—" Bunter cudgelled fat brains. Certainly he could not explain to a member of the Co. why he wanted a hammer! But the



"What are you doing in my study, old fat man?" inquired Bob

unveracious fat Owl was seldom at a loss for a fib. "I—I mean—there's a nail in the armchair in my study, and I—I want to knock it out—just a nun-nun-nail in the—the armchair, if you'll lend me the hammer—"

"Okay!" said Bob, cheerily. "You can borrow the hammer if you like. I'll tell you what," added Bob, "I'll come along and help."

"Eh?"

"I'll help you handle that armchair—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. It was quite a kind offer, for Bob was rather good at the carpenter's art, while Bunter was anything but! Nevertheless, it was not an offer Bunter was likely to accept: considering the actual use to which he planned to put that hammer! "Oh! No! Don't you bother—"

"No bother at all," said Bob. "You come and help too, Inky."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded and grinned.

"The helpfulness will be terrific," he agreed.

"I—I—I don't want any help!" stammered Bunter. "I can manage all right. It—it's only just a nail in the table—"

"As well as in the armchair?" asked Bob.

"I—I mean in the armchair!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I—I'll take these pin-cers and the —the chisel, if you don't mind—"

"Oh, do!" said Bob. "Sure you wouldn't like me to help—?"

"Quite sure!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, look here, I'll carry the tool-chest along to your study for you," said Bob. "Then you'll have all the tools you want—"

"Oh! No! I—I should have to carry it back, and it's rather heavy—"

"Oh, that's all right! I'll wait while you knock out that nail and carry it back myself," said Bob, affably.

Billy Bunter breathed hard. This was disconcerting: as there was no nail to be knocked out of the armchair in his study: and he was anxious to head, not for that study, but for the top attic, where Sammy was awaiting him. All he wanted of Bob, just then, was to see his back!

Before he could reply, there were footsteps in the Remove passage, and Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull came into the study. Both of them looked at Billy Bunter, and at the hammer in his fat hand.

"Bunter taking up carpentry?" asked Nugent.

"Mending something?" asked Johnny.

"Oh! Yes! No! I—I—I mean, there's an armchair in the nail in my study—I mean there's a nail in the study in my armchair—I mean—"

"We're going to help!" said Bob. "Bunter isn't much of a hand at carpentry, and I'm going to lend a hand. Come along to your study, Bunter, and we'll have that nail out in two shakes of a monkey's tail."

"We'll come and help," said Nugent.

"Yes, let's!" agreed Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter breathed harder. Really, it looked as if he never would get rid of those too obliging fellows. Why four members of the Co. had come up to the studies was an irritating mystery to him: as a rule they would have been punting a footer after third school. But here they were, gathered in No. 13 study: the very last place where Billy Bunter wanted them. He had to get rid of them somehow, and their kind offers of help in dealing with that imaginary nail in the armchair.

"I—I say, you fellows—?" he stammered.

"Come on!" said Bob.

"Look here, I don't want any help," said Bunter, desperately, "and I jolly well don't want a crowd in my study. You fellows can stay here."

The fat Owl rolled to the door.

Behind his plump back four fellows exchanged a grin. If Billy Bunter had seen that grin he might have wondered whether they guessed what he was going

to do with that hammer and chisel and pincers! But Bunter, of course, had no eyes in the back of his head, and he remained in ignorance of the fact that the chums of the Remove seemed to be enjoying a joke among themselves.

He rolled out of the study.

He almost rolled into the captain of the Remove. Harry Wharton stopped him.

"Hold on, Bunter—!"

"I—I'm in a hurry—"

"Stop a minute, all the same. I'm looking for a box."

"A—a—a bib-bib-box!"

"Yes. Seen anything of it?"

Billy Bunter, assuredly, had seen something of a box. But he was not likely to confide that fact to the captain of the Remove.

"What—what—what sort of a bib-bib-box?" he stammered.

"Rather a big box—the one we sometimes use for a chair in the study," explained Wharton. "We left it there before class, but somebody must have shifted it out of the study."



"Hold on, Bunter, I'm looking for a box"

"I—I—I wonder who!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, somebody has! Seen anything of it?"

"Oh! No!" Billy Bunter was never handicapped by any regard for the facts. "I—I haven't been near your study, Wharton. I—I don't know anything about your box. Sure it isn't in the study?"

"Well, it's big enough to be seen, if it was!" said Harry. "We left it there, but it's not there now."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody been monkeying with that box?" asked Bob Cherry.

"It's been shifted—."

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I expect somebody's shifted it for a jig-jig-joke," stammered Bunter. "I—I'd look in the other studies, if I were you, Wharton. I—I expect you'll find it in one of the studies. Anything in it?" added Bunter, in a casual sort of way.

"Oh, nothing of any value," answered Wharton, carelessly.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. He was not likely to believe that! Unless his fat ears had deceived him when he was listening-in under the elm, that box was stacked with jam-tarts, cakes, dough-nuts, ham sandwiches, ginger-pop, and other such attractive things. Wharton, apparently, was keeping that dark! But Bunter knew what he knew!

"Sure you've seen nothing of it, Bunter?" asked Harry.

"Quite!" answered Bunter. "I—I wasn't up in the studies just before class. I was late because I was out of the House when I was up in the studies—I mean when I wasn't up in the studies. Sorry, old chap, but I haven't an idea what's become of your box."

Harry Wharton, to Bunter's great relief, went into No. 13 study. The fat Owl was impatient to head for the attic: but he did not want so to do with eyes on him. The door of No. 13 closed, however, and not an eye among five pairs of the same was on Bunter now.

Grinning, the fat Owl rolled along to the stairs at the end of the passage. He mounted those stairs with unusual rapidity. Generally Bunter did stairs at the pace of an old fatigued snail. But circumstances alter cases. What awaited him in the attic drew Bunter like a magnet. He fairly skipped up those stairs.

In No. 13 study, five juniors looked at one another, and chuckled.

"I wonder," said Bob Cherry, ruminatively. "I wonder when it will dawn on that fat chump that we knew he was listening in when we were talking in the quad before class—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He won't guess that till he gets that box open!" chuckled Nugent.

"And then—!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He won't get it open in a hurry," said Bob. "I used up about half a pound of nails on that box, and I can tell you I drove them well in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's time Bunter had a lesson about snooping tuck," said Bob. "When he gets that box open, it may dawn on him that we fixed up that chat in the quad entirely for his benefit. But I don't suppose he'll be grateful! It's a thankless world."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob opened the door of No. 13 and glanced into the passage. It was vacant. Billy Bunter was gone.

"Come on," said Bob. "May as well get out and punt a footer. No use calling Bunter to join up—I expect he's busy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Five laughing juniors went down to punt a footer. Where that box was they did not know: but they had no doubt that wherever it was, Bunter was there too, and that he was busy! They were quite willing to leave him to it—and they left him to it!

CHAPTER IV

BILLY BUNTER rolled into the attic, gasping for breath. Sammy Bunter, sitting on a nailed box, blinked at him impatiently. Bunter minor had been waiting for Bunter major in the attic. He had cut up the stairs immediately Mr. Twigg dismissed the Second Form. He expected Billy there every minute: but a good many minutes had elapsed.

"You've come at last!" grunted Sammy.

"Oooh! Those stairs!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I'm all out of breath."

"I've been waiting a jolly long time," yapped Sammy. "Has it taken you all this while to borrow a hammer?"

"I had to look for Cherry's toolchest. Then all those beasts came up to the study and wasted time. Just as if they knew I was in a hurry to get away!" said Bunter. "They've missed the box: but they don't know where to look for it—he, he, he! I expect they're rooting through the studies now—he, he, he! Wharton said there was nothing of value in it. He wasn't going to let on that it was packed with tuck! He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter chuckled breathlessly.



"You've come at last!" grunted Sammy

"We jolly well know what's in it!" grinned Sammy. "We heard them going over the list in the quad. I say, get it open."

"Here's the hammer."

"Go it!"

Neither Bunter was much given to exerting himself. But both were eager to get that box open. Hammer and chisel and pincers were soon busily at work.

Bang! bang! bang! resounded in the attic. That remote attic was too remote for the sounds to be heard below. Both Bunters were feeling quite safe from interruption and discovery.

But it was an arduous task. Bob Cherry had not spared the nails. Nails innumerable secured the lid of that old box: and every one of them had been driven in to the head.

Hammer banged on chisel, and the chisel wrenched, and nails, one by one, were loosened, and gripped in the pincers and dragged out. Nail after nail

scattered on the attic floor, till there was quite a sea of nails. Still there were more nails to be drawn, before the lid could be prised up.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. "What did the silly ass nail it up like this for, I'd like to know?"

"He meant to keep his tuck safe!" gasped Sammy. "I say, pile in, Billy—we don't want to be up here when the dinner-bell goes."

"Blow him and his nails!" panted the fat Owl.

"Get on with it."

Bang! bang! bang! Billy Bunter got on with it, with the hammer and chisel: Sammy Bunter with the pincers. More and more nails were extracted. At last—at long, long last—the lid was loose: and two pairs of fat hands dragged at it, and dragged it up.

"Now—!" gasped Billy.

"Now—" gasped Sammy.

It was quite a large box. Its weight had taxed the efforts of both Bunters to get it up to the attic. So the quantity of tuck it contained must really have been enormous. Two wide mouths watered at the prospect. Four fat hands clutched up a layer of old newspapers that covered the contents of the box.

And then—!

"Oh!" gasped Billy.

"Oh!" gasped Sammy.

They gazed into the box! They looked, for the moment, as if two pairs of eyes would pop through two pairs of spectacles. Indeed, for a moment or two, they could hardly believe their eyes or their spectacles.

After what they had overheard under the elm, they knew—or at least fancied they knew—what was in that box: jam-tarts, cakes, dough-nuts, ginger-pop, ham sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, biscuits—! But no such things met their astonished eyes. There was not the ghost of a cake, or a jam-tart, or a dough-nut, or a sandwich—not the spectre of a bottle of ginger-pop—not the phantom of an orange or a banana!

What met the astounded gaze of the two Bunters was a stack of old bricks, carefully and neatly packed in the box. Bricks! Merely that, and nothing more!

"Oh!" repeated Billy, faintly.

"Oh!" moaned Sammy.

"It—it—it's a lot of—of old bricks—."

"Just old bricks!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Oh, scissors!"

Both the Bunters had good appetites. They could eat almost anything.



"It . . . it . . . it's a lot of . . . of old bricks . . ."

But both of them drew the line at dusty old bricks! The contents of that box were safe from the most voracious members of the Remove and the Second Form at Greyfriars!

"Bricks!" moaned Bunter.

"Bricks!" groaned Sammy.

"Nothing to eat—"

"Nothing at all—"

"We—we—we've dragged a box of old bricks up all those stairs—" gasped Billy Bunter. "I—I say, is Cherry off his rocker? What did he want to nail up a lot of old bricks in that box for? We heard what they were saying in the quad—it was tuck they were going to pack in that box—"

"You silly ass!" hooted Sammy. It dawned on Sammy. "It's a leg-pull! They jolly well knew we were there behind that tree—"

"Oh!" gasped Billy.

"They jolly well piled it on for us to hear! This is what they meant all along! There wasn't any tuck at all!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Just pulling our legs—."

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

"Rotters!" hissed Sammy.

"Oh, lor'!"

Two Bunters blinked at one another across that box of old bricks. They understood now. Harry Wharton and Co. had deliberately gone through that enticing list of comestibles in their hearing, aware that they were listening-in. There was no tuck! There never had been any tuck! There had been nothing but a playful scheme to pull a fat leg. And both Bunters had fallen for it: and they had lugged a heavy box up endless stairs and laboured hard to extract innumerable nails—only to be rewarded with a view of a stack of old dusty bricks! Their feelings, as they realised it, could hardly have been expressed in words.

Slowly and sadly they rolled out of the attic.

CHAPTER V

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's fat face did not indicate that he was enjoying life! He rolled in the quad, looking as if all the woes of the universe, and a few over, had landed in a heap on his fat shoulders. Like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and could not be comforted.

"Beasts!" was his reply.

"Anything up, Bunter?" asked Nugent.

"Beast!"

"Is the upfulness terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter?" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Beast!"

"Seen anything of a box?" inquired Harry Wharton.

"Beast!"

"Done with that hammer?" asked Bob.

"Beast!"

"Did you get that nail out of that armchair?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

Billy Bunter's vocabulary seemed limited. But it was very expressive. It was a disconsolate and exasperated Owl: and the glare he cast after the Famous Five, as they walked on, laughing, might almost have cracked his spectacles. He was the only fellow in the Remove who failed to see anything funny in the episode of Both Bunters and a Box!

THE END

HOME FOR THE HOLS!

By FRANK RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

“MAULY, old man—.”

“What’s up?”

“Is the upfulness terrific, my esteemed Mauly?”

“Give it a name, old fellow.”

“What hath chanced to-day, that Caesar looks so sad?” inquired Bob Cherry, quoting from recent Shakespeare in the Remove form-room.

The Famous Five, of the Greyfriars Remove, were quite concerned. It was most unusual to find Lord Mauleverer looking down in the mouth. His lordship was seldom exuberant: but he was always cheerful. When troubles came his way he was wont to meet them with equanimity.

Troubles did accrue sometimes. Mauly, excellent fellow as he was in many ways, was almost as lazy as Billy Bunter, and almost as careless in the matter of lessons. That led, not uncommonly, to spots of bother with Mr. Quelch, his form-master. Sometimes it led to severe admonitions from his guardian,

Sir Reginald Brooke. Nevertheless, it was unusual to see Mauly with a clouded face.

But it was clouded now.

Which was all the more surprising, because it was the day before break-up, and most faces at Greyfriars School were bright, in anticipation of the Christmas holidays. Quelch, and lessons, were going to be left behind, on the morrow. Yet Mauly's brow, for once, was clouded.

Coming on him in the quad, Harry Wharton and Co. stopped to inquire the cause. They liked Mauly—everybody liked old Mauly—so they were concerned.

"Oh! It's nothing, really," said Mauly, with an attempt at his accustomed cheerfulness. "I've no doubt it's all for my good, as nunky said in his letter."

"But what the dickens!" said Harry Wharton, puzzled. "You're going home for the holidays to-morrow—"

"That's washed out!" sighed Lord Mauleverer.

"Something happened to stop it?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Yaas."

"Hard luck," said Johnny Bull. "But—"

"But if you're not going home for the hols, why not join up with us?" asked Harry. "These chaps are all coming home with me, and we'd all be jolly glad if you'd come too, Mauly."

"Hear, hear!" said four voices in unison: and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh added that the hear-hearfulness was terrific.

"Wharton Lodge isn't quite up to the style of Mauleverer Towers," went on the captain of the Remove. "But—. We'd all be glad to have you, if you'll come."

"Jolly good of you," said Mauly. "But it can't be done. I'm booked. Me for school and extra toot."

"What?"

"That's the verdict!" said Lord Mauleverer, sadly. "Quelch seems to have been giving me rotten reports the last term or two. Nunky has put his foot down. My uncle's a jolly old boy, really, and I like him no end: but he can be tough. He seems to think that I take things too easily—"

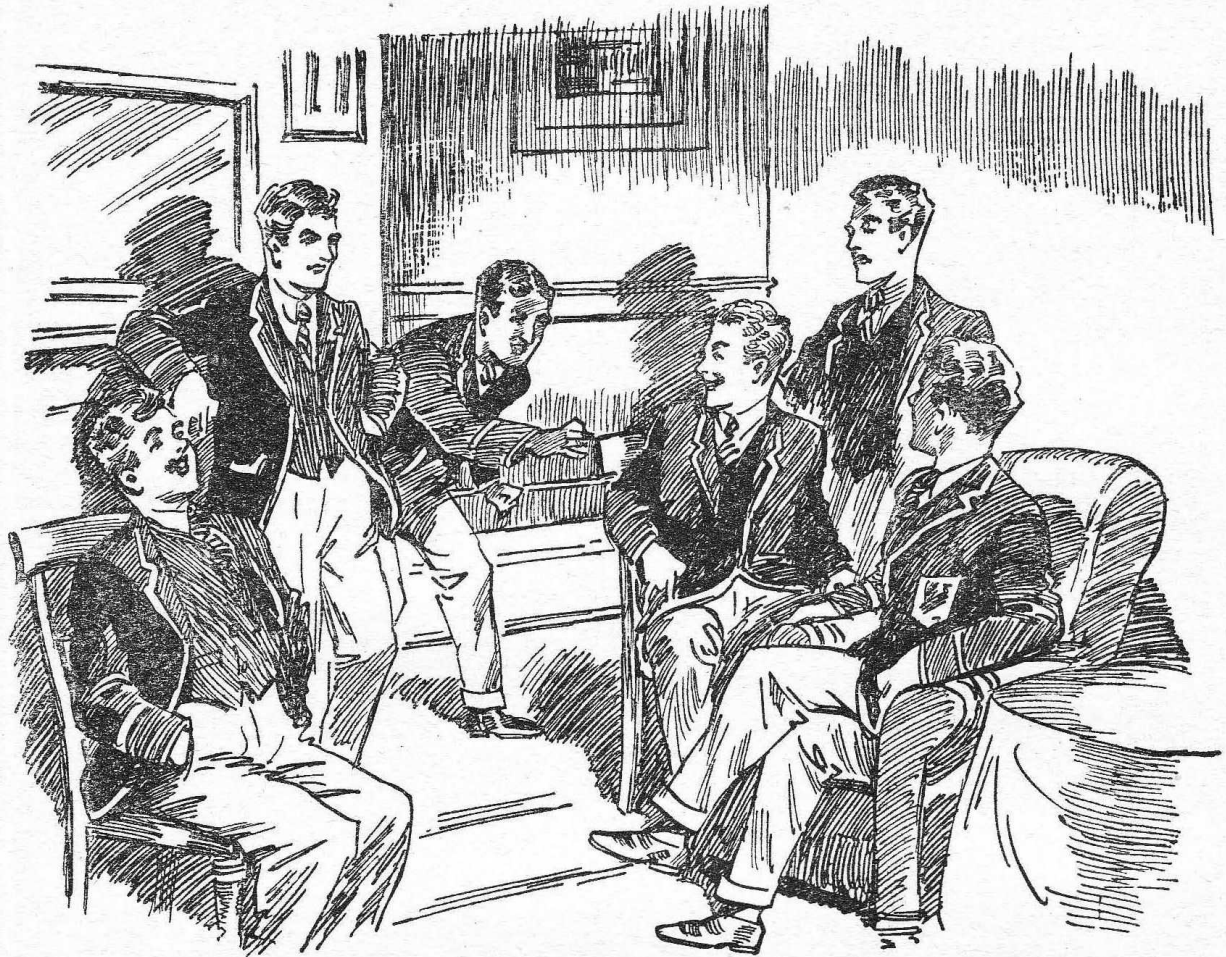
"Perhaps you do, a trifle!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Yaas—I shouldn't wonder," agreed Lord Mauleverer. "Anyhow, nunky's put his foot down. He's fixed it up for me to stay at the school over the hols and have extra tuition every day from Quelch—"

"Oh, scissors!"

"What rotten luck!"

"Poor old Mauly!"



"Jolly good of you"—said Mauly, "but it can't be done"

"That will put me in better shape for school work next term. Good thing for me, really. I daresay nunky's right. I may have let things slide a bit—and it's time I pulled up. Drastic beneficial, and all that. Only it will seem a bit slow," sighed Lord Mauleverer. Then he smiled. "It came as a bit of a shock—but when a fellow asks for it, he must expect to get it. I'm going to play up—and while you're doing your Christmas stunts at Wharton Lodge, you can think of me up to the neck in irregular verbs with Quelch, and simply burstin' with knowledge when you come back next term."

And Lord Mauleverer, with a cheery nod, sauntered on his way, leaving the chums of the Remove more concerned for him than he was for himself. No doubt it was a blow: but Mauly was taking it on the chin.

"Hard luck on old Mauly!" said Harry.

"Good for him, in the long run!" said Johnny Bull.

"Um! Yes! But—"

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked a fat voice. Billy Bunter rolled up to the Famous Five. "I say, I've been looking for you chaps. I say, you know we break up here to-morrow. I say, about Christmas—"

"Run for your lives!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter had more to say, on the subject of the Christmas holidays. But he had no chance of saying it. Nobody in the Greyfriars Remove was keen to discuss that subject with William George Bunter. Five laughing juniors scampered away in time.

CHAPTER II

"I SAY, Mauly."

"Shut that door!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Buzz off—I'm busy."

It was the following day, and Greyfriars School was in the process of breaking up. Form-rooms and studies were deserted—passages echoed to hurried footsteps and bumping of boxes. Some fellows were already gone, others on the point of going. Why Lord Maulever had shut himself up in his study, with so much animation on all round him, Billy Bunter did not know. Often, at the end of term, a magnificent car arrived for Mauly. No such car had yet arrived—Billy Bunter's little round eyes and big round spectacles had been on the look-out for it. Nor was Mauly to be discerned among the crowds of Greyfriars fellows, when those little round eyes and big round spectacles looked for him. But Billy Bunter had found him at last—in his study. Mauly was sitting at the study table writing a letter—a quite unusual occupation when every other fellow in the school was thinking of home and holidays.

"Busy?" repeated Bunter. "What are you busy about, Mauly?"

"Letter to nunky. You're interrupting. Buzz off, like a good bluebottle."

"Oh, really, Mauly!"

Bunter did not buzz off. He rolled into the study.

Lord Mauleverer, who was an orphan, had several uncles. To which of them he was writing, Bunter did not know, and couldn't have cared less. A fellow who wasted time writing to any old uncle, on breaking-up day, was, in Billy Bunter's opinion, a silly ass. Anyhow it was a matter of no importance—and what Billy Bunter had to say was very important indeed. It was about the Christmas holidays.

Lord Mauleverer, that morning, was looking his usual cheerful self. The prospect of "hols" at school, and "extra toot" with Quelch during those hols, was not precisely exhilarating. But his cheery lordship never allowed anything to dash his cheery spirits for long. So his good-natured face had its accustomed amiable and placid expression, when the fat Owl of the Remove rolled in on him.

"Do buzz off, Bunter, when a fellow's busy writing a letter."

"Oh, never mind that!" said Bunter, airily. "What the dickens do you want to write to your uncle to-day for, Mauly?"

"It's about his arrangement for the hols," explained Lord Mauleverer. "I want to let him know that it's okay by me."

"Oh! The hols!" said Bunter. "As a matter of fact, Mauly, that's what I looked in to speak about."

Billy Bunter was quite glad that that subject had come up. It was one in



He sat on the corner of the table

which he was deeply interested. Nobody, so far, had asked Bunter for the "hols". Harry Wharton and Co. actually dodged him if he raised the subject. Quite probably Lord Mauleverer might have done the same. But the fat Owl having run him to earth, as it were, in his study, he had to take it. Mauly was, in fact, Bunter's last hope. The alternative was Bunter Villa. Happily unaware of the drastic change in Mauly's plans for the hols, Bunter was going to land himself at Mauleverer Towers—if he could.

"About the hols—," went on Bunter.

"Do be quite while a fellow's writing a letter!"

"I'll wait, if you like," said the fat Owl.

Lord Mauleverer's expression did not indicate that he "liked". Even Billy Bunter could not have supposed that Mauly was delighted to see him. But that, to Bunter, was a trifle light as air. Billy Bunter was somewhat pachydermatous. Anything short of a boot on his plump trousers was good enough for Bunter.

It was like Bunter to blink over Mauly's shoulder at the letter he was writing. Inquisitiveness was one of his many sins. The letter had not, however, proceeded very far. Mauly was a slow worker. So far it ran:

Dear Nunky,

Your letter came as a bit of a shock, but now I've thought it over, I rather think that you are right. Quelch certainly hasn't been pleased with me in class this term, and I'd better own up that I've been a bit slack. I'm jolly well going to pull up, and put my beef into it.

That was all so far. From which, Billy Bunter deduced that Mauly's guardian was not precisely pleased with his ward's progress at school, and had probably been "ragging" him on the subject. Bunter could sympathize—for he had been there himself, so to speak. At home, at Bunter Villa, the fat Owl's reports from school often caused a spot of stormy weather.

"Carry on, Mauly," he said. "I don't mind waiting."

But Lord Mauleverer did not carry on. Evidently Bunter did not intend to go, with what he had come to say unsaid. He sat on the corner of the table, prepared to wait. But he did not have to wait. Mauly laid down the pen.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Not finishing that letter now?" he asked. "Well, look here, old chap. I dropped in for a chat about the hols."

"Oh, dear!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

Bunter decided not to hear that.

"I haven't quite made up my mind yet," he resumed. "Smithy's rather keen for me to go with him, but—." Bunter shook a fat head. "Smithy's a bit of a



"You are the only chap I should care to do the hols with"

bounder, you know. Then there's Wharton's crowd—I was at his place last Christmas, and it wasn't too bad—but the fact is that I see quite enough of that mob at school. To tell the truth, Mauly, you're the only chap in the form that I should really care to do the hols with."

"Oh!"

"I mean it," said Bunter. "Not because you've got a topping place at Mauleverer Towers, or anything of that kind: but just because I like you so so much, old chap. Why shouldn't we stick together for the hols, Mauly?"

"But—!"

"After all, we're pals, ain't we?"

"Are we?"—

"Oh, really, Mauly! I say, is it a go? Let's settle it now old chap—the school's breaking up to-day, you know."

"Yaas! But—."

"Lots of time to finish that letter," said Bunter. "You won't be going off in the school bus with the mob."

"No! But—."

"I'll wait as long as you like. It's a go, then!" said Bunter. "Rely on me, Mauly: I won't let you down."

"But—!"

"But what?" asked Bunter. He did not want to hear of any "buts". He had settled the matter, whether Mauly had or not, and "buts" were superfluous.

"I'm not going home for the holidays." Mauly got it out, at last. "I'm not having Christmas at Mauleverer Towers. So you see—."

"That's all right, old chap," interrupted Bunter, breezily. "What does it matter where we are, so long as we're together? That's all I care about."

"But—."

"Leave it at that!" said Bunter. He slipped off the table, prepared now to go, and leave Mauly to finish his letter. "I don't care a bean about anything but sticking together for the hols, Mauly."

"I don't think you'd really care for it—."

"I jolly well would!" declared Bunter. "Stick together—that's all I care about."

"But—."

"It's a go, then," said Bunter.

"If you like. But—."

"That's settled then," said Bunter. "Not another word, old fellow. It's a fixture."

Bunter rolled to the door. He was not only willing to depart now, but anxious to do so—before Mauly could change his mind!

"But—," said Lord Mauleverer. Mauly seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of "buts". But his last "but" was wasted on Bunter, as the study door closed behind the fattest figure in the Remove.

Billy Bunter grinned cheerily as he rolled away down the Remove passage. Really he could hardly believe in his good luck.

Of all the Remove fellows that he regarded as possible victims, Mauly was the one he would have selected: and Mauly had proved an unexpectedly easy victim. Bunter could afford now to turn up his fat little nose at Wharton Lodge! Christmas with Mauly, whether at Mauleverer Towers, or at some other equally magnificent abode, made Harry Wharton's place in Surrey seem very small beer indeed, in comparison. It was no longer necessary for the Co. to "run for their lives" at the sight of William George Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had absolutely no use for them now. Billy Bunter rolled out into the quad in high feather.



Billy Bunter rolled out into the quad

Probably Bunter would have felt less tremendously bucked, had he lingered in Mauly's study to read the remainder of that letter over Mauly's shoulder. For the remainder ran:

I can't say that I shall exactly enjoy staying at school over the holidays, with extra tuition from Mr. Quelch. But I'm going to make the best of it, and I'm not grouching. So no more at present from your affectionate nephew,

HERBERT MAULEVERER.

"That's that!" said Lord Mauleverer, as he rose from the table. And leaving that epistle where it lay, his lazy lordship stretched himself on the settee under the window, for a much-needed rest after his exertions as a letter-writer.

CHAPTER III

"HALLO, hallo, hallo, there's the old fat bean."

Five pairs of eyes fell on Billy Bunter, as he rolled out of the House. Five faces had rather thoughtful expressions. As a matter of fact, Harry Wharton and Co. had been discussing Bunter, when he rolled into view.

The crowd was thinning out. Many fellows were gone. Vernon-Smith had rolled off in a Rolls: less wealthy fellows were content with the school 'bus to take them to the station at Courtfield. The bus in which the Famous Five were to embark, was filling up. But they had not yet taken their places. And—strange to relate—it was on Billy Bunter's account that they were lingering.

Hitherto the Co. had, like a good many other fellows, "dodged" Billy Bunter on the subject of the "hols". Billy Bunter's own opinion was that he was the life of any party: but somehow or other, Bunter had that opinion all to himself. Nobody, really, wanted Bunter, in the hols. Everybody seemed to have quite enough of him at school.

Nevertheless, perhaps under the ameliorating effect of the near approach of Christmas, Harry Wharton was thinking of adding the fat Owl to the party for Wharton Lodge.

"If you fellows wouldn't mind—!" he had said.

"It's your party," said Johnny Bull. "Don't mind us."

"Oh, rot," said Harry. "I know it's a bit thick to land the fat ass on you chaps. But—if you think you could stand it—."

"My dear chap," said Bob Cherry. "We've stood him before, and we can stand him again."

"The standfulness will be preposterous!" assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Right as rain!" said Frank Nugent.

Johnny Bull grunted. But he nodded. And so it was settled, when the Owl of the Remove rolled out of the House, and came into view. Billy Bunter was going to be asked to join the party at Wharton Lodge for the Christmas hols, and that was that! He was not, perhaps, likely to add to the enjoyment thereof: but it was a kindly impulse, and all the Co. were prepared to play up.

The fat Owl blinked at the group of juniors. But, rather to their surprise, he did not roll up to them. He gave them the most careless of blinks. Harry Wharton waved a hand to him, but the fat Owl did not seem to observe it. As Bunter did not roll over to them, they walked over to him, considerably perplexed. So far from making the most of this last chance of chatting about the hols, Bunter did not seem interested in them at all.

In fact, his blink at them was not merely careless, but slightly contemptuous.



Bunter rolled away

He had—though they were not yet aware of it—no use for these fellows now. Happily landed for the hols with the magnificent Mauly, Billy Bunter could afford to take a lofty line. And if Billy Bunter could afford to take a lofty line, Billy Bunter was the fellow to take it.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man,” greeted Bob, affably.

“Did you speak to me?” asked Bunter.

“Eh! You know I did, you fat ass.”

“Well, don’t yell.”

“What?”

“Don’t yell! You’re too jolly noisy, Bob Cherry.”

“You fat chump—.”

“That will do!” said Bunter. And he turned to roll away, the chums of the Remove staring at him in surprise. This was quite an unexpected Bunter.

“Hold on a minute, Bunter,” said Harry.

Bunter condescended to hold on.

"Well, what?" he asked. "Cut it short."

Harry Wharton breathed rather hard. This was not only an unexpected Bunter, but a far from agreeable Bunter. However, having made up his mind what he was going to do, he proceeded to do it.

"About the hols, Bunter," he said.

"Oh, the hols," said Bunter, carelessly. "What about the hols?" He smiled, a derisive smile. "I suppose you'll be going home to your little place."

"I'm going home, and these fellows are coming—."

"Wish you joy of it," said Bunter, sarcastically. "I'd have thought you had enough of them at school. I know I have."

"You cheeky, fat tick—!" began Bob Cherry.

"More than enough," said Bunter, calmly. "Glad to see the last of them."

That rather dimmed the kindly impulse to include the fat Owl in the Christmas party at Wharton Lodge. But Harry Wharton went on:

"Like to come along too, Bunter?"

"Eh?"

"We'll make you welcome, if you'd like to come," said Harry.

Bunter blinked at him.

Quite recently, the promptest of prompt affirmatives would have been his answer. But circumstances were changed now. Billy Bunter was booked for Christmas with Mauly: and words could hardly have expressed his disdain for Wharton Lodge. His fat lip curled as he answered:

"Thanks! Nothing doing."

"What?"

"Deaf?" asked Bunter. "I said nothing doing. Sorry, and all that. I'd give you a look-in these hols, if I could: but it couldn't be done."

The chums of the Remove gazed at him. This was not merely surprising—it was astonishing. For days on end Billy Bunter had been going up and down the Remove, seeking a landing for the hols. Fellows had been known to dodge round corners when they saw Bunter coming. And now—!

Billy Bunter grinned. He was enjoying this. This was an opportunity to let these fellows know what he thought of them.

"Sorry, of course," he went on. "But it wouldn't do, Wharton. I have quite enough of your crowd at school—I just couldn't stand them in the hols. as well. You can't expect it."

"You fat, fozzling, footling frump—!"

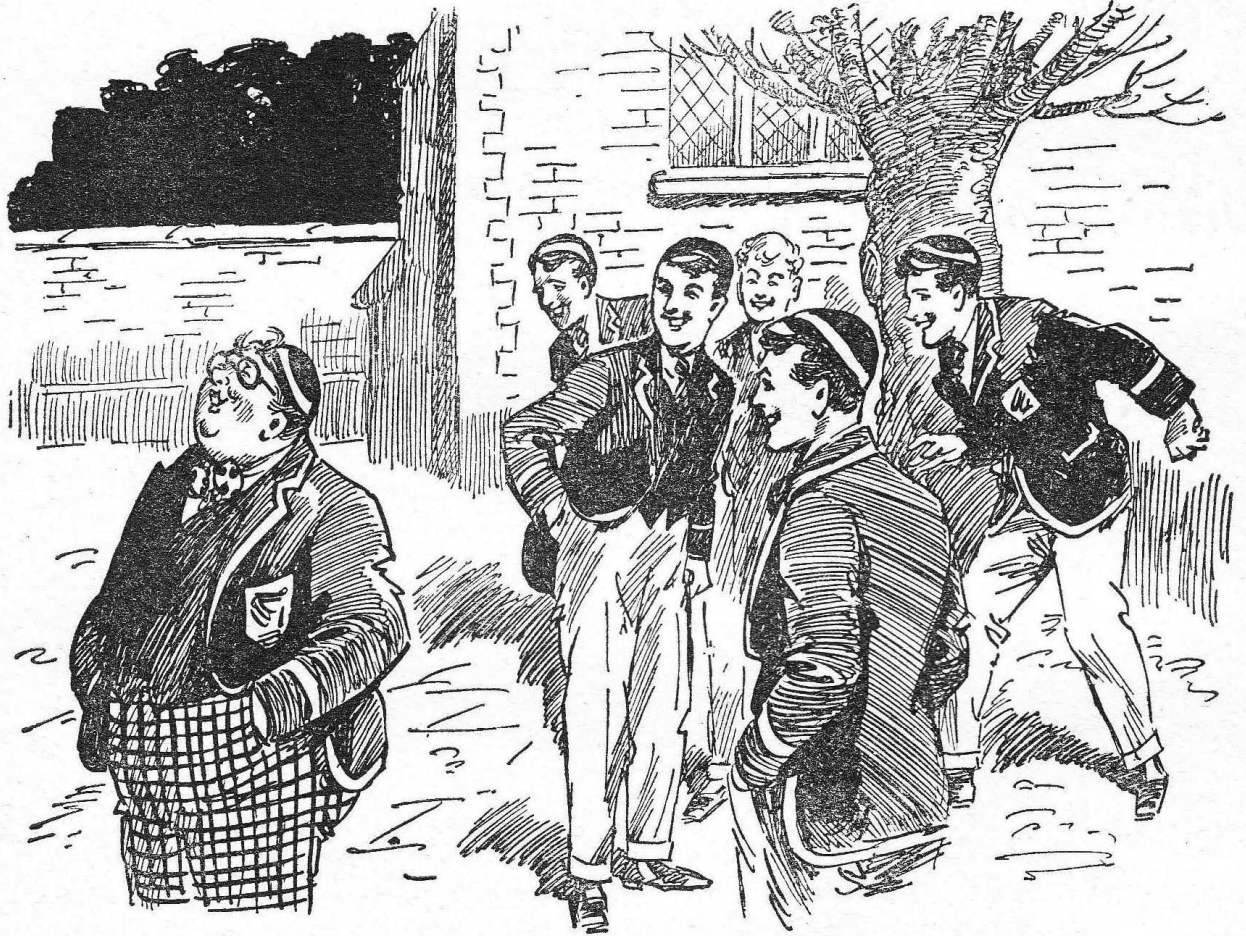
"You can call a fellow names," said Bunter, cheerfully. "But you jolly well won't get me to your little place for Christmas, Harry Wharton, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. I can't stand your pals, and, if you

don't mind my mentioning it, I can't stand you either, with your airs and graces. And that stuffy old Colonel, your uncle—I had enough of him, I can tell you, last time I had the hols at your show. Sorry I can't come: but if you want it plain, I wouldn't be found dead at Wharton Lodge. I don't want to rub it in, but you and your pals are a bit too much of a Bank Holiday crowd for me."

Never had Billy Bunter enjoyed himself more. The varying expressions on five astonished faces were a sheer delight to him. He had said that he didn't want to "rub it in": but he certainly had rubbed it in very thoroughly—perhaps a little too thoroughly.

"Thanks all the same!" added Bunter, with overwhelming sarcasm.

And with that, and his fat little nose in the air, the fat Owl rolled away: leaving five fellows staring after him, quite dumbfounded—turned down—unmistakably and emphatically turned down—by Billy Bunter. They were still



"Thanks all the same"

astonished, when the school bus rolled off with them to take their train at Courtfield: and Billy Bunter could never have guessed that relief was mingled with their astonishment!

CHAPTER IV

“MAULY!”
“Yaas?”

“Finished your letter?”

“Yaas.”

“Time’s getting on,” said Billy Bunter. “Almost everybody’s gone, Mauly.”

“Yaas.”

“I’ve been looking out for the car. It hasn’t turned up yet.”

“Eh! What car?”

“Oh, really, Mauly! Your car from Mauleverer Towers, of course. Aren’t you going home in the car?”

“Not at all.”

Grunt, from Bunter. Mauly, as a rule, went home by car. Bunter saw no reason why his manners and customs should be changed on this particular occasion. It annoyed Bunter. He preferred cars to trains. Still, he was going when Mauly went: that was the chief thing. He was still happily unaware that Mauly was not going at all.

Bunter had been watching and waiting for that car, while the rest of Greyfriars went their various ways. Now, when he came up to the study to ask Mauly about it, it was only to learn that there wasn’t going to be a car. Lord Mauleverer was still stretched in lazy ease on his settee. His letter still lay on the blotting-pad. Mauly had not yet found energy enough to enclose it in an envelope and take it down for the post. Bunter—naturally for Bunter—blinked at it.

The inquisitive fat Owl had already read the first part of that letter, over Mauly’s shoulder. Now he read the conclusion. And, as he read it, he gave quite a jump, and his little round eyes almost seemed to bulge through his big round spectacles.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

He blinked at that letter. He blinked again. He read it a second time, as if he really could not trust his eyes or his spectacles.

Then he blinked at the lazy figure on the settee. And the blink he bestowed on Lord Mauleverer was absolutely deadly.



"What's all this," hissed Bunter

"Mauly—!" he squeaked.

"Yaas," yawned Mauly.

"What's all this?" hissed Bunter. "Wharrer you mean? You're not stopping at the school over the hols—."

"Eh! Yaas."

"Stopping at school, for extra toot with old Quelch!" shrieked Bunter.

"Yaas."

"Aren't you going home for the hols?" yelled Bunter.

"Eh! Didn't I tell you I wasn't?"

"Oh! Yes! I thought you meant you were going somewhere else for Christmas—," howled Bunter. "You didn't tell me you were staying at the school for extra toot with Quelch."

"You didn't give me a chance—."

"Oh, you fathead! Oh, you chump! Oh, you idiot!" gasped Bunter. "Oh, you blithering cuckoo!"

Lord Mauleverer gazed at him.

"What's the matter, Bunter?" he inquired. "Didn't you say that it wouldn't matter where we were, so long as we were sticking together? We shall be sticking together here."

"Think I wanted you to ask me for the hols, sticking at school?" yelled Bunter.

"But I didn't ask you," Lord Mauleverer pointed out, gently. "You asked me."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Yah!"

Into that monosyllable, Billy Bunter threw all the scorn and contempt that a fat squeak could express. Then he rolled out of the study and banged the door after him.

Really, it was beastly for Bunter. He had turned down Harry Wharton and Co.—turned them down so emphatically and effectually that there was no hope of turning them up again; now he had turned down Lord Mauleverer. His feelings were deep, very deep indeed, as he rolled off for his train for home. When Lord Mauleverer came down to post his letter, Bunter was gone.

CHAPTER V

"MAULEVERER!"

Mr. Quelch called to his solitary pupil, the next morning, as Mauly, somewhat pensively, was sauntering in the deserted quad. It seemed very quiet, and a little dismal, to Mauly, now that all the fellows were gone. He was "taking it on the chin": but he was pensive.

"Yes, sir!" said Mauly. "I'm ready, sir, if it's lessons—."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"I have had a telephone call from your guardian, Mauleverer!" he said. "He seems to have been very pleased by your reply to his letter: and on further consideration, he has decided that you may go home for the holidays as usual. He is sending the car for you this morning."

"Oh!" gasped Mauly.

At Wharton Lodge, Harry Wharton and Co. enjoyed their Christmas holidays. In the more magnificent surroundings of Mauleverer Towers, Mauly also was having a good time. And—sad to relate—they did not even remember the fat existence of Billy Bunter, who had turned them all down, and who was home for the hols!

THE END

A ROOKWOOD PRAG!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



Leaving Arthur Edward Lovell sitting on the floor

CHAPTER I

“SOCCER!” said Jimmy Silver.

“Never mind soccer now,” said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver looked at him.

“Uncle James” of Rookwood was generally, very patient with Arthur Edward Lovell. Arthur Edward was a fellow who required quite a lot of patience from his friends. And quite a lot of patience was exercised in the end study in the Fourth Form at Rookwood. Jimmy Silver was very patient: Raby a little less so: Newcome least of the three. But they were all more or less patient with Lovell.

But there was a limit.

And when, on the day of a soccer match with Manders’ House, Lovell said, “Never mind soccer”, that limit had been reached.

"Did you say never mind soccer?" inquired Jimmy Silver, in measured tones.

"Yes, I did."

"We're playing the Moderns this afternoon! Manders House beat us last time. And you say never mind soccer."

"We shall beat the Modern ticks all right," answered Lovell. "But never mind that now—."

"Ass!" said Jimmy.

"Fathead!" said Raby.

"Goat!" said Newcome.

Three members of the end study were quite concentrated on football. Other matters were dismissed from mind. In the last soccer game before the school broke up for Christmas, obviously the Classicals had to beat the Moderns—especially as they had failed to beat them last time. Lovell, no doubt, was as keen as his friends on beating the Modern ticks of Manders' House, but in his mind other matters, for the moment, predominated.



"If you'd let a chap speak, without interrupting him"

"If you'd let a chap speak, without keeping on interrupting him—" went on Lovell.

"Would you ever stop, if you weren't interrupted?" inquired Newcome.

"Not likely," said Raby, shaking his head.

"Look here—!" hooted Lovell.

"Cut it out!" said Jimmy Silver. "Try not to be such a silly ass, Lovell. I know you can't help it. But do your best."

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard.

"I've told you," he said, "that I've got Extra School on Saturday, because Manders complained about me to our beak. He made a fuss because he saw me dipping a Modern man's head in the fountain. Next Saturday I've got to stick in Extra, because old Manders couldn't mind his own business."

"Never mind next Saturday—"

"I do mind! If Manders rags me, I'm going to rag him back. Think I'm going to take it lying down?" demanded Lovell.

"You'll take it bending over, if you start ragging Manders," said Newcome.

"Forget all about it!" suggested Raby.

"I'll forget all about it when I've made old Manders sit up!" said Lovell. "And I know just how, as I've told you. Manders went out after dinner. He left his study window wide open. All I want is a bunk up to that window. If it was on the ground floor I shouldn't need you fellows to help. But it's too high up without a bunk. You needn't all come. One of you can give me a bunk up to that window, and I can get into Manders' study."

"And what are you going to do, when you get in?"

Lovell laughed—one of those sardonic laughs!

"Leave that to me," he said. "But I can tell you that when Manders comes in, he may think that a wild bull has been loose in his study. It will be a lesson to him to leave Classical men alone."

"And suppose you're copped there?"

"I shan't be copped! I know my way about," said Lovell. "I can drop from the window when I'm through."

"That window's too high to drop from," said Raby.

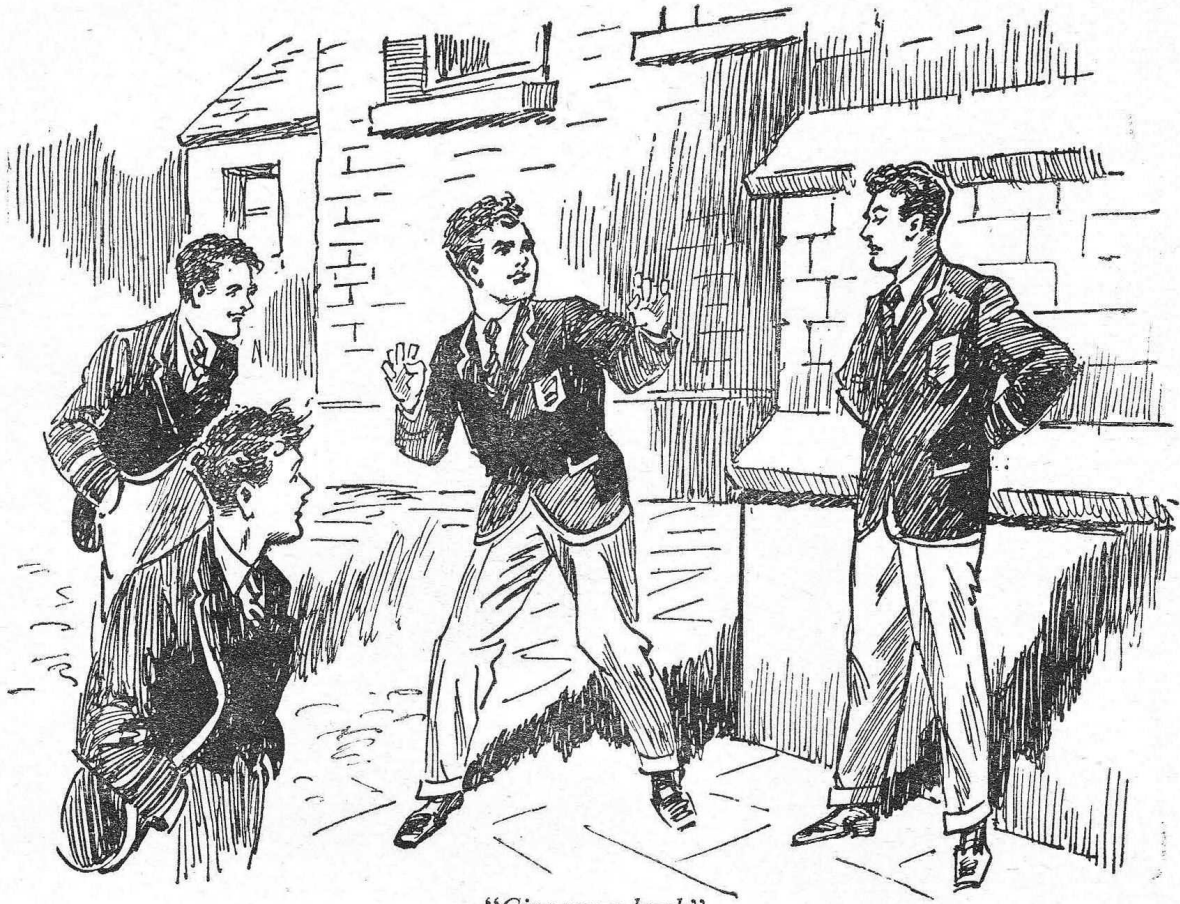
Sniff, from Lovell.

"Might be for you," he said. "But I've got some nerve."

"You cheeky ass—!"

"Look here, we've had enough palaver," said Lovell. "Which of you fellows is coming to give me a bunk at Manders' window?"

"And you look here," said Jimmy Silver. "We're playing soccer this afternoon, and we kick off in an hour's time. You're wanted in the team, and you're not going to land yourself in a row just before the match. Ten to one



"Give me a bunk"

you'd be seen clambering up to Manders' window, and if not, you'd be copped in his study; and if you weren't copped, they'd spot you getting away—and if you got a detention, you'd be out of the soccer. You're wanted to play."

"I know that!" agreed Lovell. "Lots of time to rag Manders before the kick-off. You coming, Jimmy?"

"No, you ass! No, you goat! No, you fathead! Nobody's going to help you play the giddy ox. You're going to steer clear of Manders House."

"You coming, Raby?"

"Not in these trousers."

"You coming, Newcome?"

"Fathead!"

Evidently, nobody was coming. If Lovell's rag on Mr. Manders depended on aid from the end study, that rag did not seem likely to materialize.

"Now stop talking rot," said Jimmy Silver. "Never mind old Manders, and never mind ragging. Soccer—."

"Please yourselves!" snapped Lovell. "I can't get up to that window without a bunk, but I daresay I can dodge into the House, and get away by the window afterwards—I can drop it—"

"You can't!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Rats!" retorted Lovell.

He turned to the door. His three chums gazed at him, exasperated. Patience was at a very low ebb now. Lovell, headstrong fathead as he might be, was a tower of strength in the junior Classical football team: he simply could not be spared from the game. Often it seemed that Arthur Edward Lovell was one of those fellows who are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward: but really, it seemed to his friends, even Lovell might have been expected to dodge trouble with beaks just before the last match of the term, within an hour of kick-off. It was true that Lovell had unbounded confidence in himself, and in his ability to carry out his plans without mishap. But that confidence was very far from being shared by his comrades.

"Where are you going?" hooted Jimmy Silver.

"I'm going to Manders House."

"You're not."

"I jolly well am."

At that point, "Uncle James's" patience finally gave out.

"Bump him!" he said.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Raby and Newcome together.

"Here, look, here—!" roared Lovell, as his three friends jumped at him and collared him. "Stoppit—chuck it—leggo—oh, my hat! Whooooooop!"

Bump!

"Coooooooooooooh!" gasped Lovell, as he landed.

Bump!

"Woooooooooooooh!"

Bump!

"Goooooooooooooh!"

"There!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Now forget all about it. You go near Manders House before the game, and we'll give you some more—lots more! If you haven't as much sense as a bunny rabbit, try to act as if you had!"

"Wuuuuurrrggh!" gurgled Lovell, breathlessly.

And his three friends departed, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell sitting on the floor of the end study, gasping and spluttering, and spluttering and gasping, as if gasps and splutters were going to keep him busy for quite a long time to come.

CHAPTER II

"I'll show 'em!"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed those words to himself, as he stood in Mr. Manders' study, in Manders House. He was going to show Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome. They fancied that they could stop him, did they? They had had the cheek to bump him, as a warning, had they? Well, Lovell was going to show them!

Manders had landed him in Extra. That, to Arthur Edward, was ample reason why Manders should get something back. Opposition never had any effect on Arthur Edward, except to make him more determined. He was going to rag Manders; that was as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. And if Uncle James fancied he could stop him, he was going to show him!

He had been lucky in getting to Manders' study on the Modern Side of Rookwood. Mr. Manders was out, and on that fine, clear winter's afternoon, almost everyone else seemed to be out also. Anyway the coast was clear—Lovell entered Manders House cautiously, but his caution was not needed; he did not pass a single soul on his way to the house-master's study. He slipped into that study, and shut the door, and then all was serene. Nobody—at least nobody but Lovell—was likely to come to that study during Manders' absence: it was at his mercy. And he was not going to be merciful. He was going to make the Modern master sorry that he had landed a Classical man in Extra. He was going to shy books and papers all over the room: he was going to scatter ink right and left: he was going to leave that study in a state that would make Manders' eyes pop when he came in and beheld it. And he was going to be safe off the scene, leaving Manders to guess, and keep on guessing, who had called while he was out.

"I'll show 'em!" breathed Lovell, "I'll show 'em, and I'll show old Manders. I'll jolly well show 'em!"

He stepped to the big open window and looked into the quadrangle. Manders was out, but he might, of course, come in. From the high window, Lovell took a survey of the quad. Mr. Dalton, his own form-master, passed at a little distance, and he drew back till Dalton had disappeared. Bulkeley, the captain of Rookwood, came along, but he too disappeared. Others were to be seen, but quite a long way off. It would be all right if he had to drop from the window. All he had to do was to slip out, hang on the sill with his hands, and drop—a matter of seconds. That was all right.

But was it?

Now that he was actually in the study, looking down from the window, Lovell realized that it was a rather long drop. His friends had told him that he couldn't do that drop, and knowing better, he had laughed that suggestion to scorn. Now, looking down, he was not quite sure that he had known better. It was undoubtedly a long drop, and it was uncomfortable to think of a sprained ankle, or something of that kind, as a result. He did not want to crock himself for the soccer. His face grew very thoughtful, as he looked down at that drop, and calculated the distance. He decided that he would not, if he could help it, drop from that window after all. Better to leave as he had come; if the coast was still clear at any rate.

He realized that the sooner he was through, and gone, the better. And he was turning from the window, when three Classical juniors came in sight—Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome. All of them stopped and looked up at that window.

Lovell grinned.

No doubt they had missed him, and guessed where he was. Well, they couldn't even try to stop him now! Grinning, he waved a hand to the three. Jimmy Silver made him an almost frantic sign. Lovell wondered why—till, looking past the three, he discerned a tall, lean figure coming along from the direction of the school gates.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

He stared down at Mr. Manders.

Manders had come in! There he was—walking towards his House. That was why Jimmy was making signs!

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Lovell.

He backed from the window, hastily, lest Manders should glance up. He stood for some moments nonplussed. So far, he had not started to rag the study. On second thoughts—proverbially the best—he decided that he wouldn't begin. If he was caught there, with the room in disorder, ten to one Manders would march him off to the Head. Lovell did not want to call on Dr. Chisholm that afternoon—very much indeed he didn't! Indeed, at that exciting moment, he rather wished that he had listened to his friends, and steered clear of Manders House. There was no escape now but by the window—and he couldn't drop from that window with Manders walking towards the House, he had to wait till Manders was inside the building. After which, there would not be much time; and if Manders caught him there, even without a "rag" having taken place, it meant trouble.

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Lovell.

He peered cautiously from the window again. The lean figure of the



He backed from the window, hastily

Modern master disappeared into the porch. If he came direct to his study, it was only a matter of moments now. Lovell swung himself from the open window and, holding on to the sill, hung there, ready to drop. Below, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome stared up at him.

And then—!

Thinking was not much in Arthur Edward Lovell's line. If he ever thought at all—which his friends doubted—it came too late to be of much use. Now—too late as usual—he couldn't help doing some thinking! It was borne in upon his mind that it was too long a drop, after all: that if he let go that window-sill and dropped, and hit a concrete path ten or twelve feet below, the result would be serious—probably awfully serious. Only at the very last moment did it dawn on Arthur Edward that he had bitten off more than he could chew. But it did dawn—in time to stop him. He hung on the window-sill, and did not drop.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Lovell.

He heard, from within, the sound of a door opening. Mr. Manders had come into his study. Lovell heard the creak of an armchair as the Modern master sat down, no doubt to rest after his walk. Manders, evidently, had not the remotest idea that a Classical junior was hanging outside his window. That was a respite, at least. Lovell hung on undetected, his chums gazing up at him from below.

"That ass!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

"That goat!" murmured Raby.

"That dithering dunderhead!" sighed Newcome.

They could only gaze up at him. They could not help him. They realized that, at the last moment, Lovell had got it into his somewhat solid head that he couldn't do that drop. They also realized that he could not hang on to Mr. Manders' window-sill for ever!

Neither could he hang on it very long unobserved. The coast, at the moment, was clear: but anybody might come along at any moment and behold him dangling there. In fact, in a couple of minutes Tubby Muffin, came rolling along, and he stopped to blink at Jimmy Silver and Co.

"What are you staring at?" asked Tubby. Then he stared up too. "Oh, gum. Is that Lovell? What's he doing up there? He, he, he."

Other fellows came along: Mornington and Rawson of the Classical Fourth; Hansom of the Fifth; Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth. They all stopped to stare at the junior dangling from Manders' window-sill. Obviously it would not be long before a beak or a prefect came on the scene.

But there was nothing to be done. Fellows below could only stare up—and the fellow hanging on the window-sill could only hang on. The crowd thickened—innumerable eyes stared up at Lovell. He was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes. Arthur Edward Lovell rather liked the limelight, but he did not enjoy it now. He was getting much more publicity than he wanted. It was really awful for Lovell. He could have climbed in at the window again—to face Mr. Manders. He did not want to face Mr. Manders! Neither did he want to hang there with dangling legs till all Rookwood gathered to gaze up at him. He almost made up his mind to drop and chance it. But just a glimmer of common-sense checked him. He hung on. Voices reached him from below.

"That ass Lovell—!"

"What's he doing up there?"

"That goat, Lovell—."

"Daylight burglar, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell hung on.

CHAPTER III

MR. MANDERS rose from his armchair. He was conscious of a crowd gathering under his window, at last. He wondered, irritably, why. He stepped to the window and looked out.

Then he almost fell down, in his astonishment. He stared at Arthur Edward Lovell's crimson face over the window-sill. Lovell stared up at him.

"What—what—what!" stuttered Mr. Manders.

Lovell did not speak. There was nothing for him to say. Also, he was feeling the strain by this time. His arms were strong, but they were aching now. He was feeling all hot and bothered and breathless. He could only gaze up at Mr. Manders' astonished face.



A bony hand fastened on to his collar and dragged him in

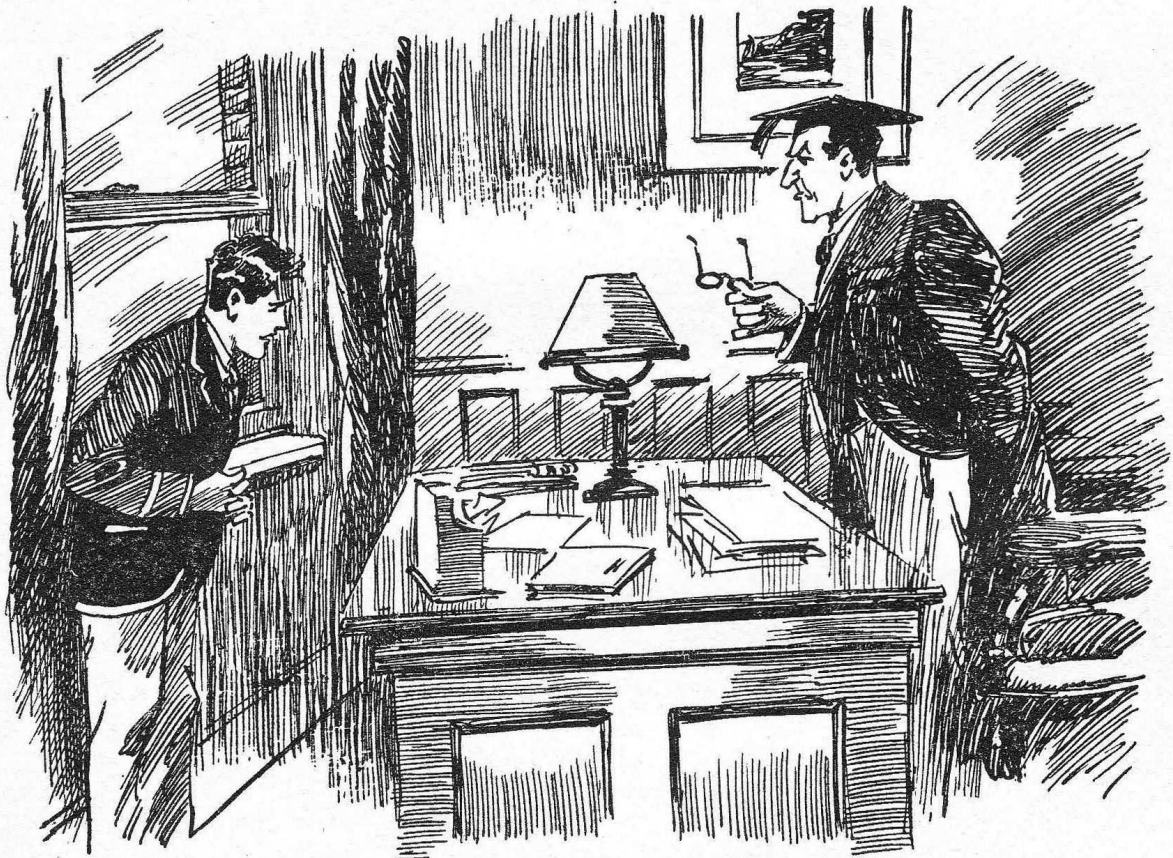
"Lovell! Is that Lovell? What are you doing there?" gasped Mr. Manders. "You utterly foolish and reckless boy, how dare you climb up to a high window—at the risk of limb and life? You incredibly stupid and reckless boy."

Apparently Mr. Manders concluded that Lovell had climbed up to that window! Perhaps Lovell was content to leave it at that. Anyhow, he had no breath for conversation. He just gazed speechlessly at Manders.

"Such stupidity—such reckless foolishness!" ejaculated the Modern master. "But—but hold on, Lovell—take care that you do not fall! I will help you in at the window! Take care!"

Manders was angry. But he was more concerned than angry. He stretched out a bony hand to help. Lovell could have climbed in without that: but the bony hand fastened on his collar, almost throttling him, and dragged him in. He slithered in at the window, and disappeared from the gaze of his numerous audience below.

He stood once more in Mr. Manders' study, red, panting, breathless. He



"I shall take you at once to your form-master"

listened, without the least pleasure, to what Mr. Manders had to say to him, which lasted several minutes. Fortunately, Mr. Manders remained under his impression that the Classical junior had only been performing a reckless exploit by climbing up to that window, and had no idea how narrowly his study had escaped a "rag". But so reckless an exploit could not pass without results.

"I shall take you at once to your form-master, Lovell!" Mr. Manders wound up. Which he did, forthwith.

LOVELL, already booked for Extra on Saturday, sat in Extra that afternoon, while the last soccer match of the term was played without him. He had the pleasure, or otherwise, of reflecting, while he sat in Extra, on the doubtful result of that football match, and on the absurd figure he had cut dangling from Manders' window-sill. Jimmy Silver and Co. agreed that if the Moderns beat them, the scragging of Arthur Edward Lovell should be a record in the annals of Rookwood. Luckily for Lovell, they beat the Moderns after all.

THE END

ONE GOOD TURN-----!

By
FRANK RICHARDS



"You have found it, and you must take a share—"

CHAPTER I

JACK of All Trades came to a halt.

Night was falling on the Sussex countryside. And with the night fell the rain. It came down steadily, and the dripping branches of trees on either side of the muddy lane gave no shelter. The lane seemed endless, winding through shadowy wet pasture-lands: and it seemed to the boy, wet and weary, that he was traversing a desert far from the haunts of men. It was the glimmer of a faint light through the thickening gloom that brought him to a halt.

Under the dripping trees was a little gate. Beyond, he could dimly make out the shape of a thatched cottage, the light glimmering from a tiny window. He rested his bundle on the gate, and gazed across at that glimmering light. The cottage was surrounded by a large garden, in which stood a shed. Any shelter from the rain, any lodging for the night, was welcome, even an open shed, to

the boy tired from a day's tramping. But he hesitated. Strangers after dark were likely to be regarded with suspicion, with hostility, in a lonely cottage. But the ceaseless drip-drip-drip of the rain decided him. He opened the gate at last, and tramped up a muddy, weedy path to the cottage door.

He knocked with his knuckles.

There was a sound of a movement within. But the door did not open. He knocked again, timidly. Then a voice was heard: a woman's voice in tremulous tones, in which there was a very perceptible trace of uneasiness.

"Who is there?"

In those tones Jack could read that the woman feared to open her door to a stranger's knock when night had fallen. He answered quietly:

"Please don't be alarmed! Don't open the door! Will you give me leave to shelter in your shed?"

"Who are you?"

"My name is Jack Free. I am on tramp. All I want is shelter from the rain till morning."

There was a long pause. Jack broke the silence.

"Please don't trouble—I will go on my way!"

He made a move to go. Then came the voice again.

"Stop! Is that a boy speaking—it sounds like a boy's voice."

"Yes, it is a boy speaking," answered Jack. "But you are quite right not to open your door to a stranger at night. If you wouldn't mind my sleeping in your shed, I will not disturb you in any way."

There was a rattle of a chain, and the door opened a few inches. A lamp glimmered out into the gloom, and an old wrinkled face looked out. The light fell full upon Jack's face: wet and tired, but so openly honest and frank, that few could have failed to be reassured by a single glance. The old woman looked at him steadily for a few moments, and then the wrinkles broke into a thousand creases as she smiled.

"You don't look like a Cosh boy," she said.

Jack smiled too.

"I hope not," he answered. "I am down on my luck, and on tramp, madam, that is all. If I may sleep in your shed—"

"You may come in."

The chain rattled again, as it was removed. The door was opened wide. The little old woman, half-hidden by a shawl, stepped back, holding up the lamp, for him to enter. Jack hesitated.

"I only want a shelter in the shed," he said.

"Come in, boy."

"Thank you. But—"

CHAPTER II

“A HUNDRED pounds!”
“Yes, a hundred pounds.”

Jack blinked.

He had been up with the dawn. It was a bright and sunny morning after the rain, and his face was bright as the morning, when he came out of the cottage to wash at the pump. When he came back, with a cheery glowing face, old Mrs. Burr was down from her attic, and already preparing breakfast. She greeted him with a wrinkled smile.

“Sit down to breakfast, boy.”

“But—!” began Jack, uneasily.

“Sit down.”

He sat down.

Over a frugal breakfast he heard the simple story. She was, as he had guessed, a widow, and lived alone in the little cottage, and eked out her old-age pension by cultivating the garden,—as well as she could. There was ample space for cultivation, but to dig over that space was beyond an old woman's strength, and the greater part of it was unused, and wild with weeds. But there was one item in that simple story that was a surprise to him. Her husband had been a saving man: and, like many an old-fashioned countryman before him, he had kept his savings in his own possession. Over the years he had accumulated no less a sum than a hundred pounds, which he kept in a tin box, carefully hidden from thieves. Where it was hidden, even Mrs. Burr did not know. Women would talk, he used to say, and he was taking no risks with his life's savings. And then the end had come suddenly, and he had been unable to tell her. Somewhere about that old thatched cottage was hidden a tin box in which were packed a hundred pound notes: but as she told Jack, continual searches had failed to find it, and for years now she had given up hope of ever seeing it. A hundred pounds would have meant many comforts for her old age: but her good man's secret had been kept only too well.

“A hundred pounds!” repeated Jack, his eyes widening. To the boy on tramp, with a few shillings in his pocket, it seemed a stupendous sum.

“The savings of many, many years!” she answered. “Many, many years!”

“But it ought to be found,” said Jack. “What a tremendous lot it would mean to you.”

She nodded and smiled.

“It will never be found now, after all these years,” she said. “If I had it.

laddie, I would give you something to help you on your way."

"No, no, no," said Jack, hastily. "I am not in need of that, Mrs. Burr. You've been kindness itself, and I wish I could repay you somehow. Is there anything I can do before I go—fetching water, or chopping wood, or anything that would help?"

"Good boy! You may chop the wood, if you like."

"Gladly," said Jack.

In the sunshine, after breakfast, he chopped the wood, and piled it neatly in the shed. As he came out of the shed, he found that the widow was already



He chopped the wood

busy, with a hoe on the potato-patch. He glanced round over the wide weedy garden, and came across to her.

"You've plenty of room here for a much bigger crop," he said.

She nodded.

"My old hands could not do the work," was her answer.

"But my hands are young and strong," said Jack. "And I'm going to dig over the whole garden, and clear off every spot of weed, before I go on my way, Mrs. Burr. I know something about gardening." He laughed, "I've been called Jack of All Trades, and I can turn my hand to anything."

"But I could not pay you anything—."

"I wouldn't let you, if you could. One good turn deserves another, doesn't it? In a couple of days, ma'am you won't know this garden when you look at it. There won't be a weed left."

"But, my dear boy," faltered the widow, "I must be plain—I could not give you even your meals."

"And I wouldn't let you, either," said Jack. "I've enough to see me through, and I'm going to cut down to the village for some shopping, and then I'm going to set to work. You're going to have the whole garden planted up from fence to fence, before you see the last of me, ma'am."

There was a glimmer of a tear in the widow's eyes.

"You're a good boy, Jack," she said. "God bless you."

And for the next two or three days, "Jack of All Trades" had a new trade added to his list: digging and delving and hoeing and weeding from early morn till dewy eve.

CHAPTER III

CLINK!
"Bother!"

It was the last section,—a hard and stony patch in a remote corner of the long cottage garden. Jack had left it till last, and was in fact a little doubtful about digging it at all: it hardly seemed worth while. But he would not leave a job unfinished. The remainder of the garden had been dug over, and rich smooth crumbled earth was pleasant to the eye in all but that one spot. So at last he came to it, and under a shining sun, delved away industriously. It was hard, it was stony: and he changed the spade for a garden-fork, and laboured on. And as a prong of the fork clinked on something hard, he concluded it was a larger stone than usual, and ejaculated "Bother!"

He added "Blow!" as he withdrew the fork, and found that the prong was bent from the sudden hard contact. However, he fetched a hammer from the shed, and proceeded to hammer the prong straight again. Bang, bang, bang, echoed over the garden: and Mrs. Burr, sitting knitting at the cottage door, looked over at him, and then laid down her knitting and came across.

"It's too hard for you, boy," she said. "Leave it."

Jack shook his head.

"I'll hammer this straight in two ticks, ma'am," he answered. "Another hour or so and I'll be through."

"You've made the garden look lovely already," said the widow. "And that corner patch never did grow anything—it has never been planted up before."

"Its going to be planted up now," said Jack. "I'm going to leave every inch of your garden in apple-pie order, ma'am. Here goes."

He started in with the fork again.

Clink!

"Bother that stone," said Jack. "I'll have to dig round it, and hook it out! It sounds more like metal than a stone: but I suppose there can't be any old cans or kettles buried here. I'll have it out anyway."

"But you are getting tired—"

"Not a bit! Here it comes—Oh! What the dickens! Look!" Jack stared.



"It is the box my husband kept his savings in—"

It was not a stone, and not an old disused can or kettle, that turned up on the fork. It was a rusted tin box.

"An old tin box!" said Jack. "I thought it sounded like metal. Well, it's out now." He tossed it aside with the fork. He was about to plunge the prongs into the earth again, when a cry from the widow startled him.

"Boy! That box!"

Jack looked at her. The old wrinkled face was ablaze with an excitement that puzzled him. She pointed to the box with a shaking hand.

"What about it?" asked the boy. "Just an old tin box, looks as if it's been there for years, rusting—."

"That box—it is the box my husband kept his savings in—."

"What?"

"That box—I know it again at once—."

"Oh!" gasped Jack.

He snatched up the box. It had been locked: but the lock had rusted, and snapped at a touch. He opened the rusty lid.

"Is it—is it—?" The widow's voice faltered.

"Oh! Look!"

Jack, with dancing eyes, groped in the tin box. His hand came out with a roll of engraved slips of paper in it. He handed the roll to the widow, who took it in trembling fingers.

"Pound notes!" she whispered. "My husband's savings—his life's savings, which he meant for me—and you have found it!" The tears streamed down the old wrinkled face. "My dear boy! My dear boy!"

"Hurray!" shouted Jack.

"So that was where it was hidden—buried in that stony patch which was never dug! And you have found it! If you had not dug my garden for me, it would never have been found."

"You gave me shelter," said Jack. "And didn't I say that one good turn deserved another,—but who would have thought of this! Oh, I'm so glad, ma'am, so glad!"

"You have found it, and you must take a share—."

"No fear! Not so much as a threepenny-bit!" answered Jack, promptly. "But if you'll let me advise you, ma'am, you'll go straight down to the village and put it in the Post Office Savings Bank while it's safe. I'll finish digging over this patch while your gone."



He went with a widow's blessing

JACK of All Trades went on his way, his bundle on his shoulder, his face bright and cheery in the sunshine. He went with a widow's blessing and a light heart.

THE END

SURPRISE FOR SAMMY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

“BEAST!”

Sammy Bunter, of the Second Form at Greyfriars, gave quite a start. It was an unexpected greeting.

Bunter minor had been looking for his major, Billy Bunter of the Remove. Now he had found him, in the quad. Billy Bunter was not looking like a fellow enjoying life. His plump brow was overcast. His little round eyes glinted behind his big round spectacles, as he blinked in the direction of his form-master's study window. Apparently Billy Bunter had had a spot of trouble with Mr. Quelch, and was annoyed about it. Still, that was no reason why he should give Sammy such a greeting. It could not be called brotherly.

“Look here, Billy—.”

“Beast!”

“Wharrer you calling me names for?” demanded Sammy, indignantly.

"Eh! What?" Billy Bunter transferred his gaze from Mr. Quelch's study window, to the fat face of his minor. "That you, Sammy? I wasn't speaking to you, fathead."

"Talking to yourself?" inquired Sammy.

"Don't be a cheeky young ass, Sammy. It's Quelch!" said Billy Bunter. "Of all the beasts—!"

Sammy Bunter grinned. His major, apparently, had merely been indulging in an expression of his opinion of his form-master—at a safe distance from Quelch's ears!

"Whopped?" asked Sammy. "Hard cheese, old chap! But I say, what about that toffee?"

"What toffee?" grunted Bunter.

"Oh, come off it," said Sammy, warmly. "I was in the tuck-shop, just before class, when you got it. The bell went the next minute, so you can't have scoffed it yet, as we're only just out. Look here, Billy, you jolly well do the decent thing, and whack it out."

Snort, from Billy Bunter.

"You'd better ask Quelch!" he snapped.

"Quelch!" repeated Sammy.

"He's got it." Billy Bunter cast another ferocious blink towards his form-master's study window. "He copped me eating some in class. I believe he's got eyes in the back of his head, blow him! So he made me hand over the packet, and confiscated it. He took it to his study with him after class. Of all the beasts—."

"Oh, crikey!" said Sammy. "Just like you, Billy, to be guzzling in class, and getting copped! But look here, couldn't you nip into his study when he goes to tea and bag it—?"

"Too jolly risky!" said Bunter, shaking a fat head, "But you look here, Sammy—I'll go halves, if you'll nip into his study when he goes to tea—."

"Too jolly risky to you, but not for me?" asked Sammy, sarcastically. And Sammy rolled on his way. He had been looking for Billy—and toffee—but a Billy minus toffee did not interest him.

Billy Bunter was left blinking at Quelch's window with an inimical blink.

"Beast!" he murmured, still referring to Quelch.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?" roared a cheery voice. Five Remove fellows, trotting round the quad after class, came on the disconsolate Owl of the Remove. Bunter blinked at Harry Wharton and Co.

"I say, you fellows," he squeaked, "You know Quelch has got my toffee—."

"And so the poor dog had none!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, which of you fellows will nip into his study when he goes to tea, and bag it—?"

"The whichfulness is terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Any of you fellows keen on a row with Quelch, so that Bunter can guzzle stickers?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

None of the five, apparently, was keen! They trotted on, and Billy Bunter was left to contemplate Quelch's window once more: and debate in his fat mind whether that confiscated toffee was worth the risk of "nipping" into his form-master's study when Quelch went along to Common-Room to tea. And, after long cogitation, he decided that it was!

CHAPTER II

BILLY BUNTER blinked this way and that way. Masters Studies were deserted. The "beaks" were in Common-Room: and the door of that apartment, at the end of the passage, was closed. But the Owl of the Remove was very cautious. He tiptoed along to the door of Mr. Quelch's study. He opened that door with scarce a sound, and closed it behind him the moment he was in the study. Then—keen as he was to recapture his toffee, his first proceeding was to roll across to the window, and push up the sash. It was an easy drop from that window: a second line of retreat for the fat intruder, if he heard a footstep in the passage.

Having opened up that line of retreat, the fat Owl rolled to the table, and scanned it with eager eyes and spectacles for the packet of toffee. Quelch had taken it with him when he left the form-room after class, and he could only have taken it to his study. Bunter expected to find it on the table there. But it was not to be seen on the table.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

He blinked round the study. Where was that packet of toffee? Having blinked at several possible, and some impossible places, and having still failed to discern it, Billy Bunter had to realize the awful truth—that packet of toffee was not in the study at all.

"Beast!" he hissed.

Had Quelch thrown it away? It was possible—Quelch did not place the high value on "stickers" that Bunter did. Whatever he had done with it, he had not left it in his study. Billy Bunter had taken the risk of that surreptitious visit to his form-master's study for absolutely nothing!



In Quelch's Study

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose. His feelings were deep—they could hardly have been deeper. At that moment, sad to relate, he would willingly have planted a fat fist fair and square upon his form-master's majestic nose, had such things been practicable. Dismally and dolorously, he rolled to the door, to go empty away.

Then he paused.

There was a vengeful gleam behind his spectacles.

Instead of tiptoeing away, he opened the door a few inches, and blinked into the corridor. It was deserted: and likely to remain so till the "beaks" had finished tea in Common-Room.

Leaving the door ajar, the fat Owl stepped to the book-case, and picked out five or six of the largest volumes there. Then he placed a chair by the door and mounted on it, with the volumes under a fat arm.

He was grinning now.

Quelch had had his toffee! He was going to give Quelch something in return. On top of the door, resting on the lintel of the doorway, he carefully lodged a substantial volume of Lucretius. Then he ledged the works of Virgil on Lucretius, and the History of Josephus on Virgil. He crowned that massive pile of learning with several more volumes—Horace, and Catullus, and Propertius, and Juvenal and Persius. Quelch was keen on all these classic authors: but whether he would find any pleasure in them when he returned to his study on the present occasion, was very doubtful.

Grinning, the fat Owl stepped down from the chair, and lifted it away from the door. He rolled across to the window. After a cautious blink up and down and round about, he clambered out. He paused for a moment on the broad sill to shut down the sash, and then dropped to the ground.

“He, he, he!” chuckled Billy Bunter, as he rolled away.

He was still toffee-less. But there was consolation in the prospect of that shower of hefty volumes descending on Quelch’s head when he returned to his study and pushed open the door.

CHAPTER III

“HALVES—I don’t think!”

Sammy Bunter of the Second, made that remark, derisively. He was communing with himself. Sammy’s thoughts, like Billy’s, ran on toffee.

Sammy was standing outside the door of Common-Room, with an ear bent to listen to the murmur of voices within. Not that Bunter minor was interested in the conversation of the beaks over their tea. Whatever Quelch had to say to Prout, or Prout to Hacker, or Hacker to Wiggins, Sammy couldn’t have cared less. What Sammy wanted was to hear Quelch’s voice, and thus make sure that the Remove master was still at tea, and had not gone back to his study. Sammy had designs on that study—if it was not too late!

Quite unaware that his major had already visited that study, with no more luck than Mrs. Hubbard when she went to her cupboard, Sammy Bunter was on the trail of that toffee. According to Billy there was a packet of toffee in Quelch’s study, to be had for the picking up—if a fellow had the nerve to raid a beak’s study! Billy funked it—and Sammy, as a matter of fact, funked it too—and he had hesitated long before he made up his mind. But the lure of toffee was as strong for Bunter minor as for Bunter major: and Sammy had resolved on it at last. But he had to make sure first that the coast was clear. Hence the fat ear bent to listen at the door of Common-Room.



Sammy at door

“Halves!” Sammy murmured that word with derision. “Me to take the risk—and halves! I don’t think! If I get that toffee, I jolly well know who’s going to scoff it!”

A booming voice was audible through the door of Common-Room. It was the booming of Prout, master of the Fifth.

“Me dear Quelch, you must admit that the word is ‘quo’, in all the known manuscripts—.”

That was enough for Sammy.

They were arguing about Horace: and Sammy’s interest in Quintus Horatius Flaccus was precisely nil. But as Prout was addressing Quelch, evidently the Remove master was still in Common-Room. The coast was still clear.

Sammy Bunter cut away down the passage, to the door of Quelch’s study. That packet of toffee was at his mercy. He had only to “nip” in, grab it, and “nip” out again. And—having taken all the risk, Sammy was also going to

take all the toffee! Unscrupulousness, in matters of tuck, was as strongly developed in Bunter minor as in Bunter major.

The door of Quelch's study was ajar. Sammy did not even have to turn the door-handle. He pushed the door open and "nipped" in.

But he did not "nip" very far.

What happened next was a surprise.

Whiz! thud! crash! crash! Bang!

"Oh! Ow! Wow!" roared Sammy Bunter.

He hardly knew what was happening. Indeed, for an awful moment it seemed to him that the venerable pile of Greyfriars School was collapsing on his head. He tottered in the doorway, yelling. Heavy objects, heavy and unexpected, descended on him in a shower as he "nipped" into the doorway. Lucretius landed on his head—Horace and Virgil on either shoulder—while



Surprise for Sammy!

Catullus and Propertius crashed on the back of his neck. Sammy Bunter tottered in a sea of classics. His startled yell woke all the echoes of Masters' Studies.

CHAPTER IV

THAT startled yell reached ears in Common-Room, interrupting tea and talk. Several of the beaks rose, to come out and see what the matter was. The door of Common-Room opened, and Quelch, Prout, Hacker, and Wiggins stared along the passage. They barely glimpsed a running figure as it vanished round a corner. They stared at a sea of classics in Quelch's study doorway. Precisely what had happened they never knew. It was a surprise for the beaks. It had been a still greater surprise for Sammy!

THE END

Unexpected



By
FRANK RICHARDS
Creator of **BILLY BUNTER**
& **GREYFRIARS**

CHAPTER I

WHEN Tom King, the captain of the Fourth Form at Felgate, pulled Langdale of the Sixth, captain of the school, out of the deep waters of the Fenny, Langdale was naturally grateful.

Any man would have been.

It had been touch and go. Langdale's skiff had capsized, and his head had banged on a rowlock, dazing him. Good swimmer as he was in a normal state, the Felgate captain was simply nowhere in the circumstances—a dizzy head, a deep stream, and a tearing current. Whether Langdale could have struggled ashore somehow was a moot point, never

decided—for, as it happened, there was no need. King of the Fourth saw the disaster from Fell Bridge, and without even stopping to think, dived in to his assistance. It was a dive at which most Felgate seniors would have jibbed, and which no Felgate junior had ever dreamed of: so perhaps it was as well that Tom did not stop to think.

Langdale was drifting under, when Tom's helping hand reached him. Somehow the junior supported him and steered him shoreward. He never quite knew how he did it—but he did. Both of them, as Skip Ruggles said, might have been washed away and jolly well drowned! But they weren't: and the next day neither was a penny the worse for the ducking.

But Langdale, as afore said, was grateful.

His gratitude, indeed, knew no bounds. If Tom King had asked for a place in the Felgate First eleven, Langdale could hardly have refused, in the first flush of gratitude. For actually he told Tom King that, if the junior ever wanted anything that he could give he had only to ask, and it was as good as done. And the next day, when he came on him in the quad, and honoured him by remembering his existence, Langdale repeated that assurance, and there was no doubt that he was quite in earnest about it.

It was some days later that the Felgate captain's gratitude became rather a worry to him: sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, as it were. Almost he wished that Tom King of the Fourth had stayed on Fell Bridge, and left him to take his chance in the Fenny. Not quite, for really life at Felgate School was too good a thing to lose.

For Tom King after consultation with his chums Dick Warren and Skip Ruggles in Study Four in the Fourth, did ask something. And it was something that made even the deep waters of the Fenny seem—almost—attractive.

They were great cricketers in the Fourth Form at Felgate. A batsman like Tom King, or a bowler like Dick Warren, was seldom found in a junior eleven. And Reece and Preece, and Valence and Carton, and Parrott and Bullinger, were all good men of their hands at the great summer game. They had beaten the Shell, an older form. They played outside matches and they won them. They believed that they could have beaten the Fifth, if the Fifth would have deigned to fix up a Form match with the lower school. Of course the Fifth wouldn't: Perkinson and Purring and the rest laughed at the idea.

Perhaps that was why it came into Tom King's head to fly at bigger game.

They talked it over in Study Four. They decided on it. All the Fourth Form cricketers enthused. Even Skip, who had no more chance of playing for the Fourth than for England, was enthusiastic. And the matter having been decided nem. con., the captain of the Fourth betook himself to the study of the captain of the school, and there proffered his request.

Langdale greeted him with a kindly smile and a nod. It was several days since Tom had dived in for him from Fell Bridge: but his gratitude was genuine and still going strong. He sincerely hoped that there was something he could do for that plucky junior. But when he learned what that something was, he had the shock of his life.

'Play the Sixth!' he repeated, after Tom King had explained his errand. He stared blankly at the junior captain. 'Did—did—did you say play the Sixth, King?'

'That's what I said; Langdale.'

'Joking, I suppose?' said Langdale.

'Not so's you'd notice it,' said Tom.

'But my dear kid—' Langdale was kind and patient. The Fourth had done remarkably well at cricket, and had reason to be proud of their exploits. If they were getting a little above themselves, Langdale could be tolerant. 'My dear kid, the idea's absurd.'

'I don't know.'

'We play form matches with the Fifth—there are First-Eleven men in both forms. But a match with the lower school!' Langdale laughed. 'I'm afraid they'd scalp me in the Prefects' Room if I suggested it.'

'You're skipper.'

'Oh! Yes! But—I'd do anything I could,



'Did - did you say play the sixth, King?'

kid. But I couldn't make the Sixth look ridiculous.'

Tom King coloured. It was an ambitious project: he admitted that. Good men as they were at the game, the Fourth could hardly hope to beat the Sixth Form, with seven or eight First-Eleven men in its ranks. That prospect exceeded the wildest hopes in Study Four. But they would give them a good game. They would go down, but they would not go down ingloriously. They would give the Sixth something to think about. They would make runs, and they would take wickets, whatever the lofty seniors thought about it. If there was anything 'ridiculous' in such a match, from Langdale's point of view, there was nothing of the kind from Tom King's

point of view. Hadn't they beaten the Shell? Couldn't they beat the Fifth, if the Fifth would take it on? They were jolly well going to have a shot at the Sixth, and chance it.

'Anything else?' said Langdale.

'Nothing else on the agenda,' said Tom. 'We'll play you and give you a good game. And why not?'

'Lots of reasons why not,' said Langdale. 'About a million or so. Look here, King, don't be a young ass!'

'Does that mean that you won't?'

'Right on the wicket.'

Tom drew a deep breath.

'O. K.,' he said, and walked to the study door.

Langdale called him back, as Tom had no



They could not believe that Langdale was serious

doubt that he would. Arthur Langdale was a man of his word. His word was his bond: and that bond had to be honoured, though the skies fell.

‘Hold on, King.’

Tom turned back.

‘It’s awful rot,’ said Langdale. ‘You’ll make us look fools, and you’ll look fools yourselves. Can’t you see that?’

‘No!’ said Tom.

‘You’re set on it—’

‘Like glue.’

The Felgate captain sighed.

‘Then the answer is yes,’ he said. ‘We’ll play you—if the Sixth don’t lynch me as soon as they hear of it.’

Tom King departed with the good news, and there was great rejoicing in the ranks of the Fourth.

In the Sixth feelings were quite different. In the Prefects’ Room, they could not believe that Langdale was serious, when he told them that a match was fixed up with the Fourth Form. And when they found that he was serious they were surprised, indignant, and wrathful. Denver, Loring, Cadby, Chard, mighty men of the First Eleven, fairly snorted at the idea of playing a team described by them, as a mob of grubby fags. Paynter said plainly that Langdale had let the Form down in agreeing to any such proposition. He should have smacked that cheeky junior’s head and kicked him out of his study. That day, and the next, Langdale found the atmosphere of the Prefects’ Room uncongenial and uncomfortable. He was the most popular man at Felgate: but his popularity trembled in the balance. Even his authority, hitherto unquestioned, trembled!

Tom King and Co., in the Fourth, went on their way rejoicing. Even a defeat at the hands of the Sixth was an honour and distinction for the juniors. So they were all right in any case. But there was no glory for the seniors in a victory over a mob of grubby fags! Victory was almost as absurd as defeat in such a game. To let all Felgate School see them in the field with the inky little scoundrels of the Fourth—every man in the Sixth agreed that it was intolerable: and Langdale had to admit that it was: and almost, though not quite, wished that Tom King had left him to it in the waters of the Fenny. Sixth Form men frowned darkly at Tom King and Co. when they encountered them: and on several occasions, there were prefects’ whippings, for

which no really adequate cause could be adduced. But the fixture was fixed, and the date was coming round, all the same.

And then, suddenly, there was a change.

It was Denver, well known to be astute, and to possess a sense of humour, who made the suggestion that poured oil on the troubled waters. It was as if the disgruntled Sixth had suddenly discovered that there was, after all, balm in Gilead. Denver, when he propounded his idea for meeting the peculiar situation, was greeted, first with an astonished stare, then with a roar of laughter. Langdale, greatly relieved, laughed as loudly as anybody. After which, the Sixth Form men ceased to be disgruntled: and, to the surprise of the rest of Felgate, looked forward to that unusual match, Sixth v. Fourth, with good humour and smiling faces.

CHAPTER II

‘HOT!’ remarked Dick Warren.

Tom King nodded.

It was a hot afternoon: there was no doubt about that. It had been a warm summer, and this was the warmest day so far. Not that any man in the Fourth Form eleven cared two hoots, or one, whether it was hot or cold on that great day: or what it was like so long as the weather allowed cricket to be played. Only Skip Ruggles was rather glad, for once, that he wasn’t in the eleven. Skip was plump, very plump, with a lot of weight to carry from one wicket to another: and on that blazing day, a shady seat and a bag of cherries appealed to Skip with a strong appeal.

Stumps were pitched at two. Tom King and Co. were ready, and keen, and eager. Every man in the eleven looked fit and fine

in his flannels, and every inch a cricketer. No doubt they were rather on the small side, compared with the towering men of the Sixth. But there was quality, if not quantity—in the opinion of the Felgate Fourth, at least.

Dick Warren sent the ball up into the air, straight as a die, and caught it with his left as it came down. Warren could do anything with the ball. He had a secret conviction that he was going to take Sixth Form wickets. Tom King, certainly, was going to score runs, even against bowlers like Denver and Loring. And they were all good men in the field—Tom always kept his men well up to the mark in that often neglected branch of the game. There were going to be some catches in the



Skip Ruggles was rather glad he wasn't in the eleven

field that would surprise the Sixth—at least the heroes of the Fourth hoped so. And even if they were licked to the wide—or rather, when they were licked to the wide—they would still have played the Sixth in a Form match, which would be an unforgotten fact in Felgate history.

Men of all forms gathered round the field. Nobody expected the game to last long, and the Sixth, of course, wouldn't bat twice. But while Tom King and Co., in spotless flannels, were ready, the senior team had not yet appeared at the pavilion. Two o'clock had chimed from the clock tower, and the game was due to start. Tom King was ready to toss the coin with Langdale of the Sixth. But there was as yet no sign of Langdale and his merry men.

Tom looked a little worried.

'They're late, Dick,' he muttered.

'Only a few minutes, so far,' said Warren. 'Screwing up their courage to the sticking-point perhaps.'

Tom laughed. Then he looked worried again, and cast a glimpse towards the House.

'Are they pulling our leg?' asked Reece. 'Look here, they're coming ain't they?'

That was the doubt that had smitten the captain of the Fourth. Only too well he knew how disgruntled the Sixth had been on the subject: how they just hated the idea of a match with the fags. Nobody but old Langdale could have made them toe the line. Had they talked old Langdale round, and were they simply going to stay away—leaving the Fourth Form cricketers in the air, so to speak?

Tom's cheeks burned at the thought. Perhaps it had been rather a cheek to challenge the Sixth to a cricket match. Certainly the Fourth would look awful asses, if the other

side did not turn up, and left them to go bootless home. But he shook his head.

'Langdale wouldn't let us down,' he said. 'They're coming all right. Bank on that.'

All eyes were turned on the distant House. And suddenly, there was a shout from the fellows round the field, and a roar of laughter.

'Here they come!'

'Ha! ha! ha!'

'Oh!' gasped Tom King.

He stared. All the Fourth Form cricketers stared. For a moment or two they could hardly believe their eyes.

The Sixth Form men were coming at last. As they were to play cricket, they had naturally been expected to appear in flannels. But they were not in flannels. They were in tail-coats and top-hats!

Tom King and Co. stared petrified.

The crowd round the field, and another crowd that followed the Sixth Form men as they came, howled with laughter.

'What—what—what—?' stuttered Tom.

'Guying us!' said Dick Warren, 'By gum! Guying us!'

'Oh, crumbs!'

The Sixth Form men looked quite serious, as they marched down to the cricket field: though there were some lurking smiles. All Felgate crowded round to stare, and shriek with laughter. Every man in the Sixth Form team was dressed as if for a party—well-creased trousers, polished shoes, white linen, tail-coat, top-hat. For Sunday parade it was perfect: for cricket extraordinary. It made it clear to all Felgate, and the universe generally, what the Sixth thought of Fourth Form cricket. They disdained to beat them in flannels. They were going to beat them in tails and toppers!

'Sorry we're a few minutes late,' Langdale, with a cheery smile, addressed the waiting captain politely. 'All ready now.'

Tom gasped. Round him his men were gasping. They were indignant and angry. This was treating them, not like cricketers, but like silly kids. It was making game of them. Cricket couldn't be played in topper and tails. It made the Form match a farce. It made the Fourth look fools! It made the whole thing idiotic! Which, indeed, was the object of the seniors. Denver, the astute, had made that happy suggestion for making the ambitious Fourth Form men look the young asses they really were, and the Sixth had lapped it up. And here they were—in tails and toppers!

'I—I say—!' gasped Tom.

'Yes?' said Langdale.

'I—I say, you—you're going to change for the game?'

Langdale raised his eyebrows.

'We have changed for the game,' he answered.

'But—but look here—' exclaimed Dick Warren. 'We're not funning—we're here to play cricket.'

'Aren't the terms synonymous in the Fourth?' inquired Denver, affably.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Tom King drew a deep, deep breath. He was tempted to wash out that match there and then, rather than be guyed in this manner. But he had a strong suspicion that that was just what the Sixth Form men would like. Langdale had kept his word: the Sixth were there to play the Fourth. But certainly they didn't want to: and, if they did, they weren't going to pretend to take the game with any seriousness. They were going to

walk all over the cheeky fags in tails and toppers, amid laughter from all Felgate. But no doubt they would have preferred to wash the game out. Tom was not going to gratify them in that, at all events.

'O. K.,' he said, at last. 'Just as you like, of course.'

'Exactly!' agreed Langdale.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Tom King won the toss and chose first knock. He opened the Fourth Form innings with Reece at the other end. Loring, the demon bowler of the Upper School, went on to bowl. The general expectation was that Loring would put up a double hat trick, and that



All Felgate yelled with merriment

six of the fag mob would be laid low in the first over. No runs were expected.

But it did not work out like that. Loring found his style somewhat cramped by garments more suitable to Sunday parade than to the cricket field. It was no end of a joke on the cheeky fags, Tom King not only lived through the over, but scored four off Loring's bowling—which made some of the seniors frown. They had not intended the juniors to take a single run.

In the next over, Denver bowled to Reece. Reece hit out valiantly. Langdale, in the field caught the ball with his left, and with his right, raised his toppler to Reece, as if expressing thanks for the gift. And all Felgate, packed round the field, yelled with merriment.

But when Tom King was batting again it was not so hilarious. No fieldsman raised his hat to Tom for the gift of the ball. Tom was the best junior bat at Felgate, and quite able to put up a good game, even against senior men—especially when the senior men were incommoded by tails and toppers. He gave the seniors some leather-hunting, which in the circumstances, they found rather wearing, under a hot sun. Sixth Form faces were red, and perspiration trickled down them. Guying the Fourth had its drawbacks.

Langdale and Co. had it fairly clearly mapped out in their minds. A quarter of an hour, at the most, for the junior innings—no runs, or hardly any. Then ten minutes or so for a couple of Sixth Form batsmen to knock up enough runs for a win, and declare. Then ten minutes to mop up the junior second innings. The whole thing over in half-an-hour or so: the cheeky fags very properly put in their place, and grinned at by all Felgate.

That was how the seniors planned it. But like so many plans in these days of planning, it did not work out according to plan. For it was three o'clock when the last Fourth Form wicket fell, for a total of twenty-four runs: and by that time, the Sixth Form men in their tails and toppers were feeling so thoroughly cooked, that they were more disposed to kick Denver on his coat-tails than to thank him for the brilliant idea he had propounded in the Prefects' Room.

CHAPTER III

THAT was an unexpected match in every way. It was unexpected that the Fourth ever would or could play a Form match with the Sixth. It was unexpected that, if they did, they could survive for more than a matter of minutes. But the ultimate outcome was the most unexpected of all; quite unexpected by even Study Four. In their wildest dreams they had never dreamed of such unexpectedness.

Langdale and Denver batted for the Sixth. Even Dick Warren's bowling failed to relieve them of their wickets. Still they did not stay long. The combination of tails and toppers and a hot sun did not make batting a pleasure. They knocked up fifty between them, and declared. Afterwards, Langdale wished he hadn't. But then it was too late.

The Fourth Form second innings was not washed out in ten minutes as planned. It lasted longer than their first. And the runs came. The juniors were not expected to make the necessary twenty-six runs to tie. The Sixth had not dreamed of batting a second time. But Langdale, having declared in haste, repented at leisure. The score passed twenty-six with half a dozen wickets in hand. And they

were still batting strong and the seniors, cooked to a turn in their tail-coats, with perspiration streaming under their top-hats fagged at leather hunting till they almost melted away like butter in the sunshine. Their fielding was hardly worthy of the Third: and their bowlers seemed only able to give the batsman runs. If that game had finished under the half-hour, as planned, all would have been well. When it lasted more than two hours, under a summer sun that was rather like a furnace, it was quite another story. The Fourth were out at last for eighty, and the Sixth had to bat again. And then —!

Felgate could hardly believe its eyes when Langdale — Langdale who had captained the First Eleven against the M.C.C. — went down to Dick Warren's bowling. Denver fancied for a moment that he was seeing visions, when Tom King caught him out first shot. Loring stared at the wicket from where the middle stump was missing, with unbelieving eyes. Such surprise occurred, and recurred, as the men in tail-coats and toppers sweated under the blazing sun, and the juniors, fresh as paint, gave them the time of their lives. It was hard for the Fourth to believe it when the Sixth were all down for forty-eight. But they were — and the Fourth, unexpectedly and almost miraculously, had won that match by six runs. Langdale and several other men kicked Denver afterwards. Denver took it



Denver fancied he was seeing visions

meekly: he felt that he had deserved it. But kicking could not alter facts.

And the fact was, as the Fourth Form cricketers never seemed to tire of telling the world, that the Fourth had played the Sixth in a Form match and beaten them — even if that glorious result was somewhat unexpected!