

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN



BUNTER COMES A CROPPER



The fat Owl rolled into an armchair

**BILLY BUNTER'S
OWN**

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Illustrations by C. H. Chapman

WHO WANTS BUNTER?

— By —
FRANK RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

HIS MASTER'S VOICE!

“**H**ARRY, old chap—”
Billy Bunter stopped, at that.

The fat Owl of the Remove was blinking into No. 1 Study through his big spectacles, as he began, in affectionate, indeed honeyed tones.

But that blink revealed that the study was vacant: Harry Wharton was not there. Billy Bunter's affectionate address had been wasted on the desert air.

“Beast!” added Bunter: which was quite a change from “Harry, old chap”.

He frowned into the study.

As a matter of fact, Billy Bunter was not, at the moment, interested in “Harry, old chap” at all. His interest was centred in a bag of dough-nuts which he had seen Harry Wharton conveying from the tuck-shop to the House a few minutes before. Bunter had, naturally, followed on. Bunter liked dough-nuts.

But he had lost sight of Wharton on the stairs. Stairs told on Bunter. He had more weight to carry up than most fellows.

He expected to find Wharton in his study—with the dough-nuts. But if the captain of the Remove had gone into his study, evidently he had gone out again, for he was not visible. Neither were the dough-nuts. It looked as if he had gone to some other study with that bag of attractive comestibles.

“Beast!” repeated Bunter. “Where is he, blow him! Where—”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

Billy Bunter jumped at a stentorian voice behind him in the passage. He revolved in the doorway, and blinked at Bob Cherry, who had come down the passage with a football under his arm.

“Looking for Wharton?” asked Bob.

“Eh? Oh! Yes! I—I’m going to help him with his lines for Quelch! But he isn’t here! Know where he is?”

“He’s gone to my study to borrow some impot paper. Inky’s sorting it out for him. Like to come and help me punt this ball about in the quad, old fat man?” asked Bob, with a grin.

“I’ll watch it!” snorted Bunter. Punting a footer had no appeal whatever for a fat and lazy Owl: especially when he was on the track of dough-nuts.

“A spot of exercise would do you good, old porpoise,” urged Bob.

“Yah!” was Bunter’s reply to that. Billy Bunter had no desire whatever for good to be done to him, in the way of strenuous exercise in the frosty air.

Bob Cherry laughed, and went on down the passage to the stairs. Billy Bunter blinked after him, and then blinked into No. 1 Study again. Then he rolled into the study, his little round eyes glistening behind his big round spectacles.

Billy Bunter’s fat brain did not often work quickly. But when provender was the subject, it could be quite alert. If Harry Wharton had gone up the passage to No. 13, Bob’s study, to borrow impot paper for his lines, he could hardly have taken that bag of dough-nuts with him. Ten to one, he had left it in the cupboard in No. 1, ready for tea later.

Bunter shot across the study to the cupboard. He was quite prepared to deal with those dough-nuts, without the assistance of “Harry, old chap”. He grabbed open the cupboard door.

“Oh! Good!” gasped Bunter.

There it was—under his eyes and his spectacles. It did not remain there. A moment more, and the bag was in Bunter’s fat hands. On the subject of tuck, William George Bunter never seemed able to remember the distinction between “meum” and “tuum”. Often and often had Bunter been kicked for snooping other fellows’ tuck. But he never could resist its lure. Somehow or other, it always seemed to Bunter that, if there was tuck about, its natural destination was his own capacious inside.



He grabbed the bag from the study cupboard

He grabbed that bag from the study cupboard, and was about to thrust in a fat hand for a dough-nut, when he paused. If Wharton had only gone up the passage to borrow impot paper, he might be back any minute—any second. There was no time to linger. Prompt retreat was indicated: to a safer spot where the voracious fat Owl could devour his prey at his leisure. Bunter put the paper bag under a fat arm, and started for the door.

But alas for Bunter! Even as he started, there was a sound of approaching footsteps in the passage. He stopped, in alarm.

“Oh, crikey!” breathed Bunter. “If that’s that beast coming back—!”

He grabbed the bag from under the fat arm, and put it behind him: only just in time, as Harry Wharton appeared in the doorway, with a sheaf of impot paper in his hand.

He started at Bunter as he came in. The bag of dough-nuts was quite invisible behind Bunter’s extensive circumference. Billy Bunter was very careful to keep it out of sight, as he blinked at the captain of the Remove.

“Oh! Here you are, old chap!” he gasped.

“Here I am,” assented Harry Wharton. “Want anything?”

“Oh! Yes! I came here to—to—to—”

“Well?”



"Here I am," assented Harry Wharton. "Want anything?"

"To—to—to speak to you, old chap—"

"Fire away."

"About—about the hols," stammered Bunter. He had to say something: and the "hols", as it happened, were very much in Bunter's mind towards the end of term. Bunter was not yet "fixed up" for the Christmas holidays: and it was necessary, as the old song says, for a victim to be found.

"What about the hols?" asked Harry.

"Well, Christmas is coming, you know—"

"I know!" assented Wharton. "It generally does, about the end of December. Quite a usual thing."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Thanks for reminding me," added Harry Wharton, laughing. "And now, roll away, old barrel: I've got lines to do, and I'm late with them already. I don't want Quelch to double them."

Billy Bunter would have been glad to roll away—if he could have rolled with the bag of dough-nuts undetected. As it was, he remained.

"But I say, old chap—" he recommenced.

"Lines—!"

"Never mind your lines for a minute. About Christmas—"

"Never mind Christmas now. I tell you I'm late with my lines—Quelch will be shirty if I don't take them down—so roll off like a good barrel—"

"I'd rather settle about the hols now," said Bunter. "I suppose you're taking some fellows home with you to Wharton Lodge."

"Bob and Inky and Nugent and Bull," said Harry. "We're all going together, if you want to know. Now cut."

"Like me to come?"

"Eh? Thanks! No."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Sorry, old fat man, but I couldn't land you on my uncle again. Last time you came, you put his back up with your potty ventriloquist tricks—"

"I should think you'd be jolly glad to have a jolly good ventriloquist at a Christmas party!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, indignantly. "It was jolly funny that time when I imitated Colonel Wharton's voice and made the butler think he was calling him a fathead—"

"Too jolly funny," said Harry.

"And when I ventriloquised a dog under the table, growling, and made your aunt jump nearly out of her skin—"

"I couldn't kick you then, as you were a guest—but I think I'll kick you now, now that you remind me—"

Billy Bunter backed hastily away.

"Look here, you beast—"

"Oh, cut!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, impatiently. "I've got my lines to do, and I tell you I'm late with them. Think I want a detention to-morrow, with the Redclyffe match due? Roll away, and shut the door after you, and for goodness sake give a fellow a rest."

Billy Bunter breathed hard. Then he gave a little fat cough. That, if Harry Wharton had thought of it, was Bunter's usual preliminary to exercising his weird powers as a ventriloquist. That peculiar gift did not make Bunter popular. Certainly it must have been a gift: for, as many fellows had remarked, if it required brains, Bunter couldn't have done it. But there was no doubt that he could do it: and fellows failed to be amused when he made them jump by imitating Mr. Quelch's sharp voice behind their backs. The fat ventriloquist could imitate any voice that was at all distinctive: and Quelch's bark was very distinctive indeed.

Harry Wharton had placed the sheaf of impot paper, borrowed from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in No. 13, on the table, and now he sat down to write lines. Those lines ought really to have been delivered in Mr. Quelch's study some time ago: and he was anxious to get through. The mere thought of

a possible detention was alarming, with football at Redclyffe scheduled for the following afternoon—the last match in the Remove list before the school broke up for the Christmas holidays. Bunter, as so often happened, was superfluous: and the captain of the Remove, as he dipped his pen in the ink, gave him almost a glare.

“Hook it, Bunter,” he rapped.

“Wharton!”

That name came in a sharp rap. It came—or at least appeared to come—through the half-open door from the passage. If it was not the voice of Mr. Quelch, calling to the junior in the study, it was a twin to it: and if it did not come from the passage, it certainly seemed to do so.

“Oh!” ejaculated Harry. He stared round at the door in dismay. He had dreaded that Quelch might come up about those lines, as they were so late. Now, as it appeared, Quelch had done so. “Oh! Yes, sir.”

“Have you written your lines, Wharton!”

“Oh! No, sir! N-n-ot yet! I’m just going—”

“That will not do, Wharton.”

“I—I—I’m just—”

“Follow me to my study at once, Wharton.”

Harry Wharton rose from the table, setting his lips. Quelch was a whale on punctuality. If a fellow, given lines, did not hand them in at the specified time, trouble was likely to accrue. Still, there was no need for Quelch to hoot into the study without even looking in: and an order to follow him to his own study looked like “whops”. Wharton laid down his pen, with a dark brow.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, with a lurking grin.

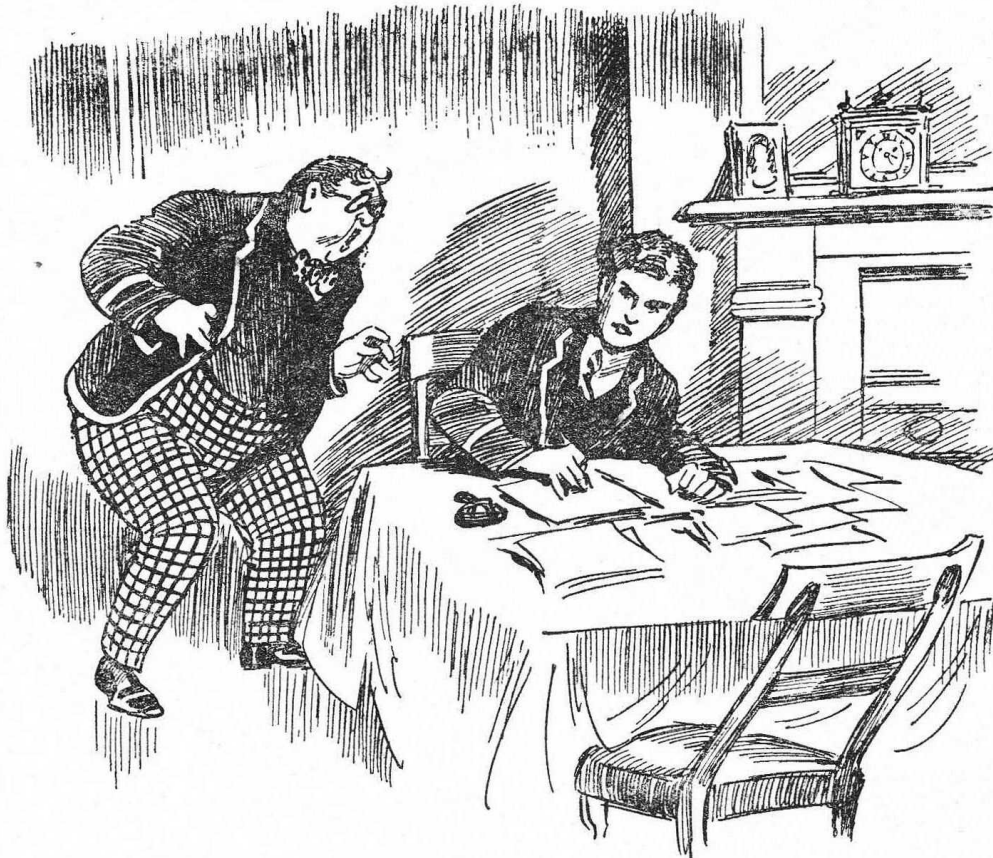
“I say, old chap—”

“Oh, go and eat coke!” snapped Wharton. He had no more patience for Bunter. “What the dickens is Quelch so ratty for, bother him? Fellows have been late with their lines before this.”

“I’d go down though,” said Bunter, shaking his head. “Keeping the old bean waiting only makes him worse.”

“Think I don’t know that?” growled the captain of the Remove. And he crossed to the door. Billy Bunter’s grin widened as he blinked after him.

Harry Wharton tramped out of the study, in far from a good temper. He was a little surprised not to see Quelch in the passage. Apparently the Remove master had gone immediately after calling into the study. At the moment, it did not occur to Wharton that Mr. Quelch had been nowhere near the study, and that a fat ventriloquist had reproduced his master’s voice. Had he guessed that this was one more of Billy Bunter’s ventriloquial trickeries, Billy Bunter would probably have suffered for his sins on the spot. As it was,



"I'd go down though," said Bunter

Wharton hurried down the passage to the stairs, without a suspicion.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter blinked out of the study after him. He chuckled a fat chuckle as the captain of the Remove disappeared. Then he rolled out of the study in his turn. It would not take Wharton long to learn that his leg had been pulled: and Bunter was not going to risk being caught in the study a second time. Billy Bunter rolled away: and, like Iser in the poem, he rolled rapidly.

It was ten minute later that Harry Wharton came back—having found that Quelch was not in his study, and having learned that he was walking in the quad with Mr. Prout, and had certainly not been up to the Remove studies. Then it dawned on him, and he came back to No. 1 with a look on his face that would have alarmed Billy Bunter—had he been still there! But the fat Owl was gone: and with lines on his hands, the captain of the Remove had no time to look for him, and award him the kicking he merited. He sat down to lines again. It was no use looking for Bunter. It would have been still less useful to look for the dough-nuts. By that time, they were inside Bunter.

CHAPTER II

MERELY A MISTAKE!

“THROUGH?”
“Not yet.”

Frank Nugent asked the question as he came into No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton answered it over his shoulder without looking up. He was working fast at those lines. He had a hundred to do, and so far, barely fifty had been transcribed. His master's voice at the door had been a false alarm: but time pressed all the same. Quelch would not be walking in the quad for ever, and when he came in, he would expect to find that imposition on the table in his study.

“Okay! Carry on,” said Nugent. And he sat in the window-seat and picked up a book.

Wharton's pen hurried on. It was tea-time and he would have been through by tea-time but for Billy Bunter and his knavish tricks. All the Famous Five were due for tea in No. 1 Study, where they generally tea'd together when the funds ran to a study tea.

Bob Cherry was the next to arrive. He came in with a cheery ruddy face, and pitched a football into a corner.

“Tea ready?” he asked, as he came in. “I'm as hungry as a hunter—or a Bunter. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Not done your lines yet, Wharton?”

“Not yet.”

“Hurry up, old man!” Bob sat down beside Nugent in the window-seat.

Harry did not reply to that. He was hurrying up as fast as he could: but lines for Quelch could not be dashed off anyhow: Quelch was rather particular about his impots.

Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh came into the study together. They too expected to see signs of tea. What they saw was two juniors sitting at the window, and another at the table scribbling lines from a Virgil propped open against the inkstand.

“Still at it?” asked Johnny.

No answer. There was no time for speech, and Johnny was left to guess that the answer was in the affirmative.

“You're taking your time over those lines,” remarked Johnny. “You're jolly late with them already.”

“I know that, fathead.”

“Well, if you'd done them immediately after class—”

"I didn't."

"I know you didn't, but I jolly well told you you'd better, and if you had—"

"Dry up, old man," said Bob Cherry. "Wharton won't get on any faster if you chew the rag."

"Well, I did tell him so—"

"Speech is silvery, my esteemed Johnny," murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "But silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks."

"Well, my idea is that when a thing has to be done, the sooner it's done the better," said Johnny Bull. "I told Wharton so—"

Harry Wharton looked up.

"Do you want me to shy this inkpot at you, Johnny?" he asked.

"Eh! No."

"Then shut up till I've done my lines."

Johnny Bull contented himself with a grunt, by way of rejoinder, and sat down in the window-seat to wait with the others. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh sat down beside him. In a row under the window, they watched Harry Wharton grinding on with his lines. His pen raced on. He was more than anxious to get those lines down to Quelch's study, before Quelch came in from his walk with Prout. He did not hear, or heed, a footstep in the passage, and as he sat with his back towards the door, he did not see an angular form appear in the doorway, and a gimlet-eye gleam into the study. The Co. looking past him from the window, saw Mr. Quelch, and rose respectfully to their feet. Wharton, unaware of him, raced on with his pen on impot paper.

"Wharton!"

It was a bark from the doorway.

Wharton's friends stared at him. They expected him to jump up at once at his form-master's voice. But he did not stir: he did not even turn his head. His pen raced on regardless.

"Wharton!"

The bark was repeated. Still the captain of the Remove did not heed. His friends could only stare at him in amazement: and the Remove master in amazement also. It was the first time that Quelch's majestic bark had been passed by, in his form, like the idle wind that was regarded not. And certainly Harry Wharton would have heeded at once, but for the ventriloquial trick Billy Bunter had so recently played on him. As it was, he had no doubt that the fat ventriloquist was at his tricks again, and he was not to be caught a second time.

"Wharton!" Quelch fairly thundered.

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Wharton, without looking round. "Do you want me to come out and kick you, you silly ass?"

Mr. Quelch almost fell down in his astonishment. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gazed at the captain of the Remove in utter consternation.

"Harry!" gasped Frank Nugent.

"Wharton, old man—!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"My esteemed idiotic Wharton—!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Mr. Quelch did not speak immediately. He was too astonished to speak. He gazed speechlessly at the back of the bent head over the table. Wharton, unaware and regardless, raced on with his pen.

"Wharton—!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Do be quiet—"

"But—"

"You're interrupting me! Haven't I got to get these lines done for Quelch?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in exasperation. "Do give a fellow a chance to get through. I've only a dozen more to do."

"It's Quelch!" howled Johnny. "Quelch—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"WHARTON!" Mr. Quelch found his voice, and roared, "Wharton! What is the meaning of this? What—?"

"Will you shut up?" yelled Wharton, over his shoulder.

"Bless my soul!"

"Can't one of you fellows go out and kick that silly fathead?" exclaimed Wharton. "I've no time to kick him, if I'm to get these lines down to Quelch's study before there's a row about them."

"It's Quelch—!" gasped Bob.

"Fathead! It's Bunter, playing his silly tricks again. Now shut up while I get through." Wharton mumbled the line aloud as he scribbled. "Ecce manus juvenem—"

"Wharton!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Stand up immediately."

"Fathead!" hooted Harry Wharton.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Ass!"

"Goodness gracious me, has the boy taken leave of his senses," exclaimed Mr. Quelch: and he strode into the study, and grasped Wharton by the shoulder, "Now, Wharton—"

"You fat ass, let go! You—" Harry Wharton, at last, turned his head. Then he jumped—or rather, bounded. His eyes almost popped from his face at the sight of Mr. Quelch. Up to that moment he had not doubted that it



"Wharton! What do you mean? How dare you address me in such a manner?"

was the fat ventriloquist at his tricks again. The ghost of Banquo did not startle Macbeth more than the sight of Mr. Quelch startled the captain of the Remove. He fairly goggled at him.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Wharton! What do you mean? How dare you address me in such a manner! I repeat, how dare you?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, crumbs! I—I—I—" Wharton stammered helplessly, "I—I—I—I—I didn't know it was you, sir—I—I—I never knew you'd come up, sir—I—I—I"

"I came up because I did not find your imposition in my study, Wharton. You have not done your lines. But that is a slight matter in comparison with your impertinence—your insolence—your—your—your unexampled audacity in speaking as you have done to your form-master! I shall take you to Dr. Locke immediately, and your head-master will deal with you."

"But, sir, I—I—I—"

"Follow me at once."

"But, sir, I—I—I never knew it was you," gasped Harry. "I—I didn't see you, sir, as I had my back to the door—"

"You know my voice, I presume."

"Oh! Yes! But—but I fancied it was a fellow playing a trick—I—I—I— Surely, sir, you know that I wouldn't have said what I did if I'd known that it was you, sir!" gasped Harry.

Mr. Quelch's stern face relaxed a little. He realised that there had been a mistake in the matter. The distress in Harry Wharton's crimson face was convincing. There was a pause.

"Very well, Wharton, I accept your explanation," said Mr. Quelch, much to the relief of the whole Co. "I advise you not to make such a mistake again."

"Oh! Certainly, sir. I'm sorry—I—I—"

"Very well: say no more." Quelch dismissed the matter with a gesture. "But you have not brought your lines to my study, Wharton. Your imposition is doubled. You will write two hundred lines instead of one hundred. You will bring them to my study to-morrow before you go out of gates. That is all."

With that the Remove master rustled out of the study.

There was silence in the study till his footsteps had died away. Harry Wharton wiped a spot of perspiration from his brow. Johnny Bull was the first to speak.

"You ass!" he said.

"You terrific ass!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, that fat villain!" breathed Harry Wharton. "It's all Bunter's fault—"

"Bunter? How—"

"He was playing his potty tricks here, imitating Quelch's voice, and I thought he was at it again—"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "Better make sure next time before you slang a beak and call him an ass and a fathead—"

"I'll burst that fat frog—"

"Might have guessed that Quelch would come after those lines as they were so jolly late," said Johnny Bull. "If you'd taken my tip, and done them at once—"

"Oh, pack it up."

"Well, I told you so!"

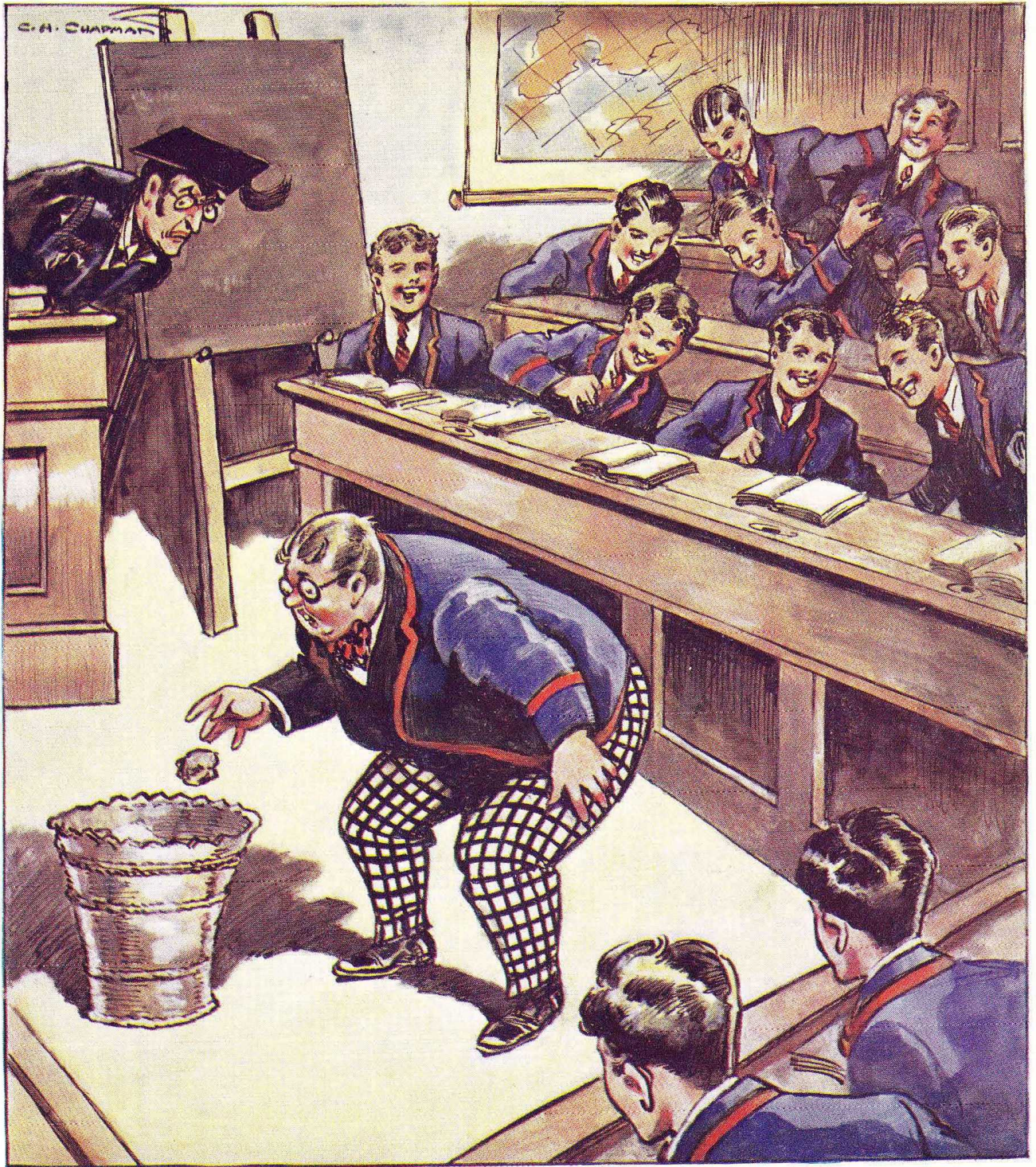
"I know you did, and if you tell me so again, I'll jolly well punch your silly head!" roared the exasperated captain of the Remove.

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Bob Cherry. "What about tea! You needn't scurry over those lines now—you've got till to-morrow—"

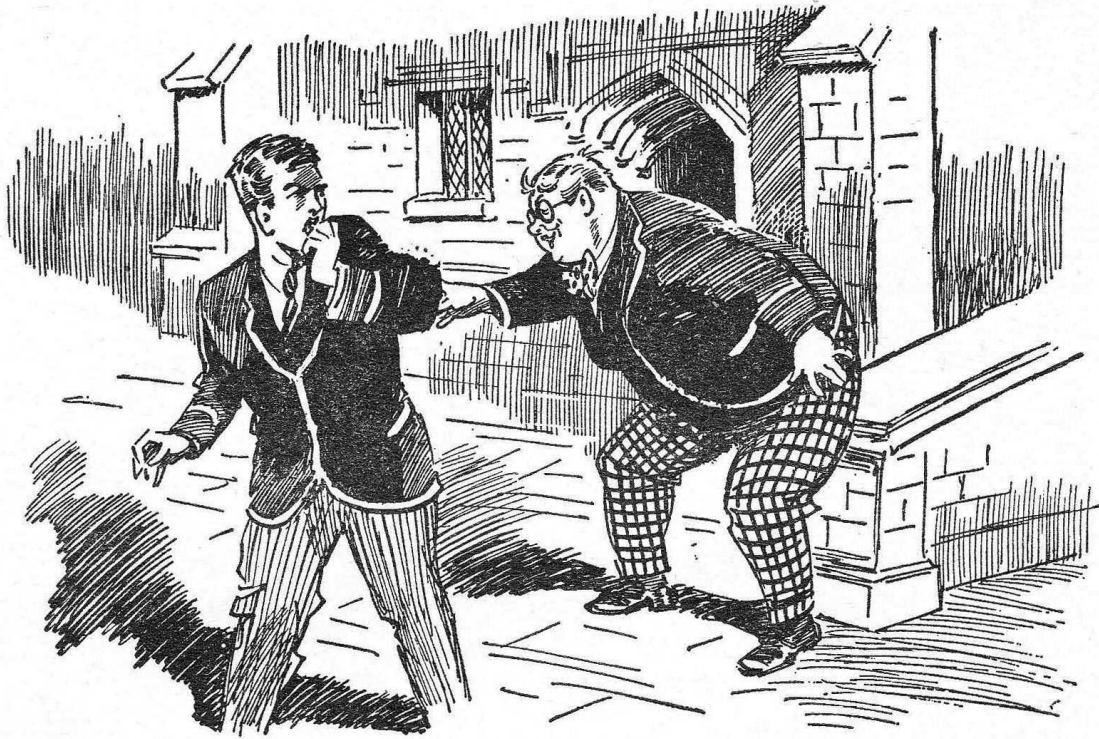
"Yes—and two hundred to do—and the Redclyffe match to-morrow! I shall have to get through them this evening, somehow. That fat villain—"

"Well, let's have tea," said Nugent.

"Bother tea—"



"Bunter! You will take 50 lines. Go," snapped Mr. Quelch



"Mauly, old man?" "Yaas," sighed Mauly

"Past tea-time," said Johnny Bull.

"Blow tea-time! You fellows can tea if you like," snapped the captain of the Remove, turning to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to look for Bunter, and strew him in small pieces over the House!"

With that, Harry Wharton tramped out of No. 1 Study. Four fellows exchanged grins, and sat down to tea. A few minutes later, a sound of frantic yelling up the passage announced that the captain of the Remove had found Bunter. Probably he was not strewing him in small pieces over the House—but it certainly sounded something like it.

CHAPTER III

WHO WANTS BUNTER?

"**M**AULY, old man—"
"Yaas," sighed Lord Mauleverer.

He stopped—reluctantly. But he had to stop as a fat and rather sticky paw clutched his sleeve.

It was morning break at Greyfriars. The day was quite sunny, for December, and there was a nip of frost in the air. Most fellows were out of the House, in break, enjoying both the sunshine and the frosty nip. Among them was William George Bunter of the Remove.

Bunter, certainly, did not enjoy frosty nips. As a matter of taste, he would have preferred an armchair before the fire in the Rag. But the fat Owl had a matter of some weight on his fat mind. Break-up for Christmas was near at hand. Often and often as Bunter had described the luxurious amenities of Bunter Court, he never seemed keen to head for home in the "hols". He had, in fact, banked on Wharton Lodge for Christmas. The lack of an invitation for the hols did not worry Bunter. So long as he could wedge in, Bunter was satisfied. But, after the episode in No. 1 Study the previous day, the fat Owl had to realise that Wharton Lodge was a very doubtful proposition. Harry Wharton was far from being in a mood to listen to the voice of the charmer. At that very moment, in fact, he was in his study, finishing his doubled impot, instead of joining his friends in the open air.

Billy Bunter wanted to get this matter settled. It was really rather a puzzle to Bunter why invitations for the "hols" did not shower on him right and left. So charming a fellow, it might have been supposed, would be a gladly welcomed addition to any party. Nevertheless, though many fellows were asking one another, nobody seemed to want Bunter. That Lord Mauleverer didn't was only too clear from the expression on his noble visage. Billy Bunter could have seen that, even without the aid of his big spectacles. But that, to Billy Bunter, was a trifle light as air.

"Hold on a minute, Mauly—"

"Yaas!" sighed his lordship again. Had he seen Bunter coming, his lordship would have accelerated and escaped. But now a sticky paw was clutching his sleeve.

"About the Christmas hols, old fellow—"

That did it! Lord Mauleverer was just one chunk of polished politeness: but there was a limit. He jerked his arm away from the fat clutch and walked off without waiting for Bunter to continue.

A wrathful glare through a pair of big spectacles followed him.

"I say, Mauly—!" howled Bunter.

Lord Mauleverer disappeared behind the elms.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

It was necessary—indeed urgent—that a victim should be found! But it was clear, even to Bunter, that Lord Mauleverer was not going to be that victim.

The fat Owl blinked disconsolately round him. Four members of the

Famous Five were in a group, discussing the fixture of the afternoon. Billy Bunter rolled up to them.

"Wharton will get through all right with that dashed impot," Bob Cherry was saying. "He did most of it after prep last night. He will have it ready for Quelch when we go in for third school. All right for this afternoon—and we're going to wipe Redclyffe off the face of the earth."

"We are—we is!" agreed Johnny Bull.

"The wipefulness will be terrific," assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Last match of the term," said Bob, "and we're going to wind up with a glorious victory—"

"I say, you fellows—!" howled Bunter.

"Redclyffe are pretty good, but we're going to walk over them," said Bob. "They won't find it easy to get past Johnny in goal."

"Not if I can help it," said Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—"

"And Smithy on the wing is a real nut," went on Bob. "And I'm not bad at half, though it's me as sez it as didn't orter—"

"I say, you fellows—!" yelled Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that a barrage balloon got loose in the quad? Oh, it's Bunter! Did you speak, Bunter?"

"Yes, I jolly well did—"

"Well, don't!"

"Beast! I mean, look here, dear old chap—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"About Christmas—"

"Run for your lives!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" howled Billy Bunter, as four laughing juniors trotted away. Only too clearly, the Co. did not want to hear anything from Bunter about Christmas.

"Smithy!" called out Bunter, as Herbert Vernon-Smith came along. The Bounder glanced round at him.

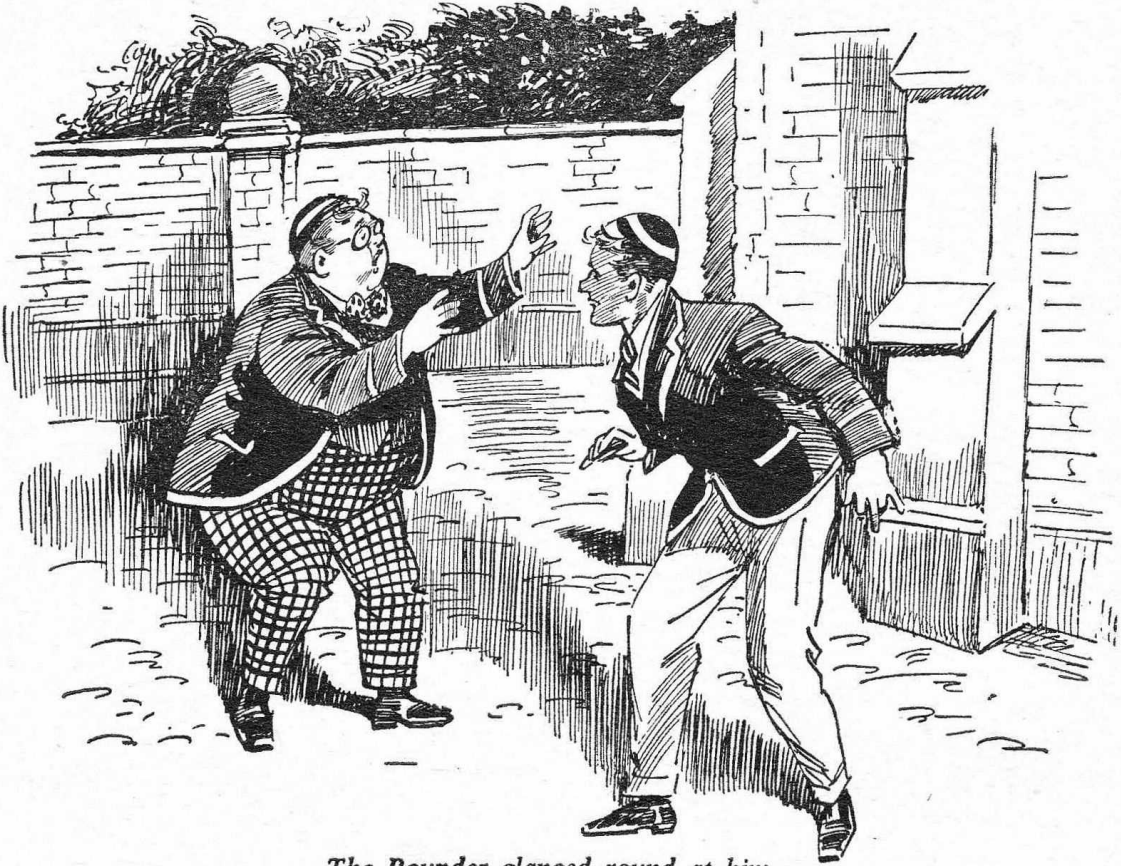
"Well?" he asked.

"Fixed up for the hols, Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"Yes."

"I hear you're going abroad this time—"

"You hear a lot of things," said Smithy. "I suppose you always will, so long as they make keyholes to doors."



The Bounder glanced round at him

“Oh, really, Smithy—”

“Is that the lot?”

“Well, what I mean, if you’re going to the south of France, you’ll want a pal with you who speaks jolly good French—”

“Yes: Redwing does.”

“I could talk Redwing’s head off at French, Smithy. Look here, I’ve just told Mauly I can’t go with him for the hols—he’s such a bore, you know: and I don’t much like the idea of Wharton and his gang—they’re rather a rough-and-ready lot. If you’d like a pal with you who speaks French like a native—I say, Smithy, don’t walk away while a fellow’s talking to you.”

But Smithy did walk away.

“Beast!” breathed Bunter.

He rolled back to the House. In the doorway he encountered Peter Todd, who had the pleasure—or otherwise—of sharing No. 7 Study in the Remove with the fat Owl. He caught Peter by the arm.

“I say, Toddy, old chap—hold on a minute—I say, I’ve decided not to go with Wharton after all for Christmas—”

"Lucky man!" said Toddy.

"Oh, really, Toddy! The fact is, old chap, I should miss you in the hols—we're such pals here. I'll come home with you, Toddy."

"Will you?" said Toddy.

"Yes, old fellow. Your people aren't exactly the sort I'm accustomed to mixing with, I know—"

"Eh?"

"But I can stand them all right," said Bunter, reassuringly.

Peter looked at him.

"There's just one difficulty," he said.

"What's that, old fellow?"

"They couldn't stand you!" explained Peter: and he jerked his arm away, and walked on.

"Beast!" mumbled Bunter.

He rolled away disconsolately to the Rag and an armchair before the fire:



"They couldn't stand you!" explained Peter

his problem still unsolved. It was inexplicable—to Bunter—and it was quite annoying and exasperating—but it seemed an indubitable fact that, fascinating fellow as he was, nobody wanted Bunter!

CHAPTER IV

HARD LINES!

“**B**LOW!” said Harry Wharton.

He made that remark, in No. 1 Study, as a bell rang. That bell announced the end of “break”: and summoned Greyfriars fellows back to the form-rooms. It was never really a very welcome sound to the ears of juniors: and, at the moment, it was more unwelcome than ever to Harry Wharton’s.

All through break, he had been grinding at lines in his study. The previous evening he had got through quite a chunk of that imposition: and he had intended to complete the final chunk in break, and have done with it. But he was not quite finished when the bell rang for third school. Fifteen lines remained to be written, out of the two hundred, when the clang of the bell woke the echoes.

“Blow!” he repeated, quite crossly.

He laid down his pen and rose from the table. There was no time to finish now: he had to cut down to the form-room. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and he was booked to captain the Remove footballers at Redclyffe: the team had to leave immediately after dinner. But that impot had to be handed in to Quelch first. However, there was time between third school and dinner to add the final fifteen lines, and get through: and then all would be well. Leaving the unfinished impot on the study table, he hurried out of No. 1 and down the stairs to join his friends at the door of the Remove form-room.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Done your lines?” asked Bob Cherry, as he came up.

“Not quite. Fifteen more to do,” answered Harry.

“Lots of time before tiffin,” said Bob, cheerily.

“Oh, lots,” agreed Harry.

“For goodness sake,” said Johnny Bull, “cut up to your study and finish the minute we get out of form. If you put it off like you did yesterday, the fat will be in the fire.”

“Fathead!” was Wharton’s reply to that.

Johnny’s advice was good: Johnny Bull was the man for good advice. He was a fellow of sound and solid common-sense. But he did not always shine in tact. Nor did he always realise that even good advice may be superfluous.

"Well, you can call a pal names," he said. "But you did put it off yesterday and look what happened—"

"Ass!"

"If you put it off again—"

"Chump!"

"Well, it was fatheaded to put it off yesterday, as I told you at the time. You remember that I told you so, don't you?"

"Blitherer!"

"Shirty about something?" asked Johnny, staring at him. "Nothing to be shirty about, that I can see. Look here, you cut up to your study and finish that impot the minute Quelch lets us out. That's my advice: take it or leave it."

"I say, you fellows." A fat voice chimed in, before Wharton could speak again: which was perhaps just as well. "I say—"

"Don't say 'Christmas'," warned Bob Cherry. "One word about the hols and I'll jolly well bang your head on the wall. That's a tip, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Pack it upfully, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Scat, you fat ass!" snapped Harry Wharton.

"I say, old chap—"

"If you 'old chap' me I'll boot you."

"But I say, have you finished your lines—?"

"No, bother you."

"Like me to come up to the study after class and help?" asked Bunter.

"If I find you in my study again, I'll kick you to the end of the passage, and back again."

"Beast!"

Mr. Quelch arrived just then to let in his form. The Remove went in and took their places and English History was the order of the day for the next hour. With a football match due that afternoon, and the Christmas holidays so near, it was probable that many thoughts, among the juniors, wandered from the annals of their native land.

Billy Bunter, certainly, was not giving undivided attention to the words of wisdom from his form-master. That was quite clear when, in answer to a question, he informed Mr. Quelch that the Spanish Armada came in the reign of Charles the Third. Neither did he improve matters when, guessing from Mr. Quelch's look that that answer wouldn't do, he hurriedly made it George the Eighth. Fifty lines apprised Bunter that History in the Remove form-room was not to be treated as a guessing game.

However, third school came to an end at last, and the Remove were dismissed. As they came out, Johnny Bull tapped Wharton on the arm. Once more he failed to realise that, good as his advice was, it was possible to have too much of a good thing.

"Don't forget your lines, old chap," he said.

"Think I'm likely to forget them, when I shall be out of the football if I don't hand them in on time?" asked Harry.

"Well, you did yesterday—anyhow, you left them late. If you leave them late again—"

"Fathead!"

"You've got plenty of time before tiffin, if you don't waste any," said Johnny. "Don't waste any, old fellow. You were an ass to waste time yesterday. I told you so, and I'm bound to say—Yaroooop!" Johnny Bull wound up with a sudden yell as his chum suddenly caught him by the collar and banged his head against the corridor wall. "Wow! You mad ass, what do you think you're up to? Wow!"

Harry Wharton hurried on and cut up the stairs to the Remove studies. He was very anxious to get that troublesome impot finished and handed in to Quelch: and really and truly, he did not need Johnny's sage advice on that subject. Johnny was left rubbing his head and his friends grinning.

"Is Wharton shirty about something to-day?" asked Johnny.

"Perhaps you've told him once too often that you told him so!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I did tell him so, didn't I?" demanded Johnny.

"You did, old chap! Now go up to his study and tell him again that you told him so! I'll come after you and pick up the pieces."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Johnny.

Harry Wharton, in No. 1 Study, sat down at the table and dipped his pen in the ink. One hundred and eighty-five Latin lines lay there, all nicely and neatly written: equal to the test if a gimlet-eye looked over them scrutinisingly, as probably it would! From "conticuere omnes" to "Calchas attollere molem" had been neatly transcribed from the second book of the Aeneid: and it remained to push on to "improvida pectora turbat". Taking up the tale, so to speak, at "roboribus textis", the captain of the Remove went on with his task.

"I say, old chap—"

Ten of the fifteen lines had been written, when that fat voice floated in at the doorway of No. 1 Study.



"Get out!" he hooted

Harry Wharton looked up, with a concentrated glare at the fat and fatuous features of William George Bunter.

"Get out!" he hooted.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Buzz, you bloated bluebottle."

"If that's what you call civil to a fellow—"

"Hook it!"

"I say, old chap, don't be so jolly shirty," said Bunter. "I've come up to help you with your lines." The fat Owl rolled into the study. "Think Quelch would notice if I did twenty or so for you?"

"You fat ass, he would think a spider had got into the inkpot and crawled over the paper! Scat!"

"Well, I mean it," declared Bunter. "I'll help you with your lines, if you like. After all, we're pals, ain't we? I'm always ready to help a pal. Kindest friend and noblest foe, you know, that's me! You kicked me yesterday, Wharton—"

"I'll kick you again if you don't hook it."

"Well, I'm not the chap to owe a grudge," said Bunter. "You kicked me—and now I've come up to help you out. I know you can't help having a beastly temper, old chap, and I don't expect much in the way of manners from you.

That's all right. I'm going to help you with those lines, because we're pals—I'm not thinking about the Christmas hols, or anything of the kind—just being pally, you know—I say, what are you picking up that Latin grammar for—yaroooooh!" added Bunter, suddenly discovering why Wharton had picked up the Latin grammar, as it flew through the air and landed on a fat little nose. "Wow! Why, you beast—wow! ow!"

"Now get out—"

"Ow! wow! wow!"

"Or do you want the inkpot next?"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I jolly well won't help you with your lines now, and I wouldn't come with you for Christmas if you asked me on your bended knees! Ow! My boko! wow! Here's your rotten grammar back, you beast."

Bunter clutched up the Latin grammar and hurled it back.

"You fat chump!—"

Harry Wharton put up his hand and knocked the whizzing grammar aside as it arrived. It landed on the table, knocking over the inkpot. There was a splash of ink and an almost frantic roar from the captain of the Remove.

"Oh! My lines! Oh!"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at the havoc he had wrought. The inkpot lay upturned on that long, long imposition: one hundred and ninety-five Latin lines swam in a sea of ink. Harry Wharton gazed at the ruin in utter dismay, for a moment spellbound by that overwhelming catastrophe.

Bunter made the most of that moment. He made a bound for the door and vanished into space. Harry Wharton was left staring blankly at his hapless lines: certainly not now in a condition to be handed in to his form-master.

CHAPTER V

BOOT FOR BUNTER!

"TIFFIN!" said Bob Cherry.

"Didn't you hear the bell?" asked Nugent.

"You're through by this time, surely?" said Johnny Bull. "You've had lots of time since class."

Harry Wharton did not answer. He was bending over a batch of inky lines at his study table. Billy Bunter had fled for his fat life: but the captain of the

Remove was not thinking of Bunter. He was seeking to salvage something from the wreck, as it were. But it was hopeless. Every sheet covered with lines from the Aeneid was blotted and spotted with ink, and half the lines were quite undecipherable. On one sheet hardly a word could be read. That imposition had to be written out again, its whole weary length from "Conticuere omnes" to "improvida pectora turbat": and Harry had to realise that unpleasant fact. He had to realise, too, that as no time was left for the completion of such a task before the footballers had to start for Redclyffe, the probability was that they would have to go without their captain. The expression on his face was very grim as he sorted over those inky lines.

"Anything up?" asked Bob.

"Is the upfulness terrific, my esteemed Wharton?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

As Wharton had not come down, they had come up for him. The bell for dinner was ringing. Four fellows stared in at him from the doorway of No. 1 Study.

Harry Wharton glanced round, and then pointed to the inky impot.

"Look at that!" he said.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as he looked. "Your lines? Phew! That won't do for Quelch."

"Upset the inkpot over them?" asked Johnny Bull. "Dash it all, that was jolly clumsy, old chap."

"Idiot!" was Wharton's brief rejoinder.

"Look here—"

"Accidents will happen!" said Bob. "But—my hat! That's jolly unlucky. Quelch wants his dashed lines before you go out."

"Rotten luck," said Nugent. "There's no time to do them over again, if you're playing at Redclyffe this afternoon."

"No!" said Harry, compressing his lips.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I'm going to kick Bunter, every time I see him, till the end of the term," said Harry. "That fat fool was playing the goat here—that's how it happened. By gum, I'll boot him all over Greyfriars."

"Do him good," agreed Bob. "But—"

"That won't help much, though," said Johnny Bull. "If you take my advice—"

"Oh, pack it up!" Wharton, apparently, had had enough advice from Johnny, and did not want any more.

"If you take my advice—"

"Give us a rest."

"If you take my advice," said Johnny, stolidly, for the third time, "you'll take that impot to Quelch, just as it is—"

"Fat lot of use that would be."

"—just as it is, and tell him it was done, but the inkpot got upset over it. If you explain—"

"Quelch wants lines, not explanations."

"I'm rather afraid he does," remarked Bob Cherry. "But—you've simply got to come over to Redclyffe with us, old man. Quelch might stretch a point if you explain—"

"Not likely."

"Well, we've got to go down to tiffin now," said Bob. "The bell's stopped. Come on—Quelch don't like late comers."

Harry Wharton nodded and left the study with his friends. His face was clouded as he went down to hall with them. He could picture the look on Quelch's face when he saw those inky sheets—if a fellow had the nerve to show up such an impot. He would be told to write that impot over again: quite regardless of anything else on hand that half-holiday. The Redclyffe match was washed out for him: another man would have to take his place in the forward line, and Smithy would have to captain the side—while he sat in his study at Greyfriars writing lines. Kicking Billy Bunter was, no doubt, a solace: but, as Johnny Bull had sapiently remarked, it would not help much.

Mr. Quelch, at the head of the Remove table in hall, gave the Famous Five an expressive glance, as they came in, a minute late. Quelch did not approve of unpunctuality, even to the extent of one minute. However, he said nothing and they took their places—Billy Bunter blinking across the table at Wharton with a very uneasy blink. The glance he received in return left him in no doubt that his uneasiness was well founded: and the fat Owl sagely made up his fat mind to steer carefully clear of Harry Wharton after dinner.

After "tiffin" Mr. Quelch called to Wharton, as the crowd were leaving hall. His expression was severe.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you written your lines?"

Harry Wharton had not received Johnny Bull's advice very graciously. But at that moment, he made up his mind to act upon it.

"Yes, sir! But—"

"Take them to my study."

"But, sir—"

"That will do, Wharton."

"There was an accident with them, sir—"



"Ow! Beast! You keep off!" he howled

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch, very dryly. "I shall expect those lines before tea-time, Wharton."

"But, sir—"

"You may go, Wharton." Mr. Quelch turned away with that, leaving Wharton with a view of his back.

The captain of the Remove compressed his lips and followed his friends out. They went into the quad together, not very cheerfully. A fat voice impinged upon their ears as they came out of the House.

"I say, you fellows, that silly ass Wharton knocked his inkpot over on his lines for Quelch—he, he, he!—I'll bet the old bean makes him do them over again! Serve him jolly well right, with his beastly temper! I say—yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter broke off, with a loud yell, as a foot crashed on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School.

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Billy Bunter.

He spun round and blinked at Harry Wharton. One blink was enough for Bunter. He jumped away in alarm.

"Ow! Beast! You keep off!" he howled.

"You fat villain, I'm going to boot you all over the school—"

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter did not wait to be booted! His little fat legs fairly flashed as he flew. Harry Wharton made a step in pursuit: but Frank Nugent caught his arm, and he paused, and then walked on with his friends.

But Billy Bunter did not stop. The guilty flee when no man pursueth! The fat Owl charged on breathlessly and did not stop till, at last, he halted under Mr. Quelch's study window, where he leaned on the wall gasping for breath. In that spot he was secure from booting: and he sagely resolved to remain there out of the reach of an avenging boot.

END OF FIRST SECTION

FRENCH LEAVE!

By

FRANK RICHARDS



The old military gentleman glanced at the fat face

CHAPTER I

TO GO OR NOT TO GO!

“COME all the same!” said Smithy.

It was like the reckless Bounder to give that advice. In similar circumstances, Herbert Vernon-Smith would not have hesitated for a moment.

Harry Wharton, as a rule, was very little disposed to follow the Bounder's example in flouting authority. But for once, he was inclined to listen. His temper, which had been rather sorely tried, was not at its best. He was keen—very keen indeed—to play Soccer at Redclyffe that afternoon: and it was really by no fault of his own that he was booked to miss the last football match of the term. He was wanted in the team: he was captain of the side. It was in a way disinterested of Smithy to advise him to “come all the same”, for in his absence Smithy would have captained the team. And after all, why shouldn't he? Wednesday was a half-holiday. Why shouldn't he go?

The motor-coach was ready to take the footballers across to Redclyffe. It

was time to start. Up to the last moment, Wharton was undecided. But it seemed that Smithy's words decided him, for he nodded.

"I'm coming!" he said.

"Good man!" said Smithy.

"Now, look here, Wharton—!" began Johnny Bull.

"I'm coming!" repeated Harry, interrupting him. "Quelch can wait for his dashed lines. I've done them once; and if I have to do them again, tomorrow will be soon enough."

"That isn't the point," said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "Quelch said jolly distinctly that he wants them this afternoon. If you cut without doing them, it isn't merely leaving them over and getting them doubled again—it's as good as telling Quelch that you don't care a boiled bean for him or his orders—"

"I don't, just now," snapped Wharton.

"It will mean a row," said Bob Cherry, uneasily. "If you take French leave, old chap—"

"I don't care if it does!"

"My esteemed Wharton—!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The captain of the Remove knitted his brows. In his present mood, opposition from his friends had the unfortunate effect of making him all the more stubborn.

"Look here, am I wanted in the team, or not?" he demanded.

"Of course you are," said Bob. "Likely as not we shall be licked at Redclyffe if you stay out. But—"

"That settles it then."

"But—!" said Frank Nugent, very dubiously.

"Oh, chuck butting!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "Let's get off. We don't want to keep the Redclyffe men waiting."

"I'm ready," said Harry.

"Look here, have a little sense," urged Johnny Bull. "You're in a temper now—"

"Who's in a temper?"

"You are!" said Johnny, calmly. "And a fellow in a temper ought to listen to advice from his pals before he makes a fool of himself. Quelch will be as mad as a hatter if you walk out on him like that."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders: from which it appeared that he couldn't have cared less, whether Quelch was "mad as a hatter" or not.

"Take my tip," went on Johnny, "Quelch isn't any too pleased with you just now, but he's not a bad old bean. Take that impot to him and explain that it was soaked in ink by accident—"



"Look here, am I wanted in the team, or not?"

"I've tried that."

"Try again, then—"

"You heard what he said in hall, after tiffin. He doesn't want to hear anything about accidents to a fellow's lines. He wants the lines. I'm not going to try again."

"You'd rather cheek him, and leave him to whistle for his lines?" inquired Johnny, sarcastically.

"Much rather," said Wharton, coolly.

"It won't do, Harry," said Frank Nugent, uneasily.

"It will have to do," said Harry. "Fellows have left over their impots before now, and I don't see why I shouldn't. Quelch can double them again if he likes."

"More likely to be whops," said Johnny.

"I can stand whops—I'm not made of putty."

"Well, if that's how you look at it—"

"Just like that! Come on—we shall be late at Redclyffe at this rate."

"After all, it's only lines," said Peter Todd.

"It isn't only lines—it's directly disobeying an order," said Johnny Bull.
 "That sort of thing is good enough for Smithy—"

"Thanks," said the Bounder, laughing.

"And for me too," said Harry Wharton. "You can talk till you're blue in the face, Johnny, but I'm coming to Redclyffe all the same. I'm not cutting a football match because that fat villain Bunter mucked up my impot. Come on, you fellows."

"Oh, come on," said Johnny, sarcastic again. "Let Quelch see you rolling off for the afternoon: it's sure to please him."

Harry Wharton paused.

Johnny's good advice had no more effect on him than water on a duck. He was in no mood to listen to good advice. He was going to play football at Redclyffe, and that was that. But he realised that if Quelch did see him "rolling off for the afternoon", as Johnny expressed it, he was not likely to be allowed to "roll" very far. The sharpest of sharp voices would certainly call him to order at once.

"It won't do for Quelch to see me go," he admitted.

"Hardly," said Bob.

"Easy enough," said Vernon-Smith. "We'll get off, and pick you up on the road afterwards. You hang about the quad, and let Quelch see you from his study window, till we're clear. Then you can run your bike out quietly and follow on."

"Good!" said Harry.

"Quelch won't know a thing," said Smithy, with a grin. "If he thinks of you at all, he'll think you're in your study, grinding out lines. He won't know a thing till you don't show them up at tea-time. You've only got to get out quietly after we're gone, and it's all serene."

"Quite!" said Harry.

"But—!" said Nugent.

"The butfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"But—!" said Bob.

"Oh, cut out the buts," exclaimed the Bounder, impatiently. "We're wasting time. Let's get off."

"Let's!" said Peter Todd. "If you've made up your mind, Wharton—"

"Quite!"

"Then let's get started."

Harry Wharton strolled in the quad, while a crowd of fellows piled into the motor-coach. They rolled away, leaving him sauntering idly with his hands in his pockets. Mr. Quelch, walking and talking with Mr. Prout, gave him a glance, and frowned slightly. Perhaps he thought that Wharton would be



"I say," squeaked Bunter. "Have they gone without you?"

better occupied writing his lines than idling about the quad. However, the junior had till tea-time for those lines, and so long as they were shown up by then, the Remove master had nothing to say.

Wharton was still idling in the quad, when Mr. Quelch went into the House, and to his study. Remembering the Bounder's advice, Wharton strolled past his form-master's study window: evidence that he was still within gates if the Remove master looked out. Under that window, a fat junior gave him an inimical glare through a pair of big spectacles.

"Beast!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton gave him an expressive glance, and walked on. Kicking Bunter, under a form-master's window, was not a practical proposition. The fat Owl, in that spot, was secure from the booting he richly deserved.

"I say," squeaked Bunter, as he walked on, "have they gone without you? Serve you jolly well right! He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton paused for a moment. Even under Quelch's window, from which the Remove master might be glancing, Billy Bunter had a narrow escape of a boot landing in his tight trousers. However, prudence prevailed: and the captain of the Remove walked on, and dismissed Billy Bunter from his mind—with a mental reservation to kick him next time he saw him.

For five or six minutes more, he loitered about the quad, with a casual air, as if he had nothing particular on his mind. It was easy to overtake the footballers, on a bike, and join up. He was heading for the bike shed, at last, when he came on Lord Mauleverer, who stopped, and gave him a sympathetic nod.

"Hard luck, old man," said Mauly, "All in the day's work, though—chap can't do just as he likes; at school. I say, hadn't you better get started on that impot?"

"I'm just getting started for Redclyffe."

Mauleverer looked very grave.

"I wouldn't, old man," he said.

Harry Wharton paused. Johnny Bull's advice had rolled off him like water from a duck. Somehow Mauly's made more impression. He paused: but it was only for a moment. It was too late now to back out—the footballers were expecting him to join them on the road, and he could not let them down.

"I'm going," he said.

And with a nod to Mauly, he walked on. Lord Mauleverer shook his head, but he said no more: and Harry Wharton went for his bike.



"Hard luck, old man!" said Mauly

CHAPTER II

BUNTER DOES HIS BEST!

BUZZZZZZ!

Mr. Quelch very nearly said "Bother!"

Quelch had settled down in his study, with a volume of Lucretius to keep him cheery company. T. Lucretius Carus, with the celebrated Lachmann's Latin notes on the same, was the kind of company Quelch enjoyed, in his hours of leisure—a taste that certainly was not shared by a single member of his Form! Deep in those majestic hexameters, the telephone-bell was the very last thing that Quelch wanted to hear.

BZZZZZZ!

Mr. Quelch laid Lucretius on the table, and stepped to the telephone. He jerked off the receiver.

"Well?" he almost barked.

"Is that Mr. Quelch—?" a deep voice came through.

"Speaking."

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Quelch. This is Colonel Wharton, speaking from Wapshot. I trust that I am not interrupting you."

Colonel Wharton's trust was unfounded. Undoubtedly he was interrupting Mr. Quelch. However, the old Colonel was a man whom Mr. Quelch liked and respected and he was also a member of the Governing Board of Greyfriars School. So the Remove master's voice, as he replied, resembled rather less a bark.

"Good-afternoon, Colonel Wharton. Pray go on."

"I had to come down to Wapshot to-day on a business matter, Mr. Quelch: and I find that I have time to come across to the school before catching my train back to London. As it is a half-holiday at the school, I conclude that my nephew will be at liberty for me to see him. My stay must be brief."

"Certainly," answered Mr. Quelch.

"I thought I would ring up first, in case Harry might be going out for the afternoon, as would be very probable on a half-holiday. Perhaps you would be kind enough to send him word that I shall be coming over, in about an hour's time, and that I should like to see him."

"I will do so at once, Colonel Wharton."

"If by chance he is gone out already, it cannot be helped—but no doubt you could tell me whether that is the case or not."



"Certainly," answered Mr. Quelch

"It is certainly not the case, sir, for, as it happens, he has an imposition to write, on which he will be engaged for some considerable time this afternoon. I will send him a message immediately. You may rely upon seeing him here."

"Thank you, Mr. Quelch."

"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Quelch, quite graciously.

Colonel Wharton, ten miles away at Wapshot, rang off. Mr. Quelch put up the receiver. He stepped to the study window, opened it, and looked out. He remembered that he had seen Harry Wharton loitering in the quad, and if he was still there, it was easy to beckon him from the window, and impart the message from his uncle.

Wharton, however, was not to be seen: and Quelch had no doubt that he had gone up to his study in the Remove to write his lines: as undoubtedly he ought to have done. Others were to be seen in the quad: and nearest at hand was a fat junior leaning on the wall under the window. Quelch glanced down at a fat head.

"Bunter!" he rapped.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

He jumped at that sharp voice over his head. He blinked up at Quelch in

alarm through his big spectacles. The fat Owl had had a wary eye for Harry Wharton: but he was not thinking of Quelch, and he was startled.

"It—it wasn't me, sir!" stammered Bunter.

Quelch stared at him.

"What do you mean, Bunter?" he snapped, testily.

"I—I mean, it—it really wasn't me, sir—"

"What was not you, Bunter?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I mean, anything! I—I mean—" stuttered Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had many little sins on his fat conscience, and his impression was, that Quelch was about to call him to account for one or another of them.

"Do not be absurd, Bunter," snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! But it—it wasn't me, sir—"

"Silence, you foolish boy! I desire you to take a message," snapped the Remove master.

"Oh! Certainly!" gasped Bunter, relieved of his apprehensions. "Certainly, sir! With—with—with pleasure, sir."

"Find Wharton at once—"

"Wh—Wh—Wharton, sir?"

"Yes, Wharton. Probably he is in his study at the moment, as he has an imposition to write. Go to him at once, and tell him that his uncle, Colonel Wharton, will be here in about an hour's time, and desires to see him. Go at once, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey! I—I mean, I—I—I—"

"Do you hear me, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—but—"

"That is all! Take my message to Wharton immediately."

With that, Mr. Quelch shut his study window. He returned at once to T. Lucretius Carus: and once more immersed in majestic hexameters, dismissed the trifling matter from his mind.

Billy Bunter blinked at the shut window, in dismay:

"Oh, lor'!" he murmured.

Even Billy Bunter, lazy as he was, and disinclined to any sort of exertion, would not have minded very much taking that message—in other circumstances. But in present circumstances he did mind. Quelch, naturally, had no idea that Harry Wharton, just then, was a person whom William George Bunter desired particularly to avoid.

However, there was no help for it: and the fat Owl rolled away to carry out his form-master's behest. He rolled into the House, and slowly and reluctantly heaved his weight up the stairs to the Remove studies.



"Oh, crikey!" "Do you hear me, Bunter? That is all!"

At the door of No. 1, he hesitated. The door was half-open, and he blinked round it cautiously, prepared to dodge. But caution was unnecessary: Harry Wharton was not there.

Having blinked into the vacant study, the fat Owl turned away. Skinner was coming down the passage, and he called to him.

"Seen Wharton, Skinner?"

"Lots of times," answered Skinner.

"Look here, do you know where he is?" yapped Bunter. "I've got a message for him from Quelch."

"Couldn't care less," answered Skinner.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter descended the stairs again. He blinked into the Rag. Only one fellow was there: Fisher T. Fish, deep in an account-book. Fishy was making financial calculations, which was often his happy occupation on a half-holiday.

"Seen Wharton, Fishy?" squeaked Bunter.

"Nope!"

"Blow him!" breathed Bunter, and he rolled out of the House. In the quad he came on Lord Mauleverer.

"Seen Wharton, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"Is the beast about?" asked Bunter. "I've got a message for him, blow him. I say, know where he is now?"

"Look in the bike-shed: he's just gone there."

"What the dickens is he gone to the bike-shed for, when he's got to stay in and do his lines," grunted Bunter. "I say, sure?"

"Yaas! Hurry up and you'll catch him."

"Oh, all right."

Billy Bunter rolled away to the bike-shed. He was just in time to encounter Harry Wharton wheeling his machine out. At the sight of him, Bunter stopped: preferring to deliver his message from a safe distance.

"I say, Wharton!" he yelled. "I say, stop!"

Harry Wharton glanced round at him, knitting his brows. His wish, at that moment, was to get out quickly and quietly, unobserved. Why Bunter was yelling to him he had not the faintest idea: but it was an unpropitious moment for a fat Owl to yell out his name at the top of his voice. Neither had he for-



There was a frantic yell as a foot helped him on his way

gotten that the fat and fatuous Owl was the cause of all the trouble that had accrued, and that a booting was due to him.

He did not answer Bunter. He lodged his machine against the bike-shed, and cut towards the fat Owl, with an expression on his face that was quite alarming to Bunter.

One blink at that angry face was enough for Bunter. He did not stay to deliver his message. He did not linger a second. He turned to flee. His motions were unusually swift. But Wharton's were swifter. There was a frantic yell from Bunter, as a foot crashed behind him, and helped him on his way. Billy Bunter, yelling, bolted: and Harry Wharton ran back to his machine, and ran it out into the road. A moment more, and he was in the saddle: greeted, ten minutes later, by a waving of hands from the motor-coach ahead on the Redclyffe road.

Mr. Quelch, in his study, if he remembered the matter at all, had no doubt that Harry Wharton, duly apprised that his uncle was calling that afternoon, was on the spot. In point of fact, Harry Wharton was playing Soccer at Redclyffe, a good many miles distant from Greyfriars, when a taxi-cab from Courtfield Station landed Colonel Wharton at the school.

CHAPTER III

NOT AT HOME!

“OH, crikey!” breathed Billy Bunter.

He blinked out of No. 4 Study in the Remove, at a tall, soldierly figure that was coming up the passage from the landing.

Bunter, of course, had no business in No. 4 Study, which belonged to Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. But the Bouncer was miles away, playing football: and his chum had gone with the team, to watch Smithy kicking goals for Greyfriars: and it seemed to Billy Bunter quite a golden opportunity for exploring the study cupboard in No. 4. Having discovered a cake therein, the fat Owl had happily proceeded to surround the cake with his ample circumference. He was about to leave Smithy's study, when that firm military tread came up the passage, and he blinked at Colonel Wharton.

The old military gentleman glanced at the fat face looking out of No. 4, with a glance of some disfavour. Perhaps he had not forgotten that fat Owl's ventriloquial tricks at Wharton Lodge in the summer “hols”. Then he turned to No. 1 Study and walked into that apartment. Bunter heard his deep voice as he went in:

"Harry, my boy—"

That was all Bunter heard from him. No doubt he observed the next moment that his nephew was not present. Certainly, he had expected to find him there. He had called on Mr. Quelch—once more interrupting the perusal of Lucretius—but had stayed only a few minutes and then came up to see his nephew. He had only half an hour to spare before returning to Courtfield for his train.

"Oh, crikey!" repeated Bunter.

In his deep interest in Smith's cake, the fat Owl had forgotten Harry Wharton and the undelivered message. Now he had to remember both. Wharton, unaware that his uncle was coming, had gone out on his bike. Bunter, really, had done his best. In spite of his reluctance to go anywhere near the captain of the Remove that afternoon, he had run him down and sought to deliver Quelch's message. But could any fellow deliver a message to another fellow who was kicking him? Obviously, a fellow couldn't: and Bunter hadn't. But the sight of Colonel Wharton, calling to see a fellow who was not there, made him feel very uneasy.

Again there was a heavy tread, and Colonel Wharton came out of No. 1 Study. He did not glance at the fat face in the doorway of No. 4 again. He walked back to the landing.

He was frowning a little as he went down the stairs. As Harry had lines to do for his form-master, he should have been in his study writing them: as Mr. Quelch had taken for granted. It was not likely to occur to the Colonel that the junior had "walked out" on his beak: still less could he have guessed that Wharton was wholly unaware of his impending visit. With lines to do, and with his uncle and guardian coming to see him, Harry should have been in his study; but he was not there, and the old Colonel had to look farther afield.

He tapped at Mr. Quelch's door. For the third time that afternoon, the perusal of the majestic hexameters of T. Lucretius Carus was interrupted. Mr. Quelch rose politely, if with a suppressed sigh. Much as he respected the bronzed old soldier, he preferred Lucretius. But Lucretius had to be laid aside once more.

"I am really sorry to interrupt you again, Mr. Quelch—"

"Not at all!" said Mr. Quelch, with perhaps more politeness than sincerity.

"I have little time to stay, and my nephew is not in his study. Perhaps you could send for him? I will wait in the visitors' room."

"He is not in his study?" repeated Mr. Quelch. He frowned a little. If the junior was still loitering idly about, instead of getting on with his lines, it did not look as if Mr. Quelch would receive them by tea-time. "Pray take a seat, Colonel Wharton, and I will send for him immediately."

"Thank you, Mr. Quelch."

The old gentleman sat down in Mr. Quelch's armchair, and the Remove master touched a bell. Trotter, the House page, appeared at the door; and was instructed to find Master Wharton at once and send him to the study.

Trotter departed on that mission: not a very hopeful one. Mr. Quelch, with a side-glance at Lucretius, sat down, prepared to expend a few minutes of his valuable time in the cause of politeness to a visitor who was also a governor of the school. Neither expected to have to wait more than a few minutes, more or less happily occupied by desultory conversation.

But more than a few minutes had passed, when footsteps arrived at the door. But it was not Harry Wharton who appeared there. It was Trotter who had returned.

Mr. Quelch gave him a frowning questioning glance.

"If you please, sir—!" said Trotter.

"Why have you not sent Master Wharton here?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Please I can't find him, sir."

"You cannot find him?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir! I've looked everywhere, and asked a lot of the young gentlemen, sir, but nobody has seen him."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"He must have gone out, sir," ventured Trotter. "I looked in the bicycle-shed, sir, and his bicycle is gone."

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"Very well, Trotter," he said. "That will do."

"Yessir." Trotter retired.

Colonel Wharton's brow was knitted in a deep frown. That frown was reflected on the Remove master's face. They looked at one another, in silence, for a moment or two.

"This is very extraordinary, sir!" said Colonel Wharton, at last.

"Very!" said Mr. Quelch, his lips set.

"I suppose there is no doubt that my nephew knew that I was coming to see him this afternoon?"

"I sent him a message to that effect immediately after receiving your telephone call, sir."

Not for a moment did it occur to Mr. Quelch that that message had been undelivered. Quelch was accustomed to speak as one having authority, saying, "Do this!" and he doeth it! He had sent a Remove boy with a message to Wharton: and that was that! There was no room for doubt!

Colonel Wharton rose.

"As it appears that my nephew has gone out, it is useless for me to remain

longer, and I have a train to catch," he said. "I am sorry to have wasted your time, Mr. Quelch."

"Not at all, sir."

They shook hands, and the old Colonel left the study: leaving Mr. Quelch with a very grim expression on his face. But Colonel Wharton did not immediately return to his waiting taxi. He walked into the quadrangle with a thoughtful and troubled frown on his brow. It was hard to believe that his nephew, who had never been lacking in respect and affection, had deliberately disregarded him, without leaving even a word of explanation. If, indeed, he had done so, Colonel Wharton was prepared to be very angry indeed. But he was slow to anger, and he hoped that there might be some explanation to come. Pacing in the quad, with frequent glances at the gates, it would have been a great relief to him to see his nephew coming in—and he half-expected it.

But Harry Wharton did not come in: and at length, having left himself only just time to catch his train, the Colonel stepped into the taxi and departed. His bronzed face was grim as he drove to Courtfield. Certainly, unless Harry Wharton had a very good explanation to give, the vials of wrath were going to pour, very emphatically, upon the captain of the Remove.

CHAPTER IV

CALLED TO ACCOUNT!

"WHARTON!"

"Yes, Wingate."

"Quelch's study—at once."

"Very well," said Harry, quietly.

He had, of course, expected it.

The footballers had returned from Redclyffe. They came back in quite cheery spirits, after having beaten the home team by three goals to two. Of those three goals, Harry Wharton, at centre-forward, had kicked two—the Bounder having supplied the other. It had been a hard game, and while it lasted, Harry had banished Quelch and consequences from his mind. But on the run home he had to remember them, and he came back in full expectation of a "row".

But he was not sorry that he had gone. He had been wanted in the team—and without him, it was extremely probable that defeat would have taken the place of victory, in the last match before the holidays. All his friends had

been glad that he was there; even Johnny Bull admitted that perhaps, after all, it had not been such a bad idea. But after the feast came the reckoning: and when Wingate of the Sixth came up to him, Harry knew what was coming. Quelch wanted him: it was now long past the time when those miserable lines should have been handed in: and there was no doubt that Quelch would be "wrathy". Those lines might be doubled, or trebled—or it might be "whops" or detentions, or both. Wharton was prepared to face it, whatever it was. As yet, he had no suspicion that there was anything more serious in the offing than the matter of the lines. It was a couple of hours since Colonel Wharton had come and gone: and Harry had not the faintest idea that his uncle had been at the school that day at all.

"I'll go at once, Wingate," he said.

"You'd better," said the prefect, dryly.

"I say, Wingate, did Quelch look shirty?" asked Bob Cherry, as the Sixth Form man was turning away.

Wingate smiled slightly.

"Just a few," he answered, and he walked away.

Harry Wharton gave a shrug of the shoulders. He was not in a penitent mood, and apparently cared little whether Quelch looked "shirty" or not.

"You're for it, old man," said Bob, rather dismally.

"Looks like it," agreed Wharton, indifferently.

"Well, we beat Redclyffe," said Smithy. "It was worth it."

"Quite!" said Harry.

"But the callfulness of the tune must be followed by the payfulness of the piper, as the English proverb remarks," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed and ridiculous Quelch will probably be infuriated."

"If you'd gone to him," said Johnny Bull, shaking his head, "if you'd gone to him, as I wanted you to—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Are you going to tell me that you told me so?" he asked. "Guard with your left, if you do, fathead."

"Well, you'd better go and get it over," said Peter Todd. "Like me to lend you a sweater to pack?"

"Ass!"

With that polite negative, Harry Wharton left his friends and walked away to his form-master's study. It was quite likely that it would be "whops": but the captain of the Remove certainly had no idea of "packing".

He tapped at Mr. Quelch's door.

"Come in."

There was a very deep note in the voice from the study. Harry Wharton

breathed a little hard as he entered. He had expected Quelch to be angry: but he had not expected quite so grim a look as he discerned on his form-master's face. His own face hardened.

"So you have returned, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, his gimlet-eyes glinting like steel across the table.

"Yes, sir."

"You have not done your lines."

"Not yet, sir."

"You were told distinctly to bring them to my study this afternoon."

"I had written them, sir, but they were destroyed by an accident, as you will remember I told you in hall."

"That is quite immaterial. Such accidents should not happen, and if they do occur, the lines should be re-written, as you know very well."

"I know, sir! But—"

"But you have not written them?"

"Not yet, sir! I can hand them in by prep."

"It appears that your form-master's instructions are regarded, by you, as mere trifles to be set aside, Wharton."

Harry Wharton coloured.

"No, sir," he answered, in a low voice. "Nothing of the kind, sir. But—"

"I cannot but take a serious view of this, Wharton. Carelessness and thoughtlessness may be excused: but deliberate disobedience is a more serious matter. Still more serious, in my opinion, is your conduct towards your uncle and guardian, Colonel Wharton."

Harry Wharton gave quite a jump. He had expected Quelch to be irate over those wretched lines. But why he mentioned Colonel Wharton was quite a mystery.

"My uncle, sir!" he repeated, blankly.

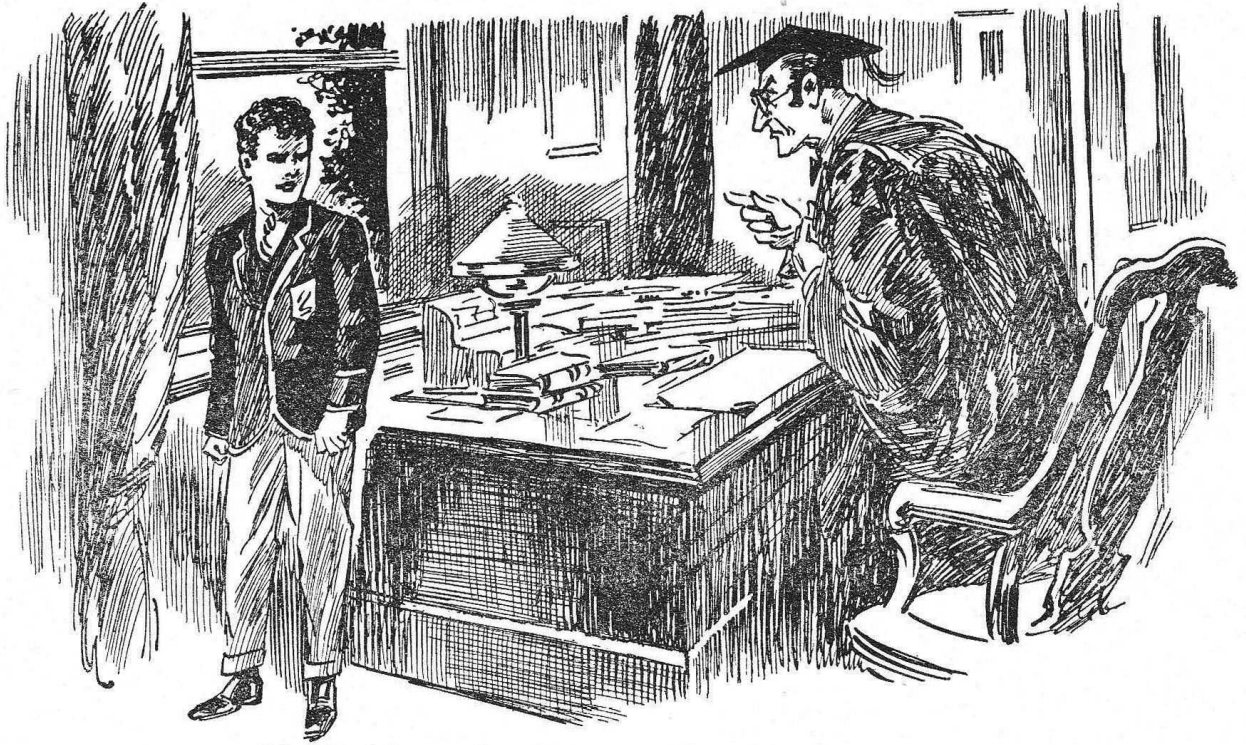
"Your uncle, Colonel Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, sternly. "Your uncle is, I understand, your guardian, and he has taken your father's place since you were left an orphan at a very early age. You owe him every duty and respect. Yet you have treated him with utter neglect and disrespect—with what I can only term contemptuous disrespect—"

Harry Wharton felt as if his head were turning round.

"I—I—I don't understand, sir," he stammered. "What have I done?"

"What have you done?" repeated Mr. Quelch, thunderously. "You are well aware of what you have done, Wharton. Colonel Wharton had to leave without seeing you—"

"Has my uncle been to the school, sir?" gasped Harry, in utter dismay.



Mr. Quelch stared at him across the table. He was angry

“What do you mean?” snapped Mr. Quelch. “You were aware that your uncle was coming to see you this afternoon—”

“I—I never knew!” gasped Harry. “I had a letter from him the other day, about the Christmas hols, but he never mentioned that he was thinking of coming down to the school. I hadn’t the faintest idea that he was coming, sir—he must have known that I never knew . . .”

Mr. Quelch stared at him across the table. He was angry: intensely angry: but the trouble and distress in the junior’s face moved him. His frowning brow relaxed a little.

“Wharton! Are you telling me that you were unaware of your uncle’s visit this afternoon?” he exclaimed.

“Of course, sir!” exclaimed Harry. “He had not said a word about it in his letter—how could I know? He must have called in by chance, and any fellow might be out of gates on a half-holiday—my uncle knows that. He can’t have believed that I knew he was coming and went off all the same. He knows me too well to think anything of the kind.”

“Colonel Wharton telephoned to me that he was at Wapshot on business, and had time to call and see you before he took his train back to London. I sent you a message at once.”

"I never had it, sir! I never knew—"

"You did not receive my message?"

Harry Wharton panted.

"How can you suppose that I did, sir? Do you think that I would treat my uncle with disrespect—the kindest man that ever lived—who has done everything for me since I was a little kid—that I'd go out, without even leaving a word for him? If you think so, sir, I know my uncle will not—he wouldn't—he couldn't." The words came in a passionate stream.

Mr. Quelch was not frowning now.

"My uncle can't have supposed that I knew, sir—"

"What else was he to suppose, Wharton, when I had told him that you were certainly in the school, as you had lines to write, and that I had sent you a message on the subject? But if you did not receive that message—"

"I did not! I did not."

"Bunter did not tell you—?"

"Bunter!" repeated Harry.

"It was Bunter to whom I gave the message."

"Oh!" gasped Harry. He remembered that little scene at the bike-shed.
"Oh! If—if it was Bunter—"

Mr. Quelch's brow grew grim again.

"Did Bunter give you my message or not?" he rapped.

"No! I—I—I suppose he was going to—but—but—but—" Harry Wharton stammered. "I—I—I was in a hurry, and—and—and I—I—I suppose I was in a temper too, because he had mucked up my lines—and—and—if he had a message for me, he never got it out—"

"It appears, then, that Bunter is not to blame. He came to you with my message, to which you did not listen."

"I—I—I suppose so—yes—"

"If you had been in your study, writing your lines, Wharton, your uncle would have found you there, although my message did not reach you. As it is, he had to leave, and I need hardly tell you that he was very deeply troubled and pained by what he could only suppose to be deliberate disrespect—"

"May I use your telephone, sir?"

"Eh! What? What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"Do please let me, sir. I must explain to my uncle—I must tell him—I must! I can't let him think me an ungrateful young rotter—I've got to let him know how it is—may I telephone, sir?"

Mr. Quelch sat silent for a long moment, staring at the junior across the table. He had been angry—very angry indeed. But he knew now that Wharton was not so culpable as he had supposed: it was, after all, only the affair of the

lines in which he had offended. And he could not but be moved by the distress in the boy's face.

"You may telephone, Wharton," he said, at last.

Harry Wharton ran to the instrument.

CHAPTER V

RIGHT AS RAIN!

"WHARTON Lodge."

It was the fruity voice of Wells, the butler, that came to Harry Wharton's ears, as he held the receiver in Mr. Quelch's study. His hand was almost trembling with eagerness as he held it.

"Wells! Harry speaking from Greyfriars. Please ask my uncle to come to the telephone."

"I am sorry, Master Harry—"

"At once! At once!"

"I am sorry, Master Harry," came the fruity voice again. "But the master has been away all day, and has not yet returned home."

"Oh!" panted Harry.

It was an unexpected blow: yet he might very well have expected that answer. Colonel Wharton, by that time, was probably only as far as London, on his homeward way.

"Can I take a message, Master Harry?"

"Yes! No! Is my aunt at home, Wells?"

"Certainly, Master Harry. Miss Wharton is in the drawing-room."

"Ask her to come to the phone, Wells. Tell her it's important."

"Very good, sir."

There was a brief interval, which seemed very long to Harry Wharton. Mr. Quelch, sitting at his table, watched him curiously. All his anger had departed now. In his eager anxiety to set matters right with his uncle, the boy had forgotten the matter of the lines and the impending penalty. Quelch, under his crusty exterior, was a kind-hearted man: and even in the matter of the lines, he was feeling disposed to be lenient now.

"Harry, dear!" The rather sweet and rather tremulous voice of old Miss Wharton, the Colonel's sister, came through. "Is that you, Harry, dear?"

"Yes, Aunt Amy: Harry speaking. I wanted to speak to uncle, but—"

"James is not home yet, dear. He has been in London, and I think was going to a place in Kent—Pot-shot, I think—or was it Crock-shot—"

"Wapshot," said Harry. "It's only a few miles from here, Auntie, and I've just heard that Uncle James found that he had time to run across and see me before he had to take his train back—"

"How very nice, Harry dear. How pleased you must have been to see him at your school—"

"Of course I should have been, Auntie, but I was out of gates, as I never knew he was coming—"

"Dear me! Did James leave without seeing you, then? That must have been a great disappointment to him."

"I want you to explain to him, Auntie, as soon as he comes home. You see, he telephoned from Wapshot to my form-master, who sent me a message that he was coming, but I never had the message, and went out—"

"How very unfortunate, Harry."

"Yes, yes: but as uncle doesn't know that I never had the message, he may think that I went out knowing that he was coming—"

"Oh! No! That is quite impossible, Harry. James would never think anything of the kind."

"I hope not, Auntie. But I want him to know—I want you to explain to him the minute he comes home—"

"Of course, my dear."

"Tell him I never had the message from Mr. Quelch, and never even dreamed that he was anywhere near Greyfriars. I was quite knocked over, when I came in, and Mr. Quelch told me that Uncle had been here, and had had to leave without seeing me. I just couldn't bear him to think that I didn't care. You'll tell him the minute he comes home, won't you, Auntie?"

"Certainly I will, dear. The moment James comes in at the door I will explain it all to him. But you need have no uneasiness whatever, Harry—I am quite sure that your uncle will not suppose that you were to blame in any way. But I will tell him everything you have said."

"You're a dear!" said Harry, gratefully. "Now good-bye till Christmas, Auntie dear."

"Good-bye, Harry."

Wharton put up the receiver. He stood for a moment, a little breathless, but immensely relieved in his mind. Whatever Colonel Wharton might be thinking, in his train home, all would be explained as soon as he reached Wharton Lodge. He would know, no doubt, that Harry had taken French leave that afternoon, regardless of orders: which the junior certainly would have preferred him not to know. But he would know, too, that so far as he personally was concerned, his nephew was blameless. And that was what mattered.



"Thank you for allowing me to use your telephone. It was kind of you"

Harry Wharton turned from the telephone, and coloured a little under Mr. Quelch's keen glance.

"Thank you for allowing me to use the telephone sir," he said, in a low voice. "It was very kind of you."

"Not at all, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, almost graciously. "I am very glad to know that, so far as concerns your uncle at least, you have been blameless. As for the lines—!" He paused.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Wharton. "I know I ought to have been in my study when my uncle came, and that it's my own fault that all this has happened. I—I wish—!" He broke off.

There was a long pause.

"You will write the lines again, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, at last.

"Certainly, sir."

"You may bring them to me to-morrow. That is all! You may go!" added Mr. Quelch, in quite a kindly tone.

"Thank you, sir."

Harry Wharton left the study.

He found a crowd of fellows waiting for him in the Rag. There was a shower of questions as he came in.

"Licked?"

"Whopped?"

"Going up to the Head?"

"What's the verdict?"

"Worth it, anyhow, to beat Redclyffe," said Vernon-Smith. "But you don't look whopped, old bean."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"Quelch is a good sort, and I was a hot-headed fool to cheek him," he said.

"Johnny, old man—"

"Hallo!" said Johnny Bull.

"You told me so—"

"I jolly well did!" said Johnny.

"Well, you can tell me so again, if you like, and as often as you like," said Harry. "Quelch has let me off jolly lightly, and I could jolly well kick myself for having cheeked him."

"Then it's all right?" asked Nugent.

"Right as rain!"

"I say, you fellows." It was a fat voice in the doorway, as Billy Bunter blinked in through his big spectacles. "I say, is that beast Wharton about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle about. I want to keep clear of the beast if he's in one of his rotten tempers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I jolly well hope that Quelch gave him six, and that he laid it on jolly hard—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat villain!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter jumped, as he discerned the captain of the Remove in the crowd in the Rag.

"Oh, crikey!" he ejaculated.

Bunter did not stay to ascertain whether Harry Wharton was in "one of his tempers". He disappeared from the doorway like a fat ghost at cock-crow. But really the fat Owl had nothing to apprehend. The captain of the Remove was no longer feeling any urge to plant his foot on Bunter's tight trousers—everything now was "right as rain".

Or was it?

END OF SECOND SECTION

The GREYFRIARS VENTRILOQUIST!

—By—

FRANK RICHARDS



"You fat spoofing rotter!" he roared

CHAPTER I

BLOW FOR BUNTER!

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

"Oh, good!"

Billy Bunter's fat face brightened.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, blow!" grunted Bunter.

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

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



"Oh! blow!" grunted Bunter

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

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

Then his fat face, already long, grew longer.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter.

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

Dear William,

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

Your affectionate Father,
W. S. Bunter.

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

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

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

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

"I say, Mauly—"

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Then the captain of the Remove looked up.

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

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

"Harry, old fellow—!" mumbled Bunter.

"Get out!"

"I've been let down over the hols—"

"Get out!"

"But I say, old fellow—"

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

Bang!

A fat head established contact with the door.



A fat head established contact with the door

"Yaroooh!"

Bang!

"Yooo-whooooooooop!"

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

"Wow! Beast! Wow!"

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

CHAPTER II

MYSTERIOUS!

PETER TODD jumped.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where's Colonel Wharton?"

"Eh! How should I know?"

"He was here—"

"He, he, he."

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

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

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

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

Peter jumped almost clear of the floor.

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

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

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

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

Toddy turned on the grinning Owl with a glare.

"You fat spoofing porpoise!" he roared.

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"It was you!" roared Peter.

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

"I've a jolly good mind—"

Bunter promptly dodged round the study table.

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

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

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

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

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

"I did," admitted Peter.

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

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

"He banged my head this morning—"

"Good!" said Peter.

"And he kicked me yesterday—"

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

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

"I'll watch it!"

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

"I don't!" contradicted Peter.

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

"Too often!" agreed Peter.

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

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

"That's telling!" grinned Bunter.

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

"He, he, he!"

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

"He, he, he!"

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

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

"You fat chump!"

"Yah!"

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

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

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

CHAPTER III

HARRY WHARTON GETS A SHOCK!

"QUA, in my opinion!" said Mr. Quelch.

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

Tap!

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

"What is it, Trotter?"

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

Mr. Quelch breathed rather hard.

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

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

"Very well, Trotter," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

"I am wholly at your service, sir."

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

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

"Precisely, sir."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry Wharton almost dropped the receiver in his surprise.

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

"Uncle—!" gasped Harry.

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

"But—but—uncle—!" stammered Harry.

"Listen to me—"

"Yes, yes, but—"

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

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

"What your aunt has told me is immaterial."



Harry Wharton picked up the receiver

"But—but you know now that—that—"

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

"No! Oh, no! But I never knew—"

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

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

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

"I—I—I—" Wharton stammered again.

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

"I'm sorry, uncle—I—I—"

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

"No! No! No! I—I never meant—"

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

Wharton almost staggered.

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

"Do I not speak plainly?"

"Yes, yes, but—but—"

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

Harry Wharton stood very still.

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

"Do you mean that, Uncle?"

"I mean every word I say."

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

"No!"

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



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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV

ADVICE NOT WANTED!

"I TOLD you so."

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

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

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

"Rotten!" said Nugent.

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

Wharton set his lips.

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

It was then that Johnny made his unfortunate remark.

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

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

"Steady the Buffs!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Well—!" began Johnny.

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

"Put a sock in it," advised Bob.

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

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

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

"It's been explained to him already."

"Well, yes, but if you wrote—"

Wharton's lips set harder.

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

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

“I think—!” began Johnny Bull.

The captain of the Remove interrupted him without ceremony.

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

“I tell you I think—”

“Give us a rest.”

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

“Keep it.”

“If you’ll take my advice——”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

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

“Will you dry up?”

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

“There’s nothing to clear up.”

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

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

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

“I haven’t heard any, so far.”

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

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

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

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

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



A fat face grinned into the study

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

"But what?" asked Harry.

"If you will listen to my idiotic opinion—"

"Carry on, fathead."

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

"Cut that out," said Harry, curtly.

"Well, the fact is—!" began Nugent.

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

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

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



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

"I say, you fellows—!" he squeaked.

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

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

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

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

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

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

"Cut!" snapped Johnny.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Get out!" breathed Harry Wharton.

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

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

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

END OF THIRD SECTION

The DEEP END!

—By—

FRANK RICHARDS



Holding it in his fat fingers, blinked at it again

CHAPTER I

LUCKY FOR BUNTER!

“BUNTER!” rapped Mr. Quelch.

“Oh! Yes, sir.”

“You will go on, Bunter.”

“Oh!” gasped Billy Bunter.

It was second lesson in the Remove form-room: on a bright and frosty December morning.

The Remove were in form with Mr. Quelch, and enjoying—more or less—the deathless verse of Publius Vergilius Maro.

It was getting near time for “break”: and a good many glances wandered to the form-room clock as the Remove fellows, one after another, stood up for “Con”.

Generally, Billy Bunter’s little round eyes, and big round spectacles, wandered to the clock more frequently than any other fellow’s. The adventures and misadventures of the “pius Aeneas” had no charms whatever for William George Bunter. Even the celebrated shipwreck episode, on which the Remove were now busy, failed to attract Billy Bunter. Indeed he was rather disposed to regret that the pius Aeneas hadn’t been drowned in that shipwreck.

But though the Owl of the Remove found no more charms than usual in Virgilian verse, he was not, as usual, blinking longingly at the clock. His fat mind was otherwise occupied.

In Billy Bunter's pocket was a chunk of toffee.

Bunter had had several bites at it before the Remove came into form. But those bites had only whetted his appetite. Whenever Quelch's attention was engaged elsewhere, during that lesson, the fat Owl stealthily abstracted that chunk from a sticky pocket and helped himself to another chew.

That chunk was growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less: but, as yet, even Quelch's gimlet-eyes had not detected the fat Owl's surreptitious chewings.

Now, all of a sudden, he swivelled round on Bunter, and bade him "Go on".

Harry Wharton had been last on "con". Wharton's look, that morning, was somewhat quiet and subdued, and a keen observer might have guessed that there was a trouble on his mind. But he was quite up to the mark in form. He was well aware that Mr. Quelch had been lenient with him, in the late affair of taking "French leave" to play Soccer at Redclyffe: and he was anxious to show that he was not ungrateful for it.

His "con" was quite faultless, a proof that he had not slacked in prep, and Mr. Quelch was looking quite pleased with it as he listened. But that pleased expression faded from his face as he fixed his gimlet-eyes on the fattest member of his form.

Bunter seemed in no hurry to "go on".

"Do you hear me, Bunter," rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I'm finding the place, sir!" stammered Bunter.

Bunter, of course, should have been listening-in, prepared to "go on" if called upon. But the fat Owl's fat mind had been wholly occupied by surreptitious chews at that chunk of toffee, and in anxious dread lest Quelch should spot him chewing. Really, he had had no leisure to attend to the lesson. His fat mind was, in consequence, wholly a blank on the subject of the shipwreck scene in Virgil's epic.

Mr. Quelch frowned. It was not uncommon for Bunter to draw a frown to that majestic brow. Often and often was Bunter inattentive: and he seemed to Quelch more inattentive than ever now.

The gimlet-eyes glinted at the fat Owl.

Little escaped those gimlet-eyes when they were turned upon any object. Now, as they turned on Bunter, they detected toffee-smears that decorated the widest mouth in the Remove.

"Go on from 'Interea magno—" whispered Peter Todd in a fat ear: as a present help in time of need.

"Oh!" Bunter blinked at his book. "Interea magno misceri—"

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I've found the place, sir."

"Stand out before the form, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey!"

The fat Owl unwillingly rolled out. He blinked in dismay at his form-master. Quelch eyed him grimly.

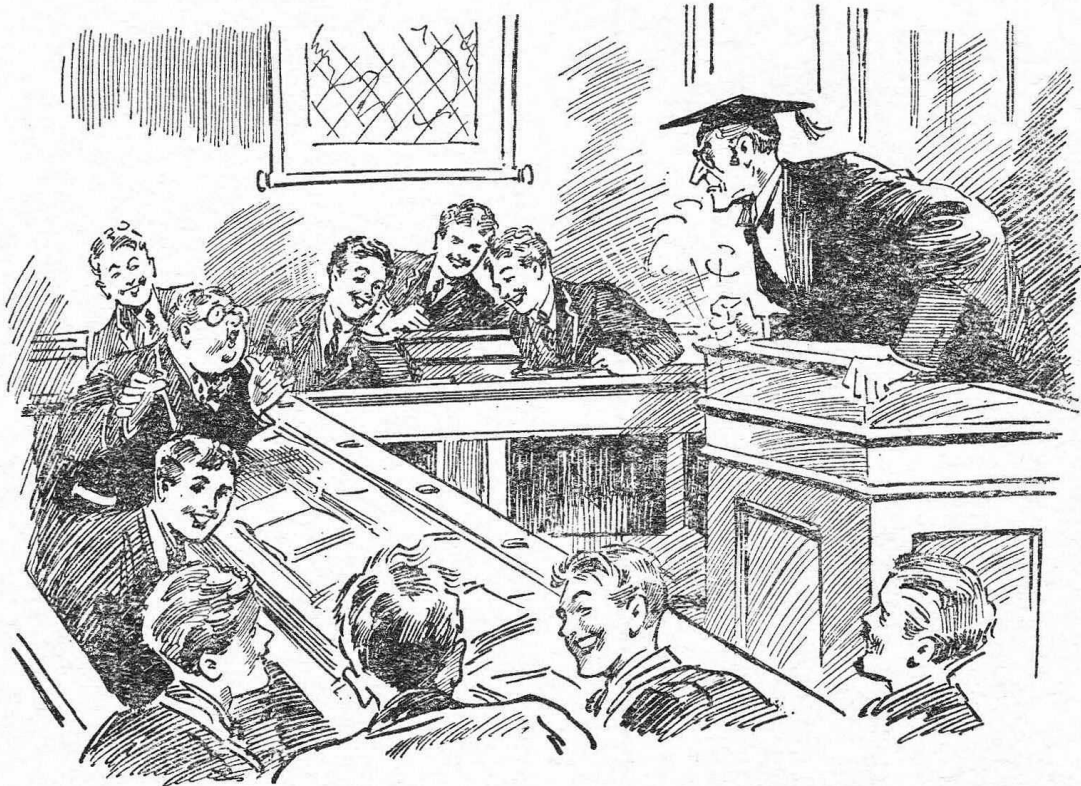
"Bunter! You have been eating sweetmeats in class!"

"Oh, no, sir! I—I haven't tasted toffee for days, sir—I—I never had any toffee in my pocket, sir, and—and it ain't in my pocket now!" gasped Bunter.

"Upon my word! Take the toffee from your pocket, Bunter, and drop it into the waste-paper basket immediately."

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter.

A sticky hand groped in a sticky pocket, and a sticky chunk came to light. There was not much left of it: bites during class had been frequent. But it was a blow to part with the remnant.



"Do you hear me, Bunter?" rumbled Mr. Quelch

But there was no help for it! That sticky remnant dropped into the waste-paper basket, the fat Owl's eyes following it sadly as it dropped. Quelch's eyes dwelt with disfavour upon a sticky mouth and a pair of sticky hands.

"Bunter! You will take fifty lines."

"Ow! I mean, yes, sir," groaned Bunter.

"Leave the form-room at once and wash your face and hands, Bunter. You are an uncleanly boy, Bunter."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Go!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter, with deep feelings, rolled to the form-room door. Grinning glances followed him from the rest of the Remove. It was not the first time that William George Bunter had been sent out of the form-room for an extra wash. Quite often he had needed one. But it was very annoying to Bunter. Still, there was a solace—even a wash, much as he disliked it, was no worse than "con": and he was getting out of that.

"You will go on, Todd."

Peter Todd went on from "interea magno" as the door closed on Bunter. Outside that door, Billy Bunter stopped to shake a fat and sticky fist: which, sad to relate, he would have been quite pleased to land upon the majestic nose of Henry Samuel Quelch! Then he rolled off for his wash.

He was in no hurry to return after he had washed off the sticky smears of toffee. Quelch, no doubt, would expect him back in a few minutes, and would inquire acidly what had delayed him if he stayed out longer. But it would be easy to tell Quelch that he couldn't find the soap, or that the towel was missing, and had to be looked for. Billy Bunter and the truth had long been strangers: indeed, some Remove fellows opined that Bunter really didn't know that there was such a thing at all.

Much more interesting than going back to class was looking in the letter-rack, to see whether there was one for him. It was Trotter's duty to place the letters in the rack, in time for the juniors to take them out in break: and break was close at hand now, so no doubt the letters would be there. One disappointment about a postal-order after another had not dimmed Billy Bunter's hope that, at long last, his celebrated postal-order might turn up. So he rolled to the rack and scanned the letters which Trotter had dutifully placed therein.

But alas for Bunter! Once more that celebrated postal-order had failed to arrive. There was no letter in the rack addressed to him.

But his eyes, and his spectacles, fixed on a letter that was addressed to another fellow, with a startled blink.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter.

That letter was addressed to Harry Wharton, in the firm, clear hand-



He rolled to the rack and scanned the letters

writing of his uncle at Wharton Lodge. Bunter knew that "fist" well enough and he blinked at it in uneasy dismay.

The previous day the fat ventriloquist, on the telephone, had given the captain of the Remove what, in his fat and fatuous mind, he regarded as "tit for tat". He had, undoubtedly and effectually, "dished" Harry Wharton over the Christmas holidays. That, in Bunter's opinion, served him jolly well right! Having "got away" with that tit for tat, Bunter had let the matter drift from his fat mind. But he was rather unpleasantly reminded of it now as he blinked at that letter from Colonel Wharton to his nephew at Greymfriars.

"Oh, crikey!" repeated Bunter.

He blinked long and uneasily at that letter. Then he took it down and, holding it in fat fingers, blinked at it again.

What was in that letter?

Nothing like that talk on the telephone: Bunter could guess that. Most likely it was a cheery note from the old Colonel to reassure his nephew. If so, what was going to be the effect on Harry Wharton? It would reveal at once that he had been tricked on the telephone by some person who had

imitated the old gentleman's voice—and how long would it be before he jumped to it that that person was the Remove ventriloquist?

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Bunter again. "Oh, lor'!"

In giving the captain of the Remove that Roland for his Oliver, the fat and fatuous Owl had not looked ahead. Thinking was not much in Bunter's line. But he had to do some thinking now. If Harry Wharton found out—!

Bunter wriggled anticipatively as he pictured that. He seemed to feel already a boot crashing on his trousers.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bunter once more.

Obviously, from Billy Bunter's point of view it was better for Harry Wharton not to see that letter just yet! Later on, after the school had broken up for the holidays, it would not matter. But while Billy Bunter was within range of an avenging boot, it did matter—it mattered a lot! Luckily—as Bunter looked at it!—Wharton knew nothing about that letter, so far: and if he did not find it in the rack, he would continue to know nothing about it! Billy Bunter cast a stealthy blink round him through his big spectacles. There was no one to observe him. He slipped that letter into his pocket. Wharton could have it later—at present, Billy Bunter's pocket was the safest place for it! And as Billy Bunter was the only person within the wide limits of the universe who really mattered, that was, so far as Bunter could see, quite all right! This was, in fact, quite lucky—for Bunter!

Relieved in his fat mind, Bunter rolled back, at last, to the Remove form-room. A gimlet-eye glinted at him as he rolled in.

"Why have you been so long, Bunter?"

"Please I couldn't find the soap, sir—"

"Go to your place! You will go on from 'Defessi Aeneadae,'" rapped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter very nearly ejaculated "Beast" as he rolled to his place. He had not escaped "con" after all! He had to go on from "Defessi Aeneadae" as far as "unda reductos" under a glinting gimlet-eye. And that struggle with the deathless verse of P. Vergilius Maro quite banished Harry Wharton's letter from his fat mind.

CHAPTER II

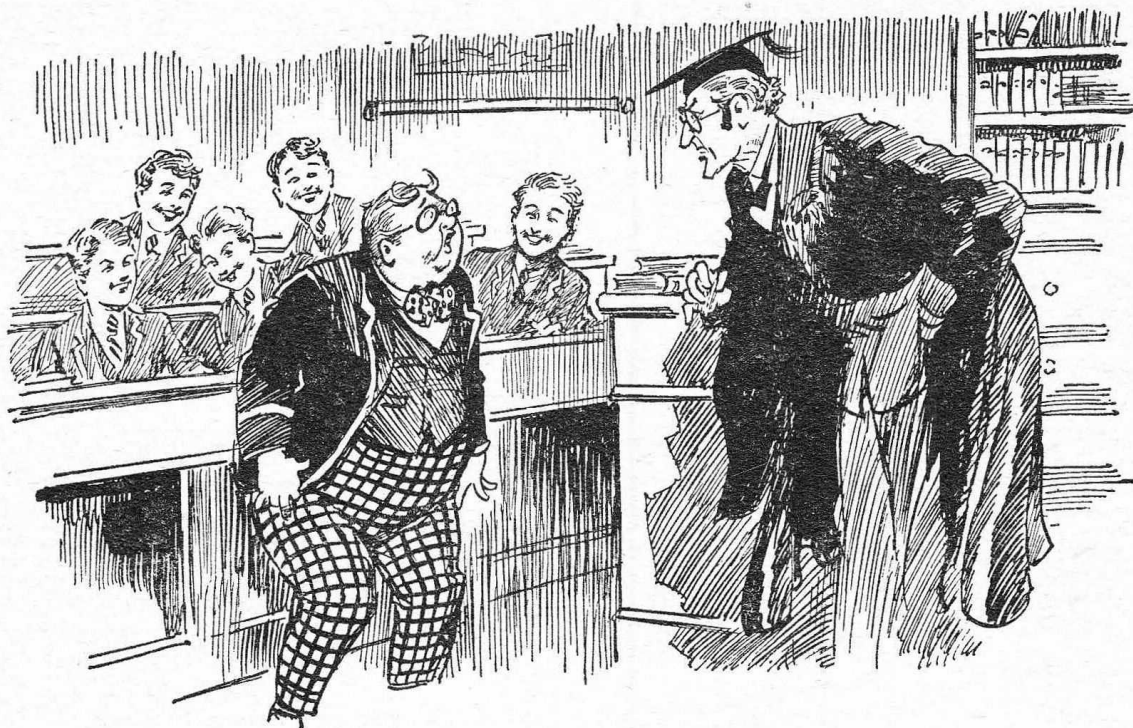
AT THE DEEP END

"**N**OTHING?" asked Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"Nothing!" he answered.

He was looking at the letter-rack. The Famous Five gathered there at once



"Why have you been so long?"

when the Remove were dismissed in break. For once, Billy Bunter was not prominent. Bunter already knew that there was nothing for him. Harry Wharton's hurried glance over the letters was eager. The dark look that settled on his face, when he saw that there was nothing for him, made his friends exchange uneasy glances.

Wharton smiled faintly.

"I wasn't really expecting a letter," he said. "But—" He left it at that.

After that talk on the telephone in Quelch's study, which had given him so severe a shock, it was true that he had not expected to hear anything further from his uncle before Christmas. But if he had not expected, he had had a lingering hope. Surely the old Colonel, on reflection, would realise that he had been unduly harsh, even if he did not realise that he had no just cause for anger. And if so, surely he would write a few words at least. But there was nothing—not a word!

"It's rotten," muttered Nugent.

"The rottenfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a sad shake of his dusky head.

"Can't make it out," said Bob. "It's so unlike him, from everything that we know of him."

"There's a mistake somewhere," said Johnny Bull. "And if you'd take my advice, Wharton—"

Wharton's lip curled bitterly.

"It's the end!" he said, in a low voice.

"If you'd write—"

Harry Wharton laughed: a laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

"You're still advising me to write to my uncle?" he asked.

"I am!" said Johnny.

"I'm going to. You fellows get out—I'm going up to my study to write a letter," said Harry.

Without waiting for a reply, he walked away. His friends were left looking very uneasy and troubled. Much as they liked Harry Wharton, and splendid fellow as they knew him to be, they were well aware of his faults of temper, and of the stubbornness that had more than once led him to act in haste and repent at leisure.

"What's he got in his noddle now?" muttered Bob.

"Something fatheaded, I expect," grunted Johnny Bull. "You know what he's like when he's got his back up."

"Well, any fellow would have his back up in the circumstances," said Frank Nugent, always quick in defence of his best chum. "That jaw on the phone from his uncle knocked the stuffing out of him."

"It was too thick," agreed Bob.

"The thickfulness was altogether too terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the esteemed and idiotic Wharton will not improve matters by going off at the deep end."

"Hardly," said Bob. "But—"

"Look here, we'd better go up and see," said Nugent, uneasily. "Goodness knows what he might write—you could see in his face that he wasn't thinking of a pleasant letter home. Come on."

"Let's!" agreed Bob.

And the four juniors followed Wharton up to the Remove studies. The door of No. 1 was half open, and they looked in, and saw Harry Wharton seated at the table, a pen in his hand, his brows knitted over it. He was writing hurriedly.

"Harry, old man—!" said Nugent.

"Wharton looked up.

"You fellows? Don't wait for me—I'll be down in a tick or two to post this letter in the box."

"Leave it till after class, and come down now and help us punt a ball," suggested Bob Cherry.

"I'd rather get it through."

"Look here—!" began Johnny Bull.

"Shut up a minute while I finish this letter. It's not a long one."

The pen ran on again, while the four juniors, in the doorway, watched him and exchanged glances. In a minute more the letter was finished and Wharton sorted in the table drawer for an envelope.

Johnny Bull tramped into the study and the others followed him in.

"You've written to Colonel Wharton?" asked Johnny.

"Yes."

"What I advised you to write?"

"Not quite."

"No use for advice from a pal, I suppose?" asked Johnny, sarcastically.

"None at all."

"Harry, old fellow—!" said Nugent, miserably. "Matters are bad enough—don't make them worse, old chap. You're feeling bitter now, and no wonder—but—"

"Look here, let's see what you've written, anyway," said Bob.

"O.K. Read the letter if you like," said Wharton, indifferently. "Lots of time to post it before the bell goes."

Bob Cherry drew the written sheet across the table, and four pairs of eyes scanned it. Four faces grew very serious indeed. Johnny Bull gave a very expressive grunt.

"You're not sending that letter to Colonel Wharton?" he asked.

"I haven't written it as an exercise."

They stared at the letter. It was brief and written in a firm hand. It did not begin, as Wharton's letters home were accustomed to do, with "Dear Uncle". Neither did it read like any letter that the captain of the Remove had ever hitherto written to Wharton Lodge. Wharton, in that talk on Quelch's telephone, had had a shock—and if that letter arrived at Wharton Lodge, there was no doubt that the old Colonel would have another. It ran:

Sir,

I shall not come to Wharton Lodge for the holidays: and, as I have no doubt that you wish, I shall not come again at all. From now on, you will be relieved of a burden of which you are tired. I shall remain at Greyfriars, if I can do so by my own efforts: but anything further from you I will not touch. That is all I have to say, except that I shall not write again, and that I shall not read your letter if you write to me.

H. Wharton.

Harry Wharton stood cool and quiet, a faintly mocking expression on his

face, as he watched the dismay in the faces of his chums. And for a long minute, there was silence in No. 1 Study in the Remove. Only too clearly, Harry Wharton was off at the deep end.

CHAPTER III

A RIFT IN THE LUTE!

BOB CHERRY broke the silence.
"You can't send that letter," he said.

"Why not?"

"My dear chap—" said Bob, with deep distress in his honest, rugged face.
"You can't—"

"The why-notfulness is terrific, my esteemed Wharton," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his head. "The estimable Colonel would be infuriated."

"Very likely," assented Wharton.

"You can't do it, Harry," urged Nugent. "You can't write like that to a man who has been kindness itself to you all your life. You can't."



"You're not sending that letter to Colonel Wharton?"

"The kindness seems to have petered out," said Wharton, with a shrug of the shoulders. "What's the matter with that letter?"

"What isn't, you mean?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I mean what I say. Oh, look at it," exclaimed Wharton, bitterly and impatiently. "My uncle can't be offended to the extent of what he said on the telephone, simply because he missed seeing me the other day. He knows that it wasn't my fault that I missed him—but even if it had been, he had no right to come down so hard. It isn't that—it can't be—that's only a pretext—he's fed up with his brother's son dependent on him—that's what it boils down to. It can't mean anything else. Would you advise a fellow to hang on where he's not wanted?" Wharton's eyes flashed. "Am I to be a hanger-on and cadger like Bunter? Why, even Bunter would have his back up in my place. That letter's going—and it's the finish."

"But—but—think a bit," said Bob. "It's rotten all round, I know—but—but if you turn your uncle down—"

"He's turned me down."

"What are you going to do then? It's Colonel Wharton who sees you through here at school—"

"I shall have to see myself through, somehow. If I can't, I shall have to go. But I'm not at the end of my tether," said Wharton, coolly. "There are fellows in our form who see themselves through—Mark Linley for one: he's here on a scholarship, and it doesn't cost his people sixpence. Same with Penfold. What they've done, can't I do? I shall look into the list, and see what's going—"

"Pretty late in the day for that."

"Better late than never," said Harry. "If there's something open for next term, I shall be in time—with the hols ahead to swot for it. Think I couldn't swot like old Marky, if I had to?"

"I daresay you could, but—"

"But—!" said Nugent, dismally. "Harry, old chap. you're angry now—I know you've got reason, but think it over—"

"Nothing to think over, that I know of."

"The Colonel couldn't have meant—"

"I know what he meant, because he couldn't have meant anything else. Think he's changed all of a sudden, simply because I was fool enough to cheek Quelch, and was out when he called?" exclaimed Wharton, scornfully. "He's as good as told me where I get off—and I'm getting off. He's made it pretty clear that that's what he wants."

The juniors were silent again. They could understand their chum's passionate resentment and the blow to his pride. All the more because he had

truly been a grateful and affectionate nephew, trusting his uncle as he would have trusted a father, he was hurt and humiliated, and liable to take the darkest view. And the stubborn temper which had, more than once, made him his own enemy, was fully roused. Wharton Lodge had always been his home—and he had been told, harshly, not to come there for the vacation. That, in his present mood at least, meant that it was no longer his home: and he had resolved that he would never step under its roof again.

It was Wharton who broke the silence.

“No good talking! I don’t want to bother you fellows with all this—”

“We’re your friends, I hope,” said Nugent, quietly. “Harry, old man, I don’t pretend to make it all out, but I can’t believe that you’re right—Colonel Wharton isn’t the man to change like that—he’s the last man in the world to let anyone down—”

“Hasn’t he done so?”

“I know it looks like it. But—”

“I’ve said it’s no good talking! I’d better get that letter posted—none too much time now before the bell goes.”

“Never mind the bell for a minute,” said Johnny Bull, in his slow, stolid way. “If you want to know what I think—”

“I don’t!”

“I’ll tell you all the same. I think you’re making a fool of yourself,” said Johnny, deliberately.

“Thanks! Is that all?”

“No! You’ve got your back up, and on appearances you’ve got plenty of reason for it: but you’ve landed in trouble before because you had your back up and wouldn’t listen to reason: and now you’re on the same tack. Sulking never did any fellow any good—”

Wharton’s face flamed.

“Who’s sulking?” he breathed.

“You don’t know it, old chap, but that’s how it is,” explained Johnny calmly. “And the best thing you can do is to leave this over and think it over, and take jolly good care not to do anything in a hurry—”

“That’s enough.”

“Perhaps—but I haven’t finished yet. Chuck that letter into the fire, and write the one I’ve advised you to write, telling your uncle the whole story from beginning to end—”

Wharton laughed harshly.

“He knows already all I could tell him—if he wanted to know. He doesn’t. Don’t talk any more—that letter’s going, and it’s the finish.”

“You can’t do it,” said Johnny. “I believe, and you can see that the other



The letter was torn to fragments

chaps think the same, that there's some misunderstanding somewhere: I can't guess what, but there it is. That means that it's a time for keeping a cool head, not for going off at the deep end in a sulky temper—and sending a man a letter that's like a blow in the face.”

Harry Wharton, with set lips, stretched out his hand to the letter, an envelope in his other hand. Johnny stared at him steadily.

“You're going to post that letter?” he asked.

“I've said so.”

“And you've no use for what all your friends think about it?”

“None. Now chuck it.”

“Well,” said Johnny, “you're not going to post that letter, Wharton, because I'm going to stop you, whether you like it or not. You'll be glad later.”

And, as he spoke, Johnny Bull grabbed up the letter and backed away from the table with it in his hand. Harry Wharton, his face aflame, came round the table with a rush. But he was not in time. Johnny Bull did not lose a second: and that letter was torn into fragments and scattered on the floor of the study before the captain of the Remove could reach him.

“Oh, my hat!” murmured Bob Cherry.

Wharton's face blazed with anger.

"You cheeky rotter!" he shouted.

"Call me all the fancy names you can think of, old boy," said Johnny, unmoved. "I don't mind, if you feel it does you any good."

Harry Wharton's hands were clenched. It looked as if he was not going to stop at "fancy names". But Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh hastily pushed between the two.

"Steady on!" said Bob.

Harry Wharton panted.

"Get out!" he breathed.

"Look here, Harry—"

"Wharton, old chap—"

"My esteemed and ridiculous chum—"

"Get out, and leave me alone!" Wharton almost shouted. "I'm going to write that letter over again—not a word of it changed—and post it to Colonel Wharton—"

"Not now, at any rate," said Johnny Bull, coolly. "There's the bell!"

Clang! Clang! It was the bell for third school, ringing through the frosty air.



Harry Wharton stood—his face dark with anger

Johnny tramped out of the study. Bob and Hurree Singh, with troubled faces, followed him. Frank Nugent paused.

"Harry, old man—!" he muttered.

"Oh, leave me alone!"

"Very well," said Frank, compressing his lips. And he walked out of the study after the others.

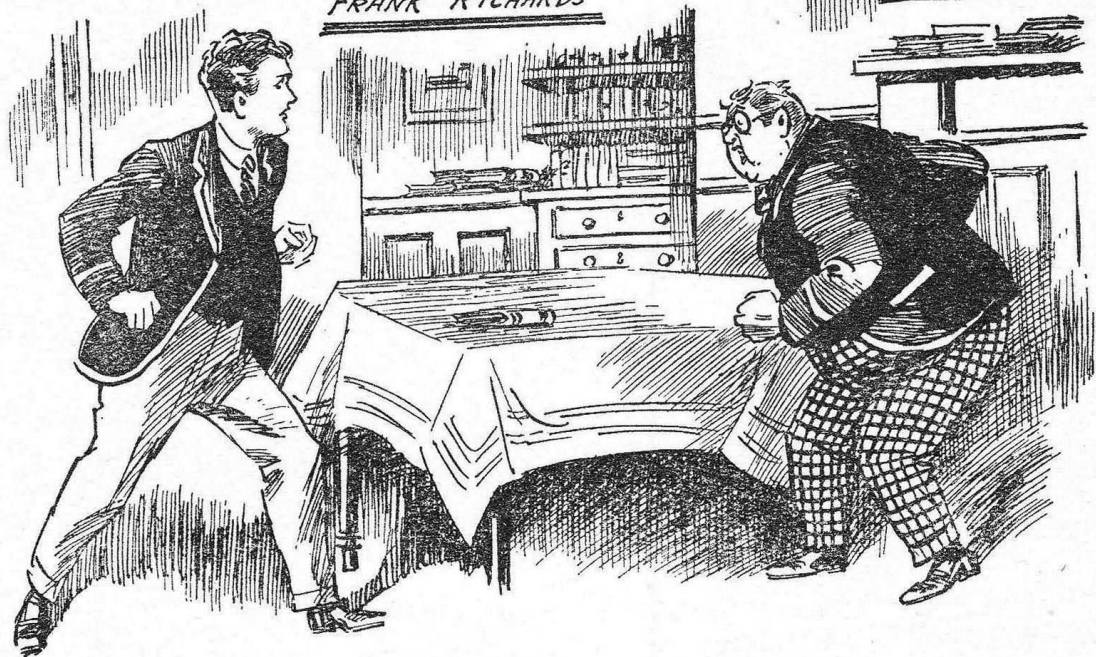
Harry Wharton stood, his face dark with anger, as the bell ceased to ring. It was too late now to write that letter over again: unless he was going to be very late for class with Quelch, and even in his angry excitement, he did not want more trouble with his form-master. Slowly, he left the study in his turn and joined the Remove at the form-room door, just as Mr. Quelch arrived to let in his form.

But he did not speak to his friends or look at them. It was only too clear that there was a rift in the lute, and that Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, was right off at the deep end.

END OF FOURTH SECTION

BILLY BUNTER OWNS UP!

—By—
FRANK RICHARDS



The fat Owl dodged round the table

CHAPTER I

BUNTER WISHES HE HADN'T!

BILLY BUNTER caught his breath.
“Oh, lor!” he breathed.

The fat Owl of the Remove was alarmed.

It was after third school: and most Greyfriars fellows were out of the House, enjoying the open air on a cold and frosty morning, in the interval before the bell rang to summon them to “tiffin”.

Bunter, never very keen on the open air, but very keen indeed on a spot of tuck, to tide him over till dinner, was not out of the House. He was in a Remove study—not his own.

His own study had no attraction for him: there was nothing in the cupboard in that study. It was otherwise in No. 1—for Bunter, with his usual remarkable nose for tuck, was aware that a parcel had arrived for Frank Nugent that morning.

It seemed—to Billy Bunter—quite a simple and natural thing to sample the contents of Nugent's parcel, while the proprietors of the study were out of doors.

Nobody was likely to come up to the studies just then. The Famous Five, according to their usual manners and customs, were certain to be out: most likely punting a footer in the quad.

So it seemed to Bunter that opportunity knocked! He couldn't have chosen a safer moment for investigating the contents of the study cupboard in No. 1. And then—

He had found the parcel. He had extracted a cake therefrom. He had taken one bite at that cake—an extensive bite, which left quite a gaping gash in it. And then—footsteps and voices in the passage outside impinged upon his fat ears.

“Coming down for a punt-about, Wharton?” It was the voice of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

“No: I'm going to my study!” came the answer in Harry Wharton's voice.

“Okay!”

The startled Owl, inside the study, heard the Bounder's footsteps receding towards the stairs. And he heard Harry Wharton's, as the captain of the Remove came along to the study approaching!

Bunter forgot even the cake at that moment.

Harry Wharton was coming into the study, and Billy Bunter did not need to be told what was going to happen if Wharton found him there. It was Billy Bunter who was the original cause of the spot of trouble that had arisen between Harry Wharton and his kind old uncle, Colonel Wharton at Wharton Lodge. And—although Wharton was unaware of it—it was Bunter with his knavish tricks of ventriloquism who had caused that spot of trouble to grow till it was like a dark shadow over the captain of the Remove. Wharton knew enough, at all events, to make it certain that he would boot Bunter if he found him surreptitiously in No. 1 Study. Instinctively, forgetful of cake, the fat Owl hunted cover. Before those approaching footsteps reached the door, the fat Owl backed behind the armchair in the corner, and ducked a fat head out of view.

A moment later, Harry Wharton came in. Behind the armchair, Bunter hardly ventured to breathe. The cake was still in his fat hands: but he did not take another bite. He waited breathlessly for Wharton to go. The beast couldn't have come to stay, at that time of day, surely. No doubt he had come up for a book or something, and would go at once. Bunter fervently hoped so.

Then he heard the door close.

It looked as if the captain of the Remove, had, after all, come to stay—or

why should he have closed the door? Billy Bunter could really have groaned—if he could have ventured to make a sound at all! If Wharton looked into the cupboard and noticed that the parcel had been raided, he might guess that the raider was still on the spot, and then—! The hidden Owl trembled.

But Wharton did not go to the cupboard. Bunter heard a sound of slow footsteps. Wharton was pacing the study.

Billy Bunter began to be as much puzzled as alarmed. Why on earth had the captain of the Remove come up, just to walk about his study! The open air was the place for a walk, if he wanted to walk about! Yet for long minutes those regular pacing footsteps came to the fat ears.

Then, to Bunter's utter amazement, he heard another sound—a wholly unexpected sound. It was a sigh!

Bunter could hardly believe his fat ears. A sigh—from Harry Wharton! Certainly no such sound ever would have escaped him, had he known that there were ears to hear. But there was no mistake about it—it was a sigh that told of a heavy heart.

What was the matter with Wharton? Something was—Billy Bunter could



Behind the armchair, Bunter barely ventured to breathe



Harry and Nugent only in study. "I've thought it over and I've changed my mind"

understand that. Something troubled him deeply. Was it because he had been "dished" over the Christmas holidays? Or what?

Then Bunter heard the door open, and footsteps in the doorway. And again the fat Owl could have groaned. Instead of the beast going, as he had hoped, another beast was coming!

"Harry, old man—!" It was Frank Nugent's voice. "You're here!"

"Yes, Frank. Come in, old fellow."

Harry Wharton smiled faintly as he spoke. There had been something very like a rift in the lute, and his chum was determined to disregard it—but he could guess that Nugent had come up with some inward misgivings.

But if Frank Nugent had any misgivings, they were dismissed by Harry's quiet, friendly tone. His face brightened as he came in.

"Harry! You didn't come up to write that rotten letter over again, did you?" Nugent's voice was almost pleading. "That letter to your uncle—?"

"No!"

"Thank goodness for that."

"I was going to," said Harry, quietly, "but—I've thought it over, in third school. I've changed my mind."

"I'm glad," said Nugent, simply.

"We came rather near a row in this study, old chap, in break. But—you, and the other fellows, will forget all about that—I've had a pretty hard knock, as you know, if that's any excuse for a rotten temper—"

"That's all right, old fellow! And—and—" Nugent hesitated. "Johnny's a bit rough-and-ready, perhaps, but—but—"

"I'm glad he butted in—though I didn't feel like it at the moment. I shall not write to my uncle at all." Harry Wharton's lips quivered a little, "I've got to remember, Frank, that he's always been kind and generous to me, even if he has changed, and turned me down all of a sudden. It's left me at a loose end, and I've got to think it out—but I think I've got it pretty clear now. I shall never set foot in Wharton Lodge again."

Behind the armchair in the corner, a fat Owl gave quite a jump, as he heard that. Once more Billy Bunter could hardly believe his fat ears.

"But—!" said Frank, uneasily.

"That's fixed and settled," said Harry, his lips setting a little. "I've been told not to go home for Christmas. I don't need telling twice! That's not my home any longer, and I shall never enter it again."

"But—" muttered Nugent.

"Nothing will change that," said Harry. "If Colonel Wharton changes his mind again, I shall not change mine. I think I can pull through here. I'm going to consult Quelch about putting in for a scholarship, like Linley, and if I'm lucky that will see me through school. It's a chance, at least." He smiled again, "I shall be swotting hard, old chap, while you fellows are festivating at Cherry Place in the hols."

"You're coming too—"

Wharton shook his head.

"No!" he answered. "That won't do. I've no time on my hands for hols now. I can get leave to stay at the school over the holidays—no difficulty about that. And I shall be working hard all the time, swotting for a schol. After all, why shouldn't I? I've been luckier, so far, than lots of other fellows—but now the shoe pinches, I can face up to it. I'm not afraid of work, I hope."

"But—but!" muttered Nugent, miserably.

"But I'm not going to feel bitter about it, Frank, and I'm not going to complain," said Harry, quietly. "Johnny calls it sulks—and I daresay he's right. Anyhow, that's all over now. I'm going to face it, and try not to feel down in the mouth."

"Harry, old man," said Nugent, earnestly, "I believe Johnny's right, and that if you got in touch with your uncle—"

Wharton's face hardened.

"That's all over," he said. "I shall never see Colonel Wharton again, and never enter his house. I'm not going to reproach him, Frank. I owe him too much for that. But—it's the end."

Nugent was silent.

"Now, if you don't mind, old fellow, I'd rather be left alone—cut down and punt that footer with Bob."

Nugent nodded, and left the study. The door closed after him. Harry Wharton was left alone—as he believed, at last. Fat ears behind the armchair heard him resume that tireless pacing. And again, to the fat ears, came that sound of a deep sigh, that somehow sent a pang to the fat Owl's heart.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter, inaudibly.

Dimly, it was coming into his fat mind what he had done. "Dishing" Harry Wharton for the hols had seemed, to Bunter, tit for tat, a Roland for an Oliver: a remarkably clever joke at Wharton's expense. That it might have serious consequences had not even occurred to him. Now it was borne in upon him that the consequences were serious—terribly serious—that what, to his fatuous mind, had seemed a comedy, was a tragedy. Never for an instant had he dreamed of anything like this. From the bottom of his fat heart, he wished that he had never played that trick on the telephone. For the first time in his fat career, Billy Bunter was feeling the twinges of remorse!

CHAPTER II

LIGHT AT LAST!

"BUNTER!"
"Oh!"

Harry Wharton had ceased to pace the study. He was standing at the window, looking out into the quadrangle below, and a crowd of Greyfriars fellows there. Perhaps he was wondering whether, the next term, he would be among them as of old. And Billy Bunter, peering out from behind the armchair, blinked at his back, and wondered too—whether he had a chance of tiptoeing out of the study while that back was turned. And then suddenly, Wharton turned from the window—and uttered a startled ejaculation, as his eyes fell on a fat face staring at him from the corner of the study.

He stared at Bunter.

Not for a moment had he dreamed that anyone was in the study with him, And there was Bunter—blinking at him from the corner like a startled and terrified fat Owl.

As it came into his mind that Bunter had been there, must have been there, ever since he had entered the study, and that the fat Owl must have heard all that he had said to Nugent, a flash of anger came into his eyes—and he made a step towards the corner. There was a yelp of alarm from Bunter.

"Here, you keep off, you beast!"

Wharton breathed hard.

"You fat sweep, what are you doing here?"

"Oh! Nothing! I—I wasn't after anything—nothing at all, especially a cake!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I—"

"Get out of it."

"I—I say, old chap—" Bunter would have been glad to get out of it. But he could not get out of it without coming within range of a foot.

But the anger faded out of Harry Wharton's face. He was not in a "rotten temper" now. He was past that. What had happened was like the shattering of his little world: it left him with a heavy heart, but no longer angry or resentful. Only sadness remained: and in that softened mood, Bunter was, if he had known it, quite safe from the kicking he richly deserved.

"You fat ass, get out." Wharton's tone was mild. "Cut."

"You ain't going to kick a chap?" asked Bunter, cautiously.

"No, you ass! Just get out! Leave that cake alone—it's Nugent's. But get out."

Bunter gave him a very cautious blink. But he was reassured, and he emerged from the corner. Reluctantly, he laid the cake on the table: then, with his eyes and spectacles still warily on the captain of the Remove, he edged towards the door.

Harry Wharton turned to the window again.

Bunter reached the door. At the door he stopped. Had the captain of the Remove booted him out of the study, as he had fully expected, the fat Owl would have fled yelling up the passage. But that unlooked-for mildness made a difference. Stopping at the door, Bunter blinked back at Wharton, and hesitated. Quite unusual thoughts were passing in Billy Bunter's fat mind.

Wharton seemed to have forgotten him. No doubt he supposed that Bunter was gone. But Bunter was not gone: and for several long minutes, he stood there, uncertain, blinking at Harry's back. Then, as if suddenly making up his mind, he spoke.

"I—I—I say, old chap—"

Harry Wharton looked round.

"You fat ass, are you still there! What do you want!"

"Oh! Nothing! But—" stammered Bunter.

"Well, travel, fathead."

"But I—I—I say." Bunter stammered again, "I—I say, old chap, I—I—I wouldn't row with your uncle, if I were you. I—I say, I—I heard what you said to Nugent—"

"I know that! Get out."

"But—but—but—perhaps it ain't so bad as you think," stammered Bunter. "Perhaps there—there's some mistake—I—I say, I—I wouldn't do anything in a—a—a hurry—you might be sorry for it afterwards, you know."

Harry Wharton stared at him. He had had that advice from his chums, and had had no use for it. He did not expect it from Bunter, whose fat thoughts, as a rule, were wholly concentrated on one person: William George Bunter of the Remove. He frowned: and then, as he saw that there was a look of real concern on the fat face, his brow relaxed, and he smiled faintly.

"Don't bother your fat head about it, Bunter," he said. "Just cut."

"But—but I say—" Bunter did not "cut". He stood blinking at the captain of the Remove like a distressed Owl. "I say, suppose—suppose—suppose—"

"Suppose what?"

"Well, suppose there was a mistake—suppose you've got it all wrong, and the old bean ain't ratty with you as you think. I—I'm jolly sure that he ain't."

"You don't know anything about it."

"I jolly well do," said Bunter, desperately. "I—I never thought you'd take it like this—never dreamed of it! It was just a—a—a joke, really—how was I to know you'd go off the deep end like this? I wouldn't have, myself. But you get your back up and make all this fuss about nothing—"

"Nothing?" repeated Harry.

"Yes—just nothing! You think your uncle slanged you on Quelch's telephone—and you go off like fireworks, when a fellow was only pulling your leg—"

"What?"

"Mind, I don't know anything about it," exclaimed Bunter, in a great hurry. "It wasn't me."

"What wasn't you?"

"Oh! Nothing! I never knew anything about it, of course. I never went down to Friardale for the telephone at the post-office, or anything of the sort. I couldn't speak like the old bean if I tried, and I never practised his voice in my study, and Toddy never heard me and fancied he was there. Besides, it was only a joke. Just a spot of ventriloquism for a—a—a joke."

Harry Wharton gazed at him.

"I don't know anything about it, of course," said Bunter. "But if you

fancy it was your uncle slanging you on Quelch's telephone, you're barking up the wrong tree, see?"

Wharton gasped.

"What do you mean? It was my uncle—I know his voice well enough—Oh! You fat villain—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Was it you?" shrieked Harry Wharton. "One of your potty ventriloquial tricks? No! No! It can't have been—it was Colonel Wharton. What are you spinning me this silly yarn for, you fat idiot?" He made a step towards the fat Owl.

Bunter half-opened the door. He did not like the look on Harry Wharton's face just then: and he was prepared to dodge.

"You jolly well keep off!" gasped Bunter. "I didn't have to tell you, did I? I'm only telling you because you're landing yourself in trouble and there ain't anything for you to make a fuss about. I think you might be grateful to a chap for telling you when he didn't have to."

Harry Wharton paused.

His mind was in a whirl. He had forgotten all about Bunter's ventriloquism, and his trick of imitating voices, though he had quite lately had a sample of it. But now the fat Owl's stammering confession was enlightening him.

"Bunter." His voice was quiet and calm. "Tell me the truth—for once, if you can. Did you play a rotten trick on the telephone—?"

"Well, that's a rotten way of putting it, when a fellow was only pulling your leg," said Bunter.

"Was it you or not?"

"Yes, it was," gasped Bunter. "I was going to dish you over the hols, like you dished me, and how was I to know that you'd make such a fool of yourself about it? Your uncle doesn't even know that you fancy he phoned you—it was me all the time, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"I—I can't believe it—I—I—"

"Perhaps you will when you read his letter—"

"His letter? He hasn't written—"

Bunter groped in a sticky pocket.

"I—I was going to give you this, but I—I forgot! You can have it now. I wasn't going to keep it till break-up—here, you keep off!" yelled Bunter, as Harry Wharton ran towards him. It was only to snatch the letter from the fat sticky hand: but Billy Bunter did not stay for more. He bolted out of the study and raced for the stairs.



"Are you still there? What do you want?"

Harry Wharton was left with the letter in his hand—his uncle's letter. His fingers were trembling a little as he opened it. And the expression on his face was extraordinary as he read it.

CHAPTER III

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY!

STOP that ball, Bunter!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, quite unintentionally, stopped the whizzing football—with a podgy chest. It was quite a bang, on the most extensive waistcoat in the Remove. Bunter roared, and sat down in the quad.

"Ow! wow! wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They were punting the footer before dinner, enjoying the exercise in the keen, frosty December air. It whizzed quite a distance from Smithy's foot, as Bunter rolled along—just in time to stop it!

"Ow! wow!" roared Bunter.

A laughing crowd came up after the ball. Billy Bunter sat up, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and gave them an infuriated blink. They rushed on with the ball: but Bob Cherry stopped.

"Hurt, old fat man?" he asked, kindly.

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "Of course I'm hurt! Knocking a chap over with a football! I'm fearfully hurt. Pains all over."

"Well, if they're all over, you needn't worry about them," said Bob.

"You silly ass! I don't mean they're all over—I mean they're all over—" Bob, however, did not remain to learn precisely what Bunter meant—he ran on after the punters.

The fat Owl heaved up his weight. He rolled off to the House. After his sudden exit from No. 1 Study, Bunter had rolled out, to keep at a safe distance from Harry Wharton. Now he rolled in again, to seek an armchair by the fire in the Rag—with a wary eye open for the captain of the Remove as he rolled. It was upon a good impulse—rather rare with Bunter—that he had owned up to the trick on the telephone, and handed over the letter from a sticky pocket. But he did not expect Wharton to be in a good temper about it.



"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Hurt, old fat man?" Bob asked

His best guess, in the circumstances, was to keep at a safe distance. But alas for Bunter—even as he rolled into the House, he came on Harry Wharton, face to face, coming out.

“Oh, crikey!” gasped Bunter.

He revolved on his axis immediately, and dashed back into the quad. Harry stared after him.

“Bunter, you ass—” he called out.

Bunter did not stay to listen. He flew. Harry Wharton stared, laughed, and went on his way. Not till a good five minutes later, did Billy Bunter, blinking about him like a very cautious owl, approach the doorway again. But this time, the coast was clear, and the fat Owl rolled in, rolled to the Rag, and at long last reposed his fat limbs in an armchair by the fire: hoping that that unspeakable beast, the captain of the Remove, would stay out till the bell rang for tiffin.

Harry, if Bunter had only known it, had dismissed him from mind. He was not looking for Bunter—he was looking for his chums, with news for them. And—if Bunter had only stayed to ascertain the fact—there was no sign of a “rotten temper” about him. His face was bright and cheery—much brighter than it had been for some time of late.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” came a roar from Bob Cherry. “Here you are, old man! Come and help us punt this footer.”

“Come on, old boy!” called out Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton smiled. There had been a rift in the lute, in break that morning, but his friends, evidently, were passing it over like the idle wind which they regarded not. There was not going to be trouble in the Co. if they could help it. But Harry Wharton’s mood for trouble had passed away as if it had never been.

“Leave that footer alone for a bit,” he called back. “I’ve got something to tell you chaps.”

“Okay!” answered Bob: and the Co., leaving the footer to Smithy and the rest, joined him; rather wondering what was coming. Johnny Bull’s face was just a little expressive.

“You haven’t written that letter again!” he asked.

Harry Wharton coloured.

“No!” he answered.

“That’s good, anyhow,” said Johnny.

“More so than you think, Johnny,” said Wharton, quietly. “But for you, old chap, that rotten letter would be in the post now, on its way to my uncle—” His voice trembled. “Thank goodness you did what you did. You’ve always been a good pal, but you never did a fellow a better turn than that.”

"Oh!" said Johnny, quite taken aback.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Glad you've thought it over, old fellow," he said.

"I'm glad, too, that I changed my mind about that, as I told Franky, before I knew that it was all a mistake," said Harry. "But I've found that out now, and I can tell you fellows, it's like a ton weight off my mind."

Johnny Bull grunted.

"So there was a mistake?" he said.

"Yes, as I know now."

"I told you so!"

Harry Wharton winced. Johnny had told him so: there was no doubt about that. He knew now that had he taken Johnny's advice, all would have been well: and it was not pleasant to remember that stubborn pride had stood in the way. But the next moment, he smiled.

"You did, Johnny," he said. "But it's no use talking sense to an obstinate ass with his back up, and I'm sorry for it."

"Oh!" said Johnny, taken aback again.

"But what's happened, Harry?" asked Frank Nugent. "You say you've found out that there was a mistake—how and what!"

"What was the idiotic and absurd mistakefulness, my esteemed and ridiculous chum?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"That phone call from my uncle—"

"What about that?"

"My uncle never phoned at all."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Colonel Wharton knows nothing about it," said Harry. "Goodness knows what he'd have thought if I'd posted that letter—thank goodness Johnny saved me from that. He never phoned at all—"

"But—but—but—!" stuttered Bob, blankly. "You didn't dream it, did you?"

"That fat ass Bunter—"

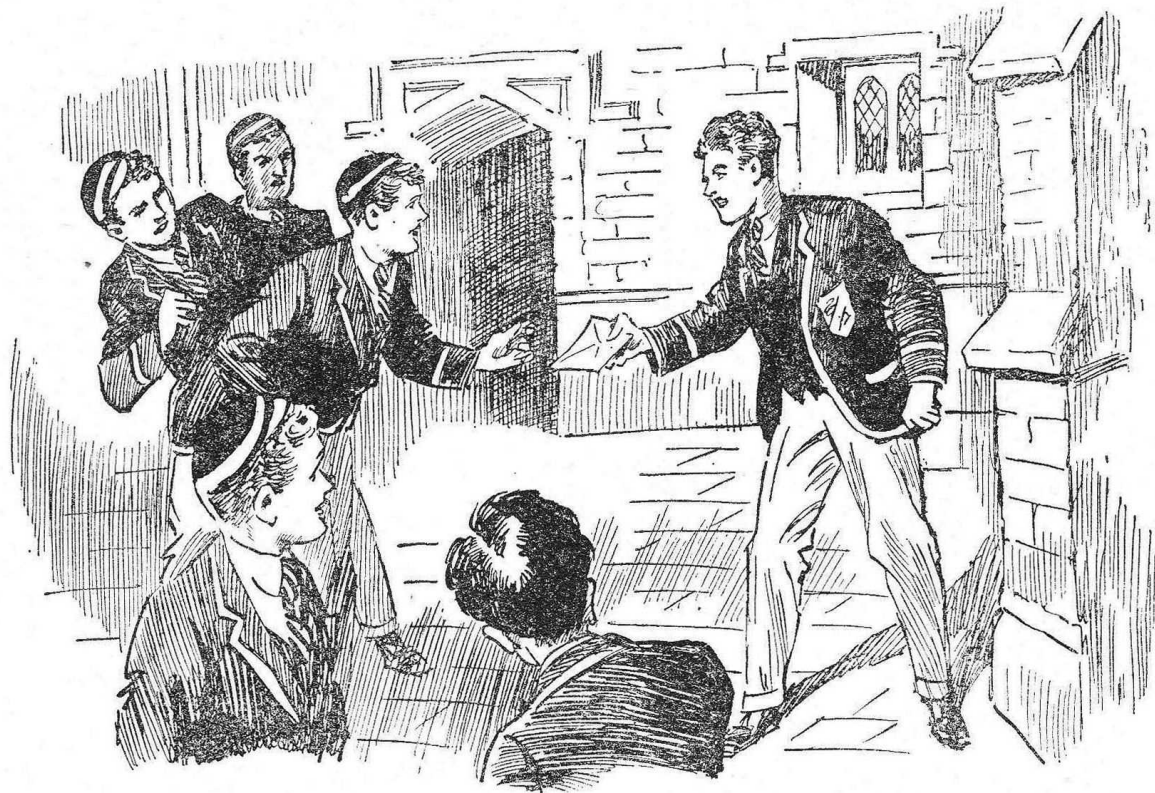
"Bunter?"

"You know his potty ventriloquism, and his potty trick of imitating voices. It was Bunter on the phone that time, pulling my leg."

"Great pip!"

"Of course, the fat ass never knew the harm he was doing," said Harry. "It was his fatheaded idea of a leg-pull. He's owned up to it. I—I couldn't quite get it down that he had taken me in like that, but—but—it turns out that my uncle had written—"

"You never had a letter—"



Harry drew a letter from his pocket. He held it out for his friends to read

“That blithering, blethering, benighted fathead must have taken it out of the rack before break this morning—anyhow, he had it, and he gave it to me after owning up to his potty trickery—”

“You’ve got the letter?” exclaimed Bob.

“Here it is.”

Harry Wharton drew a letter from his pocket. He held it out for his friends to read. The envelope bore Thursday’s post-mark, and the letter had, evidently, been delivered at Greyfriars that morning, though Wharton had known nothing of it. The letter, written in the old Colonel’s firm hand, ran:

Dear Harry,

Your aunt has explained the whole matter to me, and I understand, of course, that you were not to blame for missing me on Wednesday afternoon. Forget all about it, my dear boy. I am looking forward to seeing you, with your friends, in a few days now, and we shall all have a merry Christmas.

Your affectionate Uncle,
James Wharton.

Bob Cherry gave a long, long whistle. Johnny Bull gave a grunt. Frank Nugent looked like a fellow who had come into a fortune: and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled all over his dusky face.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob.

"So, you see, it's all right—right as rain!" said Harry. "All a rotten mistake, owing to that fat chump's potty tricks. I was all set for making a priceless fool of myself—and all the while there was nothing the matter—as I might have found out for myself if I'd been a bit more reasonable, I suppose—"

"I told—!" began Johnny Bull. But he stopped, at that. Even Johnny, perhaps, realised that he had made that remark often enough!

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, it's all clear now, and we're all going to Wharton Lodge for the Christmas hols, after all, and everything is going to be jolly," he said. "And the sooner we forget all about this, the better."

"There's one thing beats me," said Bob, slowly.

"What that?"



"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "So you see, it's all right"

"Why did Bunter own up? You never found him out—he owned up! Why?"

"The whyfulness is terrific."

"Not like Bunter," said Johnny Bull.

"No!" said Harry, slowly. "Not like Bunter! But—well, he heard me talking to Nugent in the study, and that put him wise to the harm he had done, and—and I suppose he's got a spot of conscience somewhere under his fat—anyhow, he did own up, and put it right. He ought to be jolly well booted, but—but I feel more like giving him your cake, Franky."

Frank Nugent laughed.

"Do!" he said.

CHAPTER IV

BUNTER TOO!

"**B**UNTER—"

"Beast!"

"Here you are—"

"You keep off!"

"I've been looking for you—"

"Keep off!" yelled Bunter.

He had hoped that Harry Wharton would stay out till "tiffin". That hope proved unfounded, as the captain of the Remove walked into the Rag. The fat Owl bounded out of the armchair, and dodged round the table.

"You fat ass—"

"Beast!"

"I tell you I've been looking for you—"

"I know that! Keep off."

Harry Wharton stared at the fat Owl across the table, and burst into a laugh.

"Fixed up for Christmas yet, Bunter?" he asked.

"Eh?" Bunter blinked at that unexpected question. "Have you been looking for me to ask me that?"

"Just that!"

"Oh!" said Bunter, reassured. "Well, I ain't exactly fixed up for the hols yet, old chap. A lot of fellows have asked me home, of course—"

"Hundreds, I expect," said Harry Wharton, gravely.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But if you feel like turning the lot of them down, and coming to Wharton

Lodge for the hols, I'll make it all right with my uncle," said Harry, laughing.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. He had expected a booting. This was ever so much more agreeable than a booting. His fat face beamed.

"My dear chap, that's all right," he said, affectionately, "I'll come! I'll come with pleasure. Rely on me."

"I will!" said Harry, "and if you feel like a cake before tiffin—"

"Eh?"

"There's one in my study—as I think you know. Cut up and scoff it."

"Oh, crikey!" said the astonished Owl.

It was quite near time for tiffin. But that made no difference to William George Bunter. Billy Bunter had room for a cake, with as many helpings at dinner to follow as he could venture to ask for under a gimlet-eye. Bunter lost no time in cutting up to the study and scoffing that cake.

THE clouds had rolled by. Most faces were merry and bright when Greyfriars School broke up for Christmas, and Harry Wharton's as bright as any—with one exception. Brightest of all was the fat face of Billy Bunter—safely landed, at last, for a merry Christmas.

THE END

LUCKY for LOVELL!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



He tottered and almost fell over

CHAPTER I

LIKE LOVELL!

“**T**HAT funk Carthew—!”

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, got no further than that.

He had more to say. Lovell rather liked the sound of his own voice. Also, he had a high opinion of his own opinions, which, as he believed if no one else did, were worth hearing.

Probably Lovell would have said quite a great deal more, on the subject of Carthew of the Sixth, the most unpopular prefect at Rookwood School, had he not been interrupted.

He did not like Carthew. Few fellows, if any, did. Carthew was much given to a too liberal use of the official ashplant. Now, as it happened, scorn was added to dislike: for had not Pipkin of the Third actually seen Carthew, Sixth-Form man and prefect as he was, running away from a tramp in Coombe Lane? Pipkin had related that incident to other fellows, who

had in turn related it to still other fellows, till all Rookwood knew about it, which was rather awful for Carthew. So there was Lovell, in the quad, telling Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome what he thought of Carthew: and no doubt he would have gone on telling them, had he not been interrupted.

But he was—suddenly.

Smack!

The chums of the Fourth had not seen Carthew coming. He came round a corner of the building, just in time to hear his name, with the unpleasant epithet "funk" attached to it. And the smack he handed out to the speaker rang like a pistol-shot.

Lovell caught it with his ear. It was a mighty smack. He tottered, and almost went over.

"Oh!" spluttered Lovell. "Oh! Ow! Who—!"

With a hand to a burning ear, he spun round at his assailant. He glared at Carthew. The Sixth-Form man gave him an angry stare, and walked on. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome exchanged looks. It was so like Lovell to be expressing his opinion of Carthew, in his usual loud tones, just as the person concerned was coming into hearing.

Lovell rubbed his burning ear, spluttering with fury.

"Why, the cheeky rat—does he think he can smack a fellow's head?" gasped Lovell.

Carthew, apparently, did think so: for he had done it. Lovell's somewhat thick head was singing from that sounding smack. Really, they did not smack heads at Rookwood. A prefect could, for just cause, order a fellow to bend over: but he really couldn't smack his head. However, whether he could or not, Carthew undoubtedly had done it!

"That funk, who bolted from a tramp, smacking a fellow's head!" gasped Lovell. "By gum, I'll show him whether he can smack a fellow's head or not!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell clenched his fists and started at a rush after Carthew, who had walked on as if he considered the incident closed, as doubtless he did. Arthur Edward forgot, at that moment, or did not choose to remember, that Sixth-Form prefects could not be punched by juniors, and that the punching of a prefect could only mean an interview with the Head, with dire results. Lovell was not only going to punch Carthew, but he was going to punch him as hard as he jolly well could, prefect as he was.

But again he was interrupted.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, all three, jumped at him, as he started after Carthew, as if moved by the same spring. They grasped him on all sides, and whirled him back.

Lovell struggled in their grasp.

"Let go, you fatheads!" he roared.

"Easy does it, old boy!" said Jimmy Silver, soothingly.

"Chuck it, fathead!" said Raby.

"Want to go up to the Head to be sacked?" inquired Newcome.

Lovell wrenched at detaining hands.

"You saw him smack my head—" he howled.

"And we heard you ask for it!" said Raby.

"You can't call pre's fancy names," said Jimmy.

"Not when they can hear you, at any rate!" said Newcome.

"I'm going to hit him in the eye!" yelled Lovell. "Think I'm going to let him smack my head? Let go!"

He wrenched and again wrenched. But his loyal chums did not let go. If Lovell, for the moment, had a fancy for going up to Dr. Chisholm to be sacked for hitting a prefect in the eye, it was up to his faithful friends to restrain him. And they did!

"Jolly near time for class," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's get along to the form-room."

"I'm going to hit Carthew in the eye—"

"Carthew's a pre—"

"I don't care!"

"You will, when the Head tells you to look out a train for home!" said Newcome. "Forget it, old man."

"The rotter—the rat—the swob—"

"All that, and more," agreed Jimmy. "But—"

"Will you let go?"

"Not so's you'd notice it! Come along to the form-room."

"I won't!" roared Lovell. "Not till I've given that funk Carthew a oner in the eye."

And again he wrenched.

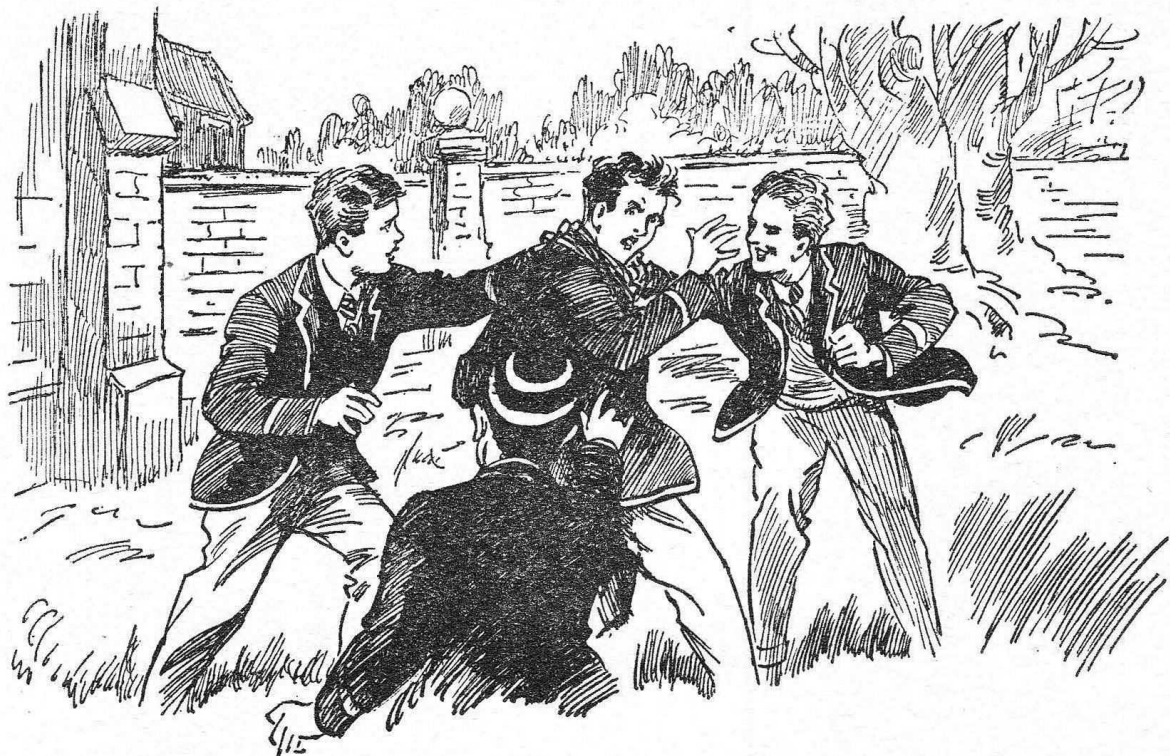
Arthur Edward Lovell was quite a hefty fellow. But he was not hefty enough to deal with his three faithful friends in a bunch. They held on to him: and he wrenched in vain. They rocked and almost rolled: but they held on.

"Come on, old chap!" said Jimmy.

"I'm going—"

"Not at all—you're coming!"

And Lovell came! With three fellows grasping him, and walking him off, he had no choice. Carthew, quite unconscious of his narrow escape from a punch in the eye, walked on his way: what time Arthur Edward Lovell, vociferous but safely held, walked to the form-room.



And Lovell came! With three fellows grasping him and walking him off

CHAPTER II

LOVELL MEANS BUSINESS!

I COULD lick him!"

"Eh! Who?" said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell frowned darkly.

It was prep in the Classical Fourth. The "Fistical Four" were in the end study: three of them seated round the table with their books, one of them leaning on the mantelpiece with his hands in his pockets and a frown on his brow . . . which deepened as Jimmy replied to his remark.

Lovell rather liked leaning on that mantelpiece. He was the tallest of the four: the other three were hardly long enough for such leaning. They were all sturdy youths: but it was an undoubted fact that none of them was so long as Lovell: and Arthur Edward did not dislike making that fact manifest. Now, as he leaned, he looked down from superior height on three bent heads at the table. He was not, for the moment, bothering about prep. It was not, indeed, uncommon for Lovell not to bother about prep, and land into a spot of trouble with Mr. Dalton in the form-room in consequence.

But it was not just his accustomed carelessness that now banished prep from Lovell's mind. He was thinking of the episode of that day in the quad: and the more he thought of it, the more it rankled. Smacking a fellow's head was the limit: far beyond the limit.

It was true that Arthur Edward himself, now and then, had cuffed some cheeky fag in the Second or Third. So it would be hard to say that he objected to the smacking of heads wholly on principle. But the case now was, of course, very different. In this case, it was Arthur Edward's own head that had been smacked: and there is no doubt that head-smacking is one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive. Lovell was not a fag in the Second or Third—Lovell was a man in the Fourth: and in his own esteem at least, quite an important man in the Fourth. Actually, if Lovell's head was smacked, it was practically time for the skies to fall. He brooded on it. To let such an indignity pass, and nothing done, was unthinkable. The fact that Mark Carthew was a Sixth-Form prefect, and by all the rules and laws of Rookwood School unpunchable, did not make it thinkable.

Jimmy Silver and Co. on the other hand, had almost forgotten the incident. It did not loom so largely in their minds as in Lovell's. And in preparation, too, a fellow had to think of prep. The Classical Fourth had to prepare a section of the Aeneid for the morrow: and really and truly, there was enough in Virgil for a fellow to think about, if he did not want to perpetrate "howlers" in form—as Lovell very frequently did!

Lovell frowned, and his lip curled.

"Who?" he repeated. Jimmy Silver had actually asked "Who?"—when Lovell declared that he could "lick him." Evidently, the matter that was seething in Lovell's mind was not seething in Jimmy's. His thoughts were in prep: and he did not know to whom Lovell was alluding! "Did you say 'Who'?"

"Eh! Yes!" said Jimmy. "But never mind who, old chap—hadn't you better pile into prep?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Well, prep's prep!" remarked Raby.

"Blow prep."

"Are you going to blow Dalton in the form-room to-morrow, too?" inquired Newcome.

"I'm not bothering about Dalton, and I'm not bothering about prep," hooted Lovell. "I said I could lick him, and I jolly well could."

"Lick Dalton?" ejaculated Raby, staring up from Virgil.

"You silly ass—"

"Well, you said—"

"I said I could lick him!" roared Lovell, "and you jolly well know whom



"I could jolly well stand up to him, and lick him," declared Lovell

I mean, if you haven't forgotten Carthew smacking my head. Perhaps you have!" added Lovell, with bitter sarcasm.

"Eh! Oh! No! Yes," said Jimmy, rather vaguely. "Never mind that now, old boy—just sit down and tackle jolly old Virgil—"

"I could lick him! He's a Sixth-Form man, I know, a senior and all that—but he's a weedy specimen: he never turns up for games if he can crawl out of it, and he's a funk. I'm as big as he is, or jolly near. I could jolly well stand up to him, with or without gloves, and lick him!" declared Lovell.

"My dear chap—"

"I've got more pluck, at least! Think I'd run away from that tramp, as young Pipkin saw Carthew doing?" demanded Lovell.

"Um!" said Jimmy. "From what I've heard, that tramp was a husky fellow, and Carthew wouldn't have had much chance. And from what Carthew says, he thought the man was a footpad, going to rob him—"

Scornful snort from Lovell.

"He would say anything, after what he did!" he jeered. "He'd like fellows to believe that the man was a dangerous character—"

"Perhaps he was!" suggested Newcome.

"Rot!" said Lovell.

"Well, Pipkin described him as a big, brawny brute of a fellow, with a bull neck in a spotted muffler, and—"

"Pipkin's a young ass."

Arthur Edward, clearly, was not prepared to hear or heed anything in favour of Carthew of the Sixth. So Jimmy, Raby and Newcome reverted to Virgil.

Virgil, however, was interrupted by Lovell.

"Carthew's a funk, as I was saying this afternoon when he came up and smacked my head!" resumed Lovell. "Even if that tramp was a footpad, which he most likely wasn't, and even if he was a brawny brute, which I don't suppose for a minute he was, Carthew was a funk to run. Rookwood men don't take to their heels because they're frightened of a tramp. Think old Bulkeley would have run, or even Knowles of the Modern Side? I said that Carthew was a funk, and he smacked my head for it—and I could lick him, all the time. Don't you fellows think I could?" demanded Lovell, aggressively. "What do you think, Jimmy?"

"I think you'd better get on with prep—"

"You silly ass! What do you think, Raby?"

"Same as Jimmy."

"Will you talk sense?" bawled Lovell, in a voice heard far beyond the confines of the end study. "What do you think, Newcome?"

"I think you'll have a beak up here if you bellow like an elephant."

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard.

"Oh, all right!" he said, in a tone clearly implying that, so far from being all right, it was all wrong. "All right. If you don't care about a senior man smacking Fourth-form men's heads, all right! Get on with your prep! I know what I'm going to do, all the same."

Three juniors looked up at that.

That afternoon, they had barely restrained Arthur Edward Lovell from asking for the "sack". It sounded as if more restraint might be required. Lovell was a determined fellow. He rather prided himself upon being as firm as a rock: and his friends acknowledged that he was, at least, as obstinate as a mule!

"Well, and what are you going to do?" asked Jimmy.

"I'm going to lick Carthew."

"Oh, my hat!" said Raby.

"You're going to lick a Sixth Form pre, when any man would be sacked for laying a finger on him?" said Jimmy.



"But he's got it coming!" added Lovell

"He smacked my head—"

"We've had that!" remarked Newcome.

Lovell glared at him.

"You fellows can walk round Rookwood having your heads smacked right and left, if you like it," he said. "I don't! I'm not taking it lying down, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it! I tell you I could lick Carthew—and I'm jolly well going to do it, for smacking my head. Only—" Lovell paused.

Apparently even Lovell realised that there was an "only".

"Only," he went on, more slowly, "only I don't want to go up to the Head to be bunked. If it wasn't for that, I'd walk into Carthew's study this very minute and knock him right and left. But—"

Another pause! Clearly, there was a "but" as well as an "only".

"But he's got it coming!" added Lovell, finally. "I shall have to think it out a bit—I certainly don't want to go up to the Head! But you fellows can bank on this—I'm going to lick that cad Carthew. I've made up my mind about that, and it's as settled and fixed as the laws of the What-do-you-call-'ems and the Thingummies. I mean business—and that's that!"

And that being that, Lovell, at last, dropped the subject, and condescended to give a little attention to prep.

CHAPTER III

LOOKING AFTER LOVELL!

“CRICKET!” said Jimmy Silver.

Lovell shook his head.

It was the following afternoon.

That day, Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had had rather an anxious eye on Arthur Edward Lovell. The “Fistical Four” of Rookwood were generally inseparable: but never had they been quite so inseparable. There was really no telling what Lovell, in his present mood, might do: and the three agreed that he needed an eye kept on him.

In morning break, he had eyed Carthew, in the quad, rather like a truculent mastiff. His three chums had been prepared to collar him, as one man, if he made a single step towards the object of his deep wrath.

But Lovell restrained that wrath. Even Lovell realised that it wouldn't do to punch a Sixth Form prefect in open quad, under the eyes of all Rookwood. He was quite determined that he was going to “lick” Carthew. But between that determination, and his strong objection to being “sacked” for such an exploit, Arthur Edward was in rather a dilemma. He had said that he would have to think it out: and undoubtedly it was a difficulty that required considerable thought!

The afternoon was a half-holiday, and Jimmy Silver hoped that cricket would keep Lovell too busy to bother about reprisals on Carthew. Lovell was a keen cricketer, and not as a rule willing to miss a game. But it appeared that even cricket was taking second place now. Lovell's negative shake of the head indicated as much when Jimmy mentioned the subject in the quad after dinner.

“Not this afternoon,” said Lovell.

“You can't cut cricket,” urged Jimmy.

“There's no match on—”

“We've got to keep up to the mark for the Felgate match next week.”

“Never mind next week!” said Lovell.

Jimmy breathed rather hard. If Lovell turned down cricket, there was only one explanation—his feud with Carthew of the Sixth.

“Look here, you ass, what have you got in your head now?” demanded Jimmy. “If it's Carthew—”

“Just that!” assented Lovell.

“Then you can forget it!” snapped Newcome.

"I'll forget it after I've licked Carthew."

"But you can't!" hooted Raby.

"I fancy I could! I'm going to try, anyway."

"You're not!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"I jolly well am! I've thought it out," said Lovell. "I know how! You needn't tell me that I can't walk up to him in the quad here and wallop him. I know that. But outside the school, with nobody to butt in—what about that? Suppose I catch him, say, in Coombe Wood—a quiet spot all to ourselves. Carthew's been pretty well grinned at over running away from that tramp. Think he'd like to tell all Rookwood that he's been thrashed by a Fourth Form man? What? Why, he wouldn't be able to look a fellow in the face afterwards. He wouldn't dare show his nose in the Prefects' Room. Bet you he wouldn't say a word. Think so?"

Lovell's chums gazed at him. Evidently, Lovell had been doing some thinking! And his chums had to admit that there was, perhaps, something in what he said. A Sixth Form man, thrashed in a stand-up scrap by a junior of the Fourth, might quite possibly hesitate to tell the world about it. If he did, Lovell undoubtedly would be sacked: but Carthew would never hear the end of it. There was a chance—just a slim chance—that Lovell might get by with this!

Slim as that chance seemed to Jimmy Silver and Co., Lovell did not seem to regard it as slim. It seemed that he banked on it.

"Think he wants them turning up their noses at him in the Prefects' Room, and fags cackling over it, and everybody pointing him out as the man who was licked by a junior?" said Lovell, derisively. "Not on your life! If it's quite private, with nobody to see, I'll bet that Carthew will say nothing about it. What?"

"It's just possible—!" said Jimmy, slowly. "But—"

"It's a cert!" said Lovell, confidently.

"Fathead!" said Raby.

"Look here, Raby—"

"Well, thank goodness Carthew won't give you a chance of catching him in a lonely spot in Coombe Wood," said Newcome.

Lovell laughed.

"That's exactly what he's going to do this afternoon," he answered. "Carthew's walking over to Latcham this afternoon to go to the Regal."

"How do you know!"

"Because I heard him asking Neville to go with him. But Neville's playing cricket, and Carthew's going alone."

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy Silver.



"Well, I shall be behind that oak when Carthew comes along"

"So I've got it all cut and dried," went on Lovell. "I go out before Carthew starts, and wait for him on the footpath in Coombe Wood. You know that place where the big oak spreads over the footpath? Well, I shall be behind that oak when Carthew comes along."

"Look here, Lovell—"

"I shan't give him a chance to cut, like he did from that tramp," added Lovell. "I shan't let him see me till I've got him! See? Then he can use his fists, instead of smacking a fellow's head from behind. I shall lick him—"

"Suppose he licks you!" suggested Newcome.

"I'll chance that!"

"Suppose he comes straight back and goes to the Head—"

"I'll chance that too."

"You can't do it, old man."

"Can't I? You'll see."

Lovell's mind, evidently, was made up. He was going ahead, regardless—banking on that slim chance that Carthew would never own up to all Rook-

wood that he had been thrashed by a Fourth Form junior. That chance seemed good enough to Arthur Edward Lovell. It did not seem good enough to his chums.

"You fellows cut cricket, and come along and watch the show!" suggested Lovell.

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Fathead!" said Raby.

"Goat!" said Newcome.

Raby and Newcome seemed to give the case up as hopeless. Argument rolled off Arthur Edward Lovell like water off a duck. But "Uncle James of Rookwood" had a card yet to play. Desperate diseases, as the poet has remarked require desperate remedies: and "Uncle James" was prepared to go great lengths to keep his hot-headed chum from asking for the "order of the boot".

"Come up to the study, Lovell," he said.

"What for?" asked Lovell.

"Something I want to show you."

"Oh, all right."



"Suppose he licks you?" suggested Newcome



Deposited in a breathless, gasping, infuriated heap on the study carpet

They went into the House, and up to the junior studies, Newcome and Raby following. Lovell had a cheery grin on his face, evidently in happy anticipation of what was going to happen in Coombe Wood later. Raby and Newcome were puzzled: they guessed, if Lovell did not, that Uncle James had something up his sleeve, though they could not guess what it was.

"Well?" said Lovell, having marched into the end study, "What is it that you want to show me, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver, standing with his back to the door, put his hand behind him and extracted the key from the lock.

"I want to show you that you can't carry on with playing the giddy goat," he explained. "Now, old fellow, will you chuck it up, and come along with us and play cricket?"

"No!" hooted Lovell, "I won't!"

"Do, old chap!" urged Raby.

"Rats!"

"Well, if you can't look after yourself, your pals will have to look after you," said Jimmy Silver, resignedly, and he jammed the key into the outside of the lock. "Come on, you chaps—Lovell's staying here."

Raby and Newcome chuckled.

"Good egg!" said Raby. "Come on!"

"Why, you—you—you—!" spluttered Arthur Edward Lovell. "You fancy you can lock me in the study—you—you—!" Lovell made a rush.

Three pairs of hands met him. There was quite a mix-up for a minute or two. But if Arthur Edward could handle Carthew, as he fancied, or not, he couldn't handle his three loyal pals; on the other hand, they handled him, and Arthur Edward was deposited in a breathless, gasping, infuriated heap on the study carpet.

Leaving him to gurgle for breath there, Jimmy Silver slammed the door, turned the key outside, and put it in his pocket. Three juniors walked away, satisfied that Arthur Edward was safe for the afternoon.

But was he?

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome joined a crowd of the Fourth on Little Side, and cricket was the order of the day. They even forgot Lovell. But had they remembered him, they would never have guessed that Arthur Edward in broad daylight, at the risk of being spotted by masters and prefects, had climbed down a rain-pipe from the window of the end study.

But he had! And while his faithful friends, nothing doubting, were urging the flying ball, Arthur Edward Lovell, as obstinately determined as ever, was on his way to Coombe Wood: there to lurk in ambush for Carthew of the Sixth, and administer the scheduled licking to that unpopular prefect.

CHAPTER IV

CHANGE IN THE PROGRAMME!

"**B**LOW!" muttered Lovell.

He muttered that expressive word under his breath.

It was very annoying.

For half an hour Arthur Edward Lovell had lurked behind the big spreading oak, on the footpath through Coombe Wood. He had started well ahead of the Sixth Form man who was going to Latcham: and he had to wait: but he was quite content to wait till Carthew came along. It was a solitary footpath, shaded by the thick foliage of trees on either side: and Lovell had certainly selected a favourable spot for an ambush. Underwoods grew thickly and he was in good cover, behind the oak, as he peered occasionally along the path, in the direction of Rookwood, to see whether Carthew was coming.

And then came footsteps on the grassy path: not from the direction of Rookwood, but from Latcham in the opposite direction. Lovell, no doubt, would have preferred to have Coombe Wood all to himself—and Carthew—that afternoon: but even Lovell did not expect the general public to give up

the use of that footpath to suit his personal plans. Somebody was coming along from Latcham, and Lovell, behind his tree, waited for that somebody to pass and disappear into space.

That somebody did not pass.

Lovell heard a sound of someone, unseen through the massive trunk of the oak, throwing himself down in the grass. Further sounds apprised him that that someone was sitting there, leaning on the tree: apparently taking a rest in the shade on a warm summer's afternoon. That spot, favourable for an ambush, was equally favourable for a rest in the shade. It was natural enough: but very annoying to Lovell. He did not want an audience on the spot when he "licked" Carthew. However, he waited as patiently as he could for that pedestrian, having rested, to resume his way. Instead of which, a scent of tobacco floated in the air. That pedestrian was not going on his way. He had lighted a pipe: to judge by the scent, a fairly foul one.

Lovell, at last, peered round the massive trunk, to see who or what it was. He caught his breath as he saw.

Sitting there, in the grass, his back to the oak, a pipe in his mouth, was a roughly-clad, muscular-looking man, with a rag of a cap on the back of his head, and a spotted muffler round a bull-neck. Obviously, the man was a tramp, if not something more truculent: and it dawned on Arthur Edward Lovell that that spot, which he had selected for its loneliness, was rather too lonely for a fellow to want to run into a tough-looking tramp.

He muttered "Blow!" but he was careful not to let that mutter be audible. He did not want to attract the attention of the bull-necked gentleman in the spotted muffler.

That spotted muffler rang a bell, as it were. He remembered Pipkin's description of the tramp from whom Carthew of the Sixth had fled: a big, brawny brute in a spotted muffler. It occurred to Lovell that this, in all probability, was the very tramp, or footpad, from whom Carthew had run.

Lovell drew back behind the oak trunk.

He was feeling rather serious now.

The spot was lonely—very lonely. If that tramp was Carthew's tramp—and he could hardly doubt it—the man had attacked Carthew, who had run for it. Carthew had declared, at Rookwood, that the ruffian had wanted to rob him—and Lovell had to admit that this man looked none too good for it. He wondered a little whether he had done Carthew injustice: for the Rookwood senior certainly was no match for that hefty tramp, and after all, no fellow wanted to be robbed. And suppose the brute spotted him there, and decided that a Rookwood junior was worth plundering as well as a Rookwood senior?

Lovell breathed rather hard—but very quietly.



Obviously, the man was a tramp

He longed to hear the man in the spotted muffler get up and go on his way. But the man did not stir.

His presence knocked out Lovell's carefully-laid plans. Any minute now Carthew might come along that footpath. At the first glimpse of that truculent-looking tramp, Lovell knew what Carthew would do—he would take to his heels, as he had done before. If it was the same man, one glimpse would be enough!

It was really very annoying!

Suddenly a sound came through the silence of the dusky wood. It was the sound of someone coming along the footpath from the direction of Rookwood.

Lovell set his lips.

Carthew was coming. Ten to one, it was Carthew: and the minute he saw that tramp, he would bolt. That was going to be the ultimate outcome of all Arthur Edward's careful planning.

Then a sound closer at hand caught his ear.

The tramp was stirring.

Lovell heard him scramble up. A rustling sound told that he had pushed into the bushes on the other side of the footpath.

Was he gone? Lovell listened intently. But the rustle died away immediately: the bushes were still and quiet. The tramp was not gone. He had only taken cover in the bushes across the path.

Lovell wondered why.

He was soon to know.

Footsteps on the footpath came closer. Peering from behind the trunk, Lovell saw the newcomer at last. It was Mark Carthew, of the Rookwood Sixth: swinging carelessly along, with his hands in his pockets—walking right into Lovell's ambush, and evidently happily unaware of tramps. The man was still close at hand, but nothing was to be seen of him.

The tramp, for some reason of his own, had dodged out of sight. There was no glimpse of him to alarm Carthew. The Sixth Form man came swinging on under the branches of the oak.

Now was the time for Arthur Edward Lovell to go into action, as planned. But he hesitated. A truculent tramp only three or four yards away made a difference. Suppose he butted in—!

As Lovell, behind the oak, hesitated, there was a sudden stir in the bushes on the other side of the footpath. An unwashed face, a ragged cap, a spotted muffler, came suddenly into sight—and then, as the man leaped on Carthew, it dawned on Lovell why he had taken cover! He was, after all, a footpad: and he had dodged out of sight till the wayfarer was within his reach! Lovell, really, might have guessed that one!

Carthew uttered a yell of alarm.

But he had no chance to run. The ruffian's grasp was on him, and he struggled in that grasp.

"Gotcher!" grinned the man in the spotted muffler.

"Let go!" panted Carthew.

"I don't think! You agin, is it—I know you! You bolted the other day—you ain't bolting now! I gotcher! Now, then, 'and it over—all you've got about you—and sharp! And if—Oh!"

Carthew was struggling. It did not seem that he was, after all, such a funk as Arthur Edward Lovell had declared. No doubt he would have taken to his heels, given a chance: but he had no chance of that. But he was not going to be robbed if he could help it. He struggled, and hit out: and his knuckles crashed on an unwashed face.

"Oh!" panted the man in the spotted muffler. "Oh! Oooh!" His nose spurted red from that jolt. "Cor! Why, I'll smash yer."

Lovell stared on—only for a moment or two!

The enraged ruffian was hammering Carthew right and left. The Rookwood senior was putting up a fight: but he was simply nowhere in those



"Gotcher!" grinned the man in the spotted muffler

muscular hands! Lovell had come there, and lurked in ambush, with the fixed determination of "licking" Carthew. Carthew was now getting such a "licking" as even the exasperated Arthur Edward would never have dreamed of handing out. Really, that should have suited Lovell's book. Somehow, it didn't!

He rushed out from behind the oak.

Lovell wasn't thinking now of "licking" Carthew. So far as he was thinking at all, he was only thinking of helping a Rookwood man attacked by a footpad. And the unfortunate Carthew was in need of help—there was no doubt about that. Punches were landing on him like hail, as Arthur Edward Lovell rushed into the fray.

His rush took the man in the spotted muffler quite by surprise. Both Lovell's fists, with plenty of beef behind them, crashed into the unwashed face, and the ruffian, with a bellow of rage, released Carthew, and turned on Arthur Edward. Carthew tottered against a tree, panting for breath. And for the next minute or two, until Carthew recovered sufficient wind to come to his aid, Arthur Edward Lovell had the time of his life.

CHAPTER V

UNEXPECTED!

JIMMY SILVER stared.

"Where—?" he ejaculated.

"How—!" exclaimed Raby.

"Mizzled!" said Newcome.

"Oh, the ass!"

"The fathead!"

Three Classical juniors stared into the end study. They had been rather surprised, as they came up the passage, after the cricket, to hear no sounds from that study: they had quite expected Arthur Edward Lovell to be audible. A fellow locked in a study for a couple of hours was not likely to keep quietly patient: least of all a fellow named Arthur Edward Lovell. Surprisingly, there was no sound: but the silence was explained when Jimmy Silver unlocked the door: the end study was vacant.

"The goat!" said Newcome. "The blithering ass! He must have mizzled by the window!"

"Down that rain-pipe!" said Raby, with a nod.

"The ass!" said Jimmy. "The goat! Oh, my hat! In broad daylight—with beaks and pre's about—clambering down from a study window! If he was spotted, it means six of the best from Dalton."

"Do him good, perhaps," said Newcome.

"Well, yes, but—" Jimmy wrinkled his brows. "He's gone, anyway. Whether he had six or not, he's gone. And we jolly well know where he's gone."

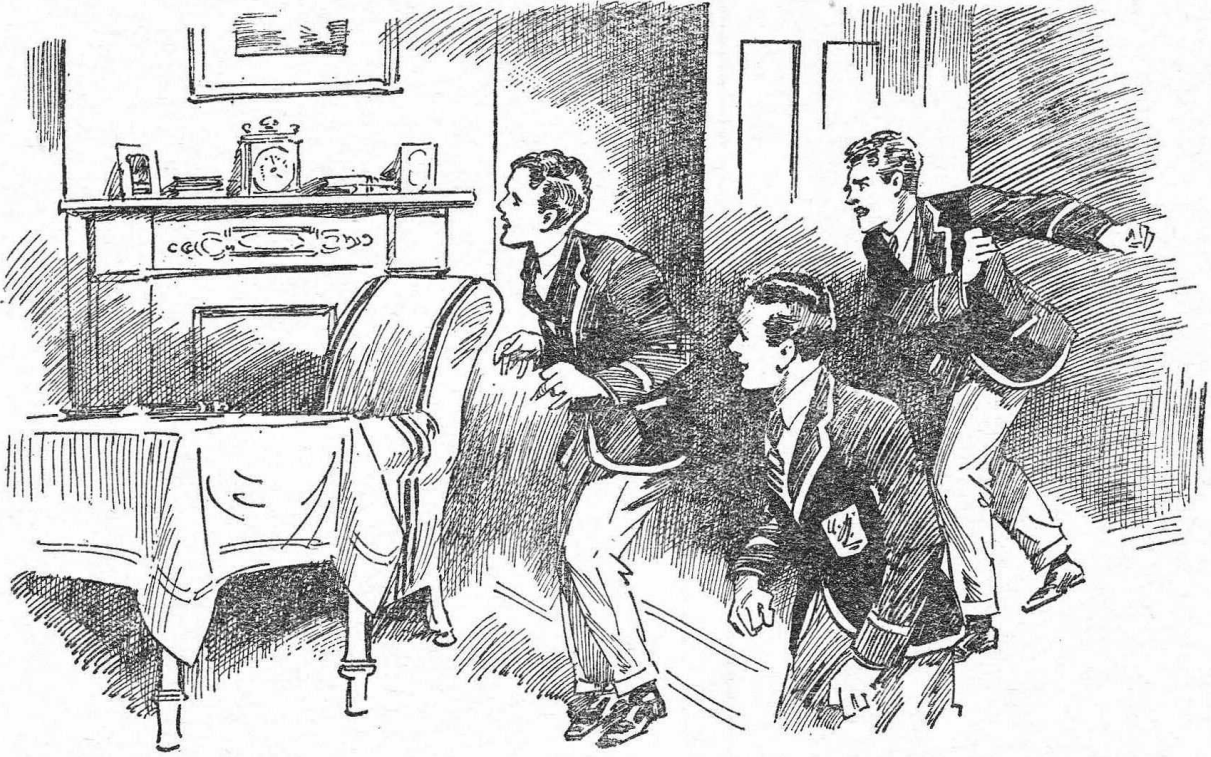
The three exchanged dismayed glances. Lovell was gone: and it was easy to guess where and why. He was carrying on with the plan which his loyal chums had hoped to nip in the bud by locking him in the study. There could be no doubt about that. And it was too late—much too late—to intervene. Whatever had happened in Coombe Wood, it must be long over by now.

"Poor old Lovell!" said Raby. "It's the long jump for him, if he pitched into Carthew in the wood."

"There's just a chance!" said Jimmy. "If he licked Carthew, Carthew mightn't want to let it out, as Lovell thought——"

Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

"But could he lick Carthew?" he said. "He thinks he could, but—Carthew's a bit of a weed, but he's a Sixth Form man—if there was a scrap, I'll bet it was Lovell got the licking, not Carthew."



Lovell was gone! The three Classical juniors stared into the end study

"Oh, suffering cats!" said Jimmy. He realised that Newcome was probably right. And if that was so, Carthew would have no reason for keeping the affair dark. The outcome of Arthur Edward's proceedings would be, first a thrashing from Carthew, and then the "sack" from the Head!

"I wonder if he's come in yet," said Raby. "Better go down and see."

In quite low spirits, the Co. went down to see. They soon learned that Lovell had not come in, and they stationed themselves at the gates to wait for him to do so. They waited anxiously, watching the road for Lovell like three Sister Annes.

Three faces were glum and worried.

Had Lovell, as he confidently believed that he could, licked Carthew? And if he had, was there a chance that the prefect would keep it dark, rather than own up that he had been licked by a junior? That was Lovell's only chance. Or—had Arthur Edward over-estimated his powers, and had Carthew handled him as any other Sixth Form man would have done? If that was how it was, Lovell was coming back to the school to be reported to the Head for punching a prefect, and sacked accordingly.

"There's Lovell!" exclaimed Newcome, suddenly.

Lovell was coming at last.

They watched him anxiously. He was not coming with his usual free-and-easy stride. He seemed to be almost crawling. And as he came nearer, they could see, with dismay, that there had, undoubtedly, been a scrap. Neither did Lovell look as if he had had the best of it.

"He's got a black eye!" murmured Raby.

"And look at his nose!" said Newcome.

"Poor old Lovell!" said Jimmy, sadly.

They went down the road to meet him. Lovell gave them a faint grin.

"Oh! You fellows!" he said, "did you fancy you could keep me locked in the study? Rats!"

They gazed at him. He had one black eye, and the other was an art shade in green. His nose looked red and swollen, and had evidently shed much claret. He had a bruise on either cheek, and another on his forehead. Only too clearly there had been some hard hitting.

"Did you meet Carthew?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh! Yes."

"Licked him?"

"Oh! No."

"If only you'd stayed in the study—!" sighed Jimmy.

Snort from Lovell.

"Catch me staying in the study, you cheeky asses! I'd jolly well smack your cheeky heads all round for locking me in, only I feel too done up. Rats!"

Lovell tottered on to the school gates, his friends keeping him company in sad silence. They felt that it was all up now.

Many glances were cast at Lovell as he came in at the gates. It was uncommon—very uncommon—for a Rookwood fellow to come in, on a half-holiday, with a black eye, a swollen nose, and a general aspect of having been under a lorry. In the quad, fifty fellows at least stared at Lovell.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Raby, "there's the Head!"

Dr. Chisholm was walking in the quadrangle. He ceased to walk and stood staring at Arthur Edward Lovell, blankly. Then, with a frown on his majestic brow that rivalled the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner, he bore down on the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome stood in silent dismay. Strange to relate, and much to their surprise, Lovell did not seem dismayed. He blinked at his headmaster, with discoloured eyes that persisted in winking, but displayed no sign of uneasiness.

"Lovell!" said the Head, in a very deep voice.

"Yes, sir."

"You have been fighting!"



"You are in a disgraceful state, Lovell!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are in a disgraceful state, Lovell. You are in a state in which no Rookwood boy should ever be seen."

"I—I couldn't help it, sir! I—I got some jolly hard knocks—"

"I can see that, Lovell! With whom—" The Head's voice was deeper. "With whom have you been fighting, Lovell!"

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome hardly breathed! It had to come out now! But as Lovell answered his headmaster's question, they wondered whether they were dreaming.

"A tramp, sir!"

"A tramp!" repeated the Head. "You return to the school in this state, Lovell, because you have been fighting with a tramp!"

"I couldn't help it, sir, really," said Lovell. "He was a footpad really, sir, and I couldn't let him knock Carthew about without going to help him—"

"Carthew?" repeated the Head.

"The brute set on Carthew in the wood, sir, and was knocking him about, and was going to rob him—"

"Bless my soul!"

"I had to help him, sir," said Lovell. "We handled the man between us, and he was glad to get away at the finish, but he gave us some jolly hard knocks—"

The Head gazed at Lovell. Jimmy Silver and Co., almost doubting their ears, gazed at him too. The Head spoke at last.

"You had better go in at once, Lovell, and bathe your face!" he said.

"Yes, sir!" said Lovell.

His friends, still wondering a little whether they were dreaming this, marched him into the House.

JIMMY SILVER and Co., really, could hardly believe it at first. But they had to. For it was so! Lovell hadn't licked Carthew—he hadn't even tried to. Instead of that, he had gone to Carthew's rescue, and collected untold damages in so doing. And he admitted that Carthew was not such a funk after all, for he had taken a full share in that scrap with the man in the spotted muffler. Had he not done so, Lovell's damages, already severe, would have been much severer. For which reason, it appeared that Lovell was prepared to forget and forgive that smack on the head! It was long before Arthur Edward's eye and nose ceased to be the most decorative in the Classical Fourth. But there was no doubt that the way it had turned out was Lucky for Lovell.

THE END

SOMETHING for SAMMY!

by
FRANK RICHARDS



"Here you are, old fat man"

CHAPTER I

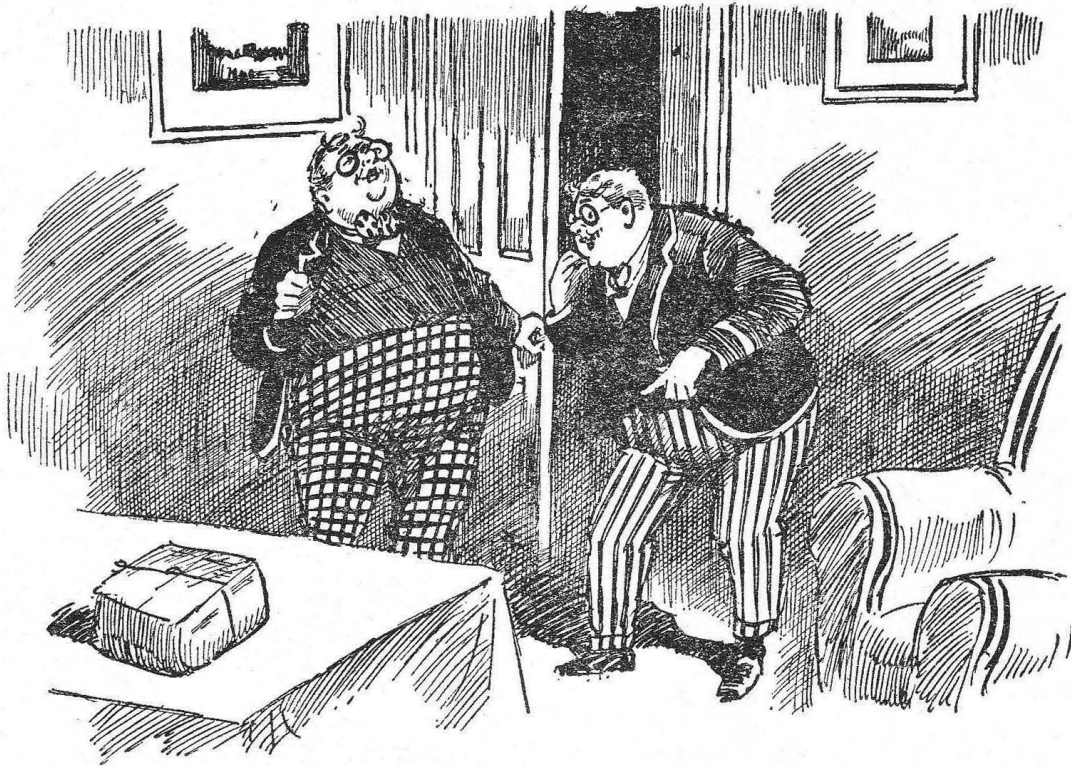
"SAMMY!" ejaculated Billy Bunter.
He frowned.

Bunter major, of the Remove, did not seem pleased to see Bunter minor, of the Second Form, in his study.

Billy Bunter came rather hurriedly into No. 7 Study in the Remove. Some object, wrapped in a newspaper, was under his fat arm. He closed the door, and deposited that object on the study table, before he noticed that Sammy was there. Then, as his little round eyes and his big round spectacles turned on Bunter minor, he frowned.

"I say, Billy, I've been waiting for you to come in," said Sammy. "I say, can you lend a chap a bob?"

Probably Billy Bunter had not supposed that it was a desire to see him, from motives of brotherly affection, that had brought Sammy of the Second to No. 7 Study. But if he had supposed so, Sammy's question would have enlightened him. It was the hope—no doubt a faint one!—of borrowing a "bob", that had brought Bunter minor there.



"I say, what's in that bundle, Billy?" he asked

Billy Bunter shook his head.

"Couldn't be done," he answered, "I've been disappointed about a postal-order. Stony! If that's it, you can cut."

He reopened the study door.

But Sammy Bunter did not move towards that door. His gaze was fixed on the object, wrapped in newspaper, that his major had landed on the table. Sammy seemed interested in it.

"I say, what's in that bundle, Billy!" he asked.

"Eh! That? Only some books, Sammy. Cheerio." Billy Bunter held the door open, evidently waiting to close it after his minor when he departed. But Sammy did not depart.

"I say, Billy, if it's tuck—" said Sammy.

"Didn't you hear me say it was only some books?" demanded Bunter.

"Yes: that's why I fancy it may be tuck."

"If you've come here to cheek your elder brother, Sammy, the sooner you cut the better," said Bunter. "Buck up—I'm waiting to shut the door. I've got to get busy on some deponent verbs for Quelch."

"Look here, Billy—"

Sammy Bunter was interrupted, by a sudden bawl from the passage.

"Bunter!"

Billy Bunter jumped. Someone was shouting his name in the Remove passage—and he did not need telling who it was. He knew that stentorian voice. Either it was Stentor himself, or it was Bob Cherry. Obviously it couldn't be Stentor. So it was Bob Cherry.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Bunter!" came the roar, "Bunter! Bunt! Bunt!"

"Beast!" breathed Billy Bunter.

Footsteps sounded in the passage—vigorous footsteps. Billy Bunter knew Bob Cherry's tread, as well as he knew his voice. Bob was coming up the passage.

Sammy grinned.

But Billy Bunter did not heed Sammy. Alarm was registered in his fat face as he blinked from the doorway. For some reason—which perhaps Sammy could guess—Billy Bunter was not anxious to meet Bob Cherry just then. Possibly he did not want Bob to see that bundle on the study table.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" A ruddy face, surmounted by a mop of flaxen hair, appeared in the passage, "Here you are, old fat man."

"Oh! Yes! Here I am," gasped Bunter. He rolled out into the passage, before Bob could come into the study. "I—I say, I—I haven't been in your study, Bob—"

"That's just where you're coming, old fat man," said Bob Cherry cheerily, "I've got a bag of dough-nuts there."

"Eh?"

"There's a bag of dough-nuts in my study," explained Bob, "I'm just going there—and you're coming in on the dough-nuts, see? Come on."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Like some dough-nuts, what?" grinned Bob.

"Oh! Yes! No! I—I—I—" stammered Bunter.

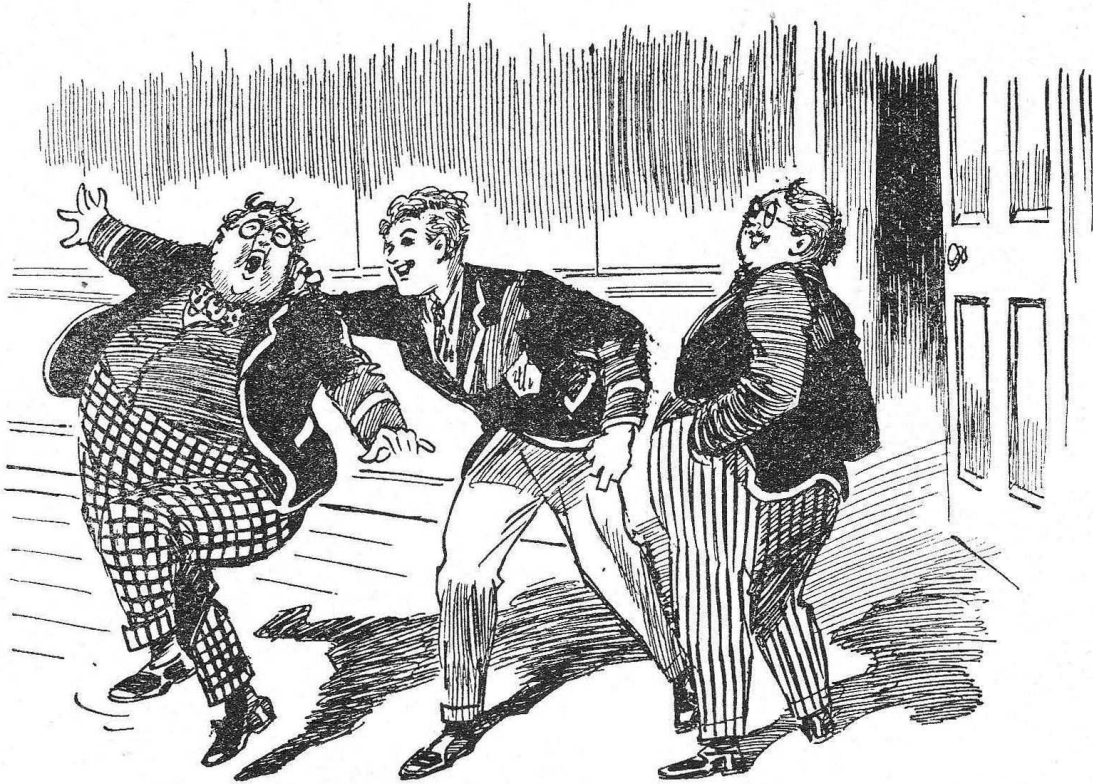
"Trot along, old porpoise."

"I—I—I—I've got some French to do for Mossoo," stammered Bunter, "I—I can't come just now, Bob, thanks all the same."

"Wha-a-a-a-t?"

Bob Cherry stared blankly at the fat Owl of the Remove. For Billy Bunter to decline the offer of a "whack" in a bag of dough-nuts was not only surprising. It was astonishing. It was astounding. It was unheard-of. It was probably the first time in Billy Bunter's fat career that he had declined such an offer.

"Joking?" asked Bob, at last, quite mystified.



He playfully propelled him up the passage

“Oh! No! You see, I’ve got those deponent verbs to do for Quelch—”

“As well as French for Mossoo?”

“I—I—I mean. French for Mossoo,” stammered Bunter. “I’d come with pleasure, old chap, but I’ve simply got to get going on that deponent French for Mosoo—I mean that French Mossoo for Quelch—I—I mean—”

“Blessed if I know what you mean, unless you’re trying to pull my leg,” said Bob Cherry. “Stop talking out of the back of your neck, and come along and have a whack in my dough-nuts. This way!”

And Bob Cherry, playfully taking the fat Owl by the back of a fat neck, playfully propelled him up the passage to No. 13.

“He, he, he!” chuckled Sammy Bunter, left alone in No. 7.

Sammy gave one blink up the passage after two disappearing figures. Then he stepped to the study table. In a moment, the newspaper was unwrapped. As his major had stated that the parcel contained only some books, Sammy was really due to be surprised when a large paper bag crammed with dough-nuts was revealed. But Sammy was not at all surprised.

“He, he, he!” repeated Sammy.

But Sammy Bunter wasted time only in one chuckle. The next moment,

there was an impediment in the way of chuckles, in the form of a dough-nut cramming into a mouth almost as extensive as Billy Bunter's own. Sammy gobbled that dough-nut at record speed, scattering crumbs right and left. It was followed by another—and another—with a further scattering of crumbs.

But Sammy realised that he was not likely to be given time to travel through the whole bag. With his extensive mouth packed to capacity, Sammy jammed the paper bag under his arm, and rolled out of No. 7 study. He left the newspaper and a sea of crumbs on the table—all that remained for Brother Billy when he returned. Sammy, with the bag of dough-nuts, disappeared into space.

CHAPTER II

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!” roared Bob Cherry, in surprise.
He stared at the table in No. 13 Study.

On that table, before class, Bob had left a bag of dough-nuts. Naturally he had expected to find it there when he came up after class. In the kindness of his heart, he had brought Billy Bunter along to share those dough-nuts. But there were no dough-nuts to share. The spot where that bag had been left was vacant. That bag was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. Evidently, someone had come up, after class, before Bob!

Having stared at the table, Bob Cherry stared at Billy Bunter. Bunter was gasping for breath, after his rapid progress up the passage. Bob had marched him into the study, willy-nilly: for really, it was quite impossible to believe that Billy Bunter really didn't want a “whack” in a bag of dough-nuts. Now, however, the explanation dawned on Bob.

“You fat sweep!”

“Oh, really, Cherry—”

“Where are my dough-nuts?”

“How should I know?” gasped Bunter. He cast a longing blink at the passage. But Bob had stepped between him and the doorway. “I—I told you I hadn't been in your study, old chap—”

“Where's my dough-nuts?” roared Bob. “You fat villain, that's why you said you wouldn't come! You knew they were gone.”

“I—I—I never knew a thing,” stuttered Bunter. “I never knew you had any dough-nuts, old chap. I never saw you get them at the tuck-shop before class, and I never cut up here after class—I—I—I came up to do my deponent Mossoo for French—I mean my French Quelch for Mossoo—”

“By gum!” exclaimed Bob Cherry, “you jolly well had them in your study when I came up and called you. Have you wolfed them!”



Bob Cherry stared at Billy Bunter. "You fat sweep!" he roared

"I tell you I didn't, wasn't never!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, you let me get out of your study, Bob Cherry—I shall get into a row with Mossou if I don't do that deponent French for Quelch—I mean—"

"You fat sweep! I'll look in your study—"

"Look here, Bob Cherry, if you can't take a fellow's word, I can jolly well say—Yaroooh! Leggo, you beast."

"Kim on!" said Bob.

"Wow! Ow! Leggo!"

In the circumstances, Billy Bunter was quite unwilling to revisit No. 7 Study in company with Bob Cherry. But with a grasp like iron on the back of his fat neck, it was not a matter of choice with Bunter. That iron grasp twirled him out of No. 13, and marched him down the passage back to No. 7—from which study, hardly more than a minute earlier, a fat fag had vanished with a bag of dough-nuts. Bob Cherry kicked open the door, and propelled Bunter in.

"Now, you fat sweep—"

"Ow! Wow! I—I—I say, that bag of dough-nuts ain't yours!" gasped Bunter. "I—I had it from Bunter Court this morning! I—I—I—oh, crikey!"



The next few minutes were quite lively for William George Bunter

Billy Bunter broke off as he blinked through his big spectacles at the study table in No. 7. No bag of dough-nuts was visible there. There was the newspaper in which it had been wrapped. There was an ocean of crumbs, relics of a recent hurried feast. Merely that, and nothing more. For a second time, that bag of dough-nuts had performed the vanishing trick.

"By gum!" said Bob, as he stared at the newspaper and the crumbs. "By gum! You've wolfed the lot! Every dashed one! You fat, footling, frabjous octopus—"

"I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—I—I never—"

"Where did all those crumbs come from?" inquired Bob. "Walked here, perhaps! You pernicious porpoise, I was going to whack out those dough-nuts with you: and you've scoffed the lot! Now I'm going to boot you round the study and back again—"

"I say—yaroooh! Keep off!" yelled Billy Bunter. "Ow! Wow! You kick me again, and I'll jolly well—whooop! Wow! Oh, crikey! Yaroooooh!"

The next few minutes were quite lively for William George Bunter. Often and often had Billy Bunter been booted for his sins: but this time it was quite a record booting. Twice round No. 7 Study he flew, with a lunging foot behind him. Bob had landed a good dozen before he considered that Bunter

had, perhaps, had enough. There was no "perhaps" about it in Bunter's opinion. His impression was that he had had more than enough.

After which, Bob Cherry tramped out of the study and banged the door. He left a gasping, gurgling, wriggling fat Owl behind him. Billy Bunter, as he gurgled and wriggled, blinked dismally at a sea of crumbs on the table—all that remained for him. Proverbially, after the feast comes the reckoning: but the Owl of the Remove had had the reckoning without the feast! There was nothing for Bunter — but happily, from the point of view of Bunter minor, there had been something for Sammy!

THE END