

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN



G. H. CHAPMAN

BILLY BUNTER GOES HUNTING



Billy Bunter goes hunting

**BILLY BUNTER'S
OWN**

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WAS IT BUNTER?



CHAPTER I

BUNK FOR BUNTER!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!”
“That ass Bunter—!”

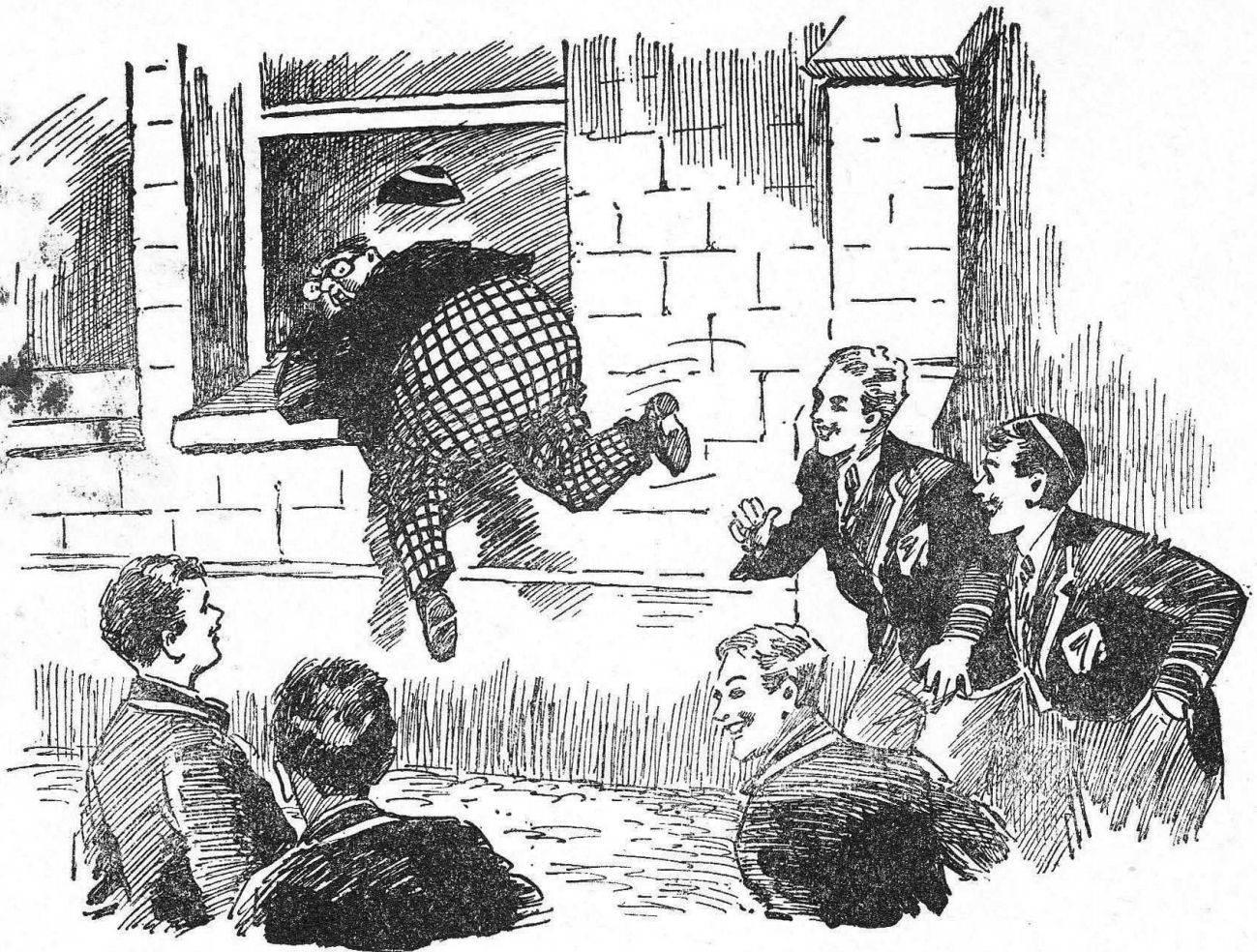
“What the dickens is he up to?”

It was morning break at Greyfriars School. Harry Wharton and Co. of the Remove, were taking a trot round the quad. They came to a sudden stop, as they were passing the window of the Remove form-room, and stared.

What they beheld at that window, was enough to make any fellow stare.

The window was wide open. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, always locked the form-room door after a class. But the window was left open to admit the fresh air of a fine winter's day.

Probably it had never occurred to Quelch that it might also admit a member of his form, clambering in from the quad!



The friends came up to the window

But just that was happening now.

What chiefly met the surprised view of the Famous Five, was an ample pair of trousers. They had only a back view of the clamberer as he clambered. But they knew those trousers. Those extensive trousers could only have been inhabited by Billy Bunter, the plumpest fellow in the form. It was Billy Bunter who was climbing in at the form-room window. Why, was really a mystery. Bunter, as a rule, was no climber. He had too much weight to lift. But there was Bunter—clambering up on the broad stone sill, puffing and grunting for breath as he exerted himself.

He was not making rapid progress. His fat elbows were on the sill, and his fat head almost in at the window. But the rest of him still hung below the sill, resisting all his efforts to get further. The Law of Gravitation, so ably expounded by Sir Isaac Newton, seemed too strong for Bunter.

“The fat chump!” said Bob Cherry, as he stared. “What the dickens does he want to get into the form-room for, in break?”

"Nothing to eat there!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"If a beak or a pre. came along and spotted him, it would be whops for Bunter," said Frank Nugent. "If Quelch saw him at it—."

"The whopfulness would be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Harry Wharton laughed.

"He won't get in, in a hurry," he remarked. "At his present rate, those bags will still be on view when the bell goes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That ripple of merriment apparently reached Billy Bunter's fat ears. A fat head was turned from the window, and a pair of little round eyes blinked at the Famous Five through a pair of big round spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, come here, will you?"

The juniors came up to the window. The fat Owl of the Remove, half-perched on the sill, blinked down at them.

"What's this game, you fat duffer?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I say, give me a bunk up, will you?" gasped Bunter.

"Against the rules to get into the form-room by the window, fathead! Do you want Quelch on your track?"

"Blow Quelch! Haven't I had him on my track already?" hooted Bunter. "Didn't he make out that I'd forgotten my lines in rep., just because I couldn't remember them—?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've got to write out those rotten lines twenty times. I'm jolly well going to let Quelch know what we think of him. You fellows wouldn't have the nerve to say 'Rats' to Quelch—".

"Oh, my hat! Not likely!"

"Well, I'm going to," said Bunter. "That's what I'm getting in for. Of course I can't say it to him in form. I don't want to be whopped. But I can jolly well write it on his desk, for him to see when he takes us in third school. See? Fancy his face when he sees 'RATS' written on his desk! He, he, he!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You howling ass, think he won't know that spidery scrawl you call writing?"

"No, he jolly well won't, as I shall print it in capital letters!" grinned Bunter. "He can fancy that it was any fellow in the form. How's he going to know that it was me?"

Billy Bunter chuckled, a fat chuckle.

"You see, I've thought this out!" he said. "I'm jolly well going to say 'Rats' to Quelch, without getting whops for it. I'm no fool, you know."

"We don't know!" contradicted Bob Cherry.

"Not at all," said Nugent.

"The knowfulness is not terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"In fact, we know otherwise," said Harry Wharton.

"Silliest ass going!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yah!" was Billy Bunter's elegant rejoinder to that. "Look here, don't jaw—just give a fellow a bunk up, before some beak comes prowling along."

Five heads were shaken as one!

Harry Wharton and Co. were obliging fellows. They would, in other circumstances, have obliged any fellow with a "bunk up" if he needed one. But bunking up a fat and fatuous Owl into the form-room, to play a trick on a form-master, was quite another matter.

It was true that Quelch had come down hard and sharp on Bunter in class that morning. Bunter, like the rest, had had to learn certain verses by heart, and repeat the same in form. "Repetition" was always a worry to Bunter—not only because he had a bad memory, but also because he was too lazy to learn his lines. Between forgetfulness and laziness, Bunter had naturally made a hash of his "rep". He had had to recite six lines of "Lochiel's Warning", which really ought not to have been too much even for a lazy fat Owl. But he had got no further than "Lochiel": sticking fast at the first word. So he had those six lines to write out twenty times: which perhaps Quelch hoped might fix them in his memory. For which, in Bunter's opinion at least, Quelch deserved anything that a fellow could do in return: indeed, he almost deserved something lingering with boiling oil in it!

Billy Bunter was going to make Quelch "sit up" for those lines: and certainly there was no doubt that Quelch would sit up, if he found the word "RATS" inscribed on his desk in the form-room. Only the difficulty of negotiating the form-room window stood in the way. A bunk-up would have solved that problem. But there was no bunk-up for Bunter.

"Wash it out, old fat man," advised Bob Cherry. "It would make Quelch as mad as a hatter—."

"That's what I want!" yapped Bunter.

"You don't want what would follow on," said Bob. "Quelch would give you six of the very, very best."

"I know he would, if he knew: but he wouldn't know," hooted Bunter. "Don't I keep on telling you that I'm going to write it in capitals, and Quelch won't know a thing."

"Quelch is a downy bird!" said Johnny Bull. "Not a safe game to rag old Quelch, fatty. Ten to one he'd root you out."

"Look here, gimme a bunk up, and don't jaw—."

"You fat ass," said Harry Wharton. "You'll be spotted, and whopped—Get down off that window-sill, and chuck it."

"Beast!"

"Well, we're not going to help you land yourself in trouble you don't want, you fat chump!" said Harry. "Come on, you fellows."

The Famous Five resumed their trot. That Quelch, who undoubtedly was a "downy bird", would spot the perpetrator, if Bunter carried on, they had no doubt at all. And the result would certainly have been very painful to the vengeful Owl. It was really kind of them to save Bunter from his own fat-headedness, as it were: but the fat Owl did not seem at all grateful for that kindness! He cast a glare after them that might almost have cracked his spectacles.

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter.

Then he resumed his efforts to overcome the Law of Gravitation. He pulled and he dragged, and he wriggled, and he squirmed. It was quite a cold December day: but the perspiration came out in chunks on his fat brow. And with all his efforts, the Law of Gravitation continued too strong for him. Bunter just couldn't heave his plump form up on to that window-sill.

"Oooooooh!" spluttered Bunter, winded by his efforts.

"Hallo, what's the game, Bunter?"

Bunter blinked round again. This time it was Skinner of the Remove who had come along. Skinner stared at the fat figure clutching on the sill, as the Famous Five had done a few minutes earlier.

"Oh! I say, Skinner, old chap, give a chap a bunk up!" gasped Bunter. "I've got to get into the form-room, and Quelch locks the door, you know—."

"What on earth for?" asked Skinner. "A rag on Quelch, or what?"

"Just that!" gasped Bunter. "I say, bunk me up! Quelch whopped you yesterday for having smokes in your study, didn't he? You owe him one, as well as I do. I'm jolly well going to make him sit up, I can tell you. Gimme a bunk."

Skinner paused. He cast glances to right and left and round about. Harold Skinner certainly had no objection to Quelch being made to "sit up", whatever might be the trick Bunter intended to play in the form-room. Skinner had not forgotten the "whops" of the day before, and he would gladly have retaliated, if he could have ventured to do so with safety. If Bunter was going to take the risk, Skinner wished him luck: and if the fat Owl was spotted and whopped, Skinner did not mind in the very least: he was not a good-natured fellow by any means. All Skinner was particular about, was his own precious skin: and he observed his surroundings with a keen and watchful eye before he gave the fat Owl the required "bunk". It was very much against all rules for a fellow to clamber in at a form-room window—and Skinner did not want to take risks, if Bunter did.



"Hullo, what's the game, Bunter?"

But the coast was clear—there was nobody at hand. Having ascertained that fact, Skinner stepped closer to the window. He grasped at a fat figure and shoved.

Bunter pulled and dragged, and Skinner shoved from below: and at long last the troublesome Law of Gravitation was overcome. Slowly, but surely, Billy Bunter heaved up on the window-sill. He rolled headlong into the room within, his fat little legs twinkling as he disappeared.

Bump!

"Ow! Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

Bunter seemed to have landed in a heap on the form-room floor. A loud howl from within announced that he had not found it agreeable to do.

Skinner did not stay to listen to it. He walked quickly away, and the fat and fatuous Owl was left to his own devices.

CHAPTER II

TOCO FOR TWO!

MR. QUELCH frowned.
He frowned portentously.

All the Remove noted that frown. All of them realised that something was "up". Most of them wondered what it was.

It was third school at Greyfriars. The bell had summoned everyone to the form-rooms. Mr. Quelch, when he unlocked the door and let in his form, had looked quite genial. Often he was crusty. But perhaps the approach of the Christmas holidays had an ameliorating effect. Remove fellows looked forward to the "hols" and a rest from Quelch. Quite probably Quelch looked forward to a rest from the Remove! Anyway, he was genial when he let his form into the form-room for third school.

But a sudden change had come over him.

Harry Wharton and Co. and the rest of the Remove, took their places as usual. Their form-master went to his desk. And it was then that the genial expression faded from Quelch's face, as if wiped off by a duster, and that portentous frown replaced it.

"Mind your eye, you men!" whispered Bob Cherry. "Quelch looks shirty about something."

"The shirtiness seems to be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"He was all right when he let us in—what's come over him?" murmured Frank Nugent. "Looks quite fierce."

"Something on his desk—!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"But what the dickens—!" said Harry Wharton. He glanced round at Herbert Vernon-Smith. "You been larking, Smithy?"

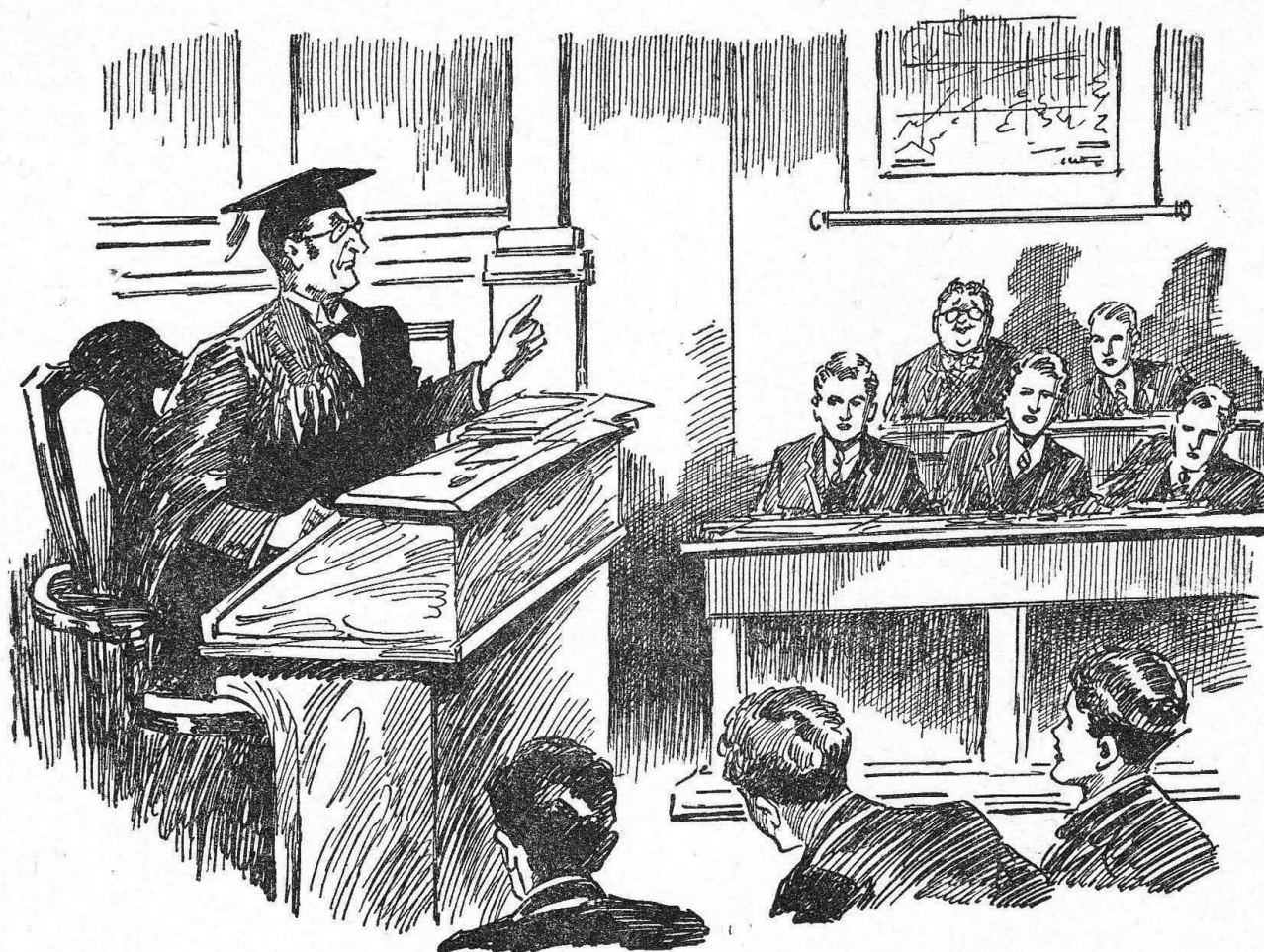
Smithy shook his head.

"Not guilty!" was his reply.

"Something's up!" whispered Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter grinned.

Bunter, if no one else, knew what was "up". Quelch was standing at his desk, staring, and frowning, at a sheet of paper that lay thereon. Billy Bunter knew what was written, or rather printed, on that sheet of paper. It was something fully calculated to make Quelch "sit up". The fat Owl, in fact, could hardly repress a fat chuckle, as he watched his form-master through his big spectacles.



Mr. Quelch (angry) and the boys in class.

There was going to be a row, of course. Quelch would be wild! But Billy Bunter didn't mind at all. There was no clue! Quelch had the whole form to choose from, if he wanted to know who had left that paper, with its impertinent message, on his desk. It was, so far as Billy Bunter could see, safe as houses. How could the perpetrator be traced, when he had been careful to print that message in large capital letters?

Bob Cherry caught that grin on the fat face, and gave a start. He remembered the incident at the form-room window in break.

"You fat ass!" He leaned over towards Bunter and whispered, "Did you—?"

"Didn't I just!" grinned Bunter.

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" breathed Bob. "Did you get somebody to bunk you up after all, you benighted barrel?"

"What do you think?" grinned Bunter.

"Look out for squalls then, you fathead."

"Yah! How's he to know a thing?"

There was quite a lot of whispering in the Remove, as they watched Quelch at his desk. He stood there, his eyes fixed on that paper: staring at it as if he could hardly believe those gimlet-eyes.

Skinner watched him very curiously. What trick Bunter had played in the form-room, he did not know. But clearly it was something at Quelch's desk which roused Quelch's deep ire.

It was a long minute before Mr. Quelch turned from his desk. He fixed his eyes on his form, scanning them. Most of the juniors tried to look as if butter would not melt in their mouths. Nobody wanted to meet those glinting gimlet-eyes. Even Billy Bunter, safe as he believed himself, felt a faint qualm, and ceased to grin. Then Quelch spoke:

"Bunter!"

The fat Owl jumped.

Not for a moment had he expected that gimlet-eye to single him out. Why should it, when he hadn't left a clue?

But it did!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "it—it—it wasn't me, sir! I—I—I—."

"Stand out before the form, Bunter."

"Bub—b—but, sir, I—I—I—!" babbled the hapless Owl.

"Stand out at once, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter rolled dismally out of his place. Harry Wharton and Co. gave him commiserating glances, as he rolled. Clearly Bunter was "for it". They had done their best to keep the fat Owl out of mischief: but evidently they had failed. Somebody else had given Bunter the required bunk, and he had carried out his intention. And Quelch had somehow spotted him.

"Bunter! You entered the form-room during break—!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I couldn't sir! The door was locked, sir—it was locked when I tried the handle, sir—I—I—I mean, when I—I didn't try the handle, sir—I—I never came near the form-room in break, sir—."

"You must have entered by the window, Bunter, which was open."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I couldn't! The window's too high for me, sir! I—I—I couldn't do it, sir."

"No doubt, Bunter, but doubtless some other boy gave you assistance in climbing in at the window," said Mr. Quelch. "You certainly entered the form-room during break, Bunter, as it was you who wrote that disrespectful and impertinent word on the paper on my desk. No other boy in my form

could possibly have made so absurd a mistake in spelling so simple a word, Bunter."

Mr. Quelch held up the paper from his desk.

The whole Remove stared at it.

On that paper, in large capital letters, was written the unusual and remarkable word:

RATTS.

Billy Bunter blinked at it. Certainly Bunter was the only fellow in the Remove, or in all Greyfriars, capable of such orthography. Laziness, carelessness and obtuseness combined to make Billy Bunter's spelling a thing that was really weird and wonderful. But this really was the limit, even for Bunter.

Not that Bunter saw anything in that remarkable word to furnish a clue to the writer. It was okay by Bunter! But the rest of the Remove, staring at it, burst into an irresistible chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter had been sure, absolutely sure, that he had left no clue. He was still happily unaware that he had left one in the spelling of that simple word. Why Quelch had picked on him was still unknown to Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Rats with a double-T! Isn't that Bunter all over?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the class!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "This boy's impertinence, and his crass ignorance of the simplest orthography, are by no means a subject for merriment."

On that point the Remove did not see eye to eye with their form-master! However, they ceased to chuckle. Quelch did not look in a mood for merriment!

"Now, Bunter—!" he rumbled.

"I—I—I—it wasn't me, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I never—I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—I—I wouldn't, sir—I—I—."

"Only you, Bunter, could have spelt that simple word in so ridiculous a manner!"

Bunter blinked at that simple word. He could see nothing ridiculous in it! Really, he wondered what Quelch was driving at.

"Ain't—ain't that word spelt right, sir?" he stuttered.

"You utterly absurd boy!" thundered Mr. Quelch, "Do you suppose that the word 'rat' is spelt with a double T?"

"Oh, crikey! Isn't it, sir?" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Now, Bunter, I shall punish you for this impertinence—."

"But—but—but it wasn't me, sir!" groaned Bunter, "I—I never got into the form-room in break, sir! I—I couldn't climb in at that window, sir, and Skinner never gave me a bunk up—did you, Skinner?"

Harold Skinner, up to that moment, had been grinning. His grin vanished suddenly as Bunter uttered those words. He caught his breath, and gave the fat Owl the deadliest of deadly looks.

"Skinner!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Stand out before the form, Skinner."

Slowly, with set lips, Skinner moved out. The look he gave Bunter, as he did so, might almost have withered the fat Owl. Bunter, certainly, had not intended to give him away. But he had very effectually done so, without intending to. Skinner was "for it" now, as well as Bunter.

"You were a party to this, Skinner!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly, tapping the paper in his hand.

"No, sir!" muttered Skinner, "I never knew anything about it. Bunter asked me for a bunk up, but I never knew what he was going to do."

"You helped Bunter climb in at the form-room window?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

"You could only have supposed that he intended to play some trick in the form-room, by making so surreptitious an entrance."

Skinner made no reply to that.

"You were aware, Skinner, well aware, that you were breaking a strict rule, in giving that foolish boy such assistance."

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir—I—I did as Bunter asked me, that's all, sir—."

"That will do, Skinner! Now, Bunter—."

"Oh, crikey!"

"You will bend over that form, Bunter."

"But—but—but it wasn't me, sir," wailed Bunter. "I—I wasn't anywhere near the place, sir. I—I was in the tuck-shop when Skinner bunked me up at that window—I—I mean, when he didn't bunk me up at that window—."

"Bend over this instant."

"Oh, lor'!"

A fat figure bent over a form. There was no help for it. The cane swished in Quelch's hand.

Whop! whop! whop!

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter.

"Go back to your place, Bunter."

A hapless fat Owl crawled back to his place. Skinner had watched that infliction with unenviable feelings. Now his turn was coming.

"Bend over, Skinner."



"Bend over, Skinner"

With a set and savage face, Skinner obeyed.

Whop! whop! whop!

"Go back to your place."

Skinner in his turn limped back to his place. Quelch laid down the cane. He tore the offending paper across and across, and consigned the remains to the waste-paper basket. Then the lesson commenced. Two members of the Remove, during third school that morning, wriggled and wriggled and wriggled as if they would never leave off wriggling.

CHAPTER III

SAUCE FOR THE GANDER!

WHIZ!
Smash!
"Yaroooh!"

That sudden yell rang far and wide, over a deserted quadrangle.

Few fellows were out of the House. The weather was attractive to few that afternoon.

A fine morning had been followed by snow-clouds drifting in from the sea. The December dusk was falling in the old quad: and snow was falling along with it.

A mantle of white covered the quad, and the frosty branches of the old elms glimmered with ridges of snow. Hardy fellows, like Harry Wharton and Co., might welcome snow before Christmas, with a view to snowballing. But such an idea had no attraction whatever for William George Bunter.

It was quite against the grain that Bunter was trudging through the snow in the quad. Much very much indeed, he would have preferred an armchair by the fire in the Rag. Billy Bunter was not a fellow to brave the elements, if he could help it.

Nevertheless, there was Bunter—trudging. After class, the fat Owl had succeeded in borrowing half-a-crown from Lord Mauleverer. When Billy Bunter was in possession of coin of the realm, its natural destination was the school shop.

So there was Billy Bunter, heading for the tuck-shop, to expend that half-crown in sticky comestibles to the exact value of two shillings and sixpence.

He did not even notice that Harold Skinner had followed him out of the House. He was not thinking of Skinner. Having recovered from the twinges of Quelch's cane in the morning, Billy Bunter had dismissed that licking from his fat mind—and naturally, he had dismissed Skinner's too. Skinner's, in fact, really did not matter very much—to Bunter.

Unluckily for Bunter, it did matter to Skinner.

Skinner had a long memory for grudges. Certainly, Bunter had not intended to give him away to Quelch. He had done so unintentionally. But it had resulted in a whopping: which lingered longer in Harold Skinner's memory than in Bunter's. Skinner was not the fellow to leave it at that. The fat Owl was to get something back for it; something as unpleasant as Skinner could make it.

Unaware of the vengeful Skinner on his track, Billy Bunter tramped through the snow, his fat mind concentrated on the sticky things ahead at the tuck-shop. He did not, in fact, know that anybody was about, till a sudden snowball apprised him that somebody was.

That snowball whizzed from somewhere, and smashed behind a fat ear: and the smash was followed by a wild roar from Billy Bunter.

He tottered, slipped in the snow, and sat down.

Crash! smash!



The snowball smashed behind his fat ear

“Oh! Who’s that! Stoppit! Wooooh!” spluttered Bunter.

He scrambled up, blinking round through his big spectacles like a startled owl. Another snowball crashed under a fat chin, and he tottered backwards, slipped again, and sat once more in the snow, this time rolling over on his back, with his fat little legs kicking in the air.

Whiz! whiz! smash! smash!

“Take that, you fat frog—and that—and that—and that—!”

Billy Bunter roared as he took them. He had no choice about taking them. They came hard and fast as he floundered wildly in the snow.

“And that—and that—and that——!”

“Yaroooh! Stoppit!” shrieked Bunter. “Oh, crikey! Ow! Is that you, Skinner, you beast! Whoop! Stoppit! Yaroooh!”

“More coming, you fat tick.”

“Oooooogh! Stoppit!”

Whiz! whiz! smash!

"Ow! Oh, crikey! wow!" spluttered Bunter. He could almost have wished, at that moment, that he hadn't borrowed that half-crown from Mauly! He was not getting sticky tarts at the tuck-shop: he was getting snowballs that seemed to come like hail.

Skinner, grinning, grabbed up snow. Another and another snowball crashed on the fat Owl, as he sought to scramble to his feet. He sprawled headlong in snow, yelling.

Snowballs fairly rained on him as he sprawled.

"Stoppit!" yelled Bunter, frantically, "Skinner, you beast—yaroooh! Will you stoppit? Oh, crikey! Whoooooop!"

"Take that, you fat freak! That's for giving me away to Quelch—!"

"Yow-ow-ow! I didn't—I wasn't—I never—yaroooh!"

"And that—and that—and that——!"

"Ow! wow! Oh, crikey! Help!" yelled Bunter. "Stoppit! wow! Ow!"

But Skinner did not "stoppit". The fat junior, sprawling helplessly in the snow, was at his mercy: rather like a turtle turned on its back. Billy Bunter sprawled, and wriggled, and rolled, and dodged, but snowball after snowball crashed and smashed all over him. His breathless yells rang far and wide. Crash! smash! Crash! smash!

Skinner put his beef into it. The fact that the obtuse Owl had quite inadvertently given him away to Quelch, mattered nothing. Skinner had been "whopped" in consequence: and that was all that mattered to Skinner. He rained snowballs on the helpless Owl with vicious force.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sudden roar.

Five fellows came running up.

The Famous Five had turned out for a spot of snowballing. They had spotted Coker of the Fifth in the quad, from the window of the Rag: and Bob had suggested "giving Coker a few". That was quite an attractive idea to the chums of the Remove, and they had turned out to give Coker a few. But as Billy Bunter's frantic yells reached their ears, they forgot all about Coker—who never knew what a narrow escape he had had! They came on the scene with a rush, as Skinner pelted the unhappy Owl, wriggling and rolling in the snow.

"Stop that, Skinner!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Mind your own business," retorted Skinner, over his shoulder. And he delivered another missile, which smashed on Billy Bunter's fat little nose, followed by an anguished squeak.

Skinner had another ready, but he did not deliver it, for Bob Cherry grasped him by the collar, and with a twist of his strong arm, sat him down in the snow.

Billy Bunter sat up, gasping.

"Ow! Ooogh! I say, you fellows, stoppim! Oooooogh."

"We'll stop him fast enough," said Bob. "There's a limit, Skinner, though you don't seem to know it. What do you mean by pitching into Bunter like that?"

"Didn't the fat tick give me away to Quelch, and get me whopped in the form-room?" hissed Skinner.

"Ow! I didn-t—I wasn-t—I never—." spluttered Bunter, "I wouldn't give a fellow away—you chaps know that I wouldn't—."

"We know you wouldn't, old fat man," said Bob. "We know that you can't help being a born idiot—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunter let out your name because he's a burbling, babbling fat ass Skinner," said Bob. "You know that as well as we do."

"I know I'm going to make him squirm for it," snarled Skinner.

"Are you?" said Bob, with a warlike gleam in his blue eyes. "We'll have something to say about that. You've been pelting a fellow who's too fat and clumsy to stand up for himself—well, now you're going to have your turn. Get up, Bunter."

"Ohhh! I'm all out of breath!" gurgled Bunter, "I say, you fellows, lend a fellow a hand! Grooogh."

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull grasped a fat arm each, and Billy Bunter was heaved to his feet. Skinner scrambled up: but he resumed the perpendicular only for a moment. A strong arm tipped him over again, and he sat once more in the snow. Bob Cherry grinned down at him.

"Stick there, Skinner," he said. "Don't get up again—I shall tip you over, if you do! Bunter old fat man—"

"Groooooogh!"

"Like to give Skinner a few?"

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. "Oh! Yes, rather! What-ho!"

Skinner leaped up in alarm. The next moment he was tipped over again. He had dealt quite easily with the fat Owl: but the sturdy Bob was quite a different proposition. He sprawled in the snow and glared up at Bob.

"Look here, what's this game?" he hissed.

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," answered Bob. "You're going to get back from Bunter what you've given him."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull.

"The goodfulness of the egg is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.



Skinner leapt up in alarm

“My esteemed Skinner, whoever is saucy to the goose, must be saucy to the gander, as the English proverb remarks.”

“Go it, Bunter,” said Harry Wharton, laughing.

“He, he, he!” chuckled Bunter. He was quite keen to “go” it. Having recovered his breath a little, he gathered up snow with both fat hands.

Up jumped Skinner. Prompt hands up-ended him again. He sprawled in snow, and snowballs rained upon him in his turn.

Billy Bunter, as a rule, disliked exertion. But he seemed now to have quit a liking for it. He warmed to the work. He rained snowballs on Skinner, with all the force of his fat arms: and it was Skinner’s turn to dodge and yell. The Famous Five stood round, laughing—Bob Cherry’s sinewy arm ready to tip Skinner over again if he scrambled up. It was “sauce for the gander”—and Billy Bunter enjoyed it, if Skinner did not.

Not till the fat Owl was quite out of breath, and had not an ounce of wind

left in his fat circumference, did the snowballs cease to rain. Then, at last, Bunter ceased his unaccustomed exertions.

"He, he, he!" he gurgled. "How do you like it yourself, Skinner? He, he he!"

Billy Bunter rolled on to the tuck-shop, chuckling breathlessly. Skinner sat up in the snow, his eyes smouldering at Harry Wharton and Co.

"That's a tip, Skinner!" said Bob. "And here's another—Bunter never meant to give you away, and you're not going to scrag him for it, see? You touch Bunter again, and we'll jolly well touch you—hard!"

"Jolly hard," said Johnny Bull.

"The hardfulness will be terrific, my esteemed and execrable Skinner."

With that, the Famous Five walked away—leaving Skinner gasping and panting for breath, looking remarkably like an Abominable Snowman, and in the very worst temper ever.

CHAPTER IV

BUNTER, OF COURSE!

"UPON my word!"

Mr. Quelch almost jumped.

Quelch had been in Common-Room at tea with the other masters. He came back to his study without the slightest suspicion that anything had happened there during his absence. But as he walked in, he became suddenly aware that something had!

He stopped dead, staring at the looking-glass over his mantelpiece. His eyes fairly popped at it. That glass, as a rule, was polished clean and bright, without a mark on it. It was not in its usual state.

Someone, evidently, had been in the study while the Remove master was in Common-Room. That someone had dipped a finger in the inkpot and traced an inscription, in capital letters, across the looking-glass. It ran:

WHOO CAIRS FOR OLD QUELCH?

"Upon my word!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

The impertinence, the effrontery, of such a message, left for him by a member of his form, were amazing. Still more amazing, if possible, was the obtuseness of the perpetrator. For Quelch had no doubt who had traced that impertinent message. He had not forgotten the remarkable word "Ratts" on his desk in the form-room that morning. Only too well was he acquainted with the weird orthography of a certain member of his form. Only one fellow

in the Remove was capable of spelling "rats" with a double t: and only that same fellow was capable of spelling "cares", "cairs". Quelch was as assured of the guilty man, as if he had actually seen Billy Bunter there, tracing those words with an inky fat finger.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch, for the third time.

Bunter had been in that study! Indeed, there was proof of it, on the table, for thereon lay Bunter's lines. Quelch glanced at those lines. They ran—in Campbell's verse, but in Billy Bunter's own original spelling—

"Lochiel, Lochiel, bewair of the day
Wen the Lowlands shall mete thee in battel array,
For a feeld of the dedd rushes redd on my site,
And the klans of Culloden are scattered in flite.
They rally, they blede, for their kingdom and krown,
Whoa, whoa, to the ryders that trampel them down."

Bunter had delivered his lines. He had left them on the table, as was the rule when Quelch was absent. It could hardly be doubted that, having done so, he had lingered to leave that message on the looking-glass: in retaliation for the lines: never even dreaming that the writer could be immediately identified by his spelling!

"That foolish, absurd, obtuse, impertinent boy!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

Thunder gathered on his brow.

He touched a bell. Trotter, the House page, appeared at the door: and was immediately despatched to find Master Bunter and send him to the study. Mr. Quelch waited with a grim brow. Rhadamanthus himself could hardly have looked grimmer than Henry Samuel Quelch, as he fixed his eyes on a fat figure that rolled reluctantly into the study.

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice.

"I—I've done my lines, sir!" said Bunter, in a hurry. "They're on the table, sir! There they are, sir."

"I have not sent for you on account of your lines, Bunter."

"Oh!" Billy Bunter blinked at him uneasily. "I—I haven't done anything, sir! I—I only snowballed Skinner because he snowballed me, sir—."

"I have sent for you, Bunter, to punish you for this latest example of your unparalleled impertinence and disrespect." Quelch pointed a lean finger at the looking-glass.

The fat Owl blinked at the glass.

"Oh, crikey!" he ejaculated. "He, he, he!"

"Upon my word! Are you laughing, Bunter?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter became serious at once.

"Oh! No, sir! Not at all, sir! I—I don't think that's funny, sir! I—I wasn't laughing, sir—I was—was coughing—."

"You have dared to repeat your impertinence, Bunter, of this morning—."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter, in alarm. "I—I never did that, sir! I—I wasn't—I—I mean I—I wouldn't—I—I never did it, sir. I—I don't know who did, but I—I didn't, sir—."

"It was you, Bunter—."

"It wasn't!" howled Bunter. "I—I only left my lines on the table, sir, when I was here—I never did that, sir—oh, crikey!"

"You utterly obtuse and stupid boy!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "How dare you tell me such palpable untruths?"

"But I—I didn't, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't know why you pick on me, sir, when I don't know anything about it."

"No boy in this school but you, Bunter, is capable of such absurd and egregious mistakes in spelling."

"Eh!" Bunter blinked at the inscription on the glass. "Is—is—is there anything wrong with the spelling, sir?"

"Only you, in all my form, would ask such a question. The spelling in that impertinence, Bunter, is on a par with the spelling in your lines on my table. There is no doubt in the matter. I caned you this morning, Bunter, for a similar offence—."

"But I—I—I never—!" babbled Bunter.

"I shall not cane you again, Bunter. But you will be punished for this act of gross disrespect."

"But I—I didn't—wasn't never—."

"Silence! You will go into Extra School, Bunter, for every half-holiday until the end of the term. You will also write out a whole book of Virgil."

"Oh, crikey!"

"That," said Mr. Quelch, grimly, "may impress upon your obtuse mind, Bunter, that respect is due to your form-master."

"B-b-b-but I never—didn't—wouldn't—." babbled Bunter.

"If anything of this kind should be repeated, Bunter," went on Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "I shall cane you with the utmost severity."

"But I never—."

"That will do, Bunter! Leave my study."

"But—but—but I didn't do it, sir!" wailed the fat Owl. "I never—."

"Go!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"But I—I say—."

"Another word, Bunter, and I shall cane you now."



"Is—is—is there anything wrong?"

Billy Bunter gave him a hopeless blink. But he did not utter another word. He rolled out of the study.

Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow, took a duster and wiped that inscription from the glass. Billy Bunter rolled away with a face of woe.

CHAPTER V

DOUBTING THOMASES!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I say, what do you fellows think of Quelch?"

There was a crowd of the Remove in the Rag after tea. Most of them looked round, as Billy Bunter rolled into that apartment, his fat face crimson, and squeaked in tones of thrilling indignation.

"What about Quelch?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Extra School right up to Christmas, and a book!" gasped Bunter, "Fancy that! "He's given me Extra, and a book!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What on earth have you been doing, you fat ass?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, perhaps, was expecting sympathy. But his reply evoked only a ripple of merriment. Quelch was the last man to award a punishment for "nothing". If he was, as Bunter often declared, a beast, he was at least a just beast! In that line, Aristides of old had nothing on Quelch. And Extra School till Christmas was a heavy penalty—and a "book" a still heavier one. Obviously only some dire offence could have been visited with such a punishment.

"Tell us another!" suggested Skinner.

"Beast! I tell you it was for nothing—"

"Was the nothingfulness terrific, my esteemed fibbing Bunter?" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I tell you I never did anything—"

"You can tell us that till you're black in the face," said Johnny Bull. "But it won't wash, old fat frump."

"I told Quelch I never did it, and he wouldn't believe me—"

"Did you expect him to?" chuckled Bob. "You roll out too many whoppers for anybody to believe you, Bunter. But what was it?"

"Somebody's been scrawling on the glass in his study," gasped Bunter. "Somebody wrote on it, 'Who cares for old Quelch?'"

"Oh, scissors!" ejaculated Bob. "You fat chump! No wonder Quelch's given you Extra and a book! I wonder he didn't take your skin off."

"But I never did it—!" shrieked Bunter.

"If you didn't, what makes Quelch think you did, then?" asked Frank Nugent.

"He says the spelling's wrong—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I couldn't see it myself, only Quelch said so, just like he did in the form-room this morning—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you bloated blitherer," said Bob. "Have you been at it again, after what you got this morning?"

"No!" yelled Bunter, "I haven't! Think I wanted another whopping? I went to his study to take my lines, but I never wrote anything on the glass. Never thought of it. But Quelch thinks it was me. I told him I never did it—"

"You told him you never did it, when you wrote 'rats' on his desk in the form-room," said Harry. "You fat ass, you should learn to spell before you send messages to Quelch; and learn to tell the truth sometimes, too."

"Well, Bunter's got a nerve, to play the same game a second time," said Skinner. "Didn't Quelch whop you, Bunter?"

"No—he's given me Extra and a book—but I never did it—"

"Rats!" said Skinner.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, what do you think of Quelch now—jumping on a fellow, and making out he did it, when he jolly well didn't! That's the sort of justice we get here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you I never did it!" yelled Bunter. "I've got Extra, and a book, and I never did nothing—I mean anything. I don't know who did it."

"Quelch does!" chuckled Bob.

"He doesn't—he thinks it was me—I say, you fellows, don't you believe me?" hooted Bunter, indignantly.

"Believe you! Oh, my hat!"

"The believfulness is not terrific."

"You fat ass!" said Johnny Bull. "What's the good of gammoning? If your spelling's given you away again, as it did this morning, what did you expect?"

"But I tell you I never—"

"Bow-owow!"

"If you fellows can't take my word—"

"Oh, crumbs! Bunter's word! Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at a crowd of laughing faces. Quelch had not believed him. Evidently the Removites did not, any more than Quelch. Bunter's reputation as an Ananias was, in fact, rather too well known. The hapless Owl's first resource, in time of trouble, was to roll out the first fib that came into his fat head. The juniors could hardly doubt that he was fibbing now. Who else would have made mistakes in spelling, in writing an impertinent message to Quelch? The case looked clear enough: and what the fat Owl had to say on the subject counted for nothing at all. His system of fibbing had come home to roost, as it were!

"I keep on telling you that I never did it!" wailed Bunter.

"Keep on as long as you like," said Bob. "But why not try telling the truth, for a change? A change does a fellow good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it wasn't me," yelled Bunter. "It must have been one of you fellows. If it was you, Bob Cherry—"

"Why, you fat villain—!"

"Or you, Wharton—"

"You podgy piffler—"

"Well, it wasn't me, and the chap who did it ought to go and own up to Quelch, now I've got Extra and a book. I say, if it was you, Bull—. Ow! Keep off, you beast! Stop kicking me, will you? Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter bolted out of the Rag.

CHAPTER VI

SKINNER KNOWS HOW!

SKINNER grinned.

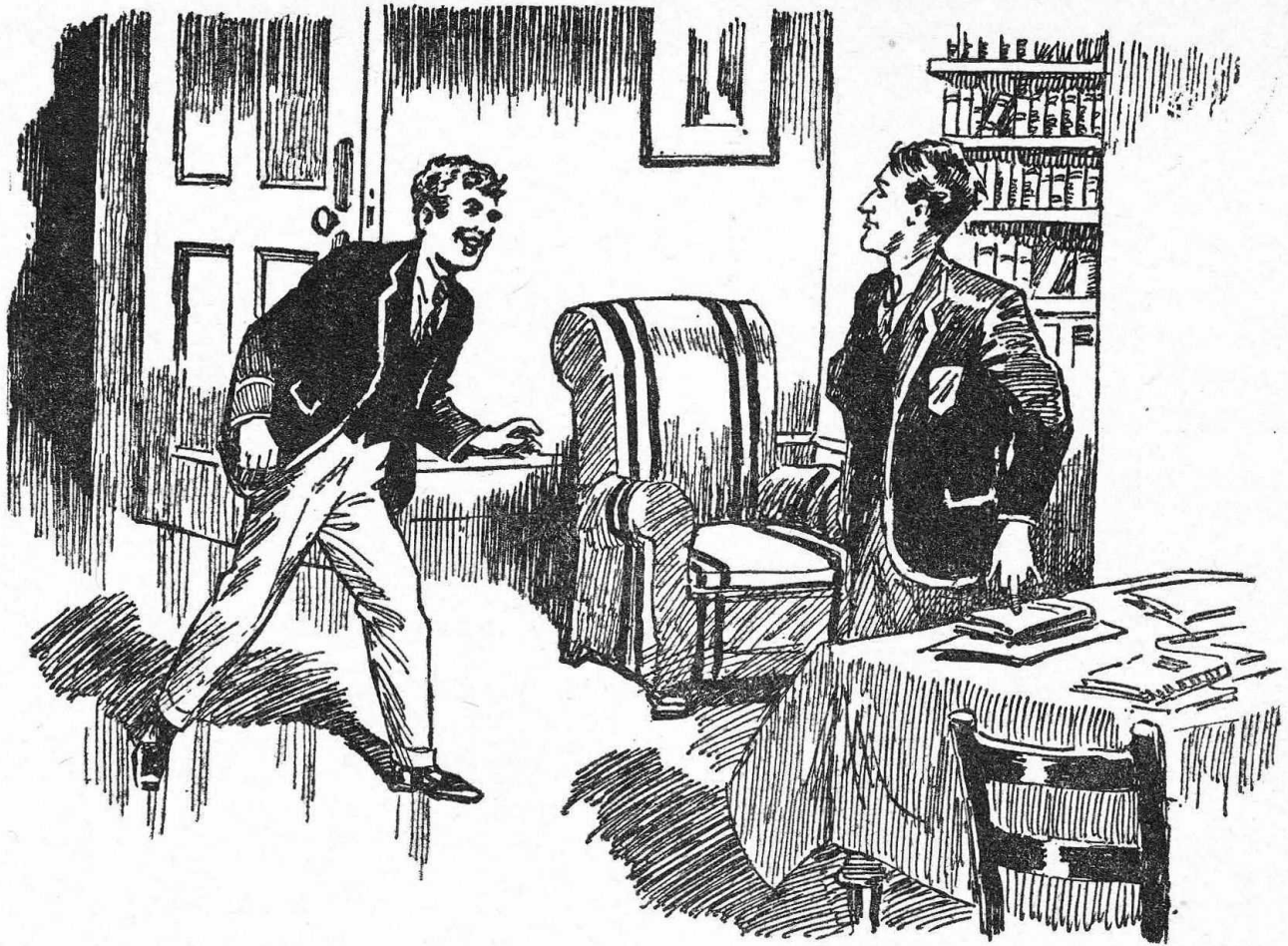
He was standing by his table in his study, No. 11 in the Remove. There was a pen in his hand. He grinned as he dipped the pen into the ink, and laid a sheet of paper on his blotter.

It was the following day. The Remove were through with Quelch: and except for an hour in the gym with Lascelles, still to come, they were their own masters till prep. Various fellows had various occupations: Skinner's was one that he would not have cared for the other fellows to see. Harry Wharton and Co. were improving the shining hour by snowballing in the quad, Lord Mauleverer by stretching his noble limbs on the settee in his study: Fisher T. Fish by counting his money: and Billy Bunter by trying to make up his fat mind to begin on the "book" he had to transcribe for Quelch. Skinner had been hanging about, till he was sure that his study-mates, Snoop and Stott, were nowhere near No. 11. What he was intending to do there would have startled any Remove fellow who had seen it. With a pen full of ink, he proceeded to "print" on the sheet of paper, in large capital letters:

OLD MUNKEE-FACE.

He chuckled as he proceeded. Skinner, certainly, knew how to spell the word "monkey" if Billy Bunter perhaps did not. Any fellow who had seen that paper would certainly have supposed, without a doubt, that it was William George Bunter's handiwork. Nobody in the Remove would have been capable of spelling monkey "munkee" excepting the fat Owl.

"Mustn't touch Bunter, mustn't I?" muttered Skinner. "He got me a licking, and I mustn't touch him, mustn't I? Well, Quelch will touch him, I fancy, and hard, too—it won't be Extra or a book again, it will be a licking! More ways than one of killing a cat! I fancy I know how!"



"What do you want?" snapped Skinner

And Skinner chuckled again.

He ceased to chuckle, suddenly, as there was a heavy tramp in the Remove passage, and the study door was hurled open. In an instant, Skinner caught up that paper, slammed it face down on the blotter and dropped a book on it, as Bob Cherry tramped into the study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

Skinner gave him a vicious look. He had very nearly been caught: and he was startled.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Nothing!" answered Bob, cheerily. "Hiding something?" he added, with a grin, glancing at the paper on the blotter. Skinner's hurried action had not escaped his eyes as he tramped in.

"Mind your own business," snarled Skinner. "Look here, what are you barging into my study for? You're not wanted here."

"You're wanted, fathead," said Bob. "Forgotten gym?"

"Hang gym!" snapped Skinner.

"Hang it as high as you like, but you've got to turn up with the rest," said Bob Cherry, "Lascelles sent me to call you."

Skinner compressed his lips. In his interest in his peculiar occupation in his study, he had forgotten gym.

"Oh, all right," he growled. "I'll come."

"Come on, then," said Bob. "Everybody else has turned up—even Bunter."

"I'm coming! You needn't wait."

I don't mean to!"

Bob Cherry tramped away down the passage, followed by a scowl from Skinner. Skinner waited till his footsteps died away towards the stairs. Then he threw aside the book, and picked up the paper from the blotter, crumpled it into his pocket, and hurried from the study.

CHAPTER VII

AT IT AGAIN!

MR. QUELCH gave a start.

He was seated in his study, pen in hand, busy correcting papers for his form. He glanced up at a slight sound at his door.

Then he started—and stared.

Under the door, from the corridor outside, the edge of a sheet of paper appeared. Quelch stared at it blankly.

"Wha-a-at—!" He almost stammered, in his amazement. "Who is there? You may come in! What—what—"

The door did not open, and there was no reply. But the sheet of paper, pushed from outside, slipped in under the door.

Quelch sat staring at it.

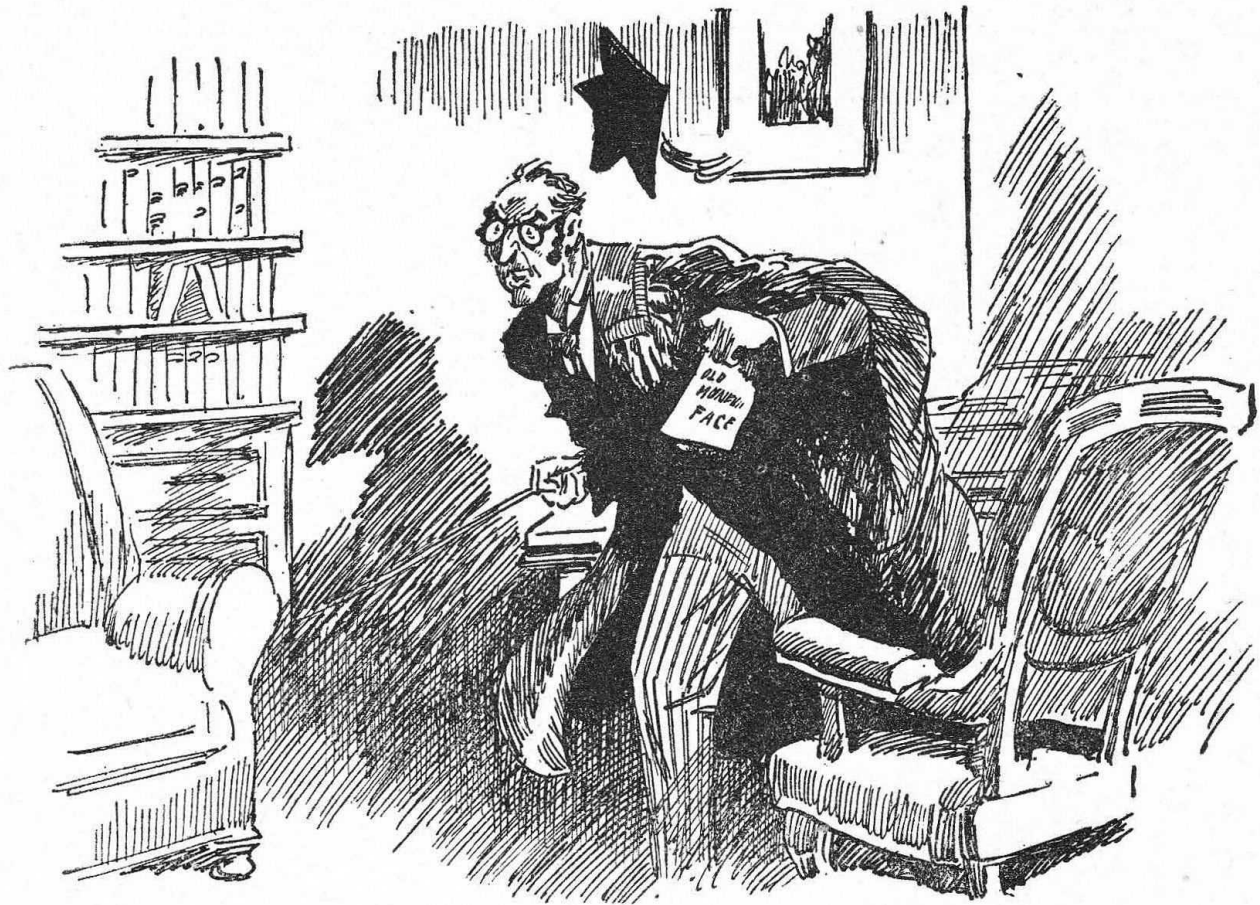
Seldom had he been so astonished. Someone, apparently, had come quietly up the corridor, and slipped that paper under his door, and departed as quietly as he had come. What it meant he had no idea.

He rose from the table, frowning, and stepped to the door and threw it open. He looked out into the corridor. Nobody was visible there. Whoever had slipped that paper under his study door had retreated promptly.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Quelch. "Someone was here—but he is gone! What can this mean? What—?"

He picked up the paper from the floor, and glanced at it. Then he jumped. His eyes popped at that paper. On it was written, in large capital letters:

OLD MUNKEE-FACE.



With cane in one hand and the paper in the other, he rustled out of the study

“Upon my word! That incredibly stupid boy Bunter again!” gasped Mr. Quelch. “Upon my word! This passes all patience! Upon my word!”

He gazed at that message, thunder in his brow.

“That utterly stupid boy—that incredibly foolish and impertinent boy—he does not even seem to understand that his errors in spelling betray him! such obtuseness—such stupidity—upon my word! This time I shall deal with him with exemplary severity.”

Mr. Quelch picked up a cane from his table. With the cane in one hand, and the paper in the other, he rustled out of his study. Extra, and a “book”, it seemed, had had no effect on Billy Bunter—he was “at it” again! Once more he had indited an affront to his form-master—and once more his remarkable spelling had given him away! Mr. Quelch was going to see Bunter at once: and this time, the fat and fatuous Owl was going to have such a lesson, that it could hardly fail to make an impression on his fat mind!

A group of juniors in the doorway of the Rag stared, as Mr. Quelch came up the passage paper in one hand, cane in the other. The Famous Five ex-

changed startled glances. Quelch, obviously, was in a "bait", and he was coming to the Rag, evidently with the intention of using that cane!

"What's up—?" breathed Bob Cherry.

"The upfulness seems to be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Wharton!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Is Bunter here?"

"No, sir—I think he's up in the studies. Is—is—is anything the matter, sir?" added Harry. It was rather a superfluous question. Only too clearly, something was the matter!

"Yes, Wharton! That foolish boy Bunter—that stupid boy Bunter—he has written this and slipped it under my study door. He must be found at once. I must deal with him without delay."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, as he stared at the paper in Quelch's hand. All the Co. stared at it, blankly. The spelling might, perhaps, have made them smile: but it was no time for smiling!

"Did—did—did Bunter do that, sir?" gasped Harry.

"What? What? Is any other boy in my form capable of such orthography?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "This is the third time, and it shall be the last! Find Bunter at once, and send him to my study, Wharton."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Lose no time!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

The Famous Five lost no time. After gym, it was tea-time, and they had no doubt that Bunter would be found up in the Remove studies. They cut up the stairs at a run.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob, as they reached the landing. "He's for it this time! Quelch is as mad as a hatter."

"No wonder!" grunted Johnny Bull, "Monkey-face—fancy that fat chump having the nerve—!"

"Fancy him having the fatheadedness," said Nugent' "Doesn't he know he can't spell for toffee? He was just asking for it."

"It's whops this time," said Harry.

"The whopfulness will be terrific."

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob, again. "He can't help being a blithering ass! But come on—Quelch wants him, and won't be happy till he gets him. Poor old porpoise!"

They ran into the Remove passage, in quest of Bunter. They were sorry for the hapless Owl, who evidently had a hectic time coming. But Quelch was waiting for him, and was plainly not in a mood to wait long. Bunter had to be found and sent to judgment: and that was that.

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN

CHAPTER VIII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY!

"I SAY, Mauly—Oh, it's you, Skinner."

Billy Bunter grunted a dissatisfied grunt.

He was leaning on the wall in the Remove passage, between the doors of No. 11 and No. 12. The former was Skinner's study: the latter Lord Mauleverer's. He blinked through his big spectacles at a junior coming up the passage. But it was not the hoped-for Mauly coming up to No. 12. It was Harold Skinner coming up to No. 11.

Skinner gave the fat Owl a black look. A caning from Quelch, followed by a snowballing from Bunter, the previous day, had not in the least faded from Skinner's mind. The lapse of twenty-four hours made no difference: Harold Skinner was wont to remember grudges much longer than that.

"I say, Skinner, seen Mauly?" asked Bunter, blinking at him. "I'm waiting for him to come up to tea—"

"Wait somewhere else, then," snapped Skinner. "Don't loaf round my study door, you fat frog."

"I tell you I'm waiting here for Mauly—"

"Get out, I tell you."

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter, independently.

"If you want my boot, you fat tick—"

"You jolly well touch me, and you'll get toco from Bob Cherry," grinned Bunter. "I'll jolly well wait here as long as I jolly well like, so yah!"

Skinner breathed hard. Gladly he would have "touched" the fat Owl, with a heavy hand. But he had not forgotten Bob Cherry's warning: and he did not want trouble with the heftiest fighting-man in the Remove.

"You cheeky fat grampus—!" he muttered.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a shout along the passage. "There he is."

Five fellows came up the Remove passage at a run. Billy Bunter gave them an inquiring blink.

"Looking for me, you chaps?" he asked. "I say, if it's a feed, all right. I was waiting here for Mauly, but if you chaps are standing a spread—"

"Bunter, you ass—"

"Bunter, you fathead—!"

"Bunter, you terrific chump—!"



"Looking for me, you chaps?"

"Eh! I say, you fellows, wharrer you calling a fellow names for?" demanded Bunter. "Is anything up?"

"You potty, piffling, pernicious porpoise," said Bob Cherry. "Quelch wants you, and he wants you at once. Roll off."

Skinner laughed.

"What does Quelch want Bunter for?" he asked.

"The howling ass has been at it again," said Harry Wharton. "He slipped a paper under Quelch's study door—"

"I didn't!" yelled Bunter.

"With 'old monkey-face' written on it!" said Nugent. "And of course he spelt it all wrong, and Quelch knew at once—"

"I never—!" shrieked Bunter.

"Better tell Quelch that!" said Johnny Bull. "He's waiting for you."

"Oh, crikey! You go and tell him it wasn't me!" gasped Bunter.

"You can tell him that yourself, you fat Ananias!"

"I haven't been near his study—"

"Draw it mild, old fat man," said Bob. "You must have been pretty near his study to slip that paper under his door—"

"I didn't!" yelled Bunter. "I haven't pipped any slaper—I mean slipped any paper—under anybody's door. What makes Quelch think it was me this time?"

"He knows your spelling," said Nugent. "Think anyone else in the Remove would spell 'monkey' M-U-N-K-E-E?"

"Eh! Isn't that right?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I never did it, anyway. I don't know who did—"

"You fat ass!" said Harry. "Didn't I warn you to learn to spell before you sent any more messages to Quelch? Cut off, Bunter—"

"Shan't!" gasped Bunter. "I jolly well ain't going to be whopped, when I never did it. If it was one of you fellows—"

"You benighted fathead, go down at once. Quelch is waiting, and if you don't go, he will come up after you. He's got his cane with him."

"Oh, crikey! I tell you I never—"

"Cut off, fathead."

"I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I'll go to my study, and—and hide—and—and if Quelch can't find me—"

"You fat chump, he will look in your study first of all."

"Oh, lor ! I—I say, I'll cut in here, then." Bunter pitched open the door of Skinner's study. "Don't you fellows say anything to Quelch—"

"Keep out of my study!" snapped Skinner.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled into No. 11. His own study, obviously, was no safe refuge. Quelch was certain to look into Bunter's study for him. The alarmed fat Owl could only hope that he wouldn't think of looking into Skinner's.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "You fat fozler, do you think that you can dodge Quelch?"

"I say, you fellows, don't you tell Quelch I'm here—"

"Come out, you ass."

"Beast!"

"Quelch may come up any minute—"

"Oh, crikey!"

"You've got to go—"

"Shan't!"

Harry Wharton and Co. followed the fat Owl into No. 11. Skinner, grinning, followed them in. Billy Bunter cast a beseeching blink at them.

"I say, you fellows, keep it dark that I'm here! I say, I never pipped that slipper—I mean I never slipped that pippet—I mean—"

"For goodness sake, don't be such an ass, Bunter," said Harry. "You've got to face up to it, after what you've done."

"I haven't done nothing—I mean anything—I never done it—I mean I never did it—I tell you I never didn't done—"

Frank Nugent glanced out of the doorway. He had a glimpse of a mortar-board at the other end of the passage. Quelch was coming up!

"He's coming!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Oh, crikey!"

"Bunter, you ass, you've got to go—"

"Oh, lor'! I—I say, you fellows, don't you let on that I'm here—I—I—I ain't going to be whopped!" wailed Bunter. "If—Quelch comes here, tell him I'm gone out of gates—tell him. I'm in the gym—tell him I'm ill and gone into sanny—tell him—!"

"OH!" came a sudden roar from Bob Cherry, interrupting Bunter. All eyes turned on him. Bob was staring at a blotter on the study table.

"What—?" began Harry.

"Oh! Oh, my hat! Look at this!" roared Bob. "Skinner, you rat—Skinner, you tricky tick—Skinner, you double-crossing rotter—"

"What the thump—?" gasped Wharton.

"Look!" roared Bob.

He held up the blotter. Clearly on the white blotting-paper, was the impression of a row of capital letters, from wet ink when a paper had been hurriedly jammed face down on the blotter. All the juniors in the study stared at it blankly. What they beheld was:

.ECAF-EEKNUM DLO

For a moment, they simply stared. Then, realizing that an impression on blotting-paper would be backwards, they read that row of letters backwards. And what they read was "OLD MUNKEE-FACE."

CHAPTER IX

ALL RIGHT FOR BUNTER!

"OH!" gasped Skinner.

He made a spring forward, snatching at the blotter.

Bob Cherry held it out of reach in his right hand, and with his left, gave Harold Skinner a shove on the chest, that sent him tottering across the room.



"That's my blotter," panted Skinner

"Hands off, you rotter!" he snapped.

"That's my blotter!" panted Skinner. "Hand it over—it's mine—"

"Yes, it's yours, you rat, and what's on it is your handiwork!" roared Bob, his face red with anger and indignation. "That's what you were hiding when I came in here to call you to gym. I didn't know what it was, and I didn't care—but I could see you were hiding something. And this was it—You wrote that paper that was slipped under Quelch's door—"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter, his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles at Skinner.

"Skinner, you rotter—!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Skinner all the time!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"The execrable and ridiculous Skinner!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look at it!" roared Bob. "It's spelt backwards on the blotter—but you can read it from right to left! Skinner did this—"

"In Bunter's spelling!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes, that was his game! That silly fathead spelt 'rats' R-A-T-T-S on Quelch's desk yesterday, and Quelch knew at once who it was. Of course he thought it was Bunter next time. Nobody else spells like that fat ass—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Only that ass Bunter could make such mistakes in spelling—"

"Look here, I jolly well don't make mistakes in spelling!" squeaked Billy Bunter, indignantly. "I could jolly well spell your head off, and chance it. If you're going to make out that I can't spell, Cherry—"

"Kick him, somebody! That was Skinner's game—because we stopped him pitching into the fat chump—he was going to get him a whopping from Quelch instead!" roared Bob. "It was Skinner put that message on Quelch's glass in his study yesterday—I can see that now—spelling it like Bunter to take Quelch in—and now he's done this—"

"Skinner, you rat—"

"Skinner, you cad—"

"Skinner, you terrific toad—"

Skinner stood panting. It was all clear now: and the startling discovery had come only in time: for Mr. Quelch, having looked into Bunter's study in vain, was coming up the passage. But the juniors had, for the moment, forgotten Quelch, in the excitement of that discovery. The looks of contempt that were cast on him pierced even Skinner's thick skin, and he stood panting and stammering.

"It—it—it was only a joke—" he stuttered, "I—I—"

"Perhaps Quelch will see the joke, when he sees this blotter!" roared Bob. Skinner gave a gasp of terror.

"Give it me! It's mine—give it me! You can't let Quelch see that—give me my blotter—"

"I say, you fellows, I jolly well told you it wasn't me," squeaked Billy Bunter. "Skinner all the time! I told you it wasn't me, didn't I? Perhaps you'll believe me another time."

"Perhaps!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Not likely, though—"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"You tell too many whoppers, old fat man," said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Give me that blotter, Cherry," panted Skinner. "Quelch may come up any minute—give it to me, I tell you. You can't let Quelch see that blotter—Don't let him see it—don't—"

There was a step at the doorway.

"What is all this?" Gimlet-eyes glinted into the study. They glinted, for a moment, at Billy Bunter. Then they fixed on Bob Cherry. "I heard what you

said, Skinner! What is this that I am not to see? Cherry, hand me that blotter instantly."

Bob, in silence, handed over the blotter.

The gimlet-eyes fixed on it.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

There was a dead silence in the study, as the Remove master gazed at the impression on the blotter. It was a silence that might have been felt. It was, indeed, felt by the wretched Skinner, who stood with his knees knocking together, and clots of perspiration on his face. The expression that was dawning on Mr. Quelch's face was positively terrifying.

Quelch broke the awful silence at last.

"Upon my word! Skinner, this is your blotter?" His voice was like the grinding of a file. "This is what you did not desire me to see! Upon my word! It was you who wrote that paper and slipped it under my door. It was written here and blotted on your blotter. I cannot doubt now that it was you also who wrote the impertinent words on my looking-glass yesterday, Skinner. You can spell correctly if you choose: but you have deliberately imitated Bunter's bad spelling, in order to delude me. Upon my word."

"I—I—I—! mumbled Skinner. His voice trailed away.

"It was you, Skinner, and not Bunter at all."

"I—I—I didn't mean—"

"I think I know what you meant, Skinner. I have no doubt of your meaning in playing so deceitful a trick. Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! It—wasn't me, sir—", gasped Bunter, in a hurry.

"I know now that it was not you, Bunter. You will not go into Extra School, and you need not write the book of Virgil."

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's fat face registered joy! "Oh! Thank you, sir! I—I told you all the time it wasn't me, sir—"

"You are too untruthful a boy, Bunter, for your word to carry any weight whatever!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"That will do, Bunter. You are exonerated, and that is enough. Skinner, I shall deal with you here and now. Such duplicity must be punished with the utmost severity. I shall cane you, Skinner, more severely than I have ever caned a boy before: and I trust that it will be a lesson to you." Mr. Quelch glanced round. "You others may go."

Harry Wharton and Co. quietly left the study. Billy Bunter, grinning, followed them. Gladly would Skinner have followed also. But the hapless schemer had to take what was coming to him.

Mr. Quelch pointed to a chair with the cane.



"Bend over that chair, Skinner"

"Bend over that chair, Skinner."

Skinner drooped dismally over the chair. There was a sound of swishing in the study, as the cane rose and fell. It rose and fell with tremendous vigour, Mr. Quelch evidently felt that it was his duty to be severe, in this case: and Quelch was a whale on duty. He did his duty thoroughly. Harold Skinner was wriggling like an eel, when Quelch finally tucked his cane under his arm and departed.

"I SAY, you fellows."

"Say on, old fat fathead!" said Bob Cherry, cheerily.

"I say, I want to thank you chaps!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. He had caught them on the Remove landing, going down after tea. He beamed on them. "I say, you're real pals.

you chaps! Look what you've done for me! Quelch was jolly well going to whop me, wasn't he—?"

"He was!" said Harry Wharton.

"And it was Skinner all the time—"

"I expect he's sorry for it by now. Quelch laid it on."

"Serve him jolly well right," said Bunter. "I'd jolly well go along to his study and whop him myself, only—only I think I'd better keep clear of the brute—"

"You better had!" chuckled Bob. "You wouldn't find him in a good temper."

"Well, never mind Skinner," said Bunter. "The fact is, I was for it, if you fellows hadn't chipped in, and pulled me through, and I think you're real jolly good pals."

"Thanks a lot!" said Bob. "Is that all?"

"Nunno! I mean to say, I'm jolly grateful, and all that—mind, I'm not piling it on because I want anything—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I mean it, every word, and I jolly well think you're jolly splendid chaps, standing by a fellow like that—finest fellows at Greyfriars and chance it: and I'll tell you what—I'll jolly well turn down a lot of invitations I've had, and come along with you for the Christmas hols——"

"Help!"

"Run for your lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

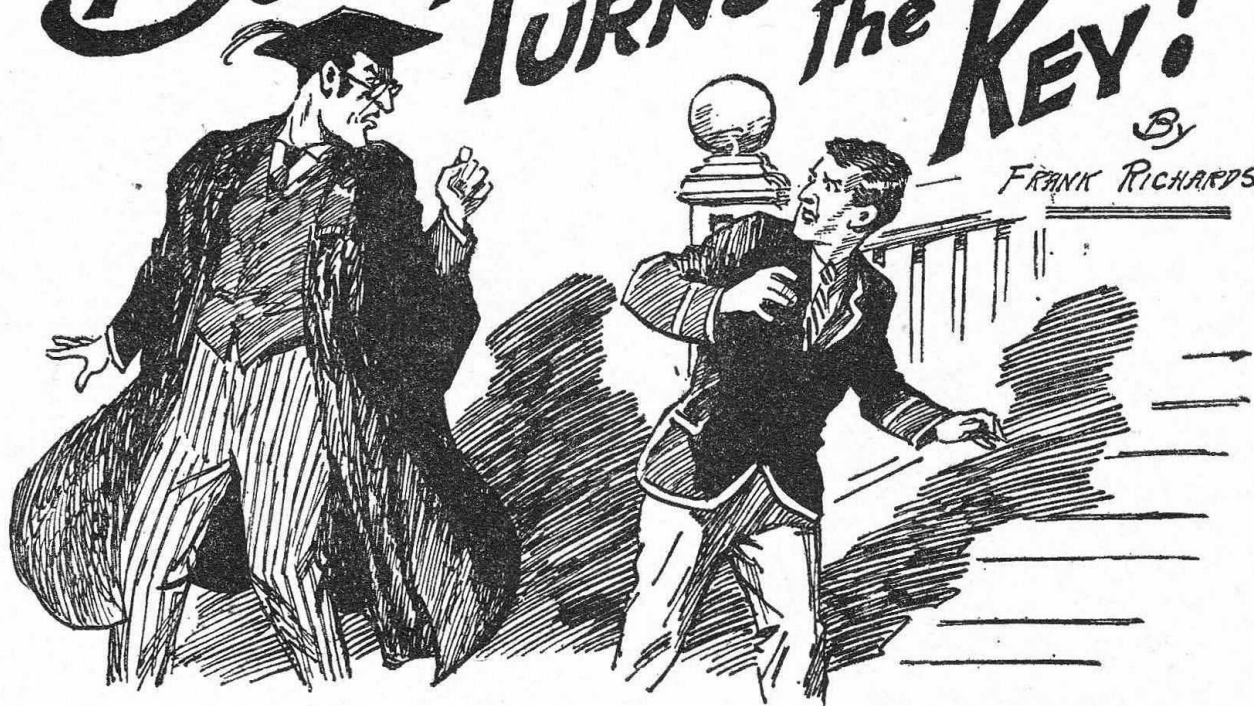
"I say, you fellows," yelled Billy Bunter, as the Famous Five scampered across the landing, and down the stairs. "I say, don't cut off while a fellow's talking to you—I say—"

But the chums of the Remove did cut off, laughing as they cut, and Billy Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air!

THE END

BUNTER TURNS the KEY!

By
FRANK RICHARDS.



CHAPTER I

"IF Quelch goes out—!" said Bob Cherry, hopefully.

"He won't!" said Johnny Bull.

"He often goes for a grind on a half-holiday."

"He won't this afternoon, just to please us."

"Um!" said Bob, doubtfully.

"Not likely!" sighed Frank Nugent.

"The likeliness is not terrific," concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"If he did, okay!" he said. "But—" He shook his head again.

It was a knotty problem for the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

They were "gated".

"Gates", on a half-holiday, interfered very considerably with their plans for the afternoon. Quelch had "gated" them for a ramble out of bounds: and it was not really a very severe penalty: but it came very awkwardly for five fellows who were due to walk over to Cliff House for tea with Marjorie and Co. there.

As a rule, Harry Wharton and Co. were quite law-abiding youths, and would not have envisaged disregarding an order from their form-master. But

circumstances alter cases. On this especial occasion, they couldn't, if it could be helped, let the Cliff House girls expect them in vain. They had to keep that appointment, if they could. So, for once, they were prepared to pass the sentence of "gates" by, like the idle wind they regarded not—if it could be managed.

It could—if Quelch went out on one of his long grinds. After he was gone, what could be easier than to slip out quietly, unnoticed: and, on their return, to slip in, equally quietly and unnoticed—if only that gimlet-eye was at a safe distance?

It all depended on whether Quelch did, that afternoon, set out on one of those long grinds! But that would have solved the problem so happily, that it really seemed too much to hope for.

Bob Cherry glanced out of the window of No. 1 Study. Outside in the quad, it was bright and sunny.

"Just the weather for one of Quelch's long trots!" he said.

"Just!" agreed Harry. "But—"

"The butfulness is terrific!" sighed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Couldn't risk it if Quelch doesn't go out!" said Johnny Bull. "And—he won't, when we want him to."

"I say, you fellows."

A fat face looked in at the study doorway, and a fat voice interrupted. Billy Bunter rolled into No. 1. There was a cheery grin on Bunter's fat face, and to the surprise of the Co. he had a rather large and rather rusty key in a fat hand.

"You fellows going out?" asked Bunter.

"Yes—if Quelch does," answered Bob Cherry. "Can't chance it if he doesn't. What the dickens are you doing with that key?"

"He, he, he! You'll miss the joke if you go out," said Bunter.

"Eh! What's the joke?"

"That's the box-room key!" explained Bunter, holding it up for view. "I've just been up and taken it out of the lock. He, he, he! I'm going to catch Skinner—"

"Skinner! What the dickens—"

"I'm on his track!" said Bunter. "You know what he did—getting me into a row with Quelch—jolly nearly got me whopped. Well, perhaps he'll be sorry for himself, when he's locked up in that box-room for a half-holiday—he, he, he."

Billy Bunter chuckled explosively.

The Famous Five stared at him. They forgot their own problem, for a moment.



Bunter shows the key

"You fat ass," said Johnny Bull. "Is Skinner going to walk into the box-room this afternoon, to let you lock him in?"

"Likely!" said Bob.

"That's all you know!" grinned Bunter. "I jolly well know, if you fellows don't, that that cad Skinner goes up to the box-room to smoke cigarettes, and I jolly well know he's going to this afternoon, because I heard him tell Snoop that he'd only got two or three, and so he hadn't any to whack out, and Snoop said he was a mean tick, and that he'd better be careful that Quelch didn't catch him smoking in the study, and he said he wasn't going to smoke in the study, and—"

"You seem to have heard him saying quite a lot, you podgy Peeping Tom."

"I wasn't listening, if that's what you mean. I happened to stop and tie my shoe-lace while they were talking. I'm not the sort of fellow to listen to fellows behind their backs, I hope!"

"Hopeful chap, Bunter!" remarked Bob.

"I'd scorn it, of course," said Bunter. "But as I just happened to stop and pick up a pin—"

"As well as to tie up your shoe-lace?"

"Oh! I—I mean, I'd stopped to pick up a shoe-lace—I mean to tie up a pin—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I've got it in for Skinner," said Bunter. "He can smoke his two or three cigarettes in the box-room, and then he won't be able to get out again! He, he, he! Serve him jolly well right, what? He's too jolly funky to try climbing from the window, and he'll be stuck there till I choose to let him out, and that won't be in a hurry. He, he, he."

"He will kick up a row there—"

"Let him!" chuckled Bunter. "Everybody's out, on a half-holiday, and who's going to hear him, from the box-room?"

"Better not let him see you at it," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"I'll watch it," grinned Bunter. "I'm going to hide in the big cupboard on the box-room landing, and wait for him to go in. Then I step out and lock the door after him. Safe as houses. Will he be wild? Will he be as mad as a hatter? What? He, he, he."

The Famous Five laughed. Skinner, recently, had played quite a scurvy trick on Bunter: and this, apparently, was Bunter's method of "getting his own back."

"You fellows will miss the joke, if you go out," said Bunter. "But I say, you can't go out when you're gated, can you?"

"We're chancing it, if Quelch goes for a grind."

"He, he, he!"

"Well, where does the cackle come in, you fat ass?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Quelch ain't going for a grind," explained Bunter.

"And how do you know, you fat chump?"

"Because I happened to hear—"

"Bunter will always happen to hear something, so long as they make keyholes to doors!" remarked Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you think I'd listen at Quelch's keyhole—"

"Didn't you?" snorted Johnny.

"No, I didn't!" hooted Bunter. "I happened to hear him speaking to Prout, that's all. I was under Common-Room window, and the window was open, so I just happened to hear what they said. Quelch said he would be at work on his 'History of Greyfriars' this afternoon, and—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Sold!" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Rotten!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific."

What Billy Bunter had "happened" to hear, was a blow to the hopes of the Famous Five. If Quelch was going to get busy on that "History" of his, evidently he wouldn't be going on one of his long grinds that afternoon. That visit to Cliff House had to be washed out. To walk out, regardless of "gates", while Quelch was on the spot, was simply impracticable. Five faces registered dismay.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, scat!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"But I say, I may have to stick in that cupboard a good while—I don't know when Skinner will be going up. I'd like to have some toffee or something—so if you fellows have got any toffee—"

"We haven't."

"Well, if you've got a cake in the cupboard—"

"Nothing in the cupboard."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Bunter. "I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Help!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you lend me half-a-crown, and I'll settle out of my postal-order to-morrow. What about that?"

"Nothing about it! Cut."

"Make it a bob, then—"

"I'll make it a boot, if you don't take your face away!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter took his face away—it disappeared with the rest of him. The Famous Five were left with their problem: which looked now as if it had no solution.

"Quelch might change his mind, and go out, after all, in this jolly good weather," suggested Bob, always optimistic. "We don't get a lot of fine afternoons in December. If he changes his mind—"

"If!" grunted Johnny.

"The if-fulness is terrific!" sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

It was but a faint hope!

CHAPTER II

"SKINNER!"

Harold Skinner jumped almost clear of the box-room stairs.

In that spot, and at that particular time, the last thing that Skinner expected to hear, was the voice of his form-master, Henry Samuel Quelch.

He did not know, as Billy Bunter did, that Quelch proposed to spend that

afternoon on his beloved and interminable "History of Greyfriars". But, so far as he thought of Quelch at all, he supposed that the master of the Remove would be in his study, or in Common-Room, or gone out on a grind. Assuredly he never supposed that Quelch would be up in the Remove passage, heading for the box-room stairs at the end of that passage.

Skinner, with his two or three cigarettes in his pocket, was mounting the box-room stairs. He was going up to the box-room for a quiet smoke—which was one of Skinner's ways, and no doubt accounted for his pasty complexion. Quelch's sudden voice behind him was very startling.

Skinner was too cautious to smoke his smokes in his study, since he had been caught at it there. But the remote box-room was a safe retreat. Or at least it should have been so: and would have been so, but for the unexpected appearance of Quelch on the scene.

Skinner spun round, to meet a pair of gimlet-eyes that seemed almost to pierce him.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Yes, sir."

"Where are you going, Skinner?"

Skinner caught his breath. He knew immediately that Quelch was suspicious,—as he had reason to be. Skinner was cunning, but he had been caught out more than once. Certainly, a fellow could go up to the box-room if he liked—a fellow might happen to want something from a box there. For such a reason, Harry Wharton or Bob Cherry or Mark Linley or Lord Lauleverer might have gone up, and they would have had no hesitation in telling Quelch why. But Harold Skinner was an "old offender", and he preferred not to admit that he was going to such a secluded spot at all.

"Only up the stairs, sir," said Skinner. "I—I was going to slide down the banister, sir."

"It is against the rules for boys to slide down the banisters Skinner."

"I—I forgot, sir."

"You should not forget a rule, Skinner."

"Oh, no, sir! Certainly not. I'm sorry, sir."

"As you have not done so, Skinner, you may go."

"Thank you, sir."

Gladly Skinner went. The gimlet-eye followed him, down the Remove passage, till he disappeared down the stairs. Mr. Quelch was frowning. He did not trust Skinner, and he doubted very much whether the explanation the junior had given was a veracious one. Skinner, for his part, alarmed and irritated as he was, was glad that Quelch had caught him on the stair, and not in the box-room smoking his cigarettes—it had been a narrow escape for Harold Skinner.

Mr. Quelch stood frowning, for a long minute, after Skinner was gone. Then he ascended the box-room stair, still frowning. That afternoon, Quelch intended to spend some happy hours on his "History of Greyfriars", and he was very keen to get going on that attractive occupation. But duty came first: he was a schoolmaster before he was an historian! and he was a whale on duty. Fag-ends had been found in the Remove box-room, which indicated that some members of Quelch's form indulged in smoking there: which was very much and very severely against the rules. Quelch had to look into the matter: and he was doing so, before he sat down to that entrancing History. And if he found any young sweeps smoking in that box-room, the results were going to be quite painful for those young sweeps.

He had little doubt, if any, that he had surprised Skinner on his way up with that very object in view. Skinner's excuse had to be taken at face value. But if there were others, they were caught—and Quelch had a dubious eye on such fellows as Snoop, and Stott, and Vernon-Smith. Anyhow he was going up to investigate.

Somewhat slowly, for the box-room stair was steep, Quelch ascended. He paused on the little landing above to take breath. A small window there dimly illumined the landing, from one side: on the other, was an old cupboard that extended from floor to ceiling, never used unless for odds and ends of lumber. Mr. Quelch naturally did not imagine for one moment that that dark, dusty old cupboard was, for once, inhabited. Such an idea could hardly cross his mind. Not for a moment did it occur to him that his footsteps crossing the landing were heard, by a pair of the plumpest ears in Greyfriars School: faintly, it was true, through a thick oak door, but unmistakably. A fat Owl knew that somebody had come up the box-room stair, and was crossing to the box-room. Billy Bunter could not see anything from his dusky hide-out, but he could hear: and he grinned as he heard.

Utterly oblivious of Bunter, Mr. Quelch, after pausing a moment for breath, walked across the landing. The box-room door was ajar, and he pushed it open and walked in. As he did so, he heard a faint sound behind him, and glanced back to the landing. That faint sound seemed to have proceeded from the old cupboard: as, in fact, it had, as Billy Bunter had stirred in his hide-out, to brush away a spider that had settled on his fat neck.

However, after that glance back, Quelch took no heed. In the more ancient parts of the old building, mice might stir behind the walls, and there was no reason to suppose that the sound he had heard was anything more than that.

In the box-room, Mr. Quelch glanced about him.

No one was there! If Skinner had been coming up for a surreptitious smoke, he had been coming on his own. Quelch was, in fact, glad to find no delinquent:



Mr. Quelch in the Box Room

he did not want to have to punish Snoop, or Stott, or Smith, or any other reckless young rascal. It was, in fact, a relief to him. However, now he was there, he moved about the room glancing to and fro, in search of any sign of infraction of the rules. And he frowned a thunderous frown at the sight of a couple of fag-ends, and several burnt matches, in the old grate. Evidently, smokers had been there, and not very long ago: though he had failed to make a catch.

Then, as he stood frowning at those tell-tale relics in the grate, he gave a sudden start.

Slam!

That slam of the door was startling.

Mr. Quelch stared round at it.

He had left the door half-open behind him. Someone, unseen, had dragged it shut from outside, with that sudden slam.

"What—what—!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He stood staring at the shut door. As he stared, he heard the sound of a

key turned in the lock outside. Then there was a scraping sound as it was drawn out, and then a sudden scamper of retreating feet.

Quelch stood as if rooted.

His ears told him what had happened—yet he could hardly believe it. Was it possible that anyone, within the precincts of Greyfriars School, had the nerve—the audacity—the effrontery—the unparalleled impertinence,—to lock him in that box-room? Really it was unthinkable.

“Bless my soul!” breathed Mr. Quelch.

He walked across to the door. He tried the handle. The door did not yield. Evidently, it was locked on the outside.

Breathing hard, Mr. Quelch rapped on it with his knuckles.

Rap! rap! rap!

Echo answered. But that was all. Whoever it was that had locked the door, had scampered down the box-room stair, and gone.

Rap! rap! rap! rap! rap!

“Who is there? Who was that? Unlock this door instantly! Do you hear! Is that you, Skinner? Open this door immediately.”

There was no reply.

Mr. Quelch realized that the locker-in was gone. Grimmer and grimmer grew his speaking countenance. Who had done this?

His first thought was of Skinner. Skinner knew that he was there, and no other Remove fellow had been about, when he came up. But he shook his head. It was not Skinner. It was evident that the key had been taken out of the inside of the lock, deliberately, by the person who had used it on the outside, and that must have been done earlier, with the intention of doing what had now actually been done. Whoever it was couldn't have known, at that time, that Quelch was coming up at all.

Who was it, and why?

Quelch's grim brow grew a trifle less grim, as it dawned upon him that, whoever had locked him in, did not know that it was he, Henry Samuel Quelch, who was there. This was some schoolboy trick: not as he had at first supposed, an act of audacity, of effrontery and of unparalleled impertinence! He remembered that faint sound he had heard from the cupboard on the landing, and he understood. That sound had not been made by a mouse. Someone had been hiding there, key in hand, to play this trick on some other fellow—perhaps on Skinner!—that was what had happened.

“Some utterly foolish boy—!” murmured Mr. Quelch.

It was clear enough to him now. He had been heard, but not seen, and he had been locked in by mistake.

It was a relief to realize that it was nothing more than a practical joke—



"Can you hear me? I'm locked in"

and not an act of unparalleled impertinence! But the fact remained that Quelch was locked in the box-room, whether intentionally or not. Whoever had been intended to be the victim of that practical joke, it was Henry Samuel Quelch who was the actual victim of it: and until the practical joker chose to return and unlock the door, he was a prisoner in the box-room.

Rap! rap! rap!

Quelch played a tattoo on the door with bony knuckles.

Rap! rap! rap!

"Can you hear me? Can anyone hear me? It is I, your form-master! I am locked in! If anyone can hear me, come at once."

But it was only too painfully clear that no one could hear. Quelch remembered that it was a half-holiday, and an unusually fine day for December: everybody would be out of doors. He thought for a moment of Harry Wharton and Co. who were "gated", and in consequence must—so far as Quelch knew at

least—be within the precincts. But those strenuous youths were not likely to be indoors on a fine afternoon. "Gates" did not exclude the football ground, and that was a likely spot, as they couldn't go out. Quelch had to realize that he was a prisoner till he was let out—or until someone might chance to come up to the box-room for something—a slender chance.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch.

He walked across to the little window and looked out. But Quelch was long past the age for acrobatics. He shook his head.

He paced the box-room.

He had to wait!

Finally, he sat on a box, and took his pocket Horace from his pocket. Quintus Horatius Flaccus was always good company! But for once, Quelch did not find Horace so delightful as was his wont. Sad to relate, he frowned, and almost scowled, at Horace, as if that ancient Roman poet had done something to offend him. Quelch could not be wholly consoled, even by Horace: and his feelings, as he sat in that cold and dismal box-room, grew deeper and deeper.

CHAPTER III

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! He's not there."

"Can't hear the clicker."

"Not a sound."

"Can he have gone out after all?"

"Oh, what luck, if he has!"

"The luckfulness would be terrific."

"Listen!"

Five fellows had strolled, as it were casually, by Mr. Quelch's study window. That window was partly open, as Quelch's window always was in anything like good weather. From the open window, no sound came from the study within.

All the Remove knew that, when Quelch was busy on his "History of Greyfriars", the click of his typewriter was audible in his study. Had that typewriter been in action, undoubtedly the sound of the keys would have floated out into the quad. But five pairs of ears failed to pick up a sound of the machine.

The chums of the Remove exchanged hopeful glances. Had the fine afternoon tempted Quelch out, after all, leaving the "History of Greyfriars" over for a rainy day? On the other hand, he might be consulting his notes, in which case the typewriter would naturally be silent for a time.

The window was too high from the ground for the juniors to look in. But they had to know.

"I'm going to see!" whispered Bob Cherry. "Just one squint in at the window—"

"You'll get lines for squinting in, if Quelch's there!" said Johnny Bull.

"It sounds as if he isn't—I mean, it doesn't sound as if he is! I'm going to chance it."

Bob moved quietly nearer the window, his friends watching him. He grasped the sill, and drew himself up, and shot a rapid glance into the study. Had Quelch been there, and noticed him, it was probable that "lines" would have accrued. But Quelch was not there, so that was all right.

Bob dropped back, and rejoined his friends, grinning.

"Okay!" he said.

"Not there?" asked Nugent.

"Not a sign of him."

"Good egg! If he's gone out after all—"

"Might be in Common-Room, with the other beaks," said Johnny Bull. "Prout may have kept him jawing."

"The jawfulness in Common-Room is terrific", agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"Well, we've got to know," said Harry Wharton. "Look here, one of us can go along to Common-Room and ask Quelch a question if he's there."

"I'll go," said Nugent. "If he's not there, all right! But if he's there, what am I to ask him? Must say something."

"That's easy! Ask him whether 'parco' takes the ablative or the accusative. A thirst for knowledge like that will please him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent, grinning, went into the House, leaving his comrades grinning also. But they waited rather anxiously for him to return.

He came back in a few minutes.

"Okay!" he said. "Quelch isn't in Common-Room."

"Looks better and better," said Bob Cherry. "But perhaps we'd better draw the library, before we make a move. Quelch goes there sometimes to root among the manuscripts. If he's there, a fellow can have come in for a book."

"My turn!" said Harry: and he went into the House in his turn. He also came back in a few minutes, with a cheery countenance.

"Not there!" he said.

"Safe enough to cut," said Bob. "He must have gone out! Still, we'll ask some of the fellows whether they've seen him about."

"Can't be too careful," said Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy!" roared Bob. "Have you seen Quelch about?"
Vernon-Smith stared round.

"Yes," he answered.

"Oh, blow! Isn't he gone out then! Where did you see him?"

"In form this morning," answered the Bounder.

"You silly ass!" howled Bob. "Think we want to know whether you saw him in form this morning? Have you seen him later?"

"Yes, I saw him later—"

"Where, then?"

"At dinner."

Smithy, it seemed, was in a humorous mood. But the anxious five had no use for Smithy's little jokes.

"Kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.

The Bounder, laughing, walked away. A fat figure rolled up to the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Seen Quelch about, Bunter?"

"Quelch? No! I expect he's in his study—I told you I heard him telling Prout he was going to work on that rot of his. But I say, you fellows, never mind Quelch! I say, I've done it."

"You've done what, ass?"

"Copped Skinner!" chuckled the fat Owl, "I say, I expect he's yelling to be let out by this time. You can go up and hear him, if you like. He, he, he! You couldn't let him out—I've got the key, and I'm jolly well keeping it! He, he, he!"

"Bother Skinner, and bother you, you fat ass!" answered Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, Toddy—seen Quelch about anywhere?"

"Not since dinner," answered Peter Todd. "Want him?"

"Not a lot—in fact he's precisely the johnny we don't want. Look here, you chaps, Quelch has either gone out, or he's dissolved into thin air like that chap Mercury in the Aeneid. Which do you think is likely?"

"Gone out, I should say," said Harry, laughing.

"Looks like it," said Johnny Bull.

"Must be gone out," said Nugent. "We'll chance it, what?"

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

And that was that! Satisfied, at last, that Quelch with his gimlet-eyes was off the scene, probably covering the miles with his long strides at a safe distance from Greyfriars, the chums of the Remove lost no further time. In a quiet corner of the old Cloisters, they dropped out over an ivied wall, and vanished into space. And after a walk through Friardale Wood, there was tea at Cliff House, and all was calm and bright!

CHAPTER IV

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Don't bother now—"

"But I say—"

"It's calling-over, fathead! Can't you hear the bell?"

"Yes, but—"

"Scat!"

Five fellows were in a hurry! They had no time to waste on Billy Bunter. Time pressed. Moments were precious.

The bell was ringing for calling-over. Many fellows were in hall already, and others on their way thither. Harry Wharton and Co. were coming into the House at a trot, when the fattest figure at Greyfriars interposed.

The Famous Five had intended to get back from Cliff House in good time, with a good margin. As they were supposed to be within gates, it was obviously judicious not to risk being late for call-over. Quelch, however long his walk, if he had gone out on a grind, was certain to be back for call-over, for it was his turn to call the names in hall. It behoved the truants to be back before Quelch.

So they had intended. But the best intentions are not always carried out. The best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley, as the poet has told us. Instead of coming in early, with a margin to spare, the Famous Five were barely on time for roll.

There had been pleasant chat at Cliff House over the tea-cups. Then, it having transpired that the fastening of Marjorie's hand-bag was broken, Bob Cherry had undertaken to repair it. Bob was a willing worker, but not a skilful one. The last state of that fastening proved worse than its first, after Bob had manipulated it. So Frank Nugent had taken it in hand, and as he had to set right not only the original defect, but Bob's handling of it, it had taken time.

And so it had come about that the Co. had left Cliff House later than planned. They had trotted all the way back through Friardale Wood, and clambered in over the Cloister Wall, breathlessly, just in time to hear the bell ring for call-over. In such circumstances, they naturally had no time to spare for William George Bunter.

But Billy Bunter was not to be denied. He grabbed Harry Wharton's arm, as the Famous Five were trotting on.

"I say, Harry, old chap—"

"Let go my arm, you fat ass!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently. "The bell may stop any minute—"



"I say, Harry, old chap," said Bunter

"Yes, but about Skinner—"

"Bother Skinner, and bother you."

"But I say, here's the key." The fat Owl held up a large key. "I say, it served Skinner jolly well right to lock him in the box-room, after what he did, you know, but I don't want to make him miss call-over—I don't want him in a row with Quelch, you know—and Quelch takes roll this time—"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry. "Mean to say that you haven't let him out yet, you fat fozzling fathead?"

"Well, I wasn't in a hurry to clamber up all those stairs—I mean, serve him jolly well right to keep him there, after what he did. I say, you cut up and let him out, old chap, will you?" Bunter held out the key.

"Cut up yourself, fathead."

"Well, look here, I expect he'll be in a pretty bad temper, after a half-holiday in the box-room," said Bunter, uneasily. "If I let him out, he'll guess that it was me locked him in, see? I don't want a scrap with Skinner. Of course, I'd knock him spinning as soon as look at him, but—but—"

Bob Cherry stopped and looked back. Nugent, Johnny Bull, and the nabob, had already gone in.

"Come on, Wharton!" bawled Bob. "What are you stopping for? Waiting for the bell to stop, or what?"

"Coming!" called back Harry.

"But I say, old chap, I'm not going to have Skinner pitching into me, if I let him out—I say, you take this key, and go up—"

"No time!"

With that, Harry Wharton unhooked the fat paw from his sleeve, and cut on after his comrades. Billy Bunter was left to release his prisoner from the box-room, or to leave him there, just as the spirit moved him to do.

It was upon the latter course that the fat Owl decided. Really, he did not want his retaliation on Skinner to go to the length of making him miss calling-over. But still more he did not want an enraged Skinner punching him right and left when he was let out! He slipped the key back into his pocket, and rolled on to hall.

Harry Wharton overtook Bob at the door, and they followed the others in. Breathless, but on time, they joined the ranks of the Remove. They cast rather anxious glances towards the dais at the upper end of hall, where the master on duty would stand to call the names. To their relief, Quelch was not there. Generally, if not always, Quelch was punctually on time. But on this occasion he seemed a laggard. Prout, and Twigg, and Hacker, and Wiggins were there: but Quelch was not.

"Good luck!" whispered Bob Cherry. "The old bean's not come in yet, and he won't notice that we cut in at the last minute."

"The goodfulness of the luck is terrific."

The Famous Five were feeling at their ease now. There they were, in their places in the Remove, ready to meet Quelch's eyes when he came in to take roll. There was nothing to indicate that five "gated" juniors had been out of gates at all. So all was well!

The bell ceased to ring. Billy Bunter, last to arrive, rolled in as Wingate of the Sixth was about to close the door. The prefect gave him a look: however, he allowed him to roll on and join the Remove, and the door shut. The fat Owl gave Harry Wharton a reproachful blink.

"Look here, Wharton, it's your fault if Skinner cuts roll—!" he squeaked.

"Fathead!" answered Harry.

"You jolly well know that I asked you to cut up and let him out—"

"Blitherer!"

"Well, I never meant Skinner to cut roll, and it's your fault—"

"You fat ass," said Bob Cherry, "Skinner isn't cutting roll. What are you driving at? Skinner's here."

"Eh! Don't talk rot, Cherry—"

"Look, fathead!"

Bob caught hold of a fat shoulder, and jerked Bunter round, with one hand: and with the other, pointed to a junior who was standing between Snoop and Stott. Billy Bunter blinked at that junior, and almost fell down in his astonishment. Skinner, so far as Bunter knew, was still locked in the Remove box-room. Yet there he was!

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Is—is—is that Skinner?"

"Or his ghost," said Bob.

"Bib—bib—bib—but—but he's in the box-room!" gasped Bunter.

"Looks as if he isn't."

"B-b-but how did he get out, then? I've still got the key! He's too jolly funky to try getting out of the window—"

"How did you get out, Skinner?" asked Bob.

Skinner stared round at him.

"Out of where?" he asked.

"The box-room—"

"I haven't been in the box-room. What do you mean? I've been out of gates most of the afternoon—only came in ten minutes ago."

"Oh, my hat!"

The Famous Five chuckled. Bunter, evidently, hadn't after all locked Skinner in that box-room. He fancied that he had: but quite evidently, he hadn't.

Billy Bunter blinked and blinked at Skinner, feeling as if his fat head was turning round.

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I did lock him in," he breathed. "I jolly well know that I locked him in and I've got the key in my pocket."

"Fathead! You locked nobody in—"

"But I—I—I did!" breathed Bunter. "I tell you I was in the landing cupboard, and heard him go in, and nipped out and pulled the door shut and locked it, and cut. I tell you I know I did."

"You unutterable ass, if you locked anybody in, it wasn't Skinner."

"Oh, crikey! Think a fellow went up to the box-room, and I got him thinking it was Skinner!" gasped Bunter as that possibility dawned on his fat mind.

"No, ass! The Remove are all here, every man in the form."

"But—but it was somebody—"

"Fathead! You fancied it—"

"I—I didn't! I—I did lock up somebody, and he's still there—he must be, as I've got the key in my pocket—"

"Rubbish!" said Bob. "But we'll soon see if anybody's missing, when Quelch calls the names. I wonder why he doesn't come in."

Others, as well as Bob Cherry, wondered why Quelch did not come in. Never before had Quelch been late for a duty. But he was now several minutes late, and still there was no sign of him. Prout, Wiggins, and Hacker were glancing at the door: and exchanging remarks. Finally, Prout spoke to Wingate, who left the hall: and everyone present guessed that the captain of Greyfriars had been despatched to remind Quelch that he was on duty.

But a few minutes later, Wingate came back alone.

"Where the dickens is Quelch?" murmured Bob. "Hasn't he come in from his grind yet?"

"Looks like it!" said Harry.

"Quelch is never late," said Nugent.

"He's late this time."

"The lateness is terrific."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Prout's going to take the roll."

The prefects called for silence, and the buzz of whispering died away. Mr. Prout proceeded to call the roll, taking the place of the master on duty who was so unaccountably absent. Billy Bunter listened with intent fat ears, wondering who was going to be missing. Somebody, in one or other of the forms, had to be missing, since the fat Owl was quite certain that somebody was locked in the box-room. But, to his utter amazement, nobody was missing—every man in every form answered to his name. Nobody was missing,—excepting the master who should have taken roll: yet it was quite certain that somebody was under lock and key in the Remove box-room. It was a bewildered Bunter who rolled out of hall after calling-over.

CHAPTER V

KNOCK! Knock!

"Oh, my hat! Listen!"

"Somebody's there!"

"Kicking up a row, too—"

"The rowfulness is terrific."

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged startled glances. After calling-over, they had come up to the Remove studies. The fat Owl of the Remove was so positive that he had locked somebody in the box-room, that they thought it as

well to make sure: for certainly, if there was anyone locked in that box-room, it was high time that he was let out!

So they came up the Remove passage, and mounted the stair at the end: and then the sound of knocking from above impinged upon their ears. Someone in a room above was knocking on a door! That certainly, bore out Bunter's statement: though who it could possibly be, they had no idea. No Greyfriars fellow was missing.

Knock! knock! knock!

"It's somebody," said Bob, with a whistle. "Who the dickens—"

"That ass Bunter—"

"He's locked in somebody or other—"

"The house-porter might have gone up for something," said Nugent. "Anyhow, we'd better see."

"Come on."

The juniors hurried up the box-room stair. Knock! knock, came in greeting, louder now that they were near at hand. They ran across the landing to the box-room door, and Bob tried the handle.

"Locked!" he said.

Knock! knock! knock!

"That fat chump was right—he's locked in somebody," muttered Bob. "Goodness knows who! Hark!"

From within the box-room came a voice. The prisoner had doubtless heard the handle turn, and knew that someone was outside.

"Is someone there? Unlock this door at once! Do you hear?"

Five fellows jumped almost clear of the landing!

They knew that voice!

It was the very last voice they would have expected to hear. But they knew it. There was no mistaking the tones of Henry Samuel Quelch!

"Quelch!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Quelch! Oh, crumbs!"

"Quelch! Oh, scissors!"

"Quelch! Oh, holy smoke!"

Everyone had wondered where Quelch was. The Co. had supposed that he had not yet come in from a grind. Evidently, now, he had not gone out on a grind! For it was Quelch in the box-room!

"Quelch!" breathed Harry Wharton. "Oh! That born idiot Bunter—."

Knock! knock!

"Who is there? Open this door! Who is there?"

"It—it—it's us, sir!" stammered Harry. "Is—is—is that Mr. Quelch?"

"It is, Wharton! Did you lock me in?"

"Oh! No, sir! Certainly not, sir!" gasped the captain of the Remove. "We hadn't the faintest idea you were here, sir."

"Open the door at once."

"The—the key isn't here, sir—."

"Upon my word! Wharton, I have been locked in! Hours—hours—I tell you, hours ago, I came up, and some boy was hidden in the cupboard on the landing, and he locked me in—do you hear? I have been locked in this box-room for hours! From time to time I have knocked on the door, but no one appears to have heard! Some Remove boy locked me in—."

"He—he—he couldn't have meant it, sir!" gasped Harry. "He couldn't have seen you, sir—he must have fancied it was some Remove fellow—nobody would lock you in if he knew, sir—."

"No doubt, Wharton, no doubt! But he will be punished with the greatest severity for playing so foolish a trick, which has resulted in my spending hours—I tell you, hours—in this box-room! I shall cane him very severely indeed! However, what is urgent now is to release me from this room! Go down and find the house-porter, and tell him to bring his bunch of keys—one of them will fit the lock."

"Certainly, sir."

The Famous Five hurried down the box-room stair. In the Remove passage below they looked at one another, eloquently.

"That awful ass Bunter—!" breathed Bob.

"That benighted idiot Bunter—!" said Johnny Bull.

"Quelch wasn't gone out after all!" said Nugent. "Oh, my hat! He was locked in that box-room—."

"That terrific ass Bunter—."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"It's tough on Quelch," he said. "But—that fat idiot did us a good turn without knowing it. We couldn't have gone over to Cliff House if he hadn't copped Quelch thinking it was Skinner—!"

"We couldn't!" agreed Harry Wharton. "So perhaps it's all for the best—though I don't suppose Quelch would think so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hardly!" chuckled Nugent. "Not a whisper about Bunter, you fellows! Quelch will take his skin off if he spots him."

"Not a syllable," said Harry. "I'll cut down to the house-porter—."

"Bunter's got the key," said Johnny.

"Yes, but we'd better not know anything about that, fathead! Phipps will have a key that will work the oracle."

Harry Wharton ran down the stairs.



He rustled down the passage and passed the Juniors

Five minutes later the box-room door was open, and Mr. Quelch came down. He came down with a set face and glinting eyes. Seldom, or never, had Quelch been seen in such a "bait". He rustled down the Remove passage, and passed the Famous Five like a thundercloud. He disappeared down the staircase, and the juniors looked at one another.

"Did he look wild?" murmured Nugent.

"Sort of!" murmured Bob.

"The esteemed Quelch is terrifically infuriated!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There will be a preposterous row."

"That ass Bunter—!"

"Keep it dark," said Bob.

"Yes, rather."

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled up the passage. "I say, I've just passed Quelch on the stairs—he looks savage about something! Has he been up here?"

"He has, you benighted chump."

"Well, something seems to have upset him, from the way he looked," said Bunter. "I wonder what it was? But I say, you fellows, here's the key, if one of you will go up to the box-room. I tell you there's somebody there, though I can't guess who it is. I jolly well know I locked somebody in, though it couldn't have been that cad Skinner after all. One of you go up and let him out—."

"He's let out, ass," said Bob Cherry. "Phipps let him out with his key."

"Oh! Who was it, then?" asked Bunter.

"Quelch!"

"Eh?"

"Quelch!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter gazed at the Famous Five in horror. His little round eyes almost bulged through his big round spectacles.

"Did—did—did you say Quik—quik—Quelch?" he stuttered.

"Yes, ass!"

"Yes, blitherer."

"Yes, ditherer."

"So—so—so that's why he was looking so wild!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, you fellows, n-n-not a word! N-n-not a syllable! I—I say, kip-kop-keep it dud-dud-dark! Oh, crikey! Quelch! Oh, crumbs! Quelch! Oh, jiminy! I say, there'll be a row. There'll be an awful row! Oh, lor'! I—I—I hope Quelch won't find out that it was me!"

Harry Wharton and Co. shared that hope! It was really awful to contemplate what would happen to Bunter if Quelch found out. Fortunately, that hope was well-founded! Fortunately, very fortunately for the fat and fatuous Owl, Quelch never found out!

THE END



CHAPTER I

“MOVING on, guvnor?”

“No.”

“Sticking to this pitch?”

“Yes.”

“We ain’t doing much business ’ere.”

“I know that.”

“The people don’t come—”

“I know they don’t.”

“Well, then, why not move on?” asked Monty Chipmunk, with a puzzled frown. “We struck a bad patch ’ere. Wussn any we’ve struck for dog’s ages. But you got the ole country to choose from, Mr. Pipper, so why not move on afore the circus goes right down and out?”

Mr. Pipper, proprietor of Pipper’s Imperial Circus, made no reply to that, beyond a grunt. He was sitting on the step of his van, in the circus camp on a Hampshire common. His plump face was gloomy. Generally Mr. Pipper,

plump and ruddy, was also genial and cheery. Now he looked as if most of the troubles of the universe had settled down on his plump shoulders.

Jack Free looked at him curiously. Like his friend Monty Chipmunk the clown, "Jack of All Trades" was puzzled. Pipper's Imperial had undoubtedly struck a bad patch. Business had been bad—very bad indeed, since the circus had camped on Woodfield Common. Even the "Handsome Man", with his marvellous riding act, seemed to fail for once as a draw. Mr. Chipmunk turned his somersaults and cracked his ancient jokes to a half-empty tent. Jack, like Chip, wondered why the Guvnor did not move on in quest of better fortune. The whole company knew that the circus was losing money day by day: and that, obviously, could not go on for ever.

"There ain't much to be done, guvnor, if we stick 'ere!" went on Chip, persuasively.

"Don't I know it?" snapped Mr. Pipper. "Think I need a wooden-headed, fatheaded, dunderheaded clown to tell me that, Monty Chipmunk? I shouldn't wonder if it was your face that keeps the public away. Or mebbe it's them old wise-cracks that you've cracked agin and agin, till the people in front yawns their heads off, or goes to sleep!"

Chip winked at Jack Free, with the eye furthest from Mr. Pipper, and Jack smiled. Mr. Pipper was in a worried and troubled mood: and if it relieved him to blow off steam at the expense of an old pal, Chip did not mind.

"Fat lot of good you are!" went on Mr. Pipper. "And a fat lot of good that kid is, grinning there like a monkey. What are you grinning at, you Jack? Think it's funny for Pipper's Imperial to go down and out?"

Jack's face became serious at once.

"Fat lot of good any of you are!" continued Mr. Pipper. "Even Handsome don't seem to go down with the natives 'ere. They don't care a bean for El Greco and his lions, and Wad Wadi and his elephants is a drug on the market. And mebbe it's all because you've wored them out with your moth-eaten wheezes that came out of the Ark, Monty Chipmunk!"

"Pile it on, guvnor, if it does you good," said Mr. Chipmunk. "We was going for a walk: but we'll stay and hear all your compliments. Carry on."

Snort, from Mr. Pipper.

"Go for your walk, and be blowed," he said. "Don't trouble to come back, either of you."

"But you ain't told me yet why we don't move on, guvnor. What are we sticking 'ere for, with business going from bad to worse?"

Mr. Pipper gave the clown an exasperated glare.

"You're a fool, Monty Chipmunk—"

"Thanks, guvnor."



"What are you grinning at?"

"And an idjit—"

"Thanks agin."

"And a wooden-headed chump, but even a fatheaded clown with no more brains than a bunny rabbit ought to know that we wouldn't stick on the worst pitch we've ever struck, if we could 'elp it," hooted Mr. Pipper.

"And why can't we 'elp it, guvnor?"

"I'll tell you! Got a hundred pounds in your pocket?"

"I've got ninepence!" sighed Mr. Chipmunk.

"You Jack—you got a hundred pounds in your trousis pocket?"

"Only sixpence, sir," answered Jack.

"Well, then!" snorted Mr. Pipper, "I ain't got much more in mine. And if a hundred pounds don't turn up from somewhere, we're stuck. I've got bills to meet. Praps you've never 'eard of bills to meet? Praps you don't know that when money goes out, and don't come in, the accounts get into the red? I spose a fool of a clown wouldn't know that, or a fool of a kid either. So I'm telling

you. A hundred pounds is wanted afore the circus can take to the road agin, and if it don't turn up, we got to stick 'ere till the bailiffs is put in. Now you know why we ain't moving on, Monty Chipmunk."

Chip gave a low whistle.

"As bad as that, guvnor?" he asked.

"Jest as bad as that, and worse! And now you know, go for your walk, and don't worrit a man that's worrited already, blow the pair of you."

"I'm awfully sorry, sir—!" said Jack.

"Fat lot of 'elp that will be!" snorted Mr. Pipper.

"But I say, guvnor—!" began Chip.

"Don't say any more. You've made me tired already."

"If I could do anything—"

"There's one thing you can do, Monty Chipmunk—you can take your face away—if you call it a face. It don't look much like one, to me."

"Praps we'd better go for that walk, Jack!" murmured Mr. Chipmunk, and Jack of All Trades nodded, and they walked away together: Mr. Pipper staring after them with a thunderous brow as they went.

CHAPTER II

"CIRCUS luck, Jack!" said Mr. Chipmunk, shaking his head. "You 'ave your ups, and you 'ave your downs: and when you 'ave the ups, you feel on top of the world, and when you get the downs, you get the 'ump along with 'em, Jack! And has old Pipper got the regler, blinking, camellious 'ump? I'll say he has!"

Jack made no reply.

The two pals of Pipper's Imperial Circus had stopped, to sit on a stile in a leafy lane, after their walk. Both of them were rather glad to get away from the circus camp for a while, with Mr. Pipper in his present gloomy, pessimistic, exasperated mood. Nobody at Pipper's, in fact, had been looking very cheery, of late. Salaries were in arrears: business was bad, and the outlook uncertain. Chip was not the only member of the circus company who had wondered why the Guvnor did not move on and look for better business elsewhere. Chip and Jack, at least, now knew the reason: and it worried them. Both of them liked old Mr. Pipper, liable as he was to go off the deep end, and hurl uncomplimentary remarks at all and sundry, when he was under the weather. Either of them would have gone to any length to help the circus-master out of his trouble. But neither of them could help.

"If I had a 'undred quid!" went on Chip, with a sigh. "I'd 'and it over to the Guvnor and glad. But 'ave I got a 'undred quid, Jack? I've got ninepence. Ninepence won't see the Guvnor through, Jack! What?"

Still Jack did not answer.

He was looking along the leafy lane, as if interested in some object at a distance, and seemed to have forgotten that Chip was there at all.

Chip gave him a look.

"Mr. Free," he said, with dignity. "I'm a-talking to you! Praps you don't 'ear me? Or praps you think what a clown has to say ain't worth 'earing, Mr. Free!"

"That old duffer—!" exclaimed Jack.

"Eh?" ejaculated Mr. Chipmunk.

"He'll be off that horse any minute."

"What?"

"Look!" exclaimed Jack. "That old boy oughn't to be riding a fresh horse like that. Look!"

"I was a talking about the Guvnor—"

"Yes, yes, but look at that old boy on that horse! He will have an accident if he doesn't look out."

Jack Free pointed down the lane, and Mr. Chipmunk, at last, turned his attention in that direction. Then his little gnome-like face wrinkled in a grin. What he saw seemed to amuse him.

At a distance, a rider had appeared in sight from another lane. He was a little old gentleman with a fringe of silver hair under his hat. Obviously he had difficulty in managing his horse. It was a fine animal, full of spirit—too full of spirit for the rider, apparently. The old boy, as Jack called him, was riding down the lane towards the stile: but making little progress, for the horse was prancing and curvetting wildly, almost out of control. It looked to Jack as if the animal might bolt, at any moment: in which event the rider was very unlikely to keep his seat, which he had difficulty enough in doing already. And a crash on the hard road would certainly have been a serious matter for a man of his age.

Jack Free had his own troubles, and the Guvnor's troubles, to think of: but he forgot them for the moment, as he watched the prancing horse, and the rider's vain efforts to control it.

"Some rider, what?" grinned Mr. Chipmunk. "That old gent ought to be in a wheelchair, Jack, not in a saddle. My eye! I dessat the gee's been scared by one of them blinking cars whizzing by under his nose! My eye! That would go down as a turn in the ring, Jack." And Mr. Chipmunk chuckled. "Funny, ain't it?"

"It won't be funny, Chip, if he's thrown," said Jack.

"Nor yet it won't!" agreed Chip. "There'll be bones to mend, if he goes down wallop! That old gent should be 'ambling on a quiet old pad-horse, if he wants to ride at all, not on a critter full of beans like that." 'Owever, as I was saying—we're on a bad break at the circus, Jack, and it looks as if Pipper's Imperial is goin' to be a back number. I ain't worriting about myself, Jack—a good clown is always worth his money. Nor you needn't worrit a lot, you being a mere kid with all your life before you. But the Guvnor—" Chip shook his head again, sadly. "It's 'ard on the Guvnor, Jack. One of the best that ever was, with all his flying off the 'andle at times. My eye! I almost wish, Mr. Free, that I knew my way into the back door of a bank!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jack. "Look!"

"I'm a-talking to you, Mr. Free—"

"He's off!"

"If he ain't, he soon will be," said Mr. Chipmunk, glancing down the lane again. "He'll want that wheel-chair presently."

There was a wild clatter of hoofs. The horse, quite out of control now, bolted suddenly. It came towards the stile at a frantic gallop. The reins, lost by the rider, tossed in the air. The old gentleman was still in the saddle, clinging on somehow, but only too evidently in danger of being thrown off headlong at any moment.

"My eye!" said Chip. His face was very serious now. "My eye! He's going! We'll 'ave to 'elp him to the hospital, Jack."

Then Mr. Chipmunk gave a startled yell:

"Jack! Gone mad, boy? Stop! You can't do a thing! Oh, my eye."

Jack did not heed.

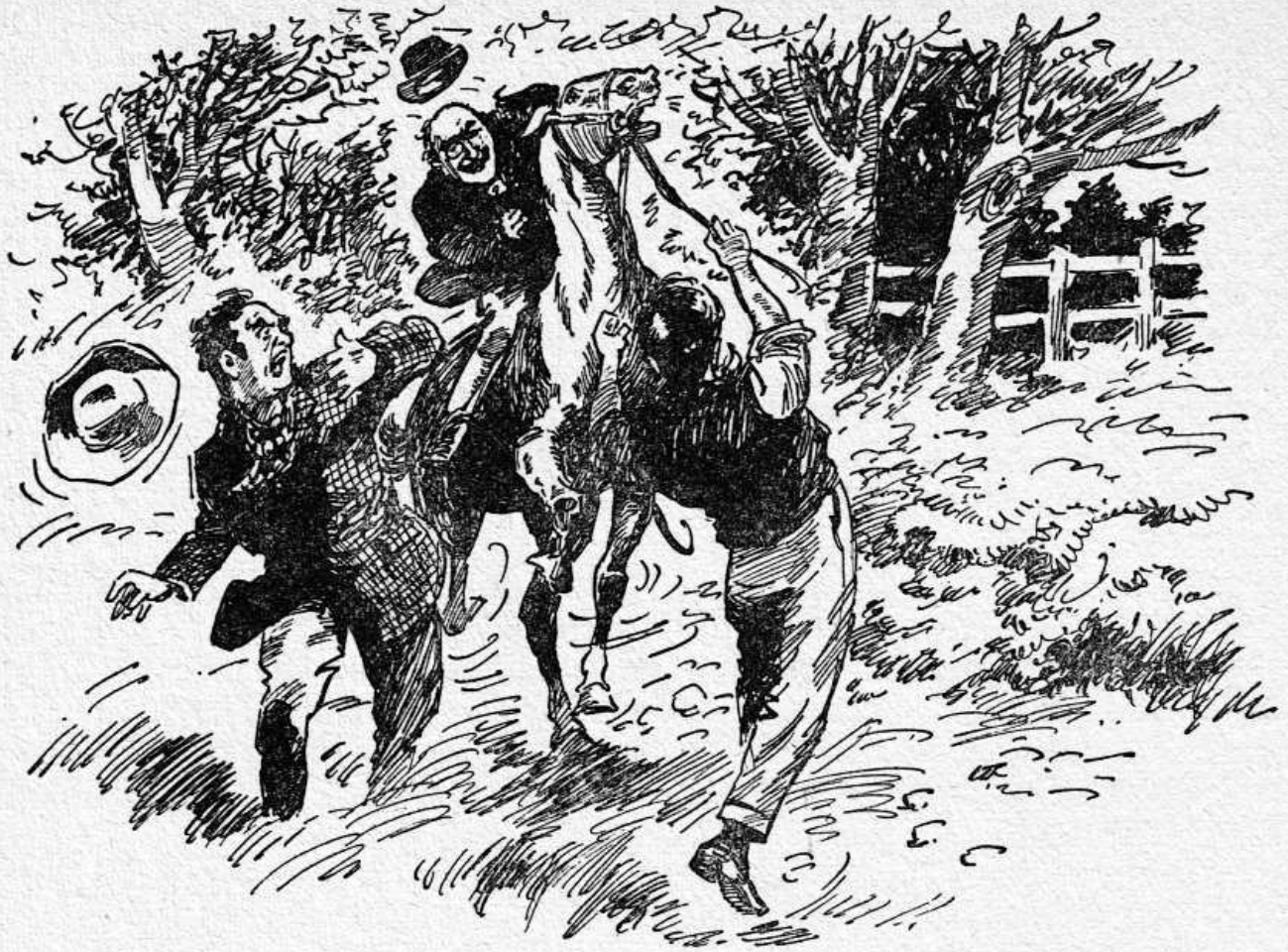
As the frantic horse came racing by, the circus boy leaped from the stile, and shot into the road.

Chip watched, almost spell-bound with horror, fully expecting him to go down, trampled under the wild hoofs.

But Jack Free had learned agility, nimbleness, swift cool judgment, as a rider in the circus ring. How he escaped the tossing head, the lashing hoofs, he hardly knew himself. But he did escape them, and his grasp fastened on the tossing reins, and held.

"Jack!" panted Chip.

The reins were in Jack's hands, and he held to them like iron. His feet kicked up a cloud of dust as he was dragged along by the careering horse. But the tossing head was dragged down, and the frantic gallop slowed. For long, long seconds, the circus boy felt as if his arms were being wrenched from his body, and earth and sky and leafy trees seemed to be spinning about him in a mad



He held on, and the runaway was dragged to a halt

dance. But he held on—and the runaway, at last, was dragged to a halt.—the little old gentleman still in the saddle, white as a sheet, his eyes popping from a colourless face.

CHAPTER III

“MY eye!” gasped Chip.
He came running up.

The horse, trembling now with the reaction after the wild outburst, was quiet enough. Jack held the reins, the horse standing quiet: the little old gentleman staring at Jack, from the saddle, like a man in a dream. Chip came breathlessly up.

“You young hass!” he said.

“It’s all right, Chip—”

"I can see that it's all right now, Mr. Free, but you're a young hass all the same! I could see you trampled to death under them blinking 'oofs, and did it give me a turn?"

Jack laughed, breathlessly.

"You can chortle now, you young hass," said Mr. Chipmunk, severely. "But you was as near as a toucher to being trampled to a pancake. You was asking for it."

"I had to help, Chip—"

"Well, okay, as it's turned out," said Chip. "But if I'd knowed what you was going to do, Mr. Free, I'd have had you by the back of the neck. I tell you, you hadn't an earthly."

"Look as if I had," said Jack.

"You ought to be a blinking pancake this very minute. But I'll say I'm glad you ain't," said Chip.

"Thanks," said Jack, laughing.

"Boy!" The little old gentleman in the saddle found his voice. "Boy! You are a brave lad—a very brave lad. You have saved me from a bad fall—very likely saved my life."

"I'm glad I was able to help, sir," said Jack, modestly.

"Hold the horse while I dismount."

"Certainly, sir."

The little old gentleman clambered down from the saddle.

"Give me the reins."

Jack handed them over.

"I shall lead him home! I am much obliged to you, my boy. I shall reward you for this brave action."

"Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed Jack, colouring.

"What? What? I shall certainly do so. Who are you?"

"My name's Jack Free, sir."

"Boy rider in Pipper's Imperial, sir," put in Chip. "Does he get the 'ands when he cavorts round the ring? I'll say he does, and then some. If you ever want to see some good riding, sir, you jest look in at Pipper's Imperial Circus, sir, on the common by Woodfield—"

"Chuck it, Chip," murmured Jack.

"A circus rider!" said the little old gentleman, scanning Jack. "Well, well, I am sure that a reward will be useful to you, my boy."

"No! No! I don't want anything, really, sir," exclaimed Jack, reddening. "Please say no more about it, sir."

"Nonsense! Don't answer back, boy." Boys should not answer back to their elders."



"That's all right, sir," he said

"Oh! No, sir! But—"

"I have said that I shall reward you, and I shall certainly do so." With the reins lopped over his arm, the little old gentleman groped in a pocket.

Jack Free stepped back. Certainly, he had saved the little old gentleman from a bad fall, and in all probability saved his life. But equally certainly, he did not want to be rewarded for his services. Chip gave him a comical look.

"Don't you be a young hass!" he whispered.

"Come on, Chip—time we got back to camp," said Jack.

"Stop, please!" rapped out the old gentleman. He was going through pocket after pocket. "Good gad! I must have forgotten my wallet. I have nothing on me, boy."

Jack Free was glad to hear it.

"That's all right, sir," he said.

"It is not all right! Stop!"

"Old on, Mr. Free, when your elders is a-talking to you," said Chip.

"I am Colonel Ponsonby, of Ponsonby Hall, near Woodfield," said the little old gentleman. "Come up to the Hall later, boy, and I shall then reward you suitably for what you have done."

"But, sir—"

"I shall expect to see you—"

"But—"

"That is all!" said Colonel Ponsonby: and he walked the horse up the lane, with that, and departed.

Jack smiled.

"That's that!" he said. "May as well walk back to camp now, Chip."

"You'll be going up to the 'all?" said Chip.

"No fear."

"Look 'ere, young Jack, it might be a fiver—or even a tenner!" said Chip, impressively. "You could see that old gent was caked with oof, from the look of him and his gee. Who the dickens are you to turn up your nose at a fiver?"

"I'm not turning up my nose at it, Chip: but I don't want it, and won't have it," answered Jack. "I'm not going anywhere near Ponsonby Hall. I suppose a chap can lend an old man a hand without wanting to be paid for it."

"You're a young hass, Jack."

"You've said that before, Chip! You're repeating yourself, old man."

"I'm tell you that that old gent looked good for a fiver—"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Mebbe a tenner—!"

"Quite possible! Well, I don't want his fivers or his tenners," said Jack. "Come on, Chip, or we shall be late back for grub."

"If I wasn't the best-tempered covey on the road," said Chip, "I'd smack your silly 'ead, Mr. Free."

"Then I'm glad you're the best-tempered covey on the road, Chip," said Jack, laughing. "Look here, Chip, I don't want that old boy's fiver, and I'm not going anywhere near Ponsonby Hall: so chuck it, and come along."

Chip grunted, and came along.

CHAPTER IV

"I'M sorry, Mr. Pipper—"

"Don't bother."

"But—!"

"Did I say don't bother, young Jack, or did I not say don't bother!" hooted Mr. Pipper. "Praps I don't speak plain? Praps you've gone deaf? Or praps you fancy you can cheek your boss because he's down on his luck! What?"

Mr. Pipper's voice, never very subdued, was rather like a trumpet. When the Guvnor was in one of his tantrums, he was wont to put on steam. And Mr. Pipper undoubtedly was in a tantrum now. His voice could be heard far and wide. Jack Free coloured uncomfortably. He did not mind getting the rough edge of Mr. Pipper's tongue, if that afforded Mr. Pipper any relief in a time of trouble; but at the moment he would have preferred to give the Guvnor a wide berth. But he had to speak to him.

It was close on time for the evening show. Chip, in his clown's attire, with his queer little face daubed, and a conical hat on his head, was at the door of the big tent, thumping a drum, and calling on the public generally to "walk up". But there did not seem to be much of a public for circus shows in the neighbourhood of Woodfield, and it was a sparse audience that trickled in. Which, no doubt, added to Mr. Pipper's ire. Pipper's Imperial was doing poor business, and it did not look like improving. When takings did not come up to running expenses, it was a dim outlook for everyone.

Mr. Pipper, in his silk hat and gorgeous waistcoat, his whip under his arm, was about to go in by the staff entrance, when Jack intervened. Mr. Pipper had always been kindness itself to the wandering boy who had been taken on in the circus. But all the milk of human kindness seemed to have exuded from him now. He glared at Jack.

"If you please, sir—!" faltered Jack.

"I don't please!" interrupted Mr. Pipper. "Get out."

"Do listen a minute, sir—."

"I said get out! You waiting for me to lay this 'ere whip round you?" demanded Mr. Pipper.

"I can't ride this evening," blurted out Jack. "I—I'm sorry, but—but through something that happened this afternoon, I'm stiff all over, and I couldn't ride even a pad-horse, sir, let alone go over the banners and through the hoops. I'm very sorry sir—."

"Blue blazes!" ejaculated Mr. Pipper. "You going off work because your salary ain't been paid for a week? Is that it?"

Jack crimsoned.

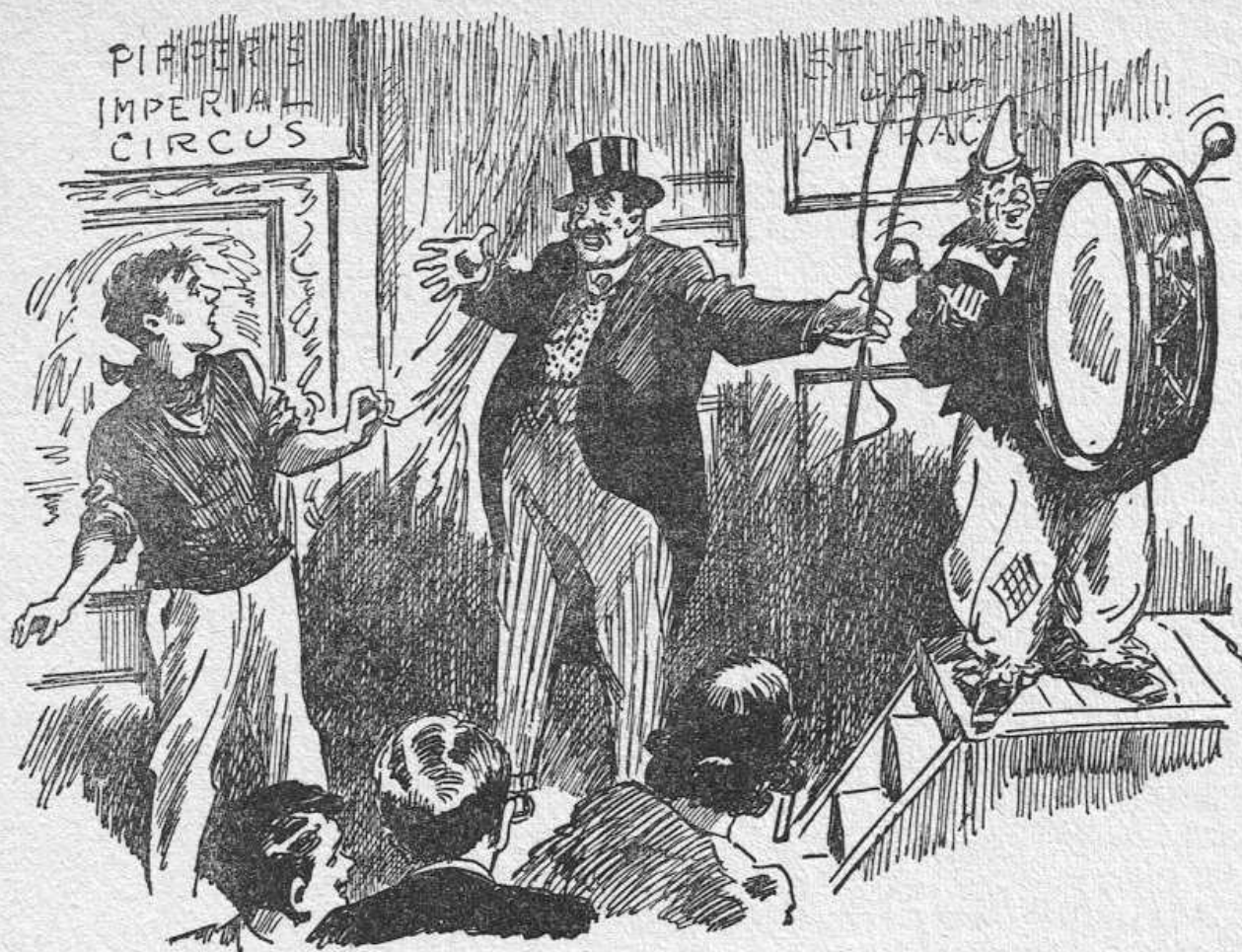
"No! No! No!" he exclaimed. "You couldn't think that of me, Mr. Pipper. After all your kindness to me—."

"After all my kindness to you, you're going to let me down, what?"

"No! No! But—but—."

"And what's 'appened to knock you out?" snorted Mr. Pipper. "You went out for a walk with Chip. Tired you out, what? You a delicate little flower that can't walk a mile without getting wore out?"

"My arms are too stiff to hold the reins—."



"If you please, sir—!" faltered Jack

"And for why? What have you been up to, I'd like to know?"

"I stopped a runaway horse in the lanes—."

"Blue blazes!" roared Mr. Pipper. "And can't you stop a runaway horse, and you a circus rider, without becoming a hospital case? Made of putty?"

"It wasn't easy—."

"You like things easy, what? You joined a circus for an easy life, did you? You wanted a feather bed, and a nurse to tuck you up o' nights, what? Champagne and oysters, praps—or mebbe you'd prefer caviare? And a nice easy armchair to sit in, and a footstool for your poor little feet?"

"I—I had to stop that horse, sir—."

"Oh! You had to, had you? Are you paid to ride in my ring, or are you paid to walk about Hampshire stopping runaway horses?"

"The rider was in danger—."

"Was he?" snorted Mr. Pipper. "If he couldn't ride, what was he doing

on a 'orse? Your special business to look after coves who get on 'orses and can't ride 'em?"

Poor Jack stood silent, his face burning. He had hardly noticed it, in the excitement of the tussle with old Colonel Ponsonby's horse: but the strain on his arms had been a terrible one. They ached from shoulder to wrist. For the pain itself he cared little: he was hardy and strong, and could stand it. But until he pulled round, he could not carry on with his circus act. To ride in the ring was simply to fall into the tan.

"So you're cutting out your act, are you?" went on Mr. Pipper, as he did not speak. "Well, it ain't much of an act—you don't fancy you're a draw like Handsome, do you?"

"No, no, of course not—."

"Think the people in front will miss you, and weep briny tears?" Mr. Pipper was sarcastic. "Think they'll ask for their money back, because you ain't in the ring? That the big idea?" Mr. Pipper snorted. "Well, stand out if you like, and take it from me that you won't be missed, and that nobody will notice whether you're there or not! Got that, young Jack?"

"Yes, sir!" faltered Jack.

"And get this, too," said Mr. Pipper. "You ain't much use, and you ain't much ornymment, but you got your job to do in this 'ere circus, s'long as you're on the pay-roll, and if you're a-throwing it in my face that you ain't been paid regler—."

"Oh! No! No! I—."

"If that's it, what's keeping you 'ere?" hooted Mr. Pipper. "It's a sinking ship, and rats runs away from a sinking ship. And the sooner you do it, the better. You're sacked."

"Oh, sir—!"

"Don't 'oh, sir' me! You're sacked! Praps you'll tell me next that you ain't going without your pay? Well, I ain't so far on the rocks that I can't cough up a pound or two. You come to my van arter the show, and you'll be paid, if that's what's worriting you."

"It isn't! I—."

"You'll be paid, and you'll go! You're sacked! Now get out of my way, if you don't want this 'ere whip round your legs."

Jack stepped aside, and the circus master, with a final glare, stamped into the tent. Only too clearly, Mr. Pipper's financial difficulties had told on his temper, and he was not in a reasonable mood. Jack's request to be let off the evening show had come as a last straw, as it were, on the top of everything else, and Mr. Pipper had exploded rather like a bomb. Jack had had the full benefit of it. He did not feel resentment for the Guvnor's hard words: he



"You ain't much use, and you ain't much ornymment . . ."

owed Mr. Pipper too much for past kindnesses for that. But he was feeling utterly miserable as he walked away—sacked.

CHAPTER V

"Ow's the fins?" asked Chip.

The performance was over. The last blare from the big tent had died away. The sparse audience that had trickled in, had trickled out. Mr. Pipper had gone to his van, with a gloomy brow, doubtless to wrestle there with his financial problems. Jack Free was sitting in the doorway of the little tent he shared with Chip, looking out over the grassy common, bright in the light of a full round moon. His face was overcast: but he tried to smile, as Mr. Chipmunk came along and addressed him.

"Okay, Chip," he answered. "Much better."

"You've rubbed 'em with that stuff I give you?"

"Yes, lots of times. They don't ache so much now. I—I wish I could have put on my act, Chip. But I—I couldn't."

"Of course you couldn't, you young idjit," said Mr. Chipmunk. "And don't you mind the Guvnor blowing off steam—."

"You heard him?" asked Jack.

Mr. Chipmunk grinned.

"If everybody between Bristol one way, and London the other, didn't 'ear him, there must be a lot of deafness about," he said. "Yes, I 'eard him, young Jack! Don't you mind his temper—he's got a lot of trouble on 'and—."

"I don't!" said Jack. "But—."

"You'll be all right to-morrer—."

"There won't be any to-morrow here for me, Chip. I'm sacked."

Chip shook his head.

"That was only a spot of steam," he said. "I couldn't count how many times the Guvnor's sacked me, when his steam was up. But he always comes round. Why, bless your little 'eart, the Guvnor never sacks nobody. He keeps a man on, good times or bad, and between you and me, young Jack, that's one reason why he's hit a bad spot. Too generous, the old Guvnor."

"He's a good sort," said Jack. "I don't care if he blows off steam at me, Chip: not the least little bit in the world. I don't think he meant what he said, either—it was only that he's out of sorts. He knows I wouldn't let him down if I could help it. But—."

"Forget it," said Chip.

"I can't forget that I'm sacked, Chip. Mr. Pipper told me to go to his van for my money after the show. I'd rather slip away quietly without seeing him again—."

"You try it on, and I'll lug you back by the blinking ears, Mr. Free," said Chip, emphatically. "Don't you get your back up with the old Guvnor, Jack, or you and me is going to 'ave a row."

"I haven't, Chip! Not in the least. I'd just love to help him if I could," said Jack. "And it would help him a little, if only a little, to cut down the salary-list—even my little bit."

"If that's the idea, forget it!" grunted Chip. "You're worth your money 'ere, Jack, even if you do 'ave to cut a turn now and then owing to your fancy for stopping runaway 'orses and saving silly old gents from a-breakin' of their silly old necks! Jest forget it."

Jack sat silent, his face clouded.

"Come along to the mess-tent, kid," said Chip. "I feel like 'aving some supper, arter performing to the crowned 'eads of 'ampshire. 'Ere, what may you 'appen to want, Fred?"



"I am Colonel Ponsonby's valet"

Fred, the stableman, came up. He was followed by a plump man dressed in dark clothes: a stranger to Jack and Chip.

"This 'ere gent is asking to see Mr. Free," answered Fred. "That'll be young Jack, I s'pose."

"Well, 'ere's young Jack, if he's wanted," said Chip.

"'Ere you are, sir!" said Fred, and he departed, leaving the plump man eyeing Jack curiously. Jack eyed him in return, wondering what a stranger could want with him.

"You are Mr. Free?" asked the plump man.

"I'm Jack Free," answered Jack, with a smile.

"Then you are the boy who stopped my master's horse this afternoon, and, I understand, saved him from a fall."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jack. "Yes! But what—?"

"I am Colonel Ponsonby's valet. He has sent me to bring this letter to you."

The plump man fished an envelope out of his pocket. He held it out to the circus boy. Jack took it from his hand.

"There is no answer!" added the plump man, and with that he turned and walked away.

Jack was left staring at the envelope in his hand.

Chip chuckled.

"No use saying no to that old gent, Jack," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if he's coughed up that fiver, in that wallop. Open it and see."

"I hope not," said Jack. "I can't take a reward for what I did."

"If there's a fiver in that there wallop, Jack, and you don't want it, you can 'and it over to yours truly!" said Chip. "I got a use for fivers. But praps its only a letter of thanks or something of that sort. Anyhow, you won't know what's in it by staring at it."

Jack slit the envelope.

He drew out a folded letter, and as he unfolded it, a slip of engraved paper came to light, folded. Chip gave a whoop.

"What did I tell you, young Jack?" he trilled. "Didn't I tell you that old gent was caked with oof, and wasn't his silly old neck worth a fiver to him? But what does he say?"

With the folded banknote in one hand, Jack held up the letter in the other, and they read it together by the bright moonlight.

To Jack Free.

As you have not called here, as I requested, I am sending you this letter by hand. I quite understand that you do not desire to be rewarded for the great service you rendered me, and I respect your independence. Nevertheless, I insist upon your accepting the enclosed banknote, and shall be very seriously offended if you make any further demur. It does not diminish the gratitude I feel for the brave and generous act in coming to the help of an old man at the risk of your life.

Gilbert Ponsonby.

"Well, blow me up a gum-tree!" said Chip. "Put very nicely, I must say, though a bit as if the old gent had swallowed a dictionary. You jest can't chuck his fiver back at him, Mr. Free."

"But, Chip—"

"But me no buts!" interrupted Mr. Chipmunk. "Want to seriously offend sich a nice old gent?"

"No! But—"

"You got to chew on it, young Jack." Chip chuckled again. "Tain't every circus kid that has a fiver to chew on, neither."

"I know! But—."

"There must have been billygoats in your family, the way you keep on butting," said Chip. "I tell you, you got to stand for it."

Jack nodded slowly.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said. "But—."

"There you go again—but—but—but! Chuck butting, and let's see that banknote—might be a tenner, for all we know! If it's a tenner you're standing me beer, Mr. Free! Let's look at it."

Jack unfolded the banknote.

He glanced at it—and jumped!

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Tenner?" asked Chip. "Golly! I wish I was an old gent with tenners to chuck about, though I wouldn't like to ride like 'im! Is it a tenner?"

"No!" gasped Jack.

"Then what the dickens is it?"

"It—it—it—it's a hundred—!"

Mr. Chipmunk jumped clear of the ground.

"A hundred!" he bawled.

Jack held up the banknote. The moonlight shone on it. Mr. Chipmunk gazed at it with almost unbelieving eyes.

"A 'undred!" he stuttered. "Oh, my only 'at with pink flowers! A 'undred! Oh, my beloved aunt Sempronia! Let me look at it, Jack—it does me good to look at it! A 'undred! A 'undred quids! We ain't dreaming this 'ere, is we, Jack?"

Jack laughed.

"No! It's real—though it doesn't seem real!" he said. "I'm not going to offend the old boy by sending it back, Chip—I couldn't, when the Guvnor's in such a spot!"

"The Guvnor!" repeated Chip, blankly. "What's the Guvnor got to do with it?"

"Guess!" said Jack, laughing. "See you later, Chip!"

"But look 'ere—."

But Jack Free did not "look there". He was running for Mr. Pipper's van, leaving Chip staring after him as he ran.

CHAPTER VI

"YOU!"

"Yes, sir! I—."

"You can step in," Mr. Pipper's voice was quiet and subdued. He smiled

faintly at Jack Free. "Don't be afeared, kid—I ain't going to blow your 'ead off! Jest step in."

Jack stepped into the Guvnor's van.

Mr. Pipper was sitting on his bunk. He had an unlighted cigar in his teeth. On a little trestle table before him were sheets of paper covered with figures. He had a pen in his hand, a spot of ink on his plump nose, and several more on his plump fingers. Apparently Mr. Pipper had been going through accounts, and was still so occupied when Jack Free tapped at the van door and looked in, with a bright and eager face.

Mr. Pipper was no longer in a state of "tantrums". He had a tired and weary look that went straight to the boy's heart. Clearly he had found nothing inspiring in those accounts. He looked, in fact, as he felt—down and out! Pipper's Imperial had often weathered rough times, and pulled through: but this time Mr. Pipper saw no way through. There was not a glimmer of ill-humour about him now. He was only worn and weary.

"I've come, sir—!" began Jack.

"Yup, I told you to come for your money," said Mr. Pipper. "I got it for you, young Jack: that's okay. I said you was sacked—."

"I hope you didn't mean it, sir."

"No more I did, really," said Mr. Pipper. "Jest blowing off steam because everything's at sixes and sevens, and a man's worried, and I'm an ol' fool, I dessay. But you may as well call it the sack, kid, for you'll 'ave to go, and every man 'ere will 'ave to go—and Pipper's Imperial won't be seen on the roads no more. There's been bad times and good times, but I've always 'eld the ol' show together, till now! Now—," Mr. Pipper heaved a deep sigh. "Now the luck's run out to the last drop, and it's the finish."

"But, sir—."

"You're a 'andy lad, Jack, and willing to work, and you'll find something afore long," said Mr. Pipper. "Mebbe old Chip will find a market for his old wheezes, too. I 'ope so. I'm sorry, Jack, that I gave you the rough edge of my tongue. Praps you know that I never meant a word of it. But I'm sorry I let off like that. I'd like you to remember me as a good boss, when the circus is sold up and we're on different roads."

"I shall always remember your kindness to me, sir, taking me in off the road as you did," said Jack. "But—."

"Well, that's the lot," said Mr. Pipper, "and 'ere's what's doo to you—."

"I didn't come here for that, sir."

"Well, it's yourn, anyways, so take it, kid, and good-bye."

"It's not good-bye, sir, if you mean that I'm not sacked after all," said

Jack. "This morning, sir, you told Chip that a hundred pounds would pull you through."

"What about it?"

"I—I want to help—."

"I know you would, Jack, if you could: and if you could find a 'undred pounds a-growing on one of these 'ere Hampshire trees, I'd thank you to catch it in your 'at, and lend it to me!" said Mr. Pipper, with a ghost of a grin. "But you can't 'elp, young Jack—the game's up for Pipper's Imperial, and I got to chew on it."

"Look!" said Jack.

He held up the banknote.

"Eh! What's that?" ejaculated Mr. Pipper.

"It's a banknote for a hundred pounds," said Jack. "I didn't find it growing on a tree, Mr. Pipper—it was sent to me by the old boy whose horse I stopped this morning in the lanes, and—and it's yours, sir."

"I'm dreaming this!" said Mr. Pipper.

Jack laid the banknote on the table, among the many papers. Mr. Pipper blinked at it, and then at the boy.

"A 'undred pounds!" said Mr. Pipper, like a man in a dream. "With a 'undred pounds I could clear up and get on the road again, like I told Chip. And the kid whose 'ead I was a-biting off, walks into my van with a 'undred-pound banknote, and he says, says he, it's yours, says he. You better wake me up, young Jack, me being fast asleep and dreaming."

Jack laughed.

A chuckle was heard at the door, and Chip's little gnome-like face looked into the van.

"You ain't dreaming, guvnor," said Chip. "It's the real goods, guvnor, though you could 'ave knocked me down with a ten-ton lorry when I seed that banknote. Did I tell you, guvnor, when young Jack joined the circus, that he was a mascot? Did I or did I not?"

"You did, Chip!" gasped Mr. Pipper. "And me a-jawing of him for getting crocked stopping a runaway 'orse, and then this a-coming of it!" Mr. Pipper picked up the banknote, and fingered it lovingly. "If you mean this, young Jack—?"

"Of course," said Jack.

"After I was a-biting of your 'ead off—."

"That doesn't matter," said Jack. "You can bite if off again, if it makes you feel better, sir."

"I could jest kick myself," said Mr. Pipper.

"I'll do it for you, if you like, guvnor," said Chip.



"You ain't dreaming, Guvnor," said Chip

"You 'old your row, you old clown," said Mr. Pimper. "Jack, you're to lend me this 'ere banknote, and I'm going to square later when the tide turns: and then I'll make you put it in the bank, and keep it by for a rainy day. Rainy days comes to circus folk! But there's sunny ones, too: and Pimper's Imperial is going to see some of 'em. Now get out while I go through these 'ere accounts again, what has been making my poor old 'ead ache—but they won't make it ache no more!"

Chip pressed Jack's arm, as they walked away from the Guvnor's van.

"Who'd have thought it?" he said.

"Who indeed!" agreed Jack.

"But it's 'appened," said Mr. Chipmunk. "You never knows your luck, Mr. Free. Specially in circus life you never knows your luck. You stops an old gent's 'orse, and saves his silly old neck for him, never dreaming of making as much as a thrippenny bit out of it: and lo and behold, it turns out that you've saved Pimper's Imperial from going to pot. There's ups and downs in circus life, Mr. Free, like I've told you before: and by gum, this is one of the

ups—right up, Mr. Free, up like a blinking Sputnik. It's circus luck, young Jack—jest circus luck!"

"Jolly good luck, anyway," said Jack.

"And then some," said Mr. Chipmunk, "and if I hadn't spent that ninepence I had this afternoon, I'd stand myself an extra beer, jest to celebrate. Which I'll do jest the same, Mr. Free, if you'll lend me that sixpence of yourn."

Jack laughed and handed over the sixpence.

THE END



Smack!—Peele clapped his hand to his ear

CHAPTER I

DICKY was hasty.

Dicky—otherwise Mr. Richard Dalton, master of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood—was a kindly young man. But there was no doubt that he had a slightly hasty temper.

That was how he came to box Peele's ears.

Ears were not boxed at Rookwood. It was a hasty act.

The Fourth Form at Rookwood liked their beak. They always called him "Dicky": not in his hearing, of course. He was even alluded to sometimes as "Old Dicky". On the other hand, nobody liked Peele. Peele had a "catty" temper, and a malicious tongue, and would remember a grudge for a whole term or longer. So when Dicky boxed Peele's ears, it was rather a shock and a surprise, but nobody had any sympathy to waste on Peele.

Dicky, of course, shouldn't have done it. There was a cane in his study,

the accustomed instrument of punishment when punishment was required. Dicky should have walked Cyril Peele off to his study and caned him. Boxing a fellow's ears was "not done".

Dr. Chisholm, certainly, would have raised his eyebrows very expressively at such a hasty act. The other beaks, in Common-Room; would have shaken their heads very seriously at such an incident. Dalton himself, probably, regretted the action a moment after it was performed. But there it was—he did it!

Peele had asked for it, and fully deserved it, and more. Among Peele's other unpleasant characteristics, there was a streak of cruelty. On this especial occasion, Peele was entertaining himself by throwing stones at the pigeons in a corner of the quad. He had no idea that Dicky Dalton was at hand. But as it happened, Dalton was taking a walk under the old Rookwood beeches in morning break, and he came on Peele, just as the marksman landed a stone on an unoffending pigeon.

Smack!

It rang like a pistol-shot. Louder still rang Peele's startled yell that followed the smack.

Peele clapped his hand to his ear, and spun round, to meet his form-master's angry stare.

"You young rascal!" exclaimed Dalton.

"Oh! Oh! Ow! Ooogh!" gasped Peele, rubbing his ear. That ear seemed to have a pain in it. Dicky's smack had landed hard.

That smack, and the yell that followed, had drawn attention. A dozen fellows came running up to see what had happened. Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, Newcome, Mornington, Tubby Muffin, and five or six other fellows, gathered round. Peele, gasping, rubbed his ear—and Dicky Dalton stood with a face that was becoming crimson. He had acted on a hasty impulse, and done that which a Rookwood form-master should not have done: and he felt that he had let himself down in the eyes of his form. He would have given anything to recall that hasty smack. But it was too late.

He strode away and disappeared into the House. A crowd of fellows were left staring at Peele, as he rubbed his burning ear.

"Did Dicky—?" began Jimmy Silver.

"He smacked my head!" hissed Peele. "Smacked a fellow's head! I wonder what Dr. Chisholm would say, if he knew?"

"I expect you asked for it," said Lovell. "What were you doing to make Dicky smack your head?"

Peel did not answer that.

"I jolly well know what he was doing," squeaked Tubby Muffin. "He was stoning the pigeons—I saw him—."

"So that's it, Peele," said Jimmy Silver. "Serves you right! I'd have booted you if I'd seen you."

"Same here!" said Raby and Newcome together.

"He's no right to smack a fellow's head," said Peele, sullenly. "He could whop a fellow if he liked. But he can't box a fellow's ears. I'll jolly well make him sorry for it, too, somehow."

Peele trailed away, still rubbing his ear. The other fellows were left discussing the incident, till the bell rang for third school. They were rather sorry for Dicky who, as they could easily guess, wished that he hadn't acted on a hasty impulse. They were not in the least sorry for Peele. As for his sulky threat to make Dicky sorry for it, they did not heed that at all. When they went in, at the clang of the bell, they expected to hear no more about the incident. But in point of fact, quite a great deal more was going to be heard about it.

CHAPTER II

"PEELE!"

No answer.

"Peele!"

Still no answer.

Cyril Peele sat in his place, in the form. It was Latin in third school that morning, and Peele was looking at his book. He did not look up, and he did not speak, as Dicky Dalton addressed him.

Every other fellow in the Classical Fourth glanced round at Peele.

That Peele, in his usual vicious way, was nursing a grudge, was easy to guess. That he would have wreaked it, in any way he could, was also an easy guess. But disrespectful disregard of his form-master, in the form-room, was hardly the line he would have been expected to take. Yet he sat with his eyes on his book, and Mr. Dalton's voice passed him by like the idle wind which he respected not.

A glint came into Dalton's eyes.

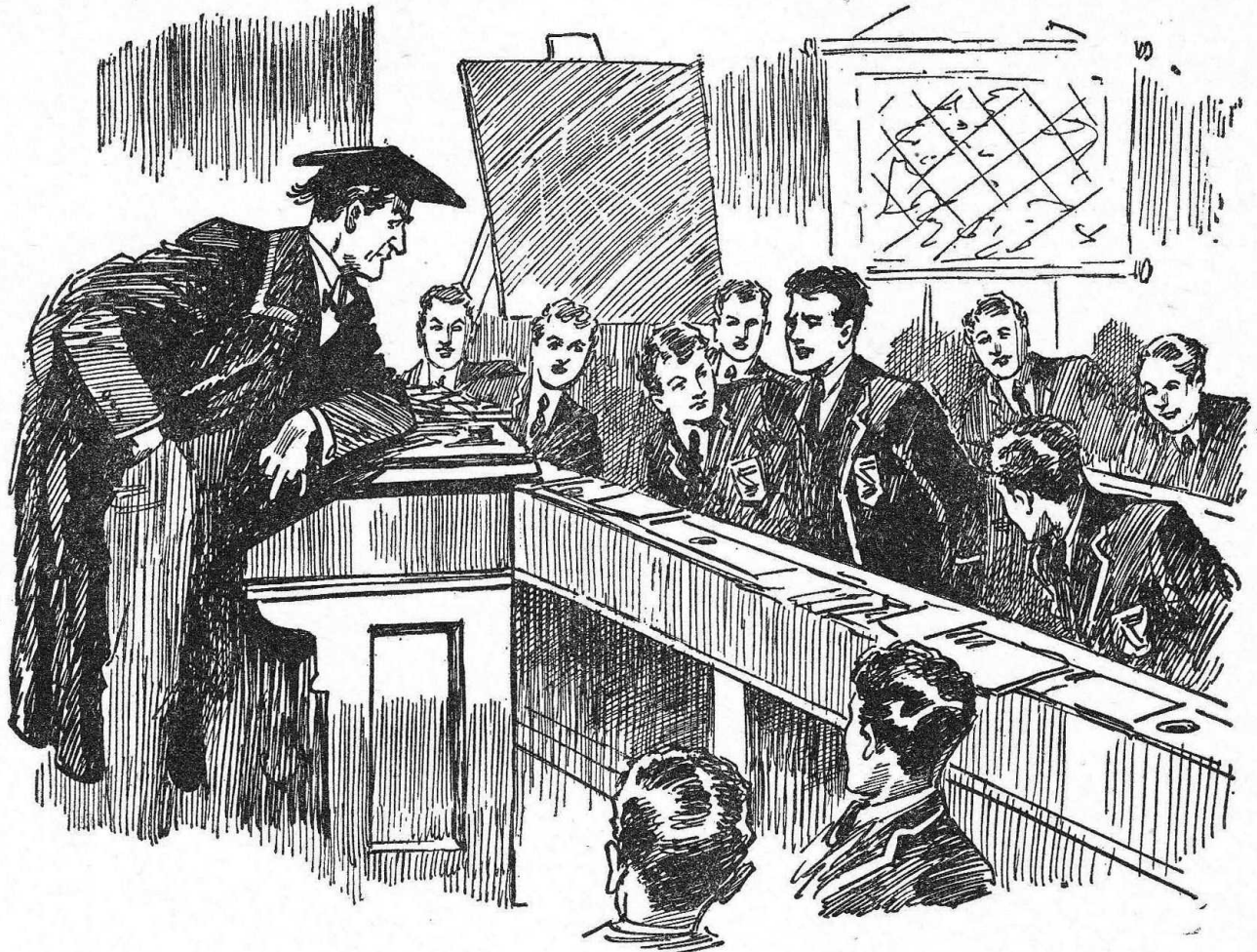
"Peele!" he rapped out, for a third time, in sharper tones. "You will go on."

Jimmy Silver had been on construe. Now it was Peele's turn. But Peele still sat silent and unregarding. Unless he had suddenly gone deaf, it was quite inexplicable.

Oswald gave him a nudge.

"Dicky's speaking to you, Peele," he whispered.

"Eh?" said Peele.



"Did you speak, sir?" he asked

"Peele!" The fourth time Mr. Dalton pronounced that name, was in a voice of thunder.

Then, at last, Peele looked at him.

"Did you speak, sir?" he asked.

"I have called to you four times, Peele. How dare you?"

"Eh?"

"Peele! What does this mean?"

Peele put his hand to his ear, as if in an effort to hear.

"What did you say, sir?"

All eyes were glued on Peele, now. Mr. Dalton came towards him, with a puzzled face. Peele's manner was quite respectful. He was not "cheeking" his beak. But what it all meant was a mystery.

"Asking for it, and no mistake!" Arthur Edward Lovell whispered to Jimmy Silver, and Jimmy nodded.

"Has the fellow gone deaf?" muttered Raby.

"Rot!" said Newcome.

"Well, it looks like it!"

"Bosh!" said Lovell. "He's pulling Dicky's leg."

"Peele! What do you mean by this?" Mr. Dalton's voice was not loud, but deep. "Explain yourself at once."

"I don't mean to be a dunce, sir—"

"What? What? I did not call you a dunce, Peele, as you know perfectly well," exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "What do you mean?"

"Eh?"

"Upon my word! Unless you explain yourself at once, Peele, I shall cane you."

"Oh, sir! I'm sure you wouldn't brain me—"

"What?" gasped Mr. Dalton.

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't hear what you say," said Peele, meekly.

"Are you deaf?" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"Yes, sir, I think I must have gone deaf, through you smacking me so hard on my ear, sir—"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell. There was a buzz of excited whispering in the Classical Fourth.

"You can hear me perfectly well Peele," said Mr. Dalton, breathing hard.

"I am assured, Peele, that you hear every word I speak."

"I don't mean it for cheek, sir—"

"What?"

"It isn't cheek, sir, only I just can't hear you."

Richard Dalton stood looking at him. The whole Classical Fourth looked on breathlessly.

"I'm so sorry, sir," said Peele, meekly. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind speaking louder, sir. I'm trying to hear you, sir."

"Are you telling me, Peele, that you cannot hear what I say?"

"Eh?"

"Can you hear me or not?"

"Do please speak louder, sir! I'm trying to hear! But there's a buzzing in my ear, sir, where you struck me—"

"That will do, Peele."

"Eh?"

Richard Dalton said no more. He went back to his desk, with a heightened colour. Peele sat down, and rubbed his ear.

"You will go on, Mornington," said Mr. Dalton, quietly.

"Yes, sir," said Morny.

The lesson proceeded without a contribution from Cyril Peele. He sat it

out, escaping "con". Richard Dalton gave him no more attention. He did not allow his face to express his thoughts or his feelings. But Jimmy Silver and Co. and all the rest of the Classical Fourth, could guess at his feelings, which could only have been of the greatest and keenest discomfort.

Peele might be playing a trick: he was well known to be as full of malicious tricks as a monkey. On the other hand, if he was telling the truth, the matter was very serious for Dicky Dalton. Boxing ears was, in fact, a perilous practice. It had been known to cause deafness. Had that hasty smack produced so dire an effect on Cyril Peele? Whether that was so, or not, there was no doubt that he was, as he had declared that he would, making Dicky Dalton sorry for that hasty smack.

CHAPTER III

"YOU spoofing worm!"

Thus Arthur Edward Lovell.

After third school, the "Fistical Four" rounded Peele up in the quad. They wanted to know. All the form was buzzing with excitement over the incident. If Peele was playing a part, he certainly played it well: and it certainly looked as if his sudden deafness was genuine. Arthur Edward Lovell, at all events, had no doubts about the matter. He liked Dicky Dalton, and he loathed Peele: so it was all "spoof". Thus did Arthur Edward reason it out!

"Spoofing worm!" repeated Lovell, as Peele did not answer. "Think we're going to believe that that tap made you go deaf?"

"Eh?"

"Making out you can't hear me?" roared Lovell.

"Did you speak?"

"Did I?" gasped Lovell. "You know jolly well I did. You're doing this to pay Dicky out."

"Lout yourself," said Peele.

"Whaat?" stuttered Lovell.

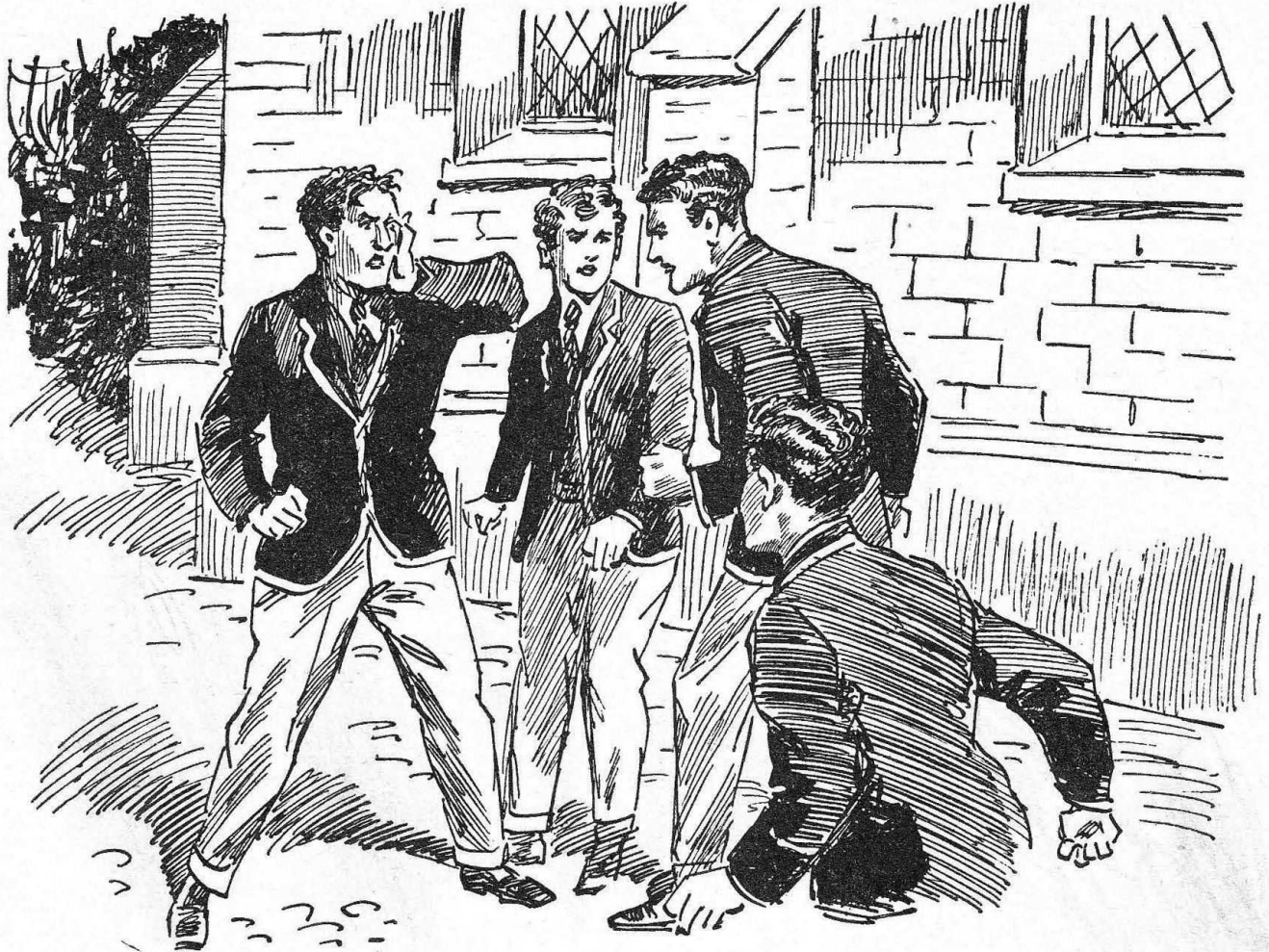
"You call me a lout, and I'll call you one—!"

"I didn't call you a lout! You jolly well know I didn't! You're just playing tricks to make out you can't hear."

"Can you or not, Peele?" asked Jimmy Silver, doubtfully.

"Eh! Did you speak, Silver?"

"It's all gammon," hooted Lovell. "Just one of his tricks to get level with Dicky. Why if this gets around, it will be the talk of the school. Dicky will be in a row with the Head. That's what that spoofing worm wants. Wouldn't he just like to land Dicky in a row with the Big Beak! He's thought this up, since



"Think we believe that tap on the ear made you go deaf?"

Dicky boxed his ears, and he's jumping at the chance. And I'm jolly well going to punch his head for it."

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, barged between, just in time to prevent Edward suiting the action to the word.

"Stop that, ass," said Jimmy. "If he's really deaf—"

"He isn't!"

"Well, he says he is," said Newcome. "If it's true—"

"He couldn't tell the truth if he tried," snorted Lovell. "And he's not going on with this game, and landing Dicky in a row—"

"Here comes Dicky!" murmured Raby. "Quiet!"

Arthur Edward Lovell suppressed his wrath, as Mr. Dalton came into the offing. Richard Dalton's face was very thoughtful, and a little troubled. No doubt he realized how very awkward the affair would be for him, if that hasty smack really produced the result claimed by Peele.

"Peele!" he said, very quietly, taking no notice of the Fistical Four. Peele looked at him.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" he asked.

"I did, Peele," said Mr. Dalton, breathing hard.

"Would you mind speaking a little louder, sir?"

"Cannot you hear me, Peele?"

"I'm sorry, sir, that you hurt me so much. I know you didn't mean to, sir. But I can't help it, can I, sir?"

Mr. Dalton compressed his lips. Jimmy Silver and Co. stood silent. If Cyril Peele was "spoofing", he had the nerve to do it thoroughly. Three members of the Co. were convinced, or almost convinced. Only Arthur Edward Lovell remained fixed in his belief that it was all "spoof". Arthur Edward was not a fellow to change his opinion in a hurry.

"If you really cannot hear, Peele—" said Mr. Dalton.

"Eh?"

"If you really cannot hear," repeated Mr. Dalton, more loudly, "you must see the school doctor about it, Peele."

"Very well, sir."

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances. If Peele was prepared to undergo examination by a medical man, that certainly looked like proof.

Mr. Dalton gave Peele a very, very keen look, and walked away. Peele's eyes glimmered after him as he went. Lovell barely restrained himself till Dalton was gone. Then he burst out:

"You spoofing, diddling, fibbing tick—!"

"Oh, chuck it, Lovell," said Raby. "If it's true, Peele can't help it. Think he'd have the nerve to face the doctor, if he was spoofing?"

"Of course he would!" snorted Lovell. "How's the doc. to know whether he's lying or not? He can hear all the while just as well as I can, and I'm going to punch him for his monkey tricks—."

Three pairs of hands fastened on Arthur Edward Lovell, and he was walked away from the spot by his chums. Peele was left grinning.

CHAPTER IV

"**A**LL spoof, I tell you!" snapped Lovell.

He snapped that statement at tea in the end study.

Three heads were shaken.

By that time, Arthur Edward Lovell was the only fellow in the Classical Fourth who clung stubbornly to the conviction that Peele was playing a mali-



Peele was left grinning

cious part, in retaliation for that smack on his head. Could a fellow keep up such a "spoof" for so long: never once making a false step? Peele, certainly, was a cunning fellow, with all his wits about him, and his wits were very sharp. But it did not seem possible. At dinner, Peele hadn't been able to hear a word. Later, he failed to hear anything that was said to him by other fellows, many of whom doubted, and tried to catch him out. Morny even dropped a coin behind him to surprise him into turning his head, if he could hear it drop. But Peele did not turn his head. In form in the afternoon, Dalton passed him over—no doubt puzzled how to deal with him. After class, Peele was still deaf—and by that time, it was attracting quite a lot of attention.

Obviously, before long, it would come before the Head. If Peele had to see the school doctor about it, the Head would have to know. If Peele actually was "spoofing", would he have the nerve to keep it up to Dr. Chisholm, and to a medical man? Few fellows could think so. The fact was, that Richard

Dalton was in a "spot". That hasty smack at Peele's head had landed him, bound hand and foot as it were, into Peele's hands: genuine or not genuine, the result of that smack was going to spell trouble for Dicky Dalton. Peele, who owed him many a grudge, was going to square the whole account.

"All spoof!" repeated Lovell, with a glare at his study-mates. "That tick Peele can take you in. He can't take me in. I keep on telling you that it's all spoof from beginning to end."

"Fraid not," said Jimmy Silver.

"You're an ass, then," said Lovell.

"Looks genuine, at any rate," said Raby.

"Think so?" snorted Lovell.

"Yes, I do."

"Then you're as big an ass as Jimmy."

"Everybody's an ass except Lovell," remarked Newcome, sarcastically. "Lovell knows all the answers. He always did, and he always will. Shut up, you fellows, and listen to the Great Panjandrum!"

At which Jimmy Silver and George Raby chuckled.

Lovell frowned.

"Have a little sense, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "Look what this means to Dicky Dalton! Why, he might have to resign here! Want us to lose him?"

"Of course not, fathead," said Jimmy. "But—"

"Isn't he the best of the batch among the beaks?" demanded Lovell.

"He is! But—"

"Look what a cricketer he is!" added Lovell, as if that clinched it.

"Topping!" said Newcome. "But—"

"Don't we all like him, and admire him, too, every man in the form, excepting that worm, Peele?"

"Quite!" said Raby. "But—"

"Well, that settles it," said Lovell. "Peele's got to own up that he's spoofing, before it all gets to the Head."

"But if he isn't spoofing—"

"Rot!"

"If he's really gone deaf—"

"Rubbish!"

"My dear chap—"

"Don't dear chap me!" hooted Lovell. "You all admit that Dicky Dalton is a splendid chap. You all know that Peele's a wormy tick—smokes in the box-room, bullies small fags in the Second Form, and chucks stones at birds. I'm surprised at you fellows—sticking up for a rat like Peele, and letting down a chap out of the top drawer like old Dicky—"



He left the study, frowning

“We’re not!” yelled Jimmy Silver. “Dicky’s top-notch, and Peele’s a rat, but that’s got nothing to do with Peele going deaf because his ear was smacked.”

“Nothing at all,” said Raby.

“Less than nothing!” said Newcome.

“Oh, pack it up!” growled Lovell. “You make me tired! I can jolly well tell you this much—Peele isn’t going to put this across old Dicky if I can stop him. Why, if Peele’s really gone deaf because of that smack, Dicky might have to go. He jolly well hasn’t, see?”

Lovell’s chums gazed at him. His reasoning powers were rather beyond them. However, they seemed to satisfy Lovell. Arthur Edward Lovell never doubted that he had it right! And, as a fellow who always knew best, he had little patience to waste on lesser intellects. He rose from the table, frowning, marched out of the end study, and slammed the door after him as he went.

“Dear old Lovell!” sighed Jimmy Silver. “What a brain! Peele’s spoofing

—because it would be bad for Dicky if he wasn't! He's only pretending to be deaf, because Dicky's a good cricketer—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lovell all over!" chuckled Newcome.

"Just Lovell!" agreed Raby.

It was said of old that a prophet is without honour in his own country. Perhaps it was just as well that Arthur Edward Lovell had so profound a faith in his own judgment. No other member of the study had any.

CHAPTER V

"**H**ERE, Peele!"

"No answer.

"Still deaf?"

Silence.

"Keeping it up, what?" jeered Lovell.

Peele looked at him, but did not speak.

Lovell had looked for him after tea, and he found him loafing under the old beeches. There was a grin on Peele's face, as if he had amusing thoughts. Possibly he was thinking of the rough passage that lay ahead for Richard Dalton.

"So you can't hear me?" went on Lovell.

"Eh? Did you speak?"

"You jolly well know I did."

"Eh?"

"Deaf as an adder, what?" said Lovell. "Jolly like an adder in other ways, too, aren't you?"

"What did you say?" drawled Peele. "You'll have to speak louder if you want me to hear. Didn't you know that my hearing's gone, since Dalton hit me on the ear this morning?"

"You cringing tick, Dalton didn't hit you on the ear—he smacked your head, as you jolly well deserved, and serve you jolly well right. I'd have smacked it myself if I'd seen you at your rotten game. You're putting up this show just to worry old Dicky whose shoes you're not good enough to clean. You'd like him to get the Head's marble eye, wouldn't you?"

"Do speak louder."

"I'm not going to speak louder," said Lovell. "I'm going to speak just like I'm speaking now, Peele, and you're going to own up that you can hear every word. Got that?"

"Sorry, I can't hear a word you say, Lovell."

"You'll be sorrier soon," said Lovell. "Know what I'm going to do, Peele? I'm going to up-end you, here and now, and sit on your chest, and bang your head on the ground—."

Peele made a hurried backward step. Apparently he heard that, although Lovell was carefully speaking in a quite ordinary tone of voice. Otherwise, there was no apparent reason why Lovell's statement of his warlike intentions should have caused him to back away.

"Oh, you heard that, did you?" jeered Lovell.

Peele bit his lip, hard.

"Well, that's what I'm going to do," said Lovell. "I'm going to bang your head, Peele, and keep on banging it. till you own up that you can hear me, when I whisper. Hallo, where are you going, Peele?"

Peele did not answer that question, whether he heard it or not. He turned to run. But a powerful grasp was on him before he could escape. In Arthur Edward's grasp Cyril Peele was nowhere. Slack and loafing ways, and cigarettes in the box-room, did not make for fitness. Peele was leagues ahead of Lovell in cunning. But he was a weed in his grasp.

"Let go!" yelled Peele, struggling.

Arthur Edward did not let go. If he had doubted before—which he hadn't, being a fellow who always knew best!—he could not have doubted now, that Peele had been putting on an act.

With a twist of his strong arms he up-ended the weedy slacker of the Fourth and strewed him on the earth under the beeches. Then he sat on his chest, pinning him down.

"Now then—!" said Lovell, grimly.

"You bully, let me get up!" panted Peele.

"All in good time!" said Lovell. "Can you hear me?"

"I'll yell for help—."

"Can you hear me?"

"Help!" yelled Peele.

Bang!

Lovell's grip was on his collar. Peele's head smote the hard, unsympathetic earth. It smote it hard.

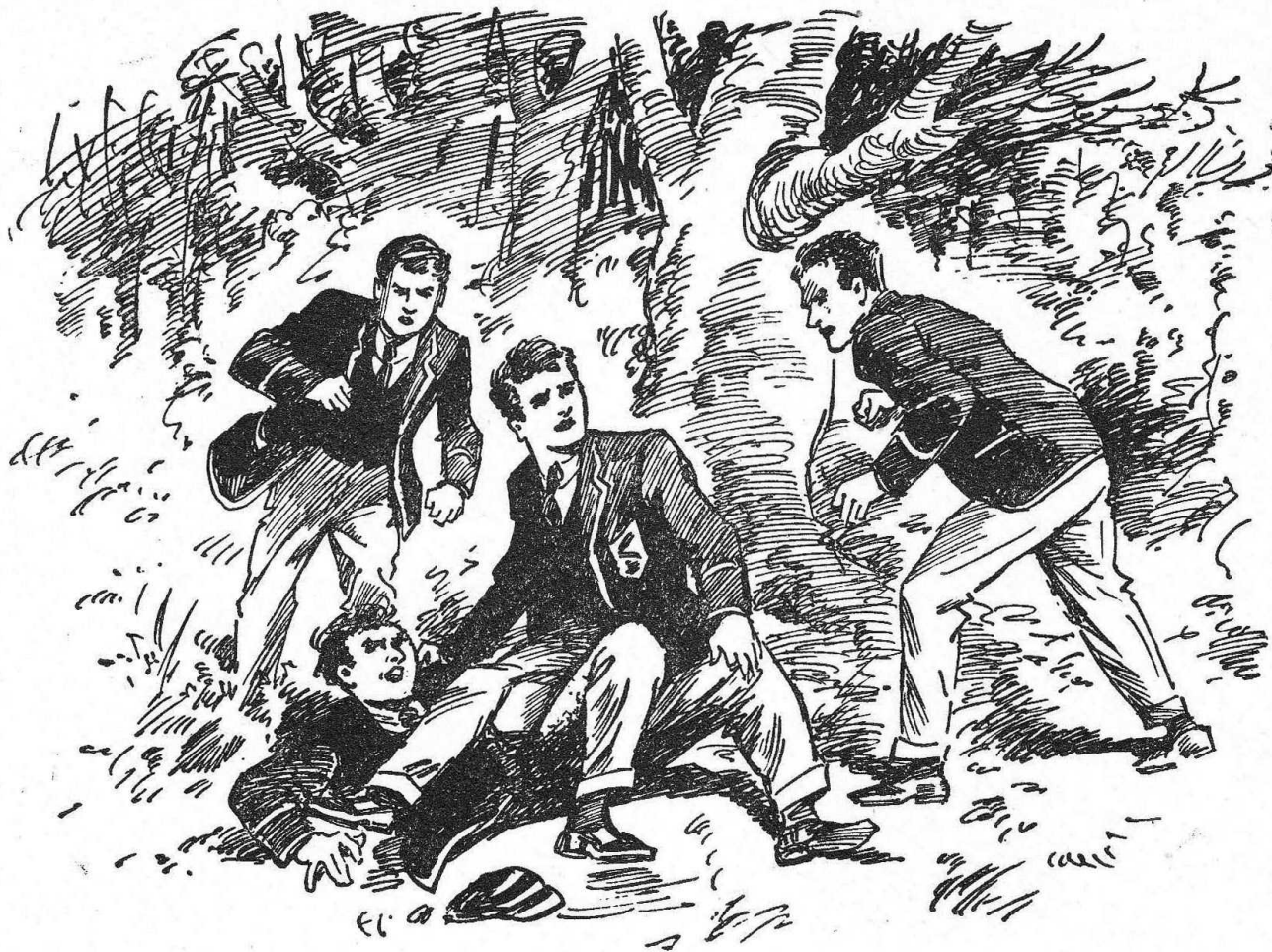
"That's a start," said Lovell. "Now I'm going to whisper, Peele. If you don't hear me, I'm sorry for your napper."

"Help!" shrieked Peele.

Bang!

"Oh! Ow! ow! ooooh!"

"Can you hear me?" Lovell deliberately whispered. "Can you hear me, Peele? Your napper gets another bang if you can't! Yes or No?"



"Can you hear me?"

Peele glared up at him. To hear that whisper was to give his whole game away, and admit that the pretended result of Dicky Dalton's smack was a deception from beginning to end. But two bangs of his head were enough for Peele. He dared not face up to a third.

"Yes!" he gasped.

"Oh, you toad!" said Lovell. "You make out that you can't hear a word any fellow says, just to get at Dicky: and you own up that you can hear me whisper! I've a jolly good mind to bang your head again—."

"Stoppit!" gasped Peele.

"I'll stop it if you'll go straight to Dicky and own up that you've been spoofing about being deaf—."

"I—I—I can't do that—."

Bang!

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Stoppit! I'll go to Dalton!" shrieked Peele.



Even Tubby Muffin landed one

“Mind you do!” said Lovell. He rose from the wiggling young rascal’s chest. “Get up, you worm! Go off to Dicky—while I go and tell all the fellows just how deaf you are you miserable tick.”

With that, Arthur Edward Lovell marched off, leaving Peele sitting up under the beech, rubbing his head, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had never thought up that cunning scheme for putting Dicky Dalton in a “spot”.

CHAPTER VI

RICHARD DALTON was undoubtedly very glad to hear from Peele that he had completely recovered. That was how Peele put it. Probably Dicky saw through the whole thing, and was quite aware that his leg had been

pulled. But he had to remember that his own hasty act had started the trouble: and for that reason he let the matter drop.

But if Dicky let it drop, the fellows in the Classical Fourth were in no haste to do so. When Edward Arthur Lovell stated the facts—which he did at the top of his voice—Peele's last state was worse than his first. Almost every fellow in the form felt that it was up to him to kick Peele for his trickery. Even Tubby Muffin landed one.

In the end study Lovell, of course, was triumphant. In that study he pointed out that he had known best all along. That, according to Lovell, was nothing unusual: did he not always know best? But this time, at least, his comrades had to admit it, which hitherto they had seldom done.

“Did I know best?” demanded Lovell. “Did I or didn't I?”

To which Jimmy Silver, George Raby, and Arthur Newcome answered, with one voice:

“You did!”

And that was that!

THE END

AWFUL for AUBREY

By CHARLES HAMILTON



"You may go, Compton"

CHAPTER I

AUBREY COMPTON winked at Bob Darrel and Teddy Seymour.
Teddy grinned.

Bob looked puzzled.

Those three members of the Fifth Form at High Coombe were standing in a group in the quadrangle, near the window of the Head's study. That window was wide open. James McCann, the young man who was head-master of High Coombe, was keen on fresh air, and his window was generally open wide. Voices within naturally floated out, and as the three were quite near the window, they could hardly have helped hearing.

But, so far as Bob Darrel could see, there was nothing in what they heard, to cause Aubrey to wink, or Teddy to grin.

It was Mr. McCann's voice that they heard: clear, incisive, but pleasant in its tones. It seemed that he was speaking to Chard, the master of the Fifth.

"I have prepared the paper for your form, Mr. Chard. It is almost finished."



Standing near the window of the Head's study

Then came Chard's voice: loud and booming. Chard, big, red-faced, aggressive, had a voice that was often likened, at High Coombe, to the trumpeting of an elephant.

"Really, Head-master—."

Chard hated addressing Jimmy McCann as "Head-master". Everyone at High Coombe knew that Chard had hoped to be addressed as "Head-master" himself, when Dr. Chetwode retired. Even the fags in the Third Form knew that Chard regarded Jimmy McCann as an interloper. Everyone knew, also, that Chard, so far as he could venture to do so, set himself up in opposition to the new Head. In which he had the heartiest good wishes of all the "School for Slackers". Bob Darrell, who liked and admired the new Head, was an exception.

"Yes, Mr. Chard?" McCann's voice was politely inquiring. McCann was as firm as a rock: but he was always courteous.

"Really, Head-master—!" repeated Chard. "Really—in the late head-

master's time, sir, there was no such intervention in my form. I regret, sir, that you should find it necessary to intervene."

"I regret it also, Mr. Chard. I regret it very much."

The three Fifth-formers in the quad heard a sound resembling a snort. Chard was not quite able to suppress his feelings.

"If that is all, Head-master—"

"That is all, Mr. Chard. I have a few more touches to add to the paper, but I will let you have it in time for form to-morrow."

"Very well, sir!" came in trumpet-tones from Mr. Chard. "Very well, sir! You are head-master, sir, and it is for me to carry out your instructions, sir."

That was followed by a sound resembling a bang! Chard had shut the door behind him very emphatically, leaving the head-master's study. No doubt Chard had departed in a semi-boiling state. Intervention in his form was an affront to Chard. The fact that the Fifth was the slackest form at the School for Slackers, and that some of its members had browsed for whole terms on the back benches under Chard's very easy rule, made no difference to that. Chard was popular in his form. He never made fellows work. It seemed to be Jimmy McCann's opinion that it was time for the Fifth to pull up its socks, so to speak. If they had to "do" a paper drawn up by the Head, there was no doubt that something like work was indicated.

Aubrey Compton winked again at his two friends.

Teddy Seymour grinned anticipatively. He guessed, from that wink, that old Aubrey had something working in his mind—something up against the new Head, of course. The remarks that had floated out of the window had, apparently, put that "something" into Aubrey's head. Teddy couldn't guess what it was: but so long as it was up against McCann, it was all right! Bob, puzzled, frowned.

"Look here—!" he began.

Then it occurred to him that, as voices from within the study could be heard without, voices from without could be heard within: so he paused.

Aubrey Compton smiled, and sauntered away. His two friends followed him. They guessed that Aubrey had something to say—out of hearing of the young man in the Head's study now giving the finishing touches to that paper for the Fifth Form.

CHAPTER II

"WELL?" Bob Darrell grunted that monosyllabic inquiry.
Teddy chuckled.

"Give it a name, Aubrey, old bean."



They had stopped near the Clock Tower

They had stopped by the old clock-tower: a safe distance from the Head's window. Aubrey was smiling. His friends knew that smile: and while it made Teddy grin with anticipation, it made Bob frown. Some new move in the feud with the new Head was coming: both of them knew that.

"You heard what McCann said to Chard?" drawled Aubrey.

"What about it?" muttered Bob. "I don't see anything in that. He's drawing up a paper to be put to our form, that's all. If you fancy you can make anything out of that—."

"I do fancy so."

"Well, I don't see it," said Bob, gruffly. "And I think it's just rot to be always looking out for a chance to bother McCann, anyway."

"Oh, draw it mild, Bob," said Teddy. "What does the man want to barge into our form for? Chard's our beak. Why can't he let Chard alone?"

"Chard lets us alone," said Aubrey.

"Oh, he does!" snapped Bob. "No mistake about that. Perhaps McCann

has an idea that fellows come to school to learn things. Perhaps he fancies that its time somebody in the Fifth did a spot of work. Well, when we get that paper from him, we shall have to sit up and take notice, for a charge.

"Looking forward to it?" smiled Aubrey.

"Well, perhaps not!" admitted Bob. "I can guess that it won't be an easy paper to do. But we shall have to slog at it, whether we like it or not. He isn't a man to be trifled with."

"It will be a real stinker!" sighed Teddy. "All sorts of questions that a fellow can't answer without swotting with a wet towel round his head. Chard never puts us in a spot like that."

"He ought to," grunted Bob. "Anyway, we're for it to-morrow, when Chard gets that paper from McCann. And I just can't see how you can do anything about it Aubrey, if that's what you're thinking of."

"Just that!" smiled Aubrey.

"Give it a name, old chap," urged Teddy. "You shut up, Bob, and let old Aubrey tell us what the game is."

"We mayn't get that paper to-morrow," said Aubrey.

"Rot! McCann told Chard that he'd nearly finished it. You heard him."

"Quite! I can see him gloating over it, putting in the toughest twisters he can think of, to catch fellows out," sneered Aubrey. "I expect he's put in quite a lot of his valuable time on that paper. Hard luck on him if he had to do it all over again, what?"

"Why should he?"

"Well, something might happen to that paper, now that we know about it," drawled Aubrey. "A fellow might keep an eye open for McCann and dodge into his study when he goes out—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Teddy.

"Such a fellow," continued Aubrey, "might tear that paper up into little teeny-weeny pieces—"

"Ha, ha!" from Teddy.

"And scatter them over McCann's study carpet," went on Aubrey. "Quite a pleasant surprise for him when he came back, what?"

"Ha, ha!" from Teddy again.

Snort, from Bob Darrell.

"So that's what you're thinking of?" he exclaimed.

"My dear man, it came into my head the minute I heard McCann speaking to Chard," smiled Aubrey. "Tit for tat, you know. A Roland for an Oliver. If we've got to slog over that rotten paper, McCann can slog over it too—doing it twice over. A fellow might even get a chance at the second edition!

Anyhow, that paper's going West, and it won't worry us in form to-morrow, at any rate."

"You ass!" said Bob.

"Thanks."

"McCann will be wild if he finds his paper torn up."

"That's what I want."

"Ha, ha!" from Teddy again. "That's what we all want."

"For goodness' sake, Aubrey, don't be a mad ass!" urged Bob. "You'd get whops if McCann spotted you—."

"He won't."

"You can't cheek a head-master like that—."

"Can't I?" smiled Aubrey.

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Teddy, heartily. "You pack it up, Bob, and let old Aubrey carry on. Fancy the blighter's face when he sees his precious paper scattered all over his carpet! Ha, ha!"

"I tell you—."

"Bow-wow!" said Aubrey.

"Rats!" said Teddy.

Bob Darrell argued for a good five minutes before he gave it up. But he had to give it up. Aubrey was not losing a chance like this for giving Jimmy McCann a jolt.

CHAPTER III

"OH!" breathed Aubrey Compton. He was startled.

He ceased suddenly to tear at a sheet of paper.

It was a footstep that startled him.

Aubrey was in the Head's study. He had, as he had planned, kept an eye open for McCann. He had ascertained that McCann had left his study. He had seen him, with his own watchful eyes, go into Common-Room and close the door after him. How long he was going to remain in Common-Room Aubrey, of course, could not know: but obviously it meant a chat with the beaks there, and he was safe for ten minutes at least. Much less time than was required for what the rebel of High Coombe had to do in McCann's study. McCann had glanced back as he went into Common-Room, and perhaps had seen Aubrey in the middle distance: but there was nothing to make him suspicious, in a Fifth-form man idling in a passage. Fifth-form men idling about were a quite normal sight at High Coombe. Once the Common-Room door had closed on him, Aubrey felt that it was safe to carry on.

So here he was, in McCann's study. Shutting the door, he stepped to the



He had started to tear the paper

table—a large, long mahogany table, almost covered with books and papers. Among those books and papers he looked for a special paper—the one McCann had drawn up for the behoof of the Fifth Form. In less than a minute he spotted it—and he gazed at it with a sneering smile. It was, as Teddy had foreseen, a real “stinker”. It was a classical paper: and one glance at it revealed that it was going to test the classical knowledge in the Fifth Form to the very limit. There were fellows in the Fifth whose heads would have ached, just to look at it. Sooner or later, Chard’s form had to face up to that “stinker”: but this edition of it, at any rate, was never going to meet the eyes of the Fifth. It was going to meet James McCann’s eyes, scattered in fragments over his carpet when he came back to his study. His wrath, at such an act of defiant insolence, would be deep—there was no doubt about that. That did not worry Aubrey. It only made him smile.

But he ceased to smile, at that footstep in the corridor.

It was a quiet, but very firm, tread. He knew that tread. Contrary to all

expectation, McCann was coming back to his study. He had not, after all, lingered in Common-Room for a chat.

Aubrey felt his heart beat unpleasantly.

He had started to tear that paper. There was a gash of several inches in it. But he ceased to tear as he ceased to smile. He stared round at the door, panting.

If McCann caught him there—

If only he hadn't started tearing the paper, he might have made some excuse for his presence. But that tear did it! If McCann caught him now—! Alas! There was no "if" about that: McCann was coming, and there was no escape for him.

Everyone at High Coombe knew that McCann could whop! It did not happen often: but when it happened, it left no doubt that he could whop! Aubrey could almost feel the cane descending on his elegant trousers! At that moment he wished that he had listened to Bob. But he had not listened to Bob—and now he was listening to McCann's footsteps coming up the corridor to the study door.

He cast a desperate glance round the study. He hated the idea of hunting cover, like a scared fag. But still more he hated the idea of "six" from McCann's cane. He was going to elude that "six" if he could, at any cost to his lofty dignity. If he could keep out of sight till McCann left the study again—!

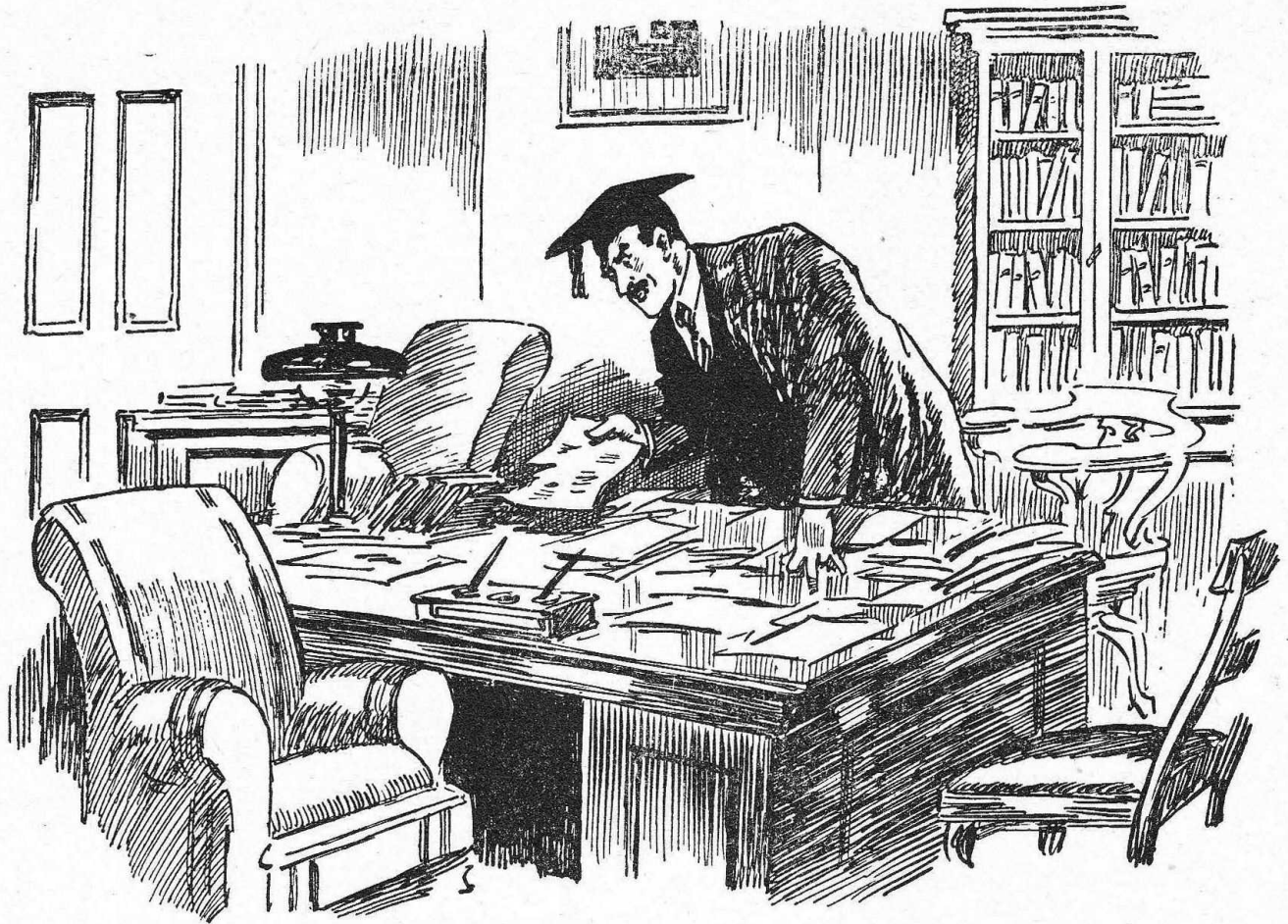
There was only one possible hide-out. Aubrey hesitated. His pride revolted at the thought of scuttling under the table and huddling there. But it was that or bending over and taking "six". Aubrey had had that experience once or twice. He did not want to repeat it. His hesitation lasted till the footsteps were almost at the door. Then he made up his mind, ducked his head, and disappeared under the table.

He was quite out of sight when the door opened.

The firm tread came in. The door closed. Then the tread crossed to the table. Aubrey suppressed his breathing. James McCann was standing by the table, looking at something on it. Aubrey could guess at what he was looking—that paper with the tear in it. He would know at once that somebody had been in the study during his brief absence. But was he likely to guess that that somebody was still there? Aubrey fervently hoped not.

"Dear me!" He heard a murmur of a voice. "The paper is torn! Upon my word!" Mr. McCann seemed to be communing with himself. "Fortunately little harm is done—a strip of stamp-edging will repair it!"

Aubrey heard a rustling on the table above him. McCann, it appeared, was repairing that gash in the paper. What was going to be his next step? He knew that some person had entered his study and torn that paper. Would he



"Dear me, the paper is torn"

guess that further tearing had been intended, and that his return had interrupted the tearer? Would he jump to it that the offender was still in the study?

Apparently no such suspicion occurred to Mr. McCann. Aubrey's dread that a head might be bent to look under the table faded out. Evidently the man did not suspect that anyone was in the study!

Mr. McCann sat down at the table.

Aubrey could have groaned, if he could have ventured to make any sound. The man had come to stay! Aubrey heard a rustling of papers, and the scratch of a pen. No doubt, later, McCann intended to inquire into the affair of the torn paper. He was not likely to allow such an incident to pass without stern inquiry. But for the present he seemed to have dismissed it from mind.

Long minutes passed.

McCann seemed to have settled down to work. He always had plenty of work to do—even if he could find time to draw up a special paper to test the knowledge of Chard's form! He might be busy on Greek for the Sixth—or on school accounts—or on correspondence with parents or with the school

governors—or even on the translation of Horace which he was going to publish some day. Anyhow, he continued sitting at the table, and the scratch of his pen came to Aubrey's ears: pausing occasionally, but always resuming. Obviously, he was not going to leave the study.

A bell rang in the distance.

Aubrey set his lips hard.

It was the bell for roll: and High Coombe fellows had to gather at that bell and answer to their names in hall. Aubrey couldn't gather with the rest, that was clear. Unless and until the Blighter left the study, Aubrey Compton couldn't.

He was glad to remember that Mr. Chard was taking roll that evening. Chard would accept any excuse for absence. Aubrey had to cut roll: but he had nothing to fear from Chard.

The bell ceased to ring. Bob Darrell and Teddy Seymour would be wondering what had become of him. They knew that he had gone to the Head's study for that rag on McCann. But they couldn't guess how he was trapped there. Even if they did, they could not help him.

How was this going to end?

Was McCann a fixture there? Wouldn't he ever step out of the study?

It looked as if he wouldn't: for the long, long minutes dragged on, and still he did not stir.

Aubrey was getting cramped. Aubrey was accustomed to stretching his elegant limbs in a very comfortable armchair in Study Three, in the Fifth. He was quite unaccustomed to huddling under a table. Pins and needles were beginning to worry him. He longed to move, to stretch out. But he knew that a movement might draw attention.

To be discovered now was worse than being caught when McCann came in. His face crimsoned at the thought of being hooked out from under that table, overwhelmed with confusion and humiliation. Pins and needles were not so bad as that. But they were very irksome.

McCann seemed a fixture. But he stirred at last, stretching out his legs under the table. A foot knocked on Aubrey's knee.

He caught his breath.

The game was up!

But was it?

He heard a mutter above:

"Dear me! Is that the waste-paper basket?"

Aubrey breathed again. McCann was apparently satisfied that it was the waste-paper basket against which his foot had knocked, for he made no further movement. The scratch of his pen resumed.

"Oh, gad!" breathed Aubrey, inaudibly.

Minutes crawled by. Then a voice floated in from the quad through the window, wide open to the balmy evening air. It was the voice of Teddy Seymour. He was calling to somebody.

"I say, seen Compton about, Corky?"

"Not since tea!" came a reply from Corkran of the Sixth.

"I can't find him anywhere!" came Teddy's voice. "It's jolly near prep. I wonder where he's got to?"

That was all. Teddy, it seemed, was looking for Aubrey. He was not likely to find him. Ten minutes later—long, long minutes to Aubrey—a bell rang. It was the bell for preparation. High Coombe seniors headed for their studies—High Coombe juniors for their form-rooms—there were no more voices or footsteps from the dusky quad. In Study Three in the Fifth, Bob Darrell and Teddy Seymour no doubt wondered why Compton did not come up to prep. Under the table in the Head's study, Compton of the Fifth huddled, and endured pins and needles, and wondered how much longer he would be able to stand it.

CHAPTER IV

TAP!

That tap at the door of the Head's study came as a relief to the harassed Fifth-former under the long mahogany table. It was someone to see the Head—and Aubrey Compton hoped, from the bottom of his heart, that the Head was wanted elsewhere, and would leave the study.

"Come in!"

It was Chard who rolled in. Aubrey, under the table, had a view of plump and ponderous legs. Mr. McCann rose politely.

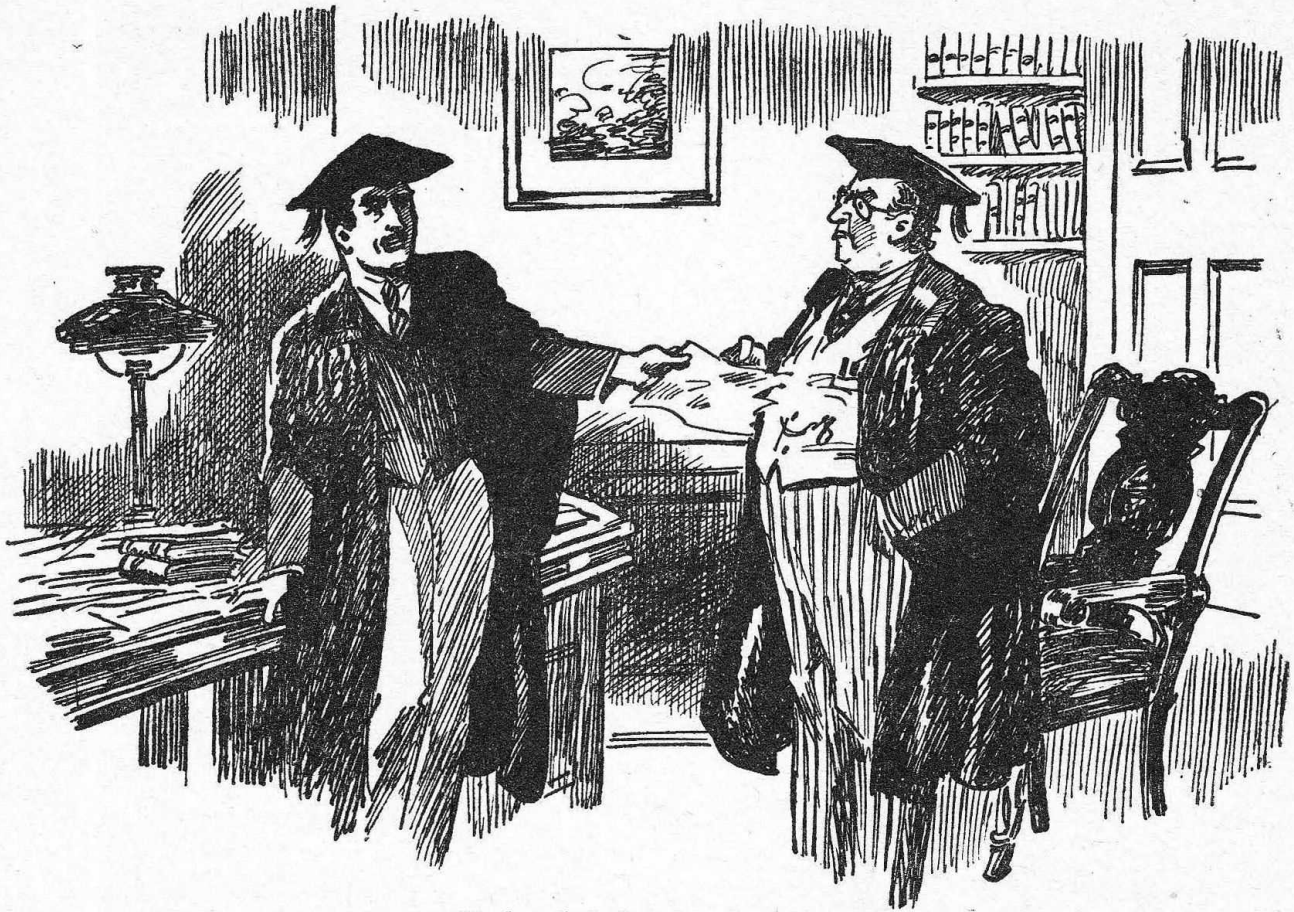
"Good evening, Mr. Chard."

"Good evening, Head-master. If that paper you mentioned is ready—!"

"Quite."

"Perhaps I may have it, then, sir. I should like to look it over," said Mr. Chard. "I should like to be acquainted with it, sir, before I deal with it in my form-room in the morning."

Aubrey, under the table, might have grinned, if he had felt like grinning—which he did not. He knew, as probably McCann knew, that Chard was a little anxious about that paper, not only on his form's account. Chard, before the new Head came, had been accustomed to taking things easily—very easily. His own knowledge was a little rusty. There were passages in Livy that Chard would pass over very lightly in form, and every man in the Fifth knew why.



He handed the paper to Chard

Chard wasn't quite sure that he could deal with the Head's new paper himself, off-hand. Poor old Chard was going to swot over that paper and make sure that he knew the answers before his form saw it. But Aubrey was too cramped and uncomfortable to grin: and not the vestige of a smile appeared on Jimmy McCann's face.

He handed the paper to Chard.

"Here it is, Mr. Chard," he said. "It has been torn, as you see—some foolish boy must have come into my study while I was absent for a few minutes and started to tear it up."

"Oh!" gasped Chard. He stared at the torn and repaired sheet. "Oh! I—I am quite sure that it was not a boy of my form, Head-master. Some foolish junior boy—"

"I hardly think so, Mr. Chard. A junior boy would scarcely concern himself about a paper for the Fifth Form."

"Really, Head-master," Chard trumpeted indignantly. "No boy in my form can have known anything about the paper. I did not know myself until you told me this afternoon, here, in this study."

"Precisely, sir," said Mr. McCann. "But three Fifth-form boys were quite near the window, which was open, and may have heard what was said."

Aubrey gave quite a jump, under the table. Never for a moment had he supposed that McCann had noticed three fellows near his window. The man had the eyes of a hawk! Nothing, it seemed, escaped him.

"Oh!" repeated Mr. Chard. He breathed heavily. "You did not find the boy concerned, in your study, sir?"

"I saw no one when I came back to my study," said Mr. McCann. "But when I went to Common-Room, I noticed a boy in the passage who seemed, I thought, somewhat interested in my movements."

Aubrey jumped again, under the table! The Blighter had noticed him then!

"If you desire me to investigate the matter, sir, among the boys of my form—!" said Mr. Chard, with dignity.

"I doubt whether you would make any discovery, Mr. Chard." Was there a sarcastic note in McCann's voice? "You may leave it in my hands."

"Very well, sir."

Chard left the study, the paper in his plump hand. The luckless Fifth were doomed to deal with that "stinker" in the morning! Aubrey Compton hardly cared about that, at this stage. All Aubrey cared about was to get out from under that table, and stretch his cramped limbs.

But there was no getting out for Aubrey. Chard was gone: but McCann remained. He sat at the table again, at work. The long, long, long minutes crawled by. McCann seemed a glutton for work. Would he never go?

Aubrey had cut roll, and cut prep. It began to look as if he would have to cut dorm also. Not only Bob and Teddy, but everybody else, would be wondering by this time what had become of him. Chard might affect not to know that he had been missing at roll: and perhaps really did not know that he had been missing at prep. But if he was missing at dorm—!

Study Three, at night, was turned into a dormitory—a three-bedder. Bob and Teddy would not only wonder, they would be alarmed, if Aubrey did not turn up for bed. Even Chard would have to take note of that. Chard let his form do very much as they liked: but there was a limit. Aubrey simply had to get out of the Head's study when the bell went for dorm. From what McCann had said to Chard, he knew that the Blighter suspected him already. It was indeed rather surprising that McCann had not sent for him. That was a spot of luck, for if he had sent for him, certainly he could not have been found. But if he did not escape in time for dorm, his number was up.

Clang!

Aubrey suppressed a groan. It was the bell.

Clang! clang! Then there was a scrape of chair-legs, as Mr. McCann pushed back his chair, and rose.

Aubrey's heart thumped. Was he going, at last? Was there still a chance? And then, to his amazement, McCann spoke.

"Compton!"

Aubrey did not answer. He could not. He was too spell-bound with amazement. For hours, endless hours, he had been huddled and cramped under that table, and McCann had given no sign. Now he spoke Compton's name as casually as if Compton had been standing before him in the study. Aubrey really wondered whether he was dreaming.

"Compton!" repeated Mr. McCann.

He was not dreaming! It was no delusion! McCann was addressing him by name.

"Compton! No doubt you have heard the bell. It is time for you to go to your dormitory! You had better go."

Aubrey gasped for breath. The Blighter knew he was there—had known he was there all the time! Aubrey realised that now. He had chosen to hide under that table, and McCann had chosen to leave him there! With a burning face, Aubrey crept out from under the table, picked himself up, and stood before his head-master.

Mr. McCann regarded him, with a faintly amused smile. Aubrey Compton stood limp, his face burning, wishing that he could sink through the floor. Six, or twice six, would have been preferable to this! Bending over under the cane would have been almost a pleasure, in comparison with feeling so utterly ridiculous. But there was no cane to bend under, at all events. Aubrey had had his punishment. McCann made a gesture towards the door.

"You may go, Compton."

Aubrey tottered to the door.

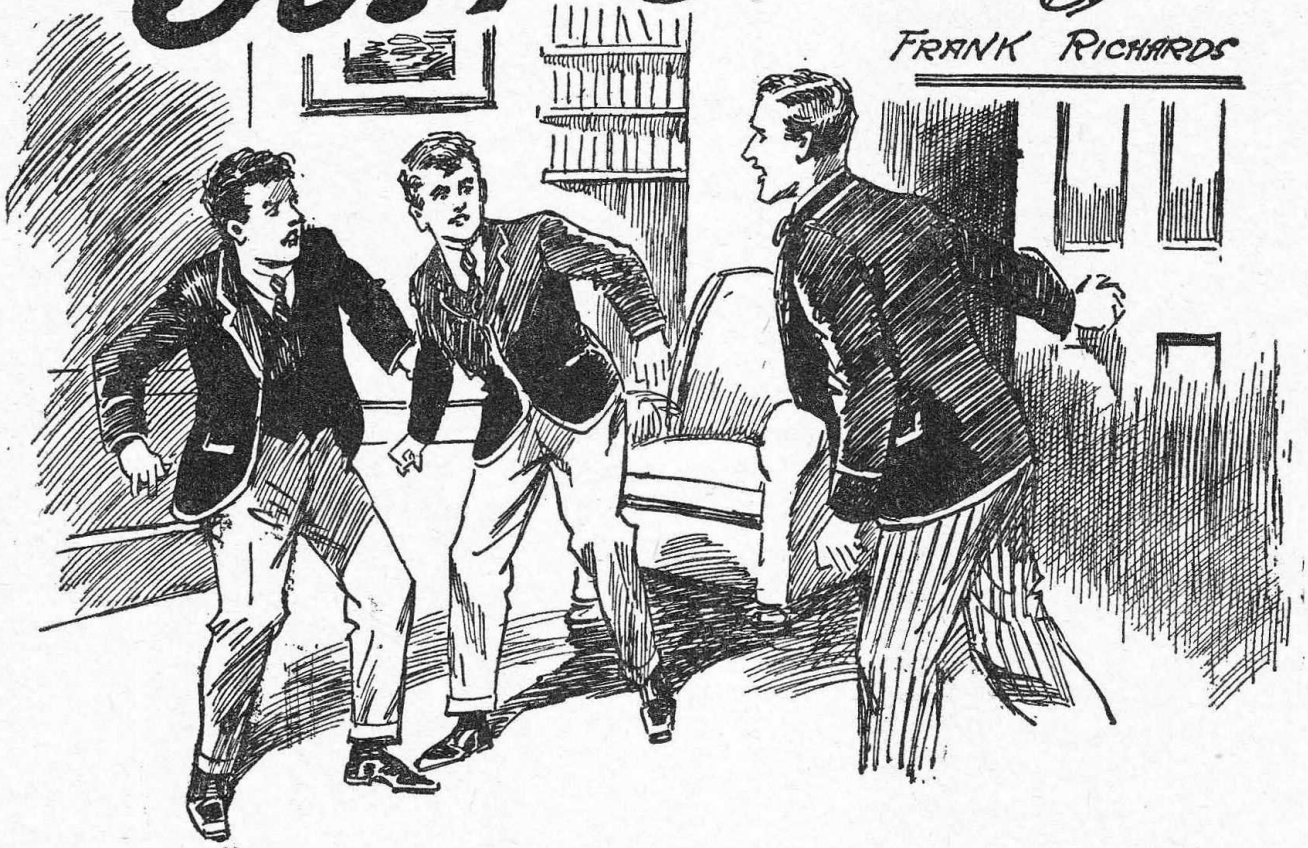
CHAPTER V

SAD to relate, the High Coombe Fifth, little as they liked McCann, and much as they liked Compton, laughed loud and long when they heard about it. Bob Darrell roared, and Teddy chuckled and chuckled: and all the Fifth, as the story spread, chortled. There was, in fact, only one fellow in the High Coombe Fifth who was not amused. That was Compton himself. It had been altogether too awful for Aubrey.

THE END

Just Skip

By
FRANK RICHARDS



"Where's Ruggles?" he snapped

CHAPTER I

IT was Skip's idea.

Skip's ideas, as a rule, were at a discount in Study Four at Felgate. Neither Tom King nor Dick Warren regarded Skip as anything but a born bungler, an unmitigated ass, and the last word in fatheads. Indeed they often told him so.

But for once, they heeded Skip. For once, if for once only, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles had the ear of the study.

The fact was, that something had to be done about Pook. King and Warren, resourceful youths as they were, couldn't think of that "something". It seemed that Skip Ruggles could.

Pook of the Sixth was the most unpopular prefect at Felgate. He had stealthy ways. As a Sixth-form prefect, he had "whopping privs": and he

exercised the same to the fullest extent. His ashplant contacted junior trousers oftener—much oftener—than any other prefect's ash. Recently Study Four had been through it, at Pook's hands.

Pook, who had an obnoxiously silent tread, had come on the three, telling one another what they thought of him. He had listened-in, unnoticed. He had heard Tom King refer to him as a greasy golliwog, Warren describe him as a footer funk, and Skip as a nasty piece of work. No prefect could have been pleased by hearing himself so described: but no prefect at Felgate except Pook would have listened-in to talk not intended for his ears. Having heard the opinions of Study Four, Pook showed up, and called them to account. Whops followed. And when Pook whopped, he whopped hard. Three Fourth-formers almost crawled up to their study afterwards.

In Study Four, there were wriggings, and mumblings, and fierce yearnings for reprisals on Pook. Something had to be done about Pook: they all agreed on that. But what was to be done? You simply couldn't get back on a pre. Gladly they would have punched him. Gladly they would have up-ended him in the quad, and ducked his head in the fountain. But a Sixth-Form prefect was untouchable. It was the sack, short and sharp for any fellow so wildly reckless as to handle a prefect. Such exploits could be dreamed of, but never performed. Even great games-men, like Perkinson of the Fifth, would never have ventured to punch Pook. It was a hopeless proposition for juniors.

But Skip had an idea!

"He's got it coming!" said Skip, darkly, "And I know how."

And for once, instead of telling Skip to pack it up, or put a sock in it, King and Warren said simultaneously:

"How?"

Skip told them how.

CHAPTER II

POOK for some moments, simply didn't know what had happened, or what was happening. There had been a Prefects' Meeting in the Prefects' Room, which Pook, as a pre. of course attended. That meeting had lasted an hour, during which all the Felgate prefects were collected in one spot, and were not, naturally, in their studies. After the meeting was over, Pook went to his study: and then it happened.

Several other Sixth-Form men came up the passage with Pook,—Denver, Cadby, Paynter and Loring. So they were witnesses of what happened to



Skip had an idea

Pook—luckily for them not near enough to get a share in it. Pook pushed open his study door—and then—!

Pook was a wary, watchful, suspicious pre. But he did not suspect that there was anything unusual awaiting him in his study. True, any fellow could have visited that study unnoticed and unknown, while Pook was in the Prefects' Room. But it did not occur to Pook that any fellow had. He was taken completely by surprise.

He did not have to unlatch the door. He found it ajar. Still, there was nothing very unusual in that: doors were often left ajar. As the door was not latched, all Pook had to do was to give it a push, and walk in. He gave it a push and walked in.

But he did not walk very far in. He stopped in the doorway. He stopped because a large paper bag, perched on top of the door fell on his head. The bag burst open as it landed, and scattered its contents. Its contents were most unpleasant, consisting of soot. As Pook discovered later, from various very

visible signs all over his study, that soot had been scraped down from his own study chimney. There was plenty of it. It smothered Pook from head to foot. It clothed him like a garment. It transformed him, suddenly, into a very good imitation of a native of Central Africa. It filled his hair, and his collar, and his ears: it got into his nose and his mouth. The chimney-sweep at Fell, after a day's work, had nothing on Pook of the Sixth. He was black if not comely. Like the sable arms of the rugged Pyrrhus, he did the night resemble! He tottered in soot—he breathed soot—he sneezed soot—he coughed soot—he reeked with soot.

“Urrrggh! Atchoooh! Aytishoo! Wurrrggh!” Incoherent sounds came from Pook, amid clouds of soot.

He tottered back into the passage, scattering soot. The other Sixth-Form men stared at him. They were surprised, though not so surprised as Pook.

“What the dooce—!” exclaimed Denver.

“It's soot!” gasped Loring.

“Soot!” repeated Cadby.

“Urrrggh! Wurrrggh! Groooogh! Oooch!” contributed Pook. “I'm smothered! Ooooh! Ooooooooch!”

“It's a booby-trap!” said Loring, “Oh, gad! A booby-trap in a pre's study! Phew!”

Obviously, it was a booby-trap. Some surreptitious hand had set that trap for Pook, and he had walked right into it. He sneezed and coughed and spluttered and clawed at soot. Sad to relate, the other seniors grinned. Pook did not seem funny to himself—he felt far from funny,—but his aspect seemed to strike the other fellows as funny. Moreover, Pook was not popular with his fellow-pre's. Certainly it was most outrageous, almost unthinkable, for such a trick to be played on the high and mighty Sixth. The perpetrator, if found, would be marched off to the Head, and dealt with most faithfully. But the Sixth-Form men in the passage grinned all the same.

“Urrrggh! Gurrgrh! Grooh! Attishooh! Who did this?” gasped Pook, “What are you grinning at, you silly dummies? Oooooooogh!”

“By gum, you want a wash, old man!” said Loring.

“Urrrggh! Who did this?—hissed Pook. “Some cheeky junior—oooogh! I'll take him to the Head,—groooogh!—this means a flogging for him! Wurrrggh! But who was it—gerrrrrooogh!”

Pook had to postpone that problem till he had had a much-needed cleaning-up. He was busy in a bath-room for quite a long while. He had to change from head to foot. Even after a bath and a change, a lingering aroma of soot seemed to cling to him. And he was quite a volcano of wrath. With set lips and gleaming eyes, he searched his study for a clue to the culprit. Plenty of



"It's a booby trap," said Loring

soot had been left about—there was soot on his carpet, and on his books—lots and lots of soot. But there was no clue.

Somebody—obviously somebody in the Lower School—had done it. But Pook had all the Lower School to pick from. There was hardly a Lower boy at Felgate who did not loathe Pook. It might have been anybody in the Third, the Fourth or the Shell. Who had done it? Pook simply didn't know and couldn't guess. But—! Thinking it out, a possible clue occurred to him. Fellows who handled soot might very likely have some sooty traces about them—and a single spot of soot would be evidence. Pook was prepared to take any amount of trouble to discover who had sooted him. With a set, savage face, Pook started on a round of the junior studies: with a hope of spotting a spot of soot on some junior: who would then be marched off forthwith to Dr. Leicester for the flogging he so richly merited.



Study Four were in high spirits

CHAPTER III

“HEARD?”

Reece of the Fourth asked that question, looking into Study Four in the Fourth. Three juniors were in that study—all of them in smiling good-humour. Tom King’s face was bright and cheery—Dick Warren looked like a fellow really enjoying life: Skip, sitting in the window-seat, grinned from one fat ear to the other, and chuckled a fat chuckle. Study Four, it was clear, were in high spirits.

“Heard what, Reece?” asked Dick Warren, with a wink at King.

“Anything happened?” asked Tom, casually.

Reece chuckled.

“Sort of!” he answered, “Pook of the Sixth—ha, ha—”.

“What about Pook?”

“Somebody rigged up a booby-trap in his study, while he was at the Pre’s meeting, and he was smothered with soot—.”

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from Skip.

"I wonder who it was," went on Reece.

"Well, Pook's pretty unpopular," remarked Tom King. "He whops too much you know. Somebody seems to have got back on him."

"You fellows wouldn't know, of course!" grinned Reece. "But I hear that Pook is going round the studies looking for his man. If he spots that spot of soot on Ruggles, he might suspect this study, what?"

Reece walked away, laughing. Tom King and Dick Warren fixed an almost deadly glare on Skip Ruggles. Both of them had been extremely careful in Pook's study, and not the vestige of a spot of soot could have been discovered on either of them with a microscope. Both had warned Skip to be equally careful. But Skip was always Skip!

"You fat ass—!" said Tom, in concentrated tones.

"You podgy piffler!" hissed Dick Warren.

"Oh, draw it mild," protested Skip, "I haven't got any soot on me. Think I'd be such an ass as that? Look at me—! Oh!" added Skip, as he looked at himself. "There's just a spot—."

"You ass—!"

"Reece says that Pook is going round the studies—."

"If he saw that—!"

"It's only just a spot on my wrist—oh, and just a little one on my other hand—and—."

"Reece noticed it, if we didn't!" hissed Warren. "Go and wash it off, this minute—quick!"

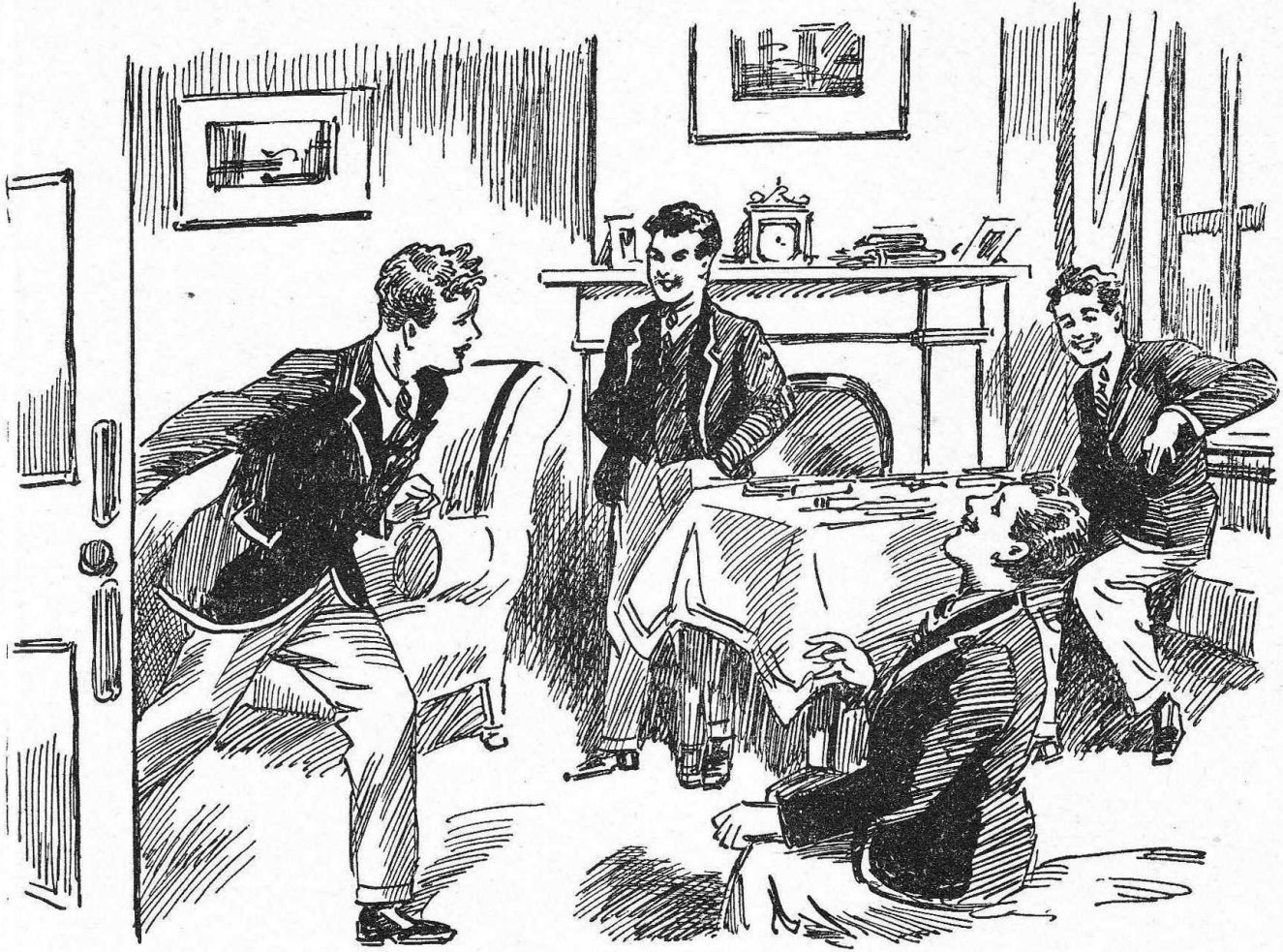
"Oh, all right!"

The fat Skip heaved his weight up from the window-seat. He rolled out of the study, to the sink at the end of the Fourth-form passage, where he washed off, with the greatest care, every trace of lingering soot.

CHAPTER IV

"**H**ERE comes Pook!" murmured Dick Warren.
"Let him come."

Tom King and Dick Warren were quite unperturbed, as Pook of the Sixth looked in at their doorway, and then walked into the study. Pook's rather narrow eyes scanned them suspiciously. Pook had had a long round already, but so far he had discovered just nothing. Probably he was more suspicious of Study Four than of any other, remembering the recent licking he had bestowed on the inhabitants thereof. But really, there was nothing to go upon,



Skip burst into the study

unless he spotted the hoped-for trace of soot on some member of that study. And no such trace met his searching eyes.

“Want anything, Pook?” asked Tom King, politely.

“I’m looking for the young rascal who fixed up a booby-trap in my study!” snapped Pook. “It’s a Head’s flogging for him when I find him.”

He scanned the two juniors. The keenest of eyes could not have discovered the slightest trace of soot on either of them. It looked as if Study Four was to be drawn blank like all the other studies that Pook had visited. But after scanning Tom King and Dick Warren, Pook walked round the study, scanning everything else. Warren winked at King. If the slightest spot of soot had been dropped about, Pook would have spotted it. But there was nothing of the kind to meet Pook’s searching eyes. Having scanned the study, Pook scanned King and Warren again. He remembered that there were three to that study.

"Where's Ruggles?" he snapped.

"Gone up the passage," answered Tom King, blandly. He was not likely to add that Ruggles had gone up the passage to wash off spots of soot! "I daresay he'll be back in a minute or two, Pook."

"I'll wait!" grunted Pook.

He waited! Evidently, he was going to give the third member of that study the once-over, before he went on his way. He had not long to wait. Two or three minutes later, a newly-washed Skip burst grinning into Study Four. "ALL serene now, you chaps! I say, jolly lucky Reece spotted that soot on me, and gave us the tip, what? I'll bet that cad Pook would have spotted it, if he'd come to this study—you know he's got eyes like a rat. But it's all right now—I've washed off every speck. But I say, are you fellows sure you haven't any soot about you? You handled it in Pook's study more than I did. You'd better make sure—."

Skip had got thus far, before he noticed that Pook was in Study Four.

But at that point he noticed Pook's presence.

He ceased suddenly to burble. He stared at Pook—he blinked at him—he goggled at him. Pook, of course, had heard every word.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Skip. "Is—is—is that Pook? Oh, crikey!"

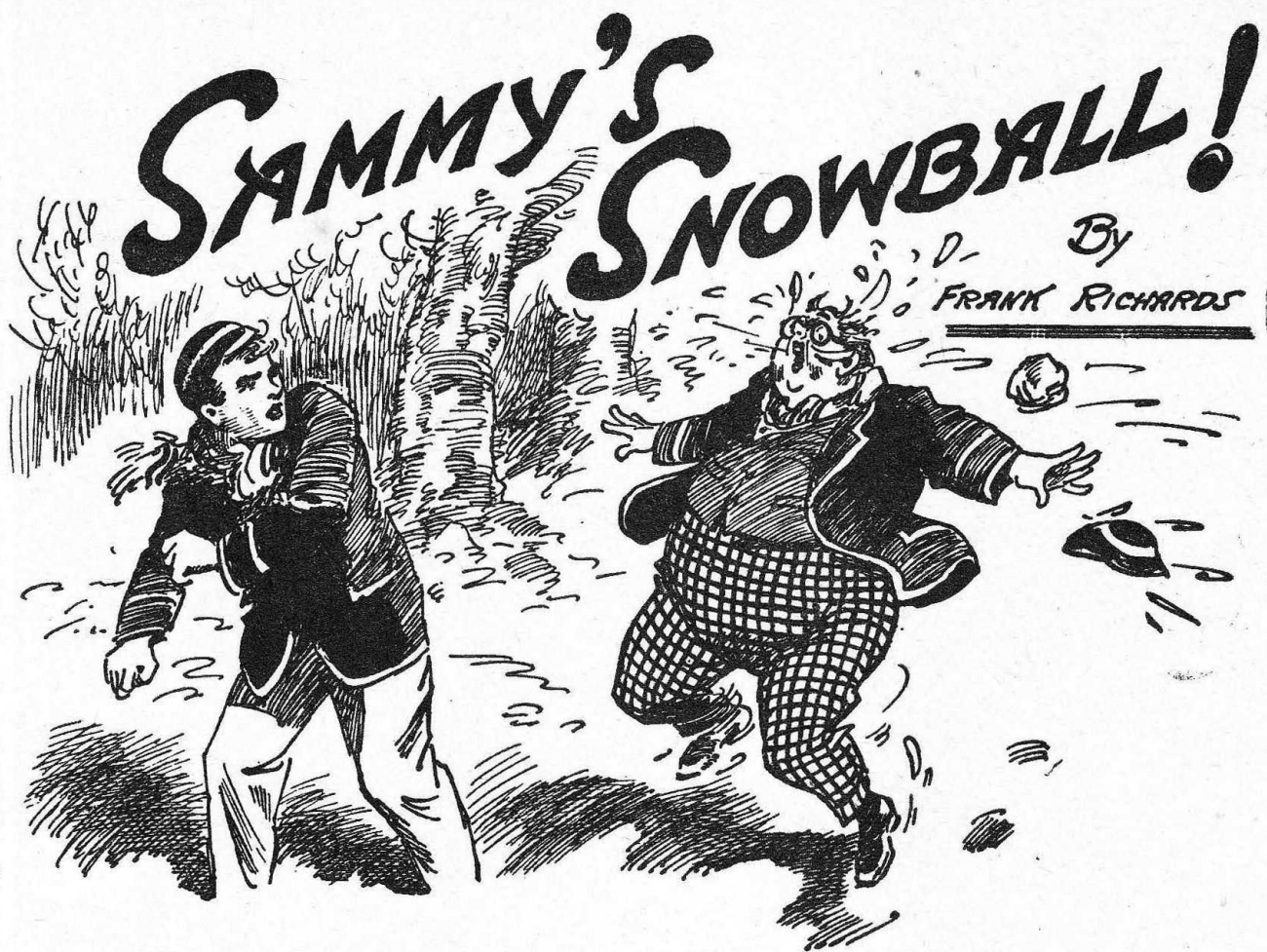
Pook smiled—a sour smile! He had them, now. Tom King and Dick Warren exchanged a hopeless look. With considerable self-restraint, they did not fall on Skip and slay him on the spot. The cat was out of the bag, and slaying Skip would not have recaptured it.

"So it was you three!" said Pook, "I might have guessed it! All three of you will follow me to the Head's study!"

They followed him in sad silence.

THE END

NOTE. The Felgate series, by Frank Richards, appears in Raymond Glendenning's Book of Sport annual.



CHAPTER I

“SAMMY, old chap!”

Billy Bunter’s tone, as he addressed his minor, Sammy of the Second Form, was quite affectionate.

Bunter major, of the Remove, was not always so affectionate to Bunter minor of the Second. Indeed, sometimes Billy Bunter seemed to forget for whole weeks that he had a minor at Greyfriars at all.

On the present occasion, however, his tone was quite honeyed. Perhaps it was the influence of Christmas, now close at hand. More probably, Billy Bunter wanted something.

The latter seemed to be Sammy’s impression, for having blinked at Bunter through the big spectacles that were so like Billy’s, he shook a head almost as fat as his major’s.

“Stony!” he said.

“Oh, really, Sammy,” said Bunter, reproachfully. “If you think that I want to borrow anything—”

“Don’t you?” asked Sammy.



Sammy and Billy

"No!" yapped Bunter, "I don't."

"Oh, all right! But what did you call me old chap for, then?"

Billy Bunter breathed rather hard through his fat little nose. Brotherly affection seemed to be quite wasted on Sammy.

"I've got some toffees," he said, with dignity. "I thought you might like some, Sammy."

Sammy's plump face brightened.

"I jolly well would!" he answered, promptly. "Shove them this way."

"Only I want you to do something for me first," went on Billy Bunter, without shoving them that way. "Nothing much—only chucking a snowball. There's lots of snow about—fairly stacked over there under the elms. All you've got to do is to make a snowball—a jolly big one, mind—and land it right in the back of Bob Cherry's neck—."

Sammy Bunter jumped.

"I'll watch it!" he gasped. "Why, he would boot me all round the quad if I did! No fear!"

"Safe as houses," assured Bunter. "You'll hide behind a tree, and catch him in the back of the neck while I'm keeping him talking, see? You'll cut off before he knows what hit him."

"Um!" said Sammy. "Well, what do you want to snowball Cherry for! What's he done?"

"Shoved a handful of snow down my neck!" yapped Bunter. "Making out that I'd been in his study after his toffees—."

"He, he, he!" chirruped Sammy. Sammy knew his major! He guessed at once where Billy's supply of toffee had come from!

"Nothing to cackle at, Sammy! I told him I hadn't been in his study, and never even saw his toffees when I was there either, but he jammed the snow down my neck all the same—groooogh! Well, I'm going to give him tit for



Plotting

tat, see? Perhaps he'll like a chunk of snow down his own neck! Mind, make it a great big snowball, and mind you land it right in his neck—and I'll whack out the toffees with you afterwards."

Sammy Bunter considered, for a few moments. He did not particularly want to surprise Bob Cherry, of the Remove, with a snowball in the back of his neck. Still more particularly, he did not want to be booted if Bob spotted him performing that exploit. On the other hand, he did want a whack in the toffees. Toffee had an irresistible attraction for both members of the tribe of Bunter. So Sammy nodded at last.

"Okay!" he said.

And the two Bunters rolled away together, to prepare that ambush for the unsuspecting Bob. After which Billy, leaving Sammy ensconced behind a frosty trunk, kneading the biggest snowball ever, rolled away to look for Bob Cherry and inveigle him into the ambush.

CHAPTER II

"**B**OB, old fellow—"

"Scat!"

"But I say—"

"Want another handful of snow down your neck, you fat villain?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hook it!"

"There's a poor little robin—"

"Eh?"

"In the snow—"

"Where?" Bob Cherry came to a halt. The astute fat Owl had touched the right chord! Bob Cherry was all good nature: and if any living creature was in trouble, Bob was the fellow to help. "Is it hurt?"

"Well, it can't fly away," said Bunter.

That statement, at least was veracious. As there was no poor little robin in the snow at all, certainly it could not fly away! With his accustomed disregard for the frozen truth, Billy Bunter had invented that robin. It was bait to catch his fish, as it were. He had to get Bob into the ambush somehow: and "crammers" came easily to Bunter. Practice had made him perfect, in that peculiar line.

"Well, where is it?" asked Bob, interested at once. "Might be able to do something for the poor little beggar. Show me where it is."

"This way!" chirruped Bunter.



"Well, where is it?" asked Bob

He rolled off by the path through the frosty elms, Bob striding by his side. If a fat fag of the Second Form was hidden behind one of those frosty trunks, with a huge snowball ready in a fat hand, Bob Cherry saw nothing of him. Bob, as he moved along under the leafless branches, glanced to and fro in search of that imaginary robin.

"Can't see anything of it," he said.

"Just under that tree," said Bunter, pointing to an ancient elm close by the school wall. Behind that especial tree, as Bunter knew if Bob did not, Sammy was in ambush.

Bob tramped through the snow under the tree. He scanned the earth without discovering any trace of a robin in distress.

"On the other side, do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh! No! Not on the other side!" gasped Bunter, in a hurry. "On this side—just about here—"

"Well, it's not here now," said Bob. "Must have flown away after all."

"Oh! Look here!" exclaimed Bunter.

Bob Cherry came back towards him. That was exactly what the artful fat Owl wanted. Bob had his back to the tree now, and it was safe for Sammy to get going with that snowball. The fat fag, peering round the trunk, had a view of Bob Cherry's back.

Grinning, Sammy Bunter lifted a fat hand, with the snowball in it. He took accurate aim at the back of Bob's neck, and hurled.

Whiz!

The snowball flew: and the instant it had left his hand, Sammy Bunter flew, too, in the opposite direction. Sammy vanished like a ghost at cock-crow, as the snowball whizzed on its way.

CHAPTER III

SMASH!
"Yarooooh!"

Billy Bunter tottered and spluttered frantically. A huge snowball, smashing in the middle of his fat face, was more than enough to make William George Bunter totter and splutter.

Up to that moment, all had gone well for the artful fat schemer. He had inveigled Bob Cherry to the spot: he had contrived to make him turn his back to the tree behind which Sammy was ambushed: and that huge snowball had been hurled at the back of Bob's neck, according to plan. It was only at the last moment that the scheme conked out: as Bob, not seeing anything of that robin, stepped aside to look round for it.

Stepping aside, left Billy Bunter facing the fire, so to speak. That snowball intended for Bob, missed him by inches as he moved aside: and landed on the next object in the line of fire, which was Billy Bunter's fat face.

It smashed on a fat little nose.

Bursting there, it smothered the fat face with snow. Billy Bunter roared, and spluttered, and tottered, and sat down.

"Yaroooh! Grooogh! Oh, crikey! Oooooogh!"

"What the dickens—!" exclaimed Bob.

"Urrrrrrggh!" Billy Bunter spluttered snow. "Oh, crumbs! Oooogh! That silly young idiot—ooooogh!"

"Who chucked that snowball?" Bob Cherry stared round. But Sammy had vanished among the elms. "Know who it was, Bunter?"

"Urrrggh!" Billy Bunter sat in snow, clawing at snow, and gurgling snow, "Grooogh! Wurrrggh! Coooch!"

"Well, where's that robin?"

"Gurrrrrrggh!"

"Must have flown away," said Bob: and, as there was evidently no distressed robin to be rescued, Bob walked away: leaving Bunter to claw at snow. Billy Bunter's splutterings followed him as he went:

"Urrrggh! Gurrgh! Wurrgh! Grooogh!"

CHAPTER IV

IT had been quite a surprise for Billy Bunter. And there was another surprise, for Sammy Bunter, when he sought out his major to claim his share of the toffees, his reward for hurling that snowball. What he received from the exasperated Owl of the Remove was a smack on a fat head, which he found much less agreeable than toffees. Neither Bunter derived any satisfaction whatever from the episode of Sammy's Snowball!

THE END

BESSIE BUNTER IN LUCK!

By
HILDA RICHARDS



CHAPTER I

“OH!” breathed Bessie Bunter.
She was startled.

Her eyes, and her spectacles, shot round to the door of No. 7 Study.

As No. 7 Study belonged to Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn and Dolly Jobling, Bessie Bunter had no business there. But Miss Elizabeth Bunter was often found where she had no business.

At the moment, she was standing at the study cupboard, with the door wide open, blinking into it through the big spectacles that were so like her brother Billy's at Greyfriars. It was not only in looks that Sister Bessie resembled Brother Billy. She shared his predilection for tuck—anybody's tuck. Had there been a cake in that cupboard, two plump hands would have pounced upon it immediately. It might have been Marjorie's. It might have been Clara's. It might have been Dolly's. But as soon as those plump paws had closed on it, it would have been Bessie's.

But—alas!—there was no cake! That the chums of No. 7 had a cake for tea, Bessie knew. She had witnessed its purchase at the school shop. She had rolled up to No. 7 Study expecting to find it there. But it seemed that Marjorie and Co. had not yet brought it up to their study. For the cupboard like Mrs. Hubbard's, was bare.



She almost bounded across the study

And then—

Footsteps and voices in the passage warned Bessie that the proprietors of the study were coming. No doubt they had that cake with them. But that was not very useful to Bessie if they found her there!

“Oh!” breathed Bessie.

Not as a rule swift in her movements, Bessie Bunter was on this occasion quite rapid. She almost bounded across No. 7 Study to the corner where the high-backed armchair stood. She was behind that armchair, huddled in the corner, when the door opened.

Three Fourth-form girls came in. Bessie heard Marjorie’s voice:

“Put it in the cupboard, Clara. Why, the cupboard’s open.”

“Who’s been here?” came Dolly’s voice.

Bessie heard Clara sniff.

“That’s an easy one!” said Clara. “Bessie saw us getting the cake. Bessie Bunter’s been here.”

Marjorie laughed.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” she said. “But don’t waste time, Clara: we’ve got to get a spot of tennis before tea.”

“Tennis can wait,” said Clara. “I’m going to put this cake in my hat-box. Bessie’s pretty sure to pay that cupboard another visit.”

Behind the armchair, Bessie grinned. She would have chuckled her fat chuckle, but that would have revealed her presence in the study. So she contented herself with a grin.

"Now come on, Clara," said Dolly Jobling, when the cake was duly deposited in the hat-box.

"I'm not through yet," said Clara. "If that fat little frump comes nosing into our study cupboard again, she's going to get a surprise. Hand me that empty chocolate box, Marjorie."

"What for?"

"I'm going to fill it with soot from the chimney."

"Soot!" exclaimed Marjorie and Dolly together.

"Just soot! And I'm going to leave it on the top shelf of the cupboard. And I'm going to tie a string to it, and tie the other end of the string to the cupboard door. What do you think will happen when the cupboard door's pulled open?"

"It will pull the box of soot off the top shelf, and it will come down—wallop—on whoever opens the cupboard door!" she said. "That will be a lesson for Bessie Bunter, if she noses into our study after our cake, what?"

"But—" said Marjorie.

"No time for buts, if we're going to get some tennis," interrupted Clara. "Now, where's the string—oh, here it is! And here goes."

"Cat!" breathed Bessie Bunter behind the armchair. But she breathed that word inaudibly.

Clara Trevlyn was busy for a few minutes. Then Bessie heard her voice again.

"That's that!"

"But—" murmured Marjorie.

"Hold the door just ajar, Marjorie, while I tie this end to the handle inside. Mustn't have too much slack. That's right."

"But—"

"Now I'll shut it, and we can go down to tennis. Bessie can come after our cake as soon as she likes—now!"

Still as a fat mouse, Bessie Bunter listened, while footsteps and voices receded down the passage. Then she emerged grinning from behind the armchair.

"Cats!" said Bessie.

She blinked at the closed cupboard door. There was nothing to indicate the sooty trap that was hidden within. Had Bessie not been put on her guard, undoubtedly she would have opened that cupboard door and received a shower of soot on the fattest head in the Cliff House Fourth.



She blinked at the closed cupboard door

But Bessie had no interest in that cupboard after what she had heard. She headed for Clara's hat-box.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bessie.

Plump hands lifted a cake from the hat-box. With the cake under a plump arm, Bessie Bunter blinked cautiously into the passage. Then she rolled out of No. 7 Study and headed for her own—No. 4. After which, anyone who had passed Number 4 Study in the Cliff House Fourth, would have heard a sound of munching and crunching from within—munching and crunching that continued till Elizabeth Bunter had finished that cake to the last plum and the last crumb.

CHAPTER II

"WELL!" exclaimed Clara Trevlyn.

"Well!" said Marjorie.

"Well!" said Dolly Jobling.

All three were surprised.

After the tennis, they came up to No. 7 for a study tea. They fully expected to find sooty traces of a surreptitious visit to the study cupboard.

But there were no such traces to be seen.

The cupboard door was closed, as they had left it. Not a speck of soot was

visible. If the cupboard had been opened, obviously the booby-trap had not worked! They had no doubt that Bessie had been there!—no doubt that she had opened the cupboard. But nothing had happened!

“Blow!” said Clara, “the booby-trap hasn’t worked. Blow!—perhaps I left too much slack on the string. What rotten luck—Bessie would have had to wash, and she hates washing. Anyhow, even if she didn’t get the soot, she didn’t get the cake either, as there was nothing in the cupboard. I suppose that beastly string came loose, or something.”

“Must have,” said Dolly. “The booby-trap certainly never worked or there would be soot about.”

“Bother!” said Clara. “I wonder what went wrong with it. I’ll soon see.”

Clara stepped to the cupboard and pulled open the door.

The next moment there was a wild shriek in No. 7 Study. Clara Trevlyn staggered back under a shower of soot.

“Oooooooooogh!” spluttered Clara. “Oooooooooogh! I’m all sooty—oooooooo! I’m smothered! Ooooooooooch!”

Marjorie and Dolly gazed at her, almost in horror. Soot smothered her from head to foot, she was clothed in soot as in a garment. Soot rose in clouds round her as she dabbed frantically at her face and her hair.

“Ooooooooooch!” gurgled Clara. “Ooooooooooch!”

Bessie Bunter blinked in through her big spectacles. Bessie seemed amused.

“He, he, he! I say, is that Clara, or a nigger minstrel? He, he, he! I say, Clara, you’d better not let Miss Bellew see you like that! I say, you want a wash! He, he, he!”

“Ooooooooooggh!”

“He, he, he!”

Bessie Bunter rolled away gurgling with merriment. She left Clara gurgling also—but not with merriment!

CHAPTER III

THE booby-trap in No. 7 Study had worked—there was no doubt about that! Why it hadn’t worked for Bessie Bunter remained a mystery. It certainly hadn’t: but it had worked for Clara: and for quite a long time afterwards, Clara was busy with soap and hot water—lots of soap and lots of hot water, getting rid of the soot. She hardly cared when it was discovered that there was no longer a cake in the hat-box. Clara was not bothering about cakes—she was bothering wholly about soot!

THE END