

BILLY BUNTER'S DOUBLE

FRANK RICHARDS

New edition with Kay King



Billy Bunter's Double

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Chapter 1

Letter for Bunter

It was a beautiful summer's day, so hot and still that the leaves on the elm trees lining the drive of Greyfriars School were not even trembling.

As the bell rang for the mid-morning break, Monsieur Charpentier swept out of the Remove form room, followed by the members of the form, all eager to get out into the fresh air. A rotund figure rolled along behind them, his small eyes blinking dismally from behind his large, round spectacles.

Although it was a bright and sunny morning, Billy Bunter was feeling far from bright. Usually, even if there was a spot of bother on the horizon, he was fairly contented, but today there were so many that they had formed a great, black cloud.

One of these spots of bother had already burst. Mr. Quelch, his form master, had been a beast. He had deliberately picked on the fat Owl and had told him to begin translating the Latin that he had set for last night's homework, and had watched, grimaced, as Bunter had staggered through it, making one howler after another. The rest of the form had been amused. Quelch had not, and the beast had given him an extra whack of translation to do during the half holiday.

'Tain't fair!' muttered Billy Bunter to himself. It hadn't been his fault. A fellow couldn't be expected to do two things at the same time, and last night he had concentrated on sitting in an armchair instead of concentrating on his prep.

There was another little cloud to think about. This one was called Coker. The burly fifth former had been rampaging around ever since a bag of apples had disappeared from his study, and so Bunter was keen to avoid him.

Bunter sighed heavily, and considered Tubb. That cheeky third former had had the nerve to think that he had taken his ice-cream. 'I ought to smack his head!' mumbled Bunter, but he didn't think he would—not today. He had an uneasy feeling that if a head got smacked, it would be his own.

Finally, there was the business of Vernon-Smith. That particular cloud hadn't blackened the Bunter horizon yet, but he rather thought it was on its way. When the Bouncer went to study no 4, he would want to know what had happened to his box of chocs. Smithy had a nasty temper, and he had a nasty suspicious mind. It would be just like him to blame William George—and he would be right.

Gloomily, Bunter trudged down the passage, and halted at the letter rack where the Famous Five were examining the mail. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had a letter with an exotic foreign stamp on it, and Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull were grinning. Their letters had contained cash. The whole group looked pleased. What they had, they shared. There would be a spread at tea time in study no 1.

'I say, Bunter!' said Bob Cherry. 'There's a letter for you.'

Bunter's face brightened. 'Chuck it over, Cherry.'

Ever since he had been at Greyfriars, he had expected a postal order. It had never arrived, but Bunter was an optimist. Perhaps it really had turned up this time. He forgot Quelch and his extra translation, he forgot Smithy and Tubb, and he even forgot the dreaded Coker as he held out a podgy paw. Beaming, he gazed at the envelope, and then his face fell. 'Oh!' he grunted.

'Not what you expected?' asked Harry Wharton.

'No! Tain't from my father or my uncle Carter. Tain't even from one of my titled relations—'

'Fancy that!' grinned Bob.

The Owl crumpled up the envelope, and stuffed it into his pocket. 'Stupid ass! Don't know why he's writing to me.'

'If you read it, my dear Bunter, you would find out,' said Hurree.

'It's not worth bothering about. It's from my cousin Wally. I bet the selfish beast is asking about the quid he lent me.'

'Jolly selfish!' agreed Frank, and the Famous Five grinned.

'Borrowed it last hols, I think,' said Bunter, airily. 'I'd completely forgotten about it. A chap can't be expected to remember trifles like that. It's neither here nor there—'

'It certainly is not here,' said Hurree.

'I can't bear people who are petty,' declared the Owl. 'I'm not cut out to be a miser. Trust Wally to remember a miserable loan like that.'

Again the Famous Five exchanged smiles. It seemed only too likely that the chap who lent the cash would remember it rather better than the fellow who had borrowed it, especially if the borrower happened to be William George Bunter.

'Was Wally the cousin who visited you here?' asked Harry, curiously.

'That's him.'

'The bloke who looked like you except that he washed?' asked Bob.

'Oh, really, Cherry! That's a bit much!'

'I rather liked him,' said Frank. 'How's he getting on?'

Bunter sniffed. 'How should I know? We don't have much to do with that side of the family. The trouble with poor relations is that the more you do for them, the more they expect.'

'Oh my hat!' murmured Bob.
'Anyway, I hardly ever see him. We've got nothing in common. Goes to some state school—'
'So what?' growled Johnny Bull. 'I did, for a bit.'
Bunter gave him a pitying look. 'I know. You can always tell.'
Johnny doubled his fists. 'You—'
Harry Wharton held his arm. 'Take it easy, Johnny.'
Billy Bunter took no notice. 'Anyway, you can't remember him,' he said. 'He's nothing like me—'
'Yes, he is,' said Bob. 'He's your spitting image.'
'Course he isn't. I mean, he's not good looking—not like me. Mind you, I don't want to boast. There's nothing to boast about. You're either born handsome or you're not. It leads to jealousy of course, but I can't help that. There's nothing I can do about my looks.'
'Nothing at all,' observed Hurree Singh, solemnly, and they all burst into laughter.
'What are you lot cackling for?' began Billy Bunter, irritably, but he changed his tone as he remembered his lack of cash. 'I say, you chaps. As you know, I was expecting a postal order—'
'Never!' exclaimed Bob.
'Yes, I was. Can't think what happened to it. Well, what about a little loan? How about something to tide me over?'
Bob looked at his friends. 'Time we toddled?'
'Time!'
'What do you think you're doing?' howled Bunter. 'It's a bit much, clearing off when a chap's talking to you.' They took no notice. Quite suddenly they had lost interest in the fat Owl.
'Beasts!' he yelled, as they disappeared round the corner, and then blinked, a look of alarm on his fat face. Coming towards him was a burly figure.
'Got you, Bunter, you bladder of lard!'
'Oh, lor'!' It was Coker of the fifth. One quick look at that angry red face was enough for Bunter. He fled.

Chapter 2

The Artful Dodger

Billy Bunter groaned. He was alone in study no 7, struggling with his Latin translation. On the table was a text book, a Latin dictionary, and a Latin grammar. On his face was an expression of misery, and on the tip of his fat, little nose was a blob of ink.

'Tain't fair!' he mumbled. His study mates, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, were down at the cricket nets with most of the form. It wasn't that Bunter wanted to be there too. Whacking a ball about with a bat didn't come very high on his list of priorities, but he felt that Toddy and Tom might have stayed behind and given him a hand with his translation.

He glanced longingly at the armchair, wondering if he could have a little rest, but he didn't dare risk it. Quelch would get shirty if the work wasn't done on time. Despondently, he looked at the Latin. He couldn't think why that chap Virgil had bothered to write all that rubbish in a foreign language, and what was more, he hadn't

much idea of what it was all about. It was something to do with a man called Aeneas—a stupid name if ever he'd heard one—who was on a ship in a storm. It was a pity that he hadn't let that beastly boat go down with all hands on board. But still, he hadn't, so he'd just have to get on with it.

After a great deal of effort, he managed to translate a line. There were still eleven to go. 'Crikey!' he mumbled, and scratched his head with his pen.

Suddenly he heard the sound of heavy feet trampling towards the study. Billy Bunter sat upright, his eyes goggling. He knew who owned those feet. Only Coker could make the floor shake like that, and Bunter quivered like a jelly. 'Oh, crumbs!' he gasped.

His luck had run out. He had dodged Coker more than once that day, but there was no dodging him now. As the feet came nearer, he leaped up, and stood by the wall. Coker flung the door open and it swung backwards, completely concealing him.

'Now, you podgy pilferer! Oh! He's not here!' There were more footsteps, and Coker turned round. 'He's not here, Potter! Didn't that fool Skinner say that he was up here, Greene?' he shouted.

'He might have been here. There are books on the table.'

'I'll boot Skinner!' roared Coker. 'Sending me on a wild goose chase! I'll kick him round the quad!'

'Hold on, Coker!' said Greene. 'He could have been right. It looks as if Bunter has been here.'

'Makes no difference!' bellowed Coker. 'I'll boot him just the same!'

Bunter almost chuckled aloud. Serve Skinner right for giving him away.

'Oh, come on, Coker,' urged Potter. 'Give it a rest. Let's push off to Pegg. We'll be late for the pictures.'

Coker thumped the table. 'I'm going to wallop that fat porker!'

'But you can't,' Potter said. 'He isn't here.'

'I'm not blind, you idiot! I'm going to catch that fat villain if it's the last thing I do!'

'If we're going to see that film at Pegg—'

Coker turned on Potter. 'If? If?' he boomed. 'What do you mean by that? I'm going to the flicks even if you're not. You can stick around if you like,' and Coker crashed out of the room.

Greene looked at Potter, his eyebrows raised, and Potter looked back and shrugged his shoulders as they followed Coker down the passage.

Bunter breathed again. 'Tee, hee, hee!' he chuckled, pleased with himself. He'd fooled Coker.

That great oaf hadn't even had the wit to look behind the door. At least he didn't have to worry about Coker for the time being.

Reluctantly, he sat down at the table again, and picked up his pen, but then he put it down. He looked at the books, and then at that inviting armchair, and considered the matter. After all, he'd used up a lot of energy in hiding from Coker and he needed a rest. Before he could make up his mind, there were more footsteps. Bunter's little eyes gleamed. Maybe it was Toddy or Tom Dutton coming back to give him a hand, or, better still, bearing a cake for tea.

Then he heard a voice. 'Trot in, Reddy. I've got a box of chocolates.'

Bunter just sat there, a look of frozen horror on his face. Smithy was wrong. There had been a box of chocs, but there wasn't one now.

'It's gone!' Smithy sounded astonished.

'It must be there.'

'Look for yourself. It's gone all right.' Smithy's voice was grim.

‘But——’ grim.

‘It’s that scrounging sausage!’ hissed Smithy. ‘It’s that fat fishcake!’

‘Bunter!’

‘Bunter!’ There was menace in Smithy’s voice. ‘Gum drops!’ Bunter got up hastily. He knew only too well what was going to happen. That suspicious beast Smithy was going to barge into study no 7, and he was going to be there in a second. There was only one thing for him to do, and he did it. He backed behind the door again, his fingers crossed, hoping that what had worked once would work twice.

The Bouncer slammed out of his room. ‘I’ll scrag him!’ He stormed down the passage and crashed into Bunter’s study. ‘You fat scoundrel—’ His voice died away.

‘What’s up, Smithy?’ asked Redwing.

‘He’s not here. He’s vanished. Come on, let’s go down to the Rag. He might be holed up there. I’m going to give him a tip when I see him.’

‘Oh?’ said Redwing.

‘Yes,’ said Smithy, ominously. ‘The tip of my shoe!’

‘He won’t be hanging around there, Smithy.’

‘It’s worth a try.’

As Vernon-Smith and Redwing clattered off, Billy Bunter emerged from behind the door. He clasped his podgy paws across his stomach. He was hungry. Any kind of activity made him hungry; narrow escapes made him hungrier than ever. He wrinkled his fat brow. What could he do about it? There wasn’t much point in looking in his own cupboard. He knew only too well that it was bare.

‘I’m ravenous!’ he said to himself. ‘Ravenous!’ And then inspiration came. He poked his head around the door, and peered cautiously up and down the passage. There wasn’t a sound. He rolled down to study no 1. Two of the Famous Five had struck it rich that morning. The chances were that they’d already bought supplies for tea.

He blinked in. There, all alone on the table, was a bulging carrier bag. With gleaming eyes, Billy Bunter stretched out eager hands. Rapidly he tore open the bag, and within seconds they were busily transferring food from one container to another.

The fat Owl forgot Quelch. He forgot his translation. He forgot Coker and Smithy and Tubb. He forgot everything but the task in front of him. His troubles disappeared as rapidly as the food. If it did occur to him that he was piling up yet another spot of trouble, it certainly didn’t bother him. The present was what he was interested in, not the future.

Chapter 3

Up-ended!

‘We’ll be late!’ grumbled Coker, as the fifth formers hurried along. ‘You shouldn’t have hung around the Remove studies like that.’

‘It was——’ began Greene.

‘A waste of time,’ growled Coker. ‘Get a move on, Potter!’

As they entered Pegg, Coker quickened his pace until they were almost trotting. Then, quite unexpectedly, he stopped dead in his tracks. ‘Wait a minute!’ he ordered.

‘What——?’

‘Shut up, Greene!’ Coker was staring at the crowded beach and promenade. There were a lot of people about. At one time, Pegg had been nothing but a small, fishing village, but it had recently developed into a popular holiday resort.

Obediently, Potter and Greene halted, but after a few minutes of inactivity, Potter said, 'Look here, Coker. Why are we standing like a lot of stuffed dummies?'

'Belt up!'

'But—'

'You heard!' Coker continued to eye the crowds.

Potter and Greene stood silently on either side of him. They were fed to the back teeth, but since he was paying for the trip to the cinema, they hadn't much Option.

'It was him all right,' said Coker. 'But where's he got to?'

'Who are you on about?' asked Greene.

'That fat porcupine!'

'Bunter?'

'Bunter! I'm after that fat tick, and I'm not moving until I spot him again.' He folded his arms and frowned.

'Time's getting on,' warned Potter. 'We'll be late for the film.'

Coker ignored him. 'I'll get him! I'll teach him a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry. He won't snitch food from the fifth form studies again.'

'I say, Coker, old man. I wouldn't do it here,' said Greene uneasily.

'I'll spiflicate him! I'll grind him into the dust!'

'He'll keep. You'll get him at school sooner or later,' remarked Potter.

Coker looked coldly at his friends. He could do without their advice. He'd sworn to wallop Bunter as soon as he saw him again, and that was what he intended to do.

What was more, he didn't care where it was. It was the walloping that counted, not the place.

'So that's why he wasn't in school. He must have come straight here. You wait. I'll smack that pilfering pancake's fat head'.

'Not here,' said Greene, nervously. 'There are dozens of people about.'

'Shut up!'

'But just think—'

'You heard!' Thinking wasn't Coker's strong point. 'I saw him a few minutes ago. It was that idiot all right. Mind you, he'd changed his clothes, and he hadn't got his specs on, but—' Suddenly his eyes gleamed, and he pointed. 'There he is! Look!'

Peter and Greene stared. A crowd of people were coming towards them. They were sauntering along in small groups, enjoying the sunshine, and, weaving his way between them, was a plump youth. It was either Billy Bunter or his twin brother, but then the Owl didn't have a twin.

He looked as he always looked, with his fat, little nose buttoned onto his fat, round face, and he rolled along with that familiar gait, but there was a difference. Perhaps it was because he was wearing neither his specs nor his cap, or perhaps it was because he had swopped his blazer and his checked trousers for a smart, grey suit.

Not that Coker was interested in differences. William George could have been dressed like Tarzan for all he cared. All that concerned him was the fact that the Owl was almost in his grasp.

The fat figure came nearer. Although he must have seen the fifth formers, instead of bolting like a frightened rabbit as usual, he strolled on, hardly giving them a second glance.

Coker's brawny arms shot out, and he grabbed him. 'Got you!' he shouted, triumphantly.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter, as he was spun round like a top. 'Here, I say—what do you think you're doing? Leggo!' Bunter's fat squeak rose to an outraged yell as Coker tightened his grip on him. 'Are you off your rocker or something? Leggo!'

‘Not likely!’

Potter and Greene backed away. They weren’t too keen to be involved, particularly since a lot of people were standing around, watching.

Bunter wriggled like a worm. ‘You’re mad! Take your hands off me!’

Coker laughed. ‘What a hope!’

‘Get off! Leggo!’

Coker transferred his grip from Bunter’s collar to his ear. ‘I said I’d wallop you, you fat fiend. Now I’m keeping my promise. This is for starters!’

Smack! There was a report like a rifle shot as Coker’s large and heavy hand landed on Bunter’s head.

‘Ouch! Ooooh!’ yelled Bunter.

Coker grinned. He was enjoying himself. He was going to follow up that first satisfying smack with another, and then one after that. Bunter was a sitting duck. Bunter seemed stunned by that first blow. He stood there, blinking at Coker, and rubbing his sore head, but as Coker lifted his hand again, he went into the attack. As he grappled with the fifth former, he hooked a leg round one of Coker’s, and then, with unexpected force and agility, he pitched him backwards. Coker landed on the ground with a sickening thud.

‘Wooroo!’ spluttered Coker. ‘Ooooh! Ouch!’

Potter and Greene stood watching, hardly able to believe their eyes. There was Coker, sprawling helplessly on the ground, up-ended by Bunter.

The Owl stepped across him and looked down, an amused gleam in his eye. ‘Keep your paws to yourself from now on,’ he said, as he dusted his hands off, and he disappeared into the crowd.

‘What a turn up for the book!’ breathed Potter.

‘Oooh! Ouch!’ Coker sat up, rubbing his head. He scrambled to his feet. ‘Where is he? I’ll smash him. I’ll—I’ll—’ he glared round at his friends. ‘Where is he? Why didn’t you grab him?’

‘Couldn’t. He slipped away

‘I can see that, you idiot! And what are you grinning for, Greene? Think it funny, do you?’ Coker shook his fist under Greene’s nose.

‘Of course I don’t,’ said Greene, hastily.

‘I say, Coker,’ said Potter. ‘It’s half past four. We’ll be late for the flicks.

‘Blow the flicks!’ Coker scanned the horizon again, hoping for a glimpse of Bunter

‘You’re wasting your time,’ declared Greene. ‘He’ll be half way back to Greyfriars by now. Come on, Coker. Let’s get going.’

‘I’ll turn him inside out!’ shouted Coker, furiously.

‘Take it easy!’

Coker’s face was crimson. ‘I’ll burst him! I’ll—’

‘Come on, Potter,’ said Greene. He’d had enough. Coker or no Coker, flicks or no flicks, he wasn’t going to hang around any longer.



‘WOOROO!’ SPLUTTERED COKER.

Coker glowered. That filcher of other people’s apples had vamoosed. There wasn’t sight or sound of him. ‘I’ll take him to pieces!’ he growled. ‘He won’t—’ Suddenly, he realised that he was alone. Potter and Greene were already making their way back to Greyfriars. ‘Here, you two!’ he bellowed, as he trotted after them. ‘What are you going that way for? I thought we were going to the pictures!’ He grabbed their arms, and turned them round. ‘Move!’ he said, impatiently, and led them towards the cinema. ‘We’ll be late!’

Chapter 4

Bunter’s Alibi

‘Are you feeling as peckish as I am?’ asked Bob Cherry.
‘I’m not peckish. I’m starving,’ said Frank Nugent.
‘I’m ravenous,’ agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
‘What are we hanging about for?’ said Harry Wharton. ‘Let’s go up to the study.’
The Famous Five had been practising at the nets, and had stayed out far longer than they had intended. The match against Highcliffe School was coming off at the end of the week, and they were keen to field a really strong team. The exercise had made them even more ready for tea than usual.
Bob led the way upstairs. ‘I’m as hungry as a hunter.’
‘Or a Bunter,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and they burst into laughter.
Bob pushed open the door of study no 1, and came to a halt so suddenly that Hurree cannoned into him, and Frank barged into Hurree.
‘What’s up?’ asked Harry Wharton.
‘Look!’ Bob pointed to the table.
Johnny peered over Bob’s shoulder. ‘Suffering cats!’

‘And crocodiles!’ added Frank.

The five juniors crowded into the study and stood around the table, their faces gloomy. The bulging carrier bag had disappeared. All that was left were some torn wrappings, and a few crumbs. Everything else had gone. The ham had gone, and so had the jam. There wasn’t a doughnut or a meringue in sight. The Famous Five looked grimly at each other.

‘Hurree, you really hit the nail on the head,’ said Harry Wharton. ‘It’s just as you said.’

‘As hungry as a Bunter,’ repeated Johnny Bull.

‘Nothing left,’ said Bob, sadly.

‘Filched!’ snorted Frank.

‘Gone for ever,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

‘Bunter’s gone too far this time,’ growled Johnny Bull. ‘Tea’s finished in the dining room, and the tuck shop’s closed. We’ll starve. Just wait until I see that blithering blancmange!’

‘Someone will have some grub,’ said Bob.

‘There’s no point in staying here,’ Harry remarked.

‘Let’s try Mauly,’ suggested Frank. ‘He’s usually well stocked.’

‘Good idea,’ agreed Bob, ‘but that can wait. Bunter comes first.’

‘Right.’ Followed by the others, Harry made his way out into the passage just as Vernon-Smith came up the stairs. ‘Seen Bunter, Smithy?’

Smithy gave a grim smile. ‘No. I was rather keen to have a little chat with him myself. I’ve spent quite a bit of time looking for him.’

‘Pity you didn’t try my study,’ said Harry, briefly.

‘He might be doing that extra translation for Quelch,’ said Bob. ‘Let’s try his study.’ He pounded along the corridor, and barged in, crashing the door against the wall.

‘Oh!’ he grunted. Only Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were there.

‘There’s no need to be so polite when you come in,’ said Toddy, sarcastically.

‘Where’s that fat sausage?’ demanded Bob. ‘The grub in our study’s vanished.’

‘And so has Bunter,’ said Hurree Ramset Jam Singh.

‘It’s no good asking me,’ said Toddy. ‘He hasn’t even done that translation for Quelch yet. He said he was going to get down to it this afternoon, but he’s only done one line so far. He didn’t come into tea either.’

‘He didn’t need to,’ Johnny said. ‘Not after packing our stuff away.’

‘We’ll massacre him!’ said Bob, Fiercely.

‘Have you seen him, Dutton?’ asked Frank. Tom looked up. He was partially deaf.

‘What’s that about mutton?’

‘Oh, crikey!’ shouted Johnny. ‘Where’s Bunter?’

‘Why ask me? I don’t know any hunters.’

‘Nothing to do with hunters!’ bawled Johnny. ‘Bunter! B for bloated, U for ugly, N for noodle, T for twister, E for exhausting, and R for rotter. Got it now?’

‘There’s no need to shout like that,’ said Tom, looking offended. ‘I can’t hear if you yell.’

‘We were asking about our friend Bunter,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, quietly.

‘Oh, Bunter! Why didn’t Johnny say so? I think he left school. Coker was after him, so I expect he made himself scarce.’

‘He didn’t go straight away,’ said Frank, bitterly. ‘He got his paws on our food before he left.’

‘Let’s go and look for him in the Rag,’ suggested Johnny.

As they trampled down the stairs, they met Skinner, Snoop and Stott on their way up.

‘Seen Bunter?’ asked Bob.

Skinner nodded, and then paused. ‘Lots of times,’ he said at last.

‘Don’t be a fool! Have you seen him recently?’

‘No, but I can guess where he is.’

‘Where’s that?’

‘As close to grub as he can get. Find the grub, and you’ll find Bunter.’

‘Very funny!’

They went along to the Rag, and found Lord Mauleverer lounging gracefully in the doorway.

‘Have you seen, Bunter, Mauly? Is he in there?’

‘Happy to say he isn’t.’

‘He cleared off once he’d scoffed our tuck,’ said Johnny. ‘Time’s getting on. He’ll have to come back soon.’

‘That’s right. Let’s wait by the gates and form a welcoming party,’ suggested Harry.

Gosling, the porter, was standing outside his lodge, a bunch of keys in his hand. It wasn’t quite time for lock-ups, and although small groups of people were strolling in, there was no sign of the Owl.

Temple and his friends drifted by. ‘Seen anything of Bunter?’ called Bob.

‘Saw something a bit like a barrage balloon sitting on the stile in Greyfriars Lane,’

Temple replied. ‘It’s got a dirty face.’

‘Aha, that sounds like our friend,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Horace Coker, an angry expression on his rugged face, stalked in with Potter and Greene close behind him.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo!’ Bob shouted. ‘Have you seen anything of Bunter?’

Coker’s face became even blacker. Bunter’s name was like a red rag to a bull. ‘Isn’t he back here yet?’

‘No. We’re waiting for him,’ explained Frank. ‘We’ve got a bone to pick with him.’

‘So have I. I’ll teach that fat freak to hook my leg, and send me flying! You’ll see! I’ll pulverise him. I’ll rip him to bits!’

The Famous Five stared at Coker in amazement. It was Johnny who broke the silence.

‘He couldn’t have. He just couldn’t have tackled you, Coker. He hasn’t even got the guts to stand up to Tubb.’

Coker turned on Johnny Bull. ‘Are you saying I’m making it up?’ he asked, threateningly. As Johnny quickly shook his head, Coker went on, ‘I should know whether he pitched me over or not. I’d just smacked his head for pinching my apples when he tripped me up. He took me by surprise. By the time that I’d got up again, he’d vanished.’

‘That’s right,’ agreed Potter. ‘He lost himself in the crowds at Pegg.’

‘So that’s where he’s been,’ remarked Harry Wharton. ‘When did all this take place?’

‘It was just on half past four,’ said Potter. ‘I heard the clock strike.’

‘That’s right,’ Greene said. ‘We thought we were going to be late for the pictures.’

‘Shuffle your feet, Greene,’ said Coker. ‘I’m not hanging around while you waste time talking to junior twits,’ and he marched off.

‘Did it really happen at half past four?’ asked Harry.

‘Yes,’ said Greene, briefly.

The Famous Five looked at each other. They could hardly believe that Bunter had floored the mighty Coker, but he must have done. Coker had said so himself.

‘We came to the wrong conclusion. Our friend Bunter couldn’t have been in two places at once,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

‘Bothered if I can make it out,’ Bob said. ‘Somebody grabbed our grub, but Bunter—’

'It was him,' insisted Johnny Bull.

'But how could it have been?' argued Frank. 'How could he have got to Pegg by half past four unless he left straight after classes. You know how long it takes him to get anywhere.'

'He usually gets overtaken by quite elderly snails,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'So how could he have pinched our tuck? It must have been someone else.'

'A cheeky third year?' suggested Harry.

'It was Bunter,' repeated Johnny, stubbornly, although he hadn't the slightest idea of how he could have pulled it off.

Bob shook his head. 'It couldn't have been him. You're wrong, Johnny. He was in Pegg, all right. Coker would never have made up a story like that.'

'Well,' said Harry, slowly. 'I'm glad Coker told us. We wouldn't have listened to that fat freak, and he'd have got the biggest scragging of his life.'

'We would have assumed that he was lying as usual,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'And we would have been right,' muttered Johnny Bull.

'Not this time. Well there's not much point in hanging around here. Let's go and find Mauly, and ask ourselves to tea. He's bound to have something to eat.'

'Let's!' said Bob, enthusiastically. 'I'm starving!' and they disappeared into the House to look for the hospitable Mauly. The disappearance of their food was still a mystery, but Bunter was in the clear for once. Coker had given him a cast iron alibi.

Chapter 5

The Poor Relation

'Oh, lor'!' sighed Billy Bunter.

He was sitting on the stile in Friardale Lane under the shade of a beech tree. It was pleasant there.

Behind him was the dusky wood and in front was a country lane winding between tall hedges, and beyond that, sheep grazed in a field, while a cow gazed solemnly at her own reflection in a pond. Nature was beautiful, but its beauty was wasted on William George Bunter.

He had other things on his mind. His sins were coming home to roost. He had only just escaped from Coker's clutches, Smithy was after his blood, and he had no doubt that when he returned to Greyfriars, the Famous Five would be on the warpath.

Bunter's fat face grew even more gloomy when he thought of Quelch. Quelch had said that he wanted that beastly translation before prep that evening, and there was no way that it could be done. Quelch would exact retribution, that was for sure, and it was bound to be an unpleasant experience.

So, sitting on the stile, Bunter tried to think up a really good excuse. He could say that he really had done it, but that Toddy had lit the fire with it. How would that sound?

Billy Bunter thought it over. He wasn't too sure. Would Quelch believe that Toddy had had a roaring fire on such a beautiful summer's day?



'OH LOR'!

Perhaps he should think up something else. He could say that he'd left that rotten old translation on the window sill, and that it had blown out of the window. It was true that there hadn't been even the hint of a breeze all day long, but if some thoughtless fellow had opened the door quickly it would have created a draught, and the paper could have gone flying into the quad.

Bunter scratched his head, and then he chuckled. That was it! Now he knew what he was going to tell Quelch. He'd say he'd left it in the study and that some idiot had upset the inkpot all over the translation so that he couldn't possibly have handed it in. He chuckled again. That sounded like a real winner to him.

The chuckle died away as he recalled his other problems. The best thing for him to do was to keep clear of Wharton and those other beasts for as long as possible. He'd wait until the last possible moment, and hope that they got tired of waiting for him.

Sitting on that stile wasn't hard work even for Bunter, and for once he wasn't even hungry, but still he went through his pockets hoping to find a bull's eye or a toffee to keep him company.

He was disappointed. There was nothing to suck or chew. There wasn't even a crumb to be found, but he did come across something else. It was his cousin Wally's letter.

William George wasn't in the slightest interested in anything Wally had to say, especially if it was about that borrowed quid, but still, reading it was better than doing nothing. He ripped open the envelope with a dirty thumb and peered at it.

Dear Billy,

By the time you get this letter, I shall be very near Greyfriars School. It's half term, and my parents thought I'd get a bit bored hanging around at home on my own. Business is booming, and they are both needed at the shop. So, they've booked me in at 15 Marine Parade at Pegg for the coming week. Mrs. Smallbones, the

landlady, sounds very pleasant, and I'm told the food is excellent. I'd like to look you up at Greyfriars and see some of the chaps I met before. Do you remember how they took me for you? It was a bit of a joke, wasn't it? However, Billy, if you'd rather I didn't come, just say so. I shall understand. Why don't you drop in at Marine Parade anyway? I'll look forward to seeing you,

Yours ever,
Wally.

'Yah!' said Billy Bunter, and then he said it again with even greater emphasis. 'Yah!' See Wally? Not likely, not if he had anything to do with it. No one could call him a snob, but there were limits. You couldn't expect a fellow to want to see another fellow whose parents kept a shop, no matter how big and successful it was. And you certainly couldn't expect a fellow to want to see another fellow who went to a state school. It was a bit much.

Mind you, he could put up with poor relations as long as he didn't have to be reminded of them. He could even borrow a quid from them as long as he wasn't reminded of it. Now he came to think of it, Wally had probably been quite proud to lend it to him. Maybe he'd done him a good turn by borrowing it.

He glanced down at the letter again, and snorted. Wally had got a bit of a nerve, staying at a place so close to Greyfriars. 'Yah!' he exclaimed again.

He was even more irritated by the reminder of the time when they had been mistaken for each other. It was true, Billy admitted, that there was some resemblance, but he had a fine solid figure whereas Wally's could only be called fat. There was no getting away from it—Wally was nothing but a roly-poly. There was also the matter of height. When they had been measured together, they had appeared to be identical, but Bunter didn't believe that. He felt taller, and that meant that he was taller.

As for looks—why, they weren't in the same league. Bunter knew that he was handsome, but was Wally good looking? Billy Bunter shook his head. Certainly not. So how on earth could anyone think that they looked alike? Wally didn't even have the advantage of wearing glasses. In Billy's opinion, faces without specs always looked a bit bare. He felt that his own spectacles gave him an air of distinction that poor old Wally lacked. Look alike indeed! What a laugh!

He stared once more at the crumpled letter in his grubby hand. 'Hm!' he grunted.

There was something of interest. Wally said that the grub was good. Maybe it was his duty to look up his cousin. Next Wednesday was a half holiday. Wally would be so pleased to see him, that he'd probably ask him to tea. Yes, that's what he would do.

But still, he'd have to make it clear to Wally that there wasn't going to be an invitation to Greyfriars. That was out. That would be carrying charity too far.

There was the faint sound of a bell ringing in the distance. It was time for lock-ups. Very slowly and reluctantly, Bunter clambered from the stile. He couldn't postpone the evil hour any longer. He'd got to make his way back to school. He knew that he'd have to keep a wary eye open for Coker, Smithy and Tubb, but he did just have a faint hope that the Famous Five wouldn't have jumped to the conclusion that he'd raided their study.

There was still the problem of Quelch. He hadn't quite decided on the story he was going to use, but he'd worry about that later. As he reached the gates, Gosling appeared, rattling his keys. 'Just made it,' he said.

'Yah!' said Billy Bunter.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo!’ came a familiar roar, ‘Buck up, Bunter. Get a move on or you’ll be late for roll call.’

Bunter blinked in surprise. That wasn’t the kind of welcome he’d been expecting. ‘I—I—I say, Cherry,’ he stammered. ‘I—I’ve been out of gates ever since classes. I—er—I’ve not been nowhere near the studies. So it couldn’t have been me—’

‘I know you’ve been out, fathead. Coker told us you had.’

‘Coker?’ Billy Bunter couldn’t think what Bob was talking about. ‘Did he?’

‘I say, Bunter,’ said Bob Cherry, a note of admiration in his voice. ‘How did you pull it off?’

‘P—p—pull it off. Oh, no! Wasn’t me. Wasn’t there. I hope you don’t think it was anything to do with me, Cherry.’

Bob Cherry gave Bunter a thump on the back that sent him staggering. ‘What are you ashamed of I thought it was a pretty good show.’

‘You—you do?’ Bunter was astonished.

‘You bet. So how did you do it?’

‘Do what?’

‘Trip Coker up.’

Bunter’s jaw dropped. ‘Oh!’ he gasped at last.

‘I wouldn’t have thought that you’d got the nerve.’

‘Bob!’ shouted Harry. ‘Come on. It’ll be roll call in a minute.’

Billy Bunter followed them into hall. He couldn’t imagine why Cherry had thought that he’d sent Coker flying—not that he cared. They could think what they liked as long as they didn’t think that he’d pinched their food. Well, that was one worry off his mind. He was in the clear as far as the Famous Five were concerned. Now he only had Coker, Smithy, Tubb and Quelch to worry about. Perhaps those little spots of trouble would evaporate in exactly the same way.

Chapter 6

Prep in No 7

‘Hee, hee, hee!’ Bunter let out a fat chuckle. He was in his study with Peter Todd and Tom Hutton, doing prep—at least, Toddy and Tom were. Bunter had his books open but he hadn’t actually started work.

Peter Todd looked up. ‘Something funny in Virgil?’ he asked. ‘Or are you just looking forward to being scalped by Quelch in the morning? You’d better get a move on. You’ve still got that translation to do.’

‘Oh, blow Quelch!’ said Bunter, impatiently. ‘And blow his translation too. You don’t have to worry about me. I’ve got it all sorted out.’ He decided to try out his story on Toddy. ‘Suppose I’d done it, and you went and lit the fire with it—’

Toddy stared. ‘I did what?’

‘By mistake, old man. I wouldn’t want to get you in the mire. I’ll say you used it to light the fire by accident.’

Toddy gazed at Bunter in disbelief. ‘But we haven’t had a fire, you stupid ass!’

‘I know that, and you know that, but Quelch doesn’t. Mind you, it doesn’t have to be that. It could have blown out of the window when someone opened the door. Only too easy if I’d left it on the window sill.’ He gazed anxiously at Toddy. ‘What do you think of that?’

‘Oh, crumbs!’ gasped Toddy.

‘Or there could have been some chaps in here, larking about, you know, and they could have upset ink all over my translation, so I couldn’t hand it in. Not to Quelch, I couldn’t.’

‘I don’t believe it!’ exclaimed Toddy.

‘You don’t have to!’ snapped Bunter. ‘It’s Quelch who’s got to.’ He lolled back, a fat grin on his face.

‘Still, I’m not thinking about him now. It’s Coker—tee, hee, hee!’ and he tittered again.

‘What was all that about tripping Coker up?’ asked Toddy. ‘I wouldn’t have thought you’d got it in you.’

‘Coker—yah! said Bunter, with a careless air. If he rubs me up the wrong way, I’ll do it again.’

‘It won’t be long before you get your chance. He’s after your blood.’

‘Pooh!’ said Bunter, disdainfully. ‘I don’t give two hoots for him. He’s a stupid oaf. I can handle him.’

Toddy smiled. Bunter would change his tune when he came face to face with the fifth former.

There was quite a little procession of visitors to study no 7 that evening. The news of his encounter with Coker had spread, and chaps popped in to ask the fat man about it. Bunter adopted a modest air, admitting that he had sent Coker flying, and saying casually that he’d do it again if he had to. He sat back and enjoyed it all. If they thought he’d got the strength, nerve and muscle to tackle Coker, then let them.

Actually, he’d spent quite a lot of time wondering what had really taken place, and then light had dawned. Coker had mistaken Wally for himself. He’d lashed out, Wally had hit back, and up-ended him.

Although he despised Wally, the Owl had to admit that Wally was extremely fit. He’d always loved games, and he was very good at them. He had to admit that Wally had brains too—not quite up to his standard, of course, but brainy enough. Why he’d even taught himself Latin, since it wasn’t done in his school. Wally got a kick out of doing things well.

A thought came into his mind, and a look of annoyance crossed his face. If only he’d read Wally’s letter straight away, he could have slipped over to Pegg and got him to do that translation for him.

The thought of Pegg set the Owl chuckling again. Wally must have got quite a shock when a fellow he didn’t know had walked up and smacked him on the ear. Wally probably hadn’t thought it funny, but he did.

Bunter went on thinking. He’d enjoyed his bit of glory, but he’d have to keep Wally well away from Greyfriars or people would guess who really had floored Coker. There was another danger. Once the Famous Five clapped eyes on him, they’d put two and two together, and realise who had snaffled their food.

Having thought that out, Bunter made his plans. What he was going to do was to call on Wally in Marine Parade, sample Mrs. Smallbones’s tea, and get a first-hand account of the meeting with Coker. Then, Provided Quelch hadn’t already asked him for it, he’d get Wally to do that rotten translation for him. He’d be glad to, he felt sure of that. After all, most people would have ignored a poor relation. Bunter smirked.

Now he came to think of it, he realised just how decent he was.

Time ticked by. There was a rustle as Peter Todd turned another page. He cast an eye at Bunter. ‘Get On with your prep, fat man. There’ll be trouble if you don’t.’

‘Oh, blow prep!’ said Bunter, peevisly. ‘Tain’t fair, that’s what I think. Why do we have to keep our noses to the grindstone when other chaps get half term, and can do

what they like and go on holiday? I can jolly well tell you that I'd rather be in a seaside boarding house with lots of grub, and nothing to do but eat it.' He heaved a sigh. 'I wouldn't mind changing places—'

'Changing places? Who with?' asked Toddy.

'Oh, crumbs! Did—did I say that? No, no, didn't mean it.' Bunter hastily flicked over a page of his Virgil. 'I say, Toddy, give me a hand with this rot, will you? Where are we supposed to start?'

'It's the bit about the shipwreck.' Toddy found the place. 'Get going, fathead!'

Bunter looked dismally at it, 'What shipwreck?'

'Don't be so thick!' said Toddy, testily. 'You've already done one line, haven't you?'

'It's a pity they didn't get drowned.' Bunter stared at the page, but he couldn't keep his mind on it. He visualised life at Pegg. He saw Wally lounging in a deck chair, Wally eating ice-cream, Wally listening to the band as he dipped a hand into a bag of toffees, and Wally at Marine Parade, being presented with plate after plate of delicious grub. He sighed again. Life just didn't seem fair.

The bell rang, and there was the sound of footsteps in the passage as fellows finished their prep and went down to the Rag. Toddy and Tom began to put their books away, but Bunter looked gloomily at his. As usual, he hadn't completed his work, and as usual, he'd be in hot water the next day, but nevertheless, he piled his books up too. He wasn't going on working when everyone else had stopped. No one was going to call him a swot.

He blinked anxiously at Toddy. 'I—I say, Toddy. Have a quick look down the passage, and let me know if Smithy's about.'

Toddy laughed. 'Why? Has it got anything to do with Smithy's chocs?'

A look of indignation spread over Bunter's face. 'I never had his chocs!' he hooted. 'It makes me sick the way I get blamed when something's missing. I never knew he had a box o chocs. It wasn't as if they were much good. Fancy making a song and dance about a box of rotten old chocs!' He broke off as Toddy let out a roar of laughter. 'That's right, cackle away! Well, I'm just telling you, it wasn't me, and it wasn't me who had Wharton's grub. It couldn't have been me. I was sending Coker flying when I was in his study, wasn't I?'

'What do you mean?' asked Toddy, sharply.

No, no—when I wasn't in his study. That's what I meant, it was the same with Smithy. I never came upstairs, and if anyone said I did, I—I was only getting a book—'

'You did what?'

'That's just it,' said Bunter, quickly. 'I didn't. Smithy's got a suspicious mind, that's what he's got.'

He never saw me. Couldn't have. I saw him beetling off before I nipped in—no. Not into his study.

Wouldn't. Besides—'

'We know you couldn't have lifted the stuff from study no 1, but we don't know when Smithy's chocs disappeared, do we?'

'They weren't there when I went out.'

'Oh? So you never clapped eyes on them?' said Toddy, grinning.

'Certainly not! Didn't know he'd got them in his cupboard.'

As Toddy started laughing again, the door opened, and Smithy looked in. 'There you are, Bunter,' he said, pleasantly. 'I missed you this afternoon.'

'Oh, did you?' Bunter wasn't fooled by Smithy's genial manner. 'I—I—I say, Smithy. If—if it's about those chocs, I—I never had them. Nothing to do with me.'

Didn't—ow! Ouch! Keep off, you beast!

He dodged round the table, but, he wasn't quick enough. 'Yarooo! he roared, as a well-shod foot came into contact with the tightest trousers in the school.

'That's a taste of what you'll get unless you replace my chocs,' said Smithy, as he walked out of the room.

'Oooooh!' moaned Bunter. 'I—I say, Toddy, I—I'd better get some for him if he's going to kick up all that fuss—not that I had them.'

'Good idea!' said Toddy, briskly.

'So what about a loan, Toddy? Just until my postal order turns up.'

Bunter beamed as Toddy dug his hand into his pocket, and pressed a coin into his paw. As the Owl peered at it, the beam faded. 'You beast, Toddy! What good's five pence? It's a bit much, having to share a study with someone who hasn't got two pennies to rub together—ouch, you rotten beast!' He only caught the tip of a shoe, but it hurt just the same.

As Toddy went out, Bunter turned to Tom Dutton. 'Lend me a pound, old man.'

'A hound! What for? We're not allowed to keep pets.'

'Not a hound!' howled Bunter. 'Cash! Just a loan.'

'Leave you alone? That suits me all right. I get fed up with your shrieks and yells,' and Tom hurried after Toddy.

Billy Bunter decided to stay where he was. He wasn't going to risk Smithy's wrath by going into the Rag. He could only hope that his postal order really would turn up in the morning. If it didn't, his future was going to be a painful one.

Chapter 7

Unlucky Bunter

'Bunter!'

It was the following morning and Bunter had hardly sat down before Mr. Quelch fixed him with his gimlet eyes, and rapped out his name. Bunter knew what was coming. It was that putrid translation, the one he should have delivered the previous evening. Some of the other masters forgot to ask for extra work set as a punishment, but Quelch was like an elephant. He never forgot.

'Place your translation on my desk, Bunter.'

'Oh, yes, sir! But please, Mr. Quelch, I—I'

'It is completed, I hope, Bunter.' Quelch's voice was icy, and Bunter knew there was going to be trouble unless he came up with a good story.

'Oh, sir. Yes, sir. I did it yesterday. Kept at it until—'

'Then produce it, Bunter.'

'Oh—er—that is, I—I left it on my study table, Mr. Quelch.'

'Then you were a foolish boy, Bunter. Go and fetch it immediately.'

'I mean—that is, that wasn't now. It was then.'

'Explain yourself, Bunter.' Mr. Quelch sounded annoyed.

'I—I—I left it on my study table yesterday,' said Bunter, nervously. 'And then, when I came in, it had—it had gone, sir.'

'Gone?' barked Mr. Quelch.

'It had flown—no, no. It had blown out of the window.' Unnerved by Quelch's stare, the fat Owl blurted out the first of the excuses that came into his head. 'Somebody flung open the study door, sir, and there was a gust of wind and it flew straight through the window.'

'He won't get away with that,' whispered Bob.

'Not good enough,' agreed Frank.

Bunter blinked hopefully at Quelch. Lying didn't worry him. It was not being believed that bothered him, and, judging by the expression on Quelch's face, he wasn't going to be believed.

'Bunter, you are prevaricating. You are not telling the truth.'

Bunter looked hurt. 'Me, sir? Oh, no, sir.'

'You wretched boy! You have not done that translation at all.'

'Oh, sir!' stammered Billy Bunter. 'I—I—I did every word of it, sir. It wasn't my fault that Toddy lit the fire with it. Never thinks, Toddy don't.'

'What!'

Bunter was alarmed at the fury in Mr. Quelch's voice. 'I—I——er, that is, Toddy blew out of the window, sir. No, the draught from the window—that's what lit the fire—'

'Upon my word!'

'It—it—er—um—well, it just happened. Just bad luck the way Toddy opened the door with my translation, and the fire blew straight out of the window. No, no. The fire lighted the window, and the door blew up the chimney.' Bunter was hopelessly confused by now. 'And I couldn't hand it in, not with all that ink all over it after those great apes had been larking about and knocked over the inkpot and it got blown out of the window—'

Mr. Quelch's voice was like thunder. 'Silence, you foolish boy!'

'Oh, yes, sir,' babbled Bunter. 'I'm sorry I never done it—that is, that I didn't take it straight to your study but it was all inky after Toddy lit the window with the chimney.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence!' said Mr. Quelch, furiously. He glared at Bunter again. 'Bunter. I do not want you to translate twelve lines of the Aeneid—'

'Oh, sir. Thank you, sir.'

'You will translate thirty-six lines instead.'

'Oh, sir!'

'And unless I have them tomorrow morning, I shall cane you.'

'Oh, lor'! Oh, crikey!'

'And I shall punish you for lying. You will spend this afternoon in detention.'

'Oh, golly gumdrops,' muttered Bunter. He sat gloomily in his place. No half holiday, no trip to Pegg, no chat with Wally and, worst of all, no slap-up tea at Marine Parade.

At break, Mr. Quelch dismissed the class. As Bunter was leaving the room, he said, 'Detention is being taken by Monsieur Charpentier. I have no doubt that your French verbs can do with some attention. I shall tell him to expect you in extra school.'

'Beast!' breathed Bunter, turning away.

'What did you say, boy?'

Bunter gulped. 'Thank you, sir. That's what I said, sir.'

'Oh?' Mr. Quelch gave him a long, hard look, but he let the fat Owl go.

Bunter bowled out into the sunny quad, and joined the rest of his form. 'I say, you fellows,' he said. 'Who's going to do that translation while I'm in extra school? I can't be expected to do everything, you know.'

'You must be joking!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter gave him a reproachful look. 'Oh, really, Cherry. It's not much to ask of a chum.'

'That's right,' grinned Bob. 'It isn't much to ask of a chum.'

'Well, then—'

‘So that’s why I’m not doing it.’

Bunter turned his back on Bob Cherry, blinking hopefully at Johnny Bull. ‘What about you, Johnny?’

‘Nope,’ said Johnny. ‘You shouldn’t have lied to Quelch.’

‘That’s right.’ agreed Frank.

Bunter looked hurt. ‘Well,’ he began. ‘I must say I’m disappointed in all of you. I didn’t know you could be so ungrateful. As for you, Wharton, well, I can only say that you must have a nasty mean streak underneath all that good humour. You could do that translation standing on your head. When I think of all I’ve done for you in the past——’

‘Oh, yes? Like what?’

‘Like—like——well, er, um, giving you a few tips over your cricket, helping you out with your French, that sort of thing.’ The fat Owl looked round crossly as there was a burst of laughter. ‘What’s so funny about that? I—oooooh! Yaroo!’ He spun round, clutching the seat of his trousers. ‘What the——?’

The Bouncer eyed him. ‘Just giving you another sample,’ he said casually. ‘And believe me, you blistering sausage, it’s going to happen day after day after day. It will only stop when I find that box of chocs waiting for me,’ and he strolled on with Redwing.

‘Ouch! Beast!’ Bunter turned pathetically to the Famous Five. ‘What about a little loan?’ he asked. ‘Just enough for a box of chocs. I’ll pay it back as soon as I get my postal order, really I will.’ He was wasting his breath. They were already walking away.

Miserably, Billy Bunter trudged across the quad. One of a little knot of third formers caught sight of the fat Owl, and nudged Tubb. He looked round, his eyes gleaming, and he rolled up his sleeves, but Bunter spotted him at the same moment, and retreated. He wasn’t going to risk an encounter with Tubb. Keeping his eye on the warlike third former, he backed away, almost into the outstretched arms of Coker. ‘Nabbed you!’ roared the fifth former. ‘Got you at last! I’ll teach you——’ but he spoke too soon. With an amazing turn of speed, Bunter slipped beneath those gorilla-like arms, bolted into the school, and pelted upstairs. Minutes later, he reached the comparative safety of his study where he flung himself into the armchair, panting loudly, and there he stayed until the bell rang for lessons again.

Life seemed hard. What with Quelch and Smithy, Coker and Tubb, extra French and no half holiday, it hardly seemed worth living. Bunter was completely and utterly cheesed off, and perhaps that was why a great idea began to develop in his fat and fatuous brain.

Chapter 8

Reckless Bunter

‘Why not?’ said Billy Bunter, leaning his considerable weight against an ancient elm tree. The Owl was leaning because it was better than standing. Sitting would have been better still, but unfortunately, there were no armchairs in the quad.

The troubles that had flooded in on him had come thick and fast, but instead of looking doleful, he looked pleased with himself, and his little eyes sparkled from behind his round specs.

‘Tee, hee, hee!’ he chuckled, and then he said. ‘It would work.’

When there was nothing else to do, Bunter's thoughts were usually centred on food, but today something else was occupying his mind, and whatever it was, it was producing one fat chuckle after another.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Life looking up, is it?' said Bob Cherry.

'Eh? What? Oh, yes! Tee, hee, hee!'

'What's brought this about? Got your postal order, or are you looking forward to extra French?'

'Might not be any extra French,' said Bunter, mysteriously, and he quivered with laughter.

'Take my tip,' said Bob. 'If you're thinking of skipping detention, think again. You'll get a swishing if you don't turn up.'

'What's a whopping? Who cares?'

'You will, once Quelch gets going.'

'Pooh! So what? As a matter of fact, I'm going over to Pegg this afternoon—no, no. Not Pegg.' Bunter was anxious not to give himself away. 'Wouldn't go there. Don't care for it. Never have.'

'Yes, you have. You've been there lots of times.'

'Did I say Pegg. Oh, yes, I've been there, but—but that's not where I'm going. I'm—I'm going the other way.'

'Don't. Think of Quelch.'

'He can go and eat coke. I don't give two hoots for Quelch—or three, come to that,' said Bunter, recklessly. 'I'm not going in to extra school, I can tell you that. And he can whistle for his rotten old translation, that's what he can do.'

'It won't be Quelch who'll be whistling,' said Bob. 'It'll be his cane as it whips down.'

'So what? I can take it. I'm not soft like the rest of you.'

Bob was staggered by this remark. 'No?'

'No!' Bunter gave a careless laugh. 'I say, Cherry, is that Smithy over there?'

Bob turned round. Smithy was chattering to Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull. 'That's him. You'd better steer clear. He's got an itchy foot.'

The Owl stuffed his hands in his pockets, and rocked backwards and forwards on the balls of his feet. 'Yes? You don't think I'm scared of him, do you? If so, you've got another thing coming. Why don't you come and hear what I've got to say?' and he made his way across the quad.

Bob followed, looking puzzled. What had got into the Owl? He'd got faults, lots and lots of them, but living dangerously had never been one of them. Now he was deliberately making for Smithy of the ready boot.

Smithy was talking about the Highcliffe match. 'They're a strong side this season,' he said.

'Mm! Courtenay's a good bat—'

'Smithy!' There was a note of authority in Billy Bunter's voice. 'I want a word with you.'

The Bounder swung round, and saw the Owl, his arms folded, blinking scornfully through his glasses. 'Oh?'

'You kicked me this morning, Vernon-Smith,' said Bunter, belligerently.

'That's right, and I'm going to keep on kicking you unless you come up with those chocs.'

'Oh, are you?' Bunter looked at him disdainfully. 'Then I'll have to give you a good hiding,' he said in an off-hand way.

The Bounder's eyes widened. 'What?'

‘Don’t give me that. You heard what I said,’ Bunter said, cuttingly. ‘I’ve had enough of your sneaky ways. It’s time you have the guts to stand up to a fellow instead of kicking him when he’s not looking.’

There was silence. Bunter had taken their breath away. The Bounder stared, and then he shook his head. ‘He’s gone round the bend.’

‘That’s right!’ sneered Bunter. ‘Hurl insults. That’s all you can do. I didn’t expect you to face up to a scrap.’

Smithy took a deep breath. ‘Have I got it right? You’re asking for a fight with the gloves on?’

‘Oh, so it’s penetrated at last, has it?’ jeered Bunter. ‘It took you long enough to get there.’

Bob clutched his brow, reeling against Harry Wharton. ‘It’s a dream. Tell me it’s a dream. It can’t be happening.’

‘It’s happening, all right.’

‘Well, what about it?’ demanded Bunter.

The whole thing was so absurd, that Harry began to laugh, and the others joined in.

‘You’d better watch out, Smithy,’ Harry said. ‘I wouldn’t take him on if I were you.’

‘Make your will before you tangle with him,’ advised Frank.

‘You’ll need an ambulance standing by.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Bunter gave them a contemptuous blink. ‘Cackle away, but I’m not joking. Smithy accused me of pinching his rotten box of chocs—as if I would.

Anyway, they only lasted a minute or two——’

There was another roar of laughter.

‘Oh, my hat!’ gasped Bob.

Bunter ignored them. ‘Look here, you rotten sneak,’ he said to Smithy. ‘I’ll take you on at any time. Let’s see you with the gloves on, facing someone who’s ready for once.’

‘You potty pelican!’ yelled the Bounder. ‘One punch from me and you’ll be spread all over Greyfriars. They’ll have to scrape you off the walls.’

‘Trying to get out of it?’ asked Bunter, scornfully. ‘This time I’m not letting you off. You’ll have to take your medicine. I shan’t be in this afternoon, but I’ll take you on tomorrow——’

‘Bunter!’ exclaimed Frank. ‘You’re down for extra school. You’d better be there. If Quelch——’

‘Pooh to Quelch!’

‘I wouldn’t risk it,’ said Johnny.

‘I dare say you wouldn’t, Bull, but I’m not like you—yes, sir, no sir, whatever you say, sir. That’s your style, isn’t it? Well, it ain’t mine. I don’t give a fig for Quelch or any other beak. I’ll jolly well do what I like, and Quelch can shove it in his pipe and smoke it. Quelch isn’t going to run my life.’

‘He’s gone bonkers,’ said Bob.

Bunter left them gazing in stupefied silence as he approached Coker. He went straight up to the burly fifth former and tapped him on the shoulder.

‘Coker!’

Coker turned round, and his jaw dropped. He was so surprised to see Bunter that he didn’t even attempt to grab him.

‘Coker! You’re a bully and a lout!’ shouted the Owl.

Coker clapped a great hand to his head. ‘What’s that?’

‘You heard! You’re a blustering bully and a lumbering lout!’ Having delivered the

insult, Bunter took advantage of Coker's astonishment, and nipped smartly into the House.

'My only summer hat!' exclaimed Bob, as Coker let out a bull-like roar as he realised that not only had he been insulted, but that his quarry had gone.

The juniors remained rooted to the spot. They'd witnessed something like a miracle. That quivering coward, that nifty dodger of trouble had gone out of his way to challenge Smithy, and then he'd deliberately baited Coker. He seemed ready to take on anyone at the drop of a hat. They were still there when he came out again, and rolled out of the gates, careless of Quelch and subsequent consequences, and totally indifferent to those after his blood.

Chapter 9

The Big Idea

'Hallo, Billy!'

'Hallo, Wally!'

The cousins met on the front at Pegg. Although it was over a mile from Greyfriars to the little seaside resort, William George had managed it, and then he had collapsed onto a bench. A mile, he vaguely remembered, was one thousand seven hundred and sixty yards—one thousand seven hundred and fifty yards more than he cared to walk at any one time, and so it was no wonder that he was exhausted.

Wally, dressed in a grey suit, had been strolling along the promenade when he had seen his cousin. He'd been enjoying the exercise. Plump though he was, there was an elastic spring to Wally's step, and he was very fit. The extra weight he carried wasn't flab—it was sheer muscle.

The resemblance of the two cousins really was quite remarkable. It was true that Wally didn't wear specs, but apart from that, they were identical.

Wally stood over Billy, his hands on his hips, while Billy sat slumped on the bench, mopping his brow with a grubby handkerchief. 'Were you coming to Marine Parade?'

'Yes, of course I was. I got your letter yesterday, Wally. Naturally I read it straight away.'

'Did you?'

'Yes, I did,' said Billy Bunter. 'I never put it in my pocket and forgot about it like some chaps do. No. That's not my way, Wally.'

'Of course not,' said Wally gravely, but there was a glint of amusement in his eyes.

'I'm jolly glad you've come to Pegg, Wally. It makes a difference having you here. Why don't you sit down?'

Wally would have preferred to continue his walk, but he knew Billy of old. Nothing was going to shift him from that seat, and so, if they were going to have a chat, he'd have to sit down.

'Having a good time here, are you?' Billy asked, with real interest.

'Yes,' admitted Wally. 'It's fine.'

'It's a bit of a change from school, you lucky devil,' Billy said, enviously.

'That's right.'

Billy looked at Wally sympathetically. 'It can't be much fun going to your school.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Wally, easily. 'It's quite good, and so is the teaching. Quite a lot go to university each year, and it's marvellous at games. Anyway, we can't all go to boarding schools—just as well. They're terribly expensive, aren't they?'

‘Must be beastly to be hard up. I often wonder how fellows manage without enough tin. By the way, got any chocs, Wally?’



THE RESEMBLANCE REALLY WAS REMARKABLE.

‘No, but there’s a shop just across the road.’

‘Oh, good.’ Billy Bunter ran his hands through his pockets, and a look of surprise spread over his face. ‘Dashed if I haven’t left my money behind,’ he said. ‘Stupid of me. I’ve come out without a bean. I say, Wally, will you nip across the road and get the chocs? I’ll settle up the next time I see you.’

Wally was already on his feet. He’d guessed what was coming. He trotted along the front, crossed the road, popped into the shop, and soon came back. Billy tore open the cardboard box, and crammed three chocolates into his mouth. Then he placed the box between Wally and himself. ‘Help yourself,’ he mumbled. ‘This is my treat.’ He frowned as he caught a glimpse of Wally’s face. ‘What are you grinning for?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Wally. ‘What are things like at Greyfriars? You must be getting in quite a lot of cricket.’

Billy Bunter nodded, as he carefully selected another chocolate. ‘Yes. I get as much as I want. Mind you, Wally, they want me to play in the team against Highcliffe. They keep on and on at me, but I don’t think I can manage it. The trouble with being popular,’ he explained, ‘is that everyone wants you to do everything.’

‘Naturally,’ agreed Wally, and if there was a note of sarcasm in his voice, Billy missed it. ‘What’s it like at Marine Parade?’ ‘Not at all bad.’

‘And is the grub good?’

‘Yes.’

‘Really good?’ persisted Billy. ‘Do you get plenty of it?’

‘Yes. Lots. Mrs. Smallbones really is a first class cook. Why don’t you come to tea?’ Billy’s eyes gleamed behind his specs. ‘What a good idea,’ he said. ‘Is it time for tea yet?’ he added, hopefully.

‘No. Let’s stroll along the front and work up a bit of an appetite,’ suggested Wally. ‘As a matter of fact, Wally,’ said Billy, confidentially, ‘I’d rather we stayed here. I’ve got something important to say, and I don’t want to risk being overheard.’

‘I don’t suppose anyone would overhear if we walked along,’ said Wally.

‘But we can make certain if we stay here.’

Wally shrugged. ‘All right. Now what’s it all about?’

Billy Bunter lowered his voice. ‘Do you remember when you came to Greyfriars and everyone kept saying we looked alike?’

‘So we do—except for your headlamps.’

William George tried not to show his irritation. It was a bit much describing his distinctive spectacles as headlamps. ‘There are some differences,’ he said, stiffly.

‘Not really. Even your sister Bessie got us mixed up once. She kept badgering me for some money you’d borrowed from her.’

The fat Owl ignored that. ‘I’ve been thinking,’ he said. ‘I thought that if the chaps got us muddled up that time, they’d probably get us muddled up again. Mind you, Wally, we’ll have to be careful. We mustn’t be seen together whatever happens, otherwise they’d cotton on. It’s a pity you’re not quite so good looking—you’re on the fat side too, but—’

‘Hang on—’ began Wally.

‘But then, they’re not going to. We’ll see to that.’

‘Not going to what?’ demanded Wally.

‘Not going to see us together, you chump!’

‘But why not?’

‘Because that would spoil it.’ Bunter leaned forward, his eyes shining with excitement, ‘You got on all right with the chaps in my form, didn’t you?’

‘Like a house on fire. I wouldn’t mind—’

Bunter lifted a fat paw. ‘I expect you realise, Wally,’ he said, condescendingly, ‘that they only put up with you because of me. They wouldn’t dare do anything else. They know what I’m like when I get my rag up. I told them it wasn’t your fault that your parents kept a shop—’ He clapped his hand to his mouth as he saw Wally’s angry face. ‘No,’ he said, hastily. ‘No, I didn’t say that. It wasn’t me. Don’t think that’s what I think, old man. Nothing wrong with honest toil, I like your folks, and your mother’s a marvellous cook. I’ve never had better meringues anywhere.’

As Billy Bunter babbled on, Wally’s good humour returned. He knew that his fat cousin was a fool as well as a snob, so there was no point in getting steamed up about it. ‘Stop gabbling, Billy, and tell me what you’re getting at.’

Eagerly, the fat Owl rubbed his hands together. ‘I’ve worked out this super scheme, Wally. I thought it out especially for you. It won’t do me any good, but it might give you a bit of a lift. How would you like a few days at Greyfriars?’

Wally considered the matter. He had thoroughly enjoyed the one visit he had made there. He had admired the buildings, the old ivy-covered walls, the academic atmosphere and, above all, the company. ‘I’d love it,’ he said.

‘More than staying in Pegg?’

‘Oh, yes,’ agreed Wally. ‘Much more. The trouble with you, Billy, is that you don’t know when you’re well off. I’ve never heard you do anything except moan about Greyfriars. I wouldn’t mind being in your shoes.’

Billy Bunter almost fell off the seat. ‘That’s it!’ he shrieked. ‘You’ve hit the nail on the head. That’s the idea!’

Wally looked startled. ‘What idea?’

‘We can swop. You’d like a few days at Greyfriars, and I expect that I could put up

with Pegg if it makes you happy. Just think. The chaps took you for me the last time, and they'll never know the difference. After all, Coker got us mixed up, didn't he? It'll be a piece of cake'

'But—'

'If the grub's as good at your place as you say it is, I'll manage at Marine Parade so as to give you a treat—'

Wally shook his head. 'We'll never pull it off.'

'Of course we will,' said Billy Bunter, persuasively. 'Nobody will ever know the difference. We can change clothes at your place, and you can bowl into school as easy as pie. You've met the fellows, and you know where my study is, and you know the layout of the school and all of that. No one will ever know.'

Wally sat quite still, turning it over in his mind. The idea was breathtaking.

Chapter 10

Change of Identity

'Well, what about it?' asked Billy Bunter, impatiently.

'But—'

'Why not?'

'But—'

Billy wagged a fat forefinger in Wally's face. 'But—but—but,' he said. 'You sound like a goat. I've told you. I've got it all worked out. It'll be easy.'

'But—'

'There you go again,' said Billy, peevishly. 'Look here, Wally. I've spent ages and ages working all this out just for your benefit. I didn't consider myself at all. It was you. That's who I was thinking of.'

'Do you really want to spend a week at Pegg?' asked Wally.

'I don't know about that,' said Billy, 'but I dare say I could put up with it. I can rough it for a bit. It was you who said you'd like to change places. Well, now's your chance.'

'I'd quite like it,' said Wally, slowly. 'It would be an interesting experience, but I don't think that we'd pull it off. No, it's not on, Billy.'

'Of course it is,' said Billy, sharply. 'There won't be any problems as long as we aren't seen together. I know we're not actually alike, but Coker didn't spot the difference yesterday, did he?'

'Who is this Coker? You mentioned him before.'

'He's the chap who smacked your head yesterday afternoon.'

'Oh, him! That's right. Some lout did clout me. He's from your place, is he?'

'Yes. He's in the fifth.'

'So that's it,' said Wally. 'I had a feeling that he wasn't a complete stranger, but I couldn't think where I'd seen him before.'

'You probably ran into him on that visit.' Billy began to titter. 'Funny, isn't it. He was after me, and ran into you instead. Hee, hee, hee! Everyone thinks that it was me who floored him. I didn't let on that it was you.'

'Why was he after you?' asked Wally, curiously.

Billy thought quickly. 'It was a misunderstanding,' he said. 'Silly misunderstanding, that's what it was. Just about some rotten old apples. The point is, he smacked your head instead of mine—tee, hee, bee! Well, if he got us mixed up, so will everyone else. We can swop our clothes, and you can put on a pair of specs.'

'I can't possibly wear your specs,' protested Wally. 'They'd make me as blind as a bat.'

'I've thought of that. You can buy glasses with plain glass in. I know you can. I found out.'

'I—I suppose I could.'

'What do you mean? I've told you, haven't I?'

'But—'

'Oh, crikey! I wish you'd give up all this butting, Wally. It's becoming a bore. All I'm trying to do is to give you a treat, and you keep putting obstacles in the way. I've got a jolly good mind to pack it all in. I thought it up just for you—nothing to do with getting out of lessons or anything like that. I hope I'm not like that,' Billy said, virtuously. 'I enjoy lessons, get quite a kick out of doing them well—even Latin. I don't suppose you'd have too much trouble with it. Didn't you say that you liked Latin?'

'Yes.'

'Mm,' said Billy Bunter. 'That might help a bit with Quelch. It's not that I'm not good at it. I could be top of the class if I liked, but I don't have the time to put in. The trouble is, I'm always wanted for everything. There's just too much to do.'

'Really?' said, Wally, drily.

'Fact,' said Billy, gazing at him with an air of candour. 'I'm not like you with my head in a book all of the time. Why, you even took Virgil on holiday last year. You'd get on like a house on fire with Quelch.'

'Quelch,' repeated Wally, thoughtfully. 'I've never forgotten him. Those eyes of his are remarkably keen, aren't they?'

'Just like a jolly gimlet,' said Billy, cheerfully. 'You can't get away with very much, but still, even he got us muddled up.'

'That's right, but—'

'Stop saying that!' said William George, testily. 'I keep telling you, it'll be as easy as winking. But still, if you haven't got the nerve, say so. That's another difference between us. I'm game for anything. Give me a little danger, and I'll go anywhere and do anything. It just adds a bit of spice to life.'

Wally's lips tightened. Billy Bunter had got him on the raw. 'I've got the nerve all right,' he said, quietly. 'Don't make any mistake about that, Billy. It's just that it doesn't sound quite straight.'

'There's nothing crooked about it!' said Bunter, indignantly. 'I wouldn't suggest it if there was. There's no harm in it. We're both Bunters, ain't we? What does it matter which of us is at Greyfriars and which at Pegg? But you please yourself. As a matter of fact, I nearly didn't tell you about it. I had a sneaky feeling that you wouldn't be sporting enough to give it a go.'

'Not sporting enough!' Wally was furious. Coming from Billy, that was a bit much. The fat Owl blinked impatiently at Wally. 'Well, what about it?'

'Shut up, and let me think!' Wally turned the problem over in his mind. The idea appealed to him. He liked his own school. Greyfriars would be an interesting contrast to it. He had certain reservations though. There was corporal punishment. Canes had been banned in his school years ago, but they were certainly still brandished at Greyfriars.

But there were advantages too. There was Latin. Wally knew that he was making headway working at it on his own, but it would help if he had a few lessons with Quelch, There was the prospect of cricket too, and certainly Greyfriars had a reputation for that. Would anyone be harmed if he swopped places with Billy? No, he

didn't think so. Billy would miss out on lessons, but that wouldn't make any difference to him.

'Make up your mind!' snapped Billy. Actually, he was feeling anxious. He had been sure that Wally would jump at the chance to go to Greyfriars. If he hadn't been so certain, he'd never have risked challenging Smithy, and he'd never have dared to tell Coker what he thought of him. Nor would he have cut detention. The thought of having to return and face the music was absolutely terrifying.

'I don't know—'

'Look here, Wally!' Billy Bunter said, firmly. 'I'd never have thought that a relation of mine could be so ungrateful. I thought it all out, and I trudged all the way over here to tell you, and now you're flinging it in my face. I always suspected that you weren't much of a sportsman. Now I know.'

The jibe was just too much for Wally. 'You lazy windbag—' he began.

'Me?' squeaked Bunter indignantly. 'Me, lazy? I ought to punch your nose in. I should flatten it, that's what I should do.'

'You just try,' said Wally, grimly.

'No, no. I didn't mean it, Wally, old chap. Really I didn't. It was disappointment that made me say it. I thought you'd want to go to Greyfriars, and I need a break myself. I've been working so hard recently,' he added, pathetically. 'What with one thing and another, I've been run off my feet.'

'Well, if you put it like that—'

'I do, Wally, I do,' said Billy Bunter, eagerly.

'Right then. I'll give it a go.'

'How long can you stay?' the fat Owl asked.

'Only until Monday afternoon. My parents will expect me back that evening, and school starts on Tuesday.'

'That's fine,' said Billy, breathing a sigh of relief. 'Let's push along to your digs and see what the grub's like—that is, we can change clothes and all of that. I dare say it'll make us feel a bit peckish.'

The cousins got up and walked along the front towards Marine Parade. The matter was settled. If Wally had any doubts, he put them in the back of his mind. He'd given his word, and that was that.

Billy Bunter had no doubts whatsoever. Since it was his brilliant mind that had thought up the wheeze, it was bound to be a wild success. In fact the fat Owl was feeling pleased with himself. All the little spots of trouble that had been weighing him down had been transferred to the unsuspecting back of his cousin Wally. Billy Bunter felt quite light hearted.

Chapter 11

Bunter?

The Famous Five had put their cricket bats down on the grass, and they were sitting beneath a shady tree near the school tuckshop, having a cold drink. They had put in some hard practice, and they felt that they deserved it.

'Hallo, hallo. hallo!' said Bob Cherry, as a familiar balloon-shaped figure bowled in through the gates.

'Golly! I wouldn't like to be in his shoes when Quelch finds out that he cut extra French,' remarked Frank.

'He looks as if he hasn't got a care in the world,' said Harry Wharton. 'Look at the

grin on his face.'

There was no reason why they should have thought that it was anyone but the blithering Owl, but had they been just a little more observant they might have noticed that he was wearing his specs rather low on his fat, little nose, as if he were looking over rather than through them.

They watched with some amusement as Bunter neared a small group of third formers. One tugged at the sleeve of another, and whispered in his ear. Tubb looked up, a delighted grin on his face as he spotted his old enemy. William George seemed quite unaware of danger as he ambled amiably towards the Famous Five. Tubb began to trot towards Bunter. The trot became a run, and the run became a gallop.

'Bunter's for it!' said Johnny Bull.

Tubb's intention was only too clear. He was going to charge as hard as he could into the fat freak, and bowl him over. Bunter, still blissfully ignorant of impending danger, rolled on.

'Wait for it,' said Harry Wharton. 'There's going to be quite a collision.'

'Correction,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Listen for it. He might burst like a balloon.'

'Bang goes Bunter,' said Frank.

'Serve him right for scoffing Tubb's ice,' grunted Johnny Bull.

Tubb had worked up quite a head of steam, and was hurtling towards Bunter like a small express train.

'Wait for it!' shouted Bob. 'One, two, three—and whoops!'

There was a thud, and a crash. A cloud of dust floated into the air, and there was a loud wail. 'Ooooh!'

Tubb pranced round and round the prostrate Owl, his arms waving wildly in the air.

'Come on, come on!' he yelled. 'That's just a sample. That's what you get for pinching my ice. Get on your feet, Bunter. I haven't finished with you yet.'

Dazed, Wally stared up at the warlike junior, and then he sat up, slowly shaking his head. Bewildered, he blinked up at Tubb from over the top of his spectacles. This wasn't quite the reception he had expected when he entered the grounds of the school.

'What was that for?'

'You know,' sneered Tubb. 'You helped yourself to my ice-cream, that's what you did.'

'Oh!' In a way. Wally wasn't surprised. He knew his cousin only too well. His anger was directed more towards Billy than towards this excited junior.

'Get up!' shouted Tubb. 'Get up, or I'll boot you up!'

'Oh, all right,' muttered Wally. The last thing he wanted was a scrap, but he certainly wasn't going to be kicked by Tubb. As he scrambled to his feet, Tubb let out a yell of delight, and took a short run, ready to barge Bunter down again.

There was another yell, and another thud. 'Ouch! Aaah!' A body hit the ground, and another cloud of dust billowed up, but as it cleared, they saw Bunter looking down on the dejected Tubb.

'Christmas!' Bob was impressed. 'Did you see that?'

'What a nifty bit of footwork!' Harry Wharton was equally impressed.

Bunter had used both speed and agility as he had side-stepped the junior's rush, before tripping him up.

'Ooooh! Aaah! Ouch!' wailed Tubb.

'Ready for another?' asked Wally.

Tubb got to his hands and knees. 'Ugh!' he said, faintly.

'That just about takes the cake,' said Bob.

'It's astonishing!' said Harry.

'What's come over him?' asked Frank. 'What with challenging Smithy—'

'And calling Coker a lout—'

'And cutting detention—'

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh put his hands in his pockets as he gazed at Bunter. 'What a remarkable transformation,' he said.

'Remarkable,' agreed Frank.

'Oh, I say,' said Johnny. 'Look at that. Tubb's had enough.'

He was right. Tubb had had enough. Still on hands and knees, he was backing away, well out of range of those nimble feet, and then he straightened up. Red-faced, sadder and wiser, he made his way to his friends, the pleasure of barging Bunter now replaced by the pain of being barged.

Bunter, a happy grin on his face, rolled on towards the small group of Remove men.

He hadn't welcomed the encounter with Tubb, but at least it had proved one thing. No one had the remotest idea that he was not Billy Bunter.

'Hallo,' he said cheerfully, as he joined the Famous Five.

'Hi!' said Bob Cherry.

'What's got into you?' asked Harry Wharton.

Wally frowned. He couldn't think what he was talking about. 'What do you mean?'

'Oh, come on,' said Bob. 'You've been scuttling away like a frightened rabbit whenever Tubb's come into view. You know you have.'

'Me? I mean, have I?'

'Of course you have.'

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh went up to Bunter and examined his face very closely. 'He is different,' he said, gravely.

Wally went pale. 'Am—am I—?' he asked nervously.

'Yes. There is no doubt about it. You have changed.' Wally said nothing, but he gulped. Hurree shook his finger under Bunter's nose. 'You've washed.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'That's a bit much,' protested Wally, but actually he was relieved. For a moment, he thought that he'd been found out.

'He's right,' said Bob. 'You're much cleaner. Fallen into the sea, have you?'

As everyone laughed, Wally joined in. It was all so good-natured, and he was delighted to feel that he was one of the crowd.

'I say,' whispered Frank Nugent. 'There's Quelch. He's heading this way.'

Mr. Quelch, who had been walking around the quad with Mr. Prout, the fifth form master, had been attracted by the laughter of the boys in his form. He came across to them. Wally watched him approach.

He felt that if anyone could see that he was not Billy, it would be Mr. Quelch.

'Bunter!'

'Yes, sir,' said Wally.

'So you have returned at last, boy!'

'Oh, yes, Mr. Quelch.'

Quelch put his hands behind his back, rocking backwards and forwards on his heels.

'And you have had a pleasant afternoon?'

'Very pleasant, sir.'

'And your explanation for your conduct?'

'My conduct, sir?' Wally didn't know what he was talking about.

Mr. Quelch sounded angry. 'You were not in detention at half past two this afternoon. You left the school, and deliberately disobeyed me. Now you have effrontery to tell

me that you have had a pleasant afternoon.'

'Oh!' Wally said. So Billy had left school against orders and had gone into Pegg just to persuade him to return in his place, and he hadn't even had the decency to warn him about the impending trouble.

'Well?' Quelch's voice was so icy that it would have frozen a volcano.

'I—I—I—' stammered Wally. 'I'm sorry, sir.' There was nothing else that he could say.

'Go and wait in my study, you wretched boy!'

'Yes, sir,' said Wally. He could guess what he would be waiting for.

Still frowning, Mr. Quelch rejoined Mr. Prout, and the two masters resumed their walk.

'He's for it,' said Bob, as they watched Bunter making his way back into school.

'Serves him right,' said Johnny Bull, unsympathetically. 'He asked for it.'

'What a nerve!' said Frank. 'He was as cool as a cucumber when he told Quelch he'd had a pleasant afternoon.'

'It'll be a swishing this time,' said Frank.

'I think you are right,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

It was what Wally himself thought as he reached the door of Quelch's study. For just a moment he was tempted to turn round, march back to Pegg, and then kick his cousin Billy all the way to Greyfriars. So this was the treat that Billy had planned for him, was it? Well, he'd plan a similar treat for Billy later on. Reluctantly, Wally went into Quelch's study. He'd given Billy his word that he would stay until Monday, and stay he would.

Chapter 12

A Surprise for Quelch!

Mr. Quelch stood at the door of his study, amazed. There, seated in his armchair, was Billy Bunter. It was true that he shouldn't have been sitting there at all, but since he had been waiting for at least half an hour, there was, perhaps, some excuse for it. But it wasn't just the fact that Bunter was in his armchair that astounded Quelch. It was his occupation. He was reading. To see him with a book in his hands at any time was an astonishing sight, but to see him reading Virgil was quite extraordinary. He was concentrating hard, his eyes glued to the page, and he was wearing his spectacles so low on his blob of a nose that it was as if he could read without their aid. When Quelch had first opened the door and quietly entered his study he had naturally assumed that Bunter was playing out a little scene for his benefit, but he had been watching him for some time now, and he was convinced that the boy really was absorbed.

The expression on his face changed from surprise to delight. He had come in, determined to cane Bunter for his outrageous behaviour, but as he gazed at that intent face bent over a page of Latin, he quite forgot about it.

Bunter had been punished frequently in the past, and now it seemed that it had paid off. He had doubted whether Bunter could ever become interested in his work, but the boy really was reading. Mr. Quelch almost smiled.

'Bunter!' he said, in a kindly tone.

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr. Quelch!' Wally bounded out of the armchair like a young kangaroo, and stood facing the Remove master, his cheeks pink, the Virgil still clutched in his hands. 'I—I'm afraid I—er—didn't hear you enter, sir. You see, I—'

er———’

‘I am quite aware that you had no idea that I was in the room, Bunter. You were reading.’

‘Yes, Mr. Quelch. Since I had to wait for you, sir, I just thought I’d pick up a book to pass the time. I’m sorry, sir.’

Mr. Quelch sat at his desk. ‘There is nothing to be sorry about. On the contrary, I consider it a welcome change.’

‘It just happened to be on your table, sir, so—well, I just sort of picked it up,’ Wally explained.

‘I see. And which particular passage were you reading, my boy?’

‘The shipwreck scene. The one in the first book.’

Mr. Quelch nodded his approval. That was the scene he had given the boy to translate as a punishment. By chance, Wally had hit on the right thing. ‘I cannot say how pleased I am to see that you are beginning to appreciate Virgil,’ Quelch said. ‘I consider it to be a very remarkable passage. One might say that it is almost faultless.’



‘YOU WERE READING!’

‘That’s what I think,’ said Wally, eagerly, forgetting that he was supposed to be Billy. ‘But I did just wonder about lines 109 and 110. They almost seem out of place.’

‘Bless my soul!’ exclaimed Quelch. If he had been surprised before, he was completely bewildered now. He would never have believed that Bunter had either the wit or the knowledge to make such an intelligent remark.

Wally suddenly realised that perhaps he had said too much. ‘Perhaps I’m wrong, sir,’ he said, hastily. ‘I really don’t know. It simply occurred to me.’

‘No, no, no, Bunter! Do not apologise.’ Mr. Quelch sounded positively genial. ‘It is a most interesting observation.’ He was about to continue with this interesting discussion when he caught sight of the cane on his desk. He pursed his lips, and

considered the matter. There was no doubt about it. Bunter's behaviour had been disgraceful, and he deserved to be caned.

Wally noticed Quelch's change of expression, and followed the direction of his eyes. He held his breath. He thought he knew what the form master was thinking. He was going to be whopped. He gritted his teeth. He'd just have to grin and bear it.

Much to his surprise, instead of getting to his feet and seizing the cane, Mr. Quelch put both hands on his desk, and looked Wally steadily in the eye. 'I had every intention of punishing you severely. Your conduct today has been flagrant—quite, quite outrageous.' He paused, and Wally's hopes began to rise. 'I am going to excuse you this time, Bunter, I shall expect to see a continuing interest in your studies. If you revert to your usual idle state, then I shall have to think again. You may go, my boy. 'Oh, thank you, Mr. Quelch,' said Wally, with real gratitude, and he hurried away, in case the Remove master should have another change of heart.

Mr. Quelch remained where he was, and thought the matter over. He was pleased—very pleased indeed, but he was also perplexed. The change in Billy Bunter was extraordinary—quite extraordinary. It really was puzzling. Well, miracles did happen. Perhaps one had happened to Bunter. For the first time since the boy had entered his form, he had some hope. Maybe he wasn't the dunderhead he had thought he was. He picked up the Virgil that Bunter had left on his desk, and smiled, feeling hopeful. Little did he know that when Wally disappeared from Greyfriars, his hopes would disappear too.

Chapter 13

Spot of Bother

'Slacking again, Bunter!' said Toddy, walking into his study.

Wally looked at him from over the top of his spectacles. 'I've only just got here,' he said. Luckily, Wally had a good memory and this had enabled him to find his way from Quelch's study to his own.

The study itself was far from grand—in fact, it was positively shabby. None of the chaps sharing it were particularly well off, and so they had done nothing about making it any smarter. The carpet was old and faded, and it was threadbare in places. There was only one armchair, and that looked as if it had never been new. Toddy had made a bookshelf, but since he wasn't much of a handyman, it wasn't level, so the books tended to slide off onto the floor. Tom Dutton owned quite a nice clock which sat upon the mantelpiece, but since it always said half past ten, it wasn't a great deal of use, except at half past ten, of course.

A lot of stuff was lying around—dog-eared books, a slipper, a battered frying pan, an old cricket ball, and some magazines. No, study no 7 was hardly palatial, but as far as Wally was concerned, it was perfectly splendid. In fact, Greyfriars itself and everything about it seemed perfectly splendid.

'Come off it. You were slacking,' said Toddy. It was the kind of remark everyone made when they entered Billy Bunter's study, and it was true. He was a slacker, but Wally was not, and although Wally knew the remark was aimed at his lazy cousin, it stung just the same.

'Quelch kept me waiting for ages.'

'Did he whop you for cutting extra school?'

Wally shook his head. 'No. He let me off.'

'Phew! You must have the luck of the devil. Bob Cherry told me that Quelch was

hopping mad.'

'He'd calmed down by the time he returned,' said Wally. 'He was quite decent.'
'He's not likely to be in a forgiving mood again, Bunter,' warned Toddy. 'You'd better get down to a spot of work.'

'What for?' asked Wally. 'It's nowhere near time for prep, is it?'

'You know it isn't, you silly fritter. I'm talking about that translation. You'll just have to slog your way through it. Quelch will want it first thing in the morning.'

Wally knitted his brows. 'Translation? What translation?' he asked.

Peter gave a little laugh. 'Honestly, Bunter! You forget everything you don't want to remember. Well, if you don't do it, Quelch will tear you into little pieces.'

'Oh—oh, yes,' stammered Wally, although he hadn't the slightest idea of what Toddy was on about. 'But—I'm not—'

'I know your little marbles rattle around in your great, fat head, but you can't tell me that you've forgotten that extra translation. Old Quelch trebled it this morning, didn't he? I'm telling you, fat man, that it'll be swish, swish, swish unless you've got it ready for tomorrow morning.'

'Oh, golly,' said Wally.

'And it won't do any good to tell Quelch that it got covered in ink and blew out of the window before I lit the fire with it. He didn't believe you this morning, and he's not going to believe you tomorrow, so don't try it on.'

'Oh!' repeated Wally, softly. His cousin had left him with more than one problem.

'Now come on, you fat slug,' said Toddy, impatiently. 'Heave yourself up, and get on with it. You've got thirty-six lines to do, and it'll be prep before long.'

'Thirty-six lines?'

'You know it was. Look here, fatty. I'll help to start you off since you're such a clot.'
'Thanks!'

Peter dragged up a chair. 'Hoist yourself up, and sit here. You are an idiot, Bunter. If you did a bit of work, you'd find it a piece of cake.'

'Okay.' Wally jumped out of the armchair with such alacrity that Toddy almost fell off his chair. The only time he had ever seen the fat Owl move so quickly was when there was food on the horizon.

'Here you are,' he said, pushing a pile of books to Wally.

Wally thumbed his way through them. He'd been landed with yet another little treat by his cousin, but he hadn't the slightest idea of what he was supposed to do. He could ask Toddy, but it might seem suspicious, and he wasn't going to risk it. 'Can you find the place for me, Toddy?'

Toddy rested an elbow on the table. 'What?' he said, surprised.

Wally grunted. What on earth was he supposed to translate? If only Billy had come clean and told him what was in store for him, he would have been able to cope. But still, if Billy had told him, then perhaps he would never have come. 'Be a sport, Toddy,' he begged. 'Find the place.'

Toddy looked disgusted. 'You lazy lump! Get your Virgil!'

Wally gave a secret little smile. He'd solved the first part of the problem. It was Virgil. He picked up the book, and opened it at random.

Toddy, his chin resting in his hand, groaned aloud. 'Forgotten how to read? You're supposed to be looking at the first book, not the sixth.'

'Oh, sure.' Wally nodded. He was making progress. So it was a passage in the front of the volume. Slowly, he thumbed over a few pages.

Impatiently, Peter snatched it out of his hands. 'I can't stand it. You're driving me nuts, bonehead. Here. This is it. It's the bit about the shipwreck.' He opened the book

at the right place. 'Come on. Pick up your pen. Look, it starts "O thrice and four times blessed". Now get that down before you forget.' He got up and stood over Wally until he saw him begin, and then he went and flung himself down. 'I've translated the first line. That's all I'm going to do, so it's no good trying to get me to help you out. You can flog your own brain, not that there's much to flog.'

Wally picked up a piece of paper, and gave a rueful little smile when he realised that he had to use a steel-nibbed pen and ink. There was a lot to be said for Greyfriars, and a great deal to be said for tradition, but having to use a pen and ink in these days was carrying things just a bit too far.

As Wally buckled down to his task, Peter Todd watched with surprised eyes. He'd expected the Owl to ask for help but his pen was actually racing across the page. He became even more staggered as time went on. The Owl was writing the translation as fast as he could read it. He couldn't make it out. What had come over him?

Actually, Wally was getting quite a lot of pleasure out of doing the work, completely forgetting that he was supposed to be hopeless at Latin. If he'd remembered, he would have played his part a bit more carefully.

'What's got into you, Bunter?' Toddy demanded at last.

Wally looked up. 'I don't know what you mean.'

Toddy got out of the chair, and stood at the side of the table. 'It beats me. You've been steaming through that translation like a hot knife through butter. You're even writing decently for a change. If you can do it once, why can't you always do it? Your work usually looks as if it's been written by a drunken spider.'

'Well—er, I don't know.'

'Just look at it!' Peter jabbed a Finger onto the page. 'Not a mistake in sight. I'm dashed if I understand it. Why haven't you done it before? I suppose you thought it easier to get it off other chaps. You lazy hound! When I think of the time I've spent helping you out—'

No, no, Toddy, said Wally, anxiously. You know I can't do Latin. Really I can't. I can't stand the stuff. It's just that I went over this bit, and—'

Peter Todd was working himself up into a temper. 'I've been looking at you ever since you sat down. You haven't opened the dictionary once. You've not even glanced at the grammar. First of all, I thought that you'd had a spot of help from someone, and that it had sunk into your thick head for once, but you couldn't have memorised this lot. It's your own work, isn't it? You could do it all the time. You've been pulling our legs, haven't you? You're just a fat, idle porpoise! You—you lazy lump!' and he thumped Wally on the head.

'Yaroo!' roared Wally.

Peter grabbed a handful of Wally's hair and banged his head on the table. 'Serve you right!' he snorted, and marched out of the study, slamming the door behind him.

'Oh, gosh!' Wally sat up and rubbed his sore head. Well, painful though the experience had been, he'd learned quite a lot from Toddy. He looked at his neat, careful translation, and then took a fresh piece of paper, and started again. This time he used the authentic William George Bunter style. He scrawled it out, making a mistake here and there, and he finished it off with an inky smear, a smudge, a few blots. It went against the grain to hand in work looking like that, but Wally realised that he had to do it. What he didn't realise was that by Bunter standards, it was still a remarkably good piece of work.

Chapter 14

One for his Nob!

‘Enjoying life, Bunter?’ asked Bob Cherry, grinning at the fat Owl.

‘You bet!’ said Wally, enthusiastically.

Bob looked at him curiously. It was yet another beautiful morning, already bright and warm. They were standing with a small group of Remove men, awaiting the arrival of Mr. Quelch.

What interested Bob was the fact that Bunter stood there beaming, with his hands in his pockets and his books tucked under his arms. Nobody could be gloomy on such a day, but Bunter’s face had the kind of expression usually seen only when he was gazing at a lavishly spread table. Generally speaking, the Bunter beam was missing when lessons were about to start, especially when they started with Latin, and Latin was to be followed by English literature, and then by maths. Bunter’s loathing of Latin, his contempt for literature and his hatred of maths were well known.

Wally felt marvellous—on top of the world. He had slept like a top and as yet, no one had guessed that he was not Billy. Someone might have done so if he had been awake the previous night, for the resonant Bunter snore had been missing.

Neither had anyone spotted that he was more particular about washing than usual, but most were aware that there was a difference in him, but they couldn’t put their fingers on what that difference was.

Wally had woken up early that morning. He had jumped out of bed, had had a shower, and had wandered around the quad and the playing fields, breathing in the atmosphere of Greyfriars. Then he’d had a good breakfast, and had bounded up to his study to collect his books.

He turned to Bob ‘What a marvellous morning! I wouldn’t mind a spot of cricket.’

‘Cricket!’ Bob exclaimed. ‘What, you?’

‘That’s right. Me,’ agreed Wally. ‘I’d like to get in as much as I can while I’m here.’

‘While you’re here?’ repeated Bob.

‘Oh, bother! I—I—er——’ Wally realised that he had made a mistake. He had forgotten that he was supposed to be Billy.

‘You’ve always had just as much cricket as you’ve wanted up to now,’ said Bob, ‘and that’s practically none. You spend all your time dodging it. Wharton’s had to kick you out to the field over and over again.’

‘Have I? Well, it’s different now. I—I———’

‘Watch it, Bunter!’ broke in Skinner. ‘Smithy’s on his way!’

Vernon-Smith and Redwing came round the corner, and halted outside the Remove form room. Wally barely glanced at the Bounder. Although he didn’t know why he should watch out for the Bounder, he soon found out. His head rang as Smithy smacked it.

‘Ow! Wow!’ he yelled, above the burst of laughter. ‘Ouch!’

‘Just keeping my promise,’ grinned the Bounder.

Wally rubbed his ear, and glared at Smithy from over the top of his spectacles. ‘You great ape! What was that for?’

Smithy gave a dry laugh. ‘Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten already. That’s for filching my chocs.’

Although he didn’t show it, Wally was furious. So this was another of Billy’s little treats, was it? Well, it was something he wasn’t going to put up with. Life wasn’t going to be worth living if he was going to be booted and thumped all over the place.

‘You keep your hands to yourself,’ he said, ‘or I’ll bash your head against the wall.’

The Bounder burst into laughter. ‘Try it! Just try it, you fat fritter!’

‘Go on, Bunter,’ urged Skinner. ‘Give him one for his nob.’

Wally looked directly at the Bounder. ‘You’ve asked for it, Vernon-Smith.’

The Bounder gave him a mocking smile. ‘That’s right, you greedy guzzler. Let’s see you try.’

Two hands shot out and grasped the Bounder. He was whirled round and round, and his head was cracked against the wall. The hands dropped and the Bounder staggered back. He almost fell over, an amazed expression on his face. He pulled himself together, slowly rubbed his sore head, and then examined his fingers carefully as if he expected to see blood. The little crowd stood there silently, waiting for Smithy’s counter-attack.

Skinner turned to Wally. ‘The fat’s in the fire now.

I’d skip while the going’s good. Smithy’s going to tear you limb from limb.’

But Wally made no attempt to skip. He remained exactly where he was, confidently facing the Bounder, awaiting the next move. For a moment or two, Smithy did nothing. He just stood, his eyes fixed on Bunter, his hands tenderly touching his head again. He was stunned by Bunter’s action. It was as if the worm really had turned. It hardly seemed possible that it was that rabbit Bunter who had jammed his head against the wall. He gave himself a shake, and moved a pace or two nearer Wally, his fists clenched, a deadly gleam in his dark eyes.

‘Hold on, Smithy,’ said Tom Redwing, warningly. He knew what a foul temper Vernon-Smith had.

Smithy shook off Redwing’s restraining hand. ‘Let go, you fool!’ he hissed. ‘I’m going to get Bunter! I’m going to smash that fat-faced fool! I’m going to hammer him into a jelly.’

‘Not now,’ said Redwing, urgently. ‘Quelch will be here any moment now.’

‘To hell with Quelch!’ Vernon-Smith rushed at Bunter, but Bunter, far from bolting, stood his ground. Two fat hands flashed up, and Smithy’s savage punch was brushed aside. A heavy fist thudded into his chest. He gasped loudly, and tottered back against the wall, and then, very slowly, he slipped down and lay sprawling on the ground.

‘Oh, my belt and braces!’ cried Bob Cherry. ‘Is it happening or are we dreaming?’

‘Bunter in Wonderland,’ suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

‘All of us in Wonderland,’ said Skinner.

‘Lookout!’ said Hazeldene. ‘Here comes Quelch!’

As Mr. Quelch’s angular figure appeared round the bend of the corridor, the Bounder, his face crimson with fury, managed to get to his feet. The form master gave the class a severe glance. He was perfectly well aware that something had been going on, but he knew that it would be pointless to question them. The form fell silent as he unlocked the classroom, and they filed in.

Smithy was thirsting for revenge. ‘You challenged me to a scrap yesterday. you fat slob,’ he hissed.

‘Who? What? Me?’

‘Yes, you did, you fat toad. I was going to let you off, but you’ve had it now, Bunter. I’ll see you behind the gym after class. Believe me, I’ll beat you into a blancmange.’

‘Oh,’ said Wally, glumly, as he took his place in class. Quelch looked at him sharply as he sat down and nodded, satisfied. The boy seemed brighter, cleaner and tidier than usual.

‘Bunter! Have you done your translation?’

‘Yes, Mr. Quelch,’ replied Wally, thankful that Toddy had tipped him off.

‘Then kindly bring it to me.’

As Bunter eased himself from behind his desk and handed his work to Quelch, Toddy

whispered to Harry Wharton, 'It beats me. He did it all himself, and he got through it in a flash. I think he's been having us on.'

Mr. Quelch ran his eye over the work. 'Hm, hm!' he said, approvingly. 'This is an improvement, my boy—a great improvement. However, there are one or two careless mistakes, but nevertheless, it is an improvement.'

'Oh, yes, sir. Sorry, sir,' murmured Wally, unable to explain that he'd made those careless mistakes very carefully indeed.

'Now I know what you are capable of, I shall expect you to keep it up. And Bunter, I should be grateful, my boy, if you could manage to avoid so many blots and smears. They do distract from the work.'

'Yes, Mr. Quelch.'

'Go to your place, Bunter. You will begin to translate aloud.'

Although Mr. Quelch was pleased with the fat Owl, he had still had a lurking suspicion that the boy had had some help with his work, and he was going to test him. The class sat up, ready for a good laugh. Bunter could be counted on to produce some really good bowlers, but they were disappointed. He translated smoothly and intelligently, and he didn't make a mistake.

'Very good indeed, my boy,' said Mr. Quelch, approvingly.

It was a happy morning for Wally, but a bad one for Smithy. Wally's face glowed with pleasure, but Smithy's didn't. He sat in the classroom scowling, his fists clenched, longing for the moment when he would be able to teach that fat slug a hard lesson.

Chapter 15

The Bounder Means Business

'Smithy, old man—!'

Vernon-Smith swung round. 'Shut up!' he snapped at Redwing. He was in a bad temper. He still hadn't got over the skirmish with Bunter that morning.

'Forget it, Smithy. It's not worth bothering about.'

'Forget it?' raged Smithy. 'You must be joking! I'm not going to let that suet pudding crack my head against a wall and get away with it. He's going to pay for it!'

'But Smithy,' urged Redwing, 'that fat chump can't stand up to you if it comes to a scrap. He won't stand a chance. Anyway, you smacked his head first.'

'And you know what for. He started the whole thing by helping himself to my box of chocs. I told him more than once that I was going to kick him until he replaced it, and that's exactly what I did.' Actually it wasn't the disappearance of the chocs that riled the Bounder. It was the humiliation of being thumped by a fat wart like Bunter. It would have been bad enough if there had been no witnesses, but the fact that so many of the Remove had seen it had made it worse. 'He won't crack my head against a wall again!'

'Oh, give it a miss, Smithy. A scrap with Bunter would be just crazy. You know that the fat Fibber can't stand up to you.'

'He should have thought of that before he bashed my head,' said the Bounder, grimly.

'Thinking doesn't come easily to Bunter.' Redwing pointed out.

Vernon-Smith stood in the bright sunlight. 'There's something different about Bunter.'

'I know,' Reddy agreed. 'He's not quite such a howling coward as he used to be.'

'That's right,' agreed Smithy. 'That probably means that he won't back out of the

scrap.'

Redwing tried once again. 'Let him off, Smithy. We all know you can lick him with one hand tied behind your back. You don't have to prove it. We all know what you can do.'

'I'm going to teach him a lesson!' Vernon-Smith looked round the quad. 'There he is, the warty hog!'

He strode across Bunter with Redwing at his heels. Reddy was troubled. He felt that Smithy was making an ass of himself by insisting on a scrap with Bunter. It would be one-sided, and Smithy would go down in everyone's opinion. They'd think he was carrying his feud too far.

Bunter! 'shouted the Bounder.

'Yes?' Wally glanced at him.

Vernon-Smith marched up. 'Forgotten our little sparring match behind the gym, have you?'

Wally made a face, and then gave an exasperated sigh. He hadn't forgotten about it at all, but he had been hoping that Smithy would give it a miss. It all seemed so stupid.

'Look here, Smithy,' he said mildly, 'why don't we wash it out? I don't want to have a scrap with you and—'

'I know you don't,' sneered the Bounder, 'but I do, and if you don't come round to the back of the gym right now, I'll kick you all round the quad.'

'Yes?' Wally gave him a half-smile. 'You just try it.'

Vernon-Smith flushed. 'I'll do just that, Bunter, I'll kick you from wall to wall unless—'

'Smithy, for goodness sake—'

'Mind your own business, Redwing!'

Hearing Smithy's angry voice, a number of the Remove drifted across to see what the row was about.

'You've got cold feet, have you?' jeered Smithy.

'Not exactly, but—'

Harry Wharton went up to the Bounder. 'You can't mean it, Smithy!'

'Oh, yes, I do, Wharton. You saw what happened this morning.'

'Sure, but there's no need—'

'But there is,' snapped the Bounder. 'You heard him challenge me to a fight. He should have thought—'

'Thinking is not Bunter's strongest point,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Chuck it, Smithy,' said Bob. 'You don't have to knock his block off to show that you're the better man. Don't be an ass!'

Smithy, his eyes blazing, rounded on Bob Cherry. 'You'd better watch what you're saying, Cherry, or I'll smash you after I've smashed him.' He smacked a fist into the palm of his hand. 'Ready, Bunter?'

The fat Owl eyed Smithy doubtfully, and the juniors looked knowingly at each other. If Bunter ran true to form, he would back out of the scrap and risk the booting round the quad, but they weren't prepared to bet on it. Bunter had presented a side to his character that they had never seen before. He had stood up to Tubb, and he'd told the mighty Coker what he thought of him.

'Well?'

Bunter shrugged. 'Oh, all right, Smithy,' he said, casually. 'I've told you, I'd much rather we didn't, if you insist—'

'You bet your life I do!'

Bunter turned and surveyed the small crowd of juniors. 'Who'll be my second?' he

asked.

'Oh, gumboots and gaiters!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'You can't mean you're going to take him on?'

'Yes, I do,' said Wally, coolly.

Bob took a deep breath. 'Okay, fat man. If you're really bent on suicide, then I'll be your second, and take care of what's left of you. Hurree, go and get the wheelbarrow, will you? Bunter's going to need it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I don't consider that particularly funny,' said Wally. 'You don't need to worry about me. I can handle Smithy.'

'He must have gone completely off his head,' said Frank to Mauly.

'Never seen him so composed before,' Mauly replied. 'It's astonishin'.'

Skinner touched Reddy on the arm. 'You want to watch out,' he said. 'The fat man'll do a bunk as soon as he gets round the corner.'

'I hope he does,' said Reddy. 'Smithy's in such a foul mood that he'll murder him.'

'Don't worry, Redwing,' said Harry. 'Bob and the others are going to step in if it gets too nasty.'

Fisher T Fish sidled up to Wally. 'Say, if you want to skedaddle, I'll try and trip Smithy up if he chases you.'

Wally gave a wry smile, and shook his head. He realised that his cousin was the world's biggest coward and that if he were to play his part properly, he should back out of the contest, but he couldn't. It went against the grain.

So, surrounded by a crowd of excited juniors, he went off to that quiet spot behind the gym where no one in authority would be likely to see what was going on.

Chapter 16

Caught!

While Wally was getting ready for his fight with Smithy, Bunter was enjoying life in Pegg. He had forgotten all about his challenge to the Bounder, and even if he had remembered it, he wouldn't have cared.

He was sitting on the soft, golden sands in the brilliant afternoon sunshine, his back comfortably

propped against a rock, and he was gazing vacantly in the direction of the sea.

Life was great. He hadn't had such a good time in years—no work, lots of grub, and money—Wally's money—in his pocket.

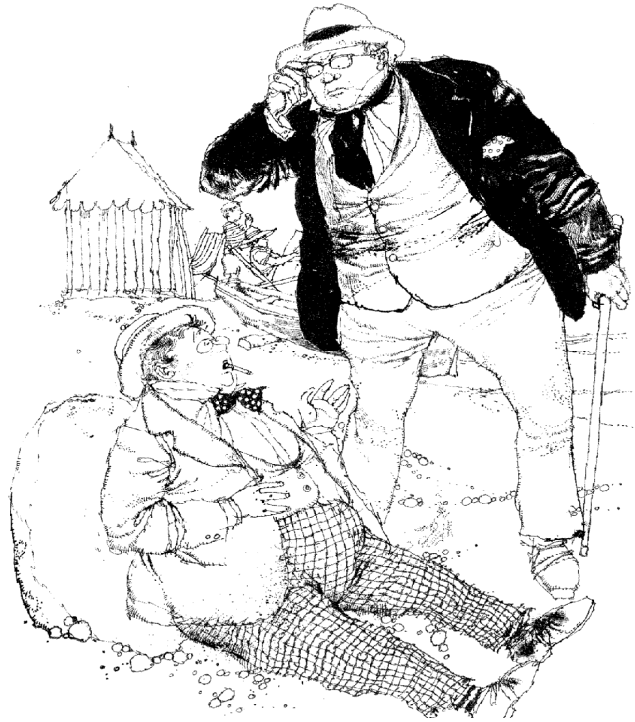
The fat Owl gave a contented grin. Wally was a bigger fool than he had imagined.

There he was,

grinding away at Latin and maths and history and all the rest of that rubbish instead of happily lazing away in Pegg.

Billy put his hand into his pocket, pulled out a packet of cigarettes and matches, and lit up. As he puffed away, he wondered if he could possibly extend his little break but, sadly, he shook his head. It couldn't be done. Wally had said that he had to return on Monday.

Idly, he watched the smoke from the cigarette spiralling up into the air, thinking how peaceful life was. A second later, that peace was shattered.



‘WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?’

‘Bunter!’ thundered a voice—a voice he knew only too well.

‘Oh, crumbs!’

Guiltily, he whipped the cigarette from his lips, but somehow, in his panic, managed to put it back again.

‘Ow! Wow! Ugh!’ he squealed. The lighted end had gone in first. ‘Oooh!’ He took it out with shaking fingers and tried to bury it in the sand, and then looked up at the purple-faced Mr. Prout who was standing over him.

‘What are you doing here? You are a disgrace to Greyfriars! This is appalling behaviour—lolling on the beach, smoking—’ He shook an angry finger at the cringing Owl. ‘Pegg is out of bounds except on half holidays! Is this a half holiday, Bunter?’

‘No,’ muttered the Owl. ‘Tain’t.’

‘Smoking! Out of bounds!’ Prout paused, and then he spotted something else. ‘Good gracious! Where is your cap? Why are you not wearing your blazer? Whatever will Mr. Quelch say about this?’

Mournfully, Bunter blinked up at the fifth form master, and tried to think of some way of getting out of this spot of trouble. He couldn’t let Prout march him back to Greyfriars, not with another Bunter in residence.

‘Get up, Bunter!’ Prout was almost shaking with fury. ‘I shall take you back to Greyfriars, and hand you over to Mr. Quelch. I have no doubt that he will know how to deal with you!’

Bunter looked even more dismal. ‘Oh, lor’! I—I ain’t Bunter, sir!’ he stammered.

‘What?’

‘I—I—He’s not me—not me at all. I—I’m his cousin,’ Billy gabbled.

‘Silence!’

‘But—but, that is, we—we just happen to look alike, sir,’ bumbled Bunter. ‘We’re always being taken for each other. It happens all the time. I’m not me—really I’m not. Even my sis—sister don’t know me.’ He was beginning to feel desperate. He hadn’t wanted anyone to know that he had a cousin staying in Pegg, but anything was better than being dragged back to Greyfriars.

Mr. Prout stared at him. ‘I can hardly believe that you are in your right mind, Bunter!’

‘But—but I am. That is, he is.’

‘And what is that supposed to mean?’

‘I—I’ve said, sir. I told you. I ain’t Bunter, sir. I ain’t Billy. I—I wouldn’t want to be him. I’m my cousin Wally, sir. I—I’m another chap—quite different. Never seen you before, Mr. Prout. Not once. Couldn’t—considering I’m not me. I—I—yarooooo!’

Ouch!’

He let out a roar as Mr. Prout pounced. He seized the fat Owl’s collar, and hauled him to his feet. ‘Stop this ridiculous charade, Bunter! We shall see what Mr. Quelch has to say about this!’

As Bunter shambled along by the side of Mr. Prout, he became more and more depressed, quite unable to imagine what he had said to arouse the suspicions of the master.

As they made their way along the crowded promenade, Bunter’s eyes flashed wildly from side to side, hoping that there might be a chance of escape, but Prout held his arm in a vice-like grip.

‘Come along!’ snapped Prout, as Bunter dragged his feet. ‘I don’t want to waste time. I’ve a great deal to do.’

Billy Bunter was only too keen to waste time and put off the hour of reckoning, but it was hopeless. Mr. Prout was determined to reach Greyfriars as soon as possible. As they got nearer, both Billy Bunter’s heart and spirits sank lower and lower until they had reached the bottom of Wally’s neat shoes.

Chapter 17

Smithy Meets his Match

While the gloomy-faced Billy was being marched back to school, Wally was behind the gym.

News of the scrap had spread, and quite a lot of fellows had gathered to see the fun. They all knew that Bunter was a duffer at everything—everything except scrounging, that is—and he was particularly hopeless at boxing. It was even worse than his cricket, and that was dreadful. Even if he did square up to the Bounder, he couldn’t hope to make any impression on him. Smithy would be able to punch hm for just as long and hard as he liked.

All eyes were on the Owl as he stood in the makeshift ring, and most of the eyes were curious. Why weren’t his fat knees knocking, and why had he got that confident smile on his lips? It seemed very odd.

They might have been looking at a stranger as he whipped off his jacket and handed it to Johnny, gave his specs to Bob as if he had no need of them, and held out steady hands so that Toddy could slip on the gloves.

Most people grinned at the Owl, but they stared with icy disapproval at the Bounder. Bunter was annoying, and his habit of filching other people’s tuck made him less than

popular, but kicking him was one thing. Beating him up was another. The fat man had no more chance than a punchbag, and although the Bounder had been provoked by him, he was taking things too far.

The fact was, the Bounder's pride had been hurt, and so he had to get his own back somehow. He justified the fact that he had forced the Owl into a fight by reminding himself that it was Bunter who had issued the challenge, and if he didn't know how to handle his fists, that was his bad luck. A fellow who couldn't box shouldn't lay hands on him.

The opponents stood in their corners, Smithy with a look of cold fury in his eyes, and the fat Owl with an air of cool confidence.

Lord Mauleverer looked at his watch. 'Time!' he called.

The Bounder leaped into the middle of the ring, intending to land a series of heavy punches which would push Bunter around without giving him time to sink to his knees and beg for mercy, but the Owl didn't back away. He met the ferocious attack with the cool steadiness of an experienced boxer.

Because he hadn't expected any resistance, the Bounder became careless. Suddenly, his flailing fists were knocked aside, and a hard glove landed heavily on his nose. He stumbled backwards, while Bunter stood still, his hands raised, awaiting the next onslaught.

'Suffering codfish!' breathed Bob Cherry.

'An astonishing performance,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Who'd have thought he had it in him?' said Frank.

As Wally and the Bounder moved around the ring, looking for an opening, Johnny sounded impressed. 'He really knows how to use his hands!'

Wally landed another blow, and Vernon-Smith gave his head a little shake. A streak of red came from his nose, and slowly dribbled down his chin. He wiped away the blood with a glove, and then launched himself on Bunter once again. Fellows held their breath, waiting for the fat man to go crashing to the ground under that fierce attack, but it didn't happen.

'What a turn up for the book!' shouted Toddy. For the first time ever, he felt a sort of pride in his study-mate. 'Keep at it! Go on, you fat porpoise!'

Bob clutched his brow. 'I'm dreaming! I must be!'

'If you are dreaming, my dear friend, then Smithy is having a nightmare.'

Harry watched Bunter's footwork. 'What's come over him? He's usually as nimble as a hippopotamus.'

'He's getting the upper hand!' said Bob, excitedly.

The two were putting everything they'd got into the Fight, the Bounder constantly on the attack, Bunter standing his ground, and landing two blows for every punch he took, refusing to be flustered by the flurry of blows.

As Mauly called time, they broke off. Bunter went back to his corner, bouncing on the balls of his feet. He seemed as fresh as paint after that First round.

Smithy wasn't in quite such good shape. He stood in his corner, breathing hard, and leaning on Redwing's arm. His astonishment was as great as his anger. It didn't seem possible for Bunter's fat fists to have hammered him so heavily.

'What's come over him, Reddy?' he gasped, and then added in quiet fury, 'I'll punch him until he bursts!'

'Call it off, Smithy,' urged Redwing. 'He'll be only too glad.'

'Shut up! I'm not stopping until he's a quivering mass of red jelly!'

Mauly consulted his watch again. 'Time!'

The Bounder straightened up, eager to get on with it. Had it been William George in

the ring, the fat Owl would have had the biggest beating of his life, but it wasn't. It was Wally, and he took it all in his stride.

The Fight went on, each of them taking and giving hard knocks, but Bunter retained his skill and agility, while the Bounder's attack became wilder.

'It's just potty. I don't understand it,' declared Harry Wharton at the end of the second round. 'I still think we're going to have to break this up, but we'll be saving Smithy's skin, not Bunter's.'

Johnny frowned. 'I can't make it out.'

'Bunter's putting a lot of weight behind those punches,' said Frank.

'And he's got plenty of that,' smiled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

'I always thought it was just fat,' said Johnny.

Bob Cherry, busy in Bunter's corner, fanned him with his handkerchief. 'Are you all right, old man?'

'Fine, thanks. But look here. I'd rather we packed it in. Ask Smithy if he's willing to call it a day, will you?'

'Sure.' Bob attracted Redwing's attention. 'Ask Smithy if he's willing to wrap it up, will you?'

Redwing bent over Smithy. 'Why not, Smithy?'

Smithy lifted his sweating, blood-smearred face, and scowled at his friend. 'Are you saying that he's beaten me?'

'Of course I'm not, but—'

'Then belt up! I've not finished with him yet, but I'll finish him off in the next round. I'll murder him!' he added, savagely.

'Well, what about it?' shouted Bob.

As Redwing shook his head and spread his arms wide in a gesture of helplessness, Smithy shouted defiantly, 'I'll slaughter him!'

'Time!'

There was almost total silence as the third round began. Smithy went into yet another ferocious attack and, for the first time, Bunter appeared to give ground. Eagerly, the Bounder followed up, pressing him hard and determined to finish him off. As Bunter backed away, the Bounder, now confident of victory, advanced again, his fists pounding away. Then, unexpectedly, the Owl side-stepped and launched a vicious counter-attack. Vernon-Smith was spun off his feet. His legs buckled, and he staggered a pace or two before crashing to the ground.

'Oh, my hat!'

'Smithy's down!' shouted Toddy, wild with delight.

Mauly began counting. 'One—two—three—' Vernon-Smith made an effort to get up, but he sank back again, shaking his dazed head. 'Four—five— six—seven.' Once again Smithy tried to get to his feet. This time he almost dragged himself upright, but his legs had no strength in them, and he collapsed into a heap on the ground. 'Eight—nine—ten! Out!'

There was a loud cheer. The fight behind the gym was over. The Bounder had been counted out, and Bunter was the victor.

Chapter 18

Both Bunters!

Wally was alone in study no 7. A lot of chaps had gone out with bats under their arms after tea. Wally would have liked to join them, but the scrap with Smithy had been

long and hard, and he was tired. So he sat near the window, gazing down into the quad.

He was feeling contented. Life at Greyfriars had turned out to be interesting, and in spite of the little spots of trouble that he had inherited from Billy, he was enjoying almost everything about it.

From where he was sitting, he had a good view of the quad. Some of the chaps were strolling about in the late afternoon sunshine. Gosling was sunning himself outside his lodge, and Wingate and Gwynne of the sixth were sitting on a bench, quietly chatting to each other. Temple of the fourth, elegant as ever, was leaning against a tree, surveying the scene, while Coker was stalking across the quad with the easy grace of a hippopotamus. He saw Tubb snatch off Nugent minor's cap and rush away with it, and he heard Dicky Nugent's warcry as he tore after him.

Two figures were approaching the gate, and Wally screwed up his eyes, wondering if he could recognise them. As they came nearer, he did. His face went pale. 'Oh, that's torn it!' he gasped. Mr. Prout was marching along in a purposeful way, and Billy Bunter was trailing behind him.

How on earth had that idiot let himself get caught by Prout? As soon as it was realised that there were two Bunters, the game would be up. They would be trundled into Dr Locke's study and to explain to the astonished headmaster just what they had been up to. Wally shuddered at the thought.

He peered quickly out of the window again. Billy was hanging back, clearly looking for a chance to bolt, but Prout, his hand on Billy's collar, was dragging him along. It was obvious that Billy wasn't coming willingly. He was there because he had no option.

Wally thought quickly. The only way to get out of this mess was for him to vanish so that there would be only one Bunter at Greyfriars. He only hoped that Billy Bunter wouldn't give the game away. He was such a blithering idiot that he was likely to blurt out anything, especially if he thought that it would save his own skin.

It was lucky that most of the chaps were out on the playing field. If he moved quickly, he could probably get away without being seen, and Billy would be able to step into his shoes. He left the window and made for the door, but he heard footsteps coming along the passage. Wally caught his breath. Suppose someone entered the study and suppose that someone happened to glance out of the window—well, that would be the end. They'd see one Bunter inside, and another being dragged across the quad by Prout. He clapped his hand to his mouth.

There were voices. 'For heaven's sake, Smithy, cut it out!' It was Redwing.

'Let go of my arm, Redwing!' The Bounder's voice was thick with anger.

'Leave Bunter alone!'

'Not until I've hammered him black and blue.'

'Simmer down, Smithy. It was a fair fight. Don't ask me how Bunter managed to knock you down, but he did, and that's all there is to it.'

'But I wasn't beaten by that fat freak.' The Bounder's voice was very angry. 'I wasn't licked. He couldn't lick a jelly baby. I could have carried on. I would have, if Mauly hadn't counted me out.'

'But he did.'

Redwing and Vernon-Smith had been talking to each other on the landing, but now they started to move down the passage again, still arguing.

'I'll show that grease-spot whether he licked me or not.'

'You're making a fool of yourself, Smithy.'

'I'll sort you out later, Redwing. I know Bunter's holed up in his study. I'll get that fat

rat.'

Wally's heart beat faster as he stood at the door. 'Oh, crikey!' he muttered. Now he couldn't escape.

'Give it a rest,' urged Redwing. The footsteps stopped again.

'If you don't take your hands off me, Reddy, I'll smash you here and now.'

'Chuck it. Let's go down to the nets instead. You know you want to play in the Highcliffe match. A spot of practice wouldn't do you any harm.' There was silence, and just for a moment Wally hoped that Redwing had persuaded Smithy to forget his grievances, but hope faded as the Bounder snapped, 'To hell with the match!'

Footsteps came towards the door of study no 7. Wally moved quickly. Quietly, he grasped the door knob, and turned the key. He was only just in time. The handle rattled, and there was the creak of wood as a shoulder was put to the door.

'What—?'

'Smithy, don't,' pleaded Redwing.

The Bounder wrenched at the door knob. 'It's locked!' he exclaimed. 'That rotten coward has locked it.'

'Stop it, Smithy!'

Smithy ignored him, and banged and kicked at the door. 'Bunter! You Filthy rat, open the door! Come on, open up!'

'I've had enough. I'm clearing off,' said Redwing.

The Bounder continued to pound at the door, but although the door shuddered, it held fast. 'Let me in. Let me in, you warty toad! If you don't open up, I'll kick it in!'

Wally breathed hard. He was safe for the moment, but only for the moment. It was true that Smithy couldn't get in, but there was no way that he could get out. He was cornered!

Chapter 19

Two of Them

'Ow—ow! Wow!'

Smithy stopped thumping the door and swung round, startled at hearing a fat squawk. He had been convinced that study no 7 harboured that paunchy porcupine, and yet here he was, trudging up the passage, his fat hands clutching the seat of his trousers.

'Bunter! What are you doing here?' he exclaimed.

Bunter gave him a mournful look. He'd just left Quelch. Prout, as he had promised, had taken him on a little visit to his form master and, as he had prophesied, Quelch had taken a very serious view of the matter. He had whacked the Owl, and the Owl was feeling very sorry for himself.

Smithy looked Bunter up and down, 'What are you wearing that gear for?'

Bunter peered down at himself. He had forgotten for the moment that he was wearing Wally's clothes. 'Oh—er—well, I, that is, I dunno.'

The Bounder looked back at the study door. 'Who's in your room?'

'What?'

'I've practically skinned my fists hammering on that door—' Smithy suddenly remembered why he was there, and he made a sudden rush at Bunter.

'Here! I say—oh, hands off! Leggo, you beast!'

Yaroo!' yelled the Owl, as Smithy's foot shot out. He skidded down the passage, slipped and fell. The Bounder strode after him and stood astride his podgy form.

'Oooh! 'wailed Bunter.

Quite unexpectedly, the Bounder burst out laughing. 'Got you at last, you fat freak!' he said, and walked off. It was hardly worth bothering with that mountain of misery. 'Beast!' hissed Billy Bunter, as he watched the Bounder disappear. He clambered slowly to his feet, and pushed at the study door. It was locked. 'Who's there?' 'I am, you fathead!' whispered Wally. 'Who else would bother to lock the door?' He let the Owl in. 'Hurry up,' he said, and locked it again as Bunter scurried inside. 'What an idiotic chump you are!' burst out Wally. 'First you persuade me to come to Greyfriars, and then you're stupid enough to turn up like a bad penny—' 'I couldn't help it! I didn't want to come back. It wasn't my fault,' yelped Billy. 'It was Prout. He shouldn't have caught me on the beach. It was his fault. He did it. He dragged me back. Didn't give me a chance to get away. And then Quelch whopped me, and that rotter Smithy laid into me and—and—' He looked pathetically at Wally. 'What are we going to do?' 'Ask me another!' snapped Wally. 'You got us into this mess. I didn't. Now you can think of a way out.'



'GOT YOU AT LAST, YOU FAT FREAK!'

'No one's seen us together, have they?' Billy had a note of hope in his voice. 'It was bad enough being swished by Quelch,' he said, ruefully, 'but I'd get a head's whopping if it came out.' 'And what about me?' asked Wally. 'You? I wasn't talking about you. I was talking about me.' 'Just for a change,' said Wally, sarcastically. 'Oh, you'll be all right,' said Billy. 'They can't give you one because you don't belong to Greyfriars. Now do try and keep to the point, Wally, and stop being selfish. That's your trouble. Self, self, self. That's all you think about. If there's one thing I

can't stand, it's selfishness. Now let's think about me for a change. We've got to get me out of this somehow or other. You can see that, can't you? Quelch would send me to Dr Locke as quick as a flash if we got rumbled. You'll have to think of something, Wally. You got me into this, so you'll jolly well have to get me out of it again.' He paused for a second, but Wally remained silent. 'Come on,' he said, impatiently. 'Get the wheels going round. Use your brain, can't you?'

Wally sat down at the table, his chin in his hands. 'It's no good, Billy. I'll have to go back. You stay here, and I'll find some way of returning to Marine Parade without being seen.' He felt surprisingly depressed. In spite of the unpleasant little treats that Billy Bunter had left him, he'd be sorry to leave the school before his time was up. Billy Bunter also looked depressed, and he heaved a fat sigh. He too would be sorry to leave his new home. He'd taken to Marine Parade and Mrs. Smallbones's excellent cooking. 'Pegg suited me down to the ground,' he said, dolefully. 'It was just what I needed. No lessons, no Quelch, nothing to do—'

Mm!' Wally got up. 'Well,' he said, 'if I'm going to beetle off, I'm going to have to get going before anyone sees me.'

Billy blinked hopefully at Wally. 'I—I say, Wally, Nobody's seen us together. I'll tell you what. I've got to do some beastly lines. You settle down and get on with them while I—'

'Oh, yes?' said Wally, grimly.

'Yes, you jolly well can!' snapped the fat Owl. 'Don't be so beastly lazy. Well, if you write out "I must not smoke cigarettes" two hundred times and take them to Quelch, I can—' He broke off, not quite sure what it was that he was going to suggest. He wrinkled his brow. The awful prospect of returning to lessons made his brain tick over just a little faster. I can hide—'

'Oh?'

'Mind you, Wally, you'd better do them properly. See you turn them in looking clean and neat like I always do. None of your rotten old scrawl. Quelch would spot the difference in a jiffy.'

'Really?' said Wally, faintly.

'Really,' said the fat Owl, firmly. His round little eyes began to glisten. 'As long as you do your part properly, it's a pushover. You can carry on being me, and I'll nip up to the attic and stick there until the gate's locked. I can dodge off when the coast's clear. I can get out of school easily enough. I did it once before when Smithy was after me. Thought it better to keep out of his way for a bit—'

'Why?' asked Wally, curiously.

'Just a bit of a mix up,' said Billy, airily. 'A cake disappeared from his cupboard, and he'd got it into his head that it was something to do with me—'

'And was it?'

'Course it wasn't,' Billy said. 'As if I would. It wasn't a very good one anyway. No icing. Not much fruit. It was hardly worth making a fuss about it.'

'Oh.'

'Anyway, Wally. You do what I say. You stay put, and leave the rest to me.'

'That's all very well,' said Wally, 'but you'll have to be jolly careful. If you're spotted—'

'Pooh!' said Billy, with a careless air. 'There's nothing to it. Now, I'll clear out before any of the fellows come up, and you get down to doing those lines. Quelch will be after them like a dog after a bone, and then—' He broke off in mid-sentence. There was a firm tread in the Remove passage, and he gave an alarmed squeak. He knew that step. 'It's Quelch! He's coming here.'

‘Quick!’ Wally pointed to the armchair, and he tiptoed across the room to unlock the door while Billy Bunter clambered behind the chair. ‘Keep still,’ breathed Wally. ‘Don’t move. I’ll handle Quelch.’

‘Oh—I—I——’

Wally put a hand on Billy’s head, and pushed it down. ‘Keep out of sight. Keep your fat head down.’ He darted to the table, grabbed a piece of paper, and dipped his pen in the ink.

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. Quelch walked in. Wally looked up, and rose respectfully to his feet. He put his hands behind his back, and crossed his fingers. If only the fat Owl could keep quiet, they might get away with it.

‘Aha! Here you are, Bunter.’ Quelch’s voice was severe, but it would have been much more severe had Bunter not started on those lines. ‘I see that you haven’t got very far, but you have at least started.’

‘Yes, sir,’ murmured Wally. He hoped that Quelch, now that he had seen him writing away, would disappear, but instead of leaving, his form master came and sat in the armchair.

Billy, crouched in the corner, heard the squeak of the chair springs as Quelch settled back, and quaked.

Both Bunters held their breath. Mr. Quelch’s eyes were fixed on the fat, youth who was standing quietly in front of him. His gaze was keen and penetrating, and Wally felt a trickle of perspiration at the back of his neck. Could Quelch possibly have guessed that he and Billy had switched places? No, it just wasn’t possible. He probably didn’t even remember that Billy had a cousin who resembled him so closely. Mr. Quelch clasped his hands. ‘Bunter,’ he said, at last.

‘Yes, sir?’

‘You have puzzled me lately, Bunter. I have found your conduct quite extraordinary.’ ‘I—I’m sorry, sir.’

Mr. Quelch paused again, and Wally’s heart sank. Clearly Quelch had come to have a chat, but that was the last thing that he wanted. He knew that Billy must be horribly cramped behind the armchair and that it would be difficult for him to keep absolutely still. Wally kept his fingers crossed, hoping that Quelch would cut the conversation short. He tried to maintain an innocent expression on his face, but it was difficult with those eyes boring into his.

Quelch really was puzzled by Bunter. He prided himself on his knowledge of the boys in his form. He thought he knew them inside out, but Bunter had surprised him. There had been that marvellous moment in his study when Bunter had appeared genuinely interested in Latin. In class that morning the boy had been attentive, intelligent and painstaking, and yet within a space of a few hours he had become the grubby, lazy, lying Bunter he knew so well.

He frowned at the boy. He had changed again and looked as he had that morning—neat, clean and respectful, dressed once more in his school clothes. ‘Tut—tut,’ said Mr. Quelch. There was something about his fat pupil that he was quite unable to fathom. ‘During the past day or two, Bunter, I thought that I had observed distinct signs of improvement.’

‘I—I’m glad you thought so, Mr. Quelch.’

‘I have been quite impressed by your new-found appreciation of Latin, and I was pleased to hear from other masters that you have taken a lively interest in their lessons. I really began to think that there was some hope for you, and that you might even be a credit to the school in time. These hopes have now been dashed. I have seldom met such blatant disobedience.’

Wally stood silently, trying not to show how anxious he was feeling. While Mr. Quelch had been speaking, he was pretty sure that he had heard a faint sound coming from behind the armchair.

‘Your Latin prose this morning was good— extremely good, Bunter. I now believe that your backwardness is due to laziness rather than stupidity, and laziness is something I will not tolerate.’

‘Oh, sir!’ mumbled Wally, who was listening to Quelch with one ear while the other was strained to catch any sound that came from the back of the armchair.

‘From now on, I shall expect better things of you. I shall not permit you to settle back into your idle and careless ways. You have shown me what you are capable of, and I shall insist on a much higher standard in future. I want you to think it over.’

Billy Bunter heard none of this. He was squashed into an uncomfortable position, with one knee jammed beneath his podgy chin while he knelt on the other. A look of horror crossed his face as he felt a prickling in his leg. It was pins and needles! He stood it for as long as he could, and then, as cautiously as possible, he moved his knee.

‘Upon my word! What was that?’ Quelch rested both hands on the arms of the chair, ready to lever himself up.

Wally stiffened. ‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Quelch?’

‘Is some small animal concealed in this study?’

‘Oh, no, sir,’ said Wally, quickly.

Quelch looked suspicious. ‘I distinctly heard a noise coming from this corner. If there is one, I advise you to own up.’

‘No, there isn’t, sir.’

‘In that case, it is something else.’ Quelch eased himself from the armchair, and stood on the other side of the fireplace. ‘Move that chair, Bunter!’

‘Oh, crikey!’

‘What was that?’

‘Nothing, sir,’ said Wally, in a dejected voice. Once the chair was moved and his cousin revealed, the fat would be in the fire.

‘Do as I—’

‘Bunter!’ bellowed a raucous voice from down below. Heavy footsteps pounded up the stairs. Lighter footsteps followed them.

There was the sound of a scuffle on the landing.

‘Take your hands off me, Potter!’ roared Coker. ‘Get off, Greene!’

‘He’s not worth bothering about, Coker.’

‘You keep your big trap shut, Potter. I know he’s here. I’ve got him this time, the cheeky worm. He’s been dodging me for days, but I’ve got him trapped now. I’m going to wallop him with this cricket stump, and I’ll wallop so hard that he won’t be able to sit down for days.’

‘Sh! Keep your voice down!’ hissed Greene. ‘If Quelch hears you’ve been kicking up a row here, he’ll—’

‘Blow Quelch!’ rumbled Coker, ‘He can take a running jump!’

Inside the study, Quelch stiffened.

‘Coker, old man—’

‘That fat blob’s not going to call me a lout and get away with it!’

‘But you call him names. You do it all of the time.’

‘That’s different!’ roared Coker. ‘He deserves it. I don’t!’

‘But—’

‘I told you to shut up, Potter You stand here with Greene so that you can nab him if he

tries to nip out. We'll take him by surprise—'

'There isn't going to be much surprise with you yelling your head off.'

'You just do what I say. Stand on either side of the door.'

Issuing orders like a sergeant major, Coker trampled on up the Remove passage, while Potter and Greene hovered on the landing, not keen to take part in Coker's retribution.

Coker marched on, his large feet making the floorboards tremble. 'Bunter!' A moment later, his burly figure filled the doorway. He stood there triumphantly as he saw his quarry in front of him, but he failed to notice the tall, spare figure of Mr. Quelch in the other corner of the room.

He came in, twirling his cricket stump. 'Now you fat fiend! I've got you at last!'

'Oh, golly! I—I—ooh! Ouch!' cried Wally, as Coker grasped the collar of his blazer, and swung him round. He raised his stump and brought it down with a resounding whack on those tight trousers.

'Whoops! Ouch! Ugh!' howled Wally.

Coker raised his powerful arm again, eager to get on with the good work. 'That's for calling me a lout. This is for—'

'Coker!' Quelch boomed. 'Coker!'

As if in a comic strip, Coker stood like a statue, the cricket stump in his hand, his arm raised high in the air. Very slowly, he shifted his eyes from Bunter to Quelch. A look of dismay appeared on his face. 'Hell's bells!' he groaned.

'How dare you, Coker! You wretched boy!' The fury on Mr. Quelch's face was terrifying.

'Oh, holy smoke! Oh, Mr. Quelch, sir, I—I never knew you were here.'

'That,' said Mr. Quelch, furiously, 'is quite obvious.'

Potter and Greene, still hanging about on the landing, exchanged glances and tiptoed downstairs again. Trust Coker to run into a hornet's nest. Well, he was welcome to both the nest and the hornet. They didn't want any part of it.

'How dare you, Coker!' repeated Mr. Quelch. 'What appalling behaviour!'

He had seldom been so angry. 'How dare you invade a junior study in this way! How dare you viciously attack one of my boys with a—a bludgeon! You will come with me immediately. I shall take you to Mr. Prout. He shall hear of your unprovoked attack on a Remove boy. I have no doubt that he will take the same view of this as I do. Follow me, Coker!'

Mr. Quelch, his gown billowing behind him, swept out. He had completely forgotten about the suspicious noises he had heard from behind the armchair, and even if he had remembered them, he would have ignored them. That was a trivial matter compared to Coker's attack on Bunter. He looked back and saw Coker still standing, as if rooted to the spot. 'Come!'

'1—1—1——'

'Immediately, you wretched boy!'

As Coker followed Mr. Quelch down the passage, his face a picture of baffled misery, Wally went to the door to watch them go.

'I say, Wally!'

He went back inside the study. A fat, perspiring face and a pair of glimmering spectacles appeared cautiously from behind the armchair. 'Has he gone?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, goody gumdrops!' Rather like a tortoise poking its head from its shell, Bunter blinked around the room, and carefully eased his way out of the cramped corner. He rubbed his aching leg and then wiped the sweat from his face. 'That was a narrow

squeak, Wally, old chap. Just think, if we'd been copped together—'
'Why couldn't you have kept quiet, you babbling baboon?'
'But I couldn't,' said Bunter, plaintively. 'I'd got pins and needles all up and down my leg. You'd have had pins and needles if you'd been squashed up like—'
'Keep your voice down, you fool.' Wally nipped across to the door, and peered up and down the passage. 'If you're going to hide in the attic, now's your chance. There's no one about.'
'All right.' Nervously, Billy rubbed his hands together. 'Are you sure it's safe?'
'Didn't I say so?' said Wally, impatiently. 'It's now or never. Move your fat carcass.'
Billy rolled towards the door, and poked his head round the corner. 'All right, I'm going, but don't forget those lines.' He turned round again. 'I say, Wally—'
'What is it now?' snapped Wally, his patience nearly exhausted.
'I'm hungry, old man. Have you got a choc or a toffee or something? Just a little nibble to keep me going.'
'No, I haven't.'
'Oh! Well, I'll just have a squint in the cupboard before I go. It won't take a minute. Toddy might have put—Ow! Ouch! Stop kicking me, you beast! Oops! No need to do that. I said I was going, didn't I?'
As Wally raised his foot again, Billy Bunter went. The fat Figure in the grey suit streaked along the passage and up the stairs that led to the attic, while another fat Figure sat down and began writing out lines..
Meanwhile, Coker, in Mr. Prout's study, was having an unpleasant and rather painful time. He was feeling very unhappy but he would have felt far more unhappy had he realised that, by bursting into study no 7 when he did, he had rescued the Bunter cousins.



... ANOTHER FAT FIGURE SAT DOWN AND BEGAN WRITING OUT LINES

Chapter 20

Amazing!

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'What's brought you here?'

'Have you lost your way, my dear fellow?' asked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. 'The tuckshop 's over there.'

Quite a number of the Remove were busy at the nets and they looked up in surprise as Bunter, dressed in flannels and carrying a bat, appeared on the scene. His lack of enthusiasm for the game—for any game for that matter—was well known, and so the sight of him on a day when games weren't compulsory was astonishing.

Wally took a deep breath. Greyfriars was fine. There was no doubt about that. Even that recent narrow squeak with Mr. Quelch hadn't dimmed his pleasure, but he was becoming tired of having to live with his cousin's reputation. Still, there it was. There was nothing he could do about it. He could hardly take over Billy's identity without taking over his character at the same time. But still, it was hard to be regarded as a slacker, a poor sportsman, and a filcher of other people's goodies.

It had taken him some time to polish off those lines for Quelch, and he had looked out of the window more than once, tired of being cooped up. The moment he had finished he had decided that what he needed was fresh air—fresh air and cricket. Wally always had been a keen cricketer. He was a permanent member of his school team, and he was longing to have a knock. He realised that what he was doing was probably unwise, but it couldn't be helped. He was going to play, and that was that.

However, by the time that he arrived, the juniors were on the point of packing up.

'I say,' Wally said. 'What about me?'

'Roll off, fat man,' said Harry, smiling at him. 'You've got the wrong day. It's not compulsory.'

'I know, but I felt like a knock. I'd have got here sooner if I could, but I was fagged out after that scrap, and then I had some lines to do. Come on, let me have an over or two.'

'Got a temperature?' asked Bob. 'Something wrong with you?'

Hurree peered at Wally's face. 'I was going to observe that the leopard has changed his spots,' he said, solemnly, 'but something remarkable has happened. There are no spots.'

Frank examined the area behind one fat ear. 'It's true' he exclaimed.

'He's washed!' grinned Bob. 'Folks, you see before you the eighth wonder of the world.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, pack it in,' said Wally. He looked around at the crowd of juniors. 'Well, who's going to bowl?'

'You can't mean it,' said Harry.

'But I do,' Wally insisted. 'Who's going to have a shot at taking my wicket? It won't be that easy.'

'We can hardly see the target once you're at the crease,' said Bob, and the juniors laughed again.

'I think I understand the rules of the game,' said Wally, a trifle stiffly. 'Let's get a

move on.' He bent down and strapped on his pads.

'Why not?' said Harry. 'It won't take long.'

'That's right,' agreed Frank. 'One ball should do it.' Harry Wharton tossed the ball to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and Bunter strode across to the wicket. He looked alertly round the field as he waited for Hurree's delivery.

Bob Cherry nudged Harry. 'Look at that. He usually stands there like a sack of coal, holding the bat as if he's playing table tennis, but he almost looks like a real cricketer today.'

Harry gave a little whistle. 'That's right. I can't make the fat man out these days.'

The small crowd watched with interest as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, easily the best bowler in the Remove side, sent down the ball. He didn't try particularly hard, but he knew that he didn't need to. As long as the ball was on target, it would be bound to shatter the stumps. It was a good ball. Bunter moved his feet quickly, and there was a sharp click, and the ball whizzed away to the boundary.

'My straw boater!'

'He actually hit it!' grunted Johnny.

'He did a bit better than that,' Harry remarked, quietly. 'That was quite a knock. He must have beef under that fat after all.'

'It must have been a fluke,' said Frank.

Redwing pounded after the ball, and returned it to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh who got ready to bowl again, a determined expression on his face. This time he really was going to try.

'Come on!' shouted Bob. 'Make it a good one this time!'

It was a good one, and so was the next and the next, but each time the bat flashed, and the ball shot away like a cannon ball while the fielders scurried after it. Wally grinned. He was feeling on top of the world.

'You have a go, Tom,' called Harry, when Hurree had finished his over.

Tom Brown, the New Zealander, was a very accurate bowler who could usually be relied upon to pin down batsmen. He sent down one ball after another, and each was knocked away with grace and fluency by Wally.

'Thanks very much,' Wally said, at the end of the over. 'I really enjoyed that,' and he unbuckled his pads. 'It was just what I wanted. I needed a little workout.'

Bob Cherry could hardly keep still as he bounced up to Bunter. 'You—you spoofing spoofer! You're not the dithering dud you've made out. Why have you been having us on all this time?'

Johnny turned to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'There's something queer about this,' he grunted.

I too think it rather perplexing,' Hurree Jamset Ram Singh agreed.

Bat under his arm, Wally sauntered up to Harry Wharton. 'Tell me,' he said casually.

'Have you got a better bat in your team?'

Harry hesitated before answering. It was true that Bunter had put on a marvellous show, but he had never done it before and perhaps he'd never do it again. 'No,' he said, after a moment's thought. 'But you've never showed form like this before. I'm dashed if I understand you. It's the first time you've showed any sparkle.'

Wally ignored that. 'What about finding a place for me in the Highcliffe match? You won't be sorry if you do, I promise you that.'

'What?' Bob Cherry was astounded.

'You've got a nerve,' said Johnny.

'But Harry's just agreed that there isn't a better bat,' Wally pointed out. 'I'd have thought that was reason enough. You want the strongest side you can get, don't you?'

The fellows hanging around looked at Harry Wharton, wondering what he would say. Bunter had shown that he could play all right, but the idea of putting him in the team seemed ludicrous.

‘I thought that you picked the team according to form,’ Wally went on.

‘That’s right. I do.’

‘Then what’s wrong with my form?’

‘Nothing, you fat porcupine, but you can hardly call it form when all you’ve done is have one knock. I know it was a really super performance, but it proves nothing.’ He frowned. ‘I’ll tell you what, though. I’ll fix up a practice game tomorrow, and if you do as well then as you did today, I’ll consider you in exactly the same way that I’ll consider everyone else.’

‘Right, that’s fair enough,’ said Wally, satisfied with the offer.

‘But you’d better watch your step,’ said Frank, warningly. ‘If you slack in class or don’t do your prep and get another detention, then bang goes your chance of playing.’

‘You don’t need to tell me that,’ said Wally, cheerfully. ‘Quelch won’t have anything to complain about. I’ll keep my nose to the grindstone. I don’t want to miss the chance of playing in the team.’

They all left the field together, Bunter strolling along in the middle of the little crowd. For the first time ever, no one was telling Bunter to push off, and no one had an itchy foot.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Frank Nugent hung back for a moment or two. Frank scratched his head. ‘What is it?’ he said.

‘I know what you mean,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘He’s different. I can’t make it out.’

They both recognised the fact that Bunter worked harder, looked cleaner, and had shown that he was more of a sportsman than anyone had suspected, but there was another difference, but neither could quite put his finger on it.

Chapter 21

Problem for Prout

‘God bless my soul!’ breathed Mr. Prout.

He stared into the dusk, peering at someone who was lurking in the shadows of the squad. That someone was a podgy figure dressed in a light grey suit. Mr. Prout’s eyes lit up. He knew that figure, and he knew those clothes. It was Bunter again, and the fifth form master had a very shrewd suspicion that he was on the point of breaking bounds.

‘God bless my soul!’ he repeated, and then said sharply. ‘Bunter! Bunter! Stand still!’ Billy Bunter didn’t stand still. Instead, he gave a startled squeak like a surprised rabbit, and swung round. For just a second a pair of little round eyes and a pair of big round spectacles glimmered at Mr. Prout, and then that fat figure scooted off.

‘Stop!’ shouted Mr. Prout, setting off in hot pursuit, but Bunter had got a good lead, and he vanished into the shadows of the trees before the master could clap a hand on him.

Panting loudly, Mr. Prout came to a halt. He looked around. Where could that boy have got to? Then he heard a rustle and the sound of scabbling feet. Mr. Prout stiffened. He knew precisely what was happening. Bunter was shinning over the wall. ‘Goodness gracious!’ he exclaimed aloud. The boy was behaving in the most extraordinarily reckless way. It was almost beyond belief. Bunter knew perfectly well

that he had been seen, and yet he had continued his flight instead of trying to return to school without being caught.

Mr. Prout swung round. He was going to report Bunter immediately, and what was more, he was going to enjoy doing it. After all, Quelch had seemed to get a kind of grim pleasure in marching Coker into his room that afternoon.

He hurried into the school, rubbing his hands together. Disgraceful though Coker's behaviour had been, it was nothing compared to Bunter's escapade. He reached Mr. Quelch's study, tapped on the door, and without waiting for an answer, threw it open. 'Mr. Quelch! ' he said, sounding rather pompous.

Mr. Quelch, book in hand, looked up. 'Mr. Prout?'

Prout burst into his story. 'A boy from your form has broken bounds. Saw him myself—taking my evening walk. I ordered him to stop, but he scrambled over the wall. I saw him clearly. It was Bunter!'

'Bunter?' Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. 'Are you sure, Mr. Prout?'

'I am absolutely certain. I saw him with my own eyes—heard him climbing—no doubt, no doubt whatsoever.'

'Could you have made a mistake? It is becoming very dark outside.'

Mr. Prout's pink face became red. 'I think I can trust the evidence of my own eyes,' he said, acidly.

Mr. Quelch closed his book, and rose from his chair. 'I shall go straight to Bunter's study and investigate the matter.'

'And I shall come with you.'

'Very well,' Mr. Quelch could hardly refuse, but he would rather have dealt with the affair on his own.

In silence, the two masters went along the corridor, and still in silence, they mounted the stairs and made their way to study no 7. Mr. Prout was well aware that Quelch thought that he had made a mistake, and he was looking forward to the moment when he would be proved right. Quelch's anger when he discovered that the wretched boy had indeed broken bounds would be well worth watching. He waited as Quelch tapped at the door and walked in.

Three juniors looked up, and rose to their feet as they saw their form master, and Quelch nodded in silent approval.

'And is Bunter there?' asked Prout, who was still outside the study.

'Indeed he is,' said Quelch.

'I—I beg your pardon?' Prout felt he hadn't heard Quelch correctly.

'Bunter is here!'

'It's impossible—quite, quite impossible.' Prout bustled in, and his jaw dropped.

'Good gracious! Bunter!' he exclaimed.

The fat face looked at him with polite concern. 'Is there anything I can do, sir?'

'God bless my soul!' Prout clutched at the door knob. He simply didn't understand.

How could the boy have got back into the school so quickly? Could he possibly have made a mistake after all? He pulled out a handkerchief, and mopped his forehead. He didn't know what to think.

'Is anything wrong?' asked Toddy.

'No, no, nothing at all, I'm happy to say. Mr. Prout thought that he had seen Bunter outside the House only a few minutes ago.'

'But we've all been here together,' said Toddy. 'We've been getting on with our prep.'

'That is just what I expected. Mr. Prout has obviously made an absurd mistake. The light is rather dim outside.' He turned. 'Shall we go, Mr. Prout? I would rather not

disturb my boys while they are working so well,' and he led the way out of the study. 'He must have been seeing things,' said Toddy, as he settled down again. 'That's right, Toddy. He must have been seeing double,' Wally remarked, and he bent over his book so that Toddy shouldn't see his grin.

Chapter 22

Bunter the Batsman

A lot of chaps drifted towards the cricket pitch. The word had got around that Bunter was going to play in a practice game because there was a chance that he might get into the team for the Highcliffe match, and so they had come along for a good laugh. Harry Wharton knew perfectly well that they thought he was off his head to consider playing Bunter, but he'd promised him a chance, and he was going to keep his word.

It was true that the whole thing seemed crazy. Bunter had always been hopeless at cricket. He muffed catches, and even if he threw the ball in the right direction, it seldom travelled more than a few yards, and he used his bat like a shovel—up to yesterday. Then they'd seen a different Bunter. Well, today he would find out if it was just a flash in the pan.

There were a few of the onlookers who wondered if the Owl was going to produce a rabbit from his hat. He'd shone in Latin that morning, and had earned words of praise from Quelch. He had delighted Monsieur Charpentier by displaying a quite unexpected knowledge of French, and he had floored Mr. Lascelles by getting his maths right without cheating. Those who had seen all this thought that Harry was right to give Bunter his chance.

'Ready?' asked Harry, glancing at the players. He had chosen the two sides with great care, and he'd deliberately put the best bowlers in the same side, and had picked Bunter to open the innings for the other.

Once again Bunter put on a remarkable performance. He stood up to the bowling of Hurree Janset Ram Singh and Tom Brown. Harry Wharton then put Sampson Quincy Iffly Field, the only Australian member of the form, on to bowl and Bunter treated him with equal disdain, hammering ball after ball all over the field. Although other wickets fell, Bunter remained at the crease, quietly confident in spite of the keen fielding.

One of the keenest fielders of all was Vernon-Smith. He was in the slips, as watchful as a cat, ready to pounce at the slightest opportunity. Smithy, a good all-round cricketer and particularly useful as a bat, had been particularly scornful when he had heard what the game was in aid of, and now, as Bunter's score increased, he became even more anxious to see the fat Owl's wicket fall.



... HAMMERING BALL AFTER BALL ALL OVER THE FIELD.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who was bowling, turned and ran down to the crease. He sent down a really good, accurate fast ball, and Bunter snicked it between the slips. The Bounder, watching the ball with keen eyes, moved like lightning, leaping forward with his hand outstretched, but as he did so, he slipped and stumbled. There was a resounding crack as the ball struck his wrist. 'Oh!' he cried, and his face went white as he sank to the ground. He stayed there for quite a few seconds, doubled up with pain and then, very slowly, he straightened himself up, furious at having missed the catch.

'Smithy,' said Redwing, anxiously. 'You're hurt.'

'Are you all right?' asked Wally.

The Bounder took no notice of him, and reached down for the ball so that he could return it to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, but he had to use his left hand.

'Let me have a look,' said Harry, running up.

'It's nothing,' said the Bounder, impatiently.

Harry took no notice. He examined the wrist. 'Gosh! It's already started to swell. I think you ought to go and see—'

'Don't make a fuss!'

'You ought to go straight to matron and ask her to have a look at it.'

'But I—'

'Smithy, don't be a fool! We're going to need you tomorrow. If you get it looked at straight away, and give it a rest, it might be all right for the match. If you don't get something done about it, you won't stand a hope of playing.'

'Oh, all right,' muttered Smithy. He slouched off with an air of casual unconcern, but actually the pain was intense, and his temper was worse.

It was bad luck for Wally Bunter that he crossed Smithy's path just as the Bounder was mooching across the quad later that afternoon, and, although he was doing no harm whatsoever, the sight of any Bunter was like a red rag to a bull. Smithy lashed out with his shoe. There was a loud and indignant yell from Wally, and he shot in the air, his hands clutching the seat of his trousers. 'Ooooh! Ouch!' he yelled.

It might have been bad luck for Wally, but it was even worse luck for the Bounder. At the moment that his foot came into contact with Wally's backside, Quelch, who had just stepped into the quad with Prout, saw exactly what happened.

'Vernon-Smith!'

'Oh, that's torn it!' muttered the Bounder.

Mr. Quelch strode across the quad. 'I saw that, Vernon-Smith. It was an utterly unprovoked attack on a perfectly innocent boy. Go inside! Wait outside my study until I have time to deal with you.'

Clutching his aching wrist, Smithy went indoors. He had a very good idea of how Quelch intended to deal with him, and he was right.

In the meantime, Frank Nugent's young brother Dickie was having a rotten time. He was Loder's fag, and that meant that he had to fetch and carry for the sixth former, keep his study tidy, clean his shoes, and so on. He also was expected to get tea for Loder whenever he wanted it.

About the time that Bunter took his place at the wicket, Dicky Nugent met his friends Gatty and Myers. 'What's up?' they asked, noticing his gloomy face.

'Loder,' he said, bitterly.

'He's a stinking pig,' said Gatty, simply.

'And a rotter,' added Myers.

'I've got to get his tea at half past four. He's got some other chap coming,' announced Dickie.

'What's so tough about that?' asked Gatty. 'You do it most days.'

'The cupboard's bare,' explained Dickie. 'There's only half a stale loaf.'

'Didn't you tell him?'

'Couldn't. He was in a vile mood.'

'You mean he didn't give you any lolly?'

'Not a bean. He just bawled at me.'

'But didn't you say what with?'

Dickie Nugent looked at Myers in disbelief. 'You must be joking. He'd have gone for me like a rhino with toothache.'

Normally, Loder was quite well off, and whatever his shortcomings, and they were considerable, he couldn't be called mean. He just handed money over to Dickie Nugent with a lordly air and let him buy whatever was necessary, so he was clearly hard up just at the moment. Loder was honest enough. Dickie knew that whatever he spent, Loder would repay, but the trouble was, Dickie had nothing to spend either.

'Let's go and ask your brother,' suggested Gatty, and the three of them trundled over to the cricket pitch.

Frank, who had been caught out, was standing watching Bunter's innings with interest. 'Frank,' said Dickie. His brother took no notice. 'Frank,' he said again, tugging at his sleeve.

Frank glanced at him. 'Hallo,' he said, and then he shouted, 'Well done, Bunter,' as the Owl's flashing bat made contact with the ball, and another four was signalled.

'Frank,' said Dickie yet again. 'I need some cash.'

'Who doesn't?'

'But I must have—'

Without looking at his young brother, Frank picked up his blazer and felt in the pocket. 'Here you are,' he said, handing over a coin. 'It's all I've got.'

Dickie looked in dismay at the two bob piece. 'Oh,' he said, and drifted away with his friends. 'Well, a fat lot of good that is,' he said, bitterly.

'What are you going to do?' asked Myers.

Dickie gave a hopeless shrug. 'Don't know. Haven't a clue.'

'You'll just have to pinch something from somebody else,' said Gatty. 'That's all you can do.'

Dickie turned the idea over in his mind. It was a risky business, helping yourself to other people's grub. He was liable to get a booting if he was caught, but, on the other hand, a beating was an absolute certainty if he couldn't provide Loder with a substantial tea.

He took a deep breath, and gulped. 'I guess you're right,' he said.

He made his way into the school, and then began the ascent to the fifth form studies. Cautiously, he poked his head round one door after another, an excuse on his lips in case any of them were occupied. but the place was as silent as the grave. The only trouble was, there wasn't any food. Dickie became more and more depressed. At last he reached Coker's study and gave a tentative little tap on the door. There was silence. Quietly, he turned the door knob and looked in, and then his face lit up with delight. On the table was a promising looking parcel—a very large parcel.

Dickie darted in and pounced on it. There was something about it that made him feel that he'd reached El Dorado at last. Quickly he ripped off the wrappings. He'd been right. He'd struck gold. It was food, and glorious food at that. There were ham and eggs. There were doughnuts, a cake, fruit, scones, butter and jam. Dickie wasn't foolish enough to spend time gloating over it. He made a quick selection of the goodies, stuffed his pockets until they were bulging, and then sped off again.

Five minutes later he was in Loder's study, busily preparing tea. He was only just in time. As the sixth formers entered, Loder looked with approval at his laden table.

When Coker entered his study at about the same time, his feelings were rather different as he surveyed the debris that Dickie had left behind.

Chapter 23

Bunter of Course!

'Hand me that stump!'

'But, Coker—'

'Stop jabbering, Potter, and hand it over!'

'Look, you'll just be asking for trouble.'

'Save your breath!' shouted Coker. 'Give me that stump. I'm going to look for Bunter, and I'm going to find Bunter, and I'm going to wallop Bunter, and then Bunter won't sit down for weeks and weeks and weeks.'

'But you don't even know that it was Bunter,' said Greene reasonably.

Coker was in no mood for reason. 'Don't be so wet, Greene. That great clown had my apples only the other day, didn't he? He's always at it, you know he is. If it wasn't Bunter, then who got his paws on my parcel?'

'How should I know?'

‘There you are then!’ hooted Coker. ‘You can’t even think of anyone else, so it must have been that fat freak.’

‘It doesn’t follow,’ pointed out Greene. ‘It might have been, but then, it might not.’ Coker glared at him. ‘There isn’t any might about it. It must have been Bunter. It always is.’ His eyes glistened. ‘This time I really am going to wear out that stump on the seat of his trousers.’

‘But Prout wasn’t any too pleased when—’

‘Prout didn’t have his grub pinched!’

‘He’ll be furious if you’re caught again.’

‘Shut up!’ Coker wasn’t interested in their warnings. He was after Bunter’s blood. He was going to wallop that worm, and nothing was going to stop him this time.

‘Coker,’ said Greene, slowly, as he looked at the food on the table. ‘It might not have been Bunter. Have you noticed? There’s quite a lot of stuff left. Have you known him to leave anything except crumbs before?’

‘He must have been disturbed or he’d have polished the lot off. I’m going to scalp that bloated baboon!’

He was even angrier than usual. After that unpleasant scene with Mr. Prout the previous day, Coker actually had decided to give Bunter a rest. Revenge hadn’t got him very far, and he had made up his mind to leave it at that, but his good intentions had been rewarded by yet another raid on his study. If Bunter had left Coker’s food alone, Coker would have left Bunter alone, but the fat fool had opened hostilities again.

‘Where is that stinking toad?’ he demanded.

‘On the cricket pitch,’ replied Potter.

‘Don’t be such a fool, Potter! That frowsting tick doesn’t play cricket. The only game he plays is helping himself to other chaps’ grub!’ Coker slammed out of the room.

‘I’m going down to the games study. Someone there might have seen him.’

Potter looked at Greene, and Greene looked at Potter, and they shook their heads.

Then, with an air of resignation, they got up and trailed after Coker. He was already thundering along the corridor to the games study where the Fifth formers hung out. Coker flung the door open. ‘Any of you seen Bunter?’ he demanded. ‘He’s raided my study again! This time I’m really going to smash him. And when I’ve done that I’m going to spiflicate him, but first of all I’m going to break this stump on the back of his trousers. And then—’ His voice trailed away. Mr. Prout was in the middle of a group of fifth formers.

Mr. Prout looked at the red face of Coker, and then at the cricket stump. ‘Coker!’ he said, angrily.

‘Oh—er—I—I—’ Coker backed away. ‘Oh, Mr. Prout, I—er—I had no idea you were here. I’m sorry. I didn’t know I was interrupting you. I’ll just go—’

‘You will go nowhere, Coker,’ said Mr. Prout, grimly. ‘You will remain where you are.’

Potter and Greene, now approaching the door of the games study, heard Prout’s raised voice. They continued on their way past the open door, chatting casually to each other as they went, hoping that Prout wouldn’t think that they had any connection with the avenging Coker.

‘You are a foolish and disobedient boy! I will not permit you to take the law into your own hands, whatever the provocation.’

‘Oh, no, Mr. Prout. That is, yes, Mr. Prout,’ said Coker hastily, not sure what his response should be.

‘Only yesterday Mr. Quelch had to intervene when you let that temper of yours get

the better of you. I can hardly believe that you are stupid enough to behave in a similar manner on the very next day.'

'Er—um—of course,' stammered poor Coker.

'However, although that is no excuse, I think that I can understand your reaction if a junior boy has indeed pilfered your food. I think you mentioned the name of a Remove boy?'

'Well—I—I'm not—'

'I think I heard you utter the name of Bunter—Bunter of the Remove.'

'Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Prout—' Coker was more than prepared to whop, smash, wallop and spiflicate Bunter himself, but he didn't want the fat freak to get it in the neck from a master. However, Prout had heard what he had said, and he had no intention of letting the matter rest. Quelch had scored over him last time. Now it was his turn.

'Did you or did you not say that Bunter had been in your study, Coker?'

'Well, yes I did,' muttered Coker, miserably, 'but I'm not all that sure that—'

'And is anything missing from your study?'

'Only some food, Mr. Prout.' Coker tried to make light of the affair. 'It wasn't much. Only some ham—'

'Yes?' Mr. Prout willed him to go on.

'And some doughnuts,' mumbled Coker.

'And?'

'And just a few other things, sir. Nothing much.'

Prout's face became stern. 'Only some ham and some doughnuts and a few other things,' he repeated. 'This is far worse than I had supposed.'

'It's not much, really it isn't,' said Coker, quickly, hoping that his form master would let the matter drop. 'It doesn't matter, honestly it doesn't.'

'Whether you think it matters or not is neither here nor there,' said Mr. Prout severely.

'I consider this is very serious indeed.'

'But, sir. Please, sir, I really don't—'

Mr. Prout held up a hand to silence Coker. 'Mr. Quelch is out at this moment, but I shall inform him of this unsavoury affair as soon as he returns. Leave it to me, Coker.'

Coker made one last effort. 'But Mr. Prout, I don't want to complain to Mr. Quelch about Bunter. Really I don't.'

'There will be no need for you to complain to Mr. Quelch. I shall undertake that task. But Coker, you must understand that I will not allow you to punish another boy. If I hear that you have attempted to, either now or in the future, I shall treat you with the greatest severity.'

'But—but——'

'That will do, Coker. You may go.' Mr. Prout waved a plump hand in dismissal, and Coker left the games study feeling that he'd like to use that cricket stump on Prout as well as on Bunter.

Prout remained in the room with the fifth formers, and continued the little pep talk he'd been giving while his pupils listened with an air of respect, and wished that he would clear off and let them get on with their own affairs.

He chatted on for another half hour, and then he pulled out his pocket watch. Aha! Mr. Quelch would have returned by now. He nodded farewell, and made his way to Quelch's study. He was going to enjoy his little chat with the Remove master. Bunter wasn't going to escape this time. Mr. Prout was going to demand that he be punished for stealing from fifth form studies, and so he walked on with a jaunty air, humming to himself.

Chapter 24

Bumps for Bunter

'It beats me,' said Bob Cherry, running his hand through his hair.

'Me too,' agreed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton looked equally perplexed. 'First in and last out,' he said. 'Who said the age of miracles was past?'

'Fact,' said Johnny Bull, briefly. 'First in, last out.' They were all puzzled. The rabbit of the Remove had turned into the batsman of the year, but how had it happened? Well, it made no difference since Harry had made up his mind to play Bunter in the Highcliffe match. In a way it was fortunate that the fat man had chosen that moment to show his real colours since it looked as if poor old Smithy wasn't going to be in a fit state to take part in the game.

The Famous Five turned to look at Bunter who was standing with his hands in his blazer pockets, a happy expression on his face. In spite of having been at the wicket for a very long time under a hot sun, he looked just as cool as he had when he had started his innings.

'Well, you've made it,' said Harry, going across to Wally. 'You're in.'

The Bounder, loafing by the window, scowled. He was still eaten up with envy and anger. Although he was longing to play in tomorrow's match, he had a very shrewd idea that he wouldn't be able to, and so, although he had listened to the chatter, he had, up to now, taken no part in it.

'Heaven help you, Bunter,' Harry Wharton continued. 'If you get stuck in detention, I'll scrag you—'

'Correction,' said Hurree Singh. 'We shall all scrag you.'

'You don't have to worry,' said Wally, calmly. 'I'll watch it.'

Johnny Bull snorted. 'That's all very well, but we all know what you're like. You'd better get your prep done, and you'd better get it done properly or—'

'He'll do it, all right,' promised Toddy. 'Leave it to me. I'll thump him if he doesn't keep his head down.'

Harry made his way to the window and stood by Smithy. 'How's the wrist?' he asked, sympathetically.

'Fine,' said Smithy, tersely. 'It'll be all right tomorrow.'

Harry Wharton looked at him, doubtfully. 'Gosh, I do hope so, Smithy, but—'

'I suppose you think you don't need me in the team now that you've got that fat fool,' burst out the Bounder.

'Don't be so stupid.'

'My dear Smithy,' put in Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, 'you know perfectly well that you are needed, but surely you will admit that our fat friend put up a good show today.'

'First in, last out,' Squiff reminded the Bounder. 'Pity the bowling was so lousy,' sneered Smithy. 'If Singh had been able to bowl on target it might have been a different story.'

'Oh, don't be such an ass,' said Bob Cherry, impatiently. 'The rest of us lost our wickets quickly enough.'

'He didn't have to be good to get rid of you, Cherry.' Bob Cherry's face went red and he doubled his fists, ready to tackle the Bounder.

'Don't,' whispered Frank. 'Can't you see that he's just trying to rile you?'

‘Why can’t you admit that Bunter’s a lousy bat who’s just had a run of luck? He’s always been hopeless, and he always will be.’

Johnny sat down on the arm of the chair. ‘He might have had a run of luck, but you can’t deny that he handled the bat well.’

‘Given a streak of luck, anyone could have done the same.’

‘He might have had a lucky streak, Smithy, but you’ve got a mean one,’ said Frank Nugent. ‘Why can’t you give him his due?’

‘It was a marvellous whack,’ Bob said, enthusiastically. ‘Let’s hope he does the same tomorrow.’

‘Always provided Quelch doesn’t shove him in extra school for slacking,’ said Vernon-Smith, sourly.

The door of the Rag was flung open, and Wingate looked in. ‘Is Bunter here?’

‘Yes,’ said Wally.

‘Quelch wants you,’ said Wingate briefly. ‘What have you been up to this time, you stupid idiot?’

‘Me?’ Wally was puzzled. ‘Nothing.’

‘The expression on Quelch’s face suggests it’s more likely to be something than nothing. I wouldn’t keep him waiting if I were you.’

Wally watched Wingate disappear. He felt bothered. As far as he knew, he’d done nothing wrong, and he couldn’t think of anything that he’d failed to do. Could it be something to do with his wretched cousin Billy again?

The faces of the members of the Remove were grim. If that fat villain was in trouble again, he was going to be very sorry for himself by the time that they had finished with him.

‘You toad in the hole!’ said Bob. ‘What have you been doing? Been pinching food again, have you?’

‘What!’ Wally was indignant. He had been able to be himself for the last few hours, and so the very idea that he would help himself to anything that didn’t belong to him was offensive. ‘How dare you, Cherry! I’ll deal with you later.’

‘Eh? What’s that?’ The look of surprise on Bob Cherry’s face flashed out a warning to Wally.

‘I—I say, Bob, old man—that is, I don’t mean it,’ stammered Wally, resuming his role. ‘But—but honestly, I haven’t the foggiest why Quelch wants to see me.’

‘Then you’d better find out,’ advised Harry Wharton. ‘Just keep it in your fat head that you’ll be boiled in oil if you don’t play tomorrow. You’re going to be needed, especially since Smithy might be on the sick list.’

The Bounder gave an unpleasant laugh. ‘You’d better not make up your mind to drop me yet, Wharton. I can do better with one hand than that fat fool can do with two.’

Harry Wharton shot an exasperated look at him. ‘Drop it, Smithy,’ he said. ‘You jolly well know that we want you if you’re fit, but Bunter’s needed too.’

‘That quivering bladder of lard!’

Wally left them bickering, made his way to Mr. Quelch’s study, and tapped on the door. His heart sank as he entered the room and saw the expression on his form master’s face. It was thunderous.

‘Bunter!’

‘Yes, Mr. Quelch,’ said Wally nervously. ‘Wingate told me that you wanted to see me.’

‘Indeed I do. Mr. Prout has reported to me that you have been pilfering food from one of the fifth form studies.’

Wally was appalled. ‘Oh, no, sir. I—I haven’t been near the fifth form studies, really I

haven't.'

'Mr. Prout was quite clear, Bunter. He had no doubt whatsoever. You have stolen food from Coker's study.'

'But I haven't, Mr. Quelch,' protested Wally. He didn't understand. He hadn't been in Coker's study, and Billy was safely tucked away in Pegg. 'I do assure you, Mr. Quelch, that—'

Mr. Quelch put both hands on his desk and stood up. 'That is quite enough, Bunter. You have lied far too often for me to listen to your protestations of innocence.'

Wally bit his lip. He was saddled with Billy's reputation. There was nothing that he could do or say that would convince Mr. Quelch. 'But—' he began.

'No, Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch sternly. 'That will do. I had hoped that your remarkable improvement would be sustained. I was wrong. I am disappointed in you.' Wally remained silent. 'I have considered this matter carefully. You will go into extra school tomorrow afternoon.'

Detention! Wally was almost too choked to say anything at first. The possibility of playing in the Highcliffe match vanished as Quelch uttered those few words. 'But—but—' he began.

'I have not forgotten what you did last Wednesday. Do not imagine you can do it again. Your detention will take place in this study tomorrow afternoon, and I shall be here in person. I shall expect you immediately after lunch, and you may be quite sure that I shall find a suitable task for you to do.'

'Oh!' gasped Wally. There was no way out. He couldn't possibly cut detention and go to Highcliffe. The trouble that he'd be storing up would be dynamite.

'That is all, Bunter. You may leave.'

Wally made a final effort. 'But, sir—'

'I told you to leave, Bunter.'

'Please, Mr. Quelch, let me explain—'

Mr. Quelch took a deep breath. 'I have no intention of listening to anything you may have to say, and even if I did so, I should certainly not believe a word that you uttered.'

'Couldn't you cane me?' asked Wally, desperately.

A thin smile appeared on Mr. Quelch's face. 'I see that I have chosen the correct punishment for you, Bunter. Thank you for confirming me in my decision.' He opened the door of the study. 'Go!'

Wally went slowly and miserably back to the Rag where everyone was waiting.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'What were you wanted for?' asked Harry Wharton, anxiously.

Frank got up from his chair. 'What happened?'

'It's detention—extra school tomorrow afternoon,' he said, dolefully. 'I've got to do it in Quelch's study with him there. It isn't the work. I don't mind that, but—'

Harry Wharton groaned aloud. 'Oh, Bunter, you stupid ass—'

'Twithead!' rumbled Johnny Bull.

'You clot!'

'You're a raving loony. You shouldn't be let out—'

'But I haven't done anything!' Wally cried. 'I wouldn't mind if I had, but I haven't. Quelch thought that I'd been helping myself to food from a fifth form study, but I haven't. I haven't been anywhere near them.'

'Oh, no. You wouldn't do anything like that, would you?'

'But I didn't, I tell you. I did nothing of the sort.'

'Of course not,' jeered Vernon-Smith. 'You never have. Poor old Bunter. It must be

hard having the finger pointed at you every time something goes missing.’
‘Listen,’ said Wally, earnestly. ‘I swear that I didn’t have anything to do with it.’
‘You really are the absolute end—the dregs,’ Harry said, cuttingly. ‘You’ve never ever in your life done anything for the form and now, when you can, you’ve made a mess of things just because you can’t keep your hands off other people’s food. You make me sick!’

‘But I swear—’

‘I’m the one who feels like swearing!’ Harry said.

Bob advanced on Wally. ‘Do you remember what we said? We said that we’d scrag you.’

‘That’s right,’ agreed Johnny. ‘What about it?’

There was a concerted rush at the Fat Owl. ‘I—I say. Leggo! Hands off.’ He struggled wildly as the indignant juniors grabbed him. ‘I tell you that— Whooop! Ouch! Crikey! Leggo, you lot! Wow!’ His arms and legs were gripped, he was raised high in the air, and let down with such a thump that the pictures on the wall shuddered.

‘Ouch! Stop it! Aaah! Ouch!’

‘One for luck,’ said Johnny, grimly, and then they left him on the floor struggling for breath. For the very first time since he’d changed places with his cousin, Wally wished that he’d never seen Greyfriars and that he had continued his uneventful holiday at Pegg.

Chapter 25

Smithy Makes a Discovery

Herbert Vernon-Smith was hard at work in Mr. Quelch’s study. He wasn’t translating Latin or learning some lines by Shakespeare, and neither was he working out a maths problem. He was mixing soot and glue together in a basin.

He had been punished that afternoon and was in the process of getting his own back. The black, sticky mixture that he was stirring was destined for Quelch’s mortar board which was sitting on the table in front of him.

It was true that there was some danger, but it wasn’t very great since the Bounder knew that his form master was dining with Dr Locke that evening. It was an opportunity which he simply couldn’t pass up.

Smithy peered at the mixture, added a little more glue to it, and then gave it another stir, thinking that its consistency seemed just about right. As he stood there, spoon in hand, he heard quiet footsteps outside. There was a tap on the door.

The Bounder thought quickly. It could hardly be Quelch himself. He was hardly likely to tiptoe along the corridor, nor would he tap on his own door. No, it had to be another fellow, perhaps someone like himself with a grievance.

Smithy wouldn’t have minded swapping notes with another victim, but he preferred to see who it was before he revealed himself, and so he ducked into the knee-hole of Quelch’s desk where he would be completely hidden unless the intruder actually walked round the desk and peered beneath it.

The door was quietly opened, and then it was closed equally quietly. Then there was the soft pad of feet going towards the small table by the window. Vernon-Smith grinned to himself. He knew what was going to happen.

The telephone receiver was picked up, and a number dialled. Vernon-Smith heard the ringing tone.

'Is that Pegg 291?'

It was Bunter! Although it didn't really matter whether the fat Owl saw him or not, the Bounder remained in his hiding place.

There was a voice at the other end. 'That's right. Pegg 291.'

'May I speak to Mr. Bunter, please?'

'Mr. Bunter?'

'That's right.'

'Who shall I say is speaking?'

'His cousin.'

Smithy listened with interest. He hadn't known that Billy Bunter had a cousin in Pegg. How odd! It wasn't like the fat Owl to keep anything quiet. Then the Bounder heard a fat, familiar voice coming from the other end. He stiffened. It was uncanny. There were two voices all right, one here in Greyfriars and the other in Pegg, but they were absolutely identical.

'Is that you, Wally,' said the voice from Pegg. 'What are you ringing me up for?' Vernon-Smith, crouched in the kneehole, clutched his head with both hands. Wally? But it was Billy Bunter who was making the call. He listened even more intently. He couldn't have heard right.

'Of course it's me. Who else would be phoning?'

'What do you want then? Are you in school?'

'Where else do you think I'd be?'

'You're taking a chance, aren't you?'

'Not really,' said the figure by the phone.

'Anyway, it's a rotten time to call. I haven't finished my dinner yet.'

'That's exactly why I'm ringing now. I knew that you'd be in.'

'Well, what's up?' The Pegg voice was querulous. 'I don't want them to clear my plate away. I haven't finished my steak-and-kidney pie yet, and anyway, there might be seconds.'

Vernon-Smith almost laughed aloud. It wasn't just their voices that were alike. It seemed that they had the same sort of appetite.

'I wouldn't have phoned you if it hadn't been important.'

'Well, get on with it,' said the fat voice from Pegg, petulantly, 'but if you're going to say that you're fed up with Greyfriars and want to change back, you can forget about it. We said Monday and that's what I'm sticking to, so there.'

'Stop nattering, and let me get a word in—'

'Now just you listen to me, Wally. Did you or didn't you agree to stay there until Monday morning?'

'You know I did, Billy.'

The Bounder's eyes widened. So it was Billy on the other end of the phone in Pegg, and it was Wally who was here in Quelch's study. He put his head even further round the desk and looked at that back again. It was a Bunter back all right—Wally Bunter's back. The similarity was amazing.

Billy's voice was heard again—the voice from Pegg. 'There you are then, Wally. You can't get out of it now. I don't know what you're grumbling about. You like Latin and all that rot, and that's exactly what you've got, so you can just stop whining.'

'I'm not whining!' Wally sounded annoyed.

'Then what are you ringing for? It's just like you——'

'Listen, you fool, I'm not fed up with Greyfriars. I'm not complaining about the place. It's great.'

'That's all right then. Mind you, I'm not having a bad time myself. The food's

smashing and Mrs. Smallbones lets me have as many extras as I want—'

'At my expense, I suppose,' said Wally, indignantly.

'Well, that's just like you to grudge me a few little extras. You seem to forget that I thought all this up for you—'

'Oh, yes, you greedy guzzler?'

'I always did think you were a bit mean,' squeaked Billy. 'Still, I shan't take against you for that. Hee, hee, hee! I almost got nabbed last night. Prout nearly caught me. You want to watch out, Wally. I know you haven't got too much upstairs, so don't you go giving the game away. Well, goodbye, Wally, old—'

'Hold on, you fat chump!' said Wally, urgently.

'I told you,' said Billy Bunter, testily. 'I haven't finished my grub yet, and the steak and kidney—'

'Listen, Billy. This really is important.'

'So's my steak and kidney.'

'Billy, Quelch has put me in detention tomorrow afternoon.' There was a fat giggle from the other end. 'It's not funny, you great ape.'

'Well, you have to take the rough with the smooth, don't you? Tee, hee, bee! What did he get you for?'

'Somebody pinched some food, and I was blamed for it.'

Billy Bunter gave an indignant snort. 'Look here, Wally. That's a bit much. I don't want to get a bad name because of you.'

'Shut up, you disgusting dustbin,' said Wally, fiercely. 'It's because of you that I was suspected, and it was because of you that Quelch wouldn't listen to me. If you hadn't been such a disgusting liar—'

'Who? Me?' yelled Billy Bunter. 'Really, Wally—'

'Listen! Wharton's picked me for the match against Highcliffe tomorrow, and I can't play if I'm in detention.'

'Do a bunk like I did!'

'Oh, yes? It's because you cleared off last Wednesday that I'm in a mess. Detention's in Quelch's study under his nose. But you can make up for all the trouble you've given me.'

'Oh?' Billy Bunter didn't sound particularly keen.

'Yes. Change back for the afternoon.'

'What?'

'Yes,' said Wally, eagerly. 'I've got it worked out. I'll rush straight out after morning school to where you'll be waiting in the spinney near the stile. We can change clothes. You go into detention, and then I'll join the team at Highcliffe. They'll think that Quelch has let me off. The minute the game's over, I'll race back again to the spinney and wait for you. Then we'll change clothes again and you can go back to Pegg.'

'What a cheek!'

'I'm needed, Billy. Poor old Smithy's got a bad wrist and it doesn't look as though he'll be able to play. What about it?'

'Not likely. I'm not risking it.'

'There isn't any risk, Billy. It can't go wrong.'

'It won't, because I'm not going to be there.'

'Be a sport,' pleaded Wally. 'After all, you've had a good time at my expense. Surely you can do something in return. After all, it'll only be one afternoon. That's not much to ask.'

'Really, Wally,' said Billy, indignantly. 'You've got a nerve! Fancy expecting me to grind away under Quelch's beastly eye while you're having a good time playing

cricket. Blow you, and blow cricket, that's what I say!

'But it's not just for me,' explained Wally. 'It's for the form.'

'Blow the form too!' There was a sharp click as the Owl banged down the receiver in Marine Parade.

Wally, his back still to the Bounder, stood by the table for a second or two, and then he gave a heavy sigh, replaced the receiver, and turned away.

'Fancy seeing you here,' said the Bounder, lightly.

Wally swung round and saw Smithy leaning across Quelch's desk, grinning at him.

He gave a silent groan. The Bounder must have heard every word that had been said.

The Bunter secret was a secret no longer.

'So that's the game, is it?' said the Bounder, in an amused tone. 'Well, I must congratulate you. You've had us all guessing, and none of us guessed right. I've got to hand it to you. You've carried it off remarkably well.' His eyes flickered up and down Wally. 'I remember you now, Wally Bunter. You came here once before.' There was a gleam of admiration in his eyes. 'So the fat man's got a free holiday and you've had a spell at Greyfriars. I must say you've got guts. Can you imagine what Quelch would have to say if he got wind of it?'

Wally stared back at the Bounder. He didn't expect much from him. He knew how bitterly he had resented being beaten in that fight behind the gym, and he knew that his success on the cricket pitch had rankled. 'All right,' he said, quietly. 'So now you know.'

'That's right,' said the Bounder, a mocking smile on his lips.

'We swapped identities because Billy wanted a bit of a break, and I wanted to come here. As you know, I go to a state school. I like it. It's a good place, but I thought I'd get some extra tuition while I was here. It matters to me because I want to go to university.' He hesitated, and then went on, 'I thought it would be an interesting experience, and it has been. I must say that things are far tougher here than I thought that they would be. We don't go in for corporal punishment in our school. Our parents would be up in arms if the staff carried on the way they do at Greyfriars.'

The Bounder shrugged. 'Well, it works.'

'Does it? It seems to me that those who get whacked are always the same—it doesn't seem to reform them. Anyway, that's neither here nor there. I don't think Billy and I have done much harm, but I don't suppose that's what Quelch would think.' Wally took a deep breath. 'You can do what you like, Vernon-Smith. I'm not asking any favours of you.'

'Just as well,' said Smithy. 'It wouldn't make any difference.'

'That's what I thought,' said Wally, as he walked towards the door.

'Hold on.'

Wally halted. 'Yes?'

Vernon-Smith rested both hands on Quelch's desk and gave a quiet little laugh. 'I've no idea what would happen to you if all of this came out, but I'm pretty sure that your fathead of a cousin would be in the middle of the biggest row of the century. I wouldn't give much for his chances of staying on at Greyfriars.'

'Nor would I,' said Wally, soberly, 'but he'll have to take his chance. I'm not going down on my knees to you just to save his skin. You must please yourself.'

'I shall.' The Bounder laughed again and then, surprisingly, said, 'Don't worry, Wally Bunter. I'm not going to squeal to Quelch or anyone else.'

Wally was staggered. It was the last thing he had expected the Bounder to say. 'Thank you,' he said quietly, as he left the room.

Chapter 26

Not Popular

'I say, you fellows!'

'Buzz off, Bunter!'

'But I just wanted—'

'Go away!' else.'

'But—'

'Butt your fat head somewhere else, you silly goat!'

'All I wanted—'

'Get out!' roared five angry voices.

Bunter had been quite popular earlier that day. What with one thing and another, he had had quite a success, but things had changed. His new-found popularity had slipped away like butter on hot toast.

He had let down the Remove, and they were fed up to the teeth. Smithy's wrist was so badly bruised that he could hardly pick up a feather, let alone a bat, and Bunter had ruined everything by looting tuck. He hadn't changed at all. He was still the same greedy, guzzling Owl.

'I only looked in to say—'

'If you don't clear out,' said Harry, grimly, 'you'll be chucked out!'

Johnny looked at him fiercely. 'You've let us all down!'

'But—'

'Oh, shuffle off,' said Harry Wharton, wearily.

'It's all a mistake, honestly it is. I—I suppose that Coker just jumped to the conclusion that it was me—'

'Fancy that!' said Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'And Prout thought that he was right, and he managed to convince Quelch. That's how it must have happened. Quelch just wouldn't listen. I wasn't able to say a word in my own defence.'

'You mean you'd got one?' said Frank Nugent, incredulously.

'How could it have been me? I was on the field with you.'

'And you just happened to be up here on your own before that, busily writing lines for Quelch,' Bob Cherry pointed out.

'Oh, crikey,' said Wally. 'That's true, but I was keen to get out for a game. The moment I'd finished, I changed, and went and joined you.' He groaned. 'If only I could have explained to Quelch—'

'It wouldn't have made any difference,' said Harry Wharton. 'He wouldn't have believed you. Why should he? It would have been all lies.'

'You can't open your mouth without them rolling out,' said Johnny.

'But I tell you I was nowhere near Coker's study,' said Wally desperately.

'That's what you said when you nicked his apples,' Bob Cherry reminded him.

'Kick him out,' advised Johnny.

Wally, leaning against the door, felt defeated. He didn't stand a chance of convincing anyone. Billy's reputation was something that he just couldn't overcome. When he had changed places with his cousin, he hadn't realised that Billy was a dog with quite such a bad name.

Bob Cherry got to his feet. 'Johnny, that's a brilliant idea. Why don't we kick him out?'

‘Do not look so alarmed, my dear Bunter,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Just remember that a kick in time saves nine.’

‘Please! Listen,’ begged Wally. ‘I’ve no idea who took Coker’s food, but it wasn’t me.’

‘Give it a rest,’ said Bob Cherry.

‘But I tell you it was somebody else.’

‘Tell us another!’

‘If we could find out who it was,’ said Wally, eagerly, ‘Quelch would let me off. It occurred to me that you lot might manage it. You know the chaps better than I do.’ Harry Wharton frowned. ‘What do you mean by that? Why should we know them better than you?’

‘Oh! I—you know how it is. I—er——’

‘What on earth are you on about?’ demanded Frank Nugent.

‘I meant—well, no, I didn’t exactly mean that,’ Wally stammered, aware that he’d almost given himself away. ‘The thing is, I’ve tried to work out who might have pinched Coker’s food, but I haven’t come up with any good ideas. I thought that if you went around chatting to blokes, you might get a clue.’

‘I think I can come up with a very good idea right now, even if you can’t,’ said Bob, moving round the table towards Wally. ‘My idea is that it was W G Bunter who snaffled the grub.’

‘But I’ve told you I didn’t. Can’t you take my word for it?’ asked Wally.

Johnny Bull let out a bellow. ‘I’ll show you whether I can take your word or not!’

‘Oh! Crikey! Hands off! Leggo! Oh! Yaroo!’

When Wally had walked into study no 1, he had had a faint hope that the Famous Five might have believed in his innocence, but those hopes evaporated as they rushed at him. He fled, dodging an avalanche of kicks, but Bob Cherry, roaring like an angry bull, pursued him up the passage, and managed to bring his foot into contact with Wally’s rear. A wild yell floated back to the chaps in study no 1. ‘He’s in good voice,’ Bob said.

Wally limped back to study no 7. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were already there, getting ready for prep, and they looked at him with disgust.

‘Why were you yelling?’ asked Toddy.

Wally rubbed the seat of his trousers. ‘It’s those blockheads in study no 1,’ he said, ruefully. ‘The trouble with them is that they can’t keep their feet to themselves.’

‘Serves you right,’ said Toddy, promptly. ‘You can’t keep your hands to yourself. You’re rock bottom, Bunter. I reckon I’ve got more respect for a worm than I have for you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for stealing Coker’s food and—’

‘But I didn’t!’ howled Wally. ‘I didn’t!’

‘Of course you jolly well did,’ said Toddy, furiously. ‘I’ve got a good mind to thump you with a cricket stump myself.’

‘Look, Toddy—’

‘Shut up!’

Wally did. There seemed to be no point in doing anything else. No one was going to believe him, no matter what he said. The glorious prospect of playing in the match against Highcliffe had gone for ever. With a heavy heart and a very gloomy expression on his face, he opened his books.

Once prep was over, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton went down to join the other fellows in the Rag, but Wally hadn’t the heart to follow them. He stood by the window, looking down at the quad, but it wasn’t the quad that he saw. He was seeing a game on a green field with white-clad figures standing around the wicket. He gave himself a

mental shake. There was no point in brooding over the affair. He wasn't going to play at Highcliffe, and that was that.

'Having fun?' asked a mocking voice.

It was the Bounder. Wally turned round, leaning against the window sill. 'No,' he answered, quietly.

Vernon-Smith, lounging in the doorway, put his hands in his pockets as he regarded Wally. He had been turning things over in his mind ever since their encounter in Quelch's room. Now that he knew it hadn't been that fat porcupine Billy who had beaten him in the scrap, he felt rather better about it. 'You really were keen to play in the match tomorrow, weren't you?'

'You know that I was.'

'Play for your school, do you?'

'Yes.'

'It was a pity that your cousin wouldn't help you out.'

'Yes,' agreed Wally, dejectedly.

'I guess it was asking just a bit too much of that selfish slacker,' said Vernon-Smith. He looked Wally up and down. 'It really is uncanny, you know. You two are as alike as two peas in a pod. Of course, I do know that you are Wally, but if you changed places again, I don't know that I should spot it. There's no doubt about it. You're brighter and cleaner—'

'Thanks,' said Wally, sarcastically.

'Have you anything else in common besides your looks—like pinching grub, for instance?' the Bounder asked.

'No!' said Wally, emphatically.

Smithy gave a short laugh. 'There's only one way to get people to believe that you didn't raid Coker's study.'

'Oh? What's that?'

'Confess that you are Wally.'

'No!' said Wally, firmly. 'I can't do that.'

'That's what I thought you'd say. Well, it doesn't look as if there's going to be any cricket for me either. Matron's had another look at my wrist, and she's given me the thumbs down. Pity that ball gave me such a whack.'

'Are you blaming me for that?' asked Wally.

'No. It was my own fault. I was just a bit too keen to get you out. I should have held that ball. But still, I can't say that I'm sorry that you're not taking my place in the eleven.'

'Don't be stupid! It wouldn't have been your place. Wharton was going to play us both.'

'Perhaps.'

Wally had the feeling that the Bounder's only object in coming to see him was to rile him. 'Do you mind getting out of my study?' he said, coldly.

'Yours?' The mocking note returned to the Bounder's voice.

Wally's face went red. He pulled the door open wider. As Vernon-Smith strolled off, a broad grin on his face, he gave Wally a kind of half-salute. 'See you around,' he said.

Chapter 27

Beastly for Bunter

Billy Bunter leaned back in a striped deck chair in the bright sunshine, and stretched out his fat little legs. As he brushed off an inquisitive fly attracted by his sticky face, he beamed at his surroundings, at the beach, the sky, the sea, and at the little boats that bobbed up and down on the sparkling waves. He was enjoying a glorious Saturday morning. The beach was crowded with sunbathers, the sun blazed down, and people were laughing and shouting as they plunged into the sea. However, Bunter didn't feel like bathing. Quite a crowd of people were canoeing, but he didn't feel like canoeing either, and neither did he feel like joining those who were strolling over the sands. What he felt like doing was nothing. It was one of the few things that he was really good at.

He suddenly thought of Greyfriars, and remembered what the timetable was—Latin, maths and physics. He shuddered, tried to banish it from his mind, and concentrated instead on lazing. Lazing, in Billy Bunter's considered opinion, was the next best thing to eating.

As far as he was concerned, the only fly in the ointment was the knowledge that this glorious laze had to come to an end, and the end wasn't that far away. Monday was approaching. But still, there was no point in meeting trouble halfway. He dipped a sticky hand into his pocket, brought out a chocolate biscuit, and began munching. The cash that Wally had left Billy Bunter had long since disappeared in an orgy of ice-creams, doughnuts, cherry cake, buttered buns, meringues and chocolate éclairs, and once it had gone, life became just a little bleaker until he had made the exciting discovery that Mrs. Smallbones would provide almost anything as an extra. Since that happy moment, the fat Owl had gone short of nothing. As far as Mrs. Smallbones was concerned, Bunter was the ideal guest.

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out another biscuit. He vaguely thought that Wally might kick up a bit of a fuss when he saw the size of the bill at Marine Parade, but that was going to be too bad. Wally would have to stump up.

'Spiffing! It's absolutely spiffing!' he said to himself, gazing vacantly into space. Unlimited grub and nothing to do. What more could a fellow want? He patted his stomach affectionately. It was getting on for lunch time. Chocolate biscuits were all very well. They were good for filling up empty corners, but he could only think of them as appetisers. They were no substitute for proper meals.

He spent a pleasant few minutes thinking about lunch. What would it be, he wondered? Boiled bacon, broad beans, and mounds of mashed potatoes would do, especially if followed by raspberries and cream. On the other hand, he wouldn't turn his nose up at roast lamb and mint sauce. He gave a loud, contented sigh. Soon it would be time to roll back to Marine Parade.

'Aha! What a surprise to find you here, Bunter!'

Billy Bunter looked up, his mouth open, and then blinked. 'Smithy!' he said, in a dejected tone.

Smithy had been sauntering along the beach at Pegg for half an hour or so, looking for someone, and now he had found him. He stood over Bunter, a sardonic smile on his face.

The smile made Billy Bunter uneasy. The last thing he had wanted was to be spotted by anyone from Greyfriars. Still, he thought to himself, what was Smithy doing in Pegg? It was out of bounds except on half holidays, and half holidays didn't start until after lunch.

'I've been to Marine Parade,' said the Bounder affably. 'They said I'd probably see you on the beach, so I had a little stroll. I'm glad I've found you.'

'Whaffor?' demanded Billy Bunter, crossly. 'Why? Anyway, Smithy, you're making

a terrible mistake. I've never seen you before in my life. I—I ain't Bunter, you know. Never have been. I've never heard of him.'

'Oh, no?'

'No!' said Billy Bunter, vehemently. 'Dunno who he is. Haven't a clue.'

'Haven't you?'

'Never. You've got it in one. I know that I'm a bit like my cousin Wally, I'll grant you that, Smithy, so I can't be me, can I?'

'That's right. You're not you, and I'm not Vernon- Smith.'

Billy Bunter struggled to sit up straight. 'Of course you are,' he said. 'Don't give me that. I'm not daft. You're Smithy all right.'

'But you don't know me?'

The Owl made a half-hearted attempt to clean his smeary spectacles, and then gave up and put them on. He peered through them. 'No,' he said shaking his head. 'Never seen you—not ever. Who are you, Smithy?'

Smithy burst into laughter. 'Are you quite sure that you don't know me?'

'I should know who I know and who I don't,' said Billy Bunter warmly. 'And you can stop that cackling, Smithy. How can I know you if I'm not Bunter? Tain't possible. I'm my cousin Wally. No, no. I'm Billy's cousin Wally, and I don't know where he is. That's why he's come here for a holiday. Goes to some beastly state school, you know. That's because his parents keep a shop. Can't stand poor relations myself.'

'You rotten snob!'

'No, that's Billy. No, it's Wally, not Billy.' He gazed at the Bounder. 'Where do you come from? Greyfriars, is it?'

'Do I?'

Billy Bunter snorted. 'You jolly well know you do. Now you push off. I don't go round speaking to strangers. Anyway, if you don't go back you'll be in trouble. Why aren't you in class?'

The Bounder held up a bandaged wrist. 'It was aching so much that I was excused lessons.'

I bet Quelch doesn't know that you're in Pegg. He won't half be mad if he finds out.'

'I see. You don't know me, and you don't know who you are, but you do know that Quelch might be

peevied if he knew that I was here.'

'Who? Quelch?' Bunter was getting flustered. 'Who's he? Now, Smithy, look here. Don't you get thinking that I'm me like Prout did the other day, because I ain't.'

'Of course not,' agreed the Bounder.

'You see, the truth is, I'm Wally,' burred Billy Bunter. 'My cousin at Greyfriars is me, and I—well, I ain't him. He can't be. Tain't possible. So if he's not me and I'm not him—' The fat Owl became even more confused. 'That's why we don't look alike and you've got it all wrong.'

Smithy started laughing again. 'It's as clear as mud.'

'Cackle, cackle, cackle!' said Billy Bunter, annoyed. 'That's all you can do, isn't it? Cackle like a hyena. You're a cheeky blighter, that's what you are, coming up and talking to someone you don't know. Well, you can jolly well clear off. I've got to go back for lunch!'

The laughter ceased. As Bunter heaved his considerable weight out of the deck chair, Smithy's hand gripped his shoulder. 'Let me help you,' he said, hauling him up.

Billy Bunter wriggled, 'What do you think you're doing? Leggo of my shoulder.'

'I'm taking you for a little walk,' said Smithy.

'I'm not going for a walk with you, Smithy. I'm going to Marine Parade.'

'Oh, no, you're not,' said the Bounder. 'You're coming with me.'

'Leggo, you beast!'

Smithy gave Bunter a grim little smile. 'I'll tell you where we're going. We're toddling back to Greyfriars.'

Billy Bunter's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

'What? Greyfriars? What do you mean? I can't go there. Wally's there, isn't he? I mean, that is, I'm there. Anyway, I'm nothing to do with your beastly school. Don't even know where it is. Never heard of it. Doesn't mean a thing to me.'



'LEGGO OF MY SHOULDER!'

'What a shame,' said Smithy. 'Well, we can soon put that right. I'll tell you what. We'll stroll back together, and I'll introduce you to Quelch. How about that?'

Bunter blinked at him in alarm. 'Oh, I say, crickey! Don't do that, Smithy, old chap. It's nothing to do with me. Think of old Wally. You can't do that to him. Quelch will come down on him like a ton of bricks.'

'And he'll come down on you like ten tons, I suspect. Now, you can take your choice, Bunter. I can boot you all the way back to school, or we can stroll along in a civilised manner, and when we get there you can either complain to Quelch or you can go into the spinney, and strip off and wait for Wally. I don't want to put any pressure on you, fat man. You can please yourself.'

'Can't I stay here?' pleaded Bunter, and then, as Smithy shook his head, he added with a touch of defiance, 'It's nothing to do with you. I don't know why you're poking your big nose into this. It's none of your business.'

'But I'm making it my business,' said the Bounder, easily. 'You don't have much choice. Come along, Bunter.'

Muttering under his breath, and with a dismal expression on his face, Bunter went.

Chapter 28

Unexpected!

‘Wharton I say, Wharton’

Vernon-Smith hurried through the gates of the school, and shouted to Harry Wharton.

‘What is it, Smithy?’ Harry looked sympathetically at the Bounder.

Smithy held up his bandaged wrist. ‘I’m sorry about this. Matron says that I haven’t a hope of playing.’

‘I’m sorry too. It’s just bad luck.’

‘It’s really tough,’ said Bob Cherry.

‘The truth is,’ Smithy went on, ‘I couldn’t even play marbles with this wrist. Have you got someone to take my place?’

Harry Wharton looked worried. ‘It’s not just you, Smithy. It’s that idiot Bunter. I wanted you two to be our opening batsmen. That would have shaken Highcliffe.’

‘So who’s playing?’

‘I’ve had to include Skinner and Stott. You can hardly say that we’re fielding our strongest side, can you?’

Vernon-Smith looked Wharton straight in the eye. ‘Don’t write Bunter off too soon,’ he said. ‘There’s always a chance that Quelch might have a change of heart and let him off extra school.’

‘Who are you kidding?’ demanded Johnny Bull. ‘Quelch never lets anyone off anything.’

Vernon-Smith smiled. ‘I’ve just got a feeling that it’ll be all right.’

‘I suppose it might be on the cards,’ said Bob Cherry, ‘but it doesn’t seem very likely.’

‘Well, you’d better cross your fingers,’ Smithy said. ‘If you’re going to win the match, Bunter’s the guy who’s going to do it for you.’

The Famous Five looked at him in surprise. Yesterday he’d been jeering away at the Owl. Now he was singing his praises. What had come over him?

‘What’s made you change your mind about him?’ demanded Johnny Bull.

The Bounder gave a self-conscious laugh. ‘Why not?’ he asked. ‘Why shouldn’t I?’ Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gave him a sharp look. ‘Do tell me, my dear Smithy, why you think our esteemed form master might have a change of heart.’

The Bounder put his hands into his blazer pockets, and shrugged. ‘I really don’t know,’ he said, casually. ‘As I said, it’s just a feeling. You will play him, Harry, if he turns up?’

‘You bet! With neither of you in the team we haven’t got a hope. If Bunter makes it, we’ve got a sporting chance.’

Bob Cherry suddenly laughed. ‘That sack of tallow over there doesn’t look much of a cricketer, does he?’ He pointed in the direction of the gate and they saw a podgy figure propped disconsolately against a tree.

The Bounder moved off. ‘Don’t forget what I said.’ They watched him go. Why the Bounder cared about Bunter and whether he played or not was beyond them. His animosity had gone. It was odd, too, the way he seemed convinced that Quelch would cancel the detention. Quelch, as they all knew, was hardly the most forgiving of teachers.

The Bounder sauntered up to Wally. ‘You look cheesed off.’

'You've got it in one,' he said, gloomily.

Smithy gave him a grin. 'Feeling like cricket?' Wally didn't answer but just scowled into the distance. 'Well, are you?'

'What do you think?'

'It would be nice to have a knock, wouldn't it?' Wally turned on the Bounder. He was fed up with his jibes. 'Look here, Vernon-Smith, I've just about had enough. If you keep on needling me, I'll punch your head in, and then—'

Smithy grinned again. He held up his hand. 'Oh, no, you can't,' he said. 'You're a sportsman. You can't hit someone who can't defend himself. You've just got to put up with me.'

'Leave me alone.'

'All right, I will, but read this first.' Smithy produced a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. 'It's for you.'

'What are you on about?'

'Read it and find out.'

Wally unfolded the note and his eyes grew bigger. He was so astonished that he almost dropped the piece of paper onto the ground. It appeared to have been written by a demented spider.

Dear Wally,

I am waiting for you in the spiney across the road. Come as soon as you get this note. I have thort of what it was that you said on the telehone and so I am going to do what you said. We can change here and Smithy has taken my clothes away. Its nothing to do with what he said. You no me better than that. Its just that I want you to have a good time. Hurry up or I shall be late for lunch and I'm freazing to deth,

Your cousin,

Billy.

Wally read the note, and then he read it all over again. He looked at Vernon-Smith.

'Gosh!' he said, gratefully. 'I don't know how you pulled it off, but it was decent of you,' and then he asked curiously, 'What made you do it?'

Smithy shrugged. 'Why not? It amused me.'

'How did you manage it?'

'No problem. I walked over to Pegg, seized your cousin by the ear, and threatened him with Quelch. He didn't put up much of a fight. He's shivering in the spinney right now. I took the precaution of taking his clothes in case he changed his mind. I took another precaution too. Redwing is waiting in the wings, a cricket bat in his hands. So, if you happen to fancy playing at Highcliffe this afternoon—'

Wally grasped the Bounder's hand. 'Thanks,' he said. 'Thanks.'

'Think nothing of it,' said the Bounder, casually. 'I've checked. If you can get there on time, Wharton will be only too pleased to see you.' He glanced down at his watch.

'They'll be off in the coach soon after lunch. I think you'll make it if you cut along to the spinney straight away and hand over your clothes to your cousin.'

'My clothes!' Wally looked down at what he was wearing. 'But—but, what about my

flannels?’

‘I’ve taken care of that,’ said Smithy. ‘They’re waiting for you in the spinney. Once Bunter’s dressed again, I’ll march him into lunch, and make sure that he goes straight from the dining room to Quelch’s study. Redwing’s got some sandwiches waiting for you, and he’s got my bike. If you pedal hard you ought to make it. The rest of the team will assume that Quelch has forgiven you, so don’t let on.’

‘Thanks, Smithy,’ Wally said yet again. He paused for a moment or two. ‘I honestly don’t understand you. I really thought you’d got your knife into me.’

‘You’ve got guts,’ said the Bounder, simply. ‘You see, I rather care for people with guts.’

As Wally dashed off, Vernon-Smith drifted after him, ready to propel the indignant Bunter into lunch. Actually, he didn’t quite know why he had helped Wally out of hole. It was quite true that he liked people with guts, but maybe he also liked Wally for himself.

A little later the lunch bell rang. ‘Bunter!’ shouted Harry Wharton. ‘Come here!’ Billy Bunter made for the dining room. It was always hard to make an impression on him when food was on the horizon. Although he would much rather have been in Marine Parade, food was still food, and nothing and no one was going to divert him from it.

‘Bunter! Cloth ears! I want to talk to you.’ Harry Wharton grabbed his arm as he rolled by.

‘Leggo, Wharton!’

‘Wait a minute, you fat chump! I tried to speak to you earlier, but you shot out of the gates like an express train.’

‘Tee, hee, hee!’

‘What does that mean?’

Billy Bunter quivered with laughter. ‘Oh, nothing, Wharton. It don’t mean nothing. I just got a tickle in my throat. I say, let go of my arm. The bell’s gone. I’m hungry. Those greedy beasts will have eaten all the grub by the time we get inside.’

‘Smithy said—’

‘Oh, bother Smithy!’ yapped Billy Bunter. He didn’t want to hear about Smithy. But for that beast he’d be back in Marine Parade tucking into Mrs. Smallbones’s lunch, and looking forward to another laze on the beach instead of slogging away under Quelch’s eye.

‘Smithy’s got some bee in his bonnet. He says that he thinks that Quelch might change his mind and let you off this afternoon.’

‘Oh! Fancy that!’ Bunter sniggered so hard that he shook like a jelly.

‘Stop tee-heeing, you idiot!’ shouted Bob Cherry.

‘If it does happen,’ said Harry Wharton, ‘you might just reach Highcliffe in time if you take a bike.’

‘Have mine,’ offered Johnny Bull. ‘It’s a racer.’

‘What? Borrow a bike and pedal all the way to Highcliffe?’ said Bunter, shocked at the thought.

‘I’ll play you if you get there in time.’

‘Hee, hee, hee!’ Bunter almost fell about with laughing.

The Famous Five looked at each other blankly. What had happened to that keen cricketer of yesterday? Bunter seemed to be the same old slacker they knew so well.

‘Aren’t you interested in playing?’

‘No!’ Bunter saw the Bounder looking at him. ‘Well, not no, that is, maybe—’ He suddenly realised that the lunch bell had stopped ringing, and that they were the only

fellows in the quad. 'I'm not standing here any longer. All the grub will have gone if we don't hurry up.'

As he bolted for the dining room, the others followed. Bob nudged Frank. 'See. Quelch is there. His eyes are on Bunter. It doesn't look to me as if the fat man's going to be doing anything except detention this afternoon. I thought Smithy was just being an optimist.'

Bunter, however, seemed blissfully unaware of Mr. Quelch. He gobbled his way through lunch, and then looked hopefully at his neighbours' plates in case there was something left. Sadly, seeing that there was nothing more, he pushed back his chair and stood up.

'Bunter!' said Mr. Quelch, sternly.

'Oh! Crumbs!'

'You will come to my study now.'

'Bother! Acid drops!' mumbled Bunter, and ambled off after his form master.

'Fat chance we've got of playing him,' said Johnny Bull. 'The Bounder got it completely and utterly wrong.'

'I can't imagine why he said it,' remarked Harry Wharton. 'There isn't a hope.'

'It is perhaps a tedious saying,' observed Hurree Singh, 'but hope is supposed to spring eternal. The trouble is, eternity goes on for such a very long time.'

They had just reached the corridor when the fat Owl reappeared. Broad smiles spread over their faces.

'Good man!' said Johnny Bull heartily.

'Eh? What?'

'How did you persuade him to let you give detention a miss?' asked Bob Cherry, eagerly.

'I didn't. He sent me to get that rotten old Virgil.'

'Oh! ' Their faces fell again.

'Look, if you can polish it off quickly, he might tell you to push off. It would be worth belting over to Highcliffe. I'll keep your place open until the last possible moment. Skinner knows. He won't mind.'

'Hee, hee, hee!' tittered Bunter. Although he wasn't amused at the thought of an afternoon with Quelch, the idea of pedalling all the way to Highcliffe and arriving at much the same time as his cousin struck him as very funny.

'Bunter!' It was Mr. Quelch's voice, and he sounded displeased. 'I told you to go to your study and fetch your Virgil and then to return immediately. Don't let me have to speak to you again.'

'Oh, lor'!' The snigger was wiped off Billy Bunter's face, and he scuttled off.

'Let's get our things together,' suggested Harry. 'It won't be long before the coach turns up.'

Bob Cherry sighed. 'Bang goes our hope of a thundering great victory,' he said.

'Never mind. We'll give them a run for their money,' Harry Wharton sounded rather more cheerful than he felt.

They put their gear together and joined their supporters who were already waiting in the coach, ready for the short journey to Highcliffe. They put the thought of Bunter to the back of their minds and settled down to enjoy the drive through the shady woods dappled with patches of bright sunshine.

'Not long now,' announced Bob, as the drive of Highcliffe School came in sight.

'And there's Frank Courtenay waiting for us,' said Harry.

The coach pulled up at the gates and he clambered aboard. 'I must say I've never seen anyone pelt down the drive like that before,' the Highcliffe captain said to Harry

Wharton as he sat down. 'He must be bursting with energy.'

'Who?'

'We're just about to overtake him. There he is.'

The Greyfriars team pressed their faces to the windows of the coach, and Bunter, a broad grin on his

face, gave them a cheery wave as they passed him.

'Bunter!

'It's the fat man himself!

'But how on earth—?'

Bob turned round in his seat, and looked back. It was the fat Owl all right. He was pedalling along at a tremendous lick, and his spectacles, gleaming in the sunlight, were worn low on his fat little button of a nose.

'So Quelch did let him off!

'But how could he have got here before us?'

'He must have taken a short cut across the fields. I bet it was a rough ride.

'I didn't know he could ride a bike for more than twenty yards without falling off,' remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

'I wonder whose bike he's ruined?'

'It's Smithy's!' shouted Johnny. 'I recognised it straight away.'

'That's all right as long as it isn't mine,' said Bob.

The coach drew up and the Greyfriars crowd tumbled out, and Frank Courtenay led the way to the pavilion. They had hardly reached it before there was the screech of tyres, and the loud ringing of a bell. Bunter had arrived.

'Well done, you fat chump!' shouted Bob, excitedly.

'How did you get round Quelch?'

'Oh!' said Bunter, cheerfully. 'Ways and means.'

'Who cares?' said Harry Wharton, happily. 'I'm glad you're here, you fat freak.'

Wally grinned. 'Me too.' He turned to Skinner who was standing at the back of the crowd. 'You don't mind, do you, Skinner?'

'No. We want to win, don't we?'



IT WAS THE FAT OWL ALL RIGHT.

'I am right, aren't I? You do want me in the team, don't you?' Wally asked Harry. 'Didn't yesterday's scragging make it clear enough?' Bob said, and they all burst out laughing.

There was no doubt that Bunter, this particular Bunter, really was wanted. It would have been different if it had been the other Bunter who, just at that moment, was chewing the end of his pen, trying to make some sense out of that beastly old Virgil. As the umpires walked out, Frank Courtenay produced a coin. Harry won the toss. 'Okay,' he said, 'we'll bat. Are you ready, Bunter? You and I will open the innings. It's a pity Smithy isn't here. We'll just have to do our best without him.'

There were smiles from the Highcliffe team as they went to the wicket. Why Greyfriars was playing Bunter was a mystery to them. His fame as a duffer had spread far and wide.

The bowler took the ball and Bunter, at the other end, watched steadily, awaiting the first ball of the match. It was a good one, and the bowler confidently expected to see Bunter's stumps go flying, but there was a sharp click, and the ball shot from the bat. Harry Wharton made a movement as if to run, but Bunter waved him back.

'Oh, my socks and sandals!' shouted Bob. 'A boundary! What a way to start an innings!'

'Fantastic!' cried Toddy.

'Staggering!'

'Golly! There goes another!'

'Good old Bunter!' bellowed Bob. 'Keep it up, fat man!'

Wally didn't need any encouragement. He whacked the ball around the field, and he did it with a grace and agility that stunned everyone. Harry's wicket fell at last, and

Bob Cherry went in.

‘What an innings!’ said Harry Wharton, admiringly. ‘They’ll have a job to take his wicket. He looks as if he’s really stuck in now.’

Back at Greyfriars, Billy Bunter was stuck in too. He was stuck indoors under the eagle-like gaze of Mr. Quelch, grinding his way through his work. Even if he had known about it, it wouldn’t have given him much consolation to know that his cousin Wally was the hero of the day. He carried his bat throughout both innings, and he knocked up the highest number of runs ever scored by a junior in either school. It was a great victory for Greyfriars, and it was all due to Bunter.

Chapter 29

Keeping it Dark!

‘I say, you chaps!’

‘Roll in, old man, roll in!’ cried Frank, hospitably.

‘We wondered where you had got to.’

As soon as the Form was dismissed on Monday afternoon, the Famous Five had charged up to study no 1, rustled up six plates, and had brought out the goodies for tea.

As they had rushed off in one direction, a fat figure had hurried off in another. Gosling, at his lodge, did notice Bunter hurtling through the gates, and some time later he saw Bunter hurrying in again. Even if he had been hawk-eyed, he would have been very unlikely to see any difference in those two figures. Only Smithy, loitering by the gates, knew. He stood there, a faint smile on his lips, the one person in the whole school who knew that Wally Bunter had gone. His days as a Greyfriars man over, and that Billy Bunter had returned to take his old place in the Remove. He watched Billy Bunter scuttle indoors, and as he entered his own study, he heard the Famous Five welcome the Owl. What they didn’t know was that although they had issued the invitation to one man, it had been accepted by another.

It had been a reluctant Billy Bunter who had left Mrs. Smallbones and Marine Parade for ever, his golden holiday over. He and Wally had changed clothes for the last time, and he had been only partially consoled with the news that he was to be an honoured guest in study no 1.

As he entered, he blinked appreciatively at the table. ‘Jolly good, chaps,’ he said, a look of eager anticipation on his face.

‘You’re late, muggins,’ said Bob.

‘There’ll be heaps of time for you to get down to the nets after tea,’ said Johnny.

‘Tee, hee, hee!’

The juniors sat up. ‘What’s so funny about that?’ demanded Johnny.

‘Hee, bee, hee! Nothing.’ Bunter tittered again. ‘I say, I’m ready for tea. Sea air doesn’t half give you an appetite.’

‘Sea air?’ repeated Harry.

‘Is that what I said? Oh, no. Not that. I haven’t been near the sea. Not today. Not for ages. Nothing of the kind. Don’t even like it.’

‘Of course you haven’t been near the sea,’ said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. ‘How could you? You’ve been in school all day.’

‘That’s it! That’s where I’ve been. I didn’t catch the bus from Pegg. I—I went for a stroll somewhere quite different. Didn’t go nowhere near Pegg or Marine Parade. Couldn’t, could I?’ Billy Bunter drew a plate towards himself. ‘I say, that ham looks

good. Not quite as good as the ham in Marine Parade—'

'What's all this about Marine Parade?' asked Frank, curiously.

'I didn't say that, did I?' said Bunter, hastily. 'I—I meant Bunter Court, that's what I meant.' He set to work with his knife and fork. 'Aren't you fellows going to have any?' he asked, helping himself to the last slice.

His hosts gazed silently as he munched away. They certainly had intended to have some ham, but with Bunter there, they hadn't had much chance.

'Tuck in, Bunter,' said Johnny, sarcastically.

'Oh, thanks, old man.' He stretched out a paw. 'Dash it!' he said, surprised. 'It's all gone,' and he flashed them a reproachful look.

They eyed Bunter's plate. They had cooked six eggs. Three of them were on his plate, and now he reached out for the rest.

'Jolly good idea, ham and eggs,' he mumbled, his cheeks bulging, and the hospitable smiles of the juniors faded a little.

During the last few days, Bunter had shown another side of his character, but they had a feeling that the fellow they had grown to like had faded away, and that the old Bunter was emerging again. They munched their way through bread and butter while Bunter polished off everything else.

Bob Cherry pushed back his plate. 'Ready for a spot of cricket?'

'You bet!' said Frank. 'Coming, Bunter?'

'Eh? What's that.' Bunter stopped scraping the jam pot.

'A spot of cricket,' repeated Harry.

'Ain't compulsory, is it?'

'What's that got to do with it?' growled Johnny. 'I'd have thought you'd have liked a knock.'

'Oh, really, Bull!' mumbled Bunter, licking his finger and rubbing it round the edge of his plate in case he'd missed a crumb or two.

'Stagger up old man!' urged Bob.

'What? Me? Not likely. You can do what you jolly well like, but you won't catch me messing around with a bat and ball.'

Five pairs of eyes focussed on that complacent face. Heedless of their stares, Billy Bunter examined the table. 'I say, isn't there any cake?'

'No!' snarled Bob Cherry.

'Well, you ought to have had one,' the Owl said, reprovingly. 'It's the proper thing to do when you ask a chap to tea. Tain't good form to ask someone, and not have cake. What's tea all about if it isn't about cake? We always had two to choose from at Marine Parade.

'There you go again,' said Frank. 'Marine Parade. Where is it?'

'Oh, cripes!' squeaked Bunter. He hadn't meant to mention it again. 'Where's that? I've never heard of it.'

Hurree Janset Ram Singh gave him a sharp look. 'Forgive me, my dear Bunter, but you have. You have already mentioned it more than once.'

'Not me! Couldn't have been me.' Bunter forgot his grievances over the cake. He blinked anxiously around the table. He suspected that the consequences might be painful if his secret ever came out.

'I say, don't you think I've been staying at Marine Parade. Wouldn't be seen dead there,' he gabbled. 'It's nothing but a boarding house. We Bunters only stay at the best hotels. I—I—haven't been anywhere near it. Didn't even know it was in Pegg, not that I've been there either. I never was there all the time I was here, and even then—'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob. 'What are you yapping about?'

'While I wasn't at Pegg, that is. Haven't you all jolly well seen me every single day while I was there? You can believe your own eyes, can't you? And it doesn't matter what Smithy says. He's a sneaky toad—'

'Smithy? What's he got to do with it?'

'You can't believe a word he says. Can't trust him. Not that he cares who gets a whopping. But—but still, he did promise Wally that he'd keep it under—'

'Who?'

'Wally what? What Wally?'

'You ought to know,' said Harry. 'You mentioned him. What about him?'

Bunter blinked in alarm. 'Oh, nothing. I didn't mean nothing. Never heard the name before.'

'You have,' said Frank. 'He's the cousin who looks like you.'

'Oh, that Wally! Haven't heard or seen from him in months and months—years actually.'

'Yes, you have,' Bob said. 'You had a letter from him last week.'

'Did—did I? Oh, yes, I remember. I never answered it, did I?' Billy Bunter could now no longer remember what he had said.

'What do you mean, you burbling beetle? Is Wally around?'

'N—n—no. He never came to Pegg for half term, and even if he had I wouldn't have had anything to do with him. Goes to some awful state school—oh!' The Owl cowered as Johnny shook his fist under his nose. 'Don't think I've got anything against them, or Wally come to that. Tain't his fault, is it? Anyway, what's that got to do with anything. We were talking about Marine Parade, weren't we? Oh!' He clapped a paw to his mouth. He'd said that name again.

The Famous Five weren't interested in Marine Parade at that moment. 'We were talking about Wally,' said Frank.

'The one who looks like you,' said Bob, determined to hammer the point home.

'No, he don't. Anyway, no one would take Wally for me, not even if we did change clothes—'

'Oh, my best Sunday titfer!'

'Besides,' babbled Bunter, 'we never did. Why should we? It was me all the time, wasn't it? And let me tell you, if Smithy says anything different, it's just spite because Wally gave him a hiding behind the gym.'

'Eh? What did you say?' asked Johnny.

'I mean when I had that scrap. It was me all the time. Look, don't you go saying anything different. Quelch would go off at the deep end if he knew—not that there's anything to know.'

'What about?' asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh

'Nothing. There's nothing to know. Wally hasn't been here, and I haven't been at Marine Parade, and I haven't just got back from there—'

'By gum!' exclaimed Johnny.

'You ought to be able to take a fellow's word,' said Bunter, warmly. 'I haven't been near Marine Parade and I haven't just got back because Wally's got to go home. Never thought of changing places to get out of lessons for a bit. Wouldn't.'

'Oh, no?'

'Besides, I never done it for that. Nothing to do with Quelch or Tubb or Coker or lessons. I like lessons. Can't get enough of them. No, I was just doing Wally a favour,' Bunter said, virtuously. 'Did it out of the kindness of my heart—my usual generosity. After all, it's the least you can do for a poor relation, and he was jolly

keen to put in a bit of time here, especially as he's so keen on cricket, poor mutt, and—'

'You—you—you—' Harry was almost lost for words. 'Wally? Your cousin—here at Greyfriars?'

'That's not what I said,' said Bunter, quickly. 'I said he wasn't here in Pegg while I was in Marine Parade—'

'So you were—?'

'Don't you keep on saying that!' yelled Bunter. 'If Smithy can keep it dark, so can you. Quelch could hear about it. Crikey! I don't want any more trouble from Quelch. You know what he's like, the suspicious beast!'

Five angry faces glared at Bunter. Although the juniors were furious with him, they were almost mesmerised as he babbled on, completely unaware of the fact that he'd given the game away. In fact, he thought he'd got out of another spot of bother rather well. He glanced around the table to make sure there was nothing more to eat, and then decided to move on to some other study—Mauly's perhaps.

He hovered in the doorway of study no 1, and gave the Famous Five an anxious blink. He thought he'd make things quite clear for the last time.

'Now don't you get it wrong,' he said, earnestly. 'You can take my word for it. I was here all the time and Wally never came to Pegg. He never had a holiday and if he did, he went to Greyfriars—no, not Greyfriars—Grimsby, that's where he went. Not that he did, but you know what Quelch is like, so you can jolly well shut up about it.'

He turned away, well satisfied with himself, but those few words had the most extraordinary effect on the Famous Five. They were jerked from their trance-like state, and they moved as one. Five feet shot out, and they landed at exactly the same moment on the best filled and tightest trousers ever seen in Greyfriars School.

There was a mighty yell. 'Yarooo!' echoed up and down the Remove passage, floated down the stairs, and rolled around the quad. Billy Bunter shot like a bullet from a gun, and disappeared from sight.