

BILLY BUNTER
At Butlins

By
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Illustrated by
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CHAPTER 1

BUTLIN'S FOR BUNTER

'BUTLIN'S?'

'Yes, Butlin's for the hols,' said Billy Bunter.

'Lucky man!' said Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter's fat face was beaming. The fat Owl of the Remove was in high feather that sunny summer's morning.

Luck, in holiday time, did not always come Bunter's way. Only too often, when Greyfriars School was about to break up for the 'hols', was Billy Bunter in an unsettled state. Home, sweet home, seemed to have few attractions for him: perhaps because the Bunter Villa of reality bore little resemblance to his magnificent descriptions of Bunter Court!

Often, only too often, did other Remove fellows have to dodge getting landed with Bunter for the 'hols'.

But this time, it seemed, it was all clear. This time Billy Bunter was serenely assured of a happy landing. Wherefore did his fat face beam, as Bob Cherry handed him down a letter from the rack.

For once, Billy Bunter did not care a straw whether Harry Wharton did, or did not, let him roll along to Wharton Lodge; whether Smithy consented, or did not consent, to let him hook on: or even whether Lord Mauleverer could, or could not, be prevailed upon to tolerate him at Mauleverer Towers. Bunter, like Gallio of old, cared for none of these things. For Billy Bunter was going to enjoy life at a Butlin Camp—or, at all events, he had no doubt that he was. Hence the beaming satisfaction in the fattest face in the Greyfriars Remove. It was morning break at Greyfriars. Fellows had gathered at the rack for letters. Bunter, of course, was on the spot. His first blink through his big spectacles, coming out of second school, was always at the letter-rack, Bunter being in a perpetual state of expecting a postal-order. But on this occasion, it was something even more exhilarating than that postal-order, that he was expecting. Fat and grubby fingers closed eagerly on the letter as Bob handed it down. One blink revealed that it was addressed to W. G. Bunter in the parental hand.

'It's from the pater,' he said. 'I say, you fellows, it's all right. I say, you should ask your people to book you up for Butlin's for the hols. I can tell you it's topping. Jolly time all round, and the grubs' good—of course, that's important—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Of course a fellow has to think about the grub first of all—'

'A fellow named Bunter, at any rate!' agreed Bob.

'But that isn't all,' said Bunter. 'All sorts of jolly attractions—no end of fun and games. I can tell you fellows, I'm going to have a jolly good time these hols.'

'You're in luck, old fat man,' said Harry Wharton.

'The luckfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Gratters!' said Johnny Bull.

'So it's fixed up?' asked Frank Nugent.

'Well, practically,' explained Bunter. 'This letter settles it. You see, I wrote to

the pater that I'd like a few weeks by the sea these hols. I wasn't sure it would come off. The pater doesn't always play up. But he wrote back that he had thought of an inexpensive seaside holiday for me, and would let me know if it was arranged. So I wrote again at once, and told him about Butlin's, pointing out that it was quite inexpensive. So that's that.'

Billy Bunter inserted a grubby thumb into the envelope in his fat hand.

Evidently he had no doubts about the satisfactory contents of that letter. It was all clear—as how could it fail to be? His respected pater, at Bunter Villa, was not always amenable to suggestions from his hopeful son at Greyfriars. But this time Mr. Bunter had actually been thinking of an inexpensive seaside holiday for him: and Butlin's was inexpensive as well as topping. So it was all right—right as rain. Bunter, as he opened the envelope, hadn't the least doubt that he was already booked for Butlin's. His fat face was happily anticipative as he jerked out the parental missive and unfolded it. His little round eyes beamed through his big round spectacles as he blinked at it.

Then a sudden change came over his plump countenance. He ceased to beam! Instead of beaming, he stared blankly at the letter.

'Oh, crikey!' he ejaculated.

'Come on, you chaps,' said Bob Cherry. 'Nothing for us—may as well get out. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anything the matter, Bunter?'

Harry Wharton and Co. were turning away. But they turned back, at that sudden change in Billy Bunter's speaking countenance, and his dismayed exclamation. It looked as if the contents of that letter from home were not precisely what the fat Owl had happily expected.

'Anything up, Bunter?' asked Harry.

'Oh, lor'!

'Somebody ill at home?' asked Bob, sympathetically.

'Oh, scissors! Worse than that!' groaned Bunter.

'But what—?'

'Oh, crikey! Oh, lor'! Oh, jimmy! I—I—I say, you fellows, look at that! Just look at it!'

Billy Bunter held out the letter. Evidently, something was amiss. The fat Owl looked utterly deflated. All his happy anticipations seemed to have vanished. Plainly that letter from home, so eagerly expected, had given Billy Bunter a shock. Seldom had his plump countenance looked so utterly woebegone. Why, the Famous Five could not guess. But they understood, as they looked at the letter the fat Owl held out for their inspection. It ran:

Dear William,

I have received your letter, but I regret that a Holiday Camp is quite out of the question. The exorbitant demands of Income Tax make the strictest economy essential. But, as I mentioned in my previous letter, I have been arranging an inexpensive seaside holiday for you, and the arrangements are now completed. You will stay at your Uncle Carter's boarding-house at Folkestone. You will, of course, be prepared to make yourself useful during your stay. That is, in fact, a condition of your holiday. I understand that in a seaside boarding-house there is a very great deal of washing-up to be done. You will be required to deal with this. You must perform this light and easy task with care, as any breakages will be charged to your pocket-money. In addition to this,

you may be required to run errands, and in fact to make yourself generally useful.

I trust that you will have a most enjoyable holiday at your Uncle Carter's.

Your affectionate Father,

W. S. BUNTER.

'I—I—I say, you fellows, what do you think of that?' groaned Billy Bunter. 'I—I—I thought I was going to have a jolly holiday at Butlin's, and—and—and all the while, this is what the pater had up his sleeve—washing-up for a mob of trippers— Look here, what are you grinning at?'

'Oh! Nothing!' said Harry Wharton, hastily. 'Hard cheese, old fat man.'
'Make the best of it,' suggested Johnny Bull. 'A spot of work won't do you any harm, Bunter. Might do you good.'

'Beast!'

The prospect of a spot of work doing him good evidently did not comfort Bunter. It was a woeful Owl.

'I say, you fellows, I'm jolly well not going to Uncle Carter's for the hols, to wash his dashed dishes! I say, it will be all right if I tell the pater I'm fixed up for the hols with you fellows, see? He wouldn't expect me to turn you down. I say, what about it, you chaps? I say, don't walk off while a fellow's talking to you!' yelled Billy Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk off! In fact, they ran— and William George Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air!

CHAPTER 2

MORE BAD LUCK FOR BUNTER

'OH lor'!' breathed Billy Bunter.

He cocked a fat ear to listen, like a startled plump rabbit. There were footsteps in the passage outside Coker's study in the Fifth. It was an alarming sound to Bunter's fat ears.

Bunter, the fat ornament of the Remove, of course had no business in a Fifth-form man's study. But William George Bunter was often to be found in spots where a Remove fellow had no business. And even if he had no business in that study, he was very busy nevertheless. He was standing at the study table, helping himself from a bag of cherries that lay thereon. Juicy smears adorned his fat face and his fat fingers. Billy Bunter had had quite a blow, in that letter from Bunter Villa. But there was comfort in comestibles. Instead of a joyous time at a Butlin's Seaside Camp, he was booked for an absolutely joyless time at Uncle Carter's—washing dishes. Nevertheless he was, at the moment, enjoying life. Those cherries were rich and red and luscious. The circumstance that they belonged to Coker of the Fifth, worried Billy Bunter no more than the circumstance that a packet of chocolates, which he had already slipped into his pocket for later consumption, also belonged to Coker. In matters of tuck, the fat Owl of the Remove had no scruples. It

always seemed, somehow, to Bunter, that if there was tuck about, his was the neck down which it ought to be dispatched. And he was dispatching Coker's cherries at a great rate, when those alarming footsteps came up the passage. Along with the footsteps came a voice: that of Coker of the Fifth.

'Come on, Potter! Come on, Greene.'

'But—!' came two voices together.

'I said come on!' interrupted Coker.

'But—!' repeated the two voices.

'Come on, and don't jaw!'

Billy Bunter breathed hard through a fat little nose. He had felt quite secure in Coker's study, in break. Fellows hardly ever came up to the studies in break. They generally like a spot of fresh air between classes. And Coker's pals, evidently, were reluctant. But Coker, for some reason, was marching them up to the study: much to Bunter's alarm and annoyance. He cast a scared blink at the door through his big spectacles. Only too well he knew what would happen if Coker caught him in that study, scoffing tuck.

But he had time to hunt cover—just time. Even as a hand was laid on the door-handle without, the fat Owl ducked and dived under the table. He had vanished from view when the door opened.

Heavy footsteps tramped into the study. Billy Bunter, under the table, had a view of Coker's long legs. Luckily, Coker had no view of Bunter. The fat Owl huddled in silence: hoping that, for whatever reason they had come up, they wouldn't stay long. Morning break was brief: and Billy Bunter could only hope that they would go, before the bell rang for third school. His form-master, Quelch, was wont to turn a glinting eye on late-comers. Coker's voice was heard again.

'Trot in, you chaps! What are you hanging about for?' Potter and Greene seemed to be lingering at the doorway. 'Help yourselves to these cherries.'

'Oh, all right.'

Potter and Greene came in. Possibly they were keener on Coker's cherries than on Coker's company and conversation.

'Hallo!' came an exclamation from Coker. 'You seem to have been helping yourselves already. All right—you're welcome.'

'We haven't been in the study,' said Potter.

'My dear chap, that bag was full, when I took it out of my aunt's parcel. Look at it now!'

'But we haven't—!' said Greene.

'I tell you it's all right,' snapped Coker. 'You jolly well know that you're welcome to a whack in my parcels from my Aunt Judy. Leave it at that.'

'But we haven't—!' said Potter and Greene together.

'For goodness sake, don't argue,' said Coker. 'You fellows are always arguing. Just sit down and let's finish the cherries, while I tell you about what I've got fixed up for the hols.'

Potter and Greene were willing, at least, to sit down and finish the cherries. The three of them sat down round the table. Billy Bunter barely repressed a fat squeak, as a large foot contacted a fat shin! Coker uttered an irritated exclamation.

'Don't shove your feet all over the shop, Potter. Give a fellow room for his

legs.'

'My feet are under my chair!' said Potter, tartly.

'Well, yours, then, Greene—'

'So are mine!' said Greene.

Snort, from Coker. His foot had contacted something under that table—something that stirred as it was contacted! It could only be—so far as Coker could see—some extended limb of either Potter or Greene. He did not want argument on the subject. Horace Coker had a way of laying down the law: and he had no use whatever for argument.

'Well, keep your hoofs out of the way, anyhow,' he said. 'Sprawling all over the shop! But about the hols— I've fixed it up, with my Aunt Judy. That's what I want to tell you fellows. I had a letter from her this morning, see, and it's all arranged. I thought I'd tell you.'

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance—an expressive glance. They were accustomed, in that study, to giving Coker his head, as it were. They really liked old Coker—in a way—he had his good points: and a fellow who was constantly receiving whacking parcels from an affectionate aunt was worth knowing. But there was a limit. Coker, it seemed, had fixed up the 'hols', for self and friends: without a word to them about it so far. Coker, perhaps, did not realize that this was a little high-handed. Still less was it likely to occur to Coker that his pals had enough of him at school, and did not yearn to hear him laying down the law during the holidays as well. They were, in fact, going to get a holiday from Coker, as well as from Greyfriars.

'That's a bit late, Coker,' said Potter. 'If you'd told us before—'

'It wasn't arranged before. I've told you now.'

'The fact is—!' said Greene.

'No need to jaw about it,' said Coker. 'The bell will be going soon. You chaps tuck into those cherries, while I tell you what we're going to do in the hols.'

'The fact is—'

'Do let a fellow speak,' said Coker, irritably. 'You fellows are like a sheep's head—all jaw! I hardly get a chance to get a word in, in this study. It's all fixed up, and I've only got to tell you—'

'Sorry!' said Potter.

'Eh! What are you sorry about?'

'We're fixed up already,' said Potter, taking the plunge.

'Coach trip on the Continent. Too late to wash it out now, isn't it, Greeney?'

Greene stared for a moment. It was the first he had heard of a coach trip on the Continent. But he caught on at once. This was a tactful way of eluding Coker in the 'hols'. Really, it was very bright of Potter to have thought of it on the spur of the moment. Greene nodded solemnly.

'No, it couldn't be washed out now,' he said. 'Sorry, Coker, old man! Hope you'll have a good time at home with Aunt Judy.'

Coker frowned with annoyance.

'Well, dash it all, you might have told a fellow, if you were fixed up already for the hols,' he snapped. 'Leaving a fellow in the dark—'

'Well, you left us in the dark, you know—'

'I wish you wouldn't keep on arguing. Well, if you're fixed up, it can't be helped, I suppose. I'd have liked you to come—Skegness is a jolly bracing spot, and you'd have had a good time—'

'Skegness!' repeated Potter and Greene, simultaneously and blankly.

They had taken it for granted that Coker's idea was home for the 'hols', in his company, with that of Aunt Judy thrown in. That prospect had no attraction for them at all. But Skegness was, so to speak, a horse of quite another colour. 'That's the place,' said Coker. 'Up on the north-east coast somewhere—Northumberland, I think—'

'Isn't it Lincolnshire?' ventured Greene.

'I don't care whether its Lincolnshire or Northumberland,' said Coker, testily.

'Don't start teaching me geography, Billy Greene. Anyhow it's a jolly place on the seaside, the camp a bit out of the town—'

'The camp?'

'Haven't you ever heard of Butlin's Camps?' asked Coker, sarcastically.

'Haven't you ever heard of anything?'

'Oh!' said Potter. He began to wish that he had not invented that coach trip on the Continent. Coker, it now seemed, was not thinking of dragging them home to enjoy

—more or less—his company and Aunt Judy's. He was thinking of a topping holiday in a Butlin Camp. It made a tremendous difference.

'Well, I'm sorry you fellows can't come,' said Coker.

'Aunt Judy's made all the arrangements for three fellows—you see, I thought you'd be coming. But never mind, if you're fixed up. I'll ask Tomlinson and Bland instead.'

'Oh!'

Potter and Greene exchanged another glance. Now that they knew, Potter could have kicked himself for having invented that coach trip. Still more willingly, Greene could have kicked him for that bright idea.

'Finish the cherries, you chaps,' said Coker. 'I'll go and look for Tomlinson and Bland now—'

'Hold on a minute, Coker,' said Potter, hastily. 'The—the fact is—'

'Yes,' stammered Greene. 'The—the fact is, Coker— We—we—we——'

Coker sat and stared at them across the table. He could not see what they were stammering about.

'Well, what?' he asked. 'The bell will be going in a minute or two—'

'Oh! Yes! But—' Potter stammered. Having invented a coach trip on the Continent, it really was not easy to disinvent it again, as it were. But Potter was not going to miss a jolly holiday at Skegness, if he could help it, now that he knew. Neither was Greene. It was Skegness for both of them, if they could explain away that Continental coach trip. It had to be explained away somehow. 'Look here, old chap, it may not be too late—'

'Not at all, now I come to think of it,' said Greene, coming to Potter's aid.

'We—we haven't actually taken the tickets, you know.'

'I fancy we could wash it out,' said Potter.

'I'm sure we could!' said Greene.

'And I don't think we should really care for continental tripping, without you, Coker, old man—' added Potter, piling it on a little.

'Well, I expect you'd be a bit lost, without me,' said Coker, with a nod.

'Oh! Ah! Yes!' gasped Potter. 'Quite.'

'Well, make up your minds one way or the other,' said Coker. 'If it's going to be Skegness—'

'Skegness!' said Potter and Greene.

'All right, then,' said Coker. 'That's settled. Now I'll tell you what the place is

like, as you're coming. I—for goodness sake, Potter, don't stick your feet right across the room.' Coker's foot had again made contact under the table. 'Or is it you, Greene? Can't you keep your silly legs to yourselves?'

'Not my legs,' said Potter.

'Nor mine,' said Greene.

'What's the good of talking rot?' demanded Coker. 'Think I dreamed that I jammed my foot on something? You don't give a fellow an inch to put his feet. If that isn't your hoof, Potter, and if it isn't yours, Greene, perhaps you won't mind if I kick it?' said Coker, sarcastically.

And he kicked it—whatever it was!

The next moment he knew that it wasn't Potter or Greene: as a fearful yell resounded from under the table.

'Yaroooooh!

Billy Bunter had kept still and quiet hitherto in his hide-out. But as Horace Coker's heavy foot landed in plump ribs, he did not continue to be still and quiet! Far from it! He uttered a frantic yell that woke every echo in the study and along the passage. Coker and Potter and Greene all jumped up.

'What—?' gasped Coker.

'Who—?' stuttered Greene.

'It's somebody under the table—'

'Ow! Wow! Ooooooh! Beast! Wow!' Evidently, there was somebody under the table. 'Oh, crikey! Ow!'

Coker grasped the table and whirled it aside. A fat figure was revealed, huddled on the floor, and blinking up in alarm through a pair of big spectacles.

'Bunter!' roared Coker.

'That fat Remove tick!' exclaimed Potter. 'What are you doing here, you young ass?'

Coker reddened with wrath.

'I know what he's been doing!' he roared. 'That's where the cherries went!'

'I—I—I say,' gasped Bunter. 'Tain't me! I—I mean, I—I—I ain't here! I—I—I mean, I—I say—yaroooooh! Stoppit! Whooooop!'

Rapid motion was not in Billy Bunter's line, as a rule. But he bounded up like a kangaroo as Coker's foot lunged, and bolted for the door. Coker had time for only one, but it was a good one. Potter and Greene landed one each, as the fat Owl flew through the doorway.

Billy Bunter vanished—yelling. Coker and Co. were left to their discussion of the joys of Skegness in the 'hols'. Billy Bunter—at a safe distance—wriggled and rubbed the places where Fifth-form feet had landed on his fat person. He was still wriggling and rubbing when the bell rang for third school. There was only one gleam of consolation for Bunter. He still had Coker's chocs in a sticky pocket!

CHAPTER 3

WHOSE CHOCS?

'EQUO ne credite, Teucri—'

Bob Cherry, on 'con' in the Remove form-room, broke off suddenly. He was

interrupted,
'BUNTER!'

It was the sharp voice of Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove, that interrupted. Virgil was the order of the day, in the Remove, in third school that morning. Nobody was enjoying the lesson. Quelch was not in his bonniest mood. Like other members of the Staff, Quelch had that end-of-the-term feeling. He was not exactly irritable: but his patience had worn a little thin. Even Harry Wharton, whose 'con' was always good, had not felt quite easy under the gimlet-eye. Lord Mauleverer, whose 'con' was seldom good, had sat down the richer by fifty lines. Then Vernon-Smith and Tom Brown in turn were apprised, not for the first time, that there was a sharp edge to Quelch's tongue. Then Bob was called on. Bob was a great man at games, but in class he did not shine. He was seldom anywhere near the top of the class. Now he was next to Billy Bunter. He was rather glad of the sudden interruption, having some doubts about the rendering of the passage in hand. Quelch's sudden rap came as a relief to him, if not to Billy Bunter.

Billy Bunter had a fat hand in a sticky pocket. He whipped it out swiftly as Quelch rapped.

Oh! Yes, sir!' stammered Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove had had rather a shock that morning. The letter from Bunter Villa had been quite a blow. The happy prospect of Holiday Camps had faded out like a mirage, replaced by a dismal vision of washing endless plates and dishes at Uncle Carter's. But there was still balm in Gilead: in the shape of a packet of chocolates in a sticky pocket.

It was, of course, strictly against the rules for any fellow to bring 'stickers' into class for surreptitious consumption during the lesson. The fat Owl had to be very wary. Twice, and thrice, had Bunter slipped a fat hand into his pocket for those chocs, and then drawn it empty away, not daring to make the venture. Now he did so hurriedly, once more, as Quelch rapped.

'Bunter! Are you giving attention to the lesson?'

'Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly, sir.'

'Why are you groping in your pockets, Bunter?'

'I—I didn't—I—I—I mean, I—I wasn't—I—I—'

'I have observed you. Bunter, groping in your pockets, several times.'

Quelch's eyes seemed to be everywhere, that morning.

'Oh! I—I—I——' stuttered Bunter.

'On several occasions, Bunter, you have been punished for bringing sweetstuffs into the form-room. Is there anything of that kind in your pockets now?'

'Oh! No, sir!' gasped Bunter. Billy Bunter had long been a stranger to truth: and he was not likely to make its acquaintance at such a moment as this! 'Oh, no, sir! N—nothing of the kind, sir! Only—only a letter from my pater, sir—I—I was just making sure that I hadn't lost it, sir—'

Mr. Quelch gave that fat member of his form a very hard look. Billy Bunter quaked in dread of being called out to turn out his pockets. However, to his tremendous relief, Quelch let it go at that. The gimlet-eyes turned back to Bob Cherry.

'You may go on, Cherry.'

Bob took up the tale again.

'Equo ne credite, Teucri. Quidquid id est, timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.'

'Construe!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'Trust not the horse, Trojans!' translated Bob. 'Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks when they bring gifts.'

'Even when bringing gifts!' snapped Mr. Quelch. 'That will do, Cherry! You will go on, Nugent.'

Frank Nugent went on from 'sic fatus'. He was a good distance from Bunter, and Quelch's eyes were on him, and no longer turned in the fat Owl's direction. It seemed, to Bunter, a chance at last. Once more the fat paw slipped into a sticky pocket. This time it drew out the packet of chocolates. But alas for Bunter! Quelch, certainly, was not looking towards him. But he seemed able to take in everything with the corner of his eye.

'BUNTER!' came an ominous rumble.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

'Did you take something from your pocket, Bunter?'

'Oh, no, sir! Nothing, sir.'

'Stand out before the form, Bunter.'

'Oh, lor!'

breathed Bunter. He blinked at his form-master, through his big spectacles, dismayed: the packet of chocs clutched in a fat hand. He wished that he had left those chocs in Coker's study. He was fairly caught now. Or was he?

For once his fat brain worked swiftly. As he rose to his feet to obey the command, he brushed against the junior next to him—Bob Cherry. Only for a moment was he in contact with Bob. But in that moment, he slipped the packet of chocs into Bob's jacket pocket. Even Quelch's eyes, sharp as they were, did not detect that swift surreptitious action: and the next moment, Billy Bunter was rolling out before the form.

There he was able to display empty hands. Quelch glanced at those hands. They looked as if they might be all the better for a wash! But there was certainly nothing of an edible nature in either of them. But Quelch had a strong suspicion that there were forbidden comestibles about the fat junior.

'You will turn out your pockets, Bunter.'

Billy Bunter was careful not to grin. He had no objection to turning out his pockets, in the circumstances. He turned them out cheerfully.

An assortment of articles came to light. There was that letter from Bunter Villa, with a forgotten fragment of a bulls-eye adhering to it. There was a sticky piece of string, a pen-nib, a pocket-knife with broken blade, and a pencil with a broken point. There was also Bunters total present supply of cash—one halfpenny.

Mr. Quelch eyed those various productions, and his frowning brow cleared. Billy Bunter's voracious appetite was well known: but even Billy Bunter could not be suspected of having intended to devour any of those articles.

'Very well, Bunter! You may go back to your place.'

The fat Owl replaced his various properties in his pockets, and rolled back to his place in form. Bob Cherry gave him rather an expressive look, as he sat down. Bob had felt that incriminating packet slipped into his pocket, but had of course given no sign. It was up to one Remove man to stand by another at a critical moment. But he decided to jam that packet of chocs down Bunter's fat neck after class.

Billy Bunter, however, had no idea of leaving that packet in its present hide-out till after class. Bunter's fat mouth watered for those chocs. He was only

and the fat Owl gave him uneasy blinks. Evidently, something was going to happen to Bunter after class: in fact, he could almost feel, in anticipation, the largest foot in the Remove landing upon the tightest trousers in that form. And he had really had more of that than he wanted from Coker and Co.

With that dread anticipation in his fat mind, Bunter, probably for the first time in his fat career, was not anxious for the lesson to end. However, it did end, and the Remove at last were dismissed. But, to Bunter's great relief, Quelch called Bob Cherry back as the juniors marched out.

'Cherry!' rapped Quelch.

'Yes, sir!' mumbled Bob. He turned back, reluctantly. He did not want to lose sight of Bunter.

Bunter, on the other hand, was extremely anxious to be lost sight of! He rolled out of the form-room: and he rolled rapidly. Neither did he linger in the corridor. Instead of modelling his movements, as usual, upon the tortoise, he understudied the hare.

Bob came up to the form-master's desk. Quelch gave him a frowning glance. He indicated the packet of chocs with a lean forefinger.

'These sweetstuffs will be confiscated, Cherry, as I have told you,' he rapped. 'You have three hundred lines to write. You will bring them to my study before preparation this evening. You are not infrequently an unpunctual boy, Cherry. I warn you that if you are late with your imposition, it will be doubled. You have ample time, as it is a half-holiday today.'

Bob was grimly silent.

'That is all, Cherry! You may go.'

Bob Cherry went.

In the corridor he looked for Billy Bunter, more than ever keen to bestow upon the fat Owl that for which he had asked, But no fat figure and no glimmering spectacles met his view.

The delay had been brief. But brief as it was, Billy Bunter had made the most of it. Bunter was seldom swift in his motions: but moments, at such a time, were enough for even Bunter. Billy Bunter was gone.

CHAPTER 4

DOGGO!

'OH, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter.

His fat face registered alarm and despondency.

Bunter was sitting on the stile in Friardale Lane. Not willingly had the fat Owl covered the quarter of a mile from Greyfriars. In a quarter of a mile there were 440 yards, which was four hundred more than Bunter really liked when he set his fat little legs into motion. He was glad of a rest on the stile.

But it was said of old that there is no rest for the wicked!

Billy Bunter had sagely decided to keep out of Bob Cherry's way as long as he possibly could, to give him time to cool down. At the moment, he had no doubt that Bob was looking for him, with the fell intention of planting a heavy foot on tight trousers. But Bob's sunny temper seldom failed him, and on the rare occasions when he was wrathful, his wrath never lasted long. Bunter was going to sit on that stile till it was time to roll back to the school for dinner. He couldn't stay longer than that, for it was impossible—to Bunter—even to think

of missing a meal. But he was not going to roll in, till the very last minute when the bell rang for tiffin. By that time. Bunter hoped at least, he might roll in unkicked.

But as he sat on the stile, his little round eyes and big round spectacles were turned rather anxiously in the direction of Greyfriars. And he suddenly spotted a figure coming down the lane at a trot. Bunter's vision was not good at a distance, even with the aid of those big spectacles. But he knew that mop of flaxen hair with a Greyfriars cap stuck on the back of it. Evidently, Bob Cherry's wrath had not yet evaporated. He was coming!

Billy Bunter was not willing to move. But he did move, quite quickly, as he spotted that mop of fair hair in the distance. He rolled off the stile on the inner side, and started up the footpath through Friardale Wood at a trot. It was a narrow, winding footpath, overhung by branches thick with their summer foliage, bordered by trees and thickets. Having covered a hundred yards or so, Billy Bunter blinked back anxiously over a fat shoulder. If Bob had seen him on the stile, no doubt he was in pursuit: but if so, the winding of the path hid him from view. But it seemed to Bunter that his fat ears picked up the sound of distant footsteps. He charged on deeper into the wood.

But breath, always in short supply with Bunter, failed him. And it dawned upon his fat mind that as Bob Cherry's long legs covered the ground at least twice as rapidly as his own little fat ones, the end of the chase was inevitable. He paused in his flight, where the massive trunk of an ancient beech bulged from the thickets into the path. It was quite a bright idea to take cover behind that massive trunk and keep 'doggo' there while Bob went chasing past. Then it would be quite easy to roll back to the school, leaving Bob to hunt for him in the Woods as long as he liked!

Grinning breathlessly at that consoling prospect, the fat Owl pushed through the thicket surrounding the old beech. And then—!

Then Billy Bunter had the surprise of his life.

Not for a moment did it occur to him that someone else might be on the spot. Bunter had a reason—a good reason—for hiding behind that beech: but what reason could anyone else have? It was startling to discover that that solitary spot was inhabited!

As he rolled through the thicket behind the beech, he stumbled over something, squeaked, and sprawled. What he had stumbled over he did not for a moment know. But the next moment he knew, as he sprawled headlong over a figure that had been crouching behind the tree.

'Oooogh!' gasped Bunter, dizzily.

He was sprawling over somebody!

That somebody moved quickly. A rough hand shoved Bunter off, and he rolled over on his back, spluttering for breath, and blinking wildly through his spectacles.

A face glared down at him. It was a startling face, for it was covered, from the peak of a cap down to the chin, by a dingy woollen muffler, in which two eye-holes had been cut. Through those eye-holes a pair of angry eyes glittered at the terrified Owl, sharp and glinting as a weasel's.

'Quiet!'

The strange man breathed that word in a hissing whisper. Bunter could only blink at him in terror.

A large, knucky fist was brandished within an inch of his fat little nose.

'Quiet! Keep still! Not a sound! One sound from you, and I'll knock your silly face through the back of your silly head.'

There was no sound from Bunter! That knuckly fist was altogether too near and too dangerous.

'Lie where you are! Don't move! Don't make a sound.' The man was whispering, as if he feared that his voice might be heard, solitary as the spot was. But that savage, threatening whisper sent a chill of terror all through Billy Bunter. Who the man was, with his face so strangely masked, what he was, why he was there, the fat Owl could not surmise. But it was only too clear that whoever and whatever he was, he was dangerous.

He turned from Bunter, and peered round the beech into the footpath. He was not looking in the direction from which Bunter had come. He was staring in the opposite direction, where the footpath wound through the wood towards Pegg. 'He's coming!' Bunter heard him mutter, as he jerked his head back.

Then it dawned on Bunter's dizzy mind. Someone was coming through the wood from the direction of Pegg, and this man was waiting and watching for him to come. That, and the fact that he was lurking behind the tree, with his face masked, made it all clear. It was a footpad upon whom the fat Owl had stumbled. No doubt the rascal had watched his intended victim enter the wood, and cut ahead to lie in wait for him in a lonely spot—certainly never foreseeing that a fat schoolboy might stumble over him in his ambush!

'Quiet!' breathed the man again, with another threatening glare. Obviously he had been disconcerted by the fat Owl's unexpected advent. A yell from Bunter would have warned the coming man of his danger.

But the terrified Owl was not likely to utter a yell. With that knuckly fist so near, he dared not make a movement or a sound. He lay where he was, silent, his eyes bulging through his spectacles at the footpad.

He could hear footsteps now.

The footpad was peering round the trunk again. Plainly he was waiting till the newcomer came abreast of the ambush, to make a sudden spring. Gladly Bunter would have uttered a howl of warning had he dared. Suddenly, through the interstices in the thicket, he caught sight of the man who was coming: a portly, well-dressed gentleman with so pleasant and kindly a face, that Billy Bunter almost ventured to utter a yell, to put him on his guard. But not quite! Billy Bunter was not of the stuff of which heroes are made: and his fat heart failed him.

Another moment, and it was too late. The newcomer came past the beech, and the footpad leaped out from his cover, swift as an arrow from a bow. In a split second his grasp was on the portly gentleman who went over backwards in the grass before he knew what was happening.

A knee was instantly planted on his chest, pinning him down. He gasped for breath, staring up dizzily at a masked face.

'Oh! What—who—what——'

'That'll do! Hand over your wallet—sharp! Lots in it, I know that—I know who you are. Sharp!'

'You rascal—'

'You handing it over?'

'No! Never! Hands off, you scoundrel!'

The man on the ground began to struggle, and the rascal kneeling on him rocked. His eyes blazed through the eye-holes in the masking muffler. Up

went his arm, the knucky fist clenched for a stunning blow. Billy Bunter blinked at the scene in horror. And as he blinked helplessly, there came to his ears the sound of rapid footsteps coming up the footpath from the direction of Friardale Lane.

CHAPTER 5

A SCRAP AND A SURPRISE

BOB CHERRY halted suddenly—staring.

Bob had, as the fat Owl feared, spotted him sitting on the stile. He put on speed, coming up the footpath in pursuit. But all thought of Billy Bunter vanished from his mind at what he suddenly saw—a man on his back in the grass, and another man with a masked face, kneeling on him, with a clenched fist uplifted for a crashing blow. In sheer amazement, he halted—but only for a second. Then he fairly hurled himself at the footpad, crashing into him and knocking him sideways—just in time to stop the descending blow.

The masked man pitched off his victim, who was left panting in the grass. But the rascal was on his feet in a moment, staring round savagely at his unexpected assailant. Had it been a man who had come so suddenly on the scene, probably the ruffian would have taken to his heels. But seeing that it was only a schoolboy with whom he had to deal, he had no doubt that he could deal with him. He came at Bob Cherry rather like a wildcat.

Bob jumped back, putting up his hands, his jaw set and his eyes glinting. It was true that he was only a Schoolboy: but he was a very strong and sturdy schoolboy, and he had unlimited pluck. If the rascal fancied that he could be handled as easily as Bunter, he very quickly found out that that was a mistake.

Knucky fists crashed on Bob, but he was not knocked out of the way as the footpad expected. So far from that, he came back with left and right, standing up to it manfully. ‘Oh, crikey!’ gasped Billy Bunter, blinking dizzily from the thicket, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

Bob had to give ground. But he contested every inch, hitting hard and hitting fast. His nose streamed red—one of his eyes winked painfully—but he gave back as good as he received, keeping the rascal much too busy to give a thought to the man gasping in the grass. It was an unequal combat: and had it lasted longer, the boy must have gone down under the man’s savage attack.

But if there was no help from Bunter, there was help from another quarter.

The portly gentleman struggled to his feet, still gasping, and plunged into the fray to the aid of his rescuer,

That did it!

Two pairs of fists were too much for the footpad. Under that combined operation, he retreated: and no doubt realizing that his designs on a well-filled wallet were no longer feasible, he suddenly turned and darted round the beech into the thickets.

‘Yarooooh!’ came a startled yell, as he stumbled over Billy Bunter. The next moment he was gone, crashing through the bushes, leaving the fat Owl sprawling and yelling under the beech.

Bob Cherry stood panting, with one hand dabbing a streaming nose with a handkerchief and rubbing a winking eye with the other.

The portly gentleman, breathing hard, looked at him. He had pleasant blue eyes, very kindly in expression, but very keen. He had been through some very hectic minutes, but he seemed quite cool and not at all flustered. Bob gave him a rather rueful grin.

'All right now, sir!' he said. 'That brute's gone.'

'You are hurt, my boy?'

'Oh, that's all right, sir. Only a knock or two,' said Bob, still dabbing. 'Jolly glad I came along. I hope you're not hurt.'

'I should have been very seriously hurt, if you had not intervened, my boy. I was taken by surprise, and had no chance at all. I should have been very badly hurt, and robbed into the bargain. That ruffian would have left me stunned, when he made off with my wallet. My dear boy, I don't quite know how to thank you for coming to my help so promptly and so courageously. You are a brave lad.'

'It was nothing, really, sir—'

'It was a great deal to me,' said the portly gentleman, with a smile. He had a very pleasant smile. 'I shall not forget this, my boy. May I ask your name?'

'Bob Cherry, sir.'

'You are a schoolboy?'

'Yes: Greyfriars.'

'Bob Cherry—Greyfriars School,' repeated the portly gentleman, as if memorizing it. He smiled again. 'My name is Butlin—you may perhaps have heard of it.'

Bob gave quite a jump.

Certainly, he had heard of a name that was a household word. He had in fact heard it only that morning, from Billy Bunter.

'Not Billy Butlin!' he exclaimed.

Mr. Butlin smiled that pleasant smile again, 'William Butlin, very frequently referred to as Billy Butlin,' he said, with a nod.

'Oh, crikey!' came a startled ejaculation from the thickets under the beech. Billy Bunter ceased to splutter, as he heard that magic name! A fat face and a big pair of Spectacles were projected from the thicket, and the Owl of the Remove stared blankly at the King of Holiday Camps.

Bob gave that plump countenance a glare.

'Bunter, you fat villain—'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'You were behind that tree,' roared Bob. 'Why didn't you show up when that footpad floored Mr. Butlin?'

'I—I—I was just going to!' stammered Bunter. 'I—I was just going to—to rush at him—only—only—I—I—I—' Billy Bunter's fat voice trailed off. It was, in fact, a little difficult to explain!

Mr. Butlin gave the fat Owl an amused glance.

'Who is this?' he asked.

'Only a fat ass in my form at Greyfriars,' answered Bob. 'I suppose that ruffian scared him out of his silly wits.'

'It is fortunate for me that all Greyfriars boys are not cast in the same mould, then,' said Mr. Butlin. 'You, I think, have courage enough for two, Master Cherry.'

'I—I wasn't scared. I—I was just going—' stuttered Bunter.

'Pack it up, you fat chump, and get ready to be booted all the way back to the school!' snorted Bob.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter backed promptly into the thicket again, and disappeared from sight. A rapid rustling in the wood indicated that he was in hurried retreat. The prospect of being booted all the way back to the school evidently had no appeal for him.

Mr. Butlin laughed. But his kindly face became serious again, as he turned to Bob.

'Thank you once more, Master Cherry,' he said. 'I shall remember you. I have a good memory for good actions. Thank you once more, my dear boy, and good-bye.'

'Good-bye, sir,' said Bob.

Mr. Butlin shook hands with him—a very hearty handshake, and walked on down the footpath. Bob Cherry followed on Billy Bunter's path through the wood.

But he was no longer in pursuit of the fat Owl: he was only taking a short cut back to Greyfriars. His wrath had evaporated: and William George Bunter was no longer in danger of the booting he richly deserved. Bob went at a leisurely pace, dabbing the crimson ooze from his nose as he went. There was, if Billy Bunter had known it, no occasion for him to scuttle through bushes and thickets like a scared rabbit.

But the guilty flee when no man pursueth! Billy Bunter scuttled, and panted, and gasped, and spluttered, without a pause, till he reached the school. He had just about enough breath left to totter in. Gosling stared at him from his lodge as he tottered by. Harry Wharton and Co. in the quad stared at him.

'Seen anything of Bob. Bunter?' called out Harry.

'Eh! Oh! Yes! No!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I say, you fellows, if Cherry comes in, tell him I haven't come in, will you? Tell him I've gone over to Cliff House to see my sister Bessie. Tell him I shan't be back for dinner, and that it's no good looking for me.'

With that, Billy Bunter rolled on to the House, leaving the Co. laughing. A breathless fat Owl collapsed into an armchair in the Rag, and did not stir again till the dinnerbell rang, which gladsome sound at last revived him.

CHAPTER 6

THE B.B.C. TO THE RESCUE

'BLOW the lines.'

'But Quelch—'

'Oh, bother Quelch!'

'Quiet, you ass—his window's open.'

'Oh!'

Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove, frowned. He frowned portentously. The celebrated frown of the Lord High Executioner had simply nothing on Quelch's at that moment.

It was just on six o'clock. Quelch, in his study, was glancing at his watch,

preparatory to switching on the radio for the news. His study window was wide open, letting in the balmy summer breeze. It also let in voices from the quadrangle. One of those voices was by no means low-pitched. Indeed Bob Cherry's vigorous tones bore a strong resemblance to those of Stentor of old. His remarks floated in at Quelch's window on the summer breeze, causing Mr. Quelch to forget the B.B.C. for the moment, and his features to corrugate in a tremendous frown. Really, it was no wonder he frowned. It was bad enough for a junior in his form to 'blow' his lines: but to bother Quelch in addition was quite beyond the limit.

Quelch stepped to the open window, and his gimlet-eyes glinted out at a bunch of juniors in the quad. The Famous Five were not near the window: but Bob's voice had great carrying powers. Quelch had heard him!

'Cherry!'

'Oh, crumbs!' breathed Bob, at that sudden rap from Quelch's window. All the five turned towards that window. It was upon Bob's ruddy face that the gimlet-eyes fixed grimly.

That ruddy face did not present quite its usual aspect. The nose had a slightly bulbous look, and was very red. One of the eyes had a dark shadow round it. A single glance at that damaged visage revealed that Bob had been in the wars. Those signs of combat were not likely to escape the gimlet-eye.

Quelch's frown intensified. He had not seen Bob since dismissing the Remove after third school. Now he saw him—looking as if he had been through a hectic scrap—as, indeed, he had, earlier in the day. No schoolmaster could approve of swollen noses and darkened eyes in his form. Henry Samuel Quelch most assuredly did not.

'Cherry! I heard what you said!' rumbled Quelch.

'Oh! Sorry, sir!' stammered Bob, his damaged face crimsoning.

'I gather from your remarks, Cherry, that you have not written your lines.'

'Oh! No, sir! Not yet, sir.'

'You have left yourself little time, Cherry, to write three hundred lines to be handed to me before preparation.'

'I—I—I've been playing cricket, sir—'

'That is no excuse, Cherry. And I imagine that your time has not been wholly occupied by cricket. You have been fighting.'

'Oh! No, sir! I—I—I mean, yes, sir,' stammered Bob.

'Apparently,' said Mr. Quelch, 'your form-master's instructions are of very little importance in your eyes, Cherry, in comparison with quarrelling and fighting.'

'I—I haven't been quarrelling, sir—'

'Your appearance indicates otherwise, Cherry. It is disgraceful.'

'Yes, sir, I know, but—'

'That will do, Cherry. You have chosen to spend your half-holiday in quarrelling and fighting instead of writing your lines as you were directed to do, and you have added to your offence by alluding to your form-master in an extremely disrespectful manner. You will come immediately to my study, Cherry.'

Quelch disappeared from the window.

He left Harry Wharton and Co. exchanging dismayed looks.

'That means whops!' said Johnny Bull.

'The esteemed Quelch looked as if the whopfulness will be terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, sadly.

'Oh, blow!' said Bob.

'All that fat chump Bunter's fault,' said Frank Nugent. 'If you hadn't gone after him this morning, you wouldn't have picked up that prize nose and that lovely black eye.'

'Well, I'm glad I did, all the same,' said Bob. 'I've told you fellows how it was—'

'You've got to tell Quelch too,' said Harry Wharton. 'He wouldn't blame a fellow for chipping in to help a man who was downed by a footpad. More likely to pat you on the back. Get it out before he starts in with the cane—if you can.'

'If!' grunted Bob.

He left his friends and went into the House. Not in a happy mood, he tapped at the door of Mr. Quelch's study, and entered.

Quelch was standing at the radio, about to switch on. But it was still a minute to six, and Bob had time to speak.

'If you please, sir—'

'You need say nothing, Cherry,' rapped the Remove master.

'If you'd let me explain, sir—'

'There is nothing to explain. I shall not punish you, Cherry, because I heard a disrespectful allusion to myself, not intended for my ears. You will be caned for quarrelling and fighting instead of obeying your form-master's commands.'

'But, sir—I—I'm going to do the lines—I—I think I've got time—'

'That will do.'

Evidently, Quelch was not in a mood to listen.

'But, sir, I—I couldn't help getting these—these marks, sir. I—'

'I have said that that will do, Cherry.'

'But, sir—'

'Silence!'

Quelch's hand reached towards the cane on the table. But at that moment, the hour began to chime from the clock-tower. The Remove master uttered an impatient exclamation.

'Bless my soul! I shall miss the news.' He switched on the radio.

'You will wait, Cherry!' he snapped. From the radio came the voice of the announcer.

'This is the B.B.C. Home Service! Here is the news.'

Bob Cherry breathed hard.

He was 'for it': there was no doubt about that. As it had to come, he would have been glad to get on with it and get it over. But Quelch was not going to miss the news on his account. He had to wait till it was through. He could only hope that the B.B.C. would cut it short, and have done with it. It was far from pleasant to stand and wait, in dismal anticipation of what was to come.

Neither was he, in the circumstances, likely to take any interest in the announcements that streamed out from Broadcasting House. Descriptions of political conferences, troubles in Central Africa, and the latest back-chat from Moscow, were merely a drone in his ears.

Quelch, on the other hand, was interested, and he listened-in with attention, as he always did. He sat in his armchair and gave ear to the B.B.C.

announcer, and seemed actually to forget the existence of the junior who stood waiting, first on one leg and then on the other.

It seemed to Bob that the drone from the radio would never end. However, the

cheering words came at last:

'That is the end of the news.'

But, as if to tantalize the hapless junior who was waiting for 'six' from Quelch's cane, the voice ran on:

'But here is a police message.'

'Oh, blow!' breathed Bob, under his breath. It seemed that the end was not yet, after all. Quelch did not stir from his armchair. Bob had to wait for that police message, never dreaming that it could have any interest for him.

But it had!

'A case of attempted robbery with violence is reported from Kent. Mr. William Butlin, the celebrated proprietor of Holiday Camps in all parts of the kingdom—'

Bob jumped!

'—while on a visit to Friardale, in the neighbourhood of Greyfriars School, was attacked on a woodland path by a footpad. Very fortunately, a schoolboy of Greyfriars, named Cherry, was at hand, and he very courageously came to Mr. Butlin's help—'

It was Mr. Quelch's turn to jump at that!

'—and the footpad took to flight. As the man was masked by a muffler drawn over his face, Mr. Butlin is able to describe him only as a man of medium height and ordinary appearance. Anyone who may have information to give is requested to call at Courtfield Police Station or to telephone Whitehall 1212. End of police message.'

Mr. Quelch switched off the radio.

Then he sat looking at Bob Cherry. It was some moments before he spoke. Evidently that message from the B.B.C. had taken him very much aback. But no frown now corrugated his brow.

'Cherry!' he said at last.

'Yes, sir!' murmured Bob.

'Your name has just been mentioned on the radio. You are the only boy at Greyfriars named Cherry. The allusion was to you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Was it in going to the aid of a gentleman attacked by a footpad that you sustained those injuries.'

'I—I had a few knocks, sir—'

'Then you have not been fighting?'

'Only with that footpad, sir! I—I had to tackle him, as he had Mr. Butlin down, and was going to bash him— I—I mean—'

'You should have told me this, Cherry!' said Mr. Quelch, severely. 'I was naturally under a misapprehension, knowing nothing of the occurrence referred to on the radio. You should have explained.'

Bob opened his lips: but closed them again. It would not have been judicious to point out that Quelch hadn't given him a chance to explain! In the circumstances, silence was golden.

'However, I am very glad that I have learned the facts, in this very unexpected way,' resumed Mr. Quelch. 'You appear to have acted very courageously, Cherry, in going to the aid of an estimable gentlemen who was in need of help. You may leave my study, Cherry.'

'Thank you, sir!' Bob backed to the door. Evidently, the execution was off! The cane on Quelch's table was not to get any exercise on this occasion.

'One moment, Cherry!' added Mr. Quelch, as Bob reached the door. Bob turned back.

'In consideration of your action, Cherry—your very creditable action—you need not write the lines I imposed in form this morning.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir!' gasped Bob.

Mr. Quelch smiled.

'That is all, Cherry. You may go, my boy.' Never had Quelch's tone been so mild.

Bob Cherry had come into the House in a far from happy mood. But he almost danced out of it again. Unexpectedly, very unexpectedly indeed, the B.B.C. had come to the rescue in the very nick of time: and Bob's face was as bright as the summer sunshine as he rejoined his friends in the quad with the good news.

CHAPTER 7

BILLY BUNTER KNOWS HOW

'I SAY, you fellows.'

Billy Bunter blinked in at the door of No. 1 Study in the Remove, with a wary and uneasy blink, as his fat squeak announced that he had arrived there. The Famous Five had gathered in Harry Wharton's study for a chat before prep. The subject under discussion was the summer holidays, now nearly due. Precisely where they were going, and what they were going to do, in those 'hols', the chums of the Remove had not yet settled: except that wherever it was, and whatever it was, they were going to do it together. The fat squeak from the doorway interrupted the discussion.

Harry Wharton glanced round at the fattest member of the form.

'Cut!' he said, briefly.

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'Hook it!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'No, don't buzz off for a minute, Bunter,' said Bob Cherry. 'I haven't booted you yet for that rotten trick you played on me in form this morning. Roll in, and turn round.'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old fellow—'

'Are you waiting to be booted?'

'No, you beast! I—'

'Then buzz off before I come over to you.'

'That's what you call gratitude, I suppose, when a fellow's come here to do you a jolly big favour!' said Bunter, disdainfully. 'I say, you fellows, don't play the goat. I've got a jolly good idea for the hols, and I've come here specially to tell you about it.'

'Now go somewhere else and tell somebody else!' suggested Nugent. 'And shut the door after you.'

'Roll off, anyway,' said Harry.

Billy Bunter did not roll off. Bunter, apparently, had come to No. 1 Study with something to say: and he was going to say the same. But he eyed Bob Cherry rather uneasily. He could not feel sure whether the booting was off, or whether it was only postponed. However, Bob looked quite good-tempered and placid now, and the fat Owl, at last, rolled into the study.

'I say, you fellows, you haven't fixed up yet about the hols,' he said. 'Look here, how would you like a seaside holiday, with crowds of jolly people, jolly good grub, all sorts of fun and games, and not costing you a penny?'

'Fine!' grinned Bob Cherry. 'Has your postal-order come, and are you going to blow it on a seaside party?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, I know how to fix it, at any rate,' declared Bunter. 'I've been thinking it over, and I jolly well know how. Mind, tain't because I don't want to go to Uncle Carter's and wash his beastly plates and dishes. I never do think much about myself, as you fellows know—'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I just want you fellows to have a splendid holiday on the cheap, because we're pals!' explained Bunter. 'Of course, I should come along. You'd like that, wouldn't you?'

'Not a lot!' said Bob, shaking his head.

'The lotfulness would not be terrific!' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'If that's how you thank a fellow for telling you how to bag a splendid seaside holiday on the cheap—'

'But you haven't told us, yet,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'How and why and which and where and when?'

'Butlin's!' said Bunter.

'Butlin's!' repeated the Famous Five, all together, blankly.

'That's it!' said Bunter, nodding a fat head. 'I've been thinking it over, after what happened this morning. That chap Butlin looked a jolly good sort, didn't he, Bob?'

'Quite!' agreed Bob.

'And that footpad would have got away with his wallet, as well as bashing him black and blue, if we hadn't chipped in—'

'We!' repeated Bob. 'Why, you fat, foozling funk, a fat lot you had to do with it. You were scared stiff behind that tree. But what about it, anyway?'

'Well, there's such a thing as gratitude!' explained Bunter. 'My idea is to write a letter to Mr. Butlin—you'd better write it, but I've got it here ready for you to copy out—and put it up to him.'

'Put what up to him?' asked Bob, blankly.

'About the hols, you know—'

'What on earth has Mr. Butlin got to do with our hols?'

'Lots!' said Bunter. 'You wouldn't have thought of it, I daresay, but I jolly well have. All it needs is a hint, and I'll bet you Mr. Butlin would play up.'

'A hint of what?' yelled Bob.

'Oh, you're dense,' said Bunter. 'You haven't my brains, old chap, if you don't mind my mentioning it. Look at this letter I've written! I can jolly well tell you that it will work the oracle, and fix us all up for the hols. All you've got to do is to copy it out, and I'll post it for you. Look at it.'

Billy Bunter groped in a sticky pocket, the Famous Five watching him blankly as he did so. Evidently, a big idea was working in Billy Bunter's fat brain, founded upon the incident in Friardale Wood that morning. What the connexion could be, between that incident, and the summer holidays, not one of the Famous Five could see. It seemed, however, that Bunter could!

Having fished out a crumpled sheet of note-paper from a sticky pocket, the fat Owl laid it on the table.

‘Just copy that out as I’ve written it, Bob,’ he said. ‘And be careful about the spelling, too—I’ve got it all right, and we don’t want them to think that we can’t spell, at Greyfriars. I’ve taken a lot of trouble with that letter, I can tell you.’ Blankly, Harry Wharton and Co. stared at the letter on the table. Then they all jumped at once. That letter was written in Billy Bunter’s sprawling, scrawling ‘fist’: and in Billy Bunter’s own original orthography. Neither the scrawl, nor the spelling, surprised the juniors in No. 1 Study. But the contents of the letter did! That letter, which the fat Owl had concocted so carefully for Bob Cherry to dispatch to Mr. William Butlin, ran:

Deer Mr. Butlin,

I hoap you pheel no ill effectks from that skrap with that beestly phootpad. I am pheeling rather nocked out at pressent, as I had some verry hard nox. But I dont mind that at all, and am onley too gladd that I was on the spott to kum to yore reskue. Just at pressent me and my frends are a bit wurried about the hols. Of corse we shoold like to spend the hols in one of yore Holliday Kamps, but the munny woodent run to it. So it has okkurred to me that you mite have a phew vakancies phree of charge konsidering that that phootpad wood have got away with yore wallet if I hadn’t stopt him, and one good turn deserves anuther. Hoaping to heer from you soon.

Yores truly

R. Cherry

Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at that effusion. They gazed dumbly. It seemed to have taken their breath away.

Billy Bunter blinked at them complacently.

‘Okay, what?’ he asked. ‘I think that puts it rather well, don’t you fellows? You could hardly have put it as nicely, Cherry. You see, I’ve pointed out that one good turn deserves another—I think that’s a rather neat touch. We saved that wallet for him, and he stands us a show in a Holiday Camp free of charge. I’ve piled it on a bit about feeling knocked out—it all helps. I’ll bet you fellows that that letter will work the oracle. Mind, if it does, I’m coming. It’s my idea from beginning to end, and I ain’t jolly well going to be left out. None of you would have thought of anything of the kind, and you can’t deny it.’

‘No!’ gasped Harry Wharton. ‘Hardly!’

‘I’ve got the brains,’ explained Bunter. ‘I think of things. If we get that holiday in a Butlin Camp, it will be my doing—mine entirely. Now you write that letter out, Cherry, and I’ll post it for you.’ Billy Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry, whose face was growing more and more expressive. ‘I say, what are you glaring at me like that for? Anything the matter?’

‘You fat villain!’ roared Bob.

‘You pernicious porpoise—’

‘What—?’

‘You—you—you—you—!’ Bob seemed at a loss for words Bunter blinked at him in astonishment.

‘I say, what’s the matter?’ he squeaked. ‘That letter’s all right, ain’t it? What are you calling a fellow names for, I’d like to know.’

'You fat frumpitious frog! Think I'd stick a man for anything because I happened to lend him a hand in a jam?' roared Bob.

'Eh! Why not?'

'The why-notfulness is preposterous, my esteemed idiotic Bunter,' chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Boot him!' growled Johnny Bull.

'Bump him!' said Nugent.

'I say, you fellows, what's the row? What are you getting your rag out for?' demanded Bunter, indignantly. 'Here I've taken all the trouble to think up a way of getting a jolly good holiday for nothing, and you jolly well know that not one of you would have thought of it, and if you can't be civil about it, I can jolly well say— Yaroooooh! Leggo!'

Billy Bunter, yelling, twirled in Bob's powerful grasp. With his right hand, Bob twirled the indignant Owl, by the collar. With his left, he grabbed up the scrawl from the table, crumpled it, and jammed it down the back of a fat neck. Bunter wriggled and roared.

'Ow! Leggo! Stoppit! Beast! I say, you fellows, dragimoff! Ooooooh!'

'There!' gasped Bob. 'There's your scrawl, down your neck, and you can take it away with you. And here's my boot!'

Thud!

'Yarooooooh!'

Billy Bunter had been slow in entering that study. But he left it very quickly. That booting had, after all, only been postponed. The fat Owl, having asked for it again, this time received it. He fairly flew through the doorway of No. 1 Study. A frantic yell floated back as he fled—a sadder if not a wiser Bunter. Why Bob Cherry had cut up rusty, Bunter did not know and couldn't guess. But it was clear that Bob was not going to write that letter to Mr. Butlin—after all the trouble Bunter had taken with it, too! Once more the prospect of a Butlin Camp for the 'hols' faded like a mirage from Billy Bunter's fat mind: and the prospect before him was once more that of washing dishes and plates at Uncle Carter's.

But—!

CHAPTER 8

UNEXPECTED!

'ONE for you, Bob.'

'Chuck it over.'

It was morning break at Greyfriars, a couple of days later. Billy Bunter was blinking up at the letter-rack through his big spectacles, no doubt with a lingering hope that his celebrated postal-order might have arrived at last. He blinked in vain. But there was one for Bob Cherry: and Harry Wharton took it down and 'chucked' it over as requested.

'Not from home!' said Bob, as he glanced at it. The address on the letter was type-written. Bob shoved it into his pocket. As it was not from home, he was in

no hurry to look into it, and he was, on the other hand, in quite a hurry to get out into the fresh air and sunshine after an hour in the Remove form-room with Quelch. So the Famous Five walked out into the quad, with that letter unopened in Bob's pocket.

'I say, you fellows—!' came a fat squeak behind them.

Unheeding that squeak, the chums of the Remove, like Felix, kept on walking: followed by an irritated glare from Billy Bunter's spectacles. Billy Bunter was interested in that letter, if Bob was not. There was always a possibility of a 'tip' in a letter for a schoolboy: and a further possibility that a good-natured, easy-going fellow like Bob, if in receipt of a tip, might exude a little loan for an impecunious Owl. So Billy Bunter, instead of heading for an armchair in the Rag as usual, rolled out into the quad after the Co.

'I say, you fellows!' came another squeak.

'Trot, you chaps!' said Bob Cherry.

'There's Bunter calling—!' said Nugent.

'That's why!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Famous Five trotted. A trot round the sunny quad was pleasant and exhilarating, after Latin and Quelch. But if the active and strenuous Co. found it so, Billy Bunter did not. Breath was always in short supply with Bunter: and trotting was not in his line at all. A dozen yards were enough for Bunter.

'I say, you fellows!' he yelled.

Bob glanced over his shoulder.

'Race you round the quad, Bunter!' he called out.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter came to a gasping halt. Even the possibility of a tip in that letter, and of a share in the same, did not tempt the fat Owl to race round the quad. The Famous Five trotted on, leaving him pumping in breath. At a distance they slowed down to a walk. Then Bob extracted the letter from his pocket. 'May as well see what it is,' he said. 'Nobody I know types letters. Can't be about anything special.'

He slit the envelope, and unfolded the missive within. Then he came to a sudden halt, staring at it blankly.

'Oh, my hat!' he ejaculated.

'What—?'

'Great pip!' exclaimed Bob. 'Who'd have thought it!' He Whistled

The Co. came to a halt too, with inquiring looks. Evidently, there was something of a surprising and startling nature in that letter.

'Anything up?' asked Johnny Bull.

'Well, yes, rather!' Bob whistled again. 'It's a jolly letter. Guess where it comes from!'

Four heads were shaken.

'Butlin's!' said Bob.

'Butlin's!' repeated the Co.

'By gum!' said Bob, 'this is jolly! We hadn't fixed up anything for the hols—'

'The hols! Nothing about the hols there, I suppose.' said Harry.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'That's all you know!' he answered. 'I fancy this fixes us up.'

'How come?' asked Johnny Bull, staring.

'It's a jolly old invitation for the hols! Just listen to this! Lend me your ears, as

the chap says in the play!

Four pairs of interested ears were lent, as Bob proceeded to read out that unexpected letter.

BUTLIN'S HOLIDAY CAMP.
SKEGNESS.

Dear Master Cherry,

I am writing to you on Mr. Butlin's instructions. Mr. Butlin desires me to repeat his thanks to you for having so courageously come to his help, and to express the hope that you feel no ill effects. The period of school holidays is now close at hand, and if you have not already made other arrangements, Mr. Butlin would be delighted to welcome you here, with any friends whom you may care to bring. If you accept this invitation to a holiday in a Butlin Camp. you and your friends will come as Mr. Butlin's guests, and there will be no expenses of any kind. I am to add that it will give Mr. Butlin great pleasure if you reply accepting this invitation.

Yours sincerely,
Harold Vinter, P.R.O.

'What price that?' chuckled Bob. 'Anybody feel like having a jolly holiday in Butlinland?'

'Sort of!' agreed Johnny Bull.

'Topping!' said Frank Nugent.

'The topfulness is terrific,' declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The esteemed Butlin is a stitch in time that saves ninepence, as the English proverb remarks.'

'Couldn't say no to that!' said Harry Wharton. 'Jolly nice of Mr. Butlin, I must say.'

'The nicefulness is—'

'Terrific and preposterous, Inky,' chuckled Bob. 'Well, that's that! If you fellows all agree—'

'No "if" about that,' said Nugent.

'Not the ghost of an "if"!' said Johnny Bull. 'The letter says "any friends you may care to bring". Four wouldn't be over-doing it.'

'Not at all,' said Bob. He paused, with a thoughtful look. 'Nor would five, if you come to that. Might make it five.'

'Lots of the fellows would jump at it,' said Harry. 'Whom are you thinking of?'

'Well!' Bob hesitated for a moment. 'There's Bunter—'

'Bunter?' repeated Johnny Bull. 'Sort of fellow to make any party a success—I don't think.'

'Not quite!' said Bob. 'But—the old porpoise was banking on a holiday at Butlin's, and it turned out that he was booked for washing dishes at his Uncle Carter's—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you fellows think that you could stand him—'

'We've stood him before, and can stand him again,' said Harry, laughing.

'Make it five, and count in Bunter.'

'Oh, do!' said Nugent.

There was smiling assent from the Co. It was like Bob, whose good-nature was unlimited, to think of the fat Owl, and his dismal prospects for the 'hols'. There was no doubt that that invitation to Butlinland would come as a boon and a blessing to the forlorn Owl, before whom stretched a doleful vista of endless dish-washing at Uncle Carter's.

'That's settled, then,' said Bob. I'll cut off and tell him, and he can let his pater know that he's booked for the hols. I daresay it will save an awful lot of breakages at Uncle Carter's.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bob left his friends, and went to look for Billy Bunter. He found him still pumping in breath. The fat Owl greeted him with a reproachful blink.

'Beast!' was his first remark. 'Cutting off when a fellow was speaking to you. Think I care whether you had a tip in that letter or not?'

'I shouldn't wonder,' grinned Bob. 'But it wasn't a tip, old fat man. It was an invitation for the hols.'

Grunt, from Bunter. He was not interested in any invitation that Bob Cherry might have received for the 'hols'.

'It's from Butlin's!' added Bob.

'Butlin's for the hols?' asked Bunter.

'That's it, old fat man. Up at Skegness. And—'

Another grunt from Bunter: a still more emphatic

'That's where I was going, if the pater had played up,' he said. 'I was jolly well banking on it, you know. And instead of that, I'm going to be landed at Uncle Carter's, washing his dashed crocks. What are you grinning at?' added the fat Owl, indignantly. 'Nothing to grin at, in a fellow being landed with washing-up for the hols. Yah!'

Billy Bunter turned to roll away.

'Hold on a minute, old porpoise,' said Bob, laughing.

'Yah!' repeated Bunter, over a fat shoulder.

'Like to come?'

'Eh?' Billy Bunter was rolling away. But he ceased to roll. He revolved promptly on his axis, and blinked at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles.

'What?'

'That letter was from Mr. Butlin's P.R.O.—'

'What's a P.R.O.?''

'Public Relations Officer, fathead. It's an invitation for the holidays at the Camp at Skegness, and I can take some friends if I like, see?'

'Oh!' Billy Bunter was interested now: deeply interested. 'Mean to say Mr. Butlin's asked you for the hols—'

'Just that! Jolly holiday free of charge,' said Bob. 'Jolly crowd—bracing air—and all the fun of the fair—'

'Did he mention me?'

'You? No. Why should he?'

'Well, I suppose it's because of what happened the other day in the wood, isn't it? I was there too, wasn't I?' demanded Bunter, warmly.

'Yes: scared stiff, hiding behind a tree—'

'Beast! I—I mean, did you say you could take some friends if you like?'

'I did.'

'I say, old chap, what about me? We've always been pals, haven't we, old

fellow?’

‘Not that I know of.’

‘Oh, really, Cherry—’

‘But if you’d like to join up, I’ll count you in.’, said Bob. ‘What about it?’

‘Well, if you’d really like me to come, old chap—’

‘I Wouldn’t specially.’ Bob was nothing if not candid. ‘But you can roll along with the party if you like, see?’

Sniff, from Bunter.

‘If you put it like that, Cherry, I’m afraid I couldn’t come!’ he said, loftily, with a shake of a fat head.

‘I do put it exactly like that!’ assured Bob.

‘He, he, he!’

‘What are you he-he-heing about, you fat ass?’

‘He, he, he! Your little joke, old fellow,’ said Bunter, affably. ‘I don’t mind your little jokes, old chap! I’ll come! Rely on me, old boy. I won’t let you down! I’ll come.’

Billy Bunter, sad to relate, was not always as good as his word. But on this occasion he was quite as good as his word! He had said that he would come. And he came!

‘CHAPTER 9

LIKE IT OR LUMP IT

HERE, young Wharton!’

‘Here, old Coker!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form, was frowning, as he came up to the Famous Five in the quadrangle. His frown intensified at Harry Wharton’s reply. It was much too flippant a reply to please Coker. It lacked entirely the respect due from a Remove junior to a Fifth-form man—especially when that Fifth-form man was Horace James Coker.

‘I don’t want any cheek, Wharton,’ he said, warningly.

‘Same here!’ agreed Wharton.

‘The samefulness is terrific, my esteemed Coker!’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Coker’s rugged brow darkened still further. The chums of the Remove regarded him with smiling faces. Coker, evidently, was in a state of annoyance about something. What it was, they did not know. Neither did they care. Coker, a fellow of the greatest importance in his own eyes, was of no importance whatever in theirs.

The Famous Five were very merry and bright that morning. Break-up for the summer holidays was close at hand now. Happy prospects were in store. Bob Cherry had answered that unexpected but very agreeable letter from Mr. Butlin’s P.R.O. Everything was fixed up and settled. In a few days, they would be revelling in the bracing air of Skegness, amid a merry crowd. So it was no wonder that their cheery young faces reflected the brightness of the summer sunshine—contrasting with the grim frown that corrugated Horace Coker’s rugged features.

'I've said I don't want any cheek!' said Coker, breathing hard. 'If you want me to wallop you all round, you've only got to say so.'

'So!' said Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Coker breathed harder. But the cheery juniors did not seem alarmed. Coker was big and he was burly and aggressive: rather an out-size even for the Fifth. But 'walloping' five sturdy juniors in a bunch was not quite a practicable proposition, even for Coker of the Fifth. In fact, the Famous Five were prepared to strew Coker in the quad if he tried it on.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that on your face, Coker?' exclaimed Bob Cherry, suddenly.

'Eh!' Coker passed a large hand over rugged features. 'Is there anything on my face?'

'There jolly well is,' said Bob, staring at it. 'Looks jolly queer! I wouldn't go about with a face like that, Coker.'

'I didn't know there was anything on my face.' Coker drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his countenance. 'There! Is it gone now?'

'No: it's still there.'

Coker gave another rub with the handkerchief.

'Is it gone now?'

'No! Looks as queer as ever.'

'Well, what the dickens is it, then?' yapped Coker.

'Only your features, old chap!' said Bob, affably. 'I thought for a minute you'd got a Guy Fawkes' mask on. But it's only your features.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the Co.

Coker of the Fifth breathed very hard indeed. He was already, for some reason known only to himself, in a state of wrath. Now his wrath nearly boiled over. But he restrained it. Walloping those cheeky juniors all round could wait. 'Look here, you cheeky little ticks,' he said. 'I've got something to say to you. From what I hear, you've been fixing up the hols at the Holiday Camp run by Butlin's—'

'That's so!' said Harry Wharton. 'What about it?'

'Up at Skegness?' said Coker.

'That's the place.'

'Well, you can forget it,' said Coker. 'Just chuck it, see?'

Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at him. They had, naturally, talked about their plans for the 'hols', and plenty of fellows knew that they were booked for the Camp at Skegness. Apparently Coker had heard of it. But why he was interested in their holiday arrangements was quite a mystery to them. Why he proposed that they should 'chuck' it was another mystery. They could only gaze at him in wonder. But Coker proceeded to elucidate.

'That's where I'm going!' he said.

'Oh! You've booked for Butlin's too?' asked Harry.

'Just that!' said Coker. 'I'm going with Potter and Greene. Now I hear that you fags are thinking of the same place for the hols.'

'Why not?' asked Frank Nugent. 'Plenty of room for everybody.'

Coker gave him a glare.

'Think I want a gang of fags about, making out they know me, before a lot of people?' he demanded. 'Well, I don't! Why, people might think that we were all in the same party! That wouldn't do for me. I don't want a crew of

Greyfriars fags hanging about where I'm on a holiday. Nice for me, if people suppose that I've gone on holiday with a bunch of scrubby fags! Mind, I don't mind if you go to some other Camp!' added Coker, considerately. 'Butlin's have Camps all over the country— dozens of them. You can pick any one you like, excepting mine—'

'Yours?' ejaculated Johnny Bull. 'Have you bought it from Mr. Butlin?'

'You jolly well know what I mean,' snapped Coker. 'Pick any Camp you like, but steer clear of the Skegness Camp, see? That's where I'm going, and I don't want a crew of fags hanging about there. Anywhere you like but Skegness. That's barred! Understand?'

'Not quite!' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'You see, Coker, we're booked for Skegness, and we're going to Skegness, and if you don't like it—'

'I've told you I don't, haven't I?' hooted Coker.

'Then there's only one thing to be done,' said Harry. 'If you really don't like it, Coker, you can lump it.'

'What?'

'Lump it!' said Harry, cheerfully.

Horace Coker clenched large hands. He had been patient, so far—very patient indeed, for Coker. Now his patience seemed exhausted. His look indicated that the time had arrived for that wallop all round.

'Did you say lump it?' he asked, in quite a deadly tone.

'Just that!' agreed Harry while his comrades chuckled. 'L-U-M-P, lump! L for Lout, U for Ugly, M for Mug, and P for Piffle!—Lump! Got it now?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Coker, no doubt, 'got' it. It was borne in upon his somewhat solid brain that his lofty behests were going to be completely disregarded by these cheeky juniors, and that if he did not like a 'crew of fags' hanging about the Skegness Camp while he was honouring that spot with his important presence, his only resource was to 'lump' it! Having 'got' that, Coker realized that words were useless, and proceeded to action. He rushed.

The next item on the programme was a wallop all round for that cheeky bunch of juniors: which, in Coker's opinion at least, they richly deserved.

Coker proceeded to wallop them all round.

But that enterprise did not work out according to programme. Instead of being skittled right and left, the Famous Five closed in on Coker as one man, grasped him on all sides, and up-ended him.

Coker came down with a bump that almost shook the old Greyfriars quadrangle. It was a surprised, and extremely exasperated Coker, that sprawled and spluttered for breath.

'Man down!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Roll him over!'

'Give him up!'

'Go it!'

'Oh!' gasped Coker. 'Oh! Ah! Oooogh! Leggo! I'll smash you! Oooogh! I'll spifflicate the lot of you! Wooh! I'll—I'll—ow! Oggh! Wooooh!'

Coker struggled frantically. But five pairs of active hands were too many for him—many too many! The grinning juniors rolled him over, in a state of breathless Spluttering. His collar and tie came off—his jacket curled up about his ears—his hair was a tousled mop: and he gasped and gasped, and

spluttered and spluttered, till he Was too winded even to splutter and gasp. Then the Famous Five, laughing, strolled away, leaving him to gurgle for his second wind.

He sat up and gurgled.

Then, at last, he picked himself up. He replaced his collar, and tied his tie, and dusted his clothes, and mopped perspiration from a crimson face. And he very nearly rushed off in pursuit of the Famous Five to administer that walloping. But on second thoughts—proverbially the best!—he decided to bother no further with the cheeky young scoundrels. Which was just as well for Coker: for there was little doubt that he would have found himself at the wrong end of the walloping.

CHAPTER 10

'STOP THIEF!'

'HALLO, hallo, halo!'

'What—?'

'Know that chap?'

Four fellows glanced in the direction indicated by a nod of Bob Cherry's head. And four heads were shaken. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, did not know the 'chap' who had caught Bob's eye, on the platform of the little country station of Greenfield.

The Co. were seated in a cheery row on one of the platform seats. They were far from Greyfriars now. Greyfriars School had broken up for the summer holidays, and Greyfriars fellows had scattered north, south, east, and west. The Famous Five had gathered at Wharton Lodge to make the journey together to Skegness and the joys of Butlinland and health-giving sea-breezes. An early train had landed them at Greenfield, where they had to change trains. So there they were, merry and bright, sharing a packet of chocs while they waited for their train.

There seemed to be few passengers about, in the little country station. Not more than five or six people could be seen on the platform. Among them was the 'chap' to whom Bob had alluded: a portly, kindly-faced gentleman who was pacing the platform, apparently waiting for the same train as the Greyfriars juniors.

He was a stranger to the eyes of four members of the Co. But Bob Cherry, as soon as his eyes fell on him, knew him at once. He had seen him only once before: but that was on an exciting occasion that he was not likely to forget. That hectic episode in Friardale Wood was quite fresh in his memory.

'Somebody you know?' asked Harry.

'Sort of! At least, I met him once—a week or so before we broke up at Greyfriars.' Bob grinned. 'Behold the King of Holiday Camps!'

'Not Mr. Butlin?' exclaimed Nugent.

'That very identical johnny!' answered Bob.

The Co. scanned the portly gentleman with renewed interest. He was pacing the platform at a little distance, and had not noticed the row of schoolboys on the seat. But they noticed him very particularly, now that they knew who he

was.

'Looks as if he's waiting for the same train,' said Bob. 'I believe he does a lot of trotting about, from one Camp to another, to keep things under his eye. Better not butt in, but if he sees us, mind you fellows put on your very best manners. He's a jolly good sort, to give us such a show these hols.'

'The jolly-good-sortfulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

The juniors sat with their eyes on Mr. Butlin: prepared, as Bob suggested, to put on their very best manners, if he noticed their presence and recognized Bob. He did not glance in their direction as he paced the platform, however. But as they watched him, they became aware that there was another person who was also interested in Mr. Butlin.

A man coming up the platform suddenly stumbled, and bumped clumsily into the King of Holiday Camps. He caught at the portly gentleman, as if to keep his balance. Mr. Butlin, however, stepped aside, avoiding the clutching hand. 'Sorry, sir—my foot slipped—a bit of orange-peel, I think,' muttered the man, apologetically.

Mr. Butlin nodded, and paced on.

The man moved away, and stopped at a little distance from the schoolboys, leaning on a wall. His eyes remained fixed on Mr. Butlin—a pair of very sharp, glinting eyes. The juniors could not help noticing it. He did not notice them—all his attention was concentrated on Mr. William Butlin. Bob Cherry watched him, a puzzled expression on his face.

'Did you fellows notice that?' he said, in a low voice. 'Looked to me as if he barged into Mr. Butlin on purpose.'

'And to me,' said Harry.

'I believe I've seen him before, somewhere,' went on Bob. 'I don't know his face, but there's something about him that looks familiar—something in his build. Look how he's watching Mr. Butlin—and I'm jolly sure he barged into him on purpose. Might be a pickpocket. Keep an eye on him till the train comes in. Mr. Butlin jolly nearly lost his wallet, that day in Friardale Wood, and he might be losing it here.'

The juniors kept their eyes curiously on the man. He was a man of middle size, in a check suit, with a bowler hat cocked a little to one side on his head. He had a hard face, and eyes that glinted watchfully like a weasel's. They would have taken him for some sort of racing man, on his looks. Whatever he was, he was obviously deeply interested in William Butlin. His eyes never left that gentleman: and once, as Mr. Butlin passed near him in his pacing, he made a move.

Bob caught his breath.

'By gum, if he tries anything on—!' he breathed.

But the man in checks did not try anything on. He settled back against the wall, and lighted a cigarette. But as he smoked that cigarette, his eyes still remained fastened on the portly pacing figure. If he was, as the juniors could not help suspecting, a pickpocket with designs on Mr. Butlin's well-filled wallet, he was biding his time.

But the train was signalled now.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, here she comes!' exclaimed Bob. And the juniors jumped up and gathered up their bags, as the train appeared down the line. It clattered into the station, and their attention was taken from the man in

checks. The train stopped, and as they moved across towards it, a rich and pleasant voice fell on their ears.

'Why, is that my young friend Cherry?'

Mr. Butlin had not noticed the schoolboys on the seat. But he noticed them now, and he came to a stop, his kindly face beaming. Evidently he recognized Bob's ruddy, cheery face under its mop of flaxen hair.

Bob gave him a cheery grin.

'Yes, sir—here we are—these are my friends from Greyfriars,' he answered, as Mr. Butlin gave him a plump handshake.

'I'm glad to see you again, my boy, and your friends too. And—!'

'Look out, sir!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

But it was too late! A figure in checks came racing across the platform, as if in haste to catch the train. Whether by accident or design, that racing figure crashed into the group like a charging bull. Frank Nugent was knocked to the right—Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to the left—Johnny Bull toppled over where he stood, and Bob Cherry went sprawling over him. And the man in checks, hurtling headlong into Mr. Butlin, sent him spinning: and the man himself sprawled over Mr. Butlin as he fell. It was a sudden and quite a wild mix-up. But it was only for a moment that he sprawled there. He was up again with the activity of a monkey.

'Oh! Sorry!' he panted.

And he ran on—leaving Mr. Butlin sitting dizzily on the platform, and four schoolboys tottering breathlessly up. Harry Wharton, for the moment, was the only one on his feet. Without a second's pause, he dashed after the running man, and collared him before he could get out of reach. With both hands grasping the neck of a check jacket, he dragged him back.

'Stop!' he panted.

The man turned on him fiercely.

'Let go, you young fool! Let go, do you hear? What are you up to? Let go, or I'll knock you across the platform.'

There was a shriek from a whistle. The train was on the point of leaving the station. But Harry Wharton was not thinking about catching that train now. He clung to the struggling man like a cat. Not for a moment did he suppose that that reckless collision on the platform had been an accident. He had no doubt whatever that something of value—probably a wallet—had changed owners, when the weasel-eyed man sprawled over Mr. Butlin. And if the rascal had robbed the King of Holiday Camps, he was not going to let him escape with his booty, if he could help it. He was almost swept off his feet by the man's savage struggle, but he held on tenaciously, and shouted:

'Here, you fellows! Mr. Butlin, have you lost anything? See if your pocket's been picked.'

'What! what!' Mr. Butlin was rather out of breath from the shock. But he was quick on the uptake. He groped in an inside pocket. 'Oh! My wallet! My wallet's gone.'

The man in checks, gritting his teeth, struck out savagely. Harry Wharton's grasp relaxed, involuntarily. as a fist crashed on his chin. The man tore himself loose, and leaped away.

'Stop thief!' shouted Harry.

He dashed in pursuit. The Co. were hardly a moment or two behind him, and then came Mr. Butlin, panting for breath. The train was in motion now, moving

out of the station, The desperate man ran along by the side of the moving train, his pursuers close at his heels, shouting 'Stop thief!' at the top of their voices. A porter ran into the path of the fleeing man, standing ready to stop his further flight. His capture seemed certain. In sheer desperation he whirled towards the moving train, tore open a door, and plunged headlong in, slamming the door after him from within. A moment or two more, and many hands would have been upon the pickpocket. But the chase came to a sudden halt. The train was gathering speed, and he was gone. Harry Wharton and Co. and the King of Holiday Camps, were left staring after it, as it roared out of the station.

CHAPTER 11

BUNTER DOESN'T KNOW

'OH!' gasped Billy Bunter.

He was startled.

It was, in fact, enough to startle any fellow.

A moment before, Billy Bunter had been lolling at his fat ease in a corner seat in the railway carriage, which he had to himself. Other passengers had left, one after another, leaving the Owl of Greyfriars on his own. Some travellers prefer a carriage to themselves. Billy Bunter was not that kind of traveller. Bunter was a gregarious animal, and had no love for the solitude in the face of which sages have seen charms. Billy Bunter liked the sound of his own voice, which was music to his own fat ears if to no others. He would have been glad to chatter about himself and about the gorgeous holiday he was going to have at Skegness, if anyone would have listened. But there it was—he was left on his own. So he lolled in his seat, stretched out his little fat legs, and chewed toffee, and blinked through his big spectacles at an attractive coloured pamphlet that set forth the joys of Skegness.

It was a sunny morning: and Billy Bunter's plump countenance was sunny too. Bunter was feeling good that morning. As why should he not, with so pleasant a prospect before him for the 'hols'.

Greyfriars School had broken up, and Greyfriars fellows had scattered far and wide. Billy Bunter, as yet, had scattered only as far as Bunter Villa. But that was only temporary. He was now on his way to Butlinland.

That awful vision of washing plates and dishes at Uncle Carter's boarding-house had faded out. His respected pater had proved quite amenable. Mr. Bunter had planned an inexpensive seaside holiday for his hopeful son at Uncle Carter's. But he had no objection to William taking his holiday elsewhere—so long as it remained inexpensive. Only on that point was Mr. Bunter firm. But a holiday at a Holiday Camp entirely free of charge, was as inexpensive as the most economical parent could have desired. So William's plan for the 'hols' had Mr. Bunter's cordial approval.

Billy Bunter was aware that Harry Wharton and Co. were also starting that morning, and he rather hoped that he might fall in with them somewhere en

route. For there was just one fly in the ointment. A fellow on holiday naturally needed something in the way of petty cash—not too petty! Mr. Bunter had acknowledged this to the extent of presenting William with a ten shilling note over and above his railway fare. It was somewhat unfortunate that Bunter had had to wait for his train. He had spent the time—and the ten shilling note—in the buffet. His financial resources, at the moment, were limited to threepence change. So it was not only desirable, but actually necessary, for Bunter to have his friends about him. It was quite easy—to Bunter!—to explain that, owing to some over-sight at the last moment, he had left his money at home! Lolling back on cushions, with fat little legs stretched out, absorbing toffee, Billy Bunter was feeling cheery and comfortable. The train was re-starting after stopping at a station. Nobody had got into that particular carriage, either from the platform or the corridor: but Bunter, though he did not turn his head, was vaguely conscious of a man running along by the side of the moving train. He was not interested in somebody who had, apparently, just lost the train. But at the last moment, as the train gathered speed, the door suddenly opened, and a man pitched in headlong, dragging the door shut after him with a bang, and then stumbling over Bunter's fat legs.

Wherefore did the startled fat Owl ejaculate 'Oh!'

He dragged those fat legs away, and the man sat up, staring at him breathlessly. Billy Bunter stared back, considerably annoyed. To his surprise, the staring man exclaimed:

'You, is it?'

Bunter blinked at him. From that exclamation, it seemed that the man knew him, at least by sight. But he was quite a stranger to Bunter's eyes. So far as Bunter was aware, he had never seen this stranger before. But there was evident recognition in the hard-lined face with its sharp weasel-eyes. As he blinked at him, however, it seemed to Bunter that there was something vaguely familiar in the man's build, though his features were quite unfamiliar. But after that hasty surprised exclamation, the man took no further heed of Bunter. He picked himself up, picked up a bowler hat that had fallen from his head, and jammed it back in place a little cocked to one side, and then stared from the window, back along the line.

The train was now well out of Greenfield, and going fast. For a full minute, the man stared back, breathing heavily. Then he turned from the window, and gave his attention to Bunter. His sharp eyes scanned the fat Owl's plump face.

He shook his head.

'Thought I'd seen you before, sir,' he said, very civilly. 'But now I look at you, I see that I was mistaken.'

'I've never seen you before, that I know of,' grunted Bunter.

'Your name wouldn't be George Smith, now, would it?'

Sniff, from Bunter.

'My name's Bunter,' he answered, loftily. 'Bunter', in the fat Owl's opinion, was ever so much more select and impressive a name than Smith! It was, in fact, like this fellow's cheek, to mistake him, even for a moment, for somebody named Smith!

Certainly, it was not likely to occur to Bunter that the man, for some reason of his own, desired to keep secret a fact that he had revealed by his unguarded exclamation.

Still less likely was it to occur to the fat Owl, that the unfamiliarity of the man's features was due to the circumstance that they had been hidden under a muffler, at a previous meeting!

Billy Bunter had almost forgotten the episode in Friardale Wood. But if he had remembered it, he would never have expected to come across the muffled footpad again. Not for a moment could he dream that he was now sitting in the presence of the rogue over whom he had stumbled under the tree, and from whom Mr. Butlin's wallet had had so narrow an escape.

Neither could it occur to his fat brain, that it was owing to a similar incident, that the man in checks had hurtled into the moving train: and that on this occasion, the coveted wallet had not escaped the thievish fingers.

'Bunter!' repeated the man, as he sat down. 'No, that ain't the name! Jest for a minute I took you for George Smith—a young pal of mine. Ten minutes to the next stop, ain't it, sir?'

'I dont' know.'

'I've got to get out at the next stop. Nearly lost my train, didn't I?' The weasel eyes watched Bunter's fat face, while the man was speaking.

'You jolly nearly did!' agreed Bunter.

'Sorry I butted into you, sir, getting in! I was in such a hurry, you see: nearly losing my train. No harm done, I hope, sir.'

Billy Bunter thawed. He had been annoyed by a stranger tumbling in over his plump legs. But so many 'sirs' had a placating effect. Evidently this man could see that he was no common person, and that a proper respect was due to him!

'It's all right,' said Bunter, graciously.

The man was silent for some moments. A wrinkle in his brow indicated that he was thinking hard.

He had, in fact, food for thought, though his fellow-passenger was unaware of it. A well-filled wallet which did not belong to him was in his possession. He had been 'second-time lucky', as it were: the prize that had escaped his clutches in Friardale Wood, owing to Bob Cherry's intervention, was now safe in his pocket. But for how long?

He had barely eluded capture at Greenfield, by plunging into the moving train: escaping by the skin of his teeth, as it were. Harry Wharton's prompt action had prevented him from dodging out of the station with his plunder: and the train had been his only resource. But already, he could not doubt, the telephone would be at work: his description flashed along the line: and porters and policemen would be looking out for him at the next stop. His possession of Mr. Butlin's wallet was not likely to last long. And if it was found on him, as it must be, it meant what he would have called a six-months' 'stretch'. And Jimmy Jecks, who had been 'inside' more than once, had the strongest objection to going 'inside' again.

That wallet was not going to be found in him. Pitching it from the train window was one way out. But he dismissed that idea at once. It would be picked up by somebody: neither could he make up his mind to part with so rich a prize for good. Hiding it on the train was scarcely practicable, even if he could have hoped to recover it afterwards. Was there some other way? As he watched the fat, obtuse face of the schoolboy chewing toffee, it came into Jimmy Jecks' mind that there was. He had to get rid of that wallet before he was searched for it: and he had, if he could, to land it somewhere where there was

a chance, at least, of getting his dishonest fingers on it later. Ever so uncertain a chance was better than nothing. The rogue's way of life accustomed him to quick thinking. He was silent, thinking it out, for hardly more than a minute, while Billy Bunter chewed toffee.

'Going to school, sir?' he asked, affably.

Billy Bunter nearly sniffed again. The man did not seem to know that school holidays were on. However, the repeated 'sirs' repressed the sniff.

'We're on holiday,' Bunter condescended to explain. 'I'm on my way to Butlin's now.'

The man gave a little start, at the name.

'Butlin's!' he repeated.

'I expect you've heard of Butlin's Holiday Camps,' said Bunter. 'I'm going up to the Camp at Skegness, with some of my pals from Greyfriars.' The fat Owl was always prepared to talk about himself: only a listener was required. And how was Billy Bunter to guess that that man, a stranger to him, wanted to know where he could be found later?

'Oh, yes. I've heard of Butlin's, of course. So you're going to the Camp at Skegness. Fine bracing place, I've heard. Staying there long, sir?'

'Oh, yes, two or three weeks at least.'

'Hope you'll have a good time, sir.'

Billy Bunter nodded, and chewed toffee. The man rose to his feet, and stood looking from the window. Turning from the window, he stumbled, and pitched over on Bunter.

'Ooooh!' gasped the fat Owl. 'Ow! Look out, will you! Oooogh! Gerroff! Stop grabbing at a fellow, will you? Gerroff!'

'Sorry, sir—my foot slipped—'

'Oooogh!'

Only for a matter of seconds, the man sprawled over the fat junior, grabbing at him as if for support. Billy Bunter had not the faintest idea that, in those few seconds, a wallet was slipped into the inside pocket of his jacket. But as the man disengaged himself from the spluttering Owl, that wallet was no longer in his possession. It was in Billy Bunter's!

'So sorry, sir—my foot slipped when the train jerked—' The man in checks stood up, looking down at the gasping Owl with a penetrating stare: perhaps with some lingering doubt that the fat schoolboy might have some suspicion of the trick he had played. But there was no trace of suspicion in Billy Bunter's fat face. The man had sprawled over him, clutching at him, and rumpling his jacket: that was all Bunter knew. He was annoyed:

but he had not the slightest consciousness of that light-fingered transfer of property. Unless, and until, he might have occasion to grope in that inside pocket, he was likely to remain unconscious of it. All that concerned Billy Bunter, at the moment, was that most of the breath had been knocked out of his extensive circumference. He gasped and gurgled to recover it.

'Urrgh! Wurrgh! Wurrr!' gurgled Bunter. 'Look here—urrggh! I'm all out of breath! Wurrrrrg!'

The man in checks did not stay to listen to his gurgles. He moved across to the door on the corridor. It was Jimmy Jecks' cue, when he stepped out of that train, to step out as far as possible from the carriage where he had left his booty in that fat schoolboy's keeping. He disappeared along the corridor. Once more Billy Bunter was left on his own.

Having, at length, recovered his breath, he resumed operation on the toffee. There was still several chunks left in his pocket, and he chewed them industriously, while his eyes and spectacles scanned the pamphlet which set forth the innumerable attractions of Skegness.

He gave the man in checks no further thought. Why the man had gone along the corridor he did not know, and did not care in the least: the man had no interest whatever for him. In fact, he had almost forgotten his existence, by the time the train stopped at a station. He did not even glance from the window. His own destination was a long way ahead, and he was not interested in wayside stations. He chewed toffee, blinked at the Butlin pamphlet, and remained quite unconscious of a little scene some distance along the platform, when the train was at a standstill.

When it roiled on again, Billy Bunter rolled on with it, happily unaware that the man in checks, when he stepped off, had been surrounded by a couple of porters, a policeman, and a station-master: who walked him off to the station-master's office, to be searched for a wallet bearing the monogram 'W.B.'. Needless to add, no such article was found on the astute rascal. That article, in Billy Bunter's inside jacket pocket, was on its way to Skegness: where probably the acutest officer in the Criminal Investigation Department would never have dreamed of looking for it!

CHAPTER 12

CAKE FOR BUNTER

'THAT fat rabbit!'

'Who?'

There was a crowd at the station at Skegness. In the holiday season, in brilliant summer weather, there could hardly fail to be. That bracing spot naturally attracted a crowd on its own. A Holiday Camp in the vicinity attracted still more. So there were plenty of people about: young and old, tall and short, of all ages and sizes: most if not all of them looking as if they were enjoying life: as no doubt they were. In fact, only one face wore a frown: that of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars.

Why Horace Coker frowned, and to which individual among so many he alluded as a 'fat rabbit', Potter and Greene did not know. But it was clear that Coker was annoyed. Something, or somebody, had come between the wind and his nobility, as it were.

'Cheek!' said Coker. 'That's one of the gang. I expect the others are about. They'd better steer clear of me, that's all.'

'But who—?' asked Potter.

'But what—?' asked Greene.

'Blind?' inquired Coker. He jerked a thumb in the direction of the 'fat rabbit' who had caught his eye. 'That's Bunter.'

'Oh!' said Potter and Greene, becoming aware of Bunter.

They exchanged a wink, behind Coker's burly back.

Coker, they were aware, objected to Remove fags at 'his' Holiday Camp. It was, in Coker's opinion, cheek for Harry Wharton and Co. to make any such plans. It would have been annoying, disconcerting, irritating, in fact awful, if people had supposed that he, Horace James Coker, a Fifth-form senior, was

holiday-making with a crew of Lower boys. It did not occur to Coker that nobody was likely to suppose anything about him, or even to notice that he was in the Camp at all. Coker filled up quite a large space on his own horizon. Somehow or other it always seemed to Coker that he was monarch of all he surveyed, his right there was none to dispute! So the sight of a fat face adorned with a big pair of spectacles brought that frown to Coker's brow. Neither was Billy Bunter steering clear, as so inconsiderable a microbe as a Remove junior ought to have done. He was pushing his way towards the three Fifth-formers, as if he intended to speak to them. Actually, as it appeared, he was going to make out that he knew Coker—before a crowd of people, too! 'I say, you fellows!' squeaked Bunter.

Coker breathed hard. But with considerable self-restraint, he did not smack Bunter's head.

'I say, have you seen anything of Wharton and Cherry and those chaps?' asked Bunter. 'I've been waiting for them, but I can't see them about.'

'Haven't seen them,' answered Potter: Coker disdainingly to reply.

'Might be anywhere in this crowd,' said Greene.

'Well, I don't want to go on to the Camp without them,' said Bunter. 'I say, stop a minute! Hold on a minute, Coker—I say, it's important.'

'What the dickens do you mean?' snapped Coker. 'What's important, you fat frog?'

'I got off in rather a hurry this morning,' explained Bunter. 'I—I forgot my wallet—I—I've left all my money at home.'

'Tons of it, I suppose!' remarked Potter, sarcastically.

Bunter decided not to hear that.

'It's jolly awkward, landed here without any cash,' he squeaked. 'Of course, I shall write to the pater at once, to send my wallet along. I—I've got only threepence in my pocket—not even a bus fare. It will be all right when I hear from the pater, of—of course. I—I suppose one of you fellows couldn't lend me a few bob for a day or two.'

Billy Bunter eyed the three anxiously.

As a matter of fact, he did not 'suppose' anything of the kind. He only hoped, and that was with a very faint hope. Billy Bunter was a borrower of deadly skill: and he could never have computed how many sixpences, shillings, and half-crowns he owed, up and down the Remove at Greyfriars. But borrowing from Fifth-form men—one of whom was scowling at him—was a quite different proposition. It was, in fact, a forlorn hope! Still, it was worth trying on, forlorn as the hope was! There was nothing to lose by trying it on!

And there was no doubt that the position was, as he had stated, awkward.

The threepence change from his ten shilling note could be rattled in his trousers' pocket, and sound as if something more substantial was there: but it was not scheduled to go far in the way of expenditure. And Bunter was hungry after his railway journey. There was no sign of Harry Wharton and Co. in the offing. It was a case of any port in a storm. And there was a refreshment-room quite near at hand!—if only Coker and Co. proved amenable to the voice of the charmer!

But alas for Bunter!

Whether Potter or Greene might have proved amenable, he never knew.

There was nothing amenable about Coker. Coker reached out with a large hand, and gripped a fat ear. He pulled that ear hard. That, to Coker, seemed

the only adequate rejoinder.

'Ow!' yelled Bunter. 'Wow! Leggo! Yow-ow-owow-wow! Beast! Wow!'

Dozens of people stared round. Coker did not mind. All Lincolnshire was welcome to stare at him, if all Lincolnshire liked. Coker was quite indifferent. But if Coker was, Potter and Greene were not.

'For goodness sake, come on!' gasped Potter.

'Come on Coker!' hissed Greene.

They linked arms with Coker on either side, and marched him on, hurriedly. Billy Bunter was left rubbing a reddened fat ear, and blinking after them with a blink so ferocious that it might almost have cracked his spectacles.

'Look here, what's the hurry?' growled Coker. 'What are you rushing a fellow about for?'

'Let's get out to the coach,' snapped Potter.

'There's a coach ready to take us to the Camp,' said Greene. 'They meet the trains here. Come on.'

'I'm not in a hurry, if you are,' snapped Coker. 'The Camp won't run away, I suppose. Aren't you fellows peckish after all that time in the train? You can cut off if you like—I'm going to have something to eat.'

'Oh, all right!' agreed Potter and Greene. Coker of the Fifth had plenty of money, and he was the fellow to throw it about. His faithful friends had no objection whatever to his doing so. They walked into the refreshment-room with him quite cheerfully.

'Beasts!' breathed Billy Bunter, blinking after them as they went. They disappeared: and the fat Owl resumed his roaming, up and down and round about, with his eyes and spectacles watchfully on the look-out for Harry Wharton and Co. But the Famous Five of Greyfriars remained invisible. They were coming to Skegness that day: Bunter knew that. But apparently their train was not yet in. It was a hungry and irritated Owl that blinked about for them in vain. Finally, he rolled away to the buffet. If, after all, they had arrived unseen by Bunter, that was a likely spot to look for them: indeed, quite a certain spot, if the journey had made them anything like as hungry as Bunter. The place was crowded—but in the crowd, no sign of the Famous Five dawned on Billy Bunter's eyes or spectacles. They were not there.

'Beasts!' breathed Bunter, morosely.

But though nothing was to be seen of Harry Wharton and Co. he had another view of Coker and his comrades. He eyed them from a little distance, frowning over his spectacles. Coker and Co. appeared to have been doing themselves very well. They sat round a little table in a corner. That table was well supplied with varied viands: and a cake, of considerable proportions, was still uncut. All three were too busy to notice a fat Owl in the offing: amid a crowd. But Billy Bunter noticed them—his little round eyes and big round spectacles fastening longingly on the cake.

But he did not venture nearer. One ear-pull was enough for Bunter: he did not want the other pulled, over and above. He blinked morosely at the Fifth-formers. and groped in his trousers' pocket, with a faint, faint hope that some forgotten coin might be there as well as his three-pence. But he groped in vain. Three pennies constituted the total sum of his wealth. All that remained was to calculate, anxiously, how much in the way of foodstuffs could be obtained for the very modest sum of threepence.

And all the while, Coker and Co. were tucking into a lavish spread.

The cake, apparently, was intended to wind up the feast. But at last, Coker took up a knife to divide it into sections. It was then that Billy Bunter had a sudden brain-wave. He rolled up to Coker's table.

'I say, you fellows!' he exclaimed, breathlessly. Horace Coker gave him a glare.

'Get out!' he rapped.

'But I say—'

'If you want your cheeky head smacked, Bunter—'

'But I say, it's awful—!' gasped Bunter.

'Eh! What's awful?' asked Potter.

'Did you know the Butlin Camp was on fire?'

'On fire!' The three jumped up, as if moved by the same spring. 'The Camp on fire! The Camp where we're going.'

'Blazing away like anything—seen for miles—'

'Come on, you chaps!' exclaimed Coker. He rushed for the door.

Potter and Greene followed him. If the Butlin Camp, where they were booked for their holiday, was on fire, and blazing away like anything, it was more than enough to draw Coker and Co. They simply tore off.

Billy Bunter blinked after them as they vanished. He grinned. He had not been sure that it would work. But it had worked. He did not waste time. How long it would take Coker and Co. to discover that there was no fire anywhere in the vicinity of Skegness, and that the Butlin Camp presented its normal and attractive aspect, he did not know: but delays were dangerous. Two fat hands grabbed the cake that Coker had been about to cut. Lingered only for a moment to break off a chunk, and cram it into a capacious mouth, the fat Owl slid it under his jacket, and rolled away.

Five minutes later, Coker and Co. were back again.

They came back breathing wrath, and looking for the fat Owl who had pulled their leg. But Billy Bunter was gone. So was the cake!

For the next quarter of an hour Coker fairly dragged Potter and Greene all over the station, hunting for Bunter and the cake, amid jostling crowds.

Fortunately for the fat Owl, they did not find him: and at last they gave it up, and went out to board the motor-coach for the Camp. But if they had found Bunter, they would hardly have found the cake. An X-ray outfit would have been required for that. Billy Bunter, in a secluded corner, had finished it to the last plum and the last crumb.

CHAPTER 13

SOMETHING LIKE A SURPRISE

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

Billy Bunter blinked at five cheery faces. The Famous Five had turned up at last. Billy Bunter was glad to see them. Perhaps they were glad also to see Bunter. Anyway that was a trifle that did not matter. What mattered was that five fellows, probably well supplied with pocket-money for a holiday by the sea, had turned up, to relieve the anxieties of an impecunious Owl. That

mattered very much indeed.

'I've been waiting about for you, hours and hours,' grunted Bunter. 'Did you lose your train, or what?'

'We did, as it happens,' answered Harry Wharton. 'You see—'

'Just like you!' grunted Bunter. 'Losing trains, and keeping a fellow hanging about a station hours and hours and hours and hours—'

'Well, here we are!' said Bob Cherry, cheerily. 'Feast your eyes, old fat man.'

'Ha, ha ha!'

'I've been waiting and waiting and waiting—'

'Why?' asked Frank Nugent. 'You know your way out of a railway station, I suppose, and there's motor-coaches ready to take everybody on to the Camp.'

'Oh, really, Nugent! I didn't want to miss my pals, of course. And—and—and——!'

'And what?' grunted Johnny Bull. Perhaps he could guess what'.

'Well, ain't you fellows hungry after all that time in the train?' asked Bunter.

'There's a place here, in the station—'

'That's all right—we had a snack on the train,' said Harry. 'We're going right on to the Camp! Come on.'

'I say, you fellows, don't rush about as if it was a footrace!' exclaimed the fat Owl, irritably. 'You can rush about when you get to the Camp, or when you go out on the Wolds. Hold on, can't you. Look here, suppose we don't get in in time for a meal? What about that?'

'Right as rain,' said Bob. 'There's cafés, and milk-bars, and restaurants and things, where the campers can buy all they want.'

Billy Bunter gave him an expressive look. Places where campers could buy all they wanted were not of much use to a fat Owl whose financial resources were limited to threepence. Holidays at Butlin's were reasonably inexpensive: but such a sum as threepence really was inadequate.

'Come on!' added Bob. 'The minute we get to the Camp, we'll roll you off the bus, and you can head for the nearest grub, while we have a trot round.'

Billy Bunter was hungry. Coker's cake had done no more than take the keen edge off his appetite. But he had no urge to head for 'grub' while the other fellows trotted round the Camp. Threepence would hardly have seen him through.

'I say, you fellows, don't be in such a dashed hurry!' yapped Bunter. 'We can get a snack here, and there's no hurry—'

'Oh, none at all,' said Johnny Bull, sarcastically. 'What about sitting round all the afternoon watching Bunter eat? That's what we came to the seaside for, isn't it?'

Not quite!' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'Come on'

'I say, you fellows, don't hike off while a fellow's talking to you!' howled Bunter.

But the Famous Five did hike off! They jostled away down a crowded platform, and the blink Billy Bunter cast after them through his big spectacles was quite expressive. Then he rolled after them. The unscrupulous Owl had been prepared to sit down to the most extensive meal that the station buffet could provide, and at the end to discover that he had left his money at home—in which circumstances, whoever had to pay the bill, it would certainly not have been William Bunter! But that artful dodge, on his own, was

impracticable. So, in a state of considerable annoyance and indignation, he rolled out of the station after the Famous Five, into the brilliant sunshine of Skegness.

'Jolly here,' said Bob Cherry, after his first glance round. The cheery Bob was seldom in any spot that he did not regard as more or less jolly. But the sunny seaside at this particular spot undoubtedly was jolly.

'The jolliffulness is terrific!' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Topping!' said Harry Wharton. 'Lot's of people seem to think so, too! What a crowd! That's our bus for the Camp, I think.'

'I say, you fellows—!'

'Come on, Bunter!' said Bob. 'These coaches for the Camp take fifty passengers, so there'll be room for you and nearly a dozen more.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, you fellows, you needn't dash for that coach. I don't want to crowd in with a mob, if you fellows do. What's the good of cramming into a coach—'

'Mean to say you'd rather walk!' exclaimed Bob, in surprise.

'No!' roared Bunter. 'I wouldn't rather walk, you fathead. Catch me walking miles and miles and miles—'

'It's only two or three miles to the Camp,' said Johnny Bull. 'Walk it if you like, Bunter.'

'You silly ass, I don't mean walk it!' howled Bunter.

'Well, what the dickens do you mean, then?' asked Bob. 'If we don't bus it, and don't walk it, how are we getting to the Camp? Have you got a helicopter in your trousers' pocket?'

'What about a car?' yapped Bunter. 'We can get a car here, and they would run the lot of us out to the Camp for a quid or so. I don't believe in being mean when fellows are on a holiday. Chaps expect to spend money, at the seaside. Do the thing in style, see? What's a quid or so when fellows are on a seaside holiday?'

Snort, from Johnny Bull.

'If you've got quids to chuck away, you fat ass, we haven't,' he said. 'We're going on that motor-coach. Come on, you fellows.'

'Hold on, though,' said Bob Cherry. 'If Bunter prefers a car—'

'I jolly well do!' snapped Bunter. 'Cramming in with a mob isn't my style, I can jolly well tell you.'

'That settles it, then!' said Bob.

'Look here, Bob—!' growled Johnny.

'My dear chap,' said Bob. 'If Bunter wants to do the thing in style, why not? In fact, it's jolly generous of him to offer to stand us a car. There's only one point—better make sure you've got the tin to settle with the driver, old fat man. He will want to be paid, you know.' At which there was a general chuckle. Nobody supposed that Billy Bunter had the remotest intention of 'standing' that car: as, indeed, he hadn't! Such trifles Bunter was prepared to leave to his friends.

The fat Owl frowned.

'If you fellows are going to be stingy—!' he said.

'We are—when it comes to paying quids for a car we don't want,' assured Bob. 'Awfully stingy.'

'The stingfulness will be terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,' chuckled Hurree

Jamset Ram Singh.

'Oh, all right!' said Bunter. 'I'll pay! Nothing stingy about me, I hope! Of course, we pay at the other end.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! What are you cackling at, I'd like to know.'

'No deception, gentlemen!' said Bob. 'Bunter wouldn't find himself short of cash at the other end, and leave us to settle with the driver: would you, old fat man?'

'Yes—I mean no—of course not—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, do stop cackling,' yapped Bunter. 'I'll settle for the car all right, if that's what's worrying you. Only—'

'Ah! There's an "only", is there?' said Bob. 'I sort of fancied that there might be.'

'Well, I'm not sure I put my wallet in my pocket, when I left this morning,' explained Bunter. 'I'll go through my pockets for it while we're in the car—'
'Better make sure, before we get into that car!' grinned Bob. 'We'll wait while you sort out that wallet.'

'We don't want to hang about here in this crowd—'

'We don't mind a bit! Sort out that wallet.'

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose. He blinked morosely at five grinning faces. However, he proceeded to go through his pockets for a nonexistent wallet. After which, his only resource was to announce that he had, after all, left the wallet at home! Which announcement the Famous Five expected to hear, as a matter of course.

But—!

It was said of old that it is the unexpected that happens. A strange, startling change came over Billy Bunter's fat face, as he groped in the inside pocket of his jacket. Certainly he did not expect his fat fingers to contact anything in the shape of a wallet there. Neither did the grinning juniors watching his performance. But the utterly unexpected happened! Those fat fingers did contact a wallet. In utter amazement, Billy Bunter drew it out. It was quite an expensive-looking wallet, and it had the monogram 'W.B.' embossed on it. Billy Bunter blinked at it, hardly able to believe his eyes or his spectacles. He stared at it as he might have stared at a ghost.

But it was certainly not the ghost of a wallet! It was a quite solid and substantial object that the fat Owl held in his fat fingers. Like a fellow in a dream, Bunter gazed at it. Never, in all his fat career, had Billy Bunter been so astonished. In what mysterious manner that plump wallet had found its way into his pocket, he could not begin to imagine. But there it was!

'Oh!' ejaculated Bunter. 'Oh, crikey!'

He stood with the wallet in his fat fingers, too amazed to do anything but blink at it.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the jolly old wallet, at any rate,' said Bob Cherry.

'Anything in it, Bunter?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I—I—I don't know—!' gasped the bewildered Owl.

'We do!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Cram-jam full of nothing! Look here, you chaps, that coach will be going. I'm going in it, for one!'

'I—I—I say—!'

'Come on, Bunter.'

Johnny Bull went. His comrades followed him. Billy Bunter's antics might be more or less entertaining: but they were not going to lose the coach for the Camp. But Bunter did not follow them. He remained petrified, staring with bulging eyes at that amazing unexpected wallet. He could almost have supposed that he was dreaming this.

'Come on, Bunter!' shouted Bob, over his shoulder.

But Bunter did not come on. He did not stir. He did not even blink after them. He stood as if in a trance, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles at that wallet. The motor-coach rolled off to the Camp with the Famous Five. It rolled off without Billy Bunter.

Chapter 14

A WONDERFUL WINDFALL

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter.

The Famous Five were gone. Billy Bunter hardly noticed that they were gone. He was too bewildered to notice anything but that unexpected, amazing wallet. It had turned up in his pocket as if by magic. He could hardly have been more surprised if it had vanished again by magic. But it did not vanish! There it was, solid and substantial in his fat fingers.

His spectacles fixed on the monogram, tastefully embossed on expensive leather. W.B. They were his own initials. If W.B. did not stand for William Bunter, for what could W.B. stand? Obviously, they were his own initials—and in whatever mysterious way that wallet had been introduced into his pocket, it could only be intended for him! That, at least, was clear—to Bunter!

'Oh, crikey!' repeated the astonished Owl.

It felt as if it was full of something. What could a wallet be full of, unless—!

Billy Bunter could hardly hope that it was full of notes. The wallet itself was a valuable article: but that its contents were still more valuable was really too much to expect. But really, after the amazing discovery of the wallet in his pocket, Billy Bunter could hardly have been astonished at anything.

At length he opened it, to ascertain what was inside. Then he gasped aloud.

His fat brain almost swam. His eyes popped at the edges of almost innumerable notes. Ten shilling notes, pound notes, even five pound notes!

What was the total sum the fat Owl could not even guess. But he knew it was a larger sum than he had ever dreamed of possessing. Had the Famous Five remained on the spot, they would certainly have had to be convinced that Billy Bunter was in a position to 'stand' a car, or a whole fleet of cars!

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter, for the third time.

He tried to think it out.

He had never dreamed that there was a wallet in his pocket at all, let alone one crammed with notes. How had it got there? Who had, so strangely and secretly, bestowed upon him such a gift? Who, indeed, could have got at his pocket at all to put it there? It must— so far as Bunter could see—have been

slipped in, before he put the jacket on. It must have originated at Bunter Villa, before he started that morning!

Was it—could it be—a very extraordinary and unlooked-for burst of generosity on the part of his pater? Had Mr. Bunter slipped that wallet into his pocket, as a happy surprise for him when he found it there?

It seemed improbable. It was true that William had explained at home, more than once, and indeed at considerable length, that a fellow needed a spot of extra pocket-money on a seaside holiday. But he could not remember that Mr. Bunter had seemed much impressed. Indeed, whenever Bunter had referred to the subject, Mr. Bunter had seemed disposed to brush it aside. As practically everything was free, at a Butlin Camp, Mr. Bunter had appeared to have no doubt that a ten shilling note, over and above his railway-fare, would see William through. No doubt that was an error on Mr. Bunter's part: but there it was: or there, at least, it had seemed to be.

But now—this! Kind relatives had supplied Harry Wharton and Co. with pocket-money for their holiday: but the total wealth of the Famous Five assuredly did not amount to so much as Billy Bunter now held in his fat hands. For the first time in his fat career, Billy Bunter was as good as rolling in it! Billy Bunter's fat brain was not designed, by Nature, for working out difficult problems. And really, the problem of that wallet was more baffling than anything in Euclid.

Not for a moment did he dream of connecting that wallet with the weasel-eyed man he had met in the train, and whose existence he had already forgotten. Nor could he have believed, if he had been told, that any hand could have slipped something into his pocket without his knowledge. Billy Bunter was very far from realizing that he was an obtuse duffer. His own belief was that he was a very wary fellow indeed. It simply could not occur to him that the wallet had been landed on him by a pickpocket anxious to get rid of it. That wallet had been put into his pocket before he put that jacket on—that, to Bunter, seemed absolutely certain.

It could only have been his pater! Who else?

Possibly Mr. Bunter was in unusual funds. He was a stockbroker, and there were all sorts of ups and downs in the City. From talk at home, Bunter knew that his respected pater was sometimes a bull, sometimes a bear, sometimes even a stag. He had only the vaguest idea of the activities of those strange animals that roamed Throgmorton Street: but he was aware that in some mysterious way they made and lost money. It looked now as if Mr. Bunter, whether as a bull, a bear, or a stag, had made some and generously passed on a slice of it to his hopeful son—in a handsome wallet specially embossed with William's own initials in a monogram!

That, undoubtedly, was it! That was it, because it couldn't be anything else—so far as Billy Bunter could see with either his eyes or his spectacles! That munificent gift came from his pater, simply because it couldn't have come from any other person!

Amazement gradually gave place to satisfaction. He was still astonished. Even after he had worked it out in his fat brain that Mr. Bunter was the donor of that wallet crammed with notes, astonishment remained, for Mr. Bunter certainly had never done anything of the kind before, and Billy certainly had never dreamed that he ever would. But as he blinked, and blinked, at that well-filled wallet, gleeful satisfaction predominated. Billy Bunter was no longer

a fellow with the deplorable sum of three-pence to jingle in a trouser's pocket. Billy Bunter was a wealthy fellow. Billy Bunter had more cash than the Famous Five put together. More than any dozen, or two or three dozen, holiday-makers at the Skegness Camp. He swelled with importance as he realized it. When, at last, he shoved that wallet back into his pocket, and left the spot, he almost strutted. It was a happy and exhilarated Bunter. He was in no hurry to get on to the Camp. Whether, if he did, he would arrive in time for a meal, little cared Bunter. There were plenty of places in Skegness where any amount of money could be spent on any amount of provender: and Bunter remembered that he was hungry. At school, when the fat Owl had any cash, it was wont to take unto itself wings, and fly away—in the direction of the tuck-shop. Some of his new-found wealth was certainly going to be expended on refreshments liquid and solid, without delay. But be it said to Bunter's credit, that he was not unmindful of the munificence of that unexpected windfall. Even Billy Bunter realized that a word of thanks would not come amiss, in such circumstances. That really was the least he could do, after his pater had shelled out so magnificently. His first proceeding was to purchase a picture-postcard, and a stamp. On the blank portion of the card he scribbled a grateful note.

Dear Father,

I have arived in Skegness safe and sownd and feeling phine. I have fownd the wollet you put into my pokket before I left, and I am verry glad to have so mutch munny to spend on my hollyday. It is a luvly wollet and I like my monogram on it verry mutch. Menny thanks for the wollet and the munny.

William.

That postcard was duly dropped into the post: the fat Owl little dreaming of the surprise it was likely to cause when it was delivered at Bunter Villa in Surrey. Then Billy Bunter proceeded to more important matters. In the shortest possible time he was seated at a table laden with such a spread as he had seen hitherto only in happy dreams.

Bunter, on the very rare occasions when he was in funds, was not the fellow to stint himself. Bunter liked a lot. Now he proceeded to encircle quite a lot—in fact, a tremendous lot. His only regret was that the other fellows had not lingered. Willingly he would have stood them a spread regardless of expense: still more willingly would he have dazzled their astonished eyes with a display of that wad of notes. However, that would come later, at the Camp—certainly the Co. were not going to escape being dazzled by Billy Bunter's wealth! By the time he had finished that spread, Bunter was feeling rather disinclined to move. He had loaded well up to the Plimsoll line, and a little over. However, he rolled out at last, slowly but happily. He did not condescend to cast a single blink in the direction of a motor-coach. Motor-coaches were far beneath a wealthy Owl. Billy Bunter was, after all, going to arrive in Butlinland in style. He was lolling back on cushions in a very handsome and expensive car when, at length, he rolled out of Skegness on his way to the Camp.

CHAPTER 15

WEALTHY BUNTER

'Is it topping?' asked Bob Cherry.

'It is!' said Frank Nugent.

'It are!' agreed Johnny Bull.

'The topfulness is terrific.'

'What a jolly crowd!' said Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five were happily landed in Butlinland. They had been handed their badges and their chalet keys, which answered the purpose of identity cards. They had wandered about, amid crowds, exploring the Camp, and seeing what was to be seen—and there was quite a tremendous amount to be seen. There was everything, it appeared, but silence, which seemed a little scarce. But what cheery holiday-maker wanted silence? Strains of music from the Butlin Radio mingled with a buzzing boom from the roller-skating rink: splashing and merry voices from the bathing-pools with the clicking of table-tennis balls, the clicking of cameras, shrieks of merriment from the Infants' Amusement Park, and the hum of innumerable voices. They had walked along arcades of shops, looked in at the theatres, had their photographs taken, admired the bronze bust of Mr. William Butlin in the Reception Hall: made the acquaintance of the amiable gentleman who was House-captain of Kent House, the House in which their chalets were located: and with so much to see, and so much to hear, they had rather forgotten that one member of the party had not yet arrived in the Butlin fairyland.

However, they remembered Billy Bunter at last, and walked down to the main gate, to look out like five Sister Annes and see whether he was coming.

Motor-coach after motor-coach had landed relays of Butlineers at the Camp, but the plump ornament of the Greyfriars Remove was not among them.

'What the dickens has become of the fat ass?' asked Bob Cherry. 'It's hours since we left him at the station.'

'Here comes another car!'

There had been plenty of cars on the road from Skegness. Now another came whizzing up the road: a very handsome-looking car. The juniors glanced at it as it came. Billy Bunter, so far as they knew, was in his accustomed state of impecuniosity. Even a modest taxicab was out of his reach—so far as they knew! Nevertheless, they would not have been surprised to behold a fat face and a pair of gleaming spectacles in that expensive-looking car. Bunter was the fellow to take chances—long chances.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob, suddenly.

'Is it Bunter?'

'It's Bunter!'

'The fat chump!' growled Johnny Bull. 'I wonder what they're charging him for that car! Not under a quid.' Johnny gave a snort. 'I jolly well know his game—pay at this end—anybody but Bunter, what?'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'If that's it, we shall have to see him through,' he said. 'Can't let a Greyfriars man bilk the driver.'

'Might have been something in that wallet we saw him fish out at the station,' suggested Bob.

'The mightfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Another snort from Johnny!

'You know Bunter!' he grunted. 'He wanted to stick us for a car—pay at this end! Who was going to pay, do you think?'

'Not Bunter!' said Nugent. 'Not in his line at all.'

'Well, leave him to it, and let him make the best of it!' growled Johnny. 'It will be a lesson to him.'

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Can't start here with a row,' he said. 'If Bunter's banking on sticking us for the car hire, we shall have to stand for it—and kick him afterwards.'

Johnny Bull indulged in another snort. However, he came out into the road with the other fellows, to meet the car as it slowed down. Billy Bunter gave them a wave of a fat hand.

They looked at him rather curiously. Bunter seemed quite at his ease. Several smears on his fat face seemed to indicate that he had recently been somewhere where there was jam. If Bunter was taking chances in hiring that expensive car, it did not appear to disturb his equanimity. Indeed, fat self-satisfaction was written all over him. Billy Bunter, for some reason quite unknown to the chums of the Remove, was in high feather.

The car stopped, and the fat Owl rolled out.

He blinked cheerily at the five.

'So here you are at last,' said Bob. 'What have you been doing all this while?'

'Well, I stopped for a snack in Skegness,' said Bunter. 'Jolly place—good grub, and lots of it. You fellows shouldn't have rushed off as you did. I'd have stood you a topping spread.'

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'We've got some tin for the hols,' he remarked. 'But we're not rich enough for you to stand us topping spreads, old fat man.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—! You fellows came here on one of the motor-coaches, I suppose?' asked Bunter.

'We did!' admitted Bob.

'Packed in with a mob!' said Bunter. 'Hope you liked it.'

'We did, rather,' said Harry.

Sniff, from Bunter.

'Wouldn't do for me,' he said. 'I'm accustomed to something a bit more select, you know.'

'We don't!' said Bob.

'Well, you know now I've told you,' yapped Bunter. 'I daresay you fellows have to count your half-crowns and bobs,' he added, condescendingly. 'We can't all be rich.'

'We can't!' grunted Johnny Bull. 'And you least of all, you fat spoofer.'

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'He's been feeding,' said Bob, scanning the jammy smears on the fat face.

'There must have been something in that wallet, after all. Or have you run up a bill somewhere, you fat villain?'

Billy Bunter chuckled, a fat chuckle. Certainly there had been 'something' in that wallet: something that was going to surprise and dazzle these fellows

who took it for granted that he was still the impecunious Owl they knew! 'I jolly well did run up a bill, and I jolly well paid it, too,' he answered. 'I can afford it, if you fellows can't. I can tell you I had a topping spread, and I've had a run round in the car since, too. I'm not the chap to be close with money when I'm on a holiday! Not my style.'

'Don't they charge extra for running round in the car?' asked Nugent.

'Eh! I suppose so,' assented Bunter. 'Jolly good run, along by the sea, and out on the Wolds. I'd have taken you fellows if you hadn't rushed off as you did. Better stick to me, in future, if you want a good time. Expense is no object to me, on holiday.'

They gazed at him.

'Rolling in it, what?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

Billy Bunter nodded cheerfully.

'Something like that,' he assented. 'Lots, anyhow.'

'You've had that postal order you were expecting at Greyfriars'?' asked Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Well, if you're rolling in it, you'd better settle with your driver,' said Johnny, still sarcastic. 'He's waiting.'

Billy Bunter dived a fat hand into his pocket. The Famous Five watched him. They knew their Bunter! That he had a wallet they were aware, having had a glimpse of it at the station. But that there was anything of a substantial nature in that wallet they were not aware: neither did they suppose so for one moment. They fully expected that the next item on the programme would be an announcement that in the hurry of departure from Bunter Villa that morning, the fat Owl had omitted to put any notes in that wallet.

A surprise was in store for them! Billy Bunter blinked inquiringly at the chauffeur.

'How much?' he asked, carelessly.

'Thirty shillings, sir.'

Five pairs of eyes opened a little wider, as Billy Bunter extracted two pound notes from the wallet. With a flourish, he handed them to the driver.

'Keep the change!' he said, graciously.

'Thank you, sir.'

Bunter closed the wallet and jammed it back into his pocket, grinning. He was well aware of the surprise in five faces, and he was enjoying it. Seldom, very seldom, if ever, did Billy Bunter have a chance of swanking as a wealthy fellow who could afford ten-shilling tips! He was the fellow to make the most of such a chance, if it came his way.

'Well!' said Bob Cherry, 'wonders will never cease! Bunter's postal-order must have turned up at last, and it must have been a whacker.'

'Oh, really, Cherry——'

'Glad to see you so jolly well fixed for the hols, old fat man.'

'You see, the pater came down rather handsome,' explained Bunter, negligently. 'He's got tons of money, as I daresay I've told you—'

'Lots of times!' said Johnny Bull.

'Perhaps you didn't believe me!' said Bunter, with a curl of a fat lip.

'No perhaps about that!' grunted Johnny.

'Yak!' was Billy Bunter's elegant rejoinder.

Billy Bunter's fat little nose was high in the air, as he rolled into Camp with the

chums of the Remove. Bunter was no longer the impecunious Owl of Greyfriars. He was no longer the persistent borrower of half-crowns and 'bobs' and 'tanners'. Half-crowns and 'bobs' and 'tanners' were far beneath him now. He was a wealthy Bunter: prepared to shed his unaccustomed wealth all over Butlinland. Bunter was feeling fine: in fact he was feeling rather like the classic gentleman of old, who was like to strike the stars with his exalted head.

CHAPTER 16

COKER ON THE WAR-PATH

'BUNTER!'

Snore!

'Bunter! Bunty! Bunt!' roared Bob Cherry.

Snore!

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'They have a lot of competitions here,' he remarked. 'Bunter ought to go in as the Sleeping Beauty!'

Snore! from Billy Bunter.

Five cheery faces looked in on him, in the bright summer morning. The Camp was humming and buzzing with activity. But Billy Bunter did not seem eager to add himself to the active list. There was no imperative rising-bell at Butlin's: in which respect it was, in Bunter's opinion, far superior to Greyfriars. True, Butlin Radio announced a fairly early 'Good morning' to all Campers. It announced breakfast. But there was no compulsion about it. Holiday-makers who preferred to be organized, were organized in quite a masterly manner. Holiday-makers who didn't, did as they liked. What Billy Bunter liked was frowsting in bed till a quite late hour in the morning. So there he was, still snoring, after the Famous Five had breakfasted, and were ready to make the most of a sunny day.

Harry Wharton and Co. had been two or three days in Camp, so far. They had found plenty of occupation for every minute of every day, and every minute of every evening up to bedtime. Butlin's seemed to provide practically everything, to please all tastes. There were theatres, concerts, cinemas, ballrooms, sports stadiums, swimming-pools, facilities for almost every game under the summer sun: arcades of shops where you could buy almost anything you liked: boats and bikes if you wanted them: and all around the bracing air of Skegness, and an atmosphere of general content and friendliness. It was Harry Wharton and Co's. first experience in a Butlin Camp: and they liked it tremendously. There might be moments when, amid swarms of teenagers, a few might prove a little too braced by the bracing air and get a little out of hand. That was where the Redcoats came in. The Redcoats were officials whose duty it was to keep order in the Camp, tactfully but firmly subduing any undue exuberance: but so far as the Greyfriars fellows could see, they never had any trouble. Good-humour reigned supreme.

That morning the Co. were going down to the sea to bathe and swim, so they were calling Bunter. It was possible that, had Bunter stayed in bed, it would not have detracted from their enjoyment of the salt sea waves. Indeed, so far

as they were concerned, he was welcome to snore till Butlin Radio announced the evening meal, if the spirit moved him so to do. But they did not want to leave him on his own if he wanted to join up: so there they were, with Bob Cherry's powerful voice rousing the echoes of the Camp.

The Greyfriars party were accommodated in comfortable little chalets, which were grouped into Houses, each under the superintendence of a House-captain. Their House-captain was a pleasant young man whom they knew as Freddy. This system rather reminded them of school: the Redcoats, in their manners and customs and duties, being rather like the prefects at Greyfriars. The chalets were one-roomed, planned to accommodate up to four: each with its own bathroom attached. Two chalets had been allotted to the party: and on the first day it had been a moot point which member of the Famous Five should share with Bunter. Nobody was anxious to be lulled at night by Billy Bunter's snore, in closer quarters than the spacious dormitory at Greyfriars. But Freddy had come to the rescue: and the five had one chalet, and Billy Bunter had the other to himself. Even so they did not quite escape the snore. But it was at least subdued by distance. Now, however, it rumbled close at hand, as they looked in on the sleeping beauty.

'Bunter!' roared Bob. 'Wake up, old fat man! Coming out?'

Snore!

'Leave him to it!' suggested Johnny Bull.

'Well, he belongs to us, sort of,' said Bob. 'We'd better wake him, and see whether he wants to come out, or whether he wants to keep up that melody till next term at Greyfriars.'

Bob shook a fat shoulder. Billy Bunter's snore modulated into a grunt.

'Urrrrgh!'

'Wake up, old fat man!' roared Bob, Bunter's eyes opened.

'Beast! Leggo! Tain't rising-bell.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Tain't!' chuckled Bob. 'But it's half past we're going down to the jolly old sea, and if you want to come, we'll give you five minutes to pack your clobber.'

'Beast!'

'Does that mean yes or no?' inquired Bob.

The fat Owl gave him a glare.

'I'm not turning out yet!' he yapped. 'We're on holiday, ain't we? Think I'm going to turn out as if we were at school? What's the good of a holiday if a fellow can't have his sleep out. Go and eat coke.'

'Okay—come on, then, you fellows!' said Bob.

'I'll be ready in about an hour,' added Bunter. 'I'm not getting up early to please you, Bob Cherry. You can wait for me, see?'

'Anybody feel like mooching about for an hour waiting for Bunter to get out of bed?' inquired Bob. 'Don't all speak at once.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The chums of the Remove did not all speak at once! They did not speak at all. They chuckled, and crowded out of Bunter's chalet.

'I say, you fellows,' came a howl behind them. 'You can jolly well wait for me. I shan't keep you more than an hour.'

'You won't!' agreed Bob, over his shoulder. 'You won't even keep us a minute, old porpoise. Good-bye.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter, with that valediction, settled down once more to repose. The Famous Five went out cheerily into the sunshine. Somewhat to their surprise, a familiar voice greeted them: a voice they had not heard since Greyfriars had broken up for the summer holidays.

'Oh! Here you are, you young sweeps.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' ejaculated Bob. 'Is that Coker?'

It was Horace Coker. Potter and Greene were with him: not looking quite at their ease. No doubt they were enjoying life in Butlinland: but it was probable that Horace Coker's manners and customs did not add to the enjoyment. Horace Coker did not know that he was an obstreperous ass, though any fellow at Greyfriars could have told him. Potter and Greene did: and they were never quite sure what Coker was going to do next, which might draw unwelcome attention from a Redcoat.

Coker frowned at the five. Evidently he still regarded it as cheek on their part to be holiday-making in 'his' Camp. However, the Famous Five were rather relieved that he did not seem to be contemplating hostilities. They were prepared to give Coker all he might ask for: but they did not want a row in Butlinland.

'Good morning, Coker,' said Harry Wharton, politely.

'Top of a beautiful morning, my esteemed Coker!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, affably. 'The pleasurefulness of seeing you is terrific.'

'Having a good time here, Coker?' asked Frank Nugent.

Horace Coker did not answer that inquiry: neither did he acknowledge the polite greetings. Coker had no politeness to waste on cheeky fags. They were lucky, in Coker's opinion, that he did not smack their heads all round!

'Is that fat freak Bunter with you?' he grunted.

'Bunter? Yes, Bunter's here,' said Harry. 'There's his chalet. But he's not up yet. If you want to see Bunter, you'd better call later.'

Why Horace Coker wanted to see Bunter, the Co. could not guess: being unaware of an incident, involving a cake, at Skegness Station a few days ago. But if he wanted to see Bunter, he was welcome to do so, so far as they were concerned.

'Cheerio, Coker!' said Bob Cherry: and the chums of the Remove walked on, leaving Coker of the Fifth to call on Bunter, or to delay his call till the fat Owl turned out, just as he liked.

But Horace Coker had no idea of delaying that call. He frowned after the cheery juniors as they departed, and then turned to Potter and Greene.

'So he's here,' said Coker. 'I fancied that he might be with that cheeky gang. Not jolly easy to find anybody you want, in this swarm. But I've found him now!'

Potter and Greene exchanged an uneasy glance. No doubt Billy Bunter deserved a smack or two for the wily trick he had played. But they did not want the obstreperous Horace kicking up a row in Butlinland. And there was a Redcoat quite near at hand.

'I wouldn't bother about that young sweep if I were you, Coker,' ventured Potter.

'You're not me!' Coker pointed out.

'Look here, we don't want a row!' said Greene. 'We're not at Greyfriars now, Coker. Don't kick up a shindy here.'

'Who's kicking up a shindy?' inquired Coker. 'Did that fat young sweep pull

our leg in Skegness the other day, or didn't he?'

'Yes: but—'

'Did he wolf that cake after making fools of us, or didn't he?'

'Um! Yes! But—'

'I'm going to smack his cheeky head, hard!' said Coker. 'If that's what you call kicking up a shindy, Billy Greene, I'll thank you to keep your opinion to yourself.'

'But look here—!' urged Potter.

'Don't jaw,' said Coker. 'Just come along and root that fat freak out. He won't play any more tricks on me, after I've done with him, you can take my word for that.'

'Coker, old chap—'

'I said don't jaw!' interrupted Coker. 'Come along.'

Coker marched off. Potter and Greene exchanged another glance. And they did not 'come along' as Coker bade.

'Want to join in a rumpus, and get run in by a Redcoat, Greeney?' asked Potter.

'Not a lot,' said Greene.

'Better clear off, I think.'

'Much better,' agreed Greene.

And they cleared off. If Coker persisted in going on the war-path, his friends were willing to leave him to the enjoyment thereof, wholly on his own. They disappeared in the direction of the Sports Stadium, and Horace Coker, with a grimly frowning brow, tramped into Billy Bunter's chalet: to be greeted there by a Gargantuan snore!

CHAPTER 17

CALLED TO ORDER

'YAROOOOH!'

Billy Bunter awoke quite suddenly.

Bunter was not easy to wake. Having settled down to slumber again after the visit of the Famous Five, less than a minute had sufficed to plunge him once more into the embrace of Morpheus. There were few things that Billy Bunter could do well: but sleeping was one of the few. In that line Bunter had hardly an equal. Rip Van Winkle had little or nothing on Bunter—even Epimenides of old could scarcely have beaten him. At Greyfriars, the rising-bell often failed to rouse him, and he did not open his eyes till some kindly hand jerked off his bedclothes. Nevertheless, on this occasion Billy Bunter did awaken promptly. A vigorous shove that rolled him out of bed, to land with a bump on the floor, sufficed to wake even Bunter. He woke and roared.

'Yaroooh! Beast! If that's you, Bob Cherry—oh' Billy Bunter broke off, with a gasp, as he blinked at a burly figure on the other side of the bed out of which he had rolled. 'Oh! Oh, crikey! Is—is—is that Coker?'

The fat Owl sat up, in a tangle of bedclothes.

He groped for his spectacles, jammed them on a fat little nose, and blinked across the bed at the rugged features of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars.

Bunter had forgotten Coker. He had forgotten that cake. He had, in fact, consumed so many cakes, tarts, buns, and other sticky comestibles, since arriving in Butlinland, that he could hardly be expected to remember a single item. Billy Bunter was wealthy now, and his wealth flowed in an almost uninterrupted stream in any direction where there was something sticky. But if he had forgotten Coker and Coker's cake, evidently Coker had not forgotten him! For here was Coker, glaring at him across the bed.

'I've got you now!' said Coker, grimly. 'I've been keeping an eye open for you, Bunter. Now I've got you.'

'I—I—I say, you keep off!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I never—I mean, it wasn't me—I—I say—oh, crikey!'

'Funny, wasn't it, to pull a fellow's leg, and send him rushing off and scoff his cake while he was gone, what?' said Coker. 'You didn't expect to have your cheeky head smacked for it, what?'

'I—I—I never had that cake,' gasped Bunter. 'Never touched it! Think I'd scoff your cake? It wasn't much of a cake, either—hardly any plums in it—I—I mean, I'll pay for it if you like—'

'I haven't come here to be paid for it,' said Coker. 'I don't care a bean about the cake! I'm going to wallop you for pulling my leg. Like your cheek to butt in here at all, in my Holiday Camp. But if you fancy you can pull a Fifth-form man's leg, and get away with it, you've got another guess coming, you fat freak. Get up! You've got it coming!'

Billy Bunter got up, eyeing Coker very warily, across the bed. If he had it coming, he was not at all willing for it to come. He rather wished now that he had turned out, and gone down to the beach with the other fellows. Laziness, as often happened, had been his undoing.

'Come here!' commanded Coker.

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap—' gasped Bunter.

'If you call me old chap, I'll give you a few extra! Come here, I tell you.'

But the fat figure in pyjamas did not 'come there'. Billy Bunter seemed to prefer his own side of the bedstead.

Coker reached across it. Bunter backed out of reach.

'Look here, you keep off!' he howled. 'I'll yell for help—'

'Fat lot I care if you yell,' said Coker, disdainfully. 'You'll yell all right, when I get my hands on you.' And Coker rushed round the bed.

Billy Bunter plunged across it to escape. But he did not quite escape. A large hand closed on a fat ankle as he sprawled across the bed.

'Got you!' grinned Coker. 'Now, then—' He tugged.

'Leggo!' yelled Bunter.

Coker did not let go. He tugged. In sheer desperation, Billy Bunter kicked out with his free foot. There was a roar from Coker as that foot landed, with a sudden bang, on a rugged nose.

'Oh! Ow! My boko! Wow!'

His hand went to his nose, releasing the fat ankle. Bunter rolled off the bed.

But he had no time to flee. He had barely reached the door, when Coker, with a trickle of red running from his nose, grasped him.

'Now, then—!' panted Coker.

'Wow! Leggo! Yaroooooh! I say, you fellows! Wow! Help!' yelled Bunter. Smack!

Coker delivered one smack. He had no intention of stopping at one. Indeed, with a pain in his nose, and a trickle of crimson therefrom, he was in a mood to deliver innumerable smacks. But he did stop at one— for an unexpected grasp was laid on the back of his collar, and a strong hand jerked him away from the fat Owl. In surprise and wrath, he twisted his head round to see who had so suddenly collared him: and stared at a pleasant-faced young man in a red blazer. It was Freddy.

'Let go my collar!' roared Coker. 'Who the dickens are you, I'd like to know.' 'House-captain of Kent House,' said Freddy. 'Please keep your temper. Fighting is not permitted here.'

'Fighting!' snorted Coker. 'Who's fighting? I'm going to smack that cheeky young sweep's head, and you're jolly well not going to stop me, see?'

'Ow! Wow! Keep him off!' howled Bunter. 'I say, you jolly well turn him out.'

'Let go my collar!' roared Coker. He barely restrained himself from delivering a punch at the red blazer. But even Coker was able to understand that Butlin Redcoats were not punchable.

Freddy let go Coker's collar. But he stepped between Coker and Bunter. His manner was pleasant and polite. But it was very firm.

'Please go!' said Freddy. 'I see by your badge that you're in Gloucester House. Kindly return to your own House.'

'Not till I've smacked that young sweep's head!' roared Coker. 'Look at my nose!'

Redcoat looked at it, and smiled. It looked rather like an over-grown strawberry. Coker gave him a concentrated glare.

'Think it's funny?' he bawled. 'Look here, get out of the way. I'm going to smack that fat freak's head right and left.'

'Not at all! You're going away from here, and you're going now!' said Freddy. 'And if you do not go quietly—'

'Catch me going quietly!' hooted Coker.

'I'm sure you wouldn't like to be dumped, bag and baggage, outside the gate, now would you?' asked Freddy.

'Me!' gasped Coker.

'You!' assented Freddy.

Coker looked at him. His rugged face was red with wrath—almost as red as his nose, or Freddy's blazer. That any common mortal could even dream of dumping him, Horace James Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth, bag and baggage outside the Camp, was almost unimaginable. But he had to realize that it was so. If polite and pleasant persuasion failed, that was the fate that awaited the over-obstreperous. Coker had to get it down.

His look at the House-captain of Kent was expressive. It couldn't have been more so. But he left it at that. He gave one emphatic snort, turned on his heel, and stalked away.

'He, he, he!' followed him from Bunter, as he went. That squeaky giggle almost made Coker turn back, at the risk of being dumped on the Skegness Road bag and baggage. Luckily, it did not quite!

With deep feelings, Coker stalked away. Freddy strolled after him, to see him clear. Billy Bunter was left rubbing the place where Coker's solitary smack had landed: but he grinned as he rubbed. It was quite entertaining to Bunter to

see Coker of the Fifth taken down a peg or two. Having been so effectually roused out by Coker's call, even Billy Bunter did not think of going back to bed at ten in the morning. Now that he was wide-awake, Bunter was conscious of a feeling of vacancy in his extensive inside. He had missed breakfast, and lunch was not till one o'clock: which would have been a dismaying state of affairs to a voracious Owl in ordinary circumstances. But the circumstances were not ordinary now. They were indeed extraordinary! Bunter was not dismayed. Other fellows might turn up for regular meals at the voice of the loud-speaker, but little cared Bunter. He rolled out of his chalet with a well-filled wallet in his pocket, like a lion seeking what he might devour.

There were plenty of places in Camp where money could be spent on every variety of edibles. Bunter had plenty of money: and he was not the fellow to count it, where foodstuffs were concerned. For the next hour or so, he was busy: packing away one breakfast after another. Then—with a wary eye open for Coker—he rolled forth, and rolled down to the beach to look for Harry Wharton and Co.

CHAPTER 18

THAT MAN AGAIN!

*'I do like to be beside the seaside,
I do like a jolly Butlin Camp!
And of all the jolly places
Where we see such jolly faces,
Butlin's is the champ!'*

Bob Cherry was singing. That, at all events, was the intention. Bob's voice was more powerful than melodious. And it was rather a handicap that he did not quite remember the tune, and had only a vague recollection of the words. However, these trifles did not deter Bob when he was in high spirits. His cheery roar woke the echoes of the Lincolnshire sand dunes. It seemed to his comrades that it might almost have been heard from Grimsby to the Wash, and might have started an echo or two in the aisles of Lincoln Cathedral, away across the Wolds.

A dim recollection of the words of that cheery seaside song did not trouble Bob. It was easy to fill up the blanks, topically. Sitting on the warm sand, under a glowing blue sky, exhilarated by a swim in the sunny sea, Bob was enjoying life: and anyone in the vicinity must have been extremely deaf, to remain unaware of that fact.

The Famous Five were sunning themselves on the sand after a swim. Three miles from the town, it was practically a private beach. But it was extremely well populated that summer's morning. Bathers and sun-bathers, swimmers and waders and paddlers, abounded. The placid waters were dotted with

happy heads. Bright faces and bright colours made a colourful panorama along the beach.

'Go it, Bob!' said Johnny Bull, as Bob Cherry paused in his more or less melodious roar. 'They'll be enjoying that in Grimsby and Hull.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Fathead!' said Bob, cheerily. 'But I say, though, is it jolly here?'

'The jolliffulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The nabob of Bhanipur was basking in a sun that reminded him of his native land, and his dusky face glowed back its rays.

'Fancy that fat ass Bunter sticking in bed, when he might be here!' said Bob.

'We ought to have lugged him out by the ears, really! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he comes! Is that Bunter, or has a porpoise got ashore?'

It was Bunter!

The Owl of the Remove was apparently looking for the party, for he was blinking to right and left through his big spectacles, as he came picking his way along the crowded beach. He was in full view of the juniors sitting in a group on the sand, but he had not spotted them, his vision being limited, even with the aid of those big spectacles.

'Looking for us, I suppose,' said Bob. 'I'll give him a yell when he gets a bit nearer, or he will roll on and miss us. Oh, my hat!' he added, suddenly, staring.

'What—?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Seen that chap before?' exclaimed Bob.

'Eh! We've seen Bunter before, fathead—'

'I don't mean Bunter, ass—I mean that man who's following him,' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Look at him.'

His comrades sat up at that. At a little distance behind Billy Bunter, as he rolled, was a man whose face the Greyfriars fellows had seen once before. They had never expected to see it again: but they had not forgotten the sharp features and the weasel eyes.

'Oh!' exclaimed Nugent. 'That man again!'

'That pickpocket, who had Mr. Butlin's wallet at Greenfield!' said Johnny Bull.

'It's the same man!' said Harry.

'The samefulness is terrific.'

'Is he after Bunter?' asked Bob. 'You can see that he's following him—and he's got his eyes on him all the time.'

Billy Bunter rolled on, quite unaware of the man behind him. But the Famous Five fixed their eyes very keenly on the man. They knew him at once, and they had no doubt whatever that he was a pickpocket. It was true that when he had been taken in charge and searched, nothing had been found on him, and as there was no proof against him, he had had to be allowed to go. Nevertheless, they had no doubt on the subject. And now, it appeared, he was interested in Billy Bunter.

'He jolly well had Mr. Butlin's wallet,' said Bob. 'I expect he chucked it out of the train window, before they got him at the next station, and it wasn't found on him. But he had it.'

'As good as certain,' said Harry, with a nod. 'He didn't dare to keep it, as it turned out, and he got rid of it on the train somehow. If he's up to the same game here—'

'Looks like it,' said Bob. 'Bunter wouldn't be much of a catch for a pickpocket,

as a rule: but he's got lots of money now, as it happens.'

'I don't see how that fellow could know,' remarked Nugent.

'If he's been hanging about the Camp, he would know,' answered Bob.

'Bunter's been flourishing his wealth all over the shop, spending money right and left. Anyhow. he's jolly well after Bunter, and if he tries on any of his tricks, we're jolly well going to put paid to him.'

'Yes, rather.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look!' exclaimed Bob.

The weasel-eyed man had drawn nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting Owl. Now, close behind him, he bumped into him all of a sudden. There was a startled splutter from Bunter, as he tottered over, and sprawled on the sand. As if he had lost his footing, the man stumbled over on him.

That was enough for Harry Wharton and Co. It was the same trick that the man had played only a few days ago at Greenfield. They did not need to see more. Like arrows from a bow, they tore across the sands.

'Ooooh! Ooooh! Woooogh!' spluttered Bunter. 'Gerroff! Wharrer you up to! Woooogh! Gerroff!'

The sprawling, gasping Owl blinked up breathlessly and angrily. In a moment more, the man would have been on his feet, and a fat wallet, which a skilful hand had already extracted from Bunter's pocket, would have been slipped into his own.

But in that moment, a sudden rush of five fellows in a bunch took him by surprise.

That rush flattened him out on the sand beside the sprawling Owl. The bowler hat flew from his head, and the wallet from his hand, as he rolled over, struggling, kicking up clouds of sand.

'Oooogh!' gurgled Billy Bunter. He sat up, and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose. 'I say— oooogh! Oh, is that you fellows? I say, that silly idiot bumped me over! Oooogh.'

The weasel-eyed man struggled fiercely. But the Famous Five had him, and they held him. Holiday-makers on all sides stared at the scene. It was an unaccustomed spot of excitement for the Butliners.

But the juniors did not heed staring eyes. They had no doubt whatever what the rascal's object had been, in bumping the fat Owl over on the beach. And if he had Bunter's wallet, they were not letting him get away with it, as he had got away with Mr. Butlin's.

'Where's your wallet, Bunter?' asked Harry. Bunter blinked at him.

'Eh! In my pocket, of course,' he answered. 'Make sure it's there, then.'

'Rot! I know it's there.'

'You fat ass, this fellow bumped you over to pick your pocket!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Don't you know you're ass enough to have your pocket picked?'

'I'd like to see anybody pick my pocket!' retorted Bunter, disdainfully. 'Think I'm a fool?'

'Yes, rather.'

'Yah!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is this it?' exclaimed Bob, as he spotted an object near at hand in the sand. He jumped to it, and picked it up. It was, undoubtedly, a wallet, and a well-filled one. And the monogram 'W.B.', embossed on it, seemed to indicate the ownership.

'Oh, crikey!' spluttered Bunter, as he blinked at it. He groped in an empty

pocket. 'I say, that's mine! Must have dropped out when that silly idiot bumped me over! You gimme my wallet, Bob Cherry.'

Billy Bunter scrambled up, stretching out a fat hand. Bob handed over the wallet, which the fat Owl promptly restored to his inside pocket. Harry Wharton and Co., naturally, had never seen Mr. William Butlin's wallet, and certainly were not likely to guess that Billy Bunter's wallet was the very same identical article, any more than Bunter himself could. So far as they knew, that wallet was Bunter's: and Bob, handing it back to the fat Owl, had no doubt that he was handing it to the rightful owner.

The weasel-eyed man was no longer struggling. He was cool again now, with a sneer on his hard sharp face.

'Praps you'll take your hands off me, now the young gentleman's found his wallet,' he said. 'Can't a man stumble in the sand by accident, without being accused of picking pockets?'

'You dropped it when he collared you,' said Harry Wharton.

'You heard the young gentleman himself say that it fell out of his pocket when he tumbled over,' said Jimmy Jecks, coolly.

'I say, you fellows, it's all right!' said Bunter. He blinked at the weasel-eyed man, recognizing him as his fellow-passenger of the week before. 'I've seen that chap before—I met him on the train coming down. What makes you think he picked my pocket?'

'We know he did!' growled Johnny Bull.

'The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter.'

Sniff, from Bunter.

'Rot!' he said. 'I'm not the fellow to have my pocket picked, I fancy. Think I go about with my eyes shut? I daresay you fellows might have your pockets picked—if there was anything in them worth picking—he, he, he! Not me!'

'You fat chump—'

'Oh, draw it mild,' snapped Bunter. 'I don't see what you wanted to grab that chap at all for. He hasn't done anything, that I know of.'

'You blithering bloater, he would be half a mile away with your wallet by this time, if we hadn't grabbed him,' hooted Johnny Bull.

'Rot!' said Bunter.

The juniors looked at him—expressively!—then at one another, and then at the weasel-eyed man, whose hard face now wore a sneering grin. Obviously, there was nothing more to be done.

'You can cut!' said Harry Wharton, curtly.

'Thank you for nothing!' jeered Jimmy Jecks. 'I'll trouble you to keep your hands off me if we happen to meet again. You might find yourselves charged with assault and battery.'

With that, Jimmy Jecks picked up his bowler hat, jammed it on his head, and sauntered away along the beach.

'I say, you fellows—' squeaked Bunter.

'Oh, go and eat coke!' growled Johnny Bull. 'Let's get out of this, you chaps. There's about five hundred people staring at us already.'

'Well, what do you expect, if you kick up a shindy like that?' inquired Billy Bunter. 'Lucky for you a Redcoat didn't spot you at it. He would have combed your hair for you—kicking up a row on the beach—I say, what are you grabbing up that handful of sand for, Bob Cherry?'

'I'm going to jam it down the back of your neck.'

'Eh! What! Here—I say—yaroooooh—leggo—stoppit—Beast—Ow! Will you stoppit?' yelled Billy Bunter. 'I say—ooooohh!' Harry Wharton and Co. walked away along the beach, rather anxious to get away from the publicity they had acquired. Billy Bunter was left wriggling in wild attempts to extract sand from the back of a fat neck, much to the entertainment of innumerable holiday-makers.

CHAPTER 19

BUNTER SHOWS THEM!

'I'LL show you!' said Billy Bunter.

Bunter liked to show fellows how to do things.

There was a cheery whirr and clatter in the skating-rink. Crowds of boys with girl-friends, and girls with boy-friends, whizzed and whirled. Roller-skating seemed a very popular attraction at Butlin's. Naturally, Harry Wharton and Co. were not going to miss it, and they turned up cheerfully that evening to whiz and whirl. Billy Bunter, of course, turned up too. Bunter rather fancied himself on rollers. He fancied that he could show the other fellows, and the public generally, a thing or two in that line. It was one of the fat Owl's many unfounded fancies.

'You fellows just watch me,' he added.

'Hadn't you better sit it out, and watch us?' suggested Bob Cherry. 'You'll be safer sitting down.'

'So will everybody else!' remarked Johnny Bull.

Bunter curled a fat lip.

'You fellows don't like being put in the shade, do you?' he asked, sarcastically. 'I can skate, I fancy. Didn't you see me on the ice at Wharton Lodge last winter?'

'We did—on your back, mostly,' said Nugent.

'A fellow might slip, when clumsy asses get in his way,' retorted Bunter. 'Mind you don't barge into me, that's all. I can tell you that nobody will notice you when I'm around. Look at that pretty girl—did you see her smile at me as she passed?'

To Bunter's surprise, the Famous Five chuckled, at that remark. It was a fact that a pretty girl had glided past, and that she had smiled. Billy Bunter was at no loss to attribute that smile to his uncommon good looks. His companions were rather disposed to attribute it to his uncommon circumference.

'You can snigger,' said Bunter. 'Girls don't take any notice of you fellows, but I can tell you that I never go out of my chalet without lots of them smiling at me. You needn't get jealous about it. It's not my fault that I'm the best-looking fellow in the Greyfriars Remove.'

'Oh, crumbs! No, that's not one of your faults, old fat man!' gasped Bob. 'Any old judge would find you not guilty.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's old Coker!' exclaimed Bob, as a burly figure plunged by. It was Horace Coker, skating with the ease and grace of a hippopotamus. He seemed to have some little difficulty in keeping his long

legs under control. Catching sight of the juniors, he bestowed a frown upon them. Bob gave him a cheery wave of the hand in acknowledgment, which caused Coker's frown to intensify as he clattered onward.

'Clumsy ass!' said Bunter, blinking after him. 'Coker can't skate. I expect he'll be over, any minute. I say, you fellows, mind you don't barge me like you did on the ice once. Steer clear when I get going, see?'

'We will!' assured Bob. 'Nobody here wants to be cannoned.'

'Well, let's get going,' said Harry. 'Be careful, Bunter, when you get those skates on.'

'When I want advice about skating, I'll ask for it, thank you!' answered the fat Owl, disdainfully. 'But I think you might lend a fellow a hand with these skates—they don't seem to fix somehow.'

Bob Cherry obligingly lent the required hand. Billy Bunter, securely equipped for deeds of derring do, rolled on the rink. There was a sudden wild and frantic clatter of rollers, and a yell from Bunter.

'Yaroooooh! I say, you fellows, hold me! Wooooooh!'

Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh were already spinning away. But Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry sped to the rescue. One of Billy Bunter's feet had flown into the air. They grasped him just in time, before the other followed it into the upper spaces.

'Oooogh!' gasped Bunter. 'Hold me—'

'We've got you—'

'Don't grab my arm like that! You're twisting my arm!' howled Bunter. 'Leggo my neck, Harry Wharton, will you? You're chook—chook—choking me. Can't you lend a fellow a hand without chook—chook—choking him! Beast!'

Clatter, clatter, clatter. With Bob Cherry grasping a fat arm, and Harry Wharton a fat neck, Billy Bunter was saved from immediate disaster. Both his feet landed, though with a somewhat uncertain landing. He blinked at his helpers with an indignant and reproachful blink.

'Just like you chaps!' he said. 'You'd jolly well like to see me go over, wouldn't you? Well, I'm jolly well not going over to please you. I'm all right now. I was all right all the while, really, if you fellows hadn't grabbed at me. Just leave me alone, see?'

'You fat ass—!'

'Yah!'

Well, if you're all right—!' said Harry.

'Of course I'm all right! Think I can't skate?' snorted Bunter. 'Just let go.'

Harry Wharton did not state his opinion about that. Evidently, Billy Bunter was about as useful on rollers as he was on the ice! But the captain of the Greyfriars Remove let go, as requested, and spun away amid the merry crowd of whizzers and whirlers. Bob Cherry, however, lingered.

'Sure you're all right now?' he asked, doubtfully.

'Oh, really, Cherry! If you think I can't skate—'

'I don't think—I know, you fat chump—'

'Yah! Just you leggo? Are you holding on to me because you're afraid of falling down?' jeered Bunter. 'Look here, I'm not going to hold you up! You can't expect it.'

Bob released the fat arm. Bunter gave a plunge. Clatter! clatter! clatter!

'Oh, crikey!'

Bob made a clutch at him, too late. The fat Owl shot away, yelling as he shot.

Bob shot after him, anxious for Bunter, but still more for the swarm of skaters into whom he might have cannoned at any moment. A charge with Billy Bunter's weight behind it, would have been no light matter for the heftiest Butlineer in Camp. He caught up with Bunter, just as two little fat legs flew into the air.

Bunter very nearly came down with a bump that might have shaken Skegness. He just escaped a bump, by clutching at Bob. He hardly knew where and what he clutched, and certainly he did not care, at that exciting moment. One fat hand grasped Bob by the ear. The other was buried in a mop of flaxen hair. With a tenacious grip on the ear and the hair, the fat Owl hung on, giving Bob the benefit of his uncommon weight.

Bob struggled to shove him off. For the moment, he did not care what might happen to Bunter, so long as he rescued his ear and his hair.

'Let go, you lunatic!' shrieked Bob. 'You're dragging my hair out by the roots, you dangerous maniac! Oh, crumbs! Get away, blow you!'

A vigorous shove sent the fat Owl spinning off. Bob, just keeping his own footing, rubbed his ear and his head. There was a pain in both. Billy Bunter whirled away. Miraculously, he kept both his feet, but he did not even think of steering a course, his fat mind being in such a state of confusion that he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. With his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles, he shot onward, and alarmed roller-skaters scattered hastily out of his way, as if the charging fat Owl had been Death on a Pale Horse!

All but one! That one was Horace Coker. Whether Coker of the Fifth disdained to dodge out of the way of a Remove junior, or whether he was slow on the uptake, at any rate he stopped Bunter's wild charge. There was quite a terrific crash as they met. Coker, big and burly as he was, went over backwards. Billy Bunter rolled headlong over him, with a final clatter of rollers.

'Oh!' spluttered Coker.

'Oooooogh!' spluttered Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from many directions.

Billy Bunter rolled off Coker, and sat up, dizzily, with all Butlinland spinning round his dizzy head. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came whizzing up. They grasped the fat Owl, and heaved him up, and ran him off the rink. It was just as well that they were prompt: for a whole army of Redcoats could scarcely have saved Billy Bunter from Horace Coker's wrath, had he remained within reach when Coker clambered to his feet. Fortunately, the fat Owl was at a safe distance, when Horace succeeded in resuming the perpendicular, and looked round for him with a fiery eye.

At that safe distance, Wharton and Nugent landed the spluttering Owl. They sat him down and peeled off his skates. Billy Bunter had set out to show them and everyone else what he could do on rollers. He had undoubtedly shown them, and they did not want any further display: and Bunter, luckily, was too bumped and breathless to carry on. They left him pumping in breath, and rejoined the merry crowd on the rink. Billy Bunter pumped and pumped, till he had recovered sufficient breath to roll away, in search of something more congenial. And when the chums of the Remove saw him again, an hour or two later, the jammy smears on his fat countenance indicated that he had found it.

CHAPTER 20

AFTER DARK

'COKER, old man—'

'Coker, old chap—'

'Don't jaw!' said Coker.

Potter and Greene spoke in almost beseeching tones. They heard Coker getting out of bed. Beseeching, evidently, had no effect on Coker: for he continued getting out of bed.

The Fifth-form party had a three-bed chalet in Gloucester House. Ordinarily, they would all three have been fast asleep at that late hour. Slumber had descended on Butlinland. Music and dancing, roller-skating and ping-pong, film shows, theatres, concerts, and all the other innumerable activities that filled every hour and minute of the day, had closed down. Loud-speakers were silent. Redcoats, no doubt, here and there had an eye open. Security men, no doubt, were on patrol. But most holiday-makers were sleeping the sleep of the just, after a strenuous day. Horace Coker, as a rule, would have been as fast asleep as any other Camper. On this particular night, however, he was wide awake.

Coker had his plans for that night. He had told them to Potter and Greene, much to their dismay. They had hoped that, once in bed, Coker would go to sleep and forget all about those plans.

That hope proved delusive. Coker was getting out of bed. He was going to carry out those plans. Butlin's was a free-and-easy place, where everyone was at liberty to do as he liked—within reasonable limits. But there were fixed limits for the over obstreperous. Rules were laid down which Campers had to observe, for the general good. Those rules, apparently, passed Horace Coker by, like the idle wind which he regarded not. Coker did not, perhaps, think that Mr. William Butlin had founded and organized that Camp for his, Coker's, own special and particular behoof. But he was disposed to act as if he thought so. Potter and Greene sat up in bed. They were aware that it was futile to argue with Coker. Coker always knew best: and as a fellow who knew best, he had no use for argument or expostulation from lesser mortals. But the idea of Coker kicking up a shinny in the middle of the night was so dismaying, that they felt impelled to do their best.

'For goodness sake, Coker, go back to bed and forget all about it,' urged Potter. 'If you kick up a row at this time of night—'

'Who's going to kick up a row?' inquired Coker.

'Didn't you say you were going to wallop that fat tick Bunter?' demanded Greene.

'Yes, I did! That's what I'm going to do. If you call that kicking up a row, George Potter—'

'You can't do it,' pleaded Potter.

'I think I can!' said Coker. 'Think I'm going to let a cheeky fag cheek me and get by with it? Why, if we were at Greyfriars now, I'd give him a dozen with a cricket stump—'

'We're not at Greyfriars now.'

'I don't need you to tell me that, Potter. I'd have walloped him this morning, only that Redcoat chap barged in. Look at my nose! That fat tick banged his

hoof on

it. And look what he did on the rink! Charged me and knocked me spinning—'

'That must have been an accident—'

'Not the sort of accident that is going to happen to me,' said Coker. 'I'll give him accidents! Don't you fellows get jittery. I know what I'm about. It was like the cheek of that gang of fags to come here for their holiday at all, when I told them plainly that I didn't want Greyfriars fags hanging about in my Camp. They took no notice, and came all the same. Cheek! Still, so long as they behave themselves, and keep their distance, I'm letting them carry on. But I'm not standing any cheek from any of them, I can tell you. Look at my nose!' Coker rubbed his nose: still red, and a little bulbous, from contact with a fat lunging foot. That nose had attracted quite a few glances from other Campers, and perhaps some smiles. Even Potter and Greene had grinned at it, when Coker's eye was not on them.

'That Redcoat chap butted in,' went on Coker. 'Well, I left it at that—I didn't want a row with him. He won't butt in again, at this time of night. I'm going to take a box-strap, and give that fat tick what he's asked for. I fancy he won't play any more cheeky tricks, after he's had a lesson. Well, I'm going to give that lesson. That's all. Perhaps he fancies that he can cheek a Fifth-form man, just because we're not at school now. I'll jolly well show him whether he can cheek me or not.'

'If you start him yelling—'

'I fancy he will yell all right, when I get going with this strap. Let him yell,' said Coker. 'I shan't be there a minute or two. It won't take long to give him a dozen or so with this strap. If the Redcoats come round, I shall be back here in bed before they know what's up.'

'There's one thing you've forgotten,' said Potter.

'I don't think so. I'm not the fellow to forget things. What rot are you talking now?' asked Coker.

'How are you going to get into his chalet? it the door's locked—'

'Going to bash it in?' said Greene, sarcastically.

'Don't be an ass, Billy Greene. I've fixed that up all right,' said Coker. 'I think of things, if you fellows don't. If the door's locked, I shall simply knock on it and call "Fire!"

'What?' gasped Potter and Greene together.

'Remember that trick he played on us as Skegness Station?' said Coker.

'Didn't he pull our leg about a fire, and send us rushing off, while he scoffed that cake? Well, I'm taking a leaf out of his book, see? If Bunter can call "Fire!" when there isn't a fire, so can I! Think he won't bounce out of bed, and get the door open, if he fancies the place is on fire!

'Look here, Coker—'

'For goodness sake, Coker—'

'Don't jaw, you chaps! You're like sheep's heads—all jaw! Like to come along and keep cave while I wallop that fat tick?'

'I'll watch it!' gasped Potter.

'Well, stick in bed, if you like. I'll be back in a few minutes—'

'Coker, old man—'

'Coker, old chap—'

But answer there came none! Coker was gone.

'The ass!' breathed Potter.

'The fathead!' said Greene.

'Ten to one there'll be a fearful row, and it will end up with Coker getting chucked out of the Camp!' said Potter. 'Nice for us!'

'Jolly nice, and no mistake!' said Greene.

Really, it was not at all nice for Potter and Greene. True, they had jumped at that holiday by the salt sea waves, even with Coker thrown in, as it were. Coker was standing the holiday, so obviously they had to stand Coker! But there was no doubt that Coker needed a lot of standing! Horace Coker, like an obstinate horse, had to be given his head: and they could only hope that his nocturnal enterprise would not end up in Horace being landed, bag and baggage, on the Skegness Road in the morning.

Coker had no such misgivings. He had laid his plans, and he was going to carry them out. Redcoat intervention had prevented him from administering just punishment to a cheeky Owl during the day. So he was going to administer it at night, when there were no Redcoats at hand to butt in. It was all quite simple, so far as Horace Coker could see.

And fortune seemed really to favour him. He was prepared to bang on Bunter's door, and shout 'Fire!' if that was necessary to rouse the fat junior out. But it was not necessary. He found that the door opened to his touch. It was not even latched. Apparently Bunter had gone to bed leaving his door ajar. It was a little surprising, but very satisfactory: for in the circumstances, Coker preferred to go about his proceedings as quietly as possible. There was no doubt that Billy Bunter would make enough noise, when he commenced operations with the box-strap!

Snore!

Coker grinned grimly at that unmelodious sound as he silently pushed open the door. Evidently, the fat Owl was deep in slumber. The resonant snore that was wont to wake the echoes of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars was going strong. Billy Bunter was fast asleep—but due for a sudden and startling awakening when Coker got going.

Coker groped in the dark for the light switch. Coker was not without consideration, even in a state of just wrath and on the war-path. He was going to 'wallop' Billy Bunter, as that fat young sweep richly deserved: but he did not want to scare him out of his fat wits by a sudden swoop in the darkness. But his groping hand stopped suddenly in its grope. Suddenly, surprisingly, startlingly, he became aware that there was already a spot of light in the room.

It was only a spot. It moved about in the dark. It could only come from a flash-lamp, held in the hand of some unseen person. Coker, his eyes wide open, stared at it blankly.

Snore! Obviously, it was not Bunter who was moving about the room with a flash-lamp. Bunter was asleep and snoring. Who else? Someone was in the room in the dark, apparently in search of something. Coker, for the moment, could only stare, be was so taken by surprise. Naturally it had never occurred to him that he was not the only person interested in Billy Bunter's chalet in the hours of darkness. But it was only too clear that there was a third person on the scene—who, and why, Coker could not begin to guess. He just stood staring.

Snore! Suddenly, the moving spot of light came to a stop, and gleamed on a fat face, the eyes closed and the mouth open. Who was behind the light,

Coker's staring eyes could not discern. But he did discern a hand that came into the light, slipping under the fat Owl's pillow.

Coker's rather solid brain did not work swiftly: but it dawned even on Coker that the unseen man in Bunter's chalet was a thief in the night! Coker knew nothing about Billy Bunter's recent accession to unexpected wealth. But he could guess that a watch, or a wallet, or something of the kind, was under that pillow.

A moment later, he knew. For the surreptitious hand under Bunter's pillow came out into the light—not empty! There was a wallet in it—a plump and very handsome wallet adorned with a monogram. Bunter snored on.

The flash-lamp was shut off instantly. A light swift tread came towards the door. A shadowy figure loomed under Coker's eyes.

Coker of the Fifth had come there to 'wallop' Billy Bunter. He was still going to 'wallop' Billy Bunter. But he was not going to let a sneak-thief get away with Billy Bunter's wallet. Coker clenched a large fist in readiness: and as the shadowy figure loomed before him, he hit out. It was a terrific punch. Nothing short of the kick of a mule could have equalled it. Somebody in the dark, at the receiving end, uttered a frantic yell of surprise and anguish, and pitched over headlong. Then Coker switched on the light.

CHAPTER 21

WALLOPED!

LIFE is full of surprises. Probably Jimmy Jecks had had his share of them, in his chequered career as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. But never, assuredly, had Jimmy Jecks been so surprised, so utterly astounded and taken aback, as at the present moment. What had happened was so very unexpected by Mr. Jecks.

Up to that moment, everything seemed to have gone his way. After a series of disappointments, in his quest of Mr. William Butlin's wallet, it had fallen into his dishonest hands at last. He had had several set-backs. In Friardale Wood, Bob Cherry had barged in. On the railway, he had barely escaped arrest as a pickpocket, by landing the wallet on Billy Bunter. What that fat and fatuous youth would do with it, when he found it in his pocket, Jimmy did not know and could not guess: but he hoped, at least, that it would remain in his possession: left till called for, as it were. And that it had so remained, he had had proof that morning when it would have changed owners once more on Skegness beach, but for the intervention of Harry Wharton and Co. From the feel of it he knew that some, at least, of the contents remained. All these set-backs did not discourage Jimmy from another 'go'. Neither did the locked door of a chalet, in the hours of darkness. Jimmy had had a lot of experience in dealing with locks. Once inside, he had needed only a glimmer from his flash-lamp, to search the pockets of the clothes the fat Owl had left sprawling about. Finding them empty, he guessed easily enough that the fat schoolboy had put the wallet under his pillow. There he had found it—and all was clear! All was quite

clear—except for Horace Coker, of the Greyfriars Fifth, of whom Mr. Jecks had never heard and never dreamed!

Mr. Jecks did not know what had hit him. He knew that it was something very hard and very heavy, with a lot of force behind it. It felt like the kick of a mule: but he could not imagine that a mule had wandered into a Butlin Camp. He went down like a skittle, crashing on his back: the most astonished rascal in all rascaldom!

He blinked dizzily in the light as it was switched on. He was, for the moment, incapable of getting up, or even sitting up: but as he lay, he clasped both hands to his nose, where Coker's fist had landed. Crimson oozed through his fingers. Coker's own nose was somewhat picturesque. But Coker's nose, compared with Mr. Jecks's nose, was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine. Mr. Jecks's nose felt as if it was no longer there. He had a feeling that it had been driven through his head like a nail through wood. He did not even heed the precious wallet, that had dropped from his hand as he went down. He did not snatch it up, or think of snatching it up. Both his hands seemed fully occupied with his suffering nose. After his first startled yell, he did not yell again. He just moaned.

Coker glared down at him. Coker's big fists were ready to give him another if he wanted another. But Jimmy Jecks did not want another. He only blinked dizzily at Coker, pressed his hands to his anguished nose, and moaned.

'Caught you at it, did I, you sneaking pincher?' said Coker.

'Mooooh!' moaned Jimmy Jecks.

Coker picked up the wallet. Jimmy Jecks beheld that action without dreaming of interfering. Jimmy would not have faced up to another jolt like the one he had already received, for dozens of wallets crammed with notes. He succeeded, at last, in sitting up, still caressing his nose. But he made no other move.

'Here, Bunter, you snoring grampus!' snapped Coker. 'This is yours! That sneak-thief nearly had it.'

Snore!

Billy Bunter had not awakened. Jimmy Jecks's frantic yell as he went down under Coker's fist had fallen on deaf fat ears. He snored on regardless. Coker stared at him.

'Oh, my hat!' he exclaimed. 'If that prize porker isn't still asleep! Here, you fat freak, this is yours, if you want it.'

Coker tossed the wallet to Bunter. It landed on a little fat nose. Then, at last, Billy Bunter stirred in his slumber.

'Urrrrgh!' came a drowsy grunt from the fat Owl. 'Wurrgh! Wazzer mazzer? Wurrrrgh!'

Billy Bunter's eyes had half-opened. But they closed again. Once more his snore resounded through the chalet. The tap on his fat little nose had only half-awakened him. He had stirred, and the wallet had slipped under the edge of the sheet, and was now reposing adjacent to his fat neck. Unconscious of it, Bunter snored on.

Coker turned to the dismal rascal sitting on the floor. Jimmy Jecks eyed him like a wary weasel.

'Get out!' said Coker. The unexpected presence of a thief in the night had delayed, but not changed, Coker's plans. The snoring Owl was due for that walloping as per programme. 'I'd jolly well call a bunch of Redcoats here, and

have you run in, only I don't want a row now. You've got more than you bargained for, I fancy. Now get out.'

Jimmy Jecks picked himself up. He was glad enough to get out, if it came to that. But he eyed Coker warily and uneasily, as he moved to the door. Coker stood beside the doorway, with his right foot a little drawn back. What he was going to do with that foot, as the rascal passed him, Jimmy could surmise only too easily. His weasel eyes glinted at Coker. But he dared not tackle the hefty Horace. He made a sudden rush to escape.

Thud!

Jimmy Jecks wanted to get through that doorway as quickly as possible. He got through it at a dizzy speed, as the largest foot in the Fifth Form at Greyfriars landed on his check trousers. Coker put all his beef into that kick, and Coker had a tremendous amount of beef. Jimmy Jecks fairly flew.

There was a bump outside, an anguished howl, and then a patter of feet.

Jimmy Jecks was gone: undoubtedly with more than he had bargained for. Coker dismissed him from mind.

He turned back to Bunter's bed. Billy Bunter was still snoring, but it occurred to Coker that the noise might have reached other ears. Harry Wharton and Co. were quite near at hand: and he did not want the Famous Five trooping in to inquire what the matter was. He had no time to waste.

'Wake up, you fat porker!' snapped Coker. He took a little fat nose between finger and thumb, and pulled. That awakened even Billy Bunter.

'Ow! Wow! Oh, crikey! Wow!' roared Bunter.

'Out you come!' said Coker.

'Ow! Beast! Wow! Leggo!' yelled Bunter, as a powerful hand hooked him bodily out of bed, like a plump winkle from a shell.

Whop! whop! whop!

The box-strap came into operation. Coker had no time to waste, and he did not waste any. Whop! whop! whop!

'Did you fancy you could cheek a Fifth-form man, because we're not at school now?' Whop! 'Did you think you could pull my leg and get away with it?'

Whop! 'Think you could cannon into me, and knock me spinning?' Whop! 'I've a short way with fags when they're cheeky.'

Whop! whop! whop!
Pyjamas were not much defence against a box-strap wielded in a hefty hand. Billy Bunter roared, and wriggled, and yelled, and fairly bellowed. Few of the sleepers in the adjacent chalets could have failed to hear. The celebrated Bull of Basham, famed of old for his roaring, could scarcely have awakened more echoes than did Billy Bunter, as Horace Coker demonstrated his short way of dealing with cheeky fags!

'That'll do, I think,' said Coker, a little breathlessly, as he administered the final whop.

'Yarooooooh!'

Coker walked out of the chalet, leaving Billy Bunter rousing out the echoes. He walked rather quickly. Coker feared no foe: but even Coker realized that it was judicious to be off the scene before Billy Bunter's frantic yells drew a crowd to the spot, as they could scarcely fail to do. He was back in his own chalet in very quick time.

'That you, Coker?' came Potter's voice from the darkness. 'We heard the shindy from here. There'll be a row about this.'

'They'll turn you out of Camp, Coker!' said Greene.

'Rot!' said Coker.
And Horace Coker Went back to bed, a quite satisfied Coker.

CHAPTER 22

BAG AND BAGGAGE

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'Is that Coker?'

'That's Coker!'

'What's he up to?'

The Famous Five were surprised and interested.

Sauntering out of Camp, in the bright and sunny morning, they came unexpectedly on Horace Coker. He was sitting on a suit-case by the roadside. He was frowning. That was not surprising. Coker often frowned. Something or other always seemed to be coming between the wind and his nobility, so to speak. But why he was sitting on a suit-case by the side of the Skegness Road was puzzling. Campers did not take their suit-cases with them when they took their walks abroad.

The Co. had been hearing a good deal about Coker, He had been, as it were, in the news. His nocturnal exploit had caused quite a lot of comment. Coker, having walloped a cheeky fag as he richly deserved, had dismissed the matter from mind. It had not been so soon dismissed from other minds. A Butlin Camp was not, perhaps, a spot where silence was regarded as golden. But a terrific uproar in the middle of the night was not at all in the scheme of things. The juniors glanced at Coker, curiously. He gave them a stare. Then he beckoned to them and called:

'Here, you kids.'

Remove men of Greyfriars were not, in their own esteem, 'kids'. However, they could see that some spot of trouble bad come Coker's way, and they refrained from rolling him off his suit-case.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' answered Bob Cherry, cheerily. 'Topping morning, Coker! Taking that suit-case for a walk?'

'Don't be a young ass, Cherry.'

'Well, don't be an old ass, Coker.'

Coker half-rose from the suit-case, at that reply. But he sat back again. It seemed to be a somewhat subdued Coker that sunny morning.

'Seen anything of Potter and Greene?' he asked.

'No! They're not in our House, you know.' answered Harry Wharton.

'The silly asses!' said Coker, crossly. 'I told them not to keep me waiting. Fat lot of good telling those chaps anything. They're keeping me waiting just as if I hadn't spoken.'

At which the juniors grinned. Coker, in his own eyes, spoke as one having authority, saying 'Do this!' and he doeth it! Potter and Greene, apparently, were not doing as bidden! So no wonder Coker was annoyed.

'Don't grin at me!' added Coker- 'Not unless you want some of what I gave that fat tick Bunter last night. I daresay you heard him.'

'I think half the Camp must have heard him,' said Nugent.

‘Where is he now?’ demanded Coker.

‘Still snoring,’ said Johnny Bull.

‘Just as well for him!’ said Coker. ‘I’d rather like to give the fat sweep a few more before I go.’

‘Oh! You’re going?’

‘I’m fed up with this show!’ grunted Coker.

‘You’re about the only chap in Camp who is, then,’ said Bob Cherry, staring.

‘Everybody else is having the jolliest time’

‘The jolliffulness is terrific, my esteemed Coker,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

‘It may suit you fags!’ said Coker, loftily. ‘Too much cheek, for me. Why, what do you think? I suppose you know they have games here—House matches, and all that. I put down my name, of course, for the cricket.’

‘Oh!’ said the Famous Five, all together. They knew something about Coker’s cricket. At Greyfriars, it was considered a sight for gods and men. They had no doubt that, if Coker had played cricket for his House at Butlin’s, it would have added considerably to the gaiety of existence in the Camp.

‘And what do you think?’ went on Coker. ‘I took the trouble to show my House-captain what I could do. And did he pick me for the House team? He did not.’

‘I wonder why!’ murmured Bob Cherry.

‘The whyfulness is preposterous.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if you kids have been picked to play for your House,’ added Coker, disdainfully.

‘As a matter of fact, we have!’ admitted Harry Wharton.

‘Well, that shows!’ said Coker. ‘Fat lot they know about it! But where are those silly asses? Look here, one of you cut in, and tell Potter and Greene that I’m waiting for them. I’ve ordered a car for the station, and it may be along any minute.’

The juniors looked at him.

‘Anybody here keen to run errands for Coker?’ asked Bob Cherry. ‘Any reason why you shouldn’t trot in yourself, Coker?’

Coker gave him a glare instead of replying.

Then, suddenly, it dawned on the juniors. Coker had stated that he was ‘fed up’, and was going. Now they guessed that it was not only Coker who was fed up! The chopper had come down! Coker was accustomed to throwing his weight about. Now he had thrown it about once too often, not wisely but too well. Freddy had warned him that he might be landed on the Skegness Road, bag and baggage. And there he was—bag and baggage! Butlin’s was barred, to Coker!

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Bob. ‘Is that it? All right, Coker—I’ll cut in and tell them, if you like.’

‘You’d better, if you don’t want your cheeky head smacked!’ snapped Coker.

‘Cut off and don’t jaw.’

‘What I like about Coker,’ said Bob, ‘is his polite and graceful way of thanking a chap!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo, here they come,’ added Bob, as two figures came, slowly, into the offing. Potter and Greene had come at last. They came very slowly, and apparently reluctantly, but they came.

Coker greeted them with a glare.

'Keeping a fellow waiting!' he snapped. 'And now you've come, you've come without your bags. Haven't you packed?'

'Well, no,' said Potter. 'You see—'

'You see—!' said Greene.

'Well, of all the fatheads!' exclaimed Coker. 'I told you plainly enough to pack, and follow on. It's too late now. Here comes the car.'

'But—I—I say—'

'No time for jaw now, if we're going to catch the train at Skegness,' interrupted Coker. 'They'll send your things after you. They know my address. That's all right. Here's the car.' Harry Wharton and Co. stepped out of the way, as the car drew up. Evidently, it was the car Coker had ordered for the station. Potter and Greene were exchanging glances. It seemed as if they had something to say, which they hesitated to utter.

'The fact is, Coker—!' began Potter.

'Yes, you see—!' mumbled Greene.

'Did you hear me say that there was no time for jaw now?' inquired Coker.

'For goodness sake, get in, and give your chins a rest.'

'But look here—'

'Yes, look here, Coker—'

'Skegness Station!' said Coker to the driver. 'Shove that suit-case in, Potter. Get in, Greene, What are you hanging about for?'

'We—we were thinking—' Potter hesitated.

'You were?' asked Coker, sarcastically. 'Better leave the thinking to me, old chap. It's not in your line at all. Get in! Do you want to lose that train?'

Potter gave Greene a look. Greene gave Potter a look. Harry Wharton and Co. watched them rather curiously. There was a slowness, a reluctance, about Potter and Greene, that could have escaped no eye but Coker's. It seemed to the Co. that they really didn't want to get into that car at all. As a matter of fact, they didn't!

At Greyfriars, they had invented a continental coach trip to dodge Coker in the 'hols'. The prospect of a glorious seaside holiday at a Butlin Camp had brought them back into the fold, as it were. But Coker at Aunt Judy's was no more attractive than before.

Actually, they wanted to stay out the period for which they were booked at Butlin's—notwithstanding the loss of Coker's exhilarating company. But they hesitated to explain that to Coker. Coker was a fellow who required treating with tact—quite a lot of tact.

'The fact is, Coker—!' recommenced Potter.

'Are you getting in?'

'You see, old fellow—!' murmured Greene.

'I see that we shall be losing that train, if you don't get a move on,' interrupted Coker. 'For goodness sake, don't jaw. You fellows are all jaw, as I've told you often enough. Get in.'

'But—!' said Potter and Greene together.

'I said get in!'

Potter and Greene got in. They had really come out to say good-bye to Coker, and see him off in his car. But they got in. After all, a run in a car on a sunny morning, in the bracing air of Skegness, was all right. And it was always possible to lose the train, and save argument.

The driver re-started the car. Harry Wharton and Co. gave the Fifth-formers a wave of the hand in farewell. A glare back from Coker rewarded them. Then the car buzzed off up the road to Skegness, and Coker and Co. were gone. 'Dear old Coker!' said Bob Cherry. 'Always asking for it, and always getting it! Come on, you chaps—race you down to the beach.'

Harry Wharton and Co. expected to see no more of the Greyfriars Fifth-formers at Butlin's. But a surprise awaited them, when they came back from their ramble. Amid the crowd of holiday-makers gathering at the loudspeaker's announcement of lunch, they discerned two familiar faces.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'There's Potter—'

'And there's Greene!' said Nugent.

There, undoubtedly, were Potter and Greene! Coker had caught that train at Skegness. Potter and Greene, somehow had lost it! And there they were! And to judge by their cheery looks, they were enjoying life at Butlin's no less, and perhaps a little more, since Horace Coker had departed, bag and baggage.

CHAPTER 23

EXTRAORDINARY!

'OH!' ejaculated Billy Bunter.

Five fellows, sitting in a cheery row on the Camp promenade in the golden sunset, glanced at the fat Owl. The expression on Billy Bunter's fat face, as he uttered that startled ejaculation, was quite extraordinary. He had a letter in his hand, and his little round eyes seemed to be popping through his big round spectacles at that letter. Something in that letter, evidently, had surprised and startled the Owl of the Remove.

The Greyfriars party were taking a rest on a seat on the promenade. The blue sky overhead was reddened by the sunset: the sea rolled bright and blue. Holiday-makers passed and re-passed in their myriads. Cheery voices sounded from all directions. Strains of music floated on the air. It was a very happy and contented row of schoolboys. The Famous Five had had a strenuous day. They had bathed: they had swum: they had played cricket. So a rest did not come amiss. Billy Bunter was also in need of a rest. True, he hadn't bathed, he hadn't swum, and he hadn't played cricket. But he had expended another slice of his lately acquired wealth on as many sticky things as could be accommodated within his extensive circumference. He had, as was inevitable when Bunter was in funds, over-done it a little. He was really more in need of a rest than the other fellows.

Billy Bunter had collected that letter, and slipped it into his pocket, in no hurry to read it. It was addressed to him in the paternal hand, from Mr. Bunter at Bunter Villa. After that unexpected, magnificent, and munificent gift at parting, of a well-filled wallet, it was not likely to contain a remittance: and Bunter, for once, was not in need of a remittance. He still had lots of money, However, being now at leisure, he extracted the letter from his pocket, opened it, and read it. Its effect on him was quite unexpected.

Harry Wharton and Co. were chatting about a spot of news that had reached them. They had heard from Freddy that Mr. Butlin in person was expected at

the Camp. Naturally they were interested to see that kindly gentleman again, to whom they owed the happy holiday they were now enjoying. But they transferred their attention to Bunter, as he uttered that startled squeak.

'Anything up, old fat man?' asked Bob Cherry, 'Oh, crikey!'

'Nothing wrong at home?' asked Nugent.

'Oh! Yes! No! Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter blinked at that letter. He took off his spectacles, wiped them, and blinked at it again, as if to make assurance doubly sure that he had read aright. He really seemed unable to believe either his eyes or his spectacles! Evidently it was a very surprising letter. It could not, in fact, have been more surprising, in the circumstances. There was, indeed, no way of accounting for it, unless his respected pater had either lost his memory, or taken leave of his senses! For it ran:

Dear William,

I have received your postcard from Skegness, and am glad to hear that you have arrived safely at your destination, and that you are feeling fine, as you express it, though I regret to see that there has been no improvement in your spelling.

But I utterly fail to understand your allusion to a wallet, which you appear to imagine that I put in your pocket before you left home, and your allusion to so much money to spend is incomprehensible to me.

I gave you a ten shilling note when you left; precisely that, and nothing more. I understand that there is an almost infinite variety of entertainment in a Butlin Camp, all of which is free, including regular meals quite sufficient for any normal person. Ten shillings should suffice for pocket-money.

If I had intended to present you with a larger sum, which owing to the exactions of Income Tax was impracticable, I should have handed it to you with the ten shilling note, and most certainly should not have thought of anything so absurd as placing it in your pocket for you to find later. I placed nothing whatever in your pocket.

Kindly write and explain fully what you mean by the extraordinary statement on your postcard.

It was no wonder that Billy Bunter blinked with almost unbelieving eyes at that surprising letter. That Mr. Bunter had placed that wallet, crammed with notes, and marked with his initials, in his pocket, as a happy surprise for him when he found it there, was as certain as anything in Euclid—so far as Billy Bunter could see. Who else?

Nobody else could have done it—besides, why should anyone else have wanted to make him such a munificent gift? It was surprising enough in Mr. Bunter. It would have been simply astounding in anyone other than his honoured parent.

Yet Mr. Bunter disclaimed all knowledge of it.

For once—once only!—Mr. Bunter had shelled out on a munificent scale. It

was really the last thing he might have been expected to forget. Yet, clearly, from this letter, he had forgotten it! Bunter had heard of people who lost their memories. He had never expected to hear of one at home. But this was a clear case!

'The poor old pater!' said Bunter, at last.

'Is Mr. Bunter ill?' asked Bob.

'Not exactly ill. He's lost his memory.'

'Lost his memory!' repeated the Famous Five, all together. They stared blankly at the fat Owl. That statement surprised them almost as much as Mr. Bunter's letter had surprised Bunter.

'Must have!' said Bunter. 'He's forgotten giving me that wallet. Fancy that, you fellows! Forgotten all about it, from this letter. I expect there's been a rush of business in the City, or something—perhaps he's been a bull, or a bear, or a stag, or something or other—and he's a bit upset. You fellows have seen my new wallet, haven't you?'

'We have!' grinned Bob.

'Lots of times!' said Johnny Bull.

'The lotfulness is terrific.'

All the Co., of course, had seen that wallet, not once only, but many times. Billy Bunter was not the fellow to keep such an article out of sight, like a flower that is born to blush unseen. Bunter liked to show that wallet off. No member of the Famous Five was left in doubt that Bunter, for the first time in his fat career, was plentifully supplied with cash.

'It's a jolly expensive wallet, and the pater had my monogram put on it specially,' went on Bunter. 'He meant it as a surprise for me. and so it jolly well was, when I found it in my pocket at Skegness Station the other day. Now he says he doesn't know anything about it. Forgotten the whole thing!'

'He couldn't have,' said Johnny Bull.

'He jolly well has, from what he says. Look at that letter.'

The chums of the Remove, in considerable surprise, looked at the letter. There was no doubt about it! If Mr. Bunter had placed that wallet in his hopeful son's pocket, as a happy surprise for him, evidently he had forgotten having done so. But—!

'Sure your pater put it in your pocket?' asked Bob.

'Well, who else could have?' answered Bunter. 'It was shoved into my jacket pocket before I left home that morning, before I put the jacket on, of course, or I should have known. I didn't know anything about it till we got to Skegness. I knew it could only be the pater, so I sent him a postcard to let him know I'd found it all right. Now he says that he doesn't know anything about it! Fancy that! Fancy the poor old pater losing his memory like that!'

'Beats me!' said Bob.

It beat all the party. They simply could not imagine Mr. Bunter suffering a lapse of memory to that extent. Perhaps a momentary suspicion crossed their minds. Had Bunter found that wallet? Billy Bunter was, according to his lights, quite an honest Bunter. In matters of tuck. it was true, he was quite unscrupulous. Nobody's tuck was safe from his fat paws. But nobody could suspect him of touching money that did not belong to him. But was he ass enough to fancy that 'findings were keepings'? He was, after all, ass enough for practically anything.

But if that doubt occurred to the juniors, they had to dismiss it. It was possible

that Bunter, if he found a wallet, might be obtuse enough to fancy that findings were keepings. But in such a case, he certainly would not have written that postcard to Mr. Bunter at Bunter Villa, Billy Bunter himself believed, without a doubt, that that wallet came from Mr. Bunter. And whose else could it be, if not Bunter's, when they had seen that his own initials were embossed on it? Billy Bunter crumpled the letter, and shoved it back into his pocket.

'The pater says I'm to write and explain,' he said. 'But there's nothing to explain, except that he's lost his memory, and I don't want to rub that in. I expect he'll come round all right.'

'It's jolly queer,' said Bob.

'The queerfulness is terrific.'

'Well, people do forget things,' said Bunter. 'I forget things myself sometimes.'

'You do!' agreed Bob. 'You forgot to wash this morning—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, what about some ice-creams? We can get them here. My treat. Come and have some.'

It was nearly an hour since Billy Bunter had eaten anything. So he was, naturally, feeling ready for a little more. He heaved his fat person up from the seat, and the chums of the Remove followed his example. It was a generous Bunter when the fat Owl was in funds: and ice-creams were welcome on a blazing summer's day. So they came and had some. They were still puzzled about that extraordinary letter from Bunter Villa. Billy Bunter, as one ice-cream followed another down a fat neck, dismissed it from mind. He was destined to be reminded of it later in a very unexpected way.

CHAPTER 24

ON THE OCEAN WAVE

'A life on the ocean wave,
A home on the rolling deep,
Where your lunch you cannot save,
And your dinner seldom keep!'

The bracing air of Skegness was inspiring Bob Cherry with melody again. His powerful voice rang far over blue waters, as he stood in the boat, looking back at the shore. Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull were pulling. Billy Bunter sat in the stern with a lunch-basket between his fat knees, from which he was helping himself non-stop. The beach, with its crowds of bathers and sun-bathers, its troops of teenagers and glamorous grandmothers, was dim in the distance. The Greyfriars boat was well out to sea. On a glorious summer's morning, a pull out on the North Sea was very enjoyable, and there were, of course, boats at Butlin's, as there seemed to be everything else. And if the sea happened to be a little choppy that morning who cared?

Even Billy Bunter did not care—so far, at any rate. Bunter liked a row on the blue waters as much as any fellow: with a well-packed lunch-basket for company, and so long as nobody expected him to lend a hand with an oar. On

that point Bunter was particular. He hadn't come to Butlin's to exert himself. In fact he had stated, when they started, that he wasn't going to row. A little to his surprise, the Co. agreed cordially that he wasn't, wouldn't, and shouldn't. It did not occur to Bunter that they had no use for the innumerable crabs he would have caught, if he had.

Billy Bunter was much more agreeably occupied than in handling an oar. He had had only one breakfast that morning, and that was more than an hour ago. So he had vacancies to fill. And his lunch-basket was packed with innumerable juicy, jammy, sticky things, in which his fat heart rejoiced. With nothing to do but to loll on cushions and consume one tasty sticky morsel after another, life seemed very good to Bunter.

So indeed it seemed to all the party. Wharton and Johnny Bull enjoyed the pull at the oars: Bob the exercise of his Stentorian voice, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh basking in the almost tropical sun. Frank Nugent was looking through the Butlin Programme for the Day, which included so many activities and entertainments, from Old Time Dancing to Rock 'n' Roll, tombola to television, cricket to ping-pong, almost everything in fact to almost everything else, that every minute seemed to be packed, from early morn till dewy eve. It was not till the wash of a passing steamer caused the boat to rock 'n' roll, that one member of the happy party suddenly ceased to enjoy life.

'Grooooh!' came from Billy Bunter.

As the boat rocked, Bunter rocked: and a jam-tart in transit down a fat neck seemed to stick there. Billy Bunter gurgled and spluttered wildly.

'Woooooh! Groogh! Ooooch!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anything the matter, Bunter?'

'Woo-hoooooh—grooh—groooooch!'

'He's choking!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'Pat him on the back, Bob.'

'Urrrrgh! Wurrrrggh!'

Smack! Bob Cherry was ready to oblige. He was, perhaps, a little heavy-handed. That smack on Bunters fat back sounded like a pistol-shot.

'That better?' asked Bob.

'Wurrrrggggh!'

Smack!

'That better?'

'Urrrrgh! Beast!' Perhaps those vigorous pats on the back helped. Anyhow, the block in the traffic was overcome, and Bunter found his voice. He yelled.

'Wow! Stoppit! Wharrer you hitting me for, you beast? Wow!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'That's how Bunter thanks a chap for helping him,' said Bob. 'It's an ungrateful world! Sure you're all right, Bunter? I'll give you another if you like.'

'Beast!'

Bunter's reply indicated that he did not want another! The hold-up being over, he resumed operations on the lunch-basket, frowning at five grinning faces. But the frown faded out as one jam-tart followed another on the downward path. There was consolation in jam.

'Hadn't you better go easy on that tuck, Bunter?' asked Johnny Bull. 'The sea's a bit choppy, and you don't want to be sea-sick.'

Sniff, from Bunter.

'Catch me being sea-sick! You fellows might be. I fancy I'm a pretty good sailor. You're looking rather green yourself, Bull. Feeling it coming on? He, he,

he!

'Fathead!' was Johnny's reply.

'You're looking rather yellow, Bob! Think you're going to lose your breakfast?'

'Ass!' said Bob.

No member of the Famous Five was in danger of losing his breakfast. But, as the boat rocked in a choppy sea, it did seem to them that Billy Bunter was in peril of losing the contents of that lunch-basket, if he continued to pack them away at such a rate. And he did so continue. He finished the jam-tarts: but there were cream-tarts to follow, and they followed on. Billy Bunter was enjoying life in his own particular way, and it was not his custom to leave anything eatable uneaten. Often and often, when there was tuck about, did Billy Bunter load over the Plimsoll line. Now he was far exceeding that limit. He blinked at last into an empty basket. Then even Bunter had to stop. He leaned back on the cushions, breathing rather hard. He had done well—remarkably well. He had a slight feeling that he had perhaps done a little too well. His little round eyes had a glassy look behind his big round spectacles. For quite a long time he was silent. Then— 'I say, you fellows!' It was quite a faint squeak.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'I—I say, hadn't we better be getting back?' asked Bunter. 'I—I—I'm feeling quite well, of course. But—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle! I suppose you don't want to pull as far as Belgium?' snapped Bunter. 'What I mean is, we don't want to be late for lunch.'

'You must want lunch, after what you've stacked away!' remarked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'Well, we don't want to be late. There's such a thing as good manners,' said Bunter. 'Look here, let's get back.'

'Lots of time yet,' said Bob. 'But if you're feeling ill, you fat, foozling, gormandizing gollywog—'

'I'm not!' yapped Bunter. 'Never better in my life! I'm enjoying this—enjoying it no end. I'm a better sailor than any of you fellows, and chance it. Catch me being sea-sick! I can jolly well tell you—Ooooooch!'

Billy Bunter broke off, suddenly, as the boat gave a lurch in the swell of the sea. That did it! Quite a ghastly look came over his fat face. He leaned suddenly over the gunwale. The sounds that followed were sad and sorrowful.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob. 'Better pull for the shore, you chaps! If Bunter's enjoying this no end, he doesn't look it.'

'Ooooooch!' came from Bunter. It was undoubtedly not a joyful sound. 'I say—woooogh! Urrrrgh! I say—wooooch!'

'The enjoyfulness does not seem to be terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Perhaps we had better pull shorefully.'

That was agreed non. con. Obviously, Billy Bunter was not in a state to voyage on a choppy sea. Cakes and buns, toffees and chocolates, jam-tarts and cream-tarts, were evidently on the worst of terms with one another, within his extensive circumference, with the boat doing rock 'n' roll on surging waters. Four oars pulled shoreward, while Billy Bunter leaned over the gunwale, uttering a succession of gurgles, moans, and groans, that might have moved a heart of stone. Every rock of the boat elicited a new sound of woe from the unhappy Owl. Bunter had expended quite a slice of his newly-

acquired wealth on that lunch-basket. It proved to be a sheer waste. Four oars made the boat almost fly: but it seemed an age to Billy Bunter, before it bumped on the beach. Sympathetic hands helped him ashore. A myriad of eyes turned on him. Bunter was quite unconscious of them. He clung to Harry Wharton on one side, and Bob Cherry on the other: a feeble, flabby, helpless Bunter. His fat little legs sagged under him.

'I—I say, you fellows!' moaned Bunter. 'I—I'm ill. I don't know what it is, but I've come over awfully ill. I'm not sea-sick——'

'Not?' ejaculated Bob.

'No! Nothing of the kind. But—but I—I do feel bad. Don't you fellows let go. Help me in. I—I think I'm going to peg out. Oh, crikey!'

'Not quite so bad as that,' grinned Bob. 'Brace up, old fat man, and we'll have you back in Camp in two shakes of a frog's whisker!'

They helped the tottering Owl into Camp, the procession exciting quite a lot of interest among other holiday-makers. As they reached Billy Bunter's chalet, they came on their House-captain. Freddy gave the fat Owl's ghastly visage a startled look.

'What—?' he began.

'It's all right,' said Bob, 'Bunter's only pegging out.'

Freddy gave quite a jump.

'At least, that's what he says, and I suppose he knows,' added Bob. 'We're going to shove him on his bed, where he can take his time about it.'

'Beast!' came a feeble moan from Bunter. Bunter was landed on his bed.

'Anything more we can do for you?' asked Bob. 'Urrrrgh!'

'Like something to eat?'

'Beast!'

'What about a tasty bit of fat bacon?'

'Urrrrgh! Go away!' moaned Bunter.

'Come away, Bob, you ass,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. And they departed, leaving Billy Bunter to recover at his leisure.

That he did recover, they were left in no doubt, when, a couple of hours later, they came in bright and cheery from the beach, at the loud-speaker's call to lunch. A fat figure was rolling into the House dining-ball. And the lunch that the fat Owl disposed of there, was proof positive that Billy Bunter was himself again.

CHAPTER 25

IN AMBUSH

'THAT man again!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Eh! Who?'

'Look!'

The Famous Five had had a busy morning. They had been playing tennis while Billy Bunter was still snoring in his chalet. Then there had been a meeting of the Camp

Committee. Then a train ride round the Camp, in which Bunter, having turned out at last, had joined. After which, feeling like stretching their legs a little, they sauntered forth

for a country walk. Billy Bunter, who was seldom keen on stretching his little fat legs, proposed a car: for which, unusual to relate, he was both willing and able to pay.

But the chums of the Remove had no idea of participating in the fat Owl's new-found wealth: neither was a car of much use for leg-stretching. So they walked. It was a very pleasant walk in a leafy Lincolnshire lane: and flat country suited Bunter: so for the first quarter of a mile, his fat face was fairly contented.

Bob Cherry, happening to glance back, caught sight of a bowler hat bobbing in the distance down the lane. Under it was a sharp-featured face with weasel-eyes, and a rather dingy check suit. All the party looked back, at Bob's exclamation: and they all recognized the man in the distance. Undoubtedly it was 'that man again'.

As they looked back, the man turned from the lane, and disappeared into the trees by the wayside. But they had all seen him.

'I say, you fellows, what are you stopping for?' squeaked Billy Bunter. 'Tired already?' Bunter was not yet tired: so he could be sarcastic.

'It's that man,' said Bob. 'He's following us.'

'Eh! What man?'

'That sweep who nearly had your wallet on the beach the other day.'

'Rot!' said Bunter. 'He never touched my wallet, that I know of. I fancy I can take care of my wallet. Don't you fellows be so jumpy.'

'You fat ass!' roared Johnny Bull. 'That man's a pickpocket. He had Mr. Butlin's wallet, the day we came here: and he nearly had yours on the beach—'

'Rot!' repeated Bunter. 'I tell you I met him on the train coming here. He was a clumsy ass, sprawling over a fellow when the train jerked, but he was civil enough, and he jolly well never picked my pocket. Rot!'

'He's followed us,' said Harry Wharton, not heeding the fat Owl. 'I suppose he's been hanging about the Camp looking for another chance. Might have pinched a chalet-key and got in. for all we know. Anyhow he knows that that fat chump is plastered with cash, and he's got his eye on him.'

'Rot!' from Bunter.

'Well, there's enough of us to handle him, if he tries anything on,' said Bob.

'But you'd better not trot out alone, Bunter, with that man hanging about, if you don't want to make him a present of your wallet.'

'Rot!' said Bunter, once more. 'Think I'm the kind of noodle to have his pocket picked?'

'Just that very kind of noodle,' answered Bob.

'Yah!' retorted Bunter. 'For goodness sake, come on, and don't talk rot. We don't want to be late back for lunch.'

Bunter, evidently, was not be convinced. But the rest of the party had no doubts on the subject. And their suspicions were confirmed when, a little farther on, they glanced back again, and a bowler hat again bobbed into view. It disappeared into the trees, as before: but it was clear that the weasel-eyed man was following. However, there were, as Bob said, enough of them to handle Mr. Jecks, if he asked for it, so for the present, at least, Billy Bunter's wallet, with its monogram and its wad of notes, was safe from his thievish fingers. So they sauntered on without giving much thought to Mr. Jecks.

Billy Bunter, indeed, had his fat mind occupied by quite other matters. The first quarter of a mile had not bothered him unduly. But the second quarter told on those little fat legs. Bunter was not exactly tired out by half a mile. But he was undoubtedly lazy. He lagged:

and the other fellows slowed down to accommodate their pace to his: Johnny Bull expressing his feelings with a grunt as he did so. Johnny was good for a good many miles. But he had not had so many meals between meals to carry, as Bunter had.

'I say, you fellows, lovely scenery here, isn't it?' squeaked Bunter. 'I say, let's stop and look at it. We can sit down somewhere.'

Whereat five fellows grinned. It was true that the scenery was very pleasant to the eye: green meadows, a rippling stream, shady old trees in their summer foliage. But it was seldom that Billy Bunter gave heed to the beauties of Nature. They could not help suspecting that he was less interested in the landscape of Lincolnshire, than in sitting down somewhere!

'Lovely!' agreed Bob Cherry. 'But we can admire it as we go along, old fat man. Push on.'

Billy Bunter grunted, and pushed on. He blinked about him, through his big spectacles, as he pushed. But he was not blinking at the scenery, lovely as he had pronounced it to be. Green meadows and shady trees and rippling streams passed him by unregarded. His watchful blinks were in search of something on which to sit. Perpendicularity never appealed to Bunter for long. Bunter felt the need of resting his little fat legs, and reposing his weighty person: and that he was going to do, at the first favourable spot.

Such a spot soon transpired. A clump of shady trees by the side of the lane shut off the blaze of the sun: and under the leafy branches lay a massive log. Billy Bunter, as soon as he spotted it, headed for that log like a homing pigeon. He plumped down on it, with a grunt of satisfaction.

Five fellows came to a halt, gazing at him.

'How long are you going to squat there, Bunter?' inquired Johnny Bull.

'As long as I jolly well like!' retorted Bunter. 'I don't believe in rushing about, on a holiday. You can if you like.'

'Oh, come on!' said Bob.

'Shan't!' said Bunter, positively.

'Well, sit it out if you like,' said Frank Nugent. 'We'll come back this way and pick you up.'

'Mind you're not late,' warned Bunter. 'I'm not going to be late for lunch at the Camp. If you don't turn up, I shan't wait for you.'

Evidently, that country walk had come to an end for Bunter, if not for the other fellows. Billy Bunter was going to rest on that log as long as he jolly well liked. Then he was going to roll back to Camp, in good time to take his place in the dining-hall of the House. So far as that went, nobody had any objection to make. The loss of Bunter's fascinating society was not likely to spoil the pleasure of that ramble in the Lincolnshire lanes. But there was something else to be considered.

'We can't leave the fat ass alone here,' said Harry Wharton.

'Why not?' grunted Johnny Bull.

'That man following us,' said Harry. 'He would be looking for a chance to catch the fat chump on his own. You'd better come on, Bunter.'

'Shan't!' said Bunter.

'I tell you that that rogue is after your wallet—'

'Rot!'

'Can't see anything of him now,' said Bob, looking back. There was no sign of a bowler hat or a weasel face to be seen. 'But—'

'For goodness sake, don't you fellows be so jumpy!' snapped Bunter. 'I'm not afraid of a pickpocket, if you fellows are! I'd knock him down as soon as look at him, if he tried it on. Besides, he ain't following us, and he ain't a pickpocket anyway—he never picked my pocket on the train.'

'Better come on,' said Harry.

'Shan't!'

'My esteemed idiotic Bunter——!' urged Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Rats!' said Bunter.

'Oh, come on!' exclaimed Johnny Bull, impatiently. 'Bunter can sit it out if he likes. Get a move on.'

'We're going on, Bunter,' said Nugent.

'The sooner the better,' retorted Bunter.

That was enough for the Co. Billy Bunter, evidently, had made up his fat mind, and he was not going to stir. Not, at least, till it was time to roll home to Camp for lunch. So they walked on and left him to it.

But there was a very thoughtful shade on Harry Wharton's face as they went on. He was silent for some minutes: then he spoke quietly:

'Look here, you chaps, that rogue isn't far away, and he will jump at a chance of catching that fat chump on his own. Bunter's just asking for it.'

'He can have what he asks for!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Well, yes: but I think it's time that rascal had a tip to steer clear. He seems to know that Bunter is plastered with currency notes: but he may pick other pockets too. Bad characters aren't wanted hanging about a Butlin Camp. There's a ditch across the lane. A dip in it might put him wise that his best guess is to travel.'

Bob Cherry chuckled.

'Jolly good idea, if he would oblige by walking into our hands,' he said. 'Bet you he won't try anything on, while we're all around.'

Wharton made a gesture towards the clump of trees, under the shade of which the fat Owl was reposing his fat person on the log.

'What about taking cover there, and keeping an eye on Bunter?' he asked.

'Once we're out of sight, I've no doubt that rogue will show up.'

Snort from Johnny Bull.

'Did we come out for a country walk, or to play guardian-angels to a fat ass who hasn't sense enough to go in when it rains?' he inquired.

'My dear chap, if a fellow hasn't sense enough to go in when it rains, it's up to more sensible fellows to look after him a bit. And don't we want to give that rogue a tip to clear off?'

'We do—we does!' said Bob. 'Let's.'

Johnny Bull indulged in another snort: but he nodded acquiescence. So it was settled, and the Famous Five pushed through a hedge, and circled round behind the clump of trees. They pushed through the trees, and soon had a back view of Billy Bunter: sitting on the log, refreshing himself with a chunk of toffee. The fat Owl was quite at his ease, and evidently had no idea that five pairs of eyes were now watching from the trees behind him. He chewed toffee, gurgled, and was happy. But as the minutes passed, Johnny Bull

displayed signs of impatience. He looked at his watch several times. Finally he grunted:

'How long are we going to stick here?'

'Until that man shows up,' answered Harry.

'And suppose he doesn't?'

'Keep in cover—look!'

Keeping in cover, they looked. A bowler hat came bobbing into view down the lane. Evidently, 'that man' was going to show up!

CHAPTER 26

MUDDY!

BILLY BUNTER blinked through his big spectacles at Jimmy Jecks, as he came up the lane, and stopped under the shade of the trees. Jimmy's weasel eyes were very wary as he came: but he was satisfied that the fat schoolboy was alone, with no other person in sight. He grinned, as he sat down on the log, a couple of feet from Bunter. Really, he could hardly believe in his good luck. He had followed the Greyfriars party, on the bare chance that they might separate, and that he might find an opportunity of pouncing on Bunter alone. Fortune, it seemed, had fairly played into his hands, for here was Bunter alone, and his companions nowhere visible. Many days had passed, since Jimmy had relieved Mr. Butlin of his wallet. But his quest of that wallet was over at last—at least, he had no doubt that it was.

Billy Bunter eyed him uneasily, as he sat down. What the other fellows had told him on the subject, had made no impression whatever on his fat mind. But alone with the man, so close at hand, he could not help feeling a qualm of uneasiness. Even Bunter realized that it could hardly be by chance that the man had materialized on that spot, ten minutes after the Co. had left him on his own. His blink at Mr. Jecks was very uneasy: and, ceasing for the moment to chew toffee, he hurriedly buttoned up his jacket. The weasel eyes glinted as Mr. Jecks noted that action. A light-fingered operation on an inside pocket was no longer practicable. But Jimmy Jecks had other methods at his disposal, as he had shown weeks ago in Friardale Wood. He was not going without that wallet: and if the 'rough stuff' was required, Jimmy had it ready. 'Nice morning, sir!' said Mr. Jecks, affably. 'Taking a nice walk on your own this fine morning, sir?'

'Oh! Yes! No!' stammered Bunter. 'I'm with my friends, you know—'

'I don't seem to see them about,' remarked Mr. Jecks.

'They—they've just gone up the lane—they're not far away,' mumbled Bunter. 'Just up the lane.'

Jimmy Jecks, grinning, looked up the lane. Visibility was good for quite a distance, and there was no one in sight.

Praps they've gone a bit farther than you fancy, sir!' he drawled.

'I—I—I don't think so,' gasped Bunter. 'They—they would hear me if I called out, I—I'm sure.'

'Mebbe, and mebbe not!' said Jimmy Jecks. 'But you won't call out, Mister Bunter. You jest give one yelp, and I'll give you something to yelp for, that you won't like the least little bit.'

As Mr. Jecks made that pleasant remark, he moved nearer to Billy Bunter, and displayed a rather large and knuckly fist under his fat little nose. Billy Bunter blinked at it. He had a vague impression that he had noticed that knuckly fist before, somewhere.

'I—I—I say—!' gasped Bunter. He blinked at those knuckles in terror.

'Better keep quiet, you know,' said Mr. Jecks. 'I might knock that fat chivvy of yours right through the back of your head. You wouldn't like that now, would you?'

'Oh! No!' gasped the fat Owl. 'I—I say, you lemme alone!' Bunter edged farther along the log, away from Mr. Jecks. Mr. Jecks followed him up, grinning.

'Hand it over,' he said.

'Eh? Hand what over?'

'That wallet,' grinned Mr. Jecks. 'I know you've got it about you, young Fat Jack of the Boneyard. I've had an eye on you more'n once, and seen you splashing the money about. But you ain't splashed it all yet, and you ain't going to splash any more. I'm doing the splashing from now on. Got that?'

'I—I—I—I—!' stuttered Bunter.

'That'll do! Sharp's the word!' said Jimmy Jecks, 'Somebody might come along, and I've got no time to waste.' He reached out, and grasped the back of Billy Bunter's collar. 'Now, then—!'

'Urrrrggh! Leggo!' spluttered Bunter.

Jimmy Jecks had no intention of letting go, until he had obtained possession of that wallet. But he did let go: at a sudden patter of footsteps. Up to that moment, the spot had seemed quite solitary, except for himself and Bunter. Now, all of a sudden, it was quite populated, as five figures came at a run from the clump of trees behind the log. Jimmy Jecks released Bunter's collar as suddenly as if it had become red-hot, his weasel eyes glinting round in surprise and alarm. But he had no chance to take to his heels. The Famous Five were all round him.

'Oh!' gasped Billy Bunter, as surprised as Mr. Jecks by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the Greyfriars fellows, but ever so much more pleased by that unexpected sight. 'I—I say, you fellows—'

'Collar him!' said Harry Wharton.

'I say, you fellows, he was going to pinch my wallet—'

'We know that, fathead: we've been watching him. Got it into your fat head now that he's a pickpocket?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Oh! Yes! I say, he ought to be run in—'

'Well, we're not bobbies to run him in, but we're going to give him a lesson,' said Harry. 'He's going into that ditch. Collar him.'

Jimmy Jecks clenched his knuckly fists, his weasel eyes gleaming from one to another of the five faces round him. But he did not venture to use those knuckles. He had no chance, in the hands of five sturdy fellows, and he did not resist, as Bob Cherry grasped one of his arms, and Harry Wharton the other.

'March!' grinned Bob.

There was a rather wide ditch, on the other side of the lane. Little rain had

fallen of late: it seemed to be always fine at Butlin's. There was not much water in the ditch. But if there was not much water, there was plenty of mud—thick and oozy and slimy. Jimmy Jecks, as he was marched to the edge, looked at it, and fairly shuddered.

'Look 'ere—!' he panted.

'Tip him in!'

'I ain't going into that ditch!' yelled Jimmy.

'Your mistake—you are!' said Johnny Bull. 'Shove him in.'

Jimmy Jecks began to struggle. The aspect of that ditch was altogether too uninviting. But he struggled in vain, in the grasp of many hands. Over he went, headlong, landing in the ditch with a mighty splash.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Billy Bunter.

'Wurrrrggh!' spluttered Jimmy Jecks.

He almost disappeared in wet mud. Spluttering frantically, he struggled to his feet, standing knee-deep in mud. and dripping with slime. He was clothed in slime as in a garment. From head to foot he was of the slime, slimy. The glare he cast at five grinning faces was quite deadly: but it was more slimy than deadly. He spluttered and spluttered and spluttered.

'That's a tip to keep your distance!' said Bob Cherry. 'You're not wanted around Butlin's, see?'

'Urrrrrggh!'

'If we see you again, you'll get some more of the same,' said Harry. 'Take the tip, and clear out.'

'Gurrrrrggh!'

'I say, you fellows—'

'That's that!' said Bob. 'If you want any more, you sweep, you've only got to hang around and ask for it. Come on, you chaps: we shan't get much of a walk before lunch, at this rate.'

And the Famous Five moved off, leaving Mr. Jecks to sort himself out at his leisure.

'Coming along, Bunter?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically. 'Or are you going to wait here till that sportsman crawls out of the ditch?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

It did not take Billy Bunter long to decide about that! The wealth of Golconda could hardly have tempted him to remain on the spot till the infuriated ruffian crawled out.

'I say, you fellows, I'm coming! I say, don't race off like that. I say, don't you leave me behind!' yelled Bunter. And his fat little legs fairly twinkled after the Famous Five.

They were out of sight, when Jimmy Jecks succeeded in extricating himself from clinging mud, and crawling out. He looked a deplorable object, as he scraped off mud, and the remarks he made, as he scraped, might almost have turned the atmosphere blue. Finally he fished out a muddy bowler hat, jammed it on a muddy head, and squelched away, a blot on the landscape in the summer sunshine. It was a dismal and dispirited Jimmy: and he could not help feeling that, if he did ultimately get his dishonest hands on Mr. Butlin's wallet, he would have earned it by the time he got it!

CHAPTER 27

CHUCKED OVER.

‘CHUCK me over a deck-chair!’ said Billy Bunter.

There were several deck-chairs within a few yards. Billy Bunter seemed disinclined to peregrinate those few yards. Bunter was tired.

Actually, he had covered a couple of miles that morning, and he had been very glad to roll back into Camp. Since then he had lunched. Lunch, with Billy Bunter, was not a light matter. His exertions in the dining-hall of the House, following that morning walk, quite eliminated Bunter from the active list. An afternoon nap was indicated: and the fat Owl rolled off to his chalet for the same. But it was blazing afternoon, and very hot indoors. Billy Bunter reappeared in the doorway of his chalet.

Harry Wharton and Co. in a cheery group, not feeling in the least the need of a ‘nap’, were discussing what they were going to do. There was always something to do, or something to see, at Butlin’s, and they were really spoilt for choice. There were the swimming-pools, the sports stadium, the cinema, the row-boat pond, there were tennis and table-tennis, there were the Redcoat entertainers, there was the ‘Jolly Roger’, there was music—there was, in fact, everything, and everything else! Billy Bunter’s fat squeak interrupted the discussion, and they looked round at him.

A good many elderly Campers were sunning themselves in deck-chairs. Butlin’s catered for all ages. Younger Campers preferred something more strenuous: with the exception of William George Bunter. Strenuousness had absolutely no appeal for Bunter, especially after lunch.

‘I say, you fellows, chuck me over a deck-chair, will you?’ squeaked Bunter, again, as the Famous Five did not immediately accede to his request.

‘You couldn’t manage to fetch one for yourself?’ inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically. ‘Oh, really, Bull—’

‘Lazybones!’ said Frank Nugent. ‘Toddle along for one of those chairs, if you want one. Wouldn’t you rather come along to the swimming-pool?’

‘No, I jolly well wouldn’t!’ snapped Bunter. ‘You fellows walked me off my legs this morning, and I’m tired. Chuck me over a deck-chair, and don’t be so jolly lazy.’

Really, there was no valid reason why Bunter should not have fetched the deck-chair for himself, unless laziness was a reason. Johnny Bull gave a snort and turned his back. Evidently Johnny had no intention of obliging. Bob Cherry, however, seemed more amenable. Bob, as usual, was full of beans that afternoon: and, as was not unusual, in a playful mood.

‘Any old thing,’ said Bob. ‘But let’s have it clear. Sure you want us to chuck you over a deck-chair, Bunter?’

‘Haven’t I said so?’ yapped Bunter.

‘Oh, all right.’

‘Look here, Bob—!’ growled Johnny Bull.

‘My dear chap, if Bunter wants us to chuck him over a deck-chair, why not?’ said Bob. ‘Just you lend me a hand.’

Johnny Bull stared. So did the rest of the Co. The sturdy Bob was equal to carrying, or chucking, dozens of deck-chairs. Why he wanted a helping hand was quite a puzzle.

‘Is a deck-chair too heavy for you to lift?’ asked Johnny, sarcastic again.

‘No! But Bunter is,’ murmured Bob.

‘Eh! What?’

‘Bunter wants us to chuck him over a deck-chair—’

‘Oh!’ Johnny Bull caught on, and grinned. ‘Right-ho! I’ll lend a hand.’
They moved along to the deck-chairs. They picked up one of them, bore it along, and set it up. Billy Bunter watched that proceeding with approval. He was leaning in his doorway: Bunter always leaned, if there was nothing at hand on which to sit, and there was something on which to lean. Now, however, he detached himself from the doorpost, prepared to stretch his lazy fat limbs in luxurious ease in that deck-chair. But what followed was unexpected—by Bunter! Bob Cherry, with a cheery grin, stepped to him, and grasped him by his fat shoulders, ‘Ready?’ he asked.

‘Eh! Leggo! Wharrer you mean?’ squeaked Bunter.

‘You take his feet, Johnny.’

‘Right-ho!’ grinned Johnny.

‘Leggo!’ roared Bunter. ‘Wharrer you up to you silly asses? Leggo! You’ll have me over! Oh, crikey!’

All Butlinland swam round Billy Bunter, as he was heaved off his feet. Bunter was a good weight, even for two pairs of sturdy hands. But Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull exerted all their strength, and up he went, a dizzy and infuriated Owl. He spluttered wildly as he swung, like Mahomet’s coffin, between the heavens and the earth.

‘Leggo! Beasts! Stoppit! Oh, crikey! What do you fancy you’re up to?’ shrieked Bunter.

‘Chucking you over a deck-chair,’ answered Bob. ‘Didn’t you ask us to?’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ roared the Co.

‘You silly idiots,’ yelled Bunter. ‘When I said chuck me over a deck-chair, I didn’t mean chuck me over a deckchair—I meant chuck me over a deck-chair—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘One—two—three!’ said Bob, and Billy Bunter, wriggling wildly, swung to and fro as his helpers prepared to ‘chuck’ him over a deck-chair—Certainly not in the manner intended by the fat Owl.

‘Yaroooooh! Leggo! I say, you fellows—yaroooooh!’

‘Go!’ said Bob.

And Bunter went.

Bump!

Billy Bunter landed on the other side of the deck-chair, He did not land very hard. In fact, Bob and Johnny did not let go till he was only a few inches from the ground. It was the lightest of bumps. But from the roar that Billy Bunter uttered, as he touched down, it might have been such a shock as that celebrated by the poet when Inisfail met Lochlin.

‘Yaroooooh!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘There you are, Bunter,’ said Bob, cheerily. ‘Next time you feel too lazy to stir a stump, you’ve only got to ask us to chuck you over a deck-chair.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Always ready to oblige!’ grinned Johnny Bull.

‘Anything more you want?’ asked Bob. ‘We’ll chuck you over the chalet, if you like.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Oooogh! I’m all out of breath! I’ll jolly well punch your nose for this, Bob Cherry!’ gasped Bunter.

‘Oh, do!’ grinned Bob. ‘Ask one of those Redcoat chaps to lend you a step-ladder. They’re obliging chaps.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Beast!’

Billy Bunter sat on the earth and spluttered. Breath was always in short supply with Bunter: especially after the ample and hospitable lunch in Butlinland. Gladly he would have punched five noses all round. But he did not embark on that enterprise. He sat and spluttered. The Famous Five, being more interested in strenuous activities than in listening to the fat Owl’s splutters, strolled away, laughing, heading for the swimming-pool. There they were soon splashing merrily: while Billy Bunter, having heaved himself up at last, plumped into the deck-chair.

Other occupants of deck-chairs along the chalet-line were regarding him with smiling faces. But Billy Bunter did not smile. He frowned. Bunter was irate. It was really enough to make any fellow irate, to be chucked over a deck-chair, when all he had asked for was to be chucked over a deck-chair! His fat brow was corrugated with a frown worthy of the Lord High Executioner, and his little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. Billy Bunter was thinking of reprisals!

CHAPTER 28

BILLY BUNTER’S BOOBY-TRAP

‘HE, he, he!’

Billy Bunter chuckled.

He was amused.

The fat Owl had been left sprawling in a deck-chair. For quite a long time, he continued so to do. But if his fat limbs were idle, his fat brain, for once, was active. Bunter had thought it out. He was going to give those cheery youths, Harry Wharton and Co., a Roland for an Oliver—tit for tat! If they fancied that a fat Owl could be chucked about like a sack of coke, they had, in Bunter’s opinion, another guess coming.

Having thought it out, Bunter detached his fat person from the deck-chair, and rolled away to the shopping arcade. You could buy practically anything there: all that was needed was the wherewithal to pay for the same. Bunter was in the unusual state of being well-supplied with the wherewithal. His purchase was a little unusual. It was the largest bag of flour that was to be had for love or money. With that purchase in a shopping-bag, the fat Owl rolled grinning back to his quarters.

But he did not roll into his own chalet. He rolled into the Famous Five’s. It was there that the vengeful Owl had a use for his remarkable purchase. The door of that chalet opened inwards. The juniors had left it ajar. They were going to find it ajar when they returned, but not in its accustomed innocuous state. Something quite unexpected was going to greet them when they pushed open that door.

Billy Bunter would really have preferred a bag of soot for his purpose. But even at Butlin’s bags of soot were not readily obtained. A bag of flour was the next best thing. And any fellow who suddenly found a bag of flour bursting on his head was certain to be quite unpleasantly surprised. If they all crowded in together, they would all get some of it. If one came in first, he would get it.

Billy Bunter did not care, so long as some of them got it.

And it was so easy, now that he had thought it out. The chums of the

Remove, splashing about in the swimming-pool, certainly wouldn't be thinking of booby-traps, or anything of the kind. In all probability, they had forgotten Billy Bunter's fat existence, as so often they did. They would be taken absolutely off their guard.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

His first proceeding was to set the window wide open. Once the booby-trap was in position, the door had to remain only a few inches ajar. But escape by dropping out of the window was easy. Campers might be surprised to see the fattest form at Butlin's dropping from a chalet window. Bunter did not mind that. He was certainly not going to remain on the spot till the booby-trap caught its victim, or victims. It was a wary Owl.

Next, he placed a chair by the door, to stand upon, while he arranged that surprise for the Famous Five. He had plenty of time. He had glimpsed the Famous Five through the glass walls of the swimming-pool: so obviously they wouldn't be coming back just yet. He had ample time to prepare that surprise for them when, at length, they came.

Standing on the chair, he lifted the bag of flour in both fat hands, grinning from one fat ear to another as he did so. He lifted it to the top of the door, just over his fat head.

Tap!

The door opened.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter, taken quite by surprise.

It is proverbial that it is often the unexpected that happens. Once more the truth of that proverb was exemplified. Billy Bunter knew that his intended victims would not be coming back yet. It had not occurred to his fat brain that anyone else might come.

But somebody, evidently, had!

That somebody tapped, and, finding the door ajar, naturally pushed it open.

The result was disastrous.

Bunter was not finished yet. The bag of flour in his fat hands was about to be placed in position when the door opened. The opening door, naturally, banged into the chair on which he stood. The chair rocked, and Bunter rocked. He rocked for about a second: then he crashed.

Bump!

'Oooogh!'

Billy Bunter sat on the floor. The bag of flour followed him down. It landed on a fat head, and burst there. It had been planned to burst on a head, and smother that head. Now it did! Unluckily—for Bunter!—it was Billy Bunter's own fat head on which it burst.

'Ooooooh!' gurgled Bunter.

'What—what—what——?' exclaimed a surprised voice.

A portly figure appeared in the doorway. Surprised eyes gazed at a fat junior sitting on the floor, streaming with flour. Flour smothered Billy Bunter from head to foot. He was of the flour, floury! In that whitened state, he looked like the ghost of a fat Owl.

'Who is that—what has happened—what—?'

'Oooogh!' gurgled Bunter.

He clawed flour from his eyes and spectacles, and blinked dizzily at the new arrival. He beheld a portly gentleman, with a ruddy kindly face and keen blue eyes. He had seen that face once before, and remembered it. It was Mr.

William Butlin, King of Holiday Camps.

Billy Bunter hadn't expected to see Mr. Butlin. He had heard that the Chief was expected at Skegness, that was all. How was Bunter to know that he had arrived: and even if he had known, how was he to guess that so busy a man, with a hundred-and-one affairs on his mind, would find time to walk round the chalets to give his young friends from Greyfriars a look-in? No such idea could have occurred to Bunter. He no more expected to see William Butlin, than he expected to see William Tell or William Wallace. But William Butlin had materialized, at quite an awkward moment for Bunter. Caught in his own booby-trap, the hapless fat Owl sat spluttering flour, and blinking dizzily at Mr. Butlin's astonished face through floury spectacles.

Mr. Butlin gazed at him, at the overturned chair, and the burst flour-bag, and then at the floury Owl again.

'Who are you?' he demanded. The fat face Mr. Butlin had seen in Friardale Wood was too disguised by flour to be recognizable.

'Urrrrgh! I'm Bunter!' gasped the fat Owl. 'Oh, crikey! Oooogh.'

'Bunter? Oh! One of the Greyfriars boys?'

'Urrrrgh! Yes! Oooogh.'

'And what the dickens have you been doing here?' asked Mr. Butlin.

'Oh! I—I—I wasn't setting a booby-trap,' gasped Bunter, in a hurry.

'What?'

'I—I—I mean, it was only a joke,' stuttered Bunter. 'Just—just a surprise for the other fellows when they came in. I—I thought they'd—they'd be amused.'

'Where are the others now?'

'I—I think they've gone swimming. I—I mean, I don't know. I didn't watch them through the glass—I—I mean—'

'Then I will see them later,' said Mr. Butlin. 'As for you, Master Bunter, I advise you to play no more jokes of this kind. Keep that in mind.'

'Oh! Yes! No! Certainly,' stuttered Bunter.

Mr. Butlin walked away, leaving the fat Owl clawing off flour. He hardly needed Mr. Butlin's advice: he was fed up with booby-traps. Billy Bunter did not always know when he had had enough: but on this occasion he was quite sure of it. He rolled away to his own chalet for the clean-up he badly needed: leaving a sea of flour on the floor: a surprise for the Famous Five when they came in later. How it had come there they did not know: and Billy Bunter was quite disinclined to tell them. He was still cleaning off flour, when Bob Cherry looked in.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! You look a bit floury?' said Bob. 'There's a lot of flour spilt in our chalet. Know anything about it?'

'Eh! No! Nothing at all,' answered Bunter, promptly. 'I haven't been in your chalet, and I hadn't a bag of flour, either. I wasn't going to fix up a booby-trap, and I never fell over, and—'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Bob.

Bob departed, laughing: and sounds of laughter followed from the adjoining chalet. Why, Billy Bunter did not know.

CHAPTER 29

BUNTER ON A BIKE—AND OFF!

'OF course I can!' said Billy Bunter, disdainfully.

'Look here, you fat ass—'

'Yah!'

'You'll come a purler'

'Yah!'

'And burst all over Lincolnshire!'

'Yah!'

Billy Bunter's replies to the expostulations of the Co. lacked variety, but did not lack emphasis. Billy Bunter was not easy to convince that he couldn't do a thing that he had just seen another fellow do. Bunter had a fixed belief that whatever any other fellow could do, he could do also, and a little better. It was only when he came to do it that he woke up, as it were.

And this feat was easy—at least, it looked easy to Bunter when he watched Bob Cherry perform it. That it was not so easy as it looked, especially to a fat and clumsy Owl, Bunter was to discover later.

It was another glorious summer's morning at Butlin's. The Camp hummed like a hive of bees, with the non-stop and endlessly varied entertainments that were the feature of Butlin's. There were crowds in the Camp: crowds on the promenade, crowds on the golden beach, crowds in the placid blue waters that lapped the beach. But the Greyfriars party, at the moment, were at some distance from Camp inland.

Bicycles, like almost everything else, were available at Butlin's. The Famous Five were going for a spin on the Wolds. Billy Bunter did not, perhaps, yearn for strenuous exercise. But he certainly was not going to be left behind.

Having, as a necessary precaution, crammed his pockets with sandwiches, cakes, buns, and packets of toffee, the fat Owl pushed out with the rest. There was plenty of flat country round about, and Bunter liked fiat country when he was on a bike. However, it was not all as flat as a pancake: there was a rise ahead, in the leafy lane that the juniors were now following.

Bob Cherry, who could do practically anything on a bike, shot ahead, with his hands in his pockets. Bob rather liked riding with his hands in his pockets. It was only necessary to keep up a certain speed to ride without touching the handle-bars. But it was very necessary indeed to keep up that speed, if the rider did not want the machine to curl up and land him in a heap on the earth. Bob could rely on his sinewy legs. But while it was fairly easy going on the flat, it was far from easy going when it came to a hill: and Bob had to grind hard as he flew up the acclivity.

His comrades, not in the least disposed to do likewise, watched him rather uneasily, as they followed at a more moderate pace. They would not have been surprised to see him come a 'purler', mixed up with a curling bike: which would rather have dashed the enjoyment of that spin on the Wolds. It looked easy, to Bunter, but they knew that it was risky.

'Easy enough!' said Bunter. 'I could do that, you fellows.'

'Not in your lifetime!' said Johnny Bull.

'Well, just watch me!' said Bunter. 'I'll show you.'

The fat Owl put a little more beef into his pedalling. Bunter was going to show

them! Four voices expostulated in unison. But expostulations were a sheer waste on Billy Bunter, when he was going to show them!

He shot ahead, pedalling as hard as his fat little legs could pedal. Then he transferred his fat hands from the handle-bars to his pockets.

'Chuck it, you fat chump!' shouted Johnny Bull.

'Yah!' floated back over a fat shoulder.

'Stop it, Bunter!' yelled Nugent.

'Yah!'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Harry Wharton, 'that fat ass will come down with a bump when he gets to the rise.'

The bumpfulness will probably be terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Fools rush in where angels fear to go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

Billy Bunter flew on. He was going to do what Bob did: and so far, he was doing it. On the flat he contrived to keep up the necessary speed to keep his balance. But when he reached the rise in the lane, over which Bob Cherry sailed with apparent ease, it was another story.

For some reason unknown to Bunter, he did not sail up that rise as Bob had done. The pedals failed to revolve as speedily as was required. All of a sudden it was borne in on Billy Bunter's fat brain that he couldn't ride up that slope with his hands in his pockets. He dragged those fat hands out, and made a frantic clutch at the handlebars. But it was too late. The bike curled up.

What happened next Billy Bunter hardly knew.

All he knew was that trees, and sky, and Lincolnshire, were spinning round him. Then he bumped.

'Yaroooooh!' roared Bunter, as he bumped. It was a terrific bump. It did not shake Lincolnshire: but really, it might almost have.

Billy Bunter rolled and roared. All sorts of things exuded from his pockets as he floundered on the earth— buns, cakes, sandwiches, packets of toffee, and other articles. Bunter did not heed them. All Bunter heeded was the effect of his sudden contact with the earth. He did not, like Antaeus of old, derive new energy from contact with Mother Earth. Far from it. He rolled, and floundered, and sprawled, and roared, a dazed and dizzy Owl.

'The ass!' said Johnny Bull.

'The fathead!' said Nugent.

'Come on, quick!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'He sounds as if he's damaged.'

The Co. jumped off their machines to render first-aid. Billy Bunter certainly sounded as if he needed it. Bob Cherry, from the top of the rise, looked back: and then came speeding back down the slope. Five willing helpers gathered round the sprawling, yelling Owl. They helped him to his feet. They held him on them, tottering and spluttering.

'Hurt, old chap?' asked Bob.

'Ow! Wow! I think both my legs are broken—'

'You're standing on them,' said Johnny Bull.

'Ow! Wow! Wow! Ow! Wow!' Bunter realized that those fat little legs were not broken. They were still supporting his uncommon weight. 'Ow! Wow! I think my head's cracked—'

'That's nothing new!' said Johnny.

'Beast!'

'Any more damages?' asked Nugent.

'I've got pains and aches all over me, from head to foot—ow! Wow! They're all over—'

'Well, if they're all over, let's push on,' said Johnny Bull. -

'You silly chump, I don't mean that they're all over— I mean that they're all over!' howled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle,' hooted Bunter. 'Jolly funny, ain't it, for a fellow to come a cropper like that! Wow!'

'Didn't you ask for it?' inquired Johnny.

'Yah!'

Billy Bunter's first impression was that every bone in his plump body had been broken, probably into very small pieces. But on examination, it proved not to be quite so bad as that. In fact, nothing at all was broken. Certainly he had come a very emphatic purler. But it was, after all, only a bumped and breathless Owl. Perhaps the layers of fat had cushioned the impact. But undoubtedly there were lingering aches and pains. It was likely to be long before Billy Bunter again essayed to ride up a hill with his hands in his pockets.

For quite a long time, Billy Bunter rubbed his damages, squeaked, and mumbled. At length there were symptoms of impatience from the other fellows. Really, they had not set out that sunny morning to stand in a circle round Billy Bunter while he rubbed and squeaked and mumbled.

'Well, let's push on!' said Bob, at last. 'Feel like pushing on, Bunter?'

'No, I jolly well don't!' yapped Bunter. 'Of course, you don't care if a fellow's suffering fearful agonies—'

'Is the fearfulness of the agony terrific, my esteemed Bunter?' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Yah! I'm going back to Camp! I'm not going to ride that machine again. Look how it buckled up when I was riding it—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It wouldn't be easy to ride,' said Bob, picking up Bunter's machine. There was a sound of clinking as he did so. The bike had been a good deal more damaged than Bunter. 'This isn't a going concern, old fat man. You'd better wheel it back to Camp, if you're going back.'

'One of you fellows can do that, when I've got all these aches and pains—'

'But we're not going back.'

'Oh, leave a chap in the lurch!' said Bunter, sarcastically. 'It's like you, I must say.'

'You silly fat ass!' roared Bob. 'We've come out for a spin, and we're not turning back after half a mile.'

'I'm not, at any rate!' said Johnny Bull. 'I'm going on.' And Johnny put a leg over his machine, and went on. Johnny, a practical youth, considered that enough time had been wasted already by Billy Bunter's antics. He was not going to waste any more. He pedalled onward.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh exchanged glances. Then they remounted and followed Johnny. Bob Cherry lingered. Even Bob's boundless good-nature was not equal to abandoning the spin, to wheel a bike back to Camp for a fat Owl who was too lazy to wheel it himself. But he gathered up the various articles that had tumbled out of Bunter's

pockets when he rolled in the grass by the roadside.

'Here you are, fatty,' said Bob. 'Here's your sandwiches—here's your cake—here's your buns—here's your toffee—are you putting them into your pockets, or packing them inside?'

'Yah!' was Bunter's reply. He filled a large mouth to capacity with toffee, and packed the rest in his pockets.

'Here's your bike,' said Bob.

'Blow the bike! With all these aches and pains—'

'It belongs to the Camp!' said Bob. 'You'll have to take it back.'

'Somebody can fetch it,' retorted Bunter. 'I'm not going to wheel a bike clinking and clanking like a musical-box, I know that. You can if you like.'

'Look here, you fat ass—'

'Yah!'

Billy Bunter having settled the matter was rolling off, the way he had come.

Bob Cherry was left holding the crooked bike.

'Bunter, you fathead—!' roared Bob.

No reply from Bunter! Like the deep and dark blue ocean in the poem, he rolled on. Bunter was going back to Camp: but evidently, he was not wheeling that crooked bike back. It was left on Bob's hands: and what to do with it was rather a puzzle. Bob Cherry solved the puzzle by lifting the bike across the green verge by the road, and leaning it on a tree. After all, it was Bunter's bike, and Bunter was free to leave it there if he liked.

As he turned back, after leaning the bike against the tree, Bob's foot tapped against a small object lying in the grass. He stooped to look at it, thinking that it might be one of the many articles that Bunter had shed from his pockets as he rolled, and which he had missed when he picked up the rest. And it was! 'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob, as the glimmer of a monogram on leather caught his eye.

He picked up a plump wallet. The monogram 'W.B.' revealed whose it was—at all events, Bob had no doubt that it did! It was Bunter's wallet. That wallet had had more than one narrow escape since it had come into Billy Bunter's possession. Now it had had another!

'The fat chump!' muttered Bob. He stared after Bunter. The fat Owl had turned a corner of the lane, and disappeared. He stared in the other direction. His comrades were almost out of sight. Finally, he put the wallet into his pocket, to be returned to its owner when the Co. came back to Camp after their spin. He remounted his bike, and put on a burst of speed to overtake his comrades. And that was that!

CHAPTER 30

NO LUCK!

JIMMY JECKS stared. Then he stared again. He was surprised and he was pleased. He was so surprised, and he was so pleased, that he seemed hardly able to trust his weasel eyes, sharp as they were. But there was no doubt about it. Luck, at last—at long last!—had come Jimmy's way.

He was leaning on a wayside tree, smoking a cigarette. He was not in the best of spirits. Many disappointments had fallen to his lot: and the outlook was not very hopeful. He was still hanging about the vicinity of the Skegness Camp, taking care however to keep out of observation. One experience in a muddy ditch was enough for him, and he did not want history to repeat itself. But his hope of catching the present possessor of Mr. Butlin's wallet on his own, outside the Camp, had diminished almost to zero. Six cyclists, in a bunch, had passed up that lane, and Jimmy had dodged behind his tree till they were gone. One of them was the fat 'covey' who had that wallet in his pocket. It was so near—and yet so far! Mr. Jecks would no more have thought of tackling the Famous Five in a bunch, than he would have thought of bearding a lion in his den. He had to let the coveted prize pass him by. But now—!

Leaning on his tree, smoking one cigarette after another, it was a dejected Jimmy. So many disappointments, one after another, might almost have tempted him to turn to honest ways, if he had thought of it. That wallet was out of his reach, and every day, he had no doubt, its contents were diminishing. But now—!

The weasel eyes gleamed at a fat figure rolling slowly down the shady lane. The cyclists had passed, and gone: miles away by that time, he would have supposed. And here was one of them—the one Jimmy specially wanted to interview, coming back, on foot, on his own! It was no wonder that Mr. Jecks could hardly trust his weasel eyes, for the moment. Such luck really seemed too good to be true!

He grinned, scanning the fat schoolboy as he came nearer. Billy Bunter had a dusty look, and he was without the bike he had been riding. So it was easy for Jimmy to guess that he had had a spill and abandoned the spin. The others, evidently, hadn't, for there was no sign of them. The dusty Owl was walking back to Camp by himself—walking fairly into Jimmy's hands.

Billy Bunter rolled on slowly: but he rolled on, nearer and nearer, unconscious of gloating eyes fixed on him from the shade of the wayside trees. Billy Bunter was not thinking of pickpockets, or of his wallet, or even of dinner at the Camp. Lingering aches and pains in his fat person were enough for Bunter to think of. Every now and then he paused in his roll, to rub some portion of that fat person, and give expression to a disgruntled grunt.

Jimmy Jecks cast a rapid glance up and down the lane. There was no one but Bunter in sight. But only half a mile from a Butlin Camp that hummed and buzzed with an innumerable population, it was necessary to be wary. Any minute there might be a car, or a scooter, or a crowd of Butlineers, coming into view. Jimmy did not step out into the lane till the fat schoolboy came abreast of his tree.

Then he acted very swiftly.

Billy Bunter hardly knew what it was that suddenly leaped out into the sunlight, grabbed him by the collar, and hooked him off the road into the dusky shade of the trees. He uttered a startled howl as he was hooked. 'Ow! Leggo! Who's that? Wow!'

Jimmy did not answer. Having hooked the fat junior like a fat fish, he bundled him headlong out of sight of any chance passer in the lane. Bunter, his fat brain swimming, hardly aware whether he was on his head or his heels, felt himself bundled along: till, a dozen yards from the road, Jimmy considered it

safe to stop. Then he slammed Bunter against a tree, on which the fat Owl leaned, gasping for breath, blinking wildly in amazement and alarm. Then, as he recognized the grinning rascal standing before him, he uttered a yell.

'Oh, crikey! Help!'

'Pack that up!' said Mr. Jecks. A knuckly fist, that Bunter knew only too well, came within an inch of a fat little nose. Billy Bunter 'packed it up' promptly.

'Know me agin?' grinned Mr. Jecks.

'Oh! Yes! G—g—g—g—good-morning,' stammered Bunter. 'I—I say, I—I've got to get back to Camp. You let me pass, will you? I've got to see Mr. Quelch—I—I mean, I've got to see Mr. Butlin—he—he—he's expecting me—I say, you let a fellow pass.'

Bunter made one step. But he did not make another.

Tap! Knuckles contacted a fat nose.

'Yaroooooh! roared Bunter.

'Have another?' asked Mr. Jecks.

'Ow! Wow! No! You keep off, you beast!' gasped Bunter. He rubbed that fat little nose. 'I—I say, my friends will be coming back for me—'

'Can it!' said Mr. Jecks. 'This ain't like it was the other day—they ain't laying in wait for a bloke, this time.

But you can cut off as soon as you like, after you've handed me that wallet.'

'You're not going to pinch my wallet!' gasped Bunter.

'Yourn?' jeered Mr. Jecks. 'You young rogue you, it's jest about as much yourn as it is mine, and well you know it. Yourn, is it?'

'Eh!' Bunter blinked at him in astonishment. 'Of course it's mine. Think I should have somebody else's wallet?'

Jimmy Jecks stared at him. That Bunter had found the wallet in his pocket, had kept possession of it, and had been spending its contents freely, he knew. However much he had been surprised to find it there, he could not, so far as Jimmy could see, suppose that it was his own. Yet apparently he did suppose that very thing. It was quite a surprise for Mr. Jecks. Judging others by himself, he had had no doubt that that fat 'covey' had taken the view that 'findings were keepings', and coolly appropriated the wallet that had been 'planted' on him. How he could fancy that it was his own, beat Mr. Jecks.

'Well, my eye!' said Mr. Jecks. 'You found that wallet in your pocket. 'Ow do you think it got there? Think you was made a present of it?'

'Of course I was—'

'Eh!'

'It's mine. It's got my monogram on it. What do you mean?' demanded Bunter.

'Think I'd be spending the money if it wasn't mine?'

Mr. Jecks gazed at him.

'Well,' he said. 'You look the stoopidest idjit I've ever seen in my natural, but this takes the cake, this does. You find a wallet packed with notes in your pocket, and you fancy its your own. What you're doing outside a Home for Idjits, I don't know. But I got no time to waste on you, Mister Bunter. If that wallet's yourn now, it's going to be mine. You've been spending from it pretty free, but I expect there's enough left to pay a bloke for his trouble. Hand it over, sharp.'

'Look here—!'

'Nuff said! Hand it over.' Mr. Jecks was losing patience. Billy Bunter uttered a yelp, as the knuckle tapped again on a fat little nose. 'Now then—sharp!'

Slowly, a fat hand went to a pocket. There was no help for it. The prospect of losing his unaccustomed wealth was dismaying. But the prospect of those knuckles banging upon his fat countenance was still more so. Jimmy Jecks was more than ready to hand out the 'rough stuff'. Slowly, but inevitably, Billy Bunter's fat hand went into that pocket for the wallet.

Then he gasped. That fat hand groped in an empty pocket. The wallet was not there! He groped, and groped again. Still he found only vacancy.

'Sharp!' snapped Mr. Jecks.

'It—it—it's not there!' stuttered Bunter. 'It—it—it's gone.'

Mr. Jecks gave him a grim look.

'If I 'ave to 'it you, your friends won't know your mug agin, when they see it!' he said. 'Don't keep me waiting.'

'But—but—but it really isn't there!' gasped Bunter. 'You can feel in the pocket if you like. I—I must have forgotten it this morning. I—I keep it under my pillow at night, and—and I must have left it there. Cherry was yelling to me that the bikes were ready, and—and— Ow! Stop dragging a fellow about like that, will you?' spluttered Bunter, wriggling in the angry grasp that Mr. Jecks laid on him.

Jimmy Jecks did not handle him gently. He grabbed the fat junior, and proceeded to turn out his pockets one after another. He turned out many things more interesting to Bunter than to himself—a packet of toffee, several buns, a chunk of cake, two or three apples, and sandwiches, and a couple of oranges. He flung them to right and left as they came to light. But he failed to turn out a wallet! No wallet was there! His search was very thorough. But the most meticulous search could not reveal an article that was not present. Once more Mr. Jecks had registered disappointment. Finally he released the wriggling Owl, and stood glaring at him.

'What you done with it?' he hissed.

'I—I thought I had it in my pocket,' gasped Bunter. 'But—but it isn't there—I—I suppose it's still under my pillow in my chalet at the Camp. I always put it there when I go to bed.'

Mr. Jecks was well aware of that circumstance, from his nocturnal experience on the occasion when Horace Coker had unexpectedly intervened. Certainly the wallet was nowhere about Bunter. He could only conclude, as Bunter did, that the fatuous fat Owl had left it under that pillow. His glare at the terrified Owl was almost wolfish. His luck was not in, as he had fancied, after all. It was quite out!

'You idjit!' he breathed. 'I've been after that wallet ever since that day on that train: and now I got you, you ain't got it on you! Get out of it.'

Mr. Jecks had no further use for Billy Bunter. He made that clear, by spinning him round, and planting a heavy foot on his trousers. Billy Bunter yelled and bolted. Jimmy Jecks followed him up, landing kick after kick, apparently finding some solace in that proceeding. Billy Bunter found no solace in it whatever. He yelled, and dodged, and bounded till a final kick landed him sprawling in the lane. Then Mr. Jecks, scowling, disappeared among the trees: leaving him to sprawl and roar. It was a dusty and dismal Bunter who picked himself up at last and headed for the Camp, and like the ploughman in the poem, homeward plodded his weary way.

CHAPTER 31

ON A PLATE

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Still alive, Bunter?'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Look here, you fellows! Bunter's walked half a mile, and he's still alive. Stout lad!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Harry Wharton and Co. had come back after their spin, merry and bright. They had covered a good many miles on the Wolds: during which, sad to relate, they had forgotten all about Billy Bunter. They remembered him as they came in a cheery bunch to their chalet. Billy Bunter was leaning in his doorway, waiting for them. And he looked neither merry nor bright. His fat face was deeply overcast. Generally, it was a cheerful Owl: especially since the acquisition of his sudden wealth. But he was not cheerful now. He looked as if most of the troubles of the universe had settled down, in a heap, on his fat shoulders. His fat face, as a rule as broad as it was long, had lengthened: his blink through his big spectacles was dismal and disconsolate. Something, it seemed, was weighing on his mind. He could not have looked more dismal if he had missed his dinner!

'Glad to see you've survived, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'The gladfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Oh, really, Inky—'

'But what's the trouble?' asked Harry. 'If you're worrying about that bike, it's all right. We picked it up on our way back and brought it in.'

'Eh!' Billy Bunter had quite forgotten the bike. Much more pressing matters were on his fat mind. 'Blow the bike.'

'Tired out with a half-mile walk?' asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically. 'Look here, you can get practically anything at Butlin's. What about ordering an ambulance next time you go for a spin? It would suit you better than a bike.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. He suddenly remembered the wallet in his pocket. 'Lost anything, Bunter?'

'I say, you fellows, it's gone,' groaned Bunter. 'My wallet, you know—gone!'

'Can't have gone very far!' grinned Bob. 'Shouldn't wonder if we can find it for you, old fat man.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' yapped Bunter.

'I say, you fellows, that man pounced on me as I was coming back—'

'That man again!' exclaimed Nugent.

'It was jolly lucky, in a way, that I'd left it under my pillow—'

'Under your pillow!' ejaculated Bob.

'I must have, as it wasn't in my pocket when that man grabbed me,' explained Bunter. 'He'd have had it this time, but it wasn't on me, you see.'

O what a little bit of luck!' sang Bob Cherry.

'Only, when I got back, I looked for it, and it wasn't there!' went on Billy Bunter, dolefully. 'I've rooted all through my chalet for it, over and over again,

but it isn't there. I've turned everything inside out a dozen times, but there's no sign of it.'

'Little man, you've had a busy day!' said Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' said Bunter, bitterly. 'Funny, ain't it, for a chap to lose pounds and pounds and pounds.'

'Still pounds and pounds and pounds, after the way you've been splashing it about?' asked Nugent.

'You see, I hadn't even started on the fivers—'

'Oh, my hat! Fivers!'

'Fivers are nothing to my pater,' said Bunter, loftily. 'I daresay you fellows don't see a fiver once in a blue moon. Of course there were fivers as well as pound notes. I've told you often enough that my people are rich—'

'Too often!' agreed Bob Cherry.

'Then it's all right!' suggested Johnny Bull. 'All you've got to do is to drop your pater a line, asking him for a fresh cargo of fivers.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here,' hooted Bunter. 'What I want to know is, what's to be done about it? Think I'd better go to Mr. Butlin?'

'Oh, my hat! I wouldn't be in a hurry to do that!' said Bob. 'Better make sure it's missing before you do a song and dance about it. I'll bet some of us could find it for you.'

Sniff, from Bunter.

'I tell you I've looked everywhere. It's not in my chalet at all. Fat lot of good you fellows looking for it. I can't have taken it with me this morning. That man would have had it, if I had. But where is it?'

'The wherefulness is terrific,' chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. As all the Co. were aware that Bob had picked up that wallet, and that it had been safe in his pocket ever since, they were naturally not so mystified as Bunter by its mysterious disappearance. 'Time that wallet turned up, Bob,' said Harry, laughing. 'It's just on lunch.'

'I say, you fellows, we can't be late for lunch: but I've got to find that wallet somehow—'

'Mustn't keep Bunter late for lunch,' agreed Bob. 'That would be cruelty to animals! I'll find that wallet for you, Bunter, and hand it to you on a plate, if you like. Is there a plate in your chalet?'

'Yes, there is, a plate of cream-tarts: but the wallet isn't there. I tell you I've turned the whole place inside out and upside down looking for it,' yapped Bunter.

'Well, I won't turn the place inside out and upside down, but I'll jolly well find that wallet, and hand it to you on a plate.'

'You silly ass!' howled Bunter. 'How can you find it if it isn't there?'

'The howfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, let's see!' said Bob: and he pushed past the fat Owl, and stepped into Bunter's chalet. Billy Bunter gave an angry snort. The other fellows were laughing. Bunter could see no occasion for merriment. Certainly he did not suppose for one moment that Bob was going to emerge and present him with the missing wallet on a plate!

But that, to Bunter's amazement, was precisely what Bob did! He came out

with a plate in his hands. There were no longer cream-tarts on that plate. But an object lay on it, that was more grateful and comforting to Billy Bunter's eyes even than cream-tarts! It was a wallet marked with the monogram 'W.B.'. Billy Bunter blinked at it. He blinked at it like a fellow in a dream. Indeed, for a moment he almost fancied that he was dreaming. He had searched his chalet. He couldn't have missed that wallet, if it was there. He just couldn't have! Yet Bob, in a matter of moments, had found it, and was now presenting it to him, as he had undertaken to do, on a plate! It really seemed like magic, to Bunter. 'That it?' asked Bob, with a wink at the Co.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh! Oh, crikey!' Billy Bunter clutched the wallet. 'I—I say, that's it! That's my wallet. I say, I looked everywhere—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I tell you I looked everywhere, and it wasn't anywhere—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I couldn't have missed it—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You didn't look in the right place,' said Bob, shaking his head.

'Well, where was it, then?'

'In my pocket! You see I picked it up where you dropped it when you tumbled off your bike this morning, and brought it home for you. Hallo, halo, hallo, there goes the loud-speaker! Lunch, my beloved 'earers, lunch!'

The Famous Five, laughing, walked away to the dining-hall. Billy Bunter was left blinking at his wallet, which even yet he seemed hardly able to believe was safe back in his fat hands—though it had been handed to him on a plate! Bunter, for once, was a couple of minutes late for a meal. As he rolled in, he stopped for a moment to speak a word to Bob Cherry. That word was:

'Beast!'

Which no doubt was Bunter's way of expressing thanks for the recovery of his lost property!

CHAPTER 32

ONCE TOO OFTEN

SNORE!

That unmelodious rumble seldom fell on welcoming ears, whether in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, or in the chalet-lines at the Butlin Camp at Skegness. When Billy Bunter slept, he snored: and when Billy Bunter snored, few persons in the vicinity were left in any doubt that Bunter's eyes were closed in slumber. But for once, if for once only, that rumble from Bunter's chalet was as good as music to one pair of ears that listened-in. Those ears belonged to Mr. Jimmy Jecks.

It was a blazing August afternoon. Hot as it was, the Skegness Camp was in a buzz of activity. Butlin Radio—rather more musical than Billy Bunter's musical effects—filled the air with melody. Cafés and milk-bars were crowded: the sunlit beach swarmed: swimmers splashed in the swimming-pools: billiard balls and ping-pong balls clicked: innumerable voices hummed and buzzed:

Redcoats moved about with all-seeing eyes, always ready to help or advise, and make everybody feel happily at home: a Boating Regatta was going on, and Harry Wharton and Co. had joined the watching crowd. Billy Bunter, as usual, had lunched not wisely but too well: and now he was reposing after his exertions in the dining-hall.

Door and window were wide open, to let in the balmy breeze from the sea. While they let in the breeze, they also let out the snore. Campers who passed occasionally glanced in, and grinned at a fat figure extended on the bed in its shirt-sleeves, with its eyes closed and its mouth wide open.

One such passer-by loitered near the window.

'Cor!' breathed Jimmy Jecks.

His weasel eyes took in the scene at a glance. Bunter fast asleep, his jacket carelessly thrown on a chair beside the bed. Billy Bunter, if he was dreaming, was certainly not dreaming of 'that man'. A smile lingered on his fat face as he slept. Probably he was dreaming of his recent lunch, or of a study-spread at Greyfriars.

Jimmy Jecks cast a stealthy glance round him, and stepped in at the open doorway. Quickly, he pushed the door shut, leaving it ajar, ready for retreat. He was taking risks, as well he knew. There was no Redcoat at hand at the moment, but there were plenty of them about. And Jimmy was what the Campers called a 'jibber': that is, a person whose presence in the Camp was unauthorized. Jimmy was in possession of a chalet-key and a badge that did not belong to him. Dozens of such 'passports' were lost by careless Campers every season, and 'jibbers' who found them used them for ingress and egress, surreptitiously sharing in entertainments to which they were not entitled. But the Redcoats had very keen eyes: and Jimmy knew the risk he was running. And Jimmy was risking more than any casual 'jibber', for he was known by sight to at least half a dozen Campers. In the innumerable crowd of Butlineers he hoped to escape notice by the Campers who knew his sharp face and weasel eyes: and luck had favoured him. Unnoticed and unsuspected, he now stood in the chalet which had a particular attraction for him—with Billy Bunter snoring only a couple of yards away. He had found Bunter at home, and he had found him fast asleep: and nothing could have suited him better.

This, at long last, was his chance. That wallet was now as good as in his dishonest hands. The trail had been long, since the day he had 'planted' that wallet on the unsuspecting Owl, in the train at Greenfield. The contents, he knew, had diminished. How and why Bunter could fancy that that wallet was his own, Jimmy didn't know and couldn't guess: but he knew now that Bunter did, and that he had been spending money right and left from it. Indeed he had a misgiving that there might not be much left, to reward him for that long trail. But he hoped for the best.

Anyhow, it was his now for the taking, and whatever remained in it was going to be his by nine points of the law which possession is said to be. There was no sign or sound of the other schoolboys: he had simply to help himself and beat a prompt retreat: after which the Camp at Skegness would see him no more: and the most bracing of air would not tempt him back to the neighbourhood.

Softly, he stepped to the jacket on the chair. He did not want to risk waking the sleeping Owl. There was little danger of that: Bunter was no more likely to

wake than Rip Van Winkle once slumber's chain had bound him. But Jimmy was very cautious. If that fat 'covey' had left the wallet in his pocket when he peeled off the jacket, all was plain sailing.

And he had!

Jimmy's hand contacted it at the first grope. His weasel eyes gleamed, as he jerked it out.

'Cor!' breathed Mr. Jecks. 'Is this 'ere luck! I wonder 'ow much that bundle o' lard has left in it.'

That was rather an anxious point with Mr. Jecks. Billy Bunter was the fellow to make the money fly, when he had any. It would have been a crushing blow to Jimmy Jecks to discover, at this moment of triumph, that the riches had taken unto themselves wings and flown away!

Swiftly, he opened the wallet to make sure. Then his misgiving was relieved. Billy Bunter, as he had told the Co., had not yet started on the 'fivers'. Pound notes, so far, had served his turn. But for the fact that everything was free at Butlin's, no doubt some of the 'fivers' would already have followed. As it was, they remained—to delight a pair of weasel eyes that fairly gloated over them. Snore!

Billy Bunter snored on, happily unconscious that his lately-acquired wealth was about to fade away like fairy gold. Jimmy, for a long moment, feasted his eyes on the banknotes.

Then, as a shadow fell across the sunny window, he gave a start, and hurriedly thrust the wallet into his pocket. His eyes turned in startled alarm on the window.

A red blazer met his view there.

A Redcoat was passing by. It was Freddy, the House-captain of Kent House. Jimmy Jecks almost ceased to breathe, as the red blazer passed. To his immense relief, however, the Redcoat did not glance in. The red blazer passed on and disappeared from his sight.

Jimmy Jecks wiped a spot of perspiration from his brow.

Snore! Billy Bunter was still going strong. There was no danger from Bunter. But there was danger outside, if that Redcoat was still about. So far, fortune had favoured Mr. Jecks. The long trail had ended in success: the coveted wallet was in his pocket. He had only to skulk away with his booty, mingling with the swarms of holiday-makers till he could escape from the Camp. If the coast was clear, he was more than ready to go. But was it?

He tiptoed to the window and peered stealthily Out. His weasel eyes glinted, at the sight of that red blazer again. Freddy had stopped, to exchange a few cheery words with an elderly Camper sunning himself in a deck-chair outside his chalet. That elderly Camper, no doubt, felt in a mood for a chat: and at Butlin's everybody was provided with what he wanted: so there was Freddy, listening with polite attention. To emerge while he was on the spot was too risky: there was always peril of a 'jibber' being stopped and questioned.

Jimmy Jecks had to wait.

He waited with almost feverish impatience. His only comfort was the snore from Billy Bunter. From that quarter, at all events, there was no peril. So long as nobody looked in, or came in, he was safe, till the moment came for stealthy departure. Minute followed minute.

Then, to Jimmy Jecks's horror, came a tramp of feet, and five cheery schoolboy faces burst on his view. They looked so merry and bright, that the

sight of them might have cheered the veriest pessimist. But it did not cheer Jimmy Jecks. The look he cast at the Famous Five was simply ferocious. Then he backed hastily from the window. If they came into Bunter's chalet—! Jimmy Jecks had taken risks, more than once, in pursuit of that wallet. Had he risked it once too often?

But after all, those obnoxious schoolboys occupied a different chalet: very likely they were only coming back to their own quarters, and would not look in at Bunter's. Jimmy fervently hoped so. Freddy's pleasant voice floated to his ears.

'You young fellows enjoying life here, what?'

'Who wouldn't!' answered Bob Cherry.

'The enjoyfulness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh: a reply that made Freddy smile.

'We've just met Mr. Butlin,' added Bob. 'He's asked us to tea, so we've come in for our best bibs and tuckers. Come on, you chaps.'

It was a relief to Jimmy Jecks to hear that. If those schoolboys had been honoured with an invitation to tea by the King of Holiday Camps, they would soon be gone again. But his relief was short-lived.

The door that he had closed was suddenly hurled wide open. A ruddy face and a mop of flaxen hair appeared in the doorway: and a Stentorian voice roused out the echoes.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' roared Bob Cherry. 'Roll out, Bunter! We're asked to tea, and you're in the party. Roll out, you fat fozzler—why—what—who—oh, gum!' Bob Cherry broke off, with a yell of surprise. He was there to rouse out Billy Bunter, never dreaming that anyone else was in the chalet. He had roused out quite an unexpected person. 'Oh, my hat! That man again!'

'What—?'

'Who—?'

'That man again!' roared Bob. 'He's here! Bag him!'

He rushed into the chalet, with his comrades at his heels. Jimmy Jecks had doubted whether he had risked it once too often. Now he knew, as the Famous Five collared him on all sides. Jimmy's long trail had, indeed, ended. This was the end!

CHAPTER 33

WHOSE WALLET?

'HOLD him!'

'What ho!'

'We've got him all right.'

Jimmy Jecks was struggling. But it was not of much use for him to struggle, in five pairs of hands. Bob Cherry had him by the collar in a powerful grip: Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull had his arms, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh his hair, and Frank Nugent helped himself to an ear. Once before Mr. Jecks had had to realize that he was of no use in so many hands. But he was desperate now, and he struggled hard to break away.

For about a minute, the whole bunch rocked and swayed. They bumped

against the bed, rocking it, and a snore suddenly changed into a startled squeak. Billy Bunter sat up, groped for his spectacles, and blinked in astonishment at the scene. It was quite a surprise for Bunter.

'I say, you fellows! What—who—oh, crikey! Is that that man again? Oh, jimmy! I say, he's after my wallet! I say, hold him!'

'We're holding him,' chuckled Bob Cherry. 'He won't snoop your jolly old wallet this time, old fat man.'

'And he's not getting away this time, either!' panted Johnny Bull. 'You can chuck it, you rogue—you're not getting loose.'

Jimmy Jecks ceased to struggle. He sagged in the grasp of the Famous Five, gasping and gurgling for breath. The struggle had winded him. But the Co. still held him fast. They were taking no chances with their prisoner.

'Leggo my ear, blow you! Take your knuckles out of my neck, will you, you young rip!' panted Mr. Jecks. 'It's a fair cop, and I ain't giving no trouble.'

'Where's your wallet, Bunter?' asked Harry.

'Eh! In my jacket pocket, on that chair.'

'Better make sure it's still there, fathead.'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

He rolled off the bed and clutched up the jacket. Then there was a yell!

'It's gone!' The fat Owl groped in an empty pocket. 'I say, you fellows, it's gone! He's got it.'

'All serene,' said Bob. 'If he's got it, we've got him. Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Freddy! Just the man we want to see.'

A red blazer appeared in the doorway. The sounds of the struggle had reached Freddy's ears. He stared blankly into the chalet.

'What's all this?' he exclaimed.

'Pickpocket, caught in the jolly old act!' exclaimed Bob. 'He's got Bunter's wallet about him. He's been after it ever since we came to the Camp. Now he's got it—and we've got him.'

'The gotfulness is terrific,' chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows, he's got it!' howled Bunter. 'Tain't in my pocket. He's snooped it while I was asleep! He's got it! You gimme back my wallet, you beastly pickpocket.'

Jimmy Jecks gave him a glare.

'Yourn, is it?' he snarled. 'It won't be yourn long, I fancy, after it's shown up 'ere.'

'What do you mean, you rascal?' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'You've taken Bunter's wallet, as you've tried to do before—'

'Bunter's, is it?' jeered Jimmy. 'Praps it is, and praps it ain't! 'Ow that young idjit fancied it was his, I dunno: but it ain't no more his than it's mine, I know that.' Yell, from Bunter.

'Why, you beast, you know it's my wallet! I say, you fellows, make him turn out his pockets! He's got my wallet.'

'Okay, old fat man,' said Bob. 'We know he's got it, and we're going to make him cough it up.'

'Leave this to me, please!' said Freddy. 'If that man's a pickpocket, we know how to deal with that kind of character. Are you sure that your wallet is missing, Mr. Bunter?'

'Of course I am. It was in this pocket, and it's gone. He's been after it before. He's got it!' howled Bunter.

'If it's about him, can you identify it?'

'Eh! Of course. It's got my monogram on it. All these fellows have seen it, haven't you, you chaps? They all know it's mine, with my monogram on it.' Bob Cherry chuckled.

'We all know that jolly old wallet,' he said. 'We can all identify it. It's got Bunter's initials, W.B. on it. We've seen it often enough.'

'That settles it, if it's about him,' said the House-captain. 'You can release him—he won't get away while I'm here. Now turn out your pockets, my man.' Jimmy Jecks breathed hard, as the juniors' grasp fell away from him. But if he was thinking, for a moment, of a dash for freedom, he had to forget it. There were five pairs of hands ready to collar him again: and the stalwart figure of the House-captain blocked the doorway. Jimmy's game was up: and he had to bite on it. Sullenly, he groped in his pocket, and the wallet came to light. There was a squeak of relief from Billy Bunter 'That's it! That's mine.'

'That's it,' said Harry Wharton. 'We all know it.'

'The knowfulness is terrific.'

Freddy did not speak, for a moment or two. His eyes were fixed on the wallet, with a startled stare. Freddy, certainly, had never seen Bunter's wallet in Bunter's possession. But he was staring at it, as at a familiar object. And he was evidently strangely startled. The juniors could not help noticing it, and they could only wonder what it meant.

From the wallet, Freddy's eyes turned to Bunter, with a searching look.

'That is the wallet?' he asked.

'Yes, that's it! It's mine.'

'Are you sure of that, Master Bunter?'

The fat Owl blinked at him.

'Eh! Of course I am! Can't you see my monogram on it?'

'I can see a monogram, certainly,' said Freddy. 'It is one I think I have seen before.' He paused. 'I think I had better ask Mr. Butlin to step here. Keep that man safe while I am gone.'

'We'll keep him safe all right.'

'I say, you fellows, gimme my wallet.'

'Here you are, old fat man.'

Fat fingers clutched the wallet. Bunter jammed it into his pocket, and put on his jacket. Once more that precious wallet was safe in his possession. Why there was a sneering grin on the face of the weasel-eyed man, as the juniors held him by the arms, Billy Bunter did not know or care. So far as Bunter could see, there was nothing for him to grin at.

They had only a few minutes to wait. Then a portly figure and a kindly face appeared in the doorway. On that kindly face there was an expression of surprise, as Mr. Butlin stepped in, with Freddy behind him.

'I have just been told something very odd—very odd indeed!' said Mr. Butlin. 'I want to know what it all means.'

'It's all right,' bleated Billy Bunter. 'That rogue pinched my wallet, but I've got it back—'

'Let me see it, please.'

'All right!'

Out came the wallet, in a fat hand. Mr. Butlin fixed keen blue eyes on it. Then he spoke, very quietly:

'And now, Master Bunter, kindly explain what you are doing with my wallet.'

CHAPTER 34

RICHES TAKE UNTO THEMSELVES WINGS

HARRY WHARTON and Co. jumped.

Billy Bunter almost fell down in his astonishment.

Mr. Butlin's voice was very quiet, and it had not lost its kindly tone. But the roar of the Bull of Basham could not have startled the Greyfriars party more. Indeed, they could hardly have been more amazed had the bronze bust of Mr. Butlin in the Reception Hall asked that unexpected and astounding question. For a dizzy moment they wondered whether they were dreaming, or whether Mr. Butlin was. Billy Bunter could only blink at him with popping eyes. Harry Wharton was the first to find his voice.

'Did—did—did you say yours, sir?' he stuttered.

'I did!' answered Mr. Butlin.

'But—but—but it's Bunter's!' exclaimed Harry. 'At least, he's told us so, and—and—and he thinks so.'

'You fat chump!' breathed Johnny Bull. 'What have you been up to now?'

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'You terrific ass—!' murmured Hurree Jamset Rain Singh.

'Oh, really, Inky—'

'Isn't it Bunter's?' gasped Bob Cherry.

'It can scarcely be Bunter's, as it is my property,' said Mr. Butlin. 'That is the wallet that was picked from my pocket weeks ago, at Greenfield Station, by this man who has now been caught here.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the Famous Five, all together. They had almost forgotten that incident at the station on their way to Skegness. They did not even know whether the lost wallet had been recovered or not. Evidently, it had not: though now, strangely and unexpectedly, it was in the process of recovery!

'As it was not found on the man when he was searched, I concluded that he must have thrown it from the train!' went on Mr. Butlin. 'I never expected to see it again. Now I see it, in the possession of a visitor at this Camp—'

'Bunter, you ass—'

'Bunter, you dummy—'

'What the dickens—'

'I—I—I say, you fellows, it's mine!' gasped the bewildered Owl. 'I've told you how I found it in my pocket, and my monogram's on it—'

'Yours?' asked Mr. Butlin, raising his eyebrows.

'Yes—W.B. Look at it.'

'That happens to be my monogram also!' said Mr. Butlin.

'Wha-a-at?'

'W.B.!' murmured Frank Nugent. 'Of course—that might be William Bunter or William Butlin! Oh, you fat chump—!'

'It's not yours, you blitherer!' hissed Johnny Bull. 'Where did you get it?'

'Haven't I told you it was in my pocket?' howled Bunter. 'I never knew it was there till after I got to Skegness, on that train that you fellows lost. Of course I thought my pater had put it there, as a surprise for me when I found it—I told you fellows so. It couldn't have been put there after I had the jacket on—and

it's got my monogram on it—'

'Mr. Butlin's monogram, fathead.'

'Tain't!' gasped Bunter. 'Tain't the same. It can't be. How could it get into my pocket if it's Mr. Butlin's?'

'Beats me,' said Bob. 'But your pater had nothing to do with it. He told you so in that letter—'

'He forgot—!'

'Fathead!'

'One moment!' said Mr. Butlin. He made a gesture towards Jimmy Jecks, whose ill-favoured face wore an expression oddly divided between a sullen scowl and a sneering grin. 'That rascal picked my pocket at Green-field, as I am quite assured though it could not be proved at the time. He jumped on a train to escape. Did you meet him on that train?'

'Oh!' exclaimed the Famous Five again. It was dawning on them now what must have happened.

'Eh! Yes! He jumped into my carriage,' gasped Bunter. 'I—I didn't know he was a pickpocket, then. He never picked my pocket, I know that.'

'Did he come into contact with you?'

'Yes, he did, sprawling over a fellow when the train jerked, like a clumsy ass! What about it?'

Mr. Butlin smiled.

'I think that explains this little mystery,' he said. 'That rascal did not throw the wallet from the train, as I supposed that he must have done. He slipped it into your pocket.'

'And you went on to Skegness with it in your pocket, while that rogue stepped off at the next station with nothing to be found on him.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

'And that's why he's been after Bunter ever since!' exclaimed Bob. 'He meant to get it back all the time.'

'And he's jolly nearly had it, more than once,' said Johnny Bull.

'The nearfulness was terrific.'

'Bunter, you born idiot—'

'Bunter, you dithering nitwit—'

'I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I—I thought it was mine!' stuttered Bunter. 'You jolly well know I did. Think I'd have been spending the money, if I hadn't? I—I—I don't see how that beast could have planted it on me without my knowing. Think I go about with my eyes shut?'

'As good as,' said Bob.

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'That's how it was, because the dashed thing couldn't have got into Bunter's pocket any other way,' said Bob. 'Isn't that how it was, you rogue?'

Jimmy Jecks shrugged his shoulders.

'Praps it was, and praps it wasn't,' he retorted. 'I ain't saying anything. You can sort it out for yourselves, and be blowed to the lot of you.'

'I think we have sorted it out,' said Mr. Butlin. 'Take that man away! He will be charged with pilfering here. Take him away.'

Freddy's strong hand closed on a shoulder. Jimmy Jecks cast a last yearning glance at the wallet in Billy Bunter's fat hand. It was his last view of it, as the House-captain marched him away.

'And now,' said Mr. Butlin, gently, 'if you are quite done with my wallet, Master

Bunter—'

Slowly, sadly, Billy Bunter handed over the wallet. Bunter, certainly, did not want to keep what he now knew did not belong to him. But it was a painful parting, all the same. Riches, it was said of old, take unto themselves wings and fly away. For a couple of weeks, it had been a wealthy Bunter. Now it was once more the impecunious Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles followed that wallet as it went, as Dido's sad eyes followed the departing sails of Aeneas. It was gone—gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream!

'Oh, lor!' mumbled Bunter. 'I—I—I say, you fellows, kik-kik-can you lend me about fifteen pounds?'

'What?'

'Which?'

'I—I—I've spent about that much,' mumbled Bunter. 'Thank goodness I hadn't started on the fivers. I—I say, if you fellows can't lend me about fifteen pounds—I—I—I—I shall have to owe Mr. Butlin that much—oh, lor!' To Billy Bunter's surprise and immense relief, Mr.

Butlin burst into a laugh.

'We need say nothing about that, Master Bunter,' he said. 'You appear to have acted with extraordinary stupidity—'

'Eh?'

'Quite extraordinary—'

'Oh, really, sir—'

'You must, I think, be the most stupid boy at your school—'

'I—I say—'

'But I am very glad to have recovered my wallet,' said Mr. Butlin. 'And we will say no more about the matter.' He gave the Famous Five a nod and a smile. 'I shall expect you to tea in half an hour.'

With that, the King of Holiday Camps left the chalet. Billy Bunter blinked at five grinning faces, a puzzled frown on his own.

'I say, you fellows, did you hear that?' he said. 'Me stupid! That's what he said. You heard him. Of course, he doesn't know much about me, and I suppose he wouldn't know that I'm the brainiest chap in the Remove—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I mean to say, tain't as if he was speaking of one of you fellows—but me, you know—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, cackle!' snorted Bunter. 'Cackle if you like.'

'Thanks,' said Bob Cherry, 'we will!' And they did—loud and long.

LIKE Lucifer, Son of the Morning, Billy Bunter had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof. He was left in the state of Fortunatus when he had lost the magic purse. No longer was he a wealthy Bunter splashing pound notes right and left. He was once more an impecunious Bunter borrowing half-crowns wherever and whenever he could. But there was still balm in Gilead!

Fortunately, everything at Butlin's was free: and

—most important of all—there was no shortage of foodstuffs. So there was, after all, quite a most enjoyable holiday for Billy Bunter at Butlin's.

The next book in

THE BILLY BUNTER SERIES
Will be
BUNTER THE VENTRILOQUIST