

THE OWL'S NEST.



IS MR. SELBY WILD?

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The Owl's Nest.

By
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CLIFFORD.**

A
**Magnificent,
Long, Complete
Story of Billy Bunter.**

CHAPTER I.

Still in Search.

LOOK here, Roylance!"
It was Bunter of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's who spoke.
"Thanks, no!" replied Dick Roylance, the New Zealand junior. "I've looked once, and I really don't like it. 'Tain't healthy!"

"What's not healthy, you fathead?" howled Bunter.

"Your face, old bladder of land! Take it away and bury it! Get a mask! Have it amputated! But don't ask—"

"This is serious, and I thought you were a serious chap, Roylance," said Bunter, more in sorrow than in anger.

"I am, aren't I, Smithy?"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Smith minor. Smith minor and Contarini shared Roylance's study, No. 7 on the Fourth Form passage.

"Well, don't talk silly rot, then," said Bunter severely. "I've come to speak to you on an important subject."

"Important—and unpleasant?" queried Roylance.

"Eh? No, not unpleasant at all."

"Then, it's not your face?"

"Oh, you silly idiot! Smith, can I talk sense to you?"

"I shouldn't think so, Bunter. If you do it will be something different from the stuff you talk to other chaps."

"Really, Smith, I did think—"

"Did you? That was before you came to St. Jim's, wasn't it? There's no evidence that you've done any thinking since."

The fat junior turned in despair to Giacomo Contarini, whom the St. Jim's juniors called "Jackeymo."

Contarini was a very good-tempered, obliging little chap, and Bunter would have tackled him first, but that he knew Roylance carried most weight in No. 7.

"I hope you've some sense, Contarini," he said.

"Sì, signore," replied Contarini amiably.

But whether he meant that he shared Bunter's hope or that he had some sense was not apparent. What was apparent to the two who knew him well was that he did not want to talk to Bunter, but was too polite to say so.

"Of course, you're only a foreigner—a Dago, as the sailorman say!" remarked Bunter loftily. "But that makes no difference to me. I've got a mind above such silly prejudices. I think even an Italian can be decent!"

Roylance and Smith minor stared at Bunter.

It was evident that the fat and fatuous new boy intended to be ingratiating.

It was also evident that Contarini was not pleased by the attempt.

"Go on, Bunter!" said Roylance.

"Jackeymo is just beginning to see what a really nice chap you are—so free from insular prejudices—ha, ha!"

"There's nothing in what I said to cackle at, Roylance!" replied Bunter

warmly. "I mean it, every word. Of course I know that the Italians ran away from the Russians—"

"From whom?" asked Smith minor. Contarini's slim hands clenched themselves, and the usual smile was absent from his olive face.

"Well, from the French, or the Belgians, or somebody. Anyway, they did a bunk. What about it? Nobody expected them to have British pluck—they're not Britishers, are they? Well, then, I'm not going to hold that against Contarini. Here, I say, what's the matter?"

Bunter's tone had changed to one of alarm, for the Italian junior had risen to his feet, and was approaching with plainly hostile intentions.

"You dare!" he hissed.

"Here, I say— Oh, really, Jackeymo, what's the matter? You haven't said anything to offend me—I mean, I haven't said anything to offend you, have I? Here, keep off!"

"You dare to traduce my countrymen, you fat, lying—what is it?—dog, cur, hound!"

"Try tripe-hound," suggested Smith minor.

"Here, hold on, Jackeymo!" said Roylance, who hardly liked the look of passionate resentment on the little Italian's face. "We'll deal with Bunter, you know, when we know what he wants. You needn't mind him: fact of the matter is he doesn't know when he's being offensive."

"It's all the time, you see, old Garibaldi," put in Smith minor.

"Oh, really! I've a good mind to say, after that, that I won't come into this study!" said Bunter, tossing his head.

"Were you really thinking of doing that?" asked Roylance.

"Yes, of course! I've got to dig somewhere, haven't I?"

"Take an allotment," suggested Smith minor.

"We will not have him here, Roylance, amico mio, is it not?" said Contarini, with quite unnecessary anxiety.

"Oh, yes! Bunter can come into this study all right," replied Roylance coolly.

Smith minor stared at him. But a wink reassured Smith minor.

Contarini did not see that wink, or did not understand it. His face was working, and his hands were still clenched. If Bunter did become an inmate of No. 7, it would only be over Jackeymo's dead body, so to speak.

"I thought you'd agree, Roylance," said Bunter, beaming upon the New Zealander. "You're a chap of sense."

"I am!" said Roylance emphatically.

"I've sense enough for this, Bunter, when we're moved into the Shell, or sacked, or dead and buried! Then—but not before, my fat pippin!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Smith minor.

Bunter stood dumbfounded. It really looked as if he would have to remain a

Fourth-Former at large, without a study at all.

No rebuff had ever had a lasting effect upon Bunter. He had been cleared out of No. 6, after trying very severely the patience of Blake & Co. Even the long-suffering D'Arcy had been forced to renounce him at last.

He had tried in vain to effect a lodgment with Julian & Co. in No. 5, and with Levison & Co. in No. 9. Trimble and Mellish, though they might have been thought to have so much in common with him, had chased him with ignominy from No. 2. Mulvaney minor and Tompkins had rejected him, in spite of his liberality to them—at Grundy's expense.

But in spite of all that he had vainly imagined that the arms of Study No. 7 would be opened to receive him.

"Look here, Roylance, you don't mean it," he said now. "I can take a joke as well as anyone—he, he, he!"

"Where's the joke?" demanded Roylance.

"Your not wanting me in your study, you know. I'm sure we should get on jolly well together. Contarini can change out, if he doesn't fancy it. Of course, you'd rather have me than any foreigner!"

"Travel!" said Roylance, pointing to the door.

"Eh? Oh you're joking—he, he, he!"

"I'll give you ten seconds to decide whether you go out on your feet or on your neck!"

Smith minor rose to his feet, his eyes gleaming.

Still Bunter temporised.

"Oh, don't talk rot, Roylance!" he said peevishly. "I shall appeal to Raitton, you know. He's bound to see justice done."

"If he happens to be coming along the passage in about two seconds' time he'll see that right enough!" said Roylance grimly.

"Oh, but really—"

"Open the door, Jackeymo!"

Contarini obeyed that command with obvious relish.

"Now, then, Smithy!"

"Yaroooh! Wharver doing? Stop-pit, you beasts!"

Roylance and Smith minor had seized Bunter, one on either side.

Bunter was a heavy-weight; but Roylance was powerful, and Smith minor no weakling. They did not need the aid of Jackeymo.

"Yoooop!" howled Bunter, as he smote the linoleum with a thud.

Blake looked out of No. 6.

"It's all right, you fellows," he said, to Herries and Digby and D'Arcy inside.

"It isn't murder. It's only Bunter in search of a study, and being asked out instead of in."

"Thought it was a pig being killed!" remarked Kernish, popping his head out of No. 5.

"No—not being killed!" answered Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" sounded from No. 5 and No. 6 alike.

Bunter picked himself up, scowling. "All right!" he said. "You fellows will be sorry for this one of these days!"

"When Bunter's a marquis he won't look at you," gibed Kerriush.

"Shall we be allowed to look at him?" asked Blake humbly. "Do say 'Yes,' Bunter, old top!"

Billy Bunter's fatuousness made him easy to deceive. He hardly troubled other people to deceive him, indeed; he would do it for himself.

In spite of all that had come and gone, he fancied he saw signs of relenting in Blake.

"I say, you know, Blake, I wouldn't mind coming back into your study if—"

He paused. Roylance and Smith minor and Contarini and Kerriush all grinned. Julian, Hammond, and Reilly showed themselves behind the Manx junior in the door of No. 5; and their faces also wore expansive grins.

"If what?" asked Blake encouragingly. "Go on, old gung!"

"If you fellows would undertake to treat me decently," continued the egregious Owl. "D'Arcy wasn't very nice to me last time, I must say; but I can forgive anything in my old pal Gussy. And I can stand you and Digby all right, I think, Blake. But that chap Herries—"

"What about him?" roared burlily George Herries, appearing at the rear of Blake.

"Oh, nothing! I—what I was going to say was that I liked you no end, Herries. You may seem rough sometimes; but I know you don't mean it. You have a good heart, I'm sure."

"I don't know what sort of a heart I've got," growled Herries, who was really one of the last fellows in the Fourth with whom the question of hearts could be discussed at all. "But I can tell you what sort of a boot I've got, Bunter—"

"A number eleven!" grinned Blake. "And—Here, where are you off to? Come back and be kicked!"

But Bunter was not quite fatuous enough for that.

CHAPTER 2.

Nothing Doing.

"I SAY, you chaps!"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley and George Durrance were at tea together in Study No. 1 when Bunter's little eyes blinked in at them from behind his big glasses.

"Outside!" said Durrance at once. But Bunter paid no heed to Durrance. Lumley-Lumley was his mark.

He had only lately learned that Lumley-Lumley was quite a wealthy fellow—the son of a millionaire—a real millionaire, not one of the bogus Baggy brand.

It had not seemed credible to Bunter when he first heard it. He could not understand a fellow having a millionaire father and not swanking about it.

In these days Lumley-Lumley, once "the Outsider," and the stormy petrel of the Fourth, had become a very quiet member of that Form. He could assert himself when need be; but it was not often he was called upon to do so. He went his own way; read more than most; and had no very close chum, though most of his own Form and the Shell liked him, and Durrance found him a congenial study-mate.

Bunter would really have preferred Lumley-Lumley's study to Roylance's. But it had chanced that he had seen the door of No. 7 open during his weary peregrination of the passages, and so he had tried that first.

He glanced at the table. The two appeared to be doing themselves very fairly well, all things considered. Bunter thought it would be quite a good move to get himself invited to tea as a starter.

"I see that you're at tea," he said plaintively.

"Yes. Don't disturb us!" snapped Durrance.

"You've the use of your eyes, evidently, Bunter," said Lumley-Lumley drily.

"I haven't had any tea," remarked Bunter, with the air of a martyr.

"Hard cheese!" replied Lumley-Lumley. "Wasn't there room for you in Hall?"

Bunter sniffed. "Tea in Hall isn't to my liking," he said disdainfully.

"Well, a chap can always have it in his study," observed Lumley-Lumley.

"But suppose a chap hasn't got a study?" Bunter returned.

"Every chap has," said Lumley-Lumley. "Above the Third, that is."

"Do you mind passing the cake, old chap?" said Durrance, ignoring the Owl completely.

"Certainly," Lumley-Lumley said politely. And he passed the cake.

He did not ask Bunter to have a bit. Bunter's eyes fastened upon the cake with a wolfish glare.

"I haven't," said Bunter dolefully. "Haven't what?" inquired Lumley-Lumley.

Durrance went on with his tea. He had one of Jack London's books beside his plate, and his attention was divided between that and what he was eating and drinking. There was none to spare for Billy Bunter.

"A study, of course," replied the erstwhile Owl of Greyfriars.

"Oh, haven't you? I understood you were in No. 6."

"I couldn't stick it. I'm rather particular about who I associate with," Bunter said.

"Gussy and the rest not up to your mark—eh?"

Durrance snorted. But Lumley-Lumley, in his own quiet way, was getting some amusement out of Bunter; and he did not propose to shorten it because Durrance was not amused.

"I don't mind Gussy so much, though I must say that for a chap with titled connections his ideas are rather low. But the rest of them—well, really, Lumley-Lumley, you must surely see that Blake's a bouncer."

"Queer! I never noticed that, do you know, Bunter."

Durrance snorted again. "And Digby's an empty-headed little cad—"

"Is he?"

"While as for Herries—"

"Worse than the rest of them?"

"Oh, heaps! No manners, no brains, no—"

"Well, you can't say he has no feet, anyway."

"I should say not! Bunter ought to know something about Herries' boots," remarked Durrance, looking up from his book.

Bunter scowled at him. "I don't like Huns!" he said loftily.

"That's queer, isn't it, Durrance?" said Lumley-Lumley, winking at his stable companion.

But Durrance did not see the wink. His eyes were fastened upon the face of Bunter.

"Say that again!" he rapped out.

"Well, I don't like Huns," repeated Bunter uneasily. "That's no offence to you, Durrance, is it?"

"Oh, if that's all!" said Durrance. And he went back to his book.

"Haven't you tried No. 2, too?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"I say, you know, old chap, I could do with a bit of that cake," Bunter said plaintively.

Lumley-Lumley cut him a large slice. But he did not ask him to sit down.

"What about No. 2?" he said. "Surely the chaps there were more after your own heart?"

"Oh, really, old pal!" protested Bunter, with his utterance considerably impeded by cake. "A fat cad like Trimble, and a sneaking spy like Mellish!"

A chuckle came from Durrance. "What's the joke, old man?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Oh, no joke, really! I was only wondering who it was that was a fat cad like Trimble and a sneaking spy like Mellish."

"Look here, Durrance—"

"I'm looking, Bunter!"

"I'm not talking to you, as a matter of fact. I can see quite plainly that you and I would never get on together. I don't like Huns!"

"What?"

Durrance's tone made Bunter jump. He edged nearer the door, stuffing a couple of ounces or so of cake into his mouth as he went.

"No need to get your wool off," he said. "From what I can make out you're only partly a Hun, and it wasn't really your fault, so I'm not the chap to fling stones at you. But it can't be very pleasant for Lumley-Lumley to dig with you, for your Hun breeding will be bound to tell."

All this Bunter said with the knob of the door in his hand, prepared to fly at the first movement Durrance made towards him.

But Durrance moved no farther than to his feet. And now he sat down again, with a disdainful smile on his good-looking face.

"Go on, if it amuses you, Lumley-Lumley," he said. "Go on just as if I wasn't here. I sha'n't mind."

Bunter moved a step or two forward, and looked important. He really fancied that Durrance was afraid of him.

"You're wasted on that chap, Lumley-Lumley," he said. "Look at him! Sits and reads a mouldy book all the time you're at tea! Rude, I call it!"

"He might be more sociable, I'll allow, Bunter!"

"Sociable! Why, he's piggish, that's what he is! But what can you expect of a Hun?"

Durrance made no sign of having heard. Bunter was vastly emboldened.

"The fact of the matter is that it would be better every way if he were to change out, you know!" he said.

"Change with you?"

"That's the idea!" said Bunter, smirking.

He really thought he was getting on famously.

"But there's a slight drawback. As you haven't a study Durrance would be turned out of house and home if he changed with you. He would be all dressed up and nowhere to go, you know."

Bunter did not really think that that mattered much. But Lumley-Lumley appeared to have some silly idea of treating Durrance decently; and Bunter was willing to humour anyone with so much coin as Lumley-Lumley.

"I don't think they'd take him in in No. 6," he said doubtfully. "I know they don't like Huns—I will say that for them, though that chap Herries is no better than a Hun himself."

Durrance still kept his eyes on his book.

"But there's No. 2," Bunter went on brightly. "My notion is that it's rather

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a good thing to get the rag-tag and bobtail together. A Hun would be quite good enough company for Trimble and Mellish."

"They didn't appear to think so," observed Durrance mildly.

"Eh? Do you mean that you were in No. 2 at one time?"

"Oh, no! Think it out, Bunter, and don't worry me again till you've done thinking!"

"If you came in here you wouldn't be rude enough to read at meal-times, I suppose, Bunter?" went on Lumley-Lumley.

"Rather not! Waste of time when there's grub about! Besides, I should want to talk to you, dear boy!"

"You're a great conversationalist, aren't you?"

"Rather! I've been noted for it ever since I was a kid. Plenty of times I've had roomful of people fairly hanging on my breath!"

"They must have enjoyed it! Nice for you, too! I'd no idea you were so eloquent!"

"That's me! I suppose that's one reason why I'm so much sought after, y'know!"

"But what's poor old Durrance to do when you come in here? Of course, your feeling against Huns makes it quite impossible for him to stay on. Besides, the study would be a tight fit for three, when you were one of them."

"I don't know. Hasn't the chap any idea of his own about it?" replied Bunter.

Durrance looked up.

"When Bunter comes into this study," he said quietly, "I shall dig in Nobody's Study."

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter, failing to understand.

"That's what Bunter's doing now," said Lumley-Lumley, with a grin.

"Not in the way I mean, quite," Durrance said.

"Oh, I've got it! You mean the punishment-room in the Shell passage."

"Is there a punishment-room in the Shell passage?" inquired Bunter.

"Not really. It's never used in that way now. It's empty."

"I should think that would do for Durrance all right," said the egregious Owl. "A chap who wants to stick his head into a book while other chaps are grubbing might just as well be alone. When will you move, Durrance?"

"I don't quite follow you, Bunter!"

"No; I shall follow you! He, he! Come after you here, I mean."

"I didn't say I meant to move out of here. But someone's got to move out, within two secs, or—

"Here, stoppit! Don't let him, Lumley-Lumley! Stop it, Durrance! I didn't mean any harm. You're not a Hun at all; and, besides, I like Huns! I think it's all silly rot barring them! They're human beings, same as us, ain't they?"

"Very much the same as you, Bunter, but not quite like Durrance and me!" remarked Lumley-Lumley quietly.

"Oh, I say! And I thought you were a decent chap! I thought you were going to be chummy! Yaroooooh! Stoppit, Durrance! Yooooop!"

Once more Billy Bunter smote the cold and unsympathetic linoleum.

CHAPTER 3.

Bunter Among the Third.

THERE were quite a lot of fellows at St. Jim's who had known Billy Bunter as a sponging rotter. But none of them knew that Billy Bunter was Billy Bunter.

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They believed that their Bunter was Walter Gilbert, not William George.

The two cousins had changed places and identities. Wally, who was to have come to St. Jim's, had stayed at Greyfriars instead, and had succeeded to a quite unexpected load of debt and trouble left behind him by Billy.

Meanwhile, Billy, at St. Jim's, was trading upon the impression made by Wally on Tom Merry and the rest as a particularly fine footballer and a really decent fellow.

But all that was wearing thin now. The New House had been very glad to get rid of Billy Bunter. Study No. 6 had wangled themselves free from him. Even Study No. 2, into which he had been wangled, had rejected him. And as for his football—one sample of that had been more than enough! He had played once for the New House, on the strength of Wally's reputation. He was not at all likely to play for the School House, it seemed. Tom Merry had rejected his proffered services with scorn.

Bunter wandered up and down the passages, sniffing hungrily whenever savoury scents assailed his nostrils, but not daring for the present to stick his fat little nose into any Fourth or Shell study. He had tried them all too lately for that.

By-and-by he found himself outside the Third Form-room.

There was a smell of cooking kippers in the air. Bunter was hungry, and that smell struck him as good.

He pushed open the door.

There were a dozen or more fags around the fire, including Jameson of the New House, who should not have been there. But Jameson's chums were all in the School House, and he was apt to get fed up with life over the way.

D'Arcy minor and Hobbs were toasting kippers on the ends of pens. Frank Levison was cutting slices of bread—also to be toasted, if the patience of the Third could hold out long enough to allow of the operation before it became absolutely necessary to start on the kippers. Manners minor and Frayne were dividing up butter into portions as nearly equal as possible, under the critical eyes of Gibson, Jameson, Butt, Hooley, and the rest.

To Billy Bunter, forlorn and peckish, it all looked very homelike and comfortable.

Hooley was the first to perceive the visitor.

"Sure, here's fatty!" he cried.

D'Arcy minor looked round.

"Seat!" he said.

"No Fourth Form bounders allowed here!" added Reggie Manners.

But Bunter did not scat.

He advanced farther into the room, an ingratiating smile on his fat countenance.

"I know a better way to cook kippers than that," he said.

"Rats!" snapped Jameson.

"It's the way we always cook them!" observed Levison minor.

"I dare say! But it's wrong, all the same!" answered Bunter. "When you toast kippers you dry them up. What's the good of that?"

The fags looked at one another.

There really seemed something worth considering in Bunter's theory. It was a fact that their toasted kippers seemed rather dry at times. And, as the Third system worked out at about a third of a kipper per man, at ordinary times, owing to shortage of cash, any method which rendered that fraction more palatable and caused it to go farther deserved a trial.

Bunter was not yet so well known in the Third as he was in his own Form and in the Shell.

There was a pretty clear impression

that he had turned out rather a rotter, and most certainly he could not play footer for nuts, as the Third would have expressed it.

But that did not prove that he was not a good cook.

And, as a matter of fact, he was. Fatty Wynn himself, whom Figgins and Kerr reckoned the equal of any cordon bleu, was not Bunter's master in that important art.

"What's your way?" asked D'Arcy minor.

The Third understood then that Bunter was—for the present, at least—to be treated as a guest.

"Got a kettle?" demanded the visitor.

"What for?" asked Manners minor.

"It's kippers we're cooking, not cocoa we're making."

"Never you mind what for," replied Bunter in his lordliest way. "You kids can leave this to me."

"Look here, who are you calling kids?" said Hobbs, turning a flushed face from the fire.

"Oh, dry up!" ordered D'Arcy minor.

"Yes, we've a kettle all right, Bunter. Here it is."

"Put it on the fire!" Bunter commanded. "It ought to be boiling."

The kettle was placed on the fire. It was very near boiling, anyway, as it had been standing for quite a long time inside the fender.

"Now I want a tin," said the cook.

"Salmon-tin do?" inquired Reggie Manners.

"They do say that Bunter's always wanting tin," remarked Frank Levison.

"Who says that?" growled Bunter.

"Oh, I've heard my major and Cardew and Clive say it. What price sticking to an armchair, Bunter?"

"If you're not very careful, young Levison, you'll find yourself put out of the door!" said the Owl warningly.

"Well, I like that, blessed if I don't! Just you try it on, that's—"

"Chuck it, Franky!" said D'Arcy minor. "Bunter's our head cook, and you have to be civil to cooks, else they give notice. We don't want Bunter doing that before we've learned his new way of cooking kippers."

"Tain't a new way; it's the only proper way!" sniffed Bunter. "I say, is that all the kippers you've got?"

He looked doubtfully at the supply as he spoke. There were half a dozen, quite a whack, according to Third Form notions, but not according to the ideas of William George Bunter.

Bunter made nothing of half a dozen kippers at a sitting, with cake and tarts in any quantity to top up with.

"That's the lot!" said Jameson.

"Plenty, too; there's enough to make the bread-and-scrape tasty, anyway."

"Of course, these ain't wangy," remarked Curly Gibson. "Bunter would like them wangy, I expect. They go farther that way," he explained.

Bunter sniffed. But already a wheeze for getting what he considered his share of the kippers had crossed his mind.

And it was fairly safe to assume that, if Bunter got what he considered his share, the talent of the Third for making kippers go a long way in the process of distribution would be put to a severe test.

"Will a biscuit-tin lid do?" asked Joe Frayne.

"Don't be a young ass! Much too shallow!" answered Bunter snappishly.

"Frying-pan?" suggested Butt.

"Faith, the frying-pan's busted!" said Hooley.

"I've got it! One of those dishes out of the lab!" Reggie Manners said.

"That would do," Bunter admitted.

"Of course, I'm not going to be made

responsible if there's a row about it being borrowed."

"You are a fat worm!" snapped Reggie.

But he went off to get a dish from the chemical laboratory. He had no right to enter that room at all, and there would certainly be a row if it were discovered that the Third were using the ware from it for culinary operations. But such small considerations as that seldom affected Wally & Co.

"I say, what's Nobody's Study?" asked Bunter, leaning negligently against the table, and watching Frank Levison and Curly Gibson toast bread. Operations upon the kippers had been suspended until Reggie's return.

Durrance's remark had somehow stuck in Bunter's mind.

"Oh, that one up in the corner of the Shell passage!" answered D'Arcy minor. "Why? Are they going to shove you in there?"

"Of course not! Really, you do talk rot, young D'Arcy!"

"Well, they might, you know," said D'Arcy minor thoughtfully. "It's the punishment study."

"That's no reason why I should be put in there!" protested Bunter.

"Ain't it? I thought it might be. I heard Blake and that crowd of old fogies say that Railton's jolly well fed up with you."

"Rot! He paid me a very high compliment only the other day," replied Bunter untruthfully.

"Said you'd wash'd your neck, perhaps?" grinned Hobbs. "Railton does make mistakes sometimes."

Bunter loftily ignored that.

"It would be rather good fun having that old study, Wally," said Frank Levison. "It's never used as a punishment-room now."

"Do you know why?" asked Piggott, who had come in a minute or two earlier. Reuben Piggott always affected to despise fag cookery.

"Shut up, Piggy, you cad!" said D'Arcy minor sharply.

"It's because of a rotten, dirty trick your major——"

"If you say another word against my major I'll——"

"I suppose I may say that, whatever he may pretend to be now, he used to be the biggest cad at——"

It appeared that Piggott was not allowed to say that, or anything at all like that, for before he could complete his sentence Frank was upon him.

"Yooooop!" howled the black sheep of the Third, as a fist that was hard and hefty, though it might be small, smote his nose.

"Ow-yow! You silly young idiots!" hooted Bunter, as he was clutched by Piggott and tumbled over.

Next moment Frank and Piggott, struggling wildly, fell on top of him together.

"Yaroooh! My backbone's busted!" he roared.

"Get up!" snapped D'Arcy minor.

"Piggy, if you can't behave yourself you'll get kicked out! You aren't allowed to say anything about Franky's major, because everybody knows you're a spiteful beast and have got your knife into him. And Franky isn't allowed to take notice of it if you do, because you're such a rotten cad you aren't worth taking any notice of. So you're both in the wrong, and so is fat Bunter, for getting in the way; and the best thing you can all do is to pick yourselves up and sort yourselves out and be quiet, unless you want me about your ears!"

Frank grinned as he got up. He was used to this sort of thing from the auto-cratio Wally.

Piggott scowled. He also was used to it, but he could not take it in the same spirit as Frank.

Bunter was very indignant. The idea of a kid of the Third talking to him like that!

But just as he was about to set Wally to rights Manners minor came in with the laboratory dish, which was possibly just as well for Bunter.

"Here, give it to me!" he grunted, choking down his resentment in his eagerness to get to work on the kippers.

"I stopped to give it a bit of a lick," said Reggie. "It had something or other in it that smelt rather like calceide of carbium. Of course, it wouldn't have hurt us, but I thought it might flavour the giddy kips a trifle too much."

Bunter seized the dish and put in two of the kippers. The kettle was boiling by now, and he snatched it off the fire and poured into the dish enough hot water to cover the kippers.

give Bunter half a one, as he's our guest, and that doesn't leave much among a crowd like this."

Bunter, who had turned out the two cooked kippers on to a newspaper, and was proceeding to deal with two more, look'd round, half minded to utter an emphatic protest against any such mean view as this of the duties of hospitality.

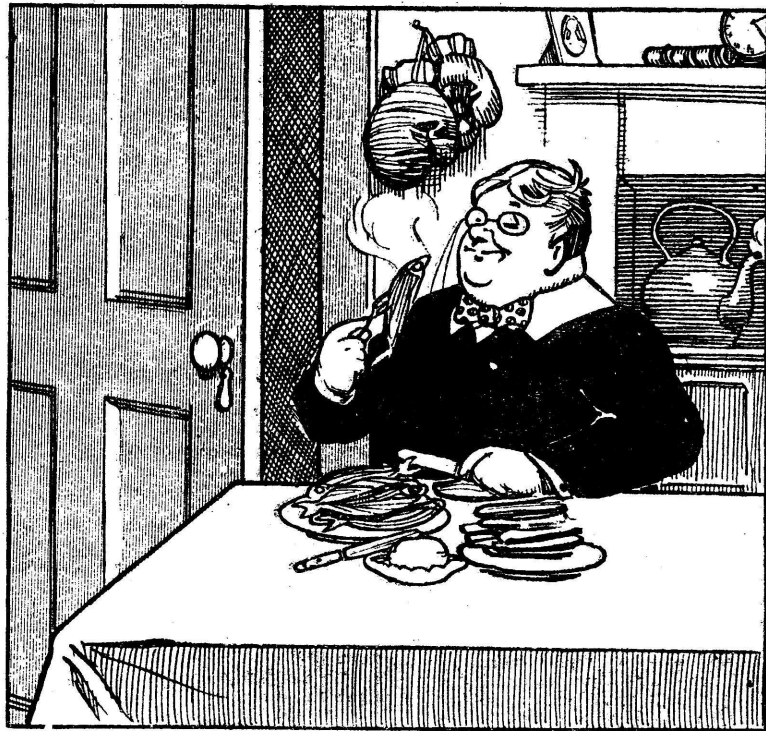
But he said nothing. He turned back to his work, with a crafty grin on his fat visage.

CHAPTER 4.

The Treacherous Bunter.

"JOLLY good!" said Wally D'Arcy. He had torn off a tail, and an inch or so of kipper adhering to it, and this sample sufficed to show him that Bunter had not claimed too much for his superior method of cooking.

"Here, let me taste!"



Bunter in His Element.
(See Chapter 4.)

"Is that all?" asked Watson.

"Yes. They'll be done in a minute or two."

"Well, that's jolly easy. I suppose you'll have to have a bit of kipper for showing us, but I ain't half sure it was worth it."

"We've got to see if they're all right yet," said D'Arcy minor.

"And if they're not we'll ram them down Bunter's fat neck!" Reggie said eagerly.

"Look here. I'll give up my share if it can be put down Bunter's neck!" generously volunteered Levison minor.

"Peace, my infants! They look all right, and they smell all right, and I don't mind tasting one, if everyone else is afraid," Wally D'Arcy said.

"Afraid your grandmother! Here, give me one!" cried Curly Gibson.

"You don't suppose there's a whole one to your young cheek, do you?" asked Wally. "Why, there won't be much more than a quarter! I s'pose we must

"And me!"

"Don't be a pig, Wally!"

"No, not yet, asses! I'm not going to take another bit until they're all done, and that mouthful can come off my share then. Get on, cook! Your way's all Sir Garnet, and you shall have half a kipper when you've done."

Billy Bunter got on. But he had no intention of accepting any such measly reward as the half of a kipper for all the trouble he was taking.

The Third fancied that Bunter was cooking kippers for them, and they considered half a fish quite a suitable payment. Their shares would work out at less than that. But Bunter was not really cooking kippers for the Third.

The kippers were all done, and there was quite a pile of toasted bread in waiting, when the voice of Mr. Selby, the tyrant of the Third, sounded from the passage.

Or seemed to sound. For, as a matter

of fact, it was William George Bunter who spoke.

Thus far Bunter had let his gift of ventriloquism lie fallow at St. Jim's.

But now there had come an occasion upon which it seemed worth while to employ it.

"D'Arcy minor! Levison minor! Hobbs! Are you there?" came the voice.

"Crumbs! That's old Selby!" said Reggie Manners. "Hang him!"

No one doubted that it was Mr. Selby. The voice was his to a shade of tone.

And no one doubted that something unpleasant was impending. There usually was something of that sort impending when Mr. Selby called upon his Form at an unwanted hour, as this was. Moreover, when anything of the sort was uppermost, he had a way of thinking first of Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison.

"Yes, sir. Most of us are here," answered Wally.

"I wish he was boiled!" he added, in lower tones. "My word, if old Selby was a kipper, I'd cook him!"

"But nobody would want to eat him," said Frank, with a grin.

"Follow me at once to the gymnasium, all of you!"

The fags stared at one another. There was no precedent for such an order as this.

Mr. Selby had no interest whatever in gymnastics. What could his summons mean?

One thing at least it meant—or so they all supposed, unknowing and unsuspecting that it was not their tyrant who spoke, but their traitorous guest.

"Are you not coming? If I have to come and fetch—"

"We're coming, sir!" yelled D'Arcy minor. "Keep an eye on the kippers, Bunter!" he said, in an agonised undertone. "It would be a pity to let them get cold now that they're done so ripping well!"

"Oh, I'll keep an eye on them—never you fear!" replied the Owl.

"But who will there be to keep an eye on Bunter?" asked Reggie dismally.

There would be nobody, of course. It would not do for any boy there to risk disobeying Mr. Selby's summons.

Backward looks were cast as they hurried out—the three minors leading, with Hobbs and Jameson and Gibson and Frayne close behind them, and Butt and Watson and Kent and Leggett and the rest crowding after for fear of a reproof. Hoooley was last but one. He looked at the kippers with a rueful eye—two rueful eyes, in fact.

"You'll get in a row if you don't go, Paddy from Cork," said Bunter.

"What are you waiting for?"

"Faith, an' I was after saying goodbye to the kippers!" replied Phelim Hoooley.

Last of all was Piggott.

"I shouldn't leave them a blessed scrap if I were you, Bunter!" said that cheery young sportsman.

"I'm not going to!" answered Bunter, with a fat wink.

Piggott went out in a far more cheerful frame of mind than most of the Form.

Bunter recognised the need for haste. The fags would probably wait a few minutes when they found that Mr. Selby was not at the gym; but they were hardly likely to wait long.

He piled the toast towards him, and began piling the butter upon it in feverish haste, his mouth full of kipper as he spread.

While the first kipper was disappearing he got half a dozen rounds spread. That

exhausted the butter, which Bunter had not spared.

Then he set to work in deadly earnest. He made about four mouthfuls to a kipper—and they were large fish.

He really had not time to sort out the bones properly. The backbones he did discard; it was easy to rip them out. But the smaller bones went down.

The toast, soaked with the butter that was to have served for over a dozen fags, disappeared at a rate almost magical. Bunter felt that he could have got on even faster if he had had something to wash down the food with. But, though he had no doubt that supplies of tea or cocoa were to be found somewhere in the Form-room, he had no time to look for them.

It was only lack of time that restrained him; he would have had no scruples as to rights of ownership.

Meanwhile, those of the Third who had gone across to the gym, at what they supposed to be the command of their Form-master, were waiting in the dark quad for Mr. Selby's appearance.

They had no suspicion at all at first. It was quite like their tyrant to order them out of their Form-room and then keep them waiting for him.

But suspicion soon arose.

"When's the old beast coming?" said Manners minor impatiently.

"Must be here soon," replied Levison minor.

"He'd better, if he wants to find me," D'Arcy minor said darkly.

"Look here, you chaps, was it really Selby?" asked Butt.

"Rats!" snapped Hobbs. "We all heard him."

"Must have been the old hunks," said Curly Gibson. "Who else could it have been?"

"Well, it might have been some boulder imitating his voice," answered Frank Levison doubtfully.

"We'll make it jolly hot for that boulder if we ever catch him, then!" said Wally hotly.

"But we never shall catch him," Jameson said.

"Look here, Jimmy, you'd no business here," D'Arcy minor remarked. "You'll have Ratty down on you for being out of your House."

"Well, Selby will be down on me if I cut off."

"He didn't see you. He couldn't have known you were with us," Frank said. "I should cut if I were you, Jimmy."

"None of us will be after mindin'," added Hoooley.

"That's all very well; but what about the kippers?" objected the New House fag.

"They're all right. Didn't you leave Bunter to take care of them? He, he, he!" jeered Piggott.

"What do you mean, Piggy?"

"You needn't bite my head off, D'Arcy minor! I mean just what I say, of course. Why, you told Bunter yourself to take care of them."

"Faith, I don't trust Bunter a yard," Hoooley said.

"He is rather a shyster, from all accounts," admitted D'Arcy minor.

"If I could only see how he could have wrangled it I should think he was at the bottom of it all," Reggie Manners said.

"But he couldn't have. Selby's voice came from the passage all right. Besides, that fat pig couldn't mimic Selby so as to take us in," replied Frank Levison.

"Not likely!" agreed Wally.

But doubt was growing with every minute.

"Don't hurry!" said Piggott sneeringly. "Give Bunter another minute or two, and the kippers will be safe enough, I'll bet!"

"I'm getting fed up with this!" announced Wally D'Arcy.

"And Bunter's getting fed up with the kippers," sniggered Piggott. "He, he, he!"

"I vote we go in!" snorted Reggie.

There was a moment's hesitation. Then D'Arcy minor led the way, and all followed him, even Piggott.

In the gloom Piggott grinned spitefully. It was but a small matter to triumph over; but Piggott's was but a small and malicious mind.

They hurried now. There might or might not be a row with Mr. Selby to follow. But they were thinking more of the kippers than of their Form-master—for the moment.

Weird sounds came from the Form-room as they neared it.

"Sus-sus-sounds like someone chuk-chuk-choking!" stammered Leggett, in alarm.

"Then it's Bunter choking over our kippers, the fat rotter!" snapped Wally.

And he bolted into the Form-room.

He was right.

Billy Bunter sprawled over a desk, squirming. The weird noises were coming from him.

In his frantic haste he had risked too much in the way of bones. Something had stuck in his throat, and his face was changing from purple to black.

They collared him, and thumped him on the back with vigour. Perhaps none of those who thumped quite knew whether his vigour was due most to vengeance or to a desire to prevent the robber's choking.

It was rough-and-ready surgery, but it proved effective.

"Ow-yow!" gasped Bunter. "It's gone now. I thought it would have killed me—I did, really!"

"Pity it didn't, you fat thief!" roared D'Arcy minor.

"Give him some more!" howled Manners minor.

"Yaroooh! Lemme be, you young cads!" wailed Bunter. "You don't know what damage I've done to my—oo-er!—inside!"

"But we know what damage you've done to our kippers!" yelled Hobbs.

It was easy for them all to see that.

Bunter had not quite cleared the decks. There remained nearly the half of one kipper—the smallest one—with half a round of butter-soaked toast. And—if those counted—there were five or six backbones, with fragments adhering which might have been relished by a hungry cat.

The Third-Formers were hungry, but they were not cats.

Their kippers had gone. Their butter had melted like snow in sunshine. All that remained, besides the fragments, was bread. And bread—with some butter, if not much—they might have had in Hall.

"The fat worm!"

"The thieving hippopotamus!"

"Oh, let's slay him!"

"Sure, killing's too good for the baste!"

Amidst all the clamour Piggott stood with a supercilious smile upon his unwholesome face.

Wally D'Arcy wheeled round, and saw that smile.

It was too much for Wally's overstrained temper.

His open hand smote Piggott's cheek with a resounding smack.

"D'Arcy minor!" roared a voice from the door.

And this time it was really Mr. Selby.

CHAPTER 5.

Nemesis on the Instalment Plan.

"I AM utterly shocked at your conduct, D'Arcy minor!" ground out Mr. Selby. "What offence had Piggott given you that you should assault him in that manner?" Wally was dumb. What could he say?

He felt that Piggott's sneering smile was more than sufficient justification for that slap of the face. But he knew that there was no chance of getting Mr. Selby to see that.

The master came into the room. "Piggott, perhaps you will answer me? What had you done to D'Arcy minor?"

"Nothing at all, sir. I didn't even speak to him," whined the black sheep. "Exactly as I thought. D'Arcy minor, you are an unmitigated young ruffian!"

"Not any more than Piggott is, sir," mumbled Wally.

"What do you say, you rebellious and unmannerly boy?"

Wally did not repeat what he had said. He felt that it was pretty weak, anyway.

"The state of this room is a disgrace—a positive disgrace!" snarled Mr. Selby. "You have been cooking here. A practice which you know to be against all rules and regulations. Do not deny it. The evidence is too flagrant!"

"He means 'fragrant'; that's the kippers," whispered Reggie to Frank.

Then, for the first time, the master's eyes fell upon Bunter.

Bunter was a sufficiently prominent object in the landscape to have been noticeable earlier. But, to do him justice, he had done all that he could to escape notice.

No doubt he was anxious to save the Third from any extra trouble that the presence of a guest might bring upon their devoted heads.

"What are you doing here?" snapped Mr. Selby.

"Nun-nun-nothing, sir," replied the Owl weakly.

"You are Bunter of the Fourth, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not aware, Bunter, that your presence here, and your participation in this disgusting orgy, are against all rules?" thundered the master.

"Participation's pretty well, when the fat rotter has giddy well wolfed the lot!" muttered Jameson.

Jameson would have done better to hold his peace.

His words did not reach Mr. Selby, but his muttering drew the master's gaze upon him.

"Ah, Jameson! May I inquire what is your errand here?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said Jameson, as if failing to understand.

"You are a New House boy. You have no right here at this hour. Hold out your hand!"

Mr. Selby had a cane with him. Mr. Selby was seldom without a cane. It was the sceptre of his rule.

Jameson held out his hand, and took three stinging cuts without wincing perceptibly.

"You will now report yourself to Mr. Ratcliff for being absent from your House," commanded the tyrant.

"Am I to tell him that you have caned me, sir?" asked Jameson.

"As you please. I really do not think it will make any difference whether you mention that detail or not," was the icy reply.

And the worst of it was that Jameson and the rest knew that Mr. Selby was

right. Ratty was as consistently unjust and spiteful as he was.

If Jameson reported himself he would certainly get another dose of cane. It was unlikely, however, that Jameson would be foolish enough to risk that. He would prefer to risk disobedience.

He went.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy minor!" snapped Mr. Selby.

Wally's right hand was extended firmly.

Swish, swish, swish!

Not a muscle of Wally's face moved.

"Now the other!"

The left hand was held out.

Swish, swish, swish!

Still no sign of pain from Wally. But that was not because he was not hurt, by any means.

"Levison minor!"

Frank stepped forward. He had expected that summons. Mr. Selby made a point always of dealing with Wally and him, and one or two more, before his arm began to flag.

Billy Bunter thought he saw his chance.

He stole unostentatiously towards the door.

"Bunter!" sounded a furious voice.

"Yessir?"

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, really, sir—nowhere, sir—at least, only into the passage for a breath of fresh air. This room does smell so of fish, sir!"

"Oh, the rotter!" breathed Curly Gibson.

And, indeed, after having put away practically the whole feast, and nearly choked himself in doing so, Bunter had no right to complain of the smell, which was pretty nearly all he had left for the rightful owners of the spread.

"Come here, Bunter!" gritted Mr. Selby, fingering his cane as if he loved it.

But any such affection was not shared by Bunter; and he did not obey at once.

"I— Oh, really, sir, you surely don't think of caning me?" he burbled.

"Wrong, Bunter! I not only think of it, but I mean to do it! Come here at once!"

"But-bub-but, I say, sir, you cu-cu-can't, you know!"

Bunter would have done better to fly the spot. He had got near enough to the door to have at least a sporting chance of escaping unscathed; and if he had known Mr. Selby better he would have been aware that flight was, at worst, no more dangerous than argument.

But a mental vision of the angry master pursuing him, the cane lashing, kept Bunter rooted to the spot.

"Wrong again! I not only can, but I will!"

"But I—I ain't in your Form, you know, sir!"

"That is merely an addition to your offence. In other words, if you were a member of the Third I should cane you for breaking rules. As it is, I shall cane you not only for that, but for intruding to break them!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Who was guilty of that gross impertinence?" roared Mr. Selby.

"I said 'Hear, hear!' answered D'Arcy minor.

"How dare you!"

"Well, sir, I didn't think there was any harm in agreeing with you."

"It was sheer impudence, and you know it! You will write me three hundred lines! Bunter!"

The Owl had got a step or two nearer the door. But he halted once more when he heard those stern tones.

"Yessir?" he burbled, trembling like a jelly.

"Come here!"

"I'll kuk-kuk-come, sir; but you kuk-kuk-can't kuk-kuk-cane me!"

The Third were giggling now. Not all their dread of Mr. Selby could restrain them from that.

Bunter came, his fat hands behind his back.

"Hold out your right hand, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, sir, I must protest! I'm Fuf-fuf-fourth!"

"No, third. He's got your turn, Franky," murmured Gibson.

"Take that!"

The lithe cane fairly sang in the air before it curled round Bunter's fat legs.

"Ow-yow! Yoooop! Stoppit, you beast!"

"Bunter! Another word of such gross disrespect and I will take you straight to Dr. Holmes!"

"Tuk-tuk-take me, then! He'll tell you that I can't be kuk-kuk-caned by you!"

"Come with me, then! I will see you boys later!"

And Mr. Selby stalked towards the door.

"I—I sus-sus-say, sir! I dud-dud-don't think I'll go to the Head!" gasped Bunter, not moving.

"Then you will hold out your hand!" rasped out Mr. Selby.

"Hold it out, you fat idiot!" hissed D'Arcy minor. "You'll only get it worse if you go to the old man!"

"I—I—I dud-dud-don't think it's right, sir; but I submit—under protest!" Bunter burbled.

"Your protest is a matter of complete indifference to me," replied Mr. Selby. "Your hand!"

It was held out. But as the cane came swishing down Bunter drew it back in dire alarm, and the full force of the blow descended upon Mr. Selby's own leg.

"Yoooop!" he howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags.

Not to save themselves from instant execution could they have kept back their laughter.

Bunter fled then. But it was too late.

He had practically no start at all. Before he had gone two yards the cane smote his shoulders.

"Owwwww!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Yooop! Oh, I say, stoppit! That hurts! Owwwww!"

Right up the passage Mr. Selby pursued, and Bunter roared and writhed and ran.

Then the master of the Third came back, and his Form found that the punishment dealt out to the hapless Owl had left plenty of vigour in him.

Levison minor, Manners minor, Frayne, Hobbs, Gibson, Hooley, Butt, Leggett—one after another they faced pain with what stoicism they could summon. It varied a good deal, for Leggett was not made of quite the same stuff as Wally & Co., though there were others who were made of much the same stuff as Leggett.

All were put through it—except Piggott. He was left until last, and then Mr. Selby's glance round seemed to overlook him. It was not really unfair in essence, for Piggott had had no share in the lost spread. But it was grossly unfair in intention, for the master did not know that, and did not ask about it.

"Clear up those disgusting remnants!" snapped Mr. Selby. "If anything like this happens again I shall not let you off with so light a punishment, I promise you!"

He stalked out, tapping his leg with his cane. But the leg he tapped was not the one he had inadvertently smitten.

Wally D'Arcy surveyed the scene.

"Crumbs, this is about the giddy limit!" he said. "We've got to clear up after that fat beast's wolfed everything!"

"Never mind!" said Reggie, throwing fragments of kipper-skin into the fire. "We'll take it out of Bunter when we catch him, you bet!"

"Here, don't waste that!" said Wally, clutching at a scrap of kipper.

"You don't want it—after Bunter—surely?"

"Of course I don't, Franky! But Piggy does! Anyway, he's going to have it—down his neck!"

"Lemme alone!" panted Piggott.

"Oh, no, my pippin! Selby missed you; but that's no reason why we should. Get him down, you kids!"

"Let him alone," said Frank. "After all, he wasn't in the feed bizney, and it was for that we were caned. I'm not sure that Bunter hasn't had about his whack, too."

Wally threw his fragment into the fire. "We'll let Piggy alone, then," he said. "He's a rotten outsider, all the same. But I'm dashed if we're going to let Bunter alone—the beastly pig! What do you say, you fellows?"

"Not jolly well likely!" came the chorus.

Frank gave in on the score of Bunter, and took his share in the discussion which ensued on ways and means of getting even with Bunter.

That youth might fancy he had already had his punishment. But the Third did not agree.

He might have had part of it; but Nemesis, in Bunter's case, was going to work on the instalment plan.

CHAPTER 6.

Any Port in a Storm.

THERE he is, the fat rotter! After him!"

Billy Bunter looked round in alarm.

It was obviously he who was referred to as a fat rotter. Whatever he might think as to the justice of the description, he could have no doubt about that.

Bunter's memory was a short one—too fatally short for anyone with his inveterate habit of saying the thing which was not. If it had not been for the fact that he could still feel the stings left behind by the lashing cane of Mr. Selby, he might by this time—nearly twenty-four hours later—have forgotten all about the matter of the Third Form kippers.

But when he saw Wally D'Arcy, Frank Levison, and a dozen or so more fags bearing down upon him it all came freshly back to his mind; and he judged it expedient to flee.

He fled accordingly.

It was almost a pity that D'Arcy minor had given tongue in such hot haste, for it handicapped the fags' chance. But for that about they might have come upon him unawares.

But there is a zest of the chase which Wally was the very fellow to feel keenly. And Wally's followers were hardly less keen than he.

Fear lent wings to the speed of William George Bunter.

He went up the broad staircase at a pace that might well have been deemed impossible to such a figure as was his. Along the Fourth passage his fat little legs went like clockwork.

"Go it, Bunter!" roared Blake.

"Where's the bobby?" howled Herries.

"Two to one on Bunter against the field!" yelled Digby.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 575.

Monty Lowther, and Harry Manners, of the Shell—appeared round the corner, coming from the passage upon which the studies of their Form were situated.

"Bunter running!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Doubly," said Monty Lowther. "His legs are going at a truly astonishing pace, and the grease from him lards the lean earth—I mean the limeoem; if I must be pedantically accurate—as he runs."

"But what's he running for?" asked Manners perplexedly, as the Owl pushed past them without a word.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth," said Lowther solemnly.

"Then Bunter isn't the wicked flea, for he is being chased," replied Cardew, looking out of No. 9. "Levison, old bird, your minor's in this!"

The pack had just come into sight, Wally and Frank leading.



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BECOMING A CADET TO-DAY!

"And mine," said Manners, sighting Reggie just behind the leaders.

"Bak Jove! An' mine, too!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, Wally, it is seaweely the thing to wash along this passage as it—"

Wally paid no heed, and Gussy left his reproof unfinished.

The pack swept on.

"It looks wathah as if they were aftah Buntah," remarked Gussy.

"Does it?" said Cardew. "What a mind you have, my noble kinsman!"

"Did you think that out for yourself, Gussy, or did Herries help you?" inquired Lowther.

"You needn't drag me in!" growled Herries.

"It must have been some great mind. I naturally thought of you, old top," said Lowther sweetly.

"But what's it all about?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bunter got the rag of the Third out last night," explained Ernest Levison. "Wolfed all their kippers."

"But where were Wally & Co. to allow that?" asked Blake.

"There's some mystery about it," Clive answered. "Young Frank says that they heard Selby's voice in the passage telling them to go across to the gym at once; but when they got there dear old Selby was non est, and they fancy someone else must have mimicked him."

"Would anyone mimic an order by Selby in order that Bunter might steal the fags' tommy?" said Digby doubtfully.

"Not knowin', can't say," replied Cardew. "My guides an' instructors have given you succinctly the story as related to us by Franky. The application—likewise the moral—we leave entirely to you."

"Are they to be allowed to slaughter Bunter in our passage, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"Seeing that it's Bunter, I should say 'Most certainly,'" said Lowther. "I consider it a meritorious deed to slaughter Bunter anywhere and anyhow."

"Oh, weally, Lowthah—"

"Any objection, Gussy? If so, put it into writing, and we will give it our best consideration."

"I rather fancy the slaughtering's off," said Tom, grinning. "Here they come back! Buntah has taken refuge somewhere, and the hounds are at fault. They have lost the scent."

Wally & Co. were indeed coming back, shepherded by Harry Noble and the great George Alfred Grundy.

"You kids can't do this sort of thing, you know," Grundy was saying.

"The merry chase should be confined to your own quarters," said Kangaroo.

"I'm talking to them, Noble!" protested Grundy, with immense dignity.

"Right-ho! They're sure to take notice of you—I don't think!"

"Oh, shut up, you asses!" growled D'Arcy minor. "What licks me is where the fat rotter got to."

"He must have gone into one of the studies," said Frank.

"Then it was an empty one," said Jack Blake. "If there had been anyone in it he would have been kicked out at once."

"Bunter is not much more popular in the Shell than in his own Form," remarked Dig, smiling.

"Less!" said Kangaroo, with conviction.

"That," said Levison, with equal conviction, "is not possible."

It was true. All along the two passages there was not a single occupied study from which Bunter would not have been expelled at once.

Not even Raske or Crooke or Scrope, not even Trimble or Mellish, could stand the Owl.

To such a pass had a few weeks at St. Jim's brought that shining light of the Greyfriars Remove!

Nevertheless, Bunter had found a refuge.

It was not in an occupied study, however. It was in the one study on the Shell passage never occupied in these days—Nobody's Study!

That apartment was at the extreme end of the passage, or, rather, in a short blind alley leading out of it.

Nobody's Study was generally kept locked. But from time to time it was opened and swept out, and this chanced to be one of the days when cleaning operations were done there.

Bunter, short-sighted and confused, had blundered into the blind alley well ahead of the chase, and had seen the open door.

The key was in the lock. He snatched

it out, transferred himself to the inside of the door, and locked himself safely in, just as the pack of fags went whooping past the head of the short passage.

They were completely at fault. They never even thought of Nobody's Study, though Bunter had spoken of it to them the evening before.

But then, Bunter had not really thought of it. He had only happened upon the open door.

It was merely a case of any port in a storm with William George Bunter.

Even now he did not at first realise where he had got.

He blinked round him confusedly. This place was quite unfamiliar. It seemed to Bunter almost as though some beneficent magician had devised a refuge for him on the spur of the moment.

Then some recollection of what Durance and the fags had told him came to his confused mind.

"This must be Nobody's Study!" he said to himself.

And he blinked round again.

"Don't think much of it," he mumbled.

There was certainly nothing very attractive about Nobody's Study.

The walls were of solid stone, for the room belonged to the older part of the school. The one window had no view but that of blank walls, by no means inspiring. Of course, furniture was entirely lacking.

"Wouldn't be so bad, though, if I had an armchair and a few more sticks of furniture," said Bunter to Bunter. "There's a good big grate; a roaring fire would soon make the place a bit cheerier. I've a jolly good mind to cotton on to this study!"

He moved over to the window.

"No chance of being overlooked by anybody—that's something to the good," he said. "With plenty of grub and firing a chap might not have half a bad time here."

Billy Bunter was not really a gregarious animal, though his habit of forcing himself into company which had no use for him might have made him seem so to an observer with not too much acumen.

When he did that, however, it was never for the sake of company. He was always after something to eat and drink otherwise unobtainable.

Let Bunter only have all that his soul—or, rather, a more solid part of his make-up—craved, and he would care but little for society. With too much to eat and drink he would have been content—in the words of the poet—to let the world go by.

His establishment in Nobody's Study would not, of course, provide him automatically with too much to eat and drink.

But if he could establish himself there unknown to any of the two Forms, he could see his way to easier times in the matter of gorging. At present, raids upon the cupboards of others were complicated by the difficulty of disposing of the stuff raided—a very real difficulty for the homeless Bunter.

If he did decide to locate himself in Nobody's Study, he must do it on the sly, of course.

It was a Shell study Nobody in the Shell wanted it, it is true; they would have crowded in four or five to a study rather than dig in that cheerless apartment.

All the same, everyone in the Shell would object to the establishment of Bunter there.

Bunter was aware of this, though he could not in the least understand it.

"I think I'll bag it!" he muttered. "Wonder whether those beastly fags have gone yet?"

He unlocked the door, opened it, and listened.

The fags had cleared off, that was plain. It was impossible for Wally & Co. to be anywhere and not to be heard; and Bunter could not hear them.

"Must have a place to get out of the way of those spiteful young rotters!" mumbled Bunter. "I'll put the key in my pocket, anyway. No one knows I've been here, and if anyone misses it they can't trace it to me."

He put the key in his pocket and rolled off.

CHAPTER 7.

Very Mysterious.

"THERE was a pie here," said Manners darkly.

Two days had passed since the fags had chased Bunter. It was tea-time, and Manners was stand-

"What's more likely Bunter?" asked Tom Merry, entering at that moment.

"Pie disappeared," replied Manners briefly.

"My hat! That certainly sounds rather like the fit villain!" said Tom. "He raided all Grundy's grub—extra-special hamper from dear old Uncle Grundy, too."

"Something will have to be done about it," said Manners.

"Can't we leave that safely to Grundy?" asked Lowther.

"As! I mean about our pie."

"Oh! That's really serious, I'll admit."

"We can't scrag him on suspicion," said Tom slowly.

"I don't see why not!" replied Manners sharply.

"Oh, yes, you do, old man! Even a fat worm like Bunter must be given justice."



The Owl's Nest.
(See Chapter 10.)

ing in front of the cupboard in Study No. 10—that which the Terrible Three shared.

"Of course there's a pie there—a rabbit-pie," replied Lowther.

"Oh, is there? I'm blind, then, that's all!"

Lowther came over in haste.

"You've put something on top of it, duffer!" he said.

"Oh, have I? Find it, then!"

But Lowther stared into the cupboard in vain. The pie was certainly not there.

"May have been Figgy & Co.," he said slowly. "I saw Fatty over here between classes and dinner."

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, of the New House, were on the best of terms with the Terrible Three as individuals, But New House was up against School House; and the raiding of the enemies' grub was reckoned more or less an act of legitimate warfare by both parties.

"More likely Bunter!" growled Manners.

"It will be blessed unhealthy for him if he gets that!" Lowther said.

"Hallo, Gussy, old bird! What's the matter?" inquired Tom, as the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into No. 10.

"There has been a mysterious disappearance from our studay, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of the Fourth.

"If it's a bottle of face-wash, apply to George Alfred Grundy, farther along the passage," replied Lowther. "He's probably taken it as evidence against you!"

"Do be sewious, Lowthah! Suahly you do not suspect me of using anything' so effeminate as a face-wash?"

"But you do wash your face sometimes, don't you, Gussy? It always looks nice and pink and clean, anyway!"

"There is a great deal of difference between a face-wash an—an—"

"A wash of the face—ch? Is there? Now, I shouldn't have thought it. It only tends to show the defects of the—"

merits—not sure which—of our beautiful language. For in Latin the two things would have to be expressed by the same word, and—

"Oh, shut up, you piffing idiot!" snapped Manners. "Anybody might think that losing a pie didn't matter—"

"Have you lost a pie, Mannahs?"

"Yes. At least, we had one boned."

"I'm not sure whether Dame Taggles bones the rabbits—"

"Oh, dry up, ass! What have you had stolen, Gussy?"

"I should not caah to assert positively that it had been stolen, Mannahs. In fact, I am quite suah that you fellows would not be guilty of such—"

"Us?" roared Manners. "Do you mean to say—"

"Really, Gussy, you might draw it a bit milder!" said Tom.

"Well, of course, we know that if you bagged it you onlay did it in fun," explained D'Arcy. "But we should like it back, don't echerknow!"

"Like what back, you potty gas-bag?"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"What have you lost, you burbling maniac?" demanded Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Leave the old chump to me," said Tom, grinning. "What is it, Gussy?"

"A cake, Tom Mewvy—a vewy large cake. An' I should like to point out that I came along heah in the vewy fwientlied spivit—"

"To accuse us of boning your cake, you dunny?" roared Manners.

"Nothin' of the sort. We simplay thought you might have taken it for a lark. At least, I thought so, an' Dig thought so. Blake was not suah, an' Hewwics was weally wathah violent about it. So it seemed up to me, as a fellow of tact an' judgment, an' all that, y'know, to come along an' ask politely whethah—"

"Whether we were grab-sneakers?" howled Manners.

"Steady does it, old chap!" said Tom soothingly. "We've raided their tommy before now, and so have they ours. But not this time, Gussy, old dear! We haven't seen your cake."

"Cake missing in No. 6?" asked Talbot, appearing behind Gussy.

"That's it. What have you lost, old top?"

"They were Gore's, really. A bag of scones, that's all. We shall get over it. But, for a philosopher, Skimmy's really making rather a fuss. He happens to have discovered that he's hungry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the giddy joke?" inquired Clifton Dane, the Canadian junior, halting in the doorway.

"Talbot's study has lost a bag of scones," explained Tom.

"And you silly asses think that's funny! I don't! We're a pound or two of bacon down, and I'm looking for the rotter who bagged it!"

"Well, we've lost a rabbit-pie, so we're not out of the fashion," said Lowther.

"My hat! Someone's been going it!"

"Hallo, here's Levison!" said Manners, who was getting back his own good temper now that it was evident that he and his chums were not alone in their loss.

"What's missing from No. 9, Levison?" asked Tom.

There was something of the old-time quick suspicion in the look that Ernest Levison gave him. But in a second the newer look, that was so different from the old one, returned to the Fourth-Former's face.

"All in it?" he asked.

"Ours is a pie, Talbot's a bag of scones, Gussy makes plaintive inquiry for

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a missing cake, and Dane has lost—not saved—his bacon," replied Lowther.

"Any of you seen an extra-big tin of sardines walking about on its own?" said Levison.

That unusual spectacle had not had a witness among the assembled company.

"It's either Baggy or Bunter," said Manners. "No good pretending that we're above suspecting anyone without proof! I'm not, I'll own. I suspect them both."

"Rather a wholesale bizney for Baggy," said Levison thoughtfully.

"Another giddy victim!" said Lowther.

It was Kerruish this time.

But now there was a change in the complaint.

"Do any of you chaps happen to have borrowed an armchair from our study?" asked the Marx junior. "Of course, we don't mind lending it; but we're not giving it away. I've inquired all along our passage."

"Not a very likely thing for anybody to borrow," said Jack Blake, coming up with Herries and Digby.

"No. We do borrow chairs at times; but an armchair is a bit too big to be got out and in again comfortably," Tom said.

"This is that wicker one of ours," explained Kerruish. "It's quite light; you can tote it along just as easily as an ordinary chair."

"When did you miss it, deah boy?" Gussy asked.

"Last night."

The meeting in No. 10 had become an overflow one by this time.

"Well," remarked Lowther thoughtfully, "if we only pool our losses we can have quite a fine spread. Items, a rabbit-pie, a cake, a dozen or so scones, a pound or two of bacon, and a large tin of sardines. Really—"

"Who's been bagging my tea?"

It was the stentorian voice of George Alfred Grundy which howled that question along the passage.

"Come along here, old bird!" said Blake. "For once you have our sympathy. We all happen to be in the same box."

"What, all lost tea? Don't talk rot! Tain't likely! Ours was a whole pound."

"We've lost—"

"And we've had—"

"Ours was—"

"An armchair of ours has vanished!"

Kerruish alone managed to make it clear to Grundy what had gone from his study.

"An armchair? Oh, don't be potty! Who'd steal an armchair?" said the great man contemptuously. "Tain't like a pound of tea."

"Not very like, certainly," said Lowther. "The difference is visible to the naked eye, anyway."

"Look here, there's a thief about!" snapped Grundy.

"See what it is to get a fellow with real detective ability on the job!" said Lowther admiringly.

"This will have to be seen into!" Grundy proclaimed.

"As the man said about the millstone," murmured Lowther.

"Things can't disappear like this!"

"Bai Jove, Gwunday, it looks wathah as if they can, though!"

"Wilky!" hooted Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy's two study-mates, came up together.

Behind them came Clive and Cardew of the Fourth, and Gibbons and Lucas of the Shell.

Of the half-dozen who thus added themselves to the growing crowd, all but Cardew looked distinctly worried. But the face of Ralph Reckness Cardew wore its usual unruined expression.

"Who's bagged our teapot?" asked Clive.

"There's a frying-pan gone from our study!" said Gibbons.

"Look here! Have any of you chaps borrowed my violin-case?" inquired Lucas.

"This looks to me like a case of complete study furnishing," said Talbot quietly.

"Wilkins," commanded Grundy, in his lordliest manner, "go round to all the studies and find out what everyone's lost!"

"Grundy," replied George Wilkins, "go and eat coke!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Go and eat coke, I said. Think I'm going to be ordered about by you, fat-head?"

Grundy gasped. This seemed to him rank mutiny.

"I don't see what anyone could possibly want with Lucas' violin-case," said Dig.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" Herries said. Herries was musical.

"Better get old Towser on the job," said Tom, with a wink at Blake.

"Towser and Grundy—a combination warranted to—"

"I don't see where Grundy comes in, Lowther!" growled Herries. "Old Towsey would jolly soon find the thief, I'll bet!"

"If he'll only find our teapot I shall be satisfied," said Clive. "I don't know about any thief. Chaps do borrow other chaps' teapots."

"Poor old Sidney! A born son of Martha—anxious and troubled about many things," murmured Cardew soothingly.

"You potty ass!" snapped Clive.

"The sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part; But the sons of Martha favour their mother of the careful soul and the troubled heart,"

chanted Cardew.

"That's Shakespeare, I suppose?" said Grundy scornfully.

"No—Kipling; but it's nearly the same thing—near enough for Grundy, anyway," Lowther said.

"It's rot!" growled Clive.

"Here's Baggy!" said Dig.

CHAPTER 8.

The Inmate of the Box-room.

"HERE, I say! Wharrer doing?"

burbled Baggy Trimble.

"Easy on, Grundy!" said Tom. "There's nothing been proved against Baggy yet!"

"An' even Baggybus has some of the rights of a Briton," drawled Cardew. "Even Baggybus must be held guilty until he's proved innocent."

"Isn't it the other way round, Cardew?" asked Talbot, smiling.

Cardew shook his head.

"Not with Baggybus," he said. "Much safer my way, old gun!"

"Yow-ow! Stoppit, Grundy! Make this beast stop it, Tom Merry!"

Grundy gave Baggy one final shake, then released him.

"Now tell the truth!" he growled.

"If Baggybus is to do that, the shaking process had better be continued," said Cardew. "Truth is fabled to inhabit the bottom of a well, y'know. If there's any in Baggybus, it's deep, deep down—"

"Farther than any plummet—"

"More Shakespeare!" groaned Grundy. "I wish you'd shut up, Lowther, and you, too, Cardew! A chap can't hear himself speak for your eternal clack!"

"That's a chap's own fault for whis-perin', Grundy," observed Cardew. "A

voice 'gentle and low' may be 'an excellent thing in woman,' but—"

"We shall never get any further till Cardew and Lowther are muzzled!" said Blake.

"I am dumb!" proclaimed Lowther. "An' I'm deaf!" said Cardew. "I can't hear Grundy at all unless he speaks louder."

"What's the row?" whined Baggy. "Things have been disappearin', Baggibus. We don't—"

"Shut up, and let me tell him, Cardew!" hooted Grundy.

"Eh? Was your Majesty graciously pleased to whisper?" inquired Cardew, with a hand to an ear.

"Well, suppose things have?" said Baggy defiantly. "What's that to me? I'm not a thief, am I?"

"Notice must be given of that question," said Lowther, in his best parliamentary manner.

"You may not be a thief," said Tom Merry, "but you must admit that now and then you've been caught in possession of things that you couldn't prove to be yours."

"Very nicely put, Thomas!" Lowther said approvingly.

"I don't admit anything of the sort!" bleated Baggy. "I would scorn to touch anything that didn't belong to me. I hope my principles are too high for that!"

"Baggibus has hope. The gentle Thomas has charity. But where—oh, tell me where!—is faith to be found when Baggibus an' the morals of Baggibus are in question?" asked Cardew.

"I haven't touched anything of anybody's," persisted the heir of Trimble Hall.

"Quite touching!" said Lowther. "The sight of such perfect innocence almost makes me weep extensive weeps."

"Oh, stop it!" hooted Grundy. "Look here, Trimble, either you bagged our stuff or somebody else did—there's no getting away from that!"

"What a stupendous brain!" murmured Lowther.

"Well, I didn't!" said Baggy. And, somehow, most of those who heard fancied he was telling the truth, unusual as it was for him to do so.

"Then who did?"

"That ain't my bizney, is it? All the same, I think I could give you a hint."

And Baggy looked very knowing indeed.

Durrance appeared just then, and behind him came Roylance and Smith minor and Kangaroo and Glyn. Even the passage was getting rather crowded.

"Sugar's done in, as well as bacon, Clifton," said Harry Noble to his chum and study-mate.

"I say, we've lost a tin of pineapple and a jar of preserved ginger," announced Roylance. "Have all you chaps lost things?"

"Somebody's made the merry dickens of a raid on our study," said Durrance. "As it happens, Lumley-Lumley and I had both had hampers. All that's left of them wouldn't make a meal for a sparrow!"

"It's all serene," remarked Glyn. "You've caught the robber, haven't you?"

"No, they haven't, then!" roared Baggy.

"Sounds a bit suspish. No one mentioned your name, fatty!"

"Everybody makes out I'm a thief!" whined Baggy. "I shall complain to Railton about it if it doesn't stop!"

"Much better wait till the chaps you bone the stuff from complain to him," said Dig. "No use giving yourself away, you know."

"Baggy thinks he can tell us who the criminal is, Glyn," said Blake.

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Bernard Glyn drily.

"It wasn't me, then! It was Bunter!"

No one seemed surprised at that charge.

"Have you any proof of that?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! It is quite off the walls to accuse a chap without pwoof. Twimble!"

"Proof enough," granted Baggy. "Do any of you chaps know where the fat rotter has been the last day or two?"

"At a guess, I should hazard Study No. 2, with Mellish," said Cardew.

"Rot! Nothing of the sort!"

"When did you change out?" inquired Cardew sweetly.

"I haven't changed out, you silly ass!"

"Oh, haven't you? Then—"

"Dry up, Cardew!" said Tom. "Come to think of it, you fellows, we haven't seen much of Bunter just lately."

"The fags have been looking for him everywhere, they say; but they can't get on his trail," said Levison.

Baggy nodded and winked and laid a podgy finger against his snub nose.

"I know!" he said

"Where?" came an eager chorus of a dozen or more voices.

"I'll take you. I consider Bunter's a disgrace to St. Jim's," said Baggy virtuously. "Whatever's gone, he's taken it—there's no doubt about that. The fellow's grossly unprincipled!"

"There's one thing he hasn't taken, Baggibus," drawled Cardew.

"What's that?" asked Noble.

"He hasn't taken away the character of Baggibus. Baggibus lost that long before Bunter came."

"Do you mean that Baggy has taken away his?"

"No, Manners—no! But it would have been a kind act if he had. Bunter has the sort of character best carefully mislaid."

"Lead on, you fat worm!" snapped Blake.

Baggy led the way upstairs to a little-used box-room at the end of the Fifth Form dormitory passage.

He flung open the door.

"There he is!" he said dramatically.

"Tableau—the Sleeping Beauty!" said Cardew.

William George Bunter lay fast asleep, and his snores fairly echoed down the passage.

He had drawn two big boxes together for a bed. Upon these he had laid several overcoats—not all his own property, of course. Indeed, he had his own overcoat on, as well as a thick rug round his ample person.

His face was greasy. His sleeping smile looked suspiciously like the smile of repletion. He lay upon his back, and inside the rug his fat arms were crossed over his waistcoat region.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Talbot.

"Here's Bunter!" Manners said. "But where's our pie?"

"Yaas, wathah! An' our cake, bai Jove!"

"And our bacon!"

"And—"

"I would suggest that only a post-mortem could answer all those questions," Cardew said.

"But you can't have a post-mortem on a chap till he's dead, ass!" objected Clive.

"That, my dear Sidney, appears to me an argument in favour of it, seein' that the person in question is Bunter!"

"It's a queer thing what he's done with all that stuff if he has boned it," said Tom.

"Nothing queer about it!" snapped Grundy. "He's wolfed it, of course!"

Don't we know what a gorging rotter he is?"

"Still, if he's eaten it here there would be some sign of it about," remarked Gunn. "But there's not—not a crumb, or a tin, or—"

"And he couldn't have cooked bacon here!" Durrance said.

"Bai Jove, it weally is queeah! For Buntah makes a tewwible lot of cwumbs as a wule, doesn't he, Dig, deah boy?"

"Untidiest chap I ever saw," agreed Dig. "Worse than you, Gussy!"

"Weally—"

"And where's our armchair?" asked Kerruish. "No sign of that!"

"Or of my violin-case!" put in Lucas.

"There's no sign of anything except Bunter!" said Manners crossly. "And goodness knows we don't want Bunter. I'd as soon think of hunting round for a dose of influenza as for Bunter!"

Baggy Trimble was evidently taken aback.

"I—I— Look here, you know, he's gorged it all—he must have!" he said.

"But where? He certainly hasn't eaten it here!" said Kangaroo.

Suspicious looks were being cast upon Baggy. It seemed very like an attempt on the part of that high-principled youth to make a scapegoat of the sleeping innocent before them.

But was Bunter sleeping? He still snored, it was true; but Cardew saw him open one eye ever so slightly.

No one else saw that. Most of them were busily engaged in examining the box-room for any sign of Bunter's alleged gorge.

Cardew, without a word, took out his scarfpin and approached the supposed sleeper.

"Chuck it, Cardew, you rotter!" roared Bunter, sitting up in a desperate hurry.

"Hallo! You awake?" said Tom Merry, wheeling round.

"Yes, I am, then! I wish you fellows would leave me alone!" replied Bunter peevishly.

"We'd do that fast enough if you'd leave our grub alone!" growled Herries.

"And our furniture!" added Kerruish.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" said Bunter, rubbing his eyes in a most natural manner.

"Everybody's been losing things this last few hours," said Levison bluntly.

"Well, I can't help that, can I? They should take better care of them, that's all!"

"The general impression is that you could help it, my fat tulip!" said Lowther.

"What do you mean? You're talking in riddles!"

"The question is—what are you doing up here? You've no right here!" hooted Grundy.

"Well, I like that! I said Bunter indignantly. "Where am I to go?"

"You've no right here!" repeated Grundy.

There was a look more of sorrow than of anger upon the fat face of Bunter as he gazed around him upon the crowd.

"I can't make you chaps out!" he said plaintively. "I thought St. Jim's was a decent school!"

"So it is, you fat rotter!" returned Clive hotly.

"Well, I haven't found it so! I'm driven out of the studies. No one will take me in—I don't know why. I suppose I've got to be somewhere, haven't I?"

"The necessity is not obvious!" Lowther said.

"Oh, really! I never heard such rot as you talk, Lowther! Well, I find this place. 'Taint very warm or very comfy, I can tell you that! But anyway I'm doing no harm to anyone here, am I?"

Bunter paused for a reply. He looked almost ready to weep fat tears. The paths of his position seemed to get home to him, if it failed to get home to anyone else present.

"As far as that goes," admitted Tom Merry, "there's no great harm in your snoozing here all the time when you aren't wanted in Form. Perhaps the chaps whose overcoats you've borrowed may object—"

"You should have a more decided opinion about that, I think, Tommy, for I see one of yours there!" struck in Lowther.

"Well, it's only my old one—it's no great odds. But the point is, Bunter, that things are missing—"

"That's no concern of mine, Merry! Search me, if you want to—I don't care! Search this miserable hole that you've driven me to—you won't find anything here."

"Bunter's conscious virtue is even more touchin' than Baggy's!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, though, Lowthah, you must own that there is no evidence whatever against the chap; an' I for one uttably refuse to condemn him without evidence! He is wathah a wotthah, I must say, but that does not pprove him a wobbah!"

And as Gussy thought, so thought most of the rest. Bunter might still be under suspicion; but the case against him was "not proven," as the Scots verdict has it.

Nothing could be done. It seemed advisable to clear off to such scanty teas as the mysterious thief had left them; and they cleared off accordingly.

Bunter waited till they had all gone. Only his own overcoat and Tom Merry's old garment were left then; the rest had been reclaimed by their owners.

But Bunter did not appear to mind that. He waited till the study passages were quiet, and then he stole on tiptoes alone to Nobody's Study, and locked himself in and sat in a wicker armchair before a roaring fire, and extracted ginger from a jar after the manner of Master Jack Horner.

CHAPTER 9. Arcades Ambo!

DURING that evening and the morning of the next day many more discoveries were made in the matter of missing articles.

It was but natural that the first things to be missed should be those which had been, in one way or another, wanted at tea; and the armchair from No. 5 left a gap which it was not easy to overlook.

But less noticeable things were found to have disappeared—an old set of bookshelves, a chair or two, a hearthrug from the study shared by Racke and Crooke. It was not the hearthrug they had had in use; the missing one had had ink spilt upon it, and had been thrown into a space behind a bookcase. But they made as much fuss about it as other fellows did about things really wanted.

When it came to comparing notes and making inventories of the things gone, the juniors began to fancy that it must be a syndicate of robbers—the phrase was Cardew's—at work, rather than a single thief.

It seemed almost impossible that one fellow could have any use for so much stuff.

Grundy got to work. He found numerous clues, invisible to anyone else—even to Gunn and Wilkins. But he did not find the thief.

Perhaps it was strange that Nobody's Study never occurred to the mind of any of those concerned. But so it was.

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Bunter needed quite a lot of luck, of course. But he had it. No one saw him coming or going to or from his real nest. But he was often seen on his way to the box-room on the dormitory floor.

Baggy Trimble sidled up to him after morning classes the next day.

"I say, Bunter—" he began. "Scat, you fat frog!" said Bunter politely.

Baggy looked vicious. "All right!" he said meaningly. "Perhaps you'll wish a bit later on that you'd listened to what I had to say!"

Bunter looked at him. Did Baggy know anything?

"Well, what have you to say?" he asked ungraciously.

Trimble put his mouth close to Bunter's fat ear, and shielded it with his podgy and unclean paw.

"Halves!" he whispered. Bunter started back.

"What do you mean?" he burred in alarm.

"Oh, you know, and I know, and we jolly well ain't going to let anybody else into it, are we, Bunter, old boss?"

"What do you fancy you know?" asked Bunter peevishly. "Mind, it's only fancy!"

Baggy hesitated. If he had really known anything he could have brought Bunter to terms with two words.

Those two words were "Nobody's Study."

Bunter waited, expecting them to be spoken.

"I know who's collaring the grub and things!" said Baggy.

At that the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove breathed more freely. He knew something; he knew that the truth was no more in Baggy Trimble than it was in him.

He was not going to be bluffed by Baggy.

"Well, I'm not surprised at that!" he said calmly.

He was sure that if Trimble had known of his nest he would have spoken of it.

"Eh? Oh, no; of course, you know what a cute chap I am, Bunter! We're alike in that way, you know! He, he, he!"

"Nothing of the sort!" replied Bunter with dignity. "I don't call it cute to steal!"

"What-a-at?"

"And I give you fair warning, Trimble, that anything you say now may be used in evidence against you later!"

"In evidence? Against me—me?" burred Baggy.

"Yes. Mind, I've no ill-feeling in the matter. But I don't want your confessions; and it's not a scrap of use your asking me to go halves in what you've boned. I hope my principles are better than that!"

And Bunter rolled virtuously away, leaving Baggy dumbfounded.

One might have expected that after that Baggy would have dogged the Owl to find out the truth. But Baggy, though there was a good deal of the spy in his make-up, was anything but a detective. He was too slack and too obtuse for the job.

Billy Bunter was no genius; but his brains were a trifle more active than Trimble's.

Bunter had made himself exceedingly comfortable in Nobody's Study.

He kept up a roaring fire. It was easy enough to steal supplies of coal, and he had carried off several old and broken-down articles of furniture to break up for firewood. The bookshelves taken from Walkley's study were hung up on the wall, and held pots of jam and marmalade, and such trifles. Bunter had no use for books. A packing-case from the

box-room served as cupboard and table. The armchair from No. 5, filled with borrowed cushions, stood in front of the fire.

Bunter was as happy as Robinson Crusoe in his best moments.

The lonely study was his desert island. The other studies served him as a source of supplies, just as the wreck served Crusoe. He had no Man Friday—not even a goat. Baggy might have served in either capacity; but Bunter did not want company, and more particularly he did not want Baggy's.

Baggy was really the last fellow in the school he would have welcomed, for Baggy alone could have put down as big a share of the provender as he. Fatty Wynn might have come near doing so. But Fatty would not have shared in the felonious enterprise at any price.

Bunter had accumulated quite a stock of supplies. Of some articles he had enough to last him for days. But there were others of which he was short; and Saturday afternoon seemed to him quite an excellent time for getting them.

There were senior and junior matches on, and practically all St. Jim's would be on the playing-fields. A look-out would have to be kept for such slackers as Baggy, Racke, Crooke, and Mellish. But while the rest were at footer Racke & Co. would be at banker, with closed door. It was Baggy alone whom one was liable to meet on the same errand as one's own.

So Bunter was on the qui vive for any sign of Baggy when he stole through the quiet passages that afternoon.

The sun was shining brightly. From the fields came the distant hum of voices, with now and then a frenzied burst of cheering which told that one of the St. Jim's teams had scored a goal. Bunter cared not for the sun and the breeze and the open air; and as little did he care for the footer.

He had Lucas' violin-case with him. A violin-case is quite a useful market-basket, so to speak. But, of course, Bunter bought in a cheap market—one where things were without price, indeed.

If he had been seen with the violin-case suspicion would have been aroused at once. But he had no intention of being seen.

He had picked up not wholly unconsidered trifles in three or four studies when, with the case under his arm, he entered that of Blake & Co.

A low growl from under the table caused him to start back in a flurry.

Towser had no right to be there. But Towser was there. Since he had come so near to being poisoned by Racke his master could hardly bear him out of his sight. And the prohibition of pets in studies dated back so far that Herries held it doubtful whether the Head still "meant it."

It was Towser who growled, of course. Bunter had not yet made Towser's acquaintance, and he had no desire to do so.

He bundled out of the study in such haste that he collided with something as heavy as himself. That something was the fat body of Baggy Trimble.

A collision between the bodies of those two was hardly likely to be attended with any very painful result to either. Both were too well padded.

But, as it chanced, their heads also met.

"Yoooooop!" howled Bunter.

"Yaroooooh!" sang out Baggy.

"You clumsy fat worm!"

"You blundering fat idiot!"

After these mutual compliments they stood and stared at one another.

Then into the eyes of each came a cunning gleam.

"What were you after in there, Bunter?" asked Baggy, with a finger to his nose.

"That's no bizney of yours! What were you going in for yourself, come to that?"

The door was shut, and Towser was silent inside the study. A project was forming itself in the brain of Bunter.

"I wasn't going in at all!" lied Baggy.

"I was coming out," said Bunter, truthfully for once. "There was no one at home," he added, still telling the truth.

"Well, did you want anyone to be there? They'd jolly soon have kicked you out if they'd been there. I say, that's old Lucas' violin-case, ain't it?"

"No, it's mine!" snapped Bunter.

"I didn't know you played the fiddle!" said Baggy cunningly.

"You don't know everything! As a matter of fact, I'm a first-class player. I looked in at No. 6 to see whether Herries had any rosin."

"You can't eat rosin!" said Baggy.

"Always thinking of grub! I'm jolly glad I'm not like that!" replied Bunter loftily.

"Well, I'll believe you can play the fiddle when I hear you; and I believe now that that case is Lucas'. And as for going in there for rosin—you can tell that to my grandmother!"

"I didn't go in there for grub, anyway!" said Bunter. "I'm not a grub-sneak. If I had been——"

He paused.

"If you had been?" said Baggy eagerly.

"No; it's not good enough, Trimble! It's not nearly good enough! I know what you'd do if you saw the cake those chaps have in their cupboard!"

Baggy's mouth watered. It was hard to believe that Bunter had come out and had left a cake; but it might be true.

"I say, was it a plummy one?" he asked greedily.

"I'm not going to tell you anything about it. If I said it was simply crammed with sultanas and currants——"

"I'll go halves with you, Bunter, old top!"

"You won't, then! I'm not a speak-thief!"

And Bunter went off without turning his head.

No sooner had he disappeared round the corner than Baggy cautiously turned the handle of the door.

And no sooner had Baggy turned the handle of the door than the head of William George Bunter was thrust round the corner.

Next moment there was an agonised yell.

"Yaroooh! Yooop! I shall be killed!" howled Baggy.

"Towser's after him!" chuckled Bunter.

Baggy came out of No. 6 all in a heap. The door partially closed behind him, and Towser had to push it open—a task for which his great blunt head was less well adapted than the sharp nose of a fox-terrier, of course.

The second or two of delay gave Baggy a chance to pick himself up and move on his way. But he was not three yards down the passage before Towser was on his track.

"Yooop! Murder!" roared Baggy.

"The beast can run," said Bunter critically.

Towser stopped. Perhaps, on reflection, he came to the conclusion that Herries, who was no end particular about his diet, would not care for his making a meal off Baggy.

He padded back to No. 6 in a thoughtful way.

Bunter concluded it best not to raid farther that afternoon.

It was not likely that Baggy would start again. Baggy, of course, was a funk. But on the whole—well, on the whole, as there was no lack of grub in Nobody's Study, that retreat seemed to Bunter safer and more comfortable than "nosing around."

Bunter and Baggy were "arcades ambo"—which, literally, means "shepherds both." But when the old Romans used the phrase it was meant in another sense. "Dodgers both" might express it.

The dodgers had choked each other off the hunt that afternoon.

CHAPTER 10.

Caught Out.

"COME along, you fellows!" said D'Arcy minor.

Wally and his chums were watching the junior team play a side from Wayland.

It was a high compliment for the critics of the Third to pay Tom Merry and his men, for there was also a senior match on. But perhaps the compliment was a trifle discounted by the fact that D'Arcy minor had expressly laid it down that no more than half-time and ten minutes over at the very outside were to be spent on the field. After that Wally & Co. were to pass on to something more important than watching "the old fogies'" well-meant efforts to play footer.

"Oh, hold on, Wally!" pleaded Frank Levison. "Just till my major scores another goal!"

"Till Doomsday!" growled D'Arcy minor.

"Rats! He's scored one already."

"Well, another fluke like that isn't likely to happen this side of next Christmas," said Reggie Manners.

"Go to Bath!" snapped Frank.

"Don't be an ass, Franky," said Wally. "Why, I wouldn't give up getting even with that fat rotter if I knew that my major was going to score twenty blessed goals."

"There's no jolly fear of that," Reggie said.

"What chance has he, on the outside there? He's a silly old dud, of course. But after all, he's in the team, and that's more than you can say about your major!"

"Glad I haven't got a major here," remarked Hobbs loftily. "But I wouldn't start squabbling about the silly ass if I had."

"He'd be a silly ass, then, if you had one?" asked Curly Gibson.

"Couldn't be off it, being Hobby's major," said Wally. "Come on, Jam-face! Come on, young Frayne!"

Six of the Third followed Wally off the field—Levison minor, Manners minor, Jameson, Hobbs, Gibson, and Joe Frayne.

They had planned to catch Bunter that afternoon.

Not to catch him out grub-hunting. Suspicion had not quite lifted its cloud from Bunter; but it was pretty equally divided now between him and Baggy, and Wally & Co. were really very little concerned as to which of the two was the guilty party.

The Third had not been losing grub—at least, not since the woeful tragedy of the kippers.

But the Third had lately come to know of Bunter's supposed establishment in the box-room near the Fifth dormitory; and they proposed, as Wally put it, to catch a porker asleep.

They felt quite sure of catching him in that box-room. They approached it on tiptoe, almost holding their breath, listening for the twenty-horse power snores of Bunter.

But they heard nothing.

Wally pushed open the door.

Bunter was not there!

"Oh, crumbs!" said Wally. "I thought it was a dead cert."

"That's you all over!" Manners minor said. "You get a notion into your fat head, and it's a dead cert at once!"

"There'll be a dead Manners here if you ain't careful, young Reggie!" snapped Wally.

"Peace, kids!" said Frank Levison soothingly.

"If Bunter ain't here——"

"Well, is he here, Hobby?"

"It doesn't look like it. If he ain't here, he must be somewhere else—that's all."

"Yes, there are one or two other places in the world!" said Wally sarcastically.

"Well, he wasn't on the ground—I'm sure of that," said Jameson.

"Let's go an' 'unt for 'im," suggested Joe Frayne.

They went down to the study floor. There they ran against Baggy.

"Hallo, porpoise!" said Wally cheerily. "What's the price of blubber? Seen the other fat rotter?"

"If you want a civil answer, young D'Arcy——"

"I'd better roll you over and sit on your waistcoat till you're ready to be civil, I s'pose? Well, I don't mind. Come along, you kids!"

"I saw Bunter going up the Shell passage just now," Trimble said, in haste, before any of the fags had time to grab him.

"Right-ho! You're let off this time. But it would be just as well if you remembered who was talking to you next, and stowed your cheek!"

"He might be in any of the studies—'cept Rake's, perhaps," said Frank.

"We can have a squint in them all," answered Wally.

They had a squint in them all, with the suggested exception. The door of that was locked.

But no Bunter was in any of them. "Might be with Rake and Crooke," said Hobbs doubtfully.

"Not likely," replied Wally. "Hallo! What have you found, Franky?"

"Old Towser's here, sniffing at the door of that empty study," said Frank, standing at the top of the short blind passage.

"Then he's after something!" said Wally. "I say, s'pose fatty was in there?"

The seven crowded together and looked in each others' faces.

"He might be, you know," said Curly.

"That would explain—oh, lots!"

"Don't make a row!" ordered their leader.

He stole cautiously up to the door of Nobody's Study.

Towser looked up at him, and wagged the behind half of his heavy body. Towser approved of Wally, though Wally wasted no affection upon him. There was, to Towser's thinking, quite a comfortable doggy smell about D'Arcy minor—a smell for which Pongo was responsible.

Wally wrinkled up his nose and held up a warning finger.

The six drew near.

"I can 'niff something a bit high," whispered Wally.

"So can Towser," said Curly Gibson.

"That's what he's on to," Hobbs said.

"But Bunter's low," said Frank. Reggie giggled.

"Listen!" hissed Frayne.

But there was really no need to tell anyone to listen.

Bunter had just begun to snore; and it would have been a very deaf person

who had failed to hear him from where the seven stood.

"My hat! Fancy the fat bounder doing all the old fogies down like this!" chuckled Wally.

"And us finding him, after all!" said Curly.

"Well, it was really Towser," Frank said.

"Towser's after the stuff Bunter's got here that's gone a bit off," corrected Wally. "He wouldn't bother his fat old head about Bunter."

"What shall we do?" asked Jameson. "Let me think a moment, Jam-face! Look here, you chaps, which is the best game—taking it out of the fat clam ourselves, or handing him over to Tom Merry and that lot?"

"Let's hand him over!" said Gibson. "They'll rag him baktheaded."

"We could do that all right," said Hobbs. "And they'd do it again afterwards, so he'd get it twice."

"But it would be rather a score over them to find him when they couldn't," argued Frank.

"Rather!" said Reggie. "And I always like scoring over my giddy major."

"Hands up for letting the old fogies know!" said Wally.

Frank and Reggie and Joe Frayne put up their hands. After a moment's hesitation Curly Gibson put up his. Then Wally followed suit; and Hobbs and Jameson, seeing that it was of no use to hold out, did likewise.

"This is the game, then," said Wally.

"Two or three of us—say Franky and Reggie and Joe—go along to the ground and bring back some of the Fourth and Shell bounders who're not playing. There's Reggie's major and Herries and Digby. Oh, and Lumley-Lumley and Durrance and Julian and Kerruish—plenty of them! We four will wait here and collar the porker if he comes out. You'll only sit on him, honour bright! You sha'n't miss anything!"

The trio departed, rendered willing by this promise; and the quartet waited.

Towser also waited. Bunter must have had a cold in the head, for quite unmistakably something among his stolen goods had gone "wanky." It was not only Towser who smelt it.

Wally sat on the floor, and Towser laid his great head on Wally's knees, and allowed his ears to be pulled gently. Hobbs and Jameson played noughts and crosses on the back of an envelope. Curly produced his latest packet of stamps on approval, and tried to reconcile limited cash resources and high approval of the specimens included.

And Bunter snored—how he snored!

A quarter of an hour passed, and then there came the tramping of many feet.

"They'll wake the sweep up!" said Wally.

But as the host drew nearer the fags the tread of one and all grew lighter.

Now they came round the corner. All those whom Wally had mentioned were there, with Hanumond and Reilly, Glyn and Gore, Gibbons and Walkley and Lucas and Buck Finn, Smith minor and Contarini, Mulvaney minor and Tompkins, and a few more. The short passage was filled by the crowd.

"Sure, we'd better bang on the door!" said Mulvaney minor.

At that moment Grundy came stalking up, with Gunn and Wilkins at his heels.

"How was it I wasn't told?" he snapped.

"Didn't want you mucking up everything," replied Reggie.

"You'd better be careful, young Manners! Now, we'll have no knocking on

the door. That will only make the fat sweep stay there, and, of course, he's locked himself in. What's the dog doing?"

"Towser, do you mean?" demanded Herries hotly.

"He's the only dog here, as far as I know."

"And you're such a silly ass that you don't know Towser's done practically everything! It was Towser who tracked the fat oyster to his lair—"

"Where do we come in?" asked Wally.

"Oh, well, you did the right thing in sending for us after Towser had found the thieving porpoise, of course. But it—"

At this moment the snoring ceased, and Dig's elbow in the ribs of Herries warned the burly Fourth-Former to dry up.

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A minute passed, seeming much longer. Then the sound of feet moving over the boards came from Nobody's Study.

"Shush!" hissed someone.

The door opened. Then came a wild cry of alarm.

The door was pushed to again, but before the Owl had a chance to lock it there was a general rush. And even as the crowd already gathered made their rush the sound of fresh voices was heard from the rear, and the School House members of the junior team surged in.

"Come on, Tommy!" yelled Manners. "We've caught the fat slug red-handed!"

Tom Merry and Lowther, Blake and Gussy, Talbot and Noble, Roylance and Levison pushed their way through the crowd.

"Yoooop! Lemme be!" howled Bunter. "I'm not doing any harm, am I?"

"My hat!"

"Our chair!"

"The fat beast's boned my bookshelves!"

"That's my violin-case!"

"Must have meant to set up in the jam trade!"

"That kettle's from our study!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"Weally, Buntah, I must say—"

"Look at the empty tins!"

"I—I— Look here, Tom Merry, make those chaps leave off, and let a fellow explain!"

"Leave off, and let a fellow explain!" commanded Tom, with a grin.

Cardew and Clive joined the crowd in Nobody's Study at that point.

"Who's the merchant who's going to explain?" asked Cardew.

"Bunter, of course!" growled Grundy.

"It will want some explainin'—what? Pile in, Bunter, old gun! The explanation ought to be no end entertainin'."

"It's like this," said Bunter slowly.

"I—well, I don't mind saying that on the face of it it does look as if—"

"Right on the wicket!" said Lowther.

"It certainly does look as if!"

"But it ain't so—really, it ain't! I—I happened to stroll along here, and to find the door open. So I walked in—any chap might walk in, mightn't he? And I sat down in front of the fire, and fell asleep—at least, I dozed for a minute or two. 'Tant five minutes since I came in, and I never even know there was a study up this corner till then."

"Oh, crumbs!" yelled Wally. "Why, we've been outside nearly half an hour!"

"Then my watch must have stopped, or something," explained Bunter. "I must have snoozed longer than I thought. This fire was a temptation to a chap who's had to pig in a cold box-room for several days, I can tell you," he added plaintively.

"And you haven't any idea at all whose stuff all this is?" asked Kangaroo.

Bunter blinked round him.

"I really hadn't noticed it," he said.

"Not really to notice it, that is. But, look here, you chaps, I don't like casting suspicion on another fellow, but I can't help thinking that fat pig Trimble's had something to do with this!"

"Oh, slay him!" howled Grundy.

Bunter was not slain. He got twenty of the best in the right place with a perfect's ash-plant, and he was compelled to carry back all that were left of the borrowed articles to the studies of their owners.

It was evident to all that Bunter's notions of honesty were more than a trifle hazy. But already the excuse always made for him at Greyfriars—that he scarcely realised the iniquity of what he was doing—was beginning to be made at St. Jim's.

And perhaps there was some truth in it!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE TWO BUNTERS!")

—by Martin Cifford.)

Are You Reading

THE

BUNTER STORIES

IN THE

"GEM," 1½^d?

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 35.—Miss Ethel Cleveland.

MISS CLEVELAND is "Cousin Ethel" to a score or more of fellows at St. Jim's. but, of course, it is only to Arthur Augustus and Wally D'Arcy that she is really related. Not to Cardew, though he is a relative of the D'Arcys. That is on the other side of the family, you see.

There are very few readers who are not fond of cousin Ethel, I know; there are many who are quite enthusiastic about her. For quite a longish time she practically disappeared from the stories; but we have seen her back at St. Jim's lately, and we are sure to see her there again before long.

She is always welcome—more than welcome—in the Head's family circle. And that is not to be wondered at, for it would be hard to find a thoroughly nicer girl in every way than Ethel Cleveland. It goes without saying that she is pretty; that matters, but it does not account for the general affection she inspires. There are lots of pretty girls with whom people fall in love for their good looks; but cousin Ethel has a charm that goes far beyond mere good looks.

She is gentle and affectionate, yet with spirit enough and certainly with more than average brains and strength of character. She is very charitable in all her thoughts and deeds; she does not like to turn her back completely even upon fellows who are barred by her chums among the juniors. Lumley-Lumley and Levison in their bad days, Mellich, and even Trimble more recently, have all been treated by her with far greater kindness than they deserved. She cannot stand Raeko and Crooke, but she has no wish to think harshly even of them.

Lots of people have been in love with cousin Ethel, of course. Gussy was so at one time, or, at least, imagined himself so; and he was for long after a trifle disposed to look upon Figgins as an intruder.

Then there was Skimpole. Just fancy Skimpole in love! It first came out when he handed in a contribution to "Tom Merry's Weekly." That contribution was to have been an article on Socialism, out of which Tom Merry had promised to take all the words of more than three syllables—not that Skimmy wished them taken out, of course. But it turned out to be a poem. Skimmy wanted it to be a long poem—all about "the soul's outpourings," "the wild, untrammelled fancy's soarings," "the lovely maid of noble race," which said maid was declared to be "the vision of a poet's brain," but seemed much more like an attempt at Miss Cleveland. Skimmy said he was "idealising the ideal," which sounds rather like carrying coals to Newcastle. But there was no possible, probable shadow of doubt as to the fact that the philosopher of the Shell was in love, or as to the object of his adoration. He got his chance to declare himself when cousin Ethel and her chums of St. Jim's were up the river once, and he seized it. There are doubtless many ways of making love—I speak as one whose experiences in that line have been extremely limited—and some ways are better than others.

Skimmy's was one way—not one of the best ways, I should say. He led up to it by remarking that on such a glorious afternoon there were more suitable subjects than pessimistic philosophy for converse; and then he went on to remark that "In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove"—to which statement in natural history, apparently apropos of nothing whatever, cousin Ethel answered "Indeed!" And I don't see what else she could very well have answered. But Skimmy, still quoting Tennyson, proceeded to inform her that "In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." Cousin Ethel, possibly failing to recognise a young man—in the general or the particular sense—in Skimmy, replied, "Does it really?" Then Skimmy got warmer. He told her that he had "beheld a being far removed from common mortals, one raised far above common wants and failings." He meant Ethel, of course. And Ethel asked him to pass the luncheon-basket! She offered him cake; she

made him open a bottle of lemonade for her; in short, she did all she could to turn down quite nicely the offer of Skimmy's devotion.

But others had to take a hand before Skimmy was cured. A tar-bucket came into the matter. It was really a little rough on Skimmy, and I am sure cousin Ethel would not have countenanced it; but it proved effective, which was the thing that mattered most.

Figgins's devotion—not turned down—began before that. It began, indeed, when he first set eyes on cousin Ethel; it has lasted ever since; and it looks like lasting. Not often do boy-and-girl attachments endure into later life. Perhaps it is as well that they should not, for on the whole the chances of happiness in such a case are decidedly not greater than in cases where man and maid first meet each other in later years; but there are such cases, and some of them turn out happily.

Perhaps enough has been said upon this matter in dealing with Figgins. But no sketch of cousin Ethel would be complete without reference to it. It is a golden thread running through all the stories in which she figures. Her boy chums—even Gussy—understand that, though she has a very deep liking

appeared showed us Figgy coming to her rescue, though there was nothing tragic about the circumstances which rendered help needful. Tom Merry and his chums—Manners, Lowther, and the four from No. 6—had taken out cousin Ethel in a big motor-car—not quite big enough, however, to accommodate the New House trio as well. Somehow or other—those who recall the story will remember how—the car broke down, and it was Figgy who took Ethel back to St. Jim's in the side-car of his motor-cycle.

In a recent series of three stories which dealt with the Head's birthday we saw plainly enough how many friends, how many ready champions, cousin Ethel has at St. Jim's. Manners thrashed a tramp who was threatening her. Cardew showed, in his own whimsical way, his desire to be of service to her; the great Grundy came forward in her cause; for her sake Wally D'Arcy fought and beat a fellow head and shoulders taller than himself. But that was not all. There were a score more eager to stand between her and the slightest annoyance; there was an organised conspiracy to defend her. Manners gave up his right to thrash Raeko; Arthur Augustus bent his stubborn pride; Tom Merry and his special chums were all in it; even those who stood outside the circle of her intimates were sharers—fellows like Julius and Keruish and Noble and Gunn and Wilkins.

Old readers will recall a time when Manners seemed to have been convicted of cowardice. He had the chance to go to Ethel's rescue, and all the available evidence tended to show that he had faked it. So black did the case look that even Ethel herself was forced to doubt him; but she only doubted—she did not accept it as proven. Only Tom Merry and Lowther stood by him; and only they were right, though Ethel herself was not so far wrong as the rest, certainly not so far wrong as to make it hard for Manners to forgive her doubting him.

Do you remember how keen they all were to honour cousin Ethel's John Palmer, the man who had rescued her dog from drowning, and how they made a great fuss of a bogus John Palmer, who turned out to be an utter wrong 'un, and how, when the girl herself came along, the real hero was discovered in the quiet old stonebreaker, who had no desire to be made a hero of, and most assuredly no desire to sponge on the juniors, as the false John Palmer had sponged on them?

And do you remember how cousin Ethel's bike ran away with her downhill, and she was thrown on the railway-line, and was saved by—well, by Levison, as it was supposed? Levison accepted the credit for it, or, at best, did not repudiate it. But Lumley-Lumley was the real rescuer, as came out afterwards.

There was a reason why Lumley-Lumley rather shirked showing up in the matter—a reason apart from any question of modesty. Earlier on, when he had been a rank outsider, he had behaved towards Ethel in a very offensive manner, and had once endangered her life by his folly and recklessness. He had long since come to feel ashamed of that; and perhaps it was natural—at any rate, it was decent—in him to prefer keeping dark about what he did for her.

It was when cousin Ethel, with her friends Phyllis Monk and Vera Stanhope, were staying at Laurel Villa, Huchleberry Heath, where Tom Merry's dear old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, lives, during the summer holidays, that Lumley-Lumley drove off the brake with cousin Ethel in it to Major Figgins's house, and was pursued by several of the juniors on bikes. In the same story we read how the three girls played cricket for Tom Merry's Eleven against Figgins' Eleven, and played jolly well, too, and largely helped to win the match for their side.

One remembers another time when Ethel distinguished herself in the cricket-field. That was against a circus team, and the catch she made at cover-point was the means of winning that game for her team.

Always Ethel is as nice as nice can be to Miss Priscilla, who, with all her many points, is not precisely the easiest person in



for them all, Figgy comes first. That they do understand this was proved in the adventure of the Black House on the Moor, when Tom Merry and Blake and Arthur Augustus chivalrously stood aside to let Figgins go to the girl's rescue first, knowing that it would be for him she would look. And one must not pass over something which escaped mention in the Figgins sketch—the time when Ethel was going to Paris for a year, and Figgy went with Gussy to Charing Cross to see her off, and jumped into the train at the last moment, hardly aware what he was doing in his grief at the prospect of so long a parting, and crossed the Channel with Ethel and her aunt, Mrs. Quayle, and was very disgruntled and jealous and sulky on account of the elderly Frenchman who would talk to Ethel. Then there was a railway accident; and the elderly Frenchman did not show up well, but George Figgins did, as might be expected of him. He saved Ethel's aunt Adelina—Mrs. Quayle—from terrible danger; and his escapade was forgiven because of the real courage and presence of mind he had shown; and Ethel came back to England to nurse her aunt, and did not go to Paris after all—much to the joy of Figgy.

The very first story in which cousin Ethel

this world to get on with. Do you recall Miss Priscilla's scheme for making peace between the St. Jim's juniors and the Grammarians—quite unnecessary in reality, but how was a maiden lady of middle age to understand how much real, good comradeship there was and is between the rivals, in spite of all their frays and all their japes? Ethel was no end tactful then. She understood; but she contrived so that Miss Priscilla's feelings should not be hurt, and the worthy lady went home to Laurel Villa sure that she had achieved a great deed.

None of you who have read it will have for-

gotten "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays," and the wayward, passionate Dolores Pelham, to whom Ethel was so good a friend; and Enid Craven, with her unpaid dressmaker's bills and her dishonesty, which so nearly brought Dolores into heavy trouble; and Milly Pratt, with her Bunterish appetite; and all the rest of the girls at St. Freda's. Gussy and Figgy and Tom Merry all came prominently into that story, and there were visits from St. Jim's to St. Freda's, and vice versa, and Dolores Pelham did her foolish utmost to arouse jealousy by making a dead set at Figgy—an attempt most completely in vain, for Figgy has eyes for no

other girl while Ethel is near, and is completely indifferent to the rest of the sex in her absence.

Is there any need to tell more? There is much more that might be told, of course. But it would only be making unneeded additions to a portrait which should already be complete for those who have read the stories—or most of them—and can hardly be made so for those who have not. To them the real charm of gentle, courageous, affectionate, loyal Ethel Cleveland may not be made clear here; but it cannot be missed by those who have read Mr. Clifford's fine stories.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE TWO BUNTERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

It has always been on the cards that Mr. Penman, Wally Bunter's former employer, who is paying for his education at St. Jim's—though he is getting it elsewhere—may endanger the double Bunter secret. For Mr. Penman would see through Billy Bunter, of course. Billy knows very little indeed of Wally's old work at Canterbury, or of Mr. Penman's office, and he would be dead certain to give himself away—incidentally giving away Wally also.

Mr. Penman writes to say that he is coming to see Wally. Billy receives the letter.

What does Billy do? And what does Wally do? How are they to meet the difficult turn of affairs?

Next week's story will tell that.

READERS' LETTERS.

You all know that we get many letters from readers. For a week or two after the postage rate was increased there was quite a perceptible falling off in numbers. But it would seem that everyone has got used to the three-halfpenny charge now, for they are coming in greater numbers than ever.

They are of all sorts. I have had letters from readers of seventy and of seven, from fellows who knew practically nothing of the laws of grammar, whose spelling was more or less like Bunter's or Grundy's, and from people of high education and wide reading. It is not on that kind of thing that one judges, though. Spelling and grammar are small considerations, and age is of no consequence at all. The tone of the letters—the intentions of the writers—is what matters.

Most of them are enthusiastic and friendly. But now and then one gets a screed from a "Falkirk," or a "Disgusted Coleman," or an "Accuser." When I refer to these letters loyal and friendly readers write to tell me not to worry. Bless you, I don't! I know too much of what worry means to let such things as that trouble me at all. The one thing I feel sorry for is that I should have spiteful and rancorous readers. It puzzles me. Why are they readers? There is no compulsion on them to buy the papers. They don't buy them to please me, I know. If they do they are making a big mistake. It would almost seem that they must like them, in spite of all their grumbling. But they don't like everything in them. Is that it? Well, who ever expected them to? No man who has learned the trade of the editor can hope that all he prints will please all his readers.

We are always fairly safe on the long stories. Once in a way Mr. Clifford or Mr. Richards may write something which does not get a 100 per cent. reception. But it is not often. As regards the other matter, I know that the stories I print will not appeal equally to everyone; but I don't know what would, and I must consider variety of tastes. Once now and then I include a short story which I suspect will not be universally popular. But I know that it will greatly please a minority of those who read it; and I consider that that minority is worth catering for. As to verses, again, I am perfectly well aware that some people never read anything of the sort. But is that any reason why a column or half a column should not be given once in a way to those who are keen?

Many of the grumbling letters make a dead set at certain types of contributions. One reader informs me that he does not approve of limericks. But that's nothing to the purpose. Valuable as his approval may be, I don't run my papers with a sole view to securing it. There are other things to be con-

sidered. Others bar adventure tales. Well, they don't get many of these at any time, and they should remember that there are many who like them.

But I have come to the conclusion that most of the grumblers are merely seekers for notoriety. They like to see their disgruntled views in print. I do not very often indulge this morbid craze of theirs; and I think that in future it will find less indulgence than ever at my hands. "Falkirk's" effusions brought me scores of letters, nearly all from Scotland, and almost without exception the attitude of the writers of these letters was as completely anti-Falkirk as could be. I was asked many times not to accept "Falkirk" as a true Scot, or as representing Scots' opinions; and some of the things said about him were calculated to make him squirm could he but have seen them. There is no chance of that, however, for I was not favoured with his name and address.

Say if you don't like anything in the paper—but say it civilly, please! That's all I ask, and it is surely not too much.

NOTICES.

Football—Matches wanted by:

WEST DRAYTON JUNIORS—14-15-5 miles.—W. H. Kennedy, 26, Brandville Road, West Drayton, Middlesex.

BRITANNIA—18-10 miles of London; home and away; members all night-workers, and can only play mornings.—G. E. Brace, 12, Suffolk Road, St. Ann's Road, South Tottenham, N. 15.

FOOTS CRAY OLD BOYS—17-5 miles.—H. Young, 47, Cray Road, Foots Cray, Kent.

Sports—Players and Teams Wanted.

Jack Graham, 37, Chermiside Road, Alburgh, Liverpool, would like to join cricket club in Liverpool (S.); wicket-keeper and stow bowler.

PARK RANGERS—17—players wanted; right-back, left-half, and outside-left; also fixtures.—H. Tandy, 369, Strone Road, Manor Park, E. 12.

W. A. D., 13, Rosebery Road, Clapham, S.W., wants to join football and cricket club—one to two mile radius.

SUFFOLK UNITED—players wanted—13-14.—E. Tomlin, 17, Mimosa Street, Fulham, S.W. 6.

Cricket.

St. HELEN'S, 1st and 2nd, require matches, home and away; 5 miles—St. Quintin's Park.—W. Cox, 5, Brasewell Road, St. Quintin's Park, North Kensington, W. 14.

Cycling.

OVERLAND CYCLING CLUB.—The secretary would like to hear from those interested in cycling within the city of Nottingham.—C. J. Petrie, 23, Holborn Avenue, Sneinton Dale, Nottingham.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted by—

Albert E. Thomas, 11, Postern, Brecon, South Wales, wants members for correspondence club; magazine 2d.—addressed envelope. E. Eden, 23, Cromwell Road, Wimbledon, S.W. 19, would like to hear from readers wishing to join amateur theatrical society within three miles.

R. Hope, Jun., Jesmond Sports Club, 8, Hamilton Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants readers who will act as agents for club—age 15-18.

N. H. T. Weston, c/o Box 116, Port Elizab-

eth, Cape Colony, South Africa—with boy readers in British Isles—16-17.

A. Richards, 98, Melrose Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, with readers anywhere interested in stamp collecting.

Miss Dora E. Stratford, Brampton House, 120, Weaste Lane, Pendleton, Lancs.—with girl readers anywhere.

F. C. 49, Judges' Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire, wants to hear from readers interested in an amateur magazine.

Members wanted for hobby club.—Hon. sec., 20 Hustlers Row, Meanwood, Leeds—stamp.

L. A. C., 40, Bathley Street, Nottingham, would be pleased to write for amateur magazines. Will editors please write?

T. Hathaway, Carlyle Street, Napier, H. B., New Zealand—with readers interested in cartooning.

James A. J. Higgins, 22, Rathmines Road, Dublin, who wants members for circulating library—Companion Papers circulated.

Thomas Wilks, 14, Wansbeck Road, Dudley, S.O., Northumberland—with readers, 15-16.

A. Dallow, 2/32, Bordesley Park Road, Small Heath, Birmingham—with readers at home and abroad.

W. A. Foster, 85, Victoria Road, Rmford, Essex, who wishes to join a "Magnet" and Gem Exchange Club anywhere.

Albert Edgar Locky, 175, Newtown Row, Birmingham—with readers in any British Colony.

Ernest Boreham, c/o Stephen Fraser Coy., P.O. Box 183, Port Elizabeth, South Africa—with readers overseas.

Miss B. Prince, c/o J. W. Jagger & Co., Main Street, Port Elizabeth, South Africa—with readers anywhere, from 21 upwards.

H. Swindells, 10, Vernon Street, Buxton Road, Macclesfield, will contribute jokes, riddles, stories, ideas, etc., to amateur magazines—stamped envelope.

L. S. D., 15, Queen Street, Colchester, wants correspondence from New Brighton, Ramsgate, Dover, Bath, Cork, Dartford, Erith, Reading, Keighley, and Derby.

J. Rice, 12, Queen's Row, Waiworth, S.E. 17—with readers, 14-15.

T. Mackay, Water Works, New Seaham, co. Durham, wants to correspond with readers in England, Scotland, and Canada.

J. E. Smallwood, The Pavilion Hotel, Scarborough—with readers anywhere—16.

A. Clark, 48, Grant Street, Greenock—with any reader of "Magnet" interested in detectives—age 12-14. 2d. for particulars.

Members wanted for correspondence and exchange club; printed magazine; competitions.—Claude Whitehead, 51, Market Square, Pocklington, Yorks.

George Williams, 20, Dudley Street, Barrow-in-Furness, Lancs.—with readers, 11-12, anywhere, interested in natural history.

Miss Amy Chicken, 47, Dover Street, Summer Hill, N.S.W., Australia—with readers overseas.

Cecil Lee, 9, Partridge Street, Warrenby, Redcar, Yorks, would like to hear from his old chum Herbert Samuel, who used to live at Chester, and is now in Wales.

J. W. Mayer, 556, Oldham Road, Bardsley, Ashton-under-Lyne, wants assistant for amateur magazine—one really interested in the work.

Miss Nan Paterson, 52, Main Street, Milngavie, near Glasgow—with readers anywhere, 14-16.

A. B. Fergusson, 52, Recliver Road, Rotherhithe, S.E. 16—with readers abroad.

Your Editor