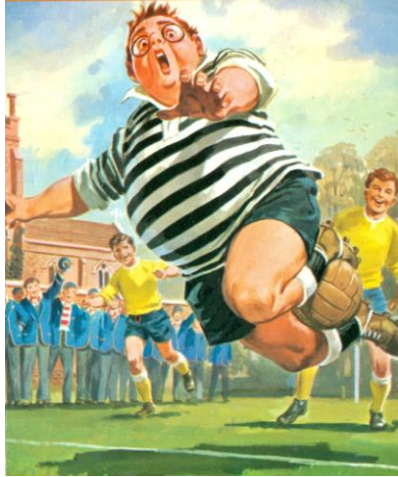




Frank Richards

2/6

BILLY BUNTER -Sportsman!



"W. Bunter played a splendid game, and Courtfield Rovers are to be congratulated upon the skill of their captain." The Remove form simply goggled at this amazing newspaper report. Billy Bunter a skillful footballer? Why-- the last time he played at Greyfriars he looked more like a porpoise out of water than a soccer star! But there it was in black and white-- and it seemed that the Owl really *was* a dark horse as far as the noble game was concerned. Or was it the noble game of deceit and trickery that Bunter was playing? That seemed more likely!

BILLY BUNTER -Sportsman!

PAUL HAMLYN

FRANK RICHARDS

**BILLY
BUNTER
SPORTSMAN!**

PAUL HAMLYN

CHAPTER I

Bunter is Carried In!

'ARE you coming to the lecture?'

'Yes; are you?'

'Yes.'

'You wish to, of course.'

'Oh, rats! Do you?'

'I don't think!'

Bob Cherry burst out laughing. He had just met Frank Nugent of the Remove in the passage. Both were on their way to the school lecture-hall. A good many more juniors, and seniors too, were on the same route.

'You fellows both going?' asked Harry Wharton, overtaking Bob Cherry and Nugent in the passage.

'Yes; and you, of course.'

'Can't very well help it.'

'Noblesse oblige, of course,' said Bulstrode, joining them. 'I don't see why we should stick it, on a half-holiday, too. It's rotten!'

'Rotten's not the word,' said Skinner. 'It's sickening.'

'Oh, rats!' said Harry Wharton warmly. 'It's not so bad as all that.'

Besides, you really needn't come if you don't want to.'

'Bosh! Chaps who didn't come would be marked.'

Wharton walked on with Bob Cherry and Nugent, leaving Bulstrode and Skinner growling. Some more juniors were joining in the growling.

The cause of it all was a notice up on the board in the hall, signed by the Head.

It announced a lecture, to be delivered that day, Wednesday, in the afternoon, to last one hour. All the fellows, of all Forms, were invited, but it was expressly stated that no fellow need come if he did not wish to do so.

Dr. Locke had put that in very considerately. Wednesday was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the fellows were entitled to it. At the same time, Dr. Locke saw no reason why their minds should not be improved by that lecture. The subject of English literature was a favourite one with the Head, and he had a praiseworthy desire to pass on his knowledge, or some of it, to his pupils.

But he was careful to add in his notice that the boys could please themselves about coming. That was only just.

Unfortunately, it did not work exactly as the Head expected.

The fellows, perhaps correctly, thought that anybody who remained away would be noticed, and it was of course natural that the Head would think less of such a person. The Form-masters, too, would have a natural desire for their Forms to turn up in full force. On the whole, it was impossible to cut the lecture, even with full permission from the Head to do so, and all Greyfriars felt it.

'Here, Bunter,' exclaimed Harry Wharton, as he passed a fat junior sitting on a bench in a window recess in the passage, 'buck up, or you won't get a good seat.'

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles. 'It's all right,' he said. 'I'm not coming.'

'What!' exclaimed the three chums of the Remove, together.

'I'm not coming,' explained Bunter. 'You see, I don't like lectures, and the Head says in his notice that we needn't go unless we like, and--'

'Rats! You're coming!'

'Oh, really, Wharton--'

'I'm not going to have a member of the Remove hanging out of it,' said Wharton severely. 'Who are you that you can't stand it as well as anybody else, I'd like to know?'

'But, really--'

'Come on!'

'I-I won't!' exclaimed Billy Bunter, squirming in his seat. 'I don't want to go--'

Bob Cherry shook his head.

'Your mistake,' he exclaimed. 'You do.'

'I don't; and--'

'We'll help you, if you're too fatigued to walk,' said Nugent kindly. 'We don't mind taking any trouble over Bunter-do we, you chaps?'

'Not a bit of it.'

'I-I say, you fellows--'

'This way!' said Bob Cherry, taking the Owl of the Remove by the collar, and jerking him off the seat.

'Ow!'

'Take his other arm, Nugent!'

'What-ho!'

'You get under him, Wharton, and bunk him up.'

'No fear!' exclaimed Harry Wharton promptly. 'I can carry a couple of hundredweight, but I'm not going to risk getting under Bunter!'

'Get a grip round him, then. Hallo, hallo, hallo, 'Inky! Lend a hand here, will you? Bunter's too tired to walk to the lecture-hall, and we're going to carry him.'

'I'm not!' roared Bunter. 'I'm not going. I--'

'Take a leg each,' said Bob. 'You the right leg, Wharton, and you the left, Inky.'

'Right-ho!' said Harry laughing.

'Certainly,' purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, in his soft voice and his peculiar English. 'The pleasurefulness of helping to carry the esteemed and very fat Bunter will be terrific!'

'Leggo! Oh! I-Ow!'

'Now then, all together!'

With an arm or a leg in each grasp, the four juniors swung the fattest Removite at Greyfriars off the floor.

Bunter roared as he was swung into the air.

With a sturdy fellow at each corner of him, so to speak, the fat junior was not easy to handle, and Harry Wharton & Co. had to exert themselves.

'By Jove, he's not a light weight!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Here, Bulstrode, come and support him underneath, while we carry him in.'

'Not much!' said Bulstrode. 'I don't want to be turned into a pancake. Ask Brown.'

'No, thanks!' said Tom Brown hurriedly. 'Here's Todd!'

'Todd will oblige!'

'Todd! Todd!'

Alonzo Todd, generally called the Duffer by the Greyfriars fellows, was the most obliging fellow in the world. He came up running as he heard his name called, only too eager to be of service to anybody.

'Did you call me?' he asked.

'Yes; lend a hand. Bunter's too tired to walk into the lecture, and we're carrying him, and we want an extra hand.'

'Certainly. I am only too glad to be useful in any way,' said Todd, beaming. 'My Uncle Benjamin always told me--'

'Never mind your Uncle Benjamin now,' said Bob Cherry. 'Get underneath.'

'Don't do anything of the sort!' yelled Bunter. 'I won't be carried. I won't go. Leggo! Yah!'

'Dear me!'

'Under him, Toddy!'

'Certainly, but--'

'Buck up, or all the good seats will be bagged!'

'Oh, very well!'

Todd got under Bunter and bumped him up. With the Duffer of Greyfriars bearing the greater part of the weight, the Owl of the Remove was carried rapidly along the passage. Todd gasped for breath.

'Cave!' shouted Hazeldene suddenly.

The form of Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, appeared suddenly from a door in the passage. He stood, and stared at the juniors in amazement.

'M-m-my hat!' gasped Bob Cherry.

'Dear me!' said the Head, in wonder.

Harry Wharton halted, and in their dismay they relaxed their hold upon Billy Bunter. Down went the fat junior. There was a suffocated gasp from Alonzo Todd.

'Ow!'

Then he was crushed under the weight of Billy Bunter.

CHAPTER II

A Little Joke on Todd!

'MY hat!' gasped Wharton.

'Great Scott! '

'Oh!'

'Ow!'

'I-I-I'm hurt!' groaned Bunter. 'My spinal column is dislocated. Help! I forgive you fellows with my last breath!'

'I think Todd's nearer his last breath than you are, Billy,' grinned Nugent, dragging at the fat junior, who was sitting on Todd, pinning him to the floor.

'Oh! Leggo!'

'Roll off Todd, then, you porpoise!'

'Boys!' said the deep, stern voice of the Head. 'What does this mean?'

'We-we're trying to rescue Todd, sir.'

'What do you mean by--'

'If you please, sir, we were carrying Bunter to the lecture-room,' said Wharton. 'He--he wasn't quite up to walking, sir.'

'The carryfulness was terrific!'

'And-and Bunter's not a light weight, sir, and you startled us, sir, and-and I think we must have dropped him!' stammered Wharton.

Dr. Locke smiled involuntarily. 'I think you must, Wharton.'

'But he's not hurt, sir. It's all right.'

'I am hurt,' groaned Bunter. 'My backbone is sprained in several places, sir, and my legs are both broken.'

'Nonsense, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, sir--'

'It's Todd who's hurt, sir,' said Nugent. 'Bunter's fell on him. Bunter's always doing something of this sort.'

'Oh, really, Nugent--'

'It's nothing at all,' gasped Todd. 'I am not really hurt, only a slight pain, and-and an ache. It is of no consequence.'

'Please be a little more orderly in going to the lecture-room,' said the Head; and he went on his way.

The juniors all looked relieved.

'Nearly got us into a row, as usual,' said Bob Cherry, shaking his fist at Bunter. 'Why are you always doing these things?'

'Oh, really, Cherry--'

'I suppose you'll walk the rest of the way?' suggested Wharton.

'I won't go! I--'

'Now, look here, are you going to make us carry you again?'

'I tell you--'

'Lift him, then. Get underneath, Todd.' Alonzo Todd hesitated.

'If-if you don't mind, I-I'd rather not get underneath Bunter,' he murmured. 'Of course, I want to be obliging, but--'

'I won't be carried!' roared Bunter. 'I-I'll walk!'

'Buck up, then!'

And Billy Bunter, grumbling loudly, walked on to the hall.

Alonzo Todd felt over his rumpled collar and unfastened tie and moppy hair. He had suffered considerable dishevelment in falling underneath the Owl of the Remove.

'I think I had better go and get a clean collar,' he said.

'Buck up, then,' said Mark Linley. 'The front seats are being taken. Shall I keep one for you?'

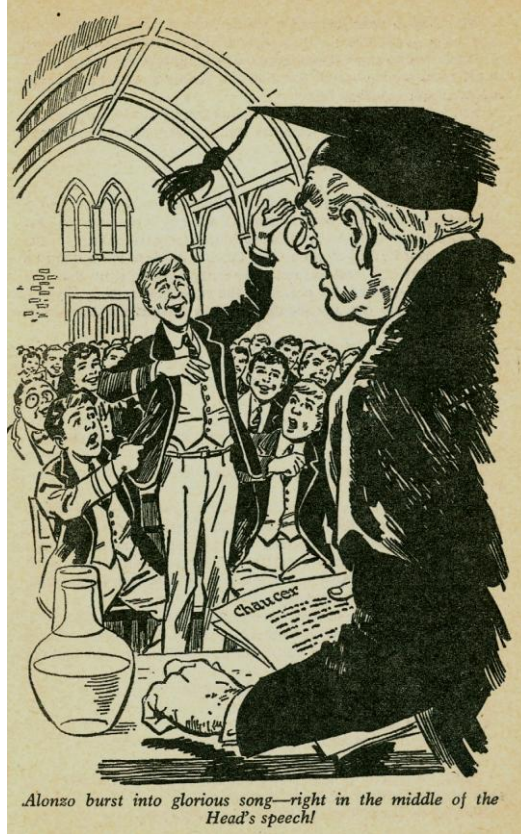
'Yes, please. You are very kind.'

He dashed down the passage at top speed, and dashed into Skinner, and knocked him flying. Skinner dropped as if he had been shot.

'So sorry!' gasped Todd, dashing on.

'You dangerous ass!' roared Skinner after him. But Todd did not even look round.

He rushed on. Up the big staircase to the dormitories he went.



A gentleman was descending at a leisurely pace. It was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove--Todd's Form-master. Todd did not even see him. He was rushing upstairs with his head lowered, in a great hurry, and not looking where he went.

Right into Mr. Quelch he crashed, before the Form-master could escape, and they rolled on the stairs together.

'So sorry!' gasped Todd.

And he was up and gone in a moment, without a glance to see who it was he had upset for the second time.

Mr. Quelch sat on the stairs and gasped.

It was two minutes at least before he could fairly get his breath, and crawl down the rest of the stairs. Then he sank into a chair in his study, still gasping. He was too winded to be angry for the time; but anger was pretty certain to follow.

Meanwhile, Todd had changed his collar, brushed his hair, and dashed away to the lecture-hall again at lightning speed.

He arrived there just as the Head stepped upon the dais and gave his preliminary cough.

Mark Linley waved to him.

'This way, Toddy!'

'Thank you so much, Linley!'

And Todd rushed up the hall, and dropped into a seat between Mark Linley and Bulstrode.

Meanwhile, Mr. Quelch, who had intended to attend the lecture with his Form, was too upset to do so. It was no joke to a gentleman in middle life to be knocked over by a charging junior on the stairs.

Mr. Quelch sat and breathed hard, and the clouds gathered over his brow. He had quite forgotten the lecture now; he was thinking of his fall, and of the junior who had knocked him over. 'Skinner!' he called out, as a junior passed his door, limping.

'Skinner! Come here!'

Skinner limped towards him.

'What is the matter with you, Skinner?'

'I-I'm hurt, sir.'

'What has happened?'

'Chap ran into me and knocked me over, sir.'

Mr. Quelch set his lips grimly.

'Was it Todd, by any chance?' he said.

'Yes, sir.'

'Ah! I thought so! Skinner, kindly tell Todd that I want him--or, rather take this note to him.'

'Yes, sir.'

Alonzo burst into glorious song--right in the middle of the Head's speech! Mr. Quelch scribbled a few words upon a sheet of paper, and handed it to Skinner. He thought it quite probable that Todd might refuse to come on Skinner's word alone; Skinner being the most confirmed practical joker in the Remove, and Todd being the frequent victim of japes.

But a signed note from the Form-master he could not possibly disobey. Mr. Quelch handed the note to Skinner, and returned the pencil to his pocket.

'Take that at once, Skinner.'

'Yes, sir.'

Skinner changed his direction, limping away towards the lecture-hall. He had several bumps on his legs, and he had intended to rub them with embrocation, cutting the lecture for the purpose. But he had to do as Mr. Quelch desired. He limped off to the lecture-hall, and as soon as a corner hid him from the sight of the Form-master, he unfolded the note and read it without scruple. Skinner was not troubled with a scrupulous delicacy in matters of this sort.

The note was brief, and pointed.

'Come to my study immediately.--H. QUELCH.'

Skinner grinned.

'That means a licking, and serve him jolly well right, the ass!' he muttered.

Then a sudden glimmer shot into his eyes.

'My hat!'

He hesitated a few moments, struggling with the desire to perpetrate the joke that had come into his mind. But it was too good to resist, whatever the risk. He took an india-rubber from his pocket, and rubbed out part of the message, and then added some words in the empty space, leaving the signature unchanged.

Then he entered the lecture-hall.

Dr. Locke had finished his preliminary remarks by this time, and he was looking over his notes, preparatory to plunging into the lecture itself. Skinner came along Todd's row and handed him the note.

Todd took it, and looked at it inquiringly.

'From Mr. Quelch,' explained Skinner.

'Oh! What is it about?'

'Better read it. He gave it me to bring to you.'

And Skinner slipped away.

Todd, considerably surprised, opened the note. He was still more surprised when he read the message. Skinner had rewritten the first four words of it.

'Sing "On the Ball" immediately.-H. QUELCH.'

Todd stared blankly at the message. Dr. Locke had now started; and Todd blinked at him, and blinked at the message. It was astounding-incredible; but there was his Form-master's signature, and his Form-master had to be obeyed. Alonzo Todd rose to his feet to obey.

CHAPTER III

By Special Request!

'CHAUCER!' said Dr. Locke, his voice taking on a tone of enthusiasm. 'What do we not owe to him? What associations does his name not awaken in every English breast? Chaucer! At the sound of the mere name, we--' It was at this moment that Todd rose to his feet, and the Head broke off, in sheer surprise, as Todd's voice quavered out:

'Here's a cheer for the grand old game!'

The audience sat petrified.

Dr. Locke seemed turned to stone.

Fellows stared at Todd, without a word. In the midst of the dead silence, the Duffer's voice went on steadily:

*'And a cheer for the men who play!
Here's a shout for the boys at home,
And a yell for the lads away.
Hurrah!'*

In the stupefaction that reigned, Todd got right through the first verse without a single interruption.

Then came a shout. 'Sit down!'

'He's mad!'

'Chuck him out!'

'Order!'

'Silence!'

'Dear me!' gasped Dr. Locke. 'Extraordinary!'

Todd was going on steadily, without looking round, and his voice rang louder than ever in the stirring chorus.

*'On the ball, on the ball!
Loud and clear it rings like a trumpet call!
Hear the shouts excited roll!
Buck up there! Look out in goal!
On the ball, on the ball!'*

'My only hat!'

'Stop him!'

'Pull him down!'

'Kick him out!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He's off his giddy rocker!'

'Extraordinary!' gasped Dr. Locke again.

Todd started on the second verse.

But Mark Linley was pulling him down into the seat, and he had to stop.

'Shut up!' exclaimed the Lancashire lad. 'Are you mad, Toddy?'

Todd blinked at him.

'Do you think one verse is enough?' he asked.

'Ha, ha! More than enough, I should say.'

'Shut up, Todd!'

'What do you mean by it?'

'Todd.!' thundered Dr. Locke.

Alonzo jumped.

'Yes, sir!' he stuttered.

'What is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct?'

'Conduct, sir?' stammered Alonzo, beginning to repeat what was said to him, in a curious parrot-like way he had when he was thrown into a state of mental confusion.

'Yes, sir. What do you mean?'

'Mean, sir?'

'How dare you interrupt my lecture in this way?'

'Lecture, sir?'

'I can only imagine, Todd, that this is intended for deliberate impertinence!'

'Impertinence, sir?' gasped Todd.

'Don't repeat my words in this ridiculous manner, boy!'

'Ridiculous manner, sir?'

'Todd! Silence!'

'S-s-silence, sir?'

Dr. Locke breathed hard through his nose.

'Will you explain your conduct at once, Todd, or will you not?' he exclaimed.

'Conduct, sir-I-I mean, sir-sir. I had to sing, sir, as Mr. Quelch wished it. I was told by my Uncle Benjamin, sir, always to obey the orders of my Form-master.'

'Mr. Quelch?'

'Yes, sir.'

'He wished you to sing?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are you mad, Todd?'

'I-I hope not, sir.'

'Then how dare you make such a statement?'

'Statement, sir?' stuttered Todd.

'Leave the hall at once, sir!' thundered the Head. 'I will deal with you presently.'

'Ye-e-es, sir.'

Todd rose again, and made his way out of the lecture-hall with a scarlet face. The boys were yelling with laughter. They tried to suppress it from respect to the Head; but they could not. They simply yelled.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Order!' exclaimed Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. 'Boys, silence!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Silence was restored at last, and Dr. Locke resumed his lecture, with a very red face. Soon, however, deep in the thrilling reminiscences of the Chaucer period, he forgot Alonzo Todd and his doings. Skinner slipped out into the passage after the Duffer. He was a little anxious about that note. He found Todd looking very red and very unhappy.

'What on earth did you make a break like that for, Toddy?' asked Skinner.

'Mr. Quelch commanded me to do so.'

'Gammon!'

'Really, Skinner--'

'When did he tell you, then?'

'In the note you gave me.'

'Let's see it.'

Todd handed him the note.

Skinner stepped to an open window, as if to see better to read it, and contrived to drop it into the Close.

'Hallo, it's gone!' he exclaimed.

'Had you read it?'

'No.'

'This is very unfortunate,' said Todd. 'I must produce that note as proof of what I told the Head. I will go and look for it.'

'I'll do it,' said Skinner.

He ran off. Todd followed, but Skinner was under the window first. He had the note safe in his pocket, and was pretending to be still looking for it when Alonzo Todd arrived upon the scene.

'Have you found it?' asked Todd.

'I'm still looking.'

'I trust it will be found. Otherwise, it may mean trouble for me-though I have no doubt that Mr. Quelch will bear out my statement.'

Skinner chuckled. He thought that very unlikely. Todd continued to look for the note--of course unsuccessfully, as Skinner strolled away with it safe in his pocket. Five minutes later Skinner had safely disposed of it in the bike shed, with a match, and his jape was safe from detection.

Todd looked for the note till he was tired, and then he went in.

He dared not present himself in the lecture-hall again; but he did not miss much enjoyment, if one could judge from the suppressed yawns, the secret glances at watches, and the low shuffling of feet among the audience.

The lecture was over at last, and the fellows poured out. And then a message was brought to Alonzo that the Head wished to see him in his study. Trotter, the page, brought the message, and he found Todd with the chums of the Remove.

'The 'Ead wishes to see Master Todd at once!' said Trotter.

'You're for it,' said Bob Cherry. 'What did you do it for?'

'By special request.'

'Eh?'

'Mr. Quelch asked me-or, rather, commanded me-to do it.'

'What!'

'I admit that it sounds very extraordinary,' said Todd mildly. 'But it is a fact. Mr. Quelch sent me a note telling me to sing "On the Ball" immediately.'

'Rats!'

'Where is the note?'

'Unfortunately, I have lost it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Bob Cherry. 'You'd better find it before you go to the Head, or tell a more likely story than that, Toddy.'

'But it is the truth--'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I have never departed from the truth. My Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me that it is very wrong to do so.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

And Todd, leaving the Removites yelling with laughter, made his way slowly and reluctantly to the Head's study. He had an excellent defence, certainly, and surely Mr. Quelch would not fail to corroborate him! Yet--

CHAPTER IV

Not Guilty!

ALONZO TODD entered the Head's study with all the courage he could muster. Mr. Quelch was there, and he was looking very surprised and displeased, and the Head was decidedly frowning. Both of them looked very grimly at the Duffer of the Remove. 'Todd,' said Dr. Locke, 'I have sent for you to ascertain whether you have any explanation to give of your extraordinary conduct.'

'Conduct, sir?'

'You began to sing a comic song--'

'Not exactly a comic song, sir-a football song.'

'Very well; you began to sing a football song while I was giving my lecture. You had the astounding impertinence to assert that Mr. Quelch requested you to do so!'

'Yes, sir.'

'You do not repeat that statement now?'

'Certainly, sir. I am sure Mr. Quelch will corroborate me.'

The Head looked at Mr. Quelch.

'I can only conclude that the boy has taken leave of his senses,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I need hardly assure you, sir, that I did not request him to do anything of the sort.'

'Certainly not. Now, Todd, why do you make such a statement?'

'It is true, sir.'

'You have heard what Mr. Quelch says?' said the Head sternly. 'Mr. Quelch must have forgotten, sir.'

'Boy--'

'It was written in plain English in the note he sent me, sir,' said Todd, perplexed. 'It was impossible to make a mistake.'

Mr. Quelch started.

'In the note I sent you!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, sir.'

'In that note I told you to come to my study at once,' said Mr. Quelch.

'The exact words were: "Come to my study immediately." It was my intention to punish you for rushing into me on the stairs.'

'Oh, sir! You must have written the wrong words!' said Todd, in distress.

'What you wrote was: "Sing 'On the Ball' immediately."'

'Todd!'

'I felt that I had to obey, sir, although the request seemed to me to be a very extraordinary one.'

'Is it possible that the note was altered before it reached Todd, for a joke upon this absurdly simple boy?' said the Head, in a low voice.

Mr. Quelch nodded.

'I think that must be the case,' he replied, in an equally low tone.

'Todd is the simplest and most absurd boy in Greyfriars but I have never suspected him of telling untruths.' He turned to the Duffer. 'Where is my note, Todd?'

'I am sorry I have lost it, sir.'

'Lost it?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How did you lose it?'

'Skinner was going to read it, and he let it drop from the window. I showed it to him, you see, as proof of your order to me.'

'Had he read it before he lost it?'

'No, sir; I am sure not.'

'H'm! And you cannot find it?'

'No, sir. We both looked for it, but it was blown away, I suppose.'
'Yet there is very little wind to-day,' said Mr. Quelch suspiciously.
'I can only state the facts, sir. I trust that you do not doubt my word,'
said Todd.

'No,' said the Head, after a pause. 'I will take your word, Todd; and so
will Mr. Quelch. It is perfectly clear that the note was altered before
it reached your hands, and you were the victim of a foolish trick.'

'Oh, sir!'

'You may go, and send Skinner to me immediately.'

'Certainly, sir.'

Alonzo Todd left the study. He found a crowd of juniors waiting for him
in the passage, all of them grinning, and at the same time anxious to
know how he had fared.

'Well?' said Bob Cherry. 'Licked?'

'Certainly not! I have explained to the Head!' said Todd. 'He thinks that
Mr. Quelch's note must have been altered before it reached me. Upon due
reflection, I am disposed to regard that hypothesis as probably correct.'

'Didn't I always tell you he had swallowed a dictionary?' demanded Bob
Cherry.

'Really, Cherry--'

'Look here,' began Skinner, 'if you've been saying anything about me--'

'I haven't,' said Todd. 'But the Head wants to see you in his study.'

Skinner changed colour.

'My hat!' said Harry Wharton. 'I can see how it was now! You were an ass,
Skinner! It was going altogether too far!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Skinner grunted, and took his way to the Head's study. Skinner was
prepared to do any amount of hard swearing, and, as the note was
destroyed, he did not see how proof was to be obtained against him.

At the same time, he felt very uneasy as he entered the study.

It was a great deal like putting his head into the lion's mouth.

'Skinner, you took a note from Mr. Quelch to Todd this afternoon?' said
the Head, entering into the subject at once.

'Yes, sir,' said Skinner respectfully.

'Did you read it as you went?'

'Oh, sir!'

'Answer my question, Skinner!'

'I hope I am incapable of doing anything of the sort, sir!'

'You did not alter it?'

'Alter it, sir?' said Skinner, with a look of wonder that was very well
done, and quite deceived the Head.

'It was altered before it reached Todd, and led him to perform a most
ridiculous action,' said Dr. Locke. 'But I should be sorry to suspect
anyone unjustly. Did the note leave your hands at all?'

'Certainly not, sir--except--' Skinner hesitated.

'Well?'

'I dropped it in one of the passages, sir, and had to go back for it,'
said Skinner. 'But it wasn't out of my hands five minutes.'

'Ah!' said the Head. 'In that five minutes some practical joker found it
and made the alteration, I have no doubt. Very well, Skinner, the matter
drops now. But I have my eye on you, and you will not find it easy to
deceive me, Skinner, if you should attempt to do so. You may go.'

'Thank you, sir.'

CHAPTER V

A Surprise for Bulstrode

BULSTRODE came up to Harry Wharton after morning lessons were dismissed the next day. Harry was with his friends and there were two or three fellows with Bulstrode. The burly Removite looked as if there was going to be trouble, and more fellows gathered to witness the interview. Wharton stopped as Bulstrode came up. He did not want to have a row with the bully of the Remove; at the same time, he would not appear to be particularly desirous of avoiding one. Bulstrode stopped directly in front of Wharton. 'I want to speak to you,' he said.

'Go it!' said Snoop.

'You can fire away,' said Harry quietly. 'What's it about?'

'The football,' said Bulstrode aggressively.

'Well, go ahead.'

'Some of the fellows want to know how things are going--'

'You mean you want to know, Bulstrode?'

'Well, I among the others. I hear that you've had a meeting in your study already to settle the matter without consulting the football committee.'

'Nothing of the sort! We had a chat, that was all!'

'Well, I dare say you're settling the matter over our heads. You might as well understand that you're not properly constituted football captain yet. I don't see why it should be taken for granted.'

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

'If the fellows don't want me, they've only got to get up on their hind legs and say so,' he replied. 'I'm ready to take a back seat if the Remove wants me to.'

'Rats!' said Tom Brown emphatically. 'And many of 'em!' added Ogilvy.

'Hear, hear!'

'Thanks!' said Wharton, smiling. 'But let's hear what Bulstrode has to say. I'm not aware of having done anything to give cause of complaint; but I'm willing to be called over the coals for my sins, if any.'

'Good!' said Bulstrode. 'Then I'll go ahead!'

'And don't talk out of your hat,' suggested Bob Cherry. 'Use your brains-if any.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You shut up, Cherry--'

'Certainly. I'll ring off while Bulstrode talks wisdom--if any.'

'This is what I want to say,' said Bulstrode, going on angrily as the Removites laughed again. 'I suppose we're going to try and play some decent football this season?'

'I suppose so.'

'If any,' added Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, I want to know how the eleven's going to be formed,' said Bulstrode, taking no notice of Cherry, and raising his voice as a larger crowd of Remove fellows gathered round. 'I want to know if the fellows who have been passed over are going to be kept out for good, and favouritism rule the roost?'

'There will be no favouritism as far as I am concerned,' said Harry Wharton quietly. 'That question's soon answered.'

'Well, we should like to have something a little more definite on that point,' said Bulstrode.

'That's all I have to say.'

'We're playing our first trial match with the Upper Fourth on Saturday. You'll be playing a trial eleven, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'Will it be asking too much to ask who's going to play in it?' said Bulstrode, with a sneer.

'I don't mind telling you as far as the list goes at present.' Bulstrode looked round at the Removites.

'Now we'll hear!' he remarked.

Wharton took a fragment of paper from his waistcoat pocket. 'There's the list, so far as it goes at present,' he said. 'Of course, it's subject to alteration.'

Ogilvy took the list as Wharton held it out.

'Read it out!' said Harry.

'Certainly. Wharton first--'

'Of course!' sneered Bulstrode.

'Cherry, Linley, Nugent, Brown, Ogilvy-- I say this list seems to me very decent!' Ogilvy broke off.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'What are you cackling at?'

'Oh, go on!'

'Hurree Singh, Morgan, Desmond--'

'Faith, and I can't see anything wrong with that list, Bulstrode darling.'

'Hazeldene--'

'Good!' said Hazeldene.

'And Bulstrode.'

Bulstrode jumped.

'What's that?' he exclaimed.

Ogilvy grinned.

'Bulstrode!' he repeated.

'My name's there?'

'Yes.'

Bulstrode turned red.

'Let me have a look at it!' he exclaimed.

Ogilvy handed him the paper. Bulstrode looked at it, and the colour deepened in his cheeks. He felt, and looked, as if he had made an egregious ass of himself--as indeed, he had.

There was a roar of laughter from the Removites.

Wharton smiled grimly.

'Well, have you any fault to find with the list, Bulstrode?' he asked.

The Remove bully stammered.

'Well, no,' he said. 'Of course, I wasn't expecting this. I-I thought--'

'You were prepared to kick against the list if your own name wasn't there, you mean!' Harry Wharton exclaimed disdainfully.

'Not exactly.'

'The exactfulness is terrific.'

'Well, if you mean to give me a trial, I've nothing more to say,'

Bulstrode said in a halting way. 'I didn't want to be passed over, that's all. You know I'm entitled to a place in the eleven.'

'I don't know anything of the sort!' said Wharton tartly. 'I'm giving you a trial, that's all. If you play up, and don't act the giddy goat, there's no reason why you shouldn't have your full share of playing for the Form Eleven during the season.'

And Wharton walked away with his friends.

CHAPTER VI

Alonzo the Footballer!

ALONZO TODD wore a very thoughtful expression in class that afternoon. The Duffer of Greyfriars was thinking of something, and the fellows who noticed his thoughtful brow wondered what the subject of his meditations might be.

When the class was dismissed, Todd joined Harry Wharton in coming out. He tapped the Remove captain on the shoulder.

'I want to speak to you on a rather important matter, Wharton,' he remarked.

'Come along to the dorm., then,' said Wharton. 'I'm going to change into my footer things for some practice before tea.'

'Oh, certainly!'

It was early enough in the season for footer practice, but the weather was very cool, and Harry was thinking of the trial match coming off on Saturday. The Upper Fourth were playing cricket before tea, and with the Removite playing football in the next field, the two great games would be represented at the same time. Harry and his friends went up to change, and Todd went with them.

'I was thinking, Wharton--' Todd began, as soon as they were in the dormitory.

'I saw you understudying a corrugated iron roof with your giddy brow,' said Bob Cherry. 'What's the matter with you?'

'I was thinking of footer--'

'Of what?'

'Footer,' said the Duffer of Greyfriars calmly. 'I think that I could very probably be of great use to the Form at that game. My Uncle Benjamin--'

'Good old Benny!'

'My Uncle Benjamin always wished me to become an athlete,' said Todd, standing a little more erect, and displaying a very weedy form. 'He said that if I could spare the time from my studies and other amusements, it would be a good idea to become a first-class footballer.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Would you care to give me a trial, Wharton?'

Wharton groaned.

'Oh, cheer up!' said Bob Cherry. 'Life's full of trials, you know- Todd is only one of them.'

'My dear Cherry-'

'Have you ever played football?' asked Harry.

'Not yet.'

'What do you know about the game?'

'Nothing,' said Todd cheerfully.

'And-and you want--'

'I think I should probably pick it up very quickly,' said Todd. 'I have seen games played, you know. I know the game is played with a ball.'

Wharton nearly fell down.

'Have you really observed that?' he gasped.

'Oh, certainly!'

'I suppose you've been trained as a detective, or something of that sort?' Bob Cherry asked solemnly.

Alonzo shook his head.

'Not at all,' he said. 'But my Uncle Benjamin has always instructed me to keep my eyes open, you know, and observe things. I have a very observant

eye. I have observed the game of football, and I think it is very simple. I believe the ball has to be kicked in the direction of a goal.'

'Well, yes, that's the general idea.'

'In the goal is placed the full-back-keeper, whose business is to keep the ball from passing the goal.'

'Ex-ex-exactly. Only his right name is a centre-forward-three-quarter-wicket-keeper,' said Bob Cherry.

'Dear me! What a long name!'

'Oh, you get used to it, and rattle it off like anything,' said Bob.

'I suppose so. I believe the number of fellows playing on each side is limited.'

'Yes; not more than a hundred and fifty--'

'As many as that?'

'Oh, no; less as a rule.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Todd looked round at the laughing juniors.

'Dear me! You are all getting changed!' he exclaimed. 'I shall be left behind if I do not hurry.'

'You're not going to change?'

'Yes, I am.'

'What for?'

'To play football.'

'Oh!'

Todd opened his box, and extracted football-shorts and a shirt and boots. He proceeded to change into them. When he was arrayed in football garb his exceedingly slim limbs were shown off to great advantage. Some of the juniors grinned as they glanced at his calves. Certainly they were not fatted calves.

'I suppose we must give him his head,' murmured Wharton. Bob Cherry nodded.

'Anyway, it will be funny,' he said. And Bob was right there.

The juniors put on their coats over their football clothes and went down to the ground. The Upper Fourth were batting away merrily at a short distance. The goal-posts had already been put up on the Remove ground, and the juniors' faces lighted up at the familiar sight. Cricket was a great game, but, after all, football was nearer to their hearts.

Todd had asked Wharton to let him carry the ball, and he came down to the ground with the footer under his arm; and the sight of Alonzo so equipped drew fellows from far and near to look on.

'Perhaps you had better form two teams, and let me captain one side,' suggested Todd.

Wharton gasped.

'Do you think you are quite up to captaining a footer team?' he inquired.

'I really don't know, but I will try.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Bob Cherry.

'My dear Cherry--'

'Let him take a kick, and see how he does it,' said Nugent. 'Place the ball for him. Now then, Toddy.'

'But surely in football one would not be allowed to take a kick so quietly and easily as this?' Todd objected.

'Well, everyone has to start, you know.'

'I would rather approximate nearer to the actual conditions--'

'Good old dictionary!'

'My dear chap, begin at the beginning,' said Harry Wharton. 'If you can kick the ball, you can get on further; but start with that.'

'Oh, very well!'

Nugent placed the ball before the goalposts. It was the easiest kick in the world, if a fellow could kick at all.

Todd eyed the ball, retreated a little, and came on at a run.
Then he kicked, with terrific force.
But he had made a slight miscalculation, and his foot missed the ball and shot up into the air.
His other foot followed it involuntarily, and Alonzo after describing a half-circle, came down on his back with a terrific bump, which knocked out all the breath in his body
'Oh!' he gasped.
He lay dazed, hardly knowing what had happened. The ball lay untouched where Nugent had placed it.
From the juniors came a roar. 'Ha, ha, ha!'
Alonzo Todd sat up and blinked at them 'Oh!' he gasped.
'Ha, ha, ha!'
'My dear fellows!'
'Ha, ha, ha!'

CHAPTER VII

Caught Bending!

HARRY WHARTON picked up the Duffer of Greyfriars and swung him off the footer ground. Todd sat down on the grass.

'Oh!' he said.

'Better take a little rest, old son,' said Harry kindly. 'Look on, and you'll see how the game is played, you know.'

'Oh, certainly; very well!'

The Removites began to practice. They did not form sides for a game, but began practising passing and shooting and dribbling, simply to get into form. Alonzo Todd looked on, with a considerable amount of surprise. He looked round for information. Skinner had strolled up to watch; and the practical joker of the Remove was ready to give Todd any amount of information--though whether it would be reliable was another question.

'I do not follow this game very well, Skinner,' the Duffer remarked.

'What are they trying to do at present?'

'Wharton is taking runs,' Skinner explained.

Todd stared.

'Taking runs?'

'Certainly.'

'But I thought runs were only taken at cricket,' said Todd, in amazement.

'I have never heard of runs being taken at football before.'

'My dear chap, where were you brought up?' exclaimed Skinner in surprise.

'I suppose you know that Public-school footer is the thing--all other, base imitations? We play the real game here, I assure you.'

'Yes. I am aware of that, Skinner, but--'

'Every time Wharton dribbles the ball as far as six yards, that counts as a run,' said the untruthful Skinner. SIX runs to a goal.

'Dear me!'

'Wharton has made six runs, so that counts as a goal for him.'

'Goodness gracious!'

'Then look at Cherry--he's shooting--'

'Shooting!'

'Kicking for goal. Now, if he sends the ball through the goal, that counts as--'

'As a goal?'

'No, that counts as six runs.'

'But you say that six runs and a goal are the same thing.'

'Oh, no! At the end of the game the goals and the runs are counted up, and one subtracted from the other, and the remainder is divided by the number of inches in the length of the goalpost, and then you get at the score.'

Todd was more and more amazed.

'Oh, dear! That seems to be a very complicated system.'

'Not at all when you get used to it. Now you see Nugent sitting down, don't you?'

'Yes; he was bumped over by Brown.'

'That's part of the game. If Nugent sits there without being pulled up by anybody for half a minute, that counts as three runs. Three runs is a try.'

'I thought tries were in Rugby.'

'So they are,' said Skinner, 'and in-in Association, too. Can I tell you anything more?--What are you doing with that pencil?'

'Keeping the score,' said Todd, scribbling away on the back of an envelope. 'I want to show it to Wharton when they come off, and let him see that I have caught on to the game.'

'Good!' exclaimed Skinner heartily.

'Let me see--there--the ball is in the goal again--that is six runs to Linley, isn't it?'

'Exactly!'

'Now Brown is kicking it. How far does he have to go--'

'Six yards.'

'Then it is a goal?'

'Precisely.'

'Good! I shall pick this up very quickly, I think. I might make myself useful at keeping the score, until I am sufficiently practised to play for the team,' said Alonzo modestly.

'My dear chap, you'd make a unique score-keeper,' said Skinner. 'There never was one at Greyfriars who kept score like this before.'

'My dear Skinner--'

'I mean it,' said Skinner. 'Hallo, there goes Wharton--six runs to him again!'

And Todd jotted it down. Quite unconscious of the fact that Alonzo was scoring for them, in that decidedly original way, the chums of the Remove continued their football practice.

When they came off the ground, Alonzo ambled up to Harry Wharton as he was putting on his coat. 'You have won,' he announced. Wharton stared.

'I've what?' he asked.

'Won!'

'One what?'

'The game.'

'I've one game,' said Wharton, perplexed. 'I don't understand.'

'I mean, you've won the game.'

'Oh, won the game! How do you mean?'

'You have scored thirty-six runs.'

'Runs!'

'Yes.'

'Eh?'

'Nugent comes next, with twenty-four runs--'

'What?'

'And then Brown, with eighteen.'

'Somebody send for a straight-waistcoat,' said Wharton faintly. 'I felt it would come to this. Better humour him.'

'My dear Wharton--'

'How many runs has Linley taken?' asked Nugent, with a grin.

'Twelve.'

'Any goals?'

'Yes, Linley has three goals--'

'Good! And any tries?' asked Bob Cherry.

'No tries have been scored.'

'And who takes the odd trick?' asked Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Dear me! I did not know that tricks were scored at football; I believed that was only in card games,' said Alonzo.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh there are lots of tricks in football,' said Harry Wharton.

'You shall keep score on Saturday, Toddy.'

'I hope to be playing in the team on Saturday.'

'Taking runs, I suppose?' asked Nugent sarcastically.

'Yes, I hope so.'

'Take a little run now, old chap.'

'But--'

'And score six for yourself. Start.'

'I should like to practise--'

'We're going in, old chap. Another time.'

'Oh, very well. I should not like to cause bother in any way,' said Todd. Harry Wharton & Co. walked off, grinning. Alonzo was funnier at football than at cricket. Skinner nodded to Bulstrode as he came up with Stott and Snoop, with a football under his arm.

'What's the joke?' asked Bulstrode. 'Those chaps were grinning their heads off.'

Skinner explained.

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Bulstrode. 'How ripping! I say, Toddy, would you like some footer practice?'

'Yes, certainly,' said Todd. 'I have been keeping score, and I think I can do that very well. I should like some practice in the field.'

'Come on, then!' said Bulstrode.

He winked at his comrades. Taking Todd cordially by the arm he led him into the field. '

'Now you have to stand here,' he said. 'I'm going to give you some instruction in keeping goal.'

'Thank you so much.'

'You stand here, facing the goal--'

'Doesn't the goalkeeper stand in the goal facing the players?' asked Todd, in surprise.

'Look here! Do you know more about this game than I do?'

'Oh, certainly not!'

'Well, then, do as I tell you.'

'Oh, certainly!'

'You stand here,' said Bulstrode, placing the Duffer of Greyfriars in front of the goal. 'You have to bend forward-you see-like that-your head well down.'

'Dear me! That is a great deal like keeping wicket.'

'There's a great similarity between keeping goal and keeping wicket. You have to be on the look-out to--to stump the centre forward whenever you can,' said Bulstrode.

'Dear me! I did not know you stumped people at football!'

'My dear chap, if you didn't stump people, how could they score the odd trick?' demanded Bulstrode.

'Oh!'

'If you stump the centre-forward, that makes grand slam and you win the rubber.'

'Oh, dear! I thought that was in bridge.'

'It's in football, too-this sort of football,' said Bulstrode calmly. 'Of course, there are different kinds of footer.'

'I-I suppose so.'

'Now, you have to stand like that-bending forward-and wait for us to kick,' said Bulstrode. 'You understand?'

'Certainly.'

'Your hands must be held downwards, almost touching the ground.'

'Very good.'

'You wait like that till we kick.'

'Oh, certainly!'

'Mind you don't move!'

'Certainly not.'

'My word!' murmured Skinner. 'If I catch you bending!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ready, Todd?' asked Bulstrode.

'Certainly.'

'Don't move.'

'Oh, no!'

Bulstrode grinned to his companions. They drew up close behind Todd, who waited in that innocent attitude for them to kick. He fancied they were going to kick the footer. But they weren't.

'Now then, all together!' said Bulstrode.

'Right-oh!'

'Kick!'

They kicked!

Alonzo Todd received four heavy boots together, and shot forward, nearly turning a somersault through the goal. He landed there on his hands and knees, quite dazed and bewildered. The rascals of the Remove walked away laughing.

Todd sat up in goal.

'Goodness gracious!' he gasped.

It was some time before he quite understood what had happened. Then he rose, with a serious shake of the head, and limped away, a sadder if not a wiser junior.

CHAPTER VIII

A Lesson in Sprinting!

TEMPLE, DABNEY, & Co., of the Upper Fourth, were standing in the doorway of the School House, when Alonzo Todd came in. Todd was limping a little, and he was looking distressed; not so much from the ache he experienced, as from the mental and moral shock he had received at being so cruelly taken in. For, trustful as he was, Todd could not help realising that Bulstrode & Co. had been japing him.

'Hallo, here's Alonzo!' exclaimed Temple. 'I hear you're playing footer, Toddy?'

Todd looked at him.

'I have been getting a little practice,' he said. 'I hope to pick up the game in time to play in the Form Eleven on Saturday.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'My dear Temple--'

'Oh, I've no doubt you will manage it,' said Temple, with a wink at Dabney and Fry. Look here! I suppose you're taking on sprinting as part of the training?'

'I haven't done so as yet, but--'

'Then take it on now,' said Temple. 'I shouldn't mind helping you a little, as you're new to it. It's splendid practice, you know.'

'But I don't quite know what sprinting is,' said Alonzo hesitating.

'Oh, that's nothing! I'll explain. Of course, if I take the trouble to explain, you'll take it up?'

'Oh, certainly!'

'This is the idea,' said Temple, with perfect calmness. 'You have one leg tied up, and hop along on the other--'

'Dear me! Is that sprinting?'

'It's this sort of sprinting,' said Temple unblushingly. 'Have you got that whipcord, Dab?'

'Oh, rather!' said Dabney.

'Give it me, then.'

Dabney handed over the whipcord, and Temple came down the steps.

'Now, I'll manage it for you,' he said.

'But--'

'You hold him, Dab.'

'Oh, rather!'

'But--'

'That's all right, Toddy. You're a born sprinter. I can tell that by the splendid development of-of your calves,' said Temple. 'Now, put your right foot as high as your left knee-that's the rule.'

'But--'

'I tie the cord round your ankle and knee, and then the other end round your waist, so that your foot can't come any lower' said Temple. 'There! Is that safe?'

'I-I don't feel very safe.'

'You'll get used to it. You have to get along on the left foot, in a series of hops. It's wonderful training.'

'I did not know sprinting was anything like this before.' You live and learn, you know.'

'Ye-e-es. But--'

'There! Can you stand all right?'

'I-I-I think so!' gasped Todd.

He stood on his left leg, holding on to Temple and Dabney. He was feeling extremely uncertain of himself.

'We'll help you up the steps,' said Temple.

'But-but hadn't I better sprint in the open air?'

'Oh, no! This kind of sprinting is better done indoors,' said Temple cheerfully. 'Bear a hand, Dab.'

'Oh, rather! '

They hauled the Duffer of Greyfriars up the steps. He clung to them heavily, hopping desperately. He was gasping when he reached the top step.

'There! Are you all right now?' asked Temple.

'Y e-e-e-es.'

'Sure?'

'I-I think so.'

'Then let go.' Alonzo Todd let go.

He immediately lost his balance, and made a wild clutch at Temple and Dabney. Temple dodged, and escaped the clutch, but caught Todd's knuckles on his nose, and staggered back blind with pain. Dabney was caught round the neck by Todd's other arm, and dragged over, and they fell and rolled down the steps together.

'Yaroooh!' roared Dabney.

'Ooch!' shrieked Temple.

Fry leaned against the wall, and roared. Temple grasped his nose with both hands, and a stream of red ran through his fingers.

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled Fry.

'You giggling idiot!' gasped Temple. 'Shut up!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Help!' groaned Dabney.

Fry ran down the steps, still yelling with laughter. Todd and Dabney had alighted on the ground, but the Duffer's arms were still lovingly entwined around Dabney's neck.

'Draggimoff!' groaned Dabney.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Fry dragged Alonzo to his feet. The Duffer of Greyfriars blinked at him dazedly.

'Goodness gracious!' he exclaimed. 'I think I must have fallen down!'

'Ha, ha, ha! '

Dabney crawled up the steps.

'Oh!' he groaned. 'I believe half my bones are broken. I know I've got an ache in every one of them. What did you want to jape that duffer for, Temple, you ass?'

'Don't dalk to me,' mumbled Temple, squeezing a handkerchief to his nose. 'By dose is sbashed, and I don'd belieb id will eber gub straight agaid!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' shrieked Fry.

He retreated as he laughed, for both Dabney and Temple were looking warlike. The matter did not seem so comical to them as it did to Fry. Bulstrode and Skinner came along to the house, and found Alonzo Todd sitting on the bottom step in the dusk tryin to unfasten the whipcord. But it had been knotted securely where it was awkward for him to get at it, and he could not succeed.

'My hat!' exclaimed Bulstrode, as he nearly ran into Todd. 'What on earth are you doing there, you ass?'

Todd looked up at him with a blink.

'I'm trying to unfasten this cord,' he said.

You might choose a safer place to sit in ' growled Bulstrode 'But how on earth did you come to be fastened up like that anyway?'

'Temple did it, to show me how to sprint.'

'To what?'

'Sprint.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'My dear Bulstrode, I wish you would untie it or cut it for me. I have no knife. Temple has gone away, and I do not wish to remain like this. I--'

'Ha, ha, ha! You must have your sprint,' said Bulstrode. 'We'll help you into the house, Toddy, and you can sprint to your heart's content.'

'Thank you so much, but--'

'Lend a hand, Skinner.'

They helped the Duffer of Greyfriars up the steps, and leaned him against the door, and left him, laughing loudly. Alonzo felt decidedly unsafe with one leg tied up, and if he could have got rid of the cord, he would willingly have abandoned the lesson in sprinting. But he couldn't; Temple had taken care of that.

CHAPTER IX

Mr. Prout is Fallen Upon!

'DEAR me!' murmured Alonzo. 'This is very awkward! It was very inconsiderate of Temple to go away and leave me like this!'

The Duffer of Greyfriars was dismayed. He felt an intense desire to get loose, and he was very doubtful about being able to get to his study on one leg. He felt, too, on reflection, that it would not do for a master to come and find him in that state.

Feeling his way along the wall, he hopped towards the staircase.

Clump, clump, clump! his boot sounded as he hopped.

He had to pass several study doors, and had to lean on them as he passed. Unfortunately, they were not all fastened.

The door of Mr. Prout's study was unlatched, and it swung open as Todd leaned on it. Todd very nearly shot head foremost into the room, but he managed to cling on the door, and swung in with it.

Mr. Prout looked up in surprise.

'Todd! You should not come in without knocking!'

'I-I'm so sorry, sir--'

'Well, what do you want?'

'N-nothing, sir. I--'

'What do you come into my study for, if you want nothing?' asked Mr. Prout irascibly.

'You-you see, sir--'

'No, I don't see at all.'

'I-I--'

'Leave the room, Todd!'

'Certainly, sir!'

'And close the door.'

'Yes, sir!'

Todd hopped back, dragging the door after him. He managed to slam it, and then leaned on it to recover his balance.

Mr. Prout was petrified for a moment. The idea of a junior opening his study door for nothing, and then slamming it as he went out, was unheard-of. The Fifth Form-master sprang up from his table and strode to the door and threw it open to say something to Todd in very plain English.

The door opened suddenly, and Todd fell into the room.

He made one desperate hop, and had just time to throw his arms round the neck of the Form-master to save himself

'Oh, dear!' he gasped.

Mr. Prout staggered back.

Todd was clasping him round the neck, and his whole weight was upon the Form-master. Mr. Prout almost fell, but he recovered himself.

'Todd!' he thundered.

'Oh!'

'How dare you!'

'I'm so sorry, sir,' gasped Alonzo. 'But--'

'Todd! Boy! How dare you act in this manner?' roared Mr Prout, as much amazed as he was angered by the extraordinary conduct of the Duffer of Greyfriars.

In this-this manner, sir?' said Alonzo beginning his unfortunate habit of repeating what was said to him, as he always did when he was frightened.

'Yes, boy! How dare you!'

'Dare I?'

'Release me at once'

'Release you, sir?'

'Yes, and at once!' shouted Mr. Prout.

'At-at once, sir?'

The Fifth Form-master gasped. He could only think that the junior had suddenly taken leave of his senses. He tried to unclasp Todd's arms. But Todd, knowing that he would fall down if he let go of Mr. Prout, held on.

'Boy! Let go!' gasped Mr. Prout.

'Let go, sir?'

'I-I-- Are you mad?'

'Mad, sir?'

'Boy! Todd! Go away! Shoo!' gasped Mr. Prout confusedly, trying to shoo Todd off as if he were a chicken or a cat. 'Shoo! Shoo!'

'Shoo, sir?'

'The boy is mad-quite mad! Dangerous!'

'Dangerous, Sir?'

'Help!' gasped. Mr. Prout, as the sturdy form of Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, passed the open doorway. 'Wingate! Drag this boy off! He is insane!'

Wingate stared at Alonzo, and stepped into the study and grasped him.

'Get away, you young ass!' he exclaimed.

'I'm so sorry, but--'

Wingate, exerting his strength, tore Alonzo away from the rumpled and breathless Form-master. Mr. Prout sank, panting, upon a chair.

Alonzo promptly threw his arms round Wingate's neck, and held on. The big Sixth-Former staggered.

'Let go, you young chump!' he roared.

'I c-c-can't!'

'What do you mean? You--'

'I shall f-f-fall down!' gasped Alonzo.

'What's the matter with you?'

'The-the matter?'

'Yes. Why can't you stand? You haven't been drinking, I suppose?'

'Drinking?'

'You blessed parrot--'

'Parrot?'

'My hat! The chap's enough to drive a fellow off his rocker!' exclaimed Wingate, exasperated; and he held the Duffer out at arm's length with a firm grip. Then he saw what was the matter, as Alonzo stood on one leg.

'What on earth have you got your leg tied up in that way for, you howling ass?'

'That way?' Wingate shook him.

'Answer me, Todd.'

'Answer you?'

'It is a joke-a practical joke,' said Mr. Prout, taking up a cane from his table. 'I shall prove to you, Todd, that a Form-master is an ill-chosen victim for a practical joke. Hold out your hand!'

'Oh, sir--'

'Hold out your hand at once!'

'M-m-my hand, sir?'

'Excuse me, sir,' interposed Wingate. 'I think Todd looks more like the victim of a practical joke than the perpetrator.'

'I'm so sorry!' gasped Todd.

'How did you come to be tied up in that manner, Todd?' exclaimed Mr. Prout. 'Have you been the victim of a Joke?'

'Oh, no, sir! I was taking my first lesson in sprinting, and Temple kindly tied up my leg for me!' gasped Alonzo.

'What?'

'I was going to practise sprinting, and--'

Wingate burst into a roar, and even Mr. Prout could not help smiling, ruffled as he was. The Greyfriars captain let go Alonzo to laugh and the junior made a wild hop to keep his balance. He failed to do so, however, and he fell towards Wingate, and clutched him, and dragged his collar out as he hung on.

'Here, stop that!' roared Wingate.

'I'm so sorry, but--'

'The boy is a fool--an absolute fool!' exclaimed Mr. Prout. 'He has been the victim of a practical joke, and does not know it!'

'A-a practical joke, sir?'

'Yes, you stupid boy! Release him, Wingate.'

Wingate, looking rather grim, opened a pocket-knife, and cut through the whipcord. Alonzo lowered his leg to the ground with a gasp of relief.

'Thank you so much, Wingate!' he exclaimed. 'I was beginning to get quite cramped.'

'You young ass!' said Wingate; and in spite of his wrecked collar, he laughed as he quitted the study.

Mr. Prout gave Alonzo a stern look

'I should recommend you to be more on your guard,' he said. 'You are the simplest boy in the school, I think, and you seem to be always the readiest possible victim of practical jokes. You may go.'

'Thank you so much, sir. I am so sorry that I--'

'That will do.'

'Yes; but I am so sorry--'

'You may go.'

'My Uncle Benjamin always told me, sir, that in case of giving annoyance, either intentional or unintentional--'

'Please go.'

'It was a fellow's duty to apologise, sir. Therefore--'

'Will you go?'

'Therefore I wish to assure you sir that--'

Mr. Prout picked up a cane, and Alonzo Todd beat a hurried retreat from the study. Mr. Prout did not look as if he were patient enough for Uncle Benjamin's excellent precepts to be worked off on him.

CHAPTER X

The Round Robin!

'SPEAKING of birthdays,' said Bulstrode.

Nobody had been speaking of birthdays. A group of Removites were lounging by the boat-house, watching some craft on the river, and Alonzo Todd was among them, and Bulstrode and Skinner and several more of his set. Harry Wharton & Co. were pulling towards the island in a four-oar, and Todd was watching them. It occurred to Alonzo that he would like to become an oarsman, and he was mentally determining to approach Wharton on the subject later, when Bulstrode spoke. Morning lessons were over that day, and the juniors had still another half-hour before it was necessary to return to the class-room.

'Speaking of birthdays, we ought to do something about Quelch's.'

Alonzo looked round.

'Mr. Quelch's birthday?' he exclaimed.

'Yes.'

'When is it?'

'Didn't you know it was to-day?' asked Bulstrode.

'No, I did not!' said Alonzo. 'Is it, really? Dear me! Something ought to be done by the Form, I should think, to-to signalise it. We ought to wish Mr. Quelch many happy returns of the day, at least!'

'Just what I was thinking!'

'Good egg!' said Skinner solemnly. He knew perfectly well that it was not Mr. Quelch's birthday, but he saw that Bulstrode had some scheme in his mind for japing the Duffer of the Remove. 'Suppose we made him some presentation.

'That's the idea!'

'I like the idea' said Alonzo. 'My Uncle Benjamin always told me to show great regard and respect for my kind teachers.'

'Bravo, Ben!' exclaimed Bulstrode. 'Your Uncle Benjamin ought to be in the British Museum, or Madame Tussaud's he ought, really, Todd. Now, about this birthday present that Todd suggests giving--'

'I!' ejaculated Alonzo.

'Yes the birthday present you suggest. I think it ought to be done. I've always noticed, you fellows, that Todd has a lot of tact in these matters, and we can't do better than follow his judgment!'

'Hear, hear!' said the fellows.

'Todd thinks of these things,' said Bulstrode, looking round. 'Some fellows are born with more tact and delicacy than others, and Todd is one of them. I don't mind admitting it-we all know Todd!'

'Yes, rather!' agreed Stott.

The Duffer coloured with pleasure.

'Now, the only question is-since Todd insists upon a presentation of some sort-what form the presentation should take,' said Bulstrode.

'Quite so!'

'Faith, and you're right!'

'What do you suggest, Todd?' Alonzo reflected.

'What about a round robin?' he said. 'We could write: "Many Happy Returns of the Day" in the centre of a card and sign our names in a circle round it, you know. That would be a rather delicate compliment, I think.'

Bulstrode patted him on the back.

'Good egg!' he exclaimed. 'Let's go and do it now'

'The signatures of all the Form ought to be on the paper,' Todd remarked. 'The whole Remove ought to sign it!'

'Certainly! Let's get the signatures first, and we can write in an appropriate inscription afterwards,' said Bulstrode. 'Don't lose any time, Toddy!'

'But I--'

'As you're leader in the matter, you ought to collect the signatures,' said Bulstrode. 'Go round to the fellows now. Here's my fountain-pen. We want to make the presentation at afternoon school, or it will be too late!'

'Oh, certainly!' said Alonzo.

He took the fountain-pen and soon found a card suitable for the purpose, and Bulstrode & Co. signed first of all. Then Todd went round collecting signatures.

This was not so easy a task as he had expected.

'How do you know it's Quelch's birthday?' Ogilvy asked him

'Bulstrode said so.'

'I'd rather Quelch said so before I get mixed up in this' said the cautious Scottish junior. 'Better let it alone!'

'My dear Ogilvy--'

'Well, go, ahead, if you like, but I'll keep off the grass, if you don't mind, said Ogilvy, and he finished the discussion by walking away.

A good many other fellows were equally cautious, but Todd obtained a total of twenty signatures, and he returned to Bulstrode with the card. He found the Remove bully in his study with Skinner and Stott.

'These are all the names I could get,' said Alonzo.

'Quite enough,' said Bulstrode, looking at the card. 'We don't want Wharton and his lot mixed up in it. Now, I'll write the message in the centre of the card, in ornamental type. You needn't wait while I do it, Toddy. I'll bring you the card in an envelope ready to present to Quelch, when we go into afternoon school.'

'Thank you so much,' said Todd.

He left the study. Bulstrode grinned at Skinner and Stott. 'What are you going to write there?' asked Skinner. That Bulstrode was not going to write the friendly birthday greeting, he knew well.

Bulstrode chuckled.

'Oh, a message from the Form,' he said. 'I'm going to do it in print letters, so that Quelch won't know who did it. And there are too many signatures round it for him to come down on any particular one. If there's any trouble, it'll fall on the Duffer who takes the card to Quelch!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'But what are you going to shove down?' asked Stott.

'Just look!'

Bulstrode set to work with his pen, and in neat print letters inscribed on the centre of the card, in the midst of the circle of signatures;

'PLEASE WE DON'T WANT SO MANY LINES!'

Skinner and Stott chuckled.

'My hat!' said Skinner. 'That's ripping!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'It will be a good hint to Quelch, and he'll think most of the Form are backing up against so many blessed impositions,' grinned Bulstrode. 'Of course, the fellows wouldn't have signed this if they'd known-everybody would have been afraid to be first.'

'Good egg!'

Bulstrode blotted the inscription, and then slipped the card into a large envelope. When the Remove went into the Form-room for afternoon lessons, Bulstrode had the envelope in his pocket, and slipped it into Todd's hand in the passage.

'Here you are, Todd,' he said. Todd looked grateful.

'Thank you so much,' he said.

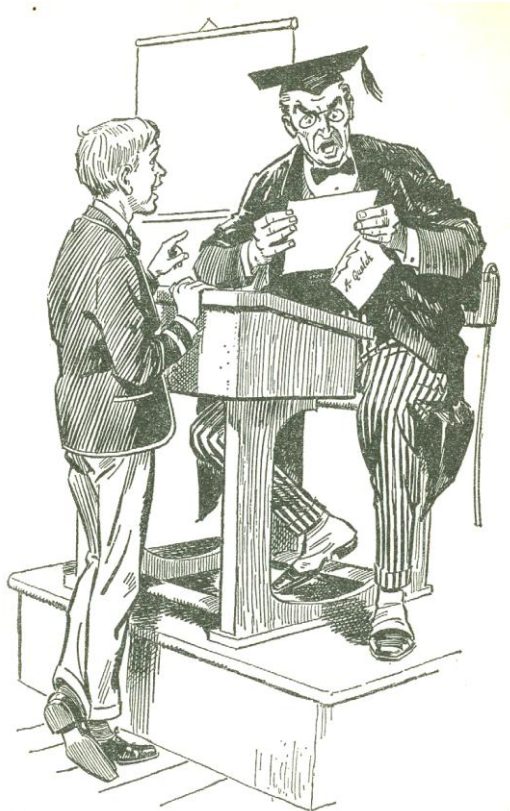
'Not at all!'

'It's very kind and thoughtful of you to take so much trouble to please our kind teacher,' said Alonzo.

'I do it from a sense of duty,' said Bulstrode, loftily. 'My Uncle Benjamin says-- -'

Todd looked surprised.

'Dear me! Have you an Uncle Benjamin, too?'



'What! What! You-you dare to jest your Form-master, Todd?'

'Certainly. My Uncle Benjamin-Benjamin Bulstrode, you know-we call him Jim for short, but his name's Benjamin-he says that I ought to do everything in my power to please my kind teacher,' said Bulstrode.

'That's why I do these things. But Uncle Jim-I mean Ben-also says that he will be very displeased with me if I ever attempt to gain any credit from a kind action. So I don't want you to mention my name in this matter.'

'Oh, certainly, just as you wish.'

'Or mine, either,' said Skinner.

'As you like.'

'Time to get in,' said Stott. 'Better present the envelope to Mr. Quelch at once, Toddy, and get it over. Then we'll all give him a cheer!'

'Excellent!' said Todd.

And the Remove went into the Form-room.

CHAPTER XI

Todd Makes a Presentation!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, in an undertone. 'What's on now?'

'I wonder!' said Harry Wharton. And the Nabob of Bhanipur murmured that the wonderfulness was terrific.

Mr. Quelch was in the Form-room early. When the Remove took their places, Alonzo Todd, instead of taking his seat with the rest, walked up to the master's desk.

He had a large white envelope in his hand, and a look of beaming good-nature on his face; a look the Remove were beginning to know too well.

'What's the little game?' murmured Nugent. 'Is Toddy being japed again?' 'I shouldn't wonder.'

Todd came up to Mr. Quelch's desk, and the master looked at him in surprise.

'If you please, sir--'

'Well?'

'On the present auspicious occasion--'

'The-the what?'

'Auspicious occasion.' sir,' said Todd, cheerfully, 'the Form wish to present you with the testimonial contained in this envelope, sir!'

'Testimonial?'

'Yes, sir, a testimonial in the form of a round robin.'

'What?'

'Signed by the majority of the Form, sir. Those who were not able to append their signatures are, I am sure, in hearty agreement with the rest!'

Mr. Quelch stared at Alonzo.

'I, do not understand this,' he said, 'I hope you are not taking the incredible liberty of Jesting with your Form-master Todd'

'Oh, Sir!'

'What have you in that envelope?'

'Please take it, sir!'

Alonzo handed the envelope to Mr. Quelch. The latter with a very puzzled look, took it and slit it open with a paper-knife. At the sight of the round robin within, his face grew more amazed; but when the message in the middle of the card stared him in the face, he simply jumped.

His brow grew as black as thunder.

'What is this?' he shouted.

Todd looked amazed. He had expected the Form-master to be pleased, and, at all events, so far as he could see, there was no reason for him to be angry.

'If you please, sir--' he stammered.

'But I do not please!' exclaimed Mr. Quelch. 'How dare you bring this to me, Todd!'

'Dare, sir!'

'Yes, how dare you-this impertinence!'

'Impertinence, sir!'

'Did you write this?'

'We all wrote it, sir.'

'And was it your idea?'

'Yes, sir,' said Todd, beginning to beam again. 'I thought that it would be a good idea, Sir, as we did not wish the occasion to pass without some recognition, sir, I hope you fully understand--'

'I fully understand that it is the intention of a considerable part of my Form to be guilty of impertinence' said Mr Quelch.

'Oh, sir!'

'So you think you have too many lines?'

'Lines, sir?'

'Yes. You shall have more reason to think so. You will take two hundred lines for presenting this gross piece of impertinence to me, Todd!'

'Oh-oh-oh! '

'Every boy whose name is signed here will take fifty lines' said Mr. Quelch.'

There was a general 'Oh!' from the Remove.

Mr. Quelch laid the card on his desk. His brow was very angry, and his eyes were glinting.

'Now, go back to your place, Todd!' he exclaimed sternly. 'If there is any repetition of nonsense of this sort, I shall cane every boy concerned in it.'

'Oh, sir!'

'Go back to your place at once!'

'But, sir--'

'Go!'

'I don't understand--'

'Another word, and I'll cane you!'

Todd turned away from the desk. He did not understand, but it was evidently not a time to argue with the Remove-master. But some of the fellows who had signed the round robin were very dissatisfied. Fifty lines for wishing a master 'Many happy returns' on his birthday was, as Russell put it, altogether too thick.

Russell rose up in his place.

'If you please, sir--' he began.

Mr. Quelch turned his gimlet eyes upon him.

'Have you anything to say, Russell?' he exclaimed sharply.

'Yes, sir,' said Russell courageously.

'I don't see why we should be punished for signing that round robin, sir.'

'Russell!'

'Many masters would take it as a compliment, sir. I'm sure we meant it quite respectfully. We didn't see any harm in it.'

'You saw no harm in it?'

'No, sir. We thought you'd like us to take some notice of your birthday.'

'My what?' exclaimed the Form-master, astounded.

'Your birthday, sir.'

'What do you mean, Russell? To-day is not my birthday, and this card has no reference to the subject of birthdays.'

'Not your birthday, sir?' exclaimed Russell, in dismay.

'Certainly not! '

'But-but we thought- T-Todd said--'

'There is some mistake here,' said Mr. Quelch more quietly. 'It is possible-- Tell me, Russell, did you sign this card after the message in the middle was written there?'

'No, sir; before.'

'And what do you suppose was to be written there after you had signed?'

'A message wishing you many happy returns of the day, sir. Todd told us it was your birthday,' said Russell, a little indignantly.

'Oh, I see!' said Mr. Quelch, his eyes glinting again. 'Todd has deceived you, then, and obtained signatures under false pretences. You may all see what is written upon the card, and you will know what you have signed.'

Mr. Quelch turned the face of the card towards the class.

The Removites gasped.

'My hat!' murmured Bob Cherry. 'This is some of Bulstrode's work.'

'What-ho!' murmured Nugent.

Bulstrode sat with an expressionless face. He did not join in the chuckle which many of the Removites could not resist.

Todd stared at the card blankly.

'Goodness gracious!' he exclaimed. 'There is some terrible mistake, sir. I did not know that that was written upon the card, sir!'

Mr. Quelch turned upon him.

'Did you not write it, then?' he demanded.

'Oh, no, sir!'

'Who wrote it, then?'

Todd was about to speak, and then he hesitated. He remembered Bulstrode's request that his name should not be mentioned. 'I would rather not say, sir,' he replied.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

'Why not?' he demanded.

'Because Bulstrode wished to avoid taking any credit for his share in the matter, sir,' he replied. 'His Uncle Benjamin told him--'

The Remove roared. They could not help it. Even Mr. Quelch's grim visage relaxed into a smile.

'So it was Bulstrode?' he exclaimed.

'Bulstrode, sir?'

'Yes.'

'I am sure I did not say so, sir.'

'You said that Bulstrode did not wish his share in the matter to be mentioned,' said Mr. Quelch sternly.

'Yes, sir; that is quite correct.'

'It was, then, Bulstrode who wrote this piece of impertinence?'

'I have agreed not to say, sir.'

'You are a most absurd boy,' said Mr. Quelch; while the Removites laughed, and Bulstrode looked savagely angry. 'You have said so in effect, without intending to do so. Bulstrode, kindly stand out before the class.'

The burly Removite obeyed.

'So you wrote this message to me, after obtaining the signatures by a pretence?' asked Mr. Quelch, fixing his eyes severely upon the junior.

'It was a joke, sir,' muttered Bulstrode.

'It may have been a joke, Bulstrode, but it was perilously near rascality, and it was, in any case, a piece of flagrant impertinence!' said Mr. Quelch, frowning. 'You will take two hundred lines, Bulstrode. The other boys concerned in the matter are pardoned, as they have been deceived by you. Go back to your place.'

Bulstrode went without a word. But he gave Alonzo Todd a look which did not bode pleasant things for the Duffer of Greyfriars in the future.

CHAPTER XII

Bunter Causes a Surprise!

'My hat!'

'What is it?'

'Bunter!'

'Not Bunter!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows--' began Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really--'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter, in football garb, was just coming downstairs, and he stopped on the lowest step as the crowd of juniors in the hall greeted him.

Bunter's garb was striking.

The pattern consisted of alternate broad stripes, so that he looked like a walking advertisement of a well-known grate polish.

Added to that, the attire, though ample enough, was more than well filled by the fat junior, so that he looked as if he were threatening to burst through at every point.

The Owl of the Remove in these striking football clothes was, as Ogilvy remarked, a new sensation.

It was no wonder that the juniors burst into a roar of laughter as they saw him.

Bunter could not see the joke.

'I say, you fellows--'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here--'

'We're looking,' howled Frank Nugent. 'Ha, ha, ha! We can't help it.'

'I tell you--'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'What's on?' demanded Bob Cherry. 'Is it a fancy-dress ball?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Certainly not! I'm going to play football.'

'What?'

'Which?'

'How?'

'Oh, my

'I'm going to play footer,' said Billy Bunter with a considerable amount of dignity. 'I may not be appreciated in my own Form--'

'You're not, Billy,' grinned Harry Wharton.

'But I have friends elsewhere,' said Bunter. 'The Upper Fourth may be glad of a recruit who is too good for the Remove'

'What?'

'Eh?'

The Removites stared at Bunter blankly. They were too amazed to laugh.

'You see!' went on Bunter victoriously, 'some fellows who know something about football may have observed my form'

'His fragile form,' murmured Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I mean my form at footer, of course. Some fellows may think more highly of my play than you fellows think.'

'H'm!'

'Rats!'

'Some fellows,' went on Bunter, with emphasis, 'may know more about footer and about a player's form than Wharton does '

'Quite possible,' said Harry Wharton cheerfully, 'but--'

'And they may be glad to play me.'

'Play you?'

'Certainly!'

'At-at footer?'

'Of course.'

'Not-not at marbles?' stammered Wharton. 'Not at hopscotch? Not at buttons-eh? You're sure you're not making a mistake about the game?'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared the juniors.

'Oh, really, Wharton--'

'I'm playing for the Upper Fourth. Temple has asked me to play, and I have consented,' said Bunter, with dignity.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You ass!' roared Bulstrode. 'Temple's pulling your leg.'

'Oh, really, Bulstrode-'

'They're making a guy of you.'

'This jealousy is what I might have expected, I suppose?' said Bunter. 'I am sorry to see it. It makes me think the less of you, Bulstrode.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'My only hat!' said Bulstrode.

'I am sorry to have to join a team outside the Remove,' went on Bunter.

'I have been driven to this. Wharton can bear witness to the fact that I have offered more than once to play for the Remove.'

'You have,' grinned Wharton.

'And you have declined my services?'

'What-ho!'

'Cherry will say the same.'

'Exactly the same,' grinned Bob Cherry.

'You asses!' grunted Bunter. 'You can cackle now, but you'll be jolly sorry when I'm kicking goals for the Upper Fourth. You'll be sorry to see me in the Fourth Form eleven.'

'So will the Fourth, if they want to win,' said Hazeldene.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, I'm not going to waste time talking to a lot of jealous rotters,' said Billy Bunter. 'I've been excluded from the Form team by personal jealousy and detraction. I'm joining the Fourth Form eleven. That's all.' And Billy Bunter walked towards the door. The juniors made room for him to pass.

'You're going to play now, Bunter?' asked Tom Brown.

'Certainly!'

'My hat, this will be worth watching!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You're welcome to come and see what you've lost,' said Bunter.

'We'll come.'

'Yes, rather!'

'The ratherfulness is terrific.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter stalked away towards the junior football-ground with great dignity. The juniors of the Remove followed him in a crowd. That Bunter was the victim of a jape on the part of Temple, of the Upper Fourth, they felt pretty certain, and it looked as if there would be fun.

CHAPTER XIII

Bunter Plays Football !

TEMPLE, the captain of the Upper Fourth, was chatting with Dabney and Fry and Stott on the junior football-ground. The Fourth-Formers were in football garb. The days were still long and light, and most of the Greyfriars fellows were now going in for football practice after school. Temple looked towards the House, and burst into a sudden chuckle. Here he comes.'

'The other fellows followed his glance. Billy Bunter was approaching. The Fourth-Formers grinned. They knew that the Owl of the Remove was too short-sighted to see them from that distance. When he got nearer they would be serious.

'My hat!' said Temple. 'Look at his clothes!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Note the giddy stripes!'

'Oh, rather!' said Dabney. 'A giddy zebra, and no mistake.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Most of the Remove seem to be coming, too' said Fry. 'They've caught on to it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Order!' said Temple. 'Don't let him see you grin. Follow my lead.'

'Oh, rather!'

Billy Bunter rolled up.

'I hope I haven't kept you fellows waiting?' he said, in a sort of superior tone of voice, as if he really didn't think it mattered if he had.

Bunter was always like that.

'Oh, that's all right!' said Temple cheerfully, bestowing a wink, which Bunter did not see, upon his comrades. 'We don't mind waiting.'

'Not at all.'

'Not for a chap like you, Bunter.'

'Oh, rather!' said Dabney. 'It would be different, of course if you were a common sort of fellow.'

'But any team would be glad enough to wait for a player like Billy Bunter,' said Fry solemnly.

Exactly.'

'Oh, all right!' said Bunter carelessly. 'I'm ready. These fellows have come to see me play.'

'They're welcome. It will be worth seeing.'

'So I've told them.'

The Removites chuckled.

'Look here what's the little game?' demanded Harry Wharton. 'I suppose you're rotting Bunter? You know he can't play footer.'

'Oh, really, Wharton--' .

'That's our business,' said Temple loftily. 'If we like to play Bunter, I suppose you've got nothing to say against it?'

'Ha, ha! No.'

'This is how the matter stands,' went on Temple, with great solemnity.

'You fellows had a ripping player in your Form and you neglected him.'

'That's it,' said Bunter.

'We saw what wonderful possibilities there were in Bunter, and we picked him up,' went on Temple. 'That shows my judgment as a footer captain. I don't want to brag, but there it is.'

'Oh, rather!'

'Now you'll see how he can play, and you'll want him back,' said Temple.
'Well, you're not going to have him. We're sticking to Bunter.'

'Oh, rather!'

'Bunter's ours.'

'What-ho!'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'You see how it is, Wharton,' said Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Lower Fourth. 'This is what comes of jealousy of a good player. You must admit that I've done my best to play for the Remove, and that I've got nothing to reproach myself with in going over to the Upper Fourth.'

'Ha ha ha!'

'They laugh best who laugh last,' said Temple. 'You wait till you've seen Bunter play.'

'Yes you just wait' said Bunter, with a sniff. 'You'll laugh on the other side of your mouth, then. Temple's going to play me against you.'

'If Bunter's satisfied with the treatment we give him, he'll stick to us,' said Temple.

'Oh, rather!'

'I'm sincerely sorry for the Remove, but you see how it is. I must go where I'm valued and appreciated.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm ready, Temple, when you are.'

'Then come on,' said Temple.

He linked his arm affectionately in Bunter's, and led him away. There were juniors and seniors gathered round the field from all sides to see the fun. Everybody but Bunter could see that an elaborate process of rotting was going on, and all were keen to see how long it would be before Bunter was undeceived.

Temple walked the fat junior upon the field.

There were a dozen Fourth-Formers ready for the game.

Bunter blinked round at them inquiringly. 'Not playing full teams?' he asked.

'Ah, no; this is just a scratch game!' said Temple. 'We're playing five against seven. Five will be enough, as you will be on the smaller side.'

'I see.'

'Five with you will be equal to any seven, I suppose?'

'I suppose so,' assented Bunter.

The teams formed up.

Temple, Dabney, Fry, Stott, and Billy Bunter formed one side. The other was composed of seven Upper Fourth fellows.

They all put on exaggerated looks of alarm as they came near Bunter. It was easy for the fat junior to see that he was regarded as a deadly dangerous antagonist.

He swelled more and more with importance, until there was really danger that his striped jersey would burst.

'You kick off, of course?' said Temple.

'Certainly!'

'Now look out, you fellows; Bunter's playing against you!'

'Go it, Bunter!'

'Kick off, stripes!'

'Bravo, zebra!'

Bunter blinked round at the disrespectful spectators, and then blinked at the footer. He kicked off.

There was immediately a wild scramble for the ball.

The Fourth-Formers and Billy Bunter were mixed up in a trampling mob.

'Now look out for fun,' murmured Bob Cherry. 'The funfulness will be terrific.'

The Removites were right.

The fun began, and it was fast and furious.

The Fourth-Formers struggled for that ball as if they had been famished dogs tussling for a bone.

The zebra stripes were seen tossing to and fro amid the crowd like a boat on a stormy sea, and soon they had disappeared, like a wrecked boat beneath the billows.

Where was Bunter?

A feeble voice was heard amid the press.

'Ow! Oh, really, you fellows! Yow! Yaroo! Gerroff!'

'Ha, ha, ha ! '

'Help!'

The press separated, and Bunter was revealed.

He was stretched upon the ground, gasping for breath.

Temple and Dabney, choking with suppressed laughter, rushed to help him up.

'Groo!'

'Winded?' asked Dabney.

'Gerroh!'

'Hold on, you chaps! Our best player's hurt.' Bunter gasped for breath.

'It's-it's all right,' he panted. 'Somebody fell on me. Groo!'

'Too bad!'

'Rotten!'

'Never mind. Buck up, Bunter!'

'Gimme my glasses.'

'They're on your nose.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'So they are,' said Bunter, adjusting his spectacles. 'I-I wish you fellows wouldn't be quite so rough. It spoils the-the finesse of my play.'

'You hear that, you chaps?' said Temple severely. 'I suppose you don't want to spoil the finesse of Bunter's play?'

'Certainly not!'

'Oh, rather-I mean, rather not!'

'Ready, Bunter?'

'Ye-e-s.'

The game proceeded.

Billy Bunter was allowed to take the ball and dribble towards goal. His dribbling was about as clumsy a performance as could be imagined; but he was getting the ball towards goal, and he was quite satisfied with himself.

The crowd burst into ironical cheers. 'Bravo, Bunter!'

'Go it, stripes!'

'On the ball, zebra!'

'Hurray!'

Bunter rushed the ball goalward.

Never had a Remove crowd cheered him before. This was glory!

Now at last he was proving his true value to his own Form, and showing Harry Wharton what an ass he had been to neglect so splendid a player.

Bunter was thinking these thoughts more than he was thinking of the ball, and perhaps that was the cause of the disaster that followed. Perhaps it was because he couldn't dribble. Anyway, his feet and the ball became somehow entangled, and he rolled over on the ground with a breathless gasp.

There was a roar from the crowd.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Do that again!'
'Go it, Bunter!'
'Buck up, stripes!'
'Encore!'

Bunter sat up.

'My-y-y hat!' he gasped. Temple dragged him up.
'You're all right, Bunter. Go ahead!'
'T-t-thanks!!'

Bunter was on the ball again. He kicked it towards goal, and at the same moment his opponents rushed in. His backers were quickly on the spot, and the two sides met-perhaps on purpose-with Bunter in the midst of the charge.

The fat junior gave a wild gasp as he was jammed among them.

The stripes disappeared again.

Footballers stumbled over him on all sides, and in a few seconds nearly everybody was on the ground in a struggling heap.

Where was Bunter?

'My hat!' gasped Cherry. 'He's underneath that lot!'
'Phew!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He'll be squashed!'

'The squashfulness will be terrific.'

The Removites, feeling that the Fourth-Form joke had gone a little too far, rushed upon the field, and dragged and pommelled the fallen footballers right and left.

Here, chuck that!' roared Temple, as he went bumping upon the ground.

'We've chucked you!' grinned Bob Cherry.

'Hands off!'

'Rats!'

'Look here--'

'More rats!'

The Fourth-Formers went whirling. Bunter was revealed.

He lay gasping like a newly-landed fish. His jersey was split up back, his hair was a tousled mop, his spectacles were gone.

Wharton dragged him into a sitting posture, and he blinked round.

'Ow! Ow! Oh! Yah! What has happened?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! I'm hurt!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm winded!'

'What did you expect, you young duffer?' said Wharton. 'Get up, and get off the field, and don't play the giddy goat.'

'Oh, really, Wharton--'

Temple sat up on the ground and yelled with laughter. Bunter blinked at him.

'Where are my glasses? Ow!'

Bob Cherry picked them up and handed them to him. Fortunately, they were not damaged, save for a twist of the frame that could be remedied. Bunter adjusted them as well as he could upon his fat little nose.

'I say, you fellows--'

'Ha, ha, ha!' gasped the Upper Fourth.

'Upon the whole, your methods of football are too crude, and too rough, and altogether no class!' said Bunter. 'I decline to play for the Upper Fourth!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' shrieked the Fourth-Formers. And Billy Bunter, gasping for breath staggered off the football-ground, leaving Temple, Dabney, & Co. still shrieking.

CHAPTER XIV

A Chance for Bunter!

'I'M so sorry, Bunter!'

It was Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars, who made the remark. Billy Bunter was going into the Remove dormitory after his unfortunate experience on the Upper Fourth football-ground.

The fat junior was looking as if he found life not worth living. He was tired and dusty and perspiring, and he rolled along with incessant grunts.

It had dawned on the Owl of the Remove that the Fourth-Formers had been elaborately 'rotting' him, and that he had had no chance of really playing footer in Temple's team.

That, added to the usage he had received, made Bunter in the reverse of a good temper, and he was by no means inclined to receive Todd's long-winded sympathy in a genial spirit.

'I'm so sorry, Bunter!' went on Alonzo. 'My Uncle Benjamin says that we should always feel sorry for persons in distress, and you look very distressed. Of course, you cannot play football, I suppose?'

'Oh, go and eat coke!' growled Bunter.

'My dear Bunter--'

'Or, ring off!'

'My dear fellow--'

'Get out!'

'But I feel so sorry--'

Bunter groped blindly for the soap to hurl at Todd.

The Duffer of Greyfriars came into the dormitory and closed the door behind him. The cake of soap crashed on the door and fell upon the floor. Bunter's aim was not good. Todd started, and blinked at the soap.

'Dear me! What did you do that for, Bunter?'

'Will you buzz off?'

'Oh, certainly, if you wish. But I had something to say to you--something that I think will interest you very much,' said Todd, taking a folded paper from his pocket. 'Have you seen this paper?'

'No, and don't want to!'

'It's the *Courtfield News*--'

'Take it away!'

'But there's an advertisement in it--'

'Hang the advertisements I'

'But--'

Bunter buried his fat face in a towel and towelled away. Todd regarded him with surprise, and went on speaking. Bunter caught a few words indistinctly, and among them the words 'Rovers' and 'football.'

They arrested his attention, and he lowered the towel.

'What are you jabbering about?' he asked, in his polite way.

Todd held up the paper.

'This advertisement.'

'What has it to do with me?'

'I thought you might like to play football.'

'What?'

'You see, you won't have any chance in the Remove, and the Upper Fourth, of course, were only making fun of you--'

'Oh, cheese it!'

'But if you can play--'

'Of course I can play!' said Bunter indignantly. 'I'm kept back by sheer jealousy on the footer committee.'

'It is the same with me, though I do not attribute it to jealousy,' said Todd.

'I have a feeling that, given an opportunity, I should shine as a very great footballer. I am kept in the background, I believe, through a misunderstanding on Wharton's part-he does not know what he is losing.' Bunter grunted.

'I should not attribute such a sordid motive as jealousy to Wharton,' went on Todd. 'My Uncle Benjamin always says that one should never attribute bad motives to anyone when it is possible to attribute good ones. You see-'

'Oh, cut the cackle! '

'But certainly Wharton fails to understand. I have no chance of playing for Greyfriars. You have no chance either. It has occurred to me, that being misunderstood and unappreciated at home, we might look further afield.'

'I don't catch on,' said Bunter, puzzled.

'Well, look at this advertisement. As soon as I saw it I thought immediately what a chance it would be.'

'Read it out.'

Todd read out the advertisement in the local Courtfield paper. '"Wanted, players for the Courtfield Rovers team. Average age, fifteen.-Apply, W. Bunter, 10, Oak Lane, Courtfield."'

'By Jove!' said Bunter.

'It struck me that this might be a relation of yours, as the name is the same,' said Todd, looking at him.

Bunter shook his head.

'I haven't any relations in this county at all,' he said. 'My people live a good distance from Greyfriars, and Courtfield is only a couple of miles.'

'H'm! It's not an uncommon name, of course.'

'We're a big family,' said Bunter. 'The original Bunter came over with the Conqueror. That was Sir Jocelyn de Bunter. The family has spread very much. Many of them are titled people-in fact, most of them. I don't suppose this Courtfield Bunter is a relation, as he can't be very well off. All my connections are rich.'

'How nice!' said Todd.

'Yes, I frequently get postal-orders from my rich relations and titled friends,' said Bunter, becoming more genial. 'Speaking of that reminds me that I'm expecting a postal-order this evening. Could you manage a small loan of, say, five shillings till my postal-order comes--'

'I should be very pleased--'

'Hand it over, then--'

'Only I haven't any money,' said Todd. 'If I had any I would lend it to you with pleasure.'

Bunter snorted.

'But about this advertisement,' went on Alonzo. 'They want players for the Courtfield Rovers. Now, Courtfield is only two miles away, and there is a short cut, too. We could get over there easily enough, and if we joined the team--'

Bunter rubbed his fat hands.

'Well, that's not a bad idea,' he agreed. 'It would serve these conceited bounders right if we gave Greyfriars the go-by and joined the Courtfield Rovers.'

'Well, it would be a chance for us.'

'I suppose they'd be glad to have us?' said Bunter. 'We're public school fellows, and they're only village chaps. Besides, this chap, W. Bunter, may turn out to be a relation of mine and I could use my influence.'

'I think we ought to call on him and see.'

'Good! We'll buzz over on bikes to-day.'

'I have no bicycle,' said Todd doubtfully. 'It is not a very long walk.'
Bunter grunted.

'If you think I'm going to tramp three or four miles you're Jolly well mistaken! It's fag enough to ride.'

'But have you a bicycle?'

'I can borrow one, I suppose?' snapped Bunter. 'But--'

Billy Bunter fastened his collar.

'We may as well get off now,' he said.

'I'll have Nugent's bike, and I'll lend you Wharton's.'

'But have you a right to lend Wharton's bike?' asked Todd.

'That's all right. Let's get off.'

And Bunter and Alonzo Todd went downstairs together. And Bunter, fully convinced in his usual way that he would be welcomed with open arms by the Courtfield Rovers, was already swelling with importance, and he was strutting by the time he reached the lower passage.

CHAPTER XV

Borrowing a Bike!

HARRY WHARTON was standing in the doorway, chatting with Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry. The chums of the Remove had been at football practice, but that was over for the day. They were discussing the advisability of 'buzzing over' to Cliff House, on the chance of finding Marjorie Hazeldene at home, and getting tea out somewhere along the shore—a very cheerful way of ending a half-holiday. The pros and cons were being discussed when Bunter and Todd came up. Todd nodded, and went on into the Close, but Bunter stopped to speak to the Removites.

Wharton smiled as he saw him.

'Feeling better for the footer, Bunter?' he asked.

'I'm all right,' grunted the fat junior.

'I was treated very shabbily. I'm not understood at Greyfriars.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I think I understand you pretty well,' said Bob Cherry, 'You're a fat, conceited young bounder. Isn't that about right?'

'Oh, really, Cherry--'

'Better stick to ventriloquism, and leave footer alone,' grinned Nugent.

'You can chuck your voice about, and it's about the only thing you can do. Better leave footer alone.'

Bunter sniffed.

'If I didn't know that was jealousy, Nugent--'

'What?' roared Nugent.

'You know how I play, and--'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Of course, you're all jealous. It's only to be expected. I'm being kept in the dark here, owing to personal envy.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'But I've had enough of it,' said Bunter warmly. 'How I stand you fellows is a mystery to me.'

'And how we stand you, that's another problem that knocks Euclid hollow,' said Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really! Look here, I'm done with Greyfriars! You can go on your knees and beg me to play in the Form eleven if you like, but I won't do it.'

'I don't think we shall come to that.'

'I won't play for the Upper Fourth either.'

'Poor old Temple!'

'Or for the First Eleven, even. If Wingate came to me and asked me to play centre-forward in the First Eleven match I'd—I'd refuse!'

'I can see Wingate doing it. I don't think!'

'There are people elsewhere who can appreciate me,' said Bunter. 'In future I shall play all my football outside Greyfriars.'

'My hat!'

'Other teams may be glad to welcome a good player.'

'Yes, but how would that concern you?' asked Nugent innocently.

Bunter blinked at him.

'Oh, really, Nugent! I'm going to play for the Courtfield Rovers. Once out of this atmosphere of jealousy and personal detraction, you will see how I shall go ahead. I want to borrow your bike, Nugent, to go over to Courtfield now. A relation of mine is captain of the footer team there, and he wants me to play.'

'Gammon!'

'The gammonfulness is terrific,' chimed in Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Look here, will you lend me your bike, Nugent?'

'You'd squash it, old chap. Besides, I want it myself. We're going to ride over to Cliff House in a quarter of an hour from now.'

'Oh, really--'

'Sorry, it can't be did.'

'But I must have a bike,' said Bunter, in an injured tone. 'I suppose you fellows don't want me to fag myself out walking over to Courtfield?'

'Blessed if I care!'

'But, really--'

'Well, we'd better get into our things, if we're going,' said Harry Wharton.

'Perhaps I might hire a bike,' said Bunter. 'I'm expecting a Postal-order this evening. If you chaps could advance me ten bob off it--'

The chaps were already going upstairs, and Bunter's modest request was not even heard. He blinked after them for some moments, and then made his way to the bicycle-shed in a state of suppressed wrath and indignation. Alonzo Todd was already there.

He had taken Wharton's and Nugent's bicycles off the stands, and had them at the door ready. He looked inquiringly at Bunter. 'You have asked them about the machines?' he said.

Bunter nodded.

'It's all right, then?'

'Of course it is,' said Bunter irritably.

'It is very kind of them to lend us the machines,' said Alonzo. 'Perhaps I ought to go and thank Wharton.'

'Oh, rats!'

'My Uncle Benjamin says that appropriate thanks should always be rendered for an obligation received,' said Todd, in his solemn way.

'Blow your Uncle Benjamin!'

'My dear Bunter--'

'Buck up, and let's get the bikes out while they're changing their clothes,' said Bunter. 'We don't want to meet them.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, come on, and don't jaw!'

They wheeled the bikes out, and soon had them in the road outside the school gates. Bunter was feverishly anxious to get off. He knew what would happen if the chums of the Remove caught sight of their machines being raided in that barefaced manner.

That the juniors wanted their machines to use themselves in a short time did not matter at all to Bunter, so long as he succeeded in escaping with them now. He was not accustomed to thinking of later consequences.

'I suppose you can ride?' he said doubtfully, as Todd brought the machine awkwardly into the road.

'Well, as a matter of fact, I am not accustomed to riding a bicycle,' said Todd, 'but I have no doubt I can ride quite easily. It certainly looks very simple.'

Bunter stared at him.

'Do you mean to say you don't cycle?' he demanded.

'Not as yet.'

'You ass! You'll have to learn before you ride, then.'

'Oh, that is all right!'

Bunter snorted.

'You fearful chump! You can't ride without learning,' he yelled. 'You'd better take that bike in, and walk by the short cut, while I ride.'

Todd shook his head.

'Not at all, Bunter. Cycling is perfectly easy. I have seen children of seven and eight on bicycles, and I am nearly fifteen.'

'But--'

'You will see that it is quite simple.'

'Then let me mount first and get away,' said Bunter. 'I'm jolly well not going to have you pitching into me.'

'Oh, I shall not fall over! You simply have to sit squarely on', the seat and strike a balance--'

'You're more likely to strike the road!' grunted Bunter.

'Oh, no; it is quite simple!'

Bunter sniffed, and, having put down Nugent's saddle as low as he could to suit his short legs, he mounted and pedalled away.

Todd wheeled Harry Wharton's handsome machine into the middle of the road, and prepared to mount.

He had seen Harry Wharton mount it often enough by lifting his right leg over the bar and sitting in the saddle quite easily.

Todd saw no reason why he shouldn't do the same. He tried it.

The next moment he was sitting in the road, and the cycle was clanging down beside him. Todd sat in bewilderment.

'How very odd!' he murmured.

He rose and picked up the machine, and rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

Bunter shouted back to him:

'Are you coming, Todd?'

'Yes, I'm coming. I'll overtake you,' shouted Todd.

'All right!'

Todd grasped the machine firmly.

'After all,' he murmured--'after all, perhaps that is the way of mounting that requires practice. Wharton is doubtless an old cyclist. Perhaps I had better mount in the usual way, using the foot-rest.'

Alonzo got behind the bike and leaned over it, grasping the handlebars. Then he put his left foot on the rest projecting from the hub of the rear wheel on the left side of the bicycle.

He remained in that attitude for some minutes, uncertain what to do next. But it was evident that he had to get speed on the bicycle, and then leap forward into the saddle. That was the way he had seen it done, and there was no other way.

He pushed the bike forward, hopping along with his left foot on the rest and his right on the ground.

Thud-thud-thud!

'Dear me!' gasped Alonzo.

He covered about a hundred yards in this way; and then, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, he made the plunge.

He went flying up to land in the saddle.

It was unfortunate that the cycle should have curled up at that moment, but perhaps it was due to the way Alonzo handled it.

What happened Alonzo did not exactly know; but there was a terrific crash and jingle as the bike crashed down in the road, and Alonzo found himself, when his senses cleared, sitting there, with his legs through the bars and a wheel reposing in his lap.

'Dear me!' said Alonzo, gasping. 'How very, very odd!'

CHAPTER XVI

A Shock for Wharton!

IT was some minutes before Alonzo Todd rose from the wreck. He was dusty, and he was aching considerably in several parts of him. He shook himself and dusted himself, and regarded the curled-up bicycle doubtfully. He wondered whether anything was broken. He felt rather broken himself. He blinked up at the road for Bunter, but Bunter was just disappearing. The fat junior did not intend to wait for his unfortunate chum.

'Dear me!' said Todd. He picked up the bicycle.

It looked all right, and, excepting for a few broken spokes, a twisted crank, and a battered mudguard, it was not much injured.

The twist of the crank was not sufficient to stop the pedals, only to give them a curious wobble, and that Todd did not even notice.

'Dear me!' he said. 'There seems to be more in riding a bicycle than I should have suspected merely from observation. I think that perhaps I shall not learn in time to accompany Bunter to Courtfield. It is very unfortunate.'

Bunter was gone. He did not mind going alone to Courtfield, and he did not mean to hang about Greyfriars until Harry Wharton & Co. came to look for their bicycles.

Todd was quite ignorant of the fact that there would shortly be wrathful juniors hunting for jiggers.

'I had better leave going to Courtfield till another time, and get some bicycle practice now, as Wharton has so kindly lent me his machine,' he murmured.

He turned the machine round towards Greyfriars again and essayed to mount.

He hopped along behind the bicycle for some time, and finally made a jump, with the same result as before. The bicycle crashed, and Todd bumped. He sat down for some minutes in a cloud of dust.

'Dear me!' he murmured. 'Who would have imagined that it was so difficult to mount a bicycle? But my Uncle Benjamin says that if at first you don't succeed, you should try again. I shall certainly try again. I really hope that the bicycle will not be injured.'

Todd was very sanguine to hope that, for the machine was already showing signs of damage. But Alonzo was always hopeful.

He rose to his feet, and as he did so a peculiar sound fell upon his ears.

'Haw, haw, haw!' Todd looked round.

A fat, red-faced youth was watching him, and grinning all over his fat, good-humoured face.

'Dear me!' said Todd. 'If you knew my Uncle Benjamin, my young friend, you would learn that it is bad form to laugh at the misfortunes of others.'

'Ha ha, ha! Shall I help 'ee, sir?'

'That is very good of you. If you would kindly hold the bicycle while I get on, I should regard it as a very great obligation.'

The grinning country youth held the bicycle while Todd mounted. He held it firmly enough, and Todd climbed upon it as if it had been a fence, and sat in the saddle. He tried to put his feet through the mudguards and then through the chain, but finally got them upon the pedals.

'Dear me!' said Todd. 'That feels very comfortable. Now, if you would start me a little, my young friend, I think I should get on nicely.'

'Yes, sir.'

The obliging youth ran alongside Todd for some distance, almost as far as the gates of Greyfriars, till he was fairly going.

Todd's feet were going round with the pedals now like clockwork, and as long as the lad was holding him up he felt all right, but as soon as he had no more support, he felt very wrong indeed.

He swayed to one side and then to the other, and the machine went through some really wonderful evolutions without falling over or curling up.

Todd drove away desperately at the pedals. He felt that he could only keep upright by going very fast.

He drove down the road at express speed.

The bike shot first to one side of the road and then to the other, and Todd was in alternate terror of falling into the ditch or crashing into the school wall.

As he came abreast of the open gateway he dragged on the handles desperately, and more by good luck than anything else the machine shot in and dashed up the drive, Todd still pedalling away as if his life depended on it.

There was a yell.

'Look out, you madman!'

Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, jumped aside just in time as the cycle rushed at him.

But Todd paid no heed to his shout. He would have been deaf just then to the voice of the Head himself. Where he was going, or why he was going there, he did not know. He would have given worlds, whole solar systems, in fact, to be off the bicycle. But the only visible way of getting off was by falling, and he did not want that.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he came out of the School House with Wharton and Nugent and Hurree Singh, and started to make his way over towards the bicycle-shed.

'Look there!'

'Todd!'

'Alonzo!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The juniors yelled with laughter as they watched the wonderful evolutions of the Duffer of Greyfriars.

Todd had evidently lost all control of the bicycle.

Why he did not fall off was a mystery. But, as sometimes happens in such cases, the rider, in expectation of a fall every moment, remained in the saddle, and the machine rushed on like a thing of life.

'Help!' gasped Alonzo faintly.

Harry Wharton rushed down the steps of the House; but the unhappy cyclist had taken a fresh turn now, and was rushing away from him at top speed.

The bicycle turned upon the grass, and Alonzo went off through the doctor's flower-beds, and a yell of laughter followed him from all quarters.

'My hat!' gasped Nugent. 'He's in for it now!'

'Look out!'

'Mind your eye, Todd!'

'He'll be in the wall in a minute!'

'He'll be killed!'

'He'll smash his machine!'

'Great Scott!'

'The Great Scottfulness is terrific!'

The juniors watched Alonzo breathlessly.

The cyclist left the flower-beds, and came careering down the drive again. There were a dozen juniors in pursuit by this time, but Todd easily outdistanced them all. Wharton rushed into his way; but the

bicycle, as if endowed with an uncanny cunning all of its own, dodged him.

Crash!

The catastrophe had come at last.



'Oh! It's not my bike—it's yours!' Alonzo cheerfully told Harry

Todd was down, sprawling in the grass, and the cycle was curled up, the front wheel twisted almost out of recognition, the chain broken, the mudguards folded up like paper.

'Phew! What a smash!' gasped Nugent. 'I'm sorry for Todd if that's a new bicycle of his. I didn't know he had one.'

'The sorrowfulness is terrific.'

Wharton reached Todd. He helped him up; but the Duffer of Greyfriars sat in the grass, grunting and gasping. 'W-w-w-what has happened?' he exclaimed.

'Ha, ha, ha! You have!' roared Nugent.

'I-I have fallen down, I think.'

'Goon!'

'I-I am somewhat hurt.'

'Well, you couldn't expect to bump down like that without getting hurt,' said Bulstrode. 'It's a wonder you were not killed.'

'Ow! I have an ache in several places. I trust my legs are not broken.'

'They're all right,' said Harry Wharton. 'You'll come round, but I don't know about the bike. That looks rather rocky.'

'The rockyfulness is terrific.'

'Oh, it'll mend!' said Bob Cherry.

'I hope so.'

'Yes, I truly hope so,' said Alonzo Todd. 'It will be a great misfortune if the bicycle cannot be repaired.'

'What an ass you were to practise on a new bike! And why didn't you get someone to hold you?'

'I thought it was easy.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The juniors roared.

'I'm so sorry,' repeated Todd, blinking at Harry Wharton. 'The machine certainly seems to have been damaged.'

'Never mind! We'll all buckle to and help mend it,' said Harry.

'You are very good--'

'Not at all. We'll all lend a hand.'

'I mean, you are very good to take it so cheerfully.' Wharton looked puzzled.

'I don't understand,' he said. 'Of course, I am sorry to see you smash your bike up in this way, but I don't see any particular reason not to be cheerful.'

'Eh? It is not my bike.'

'Not your bike!'

'Certainly not.'

Wharton gasped.

'You don't mean to say you borrowed a bike to ride on, you duffer, when you can't ride?' he exclaimed.

'You see-'

'Ha, ha, ha! Whose bike is it?'

'Yours!'

Wharton almost staggered.

'Mine?'

'Yes; certainly.'

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors. Wharton's face was a study.

CHAPTER XVII

Alonzo is Sorry!

HARRY WHARTON did not recover his breath for some moments. He simply gasped, looking at the Duffer of Greyfriars as if he would eat him.

'My bike,' he gasped at last-'my bike! That wreck is my bike?'

'Certainly. I'm so sorry.'

'You mean to say you've been riding my bike, when you can't ride, and you've twisted it up into scrap-iron in this way?' roared Wharton.

'You see--'

'My only hat,' gasped Bob Cherry, 'what princely cheek!'

'The cheekfulness is terrific.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You lent it to me, you know,' said Todd, blinking at Wharton. 'I'm so sorry this has happened.'

'I lent it you?'

'Yes; to go over to Courtfield with Bunter. Bunter had Nugent's bike, and I had yours,' explained the Duffer.

'Bunter's got my bike?' roared Nugent.

'Yes; you lent it to him.'

'Lent it him? Lend it to that fat oyster! I didn't.'

'Dear me! Bunter must have deliberately deceived me.'

'You cheerful chump!' shouted Wharton. 'Do you think I should lend my bike to a chap who couldn't ride? Oh, you dangerous ass!'

'I'm so sorry.'

Alonzo staggered to his feet.

He was really sorry, and he looked very distressed. That, however, did not mend Harry Wharton's bike, and was not likely to do so. Sorrow was all very well, but it could not undo the damage that was done.

'My hat,' exclaimed Wharton, 'I shall have to squash him!'

There's nothing else for it. Put up your hands, Todd.'

'Eh?'

'Put up your hands, you chump!'

Alonzo innocently held his hands in the air.

'Oh, certainly!' he said. 'I am willing to do anything to oblige you, Wharton, especially after the damage I have inadvertently caused to your bicycle. But will you explain in what way it will assist you for me to put up my hands?'

The Removites yelled.

Wharton, angry and exasperated as he was, could not help laughing, and he dropped his hands to his sides.

'Oh, you chump!' he exclaimed. 'You're not worth licking. You want chaining up, that's what you want.'

'My dear Wharton--'

Harry walked to his bicycle and stood looking down on it. He was laughing, but he felt inclined to cry, too. It had been a new machine that summer, and now it was a wreck. Careful and patient repair would do much, but it was doubtful if that jigger would ever be quite the same jigger again.

'I'm so sorry,' said Alonzo.

'Oh, cheese it!' said Wharton rather roughly; and he had plenty of excuse for being rough just then.

'That's all right.'

'But I assure you--'

'Oh, don't bother!'

'My Uncle Benjamin says--'

'Cheese it!' roared Wharton. 'Haven't you done enough damage, without springing your Uncle Benjamin on me, too?'

'My dear fellow--'

'Buzz off, hang you! '

And Alonzo sadly buzzed off. He was very much distressed, but it was evidently useless to stay and reason with Harry Wharton just then.

The juniors dispersed, laughing. Todd's first experience with the bicycle seemed very funny to all but the owner of the machine. Harry Wharton, with help from his chums, carried the machine away to the bicycle-shed.

'Looks like our ride to Cliff House being off,' Bob Cherry remarked.

'Well, I can't ride this, that's certain,' Harry said ruefully, 'and Bunter's got Frank's machine.'

'That fat young scoundrel! He's the cause of this.'

'Always Bunter.'

'We'll smash him when he comes in.'

'Yes, rather! But this machine--'

'I'll help you mend it,' said Nugent. 'Bob and Inky can go over to Cliff House.'

Bob Cherry coloured for a moment guiltily. He would have been very glad to go over and see Marjorie on his 'lonesome' but he heroically thrust the temptation from him.'

'I won't go,' he said; 'I'll stay and help.'

'Same here,' said Hurree Singh. 'The samefulness is terrific.'

Wharton nodded.

'All right,' he said; 'let's wire in.'

And the idea of a ride out being given up, they set to work on the damaged bicycle. They were all handy fellows and knew a great deal about bikes and machinery generally, and they made good progress. Mark Linley and Tom Brown happened into the shed, and found them at work, and joined in.

It was some time before Alonzo Todd learned what was on; but as soon as he knew that Wharton was repairing his damaged bike, he felt that he could do no less than give up his leisure time in helping him. That was the least he could do, and he hurried off to the bicycle-shed to offer his services.

The chums of the Remove stared at him as he looked diffidently into the shed.

'I want to help you, Wharton,' he began.

Wharton grunted.

'It's all right; I've got enough help.'

'But I--'

'Get out, old man! That's the best thing you can do for me.'

'But my Uncle Benjamin always said that I ought to be useful and obliging,' Todd explained, 'and I was really the cause of this damage to your machine, you know.'

'Buzz off!'

'I should very much like to help. My Uncle Benjamin--'

'Did your Uncle Benjamin ever tell you that there was a time to bother and a time not to bother?' demanded Bob Cherry.

Todd rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

'N-n-no; I don't think I quite remember my Uncle Benjamin telling me that,' he replied.

'Then he is an avuncular ass, and he has neglected your education!' said Bob. 'How long will it take you to get outside this shed?'

'Eh? Only a few seconds, I suppose,' said Alonzo, looking puzzled.

'Then buck up,' said Bob Cherry, taking up a spanner. 'In five seconds I'm going to chuck this spanner, and if you're pot gone--'

'My dear Cherry--'

Bob Cherry's hand swung into the air. Todd blinked at him for a moment, and then made a bound through the doorway.

The next moment the heavy spanner crashed on the wall. Bob had hurled it, missing the spot where Alonzo had stood by a good three feet, but Alonzo did not know that.

'Oh, dear!' he murmured. 'How very savage of Cherry! I think that perhaps I had better not press my services upon them at present. I will try and find some other way of making it up to Wharton.'

And Todd drifted away, turning over in his mind various schemes for 'making it up' to Harry Wharton; and in his perplexity he had recourse to Bulstrode and Skinner for advice, and they gave him counsel.

CHAPTER XVIII

Bunter Means to be Gracious!

BILLY BUNTER pedalled on towards Courtfield, leaving Todd to fight out his desperate struggle with the bicycle. He did not pause for a moment. He knew that if Nugent discovered him in possession of that machine there would be trouble. And he didn't want to miss the interview with W. Bunter, the captain of the Courtfield Rovers. The more Billy thought about that matter, the more he saw what a brilliant prospect was opening before him. His footer had been laughed at at Greyfriars. Well, they should see that others could appreciate it. If he could make no impression upon the Greyfriars fellows—well, there were others. At Greyfriars there was never any difficulty in filling up an eleven. The difficulty was in selecting from the crowd of candidates; but at Courtfield, in the local team, it was evidently different. The Rovers were players short for the season, and they were advertising in the local paper for recruits—a usual step on the part of junior clubs in want of members. They would not be able to pick and choose, like Wharton, Bunter thought; and he thought, too, that they would probably be glad of having a public school chap in their ranks. Bunter was already swelling with snobbish importance on that score. He was preparing to descend upon the Courtfield fellows like a great noble upon his retainers, and to treat them with condescending politeness. Of course, they would be glad to have him in their team. Probably the other Bunter would resign in his favour and make him captain. He would then challenge the Greyfriars Remove, and lick them on their own ground.

At that dazzling prospect Bunter grunted with satisfaction.

He reached Courtfield, and inquired his way to Oak Lane, which he found to be a quiet street on the outskirts of the village.

The house he was seeking was one of a row of small dwellings with large gardens. There were children playing in the street and gardens, and, small as the houses were, they looked cosy and comfortable. Bunter could see that they were inhabited by a good class of artisans. He stopped at No. 10 and wheeled the machine into the front garden and leaned it against the fence.

This proceeding was watched with considerable interest by several pairs of eyes at the front parlour window, but Bunter was too short-sighted to notice them.

He walked up the little gravel path to the house, and gave a knock and a ring that resounded through the building. That was Bunter's way of announcing that a very important person had arrived.

The door was opened very quickly by a lad of about Bunter's age. He was much better built than Bunter, however, and had a frank and cheerful face and quick eyes.

He had been watching Bunter from the parlour window, and was at the door as soon as the fat junior thundered at it.

Bunter blinked at him.

'Master Bunter live here?' he asked.

'Yes. I'm Walter Bunter.'

'Good! My name's Bunter, too—William George Bunter.'

'Oh!'

'I'm from Greyfriars.'

'The school near Friardale?'

'That's it.'

'Yes?' said Walter Bunter.

'I've seen your advertisement in the Courtfield paper,' explained Bunter. 'I've called about that.'

'Oh, I see! Will you come in, please?'

'Certainly,' said Bunter, in his lordly way.

The lad showed him into the parlour, which opened off the narrow passage-or hall, as the builder would have called it. The parlour was quietly furnished--Windsor chairs and a table with an art pot and a dead plant, and a piano that was seldom opened.

There were two other lads in the little room, both very plainly dressed and evidently lads in employment in the village. Their round, red faces were in healthy contrast to the fat, overfed visage of Billy Bunter. They looked at Bunter civilly enough as he came in. The fat junior blinked at them through his big spectacles.

'This is Bunter, of Greyfriars,' said Walter Bunter. 'He's come about our notice in the *Courtfield News*.'

'I'm thinking of playing for your team,' said Bunter. The Courtfield boys looked at him.

The fat, unwieldy body, the short, thick legs, the big spectacles, the overfed aspect generally of the redoubtable Bunter did not impress them very favourably as to his abilities on the football-field.

'Oh!' said Walter. 'Well, these chaps are members of the team--Porter, half-back, and Graham, our secretary. If you can play we should be glad to have you; but excuse me, are you playing for Greyfriars?'

Bunter shook his head. 'Not at present.'

'Sit down, will you?' said Walter Bunter, considerably puzzled by his visitor. 'I suppose you are a footballer?'

'Well, I should say so,' said Billy Bunter. 'I have played for--oh, years! I belong to the Remove at Greyfriars. The Remove is the Lower Fourth Form, you know. But I don't suppose you chaps know much about public schools.'

The chaps exchanged glances. Walter compressed his lips a little.

'No,' he said quietly; 'we don't.'

'No; I thought you wouldn't. Well, I'm in the Remove, and I've been kept out of the Form team by jealousy. You know how much jealousy there is in football matters, I suppose?'

Walter nodded without speaking.

'I've played for the Upper Fourth there, but-but I didn't quite like the team. I was badly treated. I thought I'd like to play for Courtfield. You fellows would naturally be glad to have a gentleman in your club.'

At this tactful speech the three boys turned red; but Bunter blinked at them with much self-satisfaction, as if he had said quite an ordinary thing.

It was some moments before Walter replied. He was struggling with a desire to take his visitor by the collar and sling him out of the house.

'I suppose that would be natural,' he remarked.

'Quite natural,' said Porter, between his teeth. 'It's really very kind of our friend to take notice of us in this way'

'So kind,' murmured Graham.

Bunter beamed upon them.

'You see, I mean to be kind,' he said. 'I'm not appreciated at Greyfriars, and I've come over here. Of course, I don't deny it's a bit of a come-down for a chap like me to play in a working-class club. I've never done such a thing before.'

'No; I imagine you haven't.'

'But there's no pride about me,' said Bunter, feeling that he was getting along very nicely with the Courtfield fellows. 'Why, there's a chap at our school--a chap named Linley. He used to work in a factory, and he came to Greyfriars on a scholarship, you know. He was a factory hand-fellow

who worked for his living, you know, and never had any grub unless he earned it himself. Awful, isn't it? Well, I take a lot of notice of that chap-quite a lot.'

'That's kind of you,' said Porter.

'I mean to treat you fellows in the same way,' said Bunter graciously. There's no side about me. My idea is, that a real gentleman can do practically anything, without danger of being misunderstood. Don't you think so?'

'I haven't thought the matter out,' said Walter.

'Well, that's my view. Lots of fellows at Greyfriars may sneer at me, and say I'm associating with people below me in station. I don't care. It's their own fault, anyway, for keeping me out of my proper place in the team.'

'You must be a very popular chap at your school, I should think,' remarked Graham quietly.

Bunter blinked at him.

'Oh, yes; I've got lots of influence, you know. But about this footer business-I suppose I can sign into your club?'

'I hardly think so,' said Walter, with a gleam in his eyes that was quite lost upon Billy Bunter. 'You see, we're working-class chaps, and hardly suited to associate with you.'

Hardly!' said Porter.

'Not at all,' said Graham. 'I should be very sorry to think we were.'

'Well, I like to see a chap conscious of-of social differences' said Billy, with a nod. 'But you needn't carry it too far. So long as you recognise that I am a gentleman, and have to be treated with respect, it will be all right. Of course, I should allow no familiarity. But otherwise I intend to treat you quite as if you were like-well, like myself.'

'But we are not like you at all.'

'I know you're not; but I mean to take you up and be decent to you,' said Bunter. 'Now I want to join your team.'

'I'm sorry, but--'

'You're not going to let a chance slip like that. Think what a standing it will give you, to have a public-school fellow playing in your club!'

'I'm sorry--'

'You're not going to refuse?' asked Bunter, with his eyes wide open in astonishment.

Walter nodded.

'Yes, we're going to refuse,' he said.

'But-but why--'

'Well, you see,' explained Walter, 'you are kind enough to say that we're fit for you to associate with-but we can't quite think that you're fit for us to associate with. There's the rub!'

'That's it,' said Porter.

'Exactly,' assented Graham.

'Look here--' began Bunter.

'If you weren't in my house, I'd take you by the scruff of the neck, and land you in the road,' said Walter. 'I don't want to handle a fellow who came here not expecting it, though. But you'd better go.'

'But--'

'Better get out,' said Graham.

'Look here, you rotten cads--'

Walter threw the door open.

Bunter blinked at him.

'That's the way out,' he said.

'You won't sign me in the club?' he exclaimed.

'No.'

'You-you refuse to take a public-school chap-you working-class bounders!'

Porter clenched his fists. Walter pushed him back.

'Don't touch him,' he said.

'I'm not going to stand--'

'Let him go. He's not worth a kick.'

'But--'

'You'd better go,' said Walter.

Billy Bunter blinked at him savagely. 'You-you blessed low cads--' he exclaimed.

'I'm going to smash him,' roared Porter, making a rush at Billy Bunter. The fat junior hopped out of the room with wonderful quickness.



Walter held his irate friend back, while Bunter scooted out of the house, and slammed the door behind him.

With the belief strong upon him that Porter was pursuing him, Billy Bunter raced down the path, grabbed the bicycle, and dragged it into the road, and mounted. He went pedalling off at top speed, and not till he was half-way to Greyfriars did he venture to slacken.

CHAPTER XIX

Bunter Makes Terms!

'THERE'S Bunter!'

'Collar him!'

'But where's the bike?' said Nugent.

'The young boulder's on foot!'

'We'll soon make him tell!'

The chums of the Remove had finished work on Wharton's machine, and had succeeded in restoring it to something like its old self. They were returning to the School House when they caught sight of Billy Bunter. The fat junior was rolling up the drive to the house, but he was on foot, and there was no sign of Nugent's bicycle.

The juniors ran towards him.

At the sight of them Bunter halted, with a sickly smile upon his face. He never thought of consequences till they arrived; but they had arrived now.

'You young sweep!' exclaimed Wharton. 'You told Todd he could have my bike, and he's smashed it up.'

'Oh, really--'

'Well, didn't you?'

'Todd may have understood so,' said Bunter cautiously; 'all I said to him was that it was all right.'

'And you've had my bike, when you knew I wanted to go out on it!' exclaimed Nugent.

'Well, I had to go over to Courtfield--most important--ow! Leggo! D-d--don't shake me like that, Nugent! You'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken, you'll have to pay for them, so there.'

'You--you oyster--'

'I don't think you ought to call me names, Nugent, because I'm going to play footer for an outside club,' said Bunter in an injured tone. 'You can't say that I didn't offer my services to Greyfriars first--both to the Remove and the Upper Fourth.'

'I'm-going-to-bump-you-for-taking-my-bike!' enunciated Nugent.

'Oh, really--'

'Collar him, you chaps!'

Bunter was collared by his four limbs, and swung into the air.

He was not a light weight, and it was as much as the chums of the Remove could do.

'Hold on!' gasped Bunter.

'Now, then--ready--'

'The readyfulness is terrific!'

'Hold on! Yaroooh! You'll never find Nugent's bike!'

'What!'

'I'm sorry it's lost, but--'

'My bike lost!' roared Nugent.

'I'm sincerely sorry, but--'

The chums of the Remove set Bunter upon his feet again. They stood round him and stared at him speechlessly. The fat junior readjusted his collar.

'You don't mean to say that you've lost my bike?' asked Nugent, holding himself in with great effort.

'Not exactly lost it,' said Bunter. 'I've left it outside.'

'Outside! Where?'

'In the fields.'

'Why?'

'Well, I know where it is, and I can tell you exactly how to find it,' said Bunter, blinking at the chums of the Remove. 'But-I shan't unless--' 'Unless what?'

'Unless you make it pax.' The juniors gasped. They understood. This was Bunter's way of escaping punishment. Nugent turned crimson with anger, and laid violent hands upon the fat junior. 'You fat young villain, I'll--'

'Ow! Yow! Yaroooh!'

'Where's my bike?'

'Yowp!'

'Where is it, you young scoundrel?'

'Yaroooh!'

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

'It's no good, Nugent!' he exclaimed. 'We shall have to let him off if we want to get the bike in before locking-up!'

'I won't let him off!' roared Nugent. 'I'm going to lick the cheeky young villain!'

'Well, I'm sincerely sorry!' said Bunter. 'If the bike stays out all night, it may get damaged by the dew, and if it rains--'

Nugent clenched his hands hard. The coolness of the Owl of the Remove was very hard to stand.

'There isn't much time before locking-up, either,' continued Bunter. 'Of course it doesn't matter to me. I don't care. It's not my bike!'

Frank Nugent breathed hard.

'I'll-I'll let you off this time,' he said. 'Go and get the bike in.'

'Oh, I say, you know! I'm tired. One of you fellows had better go and fetch it,' said Bunter. 'I'll tell you just where it is!'

Nugent pointed to the clock tower.

'I give you exactly five minutes to have it here,' he said. 'If the bike isn't here by that time, I'll get a cricket stump and give you such a licking as you've never dreamed about-honour bright!'

Bunter snorted.

He knew Nugent meant business this time, and he scuttled off towards the gates. The chums of the Remove followed him to the gateway. They looked after him as he went out into the road.

'My hat!' said Wharton.

The bicycle was leaning in the hedge opposite the school gates-perfectly plain to anyone who had gone near it. Bunter had not left it at a distance, as the chums had supposed; he didn't want to risk a long walk. He wheeled the bicycle in with a sullen and injured air. The chums watched him in silence. Their feelings were too deep for words.

'I suppose you're going to put it away,' said Bunter.

'I'm not,' said Nugent, with a deep breath. 'You're going to do that, Billy, and you're going to clean off every speck of dust and every stain-and I'm going to stand over you with a cricket-stump while you do it.'

'Oh, really, Nugent--'

'Buck up!' said Frank curtly.

'But, I-I can't--'

'Will you fetch me a cricket-stump, Inky, while I keep an eye on Bunter?' asked Frank.

'With pleasurefulness, my worthy chum!'

'Hold on!' gasped Bunter. 'You-you needn't trouble, you black beast; I'll do it!'

For an hour Bunter was kept fagging away in the bike-shed cleaning the bicycle, and when he had finished he staggered away exhausted. He pathetically informed the chums of the Remove that a bit of a feed at the school shop would revive him-a suggestion which was greeted with heartless laughter.

CHAPTER XX

Early in the Morning!

ALONZO TODD had been waiting for Bunter to come in but Bunter had been busily occupied, and the Duffer of Greyfriars did not meet him until they went up to the dormitory. In the Remove dorm, Alonzo tapped the fat junior on the shoulder.

Bunter Jerked round.

'What are you jabbering at me for, you ass?' he exclaimed.

'My dear Bunter--'

'You nearly punctured my shoulder, you chump!'

'I wanted to know how you got on at Courtfield ' said Alonzo patiently. I

'I'm so sorry I was unable to come with you. Wharton's bicycle broke down. Did you get on all right with the Courtfield Rovers?'

'First rate!' said Bunter, with a defiant blink round at the Removites, who were listening with interest.

'You have joined the team?'

'Certainly! That's what I went over for, wasn't it?'

'Oh! I didn't know you were certain of joining.'

'Rot! Of course I was certain. They could see by my mere look what kind of a footballer I should make.'

'Do you mean to say you've been let into the team?' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Of course.'

'What team is it?'

'The Courtfield Rovers.'

'Never heard of them-but they must be a pretty rocky team to take in a fellow like you,' Said Bob, with a shake of the head.

'As a matter of fact, I've been offered the captaincy,' said Bunter, whose vivid imagination generally outran his facts.

There was a roar of laughter.

'Captain Bunter!' roared Bulstrode.

'Oh, my hat!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bunter blinked round at the laughs.

'Have you accepted the position?' asked Nugent, with a grin.

'Yes, I have.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter grunted and kicked off his boots. Not a fellow in the dormitory, with the possible exception of Alonzo Todd, believed his statement. Bunter's yarns were too well known.

But a peculiar idea was already in Bunter's mind. The name of the Rovers captain was the same as his, and it had occurred to the fat junior to make capital out of that. Bunter was not clever, but he was cunning.

'Oh, all right,' he said. 'You can cackle if you like, but you'll see.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You don't seriously expect us to believe that you're taken on as a footer captain, Bunter?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'Well, you'll see.'

'When are you going to play?' asked Tom Brown.

'Every Saturday afternoon.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'There will be reports of the matches in the local paper,' said Bunter, with dignity. 'You can read them. I suppose seeing is believing.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Dear me!' said Todd. 'I suppose it is true, as Bunter says so. I suppose you will put me in the team, Bunter?'

'Certainly not,' said Bunter. 'I'm not going to have any Remove fellows. Besides, you're no good.'

'My dear Bunter--'

'A footer captain has to be careful, you see--'

A yell of laughter interrupted Bunter and he did not finish.

Wingate came in to see lights out, and the juniors tumbled into bed.

After the captain of Greyfriars had gone, Alonzo Todd lay awake while the rest of the Greyfriars juniors were composing themselves to sleep. Todd's bed was next to Bulstrode's, and as the sound of talking died away in the dormitory, and sleep descended the Duffer of Greyfriars whispered to his neighbour.

'I say, Bulstrode.' Bulstrode grunted. 'Bulstrode, are you asleep?'

'Eh-what?'

'You said five o'clock, didn't you?'

'Eh? Yes. Groo! Go to sleep!'

'You are quite sure Wharton--'

'Shut up!'

'But--'

'Whisper, you ass, if you must jaw,' said Bulstrode.

'Oh, all right!' said Alonzo, lowering his voice. 'Wharton has said nothing to me on the subject.'

'That's all right-he told me.'

'You are sure he wants to be awakened at five?'

'Quite sure.'

'But it is very odd--'

'Look here,' whispered Bulstrode. 'You said that you wanted to make it up to Wharton for busting his bike--'

'Oh, certainly!'

'He particularly wants to be called at five in the morning to go out bathing.'

'It is very late in the season for bathing.'

'Well, it's his own look-out about that. He said to me, almost with tears in his eyes, that his health depended on getting an early morning bathe, and that he never could wake up. He said that if he only had a chum who would throw some cold water over him at five in the morning, everything in the garden would be lovely. No good shaking him; the idea was to squeeze a wet sponge over his face and wake him up that way. He said it had a bracing effect.'

'I should think it very unpleasant.'

'Well, tastes differ, you know.'

'I suppose so.'

'But if you don't want to take the trouble--'

'Oh, it isn't that. My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to take any amount of trouble for fellows I like, and I like Wharton very much. But it is a little odd that he should not mention it himself.'

'Oh, he's so unselfish, you know! The idea of a fellow staying awake to call him wouldn't suit him at all. In fact, he wouldn't hear of such a thing.'

'I shall do so, however, in order to compensate him for breaking his bicycle. I feel that I owe him something.'

'That's right.'

'My Uncle Benjamin--'

'Exactly! Good-night!'

'My Uncle Benjamin says--'

'Good-night!'

'Uncle Benjamin--'

Snore!

Alonzo gave it up.

Bulstrode was soon asleep, and so was the rest of the dormitory with the exception of Todd. There was no doubt that Todd was a most unselfish fellow. He would do anything for anybody; generally, it is true, with the most unfortunate results.

Alonzo sat up in bed, with his bedclothes tucked round him, blinking into the gloom. Alonzo fully intended to keep awake till five in the morning to wake Wharton up at that hour, in the bracing manner suggested by Bulstrode.

Alonzo found the task difficult. In spite of himself, he would nod and nod. He dropped right off to sleep once, and woke with a start. He had been asleep about two minutes-but it might have been hours. He listened anxiously for a clock but none was to be heard. He struck a match and consulted his watch. He wondered whether it was past five in the morning. It was a quarter to eleven.

'Oh, dear!' murmured Todd. The dormitory was terribly still. Only a quarter to eleven.

More than six hours yet to the time he was to call Wharton.

Todd wished he had an alarm-clock, and mentally resolved to buy one on the morrow. That, however, would not assist him that night; he had to stay awake.

He began to repeat the multiplication table, and then to mentally recite poetry, to occupy his mind and keep himself awake.

His drowsy brain soon had them in a tangle, and he found himself sleepily murmuring:

'On Linden when the sun was low, twice two were four and three were six, and dark as winter was the flow of three times twelve and two times three.'

Naturally enough he soon slid from that to sound sleep. Alonzo had meant to keep awake; the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. He dropped his chin upon his knees as he sat hunched up in bed and snored.

Hours passed.

Alonzo slept, and dreamed-and in his dreams he was haunted by a guilty consciousness of the fact that he ought to be awake.

He awoke at last with a jump.

The bedclothes had slipped from his body, and he was shivering with cold.

'Groo!' murmured Alonzo. Then he sneezed.

The hour came booming from the clock-tower. One, two, three, four, five! Five strokes!

'Oh, dear!' murmured Alonzo. 'How fortunate it is that I woke up! This is the time that Wharton wants to be called. Groo! How cold it is!'

Alonzo scrambled out of bed.

He was catching a cold, if he had only known it; but even if he had known it, that would not have prevented him from being obliging.

He stepped to the washstand, and groped for the jug. His hands pushed against it and sent it rocking, and a splash of cold water came over Alonzo's pyjamas, and he gasped. He found the sponge, and dipped it in the jug, and filled it as full as it would hold with cold water.

Then he stepped towards Wharton's bed.

He knew which bed it was; he could find it easily enough in the dark. A glimmer was coming in, too, at the high windows of the dormitory.

Todd just made out Wharton's calm, clear-cut face on the pillow.

He lifted the full sponge directly over the sleeping face, and squeezed it with both hands.

CHAPTER XXI

A Roland for Oliver!

HARRY WHARTON started out of slumber with a wild yell.

A shower of icy water had descended upon him, and the shock woke him up instantly.

He opened his eyes, to have them flooded with water; and then his mouth, and that was also filled.

He yelled and choked, and sat up in bed, hitting out blindly.

'Ow!' gasped Alonzo.

Wharton's fist caught him on the chest, and he staggered back from the bed, and fell backwards upon the next one, and flopped upon Nugent.

Wharton's yell had awakened Frank, and he was starting up in bed, just in time to meet the falling Alonzo. Their heads crashed together with a ringing crash.

'Oh!' shrieked Nugent.

'Ah!' gasped Alonzo.

He slid to the floor. Nugent pressed his hand to his ringing, buzzing head, wondering what had happened.

Wharton sat in bed, drenched with water.

'Oh!' groaned Nugent. 'What's that?'

'What's what?'

'Somebody's hit me on the head with something awfully hard,' moaned Frank. 'I'm nearly stunned. It wasn't wood; it was too hard for wood. Some idiot is playing pranks with a lump of iron.'

'Ow!' groaned Todd. 'It was my head.'

'Your head?'

'Yes. It knocked against yours when Wharton pushed me over.'

'Todd!' ejaculated Wharton.

'Ow! I am somewhat hurt. It was very thoughtless of you to strike out in that exceedingly irrational manner, Wharton.'

'You utter ass! Did you throw this water over me?' roared Wharton.

'I squeezed the sponge over you, certainly.'

Wharton did not reply. He scrambled out of bed, found the sponge, collared Alonzo, and proceeded to squeeze cold water over him. The Duffer of Greyfriars grunted and gasped, and struggled in the muscular grip of the captain of the Remove in vain.

'There!' gasped Wharton at last, when Todd was smothered with water, and wet all over. 'There! That will teach you not to play practical jokes on chaps in the middle of the night.'

'Oh!' gasped Alonzo. 'Ow! Groo! I wasn't playing practical jokes. Ow!'

'You ass!' shouted Wharton. 'What were you doing, then? Did you think you would please me by throwing cold water over me?'

'Ow! Yes.'

'My hat!' ejaculated Bob Cherry. 'Toddy has awfully queer ideas about pleasing people.'

'Wharton wanted to be woke up-'

'What!'

'And he prefers being awakened in that manner,' groaned Alonzo. 'I thought it was very odd, and I told Bulstrode so, but it's Wharton's own business, I suppose, if he prefers it.'

'You-you unspeakable chump!' gasped Harry. 'Do you mean to say that Bulstrode told you that, and you believed it?'

'My dear Wharton--'

'Bulstrode! Bulstrode!'

The Remove bully did not reply. He thought it wiser to be fast asleep, under the circumstances.

'Bulstrode!' roared Wharton.

The whole dormitory was awake now, and there was a buzz of voices, and Bulstrode could hardly pretend to be slumbering. He affected to yawn, and sat up in bed.



'Eh? What? Did anybody call?' he asked.

'Yes, I did.'

'What's the row about?'

'Todd says you told him--'

'Oh, Todd!'

'My dear Bulstrode, you certainly told me--'

'Oh, you've been dreaming,' said Bulstrode; 'I haven't told you anything. Go to bed.'

'But you told me--'

'Ow! My head!' growled Nugent. 'It will ache for days. I wonder if we could hire somebody to take Todd into a corner and kill him?'

'My dear Nugent--'

Wharton took the jug from his washstand. He knew now how matters lay, and he did not mean Bulstrode to get off scot-free.

He strode towards the Remove bully's bed with the jug. 'You've got awfully curious ideas of practical jokes,' he remarked. 'Drenching a fellow in bed may be funny, but there's two ways of looking at it. One is when another chap's drenched, and the other way is--this.'

Splash!

The contents of the water-jug swooped down upon Bulstrode. The Remove bully gave a fearful yell and leaped up.

'Oh! Ow! Gerrooh!'

'How do you like it yourself?'

'Ow! Yaroooh! Groo!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Wharton went back to his washstand, and towelled his face and head. Bulstrode grabbed a towel and followed his example. But Bulstrode was the wetter of the two, and his bed was drenched. It was impossible to sleep in that bed again that night.

'Oh, dear,' said Alonzo, 'I feel very wet! I am afraid I am catching a cold too. Tsoo--atchoo--tsoo!'

He crept back into bed, and tucked his clothes round him.

Bulstrode felt his bed, but it was swimming with water.

'Look here, I'm not going to get into that bed, and catch my death of cold,' he shouted.

'Sleep on the floor, then,' said Tom Brown.

'You ought to draw it mild in your jokes on the Duffer. It's going too far.'

'Oh, rot! Bunter!'

Bunter snored.

'I want your bed, Bunter. You can turn in with Todd.'

Bunter snored still more emphatically. But Bulstrode soon stopped his snoring. He seized the fat junior and rolled him out of bed.

Bunter roared.

'Oh, really, Bulstrode, I'm asleep--I-I mean I'm not awake--that is to say--ow-ow! Lemme alone! You're not going to have my bed.'

'You can have mine,' said Bulstrode, slipping into Bunter's warm bed.

'Yow! It's wet!'

'Turn in with Todd, then.'

'Yow! Wharton, make him get out of my bed.'

Wharton had just settled himself comfortably in his own. He laughed.

'Don't be an ass, Bunt. He can't sleep in a soaking wet bed.'

Don't be selfish. It's only kind of you to give up your bed to a chap. Todd's Uncle Benjamin would tell you so in a minute.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blow Todd's Uncle Benjamin!' growled Billy Bunter. 'I'm not going to be done out of my bed. You ought--'

'Rats! You're a giddy football captain and you've done with the Remove--you said so yourself. You'd better go for Bulstrode and lick him.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bunter snorted, and rolled away to Snoop's bed.

'I suppose I shall have to come in with you, Snoop,' he said.

'I suppose you won't,' said Snoop promptly. 'I'm not going to have a fat porpoise in my bed, if I know it.'

'But--'

'Go to Todd.'

'But he's got a cold, and--'

'Well, you're not going to sleep in here,' said Snoop. 'There's no room. If you get near me I'll land out with my foot.'

'I say, Skinner, I think I'll come in with you.'

'Something wrong with your thinker, then,' grinned Skinner.

'You won't.'

'Look here--'

'Buzz off! I've got a boot here.'

'I'll sleep with you if you like, Russell.'

'I don't like,' said Russell.

'I say, Lacy--'

'Oh, go and eat coke!'

'I suppose I shall have to turn in with you, Todd,' grumbled Bunter.

'I don't like the idea,' said Todd. 'You are very fat, and there is hardly room, and you are very selfish, too, and will take all the bedclothes, I am sure. But my Uncle Benjamin always says that one should be kind even to selfish and unpleasant people, so you can get in if you like, Bunter.'

And Bunter grunted and got in.

CHAPTER XXII

Alonzo Catches a Cold!

'ATCHOO! Choo-oo!'

That was Alonzo Todd's first remark in the morning, as he sat up in bed.

'Choo-choo! Atchoo!'

Todd sat and sneezed, and sneezed, and sneezed.

'Oh, dear!' he said, when the worst of it was over, and he could speak.

'I fear that I have caught a cold, you know. It must have been the wetting last night.'

'Oh,' said Wharton, 'I'm sorry!'

'Yes, I think you should be sorry, Wharton, as you wetted me with that sponge because I tried to be obliging.'

'You shouldn't be so obliging, Toddy. It's a habit you'll have to get out of.'

'My Uncle Benjamin always says-choo-choo-atchoo!'

'By Jove,' said Nugent, 'what a queer thing for Uncle Ben to say!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I did not mean-choo-atchoo!'

'What did you mean, then?' 'Choo-choo-atch-atch-choo!'

'Oh, I see. Does Uncle Ben talk Chinese?'

'Chinese? No.'

'It sounds like it. What does he mean when he says choo-choo-atch-atchoo?'

'My dear Nugent-choo-choo!'

'I've nothing to chew,' said Nugent, shaking his head. 'Can't be did.'

'Really-atchoo-atchoo!'

'He's got it,' said Bulstrode. 'Serve him jolly well right, for being such an ass. It's a wonder I haven't a cold too. Go it, Toddy.'

'Choo-choo-atchoo!'

Billy Bunter squirmed out of bed. Bunter was not generally among the first to rise, but he was prompt enough to get out now.

'You blessed ass!' he exclaimed. 'You'll be giving me that cold. Keep away from me. Keep your blessed microbes to yourself.'

'My dear Bunter--'

'Don't you talk to me. Turn your face the other way, please.'

Todd stepped slowly out of bed. There was no doubt that he had a cold in the head, and the other juniors, who did not want to catch it, gave him a wide berth. Todd sneezed and grunted all the time he was dressing.

'You'd better draw it mild with that snorting when you go down, Ogilvy remarked. 'You'll get sent into the sanatorium.'

'Oh, dear!' said Todd.

'Best place for him,' growled Bulstrode. 'He'll be giving the whole class colds if he keeps on like that.'

'My dear Bulstrode--'

'Br-r-r! Keep away!'

The Remove went down. Todd found himself pretty well isolated. No one wanted to catch the cold.

At breakfast the juniors crowded up to leave a clear space on either side of him. Todd suppressed his sneezing as much as possible, for he did not want to be sent into the sanatorium. True, some of the juniors thought that the school hospital wasn't so bad, as they had no lessons to do there; but, on the other hand, the isolation was not pleasant. Todd, too, had been carefully warned by his Uncle Benjamin to stick to work.

The Duffer of Greyfriars got through his breakfast pretty well, with only a sneeze or two. After breakfast, he blinked into the Close, and sniffed. The morning air was very fresh.

'Better cut chapel,' said Skinner. 'It's very draughty there.'

'Thank you so much, Skinner. That is a good idea, and I shall certainly take your advice,' said the Duffer gratefully.

'Don't be an ass,' said Bob Cherry. 'You're not allowed to cut chapel unless you're ill, and then you have to ask the Form-master.'

'And get sent into sanatorium,' said Skinner.

'H'm! On second thoughts, I will attend chapel,' said Todd. And he did. He suppressed a strong desire to sneeze all the time, and when the Remove came out, he had a regular storm of sneezing.

By the time the juniors went into the Form-room for lessons, however, Todd had his unruly cold somewhat in hand again.

The juniors took their places, and Todd, who felt Mr. Quelch's eye on him, fought heroically with a desire to send forth a sneeze like the blast of a trumpet.

He sat struggling with that sneeze.

It was growing worse. The more he suppressed it, the stronger became his desire to let it go, and he had to hold himself hard.

It was impossible to speak, or even to move, for he felt that if he moved, the sneeze would begin; and if it began, there was no telling where it would end.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him once or twice.

The Duffer's efforts were making his face more and more crimson, and his high colour could not fail to attract attention. 'My only hat,' murmured Frank Nugent, 'I believe Todd will burst a boiler if he goes on like that!'

There was a ripple of chuckles in the class. Mr. Quelch glanced round sharply.

'Todd!'

Alonzo started.

'Todd, you will construe.' Todd rose to his feet.

That was as far as he could get. He could not have spoken a word to save his life without giving the rein to that terrible sneeze which was, as it were, lying in wait for him.

'Todd!'

'M-m-m-m-m!'

'Did you hear me, Todd?'

Todd mumbled indistinctly.

'Construe!'

Mumble.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Quelch, in astonishment-'dear me! What is the matter with you, Todd? Are you ill?'

'M-m-m-m.'

'Answer me at once, Todd!'

Todd made a desperate effort.

'I-I--Oh! Ow-choo! Atchoo-o-oo-ooo!'

It was out at last.

It rang through the class-room like a trumpet, and it was followed by a succession of sneezes, big and little.

'Choo---choo--atchoo-oo-oo-oo--choo!'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Quelch.

'Choo---choo--atchoo--atchoo!'

'Bless my soul!'

'Choo--choo--choo!'

Todd was fairly going now.

He had dropped his book, and he was grasping the desk before him with both hands, and sneezing away as if his life depended upon it.

'Atchoo--atchoo-atchoo! '

'Dear me! You have a cold,' said Mr. Quelch.

'Atchoo--atchoo! Yes, sir. Choo--choo!'

'You should not have come into class in this state, Todd. You may go to your dormitory at once, and go to bed. Take this note to the housekeeper, and she will give you something for your cold.'

'Atchoo! Yes, sir. Choo---choo!'

'Go at once!'

Todd took the note, and left the class-room. The last sound heard from him as he disappeared was: 'Atchoo-atchoo--choo--choo!'

Then the door closed, and the Remove ceased from chuckling, and resumed work.

CHAPTER XXIII

Bunter is Not so Lucky!

BILLY BUNTER sat with a thoughtful expression upon his face. Alonzo Todd had not been sent into the sanatorium; he had been sent to bed, and the housekeeper was to give him something, doubtless warm gruel. He was free from lessons for the day, and could read in bed if he liked. Billy Bunter sighed inwardly at the idea. Even with a cold, it was better to be Todd that morning. Mr. Quelch was in a business-like frame of mind, as he generally was, and Bunter did not like work.

The fat junior looked more and more thoughtful, and presently an expression of martyr-like suffering crept over his plump face. Nugent was the first who noticed it, and he nudged Harry Wharton. 'Bunter's at it again,' he murmured. 'Look at him.' Harry looked at Bunter, and chuckled.

'What's the little game?' he murmured.

'I don't know, but--'

'Bunter!'

Mr. Quelch rapped out Bunter's name. He had caught the dying-duck expression upon the fat face, and it did not please him.

Billy Bunter did not reply.

'Bunter!'

'M-m-m-m,' mumbled Bunter.

'Bunter!'

'Atchoo--atchoo! '

Mr. Quelch's eye glimmered.

'Have you a cold, Bunter?' he asked, in a quiet tone which ought to have warned the fat junior of danger ahead.

'Atchoo! I mean, yes, sir. I slept in Todd's bed last night, sir--'

'Indeed! Why did you do that?'

'Bulstrode had mine, sir.'

'Why did you have Bunter's bed, Bulstrode?' Bulstrode looked daggers at Bunter.

'Some water had been spilled on mine, sir, and it was too wet to sleep in,' he said. 'Bunter turned in with Todd.'

'That's how I caught his cold, sir,' said Bunter.

'You are sure you caught it?'

'Atchoo--atchoo--atchoo! Yes, sir.'

'A cold in the head, I suppose?'

'Atchoo! Yes, sir. Choo--choo!'

'When did you first feel it coming on, Bunter?' asked the Remove-master, still in the same quiet and patient tone.

'Just now, sir-I-I mean, this morning at brekker, sir.'

'Was it while I was telling Todd that he might leave the class-room?'

The Remove grinned. They could see Bunter's dodge with perfect clearness, and it was evident that Mr; Quelch could see it, too.

'Yes, sir- mean, sir, no, sir,' stammered Bunter.

'You are quite sure you have a cold?' said Mr. Quelch, in honeyed tones.

'Quite sure, sir. Atchoo--atchoo!'

'It is not merely a device to get out of the Form-room and escape work for the day?' suggested Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, sir! No, sir. Atchoo!'

'You would not be guilty of a lying and mean device like that, Bunter, which could only be regarded with contempt?'

'Oh, no, sir! Atchoo!'

'Very well, Bunter, if you have a cold, you certainly cannot remain here for lessons this morning,' said Mr. Quelch thoughtfully.

Billy Bunter beamed.

'Shall I go at once, sir?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Go to the housekeeper, and tell her that you are to be kept in the sanatorium,' said Mr. Quelch.

Bunter stood rooted to the floor. He hadn't expected that.

'If-if you please, sir, I don't think my cold is severe enough for that,' he said nervously. 'I'd rather go back to bed, sir, like Todd.'

Mr. Quelch smiled grimly.

'Probably you would, Bunter, but you will not be allowed to have it as you wish. Kindly go to the housekeeper, and tell her what I have told you. You may add that, as your cold is doubtless due to a weak state of health from over-feeding, you are to be kept on a very low diet.'

'Oh!'

'You will also be given some healthy physical exercises.'

'Oh!'

'You may go, Bunter. Take this note.'

'If-if you please, sir, I-I feel much better now,' ventured Bunter. 'I-I don't want to be a slacker, sir. I'd rather stick to work.'

'My hat!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'That from Bunter!'

And the Remove grinned. The idea of Bunter wanting to stick to work was funny. Mr. Quelch smiled, too. 'Ah! You feel better, Bunter?'

'Much better, sir.'

'I have noticed that you are no longer sneezing. Do you feel any desire to sneeze now, Bunter?'

'No, sir. Not at all, sir.'

'I thought not. It is wonderful; the mere mention of the sanatorium and a low diet has been sufficient to cure you,' said the Remove-master. 'It is wonderful-at least, it would be wonderful, if you had really had a cold, Bunter, but I am afraid that you were only pretending.'

'Oh, sir!'

'You have played this kind of trick before, Bunter. I think I can remember your affecting to be deaf on one occasion.'

'Oh, sir!'

'Kindly stand out here, Bunter.'

'If you please, sir,' said Bunter nervously, as Mr. Quelch picked up his pointer-'if you please, I-I have rather a cold, sir. I think perhaps I had better go into the sanatorium after all, sir.'

'It is too late now, Bunter. Your colds come and go so rapidly that I cannot send you into the sanatorium for them.'

'Atchoo--atchhoo--'

'Stop that ridiculous noise, Bunter, and step out here at once!'

'Oh, sir! Atchoo!'

'Come here!'

Billy Bunter unwillingly went out before the class. He was fairly bowled out, and he had to face his punishment. Mr. Quelch took a grip upon the pointer.

'Hold out your hand, Bunter!'

'M-m-m-my hand, sir?'

'Yes, and at once.'

'If you please, sir--'

'Will you obey me?'

'Do you think you ought to-to cane a chap with a-a bad cold, sir? It might have a very serious effect upon my constitution, sir. I-- Ow! Yes, sir! All right!'

Bunter held out his hand.

He received a cut that made him squirm, and he returned to his place gasping like a newly-landed fish.

Bunter did not sneeze any more that morning.

CHAPTER XXIV

Bunter the Jackdaw!

ALONZO TODD remained in bed in the Remove dormitory the rest of that day, and some of the fellows paid him visits there. The Duffer of Greyfriars certainly had a bad cold in the head, which was likely to stick to him. Harry Wharton, a little repentant of the sponging he had given the Duffer the previous night, spent a great deal of time with him to cheer him up. Some of the fellows drenched themselves with eau-de-Cologne or sanitas before paying their visits. They didn't want to catch that cold and if the Duffer had a cold, he was just the fellow to give it to everybody else. Some chaps could have colds for private consumption only, as Bob Cherry remarked, but Alonzo Todd was not that kind of a chap. And the Remove didn't want to begin the football season with an epidemic of colds in the Form.

But Alonzo was not allowed to remain out of the sanatorium after that day. As his cold showed no sign of being a slight one, he was shifted off into the school hospital in the evening, and Bunter, upon the whole, was rather glad that he had not succeeded in imposing upon Mr. Quelch. He had a horror of the sanatorium, with its regular spare diet and enforced tidiness and cleanliness.

Bunter had other things to think about, too. His yarns on the subject of the football club at Courtfield had not been believed by anybody in the Remove except Alonzo. But circumstances seemed to bear out the fat junior's statements, curiously enough, and some of the Removites were staggered in their disbelief a few days later.

It was Skinner who first hit on it.

Bunter had had a local Courtfield paper sent to him. The local paper reported the local junior football news, and they mentioned that the Courtfield Rovers were to play Lindrop Athletic on the Saturday afternoon that week. The list of the Rovers team was given, and the captain's name was given as W. Bunter.

Billy Bunter left the paper about, open at the page, and Skinner found it and read it. He carried it to the common-room to communicate his discovery to the other fellows. This was on Friday evening.

There were a good many juniors in the room, including Bunter.

Billy blinked in a self-conscious way as Skinner came in with the paper. He knew what was coming. Some of the fellows glanced at Skinner, wondering what he was looking so excited about.

'I say, here's news, you chaps!' said Skinner.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's up?' asked Bob Cherry.

'It's the Courtfield local rag, you know.'

'Nothing in it about Greyfriars, surely?' said Harry Wharton.

'About Bunter!'

'Bunter!'

'Yes. Listen to this.'

The fellows gathered round with keen interest. Skinner read out the paragraph that had caught his attention.

'On Saturday afternoon the Courtfield Rovers play Lindrop Athletic. The list of the home team is as follows: W. Bunter (captain), Porter, Graham, Spicer, Norton, Mason, Richards, Green, Parker, Robinson, Smith.'

The Removites stared blankly. 'What!'

'Bunter!'

'W. Bunter!'

'Impossible!'

'There it is,' said Skinner. 'Unless Bunter's paid them to put that in at advertisement rates, it's a fact.'

'Oh, really, Skinner--'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Let's look at it,' said Harry Wharton.

Skinner handed him the paper. Harry read the paragraph carefully. There was no doubting that it was there. And that Bunter could have induced the Courtfield publisher to print it was impossible, unless he were really captain of the Rovers. It was incredible; but it was there!

Wharton could only stare at the paragraph.

'Blessed if I can make it out,' he said, at last. 'I've never heard of the Courtfield Rovers, I know, but they must be an average junior club to have their bizney reported in the Courtfield paper. And if they're an average club, or anywhere near average, what on earth do they want with Bunter?'

'Echo answerfully replies what?' remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

'Oh, really, Inky--'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Let him speak!'

'Come forward, Fatty.'

'Speak up, porpoise.'

'What does it mean, Bunter?'

'Is it a joke?'

Billy Bunter blinked at the eager and excited juniors. Bunter's imagination was vivid, and he was really too stupid to distinguish clearly between truth and falsehood. By this time he almost believed that he was really the W. Bunter who was captain of the Courtfield Rovers, and who was to play Lindrop Athletic on Saturday afternoon.

'I say, you fellows, it's all right. I told you I had consented to skipper the Rovers, didn't I?'

'Yes, you told us,' said Ogilvy, in a tone that implied that some stronger evidence than Bunter's words was required.

'Oh, really--'

'It's not true, Billy,' said Nugent.

'There it is in the paper.'

'Yes, but--'

'Seeing's believing I should think,' said Bunter. 'I'm sincerely sorry to see you fellows so suspicious. It shows a low nature to be suspicious.'

'Well, I think a chap may be pardoned for being suspicious just now,' said Wharton. 'You know you can't play footer.'

'Oh, really--'

'It must be some rotten baby team,' said Tom Brown. 'Fellows who can't play for toffee, and Bunter has bounced them into it.'

'It's not that,' said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. 'I don't know anything about Courtfield Rovers, but I know Lindrop Athletic and they wouldn't play a club that wasn't pretty well up to the mark.'

'Then I'm blessed if I understand it.'

'Same here.'

'The samefulness is terrific.'

'It's perfectly simple,' said Bunter. 'The fact of the matter is, that you fellows are pretty rotten players. I'm a dab at footer. I've told you so before. You think I can't play, because I'm miles above your form, and you can't see it. That's how the matter really stands.'

The juniors gasped.

'Why, you cheeky young sweep,' said Harry Wharton.

'Well, that's how the matter really stands,' said Billy Bunter. 'If you can't see it, I can't help it; it's not my fault.'

'I don't believe what it says here.'

'Well, you'll see the report of the match in the next number' said Billy Bunter coolly. 'You'll see for yourself. The paper is published on Mondays, and in next Monday's number there will be the report.' And Billy Bunter rolled away, swelling with importance. Bulstrode caught him by the shoulder and stopped him.

'Do you mean to say you're really playing to-morrow for Courtfield, Bunter?' he demanded, in amazement and unbelief.

'Of course.'

'But it's impossible. You--'

'Keep an eye open for the report, that's all.'

And Bunter jerked himself loose and walked away. He left the Removites in a state of the greatest astonishment. True or false the news had made a sensation in the Form.

'Well, we'll see whether he goes over to Courtfield to-morrow' said Skinner. 'That will settle it.'

And the juniors agreed that they would see. Meanwhile Bunter strutted about like a jackdaw in peacock's plumes, as he was.

CHAPTER XXV

Bunter Goes!

SEEING is believing, as a rule, but though the fellows of the Greyfriars Remove saw it in plain print that 'W. Bunter' was captain of the Courtfield Rovers, they did not believe it. They couldn't. That a club that could play footer at all should take Bunter in as captain was incredible. It was more likely a misprint—a mistake of some sort—anything but what Bunter said it was. And the well-known mendacity of the Owl of the Remove made it impossible to take his words without corroboration. Bunter's yarns, his postal orders that never came, his titled friends and rich relations who were never seen—were well known and laughed about. The story of the captaincy of Courtfield was soon known all over Greyfriars as 'Bunter's latest.'

Yet some of the juniors had their doubts; and all were looking forward to Saturday afternoon, to see if Bunter really went.

The true explanation, that a fellow of the same name, who happened to have the same initial, was captain of Courtfield, naturally did not occur to the juniors. Alonzo Todd was the only one who knew that circumstance, and Alonzo Todd was shut up in the school sanatorium with a cold, and could not say what he knew.

Bunter, of course, involved as he was in a maze of falsehoods, was under the necessity of living up to them.

He had to go over to Courtfield that afternoon, or own up that he had been romancing; and like a true romancer, he was determined not to own up to the facts so long as he had a lie left.

After school on Saturday, therefore, he prepared to go to Courtfield. As he could not hope to get a bicycle again, and he did not care to walk the distance, he had to go by train, and the question of the fare arose. The train journey was a somewhat long one, as the line was not direct, and the return fare was two shillings—a considerable sum to a junior.

Bunter tackled Harry Wharton on the subject as the juniors came out of morning lessons.

'I suppose you've had your remittance, Wharton?' he remarked, blinking up at the captain of the Remove.

'Yes,' said Harry.

'I haven't,' said Bunter. 'There's some unaccountable delay on the part of the post-office. This has happened before.'

Wharton grinned.

'Yes, I think it has, Bunty.'

'I suppose you could lend me a couple of bob for my fare to Courtfield?' said Bunter. 'It would be a shame to disappoint the Rovers, for the sake of a couple of paltry shillings, and owing to my disappointment about a postal-order, I'm stony just now.'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'So you're still keeping that up?' he said.

'Keeping what up?'

'That Courtfield yarn?'

'Oh, really, Wharton--'

'If you're going, I'll stand the fare,' said Harry.

'It's two bob,' said Bunter eagerly. 'Hand it over, then.'

Wharton shook his head.

'No hurry,' he said coolly. 'I'm not going to give you two bob to blow in the tuck-shop. I know you'd tell me a yarn about having gone to Courtfield, Billy; but your lies are expensive at two bob each.'

'Oh, really--'

'We're playing footer this afternoon, but I shall have time to walk down to the village after dinner. I'll come with you and buy your ticket.'

Billy Bunter's jaw dropped.

He had intended to absent himself from the school for a few hours, and come back with a romance; he was never at the loss for one. But Wharton's suggestions nipped that idea in the bud. If he borrowed the railway fare to Courtfield, he had to go to Courtfield, and that was the long and the short of it.

Wharton was looking at him with a grin. Bunter recovered himself. It was necessary to keep up appearances. After all, the question of the fare would keep any of the juniors from accompanying him, that was one comfort. So long as he really did go to Courtfield, he could keep up his role of jackdaw.

'Oh, very well!' he said, with all the dignity he could muster. 'If you can't take my word, Wharton--'

'Hardly.'

'Then you can come with me to Friardale. When you see me in the train for Courtfield, I suppose you'll believe me.'

'H'm! Perhaps.'

After dinner, Wharton having mentioned the matter, a good many juniors decided to walk down to Friardale to see Billy Bunter off. Some of them offered to help him pack his things. Bunter groaned inwardly at the prospect of having to carry a bag about all the afternoon, but there was no help for it. The kind youths helped him pack the zebra costume, as they called it, and he left Greyfriars with the bag in his hand, and seven or eight juniors to keep him company.

Some of the fellows were beginning to have their doubts. After all, the thing had appeared in print; and it seemed incredible that anyone would undertake a long journey for the sake of backing up a lie.

Just inside the village the juniors met Marjorie Hazeldene and Miss Clara, the girl chums of Cliff House. They stopped to speak; and Bunter began to swell with importance. Bunter was not a fellow whom girls liked—he was too conceited and too self-important for that, and he had an idea, too, that all girls were fascinated by him, which was quite sufficient to make girls despise him. But Bunter never could see that, and he liked to strut about for feminine admiration.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, raising his cap, and blushing as he saw Marjorie. 'You're just in time to see England's new footer star!'

Marjorie looked puzzled.

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Nugent. 'Here he is!'

'Bunter!'

'Yes, Bunter. Isn't it so, Bunter?'

'I say, you fellows--'

'Bunter is going to play football?' asked Miss Clara, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. 'I am surprised.'

'Oh, really, Miss Clara, I don't see why!' said Bunter. 'If you girls knew anything about footer, you'd know that it was us medium-sized, well-built chaps who played footer best. Long-legged scarecrows like Bob Cherry, for instance, can't stand against us.'

'Eh? What's that?' exclaimed Bob.

'I don't mean anything personal. I'm just stating a fact,' said Bunter.

'I should think that the fact that I have been asked to captain a team shows that I'm in pretty good form as a footballer.'

'To captain a team!' said Marjorie.

'Yes. Courtfield Rovers have asked me.'

'I have never heard of them,' said Marjorie, and she looked at Harry Wharton, as much as to ask if Courtfield Rovers were a real team, or a figment of William George Bunter's lively imagination. Harry laughed and nodded.

'It's in the Courtfield paper,' he said. 'Bunter's mentioned as captain. I don't understand it, myself.'

'It's sheer jealousy,' said Bunter, 'but you'll see. When you see my record at Courtfield, you may want me to play for the Remove. I may consider it.'

'Thanks!'

'The Rovers have a specially tough match on to-day, you see,' Bunter explained to Marjorie. 'They asked me to help a lame dog over a stile, you know.'

Marjorie looked perplexed. She did not like to doubt anybody's word, even Bunter's, but she found it hard to believe that Billy Bunter had been asked to captain anything but a raid on a tuckshop.

'We're going to see Bunter off,' said Nugent, with a grin, 'as he's suddenly developed into a great footballer; he's a chap whom we delight to honour, you know.'

'The honourfulness is terrific.'

'Well, I hope you win,' said Marjorie.

'Thank you!' said Bunter, with dignity. 'I feel pretty certain that we shall pull it off, you know. You might look in the Courtfield paper for the result.'

'I will,' said Marjorie.

And the girls, very much perplexed, went on their way, and the Greyfriars party walked on to the railway-station. They were in good time for the train, and, Harry Wharton having bought the ticket, the whole party went on the platform with Bunter.

The train came in, and Bunter took his seat in the carriage. The juniors stood round the door waiting for the train to start.

They were more puzzled than ever. Bunter was certainly going! 'I say, Wharton, I suppose you don't want me to go over to Courtfield stony broke?' Bunter remarked, leaning out of the window.

'I really don't mind, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, Wharton! You might advance me a few bob off my postal-order--'

'Ha, ha, ha! '

'Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm expecting a postal-order this evening, and I'll settle up as soon as it comes.'

'Oh, give the postal-order a rest, Billy! Here's another bob.'

'I'll put this down to the account--'

'Stand back there!'

The train started.

'Good-bye, Munchausen, and mind you take all the goals,' roared Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really--' 'Ha, ha, ha! '

The train steamed out of the station. Billy Bunter was off to Courtfield, and the Greyfriars juniors, in a puzzled frame of mind, returned to the school to play footer.

CHAPTER XXVI

Glory for Bunter!

WHARTON & Co. forgot Bunter while they were on the football-field that afternoon, but when the match was over, they remembered the fat junior. The chums of the Remove changed and went into tea, and Billy Bunter had not returned. They discussed Bunter and tea at the same time.

'He's missing tea!' Nugent remarked.

'Nothing could possibly make Bunter miss a meal except--'

'Except another meal,' said Harry.

'Ha, ha, ha! Yes. They must be feeding him at Courtfield.'

'In that case he's playing.'

'The playfulness is terrific.'

'I can't understand it,' said Harry Wharton, shaking his head.

'They must be a rotten team if they'll stand Bunter; yet they're playing the Lindrop Athletic. Well, we'll see when Bunter comes in.'

'I say, you fellows--'

'Talk of angels!' grinned Nugent.

'Here he is! '

Billy Bunter came into the study.

He looked extremely tired, and he threw himself down into the armchair like a sack. He blinked at the juniors and gasped for breath. His clothes were dusty, and his fat face damp with perspiration.

'I say, you fellows, give me something to eat. I'm played out.'

'Been playing?'

'Of course.'

'Did you beat Lindrop?'

'Yes.'

'You beat them!' said Harry.

'Yes, hollow.'

'How many goals?'

'Three to one.'

'And you kicked them all, of course?'

'Two!' said Bunter.

The chums stared at him.

'You kicked two goals against Lindrop Athletic!' said Wharton.

'Oh, you can doubt my word if you like--I'm too tired to punch your head!' said Bunter. 'Give me something to eat. Can't you see I'm tired?'

'Well, you look tired,' said Nugent, 'Here's a sardine--there's one left. You can have it all.'

'Oh, really, Nugent--'

'Didn't they give you any grub at Courtfield? I should think they would, after you had kicked two goals for them.'

'Oh, they treated me splendidly!' said Bunter. 'I'm a regular big gun there, I can tell you. You'll see it all in the paper on Monday.'

'Ahem!'

'Well, seeing's believing. I was going to bring some of the fellows home to tea, but I thought you'd be mean about it. If you've got nothing better than this for me---'

'You can have the cake.'

'Hand it over! I don't want to move. I'm tired. You can give me some tea, too.'

The chums grinned and fed Bunter. He certainly looked fatigued, whether he had been playing football or not.

They did not, as a matter of fact, know what to believe.

Bunter's word was very unreliable, yet the evidence seemed to be accumulating in his favour.

Bunter wired into the cake at top speed. The way he tucked in did not look as if he had been richly fed at Courtfield; but then Bunter was always ready for a meal, whether he had just had one or not.

'Was it a hard game?' asked Nugent.

Bunter nodded.

'Yes, very tough,' he said. 'You fellows ought to come over and see us play some time, if you really want to know what footer is like.

Greyfriars footer is a joke to it. You should have seen me getting the ball down the field against Lindrop! I fairly walked over them!'

'Poor Lindrop!'

'Oh, you can cackle if you like! There are football clubs that can appreciate a good player, and Courtfield is one of them.

You'll see it all in the Courtfield paper. Hallo, what are you doing with that bag, Nugent?'

Nugent had opened the bag, and was shaking out Bunter's football costume. The fat junior jumped up, dropping his cup of tea with a crash to the floor in his excitement.

But it was too late.

Frank Nugent held up the zebra-like football costume with a shout.

'Look at it! You fat humbug!'

The football things were neatly folded, just as when the juniors had helped Bunter to pack his bag, and there was not a sign on them of having been worn. Bunter could hardly have been through a tough football match in those things without leaving a trace on them.

'Same old spoofer!' said Harry Wharton. 'You haven't been in those things to-day, Bunter.'

'Oh, really, Wharton--'

'Played in Etons, I suppose?' suggested Nugent sarcastically.

'Oh, really--'

'Now, tell us the truth,' said Harry. 'What did you go to Courtfield for?'

Bunter took a big bite at the cake.

'I went there to play footer, and I played,' he said. 'Porter suggested that I should wear the club's colours, and as he had a set to spare, he lent them to me.'

'Oh!'

'I wore the club's things. Porter happens to be my size.'

'There never was another chap your size, Bunty, except Falstaff, and that chap's at Peckham,' said Nugent.

'Oh, really--'

'Well, the esteemed Bunter is never at a lossfulness for an esteemed fib,' remarked Hurree Singh.

'Look here, Inky--'

'So you played in Porter's things,' said Harry Wharton. 'I should like to see Porter! Oh, Billy, why don't you learn to tell the truth?'

'If you fellows doubt my word, this discussion had better close,' said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

And the discussion closed. They certainly did doubt his word; but, at the same time, it had to be admitted that Bunter had an explanation ready for anything that might turn up.

When it was known that the Owl of the Remove had returned, there was a general gathering of the fellows round No. 1 Study to hear his tale.

Bunter told it, with variations, his own exploits growing larger every time he narrated them.

At last it appeared as if Lindrop Athletic had been driven before the mighty Bunter like sheep before a sheep-dog-or, rather, a wolf-and the only surprising thing was that Bunter hadn't taken dozens of goals instead of only two. But the fat junior let it be understood that he wanted to let them down lightly.



'My hat!' said Ogilvy. 'Talk about Gulliver among the Lilliputians! It was nothing to Bunter among the Athletic! '

'Ha, ha, ha! '

'Well, I was in pretty good form, you see,' said Bunter modestly. 'I went over there to play, you know, and I played-that's all! '

'Good old Bunter! '

'Champion fibber! '

'Wonderful fairy-tale merchant! '

'Oh, really, you fellows--'

'Blessed if I can make it out,' said Hazeldene. 'The ass knows we shall look in the Courtfield paper on Monday and see that it's all gas!'

'Well, look!' said Bunter.

'We jolly well shall.'

And the juniors waited quite anxiously for the appearance of the Courtfield paper. Skinner even went so far as to write for a copy,

enclosing stamps for it to be posted to him immediately on publication.

During the next day or two Bunter swaggered about Greyfriars in a most impressive way. The juniors were frankly puzzled, and they let him swagger.

When the postman brought Skinner his paper, there was a general rush to look at it. Skinner opened it in the common-room, and turned to the local football news, and read it with a dozen fellows reading over his shoulders.

**'COURTFIELD ROVERS v
LINDROP ATHLETIC.**

'Played on the Courtfield ground. The Rovers won by three goals to one after a stubbornly contested match. W. Porter scored first for Courtfield and then N. Morris captured a goal for the visitors. This was in the first half. In the second half the score remained equal till near the finish, when W. Bunter scored a second goal for the home side, and almost immediately followed it up with another. W. Bunter played a splendid game and Courtfield Rovers are to be congratulated upon the skill of their captain.'

The Greyfriars fellows stared at one another.

'My only hat!' said Skinner.

And no one else found anything to say.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Investigators

BULSTRODE looked into No. 1 Study the next day after school, Skinner and Hazeldene were with him. Harry Wharton looked up from his work.

'Coming?' said Bulstrode.

'Where?' asked Harry.

'Courtfield.'

Billy Bunter was sitting in the armchair, and as Bulstrode pronounced that word, he suddenly sat bolt upright.

'Going to Courtfield?' he exclaimed.

Bulstrode grinned at him.

'Yes, Bunter.'

'Oh!'

'Don't you want us to go?' asked Skinner.

'I-I don't care, of course. What are you going for?'

'To look up some of the Courtfield Rover chaps, and ask them things,' said Bulstrode. 'We're going to get at the facts.'

'The-the facts?'

'Yes, rather! We believe you've worked the thing somehow with the Courtfield paper, and we're going to look into it,' said Bulstrode.

'We know jolly well you're a rotten humbug and a blessed spoofer, and we're going to show you up.'

Bunter had a sickly look.

'I-I say, you fellows--' he began.

'Are you coming, Wharton?' asked Bulstrode. 'One of the chaps from this study ought to come, as a witness. We're going to get at the truth.'

'Oh, that's all right!' said Wharton. 'We shall believe your report. But as a matter of fact, I don't think Bunter's worth the trouble of a walk over to Courtfield.'

'We want to clear the matter up,' said Hazeldene. 'Bunter's been swanking about a long time now as a great footballer, but nobody's ever seen him play any decent football here. We're going to show him up.'

'Good egg!'

'Oh, really--'

'Unless he likes to own up now,' said Bulstrode.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles. It was not likely that he was going to own up. That was the last thing Bunter was likely to do. He was more likely to scheme out fresh falsehoods against the hour of discovery.

'I-I shouldn't go over to Courtfield if I were you,' he stammered.

'The Rovers mightn't like it, you know.'

Bulstrode chuckled.

'You mean you wouldn't like it,' he said.

'Oh, not at all! I-I don't mind. But if-if they think you've got anything up against me they might rag you,' said Bunter. 'I'm a very great favourite at Courtfield, of course.'

'We'll see about that!'

'Besides, you don't know the chaps, and--'

'No, but I know where to find 'em,' said Bulstrode. 'I've been told that they practise on the green at Courtfield in the evenings, and we're going to look for them there, and ask them questions.'

'You may as well own up, you fat fraud,' said Skinner.

'Oh, really, Skinner--'

'You're not coming, then, Wharton?'

'I think not.'

'Oh, very well! '

Bulstrode and his companions strode away. Billy Bunter blinked uneasily at the captain of the Remove.

'I-I say, Wharton--' he stammered.

'Well?'

'Do-do-do you think they're really going over to Courtfield?'

'I suppose so.'

'But-but--'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'You may as well own up now, Billy.'

'Oh, really--'

'Bulstrode's pretty certain to get at the facts.'

'I've given you the facts,' said Bunter. 'Bulstrode doesn't like me, and as for Skinner and Hazeldene, they'd say anything. I hope you won't believe them if they come back with a pack of lies about me?'

'No, but if they come back with the truth I shall believe them.'

I'm afraid you're going to be bowled out, Billy.'

'Oh, really--'

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study looking very uneasy. The fat junior seldom looked ahead, and he had not foreseen even so simple a thing as a visit of the Greyfriars fellows to Courtfield to ascertain the facts. The Removites all grinned at him when they saw him. They knew of Bulstrode's mission, and they had no doubt that the mystery would be explained when he returned from Courtfield. How it had been managed they did not understand, but that Bunter was a great footballer they regarded as altogether too steep.

Meanwhile, Bulstrode & Co. were on their way to Courtfield.

It was a pretty long walk for them, but the desire to show the humbug of the Remove up in his true colours was sufficient to make them undertake it.

They reached the village by taking the cut through the wood, and as they came out into the High Street the shouts from the village green told them that the footballers were at practice there.

'Here they are!' exclaimed Bulstrode.

There was the usual concourse on the village green, and a number of young footballers were at practice there. They were not playing a match, but merely passing and kicking. A good many fellows were looking on, and Bulstrode and Skinner and Hazeldene joined the crowd.

'We don't know if they're the Rovers,' Skinner remarked.

'We'll soon find that out.'

And Bulstrode put the questions to a lad who was sitting on the railings and looking on. It happened to be Porter, who was not playing. He turned round as he saw a fellow in Etons, looking not very amiable. Billy Bunter's visit to his namesake's house had not prepossessed the Courtfield fellows in favour of Greyfriars.

'Are those chaps the Rovers?' Bulstrode asked.

'Yes,' said Porter shortly.

'What's the name of their skipper?'

'Bunter.'

'What?'

'Bunter.'

The Greyfriars fellows stared at one another.

'Oh!' said Bulstrode.

'Bunter--eh? I suppose you know.'

Porter sniffed.

'I ought to know, as I belong to the team,' he said.

'You're in the team?'

'Yes, I'm a Rover.'

'You've played with Bunter?' asked Hazeldene.

'Of course.'

'Did he play for you last Saturday?'

'Yes,' said Porter, looking surprised at these questions. 'He captained us against Lindrop Athletic. What are you getting at?'

'Well, it beats me,' said Hazeldene.

'And me,' said Skinner.

'It's all rot!' said Bulstrode. 'Bunter can't play for toffee!'

Porter's eyes sparkled.

The Courtfield fellows had had enough insolence from the Owl of the Remove. That these juniors were labouring under a mistake did not occur to Porter, as he knew nothing of the mystification Billy Bunter had caused at Greyfriars.

'Who can't play?' he exclaimed.

'Bunter can't.'

'You'd better not say that here,' said Porter.

'I'll say it where I like,' said Bulstrode, all his combative instincts aroused at the tone Porter used.

Porter slipped off the railings.

'You'll get a thick ear if you do,' he said.

'Who'll give it me?'

'I will.'

'Then you'd better start!'

'Here, hold on!' exclaimed Hazeldene in alarm. 'We didn't come here for a row. Keep the peace, Bulstrode. We don't want a row in the enemy's country.'

'What-ho!' said Skinner. 'I say, Bulstrode didn't mean anything. He-'

'Rats,' said Bulstrode, in his most bullying tone. 'I mean that I could wipe up the ground with any chap in Courtfield, and not half try.'

'School cad!' exclaimed Porter.

'Village lout!' retorted Bulstrode.

Porter did not speak again. Words failed him. He rushed at Bulstrode, hitting out. Bulstrode caught Porter's knuckles on his nose, and countered with his right, sending the Courtfield footballer crashing into the grass.

There was a shout from the crowd round.

Bulstrode glared at them defiantly. He was hotheaded, and he was a bully, but he had plenty of courage. Hazeldene and Skinner were looking very uneasy.

'What's the row here?' demanded Graham, pushing his way forward.

'Mind your own bizney,' said Bulstrode coolly.

'You cad--'

'Do you want some of what your friend's had?'

'Shut up, Bulstrode!' said Hazeldene, in a hurried whisper.
'The chaps have left off playing. We shall have the lot of them on to us.'

'Bah!'

'I'm going, then,' said Skinner.

'Pooh!'

'He says that Bunter can't play footer,' said Porter, scrambling up. 'He's a cad from Greyfriars, like the fellow who came over the other day. Kick him out!'

'Down with the school cads!'

'Kick them out!'

'What are they doing on our green, anyway?'

'I'll fight anyone of you, if you like,' said Bulstrode, with a fierce look round.

'Taken,' said Graham quietly.

He put up his fists and advanced upon Bulstrode.

In a moment more they were going at it hammer and tongs.

How it would have ended it is impossible to say; for the village crowd, angered by the interruption of their peaceful gathering, were looking very ugly, and some of them made a rush at the schoolboys.

'Hang it!' muttered Hazeldene. 'We'd better clear.'

'What-ho!' muttered Skinner.

And they cleared.

They intended to walk away, but they were rushed and shoved, and they broke into a run. In a minute they were pelting off at top speed.

Bulstrode felt himself grasped by half a dozen pairs of hands and dragged away from Graham.

'Let him alone!' exclaimed the latter. 'Leave him to me!'

'Bosh!' said Porter. 'Kick him out!'

'Hurrah! Down with the college cads!'

Bulstrode was whirled away from Graham. He was not struck, but he was pushed and shoved, and pulled and hustled, till he was glad to take to his heels and dash after Skinner and Hazeldene, who were already at a distance.

He joined them breathless and gasping.

The three juniors panted on into the wood. A yell of derision followed them from the Courtfield crowd, and the latter turned back from the pursuit as the Greyfriars juniors ran into the wood.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Report!

'BULSTRODE back yet?'

Harry Wharton asked the question as he came down after tea.

Tom Brown, to whom he addressed it, shook his head. Tom Brown, the New Zealander, was Bulstrode's study-mate in the Remove, though they did not pull very well together.

'Not yet,' said Tom. 'It's a good step to Courtfield.'

There was a loud shout from the Close.

'Here they come.'

'Hallo! Is that Bulstrode, I wonder?'

'Something's up,' said Tom.

They hurried out together to see what it was. In the gathering dusk of the Close, groups of juniors were staring at three figures that came in at the gates, and a ripple of merriment ran from one end of the quad to the other.

'It's Bulstrode.'

'They've been getting into a scrap at Courtfield.'

'Hallo, Bunter! Look what your friends have done to Bulstrode!'

Billy Bunter blinked uneasily at the three through his big spectacles. They were in a torn and dishevelled state indeed.

They had tidied themselves as much as possible in the wood, after their escape from Courtfield, but they could not mend torn collars and ripped jackets. They looked very dishevelled indeed, and tired and breathless, and decidedly ill-tempered.

'Great Scott!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'What on earth have you chaps been doing?'

Hazeldene sat down on the steps with a gasp.

'I'm about done,' he said.

'Did you get into a row at Courtfield?'

'Bulstrode did.'

'We all did,' said Bulstrode, with a scowl. 'It was Bunter's fault, of course.'

'Oh, really, Bulstrode--'

'You-you fat worm! You warned them that we were coming, I suppose, and they were ready for us,' said Bulstrode savagely, and he made a rush at Billy Bunter,

The Owl of the Remove skipped behind Harry Wharton.

'Stop him!' he gasped.

Wharton pushed Bulstrode back.

'Hold on!' he exclaimed. 'You're off the track there--Bunter certainly didn't want you to go to Courtfield.'

'Of course I didn't,' said Bunter.

'The fat fraud--'

'Have you proved that he's a fraud?'

'Well, no, but--'

'It seems genuine, from what I can make out,' said Hazeldene.

'Blessed if I can understand the business from beginning to end.'

'Tell us what happened, then?' exclaimed a dozen voices.

'Yes, let's have the yarn,' said Bob Cherry.

'Well, the Rovers were practising when we got there, and we asked a chap named Porter--'

'That name was in the newspaper report,' Nugent remarked.

'Yes, and he said he was a member of the Rovers' team. He got his rag out because Bulstrode said that Bunter couldn't play footer.'

'Oh, was that it?'

'Yes. I can't catch on to it, but Bunter certainly seems to be thought a lot of there, and they hustled us because Bulstrode ran him down.'

'Blessed if I understand!'

'The blessedness is terrific! '

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his spectacles. His fat face was triumphant now. The visit to Courtfield, which had caused him so much fear and trembling, had turned out very fortunately for him.

The fact that the Rovers' captain was his namesake had not been brought to light, and all that had passed corroborated his claim. He swelled with importance again now.

'Well, I warned you how it would be!' he exclaimed. 'Wharton will bear witness that I said the Courtfield chaps would be ratty if Bulstrode went there saying things against me. They admire me over there.'

'Queer taste,' growled Frank Nugent.

'Oh, really, Nugent--'

'Then it seems to be established that Bunter had been telling the truth all along, and he has really captained Courtfield Rovers!' exclaimed Ogilvy.

'So it seems.'

'The Courtfield fellows themselves said so?'

'Yes.'

'Well, that ought to settle it.'

'I say, you fellows, I think you might take my word. Anyway, now that the whole Courtfield team have backed me up---'

'Rats!'

'Do you mean to say you don't believe me now, Bob Cherry?'

'Blessed if I know what to believe!'

'Oh, it's a miracle, that's what it is,' said Hazeldene. 'I don't see how we can doubt it any longer, when we've got evidence straight from the horse's mouth. Bunter has told the truth for once in his life; it's remarkable, but true.'

'Oh, really, Hazel--'

'How did you come to do it, Bunter?' asked Tom Brown, with great interest.

'Oh, I've practised--'

'You've never practised telling the truth, to my knowledge.'

'Oh, really, Brown, I thought you were asking me how I came to play-'

'I was asking you how you came to tell the truth? Were you in a trance at the time? Or is it possible that you've been taking to drink?'

'Oh, it's a giddy miracle!' said Russell.

'Yes, rather!'

'The ratherfulness is terrific!'

'Well, I suppose that wonders will never cease,' Nugent remarked.

'It's wonderful for Bunter to have played a decent game of footer-but to discover that he's been telling the truth-well, that takes the cake!'

'Oh, really, Nugent--'

'It's wonderful!' said Bob Cherry. 'Wonderful! Marvellous! Look here, Burner, now you've done it once, you ought to try again. It will come easier the second time, too. I should advise you--'

But Billy Bunter snorted and stalked away, without waiting for Bob Cherry's advice.

CHAPTER XXIX

A Warning for Bunter!

THERE seemed to be no further doubt about it. Billy Bunter was a footballer.

There was no doubting further, most of the fellows said. They hadn't believed Bunter. They had doubted cold print. But when the Courtfield Rovers themselves bore witness, and showed a determination to resent any aspersion cast upon Bunter, how was it possible to doubt any further?

Even Harry Wharton wavered in his doubts.

Most of the Remove came to the conclusion that, wonderful as it was, it was true; and that there was more in William George Bunter than met the eye.

It was difficult to reconcile his absurd displays at Greyfriars with his reported performances at Courtfield. But Bunter said that he really hadn't done his best at Greyfriars, owing to discouragement resulting from jealousy on the part of the others; and fellows who did not like the Remove football captain were inclined to take Billy Bunter's side there.

'After all, Bunter may be a player,' said Bulstrode, changing sides with great facility, for the purpose of scoring against Harry Wharton. 'It's quite possible that he's been kept back because some chaps didn't want to be put in the shade. Anyway, he's proved that he can play now, and I think he ought to be given a chance in the Form eleven.'

To which Wharton's reply was brief but expressive, being contained in the classic monosyllable:

'Rats!'

'Well, that's what I think,' said Bulstrode defiantly. 'I think every chap ought to have a chance. From what we hear, Bunter's a good deal better than some chaps who are playing for the Form.'

'More rats!'

'Then you're not going to give him a chance, Wharton?'

'Yes, if he shows here what he can do--where we can see him,' said Harry dryly. 'I don't care a rap what he's done or hasn't done at Courtfield. Let him put up a decent show here, and we'll see.'

'Well, you'll make some of us think that what Bunter says is quite correct, and there's personal jealousy in the matter, that's all.' Harry Wharton laughed.

'You can think what you like, Bulstrode.'

And he said no more on the matter.

'Oh, very well,' Billy Bunter said to a crowd of Removites, when Bulstrode reported this to him, 'I refuse to play for Greyfriars, that's all! If the Remove wants one of its best players to play for an outside club, all serene; I don't mind. But if this Form knew what was what, there would be a new election, and I should be chosen for football captain!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared Nugent.

Bunter left most of the juniors laughing as he rolled indignantly away. Alonzo Todd poked him in the ribs, and Bunter stopped and gasped. Todd was fresh from the sanatorium, and Bunter's new fame was a surprise to him. Todd did not quite understand it.

'This is very surprising news, Bunter,' he said.

'Oh, is it?' growled Bunter. 'You needn't puncture my ribs!'

'I heard that you are captain of Courtfield Rovers.'

'Well, suppose I am?'

'I suppose you could give me a place in the team? Wharton does not want me to play for the Remove, and Temple has declined my services for the Upper Fourth, for some reason. I should be glad to play for you-either as centre goalkeeper or right-back forward. I think those terms are correct?'

Bunter grunted.

'You're no good, Todd.'

'My dear Bunter--'

'Better drop the subject. I can't do anything for you.'

'But your relation--'

'Eh?'

'I suppose it was through your relation that you got into the team-the chap the same name as yourself?' said Todd innocently. Bunter gasped. He was cunning in his fat, slow way, but his stupidity was as great as his cunning. While Todd was in the sanatorium, Bunter had left him out of his calculations entirely; and now that he reappeared among the Greyfriars fellows it struck the fat junior with a sudden shock as he realised that Alonzo knew enough to give him away from end to end.

He simply gasped as this suddenly presented itself to his mind.

'Here, shut up!' he exclaimed hastily.

Alonzo looked at him in surprise.

'What is the matter?' he asked

'Come over here,' said Bunter. 'I don't want the fellows to hear you. Shut up about that chap the same name as myself.'

'Why?'

'Because-because'-Bunter cudgelled his brains for a reason -'because-because he's a relation of mine, you see.'

'But, surely--'

'He-he's left Courtfield now,' stammered Bunter.

'Left Courtfield?'

'Yes. He-he robbed his employer, and he's sloped!' said Bunter, astonishing himself by the fertility of his imagination.

'You see, he-he had been gambling, and he robbed his employer of a hundred pounds!'

'Dear me!'

'It's an awful disgrace to the family,' said Bunter, going on more easily, now that he had once started. 'Of course, I'm trying to keep it dark.'

'Naturally, my dear fellow,' said Todd sympathetically. 'You can rely upon my discretion. How very unfortunate!'

'Yes, isn't it? And the Courtfield fellows asked me to become skipper in his place. I couldn't very well refuse. I'm not saying anything about my cousin--'

'Your cousin?'

'Yes; he's my cousin. I'm not saying anything about him here, you see, and-and I'd be obliged if you never mentioned him.'

'Certainly, Bunter. I will be very careful. Bunter' -Alonzo dropped his hand solemnly on Bunter's shoulder-'Bunter, my Uncle Benjamin always told me that any misfortune of this sort should be a warning

to us. I trust, Bunter, that you will let this happening-this terrible happening-be a warning to you!

'Eh?'

'Take warning of it, my young friend,' said Alonzo, releasing Bunter's shoulder, and solemnly wagging his forefinger at him.

'Take warning! If you are inclined to slip into falsehood or dishonesty--'

'Oh, shut up!'

'If you are inclined to begin the primrose path of dalliance, even by the whitest of white lies--'

'Chuck it! '

'If the temptation comes upon you to deceive, either for the purpose of profit or of vain glory, take--'

'Get out!'

'Take warning in time.'

'Oh, really, Todd--'

'And I have noticed,' pursued Alonzo, in his best Uncle Benjamin manner- 'I have noticed, Bunter, that you are of a somewhat dishonest nature.'

'What?'

'You do not mind my mentioning it?' said Todd anxiously. 'I do not mean to offend, but my Uncle Benjamin always says one should serve one's friends, even at the cost of a temporary injury to their self-love. I have noticed that you have dishonest and untruthful tendencies, Bunter.'

'You-you ass--'

'You are very careless in money matters-generally other people's money-and you are careless in your statements. You are boastful; and I have observed you exaggerate most unscrupulously for the sake of bragging. This is very wrong, Bunter.'

Bunter stared at him speechlessly.

'You don't mind my mentioning it, of course?' said Alonzo.

'My only desire is to be useful. My Uncle Benjamin--'

'Look here, Todd--'

'Always told me to be useful and obliging, especially to those who needed it; and I am sure you need it in this case, Bunter. You are in danger of following in the footsteps of this unfortunate relation of yours. Bunter, Bunter, take warning!'

'You chump!'

'Take warning!' Alonzo laid his hand on Bunter's shoulder again.

'Dear friend, take warning by this. You are naturally dishonest and untruthful, and--'

Billy Bunter gave him one furious blink, and hit out.

The blow was quite unexpected. It caught the Duffer of Greyfriars on the chest, and he sat down with a heavy bump that knocked all the wind out of his body.

'Oh, dear!' gasped Alonzo.

Billy Bunter rolled away. The Duffer of Greyfriars slowly scrambled to his feet. He was in a state of great astonishment.

'Oh, dear!' he murmured. 'I wonder why Bunter did that?'

And Alonzo shook his head and gave it up.

CHAPTER XXX

Bunter's Kick-off!

BILLY BUNTER had never been what could be called modest or unassuming. He had always had an excellent opinion of himself, and had never been slow to show it. But since the report from Courtfield that seemed to confirm his claims to be considered as a great footballer, the fat junior had developed a surprising amount of 'swank,' which astonished those who knew him well.

A new strut had come into his walk, and he carried his nose high in the air. Nature had elevated it considerably, but Billy elevated it still more; and he cultivated a contemptuous sniff for special use when football was being discussed. His sniff implied that fellows could talk football as long as they liked, but if they really wanted to know anything about the game they had better ask him.

He took to watching footer, and sniffing while he watched, and confiding to everybody that Greyfriars play wasn't much, anyway. He even looked on at the Sixth-Form fellows playing, and sniffed. He said that it was all very well for fellows to brag about old Wingate, but he, Bunter, knew something about football. In fact, he grew so swankish and so insufferable that the Remove found him harder to stand than ever before.

But Nemesis was lying in wait for the boaster of the Remove.

It was Bunter's little failing that he would tell the most enormous falsehoods without reflecting that the slightest incident might tumble over his mountain of fabrication. A word from Alonzo would have been sufficient; but Alonzo, who believed Bunter's absurd explanation, as he believed everything that was said to him, kept his promise about not mentioning the other Bunter.

Billy considered himself secure. The only trouble was that he was under the necessity of making the journey to Courtfield every Saturday afternoon, in order to keep up the deception. But the deception was not to last so long as the Owl of the Remove anticipated, and he was never under the necessity of making that journey again, as it turned out.

Bulstrode, for the sake of annoying Harry Wharton more than for any other reason, held that Bunter ought to be played in the Remove eleven. There was a match on the Saturday of that week, and Bulstrode tried to raise feeling in the Form on the subject.

Billy Bunter, of course, took a lofty tone. Wharton could play him if he liked, and he would get uncounted goals for Greyfriars; but if Wharton chose to leave him out-well, the loss would be to the Remove's, not Bunter's.

'I think I ought to kick off,' Bunter remarked. 'I'm willing to play centre-forward, and you can find some other place for yourself, Wharton. I--'

It was Saturday when Bunter made that remark, and Wharton, who had his business as footer captain to think about, cut him short.

'Oh, shut up, Billy!' he exclaimed.

'I'm not going to shut up,' said Bunter blinking round. 'I'm putting the thing straight to you, from a sense of duty to the Remove. If I kick-off for Greyfriars to-day, we shall win. If you fellows are left alone, I know what sort of a muck you'll make of the match!'

'Hear, hear!' said Bulstrode.

'Faith, an' there's somethin' in it, Wharton,' said Micky Desmond.

'If Bunter can play so well for Courtfield, why can't he play for Greyfriars?'

'I'm sure I'm willing,' said Bunter. 'I'll send a-a telegram to Courtfield, to say I can't come, if Wharton wants me this afternoon.'

Wharton smiled sarcastically.

'It would be a pity to disappoint the Rovers,' he remarked.

'We'll manage without you, Billy.'

'Oh, really, Wharton--'

'Look here, you'll jolly well get a kick-off if you don't shut up!' said Harry. 'I'll kick you off the ground. I don't care what we hear from Courtfield. I don't believe a word of it, and you can't play footer for toffee!'

'Oh, really--'

Billy Bunter broke off suddenly.

A lad had entered the gateway, and was walking up towards the School House, outside which the juniors were standing.

No one noticed him particularly till he was close at hand, and then Billy Bunter and Alonzo Todd recognised him simultaneously.

It was Walter Bunter, the captain of Courtfield Rovers.

Alonzo stared at him in amazement, astonished that a fellow who had robbed his employers of a hundred pounds should dare to walk up so boldly and openly.

Bunter stared, too, and his jaw dropped. In his wildest anticipations he had never supposed that Walter Bunter would come to Greyfriars. What on earth did he want there? The fat junior stared at him as if fascinated.

Wharton followed Bunter's glance, and gave the stranger an inquiring look.

The Courtfield fellow coloured a little under the gaze of many eyes.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' said Bob Cherry.

'Dear me!' said Alonzo.

'I came over to see you chaps,' said the Courtfield lad quietly.

'Some of you came to Courtfield the other day, and were hustled.

I'm sorry for it, though I must say it was only what you might have expected, coming to a place and running a chap down behind his back, for that's what it amounted to.'

'Look here--' began Bulstrode blusteringly.

'Well, I'm sorry it happened,' said the Courtfield captain. 'I came over to say that, and to say something else. That's the second time we've had a visit from Greyfriars, and the first was more cheeky than the second. I want to say that if you feel inclined to play footer, we'll give you as much as you want. We've had a lot of blessed cheek from you, and we'd like to see if Greyfriars produces anything besides gas.'

Harry Wharton coloured.

'I don't see what we've done to call for that,' he said. 'Bulstrode came over to ask some questions the other day, and as for Bunter--'

'Bunter!'

'I say, Wharton,' began Billy hurriedly, 'better kick this chap out. He--'

'Oh, there he is!' said Walter. 'That's the specimen who came over and offered to join our club, and told us we ought to be

pleased to have him, because it was so nice for a working lads' club to have a gentleman in it! My word!

'Did the cad say that?' asked Nugent.

'Oh, really, Nugent--'

'Yes, and we gave him the order of the boot.'

'Then-then-- My hat! He hasn't joined you?' shouted Bob Cherry.

'Joined us? Not much!'

'Then-then--'

'I say, you fellows,' stammered Billy Bunter, 'there's a mistake! This chap isn't reliable! He's-he's fibbing, you know--'

'What's that?' exclaimed Walter fiercely. And Billy dodged behind Wharton.

But Alonzo Todd threw himself into the breach as it were.

'You must not rely upon the statements of that person,' he said, with a wave of the hand towards Walter. 'He is, unfortunately, a criminal. I think I'm justified in speaking out now, Bunter, for your sake. That youth has robbed his employers of a hundred pounds, and--'

'What?' yelled Walter.

'He is Bunter's cousin, and Bunter was keeping it dark to save disgracing the family--'

'Bunter's cousin?'

'Yes. He's the same name as Bunter, you know.'

'Oh, really--' murmured Billy feebly.

A light broke in on Harry Wharton. He clapped his hand on the Courtfield captain's shoulder in his excitement.

'Is your name Bunter?' he shouted.

'Yes.'

'W. Bunter?'

'Yes-Walter Bunter. What about it?'

'Are you captain of Courtfield Rovers?'

'Of course!'

'My hat!' shouted Wharton. 'We've got to me truth at last!

This chap is the W. Bunter who was in the paper. Billy knew his name, and--'

'The fraud!'

'The cheat!'

'The rascal!'

'The fraudfulness is terrific!'

The Remove understood at last. The truth was dawning even upon Alonzo Todd.

'I-I say!' stammered Alonzo. 'Isn't he really Bunter's cousin? I--'

'Of course I'm not!' said Walter angrily. 'Do you think I could be related to that worm? So he told you I had robbed my employers, did he?'

'I-I-I was only joking!' feebly gasped Billy Bunter. 'I-I didn't expect Todd to believe it. He's such a duffer, you know.'

'My dear Bunter! My Uncle Benjamin says--'

'So you're bowled out, Billy!' said Harry Wharton grimly.

'You never joined Courtfield Rovers at all, and you've never played for them.'

'Did he say he had?' exclaimed Walter.

'He said he was your skipper!'

'My hat!'

Bunter made a strategic movement to the rear, but Bob Cherry grasped him and whirled him back.

'No, you don't!' he remarked.

'Oh, really, Cherry--'

'I Say, I'm sorry that toad came over to you and cheeked you,' said Wharton to the Courtfield captain. 'You understand now how it was that Bulstrode gave offence-he was talking about this Bunter, not about you.'

'Yes; and I'm sorry.'

'It's all right,' said Bulstrode. 'It's the fault of that rotten fraud! My hat! He ought to be ragged baldheaded for this!'

'Oh, really, Bulstrode! I-I-- It was only a joke!'

'Joke!' said Harry Wharton sternly. 'It was a string of rotten, mean lies from beginning to end! But it's no good expecting you to be ashamed of yourself!' He turned to Walter Bunter, 'Look here, we'll play your team with pleasure if we can fix up a date, and I've no doubt we can. As for what this toad did and said, we're sorry for it, and we'll make him sorry, too!'

Walter laughed.

'That's all right,' he said. 'I must be off-we're playing this afternoon. Good-bye!'

Wharton shook hands with him. As the Courtfield captain left, Billy Bunter made another attempt to squirm away, but the juniors surrounded him in a grim ring. There was no escape for the Munchausen of the Remove.

Wharton shook him by the shoulder.

'Now, then, Bunter--'

'Oh, really, Wharton, I-I wish you wouldn't shake me like that. You might make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them--'

'Look here, Bunter! You wanted a kick-off to-day, didn't you?' said Harry Wharton grimly. 'Well, you're going to get one! Form up in two rows, you fellows, and Bunter shall run the gauntlet-and every fellow is to get in at least one kick. That's the kind of kick-off Bunter deserves.'

There was a roar of approval.

'Good!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'The goodness is terrific!'

'I-I say, you fellows! I-I--'

But Bunter was not listened to. The double row of juniors waited for him. Bob Cherry helped Bunter to start, using his football boots with great effect. The fat junior ran desperately.

He yelled at every step. The fellows kicked away cheerfully, and, though some of them in their haste kicked one another, Billy Bunter got the greater number of kicks. Gasping and grunting and groaning, the fat junior reached the end of the line but he did not stop. He ran on at top speed, still yelling, and disappeared round a corner of the House. A roar of laughter followed him.

Bunter, for the next few days, emulated the celebrated brer rabbit and lay low, but when he did emerge from hiding, the first person to upbraid him and lecture him was Alonzo Todd. Todd's lecture, however, did not last longer than two minutes, for Bunter, with a roar of rage, plumped a podgy fist into Alonzo's skinny face, whereat the duffer's well-meant words of advice died a sudden death, and for the next few seconds the only sounds that echoed along the Remove passage were: 'Ow! Wow! Yaroooh!'