

A COOL CUSTOMER!

A GRAND AND AMUSING SCHOOL STORY OF BILLY BUNTER'S VISIT TO ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Kind Invitation Accepted!

JIMMY SILVER whistled. It was a prolonged whistle, expressive of surprise.

The captain of the Fourth Form at Rookwood had a letter in his hand. His chums—Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—were watching him read it. They had very interested expressions.

"Well," said Lovell, "how much?"

Evidently Lovell was under the impression that there was a remittance in the letter.

Jimmy Silver did not reply to the question. He whistled again, more expressively than before.

"How much, fathead?" demanded Raby.

"Eh? Nothing!"

"Nothing in the letter?" exclaimed Newcome.

"Oh, no!"

"Well, you ass," said Lovell warmly, "you're keeping us away from the footer while you read a letter with nothing in it! Chuck it away, and come along!"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy.

"Bow-wow! Let's get down to the footer. Ain't we playing the Modern bouncers next Saturday, and haven't we got to be in form?"

"Never mind the Modern bouncers now, and never mind the footer! This is a rather queer letter," said Jimmy Silver. "Do you chaps remember when the Greyfriars cricket team came over in the summer—"

"Well, it's hardly long enough ago for us to forget it," said Lovell. "What the merry dickens about the Greyfriars cricket team?"

"Do you remember a chap named Bunter?"

"Bunter? Can't say I do."

"I do," said Raby. "Fat chap in gig-lamps. For some weird reason he was in the team—at least, I remember he said so. But they left him out of the match."

"I've seen him at Greyfriars, too, when we've been there," said Newcome; "a fat bouncer."

"Did any of you chaps chum up with him?"

"My hat! No!"

"Did I?" said Jimmy thoughtfully.

"You! I suppose you did," said Lovell. "But surely you ought to know whether you did or not."

"Well, to the best of my belief, I didn't," said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head. "But, to the best of Bunter's belief, I did. I must have, as he says so. This letter is from him. He's written on account of our close friendship!"

"Great Scott!"

"He can't bear the idea of clearing off for the Christmas holidays without seeing us first."

"Can't he, by Jove!"

"So he's coming to visit us."

"Oh!"

"This afternoon," said Jimmy Silver. "He's accepted our kind invitation to drop in at Rookwood. Did you give him a kind invitation, Lovell?"

"I jolly well didn't!"

"Did you, Raby?"

"No fear!"

"You, Newcome?"

"Rats! No!"

"Well, I know I didn't," said Jimmy, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "Somebody else must have done so, and Bunter's put it down to us by mistake. Looks as if we're going to have a visitor, instead of any footer this afternoon."

"Oh, draw it mild!" grunted Lovell. "Look here, I don't think much of that bouncer Bunter. Read out the letter, and see if we can dodge him!"

Jimmy Silver grinned, and read out the letter. It ran, in large and sprawling handwriting:

"Dear Jimmy.—Before breaking up for the Christmas holidays I should like to see you

and my other old pals at Rookwood once more. Excuse my not having written before. I hadn't forgotten our friendship, but Toddy is very keen with stamps. I shouldn't like to clear off for Christmas without seeing you chaps once more. So I am accepting your kind invitation to drop in at Rookwood, and I'm coming down on Wednesday afternoon early. If you like to meet the train at Coombe—two-thirty—I shall be pleased to see you there. If not convenient, send me a telegram.—Always yours,

"W. G. BUNTER."

"Why, it's two now!" exclaimed Lovell. "The fat bouncer must have been in the train long before this letter was delivered. How are you to send him a telegram?"

Jimmy rubbed his nose again.

"Certainly, it's a bit too late," he said.

"It's a plant!" growled Lovell. "He doesn't mean to be put off. Look here, I'm not going to spend the afternoon crawling round with a porpoise!"

"Rookwood hospitality, old chap. The Greyfriars chaps did us very well when we were over there."

"Bunter didn't."

"Well, no; but he's a Greyfriars chap."

"Oh, rot! I wouldn't object if it were Wharton or Cherry or Field—any of those fellows. But—"

"It's up to us," said Jimmy Silver resignedly. "Noblesse oblige, you know. After all, we can spare an afternoon for the sacred duties of hospitality."

"Oh, blow!"

Jimmy Silver looked at his big watch.

"Just time to trot down to the station and meet the two-thirty," he said. "Come on! Keep smiling!"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Lovell.

But Jimmy Silver's word was law to the end study. The Fistical Four took their caps and sallied forth. There was no time to lose if they were to meet Bunter's train, and they hurried down to the gates.

Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side were chatting in the gateway. Apparently they were in a humour for a rag, for, with one voice, they asked the Fistical Four whether they had found their features in a museum.

But the chums of the Classical side did not reply to that humorous question. There was no time even to bump the three Tommies in the road. They hurried out, and "trotted" down to Coombe.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Honoured Guest!

AFAT face, adorned with a large pair of spectacles, looked out of the train as it stopped in the little country station.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were on the platform, and they spotted that fat face at once.

"Here he is!" grunted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver politely opened the door of the carriage. William George Bunter of the Remove Form at Greyfriars rolled out.

He greeted the Rookwood juniors with a beaming smile.

"Jolly glad to see you!" he remarked, shaking hands effusively with Jimmy Silver. "Pleasure to see you fellows again! You got my letter all right?"

"Yes; that's why we're here."

"Jolly long way here!" said Bunter, blinking at them. "Not that I mind, to see old pals again!"

The Fistical Four grinned politely. If the Greyfriars junior claimed them as old pals, they did not feel that it would be civil to dispute the claim. But not one of them had the slightest recollection of palling with Billy Bunter. Perhaps W. G. Bunter had a better memory, or a more active imagination.

"How are all the chaps?" asked Jimmy, as they piloted Bunter out of the station.

"Oh, they're fumbling at footer this afternoon!" said Bunter. "I declined to join them. I'm left out of the eleven, you know. Wharton is rather an ass!"

"He must be to leave you out of the footer eleven!" grinned Raby.

"You're right, old fellow! There's a lot of jealousy in footer, too. A skipper doesn't like to be outclassed by one of the team, you know! By the way, I'm rather peckish after that journey. I remember there's a shop here." Billy Bunter blinked up and down the High Street of Coombe. "I dare say you fellows could do with a snack—what? Come with me; it's my treat!"

It was not an hour since the Rookwood juniors had dined, but they politely piloted Billy Bunter to Mrs. Wicks' little shop.

"I hadn't anything in the train, excepting some sandwiches, and a pork-pie and some doughnuts," said Bunter. "I'm pretty nearly famished! Pile in, you chaps; it's my treat!"

"Not at all," said Jimmy Silver. "It's our treat, Bunter. Pile in!"

"Well, if you insist!" said Bunter.

The Fistical Four contented themselves with ginger-pop; and they watched Billy Bunter pile in. They watched him in growing wonder.

Billy Bunter started on pork-pies. He proceeded to cold ham and tongue. He went on to cake and pie. Doughnuts came next, and then biscuits and preserves. His round, fat face assumed a very shiny look, and his breathing grew slower. But he went on without a break.

"That's better," said Bunter at last, eyeing the jam-tarts regretfully. It was evident that he hadn't room for even one more. "I feel comfy now. I'd rather you let me settle this bill, you chaps—"

"Oh, no; not at all!" gasped Jimmy. "Give it to me, Mrs. Wicks!"

Mrs. Wicks passed it across the counter. It came to fourteen shillings and ninepence. Billy Bunter strolled to the door, and stood blinking into the village street.

The Fistical Four, glad that his back was turned, held a hurried consultation.

Jimmy Silver's supply of cash was limited to five shillings. Lovell added half-a-crown to it, and Raby sixpence. Fortunately, Newcome, after a hurried search of his pockets, was able to make up the remainder. The bill was settled, and the four juniors joined Bunter.

"Come on, Bunter!" said Jimmy.

Bunter yawned.

"Going to walk?" he asked.

"Well, we generally walk."

"Can't get a taxi here, I suppose?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"They've never heard of taxis in Coombe, my dear chap," he replied. "All we could get would be the station-cab—made before the flood."

"Well, that's better than nothing," said Bunter. "I've had a long journey, you know. I'm tired. Let's take the cab."

"Ahem!"

"I'll pay, of course," said Bunter. "You've stood me a ripping feed; now I'll stand you a drive. Come on!"

The Fistical Four would have preferred walking to taking the slow, dusty old station-cab. But it was a case of noblesse oblige, and consideration for a guest came first. They walked down to the station again, and Bunter rolled into the cab, and the Rookwood juniors followed him.

The ancient driver whipped up the ancient horse, and they started for Rookwood. Billy Bunter leaned back in a corner of the cab, and closed his eyes.

"Hallo! Going to sleep?" said Lovell.

Bunter blinked.

"I'm rather fagged," he said. "If you

fellows don't mind, I'll take a nap till we get to Rookwood."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Jimmy Silver. Bunter went ahead. His eyes closed again, and in a few minutes a deep and sonorous snore proceeded from him.

Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged silent glances. But it dawned upon them that they were not going to have a happy afternoon.

The cab crawled on to Rookwood. Sitting inactive on that keen, clear winter's afternoon was not gratifying to Rookwood juniors. But there was no help for it.

The cab stopped with a jerk at the school gates. Jimmy Silver shook Bunter by the shoulder.

"Here we are!" he said.

Bunter grunted angrily.

"Lemme alone, Bob Cherry, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter opened his eyes as Jimmy Silver continued to shake.

"Oh! Ah! Yaw-aw-aw!" he said, rubbing his eyes and setting his glasses straight on his fat little nose. "I believe I've been fast asleep, by Jove!"

"I believe you have!" grinned Jimmy. "Come on; here's the school!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the cab, apparently having forgotten the driver and his offer to settle with him. The fat junior sauntered in at the gates. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

"Three-and-six, please!" said the driver.

The juniors glanced at Bunter, but Bunter's broad back was turned. They went through their pockets hurriedly.

"Anybody got any tin?" whispered Jimmy.

"Stony!"

"Broke!"

"Same here!"

"There's Oswald in the quad. Cut off and screw three-and-six out of him!" whispered Jimmy.

Lovell, with a very peculiar expression on his face, dashed away to intercept Oswald of the Fourth. Dick Oswald obliged willingly, and Lovell came dashing back. Jimmy Silver found some odd coppers for the driver's tip, and he was duly paid. The cab rolled away, and the Fistical Four hurried after Bunter.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Pay Up!

BILLY BUNTER was looking very thoughtful. Several fellows in the Rookwood quadrangle glanced at him with smiles. William George Bunter's ample proportions would have attracted notice anywhere.

Smythe and Howard and Tracy, the Nuts of the Shell, were staring at him. Smythe had adjusted his eyeglass to take a good look, apparently regarding Bunter as a curious specimen of zoology.

Jimmy Silver & Co. glared at the Nuts of the Shell. They were not particularly proud of their old pal Bunter, and they did not like Smythe & Co.'s looks.

"Come down and see the footer, Bunter," said Jimmy. "There's a good game on this afternoon—First Eleven match. Bulkeley and Knowles—"

Bunter yawned.

"Don't care much for footer," he said. "Like to see my photographs?" asked Newcome.

"Fed up with photographs. When I go to St. Jim's that chap Manners trots out his photographs. Awful rot!"

"Oh!" said Newcome.

"What price a climb up the clock-tower?" grinned Lovell. "You get a ripping view from there—right out to the Channel!"

Bunter glanced at the clock-tower, and shuddered.

"Thanks! I'd rather not."

"Like a stroll?" asked Raby.

"Fed up with walking."

"Oh!" said the Fistical Four. They were rather at loss what to do with their visitor.

"The fact is," said Bunter, "I was thinking that, as I'm getting a little bit hungry—"

"Hungry!" Jimmy Silver could not help exclaiming.

"Yes. You have a place here—"

"There's the school shop."

"Good! Come along with me. It's my treat this time."

"Oh, my hat!"

There were several fellows in Sergeant Kettle's little tuck-shop in the old clock-tower. They glanced at Bunter as he came in. Billy Bunter gave them an affable nod, and seated himself upon a counter at once.

THE POPULAR.—No. 100.

He rapped out orders, and Sergeant Kettle supplied him, and the Fistical Four watched him dazedly.

How Bunter could eat anything after that tremendous blow-out in the village was a mystery to them.

Bunter had often surprised fellows who knew him well by his powers in that line. He astounded the Rookwood fellows.

"I say, these are ripping tarts!" he said, with his mouth full. "Why don't you fellows have some? It's my treat, you know. Order anything you like!"

"We've—we've only lately had dinner," stammered Jimmy Silver. "Still, we'll have some ginger-pop!"

"Do try the tarts," urged Bunter. "They're topping!"

Thus urged, the chums of the Fourth tried the tarts. Fellows were beginning to drop into the tuck-shop to watch Bunter. It was a sight worth seeing. The way he travelled through the sergeant's tuck would have done credit to a hungry Hun. Where he put it was a mystery to his companions. Ample as his circumference was, it seemed scarcely possible that there was room for more inside. But Bunter went on.

"My hat!" murmured Jones minor of the Fourth. "They must starve chaps at Greyfriars, I should think!"

Jimmy Silver made a grimace.

"This is his second feed since two-thirty!" he said.

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter rolled off the stool at last.

"I won't have any more," he announced. "I don't want to spoil my appetite for tea."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"How much is that, my man?" asked Bunter, blinking at the old sergeant behind the counter.

"Nine shillings," said the sergeant rather gruffly.

The old soldier did not like being addressed as "my man" by the Owl of Greyfriars.

Bunter ran his fat hands through his pockets.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed.

"Lost anything?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I don't know. I suppose I must have left it behind—my purse, you know," said Bunter calmly.

"Oh!"

"It's too bad!" said Bunter. "All my money was in my purse, and I've left it behind!"

Jimmy Silver might have asked how it was, if he had left all his money behind, that he had been able to take his railway ticket to Rookwood; but he refrained.

"You fellows settle this," said Bunter airily. "I'll send you a postal-order as soon as I get back to Greyfriars."

"But—but—" stammered Jimmy, in dismay.

"Rely on me," said Bunter. "I'll wait for you outside. Don't be long!"

The fat junior walked out of the shop, leaving the Fistical Four in a state of dismay that amounted to consternation.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Lovell, with more force than elegance.

"You've been spoofed!" chuckled Townsend of the Fourth. "What a giddy visitor to have! I congratulate you on your choice of pals!"

"He's no pal of ours!" growled the exasperated Lovell. "He's simply fastened on us like a leech!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nine shillings, please," said Sergeant Kettle, looking at Jimmy Silver. "Am I to ask the young gentleman for it, Master Silver?"

"N-n-no!" stammered Jimmy. "We—we'll settle. Oswald—where's Oswald? Flynn, Jones, Hooker! Somebody lend us some tin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in the tuck-shop. Billy Bunter was strolling contentedly in the quad. The predicament of the Fistical Four seemed to strike the other Rookwood fellows as funny. Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern side, almost shrieked.

"Spoofed, by gum!" said Tommy Dodd. "Why don't you take him out and drown him?"

"Nice pals these Classical duffers pick up, don't they?" grinned Cook.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Jimmy Silver. "Will somebody lend me some tin till Saturday?"

Loans were forthcoming, amid howls of laughter, and the nine shillings were duly handed to Sergeant Kettle. Then the Fistical Four, with heightened colour, left the tuck-shop, leaving the other fellows howling.

Outside, Lovell grasped Jimmy Silver by the shoulder and shook him.

"I'm fed-up!" he snorted.

"Same here!" groaned Jimmy.

"Nice sort of rotter to ask here—"

"I didn't ask him! You must have!"

"I didn't!" roared Lovell.

"Well, somebody must have! That fat-head Raby—"

"No jolly fear!" said Raby. "I wouldn't be found dead within a mile of him!"

"Well, we've got to stand it," grunted Jimmy Silver. "Don't forget Rookwood hospitality. Keep smiling!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Shurrup! Here he comes!"

Billy Bunter rolled up with a bearing smile. He was feeling very contented. His visit to Rookwood was panning out very satisfactorily, from Bunter's point of view.

"Anything wrong, you fellows?" he asked.

Perhaps he had noted the somewhat grim expressions on the faces of the Fistical Four.

"Nunno! N-no!"

"Let's go down to the footer," suggested Lovell.

At that moment Lovell would have taken a fendish delight in making the fat and unwieldy junior play footer.

But Billy Bunter shook his head.

"Fed-up with footer," he said. "I'd like to rest for a bit. Where's your study?"

The Fistical Four piloted Billy Bunter to the end study.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Too Funny!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were feeling somewhat harassed by this time. Rookwood hospitality was all very well, but they were fed-up with Bunter.

They wanted to keep smiling to the end, if they could, and they felt thankful that Bunter would have to catch an early train. They were beginning to suspect, too, that there was no mistake in the matter, and that nobody had invited Bunter to Rookwood.

The Owl of Greyfriars had simply planted himself upon them for the half-holiday; but the recollection of Greyfriars hospitality made the chums anxious to stand it to the end if they could.

Bunter stretched his fat limbs in the arm-chair, and blinked at them amicably. He was in high feather. He favoured them with some views on the game of football, and expressed his opinion frankly of Harry Wharton of Greyfriars, who declined to play him in the Remove eleven. By rights, according to Bunter, he ought to have been captain of the Remove, but there was a lot of jealousy about.

"What time do you fellows have tea?" he asked.

"Generally about six," said Jimmy Silver.

"But if you want to start early—"

"Oh, no, that's all right! I've got a late pass," said Bunter. "I needn't leave here before the seven train. I shall have to ask one of you chaps to take my ticket, as I've left my cash behind. Of course, I'll send you the amount on to-morrow!"

Bunter yawned.

"What do you fellows say to a little game of nap?" he asked.

"For buttons?" asked Lovell.

Bunter snorted contemptuously.

"Of course not. I'll play you for IOUs, as I'm short of tin!"

"You won't play for money here," said Lovell, forgetting his politeness for a moment.

"If you want to know what we think of that, we think it's bad form and blackguardly!"

"Pretty slow here, ain't you?" said Bunter.

"Well, have you got a cigarette?"

"No!"

"You smoke at Greyfriars, do you?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Well, the spoonies don't—Wharton and that lot," said Bunter. "But I'm rather a blade. I go the pace a bit, you know!"

"Oh!"

"I don't get much chance of smoking in the study—that beast Toddy goes for me with a cricket-stump, you know. But we have merry little parties in the box-room!" Billy Bunter chuckled. "We're awfully goey, some of us!"

Jimmy Silver looked at the fat junior with a mingling of contempt and compassion. Courtesy to a guest forbade him to utter his thoughts.

"Excuse me," said Lovell, who seemed to be having an inward struggle. "I've got to speak to Oswald about the footer!"

Lovell quitted the study.

Raby and Newcome looked after him, and then looked at Jimmy Silver. But they would

not desert their leader at that trying moment. They nobly resolved to stand Bunter as long as Jimmy did.

Billy Bunter blinked after Lovell, and grinned. He seemed to be thinking some minutes; then he grinned again.

"I'll show you fellows a trick," he said. "It simply makes 'em roar at Greyfriars!"

"Go ahead!" said Jimmy.

"Open this door, Jimmy, you silly idiot!" Jimmy Silver jumped.

It was Lovell's voice from the passage. Jimmy stepped to the door and threw it open.

Nobody was there. Jimmy glanced out into the passage with a puzzled look. He had distinctly heard Lovell's voice through the keyhole.

"Well, of all the silly asses!" he exclaimed. "What an idiotic trick for Lovell to play!"

Jimmy closed the door and came back to the table, and sat upon it. Barely had he seated himself, when Lovell's voice was heard again from the passage:

"Jimmy Silver!"

"Hallo!" called out Jimmy.

"Open the door!"

"Open it yourself, fat-head!"

"I'll give you a thick ear, Jimmy, if you don't open the door!"

"You silly ass—"

"I'll wallop you, you idiot!"

"Will you, by Jove?"

exclaimed Jimmy warmly, and he jumped off the table and rushed to the door and threw it open. "Now, you burbling ass— My hat!"

The passage was empty.

Jimmy Silver looked out in blank amazement. It seemed impossible that Lovell could have had time to dodge out of sight so quickly. But he was not there. Why Lovell should be playing such kiddish tricks, like a fag in the Second Form, was a mystery.

Jimmy slammed the door.

"Must be off his rocker!" said Raby.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"Hallo, in there!" It was Lovell's voice again from the keyhole. "You silly asses, why don't you open the door? You silly duffers!"

"I'm fed up with this!" exclaimed Jimmy wrathfully. "If that's Lovell's idea of a joke, he wants bumping badly. Let's go and bump him!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

The three juniors rushed out of the study, leaving Billy Bunter doubled up with merriment in the armchair.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome rushed down the passage. Lovell was on the landing, chatting with Oswald of the Fourth.

Without a word his three chums seized him.

"Hallo!" roared Lovell. "What the—"

Bump!

"Yaroooh! Wharrer marrer? Leggo! Yow-ow!"

"Bump, bump!"

"Now do you feel funny, you fathead?" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Funny!" spluttered Lovell. "Why, I'll squash you! You howling asses, what's the matter with you?"

"Next time you want to yell through a keyhole, select some other keyhole," said Jimmy Silver.

"Eh? Who's been yelling through a keyhole?" roared Lovell.

"You have, you ass!"

"You silly chump, I haven't! I've been talking to Oswald for the last ten minutes," spluttered Lovell.

"Rats!"

"But it's a fact," said Oswald, in wonder.

"He has, you know."

"I tell you he's been yelling like a lunatic into the study."

"And I tell you he hasn't."

"Of course I haven't!" roared Lovell, scrambling up breathlessly. "You silly chumps, do you think I play tricks like a fag?"

"But—but it was your voice!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, taken quite aback.

"Do you think we don't know your voice?" hooted Raby.

"I tell you I didn't!"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you can't take my word, Jimmy Silver—"

"I know your voice, fathead!"

"Then you can take that—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Oswald, dragging Lovell back. "Don't begin to scrap, you duffers! There's some mistake."

"He, he, he!"

The juniors stared round as they heard

Instead of showing appreciation of Bunter's exquisite humour, Lovell made a rush at him, quite forgetting that he was a guest, and got his head into chancery.

Then the roars that rose from Bunter were like unto the roars of a bull; and the Rookwood juniors roared, too, with laughter. To Bunter it no longer seemed funny.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

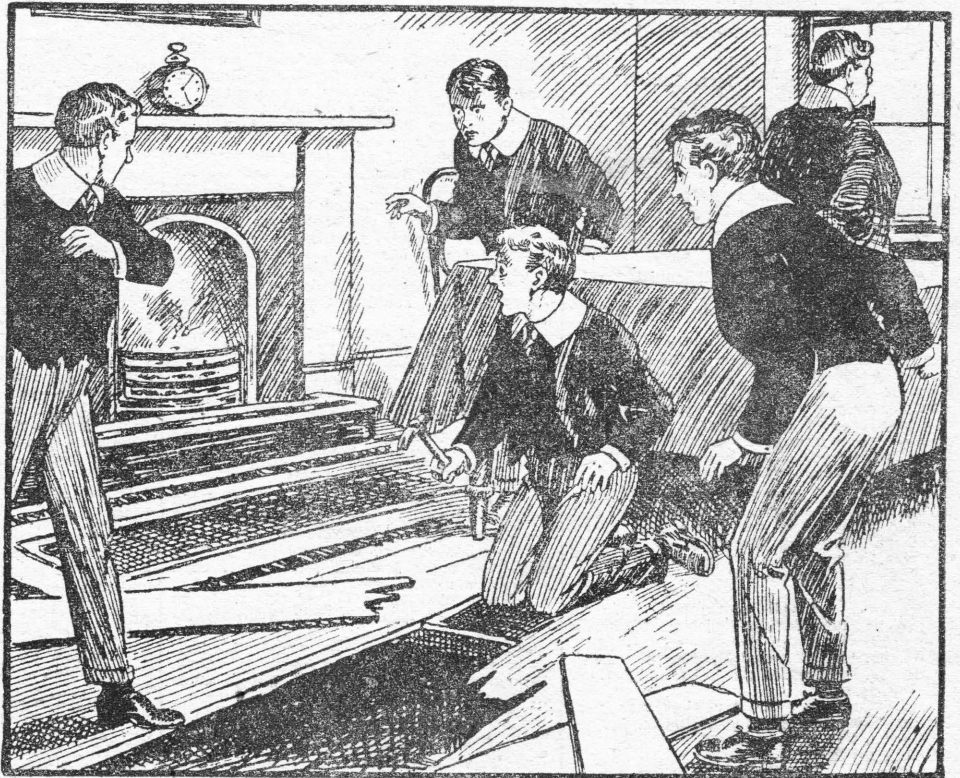
Bunter the Ventriloquist!

YAROOOH! Help! Yowp! Yowp! Groooh! Draggimoff!"

Thus William George Bunter at the top of his voice.

Jimmy Silver was the first to remember that Billy Bunter was there in the sacred character of a guest. He rushed at Lovell and grasped him.

"Chuck it, Lovell!"



Dommy Dodd peered into the opening. "Are you there?" he gasped. "Here I am!" And to the amazement of the juniors the voice came from the chimney. (See Chap. 6.)

that fat chuckle. Billy Bunter had rolled out of the end study, and he was chuckling as if for a wager. Evidently he was in possession of an extra good joke.

"He, he, he! It's all right! It wasn't Lovell!"

"Who was it, then?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Me."

"You!"

"What-ho! That was the trick I was going to show you," grinned Bunter. "Funny, wasn't it? I'm a ventriloquist."

"A—a—a what?"

"A ventriloquist, and a jolly good one," said Bunter. "I can imitate anybody's voice, you know—specially a queer grunting voice like Lovell's."

"What—?" ejaculated Lovell.

"Or a squeak like Newcome's."

"Why, you fat idiot—" began Newcome.

"Oh, really, Newcome! Funny, wasn't it?" chuckled Bunter. "It was me all the time, you know. I knew you'd go for Lovell if I kept on chopping you with his funny voice— Here, keep off, you know! Only a joke! Yah! Keep him off!"

Bunter had stated that it was very funny. Perhaps it was. But Lovell had been bumped hard, and it was excusable if he did not find it funny at all.

Punch, punch, punch!

"Yaroooh! Help! Beast! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Bunter's a guest, you fathead! Is this how you treat visitors?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Raby and Newcome added their grasp, and Oswald seized Bunter, and the two were dragged apart. Lovell panted.

"Lemme get at him!"

"Yaroooh! Oh dear! Beast! Look here, if this is how you treat a—groooh!—guest—"

"Lovell, you ass—"

"Never mind, Bunter!"

"But I do mind!" roared Bunter. "I'm hurt! That silly idiot has broken my nose, and dislocated my jaw, and blacked both my eyes! I'm going to lick him! Hold my jacket, somebody!"

"Hold the fiery porpoise, not his jacket," said Raby.

"Let him come on!" roared Lovell. "I'll teach him to play tricks and start three burbling idiots scragging me!"

"Shush!"

Billy Bunter was not really much hurt. Lovell, excited as he was, had punched carefully to avoid his big glasses. It was Bunter's fat nose and chin that had suffered chiefly.

He caressed them with a pair of fat hands, and glared.

"If this is Rookwood hospitality——" he snorted.

"Apologise, Lovell!"

"Rats!"

"We'll bump you again if you don't. Think of the good name of the end study, you fathard!" said Jimmy Silver severely.

"Well," said Lovell, calming down, "I'm sorry I—I didn't give you a few more, Bunter."

"You fathard, that's not an apology!"

"It's all you'll get out of me."

"Your apology is accepted," said Bunter loftily. "I don't want to lick you, as I came here as a visitor."

"Lick me! Why, you fat toad——"

"Shut up, Lovell!"

"I must say that Rookwood manners wouldn't do for Greyfriars," said Bunter. "We don't treat Rookwood fellows like this."

"Rookwood fellows know how to behave themselves!" snorted Lovell. "Still, I'll say I'm sorry. There!"

"All serene!" said Bunter magnanimously.

"I forgive you."

Grunt!

"Come and bathe your face, Bunter," said Jimmy.

"That's all right. I don't believe in too much washing. It's not good for the health," said Bunter. "I must say you fellows haven't much of a sense of humour. I set 'em in a roar at Greyfriars with my ventriloquism. Wharton comes to me sometimes and begs me to give 'em a show in his study. Fellows in the Sixth ask me to give 'em an entertainment on special occasions. Even the Head often——"

"And you're really a ventriloquist?" said Jimmy Silver, with some interest.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter. "It's a gift, you know."

"I'm sure of that," agreed Jimmy. Jimmy's idea was that it must be a gift, as Bunter wouldn't have had the brains to learn it. But he did not explain that.

"I'll show you what I can do, if you like," said Bunter. "I can make my voice seem to come from anywhere, you know."

"Let's hear you do it," grunted Lovell.

"Bow-wow-ow-wow! Grrr!"

Lovell jumped almost clear of the floor, as the barking and growling of a savage dog sounded at his very heels. He spun round in alarm. Then he almost staggered. No dog was to be seen in the passage.

"Why—what—where——"

"Grr-r-r-r!"

"My hat!" Lovell spun round again as the savage growl came behind him. "Where's that dog? What the thunder——"

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Rookwood juniors. Lovell gasped.

"Do you mean to say that was you, Bunter?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"He, he, he! Yes, rather!"

"Well, my hat!"

"Didn't it make you jump?" chortled Bunter. "Scared you out of your wits—what!"

"I wasn't scared—only a bit startled——"

"He, he, he!"

"Look here, you fat boulder——"

"Shush!" said Jimmy Silver. "That's jolly clever, Bunter—I mean, it's a wonderful gift. Can you do that whenever you like?"

"Certainly!"

"You must have a jolly queer throatle," said Lovell. "Something wrong with it, I should say."

"Why, you ass——"

"Will you ring off, Lovell? Where's your Rookwood manners? Bunter, old chap, come with us and see the Moderns. Let's see you pull Tommy Dodd's leg."

"Good egg!" chorused the Co.

"I don't mind," said Bunter. "But what about tea?"

"Tea!"

"Yes; I'm getting a bit peckish!"

"Oh, dear!"

"We—we shall have to have tea in Hall!" said Raby. "I'm afraid it won't run to it in the study."

Bunter grunted.

"I could have had tea in Hall at Greyfriars," he said discontentedly.

"Well, you see——"

"Bring your pal to tea in my study," said Dick Oswald, coming to the rescue. "We're having rather a spread, and we'll kill an extra-special fatted calf."

"Better make it a fatted bullock for Bunter!" murmured Lovell.

"Thanks awfully, Oswald!" said Jimmy

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Silver gratefully. "Now let's go and see the Modern worms, and spring Bunter on them."

"I'm game," said Bunter. "Any old thing!" The fat junior strutted, feeling invested with new importance, as the Classical juniors marched him away.

Even Lovell was grinning now. In all their alarms and frays with the Modern juniors they had never had a chance like this. It was their first opportunity of "springing" a ventriloquist on Tommy Dodd & Co. The prospect of pulling the Moderns' leg almost consoled the Fistical Four for Bunter's visit.

The Fistical Four and Oswald and Bunter sauntered out into the quadrangle together, looking for the Moderns. Tommy Dodd & Co. were not to be seen, so the Classics crossed over to Mr. Manders' House. Mr. Manders, the senior Modern-master, was in the doorway, and he frowned a little at the sight of Jimmy Silver & Co. Mr. Manders generally frowned at the sight of those cheery youths. There had been old troubles between them.

"Silver!" rapped out Mr. Manders.

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy meekly.

"What are you doing on this side?" Mr. Manders evidently scented a "rag."

"Taking Bunter to see Dodd, sir. Bunter's come over from Greyfriars this afternoon."

"Oh! If there is any disturbance, Silver, while you are here your conduct will be reported directly to the Head."

"Thank you, sir!" said Jimmy demurely.

Mr. Manders frowned again, and Jimmy Silver & Co. went on. They arrived at Tommy Dodd's study, and thumped on the door. Jimmy threw the door open.

The three Tommies were there. They were gathered round the table, upon which lay the sum of eightpence-halfpenny in coppers. The Modern chums were debating how eightpence-halfpenny could best be expended for tea.

"Hallo, Classical cads!" said Tommy Dodd, looking round. "My hat! Where did you pick up that prize-porker?"

"Just looked in to see you, Tommy Dodd," said Jimmy cheerfully. "Why, what have you been doing with your face?"

"My face!" said Tommy, passing his hand over his countenance. "What——"

"There's something sticking on it—looks like a squashed gooseberry——"

"What! I didn't know——" Tommy Dodd spun round to the glass. "Why, you silly ass, there's nothing on my face."

"My mistake," said Jimmy blandly. "It's only your nose. I didn't recognise it as a nose for a moment——"

"If you want to go out of this study on your neck——" began Tommy Dodd wrathfully.

Tommy Dodd paused. From under his feet, as it seemed, there came suddenly a low, deep groan, so blood-curdling that it made all the juniors jump.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Tommies to the Rescue!

"WHAT the thunder!" ejaculated

Tommy Dodd.

"Tare an' ounds!" exclaimed

Doyle. "Phwat was that?"

"It—it sounded like a groan!" gasped Cook.

Groan!

The dreadful sound came again. Tommy Dodd stepped quickly aside. It was fairly under his feet.

"What on earth——"

"Let me out!" came a faint voice. "Oh, let me out! I'm suffocating! I'm dying! For mercy's sake let me out!"

"It's somebody under the floor!" shrieked Tommy Dodd.

Groan!

"Great Scott!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"That can't be—it can't!"

He looked at Bunter. Billy Bunter was staring out of the window into the quadrangle, and seemed unconscious of what was happening in the study.

"Let me out!" The voice was faint and exhausted. "I'm dying!"

"Who—who are you?" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Help!"

"Where are you?"

"Under the floor!"

"How the thunder did you get there?"

lowled Tommy Dodd.

The juniors gazed at one another in consternation. Tommy Dodd seized the study carpet and dragged it aside. The planks of the floor were revealed. They were strong, wide planks, firmly nailed down to the joists. Certainly nobody got under the study floor from the study itself.

"Let me out!" moaned the voice. "I'm

suffocating! I can't find the way out! I've been here for hours! I'm dying!"

"My hat!" said Tommy Dodd. "Somebody's got under the floor somewhere, and crawled along here, I suppose. Who are you?" he shouted.

"I'm the gasfitter!" moaned the voice. "I got under the floor to see to the pipes, and I've lost my way. Help, I'm suffocating!"

"Well, of all the duifers!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

Groan!

"We'll help you!" shouted Tommy. "Buck up! We'll soon have you out of that!"

Tommy Dodd made a bound for his tool-chest. In a moment more he was kneeling with a hammer and chisel in his hand. He hammered and chiselled away desperately at a joint in the plank.

"Shove in the poker, Cookey, when I get it loose!" he panted.

"Right-ho!" Cook stood ready with the poker. "Buck up!"

Groan!

The groan was fainter now, and full of anguish. Jimmy Silver & Co. stood dumb-founded. Bunter was still looking out of the window. If this was the work of the Greyfriars' ventriloquist, it was certainly very remarkable. They wondered.

Bang, bang! Crash! Thump! Bang!

Tommy Dodd worked away like steam. The planks were well set; but Tommy was working like a Trojan. Bang, bang! Grind! Crash!

"It's coming!" gasped Doyle.

"My hat! You're doing some damage!"

said Lovell.

"Blow the damage—I suppose we've got to save the chap's life?" panted Tommy Dodd. "Buck up, my man—we're helping you!"

A low moan responded, fainter and weaker.

Tommy Dodd had succeeded in loosening the end of the plank. Tommy Cook shoved in the poker, and wrenched. With a creak the plank came slowly up.

Moan!

The sound was directly below the opening. The three Tommies grasped the rising plank, and dragged it away with a wrench. A dark and somewhat smelly orifice lay before them—darkness below, and dust and spiders' webs. Tommy Dodd, on his knees, peered into the opening.

"Hallo! Are you there, gasfitter?" shouted Cook.

"Here I am!" said the voice.

To the amazement of the Modern juniors, the voice came from the chimney. There was a fire in the study grate; but the voice came unmistakably from the chimney.

"In—the chimney!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"Here I am! Help! I'm scorching!"

"How did you get into the chimney?" gasped Cook. "There can't be an opening in——"

"Help! I'm scorching!" shrieked the voice.

"Better put the fire out!" suggested Oswald.

"Help! Oh, help!"

Tommy Dodd caught up a jug of water and dashed it on the fire. There was a terrific sizzling and spluttering. The three Modern juniors raked out the fire in tremendous haste. Blacks and ash rose in clouds, and Silver & Co. retreated to the door. But the three Tommies faced it heroically. They were dusty, they were black, but they were anxious to save the life of the unfortunate gasfitter.

"Now you can come down!" shouted Tommy Dodd up the chimney.

"Help me! I'm wedged in!"

"Good heavens!"

Tommy Dodd paused, but only for a moment. Then he threw off his jacket.

The chimney was wide, affording ample room for Tommy Dodd. Careless of soot, he squeezed over the grate and put his head up the chimney. He withdrew it again as black as ink, gasping:

"He ain't there!"

"What?" yelled Cook and Doyle.

"There's nobody there!"

"Oh, rats! He must be!"

Cook took the electric lamp and put his head up the chimney. He came out again as black as Tommy Dodd and as puzzled.

"Nobody there!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical juniors, unable to contain their merriment any longer.

Tommy Dodd glared at them—a very black look indeed! He was as black as a Christy Minstrel.

"You silly asses, what are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, Bunter, chappy!" The Classical

juniors retreated from the study. Jimmy Silver paused to speak one more word in the doorway. "We thought we'd entertain you a bit, you Modern duffers, with our tame ventriloquist. Ta-ta!"

"Ventriloquist!" shrieked Tommy Dodd. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver slammed the door and sped after his chums.

Tommy Dodd & Co. looked at one another, dumb for a moment. Tommy Dodd found his voice.

"Ventriloquist!" he stuttered. "That—look at fat pig is a ventriloquist! It's a jape! Look at the floor! Look at the grate! L-L-look at me!"

"Attrer thim!" roared Doyle. Tommy Dodd bounded to the door. He was not in a fit state to appear in public, certainly, but he forgot that in his fervid desire to get to close quarters with the humorous Classics. Cook and Doyle followed him fast. They rushed out on the landing.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were speeding downstairs.

"After them!" yelled Cook. "Hold on!" The voice of Mr. Manders was heard below, and the three Moderns stopped. They did not wish Mr. Manders to see them in their present state. "Cut it!"

Tommy Dodd & Co., breathing vengeance and soot, whipped back into the study. Vengeance had to be postponed. But vengeance was already upon the track of the Classical japers, in the shape of Mr. Manders.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Kill that Wasp!

STOP!" The hilarious Classics had quite forgotten Mr. Manders. They were thinking only of keeping at a safe distance from the sooty Moderns.

But Mr. Manders was there! His long, thin form interposed as the juniors were racing for the door, and he raised his hand commandingly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. halted in dismay. "Stop!" repeated Mr. Manders. "How dare you race about the House in this disorderly manner? I presume that you have been quarrelling with my boys—as usual! I have already warned you, Silver!"

"Not at all, sir!" said Jimmy Silver. "We—never quarrel, sir."

"Then why were you rushing down stairs like a crowd of wild animals?" demanded Mr. Manders.

"Ahem!"

"I will not have this horseplay in my

house!" snapped Mr. Manders. "I shall proceed to ascertain what you— My goodness!"

Mr. Manders broke off suddenly with that exclamation, and started back, as a deep, droning buzz came at his left ear.

"Bzzzzzz!"

"Bless my soul! A wasp, at this season of the year!" he exclaimed.

"Bzzzzzz!"

It was at his right ear now, and Mr. Manders bucked and jumped like a restive horse. Mr. Manders had a holy terror of wasps. He had been stung once. Certainly it was a remarkable time of the year for wasps to be buzzing about. But there was the buzz—which was unmistakable.

"Bzzzzzz!"

It was round Mr. Manders' startled head now, as if the wasp were seeking a favourable spot to alight.

"Dear me!" Mr. Manders waved both hands wildly in the air. "Silver—Lovell—do you see that insect? Pray drive it away! Dear me, I shall be stung!"

"Bzzzzzz!"

"It's on your neck, sir," said Billy Bunter cheerfully.

"Grooh!"

Mr. Manders smote himself on the neck with such force that he uttered a yelp of pain.

Jimmy Silver & Co. tried hard not to chuckle. They guessed that the Greyfriars ventriloquist was at work again.

"Is it gone?" gasped Mr. Manders. "Thank goodness! Silver, I was about to say— Bless my soul, there it is again!"

"Bzzzzzz!"

It was close to Mr. Manders' right ear, and he jumped to the left. Then the buzz came into his left ear, and he jibbed to the right. Then it was round the back of his head, and then under his chin. It seemed to the startled and flurried master that a whole swarm of wasps were buzzing round him.

"Bzzzzzz!"

"Silver—Oswald—Baby—pray see if you can—oh dear!—kill that wasp! Oh, upon my word, I shall be stung! This is most unnerving! Kill it, please! Strike it with your caps!"

"Bzzzzzz!"

"Do you hear me, boys? How dare you laugh! I command you to kill that wasp at once!" shouted Mr. Manders.

"Certainly, sir!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. rushed to the rescue, twisting their caps in their hands. They could not see any wasp, but they could see Mr. Manders, and they were quite willing to hit!

Whack! Whack! Whack! Thump!

"Be careful!" shrieked Mr. Manders, as the twisted caps smote him on all sides. "Do not strike me! Lovell, keep your cap out of my eye, you stupid boy! Silver, the wasp is not on my nose! Do not touch my nose, you utterly stupid dolt! I think it is on my shoulder. Yaroooh! You have almost dislocated my shoulder. Oswald, you unspeakable booby. Oh dear! Cease—cease at once!"

"Bzzzzzz!"

The buzz pursued him down the passage, right to his study door. But it died away when he was in the study, and Mr. Manders threw himself into a chair and gasped for breath. The wasp was gone at last.

Jimmy Silver & Co. marched, grinning, out into the quad, and they almost hugged Bunter. The Owl of Greyfriars had atoned for all his sins!

As soon as they were at a safe distance from Mr. Manders' house their pent-up feelings found expression in a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kill that wasp!" chuckled Oswald. "Oh, my hat! Didn't I give him a whop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will have a prize nose after this!"

"And a thick ear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Rookwood juniors repaired with their guest to Oswald's study.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
At Last!

DICK OSWALD was standing a "spread" on a lavish scale. His study-mates, Jones minor and Hooker, were present, as well as the Fistical Four—and Bunter. Oswald had laid in ample supplies—so he supposed. But he did not know Bunter yet. Billy Bunter took his place at the table, with his little round eyes gleaming behind his glasses. The "snacks" he had had during the afternoon did not seem to have impaired his appetite in the slightest degree.

Hooker had fried a dozen rashers to begin with. Bunter cheerfully helped himself to six of them. There were a dozen eggs on the table. Four were transferred at once to Bunter's plate.

"Won't you have some more?" gasped Hooker.

"No room on my plate," explained Bunter. "Wait till I've finished these. An egg only takes me a minute."

"Oh!"

The first course was partaken of sparingly by the Rookwood juniors. Bunter cheerfully demolished more than half of it. Sauces came next. There were six, beautifully fried.

"I must say that's ripping!" said Bunter, as Jones minor put the dish on the table.

"I'm rather fond of sosses. But ain't you fellows going to have any?"

The juniors blinked as Bunter turned the six sausages out upon his own plate. Certainly they had intended to have some. But they did not seem to have much chance.

"Nunno!" stammered Oswald. "We don't really care—ahem!"

"Not at all!" mumbled Lovell.

"That's your mistake," said Bunter, with a shake of the head. "Sosses are good. Got any more? No! Well, all right, I can fill up with something else!"

"Fill up!" murmured Jones minor. "Ye gods!"

A cake came next—a whacking cake. Billy Bunter's eyes glistened at the sight of it. This time the other fellows were in luck; they got a slice each. By the time they had finished their slices Bunter had finished the rest of the cake. Dick Oswald, with a peculiar expression upon his face, turned a whole pineapple out of a tin upon a plate. Bunter cheerfully drew the plate towards him. The Rookwood juniors gazed at him as it mesmerised as he started on the pineapple.

"I'm fond of pineapple!" said Bunter.

"You must be!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

The pineapple disappeared. Nothing but biscuits remained. Billy Bunter glanced round the table, and started on the biscuits.

"I can always fill up with these things," he remarked. "You don't have much in the way of solids here, I see. But don't mind me. I dare say I can get some sandwiches in the train."

"S-s-sandwiches!" gasped Oswald.

Bunter looked at his watch.

"Yes; but perhaps we'd better drop in at the tuckshop first. We've got time. It's bad for the health to begin a long journey hungry."

"Hungry! Oh crumbs!"

Jimmy Silver slipped out of the study. For ten minutes he was busy wildly borrowing money up and down the Fourth Form. Then Billy Bunter was helped on with his coat, and they started. They dropped in at the school shop, and when they reached the village they dropped in at Mrs. Wicks'. When they reached the station, Jimmy Silver had just enough money left to take Bunter's ticket.

Billy Bunter beamed at them from the carriage window as the Fistical Four said good-bye to him.

"Thanks awfully!" he said. "I've had quite a good time—quite. 'Tain't your fault it I'm going off a bit peckish. Hard up—what! Thanks all the same. Good-bye! I'll come and see you again early next term. I won't forget. It's a promise!"

The train rolled out of the station.

On the platform the Fistical Four looked at one another. Lovell sparred in the air, as if smiting at an imaginary face.

"Coming to see us again early next term!" said Lovell. "Well, if he does he won't go home alive, that's all!"

"If he does—" said Jimmy Silver; but he could not finish. Words could not express all those things he would do to William George Bunter if he visited Rookwood again.

Of course, there was some consolation in the fact that Billy Bunter had assisted them to play a great jape against the Modern Co. There was not the slightest doubt that Tommy Dodd & Co. would have to think of something really brilliant in the way of japes to get their own back on Jimmy Silver & Co.

In the meantime, they had a pleasant job of putting their study to rights. There was no doubt that Billy Bunter was a Cool Customer, and his visit to Rookwood would long be remembered.

THE END.

(Another grand story of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next week's PORTLAR!)

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