

WAS IT BUNTER?



CHAPTER I

BUNK FOR BUNTER!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"That ass Bunter—!"

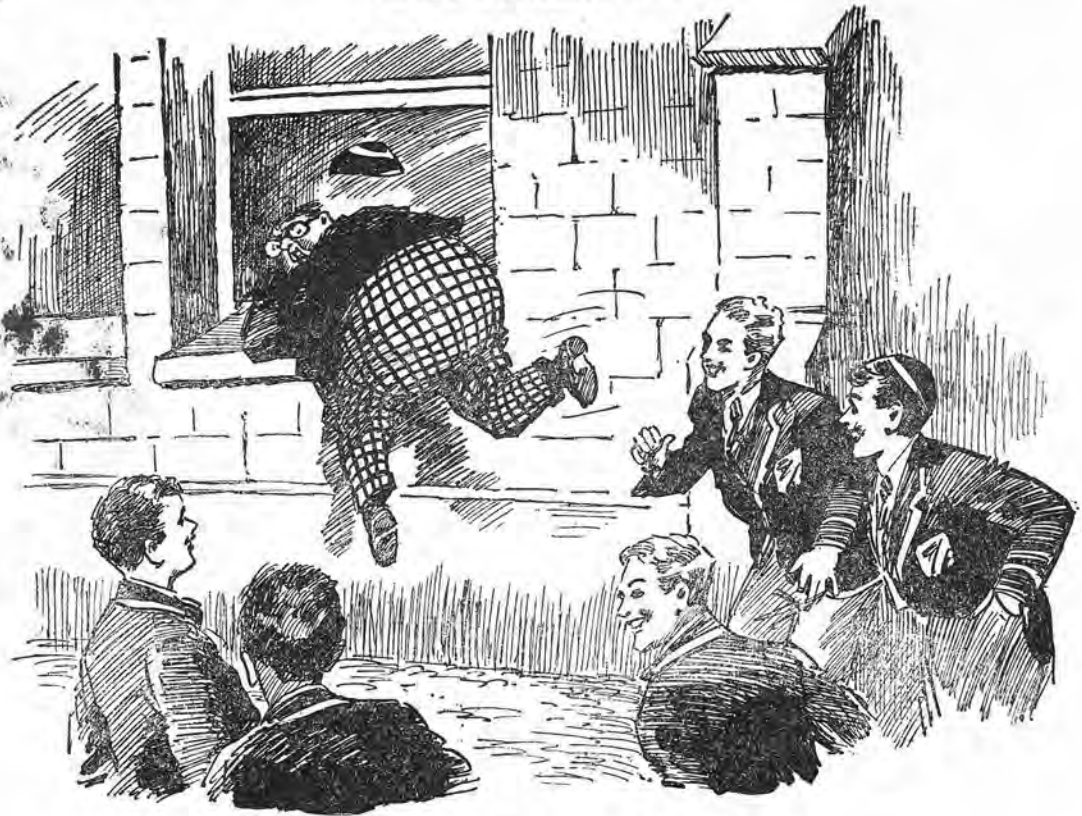
"What the dickens is he up to?"

It was morning break at Greyfriars School. Harry Wharton and Co. of the Remove, were taking a trot round the quad. They came to a sudden stop, as they were passing the window of the Remove form-room, and stared.

What they beheld at that window, was enough to make any fellow stare.

The window was wide open. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, always locked the form-room door after a class. But the window was left open to admit the fresh air of a fine winter's day.

Probably it had never occurred to Quelch that it might also admit a member of his form, clambering in from the quad!



The friends came up to the window

But just that was happening now.

What chiefly met the surprised view of the Famous Five, was an ample pair of trousers. They had only a back view of the clamberer as he clambered. But they knew those trousers. Those extensive trousers could only have been inhabited by Billy Bunter, the plumpest fellow in the form. It was Billy Bunter who was climbing in at the form-room window. Why, was really a mystery. Bunter, as a rule, was no climber. He had too much weight to lift. But there was Bunter—clambering up on the broad stone sill, puffing and grunting for breath as he exerted himself.

He was not making rapid progress. His fat elbows were on the sill, and his fat head almost in at the window. But the rest of him still hung below the sill, resisting all his efforts to get further. The Law of Gravitation, so ably expounded by Sir Isaac Newton, seemed too strong for Bunter.

"The fat chump!" said Bob Cherry, as he stared. "What the dickens does he want to get into the form-room for, in break?"

"Nothing to eat there!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"If a beak or a pre. came along and spotted him, it would be whops for Bunter," said Frank Nugent. "If Quelch saw him at it—."

"The whopfulness would be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Harry Wharton laughed.

"He won't get in, in a hurry," he remarked. "At his present rate, those bags will still be on view when the bell goes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That ripple of merriment apparently reached Billy Bunter's fat ears. A fat head was turned from the window, and a pair of little round eyes blinked at the Famous Five through a pair of big round spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, come here, will you?"

The juniors came up to the window. The fat Owl of the Remove, half-perched on the sill, blinked down at them.

"What's this game, you fat duffer?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I say, give me a bunk up, will you?" gasped Bunter.

"Against the rules to get into the form-room by the window, fathead! Do you want Quelch on your track?"

"Blow Quelch! Haven't I had him on my track already?" hooted Bunter. "Didn't he make out that I'd forgotten my lines in rep., just because I couldn't remember them—?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've got to write out those rotten lines twenty times. I'm jolly well going to let Quelch know what we think of him. You fellows wouldn't have the nerve to say 'Rats' to Quelch—".

"Oh, my hat! Not likely!"

"Well, I'm going to," said Bunter. "That's what I'm getting in for. Of course I can't say it to him in form. I don't want to be whopped. But I can jolly well write it on his desk, for him to see when he takes us in third school. See? Fancy his face when he sees 'RATS' written on his desk! He, he, he!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You howling ass, think he won't know that spidery scrawl you call writing?"

"No, he jolly well won't, as I shall print it in capital letters!" grinned Bunter. "He can fancy that it was any fellow in the form. How's he going to know that it was me?"

Billy Bunter chuckled, a fat chuckle.

"You see, I've thought this out!" he said. "I'm jolly well going to say 'Rats' to Quelch, without getting whops for it. I'm no fool, you know."

"We don't know!" contradicted Bob Cherry.

"Not at all," said Nugent.

"The knowfulness is not terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"In fact, we know otherwise," said Harry Wharton.

"Silliest ass going!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yah!" was Billy Bunter's elegant rejoinder to that. "Look here, don't jaw—just give a fellow a bunk up, before some beak comes prowling along."

Five heads were shaken as one!

Harry Wharton and Co. were obliging fellows. They would, in other circumstances, have obliged any fellow with a "bunk up" if he needed one. But bunking up a fat and fatuous Owl into the form-room, to play a trick on a form-master, was quite another matter.

It was true that Quelch had come down hard and sharp on Bunter in class that morning. Bunter, like the rest, had had to learn certain verses by heart, and repeat the same in form. "Repetition" was always a worry to Bunter—not only because he had a bad memory, but also because he was too lazy to learn his lines. Between forgetfulness and laziness, Bunter had naturally made a hash of his "rep". He had had to recite six lines of "Lochiel's Warning", which really ought not to have been too much even for a lazy fat Owl. But he had got no further than "Lochiel": sticking fast at the first word. So he had those six lines to write out twenty times: which perhaps Quelch hoped might fix them in his memory. For which, in Bunter's opinion at least, Quelch deserved anything that a fellow could do in return: indeed, he almost deserved something lingering with boiling oil in it!

Billy Bunter was going to make Quelch "sit up" for those lines: and certainly there was no doubt that Quelch would sit up, if he found the word "RATS" inscribed on his desk in the form-room. Only the difficulty of negotiating the form-room window stood in the way. A bunk-up would have solved that problem. But there was no bunk-up for Bunter.

"Wash it out, old fat man," advised Bob Cherry. "It would make Quelch as mad as a hatter—"

"That's what I want!" yapped Bunter.

"You don't want what would follow on," said Bob. "Quelch would give you six of the very, very best."

"I know he would, if he knew: but he wouldn't know," hooted Bunter. "Don't I keep on telling you that I'm going to write it in capitals, and Quelch won't know a thing."

"Quelch is a downy bird!" said Johnny Bull. "Not a safe game to rag old Quelch, fatty. Ten to one he'd root you out."

"Look here, gimme a bunk up, and don't jaw—"

"You fat ass," said Harry Wharton. "You'll be spotted, and whopped—Get down off that window-sill, and chuck it."

"Beast!"

"Well, we're not going to help you land yourself in trouble you don't want, you fat chump!" said Harry. "Come on, you fellows."

The Famous Five resumed their trot. That Quelch, who undoubtedly was a "downy bird", would spot the perpetrator, if Bunter carried on, they had no doubt at all. And the result would certainly have been very painful to the vengeful Owl. It was really kind of them to save Bunter from his own fat-headedness, as it were: but the fat Owl did not seem at all grateful for that kindness! He cast a glare after them that might almost have cracked his spectacles.

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter.

Then he resumed his efforts to overcome the Law of Gravitation. He pulled and he dragged, and he wriggled, and he squirmed. It was quite a cold December day: but the perspiration came out in chunks on his fat brow. And with all his efforts, the Law of Gravitation continued too strong for him. Bunter just couldn't heave his plump form up on to that window-sill.

"Oooooooh!" spluttered Bunter, winded by his efforts.

"Hallo, what's the game, Bunter?"

Bunter blinked round again. This time it was Skinner of the Remove who had come along. Skinner stared at the fat figure clutching on the sill, as the Famous Five had done a few minutes earlier.

"Oh! I say, Skinner, old chap, give a chap a bunk up!" gasped Bunter. "I've got to get into the form-room, and Quelch locks the door, you know—."

"What on earth for?" asked Skinner. "A rag on Quelch, or what?"

"Just that!" gasped Bunter. "I say, bunk me up! Quelch whopped you yesterday for having smokes in your study, didn't he? You owe him one, as well as I do. I'm jolly well going to make him sit up, I can tell you. Gimme a bunk."

Skinner paused. He cast glances to right and left and round about. Harold Skinner certainly had no objection to Quelch being made to "sit up", whatever might be the trick Bunter intended to play in the form-room. Skinner had not forgotten the "whops" of the day before, and he would gladly have retaliated, if he could have ventured to do so with safety. If Bunter was going to take the risk, Skinner wished him luck: and if the fat Owl was spotted and whopped, Skinner did not mind in the very least: he was not a good-natured fellow by any means. All Skinner was particular about, was his own precious skin: and he observed his surroundings with a keen and watchful eye before he gave the fat Owl the required "bunk". It was very much against all rules for a fellow to clamber in at a form-room window—and Skinner did not want to take risks, if Bunter did.



"Hullo, what's the game, Bunter?"

But the coast was clear—there was nobody at hand. Having ascertained that fact, Skinner stepped closer to the window. He grasped at a fat figure and shoved.

Bunter pulled and dragged, and Skinner shoved from below: and at long last the troublesome Law of Gravitation was overcome. Slowly, but surely, Billy Bunter heaved up on the window-sill. He rolled headlong into the room within, his fat little legs twinkling as he disappeared.

Bump!

"Ow! Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

Bunter seemed to have landed in a heap on the form-room floor. A loud howl from within announced that he had not found it agreeable to do.

Skinner did not stay to listen to it. He walked quickly away, and the fat and fatuous Owl was left to his own devices.

CHAPTER II

TOCO FOR TWO!

MR. QUELCH frowned.
He frowned portentously.

All the Remove noted that frown. All of them realised that something was "up". Most of them wondered what it was.

It was third school at Greyfriars. The bell had summoned everyone to the form-rooms. Mr. Quelch, when he unlocked the door and let in his form, had looked quite genial. Often he was crusty. But perhaps the approach of the Christmas holidays had an ameliorating effect. Remove fellows looked forward to the "hols" and a rest from Quelch. Quite probably Quelch looked forward to a rest from the Remove! Anyway, he was genial when he let his form into the form-room for third school.

But a sudden change had come over him.

Harry Wharton and Co. and the rest of the Remove, took their places as usual. Their form-master went to his desk. And it was then that the genial expression faded from Quelch's face, as if wiped off by a duster, and that portentous frown replaced it.

"Mind your eye, you men!" whispered Bob Cherry. "Quelch looks shirty about something."

"The shirtiness seems to be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a nod of his dusky head.

"He was all right when he let us in—what's come over him?" murmured Frank Nugent. "Looks quite fierce."

"Something on his desk—!" muttered Johnny Bull.

"But what the dickens—!" said Harry Wharton. He glanced round at Herbert Vernon-Smith. "You been larking, Smithy?"

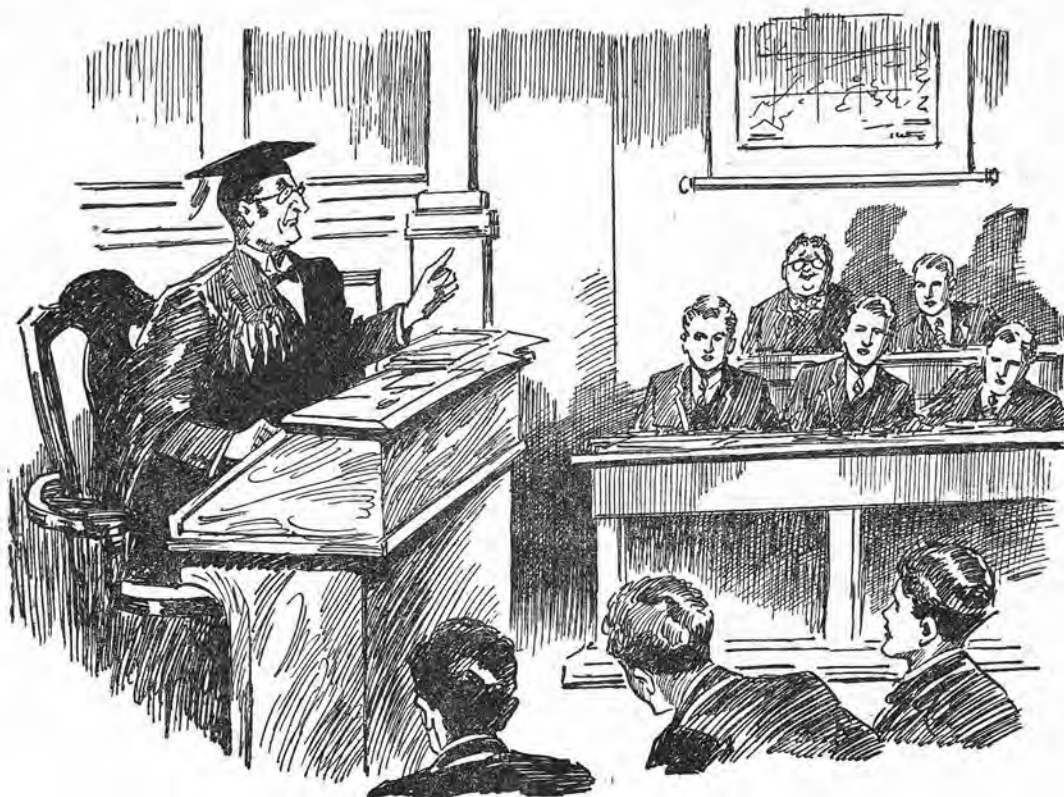
Smithy shook his head.

"Not guilty!" was his reply.

"Something's up!" whispered Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter grinned.

Bunter, if no one else, knew what was "up". Quelch was standing at his desk, staring, and frowning, at a sheet of paper that lay thereon. Billy Bunter knew what was written, or rather printed, on that sheet of paper. It was something fully calculated to make Quelch "sit up". The fat Owl, in fact, could hardly repress a fat chuckle, as he watched his form-master through his big spectacles.



Mr. Quelch (angry) and the boys in class.

There was going to be a row, of course. Quelch would be wild! But Billy Bunter didn't mind at all. There was no clue! Quelch had the whole form to choose from, if he wanted to know who had left that paper, with its impertinent message, on his desk. It was, so far as Billy Bunter could see, safe as houses. How could the perpetrator be traced, when he had been careful to print that message in large capital letters?

Bob Cherry caught that grin on the fat face, and gave a start. He remembered the incident at the form-room window in break.

"You fat ass!" He leaned over towards Bunter and whispered, "Did you—?"

"Didn't I just!" grinned Bunter.

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" breathed Bob. "Did you get somebody to bunk you up after all, you benighted barrel?"

"What do you think?" grinned Bunter.

"Look out for squalls then, you fathead."

"Yah! How's he to know a thing?"

There was quite a lot of whispering in the Remove, as they watched Quelch at his desk. He stood there, his eyes fixed on that paper: staring at it as if he could hardly believe those gimlet-eyes.

Skinner watched him very curiously. What trick Bunter had played in the form-room, he did not know. But clearly it was something at Quelch's desk which roused Quelch's deep ire.

It was a long minute before Mr. Quelch turned from his desk. He fixed his eyes on his form, scanning them. Most of the juniors tried to look as if butter would not melt in their mouths. Nobody wanted to meet those glinting gimlet-eyes. Even Billy Bunter, safe as he believed himself, felt a faint qualm, and ceased to grin. Then Quelch spoke:

"Bunter!"

The fat Owl jumped.

Not for a moment had he expected that gimlet-eye to single him out. Why should it, when he hadn't left a clue?

But it did!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "it—it—it wasn't me, sir! I—I—I—."

"Stand out before the form, Bunter."

"Bub—b—but, sir, I—I—I—!" babbled the hapless Owl.

"Stand out at once, Bunter."

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter rolled dismally out of his place. Harry Wharton and Co. gave him commiserating glances, as he rolled. Clearly Bunter was "for it". They had done their best to keep the fat Owl out of mischief: but evidently they had failed. Somebody else had given Bunter the required bunk, and he had carried out his intention. And Quelch had somehow spotted him.

"Bunter! You entered the form-room during break—!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I couldn't sir! The door was locked, sir—it was locked when I tried the handle, sir—I—I—I mean, when I—I didn't try the handle, sir—I—I never came near the form-room in break, sir—."

"You must have entered by the window, Bunter, which was open."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I couldn't! The window's too high for me, sir! I—I—I couldn't do it, sir."

"No doubt, Bunter, but doubtless some other boy gave you assistance in climbing in at the window," said Mr. Quelch. "You certainly entered the form-room during break, Bunter, as it was you who wrote that disrespectful and impertinent word on the paper on my desk. No other boy in my form

could possibly have made so absurd a mistake in spelling so simple a word, Bunter."

Mr. Quelch held up the paper from his desk.

The whole Remove stared at it.

On that paper, in large capital letters, was written the unusual and remarkable word:

RATTS.

Billy Bunter blinked at it. Certainly Bunter was the only fellow in the Remove, or in all Greyfriars, capable of such orthography. Laziness, carelessness and obtuseness combined to make Billy Bunter's spelling a thing that was really weird and wonderful. But this really was the limit, even for Bunter.

Not that Bunter saw anything in that remarkable word to furnish a clue to the writer. It was okay by Bunter! But the rest of the Remove, staring at it, burst into an irresistible chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter had been sure, absolutely sure, that he had left no clue. He was still happily unaware that he had left one in the spelling of that simple word. Why Quelch had picked on him was still unknown to Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Rats with a double-T! Isn't that Bunter all over?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in the class!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "This boy's impertinence, and his crass ignorance of the simplest orthography, are by no means a subject for merriment."

On that point the Remove did not see eye to eye with their form-master! However, they ceased to chuckle. Quelch did not look in a mood for merriment!

"Now, Bunter—!" he rumbled.

"I—I—I—it wasn't me, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I never—I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—I—I wouldn't, sir—I—I—."

"Only you, Bunter, could have spelt that simple word in so ridiculous a manner!"

Bunter blinked at that simple word. He could see nothing ridiculous in it! Really, he wondered what Quelch was driving at.

"Ain't—ain't that word spelt right, sir?" he stuttered.

"You utterly absurd boy!" thundered Mr. Quelch, "Do you suppose that the word 'rat' is spelt with a double T?"

"Oh, crikey! Isn't it, sir?" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Now, Bunter, I shall punish you for this impertinence—."

"But—but—but it wasn't me, sir!" groaned Bunter, "I—I never got into the form-room in break, sir! I—I couldn't climb in at that window, sir, and Skinner never gave me a bunk up—did you, Skinner?"

Harold Skinner, up to that moment, had been grinning. His grin vanished suddenly as Bunter uttered those words. He caught his breath, and gave the fat Owl the deadliest of deadly looks.

"Skinner!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Stand out before the form, Skinner."

Slowly, with set lips, Skinner moved out. The look he gave Bunter, as he did so, might almost have withered the fat Owl. Bunter, certainly, had not intended to give him away. But he had very effectually done so, without intending to. Skinner was "for it" now, as well as Bunter.

"You were a party to this, Skinner!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly, tapping the paper in his hand.

"No, sir!" muttered Skinner, "I never knew anything about it. Bunter asked me for a bunk up, but I never knew what he was going to do."

"You helped Bunter climb in at the form-room window?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

"You could only have supposed that he intended to play some trick in the form-room, by making so surreptitious an entrance."

Skinner made no reply to that.

"You were aware, Skinner, well aware, that you were breaking a strict rule, in giving that foolish boy such assistance."

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir—I—I did as Bunter asked me, that's all, sir—."

"That will do, Skinner! Now, Bunter—."

"Oh, crikey!"

"You will bend over that form, Bunter."

"But—but—but it wasn't me, sir," wailed Bunter. "I—I wasn't anywhere near the place, sir. I—I was in the tuck-shop when Skinner bunked me up at that window—I—I mean, when he didn't bunk me up at that window—."

"Bend over this instant."

"Oh, lor'!"

A fat figure bent over a form. There was no help for it. The cane swished in Quelch's hand.

Whop! whop! whop!

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter.

"Go back to your place, Bunter."

A hapless fat Owl crawled back to his place. Skinner had watched that infliction with unenviable feelings. Now his turn was coming.

"Bend over, Skinner."



"Bend over, Skinner"

With a set and savage face, Skinner obeyed.

Whop! whop! whop!

"Go back to your place."

Skinner in his turn limped back to his place. Quelch laid down the cane. He tore the offending paper across and across, and consigned the remains to the waste-paper basket. Then the lesson commenced. Two members of the Remove, during third school that morning, wriggled and wriggled and wriggled as if they would never leave off wriggling.

CHAPTER III

SAUCE FOR THE GANDER!

WHIZ!
Smash!
"Yaroooh!"

That sudden yell rang far and wide, over a deserted quadrangle.

Few fellows were out of the House. The weather was attractive to few that afternoon.

A fine morning had been followed by snow-clouds drifting in from the sea. The December dusk was falling in the old quad: and snow was falling along with it.

A mantle of white covered the quad, and the frosty branches of the old elms glimmered with ridges of snow. Hardy fellows, like Harry Wharton and Co., might welcome snow before Christmas, with a view to snowballing. But such an idea had no attraction whatever for William George Bunter.

It was quite against the grain that Bunter was trudging through the snow in the quad. Much very much indeed, he would have preferred an armchair by the fire in the Rag. Billy Bunter was not a fellow to brave the elements, if he could help it.

Nevertheless, there was Bunter—trudging. After class, the fat Owl had succeeded in borrowing half-a-crown from Lord Mauleverer. When Billy Bunter was in possession of coin of the realm, its natural destination was the school shop.

So there was Billy Bunter, heading for the tuck-shop, to expend that half-crown in sticky comestibles to the exact value of two shillings and sixpence.

He did not even notice that Harold Skinner had followed him out of the House. He was not thinking of Skinner. Having recovered from the twinges of Quelch's cane in the morning, Billy Bunter had dismissed that licking from his fat mind—and naturally, he had dismissed Skinner's too. Skinner's, in fact, really did not matter very much—to Bunter.

Unluckily for Bunter, it did matter to Skinner.

Skinner had a long memory for grudges. Certainly, Bunter had not intended to give him away to Quelch. He had done so unintentionally. But it had resulted in a whopping: which lingered longer in Harold Skinner's memory than in Bunter's. Skinner was not the fellow to leave it at that. The fat Owl was to get something back for it; something as unpleasant as Skinner could make it.

Unaware of the vengeful Skinner on his track, Billy Bunter tramped through the snow, his fat mind concentrated on the sticky things ahead at the tuck-shop. He did not, in fact, know that anybody was about, till a sudden snowball apprised him that somebody was.

That snowball whizzed from somewhere, and smashed behind a fat ear: and the smash was followed by a wild roar from Billy Bunter.

He tottered, slipped in the snow, and sat down.

Crash! smash!



The snowball smashed behind his fat ear

"Oh! Who's that! Stoppit! Wooooh!" spluttered Bunter.

He scrambled up, blinking round through his big spectacles like a startled owl. Another snowball crashed under a fat chin, and he tottered backwards, slipped again, and sat once more in the snow, this time rolling over on his back, with his fat little legs kicking in the air.

Whiz! whiz! smash! smash!

"Take that, you fat frog—and that—and that—and that—!"

Billy Bunter roared as he took them. He had no choice about taking them. They came hard and fast as he floundered wildly in the snow.

"And that—and that—and that—!"

"Yaroooh! Stoppit!" shrieked Bunter. "Oh, crikey! Ow! Is that you, Skinner, you beast! Whooop! Stoppit! Yarooooh!"

"More coming, you fat tick."

"Oooooogh! Stoppit!"

Whiz! whiz! smash!

"Ow! Oh, crikey! wow!" spluttered Bunter. He could almost have wished, at that moment, that he hadn't borrowed that half-crown from Mauly! He was not getting sticky tarts at the tuck-shop: he was getting snowballs that seemed to come like hail.

Skinner, grinning, grabbed up snow. Another and another snowball crashed on the fat Owl, as he sought to scramble to his feet. He sprawled headlong in snow, yelling.

Snowballs fairly rained on him as he sprawled.

"Stoppit!" yelled Bunter, frantically, "Skinner, you beast—yaroooh! Will you stoppit? Oh, crikey! Whoooooop!"

"Take that, you fat freak! That's for giving me away to Quelch—!"

"Yow-ow-ow! I didn't—I wasn't—I never—yaroooh!"

"And that—and that—and that——!"

"Ow! wow! Oh, crikey! Help!" yelled Bunter. "Stoppit! wow! Ow!"

But Skinner did not "stoppit". The fat junior, sprawling helplessly in the snow, was at his mercy: rather like a turtle turned on its back. Billy Bunter sprawled, and wriggled, and rolled, and dodged, but snowball after snowball crashed and smashed all over him. His breathless yells rang far and wide. Crash! smash! Crash! smash!

Skinner put his beef into it. The fact that the obtuse Owl had quite inadvertently given him away to Quelch, mattered nothing. Skinner had been "whopped" in consequence: and that was all that mattered to Skinner. He rained snowballs on the helpless Owl with vicious force.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sudden roar.

Five fellows came running up.

The Famous Five had turned out for a spot of snowballing. They had spotted Coker of the Fifth in the quad, from the window of the Rag: and Bob had suggested "giving Coker a few". That was quite an attractive idea to the chums of the Remove, and they had turned out to give Coker a few. But as Billy Bunter's frantic yells reached their ears, they forgot all about Coker—who never knew what a narrow escape he had had! They came on the scene with a rush, as Skinner pelted the unhappy Owl, wriggling and rolling in the snow.

"Stop that, Skinner!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Mind your own business," retorted Skinner, over his shoulder. And he delivered another missile, which smashed on Billy Bunter's fat little nose, followed by an anguished squeak.

Skinner had another ready, but he did not deliver it, for Bob Cherry grasped him by the collar, and with a twist of his strong arm, sat him down in the snow.

Billy Bunter sat up, gasping.

"Ow! Ooogh! I say, you fellows, stoppin! Oooooogh."

"We'll stop him fast enough," said Bob. "There's a limit, Skinner, though you don't seem to know it. What do you mean by pitching into Bunter like that?"

"Didn't the fat tick give me away to Quelch, and get me whopped in the form-room?" hissed Skinner.

"Ow! I didn't—I wasn't—I never—" spluttered Bunter, "I wouldn't give a fellow away—you chaps know that I wouldn't—."

"We know you wouldn't, old fat man," said Bob. "We know that you can't help being a born idiot—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunter let out your name because he's a burbling, babbling fat ass Skinner," said Bob. "You know that as well as we do."

"I know I'm going to make him squirm for it," snarled Skinner.

"Are you?" said Bob, with a warlike gleam in his blue eyes. "We'll have something to say about that. You've been pelting a fellow who's too fat and clumsy to stand up for himself—well, now you're going to have your turn. Get up, Bunter."

"Ohhh! I'm all out of breath!" gurgled Bunter, "I say, you fellows, lend a fellow a hand! Grooogh."

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull grasped a fat arm each, and Billy Bunter was heaved to his feet. Skinner scrambled up: but he resumed the perpendicular only for a moment. A strong arm tipped him over again, and he sat once more in the snow. Bob Cherry grinned down at him.

"Stick there, Skinner," he said. "Don't get up again—I shall tip you over, if you do! Bunter old fat man—"

"Groooooogh!"

"Like to give Skinner a few?"

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. "Oh! Yes, rather! What-ho!"

Skinner leaped up in alarm. The next moment he was tipped over again. He had dealt quite easily with the fat Owl: but the sturdy Bob was quite a different proposition. He sprawled in the snow and glared up at Bob.

"Look here, what's this game?" he hissed.

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," answered Bob. "You're going to get back from Bunter what you've given him."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull.

"The goodfulness of the egg is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.



Skinner leapt up in alarm

"My esteemed Skinner, whoever is saucy to the goose, must be saucy to the gander, as the English proverb remarks."

"Go it, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. He was quite keen to "go" it. Having recovered his breath a little, he gathered up snow with both fat hands.

Up jumped Skinner. Prompt hands up-ended him again. He sprawled in snow, and snowballs rained upon him in his turn.

Billy Bunter, as a rule, disliked exertion. But he seemed now to have quit a liking for it. He warmed to the work. He rained snowballs on Skinner, with all the force of his fat arms: and it was Skinner's turn to dodge and yell. The Famous Five stood round, laughing—Bob Cherry's sinewy arm ready to tip Skinner over again if he scrambled up. It was "sauce for the gander"—and Billy Bunter enjoyed it, if Skinner did not.

Not till the fat Owl was quite out of breath, and had not an ounce of wind

left in his fat circumference, did the snowballs cease to rain. Then, at last. Bunter ceased his unaccustomed exertions.

"He, he, he!" he gurgled. "How do you like it yourself, Skinner? He, he he!"

Billy Bunter rolled on to the tuck-shop, chuckling breathlessly. Skinner sat up in the snow, his eyes smouldering at Harry Wharton and Co.

"That's a tip, Skinner!" said Bob. "And here's another—Bunter never meant to give you away, and you're not going to scrag him for it, see? You touch Bunter again, and we'll jolly well touch you—hard!"

"Jolly hard," said Johnny Bull.

"The hardfulness will be terrific, my esteemed and execrable Skinner."

With that, the Famous Five walked away—leaving Skinner gasping and panting for breath, looking remarkably like an Abominable Snowman, and in the very worst temper ever.

CHAPTER IV

BUNTER, OF COURSE!

"UPON my word!"

Mr. Quelch almost jumped.

Quelch had been in Common-Room at tea with the other masters. He came back to his study without the slightest suspicion that anything had happened there during his absence. But as he walked in, he became suddenly aware that something had!

He stopped dead, staring at the looking-glass over his mantelpiece. His eyes fairly popped at it. That glass, as a rule, was polished clean and bright, without a mark on it. It was not in its usual state.

Someone, evidently, had been in the study while the Remove master was in Common-Room. That someone had dipped a finger in the inkpot and traced an inscription, in capital letters, across the looking-glass. It ran:

WHOO CAIRS FOR OLD QUELCH?

"Upon my word!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

The impertinence, the effrontery, of such a message, left for him by a member of his form, were amazing. Still more amazing, if possible, was the obtuseness of the perpetrator. For Quelch had no doubt who had traced that impertinent message. He had not forgotten the remarkable word "Ratts" on his desk in the form-room that morning. Only too well was he acquainted with the weird orthography of a certain member of his form. Only one fellow

in the Remove was capable of spelling "rats" with a double t: and only that same fellow was capable of spelling "cares", "cairs". Quelch was as assured of the guilty man, as if he had actually seen Billy Bunter there, tracing those words with an inky fat finger.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch, for the third time.

Bunter had been in that study! Indeed, there was proof of it, on the table, for thereon lay Bunter's lines. Quelch glanced at those lines. They ran—in Campbell's verse, but in Billy Bunter's own original spelling—

"Lochiel, Lochiel, beware of the day
Wen the Lowlands shall mete thee in battel array,
For a feeld of the dedd rushes redd on my site,
And the klans of Culloden are scattered in flite.
They rally, they blede, for their kingdom and krown,
Whoa, whoa, to the ryders that trampel them down."

Bunter had delivered his lines. He had left them on the table, as was the rule when Quelch was absent. It could hardly be doubted that, having done so, he had lingered to leave that message on the looking-glass: in retaliation for the lines: never even dreaming that the writer could be immediately identified by his spelling!

"That foolish, absurd, obtuse, impertinent boy!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

Thunder gathered on his brow.

He touched a bell. Trotter, the House page, appeared at the door: and was immediately despatched to find Master Bunter and send him to the study. Mr. Quelch waited with a grim brow. Rhadamanthus himself could hardly have looked grimmer than Henry Samuel Quelch, as he fixed his eyes on a fat figure that rolled reluctantly into the study.

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice.

"I—I've done my lines, sir!" said Bunter, in a hurry. "They're on the table, sir! There they are, sir."

"I have not sent for you on account of your lines, Bunter."

"Oh!" Billy Bunter blinked at him uneasily. "I—I haven't done anything, sir! I—I only snowballed Skinner because he snowballed me, sir—."

"I have sent for you, Bunter, to punish you for this latest example of your unparalleled impertinence and disrespect." Quelch pointed a lean finger at the looking-glass.

The fat Owl blinked at the glass.

"Oh, crikey!" he ejaculated. "He, he, he!"

"Upon my word! Are you laughing, Bunter?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter became serious at once.

"Oh! No, sir! Not at all, sir! I—I don't think that's funny, sir! I—I wasn't laughing, sir—I was—was coughing—."

"You have dared to repeat your impertinence, Bunter, of this morning—."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter, in alarm. "I—I never did that, sir! I—I wasn't—I—I mean I—I wouldn't—I—I never did it, sir. I—I don't know who did, but I—I didn't, sir—."

"It was you, Bunter—."

"It wasn't!" howled Bunter. "I—I only left my lines on the table, sir, when I was here—I never did that, sir—oh, crikey!"

"You utterly obtuse and stupid boy!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "How dare you tell me such palpable untruths?"

"But I—I didn't, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't know why you pick on me, sir, when I don't know anything about it."

"No boy in this school but you, Bunter, is capable of such absurd and egregious mistakes in spelling."

"Eh!" Bunter blinked at the inscription on the glass. "Is—is—is there anything wrong with the spelling, sir?"

"Only you, in all my form, would ask such a question. The spelling in that impertinence, Bunter, is on a par with the spelling in your lines on my table. There is no doubt in the matter. I caned you this morning, Bunter, for a similar offence—."

"But I—I—I never—!" babbled Bunter.

"I shall not cane you again, Bunter. But you will be punished for this act of gross disrespect."

"But I—I didn't—wasn't never—."

"Silence! You will go into Extra School, Bunter, for every half-holiday until the end of the term. You will also write out a whole book of Virgil."

"Oh, crikey!"

"That," said Mr. Quelch, grimly, "may impress upon your obtuse mind, Bunter, that respect is due to your form-master."

"B-b-b-but I never—didn't—wouldn't—." babbled Bunter.

"If anything of this kind should be repeated, Bunter," went on Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "I shall cane you with the utmost severity."

"But I never—."

"That will do, Bunter! Leave my study."

"But—but—but I didn't do it, sir!" wailed the fat Owl. "I never—."

"Go!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"But I—I say—."

"Another word, Bunter, and I shall cane you now."



"Is—is—is there anything wrong?"

Billy Bunter gave him a hopeless blink. But he did not utter another word. He rolled out of the study.

Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow, took a duster and wiped that inscription from the glass. Billy Bunter rolled away with a face of woe.

CHAPTER V

DOUBTING THOMASES!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"I say, what do you fellows think of Quelch?"

There was a crowd of the Remove in the Rag after tea. Most of them looked round, as Billy Bunter rolled into that apartment, his fat face crimson, and squeaked in tones of thrilling indignation.

"What about Quelch?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Extra School right up to Christmas, and a book!" gasped Bunter, "Fancy that! 'He's given me Extra, and a book!'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What on earth have you been doing, you fat ass?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, perhaps, was expecting sympathy. But his reply evoked only a ripple of merriment. Quelch was the last man to award a punishment for "nothing". If he was, as Bunter often declared, a beast, he was at least a just beast! In that line, Aristides of old had nothing on Quelch. And Extra School till Christmas was a heavy penalty—and a "book" a still heavier one. Obviously only some dire offence could have been visited with such a punishment.

"Tell us another!" suggested Skinner.

"Beast! I tell you it was for nothing—"

"Was the nothingfulness terrific, my esteemed fibbing Bunter?" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I tell you I never did anything—"

"You can tell us that till you're black in the face," said Johnny Bull. "But it won't wash, old fat frump."

"I told Quelch I never did it, and he wouldn't believe me—"

"Did you expect him to?" chuckled Bob. "You roll out too many whoppers for anybody to believe you, Bunter. But what was it?"

"Somebody's been scrawling on the glass in his study," gasped Bunter.

"Somebody wrote on it, 'Who cares for old Quelch?'"

"Oh, scissors!" ejaculated Bob. "You fat chump! No wonder Quelch's given you Extra and a book! I wonder he didn't take your skin off."

"But I never did it—!" shrieked Bunter.

"If you didn't, what makes Quelch think you did, then?" asked Frank Nugent.

"He says the spelling's wrong—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I couldn't see it myself, only Quelch said so, just like he did in the form-room this morning—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you bloated blitherer," said Bob. "Have you been at it again, after what you got this morning?"

"No!" yelled Bunter, "I haven't! Think I wanted another whopping? I went to his study to take my lines, but I never wrote anything on the glass. Never thought of it. But Quelch thinks it was me. I told him I never did it—"

"You told him you never did it, when you wrote 'rats' on his desk in the form-room," said Harry. "You fat ass, you should learn to spell before you send messages to Quelch; and learn to tell the truth sometimes, too."

"Well, Bunter's got a nerve, to play the same game a second time," said Skinner. "Didn't Quelch whop you, Bunter?"

"No—he's given me Extra and a book—but I never did it—"

"Rats!" said Skinner.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, what do you think of Quelch now—jumping on a fellow, and making out he did it, when he jolly well didn't! That's the sort of justice we get here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you I never did it!" yelled Bunter. "I've got Extra, and a book, and I never did nothing—I mean anything. I don't know who did it."

"Quelch does!" chuckled Bob.

"He doesn't—he thinks it was me—I say, you fellows, don't you believe me?" hooted Bunter, indignantly.

"Believe you! Oh, my hat!"

"The believfulness is not terrific."

"You fat ass!" said Johnny Bull. "What's the good of gammoning? If your spelling's given you away again, as it did this morning, what did you expect?"

"But I tell you I never—"

"Bow-owow!"

"If you fellows can't take my word—"

"Oh, crumbs! Bunter's word! Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at a crowd of laughing faces. Quelch had not believed him. Evidently the Removites did not, any more than Quelch. Bunter's reputation as an Ananias was, in fact, rather too well known. The hapless Owl's first resource, in time of trouble, was to roll out the first fib that came into his fat head. The juniors could hardly doubt that he was fibbing now. Who else would have made mistakes in spelling, in writing an impertinent message to Quelch? The case looked clear enough: and what the fat Owl had to say on the subject counted for nothing at all. His system of fibbing had come home to roost, as it were!

"I keep on telling you that I never did it!" wailed Bunter.

"Keep on as long as you like," said Bob. "But why not try telling the truth, for a change? A change does a fellow good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it wasn't me," yelled Bunter. "It must have been one of you fellows. If it was you, Bob Cherry—"

"Why, you fat villain—!"

"Or you, Wharton—"

"You podgy piffler—"

"Well, it wasn't me, and the chap who did it ought to go and own up to Quelch, now I've got Extra and a book. I say, if it was you, Bull—. Ow! Keep off, you beast! Stop kicking me, will you? Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter bolted out of the Rag.

CHAPTER VI

SKINNER KNOWS HOW!

SKINNER grinned.

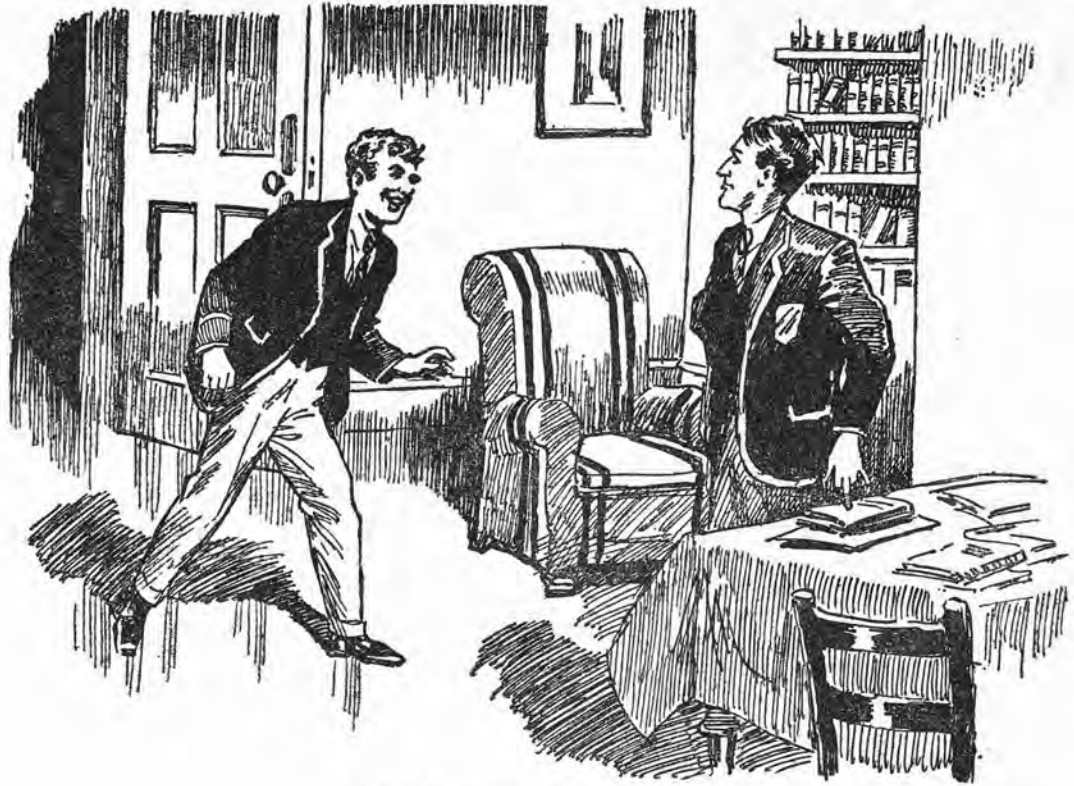
He was standing by his table in his study, No. 11 in the Remove. There was a pen in his hand. He grinned as he dipped the pen into the ink, and laid a sheet of paper on his blotter.

It was the following day. The Remove were through with Quelch: and except for an hour in the gym with Lascelles, still to come, they were their own masters till prep. Various fellows had various occupations: Skinner's was one that he would not have cared for the other fellows to see. Harry Wharton and Co. were improving the shining hour by snowballing in the quad, Lord Mauleverer by stretching his noble limbs on the settee in his study: Fisher T. Fish by counting his money: and Billy Bunter by trying to make up his fat mind to begin on the "book" he had to transcribe for Quelch. Skinner had been hanging about, till he was sure that his study-mates, Snoop and Stott, were nowhere near No. 11. What he was intending to do there would have startled any Remove fellow who had seen it. With a pen full of ink, he proceeded to "print" on the sheet of paper, in large capital letters:

OLD MUNKEE-FACE.

He chuckled as he proceeded. Skinner, certainly, knew how to spell the word "monkey" if Billy Bunter perhaps did not. Any fellow who had seen that paper would certainly have supposed, without a doubt, that it was William George Bunter's handiwork. Nobody in the Remove would have been capable of spelling monkey "munkee" excepting the fat Owl.

"Mustn't touch Bunter, mustn't I?" muttered Skinner. "He got me a licking, and I mustn't touch him, mustn't I? Well, Quelch will touch him, I fancy, and hard, too—it won't be Extra or a book again, it will be a licking! More ways than one of killing a cat! I fancy I know how!"



"What do you want?" snapped Skinner

And Skinner chuckled again.

He ceased to chuckle, suddenly, as there was a heavy tramp in the Remove passage, and the study door was hurled open. In an instant, Skinner caught up that paper, slammed it face down on the blotter and dropped a book on it, as Bob Cherry tramped into the study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

Skinner gave him a vicious look. He had very nearly been caught: and he was startled.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Nothing!" answered Bob, cheerily. "Hiding something?" he added, with a grin, glancing at the paper on the blotter. Skinner's hurried action had not escaped his eyes as he tramped in.

"Mind your own business," snarled Skinner. "Look here, what are you barging into my study for? You're not wanted here."

"You're wanted, fathead," said Bob. "Forgotten gym?"

"Hang gym!" snapped Skinner.

"Hang it as high as you like, but you've got to turn up with the rest," said Bob Cherry, "Lascelles sent me to call you."

Skinner compressed his lips. In his interest in his peculiar occupation in his study, he had forgotten gym.

"Oh, all right," he growled. "I'll come."

"Come on, then," said Bob. "Everybody else has turned up—even Bunter."

"I'm coming! You needn't wait."

I don't mean to!"

Bob Cherry tramped away down the passage, followed by a scowl from Skinner. Skinner waited till his footsteps died away towards the stairs. Then he threw aside the book, and picked up the paper from the blotter, crumpled it into his pocket, and hurried from the study.

CHAPTER VII

AT IT AGAIN!

MR. QUELCH gave a start. He was seated in his study, pen in hand, busy correcting papers for his form. He glanced up at a slight sound at his door.

Then he started—and stared.

Under the door, from the corridor outside, the edge of a sheet of paper appeared. Quelch stared at it blankly.

"Wha-a-at—!" He almost stuttered, in his amazement. "Who is there? You may come in! What—what—"

The door did not open, and there was no reply. But the sheet of paper, pushed from outside, slipped in under the door.

Quelch sat staring at it.

Seldom had he been so astonished. Someone, apparently, had come quietly up the corridor, and slipped that paper under his door, and departed as quietly as he had come. What it meant he had no idea.

He rose from the table, frowning, and stepped to the door and threw it open. He looked out into the corridor. Nobody was visible there. Whoever had slipped that paper under his study door had retreated promptly.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Quelch. "Someone was here—but he is gone! What can this mean? What—?"

He picked up the paper from the floor, and glanced at it. Then he jumped. His eyes popped at that paper. On it was written, in large capital letters:

OLD MUNKEE-FACE.



With cane in one hand and the paper in the other, he rustled out of the study

"Upon my word! That incredibly stupid boy Bunter again!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Upon my word! This passes all patience! Upon my word!"

He gazed at that message, thunder in his brow.

"That utterly stupid boy—that incredibly foolish and impertinent boy—he does not even seem to understand that his errors in spelling betray him! such obtuseness—such stupidity—upon my word! This time I shall deal with him with exemplary severity."

Mr. Quelch picked up a cane from his table. With the cane in one hand, and the paper in the other, he rustled out of his study. Extra, and a "book", it seemed, had had no effect on Billy Bunter—he was "at it" again! Once more he had indited an affront to his form-master—and once more his remarkable spelling had given him away! Mr. Quelch was going to see Bunter at once: and this time, the fat and fatuous Owl was going to have such a lesson, that it could hardly fail to make an impression on his fat mind!

A group of juniors in the doorway of the Rag stared, as Mr. Quelch came up the passage paper in one hand, cane in the other. The Famous Five ex-

changed startled glances. Quelch, obviously, was in a "bait", and he was coming to the Rag, evidently with the intention of using that cane!

"What's up—?" breathed Bob Cherry.

"The upfulness seems to be terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Wharton!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Is Bunter here?"

"No, sir—I think he's up in the studies. Is—is—is anything the matter, sir?" added Harry. It was rather a superfluous question. Only too clearly, something was the matter!

"Yes, Wharton! That foolish boy Bunter—that stupid boy Bunter—he has written this and slipped it under my study door. He must be found at once. I must deal with him without delay."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, as he stared at the paper in Quelch's hand. All the Co. stared at it, blankly. The spelling might, perhaps, have made them smile: but it was no time for smiling!

"Did—did—did Bunter do that, sir?" gasped Harry.

"What? What? Is any other boy in my form capable of such orthography?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "This is the third time, and it shall be the last! Find Bunter at once, and send him to my study, Wharton."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Lose no time!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

The Famous Five lost no time. After gym, it was tea-time, and they had no doubt that Bunter would be found up in the Remove studies. They cut up the stairs at a run.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob, as they reached the landing. "He's for it this time! Quelch is as mad as a hatter."

"No wonder!" grunted Johnny Bull, "Monkey-face—fancy that fat chump having the nerve—!"

"Fancy him having the fatheadedness," said Nugent. "Doesn't he know he can't spell for toffee? He was just asking for it."

"It's whops this time," said Harry.

"The whopfulness will be terrific."

"Poor old Bunter!" said Bob, again. "He can't help being a blithering ass! But come on—Quelch wants him, and won't be happy till he gets him. Poor old porpoise!"

They ran into the Remove passage, in quest of Bunter. They were sorry for the hapless Owl, who evidently had a hectic time coming. But Quelch was waiting for him, and was plainly not in a mood to wait long. Bunter had to be found and sent to judgment: and that was that.

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN

CHAPTER VIII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY!

"I SAY, Mauly—Oh, it's you, Skinner."

Billy Bunter grunted a dissatisfied grunt.

He was leaning on the wall in the Remove passage, between the doors of No. 11 and No. 12. The former was Skinner's study: the latter Lord Mauleverer's. He blinked through his big spectacles at a junior coming up the passage. But it was not the hoped-for Mauly coming up to No. 12. It was Harold Skinner coming up to No. 11.

Skinner gave the fat Owl a black look. A caning from Quelch, followed by a snowballing from Bunter, the previous day, had not in the least faded from Skinner's mind. The lapse of twenty-four hours made no difference: Harold Skinner was wont to remember grudges much longer than that.

"I say, Skinner, seen Mauly?" asked Bunter, blinking at him. "I'm waiting for him to come up to tea—"

"Wait somewhere else, then," snapped Skinner. "Don't loaf round my study door, you fat frog."

"I tell you I'm waiting here for Mauly—"

"Get out, I tell you."

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter, independently.

"If you want my boot, you fat tick—"

"You jolly well touch me, and you'll get toco from Bob Cherry," grinned Bunter. "I'll jolly well wait here as long as I jolly well like, so yah!"

Skinner breathed hard. Gladly he would have "touched" the fat Owl, with a heavy hand. But he had not forgotten Bob Cherry's warning: and he did not want trouble with the heftiest fighting-man in the Remove.

"You cheeky fat grampus—!" he muttered.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a shout along the passage. "There he is."

Five fellows came up the Remove passage at a run. Billy Bunter gave them an inquiring blink.

"Looking for me, you chaps?" he asked. "I say, if it's a feed, all right. I was waiting here for Mauly, but if you chaps are standing a spread—"

"Bunter, you ass—"

"Bunter, you fathead—!"

"Bunter, you terrific chump—!"



"Looking for me, you chaps?"

"Eh! I say, you fellows, wharrer you calling a fellow names for?" demanded Bunter. "Is anything up?"

"You potty, piffling, pernicious porpoise," said Bob Cherry. "Quelch wants you, and he wants you at once. Roll off."

Skinner laughed.

"What does Quelch want Bunter for?" he asked.

"The howling ass has been at it again," said Harry Wharton. "He slipped a paper under Quelch's study door—"

"I didn't!" yelled Bunter.

"With 'old monkey-face' written on it!" said Nugent. "And of course he spelt it all wrong, and Quelch knew at once—"

"I never—!" shrieked Bunter.

"Better tell Quelch that!" said Johnny Bull. "He's waiting for you."

"Oh, crikey! You go and tell him it wasn't me!" gasped Bunter.

"You can tell him that yourself, you fat Ananias!"

"I haven't been near his study—"

"Draw it mild, old fat man," said Bob. "You must have been pretty near his study to slip that paper under his door—"

"I didn't!" yelled Bunter. "I haven't pipped any slaper—I mean slipped any paper—under anybody's door. What makes Quelch think it was me this time?"

"He knows your spelling," said Nugent. "Think anyone else in the Remove would spell 'monkey' M-U-N-K-E-E?"

"Eh! Isn't that right?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I never did it, anyway. I don't know who did—"

"You fat ass!" said Harry. "Didn't I warn you to learn to spell before you sent any more messages to Quelch? Cut off, Bunter—"

"Shan't!" gasped Bunter. "I jolly well ain't going to be whopped, when I never did it. If it was one of you fellows—"

"You benighted fathead, go down at once. Quelch is waiting, and if you don't go, he will come up after you. He's got his cane with him."

"Oh, crikey! I tell you I never—"

"Cut off, fathead."

"I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I'll go to my study, and—and hide—and—and if Quelch can't find me—"

"You fat chump, he will look in your study first of all."

"Oh, lor ! I—I say, I'll cut in here, then." Bunter pitched open the door of Skinner's study. "Don't you fellows say anything to Quelch—"

"Keep out of my study!" snapped Skinner.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled into No. 11. His own study, obviously, was no safe refuge. Quelch was certain to look into Bunter's study for him. The alarmed fat Owl could only hope that he wouldn't think of looking into Skinner's.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "You fat foozler, do you think that you can dodge Quelch?"

"I say, you fellows, don't you tell Quelch I'm here—"

"Come out, you ass."

"Beast!"

"Quelch may come up any minute—"

"Oh, crikey!"

"You've got to go—"

"Shan't!"

Harry Wharton and Co. followed the fat Owl into No. 11. Skinner, grinning, followed them in. Billy Bunter cast a beseeching blink at them.

"I say, you fellows, keep it dark that I'm here! I say, I never pipped that slipper—I mean I never slipped that pipper—I mean—"

"For goodness sake, don't be such an ass, Bunter," said Harry. "You've got to face up to it, after what you've done."

"I haven't done nothing—I mean anything—I never done it—I mean I never did it—I tell you I never didn't done—"

Frank Nugent glanced out of the doorway. He had a glimpse of a mortar-board at the other end of the passage. Quelch was coming up!

"He's coming!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Oh, crikey!"

"Bunter, you ass, you've got to go—"

"Oh, lor'! I—I say, you fellows, don't you let on that I'm here—I—I—I ain't going to be whopped!" wailed Bunter. "If—Quelch comes here, tell him I'm gone out of gates—tell him. I'm in the gym—tell him I'm ill and gone into sanny—tell him—!"

"OH!" came a sudden roar from Bob Cherry, interrupting Bunter. All eyes turned on him. Bob was staring at a blotter on the study table.

"What—?" began Harry.

"Oh! Oh, my hat! Look at this!" roared Bob. "Skinner, you rat—Skinner, you tricky tick—Skinner, you double-crossing rotter—"

"What the thump—?" gasped Wharton.

"Look!" roared Bob.

He held up the blotter. Clearly on the white blotting-paper, was the impression of a row of capital letters, from wet ink when a paper had been hurriedly jammed face down on the blotter. All the juniors in the study stared at it blankly. What they beheld was:

.ECAF-EEKNUM DLO

For a moment, they simply stared. Then, realizing that an impression on blotting-paper would be backwards, they read that row of letters backwards. And what they read was "OLD MUNKEE-FACE."

CHAPTER IX

ALL RIGHT FOR BUNTER!

"OH!" gasped Skinner.

He made a spring forward, snatching at the blotter.

Bob Cherry held it out of reach in his right hand, and with his left, gave Harold Skinner a shove on the chest, that sent him tottering across the room.



"That's my blotter," panted Skinner

"Hands off, you rotter!" he snapped.

"That's my blotter!" panted Skinner. "Hand it over—it's mine—"

"Yes, it's yours, you rat, and what's on it is your handiwork!" roared Bob, his face red with anger and indignation. "That's what you were hiding when I came in here to call you to gym. I didn't know what it was, and I didn't care—but I could see you were hiding something. And this was it—You wrote that paper that was slipped under Quelch's door—"

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter, his little round eyes almost popping through his big round spectacles at Skinner.

"Skinner, you rotter—!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Skinner all the time!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"The execrable and ridiculous Skinner!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look at it!" roared Bob. "It's spelt backwards on the blotter—but you can read it from right to left! Skinner did this—"

"In Bunter's spelling!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes, that was his game! That silly fathead spelt 'rats' R-A-T-T-S on Quelch's desk yesterday, and Quelch knew at once who it was. Of course he thought it was Bunter next time. Nobody else spells like that fat ass—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Only that ass Bunter could make such mistakes in spelling—"

"Look here, I jolly well don't make mistakes in spelling!" squeaked Billy Bunter, indignantly. "I could jolly well spell your head off, and chance it. If you're going to make out that I can't spell, Cherry—"

"Kick him, somebody! That was Skinner's game—because we stopped him pitching into the fat chump—he was going to get him a whopping from Quelch instead!" roared Bob. "It was Skinner put that message on Quelch's glass in his study yesterday—I can see that now—spelling it like Bunter to take Quelch in—and now he's done this—"

"Skinner, you rat—"

"Skinner, you cad—"

"Skinner, you terrific toad—"

Skinner stood panting. It was all clear now: and the startling discovery had come only in time: for Mr. Quelch, having looked into Bunter's study in vain, was coming up the passage. But the juniors had, for the moment, forgotten Quelch, in the excitement of that discovery. The looks of contempt that were cast on him pierced even Skinner's thick skin, and he stood panting and stammering.

"It—it—it was only a joke—" he stuttered, "I—I—"

"Perhaps Quelch will see the joke, when he sees this blotter!" roared Bob. Skinner gave a gasp of terror.

"Give it me! It's mine—give it me! You can't let Quelch see that—give me my blotter—"

"I say, you fellows, I jolly well told you it wasn't me," squeaked Billy Bunter. "Skinner all the time! I told you it wasn't me, didn't I? Perhaps you'll believe me another time."

"Perhaps!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Not likely, though—"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"You tell too many whoppers, old fat man," said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Give me that blotter, Cherry," panted Skinner. "Quelch may come up any minute—give it to me, I tell you. You can't let Quelch see that blotter—Don't let him see it—don't—"

There was a step at the doorway.

"What is all this?" Gimlet-eyes glinted into the study. They glinted, for a moment, at Billy Bunter. Then they fixed on Bob Cherry. "I heard what you

said, Skinner! What is this that I am not to see? Cherry, hand me that blotter instantly."

Bob, in silence, handed over the blotter.

The gimlet-eyes fixed on it.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

There was a dead silence in the study, as the Remove master gazed at the impression on the blotter. It was a silence that might have been felt. It was, indeed, felt by the wretched Skinner, who stood with his knees knocking together, and clots of perspiration on his face. The expression that was dawning on Mr. Quelch's face was positively terrifying.

Quelch broke the awful silence at last.

"Upon my word! Skinner, this is your blotter?" His voice was like the grinding of a file. "This is what you did not desire me to see! Upon my word! It was you who wrote that paper and slipped it under my door. It was written here and blotted on your blotter. I cannot doubt now that it was you also who wrote the impertinent words on my looking-glass yesterday, Skinner. You can spell correctly if you choose: but you have deliberately imitated Bunter's bad spelling, in order to delude me. Upon my word."

"I—I—I—! mumbled Skinner. His voice trailed away.

"It was you, Skinner, and not Bunter at all."

"I—I—I didn't mean—"

"I think I know what you meant, Skinner. I have no doubt of your meaning in playing so deceitful a trick. Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! It—wasn't me, sir—", gasped Bunter, in a hurry.

"I know now that it was not you, Bunter. You will not go into Extra School, and you need not write the book of Virgil."

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's fat face registered joy! "Oh! Thank you, sir! I—I told you all the time it wasn't me, sir—"

"You are too untruthful a boy, Bunter, for your word to carry any weight whatever!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"That will do, Bunter. You are exonerated, and that is enough. Skinner, I shall deal with you here and now. Such duplicity must be punished with the utmost severity. I shall cane you, Skinner, more severely than I have ever caned a boy before: and I trust that it will be a lesson to you." Mr. Quelch glanced round. "You others may go."

Harry Wharton and Co. quietly left the study. Billy Bunter, grinning, followed them. Gladly would Skinner have followed also. But the hapless schemer had to take what was coming to him.

Mr. Quelch pointed to a chair with the cane.



"Bend over that chair, Skinner"

"Bend over that chair, Skinner."

Skinner drooped dismally over the chair. There was a sound of swishing in the study, as the cane rose and fell. It rose and fell with tremendous vigour, Mr. Quelch evidently felt that it was his duty to be severe, in this case: and Quelch was a whale on duty. He did his duty thoroughly. Harold Skinner was wriggling like an eel, when Quelch finally tucked his cane under his arm and departed.

"I SAY, you fellows."

"Say on, old fat fathead!" said Bob Cherry, cheerily.

"I say, I want to thank you chaps!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. He had caught them on the Remove landing, going down after tea. He beamed on them. "I say, you're real pals.

you chaps! Look what you've done for me! Quelch was jolly well going to whop me, wasn't he—?"

"He was!" said Harry Wharton.

"And it was Skinner all the time—"

"I expect he's sorry for it by now. Quelch laid it on."

"Serve him jolly well right," said Bunter. "I'd jolly well go along to his study and whop him myself, only—only I think I'd better keep clear of the brute—"

"You better had!" chuckled Bob. "You wouldn't find him in a good temper."

"Well, never mind Skinner," said Bunter. "The fact is, I was for it, if you fellows hadn't chipped in, and pulled me through, and I think you're real jolly good pals."

"Thanks a lot!" said Bob. "Is that all?"

"Nunno! I mean to say, I'm jolly grateful, and all that—mind, I'm not piling it on because I want anything—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I mean it, every word, and I jolly well think you're jolly splendid chaps, standing by a fellow like that—finest fellows at Greyfriars and chance it: and I'll tell you what—I'll jolly well turn down a lot of invitations I've had, and come along with you for the Christmas hols——"

"Help!"

"Run for your lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows," yelled Billy Bunter, as the Famous Five scampered across the landing, and down the stairs. "I say, don't cut off while a fellow's talking to you—I say—"

But the chums of the Remove did cut off, laughing as they cut, and Billy Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air!

THE END