

BRAINY BUNTER



"You cheeky little fat sweep"

CHAPTER I

FOGGY!

"LOOKS like Soccer, doesn't it?" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Not a lot!" said Harry Wharton.

"The lookfulness is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head. "But what cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's English proverbs often made his comrades grin. But they did not grin now. They did not feel like grinning.

Five faces, generally as cheery as any in the Greyfriars Remove, were clouded. The Famous Five, for once, were disgruntled.

Really, it was enough to disgruntle any fellow keen on the open air and the open spaces. The sea-fog could not have drifted in over the school at a more inopportune time.

It was a half-holiday. It had been misty in the morning: but mist in the morning did not matter very much, while the Remove were in form with Mr. Quelch. Harry Wharton and Co. looking forward to football in the afternoon, hoped that it would clear after dinner. Instead of which, it thickened into fog, rolling in in dense masses from the sea.

Visibility was down to almost nil. It was not merely foggy. It was pea-soupy. It clothed Greyfriars like a garment. Coming out after dinner to see what the weather was like, the Co. could certainly see that much: but they could hardly see one another. Even Bob Cherry, the hardiest and most active member of a hardy and active Co. had to admit that it did not look like Soccer. In fact it was not judicious to venture far from the House, lest they should be unable to find their way back again.

"Rotten!" sighed Frank Nugent.

"Putrid!" said Johnny Bull.

"It had to drop in on a half-holiday!" growled Bob. "It wouldn't matter if we were in form with Quelch. But on a half—Blow!"

"Well, this washes out Soccer," said Harry Wharton, "Might fix up some boxing in the Rag."

"I say, you fellows," came a fat squeak from the mist.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, fancy Bunter coming out in this!" said Bob, as that fat familiar squeak fell on his ears.

The Famous Five looked round for Bunter. He was audible but not visible. But a fat figure loomed through the fog, and a pair of big round spectacles glimmered at them.

"I say, you fellows, it's jolly thick, ain't it?" said Billy Bunter, "I couldn't see you, but I heard your voices. I wonder if one of you would cut across to the tuck-shop for me."

"Go on wondering!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Why not cut across yourself?" asked Bob.

"Well, I was going to, but it's too jolly thick," explained Bunter. "I mightn't be able to find my way back."

"And it wouldn't matter if one of us couldn't?" inquired Johnny, sarcastically.

"No—I mean, I expect you'd get back all right. Don't be funky of a spot of fog," said Bunter. "I say, Mauly's lent me ha'f-a-crown till my postal-order comes. I'll whack out the toffee, if one of you fellows will cut across and get it. You'll go, won't you, Bob?"



"Why not cut across yourself," asked Bob

"Not in these trousers!" answered Bob Cherry.

"What about you, Franky?"

"Nothing about me," answered Nugent.

"What about you, Wharton?"

"Less than nothing," answered Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Well, you're a poor lot, funky of a spot of fog," said Bunter. "Old Prout's out in it—I heard Coker say so."

"Prout won't get home in a hurry, if he's out in this!" said Bob. "Must have been an ass to go out."

"Well, he went out just after dinner, before it was so thick," said Bunter. "If he's got himself lost in the fog, serve him jolly well right. He reported me to Quelch for helping myself to a few bikkies from the box in Common-Room. Quelch gave me a hundred lines for it."

"You should keep your hands from the pickfulness and the stealfulness, my esteemed idiotic Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I told him I hadn't touched the biscuits," hooted Bunter, indignantly. "He wouldn't take my word for it, just because he caught me eating them—."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, if you've got nothing to do this afternoon, what about helping me with my lines?"

"Absolutely and definitely nothing about that!"

"Beasts!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's somebody else out in the fog!" remarked Bob Cherry, as a loud voice boomed through the invisibility. It was a well-known voice—that of Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form.

"Prout's still out!" came Coker's stentorian tones. "It's come on jolly thick since he went out, you chaps. I shouldn't wonder if he's flummoxed in this fog. You know what an old ass he is."

The Famous Five grinned at one another. Coker had a loud voice, which it never occurred to him to subdue. Anyone in the quad might have heard him stating his opinion of his form-master,—even the portly and majestic Mr. Prout himself, had he chanced to come in at that moment.

"Oh, I expect he'll wander in sooner or later," came a reply from Potter of the Fifth.

"That's all very well," said Coker. "But if he's lost himself in the fog—."

"Not your worry, if he has," came Green's voice.

"He's my beak!" retorted Coker.

"Wasn't he ragging you in form this morning, for mixing up your infinitives with your perfect plural?" asked Potter.

"Yes, he was!" snorted Coker. "Old ass, as if it mattered. Isn't he always ragging me in form for something or other? But he's our beak, and if he's got himself lost in the fog, what about going out and looking for him?"

"Bit too thick for me!" said Potter. "I'm going in, not out."

"Same here!" said Greene.

"Hold on!" rapped Coker. "I don't care if old Pompous did rag me in form—he's my beak, and I'm not going to leave him to wander all over Kent in this fog. I'm going out to look for him, so come on, both of you."

There was no reply to that, but a sound of receding footsteps, which Harry Wharton and Co. were not surprised to hear. Coker and Co. were quite near at hand, though invisible in the fog: and the juniors could guess that the footsteps were those of Potter and Greene, going back into the House. Coker, generously regardless of the fact that Mr. Prout had ragged him in form that morning, was going out to look for his beak and guide him safely home.



Smack! "Yaroooh!" roared Bunter

Evidently Potter and Greene did not want to share in that expedition to the rescue. Coker's bawling voice followed the footsteps.

"Hold on! I said hold on! Where are you going? Ain't you coming with me to look for old Pompous?"

Answer, there came none! Potter and Greene evidently preferred indoors and a fireside, to an expedition in chilly fog.

Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"He, he, he! Coker won't find old Prout in a hurry, if he does look for him. Bet you the old donkey's lost himself."

The juniors had heard the Fifth-formers' voices: and naturally Coker heard Bunter's. A burly figure loomed up closer at hand. Coker became visible as well as audible. He glared at the fat Owl of the Remove as he towered over him.

"You cheeky little fat sweep!" roared Coker. "What do you mean by calling my beak names?"

"Eh!" Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles. "Didn't you call him an ass yourself, Coker?"

"I can call him what I like, but you can't!" snorted Coker. "If you think you can slang my form-master, you cheeky fat slug, take that!"

Smack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter.

Horace Coker had a large and heavy hand. It landed on a fat ear with a mighty smite. Billy Bunter roared and tottered under that smite.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Look here, Coker—."

But Coker did not "look there." He disappeared into the fog, leaving Billy Bunter with a fat hand clapped to a fat ear, yelling. And, having seen as much as they wanted of the weather, the Famous Five went back into the House, leaving him to yell.

CHAPTER II

BRAINY!

"TODDY, old fellow."

"Don't jaw just now, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"Shut up."

"Beast!"

Peter Todd grinned, and went on with his task, which was writing lines for his form-master, Mr. Quelch. There was no particular hurry for those lines: but a foggy afternoon, which kept a fellow indoors, seemed a good opportunity for getting them done. Busy with lines, Peter seemed to have no use for conversation from his fat study-mate in No. 7 Study: William George Bunter.

Billy Bunter was seated, or rather sprawled, in the study armchair. He was as busy as Toddy, though in a different way. He was rubbing a fat ear with a fat paw. That ear had a lingering pain in it. Coker of the Fifth, like many very hefty fellows, did not quite realize the extent of his own strength and vigour. He had smacked Billy Bunter's head, as, in Coker's opinion, the fat Owl fully deserved for slanging Coker's beak. Coker, after spots of bother with Prout, was wont to call his beak all sorts of fancy names, in the Fifth. But it was not for a Remove fag to go and do likewise.

So Coker had smacked Bunter's head for his cheek: and he had smacked it not wisely but too well. Billy Bunter's fat head sang from that smack, and his plump ear burned. Coker had dismissed the trifling incident from his mind,

as he started out to look for "Old Pompous" in the fog. Billy Bunter could not dismiss it so easily. He sat in No. 7 Study rubbing that suffering fat ear, and revolving in his fat mind various ways of making Horace Coker sit up and be sorry for administering that hefty smack.

Obviously, he couldn't smack Coker's head. He would have had to stand on a chair to reach it, in fact. Coker was a big and hefty senior man, not to be smacked by a junior. Something like an earthquake would have happened to Billy Bunter, had he tried that on.

Strategy was indicated. Somehow or other, the vengeful Owl was going to get back on Coker of the Fifth for smacking his head. If Coker fancied that he could throw his weight about, smacking fellows' heads, Coker had another guess coming. But if the fat Owl of the Remove was going to make the hefty Horace sit up, quite a lot of strategy was required.

Billy Bunter rather prided himself upon being a brainy chap. Nobody else



He sat rubbing that fat ear

in the Greyfriars Remove had ever suspected him of having any brains at all. But Bunter, at least, knew that he was brainy. And while he sat rubbing that fat ear, and Peter Todd sat scribbling his lines, Billy Bunter's fat brains, such as they were, were at work: and a fat grin that overspread his fat face indicated that he had thought it up, at last. It was then that he interrupted Peter's scribbling. Peter's replies discouraged conversation, however, and he sprawled in impatient silence till Toddy had finished his lines.

"That's done!" said Peter, at length, and he threw down his pen, pitched Virgil into a corner of the study, and rose from the table. "How's that flap of yours, Bunter? Did you say Coker smacked it?"

"Yes, I jolly well did," hooted Bunter. "Jolly hard, too. I'd jolly well have knocked him down for it, too, only—only—."

"Only you couldn't knock down ten per cent of him!" grinned Peter. "Like his cheek to smack a Remove man's head. But Coker always was a cheeky ass."

"I'm going to pay him out!" said Bunter, darkly. "A jolly good hiding would do Coker good, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, my only aunt Sempronia!" ejaculated Toddy. "Better make your will before you start giving Coker of the Fifth a hiding, old fat man."

"I'm not thinking of thrashing him myself—."

"I wouldn't!" agreed Peter.

"But so long as he gets it, it doesn't matter whom he gets it from," explained Bunter. "That's what I've thought out, Peter. Suppose Prout gave him a record whopping! He would, if Coker, chucked a bundle of soot at him."

Peter Todd blinked in astonishment at the fat Owl in the armchair.

"You blithering, blethering old fat bloater," he said. "Think Coker's going to chuck a bundle of soot at his beak, just to please you?"

"It would come to the same thing, if Prout believed it was Coker chucked it," further explained Bunter. "It would be me that chucked it, and serve him right for reporting me to Quelch about those bickers. But Prout's going to think it was Coker."

"Why should he?" howled Peter.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"I've got that all cut and dried," he answered. "It only needed brains, and I've got the brains—."

"If you have, why don't you use them sometimes?" asked Peter.

"I fancy it was rather brainy, to think this one out!" said Bunter, complacently. "Look out of the window, Toddy! It's as thick as pea-soup in the quad. Prout could never spot who chucked it. Prout's out in the fog—that fathead Coker has gone out to look for him, but of course he will never find

him, an idiot like Coker. I expect old Pompous is wandering about looking for Greyfriars. But he's bound to trickle in sooner or later, isn't he?"

"Bound to," agreed Peter. "Later rather than sooner, I imagine—but he will come home to roost in the long run."

"Well, suppose a fellow waited at the gate, with that bundle of soot all ready?" grinned Bunter. "Prout gets it the minute he shows up. I shall see enough of him for that. Think he will be wild?"

"Wild isn't the word!" said Peter. "Mad as a hatter! You'd be marched off to the Head to be flogged or sacked, you fat chump."

"Coker would, you mean!" chuckled Bunter.

"Where would Coker come in, you fat fathead?"

"You see, that soot is going to be tied up in a handkerchief, in a nice little bundle to burst all over Prout's chivvy—."

"You benighted owl, all our hankies are marked. You might as well hand Prout a visiting-card, as chuck your hanky at him."



"You fat villain," roared Peter

"It won't be my hanky!" chuckled Bunter. "It will be Coker's."

Peter Todd jumped almost clear of the floor of No. 7 Study, at that.

"What!" he gasped.

"That's the big idea," said the brainy fat Owl. "And that's where I want you to lend a hand, Toddy, like a pal. You cut along to Coker's study in the Fifth and bag a hanky for me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Safe as houses," assured Bunter. "Coker's gone out, and Potter and Greene will be frowsting round the fire in the games-study. Nobody will be there. Coker leaves his things all over his study—you'll find a blazer or something with a hanky in the pocket. See?"

Peter Todd gazed at his fat study-mate.

Billy Bunter, evidently, had been using such brains as he had. He had thought up quite a masterly scheme.

Soot, bundled in a handkerchief easily identified as Coker's, was to land in Prout's portly visage. Could Prout doubt who had "chucked" it, especially after that spot of trouble in the Fifth-form room that morning, and as it would transpire that Coker was out in the fog at the time, when that fog was keeping all the other inhabitants of Greyfriars indoors? This was really quite Machiavellian of Bunter.

"See?" repeated Bunter. "You just get that hanky for me, Peter, old chap, and leave the rest to me. I—I'd rather not go to Coker's study myself, in case Potter or Greene came in—I—I mean, it's absolutely safe—."

"You fat villain!" roared Peter.

"Eh?"

"You podgy, piffling, pie-faced porker—."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"Brainy, are you?" hooted Peter. "Haven't you brains enough to understand that it would be a dirty trick?"

"Coker smacked my head—."

"I hope he smacked it hard."

"Beast! He smacked my head, and Prout reported me to Quelch," exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "Now I'm going to get back on both of them—killing two birds with one stone, see?"

"You're not!" said Peter. "You're going to forget all about it. I'm going to give you something else to think about."

"Eh! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm going to bang your head on the table for thinking up such a stunt."

"Why you cheeky beast—here, I say, leggo—yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, as

Peter grasped him and hooked him out of the armchair. "I say—whooop!"

Bang!

A fat head contacted a hard table. A fiendish yell woke the echoes of the Remove studies.

"Yaroooooh!"

Bang!

"Ow! wow! Leggo! Help! Whoooooop!"

"There!" gasped Peter. "Now forget all about that stunt, Bunter! It's not good enough, old fat man! Wash it right out."

"Ow! wow! Beast! Wow!"

Peter Todd, grinning, left the study with his lines. He left Billy Bunter quite busy, rubbing a fat head with one hand, and a fat ear with the other. But if Peter supposed that those bangs on the table had knocked that brainy scheme out of Billy Bunter's fat head. Peter was mistaken. Billy Bunter was going on his own brainy way regardless.

CHAPTER III

BUNTER MEANS BUSINESS!

"**B**EAST!" breathed Billy Bunter.

He ceased, at length, to rub a fat head and a fat ear. There was a lingering pain in both of them: but he had no time to waste. He had to be on the spot, at the gate, when Old Pompous came in.

He rolled out of No. 7, and headed, with great caution, for the Fifth-form studies. Much—very much—he would have preferred to leave that visit to Coker's study to Peter Todd, but Peter had failed to play up like a pal, and if Bunter wanted a hanky belonging to Coker, he had to annex it with his own fat hands. Luckily, he found the Fifth-form passage deserted: and no eye fell on him as he rolled into Coker's study.

A blink round that apartment, through his big spectacles, revealed a blazer thrown carelessly on the window-seat, actually with a handkerchief hanging half-out of the pocket. Coker was a careless and untidy fellow, accustomed to leave his things lying about anywhere.

Bunter, grinning, pounced on that blazer and jerked out the handkerchief.

It was Coker's. A monogram in the corner left no doubt about that. It was a rather large handkerchief, of the finest quality, with the initials H.J.C. worked in the corner by the loving fingers of Coker's Aunt Judy. Old Pompous,



Bunter pounced on that blazer

or anyone else, couldn't doubt for a moment that that hanky was the property of Horace James Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter, as he crammed Coker's hanky into his own pocket. He rolled back to the door, and rolled out—almost into the arms of Potter and Greene of the Fifth, who were coming up the passage to their study. They stared at him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"You fat young sweep, what are you up to in our study?" demanded Potter.

"Oh! Nothing!" stammered Bunter.

"Rooting after tuck, what?" snapped Greene.

"I—I—I came to speak to—to Coker—I—I didn't know he'd gone out to look for Prout—" stuttered Bunter. Billy Bunter was seldom at a loss for a fib. But his fibs were seldom convincing.

"Get out!" said Potter, "and take that with you."

"That" was a lunge from Potter's foot. Billy Bunter yelled as he took it, and bolted down the passage, barely escaping a lunge from Greene's.

It was a breathless Owl that arrived back in No. 7 in the Remove. However, he was now in possession of the article he required for carrying out that brainy scheme to kill two birds with one stone.

He proceeded to take down soot from the study chimney into Coker's handkerchief. Quite a considerable quantity was tied up in a neat little bundle—destined to burst on the majestic features of the master of the Fifth—with the attractive consequence of a record whopping for Coker.

Be it said for Bunter, that he did not realize in the least that there was anything mean or rotten in such a scheme. Toddy had told him that it was a dirty trick: but Toddy's opinion had no more effect on Bunter than water on a duck. Did not Coker deserve a whopping for smacking Bunter's head? He did! Could Bunter give him the whopping he deserved? He couldn't. Prout could, and—jolly well would, if he fancied that Coker had buzzed a bundle of soot at him. Bunter was, in fact, whopping Coker by proxy, as it were. The cane would be in the plump hand of Prout: but the whopping would be due to Bunter. Billy Bunter could see nothing in his scheme except that it was jolly clever, and showed what a brainy fellow he was! Anyhow he was going ahead with it.

That bundle of soot would not go into a pocket. Bunter wrapped it in a newspaper to convey it undetected out of the House. With the bundle under a fat arm, he emerged from No. 7, and rolled down the Remove passage to the stairs.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came up the passage from the landing, and stared at Bunter and his bundle. "What have you got there, fatty?"

"Nothing—," stammered Bunter.

"Nothing—wrapped up in a newspaper?" asked Bob.

"I—I—I mean—."

"You fat villain, have you been raiding tuck in the studies?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"If you've been after the cake in my study cupboard—."

"You can look, if you like!" snorted Bunter.

"I jolly well will! Open that bundle."

"I mean, you can look in your study cupboard," said Bunter, hastily.

"While you dodge off with my cake?" grinned Bob. "Not good enough! Open that bundle, you pilfering porker."

"Shan't!" hooted Bunter. "It's only some socks I'm taking down for the wash. You lemme pass, Cherry."

Billy Bunter was quite satisfied with himself, and with his brainy plans for

reprisals on Mr. Prout and Horace Coker. But after what Peter Todd had said—and done!—he realized that other Remove fellows might not share his views. So he was going to keep his proceedings dark—if he could.

But his reputation as a grub-raider was too well-known. Bob Cherry was going to know what was in that bundle!

"Socks, is it?" he said. "Well, let's see the socks."

"I—I—I mean—."

"You mean you've got my cake in that bundle?"

"No!" howled Bunter. "Bother your cake! Blow your cake! I never knew you had a cake! I tell you it's only a shirt I'm taking down to the house-dame's room to be mended—I—I mean, only some socks for the wash—."

"Open that bundle!"

"Shan't!"



"Well, let's see the socks"

"Then I will!" said Bob, and he jerked the bundle from under the fat arm. The newspaper unrolled, and Bob Cherry stared blankly at a sooty handkerchief packed with soot.

"What the thump—!" he ejaculated. He had expected to see a cake. A hanky packed with soot was a surprise to him. "You benighted ass, what are you carrying a bundle of soot about for?"

"Find out!" retorted Bunter. "You gimme my bundle, Bob Cherry." The fat Owl clutched back the bundle, and wrapped up the newspaper again. He rolled on down the passage, leaving Bob staring. Had Billy Bunter been aware that there was a cake in Bob's study cupboard, no doubt it would have had his attention. But this time, evidently, the Owl of the Remove had not been tuck-raiding: though why he was carrying a bundle of soot about was a mystery, to Bob. Bob was left staring after him blankly: while Billy Bunter, with his bundle under his fat arm, rolled out of the Remove passage, on to the landing.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter, as he emerged on the landing. Two figures were standing at the big landing window, looking out into the fog. One was the angular figure of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. The other was Mr. Hacker, master of the Shell.

Bunter blinked at them uneasily. It was not a moment at which he wished to meet his master's eye! But they had their backs to him, and he hoped that neither of them would look round before he reached the stairs. Mr. Quelch was speaking as he trod cautiously past.

"It does not seem to be clearing off, Hacker."

"I think it is thickening, Quelch."

"It is very unfortunate that Prout should be out in it!" Quelch, apparently, was concerned about his colleague, out in the dense fog.

"Very!" assented Mr. Hacker.

"He will find some difficulty in returning," said Quelch.

"Probably!" agreed Mr. Hacker.

"He was going down to Friardale," said Mr. Quelch. "He may be quite lost in Friardale Lane. If he does not return soon, someone ought to go out and look for him, with a torch."

Mr. Hacker shrugged his shoulders. He did not seem so much concerned about his colleague as Quelch evidently was. The idea of groping about in a dense fog, even with the aid of an electric torch, did not appeal to him.

Billy Bunter heard no more, as he reached the stairs, and descended them. He passed two or three fellows, who glanced at him and his bundle, as he made his way to the junior lobby. Luckily, nobody was interested in either Bunter or his bundle. He found the junior lobby quite deserted, when he arrived there. Nobody was going out in such weather—except Bunter.

Indeed, the fat Owl himself, keen as he was on his brainy scheme, hesitated to emerge, when he opened the door, and chunks of fog rolled in. The aspect of the old quad was distinctly uninviting. It was chilly, it was damp, and a fellow could hardly see his hand before his face.

For several minutes, Billy Bunter hesitated, blinking into the fog. Then he made the plunge. Coker had smacked his head—Prout had reported him—and this opportunity of killing two birds with one stone was too good to be lost. The fat Owl made up his fat mind, and plunged out into the foggy quad.

He rolled away from the House, heading for the gates.

But he had under-estimated the difficulty of navigation in a dense fog.

He knew, of course, every inch of the way to the school gates—when it wasn't foggy. He had had no doubt about keeping to the path. He rolled on quite confidently, expecting to arrive at the gates in a few minutes. So it was quite a surprise to him when he suddenly bumped into a wall, and still more of a surprise when he realized that it was the wall of the gym, which was nowhere near the gates.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked round him through his big spectacles, in dismay. It dawned upon his fat brain that he had missed the way, familiar as it was minus a fog.

"Blow!" hissed Bunter.

The dim mass of the gym faded into the fog behind him, as he re-started. Slowly and very cautiously he proceeded now, anxious not to miss the way again.

Bump!

"Oh, crumbs!"

It was not a gate into which he bumped. It was the granite rim of a fountain.

That fountain was in the middle of the quad. The hapless Owl was almost as far as ever from his destination.

In the worst temper ever, Billy Bunter made another start. All this was extremely exasperating. Time was passing—and if Prout found his way home at all, he might come in while Bunter was groping and blundering about the foggy quad. The school gates seemed as far away as ever as he groped and blundered. Then suddenly, from the fog, came a grunting voice—

"Blow this 'ere fog! Wot I says is this 'ere—blow it!"

He recognized the familiar voice of Gosling, the old Greyfrairs porter,—invisible but audible.

"Blow it! Ketch me coming out again, after I get back to my lodge—jest ketch me! Blow it."

Gosling, apparently, was not lost, like Bunter, only annoyed. Trudging footsteps came to Bunter's fat ears. In great relief, he fell in behind those foot-



"Blow this 'ere fog!"

steps, and followed on. Gosling's lodge was by the gates: and quite unconsciously he was acting as guide to a lost Owl.

Slam!

That slam of a door showed that Gosling, at last, had reached his lodge, and gone in. He had seen nothing of Bunter, and Bunter had seen nothing of him—but the fat Owl knew where he was now. He groped on his way, and the great arch of the gateway looked dimly overhead.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

Much time had been lost. But he was on the spot now. The gates stood wide open. If Prout hadn't yet come in—and ten to one he hadn't—it was all right. The fat Owl ensconced himself by the stone pillar at the side of the gateway: and the handkerchief, packed with soot, was in his fat hand now. And with all his fat ears, Billy Bunter listened for a sound of footsteps coming in—ready to hurl the sooty missile the moment Prout loomed through the fog.

UNEXPECTED!

MR. QUELCH stood gazing thoughtfully from the big landing window. In clear weather that window gave an extensive view of the Greyfriars quadrangle. Now it revealed nothing but impenetrable vapour. Mr. Hacker had gone back to the fire in Common-Room. But Quelch lingered at the window, looking out at the fog. Crusty as the Remove fellows often thought him, Quelch had a kind heart and a considerate nature. While Mr. Hacker concentrated on his own comfort, Quelch could not help thinking of Prout and his predicament.

No more than Mr. Hacker did he like the idea of going out into that ocean of damp, clinging mist. But it was a fact that by the light of an electric torch, one could pick one's way through even that blinding blanket of fog: while without such aid, it was almost hopeless. Unattractive as such an excursion was, Quelch was making up his mind to it.

He turned from the window at last, and descended the stairs. He looked into Masters' Common-Room, where the lights were on, and a bright fire was burning, with several beaks clustered round it.

"Prout has not come in?" asked Mr. Quelch, from the doorway.

"Not yet!" answered Mr. Hacker.

"I really hope that he has not lost himself in this dreadful fog!" said Mr. Wiggins, the master of the Third.

"Ce pauvre Prout!" said Monsieur Charpentier, shaking his head.

Quelch turned away. Prout had not come in, and goodness only knew when, or whether, he would, if left unassisted. That settled it for Quelch.

Having donned hat and coat and muffler, and provided himself with a large electric torch, the Remove master let himself out of the House. It seemed almost as thick as soup in the quad, and minus the torch, Quelch could hardly have groped his way to the gates. But with its aid, he was able to keep to the path, which—Billy Bunter, a quarter of an hour earlier, had failed to do. Billy Bunter was, in fact, just bumping into the wall of the gym, while his form-master was walking down to the gates: and certainly it never occurred to Quelch that any member of his form was out of doors in such weather.

He trod carefully out of gates, shining the torch before him. The light was reflected with a ghostly glimmer on the blanket of fog.

Prout, coming back from Friardale, must be somewhere in Friardale Lane. There were several ditches along that lane, and a false step in the fog might very likely have landed Prout in one of them. Quelch could only hope for the best



Shining the torch before him

as he proceeded slowly and carefully along the foggy lane, flashing the light to and fro, from foggy hedge to foggy hedge.

Friardale Lane was quite deserted. Nobody was likely to be out in that fog if he could help it. Deep silence and dimness surrounded Quelch as he trudged on. He might have been the only inhabitant of the county of Kent, for any sign he saw or heard of any other human being.

But that silence was suddenly broken.

Solitary as it seemed, there was, after all, somebody else abroad in Friardale Lane, and that somebody else came suddenly round a bend in the winding lane. At that point, there was a deep ditch beside the lane, and Quelch had paused to turn the torch on it, so he was not, at the moment, looking ahead.

Bump!

That somebody else, evidently, did not see Quelch in the fog, and as Quelch was between him and the light, apparently did not see the light either. Anyhow he bumped heavily into the Remove master.

Crash!

"Oh!" came a gasping exclamation from the somebody else. "What's that! Who's that?"

Quelch did not answer that question. He was tottering from the collision in the fog, and it had caused the torch to fall from his hand. The torch crashed on hard earth, and was instantly extinguished.

Mr. Quelch, gasping, righted himself. He breathed hard, and he breathed deep. But he contrived to speak calmly.

"Is that you, Prout?" he asked, peering through the vapour.

"Eh! No! Who's that?"

It was not Prout's voice. But it was familiar: Quelch had heard it before. It was a Greyfriars voice.

"Who are you?" he snapped. If it was not his colleague, there was no pressing need for politeness: and Quelch was very much annoyed. In the dense fog he could only make out a dim figure.

"Is that Mr. Quelch?" came the voice.

"It is! Who are you?"

"I'm Coker! I thought I knew your voice, sir. I say, have you seen anything of my form-master?"

"Coker! You utterly stupid boy—."

"Eh?"

"What are you doing out of gates in this fog? Have you not intelligence enough to remain indoors in such weather?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I came out to look for my beak—."

"What?"

"I mean Mr. Prout. He hadn't come in, so—."

"You stupid boy! Did you come out in this dense fog without a light?"

"I didn't think of it before I started out—."

"Pah!"

"I think Mr. Prout must have taken a wrong turning. I've been all over the shop looking for him—."

"Pah!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"So I was getting back, when I ran into you.—"

"You are not likely to find your way back in this fog, you stupid boy, and you have extinguished my light. You caused the torch to fall from my hand, crashing into me in that insensate manner—."

"I didn't see you in the fog, sir—."

"Pah!"

Mr. Quelch stooped, and groped for the torch. It was invisible on the foggy earth, and he groped and groped.



"Oh! Crumbs! Was that you, sir? I knocked my head on something"

"Coker!" Quelch's voice was deep.

"Yes sir."

"Cannot you assist me in looking for my torch, instead of standing there doing nothing?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I'll find it for you," said Coker. "It can't be far off, sir. I'll find it for you in a jiffy."

Horace Coker stooped and groped.

Crack!

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

Really, in a thick fog where a fellow could hardly see his hand before his face, it was hardly safe for two persons to grope about at close quarters. There were two loud exclamations, as two heads established sudden contact.

"Coker! You insensate boy—!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Crumbs! Was that you, sir? I knocked my head on something—."

"Fool!"

Seldom, if ever, did Mr. Quelch indulge in such expressions. But he was too intensely exasperated now to measure his words. Indeed, he came very near boxing Coker's ears.

"I didn't see you in the fog, sir. A fellow can't see anything in this. I don't think you ought to call a fellow names, sir, because you knocked into him in the fog," said Coker, warmly.

"Be silent," snapped Mr. Quelch. "I must find that torch, or we may both be lost in the fog. You are clumsy and stupid, Coker! Keep your distance while I look for the torch."

"I think—."

"That will do!"

"But I think—."

"Will you be silent?"

"Oh, yes, sir, if you like, but I think I've found it. I'm treading on something, at any rate. I expect that's it."

"Bless my soul! If you are treading on my torch, you may put it out of action. Stand aside." Quelch almost roared. And he didn't wait for Coker to stand aside. He helped him with a push. Coker was almost invisible in the fog but not quite—he was visible enough to receive a push, and Quelch gave him one—a quite energetic one!

It was, perhaps, a little more energetic than Quelch intended, in his alarm at the possibility of damage to the torch under Coker's extensive feet. Under that sudden unexpected impact, Horace Coker went over backwards. He uttered a howl as he landed on Friardale Lane.

"Ooooooh!"

Heedless of Coker and his howl, Quelch groped for the torch. His groping hand contacted it, and he clutched it up. Hurriedly he pressed the switch to put on the light.

But it was in vain. The light did not come on. Whether it was the fall to the ground, or whether it was the trampling of Coker's large feet, that had done the damage, there was no doubt that the damage was done. That electric torch was no longer a going concern.

Coker scrambled up, breathing indignation.

"Look here, sir, shoving a fellow over"—hooted Coker. "After I found your torch for you, too—."

"You stupid boy, you have damaged it, and it will not light!" shrieked Mr. Quelch. "I have a great mind to box your ears for your clumsy stupidity, Coker. Indeed, I will do so."

Coker jumped back.

Quelch, evidently, was getting dangerous: and Coker had had enough of him at close quarters. Coker disappeared into the fog.

"Coker!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Come here at once, Coker."

There was no answer from Horace Coker, and he didn't come there! Apparently he did not want his ears boxed! Footsteps died away in the dimness, and the Remove master was left alone, breathing very hard.

For some moments, Mr. Quelch stood there, nonplussed. He was without a light now, and looking for Prout without a light, was a rather less hopeful proposition than looking for a needle in a haystack. Quelch was reluctant to abandon his quest, but he realized that there was no choice in the matter. Coker of the Fifth had put paid to his search for the Fifth-form master. Indeed it was doubtful whether, without the torch, he could find his own way back to Greyfriars.



He gasped and spluttered

With deep feelings, he started on his return journey. He trudged, and peered and groped, through a world of fog. Several times he barely escaped stepping over the edge of a ditch. Once he bumped into a fence—twice or thrice into wayside trees. He had to proceed almost at a snail's pace. Even so he could not be sure that he had not taken a wrong turning. He thought of the ruddy fire in Common-Room at Greyfriars with deep longing.

When, at last, a dim mass of buildings loomed up in the fog, he felt like a ship-wrecked mariner sighting land at last! It was Greyfriars School—at long last!

Greatly relieved, Mr. Quelch groped on to the open gateway. Thankfully, he groped under the arch.

And then—!

What happened next came as a complete surprise to Henry Samuel Quelch. Out of the fog something came whizzing. Quelch did not know that it was coming, till it came. It landed fairly in the middle of his features, and burst open there. Something—something dusty and smelly—deluged his face, smothered him and choked him. He did not even hear a sound of running feet—he did not know that a fat figure vanished into the foggy quad. He gasped and spluttered, and tottered and gurgled and choked, breathless and bewildered, clawing wildly at clouds of soot.

CHAPTER V

KEEP IT DARK!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's that?”

“Sounded like somebody yelling—.”

“Somebody out in the quad.”

“Who'd be ass enough to go out in this?”

“Coker did—you remember he was going to look for Prout—

“If he's out, he's lost himself!”

“Listen!”

There had been boxing in the Rag. Most of the Remove were gathered there. The lights were on, glimmering from the windows into dense banks of fog. Having peeled off the gloves, after the boxing, Harry Wharton and Co. were looking from the window, to ascertain whether the fog had cleared sufficiently to give them a chance to get out of doors. They found that it hadn't,—indeed, it looked thicker than ever. Unexpectedly, a sound came to their ears—muffled by fog and a shut window, but audible.

It indicated that somebody was out in the foggy quad. If anybody was out without a light in hand, it was very probable that he had lost himself—he might have been only a few yards from the House, and quite unable to find his way in.

"Better make sure," said Bob Cherry. "I'll open the window, and give him a yell."

There was a snap from Skinner, who was crowding over the fire.

"Keep that window shut, Cherry! Want the room filled with fog?"

"Somebody seems to be out of the House—."

"More fool he! Keep that window shut."

"Rats!" retorted Bob.

He threw the window wide open. Nobody wanted fog to roll into the Rag, but if a fellow was in need of help, Bob was the fellow to help him. He shouted from the open window.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob's voice was powerful. Stentor's of old had little on it. That roar must have been audible in the furthest corner of the old quad.

Evidently it was heard: for a howl came back:

"Help! I say, you fellows, help! I'm lost!"

"That isn't jolly old Coker!" grinned Bob.

"That fat ass, Bunter," said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, my hat! Did he try to get across to the tuck-shop after all!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Looks like it," said Johnny Bull. "He's lost himself in the fog, anyhow."

"I say, you fellows, where are you? I say, oh crikey!"

"It is the esteemed and idiotic Bunter," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob, again. "This way, Bunter. Roll this way, fatty."

"Oh, crikey! I can't see you."

"We can't see you either, fathead. But you can hear me, can't you? Listen, and come this way."

"Oh, lor!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! We're at the window of the Rag. You'll see the light if you roll a little nearer. Roll on, barrel."

The Famous Five stared from the open window into the fog. Vernon-Smith, Redwing, and several other fellows joined them there, staring out. They could see nothing of Billy Bunter. Three or four voices shouted to him, added to Bob's stentorian roar. That volume of sound guided the fat Owl, his fat ears supplying the place of his eyes and spectacles. A fat face loomed through the fog at last, and Bunter came into view. He rolled up to the window, and stood blinking up at the crowd of faces there.



We're at the window of the Rag

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"You fat ass," said Bob. "What did you go out in the fog for—?"

"I didn't—I—I—I mean—."

"Couldn't you keep away from the tuck-shop, with Mauly's half-crown in your pocket?" asked Nugent.

"Eh! Oh! Yes! No. I say,—."

"You're all right now," said Bob. "Keep close to the wall and you'll get to the lobby door all right."

"I say, you fellows, help me in! I might get lost again! I've had enough of this fog! Help me in at the window."

"Anybody got a steam-crane in his pocket?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, you fellows, help me in. I don't weigh much, as you jolly well know."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bob. "He doesn't weigh much! Bunter doesn't weigh much!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Help me in at that window, will you?" howled Bunter.

"Okay! "All hands on deck, you men," chuckled Bob. "I daresay he will pull the lot of us out of window, but we'll chance it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent, leaned from the window, and grasped fat hands and arms. Even four pairs of sturdy hands did not find it easy to detach the fat Owl from mother earth. But with a long pull, a strong pull and a pull all together, they did it.

Billy Bunter came slithering up to the window-sill. He yelped as he came.



He landed on the floor of the Rag and yelled

"Ow! Don't drag my arms off! Wow! You're twisting my arm, Cherry, you dummy. Yow! You're squashing my fingers, Bull, you fathead! Wow! ow!"

"Roll in, barrel."

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled in.

Bump!

He landed on the floor of the Rag, and roared.

"Ow! Yaroooh! Wow!"

Bob Cherry slammed the window shut. Quite a cloud of fog had already surged in. Grinning faces surrounded Billy Bunter, as he sat spluttering on the floor. There was a sudden exclamation from Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what's this?" He held up a hand and stared at it. His fingers were blackened. "Soot!"

"Soot!" repeated Harry Wharton, blankly. "Oh, my hat! I've got some too on my hands! You benighted owl, what have you been doing with soot, out in the fog?"

"Oh! Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I haven't had any soot—."

"Why your paws are black with it!" exclaimed Smithy.

"Oh, crikey! Are they?" gasped Bunter.

He blinked at his fat hands. Brainy as he was, it did not seem to have occurred to Bunter that soot packed in a handkerchief was liable to leave traces on the fellow who handled it. As a matter of fact, it had left ample traces. Bunter's fat fingers were of the soot, sooty: and considerable smudges of it had been transferred to the juniors who had helped him in at the window.

"I—I say, I—I'd better get a wash!" Bunter scrambled to his feet. "If they see soot on me, they might think it was me."

"What have you been doing with soot?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Oh! Nothing! I—I haven't had any soot—I—I— mean—."

"You benighted bloater," said Bob Cherry. "You had soot wrapped in a hanky in that bundle I saw you carrying away from the studies—."

"Eh! Oh! Yes! No—." stammered Bunter. "I say, you fellows, don't you say anything about it. I don't want old Prout after me."

"Prout!" repeated Harry Wharton, blankly.

"Yes—I mean no! I mean to say, if—if anybody's sooted old Prout in the fog, it wasn't me—I don't know anything about it."

"Great pip!" stuttered Bob Cherry. "You've been sooting old Pompous in the fog! You potty porpoise, if that's it, you'd better wash off every speck of soot before the beaks and pre's start looking for you. You'll get a Head's flogging if you're spotted."

"I say, you fellows, you keep it dark, you know!" gasped Bunter: and he rolled across to the door of the Rag: for once in his fat life eager to get at soap and water for an extra wash.

He left most of the juniors grinning. But one face was quite serious—Peter Todd's. Peter remembered the brainy scheme Bunter had outlined in No. 7 Study. It looked now as if Bunter had carried out that scheme—it had not, after all, been knocked out of his fat head by those bangs on the study table. Peter followed the fat Owl into the passage, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Hold on, fatty—"

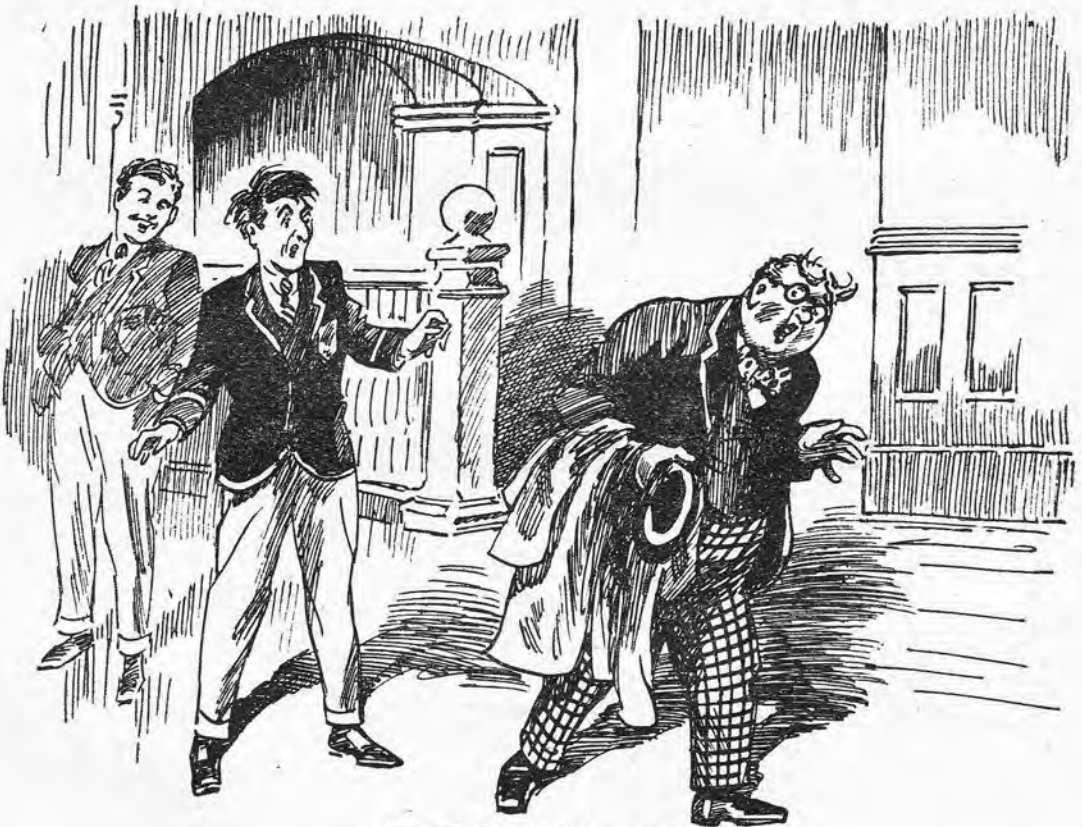
Bunter blinked round at him, impatiently.

"Leggo, Toddy," he yapped. "I've got to get a wash—"

"You've sooted old Prout—"

"Didn't he report me to Quelch about those bickers—?"

"Never mind that. Did you get a hanky belonging to Coker, as you told me



He rolled down the passage

in the study—" hissed Peter. "Have you landed it on that fathead Coker?"

"He smacked my head—."

"Bother your silly head! Have you fixed it for Coker to be up for sooting Prout? If you have, it can't be kept dark. You'll have to own up."

"Own up!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, if they get Coker for it."

"You silly idiot!"

"Look here, Bunter—."

"Yah!"

"I tell you—."

"Catch me getting Coker's whopping for him!" snorted Bunter. "Don't you get saying anything about that hanky, Peter. The—the fact is, I never went to Coker's study for a hanky, and—and I never found one in his blazer pocket on the window-seat, and—and I never sooted old Prout at all. If anybody did, I don't know who it was. I never waited for him at the gate, and never bunged Coker's hanky at him with the soot in it, and never got him right on the dial—I was somewhere else when I was there—."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"So don't you say anything, Peter. I don't even know whether old Pompous has been sooted or not. Now leggo,—I've got to get a wash before he comes in all smothered with soot. I've got to keep this dark."

And Billy Bunter jerked his fat shoulder away, and rolled down the passage, leaving Peter staring.

CHAPTER VI

SURPRISE FOR COKER!

"**Y**OU ass!"

"You fathead!"

Coker stared.

He came into his study in the Fifth, certainly not expecting such a greeting from his pals. Potter and Greene.

Coker was looking tired and worn. Long wandering and groping in the fog had told on Coker. How he had, at long last, groped his way back to Greyfriars he hardly knew. He had come in late—it was past tea-time,—but he was thankful to have got in at last.

What Coker wanted now was a rest, and hot tea. He was cold and tired and

limp. What he certainly did not want was slanging from Potter and Greene. But that was what he received as he tramped wearily in.

"You born nitwit," went on Potter.

"You dangerous lunatic!" added Greene.

"You fellows gone mad?" asked Coker. "Look here, I think you might have got tea ready. It's late. I'm famished! Get the kettle on, and don't jaw."

"What did you do it for?" howled Potter.

"Eh! If you mean going out to look for Prout, it was only decent, when an old ass like Prout was rambling about in a fog like this. I never found him, but I did my best."

"You found Quelch all right!" yapped Greene.

"Eh? I don't see how you know," said Coker, staring. "As it happens, I ran into Quelch in Friardale Lane. I think he was out looking for Prout, same as me. We bashed into one another in the fog, and he had the nerve to push me over because he dropped his torch and I trod on it. I'd have punched him, if he wasn't a beak. Pushing a Fifth-form man over, by gum."

Coker frowned at the recollection.

"Was that why you did it," snapped Potter.

"Eh! Why I did what?"

"Bunged that soot at him."

"Eh!"

"We didn't know you'd met him out. We couldn't make out what you had up against Quelch—."

"Eh! I've nothing up against Quelch, that I know of. He did push me over in the lane, but after all I did tread on his dashed torch, and I daresay he was in a flurry. It was like his cheek—a junior master—but nothing to make a song and dance about."

"Then why did you do it?"

"What the dickens do you mean? What have I done?" howled Coker.

"You laid for him at the gate—and bunged a hanky packed with soot right in his chivvy—that's what you've done," hooted Potter.

Horace Coker blinked in bewilderment.

"Did anybody?" he gasped.

"Yes—you did!"

"You silly ass," roared Coker. "I've only just got in. I got lost in the fog after I left Quelch in the lane, and I haven't seen him since."

"You saw enough of him to bung that soot at him."

"I didn't!" roared Coker. "Think I'd play a silly fag trick like that, bunging soot in a fog? Have a little sense."

"You're going to say you didn't?" asked Greene.

"Of course I am, if they ask me. If anybody's been sooting Quelch, I expect it was some young ruffian in his own form whom he's been whopping. Nothing to do with me, is it?"

"You awful ass—."

"Look here, Potter—."

"You mad fathead—."

"Look here, Greene—."

"If you wanted to bung soot at Quelch, you could have found a paper bag or something. But packing it in your own hanky—."

"I didn't!" shrieked Coker.

"You jolly well did! They've found the hanky!"

"It wasn't mine—."

"It jolly well was! Is there any other fellow in the Fifth with the initials H.J.C. worked in a monogram?"

Coker stared blankly. In his amazement and dismay, he forgot that he wanted his tea.

"Look here, tell me what's happened, while I've been out, if anything has!" he bawled.

"You don't know, of course," said Potter, sarcastically. "But I'll tell you, if you like. Quelch got a cargo of soot right on the dial as he was coming in at the gate an hour ago. He was smothered. Gosling heard him spluttering and choking, from his lodge, and went out with his lantern to see what was up. He found Quelch looking like a chimney-sweep, swamped with soot. He picked up the hanky that had had the soot in it. You can bet that Quelch pounced on it."

"It couldn't have been mine—," gasped Coker.

"Oh don't be a goat! Gosling helped Quelch to the House, with his lantern—a lot of fellows saw him come in, black as a hat. Everybody wondered who could have done it, till your hanky was recognized—."

"I tell you it couldn't have been—."

"Oh, pack that up! It was yours all right. Think it isn't as clear as daylight that you got in before Quelch, and fixed up that packet of soot for him, and waited at the gate—."

"I didn't!" yelled Coker. "I tell you I've only just got in, and I came straight up to this study—."

"The pre's can't have seen you coming in, or they'd have nobbled you already," said Greene. "They're looking for you."

"I tell you—."

"You silly ass, the minute your monogram was spotted on that hanky, everybody knew who had done it. Quelch went off for a bath and a change—I

can jolly well tell you he needed them—but he left word with the prefects to send you to his study as soon as you showed up—.”

“Like his cheek, if he did!” snapped Coker. “He’s not my beak!”

“Why on earth did you use your own hanky to pack the soot in?” asked Greene. “Didn’t you know it would be picked up, and you’d be spotted?”

“Of all the silly idiots—!” said Potter.

“Look here, you two!” roared Coker. “I tell you I had nothing to do with it, and if you can’t take a fellow’s word—.”

“It was your hanky—.”

“It was you—!”

That was too much for Coker! He made a stride at Potter and Greene. Before they could dodge he had grasped two collars.

CRACK!

Two heads came together, with a resounding concussion. There was a simultaneous yell from Potter and Greene.



Crack! Two heads came together

"Yow!" from Potter.

"Wow!" from Greene.

"There!" gasped Coker. "That's what you've been asking for. And I can tell you well tell you—."

Coker was interrupted. There was a footstep in the doorway. Wingate of the Sixth, head prefect of Greyfriars, looked in.

"Coker here?" he asked. "I hear that he's come in. Oh, here you are, Coker. Come with me: you're wanted."

Coker gave him a glare.

"Who wants me?" he snapped.

"Quelch," answered Wingate.

"Quelch isn't my beak, and he can't send for a Fifth form man," snapped Coker. "Prout's my beak. He can send for me, if he likes."

"Prout's still out," said Wingate. "Quelch wants you for that mad trick you played an hour ago—."

"I didn't—."

"You can tell Quelch that. Come on." And as Coker did not stir, Wingate added, "If you've forgotten that I'm a prefect, Coker, I've an ashplant to remind you. Are you coming?"

"I'll come!" grunted Coker.

And he came! With a frowning brow, he tramped away down the passage with Wingate: leaving Potter and Greene to rub their heads in the study.

CHAPTER VII

BOOT FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

He felt like grinning.

Sitting before the study fire in No. 7 Study, he had warmed up after his chilly excursion in the fog. Having, with unusual care in his ablutions, cleaned off every speck of soot, nothing remained to connect him with the episode at the school gates.

He grinned at the recollection of a dim figure tottering under that sooty missile. He grinned at the anticipation of what was to follow for Coker.

His wrongs and grievances were avenged. Prout who had reported him to his form-master about those biscuits in Common-Room, had been well and truly sooted—at least, Bunter believed that he had. Coker, who had smacked



Billy Bunter grinned, sitting before the Study fire in No. 7

his head, was going to be whopped for it! The brainy Owl had succeeded in killing two birds with one stone!

True, a good many Remove fellows could hardly fail to guess that it was he who had handled the soot. But Remove men did not give one another away to the beaks. The fat Owl had no fear of that.

So he felt that he had reason to feel satisfied: and he grinned from one fat ear to the other in his satisfaction.

There was a tramp of feet in the Remove passage, and the door of No. 7 was hurled open. Billy Bunter blinked at a crowd of Remove fellows, from his armchair, as they surged in. Harry Wharton and Co., Peter Todd, Lord Mauleverer, Vernon-Smith, Squiff, Tom Brown, crowded into the study. Three or four others filled the doorway.

Billy Bunter blinked at them, in surprise. He could imagine no reason for this numerous visit.

"I say, you fellows, anything up?" he squeaked.

"You fat chump!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"You potty porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—."

"You bloated blitherer—."

"Oh, really, Toddy—."

"You goggle-eyed grampus—."

"Oh, really, Smithy—."

"He doesn't know yet what he's done," said Nugent. "The howling ass, thinks he got old Pompous in the fog at the gate."

"So I jolly well did!" said Bunter. "I don't care if you fellows know. You wouldn't give a chap away."

"You never got Prout!" howled Peter Todd. "Prout's still out, wandering somewhere in the fog."

"Rot!" said Bunter. "I got him all right. Mind, if the beaks or pre's start asking questions. I don't know anything about it. I don't want old Pompous after me. He can look for a fellow in his own Form. He, he, he."

"It wasn't Prout—."

"Eh?"

"You got the wrong man, you fat ass—."

"Rubbish!" said Bunter. "Nobody was out excepting old Prout. Of course I couldn't see him in the fog, not to recognize him, but—."

"It was Quelch," roared Bob Cherry.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Quelch, your own beak, you mad ass," said Vernon-Smith.

"I tell you it was Prout—."

"And we tell you it wasn't," said Harry Wharton. "Quelch has come in smothered with soot—."

"Oh, crikey!"

"And Prout hasn't come in at all—."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You got Quelch with that soot—."

"Oh, lor! I—I never knew Quelch was out!" gasped Bunter. "What the dickens did he go out in the fog for? How could a fellow know that even a beak would be silly enough to go out in this!"

"Well, he did," said Harry, "and you got him as he came in."

"Oh, jiminy!"

"He came in black as a sweep—."

"Smothered with soot—."



"You got Quelch with that soot"

"And was he shirty?" said Vernon-Smith.

"The shirtfulness was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Mad, as a hatter," said Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors in dismay. He was not grinning now. He was no longer feeling like grinning!

Up to that moment, he had had no doubts! It was dismaying to learn that his brainy scheme had gone awry, and that Coker's handkerchief, laden with soot, had been delivered at the wrong address, so to speak.

"I—I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter. "Mind you keep this dark! Why, Quelch will be in an awful bait, if he got that soot! I didn't mean it for Quelch—I meant it for Prout—I say, mind you keep it dark."

"It can't be kept dark," said Harry Wharton.

"What? Why you beast—"

"That soot was packed in a hanky," said Harry. "It's come out that it was

Coker's hanky. The pre's are looking for Coker now. Quelch thinks it was Coker."

"Oh!" Bunter gave a gasp of relief. "That's all right, then."

"All right, is it?" roared Bob.

"Yes. Quelch couldn't think it was me, if he thinks it was Coker of course, he would, just as Prout would have! It's all right."

Bunter was comforted by that reflection. The brainy scheme had not gone as planned. He had sooted the wrong beak! But Coker's hanky was an inevitable clue to the hurler of soot. Coker would get the blame, just the same. So—from Billy Bunter's point of view—it was, after all, all right!

That, however, was not the view of the other fellows.

"Mean to say you'd leave it on Coker?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"He smacked my head—."

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed the Bounder. "Did he use Coker's hanky on purpose?"

"Even Bunter wouldn't do that," said Nugent.

Peter Todd was silent. He knew, if the other fellows did not. But the other fellows had guessed, now!

"Did you, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"By gum, he did!" said Bob. "You fat villain—."

"Didn't he smack my head?" snapped Bunter. "A whopping will do him good—smacking a fellow's head—."

"You fat sweep—!"

"You terrific rascal!"

"Great pip!" said Bob Cherry. "He must have bagged Coker's hanky on purpose, to put it on Coker, because that silly ass smacked his silly head! That's the jolly old limit."

"That settles it," said Harry Wharton. "Coker will be up for a flogging for this. You've got to stop that, Bunter. You don't seem to understand that you've played a rotten, dirty, mean trick—I suppose you wouldn't, with a brain like yours. But you've got to set it right. Quelch is waiting for Coker in his study now. Go down to him—."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Bunter.

"Go down to him, and own up that it was you—."

"Mad?" gasped Bunter. "Why, I should get the flogging instead of Coker. I'll jolly well watch it."

"You'll get a Form ragging if you don't."

"Beast!"

"You can't do anything else now, Bunter," said Bob. "It's a 'must', Bunter."

"Beast!"

"Are you going?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"No!" yelled Bunter. "I jolly well ain't going. And you fellows can't sneak about a fellow, either. You mind your own business."

"Nobody is going to give you away, you fat villain. You've got to give yourself away. Get on with it."

"Shan't!" howled Bunter.

"Scrag him!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"I—I—I say, you fellows, you keep off," gasped Bunter, in great alarm. "I—I say, it wasn't me at all. I never prouted Soot—I mean I never sooted Prout—I mean Quelch—if anybody sooted Quelch, I don't know anything about it. I expect it was Coker, as it was his hanky. I never got that hanky from Coker's study—I never went to his study at all, and I only went because Toddy wouldn't. I say, you fellows—yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter roared, as a forest of hands grasped him, and hooked him out of the armchair.



A forest of hands grasped him

"Going to Quelch?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Boot him!"

"Beast!"

"Now get this clear, Bunter," said Harry. "You've done a mean, stealthy, rotten thing—though you don't seem able to get that into your fat head. You've got to do the right thing now. Nobody's going to give you away—but every man in the Remove is going to boot you, and keep on booting you, till you play up. Got that?"

"Beast!"

"Boot him round the study, as a sample of what's to come," said Smithy.

"Go it!"

"I say, you fellows—yaroooh! I say, stoppit! I say, it wasn't me at all—it's all a mistake—I say, leave off kicking me, you beasts—ow! wow! Whoop!"

Billy Bunter was not good at arithmetic. But if he had been ever so good, he could not have counted the kicks that landed on his fat person, as he dodged frantically round the study in vain efforts to escape lunging feet. When the Removites, at last, crowded out of the study, Bunter was left too breathless even to yell: he could only gasp and mumble, wishing, from the bottom of his fat heart, that he had never thought up that brainy scheme for killing two birds with one stone!

CHAPTER VIII

THE ONLY WAY!

"**B**EAST!" murmured Billy Bunter.

It was the following morning.

The fog had rolled away over-night. Bright wintry sunshine streamed down on the old quad at Greyfriars.

Many faces were as bright as the morning sunshine, when the Greyfriars fellows came out in break. But some were far from bright.

It had been quite an exciting evening on the day of fog. First there had been the sooting of Quelch which could not fail to cause a tremendous row. Then there had been the discovery—from the clue of Coker's hanky—that a Fifth form senior man was the culprit. Then the news that Coker was to go up to the Head for judgment the following day. Had he been in Quelch's form, no doubt Quelch would have dealt with the matter himself—with a heavy hand. Dr. Locke was going to deal with him, after third school the next day. The next day

had now come, bright and sunny after the fog. But two faces at Greyfriars, that sunny morning, looked more gloomy and dismal than the fog itself.

One was Horace Coker's. The other was Billy Bunter's. Both of them seemed to be understudying the ancient monarch who never smiled again.

Coker's almost frantic denials of having handled the soot, or knowing anything about it, cut no ice. The hanky settled that. Coker couldn't believe, at first, that it was really his hanky—till he saw it in Quelch's study, black with soot. Then he could only suppose that he must have dropped a hanky somewhere, and that some fellow had picked it up, and used it for the package of soot.

Prout, when he came in at last—very late, after long wandering in the fog—and heard what had happened, was disposed to favour that view. "Old Pom-pous" often had spots of bother with Coker: but he did not want a man of his form up for a Head's flogging. But it did not rest with Prout. It was Quelch



Prout came in at last.

who had been sooted. And Quelch was going to march the sooter to the headmaster for judgment.

Few doubts or could doubt, that Coker was the man. Even his own familiar friends, Potter and Greene, had no doubts. Knocking their heads together had not altered their opinion—rather it had confirmed it.

Coker, that morning, did not appear his usual self-satisfied self. He was quite subdued. He was, in fact, in an overwhelmed state. He did not swagger in the quad as if all Greyfriars belonged to him. His loud voice was not heard laying down the law. It was not heard at all. He limped away by himself, in the lowest of spirits.

But even Coker's spirits were hardly as low as Billy Bunter's. Coker had a dreaded interview with the Head coming after third school. But Billy Bunter had something nearer at hand.

In the Remove, they knew that Bunter was the culprit. They knew, too, that the fat and fatuous Owl had actually planned to land it on Coker. So far from regarding that artful scheme as brainy, they regarded it—to Bunter's indignant surprise—as the last word in nefarious trickery. Even Skinner was shocked by it—and Skinner was not easily shocked. Worst of all, every man in the Remove agreed that Bunter could not and should not leave it on Coker. They were not going to give him away—but they were going to boot him, continuously and energetically, till he did the right thing.

Many a time and oft had Bunter been booted for his sins. But he had never had it so good before!

Over-night, he had been chased up and down the Remove dormitory. After rising-bell in the morning, the juniors only waited till they had their shoes on to give him some more. After breakfast the dose was repeated—and Bunter was glad to get into the form-room,—even for a lesson with Quelch—to escape lunging feet. When the Remove came out in break, Bunter emerged in dread—which was fully justified. The Famous Five booted him in turn—and Peter Todd, Lord Mauleverer, Smithy, and Squiff, all had a go, before he could escape. A dismal and dolorous Owl rolled away to a remote corner of the quad, for the first time in his fat life anxious to hear the bell for class.

In that remote corner, sprawling on a bench under an ancient elm, he sighted a burly form: and it was then that he murmured "Beast". He did not utter it loud enough for Coker of the Fifth to hear! He did not want another smack from that hefty hand.

But Coker, as a matter of fact, did not look in a head-smacking mood. He was slumped on the bench, in an attitude of utter dejection. There was not a trace of swank about him. He was limp. He looked down and out, as indeed he was feeling.

Bunter's blink at him was inimical. It was all Coker's fault that the fat Owl was, at present, living the life of a Soccer ball. If he hadn't smacked Bunter's fat head, the vengeful Owl would never have thought up that brainy scheme. But as he noted the dismal, dejected pessimism in Coker's usually self-satisfied countenance, the fat Owl was conscious of a pang of remorse. He even wondered a little whether the other fellows were right, and whether it had been a little too "thick" to play that scurvy trick on the headstrong Horace. Billy Bunter, after all, had a conscience. It was a very elastic one, and would stretch to almost any extent. Still, such as it was, it was there. Bunter, at that moment, wished that he hadn't done it!

Coker glanced up at him. Bunter instinctively made a retrograde movement. But it was not needed. There was nothing aggressive about Coker now.

"Has the bell gone, Bunter?" Coker's voice was quite unlike his usual bawling tones.



"Yes, I'm for it," mumbled Coker

"Oh! Not yet, Coker," answered the fat Owl. "I—I—I say, I—I hear that you're going up to the Head after third school."

"Yes—I'm for it!" mumbled Coker. "I never had anything to do with it, but Quelch won't believe a word I say, because of the hanky. I expect the Head will think just the same as Quelch! I'm for it."

It was very unusual for Coker, the most "Fifth-formy" of Fifth-formers, to chat with a Lower boy like this. He had too strong a sense of his dignity as a senior man. But in his present state of disaster, Coker seemed to have forgotten even his dignity. His self-importance was down to zero.

"They all think it was me!" said Coker, drearily. "Just because some silly ass picked up my hanky that I must have dropped somewhere. He might have been a bit more careful, not to have used another fellow's hanky."

Bunter blinked at him. Evidently Coker had not the faintest suspicion that that hanky had been selected deliberately for the package of soot. The fat Owl was conscious of another pang.

"I—I say, Coker, I—I don't believe it was you!" mumbled Bunter.

"Then you've got more sense than most fellows here, silly fat ass as you are," said Coker. "Got any idea who it was?"

"Oh! No!" exclaimed Bunter, hastily. "I—I—I—I haven't the foggiest—I say, Coker, I—I'm sorry—."

"Fat lot of use that is," grunted Coker. "I'm for it! I'm going up to the Head, and ten to one he will make it a flogging—couldn't do less, if he believes that I sooted a beak! What a fool that fellow, whoever he was, must have been, to use a chap's hanky to pack that soot. A paper bag would have done as well, or better. Must have been a born idiot."

"Oh, really, Coker—."

"Must have been," said Coker. "Just as if he did it on purpose, the nitwit,"

"You don't think he did it on purpose?" gasped Bunter.

Coker stared at him.

"Don't be a young ass!" he snapped. "Of course it wasn't done on purpose—think any Greyfriars man would play a dirty trick like that?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"But it's landed me all the same, just as if it was done on purpose!" groaned Coker, "I'm for it. Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter rolled on his way, leaving Coker slumped on the bench, looking and feeling, as if all the troubles of the universe had landed in a bunch on his burly shoulders.

"Oh lor!" mumbled Bunter, as he rolled.

His fat conscience was quite active now. Really, and truly, the fat Owl was sorry. Coker's total lack of suspicion that he had been the victim of a brainy

scheme, somehow made even the obtuse fat junior realize that it was a rotten thing to have done. Coker scorned the idea that any Greyfriars man could have been guilty of the "dirty trick" of which Bunter actually had been guilty! For once in his fat and unscrupulous career, William George Bunter sincerely repented of his misdeeds. Gladly he would have undone what he had done.

But—there was only one way of setting the matter right, and that was by owning up to Quelch. That meant transferring the impending flogging from Coker to himself! If there had been any other way, Bunter, in his repentant state of mind would have jumped at it.

But there was no other way. Either Quelch had to know the facts, or Coker had to go up to the Head.

He just couldn't do it. Coker had to take what was coming to him. There was no way out.

Or was there not?

Thinking was not much in Bunter's line. But for once he was doing some



There was no way out

hard thinking. Perhaps the prospect of continuous bootings in the Remove spurred on his fat intellect. Indeed, even a whopping from Quelch, or from the Head, was hardly worse than the incessant impact of lunging feet on his plump trousers. Between repentance for his misdeeds, and apprehension of endless bootings, Bunter's fat brain worked, and evolved a sudden brain-wave.

A bell began to ring. Break was over, and the Greyfriars fellows due in the form-rooms. Bunter rolled towards the House.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!" came a sudden roar.

"Give him a few more."

"Boot him!"

"Boot him terrifically."

"I—I say, you fellows—!" gasped Bunter, as he was surrounded.

"Last chance," said Harry Wharton. "You'll have to speak to Quelch in third school, Bunter. You'd better, if you don't want us to wear out shoe-leather on you after class."

"I—I—I say, you keep off. I—I—I'm going to let Quelch know that it wasn't Coker!" gasped Bunter. "I'm going to tell him, in the form-room."

"Stick to that!" said Bob Cherry.

And Bunter was allowed to roll to the Remove form-room unbooted.

CHAPTER IX

VERY BRAINY!

"PLEASE, sir—."

"Well?"

That monosyllable from Mr. Quelch was short and sharp. Quelch did not seem in the best of tempers that morning.

"I—I—I—" stammered Billy Bunter.

"Well?"

"I—I—I—" Bunter seemed unable to get further than that.

"Be silent."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

And silent he was!

Expressive glances were cast at him, from all over the Remove. They warned the fat Owl of what he had to expect, if he did not put Quelch wise during that class. Later, it would be too late! After third school, Coker was booked for the Head's study. It was now or never!



"I—I—I," stammered Bunter

Bunter was going to speak. He had thought up a dodge which, he hoped might see him through. But it was by no means a certainty—there was a risk—an awful risk that the fat Owl might get Coker's whopping, if he tried it on. No doubt it was worth the risk, in view of what awaited him after class if he failed to play up. But Quelch's grim countenance was far from encouraging.

However, taking his courage in both hands, as it were, Bunter tried again. Quelch had started on geography. Bunter's fat squeak interrupted geography.

"If—if you please, sir—."

A gimlet-eye glinted round at him.

"Did you speak, Bunter?"

"Eh! Yes, sir! If you please, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"If you have anything to say to me, Bunter, you may say it. If you are interrupting the lesson without cause, I shall cane you. Now what is it?"

"It—it—it—it—" It seemed to stick in Bunter's fat neck. But he got it out at last. "It—it's about kik-kik-Coker, sir."

"Coker?" repeated Mr. Quelch, staring.

"Yes, sir! It wasn't Coker!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I happen to know, sir, that it wasn't Soot that coked you—I—I mean, it wasn't Coker that sooted you, sir—."

"What?"

"I—I—I thought I ought to let you know, sir, as—as the Head's going up to Coker—I mean Coker's going up to the Head!" stuttered Bunter.

Mr. Quelch gazed fixedly at the fattest member of his form. He had not the slightest doubt on that subject. But if there was a doubt, he was of course willing to give it a hearing. Naturally he did not want punishment to land on the wrong shoulders. Geography, for the moment, was dismissed from mind.

"Bunter! Do you know anything about the occurrence at the school gates in the fog yesterday?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No, sir! I—I mean yes, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—I know that it wasn't Coker that buzzed that hanky full of soot, sir. I—I thought I—I ought to let you know, sir."

"Certainly you should let me know, if you are stating the facts," snapped Mr. Quelch. "What do you know about the matter, Bunter? Did you witness the occurrence?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"You were out of the House, in that thick fog?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I got lost in it, sir—."

"You witnessed what happened at the gates?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bunter.

"You saw the person who flung the handkerchief packed with soot?"

"I—I—I did sir. I—I was right on the spot."

"You say it was not Coker, of the Fifth Form?"

"It wasn't, sir! It—it was quite a different chap. It—it wasn't a senior man at all, sir."

"Bless my soul! You mean that it was a junior boy?"

"Yes, sir!"

"A Remove boy?"

"Yee-e-es, sir," moaned Bunter.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips, hard. His gimlet-eyes shot round over his form, as if to pick out the unknown culprit. Then they returned to Bunter.

"If what you state is correct, Bunter, you have acted very rightly in telling me this," he said. "But you must give me proof of what you say. If it was not Coker, who was it?"

No reply from Bunter.

"Do you hear me, Bunter?" Quelch's voice was deep. "All the evidence is that Coker of the Fifth Form was the culprit. If you are seeking to delude me—"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It—it wasn't Coker, sir—it—it was a Remove fellow, sir, and—and he never meant it for you, sir, only I—I—I mean he—he couldn't see you in the fog, sir—he took you for somebody else, sir, and—and it was really an accident, sir—."

"Bless my soul! If that is true, it certainly makes the matter less serious," said Mr. Quelch. "Give me the boy's name, Bunter, and I shall question him and ascertain the precise facts."

"I—I—I—"

"His name!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I'm afraid to, sir," gasped Bunter.

"What? What? Unless you give me the boy's name, Bunter, I can only conclude that you have concocted this improbable story to delude me!" thundered the Remove master. "Give me his name at once."

"I—I—I—I—" mumbled Bunter.

"I am aware," said Mr. Quelch, less thunderously, "that Greyfriars boys very properly regard it as a mean action for one boy to give information about another to the masters. I wholly approve of this. But this is an exceptional case, involving a possible miscarriage of justice. You must give me the boy's name, Bunter, as proof that your statement is the truth. There is no alternative."

"Yes, sir! No, sir! Only—only I'm afraid, sir—"

"I shall see that you do not suffer in any way for obeying my command to give me the boy's name, Bunter. You may rely on that."

"If—if I'm not to be punished, sir—"

"Of course you will not be punished, you stupid boy. All your form-fellows will, I am sure, realise that you have no choice in the matter."

"I—I—I mean, by you, sir—"

"By me!" Quelch stared blankly at the stammering Owl. "How can you be so stupid, Bunter, as to imagine for one moment that I should dream of punishing you, when what you have to tell me will prevent an act of injustice? Do not be so foolish, Bunter. Now give me the name."

"Oh! Thank you, sir! It—it—it—it was—"

"Who?" snapped Mr. Quelch, impatiently.

"Me, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Me, sir."

Billy Bunter had got it out at last. Now he stood blinking at his form-master in fear and trembling. And Henry Samuel Quelch stood gazing at him:

dumb. It really seemed as if Billy Bunter's reply had taken his breath away. He did not speak; and nobody in the Remove ventured to whisper. There was a long, long pause; during which a pin might have been heard to drop, in the Remove form-room.

There was a dead, dead silence.

The juniors fairly held their breath. Mr. Quelch stood as if transfixed, staring at the fat Owl.

Whatever reply he had expected from Bunter, he certainly had not expected that one!

He stared at Bunter. The Remove fellows stared at him. Bunter had owned up! Bootings, perhaps with the aid of his fat conscience, had had their effect! He had revealed himself as the culprit! But, with an artfulness that really was amazing, he had done so in such a way as to elude the penalty due to the culprit. Quelch, of course, had expected some other name from him. He had



There was a dead, dead silence

given his own—but not till it had been expressly stipulated that he should not be punished if he gave the name!

He had, in fact, tricked Quelch. Nevertheless, what Quelch had said, he had said! Plainly he had stated that Bunter should not be punished, if he gave the culprit's name! Bunter had given it. That was that! Could Quelch go back on his word?

The juniors stared at Bunter. They stared at Quelch. In dead silence, they wondered what was coming next.

Bob Cherry ventured to whisper:

"Oh, crumbs! Can you beat it?"

The silence continued. Quelch's gaze, at Bunter, was expressive, and grew more and more so. Billy Bunter blinked back at him anxiously. A man couldn't go back on his word—especially a school-master. But the fat Owl had a lingering doubt. There was a risk, and he had had to take the risk. Every moment of that long silence was a very anxious moment for William George Bunter.

Mr. Quelch broke it at last.

"Bunter!" His voice, never perhaps very musical, sounded like the grinding of a file.

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"You confess that it was you who flung the soot in the fog yesterday."

"Yes, sir! I—I didn't know it was you, sir, in the fog—I—I thought it was somebody else—and—and as you thought it was Coker, sir, I—I thought I—I ought to own up, sir—" mumbled Bunter.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

He had been smothered and choked with soot. It had roused his deepest ire. The culprit stood before him. Seldom or never had Henry Samuel Quelch desired so keenly to get busy with his stoutest cane. He was prepared to believe that the obtuse Owl had blundered in the fog, and that certainly lessened the gravity of the deed. All the same, he had had the soot! It was on his lips to order Bunter to stand out, and bend over—his fingers almost itched to grasp the cane!

But—what he had said, he had said!

"Very well, Bunter." The words came slowly, but they came. "I have told you that if you gave the culprit's name, you should not be punished." He paused for a moment. "Otherwise, I should administer the most severe caning that has ever been administered in this form-room."

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"In the circumstances, the matter ends here!" added Mr. Quelch.

Bunter was glad to hear it!



"I say, you fellows."

"We shall now resume!"

Geography was resumed. Quelch had been as good as his word—and the matter ended there!—dismissed and done with. There was good news coming to Coker of the Fifth—and there were no more bootings coming to Billy Bunter! So the outcome was satisfactory all round—except, perhaps, to Mr. Quelch.

CHAPTER X

THANKS FROM COKER?

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter was grinning cheerily, after third school, when he rolled up to the Famous Five in the quad. The clouds had rolled by: and Bunter's fat face was as bright as the wintry sunshine.

"You fat villain!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—."

"You artful toad!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—."

"The artfulness of the esteemed toad is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Quelch's face, in the form-room, was worth a guinea a box," he said. "But he had to stand by his word. Fancy that fat ass thinking up such a dodge!"

"It's all right for Coker now, anyway," said Nugent.

"Of course, that's why I put Quelch wise," said Bunter, "I wouldn't let another fellow take my gruel! Not my style! Kindest friend and noblest foe, you know—that's me, as Shakespeare said."

"Not Tennyson?" asked Harry.

"No, Shakespeare!" said Bunter, positively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at," said Bunter, "I know these things, and you fellows don't! But never mind that. Seen Coker about?"

"I saw Quelch speaking to him, after class," said Bob. "Coker knows it's all right now."

"Well, I want to see him," said Bunter. "Coker's a swob, and he smacked my head, but he's bound to feel grateful, now I've got him off, by owning up in a frank and manly way—."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He will want to thank me," said Bunter, "And the least he can do, after I've got him off, is to ask a fellow to a spread in his study. You know Coker's spreads! Lavish! I say, know where he is?"

"Here he comes!" answered Bob, "Looks as if he's looking for somebody."

"Me, I expect," said Bunter, cheerily, "Coker's rather a ruffian, but there's such a thing as gratitude." Bunter blinked round through his spectacles at a burly figure bearing down on the group of juniors. "I say, Coker! Looking for me? Here I am, old chap."

Horace Coker strode up.

"Oh, here you are, Bunter!" he said, "I've heard from Quelch that I'm not to go up to the Head, after all—it's come out that it was you who sooted him. You fat, foozling, frabby lump of lard—."

"Eh!"

"Leaving it on me!" said Coker, breathing hard, "Leaving it on me all this while, right up to the last minute! You fat scoundrel—."



"He will want to thank me."

"Oh, really, Coker—."

"Take that!"

"Wow!"

"And that—."

"Yaroooooh!"

Apparently it was not gratitude that Bunter was scheduled to receive from Coker of the Fifth! Not an invitation to one of the lavish spreads in Coker's study! Nothing of the kind! A fat Owl, yelling, fled as if for his fat life. After him rushed Horace Coker, letting out one foot after another, dribbling Billy Bunter across the quad like a fat football: leaving Harry Wharton and Co. laughing. It was, in their opinion, if not in the fat Owl's, a just reward for Brainy Bunter.

THE END