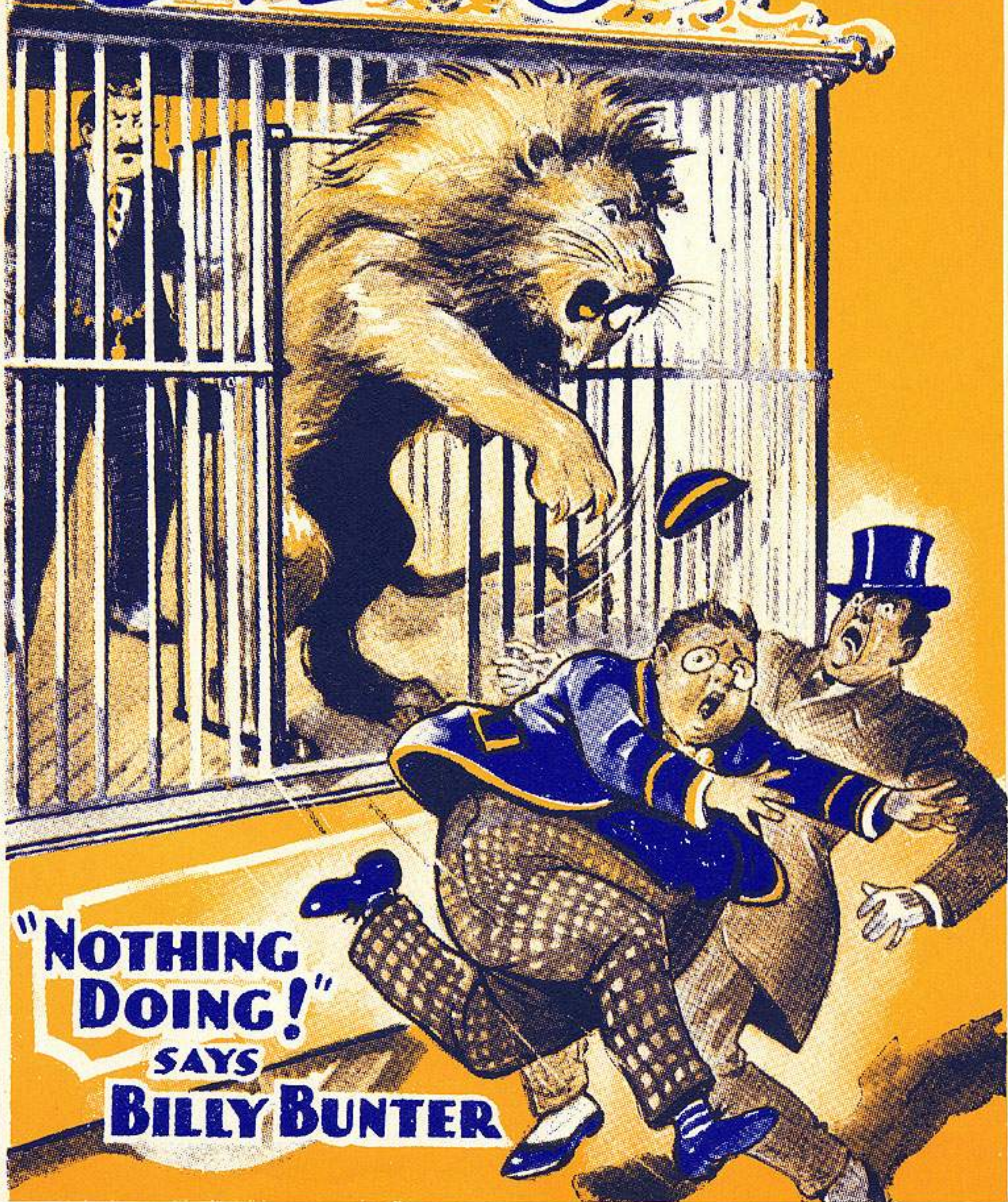


MEET THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY In this week's super COVER-TO-COVER STORY!

The Magnet ^{2^D}



"NOTHING DOING!"
SAYS
BILLY BUNTER



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

I HOPE you are all thinking that your Editor is a "real brick," for persuading Frank Richards to write cover-to-cover stories of Harry Wharton & Co. I know you will be pleased, and that's all that matters. I don't think anyone could get tired of Frank Richards' glorious school yarns of Greyfriars—and the old saying that you can't get too much of a good thing is borne out week after week by the number of letters I receive telling how pleased readers are with the grand yarns of Harry Wharton & Co. Take, for instance, our present series of circus yarns—if you don't get a fill of laughs out of them you ought to see a doctor!

The next yarn in this super series is entitled:

"THE HAUNTED CIRCUS!"

I tell you straight away that it's a scream from beginning to end. The number of things that Billy Bunter cannot do is almost unlimited, but there is one thing he can do, and do well, and that is ventriloquise. Realising that he has made a big blunder getting the "push" from Muccolini's Circus, and knowing full well the rascally doings of Muccolini, the runaway schoolboy threatens to "spill the beans" unless the fat proprietor reinstates him in his old "job." To save his skin, the spying signor agrees. It is then that the Greyfriars ventriloquist gets some of his own back! I will only spoil the yarn for you if I tell you any more. But I will say this, that you will be missing something great if you fail to get next Saturday's MAGNET.

There will be another magnificent supplement in next Saturday's issue, too. Harry Wharton certainly knows how to handle the "Herald." He is sparing no effort to get everything that is good in the way of interesting information about Greyfriars, and I am sure all of you are appreciating his efforts.

Recommendation is

THE FINEST ADVERTISEMENT

there is, and if you are a satisfied reader and enjoy the stories of Harry Wharton & Co., I ask you to recommend the MAGNET to all your chums at school. Whether they be boys or girls who are not readers, just tell them what they're missing. If you have a copy to lend them, so much the better.

I dare say most of you have heard the expression:

"GIVE 'EM BEANS!"

So you might be interested in the answer to the question which a Tonbridge reader asks me this week. He wants to know what is the most valuable plant in the world. Well, although you might find it difficult to believe, that distinction belongs to a bean—but a rather different bean from that which so many people grow in their back gardens in this country.

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Do you know that more than seven hundred million people use a variety of bean as their staple food? The bean is the Soya Bean, which is greatly cultivated in the Orient. Horticulturists are now trying to cultivate the Soya Bean in this country. All varieties are not suitable for human consumption, but you'd be surprised at the number of things which can be made from the Soya Bean.

Flour, margarine, milk and cheese, when made with soya, contain many extra vitamins. Among other things which can be produced by this magic bean are fertilisers, candles, inks, glue, sauces, linoleum, and electrical equipment. What is more, as many as four crops a year can be obtained from the first sowing. No wonder that big farms in this country are now turning their attention to the cultivation of Soya Beans.

Talking about food—I can imagine Billy Bunter's ears pricking up at this—have you heard about

THE MAN WHO EATS FROGS?

Frogs, of course, have been eaten by the French for years, and there are special frog farms in that country to supply the demand of the restaurants. The other day I heard of an Englishman, living at Market Harborough, who has been eating live frogs every day for seventy years! He obviously thrives on them, for he is now ninety years of age! When he was serving as a young soldier in India, a native doctor advised him to eat live frogs, and he has done so ever since.

DO you collect butterflies? If you do, this answer to "Magnetite," of Birmingham, may interest you. This reader wants to know if it is true that butterflies live only for one day? People used to believe that such was the case, but it is not true. In fact,

BUTTERFLIES WHICH CROSS THE OCEANS

are almost as common as birds which do the same thing. The famous Red Admirals and Painted Ladies butterflies are two of the most interesting species which do this. These butterflies leave Africa in the spring and cross the Mediterranean. Some settle in France, but others come on to Britain. The common Cabbage White butterflies come from Denmark, Sweden, France, and North Germany.

A sharp look-out is kept by lighthouse keepers, who have frequently seen flights of butterflies looking like a snowstorm, coming to this country. Not so very long ago, a woman living in Hamps-thwaite, Yorks, kept a butterfly as a pet for two years.

Some butterfly migrants even travel as far as Iceland, which is a pretty hefty journey.

Talking of Iceland, do you know that:

IT WANTS TO JOIN THE BRITISH EMPIRE?

Iceland is an independent state, under the personal sovereignty of the King of Denmark. This union expires in 1940, and the people of Iceland are wondering what to do then. Some want to continue the union with Denmark; others want to declare complete independence. But a third group wants to join the British Empire!

This suggestion is seriously worrying the men of the country's armed force, for the simple reason that all they have to do at present is to man the gunboats which keep a look-out for British trawlers poaching within the three-mile limit. If Iceland joined the British Empire, their job would be gone!

In response to many requests from readers, here are a few more paragraphs concerning out-of-the-way things in

THIS QUIANT OLD WORLD!

The Smallest Pair of Scissors in the World!—These are owned by an Edinburgh man. They are less than a tenth of an inch in length! They will cut—but only hairs!

Everyone will Live to A Hundred Years of Age!—That is, provided the claims of some Austrian scientists are correct! They claim to have found a substance which will provide new stores of energy for the human race, thus allowing life to be prolonged to the age of 100, at least!

A City Without Traffic!—Within the walls of Dubrovnik, in Jugoslavia, the streets are so narrow that no wheeled traffic is allowed in them!

The Smallest Village in England! Is claimed to be the village of Chiddingstone, in Kent. It boasts a castle, church, post-office, village hall, two shops and an inn. Yet there are only sixteen people who live in it!

Books That Talk!—Gramophone companies are now experimenting with "talking books." These will be bundles of paper tape, which will be run through an apparatus that will make them "speak" the book, together with suitable sound effect backgrounds!

Now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various queries sent in by readers.

What is "The Venice of the North"?—This description has been applied to many north-European cities where there are great numbers of canals—notably Bruges and Rotterdam.

How Many Locks are There on the Grand Union Canal—and How Many on the Thames?—On the main branch of the Grand Union, from Brentford to Braunston there are 101 locks. On the Thames, from Teddington to St. John's, there are 45 locks. There is also a tidal lock on the Thames at Richmond.

How Many Races of Mankind are There?—The races of mankind are divided into six categories. These are Caucasian, Mongolian, Negro, Semetic, Malayan, and Red Indian. The largest race is the Caucasian, which extends over Europe and the Orient. It is estimated to number over seven hundred millions of people. The smallest race is the Red Indian, estimated to consist of twenty-six million people.

So much, then, for this week, chums. Watch out for another pow-wow next Saturday.

YOUR EDITOR.

The CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Mr. Bunter Wants to Know!

BLOW!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. Buzzzz! "Bother!" Buzzzz!

It was really very annoying.

Bob was standing in Mr. Quelch's study, at the telephone. He was about to lift the receiver off the hooks, when the bell suddenly buzzed.

Somebody, evidently, was calling Quelch—at an extremely awkward moment for that member of Quelch's Form!

A moment ago all had seemed safe. The Remove were out in morning break. Quelch had been seen in Mr. Capper's study, farther along the passage. The coast was clear for a fellow who wanted the use of a phone. Which, as it happened, Bob Cherry did.

That afternoon was the last half-holiday of the term. Bob wanted to call up a fellow at Highcliffe, about plans for that afternoon. Which would have been perfectly easy and simple—had not the telephone bell chosen that very awkward and inopportune moment for putting up a raucous buzz.

Bob did not lift the receiver.

He turned an uneasy eye on the door of the study, which he had carefully closed after entering.

Quelch was sure to hear—and sure to come! And if Bob left the study, he would walk right into him as he came.

Evidently, this was not a favourable moment for speaking to Highcliffe. Prompt retreat was Bob's cue. But there was no safe egress by the door. He stepped quickly to the window.

But before Bob, quick as he was, could open the window, there was a sound of the door-handle turning.

He had just time to blot himself from

view behind the window curtain—then Mr. Quelch came in.

The bell ceased to buzz. Before it could restart, the Remove master reached the instrument and grabbed up the receiver.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bob Cherry inaudibly.

The window-curtain hid him from Mr. Quelch—but not from the quadrangle outside the window. He turned an anxious eye in that direction, hoping that no beak or prefect would happen to pass and spot him there.

Fortunately, there were no masters or prefects in the offing. He could see his friends, Harry Wharton and Frank

Ever since Billy Bunter first joined Signor Muccolini's Magnificent Circus he has been a source of trouble to the fat proprietor. But kick him out is more than the signor dare do . . . for the runaway schoolboy from Greyfriars knows too much about him!

Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh. They were standing in a group near the House, waiting for him to rejoin them after phoning. He was not likely to rejoin them just yet!

"Hallo! Mr. Quelch speaking! What? What?"

Bob was near enough to the telephone to hear a murmur over the wires, but he did not catch the words.

He was feeling extremely uncomfortable.

He did not want to overhear Quelch

on the telephone. He did not in the least resemble Billy Bunter of the Remove. Bunter would have regarded this as rather a catch! But Bob was not inquisitive, and he hated to be put into the position of an eaves-dropper.

On the other hand, to step out into view, and own up that he had come there to use a Form-master's telephone without leave, was to ask for "six" of the best! Which was far from an attractive idea.

Bob made up his mind that, if Quelch started talking of private affairs, he would show up and chance it. But if it was only some tradesman calling, or some parent talking about some fellow in the Remove, it did not matter very much, and he was going to avoid making any closer acquaintance with the cane that lay on the study table.

"No, certainly not!" Mr. Quelch barked into the transmitter. "Bunter has now been absent from school for a fortnight. He has not returned! No!"

Bob heard his Form-master snort.

Billy Bunter's name, in these days, had rather the effect on Mr. Quelch of a red rag on a bull.

Bunter was never the kind of fellow to make a Form-master glad to have him in his Form. He was backward, he was obtuse, he was lazy, he was unpunctual—he was very nearly everything that a schoolboy ought not to have been.

Still, a schoolmaster had to take the rough with the smooth, and Mr. Quelch tolerated Bunter with more or less patience—as a rule. But when Billy Bunter added to his other offences, the unheard-of offence of running away from school, Quelch naturally saw red.

Bunter always kept him on the

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simmer, as it were. Now he boiled over.

"The young rascal!" went on Quelch's voice at the phone. "Yes, Mr. Bunter! Yes, sir! I am alluding to your son William as a young rascal! A troublesome and disrespectful young rascal, sir!"

Evidently, it was Mr. Bunter on the phone!

Mr. William Samuel Bunter had been on the phone more than once since his hopeful son had disappeared from school. Now he was on the phone again, at an awkward moment for Bob Cherry.

"I fail to see what use it will be!" barked Mr. Quelch, in reply to something that did not reach Bob. "But certainly you may come down to the school if you so desire. I may as well tell you plainly, Mr. Bunter, that unless the boy returns before Greyfriars breaks up for the summer holidays, he will not be allowed to return at all! Every allowance, sir, is made for your son's stupidity—yes, I said stupidity—stupidity, sir! But there is a limit to his headmaster's patience—and to mine!"

Bob completely gave up the idea of emerging into view.

He could not see Mr. Quelch through the curtain; but the sound of his voice told that Mr. Quelch was in one of the worst of his tantrums. It was no time for drawing Quelch's wrath upon himself.

In Quelch's present mood, it was probable that it would be a relief to him to cane somebody! Indeed, he sounded as if he would have liked to cane Mr. Bunter!

Bob did not want to afford his Form-master that relief personally! He remained quiet and still.

"Undoubtedly, there is news of the young rascal—I repeat, young rascal!" barked Mr. Quelch. "I am not sure yet whether it is accurate. I have been told that he has joined a circus which was lately in this neighbourhood—"

There was a pause, as the gentleman at the other end interjected.

"Yes, a circus," went on Mr. Quelch. "A circus belonging to some foreigner named Muccolini! According to what I have heard, Bunter has joined the circus, and appears in the circus under the ridiculous name of 'Bunto.' I am not certain of this—"

Another pause.

"Naturally, I am taking steps!" barked Mr. Quelch. "But I have other matters on my hands, sir, as well as the affairs of your son—I am a busy man, sir! Certainly, as soon as I heard this, I proceeded to the circus at once, only to find that it had moved on from Courtfield, where it had been staying for some weeks. I have since ascertained that it has stopped at a place called Wapshot, some ten miles from here—"

Pause again, while Mr. Bunter interjected.

"I repeat, sir, that I am a busy man, and cannot devote my whole time to a disrespectful and lawless young rascal! I said rascal, sir—yes, rascal!" hooted Mr. Quelch. "But this afternoon, being a half-holiday in the school, it is my intention to go to Wapshot, and ascertain whether Bunter really is at the circus there. A serious inroad upon my scanty leisure, sir, especially so close to the end of the term!"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard over the telephone, as he listened to Mr. Bunter's rejoinder.

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"I take no blame whatever, sir!" he barked. "The boy has absented himself of his own accord—and I repeat, sir, that unless he returns before the school breaks up, he will not be allowed to return. Next term, sir, you may find some school other than Greyfriars for this troublesome boy! If, however, I find him at Wapshot, I shall bring him back to Greyfriars, and his headmaster will administer a flogging which, I trust, may bring even that obtuse boy to his senses! I repeat, sir—"

Mr. Quelch broke off.

"Are you there, Mr. Bunter?"

No reply

Mr. Bunter had had his three minutes, and even his natural, parental anxiety for his missing son, it seemed, did not make him feel justified in incurring additional expenditure. So he had cut off.

Mr. Quelch snorted.

He banged the receiver back on the hooks, with a bang that made the instrument rock.

"Scandalous!" Bob heard his voice. "Outrageous! Precisely the view that a parent would take—the master is to blame, not the boy! Upon my word! A flogging—a severe flogging—the very severest flogging—"

Bob Cherry hardly breathed.

It was an immense relief to him to hear Quelch stride across to the door, leave the study, and bang the door after him.

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bob.

He waited a few moments. But he was not thinking of calling Highcliffe now. He was only thinking of getting out of that dangerous quarter as fast as he could. He slid up the lower sash of the window, gave a quick glance round the quad, and dropped out. Once out of Quelch's study, Bob felt a good deal as Daniel must have felt when he got outside the lions' den.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Mysterious Voice!

"DAGO!" Signor Muccolini, proprietor of Muccolini's Magnificent Circus, jumped almost clear of the ground in his surprise and rage.

Beefy and bulky and podgy, Signor Muccolini had a greasy, swarthy face, curly black hair that shone with oil, and a swaggering manner. He owned the circus; but his manner indicated that he owned the earth.

Probably there were many members of the circus company who would have been pleased to remind the swaggering signor that he was, after all, merely a "dago."

But no one, so far, had ventured to do so.

Now someone was doing it!

Signor Muccolini could hardly believe his dusky, greasy ears, as they caught that disagreeable word.

He stared round him, his black eyes glittering with rage in search of the offender. That offender was booked for the "boot," short and sharp.

It was a sunny morning, and the signor was taking a walk round the circus camp, silk hat and eyeglass complete; every now and then stopping to bullyrag some unfortunate individual who was not in a position to answer back.

He had been telling Mr. Tippity Tip, the circus clown, that the public were fed-up on his moth-eaten wheezes, and that if he didn't think of something

new, he had better look out for another job. He had left Mr. Tip wishing that times were not so hard, so that he could have afforded to hit the signor in the eye!

Then he came on Bunto the Boy Tamer.

Bunto—otherwise Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove—was taking his fat ease in a deck-chair.

From the field where the circus was camped, on a low hillside outside the town of Wapshot, Bunter had a view of the little town, of the air camp adjoining, and of buzzing planes coming and going.

Having just disposed of his third breakfast, Bunter would have been pleased to take a little nap in that deck-chair, but the incessant buzzing of the planes disturbed him. Every now and then a plane, flying low, roared over his head with a terrific din. Which was annoying to a fat and lazy junior who wanted to nod off, so Bunter was not in the best of tempers.

He blinked at Signor Muccolini through his big spectacles with an inimical blink.

He did not like the signor. The signor did not like him. Bunter was there as the assistant of Marco, the King of the Lions, who was a great draw, and with whom the signor did not want trouble. But that did not save Bunter from the acid edge of the signor's tongue when he was in a bullying humour, as he very often was.

Bunter had heard him talking to Mr. Tip. He guessed that his turn was coming. That was why a voice, apparently from nowhere, called "Dago!" into the signor's greasy ear.

Nobody at Muccolini's Circus knew that Billy Bunter was a ventriloquist.

They knew in the Greyfriars Remove; and a "mysterious voice" did not mystify Reinove fellows, but often led them to kick Bunter. They did not know in Muccolini's Circus, or doubtless the fat Owl of the Remove would have been kicked there also.

Certainly it did not occur to Signor Muccolini for a moment that a fat schoolboy was playing tricks on him. He was not looking at Bunter, but had he looked at him he would not have seen his lips move. Bunter, who could do nothing else, could do ventriloquism amazingly well.

He grinned as the Italian glared round him with enraged eyes. There were caravans and lorries parked near at hand, on one side; on the other the annexe where the animals were kept in their cages. There was plenty of cover for anyone who desired to call the circus manager names without being spotted.

"Who—who was that?" exclaimed the signor. "Who called to me?"

"Dago! Why don't you wash your neck?" inquired a voice that seemed to come over his shoulder.

Signor Muccolini spun round like a fat humming-top.

His black, beady eyes almost started from his swarthy face as he saw that there was no one behind him.

"Dio mio!" he ejaculated. "Dov' e? Dove il furfante?"

He glared at Bunter.

"Ecco! Did you see him?" he snarled.

"See whom?" yawned Bunter.

"The rascal—the pig—the furfante—he who call me a name?" roared the angry circus manager. "He is near at hand. Did you see him?"

"What did he call you?" asked Bunter.

The signor gave an angry snort

instead of replying. He did not want to repeat the offensive epithet.

"Have you washed since you left Italy?" asked the voice, the next moment.

"Cospetto!" panted the signor. He rushed towards a lorry, from which direction the voice proceeded—or seemed to proceed. He had his circus whip under his podgy arm, and he slipped it down into his hand. His eyes gleamed with fury as he rushed round the lorry.

Had he discovered anyone hidden behind that lorry, that one would certainly have had the benefit of the whip.

But there was no one to be seen behind the lorry. Signor Muccolini stared round an empty space, while Bunter winked at a passing aeroplane and grinned.

Signor Muccolini had been going to

"You!" roared the signor, glaring at him.

"Eh, what?"

Marco stared out at him with a face covered with lather.

"It is you who call to me, you, Marco!" roared Signor Muccolini.

"I didn't call you!" answered the astonished lion-tamer. "Never knew you were there! But if I did, what does it matter?"

"You call me dago! You say wash a neck!" roared the signor furiously.

Marco almost swallowed a mouthful of lather in his astonishment.

"You're dreaming!" he said. "I never spoke! Don't be an ass, Mucky!"

"You call from this van——"

"I did not!" snapped Marco. "Perhaps there's somebody round the van, or under it! I did not speak!"

"It is one lie—you call!"

"I've not seen anything of him."

Signor Muccolini glared round furiously. Mr. Tippet Tip, at a little distance, was staring at him, perhaps wondering what was the matter with him. Mr. Tip was the circus ventriloquist, and did ventriloquist tricks with dolls in a side show. A sudden suspicion flashed into the signor's mind, and he rushed across to Mr. Tip.

"It is you!" he roared. "You play a trick! Is it not?"

"What the poker have I done now?" asked Tippet.

"You make a voice to come—you play ventriloquism on me!" roared Signor Muccolini. "You call me names with a voice that come from nowhere."

"Blow my buttons!" said the astonished Mr. Tip. "I ain't done nothing of the sort! You're dreaming, signor!"

"You call me one name!" bawled the



"Fat old bounder!" Skinner was saying, unaware of the fact that Mr. Bunter was just behind him. "As like Billy, as one porpoise is like another——" Smack! "Yaroooh!" He broke off suddenly, as a fat hand smote his ear, and he staggered sideways. Mr. Bunter had heard every word!

give him a turn in the bullyragging. But the signor was not thinking of that now. He was red with rage, and thinking only of tracking that mysterious voice to its source.

He came back round the lorry and glared at Bunter again.

"Did you see him run?" he demanded.

"I saw nobody run!" yawned Bunter.

"He was there—I heard him! I heard——"

"Go back to Saffron Hill, dago!" came the voice again, and this time the signor fixed his eyes on the window of Marco's van, near which Bunter had planted his deck-chair. He could have sworn that the voice came from that window.

He rushed across to the van.

The little window was open, and inside, Marco, the lion-tamer, could be seen. He was shaving.

Marco gave him a grim look from the window.

"Cut that out, Mucky!" he said. "I'm not an Italian, and don't tell lies. Don't give me any more of that."

The lion-tamer turned back to his mirror. Signor Muccolini glared at him with a deadly glare. But he turned away suddenly as a voice came from under the van.

"What price ice-cream, dago?"

"Oh!" gasped the signor. "He is there—he is under the van! Now I will find that furfante—I will beat him——"

Stopping, the signor peered between the wheels. Once more his black, beady eyes bulged as he saw empty space. He spun round at Bunter.

"You see him go?" he howled.

"Who?" asked Bunter.

"That rascal—that dog—that pig—that speak from under Marco's van!"

signor. "With a ventriloquism you call me a name!"

"I ain't—— Here, look out!" roared Mr. Tip, as the enraged Italian made a cut at him with the circus whip. "You gone balmy?"

Barely dodging the cut, Tippet Tip scuttled into the big circus tent and vanished. The signor brandished the whip after him.

"It is you—you who play a trickery!" he roared. "I——"

"Shut up, you silly dago!" said a voice behind him.

Signor Muccolini revolved on his axis. Clearly it was not the circus ventriloquist this time; Mr. Tip was at a safe distance. A man was rubbing down a pad-horse near at hand, and the signor rushed up to him.

"You speak?" he yelled.

The man stared.

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"Wot? I ain't said nothing, guv'nor! Wot you getting at?"

"Go home to Italy!" came the voice. Again the signor spun round.

"Dio mio!" he gasped. "Who speak? Is it that the circus is haunt? I hear someone speak, and I do not see someone." He glared round in helpless wrath. "Pig! Dog! Where do you speak?"

"I'm in this van!" came the reply, apparently from the open doorway of one of the circus caravans. "You come in here, and I'll dot your eye for you! Go home and scoff macaroni!"

With a howl of rage, Signor Muccolini leaped into the van. He almost fell down in his astonishment as he found that it was unoccupied. He came out again with an expression on his face that made the Greyfriars ventriloquist chuckle.

"I don't think I shall get any cheeky jaw from that greasy beast," murmured Billy Bunter.

And the fat ventriloquist was right. Signor Muccolini quite forgot his existence as he pursued his angry search for the owner of the mysterious voice. But he had no luck in that search.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Found!

HARRY WHARTON, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, had a thoughtful expression on his face when the school came out after dinner that day.

Bob Cherry had told his chums of the talk on Quelch's telephone, and all of them were feeling rather concerned about Billy Bunter. It looked as if the antics of the fat and fatuous Owl were

to be brought to a sudden end, with painful results for William George Bunter. Obviously his game was up if Mr. Quelch went over to the circus at Wapshot in search of him—as he was going to do.

"You fellows keen on Highcliffe this afternoon?" asked Harry.

"Not specially," answered Bob. "We were going to see old Courtenay before we break up and clear off, but I never got that phone call through. Anything else on?"

"I was thinking about Bunter."

"Blow Bunter!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Bunter's number's up, from what Bob heard in Quelch's study," remarked Frank Nugent. "Quelch will bring him back by his ears."

"The upfulness is terrific," assented Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The flogfulness is the next item on the esteemed programme."

"That's what I was thinking about," said the captain of the Remove. "Bunter's a blithering idiot and a howling ass and a pie-faced porker, and hasn't the sense of a bunny rabbit; but nobody wants to see him flogged, or sacked."

"Whopping might do him good," said Johnny Bull. "He's been asking for it long enough—begging for it."

"Well, yes; but he doesn't want all he asks for, like most of us. Look here, what about cutting over to Wapshot before Quelch starts and putting the fat ass wise that Quelch is coming?"

"It's ten miles," said Nugent.

"Ten miles on the jiggers won't hurt us."

"Last time we went to the circus to see if he was there he landed us in a

row with that fat Italian blighter," said Bob.

"I know, but—well, he's booked," said Harry. "Quelch will catch him on the hop, and it will be all up with him if we don't warn him."

"That's all very well," said Johnny Bull. "But a fellow oughtn't to run away from school; and if he does, he ought to be hooked back. We can't help him to keep dodging Quelch."

"I don't mean that, ass! He's got to get out of the circus now that Quelch is on his track, and if we tip him he can come back of his own accord without waiting to be fetched. It will make it easier for him."

"Let's!" said Nugent.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Quelch!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch came out of the House and walked briskly down to the gates.

He did not notice the Famous Five—but they noticed him. Aware of his plans for that afternoon, they knew that he was starting for Wapshot—and Billy Bunter. They watched him disappear out of gates.

"Quelch will be going by train," said Harry Wharton. "We can easily beat the local trains on the jiggers."

"Let's get off!" said Bob.

They went down to the bikeshed and wheeled out their machines.

Billy Bunter, at the circus, was happily and totally unaware of the blow that was about to fall. They could imagine his dismay when Mr. Quelch walked in at Muccolini's Circus and demanded him.

It was fairly certain that the circus people did not know that he was absent from school without leave; but, whether they wanted to keep him or not, his Form-master could not be denied.

Quelch, if he found him there, would march him off to dire punishment—and, unless Bunter was warned in time, it was absolutely certain that Quelch would find him there.

The fat Owl's only chance, in fact, was to get back to Greyfriars as fast as he could. He had to come—and the only question was whether he walked in of his own accord, or with his Form-master's hand on his collar. Now that his refuge was known, further dodging was futile.

It was only good-natured to give the fat and fatuous Owl a tip in time and help him to make the best, instead of the worst, of it.

The chums of the Remove rode down Friardale Lane in a cheery bunch. It was a glorious July afternoon, and they were prepared to enjoy the ten-mile spin to Wapshot.

In the lane they passed Mr. Quelch, heading with long strides for the village railway station.

He gave them a benevolent smile as they passed—which probably he would not have done could he have guessed their mission.

By road and lane and bridle-path they drew nearer to Wapshot, every now and then glancing up at the aeroplanes that buzzed and roared over the air camp.

"There's the jolly old circus," remarked Bob Cherry, as a fluttering flag high over the summit of the big circus tent came into view over the hedges.

Harry Wharton glanced at it.

"They're here all right," he said. "I shouldn't have thought that a circus would camp long at a little place like Wapshot, but they've not moved on yet."

"Well, no; Wapshot isn't much of a place for business, I should think," assented Bob. "Lots of people there when the races are on, but they're not on now."



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“There’s the air camp,” said Nugent. “I dare say they all go to the circus there. Still, there can’t be a lot doing.”

“Anyhow, here it is,” said Harry. “Keep your eyes open for a fat porpoise.”

No “porpoise” was to be seen, however, as the juniors dismounted at the gate of the field in which the circus was pitched.

The gate stood wide open, and a little man was seated on it, with a ventriloquial doll on his knee. The path into the field was well trodden, but did not look as if big crowds passed that way.

At Courtfield the circus had been crowded, and Signor Muccolini had done good business for several weeks; but at a place like Wapshot it was difficult to see where crowds were to come from.

It looked, if the Greyfriars fellows had been interested in the matter, as if Signor Muccolini had moved on from a good pitch to a very poor one.

The little man on the gate glanced curiously at the schoolboys. Mr. Tip had been practising ventriloquial back-chat with John, the doll, but he suspended that operation as the Greyfriars fellows arrived.

“Nothing on now, young gents!” he called out. “Only evening performances here; matinees all cut.”

Harry Wharton & Co. recognised the circus clown; they had seen him in the ring while the circus was camped on Courtfield Common.

“We haven’t come for the show, Mr. Tip,” answered Harry, with a smile; “we’ve called to see a chap at the circus—a chap we know.”

“Bunto the Boy Tamer,” said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

“I suppose he’s at home?” said Frank Nugent. “We want to see him rather particularly, Mr. Tip.”

“The particularity is terrific, esteemed Tip,” remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, a remark that caused Mr. Tip to jump and nearly drop John from his knee; he blinked at the Nabob of Bhanipur.

“My eye!” he said.

“I suppose we can go along and call on Bunto?” said Harry Wharton. “He’s rather an acquaintance of ours.”

“Oh, you’re from his school, I suppose!” said Tippity Tip.

The juniors exchanged glances. They had been certain that Bunter was at Muccolini’s Circus. But this was proof of it.

“You knew he belonged to Greyfriars?” asked Harry.

“I don’t think there’s a bloke in the circus that doesn’t,” answered Mr. Tip. “The side that fat cove put on is a caution! I dare say his schoolmaster was glad to give him leave out of school. He’s the sort of bloke it’s a pleasure to lose sight of.”

From which the juniors gathered that Mr. Tippity Tip did not admire William George Bunter. They also gathered that Bunter had pretended at the circus that he had leave out of school.

“Still, if you’re friends of his, I won’t tell you what I think of him,” said Mr. Tip considerably. “If you wasn’t, I might mention that I never saw a fatter, greedier, swankier fathead in all my born days.”

“I see you know him!” grinned Bob. “He seems to be as popular here as at school.”

“Jest about, I imagine!” said Mr. Tip. “Marco seems to think a lot of him! Marco’s a good chap—one of the best! But he ain’t fearfully bright. What he can see in that fat, swanky young ass—” Mr. Tip checked the flow of his eloquence. “But I forgot I’m speaking to friends of his. Sorry!”

“I suppose we can see him if we go to the circus?” said Bob.

“Hardly!” answered Mr. Tip. “You could if you’d got here at dinner-time. You could have stood and watched him for over an hour, packing away food as if he was loading a ship.”

The juniors chuckled. Had they doubted that “Bunto” of the circus was Bunter of the Remove, their last doubt would have left them now. The description of Billy Bunter was unmistakable!

“Now,” went on Mr. Tip, “he’s sleeping it off! If you want him, walk into the next field and look under a shady tree. You’ll find him all right! Listen for a row like an aeroplane engine doing its durndest. That’ll be his snore! You can hear him about a mile off!”

“Thanks!” said Harry, laughing.

The juniors wheeled their bicycles on, by the path across the field, past the circus camp. Mr. Tip was left sitting on the gate, extracting ventriloquial squeaks from the doll.

By a field-gate, they entered the adjoining field. Under a big, shady tree there was rich, thick grass, and in that grass a fat figure was curled. Mr. Tip had, perhaps, exaggerated a little; Bunter’s snore could not have been heard a mile off. But it could be heard at quite a considerable distance—and it guided the chums of the Remove to the spot.

Snore!

Parking the bicycles against a tree, the five juniors gathered round the sleeping beauty in the grass. Bunter’s fat head rested on a fat arm; his eyes were shut, and his mouth was open. He slept and he snored.

“Jolly old Bunter!” grinned Bob.

“Here he is!”

He leaned over the lumbering fat junior and roared in his fat ear:

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!”

Snore!

“Wake up, Bunter!” bawled Bob.

Snore!

“My hat! Talk about Rip Van Winkle!” gasped Bob Cherry. “Perhaps my boot will work the oracle.”

He jammed his boot into fat ribs!

It worked the oracle!

The snore ceased, the little round eyes opened behind the big round spectacles, and Billy Bunter woke! He blinked at five grinning faces.

“Beasts!” he said.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Tip in Time!

“**B**EASTS!” hissed Bunter.

“Time to wake up, old fat man!” grinned Bob.

“Beast! ‘Tain’t rising-bell!” snorted Bunter. “Lemme alone!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared the Famous Five.

The fat Owl seemed to have awakened under the impression that he was in the dormitory at Greyfriars. But as he sat up and blinked round him, Bunter remembered. He set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and glared at the chums of the Remove.

“I say, you fellows! Wharrer you doing here? Get out! You’re not wanted here, see? Buzz off, and let a fellow finish his nap. What the thump are you waking me up for? Cheek!”

“We’ve come over from Greyfriars specially to see you, old fat man!” said Harry Wharton.

“You can see me when the show’s on,” grunted Bunter. “Not that I’m on in the show!” he added cautiously. “Don’t you fellows get any silly idea that I’ve joined the circus. I haven’t! I don’t know where the circus is! I don’t think

it’s anywhere near Wapshot! I know nothing whatever about it.”

“Oh, my hat! You’re not on the circus bills as a jolly old Boy Lion-Tamer, what?” chuckled Bob.

“No! I’ve never heard of Bunto! I’m not Bunto the Boy Tamer! I’ve never even heard the name!”

“Oh crikey!”

“Don’t you fellows get talking any rot like that at Greyfriars,” said the fat Owl anxiously. “If old Quelch heard about it he would come along looking for me at the circus.”

“What would that matter, if you’re not at the circus?” chuckled Bob.

“Oh! I—I mean— Look here, you fellows, mind your own business!” snapped Bunter. “If you think I’m going back, you’re jolly well mistaken! Just clear off and leave a fellow in peace.”

“You silly ass—”

“Oh, shut up!” said Bunter. “I’m going to sleep! Like your dashed cheek to wake me out of a nap! I’ve a jolly good mind to call some of the hands and have you kicked out. Just shut up and clear off.”

Bunter settled down in the thick grass again.

“Quelch is coming!” said Harry Wharton.

Bunter sat up again, as if he had been electrified.

“Quelch!” he gasped.

“Yes, ass, and he may be along any minute.”

“Oh crumbs!”

Bunter jumped to his feet. He blinked round him through his big spectacles with a terrified blink—in terror of seeing the angular figure and severe features of Henry Samuel Quelch. He gasped with relief when he failed to spot that awful vision.

“You—you beasts!” he gasped.

“Pulling a fellow’s leg—”

“Fathead! Everybody at Greyfriars knows you’re at the circus,” said Harry. “Quelch is coming over this afternoon to snaffle you. We got ahead, as he went by train. But he can’t be long now.”

“Oh lor’!”

“That’s what we came to tell you, ass! The best thing you can do, is to get back to school before Quelch shows up. See?”

“I’m not going back!” howled Bunter. “Think I’m going to be flogged, you silly ass? Besides, I’m a member of the circus now! I get two pounds a week for helping Marco in his act! More than you fellows could ever earn, I can jolly well tell you. Not my value, of course. I’m jolly well going to ask for a rise. I jolly well mean to—”

“You howling ass!” said Bob. “Do you think you can stay at the circus, with Quelch after you?”

“He must have got out at Wapshot Station by this time,” said Nugent. “He may walk in at the circus any minute.”

“Oh crikey! Lucky I ain’t there, then!” gasped Bunter. “I’ll jolly well keep clear till he’s gone.”

“What good will that do, ass? He will find out for certain that you were there, and let them know you’ve run away from school. They can’t let you stay after that.”

“Oh, jiminy!” said Bunter blankly. “I—I dare say that greasy beast Muccolini would be glad of a chance to get shut of me. But I’m not going back! If that beast Quelch tells them I’ve run away from school, I—I’ll tell them afterwards that’s he’s mad, or something like—”

“Wha-a-t?”

“I can stuff Marco all right,” said

Bunter. "He's rather a fool! He likes me a lot, and—"

"Does he? Sounds as if he's a bit of a fool then!" agreed Bob.

"I don't mean that, you dummy! He likes me—admires my pluck—"

"Your whatter?"

"Pluck!" snorted Bunter. "My pluck in handling lions. I'd like to see you fellows do it! Cæsar, the lion I handle, is the fiercest of the lot. If you think he's a tame old lion, it only shows what fools you are! He—he's ferocious! Even Marco is rather afraid of him! I'm not, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, now you're here, you can do me a good turn," said Bunter eagerly. "Get hold of Quelch before he gets to the circus, and tell him you came here for me, and—and found that I wasn't here! See? Tell him you know for a fact that I've never been anywhere near the circus! Just stuff the old ass, see? I'll do the same for you another time."

"You blithering cuckoo—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Come along!" said Harry. "If you go back of your own accord, the Head will be sure to go a little easier with you. That's why we came—"

"I'm not going back!" howled Bunter.

"What about yanking him along by the ears?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Will you have a little sense, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We've biked ten miles, to give you the tip to get back to Greyfriars before Quelch blows in. I'll lend you my jigger to get back on, if you like."

"And how are you going to get back?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Never mind that now! Will you take my bike, Bunter, and get back to school before Quelch grabs you by your silly neck?"

Bunter reflected. He realised that he was in a bad box. He had to keep clear of the circus while Quelch was in the offing, that was certain. Any minute now Quelch might blow in, and would be told where he was. The Famous Five could not be very long ahead of him. Bunter had no time to waste.

"Oh, all right!" he said at last. "I'll borrow your bike, old chap! Put the saddle down for me. As low as it will go. I haven't spindle shanks like you, you know!"

Harry Wharton lowered the saddle of his machine to accommodate the short, fat legs of the fat Owl. He was only too glad to see that the runaway had decided to do the sensible thing at last.

"There's a lane by this field," he said. "You can get to the high road that way, without going near the circus again."

"Wheel it there for me!" said Bunter.

Wharton wheeled the bike away into the lane that ran by the field. Billy Bunter rolled after him.

The Co. were about to follow when the fat Owl gave them a glare.

"You fellows stay here," he snapped. "Quelch might spot a crowd of us, if he's anywhere about."

"Oh, all right! The sooner we lose sight of you the better we shall like it!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

The four juniors remained under the shady trees where Bunter had been napping. They watched Wharton wheel the machine through a gap in the hedge on the lane, at a little distance, and Billy Bunter roll after him. Then the hawthorn hedge shut off the view.

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In the lane Wharton handed the bike over to Bunter.

"Keep straight up this lane and you get to the high road," he said. "Don't turn the bike round, fathead—that will take you into Wapshot."

But Bunter did turn the bike round.

"I tell you it's the other way to Greyfriars!" roared Wharton. "You've got your back to it now."

Bunter hopped on the bike.

"And I'm jolly well keeping my back to it!" he snorted, over a fat shoulder.

"What?"

"Yah!"

Bunter drove at the pedals and shot away.

Harry Wharton stared after him, dumbfounded.

Bunter was not heading for Greyfriars School. He was heading for Wapshot, and the open spaces beyond. He had borrowed that bike, not to return to school, but to put a safe distance between himself and Quelch!

As that dawned on Harry Wharton's mind, he gave a roar, and rushed after the fat cyclist.

"Stop, you fat villain! Stop, you frabjous frog! Stop!"

Bunter did not stop.

He flew.

Wharton rushed in wild pursuit. But the bike vanished round a bend of the lane, Bunter going strong. The captain of the Remove came to a breathless halt.

"I—I—I'll burst him!" he gasped.

That operation, however, had to be unavoidably postponed. The bike was gone, and Bunter was gone. As fast as his fat, little legs could drive at the pedals, Bunter flew; and Wharton, with feelings too deep for words, walked back into the field to rejoin his friends.

Four members of the Co. returned to Greyfriars on their bikes. One member returned by slow local trains. And when that member arrived at the school, he would gladly have given a term's pocket-money to be within kicking distance of William George Bunter. Even Mr. Quelch was not keener to see the runaway Owl than was Harry Wharton. But neither of them was likely to see him in a hurry.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Exit Bunto!

MARCO frowned.

The shades of night were falling fast, as a poet has expressed it. The blare of music sounded from the big circus tent, with the thudding of hoofs, and the cracking of the ring-master's whip.

The performance was nearing its end, and Marco's turn with the lions was over. And he frowned at the sight of a fat figure that wheeled a bicycle into the field, and parked it against the van.

"So you've come back!" growled the lion-tamer.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

He had come back! He had come back late! He had to make sure of giving Quelch plenty of time to get clear before he approached the circus again. In doing so, he had had to cut his turn in the show. That could not be helped.

That was merely a trifle, in comparison with the risk of falling into Quelch's clutches. But Marco did not seem pleased.

"Yes, here I am," said Bunter.

"You've cut your turn?"

"I couldn't help it!" explained Bunter. "A pal from the school came

along this afternoon and lent me his bike. I—I went for a spin, and lost my way."

Marco grunted.

"Well, it doesn't matter much!" he said. "The turn will have to be cut from to-day, anyhow, now I know you've run away from school."

Billy Bunter breathed hard. He had no intention of leaving the circus, if he could help it. But he realised that the position was difficult.

"Who says I've run away from school?" he demanded.

"Your schoolmaster has been here!" said Marco. "A gentleman named Quelch. He came to take you back, and if you'd been here, he'd have taken you. But you couldn't be found."

He gave Bunter a very suspicious look.

"Tippity says some schoolboys came to see you this afternoon," he went on. "Did they warn you that your schoolmaster was coming? I suppose that was it—and you cleared off to keep out of his way."

"You—you see—" stammered Bunter.

"I see that the sooner you clear out of here the better!" snapped Marco. "You've taken me in. You made out that you had leave from the school, or I'd never have allowed you to join up here. You know that!"

"You—you see—"

"I found it pretty hard to make your schoolmaster believe that I never knew you were a truant!" said Marco. "You've placed me in a rotten position."

"You—you see—"

"And I've told him you'll be sent back as soon as you show up here!" added Marco.

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the King of the Lions in dismay. He realised that Marco was "shirty." That was not surprising, after his interview with Mr. Quelch, which could not possibly have been pleasant.

"I—I say, don't you take any notice of that old ass!" urged Bunter. "The fact is, old Quelch is rather mad!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"He gave me leave, and then forgot all about it!" explained Bunter.

"Rubbish!"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"You told me you had telephoned to your father, and had his leave to join!" said Marco. "That wasn't true."

"Oh! Oh, yes! Quite!" gasped Bunter. "Quelch is rather mad—a bit loose in the crumpet, you know! I—I wonder they keep him on at Greyfriars! He's been going dotty quite a long time."

"Rubbish!"

"Mad as a hatter!" urged Bunter. "Quite balmy; every chap in the Remove knows that he's as mad as a hatter. I—I say, old chap, I—I don't want to leave the circus!"

"No choice about that!" said Marco. "It's too late for a train now; but you'll have to cut first thing in the morning."

"But I—I say—"

Marco turned and walked away without waiting for the dismayed fat Owl to finish.

Only too plainly he was "shirty." He seemed quite a different Marco from the one the fat Owl had hitherto known.

Marco had started with quite a high opinion of William George Bunter. But it was possible that closer acquaintance with the fat Owl had diminished his esteem. Anyhow, it was clear that he was very much annoyed at finding himself placed in the position of harbouring a runaway schoolboy.

"Oh lor!" murmured Billy Bunter.



Hidden in the hawthorns, Billy Bunter watched Signor Muccolini taking photographs of the Wapshot Air Camp. That the fat signor had no such permission, was clear from the surreptitious secrecy of his proceedings. Bunter's heart thumped. "The cheeky dago!" he gasped.

Really, it began to look, even to Bunter, as if his game at Muccolini's Circus was up! The flogging that awaited him at Greyfriars, loomed nearer and nearer.

Luckily, that worry on Bunter's fat mind did not affect his appetite. He made as good a supper as usual. And when he turned in, his deep and incessant snore indicated that his slumbers were not disturbed.

But if the fat Owl could forget his woes in slumber, he had to remember them when another day dawned.

He breakfasted with Marco, and found him good-tempered; but quite determined that his boy assistant was to quit the circus that day. Marco said good-bye to him, and went to attend to the lions.

Probably he thought that Bunter was gone. But an hour later, Signor Muccolini, making his round of the camp, spotted a fat figure sitting on the step of Marco's van.

"Dio mio! You are not gone!" exclaimed the signor, fixing his black, beady eyes on the hapless Owl.

"I—I'm going later!" stammered Bunter. "Mum-mum-Marco wants me to stay till this afternoon—"

The signor slipped his circus whip down into his podgy hand.

"You are going later?" he asked.

"Ye-es!" said Bunter, with an uneasy eye on the whip.

"You are not going now?" grinned the signor.

"N-n-n-no!"

"I think you are mistaken! I think that you are going now!" said Signor Muccolini. "And I will help you to go!"

"I—I say— Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as the circus whip curled round his fat legs. "I say— Whooop!"

Bunter bounded. Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooooh! Keep off, you rotten dago!" yelled Bunter. "Keep off, you Italian beast! You dirty dago, keep off!"

If Bunter hoped that those compliments would cause Signor Muccolini to give the whip a rest, Bunter was disappointed.

The signor laid it on harder. He exerted himself, putting all his beef into it! Bunter hopped and bounded under the cracking whip.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" he roared.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Beast! Wow! Stoppit!" shrieked Bunter. "I'm going, ain't I?"

And he went—at top speed.

He did not even remember Wharton's bicycle, still leaning against the caravan where he had left it overnight. He dodged and jumped, and fled. The signor followed him up, still handing out lashes from the circus whip.

Whack! Crack! Whack!

Bunter did the path out of the circus field as if it had been the cinder path. Signor Muccolini brandished the whip after him as he vanished.

Bunter was gone! It looked as if the career of Bunto the Boy Tamer had come to a sudden end.

Bunto the Boy Tamer, once more Billy Bunter, did not stop running till he was a quarter of a mile from the circus. Then, panting for breath, and streaming with perspiration, the hapless fat Owl stopped, sat down in the shade of a haystack and gasped and gasped, as if he would never leave off gasping.

But when he recovered his breath and stirred, his erring footsteps did not carry him in the direction of Greyfriars School. A Head's flogging still had no attractions for him whatever. Billy Bunter was at a loose end—and what he was going to do, he did not know; except that he jolly well wasn't going

to be flogged, if he could jolly well help it! His feelings were summed up in a remark which he made at frequent intervals that unhappy morning:

"Oh lor'!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Smacks for Skinner!

"THE old Obadiah!" remarked Skinner of the Remove.

Some of the fellows grinned. Skinner's remark was called

forth by the sight of a taxi stopping at the House, and a short, stout gentleman stopping therefrom.

Mr. William Samuel Bunter, the happy parent of William George, was known at Greyfriars School. The juniors knew that he had been on the telephone very frequently since the disappearance of Billy Bunter; and now, evidently, he had come in person to look into the matter.

His plump face had a very severe expression. It was clear that Mr. Bunter had not arrived at Greyfriars in a good temper.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, that's Bunter's pater!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming along with his friends.

"The old Obadiah, looking for the young Obadiah!" said Skinner. "Judgin' by his look, the young Obadiah's lucky to be off in this scene."

Harry Wharton & Co. nodded politely to Mr. Bunter. The stout stockbroker glanced at them over his glasses.

"Has my son returned to school yet, Wharton?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir!"

Mr. Bunter grunted.

"Scandalous!" he said.

And he rolled into the House.

Trotter conducted him to Mr. Quelch's study. Mr. Quelch had retired to his study after the school dinner; not in his best temper.

Bunter, so far, had not arrived at Greyfriars; and Bunter's pater had! The non-arrival of Bunter had irritated Quelch all the morning. The arrival of Bunter senior, which he witnessed from his study window, irritated him perhaps a little more. Visits from parents rarely gratify a schoolmaster; and the circumstances of this visit were unusually awkward and disagreeable.

So Quelch rose to his feet stiffly, with a grim brow, as Mr. Bunter was shown in. Mr. Bunter's brow was equally grim.

Quelch's view was that he was unduly bothered by Mr. Bunter's son, the most troublesome boy in his Form. Mr. Bunter's view was that he was unduly bothered by a lack of firmness and discipline on the part of his son's Form-master.

Neither was pleased with the other. "Good-afternoon, sir!" said Mr. Quelch icily.

"I have called, as I mentioned on the telephone yesterday, in reference to my son William!" said Mr. Bunter curtly. "I have just been told that he has not returned to the school."

"He has not!" barked Mr. Quelch. "I understood from you, sir, on the telephone, that you had ascertained his present whereabouts—"

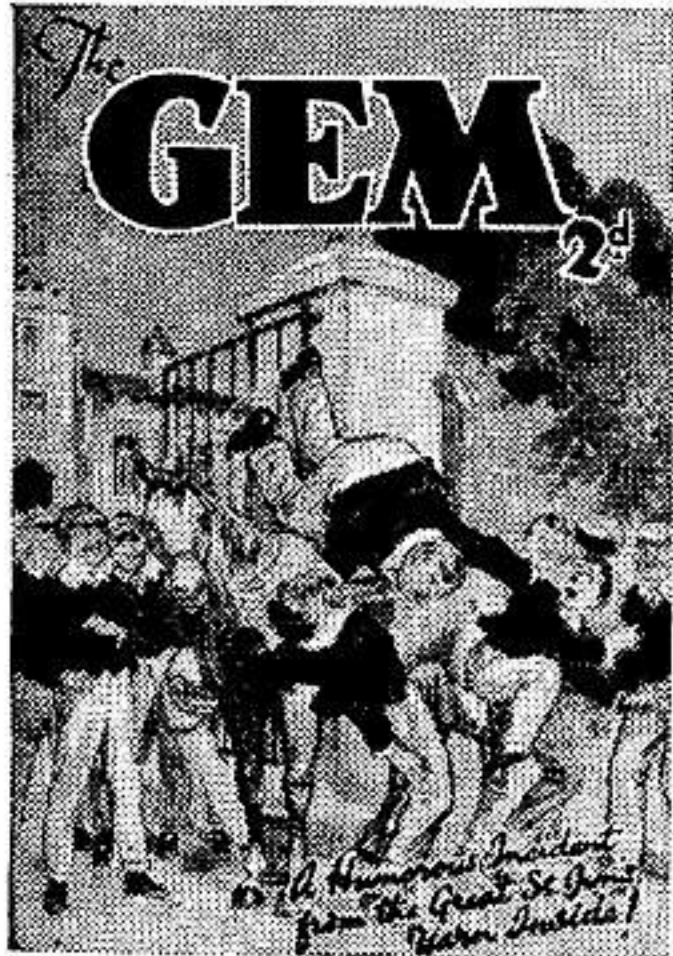
"That is the case, sir! I have ascertained, beyond doubt, that he took refuge in a circus, after running away from school. That circus is now at Wapshot, ten miles from here."

"And why, sir, has he not been fetched back?" demanded Mr. Bunter. "It is not customary at Greyfriars, I presume, for junior boys to be allowed to wander as they wish all over the country."

Mr. Quelch's prominent cheek-bones reddened.

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"No, sir! Nothing of the kind! Every attempt has been made to bring Bunter back to the school. Yesterday, sir, I visited the circus in person, at a very great trouble to myself, to fetch him away."

"Then why is he not here?"
"He is not here, sir, because somehow he appears to have taken the alarm, and he deliberately kept away from the circus while I was there, sir!" said Mr. Quelch acidly. "Possibly he saw me approaching! I do not know! At all events, he was not to be found."

Grunt from Mr. Bunter.
"I remained there, sir, a whole hour, while search was made for him!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I repeat that he was not to be found."

"No doubt he was keeping out of sight with the connivance of the riff-raff with whom he has been allowed to associate!" snorted Mr. Bunter.

"He has been allowed, sir, to do nothing of the kind!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "And I am bound to say—"

"At all events, he has not been prevented!" yapped Mr. Bunter. "May I ask why he has not been fetched away since yesterday?"

"You may, sir!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I refuse, sir—I distinctly refuse—to have my time further wasted by that rebellious and obtuse boy. I refuse, sir, to visit the circus again and again to be eluded by him. I leave the matter in your hands, sir."

Grunt!
"The man who has given your son employment—a very respectable man, by no means riff-raff, as you express it—assured me that he did not know that Bunter had run away from school—"

"Nonsense!"
"I believe his statement, sir, and have no doubt that Bunter deceived him on that point. This man, named Marco, promised that the boy should be sent away from the circus immediately he returned there."

"He is not here, however."
"He is not!"
"Then he has not left the circus after all."

"I cannot undertake to say that, sir! I can only say that I have done my best, and can do nothing more; and add, that, unless your son returns to the school, he will not be allowed to return next term."

Grunt!
"Such disobedience, sir—such reckless defiance of authority—!" said Mr. Quelch warmly.

Grunt!
"Such flagrant insubordination, sir—!"

Grunt!
"I am bound to say—"
Mr. Bunter looked at his watch.
"I have no time to waste, Mr. Quelch—"

"My time, sir, is also of value!" said the Remove master tartly.
"But I must, I presume, find time to fetch my son back from this—this circus! Good-afternoon, Mr. Quelch."

Mr. Bunter was gone before the Remove master could answer. He did not wait to be shown out. He whisked back to his waiting taxi.

Quite a little army of Greyfriars fellows had gathered by that time. News had spread that Bunter's pater had arrived; or, as Skinner put it, the Old Obadiah had come hunting for the Young Obadiah. Mr. Bunter, whisking out of the House, found a crowd of fellows round the steps. Skinner was speaking. Having his back to the door, Skinner did not see the stout gentleman suddenly emerge.

"Fat old bounder!" Skinner was saying. "As like Billy as one porpoise

is like another—what are you making faces at me for, Cherry, you ass?"

Bob was making frantic signs to warn Skinner that Mr. Bunter was just behind him. Before Skinner could catch on, he was apprised of Mr. Bunter's presence.

Smack!
"Yaroooooh!" roared Skinner, as a fat hand smote his right ear, and he staggered over sideways.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.
Smack!
Another smack, on his left ear this time, righted Skinner.

"Yoop!" yelled Skinner. "What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Mr. Bunter strode to his taxi, leaving Skinner rubbing two burning ears, and the other fellows grinning.

"Wapshot!" yapped Mr. Bunter, and the taxi-driver drove down to the gates, the stout gentleman sitting in the cab with his plump brows knitted in a deep frown.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!" gasped Skinner. "Cheeky old tick! Ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"He's off to Wapshot!" said Frank Nugent. "Bunter's number is up this time."

"The upfulness is terrific."
And when the Remove went into Form that afternoon, none doubted that before class was over, the wandering Owl would be in their midst again. And nobody envied him what he was going to receive when he got there!

At last—at long last—Bunter's number was up! The wandering Owl had reached the end of his Odyssey.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Signor's Secret!

"BEAST!" murmured Billy Bunter.

Sitting in the grass on the hillside by Wapshot, in the shade of a hawthorn hedge, the fat Owl addressed that remark to Signor Muccolini.

Needless to say, the signor was not within hearing of the remark.

It was the sight of him, in the distance, that called it forth. The circus-master, with a basket in his hand, was coming up the path over the hill, which ran close by the spot where Bunter sat.

Bunter scowled at him.
But he did not stay for more than one scowl. He rolled out of sight into the hawthorns, anxious to keep out of view of Signor Muccolini.

The fat junior was still reminded, by several painful twinges, of the signor's whip. He did not want any more. And he had no doubt that more would be handed out if the signor found him hanging about the circus.

It was not Bunter's happy day. Hours—long hours—had passed since he had left the circus camp. It was clear, even to Billy Bunter's obtuse mind, that he could not return there. Even had Marco been willing to shelter a runaway from school, which was scarcely possible, Signor Muccolini had made it quite clear, painfully clear, that Bunto was not wanted at the Magnificent Circus.

But the hapless fat Owl could not make up his mind to return to Greyfriars. The more he thought about what awaited him there, the less he liked it.

He realised that he could not sit in the grass for ever, on Wapshot Hill, comforted only by a distant view of the flag fluttering over the circus tent.

What he was going to do, in fact,

was quite unknown to Billy Bunter. He could not make up his fat mind.

Only one thing was clear! It was getting near dinner-time now, and a fellow could not possibly miss his dinner! For once, the fat Owl was not in his usual impecunious state. Owing to Marco, he had cash in his pockets. Dinner, at all events, would be grateful and comforting, though it would not solve his problems. Bunter was thinking about it when he sighted Signor Muccolini coming up the hilly path, and rolled hastily into cover.

From the hawthorns, he blinked inimically at the signor through his big spectacles.

Signor Muccolini had not seen him, and Bunter did not intend to let the Italian see him. He watched him coming nearer, expecting to see him pass on.

Instead of which, the Italian came to a halt at the belt of hawthorns on the sloping hillside.

Bunter felt a qualm. For a moment he dreaded that the circus-master had spotted him. In which case, as the signor was not carrying his whip at the moment, he expected to receive an allowance of the signor's boot.

But he soon realised that the Italian was unaware of his presence. Signor Muccolini set down the picnic-basket in the grass, and sat on a knoll, and mopped a perspiring face with a gaudy silk handkerchief.

Bunter scowled from the hawthorns at his back.

He understood now.

The beast was there to feed—a solitary picnic! More than once, since Bunter had been at the circus, he had noticed that the circus-master sometimes went out on his own for that very reason. It was rather a peculiar habit of Signor Muccolini's, for he never by any chance took any companion with him on those picnics.

Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, fixed on the picnic basket. He would have been extremely glad to sample the contents of the same. As it was, however, he was glad enough to keep out of sight.

Having rested on the knoll for several minutes, Signor Muccolini stirred. He opened the lid of the picnic-basket.

What he took from it made Bunter stare, wondering whether his eyes and spectacles had deceived him.

It was not the provender he had naturally expected to see. It was a large camera in a leather case.

Bunter blinked blankly.

He had never seen the signor with a camera at the circus. He had never heard any of the company mention that the circus-master took photographs. If Signor Muccolini's hobby was photography he seemed to keep it rather dark. And why, in the name of wonder, did he carry his camera in a picnic-basket?

Anyone observing that basket would have supposed, as Bunter had supposed, that the circus-master was going on a picnic. Instead of which, he produced a camera from the basket, and evidently was not thinking of either eating or drinking.

Camera in hand, the swarthy man cast a swift, searching glance about him. Even the short-sighted Owl of the Remove could not fail to detect the sly, cunning, furtive watchfulness in the dusky face.

Billy Bunter felt another qualm. He crouched closer into his cover. That look on the signor's swarthy face alarmed him.

For several minutes he lost sight of Signor Muccolini, only too thankful that the Italian did not catch sight of him!

But he could hear sounds of the man

moving, and a shadow fell across the sunlight, as the circus-master came nearer the hawthorns.

Bunter heard a low click.

Evidently the signor was taking photographs. There was no harm in a man taking photographs if he wanted to, but even Bunter was bright enough to realise that there was something very strange, something very mysterious and sinister behind this. It could only be for motives of secrecy that a man carried his camera hidden in a picnic-basket.

Click, click, click!

He was taking picture after picture on a roll of films, quite close to the breathless Owl. The hawthorns were behind the signor, and it seemed that he was photographing the town at the foot of the slope—or the air camp adjoining.

And as Bunter thought of that, he barely repressed a startled squeak.

He understood now.

Taking photographs in the vicinity of Wapshot Air Camp was strictly prohibited. It could not be done without special permission from the commanding officer. That Signor Muccolini had no such permission was clear from the surreptitious secrecy of his proceedings.

Bunter's heart thumped! Signor Muccolini was taking forbidden photographs, and had a constable spotted him he was liable to be "run in."

"The cheeky dago!" breathed Bunter.

Billy Bunter would have given a good deal just then to be a big hefty fellow like Coker of the Fifth. He would have liked to emerge from cover, and kick that cheeky foreigner down the hillside, and his camera after him. Like his beastly cheek, Bunter considered, to be breaking the law—coolly disregarding the fact that what he was doing was strictly prohibited in a military area.

Unfortunately, had Bunter shown up, it was Signor Muccolini who would have done the kicking. So the fat Owl remained where he was.

The camera went on clicking, from moment to moment.

"Buono!" he heard the signor mutter.

"Buonissimo!" Evidently he was satisfied with the photographs he was taking of the air camp and its environs.

"Cheeky rotter!" breathed Bunter.

It did not occur to Bunter's fat mind that Signor Muccolini's proceedings were anything but a dashed foreigner's cheek! That there might be a dark, sinister, and treacherous motive behind that secret photographing of an air camp on the coast did not enter his head. Signor Muccolini was a cheeky dago who chose to take no notice of the law; that was all that occurred to Bunter.

He was glad to hear the Italian packing the camera into the picnic-basket again at last. When he blinked out of the hawthorns again it was to get a back view of the circus master going down the hill, basket in hand.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter.

There had been no picnic—only photography. Evidently the signor's other excursions from the camp with that basket in his hand had been for the same purpose—the taking of secret photographs. Bunter knew that little secret now.

"I could jolly well get the beast run in for that!" Bunter reflected. "And I've a jolly good mind to."

But it was past dinner-time now, and Billy Bunter's thoughts turned to dinner with longing. He waited till Signor Muccolini was out of sight, and then rolled down the path on the hillside to the town. And during the next

hour the greater part of his financial resources was expended on filling the aching void within.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Roman Father!

"WILLIAM!"
"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Billy Bunter was still at a loose end. He had not decided what he was going to do. But it was suddenly decided for him!

Coming out of the Wapshot inn after parking an ample, perhaps too ample, dinner, Bunter was feeling better. But he was still worried about his unsolved problem, when the sudden and unexpected sound of his pater's voice solved it.

Having nearly walked under a taxicab in the High Street, Bunter dodged out of the way of that cab, and fairly jumped as the stout passenger within barked his name.

He blinked at Mr. Bunter.

Mr. Bunter frowned at him.

The taxi halted, and Mr. Bunter opened the door.

"Step in, William!" he snapped.

"Oh lor'!"

Bunter stepped in. There was no help for it. He had rather dreaded that he might run into Mr. Quelch, looking for him again. He had never dreamed of seeing Mr. Bunter. But it was Mr. Bunter who happened.

Mr. Bunter addressed a grunt to the driver, and the taxi went on. Then he fixed a severe frown upon his dismayed son.

"So I have found you, William!" grunted Mr. Bunter.

"Oh jiminy!"

"I have been to the school, William! Your Form-master told me you had not returned. I came here to call for you at the circus. As I have met you, that will not be necessary. I shall take you back to Greyfriars at once."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I understand," said Mr. Bunter grimly, "that it is your headmaster's intention to administer a very severe flogging."

"Oh lor'!"

"I fully approve of this!" added Mr. Bunter. "I hope and trust that Dr. Locke will not err on the side of leniency."

"I—I say—" groaned Bunter.

"You need say nothing, William!" said Mr. Bunter austere. "I leave your punishment in the hands of your headmaster. I shall only insist that it shall be sufficiently severe."

"But I—I say—"

"What is the meaning of this escapade?" demanded Mr. Bunter sternly. "How dare you leave your school and associate with circus riff-raff? Have you been getting into debt?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter.

"Any debts you have contracted will certainly not be paid!" snapped Mr. Bunter. "You are a minor—a school-boy! They should not—"

"But I—I haven't—" gasped Bunter.

He had a gleam of hope, as he realised that his honoured parent had forebodings about being presented with a bill! On that point, at least, Bunter was able to relieve the parental mind.

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Bunter.

"You have been absent from school for more than a fortnight. You have not lived on air, I presume."

"Nunno! But—"

"If any claim is made upon me, I shall repudiate it!" grunted Mr. Bunter. "Most firmly!"

"But—I say——"

"That will do!"

"But—but——"

"You need say nothing, William! I am taking you back to your school, for your headmaster to deal with. I shall not intervene, except to the extent of insisting that your punishment shall be sufficiently severe."

"Oh lor'!"

The taxi ran on. Wapshot was left behind, and Bunter, from the window, had a last glimpse of the circus flag. He blinked at it mournfully as it vanished. Was the career of Bunto the Boy Star of the Circus really at an end? It looked like it.

That was bad enough! But worse remained behind! Every turn of the taxi's wheels brought him nearer and nearer to Greyfriars School! The Head's birch was more and more in his fat thoughts.

If ever a fellow had asked for a flogging, Bunter had! If ever a fellow had begged for one, Bunter had! Indeed, all the Greyfriars fellows agreed that he would be lucky to get off with a flogging and escape the "sack." But the fat Owl hated the idea, all the same. He really loathed it! And the Head's birch was coming nearer and nearer!

"I—I say——" groaned Bunter at last.

"You may be silent, William!"

"Yes, but——"

"Do you desire me to box your ears, William?"

"Oh, no! Not at all!"

"Then be silent!"

Bunter was silent again. Mr. Bunter, who was generally good-natured, like most plump people, was now in a very stern mood, and seemed to be bent on understudying the Roman fathor.

Bunter did not like the change. Really, he did not admire the Roman style in parents!

Brutus, ordering his sons to execution with the stern virtue of an ancient Roman, had bored Bunter in the history class at Greyfriars. He did not regard Brutus as an admirable character. He thought him an unfeeling beast, and no doubt he was. Now his own plump parent seemed to be modelling himself on the lines of Brutus! It was most unpleasant.

The grey old tower of Greyfriars came in sight at last over the trees.

Bunter made one more effort.

"I—I say, I—I don't want to be flogged!" he moaned.

Mr. Bunter stared at him.

"You do not want to be flogged?" he demanded.

"No! Oh, no! I—I'd much rather not!" groaned Bunter.

"Then why have you placed your headmaster in such a position, that he has no alternative but to flog you?" yapped Mr. Bunter.

Billy Bunter did not attempt to answer that one. He only groaned.

The taxi ran up to the school gates. Gosling came out of his lodge, and Bunter detected a crusty grin on his ancient face. The prospect of a flogging, which so dismayed Bunter, seemed, on the other hand, to afford Gosling entertainment. Bunter gave him a glare through his spectacles.

"I—I say—if—if you'll speak to the Head——" mumbled Bunter.

"I shall certainly speak to him!" said Mr. Bunter.

"And—and ask him to—to go easy and——"

"That is not my intention, William! I shall request your headmaster to make your punishment severe—very severe."

"Oh lor'!"

Evidently, Mr. Bunter was resolved on playing the part of Roman parent, and the hapless Owl was booked for execution.

When they stepped out of the taxi the fat junior gave a blink round through his spectacles. All the fellows were still in the Form-rooms, and the quad was deserted. The Head would be with the Sixth, and that might mean a respite. Perhaps he would come at once, when he heard that Bunter was back. Perhaps he wouldn't! Bunter hoped that he wouldn't! The flogging was a dead cert now! But postponement was something.

Trotter showed the stout gentleman and his hopeful son to the Head's study. Unlike Gosling, Trotter gave Bunter a commiserating look. He could feel for a fellow who had run away from school and now had to face the Chief Beak!

"Inform Dr. Locke at once that I am here, and that my son has returned to school!" snapped Mr. Bunter.

"Yessir."

Trotter went—and came! He came back alone, and Mr. Bunter gave him a glare as he put his head into the study.

"Well?" he yapped.

"Please, the 'Ead says will you kindly wait, as he's busy with the Sixth Form, sir!" said Trotter.

"What?" hooted Mr. Bunter. He glanced at his watch. "I cannot wait! I am required in the City! I have already missed two appointments."

"The 'Ead won't be more'n 'arf an hour, sir!" said Trotter helpfully.

"Nonsense!" hooted Mr. Bunter.

"Yessir!" said Trotter.

"Rubbish!"

"Yessir!"

"Utterly absurd! I have a train to catch. I must leave for the station at once. My taxi is waiting!"

"Yessir."

"Certainly, I cannot wait!"

"Yessir."

Trotter faded out of the picture.

"I—I say!" gasped Bunter. "We're just on breaking up for the holidays. Suppose—suppose I come home with you?"

"If you do not desire me to box your ears, William, be silent. I can waste no further time on you. Remain here till your headmaster comes."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes."

Perhaps Mr. Bunter caught the hopeful gleam in the eyes of his hopeful son. His plump brows contracted.

"You will remain here, William——"

"Oh! Yes."

"I shall leave you here—and lock the door on the outside——"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"You will not be allowed to run away again, William. You have given your headmaster trouble enough. What is more serious, you have given me a great deal of trouble. I shall speak to the porter as I go, and request him to keep an eye on the window, since it appears that I cannot trust you to remain here of your own accord."

"Oh dear!"

Mr. Bunter left the study. He transferred the key to the outside of the lock, and turned it. Billy Bunter groaned. The stout stockbroker had no more of his valuable time to waste on him. He was anxious to get back to business, to the bulls and bears, and other fearsome animals that roamed the wilds of Throgmorton Street. But he was leaving Bunter safe for his headmaster!

"Oh lor'!" moaned Bunter.

He blinked from the window.

He saw the taxi stop at the gates and Mr. Bunter lean out and speak to Gosling. He had no doubt—none whatever—that Gosling would carry out the stout gentleman's request—with zest! The game was up!

The taxi buzzed away.

The Roman parent was gone!

And William George Bunter, in the lowest of spirits, was left to suffer for his sins.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Artful Dodger!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter. He sat in the Head's armchair—and waited!

He could do nothing but

wait!

It was, perhaps, rather a high-handed proceeding on the part of Mr. Bunter to lock the headmaster's study door. It was probable that Dr. Locke would be surprised when he arrived, to find Mr. Bunter gone and the door locked on Bunter of the Remove.

Still, had the door been left unlocked, it was certain that he would not have found Bunter of the Remove there when he came.

Anyhow, Mr. Bunter had done it, and that was that! Billy Bunter was a prisoner in his headmaster's study till his headmaster arrived.

A dismayed blink from the window revealed Gosling, carrying out Mr. Bunter's instructions. Gosling had an eye—a very keen, if ancient, eye—on the headmaster's study window. There was no escape that way for Bunter.

He was for it!

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter for the umpteenth time.

He thought of the circus, of which he had so lately been the ornament. He had not given up hope, by any means, of getting back to Muccolini's. It was only two or three days now to the break-up for the summer holidays. Then he would be free to do as he jolly well liked.

Marco, he was sure, would welcome him back. He was too valuable to lose! Signor Muccolini had made it clear that he did not want to see him again. But he would manage that somehow.

But, in the meantime——

It was in the meantime that chiefly worried Bunter! He blinked at the Head's clock. The minutes were racing by.

Mr. Bunter was in his train for London by that time. The Roman parent was done with! But the Head's birch was horribly near. In his mind's eye, Bunter could see that deadly weapon in an uplifted hand. In his mind's ear, he could hear a deep voice saying "Take him up, Gosling!" It was awful to contemplate!

He almost wished the Head would come, and get it over! At the same time, he wished very much that the Head wouldn't come!

A bell rang.

The sound of footsteps in the corridor made him bound from the armchair. He gasped with alarm.

Class was over—the fellows were coming out! The quadrangle, lately silent and deserted, echoed to footsteps and voices.

But it was footsteps and voices in the corridor outside the Head's study to which Bunter gave ear.

He shuddered.

"I understand, Mr. Quelch, that Mr. Bunter is waiting in my study, with his son——"

It was the Head's voice.



Billy Bunter did a kangaroo-like hop, as Signor Muccolini followed him up with the whip. "I say, stoppit!" he howled. "I say—yaroooooh!" "You run away from school again, and cause trouble in my circus!" said the signor angrily. "I think not! No! Take that!" Tippet Tip chuckled, as Bunter passed him, outward bound.

"I heard a taxi arrive, during class, sir. No doubt—"

That was the voice of Bunter's Form-master.

They were coming!

Billy Bunter gave a wild blink round the study.

Up to that moment his fate had seemed inevitable. With a locked door and a watched window, he was cornered, and had got to go through it. But—

Bunter did not think. He seldom thought. It was the instinct of the hunted animal that made him jump for a hiding-place.

There was a tall screen in a corner of the room. Almost before he knew what he was doing, Billy Bunter was behind that screen.

Panting there, he listened. He heard the sound of the door-handle turning. Then there was a surprised exclamation.

"Dear me! The door appears jammed, or something—"

"The key is in the outside of the lock, sir!"

"Bless my soul! So it is! This is very extraordinary, Mr. Quelch. The— the door appears to be locked."

"Very singular indeed, sir, if Mr. Bunter is there."

"Bless my soul!"

The key turned, and the door opened. Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch entered the study together, both in a state of great surprise.

Behind the screen in the corner the fat Owl suppressed his breathing. His fat heart thumped.

"Dear me! Where is Mr. Bunter?" ejaculated the surprised headmaster.

"He does not appear to be here, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "He could, indeed, scarcely be here, with the door locked on the outside. I fail to understand this."

"Please, sir—"

It was Trotter's voice at the doorway. "Well, Trotter?" said the Head.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Bunter left a message, sir! He couldn't wait, so he turned the key on Master Bunter, sir, afore he left."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Head. "Thank you, Trotter!"

Trotter stared round the study, surprised not to see Billy Bunter there. Then he withdrew.

"I understand now," said the Head. He coughed. "I am not wholly sorry that Mr. Bunter's business called him away. But—"

"But where is Bunter, sir—"

"I was about to ask you that question, Mr. Quelch! If Mr. Bunter left his son locked in my study, where is he? He does not appear to be present."

Mr. Quelch stepped quickly to the window. He glanced round with glinting eyes and compressed lips.

"Is it possible, sir, that that—that incredibly stupid boy has left by the window?"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Quelch opened the window, leaned out, and beckoned to Gosling, who was close at hand. The ancient porter of Greyfriars came up.

"Have you seen—" began Mr. Quelch.

"He ain't got out of the winder, sir!" answered Gosling. "Mr. Bunter asked me to keep a heye on that winder, sir, when he went; and wot I says is this 'ere, sir, I ain't took my heye off that winder a minute since."

"Thank you, Gosling!"

Mr. Quelch closed the window again, and turned back to the Head. The glint in his eyes was more pronounced than ever.

"It does not appear, sir, that Bunter has left the study. It appears impossible that he can have done so."

"I do not see him here, Mr. Quelch."

"I imagine, sir, that the foolish boy has placed himself out of sight. He must be still in the room."

"Bless my soul! I understand, Mr. Quelch, that Bunter is an extremely stupid boy—but is it possible that he could be guilty of such stupidity?"

"I fear, sir, that there is no limit to the depth of Bunter's obtuseness," said Mr. Quelch. "Undoubtedly the stupid boy has concealed himself in this room, and is still here. The matter cannot be otherwise."

Bunter, behind the screen, could have groaned. The Head hadn't thought of that. But that keen beast, Quelch, was sure to think of it.

"Please look round the study for that incredibly stupid boy, Mr. Quelch," said the Head. "Bunter—Bunter! If you are present in this room, I command you to step out at once! Do you hear me, Bunter?"

His voice was very deep.

Bunter heard; but he heeded not. His fat knees knocked together as he huddled behind the screen.

But it was at that desperate moment that the Greyfriars ventriloquist had a brain-wave.

Trotter's voice—or, at least, a voice that was so like Trotter's, that the House page might have imagined it to be his own—was suddenly heard.

"Oh, Master Bunter! 'Ow did you get out of the 'Ead's study, sir? I say—"

Mr. Quelch jumped. The Head, majestic as he was, jumped, too. They stared at the open doorway.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head. "How—how could the boy have escaped from the study, unseen by us? Was he—was he concealed

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behind the door when it was opened, or—or what—

Mr. Quelch did not waste time in conjectures. After the first moment of amazement, he rushed to the door. He almost bounded into the passage.

Trotter was not to be seen there. Apparently he was already gone. Neither was Bunter to be seen. But there was no doubt, of course, that if Bunter was outside the study, he would stand not upon the order of his going, but go at once.

Breathing wrath, Mr. Quelch tore up the passage.

Bump!
Mr. Prout came round the corner as the Remove master reached it. The plump master of the Fifth staggered back from the collision.

"Urrgh! Really, Mr. Quelch—Urrgh!" spluttered Prout.

"Has Bunter passed you?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Urrgh—Bunter—no—urrgh—"

Mr. Quelch spun round, and rushed down the passage. If Bunter had not passed Prout, he must have gone in the other direction. In that direction rushed Quelch, with glinting eyes and fluttering gown, in fierce search of Bunter.

He was not likely to find him. "Bless my soul!" said Dr. Locke.

Bunter, behind the screen, hardly breathed. His ventriloquial trickery had saved him—for the moment. How this was going to end Bunter did not know. But he was not getting that flogging yet. That was so much to the good.

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head. "That troublesome boy—that very troublesome boy—Bless my soul!"

He waited for Mr. Quelch to return with the fat Owl. But Mr. Quelch did not return with Bunter. He was not likely to snaffle him outside that study.

Having waited ten minutes, Dr. Locke decided to go to his own house to tea, for which function he was due. He stepped out of the study, glanced up and down the corridor, saw nothing of Mr. Quelch, and waited a moment or two. Billy Bunter heard him replace the key on the inside of the lock. Then to his immense relief, he heard him shut the door, and rustle away.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Face at the Window!

"WHARTON!"
"Yes, sir!"
"Have you seen Bunter?"
"Bunter! No, sir."
"Have you seen Bunter, Cherry?"
"No, sir. Is he back?"
"Have any of you seen Bunter?"
"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch breathed hard and deep. The Removites gazed at him in wonder. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,484.

They had no doubt that Bunter was back at Greyfriars, and they had been wondering what was happening to the fat Owl, if he had been snaffled at last. They were amazed when Quelch whisked out of the House, breathlessly demanding whether anybody had seen Bunter.

Nobody had!
"Has Bunter come back, sir?" ventured Harry Wharton.

He was rather interested to know whether the fat Owl had brought a borrowed bike back with him.

"Yes—yes; he was in the headmaster's study a few minutes ago. You are sure that you have not seen him?"

"Quite, sir!"

"The surefulness is terrific!"

Mr. Quelch hurried back into the House, leaving the Remove fellows in a buzz.

"So the old Obadiah snaffled the young Obadiah, after all," remarked Skinner. "I heard a car come in while we were in class. Has that frabjous ass really dodged them again?"

"Looks like it," chuckled the Bounder. "What a game!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jevver hear of such a howling ass?" asked Peter Todd.

"Hardly ever," grinned Bob Cherry.

"But where the dickens can he be?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"Echo answers that the wherefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The news spread like wildfire that Billy Bunter was back in the school, and was dodging the beaks again. There was an almost continuous chortle among the fellows in the quad.

Bunter's antics afforded entertainment to the Greyfriars fellows, if not to the Greyfriars masters.

"The awful ass!" said Harry Wharton, as the Famous Five sauntered in the quad, discussing Bunter's "latest." "The beak will take the skin off him for this."

"Bunter's the man to ask for more," chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Well, considering what he's got coming, I suppose he wants to put it off as long as possible," said Frank Nugent. "It won't be nice when he gets it."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry suddenly. "Look!"

He made a gesture towards the window of the Head's study, which the juniors were passing, at a little distance.

The window had opened a few inches, and a fat face and a large pair of spectacles glimmered in the July sunshine.

Harry Wharton & Co. came to a halt. They stared in blank amazement at the face of William George Bunter.

"I say, you fellows!" came an agonised whisper.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob.

The chums of the Remove approached the window. They had had no idea where Bunter could be; but the last place they would have guessed was the headmaster's study. Evidently the Head was not there.

"You frabjous chump!" said Harry Wharton. "What—"

"I say, you fellows, back up, you know!" breathed Bunter, from above. "I say, is that beast Quelch hunting for me?"

"Of course he is, you fathead! You'd better go and hunt for him, too. The sooner you get it over—"

"Beast!"

"What have you done with my bike?"

"Eh? Blow your bike!"

"You fat villain—"

"I—I mean, your bike's all right, Wharton, old chap. I've taken every care of it. I haven't left it leaning on Marco's van at the circus, and forgotten all about it—"

"You pernicious porpoise! If ever I lend you a bike again—"

"Well, you can't, you know, as yours isn't here. You can lend me your bike, Nugent."

"Can I?" gasped Frank.

"Yes, old chap. Get it out into the road, and leave it there for me. Wait with it till I come—that's better—see? I'll take every care of it, of course, and—"

"By leaving it leaning against a van, and forgetting all about it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle, you beasts! I say, I couldn't get out of the window before—that beast Gosling was watching. Where is he now?"

"Gone to his lodge, I think."

"Then I'll chance it. I can't get out by the door. I might run into Quelch. I shall have to chance the window. I say, you fellows, you keep watch, and whistle when the coast's clear—see?"

"You blithering chump—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You howling ass! You've got to have it!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "Get it over, and—"

"Beast!"

"Better not cut by the window, anyhow," said Bob. "There are three or four prefects in the quad—"

"Oh crikey!"

"And Loder's coming this way—"

"Oh lor'!"

The study window shut swiftly. Harry Wharton & Co. walked on. Loder of the Sixth was looking in their direction, and they did not want to draw his attention to the Owl's refuge. It was not their business to hand the hapless Owl over to the powers.

"Well," said Bob Cherry, "if Bunter keeps this up much longer he'll get bunked. I suppose if he leaves Greyfriars, they'll send him to a home for idiots! That's the proper place for him!"

And the Co. agreed that it was.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

His Master's Voice!

BILLY BUNTER stepped across the Head's study to the door.

Escape by the window, obviously, offered no hope.

Escape by the door seemed very doubtful, with Mr. Quelch searching the House for him. But to remain where he was was to fall into the hands of authority, and he desperately resolved to chance it—if there was a chance! He opened the door about an inch and listened. If, by luck, the corridor was clear—

Bunter had had a lot of luck in his late extraordinary adventures. But the vein seemed to have petered out now. From the corridor a booming voice reached his fat ears—the voice of Prout, master of the Fifth.

"Unparalleled, Capper—unprecedented!"

"Amazing!" said Mr. Capper.

Billy Bunter shook a furious fat fist at the Head's door. That expressed his feelings towards beaks who stopped to jaw in Head's corridor!

"Quelch's boys are, for the most part, unruly!" pursued Mr. Prout.

"But this, my dear Capper, this is—is—is—"

"Unheard-of!" said the Fourth Form master.

"I am still," said Prout, "breathless! Will you believe, Capper, that Quelch—a man of sedate years, Capper—rushed into me—I may say, dashed into me—in pursuit of that boy of his Form, Bunter—in fact, crashed into me? I was almost overthrown, Capper."

"But where is the boy now?" asked Mr. Capper.

"No one apparently knows—Quelch least of all, I gather!" said Mr. Prout, with sarcasm. "Quelch's methods with his Form are not mine, Capper."

"Or mine!" said Mr. Capper.

"Here he comes!" added Mr. Prout, as there was a footstep. "My dear Quelch, have you found the boy Bunter?"

"I have not!" came the reply, in a bark like a mastiff's.

"If I may advise you, Quelch—"

"I am not at the moment in need of advice, Mr. Prout!" barked the Remove master. "Also, I have no time to waste, as I must see the Head at once!"

Mr. Quelch rustled on, leaving Prout pink with annoyance, and Capper hiding a grin.

His words struck dismay to a fat heart, as they were heard in the Head's study!

Quelch was going to see the Head! Evidently he supposed that Dr. Locke was still in the study! Dr. Locke wasn't—Bunter was! The fat junior's blood almost ran cold at the prospect of a meeting, in Quelch's present mood.

He closed the door swiftly and turned the key. Once more he acted without stopping to think, simply on the instinct of the hunted animal with the hunter near at hand. Within the locked door he stood palpitating, as Mr. Quelch's rapid footsteps came down the passage.

There was a sharp tap, and the door-handle turned. An irritated exclamation followed. Then Mr. Quelch called: "Dr. Locke! Are you within?"

Studies were often locked at night, but it was unlikely that the Head, if he had gone, had locked the study after him in the afternoon. On the other hand, Mr. Quelch could think of no reason why the Head should lock himself in his study. It was, at least, uncommon for the headmaster to "sport his oak." He was irritated and puzzled.

Billy Bunter gave a little fat cough. It was a sign that the ventriloquism was coming on again. Dr. Locke might have been surprised to hear that there was a junior in the Remove who could imitate his stately tones to perfection. But the Greyfriars ventriloquist could.

"Ah! Is that you, Mr. Quelch?" came a voice from the study, which the Remove master did not doubt for a moment was Dr. Locke's.

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Have you found Bunter?"

"No, sir. May I ask why the door is locked, sir?" inquired Mr. Quelch, with suppressed impatience.

"I—ah—do not desire to be disturbed, Mr. Quelch. I have some letters to write, and do not desire at the moment to be disturbed."

"Indeed, sir. But—"

"As you have not found Bunter, Mr. Quelch—"

"But, sir—"

"You will kindly come and tell me at once when he is found. Until then I do not desire to be disturbed."

"Very well, sir!" said Mr. Quelch, in a choking voice. "Very well." It was seldom that Mr. Quelch was angry with his venerable chief. But he was

very much annoyed now. "As you wish, of course, sir. But I was going to suggest that you should direct the prefects to search for Bunter—"

Billy Bunter gasped.

"If you will kindly do so, sir—"

said Mr. Quelch through the door. The fat ventriloquist cudgelled his podgy brains for a suitable answer. Mr. Quelch went on, with barely suppressed impatience:

"Surely, sir, there is no time to be lost! That troublesome boy may succeed in leaving the school again. It would be extremely disagreeable to have to inform Mr. Bunter that his son is missing, after he personally brought him back to the school."

Bunter had a brain-wave! His fat wits were working overtime now.

"Ah, Mr. Quelch—pray listen to me!" came the Head's voice from the study.

"I am listening, sir."

"I have been—ah—considering the— the affair of Bunter of your Form, Mr. Quelch. I do not desire to be—er—severe."

"Really, sir, I should have thought that the utmost severity—the very utmost—"

"Not at all, Mr. Quelch. I have considered the matter, and I have decided that if—hem—Bunter returns of his own accord, no punishment shall be administered."

"Dr. Locke!"

"No doubt you will be pleased by my decision, Mr. Quelch, as the boy is in your Form."

"I—I—I—" stuttered Mr. Quelch.

"I have, at all events, decided, Mr. Quelch. I do not desire—ah—to administer a flogging so very near the end of the term. I have decided not to do so."

"B-b-but, sir—"

"That is all, Mr. Quelch! Now I have some letters—"

"But, sir," gasped Mr. Quelch, "the boy is still missing! He may be leaving the precincts of the school again—he cannot be found—"

"I have no doubt that he will be found shortly, Mr. Quelch! I do not desire—er—to cause further commotion, by a—a search conducted by the Sixth Form prefects! Nothing of the kind. Pray allow the matter to rest where it is."

"Where—where—where it is!" babbled Mr. Quelch, stupefied. "But—but—the—the Bunter—I mean the boy—"

"If he does not appear at calling-over, Mr. Quelch, we will take further measures—"

"I am absolutely certain, sir, that he will not appear at calling-over—that he has not the remotest intention of doing anything of the kind—"

"We shall see, Mr. Quelch! I repeat, definitely, that if Bunter answers his name at calling-over, the whole affair is at an end."

"Really, sir—"

"I am afraid Mr. Quelch, that I am very busy now—"

"As—as—as you decide, sir!" said Mr. Quelch, in a choking voice; and he rustled away down the passage, with crimson face and glinting eyes. Seldom, or never, had Mr. Quelch been so intensely angry.

In the study, Billy Bunter gasped for breath.

Only sheer desperation could have induced the fat ventriloquist to play that trick on his Form-master. Even with a stout oak door between them, his fat knees knocked together as he talked to Quelch.

But he had got by with it!

There was no doubt about that! Quelch had not the slightest doubt that it was Dr. Locke who had spoken from the study. Where Bunter was, he had no idea—certainly not the remotest suspicion that he was in his headmaster's study, and speaking in his headmaster's stately tones.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

He had barred off Quelch! He had so to speak, drawn his teeth. There would be no further search for Bunter, on Quelch's part; and the Sixth Form prefects would not be set on his trail. The wicked ceased from troubling, and the weary were at rest—until Dr. Locke came back to his study after tea.

Billy Bunter wiped a fat, perspiring brow. It was a deep relief to hear Quelch's footsteps die away down the corridor.

Mr. Quelch went to his own study with a brow so contracted, and an eye so glinting, that several fellows glanced after him as he passed.

They told one another that that ass, Bunter, had got Quelch into a royal wax, and that they pitied him when Quelch landed him at last.

Mr. Quelch shut his study door with a slam—a thing he seldom or never did. But he really had to express his feelings somehow.

He was puzzled—perplexed—annoyed—irritated—angry! The Head always had a leaning towards leniency—but this was really carrying it altogether too far!

However, Mr. Quelch had one comfort! He did not believe for one moment that Bunter would turn up at calling-over! If not, the offender would still receive his due! In the meantime, Quelch could do nothing—he had received his instructions, in his master's voice, and that was that! But he had never waited so impatiently for the bell for calling-over.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

No Luck for Loder!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER stepped towards the headmaster's desk, and extended a fat hand to the telephone.

He lowered it again. He stood and blinked at the telephone through his big spectacles, in a state of anguished doubt and hesitation.

At last he lifted the receiver. But immediately he had lifted it, he jammed it back on the hooks. His nerve failed him.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

Quelch was gone. Prout and Capper had drifted away. The coast was clear now for the fat Owl to escape from the Head's study.

But—there was a "but."

Quelch had been barred off temporarily! But immediately he saw the Head, of course, he would learn that it was not Dr. Locke who had spoken to him from the study. Then, there was little doubt, he would remember certain ventriloquial tricks played by a certain member of his Form! All the fat would be in the fire—and worse than ever.

Bunter's plan—quite a brain-wave—was cut and dried in his fat mind. It only needed nerve to carry it out.

But the nerve was lacking! Pulling Quelch's leg was a sufficiently risky proceeding. Pulling the headmaster's leg was, perhaps, easier; but it was an enterprise at which a more reckless fellow than Bunter might have balked.

But it was the only way!

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Before very long Dr. Locke would return to his study. Bunter knew that he had gone to tea in his house, as usual. If he came back while Bunter was still there, Bunter's number was up. The fat ventriloquist had his chance now, but it would not last long, and he stood by the telephone, trying to screw up his fat courage to the sticking-point.

He screwed it up at last, and took up the receiver.

Tap!

Back went the receiver with a jam. Billy Bunter spun round, and glared at the door through his big spectacles. Some beast who did not know that the Head had gone to tea had come there to see him. It seemed that there was, after all, no rest for the wicked.

Billy Bunter very nearly ejaculated "Beast!" in his natural voice. But he remembered in time.

Tap!

Whoever was there, was waiting to be told to come in, before he turned the door-handle. Billy Bunter stood very still and silent.

He hoped that, whoever it was, would guess that the Head had gone to tea, and clear.

Tap!

Bunter glared at the door with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles. What beast was it?

"Are you there, sir?"

It was the voice of Loder of the Sixth. The Owl of the Remove shook a fat fist at the door.

He had no use for Sixth Form prefects at the present moment, and the bully of the Sixth was the very last prefect at Greyfriars with whom he desired to establish contact.

It was all through Loder of the Sixth that he had "out" from school, in the first place. Loder owed him a whopping, and Loder was not the fellow to forget debts of that kind. Bunter was thankful that the door was locked.

Tap!

"Beast!" breathed Bunter, under his breath.

The door-handle turned. Loder had waited to be told to "come in." As he was not told to come in, he started to come in without being told. But he did not get very far.

"Locked, by gum!" Bunter heard the prefect's voice. "So you're here, you young rascal!"

Bunter trembled.

"I jolly well knew there was something on when I saw that gang under the Head's window!" went on Loder. "They were speaking to somebody in this study. I'm jolly certain of that!"

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

"You may as well come out, you fat frog!" came Loder's voice, with a chuckle. "The Head wants you, and Quelch wants you; but I want you first! I'm going to take first turn, Bunter!"

Bunter quaked.

Loder of the Sixth had not spotted the face at the window, but he had made a very accurate guess.

He had tapped respectfully at the door, to make sure whether the Head was in the study. Now he was sure! He had no doubt that the Head was not there—and that Billy Bunter was!

"Unlock this door, you fat scoundrel!" went on Loder. "Your game's up! I know you're there!"

Bunter mopped a perspiring fat brow. "I've owed you a whopping for two or three weeks," said Loder. "You're getting it now, Bunter!"

Bunter gave a fat little cough. For some moments he had been too terrified to remember his ventriloquial trickery.

Now he weighed in with that peculiar

gift. It was a masterly imitation of the Head's voice that answered Loder of the Sixth.

"Open this door, will you?" snapped Loder, thumping on the panels.

"What? How dare you, Loder!"

Loder jumped nearly clear of the passage floor.

"Wha-a-at? Is—is—is that you, sir?" he stammered.

"What do you mean, Loder? Cannot I lock my door against intrusion when I am very busy, without being disturbed in this way?"

"Oh! Yes! No! I—" stammered Loder.

"Do you desire me to degrade you from your rank of prefect, Loder?"

"Oh! No, sir! I—I—I never knew you were there. I—I thought Bunter—I—I thought that—that—"

"Nonsense!"

"I—I beg your pardon, sir!" gasped Loder.

"I imagine so!" snapped the voice from within. "You appear to have forgotten yourself strangely, Loder."

"I—I'm sorry, sir! I—I thought—I—I saw some juniors under your window, sir, and thought they were talking to someone in your study, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"I—I thought you were gone to tea, sir, and that Bunter had dodged into the room, sir! I—I—" Loder floundered.

"Listen to me, Loder!" came the stern voice from the study. "What I have heard you say only a few moments ago confirms my suspicion that you have been guilty of bullying Bunter—"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Do not contradict me, Loder!"

"Oh, no, sir! But—"

"I have learned, Loder, that it was because of your bullying that Bunter ran away from school."

"N-n-not at all, sir! Nothing of the kind!" gasped Loder. "If Bunter has told you so, sir, I hope you do not believe him. His Form-master, sir, will tell you that he's the most untruthful young rascal in the Remove."

"If you dare to contradict me, Loder—"

"Oh, no, sir! If—if you will let me come in, I will explain—"

"I desire to hear no explanations! I place the whole blame for Bunter's conduct on you, Loder! For this reason I have pardoned him."

"Oh!" gasped Loder.

"I shall have to consider very seriously, Loder, whether I can allow you to remain a prefect!"

"Oh, sir! I—"

"Take warning, Loder! I shall observe you! If there is any more of this—this bullying—this persecution of Bunter, it will not escape me! The boy will return to school to-day, and if I find that you have resumed your persecution, I shall deal with you very severely!"

"Oh, sir! I—I—I—"

"You need say no more, Loder! Reflect upon what I have said to you. I am very far from satisfied with you, Loder."

"But, sir—I—I—"

"That will do, Loder! I have told you that I am busy! Go away at once!"

"Very well, sir!" gasped Loder.

"But—"

"Go!"

Loder of the Sixth went.

Billy Bunter grinned.

He wondered what Gerald Loder would have thought if Loder could have seen through an oak door! Fortunately, Loder couldn't!

Once more the fat Owl was left in peace. But the minutes were passing; and he had no time to lose. He ap-

proached the telephone on the Head's desk again.

This time he got through. And when he spoke into the transmitter, it was in a voice that Henry Samuel Quelch had heard it, would have believed was his own!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Working the Oracle!

"DEAR me!" said Dr. Locke.

He rose from the tea-table. Sitting at tea in his own house, in the bosom of his family, the headmaster of Greyfriars had cast the cares of state behind him. In cheerful conversation with Mrs. Locke, and his daughter Molly, the headmaster had forgotten Bunter of the Remove; and the many worries and troubles connected with that surprising junior. And he did not want to be reminded of him.

He was prepared to deal with the case of W. G. Bunter, when he went back to his study after tea. In the meantime, he preferred to hear nothing about him.

But the fates were against him. He had to remember that fat and fatuous youth, when his butler entered to inform him that Mr. Quelch desired to speak to him on the telephone.

Unwillingly, the headmaster rose from the tea-table, and proceeded to the telephone-cabinet in the hall. He had no doubt that Mr. Quelch desired to speak on the subject of Bunter. He concluded that the Remove master had found Bunter, and wished to inform him of the fact at once. That could be the only reason why Mr. Quelch had rung him up in his house, while he was at tea there. Really, he wished that Mr. Quelch had left it till after tea! Even a headmaster was entitled to a rest sometimes!

However, he took up the receiver.

"Well, Mr. Quelch?" he said. "Well?"

A cough came through.

"Are you there, Mr. Quelch?" asked the Head, with a touch of impatience. Another cough!

Quelch seemed to be hesitating to speak!

There was, as a rule, very little hesitation about Henry Samuel Quelch. His manner, usually, was short and sharp, and he seldom failed to come directly to the point. But Quelch—if it was Quelch—hesitated now.

"Mr. Quelch—" said the Head, quite sharply.

"Oh, yes! I regret interrupting you, sir!" The voice came through, at last; the clear, keen, rather acid tones, that must have been uttered by Mr. Quelch, or by someone with a remarkable gift for the imitation of voices. "But I thought you would be glad to know that Bunter is found, sir."

"Oh! Quite so!" said the Head. That was what he had expected to hear.

"Pray take care that that troublesome boy does not elude you again, before I return to the House, Mr. Quelch."

"The fact is, sir—"

"Well?"

"Bunter has—hem—explained himself to me—and—and expressed sincere regret for his—his rather unusual proceedings, and—and I should be very glad, sir, if you were disposed to take a lenient view—"

"What!" The Head almost barked out that word! He was absolutely astonished by such a request from Mr. Quelch!

True, a fellow's Form-master might naturally be disposed to put in a word for him. But Mr. Quelch had been so intensely exasperated by Bunter's



“Here, look out!” gasped Tippity Tip. “Don’t you damage them dolls, young man—you leave them dolls alone!”
 “I’ll give you copper-top!” roared the red-haired young man, lifting John by a leg and bringing him down with a crash on the clown’s head. “Ow! Hoooh! Oooh!” spluttered the hapless Tippity Tip. “I say—whoop!”

antics, that the very last request Dr. Locke would have expected him to make was a request for leniency to Bunter! Quelch, indeed, had been much more incensed than the Head!

“Really, Mr. Quelch—” gasped the Head.

“I am disposed, sir, now—now that Bunter has explained, to make allowances for him!” came the voice over the wires. “If you would have the kindness to leave the matter of his punishment in my hands, sir, as his Form-master—”

“Mr Quelch! Really—”

“I regret exceedingly, sir, that a Remove boy should have given so much trouble. But as the boy is in my Form, sir—perhaps you will consent—I should take it as a favour, sir—”

“But it was you, Mr. Quelch, who suggested—I may say insisted—that the boy should be flogged!” exclaimed the astonished Head.

“Oh! Yes! But—but in view of—of Bunter’s explanation—”

“I fail to see how the boy could have explained such reckless, such disobedient, such unheard-of conduct, Mr. Quelch!” said the Head, tartly.

“Oh! Quite so, sir.”

“If you request me, as Bunter’s Form-master, to leave the matter in your hands, I shall certainly do so, Mr. Quelch. But—”

“Thank you, sir.”

“If you really consider that a flogging is not essential—”

“Oh, quite, quite!”

“Naturally, I should be relieved not to have to perform so unpleasant a duty. If you feel that a punishment from his Form-master will meet the case, Mr. Quelch—”

“Exactly, sir!”

“A severe caning—”

“Oh! Yes! Most severe, of course! You may rely upon it, sir, that the

caning will be very—hem—severe indeed.”

“Very well, Mr. Quelch! I admit that I am very much surprised by your request; but I, of course, accede to it. Pray deal with the matter according to your own judgment.”

“Very good, sir!”

The Head rang off, and went back to his drawing-room and tea.

He was surprised—greatly surprised—but not displeased. A Head’s flogging was seldom administered at Greyfriars; and the headmaster disliked the task intensely. If the culprit’s Form-master—who was the best judge—considered that he could deal adequately with the matter, Dr. Locke was glad enough to leave it in his hands. He was, in fact, glad to have done with the troublesome affair of Bunter altogether.

The Head, on the whole, was pleased. Still more pleased was his interlocutor at the other end.

Billy Bunter put up the receiver in the headmaster’s study, and wiped perspiration from his fat brow.

He had done it!

How he had found the nerve to do it, he hardly knew!

But it had been easy!

It was easy for the fat ventriloquist to imitate Mr. Quelch’s voice. The Head, obviously, had no suspicion that the call had not come from the Remove master.

Once more, the astute Owl had got by with it!

He had barred off Quelch, who believed that the Head desired to go easy with Bunter! Now he had barred off the Head, who believed that Quelch desired to go easy with Bunter!

Unless they compared notes on the subject, it was as safe as houses. And that was improbable. Anyhow, Bunter had to chance that!

He opened the study door a few

inches, and blinked out through his big spectacles. Now that he had done his telephone trick, the sooner he was off the scene, the safer.

Prout and Capper were long gone. The corridor was deserted. With beating heart, the fat junior stepped out of the study.

He crept down the passage. He turned the corner, blinked round him through his big spectacles, and out for the stairs. Five or six fellows saw him, and stared at him.

“Hallo, that’s Bunter!” exclaimed Coker of the Fifth.

“Bunter, by gad!” howled Temple of the Fourth. “Hook it, Bunter! Quelch’s after you!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Bunter scuttled up the stairs. Fellows stared after him, and chuckled. The fat junior scudded into the Remove passage.

He breathed more freely when he was in his old familiar haunts again. His chief desire was to keep dark the fact that he had been in the Head’s study; and to keep out of sight till the bell rang for calling-over. In the Remove quarters he was safe.

With a sigh of relief, he sank into Harry Wharton’s armchair, in Study No. 1. There he waited for the fellows to come up to tea. He hoped that they wouldn’t be long—and he hoped that they would have something decent for tea!

Other fellows, in Billy Bunter’s position, would probably have been thinking about other matters. Not Bunter! It was past tea-time—and Bunter’s fat thoughts concentrated on tea! And a quarter of an hour later, he was glad to hear the footsteps and voices of the Famous Five in the Remove passage.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Adsum!

"I SAY, you fellows!" Harry Wharton & Co. jumped. They were coming up rather late to tea. All over Greyfriars, fellows were discussing Billy Bunter and his weird proceedings.

Everybody knew now that Mr. Bunter had brought his hopeful son back from Wapshot, and left him for the Head to deal with. Everybody knew that he had, in some mysterious way, dodged again, and was still dodging.

The Famous Five had seen him at the window of the Head's study—they supposed that he was still there. On the other hand, there was a rumour that he had been seen scuttling about in the House. But no search for him was going on; Quelch seemed to have let the matter drop. Where Bunter was, and what he was up to was unknown, so it was a surprise to the Famous Five, when they came into Study No. 1 in the Remove, to see a fat figure reclining in the armchair, and to be greeted by a familiar fat voice.

They stared blankly at Billy Bunter. "Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" ejaculated Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"You howling ass!" said Frank Nugent. "Do you fancy you can hide here? Quelch will draw these studies first thing."

Bunter blinked at him. "Eh? I'm not hiding!" he answered.

"What are you doing there, then?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Waiting for you fellows to come up to tea," explained Bunter.

They could only stare at him. There was no sign of terror or even uneasiness about the fat Owl. He was quite cool and confident. The chums of the Remove could not begin to understand it.

"I suppose you know you're going to be flogged as soon as you're snaffled?" said Johnny Bull.

"Rot!" said Bunter.

"Have you chucked up dodging the beaks?" asked the mystified captain of the Remove.

Bunter nodded cheerily.

"Oh, yes, that's all right!" he answered. "You see, there's been so much fuss, I thought I'd better come back and wind up the term. I can get back to the circus when we break up here, see? It's only a few days now."

"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "Then you've made up your mind to take your swishing?"

"That's all right! There's not going to be anything of the kind!"

"Have you seen the Head?"

"Oh, yes! He was rather pleased to see me!" answered Bunter airily.

"Pip-pip-pleased to see you?" stammered Bob.

"Yes. We had rather a friendly chat in his study!" said Bunter. "Not a bad old bean, really!"

"Do you mean to say that the Head's let you off?" shrieked Bob.

"That's it," assented Bunter. "You see, he was so glad to see me again. He said 'My dear boy, I'm glad to see you're back!' Just like that!"

"Well, I suppose anybody would be glad to see your back—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "I don't mean that! I mean—"

"If the Head's let you off, Quelch

won't!" said Johnny Bull. "You've got it coming from Quelch, you fat Owl!"

"That's all you know!" said Bunter loftily. "Quelch's letting the whole matter drop. He thinks—"

"What does he think?"

"Oh! Nothing! I mean, he was as glad to see me as the Head was. He said: 'My dear Bunter, is it really you, my dear boy?' Those very words!"

"Quelch said that?" gasped Bob.

"Yes, he patted me on the head and said: 'Thank goodness I see you safe again, my dear boy! I have been very anxious.' They were his exact words."

"Oh crikey!"

"You see, he seems to have been afraid that he'd lost me for good!" explained Bunter. "He would feel that, of course!"

"Yo gods!"

"I'm not the sort of chap that any Form-master would like to lose from his Form, you know!" said Bunter.

"He was so relieved to see me that I thought he was going to cry—"

"Great pip!"

"I say, you fellows, what about tea?" asked Bunter. "I see you've got a parcel there. I hope it's something good. When I go back to the circus you fellows can drop in any time you like, and I'll stand you a stunning feed. I can do anything I like there, you know. I'm so valuable. It almost broke poor old Marco's heart to part with me, and old Mucky—"

"Who's old Mucky?"

"Signor Muccolini, you know—the boss of the show. He was awfully sad at losing me. But I said: 'Cheer up, Mucky, I shall be back in a few days.' That comforted him."

The Famous Five could only gaze at Bunter. That he was, as usual, departing from the straight and narrow path of veracity, they did not need telling. But it seemed clear that he was no longer dodging the beaks, and that he was confident that no flogging was coming his way. It was really astonishing.

"So—so the Head and Quelch are letting you off, after all the potty tricks you've played!" exclaimed Bob.

"Oh, yes. You see, they're so jolly glad to have me back—"

"Let's hope Loder will be jolly glad, too!" grinned Bob. "Loder's got no end of a whopping in store for you."

Bunter sneered.

"Fat lot I care for Loder!" he answered disdainfully. "I can jolly well tell you fellows that Loder won't dare to lay a finger on me. I don't care two hoots for Loder!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith looked into the study.

"Did I hear Bunter?" he said. "Oh, there you are, old fat man! Had your flogging?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"He doesn't look as if he has," said the Bunder, staring at Bunter. "When is it coming off, old fat bean?"

"It isn't coming off at all! The Head welcomed me back!" explained Bunter.

"He's rather missed me, you know."

"He won't miss you when he starts in with the birch!" grinned Smithy.

"He will get a bullseye every time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smithy went on up the passage, laughing. The news quickly spread that the missing Owl had turned up in Study No. 1, and Remove fellows came along to look at him. They came in crowds.

Bunter did not mind. It was clear to all eyes that he was no longer in hiding. He did not care who saw him in the study. In fact, he rather enjoyed the sensation he was making in the Remove.

In the meantime he gave attention to

tea. It was unnecessary to ask him to tea; Bunter was prepared to take that for granted. He sat at the table and piled in.

"You fellows will get into a row if Quelch comes up and finds Bunter in your study!" Hazeldene remarked at the door.

"Bunter says it's all washed out," answered Harry Wharton.

"Gammon!" grinned Hazel.

"You'll jolly well see!" said Bunter. "I'm going in to call-over, same as usual, when you fellows do—"

"Quelch will be there!"

"I know that."

"Well, I'll believe you when I see it!" chuckled Hazel.

The same opinion was held by the rest of the Remove. Mr. Quelch was to take the roll, in Hall, that day, and that Bunter would roll in and answer to his name, just as if nothing had happened, was very difficult to believe. Nobody, in fact, believed it.

There was keen excitement in the Remove when the time for call-over came near. Billy Bunter was still in Study No. 1, and the passage outside that study was crowded with Remove fellows.

The bell rang at last.

"Come on, Bunter!" grinned Bob Cherry.

To the general surprise, Bunter came on!

"You're really going into Hall?" roared Bolsover major.

"Eh? Of course! That's the bell for call-over, isn't it?" answered Bunter.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Skinner.

"The beatfulness of the absurd band is terrific!"

Not till the fellows arrived in Hall were the Removites convinced that Bunter was really turning up for roll. But they had to believe it when the fat Owl rolled in with the rest.

Loder of the Sixth, going in with Walker, turned a glance on him—a very expressive glance. Bunter felt a momentary quake. But the bully of the Sixth took no further notice of him—to the relief of Bunter, and the surprise of the rest of the Remove.

There was a breathless hush in the Remove when Mr. Quelch entered to take the roll. Again Billy Bunter felt a quake, and he made himself as small as possible. Mr. Quelch's lips were set, and there was a glint in his eye. When he came to Bunter's name on the list his voice was very deep.

"Bunter!"

Mr. Quelch did not expect an answer. But the answer came:

"Adsum!"

The Remove master was seen to give a start.

His gimlet-eye gleamed at the Remove. That gimlet-eye picked out a fat face adorned by a large pair of spectacles.

"Bunter!" almost gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Adsum!" repeated Bunter.

Mr. Quelch gave him a long, long look.

He had never even dreamed that the elusive Owl would turn up at calling-over. Really, it looked as if Bunter somehow knew that "his master's voice" had announced that, if he turned up at roll, his offences were to be washed out!

Long was the look that Quelch gave that hopeful member of his Form. Then, with a still more pronounced glint in his gimlet-eye, he went on with the roll.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Right for the Hols!

BILLY BUNTER resumed his place in class, in the Remove Form Room, the following morning.

That place had been long vacant. Now it was filled once more by the fat person of the Owl of the Remove.

Remove fellows looked at him, and looked at Mr. Quelch. Bunter, so far, had got off scot-free. But really, they could hardly believe that he was getting away with it like this.

But he was! The Remove master took no special notice of Bunter. And the juniors could only wonder. Naturally, they knew nothing of Billy Bunter's extraordinary ventriloquial stunts in the headmaster's study the previous day.

Quelch, it was clear, had dropped the matter like a hot brick. Neither was Bunter sent for by the Head. The Head had dropped the matter, too! Neither, still more surprising, did Loder of the Sixth seek him out, to hand over the whopping that was so long overdue.

Perhaps, however, it was fortunate for Bunter that it was the end of the term, and that in the last few days everybody was busy, and had matters other than Bunter to think about.

Mr. Quelch believed that the Head had let Bunter off; the Head believed that Quelch had dealt with him; and Loder of the Sixth believed that his headmaster had warned him off Bunter! That was a safe and satisfactory state of affairs for the astute Owl, but it might not have continued had the various parties chanced to compare notes on the subject!

But, in the last busy days of term, there were plenty of other matters to occupy the minds of headmaster and Form-master, and the matter dropped, to the complete satisfaction of the leg-pulling Owl.

Bunter rolled out of class that morning with a fat grin of satisfaction on his podgy face. All seemed to be going well for the fat junior.

He had made his peace at Greyfriars, and the dreaded flogging had vanished over the horizon. Soon he would be clear of school, and at liberty to get back to Muccolini's Magnificent Circus, without the danger of an angry Form-master taking his trail.

Probably for the first time in history, Billy Bunter was not worried about the "hols."

He gave Mauly no hint that he would look in at Mauleverer Towers. He did not offer to join Smithy on his father's yacht. He did not tell Ogilvy that he was thinking of a run up to Scotland; or Morgan that he fancied he might be in Wales that vac; or Hazel that he rather thought of Brighton for the hols.

Had any of those fellows asked Bunter for the holidays, indeed, he would have allowed himself the unusual luxury of declining an invitation!

That luxury was denied him, however, as none of them did!

Harry Wharton & Co. found it unnecessary to dodge the fat Owl. Not once did he roll up to them in the quad or the passages and begin: "I say, you fellows, about the hols!" Not once that day did Bunter speak on the subject of the holidays to any fellow in the Remove, which was really a record.

The next morning, however, the Famous Five thought it was coming! Bunter found a letter for him in the rack, and having perused the same, he blinked round through his spectacles and squeaked:

"I say, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had looked at

the rack for letters and were walking away. Hearing Bunter squeak, they walked a little faster.

"I say," howled Bunter, "don't walk off while a chap's talking, you beasts! I say!"

But the Famous Five did walk off, and Bunter, with an angry snort, chased them out into the quad.

"I say, you fellows! Hold on.

Wharton, you beast! I say, about the hols—"

"I knew it would come!" sighed the captain of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I say, about the hols—"

"Nothing about the hols, old fat man!" said Harry. "Ask next door!"

The Famous Five grinned.
(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Be it masters, seniors or inky-fingered fags, our clever Greyfriars Rhymester is equal to the occasion. This week's brilliant verses are written around

GEORGE TUBB,

the Captain of the Third Form.

(1)

The inky-fingered Captain of the Third
This week I bring before you—with regret!
A "man" of great importance, so I've heard.
I cannot say I've noticed it as yet!
A cricketer of quality (he says),
I must admit I cannot quite agree;
And everyone (he says) is full of praise.
It isn't very obvious to me!

(2)

But that is human nature, after all,
And everyone, from belted earls to elves,
Consider that of people great and small,
They're quite the most important—to themselves!
And Tubb, no less than any one of us,
Could bear a great disaster and not blub,
He wouldn't dream of making any fuss,
Unless it happened specially to Tubb!

(3)

However, let us seek this interview,
For moralising here is hardly fit.
I called to see him, and 'twixt me and you,
I really didn't relish it a bit.
The disadvantage of a Third Form job
Is easily apparent on the spot,
The fags all hang together in a mob;
And if you tackle one, you hit the lot!

(4)

I found him at the window of his room,
His voice was savage and inclined to grouse.
For Wiggins (that's his Beak) pronounced his doom,
For one day he was gated in the House!
He sniffed and told me Wiggins was an ass.
"Would you believe," he asked, "that he would rat
Because I brought a lizard into class?
Just fancy gating any man for that!"

(5)

He sniffed again and said: "Would you believe
That any man would have to jump and bawl,
Because a lizard ran right up his sleeve!
The lizard wasn't poisonous at all!
I thought old Wiggins would have had a fit,
He jumped just like a rabbit in a hutch,
And kept on shouting 'Ow! I'm bit, I'm bit!
And all the time he wasn't—very much!"



(6)

I sympathised with Tubb and said: "Tut-tut!"
It did not help him very much, no doubt!
He growled: "I'd like to break detention, but
A man would very likely be found out!"
At that I shook a sympathising head,
And carefully concealed a heartless grin.
"And if a man should be found out," I said,
"A man would very quickly be brought in!"

(7)

Then Tubb leaned out as far as he could go,
And from the window, high up in the wall,
He gloomily surveyed the Quad below,
Said I: "Take care, you ass, or else you'll fall!"
And Tubb, in mournful tones, made this reply:
"Oh, rats! I don't care twopence if I do!"
The form of Mr. Wiggins caught his eye
As that bold tyrant wandered into view.

(8)

And Tubb, quite reckless of his tyrant foe,
Leaned farther out and shook a savage fist.
An inch too far he leaned than he could go,
Then made a clutch to save himself—and missed!
My face was white as Tubby disappeared,
Full forty feet or so he had to drop;
And so, to save him from the fate I feared,
I speedily leaned out and shouted:
"Stop!"



(9)

But Tubby couldn't: he was in full flight.
My heart was bumping and it missed a beat.
Yet luckily it turned out quite all right,
For Tubby landed neatly on his feet.
He didn't even break a leg or arm;
Well, some are born beneath a lucky star!
Full forty feet he'd fallen, without harm,
But then luck left him and left him very far!

(10)

For up came Wiggins, silent as a mouse,
That's just the way he always walks about.
Said he: "I told you not to leave the House,
Yet now I find that you have ventured out!"
And though George Tubb tried vainly to explain,
The master turned and snapped out:
"Follow me!
For disobedience you will get the cane!"
That wasn't very lucky, you'll agree!



Billy Bunter had, surprisingly, given the subject a miss till that morning. But they had no doubt that he was coming down to business now.

But Bunter did not grin.

His fat lip curled in a sneer. He gave the captain of the Remove a look, which started at his face, descended to his feet, and then travelled up to his astonished face again.

This was what Bunter called looking a fellow up and down, and he had no doubt that it had a crushing effect.

"If you think I'd be found dead at Wharton Lodge—" he said scornfully.

"You'll be found very nearly dead if I see you there!" remarked the captain of the Remove.

"You're not likely to see me there!" sneered Bunter. "There was some suggestion that I might come with you for these hols. It was mentioned a few weeks ago, before I went to the circus. I may have said I would come."

"You did!" assented Wharton.

"Well, that's washed out now!" said Bunter. "It can't be done!"

"Right on the wicket!" agreed Wharton. "It can't!"

"Sorry to disappoint you, and all that—"

"I'll try to bear it," said Harry. "I fancy I can bear your absence all right, old fat bean. It's your presence that's such a worry."

"If you were counting on me," said Bunter, unheeding, "just wash it out! If I gave you the idea that I might be able to give you a few days, I'm sorry, but I shan't be able to manage it."

"You fat ass—"

"It's no good calling me names, Wharton, because I can't spare you any time these hols—"

"You blithering bandersnatch—"

"And it's no good urging me to change my mind, either!" said Bunter firmly. "Sorry, as I said, but it can't be done! The fact is, I can't stand your friends, Wharton!"

"Why, you—you—"

"And, if you don't mind my mentioning it, I can't stand you, either. I see quite enough of you in the term, I can jolly well tell you. You can't expect me to stand you in the hols as well. It's asking too much."

With which, the fat Owl turned on his heel, to walk loftily away.

The Famous Five gazed at him, as if petrified. Evidently Billy Bunter was in no need for invitations those hols. He had, or fancied that he had, other resources.

Having crushed the chums of the Remove with his disdain, Bunter rolled away, turning his back on them contemptuously. The effect of that lofty departure was, however, a little spoiled by Harry Wharton striding after him and letting out a foot!

Thud!

"Yarooooh!"

Bunter wished that he had not turned his back in that disdainful manner. Really, it was asking for it!

"Yoo-hoo-hoop!" roared Bunter, as he tottered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

"Have another?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Beast!"

Bunter did not stop for another.

That afternoon, Peter Todd came into Study No. 7 in the Remove and found his fat study-mate sitting in the arm-chair with a letter in his hand. Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, Toddy, about the hols—"

"Hallo, is that Russell calling me?" said Peter hastily.

"I'm fixed up for the hols, Peter—"

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"Oh!" said Peter. "Have you landed Mauly?"

"Oh, really, Toddy! I'm going back to the circus!" explained Bunter. "I might be able to do something for you, Toddy! They run a side-show of freaks at Muccolini's Circus! He, he, he!"

"You'll put all the others in the shade!" said Toddy.

"Look here, you cheeky beast—"

"Well, you look here, you silly ass!" said Peter. "I suppose Quelch won't worry about what you do in the hols, but your father—"

Bunter grinned.

"That's all right," he said, "I've got leave all right! Look at that letter. That will be all right for Marco."

Peter looked at it. It was in Mr. Bunter's hand, and it ran:

"Dear William,—Certainly I approve of your passing the summer vacation with your friend. If you think it best to go direct from the school, instead of coming home first, do so by all means.

Your affectionate father,
"W. S. BUNTER."

Peter looked at that letter, and looked at Bunter.

"You see, that's the pater's answer to a letter from me," grinned Bunter, "I told him I should be going for the hols with a friend—I often do, you know."

"I know!" assented Peter. "Very often! As often as you can land your fish, in fact!"

"Yah!"

"But your pater must have taken it for granted that you were going with a Greyfriars fellow, as usual!" said Peter.

"Think so?"

"Well, his letter sounds like it, to me."

"That doesn't matter, so long as it doesn't sound like it to Marco!" answered Bunter, cheerfully, "That's all I want."

"Oh!" ejaculated Toddy.

"You see, after all the fuss that's been made, a fellow can't be too careful," explained Bunter. "But that letter will make it all right. Bit diplomatic, what?"

"You fat spoofer—"

"Of course, the pater will miss me a lot—"

"Yes—this letter sounds like it!" agreed Peter.

"Yah!" said Bunter. "I mean, hold on a minute, old chap! What about a jolly good spread to wind up the term? You lend me a pound, and I'll settle up out of the postal order I'm expecting to-morrow morning, and—I say, Toddy!"

Toddy was gone.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Back to the Circus!

TIPPITY TIP stared. He was sitting on the gate of the circus field at Wapshot, with his ventriloquial doll on his knee, putting in some practice, when a fat figure and a fat face dawned on him.

He stared at Billy Bunter.

Everybody at Muccolini's Circus supposed that the last had been seen of Bunto, the Boy Tamer. Marco, perhaps, had been sorry to see the last of him—but it was certain that nobody else had. Least of all, Mr. Tip! And the clown looked surprised, but distinctly not pleased, when the fat junior rolled up the path to the gate of the circus field.

"You again!" said Mr. Tip.

Bunter gave a disdainful blink.

Circus clowns were very small beer, in Bunter's opinion—and he had never troubled to keep that opinion a secret from Mr. Tip.

"So the circus is still here!" he said, blinking across the field to the big tent, and the parked lorries and caravans.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Tippity.

Bunter had had rather a doubt of finding the circus still at Wapshot after the end of the term at Greyfriars School. He was prepared to follow it, if it had moved on; but it was a relief to find it on the same pitch.

It was rather a surprise, too, for he was aware that Signor Muccolini was not doing business at Wapshot—and such business as there was, was likely to grow thinner day by day. However, there the circus still was; and the fat Owl was glad to see it.

"Marco's at home, I suppose?" said Bunter.

"Shouldn't wonder!" said Mr. Tip, "What the dickens are you doing here again, you young ass? Want your schoolmaster to come after you again?"

"Don't be cheeky!" said Bunter. "I don't want any cheek from clowns, I can tell you. I say, is old Mucky about?"

"Find out!" said Mr. Tip, curtly.

"Beast!"

Bunter rolled up the path to the circus pitch. He blinked round him rather uneasily through his big spectacles. He wanted to see Marco; but he was not anxious to see the signor.

Once he had fixed up matters with the lion-tamer, he hoped, at least, that the signor would make the best of it. But if he fell in with the circus-master first, it was probable that Mucky's whip would be featured as the next item on the programme. That was not what Bunter wanted at all.

Tippity Tip grinned after the fat schoolboy as he went. Tippity could see farther than the short-sighted Owl; and what he could see was Signor Muccolini standing by the circus tent, staring at Bunter as he approached.

The expression on the signor's face indicated that no warm-hearted welcome awaited Bunto on his return to the circus.

"Dio mio!" ejaculated the signor, as he spotted Bunter. "Sempre quello ragazzo!"

And he slipped the circus whip down from under his podgy arm into his hand, and started to meet Bunter.

Which caused Mr. Tip, watching from the gate, to grin more widely than before. till Mr. Tip's grin extended almost from one of Mr. Tip's ears to the other.

Bunter rolled on—and suddenly halted! His eyes, and his spectacles, fixed on the circus-master, striding to meet him.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

His luck was out.

He wanted to see Marco first, and the signor afterwards, if at all. But Marco was not to be seen; and the signor was striding towards him, with the circus whip in his dusky hand, and a most unpleasant expression on his swarthy face.

"You come here once more!" exclaimed Signor Muccolini. "It is not enough to lay a whip around you once! You want it some more!"

"I—I say—" gasped Bunter.

He jumped back as the whip whistled. Signor Muccolini followed him up, and the whip whistled again. Bunter did another kangaroo-like hop.

"I say, stoppit!" he howled. "I say—yaroooh!"



As the procession reached a roadside pond, Billy Bunter gave Rajah a touch, and the elephant swung out of the line of march, with Bob Cherry curled in its trunk. The elephant lumbered into the water, the trunk uncurled, and Bob flew from it. Splash! "Yurrrrgh!" he gurgled, as he landed in a foot of water and mud.

"You run away from school again, and cause trouble in my circus!" said the signor. "I think not! No! Take that!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"And that——"

"Ow! Beast! Stoppit!" yelled Bunter.

"And that——"

"Whoop!"

Several of the circus hands gathered round, grinning. Billy Bunter retreated towards the gate. Signor Muccolini followed him.

The signor had never liked Bunter, and he had been extremely annoyed to find that a runaway schoolboy had sheltered in his circus. He was making it clear to Billy Bunter that his presence was not desired at the Magnificent Circus.

Tippity Tip chuckled as Bunter passed him again—this time, outward bound. The signor was following, with the long lash of the whip circling round Bunter's little fat legs.

"Ow! Stoppit! Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter, as he scuttled into the road.

Signor Muccolini strode after him, still whacking.

"You run away from school again!" he said. "Yes? You run some other place this time, I think! Oh, yes!"

"I haven't!" yelled Bunter. "It's the holidays now, and I can come back if I like. I say—yaroooh!"

"It is not if you like," grinned the signor. "It is if I like, and I do not like! No! I think I make it very plain! I make you to understand! Oh, yes!"

Whack, whack!

"Yow-woop!"

Bunter dodged across the road. Signor Muccolini brandished the whip in the air as he came to a halt.

"I make it plain, yes!" he grinned. "You come back once more, and I give you some more whip!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, gasping with wrath. This was his welcome back at the Magnificent Circus!

"Oh! All right!" he gasped. "All right! You wait a bit, you beast! I'm going. And I'll tell you where I'm going! I'm going to the police-station."

"You go where you like, except to my circus," said Signor Muccolini. "Do not let me see you here once more."

"You'll see me pretty soon, when I come back with a bobby!" retorted Bunter. "And you can get ready to pay the fine for taking photographs of the air camp, too!"

Billy Bunter was far from foreseeing the effect of those words on Signor Muccolini.

So far as Bunter understood, the signor had taken photographs in a spot where photography was forbidden, and was liable to be fined. But even Bunter realised that the prospect of having to pay a fine hardly accounted for the effect of his words.

The signor's whip sank down as his arm dropped to his side. His swarthy, greasy face became almost white, and his black, beady eyes seemed to bulge out of it.

A moment before, Signor Muccolini had been a swaggering bully—now he looked utterly deflated. He stood staring at Bunter, with protruding eyes and dropping jaw.

"Dio mio! What—what you say?" he gasped at last.

Bunter blinked at him in sheer astonishment.

The signor glanced quickly round him, as if to ascertain whether other ears had heard Bunter's words.

But Mr. Tip, on the gate, was

out of hearing, and there was no one else at hand. Signor Muccolini fixed his beady eyes on Bunter again. He came a little nearer to the fat junior, and Bunter eyed him warily. But the circus-master's manner was not threatening now.

"You say—what you say?" he breathed. "What do you mean?"

Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his big round spectacles. He wondered whether it might possibly be imprisonment, and not a fine, for having taken those photographs. Obviously it was some deep fear that had caused the sudden collapse of the swaggering Italian.

Unexpectedly, but very agreeably, Bunter found that he had the upper hand.

"You heard what I said!" he retorted. "I know all about it! See?"

"What you know?" breathed the signor.

"Who parks a camera in a lunch basket?" grinned Bunter.

The signor clenched his dusky hands. "You spy on me!" he muttered.

"I may have happened to spot you at it, and I may not!" grinned Bunter. "I dare say they'll be glad to hear about it at the police station. What do you think?"

If looks could have slain, it is probable that Billy Bunter's fat career would have terminated suddenly on the spot; fortunately for Bunter, looks couldn't. There was a long silence.

"Perhaps I take some photographs for my amusement," muttered the signor at last. "It is what you call a hobby. But I do not desire that it shall be talked about. It is nothing—nothing! A matter of no moment! But——" he paused. "I forget, when I take my

camera in some places, that it is perhaps forbidden. There is no harm."

"You can tell the bobby that," said Bunter. "I'm going—"

"There is no need!" said the signor quickly. "Perhaps there would be a fine, as you say. I do not want that. It would not be good for my circus. I lose my temper; I am sorry. You wish to come back to the circus—you wish to rejoin Marco? I make you welcome."

"Well, if you mean that—" said Bunter, with a deep breath.

"Andiamo!" said the signor.

Billy Bunter, grinning, followed him into the circus field.

He had never dreamed that his knowledge of the signor's secret photographic stunts was such a trump card in his hand, but he realised it now.

For whatever reason, it was plain that Signor Muccolini dreaded to have that secret revealed. The extent to which he dreaded it was clear from the sudden change in him.

Tippity Tip nearly fell off the gate in his astonishment as Bunter walked back into the circus field with Signor Muccolini.

"I say, boss, is that fat freak hanging on here?" he exclaimed.

The signor gave him a black scowl.

"Mind your own business!" he snarled.

"Don't be cheeky!" said Bunter, with a severe blink at Mr. Tip.

He walked up the path to the circus camp with the signor. Mr. Tip gazed after them blankly.

"Well!" said Mr. Tip. "My eye!"

Tippity Tip had hoped that he had seen the last of Bunter at the circus. Evidently that hope was delusive. He hadn't!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bad Luck for Bunter!

"**H**OUPLA!" said Marco.

There was a low growl.

The King of the Lions was in old Cæsar's cage. Old Cæsar, tame and good-tempered as usual, was quiet as a lamb. The deep, unpleasant growl came from Brutus, who was also in the cage.

Brutus was a fierce beast, and required all the iron control of his trainer to keep him in order. Marco was now teaching him to jump over his whip, and he had turned him into Cæsar's cage for the purpose, so that the example of the tame old lion would help to bring him up in the way that he should go.

Old Cæsar jumped over the whip willingly enough. He was accustomed to the trick and prompt to obey orders. Brutus watched him with sullen eyes, sulky and unwilling. Several times old Cæsar did the jumping act. Now Marco was holding out the whip for Brutus to jump, and, instead of jumping, Brutus crouched low and growled.

"Houp-la!" snapped Marco. He cracked the whip.

Still Brutus refused to stir. The whip cracked again and the lash stung the lion's flank.

A deep roar pealed from Brutus, and he turned savagely on the trainer with bared teeth and gleaming eyes.

Had Marco's nerve failed him, the lion would have sprung the next second, and he would have been down under tearing claws.

But the lion-tamer was used to such incidents. Up went the heavy whip, and it came down with a crash on the lion's savage face—crash on crash, till Brutus, cowed and beaten, retreated

into a corner of the cage, where he crouched.

"Cæsar!" said Marco. "Houp-la!"

He put the old lion through the jumping trick again as an encouragement to Brutus. The latter, crouching in the dusky corner of the great iron cage, watched with sullen, sulky eyes.

A fat figure came along the passage outside the cage and stopped, and a pair of little round eyes blinked through a pair of big round spectacles between the bars.

"I say, Marco—"

Marco stared round in surprise.

"Bunter!" he exclaimed. "You!"

The fat Owl nodded and grinned.

"I've come back!" he announced.

He opened the door of the cage and rolled in cheerfully.

Billy Bunter was used to old Cæsar, and accustomed to go through a performance in his cage. Between the duskiest of the place and his limited vision the Owl of the Remove did not observe that there was now another lion in the cage—the fierce and intractable Brutus.

Happily unaware of the lion crouching sullenly in the dusky corner, Billy Bunter rolled in and clanged the door after him.

Marco stared at him.

He had had a favourable impression of Billy Bunter to begin with. It was probable that that favourable impression had been rather modified.

He still believed that Bunter was plucky, but the discovery of his young friend's untruthfulness had been rather a shock to him.

He had taken Bunter's word without question, and believed that he had leave from school, so the interview he had had with Mr. Quelch had been rather disagreeable.

"I've come back, old chap!" said Bunter cheerfully. "Glad to see me again—what?"

"You must not stay here!" said Marco curtly. "You ran away from school, and you pulled my leg. If you have run away again—"

"It's the holidays now," explained Bunter. "I can do as I like. See? So I've come back. I've got my pater's leave to stay where I like."

Marco did not seem to "enthus." He was a simple-hearted man, and perhaps easy to deceive in the first place, but once bitten twice shy.

"You told me that before!" he said bluntly. "But I heard something very different from your schoolmaster Mr. Quelch."

"Well, look here!" said Bunter.

He drew a crumpled and grubby letter from his pocket.

"Look at that!" he said.

Marco looked at the letter. His face cleared. Billy Bunter, watching him rather anxiously, was satisfied with what he read in the lion-tamer's face.

Mr. Bunter, it was certain, had taken it for granted that Billy would be going with some Greyfriars fellow for the holidays; he generally did, and Mr. Bunter was very pleased to allow him to do so.

When Billy Bunter and his brother Sammy and his sister Bessie were home for the holidays the inroads on the commissariat department at the Bunter villa were simply terrific.

Mr. Bunter's view was that the school holidays were too long.

If Billy Bunter had all that he wanted to eat at Greyfriars there was no doubt that Mr. Bunter was getting full money's worth for the fees he paid for him there.

At home Billy ate everything that was available—and, like Oliver Twist, asked for more.

So it was not, perhaps, surprising that Mr. Bunter was rather relieved when he heard that his hopeful son was landed on some school friend for the long summer vacation.

Whether Mr. Bunter, however, would have given the fat Owl leave to stay at the circus for the holidays was rather doubtful.

So Bunter had worded his letter home with great astuteness. He had mentioned a "friend" without specifying who and what the friend was.

Be it said in justice to Bunter that he did not realise that this was a deception. If Mr. Bunter supposed that the "friend" he mentioned was somebody he wasn't, that, the fat Owl considered, was not his fault. Billy Bunter's fat brain had its own original ways of considering things.

To Marco, of course, the letter was satisfactory enough. There was Mr. Bunter's permission in black and white.

"That is all right, my boy," he said, handing the letter back to Bunter. "I shall be glad to have you back. I can fix it with the signor—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bunter airily. "I've fixed it up with old Mucky already."

"You've seen Mucky?" asked Marco in surprise. "Is he willing—"

"He told me I was welcome, and brought me in," said Bunter. "I fancy he's jolly glad to have me back."

Marco eyed him very doubtfully. He knew that the signor disliked his fat assistant, and had been glad to get shut of him, and he had learned now that Billy Bunter's word was a rather rotten reed to rely upon.

"You can ask him, if you like!" said Bunter breezily.

"I think I will," said Marco dryly.

"All serene! He's not far away." Bunter stepped to the grated door of the cage and coolly called through the bars: "Here, Muccolini! Come here, will you?"

Marco fairly gaped in astonishment. Marco was the most valuable member of the circus company, but he would never have dreamed of addressing the swaggering signor in that fashion. Billy Bunter called him as carelessly as if he had been one of the horse boys.

To the lion-tamer's still greater surprise, Signor Muccolini came along the passage in answer to the call, and did not arrive in a towering rage, ready to kick Bunter from one end of the circus camp to the other.

His black eyes were glittering, but his fury was carefully suppressed. He stopped outside the grated door and glanced in.

"You call me, Bunto?" he said.

"Oh, yes," answered Bunter. "Marco doesn't seem to think that you're glad to have me back at the circus. Tell him it's all right."

Signor Muccolini breathed hard. He would have given a year's takings at the box-office to grasp Bunter by the scruff of his fat neck with one hand and lay the circus whip round him with the other.

Instead of which, he answered, in a choking voice:

"Si! Si! Va bene! It is all right, Marco!"

"O.K.!" said Marco, staring from one to the other. "That's settled, then. I'm glad to have you back, Bunter, if the signor agrees. I'm afraid you're rather a young sweep, in some ways, but you've got pluck, anyhow, and that's what's wanted in this line of business."

"Pluck!" sneered the signor. "Coraggio, non credo! E un codardo, Marco mio, codardo e furfante."

Bunter's knowledge of his secret—a darker secret than Bunter ever dreamed—compelled the signor to toe the line. But it could not restrain his malice. In point of fact, the keen, cunning Italian judged Bunter very much more accurately than Marco did.

The fat Owl blinked at him angrily and suspiciously. He did not understand the Italian words, but he could see that the signor was not, at all events, paying him a compliment.

"Oh, rot, Mucky," said the lion-tamer. "The boy's no coward—"

Bunter gasped with wrath as he realised that "codardo" was the Italian word for coward.

"Look here, you cheeky dago—" he roared.

"That will do, Bunter!" said Marco. "Don't talk to your boss, and mine, like that! But you'd better pack it up, Mucky. The boy's shown his courage. He's showing it now, I fancy. At any rate, I don't think you'd care to be standing in his shoes at the present moment. Bunter's the only fellow in the circus, besides myself, who would stand in the same cage with Brutus—and you know it, as well as I do!"

Bunter jumped.

It had not occurred to Marco that the short-sighted Owl had not noticed Brutus in the cage with Cæsar.

And, certainly, it had not occurred to Bunter that the fiercest of the troupe of lions was there, or wild horses would not have dragged him inside the door!

"I—I say! What—what—" gasped Bunter.

He stared round the cage, with his eyes almost bulging from his spectacles. Then he observed Brutus crouching in the dusky corner.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter.

For a second he stared at Brutus in utter terror. Brutus glared at him and gave a growl.

Bunter bounded.

One bound carried him to the grated door. He tore it open in frantic haste and bounded out of the cage.

Crash!

Bump!

Signor Muccolini, standing outside the door, had not looked for that sudden exit. Before he knew that Bunter was coming, Bunter had come!

The fat junior crashed into the podgy circus master, and Signor Muccolini staggered back, spluttering, and sat down, hard and heavy.

"Cospetto!" he spluttered.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He reeled from the shock, and then, treading on the signor in his haste, he bolted. He did the passage between the cages as if it had been the cinder-path at Greyfriars.

"What the thump—" gasped Marco.

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled the signor. He sat up dizzily. "Dio mio! Urrrrgh!" He tottered away, gurgling for breath.

Hitherto, Billy Bunter had contrived to keep up his reputation, with Marco at least, as a fellow with pluck! But there was no doubt that he had let himself down now—with a bump!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trouble for Tippet!

TIPPITY TIP grinned.

Billy Bunter frowned.

It was a day or two later, and Bunter, now a fixture at the Magnificent Circus, was coming out after the show.

Marco had said nothing on the subject of his misadventure in the lions' cage. But all the circus hands had heard of it, and grinned over it. And as he saw that cheeky grin on the face of Mr. Tip, Bunter knew very well of what he was thinking. He gave the clown a hefty glare through his spectacles.

Tippet was standing at the doorway of the canvas structure in which the ventriloquial side-show was housed. Tippet's ventriloquial entertainment was given after the chief performance was over, and Tippet was addressing the crowd coming away from the big tent. He left off for a moment, to bestow that cheeky grin on Billy Bunter, and then re-started.

"Walk in, ladies and gentlemen! Tuppence only, to see the most wonderful ventriloquial performance of modern times! Pay your tuppences, and see John and Jane, the marvellous talking dolls! Walk up, gents! Roll in! Still room for a few more!"

There was, as a matter of fact, room for a good many more in the side-show, though it was not a large structure. Business was slack at Wapshot, and many of Signor Muccolini's company wondered why he kept to the pitch so long. Even Bunter did not suspect that that prolonged stay, during poor business, had anything to do with the camera hidden in the lunch-basket, and secret photographing of the air camp and its surroundings.

Even Marco, the King of the Lions, failed to draw his usual crowd in a place like Wapshot. And Mr. Tippet Tip told his friend Wiggles, the Elastic Man, that he might as well shut down

(Continued on next page.)

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the ventriloquial side-show, for all the business it was doing. Twopence really was a low price for Tippet's show, but even the twopences were growing rare.

However, some of the patrons of the circus yielded to Tippet's eloquent exhortations and trickled into the canvas apartment, where Jane and John were waiting for them. Mr. Wiggles was taking the twopences, while Tippet did his patter to the crowd. And when Billy Bunter rolled in after the others Wiggles held out a hand.

"Tuppence, please!" he said.

"Rot!" grunted Bunter.

"Oh, let him in on the nod, Wrig," said Mr. Tip. "He gave us a free show the other day."

And Wiggles grinned, and passed Bunter in.

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles. Mr. Tip and Wiggles had seen him bolting from Brutus, which was the "free show" to which Mr. Tip alluded. The allusion did not please Bunter.

However, he was going to get his own back when the ventriloquial entertainment started. That was why he was there.

About a dozen members of the British public had been inveigled in when Mr. Tip gave up hope of more, and got down to business.

By means of concealed strings he jerked the two figures, and gave them quite a lifelike appearance of speaking, when his ventriloquial squeak supplied Jane with a voice, and a deep grunt did the same service for John.

"I'll tell you something that happened this morning, Jane!" came the deep grunt of John.

"Yes, what is it, John?" squeaked Jane.

"I was passing an inn—"

"You were passing an inn?"

"Yes, I was passing an inn—"

"You've never done such a thing in your life, John!"

"I tell you, Jane, I was passing an inn—"

"And I tell you, John, that you never did, not without going in."

There was a laugh from Mr. Tip's small audience. Mr. Tip's ancient patter was more or less new at Wapshot.

"Isn't it wonderful!" said one. "You'd really believe that they were speaking."

"Oh, I don't know!" said a red-haired man, with an air of superior knowledge. "I can jolly well see that chap's lips move when they speak."

Billy Bunter grinned, and Mr. Tip gave the red-haired young man a glare. Comments like that from the public did not gratify the circus ventriloquist.

"Well, what did you see this morning, John?" went on Jane's squeak, after Mr. Tip had bestowed that glare upon the worldly wise young man with the red hair.

"I saw a red-headed chap with a face like a kite!" came John's grunt in answer—an answer that made Mr. Tip wonder whether he was dreaming.

He had been about to speak. But he had not spoken. It seemed to Mr. Tip that John, a stuffed doll, was speaking on his own account.

Billy Bunter could have told him who had spoken. But Mr. Tip was totally ignorant of the fact that there was a rival ventriloquist in the tent.

He stared.

So did the red-haired young man in the audience. His face flushed as red as his hair.

A touch of ginger in the hair is really a distinction. It shows character, and generally pluck. Still, people who possess that distinction seldom like rude allusions to it.

That young man had made a remark that displeased Tippet Tip. Naturally he supposed that the circus ventriloquist was getting back at him, with that remark from the doll. He was not likely to suppose that it was the doll speaking,

as seemed to be the case to the astounded Mr. Tip.

He glared at Tippet.

Tippet gasped.

While he gasped, Jane's squeak answered John's grunt. Billy Bunter was more than equal to such a performance as that.

"Oh, did you, John?" squeaked Jane. "Was it the same ginger-headed blighter who's here now?"

"My eye!" gasped Mr. Tip.

"Look here, you!" roared the young man with the red hair, justly indignant. "You stop that! See? Stop it!"

The rest of the audience chortled. They were finding this more amusing than Tippet's usual patter.

"I—I—I never—" stuttered the dazed Tippet. "I—I—"

"Stop it! That's what I said—stop it!" hooted the red-haired young man. "I didn't pay tuppence for check! See?"

"I—I never—"

"Don't interrupt, Copper-Top!" came John's grunt. "Go and put your head in the pond, before you set the circus afire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the audience.

But the young man with the red hair did not join in the merriment. His face was redder than his hair now, and his eyes flashing. He made a jump forward, and grasped both the dolls.

"Here, look out!" gasped Tippet Tip. "Don't you damage them dolls, young man—you leave them dolls alone!"

"I'll give you copper-top!" roared the red-haired young man, and he lifted John by his legs, and brought him down with a crash on Tippet's head.

"Ow! Hoooh! Oooh!" spluttered the hapless clown. "I say—Whoop!"

Crash!

Jane, hurled with all the force of the young man's arm, smote Tippet full on his features.

Tippet was clean bowled. He sat down with a bump. Not satisfied, the red-haired young man proceeded to bang him on the head with John.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience. "He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter.

Tippet had grinned cheekily at Bunter. He was not grinning now. He was yelling and howling, and dodging wildly to escape the swipes of the doll.

"Chuck it!" he yelled. "I say, chuck it! I never said anything about your mop, blow you! This here circus is haunted. I've said it afore, and I say it agin—it's blooming haunted! Yaroooh! Stop it! Whoop!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

Had Tippet addressed those remarks to the red-haired young man, he would certainly have deserved the punishment he was receiving. He hadn't; but he was getting the punishment all the same. The red-haired young man laid it on, with the ventriloquial doll, as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

John's head flew off under the force of the swipes. Really, it was a wonder that Mr. Tip's didn't!

"There!" gasped the red-haired young man, hurling the remnant of John at Tippet's dizzy head. "Take that! Here, leggo!"

Wiggles, the contortionist, grasped him by the shoulder.

"Here, you get out!" gasped Wiggles. "You can't do that there 'ere! You get outside! You—Yaroooooop!"

The Elastic Man went over backwards as a fist landed in his eye.

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"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

Mr. Tip scrambled up. The light of battle was in his eye. His show was wrecked, his dolls in ruins. His audience was howling with laughter—and it was Mr. Tip's business, certainly, to make his audience laugh. But it was clear that he did not like that way of doing it. He hurled himself at the red-haired young man.

"Now, blow you!" gasped Mr. Tip, punching frantically.

But the red-haired young man was ready for him—more than ready! In this case, there was no doubt that ginger indicated pluck! He grasped Mr. Tip, and gave punch for punch—indeed, his punches were so rapid that he counted at least two to Tippet's one.

The audience, yelling, with laughter, crowded out of the tent, to get out of the way of the scrap. Wiggles, scrambling up, with an eye that winked and blinked, rushed to his friend's aid. But the red-haired young man was full of beans—he took them on both together, punching them right and left.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter, as he backed out. "He, he, he!"

The three of them were left struggling frantically in the tent. They rolled over, tangled in the canvas, and there was a rending crash, as the flimsy structure came down on them.

The red-haired young man was the first to emerge from the wreck. He picked up his hat and glared at two dizzy faces that looked from a tangle of canvas and cord.

"Want any more?" he roared.

"Ow! Ooogh! Ow!" gasped Wiggles.

"Urrrrrrrrggh!" moaned Mr. Tip.

They did not seem to want any more. They had had more than enough of that red-haired young man. He gave a snort and walked off, leaving a crowd in a roar behind him, and two battered and breathless wrecks crawling from the wreck of the tent.

"Oh, holy pokers!" moaned Mr. Tip. "Ow! Ooo-er! Ooogh!"

"You hass!" gasped the Elastic Man. "What did you want to chip him about 'is 'air for, you thundering hass? You asked for it."

"I didn't!" moaned Tippet. "I never said a word about 'is 'air! This 'ere circus is 'aunted. It's 'appened before—and now it's 'appened again. I tell you, this 'ere circus is 'aunted!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Billy Bunter. He rolled away grinning, feeling that he had got his own back on Tippet Tip. There was no doubt that he had, and perhaps a little over!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

POM, pom, pom, pom!

Bang! Blare!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! The jolly old circus!"

And jolly old Bunter.

"Bunter!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "As large as life, and twice as natural!"

The Famous Five halted by the roadside to watch the circus procession, as it came winding along the Surrey lane.

Harry Wharton's chums had joined him at Wharton Lodge for the "hols," and they were walking to Wimford, when the circus came in sight. They watched the procession with interest, all the more because they were aware that William George Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, had joined Signor Muccolini's outfit.

Muccolini's Circus was on the road again.

A pitch had been booked at Wimford, which was only a mile or two from Wharton Lodge, and the circus was on

its way thither, when the chums of the Remove sighted it.

There was a blare of drum and trumpet as the lengthy procession wound along. The signor, with an eye to business, was making as much display as possible by way of advertisement, and there was no doubt that everybody in the vicinity could hear Muccolini's Circus coming.

Tippet Tip, the clown, led the procession, mounted on a donkey, with his face to the tail, and beating a drum. Horsemen followed him, and after them the towering form of Rajah, the elephant, with a fat figure in crimson tunic, with gold braid, mounted on his back. After the elephant came caravans and lorries, all sorts and conditions of vehicles; with a rumble of wheels, a cloud of dust, and a blare of musical instruments.

Harry Wharton & Co., smiling, waved their hands to Mr. Tip. They remembered the circus clown, and Mr. Tip remembered them, and gave them a cheery and expansive grin, and a wave of his drumsticks.

Then they grinned up at Bunter, perched on the neck of the gigantic elephant, and looking a great deal like a tropical beetle in his gorgeous circus raiment.

Bunter blinked down at them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man!" roared Bob Cherry. "Mind you don't break that bullifant's back!"

Billy Bunter frowned at the cheery Bob.

Bunter's weight was considerable, not to say enormous; but there was no danger of its breaking the back of the elephant. Even Bunter's weight had no effect on Rajah.

Signor Muccolini, who was riding a handsome black horse, glanced at the juniors, and then at Bunter. His black eyes glittered when they rested on Bunter. He could never look at the fat Owl without that glitter coming into his eyes.

The signor had never liked Bunter. But since he had been under Bunter's thumb, he had liked him less than ever.

His secret was in Bunter's keeping. Bunter was far from realising how dark and sinister was that secret. But he realised quite clearly that the signor was terribly anxious for it not to be revealed. He was well aware that, but for that secret, Mucky would have kicked him out of the circus. He could not fail to be aware that every time the signor came near him, he longed to lay the circus whip round his fat legs. But he was aware, also, that he had the upper hand, and that the dago dared not lay a finger on him in consequence.

Bunter was not the fellow to use the upper hand with discretion. It was his happy way to be cheeky to anybody who had to stand his cheek.

The more cheek the signor stood from Bunter, the more Bunter gave him to stand, and all the circus company, by this time, wondered how the bullying, swaggering Italian tolerated it, and why.

Bunter, at the moment, was not heeding the signor, or the glare of his black, glittering eyes. His own eyes, and his spectacles, were fixed on the group of Greyfriars juniors by the roadside.

He gave the elephant a touch, which Rajah understood. Bunter was accustomed to appearing in the ring with Rajah, and Rajah was used to him, and obeyed his slightest sign. The elephant moved a little out of the procession, and swung his immense head round towards the group of juniors.

Before they could guess what was going to happen, the long slender trunk

whipped out and curled round Bob Cherry.

"Here—what—hallo—look out!" gasped Bob, as he was suddenly plucked off his feet.

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter, high up on the elephant's neck.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Bob—"

"Ow! Oh! Leggo!" yelled Bob Cherry.

His brain swam as he spun in the air, swinging in Rajah's trunk.

Another touch from Bunter, and the elephant swung back into line, and towered on, with Bob Cherry wriggling wildly in his trunk and yelling to be released.

"Put me down!" shrieked Bob. "You blithering fat idiot! You howling ass! You frabjous fathead! Pumme down!"

"He, he, he!"

Rajah swung on, carrying the gasping, struggling junior in his trunk. Bunter grinned down at him and chortled.

"Bunter, you silly ass, stop that!" roared Harry Wharton.

"Bunter, you cheeky fathead—" shouted Frank Nugent.

"You esteemed and preposterous ass!" yelled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Bunter, you blithering chump—" yelled Johnny Bull.

"He, he, he!"

The Co. rushed after the elephant. But they could not help Bob, curled in the trunk of the gigantic quadruped. They could only keep pace and yell to Bunter to chuck it.

Which the grinning Owl had no intention of doing! This was rather a joke, from Billy Bunter's point of view.

It did not seem much of a joke to Bob, wriggling and breathless and dizzy as he was carried helplessly along.

Signor Muccolini, scowling, drew his horse nearer to the big elephant and shouted up to Bunter.

"Stop that! Do you hear me, furfante? Stop that at once!"

Bunter blinked down at him.

"Rats!" he replied coolly.

"Come, come!" gasped the signor, crimson with rage. "What, what?"

"I don't know what you mean, by ko-may!" answered Bunter. "But what I mean is rats! R-a-t-s, rats! See! Shut up!"

The signor almost foamed at the mouth. He clutched his riding-whip and made a motion as if to cut at the elephant's rider.

But he restrained his rage and rode on again.

Billy Bunter grinned after him. He was not taking cheek from a dago—not if he knew it!

The dago, on the other hand, had to take cheek from Bunter! A spy who was in dread of attracting the attention of the police had no choice in the matter. Signor Muccolini ground his teeth under his black moustache as he rode his horse on.

The chums of the Remove, running beside the elephant, heard what was said, and they could only wonder. Bunter, evidently, was a power in the circus! Apparently he could do as he liked, regardless of the circus-master and his wrath.

There was no help for Bob till Bunter chose to signal to the elephant to release him. And Bunter did not choose.

Being in a position to throw his weight about, Billy Bunter naturally threw it. Seldom or never at Greyfriars had he had the pleasure of the whip-hand in dealing with the Famous Five. Now he had—and he was enjoying it! He was quite glad of that chance meeting in the Surrey lane.

"Will you make this beast leggo, you fat villain?" spluttered Bob.

"He, he, he!"

"Bunter, you potty ass!" yelled Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he!"

The procession marched on, and reached a roadside pond. Billy Bunter chuckled as he spotted the glimmer of water in the bright July sunshine.

He gave the elephant a touch and Rajah swung out of the line of march again. And he swung towards the pond.

He lumbered into the water. The trunk uncurled, and Bob Cherry flew from it.

Splash!

"Yurrrrgh!"

"He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry, gurgling, sat up in a foot of water and mud. His chums rushed to drag him out.

Rajah marched on in the procession, Billy Bunter blinking back at the juniors, with a fat grinning face, from his perch.

"He, he, he!" floated back to the ears of the Co. as they dragged Bob out of the pond. "I say, you fellows! Is he wet? He, he, he!"

And Billy Bunter rode on triumphant.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Sacked!

"**C**OSPETTO!" snarled Signor Muccolini through his thick black bush of a moustache. "Siete sciocco, Marco."

The lion-tamer shrugged his shoulders. The circus was pitched in a field near Wimford. Marco was sitting on the step of his van, mending a whip. The swarthy signor stood in front of him, looking at him with a scowling brow—but with one black, glittering eye on a fat figure in the offing.

Mucky spoke in his own language, as he generally did when he was excited. But Marco knew that "siete sciocco" meant "You are a fool!" Which was not complimentary. But he was a patient and good-tempered man, and he let the signor blow off steam.

"The ragazzo is useless—a fool, a coward, a liar!" went on Signor Muccolini. Evidently his opinion of Billy Bunter was not a flattering one. "I do not want him in my circus! Why do you not give him a sack?"

Marco did not answer.

It was true that he had changed his opinion of Billy Bunter very considerably. He was a simple and trusting man—and the fat Owl had taken him in. Now that he knew William George

Bunter better, his opinion of him was very like that of the signor.

But if he was fed-up with Billy Bunter, he did not feel disposed to tell him so. His kind heart stood in the way.

Signor Muccolini eyed him impatiently and angrily. He was very anxious to get rid of Bunter from the circus—for reasons that he certainly could not have explained to Marco.

"Sack him!" snarled the signor. "I tell you, give him a sack, and let us see the last of him! I tell you, Marco, if you keep the boy, I shall think of cancelling your contract with me. I tell you, I will not have him in my circus. If you keep him, you go."

Marco shrugged his broad shoulders. "Please yourself about that Mucky!" he answered.

"Un grasso furfante!" muttered Signor Muccolini. "Un grasso porcello! I tell you, give him a sack!"

Signor Muccolini broke off, as Billy Bunter rolled up. The fat Owl blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"Buzz off, will you!" said Bunter. "I want to speak to Marco."

Signor Muccolini almost choked. Marco frowned. But the Italian controlled his rage and stalked away.

Bunter grinned after him as he went. But the lion-tamer gave him a stern look.

"Don't speak to the boss like that, Bunter!" he said curtly. "If he boxed your ears for your impudence I should not stop him."

"He jolly well knows better than to try it on!" grinned Bunter. "I'd like to see a greasy dago box my ears! But never mind old Mucky! I've got something to say to you, Marco, see?"

"Well?" rapped Marco.

"You're paying me two quid a week!" said Bunter.

"Well?"

"Well, it won't do!" said Bunter. "See? I'm not complaining of the grub—the grub's all right! But there's several other things. I don't like sharing a van."

"No?" said Marco.

"No!" said Bunter. "I expect to have a van to myself. That's the first thing!"

"Anything else?"

"Yes," said Bunter; "there's the screw! Two quid a week is no use to me. Make it five."

"Is that all?"

"Well," said Bunter thoughtfully, "if there's anything else that occurs to me later, I'll mention it. For the present, that's the lot."

"Now you've finished, I've got something to say!" said Marco.

"Go it!" said Bunter. "But mind, I

mean every word I say! If you're going to argue about the screw, you lose me, that's all. I believe in putting things plain."

"So do I!" agreed Marco.

"Well, cut it short, then!" said Bunter.

"Right! You're sacked!"

"Eh?"

"Sacked!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him as if he could not quite believe his fat ears—as, indeed, he hardly could.

"Sus-sus-sacked!" he stammered.

Marco nodded.

"Just that!" he agreed. "Now clear off!"

"Kik-kik-clear off!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, unless you want a boot to help you clear!" said Marco. "You're a fat, greedy, untruthful young rascal! I'm fed-up with you! I wasn't going to tell you so, but now you've asked for it, there it is! Get out!"

"Gig-gig-gig-gig get out!" stammered Bunter.

"Yes—and sharp!"

"Why, you—you—you silly idiot—you cheeky ass—" gasped Bunter. "You—you—Yaroooh!"

Bunter was interrupted. The lion-tamer picked up the whip he had been mending, with one hand; with the other he grasped Billy Bunter's fat neck, and twirled him round.

Whack!

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter, as the whip rang on his tight trousers. "Ow! Yaroooh! Beast! Rotter! Oh crikey!"

"Better cut!" suggested Marco.

"Ow! Beast—"

Whack!

"I—I say—"

Whack!

"Yaroooooooh!"

Bunter bolted.

Marco sat down again on the step of the van. Billy Bunter did not stop running till he was on the other side of the big circus tent. Then, at last, he came to a halt, gasping for breath.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! Ow! The cheeky beast! Wow! Sacked! My hat! Wow! Sacked! Oh lor'!"

He was sacked! He had asked for it, and got it! The career of Bunter the Boy Lion-Tamer, had come to a sudden end.

"Oh lor'!" repeated Billy Bunter.

He was sacked! That was that! And what he was going to do now was quite a disagreeable problem to Billy Bunter.

(Next Saturday: "The Haunted Circus!"—another great cover-to-cover yarn of circus adventure, starring Billy Bunter and the chums of Greysfriars. Look out for it—and don't forget to order your MAGNET early.)



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THE HEAD WHO LIKED STRIKERS!

Another Staggering Instalment of Dicky Nugent's Sensational Serial: "DOCTOR BIRCHEMALL'S DUBBLE!"

On the following morning, the news that Jack Jolly & Co., of St. Sam's, were going on strike spread like wildfire. Long before rising-bell, the Fourth Form dormitory was besieged by fellows from other Forms, anxious to throw in their lot with the rebels.

It was a rare i-opener to the Fourth to see how unpopular Professor Birchermall was. Evidently, his kind-hearted ways made no more appeal to the rest of the skool than they did to Jack Jolly & Co.!

Soon, half the skool had rallied under the banner of the kaptin of the Fourth, and the rebels were packed into the dorm. like sardines!

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! It was the familiar sound of the rising-bell ringing out on the morning air.

Jack Jolly pointed to the door. "The hour has struck and the strike has started!" he cried, dramatically. "Barrycade the door, you fellows!"

"I, I, kap'n!" Willing hands set about closing the door. This wasn't eggactly an easy task with would-be rebels still struggling to get in, and at the first attempt several things got caught up, including Swotter minor's coat and Midgett minor's nose. But evenhally these obstructions were cleared away, and the stout door locked and afterwards barrycaded with heavy articles of furniture. Then the rebels made themselves as comfortable as they could and waited for things to happen.

They hadn't long to wait. Ten minnits after the completion of the barrycade, heavy footprints were heard in the passidge outside, and someone rattled the door handle. It was Burleigh, the kaptin of St. Sam's, and he didn't sound in the best of yewmours.

"What are you yung raskals playing at?" he yelled. "Open this door at once! Do you here!"

"We here; but there's nothing doing, Burleigh!" shouted back Jack Jolly, winking at his fellow-rebels. "We're on strike! We're fed up with Professor Birchermall and we're staying here till he goes!"

The rebels heard Burleigh snort wrathfully. "You silly yung asses!" he roared. "Why, there isn't a kinder Head in the country!"

"Ner a more eggasperating one, either!" retorted the leader of the rebels. "We've had enuff of Professor Birchermall's fizzard and fairy-tales. Even a tirant like Doctor Birchermall would be better!"

"Here, here!" roared the rebels. Burleigh gave another wrathful snort, then tramped away again. "I'm going to report this to the Head at once!" he called out, as he went. "I don't think he'll be so kind-hearted when he hears what is happening!"

Some of the strikers turned a little pail. It wouldn't be very

plezzant, they reflekted, if this strike changed Professor Birchermall from a mild-tempered, kind-hearted old jentleman into a ferocious, vengeful tirant—a feend in yewman shape!

But, as a matter of fakt, there was no need for them to worry. When Doctor Birchermall had returned to St. Sam's in the guise of his imaginary cuzzin, he had made up his mind not to do a single thing that mite betray his real eyedentity. As Doctor Birchermall, he had been forced to resine, because he was such a tirant; and he didn't mean to take the slitest chance of Professor Birchermall sharing the same fate!

The result was that when Burleigh bust into his study that morning with the news that a grate rebellion had broken out, he wasn't put out in the least. Burleigh fully eggpected him to turn very nasty. But instead of that, he meerly beamed.

"A grate rebellion, Burleigh!" he eggclaimed. "How awfully jolly! Where are they barrying out?"

"In the Fourth Form dormitory, sir!" said Burleigh, staring almost dazedly at the Head. "They've barrycaded the door with hevvy

furniture and it's impossibul to get through to them!"

"Please don't call me 'sir,' Burleigh!" beamed Professor Birchermall. "I've told you before that my name is Willknot, and that you may call me 'Willie' for short!"

"All screen, sir—I mean, Willie!" gasped the kaptin of St. Sam's. "But what are you going to do about the rebellion? Something must be done!"

"Something certainly will be done!" said the Head. "We must supply them with breakfast at once!"

The rebels were dumbfounded.

"Wh-a-at?" "Unless we do so, the poor lads will be hungry, and that would worry me to deth! You say we cannot get to them through the door?"

"Not without a charge of dynamite, sir—Willie, I mean!"

"Then we will take steps to get in touch with them through the winders—or rather, we will take a ladder!" grinned Professor Birchermall. "Run and tell Fossil to take round a ladder, there's a good chap. Meanwhile, I will trot down to the kitchen and get cook to make up a hamper!"

"You—you're going to give them a tuck-hamper when they're out on strike?" ejaculated Burleigh, staring at the Head like one in a dream. "Well, my hat! You'll be giving them arms and ammunition next!"

"An eggcellent suggestion, Burleigh! On your way out, tell Tallboy to go round collecting all the pea-shooters and peas he can find. Oh, and a few pailfuls of soot at the same time. The rebels ought to find them useful!"

Burleigh was simply staggered; but he was a well-dissiplined chap who always made a point of carrying out the Head's orders without argewing the toss about them. He hurried off to do so now, serprizing though the orders were.

A few minnits after that, Fossil, the porter, came staggering across the quad, carrying a long ladder on his shoulder. There was a rush of rebels to the winders of the Fourth Form dormitory, as the word went round that the porter was going to rear it up to their stronghold, and a buzz of eggitement as they spotted the Head crossing the quad, followed by seniors carrying a number of pails and a misterious-looking hamper.

But a grate sorprize was in store for the rebels of St. Sam's. When the Head paused at the foot of the ladder, he didn't look the least bit hostile.

"Good-morning, boys!" he called out cheerily. "I've just brought along your breakfast!"

"Eh?" gasped Jack Jolly. "As you don't intend to come down for brekkor, I'm going to carry it up the ladder for you. You can't eggpect to make a suxxess of a barrying-out unless you're well supplied with tuck! Burleigh! Hoist the hamper on to my shoulders and I'll carry it up!"

"It's a trap!" eggclaimed Merry of the Fourth. "If we take it in, I eggpect we shall find we've been taken in ourselves!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Frank Fearless. "Dashed if I don't believe it's genuine! The professor's so kind-hearted that he's even going to help us to go on strike against him!"

The rebels were dumbfounded.

Clatter! Bang! Crash! "Yaroooooo!"

The rebels at the windersaped. Then they faroly roared. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well caught, sir!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

But while they shreek with larfter, Professor Birchermall was groaning a deep, deep groan. It had dawned on the new Head of St. Sam's that Sir Frederick had caught him at a most untable moment. As he dessent the ladder and gazed at his victim, he began to realise that the look was a jolly black one!

(Don't miss the last great instalment of this merry serial in next week's number. It's a yung!)

But as the Head slowly climbed the ladder and they caught a glimpse of real, genuine tuck inside the hamper on his shoulder, they couldn't help feeling that Fearless was right.

"There you are, my boys!" beamed the Head. "I hope you'll find that enuff; but if it's not, just let me know and I'll bring you up some more!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"Don't go yet, boys!" went on Professor Birchermall. "Set in case of need, I've also bought along a supply of pea-shooters and ammunition and a few pailfuls of soot. If you'll wait a minnit, I'll bring them up to you!"

"P-p-pea-shooters?"

"P-p-pailfuls of soot!"

The strikers were simply abber-gasted. They began to wonder whether they were seeing things. But, amazing as it seemed, it was true enuff. The Head descended the ladder, then climbed up again, carrying a waste paper-basket full of pea-shooters and bags of peas. Having handed this over to Jolly, he went down once again, and returned, carrying a pailful of soot slung over each arm.

And it was just at that moment that Sir Frederick Fungus, the chairman of the St. Sam's Governors, came walking across the gates!

"Grate gad! What is gag on here!" he wrapped out.

"It's a rebellion against the new Head, sir," eggplained Burleigh; and the chairman of the Governors almost eggsplored with wra.

"A rebellion? A rebellion against the kindest-hearted Head that ever rained over St. Sam's? Impossibul! I shall demand full eggplanation from Professor Birchermall at once. BIRCHEMALL!"

It was the uneggpected of that call that did it! Professor Birchermall, who was nearly at the top of the ladder, jumped as though he had been shot. And at the next moment, a load of soot washed over Sir Frederick's aristostick head.

Clatter! Bang! Crash! "Yaroooooo!"

The rebels at the windersaped. Then they faroly roared. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well caught, sir!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

But when Marianne Dupont turned up, Bolsy's nervous system seemed to suffer a severe shock. She was petite, charming, and—oh, well, anyway, she had dark, flashing eyes and a marvellous smile, and Bolsy promptly decided that she was a fascinating girl.

She had such a stunning effect on him that he was tongue-tied for the entire

The GREYFRIARS HERALD

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HOME FOUND FOR MAULY'S MOKE!

Says BOB CHERRY

Our old pal, Lord Maul- ever has found a home for his moke at last.

Ever since he bought it from the hawkker chap who was whacking it in Friar- dale lane, that donkey has been a bone of contention at Greyfriars. The Head has told Mauly times out of number that there's no room for mokes at Grey- friars. Quelchy, rather sardonically, has remarked once or twice that there are quite enough donkeys about already. But Mauly, with his well-known gift for leaving things to take care of themselves, did nothing about it till the Head, faced with the prospect of an unlooked- for donkey being left on his hands for the summer vac., threatened direct action and the forcible expulsion of the moke.

That threat brought Mauly up to scratch. He felt a sort of responsibility about the animal, and he

wanted to know what kind of a home it was going to.

So last Wednesday a Rolls drew up outside the School House with Mauly's chauffeur at the wheel, and Mauly went out to find someone who was in need of a donkey!

The donkey went with him in the Rolls!

Asked afterwards how he set about the job, Mauly stated that he called at the vicar- age, several large houses in the neighbourhood, and the police-station at Court- field. But nobody wanted the donkey.

Eventually, in despera- tion, he ordered the chauffeur to drive to Margate. Arriving there, he spent several hours on the sands, studying donkey owners, and after a lengthy weeding-out process he decided on the most benevolent-looking of them



and presented him with the moke!

Even now, there's a thoughtful look on his face in his waking mo- ments, and I haven't the slightest doubt he's still a little worried about the fate of his four-legged pal. It won't surprise me a bit to find Mauly spending half the vac. on Margate sands, making quite sure that he did the right thing!

BOLSOVER DUMB MADE

DUPONT SPEECHLESS!

"So Strange, N'est-ce-pas?"—Dupont's Sister

When Bolsover heard that his French study- mate, Napoleon Dupont, was expecting a visit from his sister, he didn't think much about it. He graciously agreed to help young Nap entertain the visitor and arranged to have a boat out on the river; and then return to his normal pastimes of arguing and scrapping with the rest of the Remove.

But when Marianne Dupont turned up, Bolsy's nervous system seemed to suffer a severe shock. She was petite, charming, and—oh, well, anyway, she had dark, flashing eyes and a marvellous smile, and Bolsy promptly decided that she was a fascinating girl.

She had such a stunning effect on him that he was tongue-tied for the entire

afternoon. And the quaint thing about it was that Nap had previously told his sister that Bolsover had the most remarkable flow of typical English talk to be heard at Greyfriars. An afternoon with Bolsy, Nap had assured her, would im- prove her English con- versation no end! This is the way it worked out:

Marianne: "Zo veather, eet ees glorious, n'est-ce pas?"

Bolsover: "Eh?"

Marianne: "Ow nice, zees rivairo!"

Bolsover: "B-b-beg pardon!"

Marianne: "You like being at school, isn't oct?"

Dupont had nothing to say about it. Bolsover dumb seemed to have made Dupont speechless!

As Nap's sister said about Bolsy's conversa- tion when she left: "So strange, n'est-ce pas?"

Dupont had nothing to say about it. Bolsover dumb seemed to have made Dupont speechless!

ACQUIRE GOOD MANNERS!

Why don't you tripe- hounds learn your manners? I teach you polite behaviour in six easy lessons, and anyone who says I don't is booked for a cosh on the conk pronto!—P. BOLSOVER, Professor of Elegance, Box No. 94, GREYFRIARS HERALD

"UNKNOWN" SPORTS- MAN'S GIFT TO GREAT CRICKETER!

Amazing Presentation Ceremony

When the cricket season began this year, Wingate received a nice little silver cup from an anonymous sportsman, to be presented at the end of the season to the man who played the most consistently sound cricket through the season.

Everybody thought it was quite a good wheeze, and there was a lot of speculation as to the identity of the unknown patron of the game at Greyfriars.

The cup had stood in the Prefects' Room all the summer. Occasionally, leading cricketers have been seen standing in the doorway, gazing at it rather thoughtfully—particularly after they've scored a century or skittled out another team.

One thing that puzzled everybody was the question of who was to pick out the best cricketer and how he was going to do it. It seemed odd that the anonymous donor of the cup had had nothing to say on the subject.

But all doubts were ended at the meeting called by Wingate last Thursday evening. When the crowd arrived, they saw that the cup was standing on the chairman's table, and in front of it was a sealed envelope that had come through the post.

After briefly stating the facts about the cup, Wingate explained that he had been informed by telephone that the donor of the cup had himself chosen the winner, and that the lucky fellow's name would be found inside an envelope which was being posted to Wingate. The envelope on the table was the fateful envelope—to be opened by Wingate in public.

Amid great excitement, Wingate opened the envelope, took out a slip of paper, and looked at it. Then he jumped.

He gave it a closer scrutiny, and those who were near enough say that he actually turned red in the face! The crowd got a little restive.

"Read it out, Wingate!"

"Cough it up, old sport!"

Wingate put down the paper and looked at the crowd again. Whatever name it was that was on the paper, Wingate looked rather disturbed about it.

"The name of the winner," he began, "is— er—"

He hesitated and had another look, as though he really couldn't believe his eyes.

"The name of the winner, according to the paper in this envelope," he then said, "is Horace Coker, Fifth Form!"

"OW!"

It was a great gasp that went up from the crowd. If you'd dropped a bombshell on them, they couldn't have been more surprised! After the first gasp, they started yelling.

"COKER!"

"Why, he doesn't know a cricket-bat from a football!"

Jeers and mocking laughter were heard on all sides. But if nobody else took the result seriously, there was one chap who did. That chap was Horace Coker himself! He swaggered up to the platform as though he fully deserved the honour.

Wingate looked at the cup, then looked at Coker.

"Sorry, old chap," he said. "But you can't have it!"

"Eh?"

"There is evidently a mistake somewhere. It's supposed to be for the best cricketer—not the worst! The man who's presenting the cup must have got hold of your name by mistake!"

"You silly ass!" roared Coker. "He did nothing of the kind! He knows the players here as well as you do yourself!"

"Then you know him?" ejaculated Wingate. And Coker, before he could stop himself, then let the cat right out of the bag.

"Of course I know him!" he yelled. "I'm the chap myself!"

And now, dear reader, you won't need any further explanation of the howls of laughter that were afterwards heard at that meeting—nor of the hectic scenes when Coker was rolled down the steps of the School House and ducked in the lily-pond.

The only chap who still can't understand it is Coker. But, then, Coker never could understand anything!