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BEGINNING . . . ANOTHER ORIGINAL ADVENTURE OF THE FAT BOY OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL

BUNTER THE LION-TAMER!

BY FRANK RICHARDS

As Billy Bunter started to run, the tramp reached out with the crook of his stick. A fat leg was hooked from under him and he pitched forward. "Oooooooooogh!" he spluttered.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

At Last!

"TWOPENCE!"

"Threepence!"

"Sixpence!"

"One absurd penny!"

"Nix!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five of the Remove through his big spectacles in surprise.

The Remove had come out of the Form-room in morning break. Harry Wharton & Co. were going through pockets, turning out cash, and counting up the same.

Harry Wharton produced twopence, Bob Cherry threepence, Frank Nugent a whole sixpence, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh a penny. Johnny Bull failed to produce anything.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter, while we're counting up our wealth!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's see—twopence and threepence, that's five-pence——"

"I say——"

"And a whole tanner—that's elevenpence. And Inky's solitary brown—that makes up a bob."

"Rotten!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sadly. "It looks as if the esteemed circus is off."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It does, rather!" he agreed. "Admission one shilling to Muccolini's Magnificent Circus and Menagerie—that's the lowest price. We've got enough to admit one——"

"I say, you fellows, do listen to a chap!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I say, I'm going to the circus tomorrow afternoon, and I was going to offer to take you fellows—my treat, you know."

"Muccolini's Circus will have moved on by the time your postal order comes!" said Bob, with another shake of the head. "I don't know how long they're staying at Courtfield, but it can't be hundreds of years——"

"I'm expecting a postal order today!" snorted Bunter.

"Or the one you were expecting the day I came to Greyfriars?" asked Harry Wharton.

"The fact is, it's from one of my titled relations," explained Bunter. "I'm pretty certain it will come today. I'll tell you fellows what. We all want to go to the circus tomorrow. Let's pool resources—see? One of you fellows may get a remittance in time, but I'm pretty certain of my postal order. If it runs to it, we'll book a box at the circus. You can get the Royal Box there for a pound, and we can all cram into it. Mind, I'm only suggesting this, because most likely you fellows won't get anything, and my postal order is a practical certainty."

"May as well agree," grinned Bob Cherry. "If we go, that fat barrel will roll along anyhow, and we shall have to pay for his ticket."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Let's go and look for letters," said Nugent.

"Hold on a minute!" said Bunter. "Let's have it clear. Any one of us six who gets a remittance stands the tickets at the circus, and if it runs to it we book a box for a pound—what?"

"Right as rain!"

"I shall expect you fellows to stick to that!" said Bunter. "Of course, there's just a chance that my postal order might not come——"

"Quite a healthy chance, I think!" chuckled Bob. "Come on, you men!"

The Famous Five walked away, with Billy Bunter rolling after them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's one for Bunter!" cried Bob Cherry, reaching the rack first. "None for us!"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter rolled up. Bob hooked out a letter and handed it to him, and the fat Owl of the Remove blinked at it through his big spectacles.

"Oh, it's only from the pater!" said Bunter. "I jolly well know what's in it—jaw! Still, I suppose I may as well look in it."

But as he unfolded the letter he gave a sudden jump and a startled squeak.

"Oh crikey!"

An engraved slip of paper was enclosed in the letter. Billy Bunter blinked at it through his big spectacles with his startled eyes almost bulging through those spectacles. And the other fellows stared at it. They were astonished—though not, apparently, as astonished as Bunter!

"Oh crikey!" repeated the fat Owl.

It was a postal order for a pound!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

A Spot of Bother for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER rolled into the Remove Form Room when the bell ran for third school with a deeply thoughtful wrinkle in his fat brow.

For whole terms the fat Owl of the Remove had been expecting a postal order—or, at all events he declared so, and perhaps believed so.

Now, at last, it had come!

But instead of going over the counter at the school shop for refreshments liquid and solid, that pound had to be reserved to pay for the Royal box at the circus on Wednesday afternoon!

No wonder Bunter's fat brow was deeply clouded with dismal thoughts.

"Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

No answer.

"Bunter!"

All the Remove glanced round at Bunter. Quelch's voice was growing both loud and deep, and a glint had come into his gimlet eyes.

Peter Todd reached out a long leg and kicked Bunter under the desk, to draw his attention. Then the fat junior woke up, as it were.

"Wow!" howled Bunter.

"Bunter!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Ow! Wow!" gasped Bunter. "Some beast hacked me—ow!"

"You were not listening to me, Bunter!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes, sir! I-I——"

"I will repeat my question. What did King Vortigern offer to the Saxons in return for their aid against the Picts and Scots?"

"A-a postal order for a pound, sir——"

"What?"

"Oh lor'! I-I-I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the whole Remove.

Evidently that postal order filled Bunter's thoughts to the total exclusion of early English history.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Bunter! How dare you make so absurd an answer! You are the most obtuse and backward boy in the Form, Bunter. You are also the laziest and most careless. Bunter! Tell me at once what you know about King Vortigern."

"Oh! I—I know all about him, of course, sir!" he stammered. "He—he won the Battle of Trafalgar, sir——"

"The what?"

"I—I mean the Battle of Waterloo, sir! He—he said 'Kiss me, Hardy' and—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And—and he never smiled again, sir!" said Bunter.

"Bless my soul!"

"Is—is—isn't that right, sir?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Bunter, you will remain in the Form-room after class, and I shall set you a history paper."

"Oh crikey!"

When the Remove were dismissed after third school, Billy Bunter was kept in. Mr. Quelch provided him with a history paper to keep him busy, and left him in the Form-room on his lonely own.

It was not till a quarter of an hour before dinner that Mr. Quelch came in to take Bunter's paper and release him.

He snorted at the paper, apparently not satisfied. However, he let Bunter go, which, after all, was all that mattered.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

A Fateful Meeting!

BILLY BUNTER managed to banish King Vortigern from his mind very easily. Far more pressing matters engaged his attention—in particular the postal order which was, as the saying goes, burning a hole in his pocket.

On one thing Bunter was determined—that postal order would never be used to pay for circus seats. Not while he continued to live in a world where the supply of grub never did meet the demands of his enormous appetite.

But how to buy it, that was the problem. The school tuck shop was ruled right out, for the Famous Five would be watching it with eyes like hawks. It would have to be Uncle Clegg's in the village, after school.

So, when the coast was clear, Bunter slipped out of the school gates, down the lane and on to the common, making his way to Courtfield by way of a narrow leafy footpath.

And then——

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He stumbled over something in the dusky woodland path, and tripped.

In point of fact, it was a long leg stretched out from a man who was sitting under a tree. And as Bunter tripped over it, a gruff, husky, angry voice proceeded from the proprietor of the long leg.

"'Ere, look where you're going, four eyes!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He righted himself, and blinked round at the man who had spoken. He was not a nice man to look at. He was roughly clad, with a dingy, battered bowler hat on an untidy head, and three or four days' growth of beard on a stubbly chin.

Clearly, the man was a tramp—and he looked the surliest, roughest, and most unpleasant tramp that Bunter had ever seen.

Bunter gave him one startled blink through his big spectacles, and started to run.

The tramp, grasping his stick, reached out. The stick had a crook handle, and he reached for Bunter with the crook.

What happened next, Bunter hardly knew.

A fat leg was hooked from under him, and he came down, hitting the county of Kent with a heavy bump.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Bunter, as he sprawled.

The tramp grinned, and rose to his feet.

As Billy Bunter lay gasping and spluttering, the man stirred him, with a poke of the stick in his fat ribs.

"Git hup!" said the tramp threateningly.

The fat junior crawled to his feet.

"Tramping on a man's legs!" said the tramp indignantly. "Can't a cove sit down and 'ave a minute's rest!"

"I—I never saw you!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, you see me now, and you see this here stick! Five bob will fix it!" said Mr. Guggs.

"I—I haven't got five shillings!" groaned Bunter. "Or lor'!"

"If you ain't!" said the tramp. "I'll take wot you got!"

Bunter, desperate, made a bound to escape. The tramp made a bound after him, and grabbed him by a fat shoulder.

"No, you don't!" he grinned.

"Leggo!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Leggo! Help! Fire! Murder! Help!"

"Take that, and shut up!" hissed Mr. Guggs, and his heavy hand smacked Billy Bunter's head with a hefty smack that made it ring.

"Ow! Wow!" howled Bunter.

"Now then, you keep quiet!" said the tramp; and, holding Bunter by the collar with his left hand, he began to grope through the fat Owl's pockets with his right.

Billy Bunter was no fighting man. But the bare thought of losing that pound stirred him to reckless resistance.

The tramp, hardly expecting resistance from the fat schoolboy, was taken by surprise as a fat fist crashed full into his stubbly face. Recovering, he jumped at the sprawling fat Owl.

In the excitement of the combat, neither Bunter nor the tramp had noticed, or heeded, a rustling in the branches that jutted over the narrow path. Neither was aware of a new arrival on the scene, till a powerful hand gripped the tramp by the back of the neck as he was jumping at Bunter.

Billy Bunter, gasping for breath, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at the man who had come to his aid so unexpectedly.

He saw a big, broad-shouldered, powerful man—almost a giant in stature.

There was something familiar in the herculean figure, the strong-featured face, the massive shoulders. Suddenly he remembered that he had seen that face and figure in pictures on all the hoardings about Courtfield and Friardale for the last week—pictured in the circus bills. The big man was Marco, the lion-tamer of Muccolini's Magnificent Menagerie and Circus.

Little did William George Bunter realize that this was more than a rescue—and a saving of his precious pound. It was a meeting that was to give him a reputation of which he would never have dreamed. Billy Bunter, lion-tamer!

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK