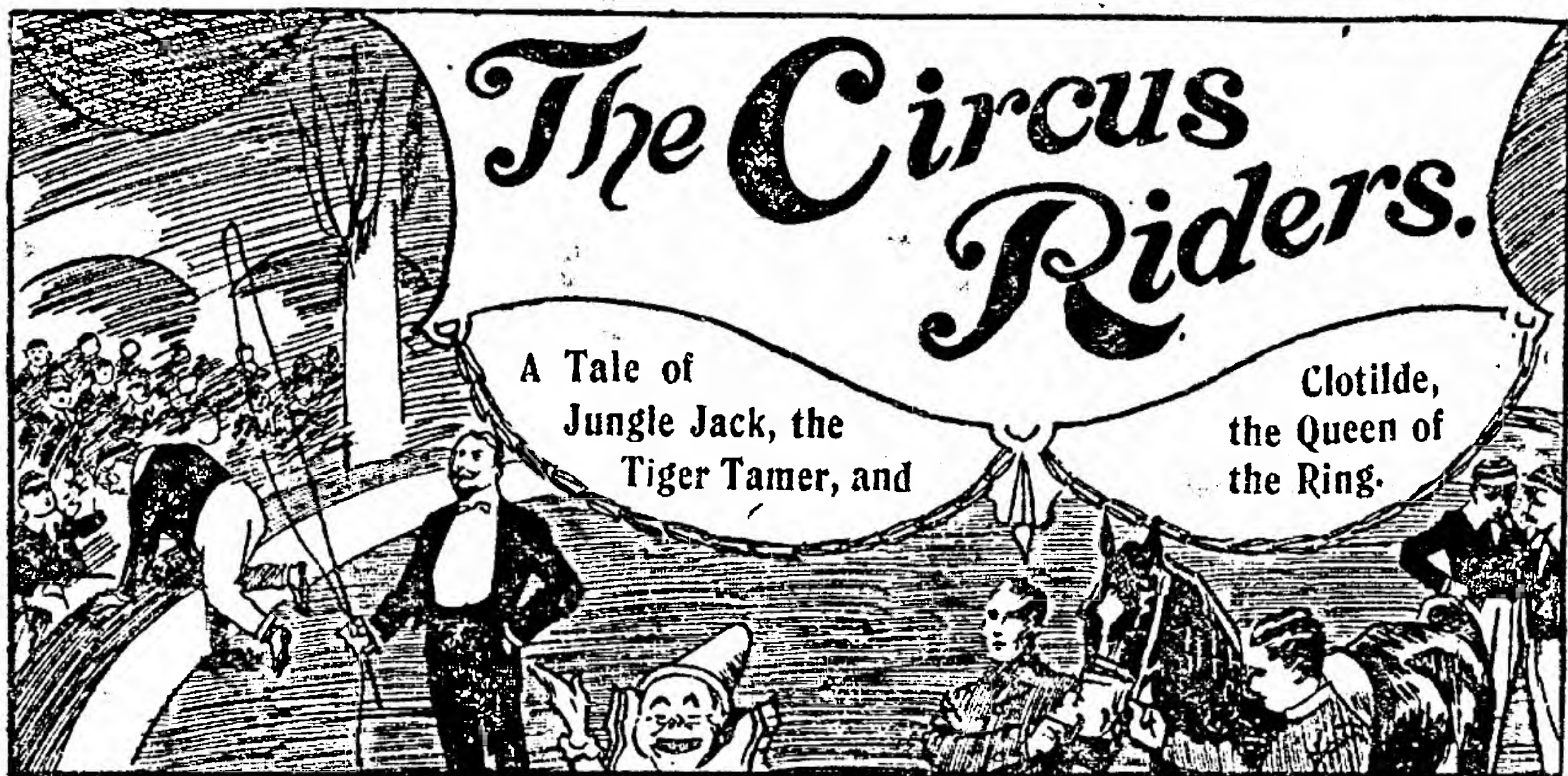


The Second Long Story.Complete in this Issue.

By HARRY DORRIAN.

CHAPTER I.

The Clown Announces Himself.

"W H O A - A !"

The little, fat fellow, who was driving a gaily-painted caravan along the road leading to the village of Friardale, drew in the reins, and the horse stopped.

The driver, about whose ears were traces of colour, as if his face had been painted, and all the paint had not been quite washed away, cocked his silk hat on one side, and then gazed at the big iron gates at which he had pulled up.

"Hallo, you gipsy, what do you want?"

The driver rolled his big eyes as a fat youth wearing a huge pair of spectacles, opened the gates and came up to the caravan.

The man smiled at the boy in the Eton suit.

"Well, what do you want?"

"My lad, you are apparently sane and intelligent—apparently, I say—yet you cannot tell me from a gipsy—a common or garden gipsy?"

The fat youth stared through his huge spectacles.

"Well," he said, "if you aren't a gipsy, who are you? You are not coming to the school, are you?"

"Have you not seen me before?"

"N-no!"

"Why, not on the coloured bills?"

The fat youth looked puzzled, and shook his head in the negative.

The driver of the caravan assumed an injured expression, and rolled his big eyes.

"Ah, well," he said, "I must introduce myself! Youth, thou who hast seen but little of the world, Joseph Montgomery Pye is before you!" And the fat gentleman raised his silk hat.

"Joseph—Montgomery—Pye!"

"Yes; that is my cognomen. I am the King of Funny Merchants. I am the renowned wheeze-wangler, the Pride of the Tan—in short, the clown of Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus!"

Another boy came through the gates, and smacked Mr. Pye's astounded listener a resounding thwack on the back.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, my fat Bunter!" he said. "And who is your friend in the State Coach?"

"Ow!" yelled the fat junior. "Really, Cherry, there was no need to thump me like that."

"Well, who is this duffer in the topper?"

Bunter adjusted his spectacles, and grinned.

"He says his name is Pye, and this is his circus."

"You seem to have misunderstood me, my son. I am

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Joseph Montgomery Pye, the wheeze-wangler of Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus. This is not the circus, it is the advance-guard. The signor, with all the wild beasts of the forest, and the Strong Man's dumb-bells, is coming up in the rear."

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I suppose it's a cock-shy kind of affair. Big tent, and the audience have to sit on the grass to see an old woman made up as a girl go round and round the ring on an old cab-horse."

Joey Pye sighed.

"And you, my lad, seem not to have heard of Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring. The wonderful child equestrienne. The beautiful girl-rider, who, with Mr. Joseph Montgomery Pye, and Jungle Jack, the boy Tiger Tamer, has performed before all the crowned heads of Europe—more or less."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry, the junior who had joined Billy Bunter, roared with laughter as the jovial little man rattled off his rignmarole of sentences.

"My son, your hilarity is misplaced. Tell me, what is this building you appear to inhabit?"

"Greyfriars School," said Bob Cherry.

"Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"Is this far from Friardale Common?"

"About a quarter of a mile, perhaps a bit more," replied Bob Cherry. "Why?"

"Ahem, it looks like business here!"

"Is this show going—"

"My son, mayhap you will adopt a more respectful manner when referring to Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome," interrupted Mr. Pye.

"Is the circus going to be on Friardale Common?" asked Billy Bunter.

"It is," replied Joey Pye. "And here come Jack Talbot and Miss Clotilde."

"Will it be worth going to see?" said the fat boy.

"When you see Miss Clotilde, sonny, you will want to go in the early doors," replied Joey, who was devoted to the girl-rider of the circus.

Thud, thud, thud!

A boy and a girl were coming along the road on horse-back, and were rapidly approaching the gates of Greyfriars School.

"My only hat, what a ripping girl!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter cleared his spectacles and readjusted them, and blinked with interest as the two riders cantered up to the caravan.

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GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

The girl was quite young, and sat her big black Arab with perfect ease and grace.

The two schoolboys raised their caps, and the girl smiled—a pleasant smile.

Jack Talbot, known to the circus-going public as Jungle Jack, reined his horse to the side of the caravan.

"Hallo, Joey," he said, with a laugh, "how much further before we get to Greyfriars?"

"Not half a mile, sonny."

"Well, we'll get along. The signor is not far behind."

"We're going to have good business here, Jackie," said Joseph Montgomery Pye.

"I hope so."

"We shall have to turn them away at the door; it will be crowded every night."

Clotilde, Jungle Jack's mounted companion, laughed.

"You are very sanguine, Mr. Pye."

"What the wheeze-monger of Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome doesn't know, isn't worth knowing," replied Joey.

"Yes; but how can you tell as early as this in the morning that we're—"

"Why, bless you, I suggested to the signor myself that we should pitch near Greyfriars School!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's up?" said Jack Talbot.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Bob Cherry and Billy Bunter leant against the wheels of the caravan and roared with laughter.

"What did you say, my lad?" said Joey Pye, as the two juniors paused for breath.

"I didn't speak," replied Bob Cherry. "But I like that yarn of yours that you knew the circus was coming to Greyfriars."

Clotilde smiled, as Joey Pye blushed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the schoolboys. And the short-sighted Bunter leant against Jack Talbot's horse in mistake for the caravan.

"Look out!" said Jack Talbot, giving the laughing junior a jab in the back with his toe.

"Ow!"

Billy Bunter jumped into the air, as though he had been shot.

"Ow! Oh, I've been kicked!"

"Where, you frabjous ass?" asked Bob Cherry, catching hold of Bunter's arm.

"Oh—oh, dear, in the back!"

"Here?"

"Ow! Don't touch it! My back's broken! I'm sure it is!"

Jungle Jack and Joseph Montgomery Pye simultaneously jumped to the ground, and steadied Billy Bunter.

"What is it?" said Jack Talbot.

"Oh, dear; I'm afraid I'm dying," moaned Bunter. "It landed me right in the back."

"What did?"

"The horse's hind-hoof!"

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Jack Talbot; "but really, it was your own fault!"

"Oh-h, I've come over quite faint!"

Joey Pye caught hold of the fat junior, and, letting down the steps at the rear of the caravan, sat Bunter down.

"That's all right, sonny," explained the clown. "You'll feel all right in a minute."

"Oh-h, I believe if I had a mouthful of something to eat it would set me right!"

"Something to eat?"

"Yes. You know, Cherry and I got up early this morning to go for a run, and I haven't had anything to eat since last night. And then I only had three helpings of beef, and four helpings of rice pudding, and—"

"Four helpings?" gasped Joey Pye, interrupting the greedy schoolboy's flow of language.

"Yes; and then I had some cake in Wharton's study, and—"

"Some cake?"

"Yes; and Bulstrode gave me some pastries that had got stale, and—"

"Some pastries?"

"Yes; and I was going to say that Frank Nugent gave me some toffee that had got burnt; but it tasted all right, and—"

"You ate it?"

"Yes; but I think if I had a mouthful, it would set my back right."

"But how could the horse have kicked you?" said Jack Talbot, as Joey Pye opened the door of the caravan, and entered.

Billy Bunter blinked at his questioner.

"Oh-h!" he groaned; "the brute got me right between the shoulders."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack Talbot. "That was me."

"Oh, dear, I suppose I shall carry the marks of the horse-shoe on my back to the grave?"

"How can you when I tell you that I kicked you?"

"You!" gasped Bunter.

"Yes; you were leaning against my horse, and I gave you a touch in the back with my foot to get you away, as Dapple is rather inclined to land out."

"You young humbug!" laughed Bob Cherry, handing Billy Bunter his cap, which had fallen to the ground.

"Well, it has been an awful shock," muttered Bunter.

"Rats! Why it was nothing!"

"That's all you know, Bob Cherry! I—I'm all in a flutter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've never been kicked by a horse, I can see," said Bunter indignantly.

"Ha, ha! Nor have you Bunt, or you'd know it!" grinned Bob.

Clotilde and Jack Talbot laughed heartily.

Billy Bunter was really so absurd; and not knowing of the fat junior's reputation for greediness, they could see no object in his absurdity.

But Bunter had had one eye firmly fixed on the open door of the caravan all the time he was speaking, and as Joey Pye reappeared with half of a huge pork-pie on a dish, his little eyes lit up with an expression of greedy anticipation.

"I—I'm feeling quite faint," he murmured.

Joey Pye grinned.

He was beginning to "tumble" to Billy Bunter's "little game," as Bob Cherry explained to his study-mates afterwards, and he rather thought that he had hit on the right remedy for Master Bunter in the shape of the huge piece of pork-pie.

But there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, and Billy Bunter felt faint in good earnest when Clotilde innocently interfered.

"Why, Joey," she cried, "what ever are you thinking about? Fancy bringing out a great piece of pork-pie to a boy who is feeling faint! Take it back, you great goose, and bring a little water instead."

"Yes, Clotilde," said Joey meekly, at the same time shooting a sly glance at Billy Bunter.

The fat junior gave a horrified gasp as he saw Mr. Pye whisk the pie round to take it in again.

"Here, I say! Hi! Hold on!" he exclaimed in alarm, recovering from his fainting-fit with remarkable rapidity. "Come back, there! Bring that pie back! That's just what I want. I don't want any water!"

And there was a world of scorn in Billy Bunter's tone as he pronounced the last word.

Bob Cherry burst into a roar of laughter, and Mr. Pye and Jack Talbot grinned broadly.

Clotilde opened her eyes wide in astonishment. She gazed at the fat junior in genuine amazement, which, however, quickly turned to amusement.

Billy Bunter snatched the enormous chunk of pie off the plate as soon as it was brought within reach of him, and proceeded to devour it in huge mouthfuls and with great and obvious relish.

It was a really amusing sight.

"My eyes," gasped Mr. Pye, throwing up his eyes humorously, "what a capacity! What a turn it would make at the circus! Don't they ever feed you at all at Greyfriars, then, youth?" he asked, turning to Bob Cherry.

"Of course they do, and jolly well, too," said Bob Cherry warmly. "Greyfriars is a jolly good school. That cormorant Bunter eats enough for at least ten ordinary chaps every day of the year."

"Oh, really, Cherry," remonstrated Billy Bunter, with his mouth full of pork-pie, "you know I never really get enough to eat. I think they're very stingy with the grub at Greyfriars."

"Shut up, you young porpoise!" exclaimed Bob Cherry half angrily.

Bunter had no idea of "sticking up for his school," or anything of that sort; but it annoyed Bob Cherry, who was justly proud of the "coll," to have its character disparaged by Billy Bunter.

Bunter assumed an injured expression as he finished the pork-pie, to the evident astonishment of Joey, who had not expected to see such a huge chunk devoured in such a short time.

"Really, Cherry," he said, in a tone of expostulation, "I don't think you ought to be rude to me, especially"—and Billy Bunter puffed out his chest, and looked very virtuous—"especially when there are ladies present."

Bob Cherry glared at him as he smirked at Clotilde in his insufferably self-satisfied way.

"You talk as if I could do nothing but eat," continued Billy Bunter, who felt that he was "holding the boards," as

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NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE FIGHTING PARSON'S CHRISTMAS FEAST."

A Splendid Love, Complete Tale of Hector Drake.

By JACK NORTH.

"RUFUS HAIGH; TRAILER."

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure.

"THE CIRCUS VENTRILOQUIST."

AND A Love, Complete Tale of Jack Talbot and Clotilde. By HARRY DORRAN.

it were. "As a matter of fact, I seldom get enough nourishment for my delicate constitution. I'm not a greedy chap, but I admit that I like a lot."

Here Joey Pye nodded to himself in a thoughtful kind of way, at the same time eyeing the dish on which, a few minutes earlier, an enormous piece of pork-pie had rested.

"I should think he does," he muttered half aloud.

"As I say," continued Billy Bunter, not hearing Joey's dry remark, "as I say, I'm good at other things besides eat—er—I—I mean, I'm a splendid athlete, you know! There's practically nothing in the sporting line I'm not expert in too."

"Oh, you—you young fabricator!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, just under his breath.

"Beg pardon, Cherry. Did you speak?" inquired Bunter, with elaborate politeness. He had heard Bob muttering to himself.

"No—oh, no! Go on!" said Bob grimly, turning rather red as Clotilde's eyes rested on his face a minute. But he registered a mental vow to "make the young ass sit up," afterwards.

"Oh, I thought I heard you mumbling to yourself, that's all," said Billy Bunter, who was too short-sighted to notice Bob's glares; "but if you didn't, all right."

"Oh, shut up, you young owl!" muttered Bob, turning redder than ever.

Mr. Pye laughed.

He seemed very amused about something, and Clotilde and Jack were smiling too.

But Bunter went calmly on with his extraordinary statements.

"Then, I'm a splendid photographer, you know," he said, blinking up at Mr. Pye through his enormous spectacles. "Every illustrated paper in the United Kingdom will be publishing my photographs very shortly."

"As an advertisement for 'Dr. Bloggin's Fattener,' perhaps," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! You're jealous of my powers as a photographer, you know you are. All the chaps in this school are jealous of me."

And Billy Bunter blinked up at Mr. Pye and sighed pathetically.

Joey Pye grinned broadly.

"I'm sure they are," he said. "And what else can you do, my little man? Is that all?"

Billy Bunter blinked up at him a little doubtfully.

He did not relish being called a "little man," but he was too stupid to see that the irrepressible Mr. Pye was trying to draw him further.

He thought he was really impressing the "circus folk" with his description of his extraordinary abilities.

He blinked round him to get an inspiration, and his eyes caught the picture of Jack Talbot sitting easily and gracefully on his big grey, which was moving about restlessly, as if it was tired of waiting, as no doubt it was.

Billy Bunter was struck by a brilliant idea.

He remembered that during a visit to Margate one summer he had had several rides on the beach donkeys there. It was true that he had fallen off even then, but that was a matter he preferred to forget.

"Then I'm a jolly good rider," he said boastfully. "You should just see me on a horse, you know."

Jack Talbot and Clotilde looked interested, and even Joey Pye's grin faded from his face. This was touching on a matter that interested the circus people.

Bob Cherry stared at Bunter.

This was the first he had heard of this latest accomplishment, and he was inclined to put it down to the efforts of Billy's imagination, which was fertile enough for a newspaper reporter.

He had no proof that the fat junior could not ride, however, though the latter's appearance justified grave doubts on the subject.

Seeing that he had made somewhat of a sensation, Billy Bunter proceeded to try and elaborate his statement.

"Yes, you should just see me on a—cavorting steed, you know. I can ride like—like anything!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Bob Cherry. "I should just like to see you on a cavorting steed."

"Really, Cherry, you don't doubt my word, do you?"

And Billy Bunter looked virtuously indignant.

"Well, that's as may be," replied Bob Cherry diplomatically. "I've known you to make—er—slight inaccuracies before now."

"Really, Cherry—"

"But I tell you what," went on Bob, struck by a brilliant idea, "if you're such a splendid horseman, perhaps this chap here would let you have a go up the road on his horse."

And Bob looked inquiringly at Jack Talbot.

Billy Bunter backed away from the horse in alarm.

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"Oh, I—I say, Cherry," he gasped, "as a matter of fact, I—I'm still feeling rather unwell after that fearful kick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, I—I shouldn't like to ask such a thing of a chap I don't know. You—you see, I—I—"

"Oh, scat! Will you let him have a ride—er—Jungle Jack?"

Jack smiled.

"Well," he said, "I'm afraid I can't. The horse isn't mine, you see, and if anything happened—"

"Oh, I see! What a pity!"

Bob Cherry looked very disappointed.

As a matter of fact, Jack didn't like the idea of seeing Bunter on Dapple's back at all; and had the horse been his own, he would have refused Bob's request.

Now that he was quite certain that there was no chance of his being allowed to mount the horse, Billy Bunter became as brave as a lion. He came forward with a swagger.

"Well, I don't mind if I do have a ride," he said, eyeing Jack Talbot a little nervously still. "I always think a ride before breakfast does you good, you know."

But Jack Talbot shook his head, to Billy Bunter's secret relief.

"Can't be done, I'm afraid!"

"Just a little way—say a couple of miles," urged Billy Bunter. "I'll be back in four or five minutes, you know."

Jack shook his head again, and Joey Pye grinned.

"Two miles in four or five minutes is pretty good going," murmured Joey, "especially on the road!"

"Well, I tell you what," said Billy emboldened by Jack's firm refusals. "Just you let me put him at that fence, to see how he jumps."

"No, I tell you!"

"Well, look here," said Billy Bunter, going too far, as usual, "may I have a ride on this—er—this girl's horse?"

Jack Talbot frowned.

There was something objectionable in Billy Bunter's tone, which Jack resented.

Besides, Mahomet, Clotilde's big black Arab, was an exceedingly spirited animal, much more so than Dapple, and Jack had an idea that Billy would be far from safe on his back, in spite of his boasting.

"Of course you can't!" he said sharply.

Billy Bunter assumed a discontented expression.

"You see," explained Clotilde, with a smile, "you could not ride side-saddle, anyway."

Bunter gave a grunt.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said airily. "I don't mind little things like that, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Joey Pye and the two boys.

Clotilde looked at the fat junior in surprise.

Then a mischievous expression crossed her pretty face.

"Oh, well, if you don't mind," she said carelessly, "perhaps you might have a little ride, after all!"

"Oh-h! Oo-er!"

Billy Bunter began to quake, and he retreated towards the school gates in alarm.

"Mahomet will probably try all kinds of tricks, but I don't suppose you will mind that," continued Clotilde calmly, apparently noticing nothing.

"Ow! Wow-yow!"

"Whatever's the matter?"

"Ow! My back!"

"Your back again!"

"Yes, it's come on worse again! Ow-wow!"

Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

The strident notes of the Greyfriars breakfast-bell interrupted Billy Bunter's lamentations.

"There's our breakfast-bell! We must be off. I'm afraid! Good-bye! See you all again at the circus!" sang out Bob Cherry cheerfully, raising his cap to Clotilde.

"Come on, you fat young humbug!"

Billy Bunter gave a grunt.

He had not troubled to raise his cap in his hurry to obey the—to him—doubly welcome summons of the breakfast-bell, but had already turned and was making for the school buildings as fast as his little fat legs would carry him.

Bob Cherry stared after him, and then, with a chuckle, and a wave of the hand to his new acquaintances, ran off after the fat junior, leaving the circus chums laughing heartily.

ANSWERS

ONE PENNY.

Every Tuesday.

GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

CHAPTER 2.

The Handsome Man Apologises.

FRIARDALE Common presented a busy scene. Signor Tomsonio, the proprietor of the World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome, was here, there, and everywhere. The big tent, wherein the grand performance took place, had been raised, and a cluster of smaller tents were now being put up at the side of it.

There was a perfect maze of caravans, and just now smoke was rising from the chimneys of them all, the appetising smell of food being cooked was general.

Jack Talbot had been working hard all the morning, and he threw down the huge mallet, with which he had been driving in pegs, with a sigh of relief as he heard Joey Pye calling him to come and have some dinner.

Carson, the acrobat—the "Handsome Man"—looked up from the rope he was tightening.

Jim Carson hated the boy tiger-tamer, and had always made an effort to make Jack Talbot's life a misery ever since the boy had joined the circus.

"You lazy young scoundrel, you!" he hissed.

"What do you mean?"

"You're shirking your work!"

"I have done my share this morning," said Jungle Jack indignantly.

"Bah! You do less than anyone else!"

"I don't see how you can tell when you spend nearly all the morning in the canteen with the doc."

Carson's eyes glistened.

"Do you want me to give you a thrashing, boy?"

"I am not afraid of you, although you are a man in years."

"You want to fight me?"

"Not at all," replied Jack. "You seem anxious to quarrel, and—"

"Then take that!"

The Handsome Man's left shot out, and caught Jack Talbot under the chin, and the boy tiger-tamer went to the ground with a crash.

"You—you cad!"

Jungle Jack jumped to his feet and faced Carson.

"I'll give you the thrashing you have been wanting for a long time, you whelp!" muttered the acrobat. "Are you ready for—"

Carson stopped suddenly as a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and he turned to look into the stern face of Samson, the Strong Man, who had come up quietly with Joey Pye.

"You saw what he did, Sammy?" said Joey Pye.

Samson breathed hard through his nose, and shook Jim Carson.

"Yes," he said, "I saw!"

"Let me go!"

"I won't! I am going to thrash you!"

"Mind your own business!"

The Strong Man smiled grimly. Intellectually, he was not particularly bright. He was of the burly, good-natured kind, and Jack Talbot was a great favourite of his.

"You will apologise to Jackie!" he said, getting a firmer grip of the Handsome Man.

"I—I will see him—"

"You will apologise!"

"Let me go!"

Samson lifted the bullying acrobat off his feet, and turned to Joey Pye, who was whispering to Jack.

"Joey!"

"Sammy?"

"You see that whip over there?"

Mr. Pye grinned, and fetched the whip.

"Sammy," he said, "what's the wheeze?"

Samson was looking very severe as the Handsome Man made an effort to wriggle free.

"Let him go, Sammy," said Jack Talbot, coming forward. "I am not frightened of him, and he only knocked me down with a coward's blow."

"No," said the Strong Man. "I saw it all, and he is going to be thrashed."

"Hear, hear!" assented Joey. "If you hold him, Sammy, I will oblige with the whip."

"Right," said the Strong Man. "Now, Carson, are you going to apologise?"

"No, hang you!"

"Very well, Joey, you can start!"

Mr. Pye raised his arm, and the next moment the long lash fell across the acrobat's shoulders.

"Ow!"

"Now, you cad," muttered Samson, "will you apologise to Jack Talbot?"

"N-no!"

Crack!

Joey Pye brought the whip down again, and the Handsome Man squirmed in the Strong Man's grip.

"Will you apol—"

"No, I'll die first!" roared Carson.

Crack!

Again the lash fell, and the bully's face went white with anger at the indignity of it all.

"You hound! Stop!" he shouted.

"Do you apologise to Jack Talbot?" demanded Samson.

"Yes!"

"Well, go on!" urged Joey Pye, raising the whip.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper, Talbot!" hissed the Handsome Man, turning to Jungle Jack.

"That is all right," said Jack. "Will you shake hands and forget?"

"Bah!" sneered Carson, as Samson let go his hold. "I will make you pay for this one day!"

"Go away, you cad!" said Joey.

"I sha'n't forget it!" And Carson walked slowly away in the direction of the canteen.

"Thanks, Sammy!" said Jack Talbot. "It was very good of you both to take my part."

"A pleasure, my boy," laughed Joey. "I could do that to the cad three times a day if Sammy would hold him. Of course, I could do it without any aid from Sammy, but—What did you say?"

"Liar!" replied the Strong Man.

"Well, come along and get something to eat," said Joey.

"I suppose I shall have proper respect shown to me one of these days."

And the two walked over to the large tent wherein Signor Tomsonio's circus hands took their meals.

Signor Tomsonio, the fat and jolly proprietor, gave his moustache an elaborate curl as the three entered.

"Come along, you boys!" he said, from the head of the table, which was well laden with food. "Tuck into it, for there is plenty more work to do this afternoon."

Joey Pye and Samson took their places on either side of Herr Biberach, the German animal tamer.

"Come along, Jack!"

Clotilde turned her pretty face to the boy, and beckoned him across to her side of the table.

"Thank you, Clotilde," said Jack. "I think I have got an appetite like that fat schoolboy."

"Hallo, sonny," exclaimed the circus proprietor, "what fat boy is that?"

Jack Talbot laughed.

"Oh, we passed a school called Greyfriars just before we got on to the common here, and Dapple kicked one of the pupils—at least, the pupil said he did."

"Was he badly hurt?"

"Yes, quite seriously, I think," replied Clotilde, smiling at Jack.

"Oh!"

"He was kicked between the shoulders, and he came over so faint Mr. Pye had to give him a pork-pie."

"A pork-pie?" gasped the signor.

"Yes; he ate it all—every crumb."

"Good gracious!"

"Good biz, too!" said Joey Pye, winking at Signor Tomsonio.

"What, one of my horses kicking a schoolboy as badly as that?"

"You do not follow my reasoning," said Joey, rolling his big eyes. "Don't you understand, signor, that as a schoolboy is kicked by Dapple, it is safe to assume that the said boy must belong to a school in the neighbourhood. In fact, that is the case, and we shall have a crowded house to-night."

"You duffer! How can you expect them to come and hear your stale wheezes?"

"If you won't allow me, the famous mirth-merchant and wheeze-wangler, to expound my old and original chestnuts, you will have to offer some other inducement to the public."

"Now, then, what do you mean, you—"

"I know," interrupted Clotilde. "I have an idea."

"What's that, my dear?" laughed Joey Pye.

"Do you remember what that fat boy said this morning, Jack?" said Clotilde, ignoring the clown's painful pun.

"What was that—about the kick?"

"No. Do you not remember he said he was a good horseman, and could ride anything he mounted?"

"Well?" said Signor Tomsonio, looking puzzled.

"Couldn't we make an offer for any of the audience to come into the ring and ride one of the horses?"

"An excellent wheeze, my dear," said the circus proprietor, his jovial face beaming as he imagined the picture some novices would make on—and off—the horse in the ring.

"Ja, ja, ja!" grunted Herr Biberach. "It would be funny mit der schoolboys, ain't it?"

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NEXT SATURDAY: "THE FIGHTING PARSON'S CHRISTMAS FEAST." A Splendid Long, Complete Tale of Rector Drake. By JACK NORTH.

"RUFUS HAICH; TRAILER." A Thrilling Tale of Adventure.

"THE CIRCUS VENTRILOQUIST." A Long, Complete Tale of Jack Talbot and Clotilde. By HARRY DORRAN.

"But what horse could we put them on?" said Jack Talbot.

"H-hem!" murmured the signor. "We don't want any of the boys to get damaged. That kind of thing isn't any good to the reputation of a circus."

"What about Bubble?" laughed Sammy.

"Why, the donkey?"

"Yes."

"Too easy, Sammy. Boys are cautious for sticking on the back of an ass. What did you say, Joey?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Pye, rolling his eyes. "I was only wondering how and when you had gained that knowledge."

"Look here, you duffer, you can—"

"I know what horse we can have," interrupted Jack Talbot. "He'll do just right!"

"Which, sonny?"

"Old Joe."

"Just the horse for the occasion," agreed Signor Tomsonio. "Up to all the tricks of the ring, but won't hurt a fly."

"What'll be the prize, signor?" said Joey.

"Oh, I've got an old silver cup in the caravan which I might value at ten pounds."

"Aren't you going to pay us this week, then?" growled Joey, feigning a pained look.

"What d'ye mean, you duffer?"

"Well, if you're going to give away all that wealth, we shall have to look after our interests."

"Do you mean that cup you found?" said Clotilde innocently. "The man you had to value it said it was worth about seven-and-sixpence. Don't you remember?"

"Perfectly!" replied Signor Tomsonio, giving his moustache a fierce curl. "I only stated that I might value it at ten pounds."

"That clears the air, then," sighed Joey Pye, "and it will be an extraordinary fine gala performance to-night. All the stars. Joseph Montgomery Pye, the funniest mirth-merchant and wheeze-wangler that ever wangled wheezes, and—"

"Shut up, Joey!"

"Samson, the Hercules, the Strong Man who can break iron chains, and is always broke himself, or—"

"Dry up!"

"Chuck it!"

"Clotilde, the beautiful Queen of the Ring, the Child Wonder of the—"

"Stop, you duffer!"

"And the Handsome Man, the wonderful—"

"Joey!" Signor Tomsonio interrupted the clown's extraordinary flow of language with a sharp command, and Joey beamed on the circus proprietor.

"What is it, signor?" he said.

"I was going to ask you why Jim Carson has not come into dinner yet."

"We had a slight difference of opinion with him this morning, so I suppose he is sulking."

"Why, what has occurred?" demanded the signor.

"Nothing much."

"But I want to know, because Carson has sulked a bit too much of late, and to-night I want him to do something 'extra' on the trapeze. Where is he now, Joey?"

"In the canteen, I suppose, as usual, with the doc."

"Do you mind bringing him along, Sammy," said the signor, turning to the Strong Man.

"Certainly!" replied Samson, smiling at Jack Talbot as he left the tent.

A minute or so later the Strong Man returned, followed by Jim Carson, who glared at Jungle Jack with such a venomous stare that Clotilde caught Jack's arm impulsively.

"Why, what has happened, Jack?" she said, in an anxious voice.

"Nothing much, Clotilde. Please do not be alarmed."

"Oh, I don't like Jim Carson!"

"And how he dislikes me!" said Jack Talbot, a little bitterly.

"Now, then, Jim Carson," exclaimed Signor Tomsonio, "how is it you have not been in to dinner? You haven't been working all the time, I suppose?"

"No," growled the Handsome Man. "What do you want?"

"Want? Why, I want you to be a little more civil when you talk to me, Jim Carson; that's what I want."

The Handsome Man growled.

"Oh, is that all you want, signor? I thought it might be because that young whelp"—indicating Jack Talbot—"had been to you with a bundle of lies."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Joey!" muttered Sammy.

"Why, what's all this about?" said the signor, with a puzzled look.

"Do not take any notice of it, signor," said Jack, rising

from his seat. "Mr. Carson and I quarrelled over a small matter, and he apologised to me for what he had done, and—"

"What was it he did?" interrupted the circus proprietor. "N-nothing," replied Jack Talbot; "and I shall be glad if you will let the matter drop."

"Bravo, Jackie, ain't it?" grunted Herr Biberach.

"Very well, then," said the signor, curling his moustache, "let's say no more about it."

"Stop a moment, Carson," continued the signor, as the Handsome Man turned to leave the tent. "I want you to put in a few extra turns to-night. We're going to have a full house."

"I will, signor."

"Now you are here, aren't you going to have something to eat?"

"I don't want anything."

And the Handsome Man strutted out of the tent.

CHAPTER 3.

The Boys of Greyfriars at the Circus.

THE naphtha lamps of Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus were blazing away, and three men in uniform were playing discordantly on brass instruments at the entrance of the big tent.

Although there was more than thirty minutes before the grand performance was due to take place, a big crowd of schoolboys and villagers thronged the circus ground.

A group of boys wearing the Greyfriars' School cap on the back of their heads were standing before a big poster, which had been pasted up on the wall of the large tent.

"My only hat!" gasped one of the boys, a curly-haired lad. "A cup valued at ten pounds!"

"Does it really say that, Wharton?" said the fat junior standing next to him.

"Of course it does, Billy! Can't you see for yourself?"

"Solid silver, too!"

"The silver is solidful," assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the Hindu junior, in the extraordinary English he had not acquired at Greyfriars School.

"I shall go in for that, you chaps," announced Bunter, the fat junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, I don't see what there is to laugh at," said Billy Bunter. "I shall go in for it."

"What, stick on the horse's back for five minutes?"

"Yes."

"But you can't ride, you ass!" laughed Frank Nugent, who was in the same Form—the Remove—as Billy Bunter.

"I think I can count that cup as good as won," replied Bunter.

"I don't believe you've ever been on a horse's back in your life."

"You see, you chaps."

"Bounding Joe's a good name for a buck-jumper," mused Harry Wharton.

"I believe you chaps are frightened of the name."

"Dry up, Bunter!"

"Well, I suppose I shall have to represent the old school," said Billy Bunter, readjusting the huge pair of spectacles he was wearing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"I feel quite sure I shall win the cup."

"Of course, I shall have a shot."

Billy Bunter blinked at Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove at Greyfriars.

"You?" he gasped.

"Yes, rather! I intend to stick on Joey's back for—"

"Hear, hear, sonny!"

The group of boys turned their heads suddenly and looked at the painted face of Joseph Montgomery Pye, the mirth-merchant of Signor Tomsonio's circus and hippodrome.

Mr. Pye was wearing a fool's cap and the usual clown's garb, and his little, fat figure looked very funny.

"Have you recovered from that terrible kick you received on your back this morning?" he asked, turning to Billy Bunter.

"Not quite," replied the fat junior. "There's a fearful bruise there of the hoof, and I shall put it down to that if I don't win that solid silver cup."

"And you are going in for it, my lad?"

"Yes, rather!"

Joey Pye rolled his big eyes.

"How sad it will be!" he murmured. "A smart lad with remarkable imagination and stowing capacity, cut off in his prime!"

"W-what do you mean?"

"It will be Bounding Joe's eighteenth victim."

"The eighteenth victim?" gasped Billy Bunter.



Bounding Joe bucked and kicked desperately and the audience applauded loudly as the lad from New Zealand was seen to keep his seat still.

Joey Pye looked up at the stars overhead, and frowned.

"I think the last man he threw was the saddest case of all!" he muttered.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Bob Cherry could easily see that Joey was "getting at" Billy, and they had difficulty in suppressing their mirth.

"Why, what was that?" said Billy, blinking up at Mr. Pye's face.

"It was two weeks ago, and Joe had been sulking just as he has been to-day."

"Yes, yes; go on!"

"The signor had made the same offer—a cup valued at a thousand pounds—"

"Ten pounds!" spluttered Bob Cherry.

"I stand corrected," said Joey. "Well, a man named Bill Bailey entered the ring and mounted the buck-jumping broncho."

"Well?"

"Oh-h-h-h!" sighed Mr. Pye. "Right in the prime of his life! I remember how poor Mrs. Bailey sang those pathetic words of a night time."

"What words?" gasped the inquisitive Billy Bunter.

"Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" gulped Joey Pye.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked at the laughing juniors, and then turned to Joey, who was still gazing up at the stars.

"What did you mean by the eighteenth victim?" he said.

"Didn't I say that Bill Bailey mounted Bounding Joe?"

"Yes."

"Need I say more?"

"Well, of course, that alters things. I can't be expected to risk my life, splendid rider as I am, just to win a rotten silver cup."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know you chaps are jealous of my wonderful abilities."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose all clever chaps have to put up with the same thing," muttered Billy.

"They do," agreed Mr. Pye. "You never spoke truer words."

Bunter was very susceptible to flattery, and he grinned at Joey.

"Of course, you know," he said, "these chaps—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"These chaps—"

"Dry up!"

"These chaps are—"

Bob Cherry cut short Billy's remarks by putting his hand across the fat junior's mouth.

"O-ow!" spluttered Bunter.

"Don't you think we might have a look at Bounding Joe?" suggested Harry Wharton, turning to Mr. Pye.

"Sonny, I have ten more minutes to spare, and in that time I will show you a portion—I say, a portion—of Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus. I suppose you are going

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NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE FIGHTING PARSON'S CHRISTMAS FEAST."

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale of Hector Drake,

By JACK NORTH.

AND

"RUFUS HAIGH, TRAILER."

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure.

AND

"THE CIRCUS VENTRILOQUIST."

A Long, Complete Tale of Jack Falbot and Clotilde. By HARRY DOBRIAN.

in later to see the most remarkable performance ever placed before the B. P.?"

"The B. P.?"

"Yes; the British public."

"Oh, rather! We're all going in."

"Bob seats?"

"Yes."

"Well, come along, gentlemen. It is always a pleasure to help educate the scholars of one of the best colleges in Great Britain."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Billy Bunter, whom Bob Cherry had released.

Mr. Pye led the way in the direction of a long tent.

"I will show you Bounding Joe, first of all," he said.

They entered the tent, which was divided up into some twenty stalls, and the clown singled out an old bay cob.

"Billy!"

Tom Brown, one of the group of juniors tugged at Bunter's sleeve, and whispered his name.

"Shut up, Brown!" growled the fat junior.

"Billy, I've got a wheezo."

"What is it?" replied Bunter. "About that feed you spoke about yester—"

"N-no!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Make this nag talk to this clown fellow."

"Make it—"

"Yes; use your ventriloquial voice."

Billy Bunter grinned, and cleared his throat. The fat junior had spent months and months practising ventriloquism, and at Greyfriars School had played many tricks with his extraordinary power, which he had got to almost perfect pitch now.

"This is Bounding Joe, gentlemen," said Mr. Pye. "A really most marvellous buck-jumper."

"Liar!"

The horse had been eating some hay, and as he gulped down a wisp at this moment, Billy Bunter threw his own voice to the champing jaws.

"Good gracious!"

Joseph Montgomery Pye staggered back in alarm.

"Yes, it's a lie!" came from the horse's mouth. "As a matter of fact, I used to pull a cab."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the juniors, who guessed where the mysterious voice came from.

The clown's fool-cap fell to the ground, and the horse blinked at it.

"What ass wears that?"

Joey Pye was really mystified, and he rolled his big eyes in alarm as he looked at the laughing juniors.

"I sha'n't ride this brute," said Bob Cherry. "Why, my only aunt, if the beast can talk, there's no knowing what it might not do!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

A hollow chuckling sound came from old Joe's mouth, and Mr. Pye edged out of the stall.

"Has it ever done this before?" gasped Frank Nugent, feigning ignorance.

"N-no!"

"Oh, yes, I have! I often have a quiet jaw to myself."

"Did you hear that?" muttered Joey Pye.

"Yes, rather!"

"Ho, ho, ho! I knew I should frighten you!"

The schoolboys entered into the joke now, and huddled together against the tent wall.

Joey Pye wiped his perspiring forehead, and smudged the various coloured paints.

"I think we had—"

"Joey Pye!"

"A deep voice shouted out the clown's name from outside the tent, and Joey answered feebly:

"Y-yes!"

"Joey Pye, you duffer, where are you?"

"Here, signor!" gasped Mr. Pye.

Signor Tomsonio, the genial proprietor of the World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome, came strutting into the tent.

"What are you doing in here, Joey!" shouted the signor. "Why, good gracious me, in twenty minutes' time the show is due to commence, and here are you! Why, you ought to be inflicting on the public some of your stale jokes at the —"

"You lads will bear me out, won't you?" interrupted Joey, appealing to the juniors from the school.

"Bear you out in what?" asked the signor.

"Old Joe's been talking!"

"Been whating?"

"Talking!"

"Talking!" shouted the circus proprietor.

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GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

"Yes!" gasped Mr. Pye, as old Joe turned his head to see who was shouting.

"Well, I'm surprised at you, Joey! I can understand a foreigner like Herr Biberach drinking too much, but you—you, a Britisher!"

"Look here, signor, I tell you that Joe talked."

"Don't be an idiot!"

"Ask the boys here, then."

Billy Bunter smiled and cleared his voice as the signor hesitated.

Old Joe shook his head at a convenient moment.

"I talked all right."

"Good—good gracious! It must be a trick," gasped Signor Tomsonio, clutching Mr. Pye by the arm.

"Oh, no it isn't! You should feed me properly, you fat old worm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the juniors.

"It's you boys."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The look of absolute mystification on Signor Tomsonio's face was so funny that the juniors from the school rolled about in a paroxysm of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Joey Pye, is this a trick?"

"N-no, signor. Old Joe—"

The horse turned his head again, and Billy Bunter threw his ventriloquial voice once more.

"It's no good, you fat old worm. I sha'n't talk any more to-night. I'm tired."

Signor Tomsonio blushed violently at the personal remark regarding his slight corpulency, and tugged at his beautifully curled moustache.

"Wonderful, extraordinary, marvellous!" he muttered. Then turning to Joey Pye he slapped the clown a resounding thwack on the back.

"Now, come on, Joey!" he said. "Get to the front entrance and let 'em have it."

"Right-ho, signor!"

"Are you boys going in to see the grand performance?"

"Yes, rather sir!" said the Greyfriars juniors in a loud chorus.

The signor was anxious to dismiss the subject of the talking horse, as the whole affair mystified him too much. And Signor Tomsonio didn't like that.

"Well, my lads, you had better get along now. Front seats one shilling."

The boys, on getting into the open again, crowded round Billy Bunter, and smacked him on the back in their loud praise of his jape.

"Come on, you chaps!" said the fat junior, anxious to save his shoulders from being further bruised. "Let's get into the circus."

"The get-infulness is terrific," assented Hurree Singh.

And the schoolboys hurried away in the direction of the big tent.

"Hallo, there's the clown chap!" laughed Bob Cherry.

Joey Pye spotted the juniors at the same moment and he raised his voice for their especial benefit.

"Now, come along, gentlemen, walk up! Come and see Joseph Montgomery Pye, the funniest wheeze-wangler who ever wangled wheezes. Prices to suit all pockets. Walk up, walk up, walk up!"

The crowd of villagers and schoolboys laughed heartily as Joey went on in his endless flow of eloquence.

"Come and see Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, the Child Equestrienne, the Wonder of the World. See her wonderful performance on Mahomet, the famous black Arab. Come and see Samson, the Strong Man, break a cigarette in half. Jungle Jack, the boy tiger-tamer, with Julius and Julia, the wild animals."

The crowd laughed good-humouredly, and walked up in their hundreds.

The juniors known as Harry Wharton & Co. streamed into the big tent, and although the place was rapidly filling up, they managed to get the row of seats nearest the ring.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, as he fell into his seat, between Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry.

"What's up, fathead?"

"There's old Quelch over there," he replied, pointing to his Form-master.

"My only Aunt Matilda!" added Frank Nugent.

"Hanged if that isn't Wingate and North with him."

The wheezy strain of the band floated into the interior of the tent, and every face looked expectant and happy.

The place seemed to be full of pupils from Greyfriars School—not only of juniors, but prefects—and here and there a Form-master.

Signor Tomsonio was standing at the entrance to the ring, and his face had lost the puzzled look it bore when Billy Bunter made old Joe talk.

He turned to Joey Pye, who was now standing next to him.

"Go on, Joey!"

"Is everything ready to start, signor?"

"Yes, yes. Go and bother the hapless audience with some of your chestnuts."

"Right-ho!"

And Mr. Pye dived into the little door at the back of the tent which led behind the scenes.

CHAPTER 4.

The Performance.

"H OUP-LA!"

The expectant audience were electrified by the sudden shrill whoop, and the next moment Mr. Joseph Montgomery Pye came cart-wheeling into the centre of the ring.

A burst of applause greeted him, coming especially heartily from where our friends of the Greyfriars Remove were sitting in a group.

After Joey stalked the Ring-master, that stately and dignified personage with the long whip—the possession of which, as Mr. Pye complained, gave him an unfair advantage in the nightly battle of wits which he engaged in with the clown.

The time-honoured "business" of jest and witty repartee was gone through, and was received as usual, with as much applause as if it was a new and original feature presented to the British Public for the first time.

The "great B. P.," as Mr. Pye frequently remarked, was not difficult to please when it was in holiday mood. To which the signor generally retorted that it was a fortunate thing for Mr. Pye that this was so.

When the signor and Joey had exhausted their store of new and ancient—mostly the latter—wheezes, the signor signalled the next turn on.

And so the performance went on differing in no great degree from the usual run of such performances.

It was followed item as set forth in the programme, and each turn met with its full measure of applause from the pleased audience.

At last came the "turn" of the Wonderful Child Equestrienne, the Queen of the Ring, otherwise Clotilde.

A ripple of applause, mingled with murmurs of admiration ran through the crowded circus as Clotilde cantered into the ring on her splendid black Mahomet.

The girl looked so fresh and graceful in her simple white dress gathered from the big red sash—so different from the usual be-spangled equestrienne of the circus—that it was no wonder that she was such a favourite with the public.

Clotilde was the object of many admiring glances as she cantered round the ring, especially from the boys of Greyfriars.

She threw a friendly glance in the direction of where Bob Cherry was sitting in company with his friends of the Greyfriars Remove.

The juniors gazed at her in unfeigned admiration. "What a ripping girl!" said Harry Wharton. "And how beautifully she rides!"

"Rather!"

"She seems to really enjoy it, too," said Frank Nugent, as Clotilde stood up on Mahomet's back and leapt nimbly through the paper hoops that the signor and Joey held out for her.

And the way her eyes sparkled and the way she smiled at the signor, whose jovial face was beaming with good nature and pride, caused the juniors to agree with Frank Nugent.

There was no doubt Clotilde thoroughly enjoyed her "turn," which she knew she could do without a slip.

And when two or three more horses had been turned into the ring, to fall into line beside Mahomet, who still maintained his easy canter round, Clotilde gave a wonderful exhibition of trick riding, the applause was loud and prolonged.

After she had retired she had to take several "calls" before the appreciative audience was satisfied.

"That's really ripping, you know," said Billy Bunter with enthusiasm, as Clotilde bowed and disappeared for the last time. "She is a ripping girl, that equestrienne!"

Bob Cherry looked at the fat Removite a little suspiciously, but only said:

"Yes, rather."

Billy Bunter grinned oilily.

"Did you notice how she looked at me when she first came in, too?" he smirked. "Ah, those kind of people know a good-looking chap when they see one, you know!"

Bob Cherry glared at the fat Removite, as did the other juniors.

"You—you fat young rotter!" he exclaimed. "I've a

jolly good mind to chuck you out of the circus on your neck."

"Oh, really, Cherry! You needn't show your fearful jealousy like that, you know."

Harry Wharton turned on Bunter with a frown.

"Don't be a young fool, Billy!" he said sharply.

Billy Bunter looked injured.

"Oh, really, Wharton!" he said. "I know you think you're a jolly good-looking chap. That's all very well, you know, but I'm here now you must remember. It isn't my fault if girls will look at me, I suppose."

Bob Cherry leaned over and took a firm grip of the fat junior's ear.

"Look here!" he said in a furious whisper. "Are you going to shut up?"

"Ow-wow! Really, Cherry, I—oh!—wow, yow! Help! You're hurting!"

"That's what I mean to do! Are you going to shut up?"

"Ow! Yow! Leggo!" roared Billy.

The people in the seats behind the Removites began to mutter and frown, while "sh-h-h's!" came from every part.

But Bob Cherry did not relinquish his firm grip on Billy Bunter's ear. He rather compressed his grip.

Billy Bunter wriggled spasmodically.

"Here! Wharton, help! He's murdering me!" he shrieked.

"Shut up, you young ass!" hissed Bob Cherry. "Now, are you going to behave yourself?"

"Ow—you! I was behaving myself!"

"Rats! You know what I mean. Now, are you?"

"Oh! Ow! Ye-yes!"

"Sure?" asked Bob, giving the captive ear an extra tweak.

"Woohoo! Yes!"

"All right, then!"

And Bob Cherry released his grip and sat back in his seat with a slight grin.

The Removites were all grinning now.

Billy Bunter was furiously indignant.

"You beast, Cherry!" he muttered. "You're the jealousiest beast I've ever met!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'll pay you out for this, see if I don't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At this point an old lady in the row of seats immediately behind the Removites muttered indignantly.

She had been trying to pay strict attention to the "turn" that was on, but found it impossible.

"Old yer noise, can't yer?" she said shrilly, glaring at Bunter angrily and grasping a big green umbrella which had been reposing at her side. "I'll lay this 'ere about yer else!"

And judging by the way the feathers in the lady's bonnet were agitated and the businesslike grip she had of her umbrella, she meant what she said.

Billy Bunter's little eyes gleamed, but he made no reply—at least, not as far as the old lady knew.

"Shut up!"

The words were rapped out impatiently by a voice which appeared to come from the mild-looking young man on the old lady's left.

"Why! What——" gasped the lady, scarcely able to believe her ears, and staring hard at the young man who seemed to be watching the performance intently.

"Shut up, you old fidget!"

The words, in a different voice, came from somewhere on the right this time, and the old lady glanced round defiantly.

"Which I'll say just whatever I chooses!" she snorted. "And none o' your lip, young man!"

The latter remark the old lady addressed with some vehemence to the young man on her left. She felt pretty certain the first voice came from him, anyway.

As a matter of fact, both voices came from the same person, to wit, William George Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove.

The mild-looking young man on the left of the outraged lady gave a violent start as he realised that he was being addressed.

He wore spectacles of a size that almost rivalled Billy Bunter's, and he blinked nervously at the indignant lady.

"I—I assure you, ma'am, that I made no remark whatever!"

"Ah! Well don't you make any more sich then, or I'll fetch yer one, sure as my name's Hemma Green," said the old lady darkly.

The young man gasped as Mrs. Green rattled her umbrella significantly and edged away from her.

But he did not attempt to argue with her, for he was a very mild young man indeed.

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NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE FIGHTING MARSON'S CHRISTMAS FEAST."

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale of Rector Drake. By JACK NORTH.

"RUFUS HAIGH; TRAILER."

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure. AND A Long, Complete Tale of Jack Talbot and Clotilde. By HARRY DORRIS.

Billy Bunter was grinning broadly, as were the rest of the Removites.

He was just clearing his throat preparatory to producing a squeaky voice from the stout gentleman next to the mild young man, when Harry Wharton grasped him by the arm.

"That's enough, Buntty," he whispered. "Chuck it!"

Billy Bunter looked injured, but his ear was still burning, and that acted as "a reminder to him."

Besides, just at that moment the signor stepped forward to the centre of the ring, and held up his hand as if he was about to make some important announcement.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in loud and pompous tones, "in the audience to-night I observe a great many young gentlemen from England's most famous and noted public school—Greyfriars College."

Here the signor paused to allow his judicious piece of flattery to soak in, and to allow the deafening cheers it produced from the Greyfriars fellows present to subside.

"This," continued the signor, when silence was once more restored, "is very gratifying to myself and to the whole of my talented company."

Here Joey Pye caused a general grin by bowing repeatedly, his hand on his heart.

"I anticipated it, however, and have decided to commemorate the occasion by organising a special turn for the benefit of my young patrons. Advance!"

The signor uttered the last words in an impressive tone, and waved his hand in a magnificent gesture.

As he did so, a gorgeous footman advanced into the ring bearing a small green table, on which glittered what appeared to be a magnificent silver cup.

Close behind this imposing sight followed Old Joe, the bay cob, which had been with the circus for years.

Two footmen held Joe firmly by his bridle, and made it appear as if they were having immense difficulty in holding him in and curbing his savage ardour.

The signor turned to the audience again, after allowing due time for them to be impressed by this apparition.

"I will present this valuable cup," he said, with a wave of the hand towards the little green table and its glittering burden, "to the young gentleman under the age of sixteen who is able to keep his seat on Old Joe, the Buck-jumping Broncho, here for the space of five consecutive minutes."

The signor bowed gracefully as he concluded his announcement, and there was a burst of applause from the audience.

They scented some fun, as with so many juniors from Greyfriars present, there were bound to be some competitors for the cup.

There was only one thing that troubled some of the audience, and their fears were voiced by a stout, motherly-looking dame in the front row.

"A shame, I call it," she said loudly. "Encouragin' of 'em to break their necks, it is, pore little dears!"

The signor, who was always quick to hear anything that denoted the temper of his audience, quickly held up his hand again as a signal that he had a further announcement to make.

"I must add," he said, "that the Buck-jumping Broncho is in no way vicious, but merely playful, and the competitors will run no danger of serious injury in any way. The tan is very soft."

The last words brought smiles to the faces of the audience, and allayed their anxiety.

The stout dame seemed quite appeased, and settled down to watch developments with evident interest.

The Greyfriars juniors were all agog with excitement.

They had been waiting for the signor's announcement, and now it had come there were numbers of eager aspirants for the possession of the silver cup.

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed with excitement behind his big spectacles.

"I—I think I shall have a go at that cup, you chaps, after all," he said. "I don't believe Bounding Joe is fierce at all. That clown chap was talking out of his hat! Joe looks as quiet as an old sheep."

"Ha, ha! Wait till you get on his back!" grinned Cherry.

"I suppose you don't want the Third Form to get the cup, Cherry? It's up to the Remove to win it, and I suppose I shall have to be the Remove representative in the contest."

"Why, you young ass, what about me? I'm going in for it, of course."

Billy Bunter snorted.

"Why, even old Dodger, the horse we had to pull us round in a caravan once, ran away with you, Cherry!"

The Removites grinned. Bob grew rather red.

"Oh, he—he started off before—before I was ready," he explained, stammering a little. "You—you see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites roared.

PLUCK.—262.

NEXT SATURDAY:

GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

They remembered what an extraordinary figure he had cut on the back of Dodger.

"That Dodger was a beast! Ho——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats! Stow that cackle, you silly asses! Blessed if you aren't like a lot of blessed geese," said Bob crossly.

"Ha, ha! Let's all go in for it, then!" said Harry Wharton. "Some of the Upper Fourth will be under age, and we want the Remove to lift that cup, even if it isn't quite worth ten pounds."

"Ha, ha, rather!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Competition.

"COMPETITORS for the Tomsonio Cup, this way, please!"

Joey Pye called this out in a loud and officious tone, and there was a movement at once among the Greyfriars juniors.

They came scrambling over the seats from all parts of the circus, looking very red and self-conscious, by a good many chaffing remarks from their schoolfellows who were not intending to compete.

Mr. Quelch was seen to look at the swarm of juniors rather doubtfully. But after a moment's conference with Wingate of the Sixth, he smiled indulgently, and allowed the proceedings to take their course without interference.

The would-be broncho-busters clambered into the ring, and ranged themselves in line—fifteen of them in all—marshalled by Mr. Pye.

Shouts of encouragement and chaff came from the auditorium as the red-faced fifteen lined up.

"Go it, Wharton!"

"Stick to it, Tod Sloan!"

"Show 'em round, Buntty!"

"Keep your eye on the cup, Owl!"

To these and innumerable similar cries, the devoted fifteen turned deaf ears, though many of them seemed to be controlling themselves only by a great effort.

Bounding Joe, the Buck-jumping Broncho, was brought forward, and the first in the line, who happened to be a biggish fellow named Dabney, of the Greyfriars Upper Fourth Form, and who was just under sixteen, was hoisted on to Old Joe's back by the two grinning footmen.

Having mounted Dabney, the two footmen sprang back, and the competition had begun.

Now, Old Joe, when he was in his most playful and skittish mood, was what Joey Pye termed "a fair caution."

He was an old horse, and experienced in all manner of cunning tricks, and when the humour took him, like many old horses, he could throw some moves which put the green efforts of young and merely skittish horses to shame.

To-night Joe had been skilfully worked up by the signor, who knew the old horse like a book, till he stood in the ring with one fixed determination in his equine mind—namely, to keep his broad back free from any burden other than that of the saddle.

On first feeling Dabney on his back, Joe stood stock still, with his fore legs wide apart and his head down.

Dabney, emboldened by Joe's inactivity, gave a click with his tongue, and jerked the reins ever so slightly, but without result.

Old Joe stood stock still.

The audience began to titter slightly, but the signor put his tongue in his cheek and winked at Mr. Pye.

Dabney was just about to give Joe a smack with his hand, when the horse suddenly gave a couple of sudden bounds forward, followed up immediately by a terrific buck.

His back was arched like an angry cat's, and his four hoofs landed on the ground together.

Dabney gave a smothered yell, and shot gracefully out of the saddle, to fall on his hands and knees in the tan half a dozen yards away.

There was a yell of laughter from the audience at this sudden turn of events.

Old Joe trotted round the ring, shaking his head, and the two footmen, grinning more than ever now, went in pursuit.

The fourteen amateur circus riders grinned, but they did not laugh so heartily as those who had not the prospect of a similar fate as Dabney's in store.

Dabney picked himself up, looking very sheepish.

As he made his way back to his seat in the auditorium, Bob Cherry called out:

"So much for the Upper Fourth, Dab, old man."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.

Dabney, looking a bit shaken, took his seat among his friends, and prepared, with a grin of anticipation, to watch the remainder of the contest.

The next rider was Bulstrode, the Remove bully at Greyfriars.

He met with a very similar fate to Dabney's, except that he kept his seat till Old Joe's second buck. Then he described the same graceful curve in the air, and landed on the tan with the same dull thud as his predecessor.

There was a fresh yell of laughter from the spectators, who were enjoying themselves thoroughly.

"So much for the Remove, Cherry, old man!" yelled Dabney.

And the Upper Fourth fellows roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And so the contest went on, with Old Joe turning up a winner every time.

Skinner and Stott, both of the Remove, returned to their seats in quick succession, rubbing themselves as they went, and Hurree Singh, the Indian junior, Nugent, Kidman of the Third Form, and two lads from the village, followed at varying intervals.

At the end of a quarter of an hour only six remained of the devoted fifteen, viz., Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, the lad from New Zealand, Billy Bunter, and two village lads.

Of these, one of the village lads very soon retired defeated, and Bob Cherry took his place in Bounding Joe's saddle.

Bob was not a horseman, and he knew it.

So he adopted different tactics from his predecessors.

To the astonishment of the two footmen, he disregarded stirrups and bridle altogether.

He took a firm grip on the pommel of the saddle with both hands, and compressed his grip on Joe's broad back with his knees.

"Right! Let her go!" he muttered, between his clenched teeth.

And the grinning footmen "let her go."

Round the ring bounded Joe, head down and back up, but Bob held on like grim death.

The audience gave a yell of laughter at Bob's unorthodox horsemanship, but at last they gave a cheer, too, as they saw how pluckily he held on.

But at last, with a buck that would have done credit to a real Wild West broncho, old Joe stopped dead, and poor Bob flew over his head and buried his face in the tan.

He got up very rumpled and breathless, but rather pleased with himself as he heard the signor announce the time he had stayed on.

"Two minutes, four seconds! Much the best so far!"

The audience cheered, and Bob Cherry returned to his seat with a modest blush beneath the tan which was sticking to his perspiring face.

The next to mount was the remaining villager, the son of a Friardale butcher, who had been used to horses from the time he could walk.

A furious tussel ensued between him and old Joe, but Joe gained the victory in something under three minutes.

It was now Billy Bunter's turn, but the fat junior did not seem at all anxious to push himself forward.

He had counted on somebody's ability to ride Bounding Joe for five minutes before his own turn came, thinking thus to be able to maintain a reputation for horsemanship without having to undergo the test itself. But as the chances of old Joe meeting his match grew fewer with the diminishing number of competitors, Bunter seemed to become more and more flabby.

Now that his turn had actually come, he dodged round Wharton in alarm.

"I—I don't think I feel well enough to ride that beast, after all, Wharton," he said nervously. "He doesn't look so quiet, after all!"

Harry Wharton grinned. He had been expecting this for some time.

"You can't back out of it now, Billy," he said. "You must keep up the reputation of the Form, you know! Go on, and take your toss if you can't stick him!"

"Ow! I—I e-c-can't! I—I feel faint!"

The two footmen stood waiting by the so-called buck-jumping broncho a trifle impatiently. The signor frowned, and beckoned to Billy with his long whip.

"Next, please!" he said sharply.

Tom Brown grabbed Bunter by the arm, and shoved him forward.

"Get on, Peckham!"

Bunter gave a roar, and squirmed and wriggled in the grasp of the sturdy lad from New Zealand.

"Oh! Ow! Help! Rescue!" he roared.

"Go on!"

"Help! Murder!"

Harry Wharton gave a laugh.

"Oh, let him go, Brown!" he said. "The young rotter's half dead with fright!"

Brown grinned, and released the fat junior's arm.

Billy Bunter was off like a flash the moment he found himself free. He scuttled to the side of the ring, and clam-

bered over the barrier in frantic haste, his eyes behind his big spectacles positively bulging with terror.

"Here, come back!" shouted the signor, giving his long whip a loud crack, and winking at Mr. Pye.

But Billy Bunter heeded not.

Amid howls of laughter from the audience, he scrambled into his seat next to Bob Cherry, and, plumping down into it, gasping, grasped the back of it as if with the determination that nothing would get him into the ring again at any cost.

Signor Tomsonio, who was now laughing heartily, beckoned to Tom Brown, and the sturdy lad from New Zealand mounted Joe with an air of quiet determination. He shortened the stirrup-leathers, and took firm hold of the reins as near the bit as he could.

"All right!" he muttered. And the two footmen let go of Joe once more.

Then began a really desperate struggle between the horse and the boy. Old Joe soon discovered that the tricks that had been so successful in unseating the other amateur "broncho-busters" left the lad from New Zealand almost unmoved in the saddle.

And so the determined old horse seemed to go half-crazy.

He bounded, and he bucked, and he kicked, and the audience applauded loudly as Tom Brown was seen to keep his seat still.

The signor looked at his big watch.

"Four minutes!" he announced.

The Remove cheered wildly. But the next minute their cheers were hushed, and they gave a gasp of dismay.

Old Joe seemed to have heard, too, that he had only one more minute to get rid of his plucky rider. He suddenly left off his antics, and galloped round the ring at a good pace.

Tom Brown, who was beginning to blow a bit by now, thought that he had conquered the horse and tired him out. He sat easily in the saddle as Joe galloped round, with the light of triumph in his eyes, when suddenly old Joe stopped dead, sending the tan up in a cloud round him.

Tom Brown was caught napping. He clutched desperately at the pommel of the saddle, but his fingers slipped, and he tumbled head-first over Joe's neck on to the tan.

"Four minutes, forty-eight seconds!" said the signor, with a smile. "Well done, young sir!"

"Good for you, Tom Brown! Hurray!"

The Remove cheered lustily as the New Zealander, smiling, walked back to his seat.

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EACH

He had almost conquered, but old Joe's cunning had been too much for him almost on the stroke of time.

Now there was only Harry Wharton left.

Would he do it? the Remove wondered breathlessly. He was the best athlete in the Form, but old Joe seemed to be a very hard nut to crack.

The boy mounted confidently, giving poor Joe, who was beginning to blow a bit by now, a friendly pat as he did so.

Jack Talbot, who was watching the competition with interest from the wings, gave a nod of approval as he saw the pat. He knew what a valuable thing it was to get on good terms with your horse beforehand.

Harry Wharton's carress seemed to have taken all the fire out of the old horse, and after a few tentative bucks, which did not seem to disturb his rider at all, he allowed himself to be ridden quietly round the ring, looking as if he had never known what it was to buck in his life!

The spectators gasped with astonishment, and then roared applause.

The boy's mastery over the horse was perfect and complete.

He rode about the ring as he pleased, and seemed in no hurry to get off, even when the signor snapped his watch to with the brief remark:

"Five minutes! The cup goes to the young gentleman!"

How the audience generally, and the Remove in particular, cheered as the signor gracefully presented the rather battered old cup to the smiling boy.

And as Wharton walked back to his seat, after having given old Joe a few final pats, bearing the Tomsonio Cup with him in triumph, Jack Talbot turned to his pretty girl-chum Clotilde with shining eyes.

"What a splendid circus-rider that chap would make!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "How I wish he was in the company with us!"

And Clotilde, with equal enthusiasm, answered:

"So do I!"

CHAPTER 6.

Joey Pys Entertains Billy Bunter.

THE audience settled down once more, for the performance was by no means over. Signor Tomsonio announced the Handsome Man.

Jim Carson came bounding into the ring, and climbed a rope-ladder to the top of the tent with the ease and grace of the practised acrobat.

Swinging on to the high trapeze, he went through his difficult feats, and his face brightened as the huge audience greeted his final "extra" turn with redoubled cheers.

Jim Carson was no modest hero, for he enjoyed the applause of the spectators more than anything else. Nevertheless, he had a nerve of iron while in the air, and his performance was always fully appreciated.

As the Handsome Man retired from the ring, the signor strutted into the centre of the arena, and, cracking his whip for silence, raised his voice.

"Jungle Jack!" he cried. "The Boy Tiger-tamer!"

There was some commotion at the ring-entrance, and the great tiger cage was hauled in.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry, turning to Billy Bunter. "That chap we spoke to this morning is going into the cage!"

"Of course, those beasts are quite tame, Cherry."

"Ass!"

"In fact, it's almost like a chap fooling about with a couple of dogs."

"Fathead!"

"Well," continued the fat junior, unabashed by Bob Cherry's interjections, "I wouldn't mind doing the same as this Jungle Jack."

"Shut up, Billy!"

"Of course, Nugent, it requires some nerve in a——"

"Dry up and watch the performance!" said Harry Wharton, as Jungle Jack entered the cage and the huge barred door was clanged to behind him.

Billy Bunter did as he was told, and settled himself down to see the marvellous display.

Jack Talbot was in good form to-night, and he put Julius and Julia through their paces without hesitation.

The huge audience held their breath in suspense as the boy tiger-tamer commanded Julius to open his mouth, and Jack put his head into it.

Then the two tigers sprang through paper hoops and went through their usual tricks.

As the grand finale to his performance Jack Talbot made Julius and Julia in turn carry him by the belt round and round the cage.

The audience simply gasped.

Jungle Jack scrambled out of the cage, and was greeted by a thunder of applause.

He bowed again and again, and smiled at Harry Wharton & Co., who persisted in calling "Encore!" for the turn.

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"Encore!"

Jack Talbot shook his head in the negative as the huge tiger-cage rumbled out of the arena.

"No more to-night, you chaps," laughed Harry Wharton, turning to his chums.

"Encore!"

"Shut up, Billy! Can't you see that they've taken the cage away?"

"Encore!"

"You frabjous ass, can't you— Hallo, it's 'God Save the King!'" said Bob Cherry, snatching his cap from his head.

The audience rose to their feet, and there was a general scramble for the exits.

Jack Talbot, throwing a cape over his shoulders, stood at the ring entrance and watched the crowd streaming out.

He turned as a light touch fell on his arm, and he looked into the smiling face of Clotilde.

"Hallo, Clotilde!" he said. "How well your riding went down this evening."

The girl laughed in the pleasing manner she had.

"Oh, I think you had the lion's, or, rather, the tiger's, share of applause, Jack," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"You did, and you deserved it, but that is not what I want to speak to you about. It's about that horrible man!"

"Horrible man?"

"Yes—Jim Carson!"

"Why, Clotilde, there is nothing to be frightened of in the Handsome Man."

"Yes there is, Jack," said Clotilde. "I have been watching him during the performance, and he has done nothing but glare in your direction."

A frown crossed Jack Talbot's handsome face, and he turned away from Clotilde.

"Perhaps I should not have said what I have," murmured the girl; "but I do wish you would try and keep away from him."

"I do," replied Jack, "and always shall do. I don't want you to worry about me in this matter, Clotilde. Anyway, it——"

The boy and girl chum gazed in astonishment at a fat junior who was standing some few yards away bowing, and scraping his cap almost to the ground.

"Hallo!" laughed Jack Talbot. "Didn't we meet you this morning, when we were on the way here?"

Billy Bunter, the fat boy, readjusted his spectacles and grinned.

"Yes," he said. "I've just dodged away from the rest of the fellows."

"Oh-h!"

"Of course, they have to turn into bed fairly early, you know."

Clotilde smiled, as Jack Talbot caught her eye.

"Do they? How is it you don't have to?"

"Well, you see, I feel a bit shaken up after the riding competition, and I thought we might have a little bit of supper together—just we three, you know."

"Have you come over faint again?" said Clotilde.

"Yes, rather."

"Does that kick make you feel faint?"

"Well, you know, I dare say it's ruined my constitution," said Bunter patronisingly, "and the only thing is to take nourishment."

"I see."

"So I thought I would suggest to——"

"Houp-la!"

Billy Bunter gave a violent start as Joseph Montgomery Pye somersaulted to the spot where the three stood, and landed—right end up—about an inch from Bunter's nose.

"Hallo, Joey!" said Jack Talbot. "This chap has come over faint again."

Billy Bunter gave a sickly grin as Joey Pye rolled his big eyes.

"Oh, if only I could stow wheezes like this youth can stow grub!" sighed the clown.

"Of course, if you can't entertain a chap," said Billy. "I'll be getting back to Greyfriars."

"Oh, no!" laughed Jack Talbot. "You had better come over to my caravan. I've got something eatable in there."

"That's awfully decent of you!"

"Not at all! Come on!"

And Joey Pye and Jack Talbot marched Bunter off in the direction of their caravan, leaving Clotilde with Samson, the Strong Man, who had just joined the little party.

Clambering into the caravan, Jack soon had a couple of lamps burning, and he gave his guest a seat to sit down on.

"Jolly good!" murmured Billy Bunter, as Joey Pye placed before him half a pork-pie and two large cakes.

"Get on with it, sonny!" said the clown.

And Billy fell to.

The two circus chums whistled in astonishment as the pork-pie disappeared, and their guest commenced on the cake.

"You're a wonderful eating machine!" said Mr. Pye.

Billy Bunter blinked through his huge spectacles.

"Yes," he replied. "You know, I'm a bit of a wonder at the old school. Of course, I cause a lot of jealousy, especially my ventriloquism—"

"Ventrilowhat?"

"My ventriloquism, you know. I'm jolly clever in throwing my voice."

"Oh-h!"

"Chaps always come to me to work a successful jape at the school," continued Bunter, cutting a big slice from the second cake.

Mr. Pye nodded his head, as he began to sift the mystery of the strange scene in the stable earlier in the evening, when Old Joe "talked."

"That was a very clever example," said Joey, feeling his way cautiously.

"When was that?"

"In the stable."

Billy Bunter beamed on the two circus chums.

"It was clever, wasn't it? You know, one day I hope to—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Jack Talbot, opening the caravan door. "I thought I heard someone shouting out your name."

"R-really?" stuttered the fat junior.

"Yes, there it is again. Your friends must be looking for you."

Joey Pye gazed in wonderment at the fat schoolboy, who had now finished the last morsel.

"What an addition you would make to Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome!" he muttered. "I can see the public reading the bills now—'The Schoolboy Ventriloquist and Food-destroyer! A bullock will be roasted in the ring and stowed away by this child-wonder in five minutes!' What did you say, Jackie?"

Jungle Jack had not made any comment on Joey Pye's soliloquising at all, for he had left the caravan to join the juniors from Greyfriars who were searching for Bunter.

He soon found them by their shouting, and he led Harry Wharton & Co. over to the caravan.

"Hallo, you fat boulder!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he caught sight of Bunter, who was in conversation with Mr. Pye.

"Half a minute, you chaps!"

"Rats! Come along, or we shall be late for call-over!"

"Just a—"

"Come along, ass!"

"Really, Wharton! I just want to—"

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent scrambled into the caravan, and interrupted Bunter's request by tumbling the fat junior out into the open.

"Now come along back to Greyfriars, you fat cormorant!"

"I was just coming, Wharton, but—"

"Shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jungle Jack and Joey Pye leaned against the caravan steps as the schoolboys whisked Bunter away.

The fat junior was still remonstrating with his captors as they were lost to view from the two circus chums.

"It must be jolly nice to be at a school like that!" sighed Jack Talbot.

Mr. Pye looked at the young tiger-tamer, and smiled.

"There are places just as nice, Jackie," he said. "Signor Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome, for instance. You are enabled to converse freely with the renowned mirth-merchant, Joseph Montgomery Pye. Then you have Clotilde, the clever—"

"Yes," interrupted Jungle Jack, smiling at Joey Pye, "there is that to be taken into consideration, and I wouldn't be parted from you and Clotilde for worlds!"

"Shake, sonny!" said the clown, after a pause.

And Jack Talbot grasped Joey Pye by the hand.

THE END.

FIGHTING HECTOR, RECRUIT.

Continued from page 15.

was willing to be friends with the recruit—who did not care for beer, anyway—if he would sign the pledge!

Nevertheless, in their queer way both Nobby Clark and Mad Maddison, distinctly two of the hardest cases in D Company, were to be Hector Drake's friends, and loyal friends, too.

Thicknesse and Jarvis went sullenly out together, the valiant Jugg accompanying them.

"Birds of a blessed feather!" said Nobby. "We're a 'ot lot in this room, Drake, but I dunno as you'll take much 'arm long as you stick to me an' Madman, an' don't do as we do. Cheer up, Mad! You're alive now, cocky; you'll be a long time dead, an' you can be as miserable as you blessed well like then!"

"I am a brand plucked from the burning!" muttered Maddison.

"Yes, cocky, the fire got 'old of you about the nose a bit first, though, didn't it?"

But the Madman, in his present mood, was quite indifferent to his chum's rough jokes. Hector wondered what made these two, so strangely unlike, such good friends, yet need not have wondered, since he, who was as little like them as they were like one another, already felt drawn in some measure towards both.

The lad was glad when "tattoo" sounded, and the roll was called by the orderly-sergeant of the company, for that meant he might go to bed, and the day had been a long and tiring one for him.

Jugg had the cot next his on the left hand, and, as Hector undressed, the rascal's cunning, covetous eyes fell upon the thin gold chain around his neck. It was only for a moment that it showed; the lad made haste to pull his shirt over it, and had no idea that it had been seen.

He soon fell asleep, in spite of the hardness and discomfort of the bed, and the unpleasant nature of much in his surroundings. He was too tired to notice particularly these things, that were to be real trials to him in the future. Hector Drake had been used to roughing it, but not to the frowsiness of an ill-ventilated barrack-room.

Perhaps it was the closeness of the air that woke him up. He lay a minute or two listening to the snoring and deep breathing of the men around him, and wondering how they could bear the absence of fresh air.

Suddenly he became aware of a hand that stole over the rough blankets and touched his bared throat. For a moment he thought that someone was making an assault upon him, then he felt the fingers move along, clutching the chain, and trying to find the catch.

He reached up suddenly, and grabbed at the hand.

But in the darkness he missed it, and, as he sprang out of his cot, a foot tripped him, and he sprawled.

The noise of his falling woke up several of those around, and various inquiries in by no means polite terms were howled at the unknown disturber of the barrack-room.

Hector said nothing, but got back into his cot.

He suspected that the would-be thief was Jugg, but could not be sure, for his fall had hindered him from finding out. To accuse him on mere suspicion would be useless, but if he caught him at that trick again, then woe to Gustavus Jugg!

The lad fell asleep with his fingers holding the chain just above the locket, and dreamed of the gentle-faced mother who had given him the chain, of the fair, generous child whose keepsake the locket had been.

But his dreams did not tell him, and, waking, he did not suspect what influence that trinket was to have on his early career as a soldier of the King.

THE END.

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