

BBC CHILDRENS ANNUAL

Edited by Freda Lingstrom



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Just like Bunter!

Frank Richards



BUNTER!

"What the dickens?"

Harry Whinnem and Frank Nugent exclaimed, together, as they came into their study. No! It is the Ransome!

They were surprised at what they beheld.

Their study, in its owners' absence, should have had no occupant. But it had one: a fat person who gave them a startled blink through a pair of big spectacles as they came in.

Billy Bunter was alarmed for a moment. But then he looked relaxed.

"Oh! Only you fellows! The usual, Y'know! for a moment it might be Quitch! I don't want Quitch to get on to this."

They gazed at him.

Billy Bunter's occupation as The Y' Study was surprising. Had they found him exploring the study cupboard, like a lion seeking what he might devour, it would not have surprised them. His present occupation did.

The fat Owl of the Ransome was standing by the study table, on which was a bottle

of ink - red ink. From that bottle Bunter was filling a quill.

He was splitting and splashing a good deal of the ink in the process. Billy Bunter was what the Cavendish fellows called *awkwardish*. His fat fingers were awkward with ink; there was a splash of red on his fat little nose, and red ink was splattered over the table, and over the books and papers thereon. A Latin poem, which Harry Whinnem had always entitled for Mr. Quitch, the master of the Ransome, was adorned by a dozen red lines, and evidently required to be recited over again. Quitch did not appear: of course! Frank Nugent's Vigil was almost extinguished; it looked as if the ink-droplet had tipped over it. Billy Bunter, regardless of such matters, gorged at the ink with the spirit.

"I say, your fellows, don't let me about that! Be real, actually! I don't want Quitch to know it was me!"

"You fat lot!" exclaimed Harry Whinnem. "What are you up to?"



A liquid stream suddenly shot through the air, and impinged upon his nostrils. James.

"It's flying the coop!" accused Baxter. "You borrowed your funds of red ink, old chap. I know you wouldn't steal."

"You've spotted that the ink, you're wrong."

"It's Baxter's Marked round here. Here it is. Well, that doesn't matter — there's enough to fill this space. That's all right."

"My Lane your ink's all right, you're wrong, look at it!"

"He, he, he!" Baxter looked at it, and smiled around. "Say, old chap, I wouldn't take this on to Quitch! If he saw red ink on it, he might think it was you!" The fat Owl checked again. "Quitch will be awfully odd when he gets spotted with red ink. What do you think?"

"Whom and Nipper both jumped.

"Quitch!" they gasped, together.

They had gazed at Billy Baxter in surprise. Now they gazed at him in hatred. Billy Baxter was well known, in the Grosvenor Rooms, as the every imaginable kind of an ass. But that even Billy Baxter could think, or dream, of spurring his fellow-roomer with red ink, seemed incredible. Yet apparently it was of that very thing that Baxter was thinking.

"You had just" gasped Harry Whom, "Quitch would smash you right off to the third for the biggest whopping you've ever had."

"How's he to know?" gasped Baxter. "You are going to tell him? I've got it in the Quitch. I can jolly well tell you. Billy Baxter's hole round your glasses looked like his usual position. Think a fellow's going to be whopped for nothing? Quitch made me that I'd had the biggest one of the two in Grosvenor Rooms — as if I'd touch this wretched ink!"

"And your hole's?" asked Nipper, scornfully.

"Oh, really, Nipper! I hope you can take a fellow's word, if Quitch can't!" said Baxter, earnestly. "I told Quitch I never even looked into the Grosvenor, and there were only half-a-dozen bottles in it, and I never touched one of them. But did he believe me? Baxter shook a fat head scornfully. "Pretty thick to doubt a fellow's word, I think. But that's Quitch all over. That's the lot of jokers we get here. He said I was wonderful. No, you know?"

"Oh, we do!"

"Well, he's got it coming!" said Baxter, softly. "I ain't going to be called wonderful, and whopped for nothing! Perhaps Quitch will be wiser for himself when he gets the ink, what'll he be?"

"There's every one'll be wiser afterwards, you bet us!"

"He won't know a thing," gasped Baxter. "He's sitting his mind out in the quiet now — under the window. I can get him from the first-floor window — nobody there after dark. You can bet I shall clean off the roomer! he's got the ink! What do you know?"

Harry Whom laughed.

"Everybody who sees you, with red ink dashed on your face, and on that purple red-calf's nose," he said.

Billy Baxter started.

"Oh! how I wish!" he ejaculated. "I've never thought of that! I shall jolly well get a wash! Quitch ain't going to see any red ink about me. Why, he would smother us once, if he saw just a spot! You have to be jolly wary, with Quitch!"

"Better forget all about it," said Nipper. "It's worth it!"

"You can't do it, you fat dump!" said Harry Wharson.

"Can't I?" Billy Buzzer seemed to think that he could. "You'll jolly well see! It's safe as houses. Quick's won't know a thing, — except that he got the ink — ha, ha, ha!" He won't begin to guess who did it — unless you take that Latin year as his line. Wharson — then he might think it was you! Ha, ha, ha!

Billy Buzzer slipped the square into his pocket, and walked to the door. Evidently the fat had's mind, such as it was, was made up. Few fellows in the Greyfriars Row would have committed "tag" if Mr. Quick and Billy Buzzer, certainly, was not at the head of which horses are made. It was a case of *God willing or where angels fear to tread!* When there was no danger, Billy Buzzer was as bold as a lion; and this extra-

ordinary exception, was, in Buzzer's opinion, as safe as houses!

"Look here, Buzzer —" said Wharson and Nugent together.

"Can't say?" said Buzzer. "Quick's will be gone in, and I want to catch him. Don't you fellows worry! It's safe as houses, I tell you. I say, you fellows, look! Quick's line, when he gets the ink! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here —"

"Tag?"

Billy Buzzer neither looked there, nor stopped. He rolled away, with a fat grinning face. Buzzer had no use for great abilities. Buzzer was on the war-path, and that was that!

||

"Oh?"

Mr. Quick's jumped — in fact, he bounded!



That's how things often go right at home.

Never before, in the history of Gerry House School, had the Banner window been seen to bleed like a kangaroo in the quad. Five or five-and-a-half pairs of eyes beheld him bleed.

Quitch was taken entirely by surprise. He was walking, meditatively, on the path under the windows. He was *not* to be troubled. He was not, certainly, thinking of the famous window of his house. He did not know that the Banner Expressions window was open, and was amazed that a pair of winged feet could ever blunder down at him through a pair of big round spectacles. He had forgotten the existence of William George Bruce McRae's original comment even in his mind. He was thinking, in Gut, of Queen Victoria Terrace. Debating in his limited mind whether the words were "Ode to, Book II, really began with "you", or whether, after all, it should be "you". There were equal arguments on both sides of this important question; and it was the kind of problem on which Quitch loved to ponder in leisure hours.

But as a typical moment suddenly shot through the air, and impinged upon his massive Goggles, Quitch forgot all about Queen Victoria Terrace. Whether inspiration in the particular Ode began with "you" or with "ye" he couldn't at that moment have cared less. He blundered.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Quitch. "What - what - what - ?" He looked down at his feet. His fingers were coming out. He stared at his fingers. He dabbed his face. "Is it - is it - is it red - red ink - Goodness gracious! What - what - how - upon my word!"

Quitch stared about petrified.

He had been sprayed - splattered with red ink! It was unbelievable - incredible - impossible! But it had happened! There was

no doubt that it had happened, for his fingers were red-inked, and red ink streamed down his feet. Fifty fellows, from various directions, stared at him. Some of them, and no doubt, were grinning. A first-masser with a face glowing redder than a Red Indian's was a most unusual sight in the Cavendish quad. From the point of view of thoughtless youth, it was *absolutely*.

But if there was anything of a circumstance in the accident, it was quite lost on Quitch himself. Under the splashes of red ink, his expression on his speaking countenance trailed that of the fabled jester.

"Oh!" breathed Mr. Quitch. "What-oh! From 112 - 114-115!"

He ran an ink-glass round his face - was not that at hand. He glanced at the open Expressions window. That was where it had come. Some anonymous Bannerer's joke!

Breathing back, Mr. Quitch looked over his massive spectacles for anybody else who might come off over the road to check the unknown banner-sprayer. A riddle-fellow handling a spirit-headed with red ink was likely to have scars about him, and Quitch's good-luck was going to search for the nearest track of red ink on any member of his form.

One member of his form, at least very common, was in a bathroom, with soap and washing hot water, indulging in an immemorial wash. Billy Bonner was six-foot on washing; and as years went, in a tide, had no appeal whatever for him. But no trace of red ink was going to be spotted on Bonner by a searching gaze-ye! A wash, and going a thorough wash, was intended; and for once, Billy Bonner did not open the door; and it was a rather beautiful

and wholly spoken, Bunter that emerged at length from the bathroom, grinning all over an unusually clean fat face.

II

"THAT fat one?" growled Harry Wharton. "That bustling thing?" agreed Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter had had rather an unpropitious effect on the classes of the Remover.

Nugent had been busy cleaning up the mess of spit ink on No. 1 Study. Wharton had a longer task before him: he had to wipe out again the Latin paper blotted with red ink by the wretched Owl. He was much more disposed to look for Billy Bunter and his lot; but this year had to be done up before breakfast, and it could not be done up sprinkled with ink, so he set down to his task, the tall spotted paper propped up against the inkstand before him, and set to work writing it out over again.

But that task was still unfinished, when there was a faint and well-known knock at the Remover passage. An irregular form appeared in the doorway; and a pair of eyes as keen as gazelles looked into the study.

The two juniors jumped to their feet at once. They gazed at Mr. Quitch. He had twisted off more of the ink. But it had been a hurried wash and there were still signs of it about his upper countenance. Wharton and Nugent recalled that Bunter had "done it." Quitch's unusually easy attitude with them at meals, for they were not surprised to see that there was something in his brow. Why he had come to their study they did not know, for a moment. But it dawned on them that Quitch was in search of the square, and was going to visit every study



An unwise form appeared in the doorway.

in the Remover, starting with No. 1, as it was the first in the passage.

"Wharret! Nugent!" Quitch's voice was deep.

"Oh! Yes, sir? Is anything the matter?" examined Wharton. "I haven't yet finished my paper, sir."

"Never mind that now, Wharret! Some-thing in my form has had the industry, the method, the importance, the unheard-of efficiency, to squirt ink!" Quitch looks off suddenly.

The golden-eyes had fallen on the Latin paper propped against the inkstand on the study table. Blots of red ink on that paper leaped to the golden-eyes.

Quitch looked at it. He stared at it. He gazed at it. He had hoped, and indeed expected, to find some trace of white ink about the perpetrator of this unbecoming act. The nearest speech would have been enough. And here was more than a speak-

how was a damn blot of red on a Latin page? The gentleman fairly glomped at that Latin page.

Mr. Quirk's mouth was the only

"Whence?"

"Oh, Yes, Sir."

"What have you been doing without me?" Harry Wharton jumped.

"I ain't!" Nothing, sir."

"Nothing?" said Mr. Quirk, gently. "This paper, Wharton, - is your Latin page, Wharton, - is splashed with red ink. I see that you have been copying it on a second page. No doubt it was blotted with red ink, when the paper was filled at this table, Wharton."

"Oh, wasn't?"

"Wharton? Quirk's voice was deep and stern. "Wharton! You have been handling red ink in this study - your Latin page is blotted with it. I need look no further. You will follow me to your book-examiner's study, Wharton. Do most cordial good-morning."

"Y-I-I-I answered Harry Wharton. Y-I-I-I mean you an, I-I-I never."

"Have you been handling red ink in the study or not?"

"No! Y-I-I, I certainly haven't."

"Then where has?"

Mr. Quirk wanted for a reply to that question. He waited in vain. Harry Wharton spread his lips - and closed them again. Really, he could not tell Quirk that it was the copyist. Out of the room, who had handled the red ink, and blotted the Latin page. Greyfriars were, did not give the answer away. He stood looking a bit uncomfortable in theory, without speaking, when Nipper looked on helplessly. Quirk's mouth - gently.

"I was a first-class man."

Then, just as Quirk was about to touch the alarm, there came a sudden interruption. A fat figure rolled into the study doorway, with a weak grin on an unusually clean face - a grin as wide, that it almost crumpled down one fat ear to the other.

"Yes, you fellows?" Billy Bunter clumped clumsily as he rolled in. "Yes, I got him all right! He, he, he! Squared the ink all over his sherry! Did he look a parcel? He, he, he?"

IV

BILLY BUNTER was full of beans. He was bubbling with satisfaction. He looked on top of the world, as he rolled getting into No. 1 Study. He did not notice, for the moment, an unusual presence there. He expected to find Wharton and Nipper in No. 1. He did not expect to find Quirk. He did not observe the angular figure, as he grunted at the passers.

"Get him a year!" boomed Bunter, "Yes, you fellows, will he be sold? He, he, he! Mind you don't slip him? Say something about our borrowing that bottle of red ink. Quirk will be after that man who opened him, like a dog after a bone! But you be'll be looking all over the shop for a fellow with red ink about him? He, he, he! He won't find out one bit! Not a spot! There we show up that game of yours, Wharton - he, he, he! You'd have told Quirk on your neck, if he saw that! I say, you fellows, ain't it jolly funny? Quirk all yesterday, and he won't know it was me - he won't know a thing! Did I get him a year, from the first-class man, window? He, he, he!"

Bunter chuckled explosively.

"Yes, you fellows, have you seen Quirk? I expect he's washing that ink off, - he, he, he! Got him, right in the middle of his



The ghost conjures that of Billy Bower's fat face. He gazed at Quitch in horror.

horror, - he, he, he? And he won't know it was me - couldn't begin to guess! And - OH!

Bower suddenly became aware of an angular figure, and an expressive face - a very expressive face - staring at him across the study. He jumped. His wide round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at Mr. Quitch. His plump jaw gaped.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Quitch found his voice.

"BUNTER!"

"Oh, why?"

"That it was me -?"

"Oh, junior!" The ghost was fast as a

whirl. Billy Bower's fat face, as if it had been wiped away by a duster, he gazed at Quitch in horror. He blinked at him. He goggled at him. "Oh, but! I - I - I didn't see you, or - I - I - I - it wasn't me -!"

"What?"

"I - I - I never?" gasped Bower. "I - I didn't! I - I wouldn't! I - I haven't touched red ink today, or, and Flavin's just been washing it off. I - I haven't been in the farm-room, or - I - I was in the milk-shop when I was in the farm-room. I - I don't know anything about it, or, I - I never came here to borrow the ink, or, and never filled my square with it - you can ask these boys, or - they can tell I - I never had a

upset. He said I could find a full-time job and I could take it as my job for now. Well, I'd hope you believe me, too."

"If Billy Brown found that Quack's behavior was a threat, then Brown was surprised. The response of Quack's law firm was nothing in all reasonable belief."

"Brown's lawyer said, 'I would like to see the Quack's lawyer's work.' I'd like to see the Quack's lawyer's work."

"You will like me to work for you. I'm ready. Brown."

"Oh, okay?"

"The same lawyer mentioned."

"Yes, but?"

"I don't see, Brown?" I showed the Quack's and he followed me out of the office.

And Billy Brown, on being getting with my lawyer, had my lawyer and he was very understanding that was not long after we were all again, around after that, in the front of my car.

"Harry Winston and Frank Meyer looked at me again."

"You Mr. Brown?" said Harry.

"Just signed Meyer."

"Well," said Winston, "I don't know how the going was this year. It was over again. He will get enough from the bank."

Billy Brown, when he was very happy, looked at it for the first time, and looked at the Quack. He was a real and honest Brown.

HOW MANY OF THESE DO YOU KNOW?



ANSWERS ON PAGE 125