



SKINNER'S SHADY SCHEME!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

HIS MASTER'S VOICE.

EVERYONE knows what a rotter Skinner of our Form is. When he gets his knife into a chap, he usually thinks out some nasty plan to give him his revenge. He doesn't go up to the chap in a straightforward and manly way and knock his head off. He plots and plans and generally makes a beast of himself.

Well, here is the story of his latest scheme of revenge. You will understand that I wasn't really present when the affair started, but only in class where, later on, it all came out.

Not for the first time does Harold Skinner try to get his own back by shady means. . . . And not for the first time does the black sheep of Greyfriars learn that the way of the transgressor is hard!

Now all the Remove know jolly well that Skinner and Snoop use the woodshed as a smoking-room. But naturally they do it strictly on the Q.T., so when old Gossy was raking round in the woodshed one morning, he was very surprised to see some cigarette

ends and matches on the floor. He toddled off and reported it to Quelch.

Old Quelch, of course, said that he "refused to

credit that any boy in his Form had been responsible for the cigarette ends"; but still, in spite of this, he thought he would pop along and investigate it. He didn't want another Beak—Prout, for instance—nosing about and finding out that it was a

Removite after all, so he walked down to the woodshed after morning school, and gave the floor a nasty gimlet glance.

Well, it seems that Billy Bunter was after a packet of toffee which he knew was in Snoop's desk. Just as Quelchy bowled down to the woodshed, Bunter dodged into Skinner's study, "snooped" Snoop's toffee, and then suddenly unearthed a large box of cigarettes in Skinner's drawer.

Being a "bit of a dog," Bunter thought he might have the cigarettes as well while he was about it. So he took the cigarettes also, and cleared out of the study just as Skinner came along. Skinner spotted him at once, of course, and gave chase. Bunter, putting on a good burst of speed, tore downstairs, rushed through the Close and sought sanctuary in the woodshed.

As it happens, Quelchy was peering into a dark corner of the woodshed when he heard Bunter's hasty footsteps approaching the door.

"This," thinks Quelchy to himself, "is one of the secret smokers, coming along for a refreshing puff before third school. I will wait and observe him. He will probably turn out to be one of the young rotters in the Upper Fourth"—or words to that effect.

You can imagine that Quelchy's eyes took on a glare when Bunter hopped in and dodged behind the door. Bunter, of course, did not see Quelchy standing there. For one thing, the master was standing in a dusky corner and, for another, Bunter was too concerned about Skinner and Snoop to worry about anything else.

He stood there panting for a moment. All was quiet on the battle front outside, so the happy Owl thought he would have a weed before the bell rang for third school. He pulled out the box of cigarettes, extracted one and lit up.

I leave you to imagine the petrifying glare in Quelchy's eyes at this point.

He was about to step forward and drop a heavy paw on the culprit's shoulder, when other footsteps were heard outside, and he paused.

"Bunter!" roared the voice of Skinner.

"Where is that fat scoundrel?" came the dulcet tones of Snoop.

"He came this way, bother him!"

"In the woodshed, perhaps. It's unlocked."

Billy Bunter trod on his cigarette and gave a deep, dolorous and despairing groan.

"Oh, lor'! Beasts!" he groaned.

The footsteps came nearer and Bunter quaked. Then suddenly an inspiration flashed into his fat brain.

"My hat!" he murmured audibly. "I'll imitate Quelchy's voice and send the beasts away."

The Owl of the Remove is a weird and wonderful ventriloquist. There are few things that Bunter can do really well, but ventriloquism is one of them. He cleared his throat with a fat cough. All the Remove know that little cough by now. It is always the prelude to a mysterious voice coming from some unknown direction.

Quelchy looked on with almost fascinated interest.

Bunter coughed again and spoke.

"Skinner! Snoop!"

Quelch almost jumped clear of the floor. The voice was his own; his tones were imitated to the finest degree. His face grew positively awful as he glared at Bunter.

Outside the door the two young rascals paused.

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped Skinner, dismayed.

"What are you two boys doing near this woodshed? You have no business here at all. Do not approach



"Skinner! How dare you?" roared Bunter, imitating Mr. Quelch's voice. "Do you venture to disobey my—ow!" Bunter made the last remark in natural tones as the door flew open and caught him on the nose.

nearer, Skinner! Stay where you are!"

"But—but—but—" stuttered Skinner.

"I desire to know what you are doing in this vicinity, Skinner. Is it possible that you are the junior who has been using this shed for smoking?"

"Bless my soul!" muttered Quelchy, giving Bunter a fascinated glance.

Skinner gasped.

"Oh, no—no, sir!" he replied. "I—I thought I saw Bunter come this way."

Bunter imitated old Quelchy's snort beautifully.

"Absurd!" he snorted. "Bunter

is not here, Skinner. Return to the House at once—both of you."

"Dear me!" goggled Quelchy, quite petrified.

Bunter coughed again.

Outside the woodshed, Skinner heard the cough. He started, and gave Snoop a questioning glance.

"I believe it's Bunter," whispered Snoop. "I know that cough."

"If it's that fat scoundrel all the time—" Skinner gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to make sure."

"But if it's really Quelchy—"

"I'll chance it."

Bunter heard with dismay Skinner's steps approaching the door.

"Skinner! How dare you?" he

roared, in his Quelchian voice. " Do you venture to disobey my— Ow ! "

He made this last remark in quite natural tones as the door flew open and caught him on the nose.

Bump !

" Yoooooop ! " he roared as he sat on the floor.

" You fat spoofe ! " howled Skinner furiously. " It was you all the time, you podgy fraud ! My hat ! I'll teach you to work your beastly ventriloquism on me. Take that—and that—"

" Whooooop ! " yelled Bunter as Skinner's feet came into play. " Leave off kicking me, you beast ! Ow-wow ! "

" I'll smash you if you try to pull my leg again," Skinner said indignantly. " Give me back those cigarettes, you thieving villain."

" Oh, really, Skinner—"

" Sharp's the word ! " snapped Skinner. " Unless you want a record ragging."

" They're my cigarettes—"

" Cheese it ! I saw you dodging out of my study with the smokes in your thieving paw. Hand them over, or I'll jolly well— Why, what—what—"

Skinner's voice trailed away as his eyes rested on a figure standing grimly in the shadows. He stood dumb with horror. Snoop and Bunter, following his glance, remained perfectly motionless, as though turned suddenly to stone.

And then Quelchy walked out, like the ghost of Hamlet's father.

" Bunter ! " he said in a deep voice.

" Oh, crikey ! " gasped Bunter, wildly alarmed. " Oh, lor' ! It wasn't me, sir—"

" Standing here, Bunter, I have seen and heard everything which has transpired since you entered this place. I have seen you light a purloined cigarette and I have heard you imitate the voice of your Form-master

for the purpose of playing a wicked and inexcusable trick upon your school-fellows. Never in all my career as a schoolmaster have I seen a more deliberate and studied piece of audacity."

Bunter quaked.

" Oh, scissors ! "

" You are a most abandoned young reprobate, Bunter ! "

" Oh, really, sir," quavered Bunter desperately. " I assure you that it wasn't me, sir."

" What ? What ? I was a witness of the whole occurrence, Bunter."

" I—I mean, they're not Skinner's cigarettes, sir. They're mine, sir—really they are—"

" What ? " roared Quelchy.

" Oh, lor' ! " Bunter gasped again as he saw how he had put his foot into it. " Nunno, sir, they're Skinner's cigarettes, sir. I took them away to prevent him smoking them, sir. I'm rather down on smoking—I can't bear it, sir. Ask Skinner, sir ; he'll tell you. He's often seen me—I mean, he's never seen me—"

" There is no need for me to ask Skinner, Bunter, as I have seen you with my own eyes smoking a cigarette."

" Oh, crumbs ! "

" For that, Bunter, you shall be caned severely. But that is the least of your offences. Your unscrupulous deception calls for very drastic treatment indeed. I shall administer drastic treatment to you, Bunter."

" Th-thank you, sir," stuttered Bunter. " Kik-can I go now ? "

" You can, Bunter—to my study, where you will await my arrival."

" Oh, dear ! I—I say, sir—"

Quelchy pointed with a long finger.

" Go ! " said he, and Bunter went.

Then Quelch turned to the wretched Skinner and the shivering Snoop.

" Skinner ! "

Skinny groaned.

"On your own admission, Skinner, these cigarettes are your property."

If Skinner had seen the faintest chance of denying it, he would have taken it like a shot. Unfortunately, though, there was no doubt about it.

"Yes, sir!" he groaned.

"You and Snoop, I presume, are the boys who have used this place for cigarette smoking?"

"Only—only once, sir," faltered Skinner.

Quelchy glared.

"I have found twenty-six stumps of cigarettes here, Skinner. If you smoked twenty-six cigarettes during the one occasion on which you utilised this woodshed—"



Skinner, Snoop and Bunter stood dumb with horror as their eyes rested on a figure standing in the shadows. It was Mr. Quelch, the Remove Form-master, at sight of whom the secret smokers quaked. "Follow me to my study!" he commanded, and walked out like a grim ghost.

"Nunno, sir! Some other fellows must have left them there."

"I hope what you state is correct, Skinner; but I have grave doubts, having been compelled to speak to you before about this habit. If you have not the common sense to wait until you are older before starting to smoke, you must be instructed in a forcible manner. That instruction, Skinner, I shall deem it my duty to administer at once. Follow me!"

"Oh, corks!"

They followed on in the lowest spirits.

Presently there was a sound of steady swishing from Quelch's study. Accompanying the sound we heard

voices which we thought, at first, came from a grand opera selection on the wireless. Then we realised that Bunter, Skinner and Snoop were forming a trio, and rendering, with much "feeling," that very famous part-song called, "Ow-wow-wow! Yarooooh!"

They crawled out into the passage after a time.

"Moooooooooh!" groaned Bunter. "I'm hurt! Ow!"

"Hurt! I'll hurt you!" Skinner said, gritting his teeth. "You wait till I've got over this licking. I'll make you chuck ventriloquising once and for all."

But the only comment Bunter made was :

"Ow-wow-wow-wow-wow!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER UNLUCKY FOR SKINNER.

SKINNER really meant what he said. He was feeling sore and savage. In the passage, where we lined up for third school, he spoke to Snoop about it.

"I'll cure that fat villain of ventriloquising," he said. "I'll make him squirm!"

Snoop, who was squirming himself at that moment, merely groaned.

"I've got an idea, too," went on Skinner. "It wants a bit of nerve, but it is a real coker—especially as Quelch has just heard the fat rotter throwing his voice. I tell you, Snoopy, the scheme can't fail."

"Ow! Do what you like to him—he's boned a huge packet of toffee from my desk," groaned Snoop. "He says he hasn't seen it. That means that he has. If you're going to smash him, I'll help."

"No good," Skinner replied. "Wharton and his set are always ready to chip in if a man starts ragging him. No; I've got a much better idea. You back me up, Snoopy, and you'll see some fun."

The story of the cigarettes had, of course, spread round the class by this time, and we all looked at Skinner with a grin as he wriggled into the Form-room. There was very little sympathy for him—everybody agreed that it served him right. So we found his squirms and his squiggles quite entertaining.

Billy Bunter was still sore, but he had a source of consolation. In his pocket was Snoop's toffee, and he intended that toffee to be in him before the lesson finished. He saw a silver lining in the clouds in spite of the fact that he lowered himself into his seat in a very delicate fashion.

Quelchy was taking English History and was dealing with James the Second. The lesson droned on, and we were just about feeling fed right up when the interruption occurred.

At the moment it came, James the Second was quietly hopping out of England after the news of William's advance. Quelchy was dealing with the abdication of James, when Skinner spoke :

"Oh, cheese it, Quelchy!" said Skinner loudly. His tones rang through the room, although his lips did not seem to move.

Quelchy dropped the book and his lower jaw at the same time.

"Wha-a-at?" he stuttered.

"Cheese it!" Skinner said tersely. "Give us a rest, old bean! We're tired!"

If a waterspout had suddenly burst through the floor we couldn't have been more startled.

We simply blinked at him—except Bunter, who was leaning back with a happy smile on his fat face. Skinner, strange to say, looked as surprised as anyone. He turned round and blinked at Toddy just behind him.

"He's gone potty!" I said to old Inky. "The heat has turned his bit of brain!"

"The pottyfulness is superb!" nodded Inky. "The flogfulness will be terrific!"

"The awful ass!" breathed Harry, in amazement.

Quelchy was recovering his breath. His eyes gleamed at Skinner like points of fire.

"Boy!" he thundered.

Skinner blinked at him blandly.

"Skinner!" gasped Quelchy. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Skinner looked startled.

"I, sir? Nunno!"

"How dare you, Skinner?"

"Eh?" Skinner appeared greatly amazed. "How dare I what, sir? I haven't done anything, have I?"

"Boy! Did not you venture to address me in a most insulting manner and impertinent fashion, Skinner?" boomed Quelchy, turning red with rage. "What do you mean by this conduct?"

Skinner actually staggered.

"I, sir?" he gasped again. "Oh, no, sir—I wouldn't—I didn't!"

"What?"

"I heard somebody speak, sir!" gasped Skinner. "It wasn't me, sir! I thought it came from just behind me, somewhere. I—I thought Toddy—"

"Me?" howled Peter.

"Silence, Todd! Skinner, what do you mean by this absurd denial? I heard you distinctly. It was your voice, Skinner. I suppose you will not venture to state that anybody could imitate your—oh!" Mr. Quelch pulled up sharply and gulped once or twice.

He had just remembered the scene in the woodshed, where somebody actually imitated his voice.

Very slowly he turned and fixed Bunter with a petrifying glare.

Then, as we realised what was happening, we looked at Bunter, too.

The Owl was not aware of the attention that was now fixed on him. He was still leaning back in his seat with a happy smile on his face.

There was no doubt left in our minds now. It was Bunter who had made those remarks.

Skinner's evident astonishment proved that. Bunter, smarting under a sense of injury to both Quelchy and Skinner, had used his ventriloquism to pay them both out at one stroke.

It was a cunning idea—quite in keeping with the fat rascal's character.

We simply blinked at him.

"Oh, crikey! The blithering ass!" muttered Wharton. "Look at him! He thinks nobody will suspect him!"

Quelchy obviously was thinking the same thing. He glared at Bunter as if he could have eaten him.

"Bunter!" he rapped out.

The Owl sat up with a jerk and blinked at Quelchy. He began to look alarmed—the sign of a guilty conscience.

"Stand up, Bunter!" grated Quelch.

Bunter stood up, quaking.

"Bunter! Have you dared to use your power of ventriloquism again after the exemplary lesson you received from me not two hours ago?" roared Quelch.

Billy Bunter goggled at him, but did not answer.

"Answer me, Bunter! Have you ventured to try to deceive me yet again by imitating Skinner's voice for the purpose of making an insolent remark to me, Bunter?" demanded Quelchy in scaring tones.

"Oh!" Skinner ejaculated. "That must be it, sir. I couldn't understand—"

"Be silent, Skinner! Bunter! Speak!"

But Bunter did not speak. He simply goggled wildly at Quelchy.

"Speak!" shrieked the Beak.

Then Bunter spoke at last.

" Whoooooooh ! " he gurgled.

" Wha-a-at ? "

" Moooooh ! Oooooogh ! Whoooh ! " choked Bunter desperately.

" Bless my soul ! Bunter——"

" Whooo-hoooo-hoooo-hooo ! "

" Is this some more of your insolence, Bunter ? "

" Chooooo ! " gobbled Bunter frantically.

" I—I think there's something the matter with him, sir," ventured Wharton.

" What ? What ? Bunter——"

" Moooooooh ! "

" Dear me ! The foolish boy appears to be choking ! Bolsover, kindly lean over and pat Bunter on the back."

" Certainly, sir ! "

Bolsy rose and drew back his leg-of-mutton fin. He was a heavy-handed merchant, and he let Bunter have the full benefit of his muscle.

THUMP !

" Yaroooooh ! " roared Bunter.

He fell forward and sprawled over his desk. At the same moment something shot from his mouth like a bullet, and landed on the floor of the room.

We all crowded forward to look at it.

It was a large and partly-chewed lump of toffee !

We simply goggled at the toffee.

One thing flashed into the mind of each fellow there. It was not Bunter who had implored Quelchy to cheese it. Bunter, with that toffee in his mouth, couldn't use his own voice, much less imitate the voice of another fellow.

Skinner realised that at once. He turned quite green.

Snoop's toffee had saved Bunter. But for that toffee which he had inserted—the whole jolly lump of it—into his mouth just before the interruption occurred, he would have been landed for a flogging.

Bunter, not realising his lucky escape, blinked at Quelchy with trepidation.

" I—I—I wasn't eating toffee, sir ! " he stammered. " It was my toffee, sir—not Snoop's. I—I—I——"

" Bunter ! " Quelchy's lips were in a thin and dangerous line. " Bunter, when did you place that—that sweetmeat in your mouth ? "

" Oh, lor' ! Just before Skinner told you to cheese it, sir," groaned Bunter.

" Ha, ha, ha ! "

We shrieked. Quelchy glared round the Form, and we became dreadfully solemn again.

" You will take a hundred lines for bringing confectionery into the Form-room, Bunter. Throw that—that portion into the waste-paper basket."

Bunter did so, in very low spirits.

Quelchy turned to Skinner. He looked as though he was going to bite him.

" Skinner ! "

" I assure you, sir——" groaned the wretched Skinner; but Quelchy stopped him.

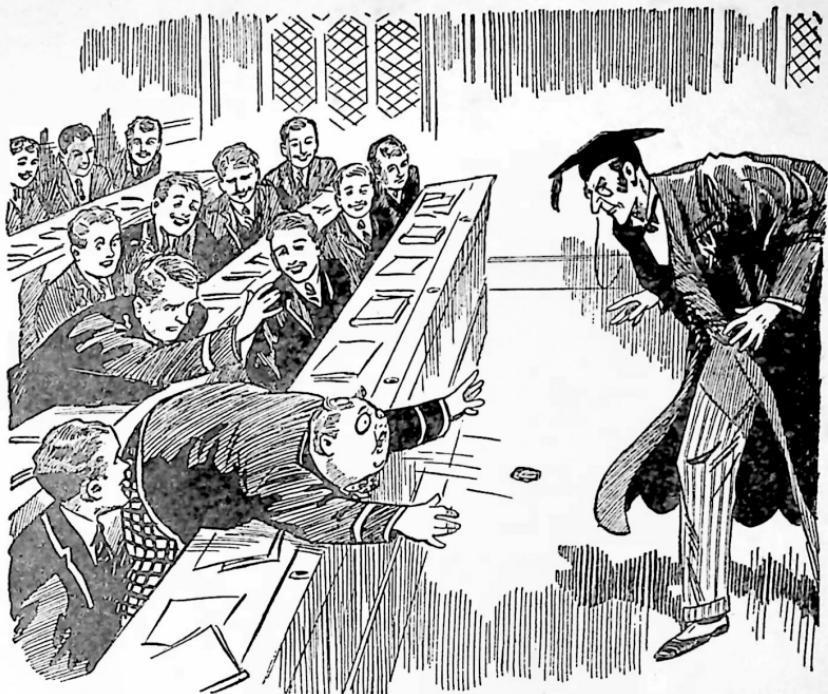
" I desire to listen to no excuses, Skinner. The facts are plain. It would be impossible for Bunter to use his vocal powers while that confection was in his mouth. You observed that he could not speak, much less ventriloquise."

" But, sir——"

" I will listen to no excuses, I say. Your wretched deception is too obvious. You have tried deliberately to force me to commit a grave injustice by punishing an innocent boy. Do you realise, Skinner, that such conduct places you in danger of expulsion from Greyfriars ? "

" I—I didn't think ! " trembled the wretched junior.

" You are fortunate that the facts have come out before, and not after, the injustice has been committed.



"Bolsover," said Mr. Quelch, "kindly lean over and pat Bunter on the back." "Certainly, sir!" Bolsover let Bunter have the full benefit of his leg-of-mutton fist, and the fat junior sprawled over his desk. At the same moment something shot from his mouth like a bullet.

Otherwise you would have been expelled at once. As it is, I shall recommend you to the headmaster for a flogging. You are a depraved and cunning young rascal, Skinner."

"Oh, scissors!"

"You will follow me after school to the headmaster, Skinner!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"And you will receive a very salutary lesson against plotting anything else in future."

"Oh, crumbs!"

That evening Skinner groaned long and loud in the seclusion of his study.

But we had no sympathy to waste on him. He deserved it all.

Billy Bunter was jubilant.

"Wasn't it lucky I managed to get hold of Snoop's toffee?" he remarked, with a beaming face. "I say, you fellows, after this I'm always going to keep some toffee in my mouth. It's safest, don't you think?"

"Providing you can get the toffee!" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh, that's all right. I've been round all the studies already, and I've got quite a large supply."

And Bunter rolled away leaving us speechless.

THE END