

BILLY BUNTER'S CIRCUS! This week's special
yarn of Greyfriars.

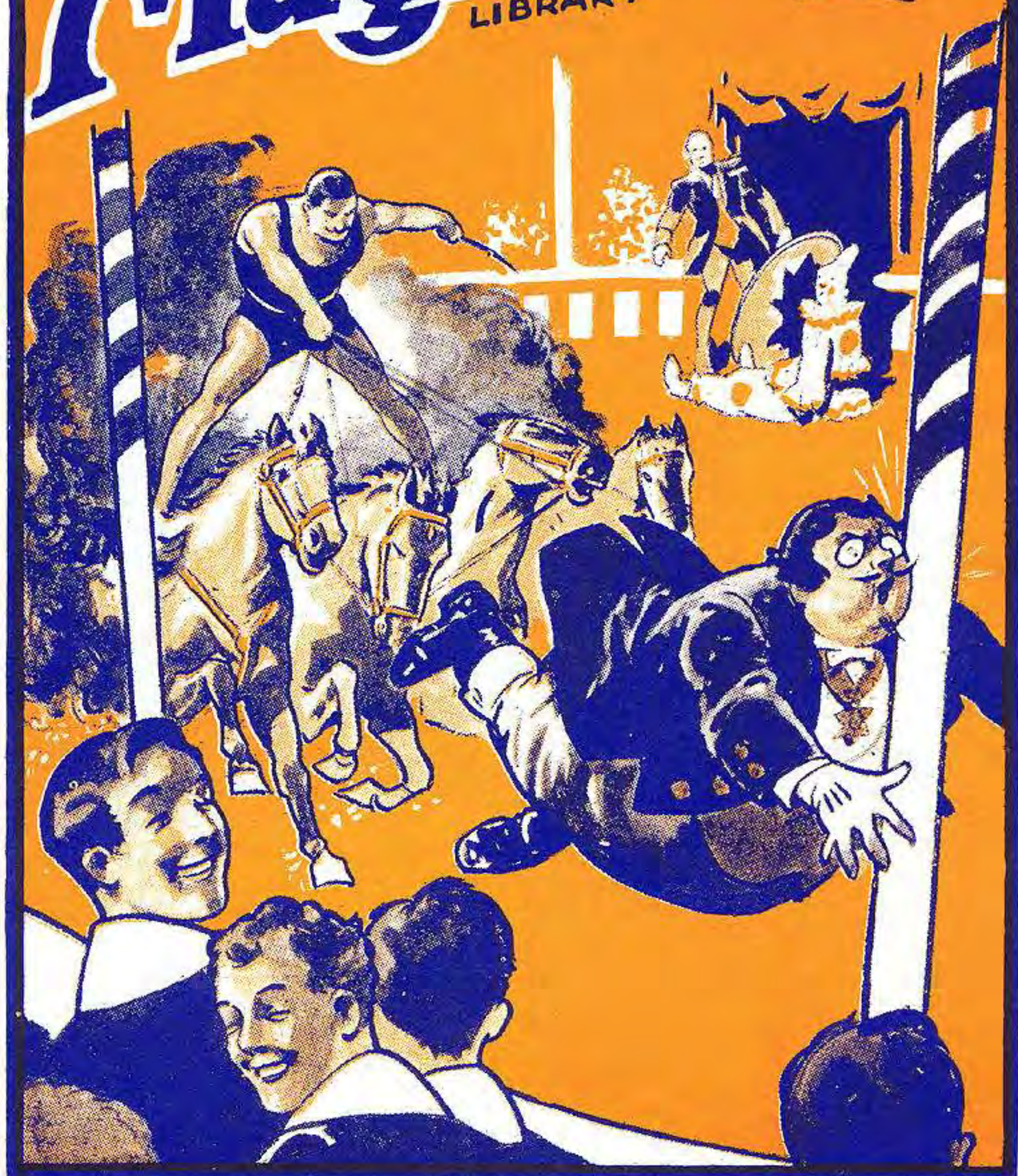
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The Magnet

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EVERY SATURDAY.



BUNTER'S STAR TURN!

(An amusing incident from the magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co., inside.)

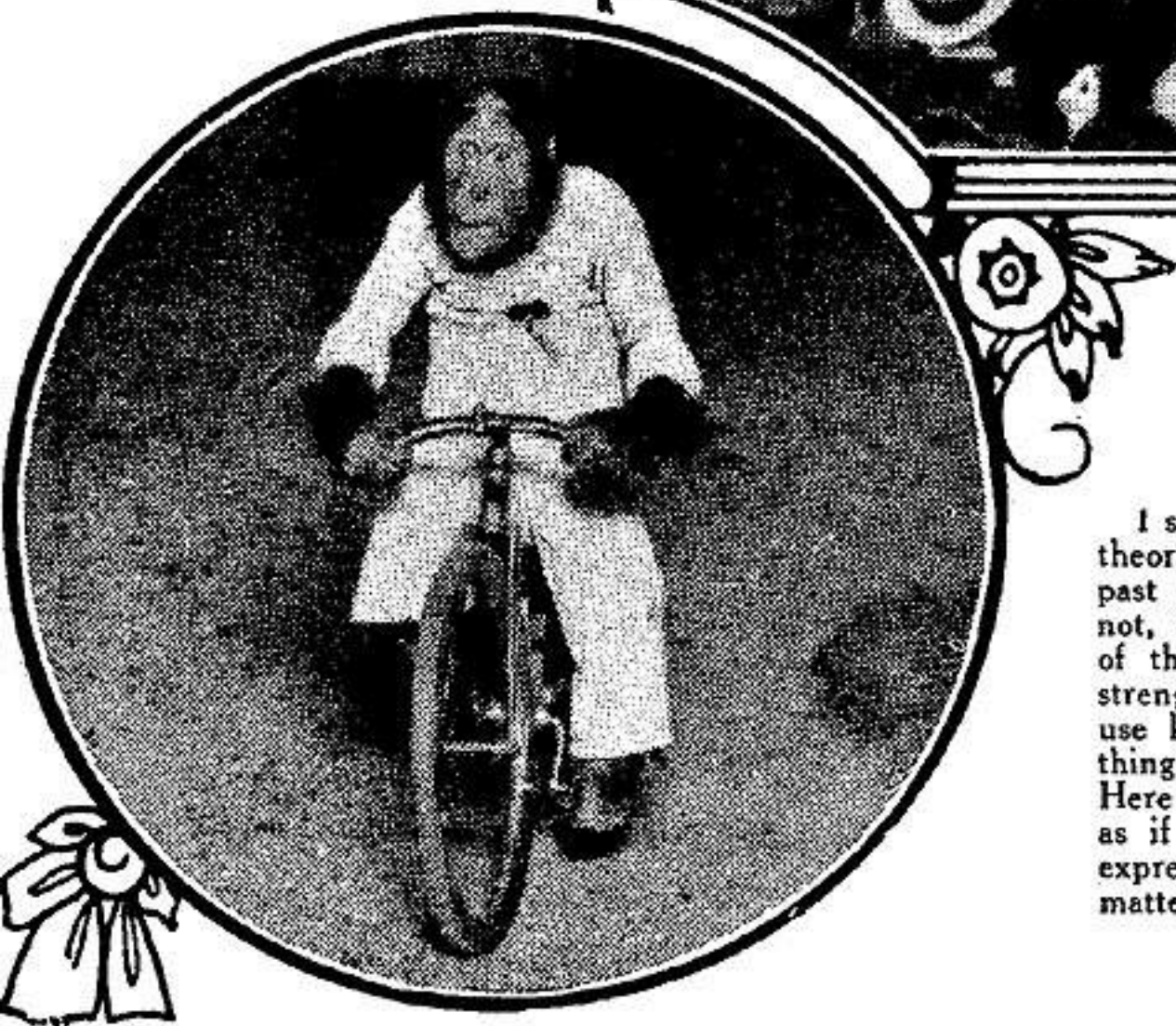
News Pars and Pictures!

AN OUTSIZE IN HATS!

Not merely an outsize in hats, but a new and original idea in sentry-boxes. Perched on top of a striped pole, with a small circular seat at the bottom, this giant edition of a military cap offers ample accommodation for the Russian sentry. Connection with headquarters is maintained by a telephone fixed to the pole.

NOT A NIGHTMARE!

The fearsome-looking monsters in the photo on the right may remind you of the after-effects of a particularly hefty and indigestible supper. But they're not. As a matter of fact, if you haven't guessed it already, they are merely some of the figures in the Plymouth Carnival. Sights like these are more common on the Continent than in England, and the animals in pyjamas, the human carrot, and the fellow with a face like nothing on earth were brought over especially from Nice. I wonder what Drake would have said had a carnival been held in Plymouth in his time? Probably he would have joined in the fun, as the rest of the town seems to be doing.



MONKEY TRICKS!

I suppose most of you have heard of the Darwinian theory, namely, that our ancestors in the dim and distant past were apes? And, whether you believe it or not, it must be admitted that the accomplishments of the clever members of Jacko and his tribe give strength to the idea. They smoke pipes, sew clothes, use knives and forks and a hundred and one other things usually regarded as the preserve of humans. Here you see one going strong on a bicycle that looks as if it has been made to measure, though Jacko's expression offers no clue as to what his feelings on the matter are.

FROM SCHOOL TO CIRCUS! Everyone knows that Billy Bunter has run away from school to escape a punishment. But they little dream where the truant has found refuge. How can they? For Bunter, in the name and guise of Mr. Whiffles, has become boss of a circus — Boss of Whiffles' Circus!



Another rollicking fine story of Harry Wharton & Co., featuring the fat and fatuous Billy Bunter in the role of circus proprietor. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"Bend Over!"

"YOU young sweeps!"

Wingate, of the Sixth Form, made that remark.

He addressed five tired and dusty juniors, who stood in a somewhat dismal group.

The hour was late—at least, for Lower boys. It was ten o'clock. Half an hour ago the Remove had gone to their dormitory, and were now—or should have been—fast asleep. And at that late hour five members of the Remove had just come in, dusty and tired.

The captain of Greyfriars eyed them grimly.

"So you've come in?" he said.

"Looks like it, doesn't it, Wingate?" said Bob Cherry, with a faint attempt at humour.

"You see——" began Frank Wharton.

"We've been——" commenced Frank Nugent.

"You can explain to Quelch; he's waiting for you. Go to your Form master's study!" said Wingate curtly.

"Right-ho!"

Harry Wharton & Co. trailed away wearily to Masters' Passage.

They were tired; there was no doubt about that. They were sleepy; there was no doubt about that, either. And they did not want to interview Mr. Quelch—on that point there was least doubt of all.

But it had to be!

They arrived at Mr. Quelch's study door, and outside that door they paused for a minute or so before knocking. They looked at one another rather lugubrously.

"We've been rather asses!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Come to think of it, we have," agreed Bob Cherry. "Isn't it odd that one only thinks of these things when it's too late!"

"The esteemed Quelch will be infuriated," remarked Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "His wrath will probably be terrific!"

"More than probably!" grinned Bob. "I should call it a cert."

"Well, no good hanging it out," said Wharton. "Let's get it over."

And he raised his hand to tap at the study door.

At the same moment the door opened from within.

Possibly Mr. Quelch had heard the murmur of low voices outside. The light from the study shone out into the dusky passage on five startled faces. Wharton stood with his hand in the air, as if petrified, for a moment. Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted at them. They had expected him to be wrathful. His looks showed that their expectations were going to be realised.

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch. "You have returned! Come in!"

He stepped back.

The Famous Five trooped into the study. As if drawn by a sort of magnetic attraction, their eyes went at once to the cane that lay on the table. They expected shortly to make closer acquaintance with that cane. Obviously, it was placed there in readiness.

Mr. Quelch stood looking at them, his eyes still glinting. The chums of the Remove stood silent, waiting for the hurricane to break.

It was very unfortunate all round. At the end of the term Quelch was never at his best, so far as temper was concerned. A term with the Greyfriars Remove was enough to wear any Form master's patience thin. Tantrums were

to be expected in the last days of the term. But that was not all. The antics of Billy Bunter, of the Remove, had exasperated Quelch, of late, into a frame of mind that made him positively dangerous at close quarters. A member of his Form was missing from the school. Mr. Quelch's opinion was that he had worries enough without that. Now he had that also. And added thereto, here were five members of his Form who had cut evening call-over, cut dorm, and stayed out of gates till ten o'clock. Really, it was too thick, though, Mr. Quelch, of course, would not have described it so.

"Wharton!"

Mr. Quelch's voice resembled the rumble of distant thunder.

"Yes, sir?"

"What does this mean?"

"Hem! We——"

"What does this disgraceful conduct mean?"

The thunder was coming nearer.

"You see, sir——"

"You five boys did not answer to your names at calling-over. You were absent when your Form went to bed. You have returned to school in the—the small hours."

That was an exaggeration. It was very late for Lower boys, but ten o'clock couldn't really be called the small hours—only by a Form master in a wax. But the juniors did not dispute the point. They knew better than to argue with Quelch.

"Where have you been?"

"Lantham, sir."

"Lantham is out of school bounds."

"Yes, sir. But——"

"Unless special leave is given. Did you have special leave from me?"

"Nunno, sir."

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The question was quite superfluous. Mr. Quelch knew the answer to that one, so to speak. But this was his way when he was seriously angry. His state was one of just and majestic wrath.

"Did you have special leave from your headmaster?"

"Nunno."

"Did you have special leave from Sixth Form prefect?"

"Nunno. But—"

"And, without leave, you have remained out of gates until this hour of the night?"

Another superfluous question. Mr. Quelch knew the answer to that one, too. He was, in fact, wasting time. But the juniors did not give him a hint to that effect. Form masters had to be given their heads, especially Form masters in a royal wax.

"You see, sir—" began Wharton.

"I do not see, Wharton! I see no excuse whatever for this unexampled disregard for all the rules of the school. In a boy like Bunter—an absolutely obtuse boy—I am not surprised. You do not claim to be an absolutely obtuse boy, Wharton?"

"Nunno, sir."

"You are head boy of the Remove. It is your duty to set an example of good conduct to the Form. Is this what you regard as a good example to the Remove?"

"Hem!"

"As you have no excuse whatsoever to offer—"

"If you'd let me speak, sir—" said Wharton, goaded, as it were, into resistance.

"Do not be impertinent, Wharton! I am waiting for you to speak. I am waiting to hear what possible excuse you can offer for this unprecedented conduct."

"We went to Lantham, sir, because the circus—"

"The what?"

"Whiffles' Circus, sir—"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Am I to understand that you have committed this breach of discipline in order to visit a circus?"

"No, no! No! Not at all!" gasped the captain of the Remove. "Nothing of the kind, sir!"

"Then what do you imply by your allusion to the circus?"

"We knew Whiffles' Circus had gone on from Courtfield to Lantham, sir, but when we got there we found it had gone farther on, and we followed. We were after Bunter."

"Bunter?" repeated the Remove master.

"That's it, sir," said Bob Cherry, taking up the tale. "We knew that that fat idiot—"

"What?"

"I—I mean Bunter, sir!" gasped Bob.

"Kindly choose your expressions with more circumspection when you are addressing a Form master, Cherry!"

"Oh, yes, sir! Rather, sir!"

"We knew Bunter was with the circus, sir!" Frank Nugent put in his contribution. "We went after it to bring him back, sir!"

For a moment the thunder in Mr. Quelch's brow relaxed. At that moment the juniors knew that, had they succeeded in bringing back Bunter, all would have been calm and bright. The trouble, however, was that they hadn't. They had done their best, but the lost sheep was still missing from the fold.

"You have brought Bunter back with you?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Nunno, sir! We—"

"Did you see him at the circus?"

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"No, sir! But—"

Thunder again! For a moment Mr. Quelch's aspect had been "set fair." Now it was more stormy than ever.

"Were you requested by anyone in authority to take up this matter and go out of school bounds in search of Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! We—"

"You took it upon yourselves to do so?"

"Hem! Yes, sir!"

"You considered it judicious and justified to disregard the rules of the school, to bring discipline and authority into contempt, and to cause your Form master anxiety?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob involuntarily.

That indictment almost took his breath away.

"Cherry, what did you say?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!"

"You uttered a ridiculous ejaculation, Cherry!"

"D-d-d-did I, sir?"

"Esteemed and respected master—" began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Silence!"

Mr. Quelch picked up the cane from the table. Really, he might as well have started in with the cane to begin with. It had to come! But perhaps Mr. Quelch had been willing to confer upon the delinquents the delightful pleasures of anticipation.

"Wharton, you will bend over that chair!"

But why, as a novelist would say, prolong a harrowing story? Five hapless Removites bent over the chair one after another. Five painful youths wriggled out of the study, and wriggled their way to the Remove dormitory. Mr. Quelch was left a little breathless, but no doubt feeling better. And Harry Wharton & Co., as they wriggled a painful way to bed, felt that they would have given anything in the wide world to kick Billy Bunter. And Billy Bunter was out of the reach of the kicking. That was the unkindest cut of all.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Some for Skinner!

"HERE they come!"

The Remove were not asleep.

At that hour they certainly should have been fast asleep. But it was not uncommon for things in the Remove to be otherwise than as they should have been.

When the light was turned on in the dormitory, nearly every fellow sat up in bed and blinked at the returning five.

Then they grinned.

The Famous Five came in wriggling, almost squirming. One glance was enough to tell the Remove what had happened.

"Had it bad?" asked Squiff.

"Ow!" replied Bob Cherry, with deep feeling.

"How many?" inquired Vernon-Smith.

"Six each! Wow!"

"Well, what the thump did you expect?" asked the Bounder. "You've kept it up pretty late."

"Wow!"

"Did you find Bunter?" asked Peter Todd.

"Wow! No! Blow Bunter!"

"I wish we'd brought him back, though!" said Johnny Bull, sulphurously. "I'd just enjoy kicking him from one end of the dorm to the other!"

"The joyfulness would be terrific!" groaned Hurree Singh.

"Well, you asked for it, didn't you?" said Skinner cheerily. "Did you really go after Bunter?"

"Yes, fathead!"

"Quelchy swallow that?" asked Skinner, with interest.

Bob Cherry limped to his bed, picked up the pillow, and turned to Skinner. Bunter was not there to be kicked, so it was really obliging of Harold Skinner to ask for it in this way.

"A good story, anyhow!" Skinner went on airily. "Nothin' like tellin' a good story! But what have you really been up to, you men? You can tell us—all friends here, you know! We—Yarooooooooop!"

Crash!

A whirling pillow, wielded by hefty hands, interrupted Skinner's airy pleasantry.

Swipe! Swipe! Swipe!

"Ow! Yow-ow!" howled Skinner. "Keep off, you rotter! Stop it! Oh, my hat! Yooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I feel better now! Have some more, Skinner? You've only got to be funny again!"

"Keep off, you beast!" yelled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry tossed his pillow back on his bed, and sat down to take off his boots. Skinner had provided him with a much-needed relief to his feelings.

"Did you see that fat chump at Whiffles' Circus, you chaps?" asked Toddy.

"No; but I'm sure he's there!" said Harry. "They're welcome to him! We were asses to go after him! He will get sacked for this, and serve him jolly well right! Bother him! Ow!"

"Quelchy doesn't seem grateful when fellows in his Form take his work off his hands!" remarked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Wharton. "We wanted to get that fat idiot back and save him from the chopper! A fellow may be sacked for running away from school! And that's what Bunter's done, though he hasn't sense enough to understand it!"

"Where did you dig up the circus?" asked Hazeldene.

"Five miles past Lantham."

"My hat, you made a trip of it!"

"The tripfulness was terrific!" grunted Hurree Singh. "I am fearfully tired, and a licking from the absurd Quelchy was ridiculously superfluous!"

"He's giving you some on account for Bunter!" remarked Skinner. Skinner was recovering himself. "He's bound to take it out of somebody if he can't get at Bunter! Form masters are like that!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Turn in quick, you men!" said Wharton. "Quelchy will come up to see the light out, and we don't want any more trouble!"

"You've had rotten luck!" said Squiff sympathetically.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Skinner. "Quelchy's been like a bear with a sore head since Bunter bunked. He was bound to take it out of somebody. Now he's licked five chaps, he may give the rest of us a rest for a bit. It may take the edge off his tantrums."

"Something in that!" chuckled Smithy. "You fellows can consider yourselves a giddy sacrifice for the general good of the Form!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Wharton. "Quelchy's been rather ratty lately,



"You have made a most unwarrantable observation, Skinner, implying that your Form master finds pleasure in the administration of just and unavoidable punishment!" said Mr. Quelch. "Fortunately I have brought my cane with me. You may get out of bed, Skinner." The cat of the Remove obeyed, but very reluctantly. (See Chapter 2.)

and he's dropped a lot of impots about. But we asked for this licking; we knew there'd be trouble if we didn't bring that fat-idiot back with us. "What would have made it all right! "Ow, ow!"

"But what the the can Bunter be doing at the circus?" asked Peter Todd. "What are they letting him stay there for?"

"Can't make it out! Blessed if I care much! Ow! They're welcome to him for keeps!"

"Wow, wow, wow!"

"Cheer up!" said Skinner. "You've done Quelch a good turn, anyhow. He was simply yearning to lick somebody. Nice boys like you ought to be glad that you've made your kind Form master happy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats! Ow!"

"Skinner!" said a deep voice in the doorway.

"Oh!" gasped Skinner.

Mr. Quelch had arrived to turn the light out. Five juniors bolted into bed like rabbits into burrows. Heads were laid on pillows promptly. Only Harold Skinner sat, frozen with horror, as the Remove master stepped in. Mr. Quelch had arrived at an unfortunate moment for him. Obviously, he had heard Skinner's remark.

"Skinner!"

"Oh dear!"

"You have made a most unwarrantable observation, Skinner, implying that your Form master finds pleasure in the administration of just and unavoidable punishment!" rumbled Mr. Quelch. "I am sure that that opinion is shared by no other boy in this Form."

If any other boy in that Form shared Skinner's opinion, he was not likely to say so. The Remove were still as mice.

"You may get out of bed, Skinner."

"Oh!"

Skinner got out of bed very slowly.

"Fortunately," said Mr. Quelch, "I have brought my cane with me."

Skinner could see nothing fortunate whatever in that circumstance.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"I trust that that will be a warning to you, Skinner, to reflect before you speak." Mr. Quelch tucked his cane under his arm again. "Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The light was out, and the door closed. Five fellows had been voicing their woes; now there were six; and the sixth made as much noise as all the other five put together. When the Famous Five settled down to sleep Skinner was still going strong; and voices came from up and down the dormitory in remonstrance.

"Shut up, Skinner!"

"Give us a rest!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Wow! Moooh! Ow!" was Skinner's answer.

But even Skinner shut up at last, and sleep descended upon the Remove dormitory.

In spite of their licking, Harry Wharton & Co., tired from their long ride, slept as soundly as Billy Bunter—curled up in Mr. Whiffles' bed, in Mr. Whiffles' caravan, at Whiffles' World-Famous Circus.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Sad Case of Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles!

BILLY BUNTER was sleeping soundly.

From the red-and-blue caravan, in the circus encampment, proceeded a deep and reverberating snore, indicating that William George

Bunter was cosily tucked away in the arms of Morpheus.

Bunter was sleeping the sleep of the just.

Bunter's recent proceedings might have weighed a little on the conscience of any other fellow—might even have kept him from peaceful slumber. But Bunter was not troubled in that way. His fat conscience was clear—at all events, as clear as it usually was. Other fellows might have found fault with Bunter's conduct. Bunter was quite satisfied; and Bunter, after all, was the fellow who mattered. Bunter was wrapped in self-satisfaction as in armour of proof. This was a great comfort at times when Bunter's actions might have seemed open to carping criticism.

The fact that he had borrowed the identity of Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles, along with his clothes, his wig, his beard, and his moustache, did not worry Bunter. So long as Bunter's fat comfort was increased thereby, why should it worry him? The universe was run for the especial benefit of Billy Bunter. At least, it should have been. If Bunter's comfort meant discomfort for somebody else, it might be unfortunate; but it could not be helped. When things could not be helped it was obviously useless to worry about them. So Bunter did not worry.

He slept, and he snored.

In caravans and tents the circus slept round him. All was peaceful in the encampment under the stars, in the field five miles from Lantham, fifteen from Greyfriars. Fifteen miles from Greyfriars, Bunter could sleep in peace. He was safe from fussy Form masters at that distance.

But there was one, at least, who was

not slumbering in the encampment of Whiffles' World-Famous Circus.

Mr. Dance, the manager, was wide awake.

Mr. Dance was the only member of the circus company who had his doubts about Mr. Whiffles.

They were vague doubts, and did not amount by any means to certainty. But Dance was suspicious—very suspicious.

He was loitering now close by the blue-and-red caravan, listening to the hefty snore that proceeded therefrom.

That reverberating snore was a new development on the part of Whiffles. It was quite an uncommon snore—it was a Brobdingnagian snore.

Dance listened, and shook his head.

He had learned from Harry Wharton & Co. that a junior schoolboy was missing from Greyfriars—a fat fellow, about the build of Mr. Whiffles, who was much more extensive in latitude than in longitude. That had added to Dance's suspicions. He alone of the circus company knew that Whiffles were a wig. Many other little circumstances strengthened his doubts—above all, the supposed lunatic who had been found on Courtfield Common, clad in a bathing-suit and a bathing-towel, and who claimed to be Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles.

Dance moved away at last to a baggage caravan, of which the door was locked, and the little window broken.

He stopped at the window and looked in.

From within he met the glance of two eyes that gleamed with wrath. Mr. Dance was not the only wakeful person in the camp, after all. The occupant of the locked van leaped to the window.

"Dance!" he gasped.

The manager eyed him curiously.

"Well?" he said.

"Dance, you know who I am," said the prisoner of the locked van hoarsely. "You know I'm Whiffles."

"Mr. Whiffles is fast asleep in his van now," said Dance.

"The villain! The impostor! The rascal!"

"Is that all?" asked Dance calmly.

"He is an impostor!" hissed the man in the locked van. "I tell you he isn't Whiffles! I don't know who he is! Some wretch—some dastard—some designing scoundrel—"

"Don't wake the camp!"

"I tell you I'm Whiffles!" howled the man in the locked van. "Don't you know my voice, Dance?"

"Your voice is just like his," said Dance. "If you call it a voice—a fat squeak!"

"You cheeky rascal—"

Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles checked himself. He had realised by this time that his power was gone in his own circus—that he could not give commands as of old, or slang Dance as he had been accustomed to do. Mr. Whiffles was a lofty and commanding gentleman—not in stature, by any means, but in character and manners and customs.

Physically he was short, and almost as broad as he was long. But he was—or, rather, had been—monarch of all he surveyed in the World-Famous Circus, and accustomed to carrying things with a high hand. This had not made Mr. Dance fond of him.

But Mr. Whiffles understood now—his painful experiences had taught him—that a lofty high hand was not, for the

moment, useful; and that it was wise to be tactful.

"Look here, Dance, surely you know me! You know I'm Whiffles! Let me out of this van and seize that impostor."

"How can you be Whiffles?" said Dance calmly. "Whiffles has a head of hair like a mane—you're as bald as a billiard ball. Whiffles has a beard and moustache—your face is as smooth as glass."

Mr. Whiffles panted.

"Don't you see? I kept it a secret—I hated to let anybody know! But it can't be helped now. It was a wig."

"Sounds a tall story!" said Dance, shaking his head. "I don't see how another man could get hold of your fixings, even if what you say is true."

Mr. Whiffles groaned.

"It was all through my going for a swim when the circus was at Courtfield. I left my clothes and—other things hidden in a thicket by the river. That villain—that thief—that rascal—that dastard—found them, and—and put them on, and—and walked off as me."

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Dance.

He understood now.

"That's how I came to be hanging about in a bathing-suit and a towel," groaned Whiffles. "I—I never imagined, of course, the game the rascal was playing. I hung about till late at night, to get back unseen. I—I didn't want to be seen without my—my fixings. And—and then I found that—that villainous impostor in my place, and—all the silly fools thought I was a lunatic, because I didn't look like myself, and he did."

Dance grinned.

"You understand now?" asked Mr. Whiffles hopefully. "Let me out of this, Dance! I—I—I'll double your salary."

"Indeed!"

"And—and give you a contract. I—I never really meant to sack you when—when I said I would the other day. It was only—only my fun!" murmured the unhappy Mr. Whiffles.

Dance smiled, not a pleasant smile.

"Sure it was only your fun?" he asked.

"Yes. At least, I take it back! If—if I hinted that I thought there was something amiss in your accounts, I—I was only just talking out of my hat! I—I know you're honest!"

"Sure of that?" smiled Dance.

"Oh! Quite! Anyhow, I'll give you an engagement for as long as you like, at any salary you fix! There! Only stand by me now."

Dance eyed him curiously.

He had no further doubt that it was Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles who was locked up in the baggage van.

But he had very great doubts as to whether Mr. Whiffles would remember all this, and stick to it, if he was released and restored to his rightful power and glory.

Whiffles locked in the van, and supposed to be a lunatic by all the circus company—and Whiffles on the high horse again—were likely to prove two very different personages! Mr. Dance, in fact, knew his Whiffles!

"I mean it!" said Mr. Whiffles. "Only stand by me now, Dance! Help me get rid of that villainous impostor! Stand by me! I'll be your friend for life! As for sacking you, old fellow, I'd never dream of it! I'm a man of my word! You know that."

"The trouble is, I hardly think I do," said Dance coolly. "Suppose you're Whiffles, as you say—"

"I am! I swear—"

"Never mind that! Suppose you're Whiffles, you'd be more likely to kick me out, for helping to lock you in this van, than to give me a long engagement at double salary. Don't you think so?"

"I—I—"

"If you're Whiffles, conceit is your strong point," remarked Dance casually. "Swank, you know! Gas!"

"You impudent rogue—I—I—I mean, look here, my best friend—"

"You don't keep your word—if you're Whiffles," said Dance, shaking his head. "Look how you treated that nian Huggins, a few months ago."

"Never mind Huggins—"

"You sacked him for pilfering from your van," persisted Dance. "That was all right! But you told him you wouldn't prosecute—and then you did, and got him three months."

"He was threatening me—and he was a hulking ruffian," pleaded Mr. Whiffles. "I had to get him out of reach before I had him run in. He was a prize-fighter, and he was going to knock my head off! Be reasonable."

"You promised him—"

"It wasn't exactly a promise," urged the wretched Whiffles. "Besides, he was standing over me with his enormous fist clenched—what could a man do?"

"You broke that promise?" said Dance ruthlessly.

"Well, perhaps I did—come to think of it! But consider the circumstances—a hulking prize-fighter with his fist only an inch from my nose, threatening to knock my head off! I had to be—hem—tactful! In these circumstances, I couldn't do anything but promise."

"And in these, too?" suggested Dance.

"Oh! Ah! No—you see—"

stammered Mr. Whiffles. "I remember you—if you're Whiffles—explaining afterwards that a promise given under duress wasn't binding."

Mr. Whiffles groaned dismally.

He had quite forgotten the episode of Bill Huggins, and did not like to be reminded of it now. It was rather awkward.

"Don't you think—if you're Whiffles—you'll forget all about these promises to me—and let me down afterwards?" smiled Dance. "Same as you did with the Huggins man."

"I—I—I—"

stuttered Mr. Whiffles. "I'll think over the matter," grinned Dance. "Of course, if you're really Whiffles, I'm bound to see justice done. But you don't look like Whiffles. You don't look like him the least little bit! The cove in the caravan yonder does, you see. Better go to sleep."

"Dance—I—"

Mr. Dance walked away.

He returned to his own van and entered it. There was a cheery grin on his face. Dance seemed to find something entertaining in Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles dismounted from his high horse. He closed the door of his caravan and turned in.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Friend or Foe?

BILLY BUNTER was still sleeping the sleep of the just.

Probably the Owl of Greyfriars would not have slept so soundly, could he have known of the interview that had taken place between "his" manager and the real Mr. Whiffles.

Fortunately, he did not know, and his slumber was peaceful and undisturbed.

Bunter was dreaming happy dreams. In his new character of a circus boss, he was going to cut the last days of the

term at Greyfriars, and he was going to enjoy a topping holiday.

If there were troublesome consequences to follow, the consideration of those consequences could be put off till they came along. That was Bunter's happy way.

So he slept peacefully; and Dance, now that he had satisfied himself as to how that peculiar change of identity had come about, slept peacefully also.

Only one member of the encampment remained awake, and that was the dismal gentleman in the locked van.

In the circumstances, Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles found it hard to close his eyes in slumber.

Of course, the present state of affairs could not continue. He told himself that over and over again. The villainous impostor would be shown up; the circus boss would come into his right again. The future was all right! But the present was dismal.

Mr. Whiffles was dressed, negligently, in some discarded clothes that had been put in the van for him. They were quite unlike his own expensive and remarkable clothes. But he had been glad of them. He had become quite tired of a bathing towel as attire.

In corduroy trousers, thick boots, and a cheap pullover, he did not feel like Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles, and certainly he did not look like him. His gleaming bald head was the least of all like the head of Mr. Whiffles, never seen in public without its ample nut-brown locks. His smooth face bore no resemblance to the bearded, moustached face that was so familiar at the circus. There was not a hair on it. Mr. Whiffles was one of those men whom nature has denied such adornments. Some men would have been glad to have been saved the daily labour of shaving. But it is human nature to want exactly the thing that cannot be had.

As a clean-shaven man, Mr. Whiffles would have been saved a lot of trouble. But just because he couldn't grow a beard or a moustache, he had wanted them. His hairdresser had supplied them; along with his nut-brown hair. Nobody had seen Mr. Whiffles unadorned—till now. And certainly he had never dreamed that the accidental loss of his adornments might lead to the still more serious loss of his identity. That was a totally unlooked-for calamity.

Mr. Whiffles gazed dismally from the little window of the locked van, the starlight glimmering on his shining scalp.

Vanity was the fat gentleman's weakness; and by vanity he had been undone!

If only that rascal, Dance, had let him out! If only some member of the company had sense enough to listen to him, instead of regarding his statements as the wanderings of a benighted lunatic!

He was tempted to yell and awaken the whole camp. But he had tried that before, and a bottle hurled by an angry man awakened from sleep had narrowly missed him.

He had to wait till morning—though the morning promised little hope.

Suddenly, as he stared from the window, Mr. Whiffles became aware of a lurking shadow among the vans.

A thick-set, burly man was moving stealthily about, in a manner that showed at once that he did not belong to the camp.

Mr. Whiffles' heart beat.

If it was some sneak-thief, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, Mr. Whiffles would be glad to see him, all the same. He would have been glad to see anybody who might have let him out of

that van. The key was in the outside of the door, if only there were somebody to turn it.

His eyes glistened.

The creeping, shadowy figure skulked by the locked van. Even in the dimness there seemed something familiar to Mr. Whiffles in that thick-set, hulking figure. But the man's movements showed that he did not belong to the circus.

"Hist!"

Mr. Whiffles breathed the word cautiously.

The lurking figure started violently and spun round. He stood staring at the face of Mr. Whiffles framed in the little window. Then he made a rapid step towards the van.

"Old your row!" he hissed. "Jest a word and I'll smash you!"

Mr. Whiffles stared at him.

There had seemed something familiar in the lurking figure. The face was quite familiar.

It was a face of the bulldog type, with deep-set eyes, and square jaw; and its beauty was not enhanced by the fact that the nose was broken. It was an

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ugly, grim, threatening face—and, worst of all, it was the face of that very prize-fighter, Bill Huggins, whom Mr. Whiffles had sent to three months' hard labour. Evidently the three months had elapsed, and Mr. Huggins was free again. Mr. Whiffles did not need telling why he had made use of his freedom to come back to the circus—sneaking into the camp when all were sleeping. He could guess that.

He gazed at Huggins in terror.

Mr. Whiffles was a pompous gentleman. He was an important gentleman. He was an impressive gentleman. But he was not a courageous gentleman.

His heart sank almost into his boots at the sight of that bulldog face and broken nose. He knew the size and the weight of Bill Huggins' fist. He trembled.

Huggins stared at him.

It dawned upon Mr. Whiffles that there was no recognition in the ruffian's look. He did not know Whiffles—any more than anybody else knew him, in his present plucked condition.

"Oh!" gasped Whiffles.

"Old your row!" growled the man. "You 'ear me? Shut it! You let out

a 'owl and I'll cave in that bald napper of yours! See?"

Whiffles gasped again. The man did not know him, that was certain. For the first time since this strange adventure had befallen him, Mr. Whiffles was glad that he no longer presented his customary aspect. Within reach of Bill Huggins' leg-of-mutton fist he could not look too unlike Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles.

"I ain't going to 'urt you," went on Huggins. "I ain't 'ere to pinch nothing! I'm looking for a bloke. See? 'Old your row!"

Mr. Whiffles did not need to ask the name of the bloke. He knew that only too well.

A gleam came into his eyes.

A villainous impostor had taken his name and identity. That impostor might as well take also the terrific thrashing that Bill Huggins intended for Mr. Whiffles.

He grinned at the thought.

"Look here," he whispered, "I'm locked in this van! Let me out and I'll keep quiet! See? Turn the key back!"

Huggins stared at him in astonishment.

"You locked in?" he breathed.

"Yes, yes!"

"Pinching something?" asked Huggins.

"Nunno! It—it's all a mistake——"

Huggins grinned.

"I ketch on!" he assented. "That old bloke Whiffles has had you locked in this 'ere van, I s'pose, to 'and you over to the peelers to-morrow, what?"

"Yes, exactly!" gasped Mr. Whiffles.

"Well, look 'ere, I'll let you out if you'll show me his van," said Huggins. "I've come 'ere to smash him!"

"Oh!"

"I'm going to bash his face right through the back of his 'ead!"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Whiffles again.

"I'm going to make 'im a 'orspital case! I'm going to bash the stuffing right out of 'im! See?"

"Ow!"

Mr. Whiffles was shaking all over. There was no mistaking the ferocious determination in the face of the man who had done three months' hard, and was apparently prepared to do as much again for the pleasure of knocking the stuffing out of Mr. Whiffles. If the man guessed who he was——

But obviously he had not the slightest suspicion. Whiffles tried to pull himself together. From the bottom of his heart he was thankful now for the trick Bunter had played on him. The mere sight of Bill Huggins at close quarters frightened him out of his wits. Under the stress of terror his brain worked actively. The impostor in the blue-and-red caravan could get what should have come to Mr. Whiffles. That would serve him right. After which the broken-nosed gentleman would be put under necessary restraint again, and Whiffles would be safe from his vengeance.

It was quite a masterly idea.

Until that dangerous ruffian was once more in the hands of the police Mr. Whiffles did not want to resume his own identity. He dared not! No disguise could be too deep for him so long as Bill Huggins was at liberty and on the trail of vengeance.

"Is it a go?" growled the broken-nosed man. "You 'elp me get at that fat old 'ound, and if you've got anything agin him I'll give him some for you as well. See? I'm going to smash him into tiny small pieces! I'll do another three months for him! I'll do

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"Jest show me where he is, and, 'elp me, he'll want 'arf a 'orspital to put him together agin!"

Mr. Whiffles shuddered.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Right!" he gasped.

The bruiser went round the caravan, and Mr. Whiffles heard the door unlock. It opened.

"'Ere you are, matey!" said Mr. Huggins.

The fat circus proprietor stepped out. He could scarcely restrain the impulse to take to his heels on the spot. But a strong grasp—so strong that it intensified his terror—closed on his arm.

"Now, then, give a covey the office!" growled Huggins.

"Oh! Yes! Ow! T-t-this way!" stammered Mr. Whiffles.

He led the ruffian to the blue-and-red caravan. From its interior came a deep and resonant snore.

"He's in there!" breathed Whiffles. "That—that's Whiffles' van. It's been repainted since you left the circus."

"Eh? You know I was at this 'ere circus, do you? I don't remember your dial!" growled Huggins, staring at him.

Mr. Whiffles trembled.

"No! I—I mean—I thought——"

"Sure that's the van? I don't remember 'earing old Whiffles snore like that afore."

"Yes—yes, that's it!"

"Orlright!"

Bill Huggins turned to the van. Mr. Whiffles backed away round another van; and the instant he was out of Huggins' sight he took to his heels. He was not thinking now of reclaiming his identity—very much he did not want to reclaim his identity. He only wanted to get quite clear, lest Huggins should discover his mistake—and to keep quite clear until he was absolutely certain that Huggins was arrested again. The darkness swallowed up the fleeing Whiffles; and Bill Huggins, with vengeance in his eyes, stepped stealthily up the steps of the caravan in which William George Bunter slept the sleep of the just.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Wild Night for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.

It was no sound of alarm, no anticipation of danger, no sort of misgiving at all that awakened him.

He just woke.

He was thirsty. Perhaps it was thirst that awakened him. It was not surprising that he was athirst; his supper had been rich and varied and extensive, and he had had a few pounds of ginger biscuits as a snack after supper before turning in. Ginger is thirst-provoking. On the table beside the bed in the caravan, however, many things had been placed in readiness, in case the "boss" should want anything before morning. On its way through Lantham the van had stopped at a shop for supplies. On Bunter's table were plates and dishes, with jam-tarts, a cake, bunches of varied fruits, Swiss roll, sausage rolls, all sort of things. Likewise, there was a tumbler, and a bottle of lemonade, a bottle of orangeade, a bottle of lime-juice cordial, and a soda syphon. If the boss awakened hungry or thirsty there was ample to supply both wants.

It was dark inside the caravan; and Bunter did not dream of lighting the lamp. That would have entailed some

exertion. Not much, but some, and Bunter did not like any.

He blinked through the gloom, sitting up in bed, and groped. His groping fingers came in contact with a pile of juicy jam-tarts.

He was groping for something to drink. But he could not resist the jam-tarts. Leaving his thirst to take care of itself for the moment, he negotiated the tarts. One after another they vanished like oysters. He was not really hungry, so a dozen tarts satisfied him. He gave a little fat grunt of satisfaction. This was better than Greyfriars. There was nothing in the Remove dormitory, if a fellow woke up with that empty feeling Bunter knew so well. A fellow wasn't even allowed to smuggle tuck into the dormitory. Things were better at Whiffles' World-Famous Circus—for the boss, at least.

Having disposed of the tarts, Bunter was thirstier than before. He found the tumbler, half-filled it with lemonade, and then took the syphon. That made a very pleasant, cooling drink on a hot night. His eyes were accustomed to the gloom by this time, and he prepared to swish the soda-water into the tumbler.

All of a sudden he stopped, and his blink turned in the direction of the door.

The door was opening.

Of Bill Huggins, and his three months' hard, and his vendetta against Mr. Whiffles, Bunter, of course, knew nothing. He was not at all aware that he had taken on the liabilities as well as the assets of the circus boss. One terrifying thought was in his fat mind as the door swung back and a shadowy figure appeared—Whiffles had escaped from the locked van and was coming after him!

Bunter had no doubt of it, and he sat frozen with terror.

He did not know, perhaps, what he deserved at Mr. Whiffles' hands. But he knew what he would get.

The dim figure stepped into the van.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

There was a horrible chuckle.

"Awake, are you, guv'nor?"

Bunter started.

It was not Whiffles' voice. And now that the man was in the van, he could see that it was not Mr. Whiffles' short, podgy figure. It was quite a hefty and powerful man who was groping towards the bed.

"Who—who are you?" stuttered Bunter.

That horrible chuckle again.

"You don't remember me, guv'nor?"

"Nunno!" gasped Bunter.

"Bill 'Uggins, what you sent to chokey for three months."

"I—I didn't——"

"And what's going to cave in your face, guv'nor!"

"I—I say, I—I didn't—I say, I'm not Whiffles!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm somebody else!"

"Are you?" growled Huggins. "Well, if that shiny-'eaded bloke has pulled my leg, I'll look for 'im and cave in his face, too! Let's 'ave a look at you!"

A match struck.

Bunter sat in the bed, clutching the soda syphon, frozen with horror.

He saw a bulldog face, with a broken nose, a square jaw, and glittering, little, piggy eyes. It was a face that, at close quarters, late at night, might have shaken a stronger nerve than Bunter's. Huggins looked like a man

who had done hard labour, and ought to have done a lot more.

Bunter looked like Mr. Whiffles! He dared not take off his disguise when he turned in! Accidents might happen! Night and day he was bound to wear the aspect of Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles, if he was not to risk discovery. The wig was crumpled—his beard and moustache a little askew. But there he was—Mr. Whiffles to the life!

The match went out. Bunter would have preferred Mr. Huggins to go out. But only the match went out, and Mr. Huggins remained. He chuckled again that horrible blood-curdling chuckle.

"It's you all right, guv'nor! Make up your mind to it! You can 'owl if you like! 'Owl out all you want to! It won't 'elp you! Afore they can come 'ere, I'll 'ave you looking as if you was run over by a lorry! You don't know yet wot it's like to 'ave your nose drove through the back of your 'ead! You're jest going to find out!"

Bunter quaked.

This was not better than Greyfriars.

This was worse.

Mr. Quelch, in his most ferocious tantrum, was nothing to this.

The ruffian loomed over the bed, and in a moment more Bunter's fat little nose would have started on its travels towards the back of his head—a frightfully disagreeable experience for any fellow's nose!

Hardly knowing what he did, Bunter shoved forward the soda syphon that was clutched in his fat hand, squeezing it. From the nozzle shot a stream of soda water, like a jet from a hose. It was the only weapon Bunter had, and he used it without stopping to think. Fortunately, it was efficacious.

Swish! Swizz! Squish! Splash!

The stream of soda-water caught Bill Huggins fairly in his glaring eyes. There was a gurgling howl from Huggins. He staggered back, howling and spluttering. Soda water in the eyes is most unpleasant.

Swizzzzzz!

"Help!" roared Bunter, as he squirted. "Help! Burglars! Thieves! Police! Murder! Fire! Help! Fire! Fire! Help!"

Bunter's voice rang far and wide.

Huggins, staggering blindly, caught at the little table, and it collapsed in his heavy grasp. He sat down violently on the floor of the caravan, and the table rolled over him, with its contents. Dishes of tarts and cream puffs, plates of sandwiches, and cakes, and fruits, bottles of various refreshing drinks rained on the sprawling Huggins. He yelled and howled and roared like a bull.

There was a painful squeak from the syphon as it exhausted its contents. But it had saved Bunter.

He knew that the ruffian was sprawling; and he leaped from the bed. His foot landed on Huggins' face, and he slipped over and sat down. Fortunately for him, though not for the avenging Huggins, he sat on the ruffian's waistcoat. An agonised gasp exuded from Huggins. Bunter's weight, suddenly dropping on his waistcoat, completely winded him. He lay in anguish, gasping for the breath that would not come. Bunter scrambled up wildly, dropping the syphon, which found a momentary resting-place on Huggins' nose, and then rolled off. Bunter leaped for the door.

"Help! Help! Fire! Murder!" yelled Bunter.

He leaped from the van.

There were shouts and exclamations on all sides now. Men came running up from caravans and tents.

"Help! Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Wot's the row, guv'nor?" gasped George Mix. "That blooming lunatic got out, sir?"

"Ow! Help! Help!" roared Bunter. "He's in the van! Collar him! A fearful ruffian! Wow!"

Huggins, in the van, scrambled to his feet, gasping and spluttering. He was a hefty man, but he had got the worst of that encounter with the Owl of Greyfriars. He had a severe pain in his inward regions, and his breath came in agonised gasps.

He glared out of the van, and beheld nearly everybody belonging to the circus gathering at the spot. Bunter, a rather conspicuous figure in flowery blue-and-pink pyjamas, was darting away towards Dance's van. Dance, half-dressed, had come running out.

"What?" he gasped.

Bunter did not answer.

He bolted into Dance's van, dragged the door shut, and locked it. The manager stared after him in amazement.

"It's Huggins!" suddenly shouted Nobby Nobbs, the clown.

The broken-nosed man made a leap from the caravan. Huggins realised that there was nothing doing that night, so far as his vengeance on Mr. Whiffles was concerned. He had already done enough to earn another three months, and he was thinking now only of escape. His settlement with Mr. Whiffles was unavoidably postponed.

He made a rush. Slaney made a grab at him, and was knocked over, and then Bill Huggins fled into the night.

He was gone.

But it was futile for Mr. Dance to call out to the refugee in his van that the ruffian was gone. Bunter was not moving. He was not taking any chances. He spent the remainder of that eventful night in Dance's van, and the door was not unlocked until the sun of the summer morning was shining down on the circus camp.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery!

"WHARTON!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"You will follow me to my study!" said Mr.

Quelch.

"Oh dear!"

"What? What did you say, Wharton?"

"Nothing, sir! I—I mean, yes, sir."

Mr. Quelch frowned, and rustled away towards his study.

It was morning in the Remove Form room at Greyfriars School, and the Lower Fourth were dismissed for break. The summons to his Form master's study did not seem to cheer the captain of the Remove at all. He looked glum.

"Look here! This is too thick!" said Bob Cherry, in the passage. "You've been licked, like the lot of us. Quelchy ought to let it drop!"

"The thickfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Head boy of the Form is rather special," grinned Skinner. "There's a little extra for Wharton!"

"Well, I'd better get it over," groaned the captain of the Remove, and he followed in the wake of Mr. Quelch.

Arrived at the Remove master's study, he was rather surprised to see a



Bill Huggins stood staring at the face of Mr. Whiffles framed in the little window. The fat circus proprietor's heart sank almost into his boots at the sight of the bulldog face and broken nose. "Oh!" he gasped. "'Old your row!" growled Huggins. "You 'ear me! Shut it! You let out a 'owl, and I'll cave in that bald napper of yours! See?" (See Chapter 4.)

stout gentleman in uniform there. He knew him by sight. It was Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield.

It dawned upon Wharton that it was not another licking, and he cheered up considerably. He guessed, too, that the inspector had been called in in connection with the missing Owl of the Remove.

"This is Wharton, Mr. Grimes," said the Remove master. "He visited the circus yesterday with some other boys, to find the missing junior. Wharton, you will tell Mr. Grimes what you know of Bunter's presence at the circus."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"It's very remarkable, sir," said Mr. Grimes, "if the boy is at the circus at all. It would practically amount to kidnapping, and it's hard to think of a motive. But, of course, I shall take the matter in hand at once if there is any real ground for supposing him to be there."

"He practically admitted as much in telephoning to me," said Mr. Quelch, "and the circus left Courtfield very hurriedly, although I understand that it was advertised to stay there for a week."

"Well, perhaps this lad can let in some light on the matter," said the inspector. "Kindly tell me anything you

know, Master Wharton. You see, of course, that this boy must be found and brought back in his own interests?"

"Oh, quite, sir!" said Harry.

"Did you see him at Whiffles Circus?"

"No; but I am quite sure he is there!"

"What makes you so sure?"

"We saw Mr. Whiffles and talked with him, sir. He as good as admitted that Bunter was there. He told us a lot of palpable whoppers—I—I mean untruths, and it was plain that he was spoofing—I mean, that he was trying to keep it dark that Bunter was there."

The inspector looked puzzled.

"You don't know any reason why Bunter should run away to a circus?"

"No; except that he's an ass."

Mr. Grimes smiled.

"Or any reason why a circus proprietor should shelter a boy who has run away from school?"

"I can't imagine, sir. I don't see at all why he should want Bunter there. But I know he's there."

"I am convinced of it, Mr. Grimes," said the Remove master. "He may have bribed the circus people, perhaps, to shelter him. Or they may have acted from a mistaken sense of hospitality."

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"Um!" said Mr. Grimes. "You had the impression, Master Wharton, that the boy was there, and that Mr Whiffles was telling you untruths?"

"I'm quite certain of it!"

"And your friends?"

"They all think the same," said Harry. "Mr. Whiffles told his men to kick us out, and we couldn't scrap with the lot of them, so we came away without Bunter. But he's there, right enough."

"Well, Mr. Quelch," said the inspector, "it seems rather vague, but I will certainly visit Mr. Whiffles and make inquiries. If Bunter is there, I have no doubt that Mr. Whiffles will hand him over at once. I have no power, of course, to make a search without a warrant; but if Mr. Whiffles is innocent in the matter, I have no doubt that he will offer to let me search the place. If he refuses, other steps can be taken. At any rate, I will go and see him immediately."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir."

Mr. Quelch made Wharton a sign of dismissal, and the captain of the Remove left the study. His chums were waiting for him rather anxiously in the quadrangle.

"How many?" asked Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It wasn't a licking. Information required. Grimey is going to the circus after Bunter."

"Oh, my hat! Then the fat idiot will come home in charge of a bobby!" said Frank Nugent.

"Like Eugene Aram, with gyves upon his giddy wrist!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Well, so long as he comes, never mind how he comes," said Harry. "He will be sacked, for a cert, if he doesn't show up before the end of the term."

"The sackfulness will be terrific! But the mysteryfulness is great!" said Hurree Singh. "Bunter is certainly there; but the whyfulness is a boot on the other leg."

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Harry. "Bunter may want to be at the circus instead of at school—that's rather natural, though, of course, Quelch wouldn't see it. But the circus people can't want Bunter."

"How could they?" said Nugent.

"How could anybody want Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull. "It's not in reason. Nobody could possibly want Bunter."

"That's what beats me," said Bob Cherry. "Nobody can want Bunter—that's impossible! But if they don't want him, what are they keeping him for? It's a giddy puzzle."

"It's a mystery! He's no use, and certainly no ornament. Greyfriars is ever so much nicer without him. So would the circus be, of course. Yet they've got him, and they're keeping him! It doesn't fit together."

"It doesn't—it don't! Hallo, hallo, hallo! There goes Grimey!"

The juniors capped the portly inspector politely, as he passed them on his way to the gates. The inspector had a thoughtful and puzzled look. The mystery of Billy Bunter perplexed him, as it perplexed all Greyfriars.

Third lesson, fortunately for the Remove, was taken with Mr. Lascelles. Mr. Quelch's temper was growing so uncertain these days, that his Form were yearning to bid him good-bye for the holidays. They had maths with Mr. Lascelles; but even maths were a welcome change from Henry Samuel Quelch, in his present frame of mind.

All the Remove were anxious to know how Mr. Grimes fared in his quest of

the missing Owl. In fact, all Greyfriars was keen. Billy Bunter was the chief topic all through the school now, even among the great men of the Fifth and Sixth. Bunter's antics had provided Greyfriars with a sensation to wind up the summer term.

Would he come back? What would happen to him if he did? What would happen to him if he didn't? These were burning questions.

There was no news that afternoon. The portly figure of Inspector Grimes was not seen again. Skinner persisted in his theory that the circus people had collared Bunter, to show him round the country as a freak.

"Bunter's always running these risks," Skinner told a crowd of grinning fellows in the Rag. "He went to the Zoo last hols. How they let him get away again I never understood. Now he's done it once too often. They've got him at the circus; they're going to bill him as the fattest freak ever! You'll see!"

But even Skinner did not really believe that that was the right explanation of the mystery.

Fellows wondered over it! They pondered over it. They discussed it in every study at Greyfriars. But they never got within leagues of the true mystery. The truth was so astonishing that they would not have believed it had it been told to them. So they were not likely to guess it.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Not the Sack!

BILLY BUNTER had breakfasted. In the summer morning the terrors of the night rolled away, and Bunter like Richard, was himself again. Or, to speak more correctly, he was Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles again.

The visit of Bill Huggins had been rather exciting; but Huggins was gone. Bunter did not know yet that the real Whiffles was also gone. He learned that after breakfast.

George Mix brought him the news.

"That loony's gone, sir!" he announced.

"Eh? What?" asked Bunter. He was debating in his fat mind whether he had room for another bun. He hadn't. He sighed, and gave it up, and bestowed his lordly attention upon George.

"That loony, sir, what was locked in the baggage van," said George. "The door was unlocked by somebody and—"

Bunter jumped.

"What?"

"And he's gone, sir!"

"Gone?"

"Vanished!" said George.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The first part of George's news was startling. The second part was astounding.

That Whiffles, if he was loose again, was gone, was good news. But why he was gone was rather perplexing. If Mr. Whiffles had cleared off, leaving his identity and his circus to Bunter, nothing could have happened better. But it certainly was a very strange proceeding on Mr. Whiffles' part.

"Sure he's gone?" asked Bunter.

"Quite sure, sir! P'r'aps he's back in the asylum by now," said George. "I couldn't help feeling sorry for that pore feller, sir, mad as a 'atter, him thinking he was you, sir."

"Oh! Ah! Yes. Poor fellow!" gasped Bunter. "Send Dance to me, George!"

"Yes, guv'nor!"

George departed, leaving Bunter pondering. He could not account for Mr. Whiffles' flight, but it was a relief. Possibly he intended to keep away till he was fitted out with a new wig. If so, Bunter hoped that it would take some time. The longer he was able to play the part of circus boss the better Bunter would be pleased. Indeed, by this time Bunter almost fancied that he really was the circus boss. He had got quite used to the idea. He was quite pleased and satisfied with his role. He had no desire to change. By this time the genuine Whiffles seemed to Bunter nothing but a troublesome interloper.

Whiffles was gone! That was so much to the good. And Dance was to go that morning. Bunter could not help thinking that the manager suspected something. Exactly how much he suspected, how much he knew, Bunter could not guess; but he knew he would feel safer with the man off the scene. Getting rid of him was easy. He had only to sack him. So long as he was circus boss he could sack anybody he liked.

So Bunter leaned back in his chair, in Mr. Whiffles' caravan, with his fat thumbs in the arm-holes of Mr. Whiffles' fancy waistcoat, and waited for Dance to come "on the carpet."

Mr. Dance arrived.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the manager, in his suave, sleek way.

Mr. Dance was a very sleek, suave gentleman.

"Er—good-morning, Dance!" said Bunter, in an off-hand way. "I find that I shall not require your services any longer."

"Indeed, Mr. Whiffles!"

"Sorry, and all that," said Bunter airily. "But there it is! I'm making some changes here. That's the first. Take a week's salary instead of notice. See?"

"I see!"

"You haven't handed over the pay-box to me yet," said Bunter. "There were good takings at Courtfield. We'll settle that matter now."

"We'll settle several matters now, sir."

"Nothing else to settle. Let's see! What am I paying you?" asked Bunter, with a negligent air. "I quite forget! I never could remember trifles. Anyhow, you get a week's salary for nothing. I'd be glad if you'd get off this morning. No good hanging a thing out, you know!"

"No good at all," assented Dance. "We may as well come to business, Master Bunter!"

"Wha-a-at?"

A bombshell could not have startled Bunter more.

He had feared that Dance suspected something. Apparently Dance suspected more than he had dreamed.

He gazed at the sleek, dark manager in stupefaction.

If Dance had required any further proof, the astounded, terrified stare of the fat impostor would have provided

"Wha-a-at did you s-s-s-say?"

it.

"Master Bunter!"

"I—I say, you know—" Bunter tried to pull himself together. "I—I say, is that a—a—a joke?"

"Not at all, Master Bunter."

"Wha-a-at are you calling me Bunter for? My name's Whiffles!" gasped the fat junior feebly.

"Let us come to business, my fine fellow," said the manager quietly. "I knew there was something wrong at the very start. Last night I talked to Whiffles and got the whole story. I

put two and two together. His clothes and things were pinched while he was bathing. A fat fellow, about Whiffles' build, is missing from a school close by the spot. I may not be a good arithmetician in my accounts, but I can add two and two together. I found that you had a wig the first night you butted in. That put me on the scent. I know the whole bag of tricks now. I don't know why I don't send for a policeman to take you in charge, you rascally impostor!"

"Oh, dear!"

Bunter collapsed like a burst bladder. Dance eyed him ruthlessly. He had the fat impostor now where he wanted him.

"Well?" he said.

"It—it—it was really only a—a—a joke," gasped Bunter. "Not that you're right, you know. I deny it from beginning to end. I never stole any clothes, or

enter into a scheme like this," said Dance. "I'm honest."

"Are you?" gasped Bunter. "You don't look it! I—I mean—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I—I know you're as honest as a burglar. I mean, as the day!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'd trust you with anything. You needn't hand over that pay-box; keep it. I—I'll trust you!"

"That's better," said Dance grimly.

"And the sack is withdrawn?"

"Oh, yes! Rather! I'd like you to stay. I—I want you to stay. Do—do stay, old fellow!"

"If I'm still to treat you as Mr. Whiffles—"

"Yes," gasped Bunter, with a gleam of hope. It dawned upon his fat brain that the manager had been frightening him, with the intention of making terms. "Anything you like!"

old fool Whiffles has cleared off. He must have seen Huggins last night, and he's frightened out of his wits. I suppose it was Huggins unlocked the van—nobody here would. The man owes him a grudge, and so long as Huggins is out of prison I fancy Whiffles will lie low. He's the funkiest booby that ever was. If he comes back, we'll handle him somehow between us. As a lunatic, he could be detained somewhere—some quiet place—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"We'll deal with that if it comes along," said Dance coolly. "I think his fear of Huggins may make him jolly glad to leave you in his place, for Huggins to get after."

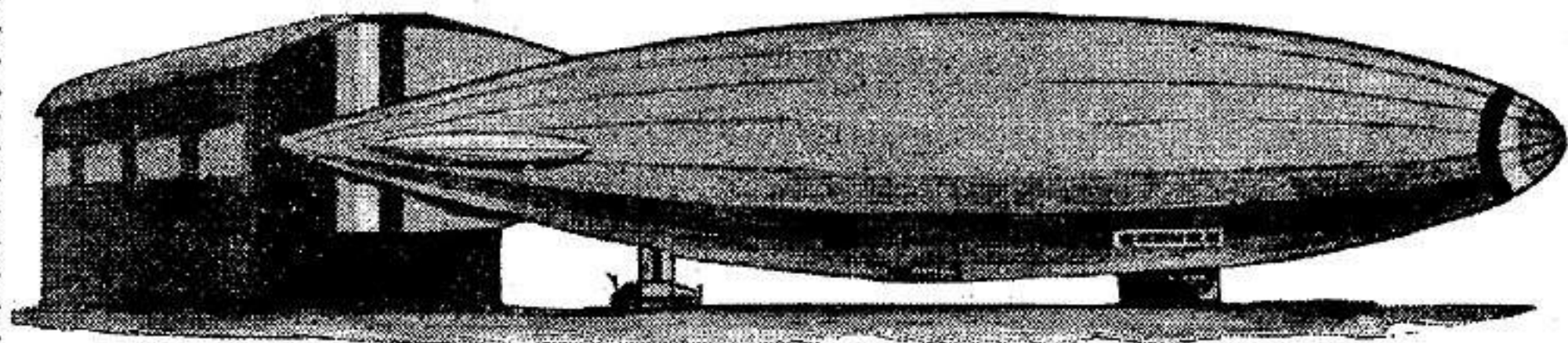
"Ow!"

"If you're afraid—"

"Nunno! I'm afraid of nothing! Any fellow at Greyfriars will tell you I'm as brave as a lion!" gasped Bunter.

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anything. A fellow in a fix with a Form master and a prefect after him might borrow a suit of clothes and a—a—a wig. I don't say he did, but he might. But, of course, I'm not Bunter! I—I never heard the name in my life. I'm Whiffles! I—I say, Dance, I'm not going to sack you, old chap!"

"Not?" asked Dance.

"Oh, no. Only my little joke!" groaned Bunter. "I—I like you too much. You—you're such a nice chap, you know."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Dance. "Anything more before I send a man for a constable?"

"Ow! I—I wouldn't do that!" gasped Bunter. "I—I don't want to give the police a lot of trouble. They—they're a hard-working set of men, you know. I—I'd rather you didn't!"

"You cannot expect an honest man to

"Very well. You may suit me better than the other Whiffles," said Mr. Dance coolly. "I'm willing to give you a chance to try."

"Oh! Good! Fine!" gasped Bunter.

"I shall expect you not to butt into the item of accounts, as he did—"

"Certainly, old chap."

"The pay-box will be completely under my control."

"Yes—anything you like."

"I shall, of course, render you an account," said Dance. "You will not question it?"

"Never!"

"Good, so far! No more cheek and no more swank," said Dance. "You can swank around as much as you like with the others—none for me."

"Oh, no! Nothing of the kind."

"That will do, then. Not a word from me as long as you behave yourself," said Dance. "I'm with you! That

"But—but I don't think my conscience will let me keep on here if that fearful ruffian is going to hang about. That poor fellow Whiffles—"

"I'll look after Huggins, if he comes back," said Dance. "I dare say he can be squared."

"Oh! All right! But—"

George Mix came up to the van.

"Guv'nor—"

"Oh, yes! What—"

"Police officer wants to see you, sir."

"Yaroooh!"

George stared. "Go and bring him here, Mix!" snapped Mr. Dance; and the wondering George departed.

"Ow! Lemme gerrou out of this van!" gasped Bunter. "Gerrou out of the way, you beast! I say—"

"You fat fool! It's only somebody come to inquire after the schoolboy THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,071,

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Sure?"

"Yes, you idiot!"

"Oh, really, you know——"

"Shut up! Here he comes."

George Mix was guiding Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, to Mr. Whiffles' caravan. Bunter's fat heart quaked at the sight of him. But he pulled himself together, realising that Mr. Grimes could only have come to make inquiries about the junior missing from Greyfriars School. And even Mr. Grimes, keen as he was, was not likely to recognise that missing junior when he saw him.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Boss!

"MR. M. WHIFFLES! Good-morning!"

Billy Bunter grinned.

That greeting from Inspector Grimes was more than enough to reassure him.

"Good-morning! Anything I can do for you?" asked Bunter, in quite the manner of a busy but polite circus proprietor.

Mr. Dance stepped back. He watched Bunter very curiously. For his own sake, if not for Bunter's, Dance hoped that the spoofer would have the nerve to carry on. It suited Mr. Dance ever so much better to have a boss who was under his thumb, instead of a boss under whose thumb he was. Little errors in Dance's accounts, which would have been difficult to explain to the genuine Whiffles, did not need explaining to the spoof Whiffles.

He need not have doubted Bunter in this case. When there was no danger Bunter was as brave as a lion. There was no danger now, so Bunter's nerve was unbounded.

"George!" rapped out Bunter.

"Yessir!"

"Bring Inspector Grimes a chair."

The inspector sat down. Mr. Whiffles' van was roomy. In the daytime the bed was transformed into an ottoman, with a gorgeous silk cover. Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles did himself luxuriously in his travelling quarters. If his taste ran rather to gorgeousness, at least it gave an impression of wealth. Bunter pushed a box of Mr. Whiffles' expensive cigars across the little walnut table to the inspector, who smiled and shook his head.

"Thank you, sir, no! I have called to inquire about a schoolboy, named Bunter, who is supposed to be here."

The fat gentleman opposite the inspector looked thoughtful.

"A schoolboy, named Bunter," he repeated. "I think I have heard that name. Did you say Bunter or Punter?"

"Bunter—W. G. Bunter, to be exact."

"Dance!" called out the Owl of the Remove.

Mr. Dance stepped to the door of the van. He had not gone out of hearing.

"Here, Mr. Whiffles."

"You remember some schoolboys came along yesterday, asking me questions about some boy who was missing. Was the name Bunter?"

"I think so, Mr. Whiffles."

"Very good. The—the boy, of course, is not here, inspector," said the boss of the circus. "I really can't make out why he is supposed to be here. What's the idea?"

"It seems that the young donkey ran away from school," explained the inspector.

"The—the what?"

"This young donkey Bunter."

"Oh, ah! Yes. He ran away from school, did he?" gasped the Owl. "I—I

sec. Bad treatment from a Form master, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! Mere fatuous folly, I conclude," said Mr. Grimes.

"Oh, do you?" ejaculated Bunter. "I—I mean, no doubt! Just so! I suppose old Quelch is frightfully ratty—what?"

"Eh?"

"I mean, Mr. Quelch! I think that's the name—Quelchy, or Squelch, or something of the sort. Or is it Welch?"

"Quelch," said the inspector. "Mr. Quelch seems assured that the boy is here, and his schoolfellows have the same belief. Can you give me any information concerning the boy, Mr. Whiffles?"

"Fraid not," said Bunter regretfully. "Dance!"

"Yes, Mr. Whiffles."

"Can you give Mr. Grimes any information about a boy named Bunter, who has run away from school?"

"No, sir—none."

"Does anyone in my circus know anything of the—the young rascal?"

"So far as I know, nobody, sir."

"Well, Mr. Grimes, there seems to be nothing doing," said Bunter. "But I'll tell you what, look round for yourself, and see whether you can pick up any information. Question the hands. If I find that any man in my—my employ has sheltered a runaway schoolboy here, I shall discharge him on the spot! I shall be glad to know if such is the case. Search the whole show! Look anywhere you like! If you find the young—hem!—rascal hanging about my circus, take him away at once!"

"With your permission, Mr. Whiffles, I will look round," said the inspector, rising.

"Oh quite," said Bunter. "A matter like this can't be cleared up too thoroughly, Dance."

"Yes, Mr. Whiffles."

"Go with the inspector, show him round, and give him any assistance you can. If you find that any man in my employ has been helping a runaway schoolboy to stay here, report him to me."

"Very good, sir."

Inspector Grimes walked away with Dance, and Bunter grinned as he watched him go. The fat junior was full of confidence now.

He watched the inspector for some time, rooting up and down the circus camp, asking questions here and there.

Finally, he watched him taking his departure; obviously satisfied that, wherever the missing schoolboy might be, he was not at Whiffles' World-Famous Circus.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter, as Mr. Grimes disappeared in the distance.

He was glad to see him go.

"All safe now," said Dance, with a sour grin, as he came back.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Have you forgotten something, Dance?" he asked loftily.

"No; what?"

"My employees address me as sir."

"Oh, come off," said Dance. "I'll keep that up in public, for appearances' sake; but I don't want any cheek from you in private."

"Oh, really, you know——"

"That's enough."

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed with wrath behind his big spectacles. He was monarch of all he surveyed at Whiffles' Circus—with one exception. It was rather a drawback. He could not sack the man who knew his secret. Dance had only to speak, to bring to a sudden end Bunter's reign as boss of the circus. But at the same time Bunter realised that Dance must have some very powerful motive for keeping

the secret, and entering into the scheme of imposture, at all—a more powerful motive than Bunter's own, in fact. So if he was under Dance's thumb, Dance was also under his. Obviously, Dance wanted this peculiar game to go on; and so Bunter had him there!

He wagged a fat forefinger at the manager.

"Now, this won't do, Dance," he said. "Got that? It won't do."

"I rather think it will have to," said Dance coolly. "If you don't like it, you can always lump it, you know."

"Oh, really, you know——"

"That police-officer isn't too far off to be fetched back," said Dance sardonically. "Shall I send a man after him?"

Billy Bunter was fatuous and obtuse—quite distinguished for his fatuousness and obtuseness—almost unique in those respects. But he was not without a kind of slyness that often goes with fatuousness.

"Right!" he said. "I daresay the inspector would like to know what you've been doing with the cash box!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Fetch him back!" said Bunter, following up his advantage. "If you don't like taking orders from me, you can take them from old Whiffles, and account for the cash box at the same time. See?"

Dance gave him a look that was almost wolfish. He knew exactly how long his job would last, if the real Whiffles came back. It would last just as long as it took Mr. Whiffles to kick him out of the circus.

"Look here——" he said.

Bunter waved a fat hand at him.

"I decline to answer anything from you, Dance, if you forget your place. Sir, please."

"You fat fool!" hissed Dance.

"That will do! Hold your tongue!"

Dance clenched his hands, and made a step towards Bunter.

For a moment the fat junior quailed. But the manager stopped at once. He was simply yearning to knock Bunter heels over head, but he did not want to knock his own plans heels over head at the same time. There was altogether too good a thing in the scheming rogue's hands, so long as he could keep this fat fool in Whiffles' place.

"Look here, we'd better understand one another," he muttered, after a long pause.

"Much better," agreed Bunter, with a grin. He had feared, for the moment, that Dance would knock him spinning. From the fact that Dance did not do so, he knew that he had the whip-hand. He was more necessary to Dance, than Dance was to him. "And understand first of all," he went on, "that I expect deference from my employees. See? No cheek! No impudence! Respect and obedience and so on."

"Very well!" said Dance, choking back his wrath.

"Very well, what?" snapped Bunter.

Dance breathed hard.

"Very well, sir!" he gasped.

"That's better," said Bunter cheerily. He had won the first round, and it bucked him considerably. "You'll be useful to me, Dance, and I'm going to treat you well—generously, in fact. But I don't want any cheek! I can't stand cheek—never could. Bear that in mind. Now go and tell the men to pack up; we're going on the road immediately."

"Next stop Sevenoaks," said Dance. "We're billed to stop there, and we're likely to do good business."

"Next stop nothing of the sort," said Bunter coolly. "I'm going to decide



Hardly knowing what he did in his terror, Billy Bunter shoved forward the soda syphon and squeezed it. Swizzzzzzzzzz! The stream of soda water caught Bill Huggins fairly in his rugged face, and he leaped back, howling and spluttering! (See Chapter 5.)

where we stop, and where we do business."

"Look here——"

"I suppose I can manage my own circus as I think fit," said Bunter. "We're keeping on the road till we're right out of Kent, see!"

"If you're afraid of Huggins——"

"I'm afraid of nobody," said Bunter scornfully. "I've never known what fear means! Brave as a lion, as any Greyfriars man could tell you. That's what a Public school does for a chap! But you wouldn't understand that, of course. Still, we're getting out of Kent. We're keeping right on the road till we get to the other side of Sussex. Give the men the orders."

Dance gave the fat junior a long, long look. Bunter grinned at him. The manager gave in.

"Very well, sir!" he said.

And he went to give the orders.

"Cheeky cad!" murmured Bunter. "I'm afraid that man's dishonest—he's jolly well got his fingers in my cash box, I believe. Still, I never was mean about money. So long as he's not cheeky, all right."

Dance was not cheeky again. It was so very much to his interest to keep the impostor as a figurehead, while he privately dealt with the takings, that he made up his mind to toe the line. He only promised himself the satisfaction of kicking Bunter most severely, when the arrangement came to an end—and obviously it could not last for ever. An hour later, the circus was packed up and rolling westward; far from Greyfriars, far from fussy Form masters and headmasters; far—Bunter hoped—from meddling Whiffleses and threatening Hugginses. Bunter lolled in the blue-and-red caravan, and ate jam tarts and sipped lemon squash, and was happy—quite enjoying his career as a circus "boss."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Breaking Up at Greyfriars!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. wondered whether they would see Billy Bunter again before Greyfriars broke up for the holidays.

They didn't.

The Remove men learned that Inspector Grimes had visited the circus, and reported to Mr. Quelch, over the telephone, that Bunter was not there; and that nobody at the circus knew anything of him. That, naturally, was the only report the inspector could make. It leaked out in a day or two, and though the Famous Five kept to their belief that Bunter was at the circus all the same, the matter was closed. Mr. Quelch had to be satisfied.

He consulted the Head, and Dr. Locke was satisfied also. A police-inspector had searched through the circus, with the fullest concurrence of the proprietor. That made the matter clear.

"But where can the boy be?" asked the Head.

"I cannot imagine, sir."

"No accident, surely——"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"From what the boy said to me on the telephone the other day, sir, it is obvious that he is remaining away from school of his own accord."

"This is very serious, Mr. Quelch."

"Very serious indeed, sir."

"He has perhaps gone home?"

"His father tells me that he has no news of him whatever."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"Something must be done, sir," said the Remove master.

"Undoubtedly!"

"But what——"

"Really, I hardly know."

"After this, sir, the boy can scarcely be allowed to return to the school."

"I fear not, Mr. Quelch."

"Such unexampled audacity and impudence, sir——"

"Quite! Nevertheless, I am very uneasy, and something assuredly must be done," said the Head.

But it was a little difficult to see what could be done.

Bunter had, apparently, vanished into thin air.

If he was not with the circus—and it seemed, after all, that he was not—his whereabouts were a complete mystery.

The last few days of the term glided by. Every day Mr. Bunter rang up the school to inquire whether his son was found. It did not seem necessary to the worthy stockbroker to come down to Greyfriars personally to inquire. After all, he could have done nothing there. That the boy was absenting himself from school of his own accord was clear; and it had to be supposed that he could have come back if he had liked. So the matter, while mysterious, was not alarming.

It was on the last day of the term that Mr. Bunter had news when he rang up. Mr. Quelch grunted as he heard the fat voice of the City gentleman on the phone. He was getting tired of these daily talks with Mr. William Samuel Bunter. He was, in fact, tired of the whole clan of Bunter. Mr. Quelch felt that life would be more restful without any Bunters at all. However, he answered politely.

"Mr. Quelch——" came the stockbroker's fat voice.

"Speaking!"

"I have received a letter from my son."

"Indeed?"

"It was postmarked Lewes. I think that is in Surrey, or Sussex, or Hampshire——" It was quite a long time since Mr. Bunter had been to school.

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 107L



(Continued from page 13.)

"Sussex!" grunted Mr. Quelch. "I cannot imagine what he is doing in Sussex. Can you?"

"I have given up attempting to account for the vagaries of this very extraordinary boy, sir!" said Mr. Quelch tartly.

"William tells me that he is travelling with some friends," said Mr. Bunter. "Apparently he is well and enjoying a holiday. You will be relieved to hear that, no doubt."

Mr. Quelch did not look relieved on hearing that Bunter was enjoying a holiday before the end of the term. Bunter certainly would not have been enjoying himself had he been within reach of Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Indeed!" said the Remove master.

"In the circumstances, there is no occasion for any further worry in the matter, I take it," said Mr. Bunter. "As the boy is travelling with friends, I shall not expect him home for the vacation. He does not mention the names of his friends, but he has, I believe, many friends; he has often told me so, and, in fact, he generally spends the greater part of the vacation away from home. I gather from his letter that all is well with him. He does not ask for money."

Apparently, so long as Bunter did not ask for money, all was well, in Mr. Bunter's opinion.

"After all, the boy is old enough to take care of himself," said Mr. Bunter. "Indeed, a boy is sent to a public school to learn self-reliance. I have no doubt that all is well. Good-bye, Mr. Quelch!"

"I must tell you, Mr. Bunter, that this unexampled conduct on the part of your son cannot possibly be passed over here. It is not to be expected that after his impudent defiance of all authority he will be allowed to rejoin the school next term. You hear me?"

Dead silence.

"Sir! Are you there?"

Mr. Bunter was not there. He had rung off after saying good-bye—not, it appeared, interested in any further remarks Mr. Quelch might have to make. The Remove master breathed hard and put up the receiver. He resolved to write Mr. Bunter a very stiff letter.

The next morning, when the school broke up, Harry Wharton ventured to ask his Form master whether there was any news of Bunter. Mr. Quelch briefly informed him that the boy's father had received a letter post-marked Lewes, in Sussex, stating that all was well with him.

That news was passed on to the Remove, and no doubt all of them were glad to hear that nothing had happened to Bunter. As a matter of fact, the excitement of break-up put the Bunter sensation into the background.

But as the train bore the Famous Five, with crowds of other fellows, away from Courtfield, they discussed the Owl of the Remove.

The Famous Five, No. 1,071.

"Bet you Bunter's with that giddy circus all the time," said Bob Cherry. "I'm absolutely certain he was there when we butted in."

"The certainfulness is terrific," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I think so. And that letter to his pater was dropped in at a post-office in Lewes, which shows that the circus has gone into Sussex."

"That's it," agreed Nugent.

"But can anybody guess what it means?" asked Johnny Bull. "If Bunter's free to write letters and post them, he must be his own master; it's not a case of kidnapping. He can't have got a job at the circus; he's too jolly lazy, even if he had brains enough, which he hasn't. So what the thump does it all mean?"

"I give that one up!" said Bob.

The Famous Five all had to give it up. It was a conundrum beyond their powers of solution. And the subject of Bunter dropped; the Famous Five expected to hear no more of him before the new term at Greyfriars. But they were destined to hear from him, and before very long. They were by no means done with William George Bunter.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Awful for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER walked round the big tent, and blinked to and fro through his big spectacles, with great satisfaction.

The circus was pitched in Surrey now, for the first time since it had left the neighbourhood of Greyfriars.

Hitherto the "boss" had kept on the road, refusing to stop for performances, in spite of the fact that the World-Famous Circus was billed in advance to perform at various places.

Bunter was of the opinion that a fellow could do as he liked with his own. And the circus was his own now.

Dance had been growing more and more impatient. He wanted to see the takings coming in again. But for days the circus kept to the road—first in Sussex, and then in Surrey. Not till he knew that Greyfriars had broken up for the holidays did Bunter feel safe from Bill Huggins.

Of Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles nothing had been heard. Why he was keeping away and letting the impostor run the circus at his own sweet will perplexed Bunter when he thought of it. But he thought of it little and seldom. Bunter was boss now, and he liked being boss; and if he held his boss-ship on an uncertain tenure, he preferred to dismiss that disagreeable reflection from his fat mind.

By this time he had grown quite used to a nut-brown wig, a pointed beard, and a waxed moustache, and was almost persuaded that he was really Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles. So long as Whiffles, for whatever reason, kept away, all was serene, and he was keeping off the grass. There was only one fly in the ointment—the fact that Bill Huggins, on the track of vengeance, supposed, like everybody else, that Bunter was Whiffles, and desired to push Bunter's nose through the back of Bunter's head.

But by this time Bunter hoped that the unpleasant Mr. Huggins was done with. He locked his caravan door very carefully every night, in case of accidents; but there was no alarm.

And Dance pointed out that money would run short if the circus did not perform. So the boss consented, at last,

to pitch the camp in Surrey; and now the big tent was up, and preparations were going forward for the afternoon show.

Bunter walked round the tan, and blinked with satisfaction. Bunter was "bossy" by nature—or born to command, as he expressed it himself. Never before had he been able to boss. Now he could boss to his fat heart's content, and he was enjoying it.

"You'll take the ring this afternoon, Dance," he said, "Keep them up to the mark!"

"I shall have to take both performances," said Dance, with a stare.

Bunter shook his head.

"No. The evening show is more important; I shall manage that myself. The master's eyes, you know—what?"

"Don't be a fool!" said Dance brusquely. "You don't know even the beginning of the business. For goodness' sake keep out of the ring, and don't butt into things you don't understand!"

Bunter gave him a freezing look.

"You forget your place, I think, Dance," he said. "Haven't I warned you that I don't want any cheek from my employees?"

"Look here—"

"That's enough! I'm taking the ring this evening," said Bunter. "I fancy I know how to manage! I suppose I can do as I like in my own circus?"

"I tell you—" hissed Dance.

Bunter waved a fat hand.

"That will do! Shut up!"

Dance glanced round to make sure that no one was in hearing.

"Look here, you fool, you'll spoil everything! You don't know anything about it. Leave it to me, and mind your own business."

"I'm leaving the cashbox in your hands," said Bunter. "I may mention that I'm not wholly satisfied with your accounts, Dance."

"What?"

"If you don't keep your place, and treat your master with proper respect, I shall have to go into the matter," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I hope you will be able to account for all the money that has passed through your hands, Dance."

Dance gritted his teeth. During the past few days he had been backing some more horses. Consequently he was not in a position to have his accounts examined by Bunter or anybody else. He opened his mouth and closed it again.

"Understand this," said Bunter. "I want no argument from any man in my employ, from the manager down to the doorkeeper. I resolutely decline to put up with any back-chat. See? I'm taking the evening performance. Don't say another word! Just shut up."

And Dance, with feelings that were quite homicidal, shut up. Bunter was boss, and he rubbed it in.

"You're not a bad manager, Dance. Your fault is that you're too cheeky. Cut it out! I don't like it! Bear that in mind."

Bunter strutted away; only the exercise of great self-control keeping Dance from helping him on his way with a kick. He promised himself that pleasure later; looking forward to it with keen anticipation.

Bunter rolled out of the big tent.

The circus was pitched in a large field, bordered by a road with a village in sight in the distance. Bunter blinked towards the village, and called to George Mix.

"George!"

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"What's that place called?"

"Wharton Magnus, sir."
"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bunter.
"Know the place, sir?" asked George.
"Yes! No! Exactly!"

Bunter rolled on, leaving George staring. It had been Bunter's intention to walk into the village in search of ice-cream. He abandoned that intention now. That village lay within half a mile of Wharton Lodge, the home of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. Bunter had no desire to fall in with Harry Wharton, or any of the other beasts who might be staying with him over the holidays. He decided to go in quite a different direction in search of ice-cream.

He rolled away cheerily down the road, with his back to the village. It was a blazing day in August, and Bunter was warm. A wood bordered the road, and Bunter rolled into a shady footpath. There was a town on the other side of the wood, from which Mr. Dance expected a large contingent of "people in front." Bunter rolled on, still thinking of ice-cream. He did not observe that a man followed him from the road into the wood. Bunter was not an observant fellow.

But the sound of hurried steps behind him made him turn his head. He was almost in the middle of the wood now. He had a vague feeling of alarm as he turned; perhaps some lingering thought of Mr. Huggins was in his fat mind. But the man that met his view was nothing like Mr. Huggins. Bunter saw a little fat man with a smooth, hairless face, in a bowler hat. There was something familiar about the podgy features. But Bunter did not know the man; though evidently the man knew Bunter. "Ho!" he said. "Here you are! You scoundrel!"

"Eh?"
"Blighter!"
"Oh, draw it mild, you know," said Bunter, in astonishment. "What's biting you? What's the row?"

"Impostor!"
Bunter started.
"You don't know me?"
"No!" gasped Bunter.
"You don't know the man whose name you've borrowed, you impostor, and whose clothes you are wearing at this very minute!"
"Oh, my hat! Whiffles!" gasped Bunter.

Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles glared at him. Bunter backed away cautiously. He did not want to meet Mr. Whiffles. He did not want to meet him at all; and especially not on a lonely footpath in a wood.

Mr. Whiffles followed him up. Even now that he knew who he was, Bunter could not recognise Whiffles; so different did the circus proprietor look without his hair, his moustache, and his beard. And Mr. Whiffles was dressed now very quietly in black.

"I've been keeping an eye on you!" said Mr. Whiffles. "I've been keeping an eye on the circus! I've been watching you! Wait till my time comes! You just wait till then!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.
"Do you know why I'm letting you run on?" hissed Mr. Whiffles. "Do you know why I haven't had you arrested?"
"Ow!"

"Do you know why I've held my hand? Can you guess?"
"Nunno!" gasped Bunter.

Mr. Whiffles laughed derisively.
"You'll find out! You'll learn in time! Impostor! You will pay for this! Keep on! Keep on this—this trickery! Nothing could suit me better—for the present! Wait till you've

got what you're asking for! Then you'll hear from me! Not yet! Ha, ha! No! Just wait!"

And having uttered those mysterious words, Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles shook a fat fist at Bunter, turned on his heel, and disappeared.

Bunter blinked after him in amazement.

His relief at Mr. Whiffles' departure was enormous. He had dreaded first a terrific thrashing, and then the stripping off of his borrowed plumes. But that, evidently, was not Mr. Whiffles' intention. For some mysterious reason, it suited the circus proprietor to let Bunter continue playing the remarkable part he had assumed.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.
Mr. Whiffles vanished from sight; his footsteps died away. Bunter stood where he was, rooted to the ground with astonishment.

"Must be potty!" he gasped, at last. "Absolutely potty! Beast! If it suits him, as he says, he might at least be grateful! It's a beastly ungrateful world. I suppose he's potty! Beast!"

There was a rustle in the wood behind Bunter. He turned—and jumped. It was a powerful, hefty figure that emerged from the wood; and a battered face, with a broken nose, glared at Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove would have run, but his fat legs refused to stir. He blinked in terror at Bill Huggins. The bruiser came slowly towards him, grinning horribly.

"Got you at last, Whiffles!"
"Ow!"
"Nobody 'ere to interfere this time!" grinned Huggins. "Got you all to meself, Whiffles! What?"

Bunter staggered against a tree. Like a flash of illumination it came into his fat mind why Mr. Whiffles was leaving him in quiet possession of his name, his identity, and his circus. This fearful ruffian was after Whiffles. Whiffles was in a blue funk. So long as Bunter was Whiffles, this awful character was after Bunter. Mr. Whiffles was lying low, leaving the impostor to bear the brunt. He was going to lie low until Bill Huggins had dealt with Bunter in the belief that he was Whiffles. What Huggins was going to do to Bunter, would earn him a long stretch behind prison bars; and then Mr. Whiffles would be safe in resuming his identity.

It was all clear to Bunter now—awfully, fearfully clear. Looking at the beetling brows, the bulldog jaw, and the broken nose, of Bill Huggins, Bunter did not wonder that Mr. Whiffles was eager to avoid an encounter with that gentleman at any price. Bunter would have given the circus, with every other circus thrown in, at that moment, to be at a safe distance from Bill Huggins.

His fat knees knocked together.
"I—I say," he gasped, "I—I ain't Whiffles!"

Huggins laughed—a blood-curdling laugh.

"Wot's the good of that?" he jeered. "You're for it, Whiffles! 'Ere's the man you sent to three months' 'ard! Now, then—"

He came on with huge fists clenched.

"Yarooooogh!"
Billy Bunter

leaped away and ran for his life! He charged down the footpath at a frantic speed. Bunter, as a rule, was no sprinter. But circumstances alter cases. He ran like the wind now.

But close behind him sounded the heavy footsteps of the bruiser. He heard the panting breath of Bill Huggins—he felt a touch on his shoulder where the outstretched hand almost grasped him. Frantic with terror, the hapless impostor, who was paying so dear now for his imposture, rushed on. He rushed round a bend in the winding footpath—and there was a terrific crash as he rushed into a bunch of cyclists who were coming on from the opposite direction, the wheels making no sound on the grassy path. But there was sound enough when Bunter rushed into them.

Crash! Thud! Jingle! Bump! Crash, crash, crash!

"Yarooooogh! Yocop! Help!"
Yelling with terror, Billy Bunter rolled among upset bicycles and upset cyclists. And Bill Huggins, coming round the bend in the path like a charging bull, rolled over and added himself to the heap.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Meeting!

"LATE for lunch!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"The lateness will be terrific."

Harry Wharton shook his head.
"That's all right; there's a short cut home."

Five cheery juniors of Greyfriars were riding along a shady Surrey lane. Early in the vacation the Famous Five of the Remove had gathered together at Wharton Lodge. The colonel and his sister, Miss Amy Wharton, were always glad to see Harry's chums from school. On this particular morning the Famous Five had gone out on a long bike spin, and now they were on their homeward way. By the road they were still a good many miles from the Lodge, but Harry Wharton knew every path and bye-way round his old home. He waved his hand towards a dusky wood that bordered the road.

"There's a footpath and bridle-path through there," he said. "We turn in a bit farther on."

"Cycling allowed on the footpath?" asked Frank Nugent, with a grin.

"Well, it's a bridle-path, so one is allowed to ride there," said Harry. "I'm not sure about bikes, but we'll chance it."

"Hear, hear!"
And a little farther on the juniors
(Continued on next page.)



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turned into a grassy path through the old wood of elms and beeches.

Like the considerate fellows they were, they proceeded at a moderate pace. The path was a rather winding one, and they really did not want to charge over any pedestrian who came round a bend under the overhanging branches. It certainly did not occur to them that a pedestrian might come round a bend and charge them over. But that was what happened.

Round a bend in the path a fat figure came flying suddenly, without the slightest warning, at frantic speed.

Before the riders could jam on their brakes, before they even knew he was coming, he had charged into them.

The path was not wide; the cyclists rode bunched together. That heavy charge fairly knocked them over.

Wharton and Nugent, who were riding ahead, went whirling on their machines and sprawled over, the newcomer sprawling with them. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh were too close behind to stop in time. They pitched over the sprawling bikes and sprawling juniors. And the next moment confusion was worse confounded by a hefty man who came racing round the bend and rolled over the whole party.

"What the thump—" gasped Wharton.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Yow-ow!"

"Whooooop!"

"Yow-ow! Help! Fire! Yaroooh!"

"Strike me pink! Ow! My eye!"

"Yoop! Help!"

"Great Scott!"

Harry Wharton & Co. scrambled to their feet, amid a sea of sprawling, clattering bicycles.

They were hurt!

Every fellow in the party was hurt; and they were more wrathful than hurt. It was quite an exciting moment.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! It's old Whiffles!" roared Bob Cherry, staring at the sprawling fat figure in the path.

"Whiffles! My hat!"

"The esteemed and execrable circus merchant!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The fat chump!" howled Johnny Bull. "What did he want to charge into us for? The—the podgy fathead!"

"Ow! My elbow!" moaned Nugent.

"I've banged my funny-bone on something! Ow! Wow! Oh!"

"It was my nose!" hissed Johnny Bull. "You've nearly caved in my nose with your silly elbow!"

"Blow your nose! My elbow—ow!"

Bunter scrambled wildly to his feet. His hat had been knocked off; but, fortunately, his hair was more firmly attached, and it was still there. He was damaged in several places—a fellow could not charge into a bunch of cyclists without getting hurt. But, for once, Billy Bunter was not thinking of his hurts. He was only thinking of that fearful Huggins who was after him. Hurt or not, he was thankful to have run into somebody. Solitude, at the moment, had lost its charm. He scrambled up, yelling for help.

"Keep him off! Yaroooh! Help! Murder! Fire!" shrieked Bunter, staggering against a tree. "Keep that beast off! Help!"

"What the thump—"

"Who the dickens—"

Bunter gave a wild blink round. Bill Huggins was sprawling breathlessly in the grass. One of his feet had gone through a wheel, and the spokes were holding him by the leg. As he tried to scramble up the bike scrambled with him and he sprawled again.

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It was Bunter's chance—and he took it. The poet has told us that there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Bunter took the tide at the flood. Huggins was for the moment held. Bunter, after one terrified blink round, resumed his frantic flight, and went along the footpath like a racer. Gasping and panting, puffing and blowing, the Owl of the Remove charged on and disappeared.

"Strike me pink!" gasped Huggins. "Ow! What's 'olding my blinking leg? Gerroff! Oh!"

"Well, my hat!" said Harry Wharton.

Huggins sat up. His leg was still through the wheel of Wharton's bike, and he grabbed at the machine savagely.

"Get this thing off me!" he roared. "I'll smash you! I'll smash the blooming jigger! Get it off! You 'ear me?"

"Mind how you handle that machine!" snapped Wharton. "Nobody asked you to shove your hoof through it!"

Huggins glared at him and yanked at the bike savagely. Obviously he did not care how much damage he did.

"Stop that!"

"Yah! I'll limb you if you tork to me! Strike me blue! That old covey is getting away! Gerroff of it!"

Bill Huggins had terrific terrors for Billy Bunter; but he had none for the Famous Five of the Remove. As he wrenched fiercely at the clinging spokes Wharton grabbed him unceremoniously by the collar and dragged him over on his back.

There was a roar of wrath from Huggins, and he turned on the captain of the Greyfriars Remove and grasped him.

Wharton was a sturdy fellow, but he had no chance in the hefty grasp of Bill Huggins.

"Lend a hand, you men!" he panted.

"What-ho!"

Four pairs of hands grasped the ruffian at once. Huggins was hefty, but five fellows were rather too much for him.

He was fairly squashed down on the grassy path, and Bob Cherry sat on his chest to keep him there. As he kicked out, Johnny Bull trampled on his legs. Each of his huge fists was secured by a junior, while Hurree Jamset Ram Singh took a grip on his neckcloth.

Huggins spluttered and gasped, and still struggled.

"Shut up, you rotter!" said Bob.

Huggins heaved at the weight on him, and almost succeeded in throwing off the juniors.

"Bang his napper, Inky! That will take some of the fun out of him!" gasped Wharton.

"The bangfulness will be terrific."

"Look 'ere! Strike me pink! Yooooooooooooop!" roared Huggins.

Bang, bang, bang!

Huggins' bullet head smote the earth with considerable force. His head was hard; but the solid earth was harder. Huggins' frantic roars awoke every echo of the wood.

"Chuck it! Leave off! You 'ear me! Strike me blue! Ow, ow, ow! Look 'ere! I ain't going to touch you! I'm arter that old covey! Let a bloke gerrup!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Yow-ow-ow! Stoppit! Oh, my 'ead! Ow my napper! Yow-ow!"

Bob Cherry chuckled breathlessly.

"Will you keep quiet for a bit?" he asked.

"Ow! Wow! I'll keep as quiet as you like!" gasped Huggins. "Oh, my 'ead! Stoppit!"

Argument would have been wasted on Bill Huggins. He was not open to reasoning. But banging his head on the ground was a thing that even his limited intellect could understand. He lay gasping and spluttering, looking as if he would like to bite, but behaving himself quite nicely.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Looking After Mr. Huggins!

HARRY WHARTON detached his damaged bike from Huggins' leg. The bike was in considerable need of repair.

So was Huggins' leg, for that matter.

"Keep the brute safe for a bit," said Harry. "He seems to have been after that man Whiffles, and we may as well give the old johnny time to get clear."

"You let a bloke up!" said Huggins. "I ain't got any row with you blokes! I'm arter that old covey."

"Footpad, I suppose," said Nugent.

"No, I ain't!" hooted Huggins. "I'm arter 'im to paste 'im! I'm going to knock his blooming features through the back of his 'ead! That's what I'm going to do, strike me pink!"

"Not to-day!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We're going to see that you don't, you beauty!"

"Let a bloke up, I tell you!"

"Sit on the brute!" said Wharton.

"What-ho!"

"Strike me—"

"Look here, I'll strike you all the colours of the jolly old rainbow if you don't shut up!" said Bob. "You talk too much!"

"Look 'ere, you young limb—"

"Bang his head again, Inky!"

"The bangfulness will be terrific."

"Old on!" roared Huggins. "I'll be quiet! You've nearly busted my blinking nut already! Chuck it!"

"The behavefulness is the proper caper, my esteemed and ridiculous ruffian," said the nabob of Bhanipur. "Otherwise, look out for the bangfulness of your absurd napper!"

"Oh, my eye!" gasped Huggins. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's remarkable flow of English seemed to take him by surprise.

Harry Wharton collected the bicycles, while the other fellows pinned Huggins to the ground. All the machines were more or less damaged, but they were, fortunately, still rideable. He also collected up Mr. Whiffles' bell-brimmed silk hat, which Bunter had left behind in his flight.

"Fancy meeting old Whiffles here!" he said. "I suppose that means that the circus is pitched somewhere by. Whiffles wasn't very civil the last time we saw him; but we'll give the circus another visit."

"Yes, rather."

"Are you going to let a bloke go?" demanded Bill Huggins in a sulphurous voice.

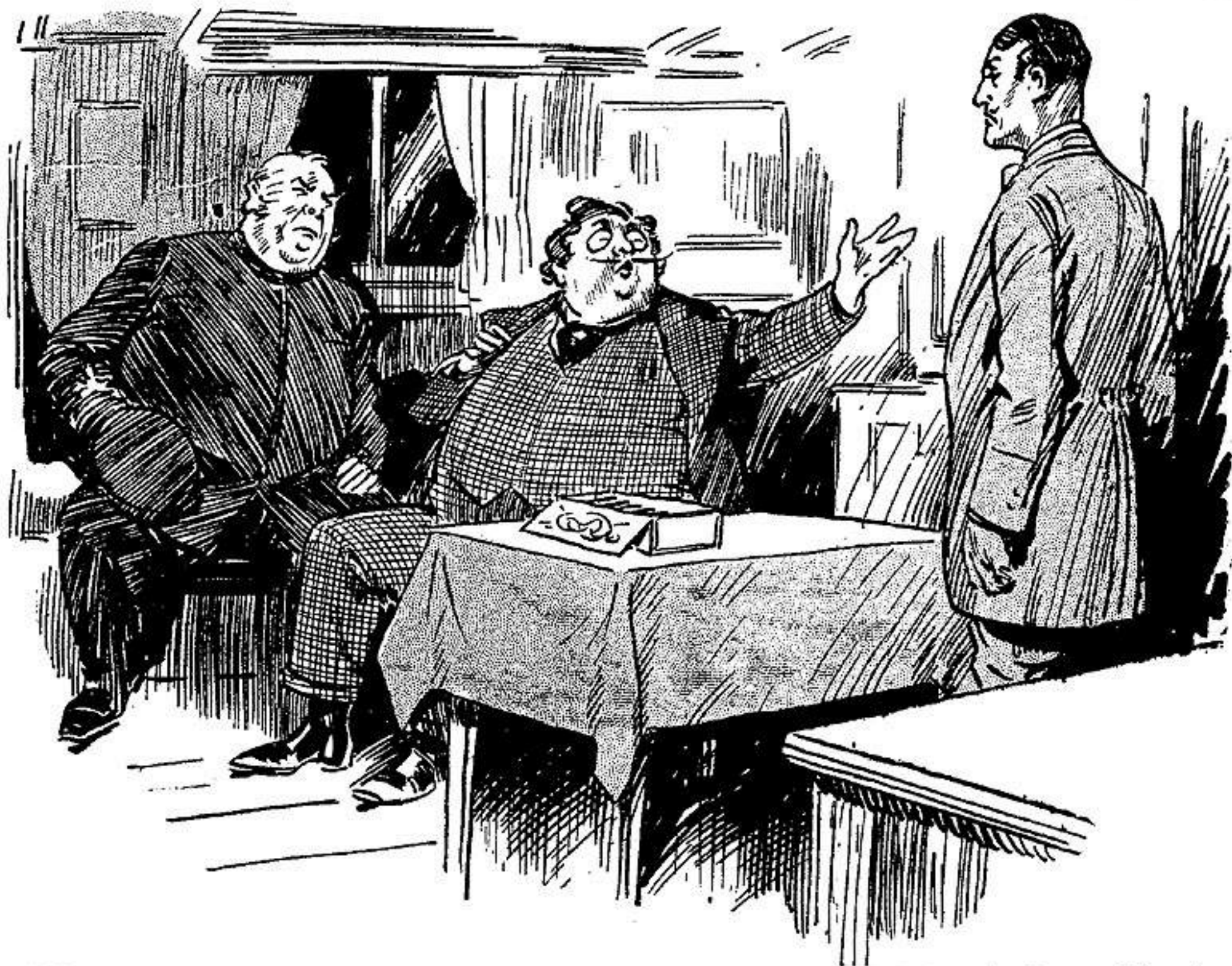
"Not yet!" answered Wharton coolly. "You're not going to be let loose till Mr. Whiffles has had time to get clear."

"I tell you I'm arter that old bloke!" hissed Huggins.

"What the thump are you after him for?" demanded Bob. "What has old Whiffles done to you?"

"Sent a bloke to chokey!" hissed Huggins. "Three months 'ard!"

"You look as if three years would



"I have called to inquire about a schoolboy named Bunter, who is supposed to be here," said Inspector Grimes. "Can you give me any information, Mr. Whiffles?" "Fraid not," said Bunter regretfully. "Dance! Can you give Mr. Grimes any information about a boy named Bunter, who has run away from school?" "No, sir!" answered the circus hand. "None!" (See Chapter 8.)

have done you good!" said Bob cheerily. "Take it calmly! We're saving you from doing another three months for assault and battery."

"I'll do a ten-year stretch for him!" gasped Huggins. "I tell you, I've got it in for that covey!"

Bob Cherry settled himself more comfortably on Mr. Huggins' chest. Obviously, Mr. Huggins was a man who needed looking after. Mr. Whiffles had not been very civil to the juniors on the occasion of their last visit to the circus in search of Bunter. But they did not intend to let this hefty ruffian get within hitting distance of the fat gentleman if they could help it. And they could.

"I've follered that old covey miles and miles!" gasped Huggins. "I'm arter him, I tell you! Three months' 'ard—"

"If you got three months' hard you asked for it!" said Harry. "You must have done something to deserve it!"

"P'r'aps I did!" snarled Huggins. "But that ain't the point. P'r'aps I picked up something from the old covey's van. But he promised to let it drop. Give me his word, he did. Then I was lagged, arter he was out of reach. Let a bloke down, he did! I'm going to give him something worse'n three months' 'ard! His own blinking circus won't know him when I'm done with him, strike me pink!"

"We shall be late for lunch at this rate," said Harry. "But we'll give old Whiffles another five minutes. That ought to see him clear. He was going strong."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors waited five minutes, heedless of the growling objurgations of Bill Huggins. By that time there was little doubt that Mr. Whiffles was in safety. Undoubtedly he had been going strong when they had seen him vanish along the footpath.

"Let the brute go," said Harry.

The juniors released Bill Huggins. That gentleman scrambled to his feet and clenched his huge fists, and glared at them. It was plain that he was strongly inclined to "run amok," hitting out right and left. But the Famous Five faced him coolly, quite prepared to handle him again if he wanted more; and the ruffian thought better of it.

"Blow yer!" he snarled. "Blow the lot of yer!"

And he tramped away along the footpath, evidently without any hope of catching Mr. Whiffles now.

Harry Wharton & Co. remounted their machines and rode on. Wharton took Mr. Whiffles' silk hat in his hand. It was unlikely that Mr. Whiffles would return to that lonely spot in quest of it, and the captain of the Remove good-naturedly took charge of it.

"We'll go to the circus and take this tile back with us," he remarked.

"Good egg!" agreed Bob.

The juniors had almost reached the end of the footpath when a figure appeared from the trees, and signed to them to stop. He was a little, podgy man in a bowler hat, with a smooth, fat face.

"Stop a minute!" he called out.

The juniors stopped, wondering who the man was, and what he wanted.

"What's up?" asked Bob.

"You've just come through this wood by the footpath?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Did you see anything of a man?" asked the stranger eagerly. "Did you see anything of a row? I thought I heard something—"

The juniors stared at him.

"There was a bit of a row," said Bob. "An old johnny butted into us, with a hefty rough after him. Friend of yours?"

"Friend! Ha, ha! A blighter—a dastard—a rogue!"

"Here's another chap who doesn't like old Whiffles!" grinned Johnny Bull. "He doesn't seem popular in these parts."

"Did the man get him?" asked the stranger eagerly. "Did he smash him? Did he assault and batter him? Did he leave him for dead?"

"No fear! We stopped him."

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"What! You stopped him!" yelled the little fat man furiously.

"Yes, rather!"

"You young idiot!"

"What?"

"You meddling puppy!"

"Eh?"

"You rascally, interfering young jackanapes!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Bob. "What's the matter with you, old gent?"

"You—you—you meddling chump!" roared the fat little man. "Why couldn't you mind your own business? You've spoiled everything! Mean to say that that wretch—that dastard—was not assaulted and battered?"

"Not the least little bit!" chuckled Bob. "We held the other man to give him time to get clear."

"Jackanapes! Rascal! Fool! Idiot! Meddling ass!"

"Oh, my hat! Come on, you men! It isn't worth while being late for lunch to listen to this cheery conversation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors rode on, leaving Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles shaking his fist after them, and never dreaming that the stranger was the genuine Mr. Whiffles, and that their intervention had completely spoiled his plans.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fed-Up!

BILLY BUNTER plunged into the blue-and-red caravan, collapsed into a chair, and spluttered.

He was gasping for breath, streaming with perspiration.

The Owl of the Remove had not slackened speed till he arrived at the circus camp. He hardly noticed that his hat was gone. He was conscious of nothing but the terror of the avenging Huggins behind him. The sight of the boss streaking through the camp, hatless, panting and puffing and blowing, caused quite a sensation in the circus. Bunter did not heed it. He did not stop till he was in his van, and then he fairly collapsed. He was too exhausted even to shut the door. He sprawled in the chair and spluttered for breath.

"Ow, ow, ow! Grooogh! Wow!"

George Mix looked in, with a wondering face.

"Anything 'appened, guv'nor?" he asked.

"Ooooooh! Ow!"

Mr. Danco came up, with a surprised and angry face. He ordered George away, and stepped into the van. Bunter blinked at him over his glasses, which had slid down his fat little nose.

"What does this mean?" growled Danco. "This isn't the way to keep up appearances! What the dickens is the matter with you?"

"Groooooogh!"

"What's happened?" snorted Danco. "Ooooooooh!"

Bunter got a little breath back at last. He blinked nervously at the open doorway of the van.

"Is he coming?" he gasped.

"He? Who? Nobody's coming."

"Sure?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes. What—"

"I'm fed-up with this!" gasped Bunter. "I'm not standing it any more! I'm off! I'm going home!"

"What?" ejaculated the manager.

"I'm going home! Back to Bunter Court!" gasped the fat Owl. "I've had enough of this! Oh dear! He nearly had me! Wow!"

"Who did?" howled Danco.

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"That beast Huggins! Ow!"

"You've met Huggins?"

"Ow! Yes! I'm going home! I ain't having any more of this! I know now why that beast Whiffles is leaving me to it! He's afraid of Huggins! He wants me to get bashed instead of him! I'm jolly well not going to be bashed! I'm going home! Ow!"

"Pull yourself together!" snapped Danco. "You're safe from Huggins here. He won't dare show up here. He can be arrested—"

"I'm fed-up!" gasped Bunter. "I'm not afraid of the brute, of course. Any chap at Greyfriars will tell you that I'm as brave as a lion. But I'm fed-up! Come to think of it, it ain't right to take a man's circus away from him. I've got a conscience, if you haven't! It ain't right! I'm going to chuck it. Ow!"

"It's rather late in the day to think of that."

"Rats! Besides, my people want me home for the hols!" gasped Bunter. "They'll miss me! My dear old pater—and Sammy—ow! The dear old home—grooogh! I can't let them miss me like that—breaking their hearts! I'm going home. It's a fellow's duty. Ow!"

Conscience and duty had suddenly awakened in William George Bunter. Bill Huggins had awakened them.

"Look here—" muttered Danco.

"It's no good talking!" hooted Bunter. "Think I'm going to stop here and be bashed to pieces by a fearful ruffian? It's not good enough! See? I'm fed-up with it! Grooogh! The awful villain nearly had me! He was going to bash me, thinking I was that other beast Whiffles! Oh dear!"

Danco stared at him morosely. In the peculiar circumstances, he could not spare Bunter from the circus. Mr. Whiffles had to be supposed to be there for Danco to carry on. He did not want the real Mr. Whiffles, but he very much wanted the spoof Mr. Whiffles. Bunter's desertion would have knocked all his schemes into pieces.

The fat junior staggered out of the chair at last.

"I'm going!" he gasped. "Oh dear! I was a fool to come here at all! It was your fault! You persuaded me! I'm going to chuck it! Whiffles can come back and be bashed himself, blow him! If he thinks I'm going to stay here and take his bashing, he's jolly well mistaken! I'm off!"

"Look here—"

"Shut up! I'm off, I tell you!" howled Bunter. "Old Whiffles is hanging about in that wood, if you want him! I met him there. He wants me to stay here; he wants me to get his bashing! Blow him! The awful rotter, letting a chap in for this! Unscrupulous! I never could stand an unscrupulous chap! You can shut up! I'm going!" Bunter paused a moment, as an important consideration occurred to his fat mind. "I mean, I'm going after dinner!"

"Tell me what's happened," muttered Danco.

Bunter gasped out his story. He blinked nervously from the doorway as he told it. He feared at every moment to see the burly figure of Bill Huggins in the offing.

"Nothing could have happened better," said Danco.

"What?" yelled Bunter.

"Don't you see—"

"No, I don't! I know I'm going—after dinner! George!" yelled Bunter from the van.

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"Buck up with dinner! I'm hungry! Famished!"

"Yes, guv'nor."

"Just as soon as I've had a snack, I'm going!" gasped Bunter. "You needn't jaw! I'm off! Catch me sticking here and getting bashed by that fearful ruffian! He nearly had me! Ow!"

"He can't get near you here," said Danco reassuringly. "I'll warn all the hands to keep watch for him. If he shows up, he will be collared. But he won't. He knows he could be run in again."

"It ain't safe!" gasped Bunter.

"Don't you see, that funky old fool Whiffles has made it as safe as houses?" urged Danco. "He's going to keep away so long as Huggins is around. He's scared to death of Huggins. It makes it all safe. I'll take care that Huggins doesn't get near you. It's all right."

"Tain't!" said Bunter. "I'm going after dinner."

And all Danco's persuasions were lost on Bunter, and the manager quitted the van with a black brow. Bunter, though he was too obtuse to realise it, was acting as a screen for Danco's speculations. If that screen was withdrawn, the unfaithful steward was likely to find himself in considerable difficulties. Mr. Danco's ultimate intention was to bolt, when he had lined his pockets to his satisfaction. But that time had not come yet.

Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles' terror of Huggins gave the impostor a chance to carry on for an indefinite period. Unfortunately, the impostor was as frightened by the hefty Huggins as Montgomery St. Leger himself. Mr. Whiffles was only too glad to leave Bunter in his place while the redoubtable Huggins was on the war-path. For the very same reason Bunter was extremely unwilling to remain in Mr. Whiffles' place. It was an awkward situation for Danco; but it was said of old that there is no rest for the wicked.

But after dinner Bunter was more amenable to argument.

It was a Gargantuan dinner—such a dinner as made the school dinner at Greyfriars look like the diet of an anchorite.

As soon as Bunter had eaten enough for one he felt a little better.

When he had eaten enough for two he felt much better.

By the time he had eaten enough for three he was growing quite comforted. And when his inner Bunter had disposed of enough for four he felt that life was worth living again.

Having by this time taken the edge off his appetite, Billy Bunter proceeded to enjoy his dinner.

He could not help reflecting that spreads like this, regardless of expense, were not to be had in the Bunter home. Bunter Court—in spite of Bunter's descriptions of that lordly abode—was not a land flowing with milk and honey. Only in Bunter's fertile fancy did it reek with wealth. The actual facts were quite different. So far as tuck was concerned, the change from the circus to the Bunter home would be a fall from the sublime to the ridiculous. On the other hand, Bunter quaked at the thought of Bill Huggins. Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles evidently dared not make an attempt to resume his identity till Mr. Huggins was disposed of somehow.

Billy Bunter had a naturally strong objection to taking the terrific "bashing" that Huggins intended for Mr. Whiffles. He did not mind taking over Whiffles' World-Famous Circus. He did not mind taking over Mr. Whiffles' name, and beard, and moustache, and wig. But he strongly objected to

taking over Mr. Whiffles' bashing. He realised that he was simply playing into Mr. Whiffles' hands by keeping up the imposture. And yet—

With enough dinner for six inside him, and slowly and thoughtfully disposing of a large plum pudding, Bunter sighed to think of all that he would give up if he gave up being the boss of the circus.

Dance found him in a more amenable mood. So long as the supply of tuck was absolutely unlimited Bunter felt that he could run risks—at all events, so long as the risks were not near at hand. Fortunately, anything that was out of Bunter's sight was generally out of his mind. He had generally found himself able to face danger when it was nowhere near. Moreover, with that dinner inside him, he was disinclined for exertion. He decided to carry on, and see!

When the big tent was crowded that afternoon, and the circus performance was on, the strains of music mingled harmoniously with a deep snore from the blue-and-red caravan. Bunter had not fled; he was having a nap. And his dreams were not of the ferocious Mr. Huggins, or the wily Mr. Whiffles, but of unlimited tuck, and he smiled sweetly as he slumbered.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Astonishing!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. walked over to the circus in the early evening in a cheery mood. One advantage of being on holiday was that they could witness an evening performance, there being no schoolmasters, or prefects, or bounds, or lights-out to bother them.

They had learned that Whiffles' World-Famous Circus was pitched about a mile from Wharton Lodge, and though they had seen the show near Greyfriars during the term, they were quite willing to see it again. Moreover, the still unexplained mystery of Billy Bunter interested them in the circus. They were quite certain that Bunter had gone with the circus people, though they could not guess how, or why, or wherefore. They wondered whether they would see anything of him there.

In the holidays Bunter had nothing to fear from Mr. Quelch—who was, anyhow, far enough away, taking a well-earned rest from his Form, in the Swiss mountains. So, if he was at the circus there was no reason, so far as they could see, why he should not show up. Wharton carried in his hand a large paper bag, which contained the well-brimmed silk hat he had picked up in the wood. It was only civil to return that headgear to Mr. Whiffles—little enough civility as Mr. Whiffles had wasted on the juniors at their last encounter but one.

Strains of more or less melodious music, wafted across the field, greeted the Greyfriars juniors as they arrived. Plenty of people were going in. All sorts and conditions of local inhabitants were crowding into the field, towards the big tent from which the music proceeded. Mumbo, the elephant, could be heard trumpeting. Harry Wharton & Co. moved out of the crowd and approached the staff entrance. They wanted to see Mr. Whiffles first, to return the silk hat. George Mix was hurrying out of the big tent, and Wharton called to him.

"Hold on! Is Mr. Whiffles about?"

"In his van, sir, preparing for the

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STILL BOSS OF THE CIRCUS!

There's a large size in hidings awaiting William George Bunter when Mr. Bill Huggins gets his hands on him, for the pugilistic Bill is firmly convinced that he is dealing with Mr. Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles. Yet even the thought of the "hiding" is not sufficient to make Bunter want to assume his own identity. With Mr. Whiffles' hirsute adornments, Mr. Whiffles' clothes, Mr. Whiffles' money, and the obedience of Mr. Whiffles' employees, Billy Bunter is having the time of his life. He keeps up the imposture throughout next week's stirring story, but all the same for that, Billy has a decidedly "sticky" time. Look out, chums, for

"BUNTER'S BIG BLUFF!"

which shows Frank Richards bang at the top of his form.

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show, sir," said George. "Other entrance for the public, sir."

"We met Mr. Whiffles to-day, and he lost his hat," explained Wharton, with a smile. "I've brought it back."

George grinned. "Oh!" he said. "Something 'appened to the guv'nor to-day, when he was out for a walk, and he come back in a 'urry, without his 'at. If you want to take it to him, sir, that's his van over there, painted blue and red."

"Thanks!" The juniors walked across to the conspicuous caravan, of which the brilliant decoration caught the eye from afar. Dance was standing on the step of the van, talking to someone inside—apparently Mr. Whiffles.

"Do listen to reason, sir! Let me take the show this evening. I really do not object to the trouble—"

"Rats!" came a voice from within the caravan.

"You'll make a muck of it!" snapped Dance.

"Rubbish!"

"You don't know how to manage—"

"Chuck it!"

"If the whole thing goes wrong—"

"That's enough! Hook it!"

Dance came down the steps and stamped away. He did not look at the juniors, but they noticed that his face was dark with anger, and that it had an uneasy, apprehensive expression. No doubt Dance was apprehensive of the results when Bunter took the management of the show in hand. Bunter's self-confidence was unbounded, but that was a feeling that Dance did not share. But Bunter was "boss"—and Bunter intended to have his own way.

The Famous Five came up to the van. The door was half-open, and they heard a fat voice muttering within:

"Beast! Of all the cheek! As if a fellow can't manage his own circus! I've a jolly good mind to sack him, after all! Oh, dear! Where's that stud? Blow it! Blow it!"

Harry Wharton & Co. paused, looking at one another rather queerly. The voice from the caravan reminded them of the fat voice of William George Bunter. They had noticed before that Mr. Whiffles' voice was very like Bunter's—a sort of squeak, that seemed smothered in fat. But now that he was off his guard, talking to himself, the voice was more like Bunter's than ever. Indeed, the juniors could hardly believe, for the moment, that it was not Billy Bunter who was in the van.

Bunter was groping in the van for a dropped stud. He was dressing for the show, in evening clothes that belonged to Mr. Whiffles. As he blinked in the glass again adjusting his collar round his fat neck, he caught the reflection in the glass of the juniors outside.

Bunter jumped. "Those beasts here!" he ejaculated.

The juniors grinned. Wharton mounted the step of the van and tapped at the door.

"Mr. Whiffles—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"What?" roared Wharton.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter's there!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in amazement. "If that isn't Bunter it's his ghost!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunter!" gasped Nugent.

"My only hat!"

"The esteemed and absurd Bunter is there!" exclaimed Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Wharton, and he pulled the door of the van wide open. For the moment the Famous Five were all convinced that they had found the missing Owl of the Remove.

But as they looked into the van it was Montgomery St. Leger Whiffles who met their gaze. Nobody resembling Billy Bunter was to be seen.

Bunter blinked at them wrathfully. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,071.

He had been taken by surprise, but he recovered himself.

"Look here, what do you—you school-boys want here?" he exclaimed. "If you've come to the circus, go round to the tent. This is private."

"Is Bunter here?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Bunter! Who's Bunter?"

"Oh, draw it mild, Mr. Whiffles! You know all about Bunter," said Bob.

"Never heard of him! Go away. I'm busy!"

"Bunter's not here," said Frank Nugent, in wonder. "I'd have sworn it was his voice. Was it you speaking, Mr. Whiffles?"

"Eh? Yes. Go away! I'll have you turned out if you don't clear off. What the thump do you mean by butting in here?"

"Is that your way of thanking us for getting you away from that hefty hooligan this morning?" asked Johnny Bull gruffly.

"Oh, really, Bull—I—I mean——"

"Blessed if I wouldn't swear that it was Bunter speaking, if I couldn't see that it was Mr. Whiffles with my own giddy eyes!" said Bob Cherry, in wonder.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"There he goes again! How does he know my name's Cherry, I'd like to know?" said Bob blankly.

"How does he know that my esteemed and idiotic friends call me by the honourable and absurd name of Inky?" said Hurree Singh.

The juniors gazed at Mr. Whiffles. They were absolutely amazed and bewildered. If they could have imagined that Billy Bunter had been transformed, by black magic, into the image of Mr. Whiffles, they would have believed that Bunter stood before them now. But they could not, of course, imagine that. They could only stare at him in bewildered amazement.

"Look here, you fellows, you clear off!" snapped the boss of the World-famous Circus. "I'm fed-up with you. I—I'm much obliged for what you did this morning—not that it was anything to speak of. I—I should have stopped and thrashed that rotter, only I was—was in rather a hurry."

"You looked in rather a hurry," grinned Bob. "A fellow could have guessed you were in a hurry, Mr. Whiffles."

"I don't want any cheek!" snorted Bunter. "Keep your rotten jokes for the Remove passage, Bob Cherry!"

"What the thump do you know about the Remove passage?" gasped Bob. "You seem to know a lot of things about us, Mr. Whiffles."

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"Oh, hook it!" said Bunter. "I'm busy!"

"I've brought back your hat, Mr. Whiffles," said Harry. "You were in such a hurry this morning that you left it behind you. Here it is."

"Oh! Thanks!"

Bunter took the hat. Then he felt in Mr. Whiffles' pocket for some of Mr. Whiffles' cash.

"Here's half-a-crown for you, my lad."

"You cheeky ass!" said Harry indignantly. "Keep your silly half-crown!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Come on, you men," said Wharton; and the juniors walked away from the van.

As they made their way round to the entrance of the big tent they were wondering. That Mr. Whiffles should have a fat, squeaky voice like Bunter's was not surprising, but that he should have Bunter's fat, squeaky voice, and

Bunter's peculiar expressions of speech, was very surprising indeed. It really seemed as if the ghost of Bunter's voice haunted the fat person of the circus master. It was extremely perplexing, and they were still thinking of it when they made their way into the big tent and found their seats.

And when Mr. Whiffles, resplendent in evening clothes and fancy waistcoat, with the silk hat on his ample nut-brown locks, and a whip under his arm, rolled magnificently into the ring, they watched him with deep interest. Somehow, the proprietor of Whiffles' World-famous Circus was indissolubly connected with William George Bunter in their minds.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER!

Beastly for the Boss!

BILLY BUNTER blinked round the great arena, and at the rows and rows of "people in front," with great satisfaction.

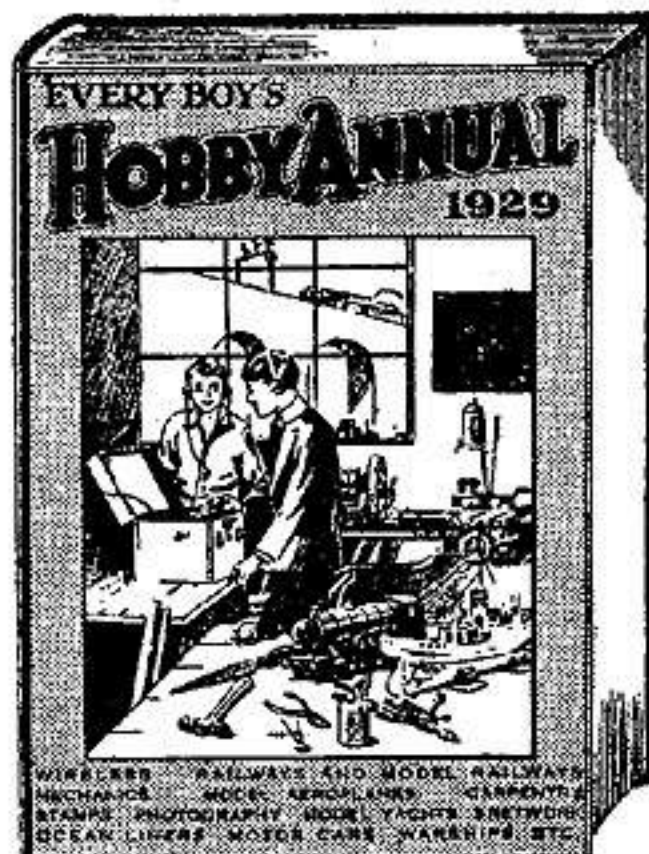
Bunter was in his element now.

That he could manage the circus performance he had no doubt whatever. His abilities were equal to any test.

Genius can be turned in any direction. Bunter had no doubt whatever that he would have shone in any walk in life. At Greyfriars, it had never been hidden from Bunter that he could have run the school ever so much better than Dr. Locke. He never read a book without realising that he could have written it better if he had had the time. He never watched a county cricket match without reflecting what valuable tips he could have given to batsmen, bowlers, and field. If a fellow had genius, he simply had to mount it, as it were, and drive it in any direction he liked. Bunter had genius, so there it was! Considering the number of things that Bunter thought he could do, it was sheer

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check on the part of Dance to fancy that he could not manage a circus performance. It was simply pie to Bunter.

The performance started with a number of horses galloping round the ring, with Tomasso Tomsonio, the acrobat, standing on them, leaping from back to back as they galloped. Bunter proceeded to crack the long whip as he had often seen ringmasters do.

Cracking a whip was surely the easiest part of a circus boss' job. But when Bunter came to handle that long whip, the natural clumsiness that was one of his many gifts got in the way. Nobby Nobbs, the clown, was turning somersaults on the tan, what time the galloping horses circled the ring. Bunter certainly had no intention of touching up Nobby Nobbs. His intention was simply to crack the whip in professional style. But what he actually did was to deliver a terrific slash that took effect on Mr. Nobbs' legs.

There was a yell from Nobby Nobbs that woke every echo of the big tent.

He rolled over and sat in the tan, blinking at the ringmaster.

"Here, what's this game?" he bawled. "Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the audience.

The people in front took this as part of the performance, and they seemed to think it funny.

Mr. Nobbs did not think it funny. Bunter brandished the whip again.

"Look out, guv'nor!" shrieked Nobby. He caught the long lash this time with his neck.

"Yooop!"

Mr. Nobbs scrambled up and fled. There was a yell of delight from the audience. This was quite amusing—to everybody except the unfortunate Mr. Nobbs. Mr. Nobbs made a beeline for the staff exit.

"Here, you, come back!" roared Bunter.

Mr. Nobbs turned a deaf ear. He scudded down the canvas passage, and almost ran into Dance. The manager caught him by the shoulder.

"Look here! What are you going off for? What——"

"I ain't going to be larruped with that whip!" bawled Mr. Nobbs. "The guv'nor's mad or drunk! Let him keep that blinking whip to himself!"

"The fat idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from the packed tent. Dance stared in round the canvas flap. Billy Bunter had got in the way of the galloping horses. Fortunately, he jumped out of the way in time as they thundered down on him; but he jumped in such a hurry that he lost his footing in the sawdust, and rolled over.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

His silk hat spun from his head as he rolled, under the galloping hoofs.

Crunch!

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter, sitting up in the tan, and blinking round him in bewilderment. "Where's my hat? Oh crikey!"

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

"I say, this is funnier than usual!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "That old Whiffles is no end of a funny merchant!"

"The funniffulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter scrambled up, and grabbed up the crunched hat before the horses came thundering round again. He blinked in dismay at the hat, and tried to punch it out into some semblance of a topper again. The audience roared. This unrehearsed turn was going well with the people in front.

Tomasso Tomsonio guided his horses



Round a bend in the path a fat figure came flying, suddenly, and without the slightest warning. Before the Famous Five could jam on their brakes, before they even knew the pedestrian was coming, he had charged into them. Wharton and Nugent, who were riding ahead, sprawled over the newcomer, and Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh, unable to stop themselves, crashed into the struggling heap of humanity. (See Chapter 11.)

out of the ring at last, while Bunter, having restored his hat to something like the shape of a hat, jammed it on his head again. Then Mumbo, the performing elephant, came lumbering into the ring, with Nobby Nobbs seated on his neck. Mr. Nobbs kept a wary eye on the boss now. His impression was that Mr. Whiffles had been drinking.

Mumbo lumbered round the ring, Nobby performing acrobatic feats on his back. At this point, it was Mr. Whiffles' cue to exchange back-chat with the clown, and Nobby wondered why he did not "go it." But Mr. Whiffles did not go it. He was quite unaware of what was expected of him. Dance scowled at him from behind the canvas flap, which perhaps relieved Mr. Dance's feelings, but was not helpful in any other way.

Having waited in vain for the guv'nor to bandy the usual back-chat, and crack the ancient jokes of the circus, Nobby Nobbs proceeded to the next item, in which Mumbo, the elephant, had to pick up Mr. Whiffles in his trunk and raise him in the air, Mr. Whiffles at the same time affecting to be terrified. In Bunter's case, terror was not at all affected. The huge elephant stopped in front of him, and Bunter jumped back in alarm.

"Here, keep that beast off!" he yelled.

Mumbo followed him up, whipped his trunk round the ringmaster, and swept him from his feet.

"Yaroooh! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo! Help! Fire! Murder!" roared Bunter. "Oh crikey! Leggo! I shall be killed! Help! Whoooop!"

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

"Blessed if a chap wouldn't think he was really frightened, if it wasn't part of the game!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Bravo!"

"Yarooogh! Make him lemme go!" shrieked Bunter, as he swam between earth and roof. "I'll sack you! Help! Help! Fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mumbo proceeded to parade round the ring, as was his custom, with the ringmaster in his trunk. Bunter wriggled and squirmed and yelled frantically. Every moment he expected to be dumped in the sawdust, and to feel the elephant's gigantic feet treading on him. His hat flew in one direction, his whip in another. His frantic yells rang far and wide.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hooray! Ha, ha!"

"Who-ooooop!" howled Bunter. "Help!"

He caught sight of the laughing faces of the Famous Five in the front row, as the elephant came opposite the place where Harry Wharton & Co. sat.

"I say, you fellows," shrieked Bunter, "lend me a hand! Rescue! Back up. Remove! Rescue! I say, you fellows—"

"Great pip!" gasped Wharton.

"What—"

"Yaroooh! Beasts! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mumbo lumbered on. Nobby Nobbs grinned at the guv'nor over the elephant's head. The boss was playing his part unusually well this time. Never had his terror seemed so real.

"Keep it up, guv'nor!" grinned Nobby.

"Yaroooh! Beast! I'll sack you!"

shrieked Bunter. "Pumme down! Lemme go! Oh crikey! Beast! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh! Help! Oh dear, I wish I was back at Greyfriars! Yaroooh! Make him lemme go! Whooop!"

Mumbo came to a halt at last, the turn being over, and set the fat Owl on his feet. Bunter stood and gasped. Only for one moment he stood, and then he started for the staff exit at top speed. He had had enough of performing elephants.

"I say, guv'nor!" stuttered the amazed Nobby.

Bunter did not heed. He burst through the canvas flap, and there was a howl as he collided with Mr. Dance. Dance went sprawling, and Bunter sprawled over him.

"Ow! Gerraway! Keep off!" howled Bunter. "Lemme gerrout! Yaroooh! Beast! Help!"

He scrambled up, stumbled over something—it was only Mr. Dance's face—trod heavily on it without noticing what it was, and tore away. From the circus came peals of laughter. Bunter, quite unintentionally, had brought down the house.

But Mr. Whiffles, though his unrehearsed effects had been a great success, did not return to the ring. The performance of Whiffles' World-Famous Circus proceeded without the assistance of Bunter, the Boss.

THE END.

(Make sure you read the next amusing yarn in this fine series, entitled: "BUNTER'S BIG BLUFF!" You'll enjoy every word of it, chums—and so will your pals, if you give 'em the tip!)

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FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH! Trussed up in the bowels of a sinking ship and left to drown like rats in a trap is the fate of Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake. But—while there's life there's hope!

THE LORD OF LOST ISLAND!



A Thrilling Story of Detective Adventure, featuring Ferrers Locke, and his boy assistant, Jack Drake.

(Introduction on next page.)

At Tala Island!

THROUGH the short hours of the night the three men and the boy sat at that small table in the foul cabin of the Angatau.

They were strangely silent, conscious, maybe of the tension in the air, aware of the fateful hours ahead. Federkiel sat erect and motionless. Chalmers, his handcuffed wrists in front of him, was sprawled forward across the table, his head buried in his arms. Jack Drake stared steadily in front of him with an occasional glance towards his guv'nor, who, leaning back in his chair, was humming quietly to himself an air from the latest opera.

Once Chalmers raised his head, and, glaring through bloodshot eyes, snarled: "Stop that, you cursed fool!"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"Nervous, Chalmers?" he asked pleasantly. "Does the hangman's noose still loom through the promises of Mackaw?"

"No, curse you, no!" shouted Chalmers; and the noise brought an alert and suspicious Joe to the door of the cabin.

Thereafter Chalmers was silent, and when the first faint streaks of the coming dawn were greying the open porthole the anchor cable went rumblingly outboards.

From where he was seated Ferrers Locke had a view of a white beach backed by dense undergrowth. The Angatau was riding within a cable's length of shore.

"Well"—Mackaw appeared on the threshold of the cabin—"here we are, gents, anchored off Tala Island, just like I promised you! Joe an' me's goin' ashore to acquaint Henri with th' details of this little transaction."

He placed a black-skinned Kanaka on guard over the occupants of the cabin, and a few minutes later Ferrers Locke heard the rattle of the boat falls, a splash, then the screech of oars in rowlocks.

It was two hours later when Mackaw and Joe returned to the ship. They were accompanied by a tall, gaunt man, whose bearded face was yellow and jaundiced. His shaking hands and twitching lips were grim token that for a long time drink had been his staple diet.

Apparently both Mackaw and Joe had been taking a little more refreshment than was good for them.

"Here they are, Henri, old friend!" bellowed Mackaw. "Sink me, if this

Mackaw's Plans!

I TAKE it," went on Mackaw, "that there ain't nothin' wrong with th' seaplane, 'cept that she ain't got no oil?"

"That is correct," replied Federkiel.

"Well, we'll reach Tala Island at dawn, and you'll get oil there off my friend, Henri," said Mackaw.

Turning to Ferrers Locke, he continued:

"It might interest you to know that before you came round that packet-boat spoke to us about the seaplane. I told 'em I had the pilot on board, an' that the machine had come down in the sea. Reckon they was plumb satisfied, for they didn't ask no more questions."

He turned to Chalmers again.

"Now then!" he said. "When we gets to Tala Island this feller"—and he jerked a thumb toward Federkiel—"will fill up and go to your base. When he comes back with th' money you go free. See? Simple, ain't it?"

"Sure is!" agreed Joe laconically.

Chalmers wetted his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"But how do I know," he asked hoarsely, "that when you have the money you will let me go free?"

Mackaw grinned broadly.

"Reckon you've got to trust me!" he replied. "I ain't going to double-cross you none. I wouldn't do that, would I, Joe?"

"Certainly not!" responded Joe, with a leer.

"I—I don't like it," said Chalmers, hesitatingly.

Mackaw pushed back his chair and rose to his feet.

"It don't matter a bit to me whether you like it or not," he replied. "Them's my terms, and they goes. Savvy?"

"Mackaw!" Ferrers Locke's voice

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was quiet, and in it was a note of amusement. "You are a fool to pit your brains against Black Michael's!"

Mackaw placed his great hands on the table and stared at the Baker Street detective with head thrust forward.

"Meanin'?" he growled.

"Meaning that he will double-cross you somehow."

"How can he?" snarled Mackaw.

"By hokey! I've got him fixed, all fine an' dandy, ain't I?"

"Yes; but he will cheat you yet. Remember, he will cheat you yet!"

Again Joe stirred uneasily in his chair. He didn't like the calmness of this English detective. He glanced at him, then switched his shifting gaze to the face of Chalmers. He saw nothing there to give him renewed confidence. There was a peculiar glint in Chalmers' crafty eyes.

"He won't cheat me!" growled Mackaw. "By gum! I'll make shark bait of him the first suspicion I get that he's aimin' to stage—"

"And what of that hound?" snarled Chalmers, jerking his head towards Ferrers Locke. "When you have received your money are you going to hand him over to me?"

Again Mackaw grinned.

"Sure!" he replied. "He ain't my meat. You can have him, an' mighty welcome. But listen! There ain't goin' to be no killin' on my ship. Joe an' me don't like it. Peaceable chaps, Joe an' me!"

He was in high good humour, was Mackaw. He was on a good thing. Easy money? He'd say it was.

"I do not intend to kill him on your ship," snarled Chalmers. "He returns with me to Lost Island—he and the boy. I shall hang them both from the cliffs which face the sea."

"Well, that ain't nothin' to do wi'

ain't the most valuable cargo what I've ever freighted!"

"Mais oui!" Henri nodded, stroking his straggling beard with a trembling hand. "But which is Black Michael?"

"That's him," replied Mackaw, indicating Chalmers. "Worth five hundred thousand dollars to me an' Joe! I always said I'd strike lucky some day, Henri! Didn't I, now?"

"Yes, you said so, m'sieur," replied the trader. "But"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"is it not dangerous to—what you say—interfere with the law?"

"I'd blamed well interfere with anythin' for five hundred thousand dollars!" snarled Mackaw. "You"—he wheeled on Federkiel—"you've got to come ashore and get your machine fixed to rights."

Federkiel nodded.

"I am quite ready," he said quietly. "And get this. If you don't come, your boss hangs! I stand to win all and lose nothin'! There ain't no other way I can fix this thing. I will give you three days. If you ain't back then what I says goes—Black Michael hangs!"

"I will return!" replied Federkiel coldly.

"Yes." Mackaw squinted at him through his little eyes. "I reckon you'll come back—you ain't the sort what quits!"

He turned and rapped out an order to the Kanaka. Then, producing an automatic from his pocket, he stood aside whilst Federkiel's handcuffs were unlocked by the key which had been taken from the pocket of Ferrers Locke.

"Now walk!" he commanded, jabbing the gun into the small of Federkiel's back.

The pilot walked steadily to the door of the cabin. On the threshold he turned, his eyes seeking those of Chalmers.

"Chief," he said evenly, "I will not desert you! I will return!"

"Yes." Chalmers' voice was hoarse. "I can trust you, Federkiel, my friend!"

The rest of the day passed quietly enough. To the two men and the boy in the cabin came the orders of Federkiel as the seaplane was unmoored and towed inshore by the Angatau's boat.

Late in the afternoon the engine burst into a shattering roar. It died away then burst into life again. And for fully four hours Federkiel tested his engine, for he had a long flight in front of him.

Darkness had descended when finally the roar of the engine rose to a high, pulsating note. It came more faintly as the seaplane skimmed across the water, then gained in volume as the machine circled over the Angatau.

Chalmers raised his head in a listening attitude. His lips moved.

"He has gone!" he whispered. "He—has—gone!"

Federkiel's Move!

CHALMERS' voice trailed away and silence descended on the cabin. The darkness was intense. Through the open porthole Ferrers Locke could see a circle of star-spangled sky. The stillness was unbroken save by the lapping of water against the hull of the ship or an occasional grunt from the Kanaka squatting somewhere by the doorway.

He was alone that Kanaka. His ship-mates were fraternising with the natives ashore.

Jack Drake, stiff and sore from his twenty-four hours in bonds, felt strangely calm. His guv'nor was far from beaten. He knew that, for he had long since learned to read the signs. There was hope. He had seen that in his guv'nor's eyes before night came and blotted out all things in the cabin. Yet Federkiel was even now on his way for the ransom which would bring freedom to Chalmers. And Chalmers had sworn the death of the man and boy who had effected his capture.

There came a faint sound from the deck. Jack Drake sensed with perception quickened by the darkness, that the Kanaka had risen to his feet. For a few moments the man seemed to be standing listening, then came a slither as he sank back to a squatting posture.

Somewhere from shorewards came the faint, haunting strains of a guitar. Strangely sweet it seemed on the calm night air.

"Grur!"

Simultaneously with a dull thud came that grunt from the doorway. Then a voice—the voice of Federkiel:

"Chief, I am here!"

"Federkiel!" Chalmers' voice was low, tense, incredulous. "What is this?"

"Listen! I climbed after I had taken off. At ten thousand feet I shut off my engine. I was miles away, but I glided back to the ship. The riding-light guided me, you understand. My machine is half a mile away. I have come back for you."

Chalmers drew a rasping breath.

"Ah, Federkiel! I knew you would not abandon me," he whispered, and there was exultation apparent in his voice. "But—but what of the guard—the Kanaka?"

"I think I have broken his skull. I must hurry, for Mackaw—"

"Yes—yes. Where is Mackaw—and Joe?"

"Drinking on shore with Henri. I think they are making a night of it."

"Good! Have you a boat to take me to the seaplane?"

"No, the boat is ashore. I dare not risk taking it. Give me your wrists!"

Jack heard the man groping forward. Then came the sharp rasp of a file biting into the steel of the handcuffs.

"Hurry, Federkiel!"

INTRODUCTION.

Ferrers Locke, the Baker Street detective, is called in to investigate the mysterious disappearance of several large vessels lost with all hands in the South Pacific. Suspecting a man known as Professor Chalmers, who answers in every way to the description of Black Michael, a pirate who has been terrorising the western seaboard of South America, Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake, his clever boy assistant, disguise themselves, and set sail for Buenos Aires. Arriving at their destination they scrape an acquaintance with 'Frisco Sam, proprietor of Black Michael's old haunt, succeed in getting aboard the Seagull, and eventually reach Lost Island, Black Michael's stronghold. Here, by a clever ruse, Ferrers Locke overpowers Black Michael, bottles up his stronghold, and with the aid of Jack Drake carries the pirate chief on board his own seaplane into the lagoon. At the pistol's point Chalmers' pilot takes off, but has to descend again owing to shortage of petrol. Thus handicapped, the Baker Street detective has perforce to transfer his prisoners aboard the Angatau, a passing trader. Here further ill luck befalls Ferrers Locke, for Mackaw, the rascally skipper of the Angatau, readily falls to Chalmers' tempting bait of one hundred thousand pounds in gold to about ship and take him and his pilot, Federkiel, back to their base.

(Now read on.)

Chalmers' voice was urgent.

"Yes, I am hurrying."

That was all which was said during those minutes in which Federkiel worked to release his chief. Then at last the rasping ceased. Chalmers scraped back his chair and rose to his feet. His bulk blotted out the star-spangled circle, which was the open porthole.

"Free!" he cried. "Free!"

"S-sh!" Federkiel whispered urgently. "We are unarmed. We dare not linger here. Mackaw may return!"

"And what of this cursed dog whose death I have sworn?" snarled Chalmers, his voice shaking with passion. "I will not leave him alive!"

"Listen!" said Federkiel tensely. "You have also to settle with Mackaw. I can show you how to settle with both at one clean stroke!"

"How? How, man?"

"Open the sea-cocks. The ship will sink at anchor. These two will drown like rats!"

"But if Mackaw should return?"

"He may not. If he does he will be too late to repair the damage. She will sink quickly."

Chalmers was silent. When he spoke his voice was icy.

"Ferrers Locke," he said, "this is the end of the trail for you. I am unarmed, otherwise I would shoot you dead. I could slit your throat with the knife of that cursed Kanaka. I could batter your brains out with a crowbar, or the leg of a chair. But both methods are crude—you will pardon the word. Federkiel is right. To drown like a rat is more fitting for you—to die slowly by inches. To feel the water washing about your ankles, then your knees, then your waist!"

He broke off, and, groping his way forward, tugged at Ferrers Locke's bonds. He gave a grunt of satisfaction and passed on to Jack Drake.

"They are well trussed, Federkiel!" he said. "Let us go!"

The two moved towards the door. On the threshold Chalmers paused.

"The noise of our engine, when we take off, will bring Mackaw on the run," he said. "That is one reason why we will remain until we see the Angatau go down. There is another, Ferrers Locke, and it is that this time I will satisfy myself that there is no mistake about your death. Curse you, you interfering hound!"

He stepped quickly back to the table. Smack!

His clenched fist drove full into the detective's face, for Chalmers made sure of the blow. Then, with a laugh which was almost a snarl, he quitted the cabin.

A Race With Death!

"JACK!"

Ferrers Locke's voice was the faintest of whispers, spoken through swollen lips.

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"How are your bonds? Have you any chance of winning free?"

"Not an earthly, guv'nor!"

"Ah!"

Silence settled on the cabin, save for the jerky breathing of the Baker Street detective and the creak of the rope which bound him to the chair.

"Guv'nor, she's settling down!"

"Don't talk, lad!"

Ten minutes had passed since Chalmers and Federkiel had left the cabin. That they had carried out their threat to open the sea-cocks was evident, for the cabin had taken a decided list.

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to port, and from the bowels of the ship came the swish and gurgle of impouring water.

"I was unconscious—when they tied me!" Ferrers Locke's voice came in jerks. "They didn't make—too good a job of it, Jack! I was limp—you see! I—could have been loose before morning! I've been working at these ropes since last night!"

"Can you do it in time, guv'nor?"

Jack Drake's voice was steady.

"I don't know, lad! This move—of Federkiel's has upset my calculations! A clever fellow, Jack—worthy of better things!"

Jack Drake knew his guv'nor of old. He knew the Baker Street detective had a nerve of steel. Never, maybe, had it been more evident than at that moment. Death was but minutes away, yet he could speak of Federkiel with an interest which was at once impersonal and genuine.

The Angatau rolled sluggishly. Something slopped against the wall of the cabin. Jack Drake heard it. Seconds passed and he felt something lapping against his shoes. The water was flooding the cabin.

"Nearly through, Jack!"

"Good, guv'nor!" replied the lad.

He knew that Ferrers Locke was fighting a losing battle. The water was a foot deep in the cabin by now. Any moment the Angatau might take a plunge downwards. If it was only light in the cabin it would not be so bad. Rotten bad luck to go out like this—in the dark. What was it Chalmers had said?—you will die like rats. Yes, that was it. Like rats, without a chance of life. Well, it would soon be over—

Again the Angatau rolled sluggishly. The end was very near now. Jack Drake felt curiously calm—wondered what Mackaw would say when he found his ship gone. Something touched him and he could not repress a shudder of

repulsion. It was the body of the Kanaka. Federkiel had killed the man then. The swirling water was floating the empty chairs which were not fastened to the floor. Jack Drake could hear them bumping faintly in the darkness.

"A-a-ah!"

Ferrers Locke gave vent to an exclamation of relief.

"Jack!" he cried. "Can you hold on, lad? I'm free! I must go to the galley for a knife!"

"I can stick it, guv'nor! Don't come back—it's not worth it—the risk—"

But Ferrers Locke was gone. It was essential he obtained a knife to release his boy assistant, for an attempt to untie the knots would be fatal. And Jack Drake's chair was screwed to the floor. There was the knife belonging to the Kanaka—but that might be anywhere. No, the galley was the only place where a knife might be obtained in time. But the risk was terrible. Already the Angatau was settling perceptibly in the water. The end could be but seconds away. The water was swirling about the boy's waist. The Angatau shuddered in every plate—

"Steady, lad!"

The cool voice of Ferrers Locke brought Jack Drake back to realities. He had not heard his guv'nor return. He felt a knife sawing at his bonds. Stiffly, he struggled to his feet as the ropes parted. Again the Angatau shuddered.

"Quick, lad!" cried Ferrers Locke, urgently. "Quick—for your life! She's going!"

On Tala Island!

BY the time Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake reached the saloon ladder, the water was up to their armpits.

"Up with you, lad!" panted the Baker

Street detective, almost lifting his boy assistant on to the iron rungs.

Jack Drake scrambled up to the sloping deck with Ferrers Locke at his heels. It was in that same instant that the stern of the Angatau commenced to rise slowly into the air, whilst the bowsprit buried itself in the still waters of the night-enshrouded bay.

"Keep with me, Jack!" rapped Ferrers Locke and, gaining the side of the deck, he dived far outboards, after waiting one precious second to allow Jack Drake to take the lead.

Up and up went the stern of the Angatau, then, with a dull burbling of troubled waters, she slid under, bows first. The Baker Street detective felt the underwash gripping at him, sucking him down. He kicked out with every ounce of his strength and rose to the surface with bursting lungs. Treading water, he drew great gulping breaths of the night air into his tortured lungs.

"Jack!" he called quietly. "Are you all right, lad?"

"Yes, guv'nor! I'm here," replied the voice of Jack Drake.

"Listen, then," said Ferrers Locke, his voice urgent. "We'll land up the coast. They can't see us from the beach at this distance, so they will not realise that we've escaped. Come on!"

Together the Baker Street detective and his boy assistant struck out with powerful strokes. For half a mile or more behind them in the darkness came the sudden, shattering roar of Federkiel's engine. Chalmers and his pilot had evidently seen the riding light of the Angatau plunge beneath the waters, and, satisfied that both vessel and prisoners had gone to their doom, were now taking off.

Ferrers Locke, realising that Chalmers would only linger long enough to make certain the vessel had gone under, had known the helplessness of attempting to reach the seaplane. He knew also that the roar of the seaplane's engine would bring Mackaw on the run.

Already wild shouts from the beach bore witness to the fact that the Kanakas had discovered the sudden loss of the Angatau. There came the splash of paddles as canoes were launched and went shooting out across the water.

Suddenly Ferrers Locke smiled grimly. Rising above the shrill voices of the Kanakas there sounded the wild bellowing tones of Mackaw. That individual was requesting, with many an oath, to be informed as to where his ship was and what had happened.

Jack Drake was swimming strongly side by side with Ferrers Locke, and at a word from the latter he swung in towards the beach. Reaching the shore about a quarter of a mile from where the Kanakas were collected in a wild, gesticulating group, they ran, crouching, up the narrow strip of beach.

"I should think everyone on Tala Island is, by now, on the beach!" said Ferrers Locke grimly. "We should have little difficulty in finding the buildings of the trading station, and I think we'll find 'em deserted."

"What's our plan, guv'nor?" demanded Jack Drake.

"It all depends on Mackaw," replied Ferrers Locke. "That individual has received one shock to-night, but he's due for another very shortly."

(Continued on page 28.)

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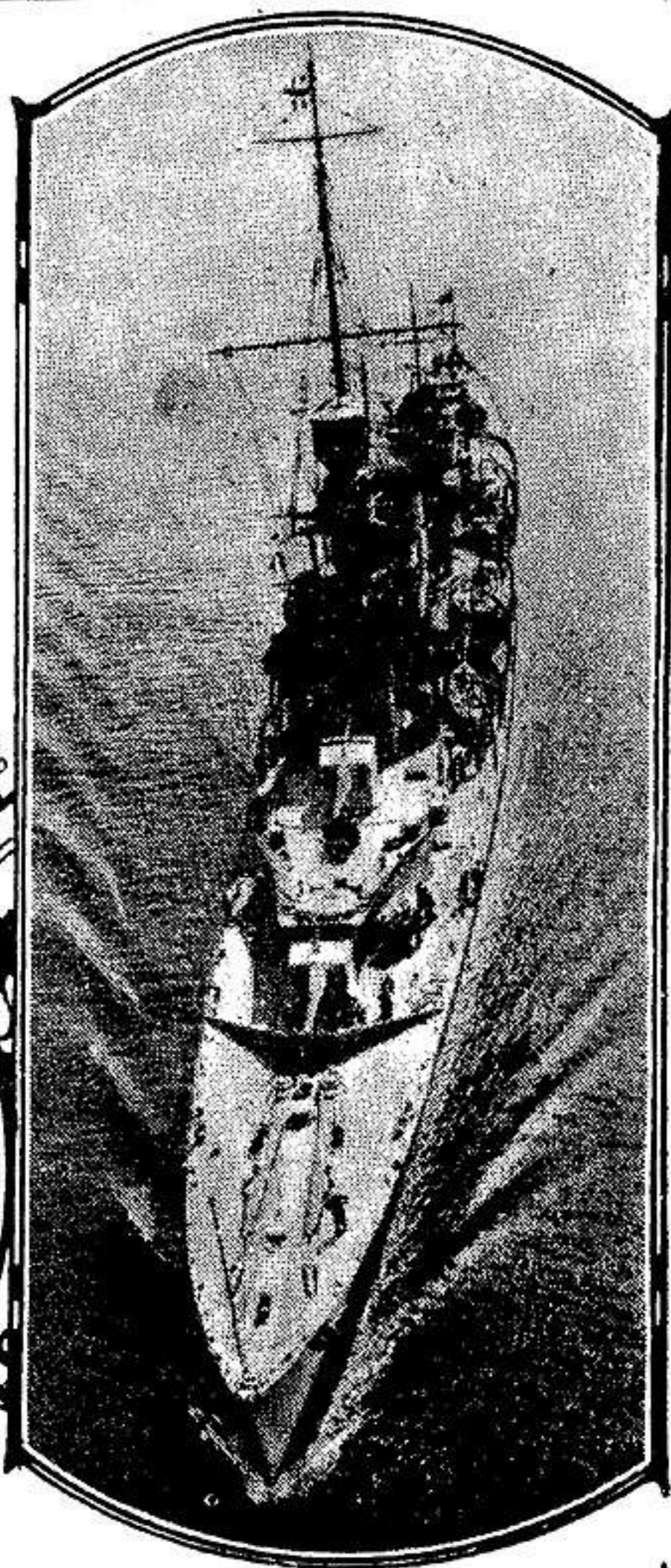
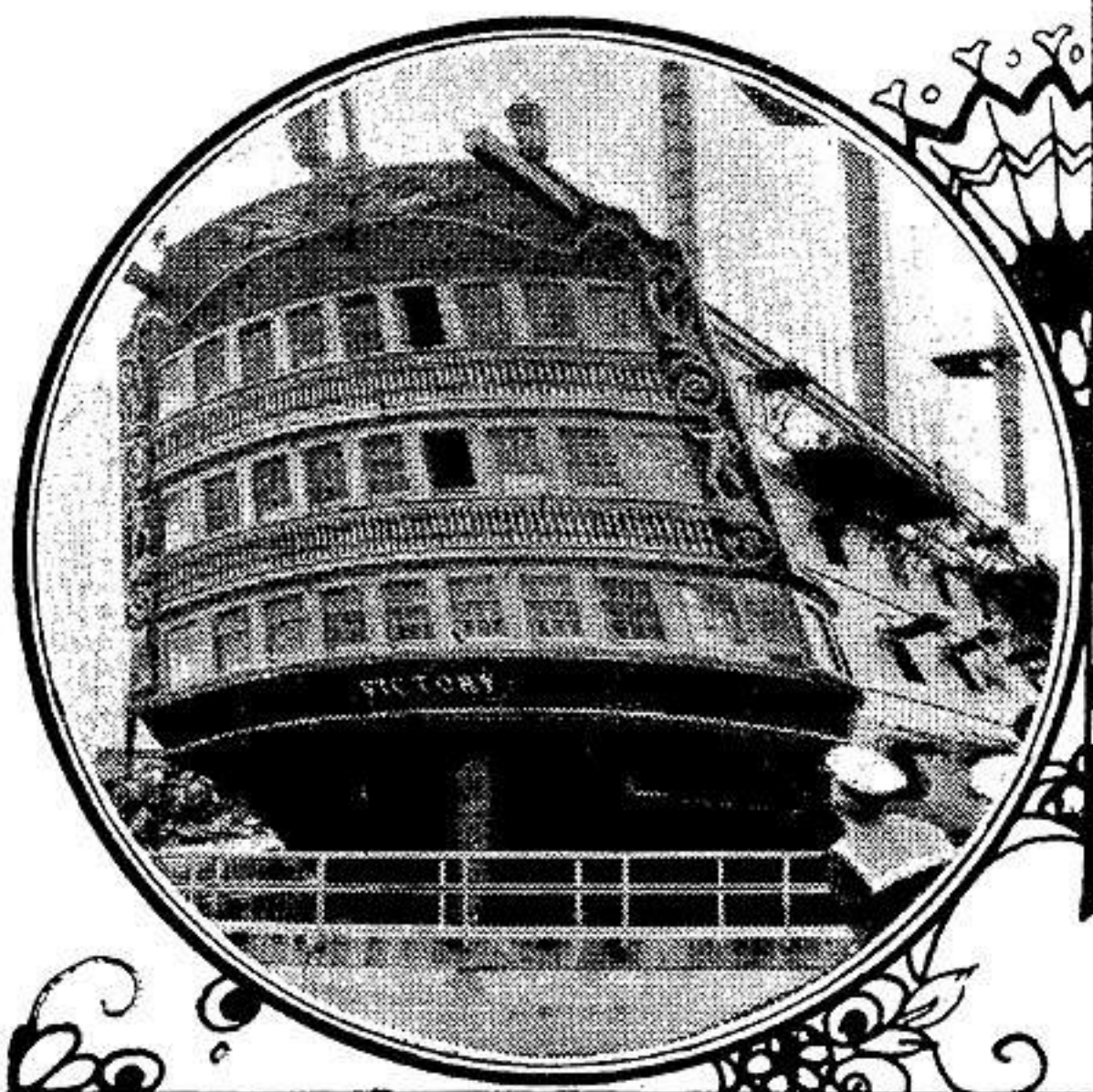


A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW!

Take a look at the photo on the right and it won't be very difficult to imagine how a mighty man-o'-war appears to a seagull wheeling overhead. This is a unique view of H.M.S. Curacoa, taken from a bridge in the Kiel Canal as, with other members of the Atlantic Fleet, she was returning to England after a visit to Riga. The turreted mainmast, the two formidable forward guns, and the clusters of bluejackets on her deck can be seen quite plainly. These British warships were the first to pass through the canal since 1914, and the villagers turned out and watched in great excitement.

"ENGLAND EXPECTS—"

If Admiral Lord Nelson were alive to-day he would find that England was living up to his immortal signal at Trafalgar. He would see his old flag ship, the Victory, as he knew her in the days of her greatest glories, restored to that condition by a country which has done its duty to the memory of its most famous sea-dog. Exact details of the work have been copied from a model lent by the King, and the strain has been minimised by replacing iron guns and anchors with wooden models. The life of the Victory, in her reconditioned state, is expected to be about three hundred years. Photo below shows a view of the stern as she lies in her new home in Portsmouth Dockyard.



NELSON'S RELICS!

A few precious relics of Nelson's have been restored to the Victory. Our photo shows some of them in the Portsmouth Dockyard Museum before they were placed on board the grand old man-o'-war. On the right is Nelson's chair, in the centre is his sea chest on which are the horn lanterns and a boarding axe used at Trafalgar, and the ward-room tea urns. On the left is the sea chest of John Scott, Nelson's secretary, and at the rear the King's model of the Victory, which his Majesty kindly lent to the authorities to act as a guide in their work of re-conditioning.





(Continued from
page 26.)

He moved off, treading very cautiously through the undergrowth, with Jack Drake at his heels. They came eventually to a clearing where long, low huts were ablaze with lights. But the place seemed strangely deserted.

"I thought so!" commented Ferrers Locke grimly. "Everyone has made for the beach. That long building with the veranda will be Henri's quarters. Let's hope we can find a gun there. Hurry and as silently as you can!"

They sprinted across the clearing, then merged with the shadows in the rear of Henri's quarters.

"Every window is open," said Ferrers Locke, "which saves us from forcing an entry. In with you, Jack. I can hear voices approaching, and one of 'em is, unless I'm mistaken, the melodious voice of Mr. Mackaw."

Jack swung himself through one of the open windows, and found himself in the darkness of a small room. A moment later Ferrers Locke joined him. Stepping cautiously across the room, the Baker Street detective groped for the handle of the door to which he was guided by a chink of light which filtered beneath it from the room beyond.

Quietly Ferrers Locke turned the handle and opened the door. He found himself looking into what was obviously the living-room. Wicker chairs and a rough deal table stood in the middle of the floor. On the table was a half-finished meal, which gave token that those who had been eating had been abruptly interrupted. The table was scattered with a profusion of bottles, which seemed to show that Henri and his guests were more in favour of drinking than eating.

By the light which streamed through

white drill coats, incredibly dirty and obviously just thrown there by their owner.

Ferrers Locke took all this in at a glance, then quietly closed the door. Crossing to the bed, he groped for the drill coats and rummaged through the pockets. Then he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, for in one of the pockets he had found a squat automatic. When he snapped open the chamber however, the Baker Street detective found that the gun was unloaded.

Suddenly his fingers closed on Jack Drake's arm. Heavy feet had clumped across the threshold of the outer room, and clearly to the ears of the detective and the boy came the voice of Mackaw.

"Sunk, by hokey!" bellowed that individual. "This sees me in a blamed fine mess, don't it?"

Silently Ferrers Locke turned the handle of the door and opened it the fraction of an inch.

"Aw, Mackaw," came the whining voice of the mate, "you ain't explained why the seaplane started up just after the old Angatau sunk. What's it all mean? That seaplane had gone long before. It must have come back."

"What for?" roared Mackaw. "Why, by everythin' what's foolish, would it come back? He mustn't really have gone, in the first place. No, sir, the pilot just kidded us he'd gone."

"But why?" whined Joe.

"Yes, why, m'sieur?" demanded the voice of Henri. "Why should the pilot of the seaplane either return, or linger near the Angatau? To me it seems there must be a reason."

(Mackaw and his friends are going to find out the reason mighty soon, boys, then they'll wish they hadn't double-crossed Ferrers Locke. No need to tell you to order your MAGNET in advance; you'll do that without any tip from me.)

the open doorway. Ferrers Locke saw that he and Jack Drake were standing in what was evidently Henri's bedroom. A small camp bed, a chair, and a rickety, wicker-topped bamboo table comprised the whole of the furnishings. On the bed lay a couple of old

THE SKOOL UNDER CANVAS!

(Continued from page 15.)

alreddy guest the trow eye-dentity of the misterious poacher.

"Well, what are you getting at, Jack?" asked Bright, after a pause.

"I'll eggsplain," replied the kaptin of the Fourth, with a glarnse round to see that there were no eye-droppers about. "I believe that the poacher that the old buffer complained about was no less a person than the Head himself!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" "Did you notiss how his eggsspression changed when Major Snorter buzzed off? If ever a man looked guilty, the Head did then!"

"My hat! So he did!"

"Well, we know already that he's had rabbit-pie for dinner," went on Jack Jolly, in a thrilling whisper. "And, so far as I can see, that makes the case con-cloosive. The rabbit-raider is our own giddy headmaster. I'm thumping sure of it!"

"Grate pip!"

Merry and Bright looked at each other with startled eyes.

"Well, this is the giddy hummit!" remarked Merry, shaking his head sadly. "It's a bit thick when the Head of a grate public skool sets up as a blessed poacher. But it certainly looks as if you're right, Jack."

"What shall we do?" asked Bright.

"There's only one thing to do," answered the kaptin of the Fourth, his eyes gleaming. "We'll follow him up on his next rabbit hunting expedition, and catch him in the giddy act. Then perhaps he'll agree to any terms we dictate rather than face eggssposure, and we can demand our proper rights in the grub line!"

"Hooray!" cried Merry and Bright enthusiastically. "All in favour?"

Three hands shot up without hesitation.

"Passed non, com!" remarked Jack Jolly, with satisfaction.

There and then the thumps of the Fourth sat down and laid their plans for catching the poacher of St. Sam's!

THE END.

(Next week's topping yarn of the further holiday adventures of Jack Jolly & Co. is one long scream from beginning to end. Note the title: "FALSELY ACCUSED"—a feast of fun you'll say when you read it?)



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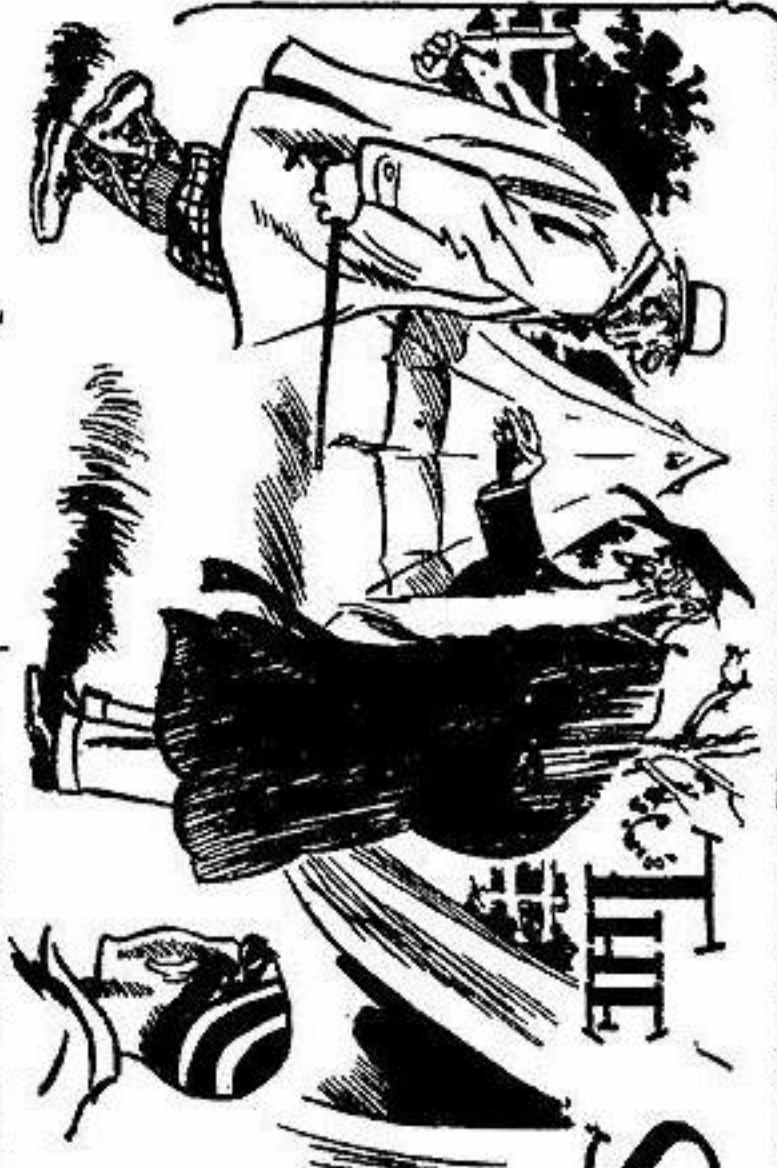
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The Picture Paper with the MOST News
SUNDAY GRAPHIC



THE SKOOL UNDER CANVAS!

By DICKY NUGENT.
of the Second
Form at Greyfriars.

The first of a series of mirth-provoking stories dealing with the adventures of the Heroes of St. Sam's under canvas.

I. NOTISS.

By kind permission of Major Snorter, the entire Skool will camp out near the village of Snorter Magnus for 3 weeks, beginning Tuesday next. Sherrybags will be ready in the Quad soon after breakfast. Fags are specially requested to wash their ears for the occasion.

(Signed) ALFRED BIRCHEMALL.
"N.A., B.Sc., D.U.D."

That notice, in Dr. Birchmell's skilfully fast, adorned the notice-board in the Hall at St. Sam's one bright morning, and natchurally caused a grate deal of eggshment.

"Three weeks in camp! Hooray!" was the general verdict of the Skool.

"Three merry old weeks in the fields and pastures, my infants!" said Jack Jolly to his pals, Merry and Bright. "No more howsy old Form-rooms, stuffy old studies, or dismal old dormitories! Isn't it grate?"

And Merry and Bright gleefully agreed that grate was the only word that described it.

After the appearance of the sensational notice, all was natchurally bustle and confusion in St. Sam's. The passages echoed with the cheery sound of kit-bags being packed. Juniors and seniors alike rushed about, raiding each other's studies for equipment. Even the masters, losing their usual dignity in the eggshment of the occasion, joined in the general scrimmage.

At last the grate dawned, and to the accompaniment of terrific cheers, the crowded sherrybags rolled, one by one, through the old Skool gates and started off on their journey to Snorter Magnus. Faces were bright and hearts were joyful as the St. Sam's juniors jolted along through the sunny countryside.

"I wonder whether the whether will be kind to us, sir?" mused Mr. Lick-ham, the master of the Fourth, as he sat beside Dr. Birchmell.

The Head larked carelessly as he took

a savidge bite at the chunk of toffy he was eating.

"San fairy Anne!" he replied, lapsing into French with skilfully ease. "Personally, Lickham, I don't care tuppence what the whether's like."

Arriving at their destination, after a pleasant journey, the imposing fleet of sherrybags, with many a jolt and much loud screaming of brakes, drew up near the grate encampment that had been erected, and the St. Sam's boys tumbled out and had a look round.

It was a scene to gladden the hart of any skoolboy. Far away into the distance extended the magnificent estates of Major Snorter. Thick woods glistened in the sun, pleasant streams waved idly in the breeze, chickens grazed peacefully in many a green meadow, while cattle pecked lazily round a neighbouring farmyard.

"This is something like!" said Jack Jolly enthusiastically.

"Oh, rather!" chorused Merry and Bright.

"How wonderful are the beauties of Natchery!" sighed Lirrick, the poet of the Fourth. "I feel just like breaking into verse. If someone could oblige me with a doocunt—"

Jack Jolly food-natchurally gave him a doocunt, and Lirrick, after swallowing it at one bite, was inspired to recite, at the top of his voice:

"Charming is the scent of the red, red rose,
And its culter is remarked on
wherever it goes,
But however bright it's hue,
Give credit where it's due,
It's nothing like the culter of Birch-cull's nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Roars of larter greeted Lirrick's poetical outburst. They quickly died away, however, as the Head himself came on the scene.

no fear of that," said the Head reassuringly. "I will look after your game myself, Major. Leave it to me!"

"Very good, sir, I will. And now I'll buzz off!" said Major Snorter.

"Cheerio, everybody!"

"Ja-ta, sir!" cried the boys.

With a wave of his military-looking hand the Major buzzed off, leaving the St. Sam's camp to settle down.

By dinner-time everything was in apple-pie order, and the boys were eagerly looking forward to their first meal under canvas. When "cook-house" was sounded there was a terrific rush for the dining-marquee. And there it was that the Skool received its grate shock.

The hungry boys had fully anticipated that they would at least be given a good meal to begin with—stewed steak and dumplings, with doocuts to follow, and finger-pop to wash it down, or something like that. But to their surprise they discovered that dinner consisted of one slice of dry bread per person, with an unlimited supply of—water!

The Head was gracious enuff to eggshplain things.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he cried, as the chaps surveyed their frugal fair with dismay. "I forgot to tell you before we came away that I have decided on a change of diet during our stay in camp. I have come to the conclusion that a lot of you have been getting more grub than is good for you lately."

"Oh, grate pip!"

"And I have therefore given orders for rations to be reduced. In future there will be only two meals a day. Each will consist of one slice of bread and plenty of pure, clear water."

There was a murmur of dismay from the crowded tables, and a wild, agonised moan as Tubby Barrell fainted pitched.

"Welcome to Snorter Magnus!" he cried jennally, shaking hands with the Head. "I sincerely hope you'll all have a good time. Roam over my estates as you will, and do as much damage as you like. I shan't mind!"

"Thank you kindly, sir!" chorused the Skool delightedly.

"There is only one thing I insist on, Dr. Birchmell. I must ask you to leave my game alone."

"Your game, Major Snorter?" repeated the Head, a little puzzled. "I presume you mean we are not to interfere when you are playing leap-frog, at sciera, with your friends?"

"No, sir, that is not my meaning," roared the Major. "By 'game,' I mean the rabbits and fessants which abound on my estates. If I catch anybody touching them, then, by gad, I'll horsewhip him!"

"Oh, crikey! Well, you need have

ing the naving pangs of hunger as they had never felt them before.

"Oh for a nice joocey veal-and-ham pie!" groaned Jack Jolly.

"Oh for a succulent stake!" moaned Merry.

"It's awful!" murmured Bright faintly. "Just look at the culter of my dile—I swear I'm dying!"

Suddenly Jack Jolly sniffed the air. "Tell me, chaps, am I seeing things, or can I really smell rabbit-pie?" he asked eagerly.

Merry and Bright listened attentively. "Grate pip! I believe you're right!" eggshclaimed Merry, with bated breath. "Some awful rotter is having rabbit-pie, while we poor beggars are starving!"

"Shame!"

"Well, look into this!" said Jack Jolly indignantly. "Follow me!"

Merry and Bright followed their leader, who followed his nose. Old readers will not be surprised to learn that his nose led him straight to the tent of Dr. Birchmell!

With stealthy tread the captain of the Fourth crept up to the Head's canvas sarkum, and applied his eye to one of the numerous holes in the tent.

"Few!" he whistled, as he saw what was going on inside.

Merry and Bright joined their leader at his point of vantage, and also had a peep. And grate was their indignation when they had an eyefull, so to speak.

"The rank outsider!" murmured Bright, turning crimson with rage. "After keeping us starved, he's actually scoffing a couple of rabbit-pies himself! Not one, mark you, but a couple!"

"With boiled onions, too!" It's eggshactly what Jack Jolly sagely. "We might have known he was living on the fat of the land himself!"

"Cave!" yelled Merry suddenly, in a horse whisper. "Someone's coming this way!"

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"Oh for a nice joocey veal-and-ham pie!" groaned Jack Jolly.

"Oh for a succulent stake!" moaned Merry.

"It's awful!" murmured Bright faintly. "Just look at the culter of my dile—I swear I'm dying!"

Suddenly Jack Jolly sniffed the air. "Tell me, chaps, am I seeing things, or can I really smell rabbit-pie?" he asked eagerly.

Merry and Bright listened attentively. "Grate pip! I believe you're right!" eggshclaimed Merry, with bated breath. "Some awful rotter is having rabbit-pie, while we poor beggars are starving!"

"Shame!"

"Well, look into this!" said Jack Jolly indignantly. "Follow me!"

Merry and Bright followed their leader, who followed his nose. Old readers will not be surprised to learn that his nose led him straight to the tent of Dr. Birchmell!

With stealthy tread the captain of the Fourth crept up to the Head's canvas sarkum, and applied his eye to one of the numerous holes in the tent.

"Few!" he whistled, as he saw what was going on inside.

Merry and Bright joined their leader at his point of vantage, and also had a peep. And grate was their indignation when they had an eyefull, so to speak.

"The rank outsider!" murmured Bright, turning crimson with rage. "After keeping us starved, he's actually scoffing a couple of rabbit-pies himself! Not one, mark you, but a couple!"

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as the Head extended his hand in cheery greeting. "I didn't come here to shake hands with you, sir!" he rasped. "I came to lodge a complaint—and a very serious one, too!"

"Dear me! You surprise me, Major Snorter!" eggshclaimed Dr. Birchmell. "However, if some of my boys—"

"Huh! I can't answer for the identity of the rascals. They may be boys, or they may be masters—"

"Tut-tut!" eggshclaimed Dr. Birchmell impatiently.

"All I know is that the promise you made me the other day has not been kept, sir. My preserves have certainly been peached on; my rabbits have been pinched!"

"Dear me! But surely you are doing me an injustice in akkewing this camp of being responsible!" eggshclaimed the Head, raising his eyebrows siltely.

"Possibly some other scoundrils have been at work. Possibly your gamekeepers have made a mistake. I am sure the average gamekeeper has no more brains than a sheep—"

"Bah!" interrupted Major Snorter contemptuously. "Some awful rotters from this camp have been pinching my giddy rabbits—of that I am convinced. I demand that you take steps to discover the eye-identity of the scoundrils, and punish them accordingly."

Dr. Birchmell sighed a little wearily. "Very well, Major Snorter. Since you insist, I will do all that I can in the matter. And if I do find that there is any treach in your allegations, I can promise you I will wield my birch with good effect!"

Major Snorter nodded, and then buzzed off.

Scarcely had his military footprints died away in the distance before the grin faded from the Head's dile, and a savidge scowl appeared in its sted.

"Silly old joser!" he hissed to himself. "Fancy knowing about those bunnies already, tho!"

Dr. Birchmell suddenly realised that Jack Jolly & Co. were still present, and that they were regarding him in wide-eyed distonishment.

"What the merry dickens are you juniors doing here?" he barked. "Buzz off immediately!"

"Jack Jolly & Co. obliged, only too anxious to escape the viles of the Head's wrath. And Dr. Birchmell, with a grunt, returned to his interrupted feed.

"What do you think of that, my pippins?" asked Jack Jolly grimly, when the Co. were back in the privacy of the Fourth Form marquee again. "Fishy, don't you think?"

Merry and Bright, who were not over-blessed with brains, didn't quite understand what their leader meant for a moment. But Jack Jolly, who had a marvellous gift of adding two and two together and making five or six, had

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(Continued on page 28.)