

"THE HAUNTED CIRCUS!" Extra-Long and Extra-Special
Story of HARRY WHARTON & Co.

The Magnet ^{2^d}



**BUNTER THE
CRYSTAL-GAZER!**

THE HAUNTED CIRCUS!



By
FRANK RICHARDS

—Featuring Harry Wharton & Co., with Billy Bunter taking the leading role.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"HARRY!"

Colonel Wharton almost barked his nephew's name. Five Greyfriars juniors, in the hall at Wharton Lodge, looked round at him.

It was a glorious summer's morning, and Harry Wharton & Co. of the Greyfriars Remove looked as bright as the morning. Judging by their looks, holidays seemed to agree with them.

A minute ago the old colonel had been looking as cheery as his nephew and his nephew's chums from school. They were going riding that morning, and were about to start, when the telephone-bell rang.

Colonel Wharton stopped to take the call, and the juniors waited. The effect of that call on the old colonel did not seem grateful or comforting.

He knitted his brows, glanced round, and barked to his nephew.

"Yes, uncle?"

Harry Wharton hurried to his uncle; Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remained where they were, wondering a little what was up.

"This call is for you, Harry!" barked the old colonel. "You had better take it."

He handed the receiver to his nephew and strode across the hall to the open doorway and tramped out.

The juniors exchanged glances.

"What the thump—" murmured Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton put the receiver to his ear. He was more than a little puzzled. Any Greyfriars fellow, or any acquaintance in the neighbourhood, might have rung him up that morning, but he did not see why it should have

irritated his usually good-tempered uncle. Evidently, however, it had.

"Hallo! Who's speaking?" he asked.

"I say, old chap, is that you?"

It was a fat, familiar voice.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes, old fellow. I say, was that your uncle took the call? What did the old ass want to bark at a chap for?"

"You fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What do you want, you blitherer?" snapped the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

He understood now the cause of the knitted brows and the bark. Billy Bunter, the fat ornament of the Remove at Greyfriars School, was not exactly popular with the old colonel.

Billy Bunter had been at Wharton Lodge at Easter. It was Billy Bunter's opinion that the old colonel was an old ass. That would not have mattered very much had Bunter kept his valuable opinion to himself; unfortunately, he had stated it in the colonel's hearing. Bunter had forgotten all about it long ago; it was probable that the colonel hadn't.

"I say you needn't be shirty, old chap," came the fat squeak of the Owl of the Remove. "I say, I'm speaking from Wimford. You knew I was here with Muccolini's Circus, didn't you?"

"Yes. Cut it short!"

"Being only a few miles from your place, old fellow, I thought I'd give you a look in."

"Think again."

"Beast!"

"Is that all?"

"No. Don't cut off; it's rather important. I say, old fellow, I'm getting on splendidly at the circus. They were awfully glad to get me back when we broke up at Greyfriars. Old Muccolini almost hugged me when I turned up. Marco, the lion-tamer, jumped for joy;

he wouldn't part with me for my weight in gold!"

"Gammon! A ton of gold is worth a lot of money."

"Beast!"

"You're repeating yourself. Any more?"

"Yes. I'm fearfully popular in the circus. I'm being billed all over the shop. Vast crowds come to see me; they come again and again."

"Good business for the optician in Wimford."

"Eh?"

"They couldn't do that without damaging their eyesight."

"Beast!"

"That's the third time. Think of something new."

"I say, old chap, don't be a rotter! I believe I told you at Greyfriars that I couldn't come with you for the holidays, old fellow, being booked for my splendid turn at Muccolini's Circus. Well, I've changed my mind about that."

"I haven't changed mine."

"Beast!"

"Put on a new record!"

"I say, don't cut off; it's rather urgent. To tell you the truth, old chap, I'm rather fed-up with it. Continual triumphs pall in the long run. The cheers of the public bore a chap after a time. I've been thinking—"

"What with?"

"Beast! I've been thinking that a week or two of quiet at your little place would be rather restful after the excitement of triumph after triumph and the deafening applause I get every time I go into the ring. Shall I run along to see you, old chap?"

"No!"

"Beast!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Hold on! I say, old chap, don't cut off! Look here, it's rather a compli-

ment to you for a fellow who's the idol of the public and the star of the circus to be willing to put in a week at your humble home. Leaving behind me the plaudits of the crowd—"

"Don't do it, old fat man; stick to the giddy plaudits—if any!"

"If you don't believe me, Wharton, I—"

"Hardly!"

"Beast!"

"My uncle's waiting for me, and the other fellows—"

"Blow them! Don't cut off! I say, old chap, I'd really like to run along for the hols. The—the fact is I—I'm tired of the circus business, and—and I'm going to resign. It will nearly break Marco's heart to lose me, but I'm going to do it."

"Bow-wow!"

"I say, don't cut off! I say, old chap, I—I—I'll tell you exactly how it stands!" came a desperate squeak over the wires. "The—the—the fact is I—I can't stay on at the circus."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'd guessed that one already!" he answered.

"There's been a dispute—a sordid dispute about salary—and I've chucked Marco, and I'm not going to do any performance with him again."

"Better unchuck him, then."

"I say, old fellow—"

"Good-bye!"

"Don't cut off, you beast! I mean listen to me, dear old chap! I—I—I've been sacked."

It came out at last; it came out unwillingly, but it came. But, as Harry Wharton had guessed it already, it did not surprise him to hear it.

"That's how it is, old fellow," squeaked the fat Owl of the Remove. "So, you see, I'm stranded. My pater doesn't expect me home for the holidays after I told him I should be away with friends. Of course, it would gladden his heart to see me—"

"Get on with the gladdening, then."

"But—but—but, look here, old chap, I'm stranded. Be a pal!"

Harry Wharton paused before he answered that. His heart smote him.

Really and truly he did not yearn to see that fat Owl of the Remove at Wharton Lodge for the holidays. Neither did his chums; they saw enough of Billy Bunter during the term at Greyfriars—in fact, too much. Still, the Famous Five had stood him before, and they could have stood him again. But—

"Sorry, old fat bean!" said Harry. "You've put my uncle's back up, and I simply can't have you here. He heard you speak of him as an old ass when you were here at Easter—"

"Grumpy old beast!"

"What?"

"How was I to know the old fathead was just behind me when I was speaking? Bother the old donkey! I say, can't you get round him? After all, he's rather a silly old idiot, isn't he? Anybody could pull his silly leg!"

Harry Wharton's face as he listened to that bore a strong resemblance to his uncle's.

"You cheeky, fat rotter!" he hooted.

"Eh?"

"If you weren't at the other end of a telephone wire, I'd boot you!"

"Beast!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Wharton jammed down the receiver. If Billy Bunter, at the other end, had any more to say, it remained unheard by the captain of the Remove. With a ruffled brow he left the telephone and rejoined his friends.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Last Straw!

BILLY BUNTER rolled out of the post office into Wimford High Street. Wrath and dismay were mingled in his fat face. But dismay predominated.

Bunter was at a loose end.

Since he had joined up with Muccolini's Magnificent Circus, the fat Owl of Greyfriars had regarded himself as booked for the summer vacation. "Hols" were often a problem to Bunter; but the offer of a job by Marco, King of the Lions, had solved the problem this time.

Bunter had even been undecided whether he would go back to Greyfriars at all at the end of the holidays. Not if he was a star of the circus, a big draw with the public, and rolling in a huge salary! This seemed quite probable to Bunter, who never underestimated his own value.

Instead of which, he was sacked!

Instead of thinking what he would do at the end of the holidays, he had to consider what he was going to do at the very beginning.

As the circus was pitched only a few miles from Wharton Lodge, he had, naturally, thought of that as a resource. But his talk on the telephone with Harry Wharton washed that right out. Bunter, as he rolled dismally down the

Neither Signor Muccolini nor Tippity Tip, world's most wonderful wheeze-wangler, have the remotest suspicion that Billy Bunter is an expert ventriloquist. And when the circus is "haunted" by a mysterious voice, they never dream of attributing that mysterious voice to the runaway schoolboy from Greyfriars!

High Street of Wimford, wished that he hadn't let Colonel Wharton hear his opinion of him last Easter. He wished that he hadn't cheeked Marco, the lion-tamer, and got the "push." He wished that he hadn't told his father, Mr. William Samuel Bunter, that he would be staying with friends for the vacation. He wished, in fact, quite a lot of things that it was rather too late to wish!

What was he going to do now? To be more exact, whom was he going to do?

Nobody at the circus wanted him. Marco had sacked him; and it was not much use to ask Signor Muccolini for any sort of job—even if he had been willing to work, which he wasn't! The signor loathed the sight of him. He might have hooked on to Tippity Tip, the clown, as an assistant in his ventriloquial side show; he was ever so much better a ventriloquist than Mr. Tip. But he had put on so much side in dealing with Tippity that he was on the worst of terms with the circus clown.

Indeed, he had seen Mr. Tip grinning with satisfaction when he rolled out of the circus camp that morning.

Tippity had even made a motion with his foot, as if to speed the parting guest with a spot of boot-leather!

There was only one trace of silver

lining in the clouds. Bunter had two whole pounds in his pocket, his salary as Marco's assistant paid up to date! That was a comfort. Two pounds would pay a fellow's railway fare to almost anywhere.

There was nothing doing at Wharton Lodge! But Harry Wharton & Co. were not the only pebbles on the beach. Lots of other Greyfriars fellows might be glad to see Bunter those holidays! Some of them, at least, might be relied on not to boot him out if he blew in!

Bunter stopped at a pastry-cook's shop. He stepped in—and stepped out again with a bag of tuck! He had decided to seek a quiet spot, and think it over—and jam tarts and doughnuts would be grateful and comforting during the process of thinking.

He walked on, past the circus field, which lay between Wimford town and a green shady wood. He blinked mournfully at the big circus tent with the flag fluttering in the wind at its summit. He had a glimpse of Signor Muccolini, swarthy and greasy and podgy, with his black bushy moustache, talking to Tippity Tip, the clown.

Both of them saw him. The Italian circus-master scowled; and Mr. Tip grinned. Then Tippity Tip came walking quickly towards Bunter. The signor disappeared into a tent.

Billy Bunter's fat face brightened. He fixed his eyes and his spectacles on the clown as he approached.

Plainly Signor Muccolini had sent the clown to speak to him. Did it mean that the circus-master realised what the circus was losing, in losing Bunter? Had he sent Tippity to recall him? What else could it mean?

Bunter forgot even the tuck in the bag in his hand as he waited for Tippity to come up. Tippity gave him a cheery grin as he came out of the field into the lane.

"You again!" said Tippity.

"Don't be cheeky!" said Bunter loftily. He had no use for cheek from a circus clown. "Did Mucky send you to speak to me?"

"You've got it!" assented Tippity.

"He wants to see me?" asked Bunter eagerly.

"Wrong! He doesn't!"

"Eh? Then what's he sent you for?" demanded Bunter.

"Because he doesn't!" explained Tippity. "The order is, to kick you out, if you hang round the circus!"

"Why, you cheeky rotter—" gasped Bunter. "Here, keep off! If you kick me, I'll jolly well—Yarooop!"

Bunter scudded. Tippity had time to land only one before he leaped out of reach. But it was a good one, and it caused Bunter to utter a roar that echoed over the circus field.

"Come back when you want another!" yelled Mr. Tip.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

Bunter did not come back for another. He put on speed; and the clown, grinning, walked back into the circus field.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter. He dropped into a walk and trudged wearily on towards the shady wood, breathing hard after his burst of speed.

But he was glad to get out of the blazing sunshine into the shade of the trees. It was comforting to sit in a mass of soft ferns in the shady wood, leaning back against a gnarled trunk, with a bag on his knees, helping himself therefrom to sticky, juicy, jammy tarts.

As the tarts went down, one after another, the fat Owl of the Remove felt better. He still had thirty-five shillings in his pocket, after his expenditure on

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tuck. He turned over in his fat mind various Greyfriars fellows whose homes were within a radius of a thirty-five shilling railway fare!

"After all, old Mauly will be glad to see me!" murmured Bunter. "Anyhow, he's more civil than that beast Wharton!"

Lord Mauleverer, at Mauleverer Towers, in Hampshire, little dreamed of his danger at that moment!

"And there's Hazeldene, at Brighton," murmured Bunter. "Hazel's rather a cad—but his sister Marjorie would be jolly glad to see me! Girls always like a good-looking chap!"

Deep in reflection and jam tarts, Billy Bunter did not observe a rustle in the thickets near at hand.

It had not occurred to him that some other person might have sought the shade of the wood on that blazing summer's day.

But some other person had; and he was now peering at Bunter, through the bushes and ferns.

He was not a nice-looking man. He was dusty and tattered, and wore an ancient bowler hat that looked as if it had been rescued from a dust-heap. His nose, which was red, had a slant, as if it had been knocked a little out of its original position in some scrap. His eyes, which were red and beery, had a gleam of recognition in them as he stared at Bunter.

"Im!" murmured Jimmy Guggs.

He pushed through the thickets and stopped in front of Bunter. Then the fat junior saw and heard him. He blinked up at the newcomer through his big spectacles and choked over a tart in his alarm and surprise.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter.

"What a 'appy meeting!" said Guggs.

"Urrgh! Oh crikey! Wurrgh!" gurgled Bunter. He made a movement to rise, and the tramp waved a grubby paw at him.

"Don't get up," he said. "Don't you give me the trouble of knocking you down agin on a 'ot day."

Bunter did not get up. He blinked at the tramp in terror. He had met Mr. Guggs once before—only once; but it was a meeting to be remembered. Mr. Guggs had stopped him in a wood near Greyfriars School, with the object of relieving him of his superfluous wealth.

On that occasion, Bunter had been in possession of a pound; and in sheer desperation he had punched Mr. Guggs—and it would have gone hard with him had not Marco happened on the scene. Now there was no chance of Marco, or anybody else, happening on the scene—and Bunter was not feeling like punching Mr. Guggs again. Only too clearly Bunter realised what would happen to him if Mr. Guggs started fistical operations with no help at hand.

He blinked at the tramp like a fat rabbit fascinated by a serpent.

"Feeding all on your own!" said Mr. Guggs reproachfully. "But p'r'aps you're going to 'and me that bag!"

"Oh dear! Oh! Yes!" gasped Bunter. He handed over the bag of tuck.

"And p'r'aps you're going to 'and me your loose change, arter it!" suggested Mr. Guggs.

"I—I—I haven't—" gasped Bunter. "P'r'aps you'll turn out your pockets!" said Mr. Guggs.

Thirty-five shillings passed from Bunter's possession into that of Mr. Guggs. Then the ruffian eyed Bunter thoughtfully.

"Last time I see you, you 'it me in the eye!" he said. "Strike me pink, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,485.

you did! P'r'aps you'd like trying to 'it me in the eye now?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter. "N-not at all!"

Mr. Guggs grinned.

"You stick there!" he said. "You shift from this 'ere spot for the next 'arf-hour, and you'll be a 'orspital case! That's a tip!"

Mr. Guggs disappeared into the wood, the richer by thirty-five shillings and a bag of tuck. Bunter sat and blinked after him. He was well aware that the footpad was making his escape while he sat there, but he dared not stir lest Mr. Guggs' eye should be on him.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter.

Either Lord Mauleverer, at Mauleverer Towers, or Hazel, at Brighton, had had a narrow escape!

Both were safe from Bunter now!

Bunter was left without the price of a railway fare in his possession; without even the price of a penny bun!

It was the last straw!

Bunter sat and groaned.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Very Late Call!

SIGNOR MUCCOLINI locked the door of his van and drew the blind carefully over the window. Then he extinguished the swinging lamp and lighted a lamp with a red glass, that threw a ruddy glimmer over the roomy interior of the van.

The hour was late. The circus performance was long over; the crowds had departed; the side-shows were shut down. Members of the circus company who camped in tents and vans had turned in; those who had lodgings in the town had long since walked off to their lodgings. At the pitch in the field by Wimford, the swarthy Italian was the only man awake.

The rest of the circus company, had they thought about him at all, would have supposed that he was asleep in his bunk. But Signor Pietro Muccolini was very wide awake. He had work on hand which was a deep secret from every man in the Magnificent Circus.

Nobody at the circus knew, or guessed, that the signor's hobby was photography. Nobody had a suspicion that, at a late hour of the night, his caravan was turned into a dark-room for the development of films.

Many times, when the circus was pitched in certain spots, the signor had been seen leaving the camp with a lunch-basket in his hand. He was supposed to have a fancy for picnics on his own, in secluded spots. Nobody had guessed that the lunch-basket concealed, not a lunch, but a camera. Even Tippetty Tip, who had been with the Magnificent Circus for years, knew no more of the signor's secret than any latecomer.

Indeed he, and the rest, knew less than the latest comer—for Billy Bunter knew. While the circus was camped at Wapshot, near Greyfriars, Bunter had seen the Italian at his surreptitious work, taking secret photographs of the air camp.

Bunter knew that such photographing was forbidden. He knew that the signor was very anxious not to have it known. For which reason, Pietro Muccolini had tolerated his presence in the circus until, to his intense relief, Marco had sacked him, and he had gone.

But Billy Bunter was far too obtuse to guess the seriousness of what he had accidentally spotted. He knew that the Italian had broken the law. But it never even crossed his fat mind that

Pietro Muccolini was a foreign spy, carrying on his nefarious work under cover of a travelling circus.

It was not, as Bunter supposed, a heavy fine that the Italian feared. What he feared was, if Bunter babbled, the discovery of his rascally game, and a term of penal servitude to follow.

Bunter's presence at the circus had been a sheer torture to the signor. He had urged Marco to sack him—in vain—till Bunter, in his ineffable self-conceit, had asked for it, and got it. There were few at the Magnificent Circus who were not glad to see the last of Bunter; but gladdest of all was the signor.

Until Bunter was gone, he had not even ventured to develop the photographs he had secretly taken at Wapshot, hidden away in the deepest hiding-place he could think of. Which meant delay in receiving his reward from his unscrupulous employers across the sea.

But now that Bunter was gone, the signor breathed more freely.

He had not dared to kick Bunter out, and so long as the lion-tamer kept him, he had to endure him. Bunter had played into his hands with the obtuseness that might have been expected of the fat Owl, and he was, at long last, gone.

Out of sight was out of mind, and once clear of the circus, he had no doubt that the fat schoolboy would forget the whole thing, of which he did not in the least understand the seriousness.

So the signor concluded, and no doubt his conclusions would have been quite correct, had Bunter succeeded in landing himself at Wharton Lodge, or had Jimmy Guggs left him the wherewithal to land himself anywhere else!

As it was, the signor had not, as he happily believed, finished with Bunter. A homeless Owl had to find a roost!

In the happy belief, however, that Billy Bunter was done with, and gone for good, Signor Muccolini lighted his red lamp, and sorted out the films he had to develop and fix. His swarthy face was dark and intent. But his greasy ears were intent, also.

Nobody at the circus could have ventured to disturb the signor after he had gone to his van without getting the "boot." He was not afraid of that. But his game, safely as he had played it for a long time, was a dangerous one—and at the back of his mind there was always a fear of hearing the footsteps of the police. He made more money by spying than by running a circus—but it was perilous money.

Bump!

The signor gave a sudden start as he heard the sound in the silence. Someone, near his van, had stumbled over the step in the dark.

"Cospetto!" breathed Signor Muccolini, through his bushy black moustache.

He stood listening, his heart beating.

What was in his van was enough to condemn him to dire punishment, if it came to the eyes of authority. Was he suspected at last—watched? Who could be prowling about his van at midnight? Some member of the company spying on him—or—his heart chilled at the thought—a detective or a constable?

He stood motionless, listening.

The wooden step outside creaked.

Tap!

Not a glimmer of the red light escaped from the van. He was very careful about that. Nobody in the camp could know that he was awake. Who was tapping at his caravan door?

To every crook there come moments when he wishes, from the bottom of his heart, that he had followed the path of honesty. Signor Muccolini had such a moment now! In the rush of terror

that came over him, he would have given all he had ever received for his spy-work to have transformed himself into what he was supposed to be—a simple circus-master and nothing more! Tap!

There was a chalky white in the Italian's dusky, greasy face. His black, beady eyes bulged. He knew that it could be no member of his company who was tapping at his door! Who was it? Tap! It was louder now. Knock! He pulled himself together.

Swiftly he thrust the roll of films back into its hiding-place. He turned out the red lamp and slid it out of sight. Then he called out, in a voice that he vainly strove to steady:

"Chi e? Chi mi chiama?" He spoke, without thinking, in his own language,

bring my whip and beat you like one dog.

"Will you, you beastly dago?" came back Bunter's voice. "All right! You try it on! I'll jolly well give you away about what you did at Wapshot if you do. Like to pay a fine of about a hundred pounds, you stingy dago?"

The signor choked.

Had it been a fine of a hundred pounds, or thrice that sum, that he had to fear, he would have leaped from the van and kicked the fat Owl of Greyfriars out of the circus camp. Billy Bunter was wielding a power of which he did not know the extent!

But he knew that Pietro Muccolini dared not let him tell what he knew. That was good enough for Bunter.

Not that Bunter, unscrupulous as he

at the circus. So he had had to wait till the camp was asleep before he ventured in.

He had no doubt that, if he got as far as the signor, the signor would come to terms. Otherwise it was, as the fatuous Owl supposed, a fine of a hundred pounds for him to pay.

Signor Muccolini stood with clenched hands in the dark van, breathing fury. He had flattered himself that he was done with Bunter. Evidently, hope had told too flattering a tale.

Knock!

Bunter was knocking again.

"Look here, you get up!" he squeaked. "See? Sorry to have to wake you up, but I'm stranded. I've got to have some supper. I've got to



"Last time I see you, you 'it me in the eye!" said Jimmy Guggs, after relieving Bunter of a bag of tuck and his loose change. "P'r'aps you'd like trying to 'it me in the eye now!" "Oh, no!" gasped the fat Removite. "N-n-not at all!" "Take a tip from me," said the tramp with a grin, "and don't shift from this 'ere spot for 'arf an hour unless you want to be a 'orspital case!"

but went on at once: "Who is it? Who calls me?"

"It's me!"

"Che!" gasped Signor Muccolini. He knew that voice!

"Kay!" repeated the voice. "You jolly well know my name ain't Kay! It's Bunter!"

The fear disappeared from the signor's swarthy face. The rage that took its place might have scared Billy Bunter if he could have seen through the caravan door.

The Italian clenched his dusky hands, till the nails dug into the greasy palms.

"You!" he stuttered. "You, Bunter! You dare to come back! You have been given a sack—you belong here no more! Do you fancy that Marco will take you on once more after your so-impudent cheek! Go! Go away, or I will have you whipped from the circus!"

"I say—"

"Will you go?" yelled Signor Muccolini. "If I come out of the van I will

was, was capable of blackmail. It would never have crossed his fat mind to extort anything from Signor Muccolini for keeping his secret.

But he was down and out; he was stony broke; he wanted a supper, and he wanted a lodging for the night. In that extremity, he remembered that the signor was afraid of what he knew. He did not see why Mucky should not play up; one good turn deserved another.

That was how Bunter looked at it.

Really it wasn't Bunter's fault. It was Mr. Guggs'. Had the tramp left him his money, Bunter would have been far enough away by that time.

Now, it was a case of any port in a storm; it was the circus, or a lodging on the cold, cold ground. Bunter naturally preferred the circus.

But he had not ventured to approach till a very late hour. From Tippetty Tip's words—and actions—he knew that the signor had given orders that he was to be kicked out if he showed up again

have a bed for the night. Do you hear me, blow you?"

"Go!" hissed the signor. "I will beat you—I—I—Go! I order you, go! I will call my men to chase you away like a mongrel dog—"

"Oh, you beast!"

"Wait one moment till I open the door—I will come out to you—I will beat you—kick you!" spluttered the circus-master.

"I—I—I say—" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, d-d-don't be so jolly shirty, you know! I say. I'm fearfully hungry—"

Signor Muccolini groped at the door and unlocked it. He groped for his circus whip, and grasped it. He grabbed the door open, and plunged out.

His swarthy face, in the summer starlight, showed red with rage. A fat figure popped hurriedly back.

Billy Bunter gave one terrified blink at the dark, furious face. Then he for-

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got all about supper and a night's lodging. He turned and fled.

And then, as he ran, the Italian's fury gave place to fear.

He stopped, and lowered the hand grasping the whip.

He could kick Bunter out—he could thrash him as he fled—but he could not prevent him from heading for the police station at Wimford. At that terrifying thought, the signor, who had been seeing red, felt the yellow in his nature predominate. He flung the whip back into the van, and called out hoarsely:

"Stop! Ragazzo mio, stop! Come back! Caro ragazzo mio, stop and come back! It is all right!"

And Billy Bunter, glad to hear that it was all right, stopped, and came back—eyeing the Italian very warily, however, as he did so.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Little Ventriloquism!

MARCO, the lion-tamer, stared, and frowned.

It was a sunny morning on the Surrey country-side, and the circus camp was astir and busy. Marco was chatting with Samson, the strong man of the circus, and Wiggles, the contortionist, when he became aware of a fat figure rolling towards him.

Like Signor Muccolini, Marco had supposed that Billy Bunter was done with when he was sacked. Like the signor, he found that that was an error.

Bunter, he supposed, had gone home; or to visit some of the innumerable friends of whom he had often talked. Marco did not care much where he was gone, so long as he was gone for good.

So he stared, and he frowned, when Billy Bunter emerged from a tent, blinked round him through his big spectacles, and came over to him. Samson and Wiggles stared, too. Mr. Tip-pity Tip, spotting Bunter from a distance, kept an eye on him. He was prepared to carry out orders, to any extent, on the subject of Bunter, and kicking him if he hung about the circus.

Billy Bunter assumed his most ingratiating grin, as he came up to the frowning lion-tamer.

Bunter had, by that time, realised that he had made rather a mistake in getting the "push." In the belief that he was of inestimable value to the lion-tamer, he had been greedy and cheeky, and the "sack" had taken him quite by surprise. Now Bunter was prepared to let bygones be bygones—if Marco was. Marco looked as if he wasn't.

"Good-morning, old chap!" said Bunter affably. "Glad to see me again, what?"

"No!" answered Marco grimly.

"Oh, really, old fellow——"

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Marco sharply. "You are finished here. Signor Muccolini will be very angry if he sees you. Most likely he will lay his whip round you, and I certainly shall not stop him."

"Oh, Mucky's all right!" said Bunter cheerily. "Mucky's no end pleased to see me again."

"Don't talk nonsense!" snapped Marco. "How did you get here? Have you been here all night, or what?"

"Yes, rather! I blew in rather late," explained Bunter. "But old Mucky got up and stood me some supper, and got me a bed in that tent. Decent of him, what?"

"What!" ejaculated Marco.

Samson and Wiggles blinked at the fat schoolboy in astonishment.

From what they knew of the signor, **THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,485.**

he was the last man in the world to turn out late at night, to provide anybody with supper and lodging. And all the circus knew that he loathed the sight of Bunter.

"It's all right about Mucky," rattled on Bunter breezily. "He will be jolly glad to have me taken on again, Marco, old bean. He knows what a draw I was, you know. If you want me——"

"I don't!"

"What I mean is, we had rather an argument," said Bunter. "It was really a—a—a misunderstanding. I'm ready to wash it all out, old chap."

"Rubbish!"

"Mucky's ready to put in a word for me," urged Bunter. "I asked him last night, and he said he would."

"That can't be true," said Marco, "and if it was, it would make no difference. I'm done with you! Get out!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him angrily.

Up till quite lately he had known Marco as a simple, good-natured, and very good-tempered man. That, naturally, had led Bunter to be cheeky. He did not realise that Marco had been getting more and more fed-up, and that, when he put the lid on, so to speak, the lion-tamer, having done with him, was done with him for good. Marco's patience had been almost inexhaustible. But, once it was exhausted, there was naturally none left.

Marco turned away—and Samson and Wiggles exchanged a grin. Wiggles made a motion with his foot.

"Boss' orders is to kick him out if he

READERS PLEASE NOTE—

that, owing to the August Bank Holiday, next week's issue of the **MAGNET** will be on sale Friday, July 31st.

butts in!" he remarked. "First kick to me, Sam."

"Next to me," said Samson, in his deep bass voice that was like the note of a drum. "Turn round, young Bunter."

Billy Bunter jumped back.

Signor Muccolini was not in sight. It was clear that his orders, given the day before, had not been rescinded yet.

Really, it was surprising how many people were willing, indeed keen, to kick Bunter, considering what a charming and fascinating fellow he was! Both the strong man and the contortionist evidently intended to do so; while Mr. Tip was watching from a distance, prepared to give him another as he went.

"I—I say——" stammered Bunter.

"Turn round!" boomed Samson.

"Beast! You'll get into a row with Mucky!" gasped Bunter. "I tell you I've got Mucky's permission to stay here——"

"Gammon!" said Wiggles.

"I tell you he got up last night to take me in——"

"I can see him doing it!" grinned Wiggles. "From what I've seen of you, young 'un, you're the biggest liar I ever struck. But that's the biggest."

"I tell you——" howled Bunter as the elastic man grasped his shoulder to twirl him round for kicking.

Thud!

"Yoo-hoop!" howled Bunter, tottering.

"Your turn, Sam!" said Wiggles.

It was then that Billy Bunter remembered that he was a ventriloquist. His signor.

weird gift had come in useful before, and now it came in useful again.

"Stop that, Wiggles!" came Samson's deep boom, though it did not proceed from the strong man. "I'll hit you if you touch him again!"

The elastic man spun round at Samson in sheer astonishment.

He was too astonished to speak for a moment or two. He glared at Samson.

Samson, like many men of huge stature and over-developed muscular power, was a little slow on the uptake. He was staring, wondering who had spoken to Wiggles, and threatened to hit him. He was staring round him in surprise. Now he stared at Wiggles.

"What's that?" he said. "Who the dickens——"

"Hit me, will you?" gasped Wiggles. "Why, you cheeky lass, I'll——"

"Eh! I never said——"

"Let's see you do it!" squealed Wiggles, in his high-pitched voice. "Think you can handle me, like you do your dummy weights in the ring?"

It was Samson's turn to glare. The strong man was rather sensitive on the subject of "dummy" weights, which he lifted to the wonder and admiration of unsuspecting audiences.

"Who handles dummy weights?" he roared.

"You do!" retorted Wiggles. "And if you think you can do the same with me, get on with it! I'll jolly soon punch your ugly mug!"

Billy Bunter, unnoticed by either of the angry circus performers, retreated from the spot without collecting further kicks. Samson and Wiggles were left wrangling, half a dozen of the circus company gathering round to look on and listen.

Marco had gone into the annexe where the cages were parked, to see to his lions. Billy Bunter rolled in after him.

"I say, Marco——" he squeaked.

"Get out!" said the lion-tamer, over his shoulder.

"But I say——"

"Parker," rapped Marco, "turn that kid out!"

Parker, the animals' keeper, came along to Bunter with a grin on his face. During his days at the circus, Bunter had been in a superior position to Parker's, and he had let that fact sink very clearly into Parker's mind. Now the tables were turned.

Parker, grinning, dropped a hand on Bunter's fat shoulder.

"Outside!" he said.

"Leggo, you beast!" howled Bunter.

"Outside!" grinned Parker.

And he twirled the fat junior out, while Marco went into Caesar's cage.

Bunter, spluttering for breath, was conducted out of the canvas building—not gently.

"Now," said Parker, drawing back his foot, "op it!"

A podgy figure in silk hat, gorgeous waistcoat and eyeglass, had never been more welcome to Bunter's sight than at that moment. He yelled to Signor Muccolini:

"Here, Mucky! Make him leggo! Do you hear? Make that beast leggo!"

The signor stared round, scowling. His natural desire was to bid Parker kick, and kick hard. But his own secret rascality made it impossible for him to yield to that natural desire.

"Stop that, Parker!" he snarled.

Parker stared at him blankly.

"Marco told me to turn him out, sir," he said.

"Do as I tell you!" snarled the

"But you gave orders yesterday, sir," stammered the astonished Parker.

"Hold your tongue!"

Parker released Bunter's fat shoulder. Billy Bunter blinked at him contemptuously. Then he blinked at the signor.

"Come and speak to Marco, will you?" he said.

Signor Muccolini stood for a moment looking at him. He breathed hard and deep. Then he gave Bunter a nod, and followed him. Parker was left staring with astonishment.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Marco is not Taking Any!

SIGNOR MUCCOLINI followed the fat figure of the Owl of the Remove to the door of Caesar's cage.

Billy Bunter was grinning now; but the scowl on the Italian's face was as black as midnight.

He had to put in a word for Bunter—he had no choice about that. He could only hope that Marco would be obstinate on the subject, and refuse his request.

Bunter was quite determined to stick to the circus now. Other resources having failed, he had turned up there again, chiefly in search of a supper and a lodging for the night. But he had been doing some thinking since. The obvious fact that the circus-master dared not turn him out was good enough for Bunter. He was going to stay.

He was going to recapture his "job" with Marco, if he could. Anyhow, he was going to stay. Mucky was not yet aware of that. He supposed that if Marco turned the fat young rascal down, the fat young rascal would go. He had a good deal yet to learn about Billy Bunter's sticking powers.

The lion-tamer looked round at him through the grated door of the cage. He frowned at the sight of Bunter again.

"Marco mio—" began the signor. He choked down his angry passions, and spoke quietly. "Questo ragazzo—this boy come back."

"I can see that," grunted Marco.

"He ask me to put in a word," muttered the signor.

"You're not putting in a word for Bunter!" exclaimed the lion-tamer, in amazement.

"Si, si! Yes, yes! He ask—"

"What do you care what he asks? What the dickens do you mean?" exclaimed Marco gruffly. "Ever since he joined up you've been worrying me to sack him; jawing me, again and again, and never giving the subject a rest. You threatened to break my contract if I didn't send him away."

"E vero—ma—ma—it is true, but—but—" stammered the signor.

"Well, if you've changed your mind, I haven't," growled the lion-tamer. "You can't say I wasn't patient with him. But there's a limit; and he's got over it. I won't stand him any longer. That's that!"

And Marco turned his back, and cracked his whip to Caesar.

"Houp-la!"

The lion jumped over the whip. Marco, evidently considering the matter done with, was getting on with his own business.

Signor Muccolini's black, beady eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He had had to put in a word for the young rascal who knew his secret. But he was very glad that Marco had not heeded that word.

Billy Bunter, on the other hand, was far from satisfied. He blinked through the bars of the cage at Marco with a very irritated blink.

"Look here, Marco—" he began.

Marco looked round again.

"Get out!" he said. "If you are still there when I come out of this cage, I will lay my whip round you!"

"Look here, you beast—" roared Bunter.

"Basta!" muttered Signor Muccolini. "That is enough! It is useless, and you must go—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Bunter.

The signor's swarthy hands clenched. Marco stared from the cage.

"What the dickens are you standing his cheek for, Mucky?" he demanded. "Why don't you kick him out of the show?"

The signor choked. He could not explain his reasons to Marco. The lion-tamer had a professional Italian name; but in private life he was Bill Williams. And Bill Williams, had he known what Bunter knew, would have taken his boss by his greasy neck, and marched him off to the nearest police station.

Instead of answering, Signor Muccolini turned and walked away.

Billy Bunter yapped at him as he went.

"Look here, Mucky! Some of your men seem to have an idea that I'm to be turned out. Tell them different—see?"

Mucky made no answer as he went. But there was no doubt in Bunter's mind that he was going to rescind his orders of the previous day.

Marco stared at the fat junior through the bars very curiously.

"What does this mean, Bunter?" he asked. "You seem to have got round Mucky somehow. I can't understand it."

"Oh, you can't understand anything!" retorted Bunter. As he realised that he had nothing more to expect from the lion-tamer, Bunter had no more politeness to waste on him. "How could you, you fathead, with a brain like yours?"

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Marco.

"Think I want to come back to your rotten show?" continued Bunter, with a blink of ineffable scorn. "Yah! I wouldn't be found dead in it! You ought to be jolly glad to get a gentleman, and a Public school man, to take notice of you! You're a low rotter!"

Marco stared at him.

"A low rotter!" went on Bunter, with relish. "Circus riff-raff! Yah!"

Marco stepped to the cage door, gripping his whip hard. Billy Bunter backed promptly away. The lion-tamer looked very grim as he came out of the cage.

"Hands off, you cad!" said Bunter. "You touch me with that whip, and I'll ask Mucky to sack you—see? I'll jolly well tell—Yaroooh!"

The whip sang round Bunter's fat legs. He yelled and hopped.

"I don't know why Mucky stands your cheek," said the lion-tamer. "But it won't go

down with me. Take that, and that, and that!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter bolted along the passage in front of the cages. The lash of the whip curled round his fat leg, and he stumbled, and came down with a bump in front of Brutus' cage. Brutus glared at him between the bars, and gave a roar. Marco grinned down at the sprawling fat junior.

"Now hop it," he said, "and don't come back! If Mucky lets you hang on in the circus, it's no business of mine; but keep clear of me!"

"Ow! Beast! Ow!"

Up went the lion-tamer's whip again. Bunter was asking for it, and he was about to receive what he asked for. He blinked up at the circling whip, and at Marco's grim face.

"Elp!" came a sudden cry, apparently from the iron-barred cage in which Brutus was roaring and lashing his tail.

Marco gave a jump, and, his whip still uplifted, spun round towards the lion's cage. Brutus was the fiercest of the circus lions, and anyone who had ventured into his cage, would have been in need of help. And it sounded to Marco as if somebody had!

"Elp!" came gasping from the cage.

Unheeding the sprawling fat Owl, Marco sprang to the door of the cage.

Billy Bunter jumped up.

He scudded.

No more cries were heard from the lion's cage, though Brutus was still roaring there! Marco, amazed and mystified, was left to make the discovery that there was no one in the cage with Brutus—what time the Greyfriars ventriloquist beat a rapid retreat.

Bunter rolled out into the sunshine, gasping.

Outside, he came on Tippetty Tip. He eyed the clown warily. But Mr. Tip's manner revealed that Signor Muccolini had already issued new instructions. Instead of kicking Bunter, Tippetty eyed him with intense curiosity.

"So you're back, are you?" said Mr. Tip.

"Looks like it!" grunted Bunter.

"It beats me 'oller!" said Tippetty. "Jest 'oller! What I want to know is, 'ow you got round old Mucky?"

"Find out!" retorted Bunter.

"He ain't the cove to 'elp a lame dog over a stile!" said Mr. Tip. "Mucky ain't that, by long chalks! What's he letting you 'ang on for, I'd like to know."

"He's found out my value!" said Bunter loftily.

(Continued on next page.)

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"It wanted some finding!" remarked Mr. Tip. "What's your turn going to be—the Fattest Boy Ever, or the World's Biggest Eater?"

"I don't want any cheek from clowns!" snapped Bunter, and he turned on his heel and rolled loftily away.

Mr. Tip could barely restrain his desire to help him with his boot! His foot fairly itched to land on Bunter. But it was clear that Billy Bunter, for some mysterious reason, was favoured by the boss; so Mr. Tip had regretfully, to let him roll away unkicked.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Scapegoats!

"THE esteemed Mucky!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced at the bulky, beefy, swarthy man, coming up the footpath towards Wimford Wood.

The chums of the Remove had been on a ramble that sunny summer's afternoon. Now they were taking a rest, sitting in a cheery row on a fence, by the edge of the wood before walking back to Wharton Lodge for tea.

It was some days since Billy Bunter's call on the telephone, and they had heard nothing since of the fat Owl of the Remove.

As Bunter had revealed that he had been sacked from the circus, they supposed that he was gone long ago, and was rejoicing the hearts of his relatives—or otherwise—at that magnificent abode, Bunter Court! They had, in fact, almost forgotten his fat existence, till now, when the sight of Signor Muccolini reminded them of the circus, and in consequence of Billy Bunter.

They recognised Signor Muccolini, whom they had seen several times, while the circus was near Greyfriars School. They had, in fact, had a row with him there, owing to Bunter's ventriloquial trickery.

The juniors looked at him curiously as he came. He was striding along with a knitted brow, scowling rather like a demon in a pantomime.

Something, evidently, had disturbed the serenity of the circus-master and roused his passionate Italian temper.

He did not, for the moment, observe the juniors sitting in a row on the fence. Seldom, or never, had they seen a face so savagely angry and vicious in its expression. They were not likely to guess that the subject of his angry,

malevolent thoughts was William George Bunter.

"The old bean looks in a wax!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"He do—he does!" grinned Frank Nugent.

"The waxfulness appears to be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And he doesn't mind letting the wide world see it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Harry Wharton, as the signor suddenly slipped a whip down from under his arm, grasped it, and cut the air with the lash.

The juniors stared at him. In a burst of rage, the Italian lashed with the whip, cracking it like pistol-shots. Evidently he was thinking of somebody on whom he would have liked to land those lashes.

"Nice temper!" murmured Nugent.

"The niceness is——"

"Terrific!" grinned Bob.

The juniors could not help smiling at that sudden savage outburst of a passionate southern temper. But they carefully subdued their smiles as the circus-master came nearer and glanced at them. Italian ways were not their ways, but they did not want to be lacking in politeness to a foreigner in the land. Indeed, they were prepared to "cap" him civilly as he passed, if he recognised them and gave them any heed.

That he did recognise them was clear, as soon as his black beady eyes fixed on them. He knew them at once.

He turned from the path and faced them, his eyes glittering at them.

"I ragazzi della scuola dell' piccolo furfante Bunter!" he said between his teeth and through his bushy moustache.

Of that remark, the juniors understood only one word, the name of Bunter, though they could guess that "scuola" meant school.

"Sorry, we don't understand Italian, Mr. Muccolini!" said Harry Wharton. "Would you mind putting it in English?"

"You are the boys of the school of that young scoundrel Bunter!" snarled Signor Muccolini. He put it into English—quite emphatic English!

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Dear old Bunter seems to have made himself as popular as usual!"

And the juniors chuckled.

"We belong to Bunter's school, yes!" said Harry. "But aren't you pitching it rather strong, Mr. Muccolini? Bunter's a blithering ass, but you've no right to call him names like that."

"He is one rascal—furfante—matto—sciocco—porcello—pig—dog!" snarled Signor Muccolini. "You are his friends, is it not? Pigs—dogs—rascals——"

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

Clearly, Billy Bunter had succeeded in getting the circus-master's rag out to a remarkable extent. He was enraged with Bunter, and ready to wreak his rage on Bunter's schoolfellows. They were not aware that he dared not wreak it on Bunter, but they were assuredly not disposed to have it wreaked on themselves. The part of scapegoat had no attraction for them whatever!

"Chuck that, please!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove curtly. "We don't like that language, Mr. Muccolini."

"You do not like!" snarled the signor. "Bah! Pigs—dogs—furfanti inglesi—I spit upon you——"

"You'd better think twice about that, you cheeky dago!" said Johnny Bull

in a voice like the growl of the Great Huge Bear.

"The betterfulness will be terrific my esteemed and absurd ice-cream merchant!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You'd better pass on your way, Mr. Muccolini!" said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "That's enough, anyhow!"

"And the sooner the better!" said Bob Cherry.

"Mind what you're doing with that whip, you cheeky fool!" yelled Frank Nugent, as the signor's arm went up.

"Oh crikey!"

"Look out!"

Signor Muccolini longed and yearned to lay that whip round the fat person of Billy Bunter. He could not venture to do so, but he could venture to lay it round Bunter's school-fellows. And he did!

That they were, as he supposed, friends of Bunter's, was enough for him. He wanted to wreak his rage, and they came in handy. It did not occur to him that he was likely to get the worst of the bargain. He expected to see them run, as he lashed with the circus whip.

But he did not see them run! He saw them jump down from the fence, red with wrath, and thinking of anything but running.

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Bob.

"Barge him over!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Snaffle him!" gasped Harry Wharton.

The angry Italian swept the whip round him in a circle. Every member of the Famous Five got a lash from it.

But they did not heed the lashing whip. They rushed straight at the Italian and charged him headlong over. Signor Muccolini went sprawling on the grassy path, spluttering with rage. Harry Wharton wrenched the whip from his hand.

"Give the cheeky cad a few with his own whip!" panted Bob.

Harry Wharton, for a moment, was inclined to do it. His hand went up, with the whip in it. But he refrained.

"You cheeky rotter!" he panted.

"You jolly well deserve to have your whip laid round you."

Signor Muccolini staggered to his feet gasping with rage. He picked up his hat and jammed it on his oily black head.

"Give me that whip!" he panted.

"I won't!" answered Wharton coolly.

"You're safer without it, you ill-tempered rotter! Get out before I touch you up with it."

The Italian, gritting his teeth, made a rush at him.

Bob Cherry promptly put a foot in the way, and the signor, stumbling over it, came down in the grass again, on his hands and knees, with a yell.

"Man down!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The signor, breathless, gasping with rage, sat up dizzily. Harry Wharton swung the whip round his head and sent it flying, and it disappeared into the branches of the trees on the edge of the wood.

"Go after it if you want it!" he said.

"And go quick, or you'll get helped with a boot!" said Johnny Bull.

Signor Muccolini staggered up again. His swarthy face was convulsed with rage; his dusky hands clenched. He looked for a long moment as if he would spring on the schoolboys like a tiger. They faced him coolly, quite ready to barge him over again if he did.

But he checked his rage, muttered an imprecation in his own language, and swung away, striding on towards the

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"Give me that whip!" panted Signor Muccolini. "You're safer without it, you ill-tempered rotter!" answered Wharton coolly. "Get out, before I touch you up with it!" The Italian made a rush, but Bob Cherry put his foot in the way and the signor stumbled over it and crashed.

wood. The Greyfriars fellows were glad enough to see him go.

"My hat!" said Bob, with a whistle. "Bunter must have got his rag out, and no mistake! What can the fat chump have done?"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry. "But whatever Bunter may have done, that cheeky dago can't take it out of us!"

"No fear!"

And the juniors, sitting on the fence again, watched the beefy Italian as he strode on and disappeared into the shady wood. What Billy Bunter could have done to exasperate the circus-master to such an extraordinary extent was a puzzle to them.

But the Italian disappeared from sight, and they dismissed him from their minds. They were, however, to be reminded of him very soon. Hardly five minutes had elapsed when there came a sudden yell from the wood into which the circus-master had gone.

"Help!"

The juniors stared round towards the trees in astonishment.

"Help!"

"That's that jolly old dago!" said Bob. "What the thump—"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton.

And, wondering what was up, but quite ready to return good for evil if the bullying Italian had landed in trouble, the chums of the Remove ran swiftly up the grassy path in the direction in which Signor Muccolini had gone.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hard Luck For Jimmy Guggs!

SIGNOR MUCCOLINI tramped into the shady wood, breathing fury.

He had been in a savage temper when he encountered the Grey-

friars juniors, and his encounter with them had certainly not improved it. Billy Bunter was a problem on his mind—and a most exasperating and enraging problem.

For three or four days now, since Bunter's return to the circus, the fat junior had been staying on.

Marco had refused to have anything to do with him. Indeed, the fat junior was very careful to give the lion-tamer a wide berth. But the fact that there was no "job" for him did not seem to make any difference to Bunter. He had a bed in a tent, and he turned up for meals without fail. True, he had offered his services in various side-shows attached to the circus; but he had not so far had any luck.

In the meantime, he stayed on, chiefly because it was a case of any port in a storm.

That the signor did not want him there was fairly clear to every member of the circus company. They could only wonder why Mucky did not kick him out.

Tippity Tip and Wiggles and Samson, and quite a number of others, would have been quite pleased to lend the aid of a boot at a hint from the signor. Billy Bunter's lofty airs of superiority naturally did not make him popular in the circus. But no such hint came from the signor, gladly as he would have seen the fat Owl booted from one end of Surrey to the other. He had to tolerate Bunter's presence and suppress his fury.

His only comfort was that Bunter obviously did not know the real nature of the secret he had discovered. But it was certain that others would not be so obtuse if the fat Owl talked too much. It was not all beer and skittles, so to speak, to be acting as a spy in a foreign country, and the sight of Bunter's fat face about the circus was

a continual reminder to Pietro Muccolini of the risks of his dastardly business.

Heedless of what he thought about it, Bunter stayed on. It was for the boss to order him to go, and that the boss dared not do.

Neither did he dare to lay hands on the fat Owl, though many times, when his fierce Southern temper boiled, he found it very difficult to keep his hands off. Thinking of the problem of Bunter, and simmering with rage, Pietro Muccolini had no eyes for his surroundings.

He did not notice a tattered man, with a slanting nose and a battered bowler hat, leaning on a tree in the wood, industriously engaged in shredding a cigar-stump, and packing the shreds into the foul bowl of a dirty black pipe.

But Jimmy Guggs noticed him.

Mr. Guggs had long since got through Bunter's thirty-five shillings. Most of those shillings had gone in the drink traffic, of which Mr. Guggs was an ardent supporter.

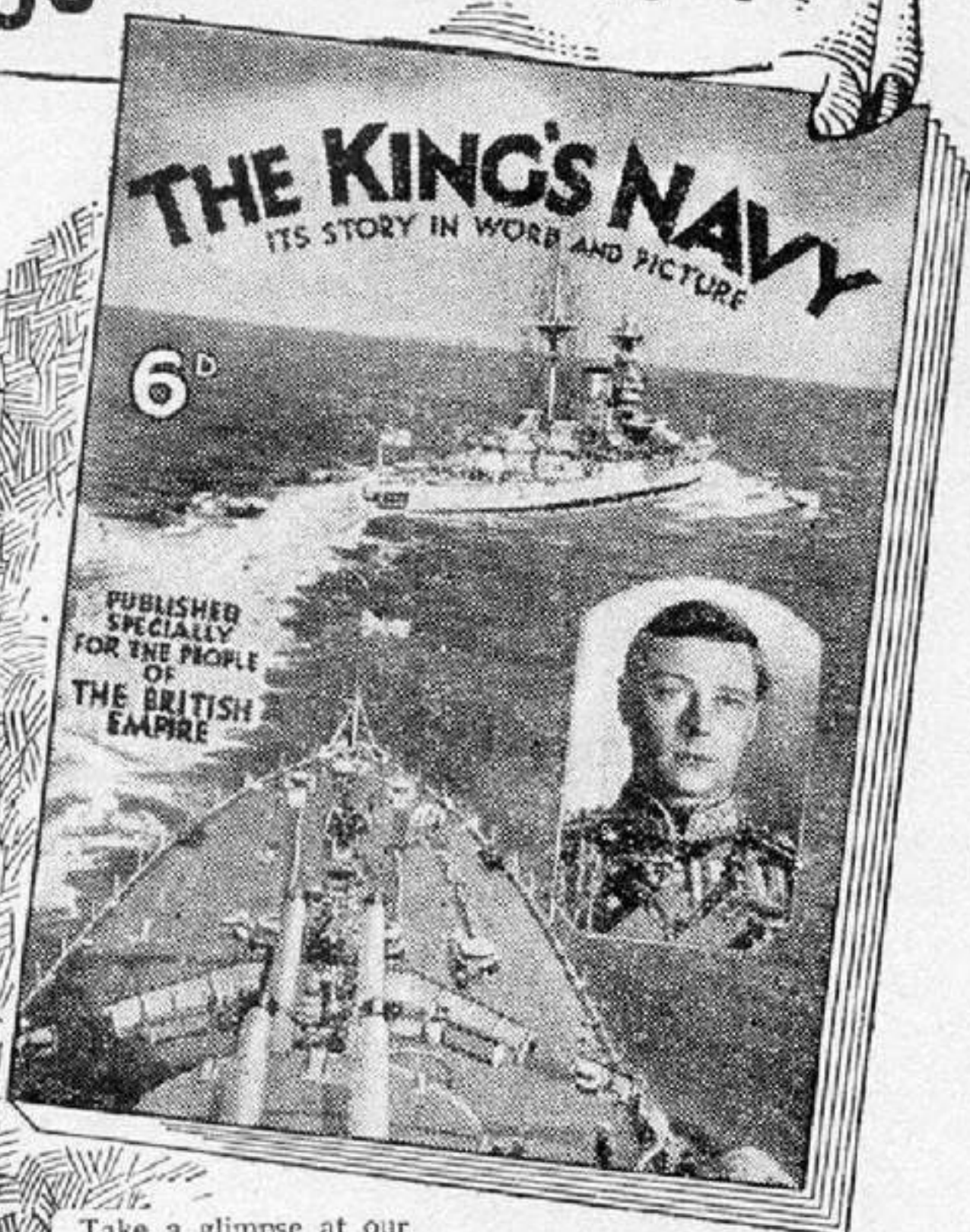
At the present time Mr. Guggs was in very reduced circumstances—reduced to the clothes he stood up in, of which any respectable dust-heap would have been ashamed.

He had not even a smoke—hence his industry with the cigar-stump, which he had rescued from the gutter in Wimford.

But he ceased to pack his pipe as he saw the circus-master. Signor Muccolini looked a "boulder" from top to toe, but he looked prosperous, and he was walking right into the footpad's hands.

Jimmy Guggs dropped the dirty pipe into a frowsy pocket, and grasped the stick he carried under his arm. Beyond the edge of the shady wood was an open field, but the trees screened the

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view. It was quite a favourable spot for the practice of Jimmy's peculiar profession as a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, with or without the aid of his knobbly stick! Jimmy felt that luck was coming his way.

"Old on!" said Jimmy Guggs, stepping from the tree on which he was leaning.

Signor Muccolini stopped, as the ruffian was standing directly in his path. His black eyes blazed at the man.

"Get out of my way!" he snarled. "What do you want, pig?"

"Jest all you've got about you, you greasy furriner!" retorted Jimmy. "And if you want me to crack your nut first, you only got to say so!"

Signor Muccolini backed away a pace or two. He realised that the man was a footpad, and the spot was a solitary one. Mr. Guggs followed him up, with the stick half-lifted.

"Stand back!" hissed the signor. "You shall go to prison for this! I will give you nothing! Niente, niente! Cospetto! Hands off!" he yelled, as the tramp grabbed him by the shoulder with one hand and flourished the knobbly stick with the other.

"You 'anding it over?" growled the tramp savagely. "I'll crack your 'ead as soon as look at you! Now, then—"

The signor panted with rage. Swagging and bullying as he was, he was far from courageous. But he had a large sum in his pocket-book, and he was not going to be robbed if he could help it.

He grasped at the footpad's right arm to stop the blow of the cudgel. The next moment they were struggling.

"Strike me pink!" gasped Jimmy Guggs; and he wrenched at his arm to free it for a blow with the cudgel.

The signor held on to it desperately. They struggled and swayed, and Signor Muccolini caught his foot in a trailing root, and went down backwards. Over him sprawled the tramp.

"Now, then, blow yer!" gasped Jimmy Guggs.

But the signor was still clutching his arm desperately, and he could not get in a blow.

"Help! Help!" yelled Signor Muccolini at the top of his voice.

He remembered the schoolboys in the field on the edge of the wood.

Whether they would come to his aid if they heard him, he did not know; but it was a chance, at least, and he yelled with all the strength of his lungs.

"Help! Help!"

"I'll give you 'elp, blow you!" granted Mr. Guggs, wrenching savagely at his arm. "Strike me pink and blue—"

"Help!" yelled the signor, his frantic yell ringing through the shady wood and over the adjoining fields.

The tramp wrenched fiercely at his arm. He dragged it loose at last from the Italian's desperate clutch.

Up went his arm, and the cudgel whirled in the air over the circus-master's head. It came crashing down, smashing in Signor Muccolini's hat.

"Help!" shrieked the signor.

There was a sound of swiftly pattering feet. Harry Wharton came speeding along the shady path under the trees.

Jimmy Guggs's arm was up again, the cudgel lifted for a blow that, had it descended, would certainly have cracked the signor's head as badly as his hat.

But even as the stick came down the breathless schoolboy came leaping on the scene and hurled himself headlong at the tramp.

Wharton crashed into Jimmy Guggs, sending the ruffian spinning off his

victim. He stumbled, falling across the sprawling Italian, as the tramp rolled back in the grass.

Guggs gave a panting howl. He would have been up in another moment, stick in hand, and lashing out with it.

But the Co. were not far behind their leader. As the tramp struggled up Bob Cherry arrived, and a running kick knocked the cudgel from the footpad's hand. Johnny Bull stumbled on him the next moment, and grasped him and pinned him down. Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh had their hands on the ruffian in a few seconds more.

"Strike me pink!" gasped Jimmy Guggs, struggling in many hands, breathless, and intensely exasperated. The spot, evidently, had not been so lonely as it had seemed to Mr. Guggs. Indeed, at the present moment, it seemed to him thickly populated with schoolboys.

Harry Wharton was quickly on his feet and rushing to the aid of his comrades. Five pairs of hands were on Guggs then, and he found them too many for him—many too many.

Signor Muccolini was slower to get on his feet. He rose, panting, his black eyes scintillating. He stared at the tramp, struggling vainly in the grasp of the five juniors. On his back in the grass, with Bob Cherry kneeling on his chest, and the other fellows holding his arms and his neck, Jimmy Guggs was at the end of his tether. The luck that had come his way was, after all, hard luck!

"Cospetto!" breathed the signor.

He grasped the thick stick that the tramp had dropped. With the cudgel in his grip, he stepped towards the juniors.

"Stand aside!" he snarled. "Leave him to me! I will beat him to a jelly! I will smash him! I will—" He whirled up the cudgel. "Stand aside, I tell you! Cospetto, I will leave him more dead than alive!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Way of the Dago!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stared round at the Italian.

They had Jimmy Guggs safe enough. They were ready to lend a hand in walking him to the police station at Wimford. But they were certainly not ready to see a helpless man beaten with a thick stick.

The signor's eyes were blazing with ferocity. Jimmy Guggs gave a howl of terror as he looked up.

"Ere, chuck it!" he gasped. "I gives in! You young gents, keep him orf—keep him orf! I gives you best! Keep him orf!"

"Stand aside!" hissed Muccolini.

"Nothing of the kind!" answered Harry Wharton. "We've got the man, you can hand him over to the police, if you like. You're not going to touch him with that stick!"

"No fear!" said Bob.

"Stand aside, I tell you, or I will beat you also!" snarled the Italian.

"Better not try it on!" said Wharton disdainfully.

"The beatfulness would be a boot on the other leg, my esteemed and ferocious dago!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Signor Muccolini glared at the juniors. His hat had been smashed, and his dusky head had had rather a knock. And he had had a narrow escape of having his head cracked, like his hat. His impulse was to beat his assailant to a jelly, as he expressed it. Certainly, he had had plenty of provocation. But there was a limit.

"Chuck it, Mr. Muccolini," said Frank Nugent pacifically. "You can charge the man, and he will get six months for this. That's enough."

Signor Muccolini lowered the stick. He was getting better control of his temper. Perhaps he remembered, too, that the schoolboys had come to his aid and saved him from personal injury and robbery, after his extremely unpleasant treatment of them only a short time ago.

"Va bene, va bene!" he muttered. "Yes, he shall go to prison. I will charge him with highway robbery. Va bene!"

"That's all right!" said Harry Wharton. "Stick him on his feet, you fellows, and we'll walk him into Wimford."

Jimmy Guggs was dragged to his feet. He was safely held, and there was no escape for him. He eyed the swarthy Italian very uneasily. The cudgel was in Muccolini's hand now, and he was evidently the man to use it as ruthlessly as Jimmy Guggs himself, if not more so.

But the signor's blaze of fury had passed. His swarthy face was cool and calm again now.

"Like us to lend you a hand with him, Mr. Muccolini?" asked Bob Cherry. "I suppose you want him given in charge?"

The Italian did not answer for a moment. There was a strange gleam in his dark eyes as he looked at the stubbly, apprehensive face of the ruffian.

"No!" he said at length. "I can handle the man. I will take him to the station. Give me hold of him! If he resists I will make him sorry!"

He grasped Jimmy Guggs' arm with his left hand, the stick in his right. He had the upper hand now, and did not need further assistance from the juniors. They let go the tramp.

"We'll walk as far as Wimford, if you like, and see that he doesn't get away, Mr. Muccolini!" said Harry.

"It is not needed. He is safe with me," answered Signor Muccolini. "I will crack his head if he lifts a finger. Va bene!"

"Look here," said Johnny Bull, "that brute's a jolly dangerous character, and we ought to make sure—"

"I say leave him to me!" snapped the signor. "I do not want your assistance, I tell you!"

"You wanted it badly enough a few minutes ago," grunted Johnny.

Signor Muccolini scowled at him, and was evidently about to make an angry retort, but he checked it.

"I thank you for helping me," he said. "Grazie—grazie! But it is enough! I have the man safe. I desire no further help. It is not necessary. Leave him to me!"

With that, he started up the path towards the open field on the edge of the wood.

Jimmy Guggs, with the signor's grasp on his arm, walked with him, his eyes apprehensively on the stick. But the Italian's spasm of fury had passed, and he was evidently no longer thinking of beating his assailant to a "jelly."

Harry Wharton & Co. followed till they emerged from the wood. The signor walked on across the fields towards Wimford, taking no further notice of them, and the juniors came to a halt.

"Blessed if I can understand the man!" said Harry. "I'm not keen on getting mixed up in it, but if he's going to charge the man he will want witnesses. Still, I suppose it's his own affair."

"Glad to be shut of him!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The gladfulness is terrific!" agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur.

And the Famous Five, taking another direction, walked away homeward to Wharton Lodge. Looking back, a minute or two later, they saw that Signor Muccolini was looking back also, watching them furtively. But in a few more minutes the corner of the wood hid them from his sight.

"Go easy, guv'nor!" muttered Jimmy Guggs, as the Italian walked him on. "Go easy with a bloke!"

The signor did not answer. He walked Guggs on across the field and stopped in the shadow of a high hawthorn hedge.

His grip on the ruffian's arm was like a vice, and Guggs eyed him with deep uneasiness. The fear was strong on him that, now the schoolboys were gone, the swarthy foreigner intended to carry out his threat of beating him to a jelly.

"Guv'nor—" muttered the tramp.

"Fool!" snapped the signor. "Stand there!"

He released the tramp's arm, and Jimmy Guggs backed against the hedge. The stick in the signor's hand was too near for him to attempt to bolt. But the tattered rascal was watchful for a chance.

"Listen to me!" said the signor, in a low voice. "You are hard up—desperate—or you would not have done this. Is it not?"

Jimmy Guggs nodded, watching him like a cat.

"I will not take you to the police!" muttered Signor Muccolini. "I may even give you money."

Mr. Guggs' eyes opened wide.

"That is why I have sent the boys away. You understand? Perhaps I may make a bargain with you."

Mr. Guggs could only stare.

"Five pounds would be very useful to you!" muttered the signor, in a low tone, though there were no ears but the tramp's to hear. "You are a brute, that would do anything for such a sum. Is it not?"

"I ain't pertickler, sir!" gasped the astonished Guggs. "You give me a chance of legging it, with five quid in my pocket, and there ain't much I'd stop at."

"You would give someone a beating? Suppose there is a young rascal, whom I would beat like a dog, but whom I do not care to beat. Suppose I send him where you may meet him. Suppose I give you one pound now, and five more pounds when you have beaten him?"

"My eye!" gasped the astounded Guggs.

"What do you say?" snarled the signor.

"I'm on!" was what Jimmy Guggs said promptly. "Jest give me a chance!"

"It is a boy," muttered Signor Muccolini. "For certain reasons, I do not care to beat him as he deserves. But I can arrange that he shall walk into your hands. That is easy—he is at my circus—I can fix it so. We will arrange a certain place—a lonely place—and he will come—and you—you understand? You will beat him black and blue!"

"My eye!" murmured Mr. Guggs. He watched the vicious, swarthy face intently.

"You will make him so that he will be glad to leave my circus and go to his home, or perhaps to a hospital—I care not, so that I see the last of him!" said Signor Muccolini in a low hissing voice.

"You will beat him, very hard, with a stick! Is it not?"

"I'm your man, sir!" said Jimmy Guggs. "It ain't my first job of that sort. But who's the bloke—what's he like? How'll I know him?"

"A boy, short and fat, with large spectacles—a Greyfriars schoolboy—you will know him easily——"

"The same bloke!" ejaculated Jimmy Guggs.

"Cospetto! You have seen him?"

"Ain't I!" said Mr. Guggs. "He punched me in the eye. I seen him about your circus more'n once."

"That is the ragazzo! That is he! Then you will know him! Now listen—I will give you instructions! With the boy I can arrange easily!"

For ten minutes or more Signor Muccolini talked to the tramp, in the shadow of the hedge.

When they parted, Jimmy Guggs stood staring after the signor as he went, a pound note in his grubby hand and a peculiar expression on his stubby face.

"My eye!" murmured Mr. Guggs. "This 'ere is a ketch—a real ketch! A reglar wildeat, that blinking furriner—I'd like to crack his 'ead for him, so I would! But sipun is sipun!"

Signor Muccolini walked back to the circus camp with a sardonic grin on his swarthy face. He had found a way of dealing with Billy Bunter!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Crystal-Gazer!

ZARA, the Queen of the Ring, frowned pettishly.

She was seated in the shade of her caravan in the circus camp in the sunny morning. On a three-legged stool before her lay a circular crystal. Zara had been gazing into that crystal for several long minutes, apparently in expectation of seeing something appear in its glimmering depths.

Nothing, however, appeared; hence the gipsy girl's frown.

At a little distance a groom was holding the handsome black horse that Zara rode in the ring, performing wonderful equestrian feats thereon. In the morning it was Zara's custom to go for a long gallop on the green hillsides that surrounded Wimford. The groom and the horse had been waiting a long time, unheeded by the Queen of the Ring, as she gazed into the crystal. She had forgotten their existence. Neither did she notice the existence of a fat schoolboy who was blinking at her through a large pair of spectacles. When Zara was crystal-gazing she was lost to her surroundings.

Billy Bunter suppressed a grin as he watched the crystal-gazing.

Zara was a gipsy, with a full allowance of the superstition of her race. She was parted from her people, while she was a member of Signor Muccolini's company, but her thoughts were often with her tribe far away. According to her belief, the crystal should have given her visual news of the absent ones—a sort of magic television. But the crystal somehow did not play up.

Often and often Zara gazed into it, and no doubt she sometimes persuaded herself that moving lights and shades were pictures of far-off scenes. Now, however, there was nothing to be seen, but clear glimmering crystal—not the slightest trace of a moving shadow

that could be imagined into a picture. And she drew her pretty brows together in a frown.

Looking up, her frown intensified at the sight of a fat face and a big pair of spectacles. She glanced haughtily at Billy Bunter.

Haughty glances had little effect on that fat youth. He rolled a little nearer, and raised his straw hat to the gipsy girl, with what Bunter had no doubt was inimitable grace.

The sight of that crystal had put a new idea into Bunter's head.

He was still at the circus. Bed and board were provided for the fat Owl by the reluctant hospitality of the signor. But the question of cash was urgent and pressing.

Billy Bunter was absolutely "stony," since his encounter with Mr. Guggs. To his credit be it said that he never even thought of raising the wind from the signor as an additional price for keeping his secret. Bunter was obtuse, and he was rather unscrupulous; but he was neither obtuse nor unscrupulous enough to think of extorting money.

He was going to "put up" a turn at the circus, and money was going to roll in! That was settled in Bunter's mind. The only question was "how." To that question, so far, Bunter had unfortunately found no answer.

His turn in the ring with Marco and the lions was a thing of the past. But there were the side-shows. He could have ventriloquised Tippetty Tip's head off—but it was not much use starting a rival ventriloquial show. Neither was Bunter willing to reveal the fact that he was a ventriloquist, after so much worry and mystification had been caused by the mysterious voice that seemed to haunt Muccolini's Circus.

So far, he had not thought of fortune-telling! But the sight of the gipsy equestrienne gazing into the crystal put that extraordinary stunt into Billy Bunter's fat head.

He could not, certainly, make magic visions appear in the crystal. But he could make mysterious voices audible from empty space.

So he saluted the Queen of the Ring very politely, heedless of the frown on her pretty face.

"I say, Miss Zara——" he began.

"Go away!" said Zara.

"But I say, won't you let me help you?" suggested Bunter.

Zara looked at him, and her frown gave place to a smile. But it was a contemptuous smile.

"You—what do you know of the gipsy's art?" she exclaimed. "It is only the Romany people who understand."

"My grandfather was a gipsy!" said Bunter calmly—a statement that would have made Mr. William Samuel Bunter, had he heard it, jump! "I've inherited it, you know! It runs in the family."

Zara looked less contemptuous. It was long since she had had news of her people, and she was willing to catch at straws.

"If that is true——" she said dubiously.

"Oh, really, Miss Zara——" said Bunter warmly. It was a peculiarity of Billy Bunter's that he never seemed to be able to distinguish between what was true and what wasn't. It was his happy custom to say the first thing that came into his head, if it would answer his purpose; and he really never paused to consider whether it was true or not.

At the same time, he did not like to have his word doubted. That made him indignant.

"Well, well, if it is true, what can

you see in the crystal?" asked Zara pettishly. "There are many cheats! Even among the gipsies, there are many cheats. They tell all sorts of tales to the house-dwellers. Look into the crystal, and tell me what you see."

Billy Bunter blinked into the crystal through his big spectacles. What he saw was the glimmering depth of the crystal; and he did not expect to see anything else. Bunter was, undoubtedly, an ass; but he was not ass enough to believe in crystal-gazing.

But his fat face assumed a serious expression.

"I see a van!" he said. "A gipsy caravan! There is a camp in a meadow, and women with baskets, and dark-faced men and children."

Billy Bunter had seen a gipsy encampment often enough, and it was easy to draw that picture from memory. Perhaps Zara guessed as much.

"What else do you see?" she asked.

Bunter coughed.

"If you'll tell me what you want to know, I fancy I can work it out," he said. "Any special relation——"

"You will know what I tell you!" said Zara scornfully.

"More than that, I can jolly well tell you!" said Bunter. "Once I see the picture in the crystal I can make the voice come from far away."

"Nonsense! Even gipsies cannot do that!"

"I learned it from my gipsy grandmother!" explained Bunter.

"Your grandmother!" exclaimed Zara.

"I—I mean my grandfather!" stammered Bunter. "My grandfather was my grandmother—I mean—my grandfather——"

"You know nothing of the art!" said Zara. "I know what you will say, that I must cross your palm with silver. Pah!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Bunter warmly. "I'm doing this just to oblige you. You might lend me the crystal afterwards."

"I will give it to you, if you can make me hear the voice of the absent, as you say!" said Zara. "But that is impossible." She smiled. "Look in the glass! Do you see my father, who is an old man?"

Bunter gazed into the crystal.

"I see a gipsy!" he said. "He is old—and—and dark! He is proud and stately—a king among men! His hair is black as the raven——"

"Barengro's hair is white!" said Zara.

"Now I look again, it's getting clearer—his hair is white, white as the driven snow! His—his name is Barengro."

Zara regarded the fat junior very doubtfully.

"I see him clearly!" went on Bunter cheerfully. "His face is—er—overcast with thought. He is—thinking—let me see—he is thinking of his absent daughter, Zara, the beautiful Queen of the Ring."

Zara smiled.

She bent her head, gazing into the crystal again. Her dark head was close beside Billy Bunter's fat one. But the clear crystal told her nothing—no more than it told Bunter, as a matter of fact.

"I see nothing," she said. "And you——"

"Plain as anything!" said the unvarnished Owl. "You see I've learned the trick of it from my uncle."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes; he was a gipsy, you know. I—I mean my grand-uncle—that is, my grandfather! Being a gipsy——"

Zara laughed.

"Look here! I tell you I can jolly well see it—it's as plain as my face!" declared Bunter.

There was another little trill of laughter from Zara.

"As plain as that?" she asked.

"Oh, really, you know!" said Bunter. "I say, I tell you I see a gipsy with hair as black as the driven snow—I mean, as white as the raven's wing—that is—as white as black—Look here! Don't you keep on laughing, you know, or you'll spoil the—the magic! I can jolly well tell you that if I make certain signs, a whispering voice will come from afar—"

"Nonsense!" said Zara. "If it were true, I would be glad to hear my father's voice. It is very long since I

self no retreat now. He was aware that Zara, the gipsy, pretty as she was, had a temper. He had no doubt that she meant every word about the box on the ear.

But the Greyfriars ventriloquist was equal to the occasion.

He proceeded to make "magic passes" with his fat hands over the crystal, as he had seen conjurers do at entertainments. Zara watched him with a scornful smile.

"Hark!" breathed Bunter.

"Nonsense!" said Zara.

"He speaks!" breathed Bunter.

"Hark!"

Zara gave a start.

From somewhere, from empty space as it seemed, came a low, whispering voice. It whispered her name:

With a smile and a nod, Zara turned away, and went to the waiting horse. Billy Bunter, with the crystal in his hand, stood blinking after her, through his big spectacles.

"I—I say—" he stammered.

But Zara was already on the black horse and riding out of the camp.

Billy Bunter blinked after the graceful rider, blinked at the crystal in his fat hand, and blinked after Zara again.

"Oh lor'!" he mumbled.

The fat Owl was so accustomed to trickery that he hardly realised the unscrupulousness of it. But now, somehow, that realisation seemed to come home to his fat mind. For once, and probably for the first time in his life, Billy Bunter was utterly and thoroughly ashamed of himself.



"What are you up to, Samson?" asked Marco, as the strong man carried Bunter, wriggling and kicking, along the passage by the dressing-rooms. "The boss doesn't want him hanging about the circus entrance!" explained Samson. "He won't walk out, so I'm helping him!" "Urrgh!" squeaked Bunter. "Make him leggo, will you?"

have seen him, and he cannot write. It would make me happy to hear his voice and know that he is well. But you can do nothing—it is all nonsense!"

"Just try it on, then!" declared Bunter. "Listen!"

Zara gave a scornful and impatient shrug of her graceful shoulders. She did not believe for a moment that Bunter had any such powers. But the vein of superstition in her nature made her give attention. She believed in magic powers in others, if not in Bunter. So she was prepared to give Bunter a sporting chance, as it were, of making his words good.

"I will listen," she said. "And if I hear Barengro speak my name, I will believe you, and if not, I will give you a box on the ear!"

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter, in alarm. "I—I—I say—"

"Say nothing, but do as you have boasted!" snapped Zara.

The fat spoofer had really left him-

"Zara!"

The gipsy girl sprang to her feet, her dark eyes dilated.

She gazed round her in amazement, and did not see Bunter wink into the crystal.

No one was at hand, save the groom holding the horse, and he was out of whispering distance. For a long, long moment Zara stood in wonder. Then she turned to Bunter.

"It is true!" she said. "I did not believe you. I am sorry! I believe you now! Yes, yes; it is true!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. Somehow or other, those words of trust gave the fat Owl a twinge in his conscience—such as it was!

"Keep the crystal!" said Zara. "I give it to you! Another time, we will read it together. Many thanks to you!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Great Guglielmo!

"WHAT about the circus?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Might as well!" agreed Frank Nugent.

"We don't want to run into Bunter!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, no. But Bunter's gone. He told Wharton days ago that he had been sacked."

Harry Wharton nodded.

More than once, while Muccolini's Magnificent Circus was at Wimford, the party at Wharton Lodge had thought of paying it a visit. They had seen the show when it was near Greyfriars in the term; but it was worth seeing again, and circuses did not often come to Wimford, and other entertainments were few.

After that talk on the telephone with the fat Owl, Wharton naturally did not

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THE HAUNTED CIRCUS!



(Continued from page 13.)

want to run into him, if he was still about. But the best part of a week had elapsed since then, and nothing had been heard of Bunter.

As he had been sacked, the natural inference was that he was gone. The chums of the Remove had learned that Signor Muccolini nourished a deep and bitter dislike for the fat junior; but they did not, of course, dream of guessing at the cause. Indeed, the fact that the signor evidently loathed him, made it seem pretty certain that he was no longer in the signor's camp.

"Let's!" said Harry. "It's a jolly good show; and I'd like to see that queer merchant Tuppity again."

"There was only one drawback—Bunter!" grinned Bob. "Now he's beaten it. They've got an afternoon show to-day. Let's trot over."

And early in the afternoon the Famous Five walked out, and took the road to Wimford. On several dead walls that they passed were highly coloured posters advertising Muccolini's Magnificent Circus and Menagerie. Among the attractions listed, there was no mention of "Bunto, the Boy Lion Tamer." It was clear that that turn was no longer an item in the circus programme.

Another item, however, was specified, one of which the juniors had not heard of before. It was "Guglielmo and his Magic Crystal."

It did not occur to the juniors at the moment, that Guglielmo was the Italian rendering of "William," even if they were aware of that circumstance. Certainly it never crossed their minds for a single instant that William George Bunter was putting up a turn in a circus side-show with a magic crystal.

"That's a new bit," remarked Bob Cherry. "We never saw that when the circus was near the school. We'll give that a look-in."

"Bunkum, of course!" said Johnny Bull.

"Of course, fathead—but it may be entertaining all the same. Guglielmo sounds Italian; but I dare say his name is Jones or Robinson. Might as well have a bob's worth of his jolly old magic."

The juniors arrived at the circus ground, greeted by a blare of music. The circus performance was not yet on; but the side-shows were open, and there were a good many people from Wimford, and the surrounding villages, in the field.

The voice of Tuppity Tip was heard, inviting the public into his ventriloquial show; and the clown, recognising the Greyfriars fellows, waved his hand to them.

"Walk in, gents! Walk in and see the most wonderful ventriloquial show on earth—listen to Jane and John in their wonderful act, more natural than life!"

"The esteemed naturalness must be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

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The Famous Five were rather curious to see Guglielmo and his Magic Crystal, as that was a new item; but they yielded to the blandishments of Mr. Tip, and entered the ventriloquial side-show. Having duly paid their twopences, and listened to the dialogue of Jane and John, the talking dolls, however, they left the tent, and looked round for the quarters of Guglielmo.

Signor Muccolini, moving among the side-shows in his shining silk-hat and gleaming eyeglass, gave them a stare.

The juniors gave him a smile in return. They had had a little trouble with the circus-master; but as they had rescued him afterwards from the hands of the footpad, they hardly expected him to be nursing a grudge.

The signor, at all events, did not want to make himself unpleasant to members of the public visiting his circus. The involuntary scowl faded from his swarthy face and he showed his teeth through his bushy black moustache in a smile, and bestowed a nod on them.

Thus encouraged, Bob Cherry stopped to ask for directions.

"Good-afternoon, signor!" he said cheerfully. "I say, we've come chiefly to see a special show—you can tell us where to find it."

"Si, si!" said the signor amiably. "What is it you wish to see?"

"Guglielmo—" began Bob.

He broke off in surprise, as the black scowl returned to the signor's face, blacker than before.

"Quel furfante!" snarled the signor. "Quel sciocco! Pah!"

He turned on his heel and stalked away, leaving the Greyfriars fellows staring.

"What the dickens is the matter with him?" asked Bob, in wonder. "He doesn't seem in his bonniest temper, does he?"

"Looks as if he doesn't like that chap Guglielmo, whoever he is!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "I don't know what a furfante is, but I imagine it's something rather unpleasant, in Italian. Let's ask somebody else."

And the juniors asked somebody else, and received information, and, making their way through the crowd, arrived at the quarters of Guglielmo.

They stopped before a canvas structure, outside which was a notice stating that Guglielmo could be found within. That notice was painted on a strip of stretched canvas on a frame, apparently by the great Guglielmo himself—and, judging by the spelling, the great Guglielmo had a limited knowledge of English orthography. Indeed, the spelling reminded the Famous Five of Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove:

"NOTIS!

THE GRATE GUGLIELMO
AND HIS MAGGIC KRYSTAL!
KUM IN AND SEE THE FUTURE
AND HEER THE VOYCES OF
ABBSENT FRENDS!"

The juniors gazed at that "notis" with grinning faces.

If the Great Guglielmo's knowledge of magic equalled his knowledge of spelling, he was evidently "some magician!"

"What a rotten spoofer!" grunted Johnny Bull. "The voices of absent friends—that's a bigger spoofer than usual!"

"We'll put him to the jolly old test!" grinned Bob. "What about asking him for news of Bunter?"

"Let's!" said Harry, laughing. Wharton put his head into the tent.

It was rather dusky within. The interior was hung with highly coloured draperies. A single figure sat at a little table, on which lay a large, circular crystal.

Wharton glanced rather curiously at Guglielmo, his comrades looking in over his shoulders. They saw a figure in a long beard, with long black moustache, and long black hair falling over his shoulders. A black robe concealed the rest of him.

Beard, moustache, and hair almost hid the face; but what could be seen of it was startlingly white—evidently, at a second glance, due to make-up. A big pair of spectacles were perched on a stubby little nose.

Guglielmo looked very sombre, and a little imposing. His age, on his looks, might have been anything from forty to seventy.

As the juniors looked in from the bright sunlight into the dusky tent, the bearded face turned towards them, and a sudden glimmer shot into the eyes behind the spectacles.

They could almost have fancied that the Great Guglielmo recognised them and knew them well by sight. But that, of course, was impossible! They, at all events, had never even heard of Guglielmo before that day.

There was no one in the tent but Guglielmo. He did not seem to be getting a rush of custom that afternoon.

"May we come in?" asked Harry politely.

"Enter!" said Guglielmo, in a deep bass voice, in keeping with his grim, sombre aspect. "All are welcome who desire to read the future! The charge is half-a-crown to hear the voices of absent friends."

"Worth more than that, if genuine," grinned Bob.

"One client at a time, please!" said Guglielmo. "You may take your turn first, boy, as you are in the position of a leader."

Harry Wharton started. The Co. looked at the magician very curiously. How he had picked out Wharton as the leader of the party was rather mysterious to them.

"How do you make that out, Mr. Guglielmo?" asked Harry.

"It is in the magic crystal," answered the magician. "All things are written there for my eyes to read. At your school you are captain of a Form."

"My hat!"

"Is not that correct?" boomed Guglielmo.

"Yes, it's quite correct," said Harry Wharton frankly. "But I'm blessed if I know how you know anything about it!"

"I read it in the crystal!" said Guglielmo, with dignity. "Lay a piece of silver on the table, and I will read all you desire to know."

Harry Wharton laid a half-crown on the table. An arm in a long sleeve whipped out, and the "piece of silver" disappeared at once.

Then the bearded face was bent over the crystal, gazing intently into its glimmering depths.

The Co. stood silent, watching. They could not help being a little impressed.

They did not, of course, believe that there was anything in crystal-gazing. As a "lark" it was all very well; but obviously there could be nothing in it. Yet they could not help being impressed by the knowledge shown by Guglielmo. How had he known that Wharton was captain of his Form at school? Trickery, of course, was

part of the business; but it was difficult to think of any trickery that would account for this.

Wharton looked into the crystal. He saw nothing there but a silvery glimmer. Apparently the Great Guglielmo saw more than that. His voice rumbled:

"I see a school—a large school! There are many boys! Among them I see you! They call your name! I catch the name! It is Wharton."

Harry gave a start, and his comrades stared blankly. How did the magician know that his name was Wharton? Had he, through the canvas of the tent, heard the juniors speaking among themselves?

"Go on!" said Harry.

"I see him clearly," said Guglielmo, his eyes and spectacles fixed on the magic crystal. "Ah! His face flushes with rage! He has a bad, hasty, violent temper! He quarrels with all his friends one after another, and he is always in the wrong!"

Harry's face flushed crimson.

The Co. could only stare.

The description of the captain of the Remove was distinctly unpleasant. Yet there was, undoubtedly, a grain of truth at the bottom of it. It was thus that Wharton might, at least, have been represented by one who did not like him.

"He has a very close chum," went on Guglielmo, still gazing in the crystal—"a good-tempered boy—very good-tempered and patient—who bears with his violent temper, but cannot always avoid quarrelling with him."

Nugent coloured uncomfortably.

Again the description was true to a certain extent. It was disagreeably exaggerated, but there was truth in it.

Wharton compressed his lips.

"That's enough!" he said curtly.

And he stepped back.

Guglielmo looked up from the crystal.

"You are offended!" he said. "I cannot help it! I can only say what I see in the crystal! The crystal cannot lie!"

Wharton made no answer to that. There was sufficient truth in what the bearded magician stated to make him feel extremely puzzled and uncomfortable. The Co., equally discomfited, stood silent.

"You fellows taking a turn?" asked Harry curtly.

"Well, we may as well go through it!" said Bob.

He laid a half-crown on the table, which disappeared at once under the cloak. And the Great Guglielmo bent his gaze on the crystal again.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Magic!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood watching the top of the magician's head, as it was bent over the crystal.

The head was almost completely hidden by the mass of thick black hair, which they could see was a wig. Guglielmo, in private life, probably looked very different—how different, the chums of Greyfriars were very far from guessing.

"What do you desire to know?" boomed Guglielmo. "The crystal tells everything. The past or the future?"

"Well, let's begin with the jolly old past!" said Bob. "Tell me whether I'm at the same school as Wharton."

Guglielmo scanned the crystal with deep intentness.

"You are his schoolfellow!" he rumbled. "You are in the same Form! For a short time, on one occasion, you took his place as captain of that Form. It is called the Remove."

Bob jumped almost clear of the ground.

"That's true!" he gasped "How the dooce—"

The magician rumbled on:

"You came to the school later than Wharton. At first you were not friends. In the crystal I see a schoolboy fight,

Yes—you are fighting! Wharton is beaten!"

The juniors looked at one another. There were incidents that all the members of the Co. preferred to forget. Their friendship, loyal as it was, had been chequered; there had been trouble at times. No member of the Famous Five liked being reminded of those episodes. Still, they could hardly complain of what Guglielmo saw in the crystal! And if he did not see it in the crystal, how did he know?

"Cut that out, please!" said Bob,

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Writing verses is just like shelling peas to our long-haired poet. Next in his series of Interviews comes

EUSEBIUS TWIGG, M.A.,

master of the Second Form.

(1)

He has no hair on top—instead,
He wears it on his face,
As though the hair upon his head
Had slipped down out of place!
The fungus now has sprouted out
Upon his upper lip;
He carries a moustache about
To grace his mastership!

(3)

As Master of the Second Form,
His life's not free from care,
But though his temper's often warm,
He cannot tear his hair.
And though he often groans beneath
His burden, his regret
Is that he dare not grind his teeth
(They're such a costly set)!



(6)

I spoke to Twigg, while on the pitch.
Dickie Nugent faced the ball.
And he slashed out at the first one, which
He didn't hit at all.
But, as he swung his windmill bat,
A ball fell on the ground.
Then came a mighty roar of "ZAT?"
From every man around.



(2)

His Oxford accent's very choice.
We love to hear him speak;
Not, mind you, for his golden voice,
But for his funny squeak!
Though lengthways he is fairly short,
Across he's fairly big;
And, adding he's a decent sort,
You have a sketch of Twigg!

(4)

I went to see him, and I found
His study cold and bare.
I wandered to the cricket ground
And saw my victim there;
As umpire in the vital game
Of Second versus Third,
He did not find his job was tame,
For trouble oft occurred.



(5)

The Second Form was batting when
I entered in the fray.
Uninterested Third Form men
Were on the field of play.
Two minor fights were taking place
At square leg and long on,
And Twigg, with boredom in his face,
Was wishing he were gone.

(7)

And Twigg replied at once: "Not out!"
I disagreed with that.
The Third at once began to shout:
"He hit it with his bat!"
And Twigg, who'd not seen what occurred,
Replied: "Not out, I say!"
Then Wiggins, Master of the Third,
Came striding up our way.

(9)

Meanwhile, with insults, yells and
screams;
With howls of pure delight;
The Second and the Third Form teams
Commenced a glorious fight.
The umpires argued with their tongues,
The teams with fists and feet,
And mere spectators swelled their lungs
In adding to the treat.



(8)

"Come, come, Twigg, come! The boy
was out!"
Thus Wiggins, as he came.
"He hit his wicket, there's no doubt!
Come, come, Twigg, play the game!"
"I say, not out, sir!" Twigg replied,
His features turning red.
"I say he was, sir!" Wiggins cried.
"I thought so, too!" I said.

(10)

The argument waxed hot and strong;
The fight waxed strong and hot.
For Wiggins said that Twigg was
wrong.
And Twigg said he was not.
Dickie Nugent, on the other hand,
Was "out," and off he went,
Upon a canvas stretcher, and
This stopped the argument!

rather hastily. "That's enough of the jolly old past—too much, in fact!"

"The too-muchfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can tell only what I read in the crystal!" said Guglielmo stolidly. "If it is not true, you may say so. I see—"

"Switch on the future!" said Bob hurriedly. "What's going to happen when I go back to school?"

"I see a football field! You play in blue-and-white. The other team is in yellow-and-black."

"That's Highcliffe!" muttered Bob. "It's our match with Highcliffe. My hat! What's my place in the blue-and-white team?"

"In the half-way line—on the right wing."

The juniors gazed at Guglielmo, stupefied. Unless this was magic, how did he know that Bob Cherry played right-half, in the Remove Eleven, in the winter game?

"Wharton is also in blue and white," went on Guglielmo, gazing into the crystal. "He takes the centre of the front line."

"Centre-forward; that's right," said Bob. "This beats me! I'd never have believed there was anything in it. But who wins the match? Tell us that."

The magician gazed silently at the crystal as if watching the progress of a scene pictured there; he spoke at last.

"Yellow and black win. Blue and white are beaten to the wide."

"Oh, rotten!" said Bob.

"Gammon!" said Johnny Bull.

"The gammonfulness is terrific."

The black-bearded face was lifted, and the magician gave the juniors a haughty stare through his big spectacles.

"Well, that's a half-crown's worth, anyhow," said Bob, stepping back. "I'm not going to believe the last bit—not till Highcliffe walk over us, anyhow. You going on, Franky?"

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent. "I'm on the absent friends stunt! Cheap at half-a-crown if there's anything in it."

The juniors chuckled. The Great Guglielmo had astonished them by what he had apparently read in the crystal, but they certainly did not believe for one moment that he could make absent voices audible.

"A piece of silver, please," said Guglielmo. He seemed rather particular about that.

Nugent handed over a half-crown.

"I want to hear about a chap named Bunter," he said.

The magician started.

"B-B-B-Bunter!" he stuttered.

"Yes; a chap at our school. I dare say you've seen him, as he was with this circus until last week."

"I know him not. I came to the circus this week. I have seen nothing of anyone of that name."

"Well, see if you can see him in the crystal," grinned Nugent.

Guglielmo's black, hairy head was bent again; his deep voice rumbled:

"I see a handsome boy—up-standing, athletic, brave as a lion—"

"Off-side!" said Nugent. "That's not Bunter; nothing at all like him!"

"No fear!" said Bob. "Bunter's short and fat and flabby, and has a little pug nose with specs stuck on it."

Guglielmo breathed hard.

"That is what I see!" he snapped.

"Then you don't see Bunter!" said Nugent. "But, look here, we're rather curious to know what's become of him since he was sacked from here. Let his jolly old absent voice speak. See?"

"Be it so!" rumbled Guglielmo.

He lifted a hand.

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"Hark!"

The juniors listened. That they were going to hear the voice of Billy Bunter not one of them believed for a moment. They only wondered how Guglielmo was going to get out of it.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked a well-known voice.

The Famous Five fairly bounded.

Fat and familiar, the voice of Billy Bunter came to their ears. They stared round, thunderstruck.

"Bunter!" gasped Harry Wharton blankly.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!" gasped the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Where the dickens is he?" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "The fat boulder must be hidden in this tent somewhere!"

"Where are you, Bunter?" stuttered Frank Nugent.

"I'm staying with Mauly at Mauleverer Towers," came back the fat squeak. "I'm having a ripping time. Don't you fellows wish you were here, too, instead of staying with that ass Wharton and his old hunks of an uncle?"

Wharton set his lips.

"That's Bunter's voice," he said; "and that means that the fat rotter is hidden out of sight in this tent somewhere."

"Of—of course it does," said Bob, but his tone was hesitating and doubtful. Unless Bunter was under the black-draped table, there was nowhere within the tent where he could have been hidden.

"He's under the table!" said Johnny Bull, after a stare round the tent. "It's a trick, of course."

"Have you no faith in the art of the magician?" demanded Guglielmo in his deep bass voice.

"Not much!" said Johnny Bull. "No such ass! Mind if I look under the table for the fat frog that's hidden there?"

"Look!" boomed the magician.

"You—you don't mind?" stammered Johnny, taken aback.

"Look!" repeated the magician sternly.

Johnny Bull lifted the drapery that covered the table; all the juniors stared underneath.

Guglielmo's knees, draped in black, could be seen there; merely that and nothing more. In utter amazement Johnny let the black cover fall again. Bunter was not there.

"The fat boulder's about somewhere!" said Harry Wharton. "You remember he's a fatheaded ventriloquist; he's just outside all the time—"

"Sticking outside and grinning at us!" growled Johnny Bull. "I'll jolly well catch him at it—and jolly well thump him, too! Come on!"

Nothing doubting that they had guessed the solution of the strange mystery, the Famous Five rushed out of the magician's tent. Bunter, they had no doubt, was parked outside, making his voice heard through the canvas. And they were prepared to kick him from one end of Muccolini's Circus to the other as a reward for his trickery.

Guglielmo grinned after them as they rushed out. And from the Great Guglielmo came a fat chuckle that might have enlightened the Famous Five had they been still inside the tent.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Trouble Behind the Scenes!

BILLY BUNTER grinned under the black beard and the black moustache.

The fat magician had quite enjoyed his interview with the Famous

Five. Moreover, they were his first customers, and he had bagged three half-crowns. Sitting in the tent, he listened to the voices that sounded loudly and wrathfully through the canvas from outside. There the incensed juniors were hunting Bunter, little dreaming that William George Bunter and the Great Guglielmo were one and the same person.

"Where's that fat spoofer?"

"He can't have got away!"

"He's not here!"

"Where the dickens—"

"I'll jolly well burst him—"

"Where the thump—"

"He, he, he!" chuckled the Great Guglielmo as he listened. That Bunter-hunt amused him hugely.

Harry Wharton & Co. had not the slightest doubt that Bunter was at hand, and in league with the black-bearded magician; otherwise, it looked like magic—and they were not likely to believe in magic. They hunted for him round the tent. They were not likely to find him.

"He's gone!"

"The gonefulness is terrific."

"Blessed if I see how he can have got away so quickly!" came Bob Cherry's voice. "Bunter's no sprinter."

"Well, it must have been Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "I suppose we're not going to believe that a circus magician can produce absent voices."

"Well, no. But it's jolly queer."

"The queerfulness is preposterous."

There was a blare of drums and trumpets from the big tent.

"Oh, bother the fat Owl!" said Harry. "We can kick him another time. The show's beginning. Come on!"

Billy Bunter heard the footsteps die away outside his tent. The Famous Five, leaving the mystery unsolved, had gone off to the big circus tent, towards which a swarming crowd was now proceeding.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

Three half-crowns was not bad for a beginning, especially as the fat Owl had been absolutely "stony" ever since he had rejoined the circus. The chums of the Remove had started the ball rolling for Bunter, the magician, and he hoped that there were more to follow.

But perhaps the counter-attraction of the circus was too strong. At any rate, nobody came to Guglielmo's tent. Bunter blinked out of the doorway and saw no one at hand; not a single eye was turned on his "notis." He grunted and proceeded to divest himself of his flowing black garments, his beard and moustache and wig, and to wash off the grease-paint.

Signor Muccolini, much against his will, had allowed the fat junior to borrow those fixings from the property van. He was not in a position to refuse a request from Bunter. His only consolation was the thought of what was going to happen to Bunter when the fat junior fell in with Mr. Jimmy Guggs.

Billy Bunter rolled out of the magician's tent in his own proper person. By that time Harry Wharton & Co. were packed among the audience in the big tent, and had no eyes for him.

Bunter rolled along to the staff entrance.

Zara was in the ring, riding her black horse, leaping gracefully over ribbons and through "banners." Billy Bunter fixed his eyes and his spectacles on the gipsy girl.

The dark-eyed Zara had made a good impression on Bunter.

Several times they had gazed into the crystal together, but there had been no more voices from afar. Somehow or



Her dark eyes flashing, the Queen of the Ring rode to the rescue of Billy Bunter, lashing out with her riding-whip. The whip lashed fairly across the tramp's shoulders, and Jimmy Guggs staggered, yelling. "Strike me pink!" he gasped. Billy Bunter sat up and blinked dizzily at the startling scene.

other, Billy Bunter felt ashamed of his trickery when Zara was its object.

He was prepared to "spoof" anybody else in the wide world, but he was not going to spoof Zara any more. Indeed, several times he had felt an urge to confess to that spoof. That impulse, however, was restrained by the certainty that Zara would have boxed his fat ears had she learned the truth.

As he stood blinking at the graceful equestrienne, Signor Muccolini, who had been out of the ring to see to some detail of the next turn, came back and pushed him angrily aside from behind.

"Get out of the way, fat fool!" snapped the signor.

Bunter blinked round at him wrathfully.

"Shan't!" he retorted.

The signor's black eyes glittered at him.

"What are you doing here? You are not in the show! Go away at once! You are not wanted, standing about here in the way."

"I'll stand where I jolly well please!" snapped Bunter. "And I don't want any lip, either, see?"

Signor Muccolini almost choked. Three or four of the circus company were standing by, ready to go on, and they exchanged curious looks as the fat junior answered Mucky in that extraordinary way.

"Shall I shift him, boss?" asked Tippetty Tip.

Bunter blinked at Tippetty.

"You shut up!" he said. "I've told you that I don't want any cheek from clowns!"

Signor Muccolini stamped into the ring without answering Tippetty.

"If I was you, Tippetty," remarked Samson, the strong man, "I'd smack that young sweep's head till he learned better manners."

"Well, the boss says he ain't to be 'andled," said Mr. Tip. "Blow me if I know why! But that's what he says."

"I'd handle him fast enough!" growled Samson.

"You'd jolly well get sacked if you did!" sneered Bunter.

Samson looked at him.

"The boss told you to go away," he said. "You going?"

"No, I'm jolly well not!" retorted Bunter.

"Then I'll help you!" said the strong man.

He grasped Bunter by the back of his collar and lifted him off his feet. There was a spluttering yell from the fat Owl.

"Ow! Leggo, you beast! Urrgh!"

Samson undoubtedly was a strong man, as the circus bills notified the public, for he swung Billy Bunter clear of the ground with ease. There was a chuckle as he carried the fat junior away, his fat little legs kicking wildly in the air.

"Ow! Leggo! Will you leggo?" shrieked Bunter.

"It's outside for you!" grinned the strong man. "Mucky don't want you hanging about the ring."

"Urrgh! Blow Mucky! Leggo! I say—gurrgh!"

Billy Bunter wriggled and kicked. Unheeding his wriggles and kickings, the strong man carried him along the passage by the dressing-rooms, with the intention of pitching him out of the tent on his fat neck.

Marco's door was open, and the lion-tamer could be seen there, getting ready for his turn with the lions in the ring. Marco stared out at the strong man as he passed with Bunter.

"What are you up to, Samson?" he ejaculated.

"The boss doesn't want him hanging about the entrance," explained Samson.

"He won't walk out, so I'm helping him."

"Urrgh! Make him leggo, will you?" squeaked Bunter.

Marco shook his head and laughed. Like all the circus company, he was mystified by the amount of "cheek" that the Italian tolerated from Bunter. His opinion was that it was high time that the fat junior had a lesson on that subject.

"Make him leggo!" yelled Bunter. "Will you put me down, you beast?"

"I'll put you down if you'll walk!" grinned Samson.

"Urrgh! I—I'll walk!" gasped Bunter.

Samson set him on his feet. The fat junior gurgled for breath. The strong man pointed along the passage.

"Get going!" he boomed.

"Beast!"

"All right; I'll carry you, if you like."

Samson stretched out his hand to Bunter's collar again. As he did so, a sharp voice rapped from Marco's dressing-room.

"Stop that, Samson! Chuck it at once, or I'll come out to you!"

The strong man dropped his hand in amazement. He spun round towards the open doorway he had just passed.

"You gone barney, Marco?" he stammered. "Come out to me, will you? By gum, you can come out as soon as you like, and I'll dust up the passage with you!"

"Hold your silly tongue!"

"What?" roared Samson.

He rushed back to Marco's door. Billy Bunter gave a breathless chuckle. The enraged strong man had quite forgotten him for the moment.

Samson glared in at Marco's door. Marco turned from his looking-glass, a stick of grease-paint in his hand, and

stared at him, surprised by the wrath in the strong man's face.

"Come out!" roared Samson.

"Wha-at!" ejaculated the lion-tamer.

"I'm waiting for you! You said you'd come out to me! Well, come out, and see what you'll get!" bellowed Samson.

"I said I'd come out!" gasped Marco, in astonishment. "I never said a word! What the dickens do you mean?"

"You said you'd come out to me!" roared Samson.

"I didn't!"

"You did! You——"

"You're dreaming! I never——"

"Didn't I hear you?" roared Samson.

"You must have heard somebody else if you heard anybody! I tell you I never——"

"Think I don't know your voice?"

"Oh, don't be a fool! I tell you I never——"

"Well, if you like to tell lies about it, leave it at that!" snorted the strong man, and he turned away from the door.

"Put your nose in my door again, and I'll pull it for you!" came the voice of the lion-tamer promptly from the Greyfriars ventriloquist.

Samson spun round again. He rushed back to Marco's door, and this time he rushed in. His face was red with wrath.

"Pull it!" he bellowed.

"What?"

"Here it is, pull it!" The strong man thrust his red face close to Marco's astonished one. "Pull it!"

"Pull what?" stuttered Marco.

"You said you'd pull my nose——"

"I didn't!" shrieked Marco.

"Well, whether you did or not, I'll pull yours!" roared the strong man, and he hurled himself at Marco. The

next moment there was a din of terrific scuffling from the lion-tamer's dressing-room.

Billy Bunter, grinning, rolled back to the ring entrance. His idea was that Samson was going to be too busy for a time to bother about him. He was right, for by the time Samson and Marco had finished with one another, both had quite forgotten the existence of the fat Owl.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Talking Donkey!

"HURRY up!" snarled Signor Muccolini.

Tippity Tip breathed hard through his nose, but made no answer. The signor was in the worst of tempers, and Tippity knew the reason. The reason was close at hand—with a grin on its fat face!

It was like Mucky, when he was in a temper, to take it out of the nearest victim. So Mr. Tip was getting the acid edge of his tongue.

Wiggles, the elastic man, was on, tying himself into all sorts of weird knots, to the great entertainment of the people in front. Mr. Tippity Tip was to follow his turn, riding into the ring mounted on his donkey, Neddy, with his face to the tail—a sight that never failed to rouse a laugh from the audience. The signor came out scowling, taking no notice of Bunter, and yapping at Mr. Tip, who was standing ready with Edward, the donkey.

"All ready, boss!" said Tippity mildly, restraining his strong desire to tell the bullying Italian what he thought of him.

And as Wiggles finished, to a round

of applause, Mr. Tip jumped on the donkey and started in. Perhaps it was by accident that Edward bumped against Billy Bunter in passing; perhaps it was not.

At all events, he did bump against Billy Bunter, and bumped hard, and the fat Owl tottered back and sat down.

"Owl! You cheeky beast!" roared Bunter, scrambling up and glaring after the clown as he rode into the ring.

Mr. Tip, with his face to Edward's tail, grinned back at him. Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at the grinning face.

The signor followed Tippity into the ring. He cracked his ring-master's whip, and the donkey careered round the tan, Tippity turning a series of somersaults, landing lightly in the sawdust, and leaping on the donkey's back again. Billy Bunter watched from the ring entrance, with a frowning, fat brow.

Tippity brought Edward to a halt. His next item was a conversation with Edward, in which Tippity introduced his ventriloquism.

Bunter watched him, with lofty disdain. Mr. Tip's ventriloquism was, in point of fact, no great shakes, and the fat Owl of Greyfriars could have ventriloquised his head off. Tippity's art, such as it was, was acquired by constant practice, while with Bunter, it seemed to be a weird gift of nature.

Tippity, who was a better conjurer than ventriloquist, produced a carrot from the back of Signor Muccolini's neck, and held it out to Edward. Edward dived for it at once, but Mr. Tip drew it back.

"Not yet, Neddy!" said Tippity. "Not till you've talked to the ladies and gentlemen in front."

"Does your donkey talk, Mr. Tip?" asked the ring-master.

"Talk! I should say he does talk!" answered Mr. Tip.

"What does he talk like?"

"Like a member of parliament!" said Mr. Tip.

"Why does he talk like a member of parliament?"

"Because he's an ass!"

At which there was a chortle from the "people in front."

"Well, let the ladies and gentlemen hear him talk!" said the ring-master.

"Now, Edward, hold your head up, and make your speech!" said Mr. Tip. "Give the ladies and gentlemen a specimen of oratory in the House of Commons."

Edward lifted up his head and brayed.

"Heee-haw!"

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

"Good, very good!" said Mr. Tip. "Couldn't be better. Now tell us what Mr. Gladstone said in 1865?"

"Hee-haw!"

"Can your donkey say anything else?" asked the ring-master.

"Can he? I should think he can!" answered Mr. Tip. "You offer him this carrot, and see what he will say."

Signor Muccolini took the carrot from the clown, and held it out to Edward. It was now Mr. Tip's cue to weigh in with a ventriloquial squeak, making the donkey say, "Give it to Tippity; he's a bigger ass than I am."

But before Mr. Tip could get going, a voice proceeded, or at least seemed to proceed, from Edward, uttering quite a different remark.

"Eat that yourself, you old ass!"

Tippity Tip almost fell down.

Signor Muccolini's swarthy face flushed with rage.

From the audience came a roar of laughter and applause.

"By gum," said Bob Cherry, "that's

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jolly good ventriloquism! That clown can do the trick, and no mistake."

"The dago doesn't look pleased!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Well, he jolly well ought to be," said Bob. "He's got a ripping ventriloquist in that man Tip! Blessed if it didn't seem just like the moko speaking."

The Greyfriars fellows, like the rest of the audience, supposed that it was the circus ventriloquist making the donkey speak. Edward's braying had been his own voice; but a remark like this, of course, had to be ventriloquism. Signor Muccolini, naturally, had the same impression.

"Fool!" he breathed, under his breath. "You dare to make fun of me in the ring—fool and rascal!"

It was the ring-master's business to take part in the back-chat in the ring; but he had no relish for jokes at his expense. Tippet Tip, as a rule, was very careful on that point. Now he seemed to have forgotten his usual caution. The signor, remembering that a swarm of eyes were upon him, strove to control his anger; but his black eyes glittered at the amazed clown.

But Edward was not finished yet.

"Eat it, you dago donkey!" came the voice from Edward.

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

"I'm dreaming this!" stuttered Tippet Tip. "If I ain't dreaming it, what's it mean?"

"Fool—rascal—furfante!" hissed the signor. "You dare—"

"I never—" gasped Mr. Tip, helplessly. "I never—"

"What do you give for the dye on your moustache?" asked Edward. "Do you use the same dye on your neck? It looks as if you do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was too much for the signor. He gripped his whip, and jumped at Tippet Tip.

"Here, look out!" yelled Tippet Tip, as the circus-master's whip curled round his legs. "What are you at? I never—"

"Take that, and that, and that!"

"Oh, holy pokers! Stop it!" yelled Tippet Tip, dodging and jumping wildly. "Keep off, blow you! Oh, my eye! Oh, scissors! Yaroooooh!"

Tippet Tip fled frantically round the ring. After him flew the signor, lashing out with the whip. Edward stared at them, and lifted up his voice again: "Hee-haw!"

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

"Oh, scissors! Oh crikey!" howled Mr. Tip, as he fled. The audience were taking this as part of the entertainment, but it was no entertainment to the unfortunate Mr. Tip. The signor, raging behind him, laid it on hard and fast. Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooo! Keep off! Yooo-hoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tippet Tip dived frantically for the exit, and bounded out. Billy Bunter grinned at him as he passed. Roars of laughter followed him from the ring. But Mr. Tip was not feeling disposed to laugh.

He tottered away, in a state of amazement, feeling as if his head was turning round. In the dressing-room passage he met Marco—who was frowning, and dabbing a reddened nose with a handkerchief.

"Marco!" gasped Tippet Tip. "This 'ere circus is haunted! I've told you so afore, and I tell you agin—it's haunted."

"Don't be an ass!" grunted Marco.

"What's the matter with your nose?"

"That fool Samson—"

"You ain't been rowing with Sam?"

exclaimed Tippet Tip.

"The silly idiot thought I was saying things to him—goodness knows why—and started a scrap!" growled Marco.

"Look at the nose I've got to show the people in front!"

"Looks as if Brutus had been chewing it!" said Mr. Tip sympathetically. "He thought you was saying things, did he? And old Mucky thought my donkey Edward was saying things in the ring! And the other day Wiggles was rowing with Sam because he thought Sam was saying things. Marco, old man, this 'ere circus is haunted—haunted by a voice!"

"Rot!" grunted Marco.

"Haunted by a voice!" said Mr. Tip impressively. "I tell you, old man, this 'ere circus is haunted by a voice."

Which seemed the only possible explanation to Mr. Tip; though Billy Bunter, had he chosen, could have put him wise.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped!

"SIGNORINO!"

"Oh, don't bother!" said Billy Bunter, over a fat shoulder.

It was the following morning, and Billy Bunter was standing looking after Zara, the Queen of the Ring, who was riding out of the circus camp on her black steed. Many glances, besides Bunter's, were turned on the graceful gipsy girl, as she rode away.

Signor Muccolini tapped Bunter on the shoulder as he spoke, but the fat Owl did not heed him. His eyes, and spectacles, remained fixed on Zara, with a rapt gaze, till the graceful rider disappeared across the green meadows. Then he blinked round at the Italian.

"Well?" he grunted.

Rather to his surprise, Mucky seemed to be in a good temper that morning. He had addressed Bunter as "signorino," which was unusually polite. And he did not seem to resent the fat Owl's cheeky, off-hand manner.

"I wish to send a message," said the signor. "Perhaps you will take it for me, signorino, to the inn at Woodhurst."

"I'm not a messenger-boy!" said Bunter loftily. "Find somebody else!"

"There is no one, at the moment, whom I can send!" explained the signor. "It is urgent. There is a man who has an appointment with me at the inn, and I cannot get away this morning."

"Why, it's three or four miles, and there's no railway, either!" said Bunter warmly. Bunter was well acquainted with the country in the neighbourhood of Wharton Lodge. "Think I can walk three or four miles?"

"If you will oblige me, signorino—"

Bunter grunted. His was not a very obliging nature. And he did not like Signor Muccolini. But had the signor been his dearest pal, Bunter would not have felt disposed to oblige him to the extent of walking three or four miles on a warm summer's morning.

"It is urgent that the message should be taken!" said the signor. "I will pay you for the service, signorino."

Billy Bunter's fat brow cleared a little.

The previous day he had made the sum of seven-and-sixpence in his new line as Guglielmo the Crystal-gazer. But there were refreshments to be had at the Magnificent Circus, and those three half-crowns had gone, one after another, in the purchase of sticky comestibles. The fat Owl was once more in his usual stony state. He blinked at the signor thoughtfully.

"How much?" he asked.

"I will give you half-a-crown—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Bunter.

"Well, five shillings—"

"Keep it!" said Bunter.

"It is urgent that the message should be taken," said Signor Muccolini. "I will give you ten shillings to take it, Bunter."

"Now you're talking!" said Bunter cheerfully. "Trot it out! I don't mind obliging you, Mucky."

Signor Muccolini took an envelope from his pocket. Bunter blinked at it. There was no name or address on it.

"Take that to Woodhurst," said the signor. "Ask for Mr. Brown, who will be there waiting for me, and give him the letter."

"All right!"

Bunter slipped the envelope carelessly into his pocket. More carefully he stowed away a ten-shilling note.

A walk of three or four miles, across lonely pasture country, appealed to Bunter not at all. But cash was cash, and he was badly in want of that useful article. He rolled cheerfully enough out of the circus camp.

Signor Muccolini watched him go, with a sardonic grin on his swarthy face.

If all went well with the plans the cunning Italian had laid, he was going to be troubled no more by that fat and fatuous youth. After Jimmy Guggs had done with him, Billy Bunter would not be in a state to carry on at the circus.

Little dreaming of the treachery in the swarthy signor's mind, Billy Bunter rolled away over the meadows. That was the way Zara had ridden on her black horse, and the fat Owl kept an eye open for the Queen of the Ring. But the gipsy rider was long out of sight.

After about a mile, Billy Bunter forgot all about Zara, charming as she was. His fat little legs were growing tired.

He plugged on, more slowly, for another mile, and then sat down to rest. Having rested, fanned himself with his straw hat, and swatted flies, the fat junior heaved himself to his feet again and plugged onward.

Before him now lay a wide extent of hilly heath, which had to be crossed to reach the village of Woodhurst. Here and there woolly backs could be seen of feeding sheep; but there was no human being in sight, and not even the smoke to be seen of any building.

Across the heath the footpath was plainly marked, and Bunter could not miss it. He had, indeed, followed it before, when staying at Wharton Lodge in the holidays. It was an extremely lonely quarter; but it never occurred to Bunter that the signor had any object in despatching him on that lonely path.

Ahead of him, at a distance, a single tall tree rose by the footpath—the only tree for some distance. Bunter panted and grunted on towards it, with the idea of taking another rest in the grateful shade of its branches.

He passed out of the glare of the summer sunshine into the grateful green shade, and stopped and mopped his perspiring brow.

"Blow it, it's hot!" grumbled Bunter. "Ot's the word!" said a voice.

The fat junior stared round. He had not noticed a man under the tree. The man, however, had noticed Bunter, and had taken care to keep screened by the trunk as the fat junior came along. Now he stepped out into view, with an unpleasant grin on his stubbly face.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked in great alarm at Jimmy Guggs. He had forgotten the tramp who had robbed him in the wood near Wimford a week ago. He was unpleasantly reminded of him now.

"Gotcher!" remarked Mr. Guggs.

Billy Bunter backed away from him.

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In taking that long walk, he had thought of the heat, and the flies, and the fatigue; but he had not dreamed of danger. Now he quite forgot heat, and flies, and fatigue, and concentrated on danger.

"I—I—I say, you keep off!" he gasped. "I—I haven't got any money!" "Who wants your money?" asked Mr. Guggs.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He had naturally supposed that the tramp did! "Wha-at do you want, then?"

Guggs twirled a stick in his hand.

"You!" he answered grimly.

Bunter, his alarm increasing, backed farther away. The ruffian followed him up, stick in hand.

"I—I say—" stammered Bunter. "I—I say—"

"You 'it me in the eye!" said Guggs. "I dessay you remember that you 'it me in the eye! Well, now I'm going to take it out of you—see?"

Bunter blinked at him in sheer terror. "Wha-at—what are you going to do?" he gasped.

"Wallop you!" said Jimmy Guggs. "I'm going to wallop you black-and-blue. That's what! Got that?"

Billy Bunter cast a wild look round him. He was trapped; there was no help—no hope of help on the wide and lonely heath. With a gasp of terror he jumped back, turned, and ran in the direction from which he had come.

Guggs rushed after him.

He fully expected to grasp the fat junior's shoulder under a minute. But terror seemed to lend Bunter wings. He pounded along the footpath at a terrific burst of speed. After him tore the footpad, panting.

For a hundred yards Billy Bunter kept up the wild race. Then he had to slack down, gasping and panting. Closer came the footsteps of the tramp, and a hand touched his neck. It grasped and held.

In sheer desperation Bunter kicked out behind.

There was a fearful yell from Guggs as he got that kick on the shin. He hopped with pain.

Unfortunately, as he hopped, he retained his grasp on Bunter's collar. The fat junior wrenched in vain to free himself.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! Oh! Ow!" howled Guggs.

"Help!" shrieked Bunter.

"Ow! Ooooooh! Ow!"

"Help, help!"

A swing of Guggs' arm, and the fat junior went down in the grass.

He yelled wildly as he sprawled and struggled frantically. But the grip on his fat neck pinned him down and the stick in the tramp's hand descended upon him with savage force. And as it descended, Billy Bunter's wild yells woke the echoes of the heath far and wide.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Zara to the Rescue!

GALLOP! Gallop!

The thudding of hoofs on the thick grass did not reach the ears of either Billy Bunter or the tramp.

Billy Bunter was yelling at the top of his voice, wriggling and struggling wildly. Jimmy Guggs spluttered oaths and yelps, with a fearful pain in his shin where Bunter's heel had hacked. Both of them were too busy and too noisy to hear or heed the soft thudding of hoofs in the grass on the heath till it came very near.

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Zara, the Queen of the Ring, urged on the black horse to a gallop. The gipsy girl, cantering homeward across the heath after a long ride, came in sight of Bunter as the tramp overtook him and threw him down.

For a moment Zara stared at the distant scene in amazement; then she gave her horse the whip, and galloped towards the spot.

Billy Bunter, since the Queen of the Ring's dark eyes had made so deep an impression on his fat heart, had sometimes fancied himself in a romantic role, displaying dauntless courage, and rescuing Zara from all sorts of dangers. But he had never pictured such a scene the other way about! That, however, was how it came to pass.

The hapless fat junior was sprawling and howling, with Guggs' grip on the back of his neck, and Guggs' stick descending on him. And Zara, her dark eyes flashing, her riding-whip gripped in her hand, rode to the rescue. The black horse's hoofs seemed hardly to touch the earth as the gipsy girl galloped up.

The stick had descended, once, twice; and it was up again for another brutal blow when the galloping hoofs, close at hand now, caught the ruffian's ear.

Guggs paused, and looked over his

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shoulder—to see the black horse thundering down on him.

"Strike me pink!" gasped Jimmy Guggs.

He jumped away from Bunter, leaving him sprawling and howling. As he did so, Zara reached him, and lashed out with the riding-whip.

It lashed fairly across the tramp's shoulders, and Jimmy Guggs staggered, yelling. The rider followed him up, lashing again and again, the riding-whip ringing on Guggs like a succession of pistol-shots. Spitting out breathless oaths, the ruffian dodged, and struck with his cudgel at the horse and rider.

Billy Bunter sat up.

He set his spectacles straight on his fat, little nose, and blinked dizzily at the startling scene.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Now was a chance for Billy Bunter to display that dauntless courage of his, and rush to the rescue. Instead of which, he sat gasping and spluttering, winded to the wide.

Luckily Zara did not need his aid.

She reined the big black horse round on the tramp, and rode him down. Jimmy Guggs strove to dodge, but he strove in vain. The black horse crashed into him, and sent him sprawling in the grass.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter, as he watched.

Zara's eyes flashed down at the sprawling tramp.

Guggs yelled and howled with apprehension close by the trampling hoofs. His stick had flown from his hand, his battered hat from his head, and he wriggled in the grass in dire terror of the lashing hoofs almost upon him.

"'Old on!" howled Jimmy Guggs. "I say, you 'old on! I'll 'ook it—on my davy, I'll 'ook it! Keep that 'orse off! Strike me pink and blue! Keep him off!"

"Go!" snapped Zara contemptuously.

Jimmy Guggs, in his career as a tramp, footpad, and pilferer, had often had to run; but he had never envisaged himself running from a mere girl. Now, however, he did, and he ran as hard as he had ever run with a police-constable behind him. He scrambled up, and bolted at top speed. Hatless, stickless, and with more pains and aches distributed over him than he could have counted, Mr. Guggs started for the horizon as fast as he could go.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Bunter.

He staggered to his feet.

He blinked at Zara.

He was saved. What would have happened to him had not the gipsy girl appeared on the scene, Bunter hardly dared to think. The two swipes he had captured from Jimmy Guggs' stick told what the rest would have been like had the ruffian been given time to deliver the goods.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say—"

Zara smiled down at him.

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

"Oh, yes—no! Oh lor'! I—I say, that beast was pitching into me!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

"You are safe now," said Zara consolingly. "He is gone."

Bunter blinked after the tramp. Jimmy Guggs, going strong, was vanishing in the far distance.

The fat Owl pulled himself together. The danger was over, and in the absence of danger Bunter's courage revived.

"If—if he comes back—" he stuttered.

Zara laughed.

"He will not come back. I would have trampled him with my horse if he had not gone. He does not look like coming back, does he?"

"I—I mean, if—if he came back, I'd jolly well give him a hiding!" gasped Bunter. "He—he took me by surprise, you know. I—I could have handled him all right—"

A silvery laugh came from Zara. As the Queen of the Ring, had first sighted him running at full speed from the tramp, she found the fat junior's statement rather amusing.

"Let him come back, that's all!" said Bunter valiantly. "I'd jolly well show him, I can tell you!"

"Well, he will not come back," said Zara, laughing. "If you think you can take care of yourself—"

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter.

"Then I will ride on."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, d-d-don't ride on, Miss Zara. I—I—I think I'd better keep with you, and—"

"I think you had," smiled the gipsy girl.

"I—I mean to—to protect you, in—in case that beast turns up again!" gasped Bunter.

"I will walk the horse until you are safe," said Zara, smiling. "Are you going back to the circus?"

"Yes; I jolly well am!" said Bunter. "Mucky wanted me to take a message to Woodhurst, but I'm jolly well not going to take it now. That beast might turn up again. He owes me a grudge. Not that I'm afraid of him, you know. I could handle him all right. But—but—"

"Come on!" said Zara.

She rode the black horse at a walk, and Billy Bunter plodded by her side.



"Ow! Go away! Keep off!" howled Tippet Tip wildly. "I know you ain't real—but keep off!" The circus clown made an attempt to get further away from Bunter, forgetting that the trough was behind him. He remembered it as he tipped over backwards into it. Splash! "He, he, he!" chortled the fat Greyfriars junior.

Every now and then he blinked round uneasily through his big spectacles. But the footpad was not seen again. If he was watching from a distance, he did not care to show up while the fat junior was in Zara's company.

The heath was left behind at last. In a lane with farmhouses in sight, Zara gave the Owl of the Remove a nod.

"You are safe now," she said. "I will ride on."

And the black horse shot away.

Billy Bunter had more than a mile yet to walk. He was fatigued and perspiring, and, of course, hungry.

He blinked at a sign displayed by a wayside building:

"LUNCHES AND TEAS."

Lunches and teas had a strong appeal for Bunter. It was not yet dinner-time, and he had ample time to get back to the circus for dinner. But it was more than a mile to walk, and he was tired in all his fat limbs. He was getting hungry, and the thought of lunch made him hungrier.

Zara vanished in the distance. But Bunter was not gazing after Zara; he was gazing at that enticing sign.

Bunter was feeling as if he could have disposed of two or three lunches, followed by three or four teas. He was strongly tempted.

On the other hand, lunches and teas had to be paid for. And Billy Bunter was stony, excepting for the ten-shilling note Signor Muccolini had given him for taking that message to Woodhurst.

Bunter hesitated.

Bunter was honest—at least, he firmly believed that he was. As he had not, after all, delivered the signor's letter to Mr. Brown at the inn at

Woodhurst, he fully intended to return that ten-shilling note to Mucky.

But lunches and teas had an irresistible appeal. Bunter hesitated, and he who hesitates is lost.

Irresistibly he was drawn towards those lunches and teas. Almost before he realised it he was sitting down, and a waiter was taking his order.

His idea was to take just a snack while he rested. Somehow or other that snack was prolonged into a feed to the exact value of ten shillings.

Bunter sat and gobbled.

With ten shillings' worth of refreshments, liquid and solid, parked in his capacious interior, Billy Bunter was in need of another rest. And there was no hurry to return to the circus. Even Bunter was not keen on dinner now. He rolled away, selected a comfortable spot in the shade of a haystack, and closed his eyes behind his spectacles.

He slept, and he snored. Had Jimmy Guggs been anywhere in the offing, that rolling rumble from the shady side of the haystack might have guided him to his victim. Fortunately for Bunter, Jimmy Guggs was far away.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Caught Napping!

"JUST the place!" said Bob Cherry.

"Just!" agreed Frank Nugent.

The two juniors were following a footpath across the fields. Frank Nugent had a sketch-book and colour-box under his arm. Bob Cherry had a "Holiday Annual." They stopped and looked at a tall haystack.

Harry Wharton had gone on a visit with his uncle that afternoon. Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh

selected tennis as an occupation. Frank Nugent, who did water-colours, took his sketch-book for a walk, and Bob went with him, taking his "Holiday Annual." Now a suitable spot had been found for sketching, with the additional advantage of a shady place for Bob to sit down and read the "Holiday Annual," while Frank dabbed water-colours.

Leaving the footpath, the two juniors crossed towards the haystack.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob suddenly. "What's that row? Might be a bull in the field. We don't want to run into him."

"That's not a bull—sounds more like a snore," said Nugent, as he listened to the deep rumbling sound that came round the haystack.

"Some hiker taking a snooze," said Bob.

"There he is," remarked Nugent, as they came round the stack, and sighted a recumbent figure in the loose hay at its foot.

"Great pip!" Bob Cherry stared at the snoring sleeper. "Bunter?"

"Bunter!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The fat villain! I jolly well knew he wasn't far away!" exclaimed Bob. "It was Bunter played that trick on us at the circus yesterday—I jolly well know that! I knew he hadn't gone."

They stood gazing at Bunter. It was William George Bunter, as large as life—proof that he was not far away from Muccolini's Circus. The Owl of the Remove lay half buried in hay, his eyes shut, and his mouth open, as fast asleep as he had ever been in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

"We owe him a kicking," said Bob. "I'd jolly well have kicked him if I'd caught him outside Guglielmo's tent yesterday! Hallo, hallo, hallo, Bunter! Wake up and be kicked!"

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Snore!

"Wake up, porpoise!" roared Bob.

Snore!

It was not easy to wake Bunter when he was asleep. Bob Cherry's roar might have awakened Rip Van Winkle, but it produced no effect whatever on William George Bunter. He snored on regardless.

"Some sleeper!" grinned Bob. He roared again: "Bunter! Banty! Bunt! I'm waiting to kick you, old fat man! Wake up! Bunter!"

Snore!

"Oh, my hat!"

Snore!

Frank Nugent chuckled, sat down on his camp-stool, and opened his sketch-book and colour-box. Bob Cherry stood gazing at the sleeping beauty. He leaned over Bunter, with the intention of taking his little fat nose between a finger and thumb—which would have awakened even Billy Bunter!

But another idea came into Bob's playful mind, and he drew back, without awakening the fat Owl.

"Lend me that colour-box, Franky," he said.

"What for, fathead?"

"I'll do some painting while you do some sketching," said Bob. "We owe Bunter one! I don't want to kick him, though he's asked for it, but he japed us yesterday, and we'll jape him to-day, see? He's asking for it."

"Go it!" said Nugent.

Bob went it.

Leaning over the sleeping fat Owl, he proceeded to paint. Billy Bunter grunted as the brush touched his face. But he showed no sign of awakening. He grunted and snored on.

Bob Cherry was not much of an artist. His chief idea, in painting, was to lay on paint. He laid plenty on Bunter's fat face.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Nugent, as the right side of Billy Bunter's fat face was painted a brilliant ultramarine blue. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's only a beginning!" said Bob cheerfully. "Bunter's going to surprise them when he gets back to the circus. He gave us a surprise yesterday—now he's going to surprise everybody."

Bunter certainly looked surprising enough when the other side of his face was painted a bright vermilion red.

But the cheery Bob was not finished yet. He painted the little fat nose dead black. Then he put two circles in Chinese white round the eyes and spectacles, giving Bunter an extraordinary appearance of having two pairs of spectacles on. Then the fat ears were painted bright green.

"Think that will do, Franky?" asked Bob, surveying his handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

"Oh crikey! I should think so!" gasped Nugent.

"A few white spots, perhaps," said Bob thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A few white spots were added to Bunter's blue and red cheeks. The final effect was really extraordinary.

Having completed this work of art, Bob Cherry sat down with his back to the haystack to read his "Holiday Annual," while Frank Nugent sketched. Billy Bunter snored happily on.

It was about an hour later that the snore was changed into a yawn, and the Owl of the Remove awoke, refreshed by his nap.

"Yaw-aw-aw-aw!" yawned Bunter.

He sat up and blinked at the two juniors. They looked at him, grinning. Bunter blinked at them in surprise.

"I say, you fellows, how did you get here?" he ejaculated.

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"Walked!" answered Bob cheerfully.

"You silly ass! I mean, what are you doing here?" grunted Bunter.

"Franky's sketching, and I've been painting," answered Bob.

"You painting?" grinned Bunter. "You couldn't paint a fence! Fat lot you know about painting."

He rose to his feet. The afternoon sunshine gleamed on his highly decorated visage, and the two juniors gave a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter, staring at them. "What are you cackling at, I'd like to know? That's a rotten sketch, Nugent."

"Thanks."

"You can't draw. As for Bob painting—he, he, he! I'd like to know what you've painted."

"I've painted an owl," answered Bob.

"Jolly queer-looking owl, I fancy, if you've painted it!" jeered Bunter.

"Right on the wicket," agreed Bob.

"It's a jolly queer-looking owl—no mistake about that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent.

"It would be!" said Bunter. "I say, where are the other rotters? Tell Wharton, from me, that I was only pulling his leg on the telephone the other day. I'm getting on fine at the circus—a regular star! I wouldn't be found dead at his rotten show. How you fellows stand him, I'm blessed if I know—any more than I know how he stands you!"

And with that valediction, Billy Bunter rolled away.

The two juniors gazed after him as he rolled away to the lane. Utterly unconscious of the decorations on his fat face, Billy Bunter was starting on his homeward way to the circus.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "I say, think it's rather too thick, Franky, to let him trot about like that?" Bob's kind heart smote him. "I—I think I'll give him the tip, after all! I say, Bunter! Hold on!"

"Yah!"

Bunter threw that answer over a fat shoulder without taking the trouble to turn his head. He rolled on towards a gap in the hedge.

"Stop!" shouted Bob. "I say—"

"Shan't!"

"I tell you—" roared Bob.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Bunter, you ass! I tell you—"

Bunter did not trouble to reply again. With his fat back disdainfully turned on the two juniors, he rolled through the gap in the hedge into the lane, and disappeared. Bob Cherry gave it up.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Tip Sees Things!

"MUCKY'S in a good temper to-day!" remarked Mr. Tippet.

"Change for him!" assented Wiggles.

Signor Muccolini was smiling.

Standing in front of Guglielmo's tent, the signor was looking at the "notis" posted outside by the fat magician. That notice, certainly, was enough to make the signor smile—it was, indeed, enough to make a cat laugh.

But the signor had worn a perpetual smile ever since Billy Bunter had rolled out of the circus camp that morning. Not once had he bullyragged any of the circus hands; not a single sneering or disagreeable remark had he made to any of the circus company.

It was a relief to Mr. Tip, who had rather dreaded to hear more about the strange affair of Edward in the ring.

In his new good-humour, the signor seemed to have forgotten that episode.

He grinned at Guglielmo's "notis" with a flash of white teeth through his bushy black moustache. The signor's belief was that the Great Guglielmo had made his last appearance in the side-shows at the Magnificent Circus.

He was done with Bunter—the incubus was lifted! Bunter, when Jimmy Guggs had done with him, would be in no state for carrying on at the circus. It had been easy enough to entrap the fat fool, the signor told himself contemptuously. Certainly, the fat Owl of Greyfriars had very little chance in a contest of cunning with the unscrupulous Italian.

Muccolini turned away from the magician's "notis" as Zara rode into the camp, and raised his hat to the gipsy girl, with another flash of teeth. Zara gave him a nod in passing, but did not stop to speak. Like most of the circus company, she had no great liking for the swaggering signor. But she, too, noticed that he seemed in an unusually good humour that morning.

In his mind's eye the Italian was following Bunter—on his lonely way across Woodhurst Heath, where the hired ruffian was waiting and watching to "beat him up." By this time it must be over—the signor had no doubt of that! He pictured the wretched fat Owl, after Guggs had done with him, crawling dismally away, or lying bruised and beaten, waiting for help from some chance passer-by.

There was nothing to connect the circus-master with what had happened. Even Bunter had no suspicion of him. What became of the fat schoolboy, the signor cared nothing. He was clear of him now, and that was enough. After that beating Bunter would have too much to think about to worry about what he had seen of the signor and his camera at Wapshot Air Camp. Whether he was taken to his home or taken to a hospital mattered nothing. The circus had seen the last of him.

If the signor had any doubts, they were settled at dinner time. Never, since Bunter had joined the Magnificent Circus, had he missed a meal. But he did not turn up to feed that day, and Tippet Tip and a good many others remarked on his absence.

The signor made no remark on the subject, but he grinned. After his lunch he strolled out into the lane by which Bunter had gone, and scanned the horizon for Bunter. There was no sign of the fat junior returning.

Fat and lazy as Bunter was, he had had time, by now, to make the trip to Woodhurst twice over. There could be no further doubt—in the signor's mind! Guggs had done his work, and that was that!

For some time he stood watching the dusty distance. Then, grinning, he strolled back into the camp. It was an immense relief to him to have got rid of the schoolboy who knew—or partly knew—his secret, and the method he had used caused no twinge of remorse in his hard heart.

In that unusual mood, the signor astonished Mr. Tip by speaking to him quite genially and presenting him with a cigar. Lighting another for himself, he swaggered away into Winford, to put in a couple of hours in the billiards-room at the Flowing Bowl.

Tippet Tip stared after him as he went. Then he stared at the cigar in his fingers. Then he stared after the signor again.

"My 'at!" said Tippet. "My only summer 'at! Wiggles, old man—"

"Hallo!" said Wiggles.

"Mucky's given me a cigar!"
 "What's the matter with it?" asked the elastic man.

"That's what beats me," answered Mr. Tip. "There ain't nothing the matter with it. What's come over Mucky, Wrig? He ain't bullyragged anybody all day! Now he's given me a cigar! My 'at! He'll be giving me a rise in salary next!"

"I don't think!" grinned Wriggles.

"He's bucked about something," said Tippet. "Let's hope it'll last! I tell you, Wrig, this is the first day since I joined the circus that I ain't wanted to punch his greasy phiz!"

Mr. Tip lighted his unexpected cigar, and smoked the same with satisfaction. Perhaps that unaccustomed Havana made Tippet dry, or perhaps it was the hot weather, or perhaps it was merely the thirst with which Mr. Tip was very frequently afflicted; at all events, Mr. Tip took a little walk down the lane that led towards Woodhurst Heath, and dropped in at the wayside inn there.

That wayside inn was only ten minutes' walk from the circus camp—which was very convenient for a man who was thirsty so often as Mr. Tip.

Mr. Tip had sampled the ale there many times, and found it good. Now he sampled it again, and still found it good. Indeed, he found it so good that he continued to sample it, and his samples were extensive.

The result was that, when Mr. Tip stepped out again, he had a fishy eye and an uncertain step. There was a horse-trough in front of the inn, and Mr. Tip paused, to regard it with a surprised fishy eye. When he went in, there had been only one horse-trough there; when he came out, Mr. Tip saw two—which naturally surprised him.

He did not at the moment attribute this to the strength of the ale he had sampled inside. He had to pass that trough to get back into the lane, and finding two in his way rather puzzled Tippet.

Carefully avoiding the one that wasn't there, Mr. Tip bumped into the one that was, and suddenly sat down.

"My eye!" said Mr. Tip. "You've been and gone and done it ag'in, Tippet! That's what you've been and gone and done—you've been and gone and done it! After all the pledges you've signed, you've been and gone and done it!"

Mr. Tip rose to his feet very carefully. He realised that he had sampled that excellent ale not wisely, but too well, and that care was necessary.

Very carefully, indeed, Tippet walked round the trough, and got safely into the lane. Then he stood transfixed.

His eyes fixed, in amazement and horror, on a strange and startling object in the lane. It was coming towards him.

Tippet rubbed his eyes, and looked again. The strange object was still there. Tippet's eyes almost started from his head.

"Elp!" moaned Tippet. "I'm seeing things! Go away! Oh, go away! I'll never touch another drop! S'long's I live, I'll never push another one back! 'Elp!"

He waved the dreadful vision away. But the dreadful vision came on. It had a face such as Mr. Tip had never seen before in his wildest dreams.

One side of it was bright blue; the other side a bright red. The nose was black; the ears green. There were white circles round the eyes, and white spots on the blue-and-red cheeks.

It was no wonder that Mr. Tip was startled. The dread figure that drew Priam's curtains at dead of night was not so startling as Billy Bunter in his decorated state.

"Keep off!" howled Mr. Tip wildly. "Go away! I know you ain't real, but keep off! Not another drop—not another drop! S'elp me! Pure water for me from this day on! Keep off!"

Billy Bunter glared at him. "You silly idiot! What's the matter with you?" he bawled.

Bunter was cross. He was puzzled and annoyed.

He had passed few people in the lane on his way back to the circus, but the few he had passed had given him extraordinary attention.

A farmer's boy had jumped clear of the ground and bolted through the hedge at the sight of him. Cottage doors had been slammed as he appeared in view. A carter had cut at him with his whip. A cyclist had nearly fallen off his machine, and then pedalled away frantically, as if fleeing from a lunatic. Now, as he drew near the circus, he came on Mr. Tip, who waved him off wildly as if he had been a grisly spectre. It was enough to puzzle and annoy any fellow.

"Keep off!" moaned Tippet. "D-d-don't touch me! I swear I'll never push one back ag'in—not one! Not a drop—"

"Look here!" bawled Bunter. "Elp!" moaned Mr. Tip.

"What do you mean?" yelled Bunter. "You know me, I suppose?"

"Last time," moaned Tippet, "it was blackbeetles! This 'ere is worse! Never another drop—never!"

He backed away from Bunter. He

(Continued on next page.)

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backed till he backed against the trough, and could back no farther.

With both hands he waved Bunter off. He had not the remotest idea it was Bunter. The fat Owl's nearest and dearest relative could not have recognised him in his present state. Tippiity waved and waved as the horror glared at him.

"What's the matter?" shrieked Bunter.

"Ow! Go away! Keep off!"

Mr. Tip made an attempt to back farther away, forgetting that the trough was behind him. He remembered it as he tipped over backwards into it.

Splash!

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. And, leaving Tippiity Tip splashing wildly in the horse-trough, the decorated Owl rolled on his way towards the circus.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Astonishes the Natives!

"LOOK out——"
"What——"
"Who——"
"Look!"

"Great Scott! What——"

Billy Bunter was more and more astonished, and more and more annoyed. A roar of voices greeted him as he arrived in the circus camp. Startled faces stared at him on all sides.

He blinked round through his big spectacles in angry amazement.

Zara was standing by her van, talking to Marco. At sight of Bunter she uttered a shriek, flew into the van, and slammed the door.

"Who is it?" yelled Wriggles. "What is it?"

"An escaped lunatic!" gasped Samson. "Look out!"

"You silly idiots!" shrieked Bunter. "What's the matter?"

Marco stared at him. He stared as if he could hardly believe his eyes at the extraordinary sight. He strode

towards Bunter, and grasped him by a fat shoulder.

"Who are you?" he rapped.

"Who—who am I?" stuttered Bunter. "Don't you know who I am, you silly idiot? Leggo my shoulder, blow you!"

The voice was familiar if the face was not. So was the circumference.

"Is—is—is it Bunter?" gasped the lion-tamer blankly.

"Haven't you seen me often enough?" howled Bunter. "Wharrer you mean? Are you blind or silly? I suppose you know me again?"

"Are you mad?" gasped Marco.

"You cheeky idiot! Wharrer you mean?"

"If you're not mad, what have you done it for?" roared Marco.

"Eh—what have I done? What the dickens are you driving at?" spluttered Bunter. "Every silly idiot I've passed has been staring, just like all these silly idiots here, and you, you silly idiot! What——"

"No wonder, if you've been going about with a face like that!" gasped Marco. "Mean to say that you've been showing a face like that on the public roads?"

"My face!" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes, your face——"

"You cheeky dummy! What's the matter with my face?" yapped Bunter indignantly. "It's better-looking than yours, and chance it! Wharrer you mean?"

"Mad as a 'atter!" said Wriggles. "A face like that would make 'em jump in the ring! But to take it out for a walk——"

"You let my face alone!" roared Bunter. "What about your own ugly mug? Do you call that a face?"

"Don't you know what your face looks like?" gasped Marco. It dawned on him that the fat junior was unconscious of his decoration, though how he could have acquired that startling complexion unknowingly was a mystery.

"Eh—of course I do!" snorted Bunter. "I suppose I've seen it often enough. Do you know what yours looks

like? A pumpkin that's been trodden on!"

"You young ass!" howled Marco. "Don't you know that your face is painted?"

"Pip-pip-painted!"

"Yes, you young lunatic!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" snapped Bunter. "How could my face be painted? Don't talk rot!"

"Mad as a 'atter!" repeated Wriggles. "He's painted his face, and don't know that he's done it!"

"I haven't!" hooted Bunter.

"Then how did your face get like that?" roared Marco.

"Like what?" shrieked Bunter.

"He don't know!" gasped Samson. "He's been walking about with a face like that, and don't know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" yelled Bunter. "There's nothing wrong with my face, is there?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Marco. "Somebody must have done this—ha, ha, ha! But how the dickens they did it without the young ass knowing——"

"Did what?" raved Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Have you been asleep anywhere?"

"Eh! Yes! I had a nap under a haystack, after lunch——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Then somebody caught you napping! You young ass, somebody's painted your face all the colours of the rainbow!" roared Marco.

"Rot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Zara's door opened, and a silvery laugh reached Bunter's ears. He blinked round at the Queen of the Ring. The first view of the decorated Owl had startled Zara into sudden flight; but she was laughing as she came out of the van. She had a mirror in her hand.

"Look!" said Zara, holding it up for Bunter to view.

The fat Owl blinked into the mirror. He jumped at what he saw there. The sight of a red-and-blue cheek and a black nose and green ears, startled him as much as it had startled Mr. Tip.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Is—is—is that my face? Oh scissors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked dizzily into the mirror at the extraordinary countenance that stared back at him.

There was a roar of laughter round him. The whole circus had gathered on the spot by that time, and Billy Bunter was the cynosure of all eyes.

Bunter rather liked being the centre of attraction. He was the centre of attraction now, there was no doubt about that.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! That beast—he caught me asleep——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, the rotter! I remember he said he had painted an owl——" gasped Bunter. "He must have meant——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at!" howled Bunter wrathfully. "This isn't funny."

"Isn't it?" gasped Wriggles. "Oh, my eye! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haden't you better go and wash your face?" asked Zara, almost weeping with merriment. "Perhaps it will wash off."

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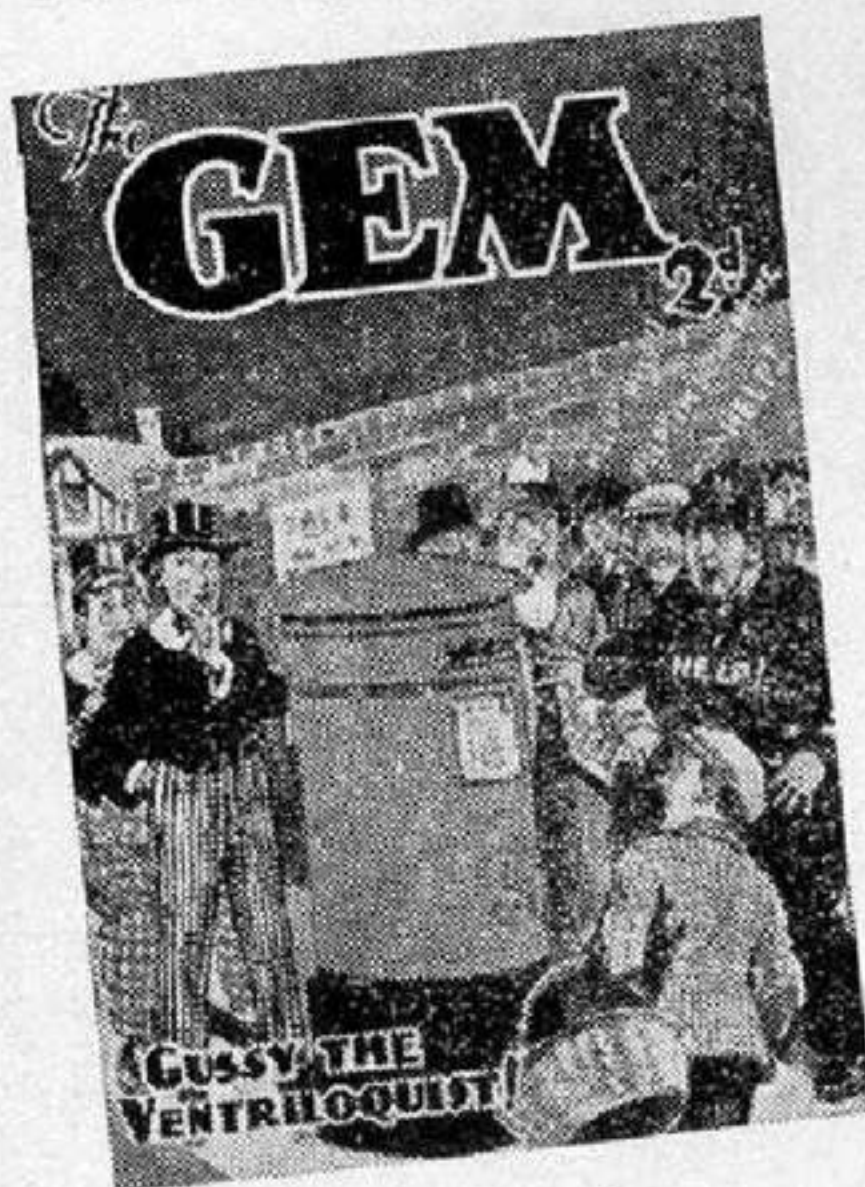
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"Perhaps!" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor'!"

A yell of laughter followed him as he scuttled away—in search of a wash.

One wash generally lasted Bunter a whole day; and he was seldom anxious for another. But he was very anxious for one now. For once, Billy Bunter was absolutely eager for soap and water.

To his great relief, his new complexion did wash off. He rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed, and Bob Cherry's artistic handiwork disappeared in soap-suds.

When he blinked into a glass again his decoration was gone and he was relieved to see the handsome and distinguished countenance he was accustomed to admire.

Grinning faces greeted him when he rolled out into public view again. Bunter scowled at them.

"Where's Mucky?" he asked, coming on Parker.

"He's in Wimford this afternoon," answered Parker, grinning. "He's missed it."

Bunter snorted, and rolled away to Guglielmo's tent, to get ready for the show when the circus opened to the public. He was there out of sight when Signor Muccolini walked back from Wimford.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Not a Success!

SIGNOR MUCCOLINI came into the circus camp with his usual swagger.

He was still in a genial mood, in his happy satisfaction at having done with Billy Bunter—little dreaming of the surprise that awaited him. He noticed smiling faces on all sides as he came in, and realised that there was some joke on in the circus, and wondered what it was. He stopped to speak to Tippity Tip with quite a gracious nod.

Mr. Tip's was almost the only serious face to be seen. Everybody else was still grinning over Billy Bunter's return with a rainbow complexion.

But Mr. Tip had reason to be serious. He had been drenched to the skin by his ducking in the horse-trough, and had crawled into camp, leaving a trail of water behind him in the dust. His many samples of ale had left him with a headache and that dismal feeling that life was not worth living, which naturally follows such indulgence as Tippity's. He was in a mood to wonder, with Cassio, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains!

"What's going on, Tip?" asked the signor.

"That idjit!" said Tippity, with a grunt. "That freak! That dummy! I s'pose you didn't see him, being out. That fat'ead—"

"Who?" asked the signor impatiently. "What do you mean?"

"That fat freak—that fat hass, Bunter—"

"Bunter!" panted the signor.

"Yes, Bunter!" growled Tippity.

"When he came back, he—"

"He—has—come—back!" The signor seemed hardly able to articulate the words. "What do you mean? Are you trying to fool me, you dolt? He has not come back—he could not come back." Signor Muccolini almost choked. "You fool, what do you mean?"

Tippity stared at him.

"I mean what I'm saying, boss! He's come back. He—"

"Do you mean that they have brought him here?" hissed the signor, through his teeth. "Has he had the impudence to tell them to bring him here? Dio mio! Did they carry him here?"

Tippity blinked.

"Eh! He didn't need carrying, that I know of!" he answered. "He jest walked in, and I can tell you, boss, he—"

"Walked in!" hissed the signor. "He—he— What do you mean, fool—dolt—sciocco—matto—furfante—what do you mean? How could he walk in, after—" The signor checked himself. "Where is he? If he is here, where is he? Answer me, blockhead!"

Tippity Tip forgot his headache as he gazed at the enraged swarthy face of the Italian. It was clear to him that Signor Muccolini had not expected Bunter to return, though why, Tippity could not begin to guess.

In his rage, the signor grabbed the clown by the shoulder and shook him. Mr. Tip staggered and swayed, gasping in the angry grasp of the beefy Italian.

"I—I say, boss—" he stuttered. "What the dickens—"

"Where is he, fool?" hissed the signor. "You are deceiving me—I do not believe you—if he is here, where is he?"

"In that there tent!" gasped Mr. Tip. "What the poker— Yaroooh!" Tippity gave a yell as the enraged Italian flung him aside and he went sprawling headlong on the ground.

Leaving Mr. Tip sitting up and gazing after him in dizzy amazement, Signor Muccolini strode away to Guglielmo's tent, his eyes blazing, his teeth gritting under his black bushy moustache.

He stamped savagely into the tent, where the Great Guglielmo gave his crystal-gazing show. A fat figure stood there, sorting over the magician's outfit.

Bunter had his back to the doorway. He was unaware of the signor's approach till a dusky, greasy hand gripped his fat shoulder and spun him round.

He turned, with a startled squeak, and blinked at Signor Muccolini.

The Italian stared at him dumb-founded. There was no sign of damage about the fat junior. He presented his usual aspect, save that he was unusually clean, owing to his recent extra wash.

"Ow! Leggo, blow you!" gasped Bunter. "Wharrer you grabbing me for? Making a fellow jump! Ow!"

"You—you—you are here!" stammered the signor. "You—you— Rascal! Fat rascal and fool! You did not go to Woodhurst, then?" He breathed fury. "I paid you to go and you did not go! Is that it?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter. "Certainly not! I'm a fellow of my word, I hope. It's all right—he—he got the message! Don't you worry—he got it all right!"

"Who?" shrieked the signor.

"Mr. Brown!" explained Bunter. "I—I found him at—at the inn at Woodhurst, and—and gave him your letter."

Signor Muccolini stared at him speechless.

The letter he had given Bunter was a blank sheet of paper, in a blank envelope, and there was no "Mr. Brown" waiting at Woodhurst to receive it. The whole thing was a trick to entrap the unsuspecting fat Owl.

"Fool—rascal—untruthful rascal—" Signor Muccolini choked again.

"Oh, really, you know!" said Bunter indignantly.

"It is false—you did not—"

"Of course, I—I may have given it to the wrong man," said Bunter cautiously. "If—if you've heard from Mr. Brown, and he says he hasn't had the letter, of—of course, there must have been a—a mistake! Still, he said his name was Brown—"

"He—he—he said his name was Brown!" gurgled the signor.

"Oh, yes! He said Brown! Otherwise, of course, I shouldn't have handed him your letter!" explained Bunter. "I'm pretty careful in these things, you know. If he hadn't said his name was Brown, I should have said—yaroooh! Leggo! Wharrer you up to? Leggo! Beast!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Ow! Leggo! Grooogh! You're chook-chook-choking me!" gurgled Bunter, as the enraged signor shook him, and shook him again, till his teeth rattled in his head. "Beast! Have you gone mad? Urrrgh! Yaroooh!"

Bump!

Signor Muccolini hurled the fat junior across the tent. He crashed into the table, and went over with it, and sprawled on the earth, in the midst of the Great Guglielmo's outfit, spluttering.

"Urrrgh! Oh crikey! Beast! You mad dago!" yelled Bunter. "Keep off! Oh crumbs! Ooooooh!"

The signor stamped out of the tent, red with rage. Billy Bunter blinked after him, gurgling for breath.

"Ow! Beast! Urrgh! How the dickens does he know that Brown never had that letter?" gasped Bunter. "I—I suppose he's heard from—coogh!—Brown! Still, he's no right to doubt a fellow's word! Urrgh! The cheek of it—a rotten circus blighter doubting the word of a Public school man! Urrrgh! I jolly well won't let him have his ten bob back now."

And Bunter didn't!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Bowled Out!

NONSENSE!" grunted Colonel Wharton.

"Well, I know it sounds rather thick!" said Bob Cherry. "But there it is—he knew our names, and told us a lot of things that happened at school—whole terms ago—"

"Magic is all rot, of course!" said Harry. "But—but—"

"But the butfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, we will put the man to the test!" said Colonel Wharton. "Certainly, what you have told me seems very remarkable. But there can be no doubt that the man is an impostor. Where is his place?"

"This way!" said Harry.

Blares of music, more or less musical, awoke the echoes of the circus ground. It was the last day of the stay at Wimford, before Muccolini's Magnificent Circus got on the road again, and there was a good crowd for the last show. Among them were the Famous Five of Greyfriars and Colonel Wharton. Circus performances did not, perhaps, appeal very much to the old colonel, but he had been interested by what the juniors had told him of Guglielmo and the magic crystal.

Harry Wharton & Co. were frankly puzzled. The more they thought over that interview with the Great Guglielmo, the more puzzled they were.

They moved through the crowd, and reached Guglielmo's tent.

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Colonel Wharton stared at the "notis" posted over the door. He stared again, and grinned. Then he stepped in, followed by the chums of the Remove.

His eyes fixed searchingly on the sombre figure seated at the table. That sombre figure gave a sudden start at the sight of the grim old military gentleman.

Bunter did not feel quite comfortable under the colonel's keen eyes. Those eyes were altogether too keen for his comfort.

Still, he was safe in his make-up. In his beard, and moustache, and wig, his fat face was almost hidden from view, and what was visible was disguised with grease-paint. Colonel Wharton had no doubt that he was an impostor, but clearly did not suspect for a moment the impostor he was!

"Enter!" said Guglielmo, in his deep bass voice. "Lay a piece of silver on the table and read the past and the future, and hear the voices of absent friends."

Colonel Wharton gave a grunt.

"The future no man knows!" he said. "Read the past in your crystal, if you can, sir!"

"Both the past and the future are written in the crystal, for my eyes to read!" said the Great Guglielmo with dignity. "Lay a piece of silver on the table first. That's important."

The colonel dropped a half-crown on the table. It disappeared into Guglielmo's pocket at once.

"Now, sir, read my past in your crystal!" grunted the colonel.

And Harry Wharton & Co. looked on and listened with keen interest.

The bearded face was bent over the glimmering crystal. For a long moment Guglielmo gazed into its glittering depths. Then he spoke, in his deep voice.

"I see a far country, a tropical land. I see elephants moving through the jungle! Vast white cities—great mountains—the Himalayas! I see a white officer. His face is yours. I hear his name spoken. It is James Wharton!"

Colonel Wharton started, and the juniors exchanged quick looks.

If this was not magic, what was it? How did Guglielmo know that Colonel Wharton had been an officer in India? How did he know his name?

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"I see a ship!" went on the crystal-gazer. "It leaves an Eastern harbour. It crosses the ocean. You land in England! After a long absence you arrive at your home. You find there

a nephew. I see his face in the crystal—a sulky, discontented face."

Harry Wharton coloured. The colonel gnawed his moustache. The magician's voice went on:

"A sulky, discontented, disagreeable boy. Now I see a school. You send him to school—your own old school—to get rid of him."

Colonel Wharton's bronzed face flushed with anger.

"That is not true!" he barked angrily. "But it sufficiently resembles the truth to assure me that you have made some impertinent inquiry into my personal affairs! I am aware, from what occurred here a few days ago, that the boy Bunter is in league with you. You have learned all this from him. Where is he?"

"I read in the crystal—" protested Guglielmo.

"Rubbish! Where is that young rascal? I will teach him to talk of my affairs to an impostor—a circus charlatan! Where is he? I will lay my walking-stick round him!"

"I—I—I say—"

"Where is he? By gad, sir, if you don't tell me at once where to find that young rascal I will lay my walking-stick round you!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped the Great Guglielmo, jumping up in alarm as the old military gentleman leaned over the table with an angry glare. He jumped back hurriedly—rather too hurriedly—and stumbled over the stool he had been seated on. "Ow! Yaroooooh!"

Bump!

The Great Guglielmo landed on his back. His bullet head tapped on the ground, and he uttered a roar that woke nearly all the echoes of Muccolini's Magnificent Circus.

"Ow! Wow! Yaroooooh! Beast! Yooooop! Oh crikey!"

"What the thump!" gasped Bob Cherry.

At that exciting moment the Great Guglielmo was no longer disguising his voice, and it had quite a familiar sound.

"Great gad!" ejaculated the colonel, staring at the sprawling magician.

Billy Bunter sat up dizzily, rubbing his head.

His big, black wig had fallen off. His big beard hung on one side, by a single wire. His fat face was revealed, and, in spite of the grease-paint, it was not to be mistaken.

There was a yell from the Famous Five.

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Oh lor'! Wow!"

"Bunter!" roared the colonel.

"Ow! I say, you keep off!" roared

Bunter. "Beast! I—I say, I—I ain't Bunter! I—I—I've never heard the name!"

"You blithering idiot!" roared Bob Cherry. "Can't you see that we know you, without your whiskers?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He passed a fat hand across his face. "Oh crikey! I—I say, you fellows—"

"Bunter!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"So that's how he knew—"

"Bunter!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"That accounts for his jolly old magic and—"

"The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!"

chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh lor'! I—I say, you fellows, I—I didn't—I mean, I wasn't—that is, I—I never—I say, keep that old beast off!" yelled Bunter, as Colonel Wharton stooped and grasped him, and jerked him from the ground. "I—I say, keep that stick away, you beast! I say—yaroooooh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Help! Whoop!"

"You young rascal!" roared the colonel. Holding Bunter's collar in his left hand, the colonel laid on the walking-stick with his right. "You rascally young impostor—"

Whack, whack!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Take that—"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"—and that—and that!"

"Yaroooooh! Help! Oh, jiminy! Whoop! I say, you fellows—yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There!" gasped the colonel. "Let that be a lesson to you, you young rascal!"

"Ow! Wow!"

Colonel Wharton strode snorting from the tent. Harry Wharton & Co., chuckling, followed him. Billy Bunter, alias the Great Guglielmo, was still roaring, and they left him to roar.

THE END.

(Bunter's in the thick of circus fun and excitement again next week. Look out for our next sparkling cover-to-cover yarn, "THE RASCAL OF THE REMOVE!" But don't forget to order your MAGNET early!)



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THE RETURN OF DOCTOR BIRCHEMALL!

Last Instalment of Dicky Nugent's Rib-Tickling
Serial:

"DOCTOR BIRCHEMALL'S DUBBLE!"

"Fool! Dolt! Idjut!"
Sir Frederick Funguss, dancing frenziedly amid dense clouds of soot, simply shrieked out the words as Professor Willknot Birchermall stepped down from the ladder.

"Sorry, Sir Frederick!" gasped Professor Birchermall. "I swear I didn't drop the soot over you a-purpuss. As a matter of fact, I was carrying it up the ladder to give to the strikers!"

"Ho, indeed! And what, prey, was the idea of giving the strikers soot?" sneered the chairman of the Guvvernors, in his refined voice. "Did they want to disguise themselves as nigger minstrels?"

"Nunno! But I thought they mite find soot useful if their stronghold was attacked from below!"

Sir Frederick pawed in his dance to give the Head an almost fœndish glare.

"You have the ordassity to stand there and admit you were helping the yung raskals who are in revolt against you?" he bellowed. "Of all the barefaced cheek—"

The Head tugged his beard thoughtfully. A cunning gleam had suddenly appeared in his greenish eyes.

"Half a minnit, Sir Frederick!" he said, with a leer. "Let me remind you of the fakts that led to me becoming headmaster of St. Sam's. First you made my cuzzin, Doctor Birchermall, resine. For why? Because he was a tirant! Then you made me Head instead of him. For why? Because I was kind-harted and yewmane!"

"Well?" wrapped out Sir Frederick.

The Head shrugged.

"I'm trying to eggspain that in helping the strikers to have a successful barring-out, I am merely carrying out the principuls on which you asked me to run this skool! You wanted me to be kind and yewmane. That's eggssactly what I am doing! Then what have you got to grumble at?"

Sir Frederick glared up at the winders, which were crowded with grinning rebbls, and farley nashed his teeth with rage.

"My hat! There's half the skool on strike and you ask me what I've got to grumble at!" he said, in a grinding voice. "Let me tell you, Professor Birchermall, that I'm going to do more than grumble! Unless you bring the rebbls to heel in dubble quick time, I'm going to discharge you! Give you the boolit! See? I'll allow you five minnits!"

He whipped out his watch and started eyeing it intently with one eye, while the other glared challengingly at Professor Birchermall.

An eggspression of dismay seemed to appear in the Head's skollary dial. But if you had eggssamined him very closely, you mite have detected beneath the surffiss a very different kind of eggspression—the mocking, crafty look of a man who was hatching a deep and cunning plot!

"Five minnits! It's not long. But still, I'll do my best!" he mermered. Then he made a meggafone of his hands and shouted up to the rebbls: "Boys!"

"Hallo!" yelled back the rebbls. "What do you want, Willie?"

"Egad!" gasped Sir Frederick Funguss, quite feintly. "Do you mean to say they call you 'Willie'?"

"Yes, rather. That's part of my yewmane system!" smirked the Head. "Boys! I wonder if you would be so kind as to stop the strike and return to your lessons?"

There was a yell from the strikers.

"Nothing doing!"

"Not to-day, baker!"

The Head grinned apollojetically.

"I know it's awful cheek on my part, boys, but can't you reconsider your decision and—"

"Not likely!"

"We're fed up with being treated like infants, Willie!" shouted Jack Jolly. "We're staying out on strike till they give us a Head who's a man—not a blessed milkop!"

"Hear, hear!"



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 199.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

August 1st, 1936.



I'D LOVE TO BE A BOY!

Says CLARA TREVLYN

You boys are a lucky lot of bargees! No knitting, no sewing, no piano-playing, no need to be perfect little ladies. Honour bright, I'd swop places with any of you, if I had the chance!

It beats me that any of you can fail to see how lucky you are to be boys. Yet some of you do. Mauleverer, for instance. I bumped into him the other day in Friardale Lano. He was wearing

running kit—and tottowing along as though he was on his last legs! "On your way to the hospital, old bean?" I asked.

"Nunno! Runnin', dear girl," Mauly answered innocently, and he added, with a groan: "That fearfully energetic chap, Cherry, said that if I didn't practise for the mile event in the school sports he wouldn't leave off raggin' me for the rest of the term!"

"Lucky old fellow!" I said enviously. "We don't get half the time you get for sports. We have to do too much knitting and—"

"Knittin'!" sighed Mauly. "What a pleasant pastime! I'd much rather knit than run!"

Rather knit than run, you know! Br-r-r! I could hardly believe I had heard aright. But I could tell by the way he spoke that he actually meant it! I looked at Mauly in wonderment.

"Well, of all the chumps!" I ejaculated. "You don't know when you're well off. What wouldn't I give to be in the thick of all your rags and rough-houses! I bet I'd be as big a scrapper as anybody!"

All Mauly did was to groan again and totter feebly off on his renewed "running" practice!

Funnily enough, on my way back I was given just the chance I could have wished for to show Mauly that I wasn't talking out of the back of my neck. What should I find in almost the same spot but Mauly himself, surrounded by Ponsonby and three other Highcliffe louts, all out for mischief. Mauly was defending himself well, but looked like getting a rough time.

I saw red! I dashed into the fray and hit out right and left. I biffed Pon on the nose and one of his pals on the ear, and I grabbed another by the hair and almost scalped him!

Pon & Co. must have thought a small-sized army had come to the rescue. They yelled and bolted, leaving Mauly and me in victorious possession of the battlefield.

Mauly was completely overcome. He murmured "Oh, gad!" several times, blushed, thanked me, and then fled.

And I fancy he still doesn't realise how lucky he is to be a boy!

(Dashed if we can see what Miss Trevlyn has to grouse about. It strikes us she's more of a boy than we are ourselves!—Ed.)

HONoured AND LUDICROUS SAHIBS!

Applyfully write to me if you wishfully yearn to learn the esteemed and idiotic English language so you can speakfully utter it like an esteemed and absurd native! —HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH, Box No. 77, "Greyfriars Herald."

Professor Birchermall turned to Sir Frederick again with a rewful grin.

"N.G., you see, Sir Frederick!" he said. "I'm afraid my yewmane methods have failed. It grieves me to say so, but the only man who can bring these lads to their senses is a stern disciplinarian!"

"Well, you can't do it, that's a cert!" barked Sir Frederick, as he replaced his watch in his weskit pocket. "You're a failure, Professor Birchermall! There's only one thing left for me to do, and that is to sack you! Go!"

Professor Birchermall boughed.

"Very well, I'll go, Sir Frederick. Are you going to pay me three months' munny in lieu of notiss now? Or would you prefer to send it on by post?"

The chairman of the Guvvernors started violently.

"Well, of all the nerve—"

"I should hate to have to drag you into court about it!" grinned Professor Birchermall. "But, of course, if you don't part up, then—"

Reluctantly Sir Frederick Funguss drew out his purse. A crisp, ruffling note and some odd coins changed hands.

"Now go!" hooted Sir Frederick.

And Professor Willknot Birchermall went.

But he didn't go far. The moment he was hidden by the trees he ran round to the back of the Skool House and sneaked in by the tradesmen's entrance. Two minnits later he was in the Head's study. There, with litening speed, he changed into another suit of clothes. After carefully locking up his left-off clobber, he dodged out of the House again. And very soon afterwards, as Sir Frederick Funguss and his attendant seniors were returning to the House, he bumped right into them.

"Good-morning, Sir Frederick!" he cride cheerfully. "Seen my cuzzin, Professor Birchermall? I've just called to see how he's getting on in my old job!"

The chairman of the St. Sam's Guvvernors jumped.



"Egad! For a moment I thought you were Professor Birchermall yourself! But I remember now, he was wearing a different suit!" he gasped. "You, of course, are the late headmaster, Doctor Birchermall?"

"Eggssactly! Eggscuse my curiosity, Sir Frederick, but you seem to be slitley agitated!" grinned Doctor Birchermall. "Is anything wrong?"

"Yes—everything!" growled Sir Frederick. "I have just discharged your cuzzin. He has proved himself a weak-need idjut who cannot handle boys for toffy. At the moment half of them are barring out against him in the Fourth Form dormitory!"

Doctor Birchermall shook his head sadly.

"Eggssactly what you mite have eggspected with a man like my cuzzin in charge! As a cuzzin and a man, Willie Birchermall has no equal. But as a headmaster, he was fœrdoomed to failure! Now I could end that strike in a jiffy!"

"I daresay you could!" grunted Sir Frederick. "But the Guvvernors have decided that you are too much of a tirant!"

"The Guvvernors are wrong!" said Doctor Birchermall calmly. "Just you put it to the boys!"

Now that they know what it's like to have a yewmane Head, I fancy I know what they'll say!"

Sir Frederick Funguss tugged at his mistosh.

"Egad! If the boys voted to have you back, bust me if I wouldn't give you another chance, Birchermall!"

"Then it's a bargain!" grinned Doctor Birchermall. "You watch me end the strike! After that, we'll put it to the boys. Burleigh! Can I trubble you to fetch me a cupple of birchrods?"

"Oh, crums! Certainly, sir!" gasped Burleigh.

He ran into the House and reappeared a minnit later, carrying two stout birchrods. Doctor Birchermall then led the way back to the ladder, which was still reared up to the winders of the Fourth Form dormitory. A moment later, with one birchrod gripped in his right hand and the other between his teeth, he was storming up the ladder.

A cry of sheer amazement went up when the strikers spotted him.

"My hat! It's the old Head!"

"Look out, you fellows!"

Before they could say more, Doctor Birchermall was diving through the open window. An instant later his birchrods were lashing out right and left! Bang! Crash! Wallop! Thud!

"Yarooooooo!!!"

"Help!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"Pax, sir!" gasped Jack Jolly. "If you've come back, the strike's over. It was your cuzzin we were striking against—not you!"

Then the Head desisted.

"Go to the winders, boys, and vote for me to be made Head again!" he grinned.

The breathless juniors crowded to the winders. From the quad. beneath them they heard Sir Frederick Funguss call out:

"Will all those in favour of Doctor Birchermall being Head again say 'Aye'?" And with one accord they yelled back a defening "Aye!"

That settled it! Doctor Birchermall was made headmaster of St. Sam's again there and then. And the strikers, happy in the nollidge that their days of fizzick and fairy tales were over, cheered and cheered again. Admittedly, Doctor Birchermall was a tirant. But after their eggspériences with his cuzzin, the boys felt releevéd to know that he was raining over them once more.

Later, in the privacy of his study, the Head larfed till the tears ran down his wrinkled dial.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" he roared. "I'm back in my old place, more powerful than ever—and with three months' extra munny with which I can pay off all my detts! And I don't suppose for a moment that anyone will ever guess that Professor Birchermall and Doctor Birchermall were one and the same all the time!"

And nobody ever did!

THE END.

(Another full-of-laugh adventure of the chums of St. Sam's next week, featuring Jack Jolly & Co. and Dr. Birchermall at the seaside. Don't miss Dicky Nugent's latest scream!)

"SEA" THE POINT?

We learn on reliable authority that when Coker & Co. took their first dip of the year, Potter and Greene became so fed up with Coker that they roped him up to a windlass on the beach, and left him there while they had their swim.

On returning, they had a shock. Coker had escaped and walked off with their clobber!

The "tied" turned sooner than they expected!

HOW GREYFRIARS "WEEDS" BASHED PONSONBY!

Told by BOB CHERRY

When Ponsonby & Co., the so-called "knuts" of Highcliffe, crowned their recent series of assaults on Greyfriars men by going for Oliver Kipps, I made up my mind it was time something was done. I could have stood it if they'd just given Kipps a ragging and left it at that. But they didn't. They had to tie his hands behind his back and jam his butterfly net over his head, and send him back to Greyfriars labelled "TO-DAY'S CAPTURE. TYPICAL SPECIMEN OF A GREYFRIARS WEED."

I was the first one to spot Kipps—and also the first one to gather a few Removites and plump for action.

"We're not taking this lying down, lads," I said. "Pon & Co. want bashing, and they're going to get it!"

"Hear, hear! But how?" asked Johnny Bull.

I wrinkled my noble brow and thought it over. And then suddenly came the brainwave.

"Got it!" I whooped. "Just for Pon & Co.'s benefit, let's all be weeds!"

And we duly tried it. Wharton and Bull and Russell and your humble rigged ourselves up as butterfly snatchers and wended our weedy way to the woods.

Did Pon fall for it? What-ho! As we dithered through the woods, nearing Highcliffe, Pon & Co. jumped out on us. There were five of them—just enough to account for four "weeds," they'd imagined. Oh, yes, old pals, Pon & Co. waded in with great heartiness, I can tell you!

Chuckling away our glasses and butterfly nets, we turned to meet our friends,

"Eh?"

"Pon is always ready to go for a weedy-looking chap. Well, let's be weedy ourselves! We can wear glasses and put a little chalk on our chivvies—and Pon will think we're just his mutton! And then, when he starts his tricks, he'll get his awakening!"

"My hat!"

"Think it'll work?" asked Russell dubiously.

"It's worth trying, anyway!" Harry Wharton grinned.

And we duly tried it. Wharton and Bull and Russell and your humble rigged ourselves up as butterfly snatchers and wended our weedy way to the woods.

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Chuckling away our glasses and butterfly nets, we turned to meet our friends,

SEASIDE NOT EXCITING? ASK OGILVY!

Chuckles DICK RUSSELL

When our people agreed to Ogilvy and I spending a fortnight of the last vac. on our own, the trouble was to decide where to go. I plumped for Brighton or Blackpool or Margate. Ogilvy wanted to go mountaineering in the Alps. He said the seaside wasn't exciting enough.

When we got down to studying fares, Ogilvy reluctantly agreed that the Alps might be just a bit too expensive. So he fell in with my ideas, and off we went to Margate.

"But, mind you, it's not the kind of holiday I'd take for preference," he growled, as we got off the train at Margate Station. "It's not exciting enough for me."

Funny how things happen. No sooner had he said that than a two-year-old boy fell off the platform between two coaches, just as the train was about to move.

And Ogilvy was the first to dive after him!

"Which only shows that it is possible to get excitement at the seaside!" I remarked, as we got into our taxi.

But we hadn't finished with excitement. In fact, we'd hardly begun!

Believe it or not, five minutes later our taxi collided with a lorry, and we were both carted off to hospital and treated for cuts and shock!

Then we started our

holiday in earnest. Ogilvy swam out a distance, got cramp, and was saved in the nick of time!

On the following day, when we were walking along the cliffs, an aeroplane came down with engine trouble, missing Ogilvy's head by a bare inch.

The day after that a dog on the beach went potty and attacked Ogilvy—fortunately being overpowered and dragged away before any damage was done.

There's no space to tell you all the rest, but that's how the holiday went on, right to the end.

Ogilvy has changed his ideas about seaside holidays now.

He still thinks he'll choose the Alps next time, but the reason is different.

It's because the seaside is just a little too exciting for him!