

BUNTER'S BIG BLUFF!

By S. Q. I. FIELD (of the Greyfriars Remove)



Mr. Quelch has often had to reprimand Bunter for his ventriloquial tricks, but there came a time when he thanked his lucky stars that Bunter was a ventriloquist.



EVERYONE knows that Billy Bunter is a ventriloquist. But not many people are aware that he was once threatened with the order of the boot if he ever again practised ventriloquism. Nor do they know of the strange happenings that afterwards led to Mr. Quelch looking on Bunter's peculiar gift with a more lenient eye.

Funnily enough, both the ban and the lifting of the ban arose out of the same cause—the presence of a suspicious character in the neighbourhood of the school.

Several fellows had seen a fishy-looking cove hanging about and the matter had been reported to the Head. The Head, having consulted the police, had learned that the stranger was possibly an ex-convict, only recently released, who belonged to a gang that was suspected of having hidden a whole lot of swag in the Friardale district. As a result of this disclosure, the Head had taken the precaution of ordering everybody to stay indoors after dark—and, as it was mid-December, when it got dark before tea, that meant we were unable to get across to the tuckshop for supplies after midday.

You can just imagine how Bunter

felt about that. Even if he succeeded in borrowing a bob or two, he couldn't get to the tuckshop to spend it! It was simply awful for the poor old porpoise. All he could do was to go foraging in the House itself. And as everybody was indoors and most studies were occupied, that didn't do him a lot of good.

So Bunter, in desperation, started clearing the studies one at a time with the aid of his ventriloquism. Which was quite a bright wheeze of his, if only he had used his savvy at the same time. Unfortunately, Bunter doesn't possess a lot of savvy, and his imagination didn't take him further than imitating Mr. Quelch's voice and ordering chaps to go to Mr. Quelch's study!

It wasn't long before our gimlet-eyed Beak smelt a rat, I can assure you! He'd known occasions before when fellows had reported to him, thinking he'd called them, and he had a pretty shrewd idea what was going on. After half-a-dozen chaps had called on him in succession, Quelch grabbed a cane and trotted up to the Remove passage and found Bunter

Of course, Bunter rolled out lavish

denials. He said he respected Mr. Quelch far too much to play such tricks on him. Other fellows might think Mr. Quelch a beast, but he admired and respected him himself; he wouldn't dream of using his ventriloquism like that. In any case, he wasn't a ventriloquist—and so on. But all his denials were useless. Quelch yanked him down to his study.

Then came the solemn ban. After giving Bunter six of the best, Mr. Quelch told Bunter he intended reporting the matter to the Head, and then issued this warning: that the next time Bunter was caught playing ventriloquial tricks, he would recommend the Head to expel him!

Bunter was in the dickens of a state when he rolled back to the Remove quarters. No more ventriloquism! Why, he was losing almost his sole means of livelihood! For the rest of that evening Bunter was like a man in a dream.

Probably it was worrying his fat brain about it that kept him awake. Whatever the reason, Bunter couldn't get to sleep that night.

As time went on, Bunter became conscious of something. He was feeling rather peckish.

He heard eleven strike. After the last stroke had died away, the House seemed very silent.

Bunter came to a sudden decision. He would hop downstairs and try his luck in the pantry. Nobody would be about.

He rolled out of bed, put on a dressing-gown (mine, as a matter of fact) and quitted the dorm. But Bunter found his summing-up had been wrong. There *was* somebody about!

That "somebody," as it happened, was a hefty-looking chap with a

life-preserver in his hand and a mask on his face—and when Bunter rolled along, he was just about to enter Mr. Quelch's study!

Bunter gasped. The man in the mask whirled round.

"Make a sound and you'll get this on your head!" he hissed, raising the life-preserver. "You go in first!"

Bunter tottered into the Remove master's study. Mr. Quelch looked up.

"Bunter! What are you——"

Mr. Quelch broke off and jumped to his feet as the masked intruder slipped in and closed and locked the door behind him.

"Quiet, you!" growled the crook. "I won't hurt you—so long as you do what I tell you! Your name's Quelch, ain't it?"

Mr. Quelch, breathless with surprise, nodded.

"Right! Then you're the expert that knows all about the underground tunnel that leads from this here school to the ruins in Friardale Woods. There's something in the third vault from the woods that I want. You're going to show me to that particular vault or you'll get something you won't like. See?"

Mr. Quelch nodded again. He could see that it was useless to argue with this desperate-looking customer.

"I'm told there's a secret panel leading to the vaults from this room," the crook went on. "We'll go that way. It'll be safer. You'll come, too!" he added to Bunter.

"The entrance from this room has been closed and sealed for some time," Quelch said coldly.

"We'll open it up again, then!" snarled the man in the mask.

He did so without a lot of difficulty. And with the crook at the back lighting their way with a torch,



Mr. Quelch and Bunter, with the crook behind them, were descending the steps to the vaults when a voice rang out from the direction of the Form-master's study. "Stop! I've got you covered! Hands up, there!" The crook gave a snarl as he swung round—but up went his hands.

Mr. Quelch and Bunter went down into the vaults! And then Mr. Quelch thought of Bunter's ventriloquism!

"Bunter!" he muttered, as they groped their way down the stone steps. "If you could only deceive him with a ventriloquial trick——"

Bunter gasped. Then his eyes gleamed in the dim light.

Suddenly, a voice rang out from the direction of Mr. Quelch's study.

"Stop! I've got you covered! Hands up, there!"

The crook gave a snarl of rage. But his hands went up!

"Wingate! 'Phone for the police!" said the voice. "North! Loder! Walker! Bring your rifles over here—and if that scoundrel tries any tricks, shoot him without hesitation!"

"Yes, sir!" came a muffled reply—apparently from within the study!

"Come, Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "We will go up first. How lucky that the others arrived in time!"

The Remove master and Bunter returned, leaving the raging crook standing in the vault with his hands above his head—fully under the impression that a crowd of armed men were awaiting him at the top of the steps!

Back in the study, of course, Mr. Quelch soon had things fixed up. He telephoned for the police first; then sent Bunter for help. Within five minutes, the crook was a prisoner in the hands of a crowd of burly seniors and the danger was over.

What a triumph it was for the old porpoise! He had accomplished the capture of a dangerous burglar and enabled the police to recover a big haul of stolen property.

But even that didn't please him quite so much as the fact that Mr. Quelch lifted the ban on his ventriloquism. And now you know how it is that Bunter remains a ventriloquist to this very day!