

Billy Bunter and Harry Wharton & Co. in Another Exciting Circus Adventure!

The Magnet

2^d



**WHERE MY
CARAVAN
HAS RESTED!**

DON'T WAIT TO BE INVITED—



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

THE first letter to hand this week comes from Robert Ponsford, of Taunton. Bob asks me which is the oldest and most popular boy's paper on the market?

What about the MAGNET, Bob? This week's issue is numbered 1,488, which means that for close on twenty-nine years boys and girls have read and enjoyed the stirring adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars. And what's more, no one has ever yet complained of a story being a "dud," which is a clear proof that the MAGNET is the ideal school-story paper for all boys and girls.

As your Editor, I feel bound to thank my many thousands of chums for the magnificent way in which they have supported the MAGNET, and also for the way in which they have secured new readers. Almost daily letters reach me from staunch chums who have read the MAGNET since its very earliest days and who read it now before passing it on to their sons and daughters! If your chums have not yet met Harry Wharton & Co., introduce them to-day, so that the MAGNET may remain as it is now—the most popular book for boys and girls on the market!

Readers both new and old will thoroughly enjoy:

"THE HERO OF THE CIRCUS!"

By Frank Richards,

the next yarn in our grand circus series. Enraged beyond measure at Billy Bunter bagging his ventriloquial show, Tippet Tip does all in his power to get rid of the fat runaway schoolboy from Greyfriars. Fortune favours the Owl of the Remove, however, with the result that the fat junior captures the admiration and gratitude of the beautiful queen of the ring. Of what happens afterwards, I do not intend to tell you here, other than that Ferrers Locke, the famous Baker Street detective, having taken notice of Bunter's tattle concerning Muccolini's spying activities, takes an interest in the case. Cunning as the signor is, it remains to be seen whether he is a match for Ferrers Locke! This grand yarn together with another topical issue of the "Greyfriars Herald" will be well worth the twopence you spend on next Saturday's MAGNET.

"THE FAMOUS FOUR!"

Every reader of our present Greyfriars stories is well acquainted with the Famous Five. But in the early days, before Johnny Bull arrived, the leading Co. consisted of Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent and Hurree Singh, who became known as the Famous Four. The first exciting story of their adventures as the Famous Four appears in our popular companion paper, the "Gem," and I'm sure every MAGNETITE will find great interest and enjoyment in reading it.

Those of you who have not yet sampled the early yarns of Greyfriars, written by Frank Richards, should make a point of getting this week's story. It has my

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strongest recommendation. Ask your newsagent for a copy of the "Gem" to-day. It's the usual price, 2d.

THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

All of you must have noticed the posters displayed in the windows of the best firework retailers, inviting you to join the Brock's "Firework Club." For the benefit of those who have not yet taken advantage of this scheme, I am going to tell you what it is all about.

You simply go into a shop displaying the Firework Club notice, and ask for a membership card. Then, if you are not under thirteen years of age, a card will be issued to you on payment of your first subscription, which may be a halfpenny or a penny or whatever sum you care to put down for a start. You then continue to pay in your subscription (any sum) as often as you like until early October, each sum being entered on your card, and on or before November 4th you choose goods to the value of your total subscriptions. Perfectly simple, isn't it? Think what a splendid heap of fireworks you will have—especially if father adds a few.

My tip to you boys is to keep watch for announcements about the Club, and when you see the card in a shop window go right in and get enrolled. Most of your pals will be in the scheme you'll find.

WHICH IS THE RAINIEST PLACE IN BRITAIN?

This is the question which Jack Turner, of Manchester, asks me. Manchester often receives the credit for having the most rainfall in these islands, but this is not correct. Borrowdale, in the Lake District, has the greatest rainfall, amounting to about 170 inches of rain per year. The East Coast has the least rainfall, amounting only to about 20 inches per year. Here are some further particulars concerning our weather:

The stormiest place in Britain is in the neighbourhood of Stornoway; the coldest place is Ben Nevis; the most thundery spots are the Midlands and East Anglia; and the sunniest spot is Guernsey. Incidentally, it is curious to know that the Scottish Highlands, far from being so bleak and miserable as most people think they are, get much more sun than we do in London! London has about 1,203 hours of sunshine in a year!

Ever heard of

A WHITE NEGRO,

chums? There is one—on the island of Haiti, in the West Indies. At one time he was as black as any other negro. He went to a voodoo witch-doctor to be cured of asthma, and the witch-doctor gave him some beans upon which, he said, he had placed a spell. The negro ate the beans. They cured his asthma all right—but they made his black skin peel off. It was replaced with white skin. Professors and doctors have examined him, and analysed the beans. They found nothing

unusual about the beans, and are completely baffled by the negro's change of colour. As Haiti is a country in which negroes rule over white people, the white negro is trying to turn himself black again, but with no effect. He is in a very unevidable position, for white people cut him because he is a negro, and other negroes shun him because he is white!

Here's another interesting item of news—this time from the Northern Territory of Australia.

HOUSES BUILT FROM ANT HILLS

are to be found there. The ant hills are frequently constructed to a very great height—sometimes as high as twenty feet! Millions of ants live in each hill, which goes down deep into the earth, and is a mass of intricate tunnels. If a piece of the hill is crushed and mixed with water, it bears a great resemblance to concrete, and is so strong that huts can be constructed of it. Ovens are made from the "concrete" of the ant hills, as it will resist fire.

IF you keep goldfish, you'll be interested to hear about

THE MAN WITH 250,000 GOLDFISH!

Ten years ago he started off with half a dozen goldfish in a glass bowl. Now he has a "fish farm" of six acres, and his stock and plant is valued at £12,000. He deals in all kinds of goldfish and tropical fish, and sells the fish he breeds to all parts of the world. His tanks have to be kept at certain temperatures and are fitted with radiators with individual controls. Every day he has to provide his fish with their various rations, including dried shrimps, dried meat, Dutch fleas, tiny beetles, and garden worms. Some of his goldfish are worth as much as £50 apiece!

You'd hardly think that there were

TOO MANY DEER,

and in England, of all places! But there are more than four hundred wild deer roaming the countryside near Ashridge, Hertfordshire. Originally, they were a small tame herd, but now the herd has increased enormously, and has become wild. The deer hide during the day, but they come out at nights and have a rare old time! They eat as much as they can, and destroy many crops. Whole fields of turnips have been eaten, and corn has been trampled flat by them. But the wild deer aren't going to have it all their own way! A "drive" is to be organised, and the deer are to be rounded up.

To wind up this chat of mine. Here are a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to shorter queries sent in by various readers:

What is "Hitch-Hiking"? It consists of making journeys not by biking properly, but by begging lifts from passing motorists, lorry-drivers, and so on. It is carried out a great deal in America.

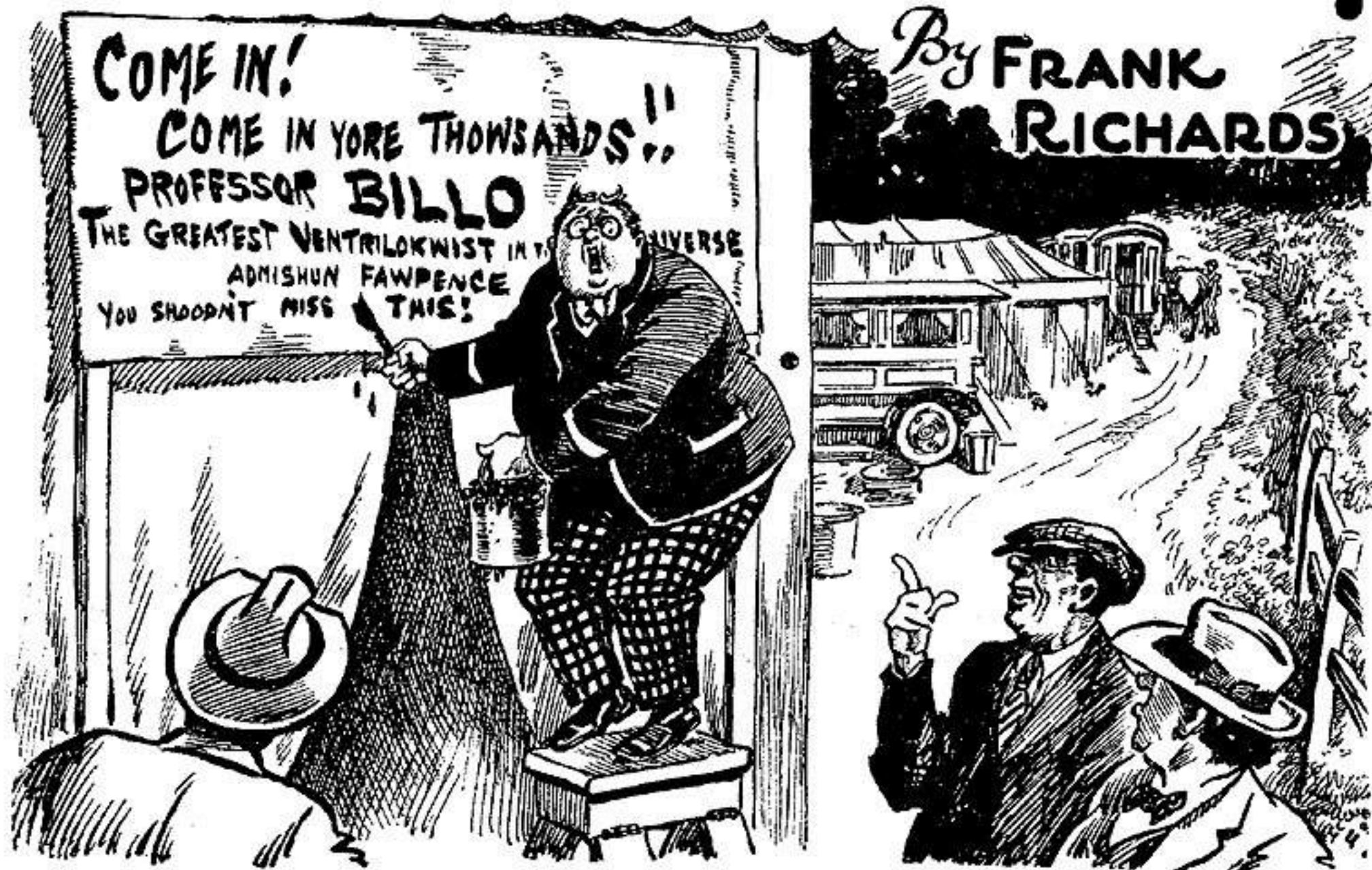
Is a Frog a Fish? No, it is an animal. But it has taken weeks of legal contention in Paris to settle the matter so far as France is concerned. Even so, the French have not classified the frog as an animal. At the present moment it is in a class by itself over there—neither fish, animal nor game!

What is a Flying-Squid? A species of squid or octopus which has two lateral fins. These enable them to leap so high out of the water that they sometimes fall on ships' decks.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE SIGNOR'S SECRET!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Starring HARRY WHARTON & Co. and BILLY BUNTER, the prize "porpoise" of Greyfriars.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Cheeking Coker!

"DON'T jaw!"
"But—"

Bob Cherry grinned as that voice reached his ears. It had an old, familiar sound. He had not heard it since Greyfriars School broke up for the summer holidays. But he knew it at once. The voice of Coker of the Fifth was distinctive. So was his choice way of expressing himself.

Bob was at a distance. But Coker's voice had great carrying powers. Coker was talking to his friends, Potter and Greene. But he might have been talking to all the county of Kent, if not to all the southern counties. He lawled.

Wheeling his bike up a rather steep lane, a few miles from Folkestone, Bob spotted a little car ahead, at a halt, with three figures standing by it. From one of them proceeded the voice that might have excited the envy of the ancient Bull of Bashan.

Apparently, something was wrong with the car. That was not surprising, as it was Coker's car. It would have been surprising if something hadn't been wrong.

"Jaw, jaw, jaw!" went on Coker. "Not a drop of juice in the tank, and all you fellows can do is to jaw, jaw, jaw!"

"You forgot to fill up—" said Potter.

"I said don't jaw!" Coker pointed out.

"You left out the extra can—" said Greene.

"Jaw, jaw, jaw!" said Coker bitterly. "If jawing could fill that tank, it would

be running over! Here we are, landed goodness knows where, and not a drop of juice! Miles from everywhere, and not even a native to be seen. We've not to get juice from somewhere. What we want is juice, not jaw!"

"Here comes a kid with a bike!" said Potter.

"Oh, good!" Coker looked round. "We can send him for some petrol." He waved his hand. "Hi!"

Bob Cherry pushed on his bike towards the halted car.

Signor Muccolini, the circus proprietor, has a secret to hide—and Billy Bunter knows it and trades upon that knowledge. But spying is a dangerous game, and the signor would be very uneasy did he but know that his secret activities have attracted the attention of cuter brains than Billy Bunter's!

Half a mile farther up the hill, the Famous Five of Greyfriars had camped in a meadow, under shady trees. Bob had ridden down to the village for supplies, while Harry Wharton went to a farmhouse for eggs and milk, and Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Hurree Singh made other preparations for lunch. On Bob's bike-carrier was a large rush basket packed with provisions from the village store.

Bob was in a hurry to get back to camp. The Greyfriars cyclists had done a good many miles since breakfast that morning, and they were more than ready for lunch. Still, Bob was a good-natured fellow, and more than willing to help a motorist in distress. At least, he could tell Coker of the Fifth the nearest place at which to obtain the much-needed juice.

"Hi!" shouted Coker impatiently.

The lane was steep, like many of the lanes in the hills round Folkestone. Bob had gone down it like the wind; but he was going up it again at a much more moderate speed, wheeling the laden bike. But Coker was not in a patient mood. He seldom was, and now he was less so than ever.

"Hi!" roared Coker, waving a large hand. "Hi! Buck up! I want you!"

The fact that Horace Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars wanted anybody was a sufficient reason for that body to buck up, of course. As soon as Coker waved his hand and shouted "Hi!" the kid with the bike ought to have come up with a rush. Instead of which, he was wheeling on at precisely the same pace as before. Which naturally irritated Coker who knew, if nobody else did, what an important fellow he was.

"These fatheaded country bumpkins!" growled Coker, in disgust. "Hi! You young ass! Get a move on! Hi!"

"That's a Greyfriars kid!" remarked Potter.

"Young Cherry of the Remove!" said Greene, with a nod.

"Is it?" said Coker. "Oh! Yes! So it is! Well, he can cut off and get us some juice!"

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"Better ask him civilly!" suggested Potter.

"Don't be an ass, Potter!"

"Look here, Coker!" said Greene. "We're in a fix, and that kid's come along in the nick of time. If he will cut off on his bike and get us some petrol—"

"No 'if' about it!" said Coker. "He's going to!" He waved and bawled again: "Here, buck up! You young idiot, can't you see I'm waiting for you?"

Bob pushed on cheerfully. He reached the halted car at length, and Coker rewarded him with a glare.

"You young ass!" he snapped. "Didn't you hear me call?"

"My dear chap, I could have heard you if I'd been across in Boulogne," answered Bob. "Were you calling me, or somebody in France?"

Potter and Greene grinned. Coker frowned.

"I don't want any check!" snorted Coker. "I've whopped you often enough for lip at Greyfriars, and if you want a whopping in the hols, you've only got to ask for it! You won't have to ask twice."

"We're short of petrol—" Potter began.

"Shut up, Potter! Now, look here, Cherry—"

"Looking!" said Bob cheerily. "You're not pretty to look at, Coker, old bean, but I'm looking! Carry on!"

Coker's eyes gleamed. He was in no mood to stand check from a Remove junior.

It was Coker's car. Coker was in command. Any suggestion or reminder from Potter or Greene, Coker treated with the contempt it deserved. So it was entirely due to Horace himself, that the motoring party were stranded in that hilly lane, miles from everywhere.

But that fact, perfectly clear to his friends, was by no means clear to Coker.

Had Potter or Greene asked him that morning whether he had filled up, or whether he had put in the spare can, Coker would have overwhelmed them with scorn. It would have been sheer impertinence to suggest that Coker might possibly have forgotten or overlooked anything.

Nevertheless, he had!

So he took the view that they might have seen to it, or at least reminded a chap!

That was the way Coker's brain worked.

Already, as he regarded it, landed in a rotten fix by the fatheadedness of his friends, and suspecting that they blamed him instead of blaming themselves, Coker was in a wrathful temper. Not at all in a temper to take check from a fag of the Greyfriars Lower Fourth!

However, be it said to Coker's credit, that he restrained his just wrath. He did not slay Bob Cherry on the spot. His eyes gleamed, and his fists clenched, but he checked his natural desire to smite that cheeky junior hip and thigh.

Bob had halted his bike. Certainly he had no intention of keeping his chums waiting for lunch, while he repeated his journey to a village two miles away. But he was willing to do all he could.

"Is there a petrol station anywhere in this dashed wilderness?" asked Coker, speaking as calmly as he could.

"One at the village," answered Bob.

"Is it far?"

"Just on two miles. Keep down this lane, turn to the left, pass the air camp, and then—"

"Pack up all that!" yapped Coker. "I'm not going! You are! I'll tip you five bob, if you like!"

"Keep it to buy a book on manners," suggested Bob.

Coker breathed hard.

"Now, look here—" he said.

"Still looking!" said Bob. "But I can't keep it up much longer!"

"What!"

"Think of the strain on my eyes, you know!"

Coker made a stride towards him. The suggestion that his countenance put a strain on a fellow's eyesight seemed to excite him.

Potter and Greene simultaneously pushed him back.

"For goodness' sake, Coker, don't kick up a shindy now!" exclaimed Potter. "Look here, kid! If you'd oblige us by cutting off on your bike and getting us some petrol—"

"Shut up, Potter!" roared Coker.

He pushed Potter to one side, Greene to the other. Then he towered over Bob, glaring.

"Now, you young tick, listen to me!" he said. "Shove that bag off your bike, and put this can on. Got it filled at the village, and bring it back. And look sharp! It's most downhill, and it won't take you long to get there. And ride back! Don't walk, pushing that jigger. Don't be a lazy young slacker, see? I can't wait about here all day for a slacking young scoundrel. Got that?"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"You put it so nicely, Coker, that I hate to refuse!" he said. "But, you see, my pals are camped up the hill, waiting for lunch, and I'm taking in the grub. Sorry, and all that; but there you are!"

"You cheeky little tick—"

"You'll have to walk down to the village," said Bob. "It's called Hawkinge—anybody you meet will tell you the way. Good-bye, Coker!"

He pushed on the bike.

But he did not push it on far.

Coker was at the limit of his patience—such as it was! He made a bound at the Remove junior.

Bob's bike went over with a clang and a crash. Bob went over, too, in Horace Coker's hefty grasp.

"Now, then—" gasped Coker.

"You mad ass!" roared Bob, struggling. "Leggo!"

"Now, I tell you—"

"Will you leggo, you potty rhinoceros!"

"I've told you what I want you to do, and I can say—yaroooooooh!" roared Coker, as the junior's fist crashed on his nose. "Ow! Woooooh!"

Coker staggered for a moment. The next, Bob Cherry was rolling in the dust, and Coker of the Fifth was rolling over him. And the dust rose in clouds in the August sunshine as they rolled.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's New Stunt!

BILLY BUNTER stepped from a big, gaudily painted caravan.

The fat ornament of the Greyfriars Remove blinked round him through a pair of big spectacles, which flashed back the rays of the sun as he blinked.

Muccolini's Magnificent Circus was pitched in a field adjoining the Canterbury road, outside Folkestone.

Bunter blinked round for Signor Muccolini, the proprietor of the Magnificent Circus. Failing to spot the beefy figure and swarthy face of the Italian Circus-master, he called to

Mr. Tippity Tip, the clown, who was in the offing.

"Here, Tip!"

Tippity Tip glanced round.

Bunter's tone was sharp and haughty, as became a gentleman, a Public school man, and a scion of the noble race of Bunter, in dealing with so common a person as a circus clown.

Mr. Tip did not seem pleased, however. Perhaps he did not realise Billy Bunter's immense superiority to the common herd. Lots of people didn't.

"Did you squeak?" asked Mr. Tip.

"Eh? If you mean did I speak, I did!" snapped Bunter.

"I didn't mean did you speak—I meant what I said—did you squeak?" said Tippity. "Did you, or was it one of that farmer's pigs got into the field?"

Billy Bunter frowned at the circus clown. He wrinkled his fat brows over his spectacles in the sternest of frowns.

Instead of being crushed thereby, as he ought to have been, Tippity Tip turned away again, and went on with his occupation.

Tippity, who did a ventriloquial stunt in one of the side-shows, was busy getting his tent ready. Wiggles, the contortionist, and Somson, the strong man, were lending him helping hands.

Wiggles and Samson grinned, just as if there was something amusing in Tippity's cheek to the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

"Where's Mucky?" snapped Bunter, addressing the back of Mr. Tip's head.

"Don't be cheeky! Where's Mucky?"

"Find out!" replied Mr. Tip over his shoulder.

Bunter breathed hard. He was strongly tempted to kick the clown for his cheek. That would have been a right and proper proceeding; but kicking was a game at which two could play, and Mr. Tip was probably better at it than Bunter.

So the fat junior of Greyfriars contented himself with a contemptuous sniff, and rolled away, looking for "Mucky"—otherwise Signor Pietro Muccolini, boss of the Magnificent Circus.

"I say, Marco, seen Mucky?" he asked, as he came across Marco the lion-tamer, talking to Zara, the Queen of the Ring.

"Gone out, I think," answered Marco. "I know he was going in his car."

"Gone out?" repeated Bunter.

"Why, I told him I wanted to speak to him! Mean to say he's gone out, when he knows I wanted him!"

Marco turned and looked at Bunter. Zara fixed her dark eyes on him.

In the Magnificent Circus, Signor Muccolini swaggered, as if he owned not merely the circus, but the earth on which it stood. Yet, for some reason which nobody at the circus understood, he allowed the fat junior of Greyfriars to hang on to the circus and put up with almost unlimited impudence from him.

"You cheeky little ass!" said Marco. "Is the boss at your orders? If Mucky heard that, he would lay his whip round you."

"I'd like to see him do it!" sneered Bunter. He rolled away towards the corner of the field where a number of cars and lorries were parked.

Zara's glance followed him, puzzled.

"Why does the boss put up with his cheek, Marco?" she asked.

The lion-tamer shrugged his broad shoulders.

"No good asking me that!" he said. "Mucky would sack a man for a word—"

or a look—and he lets that fat young rascal cheek him as much as he pleases. If it was possible, I should suppose that Mucky was under his thumb somehow.”

Zara laughed.
 “That is hardly possible,” she said.
 “I suppose not—but it looks like that. You have only to see the way Mucky looks at him to see that he can hardly keep his hands off him sometimes,” said Marco. “Yet he does not kick him out—why?”

That was a puzzle to the whole circus, as well as Marco and Zara. Certainly, from the way Billy Bunter carried on, it looked as if he had power in his fat hands.

The gaudy caravan occupied by Billy Bunter belonged to the signor. Bunter had taken possession of it, and the signor had not said him nay. Why, was a deep mystery.

master, and Mucky did not want to draw more attention to it.

He halted, and Bunter came panting up to the car.

“Look here——” he gasped.
 The Italian’s black eyes blazed at him.

“Grasso porco—fat pig!” he muttered between his teeth. “Have you no sense? Have you no brain? Do you want all the circus, and everybody else, to know that you are trading on a secret you have spied out?”

“Oh, chuck it!” said Bunter. “I don’t want any lip! I told you I wanted to speak to you, and now I’ve only just stopped you clearing off——”

“Fat fool! Speak, then!” hissed the Italian. “What do you want?”

“I want civility, to begin with!” said Bunter coolly. “I’m not taking fancy names from a dashed dago. If you’re

scrupulous himself, did Billy Bunter an injustice.

Bunter had his own weird way of looking at things. His view was that one good turn deserved another. He was keeping a secret for the Italian, and, in return, Mucky was putting him up at the circus.

But the fat and fatuous Owl of Greyfriars had his limit. Had he extorted money from Muccolini, even Bunter could not have been blind to the rascality of the action. And Billy Bunter had never been a rascal in his own eyes!

Bunter had a conscience—though it was true that it was a very elastic and accommodating one!

“How much do you want?” breathed Muccolini.

“Eh? As much as I can get, of course,” answered Bunter, blinking at him in surprise.



At the limit of his patience, Coker made a bound at Bob Cherry. Bob’s bike went over with a clang and a crash, and the Removite went over, too, in the Fifth Former’s hefty grasp. “Now, then——” gasped Coker. “Leggo, you potty rhinoceros!” roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter’s fat brow was wrathful as he hurried away to see whether Mucky had yet started in his car. An engine was buzzing, and he spotted the signor’s car moving down the track to the road. The Italian was driving.

“Hold on!” shouted Bunter.
 If Signor Muccolini heard, he did not heed. Without looking at Bunter, he drove on towards the gateway on the road.

Bunter broke into a run.
 “Stop!” he shouted. “Do you hear me, Mucky? Stop, I tell you!”
 Signor Muccolini’s dark face, never very pleasant in expression, became darker and more unpleasant. His black eyes glittered, and his teeth gritted under his bushy moustache.

But he stopped the car.
 A dozen ears heard Bunter’s shout. There was already talk enough in the Magnificent Circus on the subject of Bunter’s amazing cheek to the circus-

tired of me here, I’m ready to go, as I’ve told you more than once. I’m staying on as a favour to you. I don’t expect gratitude—but I want civility, see?”

“Will you tell me what you want?” breathed the signor. “You have fastened yourself on my circus, and I have not kicked you out. You have taken possession of my caravan, and I have not stopped you. What else do you want, furfante?”

“If you’ll shut up, I’ll tell you!” said Bunter. “I’m going to start a new side-show. You see, I’ve run out of money.”

“Money?” repeated Muccolini.
 He gave the fat junior quite a wolfish look. As a matter of fact, he had been surprised that the young rascal who knew his secret had never, so far, extorted anything from him in that line. He expected it—and now, he fancied, it was coming!

But in that the Italian, utterly un-

“Fool! Name your sum!” hissed the Italian. “You had better be moderate, or I cannot give you what you want.”

Billy Bunter looked at him. The signor’s meaning dawned on him.

“You rotten dago!” he said, with supreme contempt. “Do you think I’m sticking you for money? I suppose that’s just what a putrid dago would think! Yah!”

Signor Muccolini stared at him. Having no limit himself in the rascality line, he had not supposed that Bunter had! Still, it was a relief to him to see that he was mistaken.

“What do you mean, then?” he snarled.

“I mean what I say,” answered Bunter. “I did a crystal-gazing stunt when the circus was at Brighton, but I’ve chucked that! I’ve thought of a new wheeze. I’m short of cash; and I don’t care to write to any of my wealthy relations——”

"Will you come to the point?"
 "Yes, if you don't keep on interrupting me. I'm going to start a ventriloquial side-show—"

"There is already one in the circus—Tip's!" snapped the signor. "There is no room for two."

"I can ventriloquise Tip's silly head off!" said Bunter contemptuously. "Nobody will patronise his rotten show when I get going. When we were at Hastings, I offered to go Co. with him and he refused. In fact, he chucked a can of paint at me—that's the sort of gratitude I get, in return for my kindness. So I'm going to start a show myself."

"Tip will object—"
 "That's what I'm coming to!" said Bunter. "You're to speak to Tip, and tell him he's not to kick up any vulgar shindy. I decline to enter into any low dispute with a circus clown. See?"

"Cospetto! But—"
 "You needn't argue about it," said Bunter. "Speak to Tip before you go out. I can't have him interfering. I want a tent for the show. Tip's tent will do. Tell him I'm to have it. I suppose you can give orders to a clown in your own circus."

Signor Muccolini seemed about to choke. But he nodded.

"Send Tip to me!" he said.
 "Right-ho!" said Bunter cheerily.

"Wait here, and I'll send him along."

And Billy Bunter rolled away. Signor Muccolini stared after him. He would have given a week's takings at the circus to step from the car and kick Bunter out of the field. But a foreign spy who dreaded the revelation of his secret could not venture on such measures.

But his scowling face broke into a grim and savage grin.

Billy Bunter was going to start a rival ventriloquial side-show, regardless of Tippity Tip's feelings on the subject, which were certain to be strong. He was going to take possession of the tent put up for Tippity's show as cheerfully as he had taken possession of the signor's caravan.

True, the tent was Muccolini's property, and Mr. Tip was under his orders. Tippity would have had no choice in the matter, if Muccolini exercised his authority, as Bunter told him to do.

For which reason, Signor Muccolini, as soon as Bunter disappeared, put his car into motion and drove out into the road.

Bunter, under the impression that the circus-master had made it all right with Tippity, would be going ahead. Tippity, having received no orders on the subject, would act as his feelings dictated—probably with great vigour. As Signor Muccolini drove up the steep road inland, he felt quite bucked at the prospect of what would probably happen to Bunter in his absence!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Short Way with Fags!

BOB CHERRY struggled.

So did Coker.

Potter and Greene looked on. Bob was a sturdy fellow and a good man with his hands. There was no fellow in the Greyfriars Remove who could have stood up to him, and few in the Upper Fourth or the Shell. Even against a Fifth Form senior, Bob could have given a good account of himself.

But he had no chance now. Horace

Coker was rather an out-size in Fifth Formers. He was big, and he was heavy, and he was muscular, and he was brawny. Bob put up a gallant resistance; but Coker was too big and too strong for him. They rolled in the dust, and struggled wildly; but the struggle ended with Bob on his back and Coker's knee planted on his chest.

After which Bob Cherry could only wriggle.

"Now," panted Coker. "I've got you, you cheeky young sweep!"

"Gerroff, you cheeky fathead!" roared Bob.

"Coker, old man—?" implored Potter.

"Coker, old fellow—?" urged Greene.

"Will you fellows shut up?" asked Coker. "I'm dealing with this cheeky fag! Do we want juice, or don't we? Are we going to stick here all day, because you fellows forgot everything? Now, Cherry—?"

"Rescue!" roared Bob. "Rescue, Remove!"

He had a faint hope that some of his comrades might have left the camp, half a mile farther up the hill, and might be within hearing.

Had Harry Wharton & Co. appeared on the spot the tables would very quickly have been turned on Horace Coker.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Potter. "That means that the whole gang of them are about! Look here, Coker—"

"Rescue!" bawled Bob.

"For goodness' sake, Coker, don't let's get mixed up in a shindy with a mob of Greyfriars fags!" howled Greene.

"Shut up, Greene! If the other young rotters turn up, I'll deal with them fast enough! Think I can't handle a gang of fags!"

"Rescue!" roared Bob, with all the force of his lungs.

"Stop that row!" said Coker. "I'll tap your cheeky head on the ground, if you want something to yell for!"

"Res— Yaroooh!" roared Bob, as Coker suited the action to the word.

"Ow! Wow! Oh, you rotter! Ow!" There came no answer to his call. Bob's voice was powerful; but it did not carry half a mile; and evidently none of his friends was within hearing. There was no help for Bob.

"Now," said Coker. "Take that bag off his bike, Potter."

"But, I say—"

"I said take that bag off his bike, Potter!"

Potter, breathing hard, picked up Bob's bike, and removed the bag of provisions from the carrier.

"You shove the petrol can on, Greene."

"But, I—I say—"

"I said shove the petrol can on."

Greene shoved the petrol can on.

"Now, Cherry—"

"Gerroff, you hippopotamus!"

"Will you biko down to the village—"

"No!" roared Bob.

"And get that can filled—"

"No!"

"It won't take you long, if you look up! Don't waste time, as we shall have to wait till you come back. We'll keep that bag of grub till you get back. Sort of hostage, see?" explained Coker.

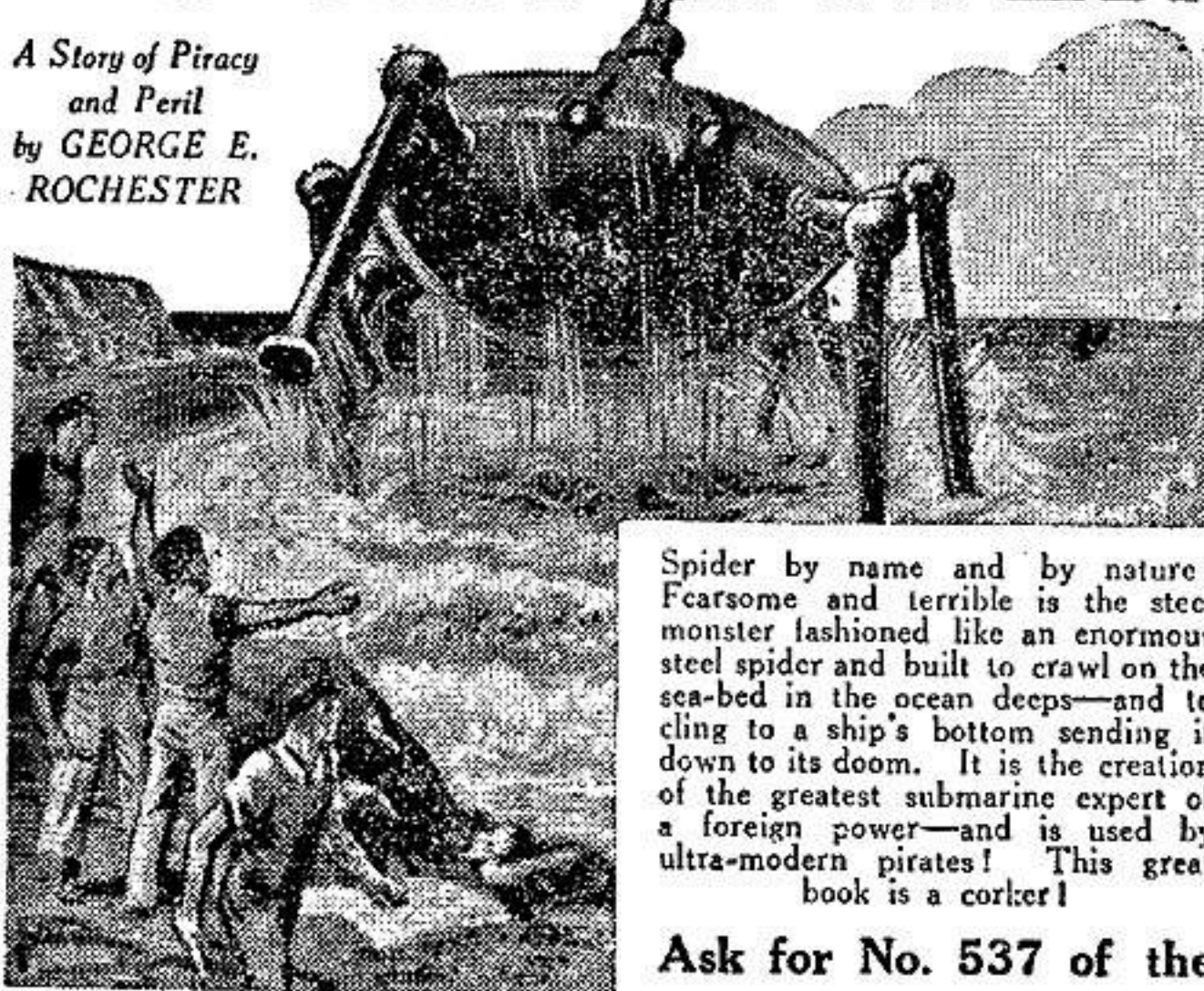
"Oh, you cheeky rotter!" gasped Bob.

"Look here, Coker, I'll walk down and—"

—said Greene.
 "You won't!" said Coker. "I'm not waiting here till you crawl miles and back! I've offered this kid five bob to do it. He's refused. Well, now I'm going to whop him if he doesn't! I've

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a short way with fags, as I've told you fellows before."

Coker's short way with fags was well known at Greyfriars School. It had often led to trouble. But even Coker had not been expected, by his friends, to exercise that short way with fags on holiday, and on a chance meeting with a Greyfriars junior. But Coker was always Coker!

"Now, are you going, Cherry?" he asked.

"No!" bawled Bob.

"All right! I shall pull your ears till you do!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Going now?"

"No!" shrieked Bob, struggling frantically. But the most frantic struggles could not shift the heavy knee that pinned him down.

Coker calmly pulled his ears. That there was anything particularly high-handed, and even in the nature of bullying, about these proceedings did not occur to Horace Coker.

He would have scorned the suggestion of bullying. But he was going to make this cheeky junior toe the line. On that point, Coker's mind was firmly made up.

Bob wriggled and struggled and roared. Potter and Greene looked on. They could hardly approve of Coker's methods. On the other hand, they saw no reason why a Lower Fourth fag should not make himself useful to Fifth Form men. And they did want to get that car going again.

"Had enough?" asked Coker.

"Yow-ow-ow! Oh, you rotter! Yooh-hoop!"

"Better do as you're told!" advised Coker. "I'm not standing any nonsense, and I tell you so plain. I never was a fellow to stand nonsense. Will you take that can down to the village on your bike—"

"No!" shrieked Bob. "Ow! Leggo my ears, you rotter! Oh, won't I make you sit up for this! Ow! Wow!"

"Will you take that empty can, and bring it back full?" asked Coker calmly.

"Oh! Ow! Yes!"

"Good!" said Coker. "I thought you'd come round! Up you get!"

Coker's short way with fags seemed to have been successful.

He moved his knee, and Bob staggered to his feet. He stood gasping for breath, and rubbing his burning ears, while Coker produced a couple of half-crowns.

Barely he restrained himself from jumping at Coker, and renewing the battle. But that was futile; and there were other ways.

"Now then, get on your bike!" said Coker. "Cut off! You ought to be back in twenty minutes. Don't waste time. Here's the money. Cut off!"

Bob Cherry gave him a look. Then he put a leg over his machine as Potter handed it to him, slipping the half-crowns into his pocket.

He went down the hilly lane at a whizz, and disappeared in a few moments from sight. Coker smiled with satisfaction.

"We can sit down and wait!" he remarked. "He won't be long, if he's anxious to get back to his pals with that bag of grub. See?"

Potter and Greene had to admit that Coker's strategy was good. Once out of reach, there was a probability that Bob might have pitched the petrol can over a hedge, and taken another route to his friends' camp, leaving Horace Coker to whistle for his "juice."

But the bag of provisions was, as Coker said, a hostage. Bob had to come back for that! And it would be no use

coming back with an empty can. So that was all right.

Coker & Co. sat on the grassy bank to wait. It was a waste of time, but Coker improved the shining hour by telling Potter and Greene what he thought of them, and their crass stupidity in landing a fellow miles from everywhere without a drop of juice.

Only one consideration prevented Potter and Greene from hurling themselves at Horace, and banging his head against the nearest tree. When that car did get going again, Coker was going to drive them down into Folkestone, and stand an expensive lunch at an expensive place. Coker was not without his uses.

But they waited impatiently. If the village really was two miles away, they could hardly expect to see Bob back with the petrol under half an hour.

But they were going to see Bob earlier than that.

The village of Hawkinge was a couple of miles off. But Bob had no intention of revisiting that village.

He had told Coker that he would take the empty can and bring it back full. In the circumstances, he might have been justified in disregarding a promise extorted by Coker's extraordinary methods. But Bob was a fellow of his word; likewise, he wanted that bag of provisions. He was going to bring the empty can back full—hoping that Coker would not discover what it was full of, before he got clear!

Half-way down to the village was a pond, which Bob had noticed as he passed that way. At the pond he stopped.

Unscrewing the metal cap of the petrol-can, he filled the can with water from the pond. Then he dropped in the two half-crowns. The empty can was now filled! Bob replaced it on his carrier, and fastened it there, after carefully screwing up the cap.

Coker, certainly, was not likely to get his car started in a hurry on that sort of juice. That was Coker's lookout. Bob was doing what he had undertaken to do—bringing the empty can back full! That was all that concerned him!

He wheeled the bike up the steep lane again.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Coker a little later, breaking off his lecture to Potter and Greene. "He seems to have bucked up! I fancy I know how to deal with a cheeky fag. Looks like it—what?"

Potter and Greene had to admit that it looked like it. Certainly it did! Appearances, however, are sometimes deceptive.

Bob halted the bike and lifted off the can.

"Now give me my bag!" he grunted.

"You can pick it up, I suppose!" said Coker. "I'm not here to wait on fags that I know of."

Coker picked up the petrol can. Evidently, from its weight, it was full of fluid!

Bob picked up the provision-bag. He jammed it hurriedly on his carrier. Then he turned the bike into the lane.

Coker was already beginning to unscrew the cap of the can. Onward and upward, Bob could not have got out of reach before he discovered the exact nature of his new supply of "juice." He had to get back to camp by a roundabout way. The most pressing necessity, at the moment, was to get out of Horace Coker's reach with the bag of provisions.

Potter and Greene stared at him as he whizzed off the way he had come. Why

he had turned back instead of going on they did not understand. However, they were going to understand shortly.

Going down the hill rather like a lightning-flash, Bob Cherry disappeared from sight in the winding lane.

It was a long way round to get to the Greyfriars camp by another route. He had to cover several miles instead of half of one. Still, he felt that it was worth it. It was a comfort, as he rode, to think of Horace Coker's face when he discovered the kind of juice that had been produced by his short way with fags! Bob's only regret was that he could not be present to see Coker's face when he made the discovery.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tippity Loses His Temper!

"MUCKY wants you, Tip!"

grunted Billy Bunter.

Mr. Tip grunted, too.

He was busy; and did not

want to be bothered by Mucky.

With the help of Wiggles and Samson, he had his tent up. Now the contortionist and the strong man had strolled away, leaving Tippity still busy. Over the entrance to the tent was stretched a wide strip of white canvas. Tippity had a brush in his hand, and a can of paint at his feet. He was about to paint the announcement on the canvas sign which would apprise the public, when they came, that this was the spot where the World's Wonderful Ventriloquist was to be found; and where, at the moderate charge of two-pence, they could hear the rib-cracking dialogue between Jane and John, the ventriloquial dolls. Tippity was just going to begin, when Bunter came back after his interview with the signor.

"Look 'ere, what does Mucky want?" grunted Mr. Tip.

"Better go and ask him!" said Bunter. "He didn't look as if he would like to be kept waiting."

"Blow 'im!" murmured Tippity, dropping his brush into the can of paint. "Well, where is he, innage? I thought he'd gone out!"

"Waiting in his car at the gate."

"Blow!" said Tippity.

Signor Muccolini was not a man to be kept waiting. And Tippity Tip was not in Bunter's happy position of being able to check the circus-master. So he walked away, grouching, to see what the signor wanted.

Bunter grinned after him as he disappeared among the numerous structures on the circus pitch.

That the signor had driven off, and that Tippity would fail to find him, Bunter did not know, and did not suspect.

Having the circus-master under his fat thumb, the Owl of the Remove had no doubt that the necessary orders would be given to the clown; and if Mr. Tip was annoyed and disgruntled thereby, that did not matter to Bunter.

He picked up the brush Tippity had left sticking in the can.

That canvas sign was going to be painted all the same; but with an announcement quite different from the one intended by Mr. Tip.

There was a stepladder on the spot; and Bunter, taking the can in one hand, and the brush in the other, stepped on it, and started work.

Wiggles, observing him from a distance, came across to look at him.

His first impression was that Bunter was doing Tippity's work for him, to save the clown trouble; which was so surprising in a fellow like Bunter that

the elastic man was naturally interested.

He stared blankly at what Bunter was painting on the sign, in large and rather irregular capital letters:

COME IN!

COME IN YORE THOWSANDS!

PROFESSOR BILLO!

THE GREATEST VENTRILOKWIST
IN THE YUNIVERSE!

ADMISHUN FAWPENCE!

YOU SHOODN'T MISS THIS!

"My eye!" said Wriggles, in astonishment. "Did Tippity ask you to put that up, podge?"

Bunter blinked down at him from the steps.

"Don't be an ass!" he answered.

"Well, what are you sticking that up for on Tippity's tent?" demanded the elastic man.

"Tain't Tippity's tent—it's mine!" answered Bunter. "I say, I've used up all the paint! Go and get me some more."

"I can see myself doing it!" remarked Wriggles. "Here comes Tippity! He will be pleased at this—I don't think!"

Mr. Tip came back, looking far from pleased, even before he saw Billy Bunter's handiwork.

He had been looking for Signor Muccolini; but he had not found him. Inquiring up and down, and round about, he could only learn that Mucky had gone out in his car, and driven up the Canterbury Road.

Which naturally gave Tippity the impression that Bunter had been pulling his leg, and that the signor had not sent for him at all.

Mr. Tip came back with the intention of telling the fat Owl exactly what he thought of him.

But as he came up to his tent he forgot that intention. At the sight of the announcement Bunter had painted up there, Mr. Tip seemed to be stricken dumb.

He stared at it, his breath taken away.

Bunter blinked down at him from the steps. Not doubting that Signor Muccolini had given the clown the required orders, Bunter was not expecting trouble with Tippity. He quite expected Tippity to be annoyed, but that did not matter in the least so long as the clown had to toe the line.

"Here, Tip. I want some more paint," he said. "Get me some."

"What the——" gasped Tippity, finding his voice. "What the jumping Joseph have you been and spoiled my noo sign for, you fat idjit? I gave two shillings for it, and——"

"I'll let you have the two bob out of my first takings," said Bunter carelessly. "Get me some more paint, will you? I haven't finished my notice."

"Your notice!" gasped Tippity. "Ain't that my tent?"

"No; mine."

"Yours!" roared Mr. Tip, astonishment giving place to wrath. "You fancy that you can snaffle my tent like you have Mucky's van?"

"I told Mucky——"

"Who's Professor Billo?" roared Tippity. "Tell me that! It ain't me! Who is it, you cheeky fat idjit?"

"Eh? Me!" answered Bunter.

"You!" gasped Tippity.

"Yes, that's the name I'm going to use for my ventriloquial show in this tent!" explained Bunter.

"Your—your show!" gurgled Tippity.

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He seemed hardly able to believe his ears. "You fancy that you're going to bag my show, and my tent to give it in! You—you—you——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter. "I've told you—— I say, leggo those steps, you fathead! You'll have me down in a minute!" yelled the fat Owl, in alarm.

Tippity had him down in less than a minute.

The step-ladder whirled as Mr. Tip rocked it, and the fat Owl of Greyfriars came down in much less than a minute. A split second was nearer the mark.

Bump!

"Yooooop!" roared Bunter.

He sat and roared.

"Your show, is it?" roared Tippity, red with wrath. "Your tent, is it? Jumping Joseph! I'll——"

"Ow! Keep off, you beast!" yelled Bunter. "Ow! Yaroooh! Help! Whoop!"

Tippity Tip did not keep off.

He grasped the fat Owl of Greyfriars by the back of the neck, and proceeded to bang his head on the county of Kent.

Bunter's head was hard, but the county of Kent was harder. Frantic yells awoke every echo of the circus pitch.

"Ow! Stoppit! I'll make Mucky sack you! Yaroooh! Leggo! Help! Oooooop!"

Bang, bang, bang!

"Yaroooooh! Oh crikey! Beast! Wow!" howled Bunter.

"You're going to bag my show, are you?" shrieked the excited Tippity. "You're going to bag my tent, are you? Take that—and that!"

Bang, bang!

"Oh lor'! Ow! Leggo! Stoppit! Help!"

Bang, bang!

"Oh crikey! Beast! Yaroooooop!" roared Bunter.

Tippity Tip released the fat junior, panting for breath. He was rather winded by his exertions.

Billy Bunter sprawled and roared.

Mr. Tip tore down the canvas sign. He jammed the strip of canvas, wet with paint, on Bunter's fat face as he sprawled.

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled Bunter.

He sat up, spluttering horribly. But Mr. Tip was not finished yet. He wound the canvas round Bunter, transferring a considerable quantity of the paint to the fat Owl in the process.

Bunter wriggled and gurgled wildly.

"Gurrgh! Grooogh! Oooogh! Wooooogh!"

"There!" gasped the infuriated Mr. Tip. "That's yours, and you can have it!"

"Ooooooogh!"

Having wound the whole length of the canvas strip round the wriggling, gurgling Owl, Tippity knotted the ends of it behind his back. Some of it was over his fat face, some round his fat neck, some round his fat arms, which were pinned down to his fat ribs, when Tippity knotted the ends behind him.

Billy Bunter bore rather a striking resemblance to a swathed Egyptian mummy when Mr. Tip had finished.

By that time a crowd of the circus men had gathered round the spot. They howled with laughter as Tippity jerked Bunter to his feet. Between the folds of the canvas over his face his big, round spectacles were revealed, with his little round eyes blinking wildly through them. He gurgled and spluttered.

"Urrggh! Help! Grugggh! Take this off, you beast! Lemme go! Urrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now 'op it!" said Mr. Tip. "You

let me catch you near my tent ag'in, that's all! You 'ear me? 'Op it!"

"Beast! I'm all tied up!" shrieked Bunter. He wrenched in vain at his fat arms. He could not get them loose. "Will you untie me, you beast?"

"No, I won't!" retorted Tippity. "You've made free with my blooming canvas, and now you can keep it!"

"Ow! Beast! I say—— Oooogh!"

"I've told you to 'op it!" hooted Mr. Tip.

"Beast! Lemme loose!" raved Bunter. "I can't go like this! I—— Yaroooh!"

"Can't you?" said Tippity. "Then I'll 'elp you!"

He helped Bunter, with a thudding boot on his tight trousers. Bunter found that he could go, and he went. He went with a jump like a kangaroo.

"Come back if you want some more!" Tippity roared after him.

"Ha, ha ha!"

Bunter evidently did not want any more. He did not come back. He tottered away, only anxious to get to a safe distance from the enraged clown. Yells of laughter followed him.

"Somebody let me loose!" shrieked Bunter. "I say, Marco, old chap, untie this beastly canvas, will you?"

The lion-tamer grinned and shook his head.

"You've asked for it," he said. "What do you mean by trying to bag Tippity's show, you young rascal?"

"Beast!"

The King of the Lions made a motion with his foot, and the hapless Owl tottered on. He wriggled and wrenched at his fat arms, but without avail. He was a prisoner in the knotted strip of canvas.

"Zara! I say, Zara!" howled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled Zara.

"I say, don't be a cat!" gasped Bunter. "I say, do untie a fellow, will you? I can't go about like this!"

But the gipsy girl only laughed. Bunter tottered on.

"Samson! I say, Samson!"

The Strong Man roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beast! Untie me!" shrieked Bunter.

"No fear!" chuckled the strong man. "Ain't you asked for it? Wait till Mucky comes back! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

There seemed to be an absolute lack of sympathy for the hapless Owl in the Magnificent Circus. His frantic appeals to be untied were answered only by howls of laughter. It looked as if Billy Bunter would have to wait till Signor Muccolini came back in his car before he could get untied. And he could only hope that the signor hadn't gone for a long drive.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Wharton!

"B OB'S a jolly long time!" remarked Harry Wharton.

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

"He's had time to get to Folkestone and back by this time!" grunted Johnny Bull. "I'm jolly hungry!"

"Puncture, perhaps," remarked Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton stepped into a gap in the high hawthorn hedge, and looked down the hilly lane. There was no sign of anyone coming.

Trees and high grassy banks shut off the view at a little distance. Coker's car, which had started up that lane quite a long time ago, was far out of sight,



Within easy range of Muccolini, Bob Cherry took aim with the peashooter. Ping! "Cospetto!" snarled the signor, as the whizzing pea impinged upon his dusky ear. The next moment he gave a jump, as his other ear was stung. He glared round savagely, but failed to see the marksman parked behind the hawthorns.

and not likely to come into sight on the supply of "juice" Coker had obtained by his short way with fags.

But of Horace's proximity Wharton was not aware. He had heard, when Greyfriars broke up for the holidays, that Coker and his friends were going motoring that vac., but he had forgotten the existence of the great Horace. He stared down the lane for a sign of Bob Cherry returning, but there was no sign of him.

He stepped out into the middle of the lane, to get as far a view as possible between the winding green banks, and walked a dozen yards down.

It had seemed to the Greyfriars cyclists a jolly good idea to camp for lunch in that little meadow high up the hill. There was a glorious view, over hill and dale, with the Air Camp at Hawkinge below them, and in the far distance the numberless roofs of Folkestone and the sea. Bob Cherry, as the quickest man on a jigger, had gone down to the village for supplies, and ought to have been back long since. As, indeed he would have been, but for his encounter with the stranded Fifth Formers. Four hungry fellows waited impatiently, wondering what on earth had become of him. Even a puncture hardly accounted for all this delay.

Honk, honk!

A motor-horn hooted sharply behind Harry Wharton, as he stood in the middle of the lane, staring down the hill.

He turned quickly and jumped to the side of the lane.

A car was coming down the lane, driven by a swarthy-faced man, with a black bush of a moustache.

The driver honked impatiently at the sight of a schoolboy standing in the middle of the road. Wharton was out of the way with a single leap, backing

against the hedge, to give the car plenty of room to pass.

The swarthy-faced motorist stared at him, and scowled. Harry Wharton recognised him at the same moment.

"Muccolini!" he murmured.

He knew the swarthy face and the black, bushy moustache at a glance.

He was not surprised to see Signor Muccolini. The Magnificent Circus was travelling along the south-eastern coast, heading by slow stages for Margate. That was the route of the Greyfriars cyclists, and more than once during their holiday cycling trip they had fallen in with the circus.

Neither was he surprised by the black scowl that came over the Italian's face at the sight of him. Billy Bunter's schoolfellows were included in the intense dislike the Italian felt for Billy Bunter.

They had had trouble with the bullying Italian more than once, in which "Mucky" had not come off best.

Wharton, however, was not looking for any more trouble, and he backed out of the way of the car and affected to take no notice of the black and savage scowl the Italian gave him.

The lane was narrow, and this was one of its narrowest points; but there was ample room for the car to pass a couple of feet clear of the Greyfriars junior as he backed against the hedge.

To his surprise, and rather to his alarm, the car swerved towards him as it came on, as if the driver intended to pin him against the hedge. He caught the sardonic grin on Muccolini's face.

"You fool!" yelled Wharton. "Keep clear! You mad idiot!"

Behind the Greyfriars junior were thick hawthorns, far higher than his head. In front of him was the dusty lane and the swerving car.

For a moment it seemed as if the

Italian deliberately intended to run him down. It was hardly possible that that was Pietro Muccolini's intention—the consequences would have been rather too serious for him. But he was taking a real risk of it in his spiteful malice.

Only by cramming himself back into the thick, thorny hedge could the Greyfriars junior avoid being struck by the mudguards as the car passed him.

The swarthy bully was deliberately driving him back into the thorny hedge at the risk of doing him very serious damage—if the junior did not back away, regardless of thorns.

But Wharton, though his face flamed with anger, had no idea of being knocked over by the car. He crammed back into the hedge, scratched by thorns, breathless and infuriated, and the Italian grinned at him maliciously as the car rushed by.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped the captain of the Remove.

The car, and the signor in it, were gone in a moment down the winding lane. Wharton was left to struggle out of the hawthorns.

He struggled out, with scratched hands, and a good many scratches on face and neck, and considerably ruffled and untidy.

"You cheeky dago rotter!" Johnny Bull bawled after the car, as it vanished down the lane.

Johnny and Nugent and Hurree Singh were in the gap in the hedge. From a distance of a dozen yards they had seen what occurred.

Wharton, red and breathless, and rubbing a dozen scratches, came up the lane and rejoined his chums. His eyes were gleaming with anger.

"You saw that?" he muttered. "That rotten dago! By gum, I'd like to be within punching distance of his greasy face! The bullying brute!"

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wouldn't have dared play such a rotten trick if a fellow could get at him!"

"Thank goodness you weren't knocked over!" said Frank Nugent, with a deep breath. "I thought for a moment—"

"I should have been, if I hadn't backed into the hedge. By Jove, I'd give something to boot that cheeky dago!" said Harry Wharton, between his teeth. "It's that fat fool Bunter who's got his rag out, of course. The fat rotter has found out something about him, and is sticking at his circus against his will. But—"

"He must be some sort of a rogue, or there wouldn't be anything to find out!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, here comes Bob! Why the dickens is he coming this way?" exclaimed Nugent, staring up the lane.

It was uphill that they had expected Bob to come. Instead of which, he came downhill from up the lane.

They stared at him in surprise as he jammed on his brake and jumped down.

"Where the dickens have you been?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Fetching the grub, old bean!" answered Bob. "I've got it here!"

"Did you come back by way of Canterbury or Ashford?" asked Johnny sarcastically. "Why the thump couldn't you come straight back to the lane, instead of biking round all over Kent?"

"There was a lion in the path!" explained Bob. "Or, to be more correct, a donkey! I had to go a long way round."

"You turned back because there was a donkey in the lane?" roared Johnny. "Are you afraid of a donkey?"

"Hardly, old chap, or I should tremble in your presence!" answered Bob cheerfully.

"You silly ass—"

"The donkey was named Coker!" Bob explained.

"Oh, fathead!" said Johnny.

"Coker of the Fifth wandering about here?" asked Harry.

"Yes, run out of juice, and hung

up!" grinned Bob. "He got hold of me and twisted my ears till I agreed to take his empty petrol can and bring it back full! Hence this delay, my beloved 'earers! I thought I'd better steer clear of Coker, after handing him the full can."

"Why, fathead?"

"Well, I thought he might get excited when he found that it was full of water—"

"Water!" gasped Wharton.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's about half a mile away, coming up this lane, said Bob. "But I don't think he'll do much in the way of speed!"

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

The Famous Five went through the gap in the hedge to their camp, chortling. It was rather a late lunch; but the Greyfriars cyclists seemed to enjoy it, judging by their chuckles. They wondered whether Coker of the Fifth would fill up his petrol-tank with water, or whether he would discover what kind of juice it was before he filled up! In either case, it was a happy thought!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Coker is Wrathful!

"I'll smash him!" gasped Horace Coker.

Coker of the Fifth breathed wrath.

He exuded rage!

He was crimson with fury!

The wrath of Achilles, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered, was a gentle, passing breeze, compared with the overpowering, overwhelming wrath of Horace James Coker, of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars School.

Coker raged—he spluttered—he gesticulated—he almost danced!

Potter and Greene looked on. They were wondering, rather dimly, whether they would ever get to Folkestone, and ever get to lunch. They were thinking, not for the first time, that

holidays with Horace Coker were rather a mistake.

What Potter and Greene thought did not, of course, matter. Coker gave that no consideration whatever.

"I'll spifficate him!" bawled Coker.

Had Bob Cherry been anywhere within reach of vengeance, he would certainly have been in serious danger of spiffication. Luckily for Bob, he was far away, and Coker raged in vain.

Coker had made the interesting discovery of the nature of the "juice" obtained by his short way with fags. He had unscrewed the metal cap of the petrol-can,—not easily, for Bob had jammed it as hard and fast as he could. However, Coker had got it open at last—though not till after Bob was out of sight—and then he prepared to quench the thirst of the engine that had gone dry.

Petrol and water are much alike to look at—to a careless eye. Had Coker given that fluid attention, of course, he would have seen that it was not the kind of juice he wanted. But there was no doubt in Coker's mind as he started pouring.

Had Potter or Greene done the trick, no doubt they would have noticed the difference. But Coker had no use for assistance from fatheads like Potter and Greene. So Coker proceeded to fill the petrol-tank with water, in happy ignorance of what he was doing—though no doubt he would soon have discovered that there was something queer about that juice had he tried to start up.

But, to his surprise, he found something clinking inside the can. He shook the empty can in surprise, and two half-crowns dropped out, one after another.

Coker gazed at them in amazement.

So did Potter and Greene.

There had, of course, been no half-crowns in the petrol can to start with. The Shell Company treated their customers well, in the way of fluid; but did not present them with gratuitous half-crowns. So where those half-crowns had come from was a baffling mystery to Coker—and might have remained so had it not dawned on Potter and Greene that they were the precise sum that Coker had handed to Bob to pay for the petrol at the village store. Picking them up, Potter and Greene noted that they were wet, but did not smell of petrol, as might have been expected, had they been immersed in the same.

Then they knew!

A few last drops, shaken from the petrol can, were only too obviously not petrol but water! Coker's short way with fags had, after all, been rather a frost!

The petrol can had been brought back full—of water! Bob Cherry had dropped the half-crowns into it as the easiest way of returning them to their owner! And that was that!

Coker was slow to believe it! Very slow to believe that a cheeky Remove fag could possibly have played such a trick on him, actually causing him to fill up his tank with water instead of the right and proper juice! But he had to believe it at last! Even Coker could not persistently doubt a fact that was plain and prominent right under his nose!

Coker had supposed that his troubles were over—by the easy and simple system of adopting pressgang methods with a Remove fag! Instead of which, his troubles were, if possible, worse than ever.

True, his petrol tank was no longer empty! Coker wished that it was!



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The most hopeful motorist could not hope to drive a car with water from a rural pond as the motive power! The thing simply couldn't be done! Sometimes, when Coker had had trouble with that engine, he had told Potter and Greene that the mixture was too rich. This time, the mixture was altogether too poor.

Then began Coker's song and dance, so to describe it! Wrath and rage and fury were the order of the day.

Coker told Potter and Greene, and the Kentish downs, and the universe generally, what he thought of this. He raged—he raved—he brandished leg-of-mutton fists! He rushed down the lane, in a faint hope that Bob might yet be in sight. He rushed back, and raged again. For the umpteenth time he told the world that he would smash and spifficate that cheeky Remove fag.

Meanwhile, the car remained at a standstill. Potter and Greene remained at a standstill.

Their private opinion was that Coker had asked for this. But it was useless to tell Coker so; indeed, in his present mood, it might have been dangerous to tell him.

So they said nothing, and left Horace to do a solo, till he was out of breath.

It was a long time before Horace recovered something like calmness. But even on Coker's solid brain it dawned at last that brandishing his fists and repeating again and again what he would do to that cheeky fag—when caught—would not buy him anything.

"We've got to get a move on!" said Coker at last; the first glimmering of reason, so to speak, that had escaped him since the discovery of the true nature of that delusive juice.

"Just thought of that?" asked Potter.

"Don't jaw!" roared Coker. "Things are bad enough, without jaw, jaw, jaw! Why couldn't you spot that young scoundrel's trick before he got away?"

"Why didn't you?" inquired Potter.

"I said don't jaw, Potter! If you think we've come here to sit around like a lot of moulting fowls, you're mistaken! If you had sense enough to make a suggestion—"

"I suggested walking down to the village about an hour ago!" remarked Potter.

"It would have saved time if we'd fetched the petrol ourselves!" assented Greene. "But Coker knows best, of course!"

Coker, blind and deaf to sarcasm, was a little mollified by that observation.

"That's the first sensible thing you've said, Greeney!" he answered. "I'm glad you can see it. We've got to get to Folkestone somehow."

As the back of the car was turned towards Folkestone, even a supply of petrol would not really have helped Coker on his way to that attractive seaside resort. Coker, of course, had taken a wrong turning, before his car conked out. Potter and Greene suspected it, but did not venture to mention it. They had given up counting Coker's wrong turnings. They nourished a hope of arriving somewhere, if the car could be got going again; but they could not help feeling that they were as likely to arrive at Ashford, Canterbury, or Rye, or at Folkestone. Indeed, as Coker was driving them to Folkestone, they would not have been astonished to arrive in Reading!

"If only some dashed car would pass, and lend us some juice," said Coker.

"If!" murmured Potter.

Cars did not seem probable on that

narrow lane winding up the downs. It was obviously little used by any vehicles but farm-carts. Certainly no car had come in sight during the long stop.

Potter and Greene could not help feeling that, if Coker persisted in taking wrong turnings, he might, at least, take them on main roads. But it was, of course, just like Coker to strand them in an uninhabited desert.

Coker glared down the lane. He glared up the lane. He mounted the bank, and glared over the hedges. In August the roads were simply covered with cars. But Coker's was the only car visible in that retired spot.

Coker jumped down the bank again. "No good sticking here!" he snapped. "If you fellows want to stand round mooning all day, I don't! I'm fed-up with it, if you're not!"

That, of course, was Coker all over! Potter and Greene had long been anxious to start walking.

"Look here, Coker!" hissed Potter, goaded.

"Don't waste time jawing. Potter, when we've got miles to walk. There isn't the remotest chance of seeing a car here, as you'd know, if you had as much brains as a bunny rabbit!"

It was at that moment that Potter, looking up the lane, sighted a car coming down, driven by a swarthy man with a black, bushy moustache.

Coker had his back to it; and, having, naturally, no eyes in the back of his head, did not see it.

"Come on!" he said, starting down the lane. "You've wasted enough time, I think. We can leave the car here, and send a man up from the garage for it—I suppose there's a garage, even in this benighted spot."

"Hold on!"

"For goodness' sake, Potter, get a move on, and don't waste any more time!" hooted Coker. "Haven't you wasted enough already?"

"If we can borrow some juice—"

"I tell you, no car will come this way! Can't you see that for yourself? No car will come along here—"

"There's one coming!" shrieked Potter.

"Oh!"

Coker turned round and stared at the car coming down the lane. His face cleared.

"That's jolly good luck!" he said. "I told you it would be all right if we spotted a car! One was bound to come along sooner or later. If you fellows would only have a little patience, instead of getting excited, like a lot of chickens—"

Honk, honk, honk!

"Flag him!" said Coker. "By gum, I know that chap! I've jolly well seen that greasy face before! You fellows remember when the circus was near the school—we went to it? That's the circus boss! His name's Muck or something! I suppose the circus is in these parts now. Anyhow, that's Mucky-bony—I think his name's Muckybony!"

Coker waved a large hand to Signor Muccolini. Potter and Greene waved, too.

The swarthy Italian stared at them surlily, and honked emphatically.

The lane was wider here than at the spot where he had passed Harry Wharton, half a mile up. There was room to pass Coker's car, but only just. The signor honked and honked angrily, for the three seniors of Greyfriars to get out of his way. Instead of which, they waved and shouted to him to stop, which the surly signor unwillingly did.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"COSPETTO!" snapped Signor Muccolini, staring angrily at Coker.

"Eh? My name's Coker!" answered Horace.

"What? What do you mean?" "I mean you're mistaking me for somebody else! My name's not Cospetto," explained Coker. "It's Coker—Horace Coker!"

Potter and Greene chuckled. They did not suppose that "Cospetto" was a name, by which the motorist was addressing Coker. They guessed it was a foreign swear word!

"Fool!" said Muccolini. Even Coker did not mistake this for a name; though, in point of fact, as a name, it would not have been unsuitable, in Coker's case.

"Here, draw it mild, Mr. Mucky-bony!" he said warmly. "Don't call a fellow names!"

"My name is Muccolini, fool!"

"Well, I knew it was something of the sort. There's not much difference between bony and lean, is there?" said Coker. "But don't call me names! I don't like it!"

"What do you want?" snarled the signor. "Why have you stopped me? I have no time to waste? Get out of the road!"

Horace Coker opened his extensive mouth for an angry retort. He was still wrathful from the unfortunate affair of the juice, and in no mood to take "lip" from a dago.

But he remembered that he was going to ask a favour of the Italian. Even Coker realised that it would not be a useful preliminary to tell him what he thought of him, his manners, his looks, and his nationality, as he was strongly tempted to do.

So he restrained his just indignation, though with difficulty.

"We're hung up here, Mr. Muccolini," said Potter civilly. "Coker forgot the petrol when we started, and—"

"Don't be a silly ass, Potter."

"Will you let me pass?" snapped the signor. "Do you want me to run over you in my car?"

"Look here—" bawled Coker.

"For goodness' sake, shut up, Coker!" hooted Greene. "Look here, Mr. Muccolini—"

"How do you know me?" snapped Muccolini. "I have never seen you before."

"We saw your circus, when it was near Greyfriars," explained Greene, "and a jolly good show it was, Mr. Muccolini."

Greene considered this tactful, as Muccolini was wanted to oblige, and looked anything but obliging.

He was surprised at the black, savage scowl that came over the signor's swarthy face at his remark. He was, of course, quite unaware that the name of Greyfriars School was, to Signor Muccolini, like a red rag to a bull.

"Greyfriars!" snarled the signor. "La scuola del piccolo furfante Bunter! Bah! Get out of my way!"

"Lots of Greyfriars fellows came to your circus when it was at Courtfield, Mr. Muccolini," said Potter. "We—"

"Stand aside!"

"Hold on!" roared Coker, as the signor seemed about to drive on, regardless of the fact that the Greyfriars seniors were in the way. "Look here, we've run out of juice, owing to these fellows forgetting to fill up this morning. If you can spare us some petrol—"

"Mai! Stand aside, fool!"

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"We'll pay for it, if that's what's worrying you!" hooted Coker.

"Just enough to let us push on——" said Potter.

Hardly any motorist would have disregarded such an appeal from a fellow motorist stranded on a solitary road.

But Mucky was never obliging at the best of times, and Billy Bunter's fascinating presence at his circus had imbued him with an intense dislike of Greyfriars and all its works. Harry Wharton & Co. had had the benefit of that bitter dislike, and now Coker & Co. were getting some of it. Schoolfellows of the "piccolo furfante," Bunter, were not likely to get help from the spy who was under Bunter's thumb.

"Stand aside!" snarled the signor. "I will give you nothing! Get out of the road, or I will drive you down!"

"You sneaking dago!" roared Coker.

Evidently there was no aid to be obtained from the signor, and no reason, therefore, why Coker should further bottle up the vials of his wrath.

"You greasy-faced blighter, what are you doing in a civilised country at all?"

Signor Muccolini did not answer that question. He started the car.

Potter and Greene had already stepped clear—Coker jumped clear. He had to jump quickly, and he stumbled, and sat down in dust, as the car roared on.

"By gum!" gasped Coker, staggering to his feet, and glaring after the car as it went. "By gum! You greasy dago! Come back, and I'll mop up the road with you! Do you hear, you snuff-coloured macaroni-muncher? I'll knock your Roman nose through the back of your napper, you cheeky rotter! Come back, and I'll jolly well knock the spaghetti out of you!"

The car ran on down the lane, leaving Coker to roar. Signor Muccolini was gone in a moment, giving Horace Coker no chance to knock the spaghetti out of him!

"By gum!" said Coker, breathing wrath. "I'll jolly well——"

It looked as if another song and dance was beginning! Potter and Greene exchanged a glance, and started walking down the lane. Coker had had an innings, so to speak, on the subject of Bob Cherry, and they were not going to give him another innings on the subject of Signor Muccolini. They were fed-up with Coker's eloquence, and they wanted their lunch. So they started.

Coker dusted his trousers and followed them.

Luckily, at the end of the lane, they fell in with an airman from the camp, who kindly directed them to an inn where they could get lunch.

Potter and Greene sat down to that lunch in great relief. Coker was glad to get at the lunch, but he was still frowning.

The landlord of the Cow and Bull dispatched a lad on a bicycle to the village with a message to the garage about the car. That matter settled, the three Fifth Formers of Greyfriars negotiated the lunch. Over that meal, Coker's brow was grim.

"It's all right, old bean!" Potter pointed out to him. "The garage man is going to bring the car round here for us. This isn't a bad lunch for a country inn. We can get off to Folkestone in another hour or so."

Coker looked at him.

"Can we?" he said.

"Well, why not?" asked Greene.

"They'll have the car here before long."

"I know that!"

"Well, then——" said Potter.

"You think I'm going on to Folke-

stone and leaving that young scoundrel

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Cherry to snigger at me, along with his fag friends?" asked Coker. "If that's what you think, you'd better start thinking again. See?"

"The kid's miles away by this time!" said Potter. "You won't see him again before next term at Greyfriars, Coker!"

"I shall see him again this afternoon," said Coker calmly. "The young rotters are camping about here somewhere, you know that. As soon as we've finished this grub, we're going out to look for them."

"But, I say——"

"You needn't say anything!"

"Well, look, here," said Potter warmly, "if you're hunting for a row with a gang of fags, we'll stay here while you're gone, Coker."

"I shall want you. If the other young rotters are with him, they'd have the check to butt in when I start thrashing Cherry. You know how cheeky they are. You'll come with me."

"But look here——" said Greene.

"Don't jaw, Greene!"

"For goodness' sake, Coker——" exclaimed Potter.

"Don't gabble, Potter!"

"Look here——" hooted Potter and Greene together.

"Jaw, jaw, jaw!" said Coker sardonically. "You fellows are like a sheep's head—all jaw! Can't you shut up?"

Lunch was brief. From Coker's point of view it was impossible to leave matters where they stood. Coker had been cheeked. He had had his leg pulled. He had been made a fool of. Obviously, Bob Cherry had to be whopped. Horace Coker was quite keen as he started out on the war-path. Potter and Greene were far from sharing his keenness. Never was a great leader followed by such unwilling recruits.

Still, they were all in a hopeful frame of mind. Coker hoped that he would come upon Harry Wharton & Co. And Potter and Greene hoped that, if he did, Harry Wharton & Co. would rag him bald-headed!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Tit for Tat!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry.

He pointed.

"The jolly old dago!" said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton's eyes glinted at the sight of the Italian.

The Famous Five were wheeling their bikes by a footpath on the steep hill-side. Lower down the hill was another path, and standing on the lower path, a beefy figure was suddenly sighted.

Signor Muccolini, standing there, had his back to the juniors above, but they knew him at once. He was staring down at the air camp in the distance below, and seemed deeply interested in the view.

Apparently he had parked his car somewhere, for he was now on foot. He had a lunch-basket in his hand, from which the juniors supposed that he had driven out to that green rural spot for a picnic on his own.

"I've a jolly good mind——" began Harry. But he shook his head. "Come on, we don't want a row with the dago. Bother him!"

"Hold on, though!" said Bob. "From what you've told me, that cheeky boulder might have damaged you, and you've collected about a hundred scratches getting out of his way. I don't see letting him get off scot-free."

"But what——"

"Look here!" Bob drew a pea-shooter from his pocket. "Duck out of sight—he hasn't seen us! I'll give him a surprise."

"Go ahead!" said Harry, laughing.

The Famous Five came to a stop, in cover of a clump of hawthorns, almost immediately above the spot where the Italian stood. Through the openings of the bush they watched, while Bob crept cautiously down the hill towards the circus-master.

Signor Muccolini did not look round. He was quite unaware of the proximity of the Greyfriars fellows. Grinning, the four watched Bob as he drew nearer and nearer to the unconscious Italian.

Within easy range of the signor, Bob halted, taking cover behind a thick willow. Between two drooping branches of the willow, he took aim with the pea-shooter.

Signor Muccolini did not stir. For some reason best known to himself he was intensely interested in the view of the air camp below.

But he stirred suddenly as a whizzing pea impinged upon a dusky ear, and clapped his hand to the spot with an angry exclamation.

"Cospetto!"

He stared round him, rubbed his ear, and waved a dusky hand in the air. Apparently he was under the impression that an insect had stung him. He could see nothing of the marksman, or of the juniors parked behind the hawthorns higher up. He waved away the imaginary insect, snarled, and resumed his staring at the scene down the hill.

The next moment he gave a jump as his other ear was stung. He clapped his hand to that ear and spun round.

"Dio mio! Dov' e?" he snarled, staring round for the insect that had stung him. No winged creature was to be seen at hand.

But as the signor stared round, another sharp twinge came on his rather prominent nose, and his dusky hand was clapped to that organ.

With his hand clapped to his nose, and his swarthy face flushed with irritation, the signor stared about him for that troublesome insect, and as he did so, a sudden sting on his fat chin made him utter a sudden yelp.

"Cospetto! Dov' e?" howled the signor. "Dov' e la zanzara? Dov' e la mosca? Dio mio!"

The grinning juniors did not understand the Italian words, but they could guess that the Italian was inquiring, of space, where was the fly that had stung him. They suppressed their chuckles.

Signor Muccolini did not doubt that it was a zanzara, a gnat, or a mosca, a fly, that had stung him. But there was no sign of a zanzara, or any sort of a mosca to meet his angry eyes.

But there was another sting coming. It caught him under the ear, and Muccolini gave a howl.

"Ow! E una vespa! Oooow!"

If it was a wasp, however, he failed to spot the wasp!

He rubbed the spot, glaring round him savagely. Bob Cherry had a good supply of ammunition, and he was a good marksman with a pea-shooter. Sting, sting, sting, came on the Italian's swarthy face, and he waved, and clawed, and dabbed, and snarled, almost dancing. It seemed to Signor Muccolini that he had landed in a hornets' nest—though there were no hornets to be seen.

The rage and bewilderment in his dusky face were too much for the watchers above. A sudden yell of laughter reached the ears of the Italian.

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Harry Wharton & Co. could not help grinning as they stared at Bunter. The fat junior was swathed in a strip of canvas and looked like an Egyptian mummy. What could be seen of his face was crimson with wrath. "Bib-bub-Bunter!" stuttered Johnny Bull. "Is this a new circus turn?" ejaculated Nugent.

Signor Muccolini jumped nearly clear of the ground in his surprise at that sudden burst of merriment in a spot where he had fancied himself alone.

He stared savagely up the slope towards the upper path, his teeth gleaming through his bushy moustache.

Evidently, it dawned upon him that he was the victim of a jape, for he started up the slope, with gleaming eyes and gritted teeth.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob.

As the Italian came with an angry rush up the slope, he passed the willows that covered the marksman and had a sudden view of Bob with the peashooter in his hand.

Then he understood. He made a rush straight at Bob Cherry, behind the willows, with a look on his swarthy face that was quite alarming.

"Look out, Bob!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Hook it!" shouted Nugent.

Bob scrambled up the slope. But a dusky hand grasped at his collar from behind and he was dragged back.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob.

He wrenched his collar free. A heavy hand smacked, and he staggered. Bob gave a roar. The heavy hand was up for another savage smack, when Bob weighed in with a punch that landed on Signor Muccolini's well-filled waistcoat.

The smack missed as the signor staggered back, stumbled, and pitched over.

The lunch-basket dropped from his hand, and rolled down the slope.

It burst open as it rolled and the contents shot out. But the contents were not, as the juniors would have supposed, a lunch. It was a large camera that shot out of the burst-open basket and rolled down the hill.

Bob Cherry scrambled up the rugged slope and rejoined his comrades on the upper path, red and breathless.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" he gasped.

"If the dago comes up, we'll give him all he wants, and a little over!"

"What-ho!" said Harry Wharton.

"He's not coming!" said Nugent.

Signor Muccolini scrambled to his feet. His swarthy face was crimson with rage; but he did not even glance after Bob Cherry.

He rushed after the camera. Heedless of the juniors looking down from above, he hastily recaptured the camera and jammed it back into the lunch-basket. The juniors stared at him.

"That's a camera!" said Johnny Bull. "What the dickens does the man carry his camera in a grub-basket for?"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry.

It was clear that the lunch-basket contained nothing else. What reason the Italian could have for hiding his camera in such a receptacle the juniors had no idea. Billy Bunter could have told them—he had seen the foreign spy at work, taking secret photographs in forbidden places.

"The dear man's done with us!" remarked Bob, as the Italian, after glaring up at the juniors, turned away and hurried along the hill. He disappeared into a thick clump of trees on the edge of the lower path and did not reappear.

"Come on!" said Harry.

A quarter of an hour later, wheeling their bikes down the winding footpath on the hillside, the juniors passed along the lower path and passed the clump of trees into which the Italian had disappeared.

But if he was still there, they saw nothing more of him. They wheeled on and reached a lane, where they mounted their machines and rode away cheerfully for the Canterbury road and Folkestone.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Coker!

"QUIET!" said Coker. "What—" began Potter and Greene together.

"I said quiet!"

Potter and Greene suppressed their remarks and their feelings. They gazed at Coker, uncertain whether to obey his lofty behests or to take him by the neck and roll him down the hill.

The three Fifth Form men of Greyfriars were coming down the hilly footpath, which the Famous Five had followed a quarter of an hour earlier. Coker came to a halt by the clump of trees on the edge of the path.

At that point the hillside dropped abruptly. Looking past that tree-clump, there was a wide and extensive view of the lower ground.

Nobody was to be seen near at hand; but, small in the distance, there were plenty of moving figures to be seen about the air camp.

Why Horace Coker stopped at that spot Potter and Greene did not know. Neither did they know why he told them to be quiet. Neither, in fact, did they want to know. They were fed-up to the chin with Coker and his war-path stunts, and all they wanted was to find themselves sitting in the car again and getting on their way to Folkestone.

Still, as it was Coker's car, they could hardly do as they wanted, without Coker. In the circumstances, Coker's word was law.

Coker had faced towards the clump of trees. His eyes were intent. To his friends it seemed as if he had developed a sudden and intense interest in a clump of ashes and elms, interspersed with hawthorns and a willow or two.

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THE SIGNORS SECRET!



(Continued from page 13.)

and grass and ferns. It was a pleasant spot, if a fellow had been looking for a place to sit down in the shade out of the blaze of the August sun. But that was not what Horace Coker was looking for. He was looking for a bunch of cheeky Remove juniors and vengeance.

For a long minute Coker stood like a hunting-dog pointing; to the surprise, and still more to the boredom, of his puzzled companions. Then he spoke, in a whisper.

"We've got 'em!"

"Who?" asked Potter.

"Those cheeky fags!" snapped Coker. "Don't be an ass!"

"Have we?" said Greene blankly. "Where are they, then?"

"In that clump!" said Coker.

Potter and Greene stared at the clump. It was open in places, thick in other places. Certainly there was plenty of cover for five schoolboys, if they had wanted cover. But there was, at all events, no sign of them to be seen, or anyone else.

"But why——" grunted Potter.

"Don't shout! They were on this path not twenty minutes ago," said Coker. "We spotted them from down the hill. Did we or did we not?"

"Yes," said Greene. "But——"

"Don't yell! They've found out that we're after them and they've dodged into those trees to keep doggo till we've passed!" explained Coker. "I dare say it would amuse them for us to walk on and leave them behind! They'd have taken you fellows in by a trick like that, of course—but they won't take me in so jolly easy, I fancy!"

"But——" objected Potter.

"Don't rave! Do you want to put them on their guard!" snapped Coker irritably. "They're in hiding now, but if they find out that we've spotted them, they will cut! If you want to chase them over the hill in this blazing sun, I don't! So keep quiet."

Coker, it was clear now, was going to be strategic. He was going to take the enemy by surprise.

"But how do you know they're there?" hissed Potter. "I can't see anything of them."

"Because somebody moved in those trees as we came along. Somebody's there, and who else could it be?" Coker pointed. "Look!"

From the clump of trees a bird rose, fluttering. It fluttered for a few moments over the treetops, and then settled at a different spot. Clearly it had been disturbed by someone moving among the trees.

Apparently someone was there. Whoever it was was on the farther, or downhill, side of the clump.

Coker had no doubt who was there. Potter and Greene, on the other hand, had strong doubts.

True, they had, from a distance, spotted five juniors wheeling their bikes along that footpath. It had taken some

time to get to the path, and the five had long vanished.

To Coker it seemed certain that, aware that he was on the trail, the young rascals had hunted cover to escape. Potter and Greene were very doubtful whether the five Removeites would have taken the trouble to do anything of the sort. Coker had been quite able to handle Bob Cherry on his own that morning, but handling the five in a bunch would have been a very different proposition—even with such help as Potter and Greene would have thrown in.

In fact, Potter and Greene rather thought that the Famous Five, if they found that Coker was tracking them, were more likely to wait for him to come up, and give him what he was asking for, than to hunt cover.

But Coker had no doubts. He knew, better than Potter and Greene did, what a terrible fellow he was!

"At this very minute," breathed Coker, "they're crouching in cover there, waiting till we're gone. We're not going to give them a chance to cut. We're going to rush them before they know we've spotted them. Got that?"

"But suppose it's somebody else there?" breathed Potter, in alarm.

"Don't be an ass, Potter! Who else would be hiding in those trees?"

"Perhaps he isn't hiding," suggested Greene. "Might be just sitting down there in the shade."

"Don't be a dummy, Greene!"

"But look here——" hissed Potter.

"Don't jaw! They were on this path, a bit ahead of us," said Coker. "Where are they now?"

"Gone on, most likely! Ten to one, on their bikes, and miles off by this time."

"Don't be a fathead, Potter!"

Really, Potter's suggestion was not improbable. In fact, it was just what had happened. But it was not good enough for Coker. Any opposition to Coker's opinion confirmed him in that opinion. Coker had no use for argument. What was the use of argument to a fellow who knew?

Had Potter or Greene suggested that the juniors were hiding in that clump, Coker would probably have doubted it. But Coker having suggested it, it was as good as a certainty—to Coker, at least.

"Now, come on!" said Coker, in low, cautious tones. "We've got to get them before they cut. Keep close to me, and we'll rush them—see?—and grab the young scoundrels before they have a chance of dodging."

It was good strategy—if the juniors were there. If they took the alarm, and scattered over the wide hillside, it meant a hot chase in the blazing sun to run them down. A sudden rush, coming right on them before they could think of scattering, was Coker's cue.

Coker was keen as mustard. But Potter and Greene were deeply dismayed. It was all very well, if Coker was right. But suppose he was wrong—and it was always about a thousand to one, if not a million, that Coker was wrong. The prospect of suddenly rushing down some harmless stranger, and startling him out of his wits, did not attract Potter and Greene.

"Ready!" breathed Coker. "Start!" And Coker, leaving the footpath, started, rushing into the clump of trees like a runaway bull.

He supposed, of course, that Potter and Greene were rushing at his heels, like two runaway bulls.

But they weren't. They stood where

they were, on the footpath, satisfied with a back view of Coker as he rushed.

Unaware of that, Horace Coker burst headlong through the clump. Bush and branch parted before him as he charged through.

There was a sudden gasp as he crashed into somebody.

That somebody went staggering, and there was a crash as a large camera dropped to the ground.

So sudden was Coker's crash, in the dusky shade of the thick branches, that he did not see into whom he crashed for the moment. But he was dimly aware that it was far too bulky a form to be a schoolboy's.

He had little time to realise his mistake.

That bulky somebody turned on him, gasping with rage, and hit out, before Coker knew what was happening.

Coker gave a fearful yell as a hard and heavy fist landed right in his eye. He staggered back.

A dark, swarthy, enraged face glared at him, and a dusky fist came at him again. Coker barely dodged it. He jumped away, and Signor Muccolini followed him, hitting out again, and Coker dodged and jumped again, not quite knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

Crunch!

He landed on the fallen camera with that jump. He landed on it with both feet, hard and heavy.

It crunched under his boots.

"Cospetto!" yelled the Italian, and he came at Coker like a tiger, hitting out with both dusky fists; and Coker, getting them both at once, went over on his back, roaring.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter in Bondage!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Bunter!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Great pip!"

Coming down the Canterbury road, from Hawkinge to Folkestone, on their jiggers, Harry Wharton & Co. spotted the circus encampment in the field by the roadside. And they dismounted at the wide-open gateway that led into the field, left their bikes at the gate, and walked in.

As they had seen Signor Muccolini up on the hills, a couple of miles away, they knew, of course, that he could not be at home. But for that knowledge, they would have passed on their way. They were keen to see their old acquaintances, Tippetty Tip and Marco, again; but they would not have entered the circus field had they not known that the signor was at a distance. While he was off the scene, however, there was a chance of speaking a friendly word to their old acquaintances, without the risk of unpleasantness with the bullying Italian.

So they walked cheerfully in.

Whether Billy Bunter was still with the Magnificent Circus they did not know—but they soon learned. A fat and familiar voice squeaked at them, and they looked round, and beheld a sight so surprising that it made them jump.

It was Bunter! There was no doubt that it was Bunter! But his aspect was so astonishing that their eyes almost bulged as they stared at him.

Billy Bunter was swathed in a strip of canvas. It pinned his fat arms down to his fat ribs. There was a fold of it across his fat face. What could be seen of his face was crimson with wrath and smeared with paint. There was a smear of paint on his big spectacles,

Why Bunter was got up in that remarkable way was a surprising mystery. The chums of the Remove gazed at him, dumbfounded.

"Bib-bub-Bunter!" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!" gasped Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Is that a new circus turn?" ejaculated Nugent. "Are you doing an Egyptian mummy stunt, Bunter?"

The weird object tottered towards the amazed juniors.

"I say, you fellows, lemme loose!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I've been tied up like this for hours, and nobody will lend me a hand! The beasts only laugh when I ask them to let me loose. Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "I say, I've been waiting for Mucky to come back and untie me, but the dago beast hasn't come back yet. I say, will you let me loose, you cackling rotters?"

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

"Beasts!" roared Bunter. "I mean, dear old fellows, do get me loose, will you, old chaps? That rotter tied it behind me, and I can't get at the knots. Nobody will lend me a hand. They only cackle. Even Zara only cackled when I asked her. I say, dear old fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five noticed a good many grinning faces turned towards the hapless Owl. Evidently, Bunter's extraordinary predicament was regarded as a great jest at the Magnificent Circus. Nobody, it seemed, was willing to lend him a helping hand out of it.

"But who the dickens fixed you up like that, Bunter?" gasped the captain of the Remove.

"That beast Tip! He's jealous of me, you know, because I'm such a splendid ventriloquist, and put his nose out of joint. I say, you fellows, will you get this beastly thing off me? I can't stay tied up like this!"

Johnny Bull grunted.

"If it was Tip, I dare say the fat boulder asked for it," he said. "Better not butt in."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's old Tippet!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the clown waved his hand from a distance and came towards them.

"Glad to see you young gents again!" said Mr. Tip affably, as he came up. "Surprised to see that fat young cove fixed up like that, what? He asked for it special!"

"I'll make Mucky sack you, you cheeky rotter!" howled Bunter.

"Ark at him!" said Mr. Tip. "You'd think he was boss of the show, owner of the circus, and Lord High-Everything-Else, wouldn't you, to hear him blowing off? You must enjoy that fat covey's company when you've got him at your school."

"The enjoyfulness is not terrific, esteemed Tip!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"But if the objectfulness of your serene self is not preposterous, we will release him from his absurd predicament!" said the nabob.

Tippet nodded.

"Oh, I don't mind, sir!" he answered. "I dessay he's had enough. He's had a lesson about bagging another bloke's show, anyhow. Mobbe he's had enough."

"We'll ask him," suggested Bob.

"Have you had enough, Bunter?"

"Beast!"

"Does that mean yes or no?"

"Rotter! I mean, let me loose, will you, you beast—I mean, old fellow? I say, dear old beasts—I mean, dear old chaps—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry opened his pocket-knife and sawed through Bunter's bonds. The folds of twisted canvas fell away, and the fat Owl of the Remove was free at last. He shook a fat fist at Tippet's grinning face.

"You wait till Mucky comes back!" he gasped. "You see if I don't jolly well get you sacked! You wait till I tell Mucky—"

"You're going to tell Mucky I tied you up?" inquired Mr. Tip.

"Yes, you rotter, I jolly well am!"

"Tell him I pulled your nose, too," suggested Mr. Tip, reaching, with a sudden grab, at Billy Bunter's fat little proboscis. "Tell him I pulled it hard—like that!"

"Gurrgh! Ooogh! Led do! Urrggh!"

Bunter jerked his fat nose away, spluttering.

"And tell him I booted you on your trousers," added Mr. Tip, lifting his foot.

But the fat junior departed from the spot before that fresh item could be added to the list. He departed at a run, and bolted into the gaudily painted van that had belonged to Signor Muccolini. The door slammed after him.

"Isn't that Muccolini's van?" asked Bob, surprised to see the fat Owl making so free with the circus-master's quarters.

Tippet shrugged his shoulders.

"It was," he answered. "Bunter's got it now. Don't ask me why the signor lets him have it, or why he don't boot him out of the circus. It beats me 'oller—abso-bally-lootly 'oller! It's got us all guessing."

Harry Wharton & Co. made no rejoinder to that remark. They could guess that the swaggering, bullying Italian's tolerance of Billy Bunter puzzled the circus company. From Bunter's own mysterious hints, when they had met him at Hastings, they knew that the fat junior had found out something which the signor did not desire to have known, though they had not the faintest idea what it was. It was not a matter they felt disposed to discuss, however, so they said nothing.

"Jolly good of you to give us a look-in," went on Mr. Tip, dropping the subject, rather to their relief. "Mucky's gone out in his car. I dessay you're just as pleased not to see him."

"We saw him up at Hawkinge, before we came down the hill," said Harry, with a smile. "Otherwise we shouldn't have dropped in. The dear man doesn't like Greyfriars fellows."

"I'm jest going to have tea with Marco and Zara!" said the hospitable Mr. Tip. "Come on and join us; we'll all be glad."

"The gladfulness of our esteemed selves would be enormous!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But if the estimable and execrable Mucky should blow in, the unpleasantfulness might be preposterous."

"Oh, he won't be back yet!" said Tippet. "I s'pose I can ask a friend to tea if I like. That blinking dago don't own the earth. You come on."

Harry Wharton & Co. hesitated a moment or two. But after all, members of the circus company had a right to entertain whom they liked. It was no business of the signor's. And really it was difficult to decline the hospitality of Mr. Tip, who was obviously very pleased to see them again.

So they assented and followed Tippet, and had a warm welcome from Marco the Lion-tamer, and a nod and a friendly smile from Zara, the Queen of the Ring, and sat down to tea on the shady side of a van, in very cheery spirits. And very soon they forgot all about Signor Muccolini, though they were destined to be reminded of him shortly.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Kicked Out!

"MUCKY!" hooted Billy Bunter. The fat junior was standing at the field gate, blinking out through his big spectacles, when the Italian's car drove up.

Bunter was waiting for Signor Muccolini to come in, and he was waiting angrily and impatiently. True, he was no longer in bondage, owing to the opportune arrival of the Famous Five at the circus pitch. He had cleaned off the smeas of paint—or some of them—and, still more urgent and important, he had had his tea. But he was in a state of wrath and exasperation to which words could hardly have done justice.

It had dawned on Bunter, by that time, that Mucky must have gone out without giving orders to Tippet Tip, as directed by the fat Owl. Had Tippet received the signor's orders, as Bunter had at first supposed, he would hardly have ventured to deal with the fat Owl as he had done. Bunter was going to put it plain—very plain indeed—to Signor Muccolini. He was going to make him understand, without the shadow of a doubt that he could not afford to disregard Bunter, and get his cheeky dago ears up. Bunter was going to make that unmistakably plain.

The car turned into the gateway. Signor Muccolini, driving it, saw Bunter and heard him.

To Bunter's further intense annoyance, he took no notice whatever. His swarthy face wore an expression which revealed that he was in an exceedingly bad temper—a worse temper even than Bunter's.

He drove on regardless to the corner of the circus ground where the cars and lorries were parked.

Bunter was left staring after him, or, rather, glaring.

"The cheeky rotter!" gasped Bunter. "By gurr, I'll show him!"

He rolled after the car.

Evidently the Italian had his "ears" up. He seemed to think that Bunter could be passed by like the idle wind, which he regarded not. Bunter was going to show him.

Signor Muccolini had parked his car and was coming away from it, when Bunter reached him.

The look on his face might have warned Bunter that it was no time to bother him, if the Owl of the Remove had been a little less short-sighted, and a little less exasperated.

The Italian had returned to the circus pitch in a state of bitter rage and fury. He had brought back in his car a smashed camera—smashed by Horace Coker's heavy feet, and he had had his trip for nothing. And he was uneasy and alarmed by the fact that Harry Wharton & Co., and then Coker and his friends, had seen him larking about the air camp with a camera. If they thought about it, they might draw conclusions that might mean trouble for him. The Italian's fierce and savage temper was very near boiling point, and Billy Bunter, at this moment, came as the last straw.

The signor would have stamped past him, but the fat junior planted himself directly in the way.

He held up a commanding fat hand. "Hold on, Mucky!" he snapped. "Can't you see I want to speak to you? Look here—"

"Dio mio!" panted Muccolini. "Fat fool, stand aside! Leave me alone, if you know what is good for you!"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Bunter contemptuously. "I don't want any gas from you, Mucky! I'm not taking lip from a dago, I can tell you."

What happened next surprised Bunter. He was used, by this time, to throwing his fat weight about, secure in his knowledge of the signor's secret, and seeing Mucky control his savage temper and toe the line. He knew that the Italian dared not quarrel with him, but he did not make allowances for a passionate Southern temper, liable to boil over, regardless of the dictates of prudence. Often and often the signor had barely succeeded in restraining his temper; now he did not succeed.

He made a rapid stride at Bunter and grasped him by the collar.

With all the force of his arm he flung the fat junior spinning along the ground.

Bunter sprawled and roared. "Yooop! Why, you cheeky rotter—you beastly dago—yaroooh! Keep off, you beast!" shrieked Bunter frantically, as the enraged Italian, following him up, kicked him as he sprawled.

Billy Bunter bounded to his feet. "Keep off!" he howled. Thud, thud! came the enraged signor's boot again.

Yelling, the fat junior bolted. After him rushed the signor, still kicking.

Prudence was thrown to the winds, in that burst of furious rage. Blind with fury, the Italian forgot that he was under Bunter's fat thumb. He rushed after him, kicking savagely.

There was a buzzing and staring from all directions, as Billy Bunter tore away, with the signor in fierce pursuit.

Nobody was surprised to see Muccolini kicking the fat Owl. They were only surprised that he had not kicked him before. Bunter had asked for it often enough.

But Billy Bunter, like so many people in this world, did not want that for which he asked. He howled and yelled and roared as he ran and hopped and dodged. Bunter had often been kicked in the course of his fat career. But he was getting the kicking of his life now.

"Ow! Keep off! Stop it! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Oh crikey! Yoop! Help! You mad dago, I'll jolly well—whoop!"

Kick, kick, kick! Bunter put on his top speed. He was not thinking of bully-ragging the signor now. He was thinking of only one thing—getting out of the reach of that crashing boot.

Yelling wildly, the fat Owl came tearing round Zara's van, on to the shady side of which a cheery tea-party sat on camp-stools, round a little table. That tea-party forgot tea, and stared blankly at Bunter, as he came bolting round the van.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Bunter—"
"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows, help!" yelled Bunter. "I say, collar that dago, and keep him off! Rescue! Hold him! Stop him! Yaroooh!"

Round the van, with blazing eyes and swarthy face crimson with rage, came the Italian, close on Bunter's track.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"What the dickens——" gasped Nugent.

Marco grinned and Zara laughed. The Famous Five stared. Tippity Tip chortled. Bunter rushed past, and the signor rushed after him.

"Yaroooh! Wow!" floated back, as the fat junior sped on his way, helped by another kick on his tight trousers as he went.

"By gum!" grinned Tippity Tip. "The boss is taking it out of him this time. Mucky's giving him what he's wanted for a long time!"

"Time he did!" remarked Marco. "Poor old Bunter!" sighed Bob Cherry. "He's the man to ask for it, isn't he?"

"Yaroooh!" came from the distance. Bunter was in full flight. He was heading for the gateway on the road now. It was his only way of escape.

He put on a desperate spurt of speed. But so did Signor Muccolini; and he reached Bunter as Bunter reached the gate.

His foot flew out and landed with a crash. It fairly lifted Bunter, and hurled him headlong out of the gateway into the road.

Billy Bunter landed there on his hands and knees, bellowing.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!"
But even yet the infuriated Italian was not finished. He rushed into the road after Bunter, and kicked, and kicked again.

The fat junior scrambled up and scuttled down the road. Then, at last, the signor stopped, panting for breath. He shook a dusky fist after the fleeing fat junior, and tramped back into the circus field.

Billy Bunter did not stop running till he had done a quarter of a mile. Then, quite winded, he stopped and blinked back through his big spectacles, in terror of seeing the enraged swarthy face just behind him.

Then, realising that he was no longer pursued, the fat junior plumped down on a bank beside the road, spluttering for breath. And for the next quarter of an hour he sat and gasped, and spluttered, and gurgled, and mopped streaming perspiration from his fat face.

The sight of five cyclists coming down the road in a cheery bunch, caused him to sit up and take notice.

"I say, you fellows!" he squeaked. Harry Wharton & Co. glanced at him and smiled.

They had taken leave of their friends at the circus, and were on their way down to Folkestone, when they sighted the fat figure gurgling at the roadside.

They smiled at Bunter in passing, but did not stop.

The fat junior jumped up from the bank and waved a fat hand.

"I say, you fellows! Hold on!" he howled. "I say——"

"Good-bye, Bunter!" called out Bob. "I say—— Beasts!" roared Bunter.

The bunch of cyclists swept on, and disappeared down the road. Billy Bunter sat down again and resumed mopping his fat brow.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

One!

"IT'S black" said Coker.
There was no need for Horace Coker to point that out.

Potter and Greene could see that it was black. Nobody but a blind man could have failed to see it. The object alluded to was Coker's

right eye! That eye was as black as the ace of spades.

An angry fist, with all Signor Muccolini's beef behind it, had landed in that eye! The result was inevitable, though annoying.

Coker had collected other damages. His nose was swollen. One of his ears felt enlarged. But the worst damage was to that eye. Coker gazed at it, reflected in the mirror in his car, with feelings that could not have been expressed in words. There was not the slightest doubt that that black eye altered his appearance considerably for the worse.

At the best of times, Coker's best pal would not have called him handsome. Now he was less so than ever.

"It's black!" repeated Coker. "I've got a black eye!"

Potter and Greene kindly refrained from mentioning that he had asked for it, and another along with it. They did not want to rub it in.

A fellow who suddenly charged into a man, barged him over, and trampled on an expensive camera, could not expect to get away undamaged, Potter and Greene considered.

True, Coker had supposed that he was charging cheeky Remove juniors, in that clump of trees. It was quite a mistake on Coker's part. Coker did not know that the juniors were miles away, and that it was Signor Muccolini who was in that clump. Why the foreign blighter had been skulking there, was a mystery to Coker. Coker did not consider that he was to blame for the mistake. Potter and Greene, who did, kept their opinion to themselves.

Most annoying of all, even more annoying than the black eye, was the fact that the foreign blighter had got away, unscathed. Coker, dazed and dizzy, had been still on his back under the trees when Signor Muccolini left the spot. Potter and Greene had seen him hurrying away, certainly without the slightest idea of intervening. If Coker chose to hunt for trouble in this wild and reckless way, he was welcome to keep to himself all that he found; Potter and Greene did not want any.

Signor Muccolini was gone when Coker tottered out of that clump, with one hand pressed to his eye and the other to his nose. Potter and Greene subdued their smiles as they walked back to the Cow and Bull.

Coker, it seemed, had dropped the chase of Bob Cherry. No doubt he realised that Bob and his friends were miles out of reach by that time. Neither was Coker, at the moment, in a condition to resume his career on the wac-path.

But, in point of fact, Coker, though more wrathful than ever, had now transferred his wrath to a new object.

Cheeky fags did not, after all, matter very much. He could whop Bob Cherry next term, at Greyfriars, if it came to that. Coker dismissed Bob from his mind. He concentrated on the foreign blighter who had blacked his eye.

The car was at the inn; there was juice in abundance; all was ready for the motoring party to resume their route. They were "doing" Kent in that car; Coker—who had his good points—footing all the bills. Potter and Greene did not exactly like the idea of continuing the tour, with a fellow who looked as if he had just emerged from a prize-fight. Still, in the circumstances, Coker was an indispensable member of the party—black eye and all. They had to make up their minds to that. They only hoped that Coker would be satisfied with one black eye, and would not go hunting trouble and getting another to match.

Which showed that, even yet, they did not know their Coker!

Coker was far from thinking of giving up hunting for trouble. If a greasy, unwashed dago fancied that he could give Horace James Coker a black eye, and get away with it, he had another guess coming. That was what Coker was thinking of as he gazed at the reflection of his discoloured optic in the mirror.

"It's black!" said Coker once more. "A black eye! I've got a black eye from a sneaking dago! Did you fellows notice which way he went?"

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance.

That question did not look as if old Horace was giving up trouble-hunting as a holiday pastime.

"He had a car parked somewhere," said Potter hastily. "I heard him starting up. You remember he was in a car when we first saw him—"

"He cleared off in his car, Coker," said Greene. "May be in the next county by this time."

"Not likely to see him again!" said Potter, shaking his head.

"Quite impossible!" agreed Greene.

Coker surveyed them with his sound eye contemptuously.

"That's where you fellows show what silly asses you are!" he answered. "He can't be far away!"

"I heard the car go," said Potter. "Sounded to me as if he was doing fifty at least!"

"Nearer sixty!" said Greene.

"I dare say he went pretty quick!" assented Coker. "The sneaking dago knew what would be coming to him if I got at him. But he's not gone very far, all the same. His circus must be somewhere about."

"His—his circus?" repeated Potter.

"That dago runs a circus—Muccolini's Magnificent Circus, is what he calls it," said Coker. "I suppose you haven't forgotten that I took you to it when it was pitched near Greysfriars last term. Well, if Muccolini is here, his circus is here, that stands to reason. I've no doubt that it will be giving a performance this evening quite near."

It seemed likely enough to Potter and Greene, too; indeed, extremely probable. But it was rather unfortunate that Coker had thought of it. They could see what was in Coker's mind—and it worried them.

"All we've got to do," added Coker, "is to find that circus. As soon as we find the circus, we shall find the dago."

"But—but we don't want to find him," urged Potter.

"I do!" said Coker coldly.

"Look here, old chap, why not let the whole thing drop?" suggested Greene. "After all, you rushed the man over—he must have been fearfully startled—"

"He will be still more startled next time I see him!" said Coker grimly.

"You seem to have smashed his camera! I dare say that made him rather wild!" urged Potter.

"I'm going to smash him, too, as well as his camera!"

"But—I say—"

"You needn't say anything!" interrupted Coker. "I've no use for gabble. Get into the car, and let's get going. We're going to call at the circus, and I'm going to give that greasy dago an eye to match this one! That's settled!"

"I—I—I say, what about getting after that cheeky young rascal Cherry?" suggested Potter desperately.

Hunting fags, Potter thought, was a

rather less hectic business than hunting circus-masters—especially as the fag in question was, no doubt, many miles away by that time.

But Coker was not to be side-tracked. He shook his head.

"Cherry will keep!" he said. "He may be ten miles off, on his bike. You haven't thought of that, of course. You never think of anything, do you?"

As a matter of fact, Potter had thought of precisely that. That was why he had made the suggestion.

"I'll thrash that cheeky fag next term," went on Coker. "He will keep! I'm going after that dago now! I'm going to show him whether a leather-faced maccaroni-muncher can black my eye! These dagoes are getting altogether too cheeky, since they beat a

mob of unarmed niggers, with their putrid poison-gas in Abyssinia—not that I believe they've really beaten them, either! But never mind that—"

Coker broke off, rather to his friends' disappointment. They would have preferred Coker to keep to that subject, and off the subject of Muccolini! "Get in!" yapped Coker.

They got in.

Coker drove.

Potter and Greene still nourished a hope that he would not succeed in tracking down the Magnificent Circus.

But that, alas, proved only too easy! The first inquiry Coker made on the road, elicited the undesired information. Everybody seemed to have

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

(1)
Of all the unpopular slackers,
James Walker is surely the worst;
The second of Loder's two backers,
He's weaker than Carne, who's the first.
With power in his hands, he's a bully,
A tyrant who uses his weight,
He wields his authority fully
But cringes to all who are great.

(2)
He isn't much given to thinking,
Or working out sums in his head;
He much prefers smoking or drinking
When healthier chaps are in bed.
The after effects are unpleasant,
Bad temper is one of the signs,
A strong disposition is present
To go about giving out lines.

(3)
And well I'm aware of the practice,
He gave me two hundred, the Hun!
Two hundred to do, and the fact is,
Two hundred are what I've not done!
It's rather a bad situation
To walk in to Walker to-night
Without any real explanation
Of what I've not managed to write.

(4)
D'you think it would pay to be candid
And tell him the truth, more or less?
And, if I'm a bit underhanded
D'you fancy the rotter would guess?
I think I'll be truthful, not caring
What form his resentment may take,
I'll tell him, quite frankly and daring,
The lines were torn up by mistake!

(5)
I tapped, and walked in like a lion,
And Walker shot up like a hare!
He thought I was trying to spy on
The habits he practiced in there.
A paper devoted to racing
Was spread open wide on his knees,
And Walker was busy disgracing
His college by picking out gees!

(6)
He gave me a look that was dirty,
The paper was soon off the scene!
I asked: "Who will win the three-thirty
At Wapshot to-morrow, old bean?
I've had information from Skinner
That Twister's an absolute cert!
If your paper says he's the winner,
I'll gladly invest my last shirt!"



(7)
"Shut up, you young ass!" He
was losing
His rage in his sudden alarm.
"That paper you saw me perusing
Was only for cricket—no harm!"
I cheerfully winked at the ceiling
And asked him to show me the
score!
He couldn't! That paper was
dealing
With racing, just that and no
more!

(8)
"We're mum as a couple of oysters!"
I said, and the Walker-bird scowled.
"I dropped a quid note in the Cloisters.
It's yours if you find it!" he growled.
I flew from the house like a swallow
And searched in the Cloisters, in vain!
Until I thought, "Walker may follow!"
And lo, Walker did—with his cane!

(9)
I'd have bolted away from him, only
I couldn't, so there I remained.
"Out here in the Cloisters it's lonely,
So say what you like," he explained.
"Let's have a slight confab together.
And don't waste your time on that quid!
I'm going to show you just whether
It pays to cheek me!"
And he did!!!!

There's no beating about the bush with our long-haired poet. What he's got to say he says—and there's an end to it! We hate to think, though, what

JAMES WALKER.
the bullying prefect of the Sixth, will have to say when he reads these snappy verses.

heard of Muccolini's Magnificent Circus, and to know where it was.

That hope having failed, Potter and Greene banked on Coker's well-known gift for taking wrong turnings.

But again hope proved elusive. Once on the Canterbury Road, Coker had only to drive straight down a main road to reach his destination. Even Coker was capable of driving along a main road without missing his way.

His sound eye gleamed at the sight of a flag fluttering in the air, over the summit of a great tent.

"There it is!" said Coker.

There it was—there was no mistake about that.

Coker halted at the open gateway. Potter and Greene exchanged glances of utter dismay.

One of Coker's eyes was black and half-closed. But the other gleamed with fierce and grim determination.

"Coker, old man," mumbled Greene, "you—you—you're not going in there to kick up a shindy, old chap?"

"I hope I'm not the fellow to kick up a shindy, Greene!" answered Coker coldly. "I'll thank you not to suggest anything of the sort!"

"Then—what are you going to do?" gasped Potter.

"I'm going to thrash that dago!"

Thrashing a dago was not, apparently, in Coker's opinion, a proceeding in the nature of kicking up a shindy.

"I—I say, you may get run in!" groaned Potter.

"Don't be an ass, Potter!"

"You can't do it, old chap!" urged Greene.

"Don't be a dummy, Greene!"

"But I—I say——"

"Don't jaw!"

"Coker, old man——"

"Don't gabble!"

Evidently Coker was beyond argument. He stepped from the car.

"You fellows coming in with me?" he asked.

"Are we?" murmured Potter.

"No fear!" yapped Greene.

"Stick in the car, then! I don't want any help in thrashing a dago, I hope," said Coker contemptuously. "I don't suppose I shall be long."

He walked into the circus field. Many eyes were cast on his black eye—which leaped to other eyes! A little man, with a cheery, chubby face, came towards him.

"Not open yet, sir!" he said. "The performance begins at——"

"Blow the performance!" snapped Coker. "Think I've come here to see a circus?"

Tippity Tip stared at him. It was rather natural to suppose that a fellow who walked into the circus field had come to see the circus.

"Is Muccolini in?" demanded Coker.

"Eh? Yes! What——"

"Where is he?"

"In his van, sir. But——"

"Point out his van, will you?"

"If he's not expecting you, sir, I wouldn't drop in on him," said Tippity. "The signor isn't in—hem—a very good temper jest now——"

"I dare say he'll be in a worse before I'm through with him! Will you tell me where that macaroni-muncher's van is?" snorted Coker.

And Tippity having obligingly pointed it out, Horace Coker tramped towards it, with his sound eye gleaming. And Tippity, and a good many other circus men, stared after him as he went, wondering what was up.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Two!

SIGNOR MUCCOLINI was sitting in his van—lately Billy Bunter's.

After dealing so drastically with the fat Owl of the Remove, the signor stamped back into the circus field, with his black eyes glittering under his knitted black brows. His temper was still in a boiling state. He stamped into his caravan; glared round it, picked up several articles that belonged to its late occupant, and pitched them out of the doorway.

Bunter's belongings were few. Such as they were, they were soon scattered in the grass round the caravan.

For the present, at least, the Italian was blind to the dictates of prudence. He had kicked Bunter out of the circus—and he was glad that he had kicked him out, and only sorry that he had not kicked him harder, and oftener! Had Billy Bunter returned, at that moment, the process would have been repeated. He was done with Bunter; and he had re-taken possession of the caravan the cheeky fat Owl had annexed, and which Bunter was never to enter again.

No doubt, later on, when that burst of fury had passed, reflection and uneasiness would follow. There was a "yellow" streak very strongly developed in Pietro Muccolini—and when he became calm again, and considered the possible consequences of his action, it was very probable that that yellow streak would come uppermost.

But he was not thinking of that at the moment. He threw himself on the ottoman in the caravan, panting after his exertions, and wishing savagely that he had given the fat schoolboy a little more before he allowed him to escape.

He lighted a big black cigar, blew out clouds of smoke, and stared through the open doorway, scowling at everyone who passed within his view. And he gave quite a jump at the sight of a big, burly fellow coming towards the van.

He knew Coker again at once. "Gospetto! Quello brutale—quello sciocco!" muttered the Italian, between his teeth. "È mai possibile?"

His feelings towards Horace Coker were bitter enough. But he had never thought of seeing the burly Horace again. Certainly it had never occurred to him that Coker would track him out, with the intention of avenging that black eye.

He rose from his seat, stepped to the door of the van, and leaned out, shouting to Coker.

"What want you? What do you want here? Go away, fool!"

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed Coker.

He came on at a run. He was not likely to go away at the dago's bidding. Coker had business with the dago before he went away.

"Come out of that van, you rotter!" roared Coker.

"Che!" snarled Muccolini. It did not dawn on him yet what Coker wanted. "Che cosa è?"

"Don't jabber your dago lingo at me!" snorted Coker. "I don't understand it, and don't want to! Come out of that van!"

"Perche?" yelled Muccolini. "Why?"

"Didn't you give me this eye?" bawled Coker. "Think you're getting away with it, you greasy dago? I'm going to give you one like it! Will

you step out of that van, or shall I come in and yank you out?"

"Dio mio!" gasped Muccolini.

He understood now.

He made a movement to spring from the van. But he paused.

Muccolini was a man, and rather a beefy, bulky man, and Coker was, after all, only a schoolboy. But he was a large size in schoolboys. He was big, he was brawny, he was muscular, and he had boundless pluck and unlimited determination. In the latter qualities, Muccolini was rather at a disadvantage. Fierce temper and wildcat ferocity were not pluck.

So Muccolini did not spring from the van. Coker, it was clear, was not to be handled like Billy Bunter. He was, indeed, big and strong enough to handle Muccolini.

In the encounter on the hill, up at Hawkinge, Coker had been downed with ease; but then he had been taken by surprise. A different tale might have been told, had Muccolini lingered for further argument.

Anyhow, whether Coker could thrash that dago or not, it was clear that he was going to try, and that he was going to try awfully hard. Even if he failed, it was certain that he would inflict a lot of damage in the attempt. The fist he was brandishing at the dago looked like a leg of mutton.

Instead of stepping out of the van, therefore, the signor shouted to some of the circus men, who were gathering round, staring.

"Turn that fool out!"

"I'd like to see them do it," said Coker. "You rotten dago, you were quick enough to punch a fellow in the eye when he wasn't looking! By gum, I'll have you out of that van fast enough!"

Coker charged up the steps.

The Italian, in the doorway, struck at him savagely. There was a spurt of crimson from Coker's nose.

But he gave as good as he received, and the signor, with a howl, staggered back into the van, under the drive of a leg-of-mutton fist.

Coker plunged in after him.

"Go," panted Muccolini, "away! Sciocco—furfante—matto—dio mio! Oh! Ow! Ooooh!"

Coker came at him with right and left. His black eye glared, and his sound eye blazed. Muccolini grappled with him, yelling for his men to come to his aid.

There was a startled buzz of voices round the van.

Tippity Tip, Marco, Samson, Wiggles, and a dozen others gathered there in a buzz of surprise and wonder. From within the van came sounds of bumping and crashing.

Coker's idea was to pitch the Italian out of the van, where there would be space to handle him. Muccolini struggled furiously in the Greyfriars Fifth Former's hefty grasp, and they reeled to and fro in the van.

The circus field was hilly, like most of the fields round about Folkestone. The caravan stood a little on the slant to one side. On the slanting floor Coker and Muccolini pitched over, and crashed.

Coker's head banged on the side of the van, and he spluttered, releasing his hold on the Italian.

Muccolini did not lose the chance. Beefy as he was, he was agile. He wriggled away from Coker, plunged to the doorway of the van, and leaped out.

Coker, however, was up in a moment or two and after him. Coker jumped out, stumbled on the steps, and landed at full length.



Billy Bunter put on a burst of speed. But so did Muccolini—and he reached Bunter as the fat junior reached the gate of the circus. The signor's boot flew out, and landed with a crash. Thud! The boot fairly lifted Bunter and hurled him headlong out of the gateway into the road. "Ow! Yow! Wow!" bellowed the runaway schoolboy.

"Seize him!" the signor was yelling. "Kick him out! Do you hear me? Will you seize that madman, and fling him out on the road? Dio mio! I order you to fling that scoundrel out at the gate!"

Coker, staggering to his feet, was seized on all sides by many hands.

Who he was, and why he had come there and pitched into Signor Muccolini, the circus men did not know; and probably they were not displeased to see the bullying Italian capture a punch or two. Still, it was evident that Coker needed restraining, and they grasped him, and restrained him.

"Leggo!" roared Coker, struggling in the hands of three or four. "You rotters! Leggo! I've come here to thrash that sneaking dago!"

"Better clear off, young man!" said Marco. "We can't have you pitching into our boss, you know."

"You can't do that there 'ere!" grinned Tippity Tip.

"Look at my eye!" roared Coker. "I'm going to give that macaroni-muncher one to match it! I'm going to knock the spaghetti out of him! You rotten dago funk, don't hide behind these chaps! Put up your hands, you skulking funk!"

"Throw him out!" shrieked Signor Muccolini.

"Come on, lad!" said Samson, the strong man.

"Leggo!" roared Coker.

"This way!" smiled Marco.

Coker was not the man to count odds. He was the fellow to bite off more than he could masticate—much more!

The gigantic lion-tamer had him by one arm, the circus strong man by the other; another man had the back of his collar. But Coker put up a desperate resistance as he was marched away across the field to the gate. He fought every inch of the way.

Even so many hands did not find it easy to escort Coker to the gate. But he was got there at last.

"Now walk off, young man!" said Marco kindly. "Don't play the fool any more! Just walk off!"

"Leggo!"

"Are you going?" grinned Samson.

"Not till I've thrashed that dago!" roared Coker.

"Throw him out!" came Muccolini's voice, screaming, from behind. "Throw the ruffian out, I tell you! Cospetto! Fling him out!"

"You won't go?" asked Marco.

"No!" howled Coker. "Not till I — Yarooooop!"

He went.

Potter and Greene gazed at him from the car as he landed on the roadside. They had rather expected Coker to come back like this—now he had come.

Coker staggered up. Breathless and dizzy, he glared back at the circus gate, crammed with grinning faces. Even Coker might have balked at the odds, but he didn't. He charged back.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Potter.

"Oh crikey!" murmured Greene.

Coker flew again. He landed with a bump and a roar. This time he was not so quick on his feet. He sat up, spluttering.

Potter opened the door of the car.

"Coker, old chap, jump in here, quick!" he pleaded. "For the love of Mike, come along before they send for a bobby and run you in!"

"Grooogh!"

"Coker—" implored Greene.

Coker got on his feet.

"I'll smash 'em!" he gasped. "I'll smash the lot of 'em, and then thrash that macaroni-muncher! I'll—"

He charged again.

"Well," said Mr. Tip, "I've 'eard of blokes who never know when they've

'ad enough; but that bloke takes the cake!"

"He do!" grinned Wiggles.

Marco and Samson picked Coker up. They were good-natured fellows, and really they did not want to hurt Coker. But he had to go. They carried him to the car, kicking and struggling like a fractious infant.

"Friend of yours—what?" asked Marco, glancing in at Potter and Greene.

"Yes," gasped Potter, "we—"

"Better take him away and keep him quiet!"

Coker was pitched into the car. Marco slammed the door.

Potter drove away. By the time Horace Coker recovered sufficient wind to sit up and take notice, the gateway and its crowd of grinning faces were left behind.

Coker had done his best. No fellow could do more. But he had not thrashed that obnoxious dago. He had only collected new damages, and, sad to relate, his left eye was slowly but surely approximating in shade to his right.

Coker had arrived at the Magnificent Circus with one black eye. He left it with two!

And Potter and Greene could only hope that Coker would be satisfied with two black eyes—since even the obstinate Horace could not possibly have collected any more!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Dropping on an Old Friend!

"COVER!" grinned Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton & Co. looked round—and grinned also.

It was a bright and sunny morning.

The Greyfriars cyclists had put up for THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,423.

the night in Folkestone. They were going to have a day at that attractive resort before pushing their bikes again on the way to Margate.

Naturally, they turned out to bathe in the hot, sunny August morning. They had enjoyed a swim, and now they were taking their ease, lying on the warm sand, lazing—which even strenuous youths like the famous Co. of Greyfriars felt entitled to do.

There were plenty of people on the beach. But the crowd was thinning off towards lunch-time.

The chums of the Remove were thinking of returning to their hut to dress, when Bob, glancing along the beach, gave the alarm.

A fat figure appeared in view.

Even had the juniors not recognised the well-known circumference thereof, they would have noted the big spectacles that flashed back the sun.

Billy Bunter was coming along the beach glancing to left and right through those big spectacles.

Evidently Bunter was in search of somebody.

The Famous Five did not need telling of whom he was in search. They had seen him kicked out of Muccolini's Magnificent Circus the previous day. It looked as if he had not returned there. So there was no doubt that Bunter was in need of pals.

Aware that they were in Folkestone, the fat Owl of the Remove was looking for them, and as he could guess easily enough that they would turn out to bathe, he was quartering the beach for them.

It was the most probable place to find anybody; and he had found them—or almost found them! He was in full view when Bob spotted him, and but for his limited vision, the Famous Five would have been in full view also. As it was, however, Bunter had not spotted them yet, though it was only a matter of minutes.

Harry Wharton sat up. Bob jumped to his feet.

"Cover!" he repeated. "Get a move on!"

"Oh, rot!" grunted Johnny Bull. "I'm not going to move!"

"Fathead!" said Bob. "Bunter's got the boot from the circus! We're the next best thing! Anybody here want him?"

"No fear!"

"The no-fearfulness is terrific."

"That's all right," said Johnny Bull. "I'll jolly well kick him!"

"You jolly well won't!" answered Bob. "Bunter got enough kicking from the dago yesterday; he can't want any more. Hunt cover, fathead, and let him roll by. Now, then, follow your leader!"

"Oh, all right!" yawned Johnny. And he heaved himself up out of the sand.

Billy Bunter's hooking-on propensities in the holidays were only too well known. He had hooked on to Muccolini's Circus, and now, evidently, he had come unhooked, with the aid of the signor's boot. The Famous Five, as Bob remarked, were the next best thing, and so Bunter was looking for them—looking, if successful, to be followed by hooking! Really, it was more good-natured to dodge out of sight, and let him roll by, than to resort to Mucky's methods!

So the Famous Five hunted cover.

At a short distance was a rather high ridge of sand, left by the last tide. On the other side of it they would be in cover while the Owl of the Remove rolled on unseeing.

Bob headed for that ridge at a run. He was, as usual, full of energy and

full of beans. Instead of clambering over the ridge, he cleared it at a bound.

He came down on the farther side of the sand-ridge—and, to judge by the fearful yell that woke the echoes, on something else.

An old proverb recommends that one should look before leaping. Bob, in his cheery exuberance of spirits, had not thought of it.

Really, he might have guessed that some sea-sider might be lying on the sand on the other side of that ridge. It was quite a probable thing. Only Bob did not happen to think of it till he landed—and then, of course, it was too late.

He landed, stumbled, and sprawled on a man who was lying in the sun, close by the sand-ridge. His nose hit the sand beyond—his knees rested on the unfortunate man's chest.

The man yelled. Obviously he was surprised and not pleased. Bob Cherry gasped. He was surprised, too, though really he had less cause for surprise than the man he had jumped on.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob, as he sprawled.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Bob's done it—"

"As per usual!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The terrific ass!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Better see if he's killed anybody!" remarked Nugent.

And the four juniors clambered over the ridge, to see what damage had been done. Meanwhile, the man on the sand had pitched Bob off, jumped to his feet, and grasped the sprawling junior by the back of the neck.

With a swing of a very powerful arm, he lifted Bob upright, and set him on his feet. Then he shook him.

"You young ass!" he hooted.

"Ow!" gasped Bob.

"What the dickens do you mean by jumping on me?"

"Wow! I didn't mean to jump on you!" stuttered Bob, wriggling in the sinewy grasp on his neck. "I didn't see you—"

"Why didn't you look?"

"Never thought!" said Bob. "Sorry if I hurt you—but it won't make it any better to crack my spinal column, will it? Would you mind letting go the back of my neck? I suppose you're using your fingers, but it feels like a pair of steel pincers."

The man burst into a laugh, and released him.

"I seem to know your voice," he remarked. "I seem to remember, also, that you were always a thoughtless young ass!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob. He spun round as the back of his neck was released, and took a look at the man he had crashed on.

He saw a rather tall, lean figure, and a clear-cut face, with very keen eyes that had a good-humoured twinkle in them.

"Mr. Locke!" exclaimed Bob.

He knew that face at once. Ferrers Locke, the celebrated detective, was a relative of Dr. Locke, the headmaster of Greyfriars School, and the chums of the Remove were very well acquainted with him.

"Ferrers Locke!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as he came plunging over the sand-ridge.

"The esteemed and absurd Locke!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"So you're all here!" said Ferrers Locke, glancing with a smile at the faces of the Famous Five. "Holiday-making, I suppose, and amusing yourselves by jumping on tired old fellows

who come down for a day's quiet by the sea."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Locke!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I was an ass to jump over without looking—"

"No harm done, fortunately," said Mr. Locke, smiling. "You winded me a little, but that is all. I should recommend a little more care, however."

"The lookfulness before the leapfulness is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well, and saves a stitch in time, as the English proverb remarks!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Good old English proverb!" grinned Bob. "I say, Mr. Locke, it's jolly to run into you here—not the way I did it, I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, it's jolly to see you again, sir!" said Bob. "We're on a biking tour, and putting in a day here before we push on to Merry Margate. Jolly glad we stopped on, now."

"The gladfulness is terrific!" declared the Nabob of Bhanipur. "It is an absurd pleasure to gaze once more upon your stately and ridiculous countenance, esteemed sahib."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"I am glad to see you again," he said. "It's some time since we met, isn't it? We—"

"I say, you fellows—"

It was a fat, familiar squeak.

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Bob. "Bunter!"

The juniors had forgotten Bunter!

Had they been lying on the sand behind the ridge, according to plan, the fat Owl would have rolled on without seeing them. But as they were standing up, their heads and shoulders were in full view of Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, as he came rolling along the beach. And he had spotted them.

The fat Owl came clambering over the ridge.

"I say, you fellows, I've been looking for you!" he squeaked. "I say, it's jolly lucky I've found you, ain't it?"

"Oh fearfully!" said Bob Cherry.

Ferrers Locke laughed. Perhaps he guessed, on Bunter's arrival, why the juniors had been in such hurried retreat.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"Is that Mr. Locke?" he asked. "Fancy meeting you here, Mr. Locke! Is that chap Drake still with you? Bit of an ass, isn't he? I say—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Blow away, bluebottle!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Ferrers Locke looked at his wrist-watch.

"I'm lunching at the Palm House," he said. "If you young fellows would like to join me and have a talk over old times—"

"Yes, rather!" said Billy Bunter, speaking first.

"What-ho!" said the Famous Five, with one voice.

"Come along in half an hour, then," said Mr. Locke, and, with a cheery nod, he walked away up the beach.

"I say, you fellows—" Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five.

"Come along and get changed," said Harry.

"I say—"

"Bow-wow!"

The Famous Five cut away to their hut to change. Billy Bunter blinked after their disappearing forms and ejaculated:

"Beasts!"

Then he rolled up the beach in the

direction taken by the Baker Street detective. It was an unexpected meeting, but quite a happy meeting for Bunter. Bunter was not going to be left out of that lunch.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Talks Too Much!

FERRERS LOCKE smiled—the kind of smile that gave his clear-cut, impassive face a very pleasant expression—as he sat at the festive board.

It was but seldom that the busy Baker Street detective allowed himself even a brief holiday. He had run down to Folkestone that morning by an early train for a day of restful quiet by the sea. That restful quiet had been rather emphatically interrupted. But it was plain that Mr. Locke was very pleased to meet his young friends from Greyfriars School, and Harry Wharton & Co. were undoubtedly pleased to meet the famous detective again. So it was a very cheery party that gathered to lunch at a special table under the red-striped awning of the Palm House facing the sea.

Whether Mr. Locke was glad to see Billy Bunter was, perhaps, another matter; neither was Billy Bunter fearfully bucked at seeing Mr. Locke. But he was very glad to see the lunch, and his fat face beamed over it.

The fat Owl had, in fact, had a lean time since leaving Muccolini's Magnificent Circus the previous day. That lunch came, to Bunter, like corn in Egypt in the lean years.

Mr. Locke had ordered that lunch with special care. It was good and it was ample. Bunter proceeded to spread himself.

It was Bunter's way, as a rule, to bag the lion's share of the conversation, as of everything else, but for a long time his jaws were too busy for talking; he contented himself with bagging the lion's share of the lunch.

He was not silent; a continuous murmur of munching and crunching proceeded from him. But he did not talk, which was a great relief. The other fellows had a chance to speak. They asked Mr. Locke about their old pal, Jack Drake, once of the Greyfriars Remove, and now the famous detective's assistant in London. They talked over old times. Lunch passed very pleasantly.

Not till Billy Bunter had loaded well over the Plimsoll line did he weigh in with chinwag; but even Bunter slowed down on the foodstuffs at last, and then his fat voice was heard.

"I say, you fellows, pass the strawberries this way, Bob. Shove over the cream, Nugent. Sugar, Juky. I say, you fellows, did you know I'd left the circus?"

"Sort of guessed it, as we saw the dago kicking you out," said Bob.

"Cheeky rotter, you know?" said Bunter. "I'll jolly well make him sit up for it! I've a jolly good mind to go back with a bobby! I fancy it would make that cheeky dago look pretty sick if I did."

Ferrers Locke raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Bunter's been at a circus, Mr. Locke," Harry Wharton explained. "He's been doing a turn there—"

"The World's Biggest Eater and the Fastest Porpoise Ever!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Bunter. "It was jolly well nothing of the kind, Mr. Locke. I've been a regular star at Muccolini's Circus. People came miles and miles to see me. I've been eating a tremendous time; enthusiastic crowds,

roars of applause—and all that, you know."

"And the jolly old boot to wind up with!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The bootfulness was terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Well, if that dago thinks he's done with me, he's jolly well mistaken!" said Bunter. "I'll make him squirm!"

"Muccolini's Circus," said Mr. Locke, with a curious glance at the fat Owl. "I think I have seen the bills about; it is at Folkestone now."

"Yes; on a pitch up the Canterbury Road," said Bob. "Jolly good show, if you wanted to see a circus, Mr. Locke; no end of attractions, though they've lost Bunter—"

"They jolly well haven't!" said Bunter. "I'm going back!"

"Look out for Mucky's boot!" chuckled Bob.

"Oh, he'll be all right when he's cooled down!" said Bunter. "Bet you he's in a funk by this time. Those dagoes have fearful tempers; but they haven't any pluck, you know. I'll bet you Mucky's expecting every minute to be tapped on the shoulder by a bobby."

"Don't talk that rot now, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton hastily.

"Oh, really, Wharton! The fact is, you fellows, I'm a bit uncertain," said the fat Owl. "That dago was in such a fearful temper yesterday, that I—I thought I'd better keep clear for a bit. It's a bit beneath a Public school man's dignity to enter into a row with a circus man. But now he's had time to think it over I'll bet he knows that he jolly well can't afford to quarrel with me, considering what I know."

"Shut up, ass!" breathed Bob. The Famous Five were feeling extremely uncomfortable.

Knowing Bunter as they did, and his impenetrable obtuseness, they could make very wide allowances for the fat and fatuous Owl, but they could hardly imagine what might be the effect of these peculiar revelations on Mr. Locke.

Had Bunter realised that the part he had been playing at the Magnificent Circus was that of an unscrupulous young rascal, no doubt he would have taken the hint and shut up.

But Bunter was very far from realising that.

Being perfectly satisfied with himself and his line of conduct, Bunter saw no reason for shutting up. Moreover, shutting up was not his long suit. He went on, regardless.

"It's a bit awkward, you see. To tell you fellows the truth, I'm a bit short of money. I had to put up at quite a cheap place last night—not my style at all—and, you'd hardly believe it, but they made me pay in advance, because I hadn't any luggage. It left me stony."

"What a new experience for you!" sighed Bob.

"The newfulness must have been terrific."

"That's why I was looking for you fellows," explained Bunter. "I knew you'd lend a pal a few pounds to see him through."

"Guess again!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Of course, I'm going back," said Bunter. "But—but—but I don't want to be in a hurry. I—I'd rather give that dago time to think it over. He jolly well knows that he's got to toe the line, of course. Still, I'd rather give him time to get cool. See?"

Evidently Bunter was in a state of doubt.

He had not, it appeared, done with the Magnificent Circus; he was going back. But he wanted to be quite, quite sure that Signor Muccolini was in a more reasonable mood before he went.

He had not dared to turn up again the previous day; he seemed rather dubious about turning up even after the lapse of twenty-four hours.

He could not help feeling that, after that outbreak of ferocious temper on the signor's part, it was judicious to steer clear for a time.

At the same time he was short of cash, and no fellow could live on air—especially Bunter.

Really it was quite a difficult position.

"You see how it is, you fellows," he went on, blinking at the Famous Five seriously through his big spectacles. "I'd rather give the brute a rest for a day or two. He's bound to come round, of course; but with such a savage-tempered beast a fellow can't be too careful. You see that? With a few pounds—"

"You're boring Mr. Locke with your silly rot," said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Not at all!" said Mr. Locke. "On the other hand, I am quite interested. Don't mind me, Bunter."

Bunter didn't.

"Of course," he went on sagely, "if I walked into the circus, taking a bobby with me, Mucky would fairly cringe. That would bring him round in no time. But I should have to explain to the bobby. That's the difficulty."

Harry Wharton & Co. hardly dared to surmise what Mr. Locke might think of this.

Whatever he thought of it, his face gave no sign.

He was regarding Bunter with a faint smile, that was all.

Bunter did not heed him; he was too deeply interested in his own affairs and his own peculiar difficulties to bother about Mr. Locke, or what Mr. Locke might be thinking. Bunter's affairs, of course, were the most urgent matter in the universe, if not the only urgent matter.

"On the whole," said Bunter, "I fancy I'd better give him time to cool down; and I'm pretty certain he'll be jolly glad to see me when I go back if I don't take a bobby with me. What do you fellows think?"

"I think we'd better give you some more of what that dago gave you yesterday, you burbling owl!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I'm blessed if I know what you can be thinking about this, Mr. Locke," said Harry Wharton, with a very red face. "But I suppose you've noticed that Bunter is a born idiot—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"He's been sticking at Muccolini's Circus!" explained Harry. "He fancies he has found out something about Muccolini which makes the man afraid to kick him out. He really doesn't understand that he is a fat rascal to trade on it, if there's really anything in it. That's the sort of brain he's got."

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"I quite understand!" he said.

"And there can't be anything in it, either, because the man actually did kick him out yesterday!" added the captain of the Remove. "I began to think there must be, as Muccolini put up with him so long—but yesterday he booted him out of the circus."

"He was in a fearful temper yesterday," said Bunter. "I think something must have happened up at Hawkinge to annoy him. He came back scowling like a demon in a pantomime."

"And jolly well booted you, as you jolly well deserved!" said Bob. "Now ring off and give us a rest."

"Well, if you fellows are too jolly mean to lend a pal a few pounds to

carry on for a day or two, I shall go back this afternoon!" said Bunter. "If Mucky cuts up rusty again, I'll send a bobby to see him next."

"Fathead!"

"Well, I know what I know!" said Bunter. "I've let him off out of sheer good-nature so long as he toed the line. But if he's going to keep this up, I'm done with him. Still, I fancy it will be all right. He can't get out of it that I saw him with the camera."

"The camera!" repeated Bob. "You weren't up at Hawkinge yesterday."

"Eh? Did he have a camera with him yesterday?" asked Bunter. "He, he, he! He would, of course—there's an air camp there, I've heard."

Bunter chuckled.

"People can take photographs there if they like, fathead!" said Bob Cherry, with a blank stare at the chuckling Owl.

"That depends!" grinned Bunter. "There's some things about the air camps that mustn't be taken! He was jolly careful to keep it dark at Wapshot, I know that! He, he, he!"

Ferrers Locke's look for a moment became very intent.

"You'll jolly well see!" went on Bunter. "I don't believe in being hard on an ignorant foreigner, who doesn't know how to behave himself in a civilised country. Mussolini kicks them into behaving themselves in Italy; and when they get into a country where they're not kicked, they don't behave! That's how it is. I'm willing to go easy with Mucky, if he gets it into his head that one good turn deserves another. But I'm not having any more cheek from him."

Billy Bunter rose to his feet.

"I must say you're mean," he said. "After all I've done for you at Greyfriars, a few pounds wouldn't hurt you. Look here, who's going to lend me a taxi fare?"

"Echo answers who!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, don't be so beastly stingy!" urged Bunter. "I can do it on half-a-crown!"

Harry Wharton produced a half-crown. It was worth a larger sum than that to say farewell to William George Bunter.

"I'll settle this next term at Greyfriars," said Bunter. "Remind me, I might forget it."

"The mightfulness is terrific!"

"Thanks for the lunch, Mr. Locke," said Bunter. "If you like to drop in and see me some day at Bunter Court, I'll stand you a better one. You fellows can go and eat coke! I'm fed-up with you!"

Bunter rolled away.

When he was gone the Famous Five rather uneasily expected Mr. Locke to make some reference to his peculiar revelations. But Ferrers Locke seemed to have forgotten Bunter's chatter, much to their relief.

Bunter had borrowed that taxi-fare to return to Muccolini's Magnificent Circus. The chums of the Remove had little doubt that when he arrived there the Italian would kick him out again.

But if the Italian did not, it certainly would look as if there was "something" in the fat Owl's hold over the dago. The juniors could not help thinking so.

And, although Ferrers Locke said nothing, and his face expressed nothing, it was probable that the Baker Street detective also was thinking so!

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,438.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Horace Knows How!

POTTER and Greene jumped out of the car with cheerful faces. They had had a ripping day in the car.

Never, since they had started on that holiday motoring tour with Horace Coker, had they enjoyed a day so much.

That was explained by the circumstance that Horace Coker had stayed indoors that day.

From early morn till dewy eve his pals had been deprived of the pleasure of his company.

Hence their cheerful faces.

Horace Coker was not the fellow to care much what people thought, or whether they thought at all. But, with two lovely black eyes, even Coker was not anxious to display himself to the public gaze.

For once, Coker of the Fifth was understudying the shy violet and seeking seclusion.

After his wild adventures at the Magnificent Circus, Coker had been got away in the car. He had been feeling altogether too used up for further hectic adventures. He had no doubt that he could handle that cheeky dago Muccolini. But it was borne in, even on Coker's mind, that he could not handle Marco, and Samson, and the rest of the circus company, in addition.

Unwillingly, but greatly to his friends' relief, Horace had allowed himself to be got away in the car. Two black eyes, a swollen nose, and a collection of bruises seemed enough for even Coker to go on with.

Those adornments made rather a change in his plans. Coker, who was stuffed with money, had intended to put up at the biggest and most magnificent hotel in Folkestone regardless of expense. Potter and Greene had expected it—it was this sort of thing that made Coker's friendship tolerable. But with two eyes as black as the ace of spades and a nose as red as a ripe strawberry, Coker was disinclined to display himself at the Hotel Magnifico or the Hotel Superbo or the Hotel Tremendo! So they had sought a quiet little hostelry, in a quiet little street, where Coker's extraordinary adornments did not fail to attract attention, but attracted much less than at a more crowded and fashionable resort.

Coker went to bed that night in a gloomy mood. He turned out in the morning still gloomy.

He, Horace Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars, had had his eye blacked by a cheeky dago. That was enough to make the skies fall. But in addition to that he had collected another black eye in the search for just vengeance. And vengeance had been denied him. The dago, still unthrashed, was no doubt sniggering at Coker. That was the unkindest cut of all.

No wonder Coker was gloomy.

Potter and Greene were sympathetic. They carefully refrained from mentioning that Coker had asked for it. Very carefully they kept secret their opinion that he deserved it, and a little more, and then some.

Coker told them curtly that he wasn't going out that day. They could have the car if they liked. But he was not going to display two black eyes and a crimson beak to a lot of gaping holiday trippers. They would have to get on the best they could that day without Coker.

Potter and Greene bore it with fortitude.

They had a day out in the car: while

Coker nursed his black eyes and his gloomy thoughts.

They looked quite merry and bright when they came back in the sunset. It had been a ripping day. There was only one fly in the ointment. They had to see Coker again when they came back. That was inevitable.

They walked into the hotel; and found further good news. Coker was dining in his room. He was still understudying the shy violet. Potter and Greene had quite a nice dinner on their own. Then they debated whether they had better go up and see Coker or drop into a cinema first. It was an undoubted fact that the cinema was more attractive than Coker—especially in his present dark and pessimistic mood.

The cinema won the day. It happened to be quite a good picture; and they stayed till the finish.

When they walked back to the hotel, it was very near bed-time. They felt, perhaps, a little compunction. It was so nice to miss Coker that they really could not blame themselves; but they felt that they had perhaps overdone it a little.

"Better drop in and see Black-eyed Susan before we go to roost!" said Potter.

Greene agreed that they had better.

They went to Coker's room. After all, they had had a ripping day; and it was only friendly to let Coker jaw for an hour or so before they went to bed.

He blinked at them as they came in. His eyes blinked and blinked and blinked. They were as dark as ever—if not a little darker. His nose was still like a beacon. His brows were knitted.

"Feeling better, old chap?" asked Potter.

"No!" answered Coker coldly.

"Hem! I say—hem—"

"I've got something to tell you chaps," said Coker. "I've been thinking out my plans, and I've decided what to do. Now you've come in—"

"You see, we—we—"

"Now you've come in, I'll tell you. I'm glad you've dropped in before going to bed!" added Coker, with a touch of sarcasm. "It's saved me the trouble of rooting you out of bed!"

Potter and Greene were glad they had dropped in. Evidently, even if they had gone straight to bed, there would have been no escape from Coker's jaw. No doubt Horace had a lot of unuttered conversation bottled up, as it were, after that long day on his lonely own.

Potter gave a surreptitious glance at the clock on the mantelpiece. Greene let his eyes fall casually on his wrist-watch. But they knew that they had to have it.

"That dago," resumed Coker—"that dago thinks he's done with me. He's blacked my eye, and I got the other one blacked in the row at the circus—I think some clumsy ass jammed an elbow into it—anyhow, there it is! I never thrashed the dago. I'm going to!"

"I—I'd give it a miss, old chap!" said Potter anxiously. "He—he's not really worth it."

"Beneath your notice!" said Greene.

"Don't jaw!" said Coker irritably. "Do listen to a chap, and keep your chins quiet for a minute! I'm going to thrash that cheeky rotter, Muccolini, of course! That goes without saying. I can hardly let him black my eyes and get away with it. He's got it coming!"

Potter and Greene exchanged a hope-



"Throw him out!" shrieked Signor Muccolini. The giant lion-tamer grasped Horace Coker on one side, and the circus strong man grasped him on the other side. Coker put up a desperate resistance, and even in so many hands it was not easy to escort him to the gate.

less glance. If Coker wasn't satisfied with two black eyes, a strawberry nose, a cauliflower ear, and a list of other damages, they could not help thinking that he was greedy. Still, they knew the futility of argument with old Horace.

"Well, if you're fixed on it, old chap—" sighed Potter.

"It's as fixed and settled as the laws of the swedes and nasturtiums!" answered Coker icily—possibly meaning the Medes and Persians!

"The—the what—the—the who— Oh! Yes!" gasped Potter. "I—I see! Well, old chap, I dare say you know best—"

"I suppose there can't be much doubt about that," said Coker, staring. "Don't be an ass, Potter!"

"Oh! Yes! Quite! Well, then, if you're going on the jolly old war-path to-morrow, we'll have a look at Dover while you're gone—"

"I'm not going to-morrow," answered Coker calmly. "I'm going to-night!"

"Tut-tut-to-night!" stuttered Greene.

"Yes—about midnight!" Potter and Greene gazed at him. "They'll all be in bed and fast asleep, then!" said Potter.

"That's why!" said Coker.

His friends could only gaze. Well as they knew old Horace, he was always surprising them. Now he had surprised them once more.

"You—you don't mean it, old chap!" gasped Potter at last.

"I generally mean what I say!" said Coker. "I told you I'd been thinking this out! I went there yesterday to thrash the dago. What did he do? Skulked behind a lot of rough blighters, who handled me and turfed me out! If I went again to-morrow it would happen again. What would be

the good of that? I've got to get the dago on his own, when there isn't a crowd of hooligans round to help him. A night attack, see?"

"A—a—a night attack!" gurgled Greene. "Oh, ye gods!"

"When they're all in bed," said Coker, with great calmness, "they can't set on me in a mob. You see that?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes! But—"

"I get in the dago's van! I hook him out, and mop him up, before the whole crew can turn out! That's strategy!" explained Coker. "When the odds are too heavy, a fellow has to use strategy. It won't take me long to whop that greasy dago!"

"But—but—but—Coker, old man!" gasped Potter. "You'll get run in—you—you really can't do these things, you know!"

"If a policeman dropped on you—" urged Greene.

"Hardly likely, in a field a mile out of the town," said Coker. "Not that I should let a policeman interfere with me! I shouldn't like to hit a policeman, of course; but if it was necessary, of course, I should."

"Oh crikey!" said Potter feebly.

And Greene gasped. They could only hope that Horace would not find it necessary to hit a policeman! Hitting policemen was an awfully dangerous amusement.

"That's the plan of campaign!" said Coker.

Clearly, he had thought it all out and had it all cut and dried.

"Well," said Potter, "if you're going to play the giddy ox, old man, I can't stop you! Time we got off to bed, Greeney."

"No good turning in," said Coker.

"You'd have to turn out again at eleven."

"Eh?"

"We start at eleven!"

"We do?" gasped Greene.

It dawned on Coker's chums that they were in this!

"I shall want you, of course," said Coker. "If any of the other blighters turn out while I'm thrashing the dago, you can keep them off till I'm finished with him. I don't mean that you'll be a lot of use. You won't be! But you'll be better than nothing!"

Potter and Greene did not go to bed. For the next hour they talked to Coker. An hour of solid argument had as much effect on Coker as the dripping of water on a granite rock. Coker's resolve was as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians—or, as he preferred to put it—the swedes and nasturtiums! Coker was not to be moved. He was going—and Potter and Greene were going with him. And that was that!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Comes Back!

"I M!" said Tippity Tip.

Mr. Tip stared.

"Im!" he repeated.

The Wheeze-wangler of Muccolini's Magnificent Circus stared at the fat figure that alighted from a taxicab at the gate.

After Billy Bunter's exit from the circus the previous day, at the end of Signor Muccolini's boot, Mr. Tip had not expected to see him again.

Nobody at the circus, except perhaps the signor, expected to see him again. Nobody was surprised that the

signor had kicked him out. They were only surprised that the signor had not kicked him out before. Having been kicked out, it was a natural supposition that he would stay kicked out. But here he was!

True, Billy Bunter did not roll in at the gate with his accustomed air of self-importance. He did not seem so full of bounce as of old. He blinked round him watchfully through his big spectacles.

Spotting the staring clown, Bunter rolled towards him.

"Mucky in?" he asked.

"So you've come back!" said Mr. Tip. "My eye! Yes, Mucky's in—and I dessay he'll boot you out agin, if you ask for it!"

"I'd like to see him do it!" said Bunter defiantly.

"Well, you will!" said Tippity, with a grin. "The boss has been like a bear with a sore head to-day. There ain't a man in the show that he ain't bull-ragged. If you'll take a tip from me, you'll go while the going's good!"

"Where is he?" snorted Bunter.

"In his van, jest at present," grinned Tippity. "Right on, fatty, if you want to ask for it!"

Billy Bunter rolled on.

He headed for the circus-master's van. But though Bunter rolled towards that van, he did not, like Iser in the poem, roll rapidly. He was in rather a worrying state of doubt.

The lapse of twenty-four hours had given the dago plenty of time to calm down and realise that he could not afford to quarrel with Bunter. On the other hand, if he was in a beastly temper, he might again forget the dictates of prudence, and repeat the performance of the previous day. Bunter still had some reminiscent twinges from that performance. He did not want to be kicked again. Very much indeed he didn't. He was going to give Mucky another chance—but he was not sure that Mucky was in a sufficiently reasonable frame of mind to make the most of that chance. It was quite an uncomfortable state of doubt for the fat Owl to be in.

Arrived at the caravan, the fat junior spotted Signor Muccolini, sitting on the ottoman within, smoking one of his big black cigars.

The signor spotted him at the same moment. The black, bitter scowl that came over his swarthy face was not reassuring.

"Voi!" muttered the Italian. "Porfante! You have come back!"

He rose from the ottoman. Billy Bunter backed away a pace or two, his little round eyes very wary through his big round spectacles.

Only too plainly the Italian's scowling face told what he would have liked to do. If he started doing it, Bunter was ready for instant flight. Mr. Tip, from a little distance, looked on, grinning. He expected to see the signor jump from the van and begin with his bore.

Instead of which, the Italian, with an effort, controlled his savage temper. The truth was that Muccolini was relieved to see the fat Owl again. He had been, as Tippity said, like a bear with a sore head all that day. But Tippity did not know that that was because he dreaded what Bunter might have said and done. He had disregarded prudence in his outburst of fury; but reflection had followed, and the man

with a guilty secret had passed a night and a day of uneasy apprehension.

Bunter blinked at him warily.

"Yes, I've come back, Mucky!" he said. "You don't deserve it, but I'm giving you another chance! I can jolly well tell you I went straight to the police station yesterday—"

"Dio mio!"

Signor Muccolini almost staggered. He put a dusky hand on the doorway of the van to steady himself. His swarthy face for a moment was ghastly. For that moment utter terror was written there.

"You—you—" His voice was husky. Bunter grinned.

If he had doubted before, he was confident now. Indeed, but for his fat obtuseness, Bunter must have realised at that moment that the signor's secret was darker and more dangerous than he had dreamed.

"But I didn't go in," added Bunter reassuringly.

"Oh!" gasped the signor.

"I had a jolly good mind to!" said Bunter. "And I jolly well will if you play any more of your rotten tricks—see? I'll go, if you like! Do you want me to?"

"No!" panted Muccolini.

"If you're glad to see me back—" pursued Bunter victoriously.

"Yes, yes!"

"That's better!" said the fat Owl. "I don't want to be hard on you, Mucky. I know you rotten foreigners are like wildcats, and don't know how to behave yourselves! But, mind, no more of it!"

Bunter waved a warning fat forefinger at the signor.

"I'll overlook it this once!" he said impressively. "Any more of it, and I'm done with you! Got that?"

Signor Muccolini choked. His danger, if his secret was betrayed, was greater than Bunter dreamed of surmising, for the fat Owl had no perception of the real nature of the Italian's secret. But he could scarcely keep his swarthy hands off the impudent fat Owl, all the same.

However, he contrived to do so. He had had one narrow escape, owing to his outbreak of furious temper. All that day he had been in dread of a visit of inquiry from a man in uniform. He did not want to go through that again.

"Got that?" repeated Bunter, raising his voice and speaking in quite a bullying tone.

He was bursting with confidence now.

"Si, si! Yes!" breathed Signor Muccolini, in choking accents. "I—I—I lost my temper! It is over! Forget it!"

"Well, I'll overlook it!" said Bunter loftily. "I don't expect a dago to know how to behave himself, as I've said! Don't let it occur again, that's all!"

The signor gasped.

"And now," went on Bunter, "you seem to have bagged my van while I've been away! I'm not having that! Get out of it!"

Signor Muccolini looked at him. The rage in his gleaming black eyes might have alarmed a fellow less obtuse and self-satisfied than Billy Bunter.

But the cheerful fat Owl was quite indifferent to his temper.

He had the dago where he wanted him, and he was jolly well going to make him toe the line! He was going to make it quite clear that he was not standing any more cheek or any more nonsense. Bunter had the whip-hand, and he was the fellow to use it without limit.

"Do you hear me?" Bunter's bullying voice reached the ears of the staring, wondering Mr. Tip. "I've told you to get out of my van! Are you getting out of it or not?"

Choking, Signor Muccolini descended from the van. He stood looking at Bunter with burning eyes for a moment or two, and then turned and walked hurriedly away.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"Well, my eye!" said Tippity Tip. He stared after the signor as he went, and then gazed at Billy Bunter. "My only 'at!"

Tippity went away in a state of dizzy astonishment. Evidently, Bunter was not going to be kicked out again. That was quite clear.

"Wrig," said Mr. Tip to his friend, the contortionist, "that bladder of lard has blown in again!"

"Neck!" said Wriggles. "The boss'll boot him out as soon as he sees him!"

"Guess again!" said Tippity. "He's got the boss' van ag'in, and the boss is letting him get by with it. I'm asking you, old feller, what does it mean?"

"Ask me another!" said Wriggles.

They were not the only ones surprised. Marco jumped when he saw Billy Bunter strolling round the circus field, with a fat, contented grin.

"You here?" exclaimed the king of the lions, staring at him. "You young ass! You'd better clear before Mucky sees you!"

"Eh? He's seen me!" said Bunter.

"And hasn't booted you out?"

"I'd like to see him do it!" sneered Bunter.

He rolled on, leaving the lion-tamer staring. Samson stared at him; Zara stared; every member of the circus company who saw him wondered.

Bunter did not mind. In fact, he rather enjoyed the sensation caused by his unexpected return to the circus.

He strolled about the camp, fat and self-satisfied, the cynosure of all eyes.

Bunter turned in that night in the signor's van—Bunter's again now! He felt rather like the king coming into his own again.

On the morrow he was going to begin his new side-show stunt; and if Tippity Tip raised any more objections, he was jolly well going to tell the signor to sack Tippity, and jolly well going to see that he did it, too. On that point his fat mind was firmly made up.

So, in a cheery and contented frame of mind, the fat Owl laid his fat head on his pillow and slept—and snored. And if he dreamed, he certainly did not dream of Coker of the Fifth, or of what was scheduled to happen to the occupant of Signor Muccolini's van that night.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Over!

"COKER, old man—"

"Don't jaw!"

"For the love of Mike—"

"Shut up!"

Three figures, in the still night, had stopped by the gate of the circus field on the Canterbury road.

Coker had parked his car at a little distance round a corner in a dark lane. They walked the last quarter of a mile. Coker did not want to risk giving the alarm. He was still being strategic.

Looking over the gate, Coker surveyed the circus camp.

All was dark and silent.

The performance was long over; the crowds were gone; circus tent and side-

shows were shut down; in van and tent, the circus company slept peacefully after a day's work. Not a single light burned anywhere in the camp.

There was a gleam of moonlight—not too much, but enough to make the visibility fairly good. All seemed to favour Coker. Surveying the scene with a strategic eye, Coker was satisfied.

Potter and Greene were not. Unwillingly, on the very verge of rebellion, they had let Coker drag them on the warpath. But they were very nearly at the limit of endurance.

While Coker looked at the camp, they looked at Coker. They were considering whether to seize Coker, bang his head on the gate, and leave him to it.

It was an attractive idea. It was so attractive that they could hardly resist it. Banging Coker's head hard would have made them happy.

But—there was a "but." After banging Coker's head, and leaving him to carry on on his own, they could hardly continue that motoring trip with old Horace. And it was not, after all, a bad trip in Coker's car, with Coker footing the bills. In fact, the only drawback to it was Coker!

They did not bang Coker's head. They suppressed their feelings and waited.

Coker, after a careful strategic survey, turned to them, unconscious of the narrow escape of his napper.

"All serene!" he said. "Fast asleep, the whole crew! But don't make a row. Come on!"

Coker pushed at the gate. It did not open. He pushed harder. Still it did not open.

"Blow the thing!" breathed Coker. "This blessed gate is jammed or something! Help me push it open!"

"But—" began Potter.

"Don't jaw! Push!"

"But it's locked!" hissed Potter.

"Oh!" said Coker.

"Can't you see—"

"I'm not blind, Potter! Don't jaw! Jaw, jaw, jaw!" said Coker.

He climbed over the gate. Slowly, unwillingly, Potter and Greene clambered after him.

Coker led the way.

There was no difficulty about that. The gaudily painted van that belonged to Signor Muccolini was easily to be seen. Its gaudy paint shone in the gleam of the moon.

It stood a little apart from all other vehicles. That circumstance favoured Coker. In fact, everything seemed to be going his way. Not even a dog barked as Coker headed that night attack.

Near the big van, Coker glanced back at his followers. They seemed to be lingering.

"Buck up!" snapped Coker. "Come on; and don't make a row!"

"Who's making a row?" snapped Greene.

"Well, don't! Come on; and don't jaw!"

Coker stepped on again, stumbled over an unnoticed irregularity in the hilly ground, and came down with a bump.

"Oooooh!" yelped Coker.

Then a dog barked somewhere.

"Ow!" gasped Coker.

"Bow-wow!" replied from afar.

"Well, you've done it now," said Potter. "Better cut, old chap. Better put it off for to-night."

"Much better," breathed Greene.

Coker scrambled up. He gave his faint-hearted comrades a glare of scorn, and did not even deign to reply to their suggestion of putting it off. Alarm, or no alarm, Coker was carrying on.

But, to the disappointment of Potter and Greene, there was no alarm. The dog barked several times, answered by other dogs at various distances—as is the way of the canine species. No doubt a chain of barking had been started, extending farther and farther in the night, like the ripples on a stream when a stone is dropped in. But it ceased in the circus camp; and, there, to Coker's satisfaction, all was silent again.

He reached Signor Muccolini's van.

"Now, you men, stand ready, and keep your eyes open!" he whispered. "If anybody turns out, keep him off while I'm handling the dago. I'll have him out of that van in a jiffy!"

Coker trod up the steps to the door of the van.

Potter and Greene, as bidden, kept their eyes open. They kept them, in fact, very wide open. But it was not with the intention of scrapping with circus men, if they turned out at the alarm. It was with the intention of bolting immediately from the spot if they sighted a foe. Night attacks, and desperate affrays in the small hours, with the lingering possibility of getting "run in," had no appeal whatever for Potter and Greene.

Unaware of that, Coker groped over the caravan door. He turned the handle; he pushed. But the door did not open. Coker realised that it was locked inside. He breathed hard, and stepped down. A snore followed him.

"The rotter's locked himself in!" he whispered.

"That let's us out, then," said Potter.

"We can't break in the door."

"There's a window," said Coker.

"Oh crikey!"

Coker trod round to the caravan window. On a warm August night, he rather expected that it might be open.

But it was shut. It was not only shut, but it was fastened, and covered by a blind. Even had it been open, it was rather a small aperture for Coker's bulky form. But it was shut and fastened, and Coker, breathing deep, turned away from it, and rejoined his friends.

"I fancy the brute may have suspected something," he said. "He's got himself fastened in pretty safe. The window's fastened."

"That tears it," murmured Greene.

"We can't—"

"Don't gabble!"

Coker was a little at a loss. Powerful as his intellect was, he had not foreseen this. Really, he might have foreseen that the occupant of a caravan in a field might lock his door at night. Still, he hadn't. He was, for the moment, checked. Not beaten, only checked. He had to think this out, and did not want jaw during his mental processes.

Snore! came rumbling from the caravan.

One thing, at least, was certain—the sleeper inside had heard nothing, and had not taken any alarm. That deep and resonant snore revealed that he was sleeping soundly.

Minutes passed. Coker's intellectual processes were not rapid.

Potter and Greene waited, with growing uneasiness and dread. Suppose they were caught there—they might be taken for pilferers, even burglars. Again they were assailed by a temptation to bang Coker's head, and leave him to it. This temptation was growing harder and harder for Coker's friends to resist.

Horace stirred at last. Once more he mounted the step, and tried over

the caravan door. He pushed, and pushed, and pushed.

Coker had lots of beef, and plenty of weight, and the pressure on that door was really terrific. It creaked, and creaked again, louder and louder.

To the startled ears of Potter and Greene, those repeated creaks sounded almost like pistol-shots.

It seemed incredible that the sleeper in the van should not awaken. They rather hoped that he would. If Signor Muccolini woke, and started yelling, with the door still locked, even Coker would have to realise that the game was up.

But the sleeper did not awaken. Snore after snore rumbled from the van.

Potter and Greene would never have supposed that the quick-tempered, nervy, jumpy Italian was such a sound sleeper. As a matter of fact, he wasn't. But they had no more idea than Coker, of course, that it was not the signor in the signor's van. Of the antics of William George Bunter they were in complete and blissful ignorance.

"Blow it!" came Coker's angry grunt. "Bother it! It won't open!" He panted after his efforts. "Blow! Hang! Br-r-r!"

"Better chuck it!"

"Will you shut up?"

Coker stepped down. His face was red with exertion, his eyes glittering. Coker's blood was up now.

"We're having that rotter out!" he said. "Follow me! I'm going to wake him, and if he won't step out, we'll jolly well up-end the van, and him in it!"

"Oh crikey! We can't—"

"We can. If you use your eyes, you can see that it's a bit tilted on that slope. We've only got to shove together. Shut up; and come on!"

Coker trod round the van to the side up the slope. The window was on that side. He tapped on the window.

Tap, tap!

Snore!

Bang!

Coker was reckless now. There was no getting at the dago who had blacked his eye, unless he came out of the van. Coker was going to get him out, if he alarmed the whole camp, and the whole County of Kent. He banged.

A snore answered the bang.

"Wake up, you rotter!" hooted Coker.

Snore!

"I've come here to thrash you! If you're not a rotten funk, come out!" roared Coker, banging again, and yet again.

Strategy was thrown to the winds. It was neck or nothing now. Coker's powerful voice sounded far and wide. It must have reached many ears in the camp. But if it reached those of the sleeper in the signor's van, it elicited no response, but a snore.

"You sneaking dago!" roared Coker. "Think I'm going to believe that you're still asleep! Hop out, or I'll pitch the van over! Mind, I mean that!"

Snore!

"He must be awake!" gasped Potter.

"Of course he must, unless he sleeps like a log, or like that fat porpoise, Bunter. Gammoning, of course! I'll give him gammon! Heave the van over! If he won't come out, we'll pitch him over in his van, and let it go at that. I'd rather black his eye, but—"

"I—I can hear somebody calling out—"

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"Will you lend me a hand, and leave this van over, or not?"

Coker braced himself against the van, and heaved.

Potter and Greene shoved.

The caravan was rather heavy. But standing sideways on the slope, there was a tilt that favoured the heavens and shovers.

Coker, if not fearfully brainy, was awfully brawny. He put all his brawn into it, and the caravan went.

It swayed, it rocked, and it went.

Over it went, landing on its other side with a terrific crash, and a crashing and smashing and bashing of dislodged articles within.

The snore suddenly ceased. Instead of it, there came a fearful yell from the caravan.

Somebody inside was rolling and wriggling and squirming amid rolling and crashing furniture. That somebody was yelling frantically. It sounded as if he was damaged.

Startled voices sounded all over the circus camp. Potter and Greene did not stay to listen to them. As the van crashed over, they flew for the gate. Coker followed them. He did not run; he disdained to run. But he walked quickly—almost as quickly as Potter and Greene ran.

They tumbled over the gate into the road. Lights were flashing in the field; voices shouting and calling; a dog barking.

"Hook it!" panted Potter.

"Bunk!" gasped Greene.

"May as well get back to the car," said Coker calmly. "I've given that dago something for my black eye now. I'd rather have blacked his eye, but—"

But Coker was addressing the desert air. Potter and Greene were running down the road. Coker, still disdaining to run, walked after them; but he walked very quickly.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Bumps for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER roared.

Crash!

Bang!

Smash! Crash! Clatter!

Bang!

It seemed to Bunter an earthquake.

Knocks and shouts had not awakened Bunter. But when the caravan went over, and crashed, and the fat junior rolled out of bed, and crashed, too, even Bunter woke up!

Bunter, when it came to sleeping, could beat Rip Van Winkle at his own game; but even Bunter could not sleep through that.

He crashed, and he rolled, and he roared.

He rolled, tangled in bedclothes, with all sorts of things falling on him and round him. He roared; he yelled; he shrieked.

The whole circus camp was awake.

Shouting and barking mingled in a merry chorus with the howls and yells from the overturned caravan.

Half-dressed circus men gathered round that van, staring at it in amazement. Marco and Tippity and a dozen other men rushed up.

Signor Muccolini turned out of a tent and hurried to the spot. As he came along, the Italian had a glimpse of a running figure in the moonlight. He took it for a running figure, though Coker was really only walking quickly; and he stared blankly at Horace till he vanished over the gate.

"Quel sciocco!" ejaculated the signor, in astonishment.

What Coker had been up to in the circus field at midnight was a mystery to Muccolini—but only for a few moments! When he arrived at the overturned van he guessed—and grinned.

"That van's pitched over!" said Tippity Tip, in wonder. "That fat covey's weight must 'ave done it. I s'pose he turned over in his sleep, and the van went—"

"Yaroooh! Help! Whoop!" came from the interior of the van. "I'm

"THE FAMOUS FOUR!"

By FRANK RICHARDS

Are you reading the early experiences of Harry Wharton & Co.? If not, sample the great story in this week's GEM—and you'll see what a grand treat you've been missing. Ask for the GEM to-day. On sale now, price 2d.

killed! Yow-ow! My legs are broken! Yooop!"

"How the dickens did that van go over?" exclaimed Marco.

"Yoo-hoop! Help! I've broken my neck! Yaroooh!"

"That fat cove turning over, I fancy!" persisted Mr. Tip.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! I say, you fellows—yaroooh! I'm smashed to pieces! Yoop!"

"His lungs ain't 'urt, anyhow!" remarked Mr. Tip.

"Yoo-hoo-hooooop!"

Cra-a-ack!

There was the sound of splintering wood as the fat head and shoulders of Bunter, garbed in striped pyjamas, was thrust through the broken caravan window.

"Yaroooh!" yelled the hapless Owl of the Greyfriars Remove, waving his arms frantically. "Help me out! Ow! Wow!"

The lion-tamer reached up, grasped a fat hand, and pulled.

"Yaroooh! Wow!" yelled Bunter.

"Lend a hand, Tippity."

Tippity grasped the other fat hand.

Both pulled, to an accompaniment of frantic yells from Bunter; and the fat Owl came out of the wreckage like a fat winkle from a shell.

"Yow-ow-ow! I say, was it an earthquake! Yarooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, what's happened? I say, I'm all smashed up! I say—yaroooh!"

"The van went over," chuckled Mr. Tip. "You must 'ave turned over in your sleep, and that did it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beast! Ow! Oh crikey! Oh lor'! Wow!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up. How many bumps and bruises he had collected, he did not know. They felt like about a million. He stared at the overturned van. He was not likely to believe that, as Tippity suggested, he had done it by turning over in his sleep. Still, there it was—overturned!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "That beastly van wasn't safe—that fool Mucky— Oh crikey! I say, put that van up again—and put it safe this time—"

Signor Muccolini walked away to his tent, grinning. He was rather glad that Coker had looked in that night!

"I say, shove that van up, Tip—Marco—Samson—the rest of you—get hold of it and stick it up!" yapped Bunter. "And mind you stick it safe, see? Now, then—I say, don't walk off while a fellow's talking to you, do you hear? I say—Beasts!"

The grinning crowd faded away. It was not an easy task to heave that van up again, and nobody seemed keen on it.

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter.

Bunter was left with the overturned van. There was nothing for it, but to crawl in and make the best of it. Which the hapless fat Owl did—but it was quite a long time before his snore woke again the echoes of the circus camp.

Coker & Co. went on their way the following morning. Coker was, on the whole, satisfied with the punishment he had meted out to the cheeky dago!

He would rather have blacked his eye—still, he had got his own back, and, as he told Potter and Greene, he could afford to let it go at that.

Potter and Greene were glad to hear it, and gladder still to get to a safe distance from Muccolini's Magnificent Circus.

That day, too, Harry Wharton & Co. were on the road. Whether Billy Bunter had succeeded in hooking on again at the circus, or whether he was looking once more for his old pals, they did not know. Anyhow, they saw nothing of him before they pushed on for Margate. But at Merry Margate they were destined to see more—much more—of Billy Bunter and the circus.

THE END

(You'll find heaps more circus fun and excitement in next Saturday's cover-to-cover story of the chums of Greyfriars, entitled: "THE HERO OF THE CIRCUS!" Don't miss it, chums, whatever you do!)

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**FOR MOLLY
BIRCHEMALL'S
SAKE!**

New Three-Weeks' Serial
By **DICKY NUGENT**



The
GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 202.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

August 22nd, 1936.



**BESSIE BUNTER Tells
Our Interviewer
ALL ABOUT
BUNTER COURT!**

I discovered Miss Bessie Bunter in a deck-chair on the sands, gazing glumly at a thimble and a small bar of chocolate—all she had managed to uncarth from the purse in her lap!

"Good-morning, Miss Bunter!" I smiled. "I am Frank Nugent, Special Interviewer for the 'Greyfriars Herald,' and—"

"Oh, yes, I was expecting you," beamed Miss Bunter. "Let's see, you want to tell your readers something about Bunter Court, don't you?"

"Well, yes, I do; but how you come to know is—"

"Ahem! It's—or—second sight or something. People have often told me I'm psychic. But what do you want to know about Bunter Court?"

"To begin with, Miss Bunter, where exactly is it?"

"Hem! Where does Billy say it is?"

I grinned. "Sometimes he says it's in Surrey, sometimes in Hampshire, and at other times in Sussex."

"That's right, then!?" said Miss Bunter, cheerfully. "Next, please!"

"My hat! Well, then, what sort of a place is it? Is it a noble, old, ancestral pile, rising out of acres of lovely parkland?"

"Does Billy say so?"

"He does, but—"

"Billy's quite right!" nodded Miss Bunter. "Anything else?"

"Ye gods! Can you tell me something about the servants? Are there a score of faithful old retainers, serving generation after generation of Bunters?"

"Billy says that!"

"Well, yes, but—"

"It's perfectly true," beamed Miss Bunter. "Great pip! Are there several Rolls-Royces and dozens of magnificent horses and packs and packs of hounds?"

"I suppose that's what Billy told you?"

"Matter of fact, he did, but—"

"It's the simple truth," smiled Miss Bunter. "Want to know any more?"

I pocketed my notebook and began to totter away.

"No, Miss Bunter, I think that will be all for to-day. Many thanks for your information."

"You're welcome," beamed Miss Bunter. "It's all quite true, of course, AND IF ANYONE SAYS I'M ONLY SAYING IT BECAUSE BILLY PROMISED TO TAKE ME OUT TO LUNCH FOR PULLING YOUR LEG, DON'T YOU BELIEVE THEM!"

Well, there's one thing about the Bunter family. They can always be relied on to give the game away.

WHO IS THIS BOY COKER?

Asks
BARBARA REDFERN



I met Coker while I was at the seaside on holiday. I'd met him before at odd times, but never knew much about him.

Coker soon remedied that for me!

Adding up all the periods in which we were together, I suppose he was talking to me in all for about two hours. Out of those two hours, he spent at least one hour and fifty-nine minutes telling me about himself!

Having heard all he said I can still only ask in bewilderment: "Who IS this peculiar creature?"

Judging by what Coker says himself, Alexander the Great has got nothing on him! In brain-power as in brawn, Coker stands supreme—so, Coker says.

The only question that occurs to me is, "If Coker says something, is it necessarily true?" When I expressed a doubt about it, Coker looked quite startled. He seemed to have an idea that the mere fact that he said a thing would at once make it true!

Oh, yes, Coker's convinced right enough that he's better in every way than anyone else he has met or is ever likely to meet. He seems equally convinced that girls are devoid of brainpower of any kind. Girls, Coker thinks, exist for the sole purpose of gazing with admiring eyes at Horace Coker!

All this I learned in slow and

easy stages. When Coker started teaching me how to ride a horse—which I knew already, but Coker didn't—I began to get a glimmering of it. When he started to teach me swimming and diving—which I also knew, but Coker didn't—I saw daylight pretty clearly. When he started to teach me tennis, at which I'm pretty hot and about which Coker didn't know the first thing, I had him well weighed up!

Coker was my partner against another couple. Our opponents were regular bunnies, and we should have beaten them all hands down. But Coker muffed everything—and finally added insult to injury by explaining just how I had lost the game!

It was the last straw. I pulled his hair and stuffed a tennis-ball into his open mouth. Then I left Coker to think it out. Now I hope you understand why I'm still asking the question, "Who IS this boy Coker?"

Whoever he is, he's a perfect freak! (You're telling us!—Ed.)

PIET DELAREY on—

**PEER'S PEERLESS
PIER PARTY!**

When Lord Mauleverer took a crowd of us on to the pier at Brighton, we had the jolliest feast of automatic-machines we'd ever experienced.

We kicked off with a delightful pennyworth of hanging. Mauly put a penny in the slot, the doors of the ghastly looking model prison opened, and we saw the clockwork hangman hang the clockwork prisoner in a most satisfactory manner. Great!

Then Mauly gave us a penn'orth of "Midnight in the Churchyard." Ghosts and skeletons bobbed up from the graves, demons danced out from behind trees, and the clock duly struck twelve. We enjoyed every bit of it!

And then we had "The Miser's Nightmare," with clockwork devils and hobgoblins jetting about in mid-air and

spectres coming out of old oak chests. And after that "A French Execution," in which we actually saw the clockwork felon's head chopped off. How we chortled!

It's difficult to remember the full programme of automatic amusements we carried out that day. I recall several more executions, an old murder or two and quite a lot of dances by skeletons and grinning spooks. I can tell you, we fairly laughed our heads off!

At the end of the trip, we had to admit that for sheer honest-to-goodness enjoyment you could hardly beat the clockwork killings, executions, nightmares, and hauntings that Mauly had given us.

Despite the fact that he himself is a peer, we all voted Mauly's pier party a perfectly peerless affair!

"Seen pop?" It was Molly Birchemall who popped her pretty head round the doorway of Jack Jolly's study and asked that question.

At the sound of her mewical voice, Jack Jolly & Co. looked round with very cheery grins on their dials. It was the first day of the new term at St. Sam's and the heroes of the Fourth were bizz unpacking; but they could always find time to welcome the Head's charming dawter.

"Yes, I've seen him, Miss Molly," said Jack Jolly, in answer to Molly Birchemall's question. "It was five minutes ago in the Hall. I believe he was on his way to the Second Form Room to swap some cigarette-pictures with Midgett minor."

The Head's dawter, who was holding a letter in her dainty hand, flashed a captivating smile at the kaptin of the Fourth.

"Oh, thank you, Jolly!" she tinkled. "I want to see him as soon as possible about this letter the postman has just brought me. It's from Mr. Selew Lloyd."

"What, the grate film projector?" eggsclained Frank Fearless, and Molly Birchemall nodded.

"Yes; he's offering me a part in the new film he's projecting," she trilled, egg-sitedly. "I want to see pop to ask his permission."

"My hat! That's egg-sitting news and no mistake," said Frank Fearless. "I'm sure you'll make a jolly fine film actress, Miss Molly."

"Yes, rathor!" grinned Jolly and Merry and Bright.

A delicate blush suffused Molly Birchemall's cheeks.

"I hoap so, I'm sure; but you must eggcuse me now or I'll miss pop."

And, with another bewitching smile, the Head's dawter left the Fourth-Formers and tripped away in search of her father.

She found him in the Second Form Room, bizzily engaged in eggshanging cigarette-cards with Midgett minor.

Doctor Birchemall, who was a keen collector, didn't like interruptions at such a time as a rule, but his frown soon vanished when he reckered Miss Molly.

"Molly, my dear! What brings you to this part of the skool?"

"I want to see you about something awfully important, pop. Guess what's happened."

The Head smiled indulgently.

"Tutt-tutt! Something that appears very important

to your youthful eyes, I'll warrant! You've wacked Mr. Justiss at croaky?"

"Nothing like it, pop!" cried the Head's dawter, with a girlish larf. "You'll never guess, so I'll tell you without any more beating about the Lush. The fact is that Mr. Selew Lloyd, the grate film projector, has offered me a part in a film he's projecting this week!"

"What!"

"I thought it would serprize you, pop!" larfed Molly Birchemall. "Isn't it ripping news? I had to follow you up right away and ask your permission to axcept this grate offer. You're going to say 'yes,' pop, aren't you?"

Doctor Birchemall jerked his thumb in the direktion of the door for Midgett minor's bennyfit.

"Seat!" he said tersely, and the yungster skooted out of the Form-room. Then the Head turned to his dawter.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, my dear," he said. "The answer is 'no.'"

"But, pop—" protested Molly Birchemall.

"It's no good you argewing the toss, Molly," said the Head jentily but firmly. "I say 'no' and 'no' is what I mean."

"For why, pop?" tinkled Molly Birchemall.

"Because, my dear child, as the dawter of St. Sam's, you are too posh to be a player on the pictures! What ever would the Guvvornors think of me if I allowed such a thing? What would be the thoughts of the nobility and jentry whose sons are skollars at St. Sam's? What would—"

"That's enuff, pop!" said Miss Molly, with a stamp of her dainty little foot. "It isn't Speech Day, you know!"

The Head stared at Miss Molly in shocked serprize. He could hardly believe that the dawter on whom he doated could be talking to him in this fashion.

"Bust me!" he cried. "How dare you talk to your father like this here? Go to your room at once! After you have recovered your senses, child, I will consider axcepting a hurable apology from you!"

"You'll be lucky, pop!"

"What!"

"For all you know, I'm going to ignore your order and act for Mr. Lloyd!"

"Then she pored out her tale

of woe into simperthetick ears. Jack Jolly & Co. frowned as they listened.

"Well, it's ruff luck, Miss Molly, and no mistake!" remarked Jack Jolly, when she had finished. "What are you going to do about it?"

"That's just what I want you to tell me," tinkled Molly Birchemall. "You boys have such a reputation for thinking out bright wheezes that I thought you mite be able to think of a way to help me out now."

The Co. pondered on the problem for a minnit. Then Frank Fearless wissled.

"Few! I've got an idea!" he said. "You won't have to stay away from the skool altogether, will you?"

"Why, no," smiled Miss Molly. "The studio is quite near the skool and I should only have to be there for a few hours every day."

"Then if the Head happens to see you about the premises once or twice each day, he'll never smell a ratt!"

"Of course not! But if he sees me here, I shan't be at the studio, shall I?"

"Yes, you will!" grinned Fearless. "He'll only think he sees you; but it won't be you at all!"

"Then who will it be?" demanded Jack Jolly.

"Little me—disguised as Miss Molly!" chuckled Fearless. "I can do it! You know what an eggspert I am at make-up—and, anyway, I shall take good care not to let him get too near me!"

For a moment Miss Molly and Jack Jolly & Co. stared at Fearless in amazement. Then they gave a shout.

"The very idea!"

"Ripping, by Jove!"

Thus began the most astounding hoaks that had ever been played upon the majestic headmaster of St. Sam's.

Soon after brekker on the following day, Molly Birchemall made her way out of the skool by a roundabout root. The Head, who took the Sixth, was too bizz for the rest of the morning trying to distill nollidge into the wooden noddles of the seniors to worry about his dawter. And when lessons were over, any doubts he mite have had about the whereabouts of Miss Molly were soon set at

