

# Off By Heart

Hilaire Belloc - Matilda

**Matilda told such Dreadful Lies,  
It made one Gasp and Stretch one's Eyes;  
Her Aunt, who, from her Earliest Youth,  
Had kept a Strict Regard for Truth,  
Attempted to believe Matilda:  
The effort very nearly killed her,  
And would have done so, had not she  
Discovered this Infirmity.  
For once, towards the Close of Day,  
Matilda, growing tired of play,  
And finding she was left alone,  
Went tiptoe to the telephone  
And summoned the Immediate Aid  
Of London's Noble Fire Brigade.  
Within an hour the Gallant Band  
Were pouring in on every hand,  
From Putney, Hackney Downs and Bow,  
With Courage high and Hearts a-glow.  
They galloped, roaring through the Town,  
'Matilda's House is Burning Down.'  
Inspired by British Cheers and Loud  
Proceeding from the Frenzied Crowd,  
They ran their ladders through a score  
Of windows on the Ball Room Floor;  
And took Peculiar Pains to Souse  
The Pictures up and down the House,  
Until Matilda's Aunt succeeded  
In showing them they were not needed;  
And even then she had to pay  
To get the Men to go away!**

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**It happened that a few Weeks later  
Her Aunt was off to the Theatre  
To see that Interesting Play,  
The Second Mrs Tanqueray.  
She had refused to take her Niece  
To hear this Entertaining Piece:  
A Deprivation Just and Wise  
To Punish her for Telling Lies.  
That Night a Fire did break out—  
You should have heard Matilda Shout!  
You should have heard her Scream and Bawl,  
And throw the window up and call  
To People passing in the Street—  
(The rapidly increasing Heat  
Encouraging her to obtain  
Their confidence)—but all in vain!  
For every time she shouted, 'Fire!'  
They only answered, 'Little Liar!'  
And therefore when her Aunt returned,  
Matilda, and the House, were Burned.**