

# "FRIENDS AT LAST!"

A Magnificent Long, Complete Tale of School Life in This Issue.

# The Dreadnought 1<sup>¢</sup>

Published  
Every Thursday.

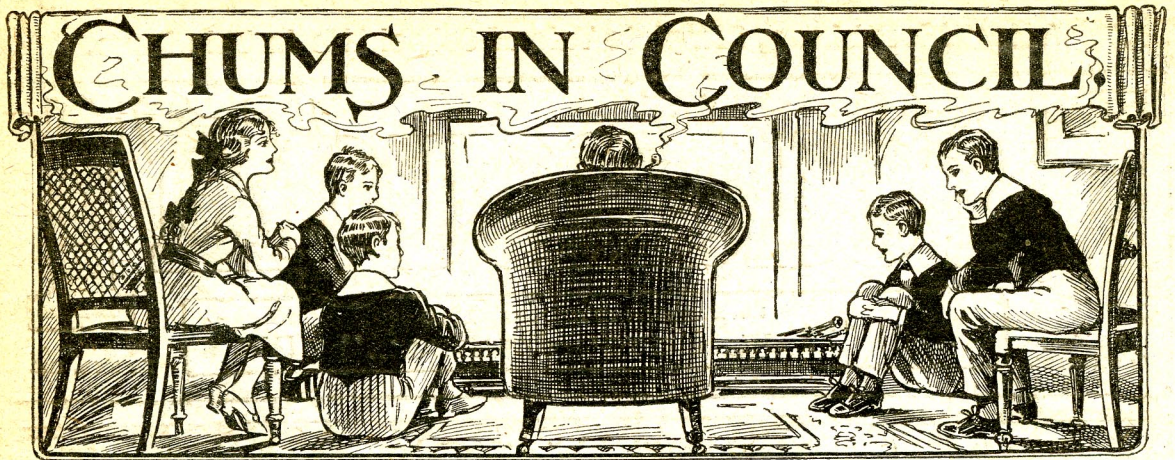
WITH WHICH IS AMALGAMATED  
No. 145] "THE BOYS' JOURNAL." [Vol. 6

Week Ending  
March 6th, 1915.



## COLONEL WHARTON'S BRAVE DEED!

(A Dramatic Incident in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale Contained in this Issue.)



Whom to write to:  
Editor,

"The Dreadnought"  
The Fleetway House,  
Farringdon St., London, E.C.

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**FOR NEXT THURSDAY:  
"FOILING THE FOURTH!"**

By Frank Richards.

Our next grand, long, complete story of Greyfriars School finds Harry Wharton considerably in the limelight. Seized with a great idea, he organises what is known as the "Wharton Operatic Society," intending to "bring down the house" with a first-rate performance of "Carmen." The scheme, however, is not destined to run smoothly, for Cecil Temple, the leader of the Fourth, plots a plot, whereby he and his followers hope to knock Wharton's wheeze completely on the head. In spite of numerous attempts to wreck the performance on the part of their rivals, Harry Wharton & Co. come out very strong in their enterprise; and the Removites, after an exciting series of scurrillages with the enemy, succeed beyond all question in

**"FOILING THE FOURTH!"**

Lovers of Bill Stubbs will find a delightful story of this soldier-hero in next Thursday's DREADNOUGHT, which abounds with good things from cover to cover. There will also be a magnificent instalment of "The Merchant's Secret," which is voted by my chums to be one of the finest stories of Sexton Blake ever penned. There are other great features, too. But my readers must see for themselves the good things which next Thursday's issue will bring forth.

**Slackers not Allowed!**

I have received a long and rather mournful letter from a reader in Belfast, who says that, so far as games of any kind are concerned, British boys are greatly deteriorating. "Their prowess in the playing-fields," says my reader, "is not a patch on what it used to be."

How many times have I heard lamentations of this kind! Prior to the present war, I remember reading in the daily papers some correspondence to the effect that we in Britain were going rapidly downhill, being outdistanced by

other countries, and losing all our prestige. We were, said these amiable correspondents, the last tottering remnants of a great race.

Since that time much has happened. The nation, plunged suddenly into war, has risen equal to the occasion and proved worthy of its steel, and those knowing people who predicted such a staggering collapse must now hide their diminished heads.

Britain's power on the wane, indeed! Shades of Jellicoe and French! I never heard anything more hopelessly absurd.

I suppose my Belfast chum is a pessimist, on whose horizon nothing of a bright or hopeful nature ever dawns. I must allow that sports have fallen away somewhat just lately, but this is not due, as my reader imagines, to slacking. It is merely a combination of circumstances. One cannot expect things to pursue the even tenor of their way at a time like the present.

I do not deny, either, that some of our lads are slack. But, then, it takes all sorts of people to make a world. And although slackers do exist in our country, I must say that they are very much in the minority.

Then, again, so many forms of sport are employed in this country that it would be a human impossibility for us to win all along the line. What single country can beat us at everything, or is ever likely to? And echo answers, "What?"

Let no one dare to sit at home in his armchair and criticise the youth of this country on the grounds that they are slack. I think that, when the German hordes have got it where the "chicken got the chopper," our sporting outlook for the future will be very bright and show high promise.

Great Britain is as keen as ever she was at games, but she cannot be expected to turn out without fail every year phenomenally fine combinations or individuals. There is no necessity for any critical busybody to tell our youths to wake up. They are quite awake; they are doing their very best for the Old Country, and if they do not in future prove superior in every branch of sport, they will always put up a very good game—the best they can, at any

rate. The British boy has learned the value of fair play, and—whether on the winning side or the losing—he can always be relied upon to play the game. This being so, there is no more to be said on the subject of slacking.

**A Straight Talk.**

One of my readers who lives at Sale, near Manchester, was sensible enough to start taking in the DREADNOUGHT, and he showed copies of this journal to all his chums in the town. The result was astonishing. They took the paper away from my reader and swore to boycott him until he agreed to give up reading it.

I am much obliged to my chum for having sent me this information, because it enables me to have a straight talk to those boys who apparently are so prejudiced against the DREADNOUGHT.

Let me preface my remarks by saying that there is absolutely nothing in this paper which should make any lad ashamed to be seen reading it. As a matter of fact, the boy who can rule his life upon the same principles as those of Harry Wharton and other of our heroes will be an honest, decent lad, and would prove a credit to those with whom he was associated; and, to my mind, no boy could wish for a greater ambition. Manly, upright, and honest! What more, in the name of Heaven, can a boy wish for?

I suppose, of course, that there are some lads who imagine it is manly to smoke and swear and be brutal to weaker boys. To such boys I would say that their idea of manliness is in hopeless error; that they are what anybody might honestly describe as bullies of the most despicable type. The lad who is ashamed of being polite to his seniors, who cannot be civil to girls and be kind to dumb animals, can surely be no true British boy.

As I have so often said on this page, there is absolutely nothing in the DREADNOUGHT to prevent any respectable, decent-minded boy from reading it.

THE EDITOR.

**IF YOU ARE WANTING ADVICE WRITE TO YOUR EDITOR. HE WILL DO HIS BEST TO HELP YOU!**

When finished with,  
please hand this book  
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The Editor.

# THE DREADNOUGHT

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mended to order in  
advance.

## FRIENDS AT LAST!

A splendid long, complete  
tale dealing with the early  
adventures of Harry Whar-  
ton & Co. at Greyfriars  
School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

#### Harry Wharton is Not Pleased.

Harry Wharton, of the Greyfriars Remove, sat in his study, with a letter in his hand and a cloud upon his brow. Twice he had read through that letter, and at each reading his brow had become darker. It was not a long letter; being, in fact, written with military brevity. Other eyes than Harry's might not have seen anything to look troubled about in the brief epistle. But it evidently weighed upon the mind of Harry Wharton.

His hand, with the letter in it, rested upon his knee, and he had fallen into a reverie, when he was startled by the sudden opening of the door of the study. A cheerful, sunny-looking junior came in.

"You here, Harry?"

It was Nugent, of the Remove, Harry Wharton's best chum since the day he had come to Greyfriars.

Harry had looked up hastily, crumpling the letter in his hand. Nugent's face grew concerned as he read his chum's expression. He came over quickly towards Harry.

"Anything wrong?"

"Yes."

"What's the trouble? Can I help you?"

"I—I don't know. Read that letter."

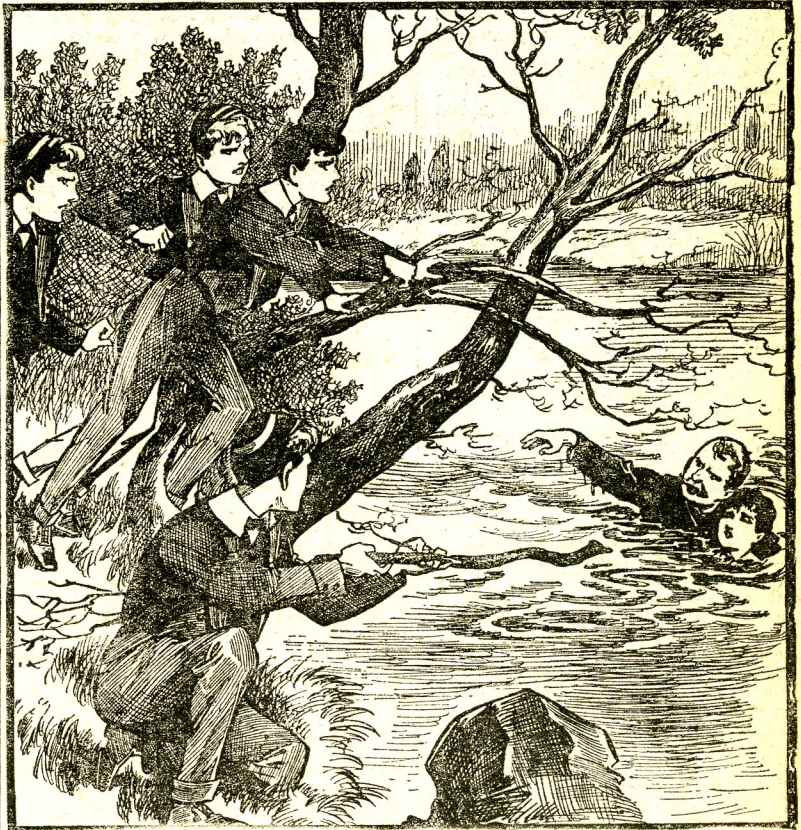
Nugent, with some curiosity, glanced over the letter. It was written in a stiff, military hand, and ran as follows:

"My dear Nephew,—I am coming down to Greyfriars to-morrow to see you. You have not written to me since you have been at school, but I am glad to say that I have received excellent accounts of you from Dr. Locke. I hope to find you quite reconciled to your life at Greyfriars.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"JAMES WHARTON."

Nugent glanced from the letter to the gloomy, troubled face of his chum.



"Catch hold, sir!" cried Bob Cherry. The colonel understood. Hope flashed up again in his bronzed face. "Can you manage it, boys?" "Rather, sir," shouted Haz-ld ne. "Catch hold!" (See page 15.)

"Blessed if I see what there is to worry about in that letter," he said. "I suppose your uncle isn't an ogre. Most of the fellows are glad to have a relation come down and see them. It usually means tips, and sometimes a holiday."

Harry face did not relax.

"I don't want either tips or a holiday through my Uncle James."

Nugent gave a whistle of comprehension.

"I see; you're on bad terms with him."

Wharton nodded.

"The letter doesn't sound ill-natured," said Nugent, glancing at it again. "He seems to really take an interest in you, and I shouldn't wonder if he were hurt at your not having written to him since you came to Greyfriars."

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"There was no need to write."

"Well, a chap sometimes does things that are not absolutely needed, out of politeness," Nugent remarked.

Wharton looked at him quickly, but if Nugent was speaking ironically there was no sign of it in his face. He was perfectly grave.

"What sort of a chap is your uncle?" went on Nugent. "He's got one virtue, anyway; he doesn't write long letters."

"He is an Army officer from India.

He seems to believe in ruling a home as if he regarded it as a native regiment. I was happy enough at home till he came."

"Ah, yes, I remember your telling me that Miss Wharton looked after you, and your uncle thought you were spoiled."

"He said so."

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, Harry, you weren't the nicest sort of chap in the world when you first came to Greyfriars," said Nugent, in his frank way.

Harry Wharton coloured. He was quite aware of that. He had had many faults when he first came to Greyfriars, and he had a good many of them still. More than once of late an uneasy suspicion had crossed his mind that, in those old bitter disputes with his uncle, the fault had not been wholly upon the side of Colonel Wharton.

"He hopes you're reconciled to your life at Greyfriars," Nugent continued. "You didn't want to come to the school in the first place, I believe."

"I was sent here against my will."

"And you cut up rough," said Nugent, with a smile, "and you naturally had a rough time of it. But hasn't it done you good, Harry?"

Harry was silent.

"You've pulled through," went on his chum. "The Remove didn't like

you at first. Airs and graces don't go down in the Lower Fourth Form in any school, I believe. And you were a bit of a cough-drop at the start—excuse me. But the Form have taken to you kindly enough now. You are cricket captain in the Remove, and looked up to as a leader. You can't say things aren't pleasant enough at Greyfriars now. You don't want to leave the school, do you?"

"Oh, no!"

Harry started at the mere suggestion. It was true that he had come against his own inclination to Greyfriars; but to leave the school now, and break up the pleasant friendships he had formed—that would be a harder blow than he had ever been called upon to face before.

"Well, then," said the practical Nugent, "you see, your uncle was right in sending you here. You're glad to be here, and it has done you good. If he's an unpleasant rotter—"

Wharton flushed.

"Oh, he's nothing so bad as that, Nugent."

"Well, then, it seems to me that you're bothering about nothing," said Nugent. "Perhaps you've been a bit unjust to him."

Wharton did not reply. The same thought was in his own mind; and it was not a pleasant one. He had nourished his ill-feeling towards his uncle, feeling that he was in the right to do so. His feeling was like that of the prophet of old; he felt that he did well to be angry. Now, his ideas were insensibly changing; but it was not agreeable to feel that he had been unreasonable and unjust.

"Anyway, he's coming down," said Nugent. "You'll have to make the best of it. Better tell him you're sorry you haven't written—"

"I can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not sorry."

Nugent smiled a little grimly. Greyfriars had done Harry Wharton good. But still, at times, there came out traces of the old obstinacy that had often tried the patience of his chum.

"Well, you ought to be sorry!" he rapped out.

"If you're going to lecture me, Nugent—"

"Oh, I'm not! I know how much good it would be," said Nugent, laughing, his good-humour damped only for a moment. "If you don't feel sorry, don't tell him you do, as that would be a cram— Only do try to feel a little kindly towards the old chap, who probably means as well as he is able."

"I don't see what he wants to come down for!" exclaimed Harry passionately. "Why can't he let me alone? We parted on ill-terms, and we have nothing to speak about. Why can't he let me alone?"

"Perhaps it worries him a bit to have parted with his nephew on ill-terms."

"Oh, rot!"

"Thanks!"

"I—I mean—"

"Oh, never mind! But really, Harry, you had better make the best of the matter, and not meet the old fellow with a scowl on your face. If he means well, he ought to be encouraged, you know."

Wharton smiled slightly. But in a moment, as he glanced at the obnoxious letter, his face clouded over again.

"Well, if he's civil, I suppose I may as well be," he growled. "But if he starts any paternal lecturing, or any crowing over me—"

"Give him a chance till he does it," suggested Nugent.

"Hang it all, Nugent, you seem to have made up your mind to take my uncle's side in this matter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton irritably.

"Well, I don't want to see you bang your head against a brick wall," said Nugent. "You see, the trouble about a parent or guardian is that he has the whip-hand. If they always did as we told 'em, things would go more smoothly. But they're obstinate; they won't! They think they know best, you know; and really I shouldn't wonder if there was something in it. If you sulk with the colonel because he sent you to Greyfriars, he may take you away again. How would you like that?"

"H'm! Of course, I shouldn't like it."

"Then take the old chap under your wing and be nice to him," advised Nugent. "Take him round the school, and stand him a feed."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I can't imagine anybody standing Colonel Wharton a feed. He is an old soldier, and a regular martinet."

"Well, martinets have tummies, the same as the rest of us," said Nugent sagely, "and you may catch him hungry. Besides, he is an Old Greyfriar, isn't he?"

"Yes, he was at this school about thirty years ago."

"Good! An Old Boy is always easy to get on with. Come, Harry, cheer up, and we'll give the colonel a good time and you'll part the best of friends."

"Is there anything else, besides your little tiffs at home?" asked Nugent anxiously.

"Yes."

"Well, get it off your chest. What is it?"

Harry Wharton's face went scarlet.

"The colonel sent me some money at the beginning of the week to get some new cricket things—bat and leg-guards and so on—"

"I know he did; and it was decent of him."

"Oh, it's my own money!" said Harry testily. "He's my guardian, you know."

"Well, go on. You've parted with your old bat, and you've blued the tin and haven't got a new one," said Nugent. "I'm aware of that."

"I didn't exactly blue it."

"Well, you went out one afternoon by yourself and spent it," said Nugent. "I have a pretty clear idea of what it was for, too. You got Hazeldene out of his difficulty with the moneylender."

"Never mind Hazeldene," said Wharton hastily. "The fact is that the money is gone, and I haven't got the things. Of course, I was at liberty to do as I liked with the money—it's not a question of that—but the colonel will probably want to see the new bat, and he will wonder. And then I—I—"

"What else?"

"I haven't any watch now," said Harry uncomfortably.

"You pawned it at Dale on Wednesday?"

"Well, yes."

"My hat! Your uncle may get his back up over that if he spots it," Nugent agreed. "It's considered absolutely rotten form for a kid to go into a pawnshop, of course, and it would mean a flogging if it were discovered by the Head."

"I had no other resource. It wasn't for myself that I wanted the money."

"I know, but it looks bad. If it had been in another week or two we could have raised the tin, and tided it over," said Nugent. "It's rather unlucky the colonel coming down like this so suddenly, while we're still all of us stony broke. Even Hurree Singh hasn't been able to raise the wind yet. The only thing is, one of us will have to lend you a watch, and—"

Harry shook his head.

"My dear chap," said Nugent, "you don't want the colonel to spot the thing, do you?"

"I'm not going to deceive him. I'm not afraid of him."

"I never said you were; and if you hint that I'm counselling you to deceive anybody, it's about time this little discussion ceased," said Nugent, turning red.

"I'm sorry, Nugent; I didn't mean that."

"It sounded jolly well as if you did."

"I mean, I don't want to use any device to get into his good books. If he rows me, I can stand it."

"Rats!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're a confounded ass!" said Nugent coolly. "There would be no harm whatever in keeping the circumstances from his knowledge, as you have done no wrong, and the matter need not concern him anyway. But in allowing him to form a wrong opinion, and then refusing to explain, you act like a fool!"

"If that's all you have to say to me—"

"That's about all."

"Well, I—"

Harry Wharton was about to speak hot words, but he was interrupted. The door was kicked open, and Bob Cherry, Billy Bunter, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, came into the study.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Cash Wanted.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, staring at Harry Wharton and Nugent. "What are you two duffers arguing about? We heard your voices in the passage."

"The loudfulness of the honourable voices was terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh, in the peculiar English he had learned before he came to Greyfriars. "Is it possible that the peacefulness of the study has been invaded by the ghost of discord?"

"By what? Oh, the spirit of discord!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Well, it sounded like it to me. Wherefore the argument, kids?"

"Oh, it was nothing!" said Nugent hastily.

Harry Wharton was silent, with knitted brows.

"I expect they're hungry," said Billy Bunter. "Fellows always start raggng one another when they're hungry. It's past tea-time, and we haven't had tea."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"I shouldn't wonder. Wharton looks as if he was hungry for something—trouble, perhaps. However, don't argue now; there's a serious question to discuss."

"What's the matter?" asked Wharton.

"We haven't anything for tea."

Harry made an impatient gesture which Bob Cherry affected not to

notice. He went on, looking at Nugent and Hurree Singh with a solemn visage of trouble.

"What's to be done? We can't do our prep, unless we have grub; and we can't have tea in the Hall. Whar-ton, having got us into this fearful position, how are we to get out of it?"

"I—how did I get you into it?"  
 "You had thirty bob from your uncle the other day, and you didn't spend it on the cricket things, therefore you ought to be in funds?" said Bob Cherry severely. "You are not in funds, therefore, you are the cause of the present distressing scarcity in the study."

"The reasonableness of our Cherryful chum is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "What has our worthy chum to say?"

"Oh, rats!"  
 "The ratfulness of our esteemed friend's reply is only equalled by the pigfulness of his manners!" purred the nabob.

Bob Cherry and Nugent chuckled, and Harry turned red.

"Oh, hang!" he exclaimed. "I'm bothered about a letter from my uncle, that's what's the matter. Don't mind me."

"Oh, that's all right, kid! We won't mind you. It's not always pleasant to hear from your uncle," said Bob Cherry. "Does he hint that the ticket is up?"

"Eh?"  
 "And that the watch is going to be put among the unredeemed pledges if you don't buck up?"

"What the dickens are you talking about?"

"That letter from your uncle."  
 "I was referring to my guardian, Colonel Wharton."

"Oh! I naturally thought you were referring to the 'uncle' in Dale, who has taken charge of your watch!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

Harry Wharton, with a very red face, quitted the study.

"The excitableness of our chum's honourable anger is great," the nabob remarked. "But the pressingly business of the moment is, how to sufficiently raise the breeze to purchase the grubfulness we require for teaful refreshment."

"And that's a jolly serious matter," said Billy Bunter, blinking solemnly at the chums through his big spectacles. "I'm hungry."

"You always are, Owl."  
 "My postal-order hasn't arrived."  
 "Go hon!"

"I was expecting it to-day for certain. It will probably arrive by the evening's post, but that will be too late for tea."

"I expect it will be too late for tea when it comes," agreed Bob Cherry. "It may be in time for a feed on your twenty-first birthday!"

"Ha, ha!"  
 "I really don't see any fun in that! That postal-order has been coming for a jolly long time, and—"

"It has, Billy—it has!"

"I wrote to my cousin to-day in the City," said Billy. "He gives me tips sometimes, and I thought he ought to stand something, as I haven't borrowed anything at all of him since last holidays. I told him, if he sent me ten shillings, to mark it 'Urgent!' as we were practically in a state of famine."

"But he hasn't done it?"  
 "Well, there's been some delay."

"The question is, what is going to be done?" said Cherry seriously. "We shall have tin again on Saturday. But we shall want a lot of it to wipe off the accounts we've run up at the tuckshop. They won't give us any more tick there. Are we to go without our tea?"

"Impossible!" said Bunter hastily. "I'm surprised at you suggesting such a thing Cherry."

"Well, can you suggest anything?"

"I think it's up against you fellows to suggest something. I always do the cooking in this study, and you fellows provide the grub. It's an equal division; and, in fact, you get the butt-end of the bargain, as you know very well you can't cook for toffee! I'm ready to keep my part of the bargain; I'm ready to cook. You fellows will have to find something for me to cook. Play the game!"

"Why, you young duffer, we should have plenty of tin, only you have cleared out the nabob over your confounded physical culture expenses!"

"The clearfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "I am broke to the wideness!"

"That's all very well, but I'm hungry! What I want to know is, where is the grub coming from?" said Billy Bunter. "I can't starve, you know!"

"You never know what you can do till you try!" Bob Cherry suggested.

"I'm jolly sure I'm not going to try! Look here, Bulstrode has a great deal of money, and he often lent me little sums when he was in this study, before Cherry came. Can't you borrow something of Bulstrode?"

"Yes, we're likely to borrow of that cad!"

"I don't see that his being a cad has anything to do with it. That's his own look-out. What I want is something to eat."

"You'd better go and look for that postal-order of yours, then!" said Bob Cherry. "I knew there had been a letter for Wharton, and I was in hopes there might have been something in it."

"His uncle is coming down to-morrow," said Nugent.

"Good! Is he the kind of individual one can touch for a feed?"

Nugent laughed.  
 "I don't think so, from Wharton's description."

"Still, you never know."

"We can't wait till to-morrow for our tea," said Billy Bunter. "Are you chaps going to raise the wind somehow?"

"We'll try," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, kids, let's go round on a borrowing expedition, and see what we can do."

"The goodness of the wheezy idea is great. It is quite probable that we shall be able to perform the borrowfulness of the necessary cash."

"We'll try, anyway," said Nugent, not very hopefully.

And the chums left the study upon the forlorn hope. Billy Bunter remained alone, with a serious wrinkling upon his brow. He was hungry, and when he was hungry he was active. But though he wrinkled his brows and rubbed his forehead, he could think of no means of raising the wind—except borrowing of Bulstrode. And he had a painful feeling that that might mean a licking from the chums of Study No. 1, who were on bad terms with the bully of the Remove.

"But I'm not going to starve to

please them!" grunted Bunter at last. "I'm jolly well going to Bulstrode's study, and chance it!"  
 And he went.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bully Bulstrode!

"I say, Bulstrode—"

Bulstrode was sitting in his study, working, when Billy Bunter's big spectacles glimmered in at the door. Hazeldene, who shared the study with the bully of the Remove, was looking out of the window, with his hands in his pockets. There was not much love lost between the study-mates, especially since Hazeldene had become on better terms with the chums of No. 1.

Bulstrode looked up irritably.  
 "Hallo, kid. What are you bothering about?"

"I haven't had my tea."  
 "Go and have it, then!"

"I haven't anything to eat."  
 "Go and eat coke!"

"Now, don't be brutal, Bulstrode! You used to lend me little sums when you were in our study."

"It's a bad habit I've got out of," said Bulstrode. "Go and borrow of Bob Cherry or your inky friend from India."

"They're stony."  
 "Then go to Jericho!"

"So I would, Bulstrode, if I could get my tea there," said Bunter. "But, you see, I'm fearfully hungry, and we haven't any grub in the study."

"Do the others know you've come cadging to me?" asked Bulstrode curiously.

"I don't see why you should call it cadging."

"Do they know you have come?"  
 "Oh, no! They might lick me if they did, and I depend upon you not to tell them that you are going to lend me ten shillings."

Bulstrode grinned.

"I certainly shan't tell them I'm going to lend you ten shillings, you Owl, when I'm going to do nothing of the sort!"

"Well, if you're short of cash, I could make five shillings do."

"Could you really?" asked Bulstrode sarcastically. "Why don't you ask for five pounds while you're about it?"

"I don't want to be unreasonable. Five shillings—"

"Oh, seat! Get out!"

"Well, if you can't spare five shillings, suppose you make it one?"

"Clear! I've got my work to do!"

"Look here, Bulstrode, I'm expecting a postal-order by the evening's post—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"It will be for ten shillings. If you like to spring eight now, you can have the whole postal-order when it comes."

"Rats! Get out, you young ass, or I'll lam you!"

"I think you're very selfish! I say, Vaseline, have you got any money to lend?"

"No!" snapped Hazeldene.

"I suppose you have given all of it to that Sheeny moneylender I saw you with the other day?" said Billy Bunter discontentedly. "Fellows are so selfish. I wish you were back in our study again, Bulstrode; I always had enough to eat then! If you can't stand me any cash, have you got a pie or anything, just for a snack?"

"I've got a ruler here," said Bul-

strode, taking it up, "and I shall lay it about you if you don't clear out and leave me alone!"

"Don't be hasty, Bulstrode! You might break my spectacles, and then you would have to pay for them, you know. Besides, I want to do a trade with you."

"In what way?" asked Bulstrode suspiciously. "Have you got something to sell? I heard that Skinner got a bargain off you in cricket-bats the other day."

"Yes, I sold him a bat for five bob that was worth nine or ten," said Bunter. "It was a bit knocked about, but it was a splendid bat, and Wharton had knocked up a lot of runs with it, I can tell you!"

"Was it Wharton's bat?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha!"

"Nothing funny in that, that I can see. I have to attend to the commissariat department in the study, and if there isn't any cash, I have to raise some."

"If I had been Wharton, I'd have collared the bat back from Skinner!"

"Oh, Wharton wouldn't do a mean thing like that! Ow! What's the matter? Let go my ear; you're hurting me!"

"Am I?" said Bulstrode, giving the fat boy of the Remove a twist that made him wriggle. "I shall hurt you some more if I have any more of your cheek, you young porpoise!"

"Oh, please don't, Bulstrode! I say, I want to trade with you—"

"Are you selling Wharton's new bat?"

"He hasn't got his new bat yet. I've got a pocket-knife here I want to dispose of. It's got three blades, and a corkscrew, and a tin-opener, and a file and gimlet in it, and I know for a fact that it cost fourteen and six!"

"Is it yours?"

"I've got it to sell," said Bunter evasively. "It would be a big bargain for anybody at five bob, Bulstrode!"

"I dare say it would," said Bulstrode, looking at the knife. "I'll spring three and six for it, if you like."

"Oh, don't be mean, Bulstrode! Ow! Let go my ear! If you won't go the five bob, I'll take three and six with pleasure! Hand it over!"

Bulstrode grinned, and handed over three shillings and sixpence, and pocketed the knife. Hazeldene dropped his hand on Bunter's shoulder.

"That knife belongs to Bob Cherry, Bunter."

"It belongs to Bulstrode now, Vaseline."

"You had no right to sell it."

"I have to raise funds for feeding in the study," exclaimed Bunter. "Of course, I shall tell Cherry; otherwise, it would not be perfectly honest to sell his knife."

"You ought to have told him first."

"Oh, no; he would have been bound to raise some objection. It's more satisfactory in every way to tell him afterwards!"

"You young rascal!"

"I wish you wouldn't call me names, Vaseline! I don't like it, and it's not polite. Besides, you are a rotter yourself, you know, and you've no right to find fault. I can sell Cherry's pocket-knife if I like, but you swindled Harry Wharton over an exam., and got jolly well ragged for it by the Remove!"

Hazeldene turned red.

"Oh, shut up!"

"I'm sincerely sorry if I've touched on a tender spot, Vaseline," said Bunter; "but, really, a chap like you has no right to start preaching at people."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Bulstrode, laughing. "He has you there!"

Hazeldene gave a mirthless laugh.

"I suppose he has," he said. "I haven't any right to preach, that's certain. All the same, Bunter oughtn't to have sold the knife and you oughtn't to have bought it, Bulstrode."

"Looking for a thick ear?" inquired Bulstrode.

Hazeldene quitted the study without replying. Billy Bunter followed, and took his way towards the school shop. This little establishment, within the walls of Greyfriars, was kept by Mrs. Mimble, the wife of the Head's gardener. Billy Bunter was one of Mrs. Mimble's most extensive customers, though he had a rather irritating little way of running up accounts and never settling them. Mrs. Mimble had of late shown herself rather sharp on that point, and she had warned Billy Bunter in round terms that it was no use his showing himself in the shop again till he was prepared to settle several little outstanding accounts.

But Billy had great faith in the efficacy of a persuasive tongue and the sight of ready money. He entered the school shop with the cash jingling in his pocket. Mrs. Mimble looked at him rather distrustfully.

"I've got nothing for you, Master Bunter," she said.

Billy slapped down three and sixpence on the counter.

"I've got ready money to pay for what I have now, Mrs. Mimble," he said. "The old account can stand over till my postal-order comes."

"I don't believe your postal-order ever will come."

"Well, it isn't right of you to damp my spirits that way, Mrs. Mimble. I look on it as very inconsiderate."

"Tush!" said the good dame. "What do you want now?"

"I'll look over the things. If I pay three and six, you won't mind my having seven shillings' worth, will you, and let the rest stand over till to-morrow?"

"Yes, I will!" said Mrs. Mimble, with emphasis. "What are you doing now? You are eating my jam-tarts, you greedy boy!"

"I'm so fearfully hungry," said Bunter, his mouth full of tart. "If I'm going to have the trouble of selling people's pocket-knives to raise the wind, I've a right to fill some of this emptiness before I get the tea, I think. You wouldn't like me to fall down dead in your shop, would you, Mrs. Mimble?"

"You might, if you eat so quickly!"

"Perhaps you're right, and I shouldn't start with jam-tarts," said Billy Bunter thoughtfully. "I'll have a rabbit-pie to begin with, and some of those pork-pies. That will take up half the tin, and I think I'm entitled to that much for my trouble. The rest will get some bread, and butter, and cheese for the other fellows. If they don't take any trouble about raising the tin, they can't expect to live on the fat of the land."

The rabbit-pie disappeared in a few minutes; the pork-pies followed; and then Billy Bunter, with the keen edge taken off his appetite, looked longingly at the jam-tarts. He took one just to

taste, and another because the first was so nice, and a third absent-mindedly. A fourth and fifth followed almost unconsciously. Then Mrs. Mimble's hand rose warningly.

"You must not take any more, Master Bunter!"

"No," said Billy, with a heavy sigh; "I suppose not, Mrs. Mimble. I must leave something for the other fellows. Will you give me the change out of the three and six in bread and cheese, please?"

"There isn't any change. What you have had comes to four shillings and threepence," said Mrs. Mimble severely.

Billy Bunter gasped.

"You—you're joking!"

"I am not. You have been eating ever since you came into the shop. You owe me ninepence, and you must pay it."

"It will have to go down on the account," said Bunter. "I haven't any cash, and I don't suppose I shall be able to raise any until my postal-order comes, unless I can find Cherry's new bicycle lantern. I know Russell wants to buy a bicycle lantern cheap. Well, I'll see."

And Billy Bunter drifted out of the tuckshop.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Nugent, slapping him on the shoulder. "We've been looking for you, Billy. What have you been doing in Mrs. Mimble's shop?"

"Gorging!" said Bob Cherry. "You can see that by the look of him!"

"The tracefulness of the jam on the honourable big mouth of our worthy chum is distinctly clearful," remarked Hurree Singh.

Nugent shook the Owl.

"Where did you get the cash from, Billy?"

"I wish you wouldn't shake me like that, Nugent. You'll shake my spectacles off, and they might get broken, you know, and then you will have to pay for them. Besides, I don't feel like being shaken after eating rabbit-and-pork pies and jam-tarts."

"Rabbit-and-pork pies and jam-tarts!" howled Bob Cherry. "Has your postal-order really come at last, you young cannibal, and you've blued it all on yourself?"

"No, it hasn't come yet, Cherry, though I'm really expecting it by every post," said Bunter. "I sold a pocket-knife to Bulstrode for three and six—"

"Whose pocket-knife?" asked Bob suspiciously.

"The whosefulness is an important point," Hurree Singh remarked.

"Well, as a matter of fact—"

"Whose pocket-knife was it?"

"You see, Cherry, it was up to me to get something for tea—"

"You've sold my pocket-knife!" roared Bob Cherry, seizing the fat boy of the Remove by the collar and shaking him violently.

"Please—please don't!" gasped Billy. "It makes me feel very uncomfortable inside. I remember now that rabbit and pork at the same time never did agree with me, though I was so hungry I forgot all about it. Make him leave off, you fellows!"

"You young villain!" said Bob Cherry. "How much did you get for the knife?"

"I told you; three and six!"

"And it cost my uncle fourteen and six! Why, I—"

"Well, I had to raise the wind somehow to get tea," said Bunter, in an



"There is no arm for me to take," Hurree Singh remarked, "but I shall be pleased to help our esteemed friend along footfully." "Ow!" grunted Billy Bunter.

aggrieved tone. "I never expect thanks from you fellows, but I think you might be civil."

"You—you—you—"  
"Oh, never mind," said Nugent, laughing; "when we're in funds we'll get the knife back! I'm famished now, and if Bunter has got tea we'll forgive him. Let's go and feed!"  
"The goodfulness of the wheeze is great."

"Oh, well, come along!" said Bob Cherry. "Where is the grub, Billy?"  
Billy Bunter turned red.

"You see—"  
"We don't see the grub. Where is it?"

"You see, I was so hungry, I thought I ought to have just a little snack before getting tea, to keep up my strength—"

"Well, no harm in that; but where's the grub?"

"I—I— You see, you fellows, I was fearfully hungry, and it ran up almost without my noticing it. And—as a matter of fact—"

"Where's the grub?"  
"There isn't any."

"Isn't any?" shouted three voices together.

"No. It's—it's all gone. I'm sincerely sorry; but, you see, I was so

famished, and I really didn't notice—"

"You young cormorant!"  
"I owe Mrs. Mimble ninepence, too," said Bunter. "The things came to four and threepence. The worst of it is that I'm still hungry."

What the chums of the Remove would have said will never be known, for just then, there was an interruption. Skinner of the Remove dashed up, evidently excited.

"Is Bunter here? Ah, I see him! Billy, there's a post-office messenger asking for you."

"What?"  
"It's your postal-order at last, Billy."  
"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"It's come."  
Billy Bunter glowed with satisfaction.

"I knew my cousin would turn up trumps!" he exclaimed. "He's rather a practical joker, you know, and he thought it funny, I dare say, to keep me waiting."

"Can't understand that sort of fun," said Bob Cherry; "but I suppose his heart has softened, as he has sent the thing down by messenger."

"Yes, rather! Now, you chaps, you'll see that I'll keep my word. I'll stand the rippingest feed we've ever had in Study No. 1!" exclaimed Billy

Bunter. "Where is he, Skinner? I say, you fellows, come along!"

And the Removites hurried down to the gate, where a lad in uniform was just coming in.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Postal-order.

"Mr. Bunter!"  
"Here I am!" beamed Billy. "You have an express letter? Hand it over."

"Yes, sir. One and six to pay, please!"  
Billy Bunter stared.

"Eh?"  
"One and six to pay, please."

"But there can't be anything to pay, you know. That letter is from my cousin, and he wouldn't leave it for me to pay for."

The lad in uniform grinned.

"One and six to pay, please," he said again.

"Oh, hang it!" said Bob Cherry. "If there's a postal-order for ten shillings in the letter, you needn't grudge eightpence, Billy."

"I don't Cherry; but, you see, I haven't it."

"One and six to pay, please."  
Billy Bunter felt in his pockets. He

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND HARRY WHARTON STORY IS ENTITLED: "FOILING THE FOURTH!"

felt in all of them very carefully, in the hope that some coin might have been overlooked in previous searches; but the hope was vain.

Not a single coin came to light. He turned out a variety of articles, ranging from marbles and toffee to caramels and whipcord; but there was not a single solitary coin of any description whatever. Billy Bunter turned to his companions.

"Have you got any money, you fellows?"

"Not a rap," said Bob Cherry.

"Not a red cent," said Nugent.

"The brokefulness of myself is terrific," said the nabob sadly.

"Oh, I say, that's too bad!"

"One and six to pay, please."

"You're quite sure that there isn't any mistake, my lad?"

"Yes, sir. I've had to bring this over from Dale."

"It was careless of my cousin, but I suppose I oughtn't to grumble at a chap who is sending me half-a-sov.," said Billy Bunter.

"Are you going to take the letter, sir?"

"Yes, of course. It's for me."

"One and six to pay, please."

"Look here, I'll tell you how we can fix it. I'll have the letter, and give you my I O U for the amount."

"I'm not allowed to leave it without the money, sir."

"Well, hand it over, then, and I'll open it, and change the postal-order, and then I can square with you."

The messenger-boy shook his head.

"Can't hand it over without the money, sir."

"But I can settle as soon as I get the postal-order out."

"Not allowed, sir."

"Look here—"

"One and six to pay, please."

Billy Bunter tore his hair. He gazed longingly at the envelope bearing his name upon it, as if meditating a personal attack upon the messenger-boy. Bob Cherry jerked him by the shoulder.

"You can't have it, Bunty, unless you can square for it. Don't be an ass!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Well, what is it?"

"Back me up, and I'll jolly soon have it," whispered Billy Bunter; "then we can change the postal order, and pay up."

"You young ass—"

"Really, Cherry—"

"Do you want to be shoved into prison for highway robbery?" said Cherry. "You utter young idiot! This is what comes of selling other fellows' bats and pocket-knives."

"Oh, I say—"

"Are you going to take the letter, sir?"

"Of course I am."

"I have to get back to Dale Post-office, and—"

Bunter ran his fingers through his hair in despair. What was to be done? It was a really desperate situation. There was the envelope containing the postal-order, and here he was, broke to the world, unable to lay hands upon the prize for want of a paltry eighteenpence!

What was to be done? To allow the letter to go back to Dale Post-office was not to be thought of. But there really seemed to be no alternative.

"My hat!" groaned Bunter. "What can we do? Don't be in a hurry, kid. You've got lots of time to get back to

Dale Post-office. This is a serious matter."

He went through his pockets again. He took out a little penknife with a silver handle, and turned it over in his fingers.

"Yates offered me eighteenpence for this the other day," he said. "It's worth double, but for the sake of the ten bob—"

"There's Yates!" said Bob Cherry, with a nod towards a lad who was passing with a football under his arm. "Now's your chance, kid!"

"Hi, Yates! Hi! Come here, will you?"

The Removite came towards them.

"What do you want, Bunter?"

"Will you give me two bob for my knife?"

"No, I won't!" said Yates promptly.

"Then I'll take the one and six you offered me the other day," said Bunter.

"This kid has a letter for me, and he won't give it up unless I pay first."

"Knows you, perhaps," suggested Yates.

"Oh, I say, Yates, have you got that eighteenpence?"

"Yes, here it is. Hand over the knife first."

"Oh, I say—"

"Hand it over; I'm in a hurry!"

"Well, here it is. Thank you! It's worth double—"

But Yates was already gone, and Bunter was left with a shilling and sixpence in his palm.

"That's rather rotten, you fellows, selling a penknife for half its value!"

"Yes, if it happens to be your own knife," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Still, it's worth it. Hand over that letter, young 'un."

"One and six to pay, please."

"Here you are. Now let me have the letter, for goodness' sake!"

The money was paid over, and the letter was given up. The messenger-boy went down the road whistling. Billy Bunter turned the letter over in his hands gloatingly. His plump, spectacled countenance was glowing with satisfaction.

"Well, aren't you going to open it?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Certainly, but—"

"Open it, then."

"The quickfulness would be gratifying under the circumstances," Hurree Singh remarked. "We are all extremely attacked by the famished hungerfulness."

"Yes; but I say—"

"Don't say anything, old chap. Open the letter."

"But, I say, you fellows have made a lot of jokes about my postal-order. You've always been hinting that it would never come. Well, here it is."

"The exactfulness of the statement is terrific," said the nabob; "but the factfulness remains that we have not yet beheld the actuality of the postal-order. The letterful communication might contain otherfulness."

"I'll jolly soon show you that!" said the fat boy of the Remove.

He slit open the envelope. There was no letter inside, but there certainly was a postal-order. It was folded, with the face inside, but the colour could be seen through the flimsy paper.

"By Jove," exclaimed Bob Cherry, "it really is a postal-order! What bouncer was it who said that the age of miracles is past?"

"Wonderfulness will never cease," said the nabob. "As your poet Shakespeare remarks: 'Can such things

be? And overcome us like a summerful cloudfulness, without our special wonder.'"

"Well, let's see how much it's for," said Nugent.

Billy Bunter opened out the postal-order. Then a change came over his gleeful face. His grin disappeared, his jaw dropped, and he gave a gasp like an expiring fish.

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look!" said Bunter faintly.

He held the postal-order out to view. The chums of the Remove looked and stared, and then burst into a roar of irresistible laughter, for upon the postal-order was printed plain to every eye:

"ONE SHILLING!"

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Hazeldene to the Rescue.

"One shilling!"

Billy Bunter was staring at the cruel words.

"One shilling!" gasped Bob Cherry, with the tears of laughter running down his cheeks. "My only hat! One shilling!"

"And it cost Bunty eighteenpence!" gasped Nugent.

"My solitary turban!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The disappointfulness is great, but the jokefulness is terrific. Ha, ha, ha!"

"One shilling!" murmured Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The rotter! One shilling! If it isn't a mistake, it is a rotten joke. I don't know what you fellows are cackling at. There's nothing funny in this to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "You said your cousin was a practical joker. If this is a sample of his practical joking, I'm glad he's your cousin, and not mine."

"By Jove, yes!" said Nugent. "If I had a practical joker like that in the family, I should get rid of him regardless of funeral expenses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter was still staring ruefully at the postal-order. The little joke of his humorous cousin did not appeal to his sense of what was funny in the least.

"Well, this is a sell!" he grunted at last. "Where's that messenger kid? Has the young rotter gone? I'm going to have my money back."

"Ha, ha! You can't, especially now you've opened the letter."

"It's a swindle. Yates ought to give me back my knife; but he's a selfish chap. I think it's rotten all round. I don't even get any sympathy from you chaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't like cackling over a fellow's misfortunes. I'm hungry! I suppose I can get Mrs. Mibble to change this order? A shilling is better than nothing."

"It will get bread-and-butter and cheese," said Bob Cherry. "We'll go with him and change it, kids, and see that he doesn't scoff it up."

"I say, you fellows, I think you might trust me—"

"Yes, we're sure to, after your scooping up my pocket-knife," said Bob Cherry. "Take his other arm, Frank."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent.

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent affectionately took an arm each of Billy Bunter, and walked him off towards the tuckshop.



"There is no arm for me to take," Hurree Singh remarked, "but I shall be pleased to help our esteemed friend along footfully."

"Ow!" grunted Billy. "Keep your great hoofs off my trousers, you inky beast!"

"Then you had better assume the hurlyfulness," suggested the nabob. "So long as you are nearfully reached with my boot, you are in danger of experiencing the kiokfulness."

"Chuck it! I'm going!"

And Billy Bunter kept on the run to the tuckshop. Mrs. Mimble greeted the sight of her best customers with an expansive smile. The smile grew a little less expansive when she learned that they had only a shilling postal-order to change.

"Is this your postal-order, Master Bunter?"

"Yes. Not really the one I was expecting, but another," said Bunter. "Will you change it for me, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Certainly."

Mrs. Mimble put the postal-order away in a drawer, and pushed threepence over the counter towards Bunter. Billy gazed at it.

"What is that for, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Your change, Master Bunter."

"But it was a postal-order for a shilling. What do you mean by giving me threepence for a shilling postal-order?"

"You remember the ninepence a little while ago, Master Bunter. You promised it when your postal-order came."

"My—my only hat! But I meant another postal-order, not this one!"

"There is your change, Master Bunter," said the dame, with lines of evident determination in her face. "And when you get another postal-order, please do not forget that you owe me eleven shillings."

"But really, Mrs. Mimble—" stammered the dismayed Billy.

"Can I get you anything, young gentlemen?"

"Rather!" said Bob Cherry. "If you don't mind chalking it up over Saturday, Mrs. Mimble."

The dame shook her head.

"Well, we'd better get all we can for threepence," said Bunter. "Are those new cream puffs you've got there, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Yes; I made them to-day. They're a penny each."

"H'm! I'll taste one."

Bunter tasted one, and it disappeared in a moment. Almost before the chums of the Remove knew what he was doing, he had bolted a couple more.

"Come along, chaps," he said. "They're nice, but three wouldn't go round, so I know you don't mind. Mrs. Mimble has acted meanly, and in future I shall transfer my custom to the tuckshop in the village. Let's get out."

"You young cormorant!"

"It's no good calling me names, Bob Cherry. It doesn't improve matters in the least. Hasn't any bounder here been able to raise any tin?"

"Not a sniff of it."

"Where's Wharton? Perhaps he's had better luck."

"Oh, he went off in a huff! He's not thinking about tea," said Bob Cherry.

"Never mind, here he is," said Billy Bunter, spotting Harry crossing

the Close with his head bowed a little in thought, and his hands in his trousers pockets. "Let's see whether he's managed it, anyway. I say, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton stopped for them to come up. There was still a shade upon the brow of the captain of the Remove.

"Hallo, Wharton! Have you had any luck?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, have you been able to raise any tin?"

"I haven't been trying to."

Billy Bunter stared at him in surprise and indignation.

"You haven't been trying to—when you know that it's nearly an hour past tea-time, and there's nothing in the larder! Are you off your onion?"

"Oh, bother!" said Harry.

"I suppose Cherry was right when he said you had gone off in the sulks."

Harry flushed crimson, and darted a quick glance towards Bob Cherry. The latter turned red, too.

"You young idiot!" exclaimed Bob.

"I didn't say anything of the kind. I said Wharton had gone off in a huff!"

"Well, I can't see much difference myself. Here we've been hunting high and low for some tin, and Wharton hasn't even thought about it. What have you done for your own tea, Wharton?"

"I haven't had any."

"Well, you want some, I suppose?"

"I suppose so. It doesn't matter."

"When I hear a fellow say that a meal doesn't matter, I can't help feeling that there's something very wrong with him somewhere," said Bunter.

"However, if you haven't any tin, it's no good talking. Let's get over to the Hall, chaps; it's better to have the school tea than nothing."

"Tea's over by this time," said Nugent.

"Ow! I never thought of that! We may be in time to get something, though."

Bunter cut off at top speed. The chums of the Remove followed more slowly, Harry Wharton joining them after a rather doubtful glance at Bob Cherry. Bob, however, seemed to be quite unconscious that there had been any friction.

They reached the door of the dining-hall, to find that Nugent's words were quite correct. Tea was over, and the tables cleared, Billy Bunter was standing in the doorway, the picture of dismay.

"We're done," he said hopelessly.

"Well, you've had a big gorge not much over an hour ago," said Bob Cherry. "You haven't anything to grumble at. But we—"

"You don't get as hungry as I do. Oh, dear!"

"Hallo, chaps!" It was Hazeldene's voice. The junior who had always been called the cad of the Remove, came towards them. "Anything the matter? Have you had your tea?"

"No," said Bob Cherry, with a grimace.

"Good! I—"

"You may call it good, Vaseline," said Billy Bunter. "I don't call it anything of the kind. I'm famished."

"I was going to say—"

"I don't know what will happen if I don't get a feed. Mrs. Mimble is a hard-hearted woman, and doesn't care if I die of inanition."

"Let me speak, Billy. I was going

to ask you fellows if you would come to tea with me," said Hazeldene. "I've had a remittance from my governor, and I want to stand a feed, if you'll accept. What do you say?"

Bob Cherry hugged him round the neck so suddenly that he staggered.

"Here, I say!"

"Corn in Egypt!" exclaimed Nugent. "Will we have tea with you? Well, rather!"

"The rafterfulness is terrific."

"Come to my heart," sobbed Bob Cherry. "Come to my heart, and let me weep briny tears over your shoulder down the back of your neck."

"We'll come—rather!" said Harry Wharton, with a curious look at Hazeldene. "We'll be jolly glad to come."

"And we'll help you with the shopping if it isn't over yet," said Bob Cherry. "And Billy Bunter will attend to the cooking department."

"I'd be jolly glad to," said Bunter. "Of course, you don't mind if I have a snack first, to keep me up while I'm doing the cooking?"

Hazeldene laughed.

"Certainly not, Billy. You chaps won't mind having the feed in your study instead of mine, will you? Bulstrode is a beast, and—"

"That's all right," said Bob Cherry. "You shall stand the feed where you like—on top of the clock tower if you please. The chief thing is to stand it quickly."

"Come on, then, and we'll do the shopping," laughed Hazeldene.

And the chums of the Remove, greatly relieved in their minds, followed Hazeldene to Mrs. Mimble's shop; and though that good lady looked glum enough when they entered, she soon melted at the sight of a five-shilling-piece in Hazeldene's hand. Ten minutes later the sorely-tried Removites were feasting.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER

### Hazeldene Inquires.

Hazeldene "did" that tea in really good style. With five shillings to expend, with Bob Cherry to help him expend it in the most judicious manner, and Billy Bunter to act the part of chef, and all the juniors as hungry as hunters, the feed was bound to be a success. If it had been held in Hazeldene's own study, Bulstrode would have made things unpleasant; but by meeting in Study No. 1, the feasters avoided the bully of the Remove, and everything in the garden, as Bob Cherry remarked, was lovely. Only a cloud hovered over the brow of Harry Wharton at intervals. He was thinking of his uncle's visit on the morrow.

Hazeldene looked at him curiously once or twice. He could not help seeing that Harry had a worry on his mind, though he tried to be cheerful. The prospect of being questioned as to what had become of his watch, and why he had not bought his new bat, was not pleasant to Harry. To fully explain seemed like lauding up the good act he had done to save Hazeldene from ruin. Besides, he was not the kind of fellow to be questioned and cross-examined. Yet the thought of standing before the colonel's keen, grey eyes in the position of a culprit, was unpleasant, although he had courage enough to refuse to explain, and to take the consequences.

"Well, this is all right," said Bob Cherry, as he filled up his cup with tea for the fourth time. "Hazel-dene, you are a friend in need, and here's to you."

"Yes, ratherfully!" exclaimed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, lifting his tea-cup. "Here is to your honourable self muchfully, my worthy and esteemed chum. We were famishing for want of the foodful refreshment, when you nobly came to the rescue, and everything was gardenfully lovely."

Hazel-dene laughed. "It hasn't been a bad feed," said Billy Bunter, with the air of a critic. "I've seen better, and I've seen worse. But when I think that but for Vaseline we might have had to go without any tea at all, I feel as if I could cry, you know. No wonder Wharton looks down in the mouth!"

Harry Wharton started. "Eh? I'm not looking down in the mouth," he said.

"Oh, aren't you? I can't see very well, you know. I'm extremely short-sighted," said Billy Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles. "But I certainly thought you were looking down in the mouth."

"Oh, rats!"

"Certainly, Wharton, I'll shut up if that's what you mean. I dare say I was mistaken, and you were not looking down in the mouth at all," agreed Bunter. "I know you don't understand the importance of having enough to eat, and having it at the right time. I dare say you've forgotten already about the danger we were in of missing our tea, and are thinking about your uncle coming down to-morrow."

Hazel-dene glanced quickly at Harry. "Your uncle is coming down to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes."  
"That will be jolly for you."  
"Ye-es."

Hazel-dene said no more. But when the tea was over, and the juniors separated, he followed Billy Bunter down the passage, and drew him into a quiet corner. Bunter followed him willingly. He expected that Hazel-dene's action meant the production of some sweets or tarts that had been reserved especially for himself. But he was disappointed.

"I say, Vaseline, what is it? Toffee?"

"Toffee? No, I want to speak to you."  
"Oh, you could have done that in the study!"

"What's that about Wharton's uncle coming down to-morrow?" said Hazel-dene, unheeding. "Why should he be down in the mouth over that?"

"Oh, I only know what I gather from a few words I happened to hear; you know, a fellow does happen to hear things—"

"I know you do, Billy—I mean, go on."

"Colonel Wharton is coming down to see him to-morrow, you see, and I fancy Wharton is in a blue funk about it."

"Why should he be?"

"Oh, didn't you know?"

"Know what?" said Hazel-dene impatiently. "How should I know anything? Go on!"

"Wharton has parted with his watch," said Bunter. "Sold it or pawned it, you know. I don't know what for, for he's been stony ever since, and he certainly didn't bring the money back to Greyfriars. I shouldn't

like to think that Wharton had been betting on Dale racecourse, but you never can tell. It looks suspicious."

"You young—I mean, is that why Wharton was depressed?"

"I suppose so, and then there were his cricket things, you know. He was to have spent thirty bob on them, and the colonel will expect to see them."

"I see," said Hazel-dene, with a strange expression upon his face.

"Wharton blued it all that same afternoon in Dale," explained Billy. "It must have been on the races. He couldn't have spent two pounds or so on grub, could he?"

"I suppose not," said Hazel-dene absently.

"He thinks the colonel will inquire about it. Of course he will—I would, if I were a chap's guardian, and he pawned his watch," said Bunter. "It isn't as if he did it to stand a feed or anything of that kind."

Hazel-dene nodded.

"The worst of it is, that Wharton never was on good terms with his uncle," went on the loquacious Billy. "He was bundled off to Greyfriars in the first place against his will, and the old chaps seems to be a tyrant, from what I hear."

Hazel-dene turned away.

"I say, Vaseline, where are you going?"

Hazel-dene did not reply. He walked away with a dark shade of thought upon his brow. Billy Bunter stared after him in surprise.

"Well, I call that rude!" he ejaculated. "Fancy walking away while a fellow's talking to you! I wonder if all those fellows are out of the study yet? If they are, I may as well get back and finish the cake."

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. An Old Boy at Greyfriars.

"Harry, my boy!"

It was a cheery, hearty greeting. The Remove were in their class-room, and Harry had been in his place in the Form, when a message was brought in to Mr. Quelch, and the Form-master signed to Harry to come out before the class.

Harry guessed at once what it meant, and he rose unwillingly from his place and went out towards the Form-master. Mr. Quelch gave him a kind look.

"Your uncle has arrived, Wharton. You are excused the rest of the lesson."

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry.

But his look was not joyful as he left the class-room and went out into the hall, where Colonel Wharton was waiting for him.

The colonel gave him a quick, searching look as he came into view. Harry advanced towards him with downcast eyes, not knowing how to greet the guardian he had parted with on such ill terms.

"Harry, my boy!"

Wharton started involuntarily. There was true heartiness in the colonel's deep voice, true regard with affection in the look he gave Harry as he grasped his hand. In spite of himself, Harry melted a little, and he raised his eyes to his guardian's face with something like a smile. The old soldier surveyed him critically.

"By Jove, Harry, you've improved!"

"Do you think so, sir?"

"Yes, I do, certainly. "You are

twice the fellow you were. How do you like Greyfriars?"

"I like it very well."

"I thought you would, when you got used to it," said the colonel, with a cheery nod. "I was a boy here myself thirty years ago, and the old place looks just the same. It's a splendid place for the right kind of lad. I have just seen the doctor, Harry, and you are excused the rest of morning lessons. It's some time since I have seen you, lad. Let's get out into the Close—or, rather, show me up to your study. I'd like to have a peep at your quarters."

"Certainly, uncle!"

In spite of his prejudice, Harry could not help thawing in the presence of this frank, unaffected heartiness and cordiality. His own look and feelings became insensibly more cordial.

He led the way to the staircase, and the Indian veteran followed him up to the Remove passage and into Study No. 1. Colonel Wharton looked about him with the keen interest of an "old boy."

"By Jove, just the same place! Same little dens, and jolly comfortable, too. Do you have your tea in here, the same as we used to thirty years ago?"

"Yes," said Harry, smiling.

"Good! What sort of fellows do you chum with here?"

"There's Nugent and Bob Cherry and Bunter in this study," said Harry, "and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur."

The colonel uttered an exclamation.

"By Jove! Is it possible?"

"Do you know Hurree Singh?"

"Do I not?" said the colonel, with a grim smile. "I fought by the side of his father, the old Nabob of Bhanipur, in India, and I have carried Hurree in my arms when he was a child of five, through the tulwars of a rebel mob!"

Harry's eyes gleamed.

"I should like to hear about that, uncle."

"I'll tell you the story some time," laughed the colonel. "I don't suppose Hurree Singh remembers it, or remembers me; but we shall see. You have four chums in this study with you?"

"Well, three chums," said Harry, "and Billy Bunter."

"Good! I have asked the Head if he could allow you, and any special friends of yours you could name, to have a holiday this afternoon, and he has promised to think of it. I am going to lunch with him, and I shall push the attack home, and I am pretty certain about that holiday. What do you think of the idea?"

Harry's face flushed. It was rather a needless question, to ask a healthy schoolboy what he thought of the idea of having a half-holiday.

"It is very kind of you, sir," said Harry. "I—I—" He broke off.

"What is it, Harry?"

"I"—the boy went very red—"I—you are very kind to me, sir. I—I am glad I came to Greyfriars, and—and you were right in what you said when I left home; it was the best place for me."

The colonel patted him on the shoulder.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Harry, lad—very glad indeed. I always knew there was sterling stuff in you; as, by Jove, there should be in the son of a soldier who died fighting for his country, with his face to the enemy! Let's go for a stroll round

the Close, Harry. I'm curious to see the old place again."

They left the study and the school-house, and Harry played the part of cicerone. At almost every step fresh delighted exclamations broke from the colonel, as he recognised some familiar spot. The space behind the chapel rails, where many of the fistical encounters of Greyfrairs took place, brought reminiscences to the colonel. It was the spot where he had licked Baker Major in seven rounds, as he told Harry with great gusto.

"That was something like a fight, too," said the colonel. "I was half a head shorter than Baker, but I licked him. I had better wind than he had—that was the reason. He stood it out as long as he could. Poor Baker! We were in India together after that, and the best of friends, and we often had a little jaw about that fight behind the chapel. Baker always maintained that if his foot hadn't slipped in the last round he would have licked me. Of course, I couldn't allow that."

Harry laughed. These reminiscences were curious enough from a grim, old bronzed veteran who had faced danger and death in a dozen fields.

"By the way, how does the time go?" exclaimed the colonel suddenly. "I mustn't be late for lunch with the Head."

Harry coloured.

"I cannot tell you, sir," he said, in a low voice.

The colonel laughed heartily, and felt for his own watch.

"Same old tale!" he exclaimed.

"Has somebody been pouring water into your watch, or have you trodden on it?"

"Oh, no, but—"

"Well, never mind, accidents will happen to watches, especially school-boys' watches," said the colonel good-humouredly. "If it is really done for, Harry, tell me and I'll send you down another from town."

Harry's face went crimson.

"It is not that, sir, but—"

"Well, never mind," said the colonel, noticing the boy's red and confused face. "It doesn't matter a bit. It's time we were moving."

Harry silently walked by his side. It was like deception to leave the colonel under this misapprehension, yet

"Uncle!" said Harry abruptly.

The colonel looked down at him.

"I have parted with my watch."

Colonel Wharton laughed.

"Ah, I see! Well, my lad, you needn't look so bothered about it. Changed it for a bat or a fishing-rod, I suppose."

"No. I have parted with it outside the school."

The colonel's face became grave.

"If you were short of money, Harry, you might have written to me. You know I don't want to treat you meanly. There was no need to sell your watch."

"I—I have not sold it."

"Then what the deuce have you done with it?" said the colonel, a trifle testily. "You have not pawned it, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have."

Colonel Wharton stopped dead, and looked at his nephew. The moment had come at last. They faced each other in silence.

"Things have changed here a little since my time, after all," said the colonel. "The boys in my time did not visit pawnshops."



During a naval engagement, a battleship's safety is almost as dependent on the stokers as it is upon those men that manipulate the guns. These dust-grimed warriors work at great pressure to keep the huge furnaces going to their fullest extent, thus enabling the captain to get every ounce of speed from his vessel. In the event of the ship sinking, there is usually little hope of the stokers being amongst the saved.

Harry's face was scarlet.

"When did you pawn the watch, Harry?"

"Last Wednesday."

"And you preferred that to writing to me?"

"I—I did not think of it, and there was no time."

"Do you mean to say that you had a sudden call to meet?"

"Well, yes, it was like that."

"I really don't quite understand how it could be. Would you mind explaining?"

Harry was silent.

"You surely had some other resource without that, even if you did not care to ask me?" said the colonel. "There was the money I sent you for the cricket things; you might have used that, and postponed getting them."

"I have done so."

The colonel knitted his brows.

"Now, Harry, I'm the last fellow in the world to inquire into a boy's private affairs; young fellows have their right to privacy as well as old ones. I am aware of that; but I don't see how a lad in the Lower Fourth could have wanted two or three pounds in a great hurry, unless he had been—well, transgressing in some way. Have you been getting into any difficulties?"

"No, sir."

"Then what did you want the money for?"

Harry did not speak.

"You don't want to explain to me?"

"I'd rather not."

"Suppose I command you to do so?"

Harry Wharton's face set obstinately.

"I shall not do anything of the

kind," said Colonel Wharton quietly.

"But I cannot rest satisfied with this matter as it stands, Harry. You have no right to visit such a place as a pawnshop, and you have no right to spend so much money without giving me an explanation. I suppose this is all a secret?"

"The Head does not know, of course."

"So I should think. I must turn this over in my mind. Leave me alone for a bit, please."

Harry Wharton walked away in silence. The Remove had come out of their class-room and were pouring into the Close. Harry passed Hazeldene, who looked at him curiously.

Hazeldene drew a quick breath. He had seen Harry part from his uncle, and noted the gloomy expression upon the boy's face. He guessed that something had happened; and, in the light of what Billy Bunter had told him he could guess what it was.

It was a difficult position for Hazeldene. A few weeks ago the cad of the Remove would have shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the affair from his mind. But Hazeldene was no longer the cad of a few weeks ago.

**THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.  
Hazeldene Plays the Man.**

Colonel Wharton walked slowly under the elm-trees, his head bent a little, and a gloomy frown puckering up his brows. The discovery he had just made had come as a heavy blow to him.

He had had faith in Harry. The boy was full of faults, hurried into

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them by his obstinate and passionate temper; but the colonel had believed that he was made of sterling stuff. He had believed that the faults were all on the surface, and that with a judicious training they would pass away. Now his belief had received a rude shock.

For the right kind of boy a public school was the right place. But for the wrong kind of boy? For the boy prone to fall into reckless or evil habits, it was by no means the right place. He had never dreamt that his nephew was that kind of boy, but he had his doubts now. A lad who spent a large sum of money—large for a junior—and refused to explain how or why—who immediately thought of the pawnshop when it was necessary to raise money—was not the kind of boy he had believed Harry Wharton to be.

Yet the colonel could not help reflecting that, had the lad been really mixed up in any disgraceful transaction, it would have been easy for him to keep the secret. A lad who had gambled away his money would probably have few scruples in prevaricating to account for it. Harry could easily have pretended that his watch had been lost or broken. Surely the boy's sturdy truthfulness was a sign that his character was sound, though it might be reckless. Yet what had become of the money? Why did the boy refuse to explain, as he could easily have done, if there was nothing in the secret to be ashamed of?

"If you please, sir—" A rather timid voice at his elbow roused the colonel, with a start, from his gloomy reverie. He glanced down at Hazeldene. The Removite was pale and red by turns, but there was a determined look upon his face.

"What is it, my boy?" said the colonel, kindly enough. "Do you want to speak to me?"

"Yes, if you are Harry Wharton's uncle."

"I am Colonel Wharton. What is it?"

Hazeldene hesitated. Colonel Wharton looked at him keenly, wondering what was the cause of the emotion visible in the somewhat weak face of the junior.

"What do you wish to say to me, my lad?"

"It's about Wharton, sir. I—I think I ought to tell you, but I don't want him to—know—"

Hazeldene broke off in confusion. The colonel's face hardened. Hazeldene's words sounded like the preamble to tale-bearing, and tale-bearing was a petty meanness for which Colonel Wharton had a very strong contempt.

"I don't want to hear any tales about my nephew, if that is what you mean," he said abruptly.

Hazeldene went crimson.

"It's nothing of that sort, sir; I've nothing to say against Harry. I—I think I ought to tell you, because you'll be down upon him—"

The colonel started.

For the first time it occurred to him that the boy might be able to enlighten him as to the affair of the watch; perhaps explain what seemed black against Harry. The old soldier's grim face relaxed.

"Go on, my lad," he said kindly enough.

"I don't know whether you know that Wharton parted with his watch," blurted out Hazeldene, "and that he hasn't bought the cricket things you sent him the money for? I found out

that he was worried because he thought you would ask him—"

"I know all about it. Go on!"

"Well, I think you ought to know why he did it," said Hazeldene eagerly. "Only if you tell the Head I shall be expelled, that's all."

"You will be expelled? What do you mean? Have you been mixed up with Harry in any affair as serious as that?"

"Oh, no; it was all my fault! I—I got into difficulties," stammered Hazeldene. "It was a rotten moneylender, you know. Wharton found it out, and made up his mind to help me—I don't know why, because I always treated him badly enough, but he did it—and he pawned his watch, and gave up buying the cricket things, to get me out of a horrible fix. Isaacs was going to show me up to the Head, and I should have been expelled."

The colonel gave the junior a keen glance.

The tale was evidently true; it was no made-up explanation. The words seemed to be, as it were, torn from Hazeldene; he only uttered them with a great effort. And his fear lest he should be compromising himself by saying so much was evident.

And a load seemed to lift from the colonel's heart.

"Let me understand you," he said quietly. "Had my nephew anything to do with your getting into the clutches of the moneylender?"

"Oh, no! He never knew till it had been going on for weeks."

"And then he helped you?"

"Yes."

"You hadn't been the best of friends?"

"We had been mostly on bad terms."

"Whose fault was that?"

"Mine, I suppose; though Wharton wasn't the easiest fellow to get on with when he first came to Greyfriars."

The colonel smiled slightly; he could quite believe that. It was probable that even yet Harry was not the easiest of fellows to get on with.

"And yet he did this for you?"

"Yes; and he wasn't going to let me know, either, only I found it out. But I knew he wouldn't explain to you, and I knew you would be down on him; only—only, if you tell the Head I shall be expelled."

"I shall not tell the Head, my lad. You seem to have acted foolishly, and to have hardly deserved what my nephew did for you, but your explaining this to me shows that you have real good in you. I shall keep the secret, of course."

Hazeldene breathed more freely.

"Thank you, sir! And you won't tell Wharton?"

"Why should I not tell him?"

Hazeldene shifted uneasily.

"Well, he's so jolly touchy, you know. He might think I was interfering in his affairs. I don't want to quarrel with him."

The colonel smiled grimly. That was Harry to the life, and he knew it; and he quite understood Hazeldene.

"Well, I must think about it," he said. "By Jove, that's the hour striking, and I shall keep the Head's lunch waiting! I am very much obliged to you, my boy! What is your name, by the way?"

"Hazeldene, sir."

"Good! I shall remember."

The colonel, with the cloud all gone from his brow, strode away rapidly towards the Head's house. He left Hazeldene feeling relieved in his mind,

and yet not without some uneasiness, too, as to how Wharton might regard the matter if he came to hear of it.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER

"The Colonel Sahib's Little Party."

The chums of the Remove joined Harry Wharton in the Close. They surrounded him and he had to stop, and he made an effort to clear his countenance.

"The troublefulness is great in the honourable countenance of our esteemed chum," Hurree Singh remarked. "Why this thulness?"

"Oh, it's all right!"

"I am truly relieved to hear that it is all rightful, as I had a fearfulness that it was all wrongful. Has the worthy uncle turned up triumphfully?"

"He's here."

"I saw him," said Nugent. "He looks a decent old boy!"

"He is one."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "Lucky bounder! I suppose the Head will be letting you off this afternoon?"

Harry was silent.

"Has he asked you about your watch, Wharton?" asked Billy Bunter, whose curiosity was never restrained by discretion.

Harry flushed angrily.

"Mind your own business, Bunter!"

"Oh, don't get ratty, Wharton! Of course, you could have told him some yarn; and I dare say you did—you couldn't very well explain that you had had a day on the racecourse at Dale, and had blued four or five pounds—"

What ever are you doing, Wharton?"

Wharton took the talkative and indiscreet Billy by the throat.

"Do you want me to bang your head on the floor?" he asked wrathfully.

"Certainly not. Mind how you shake me, or you'll make my spectacles fall off, and if they break you'll have to pay for them."

Harry released the fat boy of the Remove with a short laugh.

"Oh, get out!"

"I'm sincerely sorry if I've said anything to offend you," blinked Billy.

"Of course, I didn't know you were keeping that about the races secret from the other fellows."

"You young ass, I haven't been to the races!"

"Oh, haven't you? Well, I don't see why you should cut up so rusty at the idea, then. Looks to me like a guilty conscience. But, of course, I take your word for it. I say, if your uncle stands you a feed, don't forget me."

Nugent slipped his arm through Harry's as the latter walked away.

"Don't mind that young ass, Harry!" he said. "But really, are you in any trouble with your uncle, old chap?"

"Yes. He knows I have pawned the watch."

"And you haven't told him what for?"

"I couldn't."

"Then I've a jolly good mind to."

Harry started.

"You don't know yourself, Nugent."

Frank Nugent laughed.

"I've got a jolly good idea, though. It was to save Hazeldene. You paid the moneylender Isaacs, and got him out of his fix."

"Mind you don't say a word to my uncle about it, anyway."

"I don't see why not."

"Do you think I am going to make

capital out of it?" demanded Harry passionately. "I won't curry favour with him. If he chooses to think badly of me, let him. I don't care."

"It may be worse than that. He may speak to the Head."

"I don't care."  
"You would care, I suppose, if you were called up before the Head, and ordered to explain, wouldn't you?"  
"Perhaps. But I shouldn't explain."

"Then—"  
Harry looked at his chum. There was a determined frown upon his face.

"I don't want you to say a word, Nugent. If you've guessed the secret, that gives you no right to give it away. I expect you to say nothing."

"Of course, I shouldn't speak against your wish."

"That's all right, then."  
"But it looks to me as if you were in for a fearful row, Harry, unless you explain."

"I can stand it, I suppose."

After dinner the chums of the Remove went up to the study, where Billy Bunter was roasting chestnuts. Bunter had made a good dinner, but he had plenty of room left for any amount of chestnuts.

There was a knock at the door a couple of minutes later, and Bob Cherry sang out, "Come in!" and Colonel Wharton walked into the study. The veteran's face was very bright and cheery.

"I've good news for you, Harry—at least, I hope you will regard it as good news. The Head has given me permission to take you out with me on a little holiday this afternoon, with a few friends to be selected by yourself."

"Hip-pip!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Harry, old fellow, don't forget that we were brought up together under the same old roof—for the last few weeks, at any rate."

"Show not forgetfulness to the newness of your esteemed friends," purred Hurree Singh. "In the case of my esteemed self, the gratefulness of the friendship is only equalled by its newfulness."

The colonel laughed.  
"You haven't introduced me to your friends yet, Harry."

Harry hardly knew what to make of the colonel's look and manner. The cloud under which they had parted an hour ago seemed to be completely gone. The colonel was more cordial, more jovial, than ever.

Harry presented his friends to the veteran, who shook hands heartily with each of them, not forgetting Billy Bunter.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, all of you!" said the colonel heartily.

"The same with us, sir!" blinked Billy Bunter. "I really don't see what Wharton was so worried about at his uncle coming—Ow! What are you treading on my foot for, Bob Cherry, you clumsy beast?"

But the colonel had apparently heard nothing.

"Let me see. How many will there be for this little excursion?" he said. "Harry and Cherry and Nugent and my old friend Hurree Singh—"

"And Bunter," said that individual promptly.

"Yes, Bunter," said Harry, with a smile.

"Is there anybody else—any special chum?"

Harry hesitated.

"Well, there's a chap I should like

to take, but I can't call him a special chum," he said. "I should like to take Hazeldene."

"Good idea!" said Billy Bunter. "He stood us a tea last night, and we ought to show that we're grateful; and then Wharton's very fond of his sister—"

"Oh, shut up!"  
"Certainly, Wharton. I'm sincerely sorry if I've said anything to offend you. But, as a matter of fact, we know jolly well—Ow! What beast was that kicked my shin?"

"That's six," said the colonel. "I shall be very glad to have Hazeldene. I have already made his acquaintance."

Harry Wharton gave a start. He did not need telling more. The change in the colonel's manner was explained now. Hazeldene must have acquainted the old gentleman with the true facts.

It came as a surprise to Harry. He knew that Hazeldene had turned over a new leaf, and had been trying hard to live up to it; but a generous act like this Harry had been far from expecting of the cad of the Remove.

It was generous; for the colonel might not have taken it in the right spirit. A fussy old fellow might have considered it incumbent upon him to tell the whole story to the Head. In that contingency, Hazeldene would have been made to suffer for speaking out.

"Six," said the colonel. "The Head asked me to give in a list of the names to the Remove master before afternoon school. One of you lads may as well write it down and take it to Mr. Quelch."

"With great pleasurefulness, sir!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "Nugent will write it down, and Cherry will take it to Mr. Quelch, which will be an equal division of labourfulness. I cannot fully express the joyfulness of my hearty satisfaction at meeting the honoured sahib," went on Hurree Singh. "I have often heard my father speak in my childhood of his esteemed friend Colonel Wharton, but I did not know that the august Colonel Sahib was the relation of my honourable chum, the name not being uncommonful. I have heard my father say that I was carried through a rebel mob in the streets of Bhanipur in the honourable arms of the Colonel Sahib, with the tulwars of the rebels flashing round him."

"By Jove, so you were!" said Colonel Wharton. "I'll tell you that story this afternoon, my lads. But now for the programme. My idea was to make a picnic of it, as it's such a beautifully fine afternoon. We can stroll down to the village, get a brake or something there, and load it up with provisions, and then drive to some quiet spot. You can bring your fishing-rods with you. There's a nice pool on the Sark a mile or so up, where we used to land some fine specimens thirty years ago."

"It's still there," grinned Bob Cherry. "I've fished there myself."

"And I've reclined upon the bank and watched the fishfulness of my worthy chum," said the nabob. "In that spot everything is gardenfully lovely."

"Then the sooner we get off the better," said the colonel. "What do you all think of the idea?"

"Ripping!" was the general verdict.

"Then how long will it take you to get ready?"

Bob Cherry jammed his cap on the back of his head.

"I'm ready!" he announced.  
"About two ticks!" said Nugent, grinning. "We haven't got to curl our hair, or anything, you know. Bunter had better wipe the jam off his face."

"Oh, I say, Nugent—"  
"I'll cut along and speak to Hazeldene," said Harry Wharton.

"That's right. Hurry up!"  
Harry Wharton found Hazeldene in the Close. Hazeldene looked at him rather nervously as he came up. He had made up his mind to take the bull by the horns, so to speak.

"I say, Wharton—"  
"I was just coming to speak to you—"

"I've told your uncle about you helping me the other day," said Hazeldene abruptly. "I felt I ought to. I hope you're not going to get ratty about it."

Harry laughed.  
"I guessed something of the sort. Oh, it's all right. As a matter of fact, you've got me out of a fearful fix by telling him. I was expecting a row, with the Head mixed up in it. It's all right now."

Hazeldene drew a breath of relief.  
"Oh, that's good, then! But a fellow never knows how you are going to take things."

Harry frowned a moment. The reference to his uncertain temper was not pleasing; but his face quickly cleared.

"Oh, that's all right. I was coming to speak to you, Hazeldene. My uncle has got us a half-holiday this afternoon, and I want you to come."

"Can I get off?"

"Yes, I have permission."

Hazeldene's face brightened up wonderfully.  
"This is jolly decent of you, Wharton! Of course, I shall be glad to come—jolly glad! What do the others say about it?"

"They all want you to come, the same as I do."

"Right you are!"

And Hazeldene was one of an extremely jolly party that left Greyfriars a little later.

**THE TENTH CHAPTER.**

**The Picnic.**

A bright and pleasant afternoon; a roomy brake; two big lunch-baskets crammed with a variety of good things, the best that the local tuckshop could supply, regardless of expense! Colonel Wharton was doing that little holiday in good style, and the chums of the Remove appreciated it.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "This is really ripping! If you'd rather I drove, Nugent—"

"I wouldn't!" said Nugent tersely. "Think you can manage two horses all right?"

"Better than you could, I think, Bob."

Bob Cherry laughed.  
"Oh, all right. We don't want to break our necks—at least, mine."

"The breakfulness of the esteemed neck would mar the jollification of the holiday," purred Hurree Singh. "But our worthy Nugent seems to manage the horseful team in good stylefulness. Still, if he were tired at all, I should have pleasurefulness in relieving him of the trouble of driving."

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"No trouble," said Nugent. "I don't see the fun of driving," said Bunter. "I'd rather eat toffee any day, especially toffee like this."

"Why, the young cormorant has started already!"

"Only just a little snack, Cherry, to whet my appetite."

"The snackfulness of the esteemed Bunter is only equalled by the hearty dinnerfulness of otherful persons," the nabob remarked.

Harry Wharton was sitting silent in the brake beside the colonel. There had been no explanation between the two, and relations were still a little strained—that is, they were a little strained on Harry's side. The colonel seemed to have forgotten that there had been any friction.

Harry's feelings were mingled. The colonel's treatment of him to-day had come as a complete surprise, and he had not yet got his bearings, so to speak. He had expected something very different—a stern uncle, an unyielding martinet. A cheery old soldier, with a boyish fun and good-humour in his scarred and bronzed face, was very different from the uncle Harry Wharton had expected. The colonel had been nothing like this at home.

Yet he had been the same man! It was borne in upon Harry's mind that in those days at Wharton Lodge the fault had not been on his uncle's side. The colonel had been the same man, but Harry had been different. That was what it meant.

To the sulky, passionate, spoiled boy the colonel had been unable to show the kinder side of his nature, or when he had done so Harry had deliberately misunderstood him. That was how the case was now presenting itself to Harry Wharton's mind, and it gave him a sense of discomposure. It was not pleasant to feel that he had been in the wrong, and that the injuries of which he had nursed the remembrance had been mostly imaginary.

Nugent stopped the brake at last.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We'll leave the brake here, and let the horses graze, and walk down to the river. Bunter can carry the lunch-baskets."

"Oh, I say, Cherry——"

"I expect you'll carry away about half the contents, anyway!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Mind you don't roll into the river, Billy. There's a current out a bit from the land, and it's dangerous. The bank is sloping here, so the only thing I can think of is to tie a rope to Bunter's ankle, and have somebody holding it all the time. If he once started rolling, we should lose our Owl for good."

"The goodfulness of the wheezy idea is great," said Hurree Singh; "but if we fixed some of the fishful hooks into the ears of the esteemed Bunter, it would serve the purposefulness equally well!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hand out the lunch-baskets," laughed the colonel. "I will carry one of them. You can hobble the horses, and give them a little run here. Don't forget the fishing-rods and the cans."

Laden with their various properties, the cheerful Removites quitted the brake, and followed the short footpath down to the green, sloping banks of the Sark.

It was an ideal spot for fishing. The glimmer of the sun on the wide, rolling river, and the moving shadows

of the foliage upon the water close to the grassy bank was pleasant to see.

Bob Cherry looked about him with glistening eyes as he lengthened his rod.

"My hat, Wharton, I wish you had an uncle come to see you every day!" he remarked. "This beats swotting over Latin in a class-room. What?"

"Rather!" said Nugent.

"The rafterfulness is terrific."

"It is jolly!" said the colonel. "It makes an old fellow feel a boy again. Mind the water, you know. I remember that it's deep and dangerous here; and there was a fellow drowned a little lower down in my time."

"I know, sir!" exclaimed Nugent. "It was Haywood minor of that day. They still call it Haywood's Pool here."

"You fellows can go and fish," said Billy Bunter. "I haven't a rod, and I don't want to fish, so I'll look after the lunch. I'll spread the cloth, and boil the kettle, and get all the things ready for you. I have very seldom seen so really ripping a feed as this one. Your uncle is a brick, Wharton!"

"The brickfulness of the honourable colonel sahib is great!"

"Let's get to the fishing," said Wharton. "You brought your rod, Hazeldene?"

"I borrowed Russell's," said Hazeldene. "I sold mine a week or two ago." He coloured a little. "This one of Russell's is all right."

"Come on, then!"

The juniors made their way to the bank. With rods and lines, and bait and cans, they looked very businesslike, but whether they had the patience necessary to the true angler was a question.

The colonel went up the bank, and pulled out an Indian newspaper. He didn't want to fish, but he wanted to know what his old regiment was doing at Bogleywallah.

Billy Bunter paid his attention to the feed. That was just in Bunter's line. He had the spirit-stove going very soon in a sheltered spot, and the kettle singing away cheerily on it. He spread the cloths on the grass, and laid out the eatables in enticing array. So enticing, indeed, did they look that it was impossible for Billy to resist the temptation to sample them.

After all, he reflected that there was plenty—and he was hungry. The fishermen had their backs turned to him, and were intent upon the stream. Bob Cherry had a bite, and there was great excitement. It turned out to be a fragment of a sardine-tin from the bottom of the river, and there was a general grin at Bob's expense as he landed it. Then they fished again; but all at once it occurred to Nugent that Bunter was very silent. He looked round.

There was Billy, kneeling among the eatables, in the very act of tilting a bottle into his mouth.

Nugent gave a shout.

The sudden alarm made Bunter jump, and the bottle slipped, and the contents ran all over his neck and chest.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

Billy Bunter gasped.

"Ow, you beast, Nugent! What did you do that for?"

"What were you scoffing the grub for, without giving a fellow a chance?" demanded Nugent. "Look at the gorging young villain, you chaps!"

"Ow! My shirt is all wet, and this stuff is sticky. Ow!"

"Serve you right!" said Bob Cherry.

"You young cormorant! Still, if he's sticky, we'd better duck him into the water and clean him, chaps!"

"Ow! I won't be ducked in the water!"

"Collar him!" cried Bob Cherry.

"The collarfulness is swift!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, grasping Billy Bunter by the back of the neck. "Here is the young gorge!"

"Lemme alone!"

"The duckfulness in the river would be a wheezy good idea."

"Yank him along!"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"Roll him down the bank."

"If he once gets started, he can't stop. He'll go on like a barrel!"

"The stopfulness would be impossible after the startfulness. Roll the esteemed rotter down the bank, my honourable chums!"

"Ow, Harry Wharton—ow! Stop them!"

Harry Wharton was laughing. The Removites rolled the helpless Billy down the bank, as if fully intending to roll him into the water. Harry Wharton picked up the spectacles, and placed them on a basket in safety. Billy Bunter blinked and roared and gasped. The colonel laid down his paper at the uproar, and looked through the trees at the noisy Removites.

"By Jove, what is the matter there, boys?"

"Help!"

"It's this young cormorant has been scoffing the grub!" said Bob Cherry. "We're thinking of drowning him, sir, to see if it will cure him."

"Help! Murder!"

"Here, chuck it, kids!" said Harry Wharton, as Bunter was rolled into the sedges on the bank. "The young ass thinks you are in earnest!"

"The earnestfulness is terrific."

"Will you promise never to eat anything again as long as you live, Bunt?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Yes, certainly. I'll never taste a morsel again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"The promisefulness is prompt, but what price the performfulness?" said Hurree Singh, grinning.

"Ow! Lemme gerrup! I'll punch all your beastly heads!"

The chums of the Remove released Bunter. Harry Wharton stepped towards him to help him to his feet; but Bunter, without his glasses, was as blind as the owl from which he derived his nickname. He fancied it was one of the juniors about to seize him again, and he hit out.

The right-hander caught Harry Wharton on the chest, and he staggered back, overset by the unexpectedness of the blow.

"Look out!" shrieked Bob Cherry.

But it was too late. Harry Wharton was staggering on the verge of the steep bank, and, even as Bob Cherry's horrified cry rang out, he toppled over with a mighty splash into the deep water.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### In Peril of His Life.

Splash! The splash of Harry Wharton in the river was followed by a cry of horror from the chums of the Remove.

"Harry!"

"He's in!"

"Good heavens! You know how deep it is there!"

The chums ran forward to the water's edge. Billy Bunter was blinking, hardly knowing what had happened, but he was forgotten now.

Harry Wharton was in the midst of the waters. He had fallen backwards into the river, and the crash upon the water seemed to have had a stunning effect upon his head. He had gone under like a stone, and came up again some distance from the bank. He was seen to struggle, but his attempt at swimming was a feeble one, and he was caught in the current, which was evidently too strong for him.

Nugent threw off his jacket.

"I'm going in!"

Bob Cherry dragged him back.

"No good. You couldn't swim there, and you know it. I'm the chap. Stand back!"

"I—"

They had forgotten the colonel. There was a heavy footstep beside them, and the veteran was staring out over the river, with a face suddenly pale.

"Harry! Keep back boys! I will save him!"

The colonel had thrown off hat and coat as he ran to the water's edge. He put his hands together, and plunged into the gleaming Sark. The juniors watched him breathlessly.

The current, a dozen yards out from the bank, was swift and strong, and Harry Wharton was being whirled along with it. The colonel swam towards him with powerful strokes. The lad was keeping himself afloat, but he seemed unable to do more.

"I say, you fellows, is that somebody fallen into the river? I'm sincerely sorry."

But no one was listening to Billy Bunter now.

The chums of the Remove hurried along the bank, following the swimmers down the river, hardly able to keep pace with them.

Harry Wharton was usually in good form in the water, but the manner of his fall had dazed him. He was not much like the strong and sturdy swimmer who had dragged Frank Nugent from the jaws of death that first day at Greyfriars which Nugent had never forgotten.

"Help!"

Harry gasped out the word feebly.

"I am coming!"

It was his uncle's voice, close at hand. The powerful grip of the colonel closed upon Harry's collar, and the sinking head was jerked up above the surface again.

In the midst of the racing stream, far out from the gliding banks, Harry Wharton looked into his uncle's face, as pale as his own.

"Uncle!"

"My dear lad, I will save you!"

The old soldier's powerful grip sustained Harry. But the current had already swept them far, and now the water was running like a mill-race. In the distance, as the colonel knew, was the weir; and then—

He set his teeth, and fought his way shorewards. He heard the shouts of the juniors on the bank. He knew they were shouting warning of the weir. He did not need them. His schoolmate of thirty years ago had been drowned there, and he knew the danger.

He struggled landward, but the eddy-ing current sucked him away again and

again. Harry uttered a gasping exclamation:

"Uncle, the weir! You can hear it now."

"I can hear it."

"Save yourself!"

"And you, too!"

"You cannot! Uncle, save yourself!"

"Both, or neither!" said the old soldier, between his gritted teeth. And he spoke no more. He needed all his breath.

His hand struck something in the gliding water—something that moved and swayed. It was a broken branch trailing down from an overhanging tree. He grasped it; he hung on with a strong grip, and the race to death was stopped.

There he hung, dragged to and fro, but clinging on with desperate tenacity.

"Help!"

The cry was answered. The juniors were tearing along the bank. They were abreast of the hanging branch and its burden in a minute or less. But how to help him? The bank was

hold firmly, and the four Removites drew him in towards the bank. The river raced under and round him, seemingly eager as a beast of prey to drag its victim away to death.

But the arms of the juniors were strong—the colonel's hold was tenacious. He was drawn close to the bank, and Bob Cherry bent down and seized Harry Wharton, and dragged him safely ashore.

Then the colonel was able to scramble out of the water unaided.

Harry had been laid on the grass. He was white as death, gasping painfully, and his eyes were half closed. He was utterly exhausted. The colonel, forgetful of himself, knelt in the grass beside the boy.

"Harry, my dear lad! Safe now!"

Harry's eyes opened, and seemed to speak a volume as they met those of the colonel.

"Uncle! And it is you who has saved my life?"

There were tears in his eyes. In that moment the distrust and dislike had passed away for ever; henceforth there would be no cloud between those two.

### THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. Better Friends!

Harry Wharton had had a narrow escape, but after getting a rest, and his clothes dried at a neighbouring farmhouse, he was little the worse for his experience; and the colonel was quickly himself again. It was a somewhat long walk back to the scene of the picnic, but the party were all feeling cheerful enough when they arrived there.

Billy Bunter had not succeeded in finding his glasses, and he was blinking among the eatables. He had a bun in his hand, but evidently had not had the heart to take a single bite, a clear enough proof that his feelings were deeply stirred. He blinked mournfully at the party as they arrived.

"Hallo! I'm sincerely sorry that Wharton has been drowned!" he said, not perceiving Harry with the rest. "It's a horrible thing to have happened on a picnic!"

"But I'm not drowned!" said Harry, laughing.

Billy Bunter gave a jump.

"Is that you, Wharton? I thought you fell into the river."

"So I did, but my uncle fished me out."

"I'm really glad! I thought you were drowned, and it quite took my appetite away!" Bunter plunged his teeth into the bun, as if to make up for lost time with the least possible delay, and went on speaking with his mouth full. "I say, Wharton, I was very sorry to think you were drowned, especially as I can't find my glasses. You picked them up. What did you do with them?"

"Ha, ha! Here they are, under your nose!"

"Dear me, so they are!"

Bunter adjusted his spectacles, and blinked with satisfaction. He took another enormous bite out of the bun.

"I say, you fellows, as nobody has been drowned, we may as well go on with the picnic. I should have been sincerely sorry if it had been spoiled! You must all be awfully hungry by

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steep, the water of unknown depth. To plunge in was to be swept away, and the trailing branch would bear no greater weight.

Bob Cherry cast a desperate glance round.

A long, slender branch projected from the tree on the land side, and Bob Cherry saw it, grasped it, and called to his comrades.

"Get this off—quick!"

They understood, and lent their aid. The weight of four sturdy juniors was thrown upon the slender branch; it cracked and groaned—and broke. The juniors dragged it from the parent trunk.

"Now then!" panted Bob Cherry.

Grasping the branch by the foliage at the one end, they pushed the other extremity into the water. The branch was quite long enough to reach the spot where the colonel floated, with the almost fainting boy in his arm.

"Catch hold, sir!"

The colonel understood. Hope flashed up again in his bronzed face.

"Can you manage it, boys?"

"Rather, sir!" shouted Hazeldene.

"Catch hold!"

The colonel shifted his grasp from the trailing branch, to the end of the stem held out to him. He gripped the new

this time; I am, though I've had a snack."

"We are hungry!" Colonel Wharton laughed. "Come, the feast looks enticing enough, and we have lost time. Let us get to table!"

Table was a cloth spread on the grass, but the feast was enjoyable enough. The shadow of the narrowly-averted tragedy was still on the boys to some extent, but as the feast progressed it passed away, and the happy laughter of the juniors rang through the trees and over the sunny river.

In spite of the almost tragedy, it turned out a jolly half-holiday—one of the jolliest the juniors remembered at Greyfriars. Harry was called upon to tell the story of the kidnapping of Hazeldene's sister by the gipsies, when the chums of the Remove had rescued her, and the colonel was deeply interested.

And then the colonel told a story—a tale of revolt in the wild land of Bhanipur, and of a child carried to safety by a horseman through a crowd of savage rebels, whose weapons gleamed on every side, and yet had been escaped. And the juniors listened with breathless eagerness, especially Hurree Singh, whose narrow escape from death the colonel was telling of, though the nabob hardly remembered that wild event in his infancy.

The time to return to Greyfriars came all too soon. The last toast had been drunk in currant-wine and ginger-pop, the last tart consumed by Bunter. The colonel and his young comrades walked down to the brake with cheery, happy faces. The horses were put in, and the party drove back to the village.

And there the colonel said good-bye. He had to catch his train at Friar-dale, and the juniors saw him off before

walking back down the lane to the school. The colonel shook hands with each of them on the platform, last of all with Harry.

There was a strange emotion in the boy's handsome face as he shook hands with his uncle, the man he had disliked and distrusted, and who had risked his life for him in return.

"Good-bye, Harry!"

"Good-bye, uncle! And—and——"

The colonel smiled quietly.

"Yes, Harry?"

"I—I can't say what I feel, uncle! I—I'm not used to talking much, I suppose," said Harry, with the colour in his cheeks. "But—but I think you understand. I've been an ungrateful brute! That's the matter!"

The colonel pressed his hand.

"No, Harry. You have been hasty, and perhaps I was not quite patient enough. But that's all over now. Good friends from this day forward—eh?"

"Only I don't deserve it," said Harry, in a low voice.

"Nonsense! We start fresh now, and by-gones are by-gones. Good-bye, Harry!"

The train was snorting.

"Good-bye, uncle!"

The colonel waved his hand from the carriage window. The juniors waved their caps back, and the train rattled out of the station.

Not till it had disappeared down the line did the juniors turn away. Harry's face was very grave. Nugent tapped him on the arm, and Harry looked at him.

"What do you think of your uncle now, Harry?"

"I think you know, Frank," said Harry, in a shaken voice.

"Yes, I think I do, old chap—and I'm jolly glad."

"Well, he's a jolly good fellow," said

Bob Cherry. "You must have brought your uncle up very carefully, Wharton, for him to turn out such a credit to you. About time we hopped into Greyfriars, I think, or we shall be late for calling-over."

The juniors reached the school just before locking-up. It had been a happy afternoon and they were in a happy humour.

The next day there was something of a surprise for Harry Wharton. A parcel arrived for him, and was taken up to the study, and the chums of the Remove gathered round it with great curiosity as it was opened. It was a bulky parcel, and Harry suspected its contents before he cut the cord.

"My hat! A new bat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, unconsciously dropping into rhyme.

It was a splendid new bat. And that was not all. There was a small leather case, and when Harry opened it, he found it to contain a new silver watch, with his monogram engraved on the case. There was a wisp of paper attached, with the words: "From your affectionate uncle, James Wharton."

The tears started to Harry Wharton's eyes.

"In his letter the other day, my uncle mentioned that I had never written to him," he said. "I shall write to him now—and I wish I could tell him all I think."

And Harry wrote, and poured out more of his heart in that letter than the proud, sensitive lad had ever been able to do in words. The colonel's visit to Greyfriars had, although he had not foreseen it, resulted in much for Harry Wharton—much more than a jolly half-holiday.

THE END.





# The Merchant's Secret!

The Opening Chapters of Our Powerful New Serial Story, Introducing **SEXTON BLAKE**, The World-Famous Detective, **EZRA Q. MAITLAND**, and **BROADWAY KATE**.

## THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

SEXTON BLAKE, the famous detective, is notified by Fenlock Fawn, of the New York Police, that Count Franz von Stoltz, a German Secret Service agent, is leaving America for England. Von Stoltz goes to Newcastle. Here he falls in with Ezra Q. Maitland, a notorious New York crook, and his wife, Broadway Kate. Owing to the war Germany is very short of iron and steel. Von Stoltz seeks Maitland's assistance with a scheme whereby British consignments of these metals can be diplomatically transferred to Germany. Maitland falls in with the scheme, in the hope of out-manoeuvring Von Stoltz, and effecting a big coup for himself.

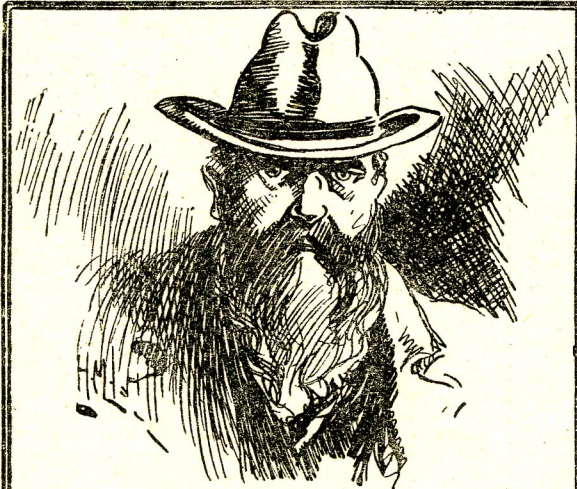
Jack McFarlane, a partner in the engineering firm which is to assist the plotters in their shady work, tells his father that he cannot be a traitor and trade with the enemy. Taking a solitary stroll over the cliffs, he overhears a conversation between a man named Silwater—who is really Maitland—and Von Stoltz. His presence is discovered, and Silwater causes him to fall over the cliff. Jack McFarlane is rescued by Sexton Blake and others, who were in the vicinity with a boat. He again tries to induce his father to throw over the traitorous contract, but fails, and after a quarrel the son is disowned. After his departure, however, the old merchant repents, and decides to cancel the contract. With this object in view, he telephones for the manager and his head clerk, Ian Adair, and Silwater. Silwater interviews the merchant, and his departure is witnessed by Edna Trevour—the merchant's ward—at midnight. In the morning Edna Trevour is awakened by the cries of the old butler—Symes—who is shouting hysterically: "The master—oh, the poor master! Dead, miss! Dead on the study floor, miss—murdered!"

(Now Read On.)

## The News Reaches Sexton Blake, who Commences Investigations.

"When you're finished reading how we're smashing up the Germans, perhaps you'll pass the eggs, sir," Tinker suggested, speaking over the table to Inspector Martin, who was deeply engrossed in a morning paper.

The lad, in company with his master and the Scotland Yard official, was seated at breakfast in the private room they had engaged at a small but remarkably comfortable hotel in Berwick, and although Sexton Blake and



COUNT FRANZ VON STOLTZ  
IN DISGUISE

Martin had both ceased to eat and were smoking, Tinker was still attending to the cravings of the inner man.

The inspector looked up in mild surprise.

"Well, may I be hanged!" he remarked, somewhat indelicately. "Are you going to keep on all day, my lad?"

"No fear," Tinker said calmly. "My appetite isn't like it was! In fact, I'm thinking of consulting a doctor, to see if he'll give me a tonic."

"What the dickens for?" Martin asked.

"Because I'm eating next to nothing," Tinker retorted. "Surely you can see I'm wasting away to a skeleton?"

"Great Scott! You've eaten four eggs, and are about to start on the fifth, to say nothing of consuming a disgusting quantity of ham!"

"Pooh! What I've eaten is a mere bagatelle," the lad answered, quite seriously. "To really keep my pecker up I require—Hullo! There's a taxi stopping outside, sir," he suddenly exclaimed, peering out of the window and addressing his master. "And Inspector Blair has got out."

Sexton Blake looked up languidly, as he tossed the butt of his cigar neatly into the grate.

"I wonder what he wants?" he said, a little wearily. "I really felt like taking a rest after last night's experience."

"He seems jolly excited, guv'nor," Tinker stated, as he tossed a morsel of ham to Pedro, who was squatting upon the rug by the fire. "Hark, that's him on the stairs now!" he added ungrammatically. "I could recognise his fairy footfalls a giddy mile away!"

The next moment the door was flung unceremoniously open, and a florid-

faced, bearded man in the uniform of a police-inspector rushed into the room. He was Inspector Blair, an officer attached to the Berwick police.

"What's wrong?" Martin snapped, in his brisk, official manner, for there was no mistaking that something out of the usual had happened.

"Murder's the matter, sir!" Inspector Blair answered, panting a little after his run up the stairs. "It's a case after Mr. Blake's own heart, I think, from what I have gathered up to the present, so I thought he might like to come along with you."

"Murder—eh?" Sexton Blake ejaculated. "Who is the victim?"

"Old Mr. John McFarlane, of Moortown, a little place about five miles away," Blair informed him.

"McFarlane!" Sexton Blake's brows raised. "The name of the man we rescued last night!" he murmured. "Has the murdered man any connection with the engineering firm bearing his name?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake. He is it's founder and head."

"Indeed! Then he will probably be the father of the young John McFarlane, a man of about twenty-three or four?"

"You appear to know him, sir!" Blair said in surprise.

"I met the young Mr. McFarlane quite by chance during last evening," Sexton Blake responded. "What are the details of the crime, inspector?"

"The only particulars we have received up to the present are very meagre, sir," Blair replied. "You shall have them, however, as I know them."

Sexton Blake nodded as he lit a fresh cigar. With the lids drooping over his eyes, and the tips of his long, sensitive fingers pressed tightly together, he leant back in his chair.

"We heard of the crime soon after nine o'clock this morning," Blair said. "Miss Trevour, the murdered man's ward, telephoned us to inform us of what had happened, but she appeared to be in a most agitated condition, and was not particularly lucid. I discovered that Mr. McFarlane was found lying upon the floor of the study by the butler, a man named Symes. Death appeared to have been caused by an ugly wound upon the old gentleman's temple. I was about to ask further details, when I heard the sound of a fall at the other end of the wire, and a moment later a voice informed me that Miss Trevour had collapsed in a fainting-fit. I found I was speaking to

the butler, and he informed me that a serious quarrel had taken place between the murdered man and his son, shortly before the crime must have taken place, resulting in the elder McFarlane forbidding his son the house, and telling him he never wished to see him again. The young man left to catch the 10.33 train from Berwick Station to London, but whether he carried out his intention or no we have not as yet been able to ascertain. Of course, upon first sight, the quarrel between father and son would seem to be a plausible motive for the crime, and Mr. McFarlane junior, in a fit of anger, and smarting under some real or supposed wrong, might have returned to the house and killed the old man. But there were two persons who called at the house after the young McFarlane had left, whom we must certainly take into our considerations."

"Who were they?" Inspector Martin jerked.

"A business acquaintance of the old merchant's, named Silwater, and the manager and head clerk of McFarlane's firm, a young fellow named Ian Adair."

"Do you know anything of these men?" Sexton Blake queried, the lids momentarily lifting from his eyes, to disclose the fact that they were very bright and keen.

"No," Blair returned, "with the exception that I once met Adair at a 'smoker,' and found him apparently a very decent fellow. Still, in matters of this kind one has to suspect everyone until the guilty party is discovered."

"Exactly," Inspector Martin snapped as he rose to his feet. "You may rely that we know our business, Mr. Blair. We had better journey to the scene of the crime at once. I suppose you have given orders that nothing was to be touched until a proper examination of the dead man and the room in which he was found had been made?"

Inspector Blair looked very much as though he was about to reply that he, too, knew his business; but he checked himself, and merely said "Yes."

"You are coming along, of course, Blake?" Martin asked, for Sexton Blake was still reclining in his chair, slowly puffing at his cigar.

"Why, certainly," the private detective answered, rousing himself. "As a matter of fact, I was at the moment deep in thought. I was wondering if the murder could possibly have any connection with the attack on young McFarlane last night."

Inspector Blair looked curious.

"I have heard nothing of the affair, Mr. Blake," he said insinuatingly.

"I will tell you all about it upon the journey," Sexton Blake promised him. "By the way, I suppose the police-surgeon is with you?"

"He is waiting in the taxi below," Blair replied.

"Then we will get along to Moor-town at once," the detective answered, getting upon his feet and reaching for his hat and coat.

"Do I come, gov'nor?" Tinker asked eagerly.

"Not at this stage of the case, my lad," his master answered. "We shall arrive at the house in force as it is. Besides, it would be a pity to interrupt your breakfast, now that your feeble appetite shows signs of improving," he added, winking at Inspector Martin.

And with this Tinker had to be content.

A taxi-cab glided almost silently up the snow-covered drive leading to the house of the late John McFarlane, and pulled up sharply as the mansion was reached.

From it alighted Sexton Blake, Martin, and Blair, together with the surgeon attached to the Berwick police, a fussy little man with a pale, ascetic face, adorned by a pair of mutton-chop whiskers.

A police-constable, who had been sent on ahead, with a fellow-officer who was now within the house, stood before the massive front door, and he saluted smartly as the little party mounted the steps.

Sexton Blake rang the bell, and the door was almost immediately opened by Symes, the butler, who was still in a most agitated state.

"Thank goodness you've come, gentlemen!" he burst out, nervously clasping and unclasping his hands until the bones cracked. "The poor master! To think that he should be took off in this manner! The doctor's in with him now, gentlemen. Not that he can do the poor gentleman any good, but—"

"The doctor?" Inspector Martin interrupted. "What doctor?"

"The late master's medical man, sir," Symes replied. "Miss Edna, Mr. McFarlane's ward, had him sent for as soon as we found the master dead on the floor. To think that my employer should come to such a fearful end! Him as was always so kind beneath a cloak of sternness. The poor will miss him, gentlemen, and—"

"Lead the way to the room, my good fellow!" Inspector Martin ordered officially, as he swaggered into the hall in such a manner that the old servant was forced to retreat before him. "No time to waste, if we are to find the murderer."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir," the old butler mumbled, awed by the official's demeanour. "Follow me, gentlemen."

He shuffled along the hall until he arrived at his late master's study, before the door of which the second constable was standing, conversing with a keen-faced, alert-eyed man, who proved to be Dr. Angus Dixon, the medico to whom the butler had referred.

Formal greetings were exchanged, then Sexton Blake stepped into the room, followed by the others.

The unfortunate merchant was lying upon the hearthrug, huddled up in a manner that was at once gruesome and unnatural. His hands were tightly clenched, his legs drawn up, while his head was twisted over his right shoulder, so that his eyes were fixed in a rigid stare at one corner of the ceiling. An ugly wound was apparent upon his right temple.

Ever so slightly Sexton Blake shuddered. Hardened and experienced criminologist though he was, he could never look upon death that had come in a violent form without a feeling of horror and repulsion.

"What is your opinion of the case, Dr. Dixon?" the detective suggested.

"Well, I would prefer our friend here to make his examination and voice his views before disclosing my own," Dixon answered, indicating the police-surgeon. "Just as a matter of form, you know. I have taken great pains not to move the body, so that it is in the same position as that in which I found it. Upon the briefest inspection I was sure my poor friend and patient was dead, and that death, when it had overtaken him, had been instantaneous."

The little, officious police-surgeon knelt beside the victim of the crime, and in a brisk, businesslike way made a formal examination.

"He has been dead for about ten hours," said he at length, as he regained his feet and carefully brushed an imaginary speck of dust from his neatly creased trousers, "which would fix the hour of the crime at about midnight, or a little before. Death was due to a broken neck. There are bruises upon the throat which suggest that the injury was forcibly delivered."

"Precisely," Dr. Dixon agreed. "Your opinion entirely coincides with mine."

"A broken neck!" Blair exclaimed. "Then the wound upon the temple was not—"

"No," the police-surgeon stated with conviction, divining what the inspector was about to say; "it is really slight, and would certainly not have been fatal."

"It was probably caused by Mr. McFarlane striking his head upon the corner of the fender when he fell," Sexton Blake said. "You will see that his head is still in close proximity to it. Yes"—he had dropped to his knees—"I was right. There are traces of blood and several human hairs adhering to the fender here."

The detective's fingers rested for a moment upon the dead man's neck. Sexton Blake was no mean surgeon, and he quickly assured himself that the opinions the medical men had put forward were perfectly correct.

"With your permission, Martin, I shall see if there is any clue to be gained from an examination of the pockets," said he, looking up at the man from the Yard.

Inspector Martin nodded. Unless in a particularly aggressive mood, the bulldog-like official was always ready to allow his friend to take the lead in matters such as this. Sexton Blake went over the dead man's clothing, but he discovered nothing of any importance until he reached his fob, to find a handsome gold watch within, which had stopped at ten minute to twelve, presumably upon the preceding night.

Sexton Blake's eyes narrowed as they scrutinised his find; and, rising, he crossed to the window and clicked open the case of the timepiece in order to reveal the delicate mechanism.

A fleeting smile of grim satisfaction played for a moment about the detective's lips as he brought his lens into play; then he turned to the others, who were interestedly watching him.

"The tragedy took place at ten minutes to twelve last night, gentlemen," Sexton Blake said, with such cool confidence that his audience stared at him in amazement.

"How do you know?" Martin asked eagerly.

"By very simple deduction, my friend," the detective returned. "The dead man's watch was stopped when he fell, and the hands point to ten minutes to twelve."

Martin grinned doubtfully, and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Can't prove that it was stopped by concussion," he protested. "Watches often go wrong and stop on their own account. Then, again, people are apt to forget to wind 'em."

"Admitted," Sexton Blake answered. "However, in the present instance the watch did not stop for want of winding. The breaking of the balance-staff was the reason for that, and I think we may safely assume that it was the shock

it sustained when its owner fell that caused it to snap."

"Humph!" Martin grunted grudgingly. "Of course, you may be right."

"There are occasions when my reasoning proves correct," Sexton Blake murmured, as he again knelt beside the body of the old merchant, after having placed the watch carefully in his pocket. The detective now turned his attentions to the bruises upon the victim's throat.

They were undoubtedly caused by violence, being plainly the tell-tale impressions left by the fingers and thumbs of some person who had clutched the old man's throat in a vice-like grip.

Of this the detective quickly assured himself, although he spent some considerable time regarding the bruises, both with his naked eye and through the lens.

Presently, however, he rose to his feet and took a keen glance about the room.

"Was the rug like this when you arrived, Dr. Dixon?" he queried suddenly, pointing to one corner of the hearthrug, which appeared to have been kicked up.

"Yes, Mr. Blake. I remember I just saved myself from tripping over it."

"Thank you, doctor," Blake murmured. "Symes"—he glanced towards the butler, who was standing nervously upon the threshold of the room, his hands still locked together—"did you move anything when you entered here and found your master dead?"

"Yes, sir. A chair was overturned, and the poker was lying on the floor. I picked up the chair, sir, and put the poker back in its place."

"Shouldn't have touched anything!" Inspector Martin snapped, so feelingly that the unfortunate old servant positively jumped. "You ought to have known better!"

"I'm sure I—I beg your pardon if I've done wrong, sir," the old man quavered. "I wasn't to know that"

"It does not matter, as it happens," Sexton Blake interrupted, not unkindly. "Can you show me just where the two articles lay?"

"I—I think so," Symes agreed, with a grateful look at the detective. "The chair was here, sir, and the poker on the rug beside the poor master."

Sexton Blake nodded, and, stooping, he picked up the poker and examined it. It was remarkably heavy, and would have made a formidable weapon in the hands of a strong man or woman, but there were no signs that it had been used as such, and the detective replaced it in the fender.

Sexton Blake suddenly leant forward, with a sharp exclamation, to peer keenly at the wall-paper by the side of the mantel. The paper was a warm red in colour, and it was for this reason that Blake had not before noticed the tell-tale mark upon it. It was a most valuable clue, for the impression was that of a man's thumb, and without doubt it had been made with blood. Once again the detective's lens came to his aid, and he found a peculiarity about the imprint that he at once realised might be the means of fixing the crime upon its perpetrator. In the centre of the impression was a circular space, signifying, Sexton Blake determined, that at some time in the past a small piece of flesh had been nipped clean out of the thumb, or that some growth had been removed from it.

He called to it the attention of the two police officials.

"It ought to hang him, Mr. Blake," Inspector Martin remarked. "You must see that this portion of the paper is removed from the wall, Blair. It will be best to chip out the plaster beneath it, I think, so as to make certain that the clue is not damaged or destroyed."

"I'll see to it when Mr. Blake has finished, sir," Blair answered, nodding.

"I do not think there is anything further to be learnt here," Sexton Blake said, glancing about him. "We had better lay him upon the couch," he added, indicating the dead man.

With a curious tenderness, Sexton Blake closed the staring eyes; then reverently he and Martin lifted the body and placed it upon the couch.

"There are one or two questions I would like to ask," the detective said. "I understood from you, Blair, that you learnt from the butler here that some quarrel took place between the deceased and his son?"

"That's so, Mr. Blake."

"What do you know of this, Symes?" Sexton Blake queried, turning to the butler. "Was the quarrel a violent one?"

The old servant hesitated, and fidgeted uncomfortably.

"It—it wasn't really worth mentioning, sir," he faltered, averting his eyes. "The young master was always a trifle hasty-tempered, but he wouldn't hurt a fly, much less kill his father. I knew him when he was so high, sir, and—"

"Look here, my friend," Sexton Blake interrupted, with a note of sternness in his tones, "you must speak out. By holding back or straying from the exact truth you may really do your young master far more harm than good. I happen to have met him, and, to speak plainly, I do not think for one moment that he is the guilty man. Now, how much did you hear?"

Symes moistened his lips and pulled himself together.

"I only heard the last few words that passed, sir, and that's the honest truth," he pleaded. "It was Mr. Jack's voice that I heard in the first place. He asked his father if he would not relent and reconsider his decision regarding something I could not catch, and told his father to think of his duty to his country and King."

"You are sure of that?" Sexton Blake asked sharply. "You are sure of those few last words?"

"Positive, sir," Symes assured him. "They were the words, I'll take my oath. 'Think of your duty to your country and King.'"

"What did the elder Mr. McFarlane reply?"

"He answered very sternly to the effect that Mr. Jack had heard his decision. He said Mr. Jack had chosen to insult him and dispute his authority, and that he never wished to look on his face again. And with that the young master came out and told me to pack him a bag, as he was leaving the old home for good, sir."

"Did he say he was going to London?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know if he started upon his journey to Berwick to catch his train?"

"Yes; I'm certain he did. I watched him stride down the drive from one of the upper windows. Somehow—the old man's voice broke—"I wanted to see the last of the young master, sir. You see, I'd known him since he was a little mite who could hardly toddle.

Mr. Blake, he didn't strike his father down!"

"I have already told you that up to the present I believe him innocent," Sexton Blake returned quietly, "and I shall do my utmost to clear him from all suspicion by bringing the crime home to the guilty man. Have you no inkling of what it was over which father and son quarrelled?"

"Not the slightest, Mr. Blake."

"By the way, where is Miss Trevour now?" Sexton Blake asked. "Would it be possible to question her?"

"I am afraid not, sir—at least, not just at present," Symes responded. "She was terribly upset, poor young lady, at her guardian's death, and she fainted while she was speaking to the police over the telephone. She's in her room now, with the housekeeper."

Sexton Blake was chagrined. He felt a desire to meet Edna Trevour, and ascertain what she knew of the grim tragedy which had suddenly descended upon the household.

"What of the two persons who called to see your master during last night, Symes?" he questioned, after a thoughtful pause. "They were a gentleman named Silwater and the head clerk of the firm of which Mr. McFarlane was the head, I believe?"

"That is correct, sir."

"What can you tell me respecting them?"

"Well, not much about Mr. Silwater, I fear," the servant said. "I can only say that he was an American and represented a Holland firm with whom the master was transacting some kind of business. As for Mr. Adair, he was always a pleasant-spoken young man, sir, although he seemed to change a lot when he made no headway with Miss Edna."

"Ah!" Blake murmured. "Then he had a regard for your master's ward?"

"He was always sending notes and flowers and things," Symes explained, "but at last I think he found that the young mistress was not for him. Bless you, sir, he might have seen it from the very first. It was Mr. Jack whom Miss Edna favoured. Even an old fogey like me could see it. Her eyes used to light up as soon as he came in sight."

"Were they betrothed?" the detective inquired.

"No, Mr. Blake; so far as I know, the young master had never spoken of what I am sure was in his heart."

"At what time did these two late callers leave the house?"

"That I couldn't say, sir. Soon after I had let Mr. Adair in, the master called me and told me not to wait up, as he was expecting Mr. Silwater after he had finished his business with his head clerk."

"It would be as well for both these men to be sent for," Sexton Blake said, addressing Inspector Blair. "It would be interesting to question them. Will you see to this, inspector?"

Blair assented, and went out to speak to the constables, whilst Sexton Blake lapsed into silence for a few minutes, during which he lit a cigar and puffed at it meditatively.

"To where do those doors lead?" he asked suddenly, indicating the folding doors at the further end of the room.

"To a small sitting-room, looking out upon the grounds," the butler replied. "Miss Edna used to use it a good deal in the afternoons, and— Mercy on us, what's that?"

The old man's body suddenly

stiffened, and he stood staring at the folding doors, from behind which had come a dull thud. Just for a moment those within the study stood inactive, looking questioningly into one another's faces; then Sexton Blake took a couple of quick steps forward, and tried the handle of the folding doors.

They proved to be unfastened, and the next instant the detective had flung them open and dashed into the room, the others at his heels, to find the figure of a girl lying before the French windows, which were slightly ajar. In her hand she tightly clutched a kid glove.

"Miss Edna!" Symes cried in alarm, as he dropped to his knees. "Miss Edna, what has happened?"

But the girl made no reply. She lay inert and still, her eyes closed, the breath coming irregularly and pantingly through her parted lips.

"Stand aside," Dr. Dixon commanded, kneeling beside Symes, and gently pushing him out of the way. "H'm! She has fainted again. I wonder what brought her from the room, and why she should collapse again like this?"

"The glove," Sexton Blake said, gently releasing it from the girl's fingers. "It may afford some explanation of the matter."

He closely examined it. The glove was of an expensive and curious make, it having a heavy gold button, engraved with initials in the form of a monogram, and being lined with fur which overlapped some two inches at the bottom.

"The initials are 'J. M. M.,'" Sexton Blake announced, after a slight hesitation.

"John Malcolm McFarlane!" the butler said. "It belongs to the young master, but how it came here is a mystery. He had both gloves with him when he left last night for Berwick. Merciful heavens!" he suddenly gasped, as he realised that every eye was upon him. "Gentlemen, you—you can't think that he returned to—to kill his father! Oh, I won't—I can't believe it!"

#### Edna's Story—A Scare for Maitland.

"It strikes me it's conclusive enough, Mr. Blake," Inspector Martin remarked, taking the glove from his colleague's hand and glaring at it as though he were endeavouring to wrest from it the explanation of the whole mystery. "Young McFarlane came back, probably had another row with his father, and killed him in a fit of temper."

"No, no, sir!" Symes almost wailed. "He couldn't do it, sir. If you knew the young master, you—"

"Oh, shut up!" Martin snapped shortly. "You can leave us for a bit. We'll call you if we need you."

The butler cast an indignant glance at the burly official from London, then, muttering beneath his breath, he shuffled from the room, whilst Sexton Blake gently lifted Edna from the floor and placed her in an easy-chair.

He then crossed to the windows and stepped into the grounds. Here he stooped and made an examination of the snow-covered path. It told him nothing, however, for fresh snow had fallen during the night, and any foot-prints that otherwise might have been in evidence had been obliterated. He returned to the room with a rueful shake of his head, and as he entered

Edna Trevour stirred uneasily in her chair. A second later her lids flickered, and she opened her eyes, to gaze about her vacantly.

"The glove!" she whispered agitatedly, as memory returned to her. "The glove!"

"Let me press you to drink a little brandy, Miss Trevour," Sexton Blake urged, proffering a glass into which he had poured a small quantity of the spirit from a decanter he had discovered upon the sideboard. "It will steady your nerves."

The girl obediently took the glass and sipped at its contents.

"I—I must have fainted again," she said weakly. "It was foolish of me, but the shock of my guardian's death has terribly affected me. Are you from the—the police?"

"These gentlemen represent the official force," the detective agreed, indicating his companions, "and I am Sexton Blake, the private investigator, of Baker Street, London. There is a chance that you have heard of me."

"Yes, yes!" the girl responded impulsively. "Oh, I am glad that you are upon the case. I have heard of the clever things you have accomplished, Mr. Blake, and I know that you will clear up this dreadful mystery!"

Sexton Blake smiled in a manner that immediately won Edna's confidence.

"That is a very pretty compliment, Miss Trevour," said he. "Do you feel well enough to answer a few questions?"

"I will try," the girl agreed bravely; "but I fear I can throw little light upon the matter."

"Tell me, in your own way, what you can recall of the happenings of last night," the detective said. "Should there be any point upon which I am not quite clear, I will take the liberty of stopping and questioning you."

"I scarcely know where to begin."

"Tell me what you heard of the quarrel between your guardian and his son," Sexton Blake suggested.

The girl hesitated perceptibly, and

her hands, which lay in her lap, clasped nervously.

"The quarrel has no connection with the crime, so far as I am aware, Mr. Blake," she protested. "My—Mr. McFarlane junior had left for Berwick long before my guardian could have been so brutally attacked and murdered."

"Miss Trevour"—Sexton Blake's eyes looked full into those of the girl, and he laid his hand lightly upon her sleeve—"you know that Mr. McFarlane junior returned," he said, with conviction.

"I—"

"Please put your whole confidence in me and keep nothing back," Sexton Blake urged quietly. "Believe me, you will be serving young Mr. McFarlane by telling me the whole truth if, as I imagine, he is innocent."

"You—you believe him innocent?" Edna asked quickly, a new light in her eyes.

"For the present, yes, black though matters may look for him," the detective assured her. "I happened to meet Mr. McFarlane during the early part of last night, and—well, I pride myself upon being no mean judge of character. He did not appear to me to be the kind of man to commit a brutal crime."

"I hardly know how to thank you for those words," Edna said, with a little catch in her voice. "Mr. Blake, Jack McFarlane and I have grown up together, and none should know him better than I. He could never sink to such a vile deed; but"—she shuddered—"everything seems to point to him as the murderer of his father."

"The glove?" Sexton Blake suggested meaningly.

"Yes," Edna agreed. "It was one of a pair I gave him for a birthday present, and when I found it here upon the floor the shock was more than I could bear. My brain reeled, and my heart seemed to stop beating, for I had purposely left these windows unfastened for Mr. McFarlane to return."

"For what reason?" Sexton Blake asked quickly.

"To make amends with his father," Edna explained. "But let me tell you everything."

A little disconnectedly at first, but growing less agitated as she proceeded, the girl told Sexton Blake how she had interrupted the quarrel between father and son, and how it had ended by old Mr. McFarlane declaring that he never wished to see his son again. She went on to tell of how Jack had taken his leave, first declaring his love for her, and requesting her to become his wife when the black clouds had passed away, and mentioned how she urged him to return to make reconciliation with his father, promising to leave open the French windows of the room in which they were now congregated, in order that he might have a means of entry without opening the eyes of the servants.

From this point she narrated how she had been aroused from her sleep by some unusual sound, the nature of which she could not determine, how she had descended to the hall and seen the man she knew by the name of Silwater emerging from her guardian's study, carrying on a conversation with Mr. McFarlane as he did so.

"You can imagine how appalled I was to discover my fiance's glove by these windows this morning," Edna

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A police-inspector rushed into the room. He was Inspector Blair, an officer attached to the Berwick police. "What's wrong?" Martin snapped, in his brisk, official manner, for there was no mistaking something out of the usual had happened.

concluded. "For a moment even my confidence in him wavered and I fainted, although with a second's serious thought I am confident that the man I love could not be the guilty party."

"You say that when you descended this man, Silwater, made his exit from your guardian's study?" Sexton Blake asked, his brows contracting.

"Yes."

"You said that he was carrying on a conversation with your guardian. What was the nature of it?"

"It was of a business nature, I think."

"Did you actually hear Mr. McFarlane answer Mr. Silwater?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly. "I was within two feet—perhaps less—of the study door."

"Could you see your guardian?"

"No; he was concealed by the half-closed door."

"Ah! You are quite certain that it was really the voice of your guardian answering? It was not, perhaps, that of some other person who was imitating it?"

Edna shook her head.

"I am quite certain that it was my guardian's voice I heard," she stated, with conviction.

Sexton Blake leant back in the chair in which he had seated himself, and the

lids drooped over his eyes. For several seconds he remained deep in thought.

"I think you said you saw Mr. Silwater out of the house, Miss Trevour?" he said presently.

"That is so, Mr. Blake."

"Have you any idea of what o'clock it was when you saw Mr. Silwater coming out of your guardian's study?" Blake queried next.

"No," Edna began hesitatingly. "Stay—yes! I can tell you exactly. As Mr. Silwater left the study the last stroke of midnight was sounded by the grandfather clock in the hall!"

"The last stroke of midnight!" Cool man though he was, Sexton Blake sat bolt upright in his chair with a distinct start, and it was plain that he was unusually excited. "You can swear to this?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Yes," Edna assured him, regarding him curiously.

"Does this clock keep good time?"

"It does not lose or gain five minutes in the course of a week."

"Can you tell me if it was correct last night?"

"Yes," Edna replied, with assurance. "As it happened, I compared it with my wristlet watch at a little after nine, so I can vouch for its accuracy."

"Go and look at it now, Martin!" Sexton Blake exclaimed, and his tones were tense and excited. "Find out if it's right, and, if not, how many seconds or minutes it is out!"

Martin quitted the room, to return

almost immediately with a grin he could not suppress playing about his lips.

"Your watch theory has been knocked on the head, Blake," he announced, surreptitiously winking at Inspector Blair.

"Why?" Sexton Blake snapped, almost irritably.

"Because the clock in the hall is right to the minute!" Martin returned. "I put my watch right this morning in Berwick, and it coincides with the time shown by the clock. The deceased must have had an accident with his watch at least ten minutes before he met his death."

"I am not so sure," Sexton Blake protested, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "I am still inclined to believe that his watch was stopped when he met his death!"

Martin started, and stared at the private detective as though he thought he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"What?" he gasped blankly.

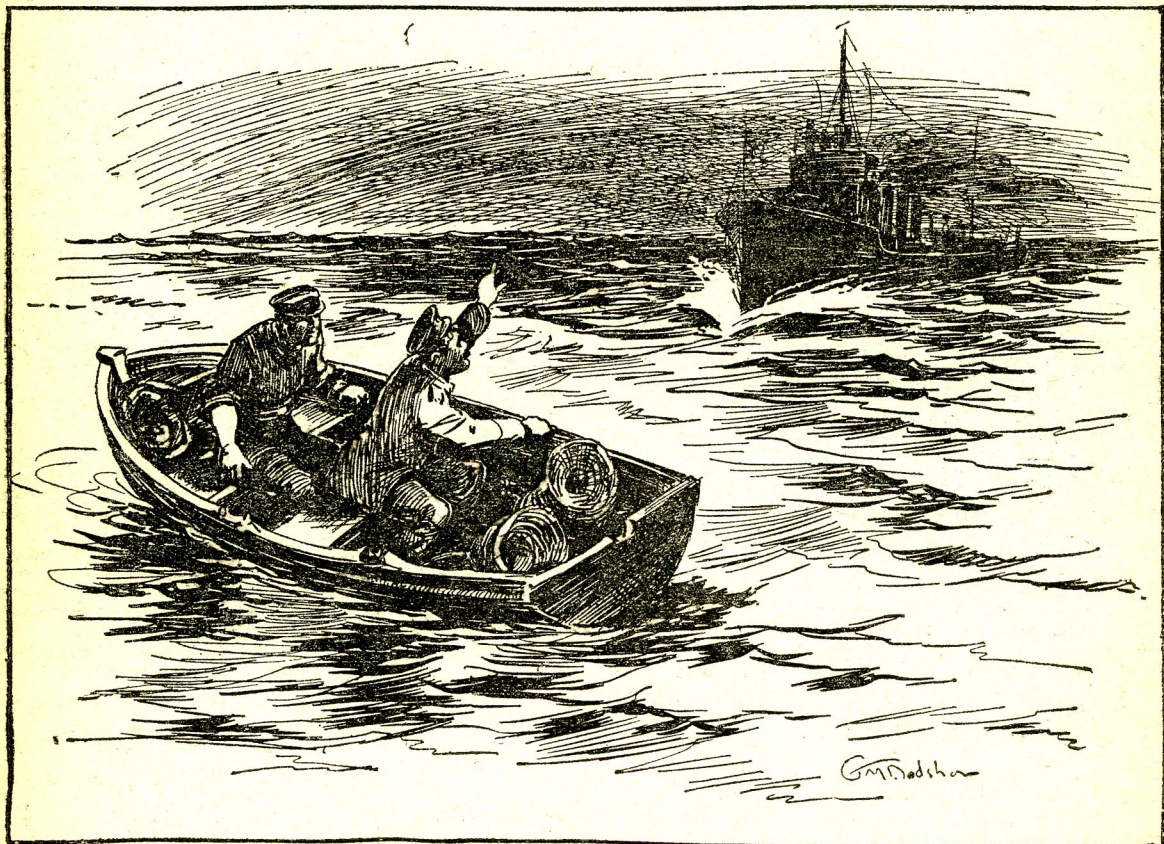
"Blake, are you mad? The hands of the watch pointed to ten minutes to twelve, and Miss Trevour heard her guardian speaking at midnight! Why, man, you are insinuating that Mr. McFarlane was speaking ten minutes after he was dead!"

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Instinctively Bob Danier grabbed for oars which did not exist to drive their boat clear. "Ahoy!" he bellowed. "Ship ahoy! Starboard your hel-lum, for mussy's sake! Help!"

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Hero-Worship.

"Now, look 'ere, Mister Jefferson—and you, Lil, and Aunt Emily there—I know you've got some game on atween you. So out with it! What's the bloomin' wheeze?"

Poor Bill Stubbs was getting quite nervous with all this unmistakable air of mystery about. Here he was, back at Dingledown Farm again, the scene of that gallant defence on New Year's night, when a shipload of German scum had been dumped ashore at Pebblesea to pillage and slay.

This time he had not come down uninvited, needless to say, but was Uncle Joe's honoured guest. As soon as Lil had written that her sweetheart Bill was returning to England on a fortnight's sick-leave, the hospitable old farmer had wired, insisting that both must come straight to Dingledown the moment Bill arrived.

The returned warrior was delighted. He found Lil looking pale and worn, and a week at the seaside was just the

thing to set her up. He wanted rest and quiet, too. He had a ricked back, rheumatism in one shoulder, and a frostbitten toe which was only just beginning to get right again.

So here they were. They found the old farmhouse spick and span once more, with barely a trace of the ravages of that fierce siege. Sir Joshua Sling, the squire and landlord, had spared no money in putting the place to rights.

And yet, with all the comfort and good cheer surrounding him, Bill felt awkward and strange. He knew there was some game going on somewhere, and that everyone except himself was in the "swindle"—even Lil.

Then, before anyone could answer, the storm burst. The old grandfather's clock in the corner had just chimed seven. It must have been the signal, for immediately from outside the window sounded such a crash and blare of brass and banging of drums as made Bill nearly jump out of his skin.

Up he bounced, in spite of his game

toe; and there he stood, catching his breath and glaring like a dying cod-fish. Uncle Joe simply roared with laughter to see him; and so did Aunt Emily and Lil.

"Great slinkers! Why, it's moosic!" gasped Bill, only making them laugh the more. Apparently he had mistaken it for a boiler-factory starting business outside, or even an earthquake.

"Why, yes, o' course it's music!" guffawed the jolly farmer. "And surely you know the toon, don't ye? That's the noo Pebblesea Brass Band, that's been practisin' speshully to welcome you back to Dingledown, and they're playin' 'See the Corncuring 'Ero Comes,' in your honour and Lil's!"

Bill had the grace to let his mouth close then. That he had failed to recognise the famous war march was really not surprising. The musicians outside had got their music mixed somehow, with disastrous consequences to the opening bars. However, they were gradually getting straight again,

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all except the trombone, who was deaf, and still kept on playing the last page, in spite of the yells of the bandmaster to "dry up."

Then Bill, meeting his sweetheart's shaming eyes, began to laugh, too. He caught her in his arms. "In your honour and Lil's." Those words had touched him. What a true little heroine she had proved, that night of fire and bloodshed!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said. "To think that you 'ad all this up your sleeve, and didn't tell me. But I knoo there was somethink—I could see it in your faces

"Come on, Lil," he added; "we've got to show ourselves, I reckon—or you 'ave, rather, for I never done nothink that I remember to deserve all this. It was you."

"I? Not I!" protested his sweetheart. However, Bill slipped his arm in hers, and out they went bashfully to the doorstep. The efforts of the band were just drawing to a close as the broad beam of lamplight revealed the players and quite a crowd of fishermen and villagers paraded outside.

Bill's appearance was the signal instantly for a regular salvo of cheers.

"'Ip, 'ip, 'ooray! 'Ooray! 'Ooray!" huzzahed everybody, including old Uncle Joe. Nor would they stop. Musicians and all joined in. The trombone gentleman brayed like a jackass; some of the duck-shooters let off guns, while the cornets struck up "Tipperary," and the clarionets "God Save the King."

Still, it was all right, though, truth to tell, Bill Stubbs would rather the earth had opened and swallowed him, to get out of it all. For he hated hero-worship, as all brave men do. If it had not been for Lil, and the fact that the demonstration was in her honour as much as in his own, he would have bolted off to bed and refused to show his nose.

But there he was, saluting and bowing, and hoping sincerely that it would all be over soon, and that these good, misguided people would "shove off" and leave him in peace again.

Not a bit of it, however. There was a big waggon drawn up outside the gate, decked with flags. Suddenly half a dozen sturdy yokels closed on their cockney hero with a rush.

"Up with 'im! Up—up!" rose the shout. They wanted to carry him shoulder-high in triumph. But Bill was not having anything of that kind if he knew it.

"No, you don't! Stand off!" he commanded, bolting back in panic, to escape into the house. Uncle Joe was behind him, though. He proved a traitor. He pinned the blushing victim in his arms, holding him in spite of his struggles till brawny hands had gripped him.

"Leggo! Lemme go!" protested Bill quite angrily. "Why don't you let me be? Where are you takin' me to?"

"Why, only down street, to the Jolly Sailor," Uncle Joe told him in glee. "The neighbours 'ave subscribed a little bit of plate as a memento of all you done for us that night agin the Germans. It's a weddin'-present for you and Lil, too. So they won't take nay."

And that was quite evident. The blushing Bill was pitched into the gala waggon like a sack, and held there in spite of his struggles. Lil and Aunt Emly were helped in, too. Then, with the brass band bellowing ahead, and

the procession of villagers following behind, away they went to the local inn, where a reception banquet in Bill's honour had been spread.

The little cockney 'bus-driver was quite flabbergasted.

"If I'd known that this sort of thing was goin' to 'appen, I wouldn't 'ave come near the place!" he protested. "They'll be askin' me to make a speech next, and if they do I know I shall die. You jest wait till I get 'old of Uncle Joe for this! I'll take it out of 'im! It ain't fair on a bloke fresh 'ome from the Front—and on sick-leave, too."

Bill meant it. He would rather have faced a thousand Boches single-handed than this. He was sweating with fright. Nor when they had set him down beside the chairman, with Lil opposite as the other honoured guest, did he recover his nerve and spirits.

For one thing, the chairman was a stranger he had never seen before. If it had been Uncle Joe, it might have been different, but this man! He could not think who he could be.

Yet everyone else seemed to know him. He was full of laughter and jokes, at which the whole table roared. Certainly it was no fault of his that Bill was not at his ease.

And then Uncle Joe whispered in tones of admiration that this was Mr. Brimby who by great good luck they had got to preside. Mr. Brimby, it seemed, was proprietor of a big grocer's and general shop in Trimpot. Every month he did Pebblesea and similar villages the honour of driving round personally and booking orders for his wares among the farms and hamlets.

"A rich man, and one of the best!" Uncle Joe whispered to Bill. "And 'e don't make 'is money, neither, by grinding the face of the poor. Sells 'is wittles moderate. You can't buy 'em as cheap nor 'alf as good, not even from Lunnon. In fact, no one knows 'ow 'e does it at the price."

"Well, that sounds all right," conceded Bill, to whom such philanthropy appealed. He unbent a little to his host after that, and the banquet went more swimmingly. But he was like a condemned man eating his last breakfast until the presentation and speech-making were over. At last that dread moment came. The gift was a handsome silver teapot, and an umbrella for Lil, each suitably engraved.

The popular Mr. Brimby made a most felicitous speech, punctuated duly with rounds of deafening applause. He extolled the blushing Bill as a hero of the first water, returned home covered with honourable wounds from fighting his country's foes.

"An' that's all bosh!" expostulated Bill, interrupting him. "I ricked my old back shiftn' a barrel of pork off a wheelbarrow, if you want to know, and as for rheumatiz an' frostbite in me toes, you don't call that gettin' wounded, do you? If I adn't been sich a fool as to go to sleep in a puddle wot froze, I wouldn't 'ave got them, neither. So don't get layin' it on that I'm a thin red 'ero, 'cause I ain't!"

Nevertheless, in spite of this modest disclaimer, both Mr. Brimby and the audience preferred to appraise the perspiring 'busman at his true value. And so it came to Bill's turn to say a few suitable words in reply.

But, beyond protesting several more times that it was "all rot," including the teapot and the umbrella, the luckless 'busman made little headway, until, suddenly remembering that he was also

responding for the blushing Lil, Bill bucked up and blossomed out in a way that astonished himself.

In two minutes he was making the speech of his life, filled with quaint jokes at his own expense, and the most whole-hearted praise of his sweetheart and the pluck she had shown on that never-to-be-forgotten night of the raid.

"So three cheers for my gal, and don't you bother about me. Three cheers for Lil, I say. She's the one you've got to give the ol' teapot to. Hip, hip, hip, boys, and let it go! Hooray! Hoorary!"

Things went splendidly after that. Mr. Brimby sang, and so did Uncle Joe. And then there was a bit of a sensation, because someone came in with a message from the special constable to say that one of the windows was showing a light visible from outside. It must be dimmed at once.

"Light? What light?" demanded Bill. He could not think what all this fuss about tacking the blinds closer could mean.

"Why, you haven't been in England for a month or two, of course," explained Mr. Brimby. "But we all have to keep our windows strictly darkened now, for fear of these German Zeppelins, you know. We've had them over once already."

"'Ave yer? Oh, yes, I remember now seeing something about it in a bit of 'Daily Mail' I picked up round the trenches," answered Bill, though still surprised at the commotion. For to have enemy's aircraft buzzing about over one's head was the most ordinary, every-day occurrence to him, of course. The serious way everyone was taking it here at home made him grin.

"And 'oo's the special constable they talk about?" he demanded of Uncle Joe.

"Why, my nevvie, Bob Danfer, for one. But there's several of 'em," explained the farmer proudly. "And werry smart they all look, too, with their whistles and chains and armlets on, to say nothing of their truncheons in their pockets. They'll give them 'ere Zeppelins socks if they come flyin' this road, I tell yer!"

This tickled Bill hugely. He wanted to hear more. But the more he heard, the less he was inclined to scoff. These "specials" seemed to have quite a lot of important work to do. They had barriers ready to put across the roads to stop any unauthorised cars, should an air raid take place.

And this was not easy work, moreover. For there were our own aircraft gun-patrols to look out for, carrying powerful headlights. These, of course, must not be delayed. Other official cars, too, were permitted abroad—the police, with a blue lamp on the near side, Red Cross with violet ones, and naval and military officers with green.

"The job is to catch the spies, you see," explained Mr. Brimby, taking up the conversation. "In the last raid it is thought that the enemy's Zeppelins were piloted to wherever they were making for by cars driven by aliens. Airships are just like ships on the sea. They steer by compass. Give them a landmark which appears on their charts, and they can set a course from it at once.

"But at night, with all lights out, the landmarks want finding, you mean?" suggested Bill, beginning to cotton to the scheme.

"That's it, exactly," replied the genial chairman. However, now that mine host had plastered up the offend-

ing blink of light, the harmony of the evening was resumed. Lil and Aunt Em'ly went home soon after. But they would not think of Bill accompanying them. So he wished them good-night.

When the concert was over at last, Bill was introduced to the vigilant Bob Danfer, who, as special constable, had been on duty outside all this time. And a well set-up young chap he found him, and one he remembered well as having borne himself gallantly in the siege of Dingle-down Farm.

"Why, you ought to be in Kitchen's army, along o' us," said the cockney promptly.

"Ah, and so I would be if they'd only have had me," was the prompt reply. Bob Danfer, however, had been rejected as medically unfit. So Bill had to apologise.

"Still, you're doing your bit," he conceded. "And it's a bigger job than I reckoned, now I've been 'earing about it. All work, anyway, and no pay."

But Bob did not grudge that.

"We 'as to 'arn our living when we can, that's all," he said simply. And, as a matter of fact, though it was nigh eleven o'clock, he was off to do part of his day's work then. Young Bob, it seemed, was a "crabber." His crab-pots had been set since the night before on his favourite fishing-ground off Eastnass Point. He was going to haul them up now, and see what luck he had had.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Mysterious Submarine.

"I suppose you wouldn't like to come, too?" suggested Bob Danfer. "It means a couple of hours in the boat, perhaps."

Bill Stubbs was delighted at the notion. Nor did Farmer Joe, his host, advance any objection. The only one who remembered that Bill was an invalid who ought to be in his bed was Mr. Brimby. He quite blew up young Bob for wanting to launch a boat at all at that hour of night. Why could not he wait until daylight?

Bob, thinking of his new friend's rheumatics and frostbite, reckoned he would. And so they parted, Mr. Brimby re-entering the Jolly Sailor, where he and his car always put up while he was travelling the country round for orders for his goods.

The sea was so smooth and the night so warm, however, and the chance of an hour's row in a boat so appealed to Bill after the smoke and heat of the crowded room that before Bob Danfer knew where he was he had changed his mind again, and they were moving down to where his boat lay beached.

"Don't you bother about my rheumatiz, or frostbitenes neither," Bill assured him. "I never seen anyone catch crabs before, 'cept the kind you get on the ol' Serpentine. So I want to know 'ow it's done, and see these 'ere crab-pots you talk about."

"Lor love a duck, why, wot's that 'umming round 'ere?" he broke off, clapping his hands to his nose as a most atrocious stench suddenly smote them. Bob only laughed. It was the crab bait—stinking fish. And Bill had to sit with a basket of it on board while Bob rowed. He was sorry he had come.

Still, when, after a pull of half a mile to his fishing-grounds, his companion began to haul up one pot after another, shaking out the broad-backed

crustaceans, Bill voted it good fun—until one monster, rumbling loose over the bottom of the boat, suddenly nipped his frostbitten toe through the boot, and then he squealed.

It was a pretty fair haul, Bob voted. But he had one or two crab-pots in a new pitch he was trying, and where he had picked up real monsters more than once. So they rowed off there, Bob plying the oars lazily, for the tide was sweeping them along.

"Hallo, there's one of my floats," he said suddenly, making a grab at a billet of wood bobbing on the water. And then as he leant over he uttered a quick growl of disgust.

"Huh!" he said. "No good 'ere to-night, cuss it. All that stinkin' oil agin. I can smell it on my fingers."

"Oil?" echoed Bill. "What oil? What's it doin' out 'ere?"

"That's more than I can tell you," answered his companion. "But this is the third time I've noticed it—the fust by daytime. And there it was all shiny, greasy, like paraffin. Where it comes from beats me, but when its about there ain't no crabs; that's all I knows."

"Well, I'm blowed!" blurted Bill. He was wondering what the presence of oil could mean right away off here, a good three-quarter mile from shore. It couldn't be a wreck, could it?

"What's that funny cross or something I saw stuck up back of the beach as we come along?" he asked, thinking this might have been erected in memory of some disaster at sea.

"Why, that's to mark where the submarine cable comes to shore—or used to, before they cut it," answered Bob.

"Cut it? What for?"

"Why, it runs to Germany," was the reply. "And as they didn't want any noos gettin' over to them, of course they sent a steamer along to lay hold of it and nip it in half."

So that was it. It could have nothing to do with the greasy film of oil spreading over the waves evidently. Bill could smell the stuff as he hung his nose over the side of the boat. Then all of a sudden he started back.

"Gee—giblets!" he gasped, rubbing his eyes. "Bob, old chum, did yer see that, or am I dreamin'? A light, I mean—down there?"

He was pointing over the side of the boat, with shaking fingers. And, sure enough, that very second, far down, ten fathoms deep perhaps, a baleful glimmer of light showed, then darted out into one long beam, which as promptly flickered and as suddenly was blotted out.

"Wouch!" gulped Bob, falling backwards off his thwart in panic. But, to his astonishment, the little cockney grabbed him in a trice. There was nothing tremulous about his fingers now. The grip was like steel.

"You silly chump—dry up!" hissed Bill, right into his face.

"Bu-but wh-what is it—a light d-own there? What can it mean?" stammered Bob Danfer breathlessly.

"Mean!" repeated Bill. "Why, it means it's a submarine—a German one, too, most likely—lying doggo on the bottom of the sea."

"Wot? Oh, marcy preserve us!" groaned Bob, his teeth chattering, and back he slid off his seat again, letting go oars and crab-pot buoy and all, so that the boat went floating away helplessly on the bosom of the tide.

"You blithering, butter-fingered booby, now you've done it!" gritted the cockney, gnashing his teeth. Without oars they might drift right out to mid-ocean for all they could prevent it.

Yet it was the best thing that could have happened really. For no sooner had the boat floated a short fifty yards from the spot where the ghost lights had showed than they saw the sea behind them begin to boil and bubble, rising in tumbled heaps of foam.

Now, though Bill had been on a submarine once already in his life—and a German one, too—he had never seen one play this sort of caper before. Yet his shrewd cockney brains knew that there was one likely solution of it.

"She's pumping out so's she can raise 'erself," he told Bob, in awesome accents, promptly increasing that young man's panic a hundredfold. "She's comin' up to the top. You'll see 'er in a minute, I'll bet. My word, don't she blow!"

Bob didn't care whether she "blew" or not. He was flat on his back on the bottom of the boat and meant to stay there. Even Bill had only the top of his nose over the gunwale. And, sure enough, after their tub had drifted another precious sixty yards perhaps, a great black finlike object slowly cleft the surface, hesitated suspiciously, then reared itself high into the air. It was a submarine's conning-tower, Bill knew.

To save themselves was impossible. All they could do was to lie tight and trust to luck that now with this great cloud spreading over the silver sickle of moon they would escape unnoticed. The boat was painted a light blue, which was a good thing, for it would not show up against the water as it would had it been tarred.

Clank—creak—thud! That was the lid of the conning-tower being unclamped and hoisted back. Now her crew would be climbing out into the open, glad enough to draw a lungful of pure air at last after fourteen hours perhaps of living on "potted" stuff.

Voices laughing came low across the water, and they were not English ones, that Bill could swear. The point was whether the brutes were likely to spot them. Bill was still keeping an eye on the marauder fading gradually in a dusky blur. But it was their tub that was moving, not it.

Not a light showed. In a few minutes it was lost to view.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" panted Bill, when they dared venture to open their lips again. "Germans sneaked right up alongside our beach almost snug as a flea in a blanket, and our blokes not knowin' a bit about it. Wot's the game they're arter, I wonder?"

And then he almost yelled aloud in sudden excitement. He had got it. He knew the solution of the riddle now.

"It's the end of that cable. That's wot they've sneaked 'old of. They're a bloomin' telegraph office, flashin' wires all the way to Berlin perhaps. They've just popped up to see if there's any messages to be sent. You just keep your eyes skinned and you'll read 'em, I reckon."

Bob thought him mad. But Bill was looking out for a light perhaps flashing signals from the beach. The papers had been full of such things ever since the war began.

With eyes nearly bulging out of his head in his excitement, he scanned every inch of the low-lying coast loom-



ing dim in the darkness. There was never a glint of light, however. Thanks to Bob Danfer and his brother special constables all Pebblesea and round about was as black as your hat.

For a good half-hour Bill sat watching while the boat drifted sluggishly along at mercy of breeze and tide. Bob had been trying to prise up the floorboards to use as paddles. But they were screwed down, and in trying to unloosen them his knife broke off short. Bill had no knife on him, so they were done.

Still, the cockney cared nothing about that. His brain was working like a steam-engine, piecing out this mystery on which they had stumbled by merest chance.

"Well, there you are!" he chuckled, turning to his companion again. "I bet you that's what they're up to, and now what we've got to—Here! Hi! Whoa! Look! What's that?" he broke off, with a yelp that only sent poor Bob jumping out of his skin in fresh panic.

A great ugly craft was towering right over them almost about to cut them down, it looked. Instinctively Bob Danfer grabbed for oars which did not exist to drive their boat clear.

"Ahoy!" he bellowed. "Ship ahoy! Starboard your hel-lum, for mussy's sake! Help!"

And then a quiet voice from the bridge high up in the darkness answered coolly:

"All right—all right there! No need to rattle yourselves. We were just wondering when you were going to wake up. What are you doing out here, two miles from land, anyway—eh?"

With the "Eh?" a searchlight was switched on them with blinding intensity, revealing them like images of silver on an ebony sea. The suddenness of it made even Bill duck beneath the thwarts. At first he thought it was the flash of a gun aimed at them point-blank. But reassured, he peered up through the blinding haze.

"Why, you're a soldier, aren't you?" continued the quiet voice. "And if I'm not mistaken, I've seen you before at Dunkirk in charge of a motor-lorry. Isn't that so?"

Bill, of course, could distinguish nothing in that merciless beam. He could only gape in wonder. Who on earth could the speaker be? Not a German, that was evident.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A Waggon and What It Contained.

Nor was Bill disappointed. It was a British torpedo-boat destroyer they had fallen in with. It had been lying hove-to with all lights masked when they came drifting into view.

In a few minutes the castaways had been taken aboard and down below to give account of themselves. And then Bill Stubbs saw who the owner of the voice was who had recognised him.

He was Lieutenant Ripshaw, a dashing young officer in the Royal Naval Motor Corps working the aircraft gunners used to repel aerial raiders. Bill had happened upon him one night when he had got his armoured motor slewed off the road into a ditch ankle deep in mud. There he must have stuck till dawn had Bill not passed him a rope and hauled him out.

It took some doing, however, and by the time it was finished the breezy young lieutenant and the cockney 'bus-driver were as near pals as officer and private may be.

At any rate, he was able to repay the good turn now. He was not commanding the destroyer apparently, and yet his word seemed to pass for law with the officer who was. He made Bill and his companion welcome, and was well rewarded, needless to say.

For in double-quick time Bill told him all about the mysterious submarine.

"Submarine?" gasped the officer.

"When? Where?"

"To-night—back there—off Pebblesea. Lyin' snug as you like in shoal water not a mile from the beach," answered Bill. "Yes, and d'you want to know what my idea is of the game they're playing at?"

Lieutenant Ripshaw certainly did, for he knew of old that this little cockney had wits as sharp as needles. So Bill told him all about the submarine cable which had been cut when the war began, and his belief that these cheeky Germans had quietly posted a submarine there to lay hold of the severed end and fit on instruments so that they could send messages by it just as well as ever.

Bill could see by the look of, blank astonishment on the officers' faces that what he was suggesting had never been thought of before, but that, nevertheless, the theory was quite sound.

"You may be right," admitted Ripshaw. "As a matter of fact, I may tell you in confidence that there has been a tremendous leakage of information of all sorts about Navy affairs of late, and from this very section of the coast, what is more.

"That is why I am on special service here now," he went on. "We could only think that the information could be conveyed by flash-signals, and we have been watching off here for these night after night. Not a light, though, have we seen. But this notion you give us may be the clue to the mystery. If so, you have done a night's work for your country that you may well be proud of."

Bill didn't care a snuff about that. He wanted to steam full speed now for the spot where they had seen the lurking monster and ram it into the middle of next month.

"Yes, or miss it in the dark and scare it away so that we never see it again."

"Yes, or have the brute torpedoing us while we are hunting round for it," said the destroyer's commander. No, it was obviously much wiser to "lie low and say nuffink" like Brer Fox. They would soon shift the skulker out of his lair, never fear for that.

Bill Stubbs told them where he was staying so that they could get in touch with him instantly.

"Right," said Lieutenant Ripshaw, noting Uncle Joe's address. "And the question is, how to get you ashore so that no one need ask you what you've been up to, or wonder why you are so late."

Still, this was not difficult. All Bill wanted was the loan of a pair of oars.

The destroyer, however, was able to give them a bigger leg-up than that. Steaming back along the coast against the tide, it turned their boat adrift at last where they would be able to make an easy slant for the shore. An hour later saw them landing at the identical spot whence they had set out.

Lieutenant Ripshaw's parting injunction to them was to keep their eyes skinned both day and night for any suspicious characters lurking about Pebblesea. This German submarine they had located might be able to transmit news to Berlin or Wilhelms-haven, as they suggested, but they must get the news from somewhere to send.

They must have spies ashore collecting it and signalling it to them somehow. These were the brutes Bill and Bob could best employ their time looking out for.

Meantime, Lieutenant Ripshaw would also be getting on their trail. They might expect to see him buzzing round either that day or the next. For the present they should keep their own council unless they were absolutely sure of the man they were talking to.

They beached their boat, and Bill was tramping round and round, the capstan hauling it up, when Bob, to his amazement, saw the soldier suddenly drop the capstan-bar and make a rush in the direction of the fishermen's sheds close by.

A protesting squeal was the result, and a moment later the cockney appeared, hauling along someone by the scruff of the neck. It was Mr. Brimby.

"Oh, don't handle me so roughly. Mind what you are about. I've been waiting for you for hours," protested their late chairman of the Presentation Banquet. He spoke more in sorrow than in anger, so Bill let him go. But he demanded to know what the grocer was doing there at that time of night.

Mr. Brimby had already told them. He had spied them launching their boat in spite of what he had advised, and remembering Bill's rheumatically shoulder had very kindly started out to give them a hand.

But they had run their tub down to the water before he could get to them. So not feeling sleepy he had decided to await their return, which was very sporting of him, as Bill had to admit.

But this was not all. Seated there on the beach, Mr. Brimby had likewise seen a dark object emerge from the deep that looked to him like a whale. He knew that they had been near the spot, and he had been waiting in trepidation for their return, wondering what they made of the mystery.

Bill Stubbs remembered the officer's parting words about keeping their mouths shut. But this hardly applied in this case, surely. And, moreover, before he could stop him Bob Danfer had blurted out the whole story, about the destroyer and all.

"Bless you, Mr. Brimby's all right," the fisherman assured Bill, when the latter would have checked him halfway. "Why, he's been about these parts for a year or more. Everybody knows him—don't they, Mr. Brimby?"

Mr. Brimby sincerely hoped so. If there was any man alive who thought himself a more thorough-going, patriotic Britisher than he was, the grocer wanted to meet him, that was all.

So with that Bill let Bob have his say out. Mr. Brimby was thunderstruck. You could have knocked him down with a feather.

"And now I come to think of it," he said breathlessly, "while I was sitting here I did see a man going skulking along back of the huts there, and make off up the cliff. But I thought he was one of your fishermen, of course.

"And now he might have been a spy!" Bill was mad enough to have kicked him for not getting a close look at the villain, at least. However, Mr. Brimby, it seemed, had been near enough to detect one or two distinguishing features. The fellow had a dark beard, and he looked to be wearing either tight-fitting knee-boots or gaiters. So this was something.

"Well, now," said Bill, taking charge of the job, as was his wont, "not a word of this to a soul. That young officer bloke 'as took the case in 'and, and we won't go messin' it up for 'im. We'll turn in now. But to-morrow we'll keep our eyes skinned, as 'e said. We may spot this cove with the whiskers again, or we may not. We can't do more than try."

"No, that we can't," added Mr. Brimby heartily. "You two can be here while I'm running round among my customers, as usual. Who knows but I may spot him somewhere inland on the road."

This was quite a feasible notion. The grocer could scour the surrounding country on his smart two-seater car, while Bill and Bob lay up somewhere and watched from the beach for any further sign of the monster skulking out yonder on the "ten-fathom line."

To explain to Lil his reason for absenting himself all day proved none too easy, as Bill discovered. His sweet-heart was jealous, and showed it. She insisted on knowing at least some inkling of where he was going. But, of course, he could not tell her.

So the result was a tiff, and poor Bill departed, looking glum as a funeral mute. He walked sharply inland for three mile or more; then, striking away on a detour, came slinking back to the coast. From bush to bush he crept, until he was at last ensconced in a snug burrow within view of the submarine cable "mark" reared close to the beach. There he waited all day, chilled to the bone and hungry as a bear. But nothing happened.

Bob Danfer was pretending to be going about his daily job as usual, boiling his catch of crabs and getting ready to peddle them in his little pony-cart round the neighbouring villages.

But he was keeping his eyes skinned, too, for suspicious characters, and he knew where he could find Bill Stubbs if he wanted him. At last, hearing a great grunting and creaking of some heavy waggon over Dingle-down Farm way, that moment came.

It was just on dusk, when Bill Stubbs in his furze-bush heard a cautious whistle close to his hiding-place. He knew it was Bob Danfer come to seek him, and he was mighty glad. For his rheumatically shoulder was aching like steam, and his bad toe was giving him "gyp" with the cold.

"Well, chum, what's up? Seen anything?" he demanded, as Bob's head popped into view. The fisherman's eyes were sticking out like hatpins.

"Yes; come 'ere and look—quick!" panted Bob Danfer. "A steam-waggon's come to Farmer Jefferson's with a load of beet that 'e don't know nothing about. There's three men with it, wot's more—all fishy-lookin' customers as ever was. They would stick it out the stuff was for 'im at fust, but seein', 'e wouldn't 'ave it, they began to reckon they'd made a mistake."

"Oh! Well, go on!" commanded Bill, his eyes rounding.

"Well, seeing as 'ow it was so late like, they've axed 'im if they can leave the waggon in his yard all night, and

now they've gone off theirselves to get lodgings, as they said. But they ain't inquired for none in the village, as I've learnt from goin' round. Wot's more, there's no one set eyes on 'em from that moment to this!"

"Ah! Um! Is that so?" grunted Bill, a dangerous glint beginning to steal into his shrewd eyes. "And they've left their waggon in Uncle Joe's yard? We must go and 'ave a look at that, I reckon."

"Oh, but you can't," struck in Bob Danfer. "They was most partikler about the gate bein' kept locked while they was gone."

"Locked! Why, afraid of someone stealin' a bushel of turnips off it?" quoth Bill quickly. "Come, that's suspicious, if you like! All the same, lock or no lock, we're goin' to examine that waggon, you and me," he announced grimly. "And you, as a special policeman, don't want no one else's authority to do it."

Bob seemed rather to doubt this. However, Bill was a man of his word. He started off, to find luckily that Uncle Joe had been before him. Inspector Joram, of the county police, had chanced to cycle into the village, and the farmer had waylaid him. Mr. Brimby had arrived back, too. So they were all there round the mysterious waggon, eyeing it as if it might be loaded with dynamite.

Motor-waggons for haulin' heavy loads are common objects in farming districts nowadays. But this was the queerest-looking craft of its kind that any of them had seen.

"Hallo, here's Bill Stubbs come at last!" exclaimed Uncle Joe with relief, as the cockney appeared. "'E knows all about these 'ere new-fangled contraptions. Let 'im 'ave a look at it and see wot he thinks. Do you make out that waggon goes by steam, as them fellows said it did, Bill?"

Bill glanced round it and under it, and in two twos told them that it no more went by steam than he did!

"It's a petrol engine, of course," he declared. "Wot's more, this 'ere number-plate in front is a false 'un. 'Gimme a screwdriver 'alf a moment, and I'll show you."

And so it proved. Underneath was a second plate, with "R.N.A.S." on it.

"Royal Naval Air Service, that's what that means," he told them. "And now we'll 'ave all them turnips out, and just see what's underneath 'em. They ain't in there 'cept it's to 'ide something, you bet."

Sure enough the little cockney proved right again. He was a regular Sherlock Holmes. But the discovery laid bare was a startling one. Hidden down under the heaps of beet was nothing less than a formidable quickfiring gun, pointing into the air. It's bore was about an inch in diameter, and beside it a store of small shells, about four inches long, ranged in belts as if for a maxim.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Air Raiders Arrive.

"Huh! And now, wot d'you make of that?" grunted Bill to the police-officer triumphantly. The inspector did not know; nor did Mr. Brimby; nor anybody, in fact, except Cockney Bill. He had tumbled to the ruse, he reckoned.

"Why, this 'ere's a German motor," he said. "Wasn't you tellin' me yourself last night, sir," he went on,

addressing the grocer, "how when them Zeppelins came raidin' 'ere last time they 'ad spies in cars to pilot 'em with their 'eadlights? That's right, ain't it? And now, if they come again, there's some places got barriers 'cross the roads, to ketch these cars an' collar 'em."

"Well, 'ere you are," continued Bill in triumph. "The spies 'ave got 'old of the police orders, you bet, 'cause the bills are stuck up everywhere thick as flies. I was readin' one myself about expectin' naval aircraft gun-cars along, wot would be allowed to carry big headlights, and wasn't to be delayed on any account. That's just the trick these beggars are up to with this one."

"Wot trick? How? I don't understand," blurted Mr. Brimby, still not grasping Bill's meaning, apparently.

"Why, don't you see?" laughed Bill. "These three spies that come spoofin' Mr. Jefferson 'ave got their car up to look like one of these armoured motors. And they'll go bustin' along, pretending to be arter the Zeppelins, when the Zeps are really follerin' them! And seeing the gun and the plate in front, no one will stop 'em!"

But Mr. Brimby had grasped it all now. So had Inspector Joram and the rest. They were consumed with amazement as much at the impudent ingenuity of the notion as at Bill's marvellous perspicacity in ferreting it out.

"Well, that being so, what's it here for, and what ought we to do with it?" queried the inspector.

"Wot's it 'ere for?" echoed Bill. "Why, gettin' ready for another Zeppelin raid, I guess!"

"What!" squealed Mr. Brimby, in panic.

"Great scissors! When? Where?" gasped Uncle Joe, staring up instinctively at the darkening sky, as if expecting to see a mighty airship hovering over his farmyard at that very moment.

Nevertheless, Bill meant what he said. There would be no moon that night, for one thing. Why they should select Pebblesea, though, as their point at which to strike the English coast he could not say, of course. But no doubt they had their reasons.

He was thinking of the German submarine squatted on the sandy bottom of the sea even now, perhaps not a mile from where they were standing. From the blank look of dismay on the police-inspector's face it seemed as if he also knew reasons of his own.

"Why, I'll tell you one thing," he blurted, "and it's a secret which wild 'osses should be drawin' from me by rights. But there you are, and we're all honest Englishmen here. And that's the solemn truth, and it's all been kept dark as dark, just 'cause of this very thing."

Bill looked at him with pitying scorn. "Solemn truth? Wot is it?" he demanded at last. "Why, you ain't told us yet. You've run past yourself."

The bobby looked blank. Then he remembered that the cockney was right.

"Why, listen close, and I'll tell you," he said in an awesome whisper. "The King!" he went on, holding up one fat forefinger.

"The King!" gasped his audience, in consternation.

"Yes, he's stopping not twenty mile from here, with a certain noble dook," continued the inspector. "He only came down this morning, and no one except the police is supposed to know

he's arrived. They all think he's still at Buckingham Palace."

"All except the very coves you thick-heads are supposed to 'ave kept it dark from!" sneered Bill. "They seem to 'ave got 'old of it, anyway! 'Cause 'ere you are!" And he turned to the disguised motor again.

Still burrowing under the load of beet, they came next on two powerful headlights, just such as spies had carried during the first raid. That settled it.

"What shall we do with it?" demanded the inspector, still unconsciously looking to Bill Stubbs for his orders.

"Why, disable it, of course," struck in Mr. Brimby, with patriotic anger. "Smash the beastly thing, so that they can't use it, at any price. Here, lend me your knife, someone, and I'll slash through the tyres—that's the quickest way."

It was one way, certainly, as Bill had to admit. He watched the grocer sawing gash on gash in covers and tubes.

The funny part of it was that, though they were soon as flat as pancakes, the air could still be heard escaping with a deep, humming note for quite a long time afterwards. It really was most uncanny.

In fact, as they listened, it even began to grow louder and louder. They all put their ears down to the wheels, to try and solve the mystery whence all this air could come.

It was Bill Stubbs who sprang back as if a scorpion had bitten him. He was staring up at the skies, his face white as dough, even in that murky darkness now descended on land and sea.

"Ark!" he commanded harshly; and they harked. The weird, drumming note came not from the punctured tyres at all, but from the sky.

"Anyplanes! Zeppelins! They're comin'!" he exploded, striking panic into his listeners. "Don't you 'ear 'em? Out there, over the sea! It's the Boches arter you ag'in—arter the King, perhaps, to murder 'im with their cursed bombs!"

Uncle Joe nearly fell backwards into his own water-barrel in his alarm. As for the police-inspector, he simply gasped, then mechanically proceeded to fish out a fat notebook, in which to note the exact hour, time and date, no doubt, of this most alarming occurrence.

The sight so infuriated Bill that he promptly knocked the book spinning out of the officer's hands, and then even cuffed his cap after it. That woke the inspector up.

"Well, I can't 'elp it. It's your fault, you fat-headed juggins!" apologised Bill furiously. "While you're wastin' time 'ere, like a stuck pig, them Zeppelins are comin' up fast as railway-trains! They won't wait while you make notes. Pull up your socks, and 'op! That's wot you've got to do—and quick!"

Thus adjured, the officer trundled off to get his bicycle.

"Bicycle be blowed!" bellowed Bill, wresting it from him. "Where are you going to bicycle to, with them things walking over you at fifty mile an hour? You want a motor-car, and Mister Brimby 'ere 'as got one. Bunk off to the Jolly Sailor, and p'raps the gent'll drive you hisself."

The worthy grocer expressed both willingness and delight. Just by chance he happened to have a powerful headlight on board, which he had bought from a customer, who, since these days of police regulations, had no further use

for it. It could all be put into working order in a brace of shakes.

"Right—that's the very thing!" declared Bill. "You must 'ave lights. You can't drive sixty mile an hour without. An' as for bein' stopped, you've got a policeman with you. He'll pass you through."

They ran to the village inn. Fortunately, Mr. Brimby's newly-purchased headlight was already charged, and merely wanted to be slipped on to its socket. A flare of a match, and it was blazing like a searchlight. They lit one of his oil side-lights, as well, and clapped a bit of blue paper over the glass.

This was the inspector's own suggestion, for blue was the official police colour. The guards at the barriers, seeing it, would open these and let them through without a halt.

It was decided that Bill Stubbs had better accompany the expedition. Nor was he in any way loth. He snatched a hasty farewell of Lil. She had forgiven his desertion of her long ago, of course.

Meantime, the skies were fairly booming with the roar of the invaders' propellers. There looked to be four of these, with aeroplanes besides. The panic among the villagers as the fleet headed straight for the village was piteous. Nor could it be surprised at.

For who could say that at any second one of the "baby-killers" might not loose a mighty bomb which would lay the street in ruins? The only safeguard was that all lights had been promptly put out. Even fires in the grates were quenched.

The only betraying light was the powerful beam cast by Mr. Brimby's motor-car. So the sooner they were out of it the better. Bill sprang aboard, therefore, dragging the stout police-inspector after him. The grocer drove, and proved no mean expert either. Away they dashed at a good fifty miles an hour.

And this was no more than fast enough to keep ahead of the oncoming Zeppelins. Toot, toot, toot! rang out the horn as the speedy two-seater raced by darkened farmsteads, at the gates of which frightened countryfolk loomed up in the headlight's glare, to vanish in a puff.

Toot, toot—too-oo-oot! On sped the car, taking corners at racing speed, one wheel in the air sometimes, sometimes mounting high up the bank.

"But, by Jinks, this 'ere grocer fellow don't want no showin' 'ow to drive!" decided Bill. "Wonder where he got 'is practice, goin' at this speed? Must 'ave been at Brooklands, I should think."

Mr. Brimby was cool as a cucumber, and knew every road and by-road. More than once, when Inspector Joram suddenly realised by a signpost whisking by that they were going wrong, Mr. Brimby held on, promising to bring them back on to the main road again in due time—which, sure enough, he did.

In fact, his was the direct and straighter course without a doubt to Gavelstone Towers—Lord Gavel's place, where the King was staying as weekend guest. It was to warn his Majesty of danger, in case the telegraph-wires had been cut, that Bill and his companions were risking their necks now.

It was amazing, too, to see what effect that scrap of blue paper over the near-side lamp had on the various police posts which barred the road.

At each of these an advance sentry was waiting to scrutinise the car. The

blue light, though, and the inspector's familiar figure caused them to flash the "all right" signal along instantly. The pole barrier was lifted from its trestle and carried aside, and through the motor dashed, with scarcely a check.

Yet, fast as they were travelling, two of the five-hundred-foot aerial leviathans overhead were never more than a mile behind, tracking them like sleuth-hounds.

In fact, it suddenly flashed on Bill that instead of assisting to safeguard his Majesty they were really leading the enemy straight to their quarry. No sooner did the thought strike him than he shouted to Mr. Brimby to pull up.

"Pull up? What for?" demanded the grocer, resenting the suggestion.

"Why, to put out that light of yours. It's too bright. It's doing the very thing we don't want to do."

"Rubbish!" bawled back Mr. Brimby.

"Rubbish yourself!" retorted Bill, losing his temper. "You'll take your orders from me, d'you 'ear? I'm the soldier in this party, and I say you've got to."

"Got to be hanged!" snarled Mr. Brimby, with a savagery that quite took Bill aback. For he had been the mildest of men before. And all this time the car was careering along at breakneck speed, skimming curves like an express train.

But Bill's dander was up. He was not going to be defied in this fashion! The pliable metallic tube feeding the headlight from the carbide container was down close to the brake at Mr. Brimby's feet. One swift snatch, though it was almost frustrated by a kick of the grocer's boot, tore the connection asunder.

The effect on Mr. Brimby was magical. From being the smoothest-mannered little shopman, he suddenly developed into a raging fury. He pulled up the car with a jerk that must nearly have torn the tyres off the rims.

"You lunatic!" he blared at the astonished cockney. "What did you go and do that for?"

"Yes, what did you go and do that for?" demanded the inspector, almost as wild.

"I say we're doing the very thing we ought not to be doing!" retorted Bill. "We're leading these scum right to where the King is stopping! They're using us as their pilot. Look—see 'ow that one is swinging away, all up a gum-tree just cause our light is out. He pointed upwards as he spoke, to the huge, dim body looming darkly against the starless sky.

Not only did the monster dirigible swing away, but for the first time during the raid a searchlight stabbed downwards through the darkness, illuminating a circle of earth which shifted rapidly here and there, in anxious endeavour to locate them again.

For that was the object of it, without a doubt. The mighty monster was even turning to wheel back over the same spot, while the one lagging in the rear darted down its searchlight, too, in the quest of the light which Bill had providentially dowsed.

"So now you can see what we've been doin' of!" he spluttered, in excitement and chagrin. For it was he, he remembered, who had suggested the race.

"Blowed if it wouldn't just serve me right if they dropped a bomb on my silly fat 'ead now, and blew it to

smithereens!" he vowed, ready to kick himself for his folly.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Traitor's Tragic End.

There was something mighty fascinating about watching the huge craft circling slowly like birds of prey in search of their quarry. And it was their miserable little two-seater that they were looking for all the time. Without it to pilot them they seemed helpless.

It was lucky that Bill had twigged the danger when he did. He never thought to look what Mr. Brimby was up to all this time. His eyes were all up in the clouds. So were the police-officer's. They had jumped out of the car, and were standing by the roadside.

"If we keep quiet and don't show our glim they'll miss us, I believe," cried the cockney. For the thunder of the propellers made the skies fairly shake.

And scarcely had the words left his lips than a blinding glare shot far ahead of the car once more. Bill ducked like a rabbit, for he thought it was a bomb bursting at first. But it was the headlight only, which this fellow Brimby had set blazing again, in spite of him.

It was madness. The man must be crazed. He—

Bill got no further. A sudden furious yell broke from his lips. He saw it all now. This pseudo grocer with his run-about car was a spy, and nothing else—the very sort of traitor that he himself had cynically described as acting as pilot to these pirates of the air. He was the brute, too, without a doubt, who had been conveying information to the lurking submarine.

And Bill having commandeered his car, the cunning villain had still quietly carried out his appointed task, in spite of them—under their very noses, in fact.

The cockney was awake to his true character now, however. And not a second too soon. For already the spy was tumbling back into his seat, preparatory to dashing away again, this time on his own.

"No, you don't, you cur!" cried Bill, springing to get round the car and intercept him. "Here, bobby, go for him, quick! Stop him!" he shouted, for the inspector was the nearer by yards. Promptly the officer turned. He seemed to realise, too, that treachery was afoot. He made a clutch to seize the traitor's arm.

Crack! Sharp as the snapping of stout stick came a report; the flame of a pistol-shot darted square at his breast, and down he pitched in a crumpled heap.

So this was the genial Brimby in his true colours at last—a ruffian ready to commit murder before he was captured! He snapped a shot at Bill Stubbs, too, as he also came plunging in to grapple with him. But this time he missed.

A lucky stumble saved Bill's brains for him. It also enabled his quarry to dodge his clutching fingers. He fell crash against the footboard of the car. At the same instant the traitor dropped his clutch and sent the motor bounding forward.

Nevertheless, Bill had not finished with his enemy yet. He was still gripping the footboard madly, his heels trailing along the road. For the moment he was helpless, yet he hung on.

For the moment, too, Mr. Brimby overlooked him, believing he had left him far behind.

And so the car raced on at gathering speed. Bill could feel the heels torn from his boots, and his feet getting red-hot with the friction on the road. He knew he could not endure such agony much longer. Yet the only alternative was to let go and scatter his brains on the macadam.

Just at that instant he saw the glint of a flash-lamp ahead. Further beyond were a couple of hurricane-lamps on either side of the road. Thank the fates it was another police post! Bill let rip a wild yell for help. The lookout had not even noticed him trailing in the mud. Seeing the blue lamp, he was actually signalling for the barrier ahead to be withdrawn.

But now he changed the flash. The result was that the pole still remained fast, barring the road. It was then that the spy spotted the cockney trailing at his side. With an oath he whipped out his pistol again and fired point-blank at his victim's head.

Bill felt he was hit. But he dared not let go. He clung on, therefore, seeing the barrier rushing closer and closer. The shot, of course, had been heard by the guards. They were tumbling into the road, with bayonets fixed, to intercept the fugitive at all costs. But Mr. Brimby was determined to finish out his mad-dog course. He charged full tilt at the pole.

Crash! The pole was stout. It smote the car just level with the bonnet, demolishing screen and steering-wheel as with a scythe. It took the spy square across the ribs, too, and that was the end of him.

The pole was placed aslant the road cunningly. The glancing blow thus hurled the car aside, causing the wheels to collapse, and overturning it in the ditch.

It was in this way that Bill's life was saved. He was flung clear, to be pounced on the next instant by an excited special with his bayonet at his throat.

"Leggo, you fool!" panted Bill. "It's the other bloke you want to go for, not me. I'm all right. You ketch old 'im."

However, the spy was quiet enough to need no holding. They flashed a bicycle-lamp on his crumpled body. He was breathing and conscious, even. He met Bill's furious gaze with a look half challenging, half triumphant. "Mr. Brimby" was dying game.

And over all boomed the terrifying roar of the pursuing Zeppelins, once again robbed of their pilot light. The two specials on guard at the post watched them in dismay. Bill had told them in a few broken sentences what the spy's work had been. His own khaki uniform reassured them that what he said must be true.

"It's this 'ere Gavelstone Towers where they're making for—where the King is stopping," said Bill.

"Gavelstone! Why, that ain't more than another six miles!" the specials told him.

One of the Zeppelins, as if to make sure that it was really not wasting time waiting for their confederate on earth, had begun to dip lower. To see the vast fabric plunge its bows in their direction, as if to swoop down on them, made even Bill's bold heart turn to water. One of the specials dropped his rifle in his fright. Promptly the cockney grabbed it up, flung it to his shoulder, and fired.

"Cartridges—cartridges!" he shouted. "Go on, give us your cartridges! Blaze into 'em!"

The other special needed no further bidding, but followed suit.

Then athwart the beam of light from the second Zeppelin, now fixed on them to dazzle their aim, the little cockney suddenly saw a ball of silver, as it looked, come darting to earth.

It was a bomb, he knew, released from the craft above them to punish them for their bold attack.

"Flat, boys! Down—lie flat!" he shouted, at the same time pushing one special headlong into the ditch, while he dragged the other down with him under shelter of the wrecked car. Nor was he a second too soon. Even as they plumped on their faces in the mud the explosion came. The bomb fortunately had pitched on the other side of the hedge. There was a deafening crash, and the air was filled with flying earth and stones. The tough thorn hedge was uprooted and blown to rags.

But no one was hurt fortunately. Bill, indeed, was on his feet the next instant blazing away with his rifle as pluckily as ever. The Zeppelins, however, were already off and towering fast again. For one thing, a succession of rapid shots, too loud and resonant for any rifle, had begun to sound from near at hand. Splashes of green flame flickered like fireflies in the sky. It was a British aircraft gun getting to work somewhere in the neighbourhood.

A moment later the hoarse note of a motor-horn sounding down the road brought them to their sense. Another car was approaching at full speed. Two blazing headlights glared full at them, projecting a beam a hundred yards into the darkness.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bill sharply. "What's this?" Naturally he thought that it might be some other spy helping to pilot the "Baby-killers."

"Get that pole up again. Shout to them. We must stop them!" he commanded, at the same time catching up the lantern and hobbling down the road, his rifle loaded and ready.

He was not going to be done this time, he vowed. And, sure enough, as the car drew nearer he recognised it as the same pseudo steam-lorry that had been left loaded with beet at Uncle Joe's.

"Hi, you blackguards—whoa!" he bawled out to the men in it. They were sounding their horn and cursing furiously at sight of the barrier barring the road. They had to pull up, however. A moment later Bill was on the footboard, rifle presented at the man at the wheel.

"No, you don't, my beauties," he laughed triumphantly. "I know all about you. Hands up!" he commanded.

"Hands up? Why, you lout, don't you see who we are?" raged a voice that made him jump. "We're Royal Navy—an aircraft gun-car, trying to chase up these cursed Zeppelins, and you fools do nothing but stop us, cutting our tyres to rage even."

"My hat!" gasped Bill, in horror. "Why, that's Lieutenant Ripshaw, ain't it?"

Lieutenant Ripshaw! So it was a Navy armoured car, after all, that they had so carefully disabled. It had been sent to Pebblesea disguised, the better to elude the vigilance of the spies now known to be haunting that place in anticipation of another Zeppelin raid.

And here, all through Bill, they had set it down as a decoy car belonging to

the enemy. They had even stood by and watched Brimby, the real spy, disable it for them.

Fortunately it had been carrying spare tyres. It was changing these that had delayed them in the pursuit. Here they were at last, though, and here was poor Bill staring at them like a stuck pig, only wishing the earth would open and swallow him.

Lieutenant Ripshaw soon recognised him, of course. He had learnt already from Farmer Jefferson how much he owed the luckless cockney for all his misfortunes that night. Now he had got hold of him he did not mean to let him go.

"Oh, you juggins!" he flared out at him. "Get that cursed pole down and jump inside. I know all about you. I'll see you suffer for this, you beauty."

Bill had already signalled feebly to his mates, the Specials, to remove the barrier. He crept into the car like a whipped dog. This was no time for excuses and apologies, and he had the sense not to attempt any. There he sat quiet as a mouse while the car got under way again and was soon roaring along once more at a good sixty miles an hour.

And then, to his further astonishment, he saw that they had got Uncle Joe on board as a pilot. A very good one he made, too, for he knew every road for miles round just as well as the spy Brimby.

But he, too, had nothing to say for himself. In any case, the work was breathless enough to make any man keep his mouth shut and hang on by his eyelids.

For the powerful electric headlights had been switched off again now, and they were driving only by the light of the stars. On they rushed at express speed, hurtling round corners with two wheels in the air, cheating death by inches.

But they were on the track of the "Baby-killers" again. The marauding Zeppelins, bereft of their guiding light now, were yawing about aimlessly, trying to pick up charted landmarks from which to lay a compass course. All unconscious of the avenging car beneath fast closing on them by by-lanes and bridle-tracks, they came dipping lower.

Now Lieutenant Ripshaw was swinging the gun into action—the same gun which Bill had unearthed beneath the load of turnips and put down as a clever "blind" to deceive the barrier guards.

One of the Zeppelins wheeling down wind, looked like passing clean over them. The grim gun waited, its ugly muzzle pointed almost vertically at its prey. At last it let go.

Pom—pom—pom! it bellowed, like the swift beating of a drum. Crack—crack—crack! came the answering echo of bursting projectile from the skies.

"Hooray—a hit! That's got him!" cried the lieutenant gaily as the monster quaked and reeled. But they had forgotten that the stricken aircraft could hit back, too.

There was no light this time to warn them of the descending bombs. The first they knew was a terrific flash and stunning report from the road directly in front of the car.

The latter was lifted bodily on its rear wheels by the blast and flung broadside, its forepart with the engines stripped and mangled—the driver killed

stone dead, and Uncle Joe beside him blown bodily over the hedge.

Lieutenant Ripshaw was struck senseless, too, with a hideous gash across his skull, while the remaining man of the crew lay in a groaning heap with a shattered arm.

The only one unhurt was Bill, and he looked like a man coming out of a dream. Until he saw the crippled Zeppelin sagging downwards with a broken back, its propellers roaring their fastest in vain effort to keep it afloat.

Nor was this all. The second airship, confident, no doubt, that the motor-gun had been blown to smithereens, was manoeuvring as if with some hope of getting to its sister-craft's aid.

That it was a target well within range of the pom-pom Bill saw. But surely the gun was smashed up, too! He could hardly believe that he himself had survived that terrible explosion.

However, there the gun was with its vicious muzzle lifted still in dumb defiance of the foe. There was a fresh belt of cartridges fed into the breech besides, for the officer had just been busy with that as the bomb burst. Whether Bill could get the hang of the firing part of it, though, was another matter.

But there was a trigger, he noticed, and two handles for aiming by. He had to crouch low on the floor of the car to clap his eye to the sights, for the motor was all askew on its broken wheels.

Still, it was not so bad that the cockney could not get the weapon trained on the second Zeppelin, now some four hundred yards only above earth. Even while he was fumbling he heard a leaden crash as the first foundered at last.

It was followed by a second crash even more startling to Bill's ears, for it was his own weapon that had exploded in his hands. He had touched the right trigger in the right way, it seemed, almost before he was ready, for the thing went on rattling away like a maxim-gun.

Still, he managed with luck to prevent all the shells going wide. The last one, at any rate, smote home. It must have crashed into the airship's engine before exploding, for there was a sharp detonation, then a pause, then a gleam of baleful light flickering over the rear car, then a flash, and an all-engulfing rush of flame leaping from end to end of the giant balloon.

One blinding blaze of light, illuminating the whole country for miles, then down the doomed craft whirled to earth, leaving a trail of millions of sparks to mark its death-flight.

"Lummy!" gasped Bill in horror at what he had done. To see such monstrous bulk wither and vanish like that merely at the crooking of his finger filled him with strange terror.

But the next instant he had shaken it off, of course. He remembered the first Zeppelin which had come down only a couple of fields away. It's crew, at least, should not be killed. They would be escaping, therefore, perhaps.

"Oh, will they!" quoth Bill, scrambling to his feet. Lieutenant Ripshaw had had a revolver, he noticed. He soon possessed himself of this. There was a rifle and bayonet in the car besides. He took those also, and, leaping down, forced his way through the stricken hedge.

There on the other side who should he blunder into but old Uncle Joe staggering about, little the worse for

the explosion except that he was dazed and shaken.

The sturdy farmer scarcely knew yet whether he was on his head or his heels. But he was game, as always. He came stumbling after as the cockney led the way. A second glance brought them in view of a crumpled mass big as ten haystacks flung across the field. Here and there Bill descried figures skulking about it.

"Hallo, there, you Boches!" sung out the cockney boldly. "We got yer, so hands up! D'ye 'ear that?" To prove that he meant business, he fired the revolver above their heads.

The "Baby-killers" fired a few wild shots and then up went their hands.

There were eight of them. How many of the crew of the other had reached earth alive Bill did not know. Nor was he bothering yet. He had his hands full enough.

"Fall in 'ere and toe the line, you bloomin' wasters," he told them, kicking the arms into a heap that they had flung down. Truth to tell, he was a little bit scared at first, until the gleam of other car lights hastening to his rescue began to shine through the trees. Some were police and some military. There were the other aircraft armoured-cars besides.

They had been drawn off by the other two Zeppelins, it seemed. These had made for Trimport, dropping bombs on every village on the way, and doing a vast deal of damage in the seaport itself. Nor had the gunners been able to wing either of them before they steered away to sea again.

Then the rumour had come through that two of the Zeppelins had made for Gavelstone Towers, and so they had all come hurrying in pursuit. Bill, however, had finished off their job for them already.

None of them seemed to have heard yet of his unfortunate bloomer over Brimby, and for that he was glad. It enabled him to get home and hide his diminished head at Dingle-down, at least, before the story got about.

However, when the truth did become known the joke against the ex-bus-driver was forgotten in light of the brilliant work he had done to retrieve his blunder.

Bill had been instrumental in squelching the spy, at any rate, and had bagged one Zeppelin all on his own.

What was more, before a week was out the destruction of a German submarine was also "another one up to him," as he described it. At least, it was Bob Danfer and he who located the lurking craft down there on the ocean bed off Pebblesea.

With characteristic Teuton stupidity it came trying the same game again. This time, though, the jolly Jack Tars were ready for it. They quietly lowered a mine down beside it and then exploded it with an electric fuse.

What is left of it is still there, but it will be many years before Bob Danfer sets his crab-pots anywhere in those waters.

Lieutenant Ripshaw recovered, to laugh heartily over the whole adventure. So does Bill, now that he has stopped kicking himself and begun to cool down again. He has still got to face his pals at the front, though.

"And when they get to 'ear about 'Mr. Brimby' they won't 'alf pull my leg, you bet," he tells Lil ruefully.

THE END.



VIVVY STEVENS.

## THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

JIM CULVER and VIVVY STEVENS are fellow clerks in the employ of Crarper & Son, paper merchants. The junior partner in the concern is a despicable cur, with no notions of chivalry, and Jim has occasion to thrash him for insulting Vivvy. The sequel to this scene is that both Jim and Vivvy are sacked, and they find they have to face the world together. They make the acquaintance of Montague Beagle, a broken-down actor, and his wife, and with this strange couple they throw in their lot. Meanwhile, Jeremy Crarper conspires with Lavington Crooks, a theatrical agent, to get Jim out of the way, as they have reason to believe that Vivvy is an heiress. The Beagles, with Jim and Vivvy, join a travelling company. Owing to the machinations of Crarper and Crooks, however, Jim and Vivvy are eventually paid off. Accompanied by the Beagles, they decide to go to London. On the journey they are befriended by a Mr. Donnell, proprietor of the Forum Music Hall, who, noting the abilities of Jim and Vivvy, offers them an engagement at that hall. This they accept, and Mr. Donnell, having given them the hospitality of his roof for the night, they retire to rest. Jim is awakened by strange noises in a room below him, and on going downstairs to investigate discovers a burglar there. A struggle ensues, Jim knocking his opponent down. On seeing the man's face, he exclaims in surprise:

"Ruff! Robert Ruff!"  
(Read on from here.)

## The Escape!

The man stared stupidly at Jim for a moment, and then slowly began to rise. The blow had dazed him. Jim was now shaking like a leaf.

Robert Ruff had been a clerk in the Crarpers' office, sacked a few weeks since for dishonesty. As the man's mind began to work he stared at Jim as if he were a ghost.

"Culver!" he muttered—"Jim Culver! What are you doing here? Have you left the office? Have you left the—"

"Yes!" said Jim shortly. He was

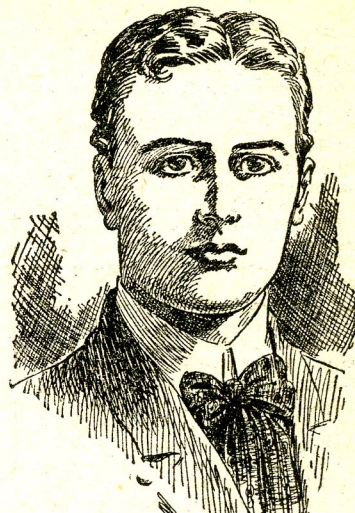
# TWO OF THE BEST!

The First Chapters of a grand  
New Serial Story dealing with  
the Thrilling Adventures of  
**JIM CULVER**

and

**VIVVY STEVENS.**

By **JACK LANCASTER.**



JIM CULVER.

wondering what to say to the fellow—what he ought to do.

"Then you're out of the Crarpers' clutches!" the other cried—"out of their clutches! You can go down on your knees, then, and thank Heaven for your luck! Look at me—look at me!"

"What do you mean?" said Jim.

The other struggled to his feet. He was plainly half-dazed. He grinned foolishly.

"I—I don't know what I said," he muttered. "I don't know what I'm talking about. You knocked me half silly."

Jim stood still, gazing at him fixedly. "You were talking sense, all the same," he said. "You said that I was lucky to be out of the Crarpers' clutches. You hinted pretty plainly that you were still in them. You said 'Look at me!' Well, you'll just explain that, please."

"Did I say that?" he murmured, passing a trembling hand across his forehead. "I—I don't know what I could have meant. You are lucky to be out of their clutches. They were bullies, and they sweated their employees. But I've got nothing to do with them now, either. They gave me the sack."

Jim's eyebrows went up.

"I have an idea," said he, "that you have a lot to do with them still, and you nearly let it out by accident. You'd better tell me all about it."

Ruff fidgeted his feet.

"I tell you—" he began angrily, and then broke off. "Look here," he added imploringly, "I swear I didn't mean anything then."

"Oh, didn't you? Well, I can hear Mr. Donnell moving about upstairs. He will be down in a minute to see what all this bother is about. If you tell me everything you know about the Crarpers, I'll try to persuade him not to hand you over to the police. But unless you do, you can consider yourself booked for Portland!"

Ruff began to cringe. He spread out his hands imploringly.

"For Heaven's sake, spare me!" he cried. "I know nothing about the Crarpers—I swear I don't! I'd tell you if I knew!"

Jim watched him closely, and smiled to himself.

"Have you ever heard of Lavington Crooks?" he asked suddenly.

Still more of the colour faded out of Ruff's cheeks, and he started perceptibly.

"Yes," Jim went on, "of course you've heard of Lavington Crooks. I can tell by your face. How is it that you know about him, unless you know something about Jeremy Crarper and his dear old father?"

The wretched youth hung his head and clenched his hands. He was trembling violently. He looked a picture of fear and utter degradation.

"I daren't tell you!" he cried out. "They'd kill me! They swore they would! They'd kill me, as sure as I'm standing here!"

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "If you won't tell me, the judge will find a way of making you speak out."

The door opened, and Donnell entered the room. He stared at Jim and Ruff for a full half-minute before speaking.

"What's all this?" he asked abruptly at last.

"This," said Jim, "is a gentleman who broke into your house a few minutes ago. I happened to hear him, so I came down and socked him one. I am ashamed to say that I once knew him. He used to be a fellow-clerk of mine."

Donnell nodded.

"Thanks, Jim Culver," he said. "I'll try to thank you properly later on. Now then, you, what do you mean by it?"

Ruff began to blubber.

"It's the first time!" he jerked out. "It's the first time I've ever done a thing like this. Let me go—for pity's sake, let me go! Say a good word for me, Jim Culver. You used to be decent to me once."

Jim turned and looked at Donnell.

"I think I told you about the Crarpers-to-night, sir?" he said. "I believe this fellow knows something about them. I've pretty good reason to think that he's in their power. I told him that I'd say a good word to you for him if he'd tell me what he knows about them, but he refuses."

Donnell set his mouth in a firm line.

"Well, we'll find a way of unlocking his tongue," he remarked. "Will you tell us what you know about these people?"

Ruff only stared at them in sullen terror. It was as if he had not heard.

Donnell spoke to Jim without looking in his direction.

"Would you mind going out and finding a policeman?" he said. "Meanwhile, I'll keep an eye on this fellow."

Jim moved slowly towards the door, looking back on the two who remained behind. But Ruff showed no signs of surrender. Evidently he was more afraid of the Crarpers than he was of the police.

The house was some distance from any village, and although the high road outside was policed, it was such a long beat that Jim knew he might have to go a long way before encountering a constable.

He hurried down the drive and out of the gate, taking the road at his right hand. He had not gone many yards when he heard a loud cry, and the smash of glass.

He turned and ran back, but ere he had reached the gate he saw a dark figure staggering out, wheeling a bicycle. He hallooed, and redoubled his pace.

The figure, which he recognised as Ruff's, heaved itself into the saddle, and began to pedal as if for dear life in the opposite direction to which Jim had taken. Jim sprinted for all he was worth, and at first gained a few yards, but unfortunately the road ran down an incline, which robbed him of his chance of overtaking the cycle. He ran until he was out of breath, when he sank down at the side of the road, and had to watch the bicycle and its rider vanish into the night. Ruff had escaped, and there was nothing to do but to put the best face on it.

As he walked back panting to the house, he realised dimly how it had happened. Ruff must have had a bicycle concealed in the shrubbery. He had made a sudden dash through the window by which he had entered, and the dash had succeeded. In the drive Jim encountered Donnell, who looked red and angry.

"The young scoundrel!" Donnell gasped. "He's learned some ju-jitsu. You'd no sooner gone than he sprang at me, got me by the arm and shoulder, and threw me. Then he went clean through the window!"

"I tried to catch him," Jim gasped, "but it wasn't any good. Still, you haven't lost anything, sir. A broken window is about all the damage done."

"I've got to thank you that he

didn't help himself to his heart's content. Well, I'm sorry he got away, if it's true that he could have told you something useful."

"I'll get hold of him again, one of these days," Jim growled, "and if he gets away he'll be clever. I know a little ju-jitsu, too. Have you rung up the police, sir?"

"I have, and they may get him yet. Well, there's nothing we can do now. We'd better turn in again."

Jim returned to bed in a bad temper. He was annoyed that Robert Ruff should have got away, although nobody could have blamed him in the matter. But it was tantalising to have come so near to exposing some secret of the Crarpers—a secret that might perhaps have put his and Vivvy's enemies out of action for ever.

Next morning, though, when he woke up in the sunlight, everything seemed well. Vivvy and he were on the road to fortune at last, and nothing else seemed worth troubling about.

After breakfast Vivvy danced again, and Donnell watched her with the air of a man who has discovered a marvel.

"You are very wonderful, my dear," he said simply. "I don't know how much money you will be asking in a few months. There are just a few little technical defects that you must overcome, but a fortnight with Madame Lebisque will settle them. She is the best dancing-mistress in London, and your fortnight's tuition will cost you forty pounds."

"But I haven't got forty pounds!" Vivvy exclaimed.

"You will have in a few minutes," Donnell answered. "I am going to fix you up for a year at the Forum and some of my provincial halls. I am going to offer you forty pounds a week."

"Forty pounds a week!" Vivvy gasped.

"For a year. At the end of a year you will be asking two hundred, and then we can talk business again. I don't mind confessing that I shall make a lot of money out of you, but I am giving you your first real chance, and business is business. Are you willing to sign a contract?"

Vivvy looked at Jim, who was grinning with sheer happiness at her good fortune.

"I don't believe I can be worth all that!" she cried. "It seems like a dream!"

"Perhaps," laughed Donnell, "you'll wake up when I give you a month's salary in advance. And now, Jim Culver, what can I do for you?"

Jim laughed. "I'm afraid I'm not any good," he

said, "but I'd like a job so that I could be near Vivvy."

"You've got a voice," Donnell answered. "Any stunts?"

"I've got an idea," Jim said modestly. "All the men who come on alone and sing songs in costume seem to be comedians. I'd rather like to sing serious songs in costume, if you'd give me the chance. That song I sang just now, 'Off to Philadelphia,' is very popular. I'd like to come on and sing it dressed as an old style of Irish emigrant, with a big bundle on my back. Then perhaps I'd come on as a West Country farmer, and sing 'Uncle Tom Cobleigh.'"

Donnell nodded several times.

"You'll do," he said. "You haven't got a wonderful voice, but it's strong enough, and it'll get stronger yet if you don't overwork it. And you sing as if you mean it all. Six pounds a week for a year, and I'll see that you're always billed at the same house as Miss Stevens. What do you say?"

"I say thank you very much," Jim answered. "This is riches!"

Donnell grinned.

"Now, you'll each want a month's salary in advance," he said, taking out a cheque-book. "I'll have the contracts ready for you to sign by this afternoon. And now perhaps you'd like to go for a stroll together, and discuss plans for the future."

They went out together, merry as a pair of small children who had just been handsomely tipped. Vivvy kept on looking at the cheque Donnell had given her, as if she were unable to believe her eyes.

"Do you know," she gasped, "that I've got a hundred and twenty pounds over and above what I've got to pay Madame Lebisque? Whatever shall I do with it? I think I shall send five pounds to Carrie Deewis, the other typist at Crarper's. She wanted some new clothes, and couldn't afford them. She won't know where the money comes from."

"And I'll send some cigars to poor old Meadows up at Crarper's. He shall have five hundred good ones. He loves cigars, but they're generally beyond his reach."

"Then there's Cæsar de Snooke," Vivvy went on. "We must send him back that money he gave us through Mr. Beagle. And we ought to pay for the damage that happened to his show that night."

"Rather!" said Jim. "He won't mind, if he knows we can afford it. And there's Mr. and Mrs. Beagle. We must make them each a nice present. I wish we could hand some money on to them,

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but they'd only be offended. Still, they look like being fairly well off now."

They spent a full hour planning to give presents to everybody they knew, but when they came to add up they found that their plans far exceeded their supply of money.

"Some of them'll have to wait a little while, until we're drawing our salaries regularly. You'll be awfully rich compared to me, Vivvy. I hope you won't be too proud to know me!"

He spoke only in fun, but the words stung Vivvy, who uttered a little cry and caught him by the arm.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked. "You know I didn't mean it. And you look quite upset, Vivvy. Aren't you happy now?"

The girl smiled rather sadly. "I ought to be, oughtn't I? But I don't believe I shall ever be happy until I find my father or learn something about him. Jim, I'm going to spend most of my money in searching for him. And we mustn't forget Mr. Steland. The moment he's better we must go down and see him."

"Oh, rather! Cheer up, old girl. Everything's coming all right now. It looks very much as if our troubles are nearly over."

Vivvy shook her head.

"I don't think so, Jim. I feel that in spite of this good luck, they are only just beginning. What about Crarper and Crooks?"

Jim snapped his fingers and laughed. "That's what I think about them now," he said. "And I never did think much more. No, Vivvy, they've tried to get you into their power, but they've failed. Their plan was to drive you to them by getting rid of me, and then ruining your show everywhere you went. Well, they can't do it now. We've beaten them—beaten 'em hollow, Vivvy!"

If he had only known!

Later on he came to remember Vivvy's words, and to reflect how true they were.

### An Anonymous Letter.

One morning London woke up to find that a new star had arisen in the Vaudeville world. The papers talked of a Vivien Stevens, a wonderful young dancer discovered by Mr. Donnell, the popular manager of the Forum Music Hall. They hinted that she bade fair to become one of the best danseuses that ever trod the stage.

Crowds who passed the Forum and scanned the next week's bill, pulled up sharply at the sight of a new name in large red print at the top. Surely, they argued, this Vivien Stevens must be somebody very special to be billed like this before she had made her first appearance. And there was another new name on the bill that week. Who was James Culver, baritone?

Vivvy now lived with Mrs. Beagle in one of a large block of flats in Maida Vale, and Jim occupied rooms around the corner, so that the two chums were still always together. Vivvy was now beautifully dressed, and Mrs. Beagle so nearly resembled a duchess that people wilted like flowers in autumn when she glared at them. Jim went about spending money freely on his old friends. It seemed that success had begun to shine on them for ever.

On the day before they were to make their first appearance at the Forum, a fine spring Sunday, Jim called for Vivvy in the afternoon.

"I've come to take you out to tea," he said. "Get your hat on like a good girl, and don't keep me waiting all night, and—"

"I like the way you order me about!" Vivvy laughed.

Jim grinned broadly. They understood each other too well ever to quarrel.

"And we'll go to the Criterion," he added. "I want to have a good long chat with you."

"I shall keep you waiting half an hour, now," Vivvy said.

"All right; that'll just give me time to read the reports of yesterday's football-matches."

"You are a pig!" Vivvy laughed, and ran out of the room.

She was back in five minutes, dressed ready to go out. Jim looked at her with a grin of approval.

"You look fine!" he said. "I shall feel bucked to be seen out with you."

"I suppose," she said, "you used to feel a little bit ashamed of me?"

"Don't rot, old girl! I liked the old clothes just as well. We'll put on our old things sometimes, shall we? It'll make it like old times. One thing, prosperity hasn't stopped us from being pals, has it?"

They went downstairs, and Jim ordered a taxi. They got in, and it bowled away. Jim reclined his head against the upholstery and sighed comfortably.

"A bit different from the old style of thing, this," he murmured. "No taxis for us a few weeks ago. Wouldn't the Crarpers be wild if they could see us—and Crooks?"

"I expect they're pretty wild as it is," Vivvy answered. "They'll have seen our names on the bills by this time. Haven't we had some luck?"

"Rather—if it lasts!"

She looked at him quickly.

"What do you mean—if it lasts?"

"Well, I've got some news for you. It's a pretty broad hint to look out. I don't think we've done with Crarper & Co yet. They're a persevering set."

"What has happened?" Vivvy demanded anxiously.

"Tell you in the Criterion," he answered.

Twenty minutes later when Vivvy was pouring out tea Jim took two letters from a leather case in his breast-pocket.

"There's good news in one of these," he said. "I wrote to the cottage hospital about Mr. Steland, and I've had a letter back from the matron. Care to read it? She says he is very much better, and that they will be able to operate on him shortly. There is every hope that the operation will be successful, and that afterwards he will recover his memory."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Vivvy cried.

She took the letter from him and read it eagerly.

"Perhaps," she said, with eyes shining, "I shall learn something about my father in a week or two. Oh, Jim, I hardly know how to wait."

"One thing," he answered, "you've got heaps to keep your mind busy. Aren't you nervous about to-morrow night? Your first appearance on the London stage!"

She nodded.

"Awfully! But I think I shall pull through somehow. Aren't you nervous yourself, Jim?"

Jim made a face over the top of his cup, and shook his head.

"Not me. I don't care. I shall go on and yell at 'em, and if they don't like me they can lump me. Some of the fellows from Crarper's are coming, you know. No eggs by request!"

"Didn't you say you'd had a warning, or something?" Vivvy asked.

"Yes. In this other letter. All about you, too, what there is of it. I don't think a chap ought to take any notice of anonymous letters, but I'd read this through before I saw that it wasn't signed. I'm glad I did read it, too! I'm certain it is meant in a friendly way. Here you are—have a look at it."

Vivvy took the letter from him. It was written on a very dirty scrap of cheap paper, and the envelope bore a London postmark. The contents, written in a round, shaky hand, were as follows:

"To Mr. Jim Culver.

"Keep an eye on Miss Stevens. She as enemies who will stick at nothing to get her into their power. Don't let her out of your site more than you can elp in the nex few days. She is in reel danger.

"Yores,  
"A WEL-WISHER."

Vivvy laughed at the quaint spelling. "Rubbish!" she exclaimed.

"I don't think it is," Jim remarked.

"Somebody must have sent it for a joke."

"I don't think so. Who would have done such a thing?"

"It's written by somebody with hardly any education."

"Or by somebody who pretends to be uneducated, so that we sha'n't guess who it is."

Vivvy shot him a quick glance.

"Do you know who sent it?" she asked.

"I've got a dim suspicion. The handwriting is disguised, but it's just a little like that of a chap I know."

"Do I know him, too?"

"Yes. But I won't say who I think it is, in case I'm wrong. No guesses, Vivvy!"

"I think you might tell me," she said, pulling a face at him.

"I'll tell you if I find out for certain.

In the meanwhile, if I send you a telegram asking you to meet me at a certain place, don't go. I sha'n't send you any telegrams, so if one comes it'll be from somebody else. And don't forget I'm only just round the corner if you should ever want me. Now, what about tea? Can you grab that boy with the sandwiches and hold him while we both take some?"

Jim had promised to take Vivvy out to lunch on the following day, but he called in the morning and asked her to excuse him.

"Sorry; important business!" he said, with a wink. "I'm going to investigate that anonymous letter. See you in the afternoon."

"All right," said Vivvy. "Tell me the news when you come in."

Jim took a 'bus up to the City and entered a bun-shop where a number of the clerks from Crarpers' came regularly to lunch. He took a seat near the door and waited.

At ten minutes past one, Summers, an old office friend of Jim's entered, and looked around him for an empty table. Jim waved his hand, and Summers, when he saw him, started.

(Another splendid long instalment of this entertaining story next Thursday. Order your copy early.)