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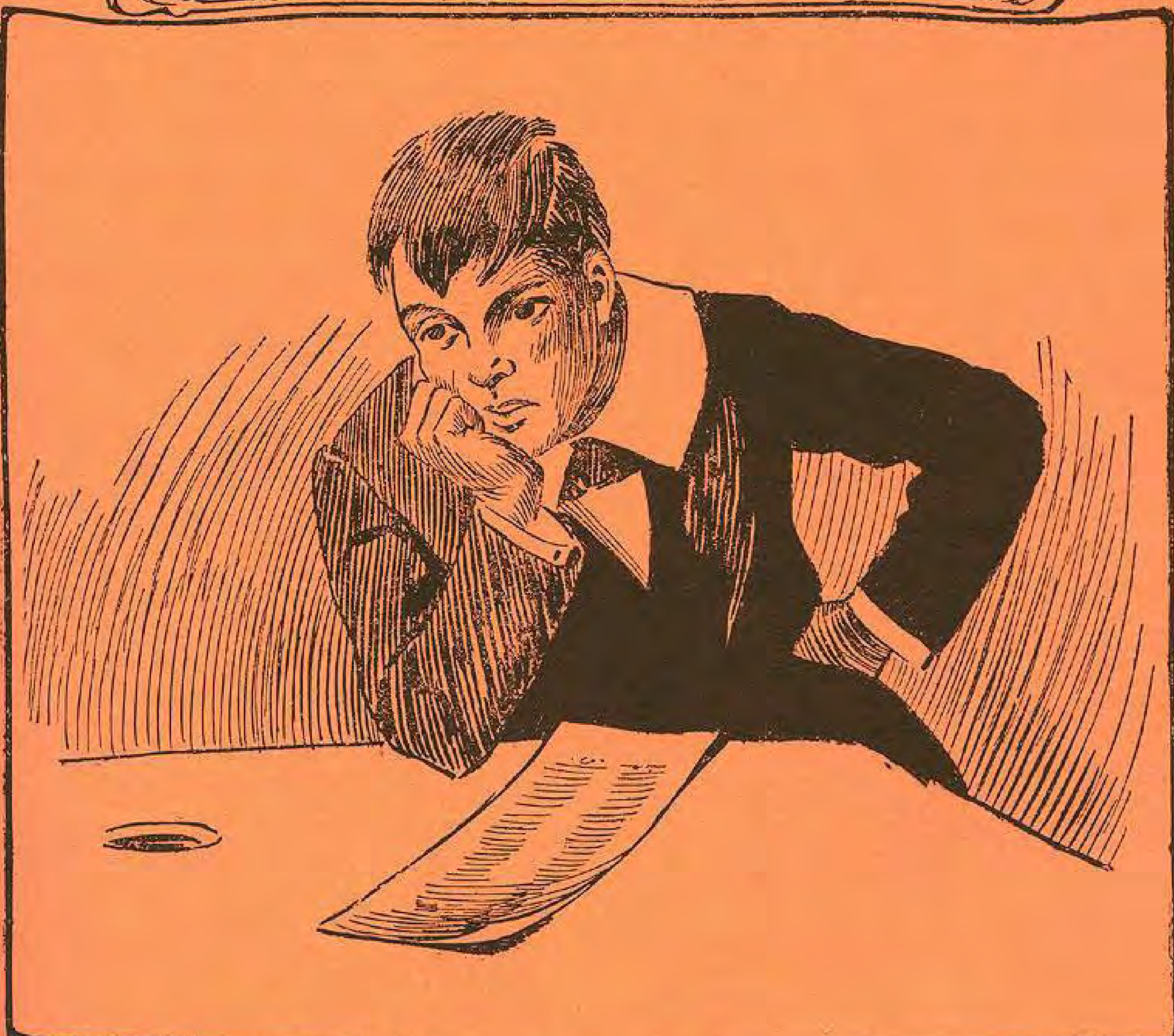

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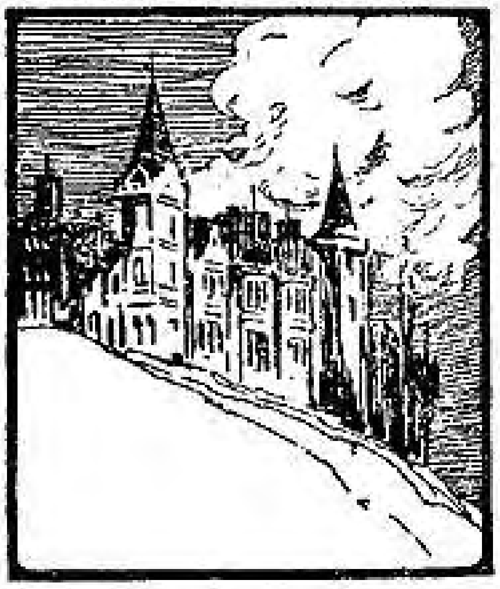

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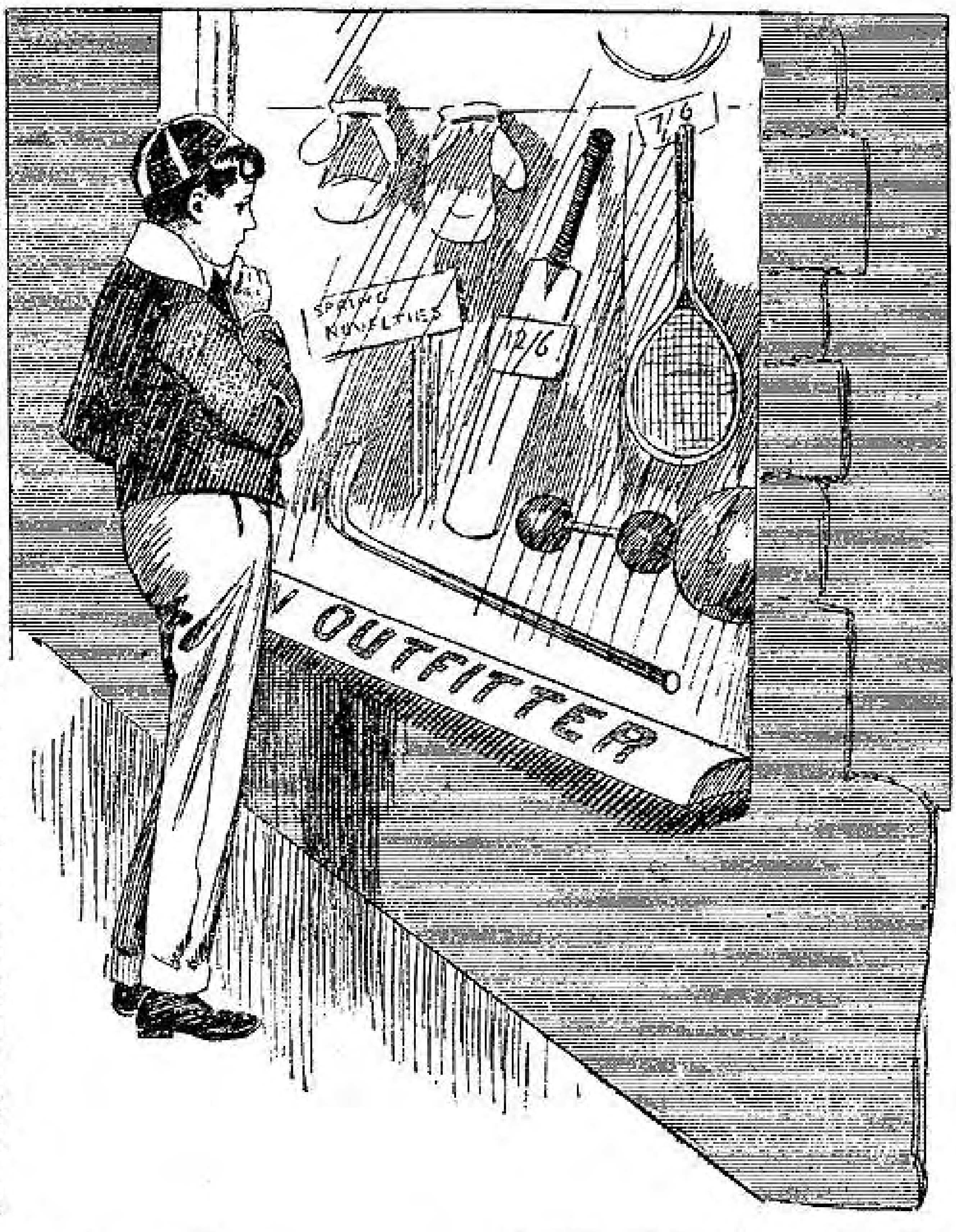
HARRY'S SACRIFICE

A SCHOOL TALE OF HARRY WHARTON AND HIS CHUMS.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Very Queer Visitor for Hazeldene!

"YOUNG shentleman——"

Harry Wharton looked round.

He was standing near the gates of Greyfriars School, waiting for his chums, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, when the oily, insinuating voice fell upon his ears.

"Young shentleman——"

Wharton glanced with no small disfavour at the speaker. He was a man of middle age, with a greasy grey beard, a decidedly hooked nose, and two little round black eyes like a parrot's. His clothes were ancient, and looked very much in want of a brushing, and the old silk hat he wore looked as if it had never been brushed at all.

"Hallo!" said Wharton. "What do you want?"

"Excuse me, young shentleman——"

"Nothing to sell," said Harry. "I don't want to buy anything, either."

And he was about to move away, when the stranger came further within the gates of Greyfriars, and laid an exceedingly dirty finger on his sleeve.

"Stop a moment, young shentleman——"

Harry jerked his arm away.

"What do you want?"

"I vant to see vun of der Greyfriars poys," said the visitor. "Do you know Master Hazeldene?"

Harry started.

Of course he knew Hazeldene, the cad of the Remove, generally called Vaseline at Greyfriars, on account of his smooth voice and manners. But what this disreputable-looking fellow could want with Hazeldene was a mystery.

"You know him?" asked the stranger, his keen black eyes on Harry Wharton's face.

"Yes," said Harry shortly.

"I vant to see him."

"Well, you can't. Strangers are not admitted into the school grounds. You will have to ask the Head."

"I do not vant to see der Head——"

"You can't come in."

"Perhaps you are a friend of Hazeldene?" said the other, watching Harry's face.

Wharton hesitated. Certainly he was not a friend of Peter Hazeldene, yet of late he had taken some interest in the cad of the Remove. Hazeldene had shown that his nature was, at all events, not all bad, and his regard for his sister Marjorie was at least a redeeming trait. And that Hazeldene was in trouble of some kind, Wharton more than suspected, and the thought crossed his mind that this visit of the old Jew might have something to do with it.

"Well, I know him," he replied at last. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it will be better for Hazeldene if I see him," said the visitor persuasively. "I must see him, young shentleman."

"What have you to do with a fellow in the Greyfriars Remove?" asked Harry Wharton abruptly.

The Jew smiled.

"Business, mine young friend, business!"

"Does Hazeldene expect you?"

"I told him I should come. It vill be better for him, mine young friend, if I see him—odervise I may have to show him up."

"Show him up! What are you driving at?"

"I have said enough. If you are his friend, you had better tell me where to find him. It is important."

"Follow me," said Wharton shortly. "I will take you to his study, but you run the risk of being kicked out if a prefect spots you."

The visitor grinned.

"I vill risk dat, mine young friend."

"Come on, then."

Harry Wharton led the way, and Hazeldene's disreputable visitor followed him towards the great school buildings. Just as they reached the door three juniors came out. They were all fellows in the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian chum, were three of the best.

They looked at Harry Wharton, and they stared at his companion.

"Hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Who's your friend, Harry?"

Harry Wharton made a grimace.

"He's no friend of mine."

"I come to see Master Hazeldene, young shentlemans——"

"Then I congratulate Hazeldene on his choice of friends," remarked Nugent.

"The congratulatefulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh, in the beautiful English he had learned under the best native instructors in Bengal. "The oilfulness of our esteemed visitor's countenance is only equalled by the exceeding hookfulness of his honourable nose."

"What are you convoying him about for, Harry?"

"I'm taking him to Hazeldene's quarters."

"There will be a row if he's seen there."

"The rowfulness will naturally be great——"

"Very likely; can't be helped. I sha'n't be long."

And Harry Wharton led the strange visitor into the house, followed by the stares of the chums of the Remove.

They ascended the stairs, fortunately without encountering anyone but a junior, who stared curiously at the old Hebrew and said nothing. But in the passage above, they almost walked into Carberry, of the Sixth, and the most unpopular prefect at Greyfriars.

Carberry stopped and stared at them.

"What on earth, Wharton——"

Harry turned red.

It was an unfortunate meeting—especially unfortunate as Carberry was always down upon him, and seeking an excuse to make things warm for him. And it was certainly in a prefect's power to make things warm for a lad who introduced such a person into the school as Wharton's present companion.

But before Carberry could finish, the old Hebrew stepped forward, and greeted the prefect with an oily grin.

"It ish you, Master Carberry?"

The prefect made a step backward.

"Ikey Isaacs! What are you doing here?"

"I come to see——"

"Not me! You haven't dared——"

Isaacs made a deprecating gesture.

"Ach, no, Master Carberry. I come to see anoder poy, and dis young shentleman kindly show me der vay."

"You have no right to come to Greyfriars——"

Isaacs shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I vant money."

Carberry hesitated a moment. He knew perfectly well that it was his duty to turn the man out of the school, if not, to report his presence to the Head. But, as Wharton could not fail to see, Carberry had evidently had dealings with Isaacs himself. There was not much doubt that Mr. Isaacs, whatever else he might be, was a money-lender too.

"Well, I suppose it's no business of mine," said the prefect. "Wharton, as you have chosen to introduce Mr. Isaacs into Greyfriars, you take the responsibility."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

He knew that Carberry was afraid to interfere with the Jew, who, in spite of his oily insinuating ways, had a square, determined chin, and could plainly be very obstinate if he chose. Carberry walked on rather quickly, and Harry lost no time in getting his companion to Hazeldene's study.

He knocked at the door and opened it. There were two fellows in the study, Hazeldene and Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove. Bulstrode stared at Isaacs in astonishment.

Hazeldene gave a choked cry.

"Isaacs! Ikey Isaacs!"

The old Hebrew grinned.

"Yesh, it ish me, Master Hazeldene."

"Why—how—how dare you come here?"

Isaacs grinned again.

"You have not answered mine letters, Master Hazeldene."

"But I—I——"

"I vant mine monish——"

"Hush!"

"Vy should I hush?" said Isaacs coolly. "I go to der Head if you do not satisfy me——"

"Hold your tongue!" burst out Hazeldene fiercely. "Wharton, you can get out——"

"I don't want to stay!" said Harry disdainfully.

"Bulstrode, will you leave me alone in this study for a bit?"

Bulstrode grinned.

"Well, that's rather cool, to ask a fellow to get out of his own study!" he exclaimed.

"You might for a few minutes, to oblige me."

"My dear Vaseline, I haven't the slightest desire to oblige you."

"You—you cad! I want to talk business——"

"What did you call me?" asked the Remove bully, with a threatening look.

"I—I didn't mean that. But do let me have the study to myself a few minutes—you might as well, Bulstrode."

"Rats!" said Bulstrode, seating himself on the corner of the table. "I'm rather curious to know what business you can have with this greasy animal. I'm afraid you've been borrowing money, Vaseline."

"Mind your own business!"

"As cock of the Remove, it is my duty to see that you don't bring disgrace upon the Form, Vaseline, my boy. I am going to look into this matter."

"Young shentleman——"

"You can go ahead, Ikey Whiskers. I'm all attention."

"Why don't you get out, you cad," said Harry Wharton hotly. "You've no right to stay and listen."

"What's it to do with you?" said Bulstrode unpleasantly. "Just you travel along, and don't meddle."

"If I were Hazeldene, I'd kick you out," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "I say, Hazeldene, you can take that fellow into my study if you like for a jaw."

"Thank you, Wharton," said Hazeldene, jumping at the offer eagerly. "Come this way, Isaacs, will you?"

"Certainly, young shentleman," grinned Isaacs.

Harry Wharton walked away. Bulstrode looked savage and disappointed. Wharton rejoined his chums in the Close. They looked at him curiously.

"That's a queer visitor for Hazeldene," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Jolly queer," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton nodded, with rather a gloomy look upon his face.

"I'm afraid there's trouble," he said. "Hazeldene owes Isaacs money, I believe. The fellow said something about going to the Head."

Nugent whistled.

"That would be serious."

"It would probably mean the expelfulness," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I do not like Hazeldene terrifically, but I should be sorrowful to see even that esteemed rotter expelled from the honourable school."

"So should I," said Bob Cherry. "He has his good points. And—and his sister is a really ripping girl. Nothing like him."

"True enough! Well, let's get down to the cricket," said Wharton. And the chums of the Remove went down to the playing fields; but Harry Wharton was still thinking of Hazeldene and his unwelcome visitor.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

No Cash.

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH, the dusky and genial Nabob of Bhanipur, put on his jacket, his olive face glowing after the healthy exercise of the cricket-field.

Hurree Singh was progressing cricketfully, as he would have termed it, and bade fair to become one of the shining lights of the Remove team.

"After the reckoning comes the feast, as your English proverb says," he remarked. "I am somewhat hungerful, and I should be honourably glad to treat my worthy chums feedfully at the tuck-shop."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Never shall it be said that I refused an offer of that kind!" he exclaimed. "This way to the tuck-shop, Inky!"

"Well, I'm rather peckish," said Nugent. "The worst of it is with me I'm close upon stony, and expect to remain so for a week or more."

"I'm not far off," grinned Bob. "My new cricket outfit has run away with the tin in a really alarming way, and, as a matter of fact, I owe half-a-sov. in the village."

"Then it is fortunateful that I am wallowing in filthy wealth," said the nabob, with a smile.

"Ha, ha! He means rolling in filthy lucre!" chuckled Nugent.

"The differentiation of the expressfulness seems to me to be infinitesimal," said the nabob. "However, here we are. It is true that of late my guardian has been growing somewhat stingiful. I have drawn upon him terrifically for the money of the pocket, and he has shown objectfulness."

"They all do," said Nugent, with a sigh of great feeling. "We neglect 'em in their youth, you see, and they grow like that."

"It was the loanful cash to our Bunterful chum that really dished the exchequer," said the nabob. "But I have the half-sovereign remaining, and what is a half-sovereign that a nabob should not blue it at the honourable tuck-shop?"

"Exactly!" agreed Bob Cherry. "Here's the honourable tuck-shop, and now where's the honourable half-sovereign?"

The nabob felt in his pockets.

"That is curious," he said, with a puzzled look.

"What is curious? The honourableness of the tuck-shop, or the honourableness of the giddy half-sovereign?"

"Neither, my worthy friend. I am amazed by the disappearfulness of the coin."

"Disappeared?"

"Exactfully! I remember bringing it out with me, pocketfully, in anticipation of a feed after the cricketful exercise, and it is gone."

"Oh, come!" said Harry Wharton. "Have another look!"

The nabob felt in his pocket again.

"It is gone!" he repeated.

"Feel in your trousers' pockets."

"But I pocketed the half-sovereign jacketfully.

"Oh, you never know," grinned Bob Cherry. "In a moment of absent-mindedness you might have pocketed it trouserfully, you know."

"I will ascertain, but I have little hopefulness of discovering the coin in my trouserful pockets."

The nabob went through every pocket on his person with the same result. The missing half-sovereign did not turn up.

"You must have dropped it when you changed your jacket in the pavilion," said Nugent, struck with a sudden thought.

The nabob looked relieved.

"Yes, that is probably quite correctful, my worthy chum. The dropfulness might be accidental and unnoticed in the honourable pavilion. Let us go and see."

"Come on, then! I'm jolly hungry!"

"I have terrific regretfulness——"

"Never mind the regretfulness now. I want the grubfulness! Let's go and hunt up that half-sov."

The chums of the Remove hurried back to the pavilion on the junior ground.

Hurree Singh looked about the room where he had changed his jacket, and his chums helped him; but there was no sign of the half-sovereign.

"It is seemfully not here," the nabob remarked. "Of course, it may be crackfully hidden in the floorfulness."

"Let's have a jolly good look, anyway."

The jolly good look was thoroughly carried out.

But the missing coin did not come to light. Every crack and cranny was scanned without success.

The chums, somewhat dusty and tired, left off at last, and looked at one another rather curiously.

"You are absolutely sure that you had the half-sovereign in your pocket, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

The nabob nodded emphatically.

"The absolute surefulness is terrific," he said. "I have not the slightfullest doubt upon the point, my worthy chum."

"I saw Inky take it from his desk," Nugent remarked.

"And I brought it with me pocketfully."

"It must have dropped out when he was changing his jacket," said Bob Cherry slowly. "Unless—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Well, I hardly like to speak out."

"I expect you are thinking the same as myself," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Unless it was taken out of Inky's pocket, you mean?"

"Yes," said Bob, turning a little red.

It seemed a mean thought, yet there was hardly anything else to be surmised. The coin had disappeared. Even if Hurree Singh had dropped it, it ought to have been in the room somewhere.

The nabob was looking greatly distressed. But suddenly a new thought made his dusky face brighten.

"I think I can guessfully surmise what has happened!" he exclaimed.

"Surmise away, old chap."

"The dropfulness of the half-sovereign was discovered by someone who came into the room after our departfulness, and he has picked up the coin, and is waiting to find the ownerful individual."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Well, that's quite possible," he said. "Before we say anything, we'll just see who has been in the room."

"There's Russell outside," said Nugent. "Let's ask him."

"Good! He has been standing there, and he ought to know."

The four chums left the pavilion.

Russell of the Remove was standing in the doorway with his hands in his pockets looking out over the field watching some fellows at practice. He nodded to the famous four as they stopped.

"Did you go in after we came out, Russell?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No. I've been watching Osborne and Trevor at the wickets."

"Then you haven't seen anything of a half-sovereign Hurree Singh has dropped?"

"No. Ask Hazeldene."

Harry started.

"Hazeldene?"

"Yes. He went into the pavilion while you were at practice, and he may have seen something of it."

"Thanks!" said Harry. "We'll ask him. Come on, kids!"

The famous four walked away.

Their faces were very grave, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was looking deeply distressed.

The same unpleasant thought had forced itself into each mind of the four.

"Vaseline has been there!" murmured Bob Cherry, "and he was just now being hunted by an old Sheeny for some tin."

"It looks queer," said Harry. "Hazeldene may have seen the half-sovereign lying on the floor, and, being in difficulties——"

"Or he may have seen Inky's jacket hanging on the peg," said Bob Cherry drily.

"It is very rotten!" murmured the nabob. "My worthy chums, let not a word be said on the matter, but let us maintain a discreetful mumfulness."

"Mum's the word, at present, at least," agreed Bob Cherry. "Goodness knows, I don't want to be hard on a fellow; but we all know how Vaseline treated Billy Bunter last week."

"He borrowed a half-sovereign of him, knowing that he could not repay it," said Harry Wharton, with darkening brows. "I told him at the time it was little better than stealing; but he looked so rotten about it I hadn't the heart to push the matter. I thought then that he was in some beastly fix."

"It looks like it."

"But if he has stolen the nabob's half-sovereign we've got to come down heavy. No difficulty can possibly make an excuse for stealing."

"That's true enough. I think a thief's about the meanest worm that crawls on the earth," Bob Cherry agreed. "But it may not be so bad as that. It's not fair to condemn Vaseline unheard. We know that he has his good points."

"Suppose we seek him, and examine him questionfully on the subject," suggested Hurree Singh. "We shall be able to decide judgfully from his answerfulness."

"Good idea! He ought to be allowed to speak for himself, anyway."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton shortly. "Let's find him."

And the chums of the Remove entered the house with grave and clouded faces.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Question of Provisions.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter met the famous four as they came into the passage upon which the Remove, or Lower Fourth, studies opened.

The Owl of the Remove blinked cheerfully through his spectacles.

Billy Bunter was looking a little less pasty and puffy than of old. Physical culture had improved him lately, although the way he had gone in for it had also furnished a great deal of fun to the Greyfriars juniors.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, Billy! Have you seen Vaseline?"

Billy Bunter grinned.

"Yes, rather. I went into the study to—to look in the cupboard——"

"And eat anything you could lay your hands on," grinned Bob Cherry. "Yes, we know what you went there for, Billy. What else?"

"Well, I found Vaseline there with an old Sheeny."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Wharton hastily. "It was a chap came to see Hazeldene on business, and I told him he might go into the study and talk there."

"Oh, I see! But it's curious——"

"What's curious?"

"There's some mystery about it," said Bunter, shaking his head solemnly. "I rather think that Vaseline has been borrowing money. He borrowed some of me the other day, you know, and never paid up, and you fellows had to pay for my dumbbells."

"Yes, we know," said Bob Cherry, with a grimace.

"Of course, I'm going to settle up when my postal-order comes," said Billy Bunter. "I'm rather surprised that it hasn't come; but it's bound to be here by the first post to-morrow morning. Then I'm going to square up quite a lot of little accounts. I believe I owe each of you fellows a little cash."

"Yes, I believe you do," agreed Bob Cherry. "More than a little perhaps. But never mind that. What's that about Vaseline?"

"Why, the old Sheeney said something about going to the Head as I came into the study," said Billy Bunter, "and Vaseline said, 'Ten shillings to-day if you'll give me a chance, Isaacs.'"

The chums exchanged glances.

"Are you sure he said that, Billy?"

"Yes, rather," said Bunter. "I suppose I can believe my own ears. He looked towards Inky's desk as he said it, and do you know the idea came into my mind that he was going to borrow it of Inky, and I thought I'd give Inky a tip, you know, because Vaseline would never pay him, and I don't like a chap who borrows and doesn't stump up again."

"No, they are rotters, and no mistake," agreed Bob Cherry. "I should naturally expect you to be down on them, Billy."

"What else do you know about the matter, Billy?"

"Nothing, because Vaseline saw me then, and he gave a jump, and called me a rude name, and left the room with the Sheeney at once."

Harry Wharton's brow was dark with thought.

"Do you know where Hazeldene is now, Billy?"

"He went out into the Close with the Sheeney, and I haven't seen him since. That was a good hour ago."

"I dare say he's in his study," said Bob Cherry. "Come along."

"I say, you fellows, don't you want me to get tea?"

"Certainly, Billy, if you like."

"Well, you know I'm stony," said Bunter reproachfully. "If my postal order had come I'd stand treat willingly, but at present I'm short of money. And there's nothing in the cupboard either."

"Oh, come!" said Nugent. "We have a quarter of a ham, and some bread and butter, and we can make that do for tea."

"That's all very well, Nugent; but I got hungry after school, and I scoffed that ham."

"Well, the bread and butter will do——"

"But I scoffed that, too."

"Young anaconda!" growled Bob Cherry. "We shall have to put up with the cake, that's all. You can get some tea from Wingate."

"What cake are you talking about, Cherry?"

"Why, the cake. It's rather stale, but it will do."

"There isn't any cake."

"No cake! Why——"

"I got hungry this morning, and I had to scoff the cake."

"You young grub-destroyer! Then there's nothing left but the tin of sardines."

"Well, you see, Cherry——"

"What's the matter with the sardines?"

"Well—er—," stammered Billy Bunter. "You see, I was rather peckish after I finished the ham, and I—I scoffed the sardines."

"Scoffers ought to be sat upon," said Nugent, "and Billy is about the greatest scoffer I ever met. Knock his head against the wall, Bob."

"Certainly."

Bunter retreated in alarm.

"I say, you fellows, no rotting, you know. You'll knock my spectacles off, and if you break them you will have to pay for them. I'm sincerely sorry there's no grub, but I'll get a ripping tea if you fork out the tin."

"We're all stony!"

"Oh, come now, that won't wash! I know Inky has a half-sovereign, because I saw him put it in his jacket-pocket."

"I have parted with the half-sovereign dropfully and, I am afraid, lostfully," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Well, you must be an ass!" said Bunter in great disgust. "Fancy losing a half-sovereign when you think of all the grub it would buy. Still, if Cherry or Nugent can raise the wind——"

"We can't raise the slightest little breeze, Billy."

"Then it's up against Wharton. I know Wharton has thirty bob that his uncle sent him for his new cricket things."

"Rats!" said Wharton.

"Now, look here, Wharton, I know you've got it——"

"Well, ass, my uncle sent it to buy my cricket things! Do you think I'm going to spend it on anything else?"

"In a case of necessity——"

"We can have our tea in Hall for once, I suppose."

"But what about me?" said Bunter in an aggrieved tone. "I'm rather particular in what I eat, and I can't stand the school tea."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, I suppose it's really a case of terrible necessity Still, I don't feel inclined to give up my new cricket outfit, even to save you from having your tea in Hall for once, Bunter."

"I think you're rather selfish, Wharton. You won't find me acting meanly when I'm in funds. When my postal order comes——"

"My dear kid, that thirty bob is locked up in my desk, and it's going to remain there till I buy the things Colonel Wharton told me to buy. That's flat!"

"Oh, very well! I suppose it's up against me to find the tommy," said Bunter in a tone of resignation. "Only I really don't know how I shall manage it."

"Don't bother. Let's have tea in Hall."

"Well, I would myself, really; only I don't like to think of you fellows going without a good tea when you're used to it," said Bunter. "I'll manage it somehow."

And the Owl scuttled off.

"I wonder what wheeze he's got in his brain," said Nugent, as the four walked on towards Hazeldene's study.

"I wonder," said Harry absently. He came to a stop near Hazeldene's door and looked seriously at his chums. "I say, kids, I've been thinking about this. We shall have to go easy on Hazeldene."

"How do you mean?"

"I'm thinking of his sister Marjorie. You remember how we went for the gipsies that time when they kidnapped her? She's a really ripping girl, and she's fond of that rotten brother of hers. If—if Hazeldene were expelled from Greyfriars think what it would mean to Marjorie. She's proud of him, you know. She doesn't know him as we do."

Nugent nodded thoughtfully.

"Quite right, Harry. But a thief——"

"I couldn't stand being the one to let her know that her brother was a thief," said Harry, with a clouded brow.

"That's how I feel about it," Bob Cherry observed. "Vaseline ought to be kicked out of the school if he's a thief, and jumped on into the bargain; but——"

"I have not had the honourable pleasure of meeting the charming and esteemed sister of the honourable rotter," remarked Hurree Singh; "but certainly I ladle out endorsefulness of all that the worthy Wharton says. It is the first duty of a boy to be considerate towards the gentle sex, for reflect, my worthy chums, where should we be without them? We should have no mothers, or sisters, or cooks——"

"Ha, ha! That sounds rather touching, especially the cooks," said Bob Cherry.

"What I mean to explicate is, that we should treat the esteemed rotter as gently as possible, for the sake of the beautiful and honourable Marjorie," said the nabob. "Perhaps a certain amount of lickfulness with a cricket-stump might improve the worthy beast, but let there be no talkfulness on the subject."

"Inky's right," said Nugent; "so are you, Harry. Let's keep it all dark, and deal with the matter wholly by ourselves. Come on!"

And the chums of the Remove knocked at the door of Hazeldene's study and entered.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Quality of Mercy.

HAZELDENE was sitting at the table in his study. His elbow was on the table, his chin resting on his hand; his face was pale, and his eyes almost haggard. He was staring straight before him—at nothing. He looked like one who had sat down there to think out, if he could, a way of escape from some terrible trouble—and failed!

He did not rise as the chums of the Remove came in. He moved slightly and glanced at them, with such a quiet, crushed look that it was hardly possible to retain a feeling of anger against him, though contempt, if he were a thief, could hardly be dismissed.

"Hazeldene!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"What do you want?"

Hazeldene's tone was as spiritless as his look.

Was this the cad of the Remove—the insinuating, cunning junior whose oily and subtle ways had earned him the name of Vaseline?

What blow had fallen upon him to crush him so utterly?

"We want to speak to you?" said Harry.

Bob Cherry closed the door. The chums came nearer to the table at which the lonely lad was sitting, but he did not move.

"Hazeldene——"

"Oh, I know what you want!"

"Then——"

"Was the half-sovereign yours?"

Harry Wharton started, and so did his companions. They had expected denial and cunning lying; they were met by a blank, bold admission. It was so unlike Hazeldene that they could not know what to make of it.

"Mine?" said Harry. "No. You admit, then, that you——"

"It was Hurree Singh's, I suppose?"

"That is quite correctful," said the nabob.

"Well, you will never see it again."
"We have come here for it," said Nugent.
"Well, you are too late."
"You mean that it is no longer in your possession?"
"Yes."
"Where is it?"
"Ask Ikey Isaacs."
"You gave it to that Sheeney?"
"I paid it to him."

The Removites looked at one another. They were utterly taken aback by Hazeldene's strange manner. Lies, subterfuge, they could have understood. Defiance, or abject admission and a pleading for mercy, they could have understood too. But this frankness, and apparent recklessness as to the consequences, took them utterly by surprise.

"Then you do not deny taking the money?" Harry Wharton exclaimed in amazement. "You admit that you took it and gave it to Isaacs?"

"What would be the use of denying it? Russell saw me go into the pavilion, and I knew the coin would be missed.'

"Did you go there to take it?"

Hazeldene was silent.

"You had better speak out."

"Well, yes. I know Inky had a half-sovereign——"

"Then you—you——"

Hazeldene made a restless movement.

"I don't know. I had to find the money or be expelled. Isaacs would have gone straight to the Head, and you know what that would mean."

The chums were silent; they knew well enough. To borrow money of a "Sheeney" moneylender was an offence for which there was little hope of pardon, though Dr. Locke was not a severe man. Another lad might have escaped with a flogging. But Hazeldene's record was not good. There were many black marks against Hazeldene. Like most who followed crooked courses, he had become known in the long run for what he was. This would be the crowning offence of a long series, and there was very little doubt that the Head would expel him from Greyfriars, and be relieved to rid the Remove of a lad whose presence there was not desired by any member of the Form.

"I—I knew Inky had a half-sovereign," said Hazeldene, in a low voice, his eyes still fixed on space before him with that strange set look. "I—I came to the ground to—to see about it. I had some idea of cadging it from Inky. I knew he was a good-natured ass, and might possibly hand it over."

"Thank you terrifically," purred Hurree Singh. "The complimentfulness is great."

"But he was at the wickets, and—and then I went in, and there was the half-sovereign lying on the floor, shining there. I suppose Inky had dropped it when he took his jacket off."

"The supposefulness is quite correct."

"I didn't know it was Inky's, but I thought very likely it was, or else Wharton's. I didn't care much. I picked it up——"

"And kept it?"

"Yes. I paid it to Isaacs. I sha'n't be expelled now—unless you tell the Head."

Harry Wharton's brow was very stern.

"You expect us to shield you?"

"No, I don't."

"If we go to the Head——"

"Go if you like."

"I don't quite understand you, Hazeldene. You know you ought to be expelled. You picked up the coin, but to keep what you find is as much stealing as to take it from a fellow's pocket. Finding and keeping is theft."

"I know it is."

"And yet you——"

"It staved it off," said Hazeldene. "It was a chance. If you fellows hold your tongues, I shall be all right. If you blab, I can't be more than expelled."

"Something in that," said Nugent. "We don't want to get anybody into a fearful row. But to let a thief remain in the school——"

"If you knew how I was placed——'

"You had better explain," said Wharton.

"I owe Isaacs' money. He is a bloodsucker; you know the way the moneylenders pile up the interest. I've been paying interest for weeks, and haven't touched the principal yet. He is a swindler, of course."

"You are not bound to pay him—you are under age."

"I know that; but he has my paper. He can take it to the Head."

"That's where he has his hold," said Bob Cherry, with a nod. "As a matter of fact, it's sheer blackmail on Isaacs' part. The rotter is trading on Hazeldene's fear of being expelled, and he had no right to lend him money in the first place."

Hazeldene dropped his face into his hands with a groan.

"I don't care what happens. I'm sick of it all. I'd be glad to be expelled, and have it all over if it weren't for——"

He did not finish.

But the chums of the Remove knew of whom he was thinking. Before their eyes seemed to rise the sweet, innocent face of Marjorie Hazeldene. What look would that face wear when Hazeldene came home—expelled, disgraced, as a thief!

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Harry Wharton, in a low, hard voice. "When you were borrowing this money, why couldn't you think of your sister then?"

Hazeldene groaned. "You don't understand."

"What did you borrow the money of Isaacs at all for?"

Hazeldene was silent.

"Some betting, I suppose," Wharton went on scornfully.

"It wasn't."

"Then what was it?"

The wretched junior did not speak.

"You can hardly expect us to believe you, Hazeldene, if you don't explain. If you wanted the money for any decent purpose, it would be a shadow of an excuse."

Still Hazeldene was silent.

"Well, keep the secret if you like," said Harry Wharton. "But, look here, Hazeldene, if we keep silent over this affair, you have got to run on a new course, do you hear?"

Hazeldene raised his head hopefully.

"Are you going to keep silent?"

"We shall say nothing," said Harry—"at least, I can speak for myself. I suppose you others say the same."

"Rather," said Bob Cherry.

"Mum's the word," assented Nugent.

"The mumfulness on my part will be terrific," said the nabob. "I should be sorry to see the esteemed cad subjected to the ignominious kickfulness from the precincts of the honourable school."

"You hear that, Hazeldene. We are going to keep quiet about the matter. But there has got to be a change on your part. Some time ago I found you looking into my desk, when I was keeping the nabob's diamond there. Last week you borrowed ten shillings of Billy Bunter, and never paid him. Now you have practically stolen a half-sovereign from Hurree Singh. There's only one way that sort of thing can end. You've got to stop it."

"You don't suppose I've exactly enjoyed myself lately, do you?" said Hazeldene.

"Well, no," said Harry, looking at the worn, miserable face of the wretched lad; "I don't. But it was all your own fault. You were a cad before you borrowed this money of Isaacs, and this is only one thing more. If we are going to keep the secret, we shall expect you to run straight in future. That's all. Come on, chaps."

"Just a moment," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, taking a step nearer to Hazeldene. "I am aware that this rotter is an esteemed cad, and has always been so, but I gather that he dislikes the position of being an honourable thief. Now, I cannot alterate the fact that he is a worthy cad, but I can prevent him from being a thief by making the bestowfulness of the half-sovereign of the free heart."

"By giving him the half-sovereign, do you mean?"

"Exactfully. Hazeldene, my worthy rotter, I give you freely the half-sovereign which you obtained purloinfully, and it is your own property, and, therefore, you are no longer a measly thief."

Hazeldene smiled a sickly smile.

"Thank you, Inky. I quite understand."

"If you could part with the cadfulness as well as the thieffulness," said the nabob, "the improvefulness of your esteemed character would be terrific. I hope to see you change over the new page, as your English expression is."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "Inky is treating you well, Hazeldene, and I hope it won't be lost on you. I don't want to preach, goodness knows, but I think the worst rotter ought to stop at lying and stealing. Come on, chaps."

The chums of the Remove quitted the study. Hazeldene was left alone again. There was relief in his face—relief mingled with shame.

"What a fool—what a mad fool I have been!" he muttered. "Oh, for the chance to make a fresh start, with a clean record! What a fool I have been! I thought it so beastly clever to be sharper than other kids, and to get the better of them; and it has landed me in this! Those chaps would raise the money to help me out if they could trust me, but they can't. They know I might be imposing on them, and getting the money for something else. What a fool I have been! But if I get clear of this—only of this, I'll make a fresh start."

The door opened, and Bulstrode came in. Hazeldene's face clouded, and he rose from his seat at the table.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tea in No. 1 Study.

HARRY WHARTON and his companions were silent as they went down the corridor. The interview with Hazeldene had been a decidedly unpleasant one, and it left a cloud upon their brows. But it was past tea-time, and boys will be boys, and healthy boys have good appetites. They headed for the study, in the hope that Billy Bunter might have kept his word, and discovered some resource for tea. Bread-and-butter and weak tea in Hall did not tempt them. The school tea was a last resource, when everything else failed.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, sniffing as they neared the study. "If that isn't bacon and sausages frying, I'm a Dutchman."

Hurree Singh sniffed.

"You are quite correctful, my worthy chum. Although I do not myself eat either baconfully or sausagefully, I am truly glad to know that you have a feedful treat. But where did the esteemed Bunter raise the necessary fundfulness?"

"I wonder," said Nugent. "He was broke, and there wasn't any tin in the house-keeping box. He could bone some tea from Wingate's caddy; but as for bacon and sausages—well, I can't understand it."

"We don't know how he came by them," Bob Cherry remarked; "so we'd better eat them first, and inquire afterwards. Come in."

The chums of the Remove entered the study. A bright and cheery scene greeted them. The table was laid for tea, and the firelight glimmered on a white cloth and clean crockery. The kettle was singing away on the hob, and Billy Bunter was frying bacon and sausages in a frying-pan. Butter and jam and marmalade, and bread—brown and white—were on the table.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in amazement. "Have you picked up Aladdin's lamp by any chance, Bunty?"

"Eh?" said Bunter, looking round and blinking through his big glasses. "Is that you, Bulstrode? You can get out. If you take any of those things I'll tell Wharton, and he'll give you another licking."

"Ass! It isn't Bulstrode, it's Wharton."

"Oh, is it? Oh, I thought I knew your voice! I say, you fellows, what do you think of that for a spread?"

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "Where did you get these things?"

"At the school shop."

"Yes, I suppose so; but I mean, how did you get them? The dame won't chalk up any more to our credit; and besides, I've warned her not to let you run bills in our names."

"Yes; and I regard that as rather inconsiderate of you Cherry. It has caused me to go short of grub on a good many occasions."

"Hard cheese, Billy."

"I consider it very hard. I should be perfectly willing to run bills in my own name, only, somehow, the old lady seems to think that the money wouldn't be safe."

"Some people are so distrustful."

"They are; and I'm afraid you are one of them, Cherry. But I haven't got this lot on tick, though I should have done so if you had not crabbed it."

"Then, how did you get the grub?"

"I bought it."

"What with?"

"Money."

Bob Cherry glanced over the spread. It was really a decent one for a junior study, such as was only seen there when the Removites were in funds.

"This little lot must have run into four bob, Billy."

"Four shillings and threepence halfpenny."

"Then where did you get it?"

"The sausages are done," said Bunter. "Will you make the tea, one of you, while I'm turning them out, and then we can all start fair?"

"I'll make the tea," said Nugent. "But where did you raise the wind for this feed, Billy? I'm curious."

"The bacon's done, too," said Bunter. "Hand me that big plate, will you, Wharton?"

"Certainly. Here it is. But where did you get the tin?"

"I can't talk while I'm working. Don't the sausages look prime? I say, Hurree Singh, I hope you will have some sausages?"

The nabob shook his head smilingly.

"I do not eat the sausageful grub," he explained. "But I shall be happy to come out strongfully with the brown bread, and the marmalade, and the bananas."

"I really think you're an ass, Hurree Singh. Still, there will be all the more left for us, so perhaps you're right. I got the bananas specially in case you did not like sausages. There are some nuts, too."

"You are a thoughtful little bounder, and I am esteemfully obliged. But where did you raise the breeze, as your English saying is?"

"Fill up the pot, Nugent," said Billy Bunter, apparently not hearing the question. "I shall want a second cup. There are enough teacups, as I bought two new ones with what was left of the five bob."

"The five bob! What five bob?"

Billy Bunter coloured a little.

"Oh, that was the cash I had in hand, you see."

"You don't mean to say that your postal order has arrived?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Well, no, it has not exactly arrived," admitted Bunter. "I am expecting it by the first post to-morrow morning, though."

"Well, it's a mystery," said Bob Cherry. "Still, it's a jolly good feed. You can help me to sausage and bacon, Billy. You are a good cook, and I'll say that much for you anywhere."

"The cookfulness equals the extreme smellfulness," said Hurree Singh. "Let us pass a vote of thankfulness to the esteemed Bunter."

"I'd rather you passed the butter," said Bunter. "I think this is a really good feed, and I don't mind saying so. There are few fellows in the Remove who can cook as I cook. Fellows in the Sixth have competed to have me for their fag. I think when I grow up I should like to run a large hotel and do my own cooking. How do you like the bacon, Wharton?"

"Ripping," said Harry, who was doing full justice to it.

"Rather," said Bob Cherry. "My hat, Billy is a treasure! And if he gets into the habit of standing feeds like this without wanting any tin to pay for them, why I think we ought to encourage him."

"Under such circumstantialfulness, the encouragement ought to be terrific," agreed Hurree Singh, who was making a milder meal of brown bread, and bananas.

"Well, I'm glad to have my efforts appreciated, of course," said Bunter modestly. "A fellow likes to be appreciated. I think, perhaps, I had better drop physical culture and take up cooking seriously. But there's something to be said for physical culture, though. It gives you a jolly good appetite. Since I took it up I have been able to work in, on an average, one extra meal a day."

"No wonder the ham disappeared," grinned Bob Cherry. "Never mind, we owe Billy our thanks as founder of the feast."

"No, you don't exactly," said Bunter. "It was really Wharton who stood this feed."

Harry looked over his teacup at the Owl in surprise.

"I! How do you make that out, Billy?"

"You see, I had to raise the money for the feed."

"Yes, and I wonder how you did it."

"Well, you see, you told me you were getting a new cricket set, your uncle having sent you the tin to get them."

"What has that to do with it?" asked Wharton in amazement.

"Why, you see, if you're having a new bat, you couldn't want your old one, and so I——"

"My bat!" said Wharton apprehensively. "What have you done with my bat?"

"Oh, nothing, I've only sold it to Skinner."

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"You've sold my bat!"

"Now don't get excited, Wharton."

"Excited!" howled Wharton. "You've sold my bat! My bat!"

"Well, as you are getting a new one——"

"My bat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "It's lucky he didn't sell your spring overcoat, or your desk, Wharton. But of all the cheek!"

"I don't see where the cheek comes in," said Billy Bunter in an aggrieved tone. "What could Wharton possibly want with two bats?"

"I was fond of the old bat, you young Owl, and I haven't got the new one yet, either."

"Well, of course, I'm not responsible for your dawdling in getting the new one," said Bunter. "I don't see how you can blame me for your own carelessness."

"You—you—you——"

"I've taken the trouble to sell your old bat, and for a pretty good figure, too, considering," said Billy Bunter. "If these are all the thanks I get, I'm blessed if I provide a feed in a time of necessity again. Pass the sausages, Cherry."

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were laughing heartily. Bunter's innocent coolness struck them as funny. Harry, who had lost his bat, did not see the matter in quite so humorous a light.

"Of course, you could have the bat back by paying Skinner the five shillings," suggested Billy Bunter. "I didn't know you were fond of a piece of wood or I'd have sold Cherry's new bicycle lamp instead."

"Would you?" howled Bob. "Let me catch you selling my new bicycle lamp, you young villain, that's all!"

"Well, there was Nugent's new lexicon would have fetched a couple of bob!"

"You young rascal! It cost my governor a guinea, and if it was lost, there would be no end of a row!" exclaimed Nugent wrathfully.

"Well, you could always get it back by repaying the purchase-money, and if the fellow didn't want to give it up, you could punch his head," said Bunter.

"I know whose head I shall punch if anything happens to my lexicon," growled Nugent. "It is bad enough selling Wharton's bat without permission, but when it comes to my lexicon, the thing's past a joke."

"And my new bicycle lamp, too! If anything ever happens to that, there will be a dead Bunter picked up in this study," said Bob Cherry darkly.

"Oh, come, Cherry. I say, Wharton, I hope you're not annoyed."

Harry could not help laughing.

"Oh, of course not," he said. "I'm pleased."

"I'm glad you're pleased," said Billy Bunter, beaming. "Of course, it was the only thing to be done; but I thought afterwards that you might be annoyed. It has been a jolly good feed, hasn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry, filling his cup a third time. "Here's good luck to the founder of the feast—Wharton's old cricket bat!"

And the chums of the Remove laughed and drank the toast in weak tea.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Bulstrode's Offer.

MEANWHILE, the cad of the Remove was having a far less enjoyable time in his study. Hazeldene had been alone only a few minutes after the chums left him, when Bulstrode came in. The bully of the form was not in a pleasant humour, as could be seen by the expression of his face.

"What have those rotters been doing in here?" he asked.

"What rotters?"

"Those rotters from No. 1 study. I saw them going out as I came along the passage."

"Why shouldn't they come in here if they want to?"

"It's my study, that's why."

"Well, it's mine as well."

"If you are going to set up as master of the house, you had better say so," sneered Bulstrode. "Then I'll jam your head against the wall for a lesson, and we shall get on better."

"I don't want to do anything of the kind."

"Then shut up and tell me what those fellows wanted in here."

It was rather a contradictory order, but Bulstrode waited for a reply, with the evident intention of getting one.

"They came in to speak to me," faltered Hazeldene.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, you are such a nice fellow that they would be bound to do that," he said. "You are so popular, so liked for your open, frank, and candid ways."

Hazeldene winced.

"Well, I don't know that I'm much more unpopular in the Remove than you are, if you come to that," he replied.

"But I can stand up for myself, and you can't," said Bulstrode contemptuously. "You are a coward, you see."

"You didn't make much of a show against Wharton, anyway."

Bulstrode's brow darkened. Any allusion to his defeat at the hands of Harry Wharton was gall and wormwood to him. He took a step towards Hazeldene, his hands clenching, his lips tightening ominously.

Hazeldene caught up a heavy ebony ruler from the table. He did not speak, but his eyes gleamed savagely. Bulstrode paused in spite of himself.

"What do you think you are going to do with that ruler?" he said between his teeth.

"Brain you with it, perhaps," said Hazeldene recklessly. "At any rate, I'll give you a blow as hard as I can if you lay a finger on me."

"Put that ruler down!"

"I won't!"

Bulstrode looked inclined to spring upon him. But the thick, heavy ruler looked dangerous. He broke into a laugh that was partly good-natured.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "You're coming out strong. What has come over you Vaseline? Fancy the oily sneak of the Remove setting up as a fighting man."

"I'm in a humour to brain you if you touch me, that's all," said Hazeldene bitterly. "I don't care what happens."

Bulstrode looked at him curiously.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't come in here for a row," he said. "You can put that ruler down, Vaseline. I'm not going to touch you. I think I know what has put your back up. You know you are going to be expelled."

Hazeldene started.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed hastily. "You were not in the pavilion——" And then he broke off hastily, feeling inclined to bite his tongue out, for Bulstrode's look of amazement showed him that he was on the wrong tack.

"Eh! What's that about the pavilion?"

"Nothing. You were saying——"

"But you said——"

"I said nothing. At all events, I'm going to say nothing. You can tell me what you were going to say or not, just as you choose," said Hazeldene sullenly.

"Oh, very well. I have had a talk with Isaacs, the money-lender."

Hazeldene turned pale.

"You rotten, spying hound!" he said thickly.

Bulstrode laughed.

"I was curious," he said. "And, as I told you, it was my duty as cock of the Remove to see that you brought no disgrace upon the Form."

"What has Isaacs told you?"

"Everything."

"You lie! You lie! Isaacs did not know——"

"What he didn't tell me, I could guess for myself," said Bulstrode coolly. "He lent you the money to buy——"

"You—you cur!"

"To buy a watch bracelet!" grinned Bulstrode. "A lady's watch bracelet! Ha, ha!"

Hazeldene turned crimson.

"Well, why shouldn't I buy it, if I liked!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"No reason why you shouldn't, if you could pay for it," said Bulstrode, and Hazeldene winced. "No reason at all. Isaacs sold you the thing himself, and I should rather imagine you were done over it, too. Did Marjorie like it?"

"What—what do you mean?"

The bully of the Remove gave a scoffing laugh.

"Do you think I don't know whom it was for?"

Hazeldene trembled with rage, but he did not speak.

"You bought it for your sister on her birthday," said Bulstrode coolly. "I knew something about it before, but I didn't know you had bought it of Isaacs, or that you had paid him only half the money for it."

"You spying cur!"

"Isaacs charged you four pounds ten," said Bulstrode. "A nice expensive thing for a fellow in the Lower Fourth to buy, and no mistake."

"That was my business, not yours!"

"Isaacs thought it was my business!" chuckled Bulstrode. "He supposed from my talking about it that I was going to pay the money for you, and he'd rather have the money than show you up."

"And he told you——"

"He told me the whole story. He doesn't know whom the bracelet was for, that's all. I know jolly well, though."

"Supposing it was so——"

"No supposing about it; it is so."

"Well, then, there's no need to go chattering about it," said Hazeldene savagely. "You had no right to inquire into my affairs, and Isaacs had no right to tell you——"

"As I said, he supposed that I was going to pay the money."

"You don't mean——"

"You know I have plenty of tin," said Bulstrode, jingling the money in his trousers' pocket. "I might pay it for you."

Hazeldene brightened up considerably.

"If you'd lend me the money, Bulstrode, and shut up——"

"Well, that's a polite way of putting it, at all events!" grinned the bully of the Remove.

"What I mean is——"

"In the first place, how much do you owe Isaacs?"

"Didn't he tell you that?"

"Yes. He made it come to two pounds."

"That's it. I gave him two pounds ten down——"

"But haven't you paid him any since?"

"Yes, over thirty bob."

"Then how——"

"It's interest."

"My hat! He's a regular Shylock!" said Bulstrode, in amazement. "Talk about cent. per cent. But, of course, he knows he's got you, so long as he's got your paper for the amount, to show to the doctor."

"That's it!" groaned Hazeldene. "If it wasn't for that I'd snap my fingers at him. It isn't so much the show-up that I mind, either. But I couldn't bear Marjorie to know about it."

"I quite understand that. Well, two pounds is a lot of money; it's the amount young Bunter wanted me to lend him the other day, and I refused. I don't know that I should refuse you if you asked me."

"What do you mean, Bulstrode? What are you getting at? I know jolly well that you don't mean to let me have the two pounds for nothing."

"Well, you could hardly expect that, could you?" said Bulstrode.

"What do you want in return?"

"Suppose I wanted to come down to your place to spend the holidays?" said Bulstrode, looking at him out of the corners of his eyes.

Hazeldene stared.

"Why should you want anything of the sort? Your people are richer than mine, and you'd have a much better time at home."

"Perhaps; perhaps not."

"You don't mean——" Hazeldene's eyes gleamed. "You don't mean that you'd like to come to my place because of—of——"

"Marjorie!" said Bulstrode, nodding coolly. "Suppose I do? I like Marjorie, and why shouldn't I improve the acquaintance if I want to?"

"Because—because—well, I won't tell you why."

"Oh, yes, do; I'm curious."

"Well, you're not fit to breathe the same air as my sister Marjorie," said Hazeldene savagely. "That's why. I wouldn't have you home to chum with Marjorie for anything you could offer me, and that's flat. Marjorie shall never speak to you if I can help it."

A very ugly look came over Bulstrode's face.

"Well, that's plain English, anyway," he said.

"You asked for it."

"And so you think my society isn't good enough for dear Marjorie—you think it's worse than her brother's?" sneered Bulstrode.

Hazeldene flushed.

"I know I'm not all I ought to be if that's what you mean, and if I get a chance I'm going to strike out a new line, too. I'm not going to begin, either, by acting like a rotten cad!"

"I don't see why I shouldn't chum with Marjorie if I like. I——"

"Well, I do."

"In plain language, you won't have me down?"

"No, I won't."

"You cheeky young rotter! And for half the term you've been touting for an invitation to my place for the holidays!" exclaimed Bulstrode angrily.

"Well, I don't want it now, anyway."

"You are going to set up in the independent line, I suppose? No more cadging or sponging?" said Bulstrode, with a bitter sneer.

Hazeldene was silent.

Bulstrode looked at him bitterly for a moment or two. Then he drew a handful of money from his pocket. There was a heap of silver, and several gold coins gleamed among it.

"Look at that, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene was looking at it, with hungry eyes. There was more than enough money there to relieve him of all the difficulties that beset him. Bulstrode selected two sovereigns from the rest, and slipped the other coins back into his pocket.

"There's the two quid, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene made no movement to take it.

"You won't accept my offer?"

"Not on the terms you named."

Bulstrode jingled the money back into his pocket.

"Very well; keep on as you are, and get expelled, you cheeky young rotter!"

Hazeldene's face involuntarily fell as the gold disappeared from sight. The Remove bully saw it, and broke into a scoffing laugh.

"Come, it's not too late, Hazeldene!" he said, jingling the money. "Don't be a silly ass! There's the cash if you want it——"

"I won't touch your money," said Hazeldene, and he turned and walked to the door.

Bulstrode's eyes followed him with a savage expression. But the cad of the Remove meant what he said, and he walked out of the study, and Bulstrode was left alone.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Speaks to the Point.

"COMING down to the gym, Harry?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Oh, come along, kid!" said Bob Cherry. "We're all going down, and even Billy Bunter is going to shake down his tea on the parallel bars!"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort, Cherry," said Bunter. "After a really good meal I don't feel inclined for physical culture, and I am not going to perform any monkey tricks on parallel bars. I don't mind watching you fellows play the giddy goat, and I'll show you some exercises with the Indian clubs, if you like——"

"That you won't!" said Nugent. "You're not going to brain me with an Indian club, you Owl!"

"I don't suppose for a moment that it would actually brain you if I hit you, Nugent, and I'm not really likely to hit you with the clubs——"

"No, you're not, for if I see you go near them, I shall chuck you out of the nearest window!" Nugent promised.

"The chuckfulness would be preferable to the brainfulness," said Hurree Singh, "and our Bunterful chum is certainly dangerous with the clubful exercise."

"I'm afraid there's a lot of jealousy in this study," said Billy Bunter, with a shake of the head.

"We—let's get down to the gym!" said Bob Cherry. "I say, why aren't you coming along, Harry? No need to start on the prep. for an hour yet."

"I wasn't thinking of the prep."

"I hope you are not thinking of your old cricket bat," said Bunter anxiously. "Of course I could not possibly know that you would mind. If you like I will redeem it from Skinner to-morrow morning when my postal order comes."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'm not thinking about the old bat, Bunter; and I think it would be a very old bat by the time you redeemed it, anyway. It's all right, kids, run along, and leave me alone, there's something I want to think out."

"Right you are!" said Bob Cherry. "Wish I could lend you my brain; it would make it easier for you. Come on, kids!"

The Removites quitted the study, and Harry Wharton was left alone.

There was a thoughtful shade upon Harry's brow as he stood leaning on the mantelpiece in the study. He was thinking deeply. With all Harry's faults—and he had many, though of late they had not been so much in evidence as of old—he had never been selfish, and he was just the kind of boy to take another fellow's troubles on his shoulders. That, to some extent, was what he was doing now.

His chums considered that Hazeldene had got off lightly as indeed he had. But Harry Wharton could not dismiss the white, miserable face from his memory; neither could he quite banish the sweet girlish features of Marjorie Hazeldene, whose eyes seemed to plead to him to save her brother.

It was no business of his; and Hazeldene might not be worth saving, for that matter. Yet Harry Wharton could not dismiss the matter so lightly from his mind. If only for Marjorie Hazeldene's sake, he would try to save the cad of the Remove. After all, he had come to have a position of something like authority in the Greyfriars Remove. Fellows looked up to him as a leader. Was it not his duty to put out his hand to save a Form-fellow from the road to ruin?

But what could he do? That was the question. He more than suspected Hazeldene of bad and reckless habits, such as card-playing and even betting on horses. That was in all probability the cause of his difficulty. If the difficulty were taken away, and the cause continued, what would be achieved? Nothing! The situation would arise again, and Harry's trouble would be simply wasted. It was reform in the breast of Hazeldene himself that was wanted. And yet——

It would want thinking out. Harry turned down the gas in the study, and went out to take a quiet stroll in the Close to think over matters. In the passage he came face to face with Bulstrode. The latter was grinning.

"Hallo, Wharton!" he said, stopping the captain of the Remove, though Harry would have passed on. "You were in my study a while back."

"I went there to speak to Hazeldene——"

"Oh, it's all right. I suppose you know he's in difficulties with a Sheeny moneylender, don't you?"

"I know something about it."

"You brought the Sheeny into his study—I remember." Bulstrode looked at Wharton very keenly. "Have you offered to lend him the money to get him out of his fix?"

Wharton started.

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, you have then! I wondered why he was so deuced independent. Well, I can only say you're a fool for your pains. Two pounds doesn't grow on every bush, my boy. But perhaps it's on Marjorie Hazeldene's account."

"I don't quite understand you, Bulstrode."

"I mean that I offered to lend Vaseline the money to fix things with the Sheeny, and he refused. It occurred to me afterwards that he was going to get it from somebody else. I hear Inky is broke; so it must be you. You're the only other fellow in the Remove, I believe, who's likely to be ass enough to pay another fellow's debts."

"Thank you! But you say you offered him the money yourself?"

"That was on conditions; and he refused. He wouldn't have refused if he hadn't been sure of the tin from another quarter. I see how it is. You were mighty chummy with Marjorie Hazeldene when she was here, and you don't want her to know the true story of the bracelet."

"The bracelet?"

"Oh, don't put that on, Wharton. I know you know all about it, and I'll jolly soon show you that I know! I got it from Isaacs direct, and Vaseline has admitted it, and so there's no good beating about the bush. Vaseline owes the Sheeny money for a bracelet he bought for his sister on her birthday."

Harry Wharton started again.

"Are you quite sure of that, Bulstrode?" he exclaimed.

The bully of the Remove looked at him searchingly.

"Do you mean to say that you didn't know, Wharton?" he demanded.

"I certainly did not know."

"Then why are you going to lend him the money to pay Ikey Isaacs?"

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort. At all events, I haven't offered to do it. As a matter of fact, I haven't two pounds in the world at the present moment."

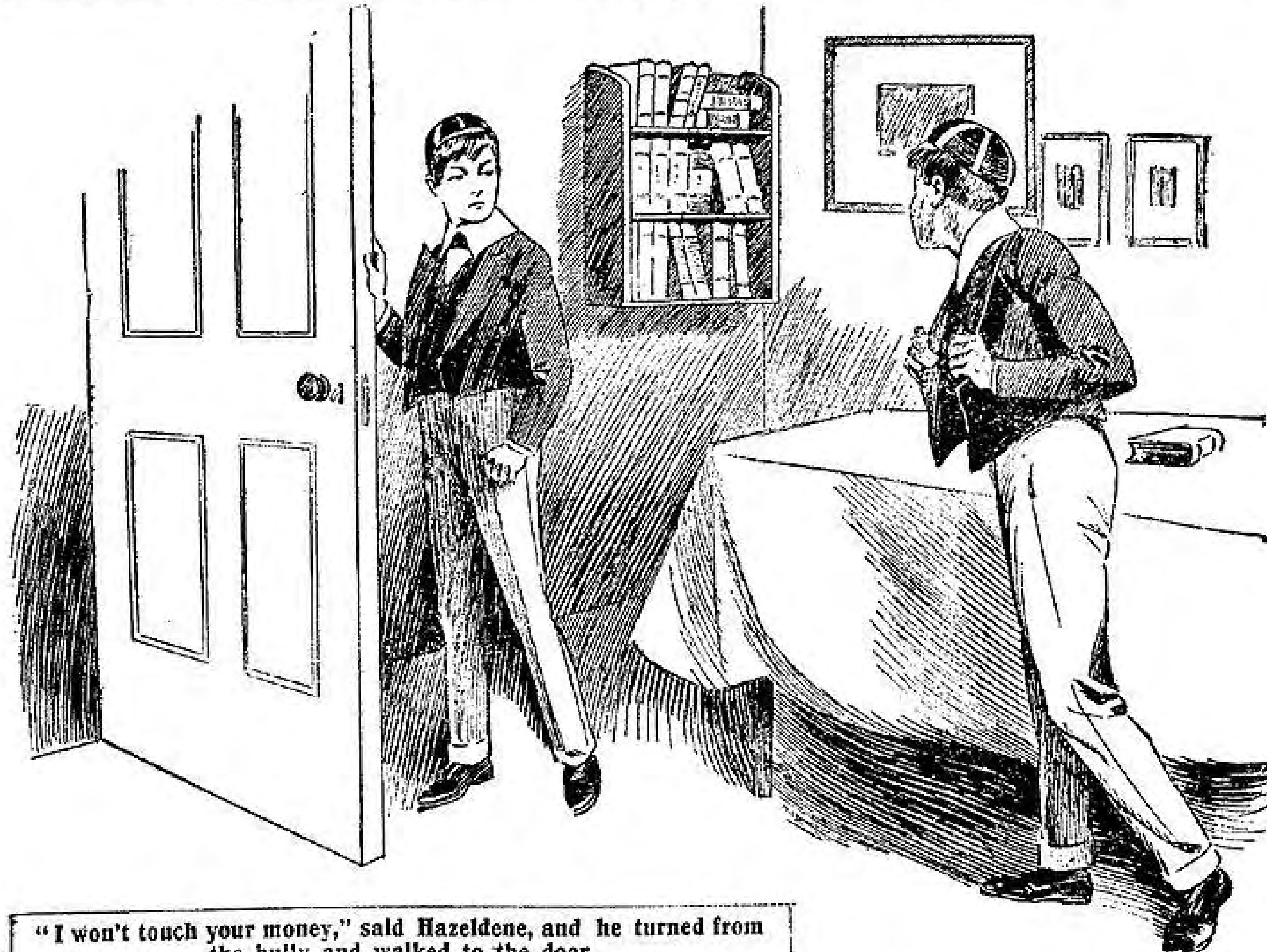
"Then who is it Vaseline expects to get the money from?"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You had better ask him.

"It must be Inky——"

"Hurree Singh is stony. As a matter of fact, we're all stony in No. 1 study, or practically so," said Harry cheerfully.



"I won't touch your money," said Hazeldene, and he turned from the bully and walked to the door.

"Perhaps, after all, Hazeldene doesn't expect to get the money."

"But he refused my offer."

"The conditions might account for that."

"I never believed he had spirit enough to refuse any conditions," said Bulstrode distrustfully. "I suppose you are telling the truth?"

"You had better not suppose anything else aloud, at all events, Bulstrode," said Harry. "I am not accustomed to having my word doubted."

"Oh, keep your wool on. I can't understand it about Hazeldene, that's all. He seems to be going on a fresh tack entirely."

Bulstrode moved to pass on. Harry Wharton stepped quietly into his way; and the bully of the Remove stopped again.

"Does anybody else know this story besides yourself and me?" asked Harry.

"Probably not."

"Then it ought to be kept quiet."

"Why?" asked Bulstrode sneeringly.

"It's not a pleasant story. Marjorie Hazeldene may be down at the school again some time. It would be rotten if this story were generally known in the Remove. Vaseline has acted badly, but not so badly as a fellow who made a girl's name the talk of the common-room."

Bulstrode laughed mockingly.

"My hat, you are setting up as a Chevalier Bayard, and no mistake, Wharton! I suppose you will be going in for amateur theatricals next."

"I am setting up to be a decent fellow!" flashed out Harry. "And if you were the same, you wouldn't think of saying a word about this affair of the bracelet."

"Rats! It's too good a story to keep."

"Then you mean to make it the joke of the Form?"

"Why not? If Vaseline had accepted my offer, I should have shut up. He threw it in my teeth, and I'm under no obligation to keep his secret."

"You are under an obligation not to say anything that would make a girl unhappy if she came to hear of it."

"I'm afraid I haven't any time to listen to sermons, Wharton," said Bulstrode, with a yawn. "Will you stand aside and let me pass?"

Harry gritted his teeth.

"No, I won't!"

"Oh, very well; I can wait," grinned Bulstrode, leaning his shoulder against the wall of the passage. "You are not going to stand there all the evening, I presume?"

"No. You intend to tell that story to the whole Form?"

"I intend to tell it to the first fellow that comes along, if you keep me standing here," said Bulstrode, with evident relish.

"Very well. Now listen to me——"

"Oh, go ahead with the sermon! It's your innings. Why don't you begin 'dearly beloved brethren'?" sneered the bully of the Remove.

"I'm not going to preach to you," said Harry quietly, but with a dangerous glint in his eyes. "I don't suppose preaching would have much effect on a cad like you, and I'm not much of a hand at it, anyway. I'm going to talk plain English. When I first came to Greyfriars you licked me once——"

"More than once," grinned the other.

"Very well, more than once. But I stood up to you till the tables were turned, and I licked you, Bulstrode."

"You had rather the best of it last time, I suppose," said Bulstrode savagely. "What are you getting at? What about it?"

"I don't want to throw my victory in your face," said Harry Wharton. "You know how you used your victory over me when you had the best of it. You were such a bullying brute that I had no choice, even if I had wanted, but to go in again and keep it up till I got the best of it. When I licked you you cannot say that I ever tried to play the bully. I never alluded to the matter, and I never taunted you as you did me many a time."

"You are making enough of it now."

"That's for a purpose. I want you to understand how the matter stands. I can lick you, and since I last did so I've improved both in boxing and in physical strength. I had a hard fight last time. I could give you twice the licking now with half the trouble."

"What are you driving at?" demanded Bulstrode uneasily.

"This! If you say a word to a single soul about this bracelet story, I'll give you such a licking that you'll hardly be able to crawl for a week," said Harry Wharton, with flashing eyes.

A bitter sneer came upon Bulstrode's face.

"So you are setting up as a bully, are you?"

"It's the last thing in the world I want to do, but you've driven me to it. Mind, I won't have a word said about Marjorie

Hazeldene or this affair at all. If you are going to make me play the bully, I'll play it right through. If you say a word—and if anything is said I shall know it came from you, as no one else knows the story—I say, if you utter a single word that might cause Marjorie Hazeldene pain if she knew it, I will thrash you within an inch of your life."

Harry's face was dark; his eyes blazing. He meant every word he said; and the one-time bully of the Remove knew it.

There was a momentary silence.

Bulstrode broke it.

"You can keep your wool on," he said, with an effort. "I really had no intention of telling the story except to a few fellows."

"That would amount to the same thing as telling the whole Form at once.

"Well, if you make such a point of it, I don't mind keeping mum. You might have been a little more civil about it."

"If civility would have been of any use I'm sorry I was uncivil," said Harry. "But it's understood, Bulstrode—not a word!"

"Oh, all right," snarled Bulstrode.

Harry Wharton stood aside; and the other passed on. He passed on with a glare of savage rage in his eyes, but there was more fear than rage. Bulstrode was not likely to tattle. Harry Wharton strolled slowly out into the dusky Close. There, in the gloom under the old elms, he thought out his problem.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Harry's Mission.

"THE man who invented half-holidays," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully, "ought to have a tin medal."

Bob Cherry made that remark in the Remove class-room the next day, just before the Lower Fourth were dismissed. The day was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the weather was fine and sunny, at the end of April. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, glanced towards the form where the chums sat in a row. Whenever there was any buzz in class, Mr. Quelch instinctively looked towards the form occupied by the famous four.

"I think I heard someone speak," said Mr. Quelch.

"Did you, sahib?" said Hurree Singh, upon whom the Remove master's eyes had fallen suspiciously. "The earfulness of the instructor sahib is very acute."

"Perhaps you spoke, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes, sir—I just spoke to you," said the nabob innocently.

"I mean before that!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Did you speak before you addressed me in reply to my remark, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes, sir——"

"Then take fifty lines."

"But, my respected and revered sahib——"

"Take a hundred lines."

"But allow me to enter upon the worthy explanativeness——"

"Two hundred lines."

"I shall have great pleasure in receiving all the lines you have the generosity to bestow upon me," said the nabob. "But it seems to me unreasonable to punish me for speaking to Wharton before we came into class. But no doubt the instructor sahib knows best. As an Oriental, I am ignorant of the home-grown ways."

"When you said you spoke before you addressed me, did you mean that it was also before you came into the class-room, Hurree Singh?"

"Certainfully, respected sahib."

"Then you—but no matter. You need not take the lines."

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"I really wish, Hurree Singh," said the Remove master, snappishly, "that you would pay more attention to the instruction you receive, and would cease to speak in that absurd travesty of the English language."

"The attention to the instructiveness is great, most worthy and ludicrous sahib," said the nabob, meekly. "But the instructful lessons I receive at Greyfriars are not samefully alike with those I received under the tuitional care of the worthy moonshee who taught me English in Bengal."

"You must speak the English of England; not the English of Bengal."

"The worthy moonshee was a learned man, and greatly respected for his knowledge of the language of the English," said the nabob. "I myself heard an English sahib tell him that his English was most picturesque."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Well, well, we will not talk about it now; we will find another opportunity. It is time for the class to——"

"But truly, most respected sahib, I am crammed with eagerness to learn the differentiation of the English speechfulness," said Hurree Singh. "If I have any small and unnoticeable errorfulness in my rendering of the great language of Shakespeare and the great poets, Milton and Dan Leno, I am sorrowful, and seek the improvefulness. It is the resultfulness of early training. As your English proverb says, as the twig is inclined to grow, so the honourable tree is bent."

"The class is dismissed."

Bob Cherry hugged the nabob as they reached the passage in the crowd of the Remove.

"You inky bounder, how much of your piffle is real, and how much humbug?" he demanded. "I'm blessed if I can tell t'other from which."

The dusky nabob smiled serenely.

"Perhaps I yielded slightfully to the temptation to pull the august leg of the instructor sahib," he purred. "I am really looking forwardfully towards the discussion on English when Mr. Quelch finds his opportunity to give me private hintfulness on that language. There are many strangefulnesses in English to which I am not accustomed even after all the studyfulnesses I have bestowed on the tongue. For instance, in your great Shakespeare's honourable play 'The Rivals'——"

"That's not Shakespeare," grinned Nugent, "that's Sheridan."

Hurree Singh shook his head gently.

"I fear that you are slightfully mistaken, my worthy chum. Sheridan was the honourable author of the 'School for Candles'——"

"Ha, ha! Do you mean the 'School for Scandal?'"

"Possibly that is the more correctful designation. But as I was saying, Shakespeare, in 'The Rivals'——"

"Sheridan."

"Shakespeare."

"Sheridan, you inky ass! Sheridan!"

"I must really insist that it was Shakespeare, because my esteemed native instructor in Bengal informed me so with his own tongue," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with quiet and polite obstinacy. "But as that great poet says, in 'The Rivals'—'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.——"

"Ha, ha! That's Shakespeare, right enough, but it's in 'King Henry IV.'"

"I am afraid you are wrong, Nugent. But to take that sentence, it is not what we English-speakers in Bengal consider sensible."

"What's the matter with it, Inky?"

"In the first place, every head has a crown, unless the person has been scalped by Red Indians. In the——"

"Ha, ha! It's not that kind of a crown."

"Besides, if the crown of the head were removed, by scalping or otherwise, the person thus crownfully scalped would lie more uneasily than a person still possessing the crown of his honourable head."

"But it's not that kind of a crown——"

"There are, of course, other kinds of crowns, such is the prolific verbosity of your honourable English language: but all the same it is not senseful. For if the crown intended by the poet is the common crown of commerce, is it not absurdful to declare that, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a five-shilling piece?'"

"Ha, ha! This tame lunatic will be the death of me if he doesn't leave off talking English," giggled Bob Cherry. "There's still another kind of crown, Inky: the kind a king wears."

The nabob shook his head.

"It was not that kind of a crown that the honourable Shakespeare meant, Bob Cherry."

"Ha, ha! Wasn't it? Why not?"

"The reasonfulness is perfectly clearful. The poet says with distinctfulness, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,' meaning that the person concerned is lying down, perhaps, taking an afternoon napful snooze."

"Well, what about it?"

The nabob smiled pityingly.

"It is clearful to me, my Cherryful friend, that you do not habitually use the thinking apparatus in your brainful box," he remarked. "Surely it is evident to the most stupidful of asses that a king, or anybody else, would take his crown off before going to bed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In the first place, there might be burglars, and unless the crown was insured prudentially, there would be a great riskfulness. In the second place, a crown is made of hard material, and would certainly give a king a head-ache if he went to sleep in it. Under those circumstances, truly, you might say that 'uneasy lies a head that wears a crown.' It would be assuredly uneasy. In India I have met several princes, but not one who goes to bed in his crown."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a figure of a speech, Inky, if you know what that is. It's a poetical way of putting it."

"I think you are slightfully mistaken, my worthy chum. I cannot regard the line as being worthy of the great poet, Shakespeare, whose works I esteem. I could quote you some hundreds of other lines——"

"Please don't, Inky."

"Oh! just a dozen or two to show you——"

"There will be an inky corpse in this passage if you start."

"Oh, very well, my esteemed Cherry! Let us take the little runfulness into the august quadrangle."

The Removites went out into the April sunshine. After dinner Bob Cherry, Nugent, and the nabob prepared for cricket practice. But Harry Wharton had other plans in his head.

"Aren't you going to get into your flannels, Harry?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Not just now."

"But we've got on a scratch match, and we want you."

"Let another chap have a chance of showing what he can do. I want to run down to the village."

"Oh, I don't know that we're set on cricket," said Bob Cherry, who would have changed his plans at any moment to please a chum. "We'll come for a stroll if you'd rather."

Harry Wharton turned red.

"Well, to be quite frank, it's a matter of business I want to see into," he said. "I shall have to go down alone. I'll join you on the cricket field later. As a matter of fact, I haven't a bat till I get my new one."

"Anybody would lend you a bat. But I say, are you going to get the new things to-day? You ought to have expert advice on the subject."

"Certainfully. We must all go alongfully with Wharton when he makes the esteemed purchase," said Hurree Singh.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That's all right, kids. I don't suppose I shall do any buying to-day. I'll explain to you another time. I must really go alone."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Oh, all right!" said Nugent. "If there's a giddy mystery, we don't want to understudy Sherlock Holmes and start solving it. Come along to the cricket, my infants, and leave his highness to get on with the mystification."

"Don't be ratty, Nugent——"

Nugent laughed good-naturedly.

"I'm not, Harry. But I'm blessed if I see what's in the wind. But I'm not curious. Go for your little run, and see us later. Ta-ta!"

The three Removites strolled off. Harry Wharton went down slowly towards the gates, with a thoughtful expression upon his brow. He did not like putting off his chums, but there was nothing else to be done.

"I say, Wharton?"

Billy Bunter was sidling after him. Harry glanced at him. There was an extremely knowing grin upon Bunter's face which rather puzzled Harry.

"What is it, Bunter? What are you grimacing about?" he asked.

"You didn't want the fellows to come to the village with you!"

"No; but that's no business of yours, is it?"

"N—no, not exactly; but you'd like me to come, wouldn't you?"

"Not in the least!"

"Now, don't be mean, Wharton."

"Mean! What on earth are you driving at?" exclaimed Harry, somewhat irritably. "How is there anything mean in not wanting a fat little barrel to roll down to the village with me?"

"Of course, I know very well what you are going to the village for."

Wharton gave a start.

"I don't believe it. What do you mean?"

"I saw you take the money from your desk and put it in your pocket. I think you might take me even if you don't want the others."

"And what do you think I am going out for?" asked Harry, curiously.

"To have a feed all by yourself, of course."

"You young pig!" said Harry, in disgust.

"It seems to me that you're the pig, when you won't let me have a snack, after the feed I stood last night," said Billy Bunter indignantly. "I'm really surprised at you, Wharton. I didn't think this of you—I didn't really."

Harry burst into a laugh. It was impossible to be angry long with Billy Bunter.

"Look here, you young cormorant," he exclaimed. "I'm not going out for a feed. I'm going on business. There's nothing to eat, and so you don't want to come. So-long!"

And Harry walked out of the gates of Greyfriars, leaving Billy Bunter looking extremely disappointed.

Harry Wharton strode down the lane with a moody shade upon his brow. He had thought the matter out, and had decided to do what he could to save Hazeldene, for his sister's sake—and perhaps for his own sake, too. What he had learned from Bulstrode had caused a change in his feelings towards the cad of the Remove.

He had known that Hazeldene sometimes bet, and he had naturally concluded that this bad and foolish conduct had placed him in the clutches of Ikey Isaacs. In that case Hazeldene would have deserved a licking rather than sympathy. But now the case was altered. Hazeldene had been wrong to purchase an article he could not pay for, and trust to good fortune to find the money. It was foolish and reckless, but the motive was good, and the case was very different from what it would have been had Hazeldene lost the money on cards or the races. Harry was sorry for him. He had before determined to do what he could. Now he had made up his mind to see Hazeldene through, at whatever cost to himself.

The cost was likely to be a serious one, to a schoolboy at all events. It was a case of money, and Harry had no money

excepting that which the Colonel had sent him for his new cricket things. His chums were short of cash, and could not help him. If Harry parted with the only money he possessed, it might be weeks before he could obtain the articles he required—he might be without them all the summer. Billy Bunter, too, had sold his old bat. For an enthusiastic young cricketer to be left without a bat of his own all through the cricket season was a sacrifice a cricketing schoolboy will easily understand. But, if necessary, Harry was prepared to make the sacrifice. That was one reason why he was now going out alone. His proud, sensitive nature shrank from anything in the nature of display. If he saved Hazeldene, no one should know it—not a soul at Greyfriars should have a hint of the sacrifice he had made.

While the chums of the Remove were busy on the cricket field that glorious April afternoon, Harry Wharton strode down the lane with a determined mind—to seek Ikey Isaacs, and deal with him!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
The Spider's Web.

"CAN I see Mr. Isaacs?"

It was a dusty, dingy little office, in the dingiest part of the High Street of the market town of Dale, a couple of miles from Greyfriars. Harry Wharton had caught the train from the village station, and got out at Dale, where he knew that the moneylender had his office. It had taken him some time to find the dingy little place, but he had found it at last. A strange, unpleasant feeling, as of a fly getting entangled in a spider's web, came over Harry Wharton as he entered the little office, descending by a step from the street.

A youth with a large nose and a shiny complexion was seated upon a high stool there, busily engaged in scanning columns of figures in a financial paper. He looked up in a leisurely way as Harry spoke, and looked him over with a pair of very bright, black eyes, that reminded the Greyfriars boy of a spiteful parrot.

"Mr. Isaacs is engaged at present."

Harry made a gesture of impatience.

He had come over specially to see Ikey Isaacs, and he did not care to linger in the dingy precincts of the moneylender's office, but there was evidently no help for it.

"I suppose I can wait?"

"Yeth," said the shiny youth. "I suppose you can."

"Is Mr. Isaacs likely to be long?"

"That's according to the time he's engaged."

The shiny youth evidently seemed to regard this reply as a pretty good specimen of real humour, for he chuckled as he returned to his paper.

Harry flushed a little.

The office clerk evidently did not regard him as a very valuable visitor, perhaps seeing at a glance that he was not the kind of fellow to want to borrow money, and setting him down as someone who had come to intercede for a friend.

But rudeness, especially from such an unpleasant little shrimp of a fellow, was hard to bear, and Harry was greatly inclined to take him by the shoulders and fling him out into the street. The fellow was five or six years older than himself, but the athletic, healthy schoolboy could have done it easily.

"Cannot you tell me how long Mr. Isaacs is likely to be engaged?"

"No," said the shiny youth, without looking up from the paper.

"Is it any use my waiting?"

"Yeth, if you like."

Harry made a quick step towards the youth, so quick that the latter laid down his paper and hurriedly slipped off the stool.

"Here, what yer at!" he exclaimed.

"Do you want to be chucked neck and crop into the street, you imp?" said Harry.

"I—I—hands off!"

"Then be civil." Harry caught hold of the paper and threw it across the office. "Now; you're put here to answer questions, I suppose? Do you know how long Mr. Isaacs will be engaged? If it's a long time, I'll go round for a walk and come back again. I don't want to stay here longer than I can help."

The shiny youth scowled sullenly.

But he was evidently afraid of the stalwart schoolboy, and his tone was unwillingly civil as he replied:

"Mr. Isaacs may be free any moment now."

"Thank you. Then I will wait."

Harry sat down upon an uncomfortable wooden chair. The shiny youth blinked at him, and then crossed the little office and picked up his paper. But he did not read it. He sat staring at Harry and blinking. He apparently did not quite know what to make of the rather unusual visitor to the office of Ikey Isaacs.

There was a murmur of voices from behind a dirty green baize door which led to the inner office of Ikey Isaacs. The word "Private," in large letters, showed that that room was the moneylender's sanctum. Once or twice a voice was raised in the inner room, and a word came faintly through. Then the shiny youth grinned as if he thought a good joke was going on. Harry Wharton easily guessed that the moneylender was being interviewed by some unhappy victim.

The door of the inner room opened at last. As it opened, it partly shut off from view the spot where Harry was sitting, and he was unseen by the moneylender as he ushered his visitor out.

Mr. Isaacs was as small, and greasy, and suave as ever. His visitor looked like a farmer, and there was an expression of helpless misery on his face that went straight to Harry Wharton's heart.

"Goot-day, my friend, goot-day," said Mr. Isaacs.

"One word more, Mr. Isaacs," exclaimed the visitor, turning towards him appealingly. "Can't you go just a little easier——"

Isaacs waved his greasy hand deprecatingly.

"I have been too easy alretty, Mr. Fairlegh."

"Ye-e-es, I know, but——"

"Goot-afternoon."

"It was only forty pounds at first that I borrowed," said Mr. Fairlegh miserably. "I've paid you fifty-five in all, and I still owe you thirty."

"Interesh, my friend, interesh," grinned Mr. Isaacs, rubbing his oily hands together. "How can an honest man live without interesh?"

"Yes, but——"

Show the gentleman out, Jacob."

"But pray listen, Mr. Isaacs—one word—I cannot possibly meet this, and—and I can't bear the thought of—of—oh, Mr. Isaacs, if you could only give me another few weeks——"

"Why don't you show the shentleman out, Jacob?"

The farmer looked helplessly at the moneylender and the grinning Jacob, and then jammed his hat tightly on his head and strode unsteadily out of the office.

Mr. Isaacs rubbed his hands again.

"Jacob, mine poy, do you—hallo, who is dis?"

The moneylender stared at Harry, just becoming aware of his presence in the office. Harry rose to his feet. It was with difficulty that he kept back the look of loathing and scorn that he felt was coming over his face. He would not improve Hazeldene's position by telling Mr. Isaacs what he thought of him, that was certain.

The moneylender recognised him at the second glance.

"Ah, it is der young shentleman I saw at der school," he exclaimed. "I tink we do piziness togetter, mine young friend, eh? Come into mine office."

"I came to see you——"

"Yeth. Come into mine office."

Harry Wharton followed the moneylender into his den, and Mr. Isaacs closed the door. He waved the boy to a seat.

"I am glad to see you, mine poy," he said affably. "Vy don't you sit down?"

"Thank you, I will stand."

"You showed me der vay at Greyfriars School, to see mine young friend Hazeldene. You have come to me from him, perhaps? He is going to pay my monish."

Harry hesitated for a moment.

"I have come to see about that," he said abruptly. "I suppose it doesn't matter to you where the money comes from, so long as the debt is paid?"

Mr. Isaacs grinned.

"Not in the least, young shentleman."

"How much does Hazeldene owe you, Mr. Isaacs?"

"I vill look at der bapers——"

"Cannot you tell me the figure?"

"It is about two pounds."

Harry Wharton nodded slightly. Bulstrode had told him the truth. In Harry Wharton's pocket there were thirty shillings, and he had no more money in the world.

"I want to speak to you about that, Mr. Isaacs," he said. "Hazeldene is in a bad way over this. He is getting desperate."

Mr. Isaacs smiled and rubbed his hands.

"Den he should pay der monish."

"He hasn't it."

"Den he should persuade some friend to pay it," grinned Mr. Isaacs. "If I do not have my monish, I go to der Head.'

"You would not get a penny of it in that case, as you must know. Hazeldene is under age, and you have no right to claim anything from him."

"It would be cheaper for him to pay dan to be expelled."

"Yes, I knew you were trading on that——" Harry Wharton checked himself. "Now, look here, Mr. Isaacs, I believe you have had your principal back, and it is only a qu stion of interest."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Isaacs cautiously.

"You put the figure at two pounds."

"Dat is der figure, young shentleman, roughly speaking."

"And you have Hazeldene's paper?"

"Yeth."

"Will you give it up for thirty shillings?"

The moneylender stared at him.

"Vy should I give you a paper worth two pounds for dirty shillings, young shentleman?"

Harry Wharton controlled his temper with difficulty.

"Ha eldene's promise is not worth the paper it is written on, Mr. Isaacs."

The moneylender shrugged his shoulders.

"Ve shall see."

"Excepting by——" Harry was going to say "blackmail," but he checked himself. It was useless, worse than useless, to quarrel with the oily little scoundrel.

"Where is the dirty shillings to come from?" asked Mr. Isaacs, with a cunning leer.

"That could be paid."

"Den vy not two pound?"

"Because that would be impossible."

Mr. Isaacs grinned. He evidently thought that if a friend of Hazeldene's could raise thirty shillings he could raise the other ten.

"My due is two pounds, young shentleman," he said. "Piziness is piziness. Two pounds is der figure. Can you settle dat?"

"No."

"Den I vish you a goot afternoon."

Mr. Isaacs opened the door leading into the inner office, and stood aside for Harry Wharton to pass him.

"Jacob, show te young shentleman out."

Jacob grinned and opened the street door. Harry Wharton hesitated a moment. But he knew, by what he had witnessed in that office, how useless an appeal to the moneylender would be. And to make an appeal under the sneering, grinning eyes of the shiny youth was too hard a pill to swallow. The lad turned away with a sickening feeling at his heart, and strode from the place, and Jacob shut the door after him. And Ikey Isaacs rubbed his greasy hands and grinned a greasy grin.

"Der young shentleman has dirty shillings, Jacob," he remarked. "I tink mineself dat he come back presently mit two pound. Ha, ha!"

And Jacob laughed, too.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Finds a Way

HARRY WHARTON strode away from the dingy office of the moneylender with a cloud upon his brow and fierce anger in his heart.

His feelings cooled down somewhat, however, as he walked on in the fresh air and the sunshine. He had seemed choked while he was in Ikey Isaacs's office. Now he breathed again freely and deeply.

But what was to be done?

That the moneylender would accept thirty shillings for a worthless piece of paper had seemed very probable to him. The man would lose and not gain by ruining Hazeldene, for revenge could not be supposed to enter into the calculations of a business man like Ikey Isaacs. Harry did not know that the moneylender felt certain that the boy, if he could raise part of the sum, could with another effort raise the whole of it, and so was determined not to abate a jot of his pound of flesh.

At another time the required half-sovereign could easily have been raised among the chums of the Remove. But it was now an unfortunate time. The money was not to be had there now. Harry Wharton had only himself to depend upon. He was used to depending upon himself; but now it really seemed that he was in a fix there was no escaping from.

He stopped by the railings of the Green. A number of people were standing by the railings, looking on at a game of cricket that was being played by lads on the Green. Harry looked on with interest, too. It was only village cricket, but the running figures, the cheery click of bat and ball, were pleasant to the keen young cricketer.

He watched the game for some time. He thought of the chums of the Remove, on the junior ground at Greyfriars, and sighed. Leaving the Green behind, he walked on down the High Street into the town again. A wide, high shop-window—a window the Greyfriars lads knew well—attracted him, and he stopped.

It was the shop of the athletic outfitter's of the district, where the Greyfriars fellows mostly dealt. Many a time had Harry Wharton looked into that window, and looked over the stock in the shop, and wished himself the possessor of limitless pocket-money.

He stood looking into the window now, with a heavy weight at his heart. There was the very bat he had made up his mind to buy—and he had the money in his pocket to pay for it, if he chose.

His hand slid into his pocket, and he jingled the coins. It was his own money; it had been sent to him to lay out as he chose, and he had promised himself that cricket outfit for a long time. He had no bat at all now, either. The inclination to go into the shop and carry out his original intention, was strong.

After all, why should he not? He had tried to settle with the moneylender, and the man had refused his offer? He had no more money to offer; surely he was free now to do as he liked with it.

But it was only for a moment. Harry Wharton turned firmly away and walked on. He had undertaken to save Hazeldene, and he would save him. But how? Where was the rest of the money to come from?

A glare of gold and silver in a shop window caught his eye: then a notice on the glass, "Money Lent." He started. He was standing outside a pawnbroker's shop, and it had brought a new thought into his mind. His hand went to his watch-pocket. His watch was a silver one, a solid and serviceable timekeeper, and he was sure he could get at least the amount he required if he chose to take it into the pawnbroker's shop.

Involuntarily he coloured, and cast a quick glance about him. He had passed that shop, and even glanced into the window, many a time before, careless whether he was seen there or not. But at the thought of pawning an article, a strangely guilty feeling came over him, and a strange nervousness, lest eyes that knew him should see him there.

He entered the shop quickly. It did not take him long to make up his mind. Fortunately the shop was empty, save for the man behind the counter.

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

Harry's face was crimson; he could not help it. He fumbled with the watch in his pocket.

"If—if you please——"

"You want your watch repaired?"

"N-no. I—I want you to lend me some money on this."

"Oh, other door, please."

Harry Wharton looked round him.

"Which door?"

The man behind the counter smiled slightly.

"There's another entrance for pledging," he said. "But never mind; come in this way," he added, kindly enough. "Come into this room."

"Thank you very much."

Harry Wharton, with his heart beating, followed the man into a room behind the shop. The man was looking at him keenly, but not unkindly.

"You wish to pledge your watch?"

"Yes," stammered Harry; "I—I—for a short time."

"Very good, sir. Let me see it, please."

The man's business-like tone pulled Harry together. He unfastened the watch from the chain and laid it upon the table. The man picked it up and looked it over.

"Fifteen shillings," he said.

"Thank you; that will be quite enough."

The pawnbroker smiled.

"I could lend you more but for the monogram," he said. "If I have to sell the watch, you see——"

"I shall come for it very soon," said Harry, going scarlet again.

"Yes, I suppose you will. Wait a minute and I will make out the ticket. There you are—fourteen shillings and elevenpence-halfpenny. I have to charge you for the ticket, you know."

"Thank you very much," said Harry.

He put the money into his pocket, said good day to the pawnbroker, and left the place. The man had been kind and considerate, but Harry breathed more freely when he was out of doors again. He turned his steps in the direction of the office of Ikey Isaacs. He had more than enough money in his possession now to satisfy the moneylender. His heart was lighter. It did not take him long to reach the office, and Jacob grinned as he came in.

Harry's face was hard and unrelaxing. There was something irritating in the grin of the shiny youth.

"I want to see Mr. Isaacs," he said abruptly.

The shiny youth tapped at the inner door and opened it.

"He's back again, Mr. Isaacs," he murmured.

Ikey Isaacs grinned like a gnome.

"Show the young shentleman in, Jacob."

Harry was shown into the inner office. Ikey Isaacs greeted him with a bow, rubbing his greasy hands.

"I am glad to see you again, young shentleman."

"I have come to settle Hazeldene's account," said Wharton shortly. "You said it was two pounds, did you not?"

"I have looked it over. It comes to two pounds three shillings and sixpence, young shentleman," said the oily Mr. Isaacs.

Harry Wharton said nothing. He had not come there to haggle with the usurer. So long as he had enough money to satisfy the rascal's demands, he had nothing to say. He drew the money from his pocket, and counted out two pounds three shillings and sixpence.

"There is the money, Mr. Isaacs. Now give me Hazeldene's paper, please."

Mr. Isaacs smiled.

"I am a piziness man," he remarked. "Piziness is piziness. Dere is the paper, young shentleman."

Harry examined the paper carefully. He knew Hazeldene's signature well. It was genuine enough, and his distrust caused a twinkle of amusement to leap into Isaacs's eyes.

"You will receipt that, Mr. Isaacs."

"Certainly, young shentleman.

Mr. Isaacs dipped a pen in ink and wrote a receipt across the paper. Harry took it and placed it in his pocket-book. Mr. Isaacs collected up the money from the table.

"If I can do any piziness mit you at any time, I am always at your service, young shentleman," he remarked. "My terms are very moderate. I always try to do justice to mine clients. You tink not? Ah, you never know. Jacob, show der young shentleman out."

And Harry Wharton was shown out of the moneylender's office, with the paper safe in his pocket.

The lad's heart was light as he strode away. He had made his sacrifice, and he had carried out his purpose. Hazeldene was saved; and if quiet and kindly help could save him from future pitfalls, he should be saved. The sacrifice had not been a light one, but Harry Wharton did not regret that he had made it.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Fresh Start for Vaseline.

THE Remove practice was over when Harry Wharton re-entered the gates of Greyfriars. He entered the school-house and went upstairs to his study. His chums were not there, rather to his relief. He did not wish to have to explain to them about the afternoon's excursion. He took the paper out of his pocket, and examined it afresh in the study. It was all right. Hazeldene was out of the clutches of the usurer. Harry Wharton enclosed the paper in an envelope and sealed it. His intention was to take it into Hazeldene's study and leave it there, without a word as to whom it had come from. His relations with the cad of the Remove had been strained, and he did not desire Hazeldene to know who he was under obligations to.

But as he sealed the envelope there was a sound of footsteps outside the study and the door was thrown open, and Bob Cherry, Nugent, and the Nabob of Bhanipur came in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here you are, then. I thought I spotted you in the Close. You've got back!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Harry, with a smile.

"The lookfulness is correct," said Hurree Singh. "We are glad to gaze upon your beautiful and esteemed countenance once more. But the pressing question of the moment is, have you succeeded in raising any cashfulness?"

"That's it," said Nugent. "We've had some jolly good practice, and we're hungry. We're all stony, and unless we sell Bob Cherry's new bicycle lamp——"

"No fear! I've locked it up, away from that young demon Bunter."

"Ha, ha! Well, have you succeeded in robbing anybody, Harry?"

"The robfulness would be very welcome in the critical moment such as has now heretofore arriven," said the nabob. "We are all in the grip of the hungerfulness, and the tuckshop invites us with the alluring charm of the grubful refreshment."

Harry Wharton laughed.

He drew from his pocket the remnant of the sum he had received from the pawnbroker in Dale. It amounted to one shilling and fivepence-halfpenny.

"Corn in Egypt!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "This will save us from the horrors of famine, at all events. Where did you get it?"

"Oh, there it is, anyway!"

"Mustn't ask him," said Nugent. "He may be able to get some more in the same place. We shall miss him when he is arrested."

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Harry laughing. "If you want to know, I——"

"We don't want to know. Come and help us blue this at the school shop. Even one and fivepence ha'penny will go far if it's laid out with great care."

"The carefulness will be terrific."

"Come along, Harry!" said Nugent, linking his arm in Harry's. "I say, after we've done this little lot in we'll come along with you to buy your bat and things."

Wharton coloured a little.

"I'm not going to buy a new bat," he said awkwardly.

Nugent stared.

"Not going to buy a new bat!"

"No. I've changed my mind."

"But your old one's gone."

"I know it is."

"But what are you going to do without a bat?"

"Oh, I shall manage somehow. I'll get my old one back from Skinner as soon as I can raise the tin."

"But if you're not going to buy the things you've plenty of tin," said Nugent. "There's the thirty bob your uncle sent you."

"As a matter of fact, Nugent, I've spent it."

"Spent it! You've been out and blued thirty bob without asking a fellow to come along and help!" exclaimed Nugent in amazement.

"Well, yes. And I can't very well explain, old chap. It—it wasn't pleasant to do it, either, but I did—and there's an end."

Nugent squeezed his arm as they left the study.

"All right, Harry, old fellow. I think I can guess; and I won't ask any questions. Come along—and mum's the word."

As the chums of the Remove went down the passage they passed Hazeldene. The latter gave them a glance, and strode on. He stopped at the top of the stairs and watched the famous four go out into the Close. Then he glanced up and down the passage.

His face was going red and white, and his breath came thick and fast. There was no one in sight—on a fine half-holiday few Greyfriars fellows remained indoors. The house was very silent and deserted.

Hazeldene turned, and went along the passage towards No. 1 study. His footfalls were very light. As he reached the door he glanced in cautiously. He had seen the four chums leave the house, but he did not know where Billy Bunter was. But wherever Bunter was, he was not in the study. The room was empty.

Hazeldene entered. His heart was beating faster. He glanced round the room. There was Harry Wharton's desk, where once the nabob's diamond had been kept. The diamond was not there now. Yet Hazeldene's eyes lingered on the desk.

Then his glance fell upon the envelope lying upon the table. He stepped towards it and picked it up, and turned it over in his hands, looking at it curiously. The envelope had not been carefully fastened, and the gum was not yet set. The flap came open in Hazeldene's hands.

He drew out the contents. A sheet of paper folded! Had he hoped to find money there? Possibly, probably, for a look of keen disappointment came over his face as he saw that the envelope contained nothing but a folded sheet of paper.

He unfolded the paper carelessly enough, and then he gave a violent start. His own signature was the first thing that caught his eye, and then the signature of Ikey Isaacs scrawled across a penny stamp.

What did it mean? It was his own paper—the paper he had given the moneylender, and which had haunted him sleeping and waking ever since. His paper, with the moneylender's acknowledgment scrawled across it! What could it mean?

Hazeldene stood with the paper in his hand, looking at it like one in a dream, feeling, indeed, as though he was in a dream from which he must wake.

The long terror was over! Here was his paper! He was safe—saved! Who had paid the money, for certainly the money had been paid? Someone belonging to No. 1 study had done this deed.

It did not take Hazeldene, as he thought over the matter, long to guess who. He knew that Harry Wharton had been absent by himself that afternoon while his chums were on the cricket field. Harry Wharton had saved him!

A change came over Hazeldene's face. A strange warm gush came to his eyes, and a hot tear fell upon the paper in his hand.

"God bless him!" he muttered.

Strange words from the lips of the cad of the Greyfriars Remove. But Hazeldene had learned his lesson. From that day forward a new course was marked out before him.

He crumpled the paper into his pocket and left the study. He went out into the Close, and to the boy upon whose mind a heavy trouble had so long hung it seemed that the sun was shining more brightly, the birds singing more sweetly. Life was brighter before him than it had been for long weeks past.

The chums of the Remove came out of the school shop. Hazeldene tapped Harry upon the arm.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Wharton?"

"Certainly."

The three juniors strolled on; and Harry Wharton remained with Hazeldene. The latter drew the paper from his pocket.

"I found this in your study," he said. "It was lying on the table."

Wharton gave a start.

"Don't ask me why I went there," said Hazeldene. "Don't ask me what thoughts have been in my mind lately. You know what I have done—you know enough! You paid this money for me?"

Harry nodded.

"I am going to burn this paper. I have been a fool, but that's over. If you knew all the circumstances, you wouldn't think so badly of me as you do now."

"I do know all the circumstances," said Harry quietly. "I learned them from Bulstrode. No one else will know; Bulstrode has agreed to keep the secret."

"Thank you. I wondered why he was silent; I understand now. You have saved me, Harry Wharton, from being expelled and from—from bringing trouble on those at home." Hazeldene's voice quivered a little, but he went on quietly. "I shall repay you this money in time, as soon as I can; but I can't repay the service you have done me. But I'm going to run straighter in future.. That's all."

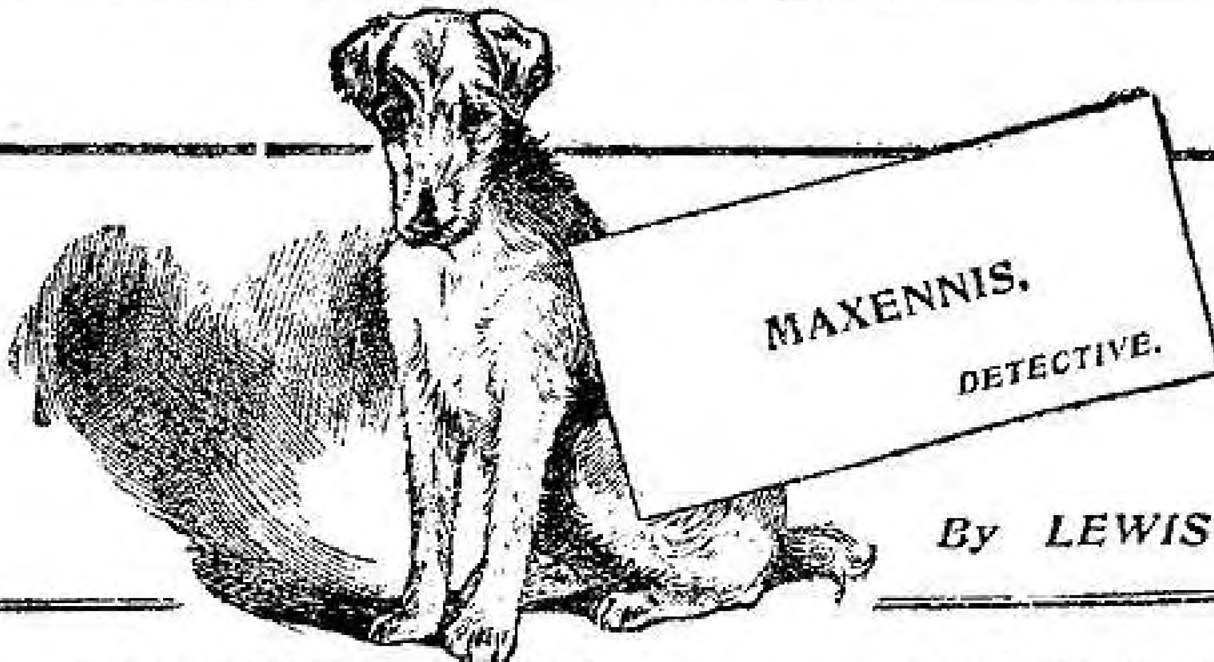
Harry held out his hand.

"And I'll help you," he said. "There was a time, and not so long ago either, when I badly needed a friend to stand by me in making a fresh start—and I found one! And as Nugent helped me I'll help you—if you'll let me."

Hazeldene did not speak, but he gripped Wharton's hand hard; and Harry Wharton knew that his sacrifice had not been made in vain.

THE END.

(Another tale of Harry Wharton and his chums next Tuesday, entitled "A Jolly Half-Holiday," by Frank Richards.)



NEW STORY SHOWING HOW TWO BOYS BECOME DETECTIVES.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

GLANCE OVER THIS FIRST.

Frank Dennis and Bob Lomax, two City clerks, are thrown out of employment. Having no prospects they decide to make the detective business their profession, and assume the name of "Maxennis."

Grip, their dog, in a strange manner is instrumental in getting their first client—a Mrs. Brewer—who is continually receiving threatening picture post-cards from Leigh-on-Sea from a man evidently aware that his victim is coming into a legacy. Lomax visits Leigh, and pursues his investigations among the regular senders of picture post cards in the district. Meanwhile, Dennis by chance acquires a post card addressed to their client, which is picked up by Grip, after having fallen from the pocket of one "Sleeping" Macdonald, a pugilist lodging with Mrs. Brewer. When Lomax returns from Leigh, Dennis shows his chum the postcard. McDonald is enticed into calling upon them, and at once shows an aggressive spirit towards "Maxennis."

Dennis's Fine Theory is Revealed.

"Oh, cut it short, guv'nor!" McDonald interrupted. "What is it you're getting at?" he went on. "I thought you'd something to tell me—something to my advantage, so your letter said! What is it? I ain't got all day ter waste listenin' to yer chin-waggin'!"

The boxer's face had taken on a disagreeable and sulky expression, his tone was just a trifle defiant.

"Say what yer've got to say, if yer have got anything, and I'll be off!" he added.

"There is no need for you to be hasty," Lomax said slowly. He was anxious to make time, to collect himself, and decide what he was to say. And then an idea came to him. "The fact is, Mr. McDonald," he continued, "that I am instructed by a friend of yours, or someone who knows you, and who is living in Essex, at a little place called Leigh-on-Sea——"

"Don't know no one living at Leigh, and ain't got no friends there!" interrupted the pugilist, with what appeared to be quite unnecessary violence, and quite uncalled for precipitancy.

"No? Well, that's odd, too! I understood that you were in correspondence with friends at Leigh!"

"Tell yer I don't know no one in the place, and don't want to; never heard of the place!"

"Well, then, I suppose I can't carry through the business I imagined I had with you. Perhaps it's some other Mr. McDonald who is meant, and I have made a mistake. But your Christian name is Alexander, isn't it?"

"Yus, it is."

"And you're a professional boxer?"

"I am, guv'nor; and don't yer forget it!" Mr. McDonald's voice became quite threatening, and he clenched his right fist in a fashion distinctly menacing.

"Curious; that all tallies! And you are living at Southwark, aren't you?"

"Yus. And just let me ask you——" Mr. McDonald had become very red in the face, his left hand was withdrawn from his trouser's-pocket, and he shifted his feet from the chair-rail to the floor.

"At the house of a Mrs. Brewer, I think?" pursued Lomax blandly.

"Yus."

"Well, then, I think you must be the gentleman to whom I am referring, with whom my business lies; every particular is in agreement."

"Tell yer I don't know no one at Leigh," the boxer reiterated sulkily.

"Then perhaps my—this gentleman, I mean—knows you without your knowing him!"

There was a silence for several seconds, and then there was a rattle as the pugilist got off his chair and came towards Lomax.

"Say, look here, guv'nor, what yer gettin' at? What's yer game with all this rot about Leigh-on-something to my advantage? Who d'yer think yer talkin' to, eh?"

"My business concerns the writing of some postcards——"

A violent exclamation escaped McDonald's lips; he stepped nearer Lomax and his right hand was raised in unmistakable threat of a blow. His rugged, hard-featured face was crimson, and his little, deep-set eyes glinted dangerously.

But Lomax's eyes met him fairly; his face betrayed astonishment, but nothing else; and whatever may have been the intention in McDonald's mind, something in the other's calm expression checked him.

"Really, sir, your conduct is most surprising," Lomax said calmly; "I quite fail to understand it. Perhaps you will be good enough to give me some explanation? What do you presume is my meaning, if the mention of the word 'postcards' leads you into such a display of violence?"

McDonald fell back sullenly.

"Yer'd better be careful, guv'nor!" he exclaimed, somewhat inconsequently.

"Of what? Please recollect I am acting for another. I told you I had something to your advantage to communicate to you? Well, that is so. I have to make you an offer——"

"What of?"

"It is concerning the matter of postcards." McDonald's fists again clenched spasmodically. "I have to offer you a certain sum"—Dennis turned his head half-round and shot a glance at his partner's face, but Lomax had now decided how he was to act, and he continued decidedly—"a certain sum, if you will inform me who is the writer of a certain postcard that was found in the street in which you live——"

McDonald uttered a hoarse exclamation, he sprang forward, and this time there could not be any doubt of his bellicose intentions. His left fist shot forward, and, but for his quickly interposed arm, Robert Lomax would have taken a facer that might have laid him out flat. Before the boxer could repeat the assault, Lomax's hand grasped his jacket-collar.

"My man"—and the Yorkshireman spoke very clearly and distinctly—"you're doing a very foolish and a very dangerous thing. For this attack of yours—entirely uncalled for—I could call in the police and have you arrested straight away, and what then would happen to you, with your fight at Wonderland coming off this evening? Have you thought of that? I am not sure I shall not send for the police. What is the reason for your extraordinary conduct, I don't know—I presume that you do yourself?—anyway, you'll find that it won't pay. I've the whip-hand of you, my friend, and I'll use my power."

Again McDonald fell back; the reminder of his impending boxing contest, particulars whereof had caught Lomax's eyes when he glanced through a sporting-paper during breakfast, sobered him, and quietened his aroused anger.

"What're yer interferin' with me for?" he growled savagely.

"I want to know about that postcard," Lomax replied, with quiet authoritativeness.

"Where is it?"

The boxer was off his guard; the question slipped out unawares—involuntarily—and Dennis, turning his head so that he caught a glimpse of the man's face, smiled.

"Then it belongs to you?" he asked.

McDonald looked at him; he recognised him immediately, and it also occurred to him that he had given himself away.

"I don't know what yer talkin' about," he said.

"Yes, you do; the postcard my dog picked up yesterday, when he was barking at you," Dennis went on.

A fresh paroxysm of anger seized McDonald. He swore violently.

"I know yer!" he shouted. "Ye're the bloke I saw come out of it! Yer coppers, that's what yer are! Give us that card, or I'll bash the bloomin' heads in of both of yer!"

"You won't!" Lomax again took a hand in the conversation. "Remember what I said. The police aren't far off, and to-night you box at Wonderland. You won't be such a fool as to ruin your chance of beating the champion lightweight of South Africa, and winning a hundred-pound purse, by running the risk of spending the next few days in a police-cell. You're not quite a fool, I take it? You just think matters over quietly for a bit."

"Have yer got my card?"

"Then it is yours? You did write it?"

"Give me my card!"

Lomax laughed.

"I can save my money. No need to pay you anything to find out who wrote it."

"Will yer——"

Possibly it was fear of being prevented from fighting his match that evening, perhaps it was something in Lomax's quiet, resolute air that held the boxer back from giving way to his temper. He restrained himself, but only by a violent effort. Nothing would have pleased him better than to have put his threat into execution, but he did not.

Muttering to himself, he backed to the door.

"Yer wait!" he cried violently. "Yer wait, that's all! Wait till I've done wi' this job to-night, an' then I'll see to yer! I'll give yer beans! I'll show yer what it is to come interferin' wi' me! I'll make it hot for yer! I'll have that postcard yer pinched if I haves to kill one or both of yer! You'll see! Only yer wait till to-night's over!"

"Please don't slam the door as you go out."

Replying to Dennis's polite request with a remark that was very much the reverse of polite, McDonald threw the door open.

"If I stays here much longer, I won't be able to keep my hands off yer nohow!" he observed. And then he disappeared, going down the steep staircase two steps at a time.

Lomax turned to his partner with a smile on his firmly-featured face.

"That chap's a handful, Frank!" he said. "You have come upon something this time, and no mistake!"

"Yes; I thought he surely meant laying the pair of us out!"

"If he could—I doubt it. But don't get scared, sonny, he won't attempt that—not till to-night's gone, anyway. At all events, we're safe for half a day or so. He's a tough lot, he is!"

"So I thought, when I saw him! Well, Bob, we've learned something, anyway!"

"You're right, we have! But it seems to me it's only complicated matters more than ever. Instead of helping us, it's only made the mystery deeper. What, in the name of Fate, can this chap have to do with Mrs. Brewer?"

"He lodges at her house."

"Well, what of that?"

"He's been there some time—months, I understand."

"Well?" Lomax's tone was impatient.

"Before the postcards began to come at all."

"What is it you're driving at, sonny? You're enough to send a fellow off his chump! What connection can he have with the blessed cards?"

"He may have seen the earlier ones. Mrs. Brewer may even have shown them to him. She's evidently a long-tongued creature, telling her troubles abroad—Mrs. Biddlecombe knew all about them."

"What if she did? I don't see——"

"Not that the idea may have been suggested to McDonald that he could write some postcards himself?"

Lomax stared at his chum in frank amazement. As he had said more than once, detective work was sheer hard work, that didn't call for the use of the imagination; and, besides, he hadn't any imagination, he thanked Providence it wasn't so. The intuitions that came to story-book detectives, and by which they solved the deepest of mysteries, were all moonshine—tommy rot that the genuine article didn't take stock in. He looked at his partner a trifle disgustedly.

"This is some of your Sherlock Holmes rubbish, I suppose?" he observed.

"Very likely, Bob," Dennis replied briskly, not at all hurt by his chum's disparagement; "but I guess you'll find my idea is not so very far away from the truth!

"Say," he went on; "this McDonald isn't quite a fool—he don't look it, he's got a good forehead. Now, presuming he saw those first postcards—and these, according to my theory, were sent only by way of a joke; why, or by whom, doesn't matter very much—what was to prevent him getting the idea and working it out by sending others, demanding money from Mrs. Brewer? He knew she had some; Mrs Biddlecombe knew all about it, so why not he? He could imitate the handwriting. Mrs. Brewer might have confided to him her suspicions as to her own jealous relations being the senders of the cards. If he could threaten or frighten her into parting with money, it would be an easy way for him to get it—easier than being hammered by some other pugilist. She's a nervous woman; why shouldn't the idea work?"

Lomax had listened quietly while his chum had, with suppressed enthusiasm, detailed his fine theory. He had offered no interruptions, but his lip had curled slightly and there was ironic mirth in his eyes. The idea was a flight of fancy of which he couldn't be capable. Palpably, he thought it absurd.

"So that's your theory?" he said at last.

"It is. I know you'll laugh at it, but you won't shake me."

"Probably not; you can be obstinate when you like! But we'll discuss it seriously, if that's possible. What have you to support it?"

"Not much, but enough. McDonald's in this, isn't he?"

"Obviously."

"Can you suggest why?"

Lomax shook his head, and Dennis continued:

"You have convinced yourself that a number of your bundle of cards are imitations—forgeries of the others. What does that show, if not that someone is working upon a suggestion the first lot of cards originated? Secondly, it is only in the later ones the demand for money occurs; the first ones are abusive and impudent, but not threatening. Thirdly, McDonald's anxiety about the lost card. Now, what was there to prevent him from getting his forged cards posted in Leigh, same as the others?"

"Nothing. He don't know anyone in Leigh, however."

"An obvious lie, and you, Frank, believe it to be so."

"I do; but that doesn't convince me your idea is correct. Granting the presumption you start with, this theory of yours is plausible enough; but—— Well, old man, you won't feel hurt if I say that presumption strikes me as being a bit impossible—ridiculous?"

"Not a bit," was the cheerful rejoinder. "Now, see here, Bob; you go on working your way, grinding until you do form a tangible theory, and I'll keep on at my end. If you want any help, I'll give it you, and vice-versa. We may find we're working quite unconsciously into each other's hands. How'll that suit?"

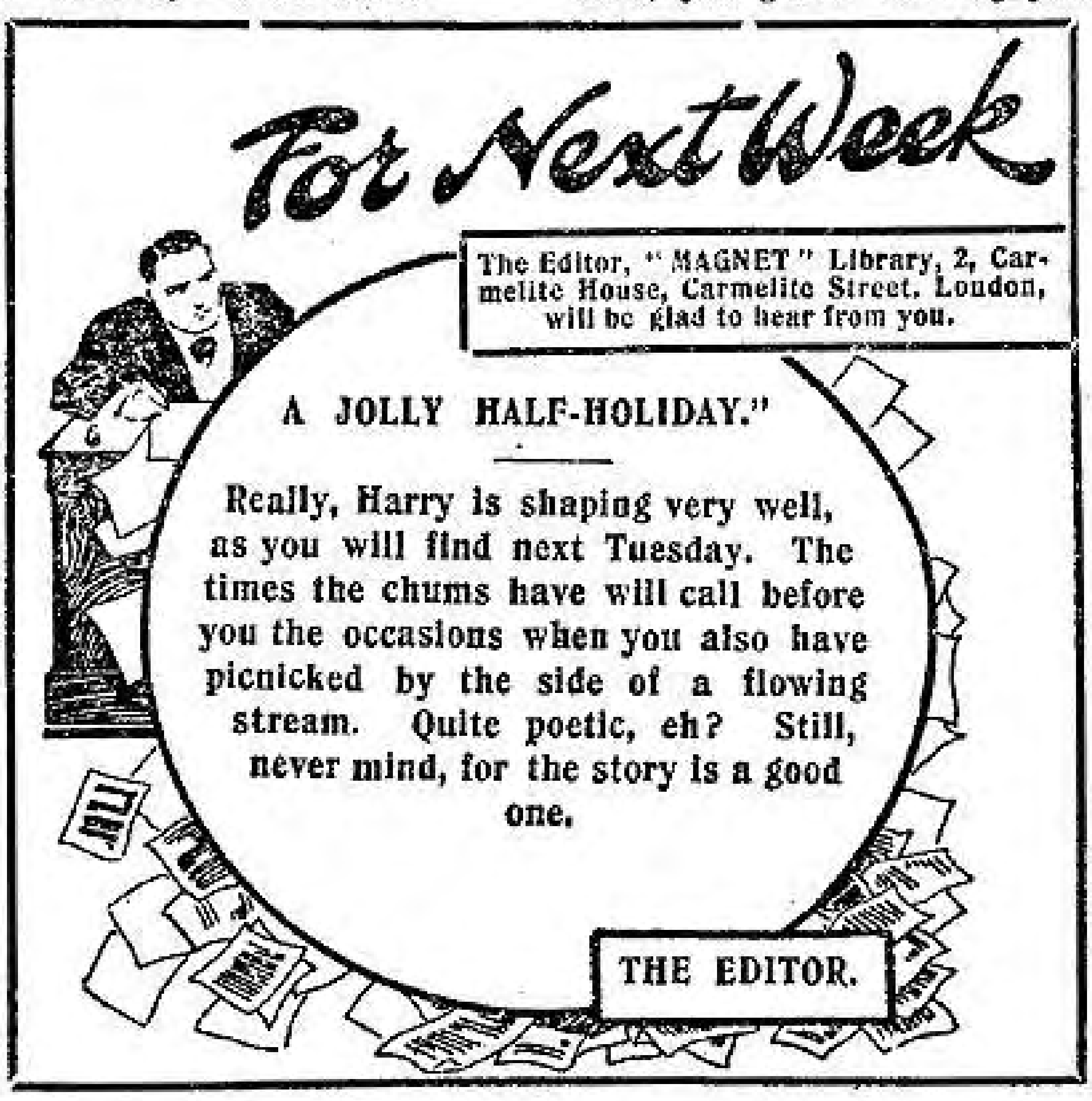
"Very well, me!" Lomax answered. "And I wish you luck, sonny, but—— However, I'll get back down to Leigh; that's where my work lies. What'll you do?"

"I'm going to Wonderland to-night, to see McDonald fight the South African," Dennis replied, with a mystifying smile.

"Right-ho!" Lomax answered, after a short pause.

It occurred to him that Wonderland would not be a very healthy part of London for his chum if McDonald happened on him.

Another long instalment of this grand Serial next week. Please order your copy of the MAGNET LIBRARY *in advance, Price One Halfpenny.*



Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors, the AMALGAMATED PRESS, LTD., of 1, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, England. Agents for Australasia and New Zealand, Gordon & Gotch, Ltd., Melbourne; for South Africa, Central News Agency, Cape Town. Subscription, 4s. 4d. per annum. Saturday, May 2nd, 1908.

Next Tuesday's Cover!

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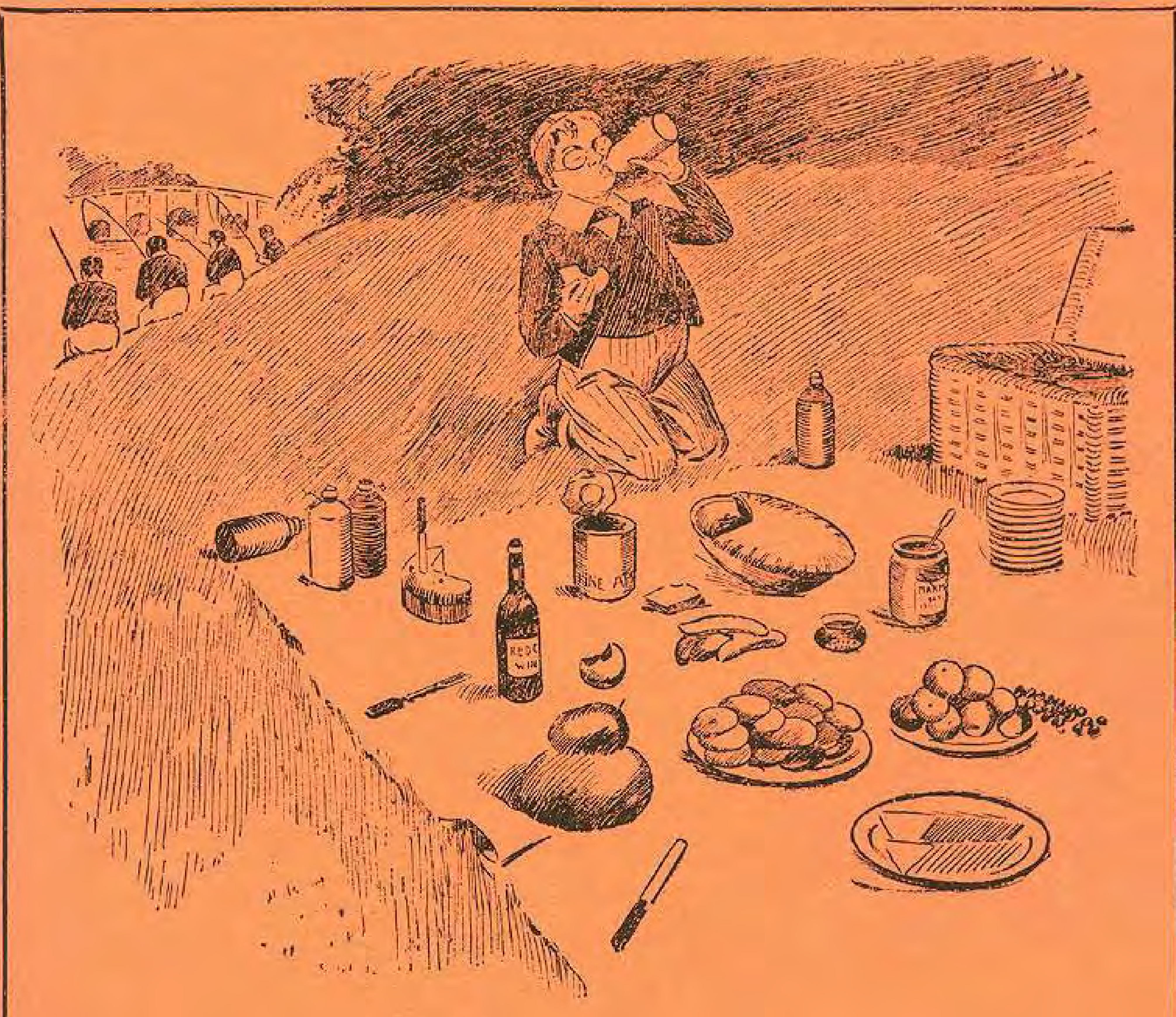

It was decidedly a mistake to have left Billy in charge of the Luncheon Basket. *(An incident in "A JOLLY HALF-HOLIDAY," next Tuesday's Splendid Long, Complete Tale.)*