

**SCHOOL TALES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS!**

**The Penny**  $1\frac{1}{2}$ <sup>d</sup>  
**Popular**

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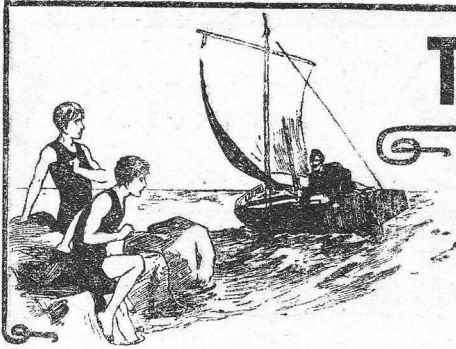
No. 12.  
New Series.

Three Complete Stories of—  
**HARRY WHARTON & CO.—JIMMY SILVER & CO.—TOM MERRY & CO.**



**RATHER ROUGH ON THE RATION PARTY!**

(An Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of St. Jim's in this Issue.)



# THE JUNIOR'S ENEMY!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Story, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Good Time for Bunter.

**O**H, gorgeous!" The exclamation broke involuntarily from Billy Bunter as he entered the dining-room of the Black Rock House.

The room was very cosy, and a huge fire blazed and roared in the wide old-fashioned chimney. The table was laid for supper—and such a supper!

Harry Wharton & Co. had arrived at Black Rock, the home of Captain Cunliffe, an uncle of Hazeldene of the Remove.

Captain Cunliffe had shown the boys to their quarters, where they had removed their coats, and changed their boots, and washed away some of the stains of their long and rough journey.

On descending to supper, they found everything ready.

The captain evidently had great ideas of hospitality.

A hot supper smoked on the board that seemed more suitable for the whole crew of a ship than for half a dozen lads, however sharp set.

The juniors were hungry enough, and their faces lighted up at the sight of the cosy room, and blazing fire, and the hospitable table.

Captain Cunliffe was sitting by the fire smoking a pipe as they came in, and he rose with a smile to greet them.

Now that they could see him fairly in the light, the Greyfriars juniors could not help liking the look of the sea-captain.

He was a man of medium size, of very powerful build, and his thick limbs and deep, broad chest denoted great strength.

His face was burnt by the sun almost to the hue of a Spaniard's, and seamed by innumerable lines.

There was a deep wrinkle between his eyes, but the eyes themselves were as keen as steel.

His hair was thick and dark, and his short beard untouched by grey.

A grizzled old fellow, who had evidently been a sailor, waited at the table.

He had a face as darkly sunburnt as the captain's, and it was easy for the juniors to guess that he had sailed tropic seas with Captain Cunliffe.

The captain addressed him as Ben, and Ben replied to every order by touching his forelock and saying, "Ay, ay, sir!" as if he were still on the deck of the old ship.

As the juniors learned later, Ben's wife was the cook and housekeeper of the establishment, and these two formed all the household of Captain Cunliffe.

The house was one of considerable size, and very old, and not many of the rooms were occupied by the household. But several more had been made ready for the reception of the visitors.

"I say, you fellows, this is gorgeous!" said Billy Bunter, in a whisper. "The cook here must be pretty good."

"Yes, rather!"

"And the captain knows that a chap is hungry after a long journey, too," said Bunter. "No blessed stinting about this supper."

"What-ho!"

"I say, Hazeldene, I like your uncle," said Bunter, in that tone of insufferable patronage he generally adopted when he felt safe in doing so.

Hazeldene looked at the fat junior.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I like your uncle," said Bunter, with his mouth full.

"Thanks!" said Hazeldene contemptuously.

Contempt, the Eastern proverb says, will pierce even the shell of the tortoise; but perhaps Bunter had a thicker rind than a tortoise, for he did not notice the contempt in Hazeldene's voice and look.

"Not at all!" he said. "I like him, and I don't mind saying so. A little rough-and-ready, perhaps, but—Ow!"

Captain Cunliffe looked down the table from his end.

He had not, of course, heard the talk, but he could not help hearing Bunter's agonised "Ow!" as Bob Cherry jammed an iron heel upon his foot.

"Ow!" moaned Bunter. "Ow! Ah!"

"Is anything the matter?" asked the captain.

"Ow! Some beast has jammed his beastly boot on my foot!" groaned Bunter. "Ow!"

Bob Cherry coloured.

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Harry.

"Ow!"

"Don't mind Bunter, sir," said Frank Nugent. "He's often taken like that—generally when he's eating, and he's generally eating."

"The eatingfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"You won't have time to finish your supper if you talk, Billy," said Harry.

And at that reminder the fat junior wired in with renewed energy.

Supper over, the juniors drew their chairs about the fire for a little chat before going up to bed.

Billy Bunter blinked at them.

"I—I'm not quite finished yet," he remarked. "I'll join you presently."

"Ay, ay!" said Captain Cunliffe.

And Bunter tackled the pudding a third and a fourth time, and kept it up, while the wondering glances of old Ben Topman followed all his movements.

The old sailor had seen hungry men at sea, and hungry savages ashore, but in the course of sixty years' experience he had never come upon an appetite like Billy Bunter's. That was unique.

The captain lighted his pipe.

"Your sister arrives to-morrow, Hazel," he observed, through clouds of smoke. "Marjorie and her friend—"

"Clara," said Nugent.

"Yes, Clara. They will be here to-morrow. And now, tell me why you were delayed. You should have been here yesterday," said the captain.

The juniors glanced at one another.

They had spent twice the time arranged upon the journey for the purpose of throwing off the track the South American who had shadowed them from London, and Harry felt that it was their duty to acquaint the captain with the circumstances.

Yet he shrank from doing so. He had a feeling that it would be a terrible shock to the captain to hear of the pursuit by Pedro Ijurra.

"The fact is—"

Harry. "But perhaps Hazel had better tell you—"

"Go on, Hazel!"

Hazeldene coloured a little. But the explanation had to be gone through.

"We met a chap in London," he said. "He saw me, and guessed that I was a relation of yours, by the likeness. You know I'm very like you, uncle."

"So you are, lad."

"Well, the chap wanted to find you out, and we thought it was none of his business, so we dodged him," said Hazeldene awkwardly.

The captain sat bolt upright in his chair.

"He wanted to find me out!"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He said he was an old friend of yours."

The captain set his lips. The juniors did not look at him. But they felt that he had grown pale under his brown skin.

"Do you know his name?"

"Pedro Ijurra."

"My Heaven!"

There was a crash on the hearth as the captain's pipe fell from his hand. Hazeldene sprang to his feet. Captain Cunliffe lay back in his chair, breathing heavily, pale as death.

"Uncle! You are ill!"

The captain waved him back.

"It's all right!" he muttered thickly. "Let me alone."

"But—"

"I am all right."

The captain recovered himself in a few moments. The juniors sat in awkward silence. The terrible shock the name had given the captain was only too apparent.

"And the man?" said Captain Cunliffe, after a pause. "What was he like?"

"A dark fellow—a South American."

"Did you see whether he—whether he had a scar upon his forehead?" said the captain, in a low voice. "Perhaps—"

"He had one," said Harry Wharton. "I saw it when he removed his hat."

"Ah!"

There was a long silence.

The captain picked up his pipe with a shaking hand, and relighted it. He smoked on for some minutes without speaking.

The juniors did not know how to break the silence.

"Tell me exactly what happened with that man and yourselves," said the captain, at last. "Spin me the whole yarn from the beginning."

Wharton quietly and concisely related how they had been tracked by the South American, and how they had eluded him finally by taking the boat at a point some miles farther up the coast.

The captain nodded approval.

"That was very keen of you!" he exclaimed. "Then the chances are that he has not followed you here."

"I should think not, sir."

Captain Cunliffe nodded.

"You—you startled me a little at first," he said slowly. "I think I owe you some explanation. I knew this man—long ago—in South America, and I have good reasons for not wanting to meet him again. That is all. I don't suppose you lads will see anything more of him. If you should do so, give him a wide berth. He is a dangerous character."

He rose to his feet.

"It will be time for you lads to be getting to bed now," he remarked.

Bunter rose from the table. Even the fat junior of Greyfriars was finished at last.

"Good-night, my lads!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The captain shook hands with the juniors, and they left him.

"Well, I'm jolly tired," Mark Limley observed, as he entered the bed-room. "I shall be glad to get to bed."

"The gladfulness will be terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I thoughtfully consider that we may sleep in the safe soundfulness, as the esteemed scoundrel Ijurra has quite lost our honourable track!"

Wharton went to the window, and pulled aside the blind and looked out.

The window opened on to the front of the old house, and gave a view to the garden with its shadowy trees, of the rocky path beyond, and the cove where the boat lay moored. Over all sailed the great, round moon.

The scene was almost as light as by day. Wharton's eyes swept the moonlit scene. At any moment he would not have been surprised to see the form of the mysterious South American start into sight.

But nothing stirred in the moonlight. He gazed from the window for several minutes. Suddenly there was a sound below, and he started.

A form loomed in the moonlight, but in a moment he recognised it as that of Captain Cunliffe.

There was a clink of a slackening chain, and a deep growl that reached the ear of the junior at the window.

The captain was releasing a dog, and Wharton caught a glimpse of a powerful mastiff as it bounded away into the shadows.

It was a proof of the watchfulness that the dweller of Black Rock House incessantly kept.

But why? What was it that Captain Cunliffe feared at the hands of the South American? Why was it that Pedro Ijurra was so grimly bent on tracking the captain to his home?

They were questions that Harry Wharton could not answer, but he went to bed in a very thoughtful mood, and in his dreams that night he saw again and again the dark and threatening face of the South American.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Morning Dip.

**H**ARRY WHARTON & CO. rose early the next morning. They tramped downstairs, and found Captain Cunliffe talking with Ben Topman in the little square hall.

The big door was wide open, and a fresh breeze blew in from the sea.

From the doorway glimpses of the deep blue water of the cove could be had through the trees and straggling bushes of the garden.

The captain was looking cheerful and bright, and there was no trace in his weather-beaten face of the emotion he had shown the previous evening at the mention of the name of the South American.

It seemed hardly possible to the juniors that this bluff, kindly old sea-dog was the man they had met under the trees, who had challenged them in a ringing voice and with a levelled revolver.

Indeed, in the bright sunlight the whole affair of the South American seemed less serious than it had seemed in the shadowy night.

The juniors were light-hearted enough now, and they hardly thought of the dark face of Pedro Ijurra.

"I thought I'd let you have your sleep out," the captain remarked, with a smile. "You must have been tired. How do you feel now?"

"Fit as a fiddle, sir!" said Wharton cheerily.

"Right as rain, uncle!" said Hazeldene. "We were thinking of having a dip in the cove before breakfast."

"Good! It shall be ready when you come in. Here, Duke!"

A huge mastiff came up at the call. It was the great animal Wharton had seen released into the garden in the moonlight.

The dog looked dubiously at the juniors, but a few words from the captain soothed him.

"You can pat his head," said Captain Cunliffe. "He will be friends with you; but he would be rough on a stranger who came into the place at night."

Wharton patted the mastiff's huge head. He was fond of dogs, and dogs generally liked him.

Billy Bunter came sulkily downstairs, and he blinked in a very doubtful way at Duke through his big spectacles.

"I—I say, you fellows, does that beast bite?" he asked.

The captain looked at the fat junior sharply.

"Duke will not hurt you," he said.

"He looks jolly dangerous."

"You need not be afraid of him."

"Oh, I'm not afraid!" said Bunter. "I'm a fearless chap, you know; but at the same time—"

"Here, Duke!"

The captain walked away, with the dog following him. Bunter breathed more freely.

As a matter of fact, Bunter would have been afraid of a poodle if it had shown its teeth.

"Come on, Bunt!" said Bob Cherry, passing his arm affectionately through that of the fat junior.

"Eh?"

"Take his other arm, Inky."

"Certainly!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on, or we sha'n't have time for a dip before brekker!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

Bunter began to struggle.

"I don't want a dip before brekker!" he roared. "I'm hungry! I've washed, too, and if I had a dip the same morning it would be a wash wasted."

"Oh, come on!"

"I won't! I—"

"Your mistake" grinned Cherry. "You will!"

The fat junior was run down the rocky path towards the cove at a speed that made him gasp.

The juniors surrounded him, and he could not escape. Hazeldene followed, grinning, with towels over his arm.

They reached the pebble ridge, and there they stripped off their clothes. A more solitary spot it would have been hard to imagine.

"What a jolly ripping place!" exclaimed Harry Wharton as he kicked off his boots.

"We shall have a jolly time here, Hazel!"

"The jolliffulness will be terrific!"

"I hope you will," said Hazeldene. "We ought to be able to get some fun, if that

"Ha, ha, ha! You've decided to bathe without your clothes, then?"

"Ow! Yes! Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter stripped off his clothes in hot haste, the juniors standing round in a ring to cut off his escape. The circle of them were roaring with laughter, but Bunter did not see anything humorous in the situation.

His jacket and vest came off in a twinkling, and his collar and tie followed.

He tore off his boots and socks. Then his shirt followed more slowly, and his wide trousers slowest of all.

He shivered as the keen breeze from the Atlantic caught his bare, fat legs.

"Ow! Groo! It's c-c-cold!"

"Jump into the water, then!"

"Is it—is it warm?"

"Dear me, I forgot to order Neptune to have the warm water laid on!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, smiting his chest.

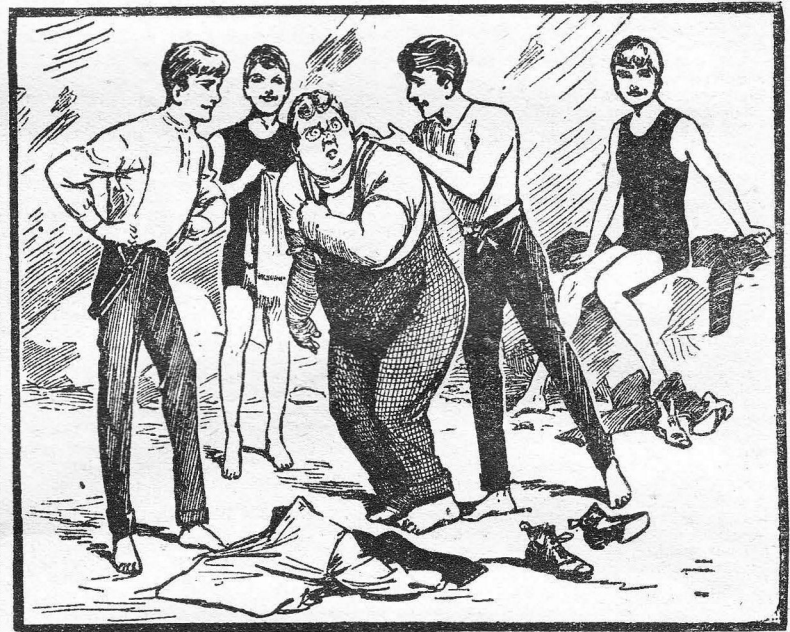
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Jump in!"

"I c-c-can't!"

"You c-c-can!" said Bob Cherry, taking the fat junior by the shoulders and giving him a sudden violent push. "There!"



Billy Bunter stripped off his clothes in hot haste, whilst the grinning juniors surrounded him, cutting off his escape. "Ow! Groo! It's c-c-cold!" he said. (See chapter 2.)

South American blackguard doesn't come bothering again."

"Oh, he's gone for good, I think!"

"I hope so!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Why, you're not undressing, Bunter—"

"I'm jolly well not going to undress! I—"

"Now, look here, Bunter, it's dangerous to bathe in sea-water with one's clothes on," said Bob Cherry, with a shake of the head.

"You might catch cold afterwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, it would spoil the clothes."

"You—you utter ass! I'm not going to bathe at all!" roared Bunter. "I don't like sea-bathing, especially so early in the season. I won't bathe!"

"Your mistake, Billy. You can bathe in your clothes, or out of them, but you're going to bathe!" said Nugent.

"I won't!"

"In with him!"

Bunter made a wild run for the path to the house, but he was caught and yanked back in a twinkling.

He yelled wildly:

"Ow, ow!"

"In with the porpoise!"

"Ow! Lemme undress first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Splash!

"Groo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter flopped face downward into the sea. He rolled over and struck out wildly.

He could swim—painful lessons at Greyfriars had taught him the art of natation, though his movements in the water were about as graceful as those of a barge.

The Owl of the Remove began to swim, puffing and blowing like a grampus, and turning a crimson, indignant face towards the juniors.

"Go it, Bunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo!" spluttered Bunter, ejecting a large dose of sea-water from his mouth. "Phew! Groo! Booh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beasts! I'm c-c-coming ashore!"

"You'll get chucked in again if you do, Bunt!"

"I—I—"

"Here, see who can catch him oftenest with these pebbles," said Nugent, stooping and collecting a handful of round pebbles.

"The chap who gets most out of twelve wins."

"Ha, ha! Good!"

In a moment pebbles were raining upon the water round the spluttering junior.

They did not hit Bunter, but he thought every moment that they would, and he puffed and blew and swam as fast as he could out into the bay.

Then the Greyfriars juniors plunged in. Bunter was having his morning dip, whether he liked it or not, and it was probably doing him good. Good or not, he was having it.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Enemy Again!

THE Greyfriars juniors plunged into the sea with great zest.

A quieter or safer spot for a bathe could not have been desired.

The morning was fresh, but not cold. The sea-water, however, felt warm after the crisp air.

The juniors swam out cheerily into the deeper water, and splashed and sported to their heart's content. They splashed one another, and splashed Bunter, to an accompaniment of shouts of merry laughter.

"What a ripping place for a swim!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Who's for a race?"

"Good!"

"First man out to the Point!" exclaimed Harry.

The Point closed in the bay to the north—a jutting tongue of rugged rock, rising abruptly from the sea.

It was a good half-mile from the beach opposite the house.

"Right you are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"The rightfulness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on, Bunt—y're going to swim out to the Point!"

"I'm jolly well not! I'm going in to breakfast."

"Come on!" roared Bob Cherry, splashing noisily towards the fat junior.

He did not really intend to bother himself with Bunter during the race; but Bunter thought he was in earnest, and he splashed hurriedly ashore.

"Come back!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yah!" gasped Bunter defiantly.

He scrambled out of the water and dashed up the beach at full speed, dripping with water, without waiting for his clothes.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob gasped with mirth as he rejoined his comrades. Harry formed them into a line.

"Ready to start?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Go!"

And the juniors struck out.

They were all good swimmers, thanks to their training in the Junior Naval Cadet Corps at Greyfriars. They all started well, and struck out manfully.

For the first hundred yards or so they kept level.

Then Hurree Jamset Ram Singh dropped behind. He swam on bravely, but the others were drawing steadily ahead of him.

Hazeldene dropped to the rear a few minutes later.

The nabob overtook him, and they swam on neck and neck, but the other four were well ahead.

For half the distance Wharton and Nugent, Cherry and Linley kept almost level, and then Nugent slackened down.

The three strong swimmers went ahead, and now the struggle was keen.

Not a word was spoken; they breasted the water in grim silence, all their energies thrown into the contest.

Had it been a struggle for a great prize the juniors could not have thrown more keenness into it.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry at last.

He dropped behind.

It was between Harry Wharton and the Lancashire lad now.

Harry had always been considered the finest junior swimmer at Greyfriars, but he knew that he had a dangerous rival in Mark Linley.

The sturdy Lancashire lad, always in the best condition and as hard as nails, was a tough customer to tackle in any way—whether at boxing, wrestling, running, or swimming.

And he seemed to be at the top of his form now.

Wharton fought on steadily, but it was all he could do to keep level with the Lancashire lad.

Mark was doing his best now.

The spit of rock was only a hundred yards away. It was the last lap, and all depended upon the next few minutes.

The extreme end of the point ran out to sea in a tongue of land rising hardly a few

feet from the water for a dozen yards or more beyond the abrupt rock.

Beyond that low tongue there came a glancing of white.

Both the juniors saw it.

It was the sail of a boat coming down the shore from the north. As yet the tongue of rock hid the boat and the man in it, but the white sail glanced into view over it.

The juniors saw it, but paid it little attention.

Sails, of course, were common enough on the coast, and they only imagined it to be a fisherman's craft from the northern shore.

The boat was evidently hugging the coast when they had observed it, and was, indeed, dangerously near to the rocks if anything like a swell had come on.

Fifty yards more!

Mark Linley was putting on a spurt now, and he drew ahead.

Wharton set his teeth hard.

He was determined not to be beaten.

He put everything he had into that last tussle. Slowly, inch by inch, he drew level again with the Lancashire lad, and then he passed him.

The spit of rock was a dozen yards ahead.

The water shallowed down, and Wharton dragged himself out of it, and turned, breathlessly, to wave his hand at Mark Linley.

The Lancashire lad had just touched ground, a yard behind.

He rose from the water with a breathless laugh.

"You've done it, Wharton!"

"It was a close thing, though."

The sail glanced under their eyes.

Standing on the rock, they could see across into the water on the other side—they could see the boat and the boatman.

Only his legs were visible for the moment, for he was handling the sheets, and the canvas hid the rest of him.

"Hallo!" called out Harry. "Look out for the rocks, my man!"

There was a sharp exclamation in the boat:

"Ha!"

Wharton started.

It was a hurried exclamation, but he fancied that the tone of it was familiar—that he had heard the voice before.

He changed colour a trifle.

"Linley!"

The Lancashire lad nodded quickly.

"I heard it, Harry."

"It was—"

"The man who shadowed us from London," said Mark quietly. "He has found us again. No; it's no good plunging in. He has recognised your voice."

"True."

The man in the boat emerged from behind the sail.

He was a lithe, powerful man, with black hair and eyes, and a face as brown as a berry. His eyes gleamed at the juniors.

"Ha! I have found you!" he exclaimed.

It was the South American!

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

#### Three Shots.

HARRY WHARTON compressed his lips. His face was dark and angry.

The South American had run them down again—close to the home of the man he was seeking.

There was something terrible in the relentless pursuit of this mysterious adventurer.

Nothing seemed to baffle him; he had found them again.

He laughed, showing his gleaming teeth under his black moustache, as he stood up in the boat looking at the juniors.

"I have found you again, senioritas."

Wharton gave him a savage look.

"Yes, you have found us," he said; "but I warned you yesterday that it would not be safe to run us down."

Ijorra laughed again.

"Bah! I have found you—"

"And now what do you want with us?" said Mark Linley.

The South American shrugged his shoulders.

"With you, nothing. I want Captain Cunliffe—El Capitano, as we called him in the South American waters, when we were shipmates."

Wharton started.

"Shipmates?"

"Why not?" said Ijorra.

"I do not believe it! You—a scoundrel like you—were never the shipmate of Captain Cunliffe!" exclaimed Wharton scornfully.

"You do not know what you are saying, little senior. But where is Captain Cunliffe, for your attempts to elude me convince me that he is near at hand? You are living

near, or you would not be bathing in the sea."

Wharton's brows contracted.

Again, unconsciously, the juniors had been the means of guiding the South American towards the home of the man he sought.

If he had not seen them now— But Wharton reflected that the South American was coasting along and examining the shore with the keenness of a hawk.

He would not have failed to explore the cove at Black Rock, and then he would have made the discovery.

Ijorra looked at the juniors with a mocking light in his eyes.

"Well," he said, "where is my old friend, Captain Cunliffe?"

"He is no friend of yours."

"But he will be glad to see me," said Ijorra, laughing.

"That is not true," said Harry, eyeing him steadily; "and you will get no answer from us."

"Bah! I shall not lose sight of you again."

The juniors exchanged a hopeless look.

The matter was now in the hands of the South American; there was no baffling him further.

"Let us return," said Harry quietly.

Mark nodded.

They plunged into the sea again, and swam slowly back to the beach.

They met the other juniors on the way, but no explanation was needed, for the South American's boat had glided round the point now, and was entering the bay.

Ijorra handled the boat well. It was clear that he was a scaman. He kept the craft well behind the juniors, but kept them in easy view.

But the swimmers were no longer necessary for his guidance. As he came into the bay he could see the smoke of Black Rock House rising above the trees.

His eyes gleamed at the sight.

He stood up in the boat, his hand upon a sheet, and looked steadily towards the shore, shading his eyes with his free hand.

From the cliff the column of smoke rose against the blue morning sky.

Beyond were cliffs on cliffs, here and there wooded at their summits where there was soil, in other places bare and grey.

From the cliffs on the southern side of the bay there came a sudden puff of white smoke, followed a moment later by a report that reverberated strangely among the rocks.

The South American uttered a cry.

A tiny round hole appeared in the sail of his craft.

"Carambo!"

The juniors were scrambling ashore now.

They, too, had heard the gunshot, and they imagined that it was someone shooting gulls.

They could see the puff of smoke curling away against the dark rock.

But as they looked towards the South American they saw that he did not imagine the marksman to be shooting at gulls.

Instead of standing up in the boat he was crouching down in it, concealed as much as possible by the gunwale, and the colour had waned in his dark cheek.

Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Good heavens! Look!"

"My hat! The chap on the cliff is firing at the boat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, agitated.

"At Ijorra, you mean!"

"Great Scott!"

Crack!

Another puff of smoke, another crack, from the distant cliff. The distance was great, but the aim was good.

There was a crack from the boat, audible across the silent bay, as the bullet crashed into the woodwork.

The juniors stood looking on with white faces.

All of a sudden they were brought face to face with tragedy—with a matter of life and death.

Who was firing from the cliff? His deadly intention could hardly be doubted.

The South American did not doubt it.

In the boat, if he rose above the gunwale, he was helplessly exposed to the aim of the marksman, but as he crouched he could not control the sail.

The wind caught it, and the boat heeled over and whirled.

It drove towards the rocks of the Point, and the South American could make no effort to stop it.

"He's going ashore!" muttered Linley.

"The safest place for him!"

Crack!

It was a third ringing report from the face

of the cliff. Of the marksman nothing could be seen.

He was hidden by the rugged rocks.

Crash!

The boat was on the rocky shore now.

The South American made a desperate spring to land, and disappeared among the rocks.

He had landed two hundred yards or more from the juniors, and they saw him for only a moment as he disappeared.

The boat pounded on the rocks, washed there by the waves, and the mast crashed over the side.

The South American did not reappear.

The juniors turned slowly towards the house. The strange and terrible occurrence had given them a shock. Hazeldene was white as a sheet.

"It—I can't be—" he muttered, and broke off.

Wharton looked at him.

"What do you mean, Hazel?"

"I—I was thinking my uncle—"

Harry started. It had not occurred to him before.

But who was firing from the cliff at the boat containing the South American?

Who at Black Rock had reason to fear his coming?

Was it possible that the captain—the dark thought was driven from the juniors' minds the next moment by a hearty voice breaking the silence.

"Tumble up, my lads! Breakfast is ready!" It was Captain Cunliffe. He had come down to the beach to meet them.

The juniors exchanged glances of relief. Captain Cunliffe was there, and he could not have been a quarter of a mile away on the southern cliff a few minutes before.

Whoever had fired those shots across the small bay, it was not their host.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Ventriloquism!

**B**ILLY BUNTER was already at breakfast when the Greyfriars juniors came in.

"I say, you fellows, the prog is jolly good here!" he remarked. "I think I shall enjoy my holiday, after all, Hazeldene."

Hazeldene did not reply. He was wearing a worried look; the mystery of the shots fired from the cliff were weighing upon his mind.

"Someone was out shooting early this morning," Captain Cunliffe remarked. "You heard the shots on the cliff, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Shooting gulls, I suppose," said Bunter, with his mouth full. "I'm rather a dab at shooting gulls, you know."

"Rats! You're a dab at drawing the long-bow!" said Nugent. "You're no good with a gun!"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly, and consoled himself with a fresh supply of kidneys and bacon.

The coming of the South American was weighing upon the minds of the juniors, and they felt that it ought to be mentioned to Captain Cunliffe.

After breakfast, Harry followed the captain into the garden, and told him.

The skipper's bronzed face turned a shade paler as he listened.

"You're sure it was Ijorra?" he asked.

"Oh, yea, sir! I spoke to him."

The skipper wrinkled his brows.

"And the shots from the cliff were fired at his boat?" he asked.

"Yes."

"But—but why, and by whom?" said Captain Cunliffe, very much puzzled. "Who should do so? I think it must have been some gull shooter, whose shots went near the boat by sheer chance. Don't you think that is possible?"

"The bullets struck the boat or the sail."

"That may have been accident."

"The South American did not think it an accident; he crouched under the gunwale, and let the boat run ashore," said Harry. "Of course, though, it may be as you think. I thought I ought to mention the matter to you."

"Quite right—quite right!" said the captain.

And Harry left him. Captain Cunliffe called after him.

"Then Ijorra is ashore here, Wharton?"

"Yes," said Harry, turning his head. "He went into the rocks on the south side of the cove."

"Thank you!"

Wharton rejoined his chums.

They had come out of the house in cheerful spirits, and Bob Cherry was seen fingering his

necktie, and trying to get it straight—almost a hopeless task with Bob.

Harry smiled as he saw it, and guessed at once what it meant.

"What time is Marjorie coming, Hazel?" he asked.

Hazeldene laughed.

"The girls get to Wynne Station at half-past ten," he said. "That's about a mile from here. It's the nearest railway point."

"We're going to meet them, of course?"

"Well, I am," said Hazeldene. "You fellows can come if you like."

"If we like!" said Nugent.

"The likefulness will be terrific, my worthy chum!"

"I don't see that it's necessary for all you fellows to come," Billy Bunter remarked. "I suppose Hazeldene ought to come, as he's Marjorie's brother, and if I go with him it seems to me that that will be enough."

"It will be too much," said Bob Cherry. "You can stay here."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"It's not fair on Clara and Marjorie to make them begin their holiday by seeing a chivvy like yours," said Bob. "Keep out of sight for a bit, and we'll break it gently to them."

"Look here—"

"We'd better start now," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

And Bob Cherry having given his offending necktie a final tug, which made it look more awry than ever, the juniors left Black Rock House, and followed the rocky path down the combe towards the railway-station, a mile away on the inland side of the great, grey cliffs.

The morning was fresh and bright, just the weather for a brisk walk.

Billy Bunter lagged behind, and grumbled at having to keep up with the others.

"I'll jolly well make 'em wait for me!" he murmured.

From the bushes beside the track the Greyfriars chums were following, a sudden voice rang.

"Halt!"

And they halted. For in that ringing shout they thought they recognised the well-known tones of the South American.

Wharton set his lips.

"He's here again, you chaps!"

"Let him show himself," said Mark Linley.

"We'll bump him!"

"Good egg!"

But no one appeared from the bushes.

Billy Bunter came panting up, and joined the juniors, but the bushes never stirred.

"Come out of there, you skulking coward!" called out Hazeldene. "Stand out here, and show your face!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter! If you're there, Ijorra, stand out!"

But there was no stir in the bushes.

"He's gone!" said Bob Cherry.

"Let's get on!"

The Greyfriars chums, greatly puzzled, strode on in their way.

Billy Bunter, grinning, lagged on in their rear. As soon as the juniors drew ahead, the voice called from the thickets again.

"Halt!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "This is a giddy joke, I suppose."

"Yes," exclaimed Nugent, rushing towards Billy Bunter; "and this is the giddy joker!"

"Ow!"

"I'll teach you to work off your giddy ventriloquism on us!" said Nugent, shaking the fat junior vigorously. "There—and there!"

"Yow! Ow!"

"Oh, it was that giddy ventriloquist, was it?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I might have guessed it, too! Hold him while I jump on him!"

"Ow! Yow!"

Billy Bunter wrenched himself free and ran. "Come back and be jumped on!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter did not accept that kind invitation. He ran on breathlessly, and the juniors, laughing, resumed their way to the station, and they did not hear any more mysterious voices.

Billy Bunter's ventriloquism was stopped for the time.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Makes a Bargain.

**O**W! Boasts!"

That was the remark Billy Bunter made when, stopping to take breath, he found that he was not pursued, and that the Greyfriars juniors were out of sight.

The fat junior stood gasping on the rocky path for a few minutes, blinking indignantly. Then he slowly followed the path the juniors had taken towards the village.

"Halt!"

It was a sudden voice from the thicket along the path.

Billy Bunter snorted.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" he exclaimed. "What's the good of working off a stale wheeze like that?"

And the fat junior tramped on, fully convinced that the challenge had come from one of the Greyfriars juniors who was playing a trick on him.

"Stop!"

"Rats!"

A figure came hastily through the bushes, and a man with a gun in the hollow of his arm stepped into view.

"Stop!" he repeated.

Bunter stopped.

He did not like the look of the stranger at all.

He was a little man—not much taller than Bunter himself—and one of his legs was curiously twisted, and he walked with a decided lameness.

His face was burnt dark by a tropical sun, and his eyes, deep-set and glittering, seemed to burn under his rugged, black brows.

The lame man hobbled in his path.

"Well, what do you want?" said Bunter feebly. "I haven't any money to give away. I'm stony-broke. I'm treated too jolly meanly by my friends to have any money to spare."

"I don't want your money, you young fool! What is your name?"

"William George Bunter, of Greyfriars School, Remove Form—"

"That's enough. Where are you staying in this neighbourhood?"

"With Captain Cunliffe."

"Ah! At Black Rock?"

"Yes."

The lame man nodded.

"You know Captain Cunliffe?" asked Billy Bunter.

The lame man laughed with a curious ring.

"Yes, I know him. But that is no business of yours. How is it that you boys are staying with Captain Cunliffe—he is generally alone, I believe?"

"We're spending the Easter vacation here."

"Oh, it is curious! Never mind. Has there been another visitor to Black Rock while you have been there?"

"Not that I know of."

"A foreign man," said the stranger—"a South American—a man with a scar on his forehead. He landed in the cove this morning, some hours ago. Have you seen him?"

"No."

"Then he is not at Black Rock?"

"He can't be without my seeing him," said Bunter. "Is he a friend of yours?"

The lame man chuckled.

"Yes, a friend—and a very old friend," he said. "I'm most anxious to see him. Listen to me, Bunter—"

"Bunter."

"Ah, Bunter! Listen to me. I want to know as soon as that man comes to Black Rock—you understand?"

"Ye-es," said Bunter, though he did not understand very clearly.

"You must let me know."

"I—I'll tell you anything with pleasure," said Bunter, beginning to think that he was dealing with a lunatic. "Would you like me to send you a postcard?"

"No, fool!"

"Oh, really—"

"I am never very far from Black Rock," said the lame man, with another of his curious chuckles. "Do you know the sundial in the garden?"

"I have seen it there."

"Well, as soon as you get any news of the South American, leave a note for me on the sundial in the garden, and I shall find it."

Bunter blinked at him.

"But—but—"

The man came closer to him.

His dark face and deep-set eyes assumed a terribly threatening look, which caused Bunter's heart to throb wildly.

"Hearken to me," said the lame man, in a low, hard voice. "I'd as soon blow your brains out as squash a fly! I've come from a country where it's not much thought of. Mind, I don't want to hurt you, but if you don't carry out my orders I'll make you sorry for it. Do you understand? If I find that

you have failed to obey me I will put a bullet through your head."

"Ow!"

"Mind, you are to do as I tell you, and not say a word to a soul," said the lame man threateningly—"not a word!"

"I—I—All right!"

"I don't want you to do it for nothing," went on the lame man, his voice softening a little as he saw that he had terrorised the fat junior sufficiently. "I'll pay you for what you do."

Billy Bunter brightened up.

"Now you're talking!" he exclaimed.

The lame man laughed.

"Look you, I will leave money for you on the sundial every evening—five shillings every time," he said. "Does that satisfy you?"

Bunter jumped.

"Five bob a day!"

"Yes."

"I'll do anything you like!" exclaimed Bunter eagerly. "You can rely on me. I'll leave you as many notes on the sundial as you like."

"Good! Leave one every morning, then, telling me whether anything has been seen of Pedro Ijorra, and I will leave the money in exchange."

"Jolly good! Perhaps you wouldn't mind paying the first lot in advance?" suggested Bunter. "I'm awfully short of money. I've been disappointed about a postal-order, you see, and—"

"Take this."

The man thrust a handful of small silver into the fat junior's palm, without even counting it. Bunter's eyes glistened.

"Remember what I have told you. Let me know anything that happens at Black Rock. If Ijorra actually comes there, you must come and tell me at once, without delay."

"But where—"

"I shall be on the cliffs on the south side of the cove. I shall see you coming, if it is daylight, with my field-glasses."

"Good! I'll do it," said Bunter. "I—I like you very much, you know, and I—I'm going to do it out of friendship. Of course, I regard this money simply as a loan."

The lame man did not seem to hear.

"Mind, not a word to a soul—even to your companions," he said.

"That's all right. They won't let me into all their secrets, and I jolly well won't tell them a word!"

"That is right. Don't forget." And the lame man disappeared among the thickets.

"By George!" murmured Bunter. He hurried on towards the village. He was in funds now, and when Billy Bunter was in funds the money always burnt in his pocket till he had spent it.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Marjorie Arrives.

"MARJORIE!" The Greyfriars chums were in good time at the station. They were on the platform when the train came rattling in.

Two pretty faces in charming hats looked from a carriage window.

They belonged to Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn, the girl chums of Cliff House.

Harry Wharton opened the carriage door and assisted the girls to alight.

Marjorie and Clara were all smiles.

"So jolly glad to see you!" exclaimed Harry.

"We're glad to see you all, too!" said Marjorie.

"Any luggage?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Shall I look after it? You know what these chaps are—they'd like to let it go on to Land's End."

"This is the last station," grinned Hazeldene. "Still, you may as well look for it. It will have to be sent after us to Black Rock. Our own luggage will be along some time to-day, too."

"I suppose we walk to Black Rock?" said Miss Clara brightly.

Harry laughed.

"Yes; that's the only way—except by aeroplane."

"Come on," said Nugent. "If Bob's going to look after the luggage, we may as well start."

Bob Cherry looked a little taken aback as the party walked out of the station.

He wanted to make himself useful, but not to be left behind.

He didn't spend very much time in looking after Marjorie's and Clara's trunks.

Then he hurried after his friends.

He overtook them in the little old-fashioned High Street of Wynne.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 12.

They walked out of the village, and entered upon the rocky path leading to Black Rock.

Marjorie and Clara were delighted with the scenery, and with the description they received of the lonely house of Captain Cunliffe.

"How jolly it will be!" Miss Clara remarked, in her boyish way. "I suppose there are caves in the cliffs, of course?"

"Heaps of them," said Hazeldene, with a grin. "Jolly dark and damp places they are, too."

"Then I shall explore them."

"That's a jolly good idea," remarked Nugent. "We might as well explore the caves this afternoon. It would be great fun."

"I've heard that the caves used to be used by smugglers in the good old times," Hazeldene remarked. "Old Ben showed me one, when I was here last, that used to have contraband cargoes stored in it, according to his account. You get to it by a path over the cliffs on the north side of the cove."

"Oh, let's explore it!" exclaimed Miss Clara.

"We'll go this afternoon," said Wharton. "Careful of the path there; it's steep."

They followed the rocky path, till suddenly at one end of it the open-wooded combe lay before them, with the sea rolling in the distance. Marjorie uttered an exclamation of delight.

"How beautiful!"

"Yes, rather!"

"But, look! Who is that?" exclaimed Marjorie suddenly.

The juniors followed the direction of her glance.

Upon a rock at some distance a figure stood, observing Black Rock House through a pair of field-glasses. It was the form of a small man, and he stood in an awkward attitude, with one leg strangely twisted.

He moved as the juniors looked at him, and lowered the glasses.

Though they were behind him, he seemed to have become aware of their presence.

"What a strange-looking man!" said Miss Clara.

"A sailorman, I should say."

The man looked down at them, and then limped away among the rocks.

"He is lame," said Nugent.

"Ahoj!" called out Bob Cherry. "Good-morning!"

The lame man did not reply.

He limped on without turning his head, and vanished among the rocks, and was gone in a few seconds.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Another queer customer," said Mark Linley.

Wharton nodded, and they walked on.

Who was the lame man, and why was he watching Black Rock House from the cliff path?

It was another mystery; and it seemed to Harry Wharton that a strange shadow of mystery was growing and thickening round that lonely house on the Devon coast.

What was to be the outcome of it all?

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### The Explorers.

"I SAY, Wharton, have you seen that South American chap again?"

Billy Bunter asked the question at lunch that day.

Wharton made him an angry sign to be silent.

The juniors had decided to tell the girls nothing of the strange pursuit of the ruffian from South America.

It might alarm them, and it could do no good. But they had reckoned without Billy Bunter.

The fat junior was not the kind of person to keep a secret.

"What are you scowling at me for, Wharton?" he asked.

Wharton coloured.

"Oh, shut up, Billy!"

"But I want to know—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Yes; but have you seen—"

"Pass the salt!"

"Anything of the—"

"Will you have some more pie?"

"Yes. The South American, Wharton?"

"No!" growled Harry at last.

"Sure he hasn't been here?" asked Bunter. "I want to know particularly. You see, he may be lurking round the house. I know

he landed in the cove this morning, after you had your swim."

"Do ring off!"

"After tracking us here all the way from London, I suppose he won't go off without coming here," said Bunter. "I don't know what his game is, but he's bound to show up here, I should think—Ow!"

"What ever is the matter?" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Ow! Some beast has stamped on my foot!"

"Shut up!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Ow! It was you! Look here, you fellows, I'm not going to stand this. If you didn't want me to say anything to Marjorie about the South American, you should have told me so!" howled Billy Bunter.

Wharton turned a crimson face towards the girls.

"It's nothing," he said. "We thought it might alarm you, that's all; but Bunter must put his foot in it as usual. A chap followed us here; we don't know what he wants, and he looks like a rascal. That's all."

"He had a knife—"

"Bosh!" said Wharton. "Shut up!"

And Billy Bunter shut up at last.

Marjorie and Clara were looking very serious.

After lunch, when they went out, Marjorie referred to the matter again.

"I'm sorry Bunter told me, as you didn't want me to know, Harry," she said. "But who is the man—the South American?" Wharton shook his head.

"I know his name, and that's all I know about him," he said. "I'll tell you the whole yarn, as you know about the man now."

And he did. Marjorie and Clara listened attentively.

"My word!" said Miss Clara. "It's quite an adventure."

"I am afraid the man must mean my uncle some harm," said Marjorie.

"At all events, he is on his guard now," said Harry. "And while we are here the South American wouldn't have much chance against all of us."

"No, that is true."

"Are you ready to start for the cliffs?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming up. "It's a ripping afternoon for exploring the caves."

"We're ready."

And in ten minutes the girls were ready, too.

The whole party started out from Black Rock, and followed the curve of the little cove towards the northern cliffs.

The sea rolled blue and bright under the bright sun, and the waves broke in little ripples on the pebbles.

"You're guide, Hazel!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as they neared the abrupt rise of the cliffs. "Which way now?"

"Follow me, kids!"

Hazeldene led the way, clambering over rock after rock, and the juniors kept on his track, the girls keeping well up.

"Here's the path!" exclaimed Hazeldene suddenly.

It was a narrow ledge winding up the face of the cliff.

It was not more than two feet wide in the widest place, and on one side was the steep cliff rising abruptly; on the other, as they advanced, the rock fell sheer away.

The path was terribly dangerous to any save those who had clear and steady heads. Harry Wharton paused.

"This isn't safe for you girls," he said.

Miss Clara tossed her golden head.

"Stuff!" she remarked.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"But it really isn't," he said. "What do you say, Marjorie?"

"Are you going on, Harry?"

"Yes."

"If it is safe for you, it is safe for us," said Miss Clara in her most decided tone.

"Isn't it, Marjorie?"

"Certainly," said Marjorie, smiling.

"Oh, come on!" said Hazeldene, from ahead. "Marjorie's been over rougher paths than this, Wharton. Buck up!"

"Right-ho, then!"

And they pressed on.

Cool and calm-nerved as the Greyfriars juniors were, they became very quiet and serious as they advanced up the rocky ledge.

A slip of the foot meant a fall, and a fall meant certain death upon the hard rocks a hundred feet below the ledge.

"Where's the cave, Hazel?" asked Mark Linley at last.

"Just ahead."

Hazeldene halted a few minutes later. In the great, looming cliff on the right hand appeared a huge fissure, extending into deep darkness in the depths of the cliff.

The juniors gathered at the opening and looked into it.

"And this is where the smugglers used to store their contraband stuff?" Bob Cherry remarked.

"So the fishermen say."

"Blessed if I know how they got it up the cliff, then," said Bob. "It must have been a pretty good bit of trouble carrying kegs up the way we came."

"They used to sling them up on ropes from the beach," said Hazeldene. "Old Ben says there are still the iron clamps stuck in the cliff that they used to fasten the ropes to."

"Oh, I see!"

Mark Linley was lighting a bicycle lantern. The sunlight extended for some distance into the cave; but after that all was dark.

"What a jolly place!" exclaimed Miss Clara, clapping her hands, and the clap came back echoing from the cave with a sound like thunder. "How it echoes!"

"The echofulness is terrific," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But hark! I thinkfully believe I hear the sound of voices."

Hazeldene shook his head.

"Not likely to be anybody else here," he remarked. "Nobody ever comes here. Why—"

He was suddenly interrupted.

From the interior of the cave came suddenly a deafening report, followed by a fierce cry and the sound of running feet.



From the cliffs came a sudden puff of white smoke, followed later by a report. The South American uttered a cry.

(See Chapter 4.)

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### Exploring the Cave.

**M**ARJORIE turned quite white, and clung to Harry Wharton's arm.

"What—what was that?" she exclaimed.

"It sounded like a shot."

"It was a shot!" said Bob Cherry.

They stared into the cave.

It was still full of echoing sound, and amid the echoes came that sound of running feet—feet approaching the entrance where the group of juniors stood.

Who was it that was running from the gloom of the cavern towards them?

They did not have to wait long to see.

The lithe form of the South American loomed up in the shadows. He had a broken and extinguished lantern in his hand, and his face was pale and startled.

He did not see the juniors for the moment. He came running out of the cave, upon the ledge, and then he suddenly halted as he saw them.

A gleam of fury darted into his eyes.

"Stand aside!" he exclaimed fiercely.

The juniors drew aside to let him pass; they had no desire to stop him.

Ijra did not give them a second look.

He ran past them down the rocky ledge. In his haste, sending stones clattering over the edge of the steep path, to fall with faint clinking upon the rocks far below.

His speed was so great, in spite of the peril of the path, that he disappeared from the view of the juniors in a few moments.

He left them utterly astonished.

At the bottom of the steep path a fat junior sat upon a rock, asleep, and his eyes opened behind his big spectacles at the sight of the South American.

"By George!" murmured Billy Bunter.

"It's the chap!"

Ijra gave him a savage look, and the fat junior promptly squirmed off the rock, and dodged behind it.

The South American ran on and disappeared.

At the mouth of the cave, high up on the cliff, the Greyfriars juniors were looking at one another in blank surprise.

"Blessed if I can make it out," said Bob Cherry, at last. "What was he afraid of? He seemed to be scared out of his wits."

"He looked like it."

"The pistol-shot explains it, I think," said Harry Wharton quietly. "There is someone else in the cave."

"Can't see anything of him," said Nugent, straining his eyes into the darkness.

"But he's there." Wharton hesitated.

"Marjorie, do you feel inclined to go into the cave, after—after that?"

Marjorie was still a little pale.

"Why not?" exclaimed Miss Clara. "Whoever is there has no reason to harm us, I suppose?"

"That's so, certainly."

"Let's go on," said Hazeldene. "There are enough of us to be safe, I should think."

"Quite safe," said Mark Linley.

"Yes, let us go in," Marjorie said.

And they went in.

Mark Linley carried the lantern, and flashed the light ahead as they advanced into the gloomy depths of the cavern.

"Look out!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "This is a jolly unsafe place to tumble in. There's a big gap in the ground here somewhere, and if a chap fell into it, he would never get out alive, I think."

"By Jove, you're right!" said Harry, halting. "Here it is!"

The lantern light gleamed upon a yawning gap in the rocky floor of the cavern—a black pit, extending to unknown depths.

Bob Cherry picked up a stone and dropped it into the opening.

The juniors heard faint echoes as it bounded from side to side, striking first one rocky wall and then the other—then silence.

They did not hear it touch the bottom.

Marjorie shuddered a little.

"What a dreadful place!" she said. "Let us get away."

And they went on their way, taking care to give the pit a wide berth.

The cavern was a huge one, extending deep into the heart of the great cliff, and smaller

hollows branched off from it in various directions.

The juniors were peering into one of them, when there was a sound of footsteps in the cave behind them, and they turned round quickly.

A dim form appeared for a moment as Linley flashed the lantern round—that of a lame man, limping towards the mouth of the cavern.

He was gone in a second.

The juniors stared after him blankly. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry, his voice ringing curiously through the deep hollows of the cavern. "Who are you?"

There was no reply.

The stranger had vanished as quickly as he had appeared, and the juniors saw no more of him.

"Who—who could that be?" murmured Marjorie.

"The man who fired the shot we heard," said Nugent.

"I—I think I have seen enough of the cavern," Marjorie said uneasily.

Wharton nodded.

"We'll get back."

And the explorers left the cave.

They descended the rocky path in silence.

The strange happenings in the smugglers' cave had left a curious impression upon them.

To all of them it seemed at that moment as though some strange tragedy were brooding in the air.

Mystery was being piled upon mystery, and the juniors were as far from solving it as ever.

And as they wended their way back to Black Rock, each one of them was thoughtful and quiet. But think as they would, an explanation of the amazing mystery would not come to them.

Their recent adventures had been of a strange and exciting nature, but although they did not realise it, still more exciting adventures were in store for them ere they departed from Black Rock.

THE END.

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## THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Trap for Bulkeley!

FROM Bulkeley's study came the sound of raised voices. Bulkeley of the Sixth, the captain of Rookwood, the idol of the Classical side, had visitors. And from the sounds that proceeded from the study it was evident that Bulkeley and his visitors did not find themselves in agreement. Bulkeley's visitors were seniors from the "Modern" side—Knowles and Catesby. The sharp, unpleasant voice of Knowles came distinctly from the study, backed up by the grumbling tones of Catesby. The pacific voice of old Bulkeley could hardly be heard.

The talk ran on cricket. And it was growing excited.

"Three Moderns against eight Classics—it's a little too thick!" exclaimed Knowles warmly.

"If you had the men, I'd play 'em," retorted Bulkeley.

"Well, we think we've got the men. I fancy we shall give your side a tussle to-morrow in the trial match, anyway."

"I hope you will, Knowles. I want to see both sides play up. But the fact is, your side have been slacking a lot—"

"I don't admit anything of the sort!"

"I suppose you don't think the Modern team will keep its end up against the Classics in the trial match?" said Bulkeley, a little irritably.

"Yes, I do."

"Certainly," chimed in Catesby. "I think very likely our team will beat you to the wide, Bulkeley."

"Very well, Catesby. If the Modern team beats us to-morrow, I'll admit that I've made a mistake in the selection of the First Eleven. Beat us on the field, and you'll prove that your men are better than I've thought."

"So you say now!" sneered Knowles.

"Oh, he can't stand that!" gasped Lovell.

But Bulkeley stood it.

"I say it now, and I will stand to it, Knowles. If the Modern team beats the Classic team in the trial match it will show that I've made a mistake, and I'll admit it, and prove it by putting six Moderns in the First Eleven."

"It's a go!" said Knowles. "Come on, Catesby!"

And the Modern seniors left the captain's study, and returned to their own quarters.

Knowles was smiling as he came into his study on the Modern side. Catesby followed him into the study, looking considerably puzzled.

Knowles kicked the door shut, and lighted a cigarette. He smiled at Catesby through a blue haze of smoke.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," said Catesby, "I'm blessed if I understand!"

"What don't you understand?"

"You seem to be jolly well satisfied," said Catesby.

"I am satisfied," said Knowles, with a nod.

"Well, I don't see it. It seems to me that we're beaten all along the line. When the trial match comes off to-morrow, the Classics will win hands down. We can say what we like over there, Knowles, but you know as well as I do that the Modern Eleven will never beat the Classic team. It wasn't easy to scrape up a senior eleven on our side at all. We've got half a dozen good men, but the rest are very scrappy. And Bulkeley's team is nearly all good stuff."

"Between ourselves, I suppose we may admit that," assented Knowles.

"Well, then," argued Catesby. "The First Eleven is going to be picked from the best men on both sides. Bulkeley had already agreed to take three of us—yourself and

Frampton and me. We've simply wasted time over there."

"Hardly. Bulkeley has agreed that if the Modern team beats him in the trial match, we get six men in the School Eleven."

"But we can't beat him, and you know it."

"I don't know it," said Knowles calmly.

Catesby stared at him. Catesby was hand in glove with Knowles, and prepared to back him up to any extent in securing the Moderns their rights, or a little more than their rights. To have a majority in the First Eleven was the keenest ambition of the Modern seniors.

"If you've got anything in your head, you may as well tell me," said Catesby, at last. "I'm quite in the dark. How can we beat the Classics? Not on our form."

"So long as we beat them, Bulkeley will have to keep his word."

"I know that. But—"

"We're going to beat them," said Knowles. "A lot in cricket depends on the captain. If the Classics had to play under another skipper to-morrow, it would make a big difference."

"Of course it would; but they're not likely to give Bulkeley the go-by to please us."

"They may have no choice. Besides, Bulkeley is their best man. He is a good change bowler, a reliable field, and a whacking batsman. Their biggest score will come from Bulkeley. Without him I don't believe their score will even tie with ours."

"But they won't play without him!" almost shrieked Catesby. "Why should they?"

"Not if they can help it, of course."

Catesby started.

"Dash it all, Knowles!" His voice faltered a little. "You don't mean to say you're thinking of some dodge for nobbling Bulkeley?"

Knowles ceased to smile; his face grew harder, and his eyes had an unpleasant, greenish glint in them.

"This isn't a time to be particular," he said. "Of course, this is strictly between ourselves, Catesby."

"We're fairly in for it," pursued Knowles. "We've set out this term to down Bulkeley. We're going to make our side top side of Rookwood. The fellows depend on us to keep their end up. We're all fed up with Classical swank. Every fellow on that side is a swanking cad, from Bulkeley down to the littlest fag. They're up against us because we have more money, more brains, and generally because we're the Modern side, and their mouldy old side is going to the dogs. Well, we're going to help it get there."

"Hear, hear!" said Catesby heartily.

"This season we're coming out strong on cricket. If we play our cards well, we may get the school games right in our hands, and we may be able to shift Bulkeley—"

"By gad!"

"That's the goal. You know very well I ought to be captain of Rookwood, and you ought to be vice-captain, Catesby."

"Of course, I see that. But Bulkeley is a pretty good skipper; the Classics stand by him to a man, and a lot on our side back him up no end."

"We've got to alter all that, and we're going to begin by getting a good representation in the School Eleven. Bulkeley was talking a bit too loosely this afternoon, but he will have to keep his word; I shall nail him down to it. If we beat the Classics in the trial match, we get six men into the First Eleven. If they don't play Bulkeley, we shall beat them. Well, then, the long and the short of it is, they won't play Bulkeley. I shall fix it."

"Oh, Knowles!"

"The game's worth the candle," said Knowles. "Of course, it will have to be kept awfully dark."

"I should jolly well say so!" gasped

Catesby. "Why, the fellows on our side would scrag us if they suspected."

"They won't suspect," said Knowles coolly. "I can fix it for Bulkeley to be called away just before the match on a fool's errand—and he's too fatheaded ever to suspect that I had a hand in it himself. If he did suspect he wouldn't dare to say so—there wouldn't be an atom of proof. Of course, I shall get a third party to do the trick."

"My hat!"

"Joey Hook is the man," said Knowles, "the fellow who drove us in the car to the races the other day—another little secret of ours."

Knowles grinned. "He can work it. I shall wire to him to meet us somewhere, where I've met him before, out of sight—the old barn."

"But—but is it safe to send a wire like that?"

"Fathead! We've got a code, the same we use when it's a wire about horses."

"Oh, I see!"

Knowles sat down to the table, and drew pen and ink and a telegraph-form towards him. Catesby read over his shoulder as he wrote:

"John Harris, Ivy Cottage, Lanchester. Six—C. K."

"That's his name for telegrams," explained Knowles. "And when I don't mention a place of meeting he knows it's the old barn. See?"

"Oh, good!" said Catesby. "Puzzle anybody to guess anything from that."

"If he's not at home, they'll phone him wherever he is, so that's all right; I've given him plenty of time." Knowles opened the study door, and shouted: "Fag!"

Tommy Dodd of the Fourth came along.

"Take this telegram to the post-office, Dodd, and send it off at once. Here's a tanner!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" said Knowles irritably.

"I'm going down to cricket practice this afternoon," said Tommy Dodd. "We're keen about it, you know. We're making Smythe put some new men in the junior team."

"Take that wire at once, you young sweep! It's important."

"Not so jolly important as our cricket practice," said Tommy Dodd, backing away as he spoke, however.

"Why, you—" Knowles caught up a cane.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Tommy Dodd. "Anything to oblige a nice chap like you, Knowles. You're always so kind and considerate."

Tommy Dodd dodged away before Knowles could reach him with the cane.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### "Taking Cover."

WELL hit!"

Jimmy Silver grinned as he watched the ball in its flight. He strolled off the pitch, tossing the bat to Jones minor, and joined Lovell and Raby and Newcome outside the pavilion.

"Nuff for to-day!" remarked Jimmy Silver. "What price a stroll out, my infants? We'll drop in for tea at Coombe, al fresco—what!"

The Classical quartette sauntered off. They stopped in the ancient village of Coombe for ginger-pop, by way of refreshment, and then started on a long walk across the heath. Jimmy Silver was a keen walker, and the Co. weren't going to admit that they were not just as good walkers as he, so they followed Jimmy's lead without demur, and left Rookwood a very considerable distance behind.

"Thinking of walking to London?" asked Raby at last.

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"Or Manchester?" queried Newcome sarcastically.

Jimmy Silver grinned. "Let's get back to Coombe now," he said. "I'm ready for tea now—quite. It's only three miles, following the footpath."

"Blow the footpath!" said Lovell. "There's a short cut in less than a mile; we go by that old quarry where you pulled me out once. I'd like to have a look at that quarry again."

"Right you are!" said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

The Classical Four followed a track, guided by Lovell, which led them past the old quarry, where Lovell had once had a narrow escape, and had been rescued by Silver. It was that incident that had healed the breach between them, and made them great chums. They both remembered it as they passed the quarry. A little later the old barn came in sight.

The Fistical Four had good reason to remember that deserted old building. They had been imprisoned there by the Modern juniors on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion when Tommy Dodd & Co. had japed them.

They were sauntering towards the barn, knee-deep in grass and ferns, when Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hook it, quick!"

"What's the row?"

"Into the barn, I tell you—sharp's the word!"

Jimmy Silver caught Lovell by the arm, and rushed him at headlong speed into the old barn. Raby and Newcome, much surprised, followed at a run. They did not understand in the least what Jimmy Silver was acting in that remarkable manner for, but they knew he must have a good reason.

Jimmy Silver panted as they stopped in the barn.

"Prefects, my sons!"

"Oh!" said the Co. They understood then. The old Coombe quarries and their vicinity were strictly out of bounds for the juniors, owing to the dangerous nature of the locality. To be "spotted" there by prefects meant lines and a gating, and perhaps a caning.

"Blessed if I saw them!" said Raby.

"Lucky for you you had your Uncle Jimmy with you, then," said Silver cheerfully. "Two rotten Modern prefects. No business to report Classics, of course; but they'd do it all the same, and Bootles would warn us."

The four juniors cautiously approached the old window, which was partly covered by a broken shutter, and peered out through the opening. Knowles and Catesby of the Sixth were in full view, crossing the heath towards the barn. They were talking together as they came, and evidently had seen nothing of the juniors. Jimmy Silver's prompt action in taking cover had saved the chums of the Fourth from a discovery that would have had unpleasant consequences. Knowles would have been delighted to report them for being out of bounds.

The juniors grinned as they watched the Sixth-Formers from the cover of the barn.

"Poor old Knowlesy! He doesn't know what he's missed," remarked Lovell. "Might have got us a licking all round if he'd been a bit sharper. We'll lie low here till he's cleared off."

"I suppose they can't be coming here," muttered Silver uneasily.

"Why should they? They haven't seen us."

"I know that; but they're coming straight towards the barn."

The juniors watched in silence from the window. There was no doubt of it. Knowles and Catesby had left the path, and were striking across towards the barn directly. It was clear that the old barn was their destination.

The Fistical Four exchanged extremely uneasy glances.

"Spotted after all, it looks like," murmured Raby.

"We're not spotted yet," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Get up into the loft."

"Good egg! If they don't hear us, it will be all right. They can't be going to stop long, I should think."

"We'll take good care they don't hear us."

Jimmy Silver swarmed up the rickety old ladder into the loft, and his chums followed him quickly. Knowles and Catesby were very close at hand now. Silver closed the creaking, cracked trapdoor over the ladder.

The ancient boards under their feet creaked as they moved.

"Quiet!" whispered Silver. "If we're spotted, it means Saturday afternoon deten-

tion, and no cricket practice, as well as being marched back to the school by a Modern cad. Sit down, and don't even breathe."

That command was a little difficult to execute. However, the chums of the Fourth sat down, and breathed softly. Through chinks in the dilapidated floor of the loft they could see into the barn below. In a few minutes there was a sound of boots on the old brick floor, and Knowles and Catesby entered. Knowles looked round the barn.

"Not here yet," he remarked.

"We're early," said Catesby, looking at his watch. "It's only a quarter to."

"Better early than late. Have a fag?"

"Thanks!"

The two prefects lighted cigarettes, and stood leaning against the old door of the barn, smoking and chatting—and waiting.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A Startling Discovery.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. exchanged glances of deep disgust and indignation.

Smoking was strictly prohibited by all the rules of Rookwood, and if Knowles had caught a fag smoking he would have been "down" on him like a hundred of bricks. Yet here he was smoking himself with Catesby. Knowles was evidently one of those authoritative persons whose maxim is, "Do as I say, not as I do."

The scent of tobacco and the murmur of voices floated up to the juniors in the loft. Through the chinks in the floor they could see the two seniors quite plainly.

They did not venture to make a remark—their own voices might have been heard. Now that they had seen Knowles smoking, it was more than ever necessary to keep their presence a secret. Knowles had a cane—a malacca—under his arm, and the Classical four had no desire whatever to make closer acquaintance with that malacca.

The juniors were in a state of dismay. It was not easy for four energetic young gentlemen to keep as still as mice for any lengthy period of time. And it looked as if Knowles and Catesby had come there to meet somebody, and there was to be an interview. There was no telling how long the Classical juniors might be kept shut up in the loft.

But there was no help for it. They had to grin and bear it.

The minutes passed very slowly. They saw Knowles look at his watch several times.

"Dash it all! It's well past six!" said Knowles. "He ought to be here."

"I suppose he got the telegram?" said Catesby.

"If he didn't they'd have telephoned to him. I know he's not away—I saw him yesterday."

Again the Classical juniors exchanged silent looks.

They began to be interested, and also uneasy. Knowles was evidently keeping a secret appointment. He would not have come such a long way without good reasons. But the Classical chums had no desire whatever to hear his little secrets, whatever they were. But there was no choice about the matter if the interview was held directly below them in the barn. They could hardly be expected to hand themselves over to punishment for the sake of Knowles' heastly secrets. And Jimmy Silver reflected grimly that Knowles had accused them of eavesdropping that afternoon. It would serve Knowles right!

They would gladly have got out of hearing, however, if it had been possible. But it was not possible. Anywhere in the loft they could have heard the voices below—and they could not even stir without risk of discovery.

The Co. looked silently and inquiringly towards Jimmy Silver. Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. It could not be helped.

Knowles was uttering impatient exclamations every few minutes. But at last Catesby, who was looking out of the doorway, called out:

"Here he comes!"

Another minute or two, and a man entered the barn. He was a man of medium height, with a borsy look, a gaudy tie, and a bowler hat cocked on one side of his head.

"You're late, Hook," said Knowles irritably. "Sorry, Master Knowles! I 'ad to get 'ere, you know."

In the loft above Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged eloquent glances. They had seen Joey Hook before, hanging round the Black Bull and the Bird-in-Hand at Coombe. He was a gentleman of sporting proclivities, with a kindly predilection for helping anybody who wanted to put a "bit" on a gee-gee. Any fellow with that kind of sporting taste found a friend in Joey Hook; and to judge by the

amount of liquid refreshment Joey Hook imbibed at the Bird-in-Hand, he did very well out of it.

"My only hat!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "Knowles—Catesby—a bookmaker—a sporting tout! Oh, ye gods and little fishes!"

It was a startling discovery, and the Classical chums almost trembled at the bare thought of Knowles discovering their presence now.

"I s'pose it's somethin' on a 'orse—wot?" said Mr. Hook. "I rely came as soon as I could, Master Knowles. You 'eard something for the Spring 'Andicap?"

"It's not that," said Knowles—"quite a different matter. You remember you picked us up in a car the other day—"

"Yes."

"I suppose you could bring the car out to-morrow?"

"Suttinly!"

"You could come rigged out as a chauffeur I suppose—respectable sort of chauffeur, with goggles and so on?"

Joey Hook stared.

"Suttinly I could," he replied. "But why—"

"I want you to do me a good turn," said Knowles. "It will be worth a quid to you and the expenses of the car. It will take up to-morrow afternoon."

"I'm at your service, Master Knowles. I don't quite see—"

"I'm going to explain. You know Bulkeley of Rookwood—a big fellow in the Sixth Form?"

Joey Hook scowled.

"Don't I know 'im!" he said. "He punched my 'ead once 'cause he found me talkin' to young Master Leggett. Punched my 'ead, the scoundrel!"

"Then he knows you by sight?" said Knowles uneasily.

"Oh, yes! Wot about it?"

"I suppose you could rig yourself up in driving-goggles so that he wouldn't know you?"

"Easy as winkin'. But—"

"Well, I want you to call at the school with the car to-morrow afternoon—"

"At the school!" ejaculated Joey Hook, his eyes opening wide.

"Yes—got up us a very respectable chauffeur, of course. You'll ask Mack, the porter, for Master Bulkeley. You'll give him a message that old Mr. Bulkeley—that's Bulkeley's uncle—has become seriously ill, and is sinking fast. You're old Mr. Bulkeley's chauffeur, and you've been sent in the car to fetch him quick."

"My eye!" said Joey Hook, in a state of great astonishment. "Wot is it—a lark on that there Bulkeley?"

"That's it," said Knowles—"pulling his leg, you know. It will take him away from a game for the afternoon, and worry him no end. You don't object to that?"

Joey Hook chuckled.

"No fear! I'm your man!"

"Old Mr. Bulkeley lives at Shoresmouth—that's thirty miles or so. He lives at the Elms, a place outside the town. Well, you'll take as much time as you can getting there—use up the afternoon, you know. Have a puncture, if you like, at some place where there's no railway-station en route—or say the road's up, and go a long way round; anything you like so long as you use up time. Finally land him at the Elms. While he's gone into the house and is finding out that his uncle's the same as ever you can clear off in the car and leave him there."

Joey Hook burst into a hoarse laugh.

"What a game!" he said.

"He won't know you again. He'll know somebody has spoofed him, and that's all," said Knowles. "You'll get away quite safely while he's interviewing his uncle and finding out that the old gent isn't at death's door."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"He can get back from Shoresmouth by train. It's a cross-country journey, and he will have to change three times, so he won't arrive at Rookwood in a hurry—not before dark. I fancy. It's easy enough for you," said Knowles.

"Easy as winkin', Master Knowles. What a young gent you are! I'll be glad to serve him a turn, too—punchin' my 'ead, the scoundrel, for 'av'ing a word with Master Leggett! You rely on me, Master Knowles. I'll be sich a respectable chauffeur that you wouldn't know me yourself. I can borrow a chauffeur's livery easy enough, and look like an old family servant. I'll rig a spool number on the car, in case he notices, too. You leave it to me!"

"Right! Get to the school not later than two. It's a half-holiday, you know, and

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stumps are to be pitched at two. Get there at half-past one to make sure."

"'Arf-past one it is!" said Joey Hook. "That'll be a quid for me and a quid for the car, Master Knowles!"

Knowles nodded. The prosperous banker's son had plenty of money. He would have spent much more than that to deprive the Classical seniors of Bulkeley's services for the afternoon if it had been necessary.

"Here's a quid," said Knowles. "I'll send you the other afterwards—a currency note to your address at Lanchester."

"Right you are, Master Knowles. You rely on me!"

"Time we got back," said Catesby, who had listened without speaking a word. "It looks to me like an easy catch!"

"Easy as winkin', Master Catesby."

"Good-bye, Joey! I shall see you on Saturday as usual!"

With a nod to the dingy blackguard, Knowles went out of the barn with Catesby. The sporting tout remained a few minutes to light a cigar and let the Rookwood seniors get clear. It would not have done for Knowles to risk being seen in the company of Joey Hook.

Mr. Hook chuckled gleefully over his cigar.

"My eye!" he murmured. "What a lark on Mister 'Igh-and-Mighty Bulkeley! And wot a precious rascal Master Knowles will make when he grows up! He, he, he!"

And Mr. Hook departed in his turn, and the old barn was deserted—save for the four juniors silent in the loft.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### "Mum's the Word!"

**W**ELL! Jimmy Silver broke the silence at last with that ejaculation.

The Classical chums were trembling with indignation and horror.

The rascally plot had been unfolded under their very noses; they had heard every word from beginning to end.

"The cads! The rotters!" spluttered Lovell. "Let's get straight back to Rookwood and tell Bulkeley!"

"He'll lick Knowles for that, surely?" said Raby.

"Even Bulkeley wouldn't stand that!" "What a lark for old Bulkeley to lick that howling cad!" said Newcome. "And to show him up to the whole school, too! Come on, Silver! What are you moaning about?"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy Silver.

"We can go to Bulkeley, and I'll tell you what'll happen. Bulkeley will think it's a yarn we've made up because that Modern cad has bullied us. He'll send for Knowles, and put it to him plain. Knowles will deny every word, and complain to the Head. We shall be flogged for saying such things about a prefect!"

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

"And then," added Jimmy Silver, "this little scheme being knocked on the head, Knowles will lay some other scheme to dish Bulkeley very likely, so we shall have done it all for nothing. He won't talk over the next scheme under our noses!"

"B-b-but what's to be done, then?" said Lovell, quite limply. "You don't suggest letting him rip, and letting old Bulkeley be spoofed to-morrow?"

"No fear! We've got to think it out,"

said Jimmy Silver; "but it's no good starting by getting ourselves hauled up before the Head for slammng a prefect. My dear kid, if we told this to the fellows in the Fourth they'd think it was gammon. Wouldn't you, if Jones or Townsend came to you with such a yarn?"

"I—I—I suppose I should," said Lovell, after a pause.

"Mum's the word!" said Jimmy Silver. "Speech is silver, and silence is golden. In this case, Silver is silent!" he added, with a grin. "We've got to have a pow-wow over this, and think it out. We've got to prevent Knowles dishing old Bulkeley; but we can't prevent it by getting ourselves into an awful scrape and leaving Knowles free to lay another little scheme. Let's get out!"

In silence the Classical chums quitted the old barn, and took their way to Rookwood.

It was too late for tea at Combe now; they had only time to get in before locking-up.

Almost in silence they walked back to the school.

The Co. thought it over, and they realised that Jimmy Silver was right. If they had carried out their first impulse to rush off to Bulkeley with the news of the rascally plot there was no doubt that the cunning Knowles would have "dished" them, and their attempt to "back up Bulkeley" would have recoiled on their own heads. Indeed, the three juniors shivered to think what might have happened to them but for Jimmy Silver's foresight.

"The fellow's a criminal—simply a criminal!" gasped Lovell at last.

Jimmy Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"He's not much better," he said. "But it's no jolly good saying so in public without a lot of proof."

"But what are we to do, then?" said Newcome helplessly.

"That wants thinking out. We'll have a pow-wow over tea."

Tea in the end study was a somewhat thoughtful meal that evening.

To go to Bulkeley with the story was impossible, for the reasons Jimmy Silver had made very clear. But to stand aside and let the Modern prefect's plot be carried out was still more impossible.

"We've somehow got to let Bulkeley know in advance that the man's coming, and then he'll know it's spoof when he comes," said Jimmy Silver. "But we can't go and tell him; we've worked that out. How the thunder—"

"It beats me!" confessed Lovell.

Jimmy Silver uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Eureka!"

"Got it?" asked his admiring chums.

Jimmy Silver's face was very excited, and his eyes had lighted up.

"Yes, I think so. You see, if Bulkeley got the tip now, it would be out. Knowles would hear of it, and warn Joey Hook off; that would make us look like liars. Bulkeley has got to have the tip just when Joey Hook gets here; and at the same time he's got to have proof that it was known beforehand that Hook was coming. Black and white, my sons—black and white!"

"Eh! What are you driving at?"

Jimmy Silver jumped to the table, and

jabbed a pen into the ink. His chums watched him breathlessly as he scrawled on a sheet of impot-paper:

"Dear Bulkeley,—Joey Hook will call for you to-morrow in a car with a whopping gram about your uncle being seedy, to take you away from the match. It's all right; your uncle is all right. Don't be taken in. We heard him jawing it over with another villain. It's a jape.

"Yours affectionately,

"A FRIEND."

"There!" said Jimmy Silver, with great pride. "When Bulkeley sees that, and knows it was written to-day, he will know it's all spoof to-morrow, won't he? Because if Hook's yarn is true, how could a friend have known it in advance?"

"But—"

"Bulkeley won't get this till the car is here," explained Jimmy Silver triumphantly. "Then it will be too late for Knowles to change his plans."

"Oh!"

"You see, I'm going to give this to Neville of the Sixth."

Jimmy Silver sealed up the communication in an envelope.

"Neville?"

"Yes; he's Bulkeley's chum. You come with me."

Jimmy Silver rushed out of the study, and his chums followed him in amazement.

Jimmy did not pause till he reached Neville's study in the Sixth Form passage. There he tapped discreetly at the door, and Neville's good-natured voice bade him enter.

The prefect looked inquiringly at the four excited juniors.

"I've got an envelope here," said Jimmy Silver. "It's awfully valuable—awfully! Would you mind putting it in your pocket till to-morrow, Neville?"

Neville laughed.

"Somebody been sending you banknotes?" he asked.

"N-n-not exactly. But it's awfully valuable!" said Jimmy Silver impressively. "I'd like you to put it in your pocket-book, if you will, and hand it over to me when I ask you for it to-morrow. It's sealed—I've done it up with wax!"

"Oh, all right!" said Neville, surprised, but good-natured. And he took out his pocket-book, and slipped the letter into it. "Now get off!"

"Right-ho! I say, we're awfully obliged, Neville."

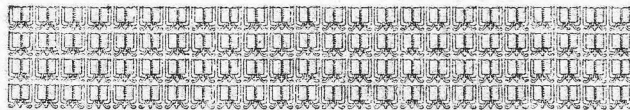
"Oh, don't mench!" said Neville, laughing. "Clear off!"

The juniors scampered away. They had very cheery faces when they came up to the dormitory. They could not help chuckling as they thought of the scene on the morrow—when the car would arrive for Bulkeley, and Neville would be called upon to produce that letter, clear proof that it had been written the night before, and so that the story of Mr. Bulkeley's sudden illness was "spoof." The thought of Knowles' face, when Bulkeley did not go, made the Classical Four chortle.

They looked forward with blissful anticipation to the morrow, and the Defeat of the Plotters!

THE END.

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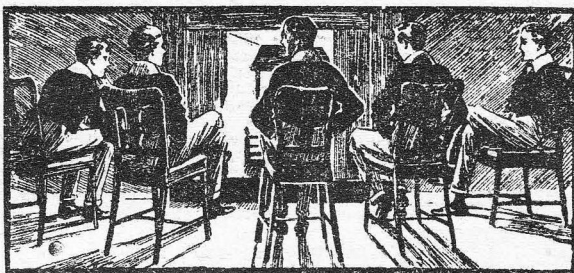
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# A PRECIOUS PAIR!

A Grand Long, Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's.



By  
MARTIN  
CLIFFORD.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Taken to Tea.

**D**IGBY was sitting on the corner of the table in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's, when Blake and Herries and D'Arcy came in. Dig had a note in his hand, which he had been reading for the fourth or fifth time, and there was a puzzled wrinkle on Dig's brow.

"It's all right!" announced Jack Blake.  
"Quite all right!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy has come to the rescue like a man and a bwotah!"

"Come on, Dig!" said Herries. Digby did not get off the table. He glanced at his chums, and then looked again at the note in his hand. Something about that note seemed to puzzle Digby of the Fourth; but he seemed pleased as well as puzzled.

"What's all right?" he asked, a little absently.

Blake looked surprised.  
"Why, about tea, of course," he said. "Tom Merry came into the tuckshop while I was trying to soften Mrs. Taggles' hard heart, and get her to run a little tick until Saturday. Those Shell bouncers are standing an extra special tea in their study, and they've asked us to come. Hence these smiles. It's all right."

"Oh!" said Digby.  
"Well, come on!" said Blake, still more surprised and a little indignant. "I should think you'd be pleased. We've been wondering whether we were going to get any tea at all, funds being in such a rotten state, and Gussy having wasted the last guinea in the study in a reckless extravagance on new toppers—"

"Weally, Blake, it was only one new toppah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mildly. "I should not be likely to get more than one toppah for a guinea, I suppose. And I was not aware at the time that you chaps were stoney—"

"Anyway, we're going to have tea with Tom Merry," said Herries, "so wake up and come along, Dig! What's the matter with you?"

"The fact is—" began Digby.  
"The fact is, I'm hungry!" said Blake briskly. "Come on!"

"I've had an invitation to tea—"  
"It never rains but it pours," said Blake genially. "Who has been along asking us to tea now, like a giddy Good Samaritan?"

Digby coloured a little.  
"Not us!" he said. "Only me!"  
"Oh! Only you!" said Jack Blake, with a sniff. "Don't say you accepted it, or I shall feel bound to bump you for deserting your pals in time of distress."

"Don't get an invitation from the Fifth every day," said Digby thoughtfully.

His chums stared at him. It was certainly rare for Fourth-Formers to be invited to tea by the great men of the Fifth. The Fifth were seniors—not quite so awe-inspiring as the Sixth, perhaps, but awfully majestic to the juniors. Between seniors and juniors there was a great gulf fixed.

"Do you mean to say that some Fifth Form chap has asked you to tea?" demanded Blake.

"Yes."  
"Well, that alters the case," said Blake considerably. "Praps we'll let you go! Who's the Johnny?"

"Look at that," said Digby, holding out the note. "Young Frayne of the Third brought it to me ten minutes ago."

The chums of the Fourth looked at the note together. And all three of them frowned as they read the signature at the bottom. The note ran:

"Dear Digby,—I should be glad to see you to tea in my study, six sharp.—Yours,  
"G. CUTTS."

"Cutts of the Fifth," said Blake, with a portentous frown. "The blackest sheep at St. Jim's! The rotter! What is he asking you for? You sha'n't go!"

Digby looked a little obstinate. It was an honour to be asked to tea by a member of the mighty Fifth, and Cutts was well known for the excellence of his little feeds. And Cutts was merely a common or garden member of the Fifth, so to speak.

He was the most swagger member of that Form. He was as well dressed as D'Arcy of the Fourth, which is saying a great deal. Cutts' opinion on a tie or a waistcoat was the very last word. If Cutts turned his trousers up, half the Middle School turned their trousers up. Cutts was the Petronus Arbiter of St. Jim's.

Digby was flattered by the invitation, all the more because he could not possibly see how Cutts could profit by him in any way. He was not rich, and he was not distinguished. To Dig's simple mind it was clear that Gerald Cutts meant to be kind, and that he was a decent fellow enough, in spite of the things that were whispered about him in the School House. He was a wild beggar in some way, perhaps, but Dig was not bound to follow his ways.

Blake and Herries and D'Arcy exchanged glances. It was evident that Dig meant to accept the invitation. In fact, Dig was a little nettled at the grandfatherly ways in which his chums were taking care of him. Dig had a firm belief that he was quite able to take care of himself.

"Now, Dig, old man, you don't want to go to Cutts!" urged Blake.

"No harm if I do," said Dig.

"Well, perhaps not; but you can't touch pitch without being defiled, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Cutts is a wank outsidah!"

"Come on, Dig!" chorused the three juniors persuasively.

"Rot!" said Dig. "Why shouldn't I go? I'm going!"

"To Cutts?"

"Yes," said Dig.

"Rats!" said Blake decidedly. "You're not! You're coming with us! If you won't walk, you'll be carried! We can't have you disgracing Study No. 6 by associating with Fifth Form bouncers! Collar him!"

"Look here!" roared Digby. "I—oh—Leggo, you asses! Leggo, you silly chumps! I—Yah!"

They did not let go!

They collared Dig, and whisked him off the table, and out of the study into the passage. Digby struggled violently in the grasp of his too-affectionate chums.

"Leggo!" he roared.

"Kim on!" said Blake.

Digby was rushed down the passage towards the Shell quarters. Unfortunately, there were three juniors in the passage, all of them laden with packages and bags, proceeding to Tom Merry's study. They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell, and they were taking in the supplies for that feed to which Blake was so keen upon taking Dig.

In the hurry and excitement of the moment, Blake & Co. did not observe them till too late. They pushed Digby down the passage, and rushed him right into the backs of the Terrible Three. There was a terrific collision.

"Oh!"

"Yah!"

"My hat!"  
Bump, bump, bump! Crash! Smash!  
Tom Merry went sprawling forward on his face. Manners and Lowther rolled over him, and Blake & Co. rolled over Manners and Lowther.

The parcels the Shell fellows had been carrying crashed upon the floor.

There was an ominous crash of eggs, and there was a spurting and splashing of yolks over the sprawling juniors.

"Oh, great Scott!"

"What the—who the—how the—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Gerroff!"

Tom Merry sat up dazedly. He felt that he was sitting in something sticky. It was the jam—the strawberry jam! The jar had broken on the floor, and Tom Merry was in the jam, which would never be of service again for a study feed!

"Oh!" gasped Blake, as he rolled off Lowther's neck, Lowther helping him off with a terrific drive in the ribs. "Oh, my hat! Sorry!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ow, ewombs! Sowwy, deah boys!"

"Didn't see you!" panted Herries.

Digby did not speak. Digby had dashed away up the passage, and disappeared round the nearest corner. The juniors did not notice his flight for the moment.

The Terrible Three of the Shell staggered up, and they looked daggers at Blake and Herries and D'Arcy. The jam was gone, the eggs were smashed, and even the ham was not attractive-looking now.

Herries' big boots had squashed upon it. The sardines, being in a tin, had escaped unhurt; but the sardines were all that had come through the disaster unscathed.

"You frabjous asses!" roared Tom Merry.

"You blithering cuckoos!" shrieked Manners.

"You chortling, burbling jabberwocks!"

hooted Lowther.

"Awfully sorry!" gasped Blake. "We didn't see you in time; we were in a hurry. We were bringing Digby in to tea. Why, where is he?"

"Bai Jove! He's gone!"

"After him!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The three Fourth-Formers dashed at top speed down the passage, leaving Tom Merry & Co. in blank astonishment, amid the wreck of their provisions. Blake and Herries and D'Arcy disappeared round the corner in hot pursuit of Digby, and the Shell fellows looked at one another blankly.

"Mad!" said Lowther. "Mad as giddy hatters! In the name of all that's idiotic, what did you ask three raving lunatics to tea for, Tom Merry?"

"Quite potty, I should say!" gasped Manners. "Look at the eggs!"

"Look at the jam!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Look at my bags!"

"The silly asses!"

"The frabjous chumps!"

"Scrape this jam off me, somebody!"

"I'm eggy all over!"

"The whole blessed lot mucked up!" hooted Lowther. "And not a blessed bob left to get anything else! I—I—I'll scalp those raving duffers! I'll slaughter 'em!"

"They won't get much tea now if they come!" growled Tom Merry. "There's only the sardines left! My word!"

The Shell fellows gathered up the fragments as well as they could, and bore them into their study. There they scraped off jam and smashed egg, with snorts of fury. That tea in Tom Merry's study had been intended to be a jolly little celebration. Tom Merry, in

the kindness of his heart, had asked Study No. 6, as soon as he learned that they were stony. The result was not encouraging. Instead of the cosy and plentiful tea, there would be nothing but bread-and-butter and sardines.

Hence the Terrible Three were not in a good temper as they prepared that meagre entertainment.

And when, ten minutes later, Blake and Herries and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in breathless, the Shell fellows met them with grim looks.

"Haven't got him!" growled Blake. "The young wotah's got away!" said Arthur Augustus. "We went like anything, but he dodged us, you know. He's got there, the boundah!"

"Couldn't stay away any longer," said Herries. "Afraid you fellows might be waiting for your tea. Dig will have to take his chance!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Cutts' Young Friend!

CUTTS, of the Fifth, was in his study when Dig arrived there, a little breathless after the chase.

Cutts' study was one of the largest in the Fifth Form quarters, and it was well furnished. Cutts had an ample allowance from his father, and he spent it freely. He had ways of supplementing his allowance, too—ways that would certainly have earned him expulsion if they had been known to the Head of St. Jim's. Cutts betted on horses, and he played bridge for money stakes, and his luck was phenomenal. Fellows who were not in the dread secret envied Cutts, and wondered at his good fortune. The knowing ones declared that he was bound to come a cropper sooner or later.

The knowing ones had been, as a matter of fact, quite right.

Cutts had come the cropper—and it was a terrific cropper. He had played high, and his usual luck had deserted him. He had laid heavy bets against St. Jim's in their match with an Australian team, and being in the St. Jim's Eleven, he had tried to throw the match away, but he had failed.

St. Jim's had won, and Cutts, in his certainty that it was a "good thing," had taken odds of three to one. He had stood to win over thirty pounds, and he stood to lose a hundred.

He had lost the hundred!

Well provided as Gerald Cutts was with money, he had not the slightest prospect of raising anything like a hundred pounds, or the half of that sum.

It was ruin, and he knew it.

Yet, after the first terrible shock, when he had staggered off the cricket-ground with a face so white that people turned in the street to stare after him, Cutts had recovered from the shock, and regained his deadly coolness.

He had to fight now to satisfy creditors, to keep his secret, to ward off ruin, and to save himself from being shown up and expelled from St. Jim's.

He had made his bets on credit, and he had to pay, or else to be exposed and ruined. But he had not given up hope yet. He was devoting all his cleverness, which was great, all his nerve and coolness, to that struggle to save himself. And, so far, Cutts had not gone under.

How he had kept his head above water during the last few weeks he hardly knew.

But he had done it, and still ruin was staved off, though it threatened every day. He had raised small sums, somehow, and paid little bits on account here and there. He had sold his bicycle, and paid more on account. The end was pushed further off, but it was still near, unless he could make a big coup.

From his coolness no one could have guessed the fears and anxiety that infested his soul day and night. He had a nerve of iron.

Now, as he sat in his study waiting for his guest, he looked calm and cheerful, and Digby had no suspicion of the thoughts that were passing in his mind. Cutts, as a matter of fact, was listening. Dig's step in the passage had sent a thrill to his heart, though his face did not change. He had feared for a moment that it might be the step of someone else—someone whose visit he feared.

Two or three of his betting creditors, partly satisfied with small sums on account, had agreed to give him time—a short time, to raise the rest. But one, at least, was at the end of his patience, and that one, Jonas Hooke, had warned him that unless he

received a remittance in full on Monday, Cutts could expect him at St. Jim's.

Cutts had sent him nothing; and to-day was Tuesday.

The mere possibility of a bookmaker coming to the school to see him would have scared almost any other fellow at St. Jim's into a fit.

It had no perceptible effect upon Cutts. If Hooke came and told his story to the Head, Cutts would have to leave St. Jim's the same night in disgrace. It would be the end of his career at the school—the end of his chance of getting the commission in the cavalry regiment upon which his heart was set. It would be the end of all things for him; the disgrace of being expelled from a school like St. Jim's would cling to him and brand him for life.

And yet Cutts was perfectly cool with that sword of Damocles suspended over his head. He greeted Digby with a nod and a pleasant smile as he came in.

Digby was looking and feeling a little awkward. It was great condescension for a Fifth-Former to ask a fag to tea, and Dig felt it. And he was dusty and breathless from his tussle with his chums of the Fourth, and he had not ventured back to the study, or to the dormitory, to make himself tidy again, for fear of being captured by Blake and Herries and D'Arcy.

Cutts gave him a rather curious look.

"Glad to see you, Digby," he said affably.

"You've hurried—eh?"

Digby turned red.

"Yes; I—I've been in a scrap," he confessed. "Only fun, you know. I hope I'm not late, Cutts."

"Five minutes early, as a matter of fact," said Cutts, glancing at the handsome bronze clock on the mantelpiece.

Dig's colour deepened.

"I—I—" he began.

"All the better," said Cutts genially. "Sit down, lid. Tea's ready. My fag's just finished, and cleared out. Lift the toast up from the grate, will you?"

"Rather!" said Dig.

It was an open secret in the School House that Cutts, in spite of his ample allowance, was hard up, and hardly knew where to turn for a half-crown. But, all the same, he always contrived to have a good spread on his study table at tea-time. In some quarters, at least, his credit was still good. The local tradesmen knew that he was the son of a rich man and the nephew of a rich Army officer, and most of them allowed Cutts almost as much credit as he wanted. And Cutts had cynically reflected that, if the crash came, it did not matter much how much he owed. He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!

Cutts' fag was a good cook. Cutts kept a cricket-stump in the study for him if he failed in that line. Dig's honest face lighted up as he saw piles of beautifully-browned toast, and broiled kidneys, and eggs poached to a turn. It was one of Cutts' very nice little "brews," and Dig wondered greatly that he should have asked a Fourth Form fag. There were plenty of fellows in the Fifth—and in the Sixth, too—who would have been glad to come.

And Cutts was very friendly and genial over tea. He talked to Dig just as if Dig were a senior like himself, and did not treat him like a fag at all.

With the toast, the broiled kidneys, and the tea, and the jam-tarts to finish, and Cutts' genially, Dig thoroughly enjoyed himself.

There was an expression of great contentment upon Dig's honest, cheerful face, and he felt very friendly indeed towards Cutts. He realised keenly that fellows had been too hard on poor old Cutts. He was the jolliest of fellows, and nobody ever was quite so black as he was painted.

When that pleasant tea was finished, Dig made a movement to rise. But Cutts made a detaining gesture.

"Don't go, kid."

Digby nodded, and sat down again, with a slight, uneasy feeling inwardly. It was whispered in the House that there were bridge parties and games of nap in Cutts' study after tea, and Dig uneasily remembered his chums' warnings. But, after all, if Cutts wanted him to play cards he could say so—especially as he hadn't any money. He grinned involuntarily at the idea of Cutts pressing him to play when he was stony.

Dig could not help wondering what Cutts had to say to him. Cutts produced walnuts, and began to crack them, and invited Dig to

do the same. Dig liked walnuts, and he was soon quite busy.

"Not pressed for time—hey?" said Cutts. "Not at all," said Dig, who was a little apprehensive of being scalped as soon as he returned to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

"I really owe you an apology," said Cutts.

"Me!" said Dig, with wide eyes.

"Yes. Your father and my uncle were schoolboys together, and they're still great chums. My uncle's often mentioned you in his letters to me."

"Has he?" said Dig.

"I've been going to take an interest in you for a long time," said Cutts. "But it's such a difficulty to see juniors. You understand that?"

"Oh, yes!" said Dig.

"And then your study has a bit of a prejudice against me, I think," said Cutts, smiling.

Dig did not reply to that. It was more polite to crack another walnut and leave the remark unanswered, and smile vaguely. He couldn't deny that Study No. 6 in the Fourth had a decided prejudice against the black sheep of the Fifth.

"I dare say you heard the jaw there was among the fags at the time of the Wallaby match," said Cutts, "about my laying bets against St. Jim's."

"Ahem!" said Dig.

"That fat fellow in the New House, Wynn, went to sleep behind a haystack, and dreamed that he heard me talking to somebody, or something of that sort," said Cutts. "Of course, he was talking out of his hat!"

"Oh!" said Dig.

"You're too sensible a kid to believe all the chatter you hear, I'm jolly sure of that," said Cutts.

"I hope so," said Dig.

"Well, I want to be your friend, so far as a Fifth-Form chap can be friends with a junior," said Cutts. "What do you think?"

What did Dig think? To be offered in this genial way the friendship of the arbiter of elegance in the Fifth—to be taken up by a senior whose regard was courted by mighty men in the Sixth—who was engaged weeks ahead for "Sunday walks." It was so flattering that Dig could only stare with big, round eyes.

"You're jolly kind!" he managed to stammer at last.

"Well, I like you," said Cutts, "and our people are great friends, you know. By the way, my uncle is coming down to the school, and you'll see him. He's your father's oldest friend—Major Cutts, you know."

Dig nodded. Cutts had never shown the slightest sign of acknowledging any claim on the Fourth-Former's part because his father was the old friend of Cutts' uncle. Never till the last week, at all events. Perhaps Cutts was waking up rather late in the day to a sense of duty. Dig could not quite make it out. He had never supposed that Cutts cared twopence for his uncle or his uncle's friends. He reflected that you never really know a fellow till you've found him out.

"I shall be glad to see my father's old chum," said Dig, at last.

Cutts laughed. "I suppose you know he's rolling in money," he remarked. "You can be pretty certain that he'll tip Sir Robert Digby's son a quid at least."

Dig's eyes sparkled. "I say, Cutts, your uncle must be a ripping old sport!" he said.

"He is," said Cutts. "Now, kid, will you lend me a hand? I've got some writing to do, and I've hurt my wrist in the cricket—that ass Knox gave me a ball right on my wrist. Do you mind?"

"Lines?" asked Dig. Was the secret out at last? Had Cutts taken all that trouble about the junior in order to get him to write out an impot?

"Ha, ha! No; I don't have lines. When I do, I tip young Curly to write them—he can imitate my hand a treat," said Cutts. "Levison of your Form does them for me, too—but I don't after have them."

"I dare say I could copy your list, if you like," said Dig.

Cutts shook his head.

"That's rather a dangerous gift," he said. "It will get Levison of the Fourth into trouble one of these days. No; I don't want you to do that. It's something else—but it's a secret. You can keep a secret?"

Dig left off eating walnuts. He was dismayed. A secret of Cutts—that meant something to do with Cutts' wild ways, and in his mind's eye Dig already saw himself the repository of guilty secrets of betting, and backing horses, and surreptitious visits to public-houses and gambling clubs.

"Oh!" said Dig. "I—I'd rather you didn't tell me any secrets, if you don't mind, Cutts!"

Cutts burst into a hearty laugh. "You young ass! Do you think I'm going to tell you about bets and bookmaking?" he exclaimed good-humouredly. "It's quite harmless, only it's a secret at present. The fact is, I'm writing a play."

Digby jumped. "Writing a play!" he exclaimed. Cutts nodded. "My hat!" said Dig. And he started on the walnuts again, his fears entirely relieved. There certainly wasn't any harm in Cutts writing a play.

"That's the secret," said Cutts. "You see, I've trusted you—but you'll keep it dark. Not a word, you know."

"Mum!" said Dig. "Honour bright, eh?"

"Honour bright!" said Dig. "That's all right. Now I'll tell you something about it," said Cutts dreamily. "It deals with a giddy young spendthrift who's been plunging and getting himself into an awful hole. He tries all sorts of ways of raising tin, and fails, and finally makes up his mind to shoot himself."

"Oh, scissors!" said Dig. "That's rather thick, isn't it?"

"Plays have to be thick," said Cutts. "I've got it done up to the scene where he sits down to write to his father. He tells the old chap that he's in debt, that he owes sixty or seventy pounds, and doesn't dare to ask him to pay it, so he's decided to blow his brains out. Very pathetic, and all that. I've been thinking it out, and I want to get it written down before I lose the thread of it, you see—only my confounded wrist is so stiff I can't hold a pen!"

"I'll do it with pleasure," said Dig. He would have done much more than that to oblige the genial Cutts. That there could be any hidden deception under that frank explanation never occurred to Dig.

"Well, there's a pen," said Cutts. "You'll find some notepaper in that desk—some of the school notepaper. That will do. I always use it—it saves the expense of buying manuscript, and I've been hard up lately."

"I could get you some impot paper, if you like," said Dig.

"No; the notepaper will be all right. You'll find some there."

Digby found the notepaper, and dipped a pen in the ink and waited. Cutts reflected deeply.

"Begin—Scene II., Act Three!" he said. "Right!" Dig wrote it down.

"Dear father—"

"Good!"

"I'm afraid you will be shocked by what I'm going to write!" dictated Cutts. Digby wrote it down in his sprawling hand.

"No; on second thoughts I won't begin like that," said Cutts. "Do you mind starting afresh?"

"Not at all."

"Take a fresh sheet, then. Don't put that in about the scene and act—I'm not quite certain that I shall put this in the third act. Begin it with 'Dear Father.' No—perhaps that's a bit too formal. How do you start your letters home yourself?"

"I always begin 'Dear Dad,'" said Dig.

"Good! That sounds better," said Cutts. "Might as well begin that way. Got a fresh sheet of paper?"

"Yes; I'm ready."

"Well, begin now." Cutts dictated, and Dig started the letter afresh:

"Dear Dad,—I'm afraid you will be shocked at this. I'm awfully sorry. I've got into frightful trouble. I'm so upset that I hardly know what I'm writing. Dear old dad, don't be too upset when you hear what's happened. I can't stand it any longer. I've been betting on horses, and I've lost a lot of money, and they've been worrying me for weeks, and I have been so miserable I wish I was dead. I can't stand it any longer, and I'm going to drop over the bridge on the Ryll to-night, and they won't be able to threaten me any longer. Good-bye, and forgive me.—Your miserable son,

"ROBERT."

"That's my own name, Robert," said Dig.

"My name's Robert Arthur, you know."

"I named my poor hero after you," said Cutts, with a smile.

"Oh, I see! What about the name of the river? The river here is called the Ryll," said Dig.

"I'm going to alter that afterwards—the Ryll will do for the present," said Cutts.

"Of course, that is only a rough draft."

"Of course!" said Dig. Cutts took the letter, and read it over carefully, and nodded with satisfaction.

"I think that will be all right," he said. "Now, take a fresh sheet of paper, and we'll go on with the scene. Enter Sir Jasper."

"Enter Sir Jasper!" wrote Dig on a fresh sheet of paper.

Cutts folded up the letter, and put it into his pocket-book. Then he went on dictating to Digby, filling several sheets of paper with the lines of the play. The lines rolled out fast enough from Cutts' fertile brain, and Dig was filled with great admiration.

They were still busy when the study door suddenly opened, and Toby, the School House page, looked in with a startled face.

"Please, Mister Cutts—"

"Well, what is it?" said Cutts.

"There's a man says he will see you—a awful man!" said Toby.

"Bring him in at once."

"He says his name is Hooke."

Dig's soft heart was full of compassion. "I'll keep mum," he said. "Rely on me!" "Thanks!"

Dig scuttled out of the study. In the passage he passed the man Toby was piloting to Cutts' room—a fat, florid man, with a glaring fancy waistcoat, and a silk hat on the back of his head. Dig ran on, feeling sick at heart. Cutts had been kind to him; and Cutts at that moment was so close to being expelled from the school that Dig could not see a loophole of escape for him. Dig's face was clouded as he ran on.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Precious Pair I

GERALD CUTTS stood by the table in his study, waiting for his unwelcome caller. His face was normal again now.

He had taken the sheets of the "play" that Dig had written for him and thrust them into the fire. But the first sheet—the letter which Dig had signed so innocently



Crash! Smash! Tom Merry went sprawling forward on his face, Manners and Lowther rolled over him, and Blake & Co. rolled over Manners and Lowther. (See chapter 1.)

Cutts rose to his feet. In spite of his nerve, his face was pale. The blow had fallen at last.

"Has anybody seen him, Toby?" he asked. "No, sir," said Toby, looking scared. "I—I think not, Master Cutts. But he's speaking very loud, and—"

Cutts slipped a half-crown into Toby's hand.

"Bring him here, and don't let anybody see him!" he said.

"Yessir!" said Toby, scuttling away.

Dig was on his feet now, looking scared. He knew the name of Jonas Hooke, the bookmaker, of Abbotsford. That the man should dare to come to St. Jim's was astounding. If the Head discovered that he had come to see Cutts—

Dig knew that Cutts had brought it on himself—that he was conning the predicted "cropper" at last; but he could not help feeling sorry for him.

"You'd better cut off," said Cutts.

"Thank you for helping me, Digby. It's a man I owe some money to. Don't mention about his coming here; I want to keep it dark if I can. I've been a fool, and I'm in an awful hole!"

and unconsciously with his own name—was still reposing in Cutts' pocket-book. All the rest that Dig had written upon it to distinguish it from an ordinary letter—was safe in Gerald Cutts' pocket-book. The spider had succeeded in his designs upon the fly—though it would have puzzled anyone but Gerald Cutts to say what use could possibly be made of that letter in Dig's sprawling hand.

The fat bookmaker appeared in the study doorway. His face was flushed with anger, and a little with drink. Probably Mr. Jonas Hooke had imbibed a little to screw up his courage to pay that visit to the public school.

"Ho, 'ere you are!" said Mr. Hooke.

Cutts nodded, with a pleasant smile.

"Yes; come in!" he said.

"Very nice and polite, ain't we?" sneered Mr. Hooke. "You'd rather I come in—eh? You don't want 'em to 'ear what I've got to say—eh?"

"Come in and sit down," said Cutts, with undiminished courtesy. "I can give you a

cool drink after your walk—and I've something else for you!"

"If you mean to square up—"  
"Of course I do," said Cutts pleasantly.  
"You can cut off, Toby. Come in, Hooke, old fellow!"

Toby, still looking scared—for he knew how serious the situation was for Cutts—departed.  
Mr. Hooke hesitated a moment or two, and finally grunted and came into the study. Cutts closed the door, and pulled out an armchair for his visitor.

At that moment Cutts could probably have killed his visitor with the greatest pleasure in the world; but his manner was urbanity itself.

He was upon the very edge of the abyss, and he knew it.

Fortunately, nearly all the fellows were in the playing-fields, or else at tea in their studies, and Mr. Hooke had been piloted to the study unobserved—at least, Cutts hoped so. If the man had been seen, all was over. A prefect or a master would certainly come to the study to inquire what he wanted.

Merely having dealings with such a man was enough to get any St. Jim's fellow expelled from the school.

And even if he succeeded in placating Mr. Hooke, there still remained the problem of getting rid of him again unseen.

And yet Cutts did not seemingly turn a hair.

"Sit down," he said pleasantly.

"I ain't come 'ere to sit down!" growled Mr. Hooke.

"Oh, be pally!" said Cutts. "There's nothing to row about. I owe you some tin—and I'm going to pay you. What is there to be ratty about?"

"Got the money?" asked Mr. Hooke, with a sneer.

"I shall have it on Wednesday."

"To-morrer?"

"Yes."

"And 'ow?"

"My uncle is coming to see me—he's lately home from Africa, you know—and he's going to give it to me."

"All of it?" asked Mr. Hooke incredulously.  
"How much do I owe you?" said Cutts coolly.

"Fifty quid!" snapped the bookmaker.  
"Just so—and twenty-five quid to Griggs," said Cutts. "Griggs is treating me more decently than this, Hooke. He's given me more time; and he knows me."

"He can afford to wait, and twenty-five quid ain't fifty," said the bookmaker. "Ain't I always paid up on the nail when you've won from me—what?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"I couldn't hand you one per cent. of it at the present moment," he said; "but to-morrow I hope to square up to the last penny!"

"Waitin' to win something?" jeered Mr. Hooke.

"No; it's my uncle, as I said."

"Gammon!" said Mr. Hooke. "I never 'eard of an uncle that would 'and his nephew fifty quid for the asking!"

"Mine will!"

"And why?"

"Because I'm working it," said Cutts. "I've got a dodge for screwing it out of him—and more, too. I'm not going to tell you what the dodge is. If it fails, I am ruined, and you can do your worst. If I succeed, I can square up to the last stiver!"

"Well, you're a deep 'un!" said Mr. Hooke. "But I've come 'ere for my money, and I ain't going away without it!"

"I've told you how I'm placed," said Cutts, with a shrug of the shoulders. "If you choose to ruin me, you can; but it will cost you exactly fifty pounds. If I'm done for here, I shan't pay you a penny!"

The bookmaker stared at him from under his thick brows suspiciously. It was evident that the Fifth-Former had succeeded in making an impression upon him. There was a short silence in the study.

"To-morrer, you say?" said Hooke at last indignantly.

"I shall have the money to-morrow. If it's cheque, I may not be able to get it changed before the bank closes, and in that case I will pay up on Thursday. I'll send you a line to meet me outside the school after third lesson."

"It ain't good enough!" said Hooke surlily.  
"Very well; then you can do as you like," said Cutts, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes. "If I go under, I'll see that things are made warm for you. You will lose your money, and what reputation you've got left—"

all because you won't wait a couple of days longer, after you've waited weeks already. That isn't business, Mr. Hooke!"

"If I could trust you!" muttered Hooke.

"You can do as you like. I'm playing for my last chance here, and if I save myself, you'll get your money. I think it's a dead cert. But you can do as you like."

There was another silence.

"I'll wait!" said Mr. Hooke, at last. "I'll wait till Thursday noon, and not a minute longer! If I don't 'ave the money—all of it, mind—by then, I go straight to Dr. Holmes!"

Cutts drew a deep breath.

"You'll have it—every penny!" he said.

"Well, see that I do!"

The bookmaker rose to his feet. Perhaps, in his heart of hearts, Mr. Hooke trembled at the thought of an interview with the stately Head of St. Jim's, and was glad enough for an excuse for not carrying out his threat.

"Then I'll travel," he said. "It won't do you any good for me to stop 'ere. I—"

Cutts gave a start.

"Hush!"

He held up a hand to enjoin silence.

In the passage there was a steady footstep approaching the study, and Cutts knew that footstep well. It was the step of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's.

For a moment Cutts' heart turned sick within him.

He had succeeded so far with Jonas Hooke, and now he was caught—caught with the disreputable bookmaker in his study!

Mr. Hooke looked uneasy, too.

"Who is it?" he murmured.

"My Housemaster!" groaned Cutts.

"Good 'evens!"

"Quiet! There's a chance yet! Get behind that screen! There's a cupboard there! You can get into it, and lie low! I'll bluff him if I can! Quick!"

The slow-witted man hesitated, but Cutts grasped him and pushed him behind the screen in the corner. There was a wall cupboard there, in which Cutts kept cricket-bats and footballs and stumps and other belongings.

The bookmaker stumbled into the dark cupboard, breathing heavily and hard. Now that it had come to the pinch the rascal was as unwilling as Cutts that the Housemaster should see him. He had seen the big, athletic Housemaster, and he had an uncomfortable conviction that if Mr. Railton found him there—whatever might happen to Cutts—he—Jonas Hooke—would be collared and flung out of the House neck and crop.

He huddled in the cupboard, panting for breath. Cutts replaced the screen, and turned back to the study table. He had just time to open a "Football Annual" when there came a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in!" said Cutts, without a tremor in his voice.

Mr. Railton entered.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Facing the Music!

MR. RAILTON strode into the study, with a deep frown on his brow.

He gave a quick glance round the room, and seemed surprised at finding Cutts alone.

The Fifth-Former rose respectfully, the book still in his hand.

Mr. Railton fixed his eyes upon him, with a sharp and penetrating glance. Cutts bore the scrutiny without flinching. His expression was simply that of respectful inquiry, as if he were waiting to hear what had brought the Housemaster to his study. As Mr. Railton was silent for some moments, Cutts' face gradually assumed a natural expression of slight surprise.

"Cutts!" said Mr. Railton at last.

"Yes, sir?"

"Has your visitor gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long has he been gone?"

Cutts reflected.

"About a quarter of an hour, sir, I think."

"Will you tell me who he was?"

"I have no objection at all, sir. He is a soldier who was discharged from my uncle's regiment for bad conduct, and has taken to tramping. I knew him years ago, when I was a nipper, and my uncle was stationed at Aldershot. He gave me some riding lessons when I was there visiting my uncle, and he remembered me. His tramping brought him to this part of the country, and as he was

hard up, it occurred to him to come in here and ask for me."

"A most improper proceeding," said Mr. Railton, frowning.

"So I told him, sir. He was, as a matter of fact, a little the worse for drink. I told him he oughtn't to have come here; but I was sorry for the poor wretch, and I gave him five shillings, and told him to get out!"

Mr. Railton's eyes were fixed keenly on Cutts' face as he made this simple explanation.

Cutts looked perfectly calm and self-possessed, as if the matter was of no importance, and, in fact, bored him slightly.

Inwardly he was wondering whether Mr. Railton doubted him sufficiently to make a search of the study.

Cutts almost smiled at the thought of the denouement if the bookmaker should be found hidden in the cupboard, after that plausible explanation. The Fifth-Former was playing a desperate game, but never had he been cooler.

Apparently a search of the study did not enter Mr. Railton's mind. He was not of the spying kind, and he hated doubting anybody's word. And he could not believe that Cutts could be so cool and calm if expulsion were hanging over his head.

"So the man has gone?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir; as I said."

"Taggles certainly had the impression that he was Jonas Hooke."

"Taggles' acquaintance with bookmakers is probably more extensive than mine," said Cutts, with a smile. "I am afraid I do not know Hiram—I mean Jonas Hooke—by sight, so I cannot say anything as to a resemblance." Mr. Railton drew a deep breath.

"I am sorry the man is not still here," he said. "I should have preferred to see him. However, I accept your assurance, Cutts." "I trust so, sir. I should not like to have my word doubted."

"I do not doubt it. I am glad that you have been able to explain what certainly looked extremely suspicious."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton left the study.

Cutts smiled.

Not until the Housemaster's footsteps had died away did Cutts move. Then he went behind the screen, and found the cupboard door ajar, and the flustered face of Mr. Jonas Hooke looking out at him. The bookmaker was red and panting.

"My word!" he murmured. "My word! 'Ow you rolled 'em out, sir! Blessed if you didn't take my breath away! It was 'ot in that cupboard, too!"

"You'll have to stay here for a bit," said Cutts coolly. "Railton thinks you're gone—so you can't go till the coast is clear."

"But I can't stay 'ere!" ejaculated Mr. Hooke, in dismay.

"You must! I'll see that nobody comes to the study again," said Cutts. "You'll have to stay here till dark, Hooke, unless you want to be caught. Railton has his malacca cane in his hand—you can guess what he'd brought it for. It was jolly lucky for you that you kept out of sight, as well as for me!"

Mr. Hooke shivered.

"If he raises a 'and against me, I'll 'ave the law on 'im!" he muttered.

Cutts laughed.

"I don't think the law would say much about a Housemaster horsewhipping a bookie who came to his school," he said. "And if it did, it wouldn't mend you, Hooke—and you'd want mending after Railton had finished with you."

"Look 'ere—"

"You'll have to stay here till after dark, and then sneak out somehow," said Cutts coolly. "You've brought it on yourself, and must make the best of it. But it's all right. I can get you some sandwiches and a whisky-and-soda."

"Well, that sounds all right," said Mr. Hooke.

And Jonas Hooke had to make up his mind to the inevitable—and he stayed. And Cutts had the pleasant prospect of keeping the man hidden in his study for some hours to come—at the risk every moment of some accident revealing his presence there. Cutts was a cool customer, and he had an iron nerve; but he needed all his coolness and all his nerve now. An accident—a mischance—one false step—one thoughtless word, and he was ruined—and he knew it! But he was as cool as ice.

### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Called Over the Coals.

"H EAH be is!"  
"Behold the deserter!"  
"Tremble, villain!"  
Those exclamations greeted Robert Arthur Digby as he entered Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, after having had tea with the genial Cutts.

Blake and Herries and Digby, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, were all there, waiting for him. They looked like a family of judges waiting for the criminal to come in—and now he had come!

Dig was feeling a little uneasy as he came back to Study No. 6. He could not explain to the chums that the suspected and suspicious Cutts had not done him any harm. He hadn't played bridge, he hadn't put any money on a horse—he hadn't done anything except make a very satisfying tea and eat walnuts afterwards—with the exception of having written out passages in that "play" for Cutts. But that was a secret, of course—he had promised Cutts not to mention that he was writing a play.

Dig felt that his friends were very unjust to Cutts, and very hard on him; but he was afraid that they wouldn't listen to reason when he explained. And he was right in his foreboding upon that point.

"Look here!" said Digby warmly, interrupting those hearty greetings. "Don't play the giddy goat, you know!"

"Weally, Dig—"  
"Have you anything to say why sentence shouldn't be passed on you according to law?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, don't be an ass?" growled Digby. Tom Merry held up his hand.  
"Let's question the culprit," he said. "We must have the facts before we slaughter Digby. Have you been playing cards, Digby?"

"No, ass!"  
"Making bets?"  
"No, fathead!"  
"Talking sport and races and things?"  
"No, idiot!"

"Then what did Cutts want you for?"  
"To have tea," said Dig. "I've had it, too! And a jolly ripping tea it was. Broiled kidneys and eggs, and ripping toast, and walnuts to finish."

"That isn't the question," said Tom Merry severely. "We don't want to know what you had for tea, and you needn't give us all those gluttonous details, after you've mucked up our feed and reduced us to one sardine each!"

"A single, solitary, lonesome sardine!" said Blake.

Dig grinned.  
"There was jam, too," he said. "Strawberry-jam!"

"There would have been stwawbewwy-jam with us, if you hadn't smashed the jam in the passage, you ass! I do not considah stwawbewwy-jam a sufficient weason for desertin' your old pals. I wegard it as bein' simlah to a hankerin' aftah the feshspots of Egypt. I am disgusted with you, Dig!"

"Same here!" said Herries. "Disgusted!"

"Shocked!"

"Horri-fied!" said Monty Lowther, with due solemnity.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless Digby!" said Manners, with a sigh.

"Let us reason with him gently," said Tom Merry, holding up his hand. "Keep your little tempers, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle!"

"Yaas, wathah!"  
Dig glared at his anxious friends. All this concern for his welfare was gratifying in one way, but not in another. Tom Merry pointed a magisterial finger at him, and spoke severely.

"Do you mean to declare, Robert Arthur Digby, on your word of honour as a silly ass, that Cutts was not up to any tricks at all?"

"Of course he wasn't."

"Now I'll be serious," said Tom Merry.

"Has he confided any secrets to you?"  
"That's the question," said D'Arcy. "Has he given you any wotten secwets to keep, dear boy?"

"He hasn't given me any rotten secrets to keep!" said Digby warmly.

Tom Merry was quick to notice the adjective.

"Not any rotten secrets?" he asked.

"No, I tell you!"

"Any secrets at all?"

Dig flushed. Cutts told him, as a secret, that he was writing a play. There couldn't be any harm in a secret like that, certainly; but it was a secret, and he couldn't tell his chums.

"Don't ask me such a lot of rotten questions!" Dig broke out. "Blessed if I don't clear out of the study if this goes on!"

Tom Merry's face became very grave. The half-jesting manner of the other juniors vanished, too. Gerald Cutts had told Dig a secret—that was clear. And the juniors felt that this alarm was well founded. The black-guard of the Fifth had had a secret motive in getting Dig to his study, as they had suspected.

"Oh, don't look like a silly set of boiled owls!" exclaimed Dig irritably.

"Seriously, Dig—Cutts has told you a secret?"

"Suppose he has?"

"You mean that he has?"

"Not much use denying it!" growled Dig. "It's a harmless secret—you'd laugh if I told you, only I'm not going to tell you, as I promised Cutts."

"Now, look here," said Tom Merry seriously. "I'll tell you something, Dig, that I haven't told anybody but Lowther and Manners yet. Cutts came to me one day, in a difficulty, and got me into keeping a secret with him. The mere fact that I had promised Cutts, and was mixed up in a secret with the blackguard, made trouble between my pals and me. That was how it started, and he jolly nearly got me into his filthy betting—only I was too sick with him to give him a chance. I came as near disgrace as any chap could come, without being done in—and Cutts kept himself safe all the time. Now you know why I think Cutts is after no good with you. He started in the same way—giving you a secret to keep—that makes a tie between him and you, and puts up a bar between you and your chums, to begin with."

"I don't see why it should," said Dig uncomfortably. "It's a harmless secret. It's nothing whatever about breaking school rules; if the Head knew, he would only grin. All the masters might know without any harm being done."

"Then why is it a secret?"

"I suppose Cutts wants to keep it dark in case the fellows should laugh about it, that's all."

"Then why did he tell you?"

"He wanted me to help him, you see," said Dig, considering how much he could say without risk of revealing the fact that Gerald Cutts was writing a play. "He hurt his wrist in the cricket to-day, and couldn't write. So I just wrote down a few pages for him."

"A few pages!" said the juniors, in astonishment. "Lines?"

"No, not lines; but I can't tell you any more," said Dig.

"This is the first time I've heard about Cutts having hurt his wrist," said Monty Lowther drily. "Hurt it in the cricket to-day, did he?"

"Yes; Knox bowled and hit his wrist!"

"His wrist was all right just before tea," said Lowther.

"Rot!" said Dig. "How do you know?"

"Because I saw him cuff young Tadd of the Second Form for bumping into him on the stairs," said Lowther. "He would have biffed him with his left, I fancy, if his right wrist had been hurt. But he didn't."

"Well, that was what he told me," said Digby. "I don't see why he should lie. He could have written the stuff down just as well as I, unless he was lazy."

"You won't tell us what it was you wrote wrote down?"

"I've promised not to."

"Anything that might get you into trouble, if it were supposed to be your own stuff?" asked Tom Merry. "It's your handwriting, you know, as you wrote it."

Dig chuckled.

"No, ass! If you saw it, you'd only think it was meant for a contribution to the 'Weekly,' that's all. No harm in it at all." The juniors exchanged glances. They did not know quite what to make of Dig's explanation. He was a sensible lad enough, but—why should Cutts have told him a secret?

That was the way Cutts had started when he was trying to initiate Tom Merry into his blackguardly ways, and Tom, in his unsuspecting simplicity, had fallen into the trap. But if Dig fell into the same trap, he would do it with his eyes open, after Tom Merry's warning.

"Well, my belief is that there's something fishy in it," said Monty Lowther, at last. "Either Cutts is trying to fix Dig on to him by giving him some silly secret to keep, or else he's taking him in, and wants something or other in Dig's handwriting for some reason of his own."

"What after rot!" said Dig.

"Might be a twick to get a specimen of Dig's handwritin' for something," said Arthur Augustus wisely. "Forjabs do that, you know, when they are goin' to forge a cheque, you know!"

Dig laughed.  
"I haven't a cheque-book, you fathead, have I?"

"I decline to be called a fathead, Dig!"

"Look here! I don't care about discussing Cutts like this," broke out Digby. "He's been very decent to me, and I don't want to hear him jawed about as if he were some blessed criminal. He explained his reason to me. My father and his uncle were old chums, and his uncle is coming down here this week. I suppose Cutts wants his uncle to see us on good terms, that's all. He said his uncle will most likely tip me a quid. He asked me to write to his uncle yesterday, to say I should be glad to see him when he came down—"

"You wrote to Cutts' uncle?" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Why shouldn't I?" said Dig. "He's my pater's oldest friend. I shouldn't have thought of it myself, but Cutts suggested it. He said his uncle took a great interest in me, and that he would be flattered if I sent him a little note, saying that I remembered him, and so forth. So I did."

"You didn't tell us," said Blake.

"You're so rabid when Cutts is mentioned!" growled Dig. "I suppose a chap is called on to be polite to his pater's old pal? I suppose you don't think Major Cutts is going to do me any harm—? What? I suppose you know he's a distinguished officer, and only recently home from Africa?"

"I don't quite understand it," said Tom Merry. It might be that Cutts has been expected to look after you a bit, and now his uncle's coming down he's going to pretend that he's done it by appearing friendly with you. But—"

"That isn't all," said Lowther.

"Wathah not!"

"Look here," said Dig angrily. "I'm fed up with this! Cutts has treated me decently, and I won't hear him run down!"

"You won't hear him cracked up here," said Blake tartly. "He's a cad and a rotter of the first water, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Dig flushed red.

"Then I'll get out!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Dig—"

Slam!

Digby was gone, and the study door closed after him with unnecessary force. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another in something like dismay.

"That's the beginning," said Tom Merry quietly. "When Cutts got me into a secret with him, trouble with my pals was the first result. It looks to me like the same game over again. Though, as Dig hasn't any money, I don't see where Cutts is going to score. But he isn't doing it for nothing. You fellows, it's no good talking to Dig."

"Looks not!" growled Blake.

"But there's Cutts. We're all Dig's pals, and we're not going to see him taken in by Cutts. Let's talk to Cutts, instead, and tell him plainly that he's got to let our chum alone, or we'll make it warm for him."

"Good egg!"

The juniors were feeling annoyed with Dig, but they were feeling intensely exasperated with Gerald Cutts. They were willing to leave the black-guard of the Fifth alone—why couldn't he leave them alone? That Cutts meant mischief, in some cunning and underhand manner, they were convinced. In their present state of mind, it would be a relief to talk plain English to Cutts of the Fifth, and let him know what they thought of him. And without stopping to reflect on the matter, the chums of the School House made their way to Cutts' study.

### THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Cornered!

THERE was a murmur as of voices in Cutts' study as the juniors approached it. They were treading lightly—not because they wanted to surprise Cutts, but because they were on dangerous ground. The Fifth Form passage was sacred to the seniors, excepting when fags were wanted, and a raid on the Fifth would have brought a crowd of big fellows out to hurl the juniors forth "on their necks." And half a dozen juniors making for Cutts' study looked like a raid—indeed, if Cutts turned rusty, it was pretty certain there would be a row, and the study might very possibly be wrecked. Tom Merry & Co.

were quite prepared to go to that length, if necessary, to save their pal from the clutches of the wily Cutts.

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and turned the handle. The door did not open. It was locked. Inside the study there was dead silence. The murmur as of voices had died away instantly at the sound of the knock.

No reply came from within the study. Lefevre of the Fifth came along the passage, and looked at the juniors.

"Hallo, you fags!—What do you want here?" he demanded. "That's what I say. What are you up to?"

"Coming to see Cutts," said Tom Merry blandly. "What's he got his door locked for? A smoking-bee, I suppose?"

"Don't you be cheeky," said Lefevre, considering for a moment whether he should chase the juniors along the passage. But as there were six of them, it occurred to Lefevre that he might be the person to be chased, possibly. So he shook a warning forefinger at them instead, and went into his study.

Tom Merry knocked at Cutts' door again. It opened in a few moments, Cutts himself opening it.

He stared inquiringly at the juniors. It seemed to Tom Merry that there was relief in Cutts' face. Perhaps he had expected more troublesome visitors than the heroes of the Fourth and the Shell.

"What do you kids want?" asked Cutts shortly.

"Want to speak to you, Cutts."

"I'm busy—"

"Sorry to interrupt the confabulation, whatever it is," said Tom Merry politely, "but this is how it is, Cutts. I haven't forgotten the time when you were trying to get me into your rotten manners and customs. Excuse me speaking plain English—it's a little way I've got. It seems to us that you are trying the same game on now with our pal Dig. We want to stop it."

"Digby came to tea with me," said Cutts. "Yes. He's not coming any more. We're going to scalp and slaughter him if he has anything to do with you," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

Cutts laughed heartily.

"For innocent kids, you seem to me to be jolly suspicious," he said. "What do you think I want Digby for? To borrow money of him?"

"We should think so, if he had any," said Herries.

"But he hasn't, has he?"

"Well, no!" Herries had to admit that. "But we don't trust you. You've got to let our pal alone. None of your rotten games for Study No. 6."

"Did you come here to ask for a licking?" said Cutts.

"You'd have to lick six of us!" Manners remarked.

"Yaas, wathah! If you cut up wuff, Cutts, deah boy, you will simply weevie it."

"I don't mind telling you why I've been kind to Digby," said Cutts. "My uncle asked me to keep an eye on him, on account of the old friendship between him and Digby's pater. They were boys together at Harrow. I want to please my uncle—for reasons that are no business of yours. I feel friendly to Digby, too—he's a very pleasant little chap, and very obliging. Are you satisfied now?"

"Is that all?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's all."

The juniors exchanged glances. Cutts' explanation was reasonable enough. His motive for wanting to please his rich uncle was plain—a tip! Cutts, as if the matter was finished, sat down at the table again and started on Homer.

"Well," said Tom Merry, after a pause, "you can't blame us for not trusting you, Cutts, considering what we know about you. Will you promise to let Digby alone, and not ask him to your study any more?"

"Yaas, that will be all wight."

"Certainly not," said Cutts. "How dare you think of dictating to me! However, my uncle is coming to-morrow, and he probably won't come to the school again, so very likely I sha'n't see Digby again after that. I'm not specially keen on the society of the Fourth-Form kids. In fact, I'm pretty certain I sha'n't see him after that, since you must know all about it!"

"Oh," said Tom Merry, "then all this attention to Dig for the last week is simply to make your uncle think you've been looking after him—when you haven't."

"Your perspicacity does you credit," said Cutts sweetly. "It shows what a lot a chap can learn in the Shell if he's really intelligent."

Some of the juniors grinned. Cutts had a very stinging tongue when he chose to let it go.

"Well," said Tom Merry, unmoved, "it seems that you've been telling Dig a secret. He won't tell what it is—quite right, of course, as he's promised. But we suspected some move of that sort, and asked him—and jolted it out of him that there was a secret. That was how you began with me, you remember."

Cutts gritted his teeth for a moment.

"I've had enough of this," he said. "Will you clear out?"

"Not till we've finished. Dig can't give away the secret, as he's promised. But we don't like secrets between Dig and you. It's dangerous. The only way is for you to tell us the secret, too. We don't want to know it—it's for Dig's sake. If there's no harm in it you can tell us; if there is harm in it, we shall know what to do, then. I'm not inquisitive—in fact, Manners and Lowther and I will step outside, and you can tell it only to Dig's study-mates—they can judge whether there is harm in it. If you can tell Dig, you can tell them."

There was no help for it. Cutts had to give in.

"I'll tell you," he said slowly.

"The truth, mind!"

Cutts' eyes glittered for a moment.

"You can ask Digby, and say I gave him leave to tell you. I'm writing a play."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

The juniors simply stuttered at that unexpected revelation.

"Writing a play!"

"Bal Jove!"

"Gammon!"

"Draw it mild!"

"That is the secret I told Digby," said Cutts calmly. "You can ask him, and he's at liberty to tell you."

"And that is all?" Tom Merry asked, in amazement.

"That is all."

"Well, my hat!"

"I don't believe it," said Herries grimly. "Any silly ass might write a play, of course; but what did you want to tell Dig for and make it a secret?"

"I told him in conversation—and it's a secret because I don't want to be chipped about it. If my play's refused, I don't want all the fellows to know. That's all. I depend upon you to say nothing, as you've forced it out of me like this."

"Oh, that's right enough," said Tom Merry—"and Dig's at liberty to tell us!"

"Yes."

"Good enough. Come on, you chaps, and we'll ask Dig," said Blake.

The juniors trooped out of the study. They were amazed and relieved. So harmless a secret as that was not a cause for uneasiness. Cutts drew a deep breath as he locked the door after the juniors.

"Hang them!" he muttered. "Hang them! But the young fools couldn't possibly suspect—they couldn't possibly! Digby didn't—and they can't!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked for Digby at once. They found him in the Common-room, and he looked at them rather grimly as they came up.

"We've been to see Cutts!" Blake announced.

"Like your cheek!" growled Digby.

"He's told us the giddy secret, and he's given us leave to ask you, and you leave to tell us. You're released from your promise," said Blake.

"Br-r-r-r!" said Dig.

"Cutts says that the secret is that he's writing a play, and he doesn't want all the fellows to know, in case he should be chipped about it. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"That's the secret he told you?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

Tom burst into a laugh.

"Well, we have been making a mountain out of a mole-hill, and no mistake," he confessed. "I never thought it was a harmless thing like that. But I don't trust Cutts."

"I think you've taken a jolly lot on yourself in bouncing it out of Cutts like that," said Digby sulkily. "I think you might have minded your own business, if you ask me."

"That's all right; we don't ask you!" said Tom Merry good-humouredly.

"And that's all there is in it!" said Monty Lowther coolly. "There's something else behind it all. I know Cutts. There's something else."

"What is it?"

Lowther shook his head.

"Don't ask me; I don't know. But I'll undertake to say that there's something behind it. I don't know what yet! Cutts is too deep for us!"

"Rot!" said Digby emphatically.

"Yaas, I must say that it seems to me to be wathah wot, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"We shall see!" said Lowther. "Just you wait a bit, my sons, and we shall see what we shall see!"

And as that was certainly incontrovertible, no one attempted to controvert it.

THE END.

NEXT FRIDAY'S Splendid Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's is entitled

# THE BLACK SHEEP!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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