

3 SPLENDID SCHOOL STORIES!

The **Penny** **1½^d**
Popular

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New Series.

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



BOB CHERRY DEALS WITH THE BRUTAL LANDLORD.
(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)

The clerk grinned.
"That's the stuff to give 'em!" he said.
Bob Cherry listened to this conversation in astonishment and disgust.
He would have been astonished and disgusted in any case.
This rascal of a landlord, not satisfied with all his profiteering in the past, was going to turn a lady out of house and home, pretend to live in it himself, and then sell the premises at an enormous profit.
Besides being astonished and disgusted at such a procedure, Bob Cherry was furious.
The occasion of his previous visit to Torquay came back to him like a flash now.
He had come to visit his aunt and his cousin Madge.
And his aunt was Mrs. Redding!
Bob Cherry clenched and unclenched his hands.
He could scarcely restrain himself from squaring up to the rascally landlord, and giving him the hiding he deserved.
Bob's aunt was an invalid. She had resided at the house called Inglenook for several years; and Bob, although he did not know a great deal about such matters, was well aware that the old lady would find it impossible to obtain another house. Houses were at a premium all over the country.
Bob Cherry's eyes blazed.
The note of triumph and arrogance in the landlord's voice fairly made Bob's blood boil.
But the junior could do nothing—not yet, at any rate.
It would be useless to make a scene in the newspaper-office.
At that moment a bundle of papers, wet from the printing-press, were dumped upon the counter.
The clerk handed a copy to Bob, who paid for it, and strode out of the office.
Then, forgetting why he had bought the paper—forgetting his chums—forgetting the cricket-match which was shortly due to take place, Bob Cherry proceeded with rapid stride towards his aunt's house.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Up Against It.

"MADGE!"
Bob Cherry fairly shouted the name. Then he bounded across the road to greet his cousin.
Long years had elapsed since Bob Cherry had seen Madge Redding. But he had recognised her instantly.
She was a pretty girl, dressed plainly but neatly, and not unlike Bob himself in appearance.
Her expression, which had been clouded when Bob had first seen her, now brightened.
"Bob! What—what are you doing here?"
Bob Cherry explained what had brought him to Devonshire.
"Why haven't you been to see us all this time?" asked Madge.
Bob looked remorseful.
"I won't excuse myself, Madge," he said. "It's been my own fault. So many things have happened since I went to Greyfriars—exciting things, too—that you and aunt fairly vanished out of my existence. I didn't even remember that you lived here until this morning."
"We sha'n't be living here much longer, I'm afraid!" said the girl wistfully.
"Why not?"
"We are being turned out of our home."
"Then it's true! You've really got notice to quit?"
Madge nodded.
"We've got to get out practically at once," she said. "Our landlord—Mr. Jenner—is a beast! He knows that mother's an invalid; he knows that it's next door to impossible for us to get another house; but he's turning us out."
"Poor kid!" said Bob softly.
"Oh, I don't mind!" said Madge. "I'm young and strong, and I could live and work anywhere. It's mother I'm thinking about. This is a terrible blow to her. She's not in the best of health, as you know; and now she's making herself ill with worry."
"It's a shame!" said Bob hotly. "A downright, beastly shame!"
"Since we were given notice," said Madge, "I've been hunting high and low for another house. I'm hunting now, as a matter of fact. It's an exhausting game."
Bob saw that his cousin looked worn and tired.
He took her by the arm.
"Come along, Madge!" he said. "I want to see your mother."
And he accompanied the girl to Inglenook,

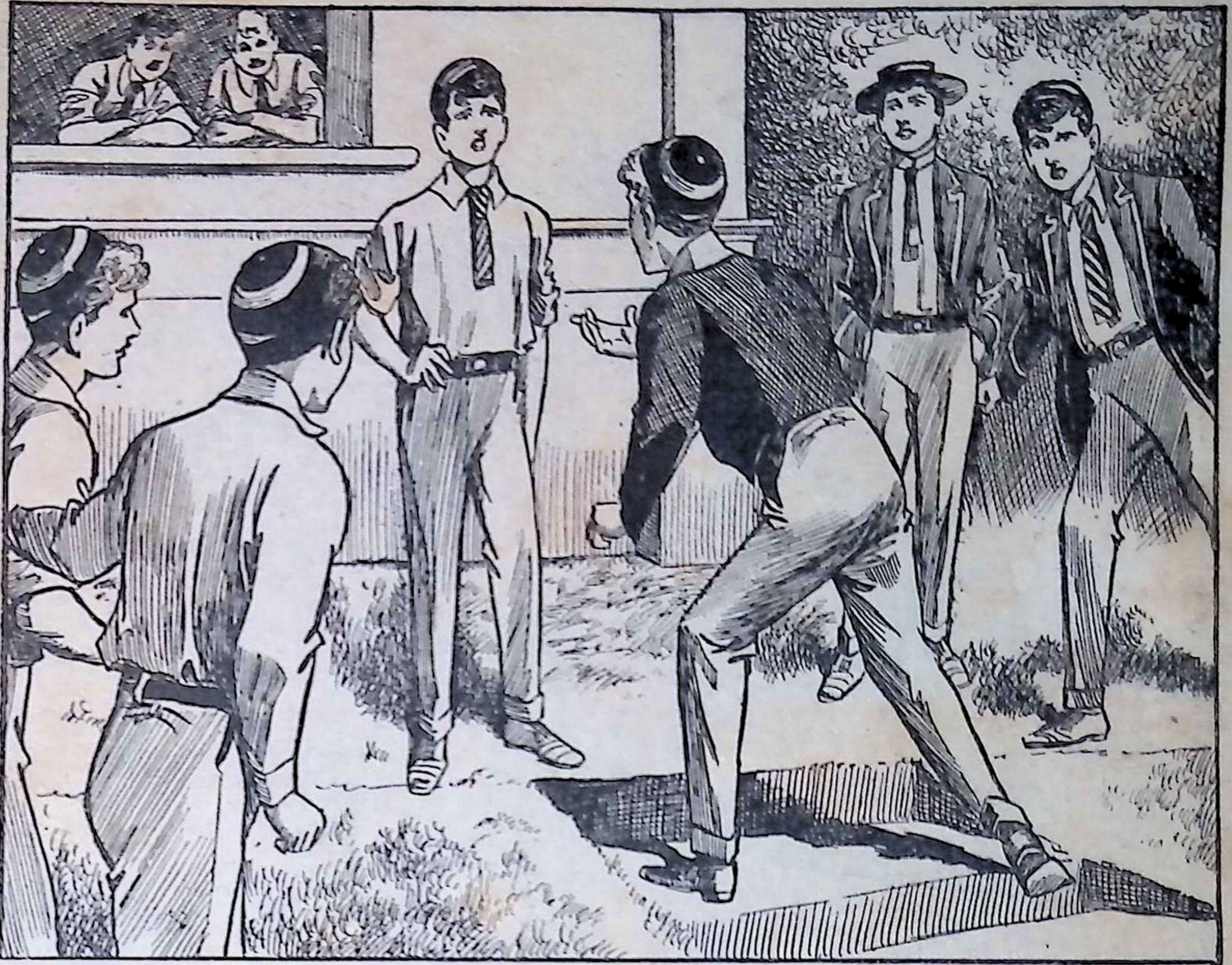
a pleasant little house, situated in one of the outlying roads.
A silver-haired lady greeted the couple when they arrived.
Bob was shocked at his aunt's appearance.
When he had last seen her she had been a bright, robust, healthy woman. Now she was little more than a wreck.
She gave Bob a warm welcome, and then turned to Madge.
"Have you had any luck, dear?"
Madge shook her head.
"I've been to the estate agent's; I've been everywhere; mother! There isn't a vacant house in Torquay—not one which we could afford to rent, anyway."
The old lady looked almost haggard. Bob Cherry saw that she was on the verge of tears.
"Buck up, auntie!" he said. "The worst hasn't happened yet. I'll try and square that brute Jenner, somehow."
"The brute in question," said Madge, glancing out of the window, "is coming here now!"
There was a heavy tread on the gravel path, and the rascally landlord stalked through the hall and entered the sitting-room.
"Mornin', Mrs. Redding!" he said, ignoring Bob and Madge. "It's not my way to beat about the bush, as you know. I find that your rent for the last quarter is still owing. Unless it is settled to-day you must quit this house to-morrow!"
Bob Cherry planted himself in front of the speaker.
"You cad!" he exclaimed, in ringing tones. "What do you mean by turning a poor woman out of her home, when you know jolly well she can't find another house for miles round?"
The landlord shrugged his shoulders.
"What's it to do with you?" he growled.
"Everything!" Mrs. Redding's my aunt, and I'm not going to see her ruined by a scoundrel like you!"
"Bob dear—" protested Mrs. Redding.
"You're a beastly outsider!" went on Bob, unheeding. "I don't believe my aunt owes you a quarter's rent, to begin with!"
"Ask her!" sneered Mr. Jenner.
Bob Cherry turned to Mrs. Redding.
"Is that right, aunt?"
The old lady nodded.
"Fourteen pounds is the sum," she said.
"And at the present moment," added Madge, "I doubt if we could raise fourteen shillings!"
"There you are, young shaver!" said Mr. Jenner triumphantly. "Fourteen pounds is owing for rent, and unless it's paid by six o'clock to-night Mrs. Redding must clear out in the morning!"
The callous tone of the man, and his swaggering, domineering manner, set a hammer going in Bob Cherry's brain. But for the presence of Mrs. Redding and Madge he would certainly have tried the experiment of a straight left on Mr. Jenner's rather prominent nose.
The landlord turned to go.
"I shall expect the money to be paid by six o'clock!" he said vindictively. "That's all. If it's not paid you know what to expect!"
Mrs. Redding sank back in her chair and covered her face with her hands.
Madge stood proud and erect, her eyes flashing at the retreating figure of the landlord.
And Bob Cherry, looking on, felt angry—not only with Mr. Jenner, but with himself.
Why had he neglected his poor relations?
Why had he allowed himself to drift out of their lives when they stood in sore need of help?
Bob thrust his hand into his pocket.
The sum total of his wealth was seven shillings.
It seemed that he was entirely helpless in the present emergency.
But he made up his mind there and then that his aunt and cousin should not suffer.
If there was justice in England—if there was still such a thing as fair dealing—the present tenants of Inglenook should remain where they were.
Bob's first thought was to wire to his father.
Major Cherry was a man who stood no nonsense. If he came down to Torquay to investigate the matter it would be a sorry sequel for Mr. Jenner.
But the major had gone to Russia with the Expeditionary Force. He had left England only a few days before.
Bob Cherry placed his hand on his aunt's shoulder.

"Cheer up, aunt!" he said. "That cad sha'n't turn you out!"
"But—but he's in the right, Bob. We owe him a quarter's rent!"
"Never mind. I'll scrape the money together somehow."
"No, no, Bob! There is no need for you to become involved in our troubles."
"I'd cut off my right hand rather than see you turned out!" said Bob grimly. "You leave it to me. I'll get the money by six o'clock."
"Even then," said Madge, "we shall have to vacate this house in three days' time."
"A good deal can happen in three days," said Bob, smiling, though he felt anything but cheerful. "I'll make that brute Jenner sing small by the time I've finished with him!"
So saying, Bob Cherry nodded an adieu to his aunt and cousin, and left the house.
Little had he dreamed, when setting out from Greyfriars, that he would come face to face with such a human problem.
Other fellows, placed in a similar position, might have left their relatives to fight their own battles.
But that was not Bob Cherry's way.
Bob determined as he strode along the sunlit streets of Torquay that he would do the right thing by his aunt and cousin, and slave off the catastrophe with which they were threatened.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Not Lost, But Gone Before!

"WHERE'S Bob Cherry?"
George Wingate asked the question in tones of annoyance.
He had just rounded up the Removites at the hotel, for the cricket-match was now nearly due to commence.
"Do you know where Cherry is, Wharton?"
"He went out to buy a paper an hour ago," said Harry.
"And he hasn't been back here since?"
"No."
"Very well. We must carry on without him. Delarey will have to play in his place if he doesn't turn up in time for the match."
The Removites were startled and uneasy.
It was not like Bob Cherry to be absent when his presence was necessary. But he was absent now.
"Better call in at the newspaper office on our way to the ground," said Johnny Bull.
"We may hear something of him. Fancy the silly idiot doing the disappearing trick like this!"
The juniors described their missing chum to the clerk in the newspaper office.
"A fellow answering to your description came in for a paper early this morning," said the clerk. "I couldn't tell you where he went afterwards."
"He may have gone straight to the cricket-ground," said Nugent. "You know what Bob is. He generally likes to be on the scene early."
"No doubt we shall run him to ground earthfully on the esteemed cricketful pitch," said Hurree Singh.
But this prophecy did not prove correct.
The Devonshire team had turned up, but there was no trace of Bob Cherry. He had vanished as completely and mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.
Harry Wharton shook hands with the Devonshire skipper—a cheery-faced fellow named Dawlish.
"You don't look exactly pleased to see us," smiled Dawlish.
Harry Wharton explained.
"Sorry if I was scowling," he said. "I'm feeling rather worried. One of our best men is missing."
"Great Scott! Still, he may turn up later. Shall we postpone the game for a bit?"
"No," said Wharton. "We'll stick to our original programme. I wish the silly ass would turn up, though!"
Bob Cherry was a player whom the Removites could ill afford to miss.
At the wicket or in the field Bob could always be relied upon to put up a good game.
Piet Delarey, the reserve, was a very fair cricketer, but by comparison with Bob Cherry he was a mere novice. The Removites was never a hundred per cent. side without Bob.
Harry Wharton won the toss, and a few moments later he opened the innings with Frank Nugent.
But somehow the two batsmen seemed all at sea.



The Greyfriars juniors sprang to their feet as Bob Cherry came running up the pavilion steps. "I want to raise fourteen quid at once, for a deserving object!" he said. (See page 4.)

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in surprise. "Harry! Franky!"

But Wharton and Nugent, if they heard, did not heed.

They continued in the direction of their hotel.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The silly asses! They cut me dead!"

Madge regarded her cousin in some concern.

"You—you haven't quarrelled, Bob?"

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"There's no rift in the lute that I can see," he said.

And then it dawned upon him, for the first time, that his absence from the Remove Eleven had probably nettled his schoolfellows.

He had vouchsafed no explanation to them.

For all that Harry Wharton & Co. knew to the contrary, Bob Cherry was engaged upon nothing more important than taking a pretty girl out for the afternoon.

They did not even know—how should they?—that Madge was Bob Cherry's cousin!

All the same, Bob Cherry felt very angry.

His chums had no right to cut him until they had heard his explanation.

Bob Cherry's brow was black as he passed on with his cousin.

"In a temper?" asked Madge.

"Well, it makes a fellow feel savage to be ignored like that!" growled Bob.

He regained his good-humour, however, by the time Inglenook was reached.

Mrs. Redding was greatly relieved to learn that she might not have to evacuate the house after all.

Bob Cherry stayed to tea, and then went along to the hotel where the Greyfriars party were staying.

A chorus of disapproval greeted the junior as he entered the lounge.

"Bob, you boulder—"

"What do you mean by it?"

"Well, I like that!" growled Bob. "I was just going to ask you the same question. Fancy cutting a fellow dead in the street!"

"When a fellow lets his side down, and prefers carting a girl around, he must expect to be cut!" said Nugent. "I don't usually go off the deep end about a thing, but it's time for a little plain speaking!"

Perhaps that sort of plain speaking was just a little too plain for Bob Cherry. He coloured up at once.

"So you think I deliberately let you down—what?"

"What else are we to think?" said Wharton.

"You've stayed away all day, and caused us to lose the cricket-match, and you've offered no sort of explanation."

"You've given me no chance!" said Bob.

"Well, if you've got anything to say, we're all ears!" said Johnny Bull.

"If you think I'm going to explain now, you're quite off-side!" growled Bob Cherry.

"You're a set of silly asses, and I've got no patience with you! Br-r-r! I'm off to bed!"

And Bob went, leaving his schoolfellows marvelling at the sudden change which had come over their chum.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Greyfriars to the Rescue!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were up with the lark.

They were bitterly disappointed at having lost the cricket-match, and there was a good deal of lost ground to be made up.

Bob Cherry joined his schoolfellows in an early-morning dip.

"Not going to desert us to-day, are you?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Not unless I'm sent for," said Bob.

"Who's likely to send for you?" asked Nugent.

"That's my bizney."

Frank Nugent coloured up, and the rift in the lute looked like widening.

But Mark Linley, with his usual tact,

managed to draw Bob Cherry aside, and thus pour oil on the troubled waters.

At ten o'clock the running races commenced.

In spite of the strained relationship which existed between Bob Cherry and his schoolfellows, Bob threw himself heart and soul into the various contests.

This was the first time he had met the Devonshire boys, and he saw at a glance that they were splendid athletes.

Dawlish, their leader, wore the cap of Blundell's School, Tiverton—a school which in its way has achieved equal renown to Eton, Charterhouse, and Winchester.

Spurred on by their initial success on the cricket-field, the boys of Devonshire started the running races in great style, and one of their fleetest runners secured the hundred yards.

Following which, Greyfriars completely turned the tables.

Bob Cherry was in fine form.

He won the long jump, the high jump, and the quarter-mile in swift succession; and then capped these performances by finishing first in the mile.

His schoolfellows watched him in wonder.

—Could this be the fellow who had left them in the lurch the day before?

"Blessed if I can understand what sort of a game Bob's playing!" remarked Squiff to Harry Wharton. "He lets us down one day, and performs giddy miracles the next. Can you make it out?"

"It beats me!" said Wharton.

Bob Cherry himself became as sunny-tempered as usual, but he still refrained from giving any explanation of his conduct of the previous day. A sort of patched-up peace prevailed between Bob and his chums. There was no open quarrel; but things would never be the same again until Bob chose to explain why he was patrolling the roads of Torquay

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Lovers of the stories of Harry Wharton & Co. should not miss reading the wonderful, complete yarn, entitled "Bessie versus Billy!" which appears in this week's issue of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. It is one of the funniest stories that has ever been written, and readers of the "Penny Popular" should ask their newsagents for a copy at once. It is now on sale everywhere

with a pretty girl instead of helping Greyfriars on to victory.

After the running races came the swimming sports; and here again Bob Cherry covered himself with glory.

The Devonshire fellows were by the natural order of things fine swimmers; and Bob Cherry had no walk-over victories.

But he won three races, and Harry Wharton and Mark Linley won one each.

Dawlish tapped Harry Wharton on the shoulder as the captain of the Remove emerged from his bathing-machine.

"You fellows are going great guns," he said. "When we licked you by an innings in the cricket-match, I thought the rest of the events would be plane-sailing for us. But I thought wrong."

Harry Wharton explained that the reappearance of Bob Cherry in the ranks of the Remove was the reason for the recent successes.

"There's only the boxing now," said Dawlish. "And I think we've got you beaten there."

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"Who's your man?" asked Wharton.

"A fellow called Chester. He's the champion boy-boxer of Plymouth. If you can produce a man who can lick him," said Dawlish, "I shall respect you more than ever!"

Wharton laughed.

"We'll see what Bob Cherry can do," he said.

On the morning of the boxing-contest strict watch and ward was kept on Bob by his anxious chums.

It was quite on the cards that Bob would again take it into his head to disappear at a critical time; and the Greyfriars fellows put their heads together, and decided to nip in the bud any attempt on Bob's part to make himself scarce.

During breakfast a note was handed to Bob Cherry. It was addressed to him in a round, girlish hand, and Harry Wharton at once "saw red."

"Bob's going to do the disappearing trick again," he murmured to Frank Nugent. "We shall have to follow him, and see what he's up to."

"Isn't that sort of thing rather mean?" chimed in Monty Newland.

Harry Wharton flushed.

"I don't see that it is," he said. "We're entitled to know what the little game is; and the sooner the affair comes to a head the better."

Bob Cherry seemed very excited on the receipt of the note. He left his breakfast unfinished, and quitted the hotel, making rapid strides in the direction of his aunt's house.

The note he had received was from Madge, and it ran as follows:

"My dear Bob.—Mr. Jenner is here with two men. They have ordered us to vacate the house at once, and they threaten to pitch the furniture out into the roadway. Please come at once.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"MADGE."

When Bob Cherry came in sight of Inglenook, he saw that Mr. Jenner was already putting his threat into effect.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Lattrey's Scheme!

"I've a message for you, Lattrey." Peele flung himself down in the big armchair in his study as soon as he entered the room after Jimmy Silver & Co. had finished with him. Lattrey looked at his chum anxiously. "From Silver?" he asked quickly. Peele nodded. "Yes. They want you now! They've finished with Gower and me, the rotten bullies! Now it's your turn. Goodness knows what game they will play with you." Lattrey whitened visibly. He was not only a sneak of the first water, he was an arrant coward as well. "I'm—I'm not going to go!" he burst out. Peele laughed ironically. "Jimmy Silver & Co. have a way of fetching chaps they want if they don't go of their own accord! Better go and get it over!" "I sha'n't!" "Much better to go—that's my advice." "Then I don't want your advice!" snapped Lattrey. And there was silence for a few minutes. Peele reddened furiously every time he thought of the ignominious position in which Jimmy Silver & Co. had placed him, and his thoughts were bitter towards the famous Classical Co. But Lattrey was not thinking of Peele and his recent unfortunate position. He was thinking of the best way to get out of what was to him a far more unfortunate position. Suddenly he sat up, and his eyes gleamed excitedly. "I know!" he exclaimed quickly. "I've got a top-hole wheeze to do them in the eye!" Peele's lip curled in a sneer. "Mind it doesn't recoil in both your eyes!" he said warningly. "I'm letting Silver & Co. severely alone." Lattrey waved his hand excitedly. "But you don't understand!" he almost shouted. "I've got the wheeze, my son, that will not only save me, but help you to get your own back." "Eh? I don't know that I want to get my own back. I tell—"

"But listen here a minute. Supposing I was missing—"

"What's the good of supposing things? In any case, there wouldn't be half the notice taken of your absence that there was of Jimmy Silver when he ran away some time ago over the Brooks' affair."

"Rats! But if there was found my coat and cap and boots on the river bank—"

"Wh-h-hat?"

"I don't mean I'm going to do anything silly, you know. I'm just saying that it would look rather rotten—a Rookwood chap helping himself off the earthly planet, and all that, because he couldn't stand being bullied by Jimmy Silver & Co."

"M-m-my hat!"

"Not so bad, eh? Then I could stop in that little wooden hut in the old woods. It's never used now, not even by our own fellows."

"My stars! Latty, old son, you've hit the nail on the topknot first whack!"

"I knew I should!"

There was just that trace of boastfulness in Lattrey's tone to make it unpleasant. "You'll have to work it mighty quickly," said Peele. "Jimmy Silver and his cronies will be here in a few minutes. They don't like being kept waiting, you know."

Lattrey stood up at once and snatched up his cap. Then, on second thoughts, he sat down again, took pencil and paper, and hastily scribbled a note.

He read it over when he had finished, and left it on the table.

"Now, it's up to you and old Gower to see that I get some grub," he said quickly. "And don't forget the smokes!"

Peele started.

"Smokes! I've finished with smokes!"

It was Lattrey's turn to sneer.

"Oh, so you're going to be dictated to by that mouldy crowd, are you! I'll bet old Gower isn't!"

Peele shrugged his shoulders, but did not venture to reply. It all depended upon what Gower did.

"Don't forget—the old wooden hut in Coombe Woods! Bring some grub, and don't forget to look miserable when the dread news is passed round."

And with a chuckle of amusement at his own "wit," Lattrey hastened from the study. He had not been gone five minutes when the study door was flung open again, and Gower came in. He grinned slightly as he saw Peele.

"Nice chaps, Jimmy Silver & Co., aren't they?" he said lightly.

Peele reddened furiously.

"Rats!" he said curtly. "Here, look at this!"

Peele handed his chum the note that Lattrey had left behind. Gower took it and read it quickly.

His eyes nearly dropped from his head as he took in the significance of the few scrawled words.

"Wh-what-what—"

Peele grinned.

"That's only his little game," he explained. "He's really going to the little wooden hut in Coombe Woods. We are to take some grub and some smokes."

Gower nodded heartily.

"Good!"

"Eh? What about your promise to Jimmy Silver & Co.?"

"Piff to them! Do you think they are going to dictate to me? But—but, all the same, I think we'll keep it dark."

Peele nodded.

There came the sound of hasty footsteps, and once more the study door was flung open.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came in.

"Where's Lattrey?" demanded Jimmy Silver curtly.

Without a word, Peele handed the note Lattrey had left behind to the Classical leader, and found time, as Jimmy Silver & Co. bent over to peruse it, to wink at Gower.

The faces of the Fistical Four were a study as they grasped the meaning of those few words.

"Good-ness-gracious!" stuttered Jimmy Silver.

"Oh!" ejaculated Newcome.

"Mum-m-my aunt!" stammered Raby.

"He's potty!" snorted Lovell.

Peele and Gower looked very solemn.

"If anything's happened to Lattrey," said Gower coldly, "we'll know who to blame!"

"Ass!" said Lovell witheringly.

Jimmy Silver read the note again.

"I'm not going to wait for Silver to bully me. You'll find me if you take a walk along the river-bank."

That was all. But it was enough to send cold shivers down the backs of the Fistical Four.

Jimmy Silver looked sharply at Peele and Gower.

"Is this a lark?" he demanded.

Gower shrugged his shoulders.

"I found that when I came in," he said.

"That's all I know about it. I'm going to see the Head—I was just going when you came in, as a matter of fact."

Jimmy Silver started.

"Right! Go ahead at once! We'll go down to the river. Come on, you chaps!"

And the four chums hurried out of the study.

Gower looked at Peele, and grinned.

"I don't think we'd better go and see the Head just yet," he said softly. "Things might happen. Jimmy Silver & Co. won't let things stand still."

And, as matters turned out, Gower was very glad that he did not go to the Head with the dramatic note that Lattrey had left behind.

Jimmy Silver & Co., as Gower said, were not letting things stand still.

They hurried out of the school gates, and took the road to the river. They were anxious, but at the back of their minds there hovered an idea that it was just one of Lattrey's jokes.

They knew what a coward he was, and that he would be able to summon up sufficient courage to do anything desperate did not appeal to them as being likely.

Raby looked nervously at Jimmy Silver as they walked quickly down the lane.

"Do you think—"

"No, I don't! He's too big a coward!"

"But even they can be terrorised into—"

"Oh, rats, Raby! I tell you, we shall find the little sneak soon—perhaps smoking. He's only trying to avoid our little correction. I don't think the cads will do much more smoking. Gower and Peele have had a pretty stiff time, you know!"

"Yes; but what about Lattrey?"

That was the point. When they reached the river, what would they find?

The uncertainty of the situation served to command silence as Jimmy Silver & Co. walked quickly down to the river.

They reached it at last, hot with the exertion and haste.

There was no sign of Lattrey. Nor could they see any cap or coat.

"It's a lark!" said Jimmy Silver, with a sigh of relief.

"We've not looked round the bend, Jimmy," put in Raby quietly.

Jimmy Silver nodded, and walked along the bank.

They turned the bend, and from the lips of the four juniors there came a gasp.

"Oh! Mum-m-my goodness!"

"Gee-whizz! He's—he's—"

Jimmy Silver pulled himself together.

"Come on!" he said shortly. "It may not belong to Lattrey."

And Jimmy Silver ran to the spot where lay a coat on the river-bank, and unceremoniously thrust his hand in one of the pockets. He pulled out a letter, and there, plainly enough, was Lattrey's name!

Raby looked down at the water with a shudder. Suddenly he started back, with a gasp of terror.

"Wh-what's that?" he muttered, white to the lips.

Jimmy Silver, Newcome, and Lovell looked down.

It was a Rookwood cap they saw resting on the bed of the river. And, with terror at their hearts, the four juniors stood and looked at each other.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Jimmy's Failure.

"GONE!"

Raby uttered that one word, and there was a world of hopelessness in his tone. Newcome and Lovell looked at Jimmy Silver, waiting for him to speak.

Jimmy Silver did not feel like speaking. There was a lump in his throat which seemed to choke back his breath.

"I—I—I won't believe it!" he muttered, and his voice was hoarse.

"But—but—"

"He may have put it there to scare us." For a moment hope rose in the juniors' breasts. There might be something in what Jimmy Silver said.

"But Gower wouldn't have gone to the Head if it was a lark," said Lovell quickly. "He was just going to Dr. Chisholm, you remember, when we arrived."

And the juniors' hopes sank. For fully five minutes they stood there, looking down at the river. At any other time, it would have appeared to them enticing, and it was not unlikely that they would have flung off their clothes and dived in.

But now that the slowly-moving waters held a secret they felt like covering their eyes with their hands, and running headlong through the woods.

Jimmy Silver was the first to speak.

"Look here, you chaps," he said quietly.

"We shall have to talk this over."

"Not much good doing that!" muttered Raby. "Better go and see Dr. Chisholm."

Jimmy Silver hesitated for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he said firmly. "There's something about this that tells me it's a joke. If it is—"

He left the sentence unfinished, but the look on his face and the tightening of his lips boded ill for Lattrey when the truth came out.

Jimmy Silver led the way into Coombe Woods, which were on the other side of the river-bank.

The four juniors flung themselves down in the shade of a great tree.

"Now, the question is—"

"The Head, or shall we wait," said Jimmy Silver. "I'm for waiting, myself, because I'll never believe Lattrey ever had enough courage to do anything like—like—"

He broke off sharply.

"Do you think we'll be blamed if—if it's true?" asked Lovell uneasily.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"A few of the wormy kind might blame us," he said quietly; "but all the right-thinking chaps will agree that the sneaks got what they deserved. But I rather think Gower and Peele will take care that not too much of the real reason of our treating them like that comes out. It won't do them much good, you know."

"N-no. Gower had it worse than Peele, too; and Lattrey would not have lasted as long as they did. I'll wager they didn't think that little smoke of theirs was going to lead to—this!"

"No, I don't believe they did. But—but we must decide what we are going to do."

"I suggest we go back, and wait for bed-time. Perhaps Lattrey will sneak in then."

The other juniors nodded, and a few

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minutes later they were on their way back to Rookwood. The more they thought of it, the more they came to agree with Jimmy Silver's idea that Lattrey was too much of a coward to do anything desperate.

But, all the same, the suspense was depressing, and, for once, there was no interchange of witticisms.

When Bulkeley came round to usher the juniors to bed, there was still no sign of Lattrey. Gower and Peele went about with solemn faces, and every now and then they would shake their heads and heave a deep sigh.

Jimmy Silver felt like shaking, not their heads, but their whole bodies, and in such a way as would make Gower and Peele desist. But there was still uncertainty concerning Lattrey's fate, and while that uncertainty lasted Gower and Peele would be permitted to take liberties.

Most of the juniors were aware of Lattrey's disappearance, and the contents of the dramatic note that the sneak had left behind. But few believed that he would carry out the threat which underlay the words.

The lights were turned out, and still Lattrey failed to put in an appearance.

Jimmy Silver & Co., despite their belief that it was all a joke, began to grow really uneasy. Lattrey, if he were in hiding, was running a great risk in stopping out all night, and Lattrey was not one who dared much.

"I say, Jimmy," whispered Raby, whose bed was next to Silver's in the Fourth-Form dormitory, "this—this is rotten! I sha'n't sleep a blessed wink to-night!"

"Nor shall I!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "But, whatever happens, I shall stick to the conviction that we were only doing our best to save the good name of Rookwood. If the Head kicks up a row, then we'll take a licking, of whatever he dishes out. But still, I think everything will come out all right."

"I'm hoping so, too!"

And Raby turned over, and tried to get to sleep. But there was no sleep for any of the chums until the grey light of dawn was turning the night into day.

Then it was the sleep of exhaustion that came to them, and, as a result, they got up at the clang of rising-bell with swollen eyes and tired bodies.

"I'm going for a swim!" said Jimmy Silver, frowning. "I feel like a blessed rag!"

"Same here!" assented Raby. "But—but you mean the baths, of course? I don't—"

"Rats! We'll show our spirit, my buck, by going down to the river!" interrupted Jimmy Silver.

"Look here—"

"No arguments! Come on!"

And, without waiting to see if his chums were ready, Jimmy Silver took up his towel and hurried out of the dormitory. It was a Sunday morning, so there was no assembly until the school went to chapel.

Raby, Lovell, and Newcome looked at each other doubtfully. They were not keen on going down to the river.

But at last Raby shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, come on!" he snapped. "The silly ass will chip us if we don't go down!"

And, snatching up their towels, the three chums followed Jimmy Silver. They caught him up as he turned out of the gates.

"I say, Jimmy, what's the good of going down to the river when you can get quite as decent a swim in the school-baths?" asked Raby.

Jimmy Silver turned to him almost sharply.

"For two reasons," he said quickly. "The first—we'll show the chaps that we don't take any notice of the tales Gower is putting round that we are the cause of Lattrey's disappearance. The second—I'm going to look at the bottom of the river!"

"What for? To see if—"

"Exactly! I'm not going to spend another night like last. I didn't sleep a wink until dawn."

"Same here!"

The Fistical Four reached the river, and were about to undress, when there came to their ears the sound of rustling bushes. Jimmy Silver looked surprised.

"Somebody's inside the woods!" said Newcome. "One of the chaps going for a bathe, I expect."

Jimmy Silver shook his head. "No; they'd go to the baths. Wait a bit." And Jimmy Silver hurried noiselessly into the woods. He was back in a few seconds, and his face was tense with suppressed excitement.

"Gower and Peele!" he said, between his teeth. "They've a big basket with them. Come on!"

Without waiting for a reply Jimmy Silver hurried back into the wood. Raby, Newcome, and Lovell quickly followed, and the four juniors scarce made a sound as they pushed their way through the bushes.

"There they are!"

Jimmy Silver whispered to his chums as he caught sight of the two sneaks.

Not until the wooden hut was reached, and Peele and Gower had passed inside, did the Fistical Four lose sight of their quarry. "Jolly early to start a picnic. Surely—"

"We'll go and see."

"No; give them a minute to settle down." As the juniors patiently waited for Jimmy Silver to give them the signal to approach the hut, there came the sound of laughter and cheery voices.

"There's more than two there!" murmured Lovell.

"Yes; let's investigate." And with a rush Jimmy Silver reached the hut and flung open the door.

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell peered over his shoulder as he stared, dumbfounded, into the interior of the hut.

For lolling back against the side of the hut, a cigarette between his lips, was Lattrey!

Peele and Gower were there, and they, too, were smoking.

They jumped to their feet in alarm as the door was suddenly burst open.

"Wh-what's that!"

"It's us!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "You—you—"

Jimmy Silver broke off helplessly. But Raby found his tongue.

"Lattrey!" he roared. "I'll give you Lattrey!"

With a rush the enraged juniors charged the sneak of the Fourth clean off his feet.

"Get up!" howled Raby. "Come on—outside! I'm going to give you the licking of your life!"

He seized the pale and trembling sneak and forced him out into the open. Jimmy Silver glanced disgustedly at Gower and Peele.

"You utter worms!" he said witheringly. "You're a disgrace to the school! I think Raby's plan a good one. Outside, Gower!"

"And you, Peele!" shouted Newcome.

"No; he's for me!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Bags I first!" said Newcome hotly.

And during the next five minutes the three sneaks experienced punishment that had seldom fallen their way. The three enraged chums simply wiped up the ground with Peele & Co.

"Into the river with them!" hooted Raby excitedly.

But Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"No, 'nuff's as good as a feast!" he said. "Let the worms crawl home as best they can!"

And Jimmy Silver & Co. went to the river, stripped, and dived in, their spirits as high as ever now that Lattrey was found to be safe and sound.

Arm-in-arm they walked back to Rookwood, their faces bright and happy.

"Fancy after all our trouble to reform Gower and Peele!" snorted Lovell. "The rotters are as bad as ever! You might remember, Jimmy, I said Gower would never be a decent chap."

"You did, old top!" said Jimmy Silver. "And I admit that I have failed to do what I wanted to do. But, all the same, I think Peele & Co. will remember the lesson!"

When Peele & Co. reached Rookwood some little time later, they found quite a crowd of Classical juniors awaiting them.

They had heard the story of Lattrey's scheme, and not one Fourth-Former had anything good to say about it.

Mornington was at the head of the crowd, and he hissed a greeting as soon as Peele & Co. came in sight.

"Ssssss!"

Peele flushed as he elbowed his way through the packed gateway.

"Rats!" he said curtly. "What's all the giddy row about!"

"We're welcoming you and Lattrey back!" grinned Mornington. "We are so awfully pleased to see Lattrey safe and sound. Aren't we, chaps?"

The chaps answered with another hiss. "Make way!"

It was not Peele & Co. who shouted that. It was unmistakably Bulkeley, and the skipper of Rookwood was not to be denied.

Room was made for him, and he went quickly to Peele & Co.

"Ah, Lattrey!" he said sharply. "I think Mr. Bootles has something to say to you. Follow me!"

Lattrey turned pale. "But—but—"

"Follow me!"

When Bulkeley made an order in that tone of voice, it was no use arguing. Lattrey, with a hopeless glance at his chums, followed Bulkeley.

There was a slight cheer as he went, but it was not of sympathy. It was expressing the juniors' satisfaction that Lattrey was not to escape scot-free.

He was not seen for some little time, and then it was with his hands tucked under his armpits that he made his appearance. He passed Jimmy Silver & Co. in the Fourth Form passage.

"Licked?"

"Yes!"

"Serves you jolly well right!"

And certainly Lattrey deserved what he had received from the Form-master.

Peele & Co.'s conduct for the next few days was exemplary, but as to how long it would last nobody would venture to say.

THE END.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Kildare is Obstinate.

"M R. SELBY wants to see you, Kildare!"

It was D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third—who spoke thus, thrusting his head into the study occupied by Eric Kildare, the skipper of St. Jim's.

That study was familiar ground to Wally, for he was Kildare's fag.

And Wally, though rather a reckless young rascal, was quite a good fag. He really liked fagging for Kildare. He thought a lot of the genial captain.

So, for that matter, did nearly all St. Jim's. Kildare was a fine sample.

But he did not look his usual genial self just now.

His forehead was corrugated into a frown, and his mouth was grimly set.

He gave a subdued growl of impatience as Wally spoke.

Having delivered his message, Wally should have gone about his business. But he lingered.

"I say, Kildare!" he ventured, after a few seconds.

"All right, kid! I hear."

"It's not that. I know you heard. But, I say, what's the old hunk's worrying you about?"

"That's rather my affair, don't you think, young 'un?"

"Oh, don't get riding the high horse! I know that he's down on you because you told him what you thought of his slashing that chump of a brother of mine across the face with his beastly cane, and—and—well, really it is a bit my bizney, you know, for I was in that. And then you caught me in the old Hun's bed-room, and—"

"My business with Mr. Selby doesn't concern either of those incidents," broke in Kildare, with the wan ghost of a smile.

"Oh! I thought—"

"Don't trouble yourself to think about me, please! There, I didn't mean to be snappish, kid; but I'm not in the mood to talk just now. Clear off! I'm going to Mr. Selby."

Wally cleared off, and Kildare made his way to the Third Form master's study.

It was not very often that Eric Kildare and Mr. Henry Selby came into collision.

Mr. Selby's post as master of the Third did not carry with it much general disciplinary authority. In the ordinary course of things at any public school any master, as such, has some authority over any boy; but in practice the masters of the junior Forms, unless they chance to be also Housemasters, seldom meddle much with seniors.

But Mr. Selby was meddling quite a lot in Kildare's affairs just then, and the handsome senior resented it hotly.

His tap at Mr. Selby's door was an irritable one, but it was not more irritable than the harsh "Come in!" which answered it.

"Ha, Kildare! I hardly knew whether to expect you!" said the master sardonically.

"You sent for me, sir—at least, so understood."

"But it does not follow that you should obey my summons. You appear to consider your position here one which entitles you to treat me with gross disrespect, Kildare!"

"If you will excuse my speaking plainly, sir, aren't you talking—well, rather rot? I assure you that I have no desire to be disrespectful to you. But I'm not quite a child, and I object to have my actions prided upon by anyone!"

"To talk of my prying upon your actions is sheer impudence, Kildare!"

"It might be so if it were untrue, Mr. Selby. In that case, indeed, it undoubtedly would be so. But it is true!"

"I deny it! I simply did my duty as a master of this school!"

"I do not think that duty—"

"Be silent, Kildare! I have heard more than enough from you!"

"I absolutely refuse to be silent, sir! I repeat that I am not a child. As long as I am at St. Jim's I know that I am amenable to the rules of the place, though you are as well aware as I am that most of those rules do not refer to the Sixth. But I am not answerable to you. To Dr. Holmes, as the Head, to Mr. Railton, as my Housemaster—yes! But I do not happen to be a member of the Third Form, and I don't mind saying that I am very glad that I am not!"

"This impertinence will not serve you, Kildare!"

"I see that I shall have to speak more plainly yet, Mr. Selby. Last night you saw me at the Empire, at Wayland. The place has been put out of bounds, I know. Very well! I have broken a rule, and I admit that this is not one of the rules which cannot be held to apply to the Sixth. You discovered me breaking it. You have a perfect right to report the fact. But, as I see it, nothing in our relative positions gives you any right whatever to browbeat and lecture me!"

It was plain speaking, and only, the measured, manly tone redeemed it from a possible charge of insolence.

Kildare was taking high ground. But he honestly felt himself justified. He did not feel himself a rebellious schoolboy, but rather a man who has to deal with another who is his inferior in taste and breeding, but has been placed by accident in a position to attempt bossing him.

Mr. Selby heaved a heavy sigh. His face took on a look which made the skipper of St. Jim's think of a tearful crocodile.

"Will nothing persuade you that I have your best interests at heart, Kildare?" he asked.

The handsome senior looked at him coldly and searchingly.

"On the whole, Mr. Selby," he replied, "I can only answer that question with a 'No.' It would take a very great deal to persuade me of that, anyway."

"Ah, you are wrong—quite wrong! Have the goodness to listen to me for a few minutes without prejudice. You have admitted your fault in going to the Empire. It was a grave fault, for the place is one by no means of good repute. But that was not the worst thing of which you were guilty."

Kildare flushed, and rapped out:

"I really think you had better stop there, sir! If you breathe a word against the lady—"

"I hope that I am incapable of saying anything against a—er—a lady without the best possible grounds for what I say, Kildare. But look at the matter from a reasonable point of view. Is it the correct thing for a senior of this or of any school to be carrying on a flirtation with a—er—a lady who—er—adorns the boards of a music-hall?"

It was only by a big effort that Kildare could restrain himself. The manner in which Mr. Selby boggled over the word "lady," as though it hurt him to be obliged to use it, was infinitely galling to the chivalrous Sixth-Former.

For the girl of whom the Third Form master spoke was a lady and Eric Kildare's cousin and dear chum, though, of course, Mr. Selby had no knowledge of that.

"I deny that there is anything in the way of flirtation between us, sir!" snapped the senior.

Mr. Selby gave an unpleasant laugh.

"Call it what you will, I have no other name for it—at least, no milder name!" he said. "Is it not a fact that you kissed this girl when you met her last night?"

Kildare started, and glared at the speaker. He did not know that Mr. Selby's spying had gone quite as far as that.

"I decline to answer!" he said haughtily.

"Oh, very well—very well, indeed, Kildare! I know what to believe!"

"It really does not matter to me what you believe or do not believe, Mr. Selby!"

"Oh, does it not? Suppose I reported not only your visit to the Empire, but also your carrying-on with this—er—lady? Do you think you could justify your conduct to Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, who, as you are condescendingly enough to admit, really have some right to take an interest in the behaviour of a member of the St. Jim's Sixth Form?"

Kildare had to let the sneer pass, though it made his hot Irish blood fairly boil. He was troubled, but it was not entirely or even chiefly on his own account.

He had lighted by accident upon the secret of another, and he was pledged in honour to keep that secret. But for that he could have explained to both Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton without difficulty. They were both his good friends, and level-headed, broad-minded men, with none of the sour Puritanism which was affected by Messrs. Rateliff and Selby.

They would have counted him in the wrong for disregarding the edict which put the Empire Music-hall at Wayland out of bounds; but they would have held that a trivial offence when once they had been told for what reason he had gone thither.

But he could not explain to them, and for that reason he dreaded the report which he had felt sure Mr. Selby would make.

He could not lower his pride to endure the Third Form master's hectoring with patience, however. Rather than do that he was ready to leave the school he loved. It would not come to expulsion, he fancied. The Head would take his word for the fact that there was nothing in the way of flirtation between him and Miss Nora Graeme.

who was really Nina Dalgleish, his cousin, who had run away from home to go upon the stage.

But he would have to go. Unless he explained, that was the least he could expect. "I can only say, sir," he said, his voice shaking slightly, "that if you think it your duty to report—and I suppose it is—you must do so."

Mr. Selby was an obstinate man, and a very spiteful one.

There was no spite in Kildare, though he was capable of hating hard. But there was in him every whit as much obstinacy as there was in this enemy of his.

The affair had developed into a feud. Mr. Selby had made up his mind to humble Kildare's pride, to bring him to heel. Kildare was resolved not to give way to Mr. Selby.

Let him threaten, storm, cajole, cant, Eric Kildare would go his own wilful way, lead him where it might!

"I give you one more chance, Kildare! Promise me that there shall be no further meeting between you and—er—this lady, and I will overlook everything."

And exult in secret at having forced such a promise from him—feel that in forcing it he had scored heavily—come out of the foolish tussle victorious! So thought Kildare. And, on the whole, he read Mr. Selby pretty accurately.

His head went up like the head of a stag royal.

"I will make you no promise whatever, sir! I deny your right to ask any such promise from me!" he said hotly. "Do your worst!"

He swung round and strode to the door.

"Oh, very well—very well indeed, Kildare! We will see if you can afford to defy me thus!" snorted the master.

Kildare did not answer that. He had gone.

Mr. Selby thumped the table before him with his fist, and then, believing himself alone, said a strong word or two because he had hurt his hand in thumping.

He went out, and as the door slammed behind him Curly Gibson of the Third popped from under the table.

Curly had been in Mr. Selby's study without having been sent for, and for a purpose which he much preferred not to confess to the master. So he had slipped under the table when he heard Mr. Selby coming, and, hidden there, had had no choice but to listen to every word of the conversation just reported.

He had listened reluctantly at first, for Curly was a youngster of decent instincts. But his interest had overpowered his feeling that he had no right to hear, and now he had forgotten all about his scruples.

"My hat! Won't Wally and the other chaps chortle at this!" he murmured, as he made good his escape.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mr. Selby Plays Knight-Errent!

HALLO, Eric! I thought you were going into Wayland after classes to meet your cousin," said George Darrel of the Sixth, running against his chum Kildare in the quad a few minutes later.

"She wired to put it off till this afternoon," answered Kildare, with a gloomy brow. "I've just come from a pleasant chat with Selby, as a matter of fact. There's going to be big heap trouble for me, George, old bean, and I only hope you won't be dragged into it."

"We've faced trouble together before, old fellow," said Darrel, "and I think we can face it again. I don't want to be out of it. But it's queer! Selby's just gone off in a motor-car, and I heard him ask Knox whether he knew if you'd gone out, as he wanted to see you."

"And what did Knox say?" asked Kildare.

"Don't know. But it looks rather as if he'd given the old bounder the impression that you had gone."

"I have it!" said Kildare. "Selby heard more than I thought last night. He certainly saw more, for he had the cheek to tax me with kissing Nina—a thing I couldn't deny, though I wouldn't admit it. He thinks he'll catch me with her now. Counts on my being late for the appointment, of course, and he's getting there as soon as I do."

"He'll be nicely taken in," said Darrel.

"Serve him right!" returned Kildare.

"Selby really is the giddy outside edge."

The skipper's guess was right. Mr. Selby had rushed off with the idea of witnessing

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the meeting between Kildare and the girl from the Empire, and of butting in upon them, more or less.

But Kildare was wrong when he imagined that the master's journey would be wholly without result. On the contrary, it was to have quite a considerable bearing on his affairs.

Mr. Selby ordered his driver to take the road by the moor, and all the way he was on the watch for Kildare cycling ahead. He did not see him, of course; but that fact did not arouse any doubt in his mind. He felt sure the Sixth-Former was in front.

Arrived at Wayland, the master ordered his chauffeur to take the car to the Wayland Arms, and, after a momentary hesitation, himself set out for the bridge.

He expected to see Kildare there. It was now nearer one o'clock than half-past twelve, the time appointed. But Mr. Selby had known that Kildare could not be up to time; what he did not know was that the meeting had been postponed.

He went on to the ancient bridge, and stood looking over its timeworn parapets into the silvery Ryll.

Out of the corner of one eye he saw a girl come along, and recognised her as the Miss Nora Graeme of the photos, and the young lady who had met Kildare at the stage-door.

There was only one other wayfarer on the bridge—a man dressed in the height of fashion, with a handsome, dissipated face. He was no longer young, but he was some years the junior of Mr. Selby.

The master was not aware of his approach. He had turned his eyes upon Miss Graeme now. He saw a very pretty and graceful girl, who carried herself well, and had about her none of the signs of the actress, as Mr. Selby imagined actresses to look.

Then he saw her give a start of alarm and displeasure.

"Mr. Williton!" she said.

"Your faithful adorer, my dear Miss Graeme!" replied the man, with a smile that showed too many gold-stopped teeth.

Mr. Selby gave something like a low growl. He did not in the least know why, but somehow it angered him to hear Mr. Williton describe himself as the faithful adorer of Miss Graeme.

"I do not wish to hear you talk in that strain," said the girl coldly.

"But I have followed you down here—"

"It was an unpardonable liberty to take! I have already told you that I do not wish to know you—I would rather never see you!"

"But, my charmer, really—"

There was no one near but Mr. Selby, and possibly the fellow did not see him. It is to be assumed that he did not, anyway, for as he spoke he tried to throw his arm around Miss Graeme.

"Desist! I will not—you must not—"

The girl was quite honestly indignant and distressed. Mr. Selby, little as he understood women, was sure of that. And something stirred in his dried-up heart. Perhaps he remembered the sister of whom he had once been fond; perhaps it was only that, in spite of his tyranny and meanness, he was a decent man in this way.

He stepped forward.

"Stop that, sir!" he roared.

Mr. Williton was taken aback for the moment. He dropped his arm, and took a pace or two to the rear.

Miss Graeme cast a grateful glance at Mr. Selby. He lifted his hat, and said:

"You will pardon my interference, I am sure. I could not help perceiving that this person was annoying you."

Before the girl could answer Mr. Williton spoke, with the cool audacity of the man of his type—the type that hangs about stage-doors and annoys girls.

"I don't know who the deuce you are, old buffer, but my advice to you is to clear out of this. It's like your dashed cheek to interpose between two people whom you don't know from Adam. You don't look like a fighting-man, and I happen to have rather a reputation that way. Probably you've never heard of Buck Williton, but everyone who is anyone knows me. So hop it, old codger!"

The coarse speech might have scared Mr. Selby at another time, for he was very far from being a hero. But his soul was up in arms now, and he felt capable of anything.

"I decline to bandy words with you, sir," he said, with more dignity than most of those who knew him would have thought him able to display. "It is plain to me that you are annoying this lady, and that gives any

man worthy of the name of gentleman a right to interfere."

Mr. Selby said "lady" now without boggling over the word at all. The fact that Nora Graeme had been followed from town by an admirer of this type might have been expected to confirm his notions that she was a "Jezebel." But somehow it did nothing of the sort. Suddenly he saw her as a charming and modest girl molested by a scoundrel.

He turned to her.

"If you will accept my escort," he said, "I will see to it that you are no further annoyed. My name is Selby, and I am a master at St. James', a few miles away."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Selby," replied the girl. "I accept your offer most gratefully."

She did not recognise him as the man who had so angered her Cousin Edric the night before, and if she had heard his name then she did not remember that now. There was something in his voice that was vaguely familiar, it is true; but Nina Dalgleish was too agitated to think much about that.

"You think I am going to put up with this sort of thing!" roared Williton, showing those gold-stopped teeth again in a wolfish grin. You old fossil, do you imagine that you are going to carry off my girl under my very eyes? Not much, my dear Methuselah!"

"It is true that I am old enough to be this lady's father," answered Mr. Selby. "The same thing might also be said of you, and it renders your conduct more grossly disgusting. If you dare to follow the lady, or to give any further annoyance either to her or to me, I shall call the police and give you in charge! Wayland is not London, and I am known and respected here!"

It was rather a pity that Eric Kildare could not have heard and seen his enemy at that moment. He would have recognised the fact that there was more manhood in Selby than he had ever suspected.

Perhaps Mr. Williton recognised that manhood. He seemed at least to understand that the St. Jim's master meant what he said, for he turned and stalked away, muttering oaths.

"I do not think that there is any more to be feared from him, Mr. Selby," the girl said tremulously, "and I should hate to put you to unnecessary trouble. My dittings are not far away, and I am sure that I can reach them alone before that man dares to return."

She did not altogether like Mr. Selby. He looked sour and bad-tempered. But she was very grateful to him, and she felt no objection to his company for the brief distance that she had to go.

Unwonted emotions stirred in the fossilised heart of the Third Form master. He would have thought anyone who had told him that he had fallen in love with Miss Graeme an utter idiot. Yet something very like that was the truth.

"If you will allow me—" he said. And then paused.

"Oh, certainly, if it will be no trouble to you," replied Miss Graeme.

"It will be a pleasure!" said Mr. Selby. And then he almost blushed at his own boldness.

They passed side by side along the sleepy street. Mr. Selby was on the watch out of the corners of his eyes for Kildare; but the girl seemed to have forgotten all about him. It struck the master as rather curious that she should forget; but it did not displease him.

"It's rather a jolly and picturesque old place, isn't it?" said Miss Graeme.

Mr. Selby did not reply at once, and she saw that his attention had been distracted by three boys who were passing.

They were quite youngsters—nice-looking youngsters, all of them, the girl thought. They had sped past in a moment, for they were on bicycles; but as they passed all three lifted their straws.

Mr. Selby lifted his own in reply with a very ill grace. That D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, and Manners minor should have seen him walking along the High Street of Wayland with a pretty girl annoyed him extremely. He felt that they were to blame—which was highly unreasonable, but very like Mr. Selby.

"Oh—er—yes, very picturesque indeed, Miss Graeme!" he mumbled, his sour face quite scarlet. "And, of course, very different from London—in fact, not at all like it; quite otherwise, and—er—all that sort of thing!"

The girl could not understand his confusion, and it was with a notion of putting him more at his ease that she remarked:



When Cardew went silently out of the room, Mellish, in his night-shirt, followed him. He dogged him to study No. 9 on the Fourth Form passage. (See page 16.)

"Those were St. Jim's boys, of course, Mr. Selby. What nice little fellows they looked!"

"I regret to say that their looks are deceptive, then, Miss Graeme," replied the master, in his sourest tones. "They are not, in my opinion, at all nice little fellows. They are most unmitigated young scoundrels, like most boys."

Then, on a sudden, Nina Dalgleish recognised Mr. Selby. She knew that this was the master whom Eric had handled so roughly the night before.

But her manner did not change. Into her mind flashed the thought that she might be able to get Eric out of the trouble that she seemed, quite innocently, to have got him into.

If there were a chance of doing that, she would not consider Mr. Selby in the least. She was grateful to him, and would not on any account have done him an ill-turn. But she had a good deal of affection for the handsome boy cousin, and if she could use Mr. Selby's obvious admiration of her as a weapon in his cause, she would not hesitate or scruple to do so.

She asked Mr. Selby into the lodgings which she shared with the leading lady of the revue, suggesting iced lemonade as likely to be welcome; and Mr. Selby went, first casting around him a careful glance, to make sure that the three minors were not in sight.

The leading lady was much more like Mr. Selby's idea of an actress than was Miss Graeme, and he did not take any sudden fancy to her. He could not imagine her as the household angel of a schoolmaster, whereas he found it quite easy to imagine Miss Graeme in that role.

If he had heard what Miss Mandeville said after he had gone he would have been shocked and furious

"That old fossil is stuck on you, Nora, my dear," said the leading lady. "Where in the wide, wide world did you pick him up? No, don't look angry; I know that you don't do that kind of thing. But I am glad that there wasn't any cream about—I'm sure his face would have turned it!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Three Minors and Cardew.

"MY hat!"
"What a lark!"
"Just fancy old Selby on the mash!"

Such were the exclamations of the three minors as they jumped off their bikes on the bridge.

"Who is she?" asked Wally eagerly.
"Jolly nice girl, whoever she is!" remarked Frank Levison. "Too good to be walking about with that old Hun!"

"I know who she is," said Reggie Manners unexpectedly.

"Who?" demanded Wally, looking as though he strongly questioned the right of Reggie to know more than he knew.

"She's a Miss Nora Graeme, who's taking one of the principal parts in the revue at the Empire."

Wally shook a warning finger.
"The Empire's out of bounds, young Manners!" he said impressively.

Reggie grinned cheerily.
"Well, what about it?" he asked.
"You've no right to go there—not without me, anyway!"

"I don't believe Reggie's been there," said Frank.

"How does he know about Miss Graeme,

then? Jolly nice name, I call that, and a ripping girl! But young Reggie—"

"I haven't been to the Empire, ass! I only had a squint at the photos—that's nothing. And I might have known without that, for I saw the advertisement in the local paper, and I went to that revue when I was in town in the Christmas hols. It's nobby! There's one song Miss Graeme sings—it goes something like this."

And Reggie proceeded to give some sort of an imitation of Nora Graeme's most popular song.

"If you'd any voice, or any notion of the difference between one key and another, young Manners," said Wally, "we might be able to stand it! As it is, dry up, or take a thick ear!"

"I'd like to see you give me a thick ear, young D'Arcy!"

"Children, children!" spoke a reproving voice behind them.

They turned, to see Ralph Reckness Cardew alone.

"Hallo, Cardew! Such a lark!" chuckled Frank Levison.

Wally and Reggie looked at Frank as though they thought he were giving too much away. But Frank paid no heed to their glances.

Cardew was one of Ernest's Levison's two great chums, and both he and Clive were like elder brothers to Frank. There was nothing Frank would not have done for Cardew; and his loyalty was no more than was due from him, for Cardew had only quite lately done much for Frank.

"It's a dashed hot day for a lark," drawled Cardew. "The energy of you young people always amazes me. Personally, I should

prefer a strawberry ice to the very best lark going at the present moment, by gad!"

"You can take us along and treat us to strawberry ices, if you like, Cardew," said Wally generously.

The Fourth-Former looked at his watch. "There is just time, if we scorch back," he said. "I have a constitutional objection to scorchin' in any form, but on a day like this what choice is there? Come along, mes enfants!"

They followed Cardew to the nearest shop where ice-creams were to be had, and were quickly served.

"An' now, what's the lark?" asked Cardew languidly.

"Tell him if you want to, Franky. As he's standing treat I suppose he'll have to hear. But I haven't time to talk," said Wally.

"Selby—and a girl," said Frank briefly. He also had not time to talk. As for Reggie, that young gentleman was concentrating his attention upon strawberry ices as he never by any chance concentrated it upon his class-work.

"You astonish me, Franky, dear boy!" drawled Cardew. "I trust, for the credit of St. Jim's, that they were on opposite sides of the street?"

"Close as we are," said Frank, who was sitting next Cardew.

"By gad! This is—well, I can hardly express myself adequately on the subject at the present temperature. Dear old Selby! Has he at last succumbed to the shafts of the little Love-god? My best Panama! Who is the lady?"

"One of those who are on in the revue at the Empire this week," replied Wally, helping himself to another ice.

"Shoekin'er an' shoekin'er! A revue girl! An' being at the wicked Empire, where we truly nice youths wouldn't think of bein' seen!"

"Speak for yourself, Cardew!" said Reggie. "I'd go to the Empire like a shot to see that revue again. It's ripping! My mater liked it, and I can tell you she's jolly particular!"

"If your mater liked it, old bean, I withdraw any slight that I may have seemed to infer," said Cardew, in that grown-up manner of his, which the fags sometimes resented and sometimes liked. "An' if you considered it rippin', by gad, that's good enough for yours truly. 'Approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley, y'know, as someone says somewhere or other in Kiplin' or O. Henry or Dickens—or somewhere. What's the lady's name?"

"Nora Graeme," answered Reggie, with his mouth full.

"Nice name, quite."

"And a jolly nice girl, too," said Reggie, still speaking under difficulties. "Can't think what she can see in old Selby."

"I don't suppose, dear boy, that she sees anythin' in Selby."

"What's she walk about with him for, then?" asked Wally.

"May have been pure accident. Must have been, I should say."

"Hallo! There's Curly and Joe!" said Frank.

"Come in, dear kids—the more the merrier!" said Cardew.

Curly Gibson and Joe Frayne, who had just appeared in the doorway of the shop, came in, looking very hot indeed.

"Could you risk an ice each?" inquired Cardew, with his head on one side as he regarded the two fags critically. "I should say that in your extremely heated condition it would be positively dangerous, and I shall expect to hear it sizzle as it goes down. But I know that you have heroic souls!"

"I dunno anything about heroic souls, but I do jolly well know that I'll take all the risk there is in eating a dozen giddy ices!" replied Curly.

"Same 'ere!" chimed in Joe Frayne, the little Cockney.

Cardew ordered more ices. "You youthful blades appear to have been hurryin'," he said languidly. "Dreadfully bad habit in weather like this. I've known people to die of it."

"Well, you'll never do that, anyway, Cardew," remarked Frank.

"I trust not, old bean. Nevertheless, I would have hastened quite some in order to see the amazin' sight of Selby with the girl."

"Old Selby with a girl?" queried Curly. "Blessed if I don't like that! Why, he's just been ragging Kildare no end for meetin' one!"

"Ragging Kildare?" said Frank, with wide-open, blue eyes.

"How do you know?" demanded Wally. "I have a profound admiration for your direct methods, cousin Walter Adolphus," said Cardew. "How does Gibson know? To me also it occurred to wonder that, but it did not occur to express my interest in the matter with such truly admirable terseness."

"You'd talk the hind leg off a donkey, Cardew!" growled Wally. "Just you cut the 'Adolphus' out! I don't like that, and I'm not standing it from anyone. Go on, Curly, you fathead! How do you know?"

"I was under old Selby's table, and heard it all," replied Gibson.

"Isn't that—well, rather off the rails, kid?" said Cardew.

"I thought so myself at first," Curly frankly confessed. "But I couldn't help hearing, could I? You wouldn't expect a chap to come out and take a caning from the old beast, would you? It wouldn't be sense. And I can't keep a thing like this to myself. I barged off after these fellows to tell them directly. We looked for Hobby and Jimmy, but they weren't anywhere about, so we had to come without them."

"As you heard it all, you had better tell us," Wally said judicially. "It's much more proper that I should know than that a kid like you should, Curly."

"Rats! But I don't mind telling you—that's what I came for."

And, at the imminent risk of being late for dinner, and with the certainty of a ride at breakneck speed back over the moor to do what might be done to avoid that, Curly sat and gobbled ices and told his tale, while the rest gobbled ices and gave ear to it.

All but Cardew, who gave ear with as much intentness as anyone, but went easier on the ices, having more regard for his digestive apparatus than the fags.

"Are you kids goin' to tell this to anyone?" he asked, as they went out, after he had paid quite a thumping bill.

"We shall tell Hobbs and Jamface, of course," answered Wally.

"No one else?"

"You'll tell Ernie and Clive, I suppose?" said Frank.

"I may. No, I don't think I shall, though. I have a scheme in my noddle. It does not really require any helpers, an'—"

"I say, Cardew, if it's anything up against old Selby, we're on!" said Wally eagerly.

"Shan't need you, cousin Walter—er—not Adolphus. But it will earn my never-ending gratitude if you keep it dark."

"Are you going to get home on old Selby? That's what we want to know!" demanded Wally.

"Yaas. I don't mind tellin' you that it is my hope to get home on dear old Selby in some way—I'm not dead sure yet how. But dear old Selby smitten by Cupid certainly seems a vulnerable object."

"Who's Cupid?" asked Curly. "If he hit Selby I like him—I don't care who he is!"

"He means that the old Hun is in love," explained Frank.

"Oh, that! Shouldn't wonder; he's a sickening old beast!"

Cardew looked at Curly in a wondering way.

"You really consider it the mark of a sickenin' old beast to fall in love, Gibson?" he said.

"Well, it's pretty middling potty, isn't it? I know jolly well I never shall. I don't see much in girls, anyway."

"My dear infant, you know nothin'—less than nothin'! But never mind that. Will you gentlemen keep this quite dark? I am sure that Kildare would prefer it so kept."

"We can't very well talk about it, I s'pose," said Wally. "Curly oughtn't to have heard, really. Yes, we'll promise, Cardew. But I wish you'd let us into your dodge, whatever it is."

"You would only spoil it, cousin Walter."

"And I'm not to tell my brother or Clive, Cardew?"

"No, Franky. If I want them to know, I will tell them myself."

"Right-ho!"

"An' now to horse!" said Cardew.

As they pedalled hard back across the moor the car with Mr. Selby in it shot past them.

The tyrant darted a baleful glance at them. He liked Ralph Reckness Cardew no better than he liked Wally & Co.

"If there are any vacant places at the dinner tables, that nice, kind gentleman will not fail to perceive them, I opine," said Cardew meditatively.

"Lam it on, kids!" Wally commanded. And it was only Cardew who lounged in fully five minutes after dinner had begun, washed and cool and immaculate, and met the stony gaze of Mr. Selby with an urbane smile. Others might go in to dine hot and flustered and but imperfectly cleansed, but not Cardew.

He cared nothing for what Mr. Selby might think, and as the Third Form master was not in charge, he could not well say anything. Mr. Railton, who presided, merely looked at Cardew, saying nothing.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Kildare and His Cousin.

"Oh, there you are, Eric!"

"I'm not late, am I?" returned Kildare, leaping from his bicycle.

"No. I was rather wishing you would come, that's all!"

And as she spoke, Nina Dalgleish cast a glance behind her.

Her appointment with Kildare was on the bridge, as the earlier one had been. At her lodgings they would have had to talk before Miss Mandeville, who was not exactly the soul of tact; and, though Nina was fond of the plump, good-natured actress, there were things she had to say to Eric Kildare that she would prefer Miss Mandeville not to hear.

She had been on the bridge three or four minutes before her time, and she had seen Roger Williton lurking about again. He had come along the bank of the river, on the side farthest from the town, and as he came up on to the bridge she had moved townwards.

But Kildare's arrival had relieved all her anxiety concerning Williton for the time being.

The fellow passed them, and lifted his expensive Panama. Miss Dalgleish acknowledged the salutation by the most formal of bows, without a smile. Williton would not have got even that much from her but that she felt sure her cousin would ask who he was if she cut him dead.

She had not dodged that query, however. "Who was that merchant, Nina?" asked Kildare.

"Oh, a man I know slightly, and don't like a little bit!"

"One of the actors in your revue?"

"Oh, no! I know all of them very well, of course. They aren't half bad. This is a man named Williton!"

"Seem to remember that name somehow. He's a rotter, to judge by the look of him. I didn't like the way he leered at you, and he fairly gared at me."

"Never mind him, Eric. What about all the people at home?"

But Williton had aroused Kildare's antagonism, and he seemed determined to find out all about him.

"Where have I heard that name?" he said, half to himself. "Oh, I've got it now! It was Mickey. Isn't that Buck Williton—bit of a bruiser, good deal of a gambler, and general all-round wrong 'un from what I know. Not the sort to be any good to dear little Mickey, who is as weak as water in strong hands."

"Mickey's pulled himself together, Nina. He isn't so weak now. The people at home? Oh, they're all well. But they're wanting you back sorely, my dear!"

Tears stood in the girl's eyes as she answered.

"I—sometimes I think I'll go back, Eric," she said. "But I've never been sure of a welcome."

"You ought not to have doubted that, Nina. All of them, the folks at your own home, and at mine, and at Mickey's—they'll all go just crazy with joy to see you again. And you won't go back a failure, dear. I know your pride would kick at that. But I saw you last night, and I can tell them how the audience applauded you, and how well you sung and acted."

The girl's lip curled.

"It wasn't to please audiences like those of such places as the Wayland Empire that I set out!" she said frankly. "No, Eric, I haven't exactly failed. I've earned my living, and I haven't had any very terrible troubles to meet. But I'm fed-up with it all—right up to the neck, as we used to say when you were a boy. You're almost a man now, Eric!"

"I'm not a kid any longer," said Kildare soberly. "I have begun to think that it's about time I went to Oxford."

"But I thought you were so keen on St. Jim's, so happy there, and in no hurry at all to leave?"

Kildare did not answer that at once. Nina looked into his face anxiously. She could see at once that there was something wrong.

"Eric, have you got into a heap big row about last night?"

"Nothing that I can't see my way out of, Nina."

"But that's not an answer at all. Never mind, though. I think I can put matters right for you with your Mr. Selby!"

Kildare looked at her in amazement.

"You put matters right for me with Mr. Selby?" he gasped. "Why—what—how? I can't understand you a bit, Nina!"

"It's easy enough, too. It was Mr. Selby who interfered last night, wasn't it?"

"Yes, the confounded old Hun! But you'd never think of anything so wild and silly as to imagine that he would hold his hand for anything you could say to him, surely!"

"I don't think it's at all wild and silly, and I'm almost sure that if I asked him, he would stop doing anything to make you uncomfortable."

Kildare gasped again.

"But you don't know him!" he said.

"But I do know him!" replied Nina. "I made his acquaintance this morning. No, I'm not precisely in love with him, Eric. But I don't think he is as bad as you think him."

"I should say that he is worse if— But is isn't fair to you to think that, Nina! You wouldn't let that old hunk hang round after you!"

Miss Dalgleish did not quite like that speech. Anyone who had wanted to be censorious might have said that she had been letting the old hunk hang round after her, she knew. It was true that she had only done so for her cousin's sake. But censorious people are never too ready to admit excuses.

"I'm not going to tell you anything more about it, Eric!" she said. "I have taken care of myself for some time now, and I really don't think that there is any fear that I can't protect myself against your Mr. Selby were it necessary. But I'm sure it isn't."

Kildare laughed a gay, ringing laugh.

"Selby's old enough to be your grandfather, kid—as ugly as sin, and as sour as vinegar. But I forbid anything in the way of getting round him in order to smooth out things for me. You savvy?"

"Oh, if you forbid it, Eric, of course that settles it!" replied the girl.

There was no mockery in her voice, and her face was guileless; and Kildare, far too young to understand the ways of the sex, was completely taken in.

"All serene, my dear!" he said. "I won't ask questions that you don't care to answer, so we'll let Selby drop. Then you've given up your dream of becoming a great actress?"

"I don't know, Eric—I don't know a bit. Sometimes I think that one never gives up one's dreams—that life wouldn't any longer be worth living if one did. But at other times I ask myself, 'Oh, what's the use, you silly kid? And I do so want to go home and see them all!'"

"There's nothing against that, surely, Nina?"

"Nothing—if the dream's to go. Everything—if it's to stay. Don't you see, boy dear? They would never consent to my coming back, and if I came back, it would be a worse break than the first."

"I'm not sure. They might consent. I don't think they see it quite as they did then," replied Kildare. "You might try, anyway. Promise me you'll go back, Nina!"

"I won't promise what I'm not sure of doing. But I'll think about it no end hard, Eric. Seeing you has brought everything back to me so keenly—the old home, and dad with his grey imperial, and his straight, stiff back, and dear mums, and the dogs and the horses, and the orchard where you made love to me, like the cheeky boy you were—oh, everything! All that and more, and only a dream to set against it. But you see, Eric, it's my dream, my own special dream, that's all mine; and, oh, it's hard to give it up!"

Kildare understood, for he also was capable of dreaming dreams. But he was very set on seeing his cousin go back to her own folk, and he would not give up the struggle.

"May I write and tell them I have seen you?" he asked.

"I'd much rather you didn't. But I can't forbid you."

"You can, though, Nina. I sha'n't do it unless you consent."

"Well, don't write just yet, anyway. I shall see you again, I suppose?"

"See me again? What do you think, my

dear? I'm going to see you every day while you're here, and when you leave I'm coming to see you off, in the face of all Wayland or all Sussex!"

And Kildare's eyes gleamed, and the hot, Irish blood danced in his veins. He was more than half in love with his pretty cousin even now, though he knew that it was hopeless, and he was ready to risk anything.

Buck Williton passed them again. This time the girl refused to acknowledge his salute.

"That fellow annoys you!" said Kildare sharply.

"I don't like him a bit, and I wish he wouldn't come near me," Nina confessed.

"But I'm not afraid of him, really. If he got troublesome I'd get dear old Mandeville on him. She knows how to put his sort in their place."

Kildare did not answer her. He was striding after Williton. The hot, Irish blood is always as ready for fighting as for love-making.

He touched the man-about-town on the shoulder.

Williton swung round, with a vicious look in his eyes.

"You're takin' a dashed liberty, let me tell you!" he snapped.

"That may be. I don't think so. I've a word to say to you. Miss Graeme is a particular friend of mine. She resents your attentions, and I have come to tell you that they must cease, or you will have to reckon with me!"

"And who the blazes are you that I should fear reckoning with you?"

"My name is Kildare, and I am at St. James' College."

"A confounded schoolboy! My good young friend, you may thank your stars that I am a more peaceable man than I used to be! Ten years ago my fist would have been in your face for half what you have said!"

"I've heard that you are a bit of a bully," replied Kildare coolly. "But two can always play at the fist-in-face game, and I've played it now and then myself. I'm not going to row with you here; but you had better take warning. And if you feel any irresistible desire at any time to play the game we've mentioned—well, you have only to let me know, and we'll arrange time and place, and play it out to the finish! I'd ask nothing better, I assure you!"

He turned on his heel and strode away, leaving Williton gasping.

"What did you say to him?" asked Nina anxiously.

"I only warned him to leave you alone, dear."

"You shouldn't—it wasn't necessary! But I love you for it, Eric—there! Now come along and be introduced to Mandeville. She'll fairly love you, and I'm sure you'll like her!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Cardew's Lone Hand.

"THAT chap Cardew's up to something again!" said Percy Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, to Racke and Crooke of the Shell.

Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke hated Cardew with a poisonous hatred. They were just as bitter against his chum Levison, and because of his friendship for those two, and also because he was dead straight, they detested Sidney Clive.

It was possible to score off Clive, though he was no duffer. But Ernest Levison and Ralph Reckness Cardew were exceedingly hard nuts to crack, as Racke and Crooke had discovered.

Crooke said as much now.

"I'm about fed-up with trying to take down Cardew's number!" he growled. "It never seems to come off, somehow."

But Racke was more hopeful—or more bitter—than Crooke.

"What is it, Mellish?" he asked. "Mind you, no cash in advance this time! I've had some of that, an' I'm not dashed well on for any more!"

"It wasn't my fault that it slipped up last time!" whined Mellish. "I carried out all that I undertook to do. But you opened your mouth too wide, Racke, and that and that sweep Levison spoiled us at the finish. I'm not saying we can get home on the boulder this time, but I'm certain he's up to something."

"Levison an' Clive in it, of course?" queried Racke.

"I don't think so. No; I'm pretty sure they're not, now I come to think of it. Cardew wouldn't have hid those things away so carefully if they had been."

"What things?" Racke asked.

Mellish put a hand to the side of his mouth and gave his reply in a loud whisper.

"Girl's clothes!" he said.

"Oh, by gad!" said Crooke.

"Nothin' very new in that," remarked Racke. "It's quite in his line. Didn't he dress up to impersonate that aunt, or whatever she is, of his at Rylecombe Lodge? An' wasn't there some dashed yarn about his turnin' up on one of the Wayland football-grounds rigged up as a girl, just to play a jape on Clive?"

"But what's the jape this journey?" asked Crooke.

"Can't tell you," said Mellish, shaking his head. "At least, I can't tell you yet. I may find out later. But I'm pretty sure he's playing a lone hand in this."

"That's likely enough, Aubrey," Crooke said. "Cardew has got Levison an' Clive into above one or two scrapes lately, an' that's about the only thing he ever repents of. I shouldn't be a bit surprised at his puttin' the next dodge through alone."

"Only thing to do is for Mellish to watch out for him an' let us know what he sees," said Racke.

"Oh, yes! Mellish is always to do the dirty work!" said the Fourth-Former bitterly.

"Well, Mellish likes the dirty money—what?" returned Racke.

Mellish's eyes gleamed at that.

"Money's never dirty!" he said.

And he went off to watch out—that is, to sneak and spy, to listen at keyholes and peep through them, too; to do anything that would enable him to discover other people's secrets, in short.

Crooke was right in supposing that it was the fear of getting his chums into trouble that induced Cardew to keep them outside of this wheeze of his. Few fellows would have got any satisfaction out of the trick he meant to play, played all alone. But though Cardew loved the limelight, he had also quite a liking for putting a thing through without help, and telling Levison and Clive all about it after it was done.

And this really was a particularly audacious trick.

Mr. Selby was even at that moment reading a letter which Cardew had typed—a letter signed "N. G." Mr. Selby took those initials to stand for Nora Greene. Cardew would have told anyone who inquired that they stood for "No go."

That letter asked the Third Form master to meet the writer at the stage-door of the Empire at half-past ten that night.

If Mr. Selby had ever made or accepted appointments at stage-doors before it must have been long ago—in the wild days of his youth. But it is doubtful whether Mr. Selby's youth had contained any wild days.

He meant to go. He had no doubt whatever as to the genuineness of the invitation, which went far to prove that he was not without his share of vanity.

But Miss Graeme had really made an impression on his somewhat cold and stony heart. It is only fair to Mr. Selby to say that she would not have made so big an impression upon him had she been what Mr. Selby imagined actresses in general to be. But she was really a charming girl, and even the tyrant of the Third liked charming girls on the rare occasions when they showed any liking for him.

It seemed that Miss Graeme liked him quite a lot. There were no expressions of endearment in the letter—Cardew was too wide for that. Such things might have choked Mr. Selby off. But she wanted to see him again, it was evident; and if the thought occurred to him that her writing in this way was a trifle bold, he put it from him at once.

Mellish was on the watch that night. He knew nothing at all about the story of Selby and the girl. The fags had been true to their word. More than twenty-four hours had passed, and yet no one but the seven and Cardew knew anything about it, which said quite a good deal for Wally & Co. But those lively young gentlemen were a very close corporation, and had many secrets into which no one else was admitted.

What Mellish had seen during the day had made him pretty certain that Cardew's scheme was to be brought off soon.

When a fellow locks himself up in his study while his chums are at the nets, and puts on girl's clothes and a veil, and poses before a mirror, the other fellow looking through a keyhole is justified in assuming that those clothes will be worn elsewhere before long. A knowledge of Cardew's little ways aided Mellish to deduce the inference that they

were quite as likely to be worn at night as in the daytime. Breaking windows at night was the merest trifle to Ralph Reckness Cardew.

So Mellish had warned Racke and Crooke to be ready, and Racke had warned Mellish not to call them unless he was certain; wherefore Percy Mellish, keen on earning the fee Racke promised in the event of success, was very much on the alert that night.

He had not very long to wait. Hardly had the Fourth dormitory settled down to slumber when Cardew stole out of bed and began to dress.

Mellish lay still. There was no need for him to put on his clothes. He had no notion of going with Racke and Crooke, and they did not want him.

When Cardew went silently out of the room, Mellish, in his night-shirt, followed him.

He dogged him to the study floor, and to Study No. 2 on the Fourth Form passage. Hidden in the recess of a window, he saw him come out with a parcel.

That was good enough for Mellish. He counted his work done, and looked forward with virtuous satisfaction to taking his wage.

He scurried along the Shell dormitory as soon as Cardew had passed, and roused Racke and Crooke.

There was no time to cut to waste. They hurried off, and Mellish went back to bed.

Cardew was over the wall before they reached the quad, and at first it seemed as though they had lost him. But in a minute or so they made out his figure along the road ahead.

There was no moon, but the night was far from dark. It was one of those nights which come about midsummer, when the sky is clear—nights which have no actual darkness.

The figure in front never once glanced back. It stopped in Rylcombe Wood, and disappeared for a few seconds. The two behind halted.

Then Cardew emerged with a bike, and for once Racke and Crooke gave Mellish credit for his foresight. They would not have thought of having machines ready outside the walls.

Their own bikes were not far away. The place Mellish had indicated was one in which these sweet youths and their cronies sometimes played banker and smoked cigarettes.

They were on Cardew's track before he had got a hundred and fifty yards ahead; but, once they had mounted, they found keeping near him no easy proposition.

But on the open moor he could be seen quite a considerable distance ahead. They never lost sight of him till they were within a short distance of Wayland, and very near the edge of the moor.

Then he suddenly disappeared. They should have seen him top the next rise, clear against the sky beyond. But they did not.

"Wait!" said Racke, as they were about to descend the slope behind.

Both jumped off their bikes.

"Better lie down," Racke suggested. Crooke could not see why. But Racke often saw further than Crooke.

They propped their bikes against a gorse-bush, and lay down in such a manner as to command a view of the crest of that rise.

"I don't get on to this," puffed Crooke. "Unless I'm all wrong, you will in a few minutes," replied Racke.

"Tell me, fathead!"

"The bounder has to get that clobber on somewhere, I suppose? Well, then, he's getting it on now, I bet! Just you wait and see, by gad!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Disappointment of Mr. Selby.

CROOKE waited and Racke saw. Their eyes were well used to the light by now; and when what appeared to be a feminine figure appeared suddenly from the side of the road, and showed up clearly at the top of the rise, they had no doubt that it was Cardew.

Very cautiously they followed him.

"What a reckless beggar he is, by gad!" said Crooke, more than half admiringly. "Why, the police would nab him if they got on to the trick, and he'd have to put in the night in the cells. An' that would mean the sack for him, safe as houses!"

As they were passing into the High Street

Crooke seized Racke by the arm, and drew him back into the shadow of a wall.

"Selby!" he whispered in his companion's ear.

"My hat! That's Cardew's game, then!" replied Racke. "It's a dashed risky one, Gerry!"

Mr. Selby had passed on without seeing them. He had obviously come in by the late train on the Rylcombe branch, and, as there was no train back, must be meaning to walk home.

"I don't see it!" growled Crooke. "How could Cardew know old Selby was comin' along?"

"I don't know how he knew; but he does know—I'm dashed sure of that!" answered Racke. "We've lost Cardew now, but I'm goin' to follow Selby, an' I wouldn't mind bettin' anythin' up to a hundred to one that Selby leads us to him!"

Crooke did not take the odds, which was just as well for him.

"Dashed if old Selby isn't goin' to the Empire! Wicked old bounder!" said Racke, a few minutes later.

"Can't be. The show's within a few minutes of being over now," Crooke replied.

"He's goin' to the stage-door! Oh, my hat, what have we dropped into?" chortled Racke.

Mr. Selby, after a nervous glance around him, had indeed disappeared down the side street into which the stage door of the music-hall opened.

The tyrant of the Third was really not doing anything wrong. A man of his age may surely meet a lady whom he holds in respect—and Mr. Selby held Miss Graeme in high respect—at the stage door of a theatre as well as at any other place, and at half-past ten at night as properly as at noon.

But Mr. Selby was not used to this kind of thing, and he had a positive dread lest he should be caught at it by anyone who knew him.

From just outside the stage door a fashionably clad female figure stepped into the light as the St. Jim's master approached.

The face of that figure was veiled, but the master made no doubt that the veil concealed the face of Nora Graeme. Cardew, slight in build and graceful in movement, made a more than passable girl.

"My dear young lady!" said Mr. Selby effusively.

His heart was beating fast. He was ready to do anything foolish—even to making a proposal of marriage to Miss Graeme.

"Will you take my arm?" asked Mr. Selby, almost lovingly.

Cardew murmured something, in which "pleasure" was the only word Mr. Selby caught.

He had to go warily in the matter of speech, for he really had not the slightest notion what Miss Graeme's voice was like. Probably Mr. Selby had. As the lady was an actress, playing a part of some importance, it was hardly likely that her ordinary speaking voice was a falsetto. That would have come easily enough to Cardew, but he realised that it would not do.

He took Mr. Selby's arm. He was beginning to wonder how he was going to get a denouement out of this. Cardew's tastes were a little bit stagey, and he was not satisfied unless his tricks worked up to a climax. But he hardly saw where the climax was to come in with this one. He could scarcely disclose himself to Mr. Selby; he realised that now, if he had not done so before.

But again he was reckoning without Racke and Crooke.

"Mustn't let Selby twig us!" said Racke to his comrade. "Lucky we've got caps on that won't give us away, an' not those rotten Eton jackets! Pull your cap down over your forehead, Gerry, an' button your jacket up as near your chin as you can. This is where Ralph Cardew gets it in the neck!"

Crooke did not understand what Racke meant to do. Had he understood, he might have objected to it on the score of risk; he would not have balked at its meanness.

"Shall we stroll across the bridge?" Mr. Selby asked tremulously.

He had made up his mind now. If he had the opportunity he would ask Miss Graeme to be his. And surely—surely she was giving him that opportunity? Surely she must know what was in his heart?

A gentle pressure on his arm indicated

that his supposed fair companion had no objection to a stroll across the bridge with him.

They strolled. The air was calm and balmy. Mr. Selby was less calm, but more balmy. Cardew, on his part, was wondering how it was all going to end.

Racke and Crooke followed them. The Empire had not yet disgorged its audience, and the streets were almost deserted.

There was no one on the bridge. They halted close to a lamp, and gazed down at the reflection of its light in the clear, rippling water.

Never in all his life had Henry Selby felt so thrilled. He ventured to steal an arm around his unresisting companion. He was thinking of venturing to steal a kiss, but propriety suggested to him that he really ought to propose first—or, anyway, get that veil lifted.

"Will you not lift your veil, sweet one?" he murmured tenderly.

And at that instant the veil was lifted.

But it was not Cardew who lifted it.

Racke, dashing past, tugged at it. He tugged also at Cardew's skirt.

The veil came away in his hand. The light skirt ripped up, revealing a pair of turned-up grey trousers.

Mr. Selby stood aghast, almost stupefied, not perceiving the tearing of the skirt at first, not recognising Cardew, only sure that, whoever this might be, it was most certainly not Nora Graeme!

Racke turned and darted away; and Crooke, in as big a funk as ever he had been in all his life, bolted also.

"Aubrey! You mad fool!" he panted.

"They didn't twig me! An' Cardew's done for—done for!" hissed Racke, all aglow with the savage joy of vengeance. "He's bound to get the sack for this—bound to, by gad! Selby can't overlook it, an' wouldn't if he could!"

"But suppose it hadn't been Cardew? Suppose—"

"Idiot! We know it was Cardew! Hadn't we tracked him all the time? Oh, come along! Let's get back as soon as ever we can! We don't want to run the risk of bein' caught out over this!"

They made through the town and over the edge of the moor to the place where they had left their bikes.

Cardew had naturally tried to bolt also. But Mr. Selby gripped him. He had recognised the Fourth-Former now.

"What does this mean? Cardew, such gross impertinence—"

"Will you not lift your veil, sweet one?"

There was nothing for it but sheer audacity, and St. Jim's held no one better fitted for such an emergency than Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Mr. Selby fairly staggered at those words. He relaxed his grip, and passed his hand over his perspiring brow.

The dreadfulness of the situation burst upon him.

He had Cardew at his mercy. He could get him expelled, locked-up for wearing feminine dress in a public place—there was hardly any limit to what he could get done to Cardew!

But he had to consider what Cardew could do to him!

He could never hold up his head again at St. Jim's if this story was told there against him. "Will you lift your veil, sweet one?" The thought of hearing those words again in mockery fairly made him shudder.

"Cardew, I—I— You—you—"

He could get no farther.

Cardew held the whip-hand now, and he knew it.

"I won't make it public if you'll agree to keep it dark, sir!" he said coolly.

"I— Really, I cannot find words to express—"

"Don't try, sir! We've both made a bloomer, I think. Let us forget all about it."

"I—I— If you tell anyone this!" spluttered Mr. Selby weakly.

"Is it likely, sir?" said Cardew.

Not for a good deal would he have promised not to tell anyone. Clive and Levi-son must certainly hear this story.

"I— Oh, go, wretched boy—go!"

Cardew went gladly. Mr. Selby stood staring after him like one dazed.

This was not the end, he was certain. And he was quite right as to that. Many things were to happen before that came.

THE END.