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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Early Rising.

BOB CHERRY jumped out of bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, and ran to the window. The hour was very early. The rising-bell was not due for an hour yet, and the wide, green Close lay very quiet in the rising sunlight
“Hurrah!” shouted Bob, in a voice that rang through the dormitory from end to end, and some distance beyond it. ‘ Ripping morning !“
Harry Wharton sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes.
“Eh? What’s the row?”
“I say it’s a ripping morning.”
“Oh ‘
“And it’s six o’clock.”
“Is it?” yawned Wharton. “And what do you mean by making an unearthly row in a respectable dormitory at six o’clock in the morning?”
“Time to get up! ”
“Yaw-aw-aw “
“We’ve got to get down to Pegg Bay before seven, Captain Stump is going to have the boat ready. Buck up !
Wharton gave a final yawn, and jumped out of bed.
“Right you are!”
Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed his example. The Famous Four were usually early risers, and they had a little scheme on for this morning which made unusually early rising a necessity.
They were allowed out of gates as early as they liked for bathing in the river, and it. had occurred to them that a sail on the bay in the early September morning would be a very pleasant experience.
To spend an hour in skimming over the blue waters of the bay, and to turn up again at Greyfriars in time for breakfast was an idea that appealed to the chums of the Remove.
Bob Cherry crossed over to Mark Linley’s bed, and shook him by the shoulder. Linley was steeping soundly; even Bob Cherry’s war-whoop had not awakened him. From under his pillow the edge of a book peeped out, for the Lancashire lad was accustomed to begin his day’s studies in bed if he happened to wake very early. This morning he did not wake till Bob shook him.
“Hallo, hallo, hallo ‘ roared Bob, in his tremendous voice. “Time to wake up! ”
‘ Hallo !“
“Aren’t you coming down to the sea?”
“ Oh, yes! All right !”
“Up you get, then!”
Mark Linley tumbled out. The 5juniors dressed themselves quickly. A fat junior sat up in bed, and regarded them with blinking eyes. It was Billy Bunter. He groped under his pillow for a spectacle case, extracted a pair of big spectacles from it, adjusted them on his little, fat nose, and stared at, the chums again.
“ I say, you fellows—“
“Shut up, Bunter !“
“But I say —“
“Go to sleep”
“You chaps going out ?“
“No; we’re dressing ourselves to go to bed !“
“Oh. really, Cherry! If you’re going out, I don’t mind coming with you. I like the idea of an early-morning picnic !“
Harry Wharton laughed.
“It’s not a picnic, Billy. Better stay in bed.”
“What are you going out for, then?”
“A sail on the bay.”
“You’ll get jolly hungry on the sea,” said Bunter, with a wise shake of the head. “You won’t be able to hold out till you get back to breakfast. You’ll have to take some grub with you.”
“Well, we shall have some grub in the boat.”
Bunter blinked.
“I thought so. It’s a picnic.”
“It isn’t a picnic.”
“I’m sincerely sorry to see you descend to prevarication, Wharton, for the sake of keeping your own study-mate out of a picnic.”
“Eh?”
“I’ve noticed this sort of thing about you before— Oh—ow! Leggo !“
Harry Wharton seized the fat junior by the shoulders and shook him. Billy Bunter shook like a jelly in his strong grasp.
“Now then,” said Wharton wrathfully, “what do you mean? Who’s prevaricating?”
“I—I—I’m sincerely sorry! I—I meant that a chap like you wouldn’t prevaricate under any circumstances! ” gurgled Billy Bunter. “That’s what I really meant to say. Leggo!”
“Well, if that’s what you realty meant to say, you had a very unfortunate way of putting it,” said Harry, laughing, as he released the fat junior.
“I—I say, you fellows—”
“Oh, go to sleep!” said Nugent.
“But I say, you know—I don’t mind coming. If you’ve got grub on the boat, I suppose you’ll want some cooking done, and I should be willing to----”
“It’s cold grub.”
“I’m very fond of cold grub.”
“Look here,” said Wharton, laughing, “you can come if you like, Billy, only you take the consequences. The last time we went for a sail you smuggled yourself into the boat, and we were wrecked on Seagull Island, and you groused and complained all the time as if it were our fault. If anything happens this morning, you’ll only have yourself to thank!’
“I don’t see what can happen on a fine morning, Wharton.”
“You never can tell.”
Bunter appeared to reflect.
“What grub have you got in the boat ?“ he asked.
“ Bread-and-butter——”
“H’m! I don’t think I’ll trouble to get up so early! ”
“And ham—”
“ Oh!”
“And hard-boiled eggs—“
“Good !“
“And saveloys—”
“ I’ll come l”
“And a pot of jam!”
Bunter hopped out of bed.
“I’m coming! Wait a tick while I get my things on
“Rats !“ said Bob Cherry. ‘Catch us waiting! If you’re not ready when we are, you can go back to bed !“
“I—I’ll be ready! I won’t trouble to wash; I’ll wash when I come back, if I have time! I had a wash yesterday afternoon, anyway! Shan’t be a tick “
Bunter’s ablutions never delayed him long. He dressed quickly this morning, too. He was ready to leave the dormitory by the time the others were ready.
Several sleepy faces looked out of the other beds as they departed.
“Shut the door after you! ” called out Ogilvy.
“Right-ho !“
“Anything you’d like me to do if you get drowned ?‘ asked Bulstrode sympathetically.
“Yes,” said Bob Cherry; “get drowned, too! It would be a benefit to Greyfriars, anyway! ”
“Oh, go and eat coke ‘
“If you don’t come back, Nugent, may I have your pocketknife?” sang out Skinner.
The chums of the Remove laughed as they quitted the dormitory, and closed the door behind them. From the remarks of their Form-fellows, it night have been supposed that they were going on it dangerous expedition.
They passed the door of the upper Fourth Form dormitory on their way to the stairs. Bob Cherry was in high spirits, and he showed it in his usual way. He opened the door of the Upper Fourth dormitory, and roared in at the sleepers;
“Wake up—quick! Temple! Dabney! Wake up!”
 “What’s the matter ?“ came in Temple’s sleepy voice.
 “Wake up—quick! You’re in danger?’
“Great Scott !“
Temple bounded out of bed. Half a dozen of the upper Fourth followed his example, and most of the others sat up in bed, rubbing their eyes and blinking.
“ What is it?” gasped Temple. “ Fire?”
“No.”
“ What is it, then ?“
“What’s what !“
“The danger, you idiot”
“Oh. the danger, you idiot! You’re in danger of getting a thick ear if you don’t treat the Remove with proper respect, that’s all !“
And Bob Cherry shammed the door and departed.
As the Removites went chuckling down the passage, the Upper Fourth door opened again, and Temple, Dabney, and Fry and some more Upper Fourth fellows looked out after the juniors, and the remarks they made were emphatic. They made personal references to Bob Cherry’s defects, both physical and mental, and gave him sweeping promises of the kindly attentions they would pay him later
in the day.
Whereat Bob Cherry only chuckled, and walked on with his chums, leaving the Upper Fourth, as he elegantly expressed it, to stew in their own juice.
Harry Wharton opened the door, and a burst of sunshine from the Close greeted the juniors. In high spirits they went down to the gates.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Getting Out.

GOSLING, the porter of Greyfriars. was not yet up, and the gates were not open. The juniors halted at the porter’s gate. and hammered on the door.
“Hallo, hallo, hallo’ roared Bob Cherry. “Time to get up, Gossy !“
There was no reply.
“The excellent Gosling is asleep,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “He sleeps the sleep of the justful person.”
“We can’t got the gates open unless he turns out,” remarked Nugent. “Better make a row.”
“The rowfulness ought to be terrific to wake the worthy Gosling! ”
Bang, bang, bang!
Kick! Crash!
There was a sound of a window being opened, and a night-capped head was thrust out into the early morning air.
Gosling, the porter, looked down with wrathful eyes upon the group of juniors.
“Whatcher want.!” he demanded.
Harry Wharton took off his cap with a polite bow.
“We want to go out,” he said.
“ ‘Tain’t time to get up!’

“But we’re up!”
“Wot I says is this ‘ere, you ain’t no business to disturb a honest man at this time in the morning “
“But we haven’t disturbed any honest man,” said Nugent. “We’ve only you so far, Gossy.”
Gosling snorted.
“Come down and open the door !“ sang Bob Cherry pleadingly. “We could climb over the wall, Gossy, but we’d rather you came and opened the gate, for the sake of your beaux yeux “
Another snort.
“Come down, Gassy!”
“Wot I says is this ‘ere——”
“We want to go out’
“Go back to bed!”
“ Rats!
“I ain’t gittin up early on your account! Which my private belief is that all boys oughter be drowned at birth!’’
“Well, that’s right in some cases I suppose. Your parents ought to have done it! ” said ob Cherry. “Are you coming down?”
“No, I ain’t !”
“But we can’t get out.”
“Go in, then! ”
And Gosling withdrew his head. Bob Cherry chuckled.
“I hold you responsible if I break my neck climbing the wall, Gossy,” hp said. “I shall appear to you as a sheeted ghost of a night after your tenth glass of gin-and-water! ”
The window slammed down.
Kick! Crash!
Bang!
“Gossy! Gossy! Pretty one, open thy window!”
“Gosling! ”
But Gosling declined to be drawn.
“We shall have to get over the wall,” remarked Harry Wharton. “It’s all right, now that we have given official notice that we’re going out. If we hadn’t, some suspicious prefect might have surmised that we’d been making a night of it when we came in.’’
“Ha, ha! I shouldn’t wonder ! Carberry, for instance!”
The feasibility is terrific.”
“Well, it’s all right now. Let’s get over the wall.”
 There was a spot on the school wall where climbing was easy, aided by the thick, hanging ivy. The juniors knew it well. They were soon upon the spot, and Bob Cherry gave Harry a hand up, and then passed up a well filled bag to him, Hurree Singh, Bob, Nugent, and Mark Linley followed, assisted by a hand from above. Then Harry leaned down for Billy Bunter.
The fat junior eyed the wall dubiously.
The climb would have been nothing to any other fellow at Greyfriars, but Billy Bunter was a heavyweight, and he was not active or inclined to exertion.
He blinked at the wall, and he blinked at the juniors above.
“Come on” said Harry.
“Oh, really, Wharton—”
“Give me your hand.”
“Ahem! Bo you think you can pull me up?’
“I can if you climb as well.”
“The ivy won’t bear my weight.”
“It will if you take hold of the thick tendrils, and I help you. Come on, for goodness’ sake! We don’t want to stay here to hear the rising-bell !“
“I’m blessed if I can do it! Look here, you fellows, come down again, and I’ll climb up over your shoulders, and you can help me.”
“What-ho !“ said Bob Cherry. “I don’t think !“
“The don’t-thinkfulness is terrific.”
“I say, you fellows—”
“Give me your hand, duffer!” said Wharton impatiently.
And Bob Cherry immediately began to chant an air he was learning for the operatic society:
 “‘Give me your band, oh, fairest,
 Whisper it gentle yes,
 Come, if for me thou carest—’ “
“Shut up, Bob! You’ll wake the whole school “
“I suppose I can sing if I like ?“ said Bob Cherry warmly.
“Something wrong with your supposer, then,” said Nugent. shaking his head. “You can’t.”
“Look here, Cherry—”
“Here, lend me a hand with Bunter! Take his old paw !“
“Oh, really, Wharton—”
“Shut up, and come on !“
The chums of the Remove took a hand each of the fat junior, lying with their chests on the wall. They dragged, and Bunter’s feet swept off the ground. He banged into the ivy, and gasped:

 “ Ow ! Oh! Gerrooh !”
“Climb, you ass !“
“Ow ! How c-c-c-can I c-c-climb when you’re holding my hands ?“
“Leggo his fist, Bob.”
“Right-ho !”
Bob let go, and Bunter swung by one hand.
“Now catch the ivy ! Oh, crumbs !”
Bunter swung from Harry’s grasp, and went down to the ground in a sitting posture, with a terrific bump.
He gave a gasp like escaping steam.
“Ow !“
“My hat! Was ever anybody bothered with such a duffer?” exclaimed Harry Wharton. “I think you’d better stay there, Bunter.”
“Ow! I’ve broken a leg, and sprained my arm !”
“Then it’s impossible for you to get over the wall. Goodbye !‘
“Hold on !” Bunter jumped up with remarkable activity for one whose leg was broken, and whose arm was sprained. “ I’m coming !”
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I think I can climb the ivy if you help me. Why can’t you lend a chap a hand?”
And Bunter essayed the climb again, and this time he succeeded in reaching the top of the wall.
He sat there, straddled, puffing and blowing.
“Oh, dear! Jolly lucky I’m an athletic chap, or I couldn’t have done that. I feel rather winded. Oh !”
“Come on !”
“Do hold on a minute, and give a chap a chance to get his wind !“
“ Buck up !”
“I won’t buck up! I’m going to get a breath first. Wait for me. I shan’t keep you more than five minutes.”
The juniors chuckled.
“You jolly well won’t keep us more than five seconds,” said Bob Cherry. Come on, my sons! Bunter can sit on the wall and ornament the landscape.”
“Here, give me a hand down, you beasts !“
Bob Cherry caught hold of Bunter’s ankle.
“Come on, then !“
“You—you’ll make me break my neck! I—I—“
 “ Oh. come on
“Oh ! Leggo! Ow !“
Bunter scrambled wildly down the wall. Wharton caught the back of his collar to help him, and Billy gasped for breath.
“I—I say, you fellows, you’re beasts, you know; you are, really! Hold on a minute! You know that exertion always makes me hungry. Give me a snack out of the bag.”
“ Rats !”
“I suppose you don’t want me to expire of hunger at your feet, Bob Cherry ?“
“Come on !” said Harry. “You shall have some grub in the boat. Get a move on. You’re making us waste too much time !‘‘
“Oh, really—”
“Shut up, and come on !” said Wharton tersely.
And Bunter thought he’d better do so.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

On the Sea.

THE wide bay was rolling and glinting in the early sunlight, as the juniors of Greyfriars came down upon the sands at Pegg. White and blue lay the bay, stretching out to the wider German Ocean.
To the left, the great rock called the Shoulder rose, jutting against the blue sky. To the right, the sands shelved away along lines of rugged cliffs. Seaward, sails and patches of smoke dotted the water.
Front the yellow sands of the bay the juniors had often seen great ships passing from Hull or Newcastle, bound on voyages to the far corners of the earth. Often their thoughts had followed the great ships to their unknown destinations. To the British boy, it comes as natural to love the sea as to breathe.
Harry Wharton and his friends had formed a corps of Naval Cadets at the school, and they spent many a busy holiday on the salt water. They could swim like ducks, with the exception of Billy Bunter, who usually came on the expeditions as cook, and declared that he would rather risk drowning a dozen times than take the trouble to learn. Bunter, however, could float a little, and Bob Cherry declared that it was his fat that kept him up.
A wooden-legged sailorman was standing by a boat on the beach, and hp removed a black pipe from his mouth, and touched his cap to the boys as they came up.
It was ‘Captain” Stump.
“Mornin’, gentlemen !“ he said.
“Good-morning !“ said Wharton. “I see you’re ready.”
“Been ready ten minutes, sir.”
“We’ve been delayed by a silly ass, said Harry. “We’re ready now. Get in, you chaps, and Captain Stump will shove us off.”
The boat was pushed into the water, and the juniors jumped in. Captain Stump blinked at them in a hesitating way,
“You’re goin’ alone, young gents ?“ he asked. Wharton laughed.
“Yes, certainly !“
“Better let an old sailorman come and take care of you,” said Captain Stump, squirting a stream of tobacco-juice over the glowing sands.
“That’s all right. We won’t bother you.”
“The wind’s going to rise.”
“Looks calm enough now.”
The old sailorman shook his head.
“I’ve sailed the sea forty year, man and boy,” he said. 1 reckon I know the weather by this time. Master Wharton. There’s going to be a blow in the mornin’.”
Harry Wharton looked at the sky. It was clear and blue. Away to the northward, behind the great Shoulder, a ragged edge of clouds showed on the blue, but that was all.
“Sure about that, skipper’” said Bob Cherry.
“I reckon so.”
“But you reckoned there was going to be a storm yesterday, and there wasn’t,” said Harry Wharton.
The old sailorman turned his quid.
“ It’s held off, sir.”
“And the day before you told us to look for rain, and it was as dry as a limp-kiln all day.”
“They had rain over to Lindale.”
Harry Wharton laughed.
“Well, I dare say they had a storm somewhere yesterday, too, and there may be a blow to-day somewhere. So long as it’s not at Pegg, I don’t mind.”
Captain Stump shook his head.
“It may come on, and it may keep off,” he said. “I reckon it will come on.”
“ I think we’ll chance it.”
And Wharton jumped into the boat.
“ Shove off, skipper !“
“ Ay. ay”, sir !‘‘
The boat rocked off into deeper water.
Captain Stump looked after the juniors, turned his quid in his mouth, and then slowly and solemnly stumped away towards the Anchor Inn.
The juniors, in high, shook out the sails.
Thee was a steady breeze off the shore, and the mainsail and jib filled at once, and the boat fairly walked through the water.
“By Jove, this is ripping! ” exclaimed Bob Cherry.
“The rippingfulness is terrific.”
“First-rate!’ said Nugent. “I suppose old Stump was talking out of his hat, as usual. The weather’s perfect.”
Bob Cherry gave Linley’ a sounding slap on the shoulder, as he detected a thoughtful expression upon the Lancashire lad’s face.
“What’s the worry, the Marky? ”
Mark Linley smiled.
“I’m not worrying. But—”
“But what? ”
“I was thinking about what Stump said. I suppose he knows the weather signs.”
“Stuff! He’s always predicting bad weather, but it doesn’t come off once in a blue moon,” said Nugent. “You can’t rely on a weather prophet.”
“No; I suppose not. It would be a pity to have the sail mucked up on spec, anyway,” agreed Mark.
“I should say so. It’s all right. We shall have a splendid run down to the end of the Shoulder, and then we can tack and beat back to Pegg, and get in splendid time for breakfast at Greyfriars.”
“Good !“
“I say, you fellows—”
“Shut up, Bunter.”
“But I say, speaking of breakfast, reminds me that I’m jolly hungry. I should like to have a snack out of the bag.”
“Oh, ring off! You’re not going to begin eating at once.”
“But I say, I haven’t eaten anything at all this morning, and—’
“Dry up! Look there, you chaps !“ exclaimed Bob Cherry, pointing up at the cliffs as the boat sped onward.
“There’s Cliff House! ”
Among the big cliffs rose the green of the trees and the red roofs of Cliff House, the girls’ school, where Marjorie, their girl chum, dwelt under the eye of Miss Penelope Primrose. Early as the hour was, a figure in a white dress could be seen on the verandah, and a handkerchief was waved as the boat shot by.
Bob Cherry gave a shout.
“It’s Marjorie! ”
The juniors all swept off their caps, and the handkerchief was waved again from Cliff House.
Then the boat rushed on, and the house was hidden by the great grey cliffs.
“My hat we’re getting along !“ exclaimed Nugent, while Bob Cherry, unusually silent., was glancing back towards Cliff House. “The boat’s fairly humming.”
“It’s a splendid breeze.”
“The humfulness of our worthy craft is terrific. We shall be past the Shoulder in the next to no timefulness,” remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.
Wharton looked ahead through the gleaming water.
The boat was going splendidly, and covering the bay in half the time he had expected, and an idea of extending the sail came into his mind.
“I don’t see why we should turn back at the end of the Shoulder! ” he exclaimed. “We might as well have a run right on and turn back in a wider sweep outside the bay.”
“Good wheeze!”
“At this rate we shall have plenty of time.”
“Good! Let’s keep on.”
The boat rushed forward gaily, the sails bellying out before the breeze. The huge Shoulder, jutting seemingly into the skies, with seagulls screaming round the dizzy summit, rose high on the port side of the boat.
Higher and higher, till it seemed to tower over the boat, and then it faded away astern, and the little craft was in the wider waters of the sea.
It was calm, and sailing was easy.
The juniors laughed as they remembered Captain Stump’s warning of bad weather. Like many of his other weather prognostications, it was likely to come to nothing,
But once past the Shoulder, and fairly out into the open sea, the ragged edge of cloud could be seen more plainly.
A shade crossed Mark Linley’s face.
“I don’t like the look of that,” he remarked.
“What’s the matter’?”
“I’ve seen the clouds like that at the mouth of the Mersey, when I’ve been out on the water,” said the Lancashire lad quietly.
Harry Wharton glanced across at him, from where he was holding the sheet.
“Do you think we ought to get into the bay, Linley ?“
“Well, I don’t want to look funky, but I think it would be a good idea.”
“I say, you fellows—”
“Oh, you don’t know anything about it, Bunter! You shut up.”
I wasn’t going to speak about the weather, Wharton. It looks all right, as far as 1 can see. I was thinking about the grub.”
“For goodness’ sake give him a saveloy and keep him quiet! ”
“ Oh, really, Wharton—”
“Here you are! Now dry up !“
Billy Bunter grunted as he received the saveloy. One saveloy was not likely to last him long.
Wharton took a keen look at the sky.
“We’ll get back,” he said.
He went to the tiller. The sails were trimmed to run back into the bay, and as long as the boat was under the shelter of the Shoulder, it ran easily enough. But as it passed beyond the great rock, the wind off shore caught it with greater force, and even in the short time that the juniors had been on the sea, it seemed to have doubled in strength.
Harry Wharton’s face set grimly.
“We shall have our work cut out to beat back into the bay,” he said. “It’s lucky we didn’t leave it any later.”

THE FOURTH CHAPTER,

A Good Wash.

J4A.RRY WHARTON could sail a boat with any lad at
Greyfriars, where there were many good sailors.
When, out of the shelter of the great cliff which had been keeping off the wind to a great extent, the boat
attempted to enter the open hay, he knew that the task would be a hard one. Captain Stump had been right, after all. The wind had been freshening ever since they started, though, running easily before it, the juniors had hardly noticed the fact. It was a very different matter when they came to tack into the bay with the wind almost in their teeth.
To get across the bay, and back to Pegg, by a series of long tacks, was what Harry Wharton intended; but this seemed to be more and more difficult every moment
“Looks like being kept out all the morning,” said Bob Cherry, with a grunt. “There won’t be a wreck this time, though. Remember the time we were shipwrecked on Seagull Island ?“
“What-ho !“
Billy Bunter groaned.
“Sick, Bunter ?“
“N-no. I was thinking of that awful time. I was nearly starved to death. I feel as if I hadn’t had really enough to eat ever since.”
“Go easy with the saveloys,” said Bob Cherry. “The sea’s getting rougher, and you know what you’re like in a rough sea. No good wasting the saveloys.”
“Ha, ha, ha press! ”
“Oh, really, Cherry.—”
Harry Wharton was looking shoreward, with the wind lashing his face, and blowing out his haw. He looked very handsome as he stood there, holding to a sheet, his face stung red by the wind.
The stretch of sandy shore, and the cluster of little houses that marked the fishing village of Pegg, were further and further off.
In the teeth of such a wind tacking was of little avail and it soon became clear that the juniors had no chance of getting back into the bay.
“Well, we are asses !“ said Nugent. “ We ought to have known better. None of the fishermen came out this morning—I can’t sea anything of the boats.”
“Captain Stump was right, after all.”
“Just by chance, I expect.”
“We’re all right,” said Harry Wharton abruptly. “It’s only a question of staying away from school for a few hours. I expect Dr. Locke will overlook it when we explain, if we’re in time for afternoon lessons.”
“But if the wind doesn’t change, I don’t see how we are to get back into the bay,” said Mark Linley.
Harry shook his head.
“No. I was thinking of landing lower down the coast— that’s the only chance now, unless we’re prepared to spend perhaps a whole day at sea.”
Bob Cherry grinned gleefully.
“What ripping fun! It will make the Upper Fourth wriggle when we tell ‘em! ”
“The Head may make us wriggle when we tell him,” said. “But I suppose there’s nothing else to be done.”
“Nothing else,” said Wharton quietly.
And the boat, keeping as close to the wind as possible, ran down the coast.
Pegg Bay vanished behind—even the great Shoulder sank into the sky. Away on the right ran the line of the coast, on the left, the German Ocean.
In spite of their pluck, the hearts of the juniors were beating hard. They could not help remembering the occasion when they had been blown to sea and shipwrecked, and had lived a Robinson Crusoe life on a rocky islet till they were rescued.
But the risk now was not nearly so great. So long as the sea grew no rougher, and the boat was well handled, there was no reason why they should not be safe. And Harry Wharton was handling the boat as well as the most experienced sailorman could have done it.
The only trouble was that they would have to miss morning lessons at Greyfriars; but perhaps the fun of the adventure was worth the “lines ” that would probably fall to their share.
“Blow, blow, thou winter wind,” said Bob Cherry.
“Thou art not so unkind as— Bunter, you young pig, let that bag alone.”
“Oh, really, Cherry—”
Let it alone !“
“I’m hungry! ”
“We shall have to look after the grub,” said Nugent, jerking the fat junior away from the bag. “It would be no joke to be hung up for a whole day with nothing to eat,”
“Bunter would be the first to go, if it came to casting lots,” said Bob Cherry, giving the let junior a hungry look.
He would cut up into beautiful steaks. The only trouble would be that he wouldn’t be alive to cook himself.”
“Oh, really, Cherry—”
“Oh, that’s no good! ” said Nugent. “I couldn’t tackle Bunter raw. I’m not a particular chap, but I bar Bunter raw.”
“Oh, really, Nugent—”
“Look out! ” called out Mark Linley.
“What’s up ?“
“The steamer.”
A huge steamer was passing seaward, within a quarter of a mile of the boat, churning on steadily through the green waters. She left a black blur of smoke behind on the sky as she churned on, and heavily from her sides came the wash of the water.
“What about the steamer!” said Nugent. “She’s too far off to hurt us.”
“The wash isn’t.”
“Ye gods! I forgot the wash !“
The wash was coming down heavily upon the boat—in great, , rolling waves. The boat rocked violently, and the juniors held on for their lives as it was tossed up and down like a cork.
There was a choking gasp from Billy Bunter. He was devouring a saveloy by the primitive method of gnawing it from to end, and he had his mouth full when he received the shock of the first roll of the boat. He tumbled into the bottom of the boat, and gasped and choked.
“Ow Help! Gerrooh! Help”
“Hold him! ”
“Groo—gerooh!”
Mark Linley caught the fat junior by the ankle with one hand, holding on to a thwart by the other. A wash of green water came over the side, and Bunter spluttered afresh,
The big steamer passed on, and the wash gradually subsided. Bunter sat up in a pool of sea water, as red as a freshly-boiled lobster.
‘I say, you fellows—”
“ Ha, ha, ha! ”
“Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I’m wet! ” “Why didn’t you hold on?”
“I was eating.”
“Well, you shouldn’t have been eating. If you eat all the time, accidents are bound to happen while you’re eating.”
“I’m jolly well not going to stand it. You Fellows got me in for this,” said Bunter, staggering up. “You ought to have known better.”
“Did we ask you to come? ”
“You shouldn’t bring a chap out in a boat if you don’t know how to handle it. I think one of you ought to change with me.”
“Ha, ha! You might as well ask a winkle to change shells with a tortoise,” grinned Bob Cherry. “You couldn’t get into our clothes, Bunty.”
“Groo! It’s chilly.”
“Jump up and down and keep yourself warm.”
“I’m too tired. I think I should feel better if I had some ham and eggs”
Nugent pushed the bag under a seat.”
“Then you jolly well won’t feel better,” he said. “We’ve got to take care of the grub, and you’ve had the lion’s share already.”
“Oh, really, Nugent—”
“Ring off, you young pig!”
And Bunter sat down, looking very sulky. But presently a gleam came into his little round eyes behind his spectacles. Bunter was feeling spiteful; and when he was spiteful ho generally called to mind, his powers as a ventriloquist.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

An Unfortunate Ventriloquist.

BILLY BUNTER know very little about sailing, and very little about the sea—very little about anything, in fact, excepting provisions, and the cooking of them.
How to manage a boat was an art far beyond his intellectual powers. Bob Cherry always declared that he had just sense enough to be mischievous. And his proceedings now really seemed to bear out that statement.
“Port, Nugent! ”
Nugent had taken the tiller and as he heard Wharton’s voice give that order—or, rather, a voice that he took to be Wharton’s—ho gave the tiller a turn.
It was the steersman’s business to obey his skipper’s orders without question, and that was what Nugent did, and he had no time to think out that it might be the Greyfriars’ ventriloquist playing a reckless trick.
The change brought the boat for an instant fairly against the wind, and the jib whipped off her like a rag, and fled away across the water like a great bird.
The shock to the boat made the juniors roll over, and Bunter once more found a resting-place in a slop of water.
“ My hat! ”
“What’s the matter!”
“The jib’s gone! ”
Harry Wharton pushed Bob Cherry off his legs, and struggled to his feet. He stared at Nugent in blank amazement. Nugent had realised instantly that the order was a wrong one, and done his best to rectify it.
“What did you do that for?” roared Wharton, in great wrath.
“What did I do what for?”
“Shove the tiller, you ass.”
“I only obeyed orders.”
“What?”
“What did you give such a fatheaded order for?” demanded Nugent, with equal excitement. “You ought to have had more sense.”
“I! What do you mean!”
“Yes, you. You said port.”
“I said port! ” exclaimed Wharton dazedly.
“ Yes.”
“I didn’t say a word.”
“Oh, don’t be funny !“
“You must be dreaming. I never spoke.”
“I appeal to the fellows,” exclaimed Nugent. “You’re off your rocker; that’s what’s the matter with you.”
“Did I speak to Nugent, you chaps?” demanded Harry, looking round.
“I didn’t hear you,” said Bob. “Precious hard to hear anything in this wind.”
“I didn’t,” said Linley.
“I am sorrowful to express the disagreeableness with my worthy chums,” murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur softly, “but I heard the esteemed Wharton.”
“You heard me, Inky !“
“I must sayfully declare that I did. He said ‘Port!’ ‘
‘‘ I ?“
“Yes, my worthy chum. I have no doubt that the word was uttered in the fit of absentfulness of the esteemed mind, and that the memoryfulness of it is non-existent.”
“Look here, I never said a word.”
Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation.
“ Bunter !“
“Blow Bunter! I say—”
“It was Bunter! ”
“What was Bunter?”
“This is some more of his giddy ventriloquism.”
“Oh!”
The Juniors understood in a flash. They fell upon Billy Bunter, and dragged him up. They surrounded him with wrathful faces
The fat junior blinked at them.
“Ow ! I’m wet.”
“Was that you Bunter?”
“I’m hurt,
“Did you imitate Wharton’s voice?”
“I have a pain in my back.”
“Did you speak to Nugent just now?”
“And a pain in my side.”
“Look here, you fat young beast---“
“A- -and another in my leg.”
Bob Cherry took the fat Removite by the collar, and knocked “ head with gentle deliberation against the mast
“Now, then, you fat bounder——”
“Ow! ”
“Was that some of your giddy ventriloquism 1”
“ Wow !”
“Was that—”
“ Wow !”
“Look here, I don’t want to damage the mast with your

head, but I’m going on knocking it till I get an answer.


Was it?”
“Let him alone, you bully! ”
“What?” roared Bob Cherry, swinging round upon Mark Linley. “What ?“
“I didn’t speak.”
“You said—”
“Ha, ha, ha! It was Bunter again.”
“It wasn’t. I—I mean, I didn’t—wasn’t—couldn’t——”
Knock, knock, knock went Bunter’s head against the mast.
“Ow! Yew! Wow!”
“Was it you that time, Bunter? ”
“You’ve hurt my head.”
“Was it you? ”
“It’s aching now.”
“Will you answer me? ”
“I feel so confused by your roughness that I feel I can’t think of anything clearly.’
“You fat worm—”
“Lemme alone !“
Bob Cherry jerked Bunter over and flopped him down into the slop of water in the bottom of the boat,
“Sit there !“ he growled wrathfully. “if you move, I’ll jab you with a boat-hook.”
“Ow ! I’m wet.”
“Then tell the truth for once, and get it over. Was that you playing your rotten ventriloquial tricks?”
“Ow! I’m sitting in the wet.”
“Serve you right.”
“My bags are getting soaked.”
“I don’t care a rap for your bags.”
“Lemme gerrup.”
“ Rats! ”
“I—I—I was ventriloquising. I—I thought it- would amuse you.”
“You lying young porpoise !“ roared Bob Cherry, flourishing the boat-hook. “You didn’t think anything of the sort.”
Bunter spluttered.
“I—I mean I didn’t think so.”
Bob burst into a laugh.
“Oh, it’s no good talking to him. He couldn’t tell the truth once if it were to save his life.”
“Oh, really, Cherry—”
Bob gave him a jab, and he broke off with a splutter.
“Now, listen to me,” said Bob Cherry severely. “If you start any more of your rotten ventriloquism, there will be a casualty in the Bunter family. Do you understand? ”
“No. Oh! Yow! Yes.”
“Do you fully understand, or shall I give you another jab with the boat-hook? ”
“Ow! I fully understand.”
“Then bear it in mind, Tubby.”
Bunter growled, and picked himself out of the water. Harry Wharton was looking anxiously seaward. The boat, with the jib blown away, was harder to keep close to the wind, and the faulty steering had caused it to take a wider swoop seaward. Coming down from the north was a huge steamer, and Harry, as he looked at it, prepared for another wash, that would be more dangerous than the previous one.
“Hold on, all !“ he said abruptly.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Wrecked!

THE boat rose rocking on the wash from the big steamer as it passed, and the faces of the Greyfriars juniors were serious as they clung on. The boat was not large, and the wash of the steamer was tremendous. The boat danced like a cork, and more than once it seemed about to topple right over from the crest of a surge. Billy Bunter, too terrified to know what he was doing, rolled into the bottom of the boat, gasping, and gasping worse than ever as a slop of salt water went into his mouth.
“Hold on !“ shouted Wharton.
“Help !“
“Catch him!”
Wharton saw Bunter’s danger, but he was too far from him to help him. Bob Cherry plunged towards the fat junior, missed him, and rolled to the side, clutching desperately to keep himself from going overboard.
Mark Linley dragged at Bunter in time, or the fat junior would have slipped into the sea. Bunter clung to the Lancashire lad, dragged him over, and they both rolled on Bob Cherry.
“Hold on! ” gasped Bob.
The boat was rocking dangerously already. The weight of the three juniors at the side, as it trembled on the surge, was too much.
Harry Wharton shouted a warning, but a warning was useless then.
Almost before the juniors knew what was happening, the boat was gunwale under, and a great green wash of water came swooping in.
“Hang on !“ shrieked Nugent.
There was a crash as the mast cracked off, and the boat plunged under. Almost in a second it was keel upwards, and the wet sail dragging in the water below kept it so.
Harry Wharton clung to the upturned timbers with one hand, and with the other dashed the water from his eyes. He looked round in wild anxiety for his comrades. Nugent was hanging on grimly—Bob Cherry was clambering upon the keel—and Mark Linley was clinging on and holding Bunter. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was swimming like a fish, close to the boat.
The disaster had been sudden and overwhelming.
The Greyfriars juniors were afloat in the water—with nothing but a wreck to cling to—nothing but that between them and sinking into the depths of the sea.
And the land was far away—a grey blur to the west. Wharton set his teeth hard.
The Greyfriars Naval Cadets had had some perilous adventures, but nothing quite so perilous as this.
It was Bunter’s fault—but it was useless to utter a word of reproach. Nor would the fat junior have heard or heeded. Ho was nearly fainting with terror. The others kept their courage splendidly.
“My only chapeau!” gasped Bob Cherry. “This is a ripping go .“
“The rippingfulness is terrific,” murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, as he swam closer to the upturned boat and laid his dusky hand on the timbers.
“It’s a giddy wreck.”
“My hat! It is!”
Wharton did not speak.
He was trying to think it out.
What was to be done?
The boat was a wreck—there was no chance of righting it. The juniors could only hope to cling on till they were picked up. And what chance was there of that?
What an ending to a morning’s sail!
Wharton glanced at the sky. The sun was high in the blue, and he knew that it must be about half-past ten.
At Greyfriars the follows would be all busy in the class rooms—Mr. Quelch would be taking the Remove, and wondering at the absence of six members of his class. No doubt he was frowning over it, and mentally resolving that the six truants should have reason to repent their escapade.
If he could only have known where they were!
Out at sea, a good four miles from land, clinging to an upturned boat, at the mercy of the waves!
“My only hat ‘ said Harry, at last. “This is the biggest go of all, 1 think. How on earth shall we get out of it.”
Mark Linley swept his glance seaward.
“We shall be picked up! ”
“I hope so.”
“A good many ships pass here. The question is to make them see us. They aren’t likely to notice a little boat, especially now it’s upside down. We ought to make some signal or other.”
“I suppose it’s no good trying to get the boat upright,” said Bob Cherry.
Wharton shook his head.
“Couldn’t be done. We might get a spar off, though, and stick it up somewhere with a rag on top, to attract attention.”
“Good!”
“ Hallo, hallo, hallo! There’s a sail !“
The juniors looked anxiously in the direction pointed out by Bob Cherry.
A splendid ship was coming down, under almost full sail, bearing along gallantly in the wind. She was likely to pass about a mile seaward of the upturned boat.
“It’s a chance! ” said Harry Wharton.
“Let’s try it.”
Wharton clambered on top of the boat timbers, maintaining a footing there with very great difficulty.
He waved his cap and shouted, and the juniors clinging on below shouted, too, with all the force of their lungs.
‘Ship ahoy!”
“ Help! ”
“Hallo-o-o-o !“
There was not the slightest sign from the great ship that they had been seen or heard. Under a press of sail it bore on, and passed them, and faded away into the blue of the south.
A rougher surge of the sea sent Wharton reeling from his insecure foothold, and hp plunged headforemost into the sea.
“ Hallo, hallo, hallo !“ ejaculated Bob Cherry, and he left his hold on the boat to swim to his comrade’s assistance.
He caught Harry’s collar and dragged him back to the boat.
Wharton, panting and gasping, clung on to the timbers. “It’s no good,” he gasped, “they won’t pick us up.”

“Looks like it.”
We shall have to take our chance.”
The boat drifted on in the rough sea. It was bearing seaward under the force of the wind, and the grey line of the coast waft fading into the blue.
Round the juniors rolled the wide sea.
Ere long land would be quite lost to sight, and then—
 Brave as they were, they could not help feeling a tremor of dread. They had no food; their provisions were in a locker in the boot; still there, but quite inaccessible now that the craft was floating keel upwards.
They were already hungry in the keen sea air. Fortunately, a drift of clouds kept the heat of the sun from them.
“I—I—I say, you fellows—”
“What is it, Bunter ?“
Wharton’s voice was unusually kind to the fat junior; he could not be impatient even with Billy Bunter when the shadow of death was upon them all.
“Are we in d-d-danger. Wharton ?“
“Well, something like it, Billy.”
“Oh. dear! Oh, dear !“
“Buck up We shall be picked up?’
“Oh, dear! You oughtn’t to have brought me with you,” grumbled Billy Bunter. “You really ought to have known better. Look here, couldn’t one of you fellows hold me, so that I shouldn’t have to cling to the boat. It makes my arm ache.”
“Our arms are aching, too, old chap.”
“Well, I don’t see how I can hold on. It will be your fault if I get drowned, anyway.”
Wharton shifted the grasp of one hand from the boat to the collar of the fat junior. His patience seemed inexhaustible now.
“Is that better, Bunty? You can let go now—I have you safe. Float on your back; you’ll be all right.”
“Sure you’ve got me ?“
“Oh, yes !“
“Don’t squeeze my neck like that—it hurts.”
“That better?“
“Ye-es. Mind you don’t let me go.”
“All serene “
And Billy Bunter floated with Wharton supporting him It was much easier for Bunter. It was much harder, too, for Harry; but that was a trifle which Bunter was not likely to take into account.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Adrift !

THE sun rose higher and higher in the sky. The wind died down—and with the dying of the wind the sun came out more brightly. A blaze of sunlight fell upon the blistering faces of the juniors as they floated by the boat.
They had made one desperate effort to get it righted. But it was useless. The wet sail dragging beneath acted as ballast, and the sea was too rough in any case. They made the one attempt, and gave it up. But it seemed more possible that they might be able to reach the locker containing the provisions. Bob Cherry dived under the boat and remained there so long that his comrades grew very anxious. He came up at last, puffing and blowing—unsuccessful.
Billy Bunter blinked at him through his wet spectacles.
“Got anything ?”
 “No.”
“Ow! I’m famished !“
“Can’t help it.. 1 couldn’t get at the locker—I was nearly drowned as it was,” panted Bob Cherry. “ It can’t be worked.”
“If you get it open, most of the stuff will shift out into the sea,” Nugent remarked. “It wouldn’t be of much use.”
“Well, a bite each would be welcome.”
“ The welcomefulness of the esteemed bite would be terrific.”
“I’ll have a try,” said Harry,
“Good ; it won’t do any harm, anyway.”
Harry Wharton stopped his breath, his face setting grimly, as he plunged under the overturned boat. There was danger of being caught in the dragging sail and entangled, and drowned as helplessly as a rat in a cage.
The junior groped his way to the locker under water.
Hp found it, by the sense of touch, and groped over it; but it seemed jammed somehow. He knew that it was not locked. He strove to get. it open, while his ears were singing, and his lungs seemed to be bursting under the pressure of the water.
Another effort—and another!
He felt that he must give it up—he could not stand the strain any longer. But it came open then, and he blindly groped for the content.
His hands closed upon something—he did not know what. He grasped both hands full—it was all he could do—and plunged away from under the boat.
He shot up to the surface, bursting for air.
As he came up, Bob Cherry grasped his collar and held his head above water, and Harry gasped and gasped as if he would never have another breath,
In a couple of minutes, however, he was himself again. Billy Bunter was blinking at him hungrily.
 “What have you got, Wharton?” he asked, two or three times before the captain of the Greyfriars Remove could reply.
Harry brought up his hand, from the water. There was a jar of jam in one, and a bottle of ginger-beer in the other.
Bunter looked disappointed.
“Haven’t you got any of the ham ?“.
“That’s all.”
“Or the saveloys?”
“I tell you that’s all”
“Well, I think you might have been a bit more careful. Jam’s not much good; though I suppose it’s better than nothing. Give me the ginger-beer.”
Wharton laughed breathlessly. It seemed curious to him that Bunter should calmly assume that he was to have all the provisions that had been saved.
“How am I going to get the bottle open, though ?“ said Bunter. “1 suppose I shall have to drink it from the bottle. Anybody got a corkscrew ?“
“Yes, I hare an esteemed corkscrew.”
“Hand it over. Give me the ginger-beer, Wharton.. I’m sorry there isn’t any for you fellows. I dare say you’re as thirsty as I am.”
“I dare say we are,” grinned Nugent, “and I dare say we’re going to have as much of the ginger-beer as you, too, you greedy young rotter! ”
Oh, really, Nugent\_\_.
“I’ll open the bottle, and we’ll take a pull each,” said Bob Cherry.
Wharton handed him the bottle, and he opened it, Billy Bunter watching him the while with hungry eyes and an injured expression.
“1 suppose you’re going to let me have first pull ?“ he said aggressively.
“I suppose we’re not,” grinned Bob Cherry. “You’ve got altogether too big a throttle.”
“Oh, really, Cherry——--”
“Oh, dry up !“
“I’m thirsty. This beastly hot sun makes me thirsty.”
“Go and eat coke !“
“Well, give me the jam. Wharton. I suppose you greedy rotters aren’t going to collar any of that.”
“Oh, shut up “
The gingerbeer was sipped by all in turn. There wasn’t much to go round among six, but it was a “wet” to six thirsty throats.
Then the jar of jam was opened. It was flimsy food for hungry boys, but when it had been shared out, it took the keen edge off their hunger.
And their spirits, which had been sinking, rose as they ate
it. The depression which is the result of want of food or lateness of meals had been settling upon them; but after they had eaten, the prospect seemed much brighter.
But still round roiled the wide sea: still over their heads stretched the blue sky, far-reaching—limitless.
The shore had faded away now; they were alone on the North Sea.
On the wide waters, here and there, were dotted sails and smoke patches. But the vessels were too far off for the boys to hope to attract attention.
Once a big steamer came swooping down from the north, so close that the boys could make out the figures of the passengers on the promenade-deck.
Wharton’s heart beat hard as he saw a group looking over the side, and he was certain that he saw a parasol pointing towards them.
But if the boat had been seen, it had not been noted; no one on the big steamer guessed that it was an upturned boat with six boys clinging to it for life.
The steamer passed on, with a throb of engines that came in the ears of the juniors, and dropped down from view in the distance.
Black despondency settled upon them again. They were hungry, fatigued, aching to the bone. The long time and they had been in the water, and the glaring of the sun, blistered them and dazed then.
Billy Bunter had ceased to complain and grumble. He was too exhausted.
Wharton’s eyes grew almost haggard as he swept his glance round the wide water. Would they never be picked up ? It was two o’clock. At Greyfriars the fellows were going in to afternoon school. Would the boys over see Greyfriars again? Had they trodden their last upon the green earth?
Mark Linley uttered a sudden exclamation.
“Look ! There’s a sail “
With eyes from which repeated disappointments had banished almost all hope, the juniors glanced towards the new sail.
It was that of a small vessel—a schooner, as near as Wharton could make out at the distance—at all events, fore and aft rigged. It was a heavy vessel for its kind, but it came along at a spanking rate before the breeze. Wharton’s brightened.
If the schooner kept on its present course, it must pass within easy hail of the drifting boat
Surely it was a chance at last.
“It’s the last chance !“ Mark Linley muttered.
Harry Wharton nodded,
“I believe you’re right. Ready, you chaps, to yell your loudest when she comes within hearing. If she passes us ---“
“She mustn’t—she shan’t ! They’re bound to see us.”
With burning eyes the juniors watched the approaching vessel.
Closer and closer it came, till the great sails looked like big white birds swooping down upon the floating boat.
The juniors’ eyes never left it. They saw a muscular form in jacket and peaked cap come to the rail and look over in their direction. It moved back again, and reappeared, and they caught the glint of the sun on the metal runs of a pair of binoculars.
Wharton gave a gasp of relief.
He’s seen us!”
The man in the peaked cap, evidently an officer, kept the glasses fixed upon the boat, which must have been rising into clearer and clearer view as the schooner bore down upon her.
The juniors looked at one another with jubilant faces.
“They’ve seen us
“We’re saved !“
“Thank Heaven!“
A second figure, much the same in appearance, joined the first. The first man handed the glasses to the second, who looked at the drifting boat through them. Then both disappeared.
The Greyfriars lads waited in an agony of anxiety. No further sign was made by the men on the schooner, but the vessel did not change her course. Almost directly towards the drifting boat, she swooped on and on.
Bob Cherry licked his dry lips.
“They’ve seen us. They must mean to pick us up.”
“They must !“
“Why don’t they move—or shout—or something? ”.
“Blessed if I know !”
“The blessfulness is terrific.”
“I—I say, you fellows ——“
“Shout!’ exclaimed Harry. “Shout! They’re near enough to hear! ”.
“Help!”
“Hallo! ”
“Ahoy!”
“Help!”
“Help! ”
And still no sign from the schooner.
What did it mean?
The juniors were as much mystified as alarmed. It seemed impossible that human beings could intend to pass them by, especially after taking the trouble to deliberately ascertain, by the binoculars, that they were there, clinging to the boat, in momentary danger of death.
The schooner could not intend to desert them. Then why did not some of the crew show themselves? Why was not a hand waved as a sign of encouragement to them?
At the thought that perhaps the vessel did not intend to stop to pick them up, the boys felt their hearts like lead in their bosoms. But surely it was impossible.
With sinking hearts, they sent their voices into the air again, with all the strength they still retained.
“Help !“

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Picked Up.

HARRY WHARTON gritted his teeth.
He had shouted till he was hoarse, and the schooner was coning steadily nearer. If she did not change her course, she would pass the drifting boat within almost a biscuit’s throw. What was the use of further shouting? The schooner’s crew knew that they were there, and if they did not choose to pick them up—
“Oh, the brutes! The cowardly brutes !“ muttered Wharton bitterly.
Bob Cherry turned an almost scared look upon him.
“They can’t mean to abandon us”
Wharton did not reply.
It was borne in upon his mind that that was exactly what the schooner’s skipper did intend.
“Good heavens !“ muttered Nugent. “This—this is horrible !“
“The horribleness is terrific.”
“They can’t desert us!”
“Help! ” yelled Bob Cherry desperately.
Mark Linley uttered an exclamation.
“Look !“
He pointed to the schooner. The two men in peaked Were visible again now, as well as a sailor looking from the forecastle. The latter was a dark-faced, black-eyed fellow, evidently a foreigner of some sort. And now that the juniors could see the schooner closely, it struck them that ft was not an English ship.
Their eyes were fixed imploringly upon the two men in peaked caps. Life or death for the Greyfriars press I in years lay in the hands of those two men. What would they do?
One of them—the skipper, Wharton could see now—called out something to the helmsman, and the schooner swung nearer the drifting boat.
Bob Cherry gave a long gasp.
“It’s all right; they’re going to pick us up.”
The schooner swung steadily towards the drifting boat. The two men looked down at the juniors. One of them had a coil of rope in his hands.
“Thank Heaven! That’s for us! ”
“It’s all right, you fellows.”
The schooner shortened sail, and slackened down, as the boat began to rock upon the washing waves. The man with the rope looked over the side at the boys, who met his glance with either eyes.
“Catch!“ he called out.
“ Ay, ay! ” shouted Wharton.
The man grinned as he looked at him. His face was not a pleasant one. The eyes were deep set and shifty, hard grey in to the, colour—the brows black and heavy. His mouth was like a gash, and the thin lips showed uneven teeth within.
His look, as Harry caught it, was strangely reminiscent of a dog and a wolf combined.
The rope came uncoiling into the sea, and Harry Wharton caught it. The schooner had scarcely any way upon her, and it was easy for Harry to secure the end of the rope to the boat. The pull of the rope brought them nearly alongside.
The hard face under the peaked cap looked down at them.
 “ Do you want to be picked up ?”
“ Yes.”
“Who are you
“Schoolboys of Greyfriars.”
“Blown out to sea, I guess.”
“Yes.”
“You can come aboard, if you like.”
It was a strange remark for the skipper to make. There was not likely to be much picking and choosing about coming on board.
“how are we to get on?”
“I guess you can climb.”
Not all of us.”
“Let the others stay there, then.”
“What do you mean? ”
“I’ve no time to lower a boat, I reckon.”
Wharton set his teeth. The man was not hospitable, or kind. But after all, the chief thing was to be picked up.
“We can all climb except Bunter,” he said. “We’ll fasten the rope to him, and pull him up. It’s all right, Bunter.”
“I—I say, you fellows, don’t leave me I”
“You’re all right. We must climb first, because we’re going to pull you up with the rope,” said Wharton patiently. “You first, Bob.”
“Right. you are! ”
“Oh, really, Wharton, you oughtn’t to desert me—a chap in your own study! I know I shall let go if I am left alone.”
“Oh, hold on !“
Bob Cherry clambered actively up the rope. Nugent followed him, and then Mark Linley and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. They were taken one by one on board the schooner. The skipper, evidently an American, and not a favourable specimen of his race, watched them coolly, with a big cigar in his mouth, without offering them the slightest aid, or calling any of his hands to do so.
Harry Wharton remained with Billy Bunter to the last. Now, than, Bunter, I’ll fasten this under your arms—”
“Don’t leave me!”
“They can’t pull up two of us together, Billy.”
“Then let me go first.”
“Then I shall have nothing to hold. Will you try to climb?”
“You know jolly well I can’t climb a loose rope.”
“I know it’s not easy.”
“ I can’t do it, of course.”
“Then there’s nothing for it but for me to go first and pull you up” said Harry. “Let me fasten it round you,”
He did so, while Bunter whimpered and complained. Then he climbed actively up the rope, Bunter calling after him in vain not to “desert” him.
“I guess you’d better hurry,” said the skipper, removing the cigar from his mouth. “I ain’t no time to waste.”
“Very well, sir.”
“You have wasted a let of time already.”
“ I am sorry.”
“That’s all right, if you hustle now! ”
The juniors dragged the fat Removite up the side. Several sailors looked on. but they did not call for help.
That there was something strange and unusual about the ship Wharton could not help seeing, even in that a moment of hurry and anxiety.
But the business then was to save Bunter, not to worry about what kind of craft it was that had picked them up.
They dragged Bunter on board, and landed him on the dock, gasping and floundering like a great fat fish.
“I say, you fellows———“
“ You’re all right.”
“Ow! I’m not all right! I—I—I feel all wrong !“
And Bunter gasped and spluttered and grumbled as the sails filled again, and the schooner bore on her course. The skipper looked at. the juniors with a grim expression.
“Thank you very much for picking us up, sir !“ said Harry, touching his cap.
“I guess I’ve saved your lives.”
“Yes, sir. If you could set us ashore somewhere—”
The skipper chuckled.
“I guess not.”
“Will you tell us what port you are making for, sir? ” asked Harry, his heart sinking as it occurred to his mind that the schooner might have some foreign destination.
Cert’nly! ” drawled the skipper. “What do you think of Rio?”
“Rio— South America! ”
“I reck'n!“
The Greyfriars juniors stared at one another in blank dismay.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bound for Rio!

“BOUND for Rio!”
The Greyfriars juniors repeated the words with blank looks.
Bound for Rio !
Greyfriars—the old school and the old associations— seemed to fade into immeasurable distance behind them.
Rio, in the Brazils!
A voyage of weeks-—months!
The schooner’s skipper looked at the boys, and gave a grim chuckle as he noted the expression his words called up to their faces.
“I guess you’re surprised, some,” he remarked.
“Yes,” said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. “We hoped you would be able to set us ashore somewhere in England.”
“Or Europe, at least,” said Cherry. “Great Scott ! What will they think at Greyfriars?”
“And there’s no way of letting them know,” said Nugent slowly.
“The wirefulness is impossible,” remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a sigh.
The skipper chuckled again.
“We haven’t a wireless installation,” he remarked; “otherwise I’d be glad to send any messages for you. But you can cable from Rio.”
“Weeks from now,” said Harry.
“1 guess
“I suppose it can’t be helped. You’re tot touching at any port nearer than Rio?”
“I guess not”
“Very well. We are much obliged to you for saving our lives, sir. Rio is better than the bottom of the sea, anyway.”
“I guess you’re right.” The skipper removed his cigar from his mouth. “You younkers can go below, and cook’ll give you a change of things I’m short-handed on this craft, which is the reason 1—” He checked himself.
“You’ll have to work for your grub. You understand that ?“
Wharton flushed.
“We’re perfectly willing to work, sir.”
“Good! You’ll find Peter Jex all right if you work hard, and don’t grouse. I’m Peter Jex. Cooky! ”
“Ay, ay! ”
“Cooky, tumble up !“
“Can’t come for a minute; I’m busy.”
The juniors exchanged glances again.
They had had little experience of sea life, but they knew that it was decidedly odd for a ship’s cook to address his captain in that manner.
Captain Jex stamped on the deck.
‘ Cooky !“
“Ay, ay!”
“If you don’t tumble up, I’ll come down and yank you up by the scruff of your neck! ”
“Oh, come off, Pete Jex! ”
The skipper turned red with rage.
But the next moment the cook appeared on deck. He was a fat man, with a single eye, and his face, red and gross, was not very prepossessing. He looked at the juniors, and nodded coolly to the captain.
“I’m here “ he remarked.
“Look here, Bill Fillot—”
“I’m looking! ”
“If you want to go overboard for mutiny—”
The man grinned.
“Mutiny! Ha, ha, ha! ”
The skipper bit his lip.
“Look here, you obey orders, or you’ll get a belaying-pin round your head,’ he said. “I’ve picked up these boys, to make them useful.”
“Ay—ay! ”
“Take ‘em into the galley to dry themselves, and find ‘em some dry things. You hear me? ”
“Ay, ay! ”
“Then do as I tell you!”
The cook grinned again.
“I reckon you’re getting into the way of it,” he remarked, with a sneer.
“What do you mean, you fat swab ?“
“Dead men’s shoes! ” said the cook, laughing.
The skipper changed colour.
He gave a glance round, picked up an iron belaying- pin, and made a quick step towards the cook.
The latter stood his ground without flinching.
“Belay it, skipper !” he said quietly. “There’s been enough of that, and we’re short-handed already. The ship can’t do without a cook, or without a captain.”
Captain Jex gave a short laugh, and dropped the belaying-pin with a clang to the deck.
“I shall brain you one of these times! ” he said threateningly. “Get below and look alter the younkers”
“ Ay, ay!”
The fat cook turned grinning to the amazed juniors. A sense of strange uneasiness was creeping over the boys. What kind of a ship had they boarded? What did it all mean?
“This way, sonnies,” said the cook.
They followed him below.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

In Strange Company,

J4ARRY WHARTON was very silent.
Till then he had been troubled about Greyfriars, about the long distance they were travelling from the school, and the impossibility of sending news of
their safety to their friends and relations,
He was beginning to realise now, however, that there was something nearer to concern himself about:
What kind of a ship were they on?
On deck they had seen few hands. A schooner like this certainly did not require many, especially in these days of undermanning, and of making one sailorman do the work of two. But surely more than the half-dozen men he had seen would be wanted to look after the schooner.
The skipper, and the cook, too, had spoken of being shorthanded. Where were the other hands, then?
It was borne in upon Harry’s mind that the schooner’s skipper had not intended to pick them up at all, but that the consideration of being short-handed had weighed with him. He had taken the trouble to pick the boys up for the use they would be to him on his half-manned craft.
Work the juniors had no objection to—in fact, full of enthusiasm for their Greyfriars Naval Cadets’ scheme they would be glad enough of picking up a practical knowledge of seamanship, even at the cost of hard work and short commons.
There was nothing to complain of in that, but where were the other hands? The schooner could not have sailed from port so short-handed.
If Captain Jex had intended to get as far as Rio with so small a crew he would not have spoken in the way he had done of being short-handed. Yet could anything have happened to some of his men since they had left port? From where the juniors had encountered the ship, it looked as if she came from some port on the north-east coast.—some English or Scottish port north of the Humber. in that case, she could not have been long at sea.
There was some strange mystery about the schooner.
Harry Wharton could not help thinking about it as he stripped off his dripping clothes and rubbed down his chilled limbs with the rough towel the cook gave him.
The one-eyed man seemed to hav8 a rough kindness about him. He brought out a variety of sailor clothes for the juniors to choose from while their own were ranged round the galley fire to dry.
But all the time he seemed to be struggling with a suppressed desire to laugh, as if something particularly humorous was tickling his fancy all the time. At times a fat chuckle escaped him.
The juniors looked at him several times.
Their surprised looks only seemed to tickle cooky the more.
“What kind of a ship is this, cooky’ Bob Cherry asked. “Trading to Rio!”
Cocky chuckled.
“That’s it !“ he said. “Trading to Rio.”
“Is Captain Jex a captain you can get on with?”
“I guess so.”
“An American, isn’t he?”
“I reckon. Same here.”
“And the crew?”
“Dagoes, mostly.”
The juniors knew that the term “dago” covers anybody of the Latin race. They had seen for themselves that the few sailors on board were mostly, if not all, of the southern races of Europe.
“You haven’t many men forrard,” said Harry Wharton. Bill Fillot shook his head and blinked with his single eye.
“No: we’re short-handed.”
“That’s curious.”
“I guess so.”
“I suppose that chap who was speaking with the skipper was the mate?” asked Nugent,
“I guess so—Joe Prye.”
“American; too?”
“I reckon.”
“Then this is an American ship?”

“Ow! Help! ”
Smack, smack, smack!
“Yow, ow, wow!
The man was raising the rope’s-end again, when Harry Wharton touched him on the arm. Preece looked at him in angry surprise.
“Hasn’t he had enough?” said Wharton.
“Mind yer own business.”
“He’s only a silly kid. Can’t you let him alone now?”
“I’ll give you a taste of it, I guess, if you give me any of your chin.”
Wharton’s eyes gleamed.
“You won’t,’ he said quietly.
“Stand back! ”
“ He, ho, he !“
The sudden sound of a chuckle came from the cook, who had come out of his galley. He blinked at the scene with his single eye, and came rolling forward.
“Let him alone, Jim Preece.”
“What’s it got to do with you, Bill Fillot ?“
“Let him alone you scum! ”
Preece hesitated. He was a much larger man than the cook, and much more active, but he seemed somehow afraid of the man with one eye—the man with the fat figure and fat, red face. In the single eye of the sea-cook there was a glint of red—a glint that told of a nature it would not be well to rouse to anger.
The skipper’s yoke came booming along the deck.
“Bill Fillot! ”
“Ay, ay?”
“Get back to your cooking.”.
“Scat! ”
“Do you want me to come there 1”
“t guess you can come if you like.”
The skipper muttered something, but he did not come. It was already clear to the juniors that the cook was as great a power on board the schooner as the skipper was.
Preece flung down the rope’s-end.
“Waal, I guess he’s had enough,” he remarked.
“I guess so, Preece.”
The long-limbed sailor stamped away. Billy Bunter blinked at the cook.
“Thank you very much, air,” he said.
“Stuff and rubbish!” said the cook. “I won’t see a kid lammed, I guess. Don’t be a lazy swab, though, or I may lam you myself.”
“I—I—I m sincerely sorry. I—I’m delicate, you know, and—”
“He, he, he! ”
“I say, sir,” exclaimed Bunter, struck by a sudden idea. “would you like me to help you in the galley, sir? I’m a good cook, and very useful at that sort of work. You wouldn’t mind me taking a snack every now and then, I know.”
The single eye winked at him.
“I guess that’s a good snap,” said the cook.
“Will you take me, sir 2”
“I reckon. Kim on.”
Bunter joyfully followed the cook. There was one kind of work he did not object to, and that was cooking, with frequent pauses for eating. In the schooner’s little galley he was likely to be happier than he had ever been at Greyfriars.
The skipper’s voice boomed after him
“Boy! Come back!”
Bunter paused and hesitated.
“Kim on,” said Mr. Fillot, calmly.
Bunter followed the cook again..
There was another roar from aft.
“Stop, I tell you !“
Again Bunter paused, irresolute ? Mr. Fillot linked his arm in the fat junior’s, and marched him into the galley.
There was a hurried tramp of feet after him. The red, angry face of the skipper looked in at the galley.
“Send that boy out, Bill Fillot !“
“I guess not”
“You fat swab !“
“You ornery, slab-sided, bullpup-faced land-lubber?’ said Mr. Fillot cheerfully.
The skipper glared, and retired. Billy Bunter breathed more freely. Mr. Fillet clapped him on the shoulder.
“Don’t you be afeared, Tubby.”
“My name’s Bunter, if you please !“
The one visible eye of Mr. Fillot glinted.
“I’m goin’ to call you Tubby! Any objection ?“
“N-no,” stammered Billy Banter hastily.
“Good, then! Wash up them dishes; and don’t you be afraid of Pete Jex so long as you’re with me.”
“But he’s captain, isn’t he?” asked Bunter.
The cook chuckled.
“I guess he is, but I’m cook; and when you’ve been longer on board this craft you’ll know that the cook is as big a man as the captain, and p’r’aps a little bit bigger, sonny !“
“That’s curious, isn’t it?” persisted Bunter inquisitive.
 “P’r’aps it is! Any business of yours by any chance?”
“N-n-no,” stammered Bunter, scared by the gleam in Mr. Fillot’s eye. “Of course, it doesn’t matter to me.”
“Stow the cackle, then! ”
“C-c-c-certainly! ”
“And wash up them dishes and plates !“
Bunter cast an eye of real disfavour upon the huge pile of dirty crockery. He didn’t fancy the task.
“If—if you please, I’d rather do some cooking!’ he ventured.
Mr. Fillot smiled genially.
“You’d rather stand by,” he suggested, in a pleasant tone “and look on while I do the rough work myself.”
“‘Yes, that’s it exactly,” said Bunter, delighted at being so easily understood by Mr. Fillot; “that a just what I should (Ike “
“And maybe you’d give me some orders now and then ?“
 “I should be very pleased.”
“And a cløut on the head if I needed it?”
“Oh, really—”
Mr. Fillot picked up a strap. Bunter eyed him nervously..
“W-w-what are you g-g-going to do ?“ he stuttered.
“Give you some more medicine!“
“Ow’! I—I—I—I say, I—I should like to wash up dishes! I’m very fund of washing-up ! I hope you’ll let me do all the washing-up there is to b8 done! That’s what I really meant to say all along !“
Mr. Pullet chuckled and dropped the strap.
“Waal, I’ll give you a chance!“ he said. “Pile in !“.
And the fat junior piled in.

THE THIRTAENTH CHAPTER

A Startling Discovery.
|
HARRY WHARTON & CO. had been well fed and well rested by the kindness of the strange sea-cook. They were willing to work, and they set to it cheerfully. Captain Jex was inclined to be captious, and Preece inclined to bully. But the juniors worked with such a good will that they could not in decency find anything to complain of.
There was no picking and choosing; the lads did as they were told, and did it well. In the new tasks they had found to do, Mark Linley had an advantage over the others. The Lancashire lad had once had is job in the Mersey docks, and he knew a. great deal about ships and the sea. In the new life he had led at Greyfriars he had gained a different kind of knowledge, but he had not forgotten what he knew. Linley was the handiest fellow of the five but what the others lacked in knowledge they made up in industry.
And there was plenty to be done.
At “ pulling and hauling” the juniors were at first, of course, of little use. Mark was able to take his place with the seamen, but the others naturally required time to “get on” to such duties. But there was plenty of other work to be done. The ship was in a state of great uncleanliness, and looked as if nothing in the way of cleaning or scrubbing had been done for weeks. The forecastle was filthy, and the juniors had the task of cleaning it out. They performed the task to the satisfaction even of Mr. Preece. He had not the slightest excuse for using the rope’s end, which he seemed greatly inclined to do upon the slightest provocation.
It was perhaps fortunate for all concerned. Bunter was the kind of fellow to be safely bullied, but the other juniors were not likely put up tamely with ill-usage.
If the rope’s-end came into play, there was likely to be trouble.
But for the present all was plain sailing.
In the dusky September night the juniors slaved away, while the seamen lounged about the decks, and smoked or played cards.
Little as Harry Wharton knew of practical life at sea, he knew that this was a most extraordinary state of affairs in the most carelessly-governed vessel afloat.
If the boys had not been there, it was clear that no work at all would have been done, except that actually necessary for the working of the ship.
No discipline seemed to be maintained at all.
Orders in connection with sailing the ship the crew obeyed, but on other occasions they took no notice of the officers.
Neither did Captain Jex nor Mr. Prye seem to exact any special respect.
Late in the evening the juniors saw the two officers playing cards with the hands on deck, with a pile of money beside them, in the light of an oil-lamp swinging overhead.

The skipper cursed as roundly when he lost as the most reckless forecastle-hand could have done.
Wharton looked at the scene in amazement, and wont on with his work.
It was no business of his. Yet he could not help wondering. And it was borne in upon his mind, clearer and clearer, that something unknown—something terrible—had lately happened on the schooner.
Where were the rest of the crew?
How came these two men, with the manners and habits of the roughest forrard-hands, to be in command of a ship?
Into what den of unknown iniquity had the boys been thrust by a strange freak of Fate?
It was useless to trouble their heads about it; they were booked now for the voyage to the Brazils, and had to make the best of it. Yet they could not help thinking about it.
Billy Bunter, in the cook’s galley was the most peaceful in mind of the Greyfriars party.
Having done all the washing-up and cleaned out th8 galley and worked at various hard and rough tasks till he was almost dropping with fatigue, he was taken pity upon by Mr. Fillot. and allowed to join in the cooking.
Then Bunter bucked up wonderfully.
He and Mr. Fillet got on together very well, and in the pleasant scent of the cooking they talked quite familiarly and cheerfully.
Mr. Preece looked into the forecastle when the juniors had finished. He could not help looking surprised at the state he found it in.
“Will it do sir?” asked Wharton.
Preece nodded.
“I guess that’s O K !“ he said.
“Good! ”
“Better sluice down the steps and finish,” said Preece; “then you can turn in, if you like.”
“ Thank you !“
Three steps led down into the forecastle. They were in as dirty and neglected a condition as any part of the ship. Bob Cherry held up a big ship’s lantern to show Wharton a light to sluice them down before the rubbing commenced .
Harry glanced at the steps, and gave a sudden start.
Preece had gone back to join the gamblers on the deck, and the Greyfriars juniors were alone.
Bob Cherry looked quickly at Harry. The latter was staring at a stop at the end of the steps with wide-open eyes and a face that had grown suddenly pale.

“What’s the matter?” asked Bob, in a whisper.
Harry made no reply.
With a hand that shook, in spite of himself, he took the lantern from Bob’s hand, and brought it close down to the steps, and knelt to examine them.
The juniors, startled and mystified, bent down round him, to stare at the wood.
On the wooden step was a great dark blotch.
It was a dark stain on the dirty wood, and not an old stain. Feet had trodden and trodden over it, but not long enough to obliterate it.
The stain had not been there twenty-four hours; Harry Wharton knew that, and the others knew it without his telling them.
But what was the stain?
What had made that purple patch upon the fo’c’s’le steps?
Harry turned a face upward to his comrades, and the lantern-light, gleaming upon it, showed it to be deadly pale.
What is it?” asked Nugent. in a hushed whisper. And Harry’s voice was a whisper, too, as h8 replied. “Blood !“

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER,

A Big Bluff.

SILENCE fell upon the Greyfriars juniors.
The strange and terrible discovery robbed them for a full minute of the power of speech.
It was blood!
The great purple blotch on the fo’c’s’le steps could be nothing else—it was nothing else.
Blood!
The terrible discovery let in a flood of light upon things that had mystified and perplexed them.
Where were the rest of the crew? What had happened on board this mysterious craft? That purple stain on the dirty wood seemed to tell only too plainly.
The juniors could not speak.
They could only look at one another with startled eyes, with faces grown suddenly white and ghastly in the light of the lantern.
From the dusky deck came the voices of the gamblers uninterrupted. What deeds had been done by these hands that were now dealing and shuffling the cards?
Wharton was the first to break the frozen silence.
‘‘It’s blood !“ he said again.
“Good heavens !“
“What does it mean?”
“I’m almost afraid to think,” said Harry, in a low voice. “ But let’s get on
“I suppose we had better !“
In grim silence the juniors went on with their work. The steps were washed down and, along with the dirt and dust, the tell-tale stains were washed out.
Tired by their labour, but more perplexed and worried than tired, the Greyfriars juniors reported themselves to Preece.
Preece was playing poker with the captain and mate and the cook. The four dagoes were playing among themselves, some game of their own.
“I go you four.” said Preece.
Captain Jex clinked five shillings into the pool. -
“That’s one better, I guess “
Mr. Prye threw down his cards, with an oath.
“Pass, partner,”
“Waal, cooky ?“
The fat cook looked at his cards, and looked at the “pot.” According to the rules of the game it cost five shillings to “come in” now, and the cook appeared to be doubtful about whether his “hand” was worth the money.
The skipper watched him, with a mocking grin. The Greyfriars juniors. not caring to interrupt the game at such an interesting point, stood by and waited till the round should be over.
“I guess I’ll ante,” said the cook.
And he clinked five shillings into the pool.
Preece followed his example, and then Captain Jex dropped in half-a-sovereign. They were evidently playing “no-limit” poker—probably one of the most reckless forms of gambling known.
“I guess that lets you down,” said the skipper.
The cook grinned.
“I guess I stay in, just for greens !“ he remarked.
And he put a half-sovereign over the captain’s.
Preece looked very dubious.
After a searching look at his cards he threw them down and scowled discontentedly.
“ I reckon one pair ‘ain’t worth it,” he remarked; “though I shouldn’t be surprised if cooky was bluffing! ”
The cook chuckled.
“Bluffing or no bluffing, I’ll see you through! ” grunted the skipper. “I raise you ten, you fat swab.”
And he dropped in a sovereign.
The cook hesitated long.
He glanced at his cards, he glanced at the pool, and he glanced at the skipper. Then he fumbled in his trousers’ pockets.
“Oh, pass !“ said Jex. “Pass, you swab! Pass, you slabsided lubber. You know you ain’t got the keerds— you’re only bluffing !“
“I’ll bluff you out then !“ said the cook. And he dropped a sovereign in.
The skipper uttered an oath.
“I’ll double that.”
Two sovereigns went in.
The Greyfriars juniors looked on in amazement. There was already a pile of silver and gold in the beercan that served as a pool.
Where did these men obtain the money? How came a sea-cook to be in possession of so much cash—at sea, too? Where had Preece obtained the money he gambled with?
Cooky hesitated again.
But Harry Wharton, as he watched the fat cook, caught the sly twinkle in his single eye, and guessed that his hesitation was only simulated for the purpose of drawing the skipper on to further recklessness.
Finally the two sovereigns went in.
Then the skipper hesitated.
He covered the bet without raising it; but his momentary hesitation showed the cook that he had reached the end of his tether.
With slow deliberation the cook drew a couple of five-pound notes out of the recesses of his trousers, and added them to the pool.
“I raise that,” he remarked.
The captain stared blankly at the pool.
To “come in” now would cost him ten pounds; and if he did not cover the bet, the cook would rake in the pool without being obliged to show his cards at all. If he did cover it, he would lose that sum of money if the cook’s hand was the better of the two.
The question was, whether the cook had a strong hand, worth the money he was risking upon it, or whether he was “bluffing “—that is, trying to freeze out his opponent by forcing the betting high.
The skipper doubted long.
The cook’s face was placid and comfortable, his single eye twinkling and gleaming in the light of the swinging lamp.
The amount he had risked must certainly be considerable to him, however he had come by it; yet he showed no sign of nervousness.
“You swab !“ said the skipper at last. “ You fat, slabby swab! You’re bluffing !“
“Cover my blind, and see the cards, then !“ said Cooky.
“You ain’t got the keerds for the money.”
“I’m ready to show up.”
The skipper snorted.
He could not call upon the cook to show his cards unless he covered the stake; and that meant the loss of his money if the cook’s hand was the stronger of the two.
Finally, with an oath, the captain threw his hand down.
He threw the cards face upwards, and revealed two jacks, two queens, and an ace—technically known as “two pairs, queen high.” it was a hand strong enough to bet a great deal upon; but it was useless if his opponent should have three of a kind, or a full hand, or a four, or a royal flush.
And that cooky had at least a full hand—that is to say, a pair and a three—the skipper was convinced.
“Take the pot, you lubber l” grunted Jex.
The cook reached over for his winnings. As the skipper had “passed,” the pool was his without the trouble of showing his cards.
He clinked the money into his pocket, leaving his cards face downwards on the table. His fat face was grinning.
“Show your keerds, you fat swab!’ grunted the skipper.
“I ain’t no call to show them !“ said the cook.
“Show up, I tell you! ”
“I guess I ain’t showing.”
Captain Jex reached over towards the hand.
A knife glimmered in the cook’s grip, and he made a motion of pinning the skipper’s hand to the deck.
Captain Jex hastily withdrew it.
The cook chuckled.
“You can see the keerds if you pay for it,” he said “I charge you a dollar for a show, skipper.”
You swab !“
Curiosity overcame the captain’s repugnance to parting with his money. He wanted badly to know whether the cook had, indeed, had a strong hand, or whether it was, after all, only a “bluff.” He clinked the four shillings across to the cook, who stowed them away in his pocket
“Now show up, you swab!”
The cook grinned, and turned his cards face upwards in the lamplight.
There was a roar of rage from the skipper, and a chuckle simultaneously from Preece and Mr. Prye.
The hand was composed of a two and three, a six, a seven, and a jack, of different suits. It was not even a flush. There was not a pair in his hand. It was worthless.
“By gosh, a kilter! ” exclaimed Preece.
“Haw, haw, haw! ” ejaculated Mr. Prye.
The skipper glared furiously at the cook.
He had been bluffed in the most barefaced way. If he had paid up and called for a show his hand would have raked in the pot easily. As it was, through want of nerve in staking his money, he had given away the pot to his opponent.
“You—you swab !“ he gasped.
Mr. Fillot chuckled.
“I guess it was a bluff! ” he remarked. “You should have asked for a show, skipper—it would only have cost you ten pounds. Ha, ha, ha ! He, he, he !“
The skipper was choking with rage.
His hand was sliding, perhaps unconsciously, towards his hip-pocket. The cook, doubled up with merriment, did not seem to observe it.
“He, he, he! He, he, he! You should have had a little nerve, skipper. He, he, he! You are playing with dead item’s money, too; and you haven’t the sand to risk it. He, he, he! ”
The skipper’s expression was murderous.
His hand came from his hip-pocket, and there was a steely glimmer in the light of the swinging lamp.
Harry Wharton was watching the man.
He had read something in his eyes—something terrible. And the boy, his heart beating like a hammer, was ready for that movement of Captain Sex’s.
He threw himself forward as the skipper’s hand came up, and grasped the strong, sinewy wrist with both hands, and forced it into the air.
Crack!
The pistol exploded, and a bullet went tearing through the canvas above.
The cook’s chuckling ceased suddenly.
He sprang to his feet, and his hand took a businesslike grip on the handle of his knife.
Captain Sex leaped up, too, his face pale now, the smoking revolver in his grip.
For a moment they glared at one another.
Then the cook chuckled—a chuckle that sounded unearthly on the lips of a man who had just barely escaped a sudden and violent death.
“He, he, he! A close call that time, skipper! He, he, he! ”
“You swab!”
“I guess you’ll hand me that barker,” said the cook. “I kinder reckon it’ll be safer in my keeping !“
The skipper hesitated a moment.
But the solitary eye of the fat cook was bent upon him, with a red glint in it. The hand that held the knife was moving spasmodically. The man was about to spring. If he had sprung, a bullet would not have stopped him in time.
And Harry, as he looked at the face of the skipper, saw that he was afraid—terribly afraid—of that strange, one-eyed man.
“You’ll give me that barker, you scum !“
Captain Jex hurled the pistol to the deck.
“Pick it up, sonny.”
Bob Cherry picked up the pistol and banded it to the cook, who slipped it into his pocket.
“I guess you can run now, skipper,” said the cook, chuckling. Then his face became serious, savage, and his eye glinted red. “But don’t try them tricks again, sonny. Don’t try to draw on Bill Fillot again! I warn you! The schooner’s lost one skipper—she’ll lose another !“
And the cook rolled back to his galley, leaving the skipper cursing under his breath.
The juniors went forward in silence.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Captain Jex Requires a Cabin-Boy.

THE cook looked out and called to the juniors.
“Kim in here! ”
They went in. The cook was chuckling as usual, but there was a kinder expression upon his fat face than they had seen there before.
“I guess you saved my life, kid,” he said to Harry Wharton.
Harry nodded,
“Very likely, sir.”
“I guess it’s so. You might have got that bullet, too,”
“I didn’t think about that.”
“You’re a good plucked lad,” said the sea-cook—” a real lad of grit. You saved my life. I ain’t likely to forget that. I stand your friend while you’re aboard the Nancy.”
“Thank you.”
“Maybe you’ll need one,” said the cook. “The skipper’ll be up agin you now. You want to look out for him, I tell you !“
“I suppose so.’
“But there ain’t so much skipper as cook on this craft,” grinned the one-eyed man. “I guess you’ve noticed that, sonn4i.”
“I have noticed it,” said Wharton. Then he went on abruptly. “You say you’re going to stand my friend. Tell me what it all means.’
“What what all means?”
“All this mystery. How is it that you have more power than the captain? ”
“Because I’ve got more grit I guess.”
“Yes, I see that; but that isn’t all. Any cook may be braver than any captain, but—”
The cook gave his peculiar chuckle.
“This ain’t an ordinary ship,” he said.
“It appears not.”
“Don’t you ask no questions,” said the sea-cook. “Better not. Maybe the Nancy sailed with a full crew and maybe she didn’t. Maybe Captain Jex sailed as skipper, and maybe he sailed as a fo’c’s’le hand. Maybe and maybe not. Don’t ask questions.”
Wharton drew a deep breath.
“There was blood on the forecastle steps before we cleaned them down,” he said.
The cook gave a start.
“There was what?”
“Blood!”
“I—I—I say, you fellows,” broke in Billy Bunter, “you’re j-j-joking !“
“Shut up, Bunter! ” grunted Bob Cherry.
“Oh, really, Cherry—”
“Dry up!”
The cook’s single eye glinted.
“You’d better not speak of that to anybody but me, sonny he said slowly. “Better not ask questions. Better not notice too much. Come in and grub.”
The juniors entered the galley, and they were hungry as well as tired after their work. They ate heartily in spite of the worry that was upon their minds. The cook’s words only seemed to make darker the shadow of crime that hung over the schooner.
What had happened there before they came on board? The cook was unusually silent, and his chuckles had ceased. A strange fellow he looked, with the black patch over his missing eye, and the other gleaming and twinkling like a carbuncle as the light caught it. There was something uncanny about the sea-cook, and yet something that the boys could not help liking.
“Maybe you’ve noticed that one of the boats is missing,” said the cook, breaking the silence at last.
“I had not noticed it,” said Harry Wharton.
“Waal, it is missing, Maybe some of the hands went in that. If one of them had a broken head, maybe at was because he was a fool, and didn’t know when to give in.
You see?”
Harry Wharton nodded.
“In plain words, there has been a mutiny here?” he exclaimed.
The cook chuckled.
“That’s an ugly word” he said,
“And Captain Jex is wearing the clothes of a man who’s drifting away in an open boat! ‘ exclaimed Bob Cherry. The cook grinned, but did not speak. So much, indeed, was clear to the juniors. The familiarity between cook and captain was a proof that He was no real captain at all. He evidently knew how to navigate a ship, but in everything else he was as rough as the roughest forrard hand. But where was the former captain—where were the crew?
The cook implied that they had been sent adrift in a boat, after a struggle! Was it the truth, or was he deceiving them? Had there been grim murder on that mysterious craft?”
Whatever the answer to that question might be, it was pretty certain that they would get no more out of Mr. Fillot. The juniors ate their supper in silence. They had finished when a red, angry face was put in at the galley.
Captain Jex scowled at them.
“1 guess I want one of them brats for a cabin-boy,” he remarked. “It’s only just kim into my mind, too.”
The cook only grinned at him.
 “Which one, skipper?”
The captain pointed to Harry Wharton, with a venomous gleam in his eyes that did not escape the boy.
“That’s the one”
“1 guess not,” said the cook.
“What do you mean?
“I mean what I say.”
“Look here, Fillot, I reckon I’m going to have that brat aft as cabin-boy, if I choose,” said the skipper, beginning to bluster.
The cook shrugged his shoulders.
“Then you’re out in your reckoning, skipper.”
“What’s the objection ?“
“That kid’s under my protection.”
“Look here, you fat swab—”
“He saved my life, skipper. Bill Fillot isn’t the kind of sea-cook to forget that. He saved my life.”
“1 tell you I’m going to have him.’
“And punish him for that,” grinned the cook. “I guess not.’
“I’m not going without him. Come here, boy.”
Harry Wharton met the savage glance of the captain steadily. He knew very well that the ruffian wanted to get him aft to make him suffer for what he had done.
“I won’t come.” he said.
The captain’s face was red with rage.
“You—you young lubber! You dare to disobey your skippers orders !“
“You are not my skipper.”
“I guess you’re on board my ship.”
“Your ship?” said Harry pointedly.
The man changed colour, He bent a furious glance upon the sea-cook.
“What have you been telling the brats, Bill Fillot?’ he hissed.
“Nothing,” said the cook. Nothing that they ain’t noticed for themselves. They ain’t blind or silly, skipper.”
“They may know more than is good for them,” said Jex, between his teeth. “But look her8, I’m going to have that boy aft. Come here.”
“I won’t”
“I’ll larrup you till the blood runs. I—”
“You won’t lay a finger on him, skipper,” said the cook coolly.
“By gosh, I’ll—”
The cook whipped out the revolver be had taken from the skipper. Captain Jex turned pale as the glimmering tube was turned towards him.
“Put that down! ” be roared. “You fool, it might go off I”
“He, he, he! It will go off if you don’t clear out of this galley, skipper! ”
“You fat hound—”
“Better skip.”
“ I’ll----I’ll---“
The hammer rose a little as the cook’s finger pressed slightly on the trigger. The skipper gasped, and made a single bound out of the galley.
The cook sent a roar of laughter after him, answered by oaths and curses from the deck.
He thrust the pistol out of sight, and resumed stirring a saucepan that was simmering on the stove.
“Jex ain’t no grit,” he said, “He can knock a man down from behind with a belaying-pin, but he can’t face a shooter. You younkers had better stay in here—you can sleep on them sacks again, and I guess you’ll be safer in here with me than the fo’c’s’le with the scum forrard.”
“Thank you very much,” said Wharton gratefully. “However this affair turns out, we sha’n’t forget your kindness to us, sir.”
“I guess I’ll see you through,” said the cook.
And the juniors gladly turned in upon the sacks; and, in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings, and the grim shadow that hung over the schooner and its crew, they slept soundly and uninterruptedly till dawn.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Straight from the Shoulder,

HARRY WHARTON opened his eyes, and blinked in the sunlight. It was morning, arid the schooner was gliding swiftly along under a sunny sky. There was a smell of cooking in the galley—a smell that seemed permanent there. It was welcome enough to the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, who had awakened very hungry.
The sea-cook was at the stove, chuckling as usual. He did not know that Wharton was awake, and he was not on his guard. His face told of the thoughts in his mind; in his expression good humour and cunning and malice were strangely mingled. It came into Wharton’s mind then that the sea-cook would be bad man to have for an enemy, and a decidedly uncertain one to have for a friend. Yet he was the boy’s only friend on board the schooner, and all that stood between them and the brutality of the skipper.
Wharton rose from the sacks, and the cook gave a slight start and turned round.
“Oh, you’re awake?”
“Yes.”
“Good! You’ve been called a dozen times from the dock.” “I’m sorry. I suppose I was tired.”
“It’s all serene, I guess. I wouldn’t let them wake you.”
 “Thank you very much.”
The cook looked at him curiously.
“You mean that?” he asked.
Wharton coloured.
“I’m not an the habit of saying things I don’t mean,” he replied. “I am very much obliged to you, and so are my friends.”
“Would you back me up if it came to that?”
“In what way—against the captain?”
The cook nodded.
“Certainly,” said Harry, at once. “You’ve stood by us, and if it gets you into trouble with Jex, you can rely upon us to stand by you.”
“What-ho !‘ said Bob Cherry, standing up, and rubbing his eyes. “We’ll pull you through, cooky.”
The cook fixed his eve upon them. He appeared to be debating something in has mind.
“You don’t want to go to Rio 7” he asked suddenly.
“Hardly.”
“You’d give a great deal to be set ashore in England?”
“Yes, a very great deal.”
“It would be worth a bit of a tussle.”
“ Yes”
“I’ll remember that. ‘Nuff said now, but I’ll remember it.”
And Mr. Fillot turned to his cooking.
The juniors were considerably puzzled, but they ate their breakfast in silence. They could not make out Mr. Fillet. It seemed to be hinted in his words that he was meditating some scheme for taking the authority out of the hand of Captain Jex.
If Captain Jex—as Wharton now felt certain was the case—was simply a mutineer masquerading in a captain’s clothes, there could be nothing wrong in superseding him. But it might be difficult—it might be dangerous. Preece and Mr. Prye and the dagoes might stand by the skipper: and they were grown men, and they were armed, in all probability, and reckless. The sea-cook, though he appeared to have boundless nerve, could scarcely hope to contend with them, backed only by half a dozen schoolboys.
Harry did not think the man would be so reckless as to attempt such an enterprise, but he could not think of any other explanation of what the cook had said.
After the meal the juniors tumbled up.
The schooner was under full sail, and getting through the water at a great rate.
No land was in sight. Here and there on the sea could be seen glancing sails, or the black smoke of a steamer.
Where the schooner was Wharton had no idea. For the voyage the captain had spoken of, she should be heading for the Atlantic, and should now he in the English Channel. In that case, she must have passed the Straits of Dover in the night.
Captain Jex was on deck, looking up a little anxiously at the great mass of canvas under which the schooner was speeding along.
The breeze was very brisk, and the Nancy was making good way; but the vessel as too short-handed for so much sail to be safe.
In the case of a squall, it would be impossible for the few hands to deal with the sails, and the result might be disastrous.
The skipper looked round at the boys as they came up. He appeared to be in an evil temper—partly the result of his anxiety about the ship, partly of his altercations with the cook, partly, perhaps, of what he had drunk the previous night, for his red, bleared eyes and loose lips showed that he was in the habit of indulging in strong drink.
“Come here, younker! ” he called to Wharton.
Harry approached him, touching his cap respectfully.
“Ay, ay, sir
“You’re goin’ to earn your rations on this craft,” said Captain Jex venomously.
“I’m quite willing to do so, sir.”
“Good! I want you to lay aloft.”
Wharton looked up at the straining masts and the bellying canvas. He was not afraid to go aloft, but he knew perfectly well that the skipper was sending him up in the hope of seeing him fall into the sea.
The boy smiled contemptuously.
“Ay, ay, sir.”
“Let’s see what you can do,” said the skipper, with an evil grin. “Up you go !“
“Ay, ay, sir.’
Harry Wharton stepped to the ratlines, and was about to ascend, when there was a call from the -direction of the galley.
“Stop !“
Wharton glanced at the sea-cook.
“It’s all right, sir,” he called out. “I’m not afraid.”
“You young swab, obey my orders!” roared the skipper.
“You’ll obey mine, I guess,” said the cook.
“Go below, Bill Fillot.”
“Go and hang yourself” retorted the cook.
“Up with you, younker !”
“You won’t leave the deck, I guess,” said the cook.
Harry Wharton hesitated. Had Captain Jex been a properly constituted skipper, his obligations to the cook would not have justified him in disobeying orders. But he owed no obedience to a successful mutineer. He stepped towards the cook.
“Come back and do as I tell you,” shrieked the captain.
“I am not under your orders,” said Wharton. “I’m willing to work, but I obey the orders of the only decent man on board. You have no right to give orders here. I owe no obedience to a man I know to be at least an attempted murderer.”
The skipper appeared to be choking.
“You—you young lubber ! Preece !“
“Ay, ay!’?
“Give that brat a dozen with the rope’s end.”
“I guess so,” said Preece.
He picked up a rope’s-end, and stepped towards Harry Wharton. The cook sat down on the combings of the hatchway, a grin on his fat face.
Wharton did not look for help from him, and he did not expect it. He was quite ready to take care of himself.
He faced Preece, his eyes gleaming, his hands clenched hard.
“Don’t touch me with that !” he said.
The man laughed. Ho did not expect much resistance from a boy; but he did not yet know the champion athlete of the Lower Forms at Greyfriars.
The rope-end swung in the air, and descended, with a. swinging blow, across Harry Wharton’s shoulders.
Harry’s eyes blazed. Without stopping for a second to think of the consequences, he sprang forward. His right fist, clenched as hard as iron, caught the ruffian on the point of the chin in a terrific upper-cut.
Preece gave a yell, and staggered back, and back, till he fell helplessly on the deck with a ringing bump.
There was a burst of chuckling from the cook.
“He, he, he!”
Preece lay dazed, astounded as much as hurt, but very much hurt, all the same. The skipper seemed to be stupefied. He stared blankly at the boy, whose young arm had struck so terrible a blow.
“Gosh !“ exclaimed Mr. Prye, in equal astonishment.
“He, he, he !“
Preece staggered to his feet. He did not speak; but his hand groped for a belaying-pin, and seized it. The Greyfriars juniors gathered quickly round Wharton. There was a sudden shout from the cook.
“Stow that, Preece !“
The man snarled like a wild beast.
“I’ll smash him !“
“Stow it, or you’ll drop “
There was a click of a trigger. Preece looked round apprehensively, and saw the glimmer of Jex’s revolver in the sea-cook’s hand. Mr. Fillot grinned pleasantly over the levelled barrel.
“Are you tired of life, Preece ?“ he asked genially.
“‘You—you dare riot pull trigger.”
“Try me and see.”
Preece did not seem inclined to try him. He flung the belaying-pin into the sea with a curse, and stamped away, holding his chin in both hands.
The sea-cook chuckled in his curious, gnomish way.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Sea-Cook’s Scheme.

After that, the juniors were let severely alone by the crew of the schooner. They were not even given orders to work. The fear in which the men stood of the cook was clearer every hour. It was curious that the chuckling, good-humoured fat man should inspire so much fear. But, Wharton was already aware that there wore depths in Fillot’s nature that did not appear on the surface. The man had a reserve, as it were, of desperate hardihood, which the others lacked. He stood the friend of the juniors, and even the skipper dared not lay a finger on them.
And although they could not help feeling that this man, who stood by them, was as darkly stained by crime as any man on board, the juniors could not helps liking him.
Indeed, it was only too probable that, in whatever dark transactions had taken place on board the schooner, the hardy, reckless sea-cook had borne the chief part.
The boys shuddered at the thought that there might be blood on his hands. Yet he was kind to them—he saved them from much.
That he had some plan in his mind of turning against the skipper, and taking the ship into his own hands, Wharton felt certain; and he was quite willing to back the cook up in that, or in anything else that did not savour of crime.
But what the man’s scheme was exactly he could not guess. During the morning, while the schooner pressed on under almost full sail, the cook kept his own counsel.
The freshening of the wind caused Captain Jex to decide to take in sail, much against his will. His keen desire to get out of the narrow seas, and to escape into the wider waters of the Atlantic, was apparent enough. In English waters he ran continual risk of being overhauled and called to account. Out in the ocean he would breathe more freely.
It seemed to Harry that the sea-cook should have had the same desire. If he was as deeply involved in the seizure of the schooner as Jex and the rest, he should naturally be as anxious as they were to escape from English waters.
But if he seized the schooner, he could not possibly hope to navigate her across the Atlantic with a crew of half a dozen juniors from a public school.
What could his intention be, then?
Harry learned from the cook that the schooner was now in the Channel. Once he taught a distant glimpse of the coast of France, far away to the south. In the Channel the wind was choppy, as well as the waves, and Captain Jex was forced to take in more sail, and to tack wearily to get on his way at all.
Captain and crew were in equally vile tempers, and in the dusk a fight was observed in progress between Preece and one of the Italian sailors.
The only contented man on board was the cook. He had blankly refused to take a hand in working the schooner, sticking to his galley with a grin on his face while the sailormen wore themselves out.
Wharton guessed that he took no interest whatever in the progress of the schooner, though that puzzled him more than anything else.
In the second dog-watch the juniors were called into the galley to feed. Billy Bunter, under the directions of the cook, had made a plentiful and savoury stew. The fat junior was given the task of waiting on the crew at their meals, a task which he performed with muttered grumbling. He took care that none of his grumbles reached the ears of the cook, however. Billy Bunter had learned already to be terribly afraid of the one-eyed man.
The cook was looking more serious than usual, and Harry guessed that he was about to speak out.
The man looked out of the galley, and then signed to Hurree Singh to get up.
“You can take your grub outside, nig,” he remarked. “Keep an eye peeled. If anybody comes this way, sing out.”
“With great pleasurefulness, my worthy and the esteemed cookful sahib,” said the polite nabob; “also I shall ho gladful to eat my esteemed stew outside, as your august apartment, is somewhat close and stuff-ful.”
And the Nabob of Bhanipur went out to keep watch,
“Now, then.” said the sea-cook, leaning a little towards the boys, “you kids want to land in England ?“
“Yes, rather! ”
“You’d like to land to-night ?“
The juniors felt their hearts beat. Greyfriars had seemed so far behind them, while they thought they were going to Rio Janeiro. To land in England—the mere thought of treading the old soil again made their hearts jump.
“My hat !“ said Bob Cherry. “We’d be jolly glad to land to-night. We’d do anything.”
“What-ho !“ said Nugent.
Mark Linley was looking keenly at the cook. -
“How can we. land to-night? ” he said. “Captain Jex is going westward, and he does not mean to touch anywhere.”
The cook chuckled.
Captain Jex don’t count in this deal,” he said. “Look you, I ain’t a saint, as I dessay you’ve observed. Things have taken place on board this craft that I won’t tell you about; you’d better not know. But Captain Jex ain’t the captain any more than Mr. Prye is the mate. They’d have left you to drown, only they thought you’d be useful. This craft sailed with a round dozen of men in the forecastle.”
“Where are they now
Mr. Pillot did not appear to hear the question.
“We could get across the Atlantic,” he said. ‘ It’s risky, but we could do it, at any rate, now we’ve got you boys to help with the ship. But I don’t want that. Jex is a tool. Bill Fillot ain’t that. Besides, there ain’t enough for all.”
“There isn’t enough what ?“
“Never mind. Look you, you will have to swear to keep your mouths shut. If you land in England, I land with you. You’ll swear not to say a word about me for twenty-four hours, and as little as possible after that.”
“ We will promise.”
The one-eyed man blanked at them.
“Waal, I guess that’s as good. In twenty-four hours Bill Fillot will be all serene. I’ve got friends in a certain place I can reach from the Devon coast, you see. Jex has come as far as suits me.”
Wharton shivered a little.
There was something terrible in the coolness and deliberation with which this man had allowed his companions in crime to carry out their plans just so far as suited him, and with which he now prepared to abandon them when they could serve his special purposes no longer.
But Jex and his crew were entitled to no sympathy from the boys.
They were criminals and ruffians, and their intentions towards the Greyfriars juniors were brutal, if not murderous.
“If we land to-night,” went on Mr. Fillot, “we’re all O. K. But Jex would rather drown than land; he doesn’t want to run his neck into a noose.”
“What if we took the boat, and stole away in the dark,” suggested Harry Wharton. “The sea is calm enough now, and the wind favourable for landing on the coast of Devonshire.”
The sea-cook chuckled.
“ I guess that won’t suit me.”
“It would be doing what you have mapped out.”
 “I ain’t going empty-handed, you see.”
“But you could easily take your belongings with you.”
The cook chuckled grimly. It occurred to Harry then that it was not only his own belongings that he wished to take.
It came into the junior’s mind that there was something of value on board the schooner; that the rascals had not mutinied simply to take possession of the Nancy: Probably there was a sum of money in the captain’s cabin:
perhaps a very large sum. And, if so, Mr. Fillot intended to annex it for himself.
Wharton felt sick at the thought of being mixed up in the wretched, sordid dealings of a gang of thieves. But he had his own safety to think of. Bad as he was, the cook was the best of the party. He was the only friend the boys had on board the Nancy.
“I guess I’m going to keep the schooner till I’m done with her,” said the sea-cook, lighting a big cigar. “The question is, where are they going—Jex and the rest?”
Harry remembered the purple stain on the fo’c’s’le steps, and shuddered.
“You surely do not mean—” he began.
The sea-cook laughed.
“Of course I don’t, you young jackanapes! What I’m thinking of is putting them into the boat. They can land in France.”
“But they are seven against its—seven men.”
“I reckon we can’t do it by taking them by the scruff of the neck,” grinned the cook. “But there are other ways. You younkers will have to stand by to help me, that’s all. The work will be in my hands.”
“We’re ready to help, if there’s no bloodshed,” said Harry Wharton quietly. “We stop at that, under any circumstances.”
“What-ho !“ said Bob Cherry emphatically.
“There won’t be any of that, sonny, I’m not a fool like Jex. If I land a lubber with a belaying-pin it won’t crack his skull. That’s settled)’
“Then we’re with you.”
The sea-cook nodded, and relapsed into silence, his brows contracted over his cigar. He was evidently thinking the matter out, and a range in his plans for the dangerous work of the night, and the juniors did not interrupt him.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Desperate Measures,

MIDNIGHT was on the sea—black and grim. There were stars in the sky, reflected in the rolling surges.
But the stars were few; the shadows deep.
The Greyfriars juniors had remained in the cook’s quarters. He had told them to sleep on the sacks, as before, and they had obediently lain down, but they did not sleep.
Their nerves wore too tense for that
Their hearts were beating and thrilling with suppressed excitement. That night was to see wild work done, and though the sea-cook had assured them that he was far from dreaming of bloodshed, they knew that they could not trust him.
What might happen they did not know, but it was impossible for them to set themselves against the man.
It was after midnight when the cook came into the galley.
They knew that he had been aft, drinking in the cabin with the captain and mate, the deck being in charge of Preece and the dagoes.
Hart-v Wharton looked at the cook as he entered.
His fat face was a little less highly coloured than usual, and his more than usual rolling gait showed that he had been drinking deeply. His fat hands were trembling.
His single eye blinked towards the juniors.
“Are you awake, sonnies ?“
His voice was a little thick, but steady.
Yes,” said Harry.
“Get up.”
They rose. They had not closed their eyes since they had lain down. ‘They fixed inquiring looks upon the sea-cook.
The fat man drew a bucket of water towards him, and soused his face in it, and rubbed it with a rough towel till he gasped again. That seemed to clear away the fumes of liquor from his brain.
“Ready for business?” he asked, with his old chuckle.
“Quite ready.”
“The readyfulness is terrific,” murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.
Jex and Prye are in the cabin,” said Fillot abruptly.
“They’re asleep—drunk as pigs.”
“Then they won’t interfere?”
“Not much.”
The cook drew the skipper’s revolver from his pocket, and carefully examined it. The boys watched him with thrilling nerves. Harry Wharton spoke in a quiet, determined a tone.
“You are not going to use that,” hp said.
“That depends.”
“It does not depend.”
The sea-cook gave him a sudden, savage scowl.
“What do you mean you young swab?’
“I mean what I say,” said Harry firmly. “What has taken place on this ship I don’t know, but I do know that there shall be no murder while I’m here, if I can stop it. If you use that weapon we shall be against you instead of for you !“
The cook laughed softly.
“I guess it’s all right, sonny. I may have to wing one of them, but that is all. ‘Bill Fillot isn’t a fool to put his neck into the halter.”
He returned the weapon to his hip-pocket.
“Now, look here,” he went on, in a lower tone, “there’s Preece on deck, and he’s an ugly customer. Then there are the four dagoes. Two of them are in the fo’c’s’le. It will be easy for you to nip along and fasten the scuttle on the outside, so that they'll be penned up there.”
“I could do that easily, ‘ said Linley.
“Then cut along and do it, kid.”
The Lancashire lad disappeared. He returned in a couple of minutes, and met the inquiring look of the sea-cook with a nod.
“All serene ?‘ asked Fillot.
“ Yes.”
“They’re fastened in.”
“Yes, quite securely.”
“I guess that’s all right. If Preece had seen me there he might have smelled a rat. It’s all 0. K. now. We’ve three men to deal with. The dagoes haven’t any pluck; the sight of a shooter will be enough for them. I may have to wing Preece, but don’t be afraid; a bullet in the leg will be enough for him if he cuts up rusty.”
The juniors breathed hard.
Now that the enterprise wag near its culmination, they realised that it was not so desperate as it had looked at first, but that it was at the same time terribly dangerous. What in the case of failure?
It would mean death for the sea-cook; his fellow mutineers would never forgive him for the trick he tried to play. What else could it mean for them?
But they did not falter.
Billy Bunter was still snoring on the sacks. As a matter of fact, the fat junior was not asleep; he did not quite know what was going on, but he knew enough to throw him into a palpitating state of terror, and he was too frightened to sleep. But he snored all the same, determined that he should riot be called upon to help. If they had tried to wake him they would have found it very hard.

Bob Cherry took the fat Removite by the collar, and knocked his head against the mast. “Now then, you fat bounder I” he exclaimed wrathfully. “Was that some of your giddy ventriloquism 1”

But they did not want Bunter. He was worse than useless in a matter like this.
The five juniors found weapons for themselves---belaying-pins or cudgels. The tussle might be a hard one—for life or death. It was no time for half-measures. Then the cook led the way on deck.
Preece was standing staring away into the gloom, where the red-and-green lights of the schooner glimmered through the night.
The two dagoes on duty were talking together in low tones.
Preece suddenly started and tried to turn as a hand was laid on his shoulder, and he felt the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed behind his ear. A convulsive shiver ran through him from head to foot.
“Quiet “ said the sea-cook softly.
“Wh-wh-what—”
“You’re my prisoner.”
“What do you mean, Bill Fillot ?”
“You’re my prisoner.”
“I— I’1l——————”
“You’ll cave in.”
Preece forced a laugh.
“I suppose this is a joke,” he muttered.
The cook chuckled quietly.
“Yes, a good joke, Preece —a very good joke. You know I’m a joking Cuss. Bring that rope here, sonny, and rope him up.”
“Yes, sir.”
The two Italian sailors were staring blankly at the scene. They looked at Preece, and they looked at the cook. One of them drew a knife, and the voice of the cook was heard, clear and cutting as the steel.
“ Put that knife down, Antonio.”
The cook’s revolver was still turned upon Preece, but his voice was enough for the Italian. The knife dropped on the deck.
The other man had started aft, evidently to call Jex and Frye.
“Come back here, Carlo.”
The man hesitated.
“Come back !“ rapped out the cook. “Another step, and I’ll put a bullet through your silly carcase!”
The Italian stopped, shivering in every limb.
‘‘ Me stoppa, signor,’’ he stammered.
“I guess you’d better!‘
Harry and Bob Cherry rapidly twisted the rope round the long limbs of Preece, making him a helpless prisoner. He was thrown on the deck, bound hand and foot. His eyes were turned fearfully upon the sea-cook. He had not dared to resist the man who had the six-shooter, and it was clear that his terror was great after he had surrendered.
‘‘ Bill,’’ he muttered hoarsely, “ I’m you shipmate. Remember that. Don’t—” His voice broke off.
The chuckle of the sea-cook answered him,
“Your life’s safe, Preece, my boy. I’m no fool.”
The man breathed deeply with relief
“ Now rope up the dagoes.’
The two Italians drew together, and one of them gripped a

And the


knife. The glimmer of the levelled revolver showed up in the faint starlight.
“You fools! Take care! ”
They made no resistance. They were more afraid of the glittering eye of the sea-cook than of the revolver. The juniors bound them hand and foot, and laid them beside Preece on the deck.
The cook laughed softly.
“Now follow me.”
He descended the steps into the cuddy, where the cabins opened. Captain Jex was at the cuddy table, his arms stretched out before him, and his head on his arms. An overturned bottle of whisky was still dripping.
He started and moved as they entered the cuddy.
The cook clapped him on the shoulder.
“Wake up, captain “
Jex started up.
“Why—what— Hallo! ”
He started beck in sudden alarm from the glimmer of the revolver, and thrust his hand into his coat
The cook’s fat hand gripped him by the throat, and he was jammed back in his chair, and a cold muzzle was thrust into his neck.
“You won’t draw that barker, I guess, Captain Jex.” The skipper’s hands dropped to his sides. He stared at the cook in blank, half-drunken amazement and fear.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Back to Greyfriars.

THE cook laughed in his soft, silky way. The revolver- muzzle was pressed to the brawny neck of the skipper, and the colour slowly faded out of the man’s bronzed face.
“Hold on, cooky, for mercy’s sake! ”
“Are you bucking ag’in me, skipper?”
“No. I reckon not.”
“Keep still. ”
The cook signed to the juniors. Almost in a twinkling the captain was bound. He was left in his chair, still blinking in dazed astonishment.
Then Mr. Fillot stepped into the adjoining cabin.
The mate lay there in drunken slumber. His hands were tied, and he was searched for weapons, which were taken away and tossed into the sea.
The cook was chuckling with great glee as they returned to the deck.
The coup had been made.
The schooner was in the hands of the fat man and the Greyfriars juniors, and the latter were as jubilant as Mr. Fillot.
Bob Cherry executed a cake-walk on the deck to show his glee, caught his foot in a coil of rope, and went down with a bump.
“Ow !“ he gasped.
“Let’s see you do that again,” said Nugent, with great interest.
But Bob Cherry did not do it again.
Mark Linley went along to the galley to reassure Bunter. He found the fat junior on the sacks, no longer affecting to be asleep, but sitting up and listening with straining ears for the slightest sound.
At the sound of Linley’s footsteps the fat Removite shook in every limb. It was very dim there, and Bunter was in too great a state of terror to look at Linley even.
“Mercy! ” he howled, as he heard the footsteps. “I hadn’t anything to do with it. It was all the fault. of that fat cook chap. I swear it was. I never had a hand in it, and I didn’t know anything about it. 1 didn’t even know they were going to do anything at all. I was fast asleep when they left the galley.
“Ha, ha, ha!’’
The roar of laughter from the Lancashire lad made Bunter come to himself, He blinked at Mark through his spectacles.
‘Oh! Is that you, Linley?”
“Ha, ha, ha! Yes! ”
“ Oh! Is it all right?”
“Yes, all serene.”
Bunter grunted with relief.
“Oh, I thought it was one of those brutes coming, you know! I—I—I wasn’t afraid, you know! I’m a brave chap, but—”
“Ha, ha, ha !“
44 . .
Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!—I——“
“Ha, ha, ha!”
“Oh, chuck it.! Look here, has it gone all right? Are we masters of the ship?”
“We are,” said Linley laughing. “I don’t know about you. You hadn’t a hand in it, as you have just said yourself.”
“Well, of course, I should have backed you up—in fact, I was just preparing to rush forth with a—a—a—a carving knife to back you fellows up when—when—”
“Oh, draw it mild, Bunty !“ said Bob Cherry, looking in.
“Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, are we really going ashore tonight?”
“Yes, I suppose so.”
“Then we’d better have a solid meal. Fortunately, I’m not at all sea-sick. It’s a good idea to lay a solid foundation, you know, and we may as well take some grub in our pockets, too.”
And Billy Bunter set about making those important preparations for going ashore.
Meanwhile, the cook was on deck, and the juniors joined him there. Mr. Fillot gave the boys quick orders, punctuated by many fat chuckles.
A quantity of provisions, water, sails, and oars were put into the remaining boat, and then it was lowered, it towe4 along beside the Nancy. The juniors had lowered it very well tinder Mr. Fillot’s directions. Then the prisoners were brought up from the cuddy and placed in the boat, lowered into it on ropes. They were still bound, and the remarks they made as they came out of their drunken stupor, and realised that they were being cast adrift, were lurid in the extreme, and deprived them of any sympathy the juniors might have felt for them.
Mr. Fillot watched them over the rail with undying merriment in his single eye.
“I guess you’re all right, skipper,” he said. “You’ve got a good boat, plenty of grub, and a larger crew than I have. You’ve only got to run due south five or six miles to get to the French coast. What more do you want:”
“You swab! You fat thief! You—”
“You’re lucky to get off with your lives,” said the cook cheerfully. I would be safer for me to sink you, skipper, only I’m such a tender-hearted cuss.”
The skipper seemed to realise it, too, and his flow of language ceased. He knew better than the Greyfriars lads what the cook might be like if the worst side of his nature was aroused.
Preece and the two Italians ware lowered into the boat after the others. Then there remained the two dagoes shut up in the forecastle. They were still sleeping. Fillot went forward with the revolver to wake them.
He came back in a few minutes with the two half-awake, scared rascals driven before him like sheep.
Under the muzzle of the revolver they swung themselves down into the boat.
Then the rope was cast off.
The boat immediately dropped behind in the gloom.
Wharton glanced after it. The rascals were safe enough. It was a short run to the coast of France, and they could easily land in a couple of hours. After that, doubtless, they were in danger of arrest, but from that danger Wharton had not the slightest inclination to save them.
The cook chuckled as the boat dropped astern.
“I guess that’s O. K.,” he remarked.
Most of the schooner’s canvas had been taken in, and the cook and this Greyfriars lads easily trimmed the sails to put the schooner before the wind.
The breeze which had baffled Captain Jex in his attempts to get out into the Atlantic was favourable for the run back to the coast of Devonshire.
If rough weather had come on the vessel, with a crew of a one-eyed man and half a dozen boys, would have been in the greatest danger, but that was not to be feared. In a few hours they would be on English soil.
With the schooner speeding on its way to Old England, the juniors’ hearts beat high.
Fillot disappeared below, and they knew that he was ransacking the desk and drawers in the cabin and concealing about his person all that he wished to take away with him. But with that, Wharton felt, they could not interfere. If the man was a thief it was not their business to turn upon the one who had saved them. Besides, as he was armed with a deadly weapon, and would certainly have used it if they had turned upon him, the enterprise would not have been a light one.
Bunter, meanwhile, was loading his pockets with eatables. For the rest of that night the juniors were too excited to sleep. The sun came up on the sea, and showed them the cliffs of the Devon coast. Harry Wharton was at the wheel when the cook came on deck in the rising sun, and glanced at the shore.
The land looked lonely enough. There was a stretch of yellow sand at the foot of frowning cliffs, broken here and there by deep “coombs.”
The cook grinned at the sight with much satisfaction.
“I guess that’s all right,” he said.
“We land here?” asked Wharton.
“I guess so.”
“Right-ho !”
The cook went below again. He did not reappear for a quarter of an hour, and then he came up locking very red and dusty. Wharton knew that he had been down into the hold, and he wondered why.
He soon discovered, The schooner commenced to roll and pitch heavily in the sea, and presently there was a sound of gurgling water below.
As Wharton heard it ha cast a startled glance at the cook.
“She’s sinking?’
“I guess so.”
“You have scuttled her! ” gasped Mark Linley.
The cook nodded coolly.
“I guess she won’t swim long. Keep her steady for the sand
Wharton set his teeth. He understood that the cook wished to cover his tracks by sinking the schooner. With only a jib drawing, the vessel plunged on towards the sands. Her keel was already grating on the sand when she heeled over, and the juniors were thrown down.
“Jump !“ shouted the cook
And he sprang into the water and swam shoreward with powerful strokes. Billy Bunter gave a squeal of fear.
“I—I—I can’t swim! ”
“Quick, I’ll help you! ” exclaimed Wharton.
“But—but I—”
Wharton wasted no time in words. He dragged the fat junior into the water and supported him there. Bunter, too terrified to know what he was doing, kicked and struggled wildly.
“Keep still, you ass! ”
“I guess I’ll manage him! ”
It was the cook. His strong grasp closed on Bunter, and at the glint of his eye the fat junior ceased to struggle.
The cook swam ashore with him as easily as if he had no burden. The juniors followed, and they dragged themselves ashore upon the sands. The cook dropped Bunter on the sand, and the fat junior lay there puffing and blowing like a grampus.
The cook shook the water from him like a dog.
“I’m off! ” he said. “Remember the agreement—nothing said of me for twenty-four hours.”
Harry Wharton nodded.
“ We’ll remember.”
“Good-bye, then! I guess we sha’n’t meet again.”
And the one-eyed sea-cook disappeared among the rocks like a man who knew the way well. The juniors looked after him until he was out of sight.
“Well,” said Bob Cherry, “he was a rum beggar, and I’m afraid he was an awful rascal, but blessed if I don’t like him somehow! ”
Greyfriars received the juniors, when they returned: with wonder and relief. They had been given up for lost. The Head, in his relief at their safe return, was not too keen to inquire into the cause of the disaster, and there were no punishments meted out, but early morning sails outside the bay were strictly forbidden in future, The juniors were the heroes of the Remove, and they had to relate their adventures a score of times over, and they were even invited in a party to tea in Wingate's study, and the captain of Greyfriars and a select circle of Sixth-Formers listened to the story of their adventures afloat. The story was thrilling enough, even when told by Harry Wharton & Co., who kept closely to the facts; but when related by Billy Bunter it became weird and wonderful, and at every repetition it became more wonderful still, and, in fact, there was only one point upon which all Bunter’s yarns agreed with one another, and that was in making himself the central figure and the hero of every exploit.
THE END..