

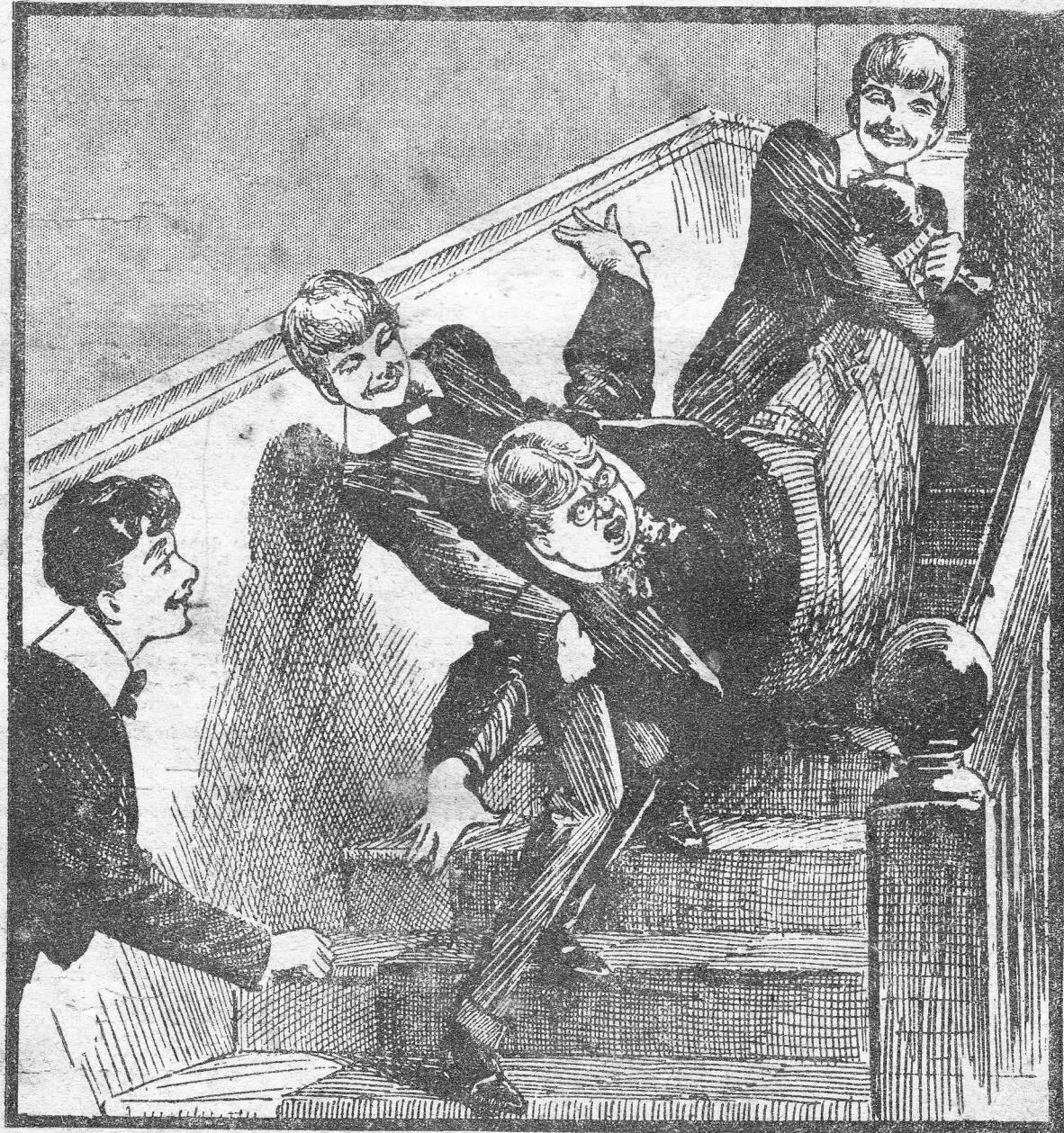
THE ALL-SCHOOL STORY PAPER!

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



TAKING BILLY BUNTER UP TO BED!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



THE BLACK ROCK MYSTERY!

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

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Bunter Reports.

"WE shall have a good time here!" Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove at Greyfriars, made the remark. He and Bob Cherry, Nugent, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, Mark Linley, and Billy Bunter were spending the Easter Vacation at Black Rock, the home of Captain Cunliffe, Hazeldene's uncle. Hazeldene was there, and so were Marjorie Hazeldene and her chum Clara.

"I hope we shall enjoy ourselves," said Hazeldene. "All the same, I wish there wasn't so much blessed mystery about the place."

"Hear, hear!"

"That South American is fairly getting on my nerves."

"Same here," agreed Harry Wharton. "I did think we had choked him off for good when we dodged him coming down here."

"But we haven't."

"No; things are worse than ever," said Wharton dismally. "I never expected to see that South American this morning."

"Neither did I."

"I wonder what he can want in the vicinity of Black Rock?"

"Goodness knows!"

The Greyfriars chums were in the throes of a big mystery. On the way down to Black Rock their footsteps had been dogged by a South American, whose name was Pedro Ijurra.

The man had shown himself to be a thorough scoundrel, and the juniors had had all their work out to throw the man off the track.

They had been successful, however, and had arrived at Black Rock with the feeling that they had said good-bye to the man. But such was not the case.

On their first day at Black Rock Harry Wharton & Co. had been swimming in the sea when they had caught sight of the South American in a small boat.

Pedro Ijurra had recognised the juniors, and had demanded from them the whereabouts of Captain Cunliffe. What the man had wanted with Hazeldene's uncle the Removites did not know. Nevertheless, they realised that his intentions were not of an honourable nature.

They had refused to supply the required information, and had gone on with their swimming. Before they reached the shore again, however, two shots were fired at the South American's boat from the cliffs.

Who had fired the shots was a complete mystery, and the chums had returned to Black Rock utterly dumbfounded.

They were now discussing the matter as they strolled towards the house, but the more they talked over the curious happenings the more mysterious the affair seemed to become.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, breaking in on the chums' thoughts—

"Shut up, Bunter!" snapped Harry Wharton.

"I wasn't talking to you, Wharton!" said Bunter curtly. "I say, Nugent—"

Nugent marched on with Clara, without turning his head.

"Hazeldene, old man—"

"Hallo!" said Hazeldene.

"They were getting some fresh tarts, they told me, at the village," said Billy Bunter confidentially. "I shall have five bob to-night. Will you lend me half-a-crown off it?"

Hazeldene grinned.

"Where are you going to get five bob from, Billy?"

"Well, I'm expecting to get it; it's a dead cert."

"Expecting a postal-order? Ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"I suppose a chap can have other resources, Hazeldene. As a matter of fact, I shall have five bob to-night for a dead cert."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Will you lend me half-a-crown?"

"Some other evening," grinned Hazeldene.

Bunter grunted.

"Look here, I shall have five bob—"

"Bosh!"

And Hazeldene walked on.

The other juniors hurried on before Billy Bunter could tackle them, and left the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove blinking discontentedly.

"Rotfers!" murmured Billy Bunter. "I'll jolly well show them whether I can raise five bob or not."

He went into the house for his coat.

The juniors looked at him as he took his cap down from the peg in the hall.

"Going out, Bunter?" grinned Linley.

"Yes," said Bunter importantly. "I've got an appointment."

"At the grub shop?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't ask questions, and I won't tell you any lies," said Bunter loftily. "I've got an appointment with a friend of mine, and I dare say I shall be able to raise a loan, and I sha'n't want any of your rotten money."

And Bunter stalked out.

The juniors soon forgot Bunter. Marjorie had produced a Gilbert and Sullivan score from her trunk, and had placed it on the rack of the piano. The sounds of merry music soon filled Black Rock House.

Marjorie played very well, and the juniors gathered round the piano, all of them singing, sometimes in parts, and sometimes in unison, as fancy dictated, and a very pleasant time they spent.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was taking his way towards the southern side of the cove.

On his arrival at Black Rock he had met a lame man, who had offered to reward him if he went there immediately he saw the South American. Bunter had seen the South American, and he was going now to claim the promised reward.

The fat junior made his way over rocks and seaweed with many a grunt, wondering how long it would be before he met the lame man.

The latter had told him to come, and told him that he would see him coming, and Bunter, who was soon tired, stopped at last, standing in full view in the sunset.

He thought that the other fellow might as well do the walking.

There was a sound of footsteps on the rocks, and a man scrambled into view, and Bunter gave a grunt of relief at the sight of the lame man.

He blinked at the dark, sunburnt face and deep-set eyes.

"So you've come!" he grunted.

The lame man nodded.

"Have you any news for me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"The South American—he has come?" exclaimed the other eagerly.

"I've seen him."

"Where?"

"On the cliffs on the other side of the cove," said Bunter. "He came down the path from the cave this afternoon."

A look of disappointment came over the other's face.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "Is that all?"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Isn't that enough? I've carried out your instructions."

"Yes, yes, that is true. But it is nothing. I saw him there." A grim smile flitted over the dark face. "You have nothing else to tell me?"

"No."

"Leave a note on the sundial if you have news," he whispered. "I will fetch it!"

And the lame man turned away.

"Here, I say!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "I say, you know, you haven't settled up yet."

"What?"

"The five bob, you know."

"Ah, I forgot!" said the other contemptuously.

He took out five shillings, and placed them in the fat junior's palm. Bunter's eyes glistened.

"Thank you!"

The lame man nodded, and hurried away into the rocks. Billy Bunter counted the money, and found it right, and turned to go back to Black Rock.

It was five shillings easily earned, and Bunter was beginning to feel very pleased with his role of reporter.

What it was all about, what kind of affair he was getting mixed up in, the fat junior neither knew nor cared. It was enough for him that the money was forthcoming.

As he went back towards the house, several times he heard a faint sound behind him, and he turned his head, with the idea that the lame man might be following him. But he saw no one.

The dusk was deepening over the shore and the bay now, the rocks were growing dim to the view, and the short-sighted junior did not see very clearly.

He was within a hundred yards of the house when a footstep sounded close behind, and a hand fell with a grip of iron on his shoulder.

He swung round with a startled gasp.

"Oh, really—"

The words died on his lips.

Through the dusk a swarthy face was looking into his.

It was the face of Pedro Ijurra, the South American.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Bunter Changes Sides.

I JURRA looked at the fat junior in silence for a few moments, as if enjoying his terror, as a cat might enjoy that of a mouse.

Bunter made a feeble effort to get away, but the grip on his shoulder was like that of a vice.

"Stop!" said the South American.

"Certainly," said Bunter faintly. "I—I shall be very pleased to stop. You see, I—I'm really awfully glad to see you, you know."

The South American smiled grimly.

"Give me the money," he said.

Bunter jumped.

"The—the what?"

"The money."

"I—I haven't any, you know. I—I'm stony-broke. My friends treat me very meanly, and I can never raise a small loan from them. I'm stony. Otherwise, I'd be sincerely pleased to lend you some tin."

"Give me the money—the money Halkett gave you."

"I—I don't know anybody of that name." "The lame man!" said the South American sharply.

"Oh!" "Give me the money! I saw him give it you! I heard all that you said. I was not half a dozen paces away from you."

Bunter shivered. Without another word he handed over the five precious shillings, and his dream of jam-tarts at the village shop faded away.

The South American took the money, but did not put it in his pocket.

With a sweep of the hand he sent it whirling through the air, and the coins splashed lightly into the bay, and sank under the water.

Bunter watched this proceeding in blank astonishment.

"W-w-what—" he began. "That is gone!" said the South American quietly. "You young hound, you have taken money to spy upon me! Is it not so?"

"Oh, no! I wouldn't do anything of that sort!" said Bunter. "I hope you don't think me capable of anything like that."

"I tell you that I heard all you said!" exclaimed the South American fiercely. "Don't attempt to deceive me. Listen to me. That man Halkett wishes to meet me. He wishes you to tell him where I may be found."

"Ye-e-es." "Now," said the South American, in a gentler tone, "he gives you silver for betraying me. I will give you gold to betray him!"

"Oh, really—" "Listen to me. That man is a murderer! He wishes to see me, to take my life!" said Ijorra. "He has fired at me twice to-day."

"Oh dear!" "You would be arrested as an accomplice if he succeeded," said Ijorra. "You would pay very dear for the money he has given you."

"I—I—I—" "You can get more money, and serve the law, by helping me instead of him," said the South American, watching the fat junior's frightened face narrowly. "I want to get him where he can be arrested. You understand?"

"Ye-e-es." "How are you to communicate with him again?"

"I have to leave a note on the sundial in the garden."

"And he will come and take it?"

"Yes."

"At what hour?"

"I don't know."

"Listen! You will write a note at my dictation, and leave it for him, so that he may fall into the hands of the police?"

"C-c-certainly!" gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't know—"

"Exactly! You shall write the note here, and I will give you a sovereign for placing it where he will find it."

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles.

"Of course, I'm jolly willing to assist the law!" he said. "If the man is a murderer he ought to be arrested, of course!"

Ijorra smiled sardonically.

"Then you shall write the note now."

"It's—it's dark."

"I will soon alter that. Come into the shadow of the rocks, and I will light my lantern."

"I haven't a pencil."

"I have one."

"Or any paper."

"A leaf from my pocket-book will do."

Bunter followed the South American in silence.

It did not occur to him to doubt the South American's statement in regard to Halkett.

The proffered sovereign was a potent argument to convince the needy junior.

In the shadow of a great rock the South American turned on the light of a dark lantern.

He set it on the ground, and tore a leaf from a pocket-book and handed it to Billy Bunter, with a stump of a pencil.

"Write, nino."

"All—all right. But what—"

"I will dictate."

"Just as you like. But—"

"Write this: 'I have seen him again, and he is hiding in the caves in the cliffs on the northern side again.'"

"That's done," said Bunter, spreading the sheet on the cover of the pocket-book, and scribbling down the words in his sprawling hand.

"Now sign it."

"All right."

Bunter added his signature—"W. G. Bunter"—to the message.

"Good!" said the South American. "Look you."

He groped in his pocket and drew out a sovereign. The gold glistened in the light of the lantern.

"That is yours."

Bunter's fingers closed on it greedily.

"You shall have five times as much as soon as the man is arrested!" said the South American, with a curious grin.

"Jolly good!"

"You will place this note on the sundial?"

"Yes, rather!"

And Billy Bunter hurried off.

He reached the garden-gate of the house.

From the lighted windows came the merry sounds of a piano and singing.

Bunter did not enter the house, however; he skirted it, and made his way to the sundial, in a secluded part of the gardens.

There he placed the note, with a stone upon it to keep it in place.

He blinked round into the dusk. There was no one in sight. The moon was showing a silver rim over the cliffs now.

Bunter went back to the house.

It was more than an hour later that a dark form appeared among the bushes in the garden and approached the sundial—a dark figure, that limped awkwardly—the figure of the lame man.

He glanced carelessly at the sundial, and then started eagerly as he saw that there was a note there.

He picked it up eagerly and read.

Then his eyes gleamed.

"At last!"

He left a small heap of silver on the sundial in the place of the note, and quitted the garden as quickly as he had come.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Black Villain.

"HALLO! Hallo! Hallo! Here's Bunter!"

Billy Bunter came into the brightly-lighted room, blinking.

"I'm sorry I've been a long time," said the Owl of the Remove.

"Don't trouble to apologise, Billy," said Bob Cherry. "We haven't missed you."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Look here," proposed Bob Cherry. "Who says a walk along the beach? It's a lovely moonlight night, and—"

"Good idea!" chorused the juniors.

"Would you like it, Marjorie?"

"Very much!"

"Let's get along, then."

The chums of Greyfriars slipped on their hats and coats, and strolled out of the garden and upon the pebble ridge. The moon was sailing over the bay, which was almost as light as day.

They followed the sands round to the northern side of the cove, under the ledge path that, high above their heads, ran to the smugglers' cave high up the cliff.

Harry Wharton paused and glanced up at the cave.

The great dark opening could be seen in the face of the cliff, high overhead.

As Harry looked, he saw a form moving on the cliff ledge towards the cave.

A dark figure, black against the moonlit face of the cliff, limped up the steep path towards the cave.

He was too far off for Harry to make him out clearly, but the limp betrayed him.

It was the lame man—the man they had seen in the cavern.

"What are you looking at up there?" asked Hazeldene.

Harry Wharton pointed.

"Look!"

"The lame man, by Jove!"

"He's going to the cave," said Billy Bunter.

"He'll jolly well be arrested there, and serve him right."

The juniors stared at him.

"What are you babbling about, Bunt?"

asked Bob Cherry pleasantly. "Off your silly rocker?"

"Oh, I forgot!"

"You forgot what?"

"Ow! If you shake me like that, you ass, you'll m-m-make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken, you'll have to pay for them!"

"What are you—"

"Good heavens!"

"Eh!"

"Look—oh, look!"

Harry Wharton's voice was sharp with horror. His hand trembled as he pointed.

The juniors stared up at the face of the cliffs, and their faces grew white.

"Good heavens!" stammered Bob Cherry.

High on the rugged face of the cliff, twenty yards above the ledge that ran along to the cave, was another ledge.

On that ledge, clearly visible in the moonlight, was a figure the juniors knew well—that of the South American.

He had a heavy piece of rock poised, and was about to roll it down the cliff upon the lower ledge, upon the lame man who was unconsciously making his way beneath.

If that stone rolled down upon the lame man, his doom was sealed, and a crushed body would crash down upon the beach beside the Greyfriars juniors.

For a moment horror held them spellbound, then Wharton found his voice.

"Look out!"

The shout rang out in the sudden silence of the cliffs, echoing over the bay. The lame man gave a sudden start, and looked down.

In doing so he changed his position, and that change saved his life.

For the stone was rolling down the cliff now—a huge mass of rock, as heavy as the South American could move.

It crashed upon the lower ledge, where the lame man had been standing, and bounded off, and crashed down upon the beach at the foot of the cliffs.

Marjorie gave a low cry, and covered her face with her hands.

"Good heavens!" stammered Nugent.

The juniors gazed up at the cliff in horror.

It was murder that had been intended, and it might yet come to pass.

The lame man, startled by the crash of the rock upon the ledge within a foot of him, staggered back against the cliff, and seemed dazed.

The South American, twenty yards above, gritted his teeth, and as his lips parted in a savage snarl, Harry caught the gleam of his teeth in the moonlight, like those of a wild animal.

"Carambo!"

The rascal hissed out the word in his savage disappointment. But another ragged rock was in his hands, and he was rolling it to the edge.

Wharton waved his hand wildly to the lame man.

"Look out! Look up!"

Halkett started out from the cliff where he was leaning, and looked upward.

He caught sight of the swarthy face of the South American peering over the upper ledge, and of the rock that was about to roll.

"Ijorra!" he cried.

"Carambo!"

The rock rolled down.

Halkett ran a few paces along the ledge, and the rock crashed where he had been standing, bounced off, and rolled down the cliff.

It splintered into a hundred pieces within a dozen yards of the group of juniors.

"The—the villain!" muttered Hazeldene.

"He means to kill him!"

"He will not succeed now."

The lame man shook his clenched fist at the swarthy face on the upper ledge, and darted into the cavern.

There he was safe from the rocks hurled from above, though he could not venture out as long as the moonlight lasted.

The South American ground his teeth.

He had failed.

It was through Harry Wharton's warning to the lame man that he had failed, and he cast a glance of poisonous hatred towards the group of juniors down on the beach.

His hand sought out another piece of rock; but he did not hurl it. Instead, he turned and tramped away up the ledge, and disappeared over the cliff.

The juniors were looking very white.

"You saved that chap's life, Harry," said Mark Linley.

Wharton nodded.

"I suppose so. What a precious villain that South American is! He meant to kill the chap."

"That was plain enough."

"Looks to me like six of one and half a dozen of the other," said Nugent thoughtfully.

"That lame chap must be the man who was firing at him in the boat."

"Phew! Of course."

"They must be old enemies, I suppose," said Hazeldene. "But why are they here? What have they got to do with Uncle Hugh?"

"That's a blessed mystery!"

"Let us go back," said Marjorie.

"Yes, do," said Miss Clara, with a shiver. "It—it is horrible!"

Even Miss Clara's insouciance was quite gone for the time.

They walked slowly back towards Black Rock.

Billy Bunter's face was a study. Even the obtuse mind of the fat junior could not fail to see the truth now, and he knew why the South American had made him write that note to the lame man; it was to lure him upon the ledge path into a death-trap.

"The awful villain!" murmured Billy Bunter. "The awful wretch! That's what he gave me the sovereign for! I've a jolly good mind to chuck it away!"

But he did not.

Hazeldene and Mark Linley walked on with the girls, the other fellows lingering behind at a sign from Harry Wharton.

Wharton's face was hard and set.

Bunter, as usual, was bringing up the rear, and he suddenly found himself surrounded by Harry Wharton & Co., and the girls out of sight.

"Stop!" said Harry.

Bunter stopped, blinking inquiringly at the juniors.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"You've got to explain yourself, that's all," said Harry Wharton. "There's enough mystery going on in this show, without you adding to it. That South American villain came very near committing a murder to-night."

"I—I don't know."

"You knew that lame chap was going up the cliff path," said Harry. "You know something about the matter. You got a sovereign from somebody to-day. It looks to me as if you have been used in some way in the matter. You're going to explain, anyway."

"I—I—"

"Will you explain?"

"You see, I—I—"

"Collar him and duck him in the sea," said Harry.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh seized the fat junior. Billy Bunter struggled in their muscular grip.

"I—I say, you fellows, hold on! I—I don't mind explaining. In—in fact, I was just going to explain, you know. I really meant to confide in you chaps all along."

"Then you'd better begin," said Harry grimly. "Mind, the truth, and nothing but the truth. You'll get a ducking at the first lie."

"Oh, really, Wharton, if you doubt my word—"

"No rot! Get on!"

"All right!" gasped Bunter.

And he explained. The juniors listened with amazement to the story. The scorn in their faces did not trouble Billy Bunter.

"You little rascal!" said Harry contemptuously. "You spied for one man, and then betrayed him to the other."

"Oh, really, Wharton, that's a rotten way to put it! I—I thought—"

"Where's the sovereign that South American gave you?"

"In my pocket."

"Take it out!"

"What for?"

"Take it out!" roared Wharton.

Billy Bunter jumped, and obeyed. He took out the sovereign, looking decidedly uneasy.

"Now throw it into the sea!" commanded Wharton.

"What!" yelled Bunter, unable to believe his ears. "W-w-what!"

"You heard what I said!"

"You—you must be dotty!" gasped Bunter. "It's—it's a real sovereign—a good one. I'm not such an ass as to waste it."

"You're not going to keep that villain's money!"

"Look here, Wharton—"

"You young rascal! Do you understand that it's blood-money?" exclaimed Harry Wharton fiercely. "Throw it away at once!"

"Well, suppose you give me another for it," said Bunter, "then you can chuck it away as fast as you like."

"I'll give you a thick ear, if you don't do as I tell you!"

"Oh, really—"

"Nuff said. Throw that coin into the sea, or we'll throw you in!" exclaimed Harry.

Bunter reluctantly spun the coin towards the sea. It fell on the sand, and lay there glistening in the moonlight.

Bob Cherry stepped over to it, and kicked it into the sea. It spun round, glittering, over the shining water, and then sank out of sight.

Bunter gave a groan.

"Look here, you jolly well owe me a sovereign, Wharton!"

"I owe you a licking," said Harry, frowning, "and you'll jolly well get it if you play any more of these mean, dirty tricks!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Get on, you—you toad! And mind, we're going to keep an eye on you in the future!" said Harry angrily. "You sha'n't go out alone again. I knew you'd jolly well disgrace us somehow if we let you come on this vac with us, but I didn't expect anything quite so blackguardly as this! Shut up; don't talk any more! You've talked too much! Get on, before I kick you!"

And Billy Bunter, almost bursting with indignation, rolled on ahead, followed by the frowning juniors of Greyfriars.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Carried Up to Bed.

BILLY BUNTER made several attempts during the remainder of the evening to get out of the house unobserved.

The fact that the lame man had followed the path to the cave showed that he must have taken the note from the sundial, and in that case he had doubtless left the promised reward behind him.

And having been deprived of the South American's sovereign, Billy Bunter was extremely anxious to get hold of the five shillings.

But whenever Bunter made a movement to go out, one or another of the juniors quietly but determinedly followed him, and the fat Removeite found it impossible to elude them.

At length he gave it up as a bad job, and gazed morosely into the fire.

"Bedtime!" announced Harry Wharton, at length.

Bunter did not move from his chair.

"Time for bed, Billy!" said Wharton brusquely. "Get a move on!"

The fat junior blinked.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I think you chaps might carry me up," he said. "I'm jolly tired."

"Well, we're tired, too," said Mark Linley. Bunter sniffed.

"If you're going to be beastly selfish about it, I suppose I needn't say any more!" he exclaimed. "I think you might be decent."

Bob Cherry winked at his comrades.

"Perhaps we'd better carry him," he remarked. "He's eaten a lot to-day, and he may have an attack of apoplexy; and what would Greyfriars do if anything happened to its Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Lend me a hand, Nugent."

"Certainly!"

"Thanks!" said Bunter. "Clasp your hands, and make a seat for me, and I'll sit down. Take care how you carry me, you know—any shock to the system might do me lots of harm. You know I've got a jolly delicate constitution."

"You take his ankles, Frank."

"What-ho!"

"I'll take his ears—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, hold on! I say, you fellows—"

Oh!

"On seconds thoughts, I'll take his shoulders," said Bob Cherry, grasping the fat junior. "Now, then, are you ready?"

"Right-ho!"

"Here goes, then."

"Oh! Ow! I say, you fellows—"

But Bunter's protests were in vain. He had asked to be carried, and Bob Cherry and Nugent meant to carry him.

He was whisked off his feet—no light task, considering his weight—and Bob dragged him up by the shoulders, and Nugent followed, grasping his ankles.

They got him as far as the stairs, and then halted.

"Ow, ow! Oh!" groaned Bunter.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Now, then, up with him!"

"I'm going my best!" gasped Bob Cherry. "But he's such a blessed weight! Does it matter if we bump you on each step, Bunt?"

"Ow!"

"Bump!"

"Yow!"

"Bump!"

"Yaroo!"

"Don't make that row; you'll wake the whole school—I mean the whole House," said Bob Cherry. "We're doing our best."

"Oh, leggo!"

"But you want to be carried up to bed."

"Yah! Lemme alone!"

"But—"

"Leggo!" shrieked Bunter. "I'll walk!"

"Nonsense! You're too tired. Bring him along!"

"Yaroo!"

Bump, bump, bump!

The fat junior was bumped on every stair, and every fresh bump brought a fresh shriek from him.

The rest of the juniors followed, laughing.

Billy Bunter struggled hard to escape from the grasp of the humorous juniors, but in vain.

"You asked for it, you know," grinned Hazeldene.

"Ow!"

"My hat! He's heavy! It's not so bad, though, if you rest him on every stair," said Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

They reached the landing at last. Hazeldene took the candle in the bed-room—a long, large room, in which seven beds had been placed in a row, curiously resembling a bit of the old dormitory at Greyfriars.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Leggo!"

"Carry him to the bed," said Bob.

"Ow!"

Bunter was carried to the bed.

Bob Cherry and Nugent gave him a final swing through the air, and let him go, and he swung upon the bed and bumped there.

There was an ominous creak from the bed as the fat junior's heavy weight crashed upon it.

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter sat up on the bed and gasped. He put his spectacles straight on his little, fat nose, and blinked at the laughing juniors.

"Ow! You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave it up.

All his remarks were answered by yells of laughter from the juniors, and the more his indignation waxed, the more funny they seemed to consider it.

It was impossible to be wrathful with dignity under the circumstances, and Billy Bunter snorted, and relapsed into silence.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

An Alarm in the Night.

HARRY WHARTON found it difficult to sleep that night.

The swarthy, evil face of the South American as he lurked behind the rock from the upper ledge was always before his eyes.

The hours passed slowly, and still sleep did not visit his eyelids. He stirred at last, and sat up in bed.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked.

"I'm awake," came Mark Linley's quiet tones.

"And I," said Hazeldene.

There was no other voice.

"Blessed if I can go to sleep," said Hazeldene, sitting up. "I suppose it was seeing that villain this evening that's got on my nerves. I can't help feeling that there's danger in the air."

"That's how I feel."

"It is very curious," said Mark Linley slowly. "Have you noticed—"

"Noticed what?"

"Duke was making a noise up to five minutes ago. Since then he hasn't made a sound."

Wharton started, and listened.

The sounds of the mastiff moving in the garden, brushing in the bushes and trotting on the paths, had been quite plain in the dead stillness of the night.

He listened intently, but there was no further sound; several minutes passed thus, but the silence was unbroken.

"It's very curious," said Hazeldene at last.

"Duke may have gone out of the garden."

"I don't think he would. He's been trained to watch the house. I—I wonder if anything's happened to Duke?"

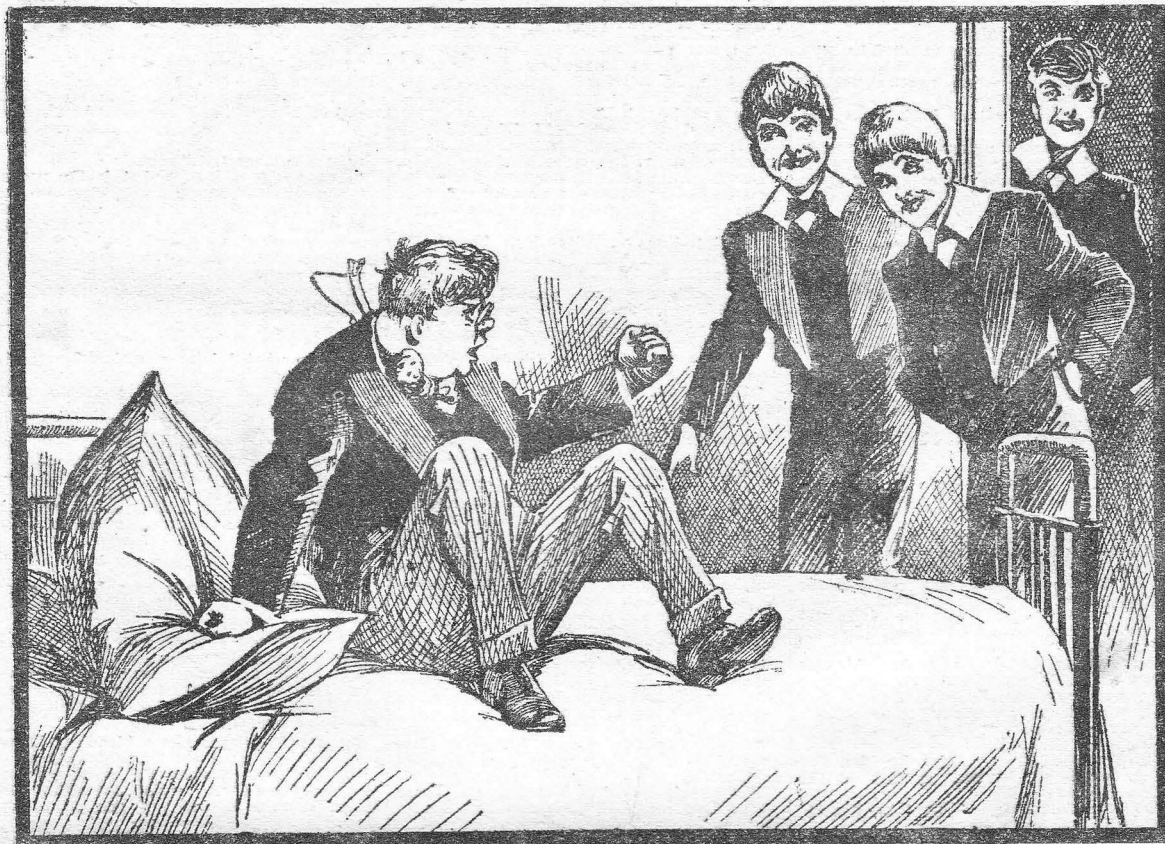
Wharton jumped out of bed.

"I'm jolly well going to see!" he exclaimed.

"May as well take a turn in the garden as lie here awake."

"Just as well," said Mark, getting up. Hazeldene turned out, too, and began to dress quickly.

"Don't wake any of the others," said



Billy Bunter sat up on the bed, and gasped. He put his spectacles straight on his little fat nose, and blinked at the laughing juniors. "Ow! you rotters!" he yelled.

Harry, as he pulled on a pair of rubber shoes. "We can call them if they're wanted. We can drop out of the window."

"Good!"
Wharton quietly opened the window. It creaked a little, and the night was so still that even a faint creak sounded loudly. Wharton looked out and measured the distance with his eye.

It was a drop that would have scared Billy Bunter, but it was not much to the young athletes of the Greyfriars Remove. There was a bed of soft mould to fall upon, too.

Wharton clambered out on the sill. "I'll go first!" he muttered.
"I say, you fellows!" It was a squeaky voice from the gloom—Billy Bunter was sitting up in bed, blinking towards them. "I say—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"
"Where are you going?"
"Only to have a look up and down the garden, to see that all's safe."

Bunter grunted.
"Look here, you fellows, you can leave me my share here. I don't want to get up."

"Eh? Your share of what?"
"The feed."
"Feed! What feed?"

"Oh, no gammon!" said Bunter. "I know you're going to have a feed, of course. A chap wouldn't be idiot enough to get up in the middle of the night except for an important purpose. What have you got?"

"If you come after us I'll pulverise you!"
"Oh, really, Wharton—"
"Ring off!"

Harry swung himself out of the window, and dropped. He staggered a little, but kept his feet, and stepped out of the way.

Mark followed, and then Hazeldene. Hazeldene rolled over on the ground, and Harry helped him up.

"All right?" he asked.
"Right as rain."

The juniors moved away from the wall. They listened for the movements of the mastiff, but not a sound was to be heard, save the wind in the trees and the distant wash of the sea.

They moved quietly down the garden.

Harry Wharton whistled softly to the dog, but there was no response.

"Duke! Duke!"
He called the name softly, but only the echo answered him.

Wharton's face was pale now. He was certain that the dog could not have wandered away; yet where was he? What had happened to him?

Suddenly the junior staggered over a dark mass that lay in the path under the shadow of the shrubbery.

He barely saved himself from falling. He stooped, and looked at the object he had stumbled over.

"Good heavens!"
"What is it?" whispered Hazeldene tensely.
"Duke!"
"Oh!"

The dog lay quite still, a black mass in the shadow. Harry Wharton touched him; he did not move.

The body was still warm, but there was no palpitation in it.

Wharton withdrew his hand; it was wet. He held it up in the moonlight. There was a red stain on his fingers.

"Blood!"
"Good heavens!" murmured Linley.
"The dog has been killed," said Wharton huskily. "Duke is dead!"

"Then—"
"The villain has been here, then."
Wharton set his teeth.

"If he has been here, he must be here now. Come on!"
He ran up the path towards the house.

But he did not think of following the juniors into the garden.

In the first place, he could not drop from the window; and making a rope of sheets again would take too much time.

And then, he felt that if he followed Wharton he might meet with a painful reception on reaching the ground. At the same time, he was determined not to lose sight of the chums.

He whipped out of bed, bundled on his clothes as quickly as he could, adjusted his big spectacles, and went to the door.

He passed out on the landing, and closed the bed-room door softly behind him.

Then he descended the stairs on tiptoe.

His idea was to get out of the house by the French windows of the dining-room, which should have been quite easy; and which would allow him to follow the three juniors without them being aware of the fact.

Bunter was too short-sighted and too excited to notice that there was a light under the door of the dining-room.

He took it for granted that at that hour, nearly one o'clock in the morning, the captain was gone to bed.

He opened the door, and a blaze of light struck his eyes.

The fire was glowing in the grate, and the lamps were still alight.

Billy Bunter stopped in the doorway, blinking, quite taken by surprise.

He was trying to think of some excuse to mumble out, for he realised now that the captain could not be gone to bed, when he became aware that the room was empty.

The French window stood open on one side, letting in the cool breeze from the sea, which made the lamps flicker.

There was no one in the room. Bunter's heart had been thumping hard, but he calmed down a little as he saw that he was as yet undiscovered.

He crossed the room towards the open window.
But before reaching it he paused.
Although his mind was occupied with thoughts of the supposed feed, it struck him as peculiar that the lights should be burning, the room empty, and the window open.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Takes Cover.

BILLY BUNTER did not go to sleep again after the three juniors disappeared from the window. The fat Removeite was quite convinced that Harry Wharton and his comrades were going to enjoy a surreptitious feast; he could imagine no other, adequate reason for getting out of bed in the middle of the night.

And if there was a feed on, Billy Bunter did not mean to be left out of it.

Where was the captain?
Had there been an alarm, and had he gone out to seek for an intruder in the grounds?

The thought of the South American flashed into Billy Bunter's mind.
He trembled, and drew back from the window.

Ijorra's murderous nature had been only too clearly revealed that afternoon, and Bunter would as soon have met Halkett again as the man from South America.

There was a soft footstep outside.
Bunter started.
Was it the captain coming in, or—
The fat junior did not wait to see.
He gave a helpless glance towards the door in the hall, but there was no time to reach it undisturbed.

Acting rather upon instinct than upon thought, he darted behind a screen that stood in the corner near the window.
He was barely out of sight when the soft footstep stopped at the window.

Bunter stood shaking behind the screen, his heart thumping violently.
Who was it at the window? Why did he not enter?

The screen was made partly of open-work, and Bunter could see through the little openings; and he kept his glance glued upon the window.

A face appeared there, and a pair of glittering, black eyes swept the room.
Bunter popped down immediately; he did not want to see any more. It was the swarthy face of the South American.

Ijorra crept stealthily into the room, and dropped to his knees behind the captain's big armchair.

Bunter's only thought was to keep his own presence a secret, and to avoid attracting the attention of the swarthy ruffian.

His knees knocked together as he waited, with thumping heart.

Where was the captain?
Ijorra was evidently waiting for him.
A heavy tread sounded at last at the French windows.

The powerful form of Captain Cunliffe appeared there, and he came in.
Bunter saw him through the slits in the screen.

The captain looked weary, and there was a revolver in his hand.

Had he been seeking for the enemy—the man who was now hidden within six paces of him?

—Captain Cunliffe closed the French windows and drew down the blind. He threw himself into the chair, and laid the revolver upon the table.

The South American drew a deep breath. He rose silently to his feet behind the chair in which the captain sat and reached his hand towards the revolver on the table. The captain caught sight of the hand, and sat petrified for a second. Then he made a wild grasp towards the revolver.

But it was too late.
The dusky fingers were grasping it, and it was snatched away, and as the captain leaped to his feet his own weapon was levelled at his heart.

Over the levelled barrel the swarthy face of the South American looked at him with a mocking sneer.

"Stand back, capitano, or you are a dead man!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Face to Face.

CAPTAIN CUNLIFFE stared blankly at the South American.
The revolver in Pedro Ijorra's grip never wavered.

It needed but the pressure of the dusky forefinger to send a bullet crashing through the Englishman's heart, and the expression on the swarthy face showed that Ijorra was ready to do it.

The captain's hands were at his sides, his fingers clenching and unclenching convulsively. He was taken at a hopeless disadvantage, and he was now unarmed.

"Ijorra!" he said at last, and his voice was husky and broken.

The South American laughed.

"Si, senor."

"You here?"

"As you see."

The captain clenched his hands hard.
"—I—I knew you had come when I found the mastiff dead," he muttered, in a choked voice. "I have been seeking you. I—I thought you had gone again as I could not find you."

"I was not gone, amigo. I am here, as you see, ready to settle the old account."

And the South American touched with his

left hand the livid scar upon his forehead. "That was a narrow escape for me, senor, and this—this will be the payment for it."

"I wish the bullet had gone through your brain."

"As you intended."

"No," said the captain, "I did not intend to. I wanted to drop you, that was all. I did not intend to take your life."

Ijorra gave a sneering laugh.

"A lie will not save you now, senor."

The captain flushed red through his bronzed skin.

"A lie! You cowardly dago bound, do you think I would lie to you to save a thousand lives? Bah!"

The South American grinned over the levelled pistol.

"I have followed you far," he said. "How long is it since you sailed from the Argentine? Five years, is it not so?"

The captain nodded.

"And all the time you knew that I was seeking you?"

"I knew it."

"And you fled—you fled always! You call me a coward—and it was you that fled?" said Ijorra, sneeringly.

"And you are a coward!" said Captain Cunliffe quietly. "A brave man may fly from an assassin—no courage can guard against a shot in the back; but I am sorry I fled now, I should have met you on your own ground, and finished with you in the true South American way, and left your bones on the pampas for the coyotes to pick."

"It is too late now, senor."

"You are not in the Argentine now," said the captain; "you are in a civilised country, where murderers are hanged. Take care."

"Your English laws will not touch me. I am here to-night, gone to-morrow. When my work is done I shall vanish."

"The law has a long arm."

"It will not reach to the Argentine. But on conditions I may spare your life mi capitano."

The captain looked at him steadily. There was a deep silence in the room, broken only by the ticking of the clock.

Behind the screen Billy Bunter was trembling like a leaf.

"What rascal business have you come to propose now?" exclaimed the captain at last. "I will enter into no compact with you. I have always regretted my folly in once doing so—in leaguening myself with two scoundrels, neither of whom kept faith with me."

"And with whom you did not keep faith," sneered the South American.

"It is false! I kept faith, or would have done so, but—"

"So you told me on the pampas, and I did not believe you. Listen! You and Halkett and I discovered the nuggets in the Argentine sierras, and as soon as we had found them we determined each to keep the whole of the treasure."

"I did not—"

"Bah! Why lie about it now?" sneered Ijorra. "The same night Halkett fell into an arroyo, where we believed he had gone to his death—"

The captain clenched his hands.

"Wretch! It was you who hurled him there! That I suspected from the first, and I was sure of it when you attacked me."

The South American shrugged his shoulders. "But you played a better game than I did when I attacked you," he said coolly. "You shot me. I lay unconscious for many hours there in the pampas grass, and dead, as you believed."

"I—"

"When I came to myself you were gone, and the nuggets. I have hunted you down, to return the favour you paid me"—the man touched the scar again—"and to recover the gold. Listen! Give it to me, and I will leave you as you are, unharmed. It is the gold that I want."

"I tell you I have none of it. I told you on the pampas that Halkett had taken it, that he was fleeing with it when you hurried him into the ravine, and that in doing so you had thrown away a fortune."

"I did not believe you."

"It was true."

"It is not true!" cried the South American fiercely. "Besides, if it were, Halkett is not dead—"

"Not dead?"

"No; I have seen him."

"He lives?" said the captain, dazed. "I believed—"

"You pretend you did not know, when he is here—when he has twice tried to kill me within sight of your house!" exclaimed the South American fiercely.

The captain looked dazed.

"I did not know."

"I do not believe you. He is alive—lame now, from the injury he received in falling into the ravine—it was his leg he broke instead of his neck, and how he escaped alive I know not. But he is alive, and here, and you must know it!"

"I did not know it!"

"Come," said Ijorra, "what is the use of wasting words. You know why I have sought you so long, and all the time Halkett was trailing me like a bloodhound. My life is in danger as great as yours. I do not desire to linger here. Give me the gold—give me even my share of it—and I will go."

"I cannot give you what I do not possess."

"Bah! How are you living here? You have left the sea, and you have money. You are rich."

"I have what I have earned and saved in forty years at sea," said the captain sternly, "and not a shilling of it will ever touch your hands, Pedro Ijorra!"

The South American gritted his teeth.

"I shall begin to believe you at last!" he exclaimed. "It may be that Halkett has the gold, and that is why he is so determined to take my life. Let it be so; but if I can get nothing else here I can get my revenge. For the last time, have you the nuggets, capitano?"

"No."

"Then—"

The South American's eyes blazed along the levelled barrel. Billy Bunter's nerves could stand it no longer.

With a wild shriek he rolled against the screen and sent it crashing to the floor.

The South American started back convulsively, the revolver lowering to his side, and with lightning swiftness the English captain seized his opportunity.

He leaped forward like a bloodhound, and hurled himself upon the South American.

His left hand grasped the right wrist of the swarthy ruffian, forcing the pistol still lower, till the muzzle was pointed to the floor.

Then, with a twist of the wrist that brought a shriek of pain from the South American, he forced Ijorra to drop the weapon.

The revolver fell upon the floor.

"Carambo!"

"Man to man now!" cried Captain Cunliffe. "You scoundrel, look out for yourself!"

And the two men closed in desperate combat.

Billy Bunter blinked at them, and sent forth yell after yell, almost out of his wits with terror.

There came a loud hammering on the French windows.

"Open—open here!"

"Help!"

"Billy! Open the window!"

Bunter understood at last.

Captain Cunliffe and Pedro Ijorra were rolling on the floor now in fierce struggle. Chairs were crashing, and a lamp had gone with a crash to the floor.

Billy Bunter rose aside the blind and unfastened the French window.

It was flung open, and Harry Wharton dashed in, with Mark Linley and Hazeldene at his heels.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Tragedy of the Cliff.

THE South American was struggling with desperation now—not for victory, but for freedom.

The entrance of the Greyfriars juniors had made all the difference. But the captain was not disposed to let him go.

His grasp was like iron on the swarthy ruffian.

Ijorra was making desperate efforts to get at the knife hidden in his breast, but he could not reach it.

Strong as the captain was, however, he was only slowly getting the advantage. The South American fought like a wild-cat.

"Wine in!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

And he rushed to the captain's aid.

"What-ho!" said Mark. "Collar him!"

"Got him at last!" said Hazeldene, with great satisfaction.

The grasp of the three juniors fastened upon the ruffian.

Wharton kicked the pistol out of the way. The South American had no chance now. He was forced to the floor, and Mark Linley knelt on his chest.

"You had better give in," said the Lancashire lad

The South American glared at the juniors. "Let me up!" he muttered. "Hardly," said Wharton. "You won't be let go till you're in the police-station. He will have to be arrested, of course, sir."

Captain Cunliffe nodded. "Yes. I will get a length of rope to bind him with. He's too dangerous a customer to be allowed loose."

"Carambo! I—"

"There was a sound at the open French window.

"Look out!" yelled Billy Bunter suddenly, and he made a wild dive to get behind the big armchair.

The juniors looked quickly towards the window. From the darkness of the garden the form of the lame man had suddenly appeared, and his deep-set eyes seemed to burn into the room.

It was only for a moment that he stood there, and then he disappeared again. Captain Cunliffe sprang towards the window.

"Halkett!"

But there was no reply.

"Look out!" shouted Mark Linley. The South American was taking advantage of the sudden consternation. The hold upon him had insensibly relaxed.

With a wrench he tore himself loose, and sprang to his feet.

The juniors leaped towards him; but the South American's hand was in his breast now, and the clear steel flashed out.

"Carambo! Stand back!"

And the juniors leaped back from the knife. Wharton made a rush for the poker. Captain Cunliffe seized the revolver.

Ijorra made a savage spring for the window, and in a moment was gone.

The lithe form vanished into the garden. The captain rushed after him. He was gone!

Wharton snapped his teeth.

"He has escaped!"

"Gone!"

Crack! Crack!

Two sharp shots rang out from the darkness, two flashes lit up for an instant the gloom. Who was firing there?

They did not need telling. It was the lame man. Ijorra had escaped capture, only to encounter a deadlier danger in the darkness of the garden.

There was a yell, a crash of footsteps, and another ringing shot.

Then silence.

The whole house was alarmed now. Bob Cherry and the rest had come downstairs, half-dressed, eagerly inquiring what was the matter.

Marjorie and Clara, wrapped in cloaks and shawls, were with them, pale and terrified.

Marjorie caught Harry's arm.

"Harry! What is it?"

"It is all right now," said Harry, pressing her hand reassuringly. "The South American has been here, but he has done no harm. He has fled."

"But who is firing?"

"The other man—his enemy," said Wharton grimly. "Ijorra will be lucky if he gets away alive to-night. It will be better for your uncle if he does not escape. But—"

"Hark!"

Crack!

"He is firing again."

"Oh, listen!"

From the darkness in the direction of the cliffs came a terrible cry.

It rang and echoed through the night, and died away sobbing among the crannies of the cliffs.

It was followed by silence—a silence still more terrible.

Marjorie and Clara shuddered. The moon emerged from behind the mass of clouds—bright, silver, sailing high and round and fair.

The light streamed upon the shining cliffs.

On the rocky ledge was seen the figure of the lame man, gazing downward towards the beach.

He raised his head, and the juniors saw him make a gesture, and then he limped on over the cliff and disappeared.

It was the last time they ever saw him.

What had he been looking at on the beach, from the height of the rocky path?

The juniors asked themselves that question with shuddering.

The moon sank out of view again in the bosom of the clouds.

"Go in, my lads," said Captain Cunliffe, in a hoarse, strained voice—"go in!"

The Greyfriars juniors went in quietly.

There was a grim silence among them.

That cry from the cliffs could only mean one thing, but what it meant they shuddered to think.

Marjorie and Clara went back to their room. They were pale as death.

The juniors did not speak till they were in their own quarters again.

"It's awful!" muttered Bob Cherry, at last.

"I'm afraid there's not much doubt what has happened," said Wharton, in a shaken voice. "The South American must have fled by the path up the cliff—the path where he hurled the rock upon the lame man yesterday—"

"It looks like it. And he fell—"

"He fell, or was thrown, down to the beach," said Harry. "It is terrible, but don't let us think about it."

But it was not so easy to dismiss the matter from their minds.

Little more sleep visited their eyelids that night.

The morning broke over the bay and wide Atlantic, and found them still awake.

The juniors were up with the first glimmer of the sun.

The captain was about to leave the house when the juniors came down.

"Good-morning, lads!" he said in a husky voice. "I am sorry that all this should have happened while you were on a holiday here. Not much of a holiday for you, I am afraid."

"I am glad we were here," said Harry. "It might have ended worse, otherwise, sir."

"Quite true."

"You are going to—to look for him?"

"Yes."

"May we come?"

"As you like."

They left the house together. Captain Cunliffe led the way in silence to

the beach, under the shadow of the great towering cliffs.

If the South American had fallen there his death must have been instantaneous when he touched the rocky earth.

He would have had time only for that one wild cry as he fell."

"Ha!"

Captain Cunliffe uttered the exclamation as he halted. The juniors caught a glimpse of the huddled form on the rocks.

The captain waved his hand.

"Go back—go back!"

"It is Ijorra?"

"Ay, ay!"

"And he is—is—"

"Dead!"

The juniors went back. They had no desire to see more. The captain followed them after a few moments. His face was very pale.

Marjorie was down when the juniors came in; she greeted Harry with a questioning glance.

He nodded quietly.

"It is all over," he said. "It was Ijorra, and we shall not see him again. Don't think about it, Marjorie."

Marjorie shivered a little. But the subject was dropped, and was not mentioned again.

The tragic occurrence at Black Rock had certainly broken up the holiday.

After what had happened the youngsters could hardly make a pretence of enjoying themselves on the scene of the tragedy, and Hazeldene's proposition that they should finish the vacation at his father's house was received with relief.

With them to Hazeldene's home went Captain Cunliffe, so that for the rest of the holiday the juniors had the company of the old sailorman.

And, terrible as had been the end of the South American, there was no doubt that it had lifted a weight from the mind of Captain Cunliffe.

The shadow of Ijorra's relentless pursuit was gone from his life now, and he was able to breathe more easily.

And the relief was apparent in his looks and manner.

In a change of scene, the dark happenings of the beginning of the vacation faded from the minds of the juniors, and they spent a very enjoyable holiday after all, and were sorry enough when the time came for them to part with their kind friends and return to Greyfriars.

Marjorie and Clara travelled with them as far as Friardale, and the juniors saw them safe to Cliff House ere they went on to Greyfriars.

"Well, the holiday's over," Bob Cherry remarked. "But we'll have a jolly time this term—eh?"

"We will!" said Marjorie brightly.

"Yes, rather!" said Miss Clara emphatically. "What-ho!"

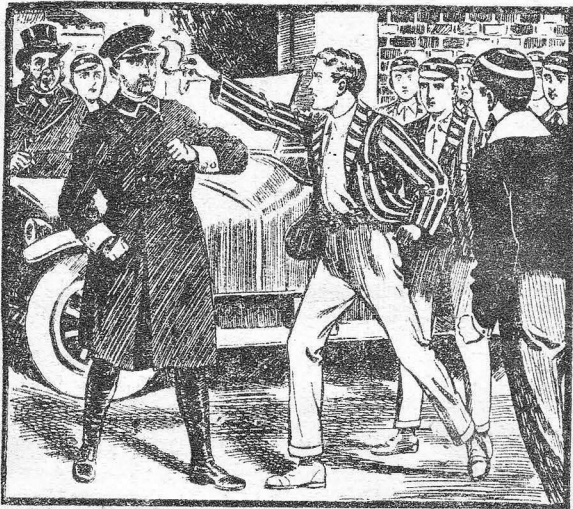
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UNMASKED! Bulkeley dragged the motor-goggles from the chauffeur's face with his own hand. "Joey Hook!" yelled Neville. (See page 9.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. That Valuable Letter.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were adorning the steps of the School House at Rookwood when Bulkeley and Neville came out after dinner.

Bulkeley was looking very cheerful and satisfied. It was one of Bulkeley's biggest troubles that he failed to pull with Knowles, the captain of the Modern side.

Bulkeley was keenly desirous of seeing the Rookwood First do well at cricket that season, but without co-operation between the two sides it was not likely to come to pass.

There were three men on the Modern side who could not be left out—Knowles, Catesby, and Frampton—if the team was to be the best that Rookwood could produce. And that was one reason why Bulkeley never listened to some hotheaded fellows who suggested playing a wholly Classical team as the School Eleven. It would have been a lesson to Knowles, certainly; but it would have been bad business for Rookwood's cricket record.

But now the trouble seemed to have passed over.

Knowles had "grouned" at having only three Moderns considered good enough for the School team, and all the Moderns backed him up hotly.

Bulkeley did not expect the trial match that afternoon to reveal any hitherto unsuspected geniuses in the rank of the Moderns. But he had met Knowles half-way, and he had stated that if the Moderns beat the Classics in the trial match, Knowles should be considered to have proved his claim, and six Moderns should go into the First Eleven. If Knowles' team won by fair play, certainly they would have proved their right.

As to their winning by foul play, Bulkeley never even thought of that. If anybody had warned him that a Rookwood fellow would be guilty of "nobbiling" an opposing player to win a match by foul means, he would certainly have kicked his kind informant out of his study.

Yet that was exactly what Knowles had planned, as Jimmy Silver & Co. could have testified, if they had cared to face the drastic consequences of making an accusation against Knowles.

By chance, the previous day, the Fistical Four had "spotted" Knowles' little game, and they had taken their measure to defeat it with such deadly secrecy that nobody outside their own select circle suspected a word of it.

The Fistical Four could keep a secret when they liked; and they kept that one as carefully as if it had been a secret of hidden treasure.

They smiled genially as they saw Bulkeley's contented face as he came out chatting with Neville of the Sixth. They knew that he would not have felt so contented if he had known that the Modern captain was plotting, and that four juniors of his own side were plotting, too—or rather, counterplotting.

"I say, Neville!" chirped Jimmy Silver, as

"Hallo!" said Neville. "What is it? Are you going to offer your services for the trial match, Silver?"

The four juniors grinned dutifully at the great man's little joke.

"Blessed if I don't think he'd have nerve enough, really!" said Bulkeley, laughing.

"Well, Bulkeley might do worse than take a player or two from the Fourth," said Jimmy Silver modestly. "But that isn't what I was going to say. It's about that letter, Neville."

"Eh? What letter?"

Jimmy Silver looked indignant.

"You don't mean to say you've forgotten!" he exclaimed. "You a prefect, too!"

"Blessed if I haven't!" said Neville, puzzled. "What letter are you talking about?"

"Didn't I give you a letter to mind for me last night?" said Jimmy Silver. "An awfully valuable letter, you remember?"

"Oh, yes, I remember!" said Neville, feeling in his pocket. "It's here."

Jimmy waved his hand.

"I don't want it yet, thanks," he said. "I was only mentioning it. You see, it's awfully valuable—awfully!"

"Far above rubies!" said Lovell solemnly.

"What the dickens—" said Bulkeley.

Neville laughed. The keenness of the fags about that precious letter amused him.

"I'm minding a letter for Silver," he explained. "Silver gave it to me last night to mind—"

"Just before we went to the dorm," said Jimmy.

"Yes. And it's crammed with banknotes, I suppose," said Neville.

"No, it isn't money," said Jimmy Silver. "It's more valuable than money!"

"You bet!" said Raby. "Bulkeley will know when it's opened!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Neville.

The two prefects walked out into the quad. "Something awfully mysterious—what?" said Bulkeley.

"Seems so," said Neville, "that young ass brought it to me in my study last night, sealed up with sealing-wax, and asked me to take charge of it. I concluded there was money in it, and he was afraid of losing it; but it appears not. What a ripping afternoon for the trial match. Do you think the Moderns have an earthy, Bulkeley?"

Bulkeley smiled.

"Knowles seems to think so, and I like to see him keen," he replied. "But, of course, they won't have a look in."

"If they should beat us, Knowles will claim six places in the School Eleven for his side, as agreed."

"If they beat us, they'll be entitled to them," said Bulkeley.

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"Knowles thinks I underestimate the Modern players. Well, if they beat us, it will show that he's right and I'm wrong, and if that's so, I'll be glad to find out my mistake before we begin playing the School matches. But I fancy it won't turn out as Knowles thinks."

Bulkeley's opinion was shared by all the Classical side. But it was certain that the

FOILED!

A Grand, Long
Complete Story, dealing with the
Early Adventures of JIMMY
SILVER & Co. at Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

the great men of the Sixth were passing on the steps.

The two prefects good-naturedly halted. They liked Jimmy Silver—nobody could quite help liking that somewhat cheeky, but always frank and cheery junior.

Modern seniors were very keen about the match, and would play up their hardest.

Jimmy Silver & Co. smiled at one another beautifully as the great swells of the Sixth walked away chatting. That valuable letter, which had been delivered so mysteriously into Neville's charge, cast their counter-stroke to Knowles' plot. They felt elated that it had fallen to them to back up old Bulkeley and save the Classical side from defeat.

"Mind you kids are at the gate at half-past one!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "I want to see Knowles' face when his little game goes bang!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Knowles doesn't know we know!" chuckled Lovell blissfully. "Hasn't the faintest suspicion that we were in the barn when he jawed it over with Joey Hook. His face will be worth a guinea a box when he finds out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Jimmy Silver Chips In.

TIME!" said Jimmy Silver.

It wanted a few minutes to half-past one. The Fistical Four came out of the tuckshop, where they had been refreshing themselves with ginger-beer, and sauntered down to the school gates. They had smiling faces. The denouncement was at hand.

Jimmy Silver leaned on one of the old stone pillars, and surveyed the road. Never had Jimmy Silver felt quite so satisfied with himself.

"Sister Anne! Sister Anne, do you see a motor-car coming?" chirruped Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a hoot of a motor-horn down the road a few minutes later, and a small grey car came in sight. It dashed up to the gates of Rookwood and stopped. A very respectable chauffeur stepped down. His face was almost hidden by his motor-goggles. He glanced at the juniors in the gateway, but passed them without speaking, and went up to the porter's lodge. Jimmy Silver & Co. exchanged ecstatic glances. If they had not known of the plot, they would never have dreamed of recognising Joey Hook, the sporting tout, in that extremely respectable get-up. He looked like a very sedate old family servant.

Old Mack, the porter, looked out of his lodge.

"Is Master Bulkeley about?" asked the chauffeur.

"Yes," said old Mack. "Wot is it?"

"I have a message for him from his uncle. Will you call him at once, please? Tell him his uncle, Mr. Bulkeley, at the Elms, has had a sudden attack, and is sinking fast, and I have been sent over to fetch him. There is not a moment to lose."

"Bless my 'eart!" said old Mack.

The old porter hurried away for Bulkeley. The chauffeur stepped out into the road again, and busied himself with his car, turning it for the return journey. Jimmy Silver & Co. waited patiently.

Bulkeley of the Sixth, his face very pale, came striding down to the gates, with old Mack following him. Bulkeley was in his flannels—he had already changed for the match—and he was bareheaded. He had come out with a rush immediately he received the porter's message.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, as the chauffeur touched his cap. "Mack tells me you've been sent from my uncle's to fetch me?"

"Yes, sir."
 "It's serious?"
 "I gave the porter my message, sir. Mr. Bulkeley is sinking fast, and if any time is lost you may not see him alive."
 "Good heavens!" muttered Bulkeley, his lips trembling. "Poor old Uncle George! I hadn't the faintest idea he was like that! I'm coming, of course."
 "What on earth's the matter, Bulkeley?" exclaimed Neville. The Classical cricketers, in a state of great dismay, had followed Bulkeley down to the gates. They had heard old Mack's message.
 "I say, I'm sorry," said Bulkeley, his lips twitching. "You'll have to play without me this afternoon, Neville. Do the best you can."
 "But—" began Raikes of the Sixth.
 "My uncle's dying," said Bulkeley, with a catch in his voice. "I'm sorry to leave you fellows in the lurch like this, but it can't be helped. Lend me a cap, one of you—I've forgotten mine. I sha'n't stay to change."
 "It's rotten," said Neville, concerned for his friend, and concerned, too, for the Classical prospects in the trial match. "Of course, you can't think of cricket now. I hope you'll find it's not so bad, old chap. Here's a cap."
 "I'm sorry, too," said Knowles. "Keep your pecker up, Bulkeley." The look on Bulkeley's face sent, for a moment, a pang of remorse to the heart of the cad of the Sixth. Knowles would have heard of the illness of any of his uncles with great equanimity; but Bulkeley seemed to be made of different stuff. "Don't be downhearted; you may find him better, old fellow."
 "Thank you," said Bulkeley. "I hope so. Do the best you can, Neville. Good-bye!"
 "Hold on!"
 It was Jimmy Silver's voice as he sprang into Bulkeley's way. The captain of Rookwood, who was springing for the car, almost fell over him.
 "Get out of the way, you young idiot!"
 "Hold on, I say! Bulkeley, listen to me! Your uncle's not ill—"
 "What?"
 "It's a rotten jape!"
 "You young fool, get aside!" roared Bulkeley.
 "I tell you it is!" shrieked Jimmy Silver. "I'll prove it! That man isn't a chauffeur; he's Joey Hook, the tout."
 "What?" yelled all the Classical seniors together.
 Knowles' face was a study.
 "Make him take off his goggles, and you'll see!" panted Jimmy Silver. "I tell you he is Joey Hook, and he's fooling you, and I can prove it!"
 Bulkeley almost staggered. He could not believe that anyone would play so heartless a trick, but Jimmy Silver's earnest face impressed him in spite of himself. He swung towards the chauffeur.
 "Let me see your face—quick! If this is one of your jokes, Silver, I'll flay you!"
 "If that man isn't Joey Hook, flay me and welcome," said Jimmy Silver.
 Without waiting for the man to answer or move, Bulkeley dragged the motor-goggles away with his own hand.
 "Joey Hook!" yelled Neville.
 Bulkeley stared furiously at the pretended chauffeur.
 "What does this mean, Hook, you rascal?"
 Joey Hook pulled himself together. Knowles had already warned him what to do in the improbable event of being recognised; Knowles left nothing to chance. The improbable event had happened.
 "Wot does wot mean?" said Hook, in his turn. "I come over to fetch you, sir, and if you don't choose to come, that's your look out. Mr. Bulkeley's doctor sent me, because there ain't time for you to get to Shoremouth by train. And I warn you that there ain't a minute to lose, from what the medical gentleman said."
 Bulkeley hesitated a moment. It was plausible enough. It was one of Joey Hook's many lines of business to hire out motor-cars, which he often drove himself. It seemed absurd to suppose that he would waste time, trouble, and money in taking the captain of Rookwood on a run of thirty miles for nothing. That Joey Hook knew, or cared, anything about the trial match that afternoon never even entered Bulkeley's head.
 "I must go," he said. "I can't chance it. It must be all right."
 "You sha'n't go!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "It's a trick to get you away from the match, so that the Moderns will win."

"You young rascal!" roared Bulkeley. "How dare you say such a thing!"
 "Oh, I say— Oh—ow!" gasped Jimmy Silver, as the angry captain of Rookwood grasped his collar and shook him furiously.
 "It's true! We've got proof—proof! Bulkeley, don't be a beast! We can prove it if you listen just a single minute."
 Bulkeley gritted his teeth.
 "Well, then, you young rascals, I'll give you a single minute," he exclaimed, "and if you don't prove it, I'll report you to the Head and ask him to flog you!"
 "Right-ho!" panted Jimmy Silver, as the Rookwood captain released him. "A minute's enough. Neville, you've got the proof! Give me my letter!"
 "Your letter! What—"
 "Give it me! No, open it and show it to Bulkeley! It's all written down in that letter."
 "What is?" shouted Bulkeley.
 "It's written down there that Joey Hook was coming for you to-day in a car, with a lie about your uncle being ill," stammered Jimmy Silver. "Now, if what he says is true, how could I have known it last night?"
 "You couldn't, you young imbecile! You—"
 "It's in the letter."
 "Nonsense! You—"
 "Open the letter, Neville, and show him!" shrieked Jimmy in desperation.
 Neville, amazed, drew the letter from his pocket.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
 Proof Positive.

HALF Rookwood seemed to be gathered round the gates now.
 The strange scene had drawn the fellows from all quarters.
 Knowles was pale as death. His scheme was crumbling about his ears; but it was not only the failure of his scheme that he dreaded. He dreaded exposure more than that. Yet, how could it be proved? His word was as good as anybody's—better than that of a fag in the Fourth—a fag who was known to be on the best of terms with him. Knowles did not want for nerve. He pulled himself together. But Catesby had already hurried away. He could not face it out.
 Neville broke the seal of the letter.
 In the midst of a deadly silence, he drew the letter out of the envelope. He unfolded it, and handed it to Bulkeley.
 The captain of Rookwood read it, with his eyes almost starting from his head. The letter bore the previous day's date, and it ran, in Jimmy Silver's sprawling hand:
 "Dear Bulkeley.—Joey Hook will call for you to-morrow in a car, with a whopping cram about your uncle being seedy, to take you away from the match. It's all spoof, your uncle is all right. Don't you be taken in. We heard him jawing it over with another villain. It's a jape."
 "Yours affectionately,
 "A FRIEND."
 Bulkeley read the letter aloud, and every word was heard by everybody present.
 Jimmy Silver smoothed his ruffled hair and collar, while Bulkeley read. He did not bear any malice for that rough shaking. It was just like old Bulkeley to refuse to believe harm of anybody, though he might have been a bit more gentle about it, perhaps.
 "My only aunt!" exclaimed Neville, when Bulkeley had finished.
 "What on earth does it mean?" exclaimed Raikes. "When was that letter given to you, Neville?"
 "Last night," said Neville.
 "Last night!" muttered Bulkeley.
 "And you've had it in your pocket ever since, haven't you, Neville?" said Jimmy Silver.
 "Ever since," agreed Neville.
 "But—but—" stammered Bulkeley.
 "If what that rotter says is true about your uncle having a sudden attack, and the doctor sending him over for you, how could I have known it last night?" demanded Jimmy Silver triumphantly.
 "You—you couldn't—"
 "But I did, you see, because we wrote it down in that letter, and gave it to Neville to mind!"
 "It was a trick to get Bulkeley away from the match," said Raib, taking up the tale. "We heard them talking it over in the old barn!"
 Knowles' teeth came together with a click. He understood now.
 "Hook was paid to do this," chimed in

Newcome. "He had a pound down for the car, and he was going to have another quid afterwards."
 "I—I—I suppose the yarn can't be true, if these young beggars knew this last night," stammered Bulkeley at last. "Hook's message is that my uncle had a sudden attack, and the doctor sent him here. If it's true, he couldn't have known it himself last night, let alone these kids. It's a trick!"
 "Collar the cad, and make him explain—" began somebody.
 "Stop him!" yelled Jimmy Silver, as the car buzzed. "He's mizzling!"
 There was a rush towards the car, but it was too late.
 Joey Hook was in the driving-seat, and he had started the engine the instant Bulkeley had read out that letter. Hook understood that the game was up, and he did not intend to remain to be handled by Bulkeley. The car whipped away down the road, leaving nothing but a cloud of dust and a smell of petrol for the enraged and disappointed Rookwood fellows.
 Two or three of them broke into a run in pursuit, but it was in vain. The car vanished round a bend in the lane, and Joey Hook was gone. Knowles was left to get out of the scrape the best way he could.
 If the astonished Bulkeley had needed any further proof, the flight of Joey Hook would have furnished it.
 The captain of Rookwood stood dumb-founded.
 It was evidently a heartless trick that had been played upon him. No message had come from his uncle; his uncle was not ill. That was clear enough now. It was equally clear that only Jimmy Silver had saved him from being taken away on a fool's errand, and leaving his team to be beaten in his absence.
 "It's plain enough," said Raikes. "We'll jolly well go into this."
 "Yes, rather!" said Neville. "Silver says it was a Modern chap fixed it up with Hook. Who was it, Silver?"
 "It's a lie!" exclaimed Knowles furiously. "And I tell you plainly, Bulkeley, if that young cad dares to accuse anybody on my side, I'll take the matter to the Head!"
 "Hold on, Silver!" said Bulkeley quickly. "You can come into my study and tell me, and I'll see whether there's anything in it!"
 "But, I say—" began Neville.
 "Leave it to me," said Bulkeley. "Come, Silver—and you other tags, too!"
 The Fistical Four followed Bulkeley to the School House. They were not feeling very pleased. They had backed up old Bulkeley, and dished Knowles, and the Classics were going to win the trial match. That was all to the good. But the triumphant exposure of Knowles' villainy did not look so assured.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
 The Reward!

BULKELEY matched the Fistical Four into his study, and closed the door.
 Bulkeley's rugged face was very grim in its expression, and Jimmy Silver & Co. felt uneasy. Bulkeley had cut up rusty before they proved their statements, and they had forgiven him for that. They really liked him all the better for his faith in others, which made him so slow to believe evil; but surely he wasn't going to cut up rusty now? That would be a little too thick.
 "Now, tell me about it," said Bulkeley. "You, Silver! Don't all jaw at once. You say a Modern fellow put Hook up to playing this trick on me?"
 "Yes, it was—"
 "Don't tell me his name."
 "Oh, all right!"
 "If it's true, I don't want to know his name!"
 Jimmy Silver trembled with indignation. "If it's true!" he gasped. "You—you don't believe me! You—you think I'm telling crams! I won't say a word, then! You can heck me if you like! I think—"
 "I hope you've made a mistake, Silver," said Bulkeley quietly. "I can't doubt your word after the proof you've given me. I admit that if you'd come with this story to me before Hook got here with the car, I shouldn't have believed a word of it—couldn't! It's too utterly rotten to believe it of any fellow! Where did you hear this man Hook getting his instructions?"
 "In the old barn yesterday."
 "What were you doing there, out of bounds?"
 "It's because it was out of bounds. We

spotted—ahem!—if I'm not to mention his name, I won't—we spotted a certain party coming—a party who had no right to report us out of bounds because he's only a rotten Modern prefect; but he would have done it, all the same, so we took cover in the loft. Then they—there were two of them—came in, and then Hook. We couldn't help seeing them, and hearing what they said. We didn't dare show ourselves. And what they said was what I put in that letter I gave to Neville."

"You saw them, as well as heard them?"

"Yes."

"You're sure you couldn't have been mistaken?"

"How could I, when I saw them—we all saw them?"

Bulkeley looked deeply worried.

"I'm going to ask you to keep this dark," he said.

"Oughtn't they to be shown up?" demanded Lovell hotly.

"Perhaps they ought," said Bulkeley. "But it's a frightful disgrace for Rookwood. If it came out they would be expelled, and—and think of the disgrace to the school! We don't want the good name of Rookwood dragged in the mud!"

"Well, no; but—"

"And the bitterness it would cause between the two sides," added Bulkeley; "it might take years to heal."

"But will the Moderns let it drop?" said Lovell. "They're awfully wild about it."

"They may demand inquiry," grinned Raby.

"If they do they'll get it."

"They will follow Knowles' lead in that matter," said Bulkeley.

"Oh, Knowles won't demand an inquiry!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Knowles will be glad to let it drop. That—that certain party whose name I mustn't mention is a very close friend of Knowles—very close."

"That's enough," said Bulkeley, as the four juniors chuckled. "You're talking too much, Silver. If Knowles is satisfied, the Moderns will let the matter drop, and the sooner the better. You fellows say nothing."

"All right, Bulkeley," said Lovell.

"All right, if you don't believe us," said Jimmy Silver. "But if you don't say plainly that you believe every word we've said, Bulkeley, we're going to have the thing right out. We're not going to have our word doubted."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

"I do believe you, every word," said Bulkeley. "I wish I didn't! Now, least said soonest mended. We don't want recriminations and accusations that can't be proved, and a Rookwood prefect lying himself black in the face to get out of the scrape, and all that."

"Mum's the word!" agreed the juniors.

Bulkeley opened the study door.

"I rely on that," he said. "You can clear."

The Fistical Four cleared. They were only half satisfied.

"Bulkeley don't seem so jolly grateful!" grumbled Lovell. "Of course, he's a bit cut up to find a Rookwood fellow such a cad. But it's only a Modern, and they're cads anyway."

"Never mind; we'll give him his head," said Jimmy Silver generously. "After all, it would make Tommy Dodd rather sick, and he's a decent chap for a Modern, you know."

The Classical Four had agreed that mum was the word. But there were difficulties. The moment they came out into the quadrangle they were surrounded by an army of Classics, all demanding information.

"Who was it, Silver?"

"What Modern cad was trying to nobble old Bulkeley?"

"Tell us all about it!"

"Why don't you speak, you ass?"

Jimmy Silver looked helplessly at his chums. It wasn't easy to refuse information to the Classics; but their promise was given to Bulkeley now.

"Why don't you tell us?" bawled Smythe of the Shell.

"It's in Bulkeley's hands now," said Jimmy Silver at last. "He's rather waxy about my saying so much already. We've left it entirely in his hands."

"But you can tell us!" shouted Jones minor.

"Bulkeley's told us not to jaw."

"My sainted aunt!" said Townsend. "He's going to screen the Modern cad who did it! That's just like Bulkeley! He's an ass! But we won't have it! You'll just tell us about it, Jimmy Silver, or we'll scrag you!"

"Get it off your chest, you cheeky young villain!"

"Now then, out with it!"

"Look here—"

"Bump him! Scrag the cheeky rotter if he won't tell!"

"Hands off, you duffers! Oh, my hat! Oh, crickey! Yow!"

The exasperated Classics, their thirst for information unslaked, swarmed over the Fistical Four, and bumped them down in the quad. They left them in a breathless condition. Even then they would probably not have left them, but somebody shouted that the placers were filling for the match, and the Modern cads were bagging all the front places.

The Classical crowd rushed off to the cricket-field, and the Fistical Four sat up, and blinked at one another and gasped.

"Oh, my word!" groaned Silver. "Oh, crumbs! This is what we get for backing up old Bulkeley, and saving the match for our side, and frustrating Knowles' knavish tricks. Blessed if I'll bother about his knavish tricks any more. Oh, my hat!"

And the Co. groaned assent.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Well Won!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were rather late on Big Side for the match. They found the Rookwood fellows swarming round the field of play, and there was no room for them anywhere near the pavilion.

The match had already started, and Bulkeley and Neville had opened for the Classics, and the Moderns were in the field, Knowles bowling the first over.

Knowles was not looking quite so fit as usual.

His scheme had been shattered like a house of cards—the certain win he had been counting on was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, and he felt that Bulkeley knew, or, at least, suspected his treachery. Bulkeley had spoken a few words to him before the match. The Rookwood captain said simply that he had told the four juniors to hold their tongues, and that the matter had better be allowed to drop for everybody's sake.

Knowles, only too glad to let it drop, had assented at once—greatly relieved in his mind, but feeling that his ready assent was as good as an admission that he was concerned in the plot with Joey Hook.

But he did not feel quite himself. Bulkeley, saved from that fool's errand to Shoresmouth, was playing in the Classical team. On its merits, the Modern team could not win. The great object Knowles had had before him was slipping from his grasp. He was down-hearted, dismayed, irritable, uneasy—in anything but a mood to put up a good game.

That was soon evident from his bowling. He was the best bowler at Rookwood; but now that he needed all his skill he was bowling like a fog. The wretched schemer was completely off his form.

Loud cheers from the Classic crowd greeted Bulkeley's mighty hitting. The captain of Rookwood was piling up runs. The score was at fifty before a single Classic wicket fell.

The Moderns, with the exception of Knowles and Catesby, played hard. There were some good catches in the field, and Frampton did some good bowling. But Catesby was like a limp rag, and Knowles was off colour. The Classic first innings was a tremendous success.

The Modern innings made their supporters groan; they were all down for forty. The Moderns followed their innings, and the Classical crowd chortled. It looked as if the Classic team would win with an innings to spare.

Wicket after wicket went down, and it soon became clear to the most obstinate and enthusiastic Modern that the second innings would not pull the team level with their opponents. Last man in was greeted with a chuckle of derision from the Classic juniors.

He did not stay in long. The last batsmen did their best to force the Classics to bat again at least, but they could not do it. Fifty-five was the score for the second innings when the last wicket fell to Neville's bowling.

"Total for two innings, ninety-five!" gurgled Jimmy Silver. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, the Modern boys are licked by an innings and fifteen runs! Where will Knowles get those six places from—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the field rang with Classical cheering.

Knowles strode away from the field of his defeat, his brow black, his teeth set, his eyes glinting green. The way of the transgressor is hard, and Knowles was finding it so.

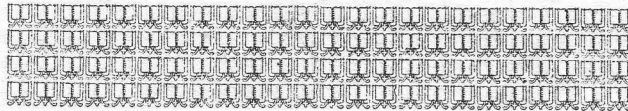
In the end study, after the match, the Fistical Four went carefully through all their pockets in search for forgotten sixpences and coppers, and pooled the result, and paid a visit to the tuckshop. They felt that that great occasion had to be celebrated. It did not often fall to fellows in the Fourth Form to save a First Eleven match—especially a trial match upon which so much depended.

"Only to think," said Jimmy Silver, "that if we hadn't spotted the little game the Classics would have been licked, and the First Eleven would have been fairly in the hands of those Modern cads! Only think of it! Gentlemen and chaps, we've saved old Rookwood from going to the giddy bow-wows! Here's to us, and may our shadow never grow less! We are it—absolutely it!"

And the Co. agreed heartily that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, they were IT!

THE END.

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THE BLACK SHEEP!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Wiles of Cutts!

TOM MERRY was the cynosure of all juniors' eyes in the School House of St. Jim's, when he came out of the Shell Form-room after morning lessons.

It was Wednesday—a half-holiday. The cricket season was in full swing, and matches were being played out with undiminished keenness. That afternoon the School House juniors were very interested to know how the eleven was to be made up. Of course, in a House match there were certain players who were bound to be played, weak players having to be contented with chances in less important meetings or in practice matches. But the "tail" of the eleven was subject to changes; and a good many fellows hoped to find their names down.

Tom Merry was known to have the list in his pocket, ready to be pasted up on the board—hence the eagerness with which the fellows watched him out of the Form-room.

The regular House matches were over, the present one being an "extra" arranged chiefly for practice, the Junior Eleven being hard at practice to get into top form for their final tussle with the Grammar School, which was coming off shortly.

Tom Merry walked down the wide passage with nearly all the Shell and the Fourth after him, and stopped solemnly before the notice-board, and pinned up his paper.

There were other papers pinned up there— notices from the Housemasters, notices to Forms from Form-masters, notices from the captain of the school, from the president of the Senior Debating Society, notices of fixtures of the First Eleven; but the juniors of the School House passed them all over as things of little account.

What interested them was the notice in Tom Merry's big handwriting. Tom walked out of the School House immediately he had pinned up the paper. He wanted to save argument. The matter was settled, and it was no use talking.

Kangaroo of the Shell—otherwise, Harry Noble—read the list down, and was satisfied with it. Needless to say, the name of Kangaroo appeared there.

Merry, Lowther, Mammers, Noble, Dane, Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Reilly, Kerruish.

That was the Junior House Eleven for the occasion.

"Well, that seems all right!" said Blake. "Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I trust you fellows are goin' to back me up this afternoon in givin' the New House a fearful thrashin'!"

"We're all in top form," said Blake. "And Dig is coming on well in fielding. We shall expect you to look out for Fatty Wynn's bowling, Dig."

Digby coloured.

"Me!" he said awkwardly and ungrammatically.

"You!" said Blake, with a nod. "Don't say you don't feel fit. You're as fit as a fiddle. I hear that Figgins & Co. are in great form, and Redfern and Kerr are specially on the warpath with their batting. We shall want a good field."

"I'm not playing!" said Digby.

Herries and Blake and D'Arcy all turned round at once, and stared at Digby in a decidedly discomfiting manner.

"I didn't know you were setting up as a humorist, Dig," said Blake pleasantly; "and I don't quite see where the joke of that remark comes in."

"It isn't a joke!" said Dig.

"It must be! You know very well you're

playing. Can't you see your name in the list? Or have you lost your eyesight or forgotten how to read?"

"I'm going out for Cutts," said Dig.

"Where? A giddy secret, I suppose?" snapped Blake.

"No. He's asked me to go over to Abbotsford for him, on my bike, to take a message to Hallam, at Abbotsford School," said Dig. "It's about a swimming match."

"Why can't he write?"

"He says there's a hurry for it, and I couldn't refuse to oblige him. I wasn't sure Tom Merry would put my name down; and as it isn't a regular match I don't mind so much missing it. Gore can play instead. He'll be glad of the chance."

"Well, I don't know that there's any harm in your biking over to Hallam at Abbotsford," said Blake reluctantly. "There's nothing but that in it—simply a message to Hallam at Abbotsford School?"

"That's all!" said Dig. "I don't say I'm pleased at standing out of the game, but Cutts asked me to do it as a favour, and I didn't like to say 'No!' after he stood me such a ripping tea yesterday, and helped me with my prep last night, too. It's little enough to do for a chap, and Cutts says it's important."

Blake and Herries and D'Arcy turned the matter over in their minds. It did not seem possible, deeply as they distrusted Gerald Cutts and all his works, to find fault in this. They had seen Hallam of Abbotsford, and knew that he was a decent fellow. It certainly would not hurt Dig to take a message to him.

"Cutts isn't going with you?" asked Blake finally.

"No, ass; he's got to see his uncle this afternoon!"

"But you want to see him, too, don't you? What about the quid Cutts said he would tip you—to say nothing of his being your pater's old chum?"

"That's all right! Cutts says he is staying the evening, and going back by the late train, and I shall be back before dark," said Dig.

"Well, I suppose you can go," said Blake grudgingly. "I must say I can't see any harm in it. But I don't trust Cutts, and I wouldn't miss the match for all the Cutts in Christendom—Comic Cuts, or Gerald Cutts, or any Cutts!"

"Well, I couldn't say 'No!' " said Dig.

"No; that's the kind of duffer you are," agreed Blake compassionately. "Now, in Yorkshire, where I come from, we can say 'No!' sharp enough, I can tell you!"

"Weally, Blake, it would have been wathah ungwacious of Dig to wufuse," said Arthur Augustus, with an air of deep consideration.

"Rats!" said Blake. "Let's find Tom Merry, and tell him the silly chump is staying out because he couldn't say 'No!' to Cutts or 'Boo!' to a goose. Come on!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Uncle and Nephew!

MAJOR CUTTS came down the road from Rylcombe with a cavalry stride. He was a thick-set, square-shouldered man, with a complexion burnt bronze by an African sun, and a sword-cut across his cheek that gave him a somewhat grim appearance. When the major was angry—which was not seldom—that old scar would begin to glow, and the major's acquaintances looked upon it as a danger-signal. The major was a tough old soldier, who had seen service under many skies, and was as hard as hickory—outside, if not inside.

The major had walked from the station. He paused as he came in sight of the old stone

gateway of St. Jim's, and glanced in. Taggles did not know whom he was, but the major's manner impelled respect. The major gave him a kind word, in spite of his grim look, and paused to speak to him.

"Taggles, what?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Taggles.

"Glad to see you again," said the grim-looking old soldier. "You don't remember me? I came here years ago, Taggles, before I went to Egypt, when my nephew was a junior—eh? I suppose Master Cutts is about somewhere?"

"Major Cutts, sir," said Taggles—"I remember you now, sir. Quite so, sir. Werry kind of you to remember me, sir. Yes, sir, Master Cutts is in the School House, sir. Shall I show you the way, sir?"

"Don't trouble; I remember it."

The major passed on, and Taggles looked after him, and wondered what Major Cutts would have thought if he had known that his nephew had had another caller the previous afternoon, and no other than Jonas Hooke, the notorious bookmaker of Abbotsford. For although Cutts had explained the matter away so satisfactorily to Mr. Raitton, Taggles knew perfectly well that Cutts's visitor had been Jonas Hooke, the bookmaker. But it was not his business to say so to Major Cutts, certainly. He felt that he would not have cared to be in Gerald Cutts's shoes if the major had known that little circumstance, however.

The major crossed the quadrangle, and Cutts, looking out from his study window, recognised the broad-shouldered man with the cavalry swagger. Cutts turned to Knox of the Sixth, who was in the study with him, and yawned.

"Cut off, Knox, old man. Here comes my uncle. Put those blessed bridge-markers in your pocket!"

And Knox grinned, and departed from the study with the bridge-markers in his pocket.

Cutts sat down at the table, and opened a Greek lexicon, a grammar, and a volume of Xenophon. He took from the bookshelf "Mugs on Fortification," and "Skeggs on the Care of Cavalry Horses," and laid the volumes on the table where they could not fail to catch the major's eye.

He was deep in Xenophon when a heavy stride came along the passage. The volume was the Anabasis—the Retreat of the Ten Thousand—the volume in which Xenophon relates the adventure of the ten thousand Greeks who marched home from the heart of Asia Minor, with a courage and determination only equalled by the courage and determination of modern readers who pursue the narrative to the end.

Tap!

Cutts rose to his feet as the door opened to admit his uncle. Toby was grinning behind the major in the passage. He had shown a very different sort of visitor into the study the previous day, and he could not help thinking of it at the moment.

"Uncle!" exclaimed Cutts.

And he ran forward to meet the major. Major Cutts shook hands with his nephew, giving him a grip that made Cutts wince.

"Well, Gerry, I'm glad to see you!" said the major, scanning his nephew with critical eyes and some approval. "You've grown."

"Yes; I was a nipper in the Second Form the last time you saw me, uncle," he said. "I remember the day you came. I'd had a licking for turning my trousers up. We don't let the fags do that here. I told you about it."

"You did!" grinned the major. "And you didn't blub, I remember. Where are you now—hey? In the Fifth Form, I think?"

"That's it!" said Cutts.

"What we used to call a swot, I suppose?" said the major, glancing at the books on the table.

Cutts shook his head.
"Not a bit of it," he said. "I work hard—I'm not ashamed of that—but I play hard, too. I'm in the First Eleven, and in the Senior Eight. But it's no good trying to get on without working, uncle, and I admit I slog a bit. I've taken up Greek, but I'm not neglecting the fortification and cavalry exercise. I can tell you. Only, don't look on me as a swot, please. I should be playing cricket this afternoon, but I've stayed in for you—and I was just filling up time with another dig at Xenophon."

"That's right!" said the major, greatly pleased. "Work hard and play hard. I heard about the school playing the famous Australian team, the Wallabies!"

"I was in the School Eleven," said Cutts modestly.

"Good, my boy!" The major deposited his person in the easy-chair, Cutts remaining standing. "Sit down, Gerry. I want a talk with you!"

"Go ahead, sir!"

"Getting on all right in the school—hey?"

"I think the Head will give you a pretty good report, uncle."

"And still wanting to go into the cavalry?"

"I've set my heart on that, sir. Of course, I know my father's made heaps of money as a merchant; but—but—Dash it all, uncle, you are in the cavalry, and you wouldn't be anything else for heaps of money, would you?"

"Right, my boy—right!" said the major, with a chuckle. "I'll see that your father doesn't put any obstacles in your way. By Jove, sir, if he does, I'll alter my will, and leave all my Consols to another nephew, by Jove!"

"That would be hardly fair on me, would it, uncle?" said Cutts, with a smile.

The major laughed.

"Depend upon me to make it all right for you there," he said. "Your father agrees with me about that. Your father looks after you all right here? Plenty of tin—hey?"

"Oh, plenty, sir!" said Cutts. "And you have been so generous, it would have been all right, anyway. I spend a good bit on books—I'm keeping Sandhurst in view all the time, you see, sir—and I may have been a bit extravagant in riding horses; but, as I'm going into the cavalry, that is really a necessity—don't you think so, sir? As a matter of fact, I've sold my bike to pay a bill at the livery stables. But I don't mind that; I sha'n't be in the cycle corral!"

"Oh, gad, that's too bad!" his uncle said. "You'll order a new bicycle—do you hear?—and tell them to send the bill to me!"

"You're kindness itself, uncle," said Cutts. He had had inwardly a hope that the major would lay down the money.

"By the way, there's young Digby—old Bob's son," said the major. "You've been keeping an eye on him, as I asked you?"

Cutts became very grave. He did not reply for the moment, and the major's sharp eyes became sharper.

"Nothing the matter with Digby, is there?" he asked. "Bob Digby was my fag at Harrow, and I should be sorry if there was anything wrong with his boy."

"He's in good health, uncle."

"Slacker at his work—hey?"

"I think not. I help him with his work sometimes," said Cutts modestly. "You see, he is in the Fourth Form, so I don't have anything to do with him, unless I look him out specially. I find time to help him a bit with his Form work."

The major nodded approval.

"That's right, Gerry. But what's the matter with him, then? Don't beat about the bush, sir. I can see you've got something on your mind."

Cutts hesitated.

"The fact is, uncle, there is—or, rather, was—something wrong about Sir Robert Digby's son," he said slowly. "But—but I don't know if I ought to tell you."

"You'd better," said the major. "I want to see him as well as you while I'm here; and if there's anything wrong, his father's got to know."

Cutts assumed an expression of great alarm.

"Not his father, sir! His father must not know! Good heavens!"

The major looked very startled.

"What do you mean, boy? What is the matter with young Digby? I insist upon knowing at once! Has he been getting into trouble?"

"Don't be angry with me, uncle. But if

I tell you, it will have to be in confidence, and on condition that Sir Robert Digby isn't told a word about it, and that you don't say a word to Dig about it, either. I promised him to keep it a secret—and you wouldn't ask me to break my word, sir?"

"Certainly not. But—"

"I'm going to tell you—in fact, I must tell you, for I want you to help me, sir, in the matter; but not a word further. I may tell you, anyway, that Digby got himself into frightful trouble, and I found it out, and saved him from taking an awful step. If I never have anything else to be thankful for, I shall always be thankful for that," said Cutts.

"You saved him?"

"Yes, uncle."

"I'm glad of that, Gerry," said the major, his voice a little husky. "I'm glad my nephew was here to help old Bob's son in the time of need. But you must tell me—all, do you understand?"

"Not unless you promise me not to breathe a word to Sir Robert, sir!" said Cutts firmly. "It would be a fearful blow to him, and I promised Digby that his father should never know."

"Well, I promise that."

"Nor speak about it to Digby himself either, sir? He would not dare to face you. In fact, only to-day, as soon as he heard you were coming, he ran out and mounted his bicycle, and has ridden off, goodness knows where!"

"Do you mean to say that the boy dare not meet his father's old friend?" exclaimed the major, aghast.

Cutts nodded.

"You don't know what he's been through, sir. Besides, it's all over now, so far as Digby is concerned. I've promised him that his father shall not know, and that, if I tell you, you will promise not to mention the matter to him."

"You must tell me, Jerry."

"Give me your word, sir, not to mention it to the poor kid. I assure you he is out of his trouble now, and has promised to keep straight, and has kept his word. I keep him very closely under my eye now, I promise you. He has had his lesson, and it has done him good. But if the matter were revived, I could not answer for what might happen. When I explain everything, you will see for yourself. And I gave Digby my word of honour, sir—the word of Major Cutts' nephew!"

"You should not have done so, Gerald. But having done so you cannot break it, certainly. Well, I promise what you tell me shall not pass my lips to Digby or his father. Now, tell me what it is. You have alarmed me horribly."

"I'd better show you the letter, sir."

"The letter! What letter?"

"The letter the boy had written in despair when I found him, and talked him out of his folly and helped him," said Cutts. "You know Digby's hand?"

"Yes. I had a letter from him yesterday."

"Then you will recognise this."

Cutts opened his pocket-book and took out a folded letter. He opened it, and laid it on the table before the major. Major Cutts read it, and stared, and gnawed his grey moustache, and set his teeth hard.

For this was the letter:

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

Your miserable son,
"ROBERT."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Cheque.

THERE was a long silence in the study. The major gazed blankly at the letter he had read in Digby's handwriting. He knew the hand. He had Dig's letter in his pocket at that moment, and this was the same sprawling, schoolboy hand. The half-incoherent wording of the letter seemed to show the dreadful stress of mind under which it had been writ-

ten. The major's eyes were dimmed as he looked up at last. Cutts was watching his face with keen, scanning eyes.

"Good heavens!" the major said at last.

Cutts gave a sigh.

"You understand now, sir, why Sir Robert must know nothing of it. I think it would have broken his heart if he had received that letter."

"Poor old Bob!" said the major. "I think it would. And you say that the foolish boy was actually going to send this letter to his father?"

"I found him with it on the table before him, sir. He was half beside himself, crying as if his heart would break," said Cutts, with an artistic shake in his voice. "I had noticed that there was something wrong with him for some time past, and I had asked him questions; but he always evaded answering. But several times he asked me to lend him money, so I guessed that money trouble was at the bottom of it. The night he wrote this letter I had been struck by his looks, and I was very uneasy. I was, in fact, thinking about him, and I had gone out into the quad to take a turn before going to bed, and was wondering whether I ought to write to his father, or speak to the Head; but you understand that it would have been a delicate matter to risk getting the kid into trouble with his people."

The major nodded without speaking.

"I was in a most unpleasant frame of mind, as you can imagine," said Cutts. "Then I saw that there was a light in the window of Digby's study. It was an hour after the bedtime of the Fourth Form, and the study should have been dark, of course, and it struck me at once that Digby had come down for something, and I hurried to the study at once. He was sitting there, with this letter on the table before him. He had just written it, and I read it over his shoulder. Under the circumstances, I felt I was justified in doing so, sir," added Cutts.

"Yes, yes; of course!"

"Then I knew what he meant to do. He was going to get out of the school and drop into the river. His troubles had unnerved him to that extent, and he was not at all himself," said Cutts. "He was worried to the pitch of suicide. I was so horror-stricken that I cried out something, and then he found I was in the study. He jumped up and ran to the door, and I had to struggle with him to stop him. But I got him back and locked the door, and talked to him. I needn't tell you what I said. I was rather upset myself, but I got the whole miserable story out of him. He had been led into gambling—putting money on horses—and had borrowed money, too, the rascals knowing that his father was a baronet, and knowing that Sir Robert would pay them to avoid a scandal. Of course, they couldn't have understood the pitch of desperation they were driving the boy to. Digby dared not write to his father to say he owed seventy-five pounds. He knew Sir Robert would never have paid such a sum. He was terrified at the thought of the exposure and scandal—and, of course, he would have been expelled from the school when the truth came out—and so he had made up his mind to do the mad thing."

"The scoundrels!" said the major.

"I talked him out of it. I made him promise to go back to bed," said Cutts. "But there was only one way I could influence him. I promised to pay the money for him, and set him free from his creditors. On his side, he promised never to mix with such rascals again; and he has kept his word, sir. A straighter, better kid than Digby couldn't be found in the school to-day! I give you my word about that, sir."

"I'm glad to hear it, Gerald. I certainly think such a lesson ought to be enough for him."

"It was enough, sir."

"But you say you promised to pay the money, Gerald," said the major, puzzled. "Have you told anyone else about this?"

"No one, sir."

"Not your father?"

"Not a word, sir. My father would think me a fool. Business men take different views of matters, sir," said Cutts. "I hope you don't think it wrong of me to confide in you instead of my father? I felt that you would understand the case better, somehow. And you have been in a way responsible, as it was by your request that I took Digby under my wing, so to speak."

"That is right, Gerald. But if you have not asked your father for the money, how could you have obtained such a sum as seventy-five pounds?"

Cutts hesitated.

"I'm afraid you'll blame me, sir," he said. "But think of the circumstances! In the heat of the moment I promised Dig that I would pay his debts. He would listen to nothing else. I took him back to his dormitory, and took charge of this letter, and I may say, sir, that I did not sleep again that night. I was afraid he might still do something foolish, and I watched outside his dormitory door till morning."

"It was kind of you, Gerald."

"About the money. I raised it, and Digby paid the harpies who were threatening him, and got back the papers he had signed. I examined the papers, and we burnt them together in the study fire."

"Then Digby is quite clear?"

"Quite. It is I"—Cutts smiled ruefully—"it is I who am in a fix instead. There was only one way to get the money, sir. I could not ask my father for such a sum, and you were still in Africa then—or, rather, on the steamer home. I raised seventy-five pounds from a moneylender."

"Gerald!"

"I was afraid you would condemn me, sir," said Cutts submissively. "But I could not think of anything else to do. The man—a man named Hooke—is fair in his way. I have paid the interest out of my allowance. It has kept me pretty short, I admit, but—I don't complain of that. Uncle, I'll admit that I hoped that when you came home you would help me."

The major was silent. His eyes were again on the letter on the table, and he did not see the almost haggard anxiety with which Cutts was watching his face.

"Did Digby know how you raised the money, Gerald?" he asked at last.

Cutts shook his head.

"I did not tell him, sir. The poor fellow had enough to bear—it was useless telling him that, too. He could not help it. I did it on my own responsibility, after thinking and thinking and thinking to try to find some other way. I told Digby that if he would promise to go straight, and keep his promise, he should never hear a word of the matter again—from me, from you, from anyone. He has kept his word. Uncle, I know what a serious thing it is for a fellow of my age to have dealings with moneylenders. My only excuse is that it was not for myself, but to save the son of your old friend—the boy you had asked me to look after."

"You did right, Gerald. There was no other way, I suppose," said the major. "But it is surprising that a moneylender should make you such a loan. He must know that he could not recover it at law, as you are a minor."

"They know their business, sir. The man would only have to send his claim to the Head of St. Jim's, and I should be expelled from the school for having had dealings with him. He considered that my relations would find the money rather than that; he knows my people are right."

"You risked all that, Gerald, to save my friend's son—because I had asked you to take care of him," said the major.

"I did, sir, though I may say I like the lad very much myself. He is a fine fellow, and, as I said, as straight as a die now he's out of his trouble."

"You owe this man—this Hooke—seventy-five pounds?" said the major, after a pause.

"Yes, sir."

"What interest have you been paying him?"

"Five shillings a week, sir."

"The rascal! Why that would be more than fifteen per cent!" the major exclaimed.

"I had no choice in the matter, sir."

"The rascal shall be paid," said the major. "I will draw a cheque for the amount. His claim shall be met in full, and I should like to have the pleasure of kicking him down stairs, begad, as well! The name is—what—Hooke?"

"Better make the cheque to Hooke & Griggs—that is the name of the firm, sir," said Cutts, his hands trembling a little.

"Give me a pen!"

Major Cutts extracted a large leathern wallet from an inside pocket, and opened it, and produced his cheque-book. Cutts, in spite of his nerve, felt a little giddy. He had played out that cunning comedy with a ruthless and unscrupulous determination; but he knew how much he was risking. Even now that he had gained his point, and swindled his uncle of the seventy-five pounds he owed to Hooke & Griggs, he did not feel safe—he knew he was not safe. Even yet, at any moment, his house of cards might come toppling down—an edifice of lies is never a safe erection. But his hand was firm as he passed the pen to the major.

Major Cutts wrote out the cheque, and Cutts could scarcely trust his eyes as he read: "Pay Messrs. Hooke & Griggs the sum of seventy-five pounds—£75." The major detached the cheque from the book, and blotted it, and handed it to Cutts.

"Send that to the man, and have done with him," he said.

"Uncle, how kind you are!"

The uncle made a gesture.

"I feel that I caused this, in a way, Gerald, by asking you to take care of Digby," he said. "But, mark me, if anything of the kind should recur, you are to communicate with me at once—let me know, and I will deal with the matter!"

"I shall obey you, sir. But I am sure nothing of the kind can occur. I have kept a very sharp eye on Digby, and I am quite satisfied."

"I am glad to hear that, at all events."

"I am sorry you won't see him, sir," said Cutts regretfully. "I think you mentioned in your letter you had to take the six o'clock train back. I am afraid that Digby will stay out until you are gone."

The major shook his head.

"I shall see him!" he said quietly.

"But your train, sir?"

"I can send a telegram, and catch a later one."

"But—but you will say nothing to Digby. You remember—"

"I shall not forget my promise, Gerald," said the major, with dignity. "But I must see Bob's son before I go. I am decided about that."

Cutts was conscious again of a giddy feeling in the head. He had played out his dangerous game with success so far, but who could tell? Yet even then his nerve was of iron; his look did not change.

"I'm glad you can stay, uncle," he said.

"I remember your catching trains was always like the laws of the Medes and Persians."

"This is an exceptional matter," said the major.

"Indeed it is, uncle. I suppose I had better send this cheque at once?"

"Certainly! I will walk down to the post-office with you, and you can register it," said the major.

There was a curse in Gerald Cutts' heart, but his face was still smiling.

"That will be ripping, sir! Come on, then!"

Uncle and nephew left the study together.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Up to Gussy!

TOM MERRY glanced over the foaming top of his glass of ginger-beer, and remarked:

"That's Cutts' uncle!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded. Tom and Arthur Augustus were "out" in the House match, and Kangaroo and Reilly were batting for all they were worth, and Tom had crossed over to the tuckshop for a "ginger-pop."

Tom had to keep his eye on the field, but Arthur Augustus, as a common or garden member of the team, was taking things easy now, gently and delicately sipping iced lemonade through a straw.

D'Arcy let go the straw, and adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and took a careful survey of the soldierly-looking man who was leaving the distant School House in company with Cutts of the Fifth.

"Looks a vewy decent sort!" he said.

"A little bit like Cutts in feature," said Tom Merry; "but a better specimen, I fancy. I've heard of him from my uncle—he's a major, and a good soldier!"

"Too good for that wascal Cutts!" said D'Arcy. "See how Cutts is makin' up to him. I myself heard him waffer disrespectfully to his uncle in speakin' to a Fifth Form chap, and look at him now!"

"Rotten humbug!" said Tom Merry, finishing his ginger-beer. "I'm off!"

Tom Merry walked back to the cricket. Jack Blake took his empty seat at the little table under the elm outside the school shop. Blake had gone down under Fatty Wynn's deadly bowling for 19.

"Warm, ain't it?" Blake remarked. "Did you say ginger, Gussy? Certainly—as many as you like—and ask 'em to ice it!"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He was going towards the major and his nephew. Major Cutts was approaching. The major had evidently caught a glimpse of the cricket-field, and wished to see the fellows playing. Besides the junior House match there was a Form match between Fifth and Sixth, and all the mighty men of the two top Forms were engaged in strife with the nimble willow and the elusive leather.

Kildare was hitting out to the bowling of Lefevre of the Fifth, and the hitting of the captain of St. Jim's was worth watching.

Major Cutts was an old cricketer—he had played at Lord's for Harrow in his time—and he was naturally keen on the great summer game.

Blake followed Arthur Augustus' glance curiously, and spotted Cutts and his uncle.

"Oh," said Blake, "old Cutts and young Cutts—eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Looks a tough old sport. Ginger-beer, please, Mrs. Taggies! No; don't get up, I'll come and fetch it!"

And Blake good-naturedly went in for the ginger-beer to save the old lady getting up and putting down her knitting.

When he came out again D'Arcy's eyeglasses were still fastened upon the bronzed major. The swell of St. Jim's was deep in thought.

"Digby's father is an old friend of Majah Cutts," said Arthur Augustus at last. "And Dig's gone out; I'm sure he wouldn't have gone if he'd known the majah was coming. I think it is up to me to explain."

Arthur Augustus rose from his seat and strolled across to get into the major's path as he came down to the cricket-ground. The swell of St. Jim's considered for a moment the possibility of dashing into the School House for a silk hat, as the visitor was a person whom he would have delighted to honour; but there was no time, neither would a silk hat have looked quite "en regle" with a cricket blazer. D'Arcy satisfied himself with raising his straw in the most elegant manner as the major came up.

Cutts of the Fifth gave him a stony look. He didn't want the major to get into talk with any of Dig's chums if he could help it. A chance word might knock over his house of cards, and he knew it.

But Major Cutts, naturally, paused as the elegant and handsome junior stood in his path with a polite bow and a lifted straw hat.

"Pwax excuse me, sir," said Arthur Augustus, in his most winning manner. "I pwesume, sir, that you are Majah Cutts?"

"Quite right," said Cutts' uncle.

"I am D'Arcy of the Fourth, sir. Pwax excuse the liberty I take in addressin' you, but I am Dig's best chum."

"Indeed?" said the major.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! And I feel bound to expwess Dig's wegwet that he is not here to greet you, sir. We know all about your bein' his patah's old pal, and Dig would have been vewy glad to meet you heah, but he has had to go out."

"Is that so?" said the major, a little surprised. "Did Digby say that he wanted to see me, D'Arcy?"

"Well, I do not remembah his words, sir," said D'Arcy. "but certainly he did wish to; and as you appear to be goin' early, I thought I ought to mention that he will be vewy sowwy to miss you. He wcedly had to go out this aftahnoon, to oblige Cutts—"

"What?"

"Nonsense!" said Cutts, a dull flush rising in his cheeks.

For a moment his heart had stood still at the horrible risk of his uncle discovering that he had purposely sent Digby away from the school that afternoon. His eyes gleamed with suppressed rage as he looked at the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy looked surprised.

"I do not like to heah my wemarks chwawtwised as nonsense, Cutts," he said stiffly. "I certainly think you should have explained to Majah Cutts why Dig is not heah, as you know vewy well why he is not heah. It would be wotten to allow the majah to think that Dig has been wude and neglectful to his patah's oldest friend."

Major Cutts gave his nephew a curious look.

"I shall see Digby," he said. "I had intended to leave early, but I am staying later, as it happens, D'Arcy. When Digby comes in, will you tell him I want to see him?"

"With pleasuah, sir!"

And D'Arcy raised his straw hat again and stepped aside. Major Cutts and his nephew walked on to the cricket-ground.

Cutts considered it better to let the matter drop there. He realised that he would have to see Digby and speak with him before the latter saw the major. If Major Cutts had kept to his original intention of leaving by an early train, all would have been well. Cutts would have seen him safely off before Dig returned—all chance of an explanation would have been avoided. But the major was grimly determined to see Digby. He

pledged word kept him from apprising Dig of Cutts' lying tale, but a chance word might bring everything out into the light. Cutts was walking in very slippery places, and he realised it very clearly.

He was thinking over it as he stood watching the cricket by the old soldier's side. Major Cutts was watching Fatty Wynn bowling against Kangooroo with keen interest. Cutts hardly saw the cricket at all. His brain was busy.

"Any minute—any minute—it may come out any minute!" so ran his thoughts, in a kind of hammering chorus in his brain. "But what could I do? I've got the cheque, and those bloodsuckers will be paid! If they hadn't been paid, they would have cast me off. I know that! If the worst happens, he can't do worse than that now. I've really risked nothing. If I hadn't taken the risk, what I'm risking now would be a certainty instead of a risk. I've done the best that could be done under the circumstances, and if my luck holds out— Oh, if I could only get him away from St. Jim's! Why doesn't he go?"

The major would have been very much surprised if he could have been aware of the thoughts that were passing through the mind of his dutiful nephew.

"Well hit!" shouted the major, as the Cornstalk junior sent the ball away to the boundary. "That's a coming man, Gerry. Who is he?"

"Eh? Who?" said Cutts vaguely.

The major turned to stare at him.

"Didn't you see that hit?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Oh, yes! Yes, rather!"

"Who's the kid?"

"Noble, of the Shell," said Cutts. "He's an Australian. Shall we be getting down to the post-office, uncle? I should like this letter to catch the collection, so that they'll get it to-night."

"Oh, certainly, my boy!"

The major turned somewhat reluctantly away from the cricket, and uncle and nephew walked down to the post-office in Rylecombe, where the cheque was duly sealed up in a registered envelope and despatched.

Cutts drew a deep, deep breath of relief when it was gone, and he had the receipt for it in his pocket. Whatever happened now, he was safe from Griggs and Jonas Hooke. Even if anything came out, his uncle would not be likely to stop the cheque. All he had to do now was to get rid of his uncle before the truth came out—and that was his one anxiety. Any kind of concern for the junior whose name he had blackened, whose reputation he had blasted in the eyes of his father's friend, did not enter Cutts' mind. He had no time to think of Digby—he was too busy thinking about himself!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Dig and the Major.

DIG came in after the House match was finished. His chums met him as he was wheeling in his bicycle. Dig was a little tired with his very long ride.

"How did it go?" he asked, as he caught Tom Merry in the quad.

Tom smiled.

"A draw!" he said. "We tied with the New House for exactly a hundred. Figgins came near knocking up some more, but Lowther caught him out just in time. Kerr was not out."

"Glad the House was not licked," said Dig.

"Delivered your precious message?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Major Cutts is here," said D'Arcy. "He asked me to tell you that he wanted to see you, Dig. I am pretty certain that Cutts has not mentioned that he sent you out this afternoon, for some reason. I felt that I was bound to point out to the majah that you did not intend to be disrespectful in goin' out. You had better explain to Majah Cutts that you had to go."

"Well, I didn't have to go," said Dig. "I went to oblige Cutts. Cutts will have told the majah that, I suppose, if he asked after me."

"I'm quite sure he hasn't."

"Oh, rot!" said Dig.

And he wheeled away his bicycle. He was putting the machine up in the bike-shed when Cutts of the Fifth came in. Cutts had been keeping an eye open for Digby, and he spotted the Fourth-Former immediately he came inside the gates.

"Given Hallam my message?" he asked.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 13.

"Yes," said Dig. "Here's the answer." Cutts took the note, and put it in his pocket without opening it.

"By the way, my uncle wants to see you. It seems that your father specially asked him to see you, and tell him how you are getting on."

"Right-ho!" said Digby.

"The major is a bit rusty at your being out," said Cutts.

"Didn't you tell him—"

"I was just telling him, but he was so annoyed that I didn't dare to go on," said Cutts. "I have to keep him in a good temper, you know. It may mean a fiver to me, and a quid to you, Digby, if he keeps his blessed temper while he's here. Be a bit tactful with him, won't you?"

Dig grinned.

"I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle," he said.

"Don't mention that I sent you over to Abbotsford. It will get his rag out at once."

"All right."

"He would be ratty if he knew I sent you out this afternoon. You'll be careful not to let him know it?"

"Rely on me," said Dig cheerfully. "I won't make any trouble between you and your uncle, Cutts; you may be sure of that."

For a moment Cutts' hard heart smote him. The generous confidence of the boy touched some chord within him.

Little did poor Dig dream of the use the cad of the Fifth had been making of his name—of the letter he had so unconsciously written, in the belief that was a scene in a play.

Little did he guess that Cutts had blackened his name without leaving a chance of clearing it, because he would never even know that it had been blackened.

"Thank you, Dig!" said Cutts. "You're a good kid."

Digby fastened his bicycle on the stand, and came out of the shed with Cutts.

"My uncle is in my study now," said the Fifth-Former. "Will you come there and see him?"

"Yes; when I've got some of the dust off," said Dig.

"We're going to have tea," said Cutts. "It will be a decent spread, and the feed will help you to stand my uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come as soon as you're cleaned down."

"Right-ho!"

Digby went up to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House to change, and Cutts returned to his study. He had left his uncle

there, talking to Knox. Knox of the Sixth was entertaining the major with stories of Cutts' prowess in games, and the old soldier was listening with pleasure. He was very proud of his nephew, and he liked to hear about his great deeds on the playing-fields. And Knox, who intended to have a "whack" in Cutts' tip if it was a good one, piled it on for the major's benefit.

Curly Gibson, who fagged for Cutts, was preparing the tea. Cutts had guessed that his uncle would be pleased to be asked to a "study brew," and he intended that study brew to be a great success. With credit as yet unlimited, Cutts had plenty of supplies, and he had ragged Curly into being a clever and careful cook. The Major, who had a keen appetite, looked on at the preparations with great satisfaction as he sat in the window chatting with Knox.

Knox took his leave when the Fifth-Former came back.

In a few minutes Digby appeared in the study doorway, with a freshly-washed and glowing face and a spotless collar. He was a little shy with the grim-looking major, but the sight of the feed on the table made his face light up.

The major fixed his keen eyes upon the junior.

Dig's honest, simple face was hardly what Major Cutts expected to see after his nephew's description of what he had saved Digby from. Certainly, judging by appearances, no one would ever have suspected Digby of the Fourth of having been mixed up in gambling transactions with book-makers.

"Come here, my lad," said the major, not unkindly. "You are Bob Digby's son—hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Dig.

The major shook hands with him.

"I've promised your father to see you, and tell him how you look," said the major.

Dig smiled.

"You can tell him I'm in top form, sir," he said. "You can mention that I want a new cricket-bat, if you think of it, sir."

Major Cutts laughed.

"Did you know I was coming here to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir! Cutts told me."

"And did you think it was quite respectful to your father's old friend to go out the afternoon I was coming?" the major demanded.

Dig gave Cutts a look of dismay.

"I—I—" he stammered. "I knew I should see you before you went, sir, or I shouldn't have gone out. Cutts told me—"

Dig was about to state that Cutts had mentioned to him that the major would be staying later, but a look from Cutts stopped him in time. He broke off in confusion.

"Oh! You didn't know I was going by an early train?" said the major, mollified.

"No, sir."

"You didn't tell Digby I was leaving early, Gerald?"

"I—I'm afraid I forgot to mention it to him, sir," muttered Cutts.

Digby stared blankly at Cutts. Cutts had deliberately told him that the major would be catching a late train, and that Dig would have ample time to see him after coming back from Abbotsford.

It was quite clear now, even to Dig's simple and unsuspecting mind, that Cutts had known the major was going early, and had deliberately misled him. Why, Dig could not imagine. But the fact was clear enough.

Dig felt his face growing red. Cutts had lied to him, and had evidently lied to his uncle. Dig did not know why, but he was troubled and worried by it. The warnings of his chums came back to his mind. Why had Cutts lied? Did Cutts want to prevent him from meeting the major? Why on earth should he? Was there—as Tom Merry & Co. persisted in thinking—something hidden behind all this? Was some deep game being played under Cutts' curious and unlooked-for kindness and friendship?

Dig was not suspicious, but the thought would not be driven from his mind. He was feeling very uncomfortable, and even the sight of the excellent feed Cutts had provided did not wholly console him.

"Then you intended to see me, Digby?" the major pursued.

"Why, yes, sir!"

"You expected to be back at school before I left?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The major scanned his face. Dig was a little red, but he was looking surprised, too, at this close questioning, and his honest face was a sufficient guarantee that he was not speaking untruths.

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Cutts was in torture. He had been unable to prevent this meeting between his uncle and Digby. The major would not break his promise about the secret, but he was naturally determined to question Digby as much as he could without breaking that promise. And Dig's simple replies, full of honesty and straightforwardness, could not fail to impress the major. Already Major Cutts could see that his nephew had been, at least, mistaken in assuming that Dig had gone out that afternoon purposely to avoid meeting his father's old friend.

"Well, I am glad of that," said the major, after a pause. "I told your father I would see you, and send him news of you, and so I have stayed for a later train."

"It is very kind of you, sir," said Digby.

"Tea's ready!" said Cutts uneasily.

They sat down to tea, and Digby recovered his spirits. The ride had made him hungry, and the feed was really first-class. Dig began to enjoy himself, but Gerald Cutts was very far from enjoyment. For the major, naturally interested and anxious about Dig after what Cutts had told him of the junior's late difficulties and escapades, talked to the Fourth-Former incessantly, making him talk and drawing him out. And Digby ran on cheerfully. Dig had no objection to talking about himself, and his Form, and his work, and his play, and he was quite willing to give the major all the particulars he wanted to know.

And as the major listened to the cheerful and innocent talk, the wonder grew and grew in his perplexed mind—how could this cheery, thoughtless, happy junior ever have been in the driven and desperate frame of mind he must have been in when he wrote that fatal letter—that letter telling of debts, difficulties, terror, and contemplated suicide? And in the major's puzzled face Gerald Cutts watched the wonder grow and grow, and his own anxiety grew in equal measure.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Tom Merry Chips In.

FAG! Cutts called from his study doorway, and Curly Gibson came trotting along the passage.

The major and Dig were chatting over the tea-table. Dig was giving the major a description of the great Wallaby match which the juniors had watched on that famous occasion, and Major Cutts was listening with keen interest.

His interest was not only in the historic match, but in Digby himself. He was scanning and judging the boy's animated face as he talked.

Cutts had gone to the door to call his bag. He was on tenterhooks. His own part in the great Wallaby match the major did not know, and some inadvertent word from Digby might give him away, and lead to fresh surmises. To his over-sharpened faculties just now it seemed that his uncle already distrusted him.

"Curly, take this note to Knox," said Cutts, in a low voice, scribbling on a sheet of paper and handing it to the fag.

"Yes, Cutts."

Curly took the note, but Cutts took it back a second later, fetched an envelope from the study, and sealed the note in it. Curly looked at him indignantly.

"Do you think I'd read your blessed note, Cutts?" he demanded.

"Cut along with it!" said the Fifth-Former.

And Curly sulkily departed. He did not like the distrust of himself implied by the careful sticking up of the note in the envelope.

However, he hurried off in search of Knox of the Sixth. Knox was not in his study, and the fag looked round the House for him. He inquired of Tom Merry as he met him in the lower passage.

"Seen Knox?"

"He was in the quad a few minutes ago," said Tom Merry.

And Curly hurried off to look in the quadrangle.

He found Knox at last, chatting to Sefton of the New House. Curly dashed up to him breathlessly.

"Note for you, Knox, from Cutts."

And Curly vanished.

Knox opened the note, and gave a whistle as he read it, for it ran as follows:

"Will you get D. out of my study somehow?—C."

"My hat!" said Knox. "I wonder—excuse me, Seffy, I'm wanted." And, with a nod to

the New House senior, he walked away to the School House, looking very thoughtful.

Meanwhile, Dig was having the time of his life in Cutts' study, and Cutts was in a state of mental torment hard to describe.

A ripping feed, and a distinguished gentleman drawing him out, and making him talk about himself—naturally Dig was in high feather.

The kind major seemed to be deeply interested in everything that concerned Dig, and the junior was naturally flattered.

He was not at all averse to giving the old soldier the fullest particulars of everything.

"My nephew played in the Wally match, I understand," the major remarked presently.

Dig coloured for a moment—he remembered the unpleasant rumours in the Lower School about Cutts on that occasion. But it was not his business to give Cutts away to his uncle—he would have bitten off his tongue first.

"Yes, sir, Cutts was in the team," said Dig. "It was a ripping match, sir—and we beat them at the finish—beat the Wallabies, sir. There was a junior in our eleven—Fatty Wynn, of my Form. You should see him bowling."

The major smiled.

There was a tap at the door, and D'Arcy minor of the Third looked in.

"Is Digby here?"

"What-ho!" said Digby.

"Knox has sent me to say he wants you."

"Can't come!" said Dig. "Explain to Knox that I'm having tea with Major Cutts, and ask him to excuse me, young shaver."

"I'll 'young shaver' you!" murmured Wally.

He ran off. But he was back again in a couple of minutes.

"Knox says you're to go to his study at once."

"What for?"

"He wants you."

"I don't fag for Knox," said Digby independently.

"You had better go," said Cutts quietly. "I dare say he only wants to speak to you, Dig, and he'll let you come back."

"Yes; cut off!" said the major.

Dig rose reluctantly.

"I'm coming back to finish tea, anyway," he said. And he went out of the study.

When he was gone, the major turned to his nephew with a very perplexed expression. Cutts drew a deep, hard breath.

It was coming now, he felt. The major's expression was only perplexed—puzzled—but to Cutts' eye there was suspicion there. But he must allay it—disarm it. He felt that he could rely upon Knox to keep Digby out of the study. Knox did not know all his plot, but he had an idea of it, and was keenly interested in helping Cutts "tap" the major for a good-sized tip.

"It's very odd!" Cutts' uncle said at last.

"What is, sir?" asked the Fifth-Former.

"About Digby."

"I don't quite understand, sir."

"I have talked to him, questioned him, drawn him out in every way," said the major. "My idea was to see whether his character had been irreparably stained by his rascally experiences—whether he had really reformed. Gerald, he shows no sign whatever of having been through such experiences. If it were possible, I should suppose that you had made some egregious mistake—that Digby had never done a rascally action in his life. How he can be so free and talkative and merry, with such a thing on his mind, is more than I can imagine."

"I have taken it off his mind, sir, by helping him out," said Cutts, with a smile—a twisted and frozen smile.

"But he must remember it—if he has any conscience: it must torment him a little," the major said. "I—I suppose there is no mistake. You have not taken too serious a view of the position he was in—"

Cutts felt a chill inwardly. He knew that the major was struggling against a doubt that was rising in his breast.

"You can judge of the position by Digby's letter, sir," he said.

"True!" said Major Cutts. "Give me that letter again, Gerald."

Cutts handed it over.

Major Cutts read it through slowly, conning it over carefully word by word. Cutts knew that he was making an examination of the handwriting, to make sure that it was actually in Dig's hand. The major did not distrust his nephew—he would not have admitted that thought to himself for a second. But there was something in the matter he did not understand, and it puzzled and

worried him. Cutts' story did not agree with Dig's frankness and easiness. If the major had not seen Digby, he would not have entertained a doubt. But now he was so perplexed that he could not make it out. He did not distrust Cutts; but he was unconsciously following a line of reasoning which led inevitably to distrust of Cutts.

"It is extraordinary," the major said, laying the letter on his knee at last. "But for this letter in Digby's handwriting, Gerald, I should think that you had dreamed it all."

Cutts forced a laugh.

"I could not very well dream the letter," he said.

"No," said his uncle. "The letter clinches it. But that lad—so frank and open and free—yet with such a burden of guilt upon his mind—Gerald, it is almost impossible that any boy could be such a monument of lying and deceit and hypocrisy as Digby has proved himself to be, according to this letter, and to what you have told me."

"But, sir—"

Cutts did not finish.

The half-open door of the study was flung open, and Tom Merry of the Shell burst in. His face flushed crimson with indignation, and his eyes blazing wrathfully.

"You liar, Cutts!" he shouted.

Cutts started to his feet. He was white as death.

"Get out of my study, Merry!" he hissed, springing towards the junior. "How dare you listen at my door, you spying young hound!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists, and faced the Fifth-Former with fearless scorn.

"Don't touch me, Cutts! I shall hit out if you do! You cad! You liar! So that is the meaning of it all—we knew you were playing some caddish game—you have been slandering Dig behind his back while you pretended to be friendly to him. You villain!"

"Stop!" shouted the major, in a voice of thunder, as Gerald Cutts hurled himself at the junior. "Gerald, stand back!"

"Uncle! I—"

"Stand back!"

The major was on his feet now, his eyes gleaming. He pushed his nephew back, and then frowned sternly upon Tom Merry.

"Now kindly explain who you are, and how you have dared to come here and call my nephew a slanderer and a liar in my presence," he said.

"I'll do that fast enough. I'm Tom Merry of the Shell—and I came here for Dig. Knox is keeping him to do lines—and Dig asked me to come here and explain to you that he couldn't come back!" said Tom Merry. "I had just got to the door while you were speaking. I hadn't the slightest idea of listening—but your voice is loud—and I couldn't help it. Cutts is telling lies, as usual, when he says I was spying. I didn't know he was slandering Digby till you said so—and when I heard that—"

"Is Digby your friend?"

"Yes—not exactly a chum," said Tom Merry. "But we've been pals ever since I came to St. Jim's. I know Dig well enough to know that he's square all the time; and if Cutts says he isn't, Cutts is lying—as he always is! All St. Jim's knows Cutts, and there isn't a fellow in the school who would take his word without proof."

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Do you understand that it is my nephew you are speaking of?"

"I understand that it is my pal whose character he has been taking away!" said Tom Merry fearlessly. "You are Dig's pater's friend—and he has slandered Dig to you. He has given you lying yarns to take to Dig's father, perhaps. Send for Dig, and tell him what your nephew has said! I don't know what it was. But you spoke of lying and deceit and hypocrisy—and anybody in the School House will tell you that Dig couldn't be a liar or a hypocrite any more than he could fly!"

Tom Merry almost panted out the words in a blaze of indignation.

The major's stern look softened. Whether he believed Tom Merry's view or not, he could not be angry with a lad who stood up so promptly and fearlessly for his friend.

He looked at his nephew, and started. Gerald Cutts' face was perfectly livid. He knew that all was up now—and if ever guilt was written in any human face, it was written in Gerald Cutts' face at that moment.

The major looked at him long and hard—and a curious, worn look came over his own face.

"We shall have to go into this!" he said quietly.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

"The Way of the Transgressor."

CUTTS wetted his dry lips with his tongue. His brain was reeling now; his deadly coolness and self-possession seemed to be deserting him at last. But he made a tremendous effort to pull himself together. The game was up, but he would fight his ground inch by inch. Cool and steady lying might save him yet. There was the ghost of a chance.

"Go and fetch Digby," said Major Cutts. "Tell Knox I want him for a most important matter, and he must come, otherwise I shall appeal to the Head."

"Very well, sir!"

Tom Merry hurried away. He hurried to Knox's study, where Digby was sitting at the table dutifully writing lines. Knox was there, keeping an eye on him. Knox was doing his best for Cutts. Tom Merry came into the study without ceremony.

"Knox! Major Cutts wants Digby at once! It's very important!"

"He can't go!" said Knox angrily.

"If you don't let him go the major is going to ask the Head. Dig, you're to come at once. Cutts has been slandering you to his uncle, and I caught him at it. You've got to defend yourself."

"Oh, my hat!" said Dig.

Anti-leaving Knox standing puzzled and undecided. Dig followed Tom Merry from the study. As he hurried along Tom Merry explained to him in breathless, jerky sentences, and by the time they reached Cutts's study Dig was in a state of white heat and indignation.

Meanwhile the major had been speaking to his nephew—in very different tones from those Cutts had heard from him before. His uncle's voice was dry and hard.

"This must be thrashed out now, Gerald. You made me promise not to say a word to Digby. I presume that now, for the sake of clearing up the matter, you are willing that I should do so?"

"No, sir," said Cutts.

"If you refuse to have the matter cleared up, Gerald, I shall have to believe that you think I slandered Digby to me, as Tom Merry says."

"You have his letter in your hand," said Cutts.

"Will you let me show it to Digby?"

"You can please yourself, of course, if you distrust me."

"I cannot please myself!" said the old soldier sternly. "You have my word! But unless you allow me to show this letter to Digby, I must believe, sir, that it is a concoction of your own."

"Uncle!"

"I don't want to believe bad of you, Gerald. For your own sake, let me clear up this matter in the only possible way."

"Do as you like!" said Cutts.

"You release me from my promise?"

Cutts ground his teeth.

"Yes."

"It is the only way you can be cleared of horrible suspicions, Gerald," said the major more gently. "I pray to Heaven that you may come out of this without a stain on your honour!"

He did not speak again till Tom Merry came in with Digby. Digby bestowed a furious glare upon Cutts as he came in.

"Tom Merry's told me!" he exclaimed.

"What have you been telling your uncle about me, Cutts?—Let me hear it, and I'll prove it's all lies!"

The major held out the letter.

"Read that, boy!" he said harshly.

Digby read the letter at a glance; he held it so that Tom Merry could read it, too. Tom Merry stared at it blankly, taken quite aback; but Dig only looked surprised. He did not see why a scene from Cutts's play should be introduced into the discussion.

"Did you write that letter?" demanded the major.

"Yes."

"You wrote it, Dig?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Of course I did!" said Digby. "Can't you see it's in my hand?"

"But—hm—"

"Then my nephew's case is proved," said the major, with a deep breath of relief. "Gerald, I must ask your pardon."

"What's all that about?" shouted the amazed and exasperated Digby. "I suppose it's nothing against me, having written this foolery, is it?"

"What?" thundered the major. "You admit having been in debt owing to gambling; you admit having contemplated suicide; you admit—"

Digby stared at the major blankly for a moment, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter, boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Dig. "Excuse me, sir; I can't help it. You don't mean to say you thought this was a real letter—a letter to my pater? Oh, crumbs!"

"What—what is it, then?"

"Cutts knows what it is!" howled Digby. "Has he been palming this off on you for a real letter? Oh, my hat! He was pulling your leg, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose I can tell your uncle about the play, Cutts?" said Digby, looking at the Fifth-Former. "I say, Cutts, you're looking pretty white about the gills, old man. You thundering villain! Was it all lies about the play—a trick to get me to write this letter, so that you could palm it off on your uncle? What the dickens good did it do you to do that?"

"Explain yourself, boy!" exclaimed the major. "Do you mean to say that that letter was not written to be sent to your father?"

"My hat! The dad would have had a fit if he got that letter!" grinned Dig. "It's not a letter at all; it's a scene in a play!"

"A—a—a play?"

"Yes, Cutts said he was writing a play, and, as he had hurt his wrist, he asked me to take it down from dictation. There was a lot more of it; this is only from one scene," said Digby. "It isn't a letter at all—only a letter supposed to be sent by a chap named Robert in Cutts's play, you know."

"What have you to say to that, Gerald?" said the major, in a voice like iron.

What had Cutts to say? Dig's statement was evidently true, and further, and closer investigation could only prove it beyond doubt. Further investigation was of no use to Gerald Cutts.

The wretched black sheep of St. Jim's bowed his head in misery.

There was a long silence.

The major's face grew strangely pale and old.

"You must speak, Gerald, and before Digby," he said, in an altered voice. "Is his statement true?"

Cutts groaned.

"Yes."

"What you have told me about him is false?"

"Yes."

"Please go, my boys," said the major. "Digby, you can be satisfied with that. My nephew retracts all he has said against you. Tom Merry, I owe you a debt of gratitude for having defended my old friend's son against a cowardly slanderer—though the slanderer was my own nephew. Please go!"

Tom Merry and Digby left the study in silence.

Major Cutts fixed his eyes upon his nephew. Cutts of the Fifth stood with bowed head, white as chalk, despair in his face. The game was up now, with a vengeance.

"Why did you do this, Gerald?" said the major at last. "Why did you deceive me? Was it for the money?"

"Yes," muttered Cutts. "I—I—oh, what's the use of talking? You'll throw me over now. But you'd have thrown me over, any way, if you'd known the facts; and you'd have known them in a day or two if I hadn't paid Hooke and Griggs."

"It's you, and not Digby, who has been gambling—who has lost so large a sum of money?"

"Yes."

"And this man Hooke—he was not a money-lender, but—"

"A bookmaker," said Cutts. "Yes."

"And you lied—and lied, and slandered my old friend's son, to obtain the money to pay him?" said the major bitterly.

"I should have been ruined!"

"You chose rather to blacken Digby's character—to lie and to slander?"

"It was the only way. Would you have given me the money if I'd asked for it?—or would my father? I had to save myself. It's all up now—I know I'm done for!"

Cutts threw himself into a chair, and let his face sink into his hands.

"You have acted like a scoundrel, Gerald!" he said at last, slowly, and in measured tones.

"I cannot acknowledge a scoundrel as my nephew! Learn, as you say, done with you! I shall not stop the cheque. You may take that as a final gift from me. You will never have anything else to expect! You understand? Good-bye!"

Major Cutts quitted the study. His heavy footsteps died away down the passage. Gerald Cutts was left alone!

There was an indignation meeting in Study No. 6 when Tom Merry and Digby told their tale to the chums of the School House. The Terrible Three and the chums of the Fourth, in a white-heat of wrath, resolved to make Gerald Cutts "sit up" for what he had done, and to make an example of him. But when they saw Cutts of the Fifth again their desire for vengeance melted away.

Cutts was looking white and worn, as if old age had fallen upon him suddenly, and the juniors realised that he had been punished enough.

"Let him alone," said Tom Merry. "He's got it in the neck this time—you can see that. He doesn't want any more from us!"

"Poor beast!" said Digby. "Yes, let him alone."

It was some time before Cutts of the Fifth recovered his old coolness and composure, and looked his old self again. Needless to say, his callous and unscrupulous plot, in which Dig had so nearly been a victim, was a lesson that was not lost upon the juniors. No member of the "Co." was likely again to have anything to do with the Black Sheep.

THE END.

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